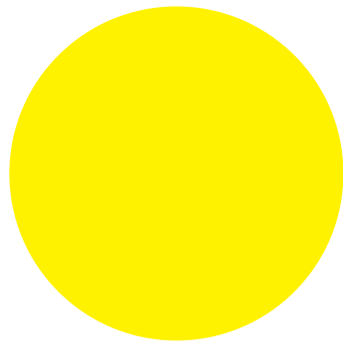


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NEWS IN BRIEF

Iran's non-oil exports to Afghanistan up 41% in 2-month period

The commercial attaché of Iran in Afghanistan said that Iran's non-oil export to the neighboring country registered a 41 percent growth in the first two months of the current Iranian calendar year (started March 20, 2024) compared to the same period last year.

Iran's export of non-oil goods to Afghanistan increased by \$102m in the first two months of the year, showing a 41% hike compared to last year's corresponding period, Hossein Roustaei said.

He added that Afghanistan is Iran's sixth export target market and that the neighboring country is one of the export target countries with the highest positive balance of trade with Iran, Tasnim reported.

He put the volume of Iran's export of non-oil goods to Afghanistan from March 19 to May 22, 2024, at \$350 million, showing a 41 percent increase compared to the same period last year. In this period, Iran exported 181,000 tons of non-oil goods to Afghanistan, Roustaei noted.

Light oils, oil products, oil gases, ingot, iron, steel, compound, polyethylene, light- and heavy hydrocarbons, foodstuff, urea, tomato, tree apples, cement, types of polyethylene, potatoes, fresh fruits and vegetables, orange and infant formula were the main products exported from Iran to the neighboring country, he stated.

Iran imported more than \$7m of products from Afghanistan between March 19 and May 22, 2024, he added.

Iran, Russia call for boosting transit via INSTC

Officials from Iran and Russia emphasized the need to boost transit via the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) and developing rail cooperation between the two countries aimed at increasing the transport of goods and commodities. In a meeting with Special Aide to the Russian President Igor Levitin and Chairperson of the State Duma's Committee on International Affairs Leonid Slutsky, Iran's Minister of Roads and Urban Development Mehrdad Bazrpash stressed the need to develop transit and implement construction operation of the Rasht-Astara Railway, Mehr reported.

During the meeting, the two sides discussed the latest situation of accelerating the implementation of the construction operation of the 164-km Rasht-Astara railway, increasing the volume of transit through Iran and completing the construction operation of the INSTC.

11 solar power plants come into operation

Iran boosts solar panel production

Economic Desk

Iran's Ministry of Energy on Monday inaugurated 11 solar power plants across six provinces, along with a hydroelectric power plant and a wind power plant, and unveiled the country's second solar panel production line with a capacity of 1800 megawatts annually. Through a video call during his visit to Markazi Province on Monday, Energy Minister Ali Akbar Mehrooz launched 11 solar power plants, a hydroelectric power plant, and a wind power plant with a confirmed capacity of 74 megawatts in Khorasan Razavi, Markazi, Qom, Kerman, Yazd, Semnan, and Lorestan provinces, ILNA reported.

The first phase of a 100-megawatt solar power plant in Mahallat, Markazi Province, the first phase of a 40-megawatt solar power plant in Sirjan, and a 3-megawatt plant in Mahan, Kerman Province, a 4-megawatt solar power plant in Pak Bana, Qom Province, 10-megawatt solar power plants in Khezrabad, two 500-kilo-

watt plants in Atrabad 3, two-megawatt Atrabad 2, and a one-megawatt plant in Nayeen, Yazd Province, 10-megawatt solar power plants in Jovein and 10-megawatt Naqab in Khorasan Razavi Province, and a 6-megawatt Pak Saman in Semnan Province were put into operation during the Monday ceremony.

Moreover, during this ceremony, a 10-megawatt wind power plant in Khaf, Khorasan Razavi Province, and a 3-megawatt hydroelectric power plant in Aligudarz, Lorestan Province, began operating.

Iran has also joined the group of countries with the capability to manufacture and export solar panels, thanks to the launch of its own 1,800-megawatt production line.

On Monday, the country's second solar panel production line was inaugurated with a capacity of 1800 megawatts per year. The factory consists of two production lines of 900 megawatts each, creating the capability to produce different solar panels ranging from 550 to 700 watts



● FARS

for the country for the first time. It incorporates the latest and most accurate technologies in the world. According to the report, the opening of this production

line enables the country to produce a high-quality solar panel every 22 seconds. Considering that in 2021, the first production line with a capacity of 500

megawatts had become operational, the total annual capacity of the factory has reached 2300 megawatts. The report added that, due to the use of state-of-the-art

technologies in the factory, the power output of solar panels has reached over 700 watts and has directly created employment for more than 400 individuals.

Iran urges collaboration with Pakistan to enhance bilateral trade



Iran's Acting President Mohammad Mokhber emphasized the importance of collaborative efforts with Pakistan to boost bilateral trade to \$10 billion, a target established by the two governments during a visit by the late Iranian president Ebrahim Raisi to Islamabad earlier this year.

● AFP

Mokhber made these remarks on Sunday during a phone conversation with Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, IRNA reported.

The Iranian acting president said that the two countries set strategic goals during Raisi's visit to Islamabad in April, including the aim of increasing bilateral trade to \$10 billion, which he expressed would be achieved in the near future through joint efforts and removing obstacles in the way of trade cooperation.

Mokhber also mentioned a significant gas pipeline project between the two neighboring countries, calling on the Pakistani side to expedite the project's progress. He also announced Iran's readiness to help in removing the existing obstacles.

The Islamic Republic of Iran considers Pakistan as a strategic partner, Mokhber said, adding that the authorities of both countries are determined to promote relations in political, economic and cultural fields through using all available capacities.

The Pakistani premier, on his part, described his country's relations with Iran as historical and based on deep cultural and religious commonalities. He said that Islamabad is ready to strengthen its ties with Tehran, especially in economy and trade.

Sharif also said that the late president Raisi's visit to Pakistan opened a new chapter in ties between the two countries, reiterating Islamabad's commitment to implementing the agreements reached during that trip, including the increase of bilateral trade to \$10 billion and removing obstacles in the way of implementing the joint gas pipeline project.

Local companies seal deals to develop two Iranian oil fields

Economic Desk

The Iranian Oil Ministry on Sunday handed over two underdeveloped oil fields to local companies to help crank up crude production by 78,000 barrels per day (bpd).

The shared Changuleh oil field near the border with Iraq will be developed under a 20-year-long deal between the National Iranian Oil Co. (NIOC), which is owned by the Iranian Oil Ministry, and the Oil Industries Engineering and Construction (OIEC).

Located five kilometers north of the Iran-Iraq border in the western Ilam province, the Changuleh oil field is estimated to have 4.8 billion

barrels of crude oil in place, according to Shana News Agency. The project, which will see the OIEC financing \$1.251 billion in direct investment, is part of a broader program aimed at maximizing extraction from shared oil fields by employing private Iranian exploration and production firms.

It includes the drilling of 25 new oil wells to churn out 60,000 bpd and the construction of surface installations, such as a central oil and gas processing facility, oil and gas pipelines, and wellhead equipment.

The oil field is expected to yield 228 million barrels of crude oil during the timespan and bring in some \$13 billion in revenue. It will also ensure a constant supply of feedstock to a nearby gas and liquid gas processing plant. This is the second oil field in Ilam that the NIOC has turned over this year to a local firm for development. In March, the state-owned company signed "the biggest deals in a decade" to develop six oil fields, including Azar in Ilam which is shared with Iraq. Speaking on the sidelines of the ceremony to ink the deals on Sunday, June 16, Oil Minister Javad Owji said his ministry had launched 300 oil projects worth \$130 billion, out of which 153 ventures valued at \$34 billion had already been completed.

The NIOC also finalized a deal with the Mapna Oil & Gas Development to further develop the Band-e-Karkheh oil field in the southwestern Khuzestan province to add 18,000 bpd to Iran's daily crude oil production.

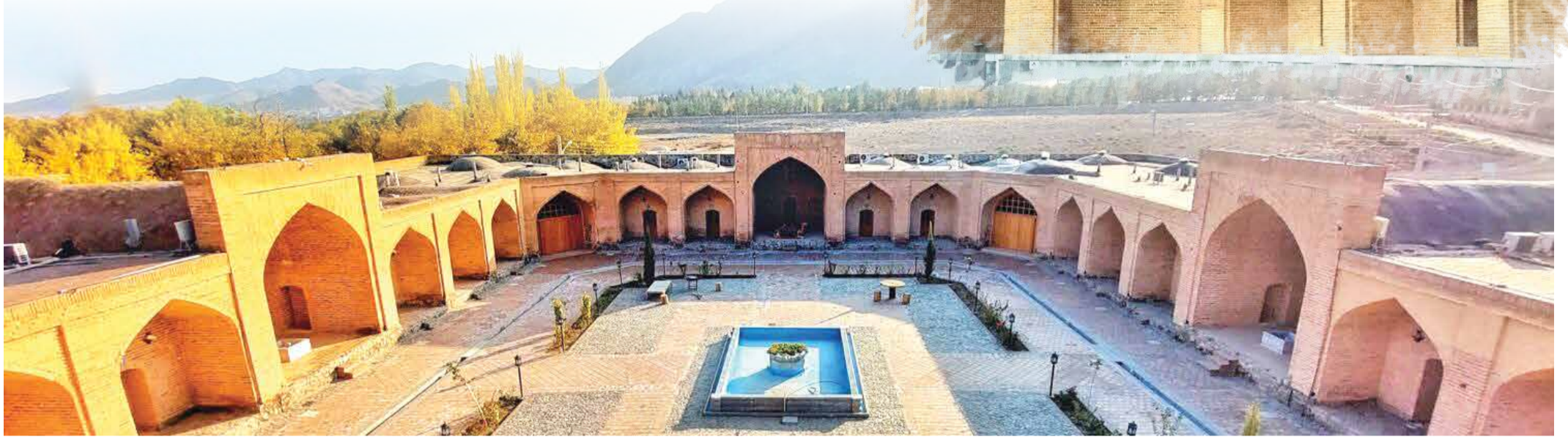
Just 20 kilometers away from the provincial capital of Ahvaz, Band-e-Karkheh holds nearly 1 billion barrels of in-situ crude in its reservoir. The company in charge, which is a subsidiary of Iran's industrial giant Mapna group, will invest \$435 million to drill 14 wells in the Band-e-Karkheh oil field.

As per the contract, 56.6 million barrels of crude are estimated to be produced during a 15-year timeframe, earning the government nearly \$3.5 billion.



● IRNA

Kuhab Caravanserai, an architectural marvel in Natanz



● soroosh-travels.com

Natanz, situated in Isfahan Province, stands out as a picturesque city with diverse climate conditions: cold, mild, and desert. The central area of Natanz enjoys a mild climate, ideal for agricultural pursuits, earning it the moniker Bagh-e Shahr or City's Garden. Within this charming locale lies a treasure trove of historical sites and tourist attractions, including the renowned Kuhab Caravanserai.

This historical gem, alternatively known as Robat-e Kuhab, Kuhab Castle, Natanz Caravanserai, and Abu al Ma'ali Caravanserai, is located in Shahid Beheshti Boulevard in Natanz. Recognized for its cultural significance, Kuhab Caravanserai was officially enlisted on the Iran's National Heritage List in 1977.

Tracing its origins back to the Safavid era under the reign of Shah Abbas I, this architectural mar-

vel was commissioned by Abul Ma'ali Barz-Rudi, a trusted emir of Shah Abbas, also referred to as Agha Mir. The caravanserai's legacy is intertwined with the history of the region, reflecting the rich heritage of Natanz.

This caravanserai, boasting a spacious area of approximately 3,962 square meters, is nestled within the enchanting surroundings of a garden known as Bagh-e Haram, owing to its proximity to the shrine (haram) of Imamzadeh Shahzadeh Abdullah. Adorning the garden is a grand water fountain, adding to the serene ambiance of the place. Furthermore, overlooking this serene setting is another notable historical site, Gonbad-e Baz, perched on the Shahin Peak in the Karkas Mountain, offering a picturesque view from the caravanserai.

Within the confines of Kuhab Caravanserai are 23 rooms, four spa-

cious *ivans*, a sizable courtyard, a forecourt, and an entrance portal graced with a stone inscription. The imposing portal entrance of the caravanserai is strikingly tall, commanding attention. Adorned with intricate Thuluth script, the inscription on the entrance portal reveals details about the year

of construction and the esteemed builders behind this architectural marvel.

At the entrance, a sturdy wooden door stands guard, offering passage into the caravanserai. Surrounding this entrance are stairs that wind their way up to the roof of the caravanserai, featuring

platforms where guards could seek respite and keep watch over the surroundings.

Moreover, atop the caravanserai's roof are guard quarters, specifically designated for the stationed guards tasked with safeguarding the premises.

The north wing of Kuhab Caravanserai boasts 10 porches, positioned on either side of the entrance portal. These porches each adorned with a roof, served as additional spaces for gatherings when the main building accommodations reached capacity. Upon crossing the portal, visitors are greeted by the expansive caravanserai courtyard. At the heart of this courtyard sits a sizable fountain measuring 7x14 square meters, a vital water source essential for meeting the needs of the weary travelers and caravans passing through. Surrounding the courtyard

are extensive roofed corridors on all four sides, each adorned with *takhtgah* that lead to small booths. *Takhtgah*, serving as spacious corridors adjoining the halls, offer passage to various parts of the caravanserai. Noteworthy is the moment where, after a brief walk of 10 meters, the courtyard corridor diverges into two branches, stretching towards the left and right and granting access to the rooms situated behind the grand *ivan*.

Furthermore, a unique feature of this caravanserai is the presence of custom stone hitching posts, signaling a bygone era where horses and cattle found shelter within its walls. These stone posts, meticulously placed, served as reliable anchors for tethering horses and cattle, embodying the rich historical significance of this renowned site.



● ISNA

Harsin kilim, a legacy of handwoven excellence from Iran



● fartaknews.com

Kilims are handwoven textiles produced on looms without the use of knots. Traditionally used as floor coverings, they are prominent among the handicrafts of village and nomadic people in Iran. Harsin, located in Kermanshah Province, serves as a significant hub for kilim weaving in the country. Its handwoven products, known internationally as Harsin kilims, are renowned for their quality.

The abundance of animal husbandry in Harsin has led many men and women to take up kilim-making. The region's production of high-quality wool in Kermanshah and nearby cities ensures the use of one hundred percent natural materials, a distinct feature of Harsin kilims. There are similarities between Harsin kilims and *shiriki pich*



● ISNA

of Sirjan, suggesting a potential influence on each other over time. However, Harsin kilims are unique for being double-sided, with backgrounds typically in dark blue or red, complemented by colors such as white, green, and crimson red.

Geographically situated south of the ancient city of Kangavar, Harsin has a historical association with kilims

dating back at least two centuries, as evidenced by reliefs in surrounding archaeological sites. The intricate motifs found in Harsin kilims, stemming from memory and passed down through generations, encompass four main categories: figurative, animals, floral, and objects. These motifs, each with its local name, draw inspiration from the region's natural environment and

surroundings.

Weavers in Harsin use these inspirations to create abstract designs that are then reflected in kilims. Animal motifs feature abstract interpretations of various creatures like ducks, butterflies, cats, rabbits, jackals, scorpions, sparrows, and snakes. Today, the kilims are not only found in Harsin but also in the cities of Gilan-e Gharb,



● IRNA

Eslamabad-e Gharb, and Javanroud. The majority of kilims from Harsin are the same colour combination and design. However, the wool and dyes used are of the highest quality, and their products always have a certain sheen and depth of colour. The terracotta triple medallion is woven on a blue ground framed with a triple border. The design is a very pretty stylized swan.

CEO of SpecialEurasia Silvia Boltuc:

Raisi forge new paths in int'l relations

Iranians' culture, identity theirs, not others



The late Iranian president Ebrahim Raisi (front row-2nd L) and his fellow BRICS leaders pose for a family photo during the closing day of the BRICS summit at the Sandton Convention Center in Johannesburg, South Africa, on August 24, 2023.

● PER-ANDERS PETERSSON/
GETTY IMAGES

INTERVIEW EXCLUSIVE

For decades, Iran has been vilified in Western media and political discourse, often portrayed as a hostile, terrorist state. This negative portrayal can be attributed to a variety of factors, including historical tensions, political agendas, and a tendency to exoticize and Orientalize Iranian culture. This narrative has been perpetuated by politicians, news media, and popular culture, shaping a reductive and often inaccurate image of Iran. Despite friendly gestures from Iranians, Western media often

focuses instead on negative stereotypes and fueling xenophobic paranoia. As a result, the complex and diverse nature of Iran and its people is often overlooked, giving way to simplistic and damaging portrayals.

That is why Iran Daily conducted an exclusive interview with Silvia Boltuc to discuss how her views about Iran have changed after her brief visit to the Middle Eastern country that has been the subject of many misrepresentations and vilifications in Western media for a number of years.

Silvia Boltuc is the founder and managing director of SpecialEurasia. She has carved out a

niche as an international affairs specialist, business consultant, and political analyst. Boltuc has helped private and public institutions make informed decisions by providing in-depth reports, risk assessments, and tailored consultancy services. Through her work and reporting trips across Europe, the Middle East, Southeast Asia, and the post-Soviet countries, she has built an impressive network of local contacts while assessing their domestic dynamics and situations on the ground.

Boltuc also wears another hat as the director of the Energy & Engineering Department at the Centro Studi Eurasia Medi-

terraneo (CeSEM). She lends her expertise as an editor and analyst to prominent Italian media agencies, including Notizie Geopolitiche, Opinio Juris, and European Affairs Magazine. Prior to her current roles, she held the position of associate director at ASRIE Analytica. With a talent for languages, she is fluent in Italian, English, German, Russian, and Arabic. Boltuc is also the co-author of the book 'Conflitto in Ucraina: rischio geopolitico, propaganda jihadista e minaccia per l'Europa' (2022), offering valuable insights into the complex dynamics of the Ukraine conflict and its implications for Europe.



IRAN DAILY: Before you came to Iran, what was your attitude towards the country? Was it more aligned with that of the Western media?

BOLTUC: As a political analyst, I have produced analyses of different countries over the years based on verified sources and a balanced perspective that encompasses the various trends and dynamics of those countries. Since Iran is among the primary focus of the consultancy organi-

zation I direct, SpecialEurasia, it was crucial for me to visit the country to gain a deeper understanding of its dynamics and policies. This includes engaging with locals and conducting interviews with various representatives.

As a Western expert, I am often exposed to Western media, which tends to have a one-sided view of Iran and focuses primarily on negative aspects even though there are some scholars and experts who have deeply

investigated the country and described it without falling for such common stereotypes. My research, in particular, delves into different levels of Iranian society, allowing me to appreciate the beauty and diversity of the Iranian landscape. Approaching Iran with an open mind, I aim to expand my knowledge of its remarkable culture and understand the institutions' strategies for improving the country's condition.

When you came to Iran and saw it up close, how different did you find the reality you saw here from the image the Western media had created for you? Has your view of this country and its people changed?

Following Western media, one might get the impression that every Iranian is an extremist with an anti-imperialist attitude. However, what always impresses me is the normali-

ty of the Iranian people. Many Iranians don't even follow politics and lead peaceful lives, focusing on their careers and families. Remarkably, their kindness and warm hospitality stand out, especially when they realize you are a foreign guest. During my trip, I encountered several logistical problems and always found someone willing to help me, even though they didn't know me personally. Another aspect I appreciate

about Iranians is their openness in sharing their views on global dynamics and helping navigate the common misunderstandings about Iran prevalent in my part of the world. Generally, Western media fail to represent every layer of Iranian society, often interviewing people in a biased and instrumental manner. As an analyst, I believe that all perspectives should be relayed honestly and without judgment.

Specifically, what did you think of Iranian women before visiting Iran and how would you describe them now?

Undoubtedly, Iranian women

are far more intelligent than they are often portrayed. Many are highly educated, modern, and capable of balancing conservative values like family with successful careers. Their role in

society is growing positively and constructively. They genuinely want to contribute to the country's growth and take pride in being Iranian. Naturally, there is a genera-

tional struggle common to all societies, with some women strongly supporting a conservative lifestyle while younger ones seek to reinterpret their roles in a more modern context.

Although Western media often portray this as a uniquely Iranian issue, I have observed similar dynamics in my own country, Italy. However, I believe that navigating this change while

preserving Iranian culture and identity should be an internal matter for the Iranian people, free from external manipulation that could harm the country.

Generally, Western media fail to represent every layer of Iranian society, often interviewing people in a biased and instrumental manner. I believe all perspectives should be relayed honestly and without judgment.

As the head of a consultancy organization that also researches Iranian issues, what is your opinion about the Islamic Republic of Iran and its trajectory in the world?

Undoubtedly, going back in history, Iran dramatically changed its allies after the Islamic Revolution. Decades past the Iran-Iraq war, I think it remains a pivotal moment in shaping Iran's geopolitical strategy. Attacked and isolated, Iran developed a strong sense of the need to protect its borders. Like major powers, Iran began working on multiple fronts: creating buffer zones by exerting influence along its borders, improving its military, and developing tactical strategies that build resilience for future confrontations.

In modern times, international isolation due to sanctions has driven Iran

to develop an indigenous industry, striving for self-sustainability and fostering regionalism. This approach has proven effective in alleviating economic pressure, as Iran has forged new partnerships with Eurasian countries, developed regional corridors, and established itself as a strategic hub.

Iran possesses immense untapped potential due to its resources and strategic geographical location, not to mention its diverse landscape, environment, and historical heritage. Despite sanctions, Iran has managed to be considered a major power on the global stage through a combination of military strength and regional networking strategies. If sanctions were lifted, Iran's potential would be further unlocked, though it would require investment and sustainable development to realize it fully.



Female journalists who flew from all across the world to participate in Iran's Khorshedd Media Festival mingle with Iranians on stage at the close of a day of the event in Mashhad, Iran, in September 2023. **QUDS DAILY**

You came to Iran last year and participated in some events. Tell us about your experience of attending these events.

My trip was an insightful experience that began with the Khorshedd Media Festival, which offered a valuable glimpse into the world of women in the media for international female journalists. The event featured experts from around the

globe discussing how women's roles in modern society have evolved and the challenges they face in balancing family, education, and careers.

As a woman from a Western country, I had the opportunity to meet Iranian women who live traditional lifestyles and understand their perspectives, which are rarely covered in my home

country. I approached them sincerely, aiming to learn about their opinions, values, and choices. An important highlight was attending a lecture by the late president Raisi's wife, who presented the government's view on women's issues. The second part of my trip focused on a different professional objective. The past year, I was working on a project called

'Persian Files,' which involved researching Iranian free trade-industrial zones. I was fortunate to secure an interview with the authorities of the Qeshm Free Zone on Qeshm Island, one of Iran's most significant free zones in the Persian Gulf. I spent a week exploring the investment environment developed by the Qeshm Free Zone Organization, including their

main goals and assets such as ports, industrial facilities, natural resources, eco-tourism, historical heritage, and geosites. The outcome of this visit was a detailed report that I shared with the Italian-Iranian Chamber of Commerce and other institutions, with the hope of fostering future relations between our countries.



Managing Director of Special Eurasia Silvia Boltuc (R) and Javad Hasheminejad, the secretary-general of Habilian Association, an Iranian human rights NGO, pose for a photo in front of a wall covered with information about terrorist activities of Mujahedeen Khalq Organization (MKO) in Iran, during their meeting in Mashhad, Iran, in 2023. **IBRAHEEM ABU MUSTAFA/REUTERS**

How do you evaluate Iran's regional policy during the presidency of the late Ebrahim Raisi? What do you think are its outstanding facets?

As my area of expertise is geopolitics, I will focus on highlighting the major achievements of Ebrahim Raisi's presidency specifically in this field.

Although the president did not solely shape the country's foreign policy, the Raisi government had distinct characteristics. Under president Raisi, indeed, Tehran pursued two foreign policies: regionalism and "Look to the East".

The first outcome of this strategy was Tehran's shift toward new alliances and the restoration of ties with some neighboring countries. Iran and Saudi Arabia re-established relations after years of tension. Notably, on May 25, King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa of Bahrain also expressed his country's willingness to establish normal diplomatic, trade, and cultural relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran. Although this occurred after the helicopter crash, I believe this achievement can be attributed to the Raisi presidency. It is also important to acknowledge that foreign minister Amir-Abdollahian

played a key role in Iran's diplomatic efforts to reshape its regional network of alliances.

The reintegration of Syria into the Arab League was another notable event, especially given Iran's strong alliance with the Syrian government. Syria had been a significant point of friction between Tehran and Riyadh. So, Damascus' return to the Arab League signaled a clear willingness among these major players to de-escalate tensions and build new relations for regional stability.

Talking about the Arab League, I should mention the renewed relations with Egypt, which could favor Iran's recent policy toward Africa. Despite initial optimism during Muslim Brotherhood's leadership over Egypt, differences emerged over Iran's support for Bashar al-Assad. The phone call on December 23, 2023, between president Raisi and Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, to extend congratulations on al-Sisi's recent re-election, was welcomed as a new chapter in the relations between the two countries.

As for Africa, president Ebrahim Raisi embarked on a three-country trip to Africa in mid-July 2023, marking the first time an Iranian

president has undertaken such a visit in over 11 years.

As demonstrated by Turkey being the only NATO country to hang the flag at half-mast after the helicopter incident that killed president Raisi and his companions, Ankara and Tehran are also seeking closer ties. It is reasonable to believe that the Palestinian issue has led several Sunni-majority countries to enhance their cooperation with the Islamic Republic.

As a result of the Look to the East policy, Iran has cultivated closer relations with Russia and China as well. The message of condolence from the Russian president following Raisi's death clearly showed the high level of cooperation between Moscow and Tehran, encompassing initiatives such as the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) and joint naval drills. Meanwhile, China brokered the normalisation of relations with Saudi Arabia and invested significantly in key Iranian infrastructure projects, such as the Persian Gulf Bridge.

In recent years, Iran's policies have also brought Tehran closer to Central Asia, the Caucasus, and India, all of which are attracted by Iran's strategic location and its ports.

What would you like to say to Iranian women as someone who has been able to meet them up close and bridge the gap between fiction and facts?

When I talk to European colleagues who have also had the chance to meet Iranian women during trips or work meetings, the most common remark is their amazement at the Iranian women's high level of education. Generally, they are seen as strong and well-equipped. My own experience not only confirms this im-

pression but also reveals that they are extremely kind and welcoming. Even though my time in Iran was brief, I have developed significant friendships with women from various segments of Iranian society over time. These inspiring individuals continuously teach me new things.

Given the importance of family in Iranian culture, women should know that they are central to their society's tapestry. Additionally, their contributions in sports, science, and academia are becoming increasingly prominent for outside viewers.



People stroll by a lake in Iran as Iranian flags on strings wave in the wind. **SHARGH**

By listing all these restoration or improvements in ties with other countries, one may get the impression that Iran put all its eggs in one basket under Raisi.

That can't be further from the truth. For example, undoubtedly, under Raisi, Iran has increased its indigenous military production, particularly of drones. This development has raised concerns in Western circles, but it has also enhanced Iran's capability to export arms and bolstered its resilience in the face of heavy sanctions in this sector.

Other notable successes of Raisi were the approval of Iran's bid for membership in BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO)

as a full member, as well as the signing of a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), which represents a significant milestone in Iran's regional economic integration.

Defining Raisi's actions regarding relations with the West is more challenging. Even though nuclear negotiations were being handled by the current Foreign Minister Ali Bagheri, no agreement has been reached yet.

The Israeli military intervention in Gaza has further strained relations, with Iran supporting the resistance axis and the US and its European allies steadfastly backing Israel. However, while the Palestinian issue has distanced some Western actors from Iran, it

has also brought some regional powers closer to Tehran. The conflict in Ukraine and Iran's close ties with Russia have further soured relations with Brussels.

Still, according to many analysts, under Raisi's government, Tehran, while not avoiding negotiation tables, has essentially turned away from the West and generally sought to redirect the country's future relations towards the East and the so-called Global South. In general, Iran has been one of the countries advocating for a multipolar order of world powers, focusing more on forging new alliances during this historical shift rather than meeting Western demands regarding its foreign policies.

Esteghlal Khuzestan parts ways with Pourmousavi



● TASNIM

Iranian top flight football club Esteghlal Khuzestan parted company with its head coach Sirous Pourmousavi.

Pourmousavi helped the Ahvaz-based football club avoid relegation from the 2023-2024 Iran Professional League (IPL), reported Tasnim News Agency. Esteghlal Khuzestan defeated Havadar 3-1 in its last match to remain in the IPL.

The win saw Esteghlal Khuzestan end the campaign in 14th place on 28 points in the final standing.

Iran's ShahrDari fourth in 2024 BCL Asia



● TASNIM

ShahrDari Gorgan of Iran lost to Japanese B.LEAGUE champion Hiroshima Dragonflies 81-76 in the 2024 BCL Asia Bronze medal match.

It was revenge for the Dragonflies who had lost to this same team earlier in the Group Phase, 94-81, wrote Tasnim News Agency.

Ryo Yamazaki finished with 18 points on 6 three-pointers to lead the Dragonflies, while Kerry Blackshear (17 points, 9 rebounds, 4 assists) and Dwayne Evans (16 points, 9 rebounds, and 7 assists).

Fourth-placed ShahrDari Gorgan wrapped up its season in FIBA club competitions with its starters all scoring in double-digits. Breakout star Sina Vahedi finished strong with 21 points.

Iran secures Olympic berth with female archer Fallah

Iranian female archer Mobbina Fallah has secured her spot for the 2024 Paris Olympics by ranking among the top eight athletes at the 2024 Final World Quota Tournament in Turkey.

Iran's Fallah triumphed over her Kazakhstan's opponent with a score of 6-2 in the Round of 16, advancing to the tournament's top eight and securing her qualification for the 2024 Paris Olympics, IRNA reported. The Final World Quota Tournament for the 2024 Paris Olympics was held in Antalya, Turkey from June 14 to 17.

Noshad Alamiyan secures Olympic spot in latest world rankings

Iranian table tennis player Noshad Alamiyan secured his spot in the 2024 Olympic Games.

His brother Nima had qualified for the Games a month ago by grabbing the gold medal at the Central Asia Regional Olympic Qualification held in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, reported Mehr News Agency.

As the countdown to the Paris 2024 Olympic Games intensifies, ITTF announced significant progress in the qualification process for the Paris 2024 Olympic Games.

With the Games now under 50 days away, this week's world ranking update has seen eight athletes secure their participation based on the selection of Continental quotas allocated by World Ranking.

With only one more world ranking update scheduled before the final roster for Paris is confirmed, the qualification process reaches its penultimate stage. Next week's world rankings will be crucial, determining the final competitors for the highly anticipated Paris 2024 Games.



● MEHR

England hang on to beat Serbia 1-0 with Bellingham header

A powerful first-half header by Jude Bellingham sent England on the way to a successful launch of their Euro 2024 campaign with a 1-0 win over Serbia on Sunday that began confidently but saw the Three Lions clinging on for the points by the end.

The excellent Bellingham stormed into the box to connect with Bukayo Saka's deflected cross that sailed across the box perfectly for the 20-year-old midfielder to put the Euro 2020 runners-up ahead from close range in the 13th minute, Reuters wrote.

The result put England top of Group C after Denmark and Slovenia drew 1-1 earlier on Sunday.

Bellingham, who began the move for the only goal himself, set the tempo for much of England's attacking play and was cheered to the rafters of the cavernous Arena AufSchalke by the army of Three Lions fans bellowing



England's Jude Bellingham celebrates scoring their first goal.

● REUTERS

his name.

Gareth Southgate's attack-minded team initially found space down the right as Saka linked up with full back Kyle Walker, whose surging runs threatened to help add to England's advantage.

But after the break, Serbia began to threaten and England showed little of their earlier fluency. The tally of 11 shots by the final whistle – six by Serbia, five from England – was the lowest in a European Championship

match since at least 1980, according to Opta data. Bellingham took issue when asked by reporters if England's loss of momentum showed the team remained a work in progress. "I don't agree with that," he

said. "I think the first half shows why we can score goals against any team and the second half shows why we can keep a clean sheet against any team."

Serbia improve

Serbia upped their game at the start of the second half after bringing on Ivan Ilic for defensive midfielder Nemanja Gudelj, and before long striker Dusan Vlahovic swept a cross dangerously across England's box, rousing their fans.

Serbia coach Dragan Stojkovic doubled down on his switch to a more attacking shape as Dusan Tadic and Luka Jovic came off the bench with just over an hour played.

Southgate responded by introducing the hard-running Conor Gallagher – replacing Trent Alexander-Arnold playing in an unfamiliar midfield role. Another substitute, Jarrod Bowen, delivered a pinpoint cross for captain

Harry Kane, whose header was pushed onto the bar by goalkeeper Predrag Rajkovic in the 77th minute.

Five minutes later, a fierce Vlahovic shot was tipped over by Jordan Pickford as Serbia kept up the pressure.

But England, with an unfamiliar-looking defence that featured the impressive Marc Guehi, playing in a major tournament for the first time, and right-footed Kieran Trippier standing in as left back, held out for the win.

Kane acknowledged the performance was not a classic by England. "Overall a deserved win. It's just about getting through," said the England captain.

"There was a spell in the second half where we got camped in our box and we found it hard to get out but it was an important win tonight."

England next play Denmark on Thursday after Serbia take on Slovenia.

Mbappe rules out playing at Paris Games after Real Madrid move

Kylian Mbappe confirmed on Sunday he will not play for France's Olympic team at the Paris Games as his new club Real Madrid are against the idea.

The 25-year-old said in March that he was keen on playing at his home Games but since the Olympic soccer tournament is not on

FIFA's calendar clubs are not obliged to release their players, Reuters reported.

Mbappe was not included in a 25-man preliminary squad for the Olympics earlier this month, though head coach Thierry Henry left the door open.

"My club's position was very clear, so from that moment

on, I think I (knew) I won't be taking part in the Games," Mbappe told reporters ahead of Monday's Group D match against Austria at Euro 2024. "That's just the way it is, and I understand that too. I'm joining a new team in September, so it's not the best way to start an adventure. "I'm going to wish this

French team all the best. I'm going to watch every game. I hope they'll win the gold medal."

The men's Olympic football competition begins on July 24, 10 days after the European Championships final, and ends on Aug. 9.



● REUTERS



Israel's PM dissolves war cabinet

Countdown begins for Netanyahu's downfall

Political tension in Israel over the conduct of the regime's war on the Gaza

Strip spilled out into public view again Monday. Israeli officials said

on Monday that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu dissolved the

war cabinet following the resignation earlier this month of centrist leader

Benny Gantz. An official told AFP that the wider "security cabinet will continue to decide on matters regarding the war". Israeli media said the move, which was not expected to trigger any major policy shift, was meant to counter pressure from far-right politicians seeking a greater say in decision-making. Political analysts believe that countdown to the fall of the Netanyahu's cabinet from power could begin after the dissolution of the war cabinet. The war cabinet was formed after Gantz had left the opposition to join Netanyahu's cabinet following Hamas's unprecedented October 7 attack. Gantz and another member of his party, Gadi Eisenkot, both former military chiefs, had agreed to join the cabinet on condition that a war cabinet be formed, said another Israeli official, speaking on condition of anonymity as he was not authorized to discuss the issue with the media. With Gantz and Eisenkot out of the cabinet, "there is no longer a need for" the war cabinet, said the

official. "It means that the security cabinet will meet more often. The security cabinet is the body responsible for making decisions (related to the war) anyway." Defense Minister Yoav Gallant, National Security Adviser Tzachi Hanegbi and Strategic Affairs Minister Ron Dermer, who were all part of the war cabinet, also sit on the security cabinet - the key forum ratifying decisions regarding the war including truce and captive release negotiations. Gantz announced his resignation on June 9 after failing to get Netanyahu to approve a post-war plan for Gaza. Israeli media reported that Netanyahu dissolved the war cabinet to avoid including far-right coalition members in the sensitive forum, fearing harm to relations with key Western allies such as the United States. National Security Minister Itamar Ben Gvir and Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich, who are both security cabinet members and opposed to a truce before Hamas is "eliminated", have put pressure on Netanyahu to add them to the war cabinet.

Israel's war has wiped out entire Palestinian families: Investigation



He is among the very last survivors of his Gaza family, a clan so close they knew without thinking how blood and marriage bound them across generations and city blocks. Then, branch by branch, 173 of Youssef Salem's relatives were killed in Israeli airstrikes in a matter of days in December. By spring that toll had risen to 270. Bones and flesh strewn over the ruins of family homes. Blond curls of a young cousin peeking through bricks. Unrecognizable bodies piled on a donkey cart. Lines of burial shrouds. These images are what survivors are left with from hundreds of families in Gaza like the Al-Aghas, Salems and Abu Najas. To a degree never seen before, Israel is killing entire Palestinian families, a loss even more devastating than the physical destruction and the massive displacement. An Associated Press investigation identified at least 60 Palestinian families where at least 25 people were killed - sometimes four generations from the same bloodline - in bombings between October and December, the deadliest and most destructive period of the war. Nearly a quarter of those families lost more than 50 family members in those weeks. Several families have almost no one left to document the toll, especially as documenting and sharing information became harder. Youssef Salem's hard drive is stocked with photos of the dead. He spent months filling a spreadsheet with their vital details as news of their deaths was confirmed, to preserve a last link to the web of relationships he thought would thrive for generations more. "My uncles were wiped out, totally. The heads of households, their wives, children, and grandchildren," Salem said from his home in Istanbul. In the last two decades, 10 members of his family were killed in Israeli strikes. "Nothing like this war," he said. The AP review encompassed casualty records released by Gaza's health ministry until March, online death notices, family and neighborhood social media pages and spreadsheets, witness and survivor accounts, as well as a casualty data from Airwars, a London-based conflict monitor.

Presidential candidates outline their foreign policy priorities

Campaigning for the upcoming presidential election in Iran continued on Monday with the six candidates outlined their programs to win the votes of people. Since the campaign kicked off following the approval of candidates by the country's top election supervisory body, one key area of focus for the hopefuls has been foreign policy. During a live roundtable discussion held on Friday, Saeed Jalili, a former nuclear negotiator and head of the Supreme National Security Council, emphasized the necessity of capitalizing on global opportunities while addressing threats through collaborative and diplomatic engagements with nations worldwide.

He stressed the need for foreign policy endeavors to directly benefit the Iranian people, emphasizing the importance of seizing global opportunities to enhance the nation's well-being. Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf, the speaker of the Iranian parliament and a presidential hopeful, also expounded on his foreign policy perspectives. He underscored the myriad of challenges and pressures faced by the Islamic Republic since the Islamic Revolution in 1979 and asserted that the nation has ascended to a prominent position in the geopolitical arena. In one of the televised sessions, the former Tehran mayor referred to unfinished foreign policy initia-

tives and promised that his administration would take them forward with full vigor. In an interview with Al Alam News Network of the IRIB World Service, Qalibaf outlined his potential future government's strategy to counter Western sanctions against Iran and protect Iranian interests. Masoud Pezeshkian, the former health minister and one of the six presidential candidates, participated in a roundtable and outlined a vision rooted in both personal insights and national service. Pezeshkian prefers increased interaction with the outside world. He advocates for a strategy grounded in diplomacy and dialogue, rejecting confrontational approaches on the

global stage. In his live TV appearances and interviews this week, he strongly emphasized the power of dialogue as a potent tool for fostering understanding and cooperation. Mostafa Pourmohammadi, who previously held ministerial portfolios in different administrations, also provided a sneak peek into his government's foreign policy agenda during televised roundtables. He asserted that foreign policy is an extension of domestic policy, emphasizing that a nation capable of securing its borders effectively can also achieve success on the international stage. According to the presidential candidate, effective communication fulfills most of

the country's requirements, stressing the importance of continuity across various domains, while prioritizing security and economic interests. In one televised program, he affirmed that the Islamic Republic "must engage with the global community, fulfilling its responsibilities to defend the rights of the oppressed and strengthen the axis of the oppressed against oppressors." During a televised roundtable on Saturday, Alireza Zakani, Tehran's Mayor and former senior lawmaker, also outlined his potential government's approach to foreign policy, emphasizing an idea-oriented strategy rooted in dignity. Zakani underscored the

paramount importance of foreign policy in governmental priorities, citing the significant role of Iranian Islamic culture in the West Asia region. During Saturday morning's press conference, Seyyed Amir-Hossein Ghazizadeh Hashemi, a former parliamentarian, articulated his foreign policy mantra as "gentleness with allies and tolerance with foes," underscoring its alignment with the late president Ebrahim Raisi's approach. He emphasized prioritizing the strategic outlook towards the East and fostering neighborly relations in Iran's foreign policy agenda, in line with the Raisi administration's policy that proved effective.

Mohammad Ali Rajabi
Cartoonist



Iran rebukes G7 statement over its nuclear program

International Desk

Iran called upon the Group of Seven on Sunday to distance itself from "destructive policies of the past" after the group warned Iran against advancing its nuclear program. "We urge Tehran to cease and reverse nuclear escalations, and stop the continuing uranium enrichment activities that have no credible civilian justifications," the Group of Seven said in a statement on June 14. "Iran must engage in seri-

ous dialogue and provide convincing assurances that its nuclear program is exclusively peaceful, in full cooperation and compliance with the IAEA's monitoring and verification mechanism, including the Board of Governors' resolution of 5 June," the G7 said. The 35-member Board of Governors passed a resolution on June 5, accusing Iran of withholding sufficient cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). The resolution proposed by Britain, France and Ger-

many demands that the Islamic Republic step up its cooperation with the IAEA and provide "technically credible explanations which satisfy the Agency's questions." Kanaani said that Tehran would continue its "constructive interaction and technical cooperation" with the IAEA, but called its resolution "politically biased." He said that the G7 statement's reference to the anti-Iran resolution by the IAEA indicates the resolution's political approach.

Iran's 'The Wasteman' to premiere at Shanghai Int'l Film Festival

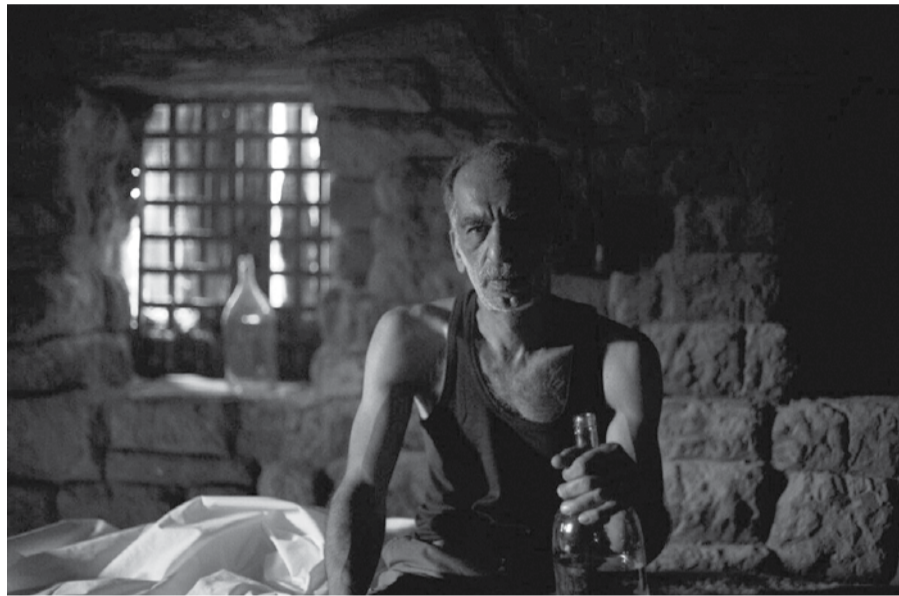
Iranian film 'The Wasteman', written and directed by Ahmad Bahrami, will be screened at the main competition section of the 26th Shanghai International Film Festival.

The film's red-carpet event was held on June 15, attending cast members Nahid Seddiq, Maryam Hemmatian, and Ahoura Bahrami, ILNA wrote.

A 2024 production, 'The Wasteman' is about a middle-aged wagon driver, of a determined demeanor, who trundles a corpse toward the cemetery of a strange, silent village bereft of all apparent life.

Bahrami's film will compete with 13 other films to win the Golden Goblet Award of the Chinese festival.

Famous international cineastes Rolf de Heer, Matthias



Glasner, Leung Ka Fai Tony, Santiago Mitre, Sonthar Gyal and Zhou Xun will evaluate the films of this section, pre-

sided by Tran Anh Hung. Nasrin Mirshab's Dream Lab company is responsible for the international distribu-

tion of the film. The Shanghai International Film Festival runs from June 14 to June 23.

Iran to pay homage to Abbas Kiarostami's on his birthday

Arts & Culture Desk

The Cinema Museum of Iran will host a special program on June 21 to commemorate the birthday of the late Abbas Kiarostami.

The event, titled 'Happy Birthday Abbas Kiarostami', will feature a live podcast and a film screening.

The podcast, focusing on Kiarostami's life and work, will be presented by Shahrad Banki and Mozghan Asghari. Following the podcast, the film '76 Minutes and 15 Seconds with Abbas

Kiarostami' will be shown. Seifollah Samadian, the filmmaker and a close friend of Kiarostami, will speak about the film and Kiarostami's legacy after the screening.

Kiarostami, an acclaimed filmmaker, is known for his works such as 'The Bread and Alley', 'The Traveler', 'The Report', 'The Chorus', 'Where Is the Friend's House?', 'Homework', 'Close-Up', 'Life, and Nothing More...', 'Through the Olive Trees', 'Taste of Cherry', 'The Wind Will Carry Us', 'Certified Copy', and 'Like Someone in Love.'

The film '76 Minutes and 15 Seconds with Abbas Kiarostami' is a cinematic portrait by Samadian, composed of footage from their shared travels. The film offers a glimpse into 76 minutes and 15 seconds of Kiarostami's life and creativity, reflecting his unique perspective on the world.

The documentary premiered at the Venice International Film Festival in 2016 and has since been featured in numerous film festivals globally. Deborah Young of The Hollywood Reporter praised the film, noting that it captures Kiarostami's simplicity, vision, and inherent modernism, offering insight into his influence on Iranian cinema.



Iran, China to enhance environmental cooperation



Social Desk

Iran is ready to expand environmental cooperation with China under a 25-year comprehensive partnership agreement, according to Ali Salajegheh, head of Iran's Department of Environment. Salajegheh made the announcement on Monday while hosting a delegation from the China Association for Science and Technology (CAST), led by its president, Wan Gang, IRNA wrote.

Salajegheh highlighted several areas for potential collaboration, including fighting dust storms, managing wastewater, protecting wildlife, addressing air pollution, droughts, and forest fires. He noted that both Iran and China have significant experience and indigenous knowledge in dealing with these issues.

Wan Gang emphasized the historical ties between the two countries and expressed hope for enhanced cooperation in various fields, including environmental protection.

He also mentioned the importance of continuing the agreements signed last year by the Chinese and Iranian presidents in agriculture and environmental sectors. Salajegheh pointed out that dust storms are a major issue for both nations, with Iran having substantial experience in soil stabilization and dust storm mitigation. He added that Iran has successfully promoted interna-

tional cooperation to combat dust storms, leading to the United Nations designating July 12 as International Day of Combating Sand and Dust Storms.

Iran and China also aim to cooperate on wastewater and waste management, wildlife conservation, wetland restoration, and tackling air and industrial pollution. In addition, Iran seeks to collaborate on marine development, a key strategy for sustainable growth.

This strategy includes sustainable exploitation of marine resources, expansion of maritime trade, and relocating water-intensive industries to southern coastal areas.

Salajegheh expressed optimism about advancing both research and practical cooperation in environmental protection with China, leveraging the 25-year agreement to address a wide range of environmental challenges.

Seven Iranian pilgrims die as heatwave affects Hajj: Red Crescent

Social Desk

Iran's Red Crescent Society announced that seven Iranian pilgrims have lost their lives so far during the Hajj ceremony taking place in Saudi Arabia.

The head of the Red Crescent Society, Pirhossein Kolivand, shared the news on Sunday while visiting the organiza-

tion's field hospital in Arafat to inspect medical services for pilgrims.

"So far, during the Hajj days in Mecca and Medina, seven pilgrims have lost their lives," Kolivand said, adding that some of the pilgrims had pre-existing health conditions, but others succumbed to heatstroke.

Only on the first day in Mina,

coincided with Eid al-Adha in Saudi Arabia, when temperatures soared and numerous rituals were performed, three Iranian pilgrims died. Iran is not the only country to have suffered pilgrim fatalities so far this Hajj season. Jordan's Foreign Ministry issued a statement reporting 14 deaths among its nationals, with another

17 pilgrims still missing. Extreme heatwaves and heat strokes were cited as the causes.

Loss of life during Hajj is not unprecedented. Last year, 16 Iranian men and six women died while on the pilgrimage. With temperatures soaring across the Middle East, health officials have warned that heat can pose a significant risk to pilgrims during the physically demanding Hajj rituals.

This year's Hajj is attended by over 1.8 million pilgrims, one of the largest gatherings in the world. The harsh weather conditions, especially for outdoor rituals, have posed significant challenges, particularly for the elderly. The extreme heat during this year's Hajj has been deadly, with temperatures exceeding 46°C (114.8°F).



PICS OF THE DAY



Sheida Opera Theater is on stage at Tehran's Niavaran Palace Complex, with the performance and singing of Parvaz Homay and Mastan Group.
● IRNA