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Iranian researcher wins Kuwait medical prize

Social Desk

Iranian epidemiologist and university professor Davood Khalili was honored with the 2023 State of Kuwait Prize for the Control of Cancer, Cardiovascular Diseases, and Diabetes in the Eastern Mediterranean Region.

The award recognizes Khalili's significant contributions to combating cancer, heart disease, and diabetes, as reported by Tehran's Shahid Beheshti University of Medical Sciences, IRNA wrote.

Khalili, affiliated with the institute of glandular sciences at Shahid Beheshti University, specializes in researching the prevention of metabolic diseases.

The prestigious prize, supported by the Kuwaiti government, is presented annually by the World Health Organization's Eastern Mediterranean Regional Office to individuals who have made important advances in the prevention, control, or research of the aforementioned health conditions.

Fereydoun Azizi, the director of Iran's Institute for Endocrine Sciences, and Afshin Ostovar, a professor at Tehran University of Medical Science, won the same award in 2007 and 2002, respectively.

Khalili emphasized the vital role of organizations like the World Health Organization in addressing prevalent diseases worldwide.

He underscored the importance of their mission to combat common illnesses and enhance public health globally. Plus, he highlighted the WHO's regional offices, including the Eastern Mediterranean region, which annually awards scientists, researchers, and specialists for their noteworthy contributions in the field.

Khalili is focusing on predictive models for cardiovascular diseases and identifying high-risk individuals in both Iran and the world.

Maragheh: 'Fossil paradise' of 10 million years old

When Nikolai Khanykov tripped over a bevy of rocks in Maragheh in 1840 that intrigued him to send a small collection to Russia for examination, what he had in his mind is anybody's guess.

Posted as general consul in nearby Tabriz, Khanykov was at the spearhead of the Russian Cause in Central Asia, the Caucasus, Persia, and Afghanistan, pushing ahead the Oriental activities of Russian imperial diplomacy and the military, Press TV reported.

He spent his last 18 years in France where he published an overwhelming majority of his findings, rousing the curiosity of globetrotting fortune hunters of the West such as German mineralogist Hermann Abich who studied the Maragheh fauna in the latter half of the 19th century.

Domestic enterprisers were no less tantalized. In 1884, a merchant from Tabriz invited Austrian paleontologist H. Pohlig to visit the locality. Two years later, Pohlig had made the first comprehensive collection of the Maragheh Basin, sampling fossils from nearly all sections which are currently held in the Natural History Museum of Vienna.

Two other Austrian paleontologists visited Maragheh later and made an extensive collection of fossils, selling some to the British Museum of Natural History in London.

However, it was the French who made an expedition at a very grand scale to Maragheh in 1904, employing local laborers to excavate a large sample of fossils from the locality and ship them to the Museum of Natural History in Paris.

Over the next century, other expeditions occurred by teams from the US, Japan, Britain, Germany and the Netherlands which scoured every nook and cranny and took away whatever they could from their excavations.

After the Islamic Revolution in 1979, Iran's Department of the Environment (DOE) and National Museum of Natural History (MMTT) sponsored new excavations in the area, which resulted in the nomination of 10 km2 of the Maragheh fossiliferous area as a national protected zone and the establishment of a field museum and research station in the area.

In 2015, Iran repatriated 1,500 fossils dating back to nine million years ago from the United States after a long battle. They had been discovered in Maragheh by paleontologists from Harvard University and transported to the US a year before the Islamic Revolution.

Today, the area has the highest environmental protection level, where eight research excavations have been carried out over the past years and nearly 2,000 unique fossils of vertebrate animals such as elephants, giraffes, saber tooth bears, cows, deer, rhinoceros and horses have been obtained.

The fossil of rhino kept at Maragheh Natural Museum

Chilotherium persiae found in Iran - Miocene, 8 mya, Museum of Natural History, Paris

Elephant tusks, the scull, jaw and movement organs of animals are among the fossils discovered in the excavations.

"Geological and paleontological research shows that these animals are the ancestors of today's animals in Africa," said Gholamreza Zare, the head of the Maragheh Environmental Protection Department.

In July 2021, the DOE director in Iran's East Azarbaijan Province announced that two mammoth tusks dating back to 15 million years ago had been discovered in Maragheh.

Last October, provincial officials announced that some 400 fossils of 10 million-year-old creatures had been discovered in the village of Ahagh near Maragheh.

Maragheh is considered one of the three most preeminent Late Miocene faunas in western Eurasia along with those of Samos in China and Pikermi in Greece.

Compared with Pikermi and Samos, Maragheh is viewed a true "Lagerstätte" or deposit because of the shear abundance and diversity of its fauna. It is unique among the three classical faunas in its clear layer-cake stratigraphy with several, laterally continuous volcanic ashes that are readily amenable to radioisotopic dating.

Investigations have revealed that the Maragheh fauna spans from a range of 9.5 to 6.5 million years and presents an especial correlation with that of Saloniki in Greece and Mt. Luberon in France in addition to Samos and Pikermi, comprising the so-called Pontian mammals' communities.

Also referred as the "Maragheh fossil paradise" by paleontologists, the area in northwest Iran is one of the most unique geosites around the world whose specimens answer to important questions about mammals evolution.

Replete with outcrops of unique mammal fossils, such as ancient elephants, rhinos, giraffes, mastodons, extinct three-toed hipparion horses, etc., findings from the region can be applied to understand paleoenvironments and model and forecast weather and climate changes.

Research on fossil paleo diet indicates grazing, feeding, and browsing among an abundance of mixed taxa in the area, suggesting Maragheh nurtured a significantly wooded environment.

Today, it is among 12 Iranian cities with a background of being a capital and one of the 10 cities with the largest number of historical monuments, but its plot of dominantly bushy vegetation is empty of any wooded setting.

Domestic cancer radiopharmaceutical unveiled

Iran achieves 99% self-sufficiency in pharmaceutical production

Social Desk

Heidar Mohammadi, the head of Iran's Food and Drug Administration (IFDA), highlighted the country's self-sufficiency in meeting its health needs domestically and emphasized the importance of supporting technology-based companies.

In addition, he announced the introduction of radiopharmaceuticals, an effective cancer treatment drug, ISNA wrote.

Mohammadi made these remarks during the opening ceremony of the second exhibition of technology-based products in the field of food, medicine, and medical equipment, titled 'Health-Based 2', being held from January 14 to 16.

He noted that a significant part of the products from technology-based firms is being unveiled for the first time at this exhibition.

Mohammadi stated, "This year, the exhibition begins with a growth of over 100% compared to last year due to the presence of technology-based companies, with approximately 200 such companies participating. The increase reflects the growing interest and development of technology-based initiatives in the health sector."

He added, "Last Iranian calendar year (March 21, 2022, to March 20, 2023), around 21% of drugs were valued over $1 million, of which 10% surpassed $3 million. As we move towards developing technology-based firms, production increases, and overall costs decrease. Our policy is to support these enterprises to enhance production."

Mohammadi highlighted Iran's transformation by achieving pharmaceutical self-sufficiency, stating, "Before the 1979 Islamic Revolution, only 20% of the country's needs were met by domestic companies, and the rest were imports or produced by multinational companies. However, today, 99% of the country's pharmaceutical needs are met domestically."

He emphasized the significance of connecting universities with industries, noting that Iran has approximately 12,000 pharmaceutical students who need to be connected to the industry. "With the support of government, we hope to witness technological growth and development in the country, achieving complete self-sufficiency in the health sector soon," he said.

The head of the IFDA underscored that the exhibition would feature the unveiling of 11 pieces of medical equipment and 12 pharmaceuticals, including one traditional medicine.