

IRGC Chief:

Iran to Unveil New Missile and Drone Cities



As part of an ongoing nationwide drill, 110,000 Basij forces join Tehran parade

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Iran security chief urges Armenian PM to solve problems locally during Yerevan visit

TEHRAN – During a visit to Yerevan, the Secretary of Iran’s Supreme National Security Council told Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan that regional countries should resolve their issues independently, without relying on foreign powers.

“The presence of extra-regional and foreign forces complicates the political and security equations of the region and will not help resolve issues,” Ali Akbar Ahmadian said during a meeting on Thursday.

Ahmadian visited Yerevan after a meeting with Azeri President Ilham Aliyev in Baku. The two countries located in the South Caucasus have been locked in a decades-long territorial dispute.

Both, particularly Baku, seem unwilling to lay down their arms. During a recent interview with state TV, the president called Armenia a “fascist state,” claiming that Azerbaijan might have no other choice but to “destroy” its neighbor’s so-called “fascist ideology.”

During the Thursday meeting, Ahmadian also spoke about bilateral ties between Iran and Armenia. ▶ Page 2

Iranian agriculture minister visits Ankara for bilateral co-op meetings

TEHRAN – Iran’s Minister of Agriculture Gholamreza Nouri Qezeljah and Samad Hasanzadeh, the head of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines, and Agriculture (ICCIMA), departed for Turkey alongside a delegation of agricultural and food industry professionals.

As reported, the agriculture minister and his accompanying delegation also attended an Iran-Turkey Agricultural Business Forum on Friday, January 10, in Ankara.

The events featured Nouri Qezeljah, Hasanzadeh, Hossein Pirmoazen, the deputy head of the Iran Chamber of Commerce, senior Agriculture Ministry officials, and private sector representatives.

Discussions focused on addressing trade barriers, fostering bilateral ties, and enhancing export potentials.

Nouri Qezeljah will also meet Turkish government officials, while Hasanzadeh will hold bilateral talks with Rifat Hisarcikloglu, President of the Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Turkey.

Speaking at a gathering of Iranian agricultural professionals in Ankara, Nouri Qezeljah stated that the government’s resolve to support private sector growth, removing obstacles to agricultural and food exports remains a top priority. ▶ Page 4

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Yemeni army targets US aircraft carrier in Red Sea

Yemen’s Ansarullah movement said in a statement on Friday that it has launched a missile attack on the USS Harry S. Truman aircraft carrier in the northern Red Sea and has fired three bomb-laden drones at Tel Aviv.

“We carried out several military operations during the past 48 hours, the most prominent of which was targeting the American aircraft carrier USS Harry S. Truman and a number of its escorts in the northern Red Sea, using cruise missiles and drones,” Yemeni military spokesperson Yahya Sarea said in the statement aired by al-Masirah TV.

“The operation succeeded in thwarting a new air attack from that carrier, which was forced to leave the area,” he noted. This is the second time in nearly a week that the Yemeni army claimed to have targeted the US aircraft carrier in the Red Sea.

Sarea added that the Yemeni army also carried out an attack on several targets in Tel Aviv with three drones on Thursday, claiming those drones hit the targets “successfully.”

He reiterated that the Ansarullah attacks against Israel would not stop until “aggression ends on the Gaza Strip and the siege is lifted.”

The Lancet: Deaths from Israeli attacks in Gaza undercounted by 41 percent

By Wesam Bahrani

TEHRAN – Research published in The Lancet reveals significant underreporting of the Gaza death toll due to the US-backed genocidal Israeli war.

Researchers from the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, Yale University, and other institutions estimate that the Palestinian Ministry of Health undercounted deaths by 41% between October 7, 2023, and June 30, 2024.

While the Gaza Health Ministry reported 37,877 deaths, the study estimates 64,260 Palestinians were killed during this period.

The findings highlight that 59% of the fatalities were women, children, and the elderly, underscoring the devastating impact on civilians by mostly US-made munitions.

The study further estimates that approximately 3% of Gaza’s population has been killed due to violence during the nine months analyzed.

Charity begins at home: LA wildfires rage as US funds Gaza genocide

By Shahrokh Saei

TEHRAN – The administration of US President Joe Biden is under fire over its handling of the devastating wildfires which continue to rage across Southern California.

According to CBS News, the Palisades Fire has burned nearly 20,000 acres since it broke out Tuesday morning in the affluent Pacific Palisades neighborhood of Los Angeles. The wildfire presently ranks as the most extensive in the Los Angeles area. It grew out of a brush fire that exploded as powerful winds ripped through the region.

The US news outlet said on Friday that firefighters were still battling the Eaton Fire, which trails the Palisades Fire in size and has engulfed more than 13,000 acres in northern Los Angeles County. Thousands of structures have so far been destroyed and hundreds of thousands of people have been ordered to evacuate.

The deadly infernos are on track to be among the most devastating and the costliest in the US history.

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Makkoran Coast is a potential platform for Iran’s development, tourism minister says

TEHRAN – The Makkoran Coast, which is located in Sistan-Baluchestan province, stands among the finest coastal regions in the world and serves as a significant platform for Iran’s development, said Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts, Seyyed Reza Salehi-Amiri, on Thursday.

Speaking on the sidelines of the Iranian President’s visit to the southeastern province, Salehi-Amiri highlighted the critical role of infrastructure in the country’s progress.

“Infrastructure in the country operates on multiple levels,” he stated, adding, “The first level includes essential utilities such as roads, water, electricity, and gas. ▶ Page 6



Projects inaugurated in president, ministers visit to Sistan-Baluchestan

TEHRAN – President Masoud Pezeshkian arrived in Chabahar port city for a two-day visit to the southeastern Sistan-Baluchestan province, his second trip to the region in less than two months.

This visit highlights his administration’s focus on addressing inequality, fostering development in underprivileged areas, and leveraging the province’s strategic significance.

During the trip, Pezeshkian stressed his commitment to eradicating poverty and injustice, describing Sistan-Baluchestan as a critical starting point for the country’s broader growth strategy. ▶ Page 4

Hezbollah’s sudden endorsement of Aoun’s election is a political victory



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TEHRAN PAPERS

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

Do not trust the Zionist regime!

In an analysis, Kayhan addressed Ilham Aliyev's unjust accusations against the Islamic Republic of Iran and wrote: Aliyev's statements with a hostile view against Islamic Iran are more similar to the Zionist regime than the president of a neighboring Muslim country. Taking advantage of Aliyev's weakness and his great concern about his lack of popularity in the Republic of Azerbaijan, the Zionist regime gained a large presence in that country.

These days, the rulers of Baku do anything; from getting the support of the West to surrendering to Ankara and Tel Aviv to continue their dominance over the South Caucasus region and North Aras.

But they should understand this point well that the enthusiasm of the people on both sides of the Aras for unity and integration under great Iran and the return of the areas separated from our country during the Iran-Russia wars is more than ever.

Aliyev should not rely on America and Israel, who are enemies of Islam, and be sure that the Zionists, after profiting from his current position, do not see the slightest reason to help him continue his rule.

Iran: The hidden dimensions of al-Sudani's visit

In a note, the Iran newspaper addressed Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia' al-Sudani's visit to Tehran and said: The Iraqi Prime Minister's recent visit to Iran is particularly noteworthy due to the shifting dynamics in Syria and former President Trump's calls for aligning the two countries amidst these new regional realities.

This potential alignment was undoubtedly central to the consultations in Tehran. A significant concern for both Tehran and Baghdad is the threat of renewed terrorism in Syria and Iraq, a challenge they both have faced in the past. Consequently, Prime Minister al-Sudani's visit included discussions on harmonizing Tehran and Baghdad's approaches to the evolving political situation in Syria, as well as addressing U.S. demands that Iran halt support for Resistance groups.

The new Syrian government is also expected to attend a regional conference in Baghdad next month. If these new Syrian officials are to attend, the Iraqi government sees it as essential that Iran, a regular participant in this annual meeting, also be present.

Efforts underway to secure Hirmand water rights: Iran energy minister

TEHRAN – The Iranian Minister of Energy, Abbas Ali-Abadi, has emphasized his ministry's determination to secure the Hirmand River's water rights through diplomatic collaboration with neighboring Afghanistan.

Speaking during a visit to Chah-Nimeh No. 3 in northern Sistan-Baluchestan on Friday, Ali-Abadi outlined ongoing efforts to address the water needs of the region while pursuing a sustainable solution with Afghanistan's interim government.

"Our priority is to work in close coordination with our neighboring country to resolve the issue of Hirmand River water rights effectively, and we will update the public on the outcomes of these efforts," Ali-Abadi stated.

Highlighting the importance of ensuring water security for the drought-stricken Sistan-Baluchestan Province, the minister noted that multiple initiatives are already underway to address the water crisis.

These projects aim to supply residents with stable and high-quality water resources.

Ali-Abadi further emphasized that negotiations with Afghan authorities over the Hirmand River are ongoing. "We are committed to advancing this matter through mutual cooperation," he said, adding that the government is determined to resolve the issue for the benefit of local communities.

Reiterating his ministry's broader goals, the minister stressed the importance of water conservation in tandem with governmental efforts. "While the Ministry of Energy will spare no effort to alleviate the water shortages in Sistan-Baluchestan, all sectors must contribute by adopting water-saving measures to

Siasat-e-Rooz: An illusion that must be debunked

In its editorial, Siasat-e-Rooz addressed Western media's actions against Iran. The paper asserted that Western media outlets aim to widen the divide between the Iranian people and their government. These outlets, it claims, conceal their role in creating economic and social instability in Iran, while simultaneously portraying themselves as saviors and liberators. Furthermore, Western media insinuates that a potential Israeli attack on Iran is intended to free the Iranian people and target the Islamic Republic.

They mask their true objective, which is to dismantle Iran and avenge their defeat by the Iranian Revolution. Moreover, through a campaign of distorted narratives and displays of unwarranted power, the West seeks to portray Iran as a failed state, thus preparing the ground for the subjugation of other nations. In light of this, the media's primary mission should be to dismantle this illusion of Western power and foster a sense of hope within Iranian society, empowering it to achieve its goals and resolve its challenges independently of Western influence.

Hamshahri: The fate of Iran's 6-year-old oil shipment in China

Hamshahri newspaper published an article examining the fate of Iranian oil shipments that have been sitting in Chinese ports for as long as six years. The article cited a Reuters report that claims Iran is attempting to repatriate 25 million barrels of oil, which have been held up in Chinese ports due to US sanctions.

The article pointed out that, despite facing some of the most stringent Western sanctions, Iran has managed to conceal its oil exports by utilizing a vast "shadow fleet" of tankers, effectively bypassing sanctions and maintaining a robust global oil trade. With Donald Trump's expected return to power on January 20, analysts believe he will reimpose tighter sanctions on Iranian oil, thus impacting Tehran's revenues.

In response, Iran is pushing China to resolve the legal status of its oil stored in various Chinese ports. The article explained that, when the National Iranian Oil Company delivered these shipments to China, the oil was registered as Iranian, preventing its release following the implementation of sanctions.



help mitigate the crisis," he urged.

The Hirmand River, shared by Iran and Afghanistan, is a vital water source for the region.

The equitable distribution of its water has long been a matter of concern, with Iran advocating for the enforcement of prior agreements on water rights.

Although a 1939 treaty was drafted to address water sharing, it was never ratified by Afghanistan, leading to protracted disputes. In 1973, the two nations agreed that Afghanistan would allow a flow of 26 cubic meters per second—equivalent to 820 million cubic meters annually—into Iran.

However, political upheavals, including a 1973 coup in Afghanistan, prevented the agreement from being fully implemented.

Efforts to resolve the issue continued with a bilateral agreement in 2003, but Afghanistan has repeatedly failed to honor the treaty's terms.

This has exacerbated the situation, leaving Iran struggling to secure its rightful share of water.

Iran security chief urges Armenian PM to solve problems locally during Yerevan visit

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Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan receives a delegation led by Iran's Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council Ali Akbar Ahmadian on January 9, 2025.

choice but to "destroy" its neighbor's so-called "fascist ideology."

During the Thursday meeting, Ahmadian also spoke about bilateral ties between Iran and Armenia,

expressing Tehran's readiness to share its scientific and technological expertise with Yerevan. He said it is important to strengthen and bolster comprehensive political, economic, and defense relations

between the two countries.

Pashinyan, for his part, reiterated Armenia's interest in expanding collaboration within the North-South corridor, a critical infrastructure project aimed at improving connectivity and trade between the two nations.

He also acknowledged the ambitious economic target set during previous administrations, aiming for a trade volume of \$3 billion between Iran and Armenia.

In addition to trade discussions, both parties explored opportunities for increased cooperation in new areas such as the construction of refineries and petrochemical plants, signaling a mutual interest in advancing industrial capabilities.

Both officials underscored the historical depth and social connections between their two nations, highlighting the importance of these ties in the context of regional stability and development.

Regional rivalries and resource battles: Iran's struggle for water rights in Afghanistan

By Xavier Villar

MADRID- The relations between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the interim Taliban government in Afghanistan are far from straightforward. Despite deep ideological and religious differences, both countries maintain ties based on a complex web of regional interests and power dynamics, a context that is often oversimplified in Western analyses.

This article seeks to delve into these relations, avoiding the pitfalls of what Afghan anthropologist Anila Daulatzai refers to as the "discursive occupation of Afghanistan." According to Daulatzai, the prevailing narrative is reduced to two limited approaches: one that attributes the conflicts to local culture as a deterministic explanation, and another that links all the violence in the country to the "fundamentalist Islam" of the Taliban. This perspective, often used to justify external interventions, overlooks Afghanistan's historical and political complexity, perpetuating a superficial and biased understanding.

Relations between Iran and the Taliban have been marked by a pragmatic approach from Tehran, especially after the first period of the Taliban regime. In 1998, following the capture of Mazar-e-Sharif, the group's image in the Islamic Republic was tainted by the brutality of the massacre of ethnic minorities, such as Hazaras, Tajiks, and Uzbeks, allegedly carried out by the Taliban in the city. That same year, the Taliban attacked the Iranian consulate and murdered 11 diplomats and the correspondent for IRNA, Mahmoud Saremi, nearly triggering an Iranian invasion. Though the Taliban rejected involvement in the attack, the situation was only averted through UN mediation.

This episode, whose memory remains vivid in Iran, helped shape the view of the Taliban as a sectarian group, focused on a Eurocentric notion of the nation-state and with a clear ethnic perspective in its politics. However, it is crucial to avoid falling into racial stereotypes that portray the Taliban as a "rural insurgency" driven solely by the conservative and predominantly Pashtun south.

Relations between Iran and the Taliban were profoundly influenced by the Mazar-e-Sharif massacre, which shaped Iranian policy towards the group until the U.S. invasion in 2001. During this period, the Taliban were viewed by Tehran as an anti-Shia threat. In 2002, Iran played a key role in the Bonn conference to address the "Afghan crisis," marking the beginning of a political pragmatism towards the Taliban regime.

Despite the discourse generated by the massacre, Iran attempted to approach the less hostile factions within the Taliban, seeking a non-aggression agreement. One example of this approach was the opening of a Taliban political office in the Iranian city of Zahedan in 2012. However, these diplomatic efforts were poorly received by the Iranian public, who still considered the Taliban a threat. Iran's Ministry of Foreign Affairs defended the need to prevent what was perceived as a potential "genocide" against the Hazara population, the Afghan Shia minority.

Iran's strategy of reaching out to the less sectarian factions of the Taliban failed, as it did not succeed in allowing these factions to prevail over the more radical elements of the group. Meanwhile, in 2014, the United States made its plans for withdrawal from Afghanistan public. In September of that year, an agreement was signed between the Afghan government and the U.S. that allowed for the continued presence of 10,000 American troops after the completion of the "combat mission" in January 2014.

As expected, the Islamic Republic strongly opposed the presence of Western troops in Afghanistan, arguing that instead of improving regional security, it would only contribute to further destabilization. This stance is in line with one of the key principles of Iranian foreign policy: to prevent any Western military presence in the region.

In 2015, the growing presence of the Islamic State in Khorasan (ISIS-K) further complicated relations between Iran and the Taliban. The common threat of this extremist group prompted Tehran and the Taliban to search for points of convergence, though without full trust between them.

That same year, the nuclear agreement with the Obama administration (JCPOA) did not alter Iran's perception of the deteriorating situation in Afghanistan or the likelihood of the Taliban's return to power. Faced with this dual threat, Iran attempted to rebuild diplomatic channels with the Taliban, while maintaining a cautious stance and withholding full trust in the group.

The hasty U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan, strongly criticized by Tehran, and the Taliban's return to power led Iranian authorities to intensify their efforts to reach a minimal agreement with the group. This shift was interpreted by some Western analysts as a change in Iran's stance. However, the Supreme National Security Council clarified that it was not a rhetorical shift, but rather a political pragmatism that did not entail abandoning the fundamental principles of the Islamic Republic or crossing its red lines in its relations with Afghanistan.

An example of this pragmatism was the decision to keep the Iranian embassy in Kabul open and operational during the Taliban's takeover of the city.

Key challenges

One of the most significant challenges for the Islamic Republic of Iran has been defining its stance toward the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. During a meeting with Iran's diplomatic corps, then-Foreign Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian outlined Tehran's red lines.

Amir-Abdollahian stated that Iran did not recognize the Taliban as the legitimate government of Afghanistan. However, he clarified that the group must be considered part of the country's political framework and involved in power processes. Iran's position called for an inclusive government that would represent Afghanistan's diverse ethnic communities, a key condition for ensuring regional stability.

A fundamental aspect for Tehran was the protection of the Hazara Shiite minority, which has historically been persecuted by the Taliban. The security of this community became a cornerstone of Iran's policy toward Afghanistan.

The dispute over water rights of the Hirmand River, essential for agriculture and human consumption in Sistan and Baluchestan, has been one of the most significant points of tension between Iran and Afghanistan. In a meeting with the diplomatic corps, then-Iranian Foreign Minister Hosein Amir-Abdollahian reminded that the Taliban must honor the 1973 agreement, which stipulates that Iran receives an annual quota of 820 million cubic meters of water from the Hirmand River. However, the agreement has been repeatedly violated, not only by the Taliban



but also by previous Afghan governments.

Over the past five decades, Afghanistan has developed plans to control its water resources, especially in the Harirud and Hirmand river basins, with hydroelectric projects that have sparked friction with Iran.

Fada Hossein Maleki, a member of the Iranian Parliament's National Security and Foreign Policy Committee, has held the Taliban government responsible for the construction of dams in Afghanistan and the failure to honor water rights agreements with Iran. Maleki emphasized that, unlike previous governments, the current Afghan rulers have adopted positions that have transformed Afghanistan's international relations, particularly regarding water resources.

The Iranian parliamentarian explained that prior to the Taliban's rise to power in August 2021, there was consistent interaction on key issues between Afghanistan and Iran. However, with the Taliban in control, Tehran has observed a radical shift in their approach, evidenced by a lack of cooperation on crucial matters such as the management of shared river basins.

The conflict over water resources in Afghanistan not only involves its immediate neighbors, such as Iran, but also has repercussions for international actors. This was highlighted by Ojjat Mianabadi, an expert in water diplomacy, who emphasized the influence of various countries in Afghanistan's water projects.

Mianabadi explained that a significant portion of the dams built in Afghanistan has been supported by Turkey, even under the Taliban regime. He also pointed out that Qatar funded the acceleration of the Bakhshabad Dam construction and, during Ashraf Ghani's government, contributed 300 million dollars to complete the Salma Dam, which directly impacts water supply to Iran.

The researcher noted that the Taliban receives advice from exiled Afghan experts, who guide them on the strategic use of projects like the Qosh Tappeh canal, designed to connect the Amu Darya River with key agricultural areas. This project has become a key asset in reinforcing the Taliban's geopolitical position.

According to Mianabadi, the Taliban's strategy aims to strengthen Afghanistan's position against regional and global rivals such as China, India, and Iran. The construction of water infrastructure addresses domestic needs but also serves as an effort to consolidate international influence.

The researcher emphasized that one of Iran's main mistakes in its attempt to secure its water rights has been failing to understand the complexity of the issue. "For 20 years, we have addressed the water conflict with a limited perspective, focused solely on direct negotiations with Afghanistan," he noted. "Suddenly, we realize that countries like China, Turkey, India, and Qatar are involved in water projects in Afghanistan. What has the United Kingdom done? What is the stance of the United States?" Mianabadi questioned.

(See full text at tehrantimes.com)

IRGC Chief: Iran to unveil new missile and drone cities

As part of an ongoing nationwide drill, 110,000 Basij forces join Tehran parade

TEHRAN – Major General Hossein Salami, Commander-in-Chief of the Islamic Revolution Guard Corps (IRGC), announced on Friday that Iran will soon reveal new missile and drone facilities.

He emphasized Iran's extraordinary power in missiles, drones, and naval capabilities, stating there are no deficiencies.

"You will witness the greatness and unfathomable depth of Iran's power," he stated.

General Salami highlighted the IRGC's rapid expansion and ongoing production of advanced missile systems, noting the need for increased storage to accommodate their growing arsenal.

He mentioned the IRGC Aerospace Force is constructing new and unique missiles, and assured that the armed forces are fully prepared, "with our hands on the trigger and our combat uniforms on."

Iran has fortified its defense with strategically situated and concealed underground missile and drone facilities referred to as "cities" due to their vastness.

The nation boasts a stockpile of thousands of ballistic missiles capable of reaching targets up to 2,000 kilometers and has significantly increased drone (UAV) production for enhanced surveillance and combat.

Reports suggest numerous underground missile and drone facilities across Iran, reinforcing its defense resolve amid a challenging geopolitical landscape.

Moreover, the IRGC chief dismissed claims by Iran's enemies that the country is weakened, asserting, "We face no shortages in our missiles, drones, and naval vessels, which are crucial to our deterrent power."

Salami also noted the Iranian people's support and joy during the True Promise I and II operations, saying, "The Iranian nation is the only one that celebrates in the streets with car lights on in the middle of the night when we hit the enemy's base."

He added that people continuously request "True Promise III".

"Our people desire us to act with authority. We will not let their appetite for sovereignty and dignity be



IRGC drill in western Iran: location was no coincidence, spokesman tells Tehran Times

TEHRAN – The Islamic Revolution Guard Corps (IRGC) Ground Force deliberately selected the location for its recent military drill in western Iran, near the Iran-Iraq border, according to drill spokesman General Mohammad Hadi Sefidchian speaking to the Tehran Times.

"The area was deliberately chosen because it was a point of infiltration for some Daesh terrorists in the 2010s, during the group's peak in Iraq," the general announced.

The IRGC Ground Force concluded the first phase of the "Great Prophet 19" military drill on Thursday, an ongoing exercise involving multiple branches of the IRGC and other Iranian armed forces.

Sefidchian did not speak about the current circumstances that prompted the IRGC to choose Western Iran, particularly the Kermanshah province, as the location for the first stage of the drill. His remarks, however, come as extremist groups recently rose to power in Syria, after toppling President Bashar al-Assad's government a month ago.

The general also outlined the IRGC Ground Force's future development plans, stating a comprehensive strategy would be implemented across technical, tactical, and intelligence domains. He explained, "We will be focusing on developing new weapons, devising new tactics, and strengthening our intelligence prowess."

Turning to specific advancements, Sefidchian highlighted the importance of quadcopters in modern warfare, acknowledging their dual role as both a threat and an opportunity for Iran. "This time we operated many quadcopters, engaged in exercises that simulated electronic warfare, and also practiced countering cyberattacks."

diminished," he declared.

Iran's armed forces demonstrated their military strength in Operations True Promise I and II, in April and October 2024 respectively, against Israel, launching hundreds of missiles and drones and hitting various targets across the occupied territories.

Following the Israeli regime's November 2024 attack on Iran, multiple Iranian officials have announced plans for Operation True Promise III, emphasizing their commitment to

national defense.

Addressing Israel, General Salami stated the regime can only kill innocent people and cannot confront and wage war.

He pointed out that Israeli forces cower when confronted by a young Palestinian but spread disinformation to instill fear among Iranians.

"Is Israel truly safe and powerful today? Does it boast a thriving economy? No. Without U.S. support,

the regime wouldn't last even a day," Salami declared.

He noted that Israeli officials are isolated and despised worldwide.

The IRGC chief also mentioned that Yemenis have proved that they can close the Red Sea, which neither the U.S. nor Israel can counter.

"Is the sky over Israel protected today? No, Yemeni missiles hit Israeli targets every day, while the regime cannot counter them. Only their sirens constantly go off," he remarked.

General Salami concluded that Iran's deterrence is entirely self-reliant.

"Our deterrence stems from our own territory, will, decisions, and inherent Iranian capabilities," he emphasized.

Grand Basij parade takes over Tehran

As part of an ongoing military exercise to showcase Iran's military and defense capabilities, 110,000 members of Iran's Basij Force paraded in Tehran in a large-scale event on Friday.

Organized by the IRGC, the parade was a key feature of the "Payambar-e-Azam 19" (Great Prophet 19) military exercises conducted across the country.

The event aimed to highlight the Basij forces' operational readiness to counter threats, including terrorist attacks, while also emphasizing their capabilities in disaster relief and rescue operations.

In addition to a demonstration of military strength, the parade included an exhibition of advanced military equipment. Brigadier General Hassan Hassanzadeh, IRGC Tehran's commander, described the parade as both cultural and combative, sending a message of resilience to Iran's adversaries.

"This event symbolizes the unwavering resolve of those who dedicate their lives to defending the Iranian nation," he stated.

The event also featured significant charitable efforts. On the sidelines of the parade, 110,000 livelihood packages, 670 dowry sets, and numerous stationery supplies were distributed to those in need, reflecting the Basij's dual role in both national defense and social support.

Offensive posters removed in France after Iranian protest

TEHRAN – Following official protests from Iran, the city of Béziers in southern France has removed offensive posters displayed on some city buses.

The posters portrayed the Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei in a derogatory manner.

Robert Ménard, the far-right mayor of Béziers known for his provocative actions, had ordered the contentious posters to be installed.

Despite the backlash, Ménard defended his actions, saying to a French outlet, "It was just a jest."

Ménard has been criticized for fostering Islamophobia and xenophobia throughout his career.

He once stated that schools in his town had "too many Muslim children". One of Ménard's most controversial policies is a ban on burkinis, a modest form of swimwear that covers more parts of the body and is favored by Muslim women.

His rhetoric often vilifies Muslims and advocates for strict immigration controls, promoting cultural fear and leading to widespread condem-

nation and legal challenges.

'Move by French mayor amounts to hate speech'

Iranian foreign ministry officials were quick to respond to the insulting posters displayed at the direction of Ménard's.

"Using offensive content against officials of the Islamic Republic of Iran is a clear violation

of accepted international principles that require respect for the cultural values of other nations," stated Majid Nili, Director General for Western Europe at the Iranian Foreign Ministry. "These amount to hate speech."

He further emphasized Iran's formal complaint through diplomatic channels, urging the French government to address the issue appropriately



and prevent future provocations.

AFP reported on Thursday evening that despite Ménard's defense of the posters, they were taken down in response to Iran's protest.

The incident follows French President Emmanuel Macron's remarks on Monday, alleging that Iran poses a significant strategic and security challenge to France, Europe, and the wider region.

(See full text at tehrantimes.com)

Tehran backs Baghdad's diplomatic initiatives for regional stability, declares Araghchi

TEHRAN – Tehran has reiterated its unwavering support for Iraq's role in promoting regional stability through effective diplomacy and innovative international initiatives.

In a short interview with Iraq's Al-Ahd network, Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi commended Iraq's approach to regional diplomacy, stating, "The Iraqi government is demonstrating effective, positive diplomacy, strengthening its regional relations with a focus on stability and cooperation."

The minister emphasized Iraq's strategic importance, saying, "Iraq is a strong nation. Its de-

isions resonate across the region, and its voice is heard and respected by other countries."

During the visit of Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia' Al-Sudani to Tehran, Araghchi highlighted the deepening ties between the two nations and Iraq's growing influence in the region.

Araghchi revealed that the discussions during Prime Minister Al-Sudani's visit encompassed critical political and security matters. The two sides explored ways to enhance bilateral cooperation and address pressing challenges impacting the broader West Asia.

The Iranian foreign minister reaffirmed Tehran's backing of Iraq's domestic policies and international efforts aimed at resolving regional conflicts. "We fully support Iraq's internal decisions and international initiatives designed to tackle and resolve issues within the region," Araghchi stated.

He lauded Baghdad's initiatives as a testament to its leadership in championing dialogue and constructive engagement among regional players. The minister further underscored Iran's readiness to collaborate with Iraq in advancing shared goals for security, stability, and economic prosperity in the region.

Final five Iran football presidency candidates announced



TEHRAN – The final five candidates of the Football Federation of the Islamic Republic of Iran (FFIRI) presidency announced.

Current head of the federation Mehdi Taj, Heydar Baharvand, former President of the Iran Football League Organization, Ali Kafashian and Shahabeddin Azizi Khadem, former presidents of the football federation and Amir Abedini, ex-general manager of Persepolis football club have registered for the post.

List of qualified candidates will be announced by Jan. 30. The elective General Assembly will be held on March 1.

Persepolis eye Kheybar midfielder Ahmadi

TEHRAN – Persepolis football club have reportedly set their sight on signing Kheybar Khoramabad Mehran Ahmadi.

The 27-year-old midfielder has reached an agreement with Persepolis.

Ahmadi will join Persepolis in the January transfer window.

The Reds have also shown an interest in signing Esteghlal Khuzestan French striker Thievy Bifouma.

Walter Mazzarri linked with Persepolis

TEHRAN – Italian tactician Walter Mazzarri, who managed Napoli last season but without notable success, has been reportedly shortlisted to replace Juan Carlos Garrido in Persepolis.

The 62-year-old coach boasts extensive experience across various clubs, including Inter, Torino, Sampdoria, Watford, Cagliari, Livorno, and others. Mazzarri, who is known for his tactical flexibility and ability to organize a solid defense, has been also linked with a move to Dinamo Zagreb.

He had been linked to take charge of Persepolis in the summer but the agreement fell apart at the last moments.

Persepolis have previously been linked with Portuguese Jose Vitor dos Santos Peseiro, French coach Julien Stéphan, former Croatia coach Slaven Bilic, ex-Dortmund trainer Edin Terzic, former Bayern Munich head coach Niko Kovac, ex-Real Madrid coach Rafael Benitez and Foolad coach Yahya Golmohammadi.

Iran, Turkey football federations to ink MoU

TEHRAN – Iran and Turkey football federations will ink a memorandum of understanding (MoU) to strengthen sports cooperation between two countries.

Mehdi Alavi, the spokesperson of the Iran football federation, said that President Mehdi Taj will travel to Istanbul this week and the Iranian delegation is going to sign a memorandum of understanding with the Turkish counterpart.

According to Alavi, Iran and Turkey football teams will meet in a friendly match in 2025.

The MoU aims to facilitate the exchange of

opinions about the technical issues, friendly matches in all national levels and holding training camp.

Iran 7th in FIFA futsal ranking

TEHRAN – Iran's futsal team are seventh in the world ranking list.

2024 FIFA Futsal World Cup champion Brazil remained top, followed by Spain, runner-up Argentina and Portugal.

Russia and Kazakhstan are fifth and sixth.

Team Melli sit seventh in the list.

Japan are the second-best Asian team, sitting in the 14th place.

Pitso Mosimane to remain Esteghlal coach: official

TEHRAN – Esteghlal's newly-appointed general manager Ali Nazari Juybari said that the club is going to continue cooperation with Pitso Mosimane.

The South African coach is on holiday and will return to Tehran on Saturday.

Nazari Juybari said that Mosimane will remain Esteghlal coach. Esteghlal are scheduled to host Shams Azar in Tehran's Azadi Stadium on January 20.

The Blues need to defeat Shams Azar to climb into the top half of the Iran league table.

Mosimane has had a salary dispute with Esteghlal after giving the club a two-week ultimatum to settle his dues or he would terminate his contract as per the FIFA rules, casting doubts over his future in Iran.

The 60-year-old's agent recently admitted his client was owed money by Esteghlal, who he joined in October last year, and has led to three wins, six draws and three losses.

Iran invited to Brazil futsal tournament, official says

TEHRAN – Ehsan Osooli, member of the Iranian football federation's board of directors, said that Team Melli have been invited to Brazil to participate in a tournament.

According to him, Iran, Colombia, Afghanistan as well as host Brazil will compete in a four-team competition. The tournament will be held in the next two months. The Iran futsal team are headed by Vahid Shamsaei.

Moghanlou nets brace As Kalba lose to Al Nasr

TEHRAN – Iranian forward Shahriyar Moghanlou scored twice but Ittihad Kalba lost to Al Nasr 3-2 in UAE Pro League on Friday.

Moghanlou scored in 11th and 50th minutes at the Al-Maktoum Stadium.

Al Nasr came from two goals down and scored three goals in the second half.

Maroun Azarkan pulled a goal back in the 58th minute and Ali Mabkhout leveled the score in the 84th minute. Othmane Boussaid scored the winner for the Al Nasr.

Al Nasr advanced to third place with 22 points, and Kalba remained seventh with 17 points, 11 points behind leader Sharjah.

The UAE Pro League, known for sponsorship reasons as the ADNOC Pro League, is the top professional football league in the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

The first team to win the title was Al Orouba (Sharjah), whilst Al Ain have the record with 14 league titles to their name. Fourteen clubs compete in the League that operates on a system of promotion and relegation with the First Division League.

Copper anode production rises 1.3% in 9 months on year

TEHRAN- Production of copper anode in Iran rose 1.3 percent in the first nine months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20-December 21, 2024), as compared to the same period of time in the past year, Iranian Mines and Mining Industries Development and Renovation Organization (IMIDRO) has announced.

The organization put the amount of produced copper anode at 259,812 tons in the nine-month period of this year, and at 256,541 tons in the first nine months of the previous year.

Given the significance of mining sector in Iran, implementation of projects to develop different parts of this sector has been always a major program of the governments.

As a major state-owned holding company active in the mining sector in the country, IMIDRO is playing a significant part in this regard, and in line with its development role, it has defined a number of programs including supporting the contractors active in the mining exploration operation, upgrading

the geographical information system (GIS) database based on international standards, exploration of hidden and deep resources using new methods and training of required manpower.

Exploration and processing of rare minerals with special technologies, assistance in equipping and updating the drilling fleet with the help of Mining Investment Insurance Fund, planning to support and upgrade the scientific-technical level of exploration consultants, and conducting additional exploration operations in all existing mines for increasing the reserves tonnage are the other programs of IMIDRO in this due.

Involving the private sector in exploration activities is also an approach that the organization has included in exploration programs.

IMIDRO had also announced that considering the importance of exploration operation in the mining sector, IMIDRO was preparing a strategic five-year program for more focus on exploration activities.

Non-oil export from Kermanshah province increases 5%

TEHRAN- The value of non-oil export from Kermanshah province, in the west of Iran, rose five percent in the first nine months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20 - December 21, 2024), as compared to the same period of time in the past year, a provincial official announced.

Ali-Asghar Abbaszadeh, the director-general of the province's Customs Department, said that 67.421 million tons of non-oil goods valued at \$2.52 billion were exported from the province in the nine-month period, also indicating seven percent growth in terms of weight, year on year.

He further announced that 12,000 tons of non-oil commodities worth \$67.421 million were imported into the province in the first nine months of the present year.

The official named tiles and ceramics, fruits and vegetables, constructional stones, dairy products, plastic products and disposable containers as the main exported items, and kraft paper, generator gas, compressor, solar battery, paper and refractory bricks as the main imported products.

As previously announced by the head of the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA), Iran's non-oil exports rose 18 percent in the first nine months of the Iranian calendar year to \$43.14 billion.

Foroud Asgari said imports during the mentioned period, including gold bullion, amounted to \$50.89 billion. The weight of imports declined by 3.16 percent to 27.94 million tons, he added.

Non-oil export volume reached 116.35 million tons in the nine-month period, a 13.77 percent increase from the previous year, Asgari noted. The average customs value per ton of exported goods rose 3.74 percent to \$371.

Petrochemical exports accounted for 50.7 million tons, valued at \$19.7 billion, representing a 33.25 percent increase in volume and a 32 percent rise in value year-on-year.

China remained Iran's top export destination, purchasing \$11 billion worth of goods. Iraq followed with \$9.4 billion, the UAE with \$5.3 billion, Turkey with \$5.2 billion, Afghanistan and Pakistan with \$1.7 billion each, and India with \$1.4 billion. Together, these seven countries accounted for 82.4 percent of the total export volume and 82.85 percent of export value.

The UAE topped the list of Iran's import partners, exporting \$15.3 billion worth of goods to Iran. China followed with \$13 billion, Turkey with \$8.9 billion, Germany with \$1.8 billion, India and Russia with \$1.1 billion each, and Hong Kong with \$1 billion. These seven countries supplied 75 percent of the import volume and 83 percent of import value during the period.

The average customs value per ton of imported goods rose 8.4 percent to \$1,821.

Natural gas in liquid form led the export list at \$6 billion, followed by liquefied propane at \$2.5 billion and methanol at \$1.9 billion. Key imports included raw gold at \$5.6 billion, livestock corn at \$2.1 billion, and smartphones at \$1.7 billion.

Asgari, who also serves as deputy economy minister, emphasized the role of trade in bolstering the national economy amid ongoing in-

ternational sanctions.

The 11th session of the Supreme Council for the Development of Non-Oil Exports was held after a four-year hiatus, with the participation of Iran's first vice president on January 1.

In an exclusive interview with IRIB, Alireza Dehghan Dehnavi, head of Iran's Trade Promotion Organization (TPO), highlighted the significance of this council, which had been inactive for nearly four years.

He noted that the council had played a key role in national decision-making processes before falling into disuse.

Dehnavi explained that the revival of the council was prompted during this year's National Export Day event, where Masoud Pezeshkian instructed its reactivation.

With the efforts of the government and the support of the first vice president and the minister of industry, mining, and trade, the groundwork for the council's return was laid, culminating in its 11th session.

The session, chaired by First Vice President Mohammad Reza Aref, brought together all council members to discuss pressing trade issues. The meeting focused on three main areas:

The council reviewed the statistical performance of the country's non-oil exports. Dehnavi acknowledged that Iran's non-oil trade balance has been negative in recent years, with a \$17 million deficit recorded last year despite a positive overall trade balance. The Vice President tasked the TPOI with reversing this trend by boosting non-oil exports.

The council identified several obstacles hindering foreign trade, including excessive regulations, insufficient infrastructure for exports (such as transportation and customs facilities), and challenges in export-related policies.

Dehnavi emphasized the need to align monetary and trade policies, as the former has often overshadowed the latter. The council resolved to reform trade policies to address these issues.

Several proposals were approved, including holding regular council sessions and establishing provincial export development task forces led by governors. These initiatives aim to make export promotion a nationwide campaign.

The council also discussed a strategic roadmap for free trade zones, aiming to transform these areas into export hubs. The TPO is preparing this document with council support.

Additionally, collaboration with the private sector was emphasized to identify and implement high-impact export projects.

Other topics included reforms in re-exports and temporary imports, with a task force comprising customs, agriculture, health, and trade organizations formed to streamline processes. The pricing of export goods at customs was also debated, with calls for a review to enhance coordination among export-related bodies.

The session concluded with plans to establish specialized commissions to maintain continuity between council meetings and ensure effective decision-making in foreign trade.

Iran, Iraq to strengthen cooperation in power industry

TEHRAN - Iran's Minister of Energy and Iraq's Minister of Electricity and Energy met to discuss electricity exchange and the export of technical and engineering services in the power sector.

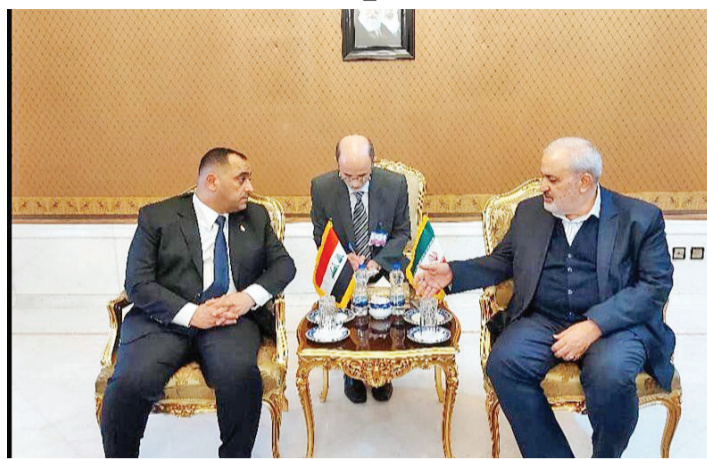
According to Iran's Ministry of Energy, Abbas Aliabadi, Iran's Minister of Energy, and Ziad Ali Fadhil, Iraq's Minister of Electricity and Energy, held discussions on the sidelines of a cabinet meeting.

The talks centered on electricity exchange and the provision of technical and engineering services in the power sector.

During the meeting, the Iraqi minister invited capable Iranian companies to participate in Iraq's electricity industry, specifically in transmission, distribution, and equipment supply.

It was also agreed that during Abbas Aliabadi's upcoming visit to Iraq, these topics would be further negotiated with the involvement of Iran's private sector.

Key issues discussed included repairing 5,000 transformers in Iraq, introducing Iranian companies for equipment supply, constructing and maintaining power plants, as well as training and joint knowledge transfer.



Iran's Energy Minister Abbas Aliabadi (R) and Ziad Ali Fadhil, Iraq's Minister of Electricity and Energy, meet in Tehran on Thursday (January 9).

Both sides agreed to establish a dedicated task force to facilitate these initiatives.

Iran and Iraq have a long-standing relationship in the electricity sector, with Iran playing a significant role in meeting Iraq's energy needs. Iran has been a key electricity exporter to Iraq, providing several gigawatts annually to help alleviate chronic power shortages in the country, especially during the summer months when demand peaks.

In addition to electricity exports, Iranian companies have actively

participated in Iraq's infrastructure development, including the construction of power plants, maintenance of the electricity grid, and upgrading outdated equipment.

This cooperation has been essential in improving Iraq's power generation and distribution capacity.

Despite geopolitical challenges, both countries have emphasized the importance of sustaining energy collaboration, viewing it as a cornerstone of bilateral economic relations. The continued engage-

ment in the power sector not only supports Iraq's energy security but also strengthens economic ties between the two nations.

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

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

Mohammad Kazem Ale-Sadeq announced the value of commercial exchanges between the two countries, and stated that economic relations between Iran and Iraq are very good, and expressed hope that these relations will improve.

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

Iran signs 5-party agreement to localize mining, steel supply chain

TEHRAN - A multilateral agreement to advance localization, technology development, and the domestic expansion of the steel and mining supply chain was signed by key Iranian entities, signaling a significant push toward reducing reliance on imports and fostering self-sufficiency.

The agreement was formalized on the sidelines of the Sixth National Steel Festival and Exhibition in Tehran.

Signatories included Touraj Amraei, Deputy for Development of Knowledge-Based Companies at the Vice Presidency for Science, Technology, and Knowledge-Based Economy; Reza Ansari, Deputy Minister and Head of Iran's Small Industries and Industrial Parks Organization (ISIPO); Mohammad Aghajani, Head of the Iranian Mines and Mining Industries Development and Renovation Organization (IMIDRO); Mohammad Nabi Shahiki, Deputy for Technology and Innovation at the Ministry of Science, Research, and Technology; and Bahram Sobhani, Chairman of the Iranian Steel Producers Association (ISPA).

In the initial phase, the agreement focuses on leveraging the capacities of domestic producers, small-scale manufacturers, and knowledge-based companies, particularly in six provinces—Isfahan, Khuzestan, Khorasan, Kerman,

Yazd, and Hormozgan—which host a significant concentration of mining and steel enterprises.

These provinces will specialize in addressing the supply chain requirements for iron and steel, covering raw materials, consumables, mechanical and electrical components, and advanced technologies.

The second phase envisions expanding these initiatives to provinces such as East Azarbaijan, Fars, and Semnan, with localized approaches tailored to regional industrial needs.

Based on the agreement, ISIPO has committed to identifying and addressing technological challenges within the steel sector.

This includes facilitating connections between supply and demand for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) operating in industrial parks, supporting the establishment of specialized knowledge-based units, and promoting innovation within the steel industry.

Additionally, ISIPO will assist in identifying startups and innovative ideas in the steel value chain, helping commercialize them with the participation of major steel producers.

The organization will also facilitate specialized training programs, research projects, and student theses to address key challenges in the

steel industry.

As reported, along with ISIPO, ISPA has played a crucial role in organizing the annual National Steel Festival since 2017.

This event, distinct from other industry conferences, aims to address the needs of the domestic iron and steel supply chain, foster sustainable production and employment, and reduce dependency on imports.

The 2023 festival, held from January 7-9 at Tehran's Milad Tower, highlighted advances in technology and localization efforts.

The experiences gained from five previous events helped shape the new agreement, aligning stakeholders to pursue a common goal of minimizing reliance on imports.

The agreement aligns with Iran's motto for the current year, "Leap in Production with Public Participation," emphasizing maximum utilization of domestic production and legal frameworks to enhance knowledge-based economic growth.

By localizing the mining and steel supply chains, Iran aims to achieve greater economic independence, boost innovation, and support domestic industries in reducing reliance on foreign resources.

Projects inaugurated in president, ministers visit to Sistan-Baluchestan

From Page 1 ▶ His agenda includes public meetings in Chabahar and Zabol, a review of ongoing infrastructure projects like the Chabahar-Zahedan railway corridor, and discussions on investment opportunities in the region, particularly in the petrochemical and port sectors.

One of the visit's most notable topics is the ongoing proposal to reform trade policies to address these issues.

Several proposals were approved, including holding regular council sessions and establishing provincial export development task forces led by governors. These initiatives aim to make export promotion a nationwide campaign.

The council also discussed a strategic roadmap for free trade zones, aiming to transform these areas into export hubs. The TPO is preparing this document with council support.

Additionally, collaboration with the private sector was emphasized to identify and implement high-impact export projects.

Other topics included reforms in re-exports and temporary imports, with a task force comprising customs, agriculture, health, and trade organizations formed to streamline processes. The pricing of export goods at customs was also debated, with calls for a review to enhance coordination among export-related bodies.

The session concluded with plans to establish specialized commissions to maintain continuity between council meetings and ensure effective decision-making in foreign trade.

Vice President Mohammad Reza Aref recently outlined the rationale behind the idea, citing Makran's abundant natural resources, lack of urban congestion, and potential for sustainable development.

Aref emphasized that Tehran's growing challenges, such as water scarcity and overpopulation, necessitate exploring alternatives.

Makran, with its strategic location along the Indian Ocean and proximity to international trade

routes, has been identified as a promising candidate.

While the proposal is still in its early stages, officials highlighted Makran's growing importance in national policy.

Investments in infrastructure, such as the expansion of Chabahar Port, underscore its potential as a trade and logistics hub. Pezeshkian's government views the relocation of the capital as part of a broader strategy to decentralize

economic activities and promote balanced national development.

Pezeshkian's visit also included the inauguration of key projects, such as a segment of the Zabol-Zahedan highway, which aims to improve connectivity and enhance economic opportunities in the region.

The president's efforts to prioritize Sistan-Baluchestan have been widely praised as a step toward addressing historical neglect and unlocking the region's full potential.

Iranian agriculture minister visits Ankara for bilateral co-op meetings

From Page 1 ▶ He emphasized the need to modernize food packaging and facilitate export terminal licenses to expand export markets.

The minister also underscored the importance of resolving customs challenges faced by Iranian exporters in Turkey, advocating for stable policies to prevent ad-hoc regulations that undermine exporters' credibility. He added that the private sector, with its emphasis on efficiency and innovation, plays a vital role in overcoming economic challenges.

He emphasized Iran's determination to deepen ties with neighboring countries, particularly Turkey, through agricultural diplomacy.

Iran's agricultural exports constitute 20 percent of bilateral trade with Turkey, which ex-



ceeded \$14 billion in the first nine months of the Iranian year 1403 (March 20 - December, 21, 2024).

During the two-day visit, Nouri Qezelgeh

toured Turkey's largest seed gene bank and Ankara's food control laboratory, exploring advanced genetic technologies and food security strategies.

He is also set to meet Ibrahim Yumakli, Turkey's Minister of Agriculture and Forestry, and deliver a speech at the Iran-Turkey Agricultural Development Conference, emphasizing regional cooperation in food security and international partnerships.

This high-profile delegation, including 180 Iranian agricultural exporters and producers, marks one of the largest economic missions between the two countries, showcasing the potential for enhanced trade and collaboration in agriculture and food industries.

Hezbollah's sudden endorsement of Aoun's election is a political victory

By Sondoss Al Asaad

BEIRUT - In the second round on Thursday, Hezbollah and the Amal Movement decided to back electing Joseph Aoun as Lebanon's president, ending the two-year presidential impasse.

The resounding message that the "Shiite duo" intended to convey is that the decisive choice in completing the numerical and political quorum mainly lies at the hands of the resistance movement, and the president cannot be elected without them, as Samir Geagea intended and even publicly declared in an interview during the Israeli large-scale war on Lebanon during September and November in 2024.

Reluctantly, the "Shiite duo" succumbed to the unprecedented foreign pressure, nevertheless asserting its powerful presence in Lebanon's political arena. Actually, the duo gave priority to Lebanon's supreme interests and national harmony.

Mohammed Raad, head of the Loyalty to the Resistance Bloc, saluted "the resistance's martyrs who have protected the country so that the session could be held, and to achieve national accord in this difficult period. By delaying our vote for His Excellency the President, we wanted to convey a message that we are the guarantors of the national accord."



The consensus had been achieved before the second round of election, during a meeting Mohammed Raad and Ali Hassan Khalil held with Joseph Aoun, who allayed the Shiite duo's military, security and political concerns.

The understanding focused on the responsibilities of the new era, especially reconstruction, forming a national government and preserving the achievements of the resistance movement.

Joseph Aoun has pledged to rebuild what the Israeli enemy has destroyed, assuring, "Our martyrs are the spirit of our determination and our prisoners are a trust in our necks."

The voting session was attended by the quintet committee's representatives seemingly to supervise

the commitment of their stooges (pro-US MPs). They, in parallel, witnessed a shameful chorus of insults that reflected those MPs' moral and national downfall.

Those were not satisfied with just pessimism, buffoonery and useless interventions, but they also blatantly posted pictures of their ballot papers on X to confirm that they are obedient boys to their strict "mom" in Washington.

In contrast, a section of nationalist MPs underscored their keenness on the constitutionality of the election and their firm rejection of foreign ambassadors and envoys' dictates.

Osama Saad asked his fellow MPs: "Does one of those [ambassadors and envoys] dare to violate their countries' constitution? Why us?"

Saad stated the US "deceptive" diplomacy" has "killed many Lebanese and destroyed many of their houses" to impose Aoun as the president, stressing that the Lebanese have had enough of "Israeli criminality and US deception."

Addressed the ambassadors, MP Halima Kaakour also called on foreign envoys not to intervene in Lebanon's affairs and sovereignty, stressing her rejection of all dictates "whether American or Iranian."

Meanwhile, Amos Hochstein, the US presidential envoy to West Asia, has claimed that Aoun's election is "a step towards peace and stability in Lebanon." Ursula Gertrude von der Leyen, President of the European Commission, has also deemed it as a "ray of hope" for Lebanon.

Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert, the UN Special Coordinator for Lebanon, has also stressed the need to speed up the formation of a new cabinet "as the tasks placed on the shoulders of the Lebanese state are extremely huge and cannot tolerate any more wasting of time."

For its part, the Iranian embassy in Beirut has expressed its congratulations to "brotherly Lebanon on the election of General Joseph Aoun as President of the Republic in an atmosphere of comprehensive consensus."

Charity begins at home: LA wildfires rage as US funds Gaza genocide

From page 1 ▶ Accuweather, a private forecasting firm, has provided an initial estimate indicating anticipated losses ranging from \$135 billion to \$150 billion.

The natural disaster has turned the spotlight on Washington's failure to contain the fires in the face of its role in fanning the flames of conflicts across the world.

Activists have argued that the devastating blazes in Los Angeles could have been managed more effectively had the US government not allocated taxpayer funds to support the military efforts of its allies.

Critics have primarily concentrated on the United States' role in supplying Israel's military operations in Gaza.

Earlier this month, the Biden administration notified Congress of a proposed \$8 billion arms sale to Israel.

The United States has also spent a record of nearly \$18 billion on military aid to Israel since the start of its genocidal war on Gaza, on October 7, 2023, according to a report for Brown University's Costs of War project, released in October last year.

"Instead of putting resources toward making our country livable, our government is putting billions toward Israel's genocide of Palestinians in Gaza," the New York branch of the anti-Zionist Jewish Voice for Peace said in a post about the fires in Los Angeles.



Los Angeles | Gaza

Jewish Voice for Peace: "Instead of putting resources toward making our country livable, our government (Biden administration) is putting billions toward Israel's genocide of Palestinians in Gaza."

Code Pink, an activist group, blamed Israel and the US government for the deadly infernos.

"When US taxes go to burning people alive in Gaza, we can't be surprised when those fires come home," it said on Instagram.

A leader of New York's anti-Israel group Within Our Lifetime also took a sharp jab at the US for feeding Israel's war machine in Gaza.

"The flames of Gaza will not stop here. Dropping hundreds of thousands of bombs on Gaza, turning it into a blazing inferno, has consequences. There are climate consequences that will find us all," Fatima Mohammed said.

Meanwhile, the White House has faced increased criticism for its announcement of a new military package for Ukraine, particularly in light of the public's outrage regarding the ongoing wildfires.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken said in a statement on Thursday that Washington will provide Ukraine with an additional \$500 million in military aid, including air defense missiles, air-to-ground munitions and support equipment for F-16 fighter jets.

Critics argue that the primary financial backing for the Los Angeles Fire Department comes from the city of Los Angeles, whereas foreign military aid is supplied by the federal government.

American citizens believe that if the Los Angeles Fire Department had sufficient financial resources, it could implement more effective strategies to combat wildfires.

Presently, there are deep concerns among Americans about the use of taxpayer funds to assist Israel and Ukraine, especially as they face the devastating impacts of wildfires on their properties due to insufficient financial resources.

The US government claims that it has a responsibility to support its allies.

There is much to be said for such US claims, but there is a good argument for saying that charity begins at home.

The Lancet: Deaths from Israeli attacks in Gaza undercounted by 41 percent

From page 1 ▶ Lead author Zeina Jamaluddine noted, "Our research reveals a stark reality: the true scale of traumatic injury deaths in Gaza is higher than reported."

Researchers employed a statistical method known as capture-recapture analysis to estimate the true death toll.

This method identifies overlaps in data from multiple sources to account for unrecorded deaths.

The study drew from different sources of data including the Gaza Health Ministry's hospital records, an online survey distributed by the ministry, and obituaries posted on social media.

Anecdotal evidence pointed to additional unrecorded deaths, with many victims thought to remain buried under rubble from destroyed buildings.

The method used in this study has been applied in other war zones, including Kosovo and Sudan, to estimate mortality where official records fall short.

The researchers emphasized

that the Gaza Health Ministry's capacity to maintain accurate death records has historically been reliable but was severely disrupted amid the ongoing genocide.

The Lancet study cited the destruction of healthcare facilities, raids on hospitals, and digital communication breakdowns as key reasons for the underreporting.

The Gaza health ministry initially relied on hospital records, but as the war escalated, it incorporated data from other sources.

However, these methods could not fully capture the extent of the Israeli attacks on the besieged enclave.

Jamaluddine added, "The UN's Human Rights Office has already condemned the high number of civilians killed in the war in Gaza, and our findings suggest that the traumatic injury death toll is underreported by around 41%. These results underscore the urgent need for interventions to safeguard civilians and prevent further loss of life."

The analysis found that women, children under 18, and individuals over 65 accounted for a majority of the deaths where demographic data were available.

This highlights the genocidal Israeli war's disproportionate impact on vulnerable populations.

Additionally, the researchers noted that the annualized death rate due to violence in Gaza was 39.3 per 1,000 people, which is 14 times higher than Gaza's all-cause mortality rate in 2022.

The humanitarian consequences of the war extend beyond violent deaths.

The researchers warned that the total death toll is likely higher when accounting for non-trauma-related causes such as disruption to healthcare services, food and water shortages, and outbreaks of disease.

The study estimates that, as of October 2024, the total number of deaths in Gaza due to traumatic injuries could exceed 70,000.

This reflects not only the inten-



The Health Ministry in Gaza says Israel has killed more than 46,000 Palestinians in the territory since October 2023.

sity of the attacks being unleashed on Gaza but also the systemic collapse of the Palestinian territory's infrastructure during the genocidal war.

The authors stressed the need for accurate mortality data to quantify and memorialize the human cost of the war.

They also called for urgent international interventions to prevent further loss of life and address the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Gaza.

Israel's internal guide: A voluntary confession of violations in Gaza?

By Xavier Villar

MADRID - Recently, Israeli media revealed an internal document that has sparked international controversy. It is a guide designed to instruct Israeli soldiers on how to evade potential detentions abroad due to their involvement in military operations in Gaza, which have been classified by various international organizations as war crimes.

The existence of the guide has been confirmed by government sources and includes a series of recommendations aimed at minimizing Israel's exposure to potential investigations by bodies such as the International Criminal Court (ICC). Among the leaked excerpts, key advice includes strategies related to the public presentation of military operations, the documentation of civilian casualties, and the preparation of legal arguments to justify the actions carried out in Gaza.

Various analysts have emphasized that the mere existence of such guides underscores the Israeli government's growing concern over the potential legal repercussions of its actions in the occupied territories. In this regard, legal experts view these recommendations as an attempt to evade accountability rather than a genuine effort to prevent possible violations of international humanitarian law.

This strategy comes at a time when scrutiny over Israel's actions is intensifying. The ICC is conducting an ongoing investigation into war crimes committed in Palestinian territories, including military operations that have resulted in a high number of civilian casualties. Instead of making a real commitment to accountability, the guide reflects the Israeli leadership's focus on shielding themselves from international courts and preserving their impunity.

One of the most striking points in the internal guide distributed by Israeli authorities is the explicit warning about the legal risks for soldiers who share videos and photos of their operations online. According to the document, such posts can be used as evidence in international investigations for war crimes.

"Uploading videos online definitely increases legal risk," the guide states. "Soldiers who share images provide hostile organizations with potential evidence to support suspicions against them," it adds.

This caution reflects growing concern over the use of social media as a documentation tool by human rights organizations and civilians in the occupied territories. Images shared by soldiers or civilians have allowed for the documentation of incidents that might otherwise have remained hidden.

In recent years, videos showing violent arrests, shootings of unarmed protesters, or house demolitions have circulated widely on the internet, fueling complaints against Israel before the International Criminal Court and other legal bodies.

Another of the most controversial points in the internal guide distributed by Israeli authorities is the warning about the legal risks involved in something as ordinary as choosing a vacation destination. Soldiers and high-ranking officials who have participated in military operations in the Palestinian territories must be cautious when traveling abroad, as they could face detentions or judicial investigations based on universal jurisdiction.

The document raises the question, "How can I

check if my destination poses a risk before traveling?" and offers a clear recommendation:

"Human rights organizations publish online reports detailing the application of universal jurisdiction in various countries. It is strongly advised to consult with an expert in international criminal law before traveling."

This warning reflects the growing concern of Israeli authorities that their soldiers and officials may be detained abroad for potential war crimes committed in the occupied territories. Universal jurisdiction allows courts in certain countries to prosecute those responsible for grave crimes, such as torture, extrajudicial executions, or indiscriminate attacks on civilians, regardless of where the crimes were committed.

The inclusion of this section in the guide indicates that, for many Israeli military personnel, their exposure does not end on the battlefield. Traveling abroad, even for personal reasons, can become a legal threat if the necessary precautions are not taken. What is a simple matter of leisure and relaxation for other tourists could become a complex legal process that requires specialized advice for these soldiers.

The guide once again reveals that the focus of the Israeli government is on protecting its officials from potential legal proceedings, rather than ensuring that abuses are not committed in the first place, which could trigger those very investigations.

One of the points that has generated significant commentary on social media pertains to the dissemination of racist content, with emphasis on the fact that "even seemingly minor acts can be treated as serious offenses."

The text warns that "some countries may treat seemingly minor content, such as racist songs, as incitement to genocide."

In one of the most controversial sections of the internal guide, a disturbing question is posed: Should Israel finance the legal defense of soldiers arrested abroad for war crimes? This seemingly administrative question reflects a deep concern over the growing accusations of abuses committed by Israeli forces during their operations in Palestinian territories. In other words: "There are simply too many war crimes to defend."

Finally, it is crucial to focus on how Israeli authorities address a key question: Will it be safer to travel once the conflict ends? The answer, far from offering reassurance, highlights a growing concern about the potential long-term repercussions of Israel's military operations, even after hostilities cease. According to the official guide, "The threat may not diminish and could even intensify as Gaza opens up to human rights groups and foreign journalists." In other words, "Will things eventually get better?" The answer seems clear: No, things will worsen when they discover what you really did.

It can therefore be said that the very existence of the internal guide issued by Israeli authorities, along with its recommendations, is, in many respects, a voluntary admission of the violations the regime of Israel has committed in Gaza during more than a year of conflict. While the Israeli regime attempts to present the document as a preventive tool to protect its military personnel from unfounded accusations, the content of the guide can be interpreted as a public confession of the abuses and crimes committed in the Palestinian territories.

Yemeni army targets US aircraft carrier in Red Sea

From page 1 ▶ Also on Friday, al-Masirah TV reported that the US, Britain, and Israel launched a joint air attack targeting several parts of areas in Yemen's capital Sanaa, the Red Sea port city of Hodeidah, and the northern province of Amran.

Meanwhile, Israel's military announced in a statement that its warplanes targeted the Hezayaz power station in Sanaa and the Yemeni ports of Hodeidah and Ras Isa, claiming it targeted infrastructures used by Ansarullah forces for military operations.

Since November 2023, the Ansarullah movement has been carrying out rocket and drone attacks on Israel and disrupting "Israeli-linked" shipping in the Red Sea in solidarity with Palestinians in Gaza.

In response, Israel has launched rounds of



airstrikes on Yemen. In addition, the US-led naval coalition stationed in the area has been conducting regular air raids on Yemen since January 2024 in a joint bid to deter Ansarullah, prompting the resistance movement to expand attacks to include US warships.

Governor of Pakistan's Punjab tours attractions in Neyshabur

TEHRAN - The Governor of Punjab, Sardar Salim Haider Khan, accompanied by the consul general of Pakistan in Mashhad, visited key tourist attractions in Neyshabur, including the Khayyam Complex, Attar Complex, and Baghrud Camp on Thursday.

The Pakistani governor also held discussions with the governor of Neyshabur following his tour of the city's historical and cultural landmarks, said Hassan Giyahi, head of Neyshabur's Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts Office.

Haider Khan admired the city's historical and tourism potential, expressing his desire to visit Neyshabur again in spring. "I have heard much about the beauty of Neyshabur in spring and am eager to see it during that season," he remarked.

He also highlighted Neyshabur's importance as a stopover for Pakistani pilgrims traveling to Karbala, emphasizing the warm hospitality of the city's residents.

In addition to the tourist sites, the governor toured the agricultural exhibition and related product displays held at Baghrud Camp, as well as the Qadamgah-e-Razavi cultural and historical complex.

Situated some 70 km west of Mashhad, Neyshabur was founded around the third



century CE. Narratives say the town derived its name from its alleged founder, the Sasanian king Shapur I. It grew to prominence in the eighth century and was ruined by invasions and earthquakes in the thirteenth century. After that time, a much smaller settlement was established just north of the ancient town, and the once-bustling metropolis lay underground—until a team of excavators from the Metropolitan Museum arrived in the mid-twentieth century.

The ancient city was once situated on the famed Silk Roads, which ran from China to the Mediterranean Sea, crossing Central Asia, Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Turkey along the way.

China-Uzbekistan joint archaeology project makes new discovery

A joint Chinese and Uzbek archaeological team has made a new discovery at the renowned Mengchaktepa site, the nearest ancient city site in Uzbekistan to China, further confirming its pivotal role as a node on the ancient Silk Road.

The Mengchaktepa site, located on the northern bank of the Syr Darya River in Uzbekistan, is an archaeological treasure trove and once was a crucial geographical location along the Silk Road.

The site, often referred to as "The Living Fossil of the Silk Road," has been the focus of a joint archaeological project carried out by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) and the Institute of Archaeology of the Academy of Sciences of Uzbekistan since 2012, according to a press release CASS sent to the Global Times on Thursday.

Liu Tao, an archaeologist from CASS and the Chinese executive leader of the China-Uzbekistan joint archaeological team, told the Global Times on Thursday that the team has discovered seven tombs and two other buildings, along with a wealth of artifacts including silk fragments, leather products, bronze mirrors, round square-holed coins, and beads.

"The silk fragments, which were in particularly good condition, clearly exhibit marks of weaving, marking the first discovery of silk at the site since 1986 and filling the recent 40-year gap in the discovery of silk in the Fergana Valley," he said.

Anarbaev Abdulkhamidjon, a professor from Uzbekistan's National Center for Archaeology, highlighted the significant contributions of Chinese scholars in an interview with the Global Times.

Their expertise in site protection, holistic extraction techniques, and meticulous indoor excavation has enhanced field archaeology in Uzbekistan, particularly in on-site cultural relic conservation. Furthermore, these advancements have demonstrated the latest achievements in Chinese archaeological de-

velopment on a global stage.

Liu recalled that the motivation of the joint cooperation is to trace the history and culture of this region that was recorded in ancient Chinese texts during the Qin and Han dynasties (221BC-220 CE).

History books record that the Western Han Dynasty's (206BC-25CE) imperial emissary Zhang Qian once established friendly exchanges between ancient China and its neighbor in Central Asia - Dayuan, which was located in today's Fergana Valley in Uzbekistan.

After Zhang Qian embarked on his journey west, alfalfa and grapes from Dayuan, the first station on Zhang's route, were introduced to China, while Chinese silk and paper, and advanced well-drilling, iron smelting and sericulture techniques were gradually spread to Europe through Dayuan and other Central Asian countries, which had a profound impact on the exchange and integration of Eastern and Western civilizations.

The 1986 excavation of the Mengchaktepa site revealed nine large cave tombs, complete with well-preserved human remains and a variety of grave goods, including colorful silk clothing fragments and ornaments such as necklaces and earrings. The tombs date back to the 5th to 8th centuries, the press release noted.

Liu introduced that this year's excavation aims to further define the scope of the tomb area, understand the distribution of the tombs, and re-examine the structural and chronological details of the tombs and their burial artifacts.

The team has implemented temporary protective measures for the large number of organic remains found at the site, including items weaved from silk, leather, and reeds, and plans to extract the relics for further detailed cleaning and analysis in a laboratory setting to preserve and extract as much information as possible.

(Source: Global Times)

Cuneiform-like data storage tech boasts four times the density of binary

Cuneiform, the world's oldest form of writing, involved making indentations in clay tablets. Scientists have now developed a data storage system that's like cuneiform on steroids - and it's capable of storing more data than a typical hard disc drive.

The experimental new technology was created by Abigail Mann and colleagues at Australia's Flinders University.

Instead of a clay tablet, the system

utilizes an inexpensive polymer film composed of sulfur and a chemical compound known as dicyclopentadiene. Data is stored on that film in the form of a series of nanoscale indentations. These tiny indentations are made (and read) using a fine-tip probe mounted on an atomic force microscope ... not by a reed stylus.

In previous attempts at such "indent-based" data storage systems, the indentations served as binary code.

The presence of an indent represented a 1, while the absence of an indent represented a 0.

Not only were the polymer substrates that were used in these earlier systems difficult to produce, they also weren't very stable or finely workable. That's where the Flinders polymer comes in.

It's sensitive enough that the depth of each indent can be precisely tweaked. As a result, instead

of data being stored via two-state binary code, it can be stored via a three-state ternary code in which the absence of an indent is a 0, a 0.3- to 1.0-nanometer-deep indent is a 1, and a 1.5- to 2.5-nanometer-deep indent is a 2.

This capability boosts the system's data density four-fold over binary coding.

What's more, the indentations remain intact and readable until the polymer

is heated to 140 °C (284 °F) for just 10 seconds, thus erasing it. The film can then be rewritten with new data. In tests performed so far, the material remained functional through four write-read-erase-rewrite cycles.

As an added bonus, the indent-writing process can be performed at room temperature, keeping the system's energy requirements relatively low.

"This research unlocks the poten-

tial for using simple, renewable polysulfides in probe-based mechanical data storage, offering a potential lower-energy, higher density and more sustainable alternative to current technologies," says Mann, who is a PhD student in Flinders' College of Science and Engineering.

A paper on the research was recently published in the journal *Advanced Science*.

(Source: New Atlas)

Makkoran Coast is a potential platform for Iran's development, tourism minister says

TEHRAN - The Makkoran Coast, which is located in Sistan-Baluchestan province, stands among the finest coastal regions in the world and serves as a significant platform for Iran's development, said Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts, Seyyed Reza Salehi-Amiri, on Thursday.

Speaking on the sidelines of the Iranian President's visit to the southeastern province, Salehi-Amiri highlighted the critical role of infrastructure in the country's progress.

"Infrastructure in the country operates on multiple levels," he stated, adding, "The first level includes essential utilities such as roads, water, electricity, and gas. The second involves establishing accommodations like hotels,



eco-lodges, and tourist facilities, which provide rest and lodging for visitors."

He noted the high costs associated with these projects and

emphasized the government's strategy to involve the private sector. "Creating attractions to draw private investment to this region [Makkoran Coast] is crucial," he said.

Salehi-Amiri pointed out that in Sistan-Baluchestan, elements such as tourism, security, and infrastructure are interconnected. He stressed the need for marine-based tourism development in the province, noting that Makkoran Coast offers prime opportunities for tourism.

"Improving the condition of roads in some southern villages of Sistan-Baluchestan could attract a large number of tourists," he said.

The Makkoran Coast, he concluded, is a cornerstone for Iran's future development and holds immense potential for tourism growth.

Makkoran, aka Makran or Mokran, is a semi-desert coastal strip, along the coast of the Sea of Oman.

Human activities threaten Teymareh petroglyphs, researcher says

TEHRAN - Human activities pose one of the most significant threats to the treasured Teymareh petroglyphs of Golpayegan, said archaeologist and researcher Mohsen Jamali on Thursday.

Petroglyphs, defined as any carvings or engravings created by humans on rocks and boulders, are among the oldest forms of cultural expression. However, Jamali emphasized that mining activities near these archaeological zones, particularly in the Teymareh petroglyph site, have become a major threat to these ancient artworks.

Jamali, author of "Golpayegan Petroglyphs" and "The Passage of History," also highlighted unregulated tourism as another critical factor causing damage to these historical treasures. "Uninformed visitors often leave graffiti or disturb the surrounding areas, further endangering the petroglyphs," he noted.

To mitigate these risks, Jamali called for



increased protection of these historical artifacts and the promotion of guided, well-regulated tourism in the region.

Having dedicated over 17 years to studying Golpayegan's petroglyphs, Jamali revealed that the area boasts some 36,000 carvings depicting images and inscriptions. These

petroglyphs serve as a testament to Iran's ancient culture and civilization, offering a rare glimpse into the lives of its ancestors.

"These carvings represent history and culture created by ordinary people rather than under the orders of rulers or elites, making them some of the most genuine and unaltered records of human life globally," he explained.

Jamali also noted that these petroglyphs offer valuable insights into extinct wildlife species that once roamed Iran. Among the animal depictions are tigers, leopards, cheetahs, lions, deer, wild goats, and mountain sheep.

"Through anthropological and archaeological studies, we can uncover hidden narratives and mysteries depicted in these carvings, shedding light on the distant past," he added.

Golpayegan, home to these extraordinary petroglyphs, is situated 170 kilometers west of Isfahan.

Chinese archaeologist visits historical sites in northeast Iran



TEHRAN - A Chinese archaeologist visited several significant historical sites in Jajarm, North Khorasan province, on Thursday,

according to Mohammadreza Talebi, head of Jajarm's Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts Office.

Talebi stated that Chinese archaeologist Deng Cheng, accompanied by the head of the University of Tehran's archaeology group, toured the region's Copper and Stone Age archaeological sites.

"Jajarm has historically been a critical point along caravan routes, consistently drawing attention throughout its history.

From prehistoric times to the later Islamic periods, the region has played a pivotal role in the cultural evolution of Khorasan," Talebi explained.

The region is home to major archaeological sites from the Neolithic, Chalcolithic, and Bronze Ages, including the Pahlavan Tappeh, Heidaran, and the vast Chalo area.

These features make Jajarm one of the oldest human settlements in North Khorasan province, Talebi added.

Located in the northeast of Iran, North Khorasan is one of the three provinces that were created after the division of Khorasan in 2004.

Greater Khorasan has witnessed the rise and fall of many dynasties and governments in its territory throughout history. Various tribes of Persians, Arabs, Turks, Kurds and Turkmens have brought change to the region time and time again.

Greece emerges as a top choice for luxury travelers in 2025

Greece continues to captivate affluent travelers, securing its place as a top luxury destination for 2025, according to insights from a leading annual luxury travel survey.

The Luxe Report, conducted annually by a prominent global travel network, serves as a valuable resource for identifying trends and preferences in the luxury travel market. It offers a comprehensive look into the priorities and evolving tastes of high-end travelers worldwide.

For the second consecutive year, Greece ranks in the top five across multiple categories: 2nd in Global Destinations, 2nd in Honeymoon Destinations, and 3rd in Cruise Itineraries. Additionally, Greece is recognized as the 4th most popular Family Travel Destination for 2025.

Classic destinations such as Greece, Italy, and France continue to dominate the luxury travel landscape, while countries like Portugal and Japan are emerging as increasingly sought-after destinations.

Italy, a perennial favorite, maintains its position as the leading global travel destination, excelling in family and honeymoon travel categories as well.

The Luxe Report also highlights five prominent travel trends shaping the industry in 2025:

Cold-Weather Adventures: Destinations like Antarctica, Norway, and Iceland are attracting travelers seeking unique, wintry experiences.

Solo Cruising: Small-ship cruising appeals to independent travelers who enjoy a blend of autonomy and social interaction.

Adventure and Wellness: Travelers are increasingly seeking active and rejuvenating experiences.

Media and Social Influence: Inspiration from media, personal connections, and expert travel advisors continues to drive travel choices.

Culinary Exploration: Immersive gastronomic experiences, highlighting local cultures and traditions, remain a key motivator.

These findings are based on the insights of over 2,200 travel advisors from luxury travel agencies worldwide, reflecting the desires and behaviors of today's upscale travelers.

As travelers look to 2025, Greece's rich cultural heritage, stunning landscapes, and world-class offerings ensure its position as a favorite among discerning globetrotters.

(Source: Travel and Tour World)

Illegal refugees to be expelled from Semnan province in a year

TEHRAN –By the end of the next Iranian calendar year 1404 (March 20, 2026), all undocumented foreign nationals in Semnan province will be dispatched to their home countries.

Semnan province, following Qom, is hosting the highest number of immigrants in the country.

In recent decades, illegal Afghan nationals have entered the country in large numbers posing many problems in the country, Mehr news agency reported.

According to the latest census in 2016, foreign nationals comprise 2.1 percent of the whole population of the country, of whom 97.8 percent are Afghan nationals, and Semnan province hosts the largest number of foreign nationals in proportion to its population, IRNA reported.

Some 35,000 immigrants are residing in Semnan province with over 10,000 students of foreign nationals benefiting from educational services.

The head of the National Organization for Migration, Nader Yar-Ahmadi, has announced the expulsion of about 3 million illegal citizens over the past three years.

"The harsh conditions prevailing in Afghanistan have led to the



re-entry of Afghan nationals into the country. Thanks to police efforts, unauthorized immigrants will be expelled," ISNA quoted Yar-Ahmadi as saying.

Some 4,000 authorized Afghans enter Iran daily

In November 2024, Yar-Ahmadi said nearly 4,000 Afghans with valid passports enter the country every day.

Approximately, six million Afghans, including documented and undocumented ones, are residing in the country, ILNA quoted Nader Yar-Ahmadi as saying.

Migration can be due to many factors such as regional crises including political, social, and even natural crises which pro-

voke social changes.

Most of the foreign nationals in the country are unauthorized. They will be located and dispatched to their home country. However, they still receive services. The rest needs to be organized, Yar-Ahmadi noted.

Stating that foreign nationals entering any country need a deposit of at least 100,000 dollars for a one-year residence permit, the official said the country is looking for thorough documentation of individuals who have entered the country to organize them better.

In August 2024, the deputy chairman of the Majlis National Security and Foreign Policy

Committee said, "The establishment of a national organization responsible for protecting the rights of immigrants and refugees is in the final stages."

The organization will utilize a precise and managed approach to organize foreign nationals, deal with undocumented migrants, and maintain the security and peace of the country, Mehr news agency quoted Ebrahim Azizi as saying.

Deportation of undocumented nationals is the right of the people, and we must stand firm against illegal immigration to the country, the official stated.

The entry of immigrants without observing requirements for legal entry is against the national interests and security of the country, and all institutions are responsible in this regard.

By the end of the current Iranian year (March 20, 2025), two million undocumented foreign nationals who are residing and working in the country will be located and sent back to their home countries, the Iranian Police Chief, Brigadier General, Ahmad Reza Radan, has said.

They have entered the country through illegal channels, Mehr news agency quoted the official as saying.

Benefactors in Isfahan donate over \$19m to health sector

TEHRAN –Over the past three years, benefactors in Isfahan province have donated more than 13 trillion rials (almost 19 million dollars) to Isfahan University of Medical Sciences.

Since the Iranian year 1400 (March 2021–2022), donors have allocated 3.2 trillion rials (around 4.7 million dollars) to implement construction projects, 8.7 trillion rials (nearly 12.8 million dollars) to purchase equipment, and 1.16 trillion rials (roughly 1.7 million dollars) in cash to conduct health and treatment projects, IRNA reported.

Iran's health system 'a role model' in world

President Masoud Pezeshkian has called the country's health system a role model in the region and even the world thanks to its unique, particularly primary healthcare, services.

The official made the remarks on January 2nd in a letter addressing a national seminar held in Mashhad to honor healthcare staff including nursing aids, the health ministry's website reported.

Lauding the substantial progress made in the health sector, the president said these remarkable achievements are the results of health workers' ceaseless efforts, such as providing vaccination and prenatal care for pregnant mothers, controlling infectious diseases, promoting health educa-



tion, sharing knowledge, and training new generations of health staff nationwide.

The notable increase in life expectancy, reduction in infant mortality rate, control of infectious diseases, and reduction in complications from chronic diseases are all due to health workers' dedication and commitment.

Pezeshkian also commended the ongoing health programs such as universal health coverage and family physician programs, which have made comprehensive and continuous healthcare accessible to millions.

The president went on to say that the administration recognizes the untiring efforts and services of all health workers, and is determined to elevate the country's health system to its rightful and deserving

position, utilizing health workers' valuable capacities and potentials.

In October 2024, the World Health Organization's (WHO) director for the Eastern Mediterranean Regional Office (EMRO) also called Iran's health sector a role model in the region.

WHO EMRO is interested in expanding cooperation with the Islamic Republic of Iran, IRNA quoted Hanna Hasan Balkhi as saying.

The official made the remarks in a meeting with Alireza Raeisi, the Iranian deputy health minister, and Mohammad-Hossein Niknam, the deputy health minister for international affairs, on the sidelines of the Seventy-first session of the WHO EMRO.

A delegation led by Health Minister Mohammad-Reza Zafarqandi participated in the seventy-first session of the WHO EMRO which was held in Doha, Qatar, from October 14 to 17, 2024.

"During my short visit to Iran a few months ago, I became familiar with the capabilities of Iran in the health sector; Iran is a role model in health in the region," Balkhi noted.

"Utilizing full potentials available in the [regional] countries is essential for us, and we will not hesitate to support the implementation of health programs," the official noted.

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Iran working with Green Climate Fund

TEHRAN – The Department of Environment (DOE) is working with the United Nations Green Climate Fund (GCF), under the auspices of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), to reduce the effects of climate change.

FAO and the Department of Environment as the National Designated Authority (NDA) of Green Climate Fund (GCF), partnered to bring together local, national, and international stakeholders in a three-day workshop, the last one in a series of iterative events held under the project "Green Climate Fund Readiness and Preparatory Program of Iran."

"Throughout the implementation of this Project, FAO as the delivery partner has always stayed committed to providing its technical expertise, data, and tools to support the country in its efforts to strengthen the national capacities to effectively access and efficiently manage, track and guide climate financing with particular attention to the requirements of the GCF," said Gerold Bodeker, FAO Representative to the Islamic Republic of Iran.

همکاری ایران با صندوق اقلیم سبز سازمان ملل

سازمان حفاظت محیط زیست به عنوان مرجع رسمی ایران در زمینه حفظ محیط زیست با صندوق اقلیم سبز سازمان ملل با محوریت سازمان خواربار و کشاورزی ملل متحد (فاو) در راستای کاهش تأثیرات تغییر اقلیم همکاری می کند.

فاو و سازمان حفاظت محیط زیست کشور به عنوان مرجع صلاحیت دار ملی ایران و صندوق اقلیم سبز با همکاری یکدیگر، این پروژه را پیش بردند و در قالب چند برگزاری چند کارگاه اقدامات را بررسی کردند. بر این اساس در آخرین کارگاه، ذینفعان محلی، ملی و بین المللی را به عنوان آخرین حلقه از زنجیره رویدادهای پروژه «برنامه آماده سازی جمهوری اسلامی ایران برای همکاری با صندوق اقلیم سبز» گرد هم آوردند.

گرولد بودکر نماینده فاو در جمهوری اسلامی ایران گفت: در طول اجرای این پروژه، فاو، به عنوان شریک اجرایی، همیشه متعهد به ارائه تخصص فنی، داده ها و ابزارهای سیاستی خود برای حمایت از کشور در تلاش های خود برای تقویت ظرفیت های ملی برای دسترسی موثر و مدیریت کارآمد، ردیابی و هدایت تأمین مالی اقدامات اقلیمی با در نظر گرفتن الزامات صندوق اقلیم سبز بوده است.

Hundreds of classrooms to be constructed in Sistan-Baluchestan

TEHRAN –To expand the education space in Sistan-Baluchestan province, the administration has allocated 20 trillion rials (almost \$30 million) to construct 3,000 classrooms in the underdeveloped province.

"President Masoud Pezeshkian's administration is determined to expand educational infrastructure in Sistan-Baluchestan province," IRNA quoted Education Minister Alireza Kazemi as saying.

The project aims to improve the educational conditions in underprivileged areas. In addition to expanding the educational space per capita, it will also lay the ground for the growth and academic progress of students in these areas, Kazemi highlighted.

"Per capita education space in Sistan-Baluchestan is low due to population growth in the region.

To address the problem, 2,000 new classrooms should be constructed in the province," dolat.ir quoted Kazemi as saying on Friday.

The official stated that the average per capita education space in Sistan-Baluchestan is 3.87 square meters, he clarified that there are eight regions with per capita education space less than three meters and nine regions above the national average.

The education minister highlighted that the administration is planning to build 3,000 more classrooms through implementing a five-year program in the province.

"Currently, 314 projects are underway in Sistan-Baluchestan province with 1,828 classes being constructed. The projects are scheduled to be completed by the beginning of the next academic year in the country, which will fall on September 23, expanding per capita education space in the region by half a meter," Kazemi further noted.

Soon there will be no stone-made schools in Sistan-Baluchestan, and the elimination of pre-fabricated schools by the end of the current year (on March 20, 2025) are on the agenda.

According to Kazemi, these 3,000 classrooms are scheduled to be constructed in three phases.

During the first phase being implemented this year (March 2024 –March 2025), 834 classrooms through 290 projects will be constructed.

Within the second phase, which will kick off in the next Iranian year (March 2025–March 2026), 274 projects will be conducted to build 1,392 classrooms; and in the third phase, which is designed to last five years, 66 projects will be implemented to construct 775 classrooms.

Investing in the education of the future generation is the best type of investment which benefits both individuals and the whole country as well.

These schools not only help develop education space but also create a bright future for the children of the region, Kazemi stressed.

Educational equity a fundamental goal

In December 2024, President Pezeshkian said that the administration intends to transform the education system so that no student is deprived of the right to quality education, highlighting that educational equity is not a mere slogan but a fundamental goal.

It is not acceptable that students in public schools in underprivileged areas do not receive a good education while they have to compete with students in private schools that benefit from the best education, Pezeshkian stressed.

He made the remarks in Bojnourd, the



capital of North Khorasan province, Borana reported.

The president said providing vocational training alongside education is one of the key areas of transforming educational methods, through which the youth will develop skills needed for a profession after graduating from high school.

Referring to the extensive plans to solve the infrastructural challenges of schools, the president stressed, "We will overcome all school constructing challenges within a year.

One of our main objectives is to turn public schools into the best education model."

The president urged governor generals and all executive officials to cooperate with other sectors on a national plan to promote equity in educational spaces within the specified time-frame.

Currently, 314 projects are underway in Sistan-Baluchestan with 1,828 classes being constructed. The projects are scheduled to be completed by September.

He went on to stress the necessity of public participation and the role of citizens in realizing the major national plan of building schools, saying, "We need to share our plans with the people to build not only schools for their children but also appropriate sports and recreational spaces for extra-curricular activities."

Pezeshkian further emphasized the importance of action instead of mere speeches, stating that his administration has prioritized solving the issue of educational space shortages, especially in deprived areas across the country within a year.

Education space per student, literacy rate improved

According to the latest statistics, education space per student in Iran has increased from 5.17 square meters in the calendar year 1396 (2017-2018) to 5.28 square meters in the year 1402 (2023 – 2024).

The literacy rate, as well, has increased from 87.9 percent in 1396 to 90.7 percent in 1402, IRNA reported.

In the mentioned six-year period, the ratio of resilient classrooms improved from 0.64 to 0.82, sport space per student grew from 0.17 to 0.20, and the ratio of classrooms equipped with cooling and heating systems rose from 0.48 to 0.68.

The literacy rate has improved in urban areas as well as rural areas.

From 1396 to 1402, the literacy rate among men and women amounted to 93.9 percent and 87.4 percent, respectively.

The literacy rate in urban areas was announced to be 92.8 percent, males had a literacy of 95.4 percent and females had a literacy rate of 90.2 percent.

In rural areas, the literacy rate reached 83.5 percent. Men accounted for 88.8 percent and women for 78.3 percent of the figure.

Moreover, the number of out-of-school students in primary, secondary, and high school lowered from 2.17, 6.71, and 18.19 percent in 1396 to 2.10, 5.23, and 16.12 percent in 1402, respectively.



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GUIDE TO SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

When two persons are together, two of them must not whisper to each other, without letting the third hear; because it would hurt him.

Prophet Muhammad (S)

Prayer Times » Noon:12:11 Evening: 17:29 Dawn: 5:46 (tomorrow) Sunrise: 7:14 (tomorrow)

What's in Tehran art galleries



Painting

* Javid Gallery is hosting an exhibition of paintings by Roja Alinejad.

The exhibition named "Like Blue" runs until January 20 at the gallery that can be found at 17 Zartosht St., Vali-e Asr Ave.

* Paintings by Sara Keshmiri are currently on display in an exhibit at Jaleh Gallery.

Entitled "Relations", the exhibition runs until January 24 at the gallery located at No. 3, Noshahr Alley, Iranshahr St., Karim Khan Ave.



* An exhibition of paintings by Morteza Mottaqi is underway at Yafteh Gallery.

The exhibition named "Commandment VI: On Killing" will run until January 17 at the gallery located at 8 Taleqani Dead End, Yarmohammadi St. in the Darus Neighborhood.



* Ev Gallery is hosting an exhibition of paintings by Shahla Armin.

The exhibit named "Sacred Secrets Through Time" will be running until January 24 at the gallery located at 5 Arabi Alley, North Kheradmand St.



* A collection of paintings by Shahrzad Qazizadeh is on view in an exhibition at Homa Gallery.

The exhibition named "Comment-Free" will be running until January 21 at the gallery located at No. 8, Fourth Alley, Sanai St., Karim Khan Ave.

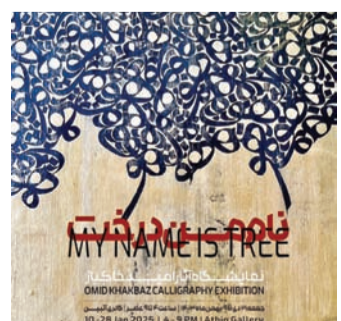
* Etemad Gallery 2 is showcasing paintings by Asal Alikhani in an exhibition named "Process".

The exhibition will be running until January 28 at the gallery located at 25 Shirudi Alley, Mofatteh St., near Haft-e Tir Square.



* Tarlan Tabar is putting her latest paintings on view in an exhibition at Bavan Gallery.

Entitled "Long Live Forgetfulness", the exhibit will run until January 27 at the gallery located at 7 Abdo off Lareztan St. off Motahhari Ave.



* Paintings by Omid Khakbaz are currently on view in an exhibition at Atbin Gallery.

The exhibit titled "My Name Is Tree" will continue until January 28 at the gallery located at 42 Khakzad Alley, Vali-e Asr Ave. near the Parkway Intersection.

* Artibition Gallery is playing host to an exhibition of paintings by Abu Hamid Asadi, Abu Saeid Asadi, Fatemeh Bujar and Majid Kamrani.

Entitled "In Expansion", the exhibit runs until January 19 at the gallery located at No. 2798, Vali-e Asr Ave, after Parkvay, next to Bank of Industry and Mine.



Iran's Resistance Theater Festival can become artistic reference for Muslim nations, Iraqi expert says

TEHRAN- Iran's Resistance Theater Festival has established significant ties with Muslim countries, Iraqi theater scholar and expert Abdul Karim Abboud has said.

He emphasized that the Resistance Theater Festival can serve as a cultural reference point within the region.

He made the remarks during his visit to Iran for the 19th edition of the International Resistance Theater Festival, which was held in Tehran and various cities across the country from November 28, 2024, to January 8.

He underscored the readiness of the Iraqi theater community to engage with Iran's Resistance Theater Festival.

In his comments, Abboud highlighted the expansive nature of theater, which encompasses a wide range of subjects, and noted the emergence of a remarkable artistic trajectory in Iraq's theater scene, particularly focusing on themes of resistance.

"The concept of resistance in our theater revolves around the Palestinian issue, the national struggle of the Iraqi people against the Ba'ath regime, the fight against ISIS, and honoring the martyrs," he explained.

Touching upon the history of theater production in Iraq, he stated that plays focused on resistance have been performed in various cities, including Baghdad and Basra, as well as cities in Iran, such as Khorramshahr and Shadegan.

"Our performances not only showcase our work in Iraqi cities but also extend to Iranian cities, fostering a mutual ex-



change," he added.

Abboud further acknowledged the significance of Iran's theater events, specifically the Resistance Theater Festival, due to their shared thematic focus on resistance.

"One of the prominent features of Resistance Theater is its emphasis on vital regional and Palestinian issues, which resonate deeply with Arab-speaking artists across Islamic countries," he noted.

He announced the Baghdad

Theater Festival's readiness to collaborate and synergize with the Resistance Theater Festival, expressing interest in leveraging the experiences garnered from Resistance Theater.

"We are keen to benefit from the expertise of Iranian artists, particularly in children's and youth performances, as well as in research and critique," he noted.

Emphasizing the inclusivity of Islamic countries towards the Resistance Theater Festival, he suggested the establishment of

offices and secretariats for the festival in various Islamic nations, including Iraq, Lebanon, and Yemen. This initiative aims to create a seamless communication framework between the festival and Arab-speaking artists.

He praised the young team managing the Resistance Theater Festival and affirmed, "We are pleased to see trust placed in a young team for the Resistance Theater Festival. We hope to expand the festival's reach to all Muslim countries, as the essence of the Resistance Festival represents a common voice shared by all Muslims."

Abboud highlighted the Ministry of Culture of Iraq's commitment to empowering talented youth in theater, stating that it aims to invigorate the theatrical landscape with fresh ideas and perspectives, given the youthful forces' ability to connect and engage effectively.

He also confirmed the Baghdad Theater Festival's openness to hosting Iranian theater groups, acknowledging the deeply-rooted and civilizational ties between Iran and Iraq.

"Culture, theater, and humanity will serve as the foundation for the solidarity between Iran and Iraq, which is invaluable and will never be severed," he remarked.

He also pointed out the diversity of themes in theater, noting that subjects with religious, spiritual, and resistance dimensions often attract greater attention.

"We witness wonderful and positive developments in cities like Babel, Basra, and Mosul, each of which hosts separate festivals," he concluded.

Chekhov's "Uncle Vanya" on stage at Shahrzad Theater Complex

TEHRAN-An adaptation of the 1897 play "Uncle Vanya" written by Anton Chekhov is on stage at Shahrzad Theater Complex in Tehran.

Titled "Unfinished Romance from Uncle Vanya," the one-hour play is directed and produced by Maryam Shirazi.

Shayan Haji-Esmaeili, Sahar Khakpur, Solmaz Keykhaei, Alireza Ataei, and Vahid Tabib form the cast of the play.

The play portrays the visit of an elderly professor and his glamorous, much younger second wife, Yelena, to the rural estate that supports their urban lifestyle. Two friends—Vanya, brother of the professor's late first wife, who has long managed the estate, and

Astrov, the local doctor—both fall under Yelena's spell while bemoaning the ennui of their provincial existence.

Sonya, the professor's daughter by his first wife, who has worked with Vanya to keep the estate going, suffers from her unrequited feelings for Astrov. Matters are brought to a crisis when the professor announces his intention to sell the estate, Vanya and Sonya's home, with a view to investing the proceeds to achieve a higher income for himself and his wife.

"Uncle Vanya" is unique among Chekhov's major plays because it is essentially an extensive reworking of "The Wood Demon," a play he published a decade earlier.

Anton Chekhov (1860-1904) was a Russian playwright and short-story writer. His career as a playwright produced four classics, and his best short stories are held in high esteem by writers and critics. Along with Henrik Ibsen and August Strindberg, Chekhov is often referred to as one of the three seminal figures in the birth of early modernism in the theater.

The plays that Chekhov wrote were not complex, but easy to follow, and created a somewhat haunting atmosphere for the audience.

"Unfinished Romance from Uncle Vanya" will remain on stage through February 2 at Shahrzad Theater Complex located at located at No. 74, Neauphle-le-Château St., Hafez St.

IAF to show Bergman's "Autumn Sonata"

TEHRAN-The 1978 drama film "Autumn Sonata" written and directed by Ingmar Bergman will be shown at the Iranian Artists Forum (IAF) in Tehran on Monday.

The movie screening is set for 5 p.m. and will be followed by a review session in the presence of the film critic Jaber Ghasemali, ISNA reported.

"Autumn Sonata" stars Ingrid Bergman (in her final film role), Liv Ullmann and Lena Nyman, and Halvar Björk.

Its plot follows a celebrated classical pianist and her neglected daughter who meet for the first

time in years, and chronicles their painful discussions of how they have hurt each other.

After having neglected her children for many years, world famous pianist Charlotte visits her daughter Eva in her home. To her surprise, she finds her other daughter, Helena, there as well. Helena is mentally disabled, and Eva has taken Helena out of the institution where their mother had placed her. The tension between Charlotte and Eva only builds up slowly, until a nightly conversation releases all the things they have wanted to tell each other.

It was the only collaboration be-

tween Ingrid Bergman and Ingmar Bergman (who were not related).

"Autumn Sonata" was the last of Ingmar Bergman's films to be made for theatrical exhibition; all of his films made after it, even those screened in theatres, were television productions.

Ingmar Bergman (1918-2007) was a Swedish film and theater director and screenwriter. Widely considered one of the greatest and most influential film directors of all time, his films have been described as "profoundly personal meditations into the myriad struggles facing the psyche and the soul."

Bergman directed more than 60 films and documentaries, most of which he also wrote, for both cinema releases and television screenings. Bergman also had a theatrical career that included periods as Leading Director of Sweden's Royal Dramatic Theatre in Stockholm and of Germany's Residenz Theatre in Munich.

He directed more than 170 plays. Among his company of actors were Harriet Andersson, Bibi Andersson, Liv Ullmann, Gunnar Björnstrand, Erland Josephson, Ingrid Thulin, Gunnel Lindblom and Max von Sydow.

Elaine Feeney's "How to Build a Boat" published in Persian

TEHRAN-The Persian translation of the novel "How to Build a Boat" written by Elaine Feeney has been released in the bookstores across Iran.

Bitā Ebrahimi has translated the book and Tadaee Publications has brought it out, Mehr reported.

This is the story of a remarkable boy and his search for his mother, told with warmth, tenderness, and flair.

Jamie O'Neill loves the color red. He also loves

tall trees, patterns, rain that comes with wind, the curvature of many objects, books with dust jackets, cats, rivers and Edgar Allan Poe. At age 13, there are two things he especially wants in life: to build a Perpetual Motion Machine, and to connect with his mother Noelle, who died when he was born. In his mind, these things are intimately linked. And at his new school, where all else is disorientating and overwhelming, he finds two people who might just be able to help him.

"How to Build a Boat" is the story of how one boy and his mission transforms the lives of his teachers, Tess and Tadhg, and brings together a community. It is about love, family and connection, the power of imagination, and how our greatest adventures never happen alone.

Elaine Feeney, 46, was born in the West of Ireland and lives in Athenry. She published her first chapbook, Indiscipline in 2007, and has since published three collections of poetry. Her debut novel "As You Were" was published in 2020.