

TEHRAN TIMES

8 Pages | Price 100,000 Rials | 1.00 EURO | 4.00 AED | 45th year | No. 14738 | Tuesday | April 2, 2024 | Farvardin 14, 1403 | Ramadan 22, 1445

Israel assassinates top IRGC members in air attack on Damascus consulate

Rogue Regime Should Pay the Price



Leader hopes new year will bring 'surge in production through people's participation'

TEHRAN – The Leader of the Islamic Revolution has designated the Iranian New Year as the year of "surge in production through people's participation", highlighting his focus on economic growth and national welfare.

During a televised message to Iranians on March 20, Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei said the country must focus on production in order to tackle its economic challenges.

"After studying the opinions of the experts on this subject, I have concluded that the key to solving the country's economic problems lies in production – domestic production, national production. This is why we have focused so much on production over the past few years. If growth in production and advancements in domestic production are pursued in a suitable manner, many of the country's key economic issues, such as inflation, employment, and the value of our national currency, will be solved in a desirable manner," The Leader stated.

Ayatollah Khamenei names the motto of the year at the beginning of each Iranian New Year. He has been focusing on the country's economy and endeavors to propel it for the past few years.

"Production is an important issue and that is why I am once again focusing on this matter this year. I expect, I am anticipating, God willing, that we will witness a surge in production. In addition to this, I truly believe that this surge will not take place without the presence and participation of the people." ▶ Page 2

All ties with Israel must be severed: Raisi to Erdogan

TEHRAN – During a telephone conversation on Saturday, Iran's president Ebrahim Raisi advised his Turkish counterpart to cut ties with the Israeli regime in order to help prevent further loss of lives in the besieged Gaza Strip

Tehran has repeatedly asked Islamic countries to sever political, economic, and diplomatic ties with Israel since the regime's latest round of onslaughts against Gaza began on October 7. Despite the devastating loss of over 32,000 Palestinian lives, Muslim nations have yet to distance themselves from Israel.

Commenting on a recent Security Council resolution asking Zionists to establish a ceasefire in Gaza, Raisi told his Turkish counterpart that no resolution is going to stop Israel from committing heinous crimes.

"The Zionist regime is not going to adhere to this resolution or any other treaty and international convention. The regime's conduct so far proves its aggressive, law-breaking, and anti-human nature which necessitates the serious cooperation of Islamic countries to support the oppressed people of Gaza," the Iranian official noted. ▶ Page 3

Iran will continue to support Palestine: Leader

TEHRAN – Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei, Leader of the Islamic Revolution, met with Ismail Haniyeh, head of the political bureau of the Palestinian Islamic Resistance Movement Hamas, and his accompanying delegation on March 26, 2024.

During this meeting, Ayatollah Khamenei praised the exceptional resistance demonstrated by the Palestinian Resistance forces and the people of Gaza. He emphasized, "The historic patience exhibited by the people of Gaza in the face of the crimes and brutalities committed by the Zionist regime, with full support from the West, is a great phenomenon that has truly dignified Islam and despite the enemy's wishes, it has turned Palestine to the world's first issue."

While underlining that the massacre of the Gazans and the genocide in this region affects any individual who has a conscience, the Leader of the Islamic Revolution added that the Islamic Republic of Iran will not hesitate to support the cause of Palestine and the oppressed and resistant people of Gaza.

Ayatollah Khamenei emphasized the importance of having the support of both global public opinion and the public opinion of the Islamic world, particularly the Arab world, for the people of Gaza. He commended the propagational and media activities of the Palestinian Resistance as being very effective and superior to that of the Zionist enemy. He also called for continued efforts to further improve these measures. ▶ Page 2

Arabs: It is the 11th hour—stand up against Israel and the United States

By Professor Hossein Askari

Let's face it. Arabs have done precious little in support of Palestinians since Israel's unfolding massacre in 2024, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, inhumanity and yes, genocide in Gaza. If you don't act now, all future generations of Arabs will be ashamed of their Arab heritage. All Muslims should be right behind you in support. And if there is any humanity left in us at all, we must all join the chorus of support.

There is little point in discussing the fine legal points.

The facts:

The Israeli response to the brutal attack of October 7 is unacceptable and is over the top:

- The cold-blooded massacre of over 33,000 Palestinians in Gaza (about 80 percent women and children) alone and on top of the continuous carnage on the West Bank is morally repugnant.

- Israel's defiance of a call from nearly all members of the United Nations for an immediate ceasefire is morally unacceptable and an indication that Israel may not deserve a place in the community of nations. ▶ Page 5

Domestic pressure mounts on Netanyahu

By Ali Karbalaie

TEHRAN- Tens of thousands of protesters have poured into the streets in Israel demanding the ouster of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, holding an immediate election, and agreeing on a deal with Hamas to free captives.

It is believed to be the largest anti-government demonstration since the regime began its genocidal war on Gaza.

The protesters stretched for kilometers around the parliament building known as the Knesset in occupied al-Quds (Jerusalem).

They were pictured gathering around fires and chanting slogans condemning the Israeli premier for his failures in Gaza.

Other footage shows sections of the crowd setting off flares while others were seen clashing with police. Some of the protesters appear to have been forcibly dragged away and arrested.

Elsewhere, settlers flooded the streets of major Israeli cities, including Tel Aviv, on Sunday for the second consecutive night. The demonstrators are also calling for immediate elections.

One protester has been cited by Israeli media as saying Netanyahu was "like the captain of the Titanic, lost at sea and telling us that in a moment he will defeat Hamas." ▶ Page 5

4 million visits to Isfahan's cultural sites recorded

TEHRAN – Isfahan province has registered over four million visits to its cultural sites such as museums and historical structures in 17 days starting before the Iranian New Year.

"According to statistics compiled by Isfahan province's travel headquarters, 4,602,607 travelers paid visits to museums and historical sites in Isfahan province from Esfand 24 (Mar. 14) to Farvardin (Mar. 30)," the provincial tourism chief said.

Moreover, the total of overnight stays in 28 counties of the province reached 1,607,616 during the period, Hamidreza Mohaqqueqian said.

The official added that 990,823 tourists stayed in Isfahan city at the time.

Isfahan, once a bustling crossroads of international trade and diplomacy in Iran, ▶ Page 6



Iranian citizens observe Qadr night

During the 19th, 21st, and 23rd days of the holy month of Ramadan, Iranians gather to observe the Qadr Night, also known as the Night of Decree or Laylat al-Qadr in Islam. On these nights, communal prayers and Quran recitations are conducted to seek blessings and virtues from God. Laylat al-Qadr is considered the night when God first revealed the Qur'an to the Prophet, making it an occasion of profound spiritual importance within Islamic traditions.

Ruholamin dedicates new painting to martyred girls of Gaza in gesture of solidarity

TEHRAN- Iranian artist Hassan Ruholamin has honored the memory of martyred sisters and girls of Gaza by dedicating his latest work, entitled "Mizan," to them.

Accompanying the artwork, Ruholamin shared a poignant poem by Ali Moalem Damghani about Imam Ali (AS), which resonates: "Open your eyes! The image of a man remains with an empty cup/ The tulip burned, Layla died, the cypress dried up from grief. Sometimes ignorance remains, and knowledge remains from ignorance. Open your eyes, O beloved, O the intoxicating cupbearer, Ali! The mirror of existence has darkened from both excess and scarcity, Ali!"

The new painting captures Imam Ali (AS) strolling through a street, wielding his renowned sword, Zulfiqar. ▶ Page 8

Leader hopes new year will bring 'surge in production through people's participation'



From page 1 ▶ "Production is an important issue and that is why I am once again focusing on this matter this year. I expect, God willing, that we will witness a surge in production. In addition to this, I truly believe that this surge will not take place without the presence and participation of the people."

The Leader also addressed the country's officials and individuals active in the economic sector, saying that while a lot has been done in the

past year, more efforts are needed to reach the desired goals. "As for the slogan that I announced in 1402 AHS, which was 'inflation control and growth in production,' good measures have been taken. Accomplishments have been made regarding both sections of the slogan. Progress has been made, but not to the extent that was desired," the Leader said, adding that the path towards economic growth "shall continue".

He noted, "There is a great amount of work that needs to be done in the year ahead of us that we have just entered, and we must fulfill our responsibilities concerning the tasks at hand."

Our country's officials, our government officials, the parliament, the judiciary, the public, and others – all of us need to fulfill our duties for the various tasks in different areas. But the main issue the country is facing again this year is the economy. The country's main weakness is in the field of economics. We must be active in this field."

Iran to deploy new technologies to fortify eastern border security

TEHRAN- The Iranian defense minister has stated that security along Iran's eastern borders is set to receive a significant boost through the deployment of state-of-the-art equipment, advanced surveillance cameras, and unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs). Brigadier General Mohammad Reza Ashtiani emphasized that the new initiative extends beyond mere fortifications, encompassing a comprehensive strategy that involves erecting barriers, deploying cutting-edge technology such as helicopters, drones, and micro-drones, as well as establishing robust telecommunications and weapons facilities.

Additionally, he underscored the importance of enhancing the training and equipment of border guards to further fortify the nation's frontiers.

Asserting Iran's exceptional security posture, Minister Ashtiani rebuffed the notion that the recent terrorist incident reflects the strength of the perpetrating group, emphasizing that such acts are fundamentally terrorist in nature and do not signify the group's prowess.

Highlighting Iran's superior security standards compared to many other nations, the defense minister reiterated that while terrorism may afflict various countries, Iran's vigilance remains unparalleled. Concluding his remarks, Minister Ashtiani affirmed that the implementation of the comprehensive strategy will markedly elevate border security levels.

Back on January 17, the Iranian defense minister declared that there are no limitations when it comes to defending the nation's interests and its people. "We condemn terrorism worldwide. Any action against the rights of the Iranian people will definitely receive a reaction, and we strongly respond, and we regard no limits when it comes to defending our national interests," Brigadier General Mohammad Reza Ashtiani said.

Minister Ashtiani highlighted the strategic relationship with Russia, stating that both nations have committed to adhere to the agreed terms in a memorandum of understanding between the two

Raisi envoy highlights West's reluctance in Afghanistan stability efforts

TEHRAN - In a recent development, Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi's special envoy on Afghanistan affairs has shed light on the reluctance of the West to see Afghanistan achieve stability and security.

Hassan Kazemi Qomi stated, "I explicitly declare that the external and collaborative origins of the terrorist acts in Kandahar and the recent incident in Moscow are the same."

During an exclusive interview with Iranian media, the senior Iranian diplomat underscored the crucial link between regional security and Afghanistan's stability. He delved into discussions with senior Turkmenistan officials and shed light on Iran's regional endeavors to tackle security challenges in Afghanistan and the region's water crisis. Reflecting on the current situation in Afghanistan, Kazemi Qomi remarked, "The prevailing conditions in Afghanistan today, resulting from 20 years of US and NATO occupation, have left the country in ruins. We witness the destruction of its infrastructure, mass migration of its people, mostly to Iran, and the proliferation of terrorism."

countries that is planned to be pursued with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The minister emphasized the importance of bilateral agreements, urging Russia to fully observe and follow issues related to Iran's security, sovereignty, and territorial integrity, expressing confidence in Russia's commitment to these matters. Addressing regional concerns, Minister Ashtiani stressed Iran's respect for the rights, interests, and territorial integrity of all countries, particularly neighbors, while asserting a firm response to any mischief at its borders.

Speaking on Iran's missile capabilities, he revealed the possession of various missiles with ranges under 2000 kilometers, including the Kheibar-class missile which is one of the most advanced missiles designed by the experts of the Ministry of Defense's Aerospace Industries Organization. It is a liquid-fueled missile with a warhead weighing 1,500 kilograms with impressive strategic and tactical capabilities.

Ashtiani further underscored Iran's position as a global missile power with cruise and ballistic missiles, expressing ongoing efforts to further enhance missile technology.

The minister also referenced ongoing developments in the region, including Iran's missile operation against terrorist headquarters in Syria, framing it as a legitimate act of defense.

He clarified that warnings, diplomatic measures, and negotiation attempts definitely precede any military action, signaling a commitment to exhausting peaceful avenues before resorting to coercive measures. Ashtiani, once again, reiterated Iran's stance against global terrorism, affirming that any action violating the rights of the Iranian people would receive a strong and unrestricted reaction.

The defense minister highlighted the Ministry of Defense's continuous efforts in various sectors, emphasizing the ministry's strong commitment to safeguarding national interests and territorial integrity.

He further lamented, "Unfortunately, terrorism, supported by foreign powers or past occupiers of the country, has deeply embroiled the people and leaders of Afghanistan in combating terrorism, economic problems, and environmental challenges. These issues have also impacted the security landscape of Afghanistan's neighboring countries."

Moreover, he underscored the unanimous consensus among Afghanistan's neighboring countries on the imperative need for collective cooperation to tackle the myriad challenges confronting the Afghan people and authorities. He outlined shared goals encompassing counterterrorism efforts, security enhancement, economic revitalization, humanitarian assistance, and border stability.

Shifting focus to the water scarcity issue in the region, Kazemi Qomi voiced grave concerns about the crisis exacerbated by ecosystem changes, which pose a dire threat to the region's environment. He stressed the urgent necessity for regional cooperation to mitigate the water crisis, emphasizing the importance of adapting to new circumstances while upholding past treaties and agreements between the involved countries.

Rogue regime should pay the price

By Mona Hojat Ansari

TEHRAN – The Israeli regime on Monday attacked the Consular Section of the Iranian embassy in the Syrian capital of Damascus killing at least 7 people including General Mohammad Reza Zahedi, a senior commander of the Islamic Revolution Guard Corps Quds Force.

Iran's Ambassador to Damascus, Hossein Akbari, verified the reports of the Israeli assault and stated that Israeli warplanes had fired six missiles at the consular building.

Ambassador Akbari mentioned that seven individuals lost their lives in the Israeli attack, although the identities and precise number of casualties remain undisclosed.

"This regime has no respect for international law," the envoy said. "We will support the resistant nation [of Palestine] and have no fear of the criminality of this regime."

General Zahedi, the highest-ranking official who lost his life during the Israeli attack, was a highly respected military leader in Iran. He held command positions in both the IRGC ground and air forces before leading the elite Quds branch in Syria and Lebanon. Israeli television had identified him as a key figure on the regime's list of assassination targets on multiple occasions.

General Hossein Aminallah, Chief of Staff of the IRGC Quds Force in Syria and Lebanon, and Brigadier General Haj Rahimi, a



close friend and deputy of Zahedi, were also assassinated.

'Netanyahu has gone mad'

During a phone call with his Syrian counterpart, Iran's Foreign Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian said Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu seems to have "lost sanity" due to his consecutive failures following the Al-Aqsa Storm Operation.

"The attack on the Iranian consulate building in Damascus was a violation of all international commitments and conventions, making the Zionist regime responsible for the consequences of this act," the top Iranian diplomat told Faisal Mekdad.

Under international law, attacking another country's embassy is considered a violation of the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations. The Convention provides that embassies are inviolable and must be protected from intrusion

or damage. Attacking Iran's embassy on Syrian soil is a serious breach of international law and must thus be followed by diplomatic consequences, sanctions, or other forms of retaliation.

While the U.S. and other Western states have not hesitated to slam resistance forces in the past six months for attacking Israeli positions, it is expected that these governments once again turn a blind eye to yet another dangerous escalation of the Israeli regime, which is unprecedented in its nature.

Why did Israel attack Iran's consulate?

Israel has targeted multiple IRGC and resistance members in the past few months as it continues to struggle to defeat Palestinian fighters inside Gaza.

The regime targeted Iranian adviser General Seyed Razi Mousavi in Syria last year. Several

senior members of Hezbollah and Hamas have also been assassinated since October 7.

Israel's assassinations are not expected to hinder resistance and they are in fact not meant to strengthen the regime's hand. When Imad Mughniyeh was killed over 15 years ago, nobody expected that Yahya Sinwar would replace him and subject Israel to an even bigger defeat in Gaza. Seyed Razi and Zahedi will also be replaced.

Rather than intimidating resistance forces, Israel is attempting to play for time before it is compelled to confront its ultimate destiny at the hands of Palestinians. The regime believes that by plunging the region into a maelstrom of chaos and entangling the United States in another pointless war in West Asia that would drain American resources, it may find a chance to survive as an apartheid establishment.

The attack on Iran's consulate should particularly raise a red flag for Washington, as it demonstrates Israel's readiness to ignite the entire region, even if it means that the U.S. and all its traditional allies in the region would suffer devastating consequences.

As Iran's ambassador to Syria said, Tehran will make sure that Israel will not come out of this unscathed. But the U.S. here, must pull the plug on Israel before it's too late.

Leader: events in Gaza show resistance forces must be strengthened

TEHRAN- On the first day of the Iranian New Year in 1403 AHS (March 20, 2024), the Leader of the Islamic Revolution, Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei, delivered his annual speech in Imam Khomeini (ra) Hussainiyah in the presence of thousands of people from various walks of life.

Congratulating the nation on the occasion of Nowruz, he said that the spring of nature and the spring of spirituality coming together this year are a source for the freshness, growth, and prosperity of the human mind, body, and soul.

"The art and power of the month of Ramadan is that through the spiritual breeze of fasting, worship, invocations, and supplications, it draws a person who is not neglectful and is on the path of righteousness and servitude toward enthusiasm and effort," he said.

Ayatollah Khamenei emphasized that the events in Gaza and the massacre of more than 30,000 women, children, the elderly, and the young in front of the eyes of the so-called civilized world is a demonstration of the oppression and

darkness ruling the Western world despite its claims of advocating human rights.

In this regard, the Leader of the Islamic Revolution noted that not only did the US and the Europeans fail to prevent the crimes of the occupying regime, but in addition from the very first days, they declared their support for that regime by visiting the occupied territories and supplying them with various weapons and aid for the continuation of these crimes.

The Leader highlighted that the recent events in Gaza serve as evidence of the legitimacy of the formation of the Resistance Front in the West Asian region. "These events have shown that the presence of the Resistance Front in this region is one of the most vital issues."

And this front, which was born from awakened consciences in order to confront the 70 years of oppression and occupation imposed by the Zionist criminals, must continue to be strengthened day by day," he stated.

The Leader considered the demonstration of the Resistance's power as being the reason for the failure of the US's calculations and their plans to dominate the countries of the region.

"The strength of the Resistance caused their calculations to go wrong. It has shown that not only is the US unable to dominate the region, they cannot even maintain a presence there. They have no option but to leave the region," he elaborated.

Ayatollah Khamenei considered the exposure of the chaos and crisis that exists in the Zionist regime to the world as being another of the significant events in Gaza. "It has become clear that the Zionist regime is suffering a crisis, not only in terms of protecting itself but also in terms of coming out of the crisis."

Because by entering the war in Gaza, it has become stuck in a quagmire. Regardless of whether it comes out of Gaza or not, it will have failed," the Leader explained.

(See full text at tehrantimes.com)

Ayatollah Khamenei says Iran will continue to support Palestine

From page 1 ▶ The Leader also paid tribute to the memory of Martyr Saleh al-Aroui, the deputy chief of Hamas' political bureau, who was recently assassinated at the hands of the Zionist regime. "This honorable martyr was a prominent figure whom the Almighty God blessed with martyrdom at the end of his life as a reward for his struggles and efforts," he remarked.

During the meeting, Ismail Haniyeh conveyed his gratitude and appreciation for the support extended by both the populace and government of the Islamic Republic of Iran towards the Palestinian cause especially the people of Gaza. He presented a report on the latest field and political developments surrounding the war on Gaza. "The exemplary patience and steadfastness displayed by the people of Gaza and the Resistance forces over the past six months, stemming from their firm faith, has prevented the Zionist enemy from achieving any of its strategic goals in the Gaza war," he stated.

The head of Hamas' political office emphasized that the "Al-Aqsa Flood" operation shattered the belief in the unbeatable strength of the Zionist regime, and now, after six months, the

Zionist enemy has suffered heavy losses with thousands of its soldiers being killed or injured. "The war in Gaza is a world war and the US governing body is the main accomplice of the Zionist crimes as it is in charge of guiding the military operations of the Zionist regime," he added.

In his closing remarks to the Leader of the Islamic Revolution, Haniyeh underscored that "Despite all the brutalities, crimes and genocide that continue to take place in Gaza, the people of Gaza and the Resistance forces remain steadfast and will not permit the Zionist enemy to achieve their goals in any way."

Gaza is so far the main winner

Ayatollah Khamenei also met with Ziyad al-Nakhalah, the Secretary General of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad Movement, and his accompanying delegation on March 28, 2024.

During this meeting, Ayatollah Khamenei praised the Resistance forces and the people of Gaza as the winners of the field thus far. He emphasized that "The peak of dignity and steadfastness demonstrated by the people of Gaza and Palestine and the failures of the Zionist regime throughout this six-month



war are a divine event and phenomenon."

Referring to the crimes committed by the Zionist regime, which have resulted in the massacre of innocent civilians in Gaza, the Leader of the Islamic Revolution stated, "The fact that the Zionist regime, despite its extensive military equipment and support from oppressive world powers, is killing women and children, indicates that this regime is incapable of opposing the Resistance forces."

During the meeting, Ayatollah Khamenei expressed confidence to al-Nakhalah that the people of Gaza would eventually achieve victory with the help of God.

On his part, Ziyad al-Nakhalah, the Secretary General of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad Movement, expressed his appreciation for Iran's support of the Palestinian issue and honored the memory of Martyr

General Soleimani. "The events unfolding in Gaza today are in fact a repetition of what took place in Karbala. Despite facing numerous difficulties and conspiracies, the people of Gaza have displayed unparalleled steadfastness alongside the Resistance forces. Together, they have successfully foiled the plots devised by the US, the Zionist regime, and their supporters to dismantle the Resistance," he said.

Emphasizing the complete coordination amongst the Resistance forces, especially Hamas and the Islamic Jihad, al-Nakhalah underlined that the people of Gaza and the Resistance forces are determined to persevere until achieving ultimate victory. He expressed confidence that, with the grace of God, this victory will be achieved in the not-too-distant future.

All ties with Israel must be severed: Raisi to Erdogan

From Page 1 ▶ Raisi also underscored the urgency of Islamic countries collaborating to provide humanitarian aid to Gaza, preventing a humanitarian crisis, and declared Iran's readiness to support any initiatives in this regard.

Figures show that the Turkish government has increased trade with Israel in the past six months. Some media outlets have claimed that Ankara has been sending gunpowder, weapons, and ammunition to the occupied territories.

Furthermore, in their discussion, the two presidents



touched on the significance of enhancing political, economic, and cultural ties between Iran and Turkey. Iran's president highlighted Tehran's commitment to reinforcing energy cooperation and voiced optimism that such collaboration

would advance both nations' interests and foster unity within the Islamic Ummah.

Recep Tayyip Erdogan, for his part, extended greetings to the Iranian government and people for Ramadan and the successful parliamentary and Assembly of Experts elections.

He affirmed Turkey's dedication to implementing the agreements reached during the recent visit of Iran's President, stressing the importance of upholding and furthering Iran-Turkey cooperation for mutual benefit and Islamic unity.

Iran calls for international probe into Israel's crimes in Gaza hospital



TEHRAN - The spokesperson for Iran's Foreign Ministry has called for an immediate international investigation into the "appalling and astonishing" war crimes committed by Israel at Gaza's Al-Shifa hospital.

In a statement shared on his social media platform X, Nasser Kanaani expressed profound shock at the extent of devastation, torture, killings, and the grim reality of Palestinian detainees within the hospital's premises.

Kanaani underscored the urgency of an international inquiry, drawing attention to compelling evidence such as released images

following a harrowing two-week siege by the Israeli military, alongside poignant testimonies from eyewitnesses and various media reports.

Highlighting the pressing need for accountability, Kanaani posed critical questions about the willingness of international bodies to uphold their responsibilities in the face of such egregious violations.

"Will the well-known self-professed human rights advocates support an international investigation into this blatant war crime, or will the selective and discriminatory behaviour towards human rights continue?" Kanaani questioned.

According to a statement from the Gaza Health Ministry, Israeli forces eventually withdrew from Al-Shifa Hospital after a prolonged two-week siege, leaving behind scenes of widespread destruction and a staggering number of casualties.

The statement grimly detailed the loss of over 400 Palestinian lives, including patients, displaced individuals, and healthcare workers, during the Israeli military's assault on the

hospital. Moreover, it disclosed that hundreds were detained and subjected to brutal torture.

The dire situation reached its peak on March 18 when heavily armed Israeli forces brazenly stormed the hospital, deploying tanks and drones while indiscriminately firing upon individuals within the complex.

Despite Israel's claims of targeting the hospital due to alleged terrorist activities by the Palestinian Resistance group Hamas, the Ministry of Health in Gaza vehemently refuted these assertions. Instead, it revealed that approximately 3,000 people sought refuge within the hospital's confines, only to face the perilous threat of sniper fire and helicopter assaults should they attempt to flee.

Hundreds of bodies of slain civilians were found at al-Shifa Medical Complex, Palestinian news agencies quoted medical sources as saying.

The sources said Israeli forces destroyed the temporary cemetery that citizens had set up at the site, taking out the bodies from underground and dumping them in different areas of the hospital.

Iran, Egypt continue path towards détente with FM's phone call

TEHRAN - The top diplomats of Iran and Egypt held a telephone conversation on Sunday during which they discussed bilateral relations, regional affairs, and the issue of Palestine.

Iran's Foreign Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian and his Egyptian counterpart Sameh Shoukry exchanged views after getting to hold a meeting in Geneva in February on the sidelines of the 55th session of the United Nations Human Rights Council.

In their Sunday conversation, the two officials reviewed the positive developments in recent months in bilateral relations and discussed ways to develop ties based on the will of the political leaders of the two countries.

In this framework and following the important meeting of the presidents of Iran and Egypt in Riyadh, the two sides agreed on the continuation of contacts and meetings to develop and improve relations between Tehran and Cairo.

Amir Abdollahian and Shoukry also reviewed the latest developments related to the barbaric attacks of the Zionist regime on the Gaza Strip and expressed great concern over the continued killing of Palestinian women, children, and civilians and the dire humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip.

They stressed the urgency of stopping the genocidal attacks of the Israeli regime on Gaza,

especially the implementation of the recent UN Security Council resolution, and the need to send large-scale international humanitarian aid to the residents of the entire Palestinian territory.

The foreign ministers of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Arab Republic of Egypt, while opposing any plan by the Zionists for the forced migration of the Palestinian people from the Gaza Strip, emphasized the need for effective measures by international organizations to prevent the invasion of the occupying Zionist regime in Rafah in the south of Gaza.

Emphasizing the important role of the resistance in Palestine, Amir Abdollahian assessed the

recent official visit of Sheikh Ismail Haniyeh, the head of the political bureau of Hamas, and Ziyad al-Nakhalah, the secretary-general of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, to Tehran as important.

Diplomatic engagements have been increasing between the two countries since Ebrahim Raisi took office as Iran's president in 2022. Ties between Iran and Egypt were severed in 1980 after Cairo welcomed the deposed Pahlavi ruler and recognized the Israeli regime.

Reports show that Israel has been pressuring Egypt to prevent it from developing closer ties with Iran.

Gaza drone shatters records

TEHRAN - The Iranian-made Gaza drone represents a significant achievement for the IRGC in the realm of UAVs.

With features such as extended range and enhanced weapon-carrying capacity, this drone has surpassed previous models and set new records in this field. The development of infrastructure and the utilization of modern technologies by knowledge-based companies have propelled Iran's UAV capabilities forward over the years, with notable advancements observed in the Ministry of Defense, the Army, and the IRGC.

In recent years, the IRGC Aerospace Force unveiled the 'Gaza' drone, marking a substantial leap in Iran's drone capabilities, boasting the longest range among Iranian-made drones, the Gaza drone was introduced nearly two years ago. The Shahed series, encompassing various drone models produced by the IRGC Aerospace Force, includes the renowned Shahed-129 drone, celebrated for its successes on the resistance front, particularly in targeting infamous Takfiri terrorist leaders. Now, the Shahed 149, the elder sibling of the esteemed Shahed 129, has been named as Gaza, paying homage to the resilience and resistance of the people of Gaza against the injustices perpetrated by the Zionist usurping regime.

The Gaza drone is a heavy, wide-bodied aircraft featuring a 21-meter wingspan, 35

hours of continuous flight capability, a flight ceiling of 35,000 feet (equivalent to 10.5 km), a maximum flight speed of 350 km/h, and a cargo carrying capacity of up to 500 kg. These specifications represent a significant advancement in flight characteristics compared to the Shahed 129 drone.

Notably, the Gaza UAV utilizes a turboprop engine instead of piston and rotary engines, enhancing efficiency at higher altitudes and enabling greater speed. This innovation elevates the Gaza drone's flight ceiling and speed compared to its counterparts. Additionally, its extended flight duration of 35 hours, 11 hours longer than the Shahed 129, extends its range and surveillance capabilities significantly.

The Gaza drone's larger dimensions, particularly its elongated wings, allow for increased bomb-carrying capacity. According to the IRGC Aerospace Force commander, the Gaza drone can carry up to 13 bombs. Furthermore, an innovative technology for bomb deployment is incorporated into this drone, featuring a rotating bomb compartment within its body.

Moreover, the Gaza drone's middle cargo compartment presents opportunities for electronic warfare cargo, radar, and potentially, a Synthetic Aperture Radar (SAR) imaging radar.



SAR radars utilize high-speed, high-frequency radio waves to map the Earth's surface, providing detailed imagery for reconnaissance purposes.

The Gaza drone also boasts a cutting-edge electro-optical surveillance system capable of capturing and transmitting images across various spectra.

However, its most remarkable feature remains its impressive range of 2,000 kilometers. With its extended flight duration and maximum speed, the Gaza drone can cover over 12,000 kilometers in a one-way flight, equivalent to 6,000 kilometers roundtrip.

Iran stands at the forefront of UAV design, development, and manufacturing, reflecting its progressive approach to enhancing capabilities in land, air, and sea battles, as well as civilian applications.

SPORTS

Iran win 2024 IIHF Women's Asia and Oceania Cup

TEHRAN - Iran national team defeated the Philippines 4-0 on Saturday to win the 2024 IIHF Women's Asia and Oceania Cup.

The competition was held at the Gorodskoi Katok in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan.

Team Melli had defeated the UAE 16-0, Kyrgyzstan 6-0 and India 10-0 in their previous matches. Iran had won a silver in the competition last year. The 2024 IIHF Women's Asia and Oceania Cup is an international women's ice hockey tournament run by the International Ice Hockey Federation (IIHF). This edition of the tournament took place from March 24 to 30 in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. The tournament followed a single round robin format.

In the match held at the Kazemi Stadium in Tehran, Farshad Faraji was on target in the 82nd minute.

Mes are scheduled to play Iran league leaders Esteghlal next Saturday, while Persepolis meet Gol Gohar in Sirjan on Sunday.

Esteghlal lead the table with 46 points, three points above Persepolis.

Brazilian keeper Luan Polli linked with Nassaji

TEHRAN - Iranian top-flight football club Nassaji are eyeing a move for Brazilian goalkeeper Luan Polli Gomes.

The 30-year-old goalie currently plays in Brazilian club Coritiba.

Nassaji currently sit 15th in the 16-team table of the 2022-23 Iran Professional League (IPL).

Iranian goalkeeper Rashid Mazaheri has also been linked with a move to Nassaji.

Iran finish 2nd in Vietnam Futsal Tournament

TEHRAN - Iran's national team finished second in the Vietnam 2024 International futsal tournament.

On Sunday, Vahid Shamsaei's men defeated Vietnam 3-1.

Team Melli had lost to Morocco 5-4 in its first match and defeated New Zealand 5-1 in the second match.

Iran is warming up for the 2024 AFC Futsal Asian Cup in Thailand, where it is drawn in Group D against Kuwait, Bahrain and Afghanistan.

Fencer Pakdaman wins bronze at 2024 World Cup

TEHRAN - Iranian fencer Ali Pakdaman claimed a bronze medal in the 2024 Men's Sabre Individual World Cup.

The fencer lost to advance to the final, losing to Italy's Luca Curatoli 15-5.

Hungarian fencer Andras Szatmari won the gold medal, defeating Curatoli 15-10 in the final.

The tournament brought 267 fencers together in Budapest, Hungary.

Faraji bags Silver at 2024 WTT Youth Contender in Beirut

TEHRAN - Benjamin Faraji of Iran won a silver medal at the 2024 WTT Youth Contender Beirut on Wednesday.

He lost to Alan Kurmangali of Kazakhstan 3-0 (11-8, 11-4, 12-10) in the final match of the U-17 Boys Singles.

Faraji had triumphed over table tennis players from Lebanon, Egypt, and Kazakhstan en route to the final match.

The competition is being held in Beirut, Lebanon from March 26 to 28.

Iranian winger Mohebi hero against Dynamo

TEHRAN - The Iranian winger of Rostov football team Mohammad Mohebi is the main hero of the match with Dynamo.

Mohebi scored a double, which his second goal was a real masterpiece, and made an assist.

Rostov won the match 4-1 at the VTB Arena in Moscow, championat.com reported.

The 25-year-old player joined Rostov in July 2023.

Rostov sits ninth with 31 points, 11 points behind Russian premier League (RPL) leader Zenit.

Iran's men's runners-up at FIBA 3x3 Asia Cup 2024

TEHRAN - Iran finished in second place at the FIBA 3x3 Asia Cup 2024 on Sunday.

Playing in their fifth straight men's final, Australia reclaimed their crown and won a fourth Asia Cup title overall after a dominant 21-7 victory over Iran. Australia stifled Iran in a spectacular performance as they pulled away early and never eased up. Iran's giant-killing run from the qualifying draw ended, but they still clinched their first medal since winning bronze in the tournament's first edition in 2013.

Defending champions Mongolia had the consolation of a bronze medal after a thrilling 21-18 win over New Zealand.

For the third straight year, Singapore hosted Asia's biggest 3x3 event with the seventh edition running from March 27-31.

Iran's Ehsan Dalirzahan was selected in the FIBA 3x3 Asia Cup 2024's Team of Tournament.

Todd Blanchfield capped a brilliant with MVP honors after leading Australia to its fourth title on March 31. They were joined in the Team by Anand Ariunbold, who came up big in the bronze medal game for Mongolia.

Rahimi takes silver at 2024 WTT Youth Contender

TEHRAN - Elina Rahimi of Iran won a silver medal at the 2024 WTT Youth Contender in Beirut on Friday.

Rahimi lost to Indian table tennis player Sayali Wani 3-1 (11-8, 11-4, 4-11, 11-3) in the final match of the women's U-19 Girls Singles.

Iran's Benjamin Faraji had won a silver medal at the U-17 Boys Singles.

The competition was held in Beirut, Lebanon, from March 26 to 29.

Roma not hopeful in Azmoun's speedy recovery

TEHRAN - Roma attacker Sardar Azmoun will not feature for the Giallorossi for quite an extensive period of time.

Following his most recent injury while on international duty, the 29-year-old made his return to Trigoria where he underwent tests to assess the damage to his flexor muscle.

The tests confirmed the injury and Il Messaggero reports that Roma are not hopeful in a speedy recovery. On the contrary - the newspaper suggests Azmoun will miss at least a month of action despite an initial prognosis indicated a recovery period of 2-3 weeks.

Persepolis beat Mes in friendly match

TEHRAN - Persepolis football team edged past Mes Rafsanjan 1-0 in a friendly match on Sunday.

Iran, Iraq extend gas export contract by 5 years



TEHRAN - Tehran and Baghdad have agreed to extend the contract on Iran's gas exports to Iraq for five years, Shana reported.

The extension of Iran's gas export contract to Iraq for five years, was signed on March 27 between Iranian Deputy oil minister for gas

affairs Majid Chegeni and Iraq's Minister of Electricity Ziad Ali Fazel, in Baghdad.

Speaking to the press on the sidelines of the signing ceremony, Chegeni said that Iran has exported about 52 billion cubic meters (bcm) of gas to Iraq worth \$15 billion under two gas contracts since 2017.

Iraqi Electricity Minister Ziad Ali Fazel also said that Iraq has signed a five-year natural gas import contract with an Iranian company, noting that his country's power plants are in dire need of Iranian gas to generate electricity.

He noted that the experience of the past years has shown that Iran is a good economic partner for Iraq and has provided Iraq's needs in the most difficult conditions.

Iran's thermal power generation capacity rises by 965MW

TEHRAN - An official at Iran's Thermal Power Plants Holding Company (TPPH) said the electricity generation capacity in the country's thermal power plants increased by over 965 megawatts (MW) in the previous Iranian year with the assistance of domestic knowledge-based companies.

The electricity generation capacity of Iran's power plants increased by more than 965 MW last year with the implementation of projects to boost the power of gas-fired and combined-cycle power plants and remove restrictions in the steam power units in cooperation with the local knowledge-based companies, Esmail Namazi said.

The Thermal Power Plants Holding Company inaugurated a number of new power plants in the previous Persian year and came up with plans to raise the electricity generation capacity of the existing power stations, he added, according to IRNA.

He noted that projects to generate over 2,000 mw of electricity have been implemented across Iran since the current administration assumed office in August 2021.

The director of Iran Power Plant Repairs Company (IPRC) said in February that Iran is the forerunner in West Asia in the field of repairing

thermal power plants.

The nominal capacity of Iran's power plants reached 92,055 MW in the previous Iranian calendar year (ended on March 19), according to the latest data released by Iran Grid Management Company (IGMC).

As reported, the capacity of the country's gas power plants, which account for 25.3 percent of the country's total power generation capacity, also increased by 3.1 percent to 23,330 MW in the past year.

The total capacity of renewable power plants also increased by 20 percent compared to the previous year, reaching 1,120 MW.

Most of Iran's power generation capacity is supplied by thermal power plants. Currently, combined cycle power plants account for the biggest share of the country's total power generation capacity followed by gas power plants.

The total capacity of the country's thermal power plants stands at over 72,000 MW, according to the Thermal Power Plant Holding.

Increasing the country's power generation capacity and preventing blackouts during peak consumption periods have been among the Iranian Energy Ministry's top priorities since the current government administration took office in 2021.

Iran stresses need for FTA to boost trade with Syria

TEHRAN - An official at the Trade Promotion Organization of Iran (TPO) said that implementation of a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between Iran and Syria would beef up the mutual trade to a great extent.

The FTA between Tehran and Damascus was signed 13 years ago but it has not yet been implemented, Mahdi Zeyghami said, calling for efforts to accelerate the implementation of the agreement and spur the bilateral trade and economic activities.

Stating that Iran currently hold about a 10 percent share of Syria's market, the deputy minister of industry said, "It is predicted that Iran will export \$500 million worth of products to this Arab country in the current Iranian calendar year (that started on March 20)."

Earlier, Director General of the West Asia Office of TPO Abdolamir Rabihavi said a forum will be held to introduce the opportunities in the Syrian market and pave the way for exporting technical and engineering services to Syria and rebuilding the Arab country.

Syria is one of Iran's export target markets and has been put at the focal attention of Iranian traders, he stressed.

Rabihavi invited Syrian economic activists and officials to take part in the Iran Expo 2024 and noted that Business-to-Business (B2B) meetings with Syrian entrepreneurs are expected to be held at the expo in line with promoting bilateral trade.

The 6th International Export Potential Exhibition of the Islamic Republic of Iran, dubbed "Iran Expo 2024", will be inaugurated on April 27 and run until May 1.

Iran's TPO held a conference on Syria's trade opportunities for Iranian business operators in early March.

The conference dubbed "Reconstruction of Syria" was attended by officials from the two

countries and representatives of companies from both sides.

Speaking at the event, Rabihavi said the economic cooperation between Iran and Syria has entered a new stage, adding that Iranian business operators have a potential \$5.0 billion market waiting for them.

"Syria is looking forward to the expansion of economic ties with Iran," Rabihavi said.

According to the official, the Central Bank of Iran (CBI) has agreed to establish a joint bank with Syria.

"Initial discussions on the establishment of a joint bank between Iran and Syria have been carried out. This bank will act far from international sanctions against Iran and Syria. We hope that the bank will reopen next year," he said.

He further noted that the FTA between the two countries is expected to be implemented in the next Iranian calendar year (begins on March 20).

According to Rabihavi, the two countries have set the goal to increase their mutual trade exchanges to \$500 million, next year.

As the body in charge of the country's foreign trade sector, TPO has presented plans for the economic development of the two countries to the secretariat of the joint commission of the two countries, the ambassadors, and the foreign ministry, the official said.

"Our most important program is to attend international exhibitions in Syria and it is an opportunity for people traders who want to enter the Syrian market to establish themselves," he noted.

Rabihavi had earlier said that Syria is one of the export target countries of the Islamic Republic, and after the end of the military crisis and the establishment of peace in the region, Iranian traders and businessmen are getting more interested in the Syrian market.

Average daily gasoline consumption reaches 122m liters

TEHRAN - Average daily gasoline consumption in Iran has reached about 132 million liters in the first 12 days of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20-31), according to the National Iranian Oil Products Distribution Company (NIOPDC).

Based on the NIOPDC data, during the Nowruz holidays this year, 122.3 million liters of gasoline were distributed in the country on average, which is 6.7 million liters more than the 115.6 million liters during the same period last year, Shana reported.

On Sunday (March 31), 128.8 million liters of gasoline were distributed throughout the country, which has increased by more than one million liters compared to the same day last year when the figure was 127.9 million liters.

The NIOPDC has warned about the increasing trend of fuel consumption in the country and asked people to manage their consumption in order to help the country in supplying fuel.



Over the past few years, the Islamic Republic has managed to not only become self-sufficient in gasoline production but also become a net exporter of the strategic fuel, however, the significant increase in domestic gasoline consumption in recent months has once again raised concerns about the need for imports.

Iran became a net gasoline exporter in February 2019, after the inauguration of the third phase of the Persian Gulf

Star Refinery (PGS) project which added 120,000 barrels to the country's daily gasoline production.

As previously announced by the NIORDC managing director, the average daily gasoline consumption in Iran rose 11 percent in the past Iranian calendar year 1402 (ended on March 19).

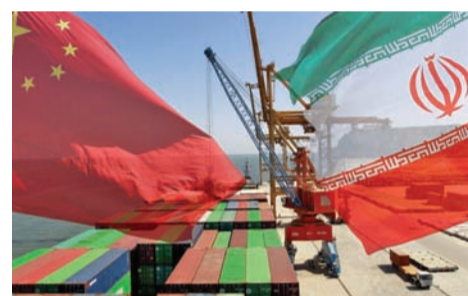
The official said that the country's average daily gasoline production has reached 115 million liters.

He added: "Unfortunately, gasoline consumption is rising exponentially in the country, as we had a 20 percent increase in gasoline consumption in 1401, while last year we had an 11 percent rise, and without a doubt, special attention should be paid to fuel consumption management."

There are now over 30 million cars in the country, and the number is rising, and on the other hand, the amount of fuel consumption in the country is far from world standards, and cars are high-consuming, which should be taken into consideration, the official added.

The NIORDC managing director further explained that the annual entry of one million cars into the country's transportation fleet is equivalent to one billion liters of gasoline consumption, and this requires the construction of a refinery with a daily refining capacity of 150,000 to 200,000 barrels, which takes at least four to five years.

Iran-China trade exceeds \$2.8 billion in Jan-Feb



TEHRAN - The China Customs has announced that the trade exchanges between Iran and China stood at more than \$2.8 billion from January to February 2024.

According to the latest data released by China Customs on Thursday, trade between Iran and China in the first two months of 2024 amounted to \$2.879 billion, marking a 37 percent increase compared to the same period last year.

China exported \$2.5 billion worth of products to Iran and imported \$829 million from Iran from January to February 2024, representing a 45 percent and 20 percent year-over-year increase, respectively.

Analysts believe that China's imports from Iran may be even higher than \$829 million, as the purchase of Iranian oil by Chinese refiners is not included in the official statistics of the country's imports from Iran.

The value of trade between Iran and China in 2023 exceeded \$14.6 billion, registering a 6.2 percent decline compared to 2022, according to China's Customs data.

Based on the mentioned data, the two countries exchanged \$14.650 billion worth of products in 2023, while the value of trade between the two countries stood at \$15.5 billion in 2022.

Iran's exports to China in December 2023 registered a 30-percent growth compared to the same period a year earlier.

China exported \$10.70 billion worth of products to Iran from January to December 2023, indicating an 8.6 percent growth.

According to the Chinese customs data, The Asian country exported \$9.270 billion worth of products to Iran from January to December 2022.

China's import of products from Iran fell from \$6.230 billion in 2022 to \$4.580 billion in 2023, showing a 27 percent decline.

The balance of trade exchanges between the two countries reached about \$5.5 billion in 2023 in favor of China.

The value of the trade between Iran and China in December 2023 hit \$1.251 billion, showing a four percent growth compared to the previous year's corresponding period.

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

Iran's Finance and Economic Affairs Minister Ehsan Khandouzi said the 25-year strategic partnership plan between Iran and China has entered a new phase with new agreements being reached between various ministries of the two countries.

According to Khandouzi, the mentioned agreements have been reached between the two sides during the visit of Iran's delegation to the 6th China International Import Expo

(CIIE).

"Specific projects were defined between the government departments of the respective ministries of Iran and China, and agreements were reached on the details of the implementation of the mentioned projects," Khandouzi said.

Regarding the private sectors of the two countries, some Iranian companies operating in China and some large Chinese companies operating in Iran faced obstacles, which were discussed and resolved by the relevant authorities, he explained.

"We are going to witness a significant growth in economic cooperation and investment between the two sides with the implementation of these projects," the minister noted.

Headed by Iran's First Vice President, Mohammad Mokhber, a senior delegation comprised of Economy Minister Ehsan Khandouzi, Industry, Mining, and Trade Minister Abbas Aliabadi, as well as the deputies of various ministries and the economic deputy of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs visited China in early November, 2023 to attend the 6th CIIE.

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

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

Back in December 2022, Iran and China finalized 16 memorandums of understanding (MOU) under the framework of the two countries' strategic 25-year agreement.

The MOUs were signed in an Iran-China comprehensive cooperation program summit which was held in Tehran on December 13 in the presence of Iran's First Vice President Mohammad Mokhber and China's Vice Premier Hu Chunhua.

The summit was focused on four areas explored by four committees between the two countries with the aim of paving the way for the implementation of the 25-year agreement.

Iran and China also signed 20 memoranda of understanding in the presence of the presidents of the two countries in Beijing in mid-February, 2023.

Heading a high-ranking delegation, Iran's President Ebrahim Raisi was on a three-day state visit to China starting February 14, 2023.

During President Raisi's visit to China, Tehran and Beijing signed a number of bilateral cooperation documents in the fields of agriculture, trade, tourism, environmental protection, health, disaster relief, culture, and sports.

The documents include agreements in the field of transportation and industry worth \$12 billion and \$3.5 billion, respectively; the agreements cover various joint projects like the high-speed rail link between Tehran and Mashhad, and investment in the Imam Khomeini Airport City.

Investment in Iran's southeastern Mokran Coast and the purchase of Iranian oil were also mentioned in the documents.

Raisi's visit served as an example of the high level of mutual trust between China and Iran,

as well as a milestone for bilateral ties.

Then in mid-July, 2023, the agreements signed between Iran and China during President Raisi's trip to Beijing in mid-February were turned into specified projects during the two countries' joint cooperation committee meeting, the Iranian finance and economic affairs minister announced.

Ehsan Khandouzi left Tehran for Beijing on July 12, 2023 to attend the Iran-China Joint Cooperation Committee meeting, which was held after four and half years.

"With the constructive atmosphere of the committee, we will soon witness good events in the fields of business and investment", the official wrote on his Twitter account on July 16, 2023.

Khandouzi further announced that Iran and China are going to begin the execution of some joint projects agreed upon in February by the presidents of the two countries, as of the following month.

According to the minister, the necessary follow-ups regarding the mentioned projects have been made over the last five months and the final decisions for the start of their implementations were made during a joint business event on July 13, 2023.

"President Raisi had an important trip to Beijing last winter and good agreements were made with the president of China; in this regard, the necessary follow-ups were made by various ministries during the last five months, and on Thursday (July 13) the first joint committee between Iran and China was held after 4.5 years," Khandouzi said.

"China is Iran's largest trading partner and the most important destination for the export of Iranian goods and an important part of our imports are also from China. Last year, China's share in Iran's (non-oil) trade was 24 percent," the minister added.

Back in early April, 2023, The Chinese ambassador to Tehran said: "This year is a good year for Iran-China relations."

Chang Hua made the remarks in a meeting with the members of the Iran-China Joint Chamber of Commerce and a number of Iranian traders and businessmen, who conduct trade with China, held at the place of the Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines, and Agriculture (ICCIMA) in Tehran.

Referring to China's growing economy, the envoy said this year is a good year for Iran-China relations, adding that during the meeting between the leaders of the two countries, important agreements were made, including the implementation of the 25-year cooperation agreement between the two countries, and a number of bilateral cooperation documents were signed in the fields of agriculture, tourism, culture, relief, and rescue, etc.

Majid-Reza Hariiri, the head of the Iran-China Joint Chamber, also emphasized the desire of Iran's private sector to develop business relations with China and said there are obstacles in this direction. Among other things, issuing visas for Iranian businessmen, especially for their presence at trade fairs in China, is associated with problems, and facilitating it will definitely help the development of relations between the two sides.

By Shahrokh Saei

TEHRAN—Israel's two-week raid on Gaza's al-Shifa Hospital has left a trail of deaths and destruction throwing a spotlight on the heinous crimes committed by the regime's forces.

The Israeli military launched the raid on Gaza's largest hospital, in the northern Gaza City, on March 18. But the regime withdrew its forces from the medical facility on Monday.

"Troops have completed precise operational activity in the area of the Shifa Hospital and exited the area," the Israeli military said.

Army officials claimed scores of resistance fighters including Hamas members have been killed during the 14-day siege and hundreds of others have been arrested.

They also claimed that the storming of the hospital had been conducted "while preventing harm to civilians, patients and medical teams".

However, footage on social media and comments made by witnesses and Palestinian authorities dispute the regime's claims.

Video footage circulating online have shown heavily damaged and charred buildings as well as mounds of dirt churned up by bulldozers and patients on stretchers in darkened corridors.

A spokesperson for Gaza's Civil Defense described the situation at the al-Shifa Hospital "very bad".

Mahmoud Bassal added that the facility is "completely destroyed and burned down. Many of its buildings are totally destroyed or charred... Injured and dead bodies fill the hospital grounds and there are bodies buried in the hospital yards."

'Total destruction'

A Palestinian resident has described a scene of "total destruction"



around the site of the hospital after the Israeli troops retreated.

Mohammed Mahdi told the Associated Press that several buildings had been burned down and that he had counted six bodies in the area, including two in the hospital courtyard.

Another resident told the AP that there were still patients, medical workers and displaced people sheltering inside the al-Shifa Hospital. Yahia Abu Auf said Israeli bulldozers had plowed over a makeshift cemetery in the hospital's courtyard.

"The situation is indescribable. The occupation destroyed all sense of life here," he added.

'Horror movie'

A journalist working for CNN also likened the scene at the al-Shifa Hospital following Israel's pullout to "a horror movie."

"Bulldozers crushed bodies of people everywhere around and in the yard of the hospital," Khader Al Za'anoun said.

Al Za'anoun added that after the withdrawal of the Israeli troops from the hospital people began arriving at the destroyed complex to search for missing family members.

around the al-Shifa Hospital, including a female doctor and her son, also a doctor, and put the medical facility out of function.

"The occupation destroyed and burnt all buildings inside Al Shifa Medical Complex. They bulldozed the courtyards, burying dozens of bodies of martyrs in the rubble, turning the place into a mass graveyard," said Ismail Al-Thawabta, director of the media office.

"This is a crime against humanity," he added.

Hamas demands ICC probe

Hamas has called on the International Criminal Court and the United Nations to condemn and investigate the Israeli atrocities at the al-Shifa Hospital.

The resistance movement said it holds the U.S. administration and President Biden personally fully responsible for the crimes, massacres and systematic destruction of civilian lives in the Gaza Strip.

Israel raided the al-Shifa Hospital under the pretext of targeting Hamas fighters. The regime claims that the resistance movement uses the facility as a base without providing any evidence to substantiate its allegation.

The Israeli military made similar claims to justify the previous deadly raid on the hospital in November last year. Throughout Israel's brutal onslaught on Gaza that broke out on October 7, the regime's army has besieged several hospitals in the Palestinian territory.

Hamas has denied operating from al-Shifa or other health facilities. The resistance movement has dismissed Israel's claims, calling them "lies and cheap propaganda"

(See full text at tehrantimes.com)

Domestic pressure mounts on Netanyahu

Largest Israeli protests since the war on Gaza started



By Ali Karbalaei

TEHRAN—Tens of thousands of protesters have poured into the streets in Israel demanding the ouster of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, holding an immediate election, and agreeing on a deal with Hamas to free captives.

It is believed to be the largest anti-government demonstration since the regime began its genocidal war on Gaza.

The protesters stretched for kilometers around the parliament building known as the Knesset in occupied al-Quds (Jerusalem).

They were pictured gathering around fires and chanting slogans condemning the Israeli premier for his failures in Gaza.

Other footage shows sections of the crowd

setting off flares while others were seen clashing with police. Some of the protesters appear to have been forcibly dragged away and arrested.

Elsewhere, settlers flooded the streets of major Israeli cities, including Tel Aviv, on Sunday for the second consecutive night. The demonstrators are also calling for immediate elections.

One protester has been cited by Israeli media as saying Netanyahu was "like the captain of the Titanic, lost at sea and telling us that in a moment he will defeat Hamas".

The Netanyahu government had vowed to eliminate Hamas, the strongest resistance force in Gaza, and release all those held by the group. However, after half a year of war on the tiny strip it has failed to achieve any of its goals.

Netanyahu has faced stinging scrutiny for the security and intelligence failure following the al-Aqsa Storm Operation by the Palestinian resistance in Gaza.

Families of the captives who helped arrange the protests in al-Quds are reportedly set to join ranks with the larger anti-Netanyahu protest movement that shook Tel Aviv for the best part of 2023 over the government's judicial overhaul plans.

Netanyahu continues to face an increasing level of pressure. On the one hand, condemnation has been on the rise within his own government, and on the other, thousands of Israelis have been protesting almost every day against his policies in Gaza since October 7.

Despite Netanyahu's vow to eliminate Hamas and release all captives, many believe any victory in Gaza that would achieve the Israeli government's declared goals is delusional.

Opposition leader Yair Lapid has joined the chorus of those calling for early elections, saying Netanyahu's government must go since it has failed in Gaza.

"One after the other, the ministers of the government go on air this morning and attack the families of the abductees. You are out of your mind," Lapid said in a post on social media, reminding Netanyahu's government that it allowed captives to be taken "on your watch".

Netanyahu's closest ministers have taken to the airwaves to verbally attack the wave of anti-government protests.

(See full text at tehrantimes.com)

Arabs: It is the 11th hour—stand up against Israel and the United States

Honor matters and shamelessness has its limits



By Professor Hossein Askari

Let's face it. Arabs have done precious little in support of Palestinians since Israel's unfolding massacre in 2024, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, inhumanity and yes, genocide in Gaza. If you don't act now, all future generations of Arabs will be ashamed of their Arab heritage. All Muslims should be right behind you in support. And if there is any humanity left in us at all, we must all join the chorus of support.

There is little point in discussing

the fine legal points.

The facts:

The Israeli response to the brutal attack of October 7 is unacceptable and is over the top:

- The cold-blooded massacre of over 33,000 Palestinians in Gaza (about 80 percent women and children) alone and on top of the continuous carnage on the West Bank is morally repugnant.

- Israel's defiance of a call from nearly all members of the United Nations for an immediate ceasefire is morally unacceptable and an indication that Israel may not deserve a place in the community of nations.

- For years, Israel has flaunted international law with its illegal annexation and occupation of Palestinian lands.

- Just today (March 22), Israel announced the largest annexation of Palestinian lands since the 1993 Oslo accords.

- Israel's shameful violations of all norms of human decency have been enabled by the United States of America, its protector in chief.

- America's financial aid, lethal arms (with no restriction on their use, in contravention to even U.S. laws), dozens of vetoes at the UNSC to protect Israel's violations, mounting pressure to silence dissent under the guise of anti-Semitism and political pressure on the weak to abstain from judgement have enabled Israel's belligerence and crimes.

- President Biden pleads and talks peace but puts no meaningful pressure on Netanyahu or Israel.

- Arab countries have been cowards! Arab rulers are scared to stand up to the United States in order to buttress their rule. Some Arab leaders, such as Mohammed bin Salman (MBS), have even rewarded the United States after facilitating the complete takeover of Jerusalem by giving billions to Jared Kushner. Shame!

- The bravest act in opposition to Israeli crimes has come from South Africa (with others riding on its coattails)—referral of a case for genocide to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) that would also target countries that are complicit (possibly the United States) and referral of a case for crimes committed by Israeli officials to the International Criminal Court (ICC).

(See full text at tehrantimes.com)

WORLD HEADLINES

Iraqi resistance attacks 'vital' Israeli target

The Islamic Resistance in Iraq says its fighters have launched an attack on a key Israeli target in the occupied territories in support of Palestinians, who are subjected to a genocidal war in Gaza.

"The fighters of the Islamic Resistance in Iraq targeted a vital target in our occupied territories on Monday morning, using appropriate weapons," the Iraqi umbrella group of anti-terror factions announced in a statement, Press TV reported.

The statement noted that the attack came "in support of our people in Gaza, and in response to the massacres committed by the usurping entity against civilian Palestinians, including children, women and the elderly."

The attack was confirmed by the Israeli army, which said soldiers identified a "suspicious aerial target that entered Israeli territory from the east" which impacted "in the Eilat Bay [The Gulf of Aqaba] area."

According to the report, the attack damaged a building. Sirens went off in the city but there was no interception by air defenses, it said.

Israeli army: 600 soldiers killed since October 7

The Israeli military on Monday announced the death of a soldier in fighting in the Gaza Strip, bringing the total number of troops killed since the October 7 Hamas attacks on Israel to 600.

The military announced the death of 20-year-old soldier Nadav Cohen and updated its overall death toll, Asharq Al-Awsat reported.

The figure includes 256 troops who have been killed since the start of Israel's ground operation in Gaza.

Israel asks UN to dismantle UNRWA

Israel has given the UN a proposal to dismantle UNRWA, its relief agency in the Palestinian territories, and transfer its staff to a replacement agency to make large-scale food deliveries into Gaza, according to UN sources.

The proposal was presented by the Israeli chief of the general staff, Lt Gen Herzi Halevi, to UN officials in Israel, who forwarded it to the organization's secretary general, António Guterres, on Saturday, sources familiar with the discussions said, the Guardian reported.

Under the terms presented last week, 300 to 400 UNRWA staff would initially be transferred either to another UN agency, such as the World Food Program (WFP), or to a new organization specially created to distribute food aid in Gaza.

More UNRWA employees could be transferred in later stages and the agency's assets would also be transferred.

Some inside the UN, other aid agencies and human rights groups see the Israeli proposal as the culmination of a long Israeli campaign to destroy UNRWA.

"If we allow this, it is the slippery slope to us being completely managed directly by the Israelis, and the UN directly being complicit in undermining UNRWA, which is not only the biggest aid provider but also the biggest bastion of anti-extremism in Gaza," one UN official said.

Erdogan vows to make amends after election loss

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan vowed on Monday to correct any mistakes that led

to his party's defeat in Turkey's local elections where the opposition capitalized on economic woes.

Sunday's vote marked Erdogan and his AK Party's (AKP) worst defeat in more than 20 years in power, revitalizing the opposition party and strengthening Istanbul Mayor Ekrem Imamoglu's standing as the president's main rival, Reuters reported.

Redrawing a political map long dominated by the AKP, the Republican People's Party (CHP) won the popular vote for the first time in decades and swept most of the main cities, penetrating far into conservative central Turkey.

Analysts said voters lost patience with both a cost-of-living crisis driven by near 70% inflation and Erdogan's divisive political style.

The result bruised his hopes of adopting a new constitution, which could potentially extend his rule beyond 2028 when his term ends, they said. Though AKP and its allies have a majority in parliament, Erdogan would need broader support or a successful referendum for a new constitution.

Erdogan delivered a somber and introspective speech in the early hours of Monday. "This is not an end for us, but actually a turning point," he said, acknowledging a "loss of altitude" for the AKP.

"If we made a mistake, we will fix it," he told crowds gathered at the AKP headquarters in Ankara, without indicating what changes he might make within his party or in policy.

Kremlin dismisses report Russia behind 'Havana Syndrome'

The Kremlin on Monday dismissed a report that Russian military intelligence may be behind the mysterious "Havana syndrome" ailment that has afflicted U.S. diplomats and spies globally.

Insider, a Russia-focused investigative media group based in Riga, Latvia, reported that members of a Russian military intelligence (GRU) unit known as 29155 had been placed at the scene of reported health incidents involving U.S. personnel.

The year-long Insider investigation in collaboration with 60 Minutes and Germany's Der Spiegel also reported that senior members of Unit 29155 received awards and promotions for work related to the development of "non-lethal acoustic weapons".

"This is not a new topic at all; for many years the topic of the so-called 'Havana Syndrome' has been exaggerated in the press, and from the very beginning it was linked to accusations against the Russian side," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters when asked about the report.

Poll: UK Labour will beat Tories in upcoming elections

A 15,029-person MRP poll conducted by Survation on behalf of Best for Britain showed opposition Labour Party getting 45% of the vote share with a 19-point lead over the Conservatives, up three points from the group's previous poll at the end of last year.

The poll was also analyzed by the UK-based The Sunday Times who also conducted a seat-by-seat survey which showed that Tory prospects have hit a record low indicating that the ruling party for 14-years is in for a major drubbing in the general election expected later this year, with even British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's seat in North Yorkshire hanging in the balance.

The survey showed that the Tories are on track for their worst election result, winning fewer than 100 seats. Labour could win 468, giving opposition leader Keir Starmer's party a whopping 286-seat majority.

Domestic airports handle 20k flights, 2.5m passengers for Nowruz travels

TEHRAN – More than 2.5 million passengers have been transported by 20,000 flights in the course of the Persian New Year's holidays which started on March 14, according to the deputy transport minister.

"With measures taken in the field of intercity public transportation," Seyyed Kamal Hadianfar noted, "we are witnessing an increase in passenger satisfaction across all transportation sectors this year."

In an interview with CHTN, Hadianfar stated that during the spring holidays, more than 20,000 flights were operated, facilitating the transport of over 2.5 million passengers through the country's airports.

The official also pointed to the importance of selling airplane tickets during special times at approved rates, mentioning the previous recommendations to travelers to purchase round-trip tickets before starting their journey.

He further outlined that the management of the new year's travel wave has been well-handled, and measures have been de-

vised to ensure people across the country can use public road, rail, and air transportation until Eid al-Fitr with peace of mind.

Referring to the transfer of about 10 million passengers using public transportation until March 31, Hadianfar declared that 50% of this figure, comprising over 1.44 million passengers, traveled by rail transport.

Additionally, over 2.5 million passengers were transported through airports during this period, with some using sailing vessels in ports for island trips and recreational excursions.

Addressing the Nowruz travelers, the official stressed the importance of time management for their return trips, considering the existing infrastructure capacities for both private car and public transportation users.

Hadianfar also announced plans to bolster transportation services in provinces experiencing heightened travel demand, with additional flights scheduled to accommodate the influx of travelers.

Archaeologists are now finding microplastics in ancient remains

Microplastics have been found in historic soil samples for the first time, according to a new study, potentially upending the way archaeological remains are preserved.

Researchers found microplastics in soil deposits more than seven meters underground, which were deposited in the first or second century CE and excavated in the 1980s, a team led by researchers from the University of York in the United Kingdom said in a statement published Friday.

In total, the study identified 16 different microplastic polymer types in contemporary and archived soil samples, the statement adds.

Microplastics are tiny pieces of plastic that are no larger than five millimeters (0.2 inches)—about the size of a single sesame seed—and form when larger plastics break down, either by chemically degrading or physically wearing down into smaller pieces.

They were also commonly used in some beauty products until around 2020, say researchers, and conversations about their proliferation in the world around us have spiked in recent years.

There are concerns about the impact of microplastics on the environment and on human health, but this latest study also suggests they could force a change in the entire field of archaeology.

While preserving archaeological remains in situ has been the favored approach in recent years, the new findings could trigger a change in approach, as microplastic contami-

nation could compromise the remains' scientific value.

"This feels like an important moment, confirming what we should have expected: that what were previously thought to be pristine archaeological deposits, ripe for investigation, are in fact contaminated with plastics, and that this includes deposits sampled and stored in the late 1980s," John Schofield, a professor and director of studies in the University of York's Department of Archaeology, said in the statement.

"We are familiar with plastics in the oceans and in rivers. But here we see our historic heritage incorporating toxic elements. To what extent this contamination compromises the evidential value of these deposits, and their national importance is what we'll try to find out next."

David Jennings, chief executive of York Archaeology, explained why microplastic contamination is such a concern.

"Our best-preserved remains—for example, the Viking finds at Coppergate (in the city of York)—were in a consistent anaerobic waterlogged environment for over 1000 years, which preserved organic materials incredibly well," he said in the statement.

"The presence of microplastics can and will change the chemistry of the soil, potentially introducing elements which will cause the organic remains to decay. If that is the case, preserving archaeology in situ may no longer be appropriate."

(Source: CNN)

Iran in frames



An aerial view of the UNESCO-designated Naqsh-e Jahan Square in Isfahan, where history whispers through the labyrinth of architecture.

Iranian families mark Sizdeh Bedar differently amid Ramadan observance

By Afshin Majlesi

TEHRAN – On Monday, when the joyous spring festival of Nowruz saw its culmination with the traditional celebration of Sizdeh Bedar, many Iranian families exclusively observed the occasion this year, due to its overlap with the holy month of Ramadan.

Sizdeh Bedar, the 13th day of Nowruz, typically sees masses of families flocking to parks and green spaces for outdoor picnics and merrymaking. However, this year's observance witnessed a departure from the usual festivities, as many families pitched tents and gathered for iftar, the evening meal to break the fast during Ramadan, in these scenic locales.

With the convergence of Sizdeh Bedar and Ramadan, the majority of Iranian households adapted their traditions to honor both occasions simultaneously. This unique combination of customs reflects the cultural harmony and reverence for tradition deep-rooted within Iranian society.

Maryam, 32, a housewife, said to the Tehran Times: "I'm thrilled to cel-



brate Sizdeh Bedar in the park this year, especially with Ramadan coinciding. It's a beautiful opportunity to connect with nature and our spirituality in a serene setting."

Mehdi, 45, a businessman: "For our family, Sizdeh Bedar has always been about enjoying the outdoors and soaking up the sunshine. With Ramadan upon us, combining iftar with our traditional picnic feels like a natural extension of our celebrations."

Sara, 28, who is a teacher, said: "As a young couple, my husband and I look forward to Sizdeh Bedar every year. This time, with Ramadan, it's

even more special."

Hossein, 63, a retiree: "I've been celebrating Sizdeh Bedar for as long as I can remember, but this year feels particularly meaningful. It's cheering to see people coming together, as many of them struggle with economic hardship, to share in this tradition."

Zahra, 21, a university student: "For me, Sizdeh Bedar has always been about making memories with friends and family. This year, with Ramadan coinciding, we will go to a park near home early in the morning and stay there till the end of the day. Breaking fast surrounded by

lush greenery adds an extra layer of peace and tranquility to the experience."

In anticipation of this special occasion, parks across the country prepared to accommodate the influx of families. Municipal authorities made arrangements to ensure the availability of essential amenities such as restroom facilities, trash bins, and designated areas for tent pitching.

For many Iranians, the prospect of celebrating Sizdeh Bedar amidst the spiritual atmosphere of Ramadan holds profound significance. It is seen as an opportunity to foster a sense of unity and solidarity among communities, transcending cultural and religious boundaries. As families come together to share in the joy of both occasions, they embrace the spirit of compassion that characterizes this time of renewal and reflection.

Moreover, the convergence of Sizdeh Bedar and Ramadan highlights the harmonious coexistence of diverse traditions within the fabric of Iranian society, where celebrations and rituals, for centuries, have shaped a shared heritage and collective memory.

4 million visits to Isfahan's cultural sites recorded

From Page 1 ▶ has evolved into one of the country's premier tourist destinations, drawing visitors from far and wide. Renowned for its wealth of architectural marvels, including unparalleled Islamic edifices, bustling bazaars, enriching museums, picturesque Persian gardens, and charming tree-lined boulevards, Isfahan offers a tapestry of experiences for the discerning traveler.

Situated along the banks of the Zayandeh-Rood, Isfahan, the provincial capital, boasts not only a plethora of historic bridges but also owes much of its allure to the life-giving river, which has en-

dowed the city with an innate beauty and fertility. Dubbed Nesf-e-Jahan, or "Half the World," Isfahan's grandeur in its prime rivaled that of cities twice its size, boasting a population nearing one million.

The iconic blue tiles adorning Isfahan's Islamic structures and its stately bridges stand in stark contrast to the arid expanse of the surrounding Iranian countryside. At the heart of the city lies the expansive Imam Square, also known as Naghsh-e Jahan Square, spanning an impressive 500 meters by 160 meters. Dating back to the early 17th cen-

tury, this UNESCO-recognized square is adorned with Isfahan's most captivating landmarks, offering a glimpse into the city's rich history and architectural splendor.

Beyond its cultural treasures, Isfahan plays host to a thriving industrial sector, boasting steel factories and even a nuclear facility on its outskirts. Moreover, the city has emerged as a leading hub for medical tourism, boasting a cutting-edge healthcare complex that attracts patients from around the globe, solidifying its status as a premier destination in the realm of medical tourism.

Nowruz travels: 10m use public transport, 1.5m favor rail

TEHRAN – Some 10 million passengers used public transportation from March 14 to 31 [Persian New Year's holidays], of whom, 1.44 million utilized rail transport, the deputy transport minister has said.

Inspecting Tehran Railway Station for the second time during the Nowruz holidays on Sunday, Seyyed Kamal Hadianfar engaged in discussions with passengers within the station's waiting area, aiming to assess the overall experience and address any concerns or feedback from

travelers.

Regarding train ticket distribution capacity, Hadianfar emphasized the need for a distribution system during peak Nowruz travel, with 70% planned and 30% for passengers requiring sudden travel due to special circumstances.

Hadianfar expressed optimism regarding the future expansion of the country's rail passenger fleet, foreseeing potential growth in the upcoming years.

He also highlighted the significant volume of 80 daily train operations to and from Mashhad, which makes Khorasan Razavi province a major transport destination in Iran.

Referring to the predicted 3 to 5% increase in travel during this year's spring holidays, the official said that there are six days left until the end of the Nowruz travel plan, with the estimation of a 3% increase in travel.

He attributed the main reasons for the modest increase in Nowruz trav-

els this year to unfavorable weather conditions and coinciding with the holy month of Ramadan, noting that the peak time for the return of Nowruz travels has begun, expecting an increase in travels during the return days.

Concluding his remarks, the official underscored the overall satisfaction expressed by the public regarding rail transportation services, assuring that the delay rate of trains has been very negligible.

Journey to the azure blue dome of Hamdollah Mostowfi's mausoleum

TEHRAN – Hamdollah Mostowfi, revered as one of the eminent historians of the Ilkhanid period, holds a significant place in the hearts of the people of Qazvin.

The striking edifice housing his mausoleum stands tall, crafted from brick with an imposing azure blue dome crowning its summit. Adorned with intricate tilework throughout, the structure exudes beauty and elegance.

Comprising two levels, the lower floor, known as the basement, serves as the original resting place of Mostowfi, though it remains inaccessible to the public. Ascending to the upper story reveals a charming space adorned with understated turquoise-blue tiles.

According to Visit Iran, a notable architectural feature of the mausoleum is its distinctive conical dome, characteristic of the Rok Dome style prevalent in traditional Iranian architecture. This dou-

ble-shell dome, with its melon-shaped interior and conical exterior, stands as a testament to the ingenuity of Persian architects.

Another remarkable aspect of this historic site is the incorporation of Se-Konj or Filpoosh technique, whereby skilled artisans transformed the original square plan into octagonal, sixteen-sided, thirty-two-sided, and finally circular forms to accommodate the dome structure. The mausoleum is adorned with two intricately crafted walnut wood doors, one of which bears a Quranic verse. While these doors are replacements dating back approximately eighty years, the original pair, one lost to fire and the other preserved in the National Museum of Iran, underscore the site's rich history.

Within the courtyard of Gonbad-e Deraz, visitors will find an inscription detailing the life and contributions of Hamdollah Mostowfi, along with access to a traditional household cistern, open for



public viewing.

Qazvin was once the capital of the mighty Persian Empire, under Safavids, from 1548 to 98. It is a major tourist destination with a wonderfully restored caravanserai-turned-arts precinct, some quirky museums and a handful of decent eating options. For most travelers, Qazvin is also primarily the staging point for excursions to the famous castle of the Assassins and trekking in Alamut Valley.

Tourism help plea to avoid planet or profit choice

Tourism businesses need more support so they are not left choosing between "sustainability or quicker profits", a guest house owner has said.

John Whitehead, who runs an eco-lodge in Eryri National Park, also called Snowdonia, said the sector needed help to tackle climate change.

It comes as Wales was named one of the world's most sustainable destinations to visit this year by travel company Lonely Planet.

The Welsh government said it was supporting tourism businesses to reach their green ambitions.

Since buying his guest house 25 years ago, Mr. Whitehead has made it more eco-friendly by adding new insulation, solar panels and "a boiler for the heating which runs on cat litter".

He added: "These things aren't cheap but there's not a lot of money out there."

"With the support we've got now you might break even in five or six years' time and sometimes businesses won't accept that, they'll just look for a quicker return.

"Government can lead on this. We're so far down the rabbit hole with climate change now they need to do more."

According to a recent YouGov poll, 35% of adults in the UK want to travel more sustainably - that figure rises to 42% among young people and is even higher globally, at 53%.

Nia Jones is co-chairwoman of the Anglesey Tourism Association and runs her own holiday let.

She said she had seen "a noticeable growth in the demand for sustainable stays in Wales".

"If we as an industry can meet that rise it can only be a good thing for us," she added.

"Tourism causes an increase in emissions and a loss of biodiversity and so we also have a duty of care to put something back."

With more than 40,000 Instagram followers, Sarah Jayne from Flintshire uses her platform to promote sustainable travel.

She said that while "everyone" tends to head for places such as Yr Wyddfa and Ynys Llanddwyn, there were "vast pockets that are unexplored, places like the Clwydian Range".

She added: "It's so easy to get away from everyone else and leave less of a mark. It could make such a difference."

Linda Osti, a senior lecturer in tourism management at Bangor University, said she felt Wales' tourism sector still had work to do.

(Source: BBC)

First Persian yellow deer born in Arsanjan in new year

TEHRAN – A Persian yellow deer was born on Sunday in the Arsanjan breeding site, southern Fars province, the first of this species born since the beginning of the current Iranian calendar year (March 19).

This 300-hectare site was launched in the Iranian calendar year 1390 (March 2011-March 2012) with seven yellow deer, Rokna news agency quoted Hassan Ebrahimi, an official with the Department of Environment as saying.

The number of yellow deer has now reached 118, including live-caught deer and those transferred to neighboring provinces, 95 yellow deer were identified in the region, showing an increase of 30 percent year on year, IRNA reported.

Creating a safe and comfortable breeding environment is a key factor for boosting the deer population in the center, Ebrahimi said.

"The center is known as one of the successful breeding sites in the country," he added.

According to Ebrahimi, ongoing monitoring of the region, providing security, ensuring timely feeding, and implementing optimal management practices are the most important indicators for the successful growth of this valuable species in this part of the country.

The 30 percent increase in the growth of this valuable species last year indicates that all the biologi-



cal conditions have been met, and some 25 new deer calves are expected to be added to the current population this year.

Endangered species

There are many threats to endangered wildlife species, including mammals, reptiles, amphibians, fish, and birds.

Habitat destruction, fragmentation, and modification caused by human-led activities such as industrial and residential development, logging, crop farming, livestock grazing, mining, road and dam building, and pesticide use have taken an extreme toll on threatened and endangered wildlife populations at an alarming rate.

Currently, about 128 species of animals and vertebrates in the

country are at risk of extinction, some of which are not in good condition, and amphibians are the most vulnerable in this area.

Persian zebra, Asiatic cheetah, black bear, and yellow deer are in danger of extinction.

Zebbras exist in two habitats in Iran; one is in the Turan protected area in the south of Semnan province, where there are about 250 zebbras, and the other is in the Bahramgur protected area in the southeast of Fars province, where 1,200 zebbras are kept.

The Persian zebra population is estimated to be around 1,500, although the zebra is considered an endangered species according to both national and international regulations.

Asiatic cheetah ranks second among Iran's endangered species. Including the cheetahs that have probably not been identified, the population of this species in Iran is estimated to be below 30.

Persian yellow deer is also one of the most important species in the world. According to the list provided by the International Union for Conservation of Nature, these deer are in the EN category and the red list, which is considered to be in danger of extinction.

The deer have been released in a limited number of habitats in "Ashk" Island, West Azarbaijan province, and "Dez" National Park, Khuzestan province.

They are also kept in reproduction and breeding centers in Ilam, Yazd, Fars, West Azarbaijan, and Mazandaran provinces.

Asian black bear, which is known as the Baluchi black bear, is another endangered species in the country. It lives mainly in forest areas, especially in mountainous areas at altitudes of 500 to 2,700 meters, and is found in Kerman, Hormozgan, and Sistan-Baluchestan provinces in very low quantities.

Paying attention to the biodiversity and wildlife inside the country will not work alone, and it is important to use international capacities to manage the current critical situation and prevent the extinction of endangered species.

Lake Urmia's area expands year on year

TEHRAN –Satellite images show that the area of Lake Urmia measured on February 22 was equal to 2,061 square kilometers which has increased compared to 1,819 square kilometers on March 7, 2023.

Lake Urmia in the northwestern West Azarbaijan province started to dry up in the 2000s. The lake is the largest in West Asia and the sixth-largest salt lake in the world with a water surface area of 5,000 to 6,000 square kilometers.

Following the recent precipitations across the country and the importance of reviving wetlands and lakes, the country's mapping organization monitored Lake Urmia's area using satellite images from the Iranian calendar year 1401 (March 2022- March 2023) to 1402 (March 2023-March 2024), ISNA reported.

The southern part of the lake has expanded notably.

Japan-funded FAO project

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), with the support of the government of Japan, identified technical agricultural solutions to increase water efficiency in the agriculture sector at the Lake Urmia basin, which may be efficient in saving the internationally known biosphere reserves.

Since 1995, Lake Urmia has been shrinking due to rapid upstream agricultural expansion and climate change. These forces have pushed the precious lake to the verge of depletion and have put the region's health, economy, environment, industry, and agriculture at risk.

Despite the efforts of the Lake Urmia Restoration Program National Committee and its focus on the Lake's restoration since 2013, the continuation of the critical situation demonstrates that sustainability, macro and micro, management solutions should be considered as the main essence of action plans.

In a concerted effort to address the challenges facing the Lake Urmia Basin in 2016, FAO launched the "Integrated Program for Sustainable Water Resources Management in the Lake Urmia Basin," which was funded by the Government of Japan.

Key technical outcomes of this initiative included the implementation of a water accounting plus project in the Lake Urmia Basin and the identification of water-consuming hotspots within the basin. Notably, water accounting revealed the significant contribution of irrigated and rainfed agriculture to the Lake's total evapotranspiration, emphasizing the importance of water-saving measures for the Lake's restoration.

Another subsequent development was the establishment of a drought monitoring system by introducing and putting in place new indexes, predicting an intensified water shortage as a foreseeable future for Lake Urmia, exacerbated by rising temperatures.

Acknowledging the challenge of reducing evapotranspiration as the critical point of losing water without compromising farmers' livelihoods, the project's third phase focused on socio-economic and livelihood planning.

The fourth component of the project focused on seeing the big picture and promoting basin management and involved a comprehensive study of a sub-basin as a model for other sub-basins, result-



ing in the creation of a framework of Integrated Watershed Management plans aimed at reducing water consumption in the agriculture sector.

The final phase centered on developing capacity among stakeholders and partners, ensuring the effective utilization of developed tools such as water accounting plus, real water savings monitoring, and drought monitoring tools.

Water transport project

The lake's restoration program was established in 2013 and aims to restore the lake within a 10-year program.

The Kanisib tunnel is the most important structure for transferring water to Lake Urmia to prevent it from drying out.

On February 24, 2023, the first phase of a national project to transfer water from the Kanisib Dam to Lake Urmia, northwestern West Azarbaijan province, came on stream.

The construction of a tunnel with a length of 36 kilometers to transfer water from the Kanisib Dam to Lake Urmia started in 2015, IRNA reported.

Some 35 trillion rials (about \$77 million) have been spent on the project.

In the first phase, 300 million cubic meters of water were projected to enter Lake Urmia every year.

The wastewater treatment plant of the city of Urmia, as the second project aimed at reviving Lake Urmia, will come on stream in the near future.

Once the project is inaugurated, 51 million cubic meters of treated wastewater will be transferred to Lake Urmia, Motamedian said, IRIB reported.

This important project started in the calendar year 1394 (March 2015-March 2016) but stopped in the year 1399 (March 2020-March 2021) due to financial problems, he explained.

Some 5 trillion rials (about \$10 million) have been recently earmarked for speeding up the implementation of the Lake Urmia revival plan.

Finland ready to help

In November 2023, Finland's ambassador to Iran, Kari Kahiluoto, announced his country's readiness to cooperate in the restoration of Lake Urmia.

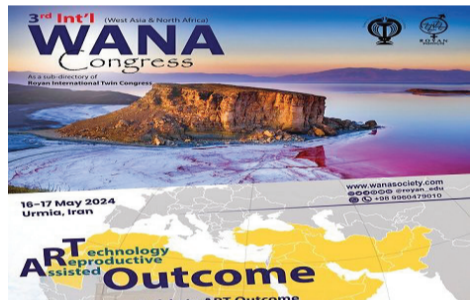
Finland is willing to expand its long-term cooperation with Iran in the fields of water, energy, and waste management, he said.

Water transfer from Lake Van

Research and academic studies are being carried out on transferring water from Lake Van in Turkey to help revive Lake Urmia which has been drying up in recent years, MP Mohammad-Reza Mirtajeddini said in September 2023.

"Four universities have conducted scientific studies and research to transfer water from Lake Van to Lake Urmia which are 160 kilometers away from each other," Mirtajeddini pointed out.

Intl. WANA congress 2024 slated for May



TEHRAN – The third international West Asia and North Africa (WANA 2024) Congress will be held in the city of Urmia, northwestern West Azarbaijan province, from May 16 to 17.

The scientific congress will lay the ground for joint scientific research focusing on Assisted Reproductive Technology (ART) outcomes and the latest scientific achievements in ART, ISNA reported.

Monitoring the children born as a result of infertility treatment, ethical and legal issues, the role of imaging, the impact of environmental factors and lifestyle, enhancing the outcome of assisted infertility: challenges, managements and options, preserving fertility in patients suffering from cancer, and the role of surgery in improving assisted reproductive outcome technology are the main themes of the congress.

The congress also focuses on maintaining a closer affinity with science communities and strengthening ties with trade and scientific ad-

vocates. It provides an opportunity for both foreign and domestic knowledge-based companies to showcase their recent achievements in infertility treatment.

Moreover, one of the important objectives of the third international congress is to establish the WANA Scientific Network.

The main objectives of establishing this scientific association include:

- Facilitating the exchange of scientific knowledge by building connections with research institutions, scientists, and centers in the WANA region globally.
- Identifying opportunities for collaboration within the region and expanding communication networks.
- Enhancing networking among knowledge-based companies in the WANA region to boost interactions and trade of scientific products.
- Offering a comprehensive range of knowledge-based services (total solution), such as training, expert consulting, and project implementation in biotechnology, to countries seeking assistance from knowledge-based companies.

Royan International Twin Congress

Reproductive Biomedicine and Stem Cells Biology and Technology has been demonstrated to be one of the most successful experiences of scientific gathering in Iran and West Asia since

2000.

During these twenty years of active involvement in sharing and exchanging scientific knowledge and expertise with renowned scientific institutes and scientists, the Royan Congress has helped to form many shared scientific projects and exchanges.

Given that the Royan Annual International Twin Congress has so far been able to establish a good platform for the exchange of the latest achievements in the fields of Stem Cell Biology & Technology and Reproductive Biomedicine worldwide, the WANA International Congress has come into existence.

WANA Scientific Society enjoys a chain of reputable scientists, researchers, and university professors as its international partners who play crucial roles in enriching the society in its content and toward seizing its goals already set.

First international WANA congress as a sub-directory of Royan International Twin Congress in June 2022.

Fertility rate

The total fertility rate should reach 2.5 from 1.66 before the closure of the demographic window in the next five years, an official with the Ministry of Health has said.

"The country is on the threshold of aging; to tackle this crisis, we must promote childbearing and youth population," IRNA quoted Saber Jabbari as saying.

ENGLISH IN USE

LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

Afghans life in Iran provided new model of migration

The friendly coexistence of Afghans with Iranians has set a new pattern in migration, secretary of human rights headquarters in Iran has stated.

The two nations of Iran and Afghanistan share similarities in religion, culture and civilization, Ali Bagherikani said on Thursday during a meeting with Afghan immigrants in Tehran.

The west is using all the capacities to turn the differences between the two nations of Iran and Afghanistan into a dispute and then a conflict in order to achieve their illegitimate interests, he lamented.

"The effort of the Human Rights Headquarters is to highly protect the right of immigrants living in Iran," he highlighted.

زندگی افغانستانی‌ها در ایران الگوی جدیدی از مهاجرت ارائه کرده است

دبیرستاد حقوق بشر جمهوری اسلامی ایران می‌گوید همزیستی ملاطفت‌آمیز افغانستانی‌ها با ایرانی‌ها، الگوی جدیدی را در مهاجرت ارائه کرده است.

به گزارش ایرنا، «علی باقری‌کنی» روز پنجشنبه در دیدار با مهاجران افغانستانی در تهران اظهار داشت: اشتراکات دینی، فرهنگی و تمدنی دو ملت ایران و افغانستان بسیار به هم نزدیک است.

وی افزود: غربی‌ها از همه ظرفیت‌ها استفاده می‌کنند تا تفاوت‌های دو ملت ایران و افغانستان را به اختلاف و سپس نزاع تبدیل کنند تا به منافع نامشروع خود برسند. او گفت: تلاش ستاد حقوق بشر آن است که کوچکترین حقی از مهاجران مقیم ایران ضایع نشود.



Blood donation on Qadr nights

People refer to blood donation centers during the holy month of Ramadan to help patients in need.

Philanthropic assistance has been recommended especially during the Qadr nights (19th, 21st, and 23rd days of Ramadan), which mark the martyrdom of Imam Ali (AS), the first Shia Imam.



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 Subscription & Distribution Dept.: Tel: (+98 21) 43051603
 Printed at: Jame Jam Bartar Borna - 44197737



No. 18, Moghadasi Alley, Nejatollahi St., Tehran, Iran P.O. Box: 14155-4843 Zip Code: 1599814713

APRIL 2, 2024

GUIDE TO SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

Patience is of two kinds: patience over what pains you, and patience against what you covet.

Imam Ali (AS)

Prayer Times > Noon: 12:08 Evening: 18:45 Dawn: 4:22 (tomorrow) Sunrise: 5:48 (tomorrow)

UK film, TV stars donate lots to raise funds for humanitarian aid in Gaza

British film and TV celebrities including Tilda Swinton, Ken Loach and Brian Cox are contributing to an online auction to raise money for humanitarian relief and medical aid for Palestinians in Gaza.

The newly formed Cinema For Gaza group has organized the online auction, opening on April 2, the Hollywood Reporter reported.

Among the auction lots to bid on are an online bedtime story read by Swinton; tickets to Cox's London stage performance of "A Long Day's Journey Into Night," including a meet and greet with the "Succession" star; and a walk-on part in the new film from "Bend It Like Beckham" director Gurinder Chadha.

Directors Mike Leigh, Asif Kapadia and Joanna Hogg, and actors Harris Dickinson, Alison Oliver, and Aimee Lou Wood, are also taking part in the auction, which will raise money for Medical Aid for Palestinians (MAP), a U.K.-based nonprofit organization that provides medical and humanitarian aid for Palestinians in Gaza.

The auction was set up by Cinema for Gaza, an organization launched by a group of U.K.-based filmmakers and film journalists: Hanna Flint, Julia Jackman, Leila Latif, Sophie Monks Kaufman and Helen Simmons.

Among the other auction lots are signed copies by Loach of the poster and script to his latest (and perhaps last) film "The Old Oak," a rare neon light from the set of Hogg's "The Souvenir," a signed "Doctor Who" shooting script with cover artwork by star Peter Capaldi, and a "Zoom serenade of a song of your choice" from actor and Eurovision contender Olly Alexander.

In a shared statement, Cinema For Gaza organizers Hanna Flint, Julia Jackman, Leila Latif, Sophie Monks Kaufman and Helen Simmons have said: "We believe that art and politics are inextricably linked and are called to act in word and deed to help those subjected to unspeakable horrors across the occupied Palestinian territory.

Cinema For Gaza is a passionate, inclusive

fundraising space powered by the generosity of people from all corners of the film industry who will not stand idly by while Palestinians are dehumanized and attacked with impunity."

Since October 7, 2023, Israeli offensive has killed at least 32,705 people, mostly women and children, in Gaza.

Across Gaza, residential areas have been left ruined, previously busy shopping streets reduced to rubble, universities destroyed and farmlands churned up, with tent cities springing up on the southern border to house many thousands of people left homeless.

About 1.7 million people - more than 80% of Gaza's population - are displaced, with nearly half crammed in the far southern end of the strip, according to the United Nations.

Further analysis reveals the scale of destruction of farmland, identifying multiple areas of extensive damage.

The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) has said it is targeting both Hamas fighters and "terror infrastructure," when challenged over the scale of damage. However, satellite data analysis shows the true extent of the destruction. The new analysis suggests between 144,000 and 175,000 buildings across the whole Gaza Strip have been damaged or destroyed. That's between 50% and 60% of Gaza's buildings.

The analysis, carried out by Corey Scher of City University of New York and Jamon Van Den Hoek of Oregon State University, compares images to reveal sudden changes in the height or structure of buildings which indicate damage.

A March 18 report from the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC), the primary organization tracking food insecurity worldwide, warned that the humanitarian situation in Gaza is catastrophic, with northern Gaza facing imminent famine and the rest of the strip also at risk.

The auction will be live until April 12. All proceeds go directly to MAP.

Ruholamin dedicates new painting to martyred girls of Gaza in gesture of solidarity

From Page 1 > Last year, Ruholamin commemorated the martyrdom anniversary of Imam Ali (AS) with his canvas entitled "The Candle of Bayt al-Mal".

The painting, which portrays a story from the Imam's concern for justice during his caliphate, was unveiled on Ruholamin's Instagram.

In his post, Ruholamin wrote that the artwork has been created to commemorate the major event in the history of Islam and dedicated it to his followers.

The artwork depicts the Imam putting out a candle in one hand, while holding another burning one in his other hand during his meeting with Talha and Zubair, two companions of the Prophet Muhammad (S).

It has been produced based on a story, which broke in the early days of the Imam's caliphate when Talha and Zubair went to meet Imam Ali (AS) to discuss a personal matter while the Imam was putting public affairs in order at the Bayt al-Mal, the public treasury in the Islamic concept. The Imam extinguished the candle purchased with public funds, instead lighting another one that he purchased with his own personal funds.

"Now, you have come for some personal work, so I must use the candle purchased with my personal funds," said Imam Ali (AS) when his guests asked about his actions.

Ruholamin, who is best known for his paintings on early Islamic



historical events, has created a captivating collection of artworks dedicated to the theme of Ashura over the years.

One of the works of the collection is "Daddy" depicting the Imam in his final farewell to his three-year-old daughter Roqayyeh (SA).

The 110 X 130-centimeter oil painting shows the Imam embracing Roqayyeh before going to the battlefield while his horse, named "Zuljinah", and the enemy forces can be seen in the background.

The collection also includes "The Sky Fell Down", "The Farewell", "After Abbas (AS)", "Are

You My Brother?", "Monastery of the Monk" and "Beginning of Silence".

"The Sky Fell Down", featuring the last moments of the life of Imam Hussein (AS), is a highlight of the collection.

The painting depicts the Imam on his horse, severely injured by arrows, while the enemy is waiting to bring down the Imam.

Ruholamin spent nine months doing the painting, which was unveiled at the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art in November 2018.

"Monastery of the Monk" is another artwork from his Ashura collection.

The painting depicts the meeting of a monk with Khawli ibn Yazid al-Asbahi, a member of Umar ibn Sad's army, when he was taking the head of Imam Hussein (AS) to Yazid ibn Muawiya, the second caliph of the Umayyad dynasty, after the Ashura event.

The artist has also blended modern events and with stories from Islamic history in some of his works.

Amid the ongoing turmoil in Gaza, the Palestinian Health Ministry reported on Saturday that over 32,705 individuals have tragically lost their lives in the territory since the commencement of Israel's attacks on October 7. Furthermore, the ministry disclosed that a staggering 75,190 people have sustained injuries since the conflict began in the Gaza Strip.

Tazieh performance on Imam Ali's martyrdom to go on stage in Tehran



TEHRAN- Shapur Square in downtown Tehran is set to host a group of thespians performing the story of the martyrdom of Imam Ali (AS) on Wednesday in the form of tazieh, the Iranian passion play.

Directed by Ahmad Azizi, the Seyyed ush-Shohada Tazieh Group will take the stage to commemorate the martyrdom anniversary of the Imam and observe Laylat al-Qadr (The

Grand Nights).

The Grand Nights, falling on the 19th, 21st, and 23rd nights of the holy month of Ramadan, mark the occasion during which the entire Quran was sent down to the Prophet Muhammad (S).

The Martyrdom of Imam Ali, observed on the 21st day of Ramadan, marks the tragic death of Ali ibn Abi Talib, revered as Hazrat Ali, the son-in-law of the Prophet Muhammad. An influential figure in Islamic history, Imam Ali was known for his wisdom, courage, and piety.

The event took place in 661 when he was viciously attacked in the Great Mosque of Kufa by Abd al-Rahman ibn Muljam, a Kharijite from Egypt. This cowardly act occurred on the 19th of Ramadan while Imam Ali was deeply engrossed in his prayers, illustrating the brutality of the attack.

Imam Ali's death serves as a solemn reminder of the sacrifices made by individuals who hold true to their beliefs, even in the face of adversity.

His legacy continues to inspire millions of Muslims worldwide to uphold values of justice, compassion, and the pursuit of righteousness.

The Iranian passion play tazieh was registered on the UNESCO List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in November 2010.

Tazieh presents religious events, historical and mythical stories and folk tales. Each performance has four components of poetry, music, song and motion.

However, stories about the uprising of Imam Hussein (AS) and his companions against the oppressive Umayyad dynasty in 680 CE are more highly regarded by tazieh troupes and audiences.

Iranian paintings on show at New York's Museum Mile

TEHRAN-Paintings of four Iranian artists are on show at an exhibition at Museum Mile Contemporary in New York, the U.S.

Titled "Shining the Light on Iran," the exhibit explores into the creativity and personal thoughts of the four Iranian artists including Nasrin Najafi, Mohsen Rezaei, Sara Azmudeh, and Sepideh Naziri, IRNA reported.

The exhibit has been compiled by Pamela Goldman, Curator and Founder of Museum Mile Contemporary, a non-profit institution. A window between

Iran and the Western world, it introduces the contemporary art and artists of Iran to the world.

Speaking about her works, Najafi said: "When I observe my environment, I face a lot of residues.

Pieces of paper, cardboard, clothes I once wore and foodstuff that were a part of my daily life. The material cost much to make, and the expense is taken from mother nature. Recycling is the best choice, yet I treat this residue differently. I make them into a tool for painting. My art is a tribute to nature."

"We should pay more attention to the environment because the continuation of life depends on protecting the environment, produce less waste and world harder to have clean air and land," she added.

Rezaei said that in his art, the collection of close-up works, the audience is confronted with works that can be seen using a variety of formal methods, especially the pointillism technique and the mixed media of materials, from a visual, momentary, impromptu event.

Azmudeh noted that she

wanted to encourage viewers to think and contemplate about the artworks beyond just admiring their beauty, to think about the meaning of them based on their own worldview.

"Their interpretations will definitely be different from each other because each person's world and thinking are different, and each individual's experience of existence is unique to themselves," she said.

Naziri hoped that viewers of her works find a final harmony and peace in the paintings.

Jules Verne's "The Carpathian Castle" hits bookstores

TEHRAN-A Persian translation of the novel "The Carpathian Castle" written by the French author Jules Verne has been released in the bookstores across the country.

Translated by Farzaneh Mehri, the book has recently been published by Qoqnoos Publishing Group, ILNA reported.

In the village of Werst in the Carpathian Mountains of Transylvania (then part of Austria-Hungary), some mysterious things are occurring and the villagers believe that

Chort (the devil) occupies the castle. A visitor to the region, Count Franz de Telek, is intrigued by the stories and decides to go to the castle and investigate.

He finds that the owner of the castle is Baron Rodolphe de Gortz, with whom he is acquainted; years earlier, they were rivals for the affections of the celebrated Italian prima donna La Stilla. The Count thought that La Stilla was dead, but he sees her image and voice coming from the castle.

The original book was first published in 1892. It is

possible that Bram Stoker took inspiration from this for his 1897 novel "Dracula". Due to castle aspect and local toponymy, it is assumed that Colț Castle in Hunedoara County inspired Jules Verne.

Jules Verne (1828-1905) was a French novelist, poet, and playwright. He is considered to be an important author in France and most of Europe, where he has had a wide influence on the literary avant-garde and on surrealism.

Verne wrote about space, air,

and underwater travel before people invented navigable aircraft and practical submarines and devised any means of spacecraft. He ranks behind Agatha Christie as the second most translated author of all time. People often refer to Verne alongside Herbert George Wells as the "father of science fiction" for novels including "Journey to the Center of the Earth" (1864) "Around the World in Eighty Days" (1873), and "Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea" (1870) among many others.

Cartoon of Day



Gaza
 Cartoonist: Mohammad Sabaaneh from Palestine