



U.S. Sanctions on Syria: a Lesson for Iran

Despite al-Jolani's overtures to U.S. and Israel, Washington refuses to remove Syria sanctions

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Iran will negotiate, but knows how to counter sanctions too, says VP

TEHRAN – Mohammad Reza Aref, Iran's Vice President, spoke at a session of the Foreign Economic Relations Committee in the Foreign Ministry on Monday, emphasizing that the country is open to negotiations, but has learned how to counteract sanctions.

Aref condemned the sanctions imposed on the Iranian people as unjust and inhumane, stating, "If the enemy's aim had been limited to the government, sanctions on essential goods and medicine would not have been imposed."

He further expressed that Iran expects the international community to assist in lifting these sanctions.

We are open to negotiations, but we must reassure our economic partners that we will counteract the sanctions while continuing our development programs, Aref said.

The vice president underscored the significance of comprehensive relations, particularly economic ties with regional and export-target countries.

He remarked that the Foreign Economic Relations Committee, established in 1981, has been a hub for interaction and thought regarding foreign relations for the past 43 years.

Aref emphasized the committee's role in analyzing current regional conditions and shaping foreign policy strategies to enhance connections with neighboring countries, Islamic countries, and those in Asia, Europe, Africa, and the Americas. ▶ Page 2

'This is hostage-taking': Iran condemns arrests of nationals at US order

TEHRAN – Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesperson, Esmail Baqaei, condemned the detention of Iranian citizens in Italy and the United States, labeling these arrests as politically motivated actions orchestrated by the United States.

Speaking in a weekly press conference on Monday, Baqaei described the detentions as "a form of hostage-taking," asserting that the accusations against these individuals lack merit. He emphasized that using judicial pretexts to justify such arrests is inhumane and violates human rights.

"We urge these countries not to let their relations with Iran be influenced by the demands of third parties. From the outset, we have pursued this issue vigorously and provided consular assistance to the Iranian citizen detained in Italy," he added. ▶ Page 2

Iran's resilient stand beyond headlines

By Faramarz Kouhpayeh

TEHRAN – Benoit Faucon in his recent article for the Wall Street Journal, titled "A Weakened Iran Prepares to Face Trump 2.0," paints a bleak picture of Iran, describing a country teetering on the brink of collapse.

While it is true that Iran faces substantial challenges, a closer and more balanced analysis reveals a different story. Many of the claims in the article seem shaped by geopolitical agendas, presenting a narrative that requires a thorough and fair reassessment.

Iran's current economic difficulties are undeniable but often misrepresented in Western narratives. The article attributes these challenges mainly to internal mismanagement and corruption while downplaying the crippling impact of decades of U.S.-led sanctions.

These sanctions, often imposed unilaterally and outside international legal frameworks, have severely restricted Iran's access to global financial systems, essential imports, and foreign investments. The sanctions have targeted critical sectors like healthcare and energy, disproportionately affecting ordinary citizens. ▶ Page 3

Why is Washington keen to nurture Syrian Kurds?

By Sondoss Al Asaad

BEIRUT – Upon assisting Israel's security and political challenges, following the Lebanon war and the fall of the Bashar al-Assad government, Foreign Minister Gideon Sa'ar stated, "In a region where we will always be a minority, we must ally with other minorities." Sa'ar added that the Kurds are "a great nation but they do not enjoy political independence."

During his meeting with Jens Ploetner, the German chancellor's special adviser on foreign and security policy on December 18, Sa'ar also stressed that "the international community has a role in protecting minorities in Syria, including the Kurdish minority, which is being attacked and threatened these days."

Fearing the growing role of former Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser in the 1950s, David Ben-Gurion formulated the Torat Haperipheria doctrine based on the advice of the Zionist theorist Elyahu Sasson.

Tel Aviv accordingly allied with Turkey; the Pahlavi regime in Iran; the Christian minorities in Ethiopia and southern Sudan; the Druze in Syria and Lebanon; the Kurds in Iraq; and the Maronite Christians in Lebanon.

Israel tightens grip on Syrian land

By Wesam Bahrani

TEHRAN – Reports from Syria say the Israeli regime is reinforcing its military in recently occupied regions of Syria, causing concerns about increasing tensions in the region.

Journalists on the ground have reported that the Israeli Occupation Forces (IOF) are constructing roads to link 13 newly established military positions in the province of Damascus, also home to the capital city, as well as the southwestern provinces of Quneitra and Daraa.

Reports show that the occupation regime is installing concrete barriers and surveillance cameras there.

In addition to these measures, it has taken control of six significant water bodies in southern Syria. The most recent one is the al-Mantara Dam, located in Rural Quneitra, further solidifying its dominance in the region.

The dam is a vital water source for Syrians living in Quneitra and its surrounding provinces.

In addition, the occupation regime has constructed large dirt barriers to prevent residents from accessing the area surrounding the dam.

Israeli ministers painting genocidal scenario for the West Bank

By Shahrokh Saei

TEHRAN- The recent deadly shooting attack in the occupied West Bank has highlighted anti-Israel sentiment amid its genocidal war in the Gaza Strip.

On Monday, gunmen opened fire on a bus and vehicles adjacent to the Palestina village of Funduq near Nablus city.

Three Israelis were killed and several others were injured in the incident.

The Israeli army immediately imposed a cordon around all villages in the area to apprehend the shooters.

The Palestinian Hamas resistance movement hailed the attack as a "heroic response against the occupation's continued crimes (including) the war of genocide in Gaza."

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu vowed a harsh crackdown on the attackers and their supporters.

Israel's far-right National Security Minister Itamar Ben Gvir said he had instructed the army to "act with force" in the pursuit of the assailants.

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Value of Iran's petchem export rises 32% in 9 months on year

TEHRAN- The value of Iran's petrochemical export has increased 32 percent in the first nine months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20 - December 21, 2024), as compared to the same period of time in the past year, the head of the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA) announced.

Foroud Asgari said that 50.7 million tons of petrochemicals worth \$19.7 billion have been exported during the mentioned nine-month period, indicating 33.25 percent growth in weight year on year.

As stated by the head of Iran's National Petrochemical Company (NPC), the petrochemical industry plays a vital role in promoting Iran's status in the international economy. ▶ Page 4



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Occupied Territories airspace defenseless against Iran: IRGC

TEHRAN – Brigadier General Ali Mohammad Naeini, the spokesperson for the Islamic Revolution Guard Corps (IRGC), has described the skies above the occupied territories as wide open and unguarded against Iran.

During a press conference on Monday, Naeini said, "The enemy saw in the True Promise II and II operations that their skies are open to us, and we can repeat these operations with even greater force."

He added that Iran has been fully prepared for large, complex, and heavy battles on any scale for a long time. ▶ Page 2

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

A possible mistake that will destroy Trump's dreams

In an analysis, Sobh-e-No discussed the relationship between Iran and the United States and wrote: These days, we are facing "diplomacy or confrontation" between Iran and the United States in the era of Donald Trump. Our country has also declared its readiness to negotiate based on the confidence-building formula in exchange for the lifting of sanctions and has prepared itself for all scenarios. Iran has proven it is ready for both negotiation and confrontation, the examples of which are the negotiations that led to the "JCPOA" and military confrontation in the form of "the True Promise I and II". But based on the facts of the international system and the goals of the Trump administration, we can guess that the diplomatic option is much more likely than the military option because it is far from America's capability to choose the wrong path. That will take Trump away from his goals and vision, which is the "superior America". The threat of attacking Iran will push our country towards nuclear deterrence. Therefore, considering the high probability of failure of any military action against Iran and its regional and international fallouts, the Trump administration should come to the negotiating table with Iran in goodwill.

Jam-e-Jam: Syria, resistance and the future of interaction with Iran

In a note, Jam-e-Jam discussed the future developments in Syria and wrote: Syria should return to the Arab League and not be under the rule of Turkey. Some believe that Syria will become a country aligned with the United States, either by being under the rule of Turkey or returning to the Arab League. America will maintain the sanctions on Syria so that they can use the stick-and-carrot policy against the current rulers of Syria to get more concessions from them. This is what America is still doing in Iraq. If a democratic government is established in Syria, the relationship between this country and Iran will definitely be good. But if a weak government is formed in Syria and chaos continues, there will still be a situation for the presence of resistance movements there. Another scenario is the establishment of a strong autocratic ruler in the country to fight the resistance, which of course is difficult considering the recent developments and it will not be easy to do so. Therefore, it must be said that removing Iran and resistance in Syria is a difficult task in any case.

IRGC chief reflects on General Soleimani's legacy and continuing influence

TEHRAN- At a ceremony commemorating the fifth anniversary of General Qassem Soleimani's martyrdom on Monday, Major General Hossein Salami, commander-in-chief of the Islamic Revolution Guard Corps (IRGC), paid tribute to the legendary Iranian general.

Speaking in Kerman, the birthplace of the martyred general, Salami praised General Soleimani's unwavering dedication to the Islamic Revolution and his lasting influence on the Resistance movements across the region.

General Soleimani was martyred by a U.S. drone strike in Iraq on January 3, 2020, while on a peace mission, leaving an indelible mark on Iran's heart as a symbol of Resistance and sacrifice.

The IRGC chief vividly recounted the overwhelming scenes from General Soleimani's funeral five years ago, where the streets of Kerman were overwhelmed by a flood of mourners.

He described the scene as "a sea with endless waves," capturing the collective grief and love of the Iranian people for their fallen hero.

Additionally, Salami lauded General Soleimani's character, emphasizing his humility and commitment to serving God.

He portrayed General Soleimani as a man who "lived and fought for God," selflessly dedicating his life to protecting Muslims without seeking personal gain.

Salami highlighted the martyred general's role in countering threats against Muslims and his unwavering dedication to the families of martyrs, stating that "Soleimani would die for the families of martyrs and never showed arrogance."



IRGC Chief Major General Hossein Salami during a speech in a ceremony marking the fifth anniversary of General Soleimani's martyrdom on January 6, 2025, in Kerman

'General Soleimani inspired Hezbollah and Ansarullah'

Salami also addressed the broader geopolitical landscape, asserting that "Hezbollah has imposed its will on Israel," describing the adversarial regime as "exhausted and clueless."

He stated that the Resistance Front, empowered by General Soleimani's teachings, is at its peak strength, while their enemies are left "despised and anxious."

The IRGC chief connected General Soleimani's legacy to the ongoing Resistance movements, noting how his leadership has inspired groups like Hezbollah and the Yemeni Ansarullah.

Salami concluded by emphasizing that "the blood of the martyrs does not rest," and their path continues, rooted in the teachings of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and his pious family members (a).

Iran will negotiate, but knows how to counter sanctions too, says VP

From page 1 ▶ He also highlighted the need for increased engagement with international institutions.

From the 1980s to now, the committee's responsibilities have significantly changed; we are now exporters, especially in technical and engineering services where we rank high in quality, and sectors like high-tech, we are among the leaders, Aref explained.

The vice president also highlighted that in the defense sector, where Iran was once unable to acquire necessary supplies, it now occupies a formidable position.

Aref also discussed Iran's progress in international organizations, highlighting the country's active and notable presence in dynamic regional organizations such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), the Eurasian Economic Union, BRICS, and the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO).

He acknowledged that while Iran's performance in Africa and Latin America could have been better, there are opportunities to



First Vice President Mohammad Reza Aref (R), sitting next to Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi during a session of the Foreign Economic Relations Committee in the Foreign Ministry in Tehran on January 6, 2025

improve and better utilize these regions in the future.

Health diplomacy is one of our major advantages that we must leverage, alongside our high-tech capabilities, which are among our regional strengths to enhance our diplomatic efforts, he noted.

Aref stressed that Iran believes cultural and economic diplomacy complements political diplomacy.

The vice president also spoke about the strategic importance of maritime development, given Iran's thousands of kilometers of coastline in the south and north of the country.

Alongside sea-oriented development, the development of Makran is a priority for the current government, Aref stated.

The official also said that Makran

can both impact national development and help distribute the country's population towards the east.

Aref concluded by emphasizing the complementary nature of political, scientific, cultural, and economic diplomacy, urging the government and relevant organizations to work together in these areas to ensure Iran's continued development and success on the global stage.

'This is hostage-taking': Iran condemns arrests of nationals at US order



From page 1 ▶ 'Iran, Russia to sign long-term cooperation agreement'

Baqaei also announced that Iran and Russia are set to solidify their strategic partnership through a comprehensive agreement to be signed by their presidents in Moscow in mid-January.

"This agreement encompasses a wide range of areas, including trade, economy, energy, defense, security, and environmental cooperation," Baqaei said.

The document, approved earlier in the summer, builds on a 2001 treaty between the two nations, which was extended until 2026.

The new pact aims to shape bilateral ties for the next two decades, reflecting the deepening relationship between Tehran and Moscow despite facing significant Western sanctions.

'Iraqi PM will visit Tehran to discuss bilateral ties'

Baqaei also confirmed that Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia' al-Sudani would visit Tehran at the invitation of Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian.

The leaders are expected to discuss strengthening mutual ties and implementing previously signed agreements.

"The developments in the region, particularly in Syria, will be a key topic during the visit, given their critical importance," Baqaei stated.

'World must honor Syria's right to determine its own future'

Baghaei reiterated Tehran's unwavering position on developments in Syria, emphasizing the importance of respecting the will of the Syrian people.

Baghaei stressed that all regional countries must honor Syria's right to determine its own future without interference from external forces.

He highlighted the significance of safeguarding Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity, which he described as vital for the stability of both Iran and the broader region.

"Syria should have the freedom to shape its destiny without harmful involvement from regional or international actors.

It must not be allowed to become a hub for terrorism or violent extremism," Baghaei declared. Echoing this sentiment, Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi underscored that ensuring peace, stability, and the preven-

tion of chaos in Syria serves the interests of both Iran and the region as a whole.

'Iran open to dignified talks with U.S.'

Addressing questions about potential negotiations with the United States, Baqaei affirmed Iran's willingness to engage in "dignified" talks aimed at lifting sanctions and addressing concerns about its nuclear program.

"Iran has never abandoned the negotiating table and remains committed to dialogue.

However, the continuation of such discussions depends on the approach and actions of the opposing side," he explained.

'Israel is violating Palestinian's rights'

The spokesperson criticized Israel's ban on operations by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) and called on the International Court of Justice (ICJ) to address the regime's actions.

He urged the ICJ to hold Israel accountable for breaching its commitments to international organizations.

"The global community has protested against this blatant violation. Stability and peace in the region depend on adherence to international obligations," Baqaei concluded.

This comprehensive briefing highlighted Iran's active stance on pressing domestic, regional, and international issues, emphasizing dialogue, cooperation, and respect for sovereignty.

Occupied Territories airspace defenseless against Iran: IRGC

TEHRAN- Brigadier General Ali Mohammad Naeini, the spokesperson for the Islamic Revolution Guard Corps (IRGC), has described the skies above the occupied territories as wide open and unguarded against Iran.

During a press conference on Monday, Naeini said, "The enemy saw in the True Promise I and II operations that their skies are open to us, and we can repeat these operations with even greater force."

He added that Iran has been fully prepared for large, complex, and heavy battles on any scale for a long time.

New missile and drone cities to be unveiled

The IRGC spokesman also announced the unveiling of new underground missile and drone cities along the coasts of the Persian Gulf and the Sea of Oman.

These facilities, which accommodate a broad range of cruise and ballistic missiles, will be revealed during the large-scale Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) 19 military exercise.

Brigadier General Naeini highlighted the significance of these developments, noting that the IRGC Aerospace Force will showcase these facilities during the ongoing military drills.

Additionally, the IRGC Navy will stage a war game in the Persian Gulf, involving around 300 combat vessels, and the

largest naval parade will be held with the participation of around 2,000 military and civilian vessels.

The IRGC's 'Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) Power' exercise, held annually in the last three months of the year, is designed to counter new security threats.

Naeini emphasized that these exercises signify stability, power, and the flourishing of a mighty Iran.

He added, "The primary aim of the exercise is to counter threats and change the enemy's calculations."

Naeini also announced plans for a war game involving 110,000 Basij forces in Tehran.

The IRGC spokesman highlighted the continuous production and upgrading of Iran's missile and defense systems.

He noted that the enemy has never had the upper hand in any battle and that Iran has never suffered an intelligence defeat.

"The enemy constantly creates narratives to compensate for the intelligence and military defeats suffered at the hands of the Islamic Republic of Iran," Naeini said.

He also addressed the psychological and perception warfare environment, stating that the enemy's military threats have only increased societal cohesion and strengthened the armed forces.

The IRGC works to consolidate its combined power infrastructure to develop the founda-

tions of national security and authority.

Additionally, Naeini affirmed that Iran would not initiate any conflict in the region based on its defensive doctrine.

However, he emphasized that the country is always ready and proactive, and when the command comes, it will demonstrate its power and change the enemy's perceptions and calculations.

New air defense systems deployed at sensitive locations

In a separate announcement, Brigadier General Qader Rahimzadeh, commander of the Khatam al-Anbia Air Defense Base, declared that new and undisclosed air defense systems have been installed at critical sites across Iran.

During an interview, he revealed that air defense units from both the Army and the IRGC are set to conduct a large-scale joint military exercise in the coming days.

Rahimzadeh emphasized that these new systems, which remain unknown to adversaries, have been strategically positioned near Iran's sensitive centers and will be utilized in the upcoming drills.

The participating forces will focus on honing the skills they have developed over the past year, with the exercises tailored to address potential threats and movements from adversarial forces, the brigadier general concluded.

U.S. sanctions on Syria: a lesson for Iran

Despite al-Jolani's overtures to U.S. and Israel, Washington refuses to remove Syria sanctions

By Soheila Zarfam

TEHRAN – Back in November, when Israel was sending death threats to President Bashar al-Assad, it was probably hoping, in its best-case scenario, to sever Syria's ties with Lebanon's Hezbollah.

It likely wasn't thinking that it would be able to occupy new areas in the Arab country, station troops close to Damascus, bomb the nation every day, and get rid of 90% of Syrian military infrastructure, even if Assad decided to turn completely into the West's orbit. However, what Israeli politicians couldn't even imagine requesting from Assad was given to them in a heartbeat by the new de facto rulers of Syria under the infamous Daesh and al-Qaeda affiliate, Abu Mohamad al-Jolani.

In the post-Assad Syria that's only lasted for a month, Israel has conducted 1200 rounds of airstrikes across the country, advanced to within 16 miles of the capital, and announced that it would be doubling the number of illegal settlements in the Syrian Golan Heights it occupied in 1967. Benjamin Netanyahu personally stepped foot in a part of Syria no Israeli leader had ever reached before, and announced that the new territories the regime has occupied will stay that way indefinitely.

Al-Jolani and his Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) officials have not yet taken action, nor have they properly addressed Israel's unprecedented aggressions in their comments. When he was pressured to speak on the matter before a crowd of his followers a few days after Assad's fall, Al-Jolani stated his country was "not ready" for a new war. Though he has not clarified what constitutes war, beyond the experience of daily bombings and loss of territory, it would be overly simplistic to assume the HTS leader made those remarks because he is a naive terrorist that knows no better. He led a government in Syria's Idlib for eight years despite consistent protests demanding his departure. Al-Jolani is hoping to gain something by bowing down to Israel, and that thing can be traced in interviews



he has recently granted to Western and Arab media.

"Syrians, the victims," al-Jolani explained to foreign journalists at the Syrian government headquarters last month, dressed in a suit and white shirt, "are being punished with sanctions for the acts of our former executioner." He further stated, "My personal sanctions and terrorist listing are insignificant. The focus should be on lifting all sanctions on Syria."

Since then, the HTS leader has held meetings with a diverse array of regional and international figures. American diplomats, numerous Arab dignitaries, and the foreign ministers of Turkey, Germany, and France have all told al-Jolani how happy they are that Assad is gone. Al-Jolani, in turn, used these occasions to repeat his call for sanctions against Syria to be lifted.

But will the anti-Syria sanctions be removed now that al-Jolani has gone far and beyond to appease Israel and the West? The Tehran Times understands that will not be the case. A U.S. government announcement published by Reuters on Monday supports our assertion.

According to the report, the U.S. is planning to ease restrictions on the provision of "humanitarian aid", while maintaining the sanctions it imposed on Assad against the new government. This is despite assertions by American officials that humanitarian goods were never targeted by sanctions. Consequently, the effectiveness of this move in alleviating the daily hardships of the Syrian population remains unclear. The case

of countries like Iran shows that as long as sanctions are in place, entities are unwilling to engage with the targeted country, even when dealing in essential goods like food and medicine.

What lessons does Syria have for Iran?

While Iran and Syria are vastly different nations, they face a similar set of critical challenges, notably the impact of Western sanctions. Though limited in number, these shared challenges are threatening to both countries.

Sanctions, a primary tool employed by the West, are designed to exert control over other nations' internal affairs and regional policies. These economic measures often cripple economies, create shortages of essential goods, and in some cases make daily life unbearable.

In Syria, the effects are stark. Across the country, people endure long queues for food, suffer from severely limited access to electricity and clean water, face low salaries, and struggle with soaring unemployment.

The situation in Iran, while not as dire as in Syria, is also marked by growing economic hardship caused by years of Western sanctions. The purchasing power of Iranian families has diminished, with many households who used to be able to make ends meet on just one salary now relying on multiple ones. While energy prices remain relatively stable due to heavy government subsidies, families struggle with increased costs of housing and groceries.

Syria, under President Assad, had demonstrated remarkable

resilience for a time. However, over the past two years, a shift in his approach became apparent. As Syria was welcomed back into the Arab League, Western-aligned nations offered him enticing promises. Reports indicate that Emirati officials suggested the U.S. would lift sanctions if he distanced himself from Iran.

Combined with constant death threats from Israel and the loss of prominent Resistance figures in the past 15 months, Assad appears to have been swayed from his path of resistance. He began to believe he could secure a deal with the West by making non-threatening concessions, such as distancing himself from Iran and the Axis of Resistance. This shift also included a rejection of advice from Iranian and other allies who urged him to enact reforms and engage in dialogue with the opposition. This shift, or even the appearance of it, may have contributed to his downfall on December 8, 2024.

Iran, too, has exhibited considerable resilience for over four decades. A period of consideration for making concessions emerged in the 2010s, culminating in the 2015 nuclear deal, wherein Iran agreed to curtail its nuclear program in exchange for sanctions relief. The U.S., however, abandoned the agreement, demanding further concessions. Today, some within Iran advocate for more concessions, including abandoning nuclear aspirations, severing ties with Resistance groups, and relinquishing its missile program.

They believe such actions will lead to the lifting of sanctions. However, the experience of al-Jolani, demonstrates that such a belief is erroneous.

Al-Jolani has made every conceivable concession to the West and Israel in the past month. There is nothing he has not done for Washington and Tel Aviv. Yet, sanctions remain. Why? Because the West and Israel are not seeking a deal; they aim to cripple. Once a nation concedes to all their demands, the negotiating table is the last location it will encounter them.

Iran's resilient stand beyond headlines

From Page 1 ▶ These sanctions, often imposed unilaterally and outside international legal frameworks, have severely restricted Iran's access to global financial systems, essential imports, and foreign investments.

The sanctions have targeted critical sectors like healthcare and energy, disproportionately affecting ordinary citizens.

Despite these obstacles, Iran has demonstrated remarkable resilience. The government has made efforts to diversify the economy, foster regional trade partnerships, and invest in self-sufficiency initiatives across agriculture, pharmaceuticals, and renewable energy.

Iran's nuclear program: peaceful intentions misrepresented

A frequent topic in discussions about Iran is its nuclear program, often clouded by misinformation.

The article suggests that Iran might accelerate its nuclear activities to restore deterrence. However, such claims ignore Iran's repeated assurances of its peaceful intentions.

As a signatory to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), Iran has consistently affirmed its commitment to using nuclear technology for peaceful purposes.

Regular inspections by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) have verified the program's compliance.

Additionally, Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali

Khamenei's religious decree against nuclear weapons underscores Iran's principled rejection of weapons of mass destruction.

Iran's pursuit of nuclear energy is driven by legitimate needs for energy security and scientific development.

The collapse of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in 2018, following the U.S. withdrawal, marked a significant setback for diplomacy.

Iran's subsequent nuclear advancements should be seen as a reaction to unfulfilled commitments by other signatories. Tehran has consistently expressed its willingness to return to full compliance if sanctions are lifted and trust is rebuilt.

Regional influence and defense policy

The article claims that Iran's regional influence is waning, citing challenges faced by the Resistance Axis in Lebanon, Gaza, and Syria. While West Asia remains a volatile region, Iran's role is best understood as one of resistance to foreign intervention and support for regional sovereignty.

Despite claims of diminishing military capacity, Iran continues to maintain robust defense capabilities. Its advancements in missile technology and indigenous defense systems serve as a deterrent, ensuring national security in a region fraught with external threats.

Iran's defense policy remains



fundamentally defensive, designed to protect sovereignty rather than pursue expansionism.

The article further highlights social unrest in Iran as evidence of a government in decline. While dissent and protest are natural in any society, especially one under economic and social pressures, Iran's government has shown a willingness to engage with public concerns.

Recent steps include softening certain restrictive social policies. For example, lifting bans on specific digital platforms reflects an effort to address demands from younger generations.

Diplomacy: a path forward

Iran's readiness to negotiate is often overshadowed by accusations of inflexibility. However, statements from officials, such as Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi, emphasize Tehran's willingness to resume nuclear talks if sanctions are lifted. Iran insists on fair negotiations that respect its sover-

eignty and national interests.

The U.S.'s "maximum pressure" campaign failed to achieve its objectives, instead deepening mistrust and exacerbating tensions.

Despite this, Iran has shown resilience, maintaining its regional commitments and scientific advancements.

The international community must now prioritize constructive engagement to avoid repeating past mistakes.

While the challenges facing Iran are significant, the narrative presented by much of Western media often exaggerates its vulnerabilities while overlooking its strengths. Iran remains a nation that has consistently demonstrated resilience in the face of economic hardship and diplomatic isolation.

Iran's story is not one of defeat but of perseverance and determination, as its people continue to strive for dignity and progress amidst adversity.

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Straight Truth
TEHRAN TIMES

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SPORTS

Shamsaei among World's Best Men's National Team Coaches

TEHRAN – The 25th edition of the annual futsal prizes has been released by Futsalplanet.com and Iran coach Vahid Shamsaei is among the Best Men's National Team Coaches in the World.

Shamsaei led Iran futsal team in the 2024 FIFA Futsal World Cup, where Team Melli booked its place in the last 16 but lost to Morocco 4-3.

Nominees

(Listed in alphabetical order)

Hicham Dguig (MOR)

Morocco N.T.

Paulo Ricardo Figueiroa Silva "Kaka" (BRA)

Kazakhstan N.T.

Oleksandr Kosenko (UKR)

Ukraine N.T.

Marcos "Marquinhos" Xavier Andrade (BRA)

Brazil N.T.

Matias Raúl Lucoix (ARG)

Argentina N.T.

Miguel José Rodrigo Conde-Salazar (ESP)

Thailand N.T.*

(since 29 February 2024)

Raphaël Reynaud (FRA)

France N.T.

Vahid Shamsaei (IRN)

Iran N.T.

Héctor Souto (ESP)

Indonesia N.T.*

(since 15 August 2024)

Damián Stazzone Alvarez (ARG)

Argentina U20 N.T.

Iran marks legendary wrestler Takhti on anniversary of death

TEHRAN – Iran marked the 57th anniversary of the death of Gholamreza Takhti, legendary wrestler, on Monday.

The memorial was held at Ibn-e Baboueyh Cemetery in southern Tehran, near Shahr-e Ray, where he is commemorated every year by the Iranians.

Takhti was born in Tehran on August 27, 1930 and was found dead in a hotel room on Jan. 7, 1968.

He won the gold medal in the 1956 Olympic Games in Melbourne, defeating Boris Kulayev from Soviet Union in the final match.

Takhti also claimed two Olympics silver medals in 1952 Helsinki and 1960 Rome.

He won two World Championships gold medals in 1959 Tehran and 1961 Yokohama. The freestyle wrestler also seized a gold medal in the 1958 Asian Games held in Tokyo, Japan.

Takhti is the most famous wrestler in Iranian history. The legend was known for his chivalry and sportsmanship and continues to symbolize the essence of sports to the Iranian people.

Mahmoud Khosravi Vafa, head of Iran's National Olympic Committee (NOC), Mehrali Barancheshmeh, president of Iran's Zurkhaneh and Koshti Pahlevani federation, member parliament Ali Yazdi Khah and the wrestling fans attended the ceremony.

Persepolis eyes Tajik winger Amadoni Kamolov

TEHRAN – Persepolis football team have reportedly shown interest in signing Tajikistani winger Amadoni Kamolov.

The 22-year-old player currently plays for Istiklol and he is a member of Tajikistan national team.

Saudi Arabian giant Al-Ittihad have also shown an interest in signing the player.

Persepolis are looking for a replacement for head coach Juan Carlos Garrido, who left the club by mutual consent in late December.

Iran football team need rejuvenation: Omid Namazi

TEHRAN – Former Iran national football team coach Omid Namazi believes that Team Melli need rejuvenation for the upcoming 2026 FIFA World Cup.

Namazi worked as Carlos Queiroz's assistant from 2011 to 2014 and also led the Iranian football club Zob Ahan in the domestic league in 2018.

Namazi, who works as technical director in D.C. United Academy, believes that the national team's high average age may pose challenges for the team.

"First of all, we have to praise Iran national team for getting good results so far in the World Cup qualifiers but Team Melli need some changes if they want to qualify for the 2026 World Cup next stage for the first time ever," Namazi said in an exclusive interview with Tehran Times.

"Honestly, we are not reliable in counter-pressing and the coaching staff must improve the team's tactic in the field. Iran need to progress when playing out from the back. I believe that all the team's players must participate in attack and the midfield line must play the key role," he said.

"Iran national football team need rejuvenation to improve their chance of advancing to the next stage. With about 18-month remaining to the 2026 FIFA World Cup, the young and talented players, in my opinion, need to be part of the team to gain experience for the World Cup," Namazi added.

Namazi, who has also worked as coach of the U.S. women football team, says that the Iranian women can make splash not only in Asia but also in the world.

"I believe that Iranian women are very talented and they can shine but overall development of women's football infrastructure and resources could be further improved. The talented players should be discovered and I think there is a bright future ahead of them," Namazi concluded.

Al Bataeh linked with Iranian coach Farhad Majidi

TEHRAN – Local media reports suggest that Emirati football side Al Bataeh are going to hire Iranian coach Farhad Majidi.

Majidi has most recently worked as head coach at Al-Ittihad Kalba.

The 48-year-old coach is a candidate to take charge of Al Bataeh.

Goran Tomic's Al Bataeh lost to Al Jazira 3-0 on Sunday and remained in the 13th place in the UAE Pro League 14-team table.

Al Bataeh have accumulated five points in 11 matches.

Foolad eye Esteghlal Argentine forward Blanco

TEHRAN – Foolad football team have shown interest in signing Esteghlal striker Gustavo Blanco Leschuk.

The media reports suggest that the Argentine appears to have been deemed surplus to requirements at Esteghlal.

Foolad, headed by Yahya Golmohammadi, are a favorite to win 2024-25 Iran Professional League (IPL). They sit fourth, four points adrift of leaders Tractor. Esteghlal coach Pitso Mosimane has previously shown his dissatisfaction with Blanco and the player will most likely leave the team in the January transfer window.

The Blues will also part ways with French winger Gael Kakuta in the January transfer window.

Govt. allocates about \$1b to agricultural projects

TEHRAN - The Director-General of Economic Affairs at Iran's Agriculture Ministry announced the allocation of 500 trillion rials (approximately \$1.0 billion) in financial resources through special investment deposit certificates for profitable and strategic agricultural projects.

According to IRIB, Mohammad Khaledi stated that the Central Bank of Iran (CBI) has approved the issuance of 500 trillion rials in investment deposit certificates through banks to fund agricultural investors, prioritizing strategic projects.

Khaledi added that the interest rate for these special certificates is set at 25 percent for purchasers and depositors, while the cost for investors seeking these funds will be around 30 percent.

He noted that there are currently 100 agricultural projects under consideration, with each strategic project requiring financial resources exceeding 1.0 trillion rials (\$2.0 million).

Emphasizing the importance of utilizing these financial tools in the agricultural sector, Khaledi said, "If 20 to 30 percent of the 100 agricultural projects are funded through these certificates, it will lead to significant transfor-

mation in the sector."

He further explained that the CBI has, for years, promoted innovative financing methods to curb inflation and avoid increasing liquidity. "We, as executive officials, are striving to align with the Central Bank's policies and leverage new opportunities to support production," Khaledi added.

Khaledi also expressed hope that eligible agricultural production units will not face bureaucratic hurdles in accessing financial resources through these certificates.

He encouraged agricultural financing applicants to submit their requests directly to the Ministry of Agriculture's Economic and Planning Department or to specialized divisions and provincial agriculture organizations.

Additionally, Khaledi highlighted the Central Bank's introduction of a new financial instrument this year known as "GAM Certificates" (Forward Credit Certificates), which offers another innovative funding method.

He concluded by stating that the Ministry will review and outline the pathways for utilizing these new financial tools and work to eliminate barriers hindering access to these resources.

Iran sets official oil prices for January 2025

TEHRAN - The National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) has announced its official crude oil prices for January 2025, IRNA reported.

Iran light crude will be priced at \$1.35 per barrel above the base price, defined by the average of Oman/Dubai crude benchmarks, for the Asian market.

According to Iran's Oil Ministry, the NIOC's International Affairs Department has detailed the pricing for various grades of Iranian crude oil in January:

Iran light crude will be priced \$2.70 per barrel below Brent crude in Northwest Europe and South Africa, while the price of Iran's heavy crude

will be \$4.50 per barrel below Brent, and Forouzan crude will be \$4.70 per barrel below Brent.

In the Mediterranean market, Iran light crude will be priced \$2.60 per barrel below Brent, Iran heavy crude \$4.70 per barrel below Brent, and Forouzan crude \$4.60 per barrel below Brent.

For the Asian market, Iran light crude will be \$1.35 per barrel above the Oman/Dubai base price, while Iran heavy crude will be \$0.80 per barrel below the base price, and Forouzan crude will be \$0.55 per barrel below the base price.

The NIOC's International Affairs Department updates its official crude oil prices monthly to reflect market conditions.

Free zones, marine industries councils sign cooperation MOU



TEHRAN - A memorandum of understanding (MOU) was signed between Iran's Free Zones High Council and the High Council of Marine Industries to advance maritime economy initiatives.

Reza Masrou, secretary of the Free Zones High Council, highlighted the significance of the maritime economy during the signing ceremony, IRIB reported.

He noted that the sector has been neglected despite the emphasis by the Leader of the Islamic Revolution on prioritizing serious efforts in this domain.

The official further stated that many critical and unaddressed issues remain in this area, including the underutilization of ports for cargo handling and the incomplete development of port value chains.

He emphasized the establishment of the Logistics Council within the High Council of Free and Special Economic Zones, stating that efficient management involves the intelligent utilization of available capacities. He added that promoting the maritime economy would significantly contribute to national GDP growth, and the Logistics Council was created to support this goal.

Iran's Ports and Maritime Organization (PMO), in a report released in early October 2024, underlined the importance of the country's maritime capacities and the role that the sector can play in

developing the country's economy.

According to the report, maritime sector in Iran has very high capacity in various fields including trade, ports and shipping due to the country's strategic location, long coastal strip in the north and south and access to open waters, and can bring economic prosperity to the country.

"About a third of the country's borders are water borders, so we cannot ignore port and shipping activities because for a country that has long water borders and access to open waters, the prosperity of shipping and maritime trade is essential. Therefore, the government should pay full attention to the strengths and weaknesses of this sector and make the best use of the current capacities with proper planning," the report read.

Increasing the share of the maritime sector in the country's gross domestic product (GDP) under the framework of the newly proposed maritime-oriented policy should be one of the most important concerns of the government, which can be achieved with proper planning, the PMO said.

The share of the sea in the gross domestic product in advanced coastal countries such as the European Union is 50 percent, but the figure is not significant in Iran despite having more than 5,800 kilometers of coastal strip, and this is despite the fact that there are huge capacities for the transit of goods from Central Asian countries.

On December 29, President Masoud Pezeshkian said that a detailed strategy and private sector's contribution is necessary for transformation in the maritime-oriented economy.

Making the remarks in a session on the development of maritime-oriented economy, the president, while emphasizing the development of a detailed strategy in this field, addressed the necessity of the presence of the private sector in the industries related to the sea and stated: "For the presence of the private sector, it is necessary to prepare and compile the economic frameworks and commercial annexes of the development plans of the sea economy."

Solar systems for 1m families can generate 5,000 MW of electricity per year

By Mahnaz Abdi

TEHRAN- The head of the Association of Iranian Manufacturers and Suppliers of Renewable Energy Products and Services (known as SATKA) has said that if a five-kilowatt solar system is installed in each house and one million families are equipped in this way, and loans are allocated for this purpose, 5,000 megawatts (MW) of solar electricity will be produced annually.

As announced by the energy minister on December 20, the capacity of Iran's solar farms is going to increase by 4,000 megawatts by the end of the next Iranian calendar year (March 20, 2026).

Abbas Ali-Abadi said that the power network of the country is large and with the annual generation and consumption capacity of about 350 billion kilowatt hours of electricity, it has technically the potential for attracting more than 30,000 megawatts of solar energy.

"We are trying to realize this



potential with the cooperation of the private sector and we provide an attractive investment environment and a suitable market to attract investors to cooperate, while significant contracts have been concluded in this field since the beginning of the government", the minister added.

He further stated that considering that the current capacity of the country's solar power plants is 1,200 megawatts, with this increase, it is expected that this figure will reach more than

3,000 to 4,000 megawatts by next year, which is a significant figure.

Iran's renewable energy capacity has grown significantly under the 14th administration, reaching 1,520 megawatts (MW) in early January.

The country's energy imbalance and the critical need to expand renewable energy use have been a priority for the administration.

President Masoud Pezeshkian has consistently emphasized the

importance of renewable energy development, urging immediate intervention to resolve any obstacles to its expansion. This commitment has driven significant growth in renewable energy capacity.

Installed capacity for renewable power plants, which stood at 1,231 MW at the beginning of the current administration, increased by 289 MW to reach 1,520 MW by the end of December.

On January 2, Mohsen Tarztab, the head of SATBA (Iran's Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Organization), announced plans to increase renewable energy capacity to 1,800 MW by the end of the year.

This expansion aligns with the country's strategic goals to diversify energy sources and reduce reliance on fossil fuels.

SATBA has identified substantial potential for further development. Assessments indicate that Iran could produce over 20,000 MW of wind energy and 800 MW of biomass energy.

Value of Iran's petchem export rises 32% in 9 months on year

From Page 1 ▶ Hassan Abbaszadeh wrote in a message on the occasion of the National Petrochemical Industry Day (December 8): "Today, this industry is not only the supplier of an important part of the domestic needs of the country, but with its powerful presence in the world markets, it plays a vital role in maintaining and improving Iran's position in the international economy."

Based on Iran's seventh National Development Plan (2022-2027), the country's petrochemical production capacity is planned to increase by eight percent to reach 130 million tons.

The Islamic Republic is also going to invest over \$40 billion in the petrochemical industry for the eighth National Development plan to further expand the mentioned sector and complete its value chain.

Currently, Iran accounts for 2.8 percent of the world's petrochemical capacity and about 28 percent of the capacity of this industry in the region, and with the plans

made, the capacity of the petrochemical industry will increase significantly in the horizon of the seventh development plan.

According to the latest data released by the NPC, the capacity of Iran's petrochemical production will reach 103 million tons by the end of the current Iranian year (late March 2025).

Also, considering that about 60 petrochemical projects are planned to go operational during the seventh National Development Plan, 35 million tons will be added to the country's petrochemical capacity by 2027.

The head of Iran's National Petrochemical Company (NPC) has said that completing the value chain and developing complementary industries is going to ensure a balanced and sustained development of the country's petrochemical industry.

"The development of the industry in all sectors must be pursued seriously, and for this purpose, all the people active in the petrochemical industry must pay

attention to the development of complementary industries according to the existing capacities in the country," Hassan Abbaszadeh has stated.

Stating that the provincial development of complementary industries, in addition to job creation, can create more added value, he said: "The development of downstream industries should be pursued and implemented seriously, and the National Petrochemical Company is ready for any cooperation in this regard."

Emphasizing the existence of suitable capacities for investment in complementary industries, Abbaszadeh said: "The portfolio of petrochemical products can be diversified with the cooperation of holdings and petrochemical companies.

Iran's petrochemical sector is set to increase its foreign currency revenue to over \$25 billion, bolstered by new investments in natural gas production, according to Ahmad Mahdavi, Secretary-General of the Iranian Petrochemical

Employers' Association.

Speaking to local media on December 24, Mahdavi revealed that 10 agreements have been signed to address the country's natural gas supply imbalance and invest in gas fields. These agreements, totaling \$8.0 billion in investment, are expected to enhance daily gas production by 200 million cubic meters.

As Tasnim News Agency reported, the new projects are slated to be completed by the end of Iran's Seventh National Development Plan (2026). Once operational, they are projected to significantly boost the foreign currency income generated by the petrochemical sector, positioning it as a key contributor to Iran's economy.

Mahdavi urged the Oil Ministry and government to streamline licensing processes to expedite investments in this critical sector. He emphasized that these initiatives could substantially mitigate the nation's gas supply shortfall while supporting industrial growth.

Iran, Uzbekistan committed to expanding regional transport, transit cooperation

TEHRAN - The Ambassador of Uzbekistan to Tehran Fariddin Nasriev met with Ali Akbar Safaei, Iran's deputy Minister of Transport and Urban Development and head of the Ports and Maritime Organization (PMO), to discuss strengthening bilateral and regional transport and transit collaboration.

The meeting emphasized facilitating trade between the two nations, the PMO portal reported.

As reported, discussions focused on streamlining multimodal transportation between Iran and Uzbekistan via Iranian ports in the country's northern and southern regions.

The PMO expressed readiness to swiftly address issues faced by Uzbek traders and businesses along regional corridors passing through Iran. The two sides also discussed organizing reciprocal trade delegations, including visits by Uzbek technical representatives, traders, and transport companies to explore Iran's port capacities for enhanced transit options within the framework of the International North-South Transit Corridor (INSTC).

Additionally, the meeting highlighted the importance of establishing joint regional corridors to facilitate the smooth movement of Uzbek goods to Russia and India, leveraging Iran's port infrastructure to achieve the goals set by the presidents of both nations.

In a meeting with a joint delegation from the Ministries of Agriculture, Trade, and Investment of Uzbekistan in Tehran in early December, Iranian Minister of Agriculture Gholamreza Nouri Ghezleji stated that Iran is prepared to enhance cooperation with Uzbekistan in sharing agricultural experiences and technology.

Referring to the 14th Iranian government's strategic vision to enhance relations with oth-

er countries, Nouri highlighted the initiative taken by the President of Uzbekistan to foster international relations, which has created significant opportunities for constructive cooperation between the two countries.

He expressed Iran's readiness to supply the agricultural machinery that Uzbekistan needs, emphasizing that cooperation could involve not only the direct export of products, but also the barter of goods such as potatoes and legumes.

Nouri also pointed out that Iran has a rich history of over a century in agricultural research and is prepared to share its valuable experiences with Uzbekistan.

During the meeting, Ibrohim Ergashev, head of the Plant Quarantine Service of Uzbekistan, stressed the importance of economic cooperation between the two countries, saying, "Uzbekistan is committed to developing and strengthening trade relations with Iran, and necessary planning has been undertaken in this regard."

On October 20, 2024, an official with Iran's Trade Promotion Organization (TPO) said that Iran and Uzbekistan plan to increase their annual trade exchanges to \$5.0 billion and the two sides have reached a primary agreement to sign a preferential trade agreement (PTA) soon.

Akbar Godari, the head of TPO's Central Asia, Caucasus, and Russia Office, referred to the economic agreements reached between the two countries during the visit of Uzbekistan's Minister of Investment, Industry, and Trade to Iran, and said: "The efforts and desire of the two countries to develop trade exchanges have been formed, therefore the 16th Joint Economic Committee meeting of Iran and Uzbekistan will be hosted by Iran in March to increase trade ex-

changes."

Also, discussions have been held regarding the details of a joint investment fund between the two countries that will be established shortly, Godari added.

Regarding the initial agreements for the signing of a preferential trade agreement between Iran and Uzbekistan, the official said: "Last year, Abbas Ali-Abadi, the Iranian Minister of Industry, Mining and Trade at the time, traveled to Uzbekistan and discussed with his counterpart in Uzbekistan the conclusion of a preferential trade agreement. For more than six months, the two countries discussed various aspects of the agreement including the certificate of origin document, and reviewed and resolved the challenges ahead, and now preliminary agreements have been made to sign this agreement."

He underlined the role of the Trade Promotion Organization of Iran in facilitating the trade relations between Iran and Uzbekistan, saying: "The list of the goods that are subject to preferential tariffs has been determined, and the Trade Promotion Organization of Iran is trying to increase the number of items that are subject to preferential tariffs in a short period."

On September 19, 2024, Uzbekistan capital Tashkent hosted an Iran-Uzbekistan business forum, in which officials and businesspeople from the two sides exchanged views on ways of expanding mutual trade ties, the portal of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (ICCIMA) reported.

Speaking at the forum, ICCIMA Head Samad Hassanzadeh called for more enhanced exchanges between Iran and Uzbekistan.

Syria's Christian crisis under the rule of HTS

By Sahar Dadjoo

TEHRAN – The war in Syria has wrought enormous suffering upon the country's varied communities, and with the shifts in the power dynamics in the country, the Christian minority, in particular, is facing challenges of a character all its own. The control in northwestern Syria by the Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), a group with roots in al-Qaeda, has raised severe concerns among the Christian residents there along with the religious leaders.

Under HTS dominance, many Christians fear for their safety, religious freedoms, and cultural heritage. Reports of discrimination, forced conversions, and desecration of churches have heightened their fears, while restrictions on public worship and the absence of legal protection add to the feelings of marginalization. Those who remain are living a precarious existence in an environment of ever-deepening insecurity and a swiftly shifting socio-political landscape.

The report examines the plight of Syria's Christians under the HTS rule, pronouncing their living standards and that the group's treatment of religious minorities and the general implications to Syria's pluralistic identity. It emphasizes their fortitude and the urgent need for international attention to secure their future.

Christians in Syria: A historical overview

Christianity in Syria dates back to the first century AD, with the Apostle Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus marking a pivotal moment in the faith's history. Over time, Syria became a hub of Christian theology, hosting early church councils and producing prominent



theologians.

Before the Syrian civil war erupted in 2011, Christians constituted about 10% of the population, numbering 1.5 million. These communities included Greek Orthodox, Syriac Orthodox, Armenian Apostolic, and various Catholic rites. Today, the Christian population has dwindled to less than 2% due to displacement, emigration, and targeted violence, leaving only an estimated 300,000 Christians in the country.

Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, a terrorist group with roots in al-Qaeda, has gained control over significant territories in Syria, particularly in the northwest. HTS's rise has raised alarms about the marginalization of religious minorities, including Christians.

Although HTS has stated it will protect minorities, its track record leaves Christians doubtful about their future under Islamist rule.

A rising tide of oppression

Reports have documented numerous violations of Christian rights in Syria. Beyond the physical destruction of churches and properties, there have been instances of

forced displacement, discrimination in areas controlled by terrorist groups, and societal pressures leading to the erosion of Christian cultural and religious practices. The international community has been urged to monitor these violations closely and advocate for the protection of religious freedoms in Syria.

In a recent case that has drawn international attention, several Christian families in Idlib reported being evicted from their homes and losing their lands to HTS fighters. Churches in the region have also been targeted, with some repurposed into military facilities or destroyed outright. Clerics and laypeople alike have faced threats, arbitrary arrests, and violence.

"They want to erase us from our own land," said Father Elias, a priest from a town near Idlib who fled to Damascus after his church was shut down by HTS forces. "They say there is no place for Christians in their vision of Syria."

Protests across Syria

In response to these violations, Christians and other minority groups have taken to the streets in various parts of Syria, includ-

ing Damascus, Aleppo, and Homs. The protests have been marked by banners reading, "Stop the persecution" and "We have a right to our land and faith."

The protests have not been confined to Christian communities. Members of other religious minorities, including Alawites, Druze, and Yazidis, have expressed solidarity, emphasizing that the violations against Christians are part of a broader pattern of systemic discrimination and violence against minorities in the HTS-controlled areas.

Regional and international concerns

Syria's Christian exodus has placed a strain on neighboring countries, particularly Lebanon, Jordan, and Turkey, which host significant numbers of refugees. Lebanon, with its delicate sectarian balance, has expressed concerns over the influx of Syrian Christians, fearing demographic shifts that could upset its political system.

These countries face the dual challenge of supporting refugees while managing their own internal sectarian tensions. Additionally, the loss of Syria's Christian community would have broader regional implications, potentially weakening Christian representation in West Asia as a whole.

The plight of Syrian Christians has resonated beyond the country's borders, prompting demonstrations in major cities such as Paris, Berlin, Washington, D.C., and Sydney. Syrian Christian diaspora communities have organized rallies, urging their host governments to take diplomatic and humanitarian actions.

(See full text at tehrantimes.com)

Israel tightens grip on Syrian land

From page 1 ▶ Analysts say this measure poses a serious threat to the water security of southern Syria and several neighborhoods in the capital Damascus, potentially disrupting access to vital resources.

Local sources have told regional media outlets that for the first time the occupation forces conducted armored patrols on the hills of Mount Hermon in Syria.

These hills were occupied recently and the patrols are said to be taking place in an area located opposite the city of Nabatiyeh in Lebanon.

The sources also confirmed that the Israeli army has sent reinforcements to the former Syrian Army's al-Jazeera barracks in the village of Ma'ariya, located in Daraa province, close to the Jordanian border.

In addition to this, Israeli occupation forces have constructed tall concrete barriers around the area and repaved all the roads leading to the barracks, further securing the site.

The occupation regime has capitalized on

recent political shifts in Syria, particularly the Syrian armed opposition's rise to power and the overthrow of President Bashar al-Assad government.

This has prompted a significant increase in Israeli aggression against Syria.

As Israel consolidates its occupation of Syria, the new Damascus governor calls for better ties with Tel Aviv

As a result, Tel Aviv has destroyed nearly all of the Arab country's military capabilities, key infrastructure, and research centers.

At the same time, the Israeli regime has expanded its territorial control, occupying approximately 600 square kilometers of land in southern Syria.

Officials serving with the new Syrian rulers have repeatedly indicated they will put up no resistance or any response to the widescale Israeli aggression and violation of Syrian sovereignty.

Last week, the new governor of Damascus said the new Syrian administration does not want to "meddle in anything that will threaten Israel's security" and called on the United States to mediate better ties.

Many observers have pointed out that the warm approach is limited to the Israeli regime and the U.S. occupation of Syria.

On Friday, the Lebanese Army announced that four of its soldiers had been injured in clashes with Syrian gunmen near the Lebanese-Syrian border in the Maaraboun area of Baalbek.

The incident marked the second time the Lebanese army has come under attack by Syrian gunmen. An exchange of fire on Thursday also left one Lebanese soldier injured.

Israeli ministers painting genocidal scenario for the West Bank

From page 1 ▶ "We will not tolerate a Gaza-like reality in Judea and Samaria (the West Bank), and anyone who follows Hamas' path in Gaza and enables or shelters the murder and harm of Jews will pay a heavy price," he wrote on X.

The Israeli army has slaughtered more than 45,850 Palestinians in Gaza since launching war on the enclave in October 2023.

It now seems that Ben Gvir is trying to convey a message that Israel may consider a Gaza-style scenario in the West Bank.

He has also used the term "Judea and Samaria" which is the biblical name by which Israel refers to the occupied West Bank. The far-right minister is, in fact, doubling down on Israel's claim of sovereignty over the West Bank.

Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich, another far-right member of Israel's ruling coalition, echoed Ben Gvir's remarks.

"Funduq, Nablus, and Jenin should look like Jabalia," he said in a statement.

Israel has devastated Jabalia since launch-

ing a new offensive in northern Gaza in early October 2024. It has carried out back-to-back massacres in the Palestinian town.

Israeli media says the Jabalia refugee camp has been left a "ghost town" with no buildings left intact.

Smotrich is now implying that the Israeli army should demolish Funduq, Nablus, and Jenin and butcher Palestinians there.

Since the onset of the conflict in Gaza, there has been a significant increase in violence in the West Bank.

According to the Palestinian Health Ministry in Ramallah, Israeli troops or settlers have killed more than 800 Palestinians in the West Bank in parallel with the genocidal war in Gaza.

Palestinian attacks on Israelis have killed more than two dozen settlers in the West Bank in the same period.

Israel has neither been able to cripple the Palestinian resistance in Gaza nor the West Bank.

The Israeli army has failed to eliminate



Smotrich suggests that the Israeli military destroy towns in the West Bank as retaliation for the shooting incident in Funduq and Ben Gvir envisions a level of violence akin to that seen in Gaza.

Hamas in Gaza about 15 months after initiating the Gaza onslaught.

Monday's shooting in the West Bank also indicates that Israelis will face a recurring nightmare as long as the regime persists in its appalling atrocities against Palestinians.

Musk hits back at 'utterly despicable' Starmer after British PM accuses him of spreading lies

Elon Musk has ramped up his criticism of British Prime Minister Keir Starmer over the grooming gangs scandal after he accused the tech billionaire of "spreading lies".

Starmer said on Monday morning that politicians calling for a national inquiry into the issue were seeking to "jump on a bandwagon of the far Right", the Telegraph reported.

But Musk hit back as he posted on his X website: "Starmer was deeply complicit in the mass rapes in exchange for votes. That's what the inquiry would show."

Musk labeled Starmer "utterly despicable".

He previously criticized the government for refusing to hold a public inquiry into historic sexual abuse by grooming gangs in Oldham.

Musk attacked the decision, taken by safeguarding minister Jess Phillips, as "disgraceful" and claimed that she "deserves to be in prison".

Starmer said a "line has been crossed" with the criticism of Ms Phillips. He also suggested Musk was "desperate for attention" as a war of words between the two men escalated.

The premier told a press conference: "Those that are spreading lies and misinformation as far and as wide as possible, they are not interested in victims, they are interested in themselves."

He added: "I enjoy the cut and thrust of politics, the robust debate that we must have but that has got to be based on facts and truth, not on lies, not on those who are so desperate for attention that they are prepared to debase themselves and their country."

Phillips has insisted it was "for Oldham council alone" to decide whether to launch an investigation into alleged exploitation between 2011 and 2014.

Israeli forces infiltrating West Bank camp in an ambulance

The footage from a surveillance camera, verified by Al Jazeera's Sanad agency, showed the moment Israeli special forces infiltrated the Balata refugee camp using an ambulance on December 19.

The raid resulted in the death of two Palestinians, including a woman.

Nicola Perugini, a professor of international relations at the University of Edinburgh in Scotland, noted the Israeli move came as its military accuses Hamas of using medical facilities for military purposes in Gaza, something UN officials say it has offered scant evidence for.

"The Israeli army hiding in an ambulance to

carry out an operation in Balata refugee camp, Nablus. The same army that destroyed Gaza's hospitals based on the fabricated accusation that they are a network of military command centers," Perugini said in a post on X.

Albanese, the UN special rapporteur for Palestine, also slammed the Israeli actions.

"Misusing the protected status of medical vehicles and personnel is a flagrant violation of the Geneva Conventions and may constitute a crime of perfidy. By systemically disregarding IHL [international humanitarian law], Israel has rendered the legal frameworks meant to protect civilians, completely meaningless," she wrote on X.

Another newborn baby freezes to death in Gaza

A new Palestinian newborn baby froze to death in Gaza, taking the death toll from the cold weather to eight amid Israel's genocidal war on the enclave, the Health Ministry said on Monday.

A ministry statement said that 35-day-old Yousef Ahmad Kalloub lost his life due to the harsh winter cold in the territory, Anadolu reported.

Palestinian civilians have been under a brutal Israeli war since October 2023.

Tel Aviv has also imposed a stifling blockade on the enclave, leaving the territory's entire

population on the verge of famine.

A cold wave and torrential rains have even worsened conditions for the helpless civilians, leaving them struggling to live in their worn-out tents in displacement camps.

In November, the International Criminal Court (ICC) issued arrest warrants for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and former war minister Yoav Gallant for war crimes and crimes against humanity in Gaza.

Israel also faces a genocide case at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) for its deadly war on the enclave.

Why is Washington keen to nurture Syrian Kurds?

From page 1 ▶ When the Kurds in Iraq tried to secede, Tel Aviv -in cooperation with the Pahlavi regime- supported them. Mulla Mustafa Barzani, the Kurdish leader, met with Israeli officials in the occupied territories in 1968 and 1973.

In 2003, after the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime and the granting of autonomy to the Kurds within the Iraqi state, Kurdish-Israeli relations expanded.

Today, not only the Israeli occupation regime but Turkey has undeniable hegemonic ambitions in Syria. That is why Ankara has rushed to strengthen its relations with Ahmed al-Sharaa (al-Julani).

However, the Turkish opposition is warning that Erdogan's policy, since his intervention in Syria in 2011, will push Israel further towards the Turkish border.

In the meantime, the political factions in the Iraqi Kurdistan have welcomed the initiative of Devlet Bahceli, the head of Turkey's Nationalist Movement Party to release Abdullah Ocalan, the leader of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK).

Bahceli's initiative urges the release of Ocalan on condition that he dissolve his party. The initiative is expected to boost the Kurdistan region's economy as the volume of trade exchange with Turkey may exceed \$20 billion

annually, according to experts.

On October 9, 1998, Ocalan fled to Syria and Greece, then to Russia and Italy, and then to the Greek embassy in Kenya, where the US and Israeli intelligence forces handed him over, to Turkey on February 14, 1999. Turkey sentenced him to life in prison.

The PKK leader is held in solitary confinement in the Imrali prison, a high-security detention center on the island of Imrali, in the Sea of Marmara in Turkey.

For five years, he was forbidden from holding any meetings, even with his lawyers. Nevertheless, Ocalan recently met two leaders of the "People's Democracy and Equality Party," to whom he reiterated that he was ready for dialogue in a bid to "reach a political and peaceful solution."

Bahceli's initiative reflects Turkey's serious concerns, particularly in the aftermath of Israel's encroachment in Syria.

According to Ocalan, "The events in Gaza and Syria revealed the failure to solve the problems that were exacerbated by foreign interventions."

Seemingly, Turkey seeks to cooperate with Ocalan to remove the PKK's cadres from Syria and dissolve it in Qandil.

(See full text at tehrantimes.com)

Delegation from BRICS Youth Council to visit Tehran



TEHRAN - A delegation from the BRICS Youth Council is set to visit Tehran as part of an educational program aimed at familiarizing Iranian youth with the values and goals of the BRICS organization.

The initiative helps underscore Iran's rich cultural heritage and its growing appeal as a destination for international collaboration and tourism.

Diana Kovala, a member of the BRICS Youth Council, announced the plan in an interview with TASS news agency on Sunday. "The idea of organizing this educational trip came up in 2024, when Russia held the presidency of BRICS," Kovala stated.

"We have visited India as a mission, and in 2025, we plan to visit several other countries such as Iran, the UAE, and Egypt."

Kovala emphasized the importance of engaging with member countries to promote awareness about BRICS principles. "Following the BRICS statement in Kazan, we need to travel to member countries for educational purposes," she explained.

Reflecting on the success of the group's recent educational trip to India, she added, "Informing the youth of member countries about the principles and values of BRICS is one of the goals of the trip."

The BRICS Youth Council, established in 2023

during the IX BRICS Youth Summit in South Africa, aims to foster cooperation among young leaders from member nations. Its efforts are aligned with BRICS' broader objectives of enhancing economic, cultural, and educational ties.

Iran, along with Egypt, Ethiopia, and the UAE, became a member of BRICS in early 2024. The country's inclusion reflects its strategic importance and rich cultural and historical legacy, which align with the bloc's mission of fostering global cooperation.

Iran's vast cultural heritage—from ancient Persian architecture to UNESCO-listed sites—and its unique tourism appeal are expected to captivate the visiting delegation. The program in Tehran will offer opportunities to explore these aspects, further promoting Iran as a vital member of BRICS with significant potential for cultural exchange and tourism growth.

Russia currently holds the rotating presidency of BRICS, which includes Brazil, China, Egypt, Ethiopia, India, Iran, South Africa, and the UAE. The 16th BRICS Summit, held in November 2024 in Kazan, Russia, saw the participation of leaders from member countries, including Iran's President Masoud Pezeshkian. During the summit, initiatives to enhance cooperation among member nations were highlighted.

Researchers find 3-million-year-old tools in Kenya, showing development of human ancestors

On a lakeside peninsula in Eastern Africa, archaeologists have found clues about a society that lived there over 3 million years ago.

The Homa Peninsula, in Kenya, is part of the East African Rift Valley, a part of the world often called "the cradle of humankind." So many of the oldest clues about humanity's earliest days have been preserved under the valley's fertile, human soil, including the remains of "Lucy," an ancient human relative who lived more than 3 million years ago.

Tom Plummer and his team are the latest to make discoveries in the area, working at a site on the peninsula called Nyanga. The team found flakes, or little knives, at the dig site. The blades are believed to be some of the first tools ever used on Earth — and even after more than 3 million years, they still have a sharp edge.

Plummer, an archaeologist at the City University of New York, said the blades were made by hammering one stone against each other. The knives would have been used to peel and cut fruits and vegetables, and to cut the flesh off prey like hippos, Plummer said. The meat would then be pounded between stones to tenderize it. The knife and stones are known as the Oldowan tool kit, and likely set the stage for further technology advancement down the line.

"I think the Oldowan technology is probably the most important technological innovation that ever happened in human history," Plummer told "CBS Saturday Morning."

"It allowed (the pre-human ancestors) to access a whole array of foods that they would never have had access to before."

Plummer said that new diet would have fueled body and brain growth, starting a "feedback loop" that created more sophisticated beings who "start doing more with technology." An similar, even older cutting tool was also found in Kenya, but that technology ap-

parently died out, so Plummer believes this tool is the one that can be credited for those developments.

"I think that's all starting with the Oldowan," Plummer said.

Who made the tools is another surprise. Along with the tools, Plummer's team found the tooth of a paranthropus, an early hominin that is not a direct ancestor of humans. That suggests that the first tool making is not a human legacy, but an idea humanity's ancestors copied, then used to dominate other hominins, who ultimately died out.

Rick Potts, the director of the Smithsonian's human origins program and the leader of research on the peninsula, said that discovery can help frame humans' existence on the planet.

"We are the last biped standing, as I call it," Potts said. "All of those other ways of life became extinct. And so that gives us a lot to think about, and it draws attention to the fragility of life, even in our own journey through time."

Searching for pre-human history

The search for these early artifacts has the look and intrigue of an "Indiana Jones" film. Finding the splintered rocks that showed evidence of being used as tools was one thing, but the archaeology team then had to find the cut marks on animal bones that confirmed how the knives were being used.

Blasto Onyango, a local archaeological legend who helped uncover the Turkana Boy, the most complete early hominin skeleton ever discovered, said that his impressive find took "four or five years" to find. As the time passed, he and other archaeologists found "different parts of the" skeleton, working slowly but surely to uncover the remains of a young boy who lived over one and a half million years ago.

(Source: CBS News)

Reviving Seljuk heritage in Isfahan: restoration of 2,000 square meters around Raran Minaret

TEHRAN - Some 2,000 square meters around the Seljuk-era Raran Minaret are being restored in an ongoing effort to revive the ancient architecture and cultural heritage in Isfahan and its surrounding villages.

"Spanning an area of 2,000 square meters, the project is near completion," Mohammad-Ali Izadkhasti, the CEO of Isfahan's Urban Revitalization Organization, said on Monday.

The Raran Minaret, located in the village of the same name in Jey rural district of Isfahan county, dates back nearly a millennium. It stands as a testament to the architectural ingenuity of the Seljuk era, with its unique design and Kufic inscriptions highlighting its cultural and historical value.

Izadkhasti emphasized that the minaret's exceptional location and architecture make it a vital part of Iran's cultural heritage.

The restoration project, conducted by Isfahan's Urban Revitalization Organization, aims to enhance the surrounding area while preserving the historical integrity of the minaret.

He said the restoration work is currently over 95% complete and is expected to be finalized within the next two months.

According to Izadkhasti, key features of the project include:

Pedestrian-friendly pathways: Newly designed walking paths, constructed with traditional materials such as brick and stone, provide easy access for visitors.

Visitor amenities: Comfortable seating areas have been installed to improve the experience for tourists and locals alike.

Locally sourced materials: The project incorporates native materials to maintain harmony with the region's historical fabric.

Cultural hub creation: A multi-functional space in front of the minaret is being developed to host cultural and artistic events, fostering community engagement and raising awareness



about the site's significance.

Preserving identity and promoting tourism

"Through this project, we aim to safeguard the historical identity of the Raran Minaret while creating an inviting environment for citizens and tourists, particularly local residents," Izadkhasti noted.

He highlighted the potential of the site to attract more visitors and enhance tourism in the area, thanks to its unique Seljuk-era architecture and cultural resonance.

Community involvement and social conservation

The initiative is not only about physical preservation but also about fostering social conservation. By creating opportunities for cultural events at the site, the organization hopes to integrate human activity with historical preservation.

Izadkhasti added that such efforts could generate economic opportunities while promoting greater community involvement in protecting Isfahan's heritage.

Architectural features

The height of Raran Minaret

is 30.40 meters, and its base is square-shaped with an initial width of 3 meters. Inside the minaret, there is a staircase that begins two meters above the base and continues up to the throat of the structure.

The lower section of the minaret is constructed with plain bricks without decorative patterns. The middle section of the minaret's body features lozenge patterns and Kufic script created with raised bricks. The upper section is adorned with checkered brickwork and lozenge shapes.

Seljuk minarets

Minarets, tall towers from which the call to a prayer is made, also saw significant evolution under the Seljuks. While earlier minarets were often square in shape, the Seljuks popularized the use of cylindrical minarets.

These new forms of minarets often featured intricate muqarnas (stalactite-like ornamentation) supporting balconies. The Seljuk minaret was not just a functional structure but also a symbol of power and religious devotion.

One of the earliest surviv-

ing examples of a Seljuk minaret is found in Saveh (1010) and Damghan (1026-29), both in Iran. The cylindrical form of the minaret soon spread to other parts of the Islamic world. Moreover, the UNESCO-registered Minaret of Jam in Afghanistan, built between 1163 and 1203, stands as one of the most remarkable examples of Seljuk architectural prowess, rising 200 feet with a beautifully ornamented shaft.

Glimpses of Seljuk Empire

The Seljuk Empire, one of the most significant Turco-Persian dynasties, played a crucial role in the revitalization of the Muslim world, and particularly in many Iranian cities, from 1037 to 1194.

The Seljuks brought with them distinct cultural and architectural influence that left a lasting legacy across the Islamic world. As their empire expanded, encompassing Persia (the former name of Iran), Mesopotamia, Anatolia, and beyond, the Seljuks fostered a rich environment for intellectual, artistic, and architectural growth. Persia, a central part of their empire, became a major hub of architectural innovation and creativity during this period. The architectural achievements under Seljuk's patronage, especially in Iran, continue to captivate and inspire those interested in Islamic art and history.

It was a period that revived and expanded upon the architectural traditions established by the Umayyads and Abbasids. However, their influence brought innovations in architectural techniques, forms, and decorative styles. In particular, the Seljuks are celebrated for introducing new types of buildings and transforming existing structures to suit their religious, cultural, and commercial needs.

It is notable that all of the Seljuk Empire's capitals are now located within the borders of modern Iran. These capitals were Neyshapur (1037-1043), Ray (1043-1051), Isfahan (1051-1118), Merv (1118-1153), and Hamadan (1118-1194).

Archaeological studies begin on a discovered hole at Shushtar's bus terminal

TEHRAN - Shushtar's Department of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts has announced the initiation of archaeological and research studies on a hole discovered during construction work at the city's bus terminal.

The cavity is suspected to hold historical significance, according to Davoud Najjar-Asiabani, head of the department.

In an interview with IRNA on Monday, Najjar-Asiabani explained that reports of the hole emerged during the construction of a basement for a shop at the terminal.

In response, a team of archaeologists, conservation specialists, and the heritage protection unit was dispatched to the site to conduct preliminary assessments, the official said.

To ensure proper evaluation, construction activities at the site have been halted. "Accurate identification and analysis require extensive fieldwork. As such, the expertise of the Khuzestan province's Cultural Heritage Directorate and other specialists are



being utilized in parallel to gather comprehensive data," Najjar-Asiabani noted.

Initial observations suggest the cavity may be part of an ancient water channel. However, the area's dense clay deposits make it difficult to determine its size and extent.

Elsewhere in his remarks, the official stressed that conclusions would only be drawn after conducting thorough research

and archaeological studies.

Shushtar: a hub of historical engineering

Shushtar is renowned for its over 100 historical water structures spanning various eras. One of those structures in the UNESCO-registered Shushtar Historical Hydraulic System includes interconnected bridges, dams, mills, waterfalls, canals, and tunnels, designed to optimize the use of river water.

Dating back to the Achaemenid and Sassanid periods, these structures were highlighted by French archaeologist Jean Dieulafoy as the "largest industrial complex before the Industrial Revolution."

Recognized globally, the "Shushtar Historical Hydraulic System" was inscribed as Iran's tenth UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2009. Another UNESCO-listed site in Shushtar is the Afzal Caravanserai, recently added to the World Heritage list during the 45th session of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee in Riyadh.

Ukraine seeks UNESCO recognition for Generous Evening customs

The Ukrainian House in Kyiv hosted "Traditions of the Generous Evening" show, Ukrinform reports on 6 January. The event showcased Ukrainian customs and cultural identity while supporting the nomination of generous evening traditions for UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage list.

Marina Kobylinska, co-founder of the NGO Institute of Cul-

ture of Ukraine and the project's author, emphasized the importance of cultural preservation, stating, "Imperialism cannot erase a state with historical roots, cultural markers, and identity."

The event featured performances by notable Ukrainian artists Jerry Heil and Artem Pivovarov, accompanied by the NAONI ORCHESTRA. The program

included a new arrangement of Mykola Leontovych's Shchedryk known in the West as Carol of the Bells.

The show incorporated traditional elements including fortune-telling ceremonies and festive table arrangements, symbolizing Ukrainian hospitality. Organizers highlighted the importance of passing traditions to younger generations.

The Institute of Culture of Ukraine organized the event as part of the USAID-funded Engage! Civic Activity Promotion Program, implemented by Pact in Ukraine. A portion of tickets was distributed to internally displaced families through the NGO Union of Large Families "Happy."

(Source: euromaidanpress.com)

Belgrade interested in enhancing educational ties with Tehran

TEHRAN – Serbian Ambassador to Tehran, Damir Kovacevic, has announced his country's willingness to foster scientific, research, and educational collaborations with Iran.

"Serbia is ready to deepen bilateral relations with Iran. The country grants scholarships to a large number of Iranian students, and offers sabbatical leaves to them," the ambassador added.

He made the remarks in a meeting with Education Minister Alireza Kazemi in Tehran on Sunday, IRNA reported.

On the other hand, "Iran's ministry of education manages two teacher training universities. I think there are opportunities for cooperation and we welcome any new and innovative ideas in this field," Kovacevic further noted.

The official went on to say that presently educational textbooks in the country feature European luminaries. However, enhancing collaborations can help include Iranian luminaries in textbooks, as well.

Kazemi, for his part, said Iran and Serbia already have bilateral relations in political, cultural, educational, and economic fields.

Highlighting the significance of exchanging knowledge and experiences, Kazemi proposed the expansion of the ties in vocational education, special education, and teaching literacy. The official went on to ask for developing education infrastructure and making use of Iranians teachers' skills in Serbia.

He also invited the Serbian minister of education to pay a visit to Iran to share expertise in education sector and become familiar with research and scientific achieve-



ments of the country.

Iran, Serbia vow closer cooperation

Iranian Ambassador to Serbia, Rashid Hassanpour, recently engaged in discussions with the Serbian President regarding a range of bilateral, regional, and international matters.

As reported by IRNA, this meeting followed a phone call in which President Aleksandar Vucic congratulated Iran's newly elected president, Masoud Pezeshkian, on his electoral success.

During that conversation, Vucic noted the significant growth in relations between Iran and Serbia under the late President Ebrahim Raisi and expressed optimism that this positive trajectory would persist with Pezeshkian's presidency.

The Serbian President underscored the necessity of strengthening collaboration across various sectors. In turn, Hassanpour, who previously served as the head of the Iran-Serbia Parliamentary Friendship Group, conveyed his

deep understanding of Serbia and expressed his aspirations for enhanced mutual cooperation to realize the full potential of the partnership between the two countries.

Iran and Serbia have had diplomatic relations for many years, and have enjoyed relatively friendly relations despite their different political systems. The two countries have cooperated in various fields, including trade, energy, education, and culture.

In recent years, there has been a push from both sides to strengthen ties, with Iranian and Serbian officials meeting regularly to discuss cooperation in various areas.

Key educational achievements

According to the latest statistics, education space per student in Iran has increased from 5.17 square meters in the calendar year 1396 (2017-2018) to 5.28 square meters in the year 1402 (2023 – 2024).

The literacy rate, as well, has increased from 87.9 percent in 1396 to 90.7 percent in 1402, IRNA reported.

In the mentioned six-year period, the ratio of resilient classrooms improved from 0.64 to 0.82, sport space per student grew from 0.17 to 0.20, and the ratio of classrooms equipped with cooling and heating systems rose from 0.48 to 0.68.

The literacy rate has improved in urban areas as well as rural areas. From 1396 to 1402, the literacy rate among men and women amounted to 93.9 percent and 87.4 percent, respectively.

The literacy rate in urban areas was announced to be 92.8 percent, males had a literacy of 95.4 percent and females had a literacy rate of 90.2 percent.

In rural areas, the literacy rate reached 83.5 percent. Men accounted for 88.8 percent and women for 78.3 percent of the figure.

Moreover, the number of out-of-school students in primary, secondary, and high school lowered from 2.17, 6.71, and 18.19 percent in 1396 to 2.10, 5.23, and 16.12 percent in 1402, respectively.

Literacy growth rate in Iran 2.5 times the world average

In the past four decades, the growth of literacy in the world has been about 18 percent, while in the same period, this figure in Iran has been 50 percent, IRNA reported.

Nearly one year after the 1979 Islamic Revolution, the Literacy Movement Organization was established by the order of Imam Khomeini with the aim of eradicating illiteracy.

At that time more than half of Iran's population, over the age of six, was illiterate. Now, Iran is on the verge of removing illiteracy.

Bolivia, Venezuela seek to further sci-tech ties with Iran

TEHRAN –Delegations from Bolivia and Venezuela have paid a visit to Iran house of innovation and technology (iHiT) to explore avenues for boosting scientific and technological cooperation with Iran.

The Bolivian delegation, led by defense minister, Edmundo Novello, and the Venezuelan delegation, headed by member of the National Assembly, Francisco Alejandro Torrealba Ojeda, held a joint meeting with Hossein Roozbeh, the head of the Organization for the Development of International Cooperation in Science and Technology, on Sunday, IRNA reported.

The Bolivian official, lauding Iran's significant progress in various fields of science and technology, said that "enhancing scientific ties will be beneficial not only to our countries but also the region and even the world. We appreciate Iran's readiness to develop scientific and technological relations with different countries. These collaborations will contribute to expertise exchange, economic growth, and improved quality of life in the two countries."

For his part, the Venezuelan official commended Iran as one of the leading countries in technology, saying, "Iran is a role model for us and we hope to benefit from Iran's experience and technical knowledge. Scientific and technological cooperation can help strengthen the industrial and scientific infrastructure of the countries and lay the basis for further growth and progress in the economic and social sectors."

Roozbeh also announced Iran's willingness to further scientific, and technological cooperation with its partners, including Bolivia and Venezuela.

Highlighting that Iran is proud of its technological and innovative capabilities, the official said Iran welcomes innovative and technological interactions with no limitations. For sure, the collaborations will bring tangible benefits to participating countries.

The official proposed utilizing the upcoming opportunities to conduct joint projects, enhance sustainable development, and strengthen relations. "We are confident that these interactions can open up new opportunities for the economic and scientific growth of all three countries," Roozbeh further noted.

Iran targets world's 12th spot in science production

Despite ongoing sanctions, Iran is planning to elevate the country's ranking for scientific productions from currently 17 to 12 by 2027.

Due to sanctions, economic restrictions, and the limitations on publishing papers by Iranian scholars, particularly during the last three years, Iran's ranking in scientific productions has lowered from 15 to 17, Shahin Akhondzadeh, an of-



ficial with the health ministry, has said.

The country's advancement in science production requires compensating for the regression in research and technology through providing funds, facilitating research, and promoting meritocracy which will reduce young elites' migration, as well, the health ministry's website quoted Akhondzadeh as saying.

Scientific associations grow by 23%

The number of scientific associations as one of the pillars of science in the country has increased from 322 in the Iranian year 1392 (2013 -2014) to 396 last year (ended on March 19), signifying a 22.9 percent growth.

Interdisciplinary and humanitarian associations have experienced the highest growth. Within a decade, the number of interdisciplinary and humanitarian associations has increased from 50 and 102 to 85 and 142, respectively, IRNA reported.

Scientific associations have always played an essential role in producing knowledge and achieving scientific development.

They are the main foundation of institutions beyond political, racial, ethnic, religious, and sexual boundaries.

Scientific associations have emerged in response to the needs of the world of democracy and the enhancement of human solidarity. They have also created an appropriate environment for free thinking and the establishment of a culture of conversations.

Their Independence from governments in finance and human resources, speed of action, high decision-making power, limited bureaucracy, and flexible mechanism bolster their efficiency at national and international levels.

According to data released by Scopus, Iran published 78,225 scientific articles in this database in 2022. Accordingly, Iran is ranked 15th in the world in terms of publication of scientific works for the fourth consecutive year.

Scopus data in 2022 shows that Iran ranks first among countries in the region in terms of the number of scientific publications.

National plan prepared to empower elderly women

TEHRAN –A national plan to empower the elderly women has been prepared and is scheduled to be unveiled soon, Mojgan Rezazadeh, head of the secretariat of the National Council of the Elderly, has announced.

Referring to the aging population of the country, the official said the society will face different challenges unless actions are taken beforehand to address social and economic problems and improve livelihood and self-care for the elderly people, IRNA reported.

The plan focuses on training elderly women by raising their awareness about aging, support systems, referral systems, and any other issues related to aging. The target society will be selected by the National Council of the Elderly, Rezazadeh noted.

The other main objective is to help elderly women stay active, and provide the best facilities for them by adapting the society to the presence of elders, she added.

Iran's transition into an aging country 'inevitable'

Considering the fact that the fertility rate in Iran is stabilized at around 1.6 children per woman, which is much lower than the rate

required to replace its aging population, the transition of society from young to middle-aged has become inevitable.

According to the first five-year national development plan (1989-1993), the policies focused on lowering the total fertility rate from 6.4 children in the Iranian year 1365 (1986) to 4 children in 1390 (2011) and reducing the population growth rate from 3.2 to 2.3 percent in the same period, IRNA quoted Mohammad-Javad Mahmoudi, an official with the National Institute for Population Research, as saying.

However, the taken measures, back then, led to a wide transformation and change in population indicators and a noticeable decrease in population growth and fertility rate far beyond the set goals of the first development plan in the country, the official noted.

The results of the census in 2011 and 2016 showed that the trend of the country's demographic changes had a significant deviation from the goals of the first five-year development plan, the official noted.

The population growth in 2011 and 2016 was announced to be 1.29 and 1.24, respec-

tively. The figure reached 0.7 in the past Iranian year (March 2023 –March 2024).

According to the latest census, the number of aged citizens in the country is growing by 3.62 percent which is five times faster than the total population growth rate, which is 1.24 percent.

In Iranian year 1385 (2006-2007), there were 5,121,043 men and women aged above 60. In 2015, 10 percent of the country's population was older than 60, ISNA quoted Mohammad-Javad Mahmoudi, an official with the National Institute for Population Research.

In the next 30 years, the population aged 60 years or older is projected to hold a 32 percent share of the whole population, that is, the elderly will account for one-third of Iran's population by 2050, the official noted.

Currently, men and women aged above 60 constitute some 11.5 percent of Iran's population, an official with the health ministry has said.

For the time being, elderly women account for 52.3 percent of the total population, outnumbering men (47.7 percent), ISNA quoted Saber Jabbari as saying.

ENGLISH IN USE

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Rainfall increases Lake Urmia level

Recent rainfall has increased the level of Lake Urmia to 1,271 meters, a step closer to its ecological level of 1,274 meters.

The lake is expected to reach its ecological level within 10 years by completing the restoration plans which started four years ago.

Farhad Sarkhosh, head of the Lake Urmia Restoration Program's office in West Azarbaijan province, said that the Lake's level is now 58 cm higher than it was last year.

According to the latest monitoring, the lake's water volume is estimated at more than 3.6 billion cubic meters.

He added that the lake surface area has reached 2,883 square kilometers, adding that the figure is increased by 538 square kilometers compared to the same period last year.

افزایش سطح تراز دریاچه ارومیه بر اثر بارش

بارش های اخیر تراز فعلی دریاچه ارومیه را به یک هزار و ۲۷۱ متر و ۳۸ سانتی متر رسانده است که در حال رسیدن به تراز اکولوژیک یک هزار و ۲۷۴ متر است.

به گزارش ایرنا، فرهاد سرخوش رییس دفتر استانی ستاد احیای دریاچه ارومیه گفت سطح دریاچه ارومیه اکنون ۵۸ سانتی متر بیشتر از زمان مشابه سال گذشته است.

طبق آخرین پایش صورت گرفته حجم آب این دریاچه بیش از سه میلیارد و ۶۷۰ میلیون مترمکعب برآورد شده است.

وی با بیان اینکه وسعت دریاچه ارومیه در حال حاضر به بیش از ۲ هزار و ۸۸۳ کیلومتر مربع رسیده، اضافه کرد: وسعت این دریاچه نیز نسبت به سال گذشته ۵۳۸ کیلومتر مربع افزایش دارد.

Polio vaccination campaign kicks off in southeast

TEHRAN –The annual door-to-door polio vaccination campaign has commenced in southeastern provinces and is scheduled to be implemented in two phases from January 4 to 18, an official with the health ministry has said.

The first phase concluded on Monday, January 6, IRNA quoted Qobad Moradi as saying.

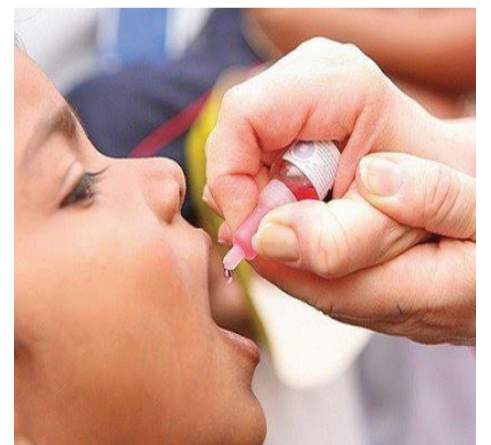
Polio is a highly infectious viral disease that largely affects children under 5 years of age. The virus is transmitted by person-to-person spread mainly through the fecal-oral route or, less frequently, by a common vehicle (e.g. contaminated water or food) and multiplies in the intestine, from where it can invade the nervous system and cause paralysis.

During the campaign, some 800,000 Iranian and foreign national children under the age of 5 will be immunized against polio by medical universities in Zahedan, Zabol, Jiroft, Kerman, Bam, Hormozgan, Bushehr, Ahvaz, Iranshahr, and Yazd, Moradi said.

The global polio eradication program with the aim to achieve world-free polio is almost in its final stage, the official noted.

However, the disease is still prevalent in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Also, some cases have been reported in some African countries.

In 2024, there were wild positive cases of



polio in the Afghanistan and Pakistan; the number of patients with acute flaccid paralysis increased 6 times, and traveling to these countries has increased the risk of the potential outbreak of the disease in the country, Moradi stressed.

Polio can be prevented through immunization. Polio vaccine, given multiple times, almost always protects a child for life. The development of effective vaccines to prevent paralytic polio was one of the major medical breakthroughs of the 20th century.

Razi Vaccine and Serum Research Institute has produced million doses of the polio vaccine, saving million children so far.



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GUIDE TO SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

Shunning a person who is attracted by you is a sign of your misfortune, and your inclination towards another who ignores you is a sign of your abjectness.

Imam Ali (AS)

Prayer Times > Noon:12:11 Evening: 17:27 Dawn: 5:45 (tomorrow) Sunrise: 7:15 (tomorrow)

Persian edition of “Wuthering Heights” republished

TEHRAN- The 10th edition of the Persian translation of English novelist and poet Emily Brontë’s 1847 novel “Wuthering Heights” has recently been published.

Elmi Farhangj Publications in Tehran is the publisher of the book translated by Ali Asghar Bahram Beigi.

“Wuthering Heights” follows the lives of the Earnshaw and Linton families in the Yorkshire moors. The story begins in 1801 when Mr. Lockwood, the new tenant at Thrushcross Grange, visits his landlord, Heathcliff, at the isolated Wuthering Heights. Upon arrival, Lockwood encounters a cold atmosphere filled with hostility from the servants. Snowed in for the night, he reads the diary of Catherine Earnshaw, leading to a disturbing nightmare that foreshadows the haunting themes of the novel.

Lockwood becomes bedridden due to illness, prompting Nelly Dean, the housekeeper, to recount the tragic history of the Earnshaws and Heathcliff. She recounts how Mr. Earnshaw adopted Heathcliff, an orphan with mysterious origins, as a favorite. This favoritism leads to resentment from Earnshaw’s biological children, particularly Hindley, who abuses Heathcliff after their father’s death. Heathcliff and Catherine form a close bond, but societal pressures and Hindley’s cruelty push Heathcliff away.

Catherine eventually marries Edgar Linton, believing that it is socially advantageous, despite her deep love for Heathcliff. This betrayal devastates Heathcliff, who returns years later, now wealthy and determined to exact revenge. His machinations lead to further suffering for those around him, including manipulating Hindley and pushing Edgar’s sister, Isabella, into a disastrous marriage with him. As Heathcliff’s obsession for Catherine continues, her health deteriorates, and she dies after giving birth to a daughter named Cathy.

Years later, Heathcliff seeks to unite his son

Linton with Cathy to secure his claim on Thrushcross Grange. However, Heathcliff’s violent passion for Catherine ultimately consumes him, leading to his demise. The novel concludes with Cathy and Hareton, Hindley’s son, finding solace together as they plan a future amidst the tragic legacies of their families. The story ends on a ghostly note, suggesting that Catherine and Heathcliff, eternally intertwined in love and suffering, may finally be at peace.

“Wuthering Heights,” the sole novel by Emily Brontë, was published in 1847 under the pseudonym Ellis Bell. A classic of English literature, influenced by Romanticism and Gothic fiction, it was accepted by publisher Thomas Newby alongside Anne Brontë’s “Agnes Grey.” Posthumously, Charlotte Brontë edited a second edition in 1850. Initially controversial for its portrayal of cruelty and challenges to Victorian values, it is now deemed one of the greatest English novels, inspiring numerous adaptations.

Emily Jane Brontë (1818 – 1848) was an English novelist and poet, best known for her only novel, “Wuthering Heights”. She also published poetry with her sisters Charlotte and Anne in “Poems by Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell.” Emily, the second-youngest of the Brontë siblings, adopted the pen name Ellis Bell. She taught briefly at Law Hill School but struggled with the demanding work schedule, returning home to assist with household duties.

In 1842, she and Charlotte attended a girls’ academy in Brussels to improve their languages. Emily felt out of place, resisting Belgian customs but impressing her teachers with her strong character. In 1844, she began organizing her poetry, with notable works emerging during this time. The sisters published their poetry in 1846 under their pseudonyms, despite initial low sales. Critically, Emily’s poems were recognized for their depth and musicality, indicating her literary talent.

Cartoon of Day



GAZA 2025

Cartoonist: Mahmoud Rifai from Jordan

Tehran photo exhibit highlights martyr Ayatollah Hakim’s life

TEHRAN- “On the Line of the Resistance” photo exhibition was inaugurated during a ceremony at Tehran’s Art Bureau on Sunday to mark the anniversary of the martyrdom of Ayatollah Sayyed Mohammad Baqir al-Hakim.

Organized by the Al Hakim Martyrs Foundation in collaboration with the House of Photographers of Iran, the ceremony was attended by various dignitaries including martyr Hakim’s son Sayyed Haidar Hakim, Deputy Head of the International Affairs of the Art Bureau Seyyed Amir-Naser Javid Haeri, former Iranian ambassador to Iraq and the deputy coordinator of the IRGC Quds Force Major General Iraj Masjedi, and Director of Public Relations for the Presidential Office Habibollah Abbasi.

Cultural Attaché of Iraq in Iran Yasser Abdul Zahra Al-Hajjaj, the representative of the Supreme Islamic Council of Iraq in Iran Majid Ghamas, the deputy head of Hamas’s youth office Ashraf Awad, Iraqi ambassador to Iran Naseer Abdul Mohsen Abdullah Al-Kawari and the Iranian president’s special envoy for Afghanistan Hassan Kazemi Qomi were also among the notable figures attending the ceremony.

Speaking at the event, Javid Haeri said, “I owe my prayers and my faith to martyr Hakim. For years, we lived next door to martyr Hakim, and I spent my childhood with this esteemed martyr.”

“Had it not been for his warmth, kindness, and the ever-open arms of Ayatollah Hakim welcoming children at the mosque—had he not shown up half an hour before communal prayers to shower us with affection—we might not have found our way to the mosque so easily.”

He continued, “What we witness in the ‘On the Line of the Resistance’ exhibition is intri-



cately linked to prayer. In these images, we can observe the prayer and worship of God in the life of martyr Hakim.”

“The House of Photographers is always open to our Iraqi brothers and sisters; this is your second homeland. Whenever you discern that our artistic community can assist in advancing the culture and civilization of Iraq, we are ready to help,” he added.

For his part Major General Masjedi remarked that the exhibition and its captivating images represent the remarkable character of Ayatollah Hakim. “I would like to express my gratitude to those who organized this exhibition,” he said.

“This exhibition immortalizes the name, memories, and life of the martyr for generations now and in the future, showcasing the character of martyr Hakim,” he added.

“It underscores the significance of art, as it holds a substantial place in today’s world, whether through cinema, film, photography, music, poetry, and more,” he noted.

Masjedi emphasized the necessity of producing a documentary about martyr Hakim’s life, referencing the recently aired film “Jamal” about Abou Mahdi al-Muhandis, stating, “We stand ready to assist in this endeavor.”

Masjedi also reflected on the moral qualities of martyr Hakim, describing him as simple, pious, hardworking, sincere, God-oriented, and amicable. “Since the time General Qassem Soleimani joined the Quds Force until his martyrdom, he had numerous meetings with Ayatollah Hakim and was always eager to visit him,” he shared.

At the end, Iraqi ambassador to Iran Naseer Abdul Mohsen Abdullah Al-Kawari expressed his satisfaction with the organization of this exhibition and said a few words about martyr Hakim.

Ayatollah Sayyed Mohammad Baqir al-Hakim, known as Shaheed al-Mehraab, was a prominent Iraqi Shia Islamic scholar and the leader of the Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI). Born in 1939, he spent over 20 years in exile in Iran, returning to Iraq in 2003,

after the U.S.-led invasion that toppled Saddam Hussein.

Upon his return, Ayatollah Hakim faced serious threats due to his advocacy for Shiite resistance against the Ba’ath regime. Tragically, on August 29, 2003, Ayatollah Hakim was killed in a devastating car bomb explosion outside the Imam Ali shrine in Najaf, which also claimed the lives of at least 75 other individuals.

In exile, Ayatollah Hakim became a vocal opponent of Saddam’s regime, establishing SCIRI aimed at advocating for Iraqi Shia interests. The group, under his guidance, gained military capability through the Badr Brigades, which conducted operations against Saddam’s forces.

Ayatollah Hakim’s assassination was linked to Abu Musab al-Zarqawi and Al-Qaeda operatives, leading to widespread protests against U.S. occupation during his funeral. His legacy remains significant in Iraq, where he is remembered for his commitment to Shia rights and his role in the tumultuous events of the early 21st century.

IAF cinematheque to screen Ingmar Bergman’s “After the Rehearsal”

TEHRAN-The cinematheque of the Iranian Artists Forum (IAF) in Tehran will show the 1984 film “After the Rehearsal” written and directed by Ingmar Bergman on Wednesday.

The film screening is set for 5 p.m. and will be followed by a review session in the presence of the film critic Ramtin Shahbazi, Mehr reported.

The script contains numerous quotes from the Swedish playwright and novelist August Strindberg’s “A Dream Play”. The film was screened out of competition at the 1984 Cannes Film Festival.

Erland Josephson, Ingrid Thulin, Lena Olin, Nadja Palmstjerna-Weiss, and Bertil Guve perform in the movie.

The story revolves around the rational, exacting, and self-controlled theater director, Henrik Vogler, who often stays after rehearsal to think and plan. On this day, Anna comes back, ostensibly looking for a bracelet. She is the lead in his new production of Strindberg’s “A Dream Play”. She talks of her hatred for her mother (now dead), an alcoholic actress who was Vogler’s star and lover.

Vogler falls into a reverie, remembering a day Anna’s mother, Raket, late in life, came after rehearsal to beg him to come to her apartment. He awakes and Anna reveals the reason she has returned: she jolts him into an emotional response, rare for him, and the feelings of a young woman and an older man play out.

Ingmar Bergman (1918-2007) was a Swedish film and theatre director and screenwriter. Widely considered one of the greatest and most influential film directors of all time, his films have been described as “profoundly personal meditations into the myriad struggles facing the psyche and the soul.”

Bergman directed more than 60 films and documentaries, most of which he also wrote, for both cinema releases and television screenings. He also had a theatrical career that included periods as Leading Director of Sweden’s Royal Dramatic Theater in Stockholm and of Germany’s Residenz Theater in Munich. He directed more than 170 plays.

Loose adaptation of Matt Haig’s “The Midnight Library” on Malek Theater stage



TEHRAN-A loose adaptation of the fantasy novel “The Midnight Library” written by Matt Haig is on stage at Malek Theater in Tehran.

The 70-minute play has been directed by Mohammad Malekshahi based on a script written by Mojtaba Golestani and Nima Nafe.

Niki Mozaffari and Mohammad Shabanpur are the only actors in the play, which is performed every night at 9 p.m.

Originally published in 2020, the novel follows a 35-year-old English woman unhappy in her dead-end life who is given the opportunity to experience lives she might have had if she had made different choices.

When Nora Seed finds herself in the Midnight Library, she has a chance to make things right. Up until now, her life has been full of misery and regret. She feels she has let everyone down, including herself. But things are about to change.

During the night she tries

to kill herself but ends up in a library managed by her school librarian. The library is between life and death with millions of books filled with stories of her life had she made some decisions differently.

The books in the Midnight Library enable Nora to live as if she had done things differently. With the help of an old friend, she can now undo every one of her regrets as she tries to work out her perfect life. But things aren’t always what she imagined they’d be, and soon her choices place the library and herself in extreme danger.

Before time runs out, she must answer the ultimate question: what is the best way to live?

“The Midnight Library” was shortlisted for the 2021 British Book Awards “Fiction book of the year”.

Matt Haig, 49, is an English author and journalist. He has written both fiction and non-fiction books for children and adults, often in the speculative fiction genre.

His other novels include “How to Stop Time,” “The Humans,” “The Radleys,” and “The Life Impossible”. He has also written books for children, such as “A Boy Called Christmas” and the memoir “Reasons to Stay Alive”.

The play will remain on stage at Malek Theater, located at Malek St., Shariati St. through January 24.