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NEWS IN BRIEF

Iraq hustles to honor security pledge

International Desk

Iraqi Foreign Minister Fuad Hussein reassured Iran on Tuesday that Baghdad remains committed to and has taken steps to honor its security agreement with Tehran regarding the expulsion of anti-Iran terrorist groups from its semi-autonomous Kurdistan region.

In one such effort, Iraq's National Security Adviser Qasim al-Araji discussed the implementation of the security deal in a meeting with the interior minister of the Iraqi Kurdistan region Rebar Ahmed Khalid Barzani. The two sides stressed the need to pursue the orders of the prime minister of Iraq and eliminate Iran's security concerns.

Swedish national broke law: Judiciary spox

IRNA - Iran's Judiciary Spokesman Masoud Setayeshi confirmed that the Swedish citizen who works for the European Union has been arrested for committing crimes on Iranian territory, and his case will soon be sent to court.

Johan Floderus, who works for the European External Action Service, was reportedly arrested on espionage charges in April 2022, while on a private trip to Iran. Setayeshi also announced that a French woman and man were arrested on espionage charges.

Raeisi: Tehran will spend \$6b 'wherever we need'

US to release five Iranian prisoners



In an interview aired on September 12, 2023, Iranian President Ebrahim Raeisi (R) speaks with NBC News' Lester Holt in Tehran, Iran. **NBC NEWS**

International Desk

Iranian President Ebrahim Raeisi said his government will decide how it will spend \$6 billion in previously frozen funds due to be released in a prisoner exchange agreement with the United States, stressing that the money will be spent "wherever we need it".

In an exclusive interview with NBC News' Lester Holt in Tehran aired on Tuesday, Raeisi suggested that the Americans held in Iran would be coming home soon, saying that the US-Iran prisoner exchange deal would be completed in "due time" and that the

American detainees were in "very healthy" condition.

Under the arrangement, Tehran will be granted access to the roughly \$6 billion in Iranian oil revenues that were blocked in South Korean banks because of US sanctions. But US officials say Qatar's central bank will oversee the funds and Iran will only be permitted to use the money for humanitarian purposes in accordance with US sanctions.

However, when asked if the money would be used for other purposes apart from humanitarian needs, Raeisi emphasized, "Humanitarian means whatever

the Iranian people need. So, this money will be budgeted for those needs, and the needs of the Iranian people will be decided and determined by the Iranian government."

Five Iranian prisoners to be freed

The incumbent US administration has cleared the way for the implementation of the deal by issuing a blanket waiver for international banks to transfer \$6 billion in frozen Iranian money from South Korea to Qatar without fear of US sanctions. In addition, as part of the deal, the administration has agreed to release five Iranian citizens

held in the United States. Secretary of State Antony Blinken signed off on the sanctions waivers late last week, a month after US and Iranian officials said an agreement in principle was in place. Congress was not informed of the waiver decision until Monday, according to the notification, which was obtained by The Associated Press.

The outlines of the deal had been previously announced and the waiver was expected. But the notification marked the first time the administration said it was releasing five Iranian prisoners as part of the deal. The prisoners have not been named.

The waiver drew criticism of President Joe Biden from Republicans and others who say the deal will boost the Iranian economy.

Former President Donald Trump on Monday criticized President Joe Biden for striking the deal, calling for the Republicans to invoke the 25th Amendment, according to The Messenger. The 25th Amendment establishes procedures for replacing the president or vice president in the event of death, removal, or incapacitation. Sen. Ted Cruz, R-Texas, said the waivers were a sign the administration was secretly pursuing a broader deal

with Iran to include more than the release of the detainees.

The waiver means that European, Middle Eastern, and Asian banks will not run afoul of US sanctions in converting the money frozen in South Korea and transferring it to Qatar's central bank, where it will be held for Iran to use for the purchase of humanitarian goods.

Iran's Ambassador to Doha Hamidreza Dehghani-Podeh announced that the implementation of the prisoner swap with the United States and the release of Iranian assets is in its final stages, Mehr news agency wrote.

Mexico, Iran joined hands will raise bilateral trade: Ambassador

By Sadeq Dehqan & Reza Abesh Ahmadlou
Staff writers

Mexico and Iran should join hands to boost bilateral trade, said United Mexican States Ambassador to the Islamic Republic of Iran Guillermo Alejandro Puente Ordorica adding that the main obstacle in the development of economic cooperation between the two countries is the imposed sanctions on Tehran. Talking to Iran Daily, the envoy noted that another factor that has left a negative impact on the amount of economic exchanges between all countries, including Iran and Mexico, is the COVID pandemic, which has been over for about two years, but eco-

conomic exchanges have not returned to the previous level. "Tehran and Mexico City can cooperate in many areas including tourism, oil and oil products, health, and auto parts to increase the amount of commercial exchanges," Puente stated.

Referring to the sanctions, the ambassador of Mexico said his country's stance regarding the sanctions against Tehran is completely clear. "Sanctions should be legal and based on the international law, as all countries should be treated fairly and in an equivalent way."

Diplomatic amity

Puente pointed to the establishment of constructive discourses between Iran

and his country, and said the Tehran-Mexico City relations should be expanded in numerous fields.

Regarding the history of relations between the two countries, he noted that there are both old and new relations between Iran and Mexico.

"The old relations are due to the fact that it has started in the late 19th century. On the other hand, the relations between the two countries are considered new because this year marks the 59th official anniversary of establishing diplomatic relations between the two countries," the top diplomat explained. Two countries can cooperate with each other in many fields, including cultural fields, science and research and technology, Puente said adding that in his opinion, Iran has capabilities in various sectors that Mexico can take help from Iran to operate in the sectors, and on the other hand, Mexico enjoys its own potentials that Iranians can benefit from.

"Currently, the two countries are supporting each other in candidacy in various international bodies

and institutions. As a result, it can be said that the will of cooperation between the two countries is established, but we must explore more to find ways of cooperation in other fields."

More planning on agenda

In the near future, a joint meeting will be held at the level of the ministries of foreign affairs in Tehran, the envoy announced noting that such a joint meeting has been held in the past and this time it will be hosted by Tehran, although the exact time has not been determined yet.

Establishing an inter-parliamentary dialogue between Iran and Mexico is another issue that efforts have been made recently, the envoy said adding that in this regard, about two months ago four Mexican MPs of the Iran-Mexico Parliamentary Friendship Group visited Iran to discuss with their Iranian counterparts. On the other hand, a parliamentary delegation from Iran is scheduled to travel to Mexico in October. Establishing such diplo-

matic and political ties and visits indicates the political will of both sides to bring the two countries closer to each other, Puente stated.

Pointing to the similarities between the capitals of the two countries, the envoy explained: Mexico City and Tehran are structurally very similar to each other; In general, both are considered megacities and according to this, their problems are indeed common to each other. "Mexico City enjoys valuable experiences in the field of fighting air pollution, how to equip public transportation, urban waste management, as well as the issue of earthquakes, as these experiences are also beneficial for Tehran." Regarding the earthquake in Mexico City, many measures have been taken that can be shared with the city hall officials of Tehran, as we know that many people in Tehran are concerned about the earthquake and its consequences, the ambassador said.

In the mentioned fields, there has been no cooperation between the two countries so far, Puente noted adding that "As the

ambassador of Mexico, I am interested in launching such cooperation so that the people and governments of the two countries can benefit from its results."



Zagros Mountains, home to various plant and animal species



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an Period. Ecologically, about 40 percent of the country's water comes from 5.5 million hectares of forest and ten million hectares of rangeland.

In addition to Iranian oak, there are other exclusive plant species in this mountain range including mountain almond. Its other herbal features include 57 species, subspecies, and varieties of the Rosaceae family that represent the peak of the vegetative evolution of this family on a global scale. About 44 percent of Zagros trees and shrubs have medicinal properties.

Many botanists believe that Iran is one of the main territories for growing tulips. The tulip has 18 species in Iran, four of which are endemic to Iran. There are unique fields of these flowers in the Zagros region and numerous related festivals are held there annually.

Mammal species roam the rocky slopes of Zagros Mountains including the Persian leopard, the Syrian brown bear, bezoar ibex, and striped hyena and Persian red squirrel. Lively leaping among branches of oaks, beautiful Persian squirrels make their homes in the oldest and tallest trees; skilled swimmers and competent climbers, they boast luxuriant tails of splendid russet red.

Finally, in the midst of this mountain range, there live many tribes and cultures that have their own lan-



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The ancient and vast plateau of Iran is located at latitudes between 25 and 40 north degrees. It is placed in the dry and semi-dry strip of the Northern Hemisphere.

The 1,300-kilometer Zagros Mountain range ex-

tends from northwestern Iran (Iran's border with Turkey) to the southeast, oirantour.com wrote.

Zagros Mountains have a history of several thousand years; some empires such as the Achaemenid were formed in its vicinity about

2,500 years ago.

Limestone and shale rocks from the Mesozoic Era and Paleogene Period form the most commonly seen geological structural materials of Zagros Mountains. The oldest rocks found there date back to the Precambri-



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guage, customs and traditions.

Mount Dena

The highest point in the mountain range is Mount Dena, with an elevation of 14,465 feet (4,409 meters), located in the middle of the

Zagros Mountains. Passes through the mountains are used for reaching the fertile intermontane plains, which lie at elevations above 5,000 feet (1,500 meters).

Gahar Lake

Gahar Lake is one of the

best sights of Lorestan Province and one of the largest freshwater lakes in Iran. This lake, with its beautiful nature and clear water, attracts every tourist, especially since it is one of the best places to catch trout.

Development of different cultures in Iran

The natural formation of the Iranian landscape – the steep mountain ranges of the Zagros and Alborz, the coast of the Caspian Sea, the tableland with the big desert, the lowlands in the West and the elevated plain in the East beyond the Lut Desert – has favoured the development of different cultures that are all embedded in their specific environment. At this time, six main geographical regions can be distinguished. The desert margin regions on the central plateau surround the desert. Iranian Azarbaijan mirrors the development in Eastern Anatolia and Transcaucasia.

The lowlands of Khuzestan Province in southwestern Iran, the ancient Susiana and adjacent plains were closely connected to Mesopotamia. The high valleys of the Zagros in Fars Province constituted an independent region, and southeastern Iran – Sistan-Baluchestan Province – had connections to Afghanistan and Pakistan. Finally, the discovered oasis culture on the Halil Rud maintained long-distance relations with Arabia and Mesopotamia across the Persian Gulf.

The definition of cultural tra-

Uzbek Hill
IRNA

ditions and their regional and chronological variants in Iranian prehistory relies mainly on pottery classification. In the fifth and fourth millennia BCE, pottery with dark painted decoration over a beige or red surface was widely but unlike Mesopotamia, painted pottery stays common in this region until well into the

fourth millennium BCE.

It is only in the late fourth millennium BCE, and probably due to the influence of new technologies, especially the introduction of the fast potter's wheel, that a new trend toward the production of a monochrome mass-produced ware emerges.

This ware is occasionally deco-

rated with horizontal circular bands and can be found throughout western Iran and the plateau. In the north, grey polished wares, already attested in small quantities in the ceramic assemblages since the fifth millennium BCE, increase continually in ratio. Only in the southeastern part of the country, on the other side

of the Lut Desert and along the Halil Rud, and therefore beyond Proto-Elamite influence, a characteristic style of painted pottery survives into the middle of the third millennium BCE.

Settlements

The southern Zagros highlands reveal a radical reorganization of settlement structures during the late fourth millennium BCE. After decreasing steadily in size and number since the end of the fifth millennium BCE, a process possibly due to the appearance of alternative ways of life, like for example nomadism, some settlements in favoured locations now started to grow to an unprecedented size. Fortification systems, administrative buildings and craftsmen's quarters portray a truly urban character. These big settlements are usually surrounded by an array of smaller sites that comprise farming villages, nomadic camps or even specialised production areas. A good example for such an early city is Tal-e Malyan in Fars Province, later to become the capital of Anshan. In the late fourth millennium BCE, its urban area, which covers several small mounds, increased

noticeably in size. A city wall encircled some of the mounds. An administrative complex formed the centre of the settlement, while workshops producing stone tools and shell beads, as well as processing areas for arsenic copper and lead, were located on the smaller outer mounds.

A similar process of development can be assumed in other settlement areas of the southern Zagros, like Tal-e Ghazir in Behbahan, Tappeh Sialk and Tappeh Hesaar, the two best known settlements on the plateau.

Nevertheless, they too certainly represent regional centres with specialised economic areas that can be characterised as proto-urban as early as the early fourth millennium BCE.

Looking at a wider geographical context, the surveys and excavations at Arisman also indicate the existence of contemporary specialised industrial settlements that supplied the market in Sialk.

More specialised settlements can be found on the plateau at Tappeh Ghabrestan, Qazvin Province, and at the excavated settlement of Tappeh Ozbaki (Uzbek Hill) in Alborz Province.

Iran's tourism among top 20 countries

Iran draws 7.1m foreign tourists amid hostile campaigns

Focusing on Iran's tourism sector is seen as a catalyst for economic growth and reducing dependence on oil revenues. This effort stimulates economic advancement, creates jobs, and involves various industries. Similar to trade, tourism relies on supply and demand and its success could trigger a chain reaction, boosting related businesses, especially micro-enterprises. Such a positive impact could spread across different economic sectors.

Tourism can be beneficial for achieving regional balance and sustainable progress in growing areas. It also helps remote regions overcome challenges. Statistics show that each tourism project provides employment for about ten people on average. In some countries, tourism incomes even surpass total tax earnings. That's why, the Iranian government emphasizes tourism in its development plans.

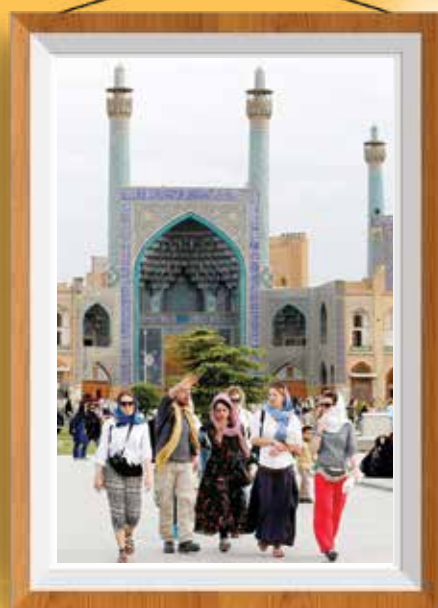
Despite recognizing its importance, Iran has lagged behind neighboring countries in tourism. The country's 7th Economic Development Plan highlights growing the tourism sector and the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts aims to attract 15 million tourists annually.

President Ebrahim Raeisi has stressed the need to tap into Iran's potential and attract foreign visitors to reach the ambitious target of 15 million. His vision includes family-focused tourism, easing visa requirements with target nations, and encouraging private-sector investments. The government prioritizes tourism, promoting collaboration across sectors to advance the industry as the concerted effort seeks to propel Iran's tourism landscape forward.

In recent years, tourism's role in Iran's economy has undergone significant shifts, as highlighted by the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) report. From contributing 3.1% of the total economic activity in 2020, tourism's share in Iran rose to 4.6% in 2022. Conspicuously, Iranian tourists spent an impressive \$33.3 billion in 2021, ranking Iran 16th globally for tourism expenditures, trailing behind prominent players like the United States, China, Germany, and more.

The headway in domestic tourism spending signals Iran's ascent in the international tourism ranking, a result of the current government's focus on promoting both internal tourism and ties with neighboring nations.

As the tourism sector prospers, the potential for employment generation within Iran surges, rising by 11.2% in 2022 alone and employing around 1.44 million people. By the end of 2022, the broader tourism sector's share in Iran's overall employment reached 6.1%.



Tourism's contribution to GDP

Iran's tourism sector experienced remarkable growth in 2022, with growth rates surpassing 39%, amounting to approximately 454 trillion tomans. This sector contributed 6% to the GDP prior to 2019 and is projected to reach 313 trillion tomans by 2028, as per the World Bank's data.

Foreign tourists' financial engagement also saw a substantial rise, with expenditures of \$6.2 billion in 2022, marking a 73.5% increase from the previous year. This surge

is a significant improvement from the \$2.5 billion spent by foreigners in 2021, resulting in a total expenditure of \$8.7 billion. Considering domestic tourism, Iranians spent 225 trillion tomans on local trips in 2021, which rose to over 316 trillion tomans in 2022, showing a substantial 40.1% year-on-year increase. These statistics underscore the growing impact of tourism on Iran's economy, emphasizing the sector's potential for economic advancement.



Revival of Iran's tourism with 40% growth

The WTTC's report on Iran reveals a significant resurgence in the country's tourism sector over the past two years. In 2020, the sector faced a substantial setback with a 45% drop in its contribution to the GDP, but in 2021, it rebounded remarkably, growing by 40% within the national economy. Analyzing the council's statistics, it's clear that Iran's tourism gained prominence in 2022, with a 39.2% upsurge. This led to the tourism industry contributing 4.6% to Iran's total economic activity, amounting to 454 trillion tomans. This value closely aligns with the pre-pandemic figure of 499 trillion tomans from before the 2019 Coronavirus outbreak.



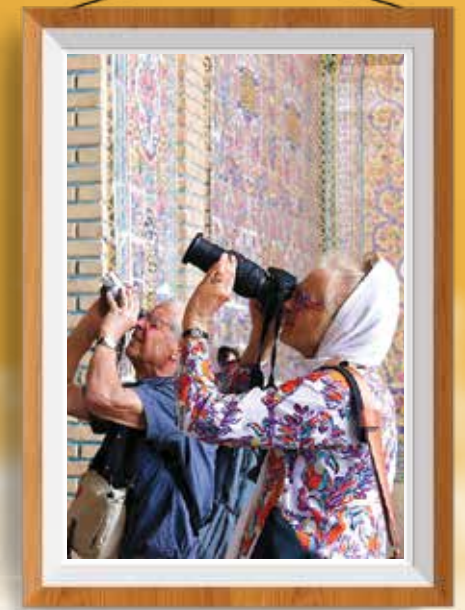
Attracting 7.1m foreign tourists in 2 years

With the new Iranian government taking office in August 2021 and the vaccination campaign, the tourism industry resumed operations after a two-year hiatus. The first steps included vaccinating hospitality and tourism employees, prioritizing accommodations and hotels, and implementing strategic tourism policies while following health protocols.

Despite initial contractions in 2021, the sector experienced a commendable turnaround. In the final quarter of 2021, Iran's tourism industry rebounded by 40%, and foreign visitors injected \$2.5 billion into the economy during this period. This outpaced the global growth rate of 21.7% for the same timeframe.

The revival gained momentum, especially in the first quarter of 2022, with the removal of restrictions on foreign tourist visas. Collaborative efforts between the Ministry of Cultural Heritage and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs led to the resumption of inbound tourism routes.

Iran's tourism sector has showcased resilience and growth, signaling a positive trajectory for the country's economy and global engagement in the post-pandemic era.



Iran's portion of 6% of Mideast tourists

The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) reports a remarkable surge in foreign tourist arrivals to Iran in 2022, with 4.1 million visits recorded, a 315% growth compared to the previous year. Despite this impressive increase, Iran's share of global foreign

tourist journeys remains modest at 0.4% for 2022. This growth stands in stark contrast to the declines experienced due to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 (83% drop) and 2021 (around 30% contraction). The Middle East region as a

whole saw a significant upswing, with 66 million foreign tourist journeys in 2022, a 163% rise from the previous year. Iran's portion of the total foreign tourists entering the Middle East is approximately 6%, indicating progress while highlighting further growth potential.

Tourism diplomacy

Under the current government, Iran has shifted its foreign policy toward enhancing relations with neighboring countries, resulting in a focus on tourism development and collaboration. The Ministry of Cultural Heritage emphasizes shared cultural ties, leading to

measures such as abolishing visa requirements, improving access to tourist sites, and promoting budget-friendly options. Joint cultural events and bilateral agreements with nations like Nigeria, Iraq, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Armenia further

illustrate this approach. This diplomatic outreach has shown results, with a decline in tourists from traditional markets (Europe and North America) but a boost in visitors from neighboring countries, particularly those with Islamic cultural affinities. The influx of

Chinese and Russian tourists has also risen compared to previous years. As Iran's tourism industry grows through strategic partnerships and policy changes, it continues to tap into the potential of its proximity to neighboring nations and shared cultural commonalities.

Countries with most tourists

In 2021, Turkish tourists accounted for over 15% of Iran's foreign tourist influx, securing the second spot after Iraq with approximately 35%. This was a notable increase from the previous year's 9% con-

tribution from Turkish visitors. Pakistan had a 10% share, Azerbaijan contributed 9%, and Kuwait held 2%, while other nations made up 29% of foreign tourist visits in Iran.

In 2022, a shift occurred with Iraq contributing 55% of foreign tourists, followed by Azerbaijan and Turkey at 6% each, Pakistan at 5%, and Kuwait at 2%, with nearly 98% of them visiting Iran for pleasure.

40% increase in domestic trips

The year 2022 marked a turning point with the arrival of Nowruz, signaling a departure from the pandemic's grip and inspiring nations to embrace tourists more warmly. A travel service coordination headquarters was established to facili-

tate these efforts, involving 23 executive bodies. The tourism industry saw promising growth, with official records showing over 52 million overnight stays in authorized lodging centers, indicating a 40% increase compared

to figures from two years prior. Nowruz 2023 continued this positive trend, witnessing a remarkable 57 million domestic travelers seeking accommodations in authorized centers. This occurred despite heightened Iranophobia measures

and negative campaigns, reflecting the industry's resilience. Despite challenges, the past two years have attracted 7.1 million tourists to Iran, defying predictions of collapse and showcasing the industry's vitality.

90% occupancy of hotels

In recent years, the tourism sector faced significant challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic and economic sanctions. Despite these difficulties, the industry has shown positive shifts through containment efforts and strategic adaptation to health

protocols. This was particularly evident during the 2022 Nowruz celebrations, reflecting pent-up travel demand accumulated over three years. This positive trajectory continued into 2023, with an unprecedented surge in hotel and accommoda-

tion center visits, resulting in an average occupancy rate exceeding 90%. Recreational facilities, museums, and historical sites also experienced substantial activity, maintaining an average above 80% compared to the corresponding timeframe.

Iranophobia, enemy's plan to target tourism

Examining campaigns to paint an insecure picture of Iran, it's evident that one of the sectors that could bear the brunt of such conditions is the tourism industry. Iran's Leader emphasized in 2022 that adversaries intend

to hinder sectors, including tourism, using Iranophobia. These forces aim to suppress Iran's tourism growth, employing bias to undermine progress and competition with regional rivals.

The battle against Iranophobia is crucial, aiming to present a secure and magnificent Iran to the world. This effort remains a focus of the incumbent government and officials from the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tour-

ism, and Handicrafts. While the industry faces hardships, the potential to showcase Iran's beauty, magnificence and security through tourism is essential in countering negative perceptions and promoting progress.

Pogba could face four-year ban after failed drug test

THE GUARDIAN – Paul Pogba could be banned from football for up to four years after testing positive for testosterone. The Juventus midfielder has been provisionally suspended following a random drugs test taken after his club's 3-0 win at Udinese on 20 August, Italy's national anti-doping tribunal (NADO Italia) announced on Monday. The test revealed elevated levels of testosterone, a hormone that can increase an athlete's endurance, meaning the 30-year-old's second sample will also need to be examined.



● REUTERS

Pogba has three days to produce a counter-analysis of the result, according to reports in Italy. If found guilty of doping, the France international could be suspended for between two and four years.

"In acceptance of the instance proposed by the National Anti-doping Prosecutor, it has provided for the provisional suspension of the athlete Paul Labile Pogba," NADO Italia said in a statement.

The tribunal said Pogba had violated anti-doping rules when they found the prohibited substance "non-endogenous testosterone metabolites", adding that the results were "consistent with the exogenous origin of the target compounds".

Pogba, who was an unused substitute in the win at Udinese, has endured a torrid time at Juventus following his return to the club from Manchester United in 2022. The 2018 World Cup winner missed most of last season with knee and hamstring injuries and was also absent from France's run to the World Cup final in Qatar due to knee surgery.

He was also dropped from a Juventus squad for disciplinary reasons and claimed to have almost quit the game after allegedly being blackmailed by an organised crime gang.

The midfielder has not started a game this season but has made two substitute appearances, last appearing in Juventus' 2-0 win at Empoli on 3 September.

The Italian club have not commented so far on the latest controversy surrounding Pogba.

IWF World Championships: Chinese favorites stunned as Javadi bags sensational golds

Iranian Mir-Mostafa Javadi makes a lift during the men's 89kg contests at the IWF World Championships in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, on September 11, 2023.
● GIORGIO SCALA/
DEEPBLUEDIA



Sports Desk

Mir-Mostafa Javadi got Iran off the mark in the medal table at the IWF World Championships by collecting a couple of surprise golds in Riyadh. On a day to forget for Chinese world record holders Li Dayin and Tian Tao, Javadi bounced back from a slow start in the snatch contest to walk away with the ultimate prizes of the clean & jerk and total events in the men's 89kg class – a massive boost for the Iranian in sealing a berth for next year's Paris Olympics.

A double world silver winner in 2021, Javadi registered 169kg to settle for the sixth spot in the snatch event, with Armenian Andranik Karapetyan (175kg), Moldova's Marin Robu (173kg), and Keydomar Vallenilla (171kg) finishing on the podiums.

Li and Tian Tao only had two successful lifts between them to end in the fourth and seventh places respectively.

It was a different story in the C&J campaign for Javadi, who began with a successful 207kg attempt.

Asked later if he fancied his chances of winning double

golds, the Iranian said: "Absolutely not.

"I was just trying my best for a bronze medal, maybe a silver, and never even thought about gold. But there were so many no-lifts."

While Tian Tao bombed out with successive failed attempts, Li thought he had done enough for the remaining golds when he took the lead on 170-213-383.

However, having overcome the 212kg barrier, Javadi went on to lift 215kg for his final attempt to finish atop the C&J podium before grabbing the total gold with 384kg.

Li took double silvers, with Venezuelan Vallenilla making a clean sweep of bronzes.

"That was my best lifting in a competition," said Javadi, whose total will move him up to fourth in the Olympic rankings.

His overall tally is four kilograms better than his fellow Iranian and 2016 Olympic champion Kianoush Rostami, who made 380kg at last year's World Championships before being dropped from the national team for the tournament in the Saudi capital.

This was only a second appearance in the new

weight class for the Iranian, following May's Asian Championships, where he tallied 364kg in total to take double bronzes, with Li and Tian Tao setting three new world records for the golds. "It was the result of months of hard work," Javadi, 23, said in perfect English "learned from movies and TV."

He celebrated on the platform with Iran's large coaching staff, adding: "This was a team effort. Hopefully there will be more medals to come."

Javadi had also participated in Bogotá last year but he was far from fitness after

a back injury and failed to make the podium.

He had to take his form to a new level in an intense preparation for this year's championships, Sajjad Anoushiravani, the head of the Iranian Weightlifting Federation, explained.

"After the Asian Championships there was no day off," said Anoushiravani, and Olympic medalist in 2012.

"We have been in training camps since then, with good nutrition, good coaching, very professional, very progressive.

"Hopefully we will win more medals here."

Djokovic's domination of tennis to continue, Murray says



Novak Djokovic celebrates after defeating Daniil Medvedev in the men's singles final at the US Open in Flushing Meadows, NY, US, on September 10, 2023.
● FRANK FRANKLIN II/AP

BBC – Andy Murray says Novak Djokovic is set to dominate men's tennis for years to come, with a younger generation of players still well below his level.

The Serb, 36, won a record-equalling 24th Grand Slam singles title with victory over Daniil Medvedev in the US Open final in New York on Sunday.

He has no immediate retirement plans.

"It's up to the young guys to be pushing Novak and looking to overtake him. It doesn't look like that's close to happening," Murray told BBC Sport.

"Novak's been an incredible player for a very long time, like Roger and Rafa, it's the longevity and how long they've all been able

to do that for.

"Novak's longevity has been the greatest. He's played at this level for such a long time now." Djokovic was beaten in this year's Wimbledon final by 20-year-old Spaniard Carlos Alcaraz.

Three-time Grand Slam winner Murray, who was speaking on the eve of Great Britain's Davis Cup campaign, said the wrong conclusions were drawn from Djokovic's defeat at SW19.

Murray, 36, added: "I said that after Wimbledon, everyone was saying it was a changing of the guard, but it wasn't for me.

"It was quite clear Novak had won two of the first three slams and was very, very close in the final of Wimbledon.

"He proved that he's the best player in the world again yesterday and like I said it's up to the youngsters to improve enough to take him.

"I don't think he's going to stop at 24 titles, but you never know how long it will last. Physically, motivation, whether someone like Alcaraz improves – he's an amazing player Alcaraz, he's brilliant, but to do what Novak is doing on a consistent basis is different.

"It's not the same as doing it for 15-20 weeks a year like Novak is doing, every time he steps on the court. I do think that Alcaraz will soon get to that level but I don't think this is going to be the last time that Novak wins a Grand Slam."

Dust storms threaten health of Green Mazandaran Province

Social Desk

Mazandaran, a province in central-northern Iran, is renowned for its lush environment which consists of many verdant valleys and forests. Situated along the southern coasts of the Caspian Sea, its sandy beaches attract both local and international tourists. However, even this picturesque region has been affected by an unexpected phenomenon: dust storms.

On August 26, 2023, IRNA reported that Ebrahim Takami, a weather expert from the Mazandaran General Meteorological Department, revealed that the province's eastern areas experienced reduced visibility due to air pollution caused by the arrival of fine dust from Turkmenistan. Just under two weeks later, on September 11, 2023, dust storms affected not only the eastern parts but also some central areas of Mazandaran.

Curiosity arises as to the origin of this dust. While some speculate that the Miankaleh wetlands within the province could be re-

sponsible for the inconvenience faced by the residents, investigations conducted by the province's Meteorological Department and the Department of the Environment point to a different source: the Karakum Desert in Turkmenistan.

Mohammadreza Razavi, the head of the province's Meteorological Department, explained to IRNA that meteorological maps and satellite images clearly indicate that the dust observed in Mazandaran originates from the Karakum Desert. The investigations further reveal that the fine dust is propelled by eastern winds, originating in the desert and making its way to Iran, eventually blanketing the skies of Mazandaran.

One of the most concerning aspects of this situation is the forecast that the dust storms are expected to persist in the future. Iran faces significant challenges in preventing the dust originating in neighboring countries from reaching its mainland due to limited technological capabilities and the overall impact of climate change, as

pointed out by Razavi. The combination of these factors hinders the country's ability to mitigate the arrival of dust particles in Mazandaran and other affected regions.

For several years now, the infiltration of dust has become deeply ingrained in the ecological and health culture of our country. Despite the officials' continuous efforts to combat this phenomenon through various means, ranging from diplomatic initiatives to solutions such as desert mulching, these unwelcome guests still find their way into our skies. This predicament is particularly unsettling considering the lush greenery that characterizes provinces like Mazandaran.

The dust crisis has plagued the southern and western provinces of Iran for years, and now it has extended its reach to the once pristine Mazandaran. In recent years, this crisis has manifested in the form of fine dust, a souvenir from neighboring desert regions such as Syria, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and now Turkmenistan. The severe weather conditions exacerbate

the pollution, leading to repeated closures of offices and schools. The micro dust particles, measuring between 2 to 5.5 microns, result from the combination of dust with urban pollutants. They form a dense cloud that severely impairs visibility, resembling a thick fog that extends only a few meters. Provinces such as Khuzestan, Kurdistan, Ilam, Kermanshah, Lorestan, and Bushehr bear the brunt of this phenomenon. Unfortunately, even the verdant Mazandaran has experienced its presence on certain days over the past few years.

In most affected provinces, people cannot navigate the cities without wearing masks. They have become accustomed to frequent closures due to the hazardous air pollution. In such circumstances the vulnerable individuals, such as the sick, elderly, pregnant women, infants, and minors, are exposed to significant risks. The invisible micro dust, carrying a multitude of bacteria, can enter the bloodstream through inhalation.



China to cooperate with Iran over dust and sand

Social Desk

Head of the Chinese Academy of Forestry stated that the Chinese government is eager to closely collaborate with Iran in curbing dust and sand storms.

China is considering the establishment of a multinational center to tackle the problem of dust and sand storms with the participation of Arab countries in the Middle East, ISNA reported.

"We hope that after the establishment of this center, we could closely cooperate with the Iranian government to counter dust and sand storms," Sun Tao said.

Speaking on the sidelines of the International Conference on Dealing with Sand and Dust Storms, Tao referenced the notable project of the Great Green Wall which is currently the largest ongoing reforestation project worldwide. Initiated in 1978 and planned

for completion around 2050, the project aims to combat the encroachment of the Gobi Desert. Despite some setbacks and failures, it has been largely successful.

The Great Green Wall project primarily focuses on planting trees and shrubs to create a living barrier in the main dust sources of China, including the Gobi and Shapato deserts. Over 32 million hectares of living windbreaks have been established so far, stabilizing the soil in northern China's primary dust sources.

The efforts to combat desertification extend beyond tree planting, with various initiatives aimed at rejuvenating damaged plants in the country's forests and pastures.

China is at the forefront of addressing desertification and dust storms. The Chinese government is ready to assist both Iran and Arab countries in the Middle East in reducing the destructive impact of sand storms in their respective regions.

In addition, China aspires to plant around 70 billion trees across different areas of the country as part of the global initiative of planting one trillion trees.



UNDP: Japan constantly contributes to CIWP

Social Desk

In recent decades, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has collaborated with Iran on various environmental projects, including the Conservation of Iranian Wetlands Project (CIWP) with a particular focus on saving Lake Urmia, supported by Japan's financial assistance.

The Conservation of Asiatic Cheetah Project is also one of these collaborations, initiated in 2002 with UNDP's assistance and funding from the Global Environment Fund, ILNA reported.

However, in 2018, the project was halted, coincid-

ed with the United States' withdrawal from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) and the escalation of unilateral and multilateral sanctions against Iran.

The severe banking sanctions have made it more challenging to secure international financial aid for environmental projects in Iran. Nevertheless, the UN Resident Coordinator for Iran Stefan Priesner has emphasized that "the implementation of the global

program for wetland protection in Iran has never been halted, and the United

Nations remains committed to supporting all initiatives related to the revival of Lake Urmia."

However, he acknowledged that "sanctions have made it more challenging to secure the necessary financial resources for international assistance to Iran."

Limited assistance vs adverse effects of climate change

There are limitations to the international assistance to address climate change-related challenges in Iran. But the resident coordinator of the United Nations believes that Iran, like many other countries, has been able to receive global financial aid, albeit with difficulties.

"Sanctions can affect any country and can make financial conditions difficult for environmental protection. In recent years, Iran, like many other countries, has managed to receive global financial aid. However, sanctions have undoubtedly made it harder for Iran to receive these aids and have led to a

reduction in the amount of international assistance received over the past few years," the envoy said.

According to Priesner, in countries severely affected by climate change, like Iran, the amount of global financial assistance for coping with climate change's consequences may be minimal, given the numerous challenges posed by this phenomenon. Although Iran has the capacity to implement essential projects to address climate change's adverse effects, attracting more financial aid is crucial for their execution.

Combating lake shrinkage Reviving Lake Urmia is another international challenge that has faced failure so far. Recent images capturing the last gasps of the lake depict a stark portrayal of its complete extinction and the severe environmental repercussions in the region. Located between the provinces of East Azarbaijan and West Azarbaijan in northwestern Iran, the lake was the largest in the Middle East and the sixth-largest saltwater lake on Earth

with an original surface area of 5,200 square kilometers in the 1970s. It had shrunk to 700 sq km by 2013. The lake began shrinking in the 1980s due to water mismanagement and climate change.

The UN envoy believes that the sanctions have not had any impact on the provision of financial assistance for the CIWP and especially saving Lake Urmia. He said that the project is supported financially by the Japanese government. Priesner noted that over the past ten years, the Japanese government has generously contributed to the project in Iran, providing one million dollars annually to support it.

He also said that during the past five years, the Iranian government has been exploring various solutions for restoring the lake. However, it's important to note that the Japanese government's financial support for the protection of Iran's wetlands, including Lake Urmia, has continued throughout this period. He emphasized that Japan's contributions have been

consistent and beneficial to the project.

The UN coordinator also highlighted the importance of adopting smart agricultural practices and changing crop choices in the regions surrounding Lake Urmia to reduce water consumption, which plays a crucial role in saving the lake.

Exact numbers of Asiatic cheetah unknown

The UNDP has also collaborated with Iran on the Conservation of Asiatic Cheetah Project that was halted in 2018. Referring to this issue, the envoy emphasized that various factors have contributed to the declining population of Asiatic Cheetahs, with road accidents now playing a significant role alongside hunting. He said the conservation project was terminated due to a natural process and the international financial aid related to this project came to an end.

He concluded that the UNDP does not plan to stop the implementation of this project or any other environmental projects in Iran.



Shahla Riahi, first female director of Iranian cinema

Arts & Culture Desk

Shahla Riahi, was the veteran actress and the first female filmmaker in the history of Iran cinema.

Riahi (1927-2019) started stage acting in 1944. In 1956, she became the first Iranian woman to direct a feature film 'Marjan'. She has acted in over 120 films, plays and TV series.

Before the 1979 Islamic Revolution, there were only a couple of female filmmakers in Iran and Riahi did a great job to direct a movie in the male-dominated film domain.

'Marjan', the 110-minute 35mm, black-and-white film was produced by Arya Film.

In 2015, Riahi was honored in a ceremony at Charsou Cineplex in Tehran which was organized by another renowned female film director and actress Niki Karimi who said, "I congratulate her for being the first woman in Iran who made a film almost 60 years ago. She was really courageous in doing so and paved the way for people like me to continue the path".

'Marjan', was about a group of gypsies who settle near a village. Squeezed by pressures of life, a man from the gypsies steals a sheep from the village. The young teacher of the village traps the man, locking him up in a schoolroom. Marjan, the daughter of the man, goes to the school to visit her father and the teacher falls in love with the girl.

Riahi began her acting career at the age of 17 by a suggestion from her husband, Esmail Riahi, a stage director and screenwriter. Her brilliant performance as the leading actress in director Moezzeddin Fekri's play 'Harun al-Rashid's Policy' presented her as a young, promising talent.



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Iran's 'No Prior Appointment' to compete in Italy

Iran's 'No Prior Appointment', directed by Behrouz Shoeibi and produced by Mahmoud Babaei, is set to take part in the 26th edition of the Religion Today Film Festival, to be held from September 13 to 20 in Trento, Italy.

In its 12th international screening, the film will compete in the Migration and Migrants section of the Italian festival. Religion Today is an international and itinerant film festival dedicated to religious diversity for a culture of peace and inter-faith dialogue.

Recently, the film won the Best Film and Best Leading Actress awards at the 19th Kazan International Festival of Muslim Cinema in Russia.

'No Prior Appointment', a collaborative effort between the Farabi Cinema Foundation and the Image of the City Institute,

tells the story of Yasmin, a woman who returns to her homeland of Iran after years in German exile following her father's passing. Her journey is made all the more challenging by her six-year-old autistic son, but during her brief stay in Iran, she gains a profound insight into the essence of humanity and death.

This outstanding film made its Iranian debut at the 40th Fajr Film Festival in Tehran in 2021, where it earned Golden Simorgh for Best Film from a national perspective. Furthermore, 'No Prior Appointment' received more than 10 awards at the National Will Manifestation Awards, a companion event to the Fajr Film Festival, recognizing films that address key issues championed by various public organizations and institutions.



Iran's theatre ensemble to perform in Pakistan festival

Arts & Culture Desk

Iranian theatrical artists to stage performance in Pakistan's Theatre Festival, which opened in Karachi on September 8 and will run until October 8.

The Pakistani festival will host 'Tik Tok' performance by Petvazh theatre group in the first week of October at the Arts Council of Pakistan Karachi.

Directed by Ahmad Nadaafi, the ensemble consists of Maryam Hashemi, Alireza Kaghazgaran, Reza A'zami-raad and Mehdi Sarsangi, as reported

by Tasnim news agency. The group will also hold workshops for Pakistani theatregoers.

At the invitation of the head of the Pakistan Arts Council, Saeed Talebinia, who is affiliated with the Iranian Embassy in Pakistan and is responsible for the Iran Culture Center in Karachi, attended the opening ceremony of the event as a special guest.

Talebinia elaborated on the advancements in Iranian cinema and theatrical arts during the 44-year period of the Islamic Revolution and expressed



Iran's interest in expanding artistic relations with Pakistan.

"Considering the Islamic

Republic of Iran's interest in cultural diplomacy and its profound impact on neighboring nations,

and upon the invitation of the Pakistani side, the Iran Culture Center, in collaboration with the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance's Performing Arts Center, has taken the necessary steps to have a prominent Iranian theatre group in the festival."

In addition, Punjab Governor Baleegh-ur-Rehman said that art unites people and gives them a channel to express themselves. He added that he was happy to see plays in so many regional and international languages which would help the people of Pakistan to understand each other.

The idea behind the festival is to portray a "soft image" of Pakistan and to bring some respite to masses in difficult economic times, according to ACP President Mohammad Ahmed Shah.

"This is the first time we are having a theatre festival of this scale with international partnerships. We have tried to create diversity as well as unity. We want to send out an image of Pakistan that reflects its people want to prosper despite difficult circumstances," Shah told Arab News at the opening ceremony.

Theatre groups from different countries are participating in the festival and 45 performances in Urdu, English, Persian, Sindhi, Punjabi languages are being presented during the festival. The festival is hosting 27 Pakistani groups as well as seven foreign ensembles.

'Indiana Jones of art world' recovers stolen Van Gogh painting

A Dutch art detective recovered a precious Vincent van Gogh painting that was stolen from a museum in a midnight heist during the coronavirus lockdown three and a half years ago, police said.

Arthur Brand took possession of the missing painting, 'The Parsonage Garden at Nuenen in Spring', painted in 1884 and worth €3m-€6m (£2.6m-£5.2m), at his Amsterdam home on Monday, stuffed in a blue Ikea bag, the Guardian wrote. Brand,

known as the "Indiana Jones of the art world" for tracing a series of high-profile lost artworks, told AFP that confirming the painting was the stolen Van Gogh was "one of the greatest moments of my life". Brand told AFP that frequent calls by him and the Dutch police to hand back the stolen artwork finally paid off when a man, whose identity was not revealed for his own safety, handed Brand the painting in a blue Ikea bag, covered with bubblewrap and stuffed in a pil-

low casing. A video clip supplied by Brand showed him unpacking the painting in his lounge and gasping in astonishment when he realised what it was. "I couldn't believe it," he said. The painting was taken from the Singer Laren Museum near Amsterdam on 30 March 2020 in a heist that made headlines around the world. In April 2021, police arrested a man named in Dutch media as Nils M for the theft. He was later convicted and

sentenced to eight years behind bars. He was also convicted for stealing another masterpiece, by Frans Hals, called 'Two Laughing Boys' in a separate burglary. "After a few months I heard from a source in the criminal world who had bought the Van Gogh," said Brand, who has gained fame for his remarkable recoveries of stolen art, including the "Hitler's Horses" bronze statues, a Picasso painting and a ring that once belonged to Oscar Wilde. This man, identified by Dutch media as Peter Roy K, was behind bars for a separate case involving the large-scale import and export of cocaine, Brand said.