



## Funding War with Taxes \$27K Per U.S. Citizen

**U.S. continues to complain about Iran as its military budget outpaces Tehran's alleged spending by 54 times**

▶ Page 3

### President Pezeshkian departs Tehran for D-8 meeting in Egypt

TEHRAN – Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian departed Tehran for Egypt to attend the D-8 summit of developing Muslim nations on Thursday.

Before his departure, Pezeshkian stressed the importance of stronger Islamic unity to counter external threats, saying, "Summits of this level... enabling the exchange of experiences, are highly effective."

He praised Egypt's significant role in the Islamic world, describing it as "a country with a long history and a great civilization which plays an influential role in the Islamic world," and emphasized the need for stronger intra-Islamic relations to counter "enemies' conspiracies."

The trip marks the first visit by an Iranian president to Egypt in over a decade.

### Iran UN envoy tells Europe to end snapback threats or face 'firm response'

TEHRAN – Iran has issued a strong warning to the three European members of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), the E3 (France, Germany, and the UK), against attempting to reinstate sanctions under the deal's "snapback" mechanism.

Iran's UN Ambassador, Amir Saeid Iravani, delivered a forceful address to the UN Security Council on Tuesday, stating unequivocally that any such action would be met with a decisive response. ▶ Page 2

### Is the army chief fit to be Lebanon's president?

By Sondoss Al Asaad

BEIRUT – Coinciding with Trump's return to the White House, Lebanon is awaiting the election of a president on January 9.

Washington is clearly seeking to bring its strategic ally, army commander Joseph Aoun, to the position.

Meanwhile, Hervé Magro, the French ambassador to Beirut, had met with Gebran Bassil, head of the Free Patriotic Movement, who confirmed his support for "electing a candidate who enjoys internal consensus and is in line with international standards."

Reports have been circulated about the Druze majority leader Walid Jumblatt's persistent efforts to convince Nabih Berri, the Speaker of Parliament, to elect Aoun. After meeting with Emmanuel Macron, the French President, Walid Jumblatt informed Berri that the most prominent countries concerned with Lebanon (the US, France, Saudi Arabia and Qatar) are pressing for electing Aoun.

For its part, Saudi Arabia rejects any president who would allow Lebanon to "attack the (Persian) Gulf states," as media reports confirm. As for Qatar, it has sent more than one official to Beirut to push for the election of Major General Elias al-Bissari. During the recent meeting between Aoun and Mohammed bin Abdulaziz bin Saleh Al-Khulaifi,

### Israeli forces assault Gaza hospital

By Wesam Bahrani

TEHRAN – Israeli forces have waged heavy artillery shelling around Kamal Adwan Hospital in the northern Gaza Strip, resulting in fires breaking out inside its intensive care unit (ICU).

The director of Kamal Adwan Hospital, Hossam Abu Safia, painted a grim picture of the devastation caused by what he described as deliberate attacks on the medical facility.

He recounted the shocking moment when vehicles and bulldozers entered the hospital grounds following relentless strikes on nearby civilian homes. "We were shocked to see vehicles and bulldozers entering the hospital's vicinity," Abu Safia said. Gunfire and shelling erupted, leaving staff and patients powerless to respond.

Abu Safia explained that the assault escalated rapidly, with indiscriminate weapons fire targeting the hospital. He emphasized that the ICU was deliberately attacked, stating, "The occupation deliberately targeted the ICU by directing gunfire at it."

Amid the chaos, hospital staff worked frantically to evacuate critically ill patients. "We miraculously managed to evacuate patients who were on ventilators from the ICU before it caught fire," he said. He underscored the facility's critical role, adding, "It's the only ICU in northern Gaza."

### Captive crisis: Israeli PM facing mounting pressure

By Shahrokh Saei

TEHRAN – Pressure is building up on Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu over his failure to return captives held in the Gaza Strip.

Since the early stages of Israel's war on Gaza, Israelis have regularly held protests calling for a ceasefire with Hamas to ensure the release of the captives.

On Wednesday, thousands of middle school and high school students staged a walkout across Israel to vent their anger at Netanyahu's inability to bring them back 14 months after the start of the Gaza conflict.

The walkouts were organized by student councils, with approximately 200 schools across Israel participating.

They demanded that the Netanyahu cabinet finalize a ceasefire deal with Hamas.

More than 1,100 people were killed and about 250 others were taken captive when Hamas carried out a surprise military attack in southern Israel on October 7, 2023. The attack dubbed AL-Aqsa Storm Operation was followed by Israel's genocidal war on Gaza which has so far claimed the lives of more than 45,000 Palestinians including 17,000 children.

▶ Page 5

### 'You are not a politician': Iran rebukes Grossi for unprofessional remarks on nuclear program

TEHRAN – Iranian officials have sharply criticized IAEA Director General Rafael Grossi's recent assessment of Iran's nuclear program, with several key figures directly addressing his claims.

Grossi, in an interview with ANSA, stated that Iran's uranium enrichment capabilities are nearing weapons-grade levels, asserting that, "Iran is enriching uranium close to military levels and is rapidly moving towards becoming a nuclear state," and further declaring that "The JCPOA is no longer relevant and a new understanding is needed to take into account the realities of Iran's nuclear program."

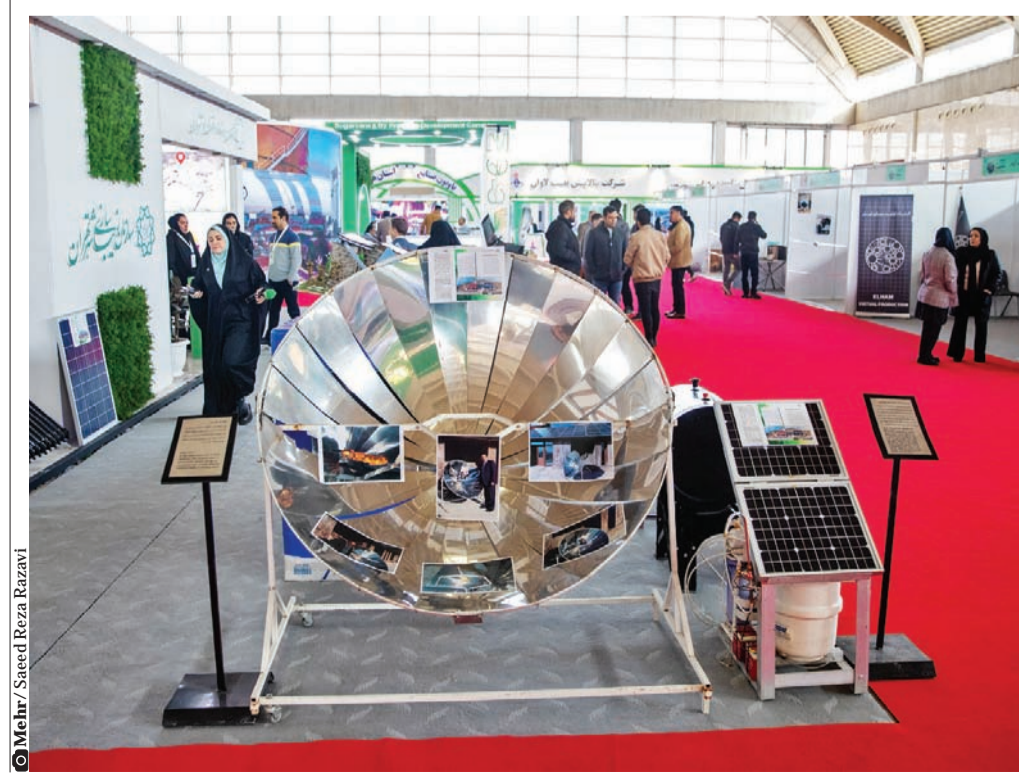
These remarks prompted a swift response from Tehran. Mohammad Eslami, head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI), called upon the IAEA to maintain its impartiality, emphasizing the need to consider the non-compliance of other parties to the 2015 nuclear deal (JCPOA) before pointing the finger of blame at Iran. ▶ Page 2

### Iranian short animation, Palestinian feature film make it to 2025 Oscars shortlists

TEHRAN – A short animation from Iran and a feature film from Palestine have found their way into the shortlist of their respected category for the upcoming 97th Oscars ceremony.

According to the announcement by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, the Iranian short animation "In the Shadow of the Cypress" directed by Hossein Molayemi and Shirin Sohani is among the 15 animated short films and "From Ground Zero" from Palestine is present in the shortlist of international feature category, ILNA reported.

"In the Shadow of the Cypress" is a complex story of family relationships. When the distance grows between the characters, an unexpected event brings them together again in an exceptionally beautifully written and illustrated way. ▶ Page 8



### Intl. environmental exhibition kicks off

TEHRAN – The 22nd international environmental exhibition started on Wednesday in Tehran with the theme of 'public involvement, green economy, sustainable future'.

The five-day event will focus on 'economic environment, environmental economy', to highlight the importance of social responsibility in protecting the environment.

The exhibition aims to raise public awareness about environmental issues, provide an opportunity for the exchange of knowledge and experiences among experts, specialists, and environmental activists, and introduce and encourage the use of innovative solutions and advanced technologies to reduce fuel and energy consumption.

The event also seeks to persuade industries, mining, and petrochemical units to support the preservation of plant and animal species and encourage them to take steps toward enhancing air quality.

### Iran's energy imbalance: challenges and solutions

By Ebrahim Fallahi

TEHRAN – Iran is tackling with significant energy imbalances as cold weather drives up demand, exacerbating fuel shortages and straining the country's power plants. The government has responded with systematic power outages across several provinces, highlighting deep-rooted challenges in the country's energy infrastructure.

#### Rising demand, fuel shortages strain power supply

As temperatures plummet during the winter months, energy consumption has surged, placing immense pressure on the country's electricity grid. Natural gas, which supplies a majority of Iran's power plants, is in short supply as residential heating demands take precedence over industrial and power generation needs. ▶ Page 4



## TEHRAN PAPERS

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

## Grossi repeated claims about JCPOA

In a note, Farhikhtegan discussed the repeated claims of Grossi, Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency, against Iran and said: Grossi claimed, "The philosophy of the initial JCPOA agreement can be used as a basis, but the agreement itself is no longer necessary". After taking office, the Democratic Joe Biden administration condemned the unilateral action of the former president of his country for quitting Iran's nuclear deal with the 5+1 group. However, Biden has continued the maximum pressure policies of his predecessor, Donald Trump. In fact, experience has shown that despite the claims of prioritizing diplomacy, the White House does not have the necessary will to decide to return to the JCPOA and compensate for the failed policy of Trump's administration against Iran. According to Foreign Minister Seyyed Abbas Araghchi, JCPOA can no longer be revived in its current form, and parts of it must be reformed and new negotiations must be held. Since reforming the 2015 nuclear agreement will not be an easy task, the Islamic Republic of Iran will make every effort in this field.

## Hamshahri: Turkey's reasons for backing terror groups in Syria

In an interview with Ehsan Movahedian, an expert on Caucasus issues, Hamshahri dealt with Turkey's support for the HTS and other armed groups in Syria. He said: One of the reasons for Turkey's support for terrorist groups in Syria was to deal a blow to the Axis of Resistance. Turkey believed that if the sensitive and transit routes of Syria, which connect Iran to Iraq and then to Syria and Lebanon, are cut Iran will no longer have land access to Lebanon and, therefore, the economic corridors connecting Iran to Syria and Lebanon will be closed. Iran was interested in creating a transit corridor from its southern ports to Iraq and then to Latakia port. However, with the recent events in Syria, the possibility of establishing such a corridor will decrease. Another reason for Turkey's military movements in Syria is to gain concessions from Russia in the Caucasus and to get concessions from Iran. Also, with these military movements, Turkey will have the upper hand in normalizing relations with the Zionist re-

## Zarif, China envoy discuss bilateral ties, implementation of 25-year cooperation agreement



TEHRAN – In a meeting held on Wednesday, Iran's Vice President for Strategic Affairs Mohammad Javad Zarif, and the Chinese Ambassador to Iran, Zong Piyu, underscored the importance of operationalizing the comprehensive 25-year strategic partnership between the two nations.

The discussions highlighted the necessity of establishing concrete agreements that would enhance cooperation across various sectors, particularly in clean industries and renewable energy initiatives. Zarif emphasized that these operational agreements are vital for translating the ambitious goals of the 25-year plan into actionable projects that can benefit both countries.

The 25-year cooperation agreement between Iran and China is a comprehensive strategic partnership signed in 2021 which mainly focuses on economic and security cooperation. While the exact details haven't been publicly

gime after a cease-fire in Gaza.

## Ettelaat: BRICS challenges the dollar

In a commentary, Ettelaat addressed the issue of BRICS and its moves to set aside the dollar in international trade. It wrote: The countries that make up BRICS are an informal group of emerging economies that hope to increase their influence in the new world order. For more than a decade, the BRICS countries have sought to reduce the dominance of the U.S. dollar in international trade. However, pessimists say these ambitions are not achievable. Iran has long believed in the emergence of a multipolar world and wants to challenge the world order led by the United States. Therefore, Iran considers BRICS a tool for its desired new world order. Despite Iran's membership in regional organizations such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the Eurasian Economic Union, and BRICS, the issue of the devaluation of national currency against the dollar has not yet been resolved. This is a long process related to the process of improving the economic-political structure, which is hoped to be achieved in the not-so-distant future.

## Etemad: Iran will protect its interests in Syria

In an explanation, Etemad addressed the current situation in Syria and Iran's approach toward the ongoing developments in the country. The paper said: Foreign publications claim that Iran will probably interact with the new leaders of Syria to ensure its basic security interests. Some security experts analyze that this approach may be part of the efforts to form a new consensus with the aim of a common understanding of the threats related to Israel. In this regard, it is also speculated that the expansion of Israel's occupation in Syria may end up in Iran's favor over time, because in this case, Tehran will probably try to use the networks of supporters it has built over the decades to design alternative logistical routes through Syria. Iran may also eventually conclude that establishing a relationship with groups such as the Syrian Kurds can help the country reduce Turkish influence and, at the same time, create pressure on the new rulers of Damascus.

released in their entirety, it's understood to encompass several key areas including energy cooperation, technology transfer, trade expansion, and investment in Iran's infrastructure.

For his part, Ambassador Zong presented a report detailing the achievements in bilateral relations over recent years, reaffirming the Chinese government's commitment to deepening ties with Iran. He stated that Beijing places significant importance on its relationship with Tehran and expressed the need for enhanced political consultations in light of evolving regional and global dynamics.

The meeting also addressed pressing regional issues, particularly the situation in Syria. Both officials expressed concerns over the rising threat of terrorism and extremist movements in the region, advocating for collaborative efforts to promote peace and stability.

## 'Stability in Iraq important to Iran'

In a separate meeting, Zarif sat down with Mohamed Al Hassan, the UN Special Representative for Iraq, in Tehran.

The Iranian vice president stressed the importance of Iraq's development and stability, highlighting the significance of regional cooperation and UN support in achieving these goals. He also emphasized the need to strengthen Iran-UNAMI collaboration.

Al Hassan briefed Zarif on the situation in Iraq and UNAMI's activities, and the two discussed broader regional issues, including the situations in Palestine and Syria, and their impact on West Asia.

## Araghchi calls for D-8 action against Israeli aggression in Gaza, Lebanon, Syria

TEHRAN – The 21st Session of the D-8 Council of Ministers convened amidst the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Gaza, Lebanon, and Syria, resulting from Israeli aggression.

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi delivered a strong statement emphasizing the D-8's unwavering commitment to supporting Palestine and Lebanon. He highlighted the organization's swift condemnation of Israel's ongoing war in Gaza which began in October of 2023, followed by a special ministerial meeting in Istanbul in June 2024, and the upcoming special summit focused on Palestine and Lebanon.

Araghchi underscored the international community's failure to hold Israel accountable, attributing this to the U.S.'s support of the Israeli regime. He stated, "The international community has embarrassingly failed to stop acts of aggression, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide by the Zionist regime. This is largely attributed to the political, military, intelligence, and financial support by the U.S. administration to Israel."

The upcoming summit, he emphasized, should send a powerful message demanding an immediate end to Israeli aggression in Gaza, Lebanon, and Syria, holding Israel and its allies accountable. He also called for a permanent ceasefire in Gaza, unhindered humanitarian access, realization of Palestinian



self-determination, prevention of land annexation, immediate Israeli withdrawal from occupied territories, and D-8 support for Palestine and Lebanon to overcome the challenges caused by the conflict.

While acknowledging the draft Cairo Declaration outlining enhanced D-8 cooperation, Araghchi stressed the need for greater economic resilience among member states in the face of future shocks, particularly considering the opportunities and challenges presented by new technologies.

He concluded by expressing his appreciation for the efforts of the D-8 Secretary General and his team in organizing the summit.

## Bilateral meetings

The Iranian Foreign Minister held separate bilateral meetings on the

sidelines of the D-8 summit in Cairo, focusing on strengthening relationships with key partners amidst escalating regional tensions.

In a meeting with Malaysia's Minister of Higher Education, Abdul Qadir Zambri, Araghchi emphasized the long-standing friendship between Iran and Malaysia, highlighting Iran's scientific and technological advancements despite Western sanctions.

He expressed optimism for enhanced cooperation in technology, science, culture, industry, and commerce, stating, "The D-8 summit comes at a critical time for regional developments, making it vital for major Islamic countries to unite and synergize efforts against the aggressions faced by Gaza, Lebanon, and Syria." Zambri echoed this sentiment, empha-

sizing Malaysia's commitment to closer ties with Iran, particularly in education, and its support for the Palestinian cause.

Both ministers expressed hope for the successful implementation of existing agreements through the Joint Economic Commission.

Separately, Araghchi met with Pakistan's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Muhammad Ishaq Dar to discuss the escalating situation in Gaza, Lebanon, and Syria. Araghchi condemned the Israeli regime's actions, blaming the U.S. and Western nations for providing comprehensive support to Israel.

He stated, "We are witnessing the aggressive Israeli regime destroying the defensive and economic infrastructure of Syria while continuing its crimes in Gaza and Lebanon," and expressed concern about a potential U.S. and Israeli design to divide and weaken Islamic countries, potentially leading to a resurgence of ISIS.

Dar, in response, praised Iran's hosting of the recent ECO summit and reiterated Pakistan's condemnation of Israeli aggression, calling for greater cooperation among Islamic nations. He asserted, "We must strengthen our consultations to collectively condemn these aggressions and support the people of Palestine, Lebanon, and Syria."

## Iran UN envoy tells Europe to end snapback threats or face 'firm response'

From page 1 ▶ "Iran categorically rejects any threats of invoking the so-called 'snapback,' by E3 – an action that would be both unlawful and counterproductive," Iravani declared. He further emphasized the gravity of the situation, stating, "Let's make it clear once and for all: the so-called 'Snapback' is not a tool in your hand to be abused for threatening Iran. Iran has made it very clear that such a provocative move will be reciprocated by a firm and proportionate response."

Iravani highlighted that Iran's own scaling back of JCPOA commitments stemmed from the West's failure to uphold its end of the bargain. "Iran's decision to walk back on some of its JCPOA commitments was a response to the West's bad promises," he explained. He maintained that Iran remains committed to cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) within its obligations. He urged a change in approach, saying, "The Iranian diplomat urged the E3 and the US to abandon confrontational approaches and demonstrate a true commitment to diplomacy."

He directly addressed the root cause of the current impasse, blaming the U.S. withdrawal from the deal and the subsequent failure of the E3 to fulfill their commitments. "The root cause of the impasse facing the JCPOA is the unilateral withdrawal of the U.S., and the E3's failure to honor their commitments under the accord," Iravani asserted. He added, "Iran has consistently acted in good faith to uphold the environment for the revival of the JCPOA, even after the United States' withdrawal and E3's persistence of violating their commitments."

Iravani also criticized the attempts to link Iran's nuclear program to regional issues, arguing that the real threats to regional stability stem from elsewhere. He stated, "Instead of diverting at-



tention to fabricated threats, the United States, France, and the United Kingdom, as permanent members of the Security Council must allow this Council to live up to its responsibility and address and confront the genuine sources of insecurity and instability in our region: the Israeli regime's illicit nuclear weapons arsenal, its decades of aggression and occupation, and its ongoing campaign of systematic war crimes, crimes against humanity and acts of genocide against the Palestinian people in Gaza."

He further condemned Israel's actions in Syria and Lebanon, declaring, "Further, Israel's relentless aggression and atrocious crimes against Syria and Lebanon underscore its role as the primary driver of violence and instability in the region."

The envoy concluded by highlighting Iran's commitment to negotiations but lamented the lack of good faith from the other parties: "Iran engaged

in the Vienna talks in good faith, showing utmost flexibility to achieve a balanced and mutually beneficial agreement. Unfortunately, the unrealistic demands of the E3 and the United States, their lack of political will, domestic political considerations, and attempts to tie the negotiations to unrelated issues ultimately failed the efforts to revive the deal. Blaming Iran for the failure to conclude the negotiations is both unjust and factually incorrect."

Ambassadors of China and Russia echoed Iravani's sentiments, stating that Washington, as the main culprit in the JCPOA crisis, should refrain from its maximum pressure measures and show its good faith toward Iran. They also called on European signatories to the deal to refrain from blackmailing Tehran through the snapback mechanism.

## 'You are not a politician': Iran rebukes Grossi for unprofessional remarks on nuclear program



From page 1 ▶ Esلمي stated, "This international institution has to preserve its impartiality and adopt a professional behavior. It is not acceptable for an international institution to address just one aspect of the issue, in a provocative manner at

that, and refuse to point to the main aspect, which is the obligated parties' non-commitment."

He further highlighted the agreement's reciprocal nature, stating, "This resolution is of two parts, which address the acceptance of [certain] restrictions on the part of Iran towards building up trust in exchange for the elimination of the [illegal] sanctions [that have been imposed on the country] and implementation of the other parties' commitments." Esلمي urged the parties to fulfill their contractual obligations and remove sanctions.

Iran did not begin to scale back on some of its JCPOA commitments until 2020, almost two years after

Washington withdrew from the deal and reimposed sanctions against the West Asian country. Tehran's incentive for joining the nuclear deal in 2015 was sanctions relief.

Separately, Kazem Gharibabadi, Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister for Legal and International Affairs, took to X to directly refute Grossi's claims.

He countered Grossi's assessment, stating, "First, the Director General of a specialized organization is expected to speak based on facts and technical reports from the Agency's inspectors. Reading intentions based on hypothetical scenarios is not part of the Director General's duties and is contrary to the letter and spirit of the Agency's statute."

Gharibabadi highlighted that Iran's nuclear program is entirely peaceful and operates under IAEA safeguards, stating, "Second, the development of Iran's nuclear program is in line with technical needs and is being carried out fully under the Agency's safeguards supervision." He also addressed the issue of enrichment levels, clarifying, "Fourth, Iran's enrichment program has no military objectives. Regarding the level of enrichment, it should also be noted that enrichment is not restricted under the Non-Proliferation Treaty as long as it is under the supervision of the Agency and does not deviate from peaceful purposes."

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



# Funding war with taxes \$27K per U.S. citizen

## U.S. continues to complain about Iran as its military budget outpaces Tehran's alleged spending by 54 times

By Soheila Zarfam

TEHRAN – The criticism pointed at Iran in recent years for the country's financial commitment to supporting its allies in West Asia has been substantial.

Western media has specifically criticized Iran for its involvement in the Syrian Civil War, with unfounded reports claiming that the country allocated between \$30 to \$50 billion to support Bashar al-Assad's government between 2011 and 2020.

However, the accuracy of these figures is questionable, as they lack reliable sources and are far above the estimated budget allocated by Iran for its foreign policy.

Additionally, a while back, The Times published an exclusive report wherein it supposedly disclosed that the Iranian government provided \$222 million in financial support to the Palestinian Resistance group Hamas between 2014 and 2020—a revelation that further calls into question the inflated claims about Iran's foreign spending, as the numbers reported by Western media simply do not add up when compared to the actual amounts Iran has allocated to its various foreign commitments.

Western critics argue that such spending, given Iran's domestic economic struggles, is a waste of resources that could be better spent addressing pressing issues at home.

Yet, this criticism overlooks the far larger financial commitments made by the United States in its global military interventions.

While Iran's alleged spending is only a fraction of what the U.S. has invested in wars around the world, the narrative often portrays Iran's financial strategy as reckless, ignoring the much greater damage caused by U.S. military overreach.

Iran's involvement in Syria is often framed by the Western media as an unsustainable drain on the country's resources. The alleged \$30 to \$50 billion allocated to support Assad, when divided among the estimated 83 million Iranian citizens, amounts to roughly \$361 to \$602 per person. This expenditure, even if true, pales in comparison to the financial burden carried by U.S. citizens due to their country's military interventions.

Furthermore, the funds spent by Iran in Syria represent a regional commitment to maintaining influence and countering external threats, in line with its strategic interests in West Asia.

The U.S., however, has spent an estimated \$8 trillion on wars since the 9/11 attacks, engaging in conflicts in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, and beyond. This amount, according to research from Brown University's Watson Institute in the year 2022, includes direct war appropriations, the Pentagon's increased budget, veterans' care, and interest payments on borrowed funds.



### US overreach and its regional consequences

Despite the immense sums spent by the U.S. on wars in West and Central Asia, the results have been widely regarded as failures.

U.S. President Donald Trump, during a campaign rally in Laconia on January 22, 2024, criticized the outcome of the U.S. military's post-9/11 interventions: "We spent 9 trillion dollars, killed millions of people... and what did we accomplish? Nothing! All we have is death and blood."

If we break these figures down, this amounts to about \$27,000 per U.S. citizen—almost 54 times more per person than the average in Iran's alleged budget, which is about \$480 per person.

These remarks reflect the growing disillusionment within the American public, as years of military engagement have often led to increased instability and the rise of extremist groups like Daesh. The human cost has been staggering, with tens of thousands of U.S. soldiers and millions of civilians from the intervened regions losing their lives.

Moreover, the U.S.'s military overreach has drained national resources that could have been used to address domestic issues. The \$8 trillion spent on war has meant fewer investments in critical sectors like healthcare, education, and infrastructure, all of which are in desperate need of funding.

While the U.S. military-industrial complex continues to profit, working-class Americans are left to bear the brunt of the financial burden, through higher taxes and reduced public services.

When comparing the cost of war on citizens, the contrast between the U.S. and Iran is striking. For U.S. citizens, the financial burden of these wars has been far more severe, with billions of dollars diverted from domestic needs into foreign military ventures.

The U.S. military budget is enormous, yet the benefits to American citizens are far from clear. While some argue that U.S. military presence abroad is meant to ensure na-

tional security, many see these interventions as futile, especially when the costs far exceed the results.

The billions spent on these wars could have been used to address pressing domestic issues, such as healthcare reform, education, and improving infrastructure. Instead, these resources have been squandered in conflicts where the U.S. has often had little direct stake.

In contrast, Iran's spending is part of a broader regional strategy. The Iranian government has always highlighted its support for Assad as a necessary measure to protect its national security and counter external threats, particularly from Western-backed forces in the region.

Iran's commitment to Syria is not a reflection of imperial ambitions but rather a strategic decision based on its security interests.

### A narrative of hypocrisy

The narrative that often emerges in Western media is one of hypocrisy. While Iran's relatively low regional spending is frequently criticized as an unsustainable drain on its resources, the U.S. continues to engage in costly and destructive military interventions that span the globe.

Despite spending far more and achieving little in terms of concrete results, the U.S. is often portrayed as a benevolent force seeking to promote democracy and stability, while Iran is painted as a rogue state wasting its resources on foreign conflicts.

This double standard overlooks the fact that U.S. interventions have often led to chaos and instability, empowering extremist groups and creating long-term consequences that continue to affect the global order.

Iran's military spending, on the other hand, is far more targeted, aimed at preserving regional stability and countering external threats. While the U.S. has caused significant harm through its military overreach, Iran's actions are a defensive measure to protect its sovereignty and influence.

## Pezeshkian announces comprehensive plan for Makran development



TEHRAN – Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian announced a major initiative to develop Iran's Makran coast, stating that necessary coordination has been made to employ top international consultants to prepare a comprehensive plan and roadmap for the development of the Makran region.

Speaking at a cabinet meeting on Wednesday, Pezeshkian emphasized the need to catch up with neighboring countries in exploiting the Makran coast's potential, aiming to "achieve a superior position in the region in line with the goals of the 20-

Year Vision Document."

He highlighted the lack of a previous overarching plan, noting, "We have not had a comprehensive and all-encompassing plan as a roadmap for the development of Makran, and various bodies have taken actions based on their missions and responsibilities in this regard."

Pezeshkian described the Makran coast as "the most important foundation for sustainable and long-term development in Iran," asserting that the country's future is inextricably linked to its development.

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

## Operation True Promise III will certainly be carried out: IRGC commander



TEHRAN – A high-ranking Islamic Revolution Guard Corps (IRGC) commander said Iran will certainly retaliate against Israel for an October attack on Iranian soil which, though failing to achieve its objectives, took the lives of five Iranians.

Speaking at a Wednesday ceremony in Tehran, The IRGC's Deputy Commander Brigadier General Ali Fadavi said people have been questioning military officials about whether Operation True Promise III will be carried out. "People must take into account that since its establishment, the IRGC has fulfilled

all its promises. Operation True Promise III will be carried out at the right time," he declared.

Israeli warplanes fired ballistic missiles at Iran's military installations from Iraqi airspace on October 26. While the regime itself has not said much about the attack, analysts suggest the assault was a multi-phased operation, significantly hampered by Iran's effective air defenses which prevented Israeli jets from penetrating Iranian airspace.

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

### Vinicius Junior wins FIFA Best award

TEHRAN – After helping Real Madrid win LaLiga and the Champions League in 2023-2024, the Brazilian was recognized at FIFA's annual awards ceremony in Doha, seeing off competition from Blancos team-mate Jude Bellingham, Manchester City midfielder Rodri, Barcelona wonderkid Lamine Yamal and other nominees.

Rodri narrowly beat Vinicius to the Ballon d'Or almost two months ago, with Madrid describing that decision as "disrespectful" and boycotting the Paris ceremony.

After being overlooked for that prize, Vinicius wrote on X: "I'll do it 10 times if I have to. They're not ready."

In winning FIFA's most prestigious individual award, Vinicius followed in the footsteps of Lionel Messi, who won the prize in 2023, 2022 and 2019, two-time recipients Cristiano Ronaldo and Robert Lewandowski, and 2018 victor Luka Modric.

He scored 24 goals and provided nine assists across all competitions last season, including netting Madrid's second goal in their 2-0 Champions League final victory over Borussia Dortmund.

Fifteen of his goals and five of his assists came in 26 appearances in LaLiga, also creating 31 chances – a tally only bettered by Bellingham (48) and Rodrygo (45) among Madrid players.

Meanwhile, only Savinho (216) and Nico Williams (191) attempted more dribbles than Vinicius' 177 in the Spanish top flight, with the Brazilian completing 36.7 percent of those.

The award, based on a voting period running from August 21, 2023 to August 10, 2024, was decided based on public votes, as well as votes cast by journalists and national team coaches.

Vinicius was also one of five Madrid players, including the now-retired Toni Kroos, to make FIFA's Best Men's XI, alongside Antonio Rudiger, Dani Carvajal and Bellingham.

Aston Villa's Emiliano Martinez – who scooped the FIFA Best Goalkeeper award – was also included, alongside Ruben Dias, William Saliba, Rodri, Yamal and Erling Haaland.

Blancos boss Carlo Ancelotti won the Best Men's Coach award, while Manchester United's Alejandro Garnacho won the Puskas award with his stunning overhead kick against Everton last November.

Real Madrid's squad was already in Qatar ahead of the ceremony, as they gear up for their Intercontinental Cup final against Pachuca.

### Azadi Stadium to reopen on Dec. 29

TEHRAN – Minister sports Ahmad Donyamali has confirmed that the Azadi Stadium will reopen on Dec. 29.

He said that renovation work is progressing and under close oversight to meet the highest international standards.

According to him, the match between Esteghlal and Sepahan in the 2024/25 Iran's Persian Gulf Professional League (PGPL) will be held four days later.

Donyamali said that the renovation has not completed and it will progress in the upcoming months but the stadium is available for the league competition.

### Iran defeat Ukraine at Water Polo World Cup 2025 Division 2

TEHRAN – Iran defeated Ukraine 16-14 in Group A of the Men's Water Polo World Cup 2025, Division 2 on Wednesday.

Team Melli, who had defeated South Africa 21-4 earlier in the day, advanced to the quarterfinals.

The Group Phase consists of four groups of three.

Two teams from Division 2 will qualify for the men's and women's Water Polo World Cup 2025—Super Final, joining the six men's and women's teams that will be eligible through the Division 1 Tournaments.

The FINA 2025 World Aquatics Championships will take place in Singapore from 11 July through 3 Aug. 2025.

The Water Polo World Cup 2025 Division 2 is being held in Istanbul, Turkey from December 18 to 21.

### Sports events in Tehran postponed due to air pollution

TEHRAN – All sports events on Thursday and Friday in Tehran have been postponed due to air pollution.

The decision has been made after attending the emergency meeting between the technical committee of Tehran province football board and the head of the medical committee of the province.

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

According to Tehran's pollution control authority, air quality index (AQI) has reached an unhealthy level.

The football match between Havadar and Nassaji slated for Friday in Tehran has been canceled.



### Sitting volleyball celebration among Top 16 2024 Paralympics photos

TEHRAN – Iran's men's sitting volleyball's celebration after winning the gold medal in the 2024 Paralympic Games has been published among the best photos.

As the old saying goes, a picture is worth a thousand words. These 16 images from the Paris 2024 Paralympic Games tell us so much about the competition, the emotion and jubilation, Paralympic.org wrote.

Iran won their eighth gold in the men's sitting volleyball tournament.



## Iran exports non-oil goods worth \$8.3b to Iraq in 8 months

By Mahnaz Abdi

TEHRAN- Iran exported non-oil commodities valued at \$8.3 billion to Iraq during the first eight months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20-November 20), the head of the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA) announced.

Foroud Asgari said that Iraq was the second top export destination of the Iranian non-oil goods in the mentioned eight months.

Considering Iran's vast export capacity and Iraq's large market for Iranian goods, both sides want to expand the volume of bilateral economic exchanges.

Iran and Iraq have set a target of \$20 billion in annual trade, and businessmen and authorities of both countries are determined to meet that target.

In late May, the head of the Department of Spatial Planning and Regional Planning of the Iranian Planning and Budget Organization (PBO) said that Iran exports some 2,200 products, valued at \$12 billion, to neighboring Iraq annually.

Speaking in a meeting entitled "Reviewing opportunities and challenges of attracting Iraqi investors and strengthening trade relations between the two countries in line with demarcating Iran in the regional value chain", Jafar Hosseini said that Iraq, benefiting from \$85 billion foreign currency reserves, 130 tons of gold reserves, and 147 billion barrels of proven reserves of crude oil, is among the richest countries in West Asia.

He went on to say that Iran's exports to Iraq have increased 15-fold over the past 20 years, rising from about \$600 million in 2003 to more than \$10 billion last (Iranian calendar) year (ended on March 19, 2024).

Currently, Iran exports over 2,200 various types of goods and products to Iraq, he said, adding that more than half of the active Iranian traders are present in the Iraqi market.

Developing the trade infrastructures to facilitate trade between the two countries, encour-

aging traders to invest in Iraq, promoting trade through dispatching and admitting trade delegations and participating in exhibitions of the two countries, etc. are suggested to strengthen the trade and economic relations between Iran and Iraq, he underlined.

In an interview on Tuesday, the ambassador of Iran in Iraq praised the economic relations between the two sides and expressed hope that these relations will be more and better.

Mohammad Kazem Ale-Sadeq announced the value of commercial exchanges between the two countries, and stated that economic relations between Iran and Iraq are very good, and expressed hope that these relations will improve. He said the value of trade between the two sides is approximately 10 to 11 billion dollars.

The envoy further noted: "Iraq is an important country in the region, and we have very important economic, political, and social relations with this neighbor."

In early May, Tehran hosted the 6th meeting of the Iran-Iraq Joint Economic Committee.

The two-day event was co-chaired by the former Iranian Finance and Economic Affairs Minister Ehsan Khandouzi and Iraqi Minister of Commerce Atheer Daoud Al-Ghurairi.

On the first day of the meeting, specialized committees including commercial, industrial, agricultural, standardization and quality control, energy, finance, banking, investment and insurance, shipping, transport, and Customs, scientific, educational, tourism, health, as well as sports consulate held meetings to discuss areas for cooperation.

Increasing non-oil exports to the neighboring countries is one of the major plans that the Iranian government has been pursuing in recent years.

Iran shares land or water borders with 15 countries namely the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Afghanistan, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Iraq, Kuwait, Kazakhstan, Oman, Pakistan, Qatar, Russia, Turkey, Turkmenistan, and Saudi Arabia.

fine projects for more development of the ports and also take some measures to encourage investment making in ports, in addition to facilitating the loading and unloading of goods, especially basic commodities, there.

It is worth mentioning that Iran's Ports and Maritime Organization has defined a high number of projects to develop and improve the country's ports, as the country aims to double the capacity of its ports in five years.

Ports and Maritime Organization has put it on the agenda to attract 300 trillion rials (about \$600 million) of investment from the private sector in the country's ports by the end of the current Iranian calendar year (late March 2025).

As reported by the PMO portal, the mentioned investment is going to be used to develop the infrastructure and operational capacity of the country's ports. Earlier this year, PMO Head Ali-Akbar Safaei said over the past few years the organization has managed to attract nearly \$1.7 billion of foreign and domestic investment in the country's ports and maritime sector.

Speaking in a press conference on July 10, Safaei said some 620 trillion rials (about \$1.24 billion) of domestic investment and \$470 million of foreign investment have been attracted in the mentioned sectors. The attraction of this amount of private sector investment is significant compared to the total budget of the government in the sea and port sectors, he said.

According to the official, regarding the foreign investment, PMO has signed contracts with five countries including India which has so far invested \$120 million in the port sector and \$250 million in the rail, roads and infrastructure sector.

Referring to the growth of maritime trade in the country, Safaei continued: Maritime trade increased from 215 million tons in [the Iranian calendar year] 1401 (2022-2023) to 237 million tons last year (ended on March 19, 2024).

In the first quarter of the current year, 60 million tons of maritime trade was recorded, which shows a 10 percent growth compared to the same period last year, and even a 70 percent growth was recorded in some ports of the Caspian Sea, he added.

# Iran's Energy Imbalance: challenges and solutions

From page 1 ▶ Despite being one of the world's largest producers of natural gas, Iran faces limitations in delivering sufficient fuel to its power plants. Aging infrastructure, inefficiencies in transmission systems, and sanctions that restrict access to modern technology have further complicated the situation.

The Ministry of Energy has acknowledged that many power plants are operating below capacity due to fuel shortages, leading to widespread electricity cuts. Systematic scheduled blackouts have been implemented in major cities and rural areas, affecting businesses, households, and essential services.

**Systematic power outages impact daily life**

In recent weeks, large portions of the country have faced unannounced power outages, disrupting daily routines and business activities. Reports indicate that industries and small enterprises, particularly in energy-intensive sectors such as manufacturing, have suffered production losses.

The outages have sparked public frustration, with concerns about economic repercussions and the impact on hospitals, schools, and households during the harsh winter. Local officials have urged citizens to reduce electricity and gas consumption, yet the imbalances persist.



**Underlying causes of Iran's energy crisis**

The current energy imbalance stems from several interconnected factors:

**Overreliance on Natural Gas:** Iran's heavy dependence on natural gas for both residential and industrial consumption makes the energy system vulnerable during peak demand periods.

**Aging Power Plants:** Many of Iran's power plants are outdated, with low efficiency and high fuel consumption rates. The lack of upgrades has diminished their reliability.

**Sanctions and Investment Shortages:** Sanctions have restricted foreign investment and access to modern energy technologies, hindering the development of renewable energy projects and infrastructure improvements.

**Inefficient Energy Consumption:** Iran's subsidized energy prices have led to high consumption rates, discouraging energy-saving practices among industries and households.

**Pathways to addressing energy imbalances**

To resolve Iran's persistent energy challenges and prevent recurring outages, the government must prioritize comprehensive reforms and strategic investments:

**Expand Renewable Energy Capacity:** Iran has significant potential for solar and wind energy development, particularly in its sun-rich and wind-prone regions. Investing in renewable energy would reduce dependence on natural gas and increase the resilience of the power grid.

**Upgrade Power Plants and Infrastructure:** Modernizing aging power plants to improve efficiency and

fuel consumption rates is essential. Integrating combined-cycle power plants and smart grid technologies can optimize energy output.

**Diversify Energy Sources:** Beyond renewables, exploring alternative fuels such as biomass and hydroelectric energy would diversify the country's energy mix and lower pressure on gas supplies.

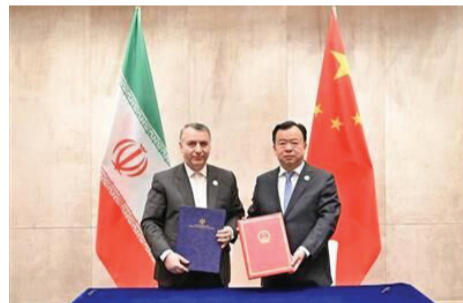
**Enhance Energy Efficiency:** The government should implement policies to reduce energy wastage through incentives for energy-efficient appliances, stricter regulations for industrial consumption, and public awareness campaigns.

**Encourage Private Sector Participation:** Facilitating private and foreign investments in energy infrastructure, particularly through partnerships with knowledge-based companies, can accelerate progress in renewable and efficient energy technologies.

**Conclusion**

Iran's ongoing energy imbalances and the resulting power outages underline the urgency of addressing structural weaknesses in the country's energy sector. While the immediate challenges of fuel shortages and rising winter demand require short-term solutions, a long-term strategy focused on renewables, efficiency, and infrastructure modernization can create a more sustainable and reliable energy future.

## Iran, China sign cooperation MOU on sidelines of Indian Ocean forum



TEHRAN - Iran and China have signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) for development cooperation on the sidelines of the Indian Ocean Rim Development Cooperation Forum.

According to Iran's Ministry of Economy, the third session of the forum was held on December 15-16 in Kunming, Yunnan Province, China, with the participation of officials from more than 20 Indian Ocean rim countries.

Iran was represented by a delegation led by Abolfazl Koudei, Deputy Minister of Economic Affairs and Finance and Head of the Organization for Investment, Economic, and Technical Assistance of Iran.

During the event, Koudei met with the deputy director of China's International Development Cooperation Agency to discuss

enhancing economic exchanges, particularly the implementation of projects in Iran using resources from the South-South Cooperation Fund and China's Global Development Initiative.

The two sides approved the implementation of two projects in Iran, formalized through the signing of the MOU. It was agreed that financing for these projects would be facilitated via the South-South Cooperation Fund and the Global Development Initiative, with the MOU marking the start of their execution phase.

As a keynote speaker at the forum, Koudei outlined bilateral and multilateral cooperation opportunities among Indian Ocean rim countries and China. He proposed joint investments, emphasizing the importance of a maritime economy, blue economy capacities, and new technologies to leverage regional cooperation opportunities and boost trade exchanges.

The Global Development Initiative, alongside other recent Chinese projects such as the Belt and Road Initiative, Digital Silk Road, Health Silk Road, and Global Security Initiative, has provided a platform for regional cooperation and joint projects between Iran, China, and other countries in the region.

On the sidelines of the event, bilateral

meetings were also held with deputy ministers from Pakistan, Bangladesh, Thailand, and officials from the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank to explore cooperation opportunities in the Indo-Pacific region.

Iran and China officially signed the document for 25-year comprehensive cooperation in March 2021.

The document was signed between Iran's former Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi at the Iranian Foreign Ministry.

Back in December 2022, Iran and China finalized 16 MOUs under the framework of the two countries' strategic 25-year agreement.

The MOUs were signed in an Iran-China comprehensive cooperation program summit which was held in Tehran on December 13 in the presence of Iran's former First Vice President Mohammad Mokhber and China's Vice Premier Hu Chunhua.

The summit was focused on four areas explored by four committees between the two countries with the aim of paving the way for the implementation of the 25-year agreement.

Iran and China also signed 20 memoranda of understanding in the presence of the presidents of the two countries in Beijing in mid-February, 2023.

## Developing renewables key to address energy imbalances

TEHRAN - Iran's Deputy Energy Minister for Economic Affairs and Planning Yazdan Rezaei has said expanding renewable energy capacity is essential to address the country's energy imbalances, IRNA reported.

Speaking on Tuesday at an event honoring research and technology achievements in the water and electricity industries, Rezaei emphasized the importance of solar panel production with the support of knowledge-based companies.

The official highlighted the necessity of developing both small and large-scale energy storage systems to optimize renewable energy use. "Knowledge-based companies must focus on localizing technology in this sector," he added.

The deputy minister underscored the importance of ensuring water and electricity security, stressing that smart technologies must be prioritized in these indus-

tries.

Rezaei also pointed to the Ministry of Energy's goals for efficiency optimization and performance enhancement in the water and power sectors, noting that research and development efforts should focus on resolving critical issues.

In mid-November, an official with Iran's Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Organization (SATBA) said that the capacity of Iran's renewable power plants is going to increase by 500 megawatts (MW) by the end of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20, 2025).

"Considering the capacity of the new power plants under construction, the capacity of renewable power plants will increase by 500 megawatts by the end of the current year," Ali Shabnavard, the director general of SATBA's Office for Supervision of Construction and Production of Power Plants said.

This trend shows the serious

determination of the Ministry of Energy and the government to overcome the imbalance of electricity supply and demand by the development of renewable energy in the country, he stressed.

He put the current nominal capacity of the country's renewables at 1,371 MW, adding that just last week 53 MW was added to the capacity of the country's renewable power plants.

Over the past few years, the Iranian government has taken serious measures to accelerate the growth and development of renewable energies in the country.

Diversification of financing models for renewable projects, increasing the ceiling of guaranteed electricity purchase, providing the possibility of buying and selling renewable electricity in the green board of the Iran Energy Exchange (IRENEX), and providing the possibility of exporting renewable electricity have been the most im-

portant measures taken for this purpose.

Iranian Energy Ministry has also put it on the agenda to add 10,000 MW to the capacity of the country's renewable power plants by the end of 2025.

In January 2022, the Energy Ministry and some of the country's private contractors signed memorandums of understanding (MOU) to cooperate in the construction of new renewable power plants across the country.

Iranian renewable power plants generated 264 million kilowatt-hours (Kwh) of electricity in the fifth Iranian calendar month of Mordad (July 22-August 22), registering a 23-percent growth compared to the same month in the previous year.

According to SATBA data, renewable power plants generated over 1280 Kwh of electricity since the beginning of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20).



# Captive crisis: Israeli PM facing mounting pressure

From page 1 ▶ Hamas released more than 100 captives following a temporary truce with Israel in late November last year. Dozens of the captives still remain in Gaza. Several captives were freed following Israel's brutal attacks in Gaza and the rest have died as a result of the regime's strikes on the enclave.

Mediators from the United States, Egypt and Qatar have renewed efforts to conclude a ceasefire in Gaza.

An Israeli delegation has traveled to the region holding talks with the mediators from the three countries.

On Monday, Israel's war minister Israel Katz said a deal is closer than ever.

Hamas has described ceasefire talks that were held in the Qatari capital, Doha, on Tuesday as "serious and positive". The re-



Thousands of students stage a walkout across Israel calling for a ceasefire with Hamas to ensure the release of captives held in Gaza.

sistance movement said reaching a truce was possible if Israel stopped setting new conditions.

Since launching war on Gaza in October last year, Netanyahu has vowed to continue fighting until

defeating Hamas and returning captives but has been unable to deliver on his promises.

Reports say Netanyahu will soon agree to a ceasefire with Hamas.

However, his coalition remains divided over a potential truce.

Far-right Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich has called the potential ceasefire deal a "serious error".

"Hamas is at its lowest point since the beginning of the war, and this is not the time to give it a lifeline," Smotrich told Israeli media as the Israeli army's goal of eliminating the resistance movement remains elusive.

Netanyahu desperately needs a ceasefire with Hamas to pacify domestic protesters who are calling for the return of the remaining captives.

However, a ceasefire and the release of captives may subsequently redirect public focus towards Netanyahu's failure to avert the Al-Aqsa Storm Operation and the existing corruption charges against him.

## Israeli forces assault Gaza hospital

From page 1 ▶ The aftermath of the attack, according to Abu Safia, is catastrophic. The hospital lies in ruins, and staff were left using makeshift tools to extinguish the flames, compounded by a week-long water shortage caused by earlier strikes on water tanks and the local network. "The ICU is out of service, and the situation is disastrous," he confirmed.

Expressing deep frustration, Abu Safia criticized the lack of international action despite months of urgent calls to protect Gaza's healthcare system and its workers. "We had been calling on the world for over 75 days to protect the healthcare system and its workers, but there has been no response," he added.

Meanwhile, reports from the area indicate that several people were killed and others injured in nearby airstrikes on civilian homes.



As the humanitarian situation in Gaza collapses, Kamal Adwan Hospital's plight highlights how the international community's silence has allowed the Israeli occupation to get away with the most heinous of war crimes.

Further reports noted that the occupation carried out heavy shelling on Jabalia and Beit

Lahia in northern Gaza, killing at least 10 Palestinian civilians. Rescue teams are reportedly unable to reach dozens of bodies and injured.

In southeastern Gaza City, Israeli artillery shelled the Zeitoun neighborhood. Meanwhile, occupation forces fired heavily in the direction of the Sudaniya area northwest of Gaza City.

This comes as the Israeli military continues destruction and bulldozing operations in areas south of Gaza City.

The death toll from the U.S.-backed Israeli genocidal war on Gaza since October 7, 2023, has risen to 45,059 and more than 107,041 injured.

Tens of thousands of others are believed to be missing or under the rubble of collapsed buildings.

## Is the army chief fit to be Lebanon's president?

From page 1 ▶ Minister of State at the Qatari Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Qatari side focused only on "the financial and logistical needs of the army." In connection with this, attention is focused on the position of the Sunni MPs who are preparing to hold a meeting entitled "Rejecting support for any president belonging to one party."

Since assuming his position in March 2017, Aoun's relations with the defense ministers have not been good. In June 2018, he struck a deal with the US under which he handed over Lebanese terrorists arrested in eastern Syria. His procedures ignored the simplest legal rules, as the General Security, the Public Prosecutor and the Government Commissioner at the Military Court were not informed of the matter.

Aoun's transgressions continued as he committed to a program based solely on American armament programs while re-

jecting any other arms offer, not only from the Russians and Iranians but even from the French. When he was handed a number of drones, he was subject to non-sovereign conditions, including that they be under the supervision of a special American force stationed at Hamat Airport, which was transformed into a landing strip for American aircraft. A number of American advisors were also allowed to reside in the Ministry of Defense headquarters on a semi-permanent basis.

After the outbreak of the October 2019 events, the army did not stand up to Geagea's supporters who attacked the peaceful protesters in Tayouneh, leading to the murder of 7 citizens.

Besides, Washington prepared files on a number of soldiers and officers who they claimed were affiliated with Hezbollah. It even went so far as to exclude a large number of them from the

financial grant that was provided to the Lebanese army. The biggest scandal emerged when Lebanon's Central Bank agreed to open a special account for the army command in US dollars, only to find out later that it had received tens of millions of dollars from the United States, Qatar, etc.

Aoun took over without obtaining the approval of the Council of Ministers, and even asked to silence those who dared to criticize him, as former US ambassador Dorothy Shea told the Minister of Defense: "These are funds placed at the exclusive disposal of the army commander, and he is free to dispose of them."

There are many things that the article does not have space to address, but the vital questions that beg on the sponsors of democracy in the West and their boys: Which candidate do you nominate as president who violates national sovereignty? Who

does not care about the principle of "separation of powers"? Who turned an official institution into an NGO that begs its funding from abroad after providing the donor with its personnel's data? How will Aoun, who acts as if he is above the law, lead an entire country?

To what extent will he succeed in thwarting the US guardianship that holds all the joints of the army while its boys never stop talking about the "Iranian occupation"?

Aoun and all those who work to implement the US policies all over the world must be aware that Washington is only concerned with preserving its own imperialist interests. It will sell you out as it sold out all its agents, so it is better for the Lebanese to be rational, especially since the situation does not tolerate any stubbornness under any pretext.

## BBC investigation: Facebook has restricted news in Palestinian territories since Oct. 2023

Facebook has severely restricted the ability of Palestinian news outlets to reach an audience during Israel's war on Gaza that began in October last year, according to BBC research.

In a comprehensive analysis of Facebook data, the BBC found that newsrooms in the Palestinian territories - in Gaza and the West Bank - had suffered a steep drop in audience engagement since the start of the war.

The BBC has also seen leaked documents showing that Instagram - another Meta-owned platform - increased its moderation of Palestinian user comments after October 2023.

Meta - the owner of Facebook - says that any implication that it deliberately suppressed particular voices is "unequivocally false".

Since the beginning of Israel's war on Gaza, just a few outside reporters have been allowed to enter the Palestinian coastal territory from the outside, and they were only able to do so escorted by the Israeli army.

Social media has filled the gap for those wanting to hear more voices from inside Gaza. Facebook pages for news outlets such as Palestine TV, Wafa news agency and Palestinian Al-Watan News - which operate out of the West Bank territory - became a vital source of updates for many around the world.

BBC News Arabic compiled engagement data on the Facebook pages of 20 prominent Palestinian-based news organizations in the year leading up to the Gaza conflict in October 2023, and in the year since.

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

## Al Jazeera analysis: Israeli institutions received \$250m from EU despite outrage over Gaza war

As Israel began its war of genocide on Gaza on October 7, 2023, the European Union's position was immediately clear.

"Israel has a right to defend itself - today and in the days to come," European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen posted on X, alongside an image of her office's headquarters lit up with Israel's flag. "The European Union stands with Israel."

Israel has since been placed on trial for genocide at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) at The Hague and its leaders have been indicted by the International Criminal Court (ICC). Yet the EU continues to partner with Israeli institutions under its "Horizon" scheme, a program that funds research and innovation.



Data collected by the European Commission and analyzed by Al Jazeera shows that since October 7 last year, the EU has awarded Israeli institutions more than 238 million euros (\$250m), including 640,000 euros (\$674,000) to Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI), a top aerospace and aviation manufacturer supplying the Israeli army.

## There are reasons to doubt the sincerity of HTS's moderate turn: analysis

TEHRAN - Sam Heller, an analyst and a fellow with Century International, doubts HTS, originally the Syrian vanguard of the Islamic State in Iraq and then al Qaeda's Syrian affiliate, is sincere in its promising statements concerning running Syria in post-Assad Syria.

"There are reasons to doubt the sincerity of HTS's moderate turn," Heller wrote on the Foreign Affairs website on December 16.

The analyst says, "Many in Western media and policy circles now evidently assume that HTS will govern Syria. Yet there are reasons to doubt that things will be that simple."

The following is an edited version of the article headlined "How to Hold Syria Together":

Until Bashar al-Assad fled Syria, on December 8, few countries actually wanted the Syrian government to fall. This was not because foreign governments liked Assad or approved of the way in which he reigned over Syria. Rather, they were afraid of what might replace him: rule by extremist militants, sectarian bloodletting, and chaos that could engulf not just Syria but much of the Middle East.

That fearful vision was also the Assad government's argument for itself, that its continued survival kept anarchy and carnage at bay—and many people, including foreign policymakers, were convinced of it. In 2015, when opposition militants came close to toppling Assad, U.S. officials regarded the possibility of outright rebel victory and regime collapse as tantamount to "catastrophic success."

Now Assad is gone. Syrians are celebrating in the streets of Damascus, opposition groups are attempting to organize a political transition, and the world is about to find out what comes after the fall. But the poor record of Syrian rebel groups when they have ruled significant stretches of territory also makes it difficult to be optimistic.

Still, it is in everyone's interest that Syria succeed. Syrians do not want to endure further strife and devastation, and the international community cannot afford to see Syria come apart. Interested countries now need to do everything they can, including encouraging a peaceful, inclusive transition and providing ample humanitarian and economic assistance, to ensure that the worst fears about a post-Assad Syria do not come to pass.

### The fall of Assad

Between 2015 and 2020, Assad retook most of the country that was under the control of armed groups.

The war then entered an extended stalemate. Turkey secured several remaining opposition-held pockets in Syria's north, while the U.S.-backed Syrian Democratic Forces, or SDF, controlled Syria's east, including the country's most valuable agricultural and petrocarbon resources. Thanks in part to new U.S. sanctions and neighboring Lebanon's economic meltdown, the whole of Syria—but government-held territory most of all—was plunged into a deep economic crisis. Syria's state institutions and military progressively weakened, and the government proved too resource-starved to stabilize and rebuild opposition-held areas it had recaptured.

But this year what remained of Syria's armed opposition seized the opportunity. Hayat Tahrir al-Sham—the Syrian Liberation Group, or HTS—and other opposition factions had been organizing for years in a Turkish-protected bastion in Syria's northwestern province of Idlib. On November 27, these groups launched an offensive on the northern city of Aleppo. When they broke through the Syrian army's defenses and seized the city, that set off the cascading failure and collapse of Syria's military nationwide. HTS-led forces pushed south from Aleppo toward the capital, Damascus, as Syrians in the country's center and south—including in formerly opposition-held areas—also rose up. On December 8, as opposition factions closed in on Damascus from both north and south, Assad

fled to Russia. After more than 13 years of grinding civil war, the Assad government had crumbled in less than two weeks.

Now, in a post-Assad Damascus, HTS has taken the reins in attempting to manage an orderly political transition. HTS has installed the interim Syrian Salvation Government, which it created in Idlib, as a national transitional authority. It has also deployed its security forces in the capital, established checkpoints on key transport nodes across the country, and repeatedly warned triumphant opposition militants against abusing civilians and looting.

### Rebels in charge

Many in Western media and policy circles now evidently assume that HTS will govern Syria. Yet there are reasons to doubt that things will be that simple. Until a few weeks ago, HTS controlled two-thirds of a province on Syria's rural periphery. Running all of Syria will present a different challenge.

HTS is the latest incarnation of the al-Nusra Front, originally the Syrian vanguard of the Islamic State in Iraq and then al Qaeda's Syrian affiliate. The group publicly broke ties with al Qaeda and transnational jihadism in 2016, although it still includes some veteran militants and foreign fighters in its ranks. It has been designated a terrorist organization by the UN Security Council, the United States, and other national governments.

In recent years, HTS has worked persistently to rehabilitate its image and secure its removal from international terrorist lists. As opposition forces marched on Damascus, HTS and its leader, Abu Muhammad al-Jolani, attempted to project an image of seriousness and moderation. HTS issued

statements reassuring Syria's diverse ethnic and sectarian constituencies and various international stakeholders, while Jolani gave interviews to Western media affirming Syria's history of coexistence and committing to institutional governance.

As HTS swept to Damascus, its fighters appear to have remained relatively disciplined.

Reports of summary executions and sectarian reprisals were limited, perhaps due, in part, to the way much of the Syrian army ceded territory without a fight. To be sure, some retributive violence has clearly taken place, and thousands of Syrians fearful of militant control have fled to Lebanon. But for the time being, the victorious opposition has not unleashed a vengeful campaign against its former foes or against communities widely associated with the old regime.

Unfortunately, HTS's record at the local level does not augur well for the construction of a national government that accommodates Syria's religious, ethnic, and political diversity. In governing Idlib, the group has not shown any real commitment to political pluralism. HTS stage-managed some legitimating exercises to establish its Salvation Government in Idlib, including an ostensibly inclusive constitutional conference. Yet these were never open, participatory democratic processes. Jolani was always in control, even though he did not hold an official government portfolio; he was just understood to be the boss of Idlib. Just months ago, HTS's security apparatus violently put down protests in Idlib demanding the release of detainees held by HTS and an end to Jolani's rule.

HTS did manage to create order and relative stability in Idlib. Yet it seems unlikely that HTS will be able to reproduce its control over Idlib across the whole of Syria. The consolidation of HTS control in Idlib was a years-long, frequently violent process, in which HTS crushed rival opposition factions and eliminated its own dissidents and defectors. It seems plausible that HTS could have extended its administrative and security apparatus from Idlib to nearby Aleppo after it seized the city.

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



## Cultural initiatives proposed between Iran, Greece



TEHRAN- The Iranian Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts, Seyyed Reza Salehi-Amiri, met with Greece's Minister of Culture, Lina Mendoni, on Tuesday during his visit to Armenia for the 8th Ministerial Meeting of the Ancient Civilizations Forum.

During the meeting, Salehi-Amiri highlighted the crucial role of culture in strengthening bilateral relations, CHTN reported.

"There is no better avenue than cultural engagement for improving and developing relations between governments.

Iran and Greece can enhance their collaboration in cultural domains, notably in specialized fields such as research, archaeological explorations, and the preservation and restoration of historical artifacts," he remarked.

He highlighted that fostering communication between the research institutes of the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts and scientific and research centers in Greece and other countries would not only facilitate scientific growth but also create pathways for improved relations and collaborations, particularly in promoting tourism.

He further noted that organizing joint cultural weeks in Tehran and Athens could play a crucial role in showcasing cultural values and enhancing mutual understanding between the nations. "Currently, a similar collaboration is ongoing with China, where 80,000 visitors daily explore Iran's historical sites," he added.

He also underscored the rich historical and cultural heritage of the country, citing unique Iranian artifacts, including the illustrious civilization of Jiroft in Kerman province, and extended an invitation to the Greek Minister to visit

these sites and discuss future agreements.

Salehi-Amiri called for a serious battle against the trafficking and sale of historical artifacts, stressing, "An essential point I will emphasize during the conference is the cooperation among member countries to combat the illicit trade of historical properties.

These artifacts possess distinct characteristics and authenticity, and it is feasible to prevent their smuggling through collective efforts."

In another part of his remarks, he asserted, "In the realm of handicrafts, Iran has much to contribute. Out of 400 types of handicrafts produced globally, 299 are being crafted in Iran.

If Greece offers support, we are ready to hold an exhibition of Iranian handicrafts and handmade carpets in Athens, which would not only bring our artists closer but also foster a monumental transformation in relations between our two nations."

For her part, Mendoni expressed her delight at the convening, stating, "I agree with you on all the matters discussed. The trafficking of historical artifacts is an issue that all countries must address with coordinated and principled policies." She continued, "Iran is a country that attracts the special interest of people worldwide. With its ancient history and unparalleled civilization, the people of Greece are also eager to travel there."

Mendonni viewed collaboration in the handicrafts sector with Iran as a positive development, stating, "Leveraging Iran's expertise in carpets and indigenous handicrafts has brought our peoples closer and promises economic prosperity for traders and artisans alike."

She also regarded the shared cultural and civilizational heritage of the two countries as a favorable backdrop for cooperation and called for the signing of memoranda of understanding in various fields. The Ancient Civilizations Forum, established in 2017, is made up of ten countries: Iran, Armenia, Italy, Bolivia, Peru, China, Iraq, Egypt, Mexico, and Greece.

In 2023, Iran assumed the presidency and hosting responsibilities for the Forum. In previous meetings, the Islamic Republic proposed measures to combat the trafficking of cultural heritage and advocated for the return of stolen and looted historical artifacts.

## 7,000-year-old alien-like figurine from Kuwait a 'total surprise' to archaeologists

Archaeologists in Kuwait have discovered a 7,000-year-old clay figurine that looks eerily similar to a modern-day depiction of an alien.

But while this figurine may look more supernatural than human, its style was common in ancient Mesopotamia, although it's the first of its kind ever to be found in Kuwait or the Arabian Gulf.

The small, finely crafted head, with slanted eyes, a flat nose and an elongated skull, was found during excavations this year at Bahra 1, a prehistoric site in northern Kuwait where a joint Kuwaiti-Polish team has been excavating since 2009. Bahra 1 was one of the Arabian Peninsula's oldest settlements, with occupation lasting from around 5500 to 4900 B.C.

During this time, Bahra 1 was settled by the Ubaid, a culture that originated in Mesopotamia and is known for its distinctive pottery, including its alien-like figurines.

The Ubaid intertwined with Neolithic, or New Stone Age societies in the Arabian Gulf in the sixth millennium B.C. and turned the area into a sort of ancient melting pot, said Agnieszka Szymczak, an expedition leader at Bahra 1 in charge of the small finds at the site, like the newly discovered figurine.

The collision of these peoples and their cultures resulted in a "prehistoric crossroads of cultural exchange," Szymczak, an archaeologist at the University of Warsaw's Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology, told Live Science in an email. Part of this exchange included art, like the recently unearthed figurine.

"[The] discovery of the figurine was a total surprise for the whole team, as it was the first such find not just among the over 1.5k [1,500] small finds excavated from the Bahra 1 site but also from the Arabian Gulf region," Szymczak said. Moreover, it's made of Mesopotamian clay, not like the "Coarse Red Ware" ceramics local

to the Arabian Gulf, meaning the Ubaid were actively importing their homegrown traditions into the region.

Ubaid figurines are sometimes called "lizard-headed," "bird-like," or "ophidian" meaning "snake-like," according to University of Chicago publications.

The newfound figurine is likely "imbued with symbolic meaning," Szymczak said, even though the figurine was discovered in a "mundane activity area," not in a special or symbolic place — like the graves they've been found in throughout Mesopotamia.

Aurelie Daems, a Near Eastern archaeologist at Ghent University in Belgium who has written book chapters on Ubaid ophidian figurines but was not involved in the current study, praised the find at Bahra 1 as having the "potential to clarify research questions related to ritual and social practices" of the Ubaid, as well as the relationships between the prehistoric Gulf region and Mesopotamia.

Various theories have attempted to explain the unusual facial features of these figurines. One idea suggests the sculptures show artificial cranial deformation, otherwise known as "head-shaping," a practice followed in Ubaid society, and evidenced in skeletal remains excavated in Mesopotamia.

Achieved by wrapping bandages around an infant's malleable skull, head-shaping could have been utilized by the Ubaid as a symbol of identity, such as class, culture or belonging to a special group within their settlement. The Ubaid may have picked up this practice in what is now Iran in the eighth and seventh millennia B.C., and head-shaping hit its peak in Ubaid society during the fifth millennium B.C.

Excavations at the site are ongoing, as are studies on the clay figurine head found this year.

(Source: Live Science)

# Yalda Night: a celebration of light and togetherness

By Afshin Majlesi

Once again, Yalda Night is approaching as a celebration of warmth, love, and togetherness cherished by all devotees of the Persian culture.

The festivity may have its roots in protection against evil forces when ancient people gathered to open fires and stay awake, ensuring safety until dawn.

Over time, this evolved into a celebration of light's rebirth and good's triumph over evil.

From another point of view, the term Yalda means "birth," referring to the birth of Mithra, the ancient Persian symbol of light and truth.

Also known as Shab-e Yalda or Shab-e Chelleh, this ancient festival is held on the winter solstice, the longest and darkest night of the year. This year, it falls on Friday night, December 20.

Today, it remains a cherished celebration in Iran and beyond. Families prepare special dishes and savor fruits, nuts, and sweets saved specifically for this occasion.

It is a time for joy, gratitude, and connection, marking the end of



darkness and the beginning of light. On Yalda Night, families and friends gather to light fires, share meals, and enjoy fruits and nuts, especially watermelon and pomegranate.

These red fruits symbolize the crimson hues of dawn and the hope of brighter days to come. Another treasured tradition is the recitation of poetry, especially from the works of Hafez. Many families practice fal-e Hafez, a form of divination using his verses.

Elder family members also share

stories and anecdotes, enriching the night's warm atmosphere.

In 2022, UNESCO added Yalda Night to its Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, highlighting its significance as a cornerstone of Persian culture and tradition.

Yalda's roots trace back thousands of years, possibly to the second millennium BC, and even, according to some sources, earlier to the fourth millennium BC.

In Zoroastrian tradition, the night represented the peak of darkness and the forces of evil.

Yalda Night is also celebrated across Greater Iran, including Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Tajikistan, Iraqi Kurdistan, and parts of Turkey, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan.

Through its rich blend of history, poetry, and cherished rituals, Yalda continues to symbolize hope and unity to underpin the enduring triumph of light over darkness.

## Iran handicraft exports see 11% growth in eight months



TEHRAN - Iran's handicraft exports reached \$150 million in the first eight months of the current Iranian calendar year (started on March 20), marking an 11% increase compared to the same period last year.

"The value of handicraft exports hit \$150 million in the first eight months of the year with an 11 percent year-on-year growth," said Farzad Ojani, an official with the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts.

Ojani highlighted that the highest growth was seen in traditional textiles and embroidery, which has gained significant popularity in various international markets.

"To boost handicraft exports, we must focus on product quality enhancement and standardization," Ojani stated on Monday.

He also emphasized the importance of advertising, participation in national and international exhibitions, and online platforms to expand market reach and drive further export growth. Iranian handicrafts are a vibrant expression of the country's rich cultural heritage, showcasing centuries of artistry and craftsmanship.

From intricate Persian carpets, celebrated for their elaborate designs and vivid colors, to exquisite miniature paintings and calligraphy, Iranian artisans create works that blend tradition with unmatched skill.

Pottery and ceramics, often adorned with geometric or floral patterns, reflect the country's

historic connection to the Silk Road.

Metalwork, including engraved copper and brass, highlights the precision of Iranian craftsmen, while turquoise inlaying, or Firoozeh-kubi, transforms jewelry and decorative items into cultural treasures.

Woodworking traditions such as Khatamkari, which is a form of marquetry, combine delicate inlay pieces to create mesmerizing designs. Handwoven textiles, such as Pateh embroidery or Gabbeh rugs, represent regional identities and local stories.

Experts say that each Iranian handicraft is more than a product; it's a narrative of history, artistry, and cultural pride, passed down through generations of dedicated artisans.

Currently, a selection of 13 cities and three villages in Iran have been registered by the World Council of Handicrafts as "world cities of handicrafts".

## Syrian artifacts on display in China to be well protected: researcher

A touring exhibition of 195 Syrian artifacts held in China has captured widespread attention on China's social media platforms amid the dramatic and astonishing changes taking place in Syria.

The collection, which began its journey in China in 2021, commemorating the 65th anniversary of diplomatic relations between the two countries, has traveled to cities such as Shenzhen, Chengdu, Beijing, and Nanjing, showcasing Syria's rich cultural heritage.

Following its recent display at the Nanjing City Wall Museum, the artifacts were expected to continue their tour at other major institutions in China, potentially including the Emperor Qinshihuang's Mausoleum Site Museum in Northwest China's Shaanxi Province, according to a report by Chengdu media outlet Hongxing Xinwen.

"These cultural relics will continue touring in China next year," Tan Ping, director of the Art Exhibitions China under China's National Culture Heritage Administration, which is one of the organizers of this touring exhibition, told Hongxing Xinwen.

An official from the Syrian Embassy in China told the Global Times that they are also waiting for updates from their home country regarding the future of these cultural relics.

"There is no doubt that these cultural relics currently on display in China will be well preserved and protected," Sun Jiashan, an associate researcher at the Central Academy of Culture and Tourism Administration, told the Global Times on Tuesday. In 2023, he

hosted talks with the visiting Syrian cultural officials who took part in training classes for cultural heritage protection.

Executive Director of the International Alliance for the Protection of Heritage in conflict areas (ALIPH), Valery Freland, told the Global Times on Tuesday that they are in close contact with many professionals in the region and are evaluating the situation as it pertains to the protection of cultural heritage in Syria.

China plays a key role within ALIPH as a founding member of the Foundation and is represented on both ALIPH's Foundation Board and Scientific Committee, said Freland, as ALIPH is the main global fund exclusively dedicated to the protection and rehabilitation of cultural heritage in areas in conflict, post-conflict or in crisis.

Founded in 2017, ALIPH's mission is in response to the massive destruction of cultural heritage over the previous two decades.

Over the past three years, a total of 195 pieces or sets of Syrian treasures highlighting Syrian culture and civilization, including statues, reliefs and lapis lazuli necklaces, have been exhibited in museums across more than 10 Chinese cities like Shenzhen and Chengdu, attracting more than 1 million visitors, according to the Xinhua News Agency.

The schedule for next year includes multiple museums including the Emperor Qinshihuang's Mausoleum Site Museum, Huzhou Museum, National Museum of Ganzhou, Dalian Museum, and Xiamen Museum.

"We are currently applying for an extension of the overseas shipment approval from the National Cultural Heritage Administration and will proceed with the specific arrangements under the guidance of relevant authorities," Tan said, according to Hongxing Xinwen.

"ALIPH has supported projects in Raqqa since 2019, and in northwestern Syria since the 2023 earthquake.

We stand ready to support the protection of Syrian heritage, where and whenever this is necessary and feasible," Freland said.

In June 2024, the National Museum of China hosted the exhibition "Salvaged from the shadows, Protecting cultural heritage," co-organized with ALIPH, for artifacts selected from 450 projects that the alliance supported in 35 countries.

This event showcased the realities of cultural heritage preservation in conflict zones, highlighting the current situation of the destruction of world cultural heritage over the past 30 years.

It showcases the specialized techniques and expertise in the protection and restoration of different types of cultural heritage, including movable cultural artifacts, intangible cultural heritage, and architectural heritage, as well as the importance of local community involvement, according to the Xinhua News Agency.

As a founding member of ALIPH, China has extensively contributed to the organization's efforts to safeguard cultural relics in conflict zones.

Deeply taking part in heritage protection, the National Museum of China became one of the three global "International Safe Havens," according to the China Culture Daily.

"It's important to have international safe havens such as the National Museum of China in Beijing in order to safeguard heritage in extreme cases - when keeping it in its country of origin places it at immediate risk," Freland told the Global Times.

China's role in international heritage preservation also includes decades of on-the-ground restoration efforts.

For example, China has helped restore ruined temples there since 1997, restoring the Chau Say Tevoda temple and the Ta Keo temple.

Since late 2018, the first Egyptian-Chinese archaeological mission has been working seasonally at the Karnak Temple Complex, inspiring many Egyptian and Chinese experts to strengthen cooperation.

According to statistics of the National Cultural Heritage Administration, Chinese archaeologists participated in 38 archaeological projects overseas in 2019, cooperating with around 20 countries.

This global involvement reflects China's broader vision for heritage preservation.

From offering sanctuary to relics to exporting restoration expertise, China has demonstrated its capability as an important global member in protecting endangered cultural treasures.

(Source: Global Times)



# UNESCO, KOICA to update Iran's technical, training centers

TEHRAN –The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), in collaboration with the Korean International Cooperation Agency (KOICA), has started a project to modernize and update the Instructor Training Center (ITC) and the Technical and Vocational Training Organization (TVTO) of the country.

In this line, an event was held on Tuesday, December 17, in Karaj, Alborz province, providing an overview of the project, its objectives, and the implementation plan.

It aims to foster strategic partnerships and facilitate technical discussions on innovative Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) solutions to address the challenges of a digital and sustainable economy.

TVET is focused on the acquisition of knowledge and skills for the world of work and helps youth and adults develop the skills needed for employment, decent work, and entrepreneurship while supporting inclusive and sustainable economic growth.

The official inauguration of the project office took place on the same day, accompanied by an exhibition showcasing innovative projects, technologies, and best practices in the field of TVET.

The other objective of the project is to promote and develop modern technical and vocational education in Iran as well as the



regional countries.

The project also intends to enhance the quality of instructor training by upgrading facilities, equipment, and pedagogical methods, supporting the goal of strengthening TVET ecosystem and aligning with the evolving demands of the labor market.

A total of 35 Iranian experts will receive essential training in agriculture, construction, information technology, education networks, and entrepreneurship in European countries as well as South Korea.

The experts will then share what they have learned with technical and vocational instructors nationwide.

The instructor training center will train coaches in regional countries, including Afghanistan, and the African continent, as well. The training courses will be followed in all groups using

digital technology and artificial intelligence.

The project aims to enhance the quality of instructor training by upgrading facilities, equipment, and methods.

## Instructor Training and Research Center, Iran TVTO

Instructor Training Center (ITC-Iran TVTO) affiliated to the Iran Technical and Vocational Training Organization (Iran TVTO) was established with cooperation of International Labor Organization (ILO) and United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in 1974.

ITC-Iran TVTO was established to provide and train instructors and trainers of Iran TVTO and other institutions under this organization.

ITC is mainly responsible for human resource development and acts as an independent center under the direct control of Iran TVTO's President.

Iran TVTO, affiliated with the Ministry of Cooperatives, Labour and Social Welfare, is responsible for applied and skill training with the objective of creating a productive employment environment, promoting job and work culture in society, developing human resources, training skilled workers and technicians needed for manufacturing and economic enterprises.

Currently, ITC is considered an advanced skills and specialized training center, at the national and regional level, due to its up-to-date and comprehensive software and hardware facilities, as well as its professional human resources.

It has 17 specialized training departments including: electricity, automotive technology, welding, machine tools, computer numerical control (CNC), IT, pedagogy and entrepreneurship, fashion design, wood industries, electronics and mechatronic, heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HAVC) and home appliance, foreign languages agriculture construction and building industries.

## Transition into an aging country seems inevitable



TEHRAN – Considering the fact that the fertility rate in Iran is stabilized at around 1.6 children per woman, which is much lower than the rate required to replace its aging population, the transition of society from young to middle-aged has become inevitable.

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

However, the taken measures, back then, led to a wide transformation and change in population indicators and a noticeable decrease in population growth and fertility rate far beyond the set goals of the first develop-

ment plan in the country, the official noted.

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

The population growth in 2011 and 2016 was announced to be 1.29 and 1.24, respectively. The figure reached 0.7 in the past Iranian year (March 2023 – March 2024).

### Population aging five times faster than growth

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

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

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

Currently, men and women aged above 60 constitute some 11.5 percent of Iran's popu-

lation, an official with the health ministry has said.

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

The aging of individuals signifies increased life expectancy. However, population aging demonstrates a shift in the distribution of a country's population towards older ages which is not a favorable indicator. In other words, the number of young people in society declines in comparison to the elderly population.

It is one of the most important challenges facing the country.

Despite offering incentives to encourage childbearing in line with youth population law, the desired growth in the youth population has not been accomplished yet.

"At best, Iran's population with a total fertility rate of 2.5 will reach 102,890,000 by the next seven years," IRIB quoted Mahmoudi as saying.

In the last two years, the fertility rate has stabilized around 1.6 which has intensified concerns over the decreasing trend in population growth in the coming years, and the probability of turning Iran into one of the oldest countries in the world, the official highlighted.

## ENGLISH IN USE

### LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

## Iran produces nano-mask with 99.9% lethality to coronavirus

Researchers at the Institute of Materials and Energy affiliated with the Ministry of Science, produced nano face masks that can kill coronavirus by 99.9 percent.

According to ISNA, Abuzar Masoudi, a faculty member of the Materials and Energy Research Institute, said that since the fibers of the fabric are hydrophilic.

Therefore, the behavior of the virus is different, so different masks have been offered, including the FFP1 mask, which prevents up to 95 percent of the virus and up to 80 percent of the bacteria. While the N95 mask resists the virus up to 95 percent, and up to 100 percent of the bacteria.

## محققان ایرانی ماسک نانو با قدرت کشندگی ۹۹.۹ درصد ویروس کرونا تولید کردند

محققان پژوهشگاه مواد و انرژی زیر نظر وزارت علوم، تحقیقات و فناوری ایران با استفاده از لایه نشانی نانو ذرات به پارچه به الیافی دست یافتند که قادر به تخریب ۹۹.۹ درصدی ویروس کرونا هستند. به گزارش ایسنا، ابوزر مسعودی عضو هیات علمی پژوهشگاه مواد و انرژی گفت الیاف پارچه آب دوست هستند.

از این رو رفتار ویروس متفاوت است و بر این اساس ماسک‌های مختلفی عرضه شده است که از آن جمله می‌توان به ماسک FFP1 اشاره کرد که تا ۹۵ درصد از ورود ویروس و تا ۸۰ درصد از ورود باکتری جلوگیری می‌کند. این میزان برای ماسک N95 تا ۹۵ درصد ویروس و تا ۱۰۰ درصد باکتری می‌شود.

## 4th Persian Medicine Festival to be held in February

TEHRAN –The fourth Persian Medicine Festival is planned to be held in February with the theme of 'integration of Persian medicine into the healthcare system'.

The integration of the services will not only help to improve health indicators but also have a significant impact on the economy of the country's healthcare system, the health ministry's website quoted Nafiseh Hosseini-Yekta, the director of the health ministry's Persian medicine office, as saying.

"Iran has the capacity to become one of the pioneers in providing traditional and complementary medicine services in the world.

The integration of Persian medicine in the healthcare system can be a turning point in the global application of the knowledge," the official noted.

Considering the general health policies of the country, including its emphasis on the promotion and development of Persian medicine, the festival is an important step towards the realization of these goals, she added.

Moreover, it opens up a valuable opportunity to introduce the unique capacities of Persian medicine while laying the ground for specialists, researchers, students, and those interested in Persian medicine to showcase their latest scientific and research achievements.

It also extends the chance for the expansion of knowledge-based markets and promotes interactions between educational, research,

and treatment centers of Persian medicine at the national level in three sectors including science, culture, and art, focusing on education, research, treatment, technology, and Persian medicine veterans.

This year, in addition to the three main sections, a special section is dedicated to students of all grades.

The 3rd Persian Medicine Festival was held in Tehran in January 2023 with the main goal of identifying and supporting top scientists and innovators in the health sector.

The event aimed to create a platform for greater productivity from the research achievements, expansion of knowledge-based markets, and multilateral interaction between educational, research, and therapeutic centers.

"Persian medicine; the path of progress and scientific innovation" was the motto of the festival, in line with the Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei's designation of the Iranian year 1401 (March 2022-March 2023) as "The Year of Production: Knowledge-Based and Job-Creating".

In July, the health ministry held a workshop on principles and basic concepts of Persian medicine in accordance with the objective of integrating Persian medicine into the country's healthcare system.

## Over 29,000 ID cards issued for children born to Iranian women, foreign men

TEHRAN –Under the nationality law amended in 2019, a total of 29,045 Iranian identity cards have been issued for children born to Iranian mothers and foreign fathers.

According to the law, women who married non-Iranian men can request Iranian citizenship for their children under the age of 18. In case they have no security problem, they will obtain their identity cards, ISNA quoted Afshar Khakbaz, an official with the Civil Registration Organization, as saying.

"Otherwise, upon reaching 18, the children themselves can apply for receiving identity cards.

If the applicants have no security problems, the identity cards will be issued for them," The official added.

The first identification cards for children born to an Iranian mother and a foreign father living abroad were issued in November 2020.

The first birth certificates were issued to the children of an Iranian woman married to a foreign man in Dubai (Marian and Lillian).

In December 2020, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced the registration started for the issuance of birth certificates for children of Iranian mothers abroad.

### Addressing statelessness

Being a stateless person means "not being

recognized as a national by any state under the operation of its law." As a result, stateless people are often excluded from society as their access to education, health services, job opportunities, financial means, legal ownership or even marriage is limited.

On October 8, 2019, Iran took a step towards reducing statelessness in the country and around the globe. The law allows Iranian mothers married to non-Iranian men to pass their nationality to their children.

Although Iran is not a party to the UN Conventions on Statelessness, the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran is taking concrete steps towards the prevention and reduction of statelessness in the country.

This law is contributing to improving the lives of thousands of children and is marking a major step towards reducing statelessness in Iran.

Today, millions of people around the world are denied a nationality. As a result, they often are not allowed to go to school, see a doctor, get a job, open a bank account, buy a house, or even get married.

Stateless people may have difficulty accessing basic rights such as education, healthcare, employment, and freedom of movement. Without these things, they can face a lifetime of obstacles and disappointment.



## Yalda Night adorns marketplaces

A woman is buying dried nuts for Yalda Night which is traditionally celebrated on the last day of the final month of autumn in the Iranian calendar that falls on December 20 this year.

On this night, tables are adorned with floral bowls, fresh fruits, dried fruits, seeds, and nuts.





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DECEMBER 19, 2024

## GUIDE TO SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

*If you overpower your enemy, then pardon him by way of thankfulness to Allah, for being able to subdue him.*

Imam Ali (AS)

Prayer Times > Noon:12:01 Evening: 17:13 Dawn: 5:39 (tomorrow) Sunrise: 7:09 (tomorrow)

## U.S. Palestine Museum interested in taking over closed Israeli embassy in Dublin

A Palestinian museum in the U.S. is interested in leasing the building in Dublin which until recently housed Israel's embassy. The Palestinian Museum in Connecticut opened in 2018, aiming to tell the Palestinian story to a global audience through art, and has since held exhibitions in several locations in Europe, including Ireland.

The founder of the museum, Faisal Saleh, said opening a branch in a former Israeli embassy would be a "political statement" and that it would make sense to have a permanent space in the region. But he has not yet been able to reach the building's owner to discuss the lease.

"We have been looking at expanding the presence of the museum globally. And we have done three very large expensive exhibits [in Europe] in the last three years. In Venice we had an exhibit for seven months that just ended. That had more than 200,000 visitors," he told The National.

"The cost of those exhibits comes very close if not higher than maintaining a permanent presence. So, at that point it would make sense to just be there permanently. There are some advantages to try to do it there. Obviously, there are some political ramifications to it in the sense of replacing an Israeli embassy with a Palestine museum, which would be a coup in terms of the public and the media," he added.

He said there "seems to be great support" for a Palestinian museum in Ireland based on initial reactions to the idea. "The museum would feature paintings, sculptures and installations which would tell the story of Palestine," Saleh added.

Israel announced at the weekend that it was closing its embassy in Dublin due to "the extreme anti-Israel policies of the Irish government". Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Saar said:

"Israel will invest its resources in advancing bilateral relations with countries worldwide according to priorities that also take into account the attitudes and actions of these states towards Israel."

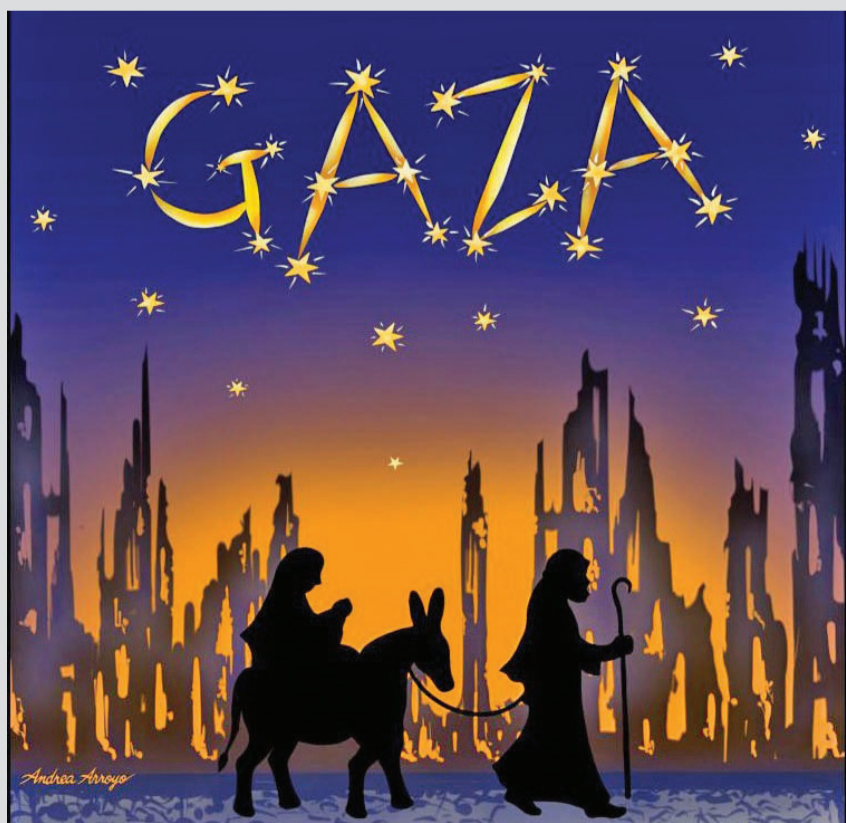
Ireland is one of Europe's most pro-Palestinian countries. Last week, it emerged that the country will formally intervene in South Africa's genocide case against Israel at the International Court of Justice (ICJ). The International Criminal Court has issued arrest warrants for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and former Defense Minister Yoav Gallant. Irish Prime Minister Simon Harris has confirmed his country's authorities would detain Netanyahu if he travelled there.

In May, Dublin recognized Palestine as a sovereign and independent state comprising the Gaza Strip and the West Bank and agreed to establish full diplomatic relations. And last month, the Irish government accepted the appointment of a full Palestinian ambassador for the first time. Spain, Norway and Slovenia also recognized a Palestinian state this year, drawing retaliatory moves from Israel.

Ireland's Deputy Prime Minister Micheal Martin said Ireland's stance on the conflict in the Middle East has "always been guided by the principles of international law and the obligation on all states to adhere to international humanitarian law."

"This has been the case with regard to our response to the terrorist attack by Hamas in Israel on October 7, 2023, and to the conduct by Israel of its military operations since then. The continuation of the war in Gaza and the loss of innocent lives is simply unacceptable and contravenes international law."

## Cartoon of Day



No Holiday Spirit in Gaza  
 Cartoonist: Andrea Arroyo from the U.S.

# Iranian short animation, Palestinian feature film make it to 2025 Oscars shortlists

TEHRAN—A short animation from Iran and a feature film from Palestine have found their way into the shortlist of their respected category for the upcoming 97th Oscars ceremony.

According to the announcement by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, the Iranian short animation "In the Shadow of the Cypress" directed by Hossein Mollayemi and Shirin Sohani is among the 15 animated short films and "From Ground Zero" from Palestine is present in the shortlist of international feature category, ILNA reported.

"In the Shadow of the Cypress" is a complex story of family relationships. When the distance grows between the characters, an unexpected event brings them together again in an exceptionally beautifully written and illustrated way.

Made in 2023, it depicts a former captain suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder who lives with his daughter in a humble house located by the sea. Together, they live isolated from the world and must confront the challenges of their situation. One morning, their lives change forever when an unforeseen event occurs.

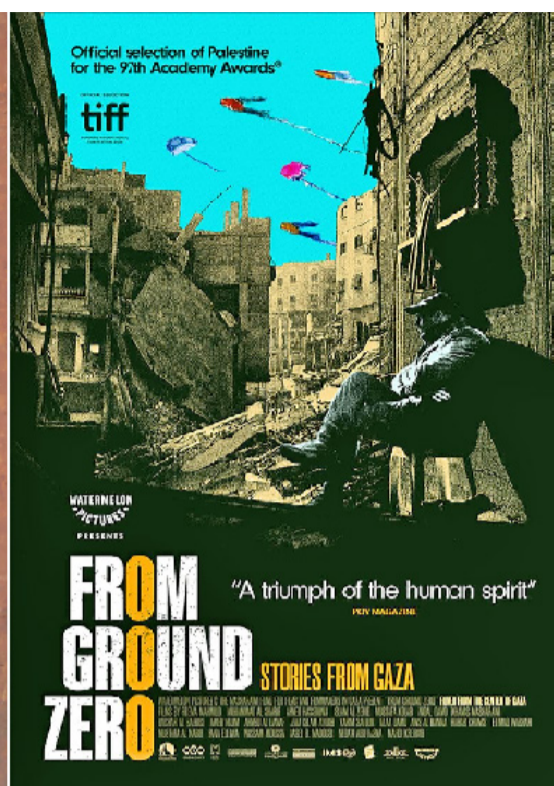
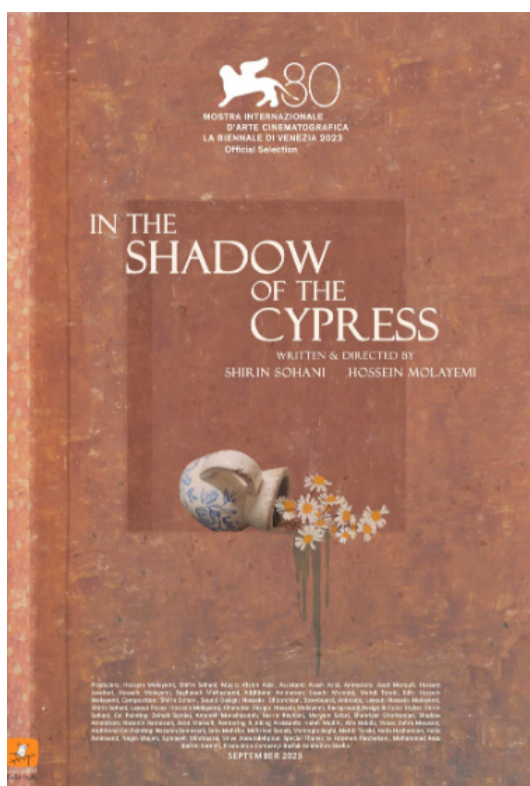
A production of the Institute for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults (known as Kanoon), the animated movie has so far grabbed several major international awards.

"In the Shadow of the Cypress" recently won the Best Animated Short Film Award at 27th Olympia International Film Festival for Children and Young People in Pyrgos, Greece, earlier this month.

It also won two silver awards in the categories of Best 2D Animated Short and Best Score in a Short Animation at the 12th Portland Festival of Cinema, Animation & Technology (PFCAT), in the U.S. in August.

"From Ground Zero" is a 2024 anthology film directed by 22 different Palestinian directors. The film is made up of 22 short films, including documentaries, fiction, animation and experimental films about the current situation of the people of Gaza in the midst of the Israel-Hamas War.

It premiered at the 5th Amman International Film Festival in July and had its North American premiere at the 49th Toronto International Film Festival in September as part of the TIFF Docs section.



Initiated by Palestinian director Rashid Masharawi, the project was born to give a voice to 22 Gazan filmmakers to tell the untold stories of the current war on film.

After the start of the war between Israel and Hamas, Masharawi founded the Masharawi Fund for Cinema and Filmmakers in Gaza with the purpose of supporting young Palestinian filmmakers to express themselves and tell their stories through cinema.

Masharawi supported the production and post-production of the 22 short films that make up From Ground Zero filmed in different parts of the Gaza Strip at the end of 2023.

A filmmaker burns his clapperboard for warmth. A schoolteacher scavenges to feed his students. A stand-up comedian arrives at a gig to find the venue bombed. In "From Ground Zero," the directors present cinematic diaries from Gaza, shot in between (and sometimes, during) IDF bombing raids to weave a portrait of life under siege.

Each short is unique in its conception, and yet, is bound by a common resilience, and a need to document the violent interruption of life and routine.

Stricken from the Cannes lineup back in May on political grounds, the anthology was screened just outside the festival as an act of protest: a fitting premiere for a defiant act of creativity in the face of genocide. "From Ground Zero"

brings dozens of emerging artists to the fore, as they present digital memories and DIY chronicles of modern life in the Gaza Strip.

The shorts range from a couple of minutes in length to nearly ten. Some are charming and wistful, like Reema Mahmoud's opening documentary portrait "Selfies," about a young woman using makeup to disguise her stress and retain a sense of femininity as the world crumbles around her. Others, like Muhammad Alshareef's "No Signal"—which immediately follows "Selfies"—use the rubble of collapsed buildings to stage intense fictitious scenes drawn from reality.

None of these stories or approaches ever feel incongruous with one another, or with the overall project. In fact, their variety is the point, as each one depicts a different facet of social and personal life in its creators' vicious new realities, whether they deal with death in the abstract — as in Kareem Satoum's absurd "Hell's Heaven," in which a man sleeps in a body bag for comfort — or with grief as their new normal.

It's a wonder only one of the films in the lineup is left incomplete, with its director showing up on screen to detail her original plans before her loved ones were killed in a manner that rendered her project too painful to approach.

While most footage is contemporaneous, a number of shorts feature brief flashbacks or super-

imposed images of life before the start of the Israel-Hamas War, imbuing the project with a palpable sense of loss — that of the subjects' social lives, and of their loved ones.

And yet, "From Ground Zero" contains, within its many cuts to black between each short, a sense of history. The artists may have been exposed to cruel new extremes, but their sense of confinement, and their familiarity with war, goes back years — if not decades — a subject broached in poetic fashion by Mahdi Karirah's haunting concluding chapter "Awakening," told with marionettes made of scraps.

The filmmaking ingenuity on display is undoubtedly impressive, but it's self-reflexive too, between the lo-fi digital quality of most shorts and the sense that the movie's very texture is a commentary too. The digital world has been Palestine's smoke-signal amidst ongoing atrocities. Many snippets of Gaza's plight have made their way onto social media (one in particular, of a man being rescued from the debris of his home, is the subject of one story in the film), but few of these fleeting clips have provided such an in-depth look at the lives of Gaza's citizens. The psychological impact of their plight is made detailed and evident, but so is their hope in the face of doom.

The Oscar nominations will be announced on January 17, 2025. The 2025 Academy Awards ceremony will take place on March 2, 2025.

## Palestine World Prize for Literature announces winners

TEHRAN— The second edition of the Palestine World Prize for Literature announced its winners across six categories during a ceremony held in Baghdad, Iraq, on Monday night.

In the play category, first place was awarded to "I Mean to Bury Them" by Du'a Muhammad Ismail Ibrahim Al-Bayati from Iraq, while second place went to "On the Thresholds of Al-Quds" by Nawal Maheni from Egypt.

For the memoirs category, "Five Thousand Days in Barzakh" by Hassan Salameh from Palestine took first place, while "Struggle, Struggle" by imprisoned Captain Kifah Hatab from Palestine came in second, and "Fish Return to the Sea" by Marzieh Etemadi from Iran was awarded third place.

In the short story category, first place went to "Diaries of Struggle and Honor" by Abdul-Majid Zarqat from Lebanon, second place was awarded to "Ashes of the Sparrows" by Hamed Askari from Iran, and third place was jointly awarded to "Futique" by Suham Abu Awad from Palestine and "The Assassination of Reihana" by Mohammad Adnan Suleiman Mardawi from Palestine.

For the novel category, first place was awarded to "Tale of the Wall" by Nasser Abu Sarour from Palestine. Second place was shared between "The Tale of Horror: A Story of War in Gaza" by Ayman Al-Atoum and "Azawad" by Ahmed Bousalim, both from Jordan, while third place went to "Necklace of Jasmine" by Amer Anwar Sultan from Palestine.

The poetry category saw first place awarded to Abdullah Issa from Palestine for his poem "The Sky of Gaza, Hills of Jenin". Second place went to Ali Al-Amri from Palestine for "This is Palestinian", and third place was jointly award-

ed to Victor De Currea-Lugo from Colombia for "Little Poems for Palestine" and Hikmat Gumilar from Indonesia for "From the Wreckage of Flowers to the Story of Memories".

In the children's literature category, Amal Nasser from Lebanon received first place for "Archivia", while second place was jointly awarded to Tala El-Fahmawi from the United States for "Salim's Soccer Ball: A Story of Palestinian Resilience" and Seyed Mehdi Mousavi from Iran for "The Secret of the Red Stone". Third place was shared between Entisar Ba'ala from Syria for "Jaffa and Canaan" and Amira Al-Balushi from Iraq for "The Tale of the Olive".

The 2nd edition of the Palestine World Prize for Literature received submissions from 26 countries.

A total of 345 book titles were submitted to the prize's secretariat in Tehran.

Earlier this week, the secretary of the event Mohsen Parviz announced that judges for the second edition of the award were selected from Syria, Lebanon, Algeria, Palestine, Iraq, Yemen, Indonesia, India, and Iran.

He elaborated, "The process has been consistent across all subcategories; judges provided their reasoning for selecting works based on technique and content. The final decision was made collectively by the judges, the head of the jury, and the scientific secretary. Except for two categories with fewer submissions, five works were chosen for final evaluation and ranking."

Parviz emphasized that the primary languages of submitted works were Arabic and Persian, thus leveraging distinguished Arabic-speaking scholars from various Arab countries for this task.

"While the majority of submissions were in Arabic and Persian, there were also entries in English, Urdu, Malay, French, and Spanish."

Six judging groups were formed in six different categories: plays, memoirs, short stories, children's literature, poetry, and novels. The highest volume of submissions came from the novel category, which received 106 entries, while the play category had the fewest, with only nine submissions, he noted.

He further mentioned that final judges included professors from Iranian universities and language faculties. Additionally, the heads of Arab Writers Union in Syria and Algeria, Muhammad Al-Hourani and Youssef Shakra, assisted in the final judging process.

He expressed hope that through effective media promotion, the selected works could be translated into other languages and serve as advocates for the accurately and artistically rendered narratives defending the Palestinian people.

"Despite a smaller volume of submissions being reviewed over a longer period last time, the quality of works in this edition seems significantly higher," he remarked.

"The impact of Palestinian heroism on writers and poets will undoubtedly yield even higher quality works in the coming years," he mentioned.

The Palestine World Prize for Literature was established in 2018 in Iran by a collective decision of cultural organizations, writers' unions, and publications from various countries. This biennial award aims to recognize the best works published about Palestine. The first edition of this prize was held in 2022 in Beirut.