Straight Truth

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Iranians Rebuff Electoral Boycott Calls

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Stock market provides $12b of funding for various sectors in 11 months

TEHRAN – Iranian Finance and Economic Affairs Minister Ehsan Khandouzi said the country's stock market has provided 6.0 quadrillion rials (about $12 billion) of funding for various economic sectors since the beginning of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21, 2023).

According to Khandouzi, considering the current trend the figure is expected to reach 7.5 quadrillion rials (about $15 billion) by the end of the year (late March 2024), IRNA reported.

Back in November 2023, Head of Iran's Securities and Exchange Organization (SEO) Majid Eshghi said 30 percent of financing in the country's economic sectors was done through the capital market in the previous Iranian calendar year (ended on March 20).

Speaking at an Exchange, Banking and Insurance Conference, Eshghi said: "We believe that the role of the capital market in the economy can be made much stronger than what currently is."

"Today, the country's economy needs creativity and innovation and the economy cannot be managed with the policies of the past decade," he noted.

According to the official, banks are less willing to finance small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), so the stock market can replace them in this regard.

"Today, we need to revive people's trust in the government, without this trust, we will not have a balanced development. People should know that the stock market is a safe and transparent platform for investment," Eshghi stressed.

Leader casts votes for parliamentary and Assembly of Experts elections in early minutes

TEHRAN - The Leader cast his ballot in the Imam Khomeini Hussainiyah in ballot box number 110 in the presence of more than a hundred journalists and cameramen from local and international media outlets, khamenei.ir reported.

After casting his vote, the Leader of the Islamic Revolution offered two recommendations to the Iranian people. In his first recommendation, he urged all Iranians to surpass others in good deeds and to cast their votes in the initial hours of the day. Secondly, he encouraged voters to select no less than the full number of candidates required for each constituency.

In his address to the Iranian nation, Imam Khamenei added, "Today many people around the world, including people in general, politicians, and holders of important national and political positions, are watching Iran. Their eyes are on you... Both our friends and those who are in favor of the Iranian nation as well as the ill-wishers of the Iranian nation want to see what you will do in these elections. Pay attention to this [and act in a manner that] will make our friends happy and ill-wishers disappointed."

In response to a reporter's question about those who are still hesitant about participating in the elections, the Leader of the Islamic Revolution said, "When it comes to doing good deeds, there should be no hesitation."

Imam Khamenei prayed to the Almighty God that the election day would be a blessed one for the Iranian nation, yielding the desired results for the benefit of the country.





© AFP

People mourn at al-Shifa hospital in Gaza City after Israeli forces opened fire on crowds rushing at an aid distribution point on 29 February 2024.

Barbaric bombardment of breadline

By Shahrokh Saei

TEHRAN - Israel has been committing acts of genocide, massacres, war crimes and crimes against humanity with impunity in the Gaza Strip since launching war on the besieged Palestinian territory nearly five months ago.

The latest Israeli massacre took place on Thursday at a neighborhood in the southwest of Gaza City where a group of trucks carrying desperately needed aid arrived. Israeli forces opened fire on hungry people who were waiting in the area for a delivery of food, including flour, from the trucks. ▶ Page 5

Democracy, human rights are much stronger in Iran than in Britain: FM

TEHRAN- Iran's Foreign Minister, Hossein Amir Abdollahian, has stressed that the Iranian government and system depend on the people's support, adding that democracy and human rights in Iran are stronger than those in the UK.

Amir Abdollahian made the remarks in an exclusive interview with Britain Channel 4 News.

The top Iranian diplomat underlined, "If a referendum, is to be held in Iran and at the same time in Britain on people's support of their regime, have no doubt Britain will be the loser."

In reaction to the claim that 75% of voters will not participate in the upcoming election in Iran and that they have lost faith in the Iranian government, Amir Abdollahian said, "Firstly, how did you come up with 75% for such a claim? Secondly, since the victory of the Islamic Revolution until today, every year we have had at least one free election with the participation of all people in Iran. The third point is that, in Iran, we encourage people to participate. However, we do not impose punitive policies on those who do not participate in the election. While in many Western countries, if a person does not participate in the election, they face temporary social deprivation or even fines."

He added, "No, your statistics are completely the opposite. We have a high turnout. In our region, Iran is one of the strongest democracies. However, the riots that you mentioned, I addressed in my yesterday's speech (on the United Nations Human Rights Council). I said, 'Ladies and gentlemen, do you remember? Months ago, following the tragic death of a dear Iranian girl, what an uproar it caused in the Human Rights Council? A fact-finding committee was formed. Five months into genocide and massacres of Palestinian women and children in Gaza, by bombs from Western countries; bombs provided by the United States, Britain, ▶ Page 3

TEHRAN PAPERS

Their only pride is sanctions

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

In a note, Shargh addressed the U.S. sanctions approach against Iran and wrote: So far, Joe Biden's government has imposed more than 55 separate sanctions against Iran, targeting more than 550 individuals and institutions. According to John Kirby, we do not have any plans to cancel, exempt, or reduce any new sanctions imposed on Iran, and these sanctions have been imposed due to human rights violations, hostage-taking, the production of missiles and drones, and Iran's nuclear programs. The United States and the United Kingdom have been working together for some time to impose some sanctions against individuals and institutions of the Islamic Republic, as well as against the Yemeni Ansarallah. For various reasons, including human rights and the wars in Ukraine and Israel, the Biden administration along with its Western allies has imposed sanctions against Iran. Following the U.S. claims, the Islamic Republic has declared that these actions against Iran or its armed forces are misleading, baseless, and unacceptable.

Javan: Germany, Given its human rights history, not entitled to judge Iran

In a commentary, Javan dealt with the human rights accusations of the German foreign minister against Iran and said: According to the human rights advisor of the Iranian delegation, the country that has made accusations against Iran its history is full of widespread human rights violations committed both inside and outside its borders. German leaders who claim to defend the rights of women and girls give financial, military, and political aid to the Israeli regime that is killing thousands of Palestinian women and girls or forcing them to escape from their homes. Germany, with a history full of extensive human rights violations, which has lost the moral and political credibility to be a member of the Human Rights Council, cannot advise Iran on human rights.

Hamshahri: John Bolton and a new story

In an analysis, Hamshahri discussed the recent claim of John Bolton, who was Trump's national security advisor, and said: John Bolton, the radical and belligerent former national security advisor of the United States, by repeating anti-Iran claims, has accused Tehran of arming its affiliated forces in order to use them for the conflict. By repeating the claims and accusations against the Islamic Republic of Iran, he claimed that the Palestinian, Lebanese, and Yemeni resistance groups supported by Tehran continue to fight against Israel. According to his claim, Iran is involved in every issue in the Middle East. So if America is not prepared to use force, it will never be able to create deterrence, which is the real key to peace and security. These anti-Iran statements are made while Amir Abdollahian has repeatedly said that Iran was not aware of this action by Hamas. But we believe that Hamas' move was a liberating action against Israel's occupation. The Islamic Republic of Iran is always against the killing of women, children and civilians anywhere in the world.

Ham Mihan: Iran is a powerful deterrent

In an interview with Ham Mihan, Mahmoud Shouri, a senior expert on Eurasia affairs, pointed to the crisis between Azerbaijan and Armenia in Iran's neighborhood. He said: Iran has managed to control the crisis in this (Caucasus) region or prevent further escalation of tension. All the actions that Iran has taken have been aimed at stabilizing the situation in the region.

In addition, no country will accept an annexation of Armenian territory to Azerbaijan by force. The Europeans do not accept such a thing, the Americans do not agree with such an approach, and the Russians are looking for a solution based on the agreement of the parties. If the Republic of Azerbaijan takes military action to achieve its goals, it may not face very serious obstacles, unless a country like the Islamic Republic of Iran through diplomatic interaction with Russia can create the necessary deterrence before such an action happens and not let Azerbaijan take such an action.

INVITATION TO ONE STEP INTERNATIONAL TENDER
Second Announcement
55/02/31570
02/03/2023

Agricultural Support Services Company

Ministry of Jihad-e-Agriculture

AGRICULTURAL SUPPORT SERVICES COMPANY

Agricultural Support Services Company, hereinafter will be referred as ASSC, affiliated to Ministry of Agriculture-Jahad of I.R of Iran, is considering the purchase of the below item of technical, through renewal of one step international tender.

	Name	PACKING	Quantity/ KG
1	**Deltamethrin Tech Min 98.5 pct.**	50 kg drums	**1800**

All of the qualified and interested companies are invited to receive tender documents from Wednesday dated 28/2/2024 until Monday dated 4/3/2024 (4 working days) from our purchasing committee (located at the 9th floor, no. 1, fourth alley, Gandhi St., Tehran, Iran).
The bidders are requested to submit their letters of introduction, along with remittance bill of IRI. Rials 1,200,000 to ASSC's account no. 4001039704005791 with SHEBA no. IR250100004001039704005791 at the Central Bank of the Islamic Republic of Iran through payment order of SATNA or PAYA with the 30-character identification code of 358039782263500650000000000006.

The bidders are requested to submit their sealed and stamped envelopes containing offers latest on Wednesday dated 3/4/2024 until 10:00 AM to our security office located on the 8th floor. Meanwhile the meeting for the opening of the envelops will be held on Wednesday dated 3/4/2024 at 14:00 with the presence of bidder's representatives at our purchasing committee (9th floor, no. 1, Fourth Alley, Gandhi St., Tehran, Iran).

We would like to emphasize that the value of the bid bond amount must be only submitted by the bidders
in bank guarantee as follows:

1- **€ 4806** for Deltamethrin Tech Min 98.5 pct. equivalent to Iranian Rials **1476076392**.

- The bid bond value should be in Euro or in equal value of any other foreign currencies, except US dollars, based on the exchange rate of Telegraphic Transfer of the basic and essential commodities on CBI's ETS website, www.fxmarketrate.cbi.ir, on 18/2/2024.

-The bidders are also permitted to submit the bid bond in Iranian Rial.

- After approval of ASSC's Financial Manager, the bidders are permitted to use their previous and definite outstanding claims as the bid bond.

For more information, you may refer to our website www.assc.ir, and http://iets.mporg.ir or contact us by phone no. 00982188776325.

PR & Intel Affairs Dept. of Agricultural Support Services Company (ASSC)

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Iranian military adviser martyred in Syria



TEHRAN — An Iranian military adviser was martyred in an airstrike by the Israeli forces on the Syrian port of Banias.

Reza Zarei, a member of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) Navy, lost his life in the attack.

Multiple powerful explosions rocked the city of Banias and its surrounding areas in northwestern Syria on Friday.

Witnesses reported seeing flashes originating from the Mediterranean Sea before the explosions, raising questions about the source of the blasts.Although authorities have yet to confirm the cause of the explosions, Banias has previously been targeted by Israeli forces.

Reza Zarei, identified as one of the guards of the 1st region of the IRGC Navy, becomes the third martyr from Hormozgan province.

It is noteworthy that the recent airstrikes on Banias mark the fourth Israeli air attack on Syria within the past 48 hours.

Banias, situated in Tartus province, Syria, is a small city and port located on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. It lies 55 km south of the port of Latakia and 40 km north of the port of Tartus.

Constitutional Council confirms surge in voter turnout for parliamentary elections

TEHRAN- Participation in the current parliamentary elections has surpassed that of the previous term, as stated by Constitutional Council spokesperson Hadi Tahan Nazif.

During a press briefing on Friday, Tahan Nazif described the voter turnout as "good," highlighting the increased engagement compared to past elections. He emphasized that preparations for the March 1 elections had been underway for months, involving various executive bodies and law enforcement agencies.

Speaking on the voting process, Tahan Nazif assured that it is proceeding smoothly without significant problems.

He encouraged citizens not to delay their participation until later hours.

"So far, we haven't encountered any major issues in the voting process," he concluded.

Iran sends Pars 1 research satellite into orbit

TEHRAN – Early on Thursday, Iran successfully put into orbit Pars 1 research-sensing satellite upon a Soyuz rocket from the Vostochny Cosmodrome in Russia's far eastern Amur region.

Equipped with three cameras, the 134-kilogram satellite will scan Iran's topography from an orbit of 500 kilometers above the Earth's surface.

According to Euronews, Russia's state-run Roscosmos corporation said that a Soyuz rocket blasted off from the Vostochny Cosmodrome launch facility in the country's far east to carry the Iranian satellite and 18 Russian satellites into orbit.

The satellite has three cameras to take images for environmental, agricultural and other purposes.

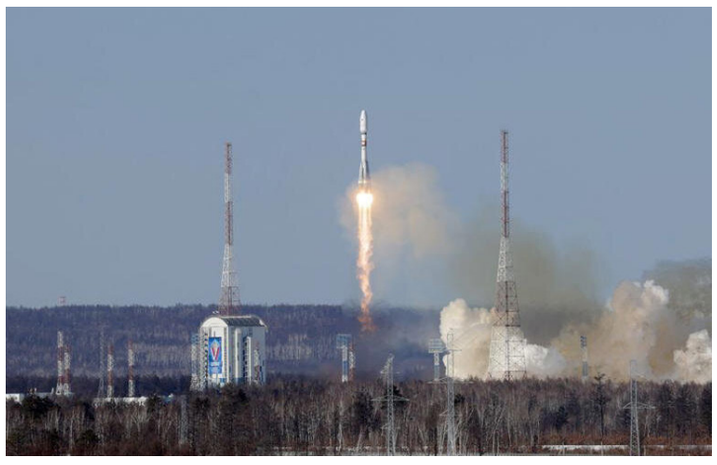
The satellite will be put into orbit around the North and South Poles, synchronized to be in the same fixed position relative to the Sun, and will be fully functional after a calibration of its systems.

Elaborating on the national space program, Communications and Information Technology Minister of Issa Zarepour told a TV program that that Iran has launched 12 satellites into space over the past 25 months.

"The country's space industry is rapidly advancing forward ... upgrading its place," Press TV quoted Zarepour as saying.

Additionally, the minister said Iran is constructing West Asia's largest launch base in the country's south.

Last month, Iran simultaneously put into orbit the Mahda research satellite, as well as the Keyhan-2 and Hatef-1 nanosatellites using the Simorgh (Phoenix) carrier.



In the same month, the Aerospace Force of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) launched Soraya satellite into orbit using Qaem 100 satellite carrier.

Despite Western sanctions on Iran in recent years, the country has taken giant strides in the civilian space program.

Iran is among the world's top 10 countries capable of developing and launching satellites.

Kuwaiti companies' endorsement facilitates visa issuance for Iranian traders, says ambassador

TEHRAN- Iranian Ambassador to Kuwait, Mohammad Toutounchi, addressed the challenges surrounding visa issuance for Iranian tradesmen, acknowledging the recent visa-related difficulties faced by Iranian citizens.

He noted that amidst decisions aimed at restructuring the population in Kuwait following the COVID-19 pandemic, the Kuwaiti government has notably tightened visa processes, particularly for pilgrimage and family reunification purposes.

Toutounchi highlighted recent developments, indicating that in the past few weeks, there has been progress in visa issuances for Iranians.

According to Toutounchi, Iranian tradesmen seeking entry for business purposes may obtain visas if sponsored by reputable Kuwaiti companies.

Underlining the ongoing efforts of the Iranian embassy in Kuwait to streamline visa procedures, Toutounchi expressed optimism for further improvements.He affirmed the embassy's commitment to facilitating smoother visa processes, aligning to enhance bilateral economic ties between Iran and Kuwait.

Raisi hails all-inclusive Friday vote

TEHRAN – Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi pointed out the inclusivity of the elections held on March 1, saying both citizens and candidates see it as their duty to take part in national votes.

"Everyone is acting on duty. It doesn't matter if our favorite candidates do not get elected. What matters is that we have shown our unity and cohesion as a great country," Raisi said while casting his own vote at a polling station in Iran's interior ministry.

"Our country functions on people's votes. Citizens get to partake in their nation's governance by choosing whom they want to see in office. All bodies operate with people's guidance," the president added.

Raisi also called on authorities to respect people's choices and try their absolute best not to disappoint Iranians.

Also talking to reporters on Friday, Raisi's spokesperson Ali Bahoderi Jahromi thanked Iranians for thwarting the enemy's vicious plots. "They have been trying to discourage us from showing up at the ballot box day and night. But as you witnessed today, nothing will sway the Iranian nation," he said.

Iran, Qatar discuss latest developments in Gaza war

TEHRAN – Iran and Qatar's foreign ministers, Hossein Amir Abdollahian and Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al Thani, engaged in a significant telephone conversation on Thursday.

The focal point of the two foreign ministers' discussion was the latest political efforts aimed at halting the Israeli regime's ongoing war of genocide against the Gaza Strip.

In the course of their talks, the ministers highlighted the importance of bilateral relations, emphasizing a shared commitment to strengthening comprehensive cooperation based on mutual interests.

They delved into recent political developments focused on ending the conflict and atrocities in Gaza, including discussions on potential ceasefires, plans for a prisoner exchange, and international humanitarian aid shipments directed towards the people of Gaza.

Israel currently estimates that 130 captives remain in Gaza, while around 7,000 Palestinians are in Israeli jails, many of whom are detained without charge.

==== Iran's FM stresses the need to halt the genocide in Gaza

Additionally, Amir Abdollahian discussed the progress in bilateral relations with Turkey's Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan. They addressed recent agreements between the presidents of both countries and the situation in Palestine, particularly the atrocities committed by the Zionist regime in Gaza.

Amir Abdollahian highlighted the agreements made during President Ebrahim Raisi's recent visit to Ankara, emphasizing the need for collaborative efforts to implement these agreements.

Acknowledging the recent events in Gaza and the ongoing atrocities by Zionist forces against the oppressed people of Palestine, Amir Abdollahian mentioned the upcoming meeting of foreign ministers from the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC).

He expressed hope that Islamic countries would achieve effective results and take actions to stop the genocide by the occupying regime of the Israeli apartheid.

During the call, Turkey's foreign minister deemed Raisi's recent visit to Ankara significant and historic, emphasizing Turkey's government's commitment to advancing cooperation with Iran. Hakan Fidan also underscored the importance of coordination among Islamic countries to confront and halt the aggressions of the Zionists.

The war on Gaza, initiated by Israel on October 7, came after the Palestinian Resistance group Hamas executed Operation Al-Aqsa Storm against the occupying entity in response to the Israeli regime's decades-long campaign of death and destruction in Palestine.

The aggression has resulted in the death of more than 30,000 Palestinians, with a majority being women and children. Another 70,457 individuals have been wounded, and many bodies remain trapped under rubble.

Life is rapidly deteriorating in Gaza due to the "complete siege" imposed by the Tel Aviv regime, cutting off fuel, electricity, food, and water to the more than two million Palestinians living there. Approximately 576,000 people, about a quarter of Gaza's population, are now "one step away from famine," according to the UN humanitarian affairs chief.

Iranians rebuff electoral boycott calls

By Soheila Zarfam

TEHRAN - Before the voting day had even arrived in Iran, Western media outlets became awash with reports and analyses predicting that Iranians would not turn up at the polling stations this year.

Headlines such as "Iran braces for low election turnout", "Iranians expected to shun elections", and "low turnout and boycott expected", were how the stenographers of politicians in the West decided to speak of Iran's March 1 elections. However, none of these renowned media outlets managed to come up with substantial data or polling information to support their claims.

The truth of the matter is that media outlets shepherded by Western political circles weren't aiming to engage in journalism. Rather, they were striving to craft a script for Iran's elections and then through their proxies on Persian-language television channels such as Iran International and BBC Persian, cast the Iranian populace as actors.

Many anti-Iran figures living abroad also went to great lengths to discourage Iranians from voting. "If people boycott the elections, we can pressure Western states



to give us more funds and impose more sanctions on Iran at the same time," said an infamous terrorist and Kurdish separatist in a leaked audio.

But on Friday as the Tehran Times took a look at the voting stations in the bustling capital, it seemed that most of those efforts in the past weeks had been in vain.

"I have some family members abroad that asked me to refrain from voting. I told them that not voting is not going to solve anything. We need to exercise our right to vote to make sure we have a say in Iran's future," a voter, 38-year-old Zahra, told the Tehran Times.

"I think Iranians abroad are more prone to getting their minds plagued by Western propaganda. Look at what's happening in Gaza. How could one believe that the West cares about us?" she said, adding that though she has "some disagreements" with the government she would still not engage in what Western states are hoping her to do.

Many Iranians seemed to be of the same mind as Zahra on the voting day. The spokesman for Iran's Guardian Council told reporters on Friday that he thinks more people have turned up for this year's parliamentary and Assembly of Experts elections than in previous years.

"We have to wait until the polling stations are closed to announce the data. But so far, our observers have told us that more people have voted compared to the previous years," Hadi Tahan Nazif asserted.

Though conservatives are expected to win an overall majority in both the 290-seat parliament and the 88-seat Assembly of Experts, their rival factions also showed active participation in the March 1 elections.

Former Iranian President Hassan Rouhani who was disqualified from running in the elections was photographed voting with a big smile on his face. His fellow reformist colleagues like former Foreign Minister Javad Zarif were also seen casting their ballots near their residences.

"We vote because we are citizens of this country. Every time we united, we got to disappoint our enemies," said Abdolnaser Hemmati, former Governor of the Central Bank of Iran, who lost to Ebrahim Raisi during the 2021 presidential election.

The Iranian government announced on Friday that it was extending voting time for the 40th round of elections held since the victory of the Islamic Revolution in 1979 which means that Iranians once again decided to put aside their differences and show up for their country.

Democracy, human rights are much stronger in Iran than in Britain: FM



TEHRAN- Iran's Foreign Minister, Hossein Amir Abdollahian, has stressed that the Iranian government and system depend on the people's support, adding that democracy and human rights in Iran are stronger than those in the UK.

Amir Abdollahian made the remarks in an exclusive interview with Britain Channel 4 News.

The top Iranian diplomat underlined, "If a referendum, is to be held in Iran and at the same time in Britain on people's support of their regime, have no doubt Britain will be the loser."

In reaction to the claim that 75% of voters will not participate in the upcoming election in Iran and that they have lost faith in the Iranian government, Amir Abdollahian said, "Firstly, how did you come up with 75% for such a claim? Secondly, since the victory of the Islamic Revolution until today, every year we have had at least one free election with the participation of all people in Iran. The third point is that, in Iran, we encourage people to participate. However, we do not impose punitive policies on those who do not participate in the election. While in many Western countries, if a person does not participate in the election, they face temporary social deprivation or even fines."

He added, "No, your statistics are completely the opposite. We have a high turnout. In our region, Iran is one of the strongest democracies. However, the riots that you mentioned, I addressed in my yesterday's speech (on the United Nations Human Rights Council). I said, 'Ladies and gentlemen, do you remember? Months ago, following the tragic death of a dear Iranian girl, what an uproar it caused in the Human Rights Council? A fact-finding committee was formed. Five months into genocide and massacres of Palestinian women and children in Gaza, by bombs from Western countries; bombs provided by the United States, Britain, and some other countries to Israel, so many women and children are being killed. Why no one in the Human Rights Council thinks of forming a fact-finding committee?'"

The Iranian top diplomat noted, "This is the very double standard democracy and human rights that we witness from the West today."

"Democracy and human rights in Iran have their roots in our beliefs and thousands of years of civilization. I unequivocally tell you that democracy and human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran today are much stronger than democracy and human rights in Britain. If you disagree, I invited you to come to Iran on Friday and see for yourself the high turnout in the elections and people deciding their own fate," he stated.

In reaction to the question of whether he is more afraid of the Iranian people or Donald Trump if he is elected as the president of the United States, he answered, "As regards British interference and instilling such incorrect narratives by Britain on Iranian society, I would like to add that your assessments or the information you possess about Iran are completely biased and entirely fabricated and artificial. Our government and our system rely on the people's support. If you take a look at the images of tens of millions of Iranians rallying on the recent anniversary of the Iranian Revolution, you will realize that your information is completely wrong."

(See full text at tehrantimes.com)

Iran questions Germany's moral, human rights, political credibility

TEHRAN- Iran's Representative to the Human Rights Council, Hamid Ahmadi, strongly criticized Germany's suitability as a member of the council, questioning its moral, human rights, and political credibility.

In response to recent remarks by the German Foreign Minister during the 55th session of the Human Rights Council, Ahmadi emphasized that Germany is not in a position to make recommendations to others in this regard.

During his address to the council, Ahmadi refuted accusations against Iran, highlighting Germany's own history of human rights violations both domestically and internationally.

He particularly pointed out Germany's support for the Israeli regime's onslaught, which he argued has exacerbated human suffering.

Ahmadi condemned Germany's backing of Israel, citing instances where German leaders expressed support for the Israeli government amidst international outcry over its actions in Gaza.

He criticized Germany's disregard for the lives of Palestinian civilians, especially women and girls, who have been adversely affected by Israeli military operations.

The Iranian representative underscored the destruction inflicted upon Gaza's infrastructure by Israeli forces and criticized Germany's continued support for Israel despite calls from the International Court of Justice to cease such actions.

In conclusion, Ahmadi asserted that Germany's track record disqualifies it from holding moral, human rights, and political credibility within the Human Rights Council, emphasizing that Germany's stance undermines its ability to advocate for human rights on the international stage.

Back in February 28, German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock's accusations against the Islamic Republic were categorically rejected by Iran as an inane attempt by the Berlin government to hide its backing for the Israeli occupation and its indifference to egregious human rights violations occurring throughout Palestinian territory.

The Foreign Ministry Spokesman Nasser Kanaani said that "it is a bitter irony that certain Western governments claim to be advocates of human rights, while they played a direct role in supplying and equipping the regime of former Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein with chemical warfare during its imposed war on Iran in the 1980s, and have now offered support for Israel's massacre in Gaza."

He went on to add, "Under the pretext of protecting human rights and yet by politicizing the matter, German authorities interfere in the domestic affairs of other countries, and at the same time, they bolster their own economy through stepped-up activities of their armament manufacturers."

The spokesman cautioned German officials from misusing the human rights issue to further their own politically motivated agenda by employing humanitarian and phony gestures.

(See full text at tehrantimes.com)

Iran condemns Israel's blatant attack on Gazans who were collecting food aid

TEHRAN - Iran's foreign ministry spokesman has called for global action to stop Israeli atrocities in Palestine, condemning the recent brutal incident where Israeli troops opened fire on hundreds waiting for food aid southwest of Gaza City.

"The scars of Gaza linger in the collective memory of freedom-loving individuals globally, underscoring the shame associated with supporting and remaining silent in the midst of mass killings and genocide," Nasser Kanaani wrote in a post on X on Thursday.

Lamenting the brutal killing of more than 100 Palestinians in the Al-Rashid Street incident, the spokesman noted, "The stain of complicity endures despite the hollow claims of human rights advocates in America and Europe."

More than 100 Palestinians have been killed and some 700 others wounded after Israeli troops opened fire on hundreds waiting for food aid southwest of Gaza City, health officials say, as the besieged enclave faces an unprecedented hunger crisis.

The Palestinian Ministry of Foreign Affairs condemned the incident, describing it as a cold-blooded "massacre". The ministry said the attack was part of Israel's ongoing "genocidal war". It called on the international community to "urgently intervene" to forge a ceasefire as "the only way to protect civilians".

"We went to get flour. The Israeli army shot at us. There are many martyrs on the ground and until this moment we are withdrawing them. There is no first aid," said one witness.

Israeli aggression on the Gaza Strip has resulted in the death of more than 30,000 Palestinians, with a majority being women and children.

Another 70,457 individuals have been wounded, and many bodies remain trapped under rubble. Approximately 576,000 people, about a quarter of Gaza's population, are now "one step away from famine," according to the UN humanitarian affairs chief.

SPORTS

Persepolis the best Iranian team in FIFA Club World Cup

TEHRAN – Persepolis football club are the best Iranian team in the FIFA Club World Cup standings.

Persepolis sit 11th among the Asian teams while Al Hilal of Saudi Arabia and Urawa Reds Diamonds lead the table.

FIFA has introduced a new ranking tool which shows the current teams in line to qualify for the 2025 FIFA Club World Cup.

The new extended format of the Club World Cup will launch in 2025 with 32 teams, including four from the Confederation of Asian Football.

Al Hilal and Urawa Red Diamonds have qualified for the competition so far.

Only the teams with the best points in the ranking will be eligible to compete in the FIFA Club World Cup to be held in 2025. The highest body in world football has created a tool that offers real-time points classification for all confederations and which is accessible from the official FIFA website.

Reza Parkas takes charge of Turkistan

TEHRAN – Iranian coach Reza Parkas was named as head coach of Kazakhstan's Turkistan football team.

Parkas has penned a one-year contract, with an option to extend for further three years.

He was head coach of Iranian football team Sanat Naft last season but parted company with the team by mutual consent.

Turkistn currently plays at Pervaya Liga, Kazakhstan's second tier.

Gambian forward Trawally joins Sanat Naft: IPL

TEHRAN – Gambian striker Steve Bubacarr Trawally has joined Iranian football club Sanat Naft.

The 30-year-old forward has joined the Iranian top-flight club from Swedish club Hammarby IF.

Sanat Naft, headed by Sohrab Bakhtiarizadeh, sits 15th in the 16-team table.

Trawally started his playing career in 2020 in his homeland club Real de Banjul and has also played in Hangzhou Greentown, Yanbian Funde, Vejle Boldklub, Al-Shabab, and Guizhou Hengfeng.

Iran lose to Singapore at 2024 World Championships

TEHRAN – Iran's national hockey team lost to Singapore 8-5 in Group B of the 2024 World Championships Division III.

Iran had lost to host Bosnia 3-0, the Philippines 14-2, North Korea 9-4 and Hong Kong 11-3 in its previous matches.

Entry to all championship games is free of charge, and the first-place team will go to division III A.Hosts Bosnia and Herzegovina qualified for Group A.

The Group A tournament will be held in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan from March 10 to 16 and the Group B tournament is underway in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina from February 23 to 29.

Farhad Majidi no longer head coach of Ittihad Kalba

TEHRAN - Ittihad Kalba football club decided to terminate the contract of the first team coach, Farhad Majidi, by mutual consent on Friday.

The Emirati club extends its thanks to Majidi for what he provided to the team in the past period, wishing him success in his future.

Kalba assistant coach Ghazi Al-Shammari will lead the team as interim coach.

Majidi had been named as Kalba coach in June 2022.

Cyril Ong named Iran volleyball assistant

TEHRAN – Cyril Ong was named Iran's men's national volleyball team assistant coach.

The coach from France has recently worked at Ukraine's Epicentr-Podolyany.

On Wednesday, the volleyball federation of Iran appointed Mauricio Paes as the new head coach of Team Melli.

The 61-year-old Brazilian coach has most recently worked at Epicentr-Podolyany.

Paes has been appointed as Iran's head coach until the end of the 2024 Olympic Games, with the option to extend for two more years.

Morais to remain Sepahan head coach

TEHRAN – Iranian football club Sepahan announced that its Portuguese coach José Morais will remain in his post.

Iranian media reports suggested earlier that Sepahan will part company with Morais, following poor results in the Iran Professional League and AFC Champions League but the team has rejected the rumors.

Sepahan lost to Esteghlal 1-0 on Tuesday, suffering its fourth consecutive loss in the Iran league.

Last week, the Isfahan-based team lost to Al Hilal in the 2023-24 AFC Champions League Round of 16 and was knocked out of the competition.

Sepahan sit third in the Iran league table with 31 points, eight points adrift of Esteghlal with two games in hand.

Iranian boxers in Italy for Paris Olympics qualifier

TEHRAN – Iran has sent six boxers to Busto Arsizio, Italy to take part in the 2024 Olympic Games Qualification.

Danial Shahbakhsh (57kg), Ali Habibinejhad (63.5kg), Moslem Maghsoudi (71kg), Meysam Gheshlaghi (80kg), Pouria Amiri (92kg) and Iman Ramezanpour (+92kg) will represent Iran in the Games.Cuba's Juan Bautista Fontanills will lead Team Melli in the competition.

The competition is being held in Busto Arsizio from February 29 to March 12.

The 2024 Summer Olympics will be held in Paris from July 26 to August 11.

Azmoun describes life under Daniele De Rossi

Roma striker Sardar Azmoun was interviewed by the club upon the conclusion to today's training session.

Azmoun spoke a few days ahead of Roma's match with Monza.

"I feel good, at ease. I have a good relationship with everyone," said the Iranian attacker when asked about his teammates.

"In this locker room there are world champions, top players internationally, yet no one gives themselves particular airs. It's easy to get along with these teammates."

"Pellegrini helped me a lot. Lorenzo is a good captain, as well as being a very strong footballer," said Azmoun of his skipper.

"De Rossi? The thing that is most surprising about De Rossi is that seeing him from the outside, as a footballer, he seemed like a real fighter full of grit."

"Seeing him every day, with his kind ways, with that kind heart, is beautiful and it's just as good to have him as a coach. It was the right choice. And, if I may add, I like the feeling that De Rossi brought to this team. But this is a general feeling. The club, the management, they are all working closely with us. This sense of unity helps us a lot."

China brings together journalists from all over the world



CIPCC Director Yu Lei answers the question raised by an African journalist in a gathering of world journalists in Beijing on March 1, 2024 (Photo by Mahnaz Abdi)

By Mahnaz Abdi

Beijing- China International Press Communication Center (CIPCC), under the China Public Diplomacy Association (CPDA), has initiated a program to build a platform for the media from the countries around the world, specially the developing countries, to observe China and study development in this country.

The program aimed at media exchange was halted in 2020 and 2021 due to the Covid-19 epidemic.In each edition of the program, journalists from all around the world gather together to get familiar with the modern China and exchange their experiences in the field of journalism.

In 2024 edition of the program, scheduled to be held from late February until late June, over 100 journalists from more than 90 countries are participating.

The CIPCC has provided accommodation and necessary aids and supports for the participants in this program.

The CIPCC has accommodated all participants in a diplomatic residence center (DRC) at the heart of Beijing.CIPCC staff and also some volunteers in the program help the participants meet their requirements through their stay in China.

On Friday, March 1, when most of the participants had already arrived in Beijing, the CIPCC held a gathering in one of the buildings of the DRC to brief the present journalists on the upcoming program and also answer the questions raised by the participants.

During the gathering, a summary of the program was presented to the participants, a video of the previous edition of the program was showed, the director and staff of the CIPCC, as well as the involved volunteers introduced themselves and briefed the journalists on the program.

As announced, on schedule, during the participants' stay in China, the CIPCC will hold lectures on China's socioeconomic development, diplomacy, science and technology, culture and other fields, arrange training on journalism and internships in Chinese media, organize media coverage of major domestic and diplomatic events in China, hold symposium with governmental departments, enterprises, think tanks and the media, and organize visits to selected provinces.

CIPCC Director Yu Lei answered the questions raised by the journalists at the end of the presentations.

Then it was said that the journalists will be categorized in some groups regarding their ethnical and cultural similarities, for example, Mahnaz Abdi, the Tehran Times journalist who was the participant from Iran, was placed in the Asia-Pacific group.At the end of the gathering, the participants were told to come to the designated place at the DRC the next day for taking PCR test (COVID-19 test).

Over 213m tons of goods loaded, unloaded at ports in 11 months

TEHRAN – Some 213.692 million tons of commodities have been loaded and unloaded at Iranian ports in the first 11 months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21.2023-February 19, 2024), According to a report by the Transport and Urban Development Ministry.

Based on the data released by the country's Ports and Maritime Organization (PMO), of the mentioned figure, 72,719,081 tons were related to unloading, and 140,973,052 tons were related to loading.

The loading of goods in the mentioned period increased by 14 percent as compared to the figure for the previous year's same 11 months.

During the said period, loading and unloading operations in the container sector reached 2,415,010 TEUs, which was three percent more than the figure in the first 11 months of the past year.

While Iran is combating the U.S. unilateral sanctions on its economy, the country's ports as the major gates of exports and imports play a significant role in this battle. This role makes all-out support to ports and more development of them serious and vital.

Such necessity has led the government to define projects for more development of the ports and also take some measures to encourage investment making in ports, in addition to facilitating the loading and unloading of goods, especially basic commodities, there.

It is worth mentioning that Iran's Ports and Maritime Organization has defined a high number of projects to develop and improve the country's ports, as the country aims to double the capacity of its ports in five years.

According to the PMO, the capacity of the country's ports has increased from 180 million tons in the Iranian calendar year 1392 (ended in March 2014) to 250 million tons in 1399 (ended in March 2021).

Stock market provides $12b of funding for various sectors in 11 months

TEHRAN – Iranian Finance and Economic Affairs Minister Ehsan Khandouzi said the country's stock market has provided 6.0 quadrillion rials (about $12 billion) of funding for various economic sectors since the beginning of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21, 2023).

According to Khandouzi, considering the current trend the figure is expected to reach 7.5 quadrillion rials (about $15 billion) by the end of the year (late March 2024), IRNA reported.

Back in November 2023, Head of Iran's Securities and Exchange Organization (SEO) Majid Eshghi said 30 percent of financing in the country's economic sectors was done through the capital market in the previous Iranian calendar year (ended on March 20).

Speaking at an Exchange, Banking and Insurance Conference, Eshghi said: "We believe that the role of the capital market in the economy can be made much stronger than what currently is."

"Today, the country's economy needs creativity and innovation and the economy cannot be managed with the policies of the past decade," he noted.According to the official, banks are less willing to finance small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), so the stock market can replace them in this regard.

"Today, we need to revive people's trust in the government, without this trust, we will not have a balanced development. People should know that the stock market is a safe and transparent platform for investment," Eshghi stressed.

Iran's foreign trade exceeds $138b in 11 months



TEHRAN - The value of Iran's foreign trade including oil and technical-engineering services reached $138.8 billion in the first 11 months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21, 2023-February 19, 2024), the head of the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA) said.

According to Mohammad Rezvanifar, the value of the Islamic Republic's trade with the partners in the mentioned 11 months increased by 2.7 percent compared to the same period last year, IRNA reported.

The official put the country's non-oil exports, excluding exports of electricity, crude oil, and techno engineering services, at 124.7 million tons worth $44.8 billion which shows an 11.42 percent rise in terms of tonnage and an 8.87 percent decline in terms of value.

He said that Iran's foreign trade, including oil exports, has registered a $19 billion surplus while seeing a $15 billion deficit without petrodollars.

Iran exported $32.59 billion of crude oil and $1.9 billion of technical engineering services in the first 11 months of this year, according to Rezvanifar.

During this period, liquefied natural gas with $3.0 billion, liquefied propane with $2.8 billion, and methanol with $2.0 billion were Iran's top exported items.

Iran's top export destination during this period was China with $12.7 billion worth of imports from the Islamic Republic, followed by Iraq with $8.6 billion, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) with over $5.9 billion, Turkey with $3.8 billion, and India with $2.0 billion.

The country's top five sources of imports in the first 11 months of the current year were the UAE with $18.6 billion, China with $16.8 billion, Turkey with $6.8 billion, Germany with $1.9 billion, and India with $1.8 billion worth of imports.

Corn, mobile phones, soybeans, automobile parts, sunflower seeds, and safflower were the five main items imported by the Islamic Republic.

Iran allocates over $6b to infrastructure projects

TEHRAN – The head of Iran's Planning and Budget Organization (PBO) has said 3.0 quadrillion rials (over $6.0 billion) has been allocated for construction and infrastructure projects in the next Iranian calendar year's (starts on March 20) national budget bill.

According to Davoud Manzour, the government has managed to fulfill almost all the goals set in the current year's national budget bill, IRNA reported.

In late December 2023, the Iranian parliament approved the general outlines of the national budget bill for the next Iranian calendar year 1403.

President Ebrahim Raisi submitted the national budget bill for the next Iranian year to the Majlis on December 5, 2023.

The proposed budget for the next year amounts to about 54.18 quadrillion rials (about $108.36 billion at the free market rate of 500,000 rials), with an 18 percent rise from the current year's budget.

The bill has estimated the government's budget at 24.29 quadrillion rials (about $48.58 billion).

Public resources are estimated at 14.95 quadrillion rials (about $29.9 billion).

The crude oil income is predicted to be 5.54 quadrillion rials (about $11.08 billion), and oil sales are estimated at 1.35 million barrels per day at an average price of €65.

Like the current year's budget, the next year's proposed budget requires the government to pay 40 percent of its oil, gas, and gas condensate revenues to the National Development Fund (NDF).

Tax revenues are predicted to be 11.22 quadrillion rials (about $22.44 billion) which is 49.8 percent more than the figure for the current year's budget bill.

The data provided in next year's budget bill indicate that the government is taking major steps to distance the economy from oil, as a big portion of the income is set to be gained from sources other than oil and gas.

Oil incomes in the next year's budget bill are estimated to be 6.2 percent less than the ceiling allowed in the budget law, accounting for only 22.8 percent of the total incomes. On the other hand, the share of tax revenues is twice the revenues from oil and gas sales, which means changing the budget approach from oil revenues to sustainable revenues

Iranian, Tajik energy ministers discuss joint projects

TEHRAN - Iran's Minister of Energy Ali-Akbar Mehrabian and his Tajik counterpart Daler Juma have reviewed joint projects between the two countries in a video conference session.

During a virtual meeting, Mehrabian emphasized the follow-up of the comprehensive document of the Iran-Tajikistan joint cooperation which was signed in the 16th Joint Commission of the two countries which was held in late December 2023.

He thanked the government of the Republic of Tajikistan for holding the 16th Iran-Tajikistan Joint Economic, Trade and Scientific Commission and the Iran-Made Expo in the Tajik capital of Dushanbe.

Emphasizing the readiness of Iranian companies to be active in the projects of Tajikistan, Mehrabian referred to the services of Iranian companies in all fields, especially in the field of large turbines and technical sectors, noting that Iranian companies can help to speed up projects in Tajikistan.

Talking about the Sangtuda 2 Hydroelectric Power Plant and the construction of a solar power plant in the Vorukh region were among other topics at the virtual meeting of the two sides.

Tajikistan's capital Dushanbe hosted the 16th meeting of Iran-Tajikistan Joint Economic Committee on December 26 and 27. 2023.

Mehrabian and Juma co-chaired the two countries' Joint Economic Committee meeting.

The first specialized Made in Iran exhibition, aimed at introducing the capabilities of the Islamic Republic of Iran in basic industries, was also held on the sidelines of this meeting.

Earlier in November 2023, Iran and Tajikistan signed a joint statement and 18 cooperation documents and memorandums of understanding (MOUs) to deepen bilateral strategic relations.

The joint statement was signed between Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi and his Tajik counterpart Emomali Rahmon in Tajikistan's capital Dushanbe.

The documents and MOUs were inked by the Iranian and Tajik ministers in the presence of the two presidents.

As reported, the documents and MOUs pertained to a roadmap for long-term bilateral trade and economic cooperation till 2030, mutual visa-free access, anti-drug trafficking operations, transportation, crisis management, and the establishment of joint free economic zones, as well as inter-city cooperation in various fields.

Tehran, Baghdad explore avenues of co-op in refining sector



NIORDC Head Jalil Salari (L) receives Iraq's Deputy Oil Minister for Refining Affairs Hamid Younes in Tehran on Thursday.

TEHRAN - Head of National Iranian Oil Refining and Distribution Company (NIORDC) Jalil Salari and Iraq's Deputy Oil Minister for Refining Affairs Hamid Younes met on Thursday in Tehran to discuss expanding cooperation between the two countries in the refining sector.

In this meeting, Salari said Iran and Iraq have great capacity to cooperate in various areas of the refining industry from transmission to distribution and compressed natural gas (CNG), IRNA reported.

"The achievements of the Iranian oil industry after the victory of the Islamic revolution and self-sufficiency in the oil and refining industry have caused us today to be in a situation where nearly 80 to 90 percent of the equipment and items used in the refining sector are made inside the country and all the engineering, design and technical knowledge needed by refining units have also been localized," Salari said.

The official noted that the Iranian government is focused on cooperation with all neighboring and friendly countries, especially with Muslim countries.

During the visit of Oil Minister Javad Oji to Iraq, some agreements were reached between the two countries that will be implemented soon, he added.

He expressed hope that Iran and Iraq will reach new agreements in the fields of renovation and reconstruction of refineries, overhauls, and supplying necessary goods, catalysts, as well as, chemicals.

Mentioning other potential areas for cooperation, Salari said: "There are more than 2,500 CNG stations in Iran, and nearly four million cars in the country's transportation fleet have been dual-fueled, and these fields can be among the areas for Iran-Iraq cooperation."

"We have also indigenized the knowledge for the production of catalysts needed for the refining and chemical production industry and today we are competing with top countries in the industry and in this field we can provide services to other countries as well," the official added.

Contracts with Russia lead to 200,000-barrel increase in Iran daily oil output: Oji

TEHRAN - Iranian Oil Minister Javad Oji has said the contracts signed with Russian companies to develop eight oil fields have helped his country add more than 200,000 barrels to its daily production.

In his response to a question posed by Russia's Energy Intelligence reporter about the outlook for Russian companies' participation in Iran's oil projects, the minister added the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) started its negotiations with Russia's leading companies several months ago and contracts for the development of eight Iranian oil fields have been so far signed with Russian companies.

Oji, who made the remarks in a joint press conference with Russian Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak after the three-day 17th Joint Economic Commission between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Russian Federation in Tehran, said negotiations with Russian companies about contracts on the development of more Iranian oil and gas fields reached their final stage during the commission meetings and new contracts will be signed in the near future.

Export of technical and engineering services, enhanced oil and gas recovery, and oil and gas swap were among the topics the two sides discussed, he mentioned.

Out of 15 memorandums of understanding (MOUs) signed by Iran and Russia, four are related to the energy sector, said the commission co-chair, adding that Russian companies are keen to participate in Iran's oil projects as they have expressed their willingness to help Iran build refinery-integrated petrochemical plants and mini LNG plants, complete petrochemical value chain, and export oil products.

Asked by the RIA Novosti reporter about the latest talks with Russia, Qatar, and Turkmenistan on the formation of a gas hub in Assaluyeh, southern Iran, Oji said serious talks started some months ago and Russia has supported the initiative.

Russia, Iran, Qatar, and Turkmenistan are the world's largest holders of gas reserves respectively, underlined the minister, adding Iran has massive gas infrastructure, particularly pipelines and gas compressor stations, which help the country play a great role in gas transit.

Iran is currently producing one billion cubic meters of sour gas per day, he concluded.

World condemns Israeli massacre of Gazans waiting for food, U.S. blocks UNSC motion

Barbaric bombardment of breadline

By Shahrokh Saei



TEHRAN - Israel has been committing acts of genocide, massacres, war crimes and crimes against humanity with impunity in the Gaza Strip since launching war on the besieged Palestinian territory nearly five months ago.

The latest Israeli massacre took place on Thursday at a neighborhood in the southwest of Gaza City where a group of trucks carrying desperately needed aid arrived. Israeli forces opened fire on hungry people who were waiting in the area for a delivery of food, including flour, from the trucks.

They killed more than 100 Palestinians and injured hundreds of others.

Reports suggest they were hit by direct Israeli artillery shelling, drone missiles and gunshots.

According to Al Jazeera, after opening fire, Israeli tanks advanced and ran over many of the dead and injured bodies.

The Israeli regime confirmed its troops fired on the Palestinian civilians. But without providing any evidence, the Israeli military claimed that the Palestinians posed a threat to its forces and they responded by opening fire. It also claimed that many of the dead were trampled in a chaotic crush for the food aid.

Heinous massacre

Reacting to Thursday's crime, the office of Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas said, "The killing of this large number of innocent civilian victims who risked their livelihood is an integral part of the genocidal war committed by the occupation government against our people."

It added that Israeli authorities bear full responsibility for the "heinous massacre" and will be held accountable before international courts.

The Palestinian UN ambassador implicitly blasted the U.S. for vetoing Security Council resolutions.

"It's not like firing in the sky to restrain people if there was confusion and chaos. It was intentionally targeting and killing. This outrageous massacre is a testimony to the fact that as long as the Security Council is paralyzed and vetoes cast, it is costing the Palestinian people their lives," Riyad Mansour said.

Hamas also called the tragic event a "heinous massacre". In a statement, the resistance movement noted that the deadly attack on the Palestinians was "unprecedented in the history of war crimes" and was part of Israel's "war of starvation" against Gazans.

International outcry

Officials from across the globe have also denounced the Israeli massacre in the Gaza City neighborhood.

The Lebanese Foreign Ministry slammed the "deliberate killings" of civilians who were seeking humanitarian aid.

The ministry said the Israeli attack was "part of a broader policy aimed at starving and collectively exterminating the Palestinian people."

The Turkish Foreign Ministry accused Israel of perpetrating "another crime against humanity", while Qatar called Thursday's attack a "heinous massacre".

China also denounced the assault and expressed "shock".

Colombia's President Gustavo Petro described it as "genocide," and announced that his government is suspending purchases of weapons from the Israeli regime.

In Europe, EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said, "I am horrified by (the) news of yet another carnage among civilians in Gaza desperate for humanitarian aid...These deaths are totally unacceptable."

France called the Israeli shooting of the Gazans "unjustifiable" and Germany demanded a probe.

Italy called on the regime to protect the Palestinian population after the "tragic deaths".

The UN secretary-general urged an independent investigation, saying he is "appalled by the tragic human toll of the conflict."

Antonio Guterres, however, fell short of calling the Israeli attack on hungry Palestinians a massacre or blaming Israel for the carnage.

U.S. duplicity

Unsurprisingly, U.S. President Joe Bide refused to blame Israel for the killing of over 100 Palestinians who were awaiting humanitarian aid.

His administration only expressed horror over the incident and vowed an investigation.

"This latest event needs to be thoroughly investigated," said White House spokesperson Olivia Dalton, adding, "This event underscores the need for... expanded humanitarian aid to make its way into Gaza."

The U.S. State Department spokesman offered condolences to the slain Palestinians. Matthew Miller said the U.S. had asked Israel to provide answers and ensure safe aid delivery.

Over the past weeks, Biden and his government officials have publicly criticized Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu for pressing ahead with his deadly war on Gaza.

Biden's criticism of Netanyahu is rooted in domestic backlash to Israel's genocidal war on Gaza. He fears that growing discontent among Muslim and Arab American voters could cost him the 2024 presidential election. This is because they played a key role in helping Biden win the 2020 election.

In action, however, the U.S. has spared no effort to help Israel politically and militarily.

Since Israel launched the Gaza onslaught on October 7, the U.S. has vetoed three UN Security Council resolutions that called for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza.

Washington also blocked a statement put forward by Algeria to the Security Council that would have assigned blame to the Israeli regime for Thursday's massacre in the Gaza City neighborhood.

The Palestinian UN envoy told reporters after an emergency closed council meeting on the tragedy that all of the council's 15 members except the U.S. had supported the draft declaration.

Explaining the decision to block the motion, the U.S ambassador said, "We don't have all the facts on the ground – that's the problem."

Robert Wood said the U.S. is trying to verify the "circumstances around how people died" to see if "we can find some language that everyone can agree on".

In terms of military support, the U.S. continues to provide Israel with weapons despite calls for attaching conditions to military assistance to the regime over its brutal war on Gaza.

In the face of international condemnations of Thursday's massacre, the White House called on House Republicans to pass a foreign aid bill to "help ensure that Israel can defend itself against Hamas and other threats".

The U.S. has thrown its full weight behind Israel's onslaught on Gaza — which has claimed the lives of more than 30,000 Palestinians — under the pretext of helping the regime "defend its self".

The Israeli massacre of the breadline in Gaza City and the U.S. complicity in the regime's atrocities will definitely go down in history.

WORLD HEADLINES

Politicians from 12 countries unite to press for arms ban on Israel

More than 200 MPs from 12 countries have committed themselves to trying to persuade their governments to impose a ban on arms sales to Israel, arguing they will not be complicit in "Israel's grave violation of international law" in its assault on Gaza, The Guardian reported.

The letter, organized by Progressive International, a network of socialist MPs and activists focused on international justice, is seen as the best practical measure possible to bring public anger over the 30,000 deaths of Palestinians in Gaza into the heart of parliaments, where calls for an immediate unconditional ceasefire have so far fallen on deaf ears or been rejected by national governments.

Yemenis stage mass rallies against Israeli war on Gaza

Thousands of people have staged mass demonstrations in Yemen to express firm solidarity with Palestinians amidst Israeli attacks on Gaza, calling on the country's military to step up anti-Israeli operation in the Red Sea and respond to U.S.-British aggression.

Pro-Palestine demonstrators took to the streets in the capital Sana'a, the northwestern city of Sa'ada and elsewhere in the country on Friday, denouncing relentless Israeli ground and aerial offensives against Palestinians in the coastal territory, Press TV reported.

"The Yemeni nation stands by Gazans in the face of their massacre and starvation at the hands of Israeli occupation forces, and will continue to carry out retaliatory operations tirelessly," read the final communiqué issued by the protesters.

The participants hailed Yemeni naval forces for operations against Israeli-affiliated commercial vessels in the Red Sea in solidarity with Palestinians. They also lauded attacks on U.S. and British ships, citing their pro-Israel strikes against Yemen.

WHO: Health system in Gaza 'more than on its knees'

People in the Gaza Strip are risking their lives to find food, water and other supplies such is the level of hunger and despair amid the unrelenting Israeli assault, the World Health Organization (WHO) said on Friday, Reuters reported.

"The system in Gaza is on its knees, it's more than on its knees," WHO spokesperson Christian Lindmeier told reporters in Geneva. "All the lifelines in Gaza have more or less been cut."

Lindmeier said this had created a "desperate situation", as seen on Thursday, when more than 100 people seeking humanitarian aid in Gaza were killed.

"People are so desperate for food, for fresh water, for any supplies that they risk their lives in getting any food, any supplies to support their children, to support themselves," Lindmeier said.

He added, "The food supplies have been cut off deliberately. Let's not forget that."

Aid agencies urge EU to resume UNRWA funding

Seventeen international aid agencies have signed a joint statement calling on the European Union and member states to resume funding to the UN Agency for Palestinian Refugees (UNRWA).

Several European countries stopped funding the aid agency in January after Israel alleged UNRWA members were involved in the October 7 Hamas attack, Al Jazeera reported.

"We urge the EU and Member States to take note that other aid agencies cannot replicate UNRWA's central role in the humanitarian response in Gaza, and amidst the current crisis, many will struggle to even maintain their current operations without UNRWA's partnership and support," the statement published by the Norwegian Refugee Council read.

Pentagon: "Over 25,000 women and children" killed in Gaza

Rare U.S. admission raises questions on Israeli motives

By Ali Karbalaei

TEHRAN- U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin has admitted the Israeli military has killed more than 25,000 women and children since October 7.

Speaking before a House committee hearing on Thursday, Austin was asked how many Palestinian women and children hav been killed by the Israeli military since October 7.

"It is over 25,000" the Pentagon chief replied.

Questioned further by the U.S. Representative from California's 17th congressional district, Ro Khana, that "the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights warned that any transfer of weapons or ammunition to Israel violates international law, how many munitions has the United States given Israel since the beginning of the war?."

Austin, aware that the hearing was being broadcast live across the United States, replied, "I don't have that number at my finger tips".

If Austin had revealed the true extent of U.S.-made weapons being shipped to the Israeli regime during the war, he would also be acknowledging America's complicity in the Israeli massacre of "over 25,000" Palestinian women and children.

Grilled again if the U.S. would end the delivery of arms to the Israeli military considering the grave warnings by the United Nations over the regime's indiscriminate use of weapons against civilians are violating international law, Austin diverted his answers without providing a simple yes or no response.

This again reflects Washington's unwavering commitment to ensure the regime continues its genocidal war on Gaza, with America's support.

The administration of U.S. President Joe Biden has been shipping tens of thousands of munitions for the Israeli military to use against civilians in Gaza.

For nearly five months now, there has been a vast number of Israeli massacres in the besieged territory (many committed with U.S.-made weapons), which Tel Aviv has tried to desperately pin the blame on Hamas without providing a shred of evidence.

When Israeli officials are questioned on TV interviews about the tragic Palestinian civilian death toll, they dispute the numbers, claiming the regime's military has killed between 7,000 and 12,000 Hamas fighters (depending on which official is speaking) and the regime does not target civilians.

When challenged on the accuracy of the Israeli figures, which do not add up, Israeli officials have struggled to convince TV and radio hosts.

They will find it more difficult to do so now after Tel Aviv's strongest ally, the U.S., acknowledged more than 25,000 women and children have been massacred.

The Palestinian health ministry says the death toll in Gaza has exceeded 30,000 people. The UN says the numbers are reliable, and the ministry's figures have been historically accurate.

With Austin acknowledging the fatalities of 25,000 Palestinian women and children that would leave some 5,000 men dead.

Analysts say it would be absurd to conclude that all these 5,000 men are Hamas fighters. It would be very logical to assume that thousands of them are non-combatant male civilians, including elderly men.

This raises another key question over how many Hamas fighters the Israeli military has killed in combat.

All the indications are that this number is very low.

Austin's admission backs up a growing argument among many experts and world leaders who say the regime is waging a war against women and children.

Most notably over the past week, Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva has repeatedly maintained the Israeli war on Gaza is a genocidal campaign by an army armed-to-the-teeth against civilians, rather than combat between soldiers versus soldiers.



In his latest remarks, President Lula again said, "It is a genocide. Thousands of children are dead, and thousands are missing. Soldiers are not dying. Women and children are dying at the hospital," he pointed out at an event in Rio de Janeiro, adding, "If that's not genocide, I don't know what genocide is."

Many experts have said the Israeli military has been instructed to target women and children in a bid to pressure Hamas to surrender power as Israeli troops are incapable of killing Palestinian resistance fighters who are putting up a fierce battle against Israeli ground forces.

Others argue the Israeli military strategy has been to kill a significantly large number of civilians, in particular women and children, as a form of revenge against the Palestinians for the al-Aqsa Storm Operation on October 7, 2023.

It has been widely documented that half of the air-to-ground munitions dropped on Gaza by the Israeli military have been unguided 2000-pound "dumb bombs", which have no precision whatsoever.

If Austin's admission has made anything else abundantly clear, it is that the Israeli military is nowhere close to its stated goal of defeating Hamas.



Iran plans to serve spring holiday tourists deservedly



TEHRAN – As millions of Iranians planning to travel in the course of approaching spring holidays, the tourism minister Ezzatollah Zarghami has called on provincial colleagues to serve holidaymakers in the best way possible.

Speaking at the meeting called "Welcome Nowruz and the holy month of Ramadan", participated by provincial colloquies, Zarghami on Thursday spelled out the convergence of two national and religious events as a momentous opportunity to appreciate Iran's cultural richness.

Zarghami called on the officials to make every effort to support new year travelers, saying: "Consider taking measures in a sincere manner as you are serving millions of domestic and foreign tourists..."

The minister also reiterated how pivotal is the role of provincial officials, mentioning their capability to turn over a new page in the tourism field.

Zarghami addressed the necessity of installing further road signs to inform people about regional capacities.

The official cited an example about the lack of information, addressing unawareness among travelers of 54 centuries-old caravanserais locations which earlier this solar year [on September 27, 2023] gained UNESCO label.Declaring the cooperation with the Ministry of Roads & Urban Development, Zarghami stated a 10-percent rising plan in installation of touristic informing road signs in the wake of exploiting the historical and natural capacities.

Regarding boosting the revenue for handicrafts, the Tourism Minister addressed the cultural and historical places of interest as the greatest locations to showcase and sell handicrafts to enthusiasts during Nowruz.

It's noteworthy that the Nowruz holidays is the period of year with the most passenger traffic, which brings to light the significance of disciplined planning in the interest of serving tourists deservedly.

Iran, China explore archaeometry achievements

TEHRAN – Chinese archaeometrist, Dr. Yimin Yang, participating in the Archaeometry Scientific Conference held at the Art University of Isfahan, underscored that arranging joint events in the field of Archaeology and Archaeometry could lead to both framing a mutual understanding and strengthening intercultural communication between two nations.

Several professors from Iran and China discussed and shared achievements at the conference which was held on Wednesday.

In an interview with Mehr News Agency, Yimin described Isfahan as a gorgeous city with a rich culture, comparing it to Xi'an, the oldest surviving capital of ancient China, boasting roots dating back up to 3100 years, as both have played a crucial role in cultural and commercial communications since the old years.

Regarding the influence of the event, the professor highlighted the importance of planning bilateral conferences as valuable platforms for bringing together active scientists in the field to reach mutual understanding and expand cooperation between two countries.Mentioning the dynamic aspect of technology, Yimin stated that transferring technology is an undeniable necessity to expand cooperation.

He further detailed the outcomes of such events, expressing that mutual understanding seems within the bounds of possibility as a consequence of combined efforts in the field.

Moreover, Seyyed-Mohammad-Amin Emami, an archaeometry faculty member of Art University, mentioned an inaugural conference as a substantial step to disseminate knowledge in the field.

Arguing the noteworthiness of getting acquainted with other nations' research and accomplishments, Emami expressed optimism toward future activities in the archaeology field.

In concluding remarks, the faculty member pointed to arranging scientific conferences as a connection link between professionals at an international level which could optimize the activities in every scientific field.

U.S. issues travel warning for Mexico ahead of spring break

The United States is warning travelers heading to Mexico to be aware of their surroundings ahead of the spring break holiday season.

The warning, which was issued this week by the U.S. Embassy and Consulates in Mexico, reminds travelers to "travel smart" and "be informed" as "thousands of U.S. citizens visit Mexico during spring break" each year.

The embassy continued that "while the vast majority travel safely," visitors should be aware of issues with crime, drugs, unregulated alcohol, drownings, and more.

"Crime, including violent crime, can occur anywhere in Mexico, including in popular tourist destinations.

Travelers should maintain a high level of situational awareness, avoid areas where illicit activities occur, and promptly depart from potentially dangerous situations," the embassy warned. "U.S. citizens should exercise increased caution in the downtown areas of popular spring break locations including Cancun, Playa Del Carmen, and Tulum, especially after dark."

The warning also reminded American travelers that drug possession and use is illegal in Mexico, including medical marijuana. It also advised that unregulated alcohol may be contaminated, that counterfeit medication is common, and that guns are illegal in Mexico.

When it comes to the country's popular beaches, the embassy reminded travelers some beaches may have strong rip tides and "may lack lifeguards, warnings, or signs of unsafe conditions."

The U.S. Embassy and Consulates in Mexico issued a similar spring break warning last year.

The U.S. Department of State classifies different states in Mexico under different warning levels. While travelers can "exercise normal precautions" when traveling to the Campeche and Yucatan states, the State Department warns them to "exercise increased caution" when heading to places like Baja California Sur (where Los Cabos is), Mexico City, and Quintana Roo (where Cancun is) due to crime.

(Source: travelandleisure.com)

Cultural heritage activist warns of potential threats to UNESCO-listed site in southern Iran



TEHRAN - A cultural heritage activist has voiced concerns over plans to cultivate approximately 30 hectares of land within the boundaries of the ancient city of Bishapur.

Situated in southern Iran, Bishapur, was inscribed as part of the "Sassanid Archaeological Landscape of Fars Region" by UNESCO in 2018.

Siavash Arya, who is an advocate of cultural heritage preservation, has provided evidence indicating significant excavation and partitioning of the ancient grounds of Bishapur, with vast amounts of stone and materials being removed, ISNA reported.

Arya, after conducting thorough investigations and inquiries, highlighted that preliminary approvals have apparently been granted for the extensive cultivation of narcissus flowers across an area of 30 hectares, a move he deems as a violation of cultural heritage laws.

"The area earmarked for the cultivation of narcissus flowers, with initial steps already taken, extends behind the World Heritage site, covering an area of 30 hectares."

Further revelations from Arya indicate that the cultivation of narcissus flowers within the historic city of Bishapur has proceeded without the necessary project proposals and approvals from the Fars province's tourism department.

Bishapur holds immense historical and cultural significance. Thus, Arya emphasized the necessity of adhering to cultural heritage laws, which strictly prohibit any agricultural activities, planting, or tree planting within historical sites without prior authorization.

He emphasized, "According to transparent heritage laws, any form of cultivation, planting, or afforestation is prohibited and constitutes a violation unless the individual or officials [who have approved such a plan] are exempt from legal consequences."

Narratives say much of Bishapur was built by Roman soldiers taken captive after their Emperor Valerian was defeated in c. 260 CE.

Situated south of modern Faliyan, just off the ancient road between Persis and Elam, the city connected the Sasanian capitals Istakhr (close to Persepolis) and Firuzabad to Susa and Ctesiphon.

Surrounded by walls that may have stood some ten meters high, Bishapur was home to some 50,000 to 80,000 people.

The city remained an important city until the Arab invasion of Persia and the rise of Islam in the second quarter of the seventh century. It became a center of Islamic learning (a madrassah has been excavated) and there were still people living over here in the tenth century, but the decline started in the seventh century.

Bishapur has undergone several rounds of excavation so far. The Palace of Shapur, and a temple dedicated to the goddess of Anahita, were highlights of the digs.

The main monuments have been excavated between 1935 and 1941. Nevertheless, most of the city is still buried, and incidentally, teams of archaeologists returned to the site afterward.

In 2018, UNESCO added an ensemble of Sassanian historical cities in southern Iran -- titled "Sassanid Archaeological Landscape of Fars Region"-- to its World Heritage list.

The ensemble is comprised of eight archaeological sites situated in three geographical parts of Firuzabad, Bishapur, and Sarvestan. It reflects the optimized utilization of natural topography and bears witness to the influence of Achaemenid and Parthian cultural traditions and Roman art, which later had a significant impact on the architecture and artistic styles of the Islamic era.

The Sassanid archaeological landscape represents a highly efficient system of land use and strategic utilization of natural topography in the creation of the earliest cultural centers of the Sassanid civilization.

3,700-year-old lipstick unearthed in Iran could be oldest ever found

TEHRAN - A fascinating discovery in Iran has unveiled what scientists believe to be a Bronze Age lipstick, possibly the oldest ever found, shedding light on the ancient art of cosmetic adornment dating back to the second millennium BC.

Discovered amidst a cache of artifacts unearthed in the Jiroft region of Kerman province, southeastern Iran, a small chlorite vial has yielded a deep red cosmetic preparation, believed to be a lip-coloring paint or paste.

Recent radiocarbon dating has pinpointed its creation to somewhere between 1936 and 1687 BC, marking it as potentially the earliest lipstick ever analytically reported.

The find not only highlights the ancient Iranians' penchant for personal adornment but also underscores the longstanding tradition of cosmetology in the region.

While cosmetics like foundations, eye shadows, and black kohl eyeliners have been previously identified in ancient Near Eastern and Egyptian civilizations, the discovery of deep red pigments, akin to those found in lipstick, has remained elusive until now.

Chemical analysis of the residue inside the vial, now resembling a fine purple powder, has revealed a composition predominantly of hematite, renowned for its intense red hue, darkened with manganite and braunite, along with traces of galena, anglesite, and other organic substances.

Furthermore, vegetal fibers found in the ancient cosmetic concoction hint at possible aromatic properties, potentially utilized to scent the lipstick.

Quartz particles, likely from ground sand or crystals, have also been identified, suggesting the inclusion of shimmer – a feature reminiscent of contemporary lipsticks. However, it's also plausible that the quartz flaked off from the decaying container over time.

The intricately decorated vial stands out from similar objects known to date, suggesting a standardized approach to branding, packaging, and trade of cosmetic products in ancient times, similar to contemporary practices.

Although the identity of the lipstick's owner remains a mystery, the discovery offers valuable insights into the often-overlooked Bronze Age cosmetics industry.

Professor Massimo Vidale, one of the study authors, highlighted the significance of such findings, stating, "It was a costly expression of luxury that played a crucial role in shaping social interaction in the hierarchies of the early cities."

The unearthing of this ancient lipstick not only adds a glamorous touch to history but also deepens our understanding of ancient civilizations and their beauty practices.

Heavy flood reveals traces of rich civilization

Until the very early 21st century, no one had ever dreamed that a refined forgotten culture could re-emerge from the sands of a remote and arid region in southeast Iran.

The story started when rounds of heavy flood swept the topsoil off thousands of previously unknown tombs in a Bronze Age cemetery in Jiroft. Arrays of remarkable findings at Jiroft demanded a reassessment of a previous interpretation, based on which Mesopotamia was considered the cradle of civilization.

According to a National Geographic article, a flood of archaeological objects began appearing in the antiquities market seemingly out of nowhere in 2001.

In a short time, distinctive pieces of jewelry, weapons, finely crafted ceramics, drinking vessels, and game boards—featuring unusual artistry and magnificent inlays of carnelian and lapis lazuli found their way to antique markets for sale.

These extraordinary pieces featured a complex symbology of animals, both wild and domesticated, depicted fighting among themselves or with human figures, the humans always triumphant. There were beautifully realized bucolic scenes of animals grazing in vast palm groves and architectural reproductions of temples or palaces.

Data provided by online sites and auction houses selling these mysterious pieces were sparse and, at best, vague. Their origins were often listed as "from Central Asia."

At first, it was assumed that the pieces were the work of expert forgers, but as more came on the market in the following months, scholars began to speculate that they could be genuine, deriving from an undocumented site whose location was unknown to them. In 2002 more appeared on the market.

Iranian police solved the mystery later that year. A coordinated investigation led to the arrest of several traffickers and the confiscation of a hoard of artifacts. These objects were being prepared to be shipped from Tehran, Bandar 'Abbas, and Kerman to buyers around the world. Investigators revealed that most of these distinctive pieces could be traced back to a location in the Halil River Valley, about 25 miles south of Jiroft, a remote and peaceful city in southeastern Iran, not far from the Persian Gulf.

The full import of the discovery became clearer after archaeologists made formal surveys of the area and found that this undocumented culture dated back nearly 5,000 years to the Bronze Age.

Visits to cultural heritage sites and museums reach 22 million



TEHRAN - Some 22 million visits to Iranian cultural heritage sites and museums have been registered during the first 11 months of the current Persian year, which began on March 21, 2023.

"From the beginning of the year until the end of Bahman, more than 22 million people visited cultural heritage museums and historical sites.

This is while the number of visitors in the previous year was 21 million," an official with the cultural heritage ministry said on Thursday.

"One of the contributing factors to the increased revenues of the Ministry of Cultural Heritage has been the rise in museum visits," Ali Tolouei said.

Tolouei further elaborated on the challenges faced by the ministry, stating, "We have nearly 6 million historical artifacts, but only 150 positions for property custodians, despite the fact that our properties have other responsibilities."

We need at least 600 additional property custodians for the preservation of historical artifacts."

The ancient country is home to one of the world's oldest continuous major civilizations, embracing settlements dating back to 4000 BC. It also hosts some of the world's oldest cultural monuments, including bazaars, museums, mosques, bridges, bathhouses, madrasas, gardens, rich natural, rural landscapes as well as 26 UNESCO World Heritage sites.

The name of Iran, formerly known as Persia, mostly conjures up the first Persian Empire, ruled by the Achaemenids (ca. 550– 330 BC) and sites such as Pasargadae and Persepolis.

However, there are tens of prehistorical sites, such as the Burnt City in Sistan-Baluchestan, Tepe Sialk in Kashan, Susa and Chogha Zanbil in the Khuzestan province, and Ecbatana in Hamedan which predate the Achaemenid period.

From a wider point of view, Iranian history can be divided into Pre-Islamic and Islamic eras. The Medes unified Iran as a nation and empire in 625 BC.

The Islamic conquest of Persia (633–656) that put an end to the mighty Sassanid Empire (224–651) was a turning point in the history of the nation.

20 traditional medicines helped treat covid-19: official



TEHRAN –During the coronavirus pandemic, the health ministry's traditional medicine office carried out more than 120 research projects, leading to the production of twenty drugs to help treat the disease.

The coronavirus pandemic is considered one of the greatest challenges in the country's health sector, ISNA quoted Nafiseh Hosseini-Yekta, the director of the health ministry's traditional medicine office, as saying.

When the coronavirus affected Iran, several treatment methods by traditional medicine along with other conventional methods were proposed, she added.

A total of 20 out of 120 projects led to the production of drugs which were included in the pharmaceutical basket for treating coronavirus.

Back then, the guidelines for the use of traditional medicine for the treatment of Coronavirus were communicated to the universities of medical sciences in the country and people were made aware of that using media coverage. This protocol was about treating coronavirus and its symptoms using herbal medicines, modifying lifestyle, and eating healthy, which was welcomed by both the public and specialists.

Traditional medicine and conventional medicine complement each other and together they can help treat coronavirus, Hosseini-Yekta further noted.

People highly welcome traditional medicine

On January 7, Hosseini-Yekta said surveys show that more than 80 percent of people in the country intend to benefit from Iranian traditional medicine, ILNA reported.

Their interest in traditional medicine has never faded, she said, adding that traditional medicine is being taught in universities.

Traditional medicine has its roots in the culture, customs, and traditions of Iranians and has always been of interest to them, the official highlighted.

With over 500 graduates in the field and numerous research articles that have been published, the country has been able to improve its position by being ranked fourth in the production of science in the field of traditional medicine in the world, following China, India, and the United States.

She went on to say that traditional medicine and conventional medicine are complementary. Each of these medicines has unique capabilities that can be used together.

But it can only be prescribed by someone who has fully mastered both fields.

Unfortunately, extremists threaten people's health by either misusing their interest in traditional medicine or depriving them of the right to use the indigenous medicine of the country along with conventional medicine.

Draft on traditional medicine strategy

In November 2023, Iran attended the World Health Organization's consultative sessions on developing a draft of a new traditional medicine strategy as the only representative from West Asia.The event took place from November 27- 30, 2023 in Geneva, Switzerland, IRIB reported.

Arman Zargaran, Iran's advisor to the traditional medicine office at the Ministry of Health, participated in the event at the invitation of the WHO headquarters in Geneva.

The International Regulatory Cooperation for Herbal Medicines Unit of WHO, WHO-IRCH, invited 20 experts in the field of traditional medicine from all over the world to develop a draft of traditional medicine strategy for the period 2025-2034.

The invited experts were from China (3 representatives), Australia, Canada, Switzerland, (2 representatives each), Iran, Malaysia, England, South Korea, South Africa, Ghana, Norway, Thailand, Philippines, Brazil, and India (1 representative each).

Within 3 days of intensive work, the entire initial draft was reviewed in the presence of Rudi Eggers, WHO Director of Integrated Health Services, and Kim Sungchol, head of the WHO Traditional Complementary and Integrative Medicine Unit.

Iran, Russia sign document on health cooperation



TEHRAN –A comprehensive document between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Russian Federation has been signed by Deputy Health Minister Mohammad-Hossein Niknam and his Russian counterpart Sergei Glagolev.

The agreement was signed on Friday during the closing ceremony of the 17th Joint Economic Committee meeting which was held in Tehran.

The memorandum of understanding was compiled following several rounds of technical negotiations between the ministries of health of the two countries.

It lays the groundwork for cooperation between the parties in various fields, including joint supply and production of medicines and medical equipment, modern and digital technologies, and academic cooperation, the Health Ministry website reported.

It also involves training health professionals, conducting health research, and managing communicable and non-communicable diseases.

During the negotiations, the two parties welcomed the idea of holding annual meetings.

The two officials also met on Tuesday, highlighting cooperation in research and education, artificial intelligence, and modern technologies, particularly vaccines and pharmaceutical raw materials, IRIB reported.

Russia eyeing more medical imports from Iran

In May 2023, Heidar Mohammadi, the head of the Food and Drug Administration, met Glagolev in Moscow, saying Russia was seeking to facilitate medical imports from Iran.

"We are determined to have interactions with Russia in the field of health," IRNA quoted Mohammadi as saying.

Mohammadi pointed out that Iran-made medical devices are currently exported to 55 countries around the world.

The Russian official, for his part, expressed hope that relations will be enhanced in the field of technology transfer.

"Certainly, we have a lot of motivation to introduce our manufacturers to Iran and also visit Iranian companies to boost cooperation in the future."He also expressed his interest in further cooperation in the field of combating infectious diseases and expanding medical tourism.

In October 2022, Hossein Shomali, an official with the Food and Drug Administration said Iran exported medicine worth $7.5 million to Russia in the [Iranian calendar] year 1400 (March 2021-March 2022).

Biological medicine accounts for a major portion of the products exported from Iran to Russia, ISNA quoted Shomali as saying.

The pharmaceutical industry is one of the active and important industries, which during the past years has been able to meet the domestic need for medicines to an acceptable level with significant growth.At the same time, one of the solutions for the development of the pharmaceutical industry, considering the large volume of the pharmaceutical consumption market in the world, is the export, he highlighted.

Exporting medicine has advantages such as saving foreign currency and thus facilitating the production cycle with the possibility of importing raw materials, it also can lead to the reduction of production costs, and on the other hand, it can encourage the manufacturing company to improve product quality, he explained.

He went on to say that the export value of the country's pharmaceutical items last year was about $60 million, which has increased by 30 percent compared to the previous year, which shows the 0.2 percent share of the pharmaceutical industry in export revenue among the different industries of the country.

Health Minister Bahram Einollahi has said many countries in the region are asking Iran for help with issues related to health.

Emphasizing that all diseases are currently treated in the country, the minister added: "With the help of scientists, we were able to educate efficient human resources," ISNA reported.

Countries that do not have pharmaceutical production infrastructure or have a small share of domestic production compared to their pharmaceutical market, can be a good export target for Iranian companies, he added.

The value of Iranian pharmaceutical exports to Russia last year was about $7.5 million, which is 12.5 percent of the country's total exports, most of which were biomedicine, he said.

ENGLISH IN USE

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'Climate change impact on Iran doubles world average'

The effects of climate change on Iran has more than doubled on average compared to other parts of the world, while southern provinces of the country are more likely to bear the consequences, secretary of environmental policy at the center for strategic studies affiliated to the presidential office has said.

"The Hoomand-Absard station in Damavand county in northeast of Tehran experienced a temperature increase of 2.7 °C over the past 50 years, while over the past 100 years, the temperature rise was about 0.76 °C," ISNA quoted Mohammad Darvish as saying on Tuesday.

Climate change impact is increasing in southern part of the country, among which Yazd province's condition has raised concern.

تغییرات اقلیمی در ایران دو تا سه برابر جهان

محمد درویش، دبیر سیاست محیط‌زیست مرکز بررسی‌های استراتژیک نهاد ریاست جمهوری گفته، ایران با تاثیرات تغییر اقلیمی دو تا سه برابر بیشتر از تاثیرات ایجاد شده در کره زمین روبرو شده است.

محمد درویش، در گفت‌وگو با خبرنگار ایسنا با اشاره به گزارش‌های منتشر شده توسط سازمان هواشناسی، وزارت نیرو و سازمان آب، اظهار کرد: ایستگاه هومند آبسرد در دامنه‌های کوه دماوند طی نیم قرن اخیر افزایش دمایی حدود ۲.۷ درجه سیلیوس را نشان می‌دهد و این مسئله در حالی رخ داده است که در ۱۰۰ سال گذشته، حدود ۰.۷۶ درجه سلسیوس افزایش دما داشته‌ایم.

وی اضافه کرد: هر چقدر به شهرهای جنوبی‌تر کشورمان نزدیک می‌شویم، تغییرات اقلیمی هم بیشتر می‌شود به طوری که از این میان یزد وضعیت نگران‌کننده‌ای دارد .

Regional, global centers 'essential' to tackle SDSs, Iran suggests



TEHRAN – Ali Salajeqeh, the Head of the Department of Environment, has called it essential to set up regional and global centers to deal with sand and dust storms.

"My country, like many other countries, has been severely affected by climate change, loss of biodiversity, and pollution, which mainly emerge from other countries and regions of the world. Meanwhile, drought as well as sand and dust storms are among the most important challenges that our region is facing," IRNA quoted Salajeqeh as saying.

He made the remarks at the sixth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA-6), which took place from February 26 to March 1 at the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) headquarters in Nairobi, Kenya.

Holding the International Conference on Combating Sand and Dust Storms, in line with the implementation of United Nations General Assembly Resolution 77/171, in Tehran in September 2023 with the cooperation of the United Nations, is an example of the efforts of the Islamic Republic of Iran to draw the attention of the international communities to the importance of these shared challenges and the necessity to find shared solutions to cope with these challenges, he added.

The conference, with the assistance of multilateral financial organizations and the United Nations, and the affected countries tried to compile, review, and implement sub-regional, regional, and global action plans to deal with dust storms and follow up on the creation of a regional fund for the West Asia region and the establishment of a regional center along with a network of countries affected by dust storms to investigate and follow up effectively.

In this regard, consulting with a group of interested countries and seeking the cooperation and support of UNEP and specialized funds, programs and agencies affiliated with the United Nations, the Islamic Republic of Iran submitted a draft resolution to the current session of the UNEA to take another step for collective action and develop appropriate regional and international mechanisms to deal with dust storms as one of the important hazards threatening our world and future.

According to Article 50 of the Constitution of the country, Iran is strongly bound to preserve the environment and in this regard, the government is trying to integrate environmental considerations into all strategies programs, and development plans of the country.

Referring to the unilateral economic and illegitimate sanctions against Iran and other countries which have resulted in numerous effects in terms of environmental destruction and reduction of sustainable development, Salajeqeh said international organizations, particularly UNEP, are expected to play their role in providing technical, financial and consulting assistance favorably in line with its mission to improve environmental indicators to witness the reduction of environmental risks.

Neglecting climate change and the preservation of the environment have posed serious and emerging challenges for all countries of the world. These challenges disrupt the balance of nature, threaten the life of biological species, increase poverty, and threaten food security and human health.

Salajeqeh also highlighted the historical responsibility of developed countries, which have been industrialized at the price of climate crises, loss of biodiversity, and extensive pollution, to help developing countries.

"In this regard, I emphasize that developing countries need capacity building, real financial support, and proper, affordable, and unhindered access to technical knowledge to play a proper role in solving the world's environmental problems, including moving towards low-carbon economies, and technologies that are compatible with the environment," he further noted.

Drafting new treaties, forming strict legal regimes, and creating various obstacles, restrictions, and challenges, especially in the field of international trade, under the pretext of implementing environmental obligations, does not help to solve their problems.

"What we need now more than ever is a correct understanding of the challenges, and mutual understanding of the opportunities, threats, and solutions ahead."

Iran, as one of the founders of the United Nations, has always emphasized the importance of preserving the environment. The country is in agreement with other countries on many environmental issues, including climate change and the need to deal with it.

In the end, he pointed out that the future of the common environment will determine the inevitable common fate of everyone. It is hoped that regardless of political issues, by enhancing cooperation, developing each other's capacities, and taking advantage of common knowledge, technology, and financial resources, we will be able to present a healthy and clean future to the next generation.

UNEA-6

As the world's top decision-making body on the environment, UNEA aims to help restore harmony between humanity and nature, improving the lives of the world's most vulnerable people.

The overall theme of UNEA-6 is effective, inclusive, and sustainable multilateral actions to tackle climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution.Ministers of environment and other leaders from more than 180 nations convened today in Nairobi for the start of the sixth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA-6).

With a focus on strengthening environmental multilateralism to address the triple planetary crisis of climate change, nature loss, and pollution, this year's Assembly negotiated resolutions on issues ranging from nature-based solutions and highly hazardous pesticides to land degradation and drought and environmental aspects of minerals and metals.

As climate change intensifies, a million species head towards extinction and pollution remains one of the world's leading causes of premature death, UNEA-6 would see countries consider some 19 resolutions, part of a broader push to spur more ambitious multilateral environmental action.

The resolutions cover, among other issues, circular economy; solar radiation modification; effective, inclusive, and sustainable multilateral actions towards climate justice; sound management of chemicals and waste, and sand and dust storms.An international summit on dealing with sand and dust storms was held in September 2023 in Tehran, a turning point in making serious decisions for implementing sub-regional programs in West Asia and Central Asia.

In a meeting with ambassadors and representatives of the countries participating in the international conference on dealing with SDSs, Salajeqeh said letters of invitation have been sent to the environment ministers of nearly 55 countries that are directly affected by the dust phenomenon.

Climate change with all its dimensions and consequences has caused serious challenges to life on the earth. One of the consequences of climate change, which has increased in intensity and occurrence, is the phenomenon of SDSs with severe harm to the world's biological and economic resources.

According to surveys, 150 countries are affected by SDSs, and most of these countries are located in Africa and Asia.

Two out of the seven main sources of dust production in the world are located in Asia, with the Great African Sahara being the first one.

The studies by the Islamic Republic of Iran show that the dust centers in West and Central Asia are more than 3.3 million square kilometers.

Considering the social, economic, health, and environmental effects and consequences of this phenomenon, it is necessary to adopt international, regional, and sub-regional solutions with the participation of all countries affected by this phenomenon and the international organizations' support, to take more seriously actions to tackle this challenge.

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Managing Director: **Mohammad Mahdi Rahmati**

Editor-in-Chief: **Mohammad Sarfi**

Editorial Dept.: Fax: (+98 21) 88808214 — 88808895
Email: info@tehrantimes.com
Switchboard Operator: Tel: (+98 21) 43051000
Advertisements Dept.: Telefax: (+98 21) 43051430
Public Relations Office: Tel: (+98 21) 88805807
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GUIDE TO SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

If matters get mixed up then scrutinize the cause and you will know what the effects will be.

Imam Ali (AS)

Prayer Times » Noon:12:16 Evening: 18:19 Dawn: 5:08 (tomorrow) Sunrise: 6:31 (tomorrow)

What's in Tehran art galleries



Painting

* A collection of paintings by Jalal Fatemi is currently on display in an exhibition at Ev Gallery.

Entitled "Trunks Talk", the exhibition runs until March 12 at the gallery located at No.5, Arabi Alley, North Kheradmand St., Karim Khan Ave.



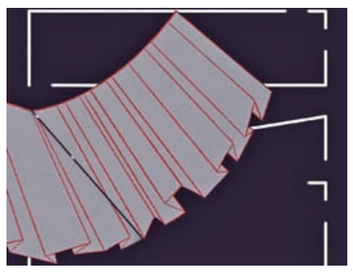
* An exhibition of paintings by Sajjad Shahbazi is underway at Ebteda Gallery.

Entitled "Out of Range", the exhibition will run until March 5 at the gallery located at 35 Farrokhi Alley, near Vali-e Asr Square.



* Paintings by Yasaman Khaleqi, Pegah Shamlou, Narges Ranjbar, Arbi Keshishian, Shadi Saeidi and Shaqayeq Saeidi are on display in an exhibition at Sheidai Gallery.

The exhibit entitled "What Went" will continue until March 15 at the gallery located at 149 Bahar Shiraz Square near Hafte Tir Square.



* Paintings by Dana Jafari are currently on view in an exhibition at Dastan Basement Gallery.

The exhibit will be running until March 15 at the gallery located at 6 Bidar St., off Fereshteh St.



* A collection of paintings by Saeid Khooyeh is currently on view in an exhibition at Seyhun Gallery.

The exhibit named "Incomplete Stories 2" runs until March 13 at the gallery located at No. 11, 4th St., Vozara Ave.



* An exhibition of paintings by Mohammad Dabbagh is currently underway at CAMA – Contemporary and Modern Art Gallery.

Named "Abandoned", the exhibit runs until March 6 at the gallery located at No. 44, 10th Golestan, Pasdaran St.



Drawing

* Drawings by Farshid Parsikia are currently on view in an exhibition at Dena Gallery.

The exhibit will run until March 15 at the gallery that can be found at 4 Sussan Alley off Qarani St.



Sculpture

* Artibition Gallery is playing host to an exhibition of sculptures by Aref Rudbari Shahmiri.

Entitled "Bull Suffer", the exhibit runs until March 10 at the gallery located at No. 2798, Vali-e Asr Ave, after Parkvay, next to Bank of Industry and Mine.



* Sculptures by Shahrzad Valizadeh are currently on display in an exhibit at Jaleh Gallery.

Entitled "Synthesis", the exhibition runs until March 8 at the gallery located at No. 3, Noshahr Alley, Iranshahr St., Karim Khan Ave.



* A collection of sculptures by Kian Vatan is on view in an exhibition at Homa Gallery.

The exhibition will be running until March 8 at the gallery that can be found at No. 8, Fourth Alley, Sanai St., Karim Khan Ave.

Mostafa Zamani's Iraqi TV series "Amirli" set for Ramadan release

TEHRAN-Famous Iranian actor Mostafa Zamani has performed in the Iraqi TV series "Amirli," directed by Ahmed Ibrahim Ahmed, which is going to be released soon by Noravision.

The drama, romance, war series tells the story of an Iraqi hero who fought ISIS for his people, ISNA reported.

The highly-anticipated series is expected to captivate audiences with its compelling narrative and stellar performances. The series is set to be a Ramadan treat for viewers.

"Amirli" unfolds a gripping tale that promises to keep viewers on the edge of their seats throughout the holy month of Ramadan (beginning on March 12).

Jafar Taye, the talented writer behind the series, has crafted a script that blends drama, suspense, and emotion, ensuring a multifaceted viewing experience.

Zamani and Nariman Al Salhy, the lead actors, bring their charisma and acting prowess to the forefront. The chemistry between these two talented performers is expected to be a highlight, drawing in audiences from diverse demographics.

"Amirli" serves as a powerful reminder of the transformative power of storytelling, bridging cultural gaps and fostering understanding.

Other actors in the series include Halah Al-Adil, Kadhim Al-Quraishiy, Ramez Al Aswad, and Awatif Salman among others.

Mostafa Zamani, 41, has received various accolades, including a Hafez Award and two Iran Cinema Celebration Awards, in addition to nominations for a Crystal Simorgh at Fajr Film Festival and an Iran's Film Critics and Writers Association Award.



Mostafa Zamani (R) and Nariman Al Salhy in a scene from "Amirli"

> "Amirli" serves as a powerful reminder of the transformative power of storytelling, bridging cultural gaps

He is famous for many roles in Iran's film industry, but his memorable acting as Yousuf (Joseph) in the TV series, "Prophet Joseph" was the beginning of his stardom.

Zamani made his series debut in 2008 with "Prophet Joseph," and cinematic debut in 2010 with "Aal". Since then, he has acted in several series, such as "In the Eye of the Storm" (2003–2009) and "Shahrzad" (2015–2018). His other movies include "Farewell Baghdad" (2009), "Retribution" (2009), "Parya's Story" (2010), "Parinaz" (2010), "The Final Whistle" (2010), "A Simple Romance" (2011), "The Queen" (2011), "I'm Her Spouse" (2011), "Mirror and Candlestick" (2012) and "The Exclusive Line" (2013) among many others.

Amirli (also spelt Amerli) is a predominantly Shia Turkmen town in Saladin Governorate, Iraq, approximately 100 km from the Iranian border.

The town, and its nearly 20,000 Shia Turkmen, was besieged by the ISIS starting in June 2014. It was running out of food, water, and supplies. On August 31, the Quds Force, the overseas arm of the IRGC under the command of Soleimani, joined the Kurdish Peshmerga fighters and the Popular Mobilization Units – Hashd al-Shaabi, breaking the siege, which was described by some top analysts as Iraq's biggest victory against ISIS.

Noravision is an international media production company known for its animations, movies, TV series, documentaries, and reality shows.

Its main focus is on MENA, Russia, and CIS regions. The platforms for broadcasting its products are VODs, IPTVs, social media, TVs, cinemas, etc. The company which is located in Turkey has successfully produced, distributed, and marketed tens of media products in various forms.

Iranian video game "Fake Emperors" receives 4 nominations at Game Connection America

TEHRAN-The Iranian video game "Fake Emperors" made by animator and game developer Mehrdad Rezaei has received four nominations at the Game Development Awards, Game Connection America 2024.

A production of Pershaland Studio, the PC and mobile game has been nominated for the Best Mobile/Tablet Game, Best Casual Game, Grand Award, and Best Development Team at the event, Mehr reported on Friday.

It is a challenging but fun point-and-click adventure game with more than six heroes that players can switch between, more than 8,000 hand-drawn animated frames and many cut-scene animations.

A comic story in a classic animation style, it is about Morris whose detective mission is to fetch a fabulous diamond from the Ghost Palace.

The game has so far won some awards including Best Adventure Game and Best artistic achievement at the 9th Fajr Game Festival 2024, where it also finished runner up in the category of Best Game of the Year. Moreover, it was the winner of Best PC Game, People's Choice Award for the Best Trailer, and People's Choice Award for the Best Game at the GCG Iranian Game Festival 2024. In 2023, the game was a nominee for the Best Game at Tokyo Game Show in Japan.

The Game Connection Game Development Awards have a history of recognizing and promoting game projects in any stage of development. For the past 16 years, they have been the place for studios to showcase their creativity and originality and to be recognized by their peers.

The contest is open to console, mobile, social, casual and online games with no restriction on genre, platform or distribution method. The award ceremony is expected to be held in San Francisco on March 18.

Game Connection is a business convention of the video games industry. It is an international marketplace for game developers, service providers and publishers looking to expand their network and find the right business partners.



It takes place in two different locations at two different times of the year. Game Connection America is held in San Francisco, the U.S., during the spring and Game Connection Europe is held in Paris, France, during the fall, after having been set in Lyon for 10 years.

Tehran cinematheque to review Satyajit Ray's "Pather Panchali"

TEHRAN-The Cinematheque of the Iranian Artists Forum (IAF) will screen Indian director and screenwriter Satyajit Ray's film "Pather Panchali" on Monday.

The screening will be followed by a review session by Iranian film critic Ilia Mohammadinia.

"Pather Panchali" is a classic Indian film directed by the legendary filmmaker Satyajit Ray. This critically acclaimed movie is the first installment in Ray's renowned "Apu Trilogy", which also includes "Aparajito" and "The World of Apu".

Released in 1955, "Pather Panchali" is based on a novel of the same name by Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay. The film follows the story of a young boy named Apu, who grows up in a rural village in West Bengal. The movie beautifully captures the joys, sorrows, struggles, and triumphs of everyday life in a small Indian village.

One of the most striking aspects of "Pather Panchali" is its stunning cinematography and breathtaking visuals. Satyajit Ray expertly captures the lush landscapes of rural Bengal, as well as the intimate moments of the characters. The film is filled with powerful imagery and poignant symbolism, which adds to its emotional depth and resonance.

The performances in "Pather Panchali" are also commendable, with the cast delivering heartfelt and authentic portrayals of their characters. Apu, played by Subir Banerjee, is especially memorable, as he navigates the challenges of growing up in poverty and facing loss and hardship.

"Pather Panchali" is a masterpiece of Indian cinema and a timeless classic that continues to resonate with audiences around the world. Satyajit Ray's sensitive direction, coupled with the film's emotional depth and visual beauty, makes it a must-see for any film lover.

At the 1956 Cannes Film Festival, "Pather Panchali" won the Best Human Document award, marking the first time that an Indian film had received international recognition on such a prestigious platform.

The film was also a critical success in India, where it won several National Film Awards, including the Best Feature Film and Best Direction honors.

The success of "Pather Panchali" paved the way for Satyajit Ray's subsequent films and solidified his reputation as a pioneering filmmaker in world cinema.

Satyajit Ray, born in 1921 in Calcutta, India, is widely regarded as one of the greatest filmmakers in the history of cinema. A multifaceted artist, Ray was not only a filmmaker but also a writer, composer, and illustrator. He is best known for his masterful storytelling, keen observation of human behavior, and his ability to create rich, nuanced characters on screen.

Ray's most iconic works include the "Apu Trilogy" consisting of "Pather Panchali", "Aparajito", and "The World of Apu", which are considered masterpieces of world cinema.

Throughout his career, Ray received numerous awards and accolades for his contributions to film, including an honorary Academy Award for Lifetime Achievement in 1991. His films often explore themes of social realism, human relationships, and the complexities of Indian society, earning him a reputation as a socially conscious filmmaker whose works resonate beyond borders and cultures. Overall, Satyajit Ray's influence on Indian cinema and world cinema as a whole is immeasurable, and his legacy continues to inspire generations of filmmakers and cinephiles around the globe.