



U.S. Sisyphcean Dream: 'Regime Change' in Iran

Senator says U.S. should work to destabilize Iran after over 4 decades of failed attempts

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© AP A torn U.S. flag is placed under a flagpole at the former U.S. embassy, which has been turned into a museum, in Tehran, Iran, on Aug. 19, 2023.

Pezeshkian visits North Khorasan on second provincial trip as president

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Highlighting the need for a shift in perspective, the President emphasized the necessity of relying on internal capabilities rather than looking outward. "Good decisions are being made for the development of the province, which will be announced later. If we focus our gaze on others, we cannot shape the progress of the country; we must rely on ourselves," he asserted.

Pezeshkian underscored the importance of decentralization, calling for greater powers to be granted to provincial authorities. He urged local leaders to form cohesive teams with economic activists to drive development initiatives. "We should have a decentralizing view away from Tehran and rely on the internal capabilities of the provinces," he noted. ▶ Page 2

Iran gears up for large-scale military exercises in coming days

TEHRAN – Iran has announced its Armed Forces will conduct a series of significant military exercises in the coming days, aimed at enhancing both defensive and offensive capabilities.

Major General Gholamali Rashid, the commander of the Khatam al-Anbia Central Headquarters, shared details of the upcoming drills during a meeting with senior military commanders on Wednesday.

General Rashid highlighted that Iran's Armed Forces will execute powerful defensive and offensive maneuvers over the next few weeks.

He noted that these exercises are a routine part of the military calendar, with approximately 30 large-scale drills being conducted each year.

These maneuvers are typically intensified in the second half of the year, especially in the final three months.

The aim of these exercises is to test the readiness of the armed forces, involving joint operations by the Iranian Army and the Islamic Revolution Guard Corps (IRGC) across land, air, and sea. ▶ Page 2

Palestinian Christians deprived of celebrating Christmas

By Sondoss Al Asaad

BEIRUT – Due to the ongoing Israeli war on the Gaza Strip and amidst the Israeli restrictions the manifestations of Christian celebrations on the occasion of Christmas in Palestine have disappeared.

Meanwhile, the patriarchs and heads of churches in occupied Jerusalem have decided to limit the festivities and revival of rituals out of respect for the blood of the martyrs who are victims of the ongoing Israeli genocidal wars.

Besides, the Israeli occupation forces have turned the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and its surroundings into a closed military zone.

Atallah Hanna, the Archbishop of Sebastia for the Greek Orthodox, called on Christian churches around the world to raise their voices to demand justice and peace in Palestine, stressing that his message will always be a message of love and peace, far from wars, violence and the violation of human dignity.

Defiant Yemen strikes Israelis again

By Wesam Bahrani

TEHRAN – The Sanaa government in Yemen has announced that its forces successfully struck the Israeli regime with a hypersonic ballistic missile.

According to a statement issued by the Yemeni Armed Forces, the operation targeted a military site in the occupied area of "Yaffa" with a missile named Palestine 2.

The forces announced that the operation achieved its objectives, in a show of strength after the latest American and Israeli strikes on the Arab country.

On December 19, the Israeli regime waged what it branded wide-scale airstrikes on Yemen, which killed nine civilians. On Saturday, the U.S. military also conducted airstrikes on Yemen as well.

The hypersonic missile attack was waged as part of what the Yemeni Armed Forces described as the "fifth scope of supportive stages" in the broader campaign known as the "battle of the promised conquest".

Turning the tide: Syrians rising up against Israeli occupation

By Shahrokh Saei

TEHRAN – Anger is growing in Syria over Israel's acts of aggression and military presence in the Arab country.

Since rebel groups led by Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) toppled the government of president Bashar Assad earlier this month, the Israeli army has carried out hundreds of airstrikes in Syria destroying much of the country's military capabilities. The regime claims it wants to prevent military equipment from falling into hostile hands.

Israel also sent its ground forces into a UN-patrolled buffer zone in the occupied Golan Heights and beyond after Assad's fall on December 8.

Israel has extended its occupation to further regions of the Syrian territory, encompassing various towns, villages, and the strategically significant Mount Hermon.

Israel claims the occupation of additional parts of the Syrian territory is aimed at ensuring the security of the regime's borders.

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Iran to sign \$6b contracts to boost gas recovery from South Pars

TEHRAN – Iran's oil minister announced plans to finalize \$6.0 billion worth of contracts to boost pressure at the South Pars gas field, a top national priority.

According to Mehr News Agency, Mohsen Paknejad stated on Tuesday, December 24, during a meeting with the parliamentary Article 90 Commission members, that implementing pressure-boosting facilities at South Pars is vital for the country.

He added that the financial arrangements for the project have been secured.

Paknejad explained that necessary legal frameworks are in place for investments by energy-intensive industries, including petrochemical and steel holdings, in the country's gas fields. ▶ Page 4



Christmas celebrations illuminate New Jolfa neighborhood

By Afshin Majlesi

ISFAHAN – The New Jolfa neighborhood, one of the most picturesque and historic quarters of Isfahan, is glowing with lights and decorations in the lead-up to the New Year.

It is time when hundreds of citizens and tourists alike flock to this vibrant area to experience the festive atmosphere and unique cultural attractions of Armenian Christmas celebrations.

A similar atmosphere can more or less be found in many other cities across Iran, such as Tehran, Tabriz, Shiraz, Rasht, Bandar Anzali, and Arak where decorations are put up, and some shops take on the spirit and ambiance of the event. ▶ Page 6

Prof. Hunter talks to Tehran Times: It's hard to predict HTS would embrace inclusive government in Syria

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TEHRAN PAPERS

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

Speculation about Japan's mediation between Iran and America

In a note, Shargh discussed the possibility of the resumption of Iran-U.S. negotiations with mediation by Japan and said: An informed source claimed that the Iranian government is considering Japan's mediation in behind-the-scenes talks with the next Trump administration on the nuclear issue. After winning the election, Trump said he does not want to hinder Iran's progress, but he will prevent it from having nuclear weapons. In his first term as president from 2017-2021, the Trump administration adopted a tough approach toward Iran for its nuclear program, which led to an escalation of tensions in Iran-U.S. relations. Though Iran had limited its nuclear activities under the 2015 nuclear agreement officially called the JCPOA, Trump pursued a policy of "maximum pressure," returned the previous sanctions against Iran, and continued to impose sanctions on Iran until his last days in the White House. Currently, Japan, a friendly country of Iran, in case of mediation, is expected to play a role in reducing the tensions between the United States and Iran regarding its nuclear program and the issue of sanctions.

Jam-e-Jam: Signs of American fear of Iran's influence in the region

In an analysis, Jam-e-Jam discussed the American concern about Iran's influence in the region. It wrote: If we take a closer look at the recent developments in the region, we will find out that some of these developments have occurred due to the fear of America and the Zionist regime of the influence of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the region. After the meeting of the American representative with Al-Julani, the United States stipulated that the new Syrian government should not give any role to Iran if it wants to establish good relations with the United States.

Americans, based on the information they have, know that the Islamic Republic of Iran has a good position in Syria and can interact with the new Syrian rulers to reform the resistance front in Syria and achieve success in this way. This kind of estimate causes concern for the U.S. and the Zionist regime because the Islamic Republic can communicate with the current rulers in Syria. In fact, the Americans, with these conditions and warnings, have somehow admitted the acceptance of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Syria and the region.

Why is the Russian embassy in Tehran raising its perimeter wall?



TEHRAN – The Russian Embassy in Iran has addressed recent media speculation regarding construction work on its premises, clarifying that the ongoing adjustments to its perimeter wall are part of a routine maintenance project and not a reaction to any specific threat or concern.

In a statement issued to ISNA, the embassy explained that it is leveling a section of the wall that is shorter than the rest of the perimeter.

"The embassy is in the process of leveling the height of a section of its perimeter wall that is shorter than other sections. This work is being carried out in a planned manner," the statement read.

The embassy also expressed its hope that the Tehran Municipality would enhance the wall's appearance once the project is completed.

Ettelaat: New program in Tehran-Washington ties

In a commentary, Ettelaat dealt with a reported message of the Trump team to Iran. The paper said: A source close to the Pezeshkian government has revealed that Trump has sent a message to Tehran through Oman in the past few days seeking talks on some issues, including the nuclear case. What is obvious is that Netanyahu is called a war criminal and an arrest warrant has been issued against him by the Hague-based International Criminal Court (ICC). Trump and the international community consider Netanyahu a "dead wood". Therefore, Trump prefers to get rid of Netanyahu who continuously causes crises throughout the region. In such a situation, with the new program in Tehran-Washington relations, Trump tends to compromise rather than initiate a war. He calls the era of Biden and the Democratic Party disastrous for America. In this situation, at the beginning, Trump will seek reconciliation, especially with Beijing and Moscow, and for this purpose, he seeks a policy in which the Middle East would take a departure from continuous wars.

Iran: Stability in region entails Iran's participation in talks on Syria's future

The Iran newspaper wrote the fall of Assad and the reduction of Iran's presence in Syria are huge challenges that threaten Tehran's regional influence. To counter this issue, a dialogue between Iran and Pakistan seems necessary. Continued U.S. support for the Syrian Kurds is very important. The Syrian Democratic Forces, led by the Kurds, are also known to be a key ally in the fight against ISIS. Washington should pressure Israel to reduce its operations in southwestern Syria. Washington should also work with its allies in the Middle East and Europe to promote an inclusive political dialogue among all Syrian groups. Indeed, the United States should give Iran a chance during the regional negotiations about the future of Syria. It should also pay attention to Tehran's security concerns and at the same time use its leadership to reduce tension on other fronts. This strategy could even open the door for more comprehensive diplomatic talks between Washington and Tehran. Establishing stability in the region will most likely require the participation of Iran in the negotiations about the future of Syria. If Washington and Tehran cannot interact with each other, Syria will continue to suffer.

Iran asks UN to respond to Israel's official admission of Haniyeh killing

TEHRAN- In a letter to the President of the Security Council, Iran's UN envoy Amir Saeed Iravani asked the international organization to take appropriate measures in response to Israel's official claim of responsibility for the July 31st assassination of Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh.

"This audacious and shameless confession to the assassination of a political leader within the sovereign territory of a United Nations Member State once again underscores the international responsibility of the Israeli regime for its acts of terrorism and aggression," Iravani wrote adding that Israel is now "desperately attempting to justify and legitimize its past and future acts of aggression against Yemen's sovereignty and territorial integrity."

Israeli War Minister Yisrael Katz stated on Monday that the regime intends to assassinate Yemeni leaders, similar to how it took the life of Haniyeh.



The Palestinian leader was killed with a short-range projectile targeting his Tehran guesthouse hours after he had attended the inauguration of President Masoud Pezeshkian.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Iravani pointed out that the Israeli minister "shamelessly" admit-

ting to the terror act only proves the righteousness of Iran's October response to Haniyeh's assassination.

Tehran targeted Israeli military sites with approximately 200 ballistic missiles under Operation True Promise II.

"The Security Council must not allow the continued impunity of a regime that flagrantly defies international law, destabilizes the region, and threatens and endangers international peace and security.

The continued silence of the Security Council, entrusted with the primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security, would not only embolden this terrorist regime for the commission of more atrocious crimes but also undermine the core principles upon which the United Nations was founded," the envoy concluded.

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President Masoud Pezeshkian arrived in Bojnurd, North Khorasan on Wednesday

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If we focus our gaze on others, we cannot shape the progress of the country; we must rely on ourselves," he asserted.

Pezeshkian underscored the importance of decentralization, calling for greater powers to be granted to provincial authorities.

He urged local leaders to form cohesive teams with economic activists to drive development initiatives.

"We should have a decentralizing view away from Tehran and rely on the internal capabilities of the provinces," he noted.

Addressing concerns regarding bureaucratic obstacles, Pezeshkian promised to eliminate cumbersome laws affecting economic activities based on feedback from local stakeholders.

"We strive to create no obstacles for economic activists and the market," he added.

Pezeshkian also called for a collective effort to transform management perspectives across various sectors, stating that solving societal issues requires continuous education and strengthening capabilities.

"Today, the country's dispute is over who should be the manager, which is a significant mistake," he said.

The president is set to spend Thursday in North Khorasan as well.

Sistan and Baluchestan was the destination of his first provincial trip where he launched multiple economic and scientific projects.

IRGC Navy chief says "no white flag shall fly" against hostile forces

TEHRAN – Commander of the Islamic Revolution Guard Corps (IRGC) Navy, Rear Admiral Alireza Tangsiri, has declared that Iran "will not raise the white flag," underscoring the country's commitment to maintaining security and sovereignty in its waters without surrendering to external pressures.

Tangsiri asserted that no foreign vessels have intruded into Iranian territorial waters in the Persian Gulf.

The rear admiral further remarked that there have been no significant threats in recent times, adding that "security is fully established in the Persian Gulf."

He noted that the foreign presence in the territorial waters of other countries in the Persian Gulf does not pose a threat to Iran's security.

The rear admiral reiterated that foreign entities in the Persian Gulf do not have the right to enter Iranian waters or those under Iranian naval supervision, maintaining a distance of more than 48 nautical miles from the coast.

Regarding the readiness of the naval forces, Tangsiri explained that the preparedness of the armed forces stems from the directives of the Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei, as well as continuous oversight by central command and support from the military headquarters.

"We are 100% ready to respond to any threat in the sea," he affirmed.

He also highlighted the extensive reach of Iranian naval forces, noting, "Our forces have gone beyond the Persian Gulf into the oceans, and today, both the IRGC's and the Iranian Army's Navy are securing not only our territorial waters but also the Indian Ocean and the Arabian Sea."

On the topic of escorting commercial and cargo ships, Tangsiri stated, "We escort these ships, and thankfully, today the shipping lanes are fully secure, which is a testament to the readiness of our forces."

Army honors top diplomat with prestigious military award



TEHRAN – In a ceremony recognizing outstanding contributions to diplomacy, Rear Admiral Habibollah Sayyari, Chief of Staff and Deputy Coordinator of the Army of the Islamic Republic of Iran, awarded the prestigious Medal of Iran Army to the Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi.

The accolade highlights Araghchi's significant efforts and accomplishments in advancing Iran's diplomatic objectives on the global stage.

The presentation took place during the closing session of a joint conference for senior officials and political advisors from the Armed Forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran on Wednesday.

The event featured a gathering of high-ranking military commanders and key figures in Iran's foreign policy apparatus.

During the event, Rear Admiral Sayyari expressed his gratitude for Foreign Minister Araghchi's relentless dedication to diplomacy, emphasizing the importance of his role in representing Iran's strategic interests abroad.

Hojjatolislam Ali Saeedi, the Head of the Ideological and Political Office of the Commander-in-Chief, also delivered remarks at the conference. He lauded the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for its "brave, bold, and innovative" approaches in addressing international challenges and for its steadfast support of the region's Resistance movements.

Saeedi specifically highlighted the role of the Minister of Foreign Affairs in navigating complex geopolitical landscapes with both courage and ingenuity.

Iran gears up for large-scale military exercises in coming days

From page 1 ▶ "These drills are meticulously planned and creatively executed to catch adversaries off guard," General Rashid stated.

The military official also pointed out the role of the Khatam al-Anbia Central Headquarters in directing and overseeing these operations to ensure their proper execution. Elsewhere in his remarks, General Rashid remarked, "The Zionist enemy has been misled by illusions and miscalculations."

He cited the powerful offensive Operation True Promise II in October as a demonstration of

Iran's military might.

He added that during this operation, ballistic missiles successfully hit predetermined military targets, proving that "contrary to their media propaganda, the sky over the occupying regime's territory is open and defenseless" against Iranian attacks. General Rashid concluded by reiterating Iran's defensive doctrine: "While Iran will not initiate any war in the region, these upcoming exercises are to enhance our defensive and offensive readiness against any form of threat."

U.S. Sisyphean dream: 'Regime change' in Iran

Senator says U.S. should work to destabilize Iran after over 4 decades of failed attempts

By Faramarz Kouhpayeh

TEHRAN – Ted Cruz is a notoriously abominable U.S. senator, who usually believes Washington hasn't killed enough people through its war around the world. His foreign policy initiatives are often the subject of folly even among Americans. But what he says about Iran bespeaks an undying dream the U.S. has always had in regard to the country.

In recent remarks on some American news show, Cruz said the right resolve for Washington and Israel is "regime change" in Iran. "I'm not saying we go to war with Iran. What I am saying though is that we use every bit of economic pressure and diplomatic pressure," he stated before claiming that the overthrow of the Iranian government would "dramatically enhance America's national security".

Similar remarks were made last week by Mark Dubowitz, CEO of the Foundation for Defense of Democracies (FDD), who said the U.S. must smuggle advanced weapons into Iran to arm anti-government elements.

Regime change has been a recurring feature of U.S. foreign policy, but it has especially been the modus operandi regarding Iran since the U.S. overthrew Mohammad Mosaddegh's democratically elected government in 1953.

What is regime change?

Regime change refers to the process by which one government or ruling authority is replaced by another, often through exter-



nal intervention. Foreign powers have historically employed a variety of strategies to effectuate regime change in other countries, each with its own implications for international relations, stability, and the affected populations.

The 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq, often referred to as the "Iraq War," is a prominent example of a foreign-initiated regime change. The invasion was carried out under incorrect and fabricated claims, and its end results were widespread instability, sectarian violence, the rise of extremist groups, a humanitarian crisis, economic devastation, and long-term regional implications.

When it comes to Iran, the U.S. does not have the option of direct military intervention. Instead, it relies on economic sanctions, propaganda and disinformation, and support for foreign-based oppositionists. These tools are employed to cultivate and amplify internal dissent to transform them into protests and, ultimately, violent unrest that could de-

stabilize and topple the government.

"U.S. officials' talk of pursuing regime change in Iran is not indicative of a novel policy," said Amir Ali Abolfath, an expert on North American affairs. "Washington has been engaged in efforts to overthrow the Iranian government since the Islamic Republic's inception. It's just never been successful."

Washington's two most significant attempts to destabilize the Iranian government occurred in 2009, when it capitalized on vote-rigging claims made by two defeated presidential candidates to incite widespread protests, and in 2022, when it exploited the tragic passing of a young woman, which was attributed to underlying health issues, to instigate protests that ultimately resulted in violent riots causing the deaths of approximately 300 people, including over 100 security personnel.

The first major U.S. bid to de-

stabilize the Islamic Republic was thwarted when millions of Iranians demonstrated their support for the ruling system on December 30, 2009, effectively countering months of preceding riots. The second wave of unrest taking place in the fall of 2022, though significantly more violent, failed to gain the same traction and naturally fizzled out after some time.

Will the U.S. ever manage to topple the Islamic Republic?

According to Abolfath, the U.S. faces long odds in its attempts to destabilize the Iranian government. While acknowledging that sanctions have caused hardship, he contends that economic pressure alone won't trigger the kind of violent uprising needed for regime change, because Iranians know they are suffering because of external forces, and no amount of propaganda is going to change that.

Speaking at the U.S. Council on Foreign Relations earlier this month, Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Washington should use all its means to bring about the downfall of the Iranian government: "We should further empower the people inside Iran who want a different future for the country."

Blinken's remarks received a clear response from Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei, who declared that the Iranian nation would "trample underfoot" any American mercenary seeking to sow unrest in the country.

Pakistan-Iran relations and global outlook

The two countries should boost economic ties after years of diplomatic and political success

By Muhammad Mehdi

TEHRAN – A shared border and a history of deep mutual respect form the bedrock of the enduring relationship between Iran and Pakistan. This bond is not just geographical; it's rooted in significant historical moments of reciprocal recognition and support.

Soon after Pakistan gained independence, Iran was the first nation to officially acknowledge its sovereignty. This spirit of solidarity was mirrored when Pakistan became one of the first countries to recognize the revolutionary government of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, solidifying a commitment to mutual understanding and cooperation.

Despite external pressures, most notably the United States' strong opposition to the Iranian revolution, Pakistan has consistently prioritized its own long-term interests and maintained its bond with Iran. This independent approach, solidified by General Zia's immediate recognition of the new Iranian government, illustrates Pakistan's commitment to charting its own course and valuing the bilateral relationship irrespective of external influences.

Today, the global landscape is complex, requiring thoughtful and nuanced foreign policy decisions. Both Iran and Pakistan understand that a stable and prosperous region depends on their strong relationship.

While mutual needs and internal dynamics in both countries play a crucial role in shaping policy, both nations have consistently prioritized mutual respect and cooperation in the face of these evolving challenges.

The strained relationship between the United States and Iran, marked by sanctions and interference allegations, has created obstacles, impacting everything from bilateral trade to energy projects like the gas pipeline.

Yet, Pakistan has consistently refused to view Iran through the lens of external interests, demonstrating a steadfast commitment to maintaining its own independent foreign policy.

This commitment includes an understanding of Iran's position and needs. As former Pakistani Foreign Ministers Khurshid Mahmood

Kasuri and Jalil Abbas Jilani have indicated, Pakistan has on multiple occasions served as an intermediary, conveying Iran's perspective to the U.S. during times of heightened tensions. This demonstrates a unique trust and commitment to dialogue.

A lack of mutual understanding can be a root cause of conflict. With its deep ties to both Iran and the broader international community, Pakistan can act as a bridge and facilitate constructive dialogue. By fostering understanding, Pakistan can not only contribute to a more peaceful region but also secure its own stability, addressing long-standing regional challenges.

Expansion of Economic ties: next step in Iran-Pakistan relations

The historical ties between the two countries showcase a shared heritage and culture, which serves as a strong foundation for their relationship. These ties have also led to diplomatic engagements over decades, where Iran has always looked at Pakistan as a friend. The shared values, cultural ties, and mutual respect create a solid foundation for their relationship.

This is a relationship that greatly benefits the entire region as a whole. It is also important to note that there have also been times when Iran and

Pakistan have come together to support the Muslim world on various issues. The unified stance of both Iran and Pakistan on the recent events in Gaza and Palestine reflects a shared understanding of humanitarian principles and a commitment to justice.

Pakistan, despite its economic difficulties, can hold a unique position as a trusted partner for Iran in its economy and trade.

The potential for increased economic and trade relations between Iran and Pakistan offers a pathway toward greater regional stability. Increased economic interdependence can create shared prosperity and strengthen their bond.

These countries have a shared goal of securing peace in the region and should work together to achieve this goal. These two countries have proven they can work together, and such collaboration can be a source of inspiration for other countries.

Ties between Iran and Pakistan are built on mutual respect and years of cultural, historical, and religious commonalities

Al-Jolani's FM issues 'warning' to Iran amidst submission to Israeli aggression



Leader of Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) Mohammad al-Jolani (L) stands next to his appointed foreign minister Asaad Hassan al-Shibani.

TEHRAN – The newly appointed "foreign minister" in Syria's recently formed government, Asaad Hassan al-Shibani, made a statement against Tehran on Tuesday.

"We warn Iran against spreading chaos in Syria, and we hold them accountable for the repercussions of their latest remarks," al-Shibani wrote on X. His remarks come as following the downfall of Bashar al-Assad's government on December 8, the Israeli regime has brazenly invaded Syrian territory and conducted airstrikes on hundreds of locations across the country.

Israeli forces have made significant advances into regions such as Western Damascus and the strategically important Mount Hermon, which offers a vantage point over the capital.

Their incursion into a demilitarized zone set up by a 1974 ceasefire constitutes a clear breach of international law.

The regime faced no opposition from Syria's new de facto leadership, headed by Mohammad al-Jolani (also known as Ahmed al-Sharaa) of Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS).

"We are not about to engage in conflict with Israel," al-Jolani said after repeated Israeli aggressions. He added, "We seek to establish good relations with Israel."

In recent days, Syrian youths have demonstrated against Israeli occupation in the villages of Hawdh al-Yarmouk and Sosseh in southern Syria. Amid the protests, the Israeli military opened fire on the demonstrators, injuring one individual. Al-Shibani or any other prominent HTS member has yet to address the shooting.

Iran wrestling legend Hassan Yazdani turns 30

TEHRAN – Iran legendary freestyler Hassan Yazdani Charati turned 30 today.

Yazdani is an Olympic and World Champion in freestyle wrestling in two weight categories. He became Olympic champion in the 74kg category at the 2016 Summer Olympics after defeating Russian wrestler Anuar Geduev in the final.

The following year he became World Champion at the 2017 World Wrestling Championships in the Men's freestyle 86 kg category. He won his second world title at the 2019 World Wrestling Championships in Kazakhstan and third at the 2021 World Wrestling Championships in Norway.

Yazdani has also won two silver medals in the 2020 and 2024 Olympic Games.

The United World Wrestling (UWW) has described Iranian freestyle wrestler Yazdani as "the greatest".

He has recently undergone shoulder surgery in Paris.

Yazdani will change his weight category and compete in the 92kg in the world championship. He will also change his category to 97kg in the 2026 Asian Games and 2028 Olympic Games.

Yazdani is the most decorated Iranian wrestler with eight world and Olympics medals.

Iran's Super Cup to be held on Jan. 17

TEHRAN – A Super Cup match between Persepolis and Sepahan football team will be held on Jan. 17 in Arak's Imam Khomeini Stadium.

The 2023/24 Iran's Persian Gulf Professional League (PGPL) winners Persepolis will lock horn with Hazfi Cup champions Sepahan.

Persepolis are the most decorated football team in Super Cup, winning the title five times.

The first edition was held in 2005, where Saba Battery defeated Foolad 4-0.

The Iranian Super Cup is an Iranian association football trophy awarded to the winner of a match between the Persian Gulf Pro League's season champions and the winners of the Hazfi Cup. It is similar to numerous other Super Cup tournaments held in other countries.

Future of Iran weightlifting looks promising

TEHRAN – The recent performance of the Iranian weightlifting team at the 2024 World Weightlifting Championships in Bahrain offers a glimpse into the future of the sport in the country.

While the team has faced challenges in recent years, with disappointing results at the 2024 Paris Olympics, the strong showing in Bahrain suggests a potential resurgence.

The inclusion of younger athletes like Alireza Yousefi, who won gold at the clean and jerk, indicates a focus on developing future talent.

Iranians super-heavyweights Ali Davoudi and Yousefi won a silver and a bronze medal at the 2024 IWF World Championships in Bahrain in mid-December.

However, the team's success will depend on various factors. Continued investment in youth development programs, effective coaching, and addressing any performance-enhancing drug issues will be crucial. Additionally, the team's ability to adapt to changing weightlifting rules and compete with strong international rivals will play a significant role in shaping its future.

Overall, the future of Iranian weightlifting looks promising, with the potential for continued growth and success on the world stage.

Iran U17 football team to compete at Belarus tournament

TEHRAN – Iran U17 football team will participate at the Belarus football tournament, Mehdi Mohammad Nabi, Vice President of Iran Football Federation, said.

The tournament will be held in Belarus from February 15 to 22.

"Iran will take part in the tournament as part of preparation for the 2025 AFC U17 Asian Cup in Saudi Arabia," Nabi said.

According to him, Belarus, Iran, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, Russia and two more teams will participate in the tournament.

Iran U17 football team is headed by Abbas Chamanian.

AFC greets Christmas and New Year

TEHRAN – The Asian Football Confederation wishes all its stakeholders a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

As 2024 draws near to a close, we would like to express our gratitude for a successful 12 months for Asian football.

The AFC will continue striving to become the leading Confederation and making football the Continent's biggest sport in line with our Vision and Mission

As we spend time with our family members and friends, we wish everyone love, joy and peace during this festive season.

El Amloud to leave Persepolis: report

TEHRAN – Persepolis football team Moroccan defender Ayoub El Amloud is reluctant to remain in the team.

After Juan Garrido's dismissal, El Amloud is going to leave Persepolis in the January transfer window. The 30-year-old defender has joined Persepolis in the summer but is unhappy with a lack of playing time in the Iranian team. The Moroccan media reports suggest that El Amloud has been linked with several clubs in Persian Gulf countries.

Iranian weightlifter Paydar snatches gold at 2024 Asian Youth & Junior

TEHRAN – Iran's weightlifter Ariya Paydar won a gold medal at the 2024 Asian Youth & Junior Championships on Tuesday.

Paydar came first in the men's 109kg Junior with 380kg (169+211). His countryman Hassan Emadi won the silver with 359kg (164+195) and bronze medal went to Uzbekistan's Salimjonov Kudratbek with 358kg (168+190).

Iranian weightlifters Alireza Nasiri (389kg) and Abolfazl Zare (366kg) won silver and bronze medal respectively in the men's 102kg Junior. Turkmenistan's Matyakubov Shahzad-bek snatched the gold with 396kg in the weight category.

Amirhossein Sepah Ajerlou and Mohammad Efsandiari of Iran also claimed a silver and bronze medal respectively with 349kg and 334kg in the men's 96kg Junior. The gold medal went to Kazakhstan's Poluboyarinov Denis with 366kg. Also, Kijan Maghsoudi from Iran at the weight category of 87 kg won a silver medal and became the Asian vice-champion after lifting 94 kg weight in the snatch, and 115 kg in the clean and jerk and a total of 209 kg.

2024 Asian Youth & Junior Championships are being held in Doha, Qatar from Dec. 19 to 25.

Transport minister to inaugurate 2,000 national housing units

TEHRAN - Minister of Transport and Urban Development is set to visit North Khorasan Province to inaugurate 2,000 units under the National Housing Movement initiative, encompassing urban and rural housing projects.

According to IRIB, Farzaneh Sadegh, along with President Masoud Pezeshkian and the cabinet, will attend the event during an official visit to the province.

The minister's agenda includes the opening of 2,000 housing units under the National Housing Movement, the inauguration of a 20-kilometer stretch of the Bojnourd-Golestan Highway, and the unveiling of projects by the provincial Road Maintenance and Transportation Authority.

These projects include rural road asphalt paving, construction of technical structures, rehabilitation and resurfacing of arterial and main roads, and improvements to rural roadways.

Sadegh will also visit various road and housing projects in Bojnourd and Esfarayen, participate in administrative council meetings in Esfarayen, Bam, and Safiabad, and join the provincial Planning and Development Council session chaired by the president.

As announced by the Iranian Transport and Urban Development Ministry, 2,046 hectares of land have been provided for the construction of National Housing Movement units across the country in the first 100 days of the current government administration's office.

As IRNA reported, 440 hectares of the mentioned figure were allocated in Tehran province, 292 hectares in Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari province, and 180 hectares allocated in Qazvin province.

In early November, he Director General of Tehran Province Transport and Urban Development Department Hassan Jannati says couples with children are the priority for allocation of National Housing Movement units.

Stating that currently the implementation of National Housing Movement projects has made good progress in Tehran Province, including Robat Karim and Damavand cities, he added: "Although financial resources have not been injected into the projects since the beginning of the current year (late March), the progress of these projects has reached more than 12 percent."

As announced by the Transport and Urban Development Ministry, 2,336.7 hectares of land have been provided for the construction of National Housing Movement units across the country in the first half of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20-September 21).

As IRNA reported, 527 hectares of the mentioned figure were allocated in Tehran province, 150 hectares in East Azarbaijan province, 396 hectares allocated in Kermanshah province, and 1,260 hectares in Fars province.

In early September, Hamid Pour-Mohammadi, the head of Iran's Planning and Budget Organization (PBO), said that the National Housing Movement is the major development plan of the government.

As announced in late July by the former minister of transport and urban development, 2.6 million units of the National Housing Movement were under construction throughout the country.

Mehrdad Bazrpash said that these units in different models are being built in the country, some of them have been delivered and the rest are in different stages of progress.

The National Housing Movement was one of the major policies of the 13th government in the housing sector, and according to this policy, the construction of four million residential units is planned in four years.

It is one of the projects through which the government is trying to help low-income individuals in society become homeowners.



Individuals in society become homeowners.

Deputy Transport and Urban Development Minister Hadi Abbasi-Asl has emphasized the acceleration in implementing the Housing Construction Leap Law to achieve the goals of the 13th government.

In late September 2023, Bazrpash announced the launching of a program for allocating free land (in the framework of the National Housing Movement) to young couples in order to help them build houses.

The National Housing Movement to construct four million housing units in four years is one of the major plans of government in the housing sector.

According to the plan, out of these four million residential units, 3.2 million units will be constructed in cities and 800,000 units in villages.

After the National Housing Action Plan (started in 2018), the National Housing Movement is the government's second major program to provide affordable housing units for the low-income classes.

The operation for the construction of 209,212 residential units of the National Housing Movement began in February 2022.

The ceremony to begin the mentioned operation and also to launch some development projects in the housing sector was attended by a former Transport and Urban Development Minister Rostam Qasemi.

Also, in July 2022, the minister inaugurated a project for the construction of the first group of affordable housing units for laborers under the framework of the National Housing Movement.

On September 10, 2023, 1,278 units of the National Housing Movement were handed over to the applicants in a ceremony attended by Aref Norouzi, the acting director of the Headquarters for Executing the Order of Imam Khomeini.

The mentioned units were delivered to the applicants in five provinces throughout the country.

The Headquarters for Executing the Order of Imam Khomeini has signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the Ministry of Transport and Urban Development to construct 100,000 units under the framework of the National Housing Movement.

According to Norouzi, the headquarters also completed and handed over 2,000 such units back in April, 2023.

Speaking at the opening ceremony, the official said construction of the National Housing Movement units is underway by the Headquarters for Executing the Order of Imam Khomeini in 27 provinces.

Late President Ebrahim Raisi stated that the National Housing Movement is the flagship project of the 13th government to meet the needs of the people, and in addition to the Transport and Urban Development Ministry, all relevant organizations are also striving to achieve it.

IFB was established on November 12, 2008, to be a gate for the majority of companies to enter the capital market and enhance their corporate governance and their businesses by providing easier listing requirements.

IFB is one of the four Iranian stock exchanges. The other three ones are Tehran Stock Exchange (TSE), Iran Mercantile Exchange (IME), Iran Energy Exchange (IRENEX).

Iran to sign \$6b contracts to boost gas recovery from South Pars

From page 1 ▶ He noted that private investors could recoup their contributions through gas deliveries after production begins.

Highlighting structural issues in the country's energy sector, the minister said: "The current energy imbalance stems from years of underinvestment in upstream sectors."

While the Oil Ministry oversees production and investment in gas fields, he mentioned that partial relief could come from gas imports and swaps, though these measures alone are insufficient to resolve the imbalance.

Oil minister has underlined "pressure boosting" in the South Pars gas field as one of the National Iranian Oil Company's (NIOC) top priorities, pledging significant progress by the end of the current Iranian calendar year (late March 2025).

"We are diligently advancing preliminary studies for the South Pars pressure boosting project, and I expect to announce promising updates



regarding the finalization of certain contracts before the year's end," Minister Mohsen Paknejad said in late November.

The South Pars gas reservoir, a critical energy source for Iran, is experiencing pressure declines, raising alarms across the energy sector. Experts have repeatedly warned about the potential consequences, with the Parliament's Research Cen-

ter highlighting the deteriorating gas balance in the country.

In a recent report, the center projected that by 2041, daily gas production in Iran might reach 898.7 million cubic meters, significantly falling short of the anticipated demand of 1,410.8 million cubic meters. This shortfall of 512 million cubic meters per day could lead to severe challenges in meeting energy needs,

especially during the winter months.

"The declining pressure in South Pars is a pressing concern for both the oil industry and the country at large," the oil minister said, calling for immediate action to be taken to address this issue.

South Pars gas field, which Iran shares with Qatar in the Persian Gulf water, is divided into 24 standard phases of development in the first stage. Most of the phases are fully operational at the moment.

The huge offshore field covers an area of 9,700 square kilometers, 3,700 square kilometers of which are in Iran's territorial waters in the Persian Gulf. The remaining 6,000 square kilometers, called North Dome, are situated in Qatar's territorial waters.

The field is estimated to contain a significant amount of natural gas, accounting for about eight percent of the world's reserves, and approximately 18 billion barrels of condensate.

'Trade agreements to accelerate development of Iran's export infrastructure'

TEHRAN - Deputy head of Iran's Trade Promotion Organization (TPO) has highlighted the approval of the Iran-Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) free trade agreement by the Iranian Parliament, describing trade agreements as a driving force for completing export infrastructure.

According to the TPO, Mohammad Sadegh Qanadzadeh stated on Tuesday that the Parliament has approved the free trade agreement between Iran and the EAEU, adding that the agreement now awaits confirmation by the Guardian Council.

"Once ratified and officially issued, its implementation will begin two months later," he noted.

Qanadzadeh stated that Kazakhstan's Parliament finalized the agreement last week, and member countries—Russia, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Armenia, and Belarus—have fulfilled their commitments.

"With the upcoming Eurasian summit in Saint Petersburg later this week, we hope to launch the operational phase of the agreement during the meeting," he said.

He further explained that after parliamentary ratifications in all member states, a two-month window is provided for implementation. During this period, Iran will prepare necessary infrastructure, streamline coordination, and standardize procedures.

The deputy TPO head emphasized the importance of developing export infrastructure, including logistics, customs, and standards. "While these areas require further work, trade agreements act as moving trains—requiring adjustments on the go rather than halting progress," he said.

"In other words, we must not delay trade agreements due to incomplete infrastructure.

These agreements serve as both an incentive and a catalyst to address existing gaps," the official added,

It is worth noting that the Iranian Parliament recently approved the general provisions and details of the Economic Commission's report on the Iran-EAEU free trade agreement.

The Tehran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines, and Agriculture (TCCIMA), in collaboration with the Trade Promotion Organization of Iran (TPO), will hold the third Eurasia Trade Exhibition and Conference from February 22 to 25, 2025, at Tehran Permanent International Fairgrounds.

Announcing the event, Mahmoud Najafi Arab, head of TCCIMA, highlighted the chamber's ongoing efforts to advance trade relations between Iran and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) and to facilitate the legal and policy frameworks necessary for such cooperation.

Speaking to TCCIMA's public relations office, Najafi Arab explained that the event, organized in partnership with Pars Karen Trade Management Company and with official authorization from the TPO, aims to strengthen ties with member countries of the EAEU, including Armenia, Belarus, Russia, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan.

"Considering that Iran's accession to the EAEU is being reviewed by the parliaments of the member states and the two sides also signed a preferential trade agreement in December 2023, which covers 87 percent of the region's traded goods, we anticipate significant opportunities for boosting trade and economic exchanges," Najafi Arab said.

He added that the agreement aims to eliminate trade barriers, create a shared market, and harmonize customs and financial policies among EAEU countries.

Najafi Arab also emphasized the transformative potential of transitioning the agreement to a free trade framework and the strategic importance of Iran's membership in the union as a gateway to expanded regional economic collaboration.

The official further noted that this year's event builds upon the chamber's successful initiatives in promoting economic diplomacy, such as two specialized conferences held in 2020 and 2022 and active participation in this year's EAEU annual summit in Armenia.

"These efforts underscore the EAEU's effectiveness as a global economic structure and its role in granting Iranian businesses access to extensive markets and unparalleled opportunities," he stated. He further encouraged leveraging this platform for knowledge exchange, establishing new commercial ties, and enhancing Iranian firms' competitiveness within the union.

The upcoming four-day conference will feature discussions on enhancing trade exchanges, fostering joint investments, improving industrial cooperation, and expanding the export of Iranian goods. Distinguished guests, including representatives of chambers of commerce, government officials, and economic experts from EAEU countries, are expected to attend.

In addition, the event will host trade delegations from EAEU member states and include matchmaking sessions, organized by Pars Karen Trade Management, to connect Iranian businesses directly with potential partners and clients.

Najafi Arab concluded by expressing confidence that the event will offer Iranian traders and businesses critical insights into the EAEU's regulatory framework and economic potential, paving the way for a new era of bilateral cooperation.

'Energy Ministry must prioritize domestic manufacturing in building renewable power plants'

TEHRAN - The head of the Semnan Chamber of Commerce has urged the government to ensure that in the construction of renewable power plants domestic production and using home-made equipment and parts be prioritized.

In an interview with the portal of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (IC-CMA), Farajollah Memari praised the Cabinet's recent resolution to facilitate the project for constructing 30,000 megawatts of renewable power plants in the country, while warning against neglecting local manufacturing capabilities.

According to ICCIMA, the Cabinet's recent decision aims to address obstacles in developing renewable energy projects. However, concerns have been raised by private-sector representatives regarding the implementation of the plan. They worry that the government's efforts to resolve electricity shortages—caused by years of mismanagement—might inadvertently undermine domestic industries.

The Chair of the Iran Chamber's Macroeconomic Committee criticized the government for failing to adequately utilize domestic industry capacities, saying: "Article 7 of

the Cabinet resolution requires the Energy Ministry to establish criteria and standards for the required equipment, prioritizing local supply within two weeks of the resolution's issuance."

Memari stressed that the plan's success hinges on sourcing equipment locally whenever possible. "Failing to adhere to this mandate would harm domestic production and industry," he warned.

The official also expressed concern over the Energy Ministry's apparent focus on imports to meet project requirements. "Businesspeople, industrialists, and producers—the economic warriors of our nation—are worried that this resolution could prioritize imports over local sourcing," he stated.

He argued that past negligence and mismanagement had led to the current electricity deficits and repeated blackouts. "We must not compound previous oversights by ignoring the capabilities of our local industries," Memari said, urging the Energy Ministry to adopt a more proactive stance on supporting domestic manufacturing.

Acknowledging that some components, such as solar panels and inverters, currently need to be im-

ported, Memari emphasized that other critical equipment, including electrical panels, cables, and transformers, can be produced domestically.

"Leveraging local manufacturing will not only strengthen the national economy but also promote domestic production," he concluded.

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

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

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

He put the current nominal ca-

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

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

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

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

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

Value of deals in Iran Fara Bourse up 9.4% in a month

TEHRAN - The value of deals in Iran's over-the-counter market, known as Iran Fara Bourse (IFB), increased by 9.4 percent in the ninth Iranian calendar month Azar (November 22-December 20).

As reported, IFB index rose 15 percent to 25,664 points at the end of the ninth month.

Iran Fara Bourse operates under the supervision of the Securities and Exchange Organization (SEO), a member of IOSCO.

Defiant Yemen strikes Israelis again

From page 1 ► The statement also alluded to the attack as retaliation for the Israeli aggression against Yemen and a show of solidarity with the Palestinian people and fighters, particularly in response to massacres against civilians in Gaza.

The Yemeni Armed Forces warned of continued operations against Israel unless the genocidal war on Gaza ends and the deadly siege is lifted.

"These operations will not stop unless the aggression on Gaza is stopped and the siege is lifted," the statement read.

The strike underscores the growing defiance of the Yemeni forces as regular U.S. and British airstrikes appear incapable of ending operations by Sanaa on Israeli interests that include vessels transiting the Red Sea and ships supporting the regime.

Observers have said that U.S., British and Israeli aggression against Yemen will not deter the Ansarullah-led government forces from ending its military operations.

On Tuesday, General Yahya Saree, spokesman for the Sanaa Armed Forces, declared that



Yemen is "fully prepared and ready to confront Israeli-American-British aggression no matter how high the costs become."

The Israeli military claimed to have intercepted a missile on Wednesday that was launched from Yemen and crossed into Israeli territory, despite media reports indicating the missile evaded Israeli air defense systems.

Israeli media reported that Yemen launched a ballistic missile at central Israel, with sirens sounding in Tel Aviv and its surroundings. Reports indicate that about nine settlers were injured while heading to shelters.

Sirens blared early Wednesday in Tel Aviv and its surroundings due to a missile launched from Yemen, according to the Israeli occupation forces.

Israeli emergency services stated that medics and medical teams were dispatched to several locations, where reports were received about nine settlers being injured while heading to shelters after the sirens were activated.

This marks the second consecutive day in which a ballistic missile has been launched at central Israel, in what the Times of Israel described as "a near-daily event."

The Hebrew newspaper Yedioth Ahronoth's journalist, Ron Ben-

Yishai, said, "The direct hits by ballistic missiles launched from Yemen, which the air defense system failed to intercept, have caused significant frustration among political and security officials in Israel and Washington."

In response to Yemen's missile launch, Israeli media reported that Yemen is "forcing millions of Israelis to jump out of their beds and head to shelters every night, while Netanyahu has no response."

The Jerusalem Post also reported that this was the fifth missile launched by Yemen toward Israel in the past seven days.

Additionally, Israeli media noted that Yemen "possesses a significant arsenal of ballistic and cruise missiles, as well as drones, capable of striking targets up to 2,000 kilometers away."

They added that Yemen "has demonstrated its ability to attack long-range targets, including those in the (Persian) Gulf and Israel."

Since November 2023, the Sanaa government has vowed to continue striking Israeli targets until the U.S.-backed Israeli genocidal war on Gaza ends.

It's hard to predict HTS would embrace inclusive government in Syria: scholar

By M.A. Saki

TEHRAN - An independent scholar believes it is hard to anticipate whether the Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) would establish a government with the involvement of Syria's diverse ethnic and religious groups.

"It is hard to predict whether the new rulers of Syria would embrace an inclusive form of government," Shireen Hunter tells the Tehran Times.

Hunter, a Georgetown University professor, says if the new rulers in Syria do not seek "revenge against the Alawites" who ruled Syria under President Bashar al-Assad "it would be a positive sign for the future."

The following is the text of the interview:

Question: What is your analysis of the turn of events in post-Assad Syria?

Answer: Thus far, events following the fall of the Assad government have been less violent and disruptive than similar circumstances in the past in places like Iraq and Libya. It appears that the rebels that took over the government in Damascus were quite prepared for governing. They have put together a government quite quickly, and it seems that Turkey will help them in the task of governance and organizing the post-Assad bureaucracy. Meanwhile, most likely, Qatar will provide the necessary financial assistance. However, creating a functioning government and economy after years of war and strife will not be easy.

"The HST's anti-Shia sentiments are likely to be moderated by feelings of Arab solidarity."

Q: What do you think of the HTS leader's overtures of respect for plurality in Syrian society? Do you think these overtures are genuine?

A: It is hard to predict whether the new rulers of Syria would embrace an inclusive form of government and would involve religious and ethnic minorities in the act of governing. The Kurds, most likely would want some form of self-governance. The question is whether Turkey would accept such a setup, given Ankara's concerns about independence movement within Turkey's Kurdish minority. I don't see any possibility, at least in the near future, for the involvement of the Alawites in politics. The same applies to the Shias and also the Druze. If the government does not pursue revenge against the Alawites, it would be a positive sign for the future. However, already some individuals have been exacting personal vendetta against the Alawites.

Q: It is clear that the HTS toppled Assad with the help of other opposition groups and each has its own priorities. What steps are needed to stop a scenario like Libya or Sudan in Syria?

A: The current groups in Syria, with the exception of the Kurds, don't have the cohesion and support -- the US claims supporting the Kurds -- to challenge the present government. Groups in Libya and Sudan were supported by outside forces, including the UAE, Turkey, and Russia. But, at the moment, I don't see any country willing to support the opponents of HTS. Moreover, unlike Libya and Sudan, Syria is close to Israel and key Arab states like Jordan. So outside actors are likely to be more careful in supporting warring factions. Should there be a conflict, it would be between the Kurds and the HTS. Israel might support the Kurds to counter Turkey's influence.

Q: Certain Arab countries, especially Egypt,



HTS leader al-Jolani

Saudi Arabia and the UAE, are apprehensive of the Turkish great influence in Syria. Given that Turkey and the HTS are inspired by the Muslim Brotherhood ideology, will they remain passive or try to advance their own interests in Syria?

A: Turkey's Islamists are not the same as the Ikhwan. Moreover, in every country, the Ikhwan acquires specific characteristics of the country. Moreover, as a Sunni movement, Ikhwan are no threat to other Sunni states. After the fall of the Ikhwan government in Egypt, the movement has been weakened. Furthermore, groups like HTS are mostly anti-Shia as their roots go to Sunni extremists like the Al Qaeda and Sunni groups like Daesh (IS). So I believe that Arab states will come to some sort of accommodation with the new Syrian leadership and the HTS will not act against Arabs, especially since Turkey, their patron, is a Western ally and they are seeking the West's support.

Q: Also, how do you think Western powers will react to the developments in Syria?

A: The position of the Western countries is cautious optimism. If the HTS manages to stabilize Syria and eventually make peace with Israel, they will support it. Western powers are happy with Assad's departure and the weakening of Iran's position.

Q: Some analysts say the Assad fall could pose threats to Iraq's security given that the two countries have Kurdish and Sunni populations. What is your analysis?

A: I don't see any immediate threat from the HTS towards Iraq. The HTS will be preoccupied with internal matters. Also seeking international acceptance, it is unlikely that it would cause problems to a fellow Arab state. Regarding Iraq, the HST's anti-Shia sentiments are likely to be moderated by feelings of Arab solidarity. The only way Iraq could become vulnerable is if it is used as a conduit to undermine Iran, including by sending terrorist groups to the country.

Q: What is your prediction of the new Syria approach toward Israel as one cannot erase the Israeli occupation of the Golan Heights from the minds of the Syrians?

A: The leader of the HTS, Al-Jolani has said that Syria will not be a threat to Israel. So far, it has done nothing in the face of Israeli attacks and occupation of more Syrian lands. Anyway, Syria is exhausted and weakened and is not capable of waging war. Golan will never be returned to Syria and I don't think that the new Syrian government would run the risk of getting it back by force and possibly losing more territory.

Q: The US and Turkey share different views on the Kurdish issue in Syria. Can the sides find a middle ground?

A: The Kurds have always been manipulated by regional and great powers. I don't see things changing now. Turkey and the US, too, would reach a compromise over the Syrian Kurds. In general, in the Middle East, the traditional state system is breaking down and various local entities are appearing, without having the characteristics of real states.

Turning the tide: Syrians rising up against Israeli occupation



Israeli Chief of Staff Herzi Halevi, war minister Israel Katz, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Northern Command chief Ori Gordin and Shin Bet chief Ronen Bar at top Mount Hermon on the Syrian side, December 17, 2024.

southwestern province of Quneitra protested against Israel's military presence there.

Israeli forces opened fire on the demonstrators in the village of Susa, injuring several of them.

A week ago, Israeli forces also attacked protesters who had gathered in the village of Maariyah on the western edge of Syria's southern Daraa province to demand an end to the regime's military presence in the area. They shot and wounded a protester.

The residents of Maariyah told the Associated Press that Israeli forces have set up a position in an abandoned Syrian army base in the village and prevented local farmers from accessing their fields.

"They prevented us from farming. They prevented us from moving. We call on the United Nations to remove the occupation as soon as possible," one of the residents said.

Syria's transitional government and HTS leader Ahmed al-Sharaa, also known by his nom de guerre, Abu Mohammed al-Jolani, have called for Israel's pullout from Syria. But they have not taken any effective measures to end Israel's aggression and occupation.

Al-Sharaa has said Syria's new rulers do not

want a conflict with Israel. This is a position that has been echoed by Israel.

Formerly known as Nusra Front, the HTS is an offshoot of Al-Qaeda and ISIL which has rebranded itself to alter public perception regarding its past violent actions.

During Syria's civil war which erupted after the 2011 Arab Spring, Al-Qaeda and ISIL members fought against the Assad government. According to American and Israeli media, the Israeli army provided treatment to those terrorists who were wounded in fighting with the Syrian armed forces.

These terrorists did not pose a threat to Israel during years of fighting in Syria. Al-Sharaa's refusal to take any action against Israel's aggression is in line with this approach.

Syria's current leadership may choose to overlook Israel's occupation of the country's territory. However, the Syrian people, who endure the consequences of this occupation, will not remain silent.

Resentment against the presence of Israeli troops in Syria will continue to build up. A permanent state of Israeli occupation will motivate Syrians to rise up and turn the occupied areas and beyond into resistance fronts against the apartheid regime.

Palestinian Christians deprived of celebrating Christmas

From page 1 ► He added that the message of the Orthodox Church in Jerusalem on Christmas is for God to protect Palestine and Syria, which are going through difficult conditions.

Archbishop Atallah Hanna stated, "We love Syria, we love Lebanon, we love the Arab nation and we wish them well. We hope that God will protect the Arab countries because when they are well, Palestine is well. When those countries are weak and in turmoil, Palestine is weak and in turmoil. We hope that the compass of the nation will always be towards Palestine and Jerusalem... I stand with the Palestinian people in their ordeal. Every Palestinian must be a fighter in his own way

and from his own position."

The Palestinian Christians in Bethlehem, Jerusalem, Nazareth, Ramallah, Haifa, Jaffa, Birzeit, several villages in the Upper Galilee, Beit Sahour, Ramallah and other Palestinian areas are descended from the Aramaeans, Canaanites, Syrians, Armenians and Byzantines.

It is estimated they are about 2.3 million people, the absolute majority of whom reside outside Palestine, where the percentage of Christians residing in the Palestinian territories does not exceed 1%, after they constituted about 11.2% before the Nakba in 1948. The main reason for this decline is the occupation regime's colonial policies, most of whom

are Roman Catholics or Catholics.

Their most famous churches are: the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem; the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem; and the Church of the Annunciation in Nazareth. Due to the occupation regime's oppressive policies, the Palestinian Christians are exposed to a real ordeal like the rest of Palestinian society.

There are dozens of holy Christian places, churches and monasteries in historical Palestine, including 95 churches and monasteries in Jerusalem belonging to all Christian sects.

In 1948, 50% of Jerusalem Christians lost their homes in West Jerusalem. Israel also con-

fiscated 30% of the lands owned by Christians after its occupation in 1967. Besides, Israel confiscated 11,000 acres of olive-grove lands in Beit Jala, to build the "Gilo" settlement, and confiscated thousands of dunams of land belonging to Christians to construct a highway linking the settlements located south of Bethlehem and Jerusalem.

To fragment the Palestinians, the Zionist regime imposed "compulsory military service" on Christians inside the occupied territories since 1948 in line with the policy of "divide and rule" and opened the doors to internal strife among all Palestinians inside.

(See full text at tehrantimes.com)

Israeli airstrike hits Baalbek in Lebanon

The Israeli army launched an airstrike in the Bekaa region in eastern Lebanon on Wednesday, the first such attack since a ceasefire agreement last month, Lebanese media said, Anadolu reported.

The Israeli strike targeted an area between the towns of Talia and Hizzine in the Baalbek district, the state news agency NNA reported.

No information was yet available about injuries or damage.

Lebanese authorities have reported around 300 Israeli violations since the ceasefire

agreement took effect on Nov. 27 to end fighting between the Israeli army and Hezbollah.

Lebanese Prime Minister Najib Mikati called on a ceasefire monitoring committee on Tuesday to pressure Israel to halt its violations of the agreement.

Data from the Lebanese Health Ministry indicates that since Israel's onslaught on Lebanon began on Oct. 8, 2023, at least 4,063 people have been killed, including women, children, and health workers, while 16,663 others have been injured.

Afghan Taliban vow to retaliate after Pakistani air strikes kill dozens

Pakistan air strikes in an eastern border province of Afghanistan killed 46 people, the Taliban government spokesman told AFP on Wednesday, as the defense ministry vowed retaliation.

The strikes were the latest spike in hostilities on the frontier between Afghanistan and Pakistan, with border tensions between the two countries escalating since the Taliban government seized power in 2021.

Taliban government spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said late Tuesday that Pakistan bom-

barded four areas in the Barmal district of eastern Paktika province.

"The total number of dead is 46, most of whom were children and women," he said, adding that six more people were wounded, mostly children.

A defense ministry statement late Tuesday condemned the strikes, calling them "barbaric" and a "clear aggression".

"The Islamic Emirate will not leave this cowardly act unanswered, but rather considers the defense of its territory and sovereignty

to be its inalienable right," the statement said, using the Taliban authorities' name for the government.

A senior Pakistani security official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the strikes targeted "terrorist hideouts inside Afghanistan, using a mix of jets and drones".

Skirmishes on the frontier followed deadly air strikes in March by Pakistan's military in the border regions of Afghanistan, which Taliban authorities said killed eight civilians.

(See full text at tehrantimes.com)

Tourism minister highlights Iran's tradition of peaceful coexistence in Christmas message



TEHRAN – Iran's tourism minister has issued a message marking the birth anniversary of Jesus Christ (PBUH), extending congratulations and highlighting the country's long-standing history as a cradle of peaceful coexistence among monotheistic religions, cultures, and beliefs.

In his statement issued on Tuesday, Seyyed Reza Salehi-Amiri said: "I extend heartfelt congratulations on the auspicious birth of Jesus Christ (PBUH), the messenger of love and peace, to all followers of monotheistic religions, especially our Christian compatriots and the esteemed Armenian community."

The minister described the occasion as an opportunity to reflect on Christ's profound and timeless messages. "His teachings, rooted in love, kindness towards fellow human beings, and steadfastness on the path of

righteousness, serve as a guiding light for all humanity. Jesus Christ (PBUH) exemplifies patience, forgiveness, and self-sacrifice, offering invaluable lessons for people of all faiths," he said.

Salehi-Amiri further emphasized Iran's historical legacy as a hub of harmonious coexistence.

"Our beloved Iran, with its millennia-old history, has always been a center of peaceful interaction among religions, cultures, and beliefs. Christian Iranians have been integral to this land since ancient times, contributing to the flourishing of Christian civilization. This shared heritage is a testament to the bonds that unite us."

He urged continued efforts to strengthen this solidarity and pass it on to future generations. "This harmony and unity among Iranians is a precious legacy that must be preserved and promoted through joint endeavors. Today, we as Iranians must reaffirm our role in fostering global unity, harmony, and understanding in the face of contemporary challenges," Salehi-Amiri added.

The minister concluded his message with a call for peace and prosperity: "May this blessed occasion mark the beginning of greater peace, friendship, and happiness across the globe."

Ancient shipwreck dating back at least 2,600 years is raised from waters off Spain

Spanish archaeologists have successfully removed a 2,600-year-old shipwreck from waters off the country's southeastern coast, two decades after the relic was initially found, officials said.

The ancient Phoenician shipwreck dates back to the 7th century BC. It was discovered in 1994 off the coast of Murcia in southeastern Spain, near the town of Mazarrón, according to Spain's Ministry of Culture.

Now called the Mazarrón II, this shipwreck was one of two located in that same general area. The first, called Mazarrón I, was initially located in 1993, lifted from the water in June 1995, and put on display at Spain's National Mu-

seum of Underwater Archaeology in 2005 after undergoing years of conservation treatments, the museum said.

Mazarrón II is of particular interest to archaeologists and researchers because it is one of only a few Phoenician-era shipwrecks discovered largely intact, said Carlos de Juan, the director of the excavation project, in a video shared by the University of Valencia. The university partnered with the regional culture ministry in Murcia to carry out the excavation.

A team of 14 specialists worked with de Juan to lift the shipwreck from the sea in less than two months.

(Source: CBS News)

Glimpses of World Heritage sites: Quebrada de Humahuaca

Quebrada de Humahuaca, situated in Argentina's province of Jujuy, follows the line of a major cultural route, the Camino Inca, along the spectacular valley of the Rio Grande, from its source in the cold high desert plateau of the High Andean lands to its confluence with the Rio Leone some 150 km to the south.

The UNESCO-designated valley demonstrates substantial evidence of its use as a major trade route over the past 10,000 years. It features visible traces of prehistoric hunter-gatherer communities, of the Inca Empire (15th to 16th centuries), and of the fight for independence in the 19th and 20th centuries.

According to UNESCO, the property is a highly representative example of the south Andean valleys, with an exceptional system of communication routes and economic, social, and cultural coordination.

This is the most important physical linkage between the high Andean lands and the extensive temperate plains in south-eastern South America. Its impressive natural environment is kept almost intact, with hundreds of archaeological and architectural sites that bear witness to its long and rich history. The valley shows substantial evidence of its use as a major trade route over the past 10,000 years. Scattered along the valley are extensive remains of successive settlements whose inhabitants created and used these linear routes. They include prehistoric hunter/gatherer and early farming communities (9000 BC to 400 CE), large structured agricultural societies

(400 CE-900), flourishing pre-Hispanic towns and villages (900-1430/80), the Incan empire (1430/80-1535), Spanish towns, villages and churches (153/93-1810), and traces of Republican struggles for independence (1810-20th century).

Of particular note are the extensive remains of stone-walled agricultural terrace fields at Coctaca, thought to have originated around 1,500 years ago and still in use today; these are associated with a string of fortified towns known as pucarás. The field system and the pucarás together make a dramatic impact on the landscape one that is unrivalled in South America. The valley also displays several churches and chapels and a vibrant vernacular architectural tradition.

The current population, on its part, keeps its traditions in an outstanding cultural landscape. Thus, Quebrada de Humahuaca is an extremely complex heritage system characterized by elements of various kinds inserted in a stunning, impressive and colorful landscape. The interaction between the geo-ecological system and the successive societies and cultures that have occupied it for the last 10,000 years shows space-time continuity that is hard to find in other areas. Separated from the ensemble, only a few properties can be considered unique and outstanding. However, the combination of natural and cultural elements has given rise to a site that is beyond comparison in every sense.

(Source: UNESCO)

Christmas celebrations illuminate New Jolfa neighborhood

From Page 1 ▶ Christmas, a Christian festival commemorating the birth of Jesus Christ (PBUH), is celebrated on December 25 by Roman Catholics and Protestants. However, Orthodox Christians and Armenians observe Christmas Eve on January 6, followed by Christmas Day on January 7.

Located along the southern bank of the Zayandehrud River, New Jolfa stands out as a hub of cultural and architectural significance.

Its roots date back to the Safavid era, and it comes alive every winter with the joy and enthusiasm of Christmas.

Over the years, many investors have transformed its historic houses into boutique hotels, cafés, restaurants, and galleries, making it a favorite destination for those seeking holiday cheer.

During this festive season, Armenian residents of Isfahan adorn their homes and storefronts with strings of lights, floral wreaths, and colorful ornaments.

The beauty of the neighborhood's streets, passageways, and squares, many of which lead to centuries-old churches, is further accentuated by the festive decorations. The unique blend of historical architecture and vibrant Christmas ambience draws not only Armenian



locals but also other Isfahan residents and tourists, creating a warm and lively winter experience.

One of the most frequented spots is the path leading to the Safavid-era Vank Cathedral. This picturesque route, lined with centuries-old homes converted into cafés and restaurants adorned with Christmas-themed decorations, serves as a gateway to the magnificent church.

The western part of this area features a charming alleyway, adorned with floral and light decorations, that leads to a small square named Jolfa Sq. Located in the heart of the Armenian quarter, this square is surrounded by columned verandas, adding to its enchanting atmosphere.

The surrounding shops,

cafés, and seating areas make it a popular gathering spot during New Year's celebrations, attracting locals and visitors to revel in the neighborhood's festive spirit.

Armenians are the largest Christian community in Iran, with an estimated population of 100,000, about 10,000 of whom reside in Isfahan province, according to available data.

The Armenian community was established in the region during the Safavid era, when Shah Abbas I relocated Armenian families to Iran, settling them in the southern part of the Zayanderud.

The district, initially named "New Jolfa" after their homeland, expanded over time and became home to additional neighborhoods established by

migrants from Yerevan and Tabriz.

Today, New Jolfa remains a symbol of cultural harmony in Isfahan, where Zoroastrians, Jews, Christians, and Muslims coexist peacefully.

This historic neighborhood exemplifies the region's tradition of interfaith harmony, making it a unique and cherished part of Iran's cultural landscape.

Once a crossroads of international trade and diplomacy, Isfahan remains one of Iran's most prominent tourist destinations.

It is renowned for its breathtaking Islamic architecture, including stunning mosques, palaces, and bazaars. Visitors can explore Persian gardens and walk along the city's tree-lined boulevards, soaking in the beauty and history at every turn.

The city's architectural marvels, such as Naghsh-e Jahan Square—one of the largest squares in the world—make it a jewel of town planning.

Isfahan is known as "Nesf-e-Jahan," or "half the world," symbolizing its historic significance.

The Zayandeh-Rood River, often called the city's "life-giving river," adds to the city's natural beauty, enhancing its allure for tourists.

Iran plans new tourist pathway linking Persepolis, Naqsh-e Rostam, and Naqsh-e Rajab

TEHRAN – The Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts Directorate of Fars province has announced the design of a new 6-kilometer tourist pathway connecting three of Iran's most iconic archaeological sites: Persepolis, Naqsh-e Rostam, and Naqsh-e Rajab.

According to Mohammad Sabet-Eqlidi, who presides over the directorate, the planned route will feature three separate lanes: one for pedestrians, one for cyclists, and one for vehicles.

"The scheme is to create a seamless experience for visitors, allowing them to explore these ancient landmarks in an integrated manner," Sabet-Eqlidi said on Wednesday.

The initiative is part of a broader effort to enhance Iran's cultural tourism infrastructure, offering both domestic and international travelers a chance to explore some of the most significant landmarks of human history.

Persepolis: a UNESCO World Heritage gem

At the heart of this route is Persepolis, the ceremonial capital of the Achaemenid Empire. Constructed 2,500 years ago, Persepolis is a UNESCO World Heritage site renowned for its grandiose palaces, towering columns, and intricate bas-reliefs. The site stands as a testament to the artistry and architectural prowess of ancient Persia.

Visitors to Persepolis can admire carvings depicting royal ceremonies, soldiers,



and dignitaries, offering a glimpse into the Achaemenid Empire's sophistication and cultural values. Highlights include the Apadana Palace and the Throne Hall, which exemplify the empire's ambition and monumental achievements.

Naqsh-e Rostam: a necropolis of Achaemenid Kings

Located a short distance from Persepolis, Naqsh-e Rostam is an awe-inspiring necropolis featuring the tombs of four Persian Achaemenid kings, believed to include Darius I, Xerxes I, Artaxerxes I, and Darius II. The tombs, carved into the cliffs, are accompanied by seven striking Sassanian bas-reliefs that portray imperial victories and ceremonial grandeur.

Adding to the mystique of Naqsh-e Rostam is the Ka'beh-ye Zardusht (Kaaba of Zoroaster), a square structure thought to date back to the early 6th century BC.

This ancient site beautifully intertwines the legacies of the Achaemenid and Sassanian eras, showcasing their artistry and reverence for history.

Naqsh-e Rajab: a testament of Sassanian arts

Often overshadowed by its renowned neighbors, Naqsh-e Rajab is no less significant. Situated just three kilometers from Persepolis, this site preserves petroglyphs from the early Sassanid kings, offering a glimpse into their eagerness to document history.

Naqsh-e Rajab features a "museum of stone carvings," highlighting scenes of regal ceremonies and triumphs. Despite its lesser fame, the site's carvings provide invaluable insight into Sassanid history and art, complementing the narratives of Persepolis and Naqsh-e Rostam.

China is building the world's largest artificial island airport

China is adding yet another superlative to its aviation roster: the world's largest airport on a man-made island.

Currently under construction off the country's northeast coast, the Dalian Jinzhou Bay International Airport will eventually cover a 20-square-kilometer (7.7-square-mile) island with four runways and a 900,000-square-meter (969,000 sq ft) passenger terminal, according to an airport statement.

Its operators aim to handle 80 million passengers per year across 540,000 flights, with the first phase due to open in 2035.

"The country's largest offshore airport is rising slowly from the sea level like the sunrise in the east," reads a post by Dalian Jinzhou Bay International on Chinese social media platform WeChat.

Once completed, it will become the world's largest airport on an artificial island, surpassing both Hong Kong International Airport (HKG) and Japan's Kansai Airport (KIX).

"There have been great challenges to the construction," Li Xiang, chief engineer of Dalian Airport Construction and Development Co., Ltd., told state-run local media in October, "as the project has complex geological

conditions, high drilling difficulty and high demand in quality with a tight construction schedule."

Dalian, a city of 7.5 million people, has long been a transport hub due to its proximity to Japan and South Korea.

Dalian Zhoushuizi Airport, the city's international airport that has been operating for nearly a century, has already met its maximum capacity and has been expanded several times in recent years, according to Yicai, a state-linked newspaper.

The city started site selection and demonstration work on the new airport in 2003, but con-

struction only began in earnest a few years ago, according to state-run local media.

New airports are a key part of China's aviation growth. The country is on track to pass the United States and become the world's largest air travel market.

Beijing's second airport, Daxing (PKX), opened to great fanfare on October 1, 2019, the 70th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China.

At the time, Chinese officials said the country would need 450 airports by 2035 to keep up with demand.

(Source: CNN)

Iran ready to set up joint sci-tech park in Iraq

TEHRAN – Science, Research, and Technology Minister, Hossein Simaei-Sarraf, has announced the country's readiness to establish a joint science and technology park in Iraq.

The official also expressed Iran's interest in attracting talented and motivated Iraqi students, particularly to the universities of border cities.

"We have only set the condition that the Iraqi students are required to study in Persian," Simaei-Sarraf said, adding that the Iraqi administration has welcomed the condition, IRNA reported.

He made the remarks on Tuesday in a meeting with Haider Abd Dahed, the Iraqi deputy minister of higher education. Both officials emphasized their interests in expanding scientific ties through exchanging students, research, and technology.

During the meeting, the Iraqi official proposed granting 100 scholarships to Iranian students to study in Iraq.

Referring to Iran's successful experiences in the development of the technology ecosystem, Dahed said, "We have taken Iran's experience as a role model in establishing science and technology parks, and in this regard, have passed regulations in the parliament."

The potential of establishing



a joint science and technology park in Iraq has been examined by experts and will be finalized at the joint meeting of Iran-Iraq universities in Karbala, the Iraqi official noted.

Referring to the significant number of Iraqi students in Iran, Dahed said, "We would like Iraqi students to study in Persian to get more familiar with Iranian culture and knowledge."

Simaei-Sarraf, for his part, said the Iranian faculty members and post-graduate students can take sabbaticals in Iraq as one of the possible ways to further develop scientific relations between the two countries.

The official also welcomed

the two neighboring countries, Rezaei-Far said the country's universities hold the capacity to accept more Iraqi students.

The Iraqi official, for his part, said visiting Iran's scientific, technological, and innovative activities can be a good experience for Iraqi students.

Referring to close relationships between the two countries, the official stressed the need to eliminate obstacles to scientific interactions.

Rezaei-Far also said the exchange of professors and students, the establishment of joint science and technology parks, and the implementation of joint research projects, can develop strategic partnership between the two ministries.

He went on to say that the implementation of decisions made by the joint scientific committee of the two countries, and the working groups in technology, innovation and research projects, along with the approval of agreed-upon regulations by the parties, will enhance cooperation between the two countries.

Developing scientific and technological ties can address the challenges of Iraqi students studying in Iran, and boost cultural and scientific relations between Iran and Iraq, Rezaei-Far noted.

Dahed's proposal for attracting Iranian students in case necessary measures are taken to lay the grounds for their education in Iraq.

In the end, Dahed, on behalf of the Iraqi minister of higher education, invited Simaei-Sarraf to attend the joint meeting of Iran-Iraq universities which is planned to be held in Karbala.

Iran has capacity to accept more Iraqi students

On Monday, Omid Rezaei-Far, an official with the Iranian science ministry, held a meeting with Dahed.

Highlighting the importance of developing scientific and technological relations between

Environmental diplomacy needs to be strengthened

TEHRAN – Being transboundary, many complicated environmental challenges can be addressed through environmental diplomacy, which means negotiations among two or more countries.

Environmental diplomacy is used globally to settle problems such as conflicts over sources of energy, water, and climate change, IRNA reported.

The fact that all the countries share the same environment necessitates fostering environmental diplomacy to settle disputes over water resources, environmental pollution, and climate change impacts.

Environmental diplomacy is an effective and required tool to mitigate and eliminate the severe consequences by fair distribution of responsibilities among involved countries as they present their national interests and solutions.

Sand and dust storms (SDSs) are a typical example of metrological hazards in West Asia, where many countries are involved as some generate them and some others are affected by them.

SDSs hit countries such as Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Syria, Turkey, Iran, and sometimes parts of Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, and even Afghanistan, and Pakistan.

These dust particles have devastating impacts on respiratory health and ecosystems;

they result in the closure of airports, schools, and offices, affect electricity transmission infrastructures, and bring about economic losses.

Removing pollution from Aras River, and securing Hirmand River water right, as well as some wetlands are other examples where environmental policies have been used to resolve the conflicts.

Tehran convention is a big achievement whereby the Caspian Sea littoral states protect the Caspian environment from all sources of pollution but also targets the preservation, restoration, and protection of the Caspian Sea species and habitats.

Therefore, to mitigate climate change impacts, and achieve sustainable development goals, environmental policy is required to be strengthened to help Iran as well as its neighboring countries benefit from available resources and secure our rights at the international level.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs in cooperation with other executive bodies such as the ministries of Energy, Industry, Mine, Trade, and Agriculture as well as the Department of Environment can establish a center to focus on specific missions and follow up on discussions and goals in line with national interests and improve the living conditions of citizens through environmental diplomacy.

Iran prioritizes environmental policy

According to the former head of the Department of Environment (DOE), Ali Salajehq, environmental diplomacy is the main priority for the country's political diplomacy.

One of the measures taken by the Iranian government toward the development of environmental diplomacy was the holding of a regional summit on combating sand and dust storms in 2022.

The meeting was attended by ministers and representatives of regional countries and six international agencies, and its final statement was approved as the Tehran Declaration.

Considering the increase in the occurrence of sand and dust storms in the region and the environmental statement on bolstering environmental diplomacy, the current administration aims to endorse regional and global interactions to tackle not only SDSs but also water diplomacy and transboundary waters as other critical issues.

Exchanging regional and global experiences in the field of environment, laying the ground for facilitating interactions and benefiting from global experiences and modern knowledge, and participating at various levels of environment-related negotiations in order to attract resources, enhance capabilities and secure national interests are parts of environmental policies of the current administration.

Female literacy rate up 2.5 times after Islamic Revolution

TEHRAN – Following the 1979 Islamic Revolution, the literacy rate among women has increased by 2.5 times, the head of the Literacy Movement Organization has said.

"In the past 45 years, 11 million women, including 800,000 female prisoners, have become literate," ISNA quoted Abdolreza Fooladvand as saying.

Highlighting the significance of literacy for the development of the country, Fooladvand said since the Iranian year 1355 (March 1976-1977), the literacy rate has grown from 47.5 percent to 97 percent in the present time, which has been significant both nationally and globally.

The official went on to say that literacy is not just reading and writing; it refers to skills that enable individuals to solve their problems effectively and make positive changes in themselves in different situations.

Referring to the revision of the statute of the Literacy Movement Organization in the seventh national development program (2023-2027), Fooladvand said according to the revised edition, besides eradicating illiteracy, the Literacy Movement Organization is obliged to promote public literacy, lifelong and continuous learning, and respond to the individual and social needs of the society.

Beyond its conventional definition, literacy should involve new concepts as well as the real needs of the society.

Therefore, the Literacy Movement Organization is planning to adapt education to individual and social needs, the official noted.

Once implemented, the program will play a key role in fostering public literacy and achieving sustainable development goals, Fooladvand stressed.

Increase in number of literate, educated women

The improvement of women's status in society and their presence in various fields, especially in the scientific and academic fields, after the victory of the Islamic Revolution, is undeniable.

Education of women is the best way to develop their health, growth and improve their cultural-economic status.

Education, especially university education, is one of the important factors for the development of any country and every person has a right to be educated.

Women as a part of society are not exempted from this right.

With the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran following the Islamic Revolution in February 1979 [by the overthrow of the Pahlavi dynasty (1925-1979)], a series of fundamental changes and developments emerged throughout the country's social system, including the education of women.

According to Article 20 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, all human beings regardless of gender are equal in human, political, economic, social, and cultural rights.

Moreover, Article 21 specifically highlights the need to protect women's rights by proclaiming that everyone should respect women's rights. It states that the protection of these rights is one of the responsibilities of the administration and the governmental organizations of the country.

In addition to the fundamental policies and documents regarding women's education in Iran, the high-ranking officials of the Islamic Republic have always stressed in their speeches the necessity to provide the infrastructures and opportunities for the development of women in their individual and social lives.

The Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei in one of his speeches about women's status said, "Women play a role in social, political, sci-



entific, and economic activities.

From the viewpoint of Islam, the field of women's scientific, economic, and political activities is completely open.

If someone tries to deprive women of doing scientific work and economic, political, and social endeavors on the basis of some supposedly Islamic viewpoint, they have acted against the divine decree.

Women can participate in different activities as much as their physical ability and needs allow.

They can engage in economic, political, and social activities as much as they can. The holy Islamic law is not against this.

Of course, because women are more delicate in terms of physical strength, they have certain restrictions." (September 18, 1996)

The promotion of women's literacy is undoubtedly one of the most significant achievements after the Islamic Revolution.

According to the religious-political leaders, it is believed that a woman in Iran can be both traditional and modern at the same time; this is instilled in the education they receive. Meaning that a woman's central role is in the home, taking care of children, their family, and house duties, while also being able to go out into the social world and create a public life not deteriorating any social standing of her family.

"In my opinion, the main issue – or let us say, one of the main issues – is the issue of home and family. The basis of the issue is women's security and opportunities in the family environment and their home-making is for cultivating their talents.

Nothing should prevent them from studying, reading, learning, and writing.

Of course, this is related to those women who are interested in such things. The ground should be prepared for them to carry out these tasks," the Leader said. (April 19, 2014)

The special attention to women, specifically regarding their scientific and academic life, has led to tangible, noteworthy changes in the growth of their individual, social, and scientific lives in Iran after the Islamic Revolution.

During these years, women have found the opportunity to exponentially grow in all levels of higher education whereas such opportunities were absent in the Pahlavi regime. Basically, the monarchical system in Iran adopted a shallow outlook toward women and looked at them as commodities in society.

In the post-Islamic Revolution, the ground was provided for more girls to enter universities and study at higher education centers.

In addition to increased access to academic and scientific environments, women's situation significantly improved in terms of the diversity of the academic fields available to them.

Women have achieved relative equality with men in different fields of study and have even overtaken them in certain fields.

Today, universities in Iran are flooded with women.

The country's literacy rate for women is among the best in the world.

Almost 60 percent of all university students are females today.

The percentage of women in higher education has increased nearly 21 times since the Islamic Revolution.

ENGLISH IN USE

LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

System to be set up for monitoring, forecasting agricultural drought

A system will be launched to monitor, forecast and report the agricultural lands being hit by drought, Amir Qaderi, an official with Disaster Management Organization has announced.

Over a meeting of a special working group for addressing drought and risks threatening agricultural sector, a plan for establishing a system for monitoring and forecasting agricultural drought in the country was approved and submitted to the Disaster Management Organization for review, he explained.

"Following the study of other countries' experiences and existing global methods, the necessity of establishing a domestic system to recognize the lands prone to agricultural drought was emphasized," he noted.

سامانه پایش و پیش‌بینی خشکسالی کشاورزی ایران ایجاد می‌شود

معاون امور بازرسی و بازرگانی سازمان مدیریت بحران کشور از ایجاد سامانه پایش و پیش‌بینی خشکسالی کشاورزی ایران خبر داد.

به گزارش پایگاه اطلاع رسانی سازمان مدیریت بحران کشور، امیر قادری روز یکشنبه با اعلام این خبر گفت: طرح ایجاد سامانه پایش و پیش‌بینی خشکسالی کشاورزی ایران طی جلسه‌ای با حضور مدیران و کارشناسان سازمان مدیریت بحران و وزارت جهاد کشاورزی بررسی شد.

وی ادامه داد: پس از بررسی تجارب داخلی و روش‌های موجود جهانی، ضرورت استقرار نمونه بومی پایش و پیش‌بینی خشکسالی کشاورزی مورد تأکید قرار گرفت و با مشارکت مراکز پژوهشی سازمان هواشناسی کشور و پژوهشکده حفاظت خاک و آبخیزداری طرح ایجاد سامانه پایش و پیش‌بینی خشکسالی کشاورزی ایران پیشنهاد شد.



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GUIDE TO SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

One who imagines himself to be all-knowing will surely suffer on account of his ignorance.

Imam Ali (AS)

Prayer Times > Noon:12:05 Evening: 17:18 Dawn: 5:43 (tomorrow) Sunrise: 7:13 (tomorrow)

IAF to screen Adam Elliot's "Memoir of a Snail"

TEHRAN-The 2024 animation "Memoir of a Snail" will be screened at the Naseri Hall of the Iranian Artists Forum (IAF) in Tehran on Thursday.

An Australian adult stop-motion animated tragicomedy film, it is written, produced and directed by Adam Elliot.

It stars the voices of Sarah Snook, Kodi Smit-McPhee, Eric Bana, Magda Szubanski, Dominique Pinon, Tony Armstrong, Paul Capis, Nick Cave, and Jacki Weaver.

The film's plot, which is loosely inspired by Elliot's own life, follows the trials and tribulations in the life of lonely misfit and melancholic Grace Pudel, a hoarder of snails, romance novels, and guinea pigs, from childhood to adulthood.

Grace Pudel is a book-loving, snail-collecting misfit that falls into a series of misfortunes after being separated from her twin brother Gilbert. Despite her hardships, inspiration and hope arise when Grace begins a friendship with an eccentric elderly woman named Pinky.

From Academy Award-winning writer and director Adam Elliot, "Memoir of a Snail" is a heartfelt and hilarious chronicle of the life of

an outsider finding her confidence and silver linings amongst the clutter of everyday life.

The film had its world premiere at the 2024 Annecy International Animation Film Festival in June, where it won the Cristal Award for a Feature Film.

Adam Elliot, 52, is an Australian animator and filmmaker based in Melbourne. Established as an independent auteur of minimalist narrative-driven films in animation, all of his films have generally use of tragicomedy genre with themes of bittersweet nature and psychological development to the characters; based loosely on his family and friends, each of his films considered a Clayography – a portmanteau genre of clay animation and biography, coined by himself.

Elliot is a voting member of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, and in 1999 was awarded The Young Achiever of the Year for Victoria.

His five films, both shorts and a feature, have collectively participated in over seven hundred film festivals and have received over one hundred awards, including an Academy Award for "Harvie Krumpet" and five Annecy Cristals.

10 Iranian short films, animations participate in Spanish festival

TEHRAN-Ten short films and animations from Iran are present at the 25th Salas de los Infantes Short Film Festival in Burgos, Spain, from December 26 to 28.

The Iranian participants include "Command" directed by Farshid Abdi, "The Pure" by Masoud Mashouf, "Life's Wheel" by Zahra Hosseini, "The Endings" by Daniel Ghasemian, Mehr news reported.

The rest of contenders at the event include "The Sound of Clouds" by Mohammad Lotfali, "10" by Faryad Khosraviani, "Paper Rocket" by Rahrang Animation Studio, "The Morgue" by Majid Farzolah, "The Small Red, Big Blue" by Asghar Besharati and Hamed Nabavi, and "Damji" by Nazanin Chitsaz.

The films will be screened in various competition and out-of-competition sections of the three-day festival.

Cartoon of Day



Christmas In Gaza

Cartoonist: **Nanda Soobben from South Africa**

"Ja'far ibn Abi Talib" painting unveiled in Tehran

TEHRAN- The painting titled "Ja'far ibn Abi Talib," created by Iranian artist Hassan Ruholamin, was unveiled during a ceremony on Monday at the Art Bureau of the Islamic Ideology Dissemination Organization in Tehran. This artwork depicts a portrait of Ja'far ibn Abi Talib, the brother of Imam Ali (AS).

Speaking at the ceremony, Ruholamin shared that following a recent speech by Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei, the Leader of the Islamic Revolution, who emphasized the importance of portraying the personalities of Hamza, the Prophet Muhammad's uncle, and Ja'far ibn Abi Talib in films and series, he felt inspired to bring his artistic vision to life in a more immediate way.

About three months prior, Ruholamin set out to create a painting dedicated to Hamza, recognizing him as a pivotal figure in the early support of Islam in Mecca.

As a result of Hamza's significance, he decided to start working on a piece honoring him. Following the unveiling of the "Hamza" artwork, Ruholamin collaborated with the Art Bureau to present the "Ja'far ibn Abi Talib" painting.



The artist noted that alongside the main piece, four sketches that contributed to the final artwork were also on display, allowing attendees to appreciate the development process of the painting.

Ruholamin further described

the dimensions of the "Ja'far ibn Abi Talib" painting, which measures 100x150 centimeters. He explained that this work was completed with the intention of portraying Ja'far ibn Abi Talib as a notable commander in Islamic history. The design aims to highlight his significance as a military

figure while subtly referencing his resemblance to the portrait of Imam Ali (AS).

Ja'far ibn Abi Talib is remembered as a companion and cousin of the Prophet Muhammad, and as the elder brother of Imam Ali (AS).

"Doctor Zhivago" to debut in new Persian translation

TEHRAN- A new Persian translation of Russian poet and novelist Boris Pasternak's "Doctor Zhivago" by Iranian translator Abtin Golkar is set to hit the book market soon.

"The reason I began translating 'Doctor Zhivago' is that the older translations, which were made over 50 years ago using intermediary languages, were not of good quality and the novel needed a fresh translation," ISNA quoted Golkar as saying on Tuesday.

Golkar emphasized the importance of this work, stating, "This novel is a book for which its author won the Nobel Prize; often, writers receive this prestigious award for their entire body of work, but in Pasternak's case, it was specifically for this novel."

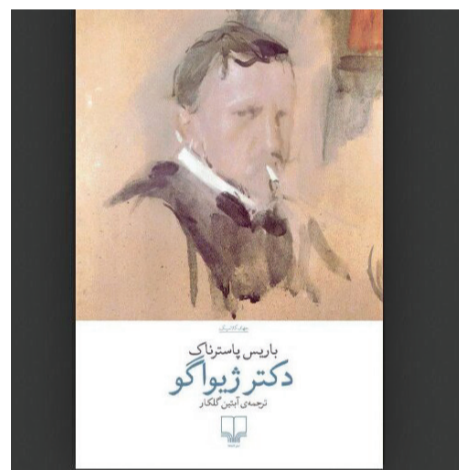
He highlighted that "Doctor Zhivago" has been widely read in various countries for many years and has garnered a dedicated following. "This book, much like classic literature, transcends time and space. It has not been confined to Russia or the 20th century."

"This work has managed to find its audience everywhere and at all times, demonstrating the existence of deep human concepts and roots that resonate with readers of any era or nationality," he added.

Published by Cheshmeh Publications in Tehran, the book is expected to be available in Iranian bookstores next week.

"Doctor Zhivago" is set against the backdrop of the tumultuous events of early 20th-century Russia, including World War I and the Russian Revolution. The story follows Yuri Zhivago, a sensitive and introspective physician and poet, as he navigates the personal and societal upheaval caused by these historical changes.

Yuri, born to a poor family, becomes an orphan at a young age and is raised by a kind guardian. He falls in love with Tonya Grom-



ko, the daughter of an affluent family that he becomes close to during his medical studies. Despite his love for Tonya, Yuri develops a profound connection with Lara Antipova, a passionate woman entangled in a turbulent relationship with the revolutionary Victor Komarovskiy. Their love is intense yet complex, marked by the constraints of time and circumstance.

As the revolution unfolds, Yuri is conscripted into the army and experiences the horrors of war. He and Lara's paths cross several times amidst the chaos, and their love story weaves through the narrative, representing hope and beauty amidst suffering. The political upheaval affects Yuri's life drastically; he struggles with the loss of his family, the challenges of serving in a revolutionary government, and his evolving feelings for both Tonya and Lara.

The novel is rich with themes of love, loss, and the quest for personal identity amidst the tide of history. It explores the conflicts between duty and desire, as Yuri grapples with his responsibilities to his wife, Tonya, and his longing for Lara. The characters be-

come emblematic of the struggles faced by many Russians during this period; they navigate the uncertainty of their futures while pursuing their passions and ideals.

"Doctor Zhivago" delves into the intersection of personal lives and historical events, illustrating how individual fates are intertwined with larger societal transformations. Pasternak's poetic prose captures the beauty and tragedy of human experiences, making it a poignant exploration of love, grief, and resilience in a time of profound turmoil.

"Doctor Zhivago" features autobiographical elements, with many characters inspired by people close to Boris Pasternak, including his mistress, Olga Ivinskaya, who inspired the character of Lara. Pasternak's earlier works, such as "Spektorsky" and "The Last Summer," reflect his experiences during the Revolution and Civil War, laying the groundwork for "Doctor Zhivago."

Despite containing sections written in the 1910s and 1920s, the novel was not completed until 1955. It was submitted for publication to the literary journal Novy Mir in 1956 but was rejected due to its implicit rejection of socialist realism and critiques of Stalinism.

After smuggling copies to the West, Italian publisher Giangiacomo Feltrinelli published a translation in November 1957, drawing significant global interest despite Soviet censorship and political backlash.

Pasternak was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1958, but faced severe repercussions, threatening his safety and that of Ivinskaya. Under pressure, he renounced the prize. After his death in 1960, he received a modest funeral that drew thousands. Finally, in the late 1980s, "Doctor Zhivago" was published without censorship, solidifying its place in Russian literature. Today, it is part of the high school curriculum in Russia.

Chilean artist shows support for Gaza on large-format mural



Chilean artist shows support for Gaza on large-format mural

Chile's first mural to show support with the children of Gaza was inaugurated Monday in Santiago, with the aim of raising awareness about the urgent need to stop the Israeli genocide in Palestine.

The initiative is part of the international project "The Names of Freedom," in which, based on photographs and videos of children in the occupied territories, students from all over the world, together with prominent artists, will create a visual work, Latin America News Agency reported.

The first such art work was depicted at the Horacio Aravena Andaur school, in the capital's San Joaquín district, designed by Chilean-American Ian Pierce (Ekeko), who has created several large-format paintings in both local and foreign public spaces.

Ekeko specializes in community art for educational purposes and his work addresses themes such as historical memory, hu-

man rights and collective identity.

"Our intention is to make as many of these international solidarity murals as possible, connecting with teachers, painters and, of course, children from different countries," he said.

He added that there are currently artists interested in participating in London, Philadelphia, Puerto Rico and Peru.

"We will start contacting more sponsors and organizations that can make the initiative grow worldwide, he said.

The relentless Israeli assault on Gaza has claimed the lives of at least 45,000 Palestinians and injured over 107,000 others since

the war began last October, the Palestinian health ministry reported.

The catastrophic human toll has pushed Gaza's medical facilities to the brink of collapse. With supplies exhausted, hospitals are overwhelmed by the continuous stream of casualties arriving daily from Israel's indiscriminate bombardment.

The International Criminal Court issued arrest warrants last month for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his former Defense Minister Yoav Gallant for war crimes and crimes against humanity in Gaza.

Israel also faces a genocide case at the International Court of Justice for its war on Gaza.