

# TEHRAN TIMES

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## Tragedy after tragedy for dislocated Gaza families

By Narges Pakdel

For nearly eight excruciating months, the people of Gaza have endured relentless displacement, pursued like prey and torn apart by the ongoing conflict that has ravaged their homeland.

Even the most skilled writers find it challenging to convey the full scope of the daily tragedies that unfold in that land, particularly affecting the most vulnerable members of society—women, children, and the elderly.

How does one adequately express the unimaginable anguish of families deprived of basic necessities, forced to seek shelter amidst ceaseless bombardments, their very survival hanging by a thread?

Imagine the profound despair of a child orphaned in an instant by the horrors of war, left to navigate a world torn apart by conflict and loss.

## Hamas kills more Israeli soldiers

By Wesam Bahrani

TEHRAN- After more than 236 days of war on the Gaza Strip, the armed wing of Hamas announced that it had executed a complex operation in the east of Rafah city.

The al-Qassam Brigades said its fighters lured an Israeli force into an ambush that resulted in the death of four occupation soldiers and the injury of several others.

In another statement the al-Qassam Brigades said three Israeli Merkava tanks had been targeted with mortar shells in Rafah.

In the Sultan neighborhood west of Rafah, Al-Qassam targeted an Israeli D9 bulldozer with a Yassin 105 shell. Additionally, two Israeli Merkava tanks were targeted in the vicinity of Khalid bin al-Waleed Mosque in the Salam neighborhood east of Rafah.

## US trying to sweep Israeli cranage in Rafah under the rug

By Shahrokh Saei

TEHRAN - As soon as Israel declared war on the Gaza Strip in early October, it laid out a systematic strategy to ethnically cleanse the besieged territory of Palestinians.

According to a document that was leaked following Israel's brutal onslaught, the Israeli Intelligence Ministry had called on the regime's army to evacuate the civilian population in Gaza to Egypt's Sinai.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his far-right ministers threw their weight behind the mass expulsion of Palestinians.

The Netanyahu regime also imposed a total siege on Gaza, cutting off food, water and electricity supplies.



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Exclusive Rabbi Weiss in exclusive interview with Tehran Times: **'Zionism an Antisemitic Project'**

## Iran acting FM says sanctions removal talks are ongoing

TEHRAN - Amidst mounting speculation surrounding the potential pause in the protracted talks on sanctions relief, especially against the backdrop of forthcoming elections in Iran and the United States, the acting Foreign Minister of Iran reassured that communication channels remain open and discussions are ongoing.

Ali Bagheri Kani, addressing reporters on the sidelines of the Iranian administration's weekly cabinet meeting in the capital Tehran on Wednesday, emphasized that Iran's nuclear activities are overseen by the Supreme National Security Council (SNSC). He highlighted the ongoing negotiations with the United States aimed at lifting sanctions against Tehran and affirmed that messaging exchanges persist without interruption.

Bagheri Kani emphasized the current administration's unwavering dedication to active involvement in foreign affairs and the prioritization of regional diplomacy, stressing serious engagement with neighboring nations.

He underscored Iran's membership in global economic alliances like the BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), highlighting the significance of Iran's foreign policy stature in international affairs, as reflected by countries' intentions and approaches towards enhancing ties with Iran. ▶ Page 2

## Interior minister elucidates on snap presidential election amidst national mourning

TEHRAN - The Iranian Interior Minister has outlined the procedural and preparatory steps for the upcoming snap presidential election, emphasizing the role of the Constitutional Council in vetting candidates and the two-week period allocated for campaign advertisements.

Speaking on the sidelines of the weekly cabinet meeting on Wednesday, Ahmad Vahidi acknowledged the nation's mourning following the tragic helicopter crash that claimed the lives of President Ebrahim Raisi and other officials.

Despite the national grief, he stressed that the officials must fulfill their duties to ensure the smooth execution of the snap election.

Vahidi confirmed that all necessary preparations have been made, including the establishment of the Election Headquarters, the formation of executive boards, notifications to provincial authorities, and the creation of the advertising commission, as mandated by law.

He announced that candidate registration would commence on Thursday, with a five-day window from 8 a.m. daily. Candidates must meet specific criteria, including age requirements and the absence of a criminal record, as detailed in the official notices. ▶ Page 2

▶ Page 5



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## Commemorative ceremony held for President Raisi at Expediency Council

TEHRAN - A commemorative ceremony was held on Wednesday for the late President Ebrahim Raisi at the Expediency Discernment Council in Tehran.

The ceremony was attended by senior officials, including interim President Mohammad Mokhber and Judiciary chief Mohsen Eje'i.

President Raisi and Foreign Minister Amir Hossein Abdollahian lost their lives during a tragic helicopter crash in northwest Iran on May 19.

## Khiva set to dazzle as tourism capital of the Islamic world

By Afshin Majlesi

KHIVA - Here in Khiva, meticulous preparations are underway as the ancient city readies itself to host the 12th session of the Islamic Conference of Tourism Ministers (ICTM) from May 31 to June 2.

According to organizers, the event, themed "Development of the Tourism Industry in a Sustainable and Resilient Way," is set to not only highlight Khiva but also serve as the inauguration of its year-long celebration as the tourism capital of the Islamic world.

The overall atmosphere of the city is highly associated with excitement and pride. Many streets are adorned with festive decorations to welcome guests that include ministers and dignitaries from the member states of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. ▶ Page 6

## \$4.6b of oil projects to go operational soon: Oji

TEHRAN - Iranian Oil Minister Javad Oji said 32 oil industry projects with a total investment of \$4.6 billion have been completed and will go operational in the near future, Shana reported.

According to Oji, over the past 33 months, some 132 semi-finished projects with a total investment of \$28.5 billion were also completed and put into operation.

The minister noted that 50 new projects worth over \$50 billion have also been started to complete the oil industry's value chain.

Earlier this month, Oji said the country's oil production has increased by 60 percent in the current government starting August 2021.

The minister made the remarks in the opening ceremony of the 28th International Oil, Gas, Refining, and Petrochemical Exhibition, better known as Iran's Oil Show 2024. ▶ Page 4

## TEHRAN PAPERS

## European governments afraid of the dangerous consequences of IRGC designation

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

In a note, Kayhan addressed the non-designation of the IRGC as a terrorist organization by European governments and wrote: The difficulty in classifying the IRGC as a terrorist organization became clear after the direct attack of the Islamic Republic on Israel with drones and missiles in April. Until recently, the diplomatic service of the European Union, headed by Josep Borrell, was hesitant to issue the ruling. Josep Borrell has been known to oppose the classification of IRGC as a terrorist organization in the European Union. One of the reasons for this is trying to convince the Islamic Republic to adhere to an agreement to limit the country's nuclear program, which aims to prevent the Islamic Republic from building a nuclear bomb. It is reminded that the IRGC was the biggest stabilizing and anti-terrorism force in the region, which reduced the evil of ISIS terrorist criminals from the people of the region and the world. On the other hand, the European governments know that if they make clear their enmity with the Revolution Guards, their soldiers and security contractors will be treated as terrorists in the region.

#### Etamed: The tense chapter of Iran and the Agency!

In a commentary, Etemad discussed the challenging days between Iran and the IAEA before the upcoming meeting of the Board of Governors and said: The International Atomic Energy Agency claims in a report that the negotiations with Iran over the country's nuclear program have been suspended. In recent years, relations between Iran and the IAEA have been full of tension, as the IAEA has consistently claimed that Iran prevents IAEA inspectors from accessing its nuclear facilities and has disabled monitoring devices there. It seems that the European powers, including the UK and France, are preparing a strong resolution against Iran in next week's meeting of the Board of Governors. This alleged action shows that the European troika intends to take a different approach from the United States toward Iran's nuclear program. Biden has asked other countries to refrain from approving this resolution because he does not want to escalate tensions with Iran over the nuclear program until the new president takes office in Iran and the new government is established. But what can be seen from the development process, there is a change in the desire of Iran and the United States to resume negotiations.

#### Iran: Iran's warning

The Iran newspaper wrote in an analysis: Tehran

has determined one of the aspects of its recent understanding with the director general of the Agency to stay away from the political game of the West. This means that the recent negotiations in Iran will proceed only if Grossi prevents the Agency from being used as an agent to implement the scenario of the West, with the United States and the European troika, and this issue can be verified in his tone, positions and reports. On the other hand, it was determined that the plan and implementation of any understanding between Iran and the Agency would be limited to the safeguards' provisions of this regulatory Agency and there would be no possibility to repeat the extra safeguards demands of the Agency from Iran. All this while the news being transmitted from Vienna about the attempt to approve the anti-Iranian resolution is against the cooperation formed during Grossi's visit to Iran. Therefore, the first step of the Director General to implement what he has agreed in Iran can be to prevent the approval of any anti-Iranian resolution and end the political movements of the Western countries of the Agency. Any wrong step towards Iran can lead to a counter-reaction from our country, which the Agency and Western countries will not have a chance to compensate for.

#### Jam-e-Jam: Reviving Iran-Saudi relations is a winning card for regional diplomacy

In an explanation, Jam-e-Jam dealt with the importance of reviving the relationship between Iran and Saudi Arabia and said: According to experts in the field of diplomacy, the improvement of relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia, which was one of the traditional partners of the United States in the West Asia region, lays the foundation for a series of developments in the region and are the improvement of relations of parties with the Islamic Republic of Iran. Publishing news about the improvement of Iran's relationship with Bahrain and the revival of Tehran-Cairo relations originates from this strategic policy in the field of foreign policy. The revival of Iran-Saudi relations was the key to these developments, which firstly defeated American and Israeli policies and neutralized their sinister plans for the future of the strategic region of West Asia, after that, many regional issues, including the establishment of security in the Persian Gulf, were on the agenda. It was for this reason that the friendly, neighboring and enemy countries reached the consensus that Tehran's active diplomacy has a good command of all developments and no equation and agreement in West Asia can be achieved without Iran.

## Free trade with Eurasia a lasting legacy of late President Raisi: Russian expert

TEHRAN - The First Deputy Chairman of the Committee on CIS Affairs has highlighted the historic signing of the free trade agreement between the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) and Iran in December 2023, describing it as a lasting achievement in the legacy of the late President Ebrahim Raisi.

In his statement, Konstantin Zatuln emphasized that the agreement was realized through the concerted efforts of the Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Khamenei, President Raisi, and Foreign Minister Amir Abdollahian.

On December 25, 2023, Iran, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, and Armenia formalized a free trade agreement during a ceremony in Saint Petersburg. This significant move followed the initial step taken in 2017, when a draft agreement for preferential export tariffs was signed in Yerevan. By 2018, a temporary agreement was in place, allowing tariff discounts on numerous goods exchanged between the parties.

Under this framework, Iran granted tariff reductions on approximately 380 items of manufactured goods from the EEU, while the EEU reciprocated with discounts on 502 items of Iranian products. These concessions facilitated equitable economic exchanges, benefiting both parties.

Zatuln also addressed the tragic helicopter crash on May 19, 2024, which claimed the lives of President Raisi, the Foreign Minister, and their companions. He expressed the profound grief felt by the Russian people and extended his condolences, noting that Tehran-Moscow relations flourished under President Raisi's leadership.

"We hope that Moscow-Tehran relations will not deteriorate in the future and that we will achieve new heights in our cooperation. It is important to honor the figures who were martyred," Zatuln stated.

Reflecting on the commencement of the new parliamentary term, he expressed confidence that the progress in bilateral relations between Russia and Iran would continue.

The 12th term of parliament began on Tuesday, with Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf re-elected as the parliament speaker.

In conclusion, Zatuln asserted that nothing will divert the path of Russia-Iran relations.

The helicopter crash that shocked Iran, resulting in the loss of President Raisi and others, has left an indelible mark on the nation, casting a profound shadow over its people.

Following the tragic incident, the people of Tehran and some other cities gathered in overwhelming numbers to participate in the funeral ceremony for the late President Ebrahim Raisi and Foreign Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian.

On May 22, the air was thick with grief as mourners from every corner of Tehran came together to honor their martyred president and foreign minister. Their presence and collective sorrow spoke volumes, reflecting a deep sense of loss and reverence for the men who had served their nation with such dedication. The streets echoed with heartfelt tributes, as the populace expressed their profound mourning and unwavering respect for President Raisi and Minister Amir Abdollahian.

# Interior minister elucidates on snap presidential election amidst national mourning

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Speaking on the sidelines of the weekly cabinet meeting on Wednesday, Ahmad Vahidi acknowledged the nation's mourning following the tragic helicopter crash that claimed the lives of President Ebrahim Raisi and other officials.

Despite the national grief, he stressed that the officials must fulfill their duties to ensure the smooth execution of the snap election.

Vahidi confirmed that all necessary preparations have been made, including the establishment of the Election Headquarters, the formation of executive boards, notifications to provincial authorities, and the creation of the advertising commission, as mandated by law.

He announced that candidate registration would commence on Thursday, with a five-day window from 8 a.m. daily.



Candidates must meet specific criteria, including age requirements and the absence of a criminal record, as detailed in the official notices.

Following the registration, the Constitutional Council will vet the candidates' qualifications. The approved candidates will then have two weeks to campaign, culminating on June 28, the date set for the first round of the presidential election. If no candidate secures a majority, a runoff will be held on July 5.

Addressing the potential for electronic voting, Minister Vahidi indicated that while voter authentication would be conducted

electronically, full electronic voting in some cities would require further agreement with the Constitutional Council.

He emphasized the importance of inclusive participation from all political perspectives, expressing hope for an election characterized by health, security, participation, and competition, as emphasized by Ayatollah Khamenei, the Leader of the Islamic Revolution.

The helicopter crash that stunned Iran, resulting in the loss of President Raisi and others, has profoundly impacted the nation.

In the wake of this tragedy, Iran's

Constitutional Council spokesperson reiterated the constitutional provisions ensuring the presidency's continuity.

Hadi Tahan Nazif affirmed that, according to the Constitution and historical precedents post-Islamic Revolution, the presidency retains a four-year term beginning immediately after the election.

"This is an unfortunate and painful loss for the Iranian nation," Nazif remarked, referencing Article 131 of the Constitution, which designates that the First Vice President, with the Leader's approval, will assume the president's duties and powers in such events.

Following the fatal helicopter crash, Interim President Mohammad Mokhber held a critical meeting with the heads of Iran's legislative and judicial branches. This meeting, attended by Parliament Speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf and Judiciary Chief Gholam-Hossein Mohseni-Eje'i, highlighted the necessity for sustained coordination and cooperation among the three branches of government to navigate the nation's challenges during this difficult period.

## Acting FM says sanctions removal talks are ongoing



TEHRAN - Amidst mounting speculation surrounding the potential pause in the protracted talks on sanctions relief, especially against the backdrop of forthcoming elections in Iran and the United States, the acting Foreign Minister of Iran reassured that communication channels remain open and discussions are ongoing.

Ali Bagheri Kani, addressing reporters on the sidelines of the Iranian administration's weekly cabinet meeting in the capital Tehran on Wednesday, emphasized that Iran's nuclear activities are overseen by the Supreme National Security Council (SNSC). He highlighted the ongoing negotiations with the United States aimed at lifting sanctions against Tehran and affirmed that messaging exchanges persist without interruption.

Bagheri Kani emphasized the current

administration's unwavering dedication to active involvement in foreign affairs and the prioritization of regional diplomacy, stressing serious engagement with neighboring nations.

He underscored Iran's membership in global economic alliances like the BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), highlighting the significance of Iran's foreign policy stature in international affairs, as reflected by countries' intentions and approaches towards enhancing ties with Iran.

Responding to questions about meetings with officials from Tunisia and Egypt, Bagheri Kani highlighted the significant visit of high-ranking officials from countries lacking political ties with Iran. He emphasized the late Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi's dynamic and successful foreign policy, noting these officials' visits to extend condolences for the deceased officials despite the absence of formal political relations.

In the wake of sudden and tragic death of President Raisi, high-ranking officials from 68 countries and several international organizations traveled to Iran to participate in the funeral ceremonies honoring the late Iranian officials.

President Raisi, Foreign Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian and six others died on May 19,

when their helicopter crashed in foggy weather in the mountains near the northwestern border with Azerbaijan.

Regarding the potential visit of Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman to Tehran, the acting Foreign Minister noted mutual invitations from both sides, though the timing of the visit remains unspecified.

Touching upon negotiations concerning the release of blocked currencies, Bagheri Kani affirmed ongoing discussions on this matter.

Despite facing illegal sanctions and obstacles imposed by Western governments, Iran has made significant strides in its peaceful nuclear energy program over the years. As a signatory to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), Iran has maintained close cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

The signing of the 2015 nuclear agreement, also known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), with six world powers showcased Iran's commitment to demonstrating the peaceful nature of its nuclear program. However, the unilateral withdrawal of the United States from the JCPOA in May 2018 and the subsequent reimposition of sanctions against Tehran have cast uncertainty over the future of the agreement.

## Massive turnout at late president, FM's funeral thwarts adversaries' plots: commander

TEHRAN - The deputy chief for coordination of Iran's Army, Rear Admiral Habibollah Sayyari, has highlighted the significant public turnout at the funeral of the late President and Foreign Minister, asserting that it nullifies the adversaries' ill wishes against the Islamic Republic.

Speaking on Wednesday, Rear Admiral Sayyari emphasized that the people's loyalty to the system and the revolution generates a powerful

deterrent effect both regionally and internationally.

He pointed out that the overwhelming participation in last week's funeral ceremony elevated the nation's stature on the global stage.

Admiral Sayyari explained that the presence of a strong defense capability discourages enemies from violating the country's territorial integrity.

He outlined that deterrence encompasses both hard (defense-

military) and soft aspects, adding that in the current period, unity, coherence, and public support for the Islamic Republic and the revolution significantly enhance the country's power and deterrence capability.

He noted that following the path of martyrs ensures a respected position in society, recalling the bravery of martyrs over eight years of sacred defense that have brought honor and dignity to the nation.

According to the admiral, the

martyrs' sacrifices have safeguarded the country and fortified the Islamic Revolution against adversarial plots.

Concluding his remarks, Admiral Sayyari stated that the country is engaged in a hybrid war with its adversaries, detailing the various facets of this conflict, including military, economic, cultural, and political dimensions. He reiterated that the nation's unity and the public's support are crucial in facing and overcoming these challenges.

## Navy chief advocates for economic security via national scientific expertise

TEHRAN -Iranian Navy Commander Rear Admiral Shahram Irani calls for robust participation in the realm of economic security, stressing the need to harness the nation's scientific capabilities to bolster economic stability in maritime domains.

Speaking at the inauguration of a cultural center in Anzali Port, located in northern Iran, Admiral Irani highlighted the strategic significance of the Fourth Marine Region, named Imam Reza.

He emphasized its strong potential in "defense

diplomacy and training of forces," which is essential for maintaining a presence in international waters and fostering relations with Caspian Sea coastal countries. Admiral Irani underscored Anzali's historical significance to the navy, paying tribute to the numerous martyrs who have been laid to rest in the region.

He stressed the importance of leveraging Iran's diverse potential, including its youth, academics, research institutions, and industrial centers, to achieve economic security.

In his remarks, the admiral reiterated the importance of following the legacy of martyrs and adhering to the directives of Ayatollah Khamenei, the Leader of the Islamic Revolution.

He also praised the valor of Iran's Armed Forces, noting its crucial role in ensuring national security.

Concluding his speech, Admiral Irani highlighted the significant sacrifices made by the navy, likening the fallen martyrs to a "propelling engine" driving the nation's progress across various sectors.

## Israel isolated in UN Disarmament Conference chaired by Iran

TEHRAN - Israel found itself completely isolated during a UN Conference on Disarmament, with the Islamic Republic of Iran presiding over the event.

The conference, held on Sunday,

highlighted the position of Israel as the primary impediment to establishing a nuclear-free West Asia. Under Iran's leadership, the conference included various discussions focusing on the elimination of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction

in the region. Iran originally introduced the initiative for a nuclear-free West Asia in 1974.

During the meetings, member states expressed support for Iran's approach to pursuing a nuclear-free

West Asia and dismantling other weapons of mass destruction. They also criticized Israel as the only obstacle to the realization of Iran's proposals, emphasizing the need for their rapid implementation in West Asia.

# 'Zionism an antisemitic project'

By Mona Hojat Ansari

TEHRAN – Israel's latest killing campaign in Gaza has devastated Muslims and even Jews all around the world.

Palestinian civilians are unable to protect themselves or their loved ones from Israeli attacks, leaving Muslims in other parts of the world feeling powerless as they witness the tragic events unfolding on their screens.

Jews are also experiencing the repercussions of Israel's actions. Reports show that there has been a surge in antisemitism, especially in Western countries where there is limited understanding of Judaism and Israel. Many individuals are unfairly associating all Jews with the actions of the Israeli regime, leading to unjust blame and discrimination.

The Tehran Times recently had the opportunity to speak with Yisroel David Weiss, a rabbi and spokesperson for Neturei Karta, an anti-Zionist Jewish group. Through this conversation, we aimed to gain insight into the current global situation for Jews and delve into the historical context and legitimacy of Zionism.

The transcript of the interview has been edited for more clarity and conciseness:

**How did you react to Israel's recent assault on Rafah and the regime's brutal killings of Palestinians seeking shelter in tents, which have shaken the world?**

We are mourning the tragedies of Gaza and what happened in Rafah. The atrocities Israel commits get worse as each day goes by. Every day, there is a new Nakba that shocks the world.

We are hurting with the people of Palestine and all we can do is to demonstrate. The Jewish people who are true to the Jewish religion and reside all across the world including in al-Quds, Europe, South America, and the U.S., are totally in opposition to the creation of the Zionist state of Israel. Those who have created Israel claim they have acted in accordance with the Torah and say they established the Zionist state for Jews and Judaism. We are practicing Jews and let me tell you that the Torah and the Jewish teaching do not give these people the right to create a state. Since 2000 years ago, Jews have been prohibited from creating sovereignty in even 1 cm of



land. Even if a land is devoid of any residents, we wouldn't be allowed to build a nation there. That is what the Torah tells, and Zionists have gone against the guidance of our book.

Throughout our lives, we have been demonstrating against the state of Israel. I began my endeavors when I was a teenager and some of my younger colleagues have been protesting their entire lives. We have taken to the streets around the world and even in Jerusalem, where we were brutally beaten, assaulted, and arrested by Israeli forces. Despite all this, we continue to demonstrate, because practicing Jews who follow the religion thoroughly know that the creation of Israel is against what God has ordered us to do.

We plead with world leaders to help bring an end to the occupation of Palestine. We want people to know that opposition to Zionism does not equate to antisemitism. It is only proper and correct that a person stands against Zionism and demands the immediate dismantlement of the Israeli state.

**Israel claims its latest killing campaign in Gaza is to protect Jews, yet there has been a surge in antisemitism globally. Do you believe there is a connection between Israel's actions in Gaza and the recent rise in antisemitism?**

I believe that a dictionary definition for antisemitism should be the "Zionist state of Israel". There is nothing more antisemitic in the world than the Israeli state. Israel says its killings are in the name of Judaism. So, when people around the world take a look at Zionists' horrendous crimes in Gaza, and elsewhere, they automatically affiliate that with every Jewish person and especially people like us

who are very evidently religious.

Sadly, I can tell you that antisemitism has in fact been on the rise because people affected by Israeli propaganda believe every Jew is a supporter of Israel. And frankly, that is not something Zionists would not want to see. Israeli officials want Jews around the world to believe that everyone hates them and that they should move to the "safe haven" Zionists have created. Zionism builds on the blood of Jews. The more the Jews suffer, the better for Zionists in occupied Palestine.

**Israeli leaders argue that when Palestinians demand the liberation of their lands, it implies a call for the massacre of Jews. Do you share this perspective?**

The argument that people calling for the freedom of Palestine are essentially calling for the eradication of Jews is simply an insult to human intelligence.

We lived alongside Palestinians for hundreds of years with no problems. When we were getting brutally killed in Europe and being forced to leave our religion, Palestinians embraced us with open arms and gave us a safe place to stay. The most precious being to every person is their baby and we used to babysit each other's children. Antisemitism was always a European phenomenon. Middle Easterners never harassed us and when we came here, they actually knew a lot about our religion. Everything was peaceful until we decided to steal Palestinian lands and make a state of our own.

And even if we look at similar instances in history, it becomes clear that these Israeli claims are vulgar and false. Did a massacre happen in South Africa when apartheid was

dismantled? The answer is no.

There has never been a religious conflict between Muslims and Jews. We lived peacefully for hundreds of years and we can do it again. There is also no doubt that the state of Israel will be dismantled because that is the promise of God. No one can go against Almighty God, and He says that Israel will cease to exist.

**You had the opportunity to meet with the late Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi before his tragic passing. Attending his funeral last week, what are your thoughts on him and the significant turnout at the ceremonies?**

I met with Mr. Raisi more than once. I saw him once in the Iranian city of Mashhad when he had not yet become president. I also saw him alongside Foreign Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian last year in New York. We felt very comfortable talking to them. They treated us with kindness and friendship. Mr. Raisi even tried to comfort me by saying that he knows we come under attack because of what Israel is doing.

After his passing, Jewish communities from all over the world contacted me and asked me to travel to Iran to offer condolences on behalf of Jews. Thank God, I miraculously managed to get a visa in a very short time and get here for his funeral. And the ceremonies I attended in Tehran were unlike anything I had ever seen before. People in millions had come out to pay respect to the late president. The weather was hot and we had to walk long distances, but people did not care. It proved to me that Mr. Raisi was truly a well-respected and popular man in Iran contrary to Western descriptions of him who call him a hardliner.

## Islamic Jihad: late Iranian President, FM regarded support for Palestine as religious duty

TEHRAN – In a ceremony held at the Islamic parliament, Nasser Abu Sharif, the Islamic Jihad's representative in Iran, emphasized the unwavering commitment of the late Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi and Foreign Minister Amir Abdollahian to the cause of Palestine.

Abu Sharif's remarks on Tuesday underscored the deeply held belief of both martyrs in the religious and legal obligation to support Palestine.

Reflecting on his acquaintance with late Foreign Minister Amir Abdollahian, Abu Sharif highlighted the profound conviction and unwavering faith the late minister held in the Palestinian cause.

"Many years have passed since my acquaintance with Foreign Minister Amir Abdollahian, so I must confess that he had complete faith in the issue of Palestine, which is commendable," Abu Sharif stated, echoing the

sentiments of many who knew the late minister. Drawing parallels with the ideological stance of Iran's leadership, Abu Sharif emphasized the foundational importance of the Palestine issue in the teachings of Imam Khomeini and the Leader of Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei. "Imam Khomeini and the Leader of Islamic Revolution consider the issue of Palestine as an unchangeable fundamental framework, and their followers also move and act in this direction," he asserted. Recalling the

tumultuous events surrounding the Al-Aqsa Storm Operation, Abu Sharif vividly recounted the tireless efforts of late Raisi and Amir Abdollahian on both domestic and international fronts.

President Raisi, Foreign Minister Amir Abdollahian and six others died on May 19, when their helicopter crashed in foggy weather in the mountains near the northwestern border with Azerbaijan.

## Iranian, Iraqi Kurdish security forces arrest a terrorist group's commander

TEHRAN – In a collaborative effort between the security forces of Iran and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, a significant development unfolded with the arrest of a commander associated with a terrorist group. Saadi Mohammadi, suspected of plotting infiltration into the country and orchestrating assassination schemes targeting internal figures, as well as maintaining ties with terrorist elements

within the nation, was apprehended during this joint operation conducted by the security forces of Iran and the Suleimaniyah governorate.

The arrest reflects the shared commitment of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq authorities to disarmament treaties and counterterrorism efforts. It underscores the resolute stance of

both Iran and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq against terrorism within the region.

Under the security agreement between Iran and Iraq, the activities of terrorist groups opposing the Islamic Republic of Iran in northern Iraq are to be monitored, and the leaders of these activities are to be expelled from these areas.

## Iraq should implement security agreement with Iran: top general

TEHRAN – In a meeting with Iraqi Minister of Interior Abdul Amir Al-Shammari on Wednesday, Chief of Staff of the Iranian Armed Forces Major General Mohammad Bagheri stressed the need to implement the security agreement between the two countries.

Under the security agreement between Iran and Iraq, the activities of terrorist groups opposing the

Islamic Republic of Iran in northern Iraq are to be monitored, and the leaders of these activities are to be expelled from these areas.

The discussion underscored the strategic importance of strengthening relations with Iraq. Despite recent tragic events, including the tragic death of the Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi and his companions, both nations

remain committed to expanding bilateral ties, a decision supported by the Leader of Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei.

Additionally, Iraq's proactive measures to enhance border security were discussed during a meeting between the Interior Ministers of Iran and Iraq. Iran's Interior Minister Ahmad Vahidi stated that the Iraqi government has

initiated various actions to improve security, including the establishment of guidance and driving stations, implementation of patrols, and utilization of surveillance technology such as cameras and radars. These efforts, according to Vahidi, aim to address the alarming frequency of road accidents, which have resulted in the loss of numerous Iranian and Iraqi pilgrims' lives in recent years.

## Ezatolahi likely to miss Hong Kong, Uzbekistan matches

TEHRAN – Iran international midfielder Saeid Ezatolahi will likely miss two matches against Hong Kong and Uzbekistan in the 2026 World Cup qualification.

The Shabab Al Ahli midfielder suffered a partial MCL tear in his right knee in Sunday's 3-0 loss against Al Wasl.

He will miss the 2023-24 UAE Pro League's next two matches and will also miss Iran's matches in the World Cup qualifiers.

Team Melli will travel to Hong Kong to meet the East Asian team on June 6 and host Uzbekistan five days later in Tehran.

Iran sit top in Group E with 10 points.

## Iran come sixth in 2024 AVC Challenge Cup for Women

TEHRAN – Iran lost to India 3-0 (25-17, 25-16, 25-11) in the 2024 AVC Challenge Cup for Women on Wednesday and finished in sixth place.

Iran had lost to India 3-0 in their opening match in Pool A.

India ran a solid game with Soorya making the most out of the middle attack. She posted 15 points to lead all scorers on the board.

"To be honest, we were sad that we didn't finish well in our Pool, but today we got back that feeling of happiness that we could win the fifth-place match. My team played very well today, with the help and the support of the coaches," Soorya said.

Anagha Radnakrishnan (13 points) and Anusree Kambrath Poyilil (10 points) contributed in double digits in the victory, asianvolleyball.net reported.

Iran looked to its usual scorers like captain Aytak Salamat and Hedieh Talefarkhondeh, but they seemed unable to establish their own tempo. They could pass the ball around and set their hitters but they were not making the much-needed decisive attacks.

India made it to the Final Four in 2023 in Indonesia, but failed to make it to the podium. Iran likewise downgrade their previous performance, from 5th place in Surabaya to 6th place in Manila.

Vietnam will meet Kazakhstan in the final match, while Australia and the Philippines play for the bronze medal.

## Iran 6th in 2024 AVC Challenge Cup for Women

TEHRAN – Iran lost to India in straight sets (25-17, 25-16, 25-11) in the 2024 AVC Challenge Cup for Women 5th-6th place on Wednesday.

Iran had lost to India 3-0 in its opening match in Pool A. India ran a solid game with Soorya making the most out of the middle attack. She posted 15 points to lead all scorers on the board.

Anagha Radnakrishnan (13 points) and Anusree Kambrath Poyilil (10 points) contributed in double digits in the victory.

Iran looked to its usual scorers like captain Aytak Salamat and Hedieh Talefarkhondeh, but they seemed unable to establish their own tempo. They could pass the ball around and set their hitters but they were not making the much-needed decisive attacks.

Team Melli had finished fifth in the previous edition held in Surabaya

Vietnam will face Kazakhstan in the final match, while Australia and the Philippines lock horns in the bronze medal.

## Expert believes Iran volleyball needs drastic change

TEHRAN – Iran's men's national volleyball team concluded the first week of the 2024 Volleyball Nations League (VNL) with a disappointing performance, finishing at the bottom of the table with just one point from four matches. Four

defeats against Serbia, Italy, Cuba, and Argentina have raised concerns about the team's chances of qualifying for the 2024 Olympics in Paris.

Team Melli, led by Brazilian coach Mauricio Motta Paes, had entered the competition with low chance but still had hopes of securing an Olympic berth. However, their poor showing has dashed those hopes and set off alarm bells among Iranian volleyball fans and experts.

Iran's four defeats, marred by uninspiring performances, have prompted calls for urgent action. Former national team coach Mahmood Afshardoost believes the team's struggles stem from long-standing issues.

"The national team's results in the first week of the VNL have warned Iranian volleyball," Afshardoost said.

"But the alarms have not just started ringing now; they have been going off for the past four or five years, ever since the team's results against their rivals started to become very close," he added.

Afshardoost identifies the team's recurring weaknesses as the root cause of their problems. "I watched the national team's matches in the first week of the VNL," he explained. "I had predicted this before the games started. I realized that the national team's weaknesses include poor first reception, attacking, coordination in blocking, and floor defense. The national team trained, and the coaching staff worked hard, but this structure cannot be fixed with two or three weeks of training."

Afshardoost also pointed to the pressure of qualifying for the Olympics as a contributing factor to the team's struggles.

"The volleyball community expects experienced players to perform better," he said. "It was only in the match against Argentina that the first pass reached the setter and the attackers were fed. The existence of this problem in the first three games means something is wrong. Even Paes repeatedly warned the players. It is a deep-rooted problem that is hurting the team."

The team's performance has sparked a debate about the future of Iranian volleyball. Some experts believe that drastic changes are needed, while others urge patience and continued support for the team.

## Persepolis one step away from PGPL title

TEHRAN – Persepolis football team defeated Shams Azar 3-1 in their away match and need just one victory to win the 2023/24 Iran's Persian Gulf Pro League (PGPL) on Tuesday.

In the match held in Qazvin's Sardar Azadegan, Oston Uronov opened the scoring in the 19th minute but Mohammad Papi leveled the score with a diving header in the 51st minute.

Masoud Rigi put the visiting team into the lead in the hour mark and Shams Azar goalkeeper Alireza Jafarpour scored an own goal in the 90th minute.

In Tehran, Esteghlal defeated Gol Gohar 1-0 courtesy of Rouzbeh Cheshmi's first half goal.

Struggling teams Foolad and Paykan shared the spoils in a 2-2 draw, Nassaji defeated Havadar 5-0, Aluminum suffered a 1-0 home loss against Sepahan, Tractor defeated Malavan 3-1 in Tabriz, and Mes Rafsanjan lost to Esteghlal Khuzestan 3-2.

Sanat Naft were relegated from 2023/24 PGPL, losing to Zob Ahan 2-1 in Isfahan.

Persepolis lead the table with 65 points, one point above Estehlal.

## Sevilla eye Sardar Azmoun: report

TEHRAN – Spanish football team Sevilla has reportedly shown in signing Sardar Azmoun on loan.

In August 2023, the Iranian international forward joined the Giallorossi from Bundesliga side Bayer Leverkusen until June 30, 2024.

Now, Azmoun wants to continue his playing career in La Liga. Azmoun has previously played for Rubin Kazan, Rostov, Zenit, Bayer Leverkusen and most recently As Roma.

He has four Russian Premier League titles, one Russian Cup, and two Russian Super Cups to his name. Azmoun was also named Russian League top goal scorer for the 2019-20 season, and was named Russia's footballer of the year in 2021.

### Iran imports over 1.3m cellphones in two months

TEHRAN - The Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA) said 1,353,786 cellphone handsets, valued at \$340.545 million, were imported into the country in the first two months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20-May 20), IRNA reported.

In this period, more than one million mobile handsets were imported through the commercial method while 62,000 of the cellphone handsets were imported by

passengers, it reported.

According to IRICA, the cell phones imported by passengers in this period registered a 37 percent and 42 percent reduction in volume and value, respectively.

Back on December 30, the president of IRICA said that more than 10 million cellphone handsets, valued at \$2.2 billion, had been imported in the first nine months of that year, which started in March 2023.

### Iran, Oman enjoy potential to promote economic co-op: Mokhber

TEHRAN - Iran's Acting President Mohammad Mokhber has said that the Islamic Republic and neighboring Oman have untapped economic potential which they can use to multiply their economic and trade interactions.

Mokhber made the comment on Monday as he hosted talks with Oman's Foreign Minister Badr bin Hamad al-Busaidi and his accompanying delegation, who visited Tehran to pay respect to martyred president Ebrahim Raisi and his entourage killed in a recent copter crash.

The acting Iranian president said that the two countries enjoy "brotherly and historical" ties, but there are still unused potential which both sides can use to further strengthen their cooperation, especially in economy.

Mokhber also expressed gratitude to Oman for its sympathy with Iranian people and government over the martyrdom of President Raisi and his companions, including Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian.

Badr bin Hamad al-Busaidi said that he had conveyed Omani King Haitham bin Tariq's message of sympathy to Iran's Supreme Leader, as well as officials and people, over the tragic

incident in which Oman lost its close friends.

He also said that relations between the two countries are strategic and important, adding that Muscat is willing to further expand ties with Tehran.

Iran and Oman signed two memorandums of understanding (MOU) to boost bilateral cooperation and emphasize the importance of using their national currencies in mutual trade instead of the dollar in December 2023.

The mentioned MOUs were signed during the two countries' 20th Joint Economic Committee meeting in Tehran.

Aiming to expand economic ties, Iran and Oman also signed four cooperation documents in various areas including energy, investment, and free zones during the official visit of Oman's Sultan Haitham bin Tariq al-Said to Tehran in late May 2023.

The document on the energy sector was signed by Iran's Oil Minister Javad Oji and Omani Minister of Energy and Minerals Salim bin Nasser al-Aufi.

The two countries also signed three other documents to cooperate in the economic, investment, and free zones sectors.

### Iran invites Chinese investors to build hotels in Isfahan

TEHRAN - A government official in Iran's Isfahan Province has invited Chinese investors to build hotels there as part of efforts to develop tourism in the historical province.

Amir Karamzadeh, head of Isfahan's Department of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts, was speaking on Monday as he hosted a Chinese delegation from Gansu province.

He said that Isfahan, as the seventh largest province located in central Iran, is already a tourist hub as it hosts more than 22,000 historical sites.

Our province needs 200 new hotels as part of measures to develop tourism, Karamzadeh said, adding that provincial officials are ready to give guarantees to the Chinese investors

helping in the construction of those hotels.

The Iranian official also proposed the establishment of direct flights between Isfahan and Gansu in a bid to develop tourism in both provinces.

Head of the Chinese delegation Guo Tiankang welcomed the proposals made by the Iranian side and said that he will convey them to top Chinese officials.

Guo Tiankang, who is Vice Chairman of the Gansu Provincial Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, also said that Tehran-Beijing relations date back to 4,000 years ago, with historical facts pointing out to the key role Gansu and Isfahan have played in promotion of cultural and economic cooperation between the two countries.

### Implementing PTA between Iran, Indonesia to boost exports: TPO

TEHRAN - The director general of the East Asia-Pacific Office of Iran's Trade Promotion Organization (TPO) said the launch of a Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA) between Iran and Indonesia will spur exports and export activities between the two countries.

Indonesia imports \$270 billion of products annually and Iran has a share of less than \$1 billion in this market, Kaveh Daliri said, adding that efforts should be made to create a market for Iranian products using the PTA between Tehran and Jakarta.

He regretted that the PTA between Iran and Indonesia had remained inactive for about eight years and said the process of reviving it lasted about one year.

Iran has the experience of exporting the SINA surgeon robot to Indonesia and this shows that the domestic producers have a high capacity to adapt themselves to the world's latest standards, Daliri added.

Back on May 17, the Iranian Parliament ratified a preferential trade agreement with Indonesia.

Daliri said Indonesia is a lucrative market for

Iranian products, Mehr News Agency reported.

Increasing the trade exchanges and cooperation between the two countries is the main objective behind signing the agreement, he said, adding that countries facilitate the process of entering each other's markets by considering tariff discounts.

The two countries intend to set up a joint committee for the operationalization of the preferential trade agreement which is tasked with monitoring and updating the lists and discounts that Iran and Indonesia consider for each other.

Indonesia has the highest Muslim population in the world, so this Southeast Asian country is a good and profitable market for Iranian products, Daliri underlined.

Once the preferential trade agreement is signed, the volume of the trade exchanges between the two countries will considerably increase, the director general emphasized.

Raw materials for edibles, oil-based materials, medical equipment with high added value, and electronic parts are among the export products that the two sides have considered discounts, the official added.

# \$4.6b of oil projects to go operational soon: Oji

TEHRAN - Iranian Oil Minister Javad Oji said 32 oil industry projects with a total investment of \$4.6 billion have been completed and will go operational in the near future, Shana reported.

According to Oji, over the past 33 months, some 132 semi-finished projects with a total investment of \$28.5 billion were also completed and put into operation.

The minister noted that 50 new projects worth over \$50 billion have also been started to complete the oil industry's value chain.

Earlier this month, Oji said the country's oil production has increased by 60 percent in the current government starting August 2021.

The minister made the remarks in the opening ceremony of the 28th International Oil, Gas, Refining, and Petrochemical Exhibition, better known as Iran's Oil Show 2024.



Oji said Iran recorded a 20 percent increase in oil and gas production in the previous Iranian calendar year 1402 (March 21, 2023- March 19, 2024), predicting a higher production this year.

"We made a great investment in the Iranian year of 1402 in upstream and downstream sectors and we completed semi-finished projects worth \$28 billion," the official said.

The oil minister added: "Last year, oil and gas production growth was more than 20 percent."

He also said that oil-related products and petrochemicals also witnessed growth, too.

Oji further noted that to have an increase in production this year of 1403 in the Iranian calendar (beginning on March 21), "We have planned new investments and

also for increasing production by finishing remaining uncompleted projects."

"We will try to set a new record [in production growth] this year that is even higher than last year's 20 percent," He emphasized.

The official further noted that semifinished projects worth more than \$28 billion were completed in the previous year.

According to Oji, the completion of the projects led to a surge in production in oil, gas, refining, and petrochemical industries and the registration of economic growth of over 20 percent in the oil and gas sectors.

The Oil Ministry made effective investments all year long, said the top official, pointing out that new investments in partially finished oil projects have been included in a comprehensive plan to boost production this year.

### Greenhouse production hits 4.3m tons in 2 years



TEHRAN - Iran's minister of agriculture said the volume of greenhouse products rose from 31 million tons at the beginning of the current administration (August 2021) to 4.319 million tons at the end of its second year in office.

In this period, the greenhouse land area (constructed and under construction) increased from 20,699 ha to 23,238 ha at large, showing a considerable hike, Mohammad Ali Nikbakht said.

He pointed to the high capacities of various regions of the country for the development of greenhouse cultivation and said it can contribute to saving water resources, boosting production, generating employment, and exporting agricultural products overseas.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Nikbakht pointed

to the current year's slogan of "Production Jump with the People's Participation" and noted that the Ministry of Agriculture has devised a comprehensive program for the realization of the objectives of the motto, YJC reported.

Supporting the construction of greenhouses and improving the cultivation of agricultural products can lead to production growth, generation of employment, development of deprived and underprivileged areas, self-reliance of rural families, promotion of the level of food security and increasing the export of agricultural products, he emphasized.

In last July, the director of the Agriculture Ministry's Greenhouse Development Program announced that 23,000 hectares of lands are under greenhouse cultivation throughout the country.

Mehdi Lotfi-Zadeh also said that 150,000 hectares of new greenhouses are planned to be set up in the country during a five-year program based on the Seventh National Development Plan.

As stated by the deputy agriculture minister, the development of greenhouse cultivation is a major policy of the Agriculture Ministry.

In this regard, several projects have been

defined and introduced to the banks, and as soon as the notification is made, the projects will receive facilities and their implementation will begin, the official added.

In recent years, the water crisis has caused serious challenges in Iran's agriculture sector.

To solve this problem, several solutions, including the implementation of pressurized irrigation projects and greenhouse cultivation, have been emphasized by experts and officials in this sector.

Iranian Agriculture Ministry's Greenhouse Development Program is one of the priority projects of this ministry which aims at increasing productivity, efficiency, and water consumption management in the agriculture sector.

The program was approved in the Iranian calendar year 1395 (which ended on March 20, 2017) under the framework of the National Resilient Economy Plan.

The development of the country's agricultural parks and greenhouses not only is going to create new job opportunities but also increases the country's non-oil exports and helps preserve the environment and the national water and soil resources.

### South Pars to reduce gas flaring by 1.2 bcm annually

TEHRAN - Managing Director of the South Pars Gas Complex (SPGC) Ahmad Bahoush says a project is underway at the complex which upon its completion, the volume of gases being burnt by gas stacks will be reduced by 12 thousand million cubic meters annually.

Bahoush added that the project will be completed in August 2024, noting the complex has been able to achieve considerable success in view of halting gas flares last year.

By completion of the project, the daily volume of gases being burnt will fall to 5.3 million cubic meters per day from 8.7 million cubic meters per day two years ago, he said, noting "right now, gas stacks are burning 74 million cubic meters of associated gases per day."

The official said elsewhere in his remarks that the complex has started a 3-phase process for buying, implementation and holding auctions, expressing hope that the process to bear fruit in the shadow

of Jihadi efforts are made at South Pars Gas Complex.

When the remaining gas flares sale project is completed, the volume of the burning associated gases of the complex will shrink by another one billion cubic meters annually, he said.

"The rate of the progress of halting gas flares projects implementation are reported and monitored at weekly meetings of the managing director of South Pars Gas Complex and NIGC's director for coordination and supervision in which the bottlenecks and challenges are reviewed regularly," He noted.

According to him, nine gas processing plants were able to achieve their 1-year targets fully, overcoming challenges they faced during the last Iranian calendar year of 1402, which ended 19 March 2024.

Earlier this month, Head of the Department of Environment (DOE) Ali Salajegheh announced that the

government has spent \$5.5 billion to reduce gas flaring to improve air quality.

Speaking to Shana, DOE's head said that since the 13th administration took office in August 2021, burning associated gases from 55 flares have come to a halt amid spending 5.5 billion dollars for upgrading the quality of fuels and improving air quality. The government is determined to improve the Petro-refineries and gas processing plants efficiency so that air pollution will subside, he said noting over the last year the amount of burnt fuel oil reached the lowest when compared with preceding years.

According to the head of the Department of Environment, the 13th administration has taken serious steps to improve the quality of fuel at 10 oil refineries while those refineries have designed some major projects to reduce using fuel oil and desulfurize their oil products as well.

Also, the managing director of the

National Petrochemical Company (NPC) Morteza Shahmirzaie told Shana this month that the process of gathering associated gases will accelerate this year so that the majority of petrochemical complexes' gas flares will be turned off at the end of the current Iranian calendar year on March 20, 2025.

Visiting Assaluyeh, the host of gas processing plants south of Iran, NPC's managing director added that NPC plans to pursue the gathering associated gases program more seriously this year.

"Gas flares play the role of safety valves so that when there is an emergency situation, they start burning to prevent the occurrence of an incident, and when there is a stable situation their burning is contained," NPC's managing director said. He went on to say that in a year which has been named the Year of Production Leap Through People's Participation, petrochemical projects will bear fruit one after another.

### Mindu China-Europe Freight Train high speed astonishing

By Mahnaz Abdi

FUJIAN - As the representative of my country and also the Tehran Times, I'm participating in a four-month program organized by China International Press Communication Center (CIPCC) for over 100 journalists from more than 90 countries around the world.

As a part of this program, we visited Fujian province in the southeast of China in a wonderful one-week trip, during which we paid visit to many interesting places and participated in a number of informative activities.

One of our visits was to Mindu China-Europe Freight Train and seeing the container cargo loading operation in Fuqing City.

While all aspects of the process were so interesting, the high speed of the train which goes directly to Moscow was so amazing, at it is 120km/h. Fuqing is a county-level city under the administration of the prefecture-level city of

Fuzhou.

Fuzhou, the capital of Fujian Province, launched its first China-Europe freight train route in July 2022. A cargo train named "Mindu" departed from Jiangyin Port in Fuzhou heading for Russia's capital Moscow.

China-Europe freight train services saw solid growth from January to April this year, with continuous improvements to the transport capacity, efficiency and service quality.

The number of China-Europe freight train services increased by 10 percent year on year to 6,184 trips in the first four months of 2024, the China State Railway Group Co., Ltd. (China Railway) announced last month.

About 675,000 20-foot equivalent units (TEU) of goods were transported through the freight trains during this period, up 11 percent from a year ago, according to the company.

By the end of April, some 89,000 China-Europe

freight train trips had been completed in total, serving 223 cities across 25 European countries, according to China Railway.

The China Railway Express (CR Express), a major international freight train service, spans China, Europe, and Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) partner countries, offering new possibilities for collaborative and sustainable trade. Praised by the international community, the transportation service, which not only revitalizes the prosperity of the ancient Silk Road but also enhances people's livelihoods, serves as a vital public good to promote win-win cooperation and economic vitality across Eurasia and beyond.

After a decade of groundbreaking and innovative efforts, the iconic BRI project, which connects 120 cities in China with 219 cities across 25 European countries, has completed over 85,000 trips by the end of February, according to China Railway Group Limited.

# US trying to sweep Israeli crumage in Rafah under the rug

## WORLD HEADLINES

**By Shahrokh Saei**  
TEHRAN - As soon as Israel declared war on the Gaza Strip in early October, it laid out a systematic strategy to ethnically cleanse the besieged territory of Palestinians.

According to a document that was leaked following Israel's brutal onslaught, the Israeli Intelligence Ministry had called on the regime's army to evacuate the civilian population in Gaza to Egypt's Sinai.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his far-right ministers threw their weight behind the mass expulsion of Palestinians.

The Netanyahu regime also imposed a total siege on Gaza, cutting off food, water and electricity supplies.

Northern Gaza was the focus of Israel's operations in the early days of the war. The Israeli army destroyed the majority of hous-



manitarian consequences of the assault.

Over the past weeks, more than a million people have fled Rafah as Israel is pushing into the city, according to the UN agency for Palestinian refugees, UNRWA.

The weekend massacre of Gazans in a Rafah neighborhood which had been designated a safe zone by Israel, once again made it clear that the regime wants to make all the territory inhabitable for Palestinians.

On Sunday, an Israel air raid caused a huge blaze at a tented area for displaced Palestinians and left nearly four dozen people dead with images of charred and dismembered children which sparked a global outcry.

According to the Gaza Health Ministry and Palestinian medics, most of the victims were women and children.

A CNN analysis of video from the scene found that munitions made in the United States were used in the deadly Israeli strike.

The US news network said four explosive weapons experts reviewed the footage and concluded that the tail of a US-made GBU-39 small diameter bomb (SDB), manufactured by Boeing, was visible in

"Everything that we can see tells us that they are not moving into a major ground operation in population centers in the center of Rafah," he said, although Israeli tanks have entered Rafah while the regime troops push deeper into the city.

When asked "how many charred corpses" it would take for Biden to change course, Kirby said, "This is not something that we've turned a blind eye to... There's not like a measuring stick here or a quota... As we've said many times, the right number of civilian casualties is zero."

The White House official tried to downplay the Rafah massacre, saying innocent people are often killed in war.

Kirby's comments clearly indicate that Biden just pays lip services when he promises to attach conditions to military aid for Israel.

Biden is under domestic pres-

### CNN and the New York Times reveal Israel used US-made bombs in the strike that killed dozens of civilians in Rafah.

sure ahead of the November presidential election amid anti-war protests in the United States.

The US administration is just seeking to appease domestic opposition by making such promises.

The White House's reaction to the Rafah carnage also shows that the deaths of Palestinians do not matter to the US, and American officials do not hesitate to support Israel.

## Hamas kills more Israeli soldiers

### U.S. media report Rafah massacre used American-made munitions

**By Wesam Bahrani**

TEHRAN - Nearly eight months into the Israeli war on the Gaza Strip, the armed wing of Hamas announced that it had executed a complex operation in the east of Rafah city.

The al-Qassam Brigades said its fighters lured an Israeli force into an ambush that resulted in the death of four occupation soldiers and the injury of several others.

In another statement the al-Qassam Brigades said three Israeli Merkava tanks had been targeted with mortar shells in Rafah.

In the Sultan neighborhood west of Rafah, Al-Qassam targeted an Israeli D9 bulldozer with a Yassin 105 shell. Additionally, two Israeli Merkava tanks were targeted in the vicinity of Khalid bin al-Waleed Mosque in the Salam neighborhood east of Rafah.

While the resistance continues its operations on various fronts, the Israeli occupation forces (IOF) acknowledged on Wednesday the death of three soldiers with the Nahal Brigade as a result of a powerful explosion in a besieged building in a combat zone in Rafah city.

The IOF also announced the injury of 26 others, 7 in critical condition, during battles with the Palestinian resistance in the Gaza Strip.

The latest casualties highlight the lack of any military progress against Hamas by Tel Aviv, while Israeli captives remain in Gaza and the IOF is killing an alarming number of civilians.

More aid groups have condemned Israeli airstrikes in Rafah. The International Rescue Committee (IRC), which operates in Gaza, said targeting densely populated areas with displaced civilians was "a violation of international humanitarian law and completely unjustifiable".

Dozens of women and children have been killed in Israeli strikes in Rafah over the past few days, while 45 were killed in a strike that caused a deadly fire that swept through a tent camp for displaced Palestinians on Sunday.

Kiryn Lanning, the IRC's director in the occupied Palestinian territory, said, "These incidents reaffirm our repeated warnings that no place and nobody is safe in Gaza."

"Camps housing displaced people must never be targeted. The reports from the ground are extremely disturbing - with people trapped in the fire and burning tents."

"There was not a single evacuation order for these attacks given to civilians that have sought shelter in Rafah after being displaced

from other parts of Gaza.

"The targeting of so-called safe zones, densely populated with displaced civilians, is a violation of international humanitarian law and completely unjustifiable."

"The high concentration of civilians in these zones makes it impossible to avoid significant collateral damage and high mortality rates during military offensives, even with precision targeting."

Adding to the humanitarian crisis facing civilians, Gaza's ministry of health announced in a statement on Wednesday that the Indonesian field hospital and Tal al-Sultan clinic in Rafah have gone out of service.

Pressure is mounting on the administration of U.S. President Joe Biden to call out Tel Aviv. The American leader had previously set a "Red Line" over any IOF ground incursion in Gaza's last refuge for civilians in Rafah.

U.S. media outlets have revealed that the munitions used in the massacre of 45 civilians on Sunday night were made in America.

The revelations will only add to global public fury with the U.S. administration's ongoing support for the IOF and the green light to expand its ground invasion of Rafah.

## Tragedy after tragedy for dislocated Gaza families

**By Narges Pakdel**

For nearly eight excruciating months, the people of Gaza have endured relentless displacement, pursued like prey and torn apart by the ongoing conflict that has ravaged their homeland.

Even the most skilled writers find it challenging to convey the full scope of the daily tragedies that unfold in that land, particularly affecting the most vulnerable members of society—women, children, and the elderly.

How does one adequately express the unimaginable anguish of families deprived of basic necessities, forced to seek shelter amidst ceaseless bombardments, their very survival hanging by a thread?

Consider the heart-wrenching image of a mother cradling the corpse of her child, a victim of the indiscriminate violence wrought by

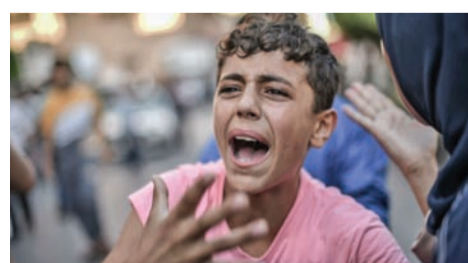
Israeli airstrikes. The inconsolable sorrow she feels cannot be put into words.

Imagine the profound despair of a child orphaned in an instant by the horrors of war, left to navigate a world torn apart by conflict and loss.

Just eight months ago, the idea that civilians in the 21st century would endure starvation and become targets in places of worship, schools, and hospitals was unimaginable to many worldwide. Yet, here we are, witnessing the unfathomable reality of human suffering in the modern age.

It is almost beyond belief to picture a father venturing out into the perilous streets of Gaza, risking his life to secure food and water for his starving family, only to meet a tragic end at the hands of occupying forces.

Similarly, the idea of a severely injured per-



son undergoing amputation without anesthesia is deeply distressing, a stark reminder of the lack of basic medical supplies in a region besieged by conflict.

Equally, it is heartbreaking that a grief-stricken family is being forced to leave everything behind in central or northern Gaza and take refuge in a plastic makeshift camp in Rafah, but, in the dead of night, missiles rain down on them and burn them alive.

### US students protest abuse by university staff

A large number of students at New York University's Staten Island College staged a protest against the abuse of their peers by university staff amid college campus demonstrations in the US over Israel's war on Gaza.

The students said their colleagues have been targeted by the university staff for expressing solidarity with Palestinian people in Gaza.

American college campuses have seen an unprecedented wave of protests against Israel's genocidal war on the Gaza Strip since April 18.

The protests spread to more than 100 colleges and universities across the country.

US police launched heavy-handed clampdowns on the protests making nearly 3,000 arrests, including faculty members.

### Brazil recalls ambassador to Israel

Brazil has recalled its ambassador to Israel and will not immediately appoint a replacement, a diplomatic source told AFP Wednesday, ratcheting up tensions between the two sides over Israel's war in Gaza.

The nearly eight-month-old conflict has soured Israel's diplomatic ties with several nations, including Brazil, whose President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva in February accused the regime of "genocide."

Israel reacted furiously, declaring the Brazilian leader "persona non grata."

The Brazilian representation in Israel in the meantime will be led by diplomat Fabio Farias.

Lula has received support in Latin America, notably from Colombia's President Gustavo Petro who has also severed ties with Israel.

Both Brazil and Colombia have supported South Africa's complaint against Israel to the International Court of Justice in The Hague, alleging the Gaza assault amounted to a breach of the Genocide Convention.

### Yemen targets 6 vessels amid escalating anti-Israel campaign

Yemen's Armed Forces have targeted six ships in waters near the country as well as the Mediterranean Sea as part of their operations against Israel and its backers, the United States and Britain.

In a statement, spokesman Yahya Saree said they hit three ships in the Red Sea, namely LAAX, MOREA, and Sealady, according to Press TV.

The spokesman said the operations were carried out using naval and ballistic missiles and drones.

They also staged missile and drone attacks on the American ships ALBA and Maersk Hartford in the Arabian Sea, according to Saree.

The sixth operation hit the ship MINERVA ANTONIA in the Mediterranean Sea with several winged missiles.

"All the aforementioned ships were targeted for violating the ban on visiting the ports of occupied Palestine," he said.

The Yemeni spokesman said they would target all the Israeli-linked ships in the declared area of operations, regardless of their destination.

### Police attack anti-war protest in Mexico

Mexican police clashed with protesters rallying against the Israeli war on Gaza.

About 200 people joined the "Urgent Action for Rafah" demonstration outside the Israeli embassy in Mexico City on Tuesday, Al Jazeera reported.

Confrontation with the police was sparked as some protesters sought to break down barriers preventing them from reaching the Israeli mission.

Protesters covered their faces and threw stones at riot police blocking their path to the complex in the city's Lomas de Chapultepec neighborhood.

Police deployed tear gas and threw the stones hurled back at the crowd.

The demonstration was called following Sunday evening's Israeli attack on a displacement camp outside Rafah, which killed 45 people.

### UK police detain anti-war protesters

London police arrested 40 people following a demonstration against Israel's Rafah offensive in Gaza, which took place on Tuesday in the British capital.

Thousands of demonstrators gathered outside Downing Street in London to protest the ongoing Israeli genocide in Gaza, condemning the British government's complicity in the tragedy, Anadolu reported.

The protest, which swelled beyond initial expectations, was organized by the Palestine Solidarity Campaign and other activist groups.

Tension arose between activists staging a sit-in protest in support of Palestine and the police in front of the Prime Minister's Office at Number 10.

A brief scuffle broke out between the protesters and the police, who threatened them with detention.

During his address to the crowd, former Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn called for an end to the arms trade with Israel.

In a passionate speech, Corbyn questioned the commitment of political leaders: "So, in this fevered political time, the question for anyone that wants to hold public office is, are you going to be a voice to end the arms trade with Israel? Are you going to stop the bombardment of Gaza?"

### The war is lost, so why is Netanyahu still killing civilians in Rafah?

**By Ramzy Baroud**

Just hours after Israel carried out a gruesome massacre of displaced Palestinians in the Tel Al-Sultan area west of Rafah in the Gaza Strip on 26 May, it carried out yet another massacre in the Al-Mawasi area. The first is now known as the "Tents Massacre". It took place shortly after the International Court of Justice (ICJ) finally issued a stern demand that, "Israel must immediately halt its military offensive and any other action in Rafah which may inflict on the Palestinian group in Gaza conditions of life that could bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part."

The killing of 50 Palestinians in their own displacement tents was the answer given

by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his extremist government to the ICJ and the rest of the international community. The successive Israeli massacres in Rafah demonstrate the degree of intransigence of Israel's genocidal regime.

Netanyahu and his Minister of Defence, Yoav Gallant, who could both be on the official "wanted" list of the International Criminal Court (ICC) within weeks, could easily have chosen a different path, even for mere political manoeuvring. They could, for example, have delayed their Rafah operation or changed strategies, just to avoid further ICJ rulings on the matter.

(See full text at [www.tehrantimes.com](http://www.tehrantimes.com))

## New restoration phase breathes life into Rayen citadel

TEHRAN – Kerman's Rayen citadel, one of the largest mud-brick structures in the world has entered a new phase of restoration.

Vahid Taheri, a local official in charge of Rayen citadel's restoration, regarding the start of this new phase, stated that the restoration project has begun with a budget exceeding 10 billion rials (approximately \$20,000).

"The new phase of the restoration," he added. "Includes work on the walls, facades, and roof of the citadel's school."

Taheri further noted that many tourists visit this historical site throughout the year, and each year various parts of this valuable structure are restored, renovated, and organized by the provincial cultural heritage headquarters.

In his concluding remarks, Taheri highlighted that the Rayen citadel is one of the most significant historical attractions of Kerman, covering an area of over 22,000 square meters.

The Rayen citadel, one of the largest mud-brick structures in the world and the second-largest in Iran after the Bam citadel, stands approximately 30 kilometers from the city of Kerman. Historical records indicate that its origins date back to the first century AH.

Discoveries within the citadel, including various inscriptions and historical artifacts, have enabled Iranian archaeologists to confirm that the Rayen citadel predates Islam and stands as one of Iran's most significant historical monuments. The architecture, reflecting Sassanid design, supports this assertion.

Perched atop a hill, the citadel features



multiple towers and a grand entrance gate leading visitors directly into its courtyard. The structure's walls are entirely made of mud bricks, with the shortest standing at 10 meters. The intricate design and geometric patterns are characteristic of Sassanid architecture, featuring large, circular arches and extensive use of mud bricks.

Inside, the citadel is divided into various sections, reflecting a vibrant community once thriving within its walls. These include a bazaar where traders sold goods, noble residences for governmental and elite figures, storage facilities for year-round food supplies, and fire temples, which have been frequently mentioned in historical texts.

The market area was a bustling hub of commerce, while the noble residences housed influential figures of the time. The fire temples, central to the Sassanid era, provide further evidence of the citadel's ancient origins. The residential areas also reveal a clear distinction between the elite and the common populace.

Kerman, known for its cold climate, makes the spring and summer the ideal seasons to visit the Rayen Citadel. During these months, the weather is pleasant, allowing visitors to enjoy the surrounding natural scenery and nearby gardens.

## Overcrowded Swiss village considers Venice-style entry fee

Lauterbrunnen is a bucolic mountain village set in the natural scenic splendour of the Alps.

With velvet green valleys, towering cliffs and the sublime 300m-high Staubbach Falls, the area is an Instagrammable idyll.

Visitors now come in their droves, and the 2,400-resident-strong hamlet is struggling to cope.

This week, local authorities announced they were considering introducing a Venice-style tax on day trippers in an effort to curb overtourism.

**Swiss village become a victim of social media**

There's no doubt Lauterbrunnen makes for an arresting photo on social media – the thundering Staubbach Falls have been snapped thousands of times.

But the rush to get Instagrammable content of the sensational scenery is becoming a headache for residents.

Car parks and public transport are over-

whelmed with visitors while the roads are strewn with rubbish. Rent prices are also rising as landlords take advantage of higher-paying tourists.

"We feel like employees in an amusement park," village priest Markus Tschanz told Swiss public radio SRF last year.

**Overcrowded Lauterbrunnen considers Venice-style entry fee**

Local authorities have set up a working group to establish ways of managing the influx of tourists.

One proposal is to follow Venice and charge day trippers a CHF5 (€5) to CHF10 (€10) entry fee, the Swiss news site Berner Zeitung reported last week.

Like in the canal city, visitors spending the day in Lauterbrunnen would have to pay using a smartphone app. However, the fee would only apply to those who arrive by car – if you arrive by public transport you won't have to pay. Guests who have booked overnight accommodation would also be exempt.

(Source: Euronews)

## Iran in frames



Inbound tourists pose for a photo at UNESCO-listed Imam (aka Naqsh-e Jahan) square, Isfahan, Iran.

# Khiva set to dazzle as tourism capital of the Islamic world

By Afshin Majlesi

KHIVA - Here in Khiva, meticulous preparations are underway as the ancient city readies itself to host the 12th session of the Islamic Conference of Tourism Ministers (ICTM) from May 31 to June 2.

According to organizers, the event, themed "Development of the Tourism Industry in a Sustainable and Resilient Way," is set to not only highlight Khiva but also serve as the inauguration of its year-long celebration as the tourism capital of the Islamic world.

The overall atmosphere of the city is highly associated with excitement and pride. Many streets are adorned with festive decorations to welcome guests that include ministers and dignitaries from the member states of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

Welcoming faces of the locals, harmonious blend of ancient traditions with modern amenities along with restaurants serving indigenous cuisine adds to its historical charm.

Here, local artisans are busy crafting traditional handicrafts, while shopkeepers prepare to welcome an influx of international visitors. The sense of community and shared purpose is inspiring.

Meanwhile, local authorities are keenly aware of the importance of this event. They view it not just as an opportunity to showcase Khiva but also as a chance to highlight



Uzbekistan's broader tourism potential.

**A must-visit destination for history enthusiasts**

One of the most ancient cities in the Khorezm region, Khiva boasts a history that spans over 2,500 years.

Within Khiva lies the walled fortress of Itchan Kala, encapsulating the essence of the city's cultural richness. This citadel harbors over 60 cultural landmarks, including medieval mosques, lavish palaces, and an array of museums, souvenir shops, and artisan workshops.

So, it would not be overstating it to say that Khiva is a living museum, with its well-preserved Itchan Kala, which has been a UNESCO World Heritage site since 1990. Walking through the narrow, cobbled streets of Itchan Kala, surrounded by towering mud-brick walls, feels like stepping back in time.

Spanning approximately 1,500

years, from 130 BC to 1453 CE, this pivotal Central Asian region served as a place for the exchange of not only goods like silks and spices but also a diverse array of ideas and philosophies.

Looking at historical sources, we realize that during the 9th to 12th centuries, the Khorezm region was a beacon of learning and scientific inquiry. The renowned Al-Ma'mun Academy in Khorezm was a center for pioneering work in astronomy, mathematics, medicine, and chemistry.

The region gave rise to illustrious scholars such as Muhammad bin Musa Al-Khwarizmi, known as the Father of Algebra, and Abu Al-Rayhan Al-Biruni, a polymath who made significant contributions to astronomy and philosophy.

Furthermore, Khiva is an architectural gem of the past. Its stunning minarets, for instance, captivate the imagination of most

visitors, it is where the echoes of history resonate through every alley and courtyard.

**Looking ahead**

Khiva is not only a testament to Uzbekistan's rich past but also a symbol of its aspirations for the future. According to a local official, the preparations for the ICTM and the year-long celebrations are deemed as pillars for solidifying the country's place on the global tourism map.

"It is more than just an event; it is a declaration of Khiva's and Uzbekistan's commitment to cultural and economic prosperity."

Available evidence suggests the designation of Khiva as the Tourism City (Capital) of the Islamic World for 2024 is expected to have a profound impact on its tourism prospects. The influx of high-profile visitors for the ICTM is anticipated to encourage more tourists to visit Uzbekistan, particularly to Khorezm and Khiva.

A relevant official said: "The increased tourism will undoubtedly contribute to our local economy, creating more jobs and boosting income for residents."

From a wider perspective and apart from tourism outlooks, in the current politically-motivated world, these close interactions of cultural dialogue are crucial for fostering mutual understanding and appreciation among nations and communities worldwide.

## Ilam's charm draws hundreds of overseas tourists in two months

TEHRAN - In the very first two months of current Persian year (started at March 19), Ilam province has seen a substantial rise in the number of inbound tourists.

Farzad Sharifi, a local official in charge of tourism, on Wednesday, announced that 1,682 foreign tourists from various countries stayed overnight in Ilam's accommodation and tourism centers during the first two months of the current year.

"This marks a notable increase compared to the previous year," he added.

Sharifi detailed that these tourists utilized various accommodation facilities, including hotels, guest houses, homestays, and resorts.

The peak periods for tourist stays, he underscored, are during Nowruz (the Iranian New Year holidays) and the summer holidays.

Sharifi highlighted that the international visitors came from countries such as Germany, Iraq, and Afghanistan, showing a diverse range of interests in Ilam as a travel destination.

He also noted a growing trend in the construction of accommodation units and tourism complexes aimed at enhancing visitor retention, thereby promoting economic development and job creation in the tourism sector.

Improving the quality of services to extend the

duration of tourist stays has become a major focus for the local administration, according to the official.

On a final note, Sharifi pointed out that Ilam's diverse climate, beautiful traditional clothing, recreational and historical attractions, rich culture of hospitality, various customs, and lifestyles across different climates all contribute to the increasing number of tourists visiting the province.

Nestled in western Iran, Ilam province boasts a rich tapestry of natural beauty, historical significance, and cultural heritage, making it an increasingly attractive destination for tourists. The region's diverse climate ranges from lush green landscapes to mountainous terrains, offering a variety of experiences for nature enthusiasts.

One of the key attractions in Ilam is its pristine natural scenery. The province is home to several parks and protected areas, where visitors can enjoy hiking, wildlife spotting, and picnicking. The stunning Abdanan waterfall and the serene Seymareh dam further add to the natural allure, providing picturesque spots for relaxation and adventure.

Ilam's historical and cultural heritage is equally compelling. The province features numerous ancient sites and monuments, such as the historical city of Darreh Shahr, which dates back to the

Elamite and Sassanid periods, offering a glimpse into Iran's rich past and the civilizations that once flourished in the region.

The cultural richness of Ilam is reflected in its vibrant traditions and customs. The local population, known for their warm hospitality, often wear colorful traditional clothing, particularly during festivals and special occasions. The province's folklore and music are integral parts of its cultural identity, providing unique and immersive experiences for visitors.

Additionally, Ilam's handicrafts, including intricate carpets, textiles, and pottery, are highly regarded. These artisanal products not only make for memorable souvenirs but also offer insights into the region's artistic heritage.

Ilam also benefits from its strategic location near the Iran-Iraq border, attracting tourists from neighboring countries.

As claimed by the provincial officials, the province's infrastructure is steadily improving, with new hotels, guesthouses, and tourist facilities being developed to accommodate the growing number of visitors.

Ilam's diverse landscapes, historical treasures, rich cultural traditions, and improving tourist infrastructure position it as a burgeoning destination with significant potential for attracting both domestic and international travelers.

## Visadar waterfall: a haven for nature enthusiasts

TEHRAN - Visadar waterfall, nestled in the scenic Rezvanshahr district of Gilan, is a haven for nature enthusiasts, being surrounded by dense forests.

Visadar stands as the third-tallest waterfall in the region, boasting a height of 15 meters.

Its unique geological backdrop is characterized by a layered rock face, beautifully sculpted by natural erosion. This geological feature becomes particularly mesmerizing in the autumn when the foliage layers in vibrant shades of yellow and red, creating a breathtaking panorama

that's truly unforgettable.

The area around the waterfall includes a semicircular pool formed by surrounding rocks, ideal for water games, especially since it is not very deep.

Visadar waterfall is located near the village of Abuyar. To reach this site, one must travel through dense forest roads, some of which may require a short hike, enhancing the adventurous spirit of the journey.

From Rasht, the distance to the waterfall is around 88 kilometers.

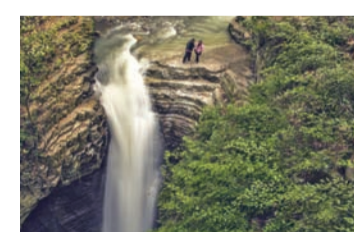
The best times to visit Visadar waterfall are during the spring and

early autumn when the weather in Gilan is most pleasant, avoiding the high humidity and heat of summer.

The surrounding forests are lush with a variety of trees like willow, alder, walnut and ash, which offer a spectacular display of colors in autumn and a vibrant green in spring and summer.

The rich biodiversity of the area includes numerous species of birds and mammals.

Visitors might spot squirrels, ducks and even deer, while the forest's dense canopy provides a habitat for various insects, making it



essential for hikers to wear appropriate clothing.

Visadar waterfall not only offers a refreshing escape into nature but also a chance to immerse oneself in the tranquil beauty of Gilan's landscape, making it a must-visit destination for anyone traveling to northern Iran.

## Campaigners threaten to bring Mallorca airport to a standstill

More 'tourists go home' graffiti has appeared in Mallorca, Spain, following a weekend of protests in Palma, as activists threaten to bring the island's airport to a standstill.

Around 10,000 locals took to the streets of Palma, Mallorca's capital, at the weekend, where they

were heard chanting 'tourists go home', as they demanded curbs on mass tourism.

As reported by El Nacional, one campaign group, known as Menys Turisme, Mes Vida (Less Tourism, More Life), have said they could 'collapse' Palma airport, which according to The Times hosted 31.1

million passengers last year.

The tactic, which was first proposed at a 'citizens' assembly in the Mallorcan town, Sineu, also involves causing a traffic gridlock outside the airport.

(Source: Daily Mail)

# DOE to benefit from NGOs to preserve wildlife: official

TEHRAN – The Department of Environment is planning to use the potential of non-governmental organizations to protect wildlife and manage four ecological zones in the country, an official with the DOE has said.

Highlighting the importance of environmental NGOs in various sectors, Hassan Akbari said, "We plan to utilize the specialized capabilities of NGOs in all areas related to wildlife conservation and management of the ecological zones namely national parks, protected areas, national natural monuments, and wildlife refuges," IRNA reported.

## protected areas

Five new protected areas, measuring 230,000 hectares, have been created across the country, expanding the protected areas to 19.5 million hectares, the Department of Environment announced on May 7.

The protected areas under the supervision of the Department of Environment now account for 11.8 percent of the country's lands, IRNA reported.

The history of Iran's first protected areas dates back to 1967 when the proposal for the establishment of two national parks and 15 protected areas as the first protected sites in Iran was approved.

In 1976, there were more than 65 protected areas covering an area of 6.7 million hectares in the country, which has now extended



to more than 300 areas with an area of 19.5 million hectares.

The first new protected area with an area of about 63,000 hectares is located in Gavkhoni Wetland with the aim of preventing any change in land use and protecting the vegetation as well as safeguarding the wetland and birds that are present at special times when the wetland is filled with water.

The second site with an area of about 11,000 hectares is Kalate and Tang-e Sorkh located in Fars province. The goal is to preserve the diverse vegetation and pristine wildlife there. It is one of the prohibited hunting zones.

Padena, measuring 30,000 hectares area in the city of Semrom in Isfahan province, is the third added area.

It can enhance the protection of the Dena National Park conservation, which is one of the most important protected areas in Zagros since wildlife moves

severely damaged over the past years.

A total of 1036 vertebrate species are identified in the country. Out of 209 mammals, 560 birds, 242 reptiles, and 25 amphibians, around 75 species were included in the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List in 2022.

Due to human activities, biodiversity has faced numerous threats, including habitat loss and fragmentation, overexploitation of natural resources, pollution, invasive species, and climate change, which has led to the extinction of many species and the degradation of ecosystems worldwide.

Several measures can be taken to mitigate the impacts of climate change, particularly drought, on the destruction of plants, such as managing the exploitation of natural resources and preventing the destruction of ecosystems to prevent severe conditions and lessen pressures on plants.

Also, raising public awareness to protect nature is an important step that helps governments to preserve nature.

By improving local communities, private sectors, and individuals' roles in preserving wildlife along with the help of today's science and technology, we can make sure that ecosystems can thrive and plant and animal species can exist for future generations.

between these two regions.

With good vegetation and abundant water sources, wildlife can be easily revived. This area was one of the free zones before.

The next area is located in the Kalate desert, covering about 126,000 hectares in the east of Isfahan around Khur and Bibanak. It is home to valuable species such as rams, ewes, gazelles, and Bustards.

The last area, about 200 hectares, is a national natural monument called 'Sheikh Mohammadlu' in Ardabil province. It contains a collection of fossil trees dating back to prehistoric geological periods.

## Wildlife preservation

Iran is considered a crossroad between Asia, Africa, and Europe. This geographical situation has led to the climatic diversity of the country.

Despite the country's rich biodiversity, some species have been

## Tehran hosts intl. conference on quantum technology

TEHRAN – Shahid Beheshti University of Tehran has held the International Conference on Quantum Technologies and Industrial Applications (ICQT) 2024.

Supported by the Ministry of Science, Research and Technology and the Ministry of Industry, Mining, and Trade, the two-day conference took place on May 28-29 at the university.

Iranian and foreign experts addressed the challenges facing the development of Quantum Technologies. The event provided a unique opportunity for researchers, managers, and practitioners of Quantum Technologies to share knowledge, discuss challenges, and foster collaboration.

The Scientific and Executive Secretary of the ICQT, Mohammad Esmail Zibaei, considered the technology to be one of the new criteria for the development of countries and said: Quantum technologies, especially quantum telecommunications, quantum imaging, quantum measurements, and quantum computers, are of great importance in the world, IRIB reported.

"The conference serves as a platform for professors, researchers, scientific managers of the country, and students to learn about the

latest research findings and advancements in the field. It also provides opportunities for networking to create domestic and international cooperation," Zibaei added.

During the conference, more than 30 domestic experts and elites in related fields presented their achievements and findings.

Also, international lecturers from Germany, Switzerland, China, the Netherlands, and Italy were scheduled to introduce and explain the latest quantum studies and achievements in the industry.

On the sidelines of the conference, a specialized exhibition of the quantum technology industry was held to showcase the latest technology and products of knowledge-based and technological companies.

## ICQT conference

According to Shahid Beheshti University's website, the conference is poised to provide a platform for groundbreaking research, insightful discussions, and invaluable networking opportunities that will play a pivotal role in shaping the future of quantum technology.

Quantum Technologies and Industrial Applications stand at the forefront of a techno-



logical revolution, promising unprecedented advancements and transformative impacts across diverse sectors.

By harnessing the principles of quantum mechanics, these technologies offer unparalleled computational power, secure communication methods, and precise sensing capabilities.

Embracing Quantum Technologies not only ensures a competitive edge but also paves the way for groundbreaking solutions to complex challenges, shaping a future where innovation seamlessly intersects with industry, ushering in an era of unparalleled progress and discovery.

The Ministry of Science, Research, and Technology of Iran is committed to fostering international collaboration and staying at the forefront of technological advancements.

Events like ICQT provide invaluable opportunities for knowledge exchange and collaboration.

participants from Germany, Switzerland, China, the Netherlands, and Italy delivered lectures.

## ENGLISH IN USE

### LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

## 'Salt particles in Lake Urmia contained by 80%'

Salt particles raising from the catchment basin of Lake Urmia has been contained by nearly 80 percent, Farhad Sarkhosh, head of the provincial department for the Lake Urmia restoration program at West Azarbaijan has said.

Saplings and shrubs have been planted in the catchment basin of Lake Urmia to slow down the wind giving rise to salt particles since past three years, which cost 600 billion rials (nearly \$14 million), Sarkhosh said.

The major salt particle hotspots in the province include Jabal Kandi village in Urmia County, Saporghan, Urmia, Choopanloo and Miandoab, which are highly contained by planting vegetation.

## کنترل ۸۰ درصد ریزگردهای نمکی دریاچه ارومیه

مدیر دفتر استانی ستاد احیای دریاچه ارومیه در آذربایجان غربی گفت: نزدیک به ۸۰ درصد از ریزگردهای نمکی حوضه آبریز دریاچه ارومیه کنترل شده است.

فرهاد سرخوش افزود: خارج از بستر دریاچه ارومیه و در حوضه آبریز با کاشت نهال و درختچه‌ها ریزگردهای نمکی کنترل می‌شود که از سال ۹۳ تا ۹۶ در این راستا ۶۰ میلیارد تومان هزینه شده است.

کانون بحرانی ریزگردها در استان شامل منطقه جبل کندی در ۴۵ کیلومتری ارومیه، منطقه سپورغان ارومیه، چوپان لو سلماس، و میاندوآب است که با نهال کاری تا حدود زیادی از این ریزگردها مهار شده‌اند.

## WFP releases April report on Iran

TEHRAN –The World Food Program (WFP) has released a report, expounding on activities in Iran over the month of April.

In April, WFP food assistance reached 33,505 beneficiaries, which included Afghan and Iraqi refugees as well as Iranian teachers.

Of those assisted, 28 percent were women, 29 percent were men, 21 percent were girls, and 22 percent were boys.

Refugees are assisted with a staple food basket which includes fortified wheat flour (12 kg per person per month) and vegetable oil (810 ml per person per month), while students and their teachers receive a date bar, and/or fortified biscuits. WFP stopped providing milk-in-school snacks in January 2024 due to funding gaps.

In addition to this in-kind food assistance, WFP provides cash assistance to 7,274 Afghan and Iraqi refugee households each month.

In April, households headed by refugee men received Iranian Rials (IRR) 2 million (US\$ 4.9, according to the UN Operational Rate) per person.

Households headed by refugee women received a slightly higher monthly cash allocation, amounting to IRR 2.5 million (US\$ 6) per person due to limited access to working opportunities, leading to higher food insecurity.

To maintain beneficiaries' purchasing power amid deteriorating economic conditions, since June 2023, WFP has increased its cash assistance to vulnerable refugee women and men facing serious risks over their food security and well-being.

Through WFP's school meals program, a total of 9,157 refugee school children including their teachers received nutritious school snacks throughout the scholastic year.

The snacks included a date bar and/or whole grain biscuit for every day of school attendance to support their education and nutrition.

Under the same program, around 2,750 girls at primary schools and junior high schools also received cash incentives of 0.5 million rials (US\$1.2) each month to support their education in line with girl's empowerment.

By April 2024, WFP Iran helped ease the financial burden associated with the gluten-free dietary needs of 48 refugee celiac patients from WFP's beneficiaries by providing them with an extra cash amount of 7.7 million rials (US\$ 19.1) per person as a replacement for their usual food entitlement.

To support the income generation and resilience of 352 refugees (59 percent women and 49 percent men), in April, WFP continued supporting the operations of 19 livelihood activities across 17 settlements, including welding, tailoring, baking, and farming.

Following WFP's Disability Inclusion Workplan 2023, WFP implemented a pilot initiative in two settlements, Shahid Naseri of Markazi and Mohajerin of Semnan provinces, providing refugees with disabilities a monthly cash top-up of IRR 1 million (US\$ 2.4) on top of their regular entitlement. In April, the program successfully reached 103 beneficiaries targeted for assistance.

On April 3, the WFP released its 2023 report

on Iran based on the interim Country Strategic Plan (2023-2025).

The Islamic Republic of Iran has been hosting millions of Afghan refugees over the past four decades.

According to the report, there are roughly 4.5 million Afghans currently living in Iran.

Around 33,000 of the most vulnerable documented refugees live in 20 settlements in 13 provinces of Iran.

WFP's response in Iran focuses on addressing the food security needs of the most vulnerable refugees living in settlements.

WFP provides food, education, and livelihood assistance through a hybrid modality of in-kind food, unconditional cash, and capacity strengthening to refugees.

In 2023, WFP Iran was able to secure more than 75 percent of its funding and address the daily food requirements of around 33,000 vulnerable refugees.

In addition to the unconditional assistance provided to around 33,000 refugees inside settlements, WFP also provided conditional support for students attending primary schools and junior high schools.

Through WFP's school meals program, around 8,620 refugee school children (49 percent girls) at primary schools and junior high schools and their 610 Iranian teachers (30 percent women) received nutritious school snacks throughout the scholastic year.

The snacks included fortified milk and either a date bar or whole grain biscuit for every day of school attendance to support their education and nutrition.

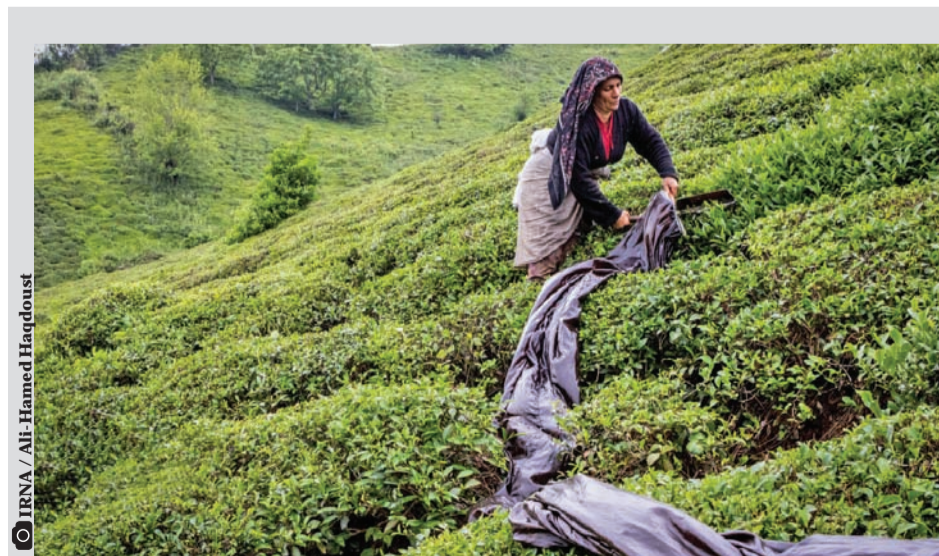
Under the same program, around 2,900 girls at primary schools and junior high schools also received cash incentives to support their education in line with girl's empowerment.

Following the successful establishment of bakeries in some settlements in the past years, WFP supported equipping a bakery in 2023 in one settlement to improve the efficiency of the baking process and the quality of the bread for around 1,400 inhabitants of the settlement.

WFP's commitment to supporting the government of Iran's assistance response for crisis-affected populations was further reinforced by WFP's provision of locally procured emergency family food packs to around 9,780 Iranian people affected by an earthquake in Khoy City in May, through its cooperating partner, the Iranian Red Crescent Society (IRCS).

WFP continued to play an active role in the interagency fora such as the United Nations Country Team, the Regional Refugee Response Plan (RRP), and Interagency Cash, Livelihood, Education, and Protection Working Groups.

WFP also continued its cooperation with its non-governmental partners, including UNHCR, IRCS, and International non-governmental organizations (INGOs) such as Relief International and Norwegian Refugee Council, Cooperazione e Sviluppo (Cesvi) across different forums and scopes such as conducting joint Post Distribution Monitoring with UNHCR and attending various interagency working groups.



## Lahijan, the hub of Iranian tea

The city of Lahijan, northern Gilan province, is the main place for tea cultivation in the country.

Tea production in Iran is expected to reach 145,000 tons in the current Iranian calendar year that started on March 20.



MAY 30, 2024

## GUIDE TO SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

*In the morning, charity is due on every joint bone of the body of every one of you. Every utterance of Allah's glorification (i.e. saying Subhan Allah) is an act of charity, and two rakath prayers which one performs in the forenoon is equal to all this (in reward).*

**Prophet Muhammad (S)**

Prayer Times » Noon:12:02 Evening: 19:33 Dawn: 3:08 (tomorrow) Sunrise: 4:51 (tomorrow)

## First national kheimeh shab-bazi festival wraps up in Tehran



TEHRAN- The first-ever national kheimeh shab-bazi festival came to a close in Tehran on Tuesday, paying tribute to the country's veteran theater artists and newcomers alike. The event honored the winners of the festival, recognizing their contributions to the traditional art of puppetry in Iran.

The event paid homage to some of the pioneers of this traditional art form, ISNA reported on Wednesday.

The ceremony also featured the unveiling of a new book dedicated to kheimeh shab-bazi, showcasing its rich history and cultural significance.

Siavash Satari, the director of the festival, expressed his satisfaction with the event's success. "Sixteen applicants from across the country applied to participate in this festival, and eight were selected," he said. "Unfortunately, some kheimeh shab-bazi artists were not able to participate this year."

Satari also lamented the lack of research in this field, saying that only three research-based works were submitted to the festival. "We hope to see more enthusiasm and dedication in future editions," he added.

The ceremony also featured a tribute to the late Mashallah Asadinejad, a renowned theater artist and pioneer of kheimeh shab-bazi. Asadinejad's son received a commemorative plaque and a golden crown on behalf of his father.

The festival's awards were presented in various categories, including best director, best puppeteer, best researcher, best musician, best storyteller and writer, and best overall

performance.

The winners of the festival received plaques, special awards, golden crowns, and cash prizes.

Organized by the Kheimeh Shab-bazi Museum in downtown Tehran, the festival aimed to bring artists together and compete artistically to enhance the quality of this traditional Iranian art form.

Kheimeh shab-bazi is a traditional form of Iranian puppet theater. It is a popular folk-art form that combines puppetry, music, storytelling, and humor in a small chamber setting known as the kheimeh (booth).

In a typical kheimeh shab-bazi performance, a musical performer and a morshed (mentor) engage in a dialogue with the puppets, most notably with the traditional Iranian puppet Mobarak. The puppets are usually made of wood and cloth and are manipulated by puppeteers behind a small curtain in the booth.

The performances often incorporate elements of satire, social commentary, and moral lessons, making them both entertaining and educational for the audience. The dialogues between the morshed and the puppets can be improvised, allowing for spontaneity and audience interaction.

The term 'kheimeh shab-bazi' can be broken down to understand its meaning: "kheimeh" refers to a castello or booth where the performances take place, "shab" signifies night - the typical time for such shows, and "bazi" translates to play.

Thus, the literal translation is "evening performance in a puppet booth."

This unique art form combines music, storytelling, and puppetry to create captivating performances that have been cherished in Iranian culture for centuries.

Kheimeh shab-bazi has been an integral part of Iranian cultural heritage, representing a unique blend of art, tradition, and entertainment. Today, efforts are being made to preserve and promote this traditional art form through festivals, workshops, and educational programs.

# Millions of Instagram users worldwide show solidarity with Palestine

By **Mohamadreza Seyedagha**

TEHRAN-An image calling for global attention to Israel's ongoing war in Gaza has taken social media by storm.

The image, which appears to be AI-generated, depicts tents arranged in a camp spelling out the words "All Eyes on Rafah."

This powerful visual has been shared more than 35 million times on Instagram in about 24 hours, igniting a renewed social media push by supporters of Palestinians following a deadly Israeli airstrike on Rafah on Sunday, an area in the south of Gaza filled with refugee tent camps where local officials said at least 45 civilians died.

The airstrike targeted a camp for internally displaced persons under the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in Rafah.

Israel Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told the country's parliament in Hebrew that the casualties were a "tragic mishap"; his office presented clarifying comments in English that translated the phrase as "tragic incident."

"All Eyes on Rafah" is a call for awareness on an important issue affecting the global community.

The image has gone viral in Instagram, people are just attracted to it and start expressing it on social networks. It has deemed to encourage people across continents to start to pay attention to the fate of Gaza.

The image has been shared primarily through Instagram's Stories feature, with influencers, athletes and celebrities — including "Bridgerton" star Nicola Coughlan, singer-songwriter Kehlani and one of India's top



actors, Varun Dhawan — posting the image.

Also, among those who have shared the image or used the hashtag #AllEyesOnRafah are Indian actresses Priyanka Chopra Jonas, Kareena Kapoor Khan, Madhuri Dixit Nene, Sonam Kapoor, and Dia Mirza, Albanian pop singer Dua Lipa, Chilean-American actor Pedro Pascal, Palestinian Model Bella Hadid, American actor Aaron Paul and American actress Susan Sarandon among many others.

Many Iranian cineastes and artists have responded to the barbaric massacre and tragedy that happened in Rafah by joining the campaign.

With their move, they seek to sympathize with the people

of Gaza and condemn Israel's attacks.

The Iranian actors supporting the Palestinians via the image include Parviz Parastui, Payman Maadi, Sahar Dowlatshahi, Hamed Behdad, Mohsen Kiaei, Amir Jafari, Saber Abar, Linda Kiani, Elaheh Hesari, Arsalan Ghasemi, Diba Zahed, Behrang Alavi, Elnaz Habibi, Laleh Eskandari, Hanieh Tavassoli, Tannaz Tabatabaei, Shabnam Gholikhani, Arastou Khoshrazm, Hamidreza Mohammadi, Parinaz Izadyar, Behnoush Tabatabaei, and Pejman Bazeghi among others.

Iranian directors who have joined the campaign include Nima Javidi, Navid Mahmoodi, Manijeh Hekmat, Kamal Tabrizi, Rambod Javan, Poursan Derakhshandeh, Maziar Miri, Hassan Fathi, Yousef

Hatamikia, etc.

Singers Sina Hejazi and Mohsen Chavoshi are also among the Iranian artists adding the image to their stories on Instagram accounts.

The image serves as a rallying cry, demanding global attention and accountability. As it circulates, it unites voices across borders, urging peace and justice for Gaza's people.

Despite Meta's efforts to limit political content, Instagram remains a vital outlet for Palestinian journalists and activists.

The image's virality demonstrates the platform's ability to convey complex issues through visual storytelling.

While journalists from Palestine have had challenges in sharing videos on Rafah, some which shows the impact of the Israeli attacks had been deleted due to sensitive content.

However, controversy does not fade over time, and the "All Eyes on Rafah" photograph remains emblematic of the war.

Pro-Palestinian activism on social media has surged at various points since Israel began its assault on Gaza after the Hamas-led attack on Israel on October 7, 2023. Most recently, a mass blocking campaign targeting celebrities who have not vocally supported Palestinians gained some traction.

Pro-Israel social media activity has also spiked at times, sparked most recently by university campus protests related to the war.

Some people with large platforms have vocally supported Israeli civilians, which has sometimes led to backlash against them.

## Celebrated actors join cast for musical play on Rustam and Sohrab



TEHRAN- Acclaimed Iranian actors Amir Aqai, Elnaz Shakerdoost and Sina Mehrad have been cast as the lead roles in the upcoming grand outdoor show "The Battle of Rustam and Sohrab", which will be directed by Hossein Parsai.

The production, set to take the stage this summer, is a musical adaptation of the legendary tale of Rustam and Sohrab from the Shahnameh, the epic masterpiece of the Persian poet Ferdowsi, with a focus on national identity and self-discovery, ISNA reported on Tuesday.

Aqai and Mehrad will take on the iconic roles of Rustam and Sohrab, respectively, while Shakerdoost will collaborate with the project

as Tahmineh, Rustam's wife. Written by Matin Izadi, the production is being produced by Seyyed Mahmoud Shobieri and Hossein Parsai. Soheil Danesh Eshraghi is the artistic director, set and costume designer of the project.

The story of Rustam and Sohrab from the Shahnameh is a poignant and tragic tale of a father and son unknowingly facing each other in a battle that leads to heartbreak and sorrow.

Sohrab, a valiant and young warrior, unaware of his true parentage, is determined to prove his bravery and skill by challenging Rustam, the legendary hero and champion of Iran.

Rustam is initially reluctant to fight Sohrab, as he senses a strong and noble spirit in the young warrior. However, duty and honor compel Rustam to accept the challenge from his unknown son.

The father and son engage in a fierce and intense battle, each displaying remarkable courage and strength. Sohrab, with his youthful vigor and skill, gains the upper hand in the duel, striking Rustam with powerful blows. In a moment of desperation and

realization, Rustam notices a distinctive bracelet on Sohrab's wrist - a token he had given to Tahmineh, a princess whom he had a brief encounter with years ago, unaware of the child she bore.

As the truth dawns upon Rustam, he is filled with anguish and regret for unknowingly facing his own son in battle.

In a heart-wrenching and emotional scene, Rustam holds Sohrab in his arms, realizing the tragic mistake that has led to the death of his beloved child. Sohrab, in his final moments of life, reveals his true lineage to Rustam, asking for his forgiveness and expressing his longing for a father-son relationship that was lost to the cruelty of fate.

The story of Rustam and Sohrab is a powerful and moving narrative that explores themes of love, destiny, and the devastating consequences of misunderstandings and the tragedies of war.

It serves as a poignant reminder of the complexities of human relationships and the inevitable sorrows that can result from the actions of both fathers and sons.

## Florian Zeller's "The Mother" on stage in Isfahan

TEHRAN-The Play "The Mother" written by the French playwright Florian Zeller has been staged in Isfahan since Monday.

Yaser Paymani has directed the 80-minute play that is performed at Farshchian Cultural and Art Complex in Isfahan.

Mojgan Navaei, Mehdi Taghipur, Reza Mohammadian, and Mona Abushahab are the four members of the cast.

First published in 2019, the play tells the story of Anne who loved the time in her life when she prepared breakfast each morning for her two young children, Sara and Nichola. Years later, her children have grown up and have lives and loves of their own. Spending hours alone,

Anne convinces herself that her husband is having an affair.

"The Mother" is a compelling and moving production that will leave the audience questioning the very nature of reality.

Zeller, 44, is a French novelist, playwright, theater director, screenwriter, and film director. He has written over a dozen plays, that have been staged worldwide and have made him one of the most celebrated contemporary playwrights.

His work has been translated into a dozen languages, including English and Persian. He won the Prix Interallié in 2004 for his novel "Fascination of Evil".

His black comedy "The Father" is one of the outstanding hits of

recent years, playing in London's West End to ecstatic five-star reviews and winning several awards and nominations in Paris, London, and New York. Zeller wrote and directed his first film, 2020's "The Father," based on his play of the same name, starring Anthony Hopkins and Olivia Colman.

The film received more than 200 nominations and awards, all over the world, including two Oscars at the 93rd Academy Awards. Since then, it has been cited as one of the best films of the 2020s and the 21st century.

In his plays, Zeller tackles the theme of lies and truth. Most often he tries to resolve the eternal dilemma within one's family circle that is believed to be most open

and receptive in embracing the truth.

However, it often transpires that one's family tends to be subjected to lies and deception. In today's world, people are inundated by fake news spread deliberately by social networks allowing individuals to achieve political goals and gain social influence. The truth is becoming increasingly relative, not only in the metaphysical, Rashomon-like sense, but objectively too: facts are being falsified, and lies are being circulated.

"The Mother" will remain on stage until June 27 at Farshchian Cultural and Art Complex in Isfahan.

## Cartoon of Day



Rafah Genocide

Cartoonist: Sanouni Imad from Morocco