



## Israel's Dream of Renewed Occupation

Israel wants to stay in Lebanon beyond 60-day ceasefire deal

▶ Page 5

Israeli occupiers in southern Lebanon, in a handout image released on December 27, 2024.

### Renowned graphic novelists to collaborate on new comic about Gaza

Art Spiegelman, author of the Pulitzer Prize-winning graphic novel "Maus," has announced that he will be collaborating with Joe Sacco, creator of the documentary-comic "Palestine," in a new project about Gaza.

Spiegelman said that the new graphic novel will likely be difficult to find a publisher for in the U.S., given the ongoing wave of censorship on Palestine in western art, but added: "I'll finish this thing or die trying," Middle East Eye reported.

Spiegelman is an American cartoonist, co-editor of the comic magazines Arcade and Raw, and contributing artist for the New Yorker.

He was born to Polish Jews who lived through the German occupation of Poland and were sent to Auschwitz.

Of 85 of his relatives alive at the beginning of the Second World War, only 13 survived the Holocaust, including his parents.

Spiegelman's "Maus" was serialized from 1980-1991, illustrating his interviews with his father about his experiences as a Holocaust survivor. ▶ Page 8

### What will await Israel if it refuses to leave Lebanese lands?

By Sondoss Al Asaad

SOUTH LEBANON – The Israeli occupation regime must its troops from southern Lebanon within 60 days of November 27, the day the ceasefire agreement went into effect. However, the Israeli regime has not only refused to pull out of the Lebanese lands it has also violated the truce by making sporadic attacks that have expanded to the north of the Litani River.

The Lebanese army had asked the committee supervising the implementation of the ceasefire agreement to pressure "Israel" to withdraw all at once from the Western sector; however, it did not heed the request. Two days after deploying in Shma'a, the Lebanese army informed the committee of its decision to enter the border town of Naqoura. Nevertheless, due to the procrastination by the Israeli occupation forces to withdraw the entry of the Lebanese army was postponed to an unspecified date, as it was scheduled for Thursday morning in coordination with UNIFIL and the Supervision Committee. ▶ Page 5

### Iraq says it won't be a launchpad for attacks on neighbors

By Wesam Bahrani

TEHRAN – Iraqi President Abdul Latif Jamal Rashid underscored on Saturday that Iraq will not allow its territory to serve as a platform for aggression against neighboring countries.

This firm stance highlights Iraq's commitment to safeguarding its sovereignty, maintaining regional stability, and fostering peaceful relations amid persistent instability in the region.

Critics have accused the United States of violating Iraqi sovereignty through its illegal military occupation of the Arab country. Experts have also pointed to the U.S. embassy in Baghdad, which is among the largest in the world, for interfering in Iraqi politics and stirring divisions with its neighbors in particular Iran.

Speaking at a ceremony commemorating the martyrdom of Sayyed Muhammad Baqir al-Hakim, Rashid declared, "We remain committed to ensuring that our land is not used as a launching pad for aggression against any of our neighbors." ▶ Page 5

### Ayatollah Khamenei urges increased focus on Imams Jawad, Hadi, and Askari in literature and art

TEHRAN – During a meeting on Saturday, Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei highlighted the importance of Imam Jawad (AS), Imam Hadi (AS), and Imam Askari (AS) in the history of Islam.

He criticized the insufficient mention of these esteemed Imams in sermons and literature, emphasizing their unparalleled role in the quantitative and qualitative expansion of Shi'ism during their eras.

During the closing of a mourning ceremony for the martyrdom of Imam Hadi (AS), the Leader underscored the necessity of addressing the lives and teachings of these Imams in various historical and artistic fields. He noted that Shi'ism has never seen such expansion as it did under the guidance of these three Imams.

"Baghdad and Kufa became the main centers of Shi'ism during the time of Imam Hadi and Imam Jawad, and their contributions to Shi'ite teachings are unmatched," he remarked.

Ayatollah Khamenei called on researchers and artists to dedicate more efforts to studying and creating works about these Imams, lamenting the lack of attention they have received in these areas. He urged for an increase in literature and artistic productions that highlight the significant contributions of these Imams.

### Iran says ready to enter 'constructive' talks for new nuclear deal

TEHRAN – Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi has said the Islamic Republic is ready to resume constructive and immediate talks on its nuclear program with the Western sides.

"We are still ready to enter constructive dialogue without any delay about our nuclear program, a dialogue with the aim of reaching an agreement," Araghchi told China's CCTV in an interview aired on Saturday.

President-elect Donald Trump quit the multilateral nuclear deal with Iran in his first term in May 2018 and returned all the previous sanctions that had been lifted under the agreement and added new ones.

According to the deal, formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), Iran agreed to put a cap on its nuclear work in return for the termination of financial and economic sanctions. ▶ Page 2

### Turkish action to cripple Iran's transit?

By Ebrahim Fallahi

TEHRAN – Turkey's recent decision to revoke fuel tax exemptions for Iranian commercial vehicles entering its borders has sparked significant controversy.

This measure, implemented on December 29, 2024, forces Iranian truck drivers to pay exorbitant fuel taxes, amounting to 155 percent of Turkey's special consumption tax rate.

Iranian truckers, already facing delays at border crossings, now confront additional financial burdens that could disrupt the region's trade dynamics.

The move comes as a retaliatory response to Iran's "full-tank" policy, which mandates foreign trucks leaving Iran to pay a customs duty equivalent to the fuel in their tanks to combat fuel smuggling.

While Turkey justifies its decision as reciprocal, it undermines ongoing efforts to strengthen bilateral trade relations between the two nations. ▶ Page 4

### Fajr theater festival welcomes intl. submissions

TEHRAN – The 43rd edition of Fajr International Theater Festival (FITF) has received submissions from 46 countries across the world, the organizers have announced. A total of 231 works from 46 countries including Russia, Norway, Sweden, Canada, and several African countries applied to participate in this year's event, Mojgan Vakili, the director of the international section of the festival said during a press conference held in Tehran on Saturday. However, the international section of the event will be held non-competitively. "The decision to host the international section non-competitively was made by the festival organizers," she added.

She shared that 20 works have been prioritized for final selection, culminating in six stage performances and one online presentation. ▶ Page 8



### IRGC begins extensive military drills in western Iran

TEHRAN – Iran's Islamic Revolution Guard Corps (IRGC) Ground Force has commenced large-scale military exercises, termed the "19th Great Prophet Exercise," as of Saturday.

The initial phase of the drill, executed by the Mirza Kuchik Khan Brigade, concentrated on rapid response operations, which included the swift deployment of troops and military hardware to designated combat zones.

Brigadier General Mohammad-Nazar Azimi, commander of Najaf Ashraf Regional Headquarters of the IRGC Ground Force, underscored the importance of these exercises, stating, "New weapons and equipment will be utilized in this exercise, and the capabilities of Basij forces will be employed."

Azimi further noted that this exercise series is ongoing, with the first stage taking place in Kermanshah province. ▶ Page 3

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

## The year of negotiations with America?

Arman-e-Melli analyzed possible negotiations between Iran and the U.S. and wrote: It must be said that the beneficiaries of the sanctions are not the only ones who are trying to create obstacles on the way to the negotiations. Israel is also against any negotiations with Iran that would break the deadlock. Israel has proven that it will take any action it can to remove Iran from the nuclear negotiations table; and secondly, not to allow negotiations to reduce the tension between Iran and the United States. It seems that the level of future negotiations is related to the non-constructive positions of the European troika, some human rights issues, and Europe's claims related to the export of Iranian missiles and drones to Russia. The tactical mistake of the previous government was that they shifted the nuclear negotiations from Europe to certain regional Arab countries. This situation is expected to be rectified because the role of Europeans is key in this regard. It is never too late to negotiate, even at the height of the political tensions that the opponents of the Islamic Republic have created for Iran so that they can have the upper hand in facing Tehran in peace and war.

### Keyhan: America's goal in negotiations is to restrain Iran, not to lift sanctions

In a note, Kayhan discussed the admissions by American analysts including Richard Nephew, John Hoffman, and Barak Ravid that an attack on Iran's nuclear facilities will not work. It said: The admissions by these politicians is on the possible failure of the West in the event of any potential attack on Iran's nuclear facilities and their proposals for negotiations are intended to restrain our country and force it to back down from its nuclear position. They believe that any military attack on Iran's nuclear facilities will have a low possibility of success and will complicate the nuclear dispute between Iran and the West. The fact is that the Americans were well aware of the consequences of attacking Iran's nuclear facilities.

They also see negotiation and agreement not in the direction of resolving tensions, but more in the direction of undermining Iran's foreign policy and its national power. The Americans are well aware that any attack, in addition to Iran's response to American forces in the region could prompt Tehran to change its nuclear doctrine.

### Ettelaat: What is the ideal agreement for Iran and Trump?

Ettelaat conducted an interview with Rahman Gahremanpour about a possible agreement between Iran and Trump's administration. He said: Trump has faced a situation in the Middle East that could affect his main policy of containing China. Trump's second administration does not have the opportunity to focus on the Middle East as much as his first administration, and the Gaza war has caused the U.S. government to get unintentionally involved in Middle East conflicts. Trump wants to distance himself from the Middle East as quickly as possible. For this, the Iran issue must be resolved in Washington. Trump is seeking to reach a comprehensive agreement with Iran that will reduce America's concern about Iran and make sure that Iran does not get a (atomic) bomb and does not threaten Israel through the Axis of Resistance. Iran is looking for a chance to maintain its nuclear power and to see the least damage from the ongoing developments in the region. It seems that in the current situation, there is a big gap between what is the desired agreement between Iran and America and the optimism.

### Iran: Two important cases of Tehran's foreign policy

Iran wrote Iran's foreign policy priorities are now interacting with the Trump administration and resolving the nuclear dispute. The results of each of them will have long-term effects on the country. Regulating the relationship with the Trump administration and focusing on developments in West Asia are more sensitive and should be given more priority than the nuclear dispute. The country's decision-makers must come to a clear conclusion as to whether negotiations with Trump's administration will meet national interests or will not achieve anything. If the decision to negotiate and solve the problems with America is within the framework of diplomacy and adopting a kind of literature that is appropriate in international relations and international law to advance the goals of meeting national interests is an absolute necessity. But if, for any reason, the country's decision-makers conclude that it will be impossible to solve issues with the U.S., especially regional issues, the nuclear case must center on interaction with Europe and the IAEA to prevent the JCPOA parties from moving to a snapback mechanism.

## Lawmakers tour Dezful Airbase, discuss Khuzestan's security challenges



Members of the Iranian Parliament's National Security and Foreign Policy Committee during a meeting with the commanders of the Vahdati Airbase in Dezful on January 4, 2025

TEHRAN – Members of the Iranian Parliament's National Security and Foreign Policy Committee recently visited the Vahdati Airbase in Dezful to assess the challenges, threats, and opportunities present at the airbase and within the broader Khuzestan Province.

The Vahdati Airbase is a strategically significant military installation for the Islamic Republic of Iran Air Force (IRIAF). Its location near the Iraq border highlights its crucial role in regional security operations. Ebrahim Rezaei, the committee's spokesperson, reported on a joint meeting with the base's commanders, including Brigadier General Hamzeh Bidadi, commander of the Iranian Army in Khuzestan Province and the Southwest Operational Headquarters. "A comprehensive report detailing the Army's activities in Khuzestan Province, including the missions, programs, and strategies of this base, was presented," Rezaei stated.

The lawmakers expressed their profound appreciation for the historical contributions of the Fourth Fighter Base Vahdati in Dezful, especially

during the Iran-Iraq War in the 1980s.

During their visit to Ahvaz, Rezaei noted, "A meeting of the Khuzestan Province Security Council was convened, where members presented a report on the region's challenges, threats, and opportunities." Discussions focused on critical issues in Khuzestan, particularly border security and the dredging of the Arvand River. The urgency of addressing these security concerns was emphasized.

"The meeting concluded with a decision to prioritize the dredging of the Arvand Rud, a matter that will be included in the National Security Commission's agenda for follow-up with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and other relevant sectors," Rezaei explained. Additional topics addressed included border monitoring and the security factors contributing to instability in Khuzestan.

Another area of focus was on factors causing insecurity in Khuzestan Province, which we agreed to investigate and address with increased efforts for resolution, Rezaei added.

# Iran says ready to enter 'constructive' talks for new nuclear deal

From page 1 ▶ The JCPOA was clinched in 2015 between Iran and the 5+1 group, the five permanent members of the UN Security Council plus Germany, after nearly two years of intensive negotiations.

"We negotiated for more than two years with the 5+1 countries in goodwill and finally we succeeded in reaching an agreement that was praised and accepted by the entire world as a diplomatic achievement," explained Araghchi, who acted as Iran's second-ranking diplomat in the talks at the time.

"We implemented it in goodwill but it was the U.S. that decided to withdraw from it without any reason and justification and brought the situation to this point."

The chief diplomat said, "The U.S. pullout from the JCPOA was a grave strategic mistake."

After the U.S. withdrawal, Iran remained fully committed to the JCPOA for a full year. Finally, in May 2019, after the European sides failed to honor their commitments, Iran started to gradually lift limits on its nuclear activities. At the time Iran announced if the European parties would abide by their share of the agreement it would reverse its decision. However, the Europeans failed to do so.

The chief diplomat added the formula that Iran has in mind for resolving the nuclear issue is the same as the JCPOA, which means creating trust in Iran's nuclear program in return for the lifting of sanctions.

"Based on this (formula) we are ready for talks," Araghchi said.

To revitalize the nuclear deal Iran held a brainstorming session in late November 2024 with the three European countries of Britain, France and Germany (E3) that are still party to the dormant nuclear agreement at the level of deputy foreign ministers in Geneva. Iran and the E3 plan to meet again on January 13.

On the policy of the new American administration toward the nuclear



talks, the foreign minister said, "It is natural that the new administration should formulate its policies, and we decide based on that."

Trump will officially take over as president on January 20.

Foreign Minister Araghchi went on to say that "China and Russia were two important influential parties in the negotiations (that produced the JCPOA) and Iran believes that the two countries should still play their own constructive role in the talks and this is our will and request."

He added since 2015 when the nuclear deal was signed the world has undergone many changes. The JCPOA expires in October 2025.

In response to the complicated situation in the West Asia region and issues surrounding Iran's nuclear program, Araghchi replied, "The road to a diplomatic solution is never closed."

"As a diplomat I believe it is possible to reach 'diplomatic solutions' in the most difficult situations, but it depends how much there is political will and how much diplomats show creativity and devise initiatives to find new ways and agree on new formulas.

Finding a solution is difficult, but

is not impossible if the other side has the diplomatic will."

### 'Deeply strategic ties between Iran, China'

Araghchi also acknowledged the tumultuous environment in West Asia during his appointment, emphasizing the need for Iran to foster peaceful and cooperative relations with its neighbors in the Persian Gulf. "Our policy is rooted in mutual respect and shared interests," he said, highlighting the importance of stabilizing the region through dialogue and collaboration.

Reflecting Iran's commitment to strategic partnerships, Araghchi revealed that his first official visit outside West Asia was to Beijing, underscoring China's role as a key ally. "China supported Iran during challenging times, and we remain dedicated to enhancing this enduring relationship," he remarked.

Araghchi described Iran's relationship with China as "deeply strategic," shaped by shared goals and high-level exchanges. He cited a pivotal meeting between the Iranian and Chinese presidents in Kazan, Russia, in late 2024 as a testament to the growing partnership.

"Our collaboration spans trade, investment, culture, and even law

enforcement," Araghchi noted. He also revealed that a recent four-hour discussion with China's Foreign Minister had focused on regional developments and strategies for addressing emerging challenges.

### 'Iran calls for a unified Syrian government'

Turning to the Syrian crisis, Araghchi disclosed that Tehran had previously warned Damascus about opposition groups' plans for renewed military operations.

While surprised by the rapid escalation and the Syrian army's inability to counter rebel advances, he reiterated Iran's call for a unified Syrian government that accommodates all ethnic and religious communities.

"Syria must not become a safe haven for terrorists or a threat to regional stability," Araghchi asserted, adding that Iran's approach would depend on the transitional government's conduct.

In closing, Araghchi shared his vision for a more equitable global system in 2025, built on justice, rationality, and respect for international law. "We hope for a world free from war, oppression, and foreign interference," he concluded, appealing for collective action to address global challenges.

## Iranian president to visit Tajikistan in January, informed source confirms



Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian (R) shakes hand with Tajik President Emomali Rahmon in a meeting in Tehran on July 30, 2024.

TEHRAN – Iranian President Massoud Pezeshkian is set to visit Tajikistan in January for high-level discussions aimed at bolstering relations between the two nations, an informed source within Tajikistan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs confirmed on Saturday.

During the visit, President Pezeshkian is expected to meet with Tajik President Emomali Rahmon and other senior officials in Dushanbe.

The talks are anticipated to focus on expanding cooperation in areas such as culture, science, trade, and regional security.

The visit follows a meeting between President Pezeshkian and President Rahmon on the sidelines of the 79th United Nations General Assembly in September 2024.

During their discussions, Pezeshkian emphasized Tehran's commitment to strengthening bilateral relations and fostering

partnerships in various fields, including economic development and regional stability.

President Rahmon also traveled to Tehran in July 2024 to attend President Pezeshkian's inauguration ceremony, signaling the importance of the relationship.

During a meeting between the two presidents, Emomali Rahmon invited Pezeshkian to pay an official visit to Tajikistan at his convenience.

This upcoming visit also builds on the groundwork laid by former Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi, who visited Dushanbe twice during his tenure.

Raisi's administration prioritized the Iran-Tajikistan relationship, with his first foreign visit as president taking him to Tajikistan in September 2021.

He returned in November 2023, during which 18 cooperation agreements were signed to deepen ties in various sectors.

## Development of Chabahar port takes center stage in high-ranking Iran-India talks



Iran's delegation led by Deputy Foreign Minister Majid Takht-Ravanchi attending the 19th Iran-India Political Consultations event, along with the Foreign Secretary of India Vikram Misri in New Delhi, India on January 3, 2025

TEHRAN – Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister for Political Affairs, Majid Takht-Ravanchi, participated in the 19th Iran-India Foreign Office Consultations held in New Delhi on Friday, engaging with multiple Indian officials.

The discussions, which included India's Foreign Secretary, Vikram Misri, covered a wide range of bilateral, regional, and international issues, emphasizing the enhancement of economic relations, particularly the strategic development of the Chabahar port.

"Iran and India enjoy traditional and historical ties," Takht-Ravanchi wrote in a post on X.

The Iranian diplomat also said he had a fruitful meeting with India's Foreign Minister, S. Jaishankar.

He highlighted that "economic relations, including Chabahar Port, were prominent in the negotiations," underscoring the commitment of both countries to strengthen their traditional and historical ties.

The strong relationship between Iran and India recognized through their 2003 Strategic Partnership Agreement, has continued to thrive, with bilateral trade reaching \$17.5 billion in 2022-2023, despite Western sanctions.

Moreover, the Chabahar port on Iran's coastline represents a vital strategic asset for both Iran and India. This importance was underscored by a recent 10-year agreement, involving India's \$250 million investment aimed at the port's development.

This strategic move positions Chabahar as a competitor to Chinese-backed Pakistani ports and aligns with India's regional connectivity goals.

Additionally, both countries' membership in BRICS has bolstered cooperation, optimized trade routes, and expanded collaboration in technology, pharmaceuticals, and tourism, highlighted by a 30% rise in Indian visitors to Iran in 2022.

# Leader tells Pope Francis Muslims and Christians should unite against Global Arrogance

TEHRAN – Pope Francis has received a beautifully crafted plaque featuring excerpts from the Leader of the Islamic Revolution's speeches about Prophet Jesus (pbuh).

The plaque was presented by Mohammad Hossein Mokhtari, the Iranian Ambassador to the Vatican, during a personal meeting.

Created by the Islamic Revolution Cultural Research Institute, the plaque was translated into Italian and presented as an exquisite tablet. Pope Francis warmly welcomed the gift and expressed his deep appreciation. He remarked that the text contained "significant and prominent points that could be impactful and influential for followers of the Christian faith."

The excerpts from Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei's speeches emphasized the profound importance of Prophet Jesus in Islam, stating that he is held in no less esteem than he is by devoted Christians. The text portrayed



Jesus as a figure who spent his life fighting against oppression, aggression, and corruption, challenging those who used wealth and power to exploit others. It urged followers of Christ to emulate his path by standing against injustice and promoting a just world order. The plaque underscored that "if Jesus Christ (pbuh) were among us today, he wouldn't hesitate for a moment to fight the leaders of oppression and Global Arrogance,"

and advocate for human virtues.

During the meeting, Pope Francis also shared his deep concern about the ongoing situation in the region, particularly the ongoing Israeli aggressions against Palestinians. He mentioned that he is regularly updated on developments through his representative in Palestine.

**'Netanyahu is the problem, not the Jews'**

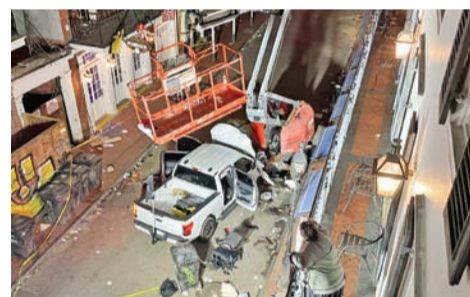
Seyyed Abolhasan Navab,

founder of Iran's University of Religions and Denominations, was also present during the meeting with Pope Francis. In his remarks to the religious leader, he emphasized the urgent need for peace and justice in the wake of the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Gaza. He stated, "We have no problem with the Jews; the problem is with Netanyahu," highlighting the distinction between the Jewish community and political actions that contribute to conflict.

Appreciating Pope Francis's stance on defending the oppressed people of Palestine, Navab remarked, "Religious leaders have proven that they are always alongside the people and the voice of human suffering."

Navab underscored the importance of solidarity among all people, regardless of race, color, ethnicity, religion, or sect. "The heart of every fair-minded person aches when they witness oppression."

## Tehran condemns deadly terror attack in New Orleans



The photo shows the pickup truck that was driven into a crowd on Bourbon Street, New Orleans early Jan. 1, 2025, killing 15 people and injuring over 30 others.

TEHRAN – Iran's Foreign Ministry has condemned a terrorist attack in New Orleans, Louisiana, that left 15 dead and more than 30 injured during New Year's celebrations.

In a statement released on Friday, Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baqaei expressed Tehran's strong denunciation of the attack, reaffirming the Islamic Republic's unwavering stance against terrorism in all its forms, regardless of its location or perpetrators. Baqaei also extended condolences to the survivors and the families of the victims.

The incident occurred early on New Year's Day when a truck driver, identified as 42-year-old Shamsud-Din Jabbar, drove his vehicle into a crowd gathered in the city's iconic French Quarter. Witnesses described horrifying scenes as the truck plowed through revelers at approximately 3:15 a.m., turning the festive atmosphere into chaos. "The best way I can describe it is truly a war zone," one eyewitness recounted.

Authorities confirmed that Jabbar, a former U.S. Army soldier who had been deployed to Afghanistan, displayed a flag associated with the Daesh Takfiri terrorist group on his truck during the attack. Investigators are currently probing potential links between Jabbar and extremist organizations.

The tragedy unfolded with additional violence, as two police officers were injured in an exchange of gunfire with the suspect. Jabbar was ultimately killed by law enforcement at the scene. A search of his vehicle uncovered firearms and a potential explosive device. Meanwhile, two other suspected explosive devices were found in the French Quarter and were safely neutralized by the FBI.

Among the injured were individuals of various ages, with many requiring hospitalization. The victims were part of a large crowd celebrating the arrival of 2025 when the attack disrupted the festive event.

While American authorities have so far only pointed to Daesh as potentially responsible, they are meanwhile closely engaging with figures in Syria who are remnants of Daesh. The leader of the factions that helped topple President Bashar al-Assad's government a month ago is an affiliate of Daesh and al-Qaeda. American diplomats, along with the German and French foreign ministers, have held multiple meetings with these new de facto rulers of Syria in recent days in an attempt to help them form a government in the war-torn Arab country.

## Two new Iranian satellites to enter orbit by late spring

TEHRAN – Iran is making more strides in its space program, with plans to launch two new satellites into orbit in the following months.

Hassan Salariyeh, Director of the Iranian Space Research Center, announced that the launches of the "Tolu 3" and "Zafar 2" satellites, previously delayed, are now scheduled for late Spring 2025. During an interview with Tasnim News Agency, Salariyeh provided updates on Iran's space industry, including the status of current satellites, ongoing projects, and the country's space ambitions.

He mentioned that the "PARS 3" satellite, which is in the design phase, aims for an imaging accuracy of about two meters. The "PARS 2" satellite, set to be unveiled in February during the Fajr celebrations, will have an imaging accuracy of less than four meters. This satellite,



a remote sensing project, requires a sun-synchronous orbit and its launch is planned for 2025 or later, depending on the launch vehicle's readiness.

The launches of "Tolu 3" and "Zafar 2," initially planned for early winter 2024, were postponed due to the need for a sun-synchronous orbit and delays with the external launch vehicle. They are now expected to launch in the first half of

2025, with a likely window in late Spring. Iran has made significant strides in its space program recently. In January 2024, the Soraya satellite was launched into a 750 km orbit, setting a national record. In September 2024, the Chamran-1 satellite was launched into a 550 km orbit, and in August 2024, the Fakhr-1 satellite was launched to test advanced communication systems.

## IRGC begins extensive military drills in western Iran

From Page 1 ► notably in the Oramanat region and areas around.

He said that the exercise will harness the capabilities of Basij forces across several regions, including Sarpol-e Zahab, Qasr-e Shirin, Gilan-e Gharb, Paveh, Javanrud, Salas-e Babajani, Ravansar, and Dalahu. The brigadier general expressed hope that these actions and exercises would enhance the honor and strength of Iran and its people.

Azimi highlighted the historical significance of conducting exercises in Salas-e Babajani, a border region with a rich history of defensive operations during the Iran-Iraq War.

He also emphasized that valuable operations had previously been conducted in this region to counter terrorist groups.

### Upcoming combined and joint exercises

In the coming days, a combined and joint

exercise involving multiple branches of the armed forces will take place across Iran and the waters of the Persian Gulf.

As announced in an IRGC statement on Saturday, the primary objectives of these exercises are to enhance coordination and synergy in the defensive and offensive capabilities of the armed forces and operationalize new military equipment.

This comprehensive approach ensures that the exercises not only boost military readiness but also demonstrate Iran's defensive and offensive capabilities in the face of potential threats. Iranian officials have consistently emphasized the defensive nature of these exercises, asserting that the country's military capabilities, including missile power, are vital for national defense and are not open to negotiation.



Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian paid unannounced visits to two schools in the suburbs of Tehran on Saturday. He discussed the concerns and challenges of the education centers with their leaders.

## SPORTS

### Bam Khatoon in Pot 2 of AFC Women's Champions League



TEHRAN – The inaugural AFC Women's Champions League season will mark another milestone on Wednesday, January 8 when the official draw ceremony for the Knockout Stage takes place at the AFC House in Kuala Lumpur.

Eight teams are still standing in the 2024-25 campaign, which kicked off last August with the Preliminary Stage and subsequently concluded the Group Stage in October.

The cast, which comprises the top two finishers from each of the three groups in the Group Stage and the two best third-placed teams, will continue their journey to glory in the single-leg Quarter-finals.

The three group winners and the best-ranked runner-up have been allocated to Pot 1 for the draw, with the remaining quartet in Pot 2, as below:

Pot 1: Hyundai Steel Red Angels Women's FC (KOR), Melbourne City FC (AUS), Urawa Red Diamonds Ladies (JPN), Ho Chi Minh City Women's FC (VIE)

Pot 2: Abu Dhabi Country Club (UAE), Bam Khatoon FC (IRN), Wuhan Jiangda Women's FC (CHN), Taichung Blue Whale Women's Football Team (TPE)

In accordance with the Group Protection Principle, teams that advanced from the same Group will not be paired with each other. This will be ensured by the draw software, which will also prevent deadlock situations.

Teams from Pot 1 will serve as the home side for the Quarter-finals, which are scheduled to be played on March 22 and 23, 2025.

This will be followed by a centralized Finals, which will see the Semi-finals and Final – all single-leg ties – being played out from May 21 to 24, 2025, with an attractive prize purse of at least USD13 million for the eventual champions of the prestigious tournament.

Watch the draw ceremony of the AFC Women's Champions League 2024/25 Knockout Stage on Wednesday, January 8, 2025.

### Esteghlal to part company with Gael Kakuta

TEHRAN – Media reports suggest that Esteghlal will part ways with French winger Gael Kakuta in the January transfer window.

The 33-year-old winger joined the Iranian top-flight club from France's Ligue 2 club Amiens in August.

Kakuta has reportedly failed to meet the expectations in Esteghlal.

Esteghlal head coach Pitso Mosimane is going to sign a Cameroonian winger in the transfer window.

The Blues sit 10th in the Iran 16-team table, 14 points behind leader Sepahan.

### Tractor forward Mehdi Abdi joins Malavan

TEHRAN – Tractor football team forward Mehdi Abdi joined Malavan on Saturday.

Tractor has recently parted ways with Albanian forward Sokol Cikalleshi and Abdi after they failed to meet the expectations.

Malavan sit ninth in the Iran Professional League (IPL) table.

Abdi played for Persepolis from 2018 to 2023.

### Nottingham Forest eye Mehdi Ghaedi

TEHRAN – UAE Pro League club Ittihad Kalba forward Mehdi Ghaedi has been reportedly linked with a move to English side Nottingham Forest.

Portuguese side Rio Ave and Greek side Olympiakos have previously shown interest in signing the 26-year-old winger.

Ghaedi joined Kalba in 2023 from Esteghlal and has stolen the show in the Emirati side.

He has scored 18 goals in 34 matches for Kalba.

### Peseiro shortlisted to lead Persepolis

TEHRAN – Portuguese Jose Vitor dos Santos Peseiro has been reportedly shortlisted to take charge of Persepolis football team.

Peseiro, 64, has most recently worked as head coach of Nigeria national football team. He was assistant of Carlos Queiroz in Real Madrid in the 2003/04 season.

Persepolis have parted company with Spanish coach Juan Carlos Garrido in late December and are negotiating with the coaches for the vacant seat.

The Reds have been linked with former Croatia coach Slaven Bilic, ex-Dortmund trainer Edin Terzic, former Bayern Munich head coach Niko Kovac, ex-Real Madrid coach Rafael Benitez and Foolad coach Yahya Golmohammadi.

### Bahrain to host 2025 Asian Youth Games

TEHRAN – The Olympic Council of Asia (OCA) has officially announced Bahrain as the new host of the 2025 Asian Youth Games after Uzbekistan's withdrawal due to financial and logistical challenges.

The decision comes as a testament to Bahrain's growing capabilities in organizing major international sporting events, underscored by the successful hosting of the ISF Gymnasiade in 2024.

The 21 sports that are set to feature in the kingdom are athletics, badminton, basketball, equestrian, e-sports, futsal, golf, handball, judo, jiu-jitsu, mixed martial arts, road cycling, swimming, table tennis, taekwondo, triathlon, wrestling, weightlifting, kabaddi, volleyball, and teqball.

The Asian Youth Games is highly regarded as the second-largest continental multi-sport meeting after only the Asian Games.

### Persepolis interested in Malaysian prodigy Arif Aiman

TEHRAN – Iranian giants Persepolis are reportedly interested in signing 22-year-old Malaysian star Arif Aiman.

Aiman currently plays at Malaysia Super League club Johor Darul Ta'zim and the Reds are going to sign the winger in the January transfer window.

The rising star was chosen as the best young player in Asian football in 2023.

Persepolis are also looking for a replacement for Spanish coach Juan Carlos Garrido, who left the team in late December.

They sit third place in 2024/25 Iran's Persian Gulf Professional League, three points behind leaders Tractor.

## Iran's renewable energy capacity to reach 4,800 MW by March 2025

TEHRAN- Iran's deputy energy minister said that the capacity of generating electricity from renewable sources will reach 4,800 megawatts (MW) by the end of the next Iranian calendar year (March 20, 2025).

Mohsen Tarzatabal, who is also the head of Iran's Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Organization (SATBA), said: "The capacity of the country's renewable power plants is currently over 1,450 megawatts, and we have planned for this figure to reach 4,800 megawatts by the end of next year."

He went on to say: "It is hoped that with the cooperation of the private sector, we can take a fundamental step to address the energy im-

balance in the country", adding: "The world is on the brink of a major transformation in the electrification of energy consumption, and it is predicted that by 2050, more than half of total energy consumption will be supplied directly through electricity."

Iran's Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Organization further stated that the most important method and source for electricity generation is renewable energy, emphasizing that the world has accelerated so much in this area that in the current calendar year, about 86 percent of the new power plants established globally are working with renewable generators.

## 'Creating a secure, transparent environment for investors a priority of Oil Ministry'

TEHRAN- The Iranian oil minister announced that creating a secure and transparent environment for investors is a priority of the Oil Ministry.

Making the remarks in a meeting with members of the Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (ICCIMA) on Friday, Mohsen Paknejad announced the ministry's readiness to cooperate with the private sector and chambers of commerce to achieve the country's macroeconomic goals and stated: "Creating a secure and transparent environment for investors is a priority of this ministry's programs."

In the meeting, which was participated by some entrepreneurs, the minister presented a report on the status of energy production and consumption in the country, and emphasizing the necessity of constructive interaction with the private sector and extensive investment in the oil and petrochemical industry, he said

the private sector can help in alleviating the energy imbalance in the country alongside the government.

Pointing to the country's abundant capacities in the oil and gas sector, he stated: "Iran, as one of the largest energy producers in the world, has significant potentials for international cooperation. The development of this industry requires sustainable investment and strengthening economic relations with other countries, which can lead to economic growth and job creation."

The oil minister urged the members of the Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture to play a more effective role in encouraging domestic and foreign investors to enter the fields of production and refining, emphasizing that interaction with the private sector in the oil industry can be utilized as a strategic opportunity for the sustainable development of the country."

## Hundreds of Iranian trucks stranded at north-west border Turkish action to cripple Iran's transit?

From page 1 ▶

### Unraveling the double standard

For years, Iranian trucks enjoyed exemptions from fuel and customs taxes upon entering Turkey. However, the recent policy change could increase transit costs by up to 50 percent for Iranian transporters, rendering cross-border trade economically unfeasible.

Meanwhile, Turkey continues to exempt Iranian passenger buses from similar taxes, ostensibly to preserve its tourism industry. This selective policy exposes Ankara's prioritization of tourism revenues over equitable trade relations.

### Contradicting trade goals

Turkey's decision stands in stark contrast to its stated goal of increasing trade with Iran to \$30 billion annually, as emphasized by Ali Celik, governor of Turkey's Hakkari Province, during a recent bilateral meeting.

Current trade levels hover



around \$7.5-10 billion, far from the target.

Ankara's unilateral actions, however, signal a lack of commitment to fostering mutual trust and cooperation.

### Iran's retaliatory measures

In response, Iran ceased providing fuel to Turkish trucks on January 4, 2025, citing Turkey's policy as unfair.

This move has triggered widespread dissatisfaction among

Turkish drivers, who face rising fuel costs and logistical challenges.

Videos circulating on social media depict Turkish drivers criticizing their government's short-sighted policies, which have escalated tensions between the two countries.

### A broader pattern of hostility

This fuel tax dispute is not an isolated incident but part of a broader pattern of antagonism.

Azerbaijan, a close ally of Turkey, recently blocked Iranian trucks from transiting through the Pol-Dasht-Nakhchivan border.

These actions collectively aim to restrict Iran's access to European markets, exacerbating geopolitical tensions in the region.

### Call for regional accountability

Turkey's actions threaten the economic stability of its neighboring countries and undermine regional trade networks.

Ankara's short-term gains come at the expense of long-term partnerships and trust.

The international community should urge Turkey to reverse its policy, engage in constructive dialogue, and uphold the principles of fair trade.

If left unaddressed, such measures could set a dangerous precedent, straining not only Iran-Turkey relations but also the broader regional economic framework.

## Iran, fifth producer of tile, ceramic in world

TEHRAN- Iran is known as the fifth producer of ceramic and tiles in the world, in terms of size, and it is also the fifth exporter of this product to the world, the chairman of the headquarters to organize the 29th Inter-

national Exhibition of Sanitary Porcelain Tile and Ceramics Exhibition of Iran stated.

Ahmad Mirzaei added: "Considering Iran's long history of 800 years in the production

of traditional tiles, such as the tiles used in mosques and old places in the cities of Yazd, Isfahan, Shiraz, Kerman, Kashan and other cities, a new look has been given to production and export."

## Strategic document being prepared for boosting exports from free zones

TEHRAN- The head of Iran's Trade Promotion Organization (TPO) said that this organization, in cooperation with the Secretariat of the Supreme Council of Free Trade and Special Economic Zones, is preparing a strategic document for

the development of the export from the free zones.

"In order for the free zones to return to their original position, with the cooperation and support of the Secretariat of the Supreme Council of Free Trade and Special Economic Zones,

we are trying to turn these zones into export hubs where a part of the country's exports is carried out through them", Mohammad-Ali Dehghan Dehnavi, noted.

The establishment of free trade zones (FTZs) in Iran dates

back to the Iranian calendar year 1368 (March 1989 - March 1990) following the fall in the country's oil income in the preceding year which prompted the government to promote non-oil exports.

## Converting and Inquiring Bank-Card Information in "BALE" App.

The BOT of converting and inquiring card, account and SHEBA numbers (SHETAB Network) was activated free-of-charge in "BALE" application. (Banking bot is an artificial intelligent development for banking operations, which can understand people queries and responds accordingly.)

According to the Public Relations

Department of Bank Meli Iran (BMI), a new BOT with the ability to inquire and convert card, account, and Sheba numbers has been activated in the services' section of "BALE" app. at the following address: ble.ir/Sheba\_Bot, so that users can easily receive Sheba, card or account numbers using this BOT. This arm has been designed

with the aim of facilitating access and increasing the convenience of users in quickly and easily making various financial inquiries and users can easily receive their required information and benefit from the banking services using this new tool.

It should be noted that this specification is very useful especially for

people who are constantly conducting financial transactions. This BOT is easily accessible in the services' section of "BALE" app. and users can access it through the "Arms", "Status Inquiry", and "Sheba Number Inquiry" options. By adding this new feature, "BALE" app. is trying to provide a better applied experience for its customers

and help grow the culture of using digital services in the banking sector.

It should be noted that, given the growing trend of using mobile applications, such initiatives can greatly help facilitate financial and banking services in the daily lives of users.

As a modern financial platform, "BALE" app. is seeking to provide



## Organizing 4th Get-together Meeting between CEO of Sadad Informatics Corporation (Holding) and Information Technology (IT) Departments of Bank Mellat Iran (BMI)

The fourth get-together meetings of Sadad Informatics Corporation (Holding) and Network and Infrastructure Directorate of Bank Mellat Iran (BMI) was held with the aim of strengthening mutual cooperation and improving productivity in various fields. This meeting was held in the presence of CEO of Sadad Informatics Corporation (Holding) Hamed Dehghani, Head of BMI's Infrastructure and Network Department General Majid Torkamani, member of the Board of Directors of SADAD Holding Corporation, experts and other officials.

Emphasizing the need for interacting and accelerating in implementation of projects, Dehghani said, "A great transformation has taken place in the banking sector of the country, and this issue is also happening rapidly at Bank Mellat Iran (BMI), so "we must move forward in line with the new systems and world's banking industry." The goals and macro policies planned at Sadad

Holding and its subsidiary companies all focus on the security of systems and network infrastructure that must be carried out parallelly in the field of transformation. Head of BMI's Infrastructure and Network Department General Majid Torkamani seized this opportunity to thank the organizing these meetings and added, "As BMI's executive arm in the field of technology, SADAD Holding must move forward well, and we will play our key role in this process in supporting the bank." In this meeting, deputies of BMI's Network and Infrastructure Department General and experts also expressed their views and suggestions. Scheduling of projects, prioritizing of bank needs, governance institutions and upstream requirements, datacenter, network and monitoring, payroll, call center, Voice over Internet Protocol (VOIP) project, correcting processes and security field were among the main topics discussed in this meeting.

## Special Investment in AI, Key Factor in Development of Bank: CEO of BMI

Chief Executive of Bank Mellat Iran (BMI) Abolfazl Najjarzadeh said that special investment in the field of Artificial Intelligence (AI) is the key factor for the transformation and development of the bank.

Speaking in his visit to SADAD Informatics Corporation (Holding), he emphasized the need for special investment in the field of Artificial Intelligence (AI) to promote the status of Bank Mellat Iran and transform the banking industry. The visit was also attended by Member of the Board of Directors of Bank Mellat Iran Mohammad Najafzadeh and Executive Board Member and Deputy Head of Information Technology and Communication Network Hamidreza Mokhtarian. Najjarzadeh considered provision of the necessary platforms for taking advantage of the new technologies "essential" and added, "We have no solution other than investing in this field i.e. Artificial Intelligence."

### Need to Invest in New Technologies for Global Competitiveness

Elsewhere in his remarks, CEO of Bank Mellat Iran Abolfazl Najjarzadeh stated that Bank Mellat Iran must move towards using new technologies, especially artificial intelligence to maintain its position in the international arena. Turning to the vital role of SADAD Informatics Corporation, he said, "As a pioneer in the field of digital technologies, this corporation must provide the necessary infrastructure for the transformation of the banking industry." These investments are essential both for Bank Mellat Iran (BMI) and transformation of the whole banking industry of the country, he said, adding, "We must move quickly in this path and use the global experiences."

### Importance of Transparency and a New Outlook in Banking Structure

The CEO of Bank Mellat Iran emphasized the importance of transparency in internal processes and need to employ modern structures in providing services,

adding that SADAD Informatics Corporation must identify customers' needs using scientific and data-based approaches and move towards providing technological solutions.

Instead of traditional approaches, "We must make special investments in the technology sector with a focus on future. This is the only way to progress and be competitive in the global markets." Najjarzadeh pointed to the importance of strengthening cooperation between Bank Mellat Iran (BMI) and technology companies, stating, "To succeed in this field, we must move forward in tandem with the global developments and take advantage of the domestic capacities as well."

Necessity of SADAD Informatics Corporation's Independence to Align with Global Developments At the other part of his speech, Abolfazl Najjarzadeh stressed the need to strengthen the position of the corporation as the driving force in the digital transformation of the country's banking industry.

SADAD Informatics Corporation should become a leading center for innovation and technological transformation, he underlined.

The chief executive of Bank Mellat Iran emphasized that independence of corporation and investment in new areas such as artificial intelligence are an inevitable necessity to maintain the position of Bank Mellat Iran in the global competition arena.

BMI's CEO also emphasized the need to change the traditional approach to banking management and use new technologies, noting that the banking services must keep pace with customer needs in the Digital Age, and Sadad Informatics Corporation must play a pivotal role in this regard.

At the end, CEO of Bank Mellat Iran Najjarzadeh emphasized the removal of structural and bureaucratic obstacles in cooperation with Sadad Informatics Corporation and expressed hope that SADAD Holding

Company, relying on its own capabilities and potentials, will become a model in modern banking industry.

Sadad Informatics Corporation's Key Role in Digital Transformation of Bank Mellat Iran

Deputy CEO of Bank Mellat Iran for Communications Network and Information Technology (IT) Affairs Hamid-Reza Mokhtarian was the next speaker who emphasized the importance of SADAD Informatics Corporation as BMI's executive arm in offering new banking services and pointed to the necessity of learning, innovation and focusing on long-term goals, calling on SADAD Holding Company to continue its effective role in the development of technology of Bank Mellat Iran. He also emphasized the importance of cooperation and agility in implementing programs and appreciated the unflinching efforts of SADAD Informatics Corporation's teams in advancing projects.

### Emphasizing Need for Strengthening Infrastructures and Productivity: CEO of SADAD Holding Company

Chief Executive of SADAD Informatics Corporation (SADAD Holding Company) Hamed Dehghani emphasized the importance of improving infrastructures, accelerating processes and optimal use of the existing capacities. Referring to the company's human resources capabilities of SADAD Holding Company, he called for increased productivity and further cooperation to achieve the goals of Bank Mellat Iran (BMI). By strengthening coordination, Dehghani expressed hope that quality of the company's services in the fields of information technology and payments will be promoted to a higher level.

Chairman of the Board of Directors of SADAD Informatics Corporation (SADAD Holding Company) Hamid Khaleghi Moghaddam was the last speaker who emphasized the importance of role of this company in offering new services in realization of objectives of Bank Mellat Iran (BMI).

# Israel's dream of renewed occupation

## Israel wants to stay in Lebanon beyond 60-day ceasefire deal

By Shahrokh Saei

TEHRAN- Israel is seeking to prolong the occupation of southern Lebanon in violation of a ceasefire deal with the Hezbollah resistance movement that took effect on November 27, 2024.

The Israeli Broadcasting Authority has reported that the Israeli army has decided to stay in the Mediterranean country beyond the 60-day withdrawal period specified in the truce agreement.

The broadcaster said the regime of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu wants to send a message to the United States that it will not withdraw military troops from southern Lebanon.

Israel has consistently violated the US and France-backed ceasefire agreement deal and carried out military operations in Lebanon.

Its troops have also pushed deeper into Lebanese territory. They have fired at Lebanese residents killing more than 30 people.

Caretaker Prime Minister Najib Mikati has urged the establishment of a ceasefire monitoring committee to pressure Israel to respect the terms of the ceasefire, but to no avail.



The Netanyahu regime is backing out of the accord and is telling tall stories to justify its presence in Lebanon.

Israel claims that the Lebanese army is not adhering to the terms of the ceasefire deal, by deploying too slowly to areas in southern Lebanon, according to the Israeli broadcaster. It also accuses Hezbollah of trying to reorganize.

Israel is supposed to withdraw its troops from southern Lebanon within 60 days of November 27. They should be replaced by UNIFIL troops, followed by the Lebanese army.

Hezbollah should also move its military infrastructure north of the Litani River.

Since the ceasefire took effect on November 27, Hezbollah has not fired missiles towards Israel.

Israel and Hezbollah began exchanging cross-border fire on October 8, 2023. That was a day after Israel launched war on Gaza. The Lebanese resistance movement struck Israel's strategic and military sites with drones and missiles to express solidarity with Palestinians in the enclave.

On September 23, 2024, Israel launched a massive bombing campaign in Lebanon and a week later sent its troops into southern Lebanon. The Israeli army has killed about 4,000 people in Lebanon since October 2023.

Israel signed the ceasefire deal with Hezbollah due to its failure to accomplish its military objectives.

Currently, there is no mechanism to enforce the truce. Reports indicate that the sole assurances for implementation stem from US commitments that Israel would comply.

Washington is Tel Aviv's main ally which has provided the Netanyahu regime with unwavering military support since the start of the Gaza war.

American media reports have acknowledged that US bombs have been used in the Israeli airstrikes in Lebanon and Gaza.

It is as clear as day that the US will support Israel if it keeps its troops in Lebanon. American politicians will undoubtedly spin a yarn to rationalize Israel's malicious falsehoods.

Netanyahu's far-right allies have already called for reoccupation of southern Lebanon.

"There is no way to restore security to the residents of the north without a war that will destroy Hezbollah, that will reoccupy southern Lebanon," Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich said in July.

For now, it is evident that expansionism and occupation are part and parcel of Israel's policy.

## The devil is in the details: Israel's West Bank annexation plan in the spotlight



Pro-Israelis are pushing Congress to pass legislation prohibiting the use of the term "West Bank" in official US statements and documents in favor of the term "Judea and Samaria".

TEHRAN- Israel stands accused of intensifying efforts to annex the entire occupied West Bank as Donald Trump is preparing to take the helm at the White House.

In November last year, the Israeli finance minister who is a member of the Religious Zionist Party said he believed Israel could work with the incoming Trump administration to promote annexation of the West Bank.

In the same month, he posted a message on X to push for Israel's "sovereignty" over the West Bank.

"2025: the year of sovereignty in Judea and Samaria," Smotrich wrote on X, using the biblical name by which Israel refers to the occupied West Bank.

On Friday, Israeli media revealed that the next US administration is set to advance Israel's expansionist agenda.

Israel's Channel 14 said activists are pushing US Congress to pass legislation prohibiting the use of the term "West Bank" in official US statements and documents in favor of the

term "Judea and Samaria".

The channel said that the US Congress will host a special event on January 15 to establish a lobby named "Judea and Samaria," according to Middle East Monitor.

According to the news station, the lobby's first initiative will aim to pass legislation banning the use of the term "West Bank" in official US statements and documents. Instead, the term "Judea and Samaria" would be used, reflecting the belief that the area is "the land of the Jewish people."

It added that this forms part of ongoing efforts to reinforce the Israeli narrative about the occupied Palestinian territories and strengthen US support for Israel's colonialist positions.

The Israeli apartheid regime occupied the West Bank in 1967. Over the past years, it has expanded settlements in the Palestinian territory. All Israeli settlements in the West Bank are illegal under international law.

## What will await Israel if it refuses to leave Lebanese lands?

From page 1 ▶ The occupation regime carried out two raids north of the Litani River, claiming that it targeted missile launch pads. It further encroached Beit Lif by Merkava tanks, targeting a number of homes before a drone carried out a raid on the vicinity of a farm.

On Monday, Naqoura will host a third meeting of the committee, which is expected to be attended by Amos Hochstein, the American special envoy.

Nabih Berri, the speaker of the Lebanese Parliament, received Lisa Johnson, the US ambassador to Beirut, along with General Jasper Jeffers, the head of the committee, to inform them of Lebanon's objection to the recurrence of Israeli violations.

Najib Mikati, the caretaker prime minister, did the same, summoning the US and French members of the committee.

Apparently, the enemy leadership is bet-

ting that Hezbollah is keen on respecting the ceasefire agreement, which prompts it to bypass some attacks. The enemy is also betting on so-called Hezbollah's "weakness" following the fall of the Syrian regime, the invasion of the Syrian territories in violation of the 1974 Disengagement agreement, the occupation of about 400 square kilometers of the Syrian territory, in addition to destroying most of Syria's military and missile capabilities.

Meanwhile, a report published by Axios revealed that the Biden administration sent an informal notification to Congress regarding the sale of \$8 billion worth of weapons to "Israel". This, according to CNN, came after Netanyahu accused the Biden administration last year of withholding weapons from "Israel." Axios quoted a US official as saying that Biden made it clear that "Israel" has the right to deter Iran and what it called its "proxies."

Failure to withdraw will undermine the credibility of UN resolutions in deterring the enemy, proving that the diplomatic option is ineffective. It will further reveal the resistance movement's righteous activity south of the Litani River.

Israeli intransigence in not withdrawing will also refute one of the most important lies promoted by Lebanon's anti-Hezbollah factions that the state can confront the Israeli threat without the need for resistance.

In parallel, the non-negotiable choice of the people and the resistance leadership is to resist the occupation regime, no matter the cost, as shameful silence will only embolden the enemy to commit more attacks.

The Israeli intransigence in not withdrawing will put the enemy in face of heroic operations that will destroy its forces in light of the development of the resistance's capabilities compared to what they were before the liberation in 2000.

## Iraq says it won't be a launchpad for attacks on neighbors

From page 1 ▶ This principle, he emphasized, reflects Iraq's impartiality and its dedication to peaceful coexistence.

The president reaffirmed Iraq's progress in building a democratic state grounded in values such as truth, justice, equality, and peace, principles championed by al-Hakim, who was martyred in 2003 after a bomb exploded at the holy shrine of Imam Ali in Najaf, months after the U.S. invasion of Iraq.

Baghdad commemorates the annual occasion as National Martyrs Day.

Rashid noted Iraq's achievements in reconstruction, com-

bating terrorism, and fostering social harmony while acknowledging the ongoing challenges posed by the region's volatile circumstances.

He emphasized that Iraq's approach is rooted in dialogue and cooperation to address these threats and ensure the region's security and development.

Turning to regional issues, Rashid affirmed Iraq's support for the Syrian people, emphasizing the need to rebuild Syria as an independent, democratic state that respects the rights of all its ethnic and minority groups.

He also expressed solidarity with Lebanon, calling for

strengthening unity in the country while addressing their ongoing economic and social crises.

Rashid reiterated Iraq's unwavering support for the Palestinian cause, advocating for their right to a secure life and the establishment of an independent state.

Reflecting on the broader regional landscape, the president called for concerted efforts to overcome the devastation caused by wars and conflicts in recent years.

He urged the international community to provide genuine support to address instability, particularly in Palestine, Leba-

non, and Syria.

In closing his remarks, Rashid reaffirmed Iraq's commitment to sovereignty, peace, and security, declaring, "We remain steadfast in protecting Iraq's independence, unity, security, and safety while ensuring that our territory is never used to harm our neighbors."

His speech underscores Iraq's aspiration to serve as a stabilizing force and a pillar of peace in the West Asia region.

Critics argue the U.S. military presence in Iraq will torpedo those aspirations.

## Russia vows retaliation after saying it downed eight US-made long-range missiles

Russia has vowed retaliation after claiming to have shot down eight US-made ATACMS missiles fired by Ukraine on Saturday morning.

Moscow sees the use of such missiles, which have a range of up to 300 kilometers (186 miles), as a major escalation, CNN reported.

The country's air defenses shot down the eight ballistic missiles alongside 72 aircraft-type unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), Russia's Ministry of Defense said. It added that "these actions by the Kyiv regime, which is supported by Western curators, will be met with retaliation."

The statement said several drones were

destroyed in the Leningrad region in the north-west and one in Kursk, where Ukraine launched a surprise attack late last summer.

The outgoing US President Joe Biden approved Kyiv's use of ATACMS in November - saying in part it was in response to Russia expanding the conflict by deploying North Korean troops.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has threatened to respond to Ukrainian strikes using ATACMS with Russia's new nuclear-capable ballistic missile "Oreshnik."

Last month, Putin suggested that it could be fired at the capital Kyiv as a test of Western-supplied air defense systems.

The first and only launch of the experi-

mental weapon targeted Ukraine's Dnipro region on the morning of November 21.

The Ukrainian drone attacks forced temporary restrictions to be introduced at an airport in St. Petersburg, Russian state media agency TASS reported.

The governor of Leningrad oblast, Aleksandr Drozdenko, said in a statement on Telegram that the "night and morning of January 4 were record-breaking in terms of the number of UAVs destroyed," with four shot down over his region.

A Ukrainian security official, Andrii Kovalenko, said a seaport in Leningrad was targeted, calling it an "instrument of economic and military survival for Russia in isolation."

## US plans \$8bn arms sale to Israel

The Biden administration has notified Congress of a proposed \$8 billion arms sale to Israel, a US official said on Friday.

The deal would need approval from the House of Representatives and Senate committees and includes munitions for fighter jets and attack helicopters as well as artillery shells, Axios reported.

The package also includes small-diameter bombs and warheads, according to Axios.

It will likely be the final deal Joe Biden's administration provides Israel, with President Biden set to leave office on January 20, when Donald Trump will succeed him.

Protesters have for months demanded an arms embargo against Israel, but US policy has largely remained unchanged. In Au-

gust, the United States approved the sale of \$20 billion in fighter jets and other military equipment to Israel.

Facing international criticism, Washington has stood by Israel during its assault on Gaza that has displaced nearly all of Gaza's 2.3 million population, caused a hunger crisis and led to genocide accusations that Israel denies.

The Gaza health ministry puts the death toll from Israel's war of genocide at over 45,000 people, with many additional feared buried under rubble.

Washington, Israel's biggest ally and weapons supplier, has previously vetoed UN Security Council resolutions on a ceasefire in Gaza.

## US Muslim group demands action to free abducted Gaza doctor



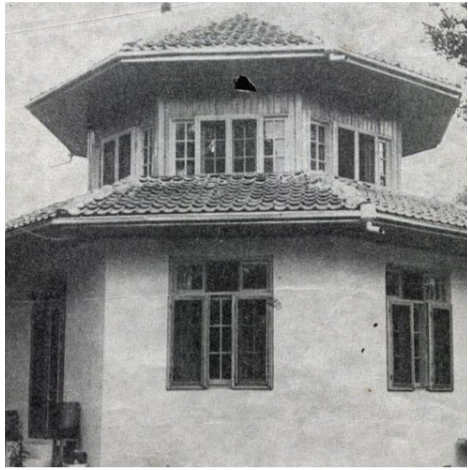
Fears for Abu Safia's safety continue to grow after he was last seen being taken away in an Israeli military vehicle outside the destroyed health facility in northern Gaza a week ago, Al Jazeera reported.

"The Biden administration, which is a full partner in Israel's genocide, must act to secure the release of Dr Hussam Abu Safia and to end the far-right Israeli government's systematic assault on hospitals and medical personnel in Gaza," CAIR said in a statement.

The Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) has called on the US government to "take immediate action" after Israel seized Dr Hussam Abu Safia from the Kamal Adwan Hospital.

"Israeli attacks on medical facilities, its daily slaughter of Palestinian civilians, and its forced starvation of an entire population are clearly part of the overall genocidal campaign of ethnic cleansing in Gaza."

## Jalal Al-e-Ahmad's house to become anthropology museum



TEHRAN – The tourism chief of Gilan province has announced plans to transform the house of Jalal Al-e-Ahmad in northern Iran into an anthropology museum.

The initiative is expected to attract tourists with an interest in culture and literature, Mehr quoted Vali Jahani as saying on Saturday.

Speaking to reporters, Jahani highlighted the significant role of Jalal Al-e-Ahmad in shaping the cultural and literary identity of the Talesh region, where the house is located.

The official elaborated on the impact of Ja-

lal Al-e-Ahmad's work on the local culture and literature, stating that restoring his house in Alalan Beach, Asalem county, and converting it into an anthropology museum would foster the development of cultural and literary tourism in Talesh.

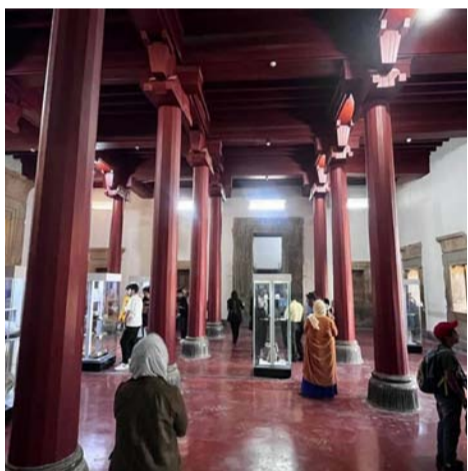
Moreover, Jahani announced plans for annual scientific and cultural conferences focusing on Jalal Al-e-Ahmad, which according to him could raise public awareness about the region's cultural values.

"These events aim to draw national literary enthusiasts to Talesh, providing a platform for analyzing and further promoting the author's contributions to the advancement of Talesh's cultural identity."

"Turning Jalal Al-e-Ahmad's house into an anthropology museum could serve as a man-made attraction alongside the region's natural and historical landmarks. This initiative is expected to boost cultural and literary tourism in Talesh," Jahani remarked.

Jalal Al-e-Ahmad (1923–1969) was a prominent Iranian figure known for his work as a novelist, short-story writer, translator, philosopher, socio-political critic, sociologist, and anthropologist. His influence on Iranian literature and culture remains significant.

## Redesign of Persepolis Museum underway



TEHRAN – The head of the Persepolis Museum has announced the initiation of a redesign project aimed at transforming the entire space of the palace attributed to Xerxes I, situated within the UNESCO-registered Persepolis, into a fully functional museum.

"This follows the relocation of administrative offices from the museum building, enabling the use of the space exclusively for museum purposes," IRNA quoted Mojtaba Doroudi as saying on Saturday.

The official explained that discussions about expanding the museum's exhibition space have been ongoing for the past eight years.

Doroudi highlighted that the Persepolis Museum is the oldest site museum in Iran, housing a rich collection of artifacts. It has also contributed significantly to the collections of the National Museum of Iran.

The palace building itself, considered the most well-preserved of the Achaemenid period, was excavated approximately 90 years ago by German archaeologist and Iranologist Ernst Herzfeld. Herzfeld, along with architect Karl Kreser, designed and partially restored the structure for use as a museum.

According to Doroudi, the redesign will ensure the museum meets international standards, incorporating facilities such as laboratories, restoration workshops, a library, and administrative offices.

Currently, the Persepolis Museum houses 3,000 registered historical items, which are displayed on a rotational basis. The artifacts span multiple historical periods, including the Elamite era, reflecting the rich history of the Marvdasht plain.

## Isfahan's handicraft exports stand at \$7.6m in 9 months



TEHRAN – The value of Isfahan province's handicrafts exports stood at \$7.6 million during the first nine months of the current Iranian calendar year 1403 (Mar. 20 – Dec. 20, 2024), the deputy provincial tourism chief has said.

The Deputy for Handicrafts at the Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts Department of Isfahan province has announced that handicrafts from the province generated approximately \$7.6 million in exports over the past nine months.

According to Norollah Abdollahi, the province's handicraft exports totaled \$15 million in 1402. The official highlighted that Isfahan, despite not sharing borders with neighboring countries, relies on

other provinces for export logistics.

"To address this issue, an agreement is reached between the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts and the Customs Administration to ensure that the point of origin for Isfahan's handicraft exports is documented on export papers, regardless of the departure location," Abdollahi explained.

He added that a significant portion of Isfahan's handicrafts is currently exported through Tehran's Imam Khomeini International Airport. "Previously, these exports were registered under Tehran's name, but the new agreement ensures that Isfahan is credited as the production and export source."

Moreover, Abdollahi noted that efforts are underway, in collaboration with the provincial governor-general, to activate Isfahan International Airport as a direct export hub for the province's handicrafts.

As reported by IRNA, of the 602 recognized handicraft disciplines globally, 299 are associated with Iran, and 200 of these are tied to the historically and artistically rich province of Isfahan.

Currently, over 70,000 artisans are active in Isfahan's handicraft industry, the report said.

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

By Afshin Majlesi

Lar is a city where history whispers through its traditional bazaars, centuries-old caravanserais, mosques, ancient ramparts, bizarre-shaped cisterns, and above all, the warm hospitality of its residents. The city's amalgam of new and old constructions creates a unique rhythm that makes every corner worth discovering.

It was a crisp November morning when I arrived in Lar, a semi-arid city in southern Iran, where ancient charm seamlessly blends with modern life, inviting avid sightseers to explore its wonders.

For me, initial impressions of Lar came through narratives, guidebooks, travelogues, pictures, and video clips. But stepping into its streets, meeting its people, and witnessing cultural treasures firsthand turned those distant imaginings into a vivid and unforgettable reality.

During a three-day stay, I, along with several media personnel and local guides, explored Lar's cultural, historical, and natural landmarks.



An aerial view of the ancient Bazaar of Qeysarie

From the lively Bazaar of Qeysarie and the dramatic Dragon's Body Fortress to the ingenuity of Halva Masghati artisans and the charm of the old quarter, it proved to be a city of surprises and stories waiting to be uncovered. Here are glimpses of the journey that left an indelible mark on my heart.

### Day 1: Arrival and initial discoveries



Neshat Garden with its Safavid-era mansion

Our excursion began around 9 a.m. With little time to waste, we ventured into Lar's historical heart.

The first stops included a traditional workshop for Halva Masghati production, the iconic Bazaar of Qeysarie, Masjed-e Ru-ye Ab ("On-Water Mosque"), and two ancient caravanserais. These landmarks, situated in close proximity, revolved around the bustling bazaar.



The Husayniyya and museum of the late Ayatollah Ayatollahi

The Bazaar of Qeysarie was a marvel of historical and architectural significance. Its grand domed centerpiece, adorned with inscriptions attributed to Shah Abbas Safavi from the 17th century, hinted at its rich history, tracing back to the early Islamic period. Built from stone instead of brick, the bazaar stood as a testament to local craftsmanship.

# Lar: a journey through time and culture



A view of the Sassanid-era Qal'eh-ye Azhdaha Peykar ("Dragon's Body Fortress"), situated beside a domed structure that according to narratives was constructed centuries ago in commemoration of Nader Shah Afshar's mother.

The vibrant stalls offered colorful spices, medicinal herbs, traditional attire, and intricate handicrafts, to name a few. This lively marketplace wasn't just a relic; it remained a thriving hub for trade, drawing shoppers from nearby towns.

Adjacent to the bazaar, we discovered Tavakol's Workshop, a family-run establishment crafting the renowned Halva Masghati. This gelatinous sweet, a signature souvenir of Lar, is exported worldwide, from the Persian Gulf states to parts of Europe. Through the owner's hospitality, we tasted almost all kinds of their products and marveled at the century-old recipes and the artistry of the local craftsmen.

In the afternoon, we hiked to Qal'eh-ye Azhdaha Peykar ("Dragon's Body Fortress"). Perched atop a hill, the fortress dates back to the Sasanian era, as evidenced by archaeological findings. Though lacking full restoration, its formidable walls and the adjacent domed structure, said to honor Nader Shah Afshar's mother, were captivating. The absence of lighting on its rugged exteriors highlighted the need for further preservation.

The next stop was a Husayniyya and museum dedicated to the late Ayatollah Ayatollahi who was the Friday Prayer Imam of Lar.

Our final stop was the newly established observatory atop a hill. The facility, designed to minimize light pollution, underscored Lar's longstanding tradition in astronomy. As the day ended, we gazed at the stars, reflecting on the city's deep connection to science and history.

### Day 2: A deeper dive into culture and nature

The second day commenced with a visit to a larger Halva Masghati factory. Unlike the previous day's workshop, this facility combined traditional recipes with innovative packaging, providing employment opportunities for local women. Their precision and dedication shone as they shared their stories, embodying the pride Lar takes in its heritage.

Next, we visited the home-turned-museum of Mojtaba Shahrashoub, a passionate collector of Lar's historical artifacts. His private collection ranged from 500-year-old Lari coins to Qajar-era garments and Pahlavi-era metalworks. This intimate museum was a treasure trove of Lar's cultural legacy.

Our journey continued to Hormud, about 40 kilometers east of Lar. This region is home to the world's smallest ram species, the Laristani mouflon, or "miniature ram." Native to this arid landscape, these rams weigh around 40 kilograms, with horns no longer than 75 centimeters. Witnessing these rare creatures in their natural habitat was a once-in-a-lifetime experience.

In the late afternoon, we explored Baqe-Neshat, a Safavid-era garden housing a historic mansion. This structure, once Lar's administrative center, showcased the elegance of Persian architecture. In the courtyard, local women baked traditional bread, sharing their culinary art with us, which added a warm and authentic touch to the visit.

### Day 3: Echoes of the past

Our final day's excursion began in Karmostaj, a village 30 kilometers southeast of Lar. Nestled among mountains, this village is renowned for its water reservoirs or "Berke" as called by the locals.

These domed structures, built below ground level, collect and store rainwater, sustaining the community in this arid region. Despite the lack of piped water, these reservoirs highlight the ingenuity and resilience of Lar's people.

Returning to Lar, we explored the city's old quarter, guided by a local expert. Amidst the remnants of centuries-old homes and courtyards with wooden doors and central pools, we felt the essence of traditional Persian life. However, the scars of time and earthquakes were evident, as much of the old fabric had been replaced by modern constructions.



Situated 30 kilometers southeast of Lar, Karmostaj village is famed for its water reservoirs

Our final stop was a quaint pottery workshop. Operated by a single artisan, this modest space was brimming with creativity. Watching him mold clay into beautiful vessels was a fitting conclusion to our journey. It was a testament to the enduring artistry of Lar.



A typical Laristani mouflon or "miniature ram" of Larestan

Lar's blend of history, culture, and resilience left an indelible mark. From the bustling bazaar and ancient fortresses to the innovative Halva Masghati artisans and the unique Laristani rams, every moment was a discovery.



A worker arranges Masghati pieces at a traditional workshop

In my opinion, Lar is still a lesser-known destination in particular for its hospitable people and rich cultural heritage.

# Administration fulfills 'women in management' promise

TEHRAN –The appointment of 70 women into management positions proves the current administration has fulfilled its promise to appoint women into managerial positions.

"I believe that women's involvement in top management and decision-making positions is their right and a key to the development of the country.

My goal is to increase the share of women in managerial positions in the country based on meritocracy and justice.

I recognize the right of women's political participation, and I will promote the status of women's affairs in the administration," President Masoud Pezeshkian had said during election campaigns.

The fact that 70 women were chosen for management positions, many of them were assigned for the first time, indicates that the current administration seeks to create opportunities for women to play their roles in managerial positions, ISNA reported.

Currently, four women hold top managerial positions in the cabinet, namely transport and urban development minister, Farzaneh Sadeq, government spokesperson Fatemeh Mohajerani, Department of Environment head, Shina Ansari, and vice president for women and family affairs, Zahra Behrouz-Azar.

First vice president Mohammad-Reza Aref has stressed that "no discrimination between men and women is acceptable in the governance system, and we must witness the promotion of women's position in the decision-making system."



In this regard, the appointment of women was not limited to cabinet, and Kowsar Yousefi became the head of the supervisory board of the Central Bank and Zohreh Alipour was appointed as the head of Iran Privatization Organization.

Although no woman was elected as the governor general, Sudabeh Zarghamnejad, Samira Hassani, Esmat Mohammad-doost, Batul Moallem, Jamileh Qaei-Pasha, and Shadi Fazli were elected as the governors of Dehgholan, Rudbar, Khomam, Sarvestan, northern Savadkoh, and Kuhpayeh, respectively.

The number of high-ranking women has risen noticeably compared to the past, and it is said to keep increasing in the future.

## Women empowered after Islamic Revolution

The status of women in various fields was improved after the Islamic Revolution and women, as half of the country's population, have been leading in many fields.

After the victory of the Islamic Revolution in February 1979 by toppling the Pahlavi regime [the last Iranian royal dynasty, ruling for almost 54 years between 1925 and 1979], women were given equal rights to shape their futures. The Islamic Revolution provided them a chance to build their distinct identity and they have been tremendously successful in doing that.

There were extensive changes in the fields of science, education, economy, employment, and presence in management positions for women. Now a large part of activists in various fields of academia, business, and management are made up of capable Iranian women.

Education as a social value for women is seen as real freedom for them. Illiteracy among women and girls has been nearly eradicated as the literacy rate reached 99.3 percent and the ratio of female to male students has increased by 28

percent.

According to the latest data, nearly 60 percent of all university students are females today. The percentage of women in higher education has increased nearly 21 times since the Revolution.

The notable presence of women in the education sector has had a remarkable impact on the job market of the country as well, with women taking more jobs in both the public and private sectors.

The labor force of the country today consists mostly of women specialists, which indicates that women are playing an important role in shaping the future of Iran.

A report by the World Bank shows that the number of female board members in various organizations has seen a three-fold increase, growing from 11 percent in 1970 before the Revolution to 30 percent in 2016 after the Revolution.

During the last 44 years after the Revolution, the number of female faculty members in universities has grown more than 17 times. The share of women in university faculty members has increased by 33.3 percent, and in medical sciences universities by 34 percent.

Only 1.4 percent of teaching staff was made up of women before the Revolution and now the number stands at above 24 percent in higher education.

A ten-fold increase in the number of women doctors could be seen between 1979 and 2012, according to some data, and nearly 40 percent of all specialized physicians in Iran today are women.

## IRCS provides relief services to people affected by snowstorms

TEHRAN –The Iranian Red Crescent Society (IRCS) provided rescue services to 549 individuals affected by blizzards and snowstorms over the past three days.

From January 1 to 3, 486 relief teams conducted 356 rescue missions, ISNA quoted Babak Mahmoudi, an official with the IRCS, as saying on Saturday.

A total of 161 injured individuals were transported to medical centers, the official added.

### IRCS is a top organization

In September 2024, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) project manager, Faisal Mahboob, lauded the capabilities of the Iranian Red Crescent Society (IRCS) as outstanding.

The official said he was really impressed by the capacity and the wide range of activities carried out by the IRCS.

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



In May 2024, Pir-hossein Kolivand, head of the IRCS, said the IRCS is recognized as one of the five prominent societies worldwide thanks to its wide range of activities and great achievements both nationally and internationally.

Referring to health, treatment, and rehabilitation as one of the parts of the IRCS activities, Kolivand said the IRCS hospitals, pharmacies, and clinics meet the medical and therapeutic needs of thousands of citizens every day.

The IRCS medical centers abroad are reputable worldwide. As a humanitarian organization,

the IRCS is trying to alleviate the suffering of the people involved in accidents, emergencies, and conflicts.

"Today, collaborations with knowledge-based firms have resulted in advancements in manufacturing orthoses, prostheses, artificial organs, and new medications, with plans to extend cooperation to rescue and relief efforts as well," the official noted.

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

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

## ENGLISH IN USE

### LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

## 'Only 15% of Tehran's construction, demolition waste recycled'

While some 50,000 tons of construction and demolition waste is produced in Tehran daily, only 10 to 15 percent of which are recycled and the rest is dumped or disposed, Mohammad Hossein Bazgir, head of Tehran's department of environment (DOE) has said. Waste materials, generally termed as construction and demolition waste, are part of construction materials' packaging, containers, and spent machinery and equipment parts that are no longer usable.

"A good portion of construction wastes can still be usable with proper planning and their usage can be a solution itself to the burgeoning waste issues that the communities and the construction industry face," Bazgir said. He further referred to a construction waste management unit opened in Abali in Damavand county last week, and stated that the unit is capable of recycling some 3,000 tons of construction waste, ISNA reported on Tuesday.

## تنها ۱۵ درصد نخاله های ساختمانی تولید شده در تهران بازیافت می شود

رئیس اداره محیط زیست شهر تهران با بیان اینکه در تهران روزانه ۵۰ هزار تن نخاله ساختمانی تولید می شود، گفت: متأسفانه تنها ۱۰ تا ۱۵ درصد این زباله ها بازیافت می شود و بیش از ۸۰ درصد آن دیو می شود. محمد حسین بازرگیر در گفت و گو با ایسنا، اظهار کرد: بازیافت پسماندهای ساختمانی بخشی از فرآیند مدیریت پسماند است که سبب می شود این نوع زباله ها دوباره به چرخه مصرف بازگردانده و بسیاری از مشکلاتی که مردم و صنعت ساخت و ساز با آن روبرو هستند، برطرف شود. ظرفیت این واحد بازیافت حدود ۳۰۰۰ تن است و می تواند این مقدار نخاله و آوار ساختمانی را بازیافت کند.

## Empowering families facing social problems a top priority: VP

TEHRAN – The Vice President for Women and Family Affairs, Zahra Behrouz-Azar, has said empowering families struggling with social problems should be prioritized.

Referring to article 10 of the Constitution which says the family is the fundamental unit of Islamic society and all laws, regulations, and pertinent programs must tend to facilitate the formation of a family, and to safeguard its sanctity and the stability of family relations on the basis of the law and the ethics of Islam, the official said it is essential to pass laws that will help strengthen the families.

The first six years of child growth is spent in the family during which the feeling of security and confidence in the family members is formed, she noted.

Moreover, the family is responsible for teaching social values, including loyalty and belief in God, and self-esteem to their children.

The families, particularly mothers, are the first to notice social harms their children are dealing with which further necessitate their being empowered.

More importantly, this generation is ahead of their families in terms of technology, which further stresses the need to empower families, Behrouz-Azar added.

The official went on to say that the generation which is known as Beta deals with artificial intelligence, and virtual reality, but the family is the main place where they can learn about the concept of the humanity. Hence, the family need to be equipped with media literacy to be able to distinguish right from wrong.

Today, according to the United Nations, families are facing four major global trends bringing about profound impacts on them. These include technological change, demographic trends, migration and urbanization, and climate change. Empowering families will for sure contribute to overcoming these challenges, IRNA quoted Behrouz-Azar as saying.

### Preserving family values, structure

Acknowledging the pivotal role of the family in making progress, Behrouz-Azar, has underscored the significance of strengthening the foundation of the family through the preservation of family values and structure.

She made the remarks while addressing the High-level Ministerial Session on the sidelines of a global conference on 'Family and Contemporary Megatrends' which was held on October 30-31, 2024, in Doha, Qatar, commemorating the 30th Anniversary of the International Year of the Family (IYF).

## Knowledge-based companies to hold exhibition in Uzbekistan

TEHRAN – The second exhibition of the Iranian knowledge-based companies operating in technology and engineering sectors will be held from February 11 to 14 in Tashkent, Uzbekistan.

Supported by the Organization for Development of International Cooperation in Science and Technology, the event will lay the ground for exporting technical-engineering services in the fields of electricity, energy and water, construction, building materials, oil, gas and petrochemical equipment, mining as well as agriculture, and irrigation equipment.

### Notable growth in knowledge-based companies

The significant and fast-paced growth in the number of knowledge-based companies with over 200 percent increase in their number just over the past year (March 2023 – March 2024), shows the solid foundation, dynamism, and growth of the country in innovation and technology and the productive atmosphere which have been made available in line with the goal of boosting domestic production with public participation.

The current administration underscores the quantitative and qualitative development of knowledge-based companies. The number of companies, which was around 5,000 before the current administration took office in August 2021, has now reached 10,000 with a total value of two billion dollars.

### exports at \$2.5 billion

It seems that knowledge-based companies have progressed well. However, with contin-



All in all, these trends necessitate special care and attention due to the changes they have made in the daily life, social, and economic structure of families, the official noted.

These changes have challenged the structure of families and affected family relationships as well as the future of the children in different ways.

The official highlighted the importance of national and local strategies along with policy-making in fostering relationships and preserving the family foundation, "what used to strengthen families in the past, in the absence of these programs, were the social values such as respect for elders, solidarity, sacrifice, commitment, and loyalty.

Preserving these values and passing them on to future generations is our duty," she further noted.

Improving communication skills, resilience, empathy and family solidarity, managing conflict, and resolving crisis, should be put on the agenda. By supporting social-cultural programs and activities, opportunities will be provided for face-to-face interactions of the families.

Moreover, enhancing cultural and sports programs as well as family tourism can reinforce relationships and develop empathy in families, Behrouz-Azar stressed.

Global conference on 'Family and Contemporary Megatrends' brought together many policymakers, experts, and thought leaders to explore megatrends including demographic change, migration, urbanization, technological advancement, and climate change that are affecting the family.

The conference also discussed family-friendly policies, best practices, and strategic partnerships to promote family welfare and social development.

One of the main objectives of the conference was to shape a future in which every family can flourish.

uously increasing support knowledge-based companies will have a brighter future.

The high number of knowledge-based companies active in the capital market proves they have fully grown. Currently, there are 108 companies in the capital market, which is anticipated to grow by 100 percent by the end of the current year, March 2025.

Iran's knowledge-based companies exported over 3.6 million tons of products, valued at \$2.506 billion, in the previous Iranian calendar year (ended March 19, 2024), according to the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA).

Based on the IRICA data, some 1.158 million tons of goods, valued at \$5.141 billion were also imported by knowledge-based companies into the country from March 21, 2023, to March 19, 2024.

About 85 percent of the goods imported by the knowledge-based companies came from China, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Turkey, Germany, and India, IRNA reported.

The domestic knowledge-based companies exported their products to China, Iraq, the UAE, Turkey, and Russia in this period, IRICA said.

In this period, the knowledge-based companies accounted for 2.6 and 5 percent of the country's total exports in weight and value respectively.

Advanced materials and products based on chemical technologies accounted for about 80 percent of the export value of these companies.

China was Iran's first buyer of knowledge-based products in this period.



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## GUIDE TO SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

*There is no greater wealth than wisdom, no greater poverty than ignorance; no greater heritage than culture and no greater support than consultation.*

Imam Ali (AS)

Prayer Times > Noon:12:10 Evening: 17:25 Dawn: 5:45 (tomorrow) Sunrise: 7:15 (tomorrow)

## Renowned graphic novelists to collaborate on new comic about Gaza

Art Spiegelman, author of the Pulitzer Prize-winning graphic novel "Maus," has announced that he will be collaborating with Joe Sacco, creator of the documentary-comic "Palestine," in a new project about Gaza.

Spiegelman said that the new graphic novel will likely be difficult to find a publisher for in the U.S., given the ongoing wave of censorship on Palestine in western art, but added: "I'll finish this thing or die trying." Middle East Eye reported.

Spiegelman is an American cartoonist, co-editor of the comic magazines Arcade and Raw, and contributing artist for the New Yorker.

He was born to Polish Jews who lived through the German occupation of Poland and were sent to Auschwitz.

Of 85 of his relatives alive at the beginning of the Second World War, only 13 survived the Holocaust, including his parents.

Spiegelman's "Maus" was serialized from 1980-1991, illustrating his interviews with his father about his experiences as a Holocaust survivor.

In the comic, he depicts Jewish people as mice and the Germans as cats. He explained that the decision was informed by the way Nazi propaganda propagated an image of Jews as the "vermin of mankind".

"In fact, Zyklon B, the gas used in Auschwitz and elsewhere as the killing agent was a pesticide manufactured to kill vermin," he said.

For Spiegelman, these symbols served to ironize such distinctions between Jews and Germans.

Spiegelman is often credited with popularizing the use of comic form as a more serious medium, subverting the over-simplification of the image to draw attention to the ways in which people are treated as subhuman on religious, racial or ethnic lines.

Sacco, who Spiegelman will be collaborating with, is a Maltese-American cartoonist and journalist.

He wrote his seminal graphic novel "Palestine" after visiting Israel and the occupied territories during the First Intifada in the late 1980s.

Although it was released over 30 years ago, according to Gary Groth, the co-founder of the book's American publisher, Fantagraphics, demand for the book has soared since the escalation of Israel's bombardment on the Palestinian enclave after October 7, 2023.

Sacco's fusion of journalism and the graphic novel form has "become recognized as a great empathetic work of art," Groth said.

A journalist by training, Sacco began interviewing Palestinians to understand the "structure of occupation and its effect", compiling the testimony into a work of "graphic journalism."

In an interview with Haaretz on his new graphic novel, "War on Gaza," published in December, Sacco explained that, since he was not able to conduct the same on-the-ground research for this project, he had to "reach back to my satirical roots".

"Gaza has been turned into a hell, yes, so if my comics reflect that in some small, abstract way - good," he added.

Referring to the "traditional superhero aesthetic" of villains and heroes, Sacco said: "I seldom think of superheroes or supervillains. I just see sociopaths with a hell of a lot of power at their disposal."

"America had just invented a Kinder, Gentler Genocide," one frame from his comic strip read, "The patent is pending."

The new collaboration between Sacco and Spiegelman will again focus on Gaza, exploring resistance and nationalism

## Cartoon of Day



New War  
Cartoonist: Fahd Bahady from Syria

# Fajr theater festival welcomes intl. submissions

TEHRAN- The 43rd edition of Fajr International Theater Festival (FITF) has received submissions from 46 countries across the world, the organizers have announced.

A total of 231 works from 46 countries including Russia, Norway, Sweden, Canada, and several African countries applied to participate in this year's event, Mojgan Vakili, the director of the international section of the festival said during a press conference held in Tehran on Saturday.

However, the international section of the event will be held non-competitively. "The decision to host the international section non-competitively was made by the festival organizers," she added.

She shared that 20 works have been prioritized for final selection, culminating in six stage performances and one online presentation.

Furthermore, 15 international instructors applied to conduct workshops at the festival, representing countries such as Canada, France, Africa, Tunisia, and India, she mentioned.

After evaluating the quality of the proposed topics, a workshop titled "Exploring Contemporary Theater," featuring an instructor from India, will be held over three days during the festival, she added.



This year's edition has also dedicated a section to the oppressed people of Gaza and plays in this regard will go on stage in this section.

Six stage works will be presented in the Gaza section, she explained.

The Health Ministry in the Gaza Strip reported that the ongoing conflict has raised the total number of deaths since October of last year to 45,484, with around 108,090 individuals injured amid the relentless Israeli attacks. The Ministry's statement emphasized

that many people remain trapped under rubble and on the streets, with rescuers unable to reach them.

Israel's military operations in the Gaza Strip commenced in response to a cross-border attack by the Palestinian group Hamas on October 7, 2023. This ongoing genocidal war, now entering its second year, has sparked significant international condemnation, with various officials and organizations describing the attacks and the obstruction of humanitarian aid as a deliberate effort to annihilate a population.

On November 21, the International Criminal Court (ICC) issued arrest warrants for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and former Defense Minister Yoav Gallant, citing war crimes and crimes against humanity in Gaza. Moreover, Israel faces allegations of genocide at the International Court of Justice due to its military actions in the region.

The 43rd edition of Fajr International Theater Festival will be held in Tehran from January 22 to February 1.

## Art Palace to host adaptation of Giuseppe Verdi's "La Traviata"

TEHRAN-The musical play "Violetta" directed by Neda Shahroki will be staged at the Art Palace in Tehran on Tuesday.

It is an adaptation of "La Traviata" (the Fallen Woman), an opera in three acts by the Italian composer Giuseppe Verdi, Mehr reported.

Ali Paknahal has translated the opera and Yasaman Khajei serves as the dramaturge in the 90-minute play. Sahar Anzali and Hasmik Karapetyan accompany the performance as vocal coaches.

The opera was originally titled "Violetta," after the main character. It was first performed in 1853 in Venice, Italy.

"La Traviata" is a tragic tale about Parisian courtesan, Violetta, who attempts to leave the life she knows behind to try and finally find true love. When she meets romantic, Alfredo, the hypocrisy of upper-class society threatens their love - and someone must pay the ultimate price.

The play echoes the notion of the "fall from Eden" a metaphor for loss of innocence and



moral failure. The "fallen woman" is a particular notion too. In both cases the woman, being feeble in the ethical sense, is being tasked

with receiving the projections of moral weakness.

The cast includes Darya Razavi, Hanita Delfani, Gandom Honarvar, Noura Mahmoudi, Ehsan Tajik, Majid Yazdani, Delsa Karimzadeh, Benyamin Biglari, Saman Rahmani, Anahita Talebi, Behnaz Amini, Farshad Bahrami, Romina Mohsenifar, Sara Hoseini, Anahita Parsa, and Pegah Hashemi among others.

Giuseppe Verdi (1813-1901) was best known for his operas. He came to dominate the Italian opera scene after the era of Gioachino Rossini, Vincenzo Bellini, and Gaetano Donizetti, whose works significantly influenced him.

Verdi's operas remain among the most popular in the repertory, especially the three peaks of his "middle period": "Rigoletto," "Il Trovatore," and "La Traviata".

The play will remain on stage until January 19 at the Art Palace, located at No. 50, Zand-e-Vakil Alley, Razi St., Neauphle le chateau St., Hafez Ave.

## Leslie Chang's "Factory Girls" available in Persian

TEHRAN-The Persian translation of the book "Factory Girls: From Village to City in a Changing China" written by Leslie T. Chang has been released in the bookstores across Iran.

Translated by Sohrab Khalili Shourini and Morteza Khalili Shourini, the book has been published by Pouyesh Modam Publications, Mehr reported.

An eye-opening and previously untold story, "Factory Girls" is the first look into the everyday lives of the migrant factory population in China.

China has 130 million migrant workers—the largest migration in human history. In "Factory Girls," Leslie T. Chang, a former correspondent for the Wall Street Journal in Beijing, tells the story of these workers primarily through the lives of two young women, whom she follows over the course of three years as they attempt to rise from the assembly lines of Dongguan, an industrial city in China's Pearl River Delta. As she tracks their lives, Chang paints a never-before-seen picture of migrant life—a world where nearly everyone is under thirty; where you can lose your boyfriend and your friends with the loss of a mobile phone; where a few computer or English lessons can catapult you into a completely different social class.

Chang takes the readers inside a sneaker factory so large that it has its own hospital, movie theater, and fire department; to posh karaoke bars that are fronts for prostitution; to makeshift English classes where students shave their heads in monk-like devotion and sit day after day in front of machines watching English words flash by; and back to a farming village for the Chinese New Year, revealing the poverty and idleness of rural life that drive young girls to leave home in the first place.

Throughout this riveting portrait, Chang also interweaves the story of her own family's migrations, within China and to the West, providing historical and personal frames of reference for her investigation.

A book of global significance that provides new insight into China, "Factory Girls" demonstrates how the mass movement from rural villages to cities is remaking individual lives and transforming Chinese society, much as immigration to America's shores remade that country a century ago.

Leslie Chang is an American writer who digs deeply into her Chinese heritage. In "Factory Girls," the setting is the greatest migration in human history of more than 130 million people

within the last three decades. Younger country people move from rural to urban-industrial China to seek a better livelihood for themselves and, through money sent home, for their loved ones left behind. These migrants represent the apparent inexhaustible supply of cheap labor that China needs for building its sprawling cities with their high-rises and factory complexes. They maintain and clean its buildings and offices, attend to the households and children of the rising urban middle class, and fill and replenish the assembly lines and various receiving and shipping departments of China's burgeoning factories.

Chang's focus is on the township of Dongguan. Seventy percent of Dongguan's population are women who work in its thousands of factories churning out textiles, electronics, shoes, appliances, toys, and Christmas decorations and lights.

Dongguan is a natural place for Chang to contact and get to know her factory girls. Through dogged determination and persistence, Chang is able to make sustained contact and put a human face on people with actual names to an otherwise impersonal monolith of China's migrant workers and floating population. They are vibrant personalities with inter-

esting stories to tell.

These girls are largely poorly educated youth, ages 16 to 25 years, who begin their first industrial employment by joining an army of assembly line workers. The very moment they are employed on the line, they are already thinking of ways to free themselves from their monotonous and fatiguing tasks. Besides being lured to the city by the possibility of improving the family economy and the excitement of seeing the world, these girls are also driven by the boredom and idleness of the humdrum farm life that their parents and younger siblings easily manage.

Being young and steeped in the Chinese tradition of self-cultivation (however much on the unconscious level) and despite inadequate formal education, they do often ask the fundamental question of what life is all about. They are anxious to seek opportunities, learning computer skills, speaking English, gaining poise and self-confidence in assertive training—all to remake themselves into more marketable human resource in the plethora of self-improvement schools that have mushroomed in their factory city.