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Turkey's foreign policy: anti-Israel posturing, Western alignment, and neo-Ottoman ambitions

By Mohammad Khatibi

TEHRAN – Following the collapse of the Bashar al-Assad government in Damascus, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's supporters and fervent loyalists have been boasting about a major victory for Turkey.

In a recent article for Daily Sabah, Hilal Kaplan illustrates what has been at the core of Turkish propaganda in West Asia. Kaplan, in her article titled "Iran is reaping what it sowed," claims that Tehran has been pursuing what she calls a "Neo-Persian Empire." She cites former Iranian officials, journalists, and presidents to support her argument. However, several important and misleading issues undermine her claims.

The individuals Kaplan references as sources are unreliable because they either lacked decision-making authority in foreign policy matters, or even if they were involved in the process, did not have meaningful control. Furthermore, it's crucial to understand that foreign policy in action cannot be solely extrapolated from statements made by elected officials, which are often influenced by personal interests or political motivations. ▶ Page 3

Six Iranian films to participate in India's Third Eye Asian Film Festival

TEHRAN-Six feature films from Iran will take part in the 21st Third Eye Asian Film Festival, slated for January 10 to 16 in Mumbai, India.

Five of the Iranian films will be screened in the Asian Spectrum section and one movie is set to be shown in the Asian Masters section, Honaronline reported.

The Iranian participants in the Asian Spectrum section include "In the Arms of the Tree" directed by Babak Khajepasha, "Leila's Brothers" by Saeed Rustayi, "Sima's Unfinished Narration" by Alireza Samadi, "Hook" by Hossein Rigi, and "Captain" by Mohammad Hamzei.

"In the Arms of the Tree" tells the story of Kimia and Farid, a couple married for 12 years, whose life crisis shatters their children's world, children who know nothing but simplicity and kindness in life.

Maral Baniadam, Javad Ghamati, Rouhollah Zamani, Ahoura Lotfi, and Rayan Lotfi are in the cast among others. ▶ Page 8

Foreigners seeking to elect president instead of the Lebanese

By Sondoss Al Assad

BEIRUT – Amidst the ongoing concerns about the future of Syria and before the expiration of the sixty-day truce, Lebanon is witnessing a session to elect the President of the Republic on Thursday. So far, there is no internal consensus on the candidate, while external pressure is mounting to elect Lebanese Army Commander General Joseph Aoun.

Amos Hochstein, the US presidential envoy, who met with Nabih Berri, Speaker of the Parliament, in Beirut said that the Israeli withdrawal from the south will continue until the "deployment of the Lebanese Army in the south, reaching the Blue Line" is complete.

Hochstein pointed out that this process is difficult, but it is an opportunity "to not think about external forces, but to focus on rebuilding the economy and implementing the necessary reforms that will allow investment and return the country to prosperity."

Undeterred Yemen expands operations

By Wesam Bahrani

TEHRAN – Yemeni forces continue to militarily pressure the Israeli regime and its staunchest ally, the United States, to end the genocidal war being waged on the people of Gaza.

In the latest actions of solidarity with Gaza, the spokesperson for the Yemeni Armed Forces, Brigadier General Yahya Saree, announced the execution of four military operations targeting the U.S. aircraft carrier USS Harry S. Truman and military and vital targets belonging to the Israeli regime.

Brigadier General Saree explained that the missile and the drone air forces carried out a joint special operation that targeted the U.S. aircraft carrier with two cruise missiles and four drones in the northern Red Sea.

According to the government in Sanaa, this occurred as U.S. forces were preparing to launch a major aerial attack on Yemen.

Saree confirmed that the operation succeeded in thwarting the attack.

Bibi's bubble bursts: Israeli PM cutting his nose to spite his face

By Shahrokh Saei

TEHRAN- Israel's ambitious plans in the Gaza Strip have gone up in smoke in the wake of the regime's inability to meet its objectives.

Israeli opposition leader Yair Lapid has come down hard on Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu over his ineffective military strategy in the besieged Palestinian territory.

This is how Lapid characterized Netanyahu's approach to negotiating the return of captives from Gaza. "The fact that the hostages have not yet been returned home is, first and foremost, a failure."

The opposition leader implied that Netanyahu, known as Bibi, is running like a chicken with its head cut off amid his desperate attempts to secure the release of the captives.

"You have support from the opposition. I've said it 1,000 times – he [Netanyahu] will receive a safety net from us, as long as he says what he wants. The main thing is that he brings the hostages home – and he's not bringing them home," Lapid said. ▶ Page 5

Tourism ministry adds division dedicated to AI

TEHRAN – On Monday, Iran's Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts, Seyyed Reza Salehi-Amiri, announced the establishment of a new division dedicated to Artificial Intelligence (AI) within the ministry.

As mentioned by the minister, the initiative is aimed to make the best use of AI and modern technologies to enhance cultural heritage preservation and the global reach of Iranian handicrafts. Speaking at the inauguration of the third exhibition showcasing the achievements and capacities of creative and knowledge-based companies, held at the University of Science and Culture, Salehi-Amiri emphasized the significance of integrating technology into cultural and economic development.

"Cultural industries and the economy of culture are critical for the country's development. In today's world, development without technology is meaningless, and AI plays a pivotal role in this process," Salehi-Amiri stated. ▶ Page 6



© Tehran Times/ Samaneh Aboutalobi

Kamal Sharaf's cartoon exhibition opens in Tehran

TEHRAN- On Tuesday, a solo exhibition titled "Kamal al-Fann," showcasing 120 pieces by Yemeni artist Kamal Sharaf, was inaugurated at the Aali Gallery of the Art Bureau in Tehran.

The opening ceremony was attended by Sharaf, who is currently in Iran, along with artists and families of martyrs, and the event revolved around the theme of resistance.

Among the notable attendees were Iranian graphic designers and caricaturists, including Masoud Shojai Tabatabai, Masoud Najabati, Maziar Bijani, as well as Russian artists Alexandra Faldina and Alexander Faldin.

The event also honored the family of martyr Mostafa Mohammad Mirzaei, the only Iranian martyr buried in Yemen.

TEHRAN PAPERS

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

Violators of rights do not seek Iran's interests

In a note, Kayhan discussed the views of the West-leaning media about possible talks between Iran and the United States. It wrote: The West-leaning media insinuates that the future Trump administration will adopt stricter policies against Iran, but this does not mean a complete deadlock. This path, although difficult and challenging, can lead to securing national interests, reducing international pressure, and creating hope in Iranian society. It should be remembered that Trump quit the JCPOA. Through maximum pressure, he was looking for more dictates and now he wants to follow the same path. It is not the case that the negotiation is due to the pressure of sanctions, but they have always acted as a supplement, and the claim that negotiation reduces the pressure is a deception of people. The next point is that pro-West media claim that European governments will try to make the relationship between Iran and America tense. They also say that America and the West are probably looking for an agreement that will provide the relative interests of Iran in a win-win situation. But they have violated the inalienable rights of Iran and committed a big fraud.

Arman-e-Melli: Sudani in the role of mediator

In a commentary, Arman-e-Melli examined the visit of the Iraqi Prime Minister to Tehran on Wednesday and said: It was in September of this year that President Pezeshkian made a trip to Iraq, a trip that won a lot of media coverage. Now, Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia Sudani is visiting Iran, a trip that is under the media's microscope at the height of tensions in the region. It seems that an important part of Sudani's talks with Iranian officials in Tehran will be about Syrian security issues. During the past few days, Julani (the new Syrian de-facto leader) has taken positions related to establishing relations with Iran, has called Iran an important power in the region, and wants diplomatic relations with Iran. It seems that Sudani's visit to Iran can be related to the relations between Iran and Syria in the future due to the changes in the power structure in Syria. In the past, Iraq tried to restore diplomatic ties between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Therefore, the possibility that he seeks to establish Iran's relations with the

new Syrian government is not out of mind.

Shargh: Situation in Syria and the future of the region

Shargh analyzed the back-to-back visits of foreign officials to Damascus and said: The visit of many foreign officials to Damascus and the visit of the foreign and defense ministers and the information officer of the interim Syrian government to Saudi Arabia, Qatar, UAE, and Jordan are important. The choice of Saudi Arabia as the destination of the first foreign trip of the Damascus officials is important in two ways: first, it can indicate the focus of these officials on the economic revival of Syria. The second reason can be due to the efforts of the Damascus authorities to diminish the concerns of almost all Arab countries about the alignment of the new Syria with Turkey and Qatar. This issue and many other issues are related to how developments will proceed in the coming months, including how Iran will deal with Syrian issues. Iran's Foreign Ministry has adopted logical and correct positions regarding Syria. Such a position helps both to stabilize the situation and avoid conflict inside Syria or a possible export of insecurity that everyone is worried about and normalize relations between Iran and Syria.

Iran: The possibility of diplomacy

In an article, the Iran newspaper discussed the relationship between Iran and America and Tehran's diplomacy. The paper said: Diplomacy should examine the possibility of a major agreement. Iran should commit itself to an open and verifiable nuclear program that limits the amount of enriched material and the level of enrichment. Under this agreement, Iran can have a nuclear energy program under strict supervision and provide political and economic support to regional actors. In that situation, economic sanctions will be significantly reduced. Also, the United States will be ready to interact with the current Iranian government and refrain from trying to change the regime. The correct approach for Washington is to start with diplomacy. The proposal to reduce sanctions in exchange for nuclear and regional limitations is likely to benefit Iran in the short term. A new agreement with Iran could also eliminate the need to use large-scale military force.

Details of MEK's brutal terrorist tactics unveiled in Tehran trial



An attorney representing the families of victims making the case against the MEK at the 11th Branch of the Tehran Criminal Court on January 7, 2025

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At the outset, Judge Dehghani invited the plaintiffs' lawyer, Mr. Kazemi, to present his remarks.

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who faced torture and murder during these operations.

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Similarly, Kazemi narrated the abduction and murder of Khosro Riyahi Nazari, who was tortured and disposed of in a semi-constructed building.

A witness, Akbar Kabiri, who worked with the Revolutionary Committee, praised the Martyrs Taleb Taheri and Mirjalili.

Kabiri further elaborated on MEK's meticulous planning, involving rented safe houses for their leadership. He explained how two young committee members, Taheri and Mirjalili, were abducted by MEK and later found tortured.

During cross-examination, Kabiri recounted the interrogation of an MEK member Zandi, who revealed information that led to the discovery of weapons and grenades in his home.

Kabiri detailed how MEK operatives were trained and the rationale behind their brutal tortures.

He cited the terrorist organization's direct orders to extract information, resulting in severe punishments for detainees, especially young committee members. Judge Dehghani emphasized the legitimacy of the court's jurisdiction in terrorism cases, asserting that the proceedings adhered to both national and international laws.

Addressing the defendants, including the MEK's legal entity, Dehghani reiterated the transparency and legal integrity of the court sessions, aiming to deliver justice.

The hearing is scheduled to continue in the future, with detailed testimonies painting a harrowing picture of the crimes committed by MEK members.

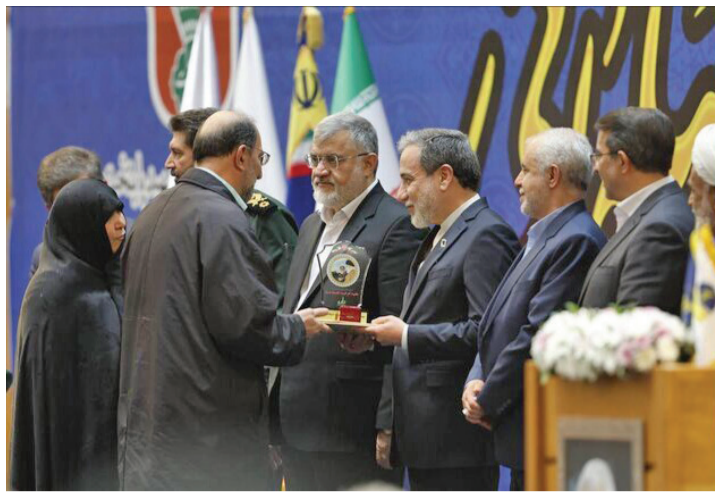
Araghchi stresses endurance of Resistance Front against enemies' will

TEHRAN – Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi has emphasized the resilience of the "Resistance school of thought," a movement late Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani significantly shaped.

Tehran hosted a ceremony commemorating the legacy of Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani on Tuesday, where a plaque of appreciation and a ring belonging to the late commander were presented to Foreign Minister Araghchi by the family of Martyr Mohammad Hossein Hadadian.

The event was part of the fourth annual ceremony dedicated to recognizing managers and staff committed to the principles of General Soleimani's vision.

He noted that despite ongoing



challenges, including military strikes and political pressures, the ideology remains steadfast and continues to grow. "The blood of martyrs," Araghchi remarked, "is a

weapon in the hands of the Resistance. It cannot be extinguished by military strikes or bombings."

General Soleimani, revered for

his leadership in combating terrorism, particularly against the Daesh (ISIS) group in Iraq and Syria, was assassinated on January 3, 2020, in a U.S. drone strike near Baghdad International Airport. The strike, ordered by then-President Donald Trump, sparked global condemnation and highlighted Soleimani's influence across the region.

Araghchi also praised Martyr Soleimani for transforming the Resistance movement into a tangible force opposing Western hegemony and Israeli aggression in the region.

Addressing the broader Resistance Front, he asserted that acts of assassination and aggression would only strengthen its resolve, as evidenced by the enduring spirit of Hezbollah and its leaders.

Iran eyeing Makran for new capital, government says



Iranian government spokesperson Fatemeh Mohajerani in a press conference on January 7, 2025

TEHRAN – In a press conference on Tuesday, government spokesperson Fatemeh Mohajerani announced plans to relocate Iran's capital to the southern part of the country.

"The new capital will certainly be in the south, specifically in the Makran region," Mohajerani stated. She emphasized that while relocating the capital is not an urgent issue, an in-depth expert evaluation is crucial due to Tehran's growing population and environmental challenges.

Mohajerani explained that two councils have been established to address the current capital's problems and to explore the maritime economy, including the potential relocation to the Makran coast. The Makran region, located in Iran's Sistan and Baluchestan Province, offers strategic advantages due to its proximity to the Gulf of Oman.

This area is an untapped treasure for Iran, with the potential to transform into a significant commercial and maritime hub, enhancing Iran's trade capabilities and reducing the economic burden on

Tehran.

"Alongside sea-oriented development, the development of Makran is a priority for the current government," announced Iran's Vice President Mohammad Reza Aref earlier this week.

The Makran coast, historically significant since the Achaemenid Empire, presents an opportunity for economic diversification.

The region boasts over 1,000 kilometers of coastline, with the Chabahar Free Trade-Industrial Zone being developed since 2003, aiming to become an international trade corridor connecting Central Asia to the Indian Ocean.

The move could also promote equitable growth across the nation.

Trade issues with Turkey

Addressing the ongoing truck drivers' issues at the Turkish border, Mohajerani expressed gratitude for their hard work under harsh conditions, transporting essential goods.

She mentioned that a delegation from Iran is heading to Turkey to resolve these issues, expressing hope for a swift resolution.

Iranian truck drivers recently encountered significant delays at the Turkish border, due to a policy change revoking fuel tax exemption, affecting over a thousand trucks. This led to a week-long backlog, with drivers facing harsh conditions.

"As mentioned by First Vice President Aref, we hope to solve the truck drivers' problems within a few days or even hours," the spokesperson added.

The possibility of joining the FATF

Mohajerani touched upon the topic of joining the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), stating that the review of the Palermo bills at the Expediency Council has resumed with coordination among the branches of government and a directive from the

Leader of the Islamic Revolution, Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei.

She highlighted that while joining the FATF is not a short-term issue, its approval would open doors for investors. Established in 1989, the FATF claims to be an intergovernmental entity tasked with setting standards and encouraging countries to implement legal, regulatory, and operational measures against money laundering, terrorism financing, and other threats to the global financial system.

Mohajerani noted that even if the country passes the remaining FATF bills today, problems won't be solved overnight.

"Not joining the FATF would create problems in transactions with neighboring countries," she warned, indicating that compliance is in Iran's best interest to foster economic relations and support regional peace and prosperity.

Plans for dealing with Trump

When asked about the government's strategies for dealing with the incoming U.S. President Donald Trump, Mohajerani remarked that the government has made preparations and communicated specific scenarios to the relevant institutions before Trump takes office on January 20.

She reiterated that there is no uncertainty or lack of planning in the government.

In response to a query regarding Iran's readiness to negotiate its nuclear program and engage in direct talks with the U.S., Mohajerani reiterated Iran's foreign policy principles of dignity, wisdom, and expediency.

She stated that Iran is willing to negotiate with the world to resolve nuclear issues but emphasized that the U.S. was the one to abandon the international agreement.

FM meets with new envoy to Tajikistan ahead of Pezeshkian's visit to Dushanbe



Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi (L) meets with Alireza Haqiqian, the newly appointed ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran to Tajikistan, on January 6, 2025.

TEHRAN – Alireza Haqiqian, Iran's Ambassador to Tajikistan, held a meeting with Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi ahead of President Masoud Pezeshkian's upcoming visit to Tajikistan. During the session, Haqiqian delivered a comprehensive update on the current state of Iran-Tajikistan relations, highlighting recent advancements in bilateral cooperation.

The ambassador also shared details of the preparations underway to ensure the success of the President's visit. This landmark trip is expected to strengthen diplomatic and economic ties between Tehran and Dushanbe, marking another step forward in the flourishing partnership between the two countries.

Tehran's new ambassador to Vienna meets FM

Asadollah Eshraq Jahromi, the newly appointed ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran to Austria, met with Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi as he prepared to assume his post in Vienna.

During the meeting, Ambassador Jahromi outlined his plans to enhance bilateral cooperation in various sectors, reflecting Tehran's commitment

to strengthening ties with Austria.

Araghchi praised the long-standing relationship between Iran and Austria, emphasizing the productive history of collaboration between the two nations.

He reiterated the importance of advancing the shared agenda within Iran's broader strategy of fostering international partnerships. The Foreign Minister extended his best wishes to Jahromi, expressing confidence in his ability to represent Iran effectively and further deepen the Iran-Austria relationship.

Ambassador Jahromi brings extensive diplomatic experience to his new role. He has held numerous prominent positions, including Director General of Peace and International Security at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Deputy Representative of Iran to the United Nations and other international organizations in Vienna.

He has also served as the Head of International Affairs for Women and Human Rights, Legal Counselor at Iran's Permanent Mission in Geneva, and First Secretary at Iran's Embassy in South Africa.

Trump reportedly halts extradition of Iranian citizen at Italy's request



U.S. President-elect Donald Trump meets with Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni at Mar-a-Lago in Palm Beach, Florida, U.S. January 4, 2025.

TEHRAN – An Italian newspaper has reported that Donald Trump, the U.S. President-elect, has agreed to temporarily suspend the extradition of an Iranian citizen detained in Milan. The decision follows a direct appeal from Italy's Prime Minister, Giorgia Meloni, during her recent visit to the United States, the paper claimed. The individual in question, identified as Mohammad Abedini Najafabadi, was arrested at Milan's airport under a U.S. judicial warrant. The U.S. government has accused Abedini of facilitating the transfer of drone technologies to Iran. According to Washington, these technologies were allegedly used in an attack on a U.S. military base near the Syria-Jordan border. The attack reportedly resulted in the deaths of three American soldiers. The Italian daily Il Giornale revealed on Monday that Prime Minister Meloni specifically requested Trump to intervene in Abedini's case. This appeal is part of broader diplomatic discussions between Italy and the incoming U.S. administration.

Iran drill downs bunker busters over Natanz

The maneuver comes after weeks of media frenzy over potential American attacks on Iranian nuclear sites

By Mona Hojat Ansari

TEHRAN – Bunker busters are some of the most fearsome bombs used by militaries around the world. They are believed to be capable of penetrating underground facilities, tunnels, and complexes. But as Iranian defense systems downed projectiles mirroring the features of a hostile bunker buster on Tuesday, the event seemed surprisingly routine.

The projectiles were intercepted over Iran's nuclear facilities, including Natanz, in central Esfahan province during ongoing nationwide drills scheduled to last several weeks.

While the downing of bunker busters this week received significant media attention, security and defense analyst Mohammad Shaltouki says it is not a new development.

"Having followed Iran's military exercises for years as a journalist and analyst," he stated to the Tehran Times, "I can confirm that Iran has routinely practiced intercepting potential weapons, including bunker busters, aimed at it for several years. Beyond intercepting bunker busters, Iran has also long practiced downing the aircraft that deploy them."

The media attention given to what appears to be a routine military exercise is likely a consequence of recent Western and Israeli media reports speculating about the incoming Trump administration's plans for potential strikes against



The chief commander of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC), Major General Hossein Salami, and the commander of the IRGC's Aerospace Division, Brigadier General Amir Ali Hajizadeh, oversee ongoing nationwide military drills codenamed Payambar-e-A'azam (Great Prophet) 19 on Tuesday.

Iran's nuclear facilities.

These reports were compounded by a story from Axios which suggested that National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan recently outlined potential U.S. strike options on Iranian nuclear sites for President Biden, in the event Tehran moves towards developing nuclear weapons before Trump's inauguration later this month.

Threats of attacks on Iranian nuclear facilities are not new. They have been lobbied at Iran across several consecutive U.S. administrations, particularly during President Barack Obama's presidency when he intensified the threat before the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

The JCPOA, which limited Iran's

nuclear program, led Washington to abandon its hawkish rhetoric.

However, since Iran increased its nuclear activities after Donald Trump's withdrawal from the deal in 2018, these threats have gradually resurfaced in American discourse. Another regime that's been threatening to hit Iran's nuclear sites for years is Israel, particularly its longest-serving Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

But the wanted criminal did not, or could not, strike his ultimate dream targets in October when Washington helped it launch airstrikes against Iran in response to two Iranian operations hitting Israeli military sites in 2024.

The attacks took the lives of four Iranian soldiers serving in the

country's defense forces.

For the Iranian public, who spent the night hearing their defense system intercept Israeli missiles launched from Iraqi airspace, the aftermath of the attack was not apparent.

There was no footage of successful strikes, and no visible damage on the ground, unlike the observable impact of Iranian attacks on Israel.

However, Israel has claimed for months that it rendered Iran "defenseless" and destroyed its defense infrastructure.

Tuesday's military drill was also significant in that it debunked Israeli claims of significantly harming Iran's defense capabilities.

During the exercise, Iranian forces employed indigenous air defense systems including the low-altitude Dezfoul anti-cruise missile and drone system, the high-altitude Sevom Khordad, and the newly revealed 358 missiles.

Shaltouki believes the 358 is a masterpiece of Iranian engineering. "It is a missile that acts like a drone. It patrols a designated area and destroys targets when it finds them," he explained.

The analyst also believes that while the defense systems deployed during the drill are impressive, they are not the best Iran has.

"Everyone knows that during wargames, only a portion of a country's military capabilities is unveiled."

Turkey's foreign policy: anti-Israel posturing, Western alignment, and neo-Ottoman ambitions

By Mohammad Khatibi

TEHRAN – Following the collapse of the Bashar al-Assad government in Damascus, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's supporters and fervent loyalists have been boasting about a major victory for Turkey.

In a recent article for Daily Sabah, Hilal Kaplan illustrates what has been at the core of Turkish propaganda in West Asia. Kaplan, in her article titled "Iran is reaping what it sowed," claims that Tehran has been pursuing what she calls a "Neo-Persian Empire." She cites former Iranian officials, journalists, and presidents to support her argument. However, several important and misleading issues undermine her claims.

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Furthermore, it's crucial to understand that foreign policy in action cannot be solely extrapolated from statements made by elected officials, which are often influenced by personal interests or political motivations.

Iran as a regional actor

Iran's post-revolution military strategy has centered around two key objectives: strengthening its domestic defense capabilities and supporting like-minded actors challenging Western imperialism.

The development of missile and drone technology, spurred by sanctions that restrict arms imports, exemplifies the former. The latter is demonstrated by Tehran's backing of the "Axis of Resistance," which Western analysts sometimes refer to as "forward defense."

While the fall of Assad in Syria undoubtedly represented a setback for the Axis, it was not a catastrophic one. The Resistance Axis is not solely dependent on Syria; Hezbollah was a significant force well before Damascus became a logistical hub, and Ansarullah in Yemen demonstrates the viability of independent Resistance movements.

Despite being under siege by the Saudi-led coalition, Yemen has successfully thwarted attempts to overthrow the government in Sana'a for almost a decade now. Yemeni forces have meanwhile been launching attacks in the Red Sea and surrounding waters targeting U.S. and Israeli interests.

They have also launched successful missile and drone attacks on occupied Palestine, de-

spite being under constant attacks by a U.S.-led coalition. Meanwhile, since October 2023, there have been virtually no operations launched against Israel from Syria, because Assad, similar to the current de facto rulers of Syria, did not wish to directly engage with Israel. This is while Western, Turkish, and some Arab media outlets have been portraying Resistance forces as proxies of Iran, not independent states or groups that make decisions on their own.

All these examples highlight that the Axis is a network of aligned actors with individual capabilities, not simply a direct extension of Iranian power.

According to the Turkish Statistical Institute, bilateral trade volume rose from \$1.41 billion in 2002 to \$8.91 billion by 2022, with Turkey consistently maintaining a trade surplus. Arguably, the anti-Israel rhetoric is merely a façade intended to secure domestic political gains, while the expansion of economic interests remains the priority.

Syria policies of Tehran and Ankara

Since the beginning of the terrorist insurgency in Syria, Tehran has consistently emphasized the Arab country's national sovereignty and territorial integrity. This policy has not changed, and Tehran has called on all parties to adhere to these principles.

Iran has been in contact with Syrian opposition groups for a long time, and its presence in the country was aimed at preventing the advancement of Daesh terrorists and the spread of terrorism throughout the region. Unlike Turkey, Tehran's presence was not for the purpose of land acquisition, and the government in Damascus retained full authority in all phases of the fight against terrorism.

This contrasts sharply with Turkey's actions which have been seen as interventions that do not fully respect Syrian sovereignty.

The presence of U.S. and Turkish military forces in Syria significantly undermines efforts to protect the country's territorial integrity and national sovereignty. The Turkish presence, along with its backing of Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) in the attempt to destabilize the Assad government, has created opportunities for Israel to decimate Syrian military capabilities and infrastructure. In the past few weeks, Tel Aviv

has effectively destroyed Syrian naval vessels, sea-to-sea missiles, helicopters, and airplanes, including the entire fleet of MiG-29 fighter jets, along with stockpiles of ammunition in attacks on various military bases.

This weakening of Syrian assets serves the strategic goals of both the U.S. and Israel in the region. While Turkey may have achieved some short-term gains with the fall of Assad, a potential rise in militancy poses a significant threat to its long-term interests. Additionally, the unwavering U.S. support for Kurdish forces in Syria further restricts Ankara's maneuverability within the country.

Furthermore, Saudi Arabia and other Persian Gulf countries have started to exert increased influence in Damascus.

Turkey's ties with Israel and U.S.

Kaplan portrays Turkey as a victim of U.S. policies in the region. However, Ankara's actions have, in fact, been a key factor in enabling Washington's support for Israel. Despite harsh rhetoric emanating from Ankara against Israel, little practical action has been taken to back up these claims.

Economic relations between Turkey and Israel have significantly expanded over the past two decades. According to the Turkish Statistical Institute, bilateral trade volume rose from \$1.41 billion in 2002 to \$8.91 billion by 2022, with Turkey consistently maintaining a trade surplus.

Arguably, the anti-Israel rhetoric is merely a façade intended to secure domestic political gains, while the expansion of economic interests remains the priority.

Following the Israeli attacks on Gaza, this disconnect between words and deeds continues. Despite claims by Turkey that trade with Israel was suspended in protest of the Gaza conflict, investigative journalist Metin Cihan and others have revealed that trade between the two countries has not ceased. Turkish goods have continued to reach Israel, often under the guise of being destined for Palestinians.

The Erdogan government has also adopted a cautious approach to domestic protests against Israel. While demonstrations have erupted across Turkey reflecting public anger towards Israel, the government has strictly controlled these protests. Allowing these protests to occur under close government oversight suggests an intention to prevent uncontrolled civil unrest that could potentially spark broader demonstrations against the government itself.

SPORTS

Iran aims top 10 at 2028 Paralympics: Karegari

TEHRAN – Head of Iran's National Paralympic Committee (NPC) Ghafour Karegari says that their delegation aims to be among top 10 in the 2028 Paralympic Games.

Iran finished in 14th place in the 2024 Paralympic Games, winning eight gold medals, 10 silvers and seven bronzes.

In the general assembly of the Iran's NPC held at the Paralympic committee's headquarters, Karegari said that they are determined to improve in the upcoming Paralympics.

"We finished in second place in the 2022 Asian Para Games in Hangzhou, China. The next edition will be held in Nagoya, Japan and we are going to keep our second place but we know that there is a difficult task ahead of us because Japan is a contender to win second place as the hosts. I think the third place is not bad in Nagoya," Karegari said.

"We also use the Games to succeed in the Los Angeles Paralympic Games. We will have developmental changes in our strategies in Nagoya with a view to developing new disciplines. We will focus on winning gold medals with the aim of having better ranks in the medal table," he added.

Iran delegation wants to be among top 10 in LA 2028, Karegari concluded.

Golmohammadi on verge of returning to Persepolis

TEHRAN – Yahya Golmohammadi is a possible candidate to take charge of Persepolis football team.

After two weeks of Juan Carlos Garrido's dismissal, the team have yet to find a replacement for the Spanish coach.

Golmohammadi parted ways with Persepolis in last year's January, and his assistant Osmar Loss Vieira led the team to the title.

The Brazilian coach left Persepolis for the Thailand's Buriram and the Iranian giants hired Garrido for the 2024/25 Iran's Persian Gulf Professional League (PGPL) but he left the team by mutual consent following poor results.

Now, Golmohammadi, Foolad current coach, is a possible candidate to return to his former club.

Persepolis have reportedly negotiated with Portuguese Jose Vitor dos Santos Peseiro, Croatia coach Slaven Bilic, ex-Dortmund trainer Edin Terzic, former Bayern Munich coach Niko Kovac, ex-Real Madrid coach Rafael Benitez, Zoran Barisic, and Igor Stimac so far.

The Defending champions sit third in the PGPL table, three points behind Tractor and Sepahan.

Roberto Piazza to come to Iran on Jan. 20

TEHRAN – Iran national volleyball team head coach Roberto Piazza will come to Tehran on Jan. 20.

The Italian coach was named Team Melli coach in early September but has not come to Iran so far.

Piazza will finalize his deal with Iran volleyball federation and also hold a meeting with head of the federation Milad Taghavi.

Piazza has replaced Brazilian coach Mauricio Motta Paes.

Iran assistant coach Tomaso Totolo will also attend the meeting.

Foolad hold training camp in Dubai

TEHRAN – Iranian football club Foolad started their training camp in Dubai, the UAE.

Foolad's training camp will last 10 days.

Foolad, headed by Yahya Golmohammadi, are the contender to win 2024-25 Iran Professional

League (IPL).

The Ahvaz-based team sit fourth in the table, four points behind leaders Tractor.

Media reports suggest that Golmohammadi has not traveled to Dubai.

He is a candidate to take charge of Persepolis after the club parted company with Juan Carlos Garrido.

Taremi Inter's standout performer against Milan

TEHRAN – Inter striker Mehdi Taremi enjoyed a dream Supercoppa Italiana final despite a heartbreaking 3-2 defeat to arch-rivals AC Milan.

According to Gazzetta dello Sport via FCInterNews, the 32-year-old was Inter's standout performer in Riyadh.

Simone Inzaghi's side let a two-goal cushion slip through their fingers in a pulsating title decider at the King Saud University Stadium.

Lautaro Martinez and Taremi fired the Nerazzurri 2-0 up with less than 50 minutes on the clock.

However, Milan pulled off a sensational comeback to deny Inter a record-equaling eighth Supercoppa Italiana title.

Indeed, goals from Theo Hernandez, Christian Pulisic, and Tammy Abraham turned the game on its head.

Unfazed by missing an early chance, Taremi continued to work hard. His tenacity paid off on the stroke of halftime as he set Martinez up for the opening goal.

Furthermore, he doubled Inter's lead two minutes into the second half with a routine finish.

Indeed, Stefan de Vrij picked him out with a delightful defense-splitting pass, setting him one-on-one with Mike Maignan. Taremi was ruthless, netting only his second goal for Inter this season.

However, it was all in vain as Milan turned things around to beat the Nerazzurri for the second time in 2024-25.

Shams Azar, Mohajeri part ways: PGPL

TEHRAN – Shams Azar football club parted company with their head coach Reza Mohajeri.

Mohajeri was named Shams Azar coach in October as Saeid Daghighi's replacement but failed to live up to expectations.

Under his leadership, Shams Azar sit 15th in 2024/24 Iran's Persian Gulf Professional League (PGPL)'s 16-team table.

Former Esteghlal Khuzestan coach Sirous Pourmousavi and ex-Havadar coach Mehdi Rahmati are shortlisted to lead the Qazvin based football club.

Pakdel named 2025 Asian Youth Games chef de mission

TEHRAN – Iran handball federation president Alireza Pakdel was named as the 2025 Asian Youth Games chef de mission.

Acting secretary general of the Iran's National Olympic Committee (NOC) said Pakdel has been named as the delegation's chef de mission.

Bahrain was chosen as the host after Uzbekistan's withdrawal due to financial and logistical challenges.

The 21 sports that are set to feature in Bahrain 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.

Iran plans 9 strategic rail corridors with €10b investment

TEHRAN - Iran's Deputy Head of Construction and Development of Transportation Infrastructure Company announced plans to build nine strategic rail corridors spanning 17,000 kilometers, contingent upon securing €10 billion in funding.

According to a statement from the Ministry of Transport and Urban Development, Abbas Khatibi detailed the company's rail projects during a meeting with members of the Iranian Parliament's Budget and Planning Committee, saying that the projects will be completed

within three to seven years.

The company is overseeing 34 rail projects totaling approximately 10,000 kilometers, including 3,000 kilometers under construction and 6,000 kilometers in the planning phase.

Highlighting the significance of the country's development plans, Khatibi explained that about 3,200 kilometers of new rail projects are mandated under transit corridor expansion efforts. The completion of these nine rail corridors would increase the nation's freight capacity to 60 million tons annually.

Iranian business delegation to accompany Pezeshkian on Tajikistan visit



TEHRAN - Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian has emphasized private sector involvement in international and political trips, with a business delegation set to accompany him on his January 16 visit to Tajikistan, the head of Tehran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (TCCIMA) announced.

Speaking at the 23rd meeting of the chamber's board of representatives on Tuesday, Mahmoud Najafi Arab highlighted the president's commitment to privatizing state-owned companies, noting that privatization offers significant opportunities for private sector engagement.

Najafi Arab also emphasized President Pezeshkian's directive for the government to withdraw from business activities, encouraging the private sector to seize this opportunity.

This upcoming Tajikistan visit reflects the administration's broader strategy of integrating private sector representatives into diplomatic and economic initiatives abroad.

Also, during a meeting between Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines, and Agriculture (ICCIMA) Head Samad Hassanzadeh and Tajik Ambassador to Tehran Nizomidin Zohidi, in late November 2024, the two sides emphasized the need to expedite a preferential trade agreement (PTA) and completely eliminate visa requirements to boost bilateral economic relations.

In the meeting, both sides highlighted untapped trade potential and the importance of closer collaboration between their business communities.

Hassanzadeh noted that the current trade volume falls far short of the two countries' capabilities, saying: "Iran has significant potential in knowledge-based areas, engineering services, food industries, petrochemicals, construction materials, tourism, and information technology."

The official expressed Iranian private sector's readiness to meet Tajikistan's needs.

He also called for joint efforts to facilitate trade by exchanging trade delegations and organizing specialized exhibitions, adding that full implementation of visa-free travel could pave the way for deeper partnerships, including the establishment of joint industrial zones.

Zohidi for his part echoed the sentiment, acknowledging progress in trade volume, which has reportedly increased tenfold since 2020. However, he urged efforts to boost bilateral trade to \$1.0 billion, inviting Iranian business leaders to explore opportunities in Tajikistan.

Addressing visa challenges, the Tajik ambassador noted that the current exemption applies only to flights between Tehran and Dushanbe and does not include flights operating between Mashhad and Dushanbe. "We plan to launch a new route between Shiraz and Dushanbe, and fully removing visa requirements will enhance tourism and trade."

Also speaking during the meeting, Mohammad Hossein Roshanak, head of the Iran-Tajikistan Joint Chamber of Commerce, criticized high tariffs on Iranian goods in Tajikistan compared to Uzbek imports, calling for fair trade practices to reduce costs and enhance competitiveness.

As announced by the vice chairman of Iran-Tajikistan Joint Economic Committee stated, Iran's export to Tajikistan has risen 33 percent in the first half of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20-September 21), as compared to the same period of time in the past year.

Making the remarks in a meeting between a Tajik Trade Delegation and a number of traders and businessmen from Iran's North Khorasan province, in Bojnourd, the center of the province, Kazem Shirdel said that the trend of the export of Iranian products to Tajikistan has been rising in recent years.

Stating that the people of Tajikistan are interested in using Iranian products, he added: "Fortunately, the Iranian goods exported to this country are of very high quality, and this makes the people of Tajikistan welcome Iranian goods."

In late September 2024, senior energy officials of Iran and Tajikistan stressed their willingness to expand energy ties between the two countries.

Iranian Oil Minister Mohsen Paknejad discussed ways of expanding mutual cooperation with Minister of Energy and Water Resources of Tajikistan Daler Juma in a meeting in Tehran at that time.

Speaking at the meeting, Paknejad said capable Iranian companies are ready to enter Tajikistan and Central Asian oil industry's upstream and downstream activities.

Referring to the cultural, language, civilizational, and historical commonalities of the two countries of Iran and Tajikistan, the oil minister said that expanding economic relations with the friendly and brotherly country of Tajikistan, especially in the energy sector, is of significant importance.

Paknejad continued that some effective steps have already been taken for expanding economic relations with Tajikistan which is hoped to be strengthened in the future.

Iran invests \$360m in agricultural industries, mechanization

TEHRAN - The head of Iran's Center for Agricultural Mechanization and Industries, affiliated with the Ministry of Agriculture, announced an investment of 180 trillion rials (about \$360 million) in agricultural industries and mechanization since the beginning of the current Iranian calendar year (March 2024).

He emphasized that these efforts have significantly reduced raw material exports, improved resource efficiency, and created jobs across the country.

According to the Agriculture Ministry, Karim Zolfaghari made these remarks on Monday during a meeting with directors of agro-industrial and mechanized technology sectors.

Highlighting the extensive activities in this domain across provinces, he stated that there are currently 1,700 projects underway in agricultural processing and com-



plementary industries.

Zolfaghari referred to Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei's emphasis on preventing the export of unprocessed agricultural products, saying: "Raw material exports in agriculture are not just an economic issue but also lead to the depletion of the country's fundamental re-

sources, including soil, water, and agricultural inputs."

Since the start of the year, over 180 trillion rials have been invested in agricultural processing and mechanization industries, with 32 trillion rials (\$64 million) in loans allocated for purchasing agricultural machinery, according to Zolfaghari.

He further noted that private investors contributed more than 85 percent of the 140 trillion rials (about \$280 million) invested during the first half of the year (March to September).

The Agriculture Ministry has been active across all stages of production, from land preparation to harvesting. "Currently, over 5,000 agro-processing and complementary units are under development, with progress ranging from 40 to 90 percent completion. Private investors have poured more than 3.0 trillion rials (about \$6.0 million) into these projects," Zolfaghari added.

He highlighted the outcomes of these investments, stating that over 30 million tons of raw agricultural materials have been integrated into processing industries, creating employment opportunities for 240,000 individuals in this sector.

Tehran, Astana to strengthen economic ties with new initiatives

TEHRAN - Mahmoud Najafi Arab, head of Tehran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (TCCIMA) and Ontalap Onalbayev, Kazakhstan's ambassador to Iran, met at the chamber on Monday to discuss ways to expand trade relations between the two countries.

During the meeting, the Kazakh ambassador announced that a trade delegation led by Kazakhstan's Minister of Trade would soon visit Tehran.

A memorandum of cooperation was also signed between Tehran's Chamber of Commerce and the Iran-Kazakhstan Joint Chamber of Commerce on the sidelines of the meeting.

The discussions highlighted the Iranian Parliament's approval of the free trade agreement between Iran and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU).

Both sides viewed the agreement as a historic economic opportunity to initiate broader economic and trade collaborations between Iran and Kazakhstan.

Trade expansion and new initiatives

During the meeting, Najafi Arab noted that the current trade volume between Iran and Kazakhstan does not align with the potential of both countries.

He described Iran's observer membership in the EAEU as a turning point for economic relations with member states, including Kazakhstan.

He reiterated Tehran Chamber's commitment to leveraging its resources and the private sector to foster stronger economic partnerships.

He also referred to the upcoming third Eurasian International Trade Exhibition, scheduled for early March 2025 in Tehran, emphasizing the potential for private sector collaboration in fields such as engineering, pharmaceuticals, medical equipment, machinery, textiles, and food industries.

He called for identifying opportunities in these areas and facilitating sustainable partnerships between businesses in both countries.

The official further proposed establishing joint chambers between Tehran and major Kazakh cities, such as Almaty and Astana, to strengthen bilateral cooperation.

Kazakhstan: A gateway to Russia and China

Ontalap Onalbayev highlighted Kazakhstan's strategic importance as a reliable trade route to major markets in Russia and China, backed by robust infrastructure and favorable conditions for foreign investments.

He noted that Iran is a significant trading partner for Kazakhstan in the region and commended Tehran's Chamber of Commerce for its critical role in enhancing bilateral economic ties.

The ambassador announced that a Kazakh trade delegation, including major companies, would visit Tehran for the 20th Joint Economic Committee meeting between the two nations.

This visit aims to foster negotiations and partnerships with Iranian counterparts.

Onalbayev emphasized that a cooperation document signed between Iran and Kazakhstan in 2023 outlines a roadmap for economic collaboration, with chambers of commerce from both countries tasked with implementing key provisions. He also noted that Iran's direct investment in Kazakhstan reached \$3.4 billion in 2023, highlighting significant potential for further growth.

Building strategic partnerships

Amir Abedi, head of the Iran-Kazakhstan Joint Chamber of Commerce, proposed twinning Tehran's Chamber with Astana's Chamber and called for extending the current 15-day visa-free travel agreement to 30 days.

He stressed that the upcoming Eurasia Trade Exhibition and related events could mark a pivotal step in revitalizing economic ties between the two nations.

Meanwhile during a meeting between Head of Iran's Trade Promotion Organization (TPO) Mohammad-Ali Dehghan Dehnavi and Ambassador of Kazakhstan to Tehran Ontalap Onalbayev in late November 2024, the Iranian official highlighted the need to establish a joint business council with Kazakhstan.

He said: "The formation of a business cooperation council between the two countries can help in the process of developing trade relations between the two countries, and we are interested in forming this council with the participation of the Iranian and Kazakh Chambers of Commerce."

He further pointed out the importance of transit and transportation of goods for Iran, adding: "Activating a railway route between the two countries can also play a role in the development of international corridors."

Regarding the need to expand trade between Iran and Kazakhstan, he said: "We are prepared to develop trade between the two countries, both in imports and exports, and we do not have a priority in which direction our trade should be oriented. Because good imports bring prosperity to the people, and exports contribute to employment and production."

Elsewhere in his remarks, the TPO head mentioned Iran's potential and capacities to export technical engineering services to Kazakhstan, saying: "Our companies have good technical knowledge and expertise and can complete various projects with the best quality and the lowest price. Many projects, completed by Iranian contractors in the region, have been appreciated as exemplary projects."

He called on the Kazakh side to facilitate bank guarantees for Iranian contractors.

Dehghan Dehnavi continued by emphasizing that the Eurasia Exclusive Exhibition in Iran is a good opportunity for the presence of Kazakh traders, merchants, and manufacturers in Iran, saying: "This year, given that the Free Trade Agreement with Eurasia is being ratified in the parliament, we hope that Kazakhstan will

South Azadegan oil output rises by 2,000 bpd

TEHRAN - The managing director of Arvandan Oil and Gas Company announced a 2,000-barrel-per-day increase in oil production from the shared South Azadegan field.

According to Shana, Abdollah Azari-Ahwazi stated during a production meeting that relentless efforts by the company's

staff and the implementation of technical and operational measures led to a new production record for the field last week.

He emphasized that the production increase is a critical step toward meeting the oil ministry's and National Iranian Oil Company's production targets, contributing to the na-

tion's economic progress.

Discussing the importance of addressing production obstacles, the official added that a recent meeting evaluated issues such as repairing decommissioned wells, securing essential pipes, and implementing effective solutions to production challenges. Decisions were made

to resolve these barriers and streamline operations.

The South Azadegan oil field, which borders Iraq, is one of Iran's strategic petroleum resources. Enhanced production from the field plays a pivotal role in boosting foreign exchange revenues and strengthening the national economy.

Foreigners seeking to elect president instead of the Lebanese

From page 1 ▶ Accompanied by Lisa Johnson, US Ambassador to Beirut, and US General Jasper Jeffers, the head of the Quintet Committee (the United States, France, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Qatar), Hochstein also met with caretaker Prime Minister Najib Mikati at the Grand Serail.

Hochstein called the meeting with Mikati was very constructive, saying, "I think Mikati has shown great leadership in getting to this point ... We talked about what the government needs to do to continue to implement this agreement and make sure that the country can benefit from it, and reach prosperity and stability."

Hochstein also visited Naqura, where he chaired a third meeting on the mechanism of the Quintet Committee's work. He discussed too "technical military plans for the gradual withdrawal of the Israeli army from the entire area south of the Litani."

Yazid bin Farhan, an advisor on Lebanon affairs at the Saudi Foreign Ministry, had also visited Lebanon, calling for the election of General Joseph Aoun, as agreed upon by the members of the committee.

It is worth noting that Yazid bin Farhan was present at Hochstein's meeting with Faisal bin Farhan, the Saudi Foreign Minister, in Riyadh, where they discussed "regional developments, especially in Lebanon."

The Saudi envoy's meeting with Speaker Nabih Berri was described as "tense," during which he confirmed that "Riyadh supports the nomination of the army commander."

Berri, however, did not hide his anger, informing bin Farhan that this proposal contradicted what he had agreed upon with the committee, demanding "support for the candidate that the Lebanese agree upon, rather than for the outside world."

Berri said it is impossible to secure sufficient votes to amend the constitution to elect the army commander. Additionally, he said,



US envoy Amos Hochstein (left) talking to Lebanese Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri

there is a lack of agreement among Christians on it.

Berri recalled Aoun's rigid relationship with many political forces and the difficulty of reaching an understanding with him as was evident from his unsteady relations with the defense ministers who succeeded each other while he was in command of the army.

Saudi envoy Yazid bin Farhan also met with Samir Geagea, leader of the Lebanese Forces, stressing his country's intention to re-engage in Lebanon's political arena "on the condition that there is a legitimate president [elected by consensus] who is strong and qualified to rule [official institutions] and form a government whose [policy] is in line with him."

Bin Farhan continued, "Saudi Arabia is interested in Lebanon; the Lebanese must seize the opportunity because the world will be preoccupied with Syria."

Geagea frankly told the Saudi envoy that he does not support the election of General Aoun.

"We have approached him more than once, but he did not respond," Geagea stated, recalling that Hezbollah, the Amal Movement, and the Free Patriotic Movement also oppose his election, which means that "he will not be able to obtain the 86 votes needed to be elected."

According to sources, Geagea fears any way out during Thurs-

day's session that would result in the election of a president "that does not fit the requirements of the stage" or the availability of consensus on the army commander.

For this reason, Geagea asked his loyal MPs to be vigilant and to keep all options on the table, including withdrawing from the session or dismantling its quorum.

Meanwhile, Hajj Mohammad Raad, head of the "Loyalty to the Resistance" parliamentary bloc, had met with Berri, reaffirming the "complete understanding" between Hezbollah and the Amal Movement, and the "unity of position regarding all internal files and political entitlements."

During a press conference held at the site of Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah's martyrdom, Wafiq Safa, head of Hezbollah's Liaison and Coordination Unit, underscored that "Hezbollah's only veto" would be on "the election of Samir Geagea because he is a project of sedition and war" and not on any candidate agreed upon by the parliamentary blocs.

For his part, Hussein Hajj Hassan, a Hezbollah MP, explained that this position does not mean that Hezbollah has backed down from its only declared candidate, namely Suleiman Franjeh, head of the Marada Movement, nor does it mean that it supports or rejects the army commander.

It is worth noting that Geagea declared, during one of the internal sessions, that "after the Israeli war destroys Hezbollah, we will negotiate with him on the presidency of the republic after he becomes weak."

Following the fall of the Bashar al-Assad government, Geagea foolishly thought that the "victory" of his American-Israeli ally would achieve his only chance to become president, even if he was forced as his predecessor Bashir Gemayel did. Nevertheless, his Saudi allies frustrated him by announcing their support for the election of the army commander.

On August 23, 1982, during the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, Gemayel was elected President of the Republic. However, he was assassinated on September 14 before he could assume office, by the resistance fighter Habib Al-Shartouni because of his crimes during the civil war and his deep relationship with Israel.

At the moment, all that Geagea cares about is to thwart Thursday's session until Trump's inauguration, as he bets on three variables: escalating pressure on Hezbollah; resuming aggression against Lebanon; and launching an aggression against Iran.

Geagea hopes to postpone the presidential elections that have been pending since 2022 and hold early parliamentary elections that will end what he calls Amal and Hezbollah's "monopoly" over the Shiite seats, which will facilitate the election of an alternative to Speaker Berri. This will tip the balance in his favor. Hence, his presidential dream will come true.

As a reminder, during the 2022 elections, Hezbollah won the 347,171 preferential votes, an increase of 3,951 votes compared to the 2018 elections. MP Mohammad Raad won the highest number of preferential votes in all of Lebanon: 48,543 votes, followed by his fellow MP Sayyed Hassan Fadlallah: 43,235 votes, then Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri with 42,091 votes.

Bibi's bubble bursts: Israeli PM cutting his nose to spite his face



Reports suggest that Hamas has approved an Israeli list of captives that need to be freed as part of the first stage of a potential ceasefire deal

From page 1 ▶ More than 1,100 people were killed and about 250 others were taken captive when Hamas carried out a surprise military attack in southern Israel on October 7, 2023. The attack dubbed Operation Al-Aqsa Storm was followed by Israel's genocidal war on Gaza which has so far claimed the lives of nearly 46,000 Palestinians.

Dozens of the captives still remain in Gaza following a weeklong ceasefire in November 2023, during which Israel and Hamas engaged in a prisoner exchange.

Netanyahu has vowed to continue fighting until achieving "total victory" over Hamas and returning captives but he has been unable to deliver on his promises.

Last month, Hamas and Israel resumed talks to reach a ceasefire deal. However, after a round of negotiations, the resistance movement accused Israel of trying to scupper the agreement by putting in "new conditions."

Last week, Netanyahu approved a delegation to head to the Qatari capital to resume truce talks. Reports suggest that Hamas has approved an Israeli list of captives that need to be freed as part of the first stage of a potential ceasefire deal. Nonetheless, Netanyahu and his allies remain accused of derailing ceasefire talks.

Previously, Israeli officials have admitted that Netanyahu's war ambitions have bitten the dust.

Former war minister Yoav Gallant, who was given the axe by Netanyahu, has already poured cold water on Bibi's dream of defeating Hamas.

Gallant told the Knesset members in August 2024, that Netanyahu's "total victory" slogan is "nonsense" and "gibberish."

In June last year, the Israeli military spokesman also challenged Netanyahu's war aim.

"The idea that it is possible to destroy Hamas, to make Hamas vanish — that is throwing sand in the eyes of the public," Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari told Israeli media

He added, "Hamas is an idea, deeply rooted in the hearts of the residents of Gaza."

In addition, the Israeli military's intelligence and the US intelligence community have downplayed Netanyahu's claim regarding the elimination of the Hamas resistance movement.

Nearly 15 months have passed since Netanyahu ordered his army to launch war on Gaza. Sooner or later, Bibi will have to bite the bullet and reach a ceasefire with Hamas as the Israeli army continues to struggle to fulfill its objectives.

The Israeli premier is a wanted criminal whose arrest warrant has been issued by the International Criminal Court (ICC). He is further deepening his isolation by prolonging the Gaza war.

Undeterred Yemen expands operations

From page 1 ▶ He further highlighted that the Yemeni drone air force carried out two military operations.

The first targeted an "Israeli military site in occupied Jaffa with two drones," while the second targeted "a vital Israeli enemy site in occupied Ashkelon with a drone."

Additionally, the drone air force later carried out a third military operation within 24 hours, targeting another "Israeli enemy military site in occupied Jaffa with a drone."

General Saree emphasized that these operations successfully achieved their objectives, noting that the Yemeni Armed Forces will continue their support operations for the Palestinian resistance movements.



He stated that these operations will not cease unless the aggression on Gaza ends and the blockade is lifted.

Since October 2023, the Yemeni Armed Forces have continued to launch ballistic and

cruise missiles, as well as drones, at strategic and vital Israeli targets within the occupied Palestinian territories.

Additionally, they have targeted ships heading to Israeli ports as part of their support for Gaza.

Analysts believe that despite facing American, British, and Israeli attacks, the government in Sanaa has shown remarkable steadfastness with consistent operations on Israeli and American interests in solidarity with Gaza.

An article published by the Foreign Policy magazine on Monday pointed out that the U.S. mission to "deter and degrade" Yemen is not working and that "military escalation" will not end the Yemeni support front.

Protests in New York in support of Gaza hospital director



Protesters gathered in New York City on Monday to call for the release of a prominent doctor in Gaza arrested by Israeli forces.

The demonstrators, including healthcare workers, protested outside NYU Tisch Hospital to demand the release of Dr. Hussam Abu Safiya, the director of Kamal Adwan Hospital, who was detained last month.

They carried banners that said: "Not an-

other child, Not another hospital," "Gaza forever" and "We are sick from genocide."

Abu Safiya was detained by Israeli forces along with others during a raid on the hospital on Dec. 27.

In late December, Amnesty International urged Israeli authorities to release him, expressing extreme concern over his well-being.

Israeli soldier faces war crimes complaint in Argentina over Gaza actions

The Israeli newspaper Israel Hayom has reported that a fresh complaint has been filed in Argentina against an Israeli soldier accused of committing war crimes in Gaza. This follows a similar incident in Brazil, where allegations were brought forward against another Israeli soldier.

The case, lodged under the principle of uni-

versal jurisdiction, accuses the soldier of participating in acts that violate international law during Israel's military operations in Gaza. There are growing efforts to hold Israeli soldiers accountable on the international stage, as evidence mounts over the high civilian casualties and war crimes stemming from Israel's ongoing war in Gaza.

North Korea says it tested hypersonic missile aimed at remote Pacific targets

North Korea said Tuesday its latest weapons test was a new hypersonic intermediate-range missile designed to strike remote targets in the Pacific as leader Kim Jong Un vowed to further expand his collection of nuclear-capable weapons to counter rival nations.

The North Korean state media report came a day after South Korea's military said it detected North Korea launching a missile that flew 1,100 kilometers (685 miles) before landing in waters between the Korean Peninsula and Japan.

The launch, conducted weeks before Donald Trump returns as U.S. president, came off a torrid year in weapons testing, AP reported.

North Korea demonstrated multiple weapons

systems last year that can target its neighbors and the United States, including solid-fuel intercontinental ballistic missiles.

North Korea in recent years has flight tested various intermediate-range missiles, which if perfected, could reach the U.S. Pacific military hub of Guam.

In recent months, North has been testing combining these missiles with purported hypersonic warheads to improve their survivability. North Korea since 2021 has been testing various hypersonic weapons designed to fly at more than five times the speed of sound. The speed and maneuverability of such weapons aim to withstand regional missile defense systems.

Hamas condemns Palestinian Authority attack on resistance groups

Hamas has denounced the Palestinian Authority (PA) security forces for shooting at a vehicle carrying three resistance fighters in Attil, north of Tulkarm.

The attack left all three injured, with one in critical condition, Al Jazeera Arabic reported.

The movement described the incident as a dangerous escalation, accusing PA forces of

abandoning patriotic values.

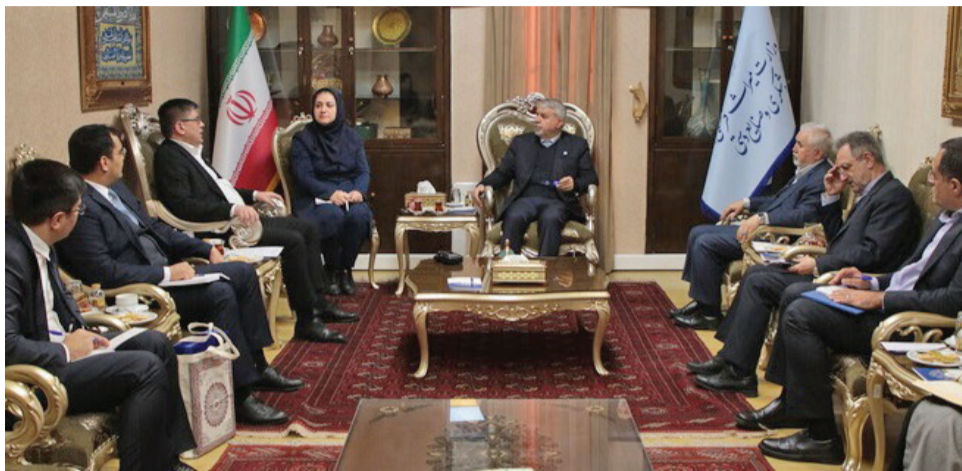
"This reflects the unpatriotic path of the PA security forces," Hamas stated. The condemnation comes amid growing tensions between Hamas and the PA.

There have been repeated accusations of PA collaboration with Israeli security operations against resistance groups.



Palestinian Tayseer Obaid eats with his family in an underground pit he dug to protect from Israeli attacks at the tent encampment in Deir el-Balah, central Gaza

Iran, Uzbekistan eager to strengthen cultural and tourism ties



TEHRAN - In a significant move to bolster bilateral relations, Iran's Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts, Seyyed Reza Salehi-Amiri, met with Uzbekistan's Ambassador to Iran, Fariddin Nasriev, on Tuesday.

The meeting, held at the minister's office in Tehran, focused on strengthening cooperation in the areas of tourism, cultural heritage, and handicrafts.

During the meeting, Salehi-Amiri emphasized the Iranian government's strategic policy of fostering stronger ties with neighboring countries. "The foundation of this important journey is the resolute will of embassies and ambassadors," he noted, highlighting the critical role of diplomatic efforts in forging closer connections.

Salehi-Amiri also referred to his recent meeting with Aziz Abdulkhakov, Uzbekistan's Deputy Prime Minister, where the two sides agreed to sign a comprehensive memorandum of understanding. Central to this agreement is the establishment of a joint technical tourism committee aimed at increasing tourist exchanges and deepening cultural interactions between the two nations, the minister said.

Initiatives to boost tourism

The Iranian minister outlined several initiatives to enhance tourism collaboration. These include increasing flight frequencies between the two countries, engaging in discussions with Uzbek airline companies, and fostering partnerships between travel agencies in Iran and Uzbekistan.

These measures, Salehi-Amiri stated, are critical to boosting mutual tourism and strengthening the cultural bonds shared by the two nations.

Shared heritage and joint celebrations

Salehi-Amiri underscored the rich shared cultural heritage of Iran and Uzbekistan,

pointing to six jointly inscribed intangible cultural assets on UNESCO's list of intangible cultural heritage.

These include Nowruz, the traditional musical instrument Rubab, illumination art (Tazhib), the Iftar tradition, sericulture and silk weaving, and miniature painting.

Moreover, the minister proposed hosting joint festivals to highlight these cultural connections, noting that such events could serve as a bridge to familiarize the peoples of both countries with their shared history and attractions.

"Increasing the number of tourists and strengthening people-to-people ties can bring about transformative changes in cultural and political relations," he added.

Expanding collaborative efforts

In addition to tourism, Salehi-Amiri highlighted other areas for potential collaboration.

These include joint archaeological excavations and restoration projects, expanding health tourism, organizing shared handicrafts exhibitions, and exchanging expertise between artisans of the two nations.

Ambassador's view

Ambassador Nasriev reciprocated Iran's enthusiasm for closer ties, expressing Uzbekistan's readiness to help facilitate Iranian travelers' entry into the country.

According to CHTN, the envoy, for his part, welcomed the proposal to establish a joint technical tourism committee and expressed optimism about fostering partnerships with Iranian travel agencies and airlines.

The meeting between Salehi-Amiri and Nasriev represents a pivotal step in enhancing regional integration and cultural diplomacy between Tehran and Tashkent.

Inside Malaysia's target to hit 35.6 million tourism arrivals by 2026

Southeast Asia's tourism race is heating up. And with destinations like Thailand and Vietnam making strong plays, Malaysia will need to up its game. It's also a chance for the destination to diversify its offerings and attract fresh audiences in a crowded regional race.

Malaysia has unveiled its ambitious tourism strategy for 2026, aiming to welcome 35.6 million international visitors and generate RM147.1 billion (\$33 billion) in tourism receipts.

The Visit Malaysia 2026 campaign launched on Monday also targets 261 million domestic visitors to contribute RM115.2 billion (\$26 billion) to the economy.

The initiative highlights a broader vision of sustainability, inclusivity, and economic growth, as outlined by Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim during Monday's launch.

Tourism Minister Tiong King Sing emphasized the government's focus on niche tourism experiences, cultural travel, and ecotourism to encourage longer stays and higher spending.

The numbers so far

Between January and November 2024, the country welcomed 22.5 million tourists, surpassing 2023's total of 20.14 million, but, still 7% below pre-pandemic levels for the same period in 2019.

Singapore has been the top source market for Malaysia with over 8 million visitors, followed by Indonesia with 3.2 million arrivals,

and China with more than 3 million arrivals.

Malaysia has set a target to attract 4.7 million Indonesian tourists in 2026.

The 3 million Chinese arrivals in the first 11 months of 2024 to Malaysia reflect growth of almost 133% compared to the previous year, Tourism Malaysia reported on Monday.

"The visa-free policy which is now extended until December 2026 together with the growing connectivity between Malaysia and China are expected to further boost these numbers," the tourism board said.

Elsewhere, India emerged as a standout contributor, with over 1 million arrivals during the first 11 months of 2024, marking a 72% increase from 2023 and a 47% growth from 2019 levels.

Skift earlier reported that in its first significant outreach effort since 2017, Tourism Malaysia in December launched The Malaysia Mix campaign to attract U.S. and Canadian travelers to the country.

In October, Malaysia and Thailand also launched a new self-drive tourism initiative for cross-border tourists.

India has become a critical market for Malaysia's tourism following the introduction of visa-free entry for Indian travelers in December 2023. Last month the government decided to extend the 30-day visa exemption for Indian nationals until December 2026.

(Source: Skift)

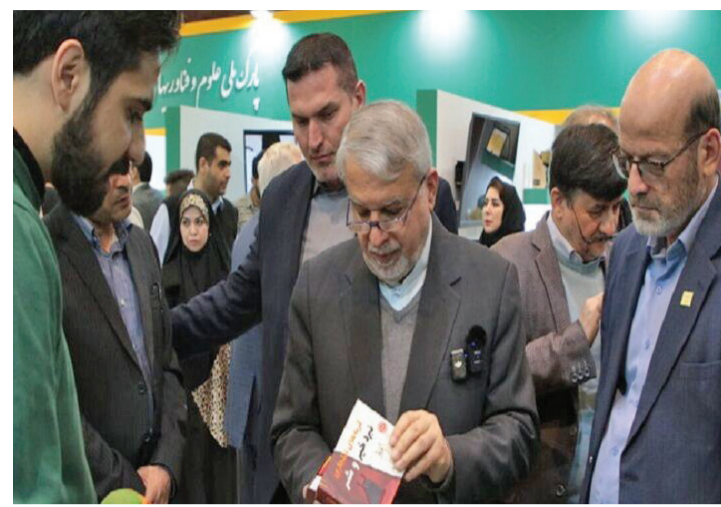
Tourism ministry adds division dedicated to AI

From Page 1 ▶ The minister added that a recent directive by the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution mandates every ministry to establish a dedicated AI structure.

AI to transform handicraft exports

The minister highlighted AI's potential to revolutionize various sectors under the ministry's purview, particularly the handicrafts industry. He noted that Iran's annual handicraft exports currently stand at about \$250 million, with an additional \$250 million in informal "suitcase" exports. However, the global market for handicrafts is valued at \$770 billion, underscoring a significant opportunity for growth.

"By making the best use of advanced technologies and contemporary knowledge, we can increase our share of global mar-



kets and exports," Salehi-Amiri said. He stressed the need for high-quality production, sustained innovation, and the removal of barriers to the export of knowledge-based products.

Moreover, the minister praised the efforts of the Supreme Coun-

cil of the Cultural Revolution, the Science and Technology Park, and the University of Science and Culture for their bold steps in supporting this critical initiative.

Exhibition highlights

The third exhibition, running from January 6 to 8, showcases

the services, products, and capabilities of creative companies and startups in soft technologies and cultural industries.

It also facilitates connections between financial and investment funds and innovative enterprises while offering opportunities for experience-sharing among technology ecosystem stakeholders.

Following the official opening, Salehi-Amiri toured the exhibition, engaging with participants and exhibitors to discuss their contributions and challenges.

The Islamic Republic expects to reap a bonanza from its numerous tourist spots such as bazaars, museums, mosques, bridges, bathhouses, madrasas, mausoleums, churches, towers, and mansions, of which 28 being inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage list.

Centuries-old carpets and a mystery unveiled at Golestan Palace

TEHRAN - In an unveiling ceremony held at the iconic Shams-ol-Emareh edifice within the UNESCO-registered Golestan Palace, researchers presented 20 historical carpets selected from a collection some of which shed light on a long-standing mystery surrounding the palace's architectural history.

Speaking at the event on Monday, Touraj Jouleh, a renowned researcher and expert in Iranian handwoven carpets, detailed documentation and analysis of the palace's carpets have revealed that Golestan Palace once featured three Ayeneh (Mirror) Halls, each adorned with its own custom-made carpet. Of these halls, only one remains intact today.

Jouleh shared his findings during the event, which marked the debut display of around 20 carpets from the palace's treasure trove. He explained that Golestan Palace houses 343 handwoven pieces, with 25 carpets meticulously documented so far. Among them is an impressive 110-square-meter carpet once used in the Ayeneh Hall, which has since been retired from public display.

Rediscovery of lost halls

The research revealed that the second Ayeneh Hall belonged to a structure called the "Emarat-e Khorouji" (Exit Edifice), ordered for demolition by Naser al-Din Shah Qajar after his return from Europe.

Jouleh noted that a unique carpet from this hall, preserved in Golestan Palace, offers a tangible link to the now-lost structure.

The third Ayeneh Hall, identified through the study of Shams-ol-Emareh's architectural remnants, also had a custom carpet. Researchers are currently documenting this piece, with plans to unveil their findings soon.

Historical connections and international interest

Jouleh highlighted the global significance of the research. Articles based on this documentation have been published internation-



ally, sparking collaboration with museums worldwide.

For example, a Bakhtiari carpet documented at Golestan was found to have a matching pair in Tehran's bazaar and a third version housed in a Pennsylvania museum.

Further discoveries include exquisite carpets from south Khorasan and Malayer, known for their intricate patterns and historical ties to royal commissions. One standout piece, potentially Naser al-Din Shah's personal prayer rug, reflects the exceptional craftsmanship of its time.

Public exhibition and preservation efforts

The exhibition also celebrates the reopening of Shams-ol-Emareh after six months of renovations. Displayed on the edifice's first floor, the 20 featured carpets will remain accessible to visitors until the end of the year (March 20).

As Jouleh emphasized, accurate documentation and preservation are vital for maintaining Iran's cultural heritage. The ongoing efforts aim to make the Golestan Palace carpet collection accessible to researchers and enthusiasts worldwide.

As mentioned by organizers, the unveiling not only reintroduces the historical treasures of Golestan Palace but also invites deeper exploration into its forgotten architectural wonders.

Glimpses of Persian carpet

Persian carpets are sought after internationally, with patterns of Persian garden being arguably the most characteristic feature of them all. Weavers spend several months in front of a loom, stringing and knotting thousands of threads. Some practice established patterns. Some make their own.

Each Persian carpet is a scene that seems ageless, a procedure that can take as long as a year. These efforts have long put Iran's carpets among the most complex and labor-intensive handicrafts in the world. When the weaving is finally done, the carpet is cut, washed, and put out in the sun to dry.

Throughout history, invaders, politicians, and even enemies have left their impact on Iran's carpets. As mentioned by the Britannica Encyclopedia, little is known about Persian carpet-making before the 15th century, when art was already approaching a peak.

Golestan Palace

One of the top things to do in the Iranian capital is visiting the most magnificent historical monument downtown; the UNESCO-registered Golestan Palace.

This majestic complex was once the official residence of the Qajar monarchs who ruled the country between 1789 and 1925. It displays a remarkable mixture of ancient Persian and contemporary European architectural styles, which characterized much of Iranian art in the 19th and 20th centuries.

UNESCO states that the complex showcases the architectural and artistic achievements of the Qajar era, highlighting the integration of European motifs and styles into traditional Persian art.

Archaeologists discover Charles XII's hidden transport route in Sweden

Archaeologists from the Norwegian Institute for Cultural Heritage Research (NIKU) have uncovered traces of the hidden Galärvegen route. King Charles XII of Sweden used this path to move war galleys over land in 1718.

This discovery, made with help from Bohuslans Museum, the Vienna Institute for Archaeological Science (VIAS), and Arkeologerna, gives us new insights into one of Sweden's boldest military moves during the Great Northern War.

In 1718, Sweden's King Charles XII came up with a bold plan to transport twelve big warships, each weighing up to 30 tons, overland from Stromstad to Idd-efjorden. This operation is known as Galärvegen or the "Galley Road." It was part of an attempt to surprise the Fredriksten Fortress at Halden, Norway. The fortress, a key military stronghold on the border, had successfully repelled previous Swedish attempts to capture it. By moving his ships over land, Charles XII hoped to bypass a blockade at the fjord's entrance and launch a

surprise attack from the sea.

The scale of this operation was huge: 800 soldiers worked hard to move the galleys across 25 kilometers of tough land. They used pulleys, hoists, blocks, horses, and greased logs to complete the operation. Moving such big ships was hard, but they did it really well.

Researchers found Galärvegen in December 2024 during a georadar project at Blomsholm in Bohuslan Sweden. The team started by looking for signs of prehistoric settlements and old ship settings. But when they used the new AutoMIRA georadar system, they uncovered evidence of the 1718 transport route. The georadar showed several parallel straight structures,

which experts think are the remains of timber logs. Workers put these logs down to stabilize

the ground for the heavy galleys. These traces stretch over 160 meters.

Owzan Co., affiliated with TPICO Pharmaceutical Holding, intends to hold a tender for the supply of 5000 kg of medical Silver Mercury with 99.99% purity through a competitive bidding process among qualified companies. Qualified applicants are invited to send their Certificate of Analysis (COA) and commercial proposals separately (two distinct emails) by **19.01.2025 at 11:00 PM** via email to the following address:
 Email: tender@owzan.com
 We look forward to receiving your proposals.

Iran-Iraq academic ties to enhance sustainable development: official

TEHRAN – The cultural attaché of Iraq in Iran, Yasser Abdul Zahra Al-Hajjaj, has highlighted the significance of boosting academic cooperation between Iranian and Iraqi universities as an important way to enhance sustainable development.

“Scientific interactions among the universities of the two countries will not only deepen the relations but also play a pivotal role in enhancing sustainable development in the two countries,” the ministry of science quoted Al-Hajjaj as saying.

The official made the remarks on Monday while paying a visit to Hazrat-e Masoumeh University in Qom.

Highlighting the importance of strategic cooperation between Iran and Iraq, Al-Hajjaj said, “The scientific and cultural collaborations should create a brighter future for the two nations while maintaining or expanding common interests.”

The official proposed expanding cooperation in certain fields such as media, art, humanities, and modern technologies, as well as conducting joint seminars, short-term courses, and science projects.

The president of Hazrat-e Masoumeh University, Maryam Bordbar, for her part, underscored the high capabilities of the university and announced the university's readiness to foster cooperation with Iraqi universities in different social, cultural and scientific fields through exchanging students,



professors, and holding scientific conferences.

Currently, the university has signed ten memoranda of understanding with Iraqi universities.

Iran has capacity for more Iraqi students

In December 2024, an official with the Iranian science ministry said the country's universities hold the capacity to accept more Iraqi students.

Omid Rezaei-Far also highlighted the importance of developing scientific and technological relations between the two neighboring countries.

He made the remarks during a meeting in Tehran with Haider Abd Dahed, the Iraqi deputy minister of higher education, IRNA reported.

The Iraqi official, for his part, said visiting Iran's scientific, technological, and innovative activities

can be a good experience for Iraqi students.

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

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

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

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

In a meeting held on August 21, 2024, in Iraq, officials from Iran and Iraq highlighted the need to expand educational and research collaborations between the two countries.

During the meeting, the head of the Leader of the Islamic Revolution's office for universities, Mostafa Rostami, and Iraqi Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research, Naeem Al-Aboudi, explored potential ways to foster scientific cooperation between Iranian and Iraqi universities, IRNA reported.

Stressing the significance of enhancing cooperation in higher education, Al-Aboudi expressed Iraq's interest in utilizing Iran's educational expertise and experiences to improve its educational system.

Rostami, for his part, underscored the central role of universities in strengthening cultural and scientific relations between the two nations.

The official voiced Iran's readiness to share its knowledge and experiences with Iraq. Rostami went on to suggest conducting shared short-term research and educational courses for both students and professors. He further called for increasing the exchange of students and professors.

Should we be worried about HMPV? expert explains

TEHRAN –Following the outbreak of human metapneumovirus (HMPV) in China which has sparked concerns worldwide, the secretary of the association of infectious and tropical diseases experts has provided some explanations about the situation as well as current common respiratory diseases in Iran.

“China is undergoing an increase in the number of infectious cases with severe respiratory symptoms, particularly affecting children and the elderly. However, it should be noted that there is nothing to worry about,” ILNA quoted Amitis Ramezani as saying.

“Several factors, including mycoplasma pneumonia, metapneumovirus, influenza, and new strains of coronavirus, as well as winter have contributed to the rise in cases of severe respiratory disease detected in China,” she highlighted.

“HMPV have cold-like symptoms including cough, runny nose, and mild fever.

Rarely, the virus causes severe lower respiratory tract conditions, including bronchitis, pneumonia, and asthma exacerbations.

Pneumonia is most common in children and elderly people, but it does not cause much problem in adults and young people,” Ramezani further noted.

The expert went on to say that there has been no report of HMPV cases in our country so far, there are only different cases of influenza which is common in the winter.

HMPV is not a new virus, discovered in 2001, it belongs to the Pneumoviridae family, which also includes Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV).

However, serological studies suggest that the virus has been present in humans for over 60 years and is globally distributed.

No global health emergency on HMPV

The World Health Organization (WHO) has not flagged the outbreak of Human Metapneumovirus (HMPV) in any country as a health emergency, so there is no need to worry, an official with the ministry of health, has said.

The official made the remarks on Sunday following the recent reports and social media posts suggesting that the virus is spreading rapidly across China. Some claim that hospitals and crematoriums are overwhelmed by the influx of patients.

Videos circulating online show crowded hospitals, with users reporting multiple viruses, including Influenza A, HMPV, Mycoplasma pneumoniae, and Covid-19, as the culprits behind the surge in respiratory illnesses.

Reports indicate that the spike in HMPV cases has led to a notable increase in sudden deaths, particularly affecting individuals aged 40 to 80.

HMPV can cause both upper and lower respiratory diseases in people of all ages, with young children, older adults, and those with weakened immune systems being most vulnerable.

“According to the International Health Regulations (IHR), if a disease is widespread in a region, it must be reported to the World Health Organization, then the organization will determine whether or not a particular event constitutes a public health emergency of international concern,” health ministry's website quoted Qobad Moradi as saying.

Observing personal hygiene, wearing masks, and washing hands continuously can greatly contribute to the control and prevention of infectious diseases, particularly respiratory and seasonal diseases, he noted.

HMPV often causes symptoms similar to the common cold, including cough, fever, stuffy or runny nose, sore throat, wheezing, shortness of breath, and rashes.

However, the risk of severe illness is higher for people who are younger than five or older than 65, with those cases taking longer to recover from. Unlike Covid-19, there is no vaccine or specific antiviral treatment for HMPV; treatment primarily involves managing symptoms.

Like other similar viruses, HMPV usually spreads from person to person through droplets from coughing and sneezing, through human contact such as hugging or kissing, and through touching surfaces and objects contaminated with the virus and then the mouth, nose or eyes.

Experts caution against the use of antiviral drugs to treat HMPV. In an interview with the state-backed National Business Daily, a respiratory expert in Shanghai warned against blindly using antiviral medications, as no vaccine exists for HMPV, and its symptoms often resemble those of a common cold.

In 2023, HMPV cases were reported in the Netherlands, Britain, Finland, Australia, Canada, the US, and China.

Normal, lower-than-normal rainfall projected for next six weeks

TEHRAN – According to Metrological Organization, average precipitation is forecast to be normal and less than normal in the next six weeks, from January 6 to February 18.

In the first week, January 6 to 12, rainfall is less than normal in Gilan, and Ardabil provinces, and in some areas of the middle and northern Zagros. There is a low chance of rain or no rain in other regions of the country.

The average air temperature is predicted to be normal in the east, and southeast. It will reach 3°C less than normal in some central parts of the country, and 1-5 °C above normal in other areas.

The highest temperature (3-5 °C) will be recorded in the northwest, the middle and northern Zagros, and the southern slopes of the Alborz and the north-eastern strip.

In the second week, the northern half of the country is predicted to receive more rainfall; the precipitations in Zagros, Alborz, north-west and north-east will be within the normal range, but it will be less than normal in the south and south-east.

Accumulated rainfall is predicted to amount to 50 to 100 mm in some parts of the middle Zagros and the western part of the country.

The air temperature, during the second week, will be 1 to 5°C above normal with the highest increase (3-5 °C) to occur in the northern half of the country.

During the third week, the rainfall in the center and northern half of the country is expected to be normal, while in the southern half, it tends to be less than normal. The air temperature is projected to be 1 to 3 °C above normal.

The amount of rainfall in the fourth week will tend to be above normal in the Caspian coast and Ardabil province, less than normal in the center, southwest, and southern parts, and normal in other regions. The air temperature will get 1 to 3 °C above normal in provinces located in southern parts of the country, and normal in other areas.

In the fifth week, precipitations will be less than normal in the provinces located in the west, and southwest, less than normal in the south and east, and normal in other areas.



Rainfall, in the sixth week, is forecast to be less than normal in the southwest, south, and southeast of the country, above normal in the Caspian coast, and normal in other areas.

The temperature in the fifth and sixth weeks will be normal in most regions; it will get 1-2 °C above normal in the south, southeast, and southwest.

Since the beginning of the current water year (September 23, 2024), precipitations have dropped by 42 percent compared to the long-term average, according to Metrological Organization.

The accumulated rainfall in the current water year has amounted to 38.4 mm which indicates a 42-percent decrease in comparison to the long-term average rainfall of 66.4 mm, ISNA reported.

The average precipitations from December 24 to 30 totaled 4.2 mm, showing about a 17.3 percent decrease compared to 5 mm in the long term.

From the beginning of the winter, average rainfall equaled 4.5 mm. Compared to the 7.3 mm rainfall recorded in the long term, it has dropped by 38.8 percent.

Apart from Mazandaran and Kordestan provinces, the amount of precipitation in other provinces has been less than normal.

Hormozgan province recording 6.3 mm of rainfall has experienced an 85.6 percent decline in precipitations, compared to 42.2 mm recorded in average long-term.

Rainfall in Tehran has also lowered. From September 23 to December 30, 2024, the average precipitation came to 53.8 mm, decreasing by 32.4 mm compared to 79.5 mm rain recorded in the long.

Combating wildfires necessitates stricter laws

TEHRAN – Wildfires in forests and pastures have increased by 27 percent in terms of frequency, and 299 percent in terms of affected areas from the beginning of the current Iranian year (March 20, 2024) till June 21, 2024, compared to the same period in the year before.

Accordingly, it is essential to legislate strict laws to mitigate fires in forests and pastures, IRNA reported.

In recent years, fire has been one of the main factors devastating large parts of forests and pastures in the world and Iran bringing along severe consequences such as loss of biodiversity, emission of CO2, global warming, and climate change which worsen wildfires.

A review of the occurred wildfires over the last decade shows that more than 90 percent of the wildfires in the country are caused by humans, indicating the ineffectiveness of laws on the protection and preservation of forests and pastures, hunting and fishing, as well as clean air law.

According to the Natural Resources and Watershed Management Organization, from 2007 to 2019, wildfires have imposed a loss of nearly 17 thousand billion rials (about 26 million dollars), while some 211 million rials (about 3,240 dollars) were spent on extinguishing fires in each hectare, and 240 million rials (around 3,690 dollars) were spent on the restoration of



the burned forests.

Fires, unlike other natural hazards, can be controlled and mitigated, as well as prevented through adopting preventive measures and policies.

A comparative study of the laws in Iran, France, Turkey, and South Africa shows that, in general, fighting fires in forests and pastures can be classified into three main parts, including measures to be taken before, during, and after the fire.

Hence, it is necessary to pass a specific law on combating wildfires in forests and pastures or simply add an amendment titled ‘protection’ (against fire, pests, diseases, and climate change) to the existing law on the protection and preservation of forests and pastures.

ENGLISH IN USE

LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

Iran reopens schools under strict health protocols

Over 15 million students attended schools nationwide on Saturday for the new school year under strict health protocols to protect teachers, staff, and students against the coronavirus pandemic.

The opening bell of the new academic year was rung symbolically by President Hassan Rouhani at a girls' high school in downtown Tehran.

Education Minister Mohsen Haji Mirzaei said this year, education is followed in three forms of in-person, virtual, and television-based, but our priority is school attendance, he noted, highlighting, all schools should strictly follow the health regulations so that the students are protected.

بازگشایی مدارس با پروتکل های سختگیرانه بهداشتی

بیش از ۱۵ میلیون دانش آموز سال تحصیلی جدید را با رعایت پروتکل های سختگیرانه بهداشتی آغاز کردند.

رنگ آغاز سال تحصیلی به صورت ارتباط تصویری در مراسمی به دستور حسن روحانی رئیس جمهور در دبیرستانی در تهران نواخته شد.

محسن حاجی میرزایی وزیر آموزش و پرورش در این مراسم گفت: امسال آموزش دانش آموزان به سه شکل حضوری، مجازی، و تلویزیونی دنبال می‌شود، اما اولویت ما آموزش حضوری دانش آموزان است. او افزود: همه مدارس باید شیوه نامه‌های بهداشتی را به طور جدی رعایت کنند تا مشکلی برای دانش آموزان پیش نیاید.



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JANUARY 8, 2025

GUIDE TO SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

God must be thanked for every blessing, and he who is thankful, receives more blessings, and he who neglects it, endangers that blessing and may soon lose it.
Imam Ali (AS)

Prayer Times > Noon:12:11 Evening: 17:28 Dawn: 5:46 (tomorrow) Sunrise: 7:15 (tomorrow)

Iranian Artists Forum to show Uberto Pasolini's "The Return"

TEHRAN-The 2024 drama film "The Return" directed by Uberto Pasolini will be screened at the Iranian Artists Forum (IAF) in Tehran on Thursday.

The Nasser hall of the IAF will show the movie, a joint production of Italy, the U.S., and the U.K., at 5 p.m. with Persian subtitle, ILNA reported.

Starring Ralph Fiennes and Juliette Binoche, the film is a retelling of the last sections of Homer's "Odyssey" as adapted by Edward Bond, John Collee, and Pasolini.

It premiered in the Gala section at the Toronto International Film Festival on September 7, 2024, and was theatrically released on December 6, 2024, in the United States.

After 20 years away, Odysseus (Ralph Fiennes) washes up on the shores of Ithaca, haggard and unrecognizable. The King has returned from the Trojan War, but much has changed in his kingdom. His beloved wife Penelope (Juliette Binoche) is a prisoner in her own home, hounded by suitors vying to be king.

Their son Telemachus faces death at the hands of these suitors, who see him as merely an obstacle to their pursuit of the kingdom. Odysseus has also changed—scarred by his experience of the Trojan War, he is no longer the mighty warrior from years past—but he must rediscover his strength in order to win back all that he has lost.

The "Odyssey" is one of two major ancient Greek epic poems attributed to Homer. It is one of the oldest works of literature still widely read by modern audiences. Like the "Iliad," the "Odyssey" is divided into 24 books.

It follows the Greek hero Odysseus, king of Ithaca, and his journey home after the Trojan War. After the war, which lasted ten years, his journey from Troy to Ithaca, via Africa and southern Europe, lasted for 10 additional years during which time he encountered many perils and all of his crewmates were killed. In his absence, Odysseus was assumed dead, and his wife Penelope and son Telemachus had to contend with a group of unruly suitors who were competing for Penelope's hand in marriage.

The "Odyssey" was originally composed in Homeric Greek in around the 8th or 7th century BC and, by the mid-6th century BC, had become part of the Greek literary canon.

Crucial themes in the poem include the ideas of nostos (return), wandering, xenia (guest-friendship), testing, and omens. Scholars still reflect on the narrative significance of certain groups in the poem, such as women and slaves, who have a more prominent role in the epic than in many other works of ancient literature. This focus is especially remarkable when contrasted with the Iliad, which centers on the exploits of soldiers and kings during the Trojan War.

The "Odyssey" is regarded as one of the most significant works of the Western canon. The first English translation of the "Odyssey" was in the 16th century. Adaptations and re-imaginings continue to be produced across a wide variety of media.

Uberto Pasolini, 67, is an Italian film producer, director, and former investment banker known for producing the 1997 film "The Full Monty" and directing and producing the 2008 film "Machan" and the 2013 film "Still Life".

Six Iranian films to participate in India's Third Eye Asian Film Festival

TEHRAN-Six feature films from Iran will take part in the 21st Third Eye Asian Film Festival, slated for January 10 to 16 in Mumbai, India.

Five of the Iranian films will be screened in the Asian Spectrum section and one movie is set to be shown in the Asian Masters section, Honaronline reported.

The Iranian participants in the Asian Spectrum section include "In the Arms of the Tree" directed by Babak Khajepasha, "Leila's Brothers" by Saeed Rustayi, "Sima's Unfinished Narration" by Alireza Samadi, "Hook" by Hossein Rigi, and "Captain" by Mohammad Hamzei.

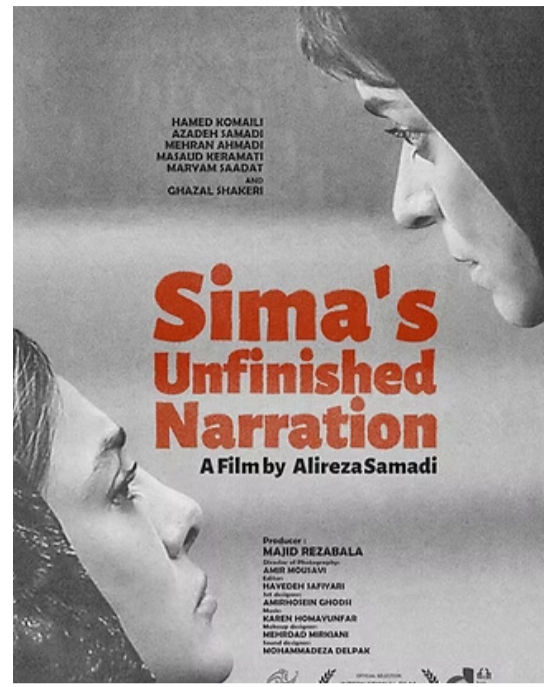
"In the Arms of the Tree" tells the story of Kimia and Farid, a couple married for 12 years, whose life crisis shatters their children's world, children who know nothing but simplicity and kindness in life.

Maral Baniadam, Javad Ghamati, Rouhollah Zamani, Ahoura Lotfi, and Rayan Lotfi are in the cast among others.

In "Leila's Brothers," Leila has been the strong backbone of her family her whole life, taking care of her aging parents and four floundering brothers. Now 40, unmarried, and the only one with a job, she's stuck supporting them all, until a longshot business opportunity emerges that could be the family's salvation. Leila and her brothers come up with a plan that just might get them out of poverty—but their father's pride stands in the way.

The film stars Taraneh Ali-dooosti, Navid Mohammadzadeh, Saeed Poursamimi, Payman Maadi, and Farhad Aslani.

In "Sima's Unfinished Narration," Dr. Arash Samin, one of the prominent professors in the field of sociology, lives a calm and peaceful life with his doctor



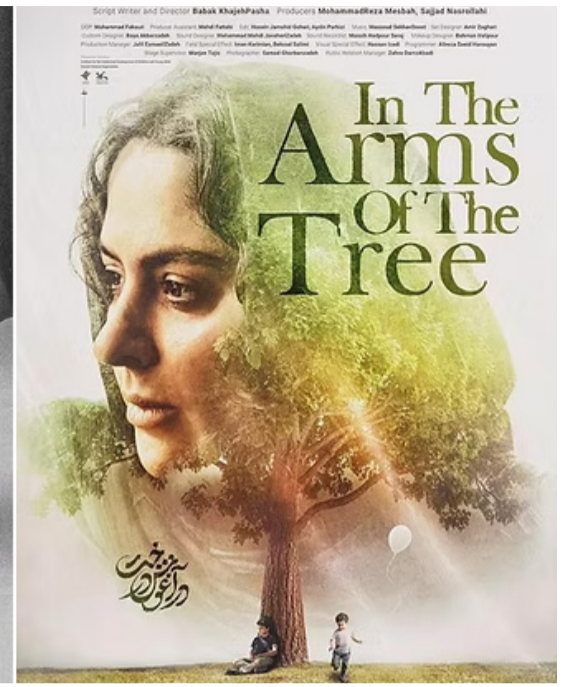
wife and young daughter. But the publication of a picture of him in cyberspace puts his personal and family life on a new path.

The cast includes Mehran Ahmadi, Ali Ashmand, Mahsa Bavafa, Sadaf Fathi, Mohammad Heidari, Masoud Karamati, Hamed Komaily, Maryam Saadat, Azadeh Samadi, and Ghazal Shakeri.

"Hook" is about Shir Khan, a boy who embarks on a journey to become a champion in the sport of boxing. However, various challenges and incidents make his path to achieving his dream quite difficult.

Amir Jafari, Roya Teymourian, Amir Mahdi Jule, Alireza Jafari, Ali Ousivand, and Mahtab Servati are in the cast among others.

"Captain" is about an 11-year-old boy named Isa who is absolutely convinced that he will soon be playing for the Iran national football team. Nothing can shake his confidence. Not even the fact that he lives in the cancer section of a hospital and gets weaker



from treatment to treatment. The film has Pejman Bazeghi, Pante'a Panahiha, Amirhossein Bayat, Bahar Noughian, Arghavan Shabani, Shayan Derampour, and Parham Gholamlou in the cast among others.

Moreover, the 1997 family drama film "Children of Heaven" written and directed by renowned Iranian filmmaker Majid Majidi will be shown at the Asian Masters section.

The plot follows a brother and sister, and their adventures over a lost pair of shoes. When young Ali accidentally loses the only pair of shoes his little sister Zahra owns, the siblings attempt to hide the bad news from their poverty-stricken father and ill mother. They devise a scheme to share Ali's own pair of worn sneakers until they can find a new pair of shoes for Zahra. When he can't, Ali tries a new way to "win" a new pair.

Amir Farrokh Hashemian, Bahare Seddiqi, Reza Naji, Fereshteh Sarabandi, and Dariush Mokhtari

are in the cast among others. Asia is the world's largest continent. It is also the world's most diverse - in cultural and artistic traditions. As such Asia presents rich and multitudinous themes for the cinematic creations. Many Asian countries today have a proud and well-developed tradition in filmmaking. India itself is a prime example as the country produces the largest number of films each year in various regional languages.

Asian Film Foundation has taken initiative to create adequate awareness and appreciation of Asian cinema. Third Eye Asian Film Festival is a major event organized by Asian Film Foundation to showcase Asian cinema and honor the artists who devote their life to cinema.

The festival seeks to show globally-appreciated Asian films to the audience of Mumbai and other cities of Maharashtra. The first edition of the festival was held in 2002.

Tehran art exhibition to celebrate birth of Imam Ali (AS)

TEHRAN- On the occasion of the birth of Imam Ali (AS) and Father's Day, which falls on January 14 this year, an art exhibition will be held at the Imam Ali (AS) Religious Arts Museum in Tehran.

The exhibition, featuring 110 pieces from the museum's treasure trove—including

paintings, calligraphy, and traditional coffee-house art—will be inaugurated on Thursday, ISNA reported.

The exhibition will showcase works by prominent Iranian artists, including Reza Bakhshi, Nasser Palangi, Anne Mohammad Tatari, Ali Taraghijah, Jamshid Haqiqatshenas,

Rezvan Sadeqzadeh, Kamyar Sadeqi, Gholamali Taheri, Keyvan Asgari, Mohsen Noori Najafi, Susan Vaziri, and Hassan Yaguti.

The common theme of all the works is the love and devotion the artists hold for Imam Ali (AS).

The exhibition will run until January 24.

Tehran cultural center to host Armenian Music Night

TEHRAN- An Armenian Music Night will be held at the Arsbaran Cultural Center in Tehran on Tuesday evening to mark the beginning of the year 2025.

Renowned Iranian artists are set to attend the event, including Fe-

reydoun Khoshnoud (composer), Vigen Davoudi (founder of Studio Pop), Sharareh Dolatabadi (veteran actress), Hamid Askari (faculty member at the University of Arts), Vartan Sahakian (musician), Davood Heidari (actor and singer), Ani Ar-

zumanian (daughter of musician Andre), Shahryar Kohanzad, Omid Hojjat, Andre Moradian (pianist), Babak Reyahi, Masoud Homayouni, Majid Behbahani, Pouria Heidari, Homayoun Aramfar, Armen Keshishi, and Babak Radmanesh.

The program will include musical performances, the unveiling of the winter issue of the magazine "Ba Taraneh," and a video message from Artush (a veteran Armenian singer).

Attendance is free and open to all interested.

Cartoon of Day



Being a Child in Palestine!
 Cartoonist: Mikail Çiftçi from Turkey

John Williams' "Stoner" at Iranian bookstores

TEHRAN- "Stoner," a novel by American author John Edward Williams has recently been published in Persian.

Translated by Marjan Mohammadi, the book has been published by Amut Publications in Tehran.

"Stoner" tells the story of William Stoner, born in 1891 on a small farm in Missouri. His father's suggestion to study agriculture leads Stoner to the University of Missouri, where a required literature course ignites his passion for literary studies.

Without informing his parents, he switches to humanities, ultimately pursuing a Master's degree in English and becoming a professor. As World War I looms, Stoner remains focused on his studies while his friends enlist, facing the tragic loss of one and the transformation of another.

Stoner's personal life is fraught with struggle. After marrying Edith, a woman plagued by emotional instability and resentment for sacrificing her dreams, their relationship quickly deteriorates. Edith's brief period of enthusiasm for motherhood fades after their daughter Grace is born, leading her to retreat into depression. Stoner increasingly bears the burdens of parenting alone, nurturing his bond with Grace amidst Edith's emotional



warfare to keep them apart.

In the academic realm, Stoner faces conflicts with colleagues, particularly Professor Hollis Lomax, who seeks revenge after Stoner fails a dishonest student, Charles Walker. Despite these challenges, Stoner's dedication to teaching earns him respect within the department. However, he finds solace and a fleeting romance with Katherine Driscoll, a younger instructor. Their affair, which briefly revitalizes Stoner's spirit, ultimately ends to protect their careers, and Katherine quietly leaves, deepening Stoner's sense of loss.

As the years pass, Stoner becomes a respected figure, yet his home life remains strained. Grace's tumultuous journey leads her to marry young, only to be widowed be-

fore their child is born. Stoner sees his daughter develop an alcohol dependency, echoing the cycles of unhappiness he has witnessed in both her and Edith.

In his later years, facing mortality, Stoner reflects on his life, evaluating his perceived failures as a husband and father. His relationship with Grace is fraught with sadness, leaving him to mourn the loss of the joyful child he once cherished.

Ultimately, as Stoner observes a new generation of students outside his window, he clings to the hope that his legacy may transcend his personal disappointments. In his solitude, he passes away, dropping the one book he published, symbolizing both his academic contributions and the bittersweet culmination of his unremarkable yet profoundly human life.

Originally published in 1965, "Stoner" was later reissued in 1972, 2003, and 2006, with an introduction by John McGahern. Initially overlooked at its release, "Stoner" experienced a resurgence in popularity and critical acclaim in the 2000s, receiving endorsements from prominent authors like Julian Barnes, Ian McEwan, Bret Easton Ellis, and John McGahern, solidifying its status as a modern classic.