

# TEHRAN TIMES

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Iran, Iraq, and Syria discuss rise of terrorism as Tahrir al-Sham continues to make advancements

## High-Level Talks in Baghdad on Syrian Crisis

Ministry of Foreign Affairs



### Tehran to consider leaving NPT if snapback activated, Deputy FM warns

TEHRAN – Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister for Political Affairs Majid Takht Ravanchi told the Parliament's National Security Committee that Iran will look into withdrawing from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) if the European signatories to the JCPOA attempt to reinstate the so-called "Snapback" sanctions.

While describing last week's talks with the European Troika (E3) as constructive, Takht Ravanchi emphasized that any agreement undermining the JCPOA or leading to the re-imposition of previous UN Security Council sanctions might force Iran to reassess its commitment to the NPT and adjust its nuclear policy.

This strong stance came before IAEA Director General Rafael Grossi's Friday statement to Reuters, highlighting Iran's rapidly increasing capacity to enrich uranium to 60% purity.

The deputy minister stressed that any further discussions with the E3 will be guided by Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei and conducted with a clear-eyed understanding of the realities of the situation. ▶ Page 2

### Tehran hosting 26th GECF ministerial meeting

TEHRAN – The Iranian capital is hosting the 26th ministerial meeting of the Gas Exporting Countries Forum (GECF) on Dec 6-8, Shana reported.

As reported, Iranian Oil Minister Mohsen Paknejad is the rotating president of the December GECF meeting in Tehran.

Some 16 countries which are among the world's most important producers and exporters of natural gas will attend the Tehran ministerial meeting which will be chaired by Paknejad.

The GECF has 12 members and eight observer states, with some other nations usually taking part in its meetings as guests.

The GECF Secretary General Mohamed Hamel arrived in the Iranian capital on Wednesday to take part in the Tehran meeting.

Iran proposed the formation of the GECF in the late 1990s before the Forum held its first meeting in 2001 in Tehran and officially started its activities nine years later. Its secretariat is currently based in Qatar.

The GECF countries hold 70 percent of the world's proven gas reserves some 40 percent of the global gas production. ▶ Page 4

### Iran debuts first homegrown space tug, breaking payload lift-off record

TEHRAN – Marking a momentous leap in its space endeavors, Iran successfully launched its heaviest-ever payload into space early Friday using the homegrown Simorgh satellite launch vehicle (SLV).

This milestone includes the deployment of an advanced module designed to transfer satellites to higher orbits.

The mission featured the Saman-1 orbital transfer unit (OTU) and the Fakhr-1 nanosatellite, setting a new national record for payload capacity.

The launch occurred at the Imam Khomeini Space Launch Terminal in southeast Semnan, where the Simorgh rocket, a two-stage liquid-fueled launcher developed by the Ministry of Defense and Armed Forces Logistics, carried approximately 300 kilograms of payloads, including the Saman-1, Fakhr-1, and a CubeSat, into an elliptical orbit with an apogee of 410 kilometers and a perigee of 300 kilometers. ▶ Page 2

### Jolani seeking to present a distorted image of himself and HTS

By Khosrow Javidi

TEHRAN – Abu Muhammad al-Jolani, the leader of the terrorist Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) group, masterminded a surprise assault on Aleppo, Syria's second-largest city more than a week ago.

Al-Jolani was born Ahmed Hussein al-Sharaa in 1982 in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, where his father worked as a petroleum engineer.

The family returned to Syria in 1989, settling near Damascus.

Little is known of his time in Damascus before his move in 2003 to Iraq, where he joined al-Qaeda in Iraq as part of the struggle against the United States invasion that same year.

Arrested by US forces in Iraq in 2006 and held for five years, al-Jolani was later tasked with establishing al-Qaeda's branch in Syria, al-Nusra Front, which grew its influence in militant-held areas, especially Idlib.

### This time around, Israeli plots against Iran in Syria will fail

By Sondoss Al Asaad

BEIRUT – The contemporary world has not witnessed a colonial project that relies on misleading religious and political myths like the Zionist project. It is based on the myth that the Jews – "God's chosen people" – have the right to establish their own state, despite history confirming that the original inhabitants of Palestine are the Canaanites, who settled there thousands of years before the appearance of the Prophet Moses.

Most of the "Jews" who occupied Palestine belonged to tribes of Eastern European origin called "Khazars." Between the middle of the eighth and ninth centuries, and also for purely political reasons, these people converted to Judaism during World War I so that the UK would ensure that a unified Arab state would not be established in this strategic region in the world. After the decline of the British role,

### Syria redeploys troops in Hama as a war tactic

By Wesam Bahrani

TEHRAN – The Syrian army has bombarded terrorist positions after they took control of many areas in Hama, the second city to slip from the government's hands.

The Syrian Ministry of Defense announced artillery, missile, and aerial strikes in coordination with Russian aviation on vehicles and terrorist gatherings in the northern and southern Hama countryside.

The ministry confirmed these strikes resulted in the death and injury of dozens of terrorists in the areas targeted by the Syrian armed forces.

In violation of the Astana process, militants waged a wide-scale offensive from northwestern Idlib city.

The terrorists took control of Aleppo to the east of Idlib with lightning speed at a time when the Syrian army was heavily deployed in the south of the Arab country near Lebanon amid tensions with the Israeli regime.

### Takfiri terrorists offer smokescreen for Israeli genocide in Gaza

By Shahrokh Saei

TEHRAN – As the eyes of the world have been fixed on the fighting in Syria, the Israeli bloodshed in the Gaza Strip goes unchecked.

Israeli attacks across the besieged enclave killed dozens of people on Friday.

Several Palestinians were killed in an Israeli air attack on Khibet al-Adas, near the southern city of Rafah.

The Israeli army also struck several buildings in Gaza City and areas in the central part of the enclave including the village of al-Musaddar and the refugee camps of Maghazi and Bureij, Al Jazeera reported.

Elsewhere, more than 30 civilians lost their lives after an Israeli attack in the city of Beit Lahiya in northern Gaza, according to Wafa news agency. ▶ Page 5

### Student Day: the day young Iranians revolted against U.S. imperialism

By Faramarz Kouhpayeh

TEHRAN – Iran commemorates Student Day on December 7th, honoring the martyrdom of three students martyred during a 1953 protest at Tehran University against a visit by then-U.S. Vice President Richard Nixon.

The protests were held four months after the 1953 August coup against the democratically-elected Mohammad Mossadegh government. The United States Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the United Kingdom Secret Intelligence Service MI6 led the coup in which the Iranian government was toppled in favor of Mohammad Reza Shah's authoritarian rule. ▶ Page 2



### Funerals across Iran mourn 300 unidentified soldiers of war

TEHRAN – Iran observed a day of national mourning on Thursday, commemorating the martyrdom anniversary of Hazrat Fatemeh Zahra (SA) with widespread funeral processions for 300 unidentified soldiers who perished during the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988).

The moving ceremonies, held simultaneously in Tehran and numerous cities across the country, served as a poignant tribute to the sacrifices made during the eight-year conflict.

A particularly large procession took place in the capital, Tehran, honoring the remains of 100 previously unidentified martyrs of the Holy Defense, as the war imposed by Saddam Hussein's regime is known in Iran.



## TEHRAN PAPERS

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

## Mandate to lift sanctions and build bridges

In a note, the Iran newspaper discussed the approach of Iran's foreign policy in the government of Pezeshkian and the path of reconciliation with the outside world. It wrote: The goal of Pezeshkian is to reduce tension and establish a constructive relationship with the world based on the fundamental principles of "dignity, wisdom and expediency" and accordingly he has taken significant steps to clarify his foreign policy agenda. It was especially reflected in his visit to New York (where he attended the annual UN conference) that set the stage for the resumption of dialogue in Geneva (with the European trio). His administration's important mission is to lift sanctions and resolve the nuclear dispute. Pezeshkian has put more energy into strategic diplomacy. He has mandated his diplomats to conduct negotiations to lift sanctions and end hostilities with some countries. The ups and downs in Iran's negotiation process with the West in recent years are quite obvious, and setting the negotiation path with the West is complicated due to the Ukraine war and the Gaza war.

## Ham Mihan: Importance of strong diplomacy in advancing goals

In an analysis, Ham Mihan discussed the visit of Foreign Minister Araghchi to Damascus after the terrorist attacks of Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) in northwest Syria. It said: At this point, one of the most important aims of the new attacks by the Takfiri terrorists is to undermine the Arab world's wave of goodwill towards Iran and the resistance front after the October 7 operation. While some news sources were claiming a coup in Damascus and Bashar al-Assad's escape from Syria, Araghchi traveled to Damascus. The reflection and function of his visit were perhaps more effective than the dispatch of several military divisions. First, it was the message of Iran's decisive support for the Syrian central government, and second, it neutralized the massive media propaganda and confusing atmosphere. Thirdly, he showed Iran on the side of the Syrian people. Maybe official diplomacy is a solution to the problems but the role of these innovative actions in the form of public and media diplomacy should not be ignored. It shows that Araghchi is a master in his profession and uses all possible capacities to advance national interests.

## Donya-e-Eqtesad: Iran's active diplomacy after developments in Syria

In an interview with Hossein Ajorlou, a

Russia affairs expert, Donya-e-Eqtesad discussed the effectiveness of Iran's diplomacy regarding the developments in Syria. He said: Anything without diplomacy is generally challenged. Considering that the Islamic Republic of Iran is part of the Axis of Resistance and pursues specific interests and goals, it has tried to have a diplomatic base alongside actions on the battlefield. One of the ways for Iran to help Syria is to align conflicting interests. This issue also requires active diplomacy. Since last week, when the crisis unfolded, the Islamic Republic has adopted active diplomacy and is trying to manage this process diplomatically before the Syrian crisis enters a dangerous stage and leads to regional and international confrontations. On the other hand, if the countries of Iran, Russia, and Turkey, plus the Syrian government, can make something happen in the Astana meeting in Doha, it might lead to the control of developments.

## Jam-e-Jam: Supporters of hired terrorists and limited opportunity of the Astana format

Jam-e-Jam wrote in a commentary: Almost immediately after the official declaration of the ceasefire between the Lebanese government and the Zionist regime, suddenly news broke out in regional and American-Zionist media outlets about the attack of Idlib-based hired terrorists towards the city of Aleppo. These terrorist attacks showed that the Syrian government, as an important and effective pillar of the resistance front, is facing a front of forces trained by a group of its enemies, especially the United States, the usurper regime of Israel, and Turkey. In the meantime, Araghchi's timely trip to Damascus and then Ankara indicated that Tehran has carefully noticed the American-Zionist scenario against the resistance front and is not going to be passive or retreat. It can be said that Araghchi's trip to Ankara was more about explaining Iran's clear and unchanging position regarding the resistance front and trying to resolve the issues surrounding the hired terrorists in Syria by reminding Turkey of its commitments as outlined in the Sochi Agreement. With these interpretations, we have to wait and see whether the enemies of the resistance front and the supporters of hired terrorists will take advantage of the opportunity to resolve the issue diplomatically or they will insist on repeating the bloody events of the past decade.

## Iran defends missile program amidst Macron's 'concerns'

TEHRAN – Iranian Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Esmail Baqaei has responded to French President Emmanuel Macron's supposed concerns over Iran's missile capabilities and nuclear activities, describing them as baseless.

In an interview released on Friday by a regional newspaper, Baqaei emphasized that Iran's missile programs are a crucial component of its defense strategy, vital for protecting national security and maintaining regional stability.

Addressing inquiries regarding President Macron's comments in a regional publication, Baqaei affirmed that Iran's missile strength aligns with its sovereign right to defend against aggression.

He also rejected persistent, baseless concerns regarding Iran's peaceful nuclear program, especially those voiced by France, a country that holds a significant stockpile of weapons of mass destruction.

Baqaei encouraged France to pursue a more independent and constructive role, leveraging its global influence to advance peace and stability.

He warned against biased stances that contradict international law and support occupation, genocide, and racism.

Reaffirming Iran's dedication to transparency in its nuclear activities, Baqaei reminded that France, a participant in the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), needs to fulfill its commitments and address its confrontational stance at the IAEA.



Established in 2015, the JCPOA was an agreement between Iran and the P5+1 nations—comprising the United States, United Kingdom, France, Russia, China, and Germany. The accord aimed to limit Iran's nuclear program while recognizing its right to peaceful nuclear energy and lifting economic sanctions.

However, the U.S.'s unilateral withdrawal from the JCPOA in 2018 and the reinstatement of sanctions have led Iran to gradually retract some of the limitations it had accepted under the accord.

The Iranian diplomat also criticized France's inaction regarding the persistent Israeli occupation and apartheid policies affecting Palestinians, stressing that the cause of regional instability stems from Western support of such policies.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Baqaei urged French leaders to reconsider their strategies and work towards a more balanced and constructive participation in global affairs, aiming to achieve true peace and stability.

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Developed by the Iranian Space



Research Center (ISRC), the Saman-1 OTU aims to elevate satellites to higher orbits, thereby reducing costs and the dependency on larger, fuel-intensive launch vehicles.

This mission represents a crucial step in advancing Iran's space technology, facilitating more efficient satellite deployment.

The Fakhr-1 nanosatellite, a 3U unit weighing under 10 kilograms, was developed by experts from the Ministry of Defense's Iran Electronics Industries, in

collaboration with the Iranian Army and Malek Ashtar University of Technology.

Named in honor of Dr. Mohsen Fakhrazadeh, the satellite's mission is to validate key technologies essential for CubeSat constellations, which utilize cutting-edge technology to provide unique services from low Earth orbit.

Upon achieving orbit, Fakhr-1 transmitted its initial signals to ground stations, confirming its stabilization and operational status. It features indigenously

developed subsystems, including a central computer, power management, radio communications, and flight dynamics, highlighting Iran's technological prowess.

The Simorgh rocket achieved an impressive injection speed of 7,754 meters per second, reinforcing its status as Iran's sole launcher capable of placing such payloads into low Earth orbit (LEO).

Recent satellite launches indicate that Iran is working to improve its imaging and electromagnetic spectrum monitoring capabilities for future missions, aiming to enhance its position in satellite development and launch technology.

Earlier this year, Iran launched three satellites simultaneously using the Simorgh rocket, achieving new heights in its satellite deployment capabilities. Additionally, in September, the Chamran-1 research satellite was placed into a 550-kilometer orbit using the Qaem-100 satellite carrier, further demonstrating Iran's growing expertise in space technology.

## Tehran to consider leaving NPT if snapback activated, Deputy FM warns



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This strong stance came before IAEA Director General Rafael Grossi's Friday statement to Reuters, highlighting Iran's rapidly increasing capacity to enrich uranium to 60% purity.

The deputy minister stressed that any further discussions with

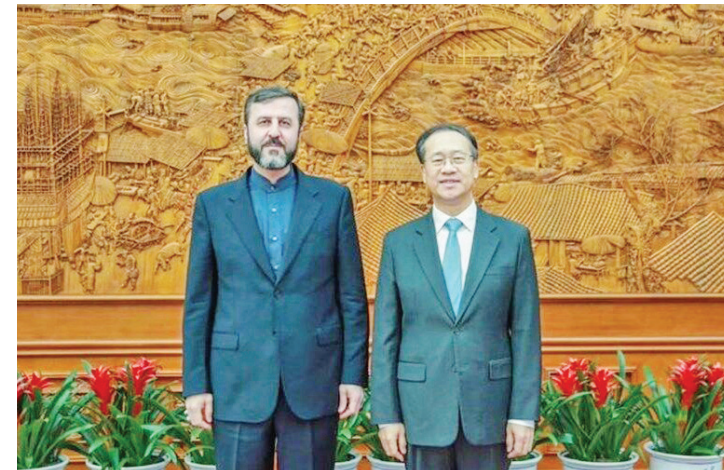
the E3 will be guided by Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei and conducted with a clear-eyed understanding of the realities of the situation.

The NPT, a 1970 international treaty, aims to prevent nuclear proliferation and promote peaceful nuclear energy use. The "Snapback" mechanism, a feature of the 2015 JCPOA (between Iran and the P5+1: US, UK, France, Russia, China, and Germany), allows for the immediate re-imposition of pre-JCPOA sanctions if Iran is deemed non-compliance.

Since the U.S. withdrawal from the JCPOA in 2018, the E3 retains the authority to trigger this mechanism, a threat Iran views as illegitimate and a pretext for renewed Western pressure.

Iran's potential withdrawal from the NPT is understood as a justifiable response to the E3's continued disregard for international law and persistent attempts to stifle Iran's legitimate nuclear program.

## Tehran, Beijing reaffirm strategic ties, shared global vision during Gharibabadi's visit



TEHRAN – Iran and China have reaffirmed their strong strategic partnership and aligned positions on key international issues, following consultations between Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Kazem Gharibabadi and Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Ma Zhaoxu in Beijing.

Gharibabadi, posting on X, detailed discussions held Thursday which covered a range of topics, including the recent Iran-European Troika talks in Geneva aimed at reviving the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

The two officials underscored the importance of continued high-level dialogue and closer cooperation within international organizations, according to the Iranian official.

This emphasis on collabora-

tion comes against the backdrop of a 25-year comprehensive cooperation agreement between Tehran and Beijing, a landmark deal signed in 2021 that encompasses economic, political, and security cooperation across numerous sectors. The agreement aims to significantly deepen the strategic partnership, including through joint infrastructure projects and enhanced trade relations.

Furthermore, Gharibabadi highlighted the shared opposition of both nations to unilateralism and their commitment to strengthening the Global South and their commitment to promoting equitable global governance. He stressed the need for continuous dialogue and exchange of views to further enhance coordination, particularly regarding legal and international issues.

## Student Day: the day young Iranians revolted against U.S. imperialism

By Faramarz Kouhpayeh

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The protests were held four months after the 1953 August coup against the democratically-elected Mohammad Mossadegh government. The United States Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the United Kingdom Secret Intelligence Service MI6 led the coup in which the Iranian government was toppled in favor of Mohammad Reza Shah's authoritarian rule. It was a retaliatory move by those two foreign powers against an initiative taken by Mossadegh to nationalize Iran's oil industry.

## When did the student movement begin?

The student movement's roots trace back to the 1941 overthrow of Reza Shah Pahlavi, which



resulted from the Allied occupation of Iran during World War II. In the decade following his ascension, the young Mohammad Reza Pahlavi (then 24) struggled to assert his authoritarian

control over the diverse political landscape that had emerged after his father's exile.

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



# High-level talks in Baghdad on Syrian crisis

## Iran, Iraq, and Syria discuss rise of terrorism as Tahrir al-Sham continues to make advancements

TEHRAN – The foreign ministers of Iran, Iraq, and Syria convened in Baghdad on Friday to discuss the escalating terrorist attacks in Syria and broader regional security challenges.

The meeting, held at Iraq's Foreign Ministry, brought together Iran's Abbas Araghchi, Iraq's Fuad Hussein, and Syria's Bassam Sabagh. The talks centered on the volatile situation in Syria, with Araghchi highlighting the need for sustained and serious negotiations to address the growing instability.

Speaking to reporters, Araghchi emphasized that his visit to Baghdad was part of a regional tour aimed at countering a recent surge in terrorist activities in northwestern Syria. "The current situation in West Asia, especially in Syria, is highly sensitive and requires close consultations and coordination among regional countries," he said.

Syria has been engulfed in foreign-backed conflict since 2011, with Western nations and Washington's regional allies supporting terrorist groups to destabilize the country.

**World should not discriminate between terrorists: Araghchi**

Following the trilateral meeting, Araghchi stated in a press conference that the three participating countries agreed that terrorism in Syria poses a significant threat to the region, with neighboring Iraq and Turkey particularly vulnerable. "Terrorists will not stay confined to certain borders. If they manage to advance to Syria, they will eventually try to plague other parts of the region."

Araghchi added that the world and neighboring countries should not "discriminate" between terrorists. "We have no good terrorists. Terrorists are bad for everyone. The UN has clearly designated the Hayat Tahrir al-Sham as an international terror outfit."



The top Iranian diplomat said Iran will continue to support the Syrian government and the Syrian nation in their fight against terrorism, adding that Tehran will send military forces to the Arab country if Damascus makes an official request on the matter.

Araghchi's Iraqi and Syrian counterparts echoed his concerns, emphasizing the urgent need to eradicate terrorism in Syria and highlighting its potential to spread to neighboring countries.

**Iraqi PM lauds Iran's support**

Araghchi held a series of high-level meetings with Iraqi officials during his visit to Baghdad, focusing on strengthening bilateral relations and addressing pressing regional developments.

One of the key meetings was with Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia' Al-Sudani, where both sides underscored the importance of collaboration in maintaining regional stability and combating terrorism.

In his discussions with Prime Minister Al-Sudani, Araghchi highlighted Iran's steadfast commitment to fostering dialogue and coordination with Iraq during the current period of heightened regional sensitivity. The Iranian minister praised Iraq's government, people, and religious authorities for their heroic efforts

in overcoming the challenges posed by terrorism, which has left indelible scars on the nation.

Reflecting on the broader regional implications, Araghchi warned that neglecting the fight against terrorism in Syria risks transforming the country into a sanctuary for extremist groups, which could exacerbate insecurity across the region. He emphasized the urgent need for regional countries to unite in support of Iraq and Syria's efforts to neutralize terrorist threats.

Araghchi also pointed to ongoing efforts to enhance Iran-Iraq relations, reiterating President Ebrahim Raisi's commitment to implementing bilateral agreements. He described these steps as essential for advancing mutual interests and addressing shared challenges.

Prime Minister Mohammed Shia' Al-Sudani expressed gratitude to the Iranian government and people for their unwavering support for Iraq's security and stability. He conveyed his greetings to Iran's Leader and President, noting that Iraq would always remember Iran's vital role in helping the country combat and defeat terrorism, particularly during the struggle against ISIS.

Al-Sudani emphasized the importance of maintaining strong ties and continued dialogue with Iran, especially given the dynamic and volatile situation in the re-

gion. He stressed Syria's stability as a cornerstone for broader regional security and reaffirmed Iraq's readiness to assist the Syrian government and people in overcoming their challenges.

In addition, the Prime Minister highlighted Iraq's commitment to strengthening its bilateral relations with Iran across all sectors, with a particular focus on enhancing collaboration in transportation and transit.

**Iranian, Iraqi FMs share perspectives on regional security**

During his visit, Araghchi also held discussions with Iraq's Foreign Minister Fuad Hussein. These talks centered on the trilateral cooperation between Iran, Iraq, and Syria to address ongoing regional security challenges.

Araghchi reiterated Iran's concern over the persistent insecurity in Syria, which he described as a growing threat to the stability of the entire region. He accused terrorist groups, backed by foreign powers such as the United States and Israel, of pursuing long-term plans to destabilize the region. Araghchi highlighted Iraq's invaluable experience in combating ISIS as a key reason for increased regional cooperation, stating that Iraq's perspective on counter-terrorism is particularly crucial given its past struggles.

Foreign Minister Fuad Hussein affirmed Iraq's commitment to Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity. He also underlined the tangible threat terrorism poses to Iraq and detailed Iraq's efforts to garner regional and international support for addressing the issue. The two ministers agreed on the need for continued dialogue and coordination to promote stability and security in the region.

Araghchi also had a meeting with Iraqi President Abdul Latif Jamal Rashid, where he discussed the bilateral ties with the Iraqi official.

## Iran UN envoy condemns Israeli use of white phosphorus in Gaza and Lebanon

TEHRAN – Iran has intensified alarm over Israeli war crimes in Gaza and Lebanon, particularly its illegal use of white phosphorus bombs against civilian populations in the region.

The issue was highlighted by Iran's UN envoy, Amir Saeed Iravani, during a UN Security Council meeting on Thursday.

While Iravani began his address condemning the use of any chemical weapons, his main focus shifted towards credible reports confirming Israel's deployment of white phosphorus munitions.

Iravani's statement strongly criticized the Israeli actions, calling them "abhorrent" and a "flagrant violation of international humanitarian law."



He emphasized that the use of white phosphorus, a weapon known for its indiscriminate and devastating effects, constitutes a war crime. "These criminal actions by the Isra-

eli regime demand unequivocal condemnation from this Body and a thorough international investigation by the OPCW," he said.

While the statement focused on Israeli war crimes, it also lauded Syria's cooperation with the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), highlighting Syria's destruction of chemical weapon stockpiles and its ongoing engagement with the OPCW. Iravani emphasized the importance of the OPCW's impartial work and called for a fair evaluation of Syria's progress, free from politicization.

Israel and the supplier of its weapons, Washington, have yet to address international concern over the regime's repeated use of white phosphorus bombs.

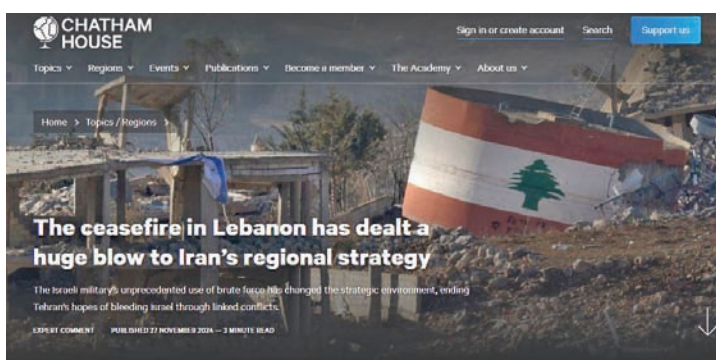
## Regional strategy of Iran stands firm despite minor setbacks

By Mohammad Khatibi

TEHRAN – Despite continuous Israeli attacks targeting Iran's military doctrine in the wake of the regime's brutal war in Gaza, the framework of that strategy remains largely intact and continues to operate across West Asia.

In a recent article for Chatham House Bilal Y.Saab argues that "the ceasefire in Lebanon has dealt a huge blow to Iran's regional strategy". However, the article fails to fully consider the current and delayed impacts of "Israel's unprecedented use of brute force" on Tel Aviv.

The military operations in the Gaza Strip and Lebanon have currently put huge burdens on the Israeli economy with long-term impacts expected to last for



years. While unconditional U.S. aid might temporarily alleviate investor concerns regarding Israel, the potential for renewed conflict poses a significant and lasting deterrent to investment.

The issue of settlers in north-

ern occupied Palestine has not been yet solved and seems to be a problem in the foreseeable future for Israel. Also, the impacts of Israel's action on Western public opinion cannot be undermined, this is being seen in some

countries to put pressure on policymakers to take more progressive action against Israel.

The author argues that Israel has achieved victory in its war with Hezbollah but the facts on the ground suggest differently. Tel Aviv since October 2023 has been targeting Hezbollah facilities and fighters across Lebanon but to no avail. Hezbollah operations in northern occupied Palestine and even deeper in Haifa and Tel Aviv continued until the last moments before a ceasefire took effect last month. Israel's "limited, targeted operations" in Southern Lebanon fell short of gaining significant territory and Hezbollah was successful in repelling those attacks.

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

## SPORTS

### Iran qualify for 2025 World Women's Handball Championship

TEHRAN – Iran defeated Hong Kong 27-16 in their third Group B match of the Asian Women's Handball Championship 2024 on Friday and qualified for the 2025 World Women's Handball Championship for the third time in a row.

Team Melli had lost to Japan 34-14 in their opening match and defeated hosts India 32-30.

The Iranin team will face the Group A top team in the semifinals on Sunday.

The competition takes place in New Delhi from Dec. 3 to 10 at the Gandhi Arena.

The event, organized by the Asian Handball Federation and presented by the World Handball League, marks a significant milestone as it's the first time the tournament is being held in South Asia.

The tournament features eight teams divided into two groups of four.

Group A includes reigning champions South Korea, Kazakhstan, China, and Singapore.

The event acts as the Asian qualifying tournament for the 2025 World Women's Handball Championship, with the top four teams qualifying.

### Iran learn opponents at FIVB Boys' U19 World Championship

TEHRAN – Iran learned their opponents at the FIVB Boys' U19 World Championship took place in Lausanne on Wednesday.

The tournament will feature 24 national teams, which are now allocated into four pools of six.

After the conclusion of pool play, the best four teams in each pool will move forward, advancing to the eighthfinals.

Teams ranked fifth and sixth in their pools will continue in action, playing in the playoffs to determine the final positions from 17th to 24th.

The 2025 FIVB Volleyball Boys' U19 World Championship will be held from 24 July to 3 August in Tashkent, Uzbekistan.

**Pool A:** Uzbekistan, Belgium, Argentina, Puerto Rico, Pakistan, Türkiye

**Pool B:** France, Bulgaria, Japan, China, Algeria, Canada

**Pool C:** Iran, Italy, Egypt, Tunisia, Poland, Spain

**Pool D:** USA, Korea, Brazil, Colombia, Cuba, Finland

### Azmoun makes a brace as Shabab Al Ahli beat Nasaf

TEHRAN – Sardar Azmoun scored two goals in two minutes to lead Shabab Al Ahli to a 3-2 win over Uzbekistan's Nasaf in Dubai on Wednesday as the side from the United Arab Emirates claimed top spot in Group D of the AFC Champions League Two 2024-25.

Azmoun's double came in the 32nd and 34th minutes after Nasaf's Akmal Mosgovoy had struck in the 30th minute to cancel out Mateusao's 23rd minute opener.

Zoran Marusic was also on target for the visitors on the stroke of halftime in a goal-filled first period.

The win moves Shabab Al Ahli onto 13 points from their six games and confirms Paulo Sousa's side as winner of the group while Nasaf finish bottom of the standings on four points and is.

### Iran discovers fate at FIVB Men's U21 World Championship

TEHRAN – Iran discovered their rivals at the FIVB Men's U21 World Championship took place in Lausanne on Wednesday.

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The 2025 FIVB Volleyball Men's U21 World Championship will be held from 18 to 31 August in Jiangmen, China.

**Pool A:** China, Egypt, USA, Thailand, Morocco, Türkiye

**Pool B:** Iran, Poland, Canada, Korea, Puerto Rico, Kazakhstan

**Pool C:** Bulgaria, Brazil, Czechia, Colombia, Japan, Cuba

**Pool D:** Italy, Argentina, Tunisia, France, Ukraine, Indonesia

### Iran's Shafie wins bronze at Qatar Squash Tournament

TEHRAN – Puya Shafie of Iran claimed a bronze medal at the Qatar Squash Tournament on Thursday.

Shafie lost to eventual champion Abdullah Almezayen of Kuwait 11-5, 11-2, 11-4 in the semifinals.

Almezayen defeated Egypt's Seif Heikal 11-2, 11-6, 11-4 to win the gold medal.

Shafie defeated Ammar Hussain of Pakistan 11-8, 11-5, 8-11, 11-9 in the first round, then defeated Salem Qatar's Al-Malki 8-11, 11-4, 12-10, 11-9 in the quarterfinals.

The event took place at the Khalifa International Tennis & Squash Complex in Doha, Qatar from December 2 to 5.

### Factors contributing to Esteghlal's struggles

TEHRAN – Esteghlal's performance in the 2024/25 Iranian league and AFC Champions League Elite has been mixed.

They managed to secure a draw against Al Ahli in the AFC Champions League, their overall performance in the group stage was disappointing, with losses to Al-Hilal, Al-Nassr and Al-Sadd, and a draw against Pakhtakor. Esteghlal have only defeated Al Gharafa in the campaign.

In the Iranian league, they currently sit in 11th place, which is not an ideal position for a team of their stature.

Several factors could be contributing to Esteghlal's struggles:

**Coaching Instability:** The team have gone through multiple coaching changes in recent years, which can disrupt team morale and tactics.

**Financial Constraints:** Economic sanctions and financial mismanagement have limited Esteghlal's ability to acquire top talent and retain their best players. Weak Squad Depth: The team's squad depth is lacking compared to other top clubs in the region, which can be a major disadvantage in long and demanding competitions.

**Poor Form:** Esteghlal have been plagued by inconsistent form, with periods of strong performance followed by disappointing results.

It's important to note that Esteghlal are a historic club with a passionate fanbase. They have the potential to turn their fortunes around, but it will require significant investment, improved management, and a strong focus on player development.



## Oil ministry boosts fuel supply to power plants



TEHRAN – Iran's Energy Minister Abbas Aliabadi announced Wednesday that the Oil Ministry has increased diesel fuel supply to power plants, aligning provision levels with demand to prevent energy shortages during the winter months.

Speaking at a meeting on winter fuel supply, attended by senior officials including the deputy executive of the president and the heads of the Oil and Industry ministries, Aliabadi said, "Significant efforts are underway within the government to address energy imbalances."

The minister highlighted that with sufficient fuel, the country could generate up to 59,000 megawatts (MW) of electricity. He also stressed the government's focus on expanding renewable energy.

"A portion of our solar power generation capacity has been realized, and we have ambitious plans to develop 30,000 MW of solar power by next winter to ensure electricity supply," Aliabadi said.

He projected an increase of 8,000 to 9,000

MW in electricity production next summer, contingent on adequate fuel availability and efficient consumption. However, he warned that achieving this goal depends on public adherence to energy-saving practices.

"If consumption follows acceptable global standards, we will face no significant issues in electricity supply," he said.

### Government seeks to curb energy consumption

Aliabadi noted the government's efforts to minimize energy usage, particularly in public offices, where stricter directives have been issued to shut down systems and reduce fuel consumption to the lowest possible levels.

He detailed the sources of fuel used in power generation, including natural gas, fuel oil, and diesel. While environmental restrictions limit fuel oil use in urban areas, only low-sulfur variants are deployed when necessary. Diesel remains the primary alternative fuel, with the Oil Ministry working to maximize its supply.

"Recent efforts have significantly improved diesel availability for power plants, reducing the risk of disruptions during the colder months," Aliabadi added.

### Minimizing winter outages

The minister assured that steps are being taken to ensure minimal power outages during winter, emphasizing the government's proactive measures to prepare for colder temperatures.

"The government is taking smart steps to minimize the impact on the public," Aliabadi said, concluding that authorities aim to navigate the season with the least possible interruptions.

## Putin praises strengthening economic ties with Iran

TEHRAN – Russian President Vladimir Putin has highlighted the stability and reliability of trade and economic relations with Iran, expressing optimism about further growth in bilateral trade volumes.

Speaking at the plenary session of the 15th VTB Russia Calling! Investment Forum in Moscow, themed "The Future of Capital and the Capital of the Future," Putin lauded ongoing projects between the two nations in logistics, energy, industry, and security.

"The North-South Corridor is operational, and the volume of transportation along this route is steadily increasing," Putin said, referring to enhanced cooperation in transportation.

Putin expressed hope that a comprehensive strategic partnership agreement between Russia and Iran would be signed during an upcoming visit by Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian to Moscow. He also welcomed Tehran's application for observer membership in the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU).

"Moscow supports Iran's intention to deepen its engagement with the EAEU," he added.



### Upcoming Tehran-Moscow agreement

Earlier this week, during a phone conversation with his Iranian counterpart, Putin reiterated the importance of bilateral ties and anticipated that cooperation would strengthen following the signing of the Tehran-Moscow Comprehensive Cooperation Agreement.

The Kremlin confirmed that preparations for Pezeshkian's visit are underway, though no date has been finalized. Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov stressed the urgency of finalizing the strategic partnership agreement without delay.

## Iran, Mauritania discuss energy cooperation



TEHRAN – The ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran to Mauritania consulted and exchanged views with the Minister of Energy and Oil of that country regarding the strengthening of bilateral cooperation.

Javad Abu, the ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Mauritania, while attending the office of Mohamed Ould Khalid, the Minister of Energy and Oil of Mauritania, discussed with him bilateral relations and ways to promote and develop it, especially in the fields related to the energy and oil sector.

## Iran to launch "Agricultural Productive City" pilot project

TEHRAN – Iranian Minister of Agriculture has announced the implementation of a pilot project for the "Agricultural Productive City," a novel initiative aimed at integrating urban living with agricultural productivity. Once the pilot phase is complete, the model will be refined and expanded nationwide.

"This groundbreaking project is currently in its pilot phase. We aim to identify and resolve

potential challenges before extending the model to other regions," Gholamreza Nouri Ghezleji stated.

These cities are envisioned to integrate urban conveniences with opportunities for sustainable agriculture, aquaculture, and job creation, centered on robust value chains in agriculture and aquaculture.

# Optimizing gasoline consumption a priority, no price changes yet: Paknejad

TEHRAN – Iran's Oil Minister Mohsen Paknejad emphasized that optimizing gasoline consumption is a top priority for the ministry, adding that no decision has been made regarding changes to gasoline prices.

"The government will notify the public before implementing any measures in this regard," Paknejad said during a meeting on winter fuel supply. The gathering included senior officials such as Mohammad-Jafar Qaempanah, deputy executive of the president, and Energy Minister Abbas Aliabadi.

Paknejad discussed efforts to bolster fuel imports and production, noting that negotiations are ongoing with northern neighbors Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan over gas imports or swaps via Iran. "The outcomes of these discussions will be shared with the



public once finalized," he added.

He highlighted a 7-million-liter-per-day increase in diesel production during the first 100 days of the 14th administration.

This boost, achieved through enhanced refinery feedstock and process modifications, reflects "the innovative efforts of col-

leagues at the Oil Ministry," he said.

Paknejad stated that part of the additional liquid fuel supply for power plants has been secured through imports. He stressed that every possible measure is being taken to mitigate challenges for citizens during the cold

season.

Addressing potential changes to gasoline pricing, Paknejad reaffirmed that no decisions have been made and underscored the government's focus on consumption optimization. "If any changes occur, they will be announced well in advance," he said.

On the topic of natural gas exports, the minister confirmed that Iran has fully met its contractual obligations to Iraq and Turkey.

Preparations are underway to negotiate an extension of Turkey's gas import agreement, with Ankara signaling interest in maintaining Iran as a reliable supplier.

Paknejad also noted ongoing discussions with Russia on gas swaps and imports, though no agreements have yet been finalized.

## Russia-Pakistan freight train project via Iran set for pilot launch: Minister

project is scheduled to launch in March 2025.

In an interview with Russia Today (RT) on Thursday, Leghari underscored the strategic nature of Pakistan-Russia relations, emphasizing their mutually beneficial goals.

"Our relationship with Russia is not directed against any other country or third-party interests," he said, adding that strengthening ties with Russia serves the people of both nations.

Leghari dismissed Western concerns over Pakistan's growing cooperation with Russia, asserting that partnerships between devel-

oping nations and global powers, particularly BRICS members, are inevitable in the current geopolitical climate.

The minister also revealed plans for direct flights between Islamabad and Moscow, alongside the freight train initiative, as part of efforts to deepen bilateral connectivity.

The North-South Corridor project aims to enhance trade and logistics by linking Russia, Central Asia, and South Asia through a multi-modal transport network, including rail and sea routes.



TEHRAN – Pakistan's Energy Minister Awais Ahmad Khan Leghari announced plans for a trial freight train service between Russia and Pakistan via the North-South Corridor, transiting through Azerbaijan and Iran. The pilot

## Iran, Saudi Arabia to collaborate on agriculture and environment

TEHRAN – Iran's Minister of Agriculture, Gholamreza Nouri Ghezleji, announced plans to form a joint working group with Saudi Arabia to strengthen cooperation in agriculture, environmental issues, and natural resource management.

Speaking on the sidelines of the 16th session of the Conference of

the Parties (COP16) to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) in Riyadh on Wednesday, Ghezleji said joint technical working groups will be established soon.

"Discussions with Saudi agricultural officials have laid the groundwork for collaboration in natural resources, the environ-

ment, and agriculture," he noted.

The minister also held talks with counterparts from Pakistan, Iraq, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Turkiye, and Syria during the conference. He highlighted the significance of such international gatherings for fostering practical and mutually beneficial outcomes.

"These meetings are not only beneficial for participating countries but also contribute positively to relevant international organizations," Ghezleji added.

The initiative marks a step forward in Iran-Saudi cooperation following the resumption of diplomatic relations earlier this year.

## Tehran, Madrid to strengthen trade ties via visa facilitation

TEHRAN – Head of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines, and Agriculture (ICCIMA), Samad Hassanzadeh, has emphasized the need for facilitating Spanish visas for Iranian traders saying that this step will significantly enhance bilateral trade relations between the two countries.

Speaking during a meeting in Tehran with Antonio Sánchez-Benedito Gaspar, Spain's ambassador to Iran, Hassanzadeh also requested an extension of the duration for issued visas. "Currently, Spanish visas are valid for only one week, which is insufficient for conducting business activities. Increasing the duration will allow more effective trade engagements," he said.

Hassanzadeh noted that the current trade volume between Iran and Spain is minimal compared to the capacities of both nations. "There is substantial potential for expansion of bilateral trade, especially in sectors like food industries, petrochemicals, and mining,"

he said.

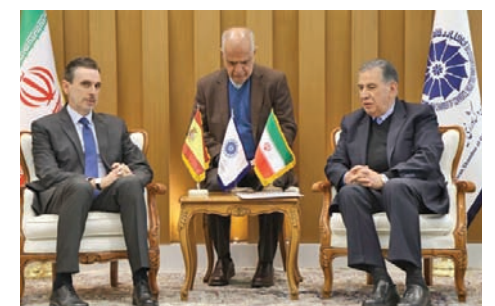
Highlighting Spain's expertise in renewable energy, Iran Chamber of Commerce president expressed interest in Spanish investments in Iran's solar energy sector, while inviting Spanish firms to collaborate in petrochemical projects and refinery setups.

### Spain eager to boost trade ties with Iran

Antonio Sánchez-Benedito Gaspar expressed Spain's eagerness to strengthen trade ties with Iran saying, although Spain is Europe's fourth-largest economy, and Iran has vast natural and human resources, the current trade volume of €300 million does not reflect the true potential of our economic relations.

Gaspar mentioned that trade between the two countries had reached \$2 billion following the JCPOA agreement, expressing optimism for a similar resurgence under Iran's new president, Masoud Pezeshkian.

The ambassador also suggested closer cooperation between the private sectors of both



ICCIMA Head Samad Hassanzadeh (R) holds a meeting with Spanish Ambassador to Iran Antonio Sánchez-Benedito Gaspar in Tehran on December 3, 2024.

nations in industries such as agriculture, ceramics, renewable energy, pharmaceuticals, petrochemicals, and tourism.

He assured that Spain is committed to streamlining visa issuance for Iranian traders endorsed by ICCIMA, paving the way for stronger economic collaboration.

## Iran, Belarus urged to boost financial exchanges using local currencies



ICCIMA Head Samad Hassanzadeh (C) and Belarusian Ambassador to Iran Dmitry Koltsov (L) met and held talks in Tehran on December 3.

TEHRAN – Head of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines, and Agriculture (ICCIMA) Samad Hassanzadeh have stressed the need for enhancing bilateral financial exchanges through joint mechanisms and the use of local currencies.

In a meeting with Dmitry Koltsov, Belarusian Ambassador to Iran, on Tuesday, Hassanzadeh emphasized the significance of joint investments and innovative financial arrangements such as barter trade and local currency usage to reduce reliance on the US dollar.

The trade volume between Iran and Belarus, amounting to approximately \$400 million, does not reflect the true potential of both countries, Hassanzadeh said. He highlighted various sectors, including oil, petrochemicals, energy, advanced technologies, engineering services, machinery, construction materials, transportation equipment, chemicals, steel, food products, agricultural goods, and pharmaceuticals, as areas ripe for enhanced cooperation.

Hassanzadeh noted that Iran has been importing part of its needs for agricultural and livestock inputs from Belarus, expressing a willingness to expand cooperation in these sectors. He invited Belarusian investors to ex-

plore joint ventures in pharmaceuticals, medical equipment, livestock, and dairy products, citing Iran's secure environment for investment.

Tourism was also spotlighted, with Hassanzadeh urging measures to facilitate tourist and business visas and establish direct flights between the two nations to promote people-to-people ties.

Ambassador Koltsov echoed the sentiments, noting the strong political ties between the two countries. He outlined plans to expand economic collaboration, including the establishment of a joint trade house in Minsk as part of the two countries' joint economic commission.

Koltsov also mentioned the need to update and implement a previously signed cooperation agreement between the chambers of commerce in Iran and Belarus, expressing optimism about fostering closer ties between the business operators of both nations.



# Syria redeploys troops in Hama as a war tactic

From page 1 ▶ On Thursday night, the militants, whom experts say are being heavily backed with arms and logistics by foreign powers also took control of many regions in Hama, to the south of Idlib.

This followed 24 hours of heavy fighting in the strategic Mount Zain al-Abidin in the western Hama countryside that overlooks the city.

The terrorist groups have vowed to move further south to the neighboring city of Homs.

The offensive has been branded by foreign observers as the greatest threat to the survival of the Syrian government.

Analysts dispute this, saying the Arab country faced a much larger threat in 2017 when terrorist groups controlled many more regions but the Syrian army managed to fight them off.

According to reporters in Syria, government forces have targeted a convoy of militants in an area between Hama and Homs that was traveling from the direction of Hama.

The Syrian army has also re-deployed some of its forces to the town of Rabia and the city of Masyaf on the northern outskirts of Hama province.

Reports have also indicated that the Syrian army has managed to station itself on Mount Zain al-Abidin and is engaged in intense battles with militants.

So far, the government has avoided fighting the terrorist groups led by the al-Qaeda-affiliated Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) inside Aleppo and Hama to minimize civilian casualties and heavy destruction to the cities again.

This comes amid a large wave of displaced civilians from Hama's countryside that has seen heavy traffic in the direction of the port cities of Tartus and Lat-



akia on the Mediterranean coast.

The Syrian army also repelled an attack by terrorist groups, which mostly comprised of Turkistani, Uzbek, and Tajik nationals in Latakia province. Reports say that the Syrian army thwarted the attack by the foreign terrorists on Turkmen Mountain in the northern Latakia countryside.

The western Homs countryside has also seen a large influx of displaced people even though there is a shortage of accommodation shelters for people fleeing the militants in all three regions.

In the province of Homs itself, armed groups in several towns are said to have caused a difficult incident for the Syrian army as soon as terrorists arrived in Hama.

Towards the end of 2019, the government offered amnesty to all Syrian citizens carrying arms to surrender their weapons in return for freedom or any punitive measures.

Many did so around the country allowing the government to remove army posts and focus on foreign terrorists in flashpoint areas

However, terrorists appear to have now taken advantage

of that move by exploiting the absence of the Syrian army outposts.

Amid these pockets of terrorist activities, mostly by sleeper cells, the main concern continues to be the capture of Hama and how the Syrian army will respond.

On Thursday, the General Command of the Syrian Army and Armed Forces announced that the military units stationed in Hama had redeployed outside the city to protect the lives of civilians and prevent them from being caught in the fighting. They confirmed that they would continue their national duty in reclaiming areas occupied by terrorist groups.

Following the Syrian army's redeployment, Syrian Defense Minister Ali Abbas confirmed that the army is in a "good field position" and that this move was made to preserve civilian lives in the city, explaining that military actions sometimes require repositioning and redeployment as part of battle tactics.

Abbas emphasized that what happened in Hama was a "temporary tactical measure," and that "our armed forces are still in the vicinity of the city, fully

prepared and ready to carry out their national and constitutional duties."

This comes as the Lebanon-based Al Mayadeen news outlet has cited an informed source close to the terror groups as saying that the goal of the militants' operation is to reach the Qalamoun area in northern Damascus countryside to prevent any connection between Damascus and Hezbollah and to stop the transfer of weapons from Syria to the Lebanese resistance movement.

Al Mayadeen has also cited a local source in Hama as saying that Arab and Syrian "opposition" media conducted interviews with the residents under intense pressure asking them to speak about the good treatment of the militants, though the residents' accounts contradicted this narrative.

"We saw with our own eyes how our people died from hunger, thirst, and cold, while the militants entered homes, stealing everything inside before us, insulting us, and hurling the worst degrading insults at all of us," the source added.

In Aleppo, local sources also confirmed that "militants enter homes under the pretext of searching for pro-government supporters and then proceed to rob and loot the houses in front of the residents, without any deterrence or resistance."

The major terror offensive in Syria coincided with a ceasefire between the Israeli regime and Lebanon in what many regarded as an opportunity to shift away global attention to the genocidal war on Gaza.

Critics argue that the timing of the foreign-backed developments in Syria is only serving Israeli interests.

## Jolani seeking to present a distorted image of himself and HTS

### Tahrir al-Sham is nurtured by Salafist ideology

From page 1 ▶ Al-Jolani coordinated in those early years with Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, head of al-Qaeda's "Islamic State in Iraq", which later became ISIS (ISIS).

In April 2013, al-Baghdadi suddenly announced that his group was cutting ties with al-Qaeda and would expand into Syria, effectively swallowing al-Nusra Front into a new group called ISIL.

Reportedly, Al-Jolani rejected this change, maintaining his allegiance to al-Qaeda. During his first televised interview in 2014, he told Al Jazeera that Syria should be ruled under his group's interpretation of "Islamic law" and the country's minorities, such as Christians and Alawis would not be accommodated.

In the following years, al-Jolani appeared to distance himself from al-Qaeda's project of establishing a "global caliphate" in all Muslim-majority countries, seeming to focus instead on building up his group within Syria's borders.

The split appeared to be a bid, according to analysts, to stress his group's national, as opposed to transnational, ambitions to groups in Idlib.

Then in July 2016, Aleppo fell to the gov-

ernment and the militant groups there started to head to Idlib, which was still held by extremists. Around the same time, al-Jolani announced that his group had changed to Jabhat Fateh al-Sham.

By early 2017, thousands of fighters poured into Idlib fleeing Aleppo and al-Jolani announced the merging of a number of those groups with his own to form HTS.

"HTS is a Salafi organization that is national oriented," Aymenn Jawad al-Tamimi, an expert on hardline groups in the Syrian war, told Middle East Eye.

"It is not trying to form a caliphate, like IS or al-Qaeda," he argued, adding that such transnational groups do not believe in the concept of a nation-state.

In fact, HTS has at times fought the Islamic State, as well as Hurras al-Din, an al-Qaeda-linked group that split from HTS when it began to pursue a nationally focused line.

The United States had designated HTS a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) in 2018 and placed a \$10 million bounty on him. However, the designation now remains in doubt as CNN conducted an interview with him in Aleppo.

"When we talk about objectives, the goal of the revolution remains the overthrow of this (Assad) regime. It is our right to use all available means to achieve that goal," Jolani said in the interview published on the CNN website on Friday, December 6.

Despite such overtures, Syria Direct, an independent journalism organization, says HTS is behind the disappearances of activists and has shot live ammunition at protesters who accuse the group of denying services to communities that oppose it.

Al-Jolani has previously claimed: "Governance should be consistent with Islamic sharia, but not according to the standards of ISIS or even Saudi Arabia."

It does still take action over incidents that it believes fall outside its interpretation of sharia.

One example came in August when an event related to the Paralympic Games organized for Idlib's disabled community was shut down by the group, allegedly due to religious jurists deeming acts within the opening ceremony in Paris to be linked to "pagan beliefs".

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

## This time around, Israeli plots against Iran in Syria will fail

From page 1 ▶ The US emerged to complete this malicious colonial role and to ensure the region's permanent submission to Western imperialist hegemony.

After the success of Iran's Islamic Revolution in 1979, the Zionist entity feared that Imam Khomeini's strategy would be implemented to confront the Zionist project. Hence, it cooperated with its Western allies to lure Iraq into a war against Iran that lasted for eight years.

Nevertheless, Iran proved to be the strongest in the confrontation, especially after Hezbollah liberated southern Lebanon and

won the 2006 war, and finally its victory in the 2024 war, which constituted a major turning point in the history of the conflict with the usurping entity. For many reasons, the most important of which is its missile program, Iran posed a serious threat to it, especially its role in arming resistance factions in West Asia.

Therefore, Netanyahu realized that the account with Iran must be settled completely, especially after it launched two ballistic missile attacks on the occupied Palestinian territories, warning that it was preparing for a third, more painful attack at a time of its

choosing, coinciding with its statements on the eve of the entry into force of the ceasefire agreement with Lebanon.

Although Netanyahu was the initiator of the request for a ceasefire on the Lebanese front, he is still deceived that he had inflicted a crushing defeat on Hezbollah. That is why he turned towards Syria, orienting a large-scale internal conflict in the country.

Netanyahu hopes to cut off military supplies to Hezbollah by doing so, however, Netanyahu's calculations will fail and the magic will quickly backfire on the magician, as in all rounds.

## Hezbollah chief: US and Israel behind efforts to fragment Syria

The secretary general of Hezbollah said on Thursday that efforts to break apart Syria are being led by the US and Israel, who are backing the "Takfiri" groups on the ground that took over Aleppo.

Naim Qassem made the comments in a televised address in which he reiterated Hezbollah's backing for the Syrian government, a position the resistance group has maintained for over a decade.



## Erdogan appears to support HTS offensive

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan seems to have thrown his weight behind Takfir terrorists who launched a surprise offensive in Syria 10 days ago.

"As of now, Idlib, Hama, Homs and the target is of course Damascus. This march of the opposition continues ... Our wish is that this march in Syria will continue without any ac-

cidents and troubles," Erdogan told reporters in Istanbul on Friday.

The Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) began its offensive on November 27.

Turkey is among the countries that stand accused of aiding and abetting the HTS terrorists in Syria.

## Takfiri terrorists offer smokescreen for Israeli genocide in Gaza

From page 1 ▶ The attack hit a residential block in the vicinity of the Kamal Adwan Hospital, which was also among the Israeli targets.

The director of the hospital, which is one of the last functioning health centers in north Gaza, said four staff members were killed in Israeli attacks on the facility, according to AFP.

"There was a series of airstrikes on the northern and western sides of the hospital, accompanied by intense and direct fire," Husam Abu Safia said.

He noted that "a large number of" people were wounded and killed.

The World Health Organization representative for the occupied Palestinian territory also said Kamal Adwan Hospital was bombed without warning.

"There was no official warning or evacuation order before the bombing of ... the hospital, only rumors that spread panic," Richard Peeperkorn added.

Israel has slaughtered more than 44,600 Palestinians in Gaza since launching war on the territory in October last year.

The actual death toll is believed to be much higher as many bodies remain buried under the rubble of buildings destroyed by Israeli bombings.

Nearly 106,000 Palestinians have also been wounded in the 14-month onslaught.

Amnesty International said on Thursday that Israel has committed genocide in Gaza in the course of the war on the Palestinian territory.

"Our damning findings must serve as a wake-up call to the international community: this is genocide. It must stop now," Agnès Callamard, secretary general of Amnesty International, said in a report.

The report also said Israel has sought to



Israeli strikes killed dozens more Palestinians in the Gaza Strip on Friday.

deliberately destroy Palestinians by mounting deadly attacks, demolishing vital infrastructure, and preventing the delivery of food, medicine and other aid.

Israel already stands accused of genocide at the International Court of Justice (ICJ).

The International Criminal Court (ICC) has also issued arrest warrants for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his former war minister Yoav Gallant for committing war crimes and crimes against humanity in Gaza.

For now, an offensive launched by Takfir terrorists in Syria has shifted focus away from the Israeli atrocities in Gaza. Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) began the assault 10 days ago.

The HTS is killing people in Syria in line with its efforts to seize more territory in the country.

The offensive of the Takfiri terrorist group has provided an opportunity for Israel to carry out its nefarious plans in Gaza.

Israel seeks to ethnically cleanse northern Gaza and pave the way for settlers to move in.

It is clear more than ever that Israel is the main beneficiary of the chaos that has broken out in Syria.



Jordanians staged a protest in the capital Amman on Friday to show support for Palestinians in Gaza in the face of the Israeli genocide. [Alaa Al Sukhni/Reuters]



## Iran eases travel to southernmost Bu Musa Island



TEHRAN – The Iranian government has announced the removal of travel restrictions to Bu Musa Island, making the strategic isle accessible to all Iranian citizens without prior vetting.

Bu Musa's governor, Morteza Ehtesham, stated on Wednesday that travel to the island has been facilitated with improved transportation options, including daily flights from Bandar Abbas International Airport and the deployment of the passenger ship Almas Qeshm.

Ehtesham also emphasized plans to develop the island's infrastructure and promote its

recreational and maritime attractions through targeted advertising campaigns, Mehr reported.

These measures are expected to significantly ease connectivity between Iran's mainland and Bu Musa Island to help drive tourism and the local economy, the report said.

"Creating better and more infrastructure for accommodating passengers and necessary advertising to introduce recreational and maritime locations is on the agenda so that we can turn this island into one of Iran's tourist destinations," Ehtesham said.

The initiative is in line with broader efforts to expand tourism across Iran's triple islands that is composed of Bu Musa (aka Abu Musa), the Greater and Lesser Tumbus.

On November 5, Iran's Minister of Transport and Urban Development, Farzaneh Sadegh, during a visit to Bu Musa, announced the expansion of flight services to and from the island.

Previously, four weekly flights operated by Karun Airlines, Pars Air, and Iran Air served the island, requiring travel permits. From December 7, daily flights will be available, eliminating the permit requirement.

## Nowruz UNESCO recognition renewed as Mongolia joins 12 participating nations

TEHRAN – The ancient Nowruz festival has achieved global recognition once again, as Mongolia joins 12 other nations to secure its inscription on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

This marks the third successful listing of Nowruz as a shared cultural heritage, highlighting its profound cultural significance in vast parts of Asia.

The journey of Nowruz's recognition began in 2010 when it was first inscribed on UNESCO's list with contributions from seven countries of Iran, Azerbaijan, India, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Turkey, and Uzbekistan.

In 2016, the inclusion of Afghanistan, Iraq, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan expanded the list. Now, with Mongolia's participation in the 2024 UNESCO session held in Paraguay, the list of countries celebrating this vibrant spring festival has grown to 13.

Nowruz, observed on the vernal equinox, symbolizes renewal, harmony, and a deep connection with nature. Its customs, rooted in ancient traditions, include greeting the sunrise, sharing festive meals, resolving disputes, and celebrating unity through cultural performances and sports.



In Mongolia, people celebrate Nowruz as a major annual event, the festivities feature unique practices such as lighting candles for prosperity and preparing traditional dishes like *koje* soup.

The inscription highlights the festival's role in promoting cultural diversity, mutual understanding, and solidarity among the participating nations: Iran, Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Azerbaijan, Turkey, Pakistan, India, Iraq, and Mongolia.

As a shared living heritage, Nowruz continues to foster connections between communities, bridging cultural differences and encouraging intergenerational learning through its rich traditions.

## Global tourism set for full recovery by end of the year with spending growing faster than arrivals

Around 1.1 billion tourists traveled internationally in the first nine months of 2024, as the global tourism sector recovered 98% of pre-pandemic levels. According to the latest World Tourism Barometer by UN Tourism, a full recovery from the biggest crisis in the sector's history is expected by the end of the year, despite economic, geopolitical and climate challenges.

UN Tourism Secretary-General Zurab Pololikashvili said: "The strong growth seen in tourism receipts is excellent news for economies around the world. The fact that visitor spending is growing even stronger than arrivals has a direct impact on millions of jobs and small businesses and contributes decisively to the balance of payments and tax revenues of many economies."

A total of 35 out of 43 countries with available data on receipts exceeded pre-pandemic values in the first eight to nine months of 2024, many reporting double-digit growth compared to 2019 (in local currencies), well above inflation in most cases. Among the best performers in terms of earnings were Serbia (+99%) where receipts almost doubled (compared to the same months of 2019), as well as Pakistan (+64%), Romania (+61%), Japan (+59%), Portugal (+51%), Nicaragua and Tanzania (both 50%).

Among the world's top earners, Japan (+59%), Türkiye (+41%) and France (+27%) all recorded double-digit growth through September 2024. Spain (+36%) and Italy (+26%) also reported strong visitor receipts, through August. The United Kingdom recorded 43% higher earnings, Canada 35%, and Australia 18%, all through June

2024. As for the United States, the world's top tourism earner, it reported 7% growth through September. Data on international tourism expenditure reflects the same trend, especially among large source markets such as Germany (+35% compared to 2019), the United States (+33%) and France (+11%).

Strong expenditure growth was also reported by the United Kingdom (+46%) Australia (+34%), Canada (+28%) and Italy (+26%), all through June 2024. Available data for India shows a surge in outbound spending from this increasingly important market, with 81% growth through June 2024 (versus 2019).

International tourist arrivals are expected to reach 2019 levels in 2024. International tourism receipts had already virtually achieved pre-pandemic levels in 2023.

While a large number of destinations already exceeded pre-pandemic arrival numbers in 2023, or have done so in 2024, there is still room for recovery across several subregions and destinations. A slower rebound in parts of North-East Asia and Central Eastern Europe contrasts with strong results in all other European subregions, the Middle East, Central America and the Caribbean, where arrivals have surpassed pre-pandemic values.

As in 2023, the year 2024 has seen strong export revenues from international tourism, due to higher average spending per trip (excluding the effects of inflation), partly the result of longer periods of stay.

(Source: UN Tourism)

## Multinational 'Nowruz dossier' reflects solidarity with Iranian culture, tourism minister says

TEHRAN – Iran's Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts considers the registration of various countries to the UNESCO-listed Nowruz as a sign of convergence and solidarity with Iranian culture.

"The inclusion of Mongolia in the global heritage of Nowruz highlights the civilizational capacity of Greater Iran," Seyyed Reza Salehi-Amiri stated on Thursday in a message on the occasion of Mongolia's inclusion in the previously registered feast.

"The global registration of Nowruz transformed its cultural scope from a national and regional level to a global status that serves a sustainable foundation for enhancing peace and stability in today's world, both for Iran and neighboring countries," the minister said.

He also emphasized that Nowruz connects the shared culture of Iranian ethnicities within the country, fostering national unity. On a regional level, it links the intangible heritage of 13 countries in the Asian continent.



The message further noted: "Mongolia's joining the global Nowruz community is highly significant. The origin and foundation of Nowruz lie in Iran, as evidenced by the construction of the unparalleled Persepolis to honor Nowruz. This profound connection between Nowruz and the values of engineering and architecture has elevated Persepolis to a distinguished global heritage site and amplified the cultural dimensions of Iranian civilization. The inclusion of countries in the global Nowruz

dossier reflects alignment with Iranian culture, as the roots and essence of Nowruz which stems from Iran."

Salehi-Amiri added that Nowruz is a key component of Iran's cultural capacity, rooted in nature and shaped by a system of beliefs and calendrical calculations. Over time, it has evolved into a cultural identity and heritage. Thus, Nowruz symbolizes the creation of the world—earth, sky, water, plants, animals, and humans. It signifies the renewal of life, as the creative energy

of spring revitalizes humanity's cultural and social systems."

Referring to Nowruz as a treasured cultural heritage, the minister said Nowruz has remained everlasting in Iranian history, as it is deeply embedded in the nation's traditions, history, and cultural memory.

"Over time, Iranian identity and Nowruz have mutually reinforced each other. After the advent of Islam, this ancient national celebration gained legitimacy, and Islamic customs blended with it, giving it new dimensions. In recent decades, with a scientific approach focused on sustainable development, the territorial identity of Nowruz and its associated rituals have been globally registered. Today, this heritage has expanded to include 13 West Asian countries officially associated with Iranian Nowruz."

In the UNESCO assembly on Thursday, with Mongolia's accession to the Nowruz dossier, the number of countries officially part of this cultural heritage has increased from 12 to 13.

## Persian ceremony of Mehrگان gains UNESCO label

TEHRAN – The ancient festival of Mehrگان, celebrated in Iran and Tajikistan, has been inscribed on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

The joint recognition was announced on December 4 during the 19th Session of UNESCO's Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, held in Paraguay.

Mehrگان, which coincides with the autumn equinox, is a celebration of gratitude for an abundant harvest and a tribute to nature's bounty. Rooted in the Zoroastrian tradition, the festival is named after Mehr, the deity symbolizing friendship, peace, and solidarity.

Available evidence suggests that the ceremony's origins trace back to antiquity, making it a vital part of cultural identity in greater Iran that now includes both countries.

In Iran, Mehrگان is celebrated primarily within Zoroastrian communities, as well as in rural Muslim ceremonies. The festival involves diverse rituals, including the recitation of Zoroastrian sacred texts, the setting of a traditional tablecloth adorned with seasonal

foods, and the preparation of special dishes. Music, local wrestling, and communal feasts are integral parts of the celebrations. In urban centers, the festival is less common but remains significant in specific regions such as northern Iran and among Zoroastrian communities in provinces like Yazd, Fars, and Tehran.

In Tajikistan, Mehrگان is celebrated as a post-harvest Thanksgiving festival, emphasizing shared customs such as feasting, music, and community gatherings. Farmers and gardeners are key participants, reflecting the festival's agrarian roots. The event is also an important occasion for social cohesion, bringing together people of all ages, genders, and backgrounds to foster mutual respect and solidarity.

UNESCO's recognition highlights the festival's role in promoting peaceful relations and cultural continuity. It underscores Mehrگان's significance as a living tradition that bridges religious and cultural divides. "Mehrگان exemplifies the enduring power of cultural heritage to unite communities and celebrate nature's gifts," UNESCO stated.



The inscription process for Mehrگان was a multi-year effort, with the festival initially proposed for recognition in 2019 and revised multiple times. Experts worked to address questions about its contemporary practice, particularly in Iran, where it faces challenges of declining observance outside Zoroastrian communities. However, UNESCO acknowledged the shared commitment of Iran and Tajikistan to preserving and revitalizing this heritage.

In addition, Mehrگان joins Nowruz as a recognized cultural tradition shared by multiple nations, reinforcing the enduring cultural connections across Central and West Asia. With this inscription, Mehrگان is celebrated not only as a historical tradition but also as a testament to the power of cultural heritage in fostering unity and gratitude.

## UNESCO recognizes Rabab as intangible cultural heritage for Iran and three neighbors



TEHRAN – UNESCO has officially recognized the art of crafting and playing the Rabab/Rubab as an Intangible Cultural Heritage, acknowledging the cultural significance of this ancient musical instrument for Iran, Afghanistan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan.

The inscription was approved on December 4 during the 19th Session of UNESCO's Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, held in Paraguay.

The Rabab, one of the oldest string instru-

ments in Central, South, and Southwest Asia, holds a cherished place in the cultural traditions of these countries. Crafted from dried mulberry wood, typically gathered from desert regions, the instrument has been a central part of local music for centuries.

Known for its deep, resonant tones, the Rabab is commonly played during significant events such as weddings, funerals, social gatherings, and ritual healings. It also plays a prominent role in orchestral and contemporary music, often featured in multinational ensembles.

The UN cultural body also praised the art of crafting and playing the Rabab for its role in fostering cultural and social cohesion across borders, particularly within migrant communities. "The Rabab has been a bridge for cultural exchanges and solidarity, linking traditions across borders," stated UNESCO.

The Rabab's craft involves a combination of carpentry, woodcarving, marquetry, and inlay

work, typically passed down through generations as a family tradition. The craft is predominantly male, while playing the instrument is open to people of all genders, ages, and ethnicities. The Rabab is also deeply woven into the fabric of local literature, with many poems and myths associated with it, often shared by elders during community gatherings.

The Rabab's influence extends beyond the region as well. It is believed to have reached Europe through two main routes: a pear-shaped variety adopted in the Byzantine Empire in the 9th century, which evolved into the medieval lira, and a boat-shaped variety brought to Spain by the Arabs in the 11th century, which influenced the rebec in Europe.

UNESCO's recognition of the Rabab as Intangible Cultural Heritage highlights not only its rich musical legacy but also its enduring role in maintaining cultural identity and promoting unity across diverse communities in Central Asia and beyond.

## Greece to introduce significantly higher tourist taxes in 2025

Greece's government aims to generate more revenue from tourism by making tourists pay tremendously more expensive taxes next year.

According to local media in Greece, tourist taxes will be implemented across different sectors – daily taxes at accommodation spots, city taxes and cruise-ship fees – making your stay in Greece significantly more expensive, Schengen.News reports.

As of 2025, tourists to Greece will pay a daily tax of €2, up from

the current €0.5. This tax will be raised to €8 during the high season, which includes months between April and October. Currently, the daily tax during the high season stands at €1.5.

In addition to these taxes, staying at highly rated hotels can also cost a tax of €15, while other accommodation alternatives have lower tax rates.

Greek cruise tourism is expected to boom in 2025, exceeding the eight million visitor mark and soaring by 20 percent in a year period.

The Greek government has decided to take advantage of these figures and raise the cruise taxes. However, the fee you have to pay highly depends on the destination. Visiting Santorini or Mykonos costs €20, while visits to other cities and islands, including Athens and Crete, cost €5 per day.

The cruise tax was first proposed in June following concerns about capacity on the island of Mykonos, which is home to just 12,000 residents. Mykonos has limited tourist facilities and was being

overwhelmed by up to 20,000 daily cruise passengers from as many as eight ships.

Santorini received 17,000 visitors in 2023's busiest summer days, while the island's population is 15,500.

Greece often encounters natural disasters such as floods and forest fires. In order to reduce the potential damage caused by these events, the Greek government wants to collect large sums, as Reuters reports.

(Source: schengen.news)



# World Soil Day Award presented to Iran's Ministry of Agriculture

TEHRAN - The 2024 King Bhumibol World Soil Day Award has been presented to the Water and Soil Department of the Ministry of Agriculture Jihad of the Islamic Republic of Iran. This recognition highlights the Islamic Republic of Iran's outstanding efforts in organizing and implementing impactful World Soil Day (WSD) celebrations in 2023.

The celebrations were held from 3 to 12 December 2023 under the theme "Soil and water: a source of life," engaged over 11 million people, and included more than 3,300 registered events. Key activities included:

- \* Tree and seed planting in pastures and forests.
- \* Plastic waste collection drives to reduce environmental harm.
- \* Soil laboratory tours and street art programmes.
- \* The creation of regional posters and statues promoting soil awareness.
- \* Special activities for children, including the "Soil class" campaign.
- \* Conferences, training sessions, and scientific webinars.
- \* Art contests (including photography, painting and stories).

The main event was held at the "Khooshe" Meeting Hall of the Ministry of Agriculture Jihad, with more than 700 attendees, including officials, researchers, farmers, youth, and children.

Coordination efforts involved 32 provincial organizations, educational institutions, environmental agencies, universities, and private companies, led by two national working groups of government, academia, and pioneering farmers.

## Award presentation in Thailand

On 5 December 2024, during the WSD celebration held in Pak Chong, Thailand, Safdar Niazi Shahraki, Deputy Minister of Water and Soil and Alireza Esmaily Falak, Head of



International Affairs at the Deputy of Water and Soil, Ministry of Agriculture Jihad, received the award on behalf of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The award, consisting of a USD 15,000 cheque and a medal, was presented by the Russian Ambassador in Thailand and HRH Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn of Thailand, FAO's Goodwill Ambassador.

Mr. Falak, who also serves as the Islamic Republic of Iran's national alternate focal point for the Global Soil Partnership (GSP), expressed his gratitude, stating: "We are proud to receive this award, reflecting the Islamic Republic of Iran's dedication to sustainable soil management and awareness raising. Celebrating World Soil Day, which we have observed since 2016, is a tradition to us, and we are thrilled to win after five years of participation."

## Iran celebrates World Soil Day with nationwide campaigns

Key activities were led by the Deputy of Water and Soil of the Ministry of Agriculture Jihad, in coordination with 32 provincial organizations, the Ministry of Education, the Organization of Environmental Protection, universities, schools, private sector companies, and soil analysis laboratories.

Two national working groups comprising government agencies, academics, private organizations, and pioneering farmers led the campaign, with the support of their provincial counterparts.

## Historic commitments and inclusive participation

Last year's WSD celebrations marked a historic shift in the Islamic Republic of Iran's approach to soil management. Senior leaders, including the Supreme Leader, President, and Minister of Agriculture, emphasized the key role played by soil in sustainable development. For the first time, a dedicated public budget was allocated to sustainable soil management, significantly enhancing the impact and quality of the celebrations.

The campaign also prioritized local involvement, particularly in villages, and actively involved students, women and farmers. Over 236,900 students took part in educational programmes, while 125,760 people attended conferences and training sessions aimed at improving technical knowledge of sustainable soil management practices.

## World Soil Day 2024: continuing the momentum

Building on its commitment to

sustainable soil management and awareness, the Islamic Republic of Iran is once again uniting for WSD 2024 under the motto "Caring for soils: measure, monitor, manage."

This year's celebrations feature a blend of high-level events, activities with soil laboratories, and engagement programmes for children across the country.

Key initiatives include a joint memorandum of agreement between the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Education to integrate soil topics into school curricula and cultural programmes, alongside year-round awareness efforts supported by the National Broadcasting Organization.

## About the King Bhumibol World Soil Day Award

Established in 2018, the King Bhumibol World Soil Day Award honours individuals or institutions that successfully raise awareness about the importance of soils through impactful WSD celebrations.

Sponsored by Thailand, the award commemorates the late King Bhumibol Adulyadej's lifelong commitment to promoting sustainable soil management for food security, poverty alleviation, and environmental restoration.

Previous winners include:

- \* Practical Action (Bangladesh) in 2018.
- \* The Costa Rican Soil Science Society (AACS) in 2019.
- \* The Indian Council of Agricultural Research - Indian Institute of Soil Science (ICAR-IISS) in 2020.
- \* The Nigerian Institute of Soil Science (NISS) in 2021.
- \* The Institute of Geology, National Autonomous University of Mexico (IGI-UNAM) in 2022.
- \* The Soil and Fertilizer Society of Thailand (SFST) in 2023.

## FAO participates in project to support Lake Urmia restoration

By Mehdi Garshasbi

TEHRAN - Through a joint project led by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and funded by the Government of Japan, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) will join to promote sustainable agricultural practices and solutions for the conservation of Lake Urmia.

On 1 December 2024, the Government of Japan and UNDP signed an exchange of notes to launch "The Project for Developing Conservation Systems of Wetlands in Lake Urmia and Other Wetlands, Including Their Surrounding Communities." The project, which runs from 2024 to 2028, will be implemented in partnership with the Department of Environment and FAO.

Focusing on sustainable agriculture and climate-adapted livelihoods, the initiative seeks to deliver long-term benefits for local communities while preserving the biodiversity of wetlands as critical ecosystems.

Lake Urmia faces significant challenges due to the overconsumption of water resources magnified by climate change impacts, which has severely

impacted its ecosystem. Agricultural activities in the region are increasingly vulnerable to water shortages, a situation exacerbated by the effects of climate change. Studies indicate that these climatic changes could further disrupt agrifood systems and the lake's fragile environment in the future.

Since 2016, FAO, supported by the Government of Japan, has been working to address these challenges through the Integrated Programme for Sustainable Water Resources Management in the Lake Urmia Basin. This earlier initiative generated lasting knowledge on water-saving measures and sustainable agricultural practices, laying the groundwork for the newly launched project.

Under the current partnership funded by the Government of Japan, FAO will join UNDP contributing to restore Lake Urmia, reduce climate vulnerability, and enhance the resilience of farming communities dependent on the basin's water resources. By improving irrigation water efficiency and targeting agriculture—the basin's largest water consumer—the project seeks to balance sustainable food production with the conservation of

this vital ecosystem.

FAO will deploy its GAIN (Governance, Autonomy, Integration, and Needs-based) methodology, a participatory approach that prioritizes community engagement. This methodology underscores the essential role of local farmers in managing water resources and advancing agricultural productivity.

The project will begin by mobilizing diverse stakeholders, including farmers, women's groups, agricultural extension workers, and respective decision makers. Through focus group discussions and participatory workshops, these stakeholders will collaboratively identify key agricultural and water management challenges. The insights gathered, especially from women farmers, will inform the development of tailored solutions and sustainable action plans for farmland management.

By fostering inclusivity and collaboration, FAO and its partners to establish a model for sustainable agriculture management contributing to wetland conservation and water resource management. The project aspires to ensure the long-term viability of Lake Urmia and strengthen the livelihoods of the communities that depend on it.

## ENGLISH IN USE

### LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

## FDA to penalize manufacturers producing unlabeled GM foods

Iran's Food and Drug Administration (FDA) will penalize food manufacturers who have not labeled genetically modified (GM) food products, Vahid Mofid, the caretaker of the FDA department of food and beverages has announced.

All food products containing ingredients derived from GMOs must be labeled, including soybean and corn oil, rapeseed and cottonseed, he also noted. He went on to say that eight laboratories in addition to the Energy & Power Industries Laboratories Company can test the products in terms of containing GM organism.

Labeling the products is merely done out of respect for the customer and providing the consumer with different choices and has nothing to do with the product's safety and health, he concluded.

## سازمان غذا و دارو با محصولات تراریخته فاقد برچسب برخورد می کند

مدیرکل فرآورده های غذایی و آشامیدنی سازمان غذا و دارو، وحید مفید در گفت و گو با خبرنگار ایرنا اعلام کرد: تمام محصولات تراریخته در سطح عرضه کنترل می شوند و در صورتی که تراریخته باشند اما برچسب نداشته باشند، حتما برخورد می کنیم. وی اضافه کرد: برخی محصولات در کشور مانند ذرت، سویا و کلزا از نوع تراریخته وجود دارد و فرآورده های غذایی در صورت استفاده از این محصولات تراریخته باید آن را روی برچسب خود اعلام کنند. مفید افزود: هشت آزمایشگاه علاوه بر آزمایشگاه مرجع در کشور می توانند تراریختگی را تعیین کنند. مدیرکل فرآورده های غذایی و آشامیدنی سازمان غذا و دارو گفت: درج تراریختگی در برچسب جلوی ترکیبات، صرفا احترام به مشتری و فراهم کردن قدرت انتخاب برای مصرف کننده است و هیچ ارتباطی با ایمنی و سلامت آن فرآورده ندارد.

## Iranian girls shine at World Math Team Championship

TEHRAN - Two Iranian female students won silver medals at the World Mathematics Team Championship (WMTTC) 2024, held in Doha, Qatar, from November 27 to December 2.

Showcasing their mathematical skills and competing against young mathematicians at the intermediate level, Parmian Heidarian and Helena Aqaei also grabbed team awards, IRNA reported.

The event brought together students from 60 countries including Saudi Arabia, India, Bangladesh, Azerbaijan, China, Hong Kong, Iran, Philippines, Taiwan, South Korea, Macau, Canada, Bulgaria, Brazil, and Australia.

The three-day event was organized under the theme "Algebra and Balancing". The event drew young mathematicians from across the globe, challenging them to solve complex problems through individual, relay, and team-based rounds while fostering international camaraderie and collaboration.

It emphasized principles of balance and fairness among nations, blending collaboration and competition in an educational environment



that fosters both challenge and learning while strengthening cultural connections among participants.

At the 30th International Mathematics Competition (IMC) held in Bulgaria from July 31 to August 6, 2023, Iranian students ranked 9th.

Ali Mirzaee-Anari, Amir-Mohammad Qavi, Javad Farrokhejad, and Mohammad Shahverdi Kondori won gold medals, while Mehdi Shavoli Kohshor won a silver medal. Also, Nima Amouei Mobaraki was granted a diploma of honor.

The event was organized by University College London, and hosted by American University in Blagoevgrad, Bulgaria.

## Over 870 cases of dengue fever reported

TEHRAN - Since the beginning of the current Iranian year (March 20) till November 30, 875 cases of dengue fever have been diagnosed in the country, according to the health ministry.

Dengue is a viral infection transmitted to humans through the bite of infected mosquitoes.

The total number of locally acquired dengue fever has risen to 677 cases, of which 666 cases were in Chabahar, southeastern Sistan-Baluchestan province, and 11 were in Bandar Lengeh, southern Hormozgan province.

Six patients with dengue fever, infected in Chabahar, were diagnosed in other cities including Isfahan, Shahr-e Kord, Meshkinshahr, and Iranshahr.

Dengue virus is transmitted through the bite of Aedes aegypti and Aedes albopictus mosquitoes.

These mosquitoes also transmit Zika and Chikungunya virus.

Dengue disease has different infectious phases, including the fever phase, critical phase, and recovery phase.

Aedes aegypti, and Aedes albopictus have been so far recorded in Hormozgan, Sistan-Baluchestan, Bushehr, Gilan, Mazandaran, Ardebil, Zanjan, Qazvin, and East Azarbaijan provinces, respectively.

The health ministry has implemented measures to address the probable increase in infected cases in autumn since a decrease in temperature accompanied by the rains in autumn can contribute to the resurgence of mosquito density, particularly in the affected areas.

## Immunization against HPV on health ministry's agenda



TEHRAN - The health ministry is carrying out studies and collecting data to decide on including the Human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccination in the national immunization program, the deputy health minister has said.

HPV is one of the most common infections causing genital warts or cervical cancer in women, IRNA quoted Alireza Raeisi as saying.

Vaccination is the best way to prevent the disease; the vaccine has already been introduced in 140 countries. Iran is also deciding on adopting the vaccine in the country, the official added.

In the Eastern Mediterranean region, countries such as Saudi Arabia, Libya, Qatar, and the U.A.E have already started the national implementation of the HPV vaccination for the target population

To add a vaccine into the national immunization program depends on the studies about the burden of disease, its prevalence, costs, and vaccine efficacy are considered, Raeisi added.

The official went on to say that a bivalent HPV vaccine targeting subtypes 16 and 18 associated with many cancers cervical cancers has already been produced in the country. However, the vaccine is not effective enough against types 6 and 11, which are responsible for genital warts.

## Cervical cancer

Cervical cancer is the fourth most common cancer in women globally with around 660 000 new cases and around 350 000 deaths in 2022.

The highest rates of cervical cancer incidence and mortality are in low- and middle-income countries. This reflects major inequities driven by

a lack of access to national HPV vaccination, cervical screening and treatment services, and social and economic determinants.

Cervical cancer is caused by persistent infection with the human papillomavirus (HPV). Women living with HIV are 6 times more likely to develop cervical cancer compared to women without HIV.

Prophylactic vaccination against HPV and screening and treatment of pre-cancer lesions are effective strategies to prevent cervical cancer and are very cost-effective.

Cervical cancer can be cured if diagnosed at an early stage and treated promptly.

Countries around the world are working to accelerate the elimination of cervical cancer in the coming decades, with an agreed set of three targets to be met by 2030.

## HPV is one of the most common infections causing genital warts or cervical cancer in women.

### Iranian-made HPV vaccine

In January, an Iranian knowledge-based company announced readiness to meet the needs of regional countries as well as North Africa for the human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine.

The product has been manufactured at a much lower price, 75 percent cheaper, compared to foreign samples.

Producing the HPV vaccine needs one of the most complicated technologies in the world, and Iran has been able to produce the vaccine domestically.

Passing quality control tests and pre-clinical trials, the clinical trial of the HPV vaccine started in 2019 on healthy volunteers.

Once the vaccine proved its safety and effectiveness in increasing the antibody titer, it obtained the Food and Drug Organization's approval to enter the market in 2020.





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DECEMBER 7, 2024

## GUIDE TO SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

*One who says unpleasant things about others, will himself quickly become a target of their scandal.*

**Imam Ali (AS)**

Prayer Times > Noon:11:55 Evening: 17:11 Dawn: 5:30 (tomorrow) Sunrise: 6:57 (tomorrow)

## What's in Tehran art galleries



### Painting

\* Aran Gallery is showcasing paintings by Mohammad Hamzeh in an exhibition.

The exhibition will be running until December 20 at the gallery located at 5 Lolagar St., Neauphle-le-Chateau St.

\* Paintings by Arash Ahmadi are on display in an exhibition at Doost Gallery.

Entitled "Image as An Image2", the exhibit will be running until January 7, 2025 at the gallery, which can be found at No. 4, 4th St. off Eshqyar St., Khorramshahr Ave.



\* An exhibition of paintings by Hoda Abbasi is currently underway at Ehsan Gallery.

The exhibit named "Creation" will run until December 11 at the gallery located at No. 22, East 14th St. in the Ajudanieh neighborhood.

\* Asr Gallery is playing host to an exhibition of paintings by Rezvan Sadeghzadeh.

The exhibit entitled "Orchards and Birds" will run until December 20 at the gallery located at 18 Delaviz St. off North Mirzaye Shirazi St.



\* Sohrab Gallery is hanging a collection of paintings by Bahram Dabiri in an exhibition entitled "Autumn, The Lord of Seasons".

The exhibit will run until December 23 at the gallery located at 142 Somayyeh St.

\* Nian Gallery is currently playing host to an exhibition of paintings by a large number of artists.

The exhibition entitled "Dreaming with Eyes Wide Open" will be running until December 16 at the gallery located at 5 Abhari Alley, Vafai St. off Tur St. off South Mofatteh St.



\* An exhibition of paintings by Kasra Sharifi is currently underway at Afrand Gallery.

The exhibit named "Anesthesia" will continue until December 20 at the gallery located at 48 Jalal Hosseini St., Jahan Ara St., off Jalal Ale-Ahmad Highway.

\* Paintings by Afshin Sadipour are currently on view in an exhibition at Dastan Basement Gallery.

The exhibit named "The Corner" will be running until December 27 at the gallery located at 6 Bidar St., off Fereshteh St.



\* A collection of paintings by Shahin Kazemi is on view in an exhibition at Adapa Gallery.

Entitled "Tide of Peril", the exhibition will run until December 19 at the gallery located at No. 5, Sumesara Alley, Sazesh St., Vali-e Asr Square.

\* Paintings by Helia Salmani are on view in an exhibition at CAMA - Contemporary and Modern Art Gallery.

Named "Immortal", the exhibit runs until December 11 at the gallery located at No. 44, 10th Golestan, Pasdaran St.



**ARASH AHMADI**  
SOLO EXHIBITION  
IMAGE AS AN IMAGE 2  
DEC 6 - JAN 7 TEHRAN



**باغ و پرند**  
Orchards and Birds  
A Solo Exhibition by  
Rezvan Sadeghzadeh  
۱۶ تا ۲۰ آذر ۱۴۰۳  
Dec 6 - 20, 2024



**او با جسمان باز خواب می بیند**  
DREAMING WITH EYES WIDE OPEN



**تید پرل**  
Tide of Peril



**IMMORTAL**  
PAINTING EXHIBITION BY HELIA SALMANI

# 27 Iranian movies to attend Kurdistan's Duhok International Film Festival

TEHRAN-A total of 27 Iranian films will take part in the 11th Duhok International Film Festival that is due to be held in Kurdistan, Iraq, from December 9 to 16.

A selection of feature, short, and documentary films from Iran will be screened in various sections of the festival, ILNA reported.

"Melody" directed by Behrouz Sebt Rasoul and "Empty Nets" by Behrooz Karamizad will compete in the World Feature Competition section.

In the World Short Competition section, "Khabur" by Nafis Fathollahzadeh and "Twenty-One Weeks Later" by Nasrin Mohammadpour will vie for the top award.

"Sakar" by Ebrahim Saeedi and "Migration" by Moshfegh Shojaei will represent Iran at the Kurdish Feature Competition section.

In the Kurdish Panorama Short Documentary section, "A Solitude Poem" by Kimiya Marzang will be screened.

Moreover, Iran will have six representatives in the Kurdish Documentary Competition section, five films in the Kurdish Short Film Competition section, and six movies in the Kurdish Panorama Short section.

In addition to the films participating in the event, three Iranian filmmakers will be in the jury panels of the film festival.

Director, writer, and producer Ali Asgari will preside over the World Cinema Jury. Director, writer, and critic Ghotbedin Sadeghi and filmmaker and VFX supervisor Akam



Rezaee will serve as members of the Kurdish Cinema Jury.

Kurdistan covers in big parts the region of former Mesopotamia. Being one of the oldest cultures in the world, Mesopotamia is widely considered as the cradle of civilization, where writing was invented and the origins of philosophy can be traced back to. With its ancient, highly developed and socially complex states it had a profound impact on the development of the western civilization and culture.

The Duhok International Film Festival aims to showcase innovative films of high artistic value with a notable handwriting made throughout the world. It shall work as a pinnacle point for all

wishing to learn more about the possibilities the Kurdish regions have to offer.

Duhok IFF wishes to create an atmosphere of exchange between different cultures and human values.

The city becomes an encounter of civilizations, where ancient culture connects with modern culture and the Kurdish film landscape with world cinema.

Unique film experiences can be made and people can share their thirst for new discoveries and a passion for cinema in all its diversity. A major task of the festival is to build a bridge between Kurdish film production and worldwide filmmaking. It wishes to create a launch platform for films from Kurdistan, taking the pulse of

new tendencies and offering the opportunity to explore a terrain opening up in contemporary filmmaking.

As a unique festival in this region, it understands itself as a forge for new talents and a meeting place for up-and-coming filmmakers.

The program does not only present a wide selection of international productions from all over the world, it also aims to spotlight Kurdish film in the world's film landscape.

It focusses both on new films from the four parts of Kurdistan (Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Turkey), as well as on films from abroad including films made by Kurdish filmmakers who live in Diaspora.

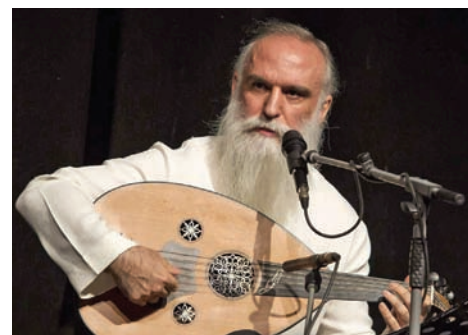
## Davood Azad to perform at Tehran's Vahdat Hall

TEHRAN-Iranian singer, multi-instrumental musician, and composer Davood Azad will perform with his band at Vahdat Hall in Tehran on Monday.

The concert of Davood Azad Ensemble will include 11 Iranian and Azeri folk pieces, five of which have been chosen from poems by Molana Jalal ad-Din Rumi, Honaronline reported.

Azad will also play tanbur (a long-necked string instrument) at the concert. He will be accompanied by Bita Ghorbanzadeh and Nima Haddadi (daf), Amin Heydari (oud), Nazli Bakhshayesh (harp), Fardin Lahourpur (balaban), and Parvaneh Anaraki (contrebasse).

Born in Urmia, West Azarbaijan Province, Azad, 60, is a virtuoso in Persian instruments



tar, oud, daf, rabab, setar (Iranian lute-like stringed instrument), and tanbur (a long-necked string instrument). He is also a vocalist in Iranian classical music, Azeri folk music, and Persian Sufi music, which refers to the

devotional music of the Sufis, inspired by the works of Sufi poets like Rumi.

Azad is admired for his unique singing style, integrating classical and modern music. He has held over 300 concerts in Iran and other countries, and performed at international festivals over the last two decades in Iran, Europe, North America, Australia and East Asia. He is the first Iranian lecturer invited to Oxford University to lecture about Iranian music and its forms.

With his contemporary vision of classical Persian music, he tries to spread the message of and belief in unity, harmony and peace among nations. His music is universal and appeals to people of all backgrounds.

## Tehran to host Iranian Islamic clothing exhibition

TEHRAN- The 5th Hoda Iranian Islamic Clothing Exhibition is scheduled to take place at Imam Khomeini Mosalla in Tehran from December 11 to 20.

This exhibition will feature a selection of family clothing, with a focus on women's and girls' attire, alongside cultural and ritual products, Mehr reported on Thursday.

A range of items including abayas, headscarves, and hijab essentials designed for families

can be found in different sections of the event, the report added.

The aim of this event is to provide affordable and suitable clothing options for consumers, promote modest and chaste attire within the community, and ease access for families seeking a variety of modest clothing.

Previous editions of the exhibition have successfully taken place at the Children and Young Adults Intellectual Development Center and Imam Khomeini Mo-

salla.

Iranian Islamic clothing is characterized by a unique blend of cultural heritage and religious principles, reflecting the country's diverse history and identity.

Traditional garments such as the chador, a full-body cloak worn by many women, signify modesty and devotion, while colorful patterns and intricate embroideries showcase the rich artistic expressions of Iranian culture.

Over the years, contemporary interpretations have emerged, incorporating modern fashion trends while adhering to Islamic guidelines.

This evolution highlights the dynamic interplay between tradition and modernity in Iranian society, demonstrating how clothing can serve as both a means of personal expression and a reflection of cultural values.

## Arasbaran cultural center to review "Leave No Trace"

TEHRAN- "Leave No Trace", a 2018 movie by American filmmaker Debra Granik, will be reviewed at the Arasbaran Cultural Center in Tehran on Sunday evening.

Film critics Kurosh Jahed and Shahram Abyaneh is set to attend a screening of the film followed by a review session.

"Leave No Trace" follows the story of Will, a veteran grappling with PTSD, and his teenage daughter, Tom, as they strive to live a secluded life in the old-growth Forest Park near Portland, Oregon. The duo relies on their survival skills to navigate life in isolation, only occasionally venturing into town for supplies.

Their life takes a dramatic turn when Tom is spotted by a jogger, leading to their arrest and assessment by social services. After being placed in a home on a Christmas tree farm, Will reluctantly starts working there, while Tom begins to engage with the local community through a youth club. However, feeling increasingly trapped by societal norms and the hovering presence of social services, Will

decides to return to their former life in the forest.

Upon their return, they find their camp destroyed and, after a series of challenges, manage to travel to a remote area in Washington state.

As they struggle to survive, Will is injured, forcing Tom to seek help from local quad bikers, who bring them to a mobile home community. There, she meets a woman named Dale and a former Army medic who treats Will's injury. Tom starts to feel a sense of belonging in the community, wanting to make a life for herself, which causes tension with Will, who is not ready to accept this change.

The climax of their emotional conflict results in a heartfelt parting; Tom insists on staying where she feels safe while Will chooses to return to the freedom of the woods. Their tearful farewell illustrates the deep bond they share, intertwined with the challenges of coping with trauma and the desire for stability. In a final gesture of love, Tom leaves a food package for

Will in the forest, symbolizing their enduring connection despite their separation.

Debra Granik is an acclaimed American filmmaker renowned for impactful narratives. She gained recognition for her 2004 film "Down to the Bone", featuring Vera Farmiga, and her 2010 Oscar-nominated film "Winter's Bone", which starred a breakout, Jennifer Lawrence. The latter won the Grand Jury Prize at Sundance and received multiple Academy Award nominations. Granik's early work includes the short film "Snake Feed", which she developed into her feature debut, exploring the struggles of addiction.

Her 2018 film "Leave No Trace" is based on Peter Rock's novel "My Abandonment". Granik's storytelling often highlights themes of resilience and community, utilizing real locations and local talent. In addition to various projects in development, including a documentary on recidivism, Granik continues to shape the landscape of contemporary cinema with her unique voice and vision.