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Iran set to hold run-off presidential elections

Pezeschkian or Jalili People to Decide Tomorrow



It's quite wrong to think those who didn't vote are opposed to the ruling system: Leader

TEHRAN- Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei met with the new custodian, a number of managers, and a group of professors from Shahid Motahari University on July 3, 2024.

During the meeting, Ayatollah Khamenei spoke briefly about the presidential runoff election, scheduled for Friday, July 5, 2024. Emphasizing the importance of the elections, the Leader emphasized that, "Anyone interested in Islam, the Islamic Republic, the progress of the country, improving the situation, and filling the voids should show their interest by participating in the elections on Friday."

Ayatollah Khamenei noted that the level of participation in the initial stage of the elections was lower than anticipated and went against predictions. "There are reasons behind this matter which should be examined by sociologists and those involved in politics," he stated.

The Leader of the Islamic Revolution completely rejected the notion held by some that individuals who abstained from voting in the first round of the elections were opposed to the system. ▶ Page 3

Lebanon will become 'eternal hell' for Israel, Iranian acting FM warns

TEHRAN – Iran's interim foreign minister, Ali Baqeri Kani, has delivered a strong message to Israel, cautioning that any incursion into Lebanon would lead to an "eternal hell" for the Zionist regime.

Speaking to reporters on Wednesday, Baqeri Kani emphasized the role of Hezbollah, Lebanon's powerful resistance movement, in creating a deterrent force in the region.

He asserted that Hezbollah's active military and diplomatic presence in Lebanon is a key factor in the war equation, making any attempt to invade a formidable challenge for Israel. "An all-out war on Lebanon will definitely turn into an eternal hell for the Zionist regime," he stated.

Turning to the potential visit of Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud to Iran, Baqeri Kani stated that the trip is firmly on the agenda for both countries. However, he clarified that any potential development in Tehran-Riyadh relations will be pursued after the next Iranian administration takes office.

Addressing the possibility of Donald Trump becoming the next U.S. president, Baqeri Kani stressed that the Islamic Republic's policies are not contingent on changes in other countries' administrations. ▶ Page 3

Pezeschkian's key advocates are both a strong point and a point of weakness for him.

Jalili is of the opinion that Iran should make the West "regret" its shunning of the JCPOA.

By Mona Hojat Ansari

TEHRAN – Iranians are set to head to the polls on Friday, July 5, to choose their next president in a runoff election.

Competition is tight between reformist Masoud Pezeschkian and conservative Saeed Jalili who respectively gained 10.41 million and 9.47 million votes during the preliminary round on June 28.

The incoming president will be stepping into the role left vacant by the untimely passing of President Ebrahim Raisi. Raisi tragically lost his life in a helicopter crash on May 19, with a year remaining in his term, and was anticipated to secure a second term in 2025.

With a campaign ban taking effect in the

early hours of Thursday, we have decided to compare and contrast the plans, perspectives, and campaigns of the two candidates competing in the runoff election in this article.

Debate performance

Pezeschkian's entrance into the presidential fray was sudden and unexpected. In his own words, he was not expecting to

get qualified to run for president, as he had initially failed to get vetted as a nominee by the Guardian Council during Iran's 2023 Parliamentary elections.

This caused most of Pezeschkian's appearances on national TV to appear garbled. In many of his debates and addresses to the Iranian populace, the reformist candidate said he needed to "consult experts"

on economic and societal issues and refrained from detailing his agenda.

While it is in no way bad to seek counsel from experts, some people had hoped that they would hear in more detail how Pezeschkian was planning to govern.

Jalili though, has campaigned for presidency multiple times in the past. He managed to outline more well-received plans and policies during debates. His remarks, however, have sometimes been deemed as too vague or too specific for the general public to understand.

The fact that Jalili was allegedly a key contributor to the late President Raisi's administration, also helped him hold a better grasp of the current issues in the country.

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"Unprecedented event" in Gaza

By Wesam Bahrani

TEHRAN- After mentioning "an event unprecedented in months" regarding clashes between the Palestinian resistance movement and the Israeli occupation forces in the Gaza Strip, Israeli media reported that two soldiers had been killed in the Netzarim area.

Under the "Permitted for Publication" clause, Israeli media detailed that the slain troops were Staff Sergeant Nadav Elchanaan Knoller from the 121st Battalion in the 8th armored brigade, and Major Eyal Avnion, a deputy company commander in the same battalion.

In the same battle where these soldiers lost their lives, five others from their battalion were injured, with one in critical condition. Another battle in southern Gaza led a soldier from the 52nd Battalion of the 401st Brigade to suffer serious injuries. ▶ Page 5

Alireza Ghorbani's concert at Persepolis extended

TEHRAN-In a groundbreaking cultural event, the renowned Iranian vocalist Alireza Ghorbani performed the first-ever concert at the ancient site of Persepolis in Shiraz, Fars Province, from June 29 to July 1.

Receiving an overwhelmingly enthusiastic response from attendees, the concert that was originally slated for three nights, was extended due to unprecedented demand. It was held on July 2 and 3 and will have another performance on July 4, IRNA reported.

The initial concert sold out within hours, prompting organizers to extend the event for several more nights. Tickets for the additional performances have also seen brisk sales, with many eager to be part of this historic event.

(See full text at tehrantimes.com)



White House under fire

By Shahrokh Saei

TEHRAN- The administration of US President Joe Biden has faced growing domestic and international criticism for its continued backing of Israel against the backdrop of the regime's genocidal war in the Gaza Strip.

Since Israel launched war on Gaza on October 7, people across the world have either held protests or used social media to vent their anger at Washington's support for the onslaught.

Over the past nine months, the White House has continued military support for Israel and vetoed several UN Security Council resolutions condemning Israel's actions in the conflict.

Criticism of the US policy in support of Israel is also widespread and multifaceted inside the country. Many Americans, including liberal and progressive groups, religious leaders and politicians have expressed concerns about the disproportionate financial and military aid provided to the Israeli regime. ▶ Page 5

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TEHRAN PAPERS

Washington at the peak of human rights violations

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

In a note, the Iran newspaper investigated America's record about human rights. It wrote: America's performance and positions about human rights confirm that this country, despite its humanitarian slogans, has become the main violator of human rights over the past years. When making human rights claims, the United States of America puts countries like Iran under comprehensive pressure and imposes sanctions against them. America's support for the nature and crimes of the Zionist regime is America's biggest action against human rights, which has entered a new phase since last year in the Gaza war. During Iran's deterrent attack on the occupied territories, it was the U.S. defense systems and military weapons that came to the aid of the Zionist regime to counter Iran's missiles and drones. For America and its Western partners, human rights are relevant as long as their crimes are not involved and they can advance their policies in the world by using humanitarian concepts as a tool.

Donya-e-Eqtesad: Iran's future in Shanghai

In a commentary, Donya-e-Eqtesad dealt with the importance of the Shanghai Pact for Iran. The paper said: Transit and energy are a high priority for Iran in the Shanghai Pact. These two cases can have an early impact on the improvement of Iran's economy due to their high and early productivity. On the other hand, Iran will try to do wider marketing with the aim of selling its oil to other member countries of Shanghai. In addition to China, which is currently the largest buyer of Iranian oil, Iran can encourage other member countries of Shanghai and the region to buy the oil they need from Iran by serious marketing in the Shanghai area. Iran is selling its oil at cheaper prices due to the intensification of U.S. sanctions. The benefit of China and Russia from Iran's current situation has caused them to have access to Iran's cheap energy. Therefore, they will try to keep Iran in its current state. Iran joining Shanghai or BRICS as important international organizations will give Iran a more prominent position.

Arman-e-Emrooz: The shadow of FATF over presidential candidates

In a commentary, Arman-e-Emrooz addressed the declaration of the statement of the Special Financial Action Task Force (FATF)

on Friday and wrote: Exactly in the days when FATF became the topic of the Islamic Republic's election debates, the Special Task Force on Financial Action (FATF) declared that Iran will still be in the money laundering blacklist of this group. FATF has two main opponents in Iran; A group of its opponents believes that joining FATF prevents Iran from evading sanctions. Another group believes that if the name of the Iranian resistance front groups is included in the list of terrorist groups by the United States and Western countries, the banks of the Islamic Republic of Iran will no longer be able to have financial transactions with them. It should also be noted that placing Iran's name on the FATF blacklist has a significant impact on Iran's foreign policy and economy. In addition to damaging Iran's credibility and soft power in international forums, this has imposed many restrictions and costs on the country's trade and financial transactions and keeps important business partners away from Iran.

Sazandegi: Iran has gained enough experience

In an article, Sazandegi discussed Iran's outlook after the elections and wrote: The system of the Islamic Republic has a structure, and the future president must be able to intelligently make the maximum impact on the people's expectations in this system structure, and if he can do around 60 or 70%, it is very positive and a forward move, and one more move should be made in the next stage and increase its effectiveness.

Currently, Iran has reached maturity, because they conduct many behind-the-scenes negotiations and do not conduct face-to-face negotiations with the American president. The new president should put JCPOA, solving FATF issues, money transfer, and SWIFT among his priorities, and with the economic team he chooses, he can solve these issues.

The saboteurs say that if Mr. Jalili comes to work, and Trump also assumes office, the Islamic Republic and the regime will be under a lot of pressure and internal protests will lead to the destruction of the Islamic Republic. But this is an illusion and only increases the pressure on people. The best thing a government can do is to reduce the pressure on people.

Iran to take legal action against harassment of voters abroad

TEHRAN – Iran's Judiciary has announced its intention to take legal action against individuals who harassed Iranian citizens attempting to vote in the June 28 presidential elections.

Kazem Gharibabadi, Deputy for International Affairs of the Judiciary, stated on Wednesday that criminal charges will be pursued against anyone —whether Iranian or non-Iranian—who insulted, threatened, or assaulted Iranian nationals in an effort to prevent them from participating in the election process.

The announcement follows a condemnation by Iranian Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Nasser Kanaani, who on Monday denounced the incidents of harassment and intimidation faced by Iranian voters abroad.

Kanaani's remarks, made via a social media post, criticized the use of threats and vulgar language by opponents of the Islamic Republic, describing these actions as "ugly behavior."

"These self-proclaimed defenders of citizenship rights, human rights, and democracy will be judged by the Iranian nation," Kanaani asserted.

The issue gained further prominence after Iran filed an official protest with the British government, highlighting attempts by anti-Iranian elements outside polling stations to disrupt the voting process.

Ali Matinfar, Iran's chargé d'affaires in London, revealed on Sunday that the Iranian embassy had sent a message to the UK Foreign Office expressing strong condemnation of the actions of anti-Iran elements who disrupted voting on June 28.

Gharibabadi elaborated on the Judiciary's stance, noting that a thorough investigation

will be conducted, and those found guilty of attempting to undermine the electoral process will face appropriate legal consequences. This move aims to safeguard the integrity of the voting process and ensure that all Iranian citizens, regardless of their location, can exercise their right to vote free from intimidation or coercion.

On June 28, thousands of Iranians living in Britain visited polling stations in cities including London, Manchester, Birmingham, Newcastle, Glasgow, and Cardiff to cast their votes. Outside these polling stations, they were subjected to verbal, physical, and sexual abuse by anti-Iran individuals.

Reports indicate that some attackers filmed themselves sexually abusing female voters, using derogatory language and making rape threats. Male voters also faced assaults from individuals linked to terrorist groups, monarchists, and separatist factions. These attackers later bragged on social media about their efforts to intimidate and dissuade voters through harassment.

Despite these aggressive actions, voting proceeded without major disruptions. UK police arrested at least six individuals involved in the attacks in Birmingham, Manchester, and London.

In an effort to facilitate participation, the Iranian government allocated 250 polling stations for the diaspora, ensuring that Iranians worldwide could exercise their voting rights.

The snap presidential election was held 40 days after President Ebrahim Raisi lost his life in a helicopter crash in Iran's mountainous northwestern region.

Iranian national Bashir Biazar released from French detention

TEHRAN – Iranian musician and filmmaker Bashir Biazar, who was detained and imprisoned in France under controversial circumstances, has been released and is en route back to Iran.

The Iranian presidency's public relations division made the announcement on Wednesday, marking the end of Biazar's month-long ordeal.

Biazar's detention has been a topic of significant debate, with many labeling the charges against him as politically motivated.

On June 4, Biazar was summoned by French police without any prior explanation or warrant. Upon arrival at the police station, he was arrested and subsequently transferred to a detention center typically used for illegal migrants.

Bashir Biazar, who has earned international acclaim for his work as an independent music composer and filmmaker, has a storied career. He previously served as the managing director of the New Horizon Institute of Arts and Culture and was the secretary of the London-based Islamic Student Association. Additionally, Biazar worked for many years as a



production manager at the Music and Song Department of IRIB, Iran's state broadcaster, contributing to numerous acclaimed productions.

Biazar was an independent journalist whose coverage of the latest Israeli war on Gaza had garnered significant attention on social media. Shortly after the beginning of the regime's onslaughts against Palestinians in the besieged enclave, Biazar's account was removed by X without prior warnings. The journalist opened up a new account, where he shared videos of anti-Israel demonstrations in France and also raised awareness about the plight of Palestinians at the hands of the

regime's cruel military.

Biazar's social media presence grew significantly following the events of October 7, which saw heightened conflict between Israel and Palestinians in Gaza. His commentary on platforms like X (formerly Twitter) and Instagram, which focused on Palestinian suffering and Western inaction, garnered widespread praise.

Many experts viewed Biazar's arrest as an attempt to silence pro-Palestinian or anti-Zionist voices in France and other Western countries. The French interior ministry's charges against him included "promoting or inciting terrorism" and disseminating

"state propaganda" for Iran.

Le Point, a major French political news magazine, reported that the expulsion order against Biazar was signed on May 22, two weeks before his arrest. Despite a court ordering his departure from France within 28 days, Biazar remained in police custody, sparking a campaign for his release. This movement gained traction on social media, with prominent journalists, activists, artists, and academics joining the call for his immediate release.

British journalist Richard Medhurst condemned the arrest on X, describing it as "outrageous." He highlighted the lack of transparency and the political nature of the charges, stating, "French police summoned an Iranian musician on June 4 with no explanation, immediately arrested him for 'supporting terrorism,' and drove him 100 km to a camp meant for illegal immigrants. This is purely political and ridiculous."

The arrest of Biazar, regarded by some analysts, was a new move by Western politicians who have been unable to exert pressure on him through his workplace, as he is an independent journalist.

Deputy FM calls out Israel for its 'terrorist activity' in Palestine



TEHRAN – Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister for Legal and International Affairs, Reza Najafi, has declared that the suppression of people living under occupation should be classified as terrorist activity, citing the Zionist regime as a prime example of such behavior.

Najafi made these remarks during the opening ceremony of the Asian-African Legal Consultative Organization (AALCO) Regional Conference on Preventing and Countering Terrorism, held in Tehran on Wednesday.

Najafi emphasized that terrorism poses a significant threat to international peace and security, undermining human values and violating the fundamental rights of its victims. He noted that, beyond the loss of innocent lives, terrorism has inflicted extensive damage, particularly in West Asia and parts of Africa.

Highlighting Iran's own experience as a victim

of terrorism, Najafi condemned all forms of terrorism, stressing that it has no legitimate connection to any religion or nationality. He pointed out that nearly 17,000 Iranian citizens have been killed by the Mujahedin-e-Khalq Organization (MKO), a group whose members predominantly reside in European countries. Additionally, he cited the assassinations of Iranian nuclear scientists by Israel and the killing of Martyr Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani by the United States at Baghdad airport as further instances of terrorism.

Najafi stressed the importance of respecting national sovereignty in the fight against terrorism, condemning any use of force or occupation under the pretext of combating terrorism. He called for the United Nations to play a pivotal role in setting global norms against terrorism and urged the UN Security Council to avoid double standards in this fight.

He highlighted the absence of a unified international definition of terrorism and criticized the creation of politically motivated terrorist lists by certain countries, particularly the United States, as detrimental to international peace and security. Najafi also condemned Canada's decision to blacklist the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC), a branch of Iran's official military, as a violation of Iran's national sovereignty, vowing a decisive

response to any actions that threaten Iran's national security.

Furthermore, Najafi pointed out that terrorist groups often operate as proxies for trans-regional actors, and he praised Iran's effective support to regional countries in combating terrorist groups. He warned that the deployment of foreign terrorists poses a threat to the peace, stability, and security of all regional nations and mentioned recent dangerous activities by terrorist groups in the region following Daesh's defeat in Syria and Iraq.

Najafi criticized Western governments for labeling popular Resistance groups in occupied Palestine as terrorists, arguing that this is a clear violation of international law.

Iran hosts the 63rd Annual Session of the Asian-African Legal Consultative Organization (AALCO) on Preventing and Countering Terrorism.

AALCO, originally founded as the Asian Legal Consultative Committee (ALCC) on November 15, 1956, now includes 48 member states from Asia and Africa, representing two-thirds of the world's population. In 2014, Iran hosted an AALCO meeting that addressed issues such as maritime law, the rights of refugees and migrants, economic sanctions, developments in Palestine, international trade laws, and sustainable development.

Iran marks 'American Human Rights Disclosure Day' with conference criticizing Western hypocrisy

TEHRAN – On Wednesday, Iran marked "American Human Rights Disclosure Day" with a conference at the University of Tehran, focusing on the hypocrisy of Western human rights claims.

The day commemorates the downing of an Iranian passenger plane by the U.S. over the Persian Gulf on July 3, 1988, which killed the 290 people on board.

High-ranking Iranian officials, researchers, and families of victims of the Gaza war attended the 8th American Human Rights Conference to discuss and expose the West's use of human rights as a political tool.

"The U.S. calls itself the defender of human rights, but human rights are politically exploited by Western authorities," said Askar Jalalian, Deputy Minister of Human Rights and International Affairs at the Ministry of Justice. "Human rights is merely a tool in the hands of Washington to secure its own interests."

Jalalian highlighted the West's role in conflicts around the world, accusing them of exacerbating suffering rather than promoting peace.

"The right to peace in the world, such as Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, and even Ukraine, has been messed up in a way that it will not be restored

for years," he said.

He further criticized the U.S. for its support of Israel, noting that the U.S. is the real perpetrator of human rights abuses in Gaza. "The U.S. supports the Zionist regime and claims that this regime legitimately defends itself.

This is despite the fact that this regime very evidently doesn't respect humanitarian laws whatsoever," he said. "Women and children are the silent victims of the American war in Gaza, and Gaza is an exhibition of all kinds of human rights violations."

Hamid Nouri, an Iranian citizen who was illegally detained in

Sweden for five years, provided a personal account of what he considers to be the West's disregard for human rights. "In 2019, I entered Sweden legally as a normal citizen, but I was arrested in an ugly and disgusting way and transferred to prison and solitary confinement," he said.

"It is nothing more than a lie to say that there is democracy and human rights in Western countries like Sweden. Human rights are an ugly claim made by Western countries. An example of Western human rights is that my lawyers were appointed by the Swedish prosecutor's office."

(See full text at tehrantimes.com)

Top Iranian commander praises late foreign minister's diplomatic achievements

TEHRAN – During a commemoration ceremony on Tuesday, the Commander of the Islamic Revolution Guard Corps (IRGC) lauded the significant contributions of the late Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian, to the nation's foreign policy.

Major General Hossein Salami commended Amir Abdollahian for his pivotal role in resolving tensions and expanding diplomatic relationships with other countries.

Salami emphasized Amir Abdollahian's

unwavering commitment to upholding Iran's rights on the global stage, stating, "Amir-Abdollahian was an exemplary minister who spoke with a confident heart and pure words. He demonstrated to the world that Iran has the right to respond in challenging situations."

The IRGC general especially praised the late diplomat for helping to establish the legitimacy of Operation True Promise. Operation True Promise was Iran's retaliation against Israel for the regime's April 1 attack on the Iranian

embassy in Damascus. It involved the firing of dozens of missiles and drones at Israeli military positions in the occupied territories from Iran's soil.

"At that time when foreign ministers of major countries contacted him and requested us not to take action or to show a mild reaction, it was Amir Abdollahian who showed the world that we have the right to respond," the military official declared.

(See full text at tehrantimes.com)

It's quite wrong to think those who didn't vote are opposed to the ruling system: Leader

From Page 1 ▶ He underlined that while it is conceivable that certain individuals may harbor negative views towards specific officials or even the Islamic system, it is completely unfounded to assume that those who did not vote align themselves with such sentiments. "This line of thinking is absolutely wrong," he remarked.

Ayatollah Khamenei stated that there may have been various reasons why some individuals did not participate in the voting, such as personal issues, work, or challenges. He expressed hope that the turnout in the upcoming phases of the polling will be inspiring and bring honor to the system.

The Leader of the Islamic Revolution considered the participation of the people as the backbone and source of pride in



the system.

He underscored that "the better and clearer the participation, the more capable the system will be to achieve its goals within the country and pursue its goals in the strategic framework of the country and this presents as

a significant opportunity [for success]."

He expressed hope that God would grant the people the means to elect the best candidate, thus allowing the chosen president to successfully achieve the goals of the system and the nation.

At the beginning of this meeting, Ayatollah Khamenei described the transformative programs of Shahid Motahari School as a vital and correct initiative.

He emphasized the importance of continually updating these programs within the framework of established principles and foundations that are in tune with the current needs, as seminaries are truly in need of new approaches.

Highlighting the issue of discipline and managerial oversight of activities, he said, "Shahid Motahari School has the potential to embody the Tehran seminary. Moreover, serving as both a seminary and school, it should aim to educate individuals who possess not only knowledge but also piety and spiritual purity."

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Pezeshkian or Jalili People to decide tomorrow



By Mona Hojat Ansari

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The incoming president will be stepping into the role left vacant by the untimely passing of President Ebrahim Raisi. Raisi tragically lost his life in a helicopter crash on May 19, with a year remaining in his term, and was anticipated to secure a second term in 2025.

With a campaign ban taking effect in the early hours of Thursday, we have decided to compare and contrast the plans, perspectives, and campaigns of the two candidates competing in the runoff election in this article.

Debate performance

Pezeshkian's entrance into the presidential fray was sudden and unexpected. In his own words, he was not expecting to get qualified to run for president, as he had initially failed to get vetted as a nominee by the Guardian Council during Iran's 2023 Parliamentary elections.

This caused most of Pezeshkian's

appearances on national TV to appear garbled. In many of his debates and addresses to the Iranian populace, the reformist candidate said he needed to "consult experts" on economic and societal issues and refrained from detailing his agenda. While it is in no way bad to seek counsel from experts, some people had hoped that they would hear in more detail how Pezeshkian was planning to govern.

Jalili though, has campaigned for presidency multiple times in the past. He managed to outline more well-received plans and policies during debates. His remarks, however, have sometimes been deemed as too vague or too specific for the general public to understand. The fact that Jalili was allegedly a key contributor to the late President Raisi's administration, also helped him hold a better grasp of the current issues in the country.

Campaign members

Pezeshkian's entourage and key supporters are both a strong point and a point of weakness for him, and that's due to the reformists' long and eventful time in office. Though Pezeshkian has claimed that he does not align with any political party, any figure or former official ever seen besides him during his campaign has been a reformist.

Mohammad Javad Zarif, former Iranian foreign minister who signed the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in 2015, is one of the figures who's garnered both support and disdain for Pezeshkian. Some like Zarif for having commenced close dialogue with the United States for the first time in decades, and some reprimand him for naively compromising on Iran's nuclear capabilities without making sure that Washington would uphold its commitments.

As for Jalili, there is no denying that his

entourage and associates have been a significant vulnerability for him. Some of his representatives ended up making extremely controversial and uncalculated remarks on TV, making it easier for reformists to stigmatize Jalili as an inflexible and hard figure.

Potential modus operandi

Pezeshkian is seen as a critic of President Raisi's government. He and his advisors have repeatedly accused the Raisi administration of not caring about the termination of sanctions, saying that a reformist comeback in return would ensure the "normalization" of ties with the West.

That's while most analysts agree that Raisi's only difference with his reformist predecessor Hassan Rouhani was that he did not believe in tying the country's existence to the sanctions, and sought dialogue with not only the West but also countries outside the Western hemisphere.

Jalili's potential administration is considered to be a continuation of martyr Raisi's time in office. Jalili thinks Iran should make the West "regret" its shunning of the JCPOA. He has not explained how plans to do that, but his remarks have been praised by some who believe there is no point in expecting sincerity from the West, as such an approach has failed Iran in the past.

Pezeshkian's views on the economy seem to be more liberal than his opponent. He believes energy prices should increase and the government must have less control over the market. Jalili on the other hand, is in favor of maintaining and increasing energy subsidies. He also believes that the government must incorporate public participation in the economy, but says the government must still act as a supervising body.

Iran imposes sanctions on U.S. officials over crackdown on pro-Palestinian campus protests

TEHRAN – The Iranian Foreign Ministry has announced sanctions against eleven American officials for their involvement in the suppression of pro-Palestinian protests that have swept university campuses across the United States.

On Wednesday, the ministry released a statement detailing the punitive measures, citing the Law on "Countering the Violation of Human Rights and Adventurous and Terrorist Activities of the United States in the Region" (2017). Article 5 of this law specifically targets individuals implicated in human rights violations, such as the suppression of peaceful demonstrations.

The list of sanctioned individuals includes:

1. William Billy Hitchens, Commissioner of the Department of Public Safety of Georgia
2. Eddie Grier, Commanding Officer over Field Operations of Georgia
3. Linda J. Stump-Kurnick, Chief of the University of Florida Police Department
4. Pamela A. Smith, Chief of the Metropolitan Police Department of the District of Columbia
5. Jeffery Carroll, Executive Assistant Chief, Metropolitan Police Department
6. Karl Jacobson, Chief of New Haven Police Department

7. Shane Streepy, Assistant Chief of University of Texas Police Department (UTPD)

8. Michael Cox, Commissioner of the Boston Police Department

9. Scott Dunning, Central Division Chief of the Indiana University Police Department

10. Michael Thompson, Chief of the Arizona State University Police

11. John Brockie, Chief of Police at California State University, Long Beach

The statement highlighted that these individuals will face sanctions in accordance with Articles 6, 7, and 8 of the Sixth Section of the aforementioned law. These sanctions include the

freezing of their assets within Iran's jurisdiction, the blocking of their financial transactions in Iranian banks, and a ban on their entry into Iran.

"All relevant national organizations and institutions of the Islamic Republic of Iran will implement the sanctions effectively, in line with regulations set by the appropriate authorities," the statement read.

The pro-Palestinian protests began in mid-April at the University of California, Los Angeles, where students rallied against the Gaza conflict and called for divestment from Israel.

(See full text at tehrantimes.com)

Lebanon will become 'eternal hell' for Israel, Iranian acting FM warns

From Page 1 ▶ While acknowledging the importance of monitoring potential shifts in the international landscape, including developments in the United States, he affirmed that the Iranian strategic policies remain unaffected. He emphasized that the next Iranian administration will take decisive action in response to any changes in the international arena.

Baqeri Kani's remarks come after multiple Iranian officials made similar warnings against Israel in the past days. An advisor to the Leader of the Islamic Revolution told the Financial Times that Iran would back Hezbollah "by all means" if Israel decides to attack Lebanon. "There would be a chance of expansion of the war to the whole region, in which all countries including Iran would

become engaged. In that situation, we would have no choice, but to support Hezbollah by all means," Kamal Kharazi said, adding that "the expansion of war is not in the interest of anyone — not Iran or the U.S."

Analysts believe that despite Israel's saber rattling, the regime faces significant hurdles in launching an invasion into Lebanon.

Iran's fixture at 2024 CAFA U20 Championship released

TEHRAN – Iran will face Turkmenistan in the opening match of the 2024 CAFA U20 Championship.

The match is scheduled for July 7. The Persians will then meet Uzbekistan two days later in Group B.

Group A consists of Tajikistan, Afghanistan and Kyrgyzstan.

The 2024 CAFA U20 Championship is the upcoming 2nd edition of the Championship, the international youth football championship organized by Central Asian Football Association for the men's under-20 national teams of Central Asia.

A total of six teams will play in the tournament, with players born on or after 1 January 2004 eligible to participate. It will be the first CAFA tournament to implement video assistant referees (VAR).

Uzbekistan is the defending champion, winning the title in the inaugural edition.

The final match will be held on July 12.

"The competition is a good opportunity for us to prepare for the 2025 AFC U20 Asian Cup 2025 Qualifiers, where we have been drawn along with Mongolia, India and Laos," Iran head coach Hossein Abdi said.

"We are ready to participate in the tournament and I think CAFA is a good competition for all the participants to challenge themselves," he added. The competition will be held in Jalal-Abad, Kyrgyzstan.

Thailand outplay Iran at 2024 Asian Women's U20 Volleyball

TEHRAN – Thailand defeated Iran in straight sets (25-14, 25-22, 25-17) in the 2024 Asian Women's U20 Volleyball Championship at the Jiangmen Sports Center Gymnasium on Wednesday.

Iran had lost to Vietnam 3-0 in their first match in Pool C.

Padideh Bolourizadeh's team will face Pool A's third-place team on Thursday in the 9th-12th semifinals. The competition started on July 2 in Jiangmen, China and will run until July 8.

A total of 12 teams will vie for top honor and four berths at stake for the 2025 FIVB Volleyball Women's U21 World Championship.

Group A consists of China, Kazakhstan and Australia. Japan, India and Hong Kong are in Group B and South Korea, Chinese Taipei and New Zealand are drawn in Group D.

Japan are defending champions.

Fasihi, Taftian to represent Iran at 2024 Olympics

TEHRAN – Hassan Taftian and Farzaneh Fasihi have both qualified for the 2024 Olympic Games through IAAF World Rankings.

Taftian and Fasihi also represented Iran at the 2020 Olympic Games in Tokyo.

Fasihi competed in the women's 100 meters and Taftian partook in the men's 100 meters.

The men's 100 meters at the 2024 Summer Olympics is scheduled to be held in four rounds at the Stade de France in Paris, France, on Aug. 3 and 4. This will be the 30th time that the men's 100 meters is contested at the Summer Olympics.

Morteza Sharifi joins Shahdab Yazd

TEHRAN – Morteza Sharifi joined Shahdab Yazd to strengthen the Iranian team the 24th edition of the Men's Asian Club Volleyball

Championship.

Sharifi was a member of Turkish giant Galatasaray last season.

The outside spiker represented Iran at the 2024 Volleyball Nations League.

The Asian Club Volleyball Championship will be held in Iranian city Yazd from September 6 to 15.

Iran Super League champion Foolad Sirjan and Shahdab Yazd will represent Iran in the competition.

The Asian Men's Club Volleyball Championship, previously the AVC Cup Men's Club Tournament (between 1999 and 2002), is an annual continental club volleyball competition organized by the Asian Volleyball Confederation (AVC), the sport's continental governing body.

The competition was first contested in 1999 in China. It was not held in 2003 and 2020 due to the 2002-2004 SARS outbreak and the COVID-19 pandemic, respectively.

Iran mixed gender wins silver at 2024 World Cup Team

TEHRAN – Iran won the mixed gender silver on day three of the World Taekwondo World Cup Team Championships Series in Chuncheon, Korea.

Mixed gender teams comprised of two male athletes with a combined weight up to 160kg and two female athletes with a combined weight up to 135kg, and the six competing nations delivered a closely-fought competition at the Air Dome at Song-Am Sports Town.

China edged out Iran in the final, earning \$10,000 in prize money and denying their opponents a World Cup Team Championships Series treble after their successes in the male and female events.

China had beaten Morocco and India earlier in the day, while Iran – who took \$7,000 in prize money – won their semi-final against the hosts Korea.

Korea had won their first match against Côte d'Ivoire, and defeated India to earn the bronze medal and \$5,000 in prize money.

A total of 69 athletes from the six countries competed across the three days of the World Cup Team Championships Series, but it is just the start of an exciting week of events in Chuncheon.

Gol Gohar to part ways with Marinos Ouzounidis

TEHRAN – Gol Gohar football club will most likely part ways with Greek coach Marinos Ouzounidis.

The Sirjan-based club has been reportedly linked with Malavan coach Mehdi tartar.

Ouzounidis has been reportedly linked with the Emirati football clubs.

Gol Gohar finished in ninth place in the Iran Professional League's 16-team table under leadership of the Greek trainer.

Gol Gohar was going to hire Moharram Navidkia but the former Sepahan coach will remain as head coach of Mes Kerman.

Sedighi re-elected as Iran wushu president

TEHRAN – Amir Sedighi was elected as head of Iran Wushu Federation on Wednesday.

In the presidential elections held at the Iran's Academy Olympic, Sedighi was re-elected for a four-year term till 2028 by receiving 49 votes out of 50 votes.

Wushu has been gaining popularity in Iran, where about 200,000 people practice China's martial arts.

Iranian athletes won two gold medals, four silvers and one bronze at the 2022 Asian Games in Hangzhou, China.

Wushu is not an Olympic sport.

Iran exports 25 tons of saffron in 2 months



TEHRAN - Iran has exported over 25 tons of saffron valued at \$22 million to 37 countries in the first two months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20 - May 20), according to a senior official with the Agriculture Ministry.

Hossein Zeinali said on Tuesday that China, the

UAE, Spain, Afghanistan and Italy were top five destinations for Iranian saffron.

The country produced over 238 tons of saffron last year which were dispatched to the domestic and international markets, he stated.

Over 127,000 hectares of land are under saffron cultivation in Iran, the official said, adding that the provinces of Khorasan Razavi and South Khorasan are the two main hubs of saffron production in the country.

He noted that the Ministry of Agricultural Jihad will not support saffron production in the areas where production is lower than 5kg per hectare and have no special plan for upgrading their performance as he said production in these areas is not economically justifiable.

'Iran can become BRICS's corridor for agricultural exports'

TEHRAN - Iran will turn into the corridor of the agricultural export of the BRICS member states, an Iranian official with the Ministry of Agriculture said on Tuesday.

Iran is located in a region that allows for exporting many products of the BRICS member countries through the international north-south, east-west, rail, and air corridors, according to Iran's Deputy Minister of Agriculture for Agricultural Affairs Alireza Mohajer.

He made the remarks at the 14th meeting of the agriculture ministers of the BRICS group of emerging economies held last week in Moscow, where he also said that BRICS member states make up more than 40 percent of the population

in the world and account for 30 percent of the world's economy so that the BRICS member states can create a special condition in producing, trading and exporting food products.

Elsewhere in his remarks, the official pointed to the potential created for the removal of the import and export barriers.

About 40 percent of the grain in the world is traded by BRICS member states and these countries can easily export these products to the world through Iran's southern ports, he opined.

Also, Iran can play a part in the imports of the corn and soybean products of countries like Brazil to the BRICS states, the deputy minister of agriculture added.

Uzbekistan calls for using Chabahar port transit capacities

TEHRAN - Uzbekistan's Ambassador to Tehran has said his country is eager for Iran's southeastern Chabahar Port's transit capacities to boost trade with the countries in the region, the portal of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (IC-CIMA) reported.

Fariddin Nasriev made the remarks in a meeting with the ICCIMA Head Samad Hassanzadeh in Tehran on Tuesday.

"We are interested in using the capacity of Chabahar port so that Uzbek companies can export their products from the port. In this context, we are talking with the Indian authorities and we hope that the field of cooperation with Tehran will be provided more than before," he said.

Hassanzadeh for his part referred to Uzbekistan's attention to infrastructure devel-

opment, and said: "Iran can invest in technical and engineering services in all provinces of Uzbekistan."

Iran has a great capacity in the field of electricity generation, dam construction, electronics, pharmaceutical industries, and medical and health equipment, and the Iran Chamber can provide the field of interaction and cooperation of these companies with their Uzbek counterparts, the official said.

Emphasizing the interest of the Iranian private sector in joint investments in Uzbekistan, Hassanzadeh continued: "We have many facilities in the pharmaceutical industry, and the best medicines are produced in Iran with international standards. In addition to exporting medicine, we are ready to transfer technology and co-produce medicine in Uzbekistan through joint investment."

Iran, Oman discuss mutual economic ties

TEHRAN - The Head of Iran's Trade Promotion Organization (TPO) Mehdi Zeighami, met the director of trade, industry, and investment development from the Sultanate of Oman to discuss areas of joint investment, industrial matters, and financial affairs between the two countries.

Zeighami, also serving as the deputy industry minister, announced on Tuesday that the first round of the talks to establish a Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA) between Iran and the Sultanate of Oman was held in Muscat.

The trade and economic relations between the two countries have been consistently improving in recent years, he said, adding that the conclusion of the Preferential Trade Agreement and the establishment of close trade and economic relations in all fields are of paramount

importance.

He characterized the trade volume between the two countries in the last Iranian calendar year (ending March 19, 2024) as "unprecedented".

He noted that the initiation of the PTA between the two countries aligns with objectives like bolstering economic relations, augmenting trade volume, creating a safer environment for trade growth, diversifying traded goods, fostering greater competition among businesses, and eliminating trade obstacles faced by both countries.

Zeighami indicated that the final results of the talks would ultimately receive approval from the legal authorities of the two countries.

Iran exporting crude oil to 17 countries: Oji

TEHRAN - Iran's oil minister said that the country is currently exporting crude oil to 17 countries, including some in Europe.

Iran will not face any problem in exporting oil no matter who comes to power in the US, Javad Oji stressed.

Speaking at a ceremony on Tuesday, he stated that good investment has been made in the past three years in the oil industry.

Iran produced 2.2 million barrels of oil per day (bpd) at the outset of the administration of the late President Ebrahim Raisi (August 2021) but the current oil production rate is about 3.570 million bpd, showing a considerable hike, Oji underlined.

He went on to say that Iran's oil exports rose from 182 million barrels in 2019 to 565 million barrels last year.

In addition, the value of the export of oil and gas condensates and other



oil and petrochemical products rose from \$10.8 billion in 2019 to \$36 billion last year, registering a 3.5fold growth, the oil minister added.

Iran has risen to become the fourth largest oil exporter within the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) due to a

surge in oil production and sales.

Iran's oil and gas condensate exports have now reached their highest level since 2018, when the United States withdrew from the Iran nuclear deal and introduced tough economic sanctions against the country, targeting its oil sales in particular,

according to a report by Vortexa, which provides data on the global energy sector.

The report emphasized that Iran's oil and gas condensate exports now account for 9% of OPEC's total crude oil and gas condensate exports.

Iran exported 1.56 million barrels of oil per day from January to May of this year, 250,000 bpd more than Kuwait and Nigeria. This has elevated Iran's ranking to the fourth spot among OPEC's largest crude oil exporters.

Despite Western sanctions, Iran managed to increase its crude oil and gas exports to 1.7 million bpd in May, the highest level in the past five years.

The report cited the rise in Chinese oil demand and the expansion of Iran's oil tanker fleet as the main factors contributing to the surge in Iran's oil exports.

Jalili, Pezeshkian debate over sanctions, inflation, housing

TEHRAN - Second debate in the 2024 Iranian presidential runoff election between presidential contenders former health minister Masoud Pezeshkian and former lead nuclear negotiator Saeed Jalili was held on Tuesday night.

The two candidates vying for the Iranian presidency, Masoud Pezeshkian and Saeed Jalili, faced each other in the second televised debate in the 2024 Iranian presidential runoff election to present their plans on economic issues.

Updates from the second and last televised debate in the 2024 Iranian presidential runoff election featuring candidates Masoud Pezeshkian and Saeed Jalili are as follows:

At the start of the debate, the Iranian national TV presenter explained that like last night's first debate, tonight's debate would focus on 10 topics in economic affairs.

Pezeshkian started speaking tonight first to answer the question about the sanctions and ways how to neutralize them.

"I will abide by the parliament's strategic action law to neutralize sanctions," Pezeshkian said in response to the question. The parliament's piece of legislation calls for taking steps away from the JCPOA (nuclear deal) in a bid to pressure the Western countries to lift the unlawful sanctions.

At the start of debate, the two rivals quarreled over foreign policy where Pezeshkian stressed the need for expanding dialogue with the other parties to lift the sanctions on Iran in a bid to help the economy.

Laili defended the foreign policy adopted by the late President Ebrahim Raisi and said that expanding ties with the neighbors and African and Asian countries is a way to neutralize the sanctions.

Jalili said that the Western countries owe much to Iran when it comes to sanctions and the JCPOA, stressing that his government will make the bullying Western states to lift the sanctions themselves by neutralizing the impact of sanctions.

TEHRAN - Head of the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA) said that in the first three months of this year of 1403 in the Iranian calendar (started March 19, 2024) the country exported \$13.5 billion non-oil goods.

In that 3-month period, the country's export of non-oil commodities registered a 7.6 percent growth compared to last year's corresponding period, Mohammad Rezvaniyar, the IRICA head added.

He, who is also the deputy minister of economy, put the value of foreign trade of the country with the oil included from March 21, 2023 to March 19, 2024 at about \$40 billion.

"General Soleimani was a hero who fought against oppression abroad and was a supporter of the oppressed at home, regardless of whether they wore Hijab or not, or whether they were religious or not," Pezeshkian said.

"We are compelled to first interact and exchange with regional countries for growth and prosperity, and then with other countries (across the world)," he added.

Jalili, in turn, said that, "You (Pezeshkian) should hold the other party accountable for not fulfilling their commitments, not say you will pressure the people to give more concessions to the foreign party."

Jalili added, "Despite sanctions, there are so many opportunities and growth potentials."

"The primary issue is the perspective: do we want to solve our problems with the world or not? I believe we must get out of the deadlock to solve the country's problems," Jalili said.

Jalili said that, "You must be proactive in the face of sanctions, not passive," adding that, "Jalili: You have not provided a plan for the country's growth or for lifting sanctions. You believe there is a deadlock, but I believe there is no deadlock."

Jalili further said that, "You (Pezeshkian) do not offer any solution for sanctions. Your only solution is to give more concessions. You gave all the concessions and got nothing in return. You still haven't presented a solution."

He added that, "We must make the other party regret imposing economic sanctions and make it costly for them to continue. This requires planning and effort."

Pezeshkian, for his part, "The reason for the current situation (in the country) is incompetent, inexperienced and unqualified managers," adding that, "I commit to striving so that no Iranian family has to worry about their children."

Pezeshkian also stressed that, "Our national

hero, the honorable Martyr General Soleimani, ensured Iraq's security, but we give the market to others."

Jalili elsewhere said that "Because of the agreement Mr. Zarif wrote, you couldn't even complain to the US when they withdrew from the JCPOA."

Pezeshkian, later said, "I have repeatedly said that my path is the path of Imam Ali (AS). The people are the criterion for me."

Pezeshkian continued to stress that, "I have repeatedly said that my path is the path of Imam Ali (AS). The people are the criterion for me."

"We should provide subsidies to vulnerable groups and at least recover the additional consumption costs from people like me," he added.

Jalili, in turn, "The best plan is to involve people themselves in this grand national plan. If you involve people in managing energy consumption, then they will participate because they will feel its benefit," adding that, "Jalili: We must trust people. It is the government's role to provide the framework and allow the people to manage their own consumption."

"People, today we must decide, and studies should have been conducted beforehand. The presidency is not a trial-and-error phase or an experiment. Every passing day puts pressure on the people," Jalili said.

Pezeshkian continued to say that, "Gov. intervention brings disaster to the stock market, market, and producers. What we are doing regarding the stock market is to restore stability and security to it. We won't compensate for the government's budget deficit from the stock market."

Pezeshkian continued to say that, "From a professional and scientific perspective, health and medical economics, industry and finance, and the stock market are vastly different. We will definitely use relevant experts to address these imbalances."

Iran's non-oil exports up 7.6% in Q1

Elsewhere in his remarks, Rezvaniyar pointed to the export of petrochemical products and noted that about 15.6 million tons of petrochemicals, valued at \$6.2 billion, were exported from the country between March 21, 2023 to March 19, 2024, showing about nine percent hike compared to the same period last year.

In that period, Iran imported \$14.3 billion worth of non-oil products into the country, indicating about 1.3 percent growth compared to the last year's corresponding period.

The country imported about 9.4 million tons of non-oil products into the country, registering a 7.7

percent growth, he added.

According to IRICA data, Iran's exports of non-oil commodities have increased by 40 percent during three years to March 2024.

Iran's non-oil trade surged from \$74 billion in 2020 to \$116 billion in 2023, marking a 57 percent increase.

IRICA's report shows that the weight of non-oil trade reached 167 million metric tons (mts) in 2023, up from 147 million mts in 2020, representing a 20 percent increase. Additionally, the value of non-oil exports in the mentioned time shows substantial growth, reaching \$49 billion in 2023, a 40 percent increase compared to the

\$35 billion recorded in 2020.

In terms of imports, Iran's total imports amounted to \$66 billion in the previous year. Notably, \$2 billion was allocated to the import of gold bars, and \$2.6 billion was spent on trucks and truck units, as reported.

Furthermore, Iran's foreign trade with neighboring countries increased by 10 percent in 2023, surpassing \$61 billion.

The transit of goods through Iran saw a significant increase, with 17.8 million mts transited in 2023, representing a 54 percent surge compared to the previous year.

CIPCC holds closing ceremony for its 2024 first half program

By Mahnaz Abdi

BEIJING- China International Press Communication Center (CIPCC) held a closing ceremony for its 2024 first half program, attended by over 100 foreign journalists, some diplomats, as well as some senior Chinese officials including Vice Foreign Minister Hua Chunying.

The ceremony, organized by China Public Diplomacy Association (CPDA), included various programs such as speeches and national performances by some journalists, as well as speeches by officials.

The following is some part of the speech delivered by Vice Foreign Minister Hua Chunying: "The CIPCC program for the first half of 2024 will soon come to a close. At this moment, I guess many of us have mixed feelings. We share your joy for completing the program, but regret to say goodbye. Four months may be short in a person's life. But in the past four months, you have all gained a rich experience in China. I'm sure you now know more about China than many foreign friends who have come to China dozens of times.

I still remember, soon after you arrived in Beijing, you got the opportunity to cover the Two Sessions. After that, you traveled from the capital Beijing to the southernmost Hainan, and from Fujian in the east to Xinjiang in the west. You have left your footprints in 12 Chinese provinces, and seen with your own eyes a vibrant and colorful China.

In Beijing, you went to the Great Wall, the Forbidden City, and Qianmen. You visited top Chinese companies, and spoke with experts in leading research institutes.

In Fujian, you visited the research base on the local tribe in Pingtan, and further learned about the fact that people on both sides of the Taiwan Strait belong to the same family. In Xinjiang, you saw how desert turned into green cities, and listened to touching stories on ethnic harmony. It showed you a real Xinjiang that is stable, harmonious, prosperous and open to the world. In Sichuan, you visited the Chengdu International Railway Port, and felt the pulse of Belt and Road cooperation. You bravely tried hotpot like the locals, and had

a close encounter with the cute pandas.

In Shaanxi, you visited the site that used to be the Maowusu desert, and saw how people there fought desertification with courage and resolve.

From the Boao Forum for Asia to the China-Arab States Cooperation Forum, from the China-Latin American and Caribbean States Space Cooperation Forum to the Meeting of China-CEEC Cooperation, from the China-Africa Youth Festival to the China-Eurasia Expo in Xinjiang, you have witnessed the fruitful results of

China-EMDC cooperation and friendship.

Last Friday, you also attended the Conference on the 70th Anniversary of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, and listened to President Xi Jinping talking about the importance and relevance of the Five Principles and the Vision of Building a Community with a Shared Future for Mankind. I'm also glad to have joined you on this journey.

(See full text at tehrantimes.com)

Former American government officials say the US has “undeniable complicity” in the killing of Palestinians in Gaza

By Shahrokh Saei

TEHRAN- The administration of US President Joe Biden has faced growing domestic and international criticism for its continued backing of Israel against the backdrop of the regime's genocidal war in the Gaza Strip.

Since Israel launched war on Gaza on October 7, people across the world have either held protests or used social media to vent their anger at Washington's support for the onslaught.

Over the past nine months, the White House has continued military support for Israel and vetoed several UN Security Council resolutions condemning Israel's actions in the conflict.

Criticism of the US policy in support of Israel is also widespread and multifaceted inside the country.

Many Americans, including liberal and progressive groups, religious leaders and politicians have expressed concerns about the disproportionate financial and military aid provided to the Israeli regime.

Others have also questioned the alignment of US foreign policy with Israel's goals, which they see as favoring the regime's interests over Palestinian rights and human rights. Such criticisms have led to calls for re-evaluating the relationship between Tel Aviv and Washington.

Over the past months people have held protests in US cities and students have set up encampments on college campuses. They have demanded that the US stop arming Israel and educational institutes divest from companies that benefit from the regime's war on Gaza.

Official exodus

In addition, a dozen American



officials have resigned since October 7 over the US support for Israel. Maryam Hassanein, who worked as a special assistant at the Department of the Interior, was the latest appointee in the Biden administration who stepped down on Tuesday.

In a statement, she said, “I am resigning today from my position as a Biden administration appointee in the Department of the Interior. As a Muslim American, I cannot continue working for an administration that ignores the voices of its diverse staff by continuing to fund and enable Israel's genocide of Palestinians.”

US failed policy

The 12 former officials issued a joint letter on Tuesday accusing Washington of complicity in the Gaza war.

“America's diplomatic cover for, and continuous flow of arms to, Israel has ensured our undeniable complicity in the killings and forced starvation of a besieged Palestinian population in Gaza,” the former officials said in the statement.

The signatories called the White House policy on Israel's war on Gaza “a failure and a threat to US national security”.

They warned that Washington's bias in favor of Israel makes the US a target.

Biden administration resignees: Israel's war on Gaza “a failure and a threat to US national security”

“This is not only morally reprehensible and in clear violation of international humanitarian law and US laws, but it has also put a target on America's back.”

Political quagmire

The statement admitted that the Gaza war has deepened Israel's international isolation.

“Rather than using our immense leverage to establish guardrails that can guide Israel towards a lasting and just peace, we have facilitated its self-destructive actions that have deepened its political quagmire and contributed to its enduring global isolation,” it pointed out.

The ex-government officials demanded that the White House use its “necessary and available leverage” to bring the war to an end and to ensure the release of Israeli captives in Gaza and Palestinian prisoners in Israel.

America's double-standards

They also brought the US double-standard policy to light in the wake of Washington's approach toward the war between Russia and Ukraine.

They said the US policy regarding West Asia has damaged the “credibility of US values” as Washington condemns Russia's war on Ukraine while “unconditionally arming and excusing Israel's”.

Generational gap

Former members of the State Department, Education Department, Interior Department, and the military are among those who signed the statement.

The resignation of the 12 officials, including 24-year-old Hassanein, and their scathing statement have highlighted a generational divide on Israel in the United States amid university student protests.

This gap has shed light on the fact that younger Americans are generally more supportive of Palestinians than the generations that came before them. The college campus protests in the US which have spilled over to Canada, Europe, Australia and beyond clearly show that young people are fed up with pro-Israel policies of American politicians.

Nonetheless, the US establishment, in particular 81-year-old Democratic President Joe Biden is looking the other way as Israel is slaughtering Palestinians in Gaza.

Israeli minister retweets post promoting Sinai occupation



Israel's far-right Heritage Minister Amichai Eliyahu on Wednesday retweeted a social media post promoting the sale of merchandise calling for the occupation of the Sinai Peninsula, more than four decades after Israel returned the territory to Egypt as part of the two sides' landmark 1979 peace treaty.

The tweet, by user Ayelet Lash, called on the public to purchase a shirt printed with what is supposed to be a map of Israel — including the West Bank, Gaza and Sinai — emblazoned with the slogan “Occupation Now.”

It also contained a link to a website selling “Occupation Now” merchandise and advocating for the expansion of Israeli sovereignty into Sinai, southern Lebanon and, eventually, Jordan.

The original post, which was promoted by Eliyahu, declared: “The people demand an occupation! Occupation now!”

Eliyahu has a history of contentious rhetoric, including accusing Israel's security chiefs of “rebellion” against the current coalition, calling anti-Netanyahu protesters “evil,” and dubbing Bank of Israel governor Amir Yaron a “savage.”

Last November, he sparked international outrage by claiming that dropping a nuclear bomb on the Gaza Strip was an option.

Hezbollah fires 100 rockets at Israeli positions in response to assassination

Lebanon's Hezbollah has launched a series of rocket attacks targeting Israeli military positions in response to an “attack and assassination” in the southern coastal city of Tyre.

According to a statement issued by Hezbollah, the resistance movement fired approximately a hundred Katyusha rockets at Israeli military positions.

The massive barrages came after the killing of a senior Hezbollah commander in an Israeli strike in southern Lebanon.

Islamic Jihad: Israeli captives attempted suicide

The spokesperson for the al-Quds Brigades, the armed wing of Palestinian Islamic Jihad, said a number of Israeli captives have attempted suicide.

Abu Hamza said in a statement this is due to frustration over Israel's neglect of their situation, and due to treatment by units in the brigades who are “depriving them of some of the privileges that were provided to them prior to the heinous Nuseirat crime committed by the criminal Nazi enemy army [Israel]”.

Last month Israeli forces killed more than 270 Palestinians in the Nuseirat refugee camp during an operation to free four Israeli captives. Some 700 others were injured.

Lebanon PM calls for ending Israel's “terrorist” attacks

Lebanon's caretaker Prime Minister Najib Mikati has called on the international com-

munity to put an end to the “terrorist” attacks carried out by Israel against southern Lebanon.

Speaking at a conference on Wednesday, Mikati reiterated Lebanon's commitment to UN Security Council Resolution 1701, denouncing Israeli attacks against southern Lebanon and the deliberate murder of its inhabitants. He evoked his repeated calls for calm and restraint since the start of the war in Gaza and his warnings against the extension of the conflict to Lebanese territory.

He also expressed concern over the “genocide” being perpetrated against the people of the Gaza Strip, urging the international community to assume its responsibility towards Palestinian refugees. As a country hosting hundreds of thousands of Palestinian refugees since 1948, Mikati reiterated the international community's humanitarian and moral responsibility towards these refugees.

He asserted that any peace agreement would be futile without guaranteeing the right of return for Palestinians, adding that attempts to prevent them from living in a free and independent state will only lead to further crises in West Asia and beyond.

Watchdog: Israel approved largest land grab in three decades

Peace Now, an anti-settlement watchdog, says Israeli authorities recently approved the seizure of 12.7 square kilometers (4.9 square miles) of land in the occupied West Bank — the largest appropriation in more than three decades, Al Jazeera reported. Since the start of the year, Israel has declared 23.7 square kilometers (9.15 square miles) in the Palestinian territory as state land, it said.

“Today, it is clear to everyone that this conflict cannot be resolved without a political settlement that establishes a Palestinian state alongside Israel,” Peace Now said in a statement.

“Still, the Israeli government chooses to actually make it difficult and distance us from the possibility of peace and stopping the bloodshed.”

Rights groups say the expansion of settlements in the occupied West Bank is aimed at reshaping the demography of the territory earmarked for a future Palestinian state.

China urges U.S. to stop plundering Syria's resources

China called on the United States to end its illegal troop deployment in Syria and stop plundering the country's resources, a Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson said on Wednesday.

Spokesperson Mao Ning made the remarks at a daily press briefing when asked about a report alleging that the U.S. military in Syria is involved in illegal wheat transportation, using over ten trucks daily to smuggle Syria's grains out of the country, Xinhua reported.

Mao said Syria was once a wheat exporter, but now approximately 55 percent of its people are facing food insecurity, for which the United States bears responsibility.

Facts have proven that the United States, under the guise of anti-terrorism, has been exploiting resources, the spokesperson added.

The United States keeps talking about protecting human rights but violates people's rights to subsistence and life in other countries. While it claims to defend democracy, freedom and prosperity, in reality it is constantly creating humanitarian crises, Mao noted.

The United States must earnestly respect Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity, immediately cease the deployment of its military troops in Syria, stop plundering Syria's national resources, and take concrete actions to make up for the damage caused to the Syrian people, Mao said.

“Unprecedented event” in Gaza

Israeli troops are killed and injured in fierce clashes

By Wesam Bahrani

TEHRAN- After mentioning “an event unprecedented in months” regarding clashes between the Palestinian resistance movement and the Israeli occupation forces in the Gaza Strip, Israeli media reported that two soldiers had been killed in the Netzarim area.

Under the “Permitted for Publication” clause, Israeli media detailed that the slain troops were Staff Sergeant Nadav Elchanan Knoller from the 121st Battalion in the 8th armored brigade, and Major Eyal Avnion, a deputy company commander in the same battalion.

In the same battle where these soldiers lost their lives, five others from their battalion were injured, with one in critical condition. Another battle in southern Gaza led a soldier from the 52nd Battalion of the 401st Brigade to suffer serious injuries.

The Israeli media reported that the soldiers in Netzarim were targeted by an explosive device planted by Palestinian militants in a sophisticated and “unprecedented” ambush not seen in months.

Furthermore, the Israeli military acknowledged on Wednesday the injury of 23 soldiers in the past 24 hours amid escalating battles in the enclave.

Experts say the Gaza resistance factions are waging operations against the occupying forces in a more sophisticated manner and in higher numbers than they had conducted so far.

It reflects a growing resilience among the Palestinian resistance groups to adapt to the war of attrition in the Strip.

Meanwhile, Palestinian resistance forces continued their steadfastness against the occupation forces on the 272nd day in defense of Gaza across various combat zones. These operations have notably led to an increase in Israeli losses. Palestinian military media are also highlighting the heroic acts of the Palestinian fighters.

The armed wing of Hamas, the al-Qassam Brigades, confirmed their successful targeting of an Israeli unit consisting of 14 soldiers who were holed up in a residential building in the Shejaiya neighborhood, east of Gaza City. Using

a TBG shell, the attack resulted in casualties, including fatalities and injuries among the Israeli soldiers, according to al-Qassam.

Additionally, al-Qassam fighters carried out successful strikes against an Israeli Merkava 4 tank and a Namer APC with Yasin 105 shells in Shejaiya, underscoring their ability to engage and disrupt Israeli military operations effectively.

In Rafah, the southernmost city in the Gaza Strip, al-Qassam Brigades targeted a gathering of Israeli forces and their military vehicles near the Talsultan neighborhood cemetery, west of the city, using mortar fire to inflict damage and casualties.

Meanwhile, the armed wing of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, the al-Quds Brigades, demonstrated their operational capabilities by targeting a fortified Israeli special forces unit inside a building in Shejaiya with a TBG shell, causing significant losses among the Israeli personnel.

Furthermore, the al-Quds Brigades successfully detonated a Thaqiq explosive device near an Israeli military vehicle in the vicinity of the Salem Mosque in the same neighborhood. Their operations extended to western Rafah, where they continued to target Israeli soldiers and vehicles with a sustained barrage of mortar shells.

Meanwhile, the al-Qassa Martyrs Brigades intensified their attacks on Israeli military positions and equipment in Shejaiya and other strategic locations in the totally blockaded enclave employing mortar shells to disrupt and inflict casualties on Israeli forces.

The war media of al-Qassa Martyrs Brigades also released footage documenting their precise targeting of the Israeli military bases of Re'im and the Mefalsim with concentrated rocket fire, aiming to undermine Israeli military infrastructure and capabilities.

In a separate engagement, al-Qassa Martyrs Brigades targeted Israeli forces stationed in Netzarim with “107 rockets and 60mm mortar shells”, demonstrating their tactical flexibility and determination to resist Israeli occupation forces.

Following the return of al-Qassa Martyrs Bri-

gades fighters from frontline combat zones, they reported conducting a highly coordinated rocket and artillery operation in Netzarim. Their attack specifically targeted the central command facility of the Israeli forces with a heavy barrage of mortar shells and “107 rockets”, resulting in confirmed casualties and disruptions in Israeli operations.

Al-Qassa Martyrs Brigades confirmed direct hits on Israeli forces, including instances where Israeli helicopters were observed landing for emergency evacuation operations, underscoring the intensity and effectiveness of their military operations.

Over the past 24 hours alone, the al-Qassa Martyrs Brigades carried out 13 missions across various combat zones, engaging in fierce clashes and successfully targeting an Israeli soldier inside a residential building in Shejaiya through precise sniper operations.

Meanwhile, Al-Qassam Brigades and Al-Quds Brigades collaborated on a joint operation in Shejaiya, resulting in the successful neutralization of two Israeli soldiers from close range, further demonstrating their operational prowess and strategic coordination.

In another well-executed operation in Shejaiya, al-Qassam and al-Quds Brigades set up a sophisticatedly planned ambush, targeting an entrenched Israeli unit with a TBG shell. As rescue forces rushed to the scene, they too were subjected to secondary explosions from Yassin 105 shells, alongside the detonation of locally manufactured Thaqiq and Shawaz devices placed near two military vehicles.

Meanwhile, the Mujahideen Brigades, the military wing of the Palestinian Mujahideen Movement, intensified their attacks by firing “107” rockets at an Israeli command and control center in “Netzarim,” aiming to disrupt and disperse Israeli military operations in the area.

In joint operations with Al-Qassa Martyrs Brigades, the Mujahideen Brigades targeted an Israeli military force attempting to advance in Shejaiya with short-range rocket fire, effectively halting their progress and inflicting losses on the occupation forces.

30 mosques selected so far collect a UNESCO label

TEHRAN – On Tuesday, the Deputy Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts announced that 30 historical mosques across 12 provinces in Iran have been identified as eligible for possible inclusion in the UNESCO World Heritage list.

Ali Darabi made the remarks during his visit to the Jameh Mosque of Saveh, one of Iran's candidates for this collective heritage listing.

Darabi stated that the criteria for a UNESCO registration are meticulously examined during UNESCO evaluators' visits.

He added the Jameh Mosque of Saveh boasts architectural features from various historical periods. "Additionally, its integration with the local community and preservation of authenticity throughout different eras are among the criteria that make this mosque a strong candidate for World Heritage status."

Referring to the archaeological excavations carried out at the Jameh Mosque of Saveh, Darabi mentioned that during the 1980s, excavations led to the discovery of architectural remains, including a [Zoroastrian] fire temple.

"However, other parts of this thousand-year-old mosque still require excavation, and funds were allocated for its restoration last year."

In an interview with reporters, Darabi noted that national funds (for the restoration of historical sites) are insufficient for the projects queuing for World Heritage registration. He emphasized that the necessary preparations and infrastructures must be put in place for the historical mosques to be reviewed and potentially registered by UNESCO evaluators.

The deputy minister also highlighted the role of civilians in safeguarding the country's cultural heritage. He then highlighted the formation of a cultural heritage benefac-



A view of Jameh Mosque of Saveh

tors association officially established in Arak, the capital of Markazi province, saying: "This association aims to secure resources from benefactors and philanthropists for the restoration of historical buildings."

In every corner of Iran, cascades of photogenic domes and minarets can be seen as inseparable elements of mosques, some of which are widely known as timeless benchmarks of Islamic architecture.

Among the country's must-see, gorgeous places of worship are Nasir Al-Molk Mosque in Shiraz, Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque in Isfahan, Shah Cheragh Mosque in Shiraz, Imam Mosque of Isfahan, Jameh Mosque of Yazd, Blue Mosque in Tabriz, Goharshad Mosque in Mashhad, Vakil Mosque in Shiraz, Agha Bozorg Mosque in Kashan, to name a few.

A mosque, locally called masjid (aka masjid, which is "a place of prostration" to God), is any house or open area of prayer in Islam. Generally speaking, the architecture of mosques in Iran is a combination of symmetry, geometric designs, and vibrant colors.

From an architectural point of view, Iranian mosques vary from one region to another, due to geometric structures, materials, and styles specific to each location. These mosques often have very complex structures in which color variations, tiles, and symbolic designs are used.

Tens of historical artifacts recovered in Hamedan

TEHRAN – Police have confiscated tens of historical artifacts in Hamedan province during the first three months of the current Persian year (started on March 20).

"108 relics along with 11 metal detectors have been discovered and confiscated in Hamedan since the very first day of the current year," said the provincial police commander in charge of protecting cultural heritage, speaking to IRNA on Wednesday.

Javad Khodamoradi outlined that 28 individuals involved in illegal actions in connection with the antiques have been arrested during this period.

82 valuable artifacts from various historical periods, he continued, have also been voluntarily handed over to the protection unit by individuals.

Khodamardi emphasized that in an effort to garner public participation in the protection of cultural and historical heritage, hundreds of heritage guard cards have been issued and distributed to honorary guards across the province.

The protection of ancient artifacts is a responsibility of the entire community, according to the commander.

In his final words, Khodamardi pointed out the importance of cultural heritage as a legacy of humanity and called for social participation from the public as honorary heritage guards.

Hamedan province boasts over 1,800 historical and cultural properties, with around 1,000 of them registered nationally.

4,000-year-old rock art in Venezuela may be from a 'previously unknown' culture

An archeological team in Venezuela has discovered 20 rock art sites that date back thousands of years in Canaima National Park, in the southeastern part of the country.

While archaeologists have found similar rock art designs elsewhere in South America, the newfound art "represents a new culture previously unknown," José Miguel Pérez-Gómez, an archaeologist and researcher at Simón Bolívar University in Caracas who is leading the team, told Live Science in an email.

Some of these designs, which researchers call "pictograms," were drawn in red and depict geometric motifs such as lines of dots, rows of X's, star-shaped patterns and straight lines that connect together to form a variety of designs. There are also simple depictions of leaves and stick figure drawings of people. Additionally, some of the images, called petroglyphs, were incised into the rock and also show a variety

of geometric motifs.

It's unclear why people created this art. "It is almost impossible to get into the minds of people living so many [thousands of] years ago" Pérez-Gómez said, but "definitely these signs had a ritual meaning." For instance, the different depictions may be related to birth, diseases, the renewal of nature or good hunting. The places where the rock art was created "most probably had a meaning and an importance within the landscape, just as the churches have a meaning for people today," Pérez-Gómez added.

While it's unknown exactly how old the rock art is, similar rock art in Brazil has been dated to around 4,000 years ago. However Pérez-Gómez thinks that the examples in Venezuela may be older.

(Source: Live Science)

Leader's advisor highlights tourism potential as an economic powerhouse

TEHRAN – A top economic adviser to the Leader of the Islamic Revolution, Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei, has emphasized that tourism could play a crucial role in bolstering Iran's economic power on the global stage.

"We must enhance our economic power on the global scene and part of that enhancement lies in the tourism sector," Ali Agha-Mohammadi said on Tuesday.

Addressing an international congress on the development and empowerment of the tourism economy, Agha-Mohammadi called on the private sector to take a proactive role in this development, encouraging industry leaders to think strategically, provide direction, and actively pursue their goals.

He pointed out that a substantial portion of the targeted 8% growth outlined in Iran's Seventh Development Plan should come from the flourishing tourism sector. He noted, "While oil and gas in Iran yield high returns and should see continued investment, tourism development must also be a priority."

Held in Tehran's conference hall of the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB), the congress focused on the role of the value chain in the tourism industry and sustainable development and gathered tourism activists and stakeholders to discuss



strategies for empowering and expanding the sector.

On the sidelines of the congress, an exhibition showcased the capabilities of Northern Cyprus, Iran's free trade zones, the Cultural Heritage Research Institute, and private sector enterprises.

The emphasis on tourism as an economic driver is part of a broader strategy to diversify Iran's economy, traditionally reliant on its rich oil and gas resources.

According to available data compiled by the tourism ministry, more than six million foreign tourists arrived by air, road, and sea in the country during the past Iranian calendar year, which came to an end on March 19. The figure marks a substantial year-

on-year increase compared to a year earlier (1401) in which approximately 4.23 million tourists visited the Islamic Republic.

Earlier in April, Cultural Heritage, tourism, and Handicrafts Minister Ezzatollah Zarghami said that the Islamic Republic had granted visa-free access to approximately half of the world's population, "totaling around four billion people." "Currently, half of the world's population can travel to Iran without visas," Zarghami said.

Elsewhere in his remarks, the minister addressed concerns over negative portrayals of Iran in foreign media, attributing them to a phenomenon known as "Iranophobia." "We are facing an issue called Iranophobia, and tourism can counteract this phenomenon," Zarghami said. "Un-

fortunately, some foreign media outlets, by pursuing the Iranophobia project, seek to hinder the growth, development, and prosperity of tourism."

The visa-waiver program was approved for India, United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait, Indonesia, Brunei, Japan, Singapore, Cambodia, Malaysia, Vietnam, Brazil, Peru, Cuba, Mexico, Bolivia, Venezuela, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Croatia, Belarus, Lebanon, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Tunisia, Mauritania, Tanzania, Zimbabwe, Mauritius, and Seychelles.

Besides, the Islamic Republic has previously had visited cancellations with some countries like Turkey, the Republic of Azerbaijan, Oman, China, Armenia, Lebanon, and Syria, in various forms - unilateral, bilateral, and group visa cancellations, including airport visas, which were implemented in some cases. The privilege has been granted to tourist groups from Russia based on a mutual agreement inked between Tehran and Moscow.

Iran expects to reap a bonanza from its numerous tourist spots such as bazaars, museums, mosques, bridges, bath-houses, madrasas, mausoleums, churches, towers, and mansions, of which 27 are inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage list.

Iran launches tourism roadshow in Malaysia

TEHRAN – On Wednesday, Iran kicked off a Tourism Roadshow in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, aiming to strengthen bilateral tourism ties between the two Muslim-majority countries.

Ali Asghar Shalbafian, Iran's Deputy Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts, attended the event, emphasizing the Iranian government's efforts to enhance tourism and attract investment.

Shalbafian mentioned that the ministry had invited renowned travel agencies to participate in the roadshow. "The government has received a positive response from global travel businesses and individuals recognizing Iran's potential as a tourist destination. This initiative will help counteract media distortions about the country," he told Bernama.

The event saw participation from over 100 representatives of Iranian and Malaysian travel companies, featuring a B2B session. To attract tourists, Iran has waived visa requirements for more than half of the world's pop-



ulation, including Malaysia and most Southeast Asian countries.

Valiollah Mohammadi Nasrabadi, Iran's ambassador to Malaysia, stressed the importance of opening Iran to tourism, highlighting the country's numerous attractive destinations and the positive impact tourism could have on Iran's image. Nasrabadi acknowledged that Iran's reputation has suffered due to negative perceptions, which he deemed unfounded. "Opening up Iran for tourism offers many benefits, including economic and

social potentials, as well as advancements in science and technology. We invite people from all over the world to visit Iran and experience the reality of the country," he said.

Earlier this week, on Monday, Iran also launched its first-ever tourism roadshow in the Vietnamese capital of Hanoi, aiming to boost bilateral tourism ties.

The event, which was part of Iran's framework of Tourism Roadshow Southeast Asia 2024, featured key officials and private sector leaders from both nations and showcased Iran's diverse travel offerings.

Recently, Iran extended tourist visa exemptions to 28 additional countries, including Saudi Arabia, Qatar, the UAE, Bahrain, Kuwait, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tunisia, Tanzania, Mauritania, Zimbabwe, Mauritius, Seychelles, Japan, Indonesia, Singapore, Cuba, Vietnam, Cambodia, Brunei, Brazil, Mexico, Peru, Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Belarus, and India.

Alborz-Norduz camper rally puts tourism front and center

TEHRAN – An international family rally tour, intended to introduce Alborz province's tourism attractions to Armenians, started on Monday.

"The family tourism rally, has been organized in collaboration with some provincial automobile clubs," the director-general of cultural heritage, tourism, and handicrafts of Alborz brought to

light.

Rahim Khaki stated that the international family rally tour for camper and caravanning is scheduled from July 1 to July 8 and follows the route from Karaj to Qazvin, Zanjan, Tabriz, Jolfa, and Norduz.

The rally tour, he further elaborated, feature 30 camper and caravan vehicles with 74 partic-

ipants.

"The event is aimed at attending the Armenian Water Festival," the director-general added.

In his concluding remarks, Khaki highlighted that the objectives of this rally tour include facilitating and promoting tourism, negotiating with Armenian participants and those from other regional countries to encour-



age travel to Iran, particularly Alborz, and increasing the rate of inbound tourism.

Alborz farms to put some spark into agritourism

TEHRAN – Some new agritourism businesses have been granted operating permits in Alborz province, marking a momentous step for farms to host holidaymakers.

"Six new agritourism businesses have been authorized to start operation within the province," said a local official in charge of tourism during a press conference on Tuesday.

Of the six projects, Rahim Khaki further elaborated, four will be established in Taleqan county, one in Chaharmahal county, and the other one in Savojbolagh county.

Shedding light on the manpower, he pinpointed that the new farms are expected to directly create jobs for 38 individuals, with additional seasonal and indirect employment opportunities also anticipated.

"The diverse projects include medicinal plant farms, beekeeping operations, and various orchards," said the official adding that these initiatives will allow tourists to engage in agricultural activities, offering a hands-on

experience.

Khaki described agritourism as a modern tourism style and a branch of community-based tourism.

This approach, he continued, aims to generate economic and social benefits, protect natural resources, preserve local identity and culture, and improve the quality of life for communities, addressing the needs of current and future generations.

The official further noted the growing popularity of this form of tourism due to the contrast between urban and rural lifestyles.

Additionally, the demand for healthy rural products among tourists has motivated villagers to increase production, thereby promoting employment and economic development in rural areas, Khaki wended up.

Agritourism, or agricultural tourism, refers to the practice of attracting visitors to farms or agricultural operations for the purposes of

education, entertainment, and participation in agricultural activities.

This niche sector combines aspects of both agriculture and tourism to create experiences that allow tourists to engage with rural life, learn about farming practices, and enjoy the countryside.

Agritourism encompasses a wide range of activities, including farm stays, where visitors can live on a farm and participate in daily activities; farm tours and educational workshops; pick-your-own operations for fruits and vegetables; and participation in farm-to-table dining experiences. These activities offer unique recreational and educational opportunities, promoting an understanding of agricultural practices and rural heritage.

To come to the point, with the growing interest in sustainable living and local food systems, agritourism continues to thrive, offering valuable experiences that bridge the gap between rural and urban lifestyles.

Knowledge-based companies explore paths to African markets

TEHRAN – Attending exhibitions on agriculture, grains, dairy, livestock, and poultry in Kenya, Iranian knowledge-based companies looked for new opportunities in the African continent.

According to the Vice Presidency for Science, Technology, and Knowledge-Based Economy, fostering cooperation with African countries to benefit from extra-territorial agricultural opportunities in the continent, and create opportunities to introduce knowledge-based companies to an international arena is one of the strategic policies of the country.

Supported by the Vice-Presidency for Science, Technology and Knowledge-Based Economy, a total of 16 Iranian knowledge-based companies took part in three following technical exhibitions: the 9th edition of the Agritech Africa International Exhibition, the 7th international exhibition on Dairy, livestock, and poultry, as well as the 4th Graintech Africa exhibition.

The exhibitions provided Iranian knowledge-based companies the opportunity to showcase their latest achievements and findings in different sectors including seeds, fertilizers, poisons, the food industry, drones, machinery, tea, and husbandry.

Visitors, who were mainly from African countries, India, and China, highly welcomed Iranian knowledge-based products, particularly agricultural machinery, drones, corn seed, cow embryo technology, and tea.

Iranian and Kenyan officials held more than ten meetings outside the exhibition space with the aim of visiting Kenya's infrastructure to assess joint investment or technology transfer, and en-



gaging in business negotiation to develop a roadmap for boosting cooperation.

Joint agricultural cooperation committee

Iran and Africa established a joint agricultural cooperation committee during the 2nd Iran-Africa International Summit in Tehran, held from April 26 to 29.

The committee was launched with the participation of the representatives of the Water and Soil Deputy Office of Iran's Ministry of Agriculture.

The representatives and managers of various sectors presented Iran's capacities and capabilities at the request of the trade ministers of Niger and Central Africa.

Then, the adviser to Iran's Minister of Agriculture, Fariborz Abbasi, and the project commissioner for the development of modern irrigation systems submitted a comprehensive report regarding the experiences of both public and private sectors in the fields of water and irrigation.

Also, Iran's capabilities in various fields of sustainable soil management especially soil science studies (pedology) and the provision of manageable maps,

production and export of fertilizers, and biological soil modifiers were introduced, according to Mehr news agency.

Iran also expressed its readiness to participate in the African countries and cooperate in the field of implementation of water and soil projects.

Visitors highly welcomed Iranian knowledge-based products, particularly agricultural machinery and drones.

Notable growth in knowledge-based companies

The significant and fast-paced growth in the number of knowledge-based companies with over 200 percent increase in their number just over the past year (March 2023 – March 2024), shows the solid foundation, dynamism, and growth of the country

in innovation and technology and the productive atmosphere which have been made available to boost domestic production with public participation.

The current administration underscores the quantitative and qualitative development of knowledge-based companies. The number of companies, which was around 5,000 before the current administration took office in August 2021, has now reached 10,000 with a total value of two billion dollars.

IHIT in Africa

In January 2021, Iran opened its house of innovation and technology in Kenya and the first center in Africa.

The center serves as a base for the creation of innovative ideas, the commercialization of these ideas, and the export of Iranian knowledge-based products and services to the East African market.

Exporting technological products of Iranian knowledge-based companies is one of the important and key programs of the Vice Presidency for Science and Technology, and in this regard over the past years, with the support of the Vice Presidency for Science and Technology, the Iranian houses of innovation have been set up in several countries to develop the global market for knowledge-based products.

These centers have already been set up in countries such as Russia, Turkey, China, Syria, Kenya, Armenia, Iraq, and Uzbekistan.

By supporting innovative ideas, and holding technological and innovative events, the centers will be a platform for the development and promotion of Iranian knowledge-based companies, startups, and creative industries.

Mountains' valuable functions make their preservation essential

By Maryam Tavassoli

TEHRAN – Mountains are home to 15 percent of the world's population and a quarter of the world's land animals and plants, they provide fresh water to half of humanity, so their conservation is critical for sustainable development.

Due to the precious metals and stones, coal, and other raw materials hidden in the mountains, they have always been encroached on by humans; also due to agricultural lands which are used for forage production, herbs, livestock breeding, production of meat, dairy and all kinds of food.

Unfortunately, mountains are under threat from climate change and overexploitation, and Damavand is no exception. As one of the prominent mountains of the country and the world, it is grappling with many challenges.

Mount Damavand, a potentially active volcano 5600-m high, is a stratovolcano that is the

highest peak in Iran and the highest volcano in Asia, which is a significant mountain in Persian mythology and folklore; it is the symbol of Iranian resistance against despotism and foreign rule in Persian poetry and literature.

Located in the middle of the Alborz range, near the southern coast of the Caspian Sea, in Amol County, Mazandaran province, mount Damavand is the 12th most prominent peak in the world and the second most prominent in Asia after Mount Everest. It is part of the Volcanic Seven Summits mountaineering challenge.

Considering the significance of the mountain, In the Iranian year 1381 (2002 –2003), environmentalists named July 4 Damavand Day to highlight the importance of the iconic mountain in preserving the valuable biodiversity of the region.

It is home to a diverse collection of wildlife, including goats, rams, and sheep. However, with the presence of large numbers of live-

stock in the pasture and human-induced activities, their habitat is moving closer to the peak of the mountain where food scarcity is endangering these species.

In addition to animal overgrazing, ranchers also use valuable plants as fuels to make food which further contributes to the degradation of the mountain's ecosystem, ISNA quoted Abbas Mohammadi, an official with the Department of Environment, as saying.

Other challenges faced by the mountain include road construction, high tourist traffic flow, poor mining, land-use changes, and construction.

"Establishing visitor limits, limiting the expansion of hiking trails and walking on designated paths, encouraging people to keep the mountain clean, and requiring them to collect their garbage are among the important measures to be taken to mitigate the negative impact of human activities," Mohammadi stressed.

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Educational projects worth \$330m to be inaugurated

A total of 1,015 educational projects worth 14 trillion rials (nearly \$330 million) will be inaugurated across the country, Mehrolah Rakhshanimehr, director of the organization for renovation, development, and equipment of schools, has announced.

The projects will be inaugurated by the next 10 days, on the occasion of the 41st anniversary of the Islamic Revolution, he stated, ISNA reported on Sunday.

According to Rakhshanimehr, the projects include 4,168 classrooms, 11 swimming pools, and 32 gyms.

About 14,000 classrooms have been built so far this year (started March 21, 2019), compared with some 10,000 last year, he concluded.

افتتاح ۱۴۰۰ میلیارد تومان پروژه آموزشی

رئیس سازمان نوسازی، توسعه و تجهیز مدارس کشور گفت ۱۰۱۵ پروژه آموزشی با اعتباری به میزان ۱۴۰۰ میلیارد تومان در سراسر کشور به بهره‌برداری می‌رسد.

به گزارش ایسنا، مه‌راله رخشانی مهر افزود این پروژه‌ها طی ۱۰ روز آینده و به مناسبت چهل‌ویکمین سالگرد پیروزی انقلاب اسلامی افتتاح خواهند شد.

به گفته او، این پروژه‌ها شامل ۴۱۶۸ کلاس درس، ۱۱ استخر، و ۳۲ سالن ورزشی هستند.

رخشانی مهر ادامه داد تاکنون در سال ۹۸ حدود ۱۴ هزار کلاس درس افتتاح شده است در حالیکه در سال ۹۷ حدود ۱۰ هزار کلاس افتتاح شده بود.

IRCS chairs BRICS Civil Forum's health working group

TEHRAN - Pirhossein Kolivand, head of the Iranian Red Crescent Society (IRCS), is the chairman of the health working group of the BRICS Civil Forum.

With the motto of 'Strengthening Multilateralism for Just Global Development and Security', the BRICS Civil Forum is being held from July 3-4 in Moscow.

Kolivand is scheduled to deliver a speech on 'the right to development: equality and justice' at the general meeting, Mehr news agency quoted Raziheh Alishvandi, the IRCS director for international affairs, as saying.

Kolivand will also lead the health working group focusing on the theme of 'healthy society, a prerequisite for the development of BRICS countries', Alishvandi added.

Meanwhile, Alishvandi will deliver a speech with the theme of needs, priorities, and development: future cities of BRICS, public health, and individual well-being.

According to the BRICS secretariat, the high potential of the IRCS in various fields has made BRICS eager to cooperate with the Society, Alishvandi highlighted.

The official went on to mention part of these potentials such as pursuing goals based on humanitarian activities, taking measures to help those in need and victims of hazards and incidents, providing health and rehabilitation services, as well as conducting relief and medical services in the IRCS medical centers abroad.

The BRICS Civil Forum is a discussion and presentation platform for the civil society of the member countries, initiated by Russia in 2015.

As part of preparations for the Civil Forum, nine working groups were created to develop recommendations for BRICS leaders.

At the BRICS Civil forum, the civil community will elaborate on proposals to enhance dialogue in such fields as Equitable Development Goals, Education and Human Development, Sovereign Economic and Financial Development, New Technologies Ethics, Public Health and Human Well-being, Environment, Energy Transfer and Social Justice.

IRCS best candidate to chair health working group

In April, the IRCS was asked to head up the health working group of BRICS. The great capabilities and accomplishments of the IRCS in various fields have made BRICS eager to cooperate with the society, IRNA quoted Alena Peryshinka, co-chair of the BRICS Civil Forum, as saying.

She made the remarks in a meeting with Pirhossein Kolivand, the head of the IRCS, in Tehran.

Following discussions with the late Foreign Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian, the IRCS was decided to be the representative of Iran in BRICS, she added.

Kolivand, for his part, called the IRCS the best candidate to chair the health working group while elaborating on the achievements of the IRCS in recent years.

The Iranian Red Crescent Society is active in various fields, such as relief operations in response to hazards and emergencies, he explained.

With some three million volunteers and 70,000 professional rescuers, the IRCS provides relief services on roads, mountains, and coasts cease-

lessly. Moreover, it has established crescent houses in different parts of the country where volunteers provide valuable relief assistance before and after emergencies.

The official stressed that education plays a key role in disaster management, noting that IRCS trains students how to prevent and handle emergencies as a way to raise public awareness in society.

Being equipped with 18 helicopters, hundreds of rescue vehicles, and warehouses storing essential items such as food and medicine, the IRCS has enhanced its readiness to address the crisis.

Currently, the IRCS factories produce a range of medicines, medical equipment, medicinal plants, and relief items. Moreover, it has concluded a contract with the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) to manufacture relief tents to be used in international crises.

Kolivand also highlighted the commitment of the IRCS to assist needy people both domestically and internationally citing its support for people affected by devastating earthquakes in Turkey, Afghanistan, and Syria.

Finally, he mentioned the potential of the society to share its expertise in providing relief and health services to the people in Africa, Asia, and Latin America through IRCS medical facilities.

The BRICS group, established in 2009, has emerged as a significant force shaping global economic discussions.

Iran, alongside Argentina, Egypt, Ethiopia, the UAE, and Saudi Arabia, received an invitation to join this influential bloc effective January 1, 2024, signaling a significant transformation in the geopolitical arena.

A revolution in healthcare system

Following the victory of the Islamic Revolution in 1979, many good improvements have been made in different fields, especially in the healthcare system, which has experienced notable growth both in quantity and quality.

Obtaining the first rank in pharmaceutical production in the region, producing 99 percent of needed drugs including biotech drugs for the domestic market, self-sufficiency in the production of vaccines, eradication of polio and other contagious diseases, and vaccination coverage from 30 to 100 percent are among scientific achievements in the field of medicine, which can be referred to as medical revolution.

Moreover, increase in the number of hospitals and medical centers; growth in the number of physicians, health specialists, and universities of medical sciences; improvement in medical equipment, and pharmaceutical products; increase in life expectancy, and reduce in mortality rate among mothers and infants, are other parts of the Islamic Revolution's achievements in health and medical field.

Now, the coverage of primary health care for rural and urban populations is 100 percent. And the goal of establishing a medical-treatment network system with over 18,000 health houses and 10,000 health centers, as a global model, has been fulfilled. The distribution of hospitals and health services in different parts of the country has been done in line with health justice.



Iran celebrates 1,757 years of higher education

The University of Tehran hosted on Wednesday a ceremony to celebrate 1,757 years of higher education in Iran.

Representatives from more than 30 countries, as well as over 3,000 students from different countries attended the ceremony.

"A just cause finds great support": Xi Jinping and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization



Chinese President Xi Jinping poses for a group photo with other leaders and guests ahead of the 22nd meeting of the Council of Heads of State of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) in Samarkand, Uzbekistan, Sept. 16, 2022. (Xinhua/Li Tao)

On June 15, 2001, then heads of state of China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan gathered in Shanghai. Together, they announced the creation of a new regional group on the Eurasian continent -- the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO).

The SCO is the only inter-governmental organization named after a Chinese city. It has become a key venue for China to bolster its cooperation with countries in Central Asia and the broader Eurasian landmass.

Over the past decade, Chinese President Xi Jinping has attended every SCO head-of-state summit, including through video conferences during the COVID period. He shared at this multilateral platform his thoughts and proposals with other world leaders on ensuring regional stability, achieving more robust common development and contributing to a better world.

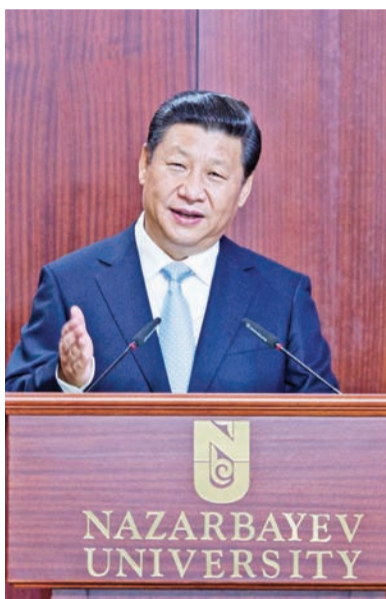
"A just cause finds great support, and a journey with many companions gets far." In Xi's eyes, the development of the SCO, which represents about half of the world's population and a quarter of the global economy, accords with the trend of the times and goes along with the direction of human progress.

"WITH PEACE, A COUNTRY ENJOYS PROSPERITY"

"The 'Three evil forces,' drug trafficking and transnational organized crime are serious threats to regional security and stability." When Xi first addressed the SCO summit in Kyrgyzstan capital Bishkek in 2013, he opened his speech with a clear and concise assessment of the security situation facing SCO members.

The SCO was born primarily for security reasons. Its predecessor, the "Shanghai Five," was formed to manage border security issues after the end of the Cold War. Terrorism, separatism and extremism, known as the "three evil forces," have for decades hung over Central

rise of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria caused a spillover of terrorist and extremist elements into Central Asia back then, resulting in more pressure for China and its SCO partners to forge strong security ties.



Chinese President Xi Jinping delivers a speech at the Nazarbayev University in Astana, Kazakhstan, Sept. 7, 2013. (Xinhua/Wang Ye)

The Chinese leader stressed security cooperation at every summit and mentioned "security" more than 120 times in his 11 SCO speeches. For the Chinese leader, security is the bedrock of development, while stability is a prerequisite for prosperity.

"With peace, a country enjoys prosperity, just as with rain, the land can flourish." Xi once quoted this Uzbekistan proverb to explain his understanding of the relationship between security and development when attending the 2022 SCO Samarkand summit.

Xi pledged "zero tolerance" towards the "three evil forces" and underscored concerted efforts to eradicate them.

He also urged the SCO members to help Afghanistan regain peace and

to cut terrorism financing. Those efforts have paid off. From 2013 to 2017, SCO member states foiled more than 600 terrorist crimes, captured some 2,000 terrorists and destroyed over 500 terrorist boot camps. Security mechanisms have improved, and joint drills have extended to cyberspace.

The SCO has also been a platform on which Xi expounded his new security vision for Asia -- a common, comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable security.

The world today remains gripped by war and conflict. Xi has always been concerned with preventing war and achieving lasting peace. In 2022, he proposed the Global Security Initiative (GSI), a global public good provided by China to advance global security governance.

The guiding principle of the GSI is consistent with his security vision, offering China's solution to the question of the times.

MODERN SILK ROAD

The SCO is naturally connected to Xi's signature proposal, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). All six initial SCO members were along the ancient bustling trade route between the

Uzbekistan through Kyrgyzstan. In the future, it can reach West Asia and South Asia, becoming a main transport artery across the Asian continent.

In his video message, Xi described the railway as a strategic project of connectivity between China and Central Asia and a landmark project of the three countries' cooperation efforts under the Belt and Road Initiative.

Located in the heartland of the Asian continent, Central Asia's development has long been constrained by a lack of ports. Once completed, the railway will shorten the time needed to transport Central Asian products to major global markets and facilitate the integration of Central Asia with the global industrial and supply chains,



A representative of Chinese troops receives medals in the closing ceremony of the "Peace Mission 2021" counter-terrorism military drill of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization member states, at the Donguz training range in Russia's Orenburg Region on Sept. 24, 2021. (Xinhua/Mei Shixiong)

thus boosting regional development.

The railway project was first proposed in the 1990s. Over the years, Xi has paid close attention to the project. In his interactions with leaders of Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, both SCO members, he repeatedly called for a joint drive to restart this transformative railway project.



A railway staff member examines the first train of a new international multimodal transport route departing from Langfang City, north China's Hebei Province, July 4, 2023. (Photo by Jia Jun/Xinhua)

East and the West, and the Chinese leader has further strengthened that connection.

During a state visit to Kazakhstan in September 2013, Xi proposed the Silk Road Economic Belt, an essential component of the BRI. Days later, when addressing the Bishkek SCO summit, Xi called on member countries to carry forward the Silk Road spirit.

Over the decade, Xi has used the BRI as a key driver to promote China's practical cooperation with the SCO countries and to accelerate development. By aligning their respective development strategies, China and the SCO members have witnessed fruitful results in boosting infrastructure, trade and financial connectivity.

Earlier in June via video link, Xi, along with Kyrgyz President Sadyr Japarov and Uzbek President Shavkat Mirziyoyev, hailed the signing of an inter-governmental agreement in Beijing on the China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan railway.

The railway, as planned, will begin in Kashgar, a city in China's western Xinjiang, and enter the territory of

Former SCO Secretary-General Vladimir Norov hailed the BRI as "an important platform for multilateral cooperation" that benefits landlocked Central Asian countries, including his home country of Uzbekistan. The BRI has provided "the chance to go freely to the world market."

The railway is just one facet of China's booming cooperation with SCO members. Thanks to increased connectivity, trade is flourishing. Over the past year, trade between China and the five Central Asian countries hit a record high of about 90 billion U.S. dollars, up over 27 percent year-on-year.

STRONGER BOND

When it was China's turn to hold the SCO summit in 2018, Xi chose to host his colleagues in Qingdao, a coastal city in China's eastern Shandong Province. The choice has rich cultural implications.

Shandong is home to Confucius and Mencius, two Chinese sages, and the cradle of Confucianism. This ancient Chinese philosophy has significantly influenced many Asian cultures and has profoundly impacted the lives of the Chinese people and their way of

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thinking.

Xi welcomed the SCO leaders

any other. "We should promote mutual learning between our civilizations and enhance good-neighborliness and friendship between our countries. This allows us to enhance public support for the SCO's long-term development."

SHARED HOME

"The SCO is our shared home," Xi once said. From time to time, the Chinese leader would describe the SCO's growing membership as a "big family."

Whether a shared home or a big family, the SCO is always open and inclusive. It features non-alliance, non-confrontation and non-targeting of any third party. That starkly contrasts with exclusive clubs of nations driven by ideological bloc confrontation.

In recent years, the SCO has incorporated new members who recognize the Shanghai Spirit, which is defined by mutual trust, mutual benefit, equality, consultation, respect for diversity of civilizations and pursuit of common development.

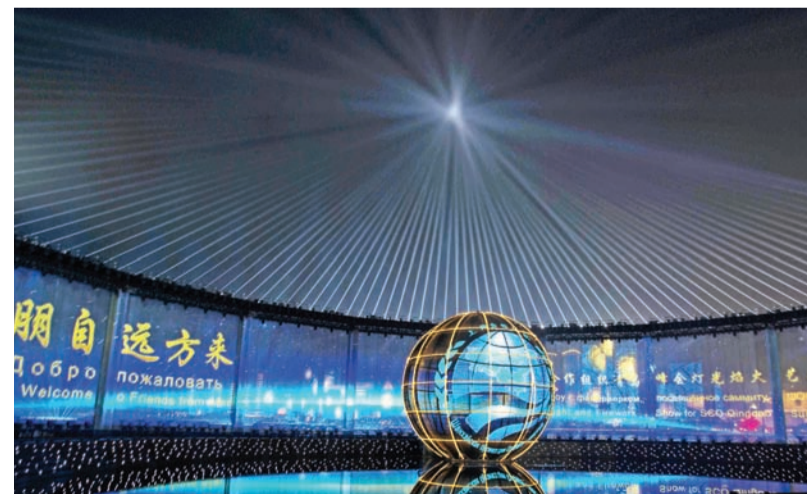
Now, with nine member states, three observer states and 14 dialogue partners, the SCO is the world's largest regional organization in terms of geographical scale and population.

For Xi, mankind, living in the same global village, are increasingly becoming a community with a shared future in which everyone's interest is closely interlinked. Thus, he proposed the building of an SCO community with a shared future at the Qingdao summit.

Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, a witness to the establishment of "the Shanghai Five" in 1996 as a senior Kazakh official, has been involved in the SCO activities from the beginning.

He expressed "a huge respect" for Xi and support for his visions. "I have no doubts about their positive impacts on developing the world, which must be free of discrimination, of sanctions, of pressure."

Xi's proposals are playing a very crucial role in building mutual trust



A lights and fireworks show takes place in Qingdao, the host city of the 18th Shanghai Cooperation Organization summit, in east China's Shandong Province, June 9, 2018. (Xinhua/Li Xueren)

continuous attention and support, the project was completed in 2019.

When he visited the Central Asian country again in 2022, Xi presented Uzbek President Mirziyoyev with a miniature of the ancient city as a state gift in celebration of the two countries' joint efforts to restore the cultural heritage of the Silk Road.

Xi regards each civilization as unique, with none being superior to

and benefit among countries in a world characterized by growing instability, uncertainty and unpredictability, said Sheradil Baktygulov, a foreign affairs consultant with the Kyrgyz National Institute for Strategic Studies, a think tank.

"The thoughts of President Xi show the way for building a close SCO community," said Baktygulov, "and a bright future for the Eurasian continent."



This photo taken on Sept. 21, 2023 shows the historical sites in the ancient city of Khiva, Uzbekistan. (Xinhua/Li Muzi)

Asia, becoming increasingly acute following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan and the so-called Arab Spring.

As Xi debuted on the SCO stage, the region was facing a much more complicated security situation. The

push forward cooperation in tackling drug trafficking, organized crime, and nontraditional security sectors like cyberspace and outer space.

With the consistent push by Xi and his fellow SCO leaders, the SCO has, over the years, organized joint drills and cracked down on drug smuggling