

Meeting in Cairo Anxiety in Tel Aviv



Israel watches warily as Pezeshkian's Cairo visit raises prospects for Iran-Egypt rapprochement

Resistance groups are autonomous, Araghchi tells Egyptian media

TEHRAN – In an interview with Egypt's Alghad TV, Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi addressed misconceptions surrounding Iran's influence in the region, emphasizing that Resistance groups operate independently and are not under Iranian command.

The interview, which aired on Friday, was recorded following the recent visits by the Iranian President and Foreign Minister to Cairo.

"The notion that Resistance groups follow Iranian directives is incorrect," Araghchi asserted during the Developing Eight (D-8) summit, aiming to dispel such myths.

He clarified that while these groups share common goals with Iran, they are not controlled by it.

Araghchi also emphasized the existence of long-term American-Israeli strategies designed to destabilize the region, underscoring the severe consequences these plans have had.

"The aggressive warfare, resulting in the deaths of over sixty thousand women, children, and civilians in Gaza, Lebanon, and Syria, starkly reveals the threat Israel poses to regional stability," he stated. ▶ Page 2

The state of Iran-Egypt relations: past and present

By Xavier Villar

MADRID – The Iranian president, Masoud Pezeshkian, visited Cairo this week to participate in the D-8 Organization for Economic Cooperation Summit, also known as the "Developing 8."

The summit gathered leaders from Bangladesh, Egypt, Indonesia, Iran, Malaysia, Nigeria, Pakistan, and Turkey. This event marked the first visit by a senior Iranian official to Egypt in the past 11 years, a significant milestone in the relationship between the two countries.

Since the 1979 Islamic Revolution, diplomatic relations between Tehran and Cairo have not been fully restored, despite numerous attempts at rapprochement. In this context, Iranian media have expressed optimism that Pezeshkian's visit, leading a high-level delegation, could signal the start of a new phase in the relations between Iran and Egypt, two key players in the region's political landscape.

Egypt and Iran severed diplomatic relations in 1979, though they were partially resumed 11 years later. However, the restoration of communication did not equate to a full return to diplomatic ties; interactions remained limited to business representatives and interest protection offices. From a political standpoint, relations between the two countries can be divided into two key phases: pre-Islamic revolution and post-1979. ▶ Page 3

War and diplomacy during and after the Al-Aqsa Flood

By Batool Subeiti

BEIRUT – Diplomacy during times of war differs significantly from diplomacy during periods of relative calm. This is particularly true when the negotiating parties fundamentally differ in their goals and have different standards. With an enemy that achieves their goals through striking fear, one cannot rely on their goodwill, nor waste available opportunities in the hope of a mirage.

History demonstrates that the trap of diplomacy has often led to setbacks for resistance movements. Delays and misplaced trust in promises from a deceitful enemy have resulted in strategic losses, particularly when officials believed in diplomatic assurances that later proved false. Understanding the true nature of the enemy is critical for success in war.

So far, independence and refusal to compromise by the resistance movement have been key to its achievements. Iran stands out as a model in its defensive and deterrence strategy. Its strength lies in its ability to fortify itself effectively, guided by the Leader of the Islamic Revolution's directives.

Ansarallah undeterred by Israeli attacks

By Wesam Bahrani

TEHRAN – Hebrew media has shed light on the Israeli aggression on Yemen that took place on Thursday.

The Public Broadcasting Corporation stated that "the attack in Yemen was approved by the Prime Minister (Benjamin Netanyahu) and the Defense Minister (Yisrael Katz) but was not discussed or approved by the security cabinet."

It also mentioned that only a general overview of developments was presented to cabinet ministers without revealing the targets of the airstrikes.

Additionally, an Israeli reserve officer, one of the pilots who participated in the aggression on Yemen, described the mission as "extremely complex."

The Israeli major explained that "the strikes were carried out over a distance of about 2,000 kilometers round trip, with more than sixty bombs dropped during the night hours, requiring precision." He added that "the pilots spent six hours in the aircraft from takeoff to landing."

US diplomats in Syria: A charm offensive to mislead the public

By Shahrokh Saei

TEHRAN – The presence of a senior delegation of American diplomats in Syria along with their efforts to engage with the country's rebel leaders primarily aims to mislead public opinion and further the US political objectives.

The delegation includes Assistant Secretary of State Barbara Leaf, who is the top State Department official for the Middle East (West Asia).

Daniel Rubinstein, who is tasked with leading the State Department's Syria engagement, is also part of the team.

Also present is Roger Carstens, the Biden administration's top official for freeing Americans held overseas.

The trip marks the first formal American diplomatic appearance in Syria in more than a decade.

The United States closed its embassy in Damascus in February 2012 in protest against the Syrian government's handling of demonstrations that broke out after the 2011 Arab Spring. ▶ Page 5



Iran tops SCO Countries Worker Skills Contest

TEHRAN – Iranian national robotics team ranked first, securing a gold and a silver medal in the third Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) Countries Worker Skills Contest, held in Qingdao, China's Shandong, from December 15 to 18.

The event served as a platform for sharing expertise, attracting skilled workers from 15 teams competing in three programs.

Mohammad-Javad Haqi grabbed the gold medal.

Achievement in robotics competitions

The 24 Iranian robotics teams that participated in the Federation of International Robosports Association (FIRA) 2024 RoboWorld Cup in Sao Luis, Brazil, managed to win 17 awards. ▶ Page 7

Iran's presence in Syria: security chief explains the 'why' and 'how'

TEHRAN – In an interview with Khamenei.ir, Ali Akbar Ahmadian, Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council (SNSC), provided a comprehensive explanation of Iran's presence in Syria over the past decade.

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's government collapsed earlier this month after an insurgency in the country's northwestern Aleppo province quickly spread across the nation in the face of the Syrian army's lack of resistance.

Assad's Syria was a close Iranian ally, maintaining a strongly anti-Israel stance. With Syria's future uncertain following Assad's departure, Western media narratives frequently portray the situation as a significant setback for Iran, suggesting that Assad's Syria was heavily influenced—militarily and politically—by Iran, and his fall represents the loss of a key asset. ▶ Page 2



TEHRAN PAPERS

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

Ankara's strategy with the Syria card

In an article by Javad Mirgaloy Bayat, Farhikhtegan discussed Turkey's evolving diplomatic approach regarding Syria, specifically focusing on comments made by Hakan Fidan, Turkey's Foreign Minister. Fidan, in his remarks, highlighted the importance of offering constructive support while also criticizing Iran's decision to resist certain pressures. The article emphasized that Fidan's statements appeared to target segments within Iran's political system that both support Resistance and may hold a more favorable view of Turkey's position. Fidan's core message was that, in order to effectively strengthen Hezbollah's Resistance through Syria, it is crucial for Iran to address the issue of the so-called Zangezur Corridor and make necessary concessions. This is an issue that has already been discussed within various political circles in both Turkey and Iran. Furthermore, Fidan suggested that Iran should demonstrate greater cooperation in the northern and southern corridors to allow Turkey to provide more significant support to Lebanon's Resistance efforts. The article speculates that this strategic shift is designed to ease tensions between Turkey and Iran while creating room for more collaboration in the region, particularly regarding Syria and Lebanon.

Keyhan: Whitewashing terrorists in Syria
In an analysis, Keyhan explored the shifting dynamics within Syria's armed groups. The article criticized the transformation of a terrorist leader, who was previously known for violent rhetoric, now presenting himself with a well-groomed appearance and Western-style philosophy. The article points out the change in tone, with the leader of this group, al-Julani, now adopting rhetoric about unity and social justice, which seems to echo Western political thought. The report argues that this shift is part of a broader strategy by Turkey, in coordination with the U.S. and Israel, to rebrand and revive the remnants of Daesh, employing new tactics after the failure of the original project. The piece warns that, despite superficial changes, the fundamental goal remains the same: to weaken Syria and its allies.

Jam-e Jam: Grossi's return to factory settings
In an article for Jam-e Jam, Mohammad Ghaderi criticized Rafael Grossi, Director-General of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), after his visit to Tehran. Ghaderi argued that Grossi's recent actions demonstrate his lack of autonomy

and his alignment with Western and Zionist interests. Despite Grossi's attempts to present himself as a neutral actor seeking resolution, the article pointed out that his comments were more politically charged than fact-based, deviating from the technical focus expected from the head of a specialized organization like the IAEA. Ghaderi emphasized that Iran's nuclear program, which is under full IAEA safeguards, is peaceful and in line with the country's technical needs. He criticized Grossi for making political statements rather than sticking to the facts outlined in IAEA reports. The article argued that Grossi's comments, particularly regarding Iran's enrichment activities, create unnecessary hurdles and distort the role of the agency. Ghaderi asserted that Grossi's remarks serve to undermine Iran's rights under international law, highlighting that Iran has the right to pursue nuclear energy peacefully, without external interference.

Hamshahri: Western cognitive war against Iran
Mojtaba Zarei, a lawmaker sitting on the Parliament's National Security and Foreign Policy Committee, wrote in Hamshahri about the ongoing cognitive and media warfare waged by the U.S. and its allies against Iran. Zarei argued that the U.S. and its partners are not only using economic pressure but are also actively engaging in campaigns to delegitimize Iran's government and destabilize the country through domestic media manipulation and disinformation. The article identified the delegitimization of the government as a key tactic in this cognitive warfare. Zarei noted that certain domestic political groups, often in cooperation with foreign adversaries, portray the Iranian government as ineffective and corrupt. These attacks, he suggested, are designed to create a sense of helplessness and isolation within the executive branch. Zarei emphasized that such criticism must avoid being influenced by foreign propaganda and should be rooted in constructive dialogue. Another tactic, according to Zarei, is the creation of a dual power structure within Iran. By exploiting the inaction of certain officials, foreign powers create internal divisions that undermine the unity of the government. This, Zarei argued, erodes public trust in the government and weakens its legitimacy. He called for greater unity within Iran's government, stressing that all branches should avoid internal conflicts and present a unified front to the people.

Iran demands investigation into murder of two nationals in France



The Loon-Plage camp, near Dunkirk, in November 2024

TEHRAN — The Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs has called on the French government to conduct a thorough investigation into the tragic murder of two Iranian nationals during a violent attack in northern France.

On December 14, a 22-year-old man shot and killed five people near Loon-Plage, not far from Calais in northern France. Two Iranian men, aged 19 and 30, who were living in a local migrant camp were among the victims. Following the incident, the Iranian Embassy in Paris promptly contacted relevant French authorities to demand accountability and justice for the victims.

In a separate statement on Friday, Vahid Jalalzadeh, Deputy for Consular Affairs, Parliamentary Affairs, and Iranians of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, expressed profound sorrow over the loss of life and extended condolences to the families of the deceased.

He highlighted the need for a serious follow-up by French security and judicial authorities, urging them to provide transparent updates regarding the investigation. The official emphasized the importance of identifying, prosecuting,

and punishing those responsible for the heinous act.

"In discussions with the French Embassy in Tehran, the Iranian Ministry underscored the necessity for a comprehensive judicial inquiry and criminal prosecution of the assailant," Jalalzadeh stated, assuring that the ministry will persist in its efforts to protect the rights of Iranian citizens abroad and facilitate the repatriation of the victims' bodies to Iran.

As investigations continue, French police have confirmed the arrest of a suspect in connection with the attack, although their identity has not yet been disclosed.

The deaths of these two Iranians have sparked outrage and concern within the Iranian community and beyond, with calls for greater protection of individuals against racially motivated violence.

Reports show that despite the impact of these events on the approximately 500 residents of the camp, including many families, no psychological support has been put in place. French police have yet to identify the shooting as a hate crime.

Iran's presence in Syria: security chief explains the 'why' and 'how'

From page 1 ► In his Thursday interview, Ahmadian clarified that Iran's involvement in Syria had been limited, focusing on counter-terrorism and regional stability. He emphasized that the Resistance movement extends beyond Syria and will continue to expand across the region.

Strategic principles and conditions for involvement

Ahmadian outlined the foundational principles that have guided Iran's military and advisory presence abroad.

He emphasized that Iran's actions are always based on decisive defense against foreign threats, with no initiation of aggression. "Iran has never initiated aggression against anyone," Ahmadian stated.

Furthermore, Iran adheres to non-interference in the affairs of other countries unless three specific conditions are met: a formal request from the official government, non-opposition to the local population, and a clear national interest or ideal, such as defending the oppressed.

Iran sent military advisors to Syria in the

2010s after an official request by Damascus which was struggling to contain the growing surge of foreign-backed terrorism.

"The relationship between Iran and Syria dates back to the era of Hafez al-Assad. This close relationship was rooted in shared opposition to Zionism and the defense of Palestinian rights. However, with the emergence of ISIS, Iran's role evolved to address the new threat," the official stated.

Had ISIS not been defeated in Syria and Iraq, Iran would have faced a far costlier fight against the terrorist group on its own soil

'Iran needed to vanquish Daesh before it could reach its borders'

Elsewhere in his remarks, the security chief explained that Iran's actions in Syria were largely for its own security. "We are not at all regretful of the costs we incurred," he asserted.

Resistance groups are autonomous, Araghchi tells Egyptian media

When discussing Iran's involvement in Syria, Araghchi explained that their role has been purely advisory, aimed at combating terrorist groups such as ISIS.

He paid tribute to the martyred General Qassem Soleimani, acknowledging his sacrifices in the fight against terrorism.

"Our support is for the Syrian people and their sovereignty, not for any individual," he clarified.

Araghchi warned of the potential resurgence of terrorism in Syria, describing it as a threat to all regional nations.

He elaborated on the concept of the Axis of Resistance, emphasizing

its role in restoring justice in Palestine.

"This is not just about fighting; it's about securing Palestinian rights and combating occupation by the Zionist regime," he stated.

Despite significant losses, including the martyrdom of leaders, the top diplomat noted that the Resistance has delivered substantial blows to the occupiers, forcing the Israeli regime to negotiate ceasefires in Lebanon.

Highlighting the historical and cultural bonds between Iran and Egypt, Araghchi advocated for stronger cooperation. "Our collaboration can lead to stability and prosperity," he remarked, ap-



Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi during an interview with Egypt's Alghad TV aired on December 20, 2024.

plauding Egypt's peace initiatives in Palestine, adding that "Iran stands with Egypt in these humanitarian efforts."

Tehran blasts interventionist policies of UK, Australia in West Asia

TEHRAN — The spokesperson for Iran's Foreign Ministry has denounced the recent joint statement issued by the foreign and defense ministers of Australia and the United Kingdom, labeling it as "baseless, unrealistic, and irrelevant."

Esmail Baqaei urged both nations to reevaluate their interventionist policies, particularly in the West Asia region.

The statement, which was released on Tuesday, condemned Iran's alleged supply of missiles and drones, and military ties with Russia. The joint statement also claimed that Iran's nuclear program lacks credible civilian justification and emphasized that Tehran must never develop nuclear weapons.

Additionally, the ministers accused Iran of human rights abuses, including the persecution of women, girls, and minorities—allegations Tehran has repeatedly denied as baseless and politically motivated.

Baqaei condemned the "one-sided and biased" stance taken by these countries regarding Iran's defensive operations, which were conducted in response to an Israeli regime attack on the Iranian embassy in Damascus.

Addressing the repeated accusation that Iran has supplied ballistic missiles to Russia for use in the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, Baqaei categorically rejected the claims. He described these allegations as part of a broader agenda led by the U.S. and the UK to escalate tensions.

He further noted that even Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy had denied the claim that Iran provided ballistic missiles to Russia, casting doubt on the credibility of such accusations.

Turning his attention to the broader instability in West Asia, Baqaei criticized the ongoing occu-

pation and aggressive expansionism of the Zionist regime.

He asserted that this instability is exacerbated by the unwavering support of the U.S., the UK, Australia, and other Western nations for Israeli policies.

Over the past 14 months, he said, these policies have included acts of genocide against Palestinians, as well as military aggressions targeting Lebanon, Syria, and Yemen. Baqaei called for the international community to hold the UK, Australia, and other supporters of the Israeli regime accountable as accomplices in these "heinous crimes."

The Iranian spokesperson also took aim at human rights records in both Australia and the UK, accusing the two countries of widespread violations. These include systematic abuses in their prisons and detention centers for refugees, complicity in Israeli crimes against Palestinians, and, in Australia's case, the continuation of "colonial extermination policies" targeting Indigenous peoples.

On the subject of Iran's nuclear program, Baqaei reiterated that all activities are peaceful and conducted within the framework of Iran's legal obligations under the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and the safeguards agreement, under the supervision of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

He emphasized that IAEA reports have consistently confirmed Iran's compliance and that its nuclear activities have never deviated from their peaceful objectives.

Baqaei also criticized the U.S. and UK for their role in transferring nuclear-powered submarines to Australia under the AUKUS pact, which he said has raised serious proliferation concerns and drawn widespread criticism, including from the IAEA.

(See full text at tehrantimes.com)

Biden's sanction encore: escalating economic warfare against Iran

By Garsha Vazirian

TEHRAN — As President Joe Biden's administration nears its end, the United States has unleashed what seems to be its final round of sanctions against Iran, aiming to cripple its economy and exert significant psychological and political pressure on its citizens.

Since 2021, the Biden Administration has maintained a hardline stance regarding sanctions against Iran, contrary to expectations of a shift from previous administrations' strategies.

These sanctions have targeted various Iranian activities, including the oil trade and military capabilities, with the goal of destabilizing Iran financially and swaying public opinion against the government.

A central tenet of U.S. hostility toward Iran

The U.S. has imposed sanctions on Iran since the 1979 Iranian Revolution, targeting sectors like the economy, military, and science, mainly in response to Iran's nuclear program and its support for Resistance movements across West Asia.

Administered by the Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC), these sanctions have evolved with different U.S. administrations.

Upon taking office, Biden was expected by some to adopt a different approach toward Iran compared to his predecessor, Donald Trump, who withdrew the U.S. from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in 2018 and re-imposed stringent sanctions.

While Biden expressed a desire to rejoin the JCPOA and engage diplomatically, his administration has continued imposing new sanctions on Iran.

Biden's sanctions target sectors like Iran's economy and oil trade, even when they are under the guise

of "If ISIS had not been eradicated in Syria and Iraq, we would have had to fight ISIS within our own borders at many times the cost today. The goal of destroying ISIS was achieved, and it was a significant achievement that justified the costs of our presence."

Ahmadian stressed, adding, "We decisively entered into war with ISIS, just as we fought ISIS in Syria and Iraq. Today, if ISIS reappears with the same characteristics and features around us, we will naturally suppress it in that location."

The official also responded to inquiries regarding the fall of Assad, and why Iran did not send troops to Syria to counter the new insurgency. "Iran was never meant to fight in place of the Syrian army, especially against a force that does not pose a decisive threat to the Islamic Republic," he clarified. He added that after the fall of ISIS, Iran had withdrawn its forces at the request of the Syrian government and did not have an operational presence in the region to decide whether to accompany them or not. "Furthermore, rapid reinforcement was not feasible unless the Syrian army resisted," he emphasized.

of "human rights" issues.

During the last 4 years, over 600 individuals and entities linked to Iran and Resistance groups like Hamas, Hezbollah, and Ansarullah have been sanctioned.

In Biden's final days, the U.S. Department of State intensified sanctions, targeting four institutions and six vessels allegedly involved in Iran's oil trade.

Additionally, individuals and entities linked to Iran's military programs, including UAVs and missiles, faced new sanctions.

Notably, Brigadier General Majid Mousavi of the IRGC ASF was sanctioned for his role in Iran's ballistic missile program, alongside entities like Sanat Danesh Rahpuyan Aflak Company and Switzerland-based Illumove SA.

Ruthless economic aggression and its ramifications

The U.S. Department of State supposedly aims to "stem the flow of revenue" Iran allegedly uses to support "military activities abroad," hoping to weaken its regional influence.

Nevertheless, by targeting Iran's oil trade, the U.S. seeks economic pressure leading to political concessions.

This approach severely impacts ordinary Iranians, exacerbating financial struggles amid inflation, currency devaluation, and goods shortages, leading to significant humanitarian repercussions.

A 'strategy' that misses the mark

Despite U.S. attempts at economic strangulation, Iran has shown remarkable resilience and adaptation.

Sanctions intended to cripple military programs have inadvertently driven Iran to advance its defensive capabilities.

(See full text at tehrantimes.com)

Meeting in Cairo Anxiety in Tel Aviv

Israel watches warily as Pezeshkian's Cairo visit raises prospects for Iran-Egypt rapprochement

By Soheila Zarfam

TEHRAN – Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian is following in the footsteps of his predecessor. The surgeon-turned-politician is deepening Iran's connections in the region, forging stronger ties with Muslim nations and solidifying key alliances.

After patching up relations with Saudi Arabia in 2023, Iran has set its sights on a more important Arab actor: Egypt.

Following over four decades of strained relations, Iran and Egypt are closer to full rapprochement than ever before. This is underscored by President Pezeshkian's landmark visit to Cairo for the D-8 summit on Thursday, the first by an Iranian president in 11 years.

During his speech at the summit, Pezeshkian spoke of Iran's vision for a close and united region. "The importance of preserving friendships and forging new bonds through multilateral cooperation among Islamic countries, based on development and collective benefits, is now felt more than ever," he said, adding, "Moving toward multilateralism and establishing smart economic and trade networks among nations is a rightful course of action, reflecting the will of the majority of countries."

In his meeting with Egyptian counterpart Abdel Fattah el-Sisi on the sidelines of the summit, Pezeshkian made it clear that Iran sees strong ties with Egypt as an important piece in the regional puzzle it is trying to build. "All Islamic countries should strive to expand



World leaders participating in the 11th Developing Eight Organization for Economic Cooperation (D-8) Summit pose for a photo-op in Cairo on December 19, 2024.

interaction and dialogue within the Islamic world according to their share, and overcome existing differences, as these differences provide a basis for foreign interventions," he stressed in remarks to Sisi.

The Egyptian president, for his part, expressed hope that the recent positive steps taken to restore ties between the two countries will continue until full bilateral relations are established.

Embassies could soon reopen in Tehran and Cairo, according to Mehdi Sanaei, a senior aide to President Pezeshkian. Speaking on the flight back from Cairo, Sanaei confirmed that "political talks and appropriate actions have started" between the two countries.

Nearly everyone welcomes the potential rapprochement between Iran and Egypt; Arab and Iranian media are celebrating the thaw in relations between these two regional

powers. Israel, however, is the exception.

On Friday, Israel's i24 news channel aired a report on President Pezeshkian's visit to Cairo, framing the growing prospects for restored Iranian-Egyptian ties as a worrying development.

"One of the most concerning aspects of this [D-8] summit is the presence of Masoud Pezeshkian, the President of Iran, who is visiting Egypt for the first time in 11 years. This suggests a shift in attitudes and the potential for new collaborations between Egypt and Iran. Furthermore, the historic meeting with the President of Turkey highlights the strengthening of regional ties for Iran," the news channel's reporter stated.

Why is Israel fearful of an Iran-Egypt rapprochement?

Alireza Majidi, a West Asia and

North Africa expert, describes Egypt as "arguably the most important Arab country," citing its ancient history, early modernization, and deep influence on other Arab nations.

"While recent economic challenges, particularly since Camp David, have led to foreign aid dependence, Egypt retains considerable influence today," the expert added, elaborating on why Iran is willing to restore ties with Egypt.

Egypt is also keen to build a new relationship with Iran, Majidi pointed out. Tehran wields considerable influence across West Asia and beyond, significantly impacting regions crucial to Egypt, such as the Suez Canal and Bab al-Mandab Strait. Decisions made in Sana'a, the capital of Iran's close ally Yemen, heavily influence conditions in these waterways.

While it appears that Iran and Egypt have strong incentives to restore ties, Israel has been trying to stand in the way of that for the longest time. Majidi attributes Israel's opposition to a rapprochement between Iran and Egypt to two key factors: Iran's well-known anti-Israel posture and the persistence of anti-Zionist sentiment within Egyptian society.

"Even though Egyptian politicians normalized ties with Israel and signed Camp David accord, the Egyptian population still loathes Israel. Recent events in Gaza have exacerbated these feelings, leading the Israeli regime to believe that closer relations between Iran and Egypt would serve to reinforce anti-Israel sentiment within Egypt, one of the most important Arab actors."

The state of Iran-Egypt relations: past and present

From Page 1 ▶ The first phase of relations between Iran and Egypt corresponds to the pre-revolutionary period, when the regime of Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi aligned with the United States and Israel, recognizing the Zionist state in 1950. This pro-Western stance solidified Iran as a strategic ally of the United States in the region, generating friction with Arab nations, including those under Egypt's leadership.

This period was also marked by the coup d'état of the "Free Officers" in Egypt, led by Naguib and Abdel Nasser, which overthrew the monarchy and established a republic oriented towards the East. This fundamental shift transformed bilateral relations, ushering in a phase of increasing tension.

Egypt's emphasis on pan-Arabism during the 1950s and 1960s played a crucial role in this deterioration. Pan-Arabism, a movement that promoted unity and cooperation among Arab countries, was perceived as a direct threat to the "reactionary axis" led by the Shah, who viewed this movement as a challenge to his alliance with the West and his geopolitical vision for the region.

Iran's policy towards the Zionist regime, its promotion of confrontation between Arabs and Iranians, criticism of the regressive nature of the Iranian monarchy, and accusations that Tehran was merely a tool of the West were some of the primary points of friction between the two countries. In this regard, opposition to Iran's growing influence in the region was a cornerstone of Gamal Abdel Nasser's foreign policy. In 1950, following a strong speech against the government of Mohammad Reza Shah, Nasser ordered the severing of diplomatic relations with Iran in response to the Shah's pact with the Zionist regime.

The death of Gamal Abdel Nasser and the rise to power of Anwar Sadat marked a crucial opportunity for improving relations between Iran and Egypt. In this new context, Egyptian President Sadat made a visit to Tehran on October 11, 1970, marking the beginning of a new phase of rapprochement. In 1974, following the visit of the Egyptian Prime Minister to Tehran, Iran granted Egypt a loan of one billion dollars for the expansion of the Suez Canal, the reconstruction of Port Said, and the construction of an oil pipeline from Suez to Port Said. This was one of the decisive steps in the reactivation of bilateral ties between the two countries.

Under the Pahlavi regime, Iran welcomed the 1975 Sinai Agreement and, later, the Camp David Accords signed by Sadat in 1978 between Egypt and Israel, viewing these agreements as an opportunity to consolidate its strategic position in the region. Iran's support for these accords reflected its desire to strengthen its relationship with Egypt, especially

at a time when regional dynamics were shifting and new alliances were being formed.

However, following the victory of the Islamic Revolution in 1979, relations between Iran and Egypt were once again marked by tension. The shift of Iran's stance on the Palestinian cause, the signing of the Camp David Treaty between Egypt and Israel, and the welcoming of the deposed Shah in Cairo were decisive factors that triggered a drastic change in bilateral relations.

From the late 1970s, Egypt, under the leadership of Anwar el-Sadat, had shifted its national security strategy, moving away from its historic confrontation with Israel and adopting a policy more aligned with Western interests. However, the Islamic Revolution brought a completely different approach in Iran, which redirected its focus toward supporting the Palestinian cause and promoting Resistance movements across the region.

The renewed rapprochement, although still in its early stages, reflects a significant shift in the regional dynamics, where both Egypt and Iran seem willing to overcome decades of estrangement

This clash of visions led to a rupture that extended beyond diplomacy. While Egypt sought to position itself as a key ally in the Western-led regional order, Iran emerged as an ideological and political challenge to the status quo. The incompatibility of their international agendas not only eliminated any possibility of collaboration but also positioned both nations as adversaries in an increasingly polarized regional landscape.

With the onset of the Iran-Iraq War in 1980, Egypt firmly aligned itself with Baghdad, offering unwavering support to Saddam Hussein's regime. This backing was not only political but also manifested through the mobilization of Egyptian citizens, many of whom volunteered to join the Iraqi army in the invasion against Iran. This policy reflected Egypt's alignment with traditional Arab interests and its intention to counter the growing Iranian influence in the region following the Islamic Revolution, which had shifted the power balance in West Asia.

However, by the late 1990s, the situation began

to change. Under the presidency of Mohammad Khatami (1997-2005) in Iran, the implementation of a policy of détente opened a new chapter in bilateral relations. This approach was reciprocated by Egypt, marking a shift towards greater cooperation between the two countries.

The rapprochement between Egypt and Iran was reflected in the strengthening of economic ties, with mutual delegation visits and the signing of agreements to boost collaboration in strategic sectors. While historical and political differences did not completely disappear, this phase represented a joint effort to overcome past antagonisms and explore opportunities for mutual benefit.

Under the presidency of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (2005-2013), Iran pursued an active foreign policy that prioritized the expansion of its political, cultural, and economic ties, particularly with Africa and strategic countries such as Egypt. Since coming to power in 2005, the Iranian government implemented initiatives such as the creation of the Africa Bureau in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the strengthening of cooperation with key ministries, such as the Ministry of Energy, to diversify its international alliances. This approach reflected Iran's desire to solidify its influence amid the growing competition for regional clout.

Following the January 25, 2011, Revolution in Egypt, hopes arose for a potential rapprochement between Cairo and Tehran. The visit of Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi to Tehran in August 2012, for a Non-Aligned Movement summit, marked a historic event, being the first time in over three decades that an Egyptian president visited Iran. In turn, in February 2013, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad traveled to Egypt to attend a summit of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, raising expectations about the possibility of normalizing relations.

However, despite these diplomatic gestures, the deep political and strategic differences between the two countries prevented significant progress in their bilateral relations. Historical factors and divergent regional alignments remained difficult obstacles to overcome, leaving relations between Iran and Egypt in a state of ambiguous cordiality, with no tangible progress toward genuine cooperation.

During Hassan Rouhani's presidency (2013-2021), relations between Iran and Egypt took a backseat in Iran's foreign policy agenda. While there were expectations that the Rouhani administration might give new momentum to bilateral ties, Tehran's regional and global priorities pushed Egypt to a secondary position.

(See full text at tehrantimes.com)

Iran discover fate at 2025 AFC Beach Soccer Asian Cup

TEHRAN – The stage is set for the AFC Beach Soccer Asian Cup Thailand 2025 following the draw at the AFC House in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia on Thursday.

The 16 teams were divided into four groups with the tournament to be played at the Jomtien Beach in Pattaya from March 20 to 30, 2025.

Thailand, who will be seeking a first title, were drawn in Group A with Kuwait, Lebanon and India while three-time winners Japan will face China, Saudi Arabia and Iraq in Group B.

Defending champions Iran, in search of a fourth title, were drawn with two-time champions United Arab Emirates, Afghanistan and Indonesia in Group C.

Oman, the 2015 champions, will face Bahrain, Malaysia and Vietnam in Group D.

The top two teams from each group will advance to the quarter-finals.

Also at stake in the continental showpiece are three tickets to the FIFA Beach Soccer World Cup Seychelles 2025.

Draw Result

Group A: Thailand, Kuwait, Lebanon, India

Group B: Japan, China PR, Saudi Arabia, Iraq

Group C: Iran, UAE, Afghanistan, Indonesia

Group D: Oman, Bahrain, Malaysia, Vietnam

Taremi assists as Inter reach Italian Cup quarters

TEHRAN – A much-changed Inter Milan side eased to a 2-0 victory over Udinese in the Italian Cup on Thursday.

Marko Arnautovic, assisted by Mehdi Taremi, was on target in the 30th minute and the second goal was scored by Kristjan Aslani in the second minute of stoppage time during the events of the half.

Taremi hit the post in the second half, while Inter also had an early penalty revoked on review.

With this valuable victory, Inter Milan succeeded in qualifying for the quarter-finals of the Italian Cup, to face Lazio.

Iran second at 2024 Asian Roll Ball Championship

TEHRAN – Indian men emerged champion in the 4th Asian Roll Ball Championship.

In the final match, the Indian men's team defeated Iran 11-2. Nepal secured third place in the men's section.

In the women's category, the Indian team also triumphed over Iran in a tough match, winning 3-2. Sri Lanka claimed third place in the women's category. The competition took place in Goa, India from December 16 to 19.

FIFA chief hails women-only crowd at Sepaham Persepolis match

TEHRAN – FIFA president Gianni Infantino has offered "heartfelt gratitude" to Iranian authorities for allowing tens of thousands of women and girls to attend a top-flight soccer match between Sepahan and Persepolis on Monday.

Monday's Pro League clash at Isfahan's Naghsh-e Jahan Stadium, which home team Sepahan won 2-1, was played in front of a crowd made up exclusively of women and girls.

That decision came after a Sepahan cheerleader led insulting chants about female Persepolis fans at a previous clash between the clubs at Tehran's Azadi Stadium in May, ESPN reported.

The Iranian Football Federation fined both clubs and ordered that their next two meetings be played in front of only female fans.

In comments posted by FIFA on social media on Thursday, Infantino said he was "very pleased" that some 45,000 women and girls had been allowed to attend the latest edition of one of Iran's fiercest club rivalries.

"FIFA has been in constant contact with authorities in Iran for several years regarding women and girls having the possibility to attend football matches," the Swiss said.

"After last year's Tehran derby between Persepolis and Esteghlal where 3,000 women and girls were in attendance, this latest development comes as a glowing representation of how our game is inclusive and open for everyone to enjoy."

Miletic named Tractor assistant

TEHRAN – Vjekoslav Miletic has been named as assistant coach of Iranian football club Tractor.

The 55-year-old coach replaced Antonio Rukavina, who left the Tabriz-based club due to personal problems.

He has most recently worked as manager at the HNK Rijeka U19 HNK Rijeka U19.

Miletic is Tractor head coach Dragan Skocic's countryman.

Tractor are favorites to win Iran league for the first time in history in the current season.

Urunov to extend deal with Persepolis

TEHRAN – Uzbek winger Oston Urunov has reached an agreement with the Iranian football club Persepolis to extend his contract.

The 23-year-old player joined Persepolis in February 2024 and helped the Reds win the 2023-24 Iran Professional League.

Urunov's deal will expire at the end of the season and he announced that he will sign a contract extension in the coming days.

Persepolis currently sit third in the Iran league table, five points behind leaders Tractor.

Iran end year unchanged in FIFA ranking

TEHRAN – Iran football team finished 2024 year unchanged at No. 18 in the FIFA ranking.

Japan maintained their position as Asia's top side, with the top 10 staying unchanged following the latest ranking released on Thursday.

The biggest movers were Vietnam, who improved two spots to occupy 114th with Hong Kong, China moving up a rung to 155th in the world rankings. Japan stayed at 15th while Iran are second at 18th, while Korea Republic (23), Australia (26) and Qatar (48th) completing the top five.

Argentina signed off the year in top spot ahead of France, with Spain, the European champion, completing the podium.

There were only limited changes in the rankings published on Thursday with just 21 international matches taking place since the previous standings were released in November.

The next edition of the FIFA Men's World Ranking will be published on 3 April 2025.

Iran into Water Polo World Cup 2025 Division 2 semis

TEHRAN – Iran defeated Portugal 15-11 in the Men's Water Polo World Cup 2025, Division 2 quarterfinals on Friday.

Team Melli had defeated South Africa 21-4 and Ukraine 16-14 in Group A on Wednesday.

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.

Iran's finance minister meets

D-8 secretary-general to discuss trade, investment



Iran's Economy Minister Abdolnaser Hemmati (R) and Secretary-general of the D-8 Organization for Economic Cooperation Isiaka Abdulqadir Imam

TEHRAN – Iran's Minister of Finance and Economic Affairs Abdolnaser Hemmati met with Secretary-general of the D-8 Organization for Economic Cooperation Isiaka Abdulqadir Imam on Thursday (December 19) to discuss boosting trade and investment among the eight developing Islamic nations.

The meeting took place on the sidelines of the 11th D-8 summit held in Cairo, Egypt.

Hemmati, who accompanied Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian to the summit, reiterated the bloc's target of achieving \$500 billion in trade volume by 2030.

As IRNA reported, during the meeting, Hemmati emphasized the importance of the D-8's member composition and economic potential, stating that the Iranian government is committed to harnessing and activating these opportunities.

The D-8, or Developing-8, comprises eight Islamic developing nations with a combined population of approximately 1.2 billion people. Trade among member states reached \$320 billion in 2022, reflecting substantial economic ties within the bloc.

Commodities worth over \$8b exported from Bushehr province in 8 months

TEHRAN – As announced by a provincial official, non-oil goods valued at \$8.185 billion were exported from Bushehr province, in the southwest of Iran, during the first eight months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20 – November 20).

Ali Soleymani, an official with the province's customs department, put the weight of the exported commodities at 22.076 million tons.

He said 213 types of products have been exported from the province to 47 countries in the first eight months of the present year.

According to the data previously released by the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA), the value of Iran's non-oil exports increased by 18 percent in the first eight months of the current Iranian year, compared to the same period last year.

Iran exported 103.558 million tons of goods valued at \$38.152 billion in the mentioned

eight months, also registering a 14.66 percent rise in terms of weight, Mehr News Agency reported.

The Islamic Republic also imported 24.525 million tons of commodities worth \$45.127 billion in the said eight months.

The country's trade balance was negative \$7.0 billion in the eight months mentioned, according to IRICA.

China, Iraq, United Arab Emirates, Turkey, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India were the main export destinations of Iranian goods during the mentioned period.

These countries accounted for 82.29 percent of the weight and 82.94 percent of the value of the country's total non-oil exports.

The UAE, China, Turkey, Germany, the Russian Federation, and India were also the top sources of imports for Iran in the first eight months of the current year.

Stock market gains on lower interest rates, deregulation

TEHRAN – Iran's stock market has seen positive momentum in the past month, driven by lower interest rates, the removal of price controls, and supportive measures from the Ministry of Economy and the Securities and Exchange Organization (SEO), a market analyst said.

In an exclusive interview with IRIB, Ali Pazaki, a capital market expert, cited the replacement of the NIMA exchange rate with a negotiated exchange rate as a key factor behind the recent market uptick, saying: "Since many listed companies are export-oriented, this shift has boosted their profitability," he explained.

He added that the government's removal of mandatory price controls has significantly benefitted certain industries, especially automotive firms.

"Given that automakers were subject to regulated pricing by the Competition Council, allowing their products to be priced through supply and demand on the commodity exchange has positively impacted their financial statements and those of parts manufacturers."

Pazaki pointed to reduced systematic risks



and easing regional tensions as additional drivers of the positive trend in the stock market.

"These factors have created a calm environment for the capital market in recent days, allowing investors to make decisions based on economic indicators," he noted.

Looking ahead, Pazaki predicted a continued positive outlook for the stock market. "Given the ongoing supportive measures and the inherent value in listed companies, the market is expected to maintain its upward trajectory."

Support from the minister of economy and increased financing for listed firms can contribute to national development projects, ultimately fostering a more dynamic economy."

Iran-Egypt trade surges 67% in 8 months amid growing economic ties

TEHRAN – Trade between Iran and Egypt reached \$17.18 million in the first eight months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20–November 21), marking a 67 percent increase compared to the same period last year, a trade official said on Thursday.

Ruhollah Latifi, spokesperson for the International Relations and Trade Development Commission of Iran House of Industry, Mine, and Trade, highlighted the significant growth, coinciding with Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian's visit to Cairo for the D-8 summit.

"While Iran-Egypt trade has seen fluctuations in line with political relations, recent developments, including closer diplomatic ties and the two countries' membership in BRICS, have contributed to a relative increase in direct trade," Latifi said.



According to Latifi, 35,883 tons of goods worth \$17.18 million were exchanged between the two countries during this period, representing a 65 percent increase in weight and a 67 percent rise in value year-on-year.

Iran's exports to Egypt amount-

ed to 28,116 tons valued at \$13.8 million, showing a 30 percent rise in weight and 41 percent growth in value compared to the previous year. Steel and iron products accounted for 96 percent of Iran's total exports, with 27,206 tons worth \$13.27 million.

Other key exports included laboratory kits (\$142,218), pistachios (\$105,309), clutch parts, marble and travertine stones, sodium hydroxide, tomato paste, tractors, bakery machinery, and agricultural equipment.

Iran's imports from Egypt totaled 7,767 tons worth \$3.39 million, reflecting a 592 percent increase in value compared to last year. Manganese stone comprised 97.5 percent of total weight and 43.2 percent of total value, with 7,580 tons worth \$1.46 million imported.

Other significant imports included disconnectors (\$1,004 million), lathes (\$359,900), razor blades (\$165,325), electronic components (\$155,610), potassium sulfate (\$138,711), flow meters (\$14,233), and glass components for lamps and projectors (\$12,750).

China ready to invest in combined-cycle power plants in Iran's Khuzestan



TEHRAN – Chinese investors are prepared to fund the construction of combined-cycle power plants in Iran's energy-rich Khuzestan province to help address the country's energy imbalance and boost regional economic development, a Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) representative said on Thursday.

Zhao Bin He, the Executive Director of SCO's Iran Office, made the remarks during a meeting with Khuzestan's governor and local religious leaders. "We are here to pay our respects to provincial authorities and outline China's plans for strengthening economic and trade ties, with a particular focus on Khuzestan," Zhao said.

He highlighted the historical and enduring relationship between Iran and China, describing it as built on mutual respect, economic cooperation, and cultural exchange.

"Khuzestan's strategic position in southwest Iran and its vast economic potential make it a key player in enhancing Iran-China relations," Zhao added. "With access to the Persian Gulf and proximity to strong regional economies, Khuzestan offers exceptional opportunities for port infrastructure development and maritime transport."

Zhao reiterated China's readiness to actively participate in developing Khuzestan's infrastructure, expanding port capacity, and exploring joint projects in energy, industry, and agriculture.

"We are also open to collaborating on sports infrastructure development in the province," he added. "Despite sanctions, Iran has achieved remarkable progress in scientific, economic, and political arenas, reflecting the determination and capabilities of its people."

Iran and China have strengthened their economic relations in recent years, particularly through the 25-year Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Agreement signed in 2021. The deal includes cooperation in areas such as energy, infrastructure, transportation, technology, and trade, with China committed to investing billions of dollars in Iran's key sectors.

China remains Iran's largest trading partner, with bilateral trade exceeding \$14 billion in 2023. Iran exports crude oil, petrochemicals, and minerals to China, while importing industrial machinery, electronics, and consumer goods. Additionally, both countries are partners in major international frameworks, including the

Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which aim to enhance regional connectivity and infrastructure development.

The energy sector plays a pivotal role in Iran-China cooperation, with Chinese firms involved in developing Iran's oil and gas fields, as well as power generation projects. Zhao's announcement of investment plans in Khuzestan aligns with China's broader strategy to strengthen its presence in the Middle East and help address Iran's energy needs.

As Iran seeks to attract foreign investment despite international sanctions, cooperation with China provides a vital lifeline for its economic growth and infrastructure development.

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

Khuzestan's strategic location and vast economic potential make it a key player in enhancing Iran-China relations

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.

Also, a meeting between Hormozgan economic operators and Cong Peiwu, China's Ambassador to Iran, was held on December 11 to explore opportunities for economic, cultural, and trade cooperation between the two nations.

Speaking at the meeting, Mohammadreza Safa, head of the Hormozgan Chamber of Commerce, highlighted the province's investment potential in maritime and mining industries, saying: "We hope the challenges facing Hor-

mozgan's economic operators will be resolved. Our request is to facilitate visa issuance for business and tourism professionals to streamline processes."

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

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

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

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

Focus on agriculture, seafood exports, and cultural collaboration

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

"Chinese consumers have a strong preference for seafood, creating significant opportunities for Iranian products in the Chinese market," he said.

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

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

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

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

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

Economic outlook of Iran's trade with neighboring countries

By Hamoon Ardalan

TEHRAN– In recent years, the economic relationships between Iran and its neighboring countries have grown in both complexity and significance. This economic integration is crucial for the development of Iran's non-oil sector and its broader economic strategy, especially considering the geopolitical challenges that the country faces.

In this article, we will explore the current state and future prospects of Iran's

trade with its neighbors, examining key sectors, trade volumes, and strategic partnerships.

Current Trade Trends

As of late 2024, Iran's non-oil trade with its neighbors has seen a notable increase. According to reports, non-oil trade volumes reached \$55.3 billion in the first 11 months of the year, with exports constituting 67 million tons of goods valued at \$25.8 billion and imports amounting to 21.4 million tons valued at

\$29.4 billion. This represents a significant increase in trade flows, driven by an increase in exports of petrochemical products, minerals, and agricultural goods.

Top Trading Partners

Iran's primary trade partners in the region include Iraq, the UAE, Turkey, Pakistan, and Afghanistan. The UAE and Iraq are Iran's two largest trade partners, especially in terms of exports. For example, in the first seven months of 2024, Iran's trade with Iraq was valued at \$7.6

billion, making it one of the most crucial destinations for Iranian goods. The major exports to Iraq include petrochemicals, cement, and agricultural products, while imports primarily consist of machinery and food items.

Turkey has also maintained its position as a key trading partner, with trade between the two countries amounting to \$9.9 billion in the same period. Iranian exports to Turkey largely consist of natural gas and petroleum products, while imports from Turkey are diverse, includ-

ing electrical machinery and textiles.

Strategic Geopolitical Position

Iran's geopolitical location, bordered by 15 countries, gives it a strategic advantage in the trade of goods and services. This advantageous position allows Iran to serve as a key transit hub for goods moving between Central Asia, the Caucasus, and West Asia.

In particular, the development of international transport corridors, such as the North-South Transport Corridor (IN-

STC), which links Iran with Russia, India, and Central Asia, is expected to enhance Iran's role in regional trade.

Furthermore, the expansion of special economic zones, such as the Lamerd Free Trade Zone, has created new opportunities for businesses to engage in regional trade.

This diversification of trade routes and infrastructure investment is expected to foster deeper economic ties with countries in the Persian Gulf and beyond.

US diplomats in Syria: A charm offensive to mislead the public

From page 1 ► But the overthrow of president Bashar Assad by Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) rebel group and its allies on December 8 prompted the US to move the goalposts.

In the middle of this month, the chief US diplomat acknowledged that Washington had engaged in direct communication with HTS.

"We've been in contact with HTS and with other parties," Blinken said during a press conference in Aqaba, Jordan, on December 14.

Blinken referred to those discussions as "direct contact."

The HTS rebel group led by Ahmed al-Sharaa, previously known by his nom de guerre Abu Mohammed al-Jolani, has its roots in Al-Qaeda and ISIL (also known as ISIS and Daesh) terror groups.

HTS represents a rebranding of the Nusra Front that was established in 2012 by ISIL. The Nusra Front separated from ISIL a year later and pledged loyalty to al-Qaeda. In 2017, HTS cut its connections with al-Qaeda and allied with other factions to rebrand itself as Hayat Tahrir al-Sham.

HTS has already been designated as a terrorist organization by the United Nations, the United States, the European Union and Britain, among many others.

The United States is now publicly holding talks with a group that it designated as a "foreign terrorist organization" in 2018 under then



HTS has been included on the US terrorism list since 2018; however, American diplomats engage in discussions with the leaders of the rebel group in Syria.

president Donald Trump.

At that time the State Department accused HTS of being a "vehicle" for the al-Nusra Front "to advance its position in the Syrian uprising and to further its own goals".

It seems that Washington has made no decision on removing the HTS terrorism designation until president-elect Trump once again takes the helm at the White House on January 20.

The United States started sending its forces to Syria in 2014.

Washington did so under the pretext of defeating ISIL. The terror group was defeated in 2017, but American troops still remain in Syria.

The Pentagon has now admitted that the US has increased the number of its soldiers in Syria.

The Pentagon spokesperson acknowledged that the US has more than doubled its troop presence in Syria.

"We have been briefing you regularly that there are approx-

imately 900 US troops deployed to Syria. In light of the situation in Syria and the significant interest, we recently learned that those numbers were higher," Pat Ryder told reporters on Thursday.

He added, "So, asked to look into it, I learned today that, in fact, there are approximately 2,000 US troops in Syria."

The Assad government had repeatedly accused the US of looting the country's natural resources including its oil.

For now, the US decision to hold negotiations with HTS and expand its military presence in Syria exposes Washington's duplicity and double-dealing.

Such talks indicate that the US blacklisting of HTS has just been a charade. American politicians are in fact throwing dust in the eyes of the public by establishing contacts with HTS which is the latest incarnation of the Nusra Front terror group.

Besides, US military presence in Syria amounts to occupation. Making contacts with a "terrorist organization" and deploying additional troops to Syria means that the US is using the carrot-and-stick approach with HTS.

The primary concern of the United States lies in exploiting Syria's oil resources and utilizing the nation as a strategic base to fulfill its regional objectives, regardless of the governing authority in Damascus.

Ansarallah undeterred by Israeli attacks

From page 1 ► The Hebrew Walla news site reported that preparations for the operation lasted for two weeks.

On Thursday, the Israel Hayom newspaper stated that the attack on Yemen was planned as a response to the Yemenis launching more than 200 ground-to-ground missiles and over 170 drones toward Israel.

The newspaper quoted the Israeli military as saying it is "determined to harm the Yemenis and grow intelligence gathering."

It also emphasized that this was a well-planned operation prepared weeks in advance and not a reaction to the ballistic missile launched from Yemen on Wednesday that targeted the Israeli regime.

A series of violent Israeli airstrikes targeted the capital, Sanaa, and the port city of Hodeidah in western Yemen early Thursday, including the Ras Isa oil facility in the west. The attacks resulted in the deaths of nine civilians and injuries to several employees at the facility.

It was the third direct aggression by the Israeli regime against Yemen in five months.

As Israeli fighter jets were en route to attack Yemen, the Arab country's Armed Forces launched another ballistic missile at Tel Aviv.

The Israeli military claims to have intercepted the missile and that only fragments of the warhead landed.

However, a former commander of the Israeli army's air defense system, Zvika Haimovich, said, "What happened with the interception of the Yemeni missile cannot be called a partial interception, as stated by the Israeli army spokesperson, since the warhead directly hit the building."

A statement by the Yemeni Armed Forces said the hypersonic missile "successfully achieved its objective targeting a military site of the Israeli

enemy in occupied Yaffa (Tel Aviv)."

The statement declared, "The Yemeni Armed Forces, as they emphasized in previous statements, confirm their readiness for a long war with this enemy, in support and assistance for Gaza, and in defense of beloved Yemen, and will not stop until the aggression on Gaza stops and the siege on it is lifted."

In a speech, Ansarallah leader Sayyed Abdul Malik al-Houthi revealed, "The hypersonic missile was launched towards the so-called Israeli Ministry of Defense, coinciding with the Israeli air force's move to attack our country."

"The coincidence of the launch of the hypersonic missile with the aggression against our country caused great confusion for the Israeli enemy and even affected the completion of its mission."

The Ansarallah leader vowed that "the Israeli aggression on our country will never deter us from our position in support of the Palestinian people and their fighters in Gaza."

He further warned that "the Israeli aggression on our country will not affect the level of escalation we are carrying out within the framework of the fifth phase of escalation and support for the Palestinian people."

According to Sayyed al-Houthi, "Since the beginning of the support for the Palestinian people until today, 1,147 operations, including ballistic and winged missiles and drones, have been launched at the Israeli occupation, alongside naval operations."

He stated, "211 ships linked to the enemies were targeted, and the Israeli enemy's maritime navigation in the Red Sea, Bab al-Mandab and the Arabian Sea was prevented."

The Ansarallah leader went on to say, "The Israeli enemy has suffered great economic losses, and the impact of our country's operations is ac-

lied this year.

"The recent military offensive in the north is a stark illustration of the brutal war the Israeli forces are waging on Gaza, and we are seeing clear signs of ethnic cleansing as Palestinians are forcibly displaced, trapped, and bombed," said Lockyear. "What our medical teams have witnessed on the ground throughout this conflict is consistent with the descriptions provided by an increasing number of legal experts and organizations concluding that genocide is taking place in Gaza."

"While we don't have legal authority to establish intentionality, the signs of ethnic cleansing and the ongoing devastation – including mass killings, severe physical and mental health injuries, forced displacement, and impossible conditions of life for Palestinians under siege and bombardment – are undeniable," Lockyear adds.

Israeli forces have on numerous occasions

prevented essential items such as food, water, and medical supplies from entering the Strip, as well as blocked, denied, and delayed humanitarian assistance. Some 1.9 million people—90 percent of the entire population of the Strip—have been forcibly displaced, many forced to move multiple times.

Fewer than half of Gaza's 36 hospitals are even partially functional, and the health care system lies in ruins. During the one-year period covered by the report – from October 2023 to October 2024 – MSF staff alone have endured 41 attacks and violent incidents, including airstrikes, shelling, and violent incursions in health facilities; direct fire on MSF shelters and convoys; and arbitrary detention of colleagues by Israeli forces. MSF medical personnel and patients have been forced to evacuate hospitals and health facilities on 17 separate occasions, often literally running for their lives.

According to experts, the Sanaa government will not be deterred in its support for Gaza by Israeli attacks.

According to the Hebrew paper, "The problem is that the Israeli army, after months of war in the north (with Hezbollah), is not yet in a sufficiently good position to fight in an area much farther from Lebanon at full intensity."

It also added that "the Israeli port of Eilat remains closed and deserted due to Yemeni attacks."

In November last year, Yemeni forces opened a military support front in solidarity with Gaza, which has faced a U.S.-backed Israeli genocidal war since October 7, 2023.

Yemen itself was subject to almost a decade of almost daily airstrikes by a Saudi-led and U.S.-backed coalition but managed to fight back.

According to experts, the Sanaa government will not be deterred in its support for Gaza by Israeli attacks.

(See full text at tehrantimes.com)

Israeli settlers set mosque on fire in occupied West Bank

Israeli settlers have set fire to a mosque in the occupied West Bank, while also defacing the building's facade with hateful and racist slogans such as "Revenge" and "Death to Arabs" spray-painted in Hebrew, Al Jazeera reported.

Abdallah Kamil, the governor of Salfit, said on Friday that the attack targeted the Bar al-Walidain mosque in the village of Marda, in the latest incident of settler violence.

"A group of settlers carried out an attack early this morning by setting fire to the mosque," Kamil said in a statement.

One resident of the village told AFP news agency that the settlers "set fire to the entrance of the mosque and wrote Hebrew slogans on its walls".

Another resident said the fire was extinguished before it could engulf the entire structure.

Nasfat al-Khufash, head of the Marda village council, also confirmed the "systematic terror attack by a group of settlers", in an interview with Reuters news agency.

The Israeli settlements on Palestinian land in the occupied West Bank are considered illegal by the United Nations and under inter-

national law.

Governor Kamil said that settlers had previously entered the village "under the protection of the Israeli army", and that similar acts of vandalism and graffiti had been reported in nearby areas.

Palestine's Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Ramallah condemned the incident, calling it a "blatant act of racism" and a reflection of the "widespread incitement campaigns against our people carried out by elements of the extremist right-wing ruling government" of Israel.

The Israeli police and Shin Bet security services said in a joint statement: "We see this incident as extremely serious and will act resolutely to bring the perpetrators to justice for rigorous trial."

Settler violence in the illegally occupied West Bank has intensified since the war in Gaza began on October 7 last year. As of October 2024, there have been at least 1,400 settler attacks in the West Bank.

Since the start of the war on Gaza, at least 803 Palestinians have been killed in the West Bank by Israeli forces or settlers, according to the Palestinian Health Ministry.

Report: Netanyahu cancels Poland trip fearing arrest

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is reportedly planning to skip next month's events in Poland marking the 80th anniversary of Auschwitz's liberation, fearing potential arrest, Polish news outlet Rzeczpospolita reported.

Rzeczpospolita said Israeli officials have

not reached out to their Polish counterparts regarding Netanyahu's attendance. Warsaw believes the absence is tied to its commitment to the International Criminal Court's arrest warrant for Netanyahu "for crimes against humanity and war crimes" committed since 7 October last year in Gaza.

Nearly 650 athletes killed in Gaza

The Palestinian Football Association has reported that at least 644 athletes, including nearly 400 football players, have been killed by Israeli forces in Gaza since October 2023.

It added that at least 91 of them are chil-

dren, Middle East Eye reported.

They are among more than 45,200 Palestinians killed by Israeli forces in Gaza since October 2023.

War and diplomacy during and after the Al-Aqsa Flood

From page 1 ► Calculations are necessary within the scope of opportunities available. For example, delaying the response to the assassination of the resistance leader in Gaza was interpreted by the enemy as a sign of weakness. This led to further escalation, including subsequent assassinations in Lebanon and an intensified pace of massacres in Gaza and Lebanon.

The most effective supporting fronts during this year's long battle have been those most steadfast in their resolve, refusing to be deceived. Yemen remains unique in maintaining an unwavering stance since October 8, positioning itself as a model of resilience. Similarly, the Islamic Resistance in Lebanon, particularly under the leadership of its martyr Secretary General Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, demonstrated remarkable resolve. It successfully instilled fear in the occupying entity. Gaza, through continuing resistance, has shown signs of effective resilience.

However, Iraq has not fulfilled its potential as Syria did under Assad. Syria's dependence on Arab nations that offered false promises, along with an overestimation of Russia's capacity amidst the Ukraine war, left it vulnerable. Additionally, Syria's request for a more limited Iranian role left it more vulnerable during the time of need. These experiences underscore the dangers of misplaced trust in diplomacy and the need for resistance movements to activate their front decisively and at the right time.

The expansion of resistance fronts depends on the model of strategic patience and the accumulation of crimes that ignite popular outrage, creating the conditions for mobilization. Resistance cannot afford to wait until its enemy decides to strike.

In the aftermath of the current war, Gaza will require years to recover and confront

the machinery of anti-resistance diplomacy. Similarly, Lebanon's leadership appears to be focused on internal consolidation, while Iraq still tries to escape the dominance of the dollar. Yemen stands firm, rejecting all forms of diplomacy with its enemy. This resilience will likely provoke an intense Western campaign, but Yemen has demonstrated its ability to understand the language of its enemy and to respond effectively.

It can be concluded that understanding the Leader's vision requires three key methodologies:

1. An effective detailed strategy capable of activating and influencing the transformations within the Muslim nations following the Al-Aqsa Flood battle.

2. Efficiency in execution, which entails adherence to principles, seizing opportunities without hesitation, and relying on a vision where the competence of individuals is proven through its implementation.

3. Comprehensive coordination among the various fronts of resistance to ensure unity and strategic alignment.

In the current fronts of confrontation, the resistance must harness the spirit created by the Gaza genocide to pivot toward new fronts that may fall outside the current scope of the struggle. These alternative fronts hold the potential for exerting pressure and rallying popular support in unexpected ways, particularly in regions where Western powers are deeply invested in maintaining stability.

Whilst the Axis of Resistance is no longer in its previous form after it was hit at its joint, it can encompass an even bigger area, because the events in the past 14 months have nurtured the idea of resistance in the Islamic Ummah.

MSF exposes Israel's campaign of ethnic cleansing, total destruction in Gaza

Repeated Israeli military attacks on Palestinian civilians over the last 14 months, the dismantling of the health care system and other essential infrastructure, the suffocating siege, and the systematic denial of humanitarian assistance are destroying the conditions of life in Gaza, Palestine, according to a new Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) report, Gaza: Life in a death trap.

MSF is urgently calling on all parties, once again, for an immediate ceasefire to save lives and enable the flow of humanitarian aid. Israel must stop its targeted and indiscriminate attacks against civilians, and its allies must act without delay to protect the lives of Palestinians and uphold the rules of war.

"People in Gaza are struggling to survive apocalyptic conditions, but nowhere is safe, no one is spared, and there is no exit from this shattered enclave," said Christopher Lockyear, MSF secretary general, who visited Gaza ear-

Tehran museum showcases 180,000-year-old tooth and other archaeological discoveries



TEHRAN - National Museum of Iran has showcased a collection of the country's latest archaeological findings, including a tooth estimated to be around 180,000 years old.

The exhibition, titled "New Archaeological Discoveries," coincides with Research Week and features artifacts uncovered during 2023's scientific excavations. The collection spans a wide timeline, from the Paleolithic era to the Islamic period.

Sajad Alibeigi, head of the Archaeology Research Institute, highlighted the importance of the exhibition, noting that nearly 390 artifacts are on display, ISNA reported.

Among the key sites represented are Tappeh Tilneh in Kermanshah, with artifacts dating back to the early third millennium BC (approximately 5,000 years ago); Zal-e Hastijan Cave in Markazi province, containing relics from the Sassanid to Islamic periods; and Qaleh Kurd Cave in Qazvin province, known for its Middle Paleolithic finds.

The recently discovered tooth is particularly significant. It was uncovered during

excavations in Qaleh Kurd Cave, where a Neanderthal child's tooth had previously been found. According to the Iranian archaeologist Hamed Vahdati Nasab, the excavation's lead archaeologist, the newly discovered tooth's estimated age is 180,000 years. However, further research is needed to determine whether it belonged to a Neanderthal or a Homo sapiens individual.

"Whether this tooth belongs to a Neanderthal or a Homo sapiens is yet to be determined. If it is Neanderthal, it will be the fifth Neanderthal remain found on the Iranian plateau. If it belongs to a Homo sapiens, it would be astonishing, as no such remains have been found in this region with this age," the archaeologist has explained.

Organizers said that the exhibition marks a milestone in showcasing Iran's rich archaeological heritage and offers a glimpse into the country's extensive historical and cultural legacy.

Established in 1937 in downtown Tehran, the National Museum of Iran serves as the country's principal museum and a vital institution for preserving and showcasing Iran's archaeological and cultural heritage. The museum houses a diverse collection of artifacts that span from prehistory to the Islamic era, including invaluable pieces such as ancient pottery, textiles, and coins. As a center for research and education, the National Museum plays a crucial role in fostering an understanding of Iran's rich history and its connections to other cultures, particularly through significant collections like the Chinese ceramics that highlight the interactions along the Silk Road.

Iran launches nationwide handicrafts markets, exhibitions for Yalda Night

TEHRAN - As part of the celebrations for Yalda Night, which marks the longest night of the year and the arrival of winter, Iran has launched a nationwide handicrafts market and exhibition initiative.

Starting from mid-December, local artisans are showcasing their craftsmanship in major cities, inviting both residents and tourists to explore the rich cultural heritage of Iran, Persian media reported.

The exhibitions aim to promote local handicrafts such as intricately designed pottery, traditional carpets, and handwoven textiles. The markets are not only served as a platform for artisans to sell their products but also provide workshops and demonstrations, allowing visitors to engage directly with the artistry and skills involved in traditional crafts.

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 refers to a traditional celebration of the sun and the warmth of life. Practiced in Iran and Afghanistan, the event takes place the last night of autumn, when families gather at the houses of elders and sit around a table adorned with a series of symbolic objects and foods: a lamp to symbolize light, water to represent cleanliness, and red fruits such



as pomegranates, watermelons, beetroots, jujube, and grapes to symbolize warmth.

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.

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".

Business groups warn against Highland tourist tax

Four chambers of commerce in the Highlands have raised concerns about the possible introduction of a tourist tax.

Highland Council is consulting on a 5 percent visitor levy which it says could generate at least £10m a year for the region.

But Cairngorm, Caithness, Lochaber and Inverness chambers say the extra cost on holiday accommodation could put visitors off coming to the Highlands.

Highland Council has been approached for comment. It has previously said money raised from the levy could be used to improve infrastructure, such as roads.

Highland Council started a 12-week public consultation last month.

The local authority has said the levy could be introduced in September 2026.

MSPs approved a plan in May for councils to add a charge to overnight accommodation such as hotels, B&Bs and holiday lets.

Accommodation providers would be responsible for collecting the levy from visitors. Chambers of commerce are associations or networks of businesspeople.

The four Highland groups want the work towards introducing a Highland tourist tax paused and reviewed.

They are concerned it would put an administrative burden on businesses and put the region at a competitive disadvantage.

(Source: BBC)

New chapter in Tehran-Cairo relations, Iran tourism minister underlines

TEHRAN - Iran's Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts, Seyyed Reza Salehi-Amiri, has announced a new chapter of progress in cultural relations between Tehran and Cairo following a meeting between the presidents of Iran and Egypt.

Salehi-Amiri made the statement on the sidelines of the 8th Ministerial Meeting of the Ancient Civilizations Forum started in Yerevan on Wednesday, during a meeting with Yasser Shaban, Assistant Minister of Foreign Affairs for Cultural Relations, Mehr reported.

Highlighting the historical and cultural ties between the two nations, Salehi-Amiri stressed the importance of further enhancing bilateral relations, particularly in cultural domains.

Furthermore, the Iranian minister extended an official invita-



tion to Shaban to visit Iran and called for stronger cooperation between the two governments in the fields of tourism, cultural heritage, and handicrafts.

Shaban, in turn, expressed Egypt's interest in improving relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran.

He emphasized the shared cultural heritage of the two nations and outlined Egypt's objectives to foster collaboration in political, economic, and especially cultural spheres.

Also, Shaban welcomed the idea of upcoming meetings and agreements to boost coopera-

tion in cultural heritage, tourism, and handicrafts, as he voiced optimism about the future of bilateral relations.

The presidents of Iran and Egypt on Thursday reviewed the recent positive steps taken in relations between the two countries and expressed hope that such steps would continue until the "full restoration of ties".

President Masoud Pezeshkian of Iran and Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi made a two-sided meeting on Thursday on the sidelines of the D-8 Organization for Economic Cooperation, also known as Developing 8. They underlined unity among Muslim states as the "most essential need" of today's world.

The Ancient Civilizations Forum, established in 2017, is made up of ten countries: Iran, Armenia, Italy, Bolivia, Peru, China, Iraq, Egypt, Mexico, and Greece.

Mist-clad mountains of Arasbaran: a gem for nature enthusiasts



TEHRAN - Stretched in northwest Iran, the often mist-clad mountains of Arasbaran beckon nature lovers with their otherworldly beauty and rich cultural history.

This enchanting destination offers travelers a unique blend of breathtaking landscapes, biodiversity, and historical intrigue.

Situated in East Azarbaijan province, Arasbaran, or Qare Daq, spans a vast area bordered by the Aras River to the north, Moghan

to the east, Sarab to the south, and Marand to the west.

Recognized as a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve, the property is home to an astonishing variety of plant and animal species.

The lush forests feature edible wild trees, such as hornbeam, walnut, hazelnut, redcurrant, and herbs used in traditional medicine.

For wildlife enthusiasts, the region hosts rare species like the Caspian red deer, brown bears, leopards, and over 200 species of birds.

Beyond its natural allure, Arasbaran is steeped in history. Kaleybar, a key landmark, was the stronghold of Babak Khorramdin, who led a two-decade resistance against the Islamic Caliphate in the 9th century from the iconic Babak Castle.

The forests later served as a sanctuary for revolutionary groups during Iran's Constitutional Revolution, including those led by Sat-

tarkhan.

In modern times, the region's cultural and historical identity has been shaped by its diverse inhabitants and political significance.

Exploring Arasbaran offers numerous adventures, from traversing the scenic Kaleybar-to-Asheqlu road to discovering hidden gems like Mikandi Valley and the serene Aynali Forests.

The Babak Castle, perched high on a rugged peak, provides not only a glimpse into history but also panoramic views of the surrounding landscape.

For those seeking more immersive experiences, the traditional lifestyle of the local tribes in their summer camps is a window into a bygone era.

Spiritual travelers can visit the holy mountain, while wellness seekers can unwind in the region's therapeutic hot springs.

Japan breaks annual visitor record with 33.4 million in just 11 months

Japan set a new record for visitor arrivals this year, receiving 33.38 million foreigners between January and November 2024 and surpassing the previous high of 31.88 million from 2019.

Government data released on Wednesday showed that Japan set the new record with a month to spare, driven by a weaker local currency and more frequent flights.

"If things go well, 2024 total will surpass 35 million," national tourism agency commissioner Naoya Haraikawa said.

There was a significant increase in visitors from the US and Europe as well as South Korea, Taiwan, and Hong Kong.

The Japan National Tourism Organization revealed that 3.19 million foreign visitors arrived for business and leisure in November alone.

The number was slightly lower than October's 3.31 million, which was the highest for any month.

But year-on-year November still recorded an increase of 30.6 per cent in visitors and marked the second consecutive month

with over three million arrivals.

The surge has been attributed in major part to a weaker yen which has made Japan more attractive to international tourists. The soaring numbers, however, have sparked concerns about "overtourism" at popular destinations, leading to challenges in managing visitor flow and preserving local environments.

Japan, in fact, imposed new rules for climbing the iconic Mount Fuji to curb overtourism and ensure safety.

From July 1 to September 10,

mountaineers were required to reserve spots online or in person and pay an increased fee of 2,000 yen (£10) per person.

The number of climbers was also restricted to 4,000 per day.

In a similar measure to protect the endangered Iriomote cat, the Iriomote island administration capped visitor numbers at 1,200 per day from April 2023.

The measure was also meant to curb overtourism and safeguard the local ecosystems and populations.

(Source: Independent)

Rare terracotta warrior commander unearthed at First Emperor's mausoleum



Archaeologists at the Mausoleum of Qin Shi Huang in Xi'an's Lintong District, China, have uncovered a terracotta warrior believed to represent a senior military commander. This significant find is the first of its kind from Pit No. 2 since formal excavations commenced in 1994.

The Mausoleum of Qin Shi Huang, the first emperor of China and unifier of the nation, is a sprawling burial complex constructed over 38 years by a workforce of 700,000 laborers. Its centerpiece is a 76-meter-tall hillock shaped like a truncated pyramid, beneath which lies the emperor's main burial chamber. Historical texts, particularly the "Records

of the Grand Historian" by Sima Qian, describe the tomb's interior as a vast chamber containing palaces, scenic towers, a bronze coffin, and treasures collected from across the empire.

Pit No. 2, where the commander figurine was unearthed, is believed to represent a military guard formation.

Alongside this commander, archaeologists also uncovered two high-level officer figurines and five other terracotta figures clad in contemporary armor. Remarkably, only 10 senior officer figurines have been discovered among the thousands of terracotta warriors excavated to date.

Zhu Sihong, the head of the excavation project stated: "Based on its location, we believe this figure was likely the highest-ranking military commander of this unit."

The general figurine, as such high-ranking figures are known, is distinguished by its intricate headdress, ornate armor adorned with patterns and ribbon knots, and a characteristic posture with hands clasped in front of the abdomen.

The discovery also included remnants of

chariots and horses, which experts say are consistent with the military formations of the time.

Since the resumption of formal excavations in 2015, Pit No. 2 has revealed a variety of formations, including cavalry, crossbowmen, and mixed units.

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the discovery of the Terracotta Warriors, first unearthed in 1974 when local farmers stumbled upon fragments while digging a well.

Over five decades, archaeologists have excavated more than 2,000 life-sized figures, along with bronze chariots, stone armor, and other cultural relics across three pits covering over 20,000 square meters.

The Qin Terracotta Warriors were designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1987.

The Qin Shihuang Mausoleum Museum stated that the meticulous restoration process for the newly found figurine is already underway.

Staff are conducting deep cleaning and preliminary assembly in preparation for detailed analysis and display.

(Source: Archaeologymag)

Iran tops SCO Countries Worker Skills Contest

TEHRAN –Iranian national robotics team ranked first, securing a gold and a silver medal in the third Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) Countries Worker Skills Contest, held in Qingdao, China's Shandong, from December 15 to 18.

The event served as a platform for sharing expertise, attracting skilled workers from 15 teams competing in three programs.

Mohammad-Javadi Haqi grabbed the gold medal.

Achievement in robotics competitions

The 24 Iranian robotics teams that participated in the Federation of International Robosports Association (FIRA) 2024 RoboWorld Cup in Sao Luis, Brazil, managed to win 17 awards. The 29th edition of FIRA Robotics and Artificial Intelligence World Competitions was held from August 5 to 9.

A total of 1,300 participants from 18 countries including the United States, Germany, South Korea, Canada, Russia, Malaysia, China, India, Indonesia, Canada, Mexico, and Iran competed in four main categories of FIRA competitions (FIRA Air, FIRA Sport, FIRA Challenge, FIRA Youth) in the form of 11 junior leagues and 10 senior leagues in U14 and U19 divisions.

The FIRA RoboWorld Cup includ-



ed competitions in the following leagues. FIRA AIR includes the use of autonomous flying vehicles in urban and disaster scenarios.

The Iranian teams participating in the 2024 World Robotics and Artificial Intelligence FIRA won 9 championships, achieved 7 runner-up positions, and secured third place in these competitions.

In the flying vehicles league, two teams ranked first, and one ranked third. In FIRA youth competitions, U14 division, two teams won second ranking in robosports league as well as innovation and business league.

Also, in the U19 division, two teams won first ranking and in robosports league, another team

ranked first in innovation and business in robotics.

Moreover, two teams ranked second in the rescue and crisis management robots and robosports league.

Two more teams received the best student awards in innovation and business in robotics.

FIRA Youth are competitions for our younger participants such as the mission impossible events.

The robotics team of Iran won a gold medal and three silver medals in the Dubai International Inventions Show (DIS) 2023.

The event provided a business platform for inventors, manufacturers, and dealers to present their

latest products and innovations and exchange information.

For this occasion, delegations from different countries came to Dubai to present their patented inventions and new ideas, the competition brings together many participants and inventions in many diverse areas.

At DIS, excellence in innovation is highlighted through the Invention & Innovation Award, it brings recognition to the best inventions, innovations, and trade, adding to its merit is supported by many international delegates.

Over 20 countries including Iran, Canada, Russia, the United States, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Turkey, Romania, and Oman participated in the competition, ISNA reported. The competition was held both in person and online.

Elite students from Iran ranked first in the UniKL International Robattle Competition (UIRC) 2023 and became champions in the category of Innovation.

The competition was hosted by Malaysia and held from December 10-13, IRIB reported.

The event brought together more than 420 participants, under the age of 17, underscoring its widespread appeal and global representation.

Intl. congress on nanoscience, nanotechnology slated for January



TEHRAN –The tenth international congress on nanoscience and nanotechnology is scheduled to be held from January 29 to 30 in Rafsanjan, a city in the southern Kerman province.

The congress will mainly cover chemistry, physics, and modern nanotechnology fields, ISNA reported.

Themed 'nanoscience development through the application of achievements', the congress seeks to increase the relevance and applicability of nanoscience in daily life, particularly in the industrial sector.

The 10th congress also aims to demonstrate the impact of innovative science by showcasing the most recent research in the field of nanotechnology.

It will center around Nanostructural Material Characterization, Nanoelectronics and Nanophotonics, Nanochemistry and Nanophysics, Nanotechnology in Medical Science and Clinical Medicine, Nanotechnology in Industrial Processes.

Nanotechnology for Energy and Environment, Nanotechnology Entrepreneurship & Commercialization Network, Nanotechnology Safety Con-

siderations, Nanofabrication, Nanoassemblies and Nanoprocessing, Nanotechnology in Agriculture and Food Science, Nanotechnology in Information Technology, as well as Nanobiotechnology are also among main topics.

Iran a global leader in nano-tech

Iran's achievements in nanotechnology are noteworthy. The increase in scientific publications and sales of nano products proves Iran's rise as a global leader in this field.

One of the industries that have experienced good growth in Iran in recent years is the nanotechnology industry, a subject area that has brought Iran to the impressive fourth place worldwide.

According to StatNano, a leading nanotechnology website, Iran has made great strides in the field of nanotechnology being ranked fourth in terms of nanotechnology publication.

This ranking proves the country's remarkable scientific development.

The site considers the number of scientific articles to compare scientific progress in nanoscience, technology, and industry.

Nanotechnology is the manipulation of matter on a near-atomic scale to produce new structures, materials, and devices. The technology promises scientific advancement in many sectors such as medicine, consumer products, energy, materials, and manufacturing. Nanotechnology refers to engineered structures, devices, and systems.

In the past two decades, the world has observed a steady increase in the number of industries producing nano-based products and the number of countries promoting nanotechnology.

More importantly, the ratio of nanotechnology to nominal GDP has increased significantly, suggesting that the contribution of nanotechnology to World GDP has increased. Nanotechnology has also played a key role in the creation of new jobs, Press TV reported.

The nanotechnology sector is a prime example of success in Iran, an arena consisting of expert and program-oriented human resources with significant goals that shine like a jewel in the country's innovation and technology ecosystem.

With the support of talented academicians and knowledge-based companies, the nanotechnology sector has indigenized many technologies to solve the country's main challenges in various areas, including industry.

Iranian nanotechnology companies export their products to 49 countries around the world, mainly to Iraq, Turkey, Afghanistan, India, and China.

Over the past few years, the sales value of domestically-manufactured nano-tech products has experienced an increase of more than 100 percent every year, IRIB reported.

The sales amounted 620,000 billion rials (around one billion dollars) over the past Iranian calendar year (March 2023-March 2024). Moreover, exports of nano-tech products hit 145 million dollars, representing 9.2 percent of the entire market value, IRIB quoted the secretary of the headquarters for the Nanotechnology Initiative Council, Emad Ahmadvand, as saying.

The best-selling products are construction materials, electronic products, and laboratory equipment, which have been even exported to the United States, via a third-party country.

ENGLISH IN USE

LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

Education, labor ministries ink MOU on out-of-school children

The Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Cooperatives, Labor and Social Welfare have signed a memorandum of understanding aiming to bring out-of-school children back to school.

The memorandum of understanding will pave the way for future steps, ISNA news agency quoted Education Minister Mohammad Bat'haei as saying on Sunday.

He made the remarks over the 8th session of council meeting for improving educational standards in underprivileged and underdeveloped areas at the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare. "The meeting is aiming to live up to educational standards, however, the current conditions are unjustifiable, and we should move faster," he added.

تفاهم وزراء برای بازگرداندن کودکان بازمانده از تحصیل به مدارس

وزارت آموزش و پرورش تفاهم نامه مشترکی با وزارت رفاه برای بازگرداندن کودکان بازمانده از تحصیل امضا کردند.

به گزارش روز یکشنبه ایسنا، محمد بطحایی وزیر آموزش و پرورش گفت: امروز تفاهم نامه ای امضا می شود که نقشه کار برای ادامه مسیر کاملاً مشخص شود.

بطحایی در هشتمین جلسه شورای هماهنگی بهبود و ارتقای شاخص های آموزشی و پرورشی مناطق محروم و کمتر توسعه یافته که در وزارت رفاه برگزار شد گفت: هدف اصلی این برنامه و شورای هماهنگی ارتقای شاخص ها بود، هرچند این روند قابل قبول نیست و باید با سرعت بیشتری حرکت کنیم.

Atlas of biosphere reserves, endemic fish poster unveiled

TEHRAN –During a ceremony held on Thursday, the head of the Department of Environment (DOE), Shina Ansari, unveiled an atlas of the country's biosphere reserves as well as the endemic fish poster.

The event was held on the sidelines of the 22nd international environmental exhibition, which kicked off in Tehran on Wednesday and will conclude on Sunday.

A total of 13 biosphere reserves have been so far registered in 11 provinces of the country, covering a total area of six million hectares.

The biosphere reserves are namely Arasbaran, Arjan, Parishan, Kavir, Turan, Miankaleh, Urmia, Kapeh-Dagh, Tang-e-Sayad and Sabz-kouh, Genu, Hara, Hamon, Golestan and Dena. They are internationally designated natural-biological protected areas for the conservation of plants and animals.

The atlas book introduces Iran's 13 biosphere reserves in two languages; it has been done by the FOE in cooperation with the United Nations Educational Scientific Cultural Organization (UNESCO) National Commission and the UNESCO regional office in Iran, DOE website quoted Hamid Zohrabi, an official with DOE, as saying.

The DOE highlights the key role of public involvement in the protection of the biosphere reserves.

Therefore, promoting the use of international standards, and legislating laws and regulations specific to the country for the management of biosphere reserves is on the agenda of the DOE, Zohrabi noted.

The official went on to say that in the next step, the DOE will make its best efforts to draft a bill on the preservation of biosphere reserves to be presented to legal authorities for approval.

Referring to the endemic fish poster, the official said there are 86 native Iranian fish species in the country, which represents the value of habitats as well as the richness of the biodiversity of the country. It also highlights the significance of preserving these species.

Biosphere Reserves are designated under the intergovernmental man and biosphere

(MAB) Program by the Director-General of UNESCO following the decisions of the MAB International Coordinating Council (MAB-ICC).

UNESCO has approved the designation of 11 new biosphere reserves in 11 countries. With these new biosphere reserves covering a total area of 37 400 km², equivalent to the size of the Netherlands, the World Network of Biosphere Reserves now totals 759 sites in 136 countries.

Each biosphere reserve promotes innovative local sustainable development solutions, protects biodiversity, and addresses climate disruption.

They also support local and Indigenous communities through practices such as agro-ecology, water management, and the generation of green income.

Biodiversity is one of the components of a sustainable environment. People depend on natural areas and biodiversity for survival. Public participation along with governmental organizations' efforts play a significant role in preserving biodiversity, and the environment.

Intl. environmental exhibition

The 22nd international environmental exhibition is being held with the theme of 'public involvement, green economy, sustainable future'.

It focuses on 'economic environment, environmental economy', to highlight the importance of social responsibility in protecting the environment.

Preserving natural resources, fostering interactions and cooperation between institutions, organizations, and companies active in the field of environment and energy, promoting the concepts of sustainability and social responsibility among the people as well as encouraging environmentally friendly behaviors are among the other goals of the exhibition.

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 towards enhancing air quality.

Over 40% of wetland area exposed to drying up: DOE chief

TEHRAN –Due to low precipitation and insufficient water right allocation, some 43 percent of the wetlands of the country are subject to dryness, the head of the Department of Environment has said.

"Wetlands need to be saved with the help of management measures and the participation of local communities," IRIB quoted Shina Ansari as saying.

She made the remarks on the sidelines of the 22nd international environmental exhibition which is currently being held in Tehran.

"Over the past few decades, water rights have not been allocated to most of the wetlands, including Parishan, Shadegan, Hamoun, Jazmourian, and even Lake Urmia. Hence, 43 percent of the area of these wetlands is more or less exposed to drying up."

Underscoring the role of local communities in preserving the wetlands, Ansari said: "If we share local communities in the benefits of the wetlands, they will volunteer to conserve and restore the wetlands."

The official went on to say that the DOE, in cooperation with the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), is planning to initiate a project by implementing a local approach to enhance wetland conservation measures.

The DOE also seeks to promote alternative livelihoods around the wetlands, to expand sustainable agriculture by identifying optimal cultivation patterns in each area, and to reduce chemical inputs such as pesticides and chemical fertilizers, which in some way contaminate wetlands and threaten their biodiversity, Ansari further noted.

Wetland conservation project lowers irrigation water consumption

On December 10, Mehri Asna-Ashari, an official with the DOE, said the conservation project of Iranian wetlands has resulted in a 27.5 percent decrease in irrigation water consumption

while increasing agricultural products by 22.5 percent.

"Currently, 49 wetlands, covering around 22 percent of the whole wetlands in the country, are being conserved in the form of native ecosystem management partnership," IRNA quoted Asna-Ashari as saying.

She made the remarks at the meeting of the steering committee of the international project for the conservation of Iranian Wetlands.

Since 2021, the conservation project has been carried out in three wetlands including Shadegan in Khuzestan province, Bakhtegan in Fars province, and Urmia in West Azarbaijan province, the official noted.

Sustainable farming methods were implemented and 2,433 farmers were trained. By February 2024, the results showed that average agricultural production increased by 22.5 percent, whereas irrigation water consumption reduced by 27.5 percent. In addition, the consumption of chemical fertilizers decreased by 25 to 30 percent. Consequently, the income of each farmer increased by 14 percent.

The establishment of 26 non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and 181 livelihood support groups, and the implementation of alternative livelihood plans in 44 villages are some of the other achievements of the project, she added.

The official went on to say that "in 2024, the project was implemented with a budget of 678,000; we hope the project further yields positive outcomes with the allocation of the new budget. Of course, the financial contribution of the government was received with a little delay and insufficiently.

To implement the project more successfully, the Ministries of Agriculture, Energy, Interior, Foreign Affairs, as well as Planning and Budget Organization, and the United Nations Development Program are required to cooperate with each other," Asna-Ashari noted.



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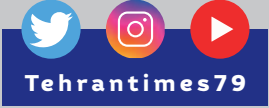
Switchboard Operator: Tel: (+98 21) 43051000

Advertisements Dept.: Telefax: (+98 21) 43051430

Public Relations Office: Tel: (+98 21) 88805807

Subscription & Distribution Dept.: Tel: (+98 21) 43051603

Printed at: Jame Jam Bartar Borna - 44197737



No. 18, Moghadasi Alley, Nejatollahi St., Tehran, Iran P.O. Box: 14155-4843 Zip Code: 1599814713

DECEMBER 21, 2024

GUIDE TO SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

Heaven lies beneath the feet of mothers.

Prophet Muhammad (S)

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

What's in Tehran art galleries



Painting

* Omid Hallaj is putting his latest paintings on view in an exhibition at Bavan Gallery.

Entitled "Absence", the exhibit will run until January 6, 2025 at the gallery located at 7 Abdo off Lareztan St. off Motahhari Ave.

* Bashghah Gallery is playing host to an exhibition of paintings by Mehdi Ahmadi.

Entitled "Home", the exhibition will be running until December 30 at the gallery located at No.13, Hosseini St., Karim Khan Ave.



* Paintings by Ali Malek are on display in an exhibition at Soo Gallery.

The exhibition will continue until January 10 at the gallery located at 30 Purmusa St. off Somayyeh St.

* Nian Gallery is currently playing host to an exhibition of paintings by Sama Anushahr, Nasrin Hassani, Elaheh Mazaheri and Alireza Mousavi.

The exhibition entitled "Zero to The Power OF Zero" will be running until December 30 at the gallery located at 5 Abhari Alley, Vafai St. off Tur St. off South Mofatteh St.



* A collection of paintings by Sobhan Shafiei is on view in an exhibition at Adapa Gallery.

Entitled "Vainglory", the exhibit will run until December 24 at the gallery located at No. 5, Sumesara Alley, Sazesh St., Vali-e Asr Square.

* Naeimeh Razaqi is currently showcasing her paintings in an exhibition at Seyhun Gallery.

The exhibit titled "Garden of Light" runs until January 1 at the gallery located at No. 11, 4th St., Vozara Ave.



* Paintings by Ghazaleh Dehpour, Sholeh Rismanchian, Maryam Taherianfar, Farzaneh Qoreishi and Minoos Ghahremani are on show at Haft Samar Gallery.

The exhibition named "Five Parallel Lines" will be running until December 25 at the gallery that can be found at No. 8, Fifth Alley, Kuh-e Nur St., Motahhari Ave.

* Paintings by Ardeshter Takestani and Mohammad Hamidi are on display in an exhibition at Sheis Gallery.

The exhibit titled "Yalda" will be running until January 3 at the gallery located at Shirzad Alley, near Daneshju Park.



Calligraphic painting

* Calligraphic paintings by a number of artists are on view in an exhibition at CAMA – Contemporary and Modern Art Gallery.

Named "Ethereal", the exhibit runs until December 25 at the gallery located at No. 44, 10th Golestan, Pasdaran St.

* An exhibition of calligraphic paintings Maryam Abedi and Azra Aiqi is currently underway at Homa Gallery.

The exhibit named "Fresh Repetition" runs until December 31 at the gallery located at No. 8, Fourth Alley, Sanai St., Karim Khan Ave.



"Rojin's Dream" wins award at Duhok International Film Festival

TEHRAN-The semi-feature documentary "Rojin's Dream" directed by Serwa Alveysi from Iran won an award at the 11th Duhok International Film Festival in Kurdistan region, Iraq.

The festival, which was held from December 9 to 16, presented the Best Kurdish Documentary Award.

The film tells the story of a disabled couple who yearn to have children, Honaronline reported on Thursday.

In addition to "Rojin's Dream," the Iranian short film "Limo Knew Everything" by Edris Mahmoudian received the festival's Special Mention for the Kurdish Short Film.

The 22-minute film is about a woman who, after having eight daughters, is now giving birth to a baby boy.

A total of 27 films from Iran participated in this year's edition of the festival. Three Iranian filmmakers served on the jury panels of the event. Director, writer, and producer Ali Asgari presided over the World Cinema Jury. Director, writer, and critic Ghotbedin Sadeghi and filmmaker and VFX supervisor Akam Rezaee were members of the Kurdish Cinema Jury.

Kurdistan covers, in large parts, the region of former Mesopotamia. One of the oldest cultures in the world, Mesopotamia is widely considered the cradle of civilization, where writing was invented and the origins of philosophy can be traced back.

With its ancient, highly developed, and socially complex states,



it had a profound impact on the development of Western civilization and culture.

The Duhok International Film Festival aims to showcase innovative films of high artistic value with a notable handwriting made throughout the world.

It shall work as a pinnacle point for all wishing to learn more about the possibilities the Kurdish regions have to offer.

Duhok IFF wishes to create an atmosphere of exchange between different cultures and human values. The city becomes an encounter of civilizations, where ancient culture

connects with modern culture and the Kurdish film landscape with world cinema.

Unique film experiences can be made and people can share their thirst for new discoveries and a passion for cinema in all its diversity.

A major task of the festival is to build a bridge between Kurdish film production and worldwide filmmaking.

It wishes to create a launch platform for films from Kurdistan, taking the pulse of new tendencies and offering the opportunity to explore a terrain opening up in

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

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

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

Handwritten edition of "Divan of Hafez" by calligrapher Mirza Mohammadreza Kalhor unveiled

TEHRAN-A ceremony was held in Tehran on Wednesday to unveil a rare handwritten edition of "Divan of Hafez" by the renowned calligrapher Mirza Mohammadreza Kalhor.

Prominent figures in Persian calligraphy, including Gholamhossein Amirkhani, Ali Shirazi, Mojtaba Malekzadeh, Mohammad Heydari, and Hamid Ajami attended the event among others, ISNA reported. It took place on Wednesday, December 19th, at the Gallery of the Nam Art and Culture Organization, ISNA reported.

This unique edition was published through a collaboration between the Nam Art and Culture Organization and Aban Publication. The original manuscript, preserved in the treasury of the Visual Arts Center of the Art Bureau, is considered a masterpiece of Kalhor's art. The publication was supervised by Amir Abdolhosseini and aimed to make such artistic treasures more accessible to the public.

Speaking at the session, several figures highlighted Kalhor's pivotal role in the evolution of Persian calligraphy. Gholamhossein Amirkhani praised collectors and institutions for preserving such works, emphasizing that these efforts enable the continued appreciation of calligraphy in mod-

ern times. Ali Shirazi noted that the publication of this manuscript marks a significant milestone in Persian calligraphy. Mirza Mohammadreza Kalhor (1829-1892) was a 19th-century Iranian calligrapher, known for his mastery of the Nasta'liq script technique.

A member of the Kurdish Kalhor tribe of Kermanshah, he initially followed the typical tribal path, learning horsemanship and sharpshooting. He gained an interest in calligraphy as a child, and left the tribe for further training. During his career, he introduced several innovations to Nasta'liq calligraphy, changing both the aesthetics and mechanics of the technique.

Kalhor modified and adapted Nasta'liq to be easily used with printing machines and newspaper lithography, which in turn helped wide dissemination of his transcripts. He also devised methods for teaching Nasta'liq and specified clear proportional rules for it, which many could follow.

On a number of occasions, Kalhor also produced some books in two different fashions, one using the printing press and one by writing in resin gum ink.

Kalhor's widespread fame as a master calligrapher soon attracted the attention of Nāser-al-Din

Shah, who invited Kalhor to train him and later offered him a position in the Bureau of Publications. He declined the offer despite his limited financial resources, and instead decided to earn his livelihood by private practice, volunteering his services to the bureau only on an occasional basis. This left him ample time to perfect his skills and train young calligraphers.

In 1883, he was invited to join the royal entourage on a journey to Khorasan. Kalhor, a devout Shi'ite, saw the trip as an opportunity to visit the holy shrine in Mashhad. Kalhor also produced a large number of unsigned exercise or siāh-maṣq pages and only a couple of finished calligraphic specimens. His passion for the excellence of his art drove him to spend countless hours, and sometimes-sleepless nights, practicing (maṣq). His siāh-maṣq pages were known to be so heavily worked that the original color of paper was often entirely concealed.

Kalhor's contributions to the Persian calligraphy serve as a testament to the innovative spirit of 19th-century Persian calligraphers who, while working within the parameters of the canon, often took liberties in introducing innovations with long-lasting effects.

Israel's cultural genocide in Gaza

Israel's war in Gaza can be described as a fight against the ancient identity of Gaza. It has led to the destruction of its original identity and historical and cultural heritage. It can be called "cultural genocide," targeting Gaza's history, the Palestinian cause and traces of those who lived in the strip. And it will have consequences that could last for centuries.

This war is not only destroying Gaza's stones and antiquities, which date back thousands of years, but it is also targeting the new generation that should preserve the Palestinian identity and cultural heritage in Gaza, and the history of the Palestinian cause, which began about 76 years ago.

The destruction caused by the war memorializes the brutality of what the people of Gaza are experiencing, World Crunch reported.

As of March 7, UNESCO confirmed damage to 41 sites in the first five months of the war: 10 religious sites, 22 buildings of historical and/or artistic interest, two depositories of movable cultural property, three monuments, one museum and three archeological sites. And expressed its "deep concern about the impact of the ongoing conflict on cultural heritage".

According to a report by ICOMOS, a professional association dedicated to the conservation and protection of cultural sites worldwide, the intense bombardments have made "no distinction be-

tween military and civilian targets or human and cultural heritage" and have destroyed or severely damaged more than 200 of the 325 registered sites in Gaza, translating to a destruction of "more than 60% of Gaza's cultural civil heritage".

The Omari Mosque, the oldest in Gaza and a major landmark, was destroyed by an Israeli airstrike in early December, leaving only the minaret intact. Its library of some 132 manuscripts, dating back to the year of 920 in the Islamic calendar (between 1514-1515 A.D.), was destroyed.

"The war is not only a military one; the genocidal war is targeting Palestinians in Gaza who have an open cultural mentality," Abu Nahl said, stressing the consequences on the next generation. With the war in its sixth month, school children and students did not attend the first semester of their school year.

"Almost all of Palestinian universities in Gaza have been wiped out. Everything in the universities, including thousands of valuable books, and thousands of master's and doctoral theses, has been destroyed, in addition to the majority of Gaza's schools," said Jamal Abu Nahl, a novelist and the founder and president of the National Center for Scholars of Palestine.

In January, the UN stated that "75% of all school buildings across the Gaza Strip have been impacted" and noted that "most UNRWA schools in

the Gaza Strip have been turned into shelters." According to the annual statistical guide for Palestinian higher education, Gaza counted a total of 16 universities and colleges; all were destroyed or severely damaged by the Israeli military.

Abu Nahl said Palestinians must work to preserve and restore Gaza's cultural heritage to "send a clear message to Israel that the history of Palestine will remain despite all attempts to unroot it".

For Riyad Aila, dean of Administrative Sciences at Al-Azhar University in Gaza, the destruction of monuments is part of an Israeli policy to eliminate Gaza's cultural heritage "with the aim of reaching a conclusion that they alone own the land".

Aila noted that many schools have been turned into shelters for displaced people, who will be there for an estimated five years until they can find other places to live in, saying Israel's goal is probably "to raise a generation that they may think will be occupied by his own life and forget (their Palestinian) cause". He said university professors and researchers will have a lot of work to do when the war ends. They will have to remind the population, especially young people, of the destroyed monuments.

"The destruction of ancient monuments will not make the generations of Palestine forget the Palestinian cause. It will continue despite the daily massacres of Gaza's women, children and elderly," Aila said.