



Ayatollah Khamenei unveils new aspects of the Syrian crisis

# Decoding a Plot

**Who is behind the latest resurgence of terrorism in Syria?**

A neighbor of Syria has been involved. But the main architects have been the U.S. and Israel

**How did the U.S. and Israel aid terrorists in their offensive?**

A joint U.S. and Israeli blockade effectively sealed Syria's land and air borders, preventing the entry of both people and humanitarian aid.

**Could Syria have foreseen the insurgency that ousted Bashar al-Assad?**

Iran's intelligence services warned Syria of the impending attacks months in advance of their execution in late November.

**What will happen to the Syrian territories recently seized by the U.S. and Israel?**

They will eventually be liberated by the courageous youth of Syria.

**How did the Syrian government collapse?**

The Syrian government collapsed because of a lack of resistance from the country's national army, which prevented volunteer forces from other areas from intervening.

**What lessons can be learned from the recent developments in Syria?**

One must not be heedless of the enemy. One must not underestimate its enemies either.



TEHRAN PAPERS

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

Syria and the new Middle East

In an interview with Nasser Imani, a political expert, Hamshahri discussed the developments of the Syrian war. Imani said: Bashar Assad's government fell 13 years after the wave of protests and riots and the defeat of ISIS in the country. What Iran did in all these years to support Syria, contrary to some who only give it an ideological face, was taking care of the country's national interests. The West and the Zionist regime planned to overthrow Assad so that Syria would be fragmented and would no longer have a military force. This is the West's plan for the new Middle East. At one point, Iran fought ISIS, which as the Westerners themselves acknowledged, was created with their support. The main goal of creating ISIS was to counter Iran, but Iran did not let the mission of the West and ISIS fetch up. Iran preserved its national interests, not guarding the rule of other countries. Although the resistance movement was weakened by the events in Syria, this will not continue and the developments will not stay like this. In the near future, the effects of Iran's support for the resistance front in previous years will be seen.

Farhihtegan: Why the 2024 developments not similar to the 2011's?

In a note, Farhihtegan discussed the overthrow of the Syrian political system and the dissimilarity of the current situation in Syria with the conditions of the country in 2011. It said: The relationship of the Islamic Republic with the Syrian political system was "special" during the Syrian war. Iran supported the political system in Syria. Of course, the basis of Iran's relationship with the Syrian political system was to counter the Zionist regime. But there are various reasons why 2024 was not like 2011. First of all, even if the Axis Resistance, including Iran, had a decision they did not have the opportunity to implement it because of the rapid pace of the developments. Of course, this time the developments in Syria were different for Iran. The militant groups did not raise slogans of cross-border or territorial greed against Iranian soil. Second, these groups did not take hostile moves against the Shiites. In addition to Iran, Iraqi and Lebanese Shiite groups did not find a reason to deal with them. The attack by the armed groups

in 2024 on the Syrian government was similar to the riot of the Free Army against it, in which Iran and the Axis of Resistance supported their ally only in the form of advisor.

Donya-e-Eqtasad: The troika opportunism following the Assad fall

In an interview with Tahmoures Gholami, a researcher on international issues, Donya-e-Eqtasad discussed Iran's future negotiations with Europe and the West in the current situation. He said: In recent days, the International Atomic Energy Agency once again has intensified its pressure on Iran under the influence of the European troika (Britain, France and Germany). In a new statement, the troika expressed concern about the increase in Iran's enrichment capacity. In part of their statement the trio said, "We are also extremely concerned to learn that Iran has increased the number of centrifuges in use and started preparations to install additional enrichment infrastructure, further increasing Iran's enrichment capacity." Concerns have been put on the agenda after the developments in Syria to put more pressure on Iran. According to many experts and observers, this issue will not be resolved without direct or indirect negotiations through the creation of a channel with the Trump administration. The recent talks in Geneva were useless inconclusive. The fall of the Assad government in Damascus has had an undesirable effect on Iran's situation and its effect should not be denied. But we should not exaggerate about its effectiveness.

Iran: The West worried about balance of power in Iran's favor

As the competition increases in Syria without Assad, the regional actors who see themselves as the victors of the Syrian battle are worried about the strengthening of Tehran's role. Therefore, regional rivals are more concerned about the realities that can emerge in the ambiguous situation in Syria. From this point of view, it is natural that different armed groups who have toppled the Assad government to prevent the formation of such a balance in favor of Tehran, and ultimately to make the situation complicated with the support of countries outside the region.

President Pezeshkian to visit North Khorasan as second leg of provincial tour



Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian visits Science, Technology Park of Zahedan in the first stop of his provincial tour in Sistan-Baluchestan on November 21.

TEHRAN – Following his first provincial visit to Sistan-Baluchestan, Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian is set to embark on his second provincial tour, this time to North Khorasan.

The Acting Director of Public Relations for North Khorasan Governorate, Moslem Rabaniyan, confirmed the visit in an interview with Tasnim News.

He stated, "North Khorasan will soon host the President and his ministers." This tour aims to build on the momentum from the President's earlier visit to Sistan-Baluchestan and further strengthen ties with local communities across the country.

Rabaniyan revealed that seven cabinet ministers are expected to join the President during this trip. "So far, the participation of the Minister of Energy, the Minister of Roads and Urban Development, and the Minister of Industry, Mine, and Trade has been confirmed. We hope the President will be accompanied by the full team," he stated.

Initially, it was announced that South Khorasan Province would be the President's second destination for provincial visits. However, it appears that

plan has been set aside.

Rabaniyan noted that this trip will provide an opportunity for citizens to voice their concerns and expectations. Additionally, the President will attend the National Prayer Conference, hosted by North Khorasan, where he will deliver the keynote speech.

Rabaniyan also referred to the Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei's previous visit to North Khorasan, during which he emphasized the province's potential to rank among the top 10 in the country. "We hope that during the President's visit, the province's challenges and aspirations, as conveyed by the media and local stakeholders, will reach the President and his ministers. This will pave the way for faster development and bring the Leader's vision for North Khorasan closer to realization," he concluded.

The President's visit is officially scheduled for late December. The accompanying ministers will travel to various parts of the province ahead of the visit to assess the latest conditions in towns and rural areas.

Iran's Simorgh aircraft celebrates first flight over Persian Gulf

TEHRAN – Iran's new home-grown light transport aircraft, Simorgh, showcased its capabilities with a successful flight on Wednesday at the airshow on Kish Island in the Persian Gulf.

The aircraft, which had undergone its test flight on May 2023, was unveiled during the 12th edition of the Iran International Aerospace Exhibition that kicked off on Kish Island.

From December 10 to 13, Iran is hosting its largest-ever aerospace and aviation industry gathering.

The event showcases a diverse array of domestic and international companies, research institutions, aerospace faculties, and knowledge-based firms, drawing over 300 foreign attendees.

Incorporating aerial demonstrations and the launch of new technologies, the exhibition aims to foster knowledge and technology exchange, while bolstering the country's industrial framework.

Speaking to reporters on the sidelines of the event, Defense Minister Brigadier General Aziz Na-



sirzadeh said the Simorgh aircraft was designed and manufactured by the Defense Ministry and domestic knowledge-based companies.

He noted that the transport plane complies with international standards and regulations.

Authorities say the development of this plane aims to enhance the country's defensive capabilities.

Named after the legendary benevolent bird in Persian mythology, Simorgh represents a significant milestone in Iran's aviation industry.

Designed and crafted by experts at the Iran Aircraft Manufacturing Industrial Company (HESA), the aircraft is a modified version of the IrAn-140 turboprop airliner, tailored for both cargo and troop transportation.

Significant modifications include enhanced wings and tail design, and a cargo ramp added to the fuselage.

The aircraft has a range of 3,900 km and a maximum speed of 533 km/h.

Its design allows for a variety of uses, from transporting 463L

standard pallets and light vehicles to evacuating injured personnel and carrying paratroopers.

At the airshow, Commander of the Islamic Republic of Iran Air Force (IRIAF), Brigadier General Hamid Vahedi, highlighted Iran's achievement of self-sufficiency in the aviation sector.

"Sanctions have failed to diminish our resolve and capabilities," he asserted, underscoring Iran's resilience in the face of external challenges.

Iranian officials have stated that the nation's military advancements, encompassing various sectors, are exclusively for defense purposes and will remain non-negotiable.

Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei, the Leader of the Islamic Revolution, has consistently called for the enhancement and expansion of Iran's defense capabilities, while also supporting the greater involvement of knowledge-based companies in the development of the nation's industrial infrastructure.

Tehran denounces E3 claims, defends nuclear activities as within legal rights



TEHRAN – Iran has strongly rejected accusations from three European nations regarding its nuclear program, warning it will respond appropriately to any confrontational actions.

The remarks were made by Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baqaei on Tuesday in response to a joint statement by France, Germany, and the UK.

The European trio accused Tehran of failing to meet its commitments under the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) and United Nations Security Council Resolution 2231, urging Iran to stop what they referred to as "nuclear escalation."

The European statement followed a report

by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), which revealed increased uranium enrichment activity by Tehran.

This escalation was framed as a response to a recent Western-backed resolution censuring Iran for alleged non-cooperation with the IAEA.

In his response, Baqaei defended Iran's actions, explaining that the country had activated advanced centrifuges as part of its rights under the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

He emphasized that these measures were carried out transparently, with due notification and under IAEA supervision.

"As a responsible member of the IAEA, the Islamic Republic of Iran has consistently demonstrated its commitment to cooperation with the agency," Baqaei stated, referencing the productive visit of IAEA Director General Rafael Grossi to Tehran on November 14-15.

The spokesman criticized France, Germany, and the UK for their "unconstructive approach" and their resolution against Iran, which he argued undermined the progress made during Grossi's visit.

Baqaei also highlighted a scheduled November 29 meeting with European representatives in Geneva, reiterating Iran's commitment to dialogue and constructive engagement based on mutual respect.

However, he warned that Iran would firmly respond to any hostile or illegal actions within the framework of its legal rights.

The spokesman further attributed the current tensions to the U.S. withdrawal from the JCPOA in 2018 and the subsequent failure of the European signatories to uphold their commitments.

Iran has gradually reduced its compliance with the deal in response to these developments, citing economic losses caused by re-imposed sanctions.

Baqaei urged the European nations to focus on addressing the root causes of the crisis, which he described as a "combination of continuous breaches of commitment and the illegal policy of sanctions and pressure against the Iranian people."

Despite the challenges, Baqaei reaffirmed Tehran's belief in constructive interaction and emphasized the importance of mutual adherence to commitments to pave the way for future cooperation.

New Armenian ambassador presents credentials to Iranian FM



Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi (R) and Grigor Hakobyan, the newly appointed Ambassador of the Republic of Armenia to Iran, meet in Tehran on December 11, 2024.

TEHRAN – Grigor Hakobyan, the newly appointed Ambassador of the Republic of Armenia to Iran, officially began his diplomatic mission by meeting with Abbas Araghchi, the Foreign Minister of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

During their meeting, Hakobyan presented a copy of his credentials, marking the start of his tenure in Tehran.

Iranian Consul General in Erbil discusses mission goals with FM Araghchi

Faramarz Asadi, the newly appointed Consul General of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Erbil, held a meeting with Abbas Araghchi,

the Foreign Minister of Iran, as he prepared to assume his new post in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

During the discussion, Asadi outlined his plans and priorities for his tenure in Erbil, emphasizing initiatives aimed at strengthening bilateral relations.

Araghchi underscored the strong and historic ties between Iran and Iraq, highlighting their shared status as neighboring and predominantly Muslim nations.

He stressed the need to deepen cooperation across political, economic, social, and cultural domains.

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

Iranian embassy in Damascus denies asset plundering rumors



TEHRAN – The Iranian Embassy in Syria has firmly refuted claims of theft and asset plundering at its Damascus premises.

In a Wednesday post on X, the embassy unequivocally dismissed these claims, stressing that thorough security protocols were established to secure the premises and its contents ahead of the evacuation.

The embassy clarified that rumors of a \$42 million theft are baseless, likely propagated for domestic political motives.

Contrary to these claims, the embassy insists that no property was left unattended or stolen during the evacuation process.

Following the fall of the Bashar al-Assad government, footage

emerged showing the Iranian embassy being raided by unknown individuals on Sunday.

Iran's Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Esmail Baqaei told the Tehran Times hours after the assault that Iranian diplomats stationed at the embassy in Damascus had vacated the building before the attack.

Iran has called on the United Nations and the Security Council to take decisive action against such militant attacks on its diplomatic missions abroad.

Furthermore, ISNA quoted an Iranian embassy official on Tuesday claiming that the embassy is now operational and continues to handle inquiries from Iranian citizens. The foreign ministry has not confirmed the news yet.



TEHRAN – Addressing a massive gathering at Tehran's Imam Khomeini Hussainiyah on Wednesday, Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei discussed recent regional events, focusing on the situation in Syria.

During the meeting, the Leader elaborated on the different layers of events unfolding in Syria, highlighting the clear role of a country neighboring Syria. "However, the primary architects, conspirators, and control room are in the United States and the Zionist regime," he stated.

Ayatollah Khamenei characterized the actions of the Zionists and the US in the recent events in Syria as one of the indications. "If they were not the architects of the events in Syria, why did they not remain silent like other countries? By bombing hundreds of infrastructure centers, airports, research centers, training centers for scientists, and other locations in Syria, they have practically interfered in the ongoing events," he asserted.

The Leader alluded to the United States' official declaration of attacking 75 locations in Syria within the first couple of days of the incidents. "In addition to targeting hundreds of locations, the Zionists have occupied Syrian territories and advanced their tanks towards Damascus. Additionally, while the United States exhibits extraordinary sensitivity to even the most minor border incidents in other countries, it not only refrained from protesting but also offered assistance," he emphasized.

Expanding on additional evidence of US and Zionist involvement in Syrian affairs, he stated, "In the final days, there was an intention to send aid and supplies to the citizens of a region in Syria, specifically Zain-Abiyah. However, the Zionist forces obstructed all land routes. American and Zionist aircraft conducted extensive flights, effectively preventing these aid supplies from being transported by air," he explained.

#### The future of Syria and the region

Ayatollah Khamenei described the goals of the invaders trying to seize Syrian territories from the north and south as different. He added that among them, the US is seeking to strengthen its foothold. However, time will show that none of them will achieve their objectives, and undoubtedly, the areas occupied in Syria will be liberated by the courageous youth of Syria.

In outlining the future trajectory of regional developments, the Leader stated, "The Arrogant Powers mistakenly believe that the Resistance Front has been weakened following the fall of the pro-Resistance Syrian government. However, they are sorely mistaken; for they funda-



## Events in Syria result of US-Israeli plot: Leader

mentally misunderstand the nature of Resistance and the Resistance Front."

He characterized Resistance not as a tangible structure susceptible to breaking or collapsing, but rather as a profound faith, a distinct ideology, a school of faith, and a heartfelt commitment. He further emphasized that for this reason, the Resistance becomes stronger against the pressures it faces, and the motivation of its individuals and elements intensifies and expands upon witnessing malevolence.

In this context, Ayatollah Khamenei, referencing the events in Lebanon, remarked, "The weight of calamities and the loss of Sayyid Hassan Nasrallah was truly profound. However, the strength and resolve of Hezbollah have only intensified. Consequently, the enemy sought a ceasefire upon witnessing this reality." Reflecting on the unprecedented atrocities committed by the Zionist regime in Gaza, and the martyrdom of prominent individuals like Yahya Sinwar, the Leader stated, "The enemy thought that the people of Gaza would rise against Hamas amidst the bombardments.

However, the opposite happened. The people have become more supportive of Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and other Palestinian Resistance groups than ever before."

Emphasizing that the widespread resistance in the entire region will be the inevitable result of the enemy's pressures and crimes, he added, "That ignorant and uninformed analyst who believes that these events will weaken Iran should understand that Iran is strong and powerful and it will become even more powerful."

#### 'Resistance has deep roots across the region'

Ayatollah Khamenei described resistance as a reality deeply rooted in the faith and beliefs of nations. "The belief in Resistance in recent months has led to enthusiastic support from the nations of the region—and, in a sense, the nations of the world—for

Palestine and expressions of hatred toward the Zionists," he said.

Pointing out that more than 75 years have passed since the occupation of Palestine, the Leader of the Islamic Revolution said, "This issue could have been forgotten during this long period, but today, the steadfastness of Palestinians and the nations of the region regarding the issue of Palestine is ten times stronger than it was at the time of the usurpation of this land."

He said alignment with the Zionist regime is a red line for nations. Addressing the Zionists and their accomplices, he added that divine tradition asserts that crimes do not bring about victory. "Today, this divine tradition and historical experience are being repeated in Gaza, the West Bank, and Lebanon," he added.

Ayatollah Khamenei also referred to Iran's presence in Syria in recent years, explaining, "Before our assistance to the Syrian government, during the critical period of the Sacred Defense, when everyone was working in favor of Saddam [Husseini] and against us, the Syrian government provided vital assistance to Iran by blocking the oil pipeline from Iraq to the Mediterranean, depriving Saddam of its revenue."

#### 'Iran's presence in Syria was necessary for effective fight against Daesh'

The Leader of the Islamic Revolution cited the fight against the Daesh terrorist group as another reason for the presence of young Iranians and some Iranian commanders in Syria and Iraq. "Daesh was a bomb of insecurity, and their goal was to destabilize Syria and Iraq, followed by entering Iran and making our country their ultimate target," he added.

The Leader of the Islamic Revolution clarified that the war had to be fought primarily by the Syrian Army. He argued that the Basij forces of other countries could participate in the war only alongside the Syrian Army. "However, if the army shows weakness and lack of determination,

the Basij forces cannot succeed. Unfortunately, this is what happened in Syria," he added.

He further said presence in any country requires the agreement and cooperation of that country's government "just as we were present in Iraq and Syria at the request of their governments." Without such a request, Ayatollah Khamenei continued, the path to assist that government is closed and no help will be possible.

"The current situation and hardships in Syria are the result of the weakness and decline in the spirit of resistance and steadfastness shown by the Syrian Army," he maintained.

The Leader of the Islamic Revolution expressed confidence that the courageous youth of Syria will rise up and, with steadfastness and even by making sacrifices, will overcome this situation, just as "the courageous youth of Iraq, following the US occupation, managed—with the help, organization, and leadership of our dear martyr [Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani]—to expel the enemy from their homes and streets."

#### Syria had been warned before terror insurgency

In discussing the lessons to be learned from the events unfolding in Syria, he said the first lesson is not to be heedless of the enemy. "In Syria, the enemy acted quickly, but the [Syrian government] should have foreseen and prevented this in advance. Our intelligence apparatus had conveyed warning reports to Syrian officials months prior to these events," he noted.

Ayatollah Khamenei also said that the Islamic Republic has also endured major tough events in the 46 years since the Islamic Revolution, yet it has never for a moment fallen into passivity. In concluding his remarks, the Leader described the Iranian nation as prepared and ready for action, emphasizing, "By God's grace, Zionism and its malevolent Western accomplices will be uprooted from this region."

near future are unacceptable," he claimed.

The Iraq War's outcome for the U.S.? A significant surge in Iranian influence across Iraq and the wider region. Simultaneously, the invasion fueled American disillusionment with its government and foreign policy—a sentiment that has only deepened in the years since. Adding the loss of over 2 trillion dollars, the war yielded nothing but detriments for the United States.

### While a full-scale conflict could inflict meaningful damage on Iran, the crucial question is whether the West is prepared to bear the far-reaching consequences of such an attack

Cohen's justification for the Iraq War rested on two now-debunked claims: Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction, and Saddam Hussein was linked to 9/11. Ironically, he now seems to celebrate the rise of those very groups responsible for 9/11 in Syria.

His current justifications for attacking Iran must be viewed through the same lens. People of the author's kind are the closest one could be to a bloodthirsty Neocon. They are thirsty for murder and destruction but are not always the cleverest when looking for justifications to make their fantasies come through, at least not anymore.

Here is a look at Cohen's analysis of the current

situation in West Asia, and why it is wrong.

#### 'Israel has pulverized Hamas'

Israel has not pulverized Hamas; it has pulverized Gaza and its civilian population. In doing so, it has become ostracized around the world. Public support for Israel, once readily offered, is now largely confined to American congress members bribed by the pro-Israeli lobby. Israel's top leaders once sold as the world's leading "democratic" leaders are now wanted war criminals. Hamas meanwhile, continues to fight Israeli forces with no signs of tiredness.

#### 'Israel has shattered Hezbollah in Lebanon, forcing it to accept a cease-fire'

The Hezbollah-Israel ceasefire has drawn sharp criticism from across the Israeli regime's political spectrum, even from those who support a Gaza ceasefire.

The reason? Many believe that Lebanon, not Israel, dictated the terms of the truce. Israel, escalating tensions after nearly 11 months of relatively contained skirmishes, aimed to eliminate Hezbollah. While the assassination of key Hezbollah figures was a setback, it didn't achieve Israel's objective. Far from being incapacitated, Hezbollah not only sustained its attacks but intensified them daily, right up to the ceasefire.

Furthermore, the reason Hezbollah agreed to the ceasefire was not because its military capabilities were dwindling.

Hezbollah has always prioritized the well-being of the Lebanese population. Israel's attacks mainly targeted Lebanon's civilians, a tactic the regime seems to use in every scenario.

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

### Persepolis battle back to defeat Malavan: PGPL

TEHRAN – Persepolis football team came from a goal down behind to beat Malavan 2-1 in the 2024/25 Iran's Persian Gulf Professional League (PGPL) on Wednesday.

Ghaem Eslamikhah found the back of Persepolis's net just before the hour mark and Soroush Rafiei equalized the match in the 64th minute. Farshad Faraji scored the winner with a header in the 74th minute.

Persepolis remained third with 23 points, two points behind leaders Tractor.

Sepahan are second with 24 points.

### Skocic's Tractor looking for long-awaited title

TEHRAN – Tractor, under the astute guidance of Croatian coach Dragan Skocic, have stormed to the top of the 2024/25 Iran's Persian Gulf Pro League (PGPL). The club's impressive 2-0 victory over Gol Gohar on Monday, despite playing a man down for a significant portion of the match, has solidified their position at the summit.

Skocic, who was unceremoniously sacked as Iran's national team coach on the eve of the 2022 FIFA World Cup, has found a new home in Tabriz and is proving his managerial prowess once more. His Tractor side have been on an extraordinary run, winning all six of their away matches in the first 11 match days of the season. These victories include triumphs over title rivals such as Esteghlal and Sepahan.

The team's success is a testament to Skocic's tactical acumen and the quality of his squad. With a blend of experienced Iranian internationals like Shoja Khalilzadeh, Alireza Beiranvand, and Mehdi Torabi, along with talented foreign players such as Igor Postonjski, Tomislav Strkalj, and Ricardo Alves, Tractor boast a formidable lineup.

However, it is Skocic's ability to galvanize his players and implement a winning mentality that has set Tractor apart. His tactical flexibility and his team's ability to adapt to different game situations have been key factors in their success.

With Tractor currently sitting atop the table with 25 points, one point clear of Sepahan, the club's fans are dreaming of a long-awaited league title. The team's impressive performances and the passion of their supporters have made Tractor one of the most exciting teams to watch in the Iranian football.

As the season progresses, Tractor will face stiff competition from the likes of Persepolis and Sepahan. However, with Skocic at the helm, the club are well-positioned to maintain their momentum and achieve their ultimate goal of lifting the PGPL trophy.

### Para archer Hemmati nominated for Athlete of the Year

TEHRAN – The shortlist for the 2024 World Archery Awards has been released and Iranian archer Fatemeh Hemmati is among the nominees.

Nominees have been named for nine prizes, including the six category trophies (recurve men, recurve women, compound men, compound women, para men and para women) that are open for public vote on the [www.worldarcheryawards.com](http://www.worldarcheryawards.com) website until midnight CET on 10 January 2025.

The overall Athlete of the Year trophy, which has been won by Ella Gibson and Marcus D'Almeida since its reintroduction in 2022, is decided by a panel of journalists.

Among the frontrunners this year are armless Paralympic Champion Matt Stutzman, triple Olympic gold medalists Lim Sihyeon and Kim Woojin, and nine-time Hyundai Archery World Cup Champion Sara Lopez.

The winners will be announced across online and physical events in early 2025.

Hemmati won two silver medals at the Individual compound and Mixed team compound in the 2024 Paralympic Games.

### Air pollution forces events cancelation in Tehran

TEHRAN – The Iranian capital Tehran's severe air pollution has led to the closure of schools, universities, and government offices in the province on Wednesday and Thursday.

The decision has been made by the Tehran Air Pollution Emergency Committee to protect public health during the peak of pollution.

A football match between Esteghlal and Mes Kerman in Iran's Hazfi Cup has been postponed due to the pollution. The match was scheduled to be held on Wednesday in Tehran's Shahr-e Qods Stadium.

The Iranian capital and several other cities have been hit by severe air pollution over the past week, forcing schools and universities to rely on remote learning.

### Foolad shock Lube on the opening day in FIVB Club World Championship 2024

TEHRAN – Reigning Asian champions Foolad Sirjan Iranian caused the biggest upset of the opening day of the FIVB Volleyball Men's Club World Championship 2024, downing Italian giants Cucine Lube Civitanova on Tuesday in Uberlândia.

Besides the Iranians, Italy's Itas Trentino, Brazil's Sada Cruzeiro and Egypt's Al Ahly SC also triumphed at the Sabiazinho stadium in the first of four days of pool play action in Brazil.

Making just their second appearance in the tournament, Foolad secured their first-ever victory at the world stage, beating the 2019 world champions Lube in a five-set battle that saw they come out on top 3-2 (25-21, 14-25, 24-26, 25-23, 16-14) in Pool A.

The MVP in their campaign at the Asian Championship, opposite Ali Hajipour led the team's offense with 18 points (16 kills, two blocks). Outside hitter Alireza Abdolhamidi, with 15 points (13 kills, one block, one ace), and middle blocker Mohammad Valzadeh, with 12 (eight kills, two blocks, two aces), also had solid performances.

Lube's French two-time Olympic champion middle blocker Barthélémy Chinenyeze topped all scorers with 21 points (16 kills, three aces, two blocks). Bulgarian outside hitter Aleksandar Nikolov and Turkish opposite Adis Lagumdžija contributed 18 and 17 points, respectively.

### Iran victorious over India at 2024 CAVA Club Volleyball C'ship

TEHRAN – The Iran Club defeated India's Calicut Heroes in straight sets (27-25, 25-22, 25-20) at the 2024 CAVA Men's Club Volleyball Championship on Wednesday.

The Iran U19 team had defeated Club HDC from Maldives 3-2 and Nepal 3-2 in its first two matches.

The five-team competition is being held in Kathmandu, Nepal. Iran's Chadormalou were supposed to take part in the competition but withdrew and Iran U19 participated in the event instead.

### Joel Kojo in Tehran to finalize deal with Esteghlal

TEHRAN – Joel Kojo, who has been playing for Dinamo Samarqand in Kyrgyzstan since February 2023, has arrived in Tehran, capital of Iran to finalize his deal with Esteghlal football team.

The 26-year-old forward had been linked with the Iranian team in September but Dinamo management did not accept the transfer.

Kojo will undergo medical examinations to join Esteghlal. Esteghlal have previously completed the signing of Kenyan forward Masoud Juma Choka.



## China seeks to boost trade ties in Iran's Hormozgan



Chinese Ambassador to Iran Cong Peiwu (L) and Hormozgan Chamber of Commerce Head Mohammadreza Safa

TEHRAN - A meeting between Hormozgan economic operators and Cong Peiwu, China's Ambassador to Iran, was held to explore opportunities for economic, cultural, and trade cooperation between the two nations.

Speaking at the meeting, Mohammadreza Safa, head of the Hormozgan Chamber of Commerce, highlighted the province's investment potential in maritime and mining industries, saying: "We hope the challenges facing Hormozgan's economic operators will be resolved. Our request is to facilitate visa issuance for business and tourism professionals to streamline processes."

He emphasized the Chamber's readiness to send trade delegations to China and welcome Chinese investors to Hormozgan.

China's Ambassador Cong Peiwu underscored the province's strategic significance for trade relations, calling Hormozgan "one of the best regions" to expand economic and investment partnerships.

"China's economic growth, which has secured the second global ranking in recent years, benefits not only China but also other nations, including Iran," Cong stated.

He noted that diplomatic ties, strengthened since 1971, reached a milestone with the 25-year cooperation agreement signed in 2016.

"Focus on agriculture, seafood exports, and cultural collaboration"

Cong highlighted the agricultural and food sectors as key areas for enhanced cooperation, stressing the potential for exporting Iranian produce, such as fruits, dried fruits, and seafood, to China.

"Chinese consumers have a strong preference for seafood, creating significant opportunities for Iranian products in the Chinese mar-

ket," he said.

Addressing educational and cultural exchanges, the envoy pointed out that Chinese universities offer favorable conditions for Iranian students, while Chinese students also show interest in studying in Iran. "The presence of Chinese students at the University of Hormozgan strengthens cultural ties," he added.

The ambassador further emphasized maritime transportation as a vital area for cooperation, particularly through the revival of maritime trade routes known as the "Maritime Silk Road." He described these routes as essential for bolstering sustainable trade between the two countries.

### Firm bilateral relations amid external challenges

The ambassador acknowledged external pressures on China-Iran relations, asserting their resilience. "The ties between our two countries are stronger than ever. We do not support financial warfare of any kind. The future of Iran-China cooperation is bright, with economic, cultural, and trade relations as top priorities," Cong stated.

During the meeting, the strategic capacities of Bandar Abbas and Jask were introduced as key economic hubs, with Hormozgan officials reiterating the province's readiness to attract Chinese investors.

The discussions laid the groundwork for further initiatives to capitalize on economic, cultural, and academic opportunities between Iran and China.

In mid-November, Tehran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines, and Agriculture (TCCIMA) and China Council for the Promotion of International Trade Beijing Sub-council (CCPIT Beijing) signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) to expand trade cooperation, IBNA reported.

As reported, the MOU was inked by TCCIMA Chairman Mahmoud Najafi-Arab and CCPIT Beijing Chairman Guo Huaigang during a meeting of TCCIMA trade delegation with Guo Huaigang in Beijing, during which suggestions were made for the development of bilateral cooperation.

Addressing the mentioned meeting, Guo Huaigang pointed to the relations between China and Iran and said: "The relations between China and Iran have a very long and old history, and fortunately, in the field of economy and trade, the relations between the two countries have expanded year by year to the point that it is more than 10 years that China has been Iran's first trade partner."

## Tehran, Belgrade emphasize boosting economic cooperation

TEHRAN - Iran and Serbia reaffirmed their commitment to strengthening economic cooperation during a meeting between Serbia's ambassador and Iran's minister of finance and economic affairs.

As IRNA reported, Damir Kovacevic, Serbia's ambassador to Iran, met with Iranian Minister Abdolnaser Hemmati to discuss bilateral ties. Both sides underscored the importance of expanding economic collaboration in line with the political will of their respective leaders.

Kovacevic highlighted Serbia's readiness to host Iran's president and parliamentary speaker, stressing his government's strong political resolve to deepen economic ties.

He pointed to past agreements on double taxation avoidance and mutual investment protection signed between the two countries, expressing Serbia's interest in implementing these accords. Kovacevic also called for convening a joint commission before the end of the Iranian calendar year 1403 (late March 2025).

Iranian Minister Hemmati underscored Iran's vast investment opportunities, citing the country's abundant mineral and energy resources, as well as its skilled and educated workforce.

"Iran offers a favorable environment for Serbian investors, and under the 14th government, there are no obstacles to enhancing bilateral ties between the governments and people of Iran and Serbia," Hemmati stated.

In a meeting between Head of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines, and Agriculture (IC-CIMA) Samad Hassanzadeh and Kovacevic in late

July, Hassanzadeh said that ICCIMA, as the representative of Iran's private sector, is ready to boost trade relations with Serbia.

Referring to Serbia as Iran's gateway to Europe, he voiced the readiness of Iran Chamber of Commerce to launch a trade-expo center in the European country.

Hassanzadeh regretted that a 2021 document for establishing a joint economic commission between Iran and Serbia has not yet been put into practice.

Noting that Iran's call for signing a free trade agreement with Serbia has not been responded by Belgrade, he called on the Serbian ambassador to put these issues on the agenda.

In the meantime, the Serbian ambassador noted that the visit to Iran Chamber of Commerce was his first visit after he began his mission in Iran, what he said indicated his country's great attention to promotion of trade cooperation with Iran.

He still believed that the two countries have to solve problems on the way of banking and money transfer so as expedite trade ties.

Ambassador Kovacevic highlighted the role of a joint committee of commerce between Iran and Serbia, urging the need for forming a trade council of business people and economic operators of the two sides to share trade potentials.

He vowed that the embassy would do its best to materialize the trade targets of Iran and Serbia, operationalize cooperation agreements already signed and establish a free trade agreement between the two countries.

# Iran, Kyrgyzstan agree on joint Eurasian logistics hub at southern ports

TEHRAN - A high-ranking economic delegation from Kyrgyzstan, led by Deputy Foreign Minister Temirbek Erkinov, met with Ali Akbar Safaei, Iran's Deputy Minister of Transport and Urban Development and head of the Ports and Maritime Organization (PMO), to discuss establishing a joint Eurasian logistics hub in Iran's southern ports.

According to a statement from the PMO, the Kyrgyz delegation—comprising senior officials including Deputy Transport Minister Almaz Turgunbaev, Deputy Economy and Commerce Minister Nazarbek Malaev, and Deputy Justice Minister Orozbek Sidikov—traveled to Tehran to explore investment opportunities in a special logistics zone at Iran's Shahid Rajaei Port.

During the meeting, Erkinov emphasized Kyrgyzstan's strategic need for maritime access due to its landlocked geography, highlighting that utilizing Iranian commercial ports is a key priority for Bishkek to enhance transit and maritime trade ties with Tehran.

"The negotiations to facilitate Kyrgyzstan's investment and transit operations through Shahid Rajaei Port began some time ago," Erkinov said. "We are ready to collaborate with Iran to execute a joint logistics zone project in the port."

He added that any Kyrgyz investments in Iran would fully adhere to Iranian laws and regulations, stressing the potential for commercial partnerships to establish a regional transit and logistics hub in line with multi-modal transport corridors.

Safaei, head of the PMO, welcomed Kyrgyz investments, noting that Iran supports all investments in its free economic and port zones. "Kyrgyz private sector investments in Iran's northern and southern ports will receive significant incentives and facilities," he said.

He further stated that Kyrgyz traders could leverage Iranian port infrastructure and shipping lines to access global markets. "The Iranian government's strategy focuses on strengthening economic relations with neighboring countries. Iran has existing cooperation agreements



with both western and eastern Caspian Sea nations and is rapidly developing its road and rail corridors," Safaei added.

The meeting included Iranian officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Customs Administration, and the Presidential Office, as well as representatives from the Ports and Maritime Organization.

Meanwhile in an online meeting between Head of Hormozgan Province's Ports and Maritime Department Hossein Abbas-Nejad and Kyrgyzstan's Deputy Economy and Commerce Minister Nazarbek Kamalidinovich, on August 20, the two sides discussed ways of expanding cooperation in ports and transit sectors.

As PMO portal reported, the virtual meeting was held at the request of the Ministry of Economy and Commerce of Kyrgyzstan on Monday with the aim of increasing transit cooperation between the two countries.

In this meeting, the parties discussed and exchanged opinions regarding the participation and investment of the private sector of Kyrgyzstan in the infrastructure projects of Iranian ports, especially Shahid Rajaei port.

In this regard, Abbas-Nejad welcomed the presence of the Kyrgyz private sector to establish a logistics center in Shahid Rajaei Port, and it was decided that the issue will be further and more thoroughly discussed and finalized in the near future during the visit of a Kyrgyz technical delegation to Iran.

Kamalidinovich for his part expressed Kyrgyzstan's readiness to send a specialized delegation

to Iran, and called on the Iranian side to speed up and facilitate the process of the presence of Kyrgyz investors and their participation in the infrastructure projects of Shahid Rajaei port with the aim of facilitating the transit of Kyrgyz goods from the territory of Iran.

Back in July, Iran's PMO and the National Investments Agency of Kyrgyzstan agreed on a memorandum of understanding (MOU) for the development of the southern ports of Iran.

The MOU was agreed upon also during an online meeting between the officials of the two countries.

In the virtual meeting, the two sides reviewed and approved the contents of the MOU regarding the participation of Kyrgyzstan's private sector in the southern ports of Iran.

The draft of the aforementioned MOU was decided to be signed by the parties during the visit of Kyrgyzstan's delegation to Tehran shortly.

Also, Iranian Minister of Energy Ali-Akbar Mehrabian and his Kyrgyz counterpart Talaibek Ibrayev have voiced readiness to cooperate in the field of energy and implementation of hydroelectric projects.

The two ministers met on the sidelines of a ministerial meeting of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) member countries in late June.

Speaking during the meeting, the Iranian minister said that the future of relations between Iran and Kyrgyzstan is bright, noting that Tehran is ready for any coop-

eration with Bishkek.

Mehrabian referred to Iran's huge energy potential and said that the country generates some 360 terawatt/h of electricity annually.

The Kyrgyz minister, for his part, appreciated Iran's capacities in the production and supply of oil and oil products, while adding that his country has good experience in constructing hydroelectric and small-scale power plants.

In the meeting, Mehrabian voiced the readiness of the Islamic Republic of Iran to export technical and engineering services, as well as supply equipment in the energy sector.

The Iranian energy minister pointed out that connecting the electricity grid of Uzbekistan to Turkmenistan and then Iran will enable the exchange of electricity for the countries of the region, especially during the peak consumption period of summer and winter.

Also on Thursday, in another meeting with Mahmoud Jurabek, the Minister of Energy of Uzbekistan, Mehrabian expressed his readiness to expand cooperation between the two countries, while thanking the president of that country for his efforts in bilateral cooperation in the field of energy.

He voiced the readiness of the Islamic Republic of Iran to develop cooperation, especially in the field of exporting technical and engineering services, as well as supplying energy field equipment to Uzbekistan.

Stating that Uzbekistan has a growing economy, the Mehrabian mentioned energy as the most important issue of development in this country.

Referring to the capabilities of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the production, transmission and distribution of electricity, Mehrabian pointed out that factories manufacturing equipment in the Islamic Republic of Iran are ready to cooperate with Uzbekistan at a competitive price.

"If Uzbekistan's electricity grid is connected to Turkmenistan's electricity grid, it will be possible to exchange electricity with Uzbekistan and manage peak consumption in summer and winter," he added.

## Paknejad elected OPEC president for 2025

TEHRAN - Iranian Oil Minister Mohsen Paknejad has been elected as the rotating president of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) for 2025.

Speaking to reporters late Tuesday after the 189th OPEC ministerial meeting, held via videoconference, Paknejad said all member states participated in the virtual session.

"The most significant outcome of this meeting was the election of the Iranian oil

minister as the president of OPEC for the upcoming year," Paknejad stated.

He added that Iraq's oil minister was elected as vice president for the new term.

During the session, OPEC's budget for the upcoming year was also reviewed and approved unanimously by member states. "It was emphasized that members who have not yet paid their contributions must settle their dues promptly," Paknejad noted.

The meeting also saw the extension of OPEC Secretary-General Haitham Al-Ghais' tenure for another three years. The Kuwaiti official, who was praised for his effective leadership, was reappointed by consensus.

Paknejad reiterated that OPEC currently comprises 12 member countries. He also announced that the exact date for the next ministerial meeting will be decided at the gathering scheduled for late May 2025.

## Special economic zones export \$8.5b of goods in 8 months

TEHRAN - Iran's Special Economic Zones recorded \$8.5 billion in exports over the first eight months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20-November 21), according to Reza Masrou, secretary of the Iranian Free Zones High Council.

Masrou highlighted government support in revising regulations that were originally intended for the domestic market but were applied to free zones. "We plan to amend specific regulations, particularly those concerning vehicle imports," he said. "While gasoline-powered passenger cars can be imported into the mainland, such imports are currently restricted in free zones. We are working to address this issue through a directive."

He also mentioned the lack of a unified strategy for the free zones, saying: "While most zones have had their individual master

plans, there hasn't been a comprehensive strategic document for all regions."

"We are currently developing a strategic roadmap that will identify each zone's priorities. The document is expected to be finalized within two months and submitted to the Free Zones High Council. This will help investors determine where and how to focus their investments," he added.

On the issue of value-added tax (VAT) on products manufactured in free zones, Masrou criticized its implementation, stating that it has increased production costs and deterred investments.

"Our proposal is that VAT should only apply when goods produced in free zones are imported into the mainland," he said.

Addressing digital economy initiatives, Masrou revealed that a strategic plan for advancing

the digital economy in free zones is being developed in cooperation with Sharif University of Technology.

"Free zones focused on the digital economy are considered next-generation zones, or seventh-generation zones," he explained.

The official reaffirmed the economic significance of Iran's special zones, noting that their \$8.5 billion export performance in the mentioned period reflects their role in supporting Iran's trade and economic development.

The establishment of free trade zones (FTZs) in Iran dates back to the Iranian calendar year 1368 (March 1989 - March 1990) following the fall in the country's oil income in the preceding year which prompted the government to promote non-oil exports.

The first two free trade zones of Iran were established in the

south of the country. The first one was Kish Free Trade Zone established in 1368 on Kish Island in the Persian Gulf and the second one was Qeshm Free Trade Zone established the year after on Qeshm Island in the Strait of Hormuz.

Some five other free trade zones have been also established in the country since then, including Chabahar in southeastern Sistan-Baluchestan Province, Arvand in southwestern Khuzestan Province, Anzali in northern Gilan Province, Aras in East-Azərbaycan Province and Maku in West-Azərbaycan Province, both in the northwest of the country.

The development of existing free trade zones and the establishment of new FTZs has become one of the major economic approaches of the Iranian government.



# Rebel riddle: Israel wants amenable servants in Syria

By Shahrokh Saei

TEHRAN- Israel has carried out an unprecedented air campaign in Syria over the past days as the apartheid and occupation regime is trying to wield its hegemonic power.

On Tuesday, the Israeli military said it had carried out up to 500 strikes across Syria since the collapse of the Syrian government at the weekend.

The air raids are much larger than 1967 when Israel occupied Syria's Golan Heights.

Israel has destroyed the Arab nation's strategic military infrastructure.

Foreign Minister Gideon Sa'ar said earlier this week that Israel has hit Syrian military facilities and long-range missiles to prevent them from falling "into the hands of extremists."

He implicitly referred to armed groups which took control of Damascus on Sunday and announced the fall of president Bashar Assad's government.

Israel is accused of supporting the armed groups led by Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS).

They launched an offensive in Aleppo late last month and took control of major cities in Syria within days.



Israel carries out unprecedented airstrikes in Syria as the regime's army executes a land grab policy.

Meanwhile, Israel has exploited instability in Syria to execute a land grab.

The regime has deployed ground forces both into and beyond a demilitarized buffer zone in the Golan Heights for the first time in 50 years.

Syrian sources said on Tuesday that Israel had breached Syrian territory beyond the occupied Golan Heights and were just 25km from Damascus.

Israel claims its military presence in Syria is aimed at ensuring that the regions adjacent to the occupied Golan Heights are not exposed to any potential security threats.

But the Golan Heights possesses a significance far beyond that.

Israel captured the rocky plateau during the Six-Day War of 1967 and unilaterally annexed it in 1981 in defiance of international law.

Israel and Syria signed an agreement in 1974 and a UN observer force has been in place on the ceasefire line in the Golan Heights since then.

Israel's latest land incursion into Syria has violated the agreement.

The Golan Heights, situated in the southwest corner of Syria, is around 60 kilometers from Damascus.

From the top of the plateau, Israel can oversee much of southern

Syria and monitor Syrian movements.

Since chaos broke out in Syria in the wake of the 2011 Arab Spring, Israel has aided and abetted militants who took up arms against the Assad government.

US media revealed in 2015 that Israel provided medical treatment to terrorists affiliated to al-Qaeda and its offshoot Nusra Front who had been wounded in fighting in Syria.

Established in 2012 by ISIL, the Nusra Front separated from the group a year later and pledged loyalty to al-Qaeda.

In 2017, it cut its connections with al-Qaeda and allied with other factions to rebrand itself as Hayat Tahrir al-Sham.

Israel played a key role in assisting the HTS to conquer Syrian cities. The regime did so in line with its plans to turn Syria into a vassal state and now expects HTS rebels to act as its stooges.

By destroying Syria's military infrastructure and grabbing additional land, Israel wants to make sure the new rulers of the country will not rebel against the regime.

In short, Israel wants the rebels to be amenable to its expansionist ambitions.

## Russia decries 'destabilizing' Israeli strikes in Syria

The Kremlin on Wednesday condemned Israel's strikes on Syria and the creation of a "buffer zone" along the Israel-annexed Golan Heights, calling for rapid "stabilization" in the country, the Moscow Times reported.

As rebels ousted president Bashar al-Assad from power in Syria, the Israeli military said it had conducted 480 strikes on the neighboring country's strategic military targets since Sunday.

Israel also sent troops into the UN-pa-

trolled buffer zone east of the Israel-annexed Golan Heights.

"The strikes, the actions in the Golan Heights and the buffer zone hardly contribute to the stabilization of the situation in the already destabilized Syria," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters.

"We'd like to see the situation stabilized as soon as possible in order to reach the prospect of bringing the situation into a legitimate course," Peskov added.

## Syrian rebels set Hafez al-Assad's tomb on fire

The tomb of ousted Syrian president Bashar al-Assad's father Hafez was torched in his hometown of Qardaha, footage taken Wednesday, December 11, showed, with rebel fighters in fatigues and young men watching it burn.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights war monitor told AFP the rebels had set fire to the mausoleum, located in Latakia.

AFP footage showed parts of the mausoleum ablaze and damaged, with the tomb of Hafez torched and destroyed.



## US welcomes Gallant despite ICC arrest warrant for crimes against humanity



Yoav Gallant meets with White House Mideast czar Brett McGurk in Washington, D.C., on December 10, 2024.

Wanted Israeli war criminal Yoav Gallant, the former war minister, has visited the White House for a meeting with a key Biden official — just weeks after the International

Criminal Court (ICC) put out a warrant for his arrest over crimes against humanity.

Gallant posted on social media that he met with President Joe Biden's Middle East envoy, Brett McGurk, on Tuesday to discuss a deal to release the Israeli captives being held in Gaza.

In the post on Facebook and X, he wrote that there was "a real possibility for a breakthrough" for a deal.

He attached photos of him merrily shaking hands with McGurk, a Trump administration holdover who has been instrumental in crafting Biden's policy on Gaza.

He added that the meeting was one of several meetings scheduled in D.C., including one with think tank Washington Institute for Near East Policy that was cancelled after protesters demonstrated outside Gallant's hotel in New York City last week.

## The trap of diplomacy

By Batool Subeiti

BEIRUT - Diplomatic traps can be more dangerous than the threats of war, as Iranian politician Saeed Jalili has recently said. War traps, however, can sometimes yield remarkable outcomes. In fact, the major achievements accomplished at the national level have often been due to war traps. War demands great leaders who possess the resolve matching the cause they represent.

The first NATO war on Syria was intended on severing the Axis of Resistance and its extensions.

Avoiding the chaos of a second Syrian war became crucial after the Al-Aqsa Food battle set the course towards Jerusalem. The distinction between those supporting resistance and the conspirators for the occupation entity have become clear.

Iran has extensive experience dealing with Western deceit and barriers. However, those who are likely to be deceived by the West's blatant tricks are not capable of implementing the Leader of the Islamic Revolution's directives.

Late President Raisi exemplifies a leader of this caliber: "A believer is not stung from the same hole twice." If figures like General Soleimani and others were still active, the outcome would have likely been different.

Regarding the turning point in Syria, Iran did not abandon Assad. It appears that an understanding was reached between Trump and Putin to trade Syria for Ukraine. The Syrian government relied on two pillars. Russia for international political cover at the UN and aerial support in battles against terrorism. And Iran for on-ground presence, support for the resistance front, and logistical preparations.

Russia's withdrawal leaves Iran at the forefront, facing possible sectarian wars and the resurgence of sedition. After the Al-Aqsa Flood battle and reaffirming the direction towards Jerusalem, toxic sectarianism must not return.

Over the past decade, Syria failed to rebuild a functioning state, a failure that drained its combat readiness.

Rampant corruption complicated the mission. Strategically, avoiding a sectarian war that aligns with the West's agenda is of paramount importance.

Assad gave up all he could within the limits of his endurance, understanding, and direction. The complexities of the situation surpassed his capacity. Syria may remain a negotiable arena for Moscow.

However, the Iranian leadership prioritizes strategic interests, chief among them maintaining the focus on Jerusalem.

The Axis of Resistance has not ended, though it has suffered blows. However, new forms of activity may arise. The goals of the Axis of Resistance have not been abandoned, however new strategies need to be pursued. Crises can transform into genuine opportunities. Awareness has advanced and is better prepared than before. The blood of martyrs fuels the resolve.

The Axis of Resistance reached this point without fully understanding the enemy's schemes. Protecting Syria without allowing room for sectarian war should be given top priority. However, given the present circumstances, avoiding a war designed to be sectarian was the wisest decision.

*"The view expressed in this article are those of the writer"*

## Eliminations, assassinations and vandalism will dilute Syria's power

it an indication of the monopolization of power by the HTS (formerly known as Jabhat al-Nusra, an offshoot of al-Qaeda).

Meanwhile, activists have documented various liquidations carried out by "unknown individuals" against those who were allegedly involved in "criminal incidents" in recent years.

Assassinations have also been recorded against prominent Syrian elites, including organic chemist Dr. Hamdi Ismail and Sheikh Tawfiq al-Bouti, head of the Union of Scholars of the Levant.

Meanwhile, the fate of most of the leaders of the former government is unknown. Washington, whose officials announced the possibility of considering removing the HTS from the sanctions list, has imposed new sanctions on the father of Asma, Bashar al-Assad's wife, and former officials in the Air Force Intelligence of the Assad government.

Following an announcement by HTS leader Abu Mohammad al-Julani, known as Ahmed al-Sharaa, to track down figures linked to the former government and offering financial rewards to anyone who provides information about them, activists have circulated a list of 169 names, including former President Bashar al-Assad and his brother Maher al-Assad, in ad-

dition to his defense minister and top officers.

Besides, the al-Bashir government has issued urgent directives to Syrian embassies abroad to begin granting passports to Syrians free of charge for a period of six months.

At the same time, several European countries have announced the suspension of granting asylum to Syrians at the present time. This comes amid fears of forcibly deporting thousands of people who have emigrated during the past decade.

The government has also announced that it is working to reopen the airports on the 18th of this month in addition to border crossings with Lebanon and Jordan.

Meanwhile, the removal of the official crossings with northern Lebanon by the Syrian side has led to looting and vandalism. Cars loaded with weapons have been stolen, as the arms trade has flourished; the price of a Kalashnikov has reached \$50.

This overwhelming chaos and fear of revenge operations has prompted a large number of Syrian (Alawite) families to flee Homs towards the Akkar coast or to Jabal Mohsen in Tripoli. Large numbers of Qusayr (Shiite) families have also fled to northern Bekaa.



ing an airstrike on a house west of the Nuseirat camp, in central Gaza.

Additionally, an Israeli strike targeted a building near Kamal Adwan Hospital that housed 30 people, including women and children. Palestinian media reported at least 22 people have been killed and several others missing in the attack.

Local sources also reported that a Palestinian mother and her two children were killed by Israeli forces in the vicinity of the Kamal Adwan Hospital while Israeli aircraft launched a series of strikes on the Tel al-Zaatar in Jabalia camp in northern Gaza. Israeli artillery shelling coincided with the firing of illumination flares around Kamal Adwan Hospital.

The Hospital's Director, Dr. Hussam Abu Safia, said on Wednesday, "The situation in northern Gaza has deteriorated dramatically since yesterday. The bombing did not stop throughout the night, with more than seven explosive-laden drones being used around Kamal Adwan Hospital, bombing entire buildings and destroying residential blocks."

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



By Sondoss Al Asaad

BEIRUT - The government of Al-Julani, which was running the affairs in Idlib, has taken over from Prime Minister Mohammad Ghazi al-Jalali, who served in the post under president Beshar al-Assad.

The government is headed by Mohammad al-Bashir and consists of 10 ministries. Immediately after taking over the power, the new government has announced that it would run the country's affairs until early March without clarifying whether Security Council Resolution 2254 would be implemented.

The resolution 2254 stipulates agreeing on a new constitution for the country, then holding elections and forming a new government. The resolution included the Assad government as a partner.

Following the appearance of al-Bashir in a television interview with a banner of Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), the new government has been subjected to severe criticism, considering

## 75,000 Palestinian lives at risk in northern Gaza

By Wesam Bahrani

TEHRAN - The United Nations has announced an almost complete halt in humanitarian aid to northern Gaza for at least 66 days.

The "significant" disruption by the Israeli military to facilitate the entry of basic supplies has left between 65,000 and 75,000 Palestinians without food, water, or healthcare for more than two months now.

In northern Gaza, the Israeli occupation regime continues to impose a deadly siege on Beit Lahia, Beit Hanoun, and Jabalia, where residents have been denied access to any form of aid.

According to a report by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), around 5,500 people were displaced from three schools in Beit Lahia to Gaza City.

In addition to the food crisis, OCHA said that only four UN-supported bakeries are currently operating across Gaza, all of them located in Gaza City.

Speaking to reporters after briefing the UN Security Council behind closed doors, Sigrid Kaag, the senior UN humanitarian and reconstruction coordinator for Gaza, described the situation for Palestinian civilians trying to survive in Gaza as "utterly catastrophic."

"I have just briefed the Security Council, as you know, in close session about the utterly devastating situation in Gaza. I've spoken about of the inhumane conditions in which our fellow

human beings, civilians are trying to survive, the young and the old."

She highlighted the collapse of the legal system and the chaos that exacerbated the situation, rendering the UN and other humanitarian organizations unable to deliver food and basic humanitarian supplies to hundreds of thousands of Palestinians in need.

Kaag emphasized that "UN measures alone are insufficient without political will to break the deadlock and overcome numerous obstacles." She added, "There is no substitute for political will, as this is a fundamentally political matter."

Kaag and other UN officials continue to call on the Israeli regime to allow humanitarian convoys into northern Gaza and other areas, permit the entry of commercial goods, and reopen the Rafah crossing.

Reports have warned that famine in Gaza has reached its most critical stage as a result of the Israeli military's blockade on the Strip.

Since October 7, 2023, Israeli forces have been conducting daily air, sea, and ground assaults on Gaza. Late Tuesday night into Wednesday, dozens of Palestinians were killed and injured as Israeli forces bombed homes in the Nuseirat refugee camp in central Gaza and around Kamal Adwan Hospital in the northern Beit Lahia refugee camp.

Reporters on the ground have spoken about dozens of casualties and missing people follow-



## Khuzestan village hosts saffron harvest festival



TEHRAN – An annual saffron harvest festival was held on Friday in the picturesque tourism village of Haji-Kamal, situated north of Khuzestan province.

Jamal Ameri-Nasab, the deputy director of tourism for Khuzestan, expressed gratitude and congratulations to the warm and hospitable residents of Haji-Kamal and nearby villages.

He emphasized that such festivals not only foster social vibrancy among locals and farmers but also spotlight the region's agricultural tourism potential.

"Given the unique geographical features of northern Khuzestan, we are looking forward to hosting a variety of winter and mountain festivals in the snow-covered areas of the province," Ameri-Nasab announced.

The one-day festival featured a range of activities, including the setup of tribal tents, exhibitions of medicinal plants, local products, and handicrafts. Visitors enjoyed horseback riding, demonstrations of traditional bread and soup-making, performances of local music, and guided tours of the saffron fields.

According to available data, Iran exported over 25 tons of saffron valued at \$22 million to 37 countries in the first two months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20 – May 20), according to a senior official with the Agriculture Ministry.

With some 127,000 hectares of land under saffron cultivation, Iran produced over 238 tons of saffron last year which were dispatched to the domestic and international markets.

## Travel sentiment survey highlights rising demand for premium, extended travel among Chinese

Chinese tourists are increasingly seeking extended, more premium travel experiences, with Japan emerging as the most favored destination.

That's according to the latest study released by digital marketing and research firm China Trading Desk (CTD), in partnership with The BlueDog Group's Essential Communications.

The report, based on a survey of 15,000 tourists, sheds light on key trends from the China Outbound Travel Sentiment Survey for the global travel retail market.

Serving clients across travel, luxury, fashion, automotive, beauty and spirits sectors, CTD aims to capture key brands in travel retail, building on its role in the i.lab technology area at the 2023 and 2024 TFWA Conferences in Singapore and Cannes, respectively.

China Trading Desk Founder and CEO Subramania Bhatt said: "I am delighted to be partnering with Essential Communications as China Trading Desk builds on its Chinese traveler insights expertise to now focus on the global travel retail market.

"We believe brands can gain a deeper understanding of key demographic behaviors from our sentiment surveys, providing the tools to build highly targeted marketing campaigns as Chinese return to overseas travel in higher numbers in 2025."

Among other key takeaways from the Q3 survey are insights into Gen Z travelers' spending behavior and alcohol consumption trends.

Bhatt said: "The ongoing recovery of the outbound travel market remains robust, and our projection that 128 million Chinese will travel abroad by year's end underscores that rebound. However, total travel this year will still fall short of pre-pandemic levels in 2019, when 155 million Chinese toured outside the Middle Kingdom."

CTD estimates that the number of Chinese outbound travelers will hit 200 million by 2028.

The findings show that last-minute planning is prevalent, with 73% of travelers finalizing their plans within a month of departure, underscoring the ongoing uncertainty and a desire for flexibility in travel planning.

This trend is especially evident among Gen Z travelers, with nearly half planning holidays within two weeks of the start of their trip.

Longer trips are becoming a more popular choice among travelers, with 80.3% opting to stay between five and 15 days abroad. This represents a notable drop in the preference for shorter holidays, from 19.3% in Q2 to just 10%.

(Source: moodiedavittreport.com)

## Glimpses of World Heritage sites: City of Valletta

Malta's capital Valletta is a fortified city located on a hilly peninsula between two of the finest natural harbors in the Mediterranean.

The Siege of Malta in 1565 captured the European imagination and mobilized the resources needed to create the new city of Valletta, founded soon after, in 1566. The Knights of St John, aided by the most respected European military engineers of the 16th century, conceived and planned the city as a single, holistic creation of the late Renaissance, with a uniform grid plan within fortified and bastioned city walls. Since its creation, the city has witnessed a number of rebuilding projects, yet those have not compromised the harmony between the dramatic topography and the Hippodamian grid. The fabric of the city includes

a compact ensemble of 320 monuments that encapsulate every aspect of the civil, religious, artistic, and military functions of its illustrious founders. These include the 16th-century buildings relating to the founding of the Renaissance city, such as the cathedral of St John, the Palace of the Grand Master, the Auberge de Castile et Léon, the Auberge de Provence, the Auberge d'Italie, the Auberge d'Aragon and the Infirmary of the Order and the churches of Our Lady of Victory, St Catherine and il Gesù, as well as the improvements attributed to the military engineers and architects of the 18th century such as the Auberge de Bavière, the Church of the Shipwreck of St Paul, the Library and the Manoel Theatre.

(Source: UNESCO)

## Toreutics: a glimpse into art of metalworking in Iran

TEHRAN – Toreutics, the intricate art of decorative metalworking, holds a revered place in Iranian handicrafts and artistic heritage.

Though the precise origins of toreutics remain unclear, archaeologists and art historians trace its roots back to the Scythians or Sakas, nomadic Iranians from the pre-Achaemenid era.

The art of toreutics evolved from basic carvings on stone and mountain surfaces to the sophisticated techniques of engraving and metal decoration that define it today.

### The process of toreutics

Toreutics involves the adornment of metal objects, crafted from gold, silver, copper, brass, or steel, with exquisite patterns and images.

Artists use specialized tools such as burins and hammers to engrave or hammer designs into the surface. Copper is particularly favored for its softness and malleability, making it a versatile medium for creating detailed and enduring works of art.

Modern practitioners prepare



the metal surface by applying a tar and plaster solution to its underside. This layer reduces noise and minimizes the risk of damaging the metal during the engraving process. Once the surface is prepared, the artist sketches the desired pattern onto the metal and selects an appropriate burin.

Hammering or pressing the tool onto the surface, the artist creates intricate grooves and textures, varying the intensity of

the strikes to achieve depth and precision.

### Styles and symbolism

The motifs and symbols in toreutics reflect the ideological, cultural, and social dynamics of their time, undergoing historical evolution alongside Iranian society.

The craft incorporates diverse styles, including relief, mid-relief, engraving, and latticework.

Two prominent regional styles dominate Iranian toreutics: the Isfahan style and the Tabriz style.

The Isfahan style is characterized by the use of hammering hits to engrave designs, resulting in deeper grooves. This method produces bold and striking patterns.

In the Tabriz style, relies on the motion and pressure of the wrist, leading to shallower and more delicate designs. The Tabriz burin creates fine, intricate details, offering a contrasting aesthetic to the Isfahan approach.

### Cultural significance

Toreutics' durability and aesthetic appeal have ensured its place as a treasured art form, with its products surviving across generations.

From royal palaces to historical monuments, the art form embodies Iran's rich artistic and cultural traditions.

Today, Iranian craftsmen continue to refine the techniques of their ancestors, blending innovation with timeless artistry to create masterpieces that honor the legacy of this ancient craft.

## Hamadan to host ECO medical tourism conference

TEHRAN – Hamadan, known as the capital of history and civilization of Iran, will host the ECO health tourism conference in June next year, the provincial tourism chief has said.

Mohsen Masoum-Alizadeh on Wednesday noted that the conference will help highlight Hamadan's capabilities in health and medical tourism, IRNA reported. "The conference will provide an opportunity for representatives from ECO member countries to experience Hamadan's tourism capabilities firsthand."

"Hamadan has proper infrastructure in health and medical tourism, and hosting such an event can significantly enhance this sector," the official said.



Approximately 20% of foreign tourists to Iran seek health services, and Hamadan's advanced medical facilities, hospitals, and skilled professionals position it as a key player in this field.

The Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) is a regional intergovernmental organization established in 1964 by Iran, Pakistan, and Turkey to promote economic and cultural collaboration among member states. In 1992, the organization expanded to include Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, bringing its membership to ten countries.

## Centuries-old caravanserai to undergo restoration



TEHRAN – Ma'in Caravanserai, a 400-year-old historical landmark in Marvdasht plain of Fars province, is set to undergo restoration, the provincial tourism chief has said.

Mohammad Sabet-Eqlidi made the remarks on Tuesday when he joined a gathering with locals and cultural heritage enthusiasts to organize a cleanup of the caravanserai and its surroundings, ISNA reported.

Sabet-Eqlidi highlighted the

significance of the Ma'in Caravanserai, describing it as one of the province's valuable historical assets.

"With 33 rooms and auxiliary spaces, the structure requires comprehensive restoration and development to realize its full potential."

"Once the remaining sections are restored, the caravanserai can serve as a tourism hub and be offered to local investors for utilization," the official explained.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Sabet-Eqlidi emphasized that the economic benefits of such a project could encourage local participation. "Establishing a cooperative of local residents to invest and manage the site could be a viable path forward," he added.

Located strategically between Marvdasht and Eqlid, the site boasts easy accessibility, making it an ideal location for investment, he said.

As mentioned by Sabet-Eqlidi, the restoration of the Ma'in Caravanserai is part of a broader initiative to preserve and promote the cultural heritage of Fars province, ensuring that historical sites like this one are preserved for future generations while contributing to the local economy.

Caravanserai or caravansary is a compound word combining "caravan" with "sara"; the former stands for a group of travelers and the latter means the building. They often had massive portals supported by elevated load-bearing walls. Guest rooms were constructed around the courtyard and stables behind them, with doors in the corners of the yard.

For centuries, caravanserais constituted key parts of a rich circuit of travel and trade by providing shelter, food, and water for caravans, pilgrims, and other trekkers. For many travelers, staying in or even visiting a

centuries-old caravanserai can be a broad experience; they have an opportunity to feel the past, a time travel back to a forgotten age.

The earliest caravanserais in Iran were built during the Achaemenid era (550 – 330 BC). Centuries later, when Shah Abbas I assumed power from 1588 to 1629, he ordered the construction of a network of caravanserais across the country. Such roadside inns were once constructed along ancient caravan routes in the Muslim world to shelter people, their goods, and animals. The former Silk Road may be the most famous example, dotted with caravanserais.

Last year, a selection of 54 roadside inns won a UNESCO label under the name: The Persian Caravanserai. The shortlist, however, is only a small percentage of the numerous caravanserais built along the ancient roads of Iran.

## A Christmas miracle? Archaeologists uncover tomb of 'Santa Claus' inspiration Saint Nicholas

Archaeologists have discovered what they believe to be the tomb of Saint Nicholas, the philanthropic Greek bishop and inspiration behind Christmas icon Santa Claus.

The six-foot-long limestone sarcophagus was found buried 6 feet deep within the two-story annex of St. Nicholas Church in Demre, Antalya, Turkey. Long considered the final resting place of the Saint, excavations have been underway here since 1989 – but this latest find is the most intriguing yet.

The project was led by Ebru Fatma Findik, an Associate Professor at Hatay Kemal University, as part of the 'Legacy for the Future Project'.

"The fact we have found a sarcophagus near the church, which is thought to house his tomb, may indicate that this is indeed the sacred area we have been searching for," Findik said. "This is a significant archaeological confirmation of historical

sources regarding the burial place of St Nicholas."

While its location lends credibility to the tomb belonging to Saint Nicholas, the research team are now hoping to find an inscription that might reveal more details about who was inside.

Speaking to Türkiye Today, Findik said: "Our biggest hope is to find an inscription on the sarcophagus. This would help clarify the burial contents and allow us to determine the exact period it dates from."

So far, only the tomb's lid has been completely uncovered, with a small section of the burial chamber visible. The team are planning further excavations in the coming months to find more clues.

Born some time after 260 CE in Myra (now the Demre district of Antalya, Turkey), Saint Nicholas was an early Christian bishop and patron saint of children and sailors. He became idolized for his

kindness and generosity, tales of him giving money to those less fortunate lending themselves to legends of miracle work.

Over time, reverence for the holy figure evolved into the creation of Santa Claus, the jolly bearded present-giver and symbol of western Christmas celebrations. The name Santa Claus came from the Dutch nickname for Saint Nicholas – Sinter Klaas.

Still, very little is actually known about the real Saint Nicholas, except that he was buried in the church named after him following his death around 343 A.D. His actual body's whereabouts have always remained a mystery, however – thought to have been stolen in 1087 and smuggled to the Basilica di San Nicola in Bari, Italy.

While scientific studies have been carried out on these bones, the evidence that they actually belonged to Saint Nicholas remain inconclusive.

(Source: euronews.com)



# IRCS provides volunteer health services in Iraq

TEHRAN – Since the beginning of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20), till December 6, volunteer physicians have provided free health services to over 67,000 individuals in the Iraqi shrine cities of Karbala and Najaf, an official with the Iranian Red Crescent Society (IRCS) has said.

This year, a total of 67,075 pilgrims were visited by general practitioners, and 1,423 others were visited by healthcare professionals. Most of them received outpatient services; 174 individuals were transferred to hospitals in Iraq, the IRCS website quoted Amin-Reza Tabatabaei as saying.

“Some 40 volunteers including general physicians, nurses, medical emergencies, pharmaceutical technicians, and laboratory experts will be dispatched to health facilities in Karbala, and Najaf on December 18,” the official noted.

## IRCS is a top organization

In September, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) project manager, Faisal Mahboob, lauded the capabilities of the Iranian Red Crescent Society (IRCS) as outstanding.

The official said he was really impressed by the capacity and the wide range of activities car-



ried out by the IRCS.

“The International Federation will support the activities of the Iranian Red Crescent Society to commence a new phase of collaboration with the society,” Mahboob added, the IRCS website reported.

In May, Pir-hossein Kolivand, head of the IRCS, said the IRCS is recognized as one of the five prominent societies worldwide thanks to its wide range of activities and great achievements both nationally and internationally.

Referring to health, treatment, and rehabilitation as one of the

parts of the IRCS activities, Kolivand said the IRCS hospitals, pharmacies, and clinics meet the medical and therapeutic needs of thousands of citizens every day.

The IRCS medical centers abroad are reputable worldwide. As a humanitarian organization, the IRCS is trying to alleviate the suffering of the people involved in accidents, emergencies, and conflicts.

“Today, collaborations with knowledge-based firms have resulted in advancements in manufacturing orthoses, prostheses, artificial organs, and new medications, with plans to extend cooperation to rescue and relief ef-

orts as well,” the official noted.

According to a report released by the IFRC on the most important achievements of the Iranian Red Crescent Society during January–December 2023, the IRCS continues to tackle the impacts of climate change, program adaptability, and preparedness efforts that have been triggered by the climate crisis.

In 2023, the Iranian Red Crescent worked on tackling climate change by developing community-level adaptation plans through volunteer initiatives and Helal Houses (community-owned Red Crescent Houses), mobilizing health caravans, and implementing early warning systems for heat waves, droughts, and flash floods.

It raised awareness among local communities and staff about climate change, created culturally appropriate educational materials, and enhanced staff capacity for climate-smart programming, the report said.

Additionally, they significantly improved drought-affected communities' access to clean water and healthcare, as well as their food security and livelihoods.

## Naqadeh wetlands hosting migratory ruddy shelducks

TEHRAN – Large flocks of migratory ruddy shelducks have been observed in Dargah Sangi and Solduz wetlands in Naqadeh county, the northwestern West Azarbaijan province, according to an official with the provincial department of environment.

“Flocks of 1,000 migratory ruddy shelducks have been observed in Dargah Sangi and Solduz wetlands on the southern shores of Lake Urmia,” IRNA quoted Akbar Qaemi as saying.

The ruddy shelduck (*Tadorna ferruginea*) is a member of the family Anatidae the biological family that includes the ducks and most duck-like waterfowl such as the geese and swans. It is a distinctive waterfowl, 58 to 70 cm (23 to 28 inches) in length with a wingspan of 110 to 135 cm (43 to 53 inches).

The official went on to say that the migratory birds have entered the wetland for resting, feeding, and wintering; in case the weather gets colder and the living conditions become harsh, they will continue their migration to the southern areas, the official noted.

Naqadeh county has 17 seasonal and permanent wetlands, which host thousands of migratory and native birds every year. Dargah Sangi, Hasanlu, and Yadgarlu wetlands are among the international wetlands listed under the Ramsar Convention, Qaemi further noted.

The wetlands' plants and vegetation as well as their favorable environmental con-



ditions have placed them among important nesting habitats for aquatic and waterside birds to lay eggs and hatch them, he added.

In addition to migratory birds, the wetlands are hosting native birds such as sandpipers, stilts, gulls, teal birds, coots, herons, and different species of ducks.

### Important stopover for migratory birds

Iran is the most important country in West Asia in terms of housing migratory birds in winter as around two million birds fly each year to spend winter in the country's wetlands, according to an official with the Department of Environment.

Encompassing numerous wetlands, reservoirs, and diverse water bodies, Iran welcomes millions of migratory birds every year.

The country has also emerged as the most important stopover for migratory birds in their flight route from Siberia to the Nile as sixteen percent of them select to spend the winter in the country, ISNA quoted Hassan Akbari as saying.

He made the remarks on the occasion of World Migratory Bird Day which is celebrated on May 11 to raise awareness about the importance of migratory birds and the need to protect them.

A diverse array of migratory birds fly to the country, with more than 160 species of aqua and waterside birds identified in Iran which is a significant number.

Despite limited water resources in the domestic habitats of the country, the study of the migratory bird population trend shows that the abundance and diversity of the birds that enter the country have not decreased. The majority of them have flown to the coastal areas of the Caspian and the Persian Gulf, though.

Iran hosts more than five percent of the world's migratory birds in 450 sites in winter, Akbari said.

“Every year some 30 to 40 million birds are counted all over the world and the related statistics are recorded in the International Waterfowl Census (IWC) database,” he added.

## UHC Day: health is on the government

By Maryam Tavassoli

TEHRAN – On December 12, International Universal Health Coverage (UHC) Day is celebrated annually to raise awareness of the need for strong and resilient health systems and universal health coverage.

UHC is based on the principles of equity, non-discrimination, and the right to health, ensuring that the most marginalized populations are reached and covered, and no one is left behind.

This year's theme, “Health: It's on the government”, underscores the role governments play in ensuring that no one is forced to choose between health care and necessities such as food.

The day also highlights the fact that healthier populations build communities that are more resilient, productive, peaceful, and prosperous. Health for all is a prerequisite to achieving sustainable development goals (SDGs).

Investing in UHC improves equity and social cohesion. It also benefits the national economy by improving health and well-being, increasing workforce participation and productivity, and building resilience in individuals, families, and communities.

On December 12, 2012, the United Nations General Assembly endorsed a resolution urging countries to accelerate progress toward UHC – the idea that everyone, everywhere should have access to quality, affordable health care without risk of financial hardship.

On December 12, 2017, the United Nations proclaimed 12 December as International Universal Health Coverage Day.

Each year on December 12, UHC advocates raise their voices to share the stories of the millions of people still waiting for health, champion what we have achieved so far, call on leaders to make bigger and smarter investments in health, and encourage diverse groups to make commitments to help move the world closer to UHC by 2030.

The COVID-19 pandemic has again shown that UHC and health security are intertwined goals to protect everyone, everywhere, that we achieve through the same health system – in crisis and calm.

For health systems to work, they must work for everyone – no matter who they are, where they live, or how much money they have. Equitable health coverage puts women, children, adolescents, and the most vulnerable first because they face the most significant barriers to essential care.

UHC is embedded in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG target 3.8) and includes the full range of essential health services, spanning health promotion, prevention, and treatment.

In adopting the Sustainable Development Agenda in 2015, heads of state and governments from every country in the world committed to ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being for everyone. They reiterated these commitments in the political declarations adopted during the 2019 and 2023 high-level meetings on universal health coverage.

And yet 4.5 billion people still do not have access to essential health services. What's more, over the last 20 years, financial protection has progressively deteriorated, with 2 billion peo-

ple experiencing financial hardship and 1.3 billion people pushed into poverty due to health spending.

The three dimensions of UHC are population coverage (who receives services, linked to equity), service coverage (what health services are available), and financial protection (ensuring health services do not lead to financial hardship).

### Health coverage for whole population

In Iran, according to an official health ministry, around 33 million out of nearly 44 million insured people are covered by free health services.

More than 142 million visits were made to 50,000 health service centers across the country during the past Iranian calendar year (ended March 20), Emad Mollazadeh said, IRNA reported.

He made the remarks on the occasion of National Health Insurance Week, celebrated from October 21 to 27.

The law for universal health coverage took effect on October 25, 1994.

In this line, different programs are being held annually to get people and health service providers more familiar with the activities and services of the Health Insurance Organization.

Iran's universal public health insurance scheme, known as Salamat Health Insurance, covers hospitalization, para-clinical, and outpatient services, including doctor's visits, radiology, lab tests, and medication costs at any public hospital affiliated with the Ministry of Health.

Iran has taken steps to provide health coverage for the whole population, in addition to the refugees. Even during the outbreak of the coronavirus, the country has provided treatment services and vaccination to foreign nationals just like Iranians.

Some 170,000 refugees residing in Iran are now covered by health insurance, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

Iran has also gone far to establish a Primary Health Care (PHC) system in 1981, now covering a population of approximately 82 million rural and urban residents, which is considered a great step towards universal health coverage, Mohammad Hossein Niknam, Immunologist in Tehran University of Medical Sciences, told the Tehran Times in 2020.

In April, former Health Minister Bahram Einollahi said health is a universal right and responsibility that is not limited to any specific age group, culture, or nationality.

All members of society from their childhood to old age have the right to access high-quality health services without financial worries.

Access to clean drinking water, soil, air, and food is a fundamental right and responsibility.

He went on to say that the family health program and referral system in Iran is one of the most advanced health programs in the world. It aims to enhance everyone's access to health services, promote well-being, and achieve significant welfare objectives.

Launched last year, the program seeks to foster a healthy, vibrant society through national and collective efforts at all levels of society.

## ENGLISH IN USE

### LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

## Excessive use of renewable water in Kerman 'worrysome'

Excessive withdrawal of renewable water, equaling 123 percent of the current volume, in the southeastern province of Kerman, has raised great concerns while posing a serious threat to the life of residents and region's biodiversity.

“Currently, there are 5.5 billion cubic meters of renewable water in Kerman province, but 6.8 billion cubic meters equivalent to 123 percent of renewable water resources is being used,” IRNA quoted Reza Jazinizadeh, the head of Kerman province's department of environment, as saying on Thursday.

In the [13]40s (falling on 1960s), concurrent with the establishment of the Ministry of Energy, renewable water resources measured at 90 million cubic meters, and some 50 million cubic meters out of this amount was withdrawn, Jazinizadeh explained.

## برداشت ۱۲۳ درصد آبهای تجدیدپذیر در کرمان نگران کننده است

مدیرکل حفاظت محیط زیست استان کرمان گفت: برداشت ۱۲۳ درصد از آبهای تجدیدپذیر در این استان که حیات انسانی و جانوری را با تهدید جدی مواجه کرده، نگران کننده است.

وی تصریح کرد: در حال حاضر در استان کرمان ۵.۵ میلیارد متر مکعب آب تجدیدپذیر داریم که ۶.۸ میلیارد مترمکعب معادل ۱۲۳ درصد آبهای تجدید پذیر برداشت و مورد استفاده قرار می گیرد. رضا جزینی زاده روز پنجشنبه در گفت و گو با خبرنگار ایرنا افزود: در دهه ۱۳۴۰ با تشکیل وزارت نیرو در کشور میزان برداشت آب از سفره های زیرزمینی مورد بررسی قرار گرفت و مشخص شد که در کشور ۹۰ میلیون مترمکعب آب تجدید پذیر وجود دارد و از این میزان ۵۰ میلیون مترمکعب برداشت می شود.



## Rescue forces getting ready for winter

Law enforcement and rescue forces launched a drill in Tehran on Tuesday to show preparedness for offering services to people during winter accidents.

Some other provinces also held such drills to improve road safety in winter conditions.





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## GUIDE TO SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

Seek sustenance through alms-giving.  
**Imam Ali (AS)**

Prayer Times » Noon:11:58 Evening: 17:12 Dawn: 5:36 (tomorrow) Sunrise: 7:06 (tomorrow)

## Egyptian artist's murals depict solidarity with Palestine

On the walls of the 1,000-year-old neighborhood Al-Khalifa, tucked indiscriminately into a corner of Cairo, Egypt, are murals depicting solidarity with the Palestinian people.

Al-Khalifa is known for its religious and historical significance; the existence of the murals painted by artist Mohamed Moataz is an expression of the Egyptian people's sense of unity with the Arab community, Upmag reported.

Despite the government's ban on public protesting, Egyptians have turned out in numbers to rally their support for the Palestinians in Gaza. The Israeli war against Gaza has continued since October 7, 2023 when Hamas launched an attack on Israel. The subsequent war has resulted in the deaths of over 44,000 Palestinian civilians, according to the Gaza Health Ministry, and the death toll is still climbing, with impending imminent famine threatening further lives.

As the Israeli government continues its bombing of Gaza, including self-declared safe zones, hundreds of thousands of displaced people are crowding into the southern city of Rafah, which borders Egypt. With the looming threat of Israel's ground offensive in Rafah and without clear plans for the evacuation of the displaced Palestinians, the situation continues to escalate. Despite the desperate need for humanitarian aid and the growing concerns surrounding the health and safety of the Palestinians in Rafah, the Egyptian government has opposed allowing refugees to enter the Sinai Peninsula. Mass protests have been continuing across the globe in support of Gaza and condemnation of Israel's actions in the region and their attacks on hospitals and schools under the guise of self-defense.

The murals painted by 26-year-old Moataz include depictions of the Palestinian flag standing erect behind the Dome of the Rock,

a gold-domed Islamic shrine in Jerusalem, and a face shrouded in a Palestinian keffiyeh, peering through the recognizable outline of a map of Palestine.

"I started drawing to express my feelings towards the Palestinians," Moataz said. "The urge started when I watched videos of children in Gaza. I felt I should support them even if it's only with my drawings."

Graffiti has long been a tool for the oppressed to speak out against the world's injustices, a way for civilians to feel a little less helpless in the face of tyrannous aggressors. Moataz, who has been creating street art for five years, wields his paint to amplify the Palestinians' voices, whose plight has been muted by Eastern and Western media for over 75 years.

"These children have dreams and goals that they want to achieve and should have this right," he said. "I hope all the dreams of Gaza's children come true, even the small ones."

The desire and right for Palestinians to return to the homes they were forced out of at the beginning of the war will likely never come to fruition. The amount of damage Israeli air strikes have done to the already limited infrastructure in Gaza has left 85% of its 2.3 million inhabitants displaced. There are no homes to return to.

One of Moataz's murals in old Cairo is a simple, large Palestinian flag standing two meters tall. Another is of a raised fist rising from a pool of water in the colors of the flag; across his works are the words "Save Gaza" and "Free Palestine." His paintings are in a dilapidated little street, with crumbling steps and stray dogs everywhere. The emotion they evoke is that of hope but also sadness, as civilians worldwide wonder what they can do to encourage a ceasefire.

## Cartoon of Day



Israel is taking advantage of the situation in Syria  
Cartoonist: **Sanouni Imad from Morocco**

# Iran calls for strengthening cultural diplomacy through BRICS national libraries

TEHRAN-National libraries can play a key role in cultural diplomacy by strengthening cultural and scientific relations between nations, Gholamreza Amirkhani, the head of the National Library and Archives of Iran (NLAI) said at the BRICS National Libraries Summit, which was held in Moscow, Russia, on December 10 and 11.

Referring to the illustrious heritage of the civilizations of BRICS countries, Amirkhani said: "The magnificent cultural, scientific, and artistic legacy of these nations—from ancient Egypt and China's scientific achievements in paper and printing, to India's historic libraries and the precious manuscripts preserved in the libraries of countries such as Turkey, Iran, and the UAE, as well as the rich Islamic heritage in West Asia and Europe—all testify to the leadership of BRICS countries in the realm of books and written human heritage," IRNA reported.

Amirkhani proposed several initiatives to enhance cultural cooperation among BRICS countries. "Holding joint exhibitions and cultural weeks, exchanging scientific and informational resources, and establishing cultural sections in national libraries to introduce and translate national literary texts can be effective steps in enhancing cultural and scientific synergy among BRICS member states," he noted.

He also announced the organization's readiness to host one of the upcoming BRICS summits. He stated: "By leveraging the country's rich cultural and historical heritage, the National Library and Archives of Iran is prepared



The head of the National Library and Archives of Iran Gholamreza Amirkhani speaks at the BRICS National Libraries Summit, held in Moscow, on Wednesday.

to take a pioneering and effective role in implementing joint cultural, scientific, and informational projects at the international level, thereby contributing to sustainable and impactful cooperation among BRICS member countries."

Amirkhani presented proposals for expanding cultural cooperation among BRICS countries and said: "Holding joint exhibitions and cultural weeks, exchanging scientific and informational resources, and establishing cultural sections in national libraries to introduce and translate national literary texts can be effective steps in enhancing cultural and scientific synergy among BRICS member states".

Amirkhani highlighted the significance of collaboration in preserving and promoting cultural heritage and noted that the shared values and traditions of BRICS nations offer a unique platform for fostering mutual understanding and respect.

The main topic of the BRICS National Library Alliance Summit was the discussion of flagship library projects designed to improve the quality of life in communities and create digital services for readers.

The summit was held with the participation of directors of national libraries from the BRICS countries that joined on January 1, 2024. The program included presentations by the heads of

the National Library and Archive of Iran, the Russian State Library, National Library of Brazil, National Library of India, National Library of China, and National Library of South Africa.

In addition, the BRICS Culture Days opened at the Russian State Library's Center for Oriental Literature within the summit, with an exhibition on calligraphy from the member countries. Master classes and lectures on regional studies were also planned.

The NLAI is an educational, research, scientific, and service institute in Iran. It is the largest library in the West Asia and includes more than 15 million items in its collections.

## Persian poetry night held in Moscow

TEHRAN- A Persian poetry night was held at the BRICS+ Information and Cultural Media Centre in Moscow on Monday.

The event was organized by the TV BRICS International Media Network, in collaboration with Iran's cultural attaché's office in Russia, and the All-Russian State Library for Foreign Literature named after M. I. Rudominov.

The event featured a rich program, including a video presentation highlighting Iran's cultural landscape, alongside lectures and master classes focused on Persian literature, music, and translation. Attendees had the pleasure of experiencing readings of the works of the renowned medieval poet Saadi, specifically from his masterpieces "Bustan" (The Orchard) and the "Gulistan" (The Rose Garden).

Masoud Ahmadvand, Iran's Cultural Attaché in Russia, emphasized the importance of cultural diplomacy in enhancing bilateral relations. "Cultural interaction serves as the foundation for fostering partnerships in other areas."

"Russia and Iran have been nurturing their relations within the BRICS framework for some time now. Events like the evening of Persian poetry play a pivotal role in deepening the understanding between our peoples," he stated.

Maria Gen, Head of the Persian Language Centre of Iran's Cultural Attaché Office and lecturer at Moscow State Linguistic University (MSLU), underscored Tehran's commitment to promoting Iranian culture abroad. "Familiarity with a neighboring culture can reveal so much about the people themselves, enabling connections even without a shared language."

"It is vital that we take steps to introduce Russians to Iran. The Iranian Cultural Centre is actively promoting the Persian language and showcasing our cultural treasures," she noted.

Aleksandra Burman, Head of the South Asia and Middle East Department at TV BRICS, highlighted the media network's role in fortifying Russian-Iranian relations. "The evening of Persian poetry at the BRICS+ Media Centre is part of our ongoing efforts to enhance cooperation between Russia and Iran."

"Our aim was to create an event that not only highlights the unique aspects of Iranian culture but also showcases the common values that unite us. TV BRICS is committed to supporting international initiatives in the Russian-Iranian sphere through the screening of national documentaries, media support for significant cultural festivals, and fostering information ex-

change between the media of both nations," she explained.

The event not only celebrated Persian poetry but also reinforced the cultural bonds between Iran and Russia, paving the way for future collaborations in the realm of arts and literature.

Persian poetry is a rich and vibrant literary tradition that dates back over a millennium, celebrating the depth of human experience through its intricate language and profound themes.

Renowned poets like Rumi, Hafez, and Omar Khayyam have left an indelible mark on world literature, exploring love, mysticism, and the beauty of nature in their works.

Persian poetry is characterized by its unique forms, including ghazals and rubaiyat, which employ lyrical elegance and evocative imagery to convey emotion and wisdom. This poetic tradition not only reflects the cultural and historical context of Persian civilization but also serves as a bridge connecting people across different cultures, resonating with universal themes of longing, spirituality, and the quest for truth.

Today, Persian poetry continues to inspire and captivate audiences worldwide, fostering appreciation for its artistic beauty and timeless relevance.

## "Dr. Cook's Garden" to go on stage in Tehran

TEHRAN- An adaptation of the play "Dr. Cook's Garden" by the American novelist and playwright Ira Levin will be staged at Iran-shahr Theater Complex in Tehran on December 17.

Melody Arammia will direct the play, which will remain on stage for one month.

"Dr. Cook's Garden" unfolds in the small town of Greenfield, Vermont, centered around young and idealistic physician James Tennyson, who returns home to work alongside his mentor, Dr. Leonard Cook. Cook, who embodies benevolence and serves as a father figure to Tennyson, seems to offer the young man a chance to start his medical career positively. However, Tennyson's past still looms large; his own father's abusive nature shapes his perception of authority and morality.

Upon his return, Tennyson is ex-

cited to reconnect with his childhood sweetheart, Jane Rausch, but his enthusiasm is soon overshadowed by a growing suspicion regarding Dr. Cook's practices. As he settles into his role, Tennyson learns from Cook's housekeeper, Dora, that Cook is suffering from heart troubles and is in need of an assistant. However, he becomes increasingly alarmed as he notices a disturbing trend—the sudden and mysterious deaths of several of Cook's patients.

Intrigued and unsettled, Tennyson investigates further and discovers a large stockpile of poisons in Cook's medicine cabinet, heightening his alarm. The local constable shares a macabre view, suggesting that the town is blessed because the "nice" citizens have survived while the less desirable have perished, implying an unseen hand at play in the deaths. Tennyson uncovers

a strange code in Cook's files, marked by the letter "R," which coincides with symbols found in the garden, leading him to suspect that Cook is deciding who lives and dies based on their worthiness.

When Tennyson confronts Cook, he is shaken by the doctor's admission of euthanizing what he deems unworthy individuals, including Tennyson's abusive father. Cook rationalizes his actions as altruistic, likening them to a gardener weeding out the undesirable plants. Shocked yet compelled to protect his mentor, Tennyson promises silence in exchange for Cook's retirement from medicine.

However, the confrontation takes a dark turn when Cook tries to poison Tennyson instead. This sparks a deadly struggle between mentor and protégé, culminating in Cook suffering a heart attack.

In a twisted act of final mercy, Tennyson denies Cook his medicine, asserting his own moral stance while symbolically severing the bond that once held them together. The play culminates in the tragic intersection of idealism, morality, and the darker aspects of human nature.

Ira Levin (1929–2007) was a notable American novelist, playwright, and songwriter. His literary contributions include the novels "A Kiss Before Dying" (1953), "Rosemary's Baby" (1967), "The Stepford Wives" (1972), "This Perfect Day" (1970), "The Boys from Brazil" (1976), and "Sliver" (1991).

In addition to his novels, Levin wrote the acclaimed play "Death-trap" (1978). Many of his works have been adapted into successful films. He was honored with the Prometheus Hall of Fame Award and received multiple Edgar Awards for his writing.