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Trump's Foreign Fund Freeze and Fallout for Iran's Opposition

U.S. President orders 90-day pause in foreign aid



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No message exchange with U.S. on sanctions talks so far: Iran FM

TEHRAN – Iran's Foreign Minister, Abbas Araghchi, has dismissed speculation that the new U.S. administration has reached out regarding possible negotiations on lifting sanctions.

Speaking on the sidelines of cabinet meeting on Wednesday, Araghchi made it clear that Tehran has received no direct messages from Washington and remains cautious about any engagement.

"So far, no clear communication has been exchanged between the two governments," he stated. "What is being discussed is only in the media."

His comments come amid growing speculation that the U.S. may have secretly sent messages to Iran regarding a potential return to the 2015 nuclear deal, formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). However, Araghchi stressed that any decision to enter negotiations would depend on meaningful confidence-building measures by the U.S. ▶ Page 2

'Victory assured,' Tehran's military leaders hail Palestinian Resistance, assert Iran's strength

TEHRAN – Iran's prominent military leaders has celebrated the recent victories of the Palestinian Resistance, describing them as a clear and strategic triumph against the Israeli regime's aggression in Gaza.

These statements were delivered during interviews after the Leader of the Islamic Revolution, Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei, convened with Iranian officials and ambassadors from Islamic nations in Tehran on Tuesday.

Palestinian Resistance secures 'strategic, ultimate' victory: Army Chief

Iranian Army Chief Commander Major General Abdolrahim Mousavi lauded the steadfastness of the Resistance front against the Israeli regime's aggression in Gaza.

He emphasized that this demonstrated the effectiveness of Resistance in achieving strategic and ultimate victories.

"The Palestinian Resistance and the Resistance Front stood by their ideals until they achieved their goals," Mousavi said. ▶ Page 2

From exile to victory

By Faramarz Kouhpayeh

TEHRAN – Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, the founder of the Iran's Islamic Revolution, returned to his country on Thursday, February 1, 1979, after 14 years in exile. His arrival was a pivotal moment in the revolution, marking the beginning of the Ten-Day Fajr (Dawn).

Imam Khomeini was invited back to Iran by a multitude of anti-Shah revolutionaries who had been courageously protesting in cities and towns across the country despite months of brutal repression and violent crackdowns by the Shah's regime.

The return of the immensely popular revolutionary leader came just two weeks after the last Shah of Iran, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, fled the country on January 16, 1979.

Imam Khomeini's arrival ultimately led to the collapse of Shapour Bakhtiar's provisional government and the final overthrow of the Pahlavi regime 10 days later, on February 11, 1979—the victory of the Islamic Revolution.

The Bakhtiar government's attempt to block Imam Khomeini's return

Before fleeing, the Shah had handed over power to Shapour Bakhtiar, his last prime minister. However, Bakhtiar's authority was weak, and his government struggled to maintain control. ▶ Page 3

Humanitarian rhetoric or a new Nakba?

By Maryam Geshani

TEHRAN – In a statement that has sparked global outrage, U.S. President Donald Trump recently suggested relocating Palestinians from Gaza to Jordan and Egypt, reigniting debates over the future of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the fate of the Palestinian nation.

The proposal has drawn sharp criticism from regional leaders and human rights bodies.

"I would like Egypt to take people," Trump said. "You're talking about probably a million and a half people, and we just clean out that whole thing and say: 'You know, it's over.'"

Trump then complimented Jordan for "having successfully accepted Palestinian refugees" and that he told the king of Jordan, "I would love for you to take on more, 'cause I am looking at the whole Gaza Strip right now, and it's a mess. It's a real mess."

Israel's more than 15-month war on Gaza has displaced almost all of its 2.3 million residents, some of them multiple times. Trump said Gaza's inhabitants could be moved "temporarily or could be long term".

Raids to terrorize residents of southern Lebanon: 8 villages still occupied

By Sondoss Al Asaad

SOUTH LEBANON – The Israeli enemy forces launched two raids targeting Nabatieh al-Fawqa and Zawtar al-Sharqiya after relative stability in southern Lebanon following the end of the 60-day deadline for their withdrawal, while 8 border villages remain occupied.

The two raids – which renewed the debate over the inclusion of the area north of the Litani in the ceasefire agreement – targeted civilian facilities.

However, the Israeli enemy claimed that it targeted an ammunition truck in light of the enemy's efforts – with Washington's support – to expand the geographical scope of UN Resolution 1701, contrary to what Lebanon and Hezbollah have previously agreed to.

The two raids, along 1000+ violations, were nothing but a clear response to the popular liberation movement, as the enemy – whose settlers refuse to return to the north – feels angry.

In parallel, the enemy – through UNIFIL – threatened the southerners with shooting, claiming that there were Hezbollah elements among them who were provoking its soldiers.

Lebanon: The graveyard of Israeli ambitions

By Shahrokh Saei

TEHRAN – Israel has consistently violated a ceasefire with Hezbollah that initially went into effect on November 27 last year.

On Tuesday night, Israeli drones conducted two airstrikes in the city of Nabatieh in southern Lebanon.

The Israeli army claimed it targeted vehicles associated with the Hezbollah resistance movement that were carrying arms. But it has failed to provide any evidence to back up the claim.

According to Lebanon's Health Ministry, Israel has killed more than 80 people in the country since the implementation of the ceasefire that was brokered by the US and France.

Based on the two-month truce agreement, Israeli troops should have withdrawn from southern Lebanon by the Sunday deadline. However, Israel maintained its military presence in the region. On the same day, Israeli soldiers killed two dozen Lebanese people who were trying to return to their homes in the country's south.

On Monday, they shot dead two more people.

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Fajr Music Festival to honor resistance with new award

TEHRAN- The upcoming edition of the International Fajr Music Festival will feature an award named "Peace and Resistance," the organizers have announced.

The award will be dedicated to the performances centered on the theme of the Resistance Front, the public relations office of the 40th edition of the festival said on Wednesday.

The festival will be held in two competitive and non-competitive sections from February 11 to 17 in ten halls throughout Tehran as well as 20 provinces across the country.

the provinces of East Azarbaijan, Ardabil, Khuzestan, Zanjan, Markazi, Fars, Lorestan, Kermanshah, Khorasan Razavi, Kerman, North Khorasan, Golestan, Mazandaran, Kohgiluyeh-Boyerahmad, Alborz, Sistan-Baluchestan, Bushehr, Hamedan, and Kordestan will organize provincial Fajr Music Festivals. ▶ Page 8



Gazans reject forced exile: Over 500,000 return to north

By Wesam Bahrani

TEHRAN – The mass return of Palestinians to northern Gaza sends a defiant message: they refuse to be displaced, rejecting any notion of relocating from their homeland.

According to Gaza's Government Media Office, more than half a million displaced Palestinians have returned to northern Gaza via two main roads over the past 72 hours.

Palestinians displaced from northern Gaza started returning to their homes on Monday.

"This comes after 470 days of forced displacement since the start of the genocide by the Israeli occupation army in the Gaza Strip," the office added. ▶ Page 5

TEHRAN PAPERS

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

There is a possibility of dialogue

In a note, Hamshahri dealt with the report of the analytical site "Responsible Statecraft" about possible Iran-U.S. negotiations and wrote: According to this analytical site, Trump is eager for a quick agreement to demonstrate his power in striking deals. After the election of Pezeshkian, Tehran has also consistently announced its readiness to re-enter diplomacy. But despite the apparent political will of both sides, the path to reaching an agreement is not easy. The United States has a clear incentive to rejoin real negotiations in a multilateral format. Otherwise, if it engages with Iran solely on a bilateral basis, there is a risk that the European troika, fearing being left out of a potential agreement between Washington and Tehran, will play the role of a disruptive actor by activating the snapback mechanism. A limited bilateral agreement could reduce tensions between the United States and Iran, followed by deeper multilateral negotiations, including first signing a reformed JCPOA, which seems to be the most realistic way forward.

Shargh: Prediction of Iran-U.S. relations

In an article, Shargh discussed the future relations between Iran and the United States. The paper said: Shortly before Donald Trump returned to the White House, Iran resumed nuclear negotiations with Europe, and on the eve of the inauguration of the U.S. President, Masoud Pezeshkian told an American television network that Iran was ready for negotiation. According to analysts, Iran and the U.S. generally face three situations: the first one resembles confrontation; the second is maintaining the current situation; and the third mode is interaction. According to observers, in the previous Trump administration, the two countries did not move towards confrontation, and even preparations were made for new negotiations, but Trump's strategy until the point of withdrawing from the JCPOA was to discredit and destabilize the situation. After Trump's withdrawal from the JCPOA, Iran concluded that it should get engaged in interaction. However, Trump disrupted the current situation, and Iran preferred to maintain it. Now, however, the outlook for Iran's foreign policy seems more ambiguous than ever. No one knows what the future holds, but Iranian society is hopeful about negotiations and the lifting of sanctions.

Sobh-e-No: Prospects of Iran-Afghanistan ties

In an analysis, Sobh-e-No discussed the

prospects for Iran-Afghanistan relations and said: Considering the steps taken during Foreign Minister Arachis's visit to Kabul and the commitments of the Islamic Republic of Iran to strengthen relations with Afghanistan, it seems that the two countries are on the path to expanding economic, political, and social cooperation. The Islamic Republic of Iran, emphasizing humanitarian principles and common interests, is trying to facilitate a path to ensure regional stability and sustainable development with neighbors, especially Afghanistan. Given Iran's active diplomacy and its emphasis on dialogue and cooperation with the Afghan government, we can hope that bilateral relations will reach higher levels of cooperation and interaction soon. On the other side, the problem of the water basin between Iran and Afghanistan comes at a time when the two countries are in the process of establishing a trade and economic partnership, and the volume of exchanges is expected to reach \$5 billion in the next two years and \$10 billion in the next three to five years.

Iran: Trump's idea to clear out Gaza condemned

The Iran newspaper analyzed the Islamic Republic's reaction to Donald Trump's suggestion to move the Gazan population to Jordan and Egypt. The newspaper wrote: Tehran reacted to Trump's new position on Gaza, calling it an occupation plan to expel Palestinians from their land. Saturday, Trump spoke of a plan for a displacement of the people of Gaza. The positions of Iranian officials have been raised at a time when Iran has repeatedly emphasized the need to end the Zionist regime's occupation of Palestine and the right to self-determination by the Palestinians over the past four decades and is 100 percent opposed to any forced displacement of the native inhabitants of Palestine. Experts warn that beyond moral and legal concerns, the influx of refugees into neighboring Arab countries could lead to deep instability in the region and pose a serious threat to peace and stability. The U.S. president is known for coming up with sudden and emotional ideas and has previously experienced failure by supporting ideas such as maximum pressure on Iran. Now we have to wait and see whether the U.S. will continue to stick to this idea or whether Trump, having learned from the past and understanding the realities of the Middle East, will not gamble his political fate with Netanyahu.

VP Aref to attend EAEU summit in Kazakhstan



TEHRAN – Mohammad Reza Aref, Iran's First Vice President, is scheduled to visit Kazakhstan on Thursday to attend the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) Prime Ministers' Summit and the Almaty Digital Summit 2025.

This visit comes in response to an official invitation from Kazakhstan's Prime Minister Oljas Bektenov.

Ali Najafi, Deputy for International Affairs and Regional Cooperation of the First Vice President, highlighted the significance of this trip on Wednesday.

He noted that it marks the first time a high-ranking Iranian official will participate

in an EAEU meeting as an observer.

Iran recently gained observer status within the EAEU, an economic bloc comprising Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Armenia, established to foster economic integration through a common market for goods, services, capital, and labor.

Najafi expressed optimism about Iran's growing relationship with the EAEU, stating, "Iran's cooperation with the economic union can enhance and strengthen ties with neighboring member countries."

(See full text at tehrantimes.com)

'Victory assured,' Tehran's military leaders hail Palestinian Resistance, assert Iran's strength

From page 1 ▶ He noted that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu failed to achieve his declared objectives in Gaza, while members of the Palestinian Resistance movement Hamas returned home with victory and pride.

"This shows that Resistance and reliance on God will ultimately prevail against any power," the senior commander stressed.

Mousavi also commented on the perception of certain "short-sighted" individuals who mistake a technical or tactical victory for a strategic one.

He highlighted that true strategic victory, pride, and ultimate triumph come through steadfast Resistance. This, he said, was the greatest message of the Resistance.

'Illusion of a weakened Iran disproved,' IRGC Aerospace Chief

The IRGC Aerospace Commander General Amir Ali Hajizadeh addressed attempts by enemies to distort realities.

Criticizing those, both inside and outside Iran, who have been deceived into believing that Iran has weakened, he stated that recent events have made the truth clear to everyone.

He praised the Palestinian nation and its supporters for their united display of Resistance, saying, "It proved that perseverance, fortitude, and genuine Resistance result in victory."

The world has acknowledged that Palestine has emerged victorious, while the Israelis have failed to achieve their objectives,



the commander added.

Victory is certain: Navy Chief

Admiral Shahram Irani, Commander of the Iranian Navy, declared that the dignity and honor of the Israeli regime's forces were shattered more than ever, as they entered the Gaza war with all their might and were defeated by the Resistance front.

In response to a question about the lessons of the Resistance's victories in Gaza and Lebanon for Iran and the Islamic world, Irani stated, "The actions of the Palestinian people secured the Resistance's total triumph."

He emphasized that despite the Palestinians' limited resources in their struggle against the occupying regime, they once again emerged victorious.

Irani highlighted the importance of not succumbing to self-defeat in any situation and moving forward under the banner of leadership, with the certainty that victory belongs to

Muslims and believers, as promised by God in the Holy Quran.

Continuing the path of Islam, revolution essential for victory: VP

First Vice President Mohammad Reza Aref also gave an interview praising the Palestinian Resistance, emphasizing that it embodies qualities such as patience, courage, perseverance, and hope, inherent in Islamic culture.

"These qualities were evident in the victory of Iran's Islamic Revolution in February 1979," Aref added.

He noted that many Western analysts doubted that the Iranian revolution could triumph over arrogant powers after approximately 15 years of struggle.

Aref explained that the weight of the bombs dropped on Gaza would equate to several kilograms or even hundreds of kilograms per martyr and wounded person.

"The world witnessed the people's return to northern Gaza, sending a powerful message to the forces of arrogance," he stated.

Aref also stressed the importance of continuing the path of the revolution and Islam, which serves as the main strategy of our revolution until complete victory is achieved.

Israeli regime has become powerless: AEOI chief

Additionally, Mohammad Eslami, head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI), stated that the Israeli regime, despite vast expenditures on weapons, bombs, and military equipment, was defeated, leading to the collapse and ineffectiveness of its entire system.

He asserted "Truth always prevails, even if its manifestations are not immediately visible."

Eslami described Resistance as a culture rooted in the Quran and the steadfastness of people worldwide.

He noted that the people of Gaza are returning to the ruins, signifying their attachment to the land.

"They defended their soil, culture, faith, history, and civilization with their heroic presence. These magnificent displays of victory once again proved that blood triumphs over the sword," the official noted.

Eslami concluded, "Despite spending vast amounts of money on weapons, bombs, and military equipment, the Zionist regime was defeated, and its entire system has become ineffective."

We must end U.S. interference in Iran's foreign policy, says Zarif



TEHRAN – Iran's Vice President for Strategic Affairs Mohammad Javad Zarif, stated, "I do not see the United States as an opportunity for Iran's foreign policy. I consider the U.S. a nuisance or a shackle that must be removed from Iran's foreign policy."

In his speech at a recent conference on international relations and geopolitics, Zarif referenced discussions from the 55th World Economic Forum (Davos 2025).

He noted that the theme of "the return of hard power," with a focus on Donald Trump's re-election as President of the United States, dominated many discussions.

Zarif highlighted a common sentiment among attendees: "Take Donald Trump, the new President of the United States, seriously but not literally."

"The 47th U.S. President seeks to revive American hard power using economic leverage rather than military tools," he noted.

Zarif also addressed the notion that a polarized world requires loyalty.

He mentioned that some attendees believed Trump divides the world into smaller countries and peer countries.

"Trump expects loyalty from smaller countries but not from those on par with the United States," Zarif said.

Discussing the post-polar world, the former foreign minister noted that some attendees believed Europe desires relative American hegemony, but Trump does not.

Others emphasized that loyalty is not a consistent factor in Trump's calculations, raising serious doubts about its stability.

Zarif added that a new international polarization would not emerge soon.

Some view this situation as a form of chaos, but Zarif argued that it signifies a new international condition where "temporary issue-based coalitions" replace "permanent polarizations."

He explained that the absence of loyalty could be interpreted within these temporary coalitions, which might last longer depending on their purpose and goals.

The official emphasized that Iran has an opportunity in this situation that must be seized.

He stated that some outside Iran, including Zionists and certain Iranian opposition groups, aim to solidify the perception that Iran is at its weakest and most dangerous.

This perception was so ingrained that a high-ranking European official repeatedly claimed during a Davos session that Iran "has been weakened."

Zarif responded, "Assuming your statement is correct and Iran has weakened, you and your like-minded colleagues can no longer claim that Iran disrupts West Asia's peace because, according to you, we lack the power to do so."

Zarif insisted that the reason for the lack of harmony in West Asia is not Iran but the unresolved Palestinian issue.

(See full text at tehrantimes.com)

No message exchange with U.S. on sanctions talks so far: Iran FM



From page 1 ▶ Araghchi emphasized that Iran is already engaged in discussions with European signatories to the JCPOA and is waiting for Washington to clarify its stance before making any decisions. He also reiterated Tehran's longstanding position that it was the U.S., not Iran, that broke the agreement.

"We had a deal. Iran honored its commitments, but it was the U.S. that unilaterally withdrew," he said, referencing former President Donald Trump's 2018 decision to abandon the JCPOA and reinstate economic sanctions under the "maximum pressure" campaign.

In response to Washington's withdrawal and its failure to uphold the agreement, Iran gradually scaled back its own compliance with the nuclear deal starting in 2019, arguing that it could not remain bound by an agreement that the other parties were not fully implementing.

Despite Trump's repeated remarks during his campaign and presidency about seeking a new agreement with Iran, Araghchi underscored that trust between the two countries has been severely damaged. "Overcoming this distrust is not a simple task," he said. "It cannot be achieved with mere words—it requires concrete action."

He further noted that if Iran ever considers returning to ne-

gotiations, it will only do so under conditions of equality and mutual respect. "Any potential talks must be based on a fair and balanced approach, not dictated by one side."

'Afghanistan a vital strategic partner to Iran'

In addition to addressing nuclear negotiations, Araghchi touched on Iran's evolving relationship with Afghanistan, particularly in light of recent regional developments. He reaffirmed Iran's commitment to engaging with Afghanistan's interim government, describing the neighboring country as a vital strategic partner with shared national interests.

One key issue in Iran-Afghanistan relations is Iran's water rights from the Helmand (Hirmand) River. Araghchi noted that the Afghan government acknowledges Iran's legal claims and has expressed its willingness to honor existing treaties as well as religious and humanitarian obligations regarding water access.

He also addressed the ongoing issue of Afghan refugees in Iran, stating that while Afghanistan's interim government has agreed in principle to repatriate illegal migrants, they insist that the process must be carried out in an organized and coordinated manner.

Trump's foreign fund freeze and fallout for Iran's opposition

U.S. President orders 90-day pause in foreign aid

By Soheila Zarfam

TEHRAN – On January 20, 2025, Donald Trump signed an executive order suspending U.S. foreign development assistance for 90 days, citing the need to reassess the efficiency and alignment of U.S. aid programs with his “America First” agenda.

The State Department quickly implemented the directive, freezing most ongoing foreign aid initiatives and pausing new funding efforts.

While this move has been framed as a routine review, it has triggered an immediate wave of concern among Iranian opposition figures and exile groups. Publicly, they argue that the aid freeze will intensify human rights abuses in Iran by cutting off support for independent media and civil society organizations.

However, a closer look suggests that these concerns are merely a cover—the real issue is that the decision threatens long-standing efforts to engineer regime change in Iran through U.S. financial and strategic backing.

In September 2024, leaked internal emails and documents obtained by The Grayzone revealed the extent to which U.S. policymakers had been orchestrating efforts to reshape Iran's opposition movement. The leaks point to a covert initiative, spearheaded by Carl Gershman, the former director of the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), to construct an “Iran Freedom Coalition”—a network of pro-Western activists and neoconservative operatives with the ultimate goal of destabilizing the Islamic Republic system.

The documents also provided an



accompanying list of “individuals involved or to be involved” in the IFC. Among the names listed as key figures in this coalition were Reza Pahlavi, the exiled son of Iran's last monarch and pretender to the country's now non-existent throne; Masih Alinejad, a U.S.-based journalist, and Mariam Memarsadeghi, a regime-change advocate who has openly called for direct U.S. intervention in Iran.

The NED, originally established during the Reagan administration as a tool for U.S. intelligence operations, has a long history of funding groups aimed at toppling foreign governments. From backing anti-government factions in Nicaragua and Venezuela to funding opposition movements in Hong Kong, the organization has played a key role in advancing Washington's geopolitical interests under the guise of promoting democracy.

The leaked documents suggest that similar tactics were being deployed in Iran, with U.S. government

funds channeled into opposition networks to sustain pressure on the Iranian establishment. This revelation casts doubt on the claim that U.S. assistance was primarily about protecting human rights. It appears that, in reality, the funding was an extension of Washington's broader strategy for regime change.

The impact of Trump's decision is perhaps best reflected in the reaction of Dana Stroul, a U.S. official who used to be Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense (DASD) for the Middle East. In a recent post on X, Stroul lamented the aid suspension, writing:

“Last year \$65M for human rights, free flow of information, and civil society organizing. Want to enable “maximum support” policy for Iranian people as part of “maximum pressure” against Iranian regime? Hard to do with 0 resources.”

While she frames the funding in terms of human rights and democracy promotion, she explicitly ties it to the broader “maximum pressure” campaign against Iran. Her use of

the term “maximum support” directly aligns with the rhetoric of Reza Pahlavi who has repeatedly called for greater U.S. assistance in bringing about regime change.

For years, Pahlavi and his allies have insisted that international backing is necessary to weaken Iran's ruling system. Stroul's post indicates that U.S. officials were actively considering this approach, treating financial aid as a tool for advancing Washington's strategic objectives rather than simply supporting civil society. Now, with Trump's aid freeze in place, those who depended on U.S. resources to push for regime change are suddenly left scrambling.

The opposition's frantic response: a crisis of dependence

The abrupt halt in U.S. funding has triggered a wave of anxiety among Iranian opposition figures, particularly those in exile.

Within days of Trump's executive order, opposition activists and media outlets rushed to warn that the aid freeze would worsen human rights conditions in Iran. Yet, their response suggests a far deeper concern—the sudden loss of a crucial financial lifeline.

Iranian exile groups have long claimed to be independent, grassroots movements representing the will of the Iranian people. However, the overwhelming distress following Trump's order suggests otherwise.

As Trump's review of foreign aid continues, the future of these U.S.-sponsored efforts remains uncertain. However, one thing is clear: the temporary withdrawal of U.S. assistance has forced a moment of reckoning for Iran's opposition.

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Straight Truth
TEHRAN TIMES

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SPORTS

Esteghlal's coaching carousel spins again

TEHRAN – Esteghlal FC, one of Iran's most storied football clubs, find themselves once more in turmoil as South African coach Pitsso Mosimane has unilaterally terminated his contract.

Mosimane's departure marks the latest chapter in a saga of managerial instability that has plagued the Tehran-based club.

Brought in to steady the ship after a tumultuous start to the Persian Gulf Pro League season, Mosimane was unable to deliver the consistent results expected of him.

Despite his reputation and experience, the South African coach failed to inspire the Blues to significant victories. His departure has left Esteghlal in a precarious position, with just three wins from 14 matches across all competitions.

The club's decision to appoint Sohrab Bakhtiarizadeh as interim coach for the second time this season highlights the lack of a long-term strategy. Bakhtiarizadeh, a former Esteghlal player, has been a stop-gap solution, but it remains to be seen if he can provide the stability the club desperately needs.

Mosimane's departure is particularly galling given the significant financial investment made by Esteghlal. Reports suggest that the South African coach will receive a substantial severance package, despite his brief and unsuccessful tenure.

The constant change of coaches at Esteghlal has had a detrimental impact on the team's morale and performance. Fans of the Blues are growing increasingly frustrated with the club's inability to build a competitive squad and provide them with a team capable of challenging for titles.

With the AFC Champions League Elite looming and the domestic league in full swing, Esteghlal must act swiftly to appoint a new coach. The club's board of directors faces a difficult task in finding a suitable replacement who can not only stabilize the team but also restore the faith of the passionate fan base.

Sirous Pourmousavi appointed Mes coach: PGPL

TEHRAN – Sirous Pourmousavi was officially appointed as the new head coach of Mes football club on Wednesday.

The former coach of Esteghlal Khuzestan steps into the role previously held by Masoud Shojaei.

Shojaei, who once played as a midfielder for Osasuna, had assumed the position in late October following Moharram Navidkia's tenure.

However, he did not meet the expectations at the Rafsanjan-based club, leading to his exit by mutual agreement.

Mes currently sit in 14th place in the 2024/25 Iran Persian Gulf Professional League (PGPL).

Bakhtiarizadeh named Esteghlal interim coach: PGPL

TEHRAN – Sohrab Bakhtiarizadeh has been appointed as the interim coach of Esteghlal football team for the second time in the 2024/25 Iran Persian Gulf Professional League (PGPL).

Pitsso Mosimane unilaterally terminated his contract with Esteghlal on Monday due to the club's failure to meet its financial obligations.

Bakhtiarizadeh, 51, will serve as interim coach until a new head coach is appointed.

He previously held the interim position in October.

Esteghlal, one of Iran's most prominent teams, currently sit 11th in the league table.

Iran volleyball to play Italy in friendly

TEHRAN – Iran national volleyball team will play Italy in a friendly match.

Team Melli, headed by Italian coach Roberto Piazza, prepare for the 2025 Volleyball Nations

League (VNL).

The volleyball federation of Iran has also reached an agreement with Argentina for a friendly match.

Iran will commence the tournament on June 11 with a match against host Brazil and face the US and Slovenia in the coming days. The Persians will also meet Ukraine on June 15.

Iran volleyball team will lock horns with hosts Serbia on June 25 in Belgrade in Week 2. Team Melli will also play Argentina (June 27), Germany (June 28) and the Netherlands (June 29).

Iran, in Week 3, are scheduled play hosts Poland on July 16 in Gdansk. It will face China (July 17), France (July 19) and Bulgaria (July 20).

I want to win title with Persepolis: Ismail Kartal

TEHRAN – Ismail Kartal, the newly appointed head coach of Persepolis, has expressed his ambition to secure the league title with the team.

He was named as Persepolis coach last week on an 18-month deal.

The 63-year-old coach previously managed Fenerbahce in the 2014/15 and 2021/22 seasons, and was assistant manager from 2010 to 2014. He bagged two Turkish Super Lig titles, two Turkish Cup trophies, and a Turkish Super Cup with the Yellow Canaries.

“I conducted extensive research before joining Persepolis. This team have incredibly passionate fans, and I understand it boasts nearly forty million supporters. Upon learning that Persepolis are a well-established club in Iran, I decided to come to Tehran to take charge. The club have ambitious goals, which is why I wanted us to embark on this journey together,” Kartal said in the press conference on Wednesday.

“I will implement an attacking style of play, as my philosophy revolves around offensive football, and we aim to win every match. Last year, with Fenerbahce in the Europa League, we were eliminated in the quarter-finals via penalties, but we set records for goals and points. Now, having parted ways with Fenerbahce, I am committed to utilizing all my experiences to achieve success with Persepolis,” he added.

“We are open to any factors that can assist us. Persepolis are a great team, and we must accomplish significant achievements. We need to work harder and develop better solutions. I love creativity and incorporate it into my football approach. I am here to do everything in my power, not just for Persepolis but for Iranian football as well. Since my arrival in Iran, I have received warm welcomes, and I thank the Persepolis fans. I have witnessed positive developments and want them to know that I will do my utmost for the success of Persepolis,” Kartal stated.

“I have worked with great coaches, including Joachim Löw, the former head coach of the German national team. We are close friends, and I have invited him to Iran; he will definitely come. Another mentor is Guss Hiddink, who has coached the Dutch national team and Barcelona. He is like a father to me, and I spent months learning from him. I also worked with Carlos Alberto Parreira, who has won the World Cup twice with Brazil.

“I came to Iran to win trophies, and we must aim to become champions, but this cannot be achieved alone. The club and Reza Darvish (General Manager) must support the team, and we need backing from the fans and the media. Players must have faith in us for us to succeed through teamwork. Persepolis supporters are passionate and back the team from start to finish. We strive to bring joy to the fans, and they will appreciate the style of play we adopt.

“There is a significant focus on football in Iran, and the people are enthusiastic about it. As the new head coach of Persepolis, I am committed to fostering a strong relationship with the players, ensuring clear communication, and specifying expectations,” Kartal concluded.

From exile to victory Imam Khomeini's return to Iran after 14 years in exile and start of the Ten-Day Fajr



From Page 1 ▶ Imam Khomeini was initially scheduled to return to Iran on January 26, but Bakhtiar's interim government announced the closure of all airports in an attempt to prevent his arrival.

Shortly after the Shah's departure, Imam Khomeini, who was in exile in Paris, declared that he would return as soon as the airports reopened to continue the struggle against the Pahlavi regime alongside the Iranian people. Meanwhile, revolutionaries and the public, eager to welcome their leader, formed a special “welcoming committee” to organize his safe return.

The Bakhtiar government's decision to shut down the airports triggered widespread protests and strikes. Seminary students and clerics staged sit-ins at religious schools across the country, while massive demonstrations erupted in major cities. In Tehran alone, 28 people were killed in clashes. Protesters chanted slogans such as, “Bakhtiar, a servant of the Shah with no authority.”

Officials of the Pahlavi regime were well aware that once Imam Khomeini returned, their chances of survival would be slim, and the regime's collapse would be imminent.

On January 29, the airports were reopened. Finally, at 9:30 a.m. on February 1, 1979, Imam Khomeini triumphantly returned to Iran, marking the beginning of the Ten-Day Fajr—the final countdown to the victory of the Islamic Revolution.

Upon arrival, he addressed reporters at Mehrabad International Airport, saying: “I thank you all for your love. The Iranian people's affection is a great responsibility on my shoulders, and I cannot repay it. Unity is the key to victory.”

A historic welcome: millions gather for Imam Khomeini's homecoming

Imam Khomeini's arrival sparked one of the largest public gatherings in Iranian history. Con-

servative estimates place the number of people flooding the streets of Tehran at over three million.

From the airport, he proceeded to Behesht-e Zahra cemetery, where many revolutionaries who had died in the struggle were buried. Along the way, millions lined the streets, chanting his name, waving banners, and celebrating his long-awaited return. At the cemetery, hundreds of thousands gathered to hear him speak.

Addressing the massive crowd, he acknowledged the sacrifices of the people: “We have suffered many tragedies. Women lost their husbands; men lost their children. When I see those who have given their lives for this movement, I feel sorrow and a great responsibility. I cannot thank a nation that has sacrificed so much for the sake of God.”

In a direct challenge to Bakhtiar's provisional government, Imam Khomeini declared his opposition, famously vowing: “I shall punch their teeth in.”

He also reaffirmed his vision for an Islamic government, based on the will of the people and determined by popular vote.

Imam Khomeini's return intensified the revolutionary momentum. On February 8, 1979, a pivotal moment unfolded when a group of “Iranian Air Force commanders, pilots, and personnel (Homafaran) visited Imam Khomeini's residence to pledge allegiance to the revolution. Their defection marked the collapse of military loyalty to the Shah, signaling the regime's imminent downfall.

Meanwhile, the army refused to enforce martial law, declaring neutrality.

On February 4, 1979, Imam Khomeini appointed Mehdi Bazargan as the prime minister of the provisional government, further solidifying the revolution's political transition.

(See full text at tehrantimes.com)

Parliamentary delegation from Iran meets Belarus' election chief, praises transparency



TEHRAN – A delegation from Iran's Parliament met with Igor Karpenko, Chairman of Belarus' Central Election Commission, to discuss electoral processes and bilateral relations.

The meeting took place as part of the Iranian delegation's visit to Belarus as international observers for the country's presidential election.

Ali Asghar Bagherzadeh and Ali Keshavarzi, the chair and vice-chair of the Iran-Belarus Parliamentary Friendship Group, led the Iranian delegation. Bagherzadeh highlighted the strengthening ties between Iran and Belarus, stating that Iran's presence in the election monitoring process reflected the deepening relationship between the two nations.

“The participation of 480 international observers in the election demonstrates Belarus' commitment to transparency,” Bagherzadeh said. He also praised the high voter turnout, describing it as a strong indication of public support for the Belarusian government.

Keshavarzi pointed out key differences between Iran's and Belarus' electoral systems, noting that Belarus allows early voting while Iran conducts all elections on a single day. He commended the high level of organization at polling stations and emphasized that broad public participation plays a crucial role in national development.

Addressing concerns about international recognition of the election results, Keshavarzi remarked, “While Western countries refuse to acknowledge Belarus' elections, every independent nation has the right to hold free and sovereign elections without external interference.”

(See full text at tehrantimes.com)

Tehran, Moscow chambers to expand economic cooperation

TEHRAN - Tehran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (TCCIMA) and Moscow Chamber of Commerce and Industry have agreed to strengthen trade relations between Iran and Russia, particularly in the food industry.

The agreement was reached during a webinar titled "Trade in Iran and Russia with a Focus on the Food Industry," organized by the Tehran Chamber's International Affairs Department in collaboration with Moscow's chamber and Business Russia.

The event, attended by economic operators from both countries, focused on increasing trade in food and agricultural products while enhancing collaboration between private sector entities. Discussions highlighted strategies for identifying economic opportunities and fostering direct business links between Iranian and Russian companies. During the meeting, Mehdi Sadeghi, deputy head of the TCCIMA, emphasized that Russia is a strategic market for Iran, citing the ratification of the Iran-Eurasian Economic Union free trade agreement by the Iranian parliament and EAEU member states as a key step toward expanding economic ties.

He also pointed to Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian's recent visit to Moscow, during which Iranian and Russian officials signed a long-term strategic cooperation document. According to Sadeghi, this agreement paves the way for joint investments, financial cooperation, infrastructure development, and banking collaboration, all of which should be leveraged by the private sectors of both nations.

To further advance this agenda, the Tehran Chamber is preparing a one-year roadmap for cooperation with the Moscow Chamber. This includes hosting business webinars tailored to targeted industries and facilitating Iranian and Russian firms' participation in trade exhibitions and commercial events.

On the Russian side, Vladislav Chenko, Vice President of the Moscow Chamber, highlighted Moscow's distinct economic structure and consumer behavior. He noted that Moscow residents, compared to the rest of Russia, are willing to pay higher prices for high-quality food products, making the city a prime market for premium imports. He also stressed the city's high influx of international tourists, which boosts demand for diverse food supplies.

Chenko outlined Moscow Chamber's readiness to connect Iranian businesses with Russian manufacturers and traders, not just in the capital but across the country. He further mentioned invest-

ment opportunities for Iranian firms, including a joint China-Russia technology park under development in Moscow. Additionally, he announced plans for a food and agricultural product exhibition tour in major Moscow retail centers and proposed establishing a joint Tehran-Moscow booth at upcoming trade fairs in the Russian capital. The Moscow Chamber hosts over 100 economic events annually.

Other participants included Roshanali Yektay Gharabaei, Vice President of the Iran-Russia Joint Chamber of Commerce; Alexey Yefimov, Russia's trade representative in Iran; Sadraddin Niavarani, Vice President of Iran's National Agricultural Products Union; Nikolai Machkov, Chairman of the Iran-Russia Economic Cooperation Commission; and Hossein Khakbaz, Logistics and Transport Advisor to the Tehran Chamber's International Affairs Department. Discussions covered strategies to enhance Iran-Russia business cooperation, with an emphasis on private sector engagement.

Meanwhile, in a meeting at the place of TCCIMA in last December, aimed at fostering strategic collaboration to enhance private sector trade with Russia and addressing challenges faced by economic operators, a memorandum of understanding (MOU) was signed between the TCCIMA and the Iran-Russia Joint Chamber of Commerce.

The event was attended by Mehdi Sadeghi, deputy head of the Tehran Chamber, and Hadi Tizhoosh Taban, the head of the Iran-Russia Joint Chamber, the TCCIMA portal reported.

The agreement aims to strengthen cooperation in resolving trade issues for Iran's private sector with Russia and expanding economic ties between the two nations.

According to the TCCIMA's Public Relations Department, the MOU was signed during a joint meeting by Hesameddin Hallaj, International Affairs Deputy of the Tehran Chamber, and Roshanali Yektay Qarabaei, Vice President of the Iran-Russia Joint Chamber.

During the meeting, Mehdi Sadeghi highlighted that the Tehran Chamber has identified eight target countries in its strategic roadmap, with Russia prioritized as a key partner for expanding trade relations. He also noted the development of six value chains to guide this strategy.

Sadeghi emphasized that the new phase of collaboration between the Tehran Chamber and the Iran-Russia Joint Chamber is designed to streamline private-sector trade with Russia while creating new opportunities for trade and investment.

the government and Oil Ministry's policies to promote CNG usage in Sistan-Baluchestan, six new CNG stations—currently over 95 percent complete—will be operational by the end of 2024, bringing the total number of stations in the province to nine.

So far, approximately 8,000 taxi fuel tanks have been replaced and converted to dual-fuel systems nationwide. Owners of public taxis with fuel tanks older than 15 years or with technical defects can register on the conversion program's online platform to replace their tanks.

Free dual-fuel conversion program for public vehicles launched

TEHRAN - The director of the CNG project at the National Iranian Oil Products Distribution Company (NIOPDC) announced the launch of registration for a free program to convert gasoline-powered public vehicles to dual-fuel in Sistan-Baluchestan Province. According to IRIB News, the initiative aims to expand CNG stations in various cities across the province while increasing the number of conversion workshops in line with fuel station capacity by the end of the current Iranian year (late March 2025).

Saeed Rahman-Salari stated that, in line with

TEHRAN- The value of non-oil export from Zanjan province rose 12 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, according to a provincial official.

Mohammadreza Naderi, the head of the province's Finance and Economic Affairs Department, said that 166,000 tons of commodities worth \$407.5 million were exported from the province in the nine-month period, indicating eight percent drop in terms of weight, year on year.

He named Turkey, Iraq, United Arab Emirates, Turkmenistan, India, Azerbaijan, Russia, Uzbekistan, South Africa and Thailand as the main destinations of the goods exported from the province in the mentioned nine-month period.

The main export goods of the province are zinc ingots, transformers and accessories, paper and cardboard, rebar, and steel ingots, the official further stated.

Non-oil export from Zanjan province rises 12% in 9 months on year

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 50.77 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 international 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 TPO 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.

China to invest in Iran's renewable energy sector

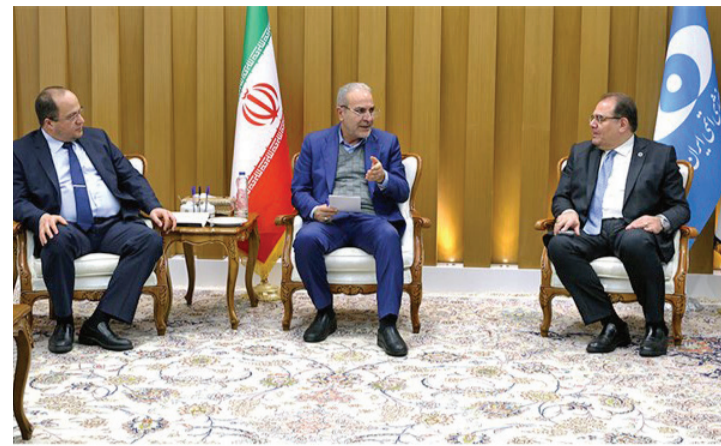
TEHRAN - Tehran and Beijing have reached an initial agreement on Chinese investment in Iran's renewable energy sector, with a Chinese company set to cover 70 percent of the investment.

The preliminary deal was made during a trilateral meeting involving Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (ICCIMA) Energy Committee, the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI), and a Chinese economic delegation.

According to the ICCIMA portal, the meeting was attended by Arash Najafi, head of the Iran Chamber's Energy Committee; Nematollah Toriki, deputy for management development and resources at the AEOI; and a representative from China's Hainan Elite Energy company.

During the discussions, both sides agreed to draft the investment agreement while the Chinese delegation remains in Iran, with plans to finalize and sign the document soon.

Liao Ghohui, representing



Hainan Elite Energy, emphasized Iran's commitment to expanding its renewable energy capacity and noted that his company, a semi-state-owned entity established in 2017, has developed a solid understanding of the Iranian market.

He highlighted that Iran's policies in the renewable energy sector provide a favorable environment for investment.

Ghohui also referenced his recent meeting with Iran's Renew-

able Energy and Energy Efficiency Organization (SATBA), which has set a goal of expanding renewable energy capacity by 5,000 megawatts.

He noted that initial collaboration with Iran would start on a smaller scale, with the potential for expansion in the future.

Under the preliminary agreement, 70 percent of the investment will be provided by the Chinese company, while the remaining 30 percent will be cov-

Sudan needs Iran's knowledge, expertise for establishing upstream oil industries

TEHRAN- A representative from Sudan's Ministry of Energy and Petroleum, who was a member of the delegation sent to Iran, said: "We need Iranian knowledge and expertise to establish upstream oil industries."

Al-Imam Allah Jabo, referring to Iran's valuable knowledge in developing upstream industries and producing oil and petrochemical products, stated: "Sudan has a downstream oil industry, and to establish upstream industries, Iran's knowledge can help our country."

He continued: "Upstream oil industries are among the most expensive industries that can transform a country's economy, and Iran has the knowledge for it."

The representative from Sudan's Ministry of Energy and Petroleum, expressing Sudan's interest in developing relations and interactions with the Islamic Republic of Iran in various energy and oil sectors, added: "Despite sanctions, Iran has always been an attractive country for private sector investment."

He expressed amazement at Iran's progress in the oil industries, even under sanctions, stating: "Sanctions have always been an obstacle to the growth and progress of countries; we are very pleased with Iran's progress under these conditions."

He further emphasized the necessity of strengthening and increasing economic interactions with the Islamic Republic of Iran and announced that Sudan's foreign minister would visit Iran within the next month to enhance bilateral cooperation.

South Pars refineries' over 11,000 equipment items produced domestically

TEHRAN - The commercial director of South Pars Gas Complex announced that with the collaboration of 120 domestic and knowledge-based companies, more than 11,589 essential equipment and components for South Pars refineries are being produced inside the country.

According to SHANA, citing the South Pars Gas Complex, Saeed Heidari stated that domestic manufacturers have consistently proven to be a strong support for the complex. He emphasized that the management prioritizes utilizing the capabilities of knowledge-based firms and local manufacturers, successfully producing over 11,589 key refinery components and breaking the monopoly of foreign suppliers.

Heidari noted that refineries across the complex are currently cooperating with more than 120 knowledge-based, manufacturing, and first-time production companies in commercial, research, and manufacturing sectors to supply vital equipment for the thirteen refineries.

He highlighted that this year, relying on Iranian expertise, the complex has initiated contracts for the production of 160 strategic equipment items.

Some of these companies operate as consortia, with which the complex has various agreements, Heidari said.

Additionally, the complex is directly collaborating with science and technology parks, which consist of multiple entities. He expressed hope that with systematic efforts, these localization initiatives will continue to expand.

Heidari stressed that leveraging domestic manufacturers to support stable and sustainable production has been welcomed by this major gas complex in Iran and West Asia. He noted that localization efforts have played a crucial role in this year's overhaul operations, significantly enhancing maintenance quality across the thirteen refineries. Currently, the complex accounts for 73 percent of Iran's total gas production.

According to the official, significant prog-



ress has been made in the localization of rotating equipment, including turbo expanders and cold boxes, which were previously dependent on technology from Japan, the United States, China, and several European countries. These technologies have now been fully indigenized.

He added that more than 95 percent of the essential and strategic equipment required by South Pars refineries has been localized. With continued cooperation from domestic manufacturers, the goal is to achieve full localization by the end of this year.

Gazans reject forced exile: Over 500,000 return to north

From page 1 ▶ They are essentially returning to rubble, where entire neighborhoods once stood, now reduced to piles of debris. Months of Israeli airstrikes and tank fire caused this destruction, leaving streets filled with the remains of buildings and shattered homes.

Israeli occupation forces didn't just destroy homes but everything (hospitals, schools, and vital infrastructure), leaving the area in ruins.

Despite the destruction, footage shows Palestinians setting up tents on the rubble. Amid the ruins, they are finding shelter, sending a powerful message to the world that this is their land and they will not be driven away.

Media interviews with families returning to northern Gaza reveal a sense of defiance.

Interviews with families now back in northern Gaza show their resolve.

After being displaced countless times for nearly 16 months, their words reflect a determination to restore their lives and rebuild their homes. This is despite everything the Israeli military has committed against them.

It appears that U.S. President



Donald Trump's remarks about resettling the 2.3 million people of the coastal enclave outside the Strip, an act referred to under international law as ethnic cleansing, will hit a brick wall.

Israeli officials have also been pushed for the illegal plan during the genocidal war on Gaza and have backed Trump's plan.

However, the U.S. president's controversial remarks over the mass deportation of Palestinians have been met with widespread condemnation, drawing strong reactions from leaders and organizations around the world.

In a statement, Hamas spokes-

man Abdul Latif al-Qanou said the mass migration scenes of families returning to the north "represent another failure of the occupation in achieving the goals of the war of extermination and destruction and a message of defiance to any new attempt to displace them."

"The steadfastness of our people on their land and their return from the south of the Gaza Strip to its north represents the end of the Zionist dream of displacing them and liquidating their just cause," al-Qanou added.

Egypt's Foreign Ministry issued a statement warning that any attempt to transfer Palestinians, whether temporarily or long-

term, "risks expanding the conflict in the region."

The statement reaffirmed Egypt's commitment to a political solution to the Palestinian issue, stressing that it remains the central issue in the Middle East.

According to the ministry, the delay in resolving the issue, ending the occupation, and restoring the rights of the Palestinian people is the root cause of regional instability.

Egypt also reiterated its support for the Palestinian people's steadfastness, their legitimate rights, and adherence to international law, emphasizing Cairo's rejection of any attempt to displace Palestinians or infringe upon their inalienable rights.

Jordan's Foreign Minister, Ayman Safadi, stated that his country's opposition to Trump's proposal was "firm and unwavering," emphasizing that Jordan will not support any attempt to displace Palestinians from their land.

Even some of America's Western allies have distanced themselves from the comments being floated about by Trump, while rights groups have described them as "illegal" and "delusional".

Humanitarian rhetoric or a new Nakba?

Trump's 900kg bombs for Israel speak louder

From page 1 ▶ "It is literally a demolition site right now, almost everything is demolished and people are dying there, so, I would rather get involved with some of the Arab nations and build housing in a different location, where they can maybe live in peace for a change," he said.

The timing of Trump's remarks is critical. Since October 2023, Gaza has been engulfed in a devastating war. Israel's military campaign has displaced 1.7 million Palestinians—nearly 75% of Gaza's population—and killed over 47,000 people, according to the Gaza Health Ministry (January 2025). The humanitarian crisis is staggering: 80% of Gazans rely on aid, and the UN warns of famine-like conditions in the besieged enclave.

Trump's proposal to relocate Gazans to neighboring countries appears to be yet another attempt to forcibly displace a large population of Palestinians, reminiscent of the events of 1948 during what is known as Nakba Day.

Here are some points that are worth mentioning in this context:

1. Trump's suggestion aligns with the goals of far-right factions in Israel's government, which have long sought to diminish Palestinian territorial rights. Far-right Israeli Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich welcomed Trump's idea to relocate Gaza's residents to Egypt and Jordan.

He said in a statement: "The idea of helping them find other places to start a better life is a great idea."

By advocating for the dispersal of Gaza's population, Trump echoes calls from Israeli hardliners who view this as a way to consolidate control over the region.

2. Trump's previous term in office was marked by policies that marginalized the aspirations of the Palestinian nation, exemplified by the so-called Abraham Accords, which was a failed attempt to normalize relations between

Israel and several Arab states while disregarding Palestinian rights to self-determination. His recent relocation proposal once again underscores this approach, prioritizing geopolitical realignment and the interests of other regional actors – the Israeli regime on top of all – over the pursuit of justice, sovereignty, and a lasting peace for the Palestinian nation.

3. Trump's rhetoric as president strongly aligned with his evangelical and pro-Israel base, reinforcing their belief that unwavering support for Israel is a moral and strategic necessity. His administration's policies, including the relocation of the U.S. embassy to al-Quds, recognition of Israeli sovereignty over the Golan Heights and now the proposal to forcefully relocate Palestinians to the neighboring countries, reflect this commitment. These moves were not only welcomed by his evangelical supporters but also by influential pro-Israel lobbying groups in the U.S., such as AIPAC and other donors who advocate for policies favorable to Israel. By making controversial statements and taking pro-Israel actions, Trump tries to maintain media attention and secure political and financial backing from these key constituencies, to solidify his position among right-wing voters.

Regional rejection and legal concerns

Egypt and Jordan have unequivocally rejected Trump's proposal. Just a few hours after Trump's proposal, Jordanian Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi said Amman's position is that the two-state solution is the way to achieve peace.

He stressed that Jordan's "rejection of displacement is fixed and unchangeable."

Also, the Palestinian Islamic Jihad condemned Trump's suggestion, calling it an encouragement of "war crimes".

Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi had warned before that relocating Gazans to Sinai could destabilize the region. Jordan, which already hosts 2.3 million Palestinian refugees,

fears further strain on its economy and social structure.

Trump's proposal clearly violates international law. The Fourth Geneva Convention prohibits the forced displacement of civilians during wartime, and the UN has condemned such plans as potential acts of "ethnic cleansing".

While Trump's proposal may appeal to his political base and align with certain Israeli interests, it ignores the humanitarian, legal, and geopolitical realities of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

According to the Gaza Ministry of Health, Israeli military actions over the past 15 months have resulted in the deaths of over 47,000 Palestinians, including a significant number of children, women, and unarmed men. International observers and United Nations envoys report that these operations have devastated Gaza's critical infrastructure, estimating that it will take decades to restore the region to its pre-conflict state.

Trump clears the way for massive bombs to Israel

In a recent development, Trump has lifted the previous administration's hold on the supply of 2,000-pound (907 kg) bombs to Israel, a restriction that was imposed during Joe Biden's tenure. This action appears to contradict Trump's claims of humanitarian intentions regarding the relocation of Palestinians to neighboring countries. Critics argue that the decision to provide such heavy munitions undermines any so-called humanitarian motives behind the proposed displacement of Palestinians.

It is important to recognize that the current situation in Palestine differs significantly from decades ago. The Palestinian people today are resolute in their determination not to experience a repeat of the Nakba, the mass displacement that occurred in 1948.

afford another government led by a single party.

Syria's new dominant group—Hayat Tahrir al-Sham—has raised outsiders' hopes by promising to be different. Although HTS is a conservative Salafi organization, it invited a variety of like-minded groups and nationalists to participate in the race to take Damascus. While he ran a rebel enclave in Idlib province, HTS's leader went by the nom de guerre Abu Mohammed al-Julani; now he has swapped this moniker for a peacetime name, Ahmad al-Sharaa, and traded his fatigues for a business suit.

(See full text at tehrantimes.com)

Israel says troops will remain in Jenin after ongoing raid

Israel ramped up a deadly assault on the occupied West Bank shortly after launching war on Gaza in October 2023.

The death toll from Israel's military campaign in the West Bank reached 884 after its troops killed a young Palestinian man on Tuesday.

Ayman Naji, 23, was killed during a raid, in the suburb of Irtaah, south of Tulkarem.

The Israeli army is also pressing ahead with a major offensive in Jenin which began more than a week ago. The offensive expanded to Tulkarem four days ago.

Israel's war minister Israel Katz said on Wednesday that the regime's forces will remain in the Jenin refugee camp after the ongoing raid there concludes.

"The Jenin refugee camp will not return to what it was – after the operation is completed...," he said.



The Israeli army has killed 884 Palestinians in the West Bank since Oct. 2023

The death toll from Israel's genocidal war on Gaza which began on October 7, 2023, has also surpassed 47,400. Israel and Hamas reached a ceasefire earlier this month which went into effect on January 19.

Katz: Israeli army to stay in Syria buffer zone indefinitely

Israeli war minister Israel Katz said during a visit to the Syrian side of Mount Hermon (Jabal al-shaykh) that his troops will remain there indefinitely, according to the Times of Israel.

"The IDF will remain at the summit of the

Hermon and the security zone indefinitely to ensure the security of the communities of the Golan Heights and the north, and all the residents of Israel," Katz said, apparently referring to a buffer zone on the Syrian side of the border that Israel seized following the fall of the Bashar al-Assad last month.

Raids to terrorize residents of southern Lebanon: 8 villages still occupied

From page 1 ▶ During the past hours, the Israeli occupation forces have built high earthen barriers to block the roads that the southerners can take.

Civil defense teams have also continued searching for the bodies of hundreds of Hezbollah's fighters who were martyred during the two months of intensive war and remain in the open because the enemy prevented ambulance forces from rescuing them.

The 8 occupied towns are: Aitaroun, Blida, Mays al-Jabal, Houla, Markaba, Rab Thalatheen, Adaiseh, and Kfar Kila.

It is noteworthy that these villages are not completely occupied, as their residents were able to liberate some areas.

Thanks to these residents, the Lebanese army

was able to reposition itself at more than one point, except for Mt. Blat between Marouhin and Ramieh, where the occupation forces are continuing to bulldoze forests and attack citizens.

During the current week, the Lebanese army, in cooperation with the Civil Cooperation Office in UNIFIL, will distribute tents to the returnees who are sleeping in the open among the rubble, while others were forced to leave for their temporary refuges to join their work and their children's schools.

At the same time, Hezbollah's Jihad al-Bina Foundation has launched a mechanism to survey the damage caused by the US-led aggression in all the liberated villages and support the municipalities to open roads and remove rubble.

(See full text at tehrantimes.com)

Lebanon: The graveyard of Israeli ambitions



From page 1 ▶ Israel has tried to justify its continued presence in southern Lebanon by accusing Hezbollah of not sufficiently pulling back from the border. Lebanon has denied the claim.

The US and Lebanon announced on Sunday that the deadline to meet the ceasefire's terms had been extended to February 18.

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

On September 2024, Israel launched a massive bombing campaign in Lebanon and a week later sent its troops into southern Lebanon.

But the regime was compelled to sign the November ceasefire after failing to meet its military objectives.

Prior to the implementation of the ceasefire, Israel had killed at least 3,961 people

and injured more than 16,500 others.

Based on the initial ceasefire, upon the withdrawal of the Israeli military, peacekeepers from the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) were scheduled to deploy, subsequently joined by the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF). Hezbollah should also pull back north of the Litani River, ending its presence in the south.

For now, Israel has not complied with the conditions set forth in the original ceasefire agreement.

Israel seems likely to seek justifications for remaining in southern Lebanon following the conclusion of the extended deadline.

Israel invaded Lebanon in June 1982 and occupied parts of the country until it was driven out by Hezbollah in 2000.

In 2006, Israel also launched a full-scale military offensive against Lebanon. Hezbollah, however, humiliated the regime and forced its military to retreat in disgrace.

Currently, Israel appears to be under the misconception that Hezbollah has been diminished, which may create an opportunity to maintain its occupation of southern Lebanon.

Israel's incursion into Lebanon in the early 1980s fostered unity among the populace against the regime's occupation.

Undoubtedly, Israel's ambitions to reoccupy Lebanon will go up in smoke in light of increasing resistance. Israel might maintain its presence in Lebanon; however, this will come at the cost of its soldiers' lives.

HTS leaders unlikely to become democratic rulers: London School of Economics professor

50 Salafist commanders promoted to senior military posts

TEHRAN - A professor of International Relations at the London School of Economics, says Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) has effectively transported its old Idlib government to Damascus while mostly excluding secular and more moderately religious opposition groups.

Writing an article in Foreign Affairs magazine, Fawaz A. Gerges also says the new Damascus government's legitimacy will be based on a "Salafi interpretation of Islam".

The following is an edited version of the article:

After half a century, the Assad

family's rule over Syria has come to an end. Syrians have every right to celebrate, but their struggle is nowhere near finished. Although Bashar al-Assad's ouster appeared abrupt, it had its roots in Syria's 2011 antigovernment protests, and Syrians will now face many of the same problems that beset other Arab countries after their Arab Spring revolutions. These and previous Middle Eastern revolutions were initially led by a diverse array of societal actors, including secular nationalists, students, public intellectuals, and left-wing activists. But in almost all cases, they were eventually taken over by hardline

groups, which went on to replace a political form of authoritarianism with a religious one. That hardline groups got the upper hand should not have come as a surprise, since they tended to be well organized, better led, and more disciplined—key advantages in a power vacuum.

Assad's effort to delay his downfall only left Syria even more vulnerable to a new strongman's rise. Over the course of 14 years of bitter civil war, millions of Syrians were driven into poverty and famine. Half a million were killed. The war further splintered Syria along ethnic and religious lines. The country is scarred. It cannot

Van-Tehran train service to start after months-long hiatus



TEHRAN - Train services between Van and Tehran will restart after a hiatus of several months.

The resumption of the service was agreed in a recent meeting of Iran's Minister of Roads and Urban Development, Farzane Sadeq, in a meeting with Turkish Minister of Transport and Infrastructure Abdulkadir Uraloglu, discussed the resumption among several other agreements to boost bilateral cooperation. Uraloglu announced that ticket sales for the Van-Tehran train will open on Feb. 20, Türkiye Today reported on Wednesday.

The Iranian minister noted that reintroducing the Van-Tehran train will boost both trade and tourism. She stated that the agreement will help attract more visitors to both countries.

"Resuming Tehran-Van passenger services will play a key role in increasing the number of tourists traveling between our nations," she

said.

"We evaluated ways to expand transit cargo transport on both road and rail. Strengthening rail and road connections, particularly in the Cemisureyya-Dilucu section, was also a key topic," the Iranian minister added.

The two ministers also focused on improving land, air, and rail transportation. Uraloglu stressed the need to eliminate trade barriers and improve connectivity. "We discussed how to remove mutual taxation and make road transport more efficient. Our teams will meet to develop practical solutions," he said.

Sadeq described Türkiye as Iran's gateway to the West and Iran as Türkiye's gateway to the East. "Increasing border crossings will benefit transit cargo transport," she added.

Both ministers also agreed to create a joint committee to resolve transportation challenges.

Book on Persian Gulf's intangible heritage goes out of print



TEHRAN - A recently published book, The Intangible Cultural Heritage of Northwest Persian Gulf, explores the rich traditions, rituals, and customs of this historically significant region.

The book includes a foreword by Mohammad-Jafar Qanavati, a member of the Supreme Scientific Council of the Center for the Great Islamic Encyclopedia.

It features 27 elements of the intangible heritage of the northwest Persian Gulf, covering a wide range of topics such as traditional sweets,

foods, breads, traditional fishing knowledge, handicrafts, games, and religious and cultural rituals.

Co-written by Gholamabbas Oveisi and Sara Ebadi, it has been printed by Now-Nevesht Publishing and is now available for those interested in Iranian cultural heritage.

Oveisi described the extensive research process behind the book, stating that it took approximately three years to compile, edit, and document the intangible cultural heritage files.

Throughout this journey, many photographers and heritage enthusiasts contributed to the project. After completing and registering the cultural files, Oveisi and Ebadi utilized the collected texts and photographs to compile the book.

According to Oveisi, in today's industrial world, preserving, introducing, and promoting ancient customs and traditions is crucial. He emphasized that this book serves as a bridge to fill the gap in cultural awareness and appreciation, helping to keep these traditions alive for future generations.

over the centuries to peel apart the scrolls' fragile, carbonized layers left many in pieces, and scholars have been forced to accept that the rest can never be opened.

Nicolardi, a papyrologist at the University of Naples in Italy, had been enlisted in an effort to use artificial intelligence (AI) to read the unreadable.

(Source: Nature)

How AI is unlocking ancient texts — and could rewrite history

In October 2023, an e-mail pinged onto Federica Nicolardi's phone with an image that would transform her research forever. It showed a fragment of a papyrus scroll that had been burnt in the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in AD 79. The scorched scroll was one of hundreds discovered in the remains of a luxury Roman villa in Herculaneum, near Pompeii in Italy, in the eighteenth century. Attempts

The government of Tamil Nadu has offered a \$1-million reward for anyone who can decode the cryptic script of the Indus Valley Civilization (IVC), one of the world's oldest urban cultures.

Chief Minister M.K. Stalin made the announcement as a follow-up to a new study suggesting striking similarities between symbols in the Indus script and those in ancient Tamil pottery.

The Indus Valley Civilization, also known as the Harappan Civilization,

flourished 5,000 years ago in the fertile plains of the Indus in what is now present-day northwest India and Pakistan. Characterized by sophisticated urban planning and commercial networks, the civilization left a script that, for over a century, has resisted all efforts at deciphering by scholars.

The mysterious script, comprising about 4,000 inscriptions, occurs almost exclusively on seals, pottery, and tablets. Most inscriptions are short, between five and six symbols, and the longest known inscription contains 34 symbols. The fact that

the script is short, combined with the absence of longer inscriptions or bilingual artifacts, like the famous Rosetta Stone, has proven to be an obstacle for researchers.

The script of the Indus first came to international attention in 1875 when an Indus seal, discovered by the British archaeologist Sir Alexander Cunningham, was published.

Since then, a variety of hypotheses have been proposed, attributing the script to a Dravidian language, early Brahmi, an early Indo-Aryan lan-

guage, and even Sumerian, but none has gained universal acceptance.

Renowned Indologist Asko Parpola has characterized the script of the Indus as "the most important system of writing that is undeciphered." Despite breakthroughs in linguistics and archaeology, its language, use, and meaning have yet to be understood.

Recent studies have hinted at the script having a connection with Tamil Nadu's early graffiti markings. Researchers K. Rajan and R. Sivanan-

than compared over 14,000 ceramic sherds of Tamil Nadu and discovered similarities with the Indus script. According to them, 60% of the signs showed a match, suggesting a potential cultural contact between southern India and the Indus Valley.

The prize announcement renewed worldwide interest, with computer scientists, engineers, and linguists putting forward claims.

Researchers such as Nisha Yadav at the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research have been applying ma-

chine learning to analyze script patterns. However, some experts doubt whether machine learning can actually break the script's code.

Decoding the Indus script, if successful, will reveal information about governance, trade habits, and the beliefs of the Indus Valley Civilization. Tamil Nadu's reward also reflects the state's attempt to highlight its cultural heritage and attach it to one of history's most mysterious civilizations.

(Source: Archaeology News)

Isfahan to host 100 tour experts from around world

TEHRAN - The historic city of Isfahan is set to host a major international tourism event titled "100 Tour Operators in Half of the World" from February 19 to 23.

According to organizers, the five-day event will bring together tourism managers, tour guides, and travelers from various European and Asian countries, further solidifying Isfahan's status as a key global tourism destination.

On Wednesday, Amir Karamzadeh, the tourism chief of Isfahan province, noted that extensive planning has gone into preparing for this large-scale event.

Speaking at a press conference held at the Isfahan Chamber of Commerce, the official stated that special programs have been organized, including a Chogan (polo) match in [the UNESCO-registered] Naqsh-e Jahan Square in collaboration with the Chogan Federation.

Confirmed participants include tour experts from Austria, Switzerland, Romania, India, Vietnam, Singapore, Indonesia, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Thailand, Iraq, Malaysia, Turkey, and China, among others.

"The event aims to showcase Isfahan's rich cultural and historical attractions while strengthen-



ing international tourism cooperation," Karamzadeh underlined.

Mojgan Izadi, Chair of the Tourism, Carpet, and Handicrafts Commission at the Isfahan Chamber of Commerce, emphasized the significance of this gathering. She described it as a milestone for Isfahan's tourism industry and a treasured opportunity for global tour operators to explore Iran's tourism potential.

She highlighted that the event would foster innovative tourism packages, boost global interactions, stimulate economic growth, and enhance Iran's inter-

national tourism standing.

With 22,000 registered historical sites, Isfahan [province] is often regarded as the cultural heart of Iran. Izadi stressed that the event will introduce lesser-known attractions of the city, helping Iran secure a stronger foothold in the global tourism industry.

Another speaker at the event was Alireza Habibi, who serves as Karamzadeh's deputy for tourism, pointed out that one of the key objectives of the event is to highlight the security and hospitality of Isfahan, aiming to present a

true image of Iran to the world.

Habibi asserted that such initiatives play a crucial role in attracting international visitors and reshaping global perceptions of Iran as a travel destination.

The ancient city of Isfahan, which serves as the provincial capital as well, is situated at the crossroads of Iran's north-south and east-west trade routes.

It reached its zenith between the 9th and 18th centuries. During the Safavid era, it became Iran's capital under Shah Abbas the Great.

Isfahan was once a crossroads of international trade and diplomacy in Iran and now it is one of Iran's top tourist destinations for good reasons.

It is filled with many architectural wonders, such as unmatched Islamic buildings, bazaars, museums, Persian gardens, and tree-lined boulevards. It's a city for walking, getting lost in its mazing bazaars, dozing in beautiful gardens, and meeting people.

The Persian proverb "Isfahan nesf-e-jahan ast" (Isfahan is half the world) reflects the city's cultural and historical prominence.

Ruins of Valerian's palace to undergo archaeological excavation

TEHRAN - Valerian's Palace, which was once a residence for the captivated Roman Emperor during Sassanid era, in Bishapur, southern Iran, is set to undergo archaeological excavation.

According to Reza Norouzi, a faculty member at the Research Institute of Cultural Heritage and Tourism, plans are in place to explore the ruins of the palace, located in the ancient city of Bishapur in Kazerun county of Fars province.

Norouzi, speaking at a specialized archaeology seminar in Kazerun, highlighted the historical significance of Bishapur and the ongoing archaeological research in the area. He noted that historical sources, particularly Islamic geographical texts, provide valuable insights into the climate, urban structure, and accessibility of Bishapur.

The initial archaeological studies in Bishapur date back to the period before World War II when French archaeologists conducted research in the ancient city. Their approach involved partial excavations of structures, mapping, and documentation, but they left behind excavation debris, which now serves as a valuable record of their findings. Following the war, the French team abruptly left the site, leaving behind artifacts and mosaics. A second phase of archaeological work was conducted between 1968 and 1978 under the direction of the late Iranian archaeologist Ali-Akbar Sarafraz, focusing on Sassanid palaces and structures within the royal citadel, including the Temple of Anahita and the ceremonial hall. A third phase, led by Mohammad Mehryar from 1995 to 2004, further examined Bishapur's urban layout.

Currently, efforts in Bishapur are concentrated on site preservation, the establishment of a museum and library, administrative infrastructure, fencing of the site, and the enhancement of visitor pathways.

Glimpses of the ruined palace

The Palace of Valerian, situated approximately 150 meters east of Shapur's Palace,

is now little more than a mass of crumbling ruins. Originally constructed to house the Roman Emperor Valerian after his capture by Shapur I, the structure played a crucial role in the Sassanid Empire's history. Following a decisive Persian victory over the Roman legions, Valerian and 70,000 of his soldiers were taken prisoner, and the palace was built to keep the emperor under close watch.

Those of the captives who had some knowledge of architecture and construction were brought to the western part of Iran to participate in the Persians' building projects, and many palaces, dams, and bridges were built using the experience of Roman soldiers.

Valerian himself is said to have been familiar with construction techniques and may have contributed to the design of his palace in Bishapur. The palace is known to have occupied an area of more than 3,000 sq. m. It was the only structure in pre-Islamic Iran made entirely of stone. The stones, all of equal size and shape, were of the same quality as the stones used in the Temple of Anahita, and many were bonded together with clamps. Shallow depressions, which can be seen in the stone bonding, and which impart an interesting look to the palace, were originally filled with molten lead to give more solidity to the structure.

Ancient city of Bishapur

Bishapur (literally, "The city of Shapur") was the grand capital of the Sassanid king, Shapur I whose armies defeated the Romans three times. Like an arch bridge at Shushtar, much of Bishapur was allegedly built by Roman soldiers taken captive after their Emperor Valerian was defeated in c. 260 CE.

Bishapur is situated south of modern Faliyan, just off the ancient road between Persis and Elam, which connected the Sasanian capitals Istakhr (close to Persepolis) and Firuzabad to Susa and Ctesiphon. The city was built near a river crossing.

Many architectural aspects of Bishapur look Roman and do not belong to Iranian building traditions. An example is what specialists call



the "Hippodamian Plan", which means that the city looks like a gridiron, while Iranian cities usually were circular in design, according to Livius.org; a website on ancient history written and maintained since 1996 by the Dutch historian Jona Lendering.

Bishapur remained an important city until the Arab invasion of Persia and the rise of Islam in the second quarter of the seventh century. It became a center of Islamic learning (a madrasah has been excavated) and there were still people living over here in the tenth century, but the decline had started in the seventh century.

In 2018, UNESCO added an ensemble of Sassanid historical cities in southern Iran -- titled "Sassanid Archaeological Landscape of Fars Region" -- to its World Heritage list. The ensemble is comprised of eight archaeological sites situated in three geographical parts of Firuzabad, Bishapur, and Sarvestan. It reflects the optimized utilization of natural topography and bears witness to the influence of Achaemenid and Parthian cultural traditions and of Roman art, which later had a significant impact on the architecture and artistic styles of the Islamic era.

The Sassanid archaeological landscape represents a highly efficient system of land use and strategic utilization of natural topography in the creation of the earliest cultural centers of the Sassanid civilization.

Lake Urmia's rising level underscores effective restoration

TEHRAN –Satellite images show that the level of Lake Urmia basin, measured on January 24, has increased from 1,270.05 meters to 1,270.13 meters, and the volume of the lake has risen by 0.19 billion cubic meters, reaching 1.24 billion cubic meters, compared to the same day last year.

Lake Urmia in the north-western West Azarbaijan province started to dry up in the 2000s. The lake is the largest in West Asia and the sixth-largest salt lake in the world with a water surface area of 5,000 to 6,000 square kilometers.

Satellite images released by the Iranian Energy Ministry demonstrates the area of the lake has increased from 770 km² in Iranian year 1402 (March 2023- March 2024) to 930 km² in current Iranian year (started on March 19, 2024), expanding by 160 km².

These changes indicate the lake is in a better condition compared to last year thanks to the successful efforts to restore the lake.

Experts believe the amount of water in Lake Urmia should reach over 5 billion cubic meters so that it can become ecologically stable, Press TV reported.

Japan-funded FAO project

Through a joint project led by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and funded by the



Government of Japan, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) are going to join to promote sustainable agricultural practices and solutions for the conservation of Lake Urmia.

On December 1, 2024, the Government of Japan and UNDP signed an exchange of notes to launch "The Project for Developing Conservation Systems of Wetlands in Lake Urmia and Other Wetlands, Including Their Surrounding Communities." The project, which runs from 2024 to 2028, will be implemented in partnership with the Department of Environment and FAO.

Focusing on sustainable agriculture and climate-adapted livelihoods, the initiative seeks to deliver long-term benefits for local communities while preserving the

biodiversity of wetlands as critical ecosystems.

Lake Urmia faces significant challenges due to the overconsumption of water resources magnified by climate change impacts, which has severely impacted its ecosystem.

Agricultural activities in the region are increasingly vulnerable to water shortages, a situation exacerbated by the effects of climate change. Studies indicate that these climatic changes could further disrupt agrifood systems and the lake's fragile environment in the future.

FAO with the support of the government of Japan, identified technical agricultural solutions to increase water efficiency in the agriculture sector at the Lake Urmia basin, which may be efficient in saving the internationally known biosphere re-

serves.

Since 1995, Lake Urmia has been shrinking due to rapid upstream agricultural expansion and climate change. These forces have pushed the precious lake to the verge of depletion and have put the region's health, economy, environment, industry, and agriculture at risk.

Despite the efforts of the Lake Urmia Restoration Program National Committee and its focus on the Lake's restoration since 2013, the continuation of the critical situation demonstrates that sustainability, macro and micro, management solutions should be considered as the main essence of action plans.

In a concerted effort to address the challenges facing the Lake Urmia Basin in 2016, FAO launched the "Integrated Program for Sustainable Water Resources Management in the Lake Urmia Basin," which was funded by the Government of Japan.

Key technical outcomes of this initiative included the implementation of a water accounting plus project in the Lake Urmia Basin and the identification of water-consuming hotspots within the basin. Notably, water accounting revealed the significant contribution of irrigated and rainfed agriculture to the Lake's total evapotranspiration, emphasizing the importance of water-saving measures for the Lake's restoration.

Iran, Norway hold meeting on supporting Afghan refugees



TEHRAN – Paul Klouman Bekken, the Norwegian Chargé d'Affaires for Afghanistan, has met with Nader Yar-Ahmadi, the head of the National Organization for Migration, discussing ways to help support Iran in hosting Afghan refugees.

During the meeting which was held on Monday in Tehran, Klouman Bekken commended Iran's remarkable efforts in hosting refugees, elaborating that he aimed to become more familiar with Iran's policies in hosting and managing refugees.

The official went on to say that he was well aware of the heavy burden placed by refugees on the country, as his responsibility was to observe Afghans' return with dignity to their home country, provide suitable living conditions for them in Afghanistan, and monitor their non-return migration.

For his part, Yar-Ahmadi, lauded the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) for its support, saying that the cross-regional problems in Afghanistan have manifested in the form of migration to neighboring countries, hence, Afghan refugees' problems are global issues requiring international communities' efforts to be resolved.

He highlighted refugees' burden on the country, particularly in the field of energy, on the one hand, and the lack of international support on the other hand, saying, "We expect Norway to persuade its allies and partners to support Iran in hosting Afghan refugees through financial contributions and developing infrastructure, and provide the basis for non-governmental organizations (NGOs) as well as international organizations that aid refugees to start their

activities in Iran."

The rise in Afghans' migration is mainly due to unfavorable conditions like lack of food, poor education, and health systems. Improving the situation in that country will benefit Afghans as well as other countries, and international communities, he added.

Iran may rethink refugee policies

In October 2024, Yar-Ahmadi said, "In case the international community refrains from taking responsibility and fairly sharing the burden of hosting refugees, the Islamic Republic of Iran will probably revise its immigration policies."

The official made the remarks in a meeting held on the sidelines of the annual session with Filippo Grandi, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees.

The 75th Annual Session of the Executive Committee of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (ExCom) held from October 14 to 19 in Geneva, Switzerland.

Lauding the support and the efforts of the UNHCR in Iran, the Iranian official said the increase in foreign nationals' population along with educational, economic, cultural-social, and health infrastructure pressure on one hand and the lack of consistency between the UNHCR budget and the needs and costs of refugees in the country on the other hand have caused numerous problems, IRNA quoted Yar-Ahmadi as saying.

The official emphasized less than one percent of the costs of refugees have been paid for; hosting more refugees is improbable, and they have to return to their home country.

"The priority of the country is to resettle vulnerable refugees in third countries, despite promises made in your last visit to Iran in the calendar year 1400 (2021 - 2022) to provide more vulnerable refugees with insurance, sadly, not only did the number of those covered not increase, but also decreased from 120,000 to 95,000 individuals.

It should be noted that political issues, including sanctions, must not affect humanitarian activities. Since humanitarian issues are apart from political issues, the Islamic Republic of Iran is ready to cooperate with financial supporters of refugees in the country, the official added.

WHO highlights Iran's capacity to serve as model in rare blood management



TEHRAN –Jaffar Hussain, World Health Organization (WHO) Representative to Iran, has highlighted Iran's capacity to serve as a model for other nations in the realm of blood transfusion and rare blood management.

Addressing National Rare Blood Day on January 22, the official praised the country's steadfast commitment to equitable health care access, ensuring that no one is left behind, regardless of their blood type.

National Rare Blood Day is a day dedicated to celebrating the lives saved, challenges overcome and unwavering commitment to ensuring every individual, regardless of their blood type, has a fighting chance at life.

The event was a vibrant tapestry of individuals united by a common cause. Health professionals, whose expertise and dedication form the backbone of rare blood management, mingled with renowned artists and influential public figures, lending their voices to amplify the message of hope and solidarity.

Families shared stories of loved ones snatched from the brink of despair thanks to the life-saving power of rare blood transfusions.

The official commended the country's unwavering dedication to tackling the unique challenges surrounding rare blood, emphasizing the critical importance of collaboration, innovation and unwavering determination in this global endeavour, WHO website announced in a press release on January 27.

Hussain painted a vivid picture of the struggles faced by those with rare blood types, individuals who often find themselves in desperate need, their lives hanging in the balance as they search for that elusive, compatible match.

The event served as a powerful reminder that behind every successful transfusion, behind every life saved, lies the selfless act of a blood donor.

Hussain paid tribute to these unsung heroes, recognizing their generosity and unwavering commitment to the well-being of others. "Blood donors," he declared, "represent the epitome of human solidarity, offering a lifeline to those in need without expecting anything in return."

WHO, Hussain emphasized, believes that universal health coverage must encompass access to safe blood and blood products. He lauded IBTO's leadership in blood safety and transfusion services, highlighting their remarkable achievement of a 100 percent voluntary, non-remunerated blood donation system, a testament to the principles of universal

health coverage in action.

He further commended the establishment of the pioneering national programme on rare blood in 2008.

National Rare Blood Day is not only a celebration of achievements but is also a call to action. Hussain urged continued collaboration, research and investment in transfusion medicine, emphasizing the need for a robust and globally connected network of systems and policies to address the unique needs of rare blood patients.

In his speech, Hussain also highlighted the interest of the Group of 5 (G5) countries in experience-sharing and collaboration with the Islamic Republic of Iran.

He said that the country's expertise, innovative practices and advanced health care infrastructure provide valuable lessons for other countries striving to enhance their health care systems.

In closing, Hussain extended his deepest gratitude to the IBTO for their unwavering dedication to advancing blood transfusion services and ensuring equitable access to rare blood. He thanked the blood donors, whose selflessness serves as an inspiration to all.

The event concluded with a renewed commitment to innovation, partnership and universal health coverage, leaving attendees with a sense of determination to continue the fight for rare blood access, ensuring that every drop counts, every donation matters and every life is valued.

ENGLISH IN USE

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Afghans life in Iran provided new model of migration

The friendly coexistence of Afghans with Iranians has set a new pattern in migration, secretary of human rights headquarters in Iran has stated.

The two nations of Iran and Afghanistan share similarities in religion, culture and civilization, Ali Bagherikani said on Thursday during a meeting with Afghan immigrants in Tehran.

The west is using all the capacities to turn the differences between the two nations of Iran and Afghanistan into a dispute and then a conflict in order to achieve their illegitimate interests, he lamented. "The effort of the Human Rights Headquarters is to highly protect the right of immigrants living in Iran," he highlighted.

زندگی افغانستانی‌ها در ایران الگوی جدیدی از مهاجرت ارائه کرده است

دبیرستاد حقوق بشر جمهوری اسلامی ایران می‌گوید همزیستی ملاطفت‌آمیز افغانستانی‌ها با ایرانی‌ها، الگوی جدیدی را در مهاجرت ارائه کرده است.

به گزارش ایرنا، «علی باقری‌کنی» روز پنجشنبه در دیدار با مهاجران افغانستانی در تهران اظهار داشت: اشتراکات دینی، فرهنگی و تمدنی دو ملت ایران و افغانستان بسیار به هم نزدیک است.

وی افزود: غربی‌ها از همه ظرفیت‌ها استفاده می‌کنند تا تفاوت‌های دو ملت ایران و افغانستان را به اختلاف و سپس نزاع تبدیل کنند تا به منافع نامشروع خود برسند. او گفت: تلاش ستاد حقوق بشر آن است که کوچکترین حقی از مهاجران مقیم ایران ضایع نشود.

Iranian bird conservationist grabs Young Wetland Champion award

TEHRAN –Iman Ebrahimi, the founder and CEO of AvayeBoom Bird conservation association, the first bird conservation NGO in central Iran, has won the Ramsar Wetland Conservation Award for Young Wetland Champions.

The achievement was announced at the 64th meeting of the Standing Committee of the Ramsar Convention, which was held from January 20 to 24, at Secretariat headquarters in Gland, Switzerland.

Ebrahimi is recognized for his efforts and contribution to preserving the birds in wetlands as well as raising public awareness about wetlands over a decade.

The official award ceremony will be held at the opening of the 15th meeting of the conference of the Contracting Parties (COP15) which is scheduled to take place in July, in Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe. The Ramsar Wetland Conservation Award for Young Wetland Champions was established to acknowledge and celebrate exemplary efforts of an individual or group of young people aged between 18 and 30 years for their contributions to the conservation, wise use, and restoration of wetlands.

Wetlands play a critical role in maintaining biodiversity, providing clean water, and protecting against floods and droughts. The Ramsar Convention aims to highlight the importance of wetlands through this award program.

The award categories include the Merit Award, the Young Wetlands Champions Award, and the Innovation Award, all of which offer substantial recognition and financial support for ongoing or completed wetland conservation initiatives.

Over 40% of wetland area exposed to drying up

In December 2024, the head of the Depart-



ment of Environment, Shina Ansari, said due to low precipitation and insufficient water right allocation, some 43 percent of the wetlands of the country are subject to dryness.

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

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

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

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



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JANUARY 30, 2025

GUIDE TO SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

Shunning a person who is attracted by you is a sign of your misfortune, and your inclination towards another who ignores you is a sign of your abjectness.

Imam Ali (AS)

Prayer Times > Noon:12:18 Evening: 17:49 Dawn: 5:39 (tomorrow) Sunrise: 7:05 (tomorrow)

Pulitzer-prize-winning play “Dinner with Friends” on stage in Qazvin

TEHRAN-The play “Dinner with Friends” written by Donald Margulies is being staged at Qazvin City Theater in Qazvin Province.

Directed by Mohsen Zarei, the 75-minute play has Erfan Darzishad, Baran Allahbakhshi, Mahnaz Khoshnoud, and Mohsen Gilakzadeh in the cast.

The winner of the 2000 Pulitzer Prize for Drama, “Dinner with Friends” is filled with humor, warmth, insight, and wisdom.

Gabe and Karen, a happily married, middle-aged couple, live in Connecticut. They have been friends with Tom and Beth, another married couple, for many years. In fact, it was Gabe and Karen who introduced their friends in the first place. While having dinner at Gabe and Karen’s home, Beth tearfully reveals that she is getting a divorce from Tom, who has been unfaithful.

Tom, who had been away on business, finds out that Beth has told their friends about the looming divorce, and hastens to Gabe and Karen’s home. Tom and Beth had planned to tell their friends about their breakup together, but Tom now believes that Beth unfairly has presented herself as the wronged party, and feels he must present his own side of the story.

The time flashes back 12 years to a vacation home on Martha’s Vineyard, when Karen and Gabe introduce Beth to Tom. Over the course of the play, both couples are seen at different ages and stages of their lives. Tom and Beth’s breakup affects Gabe and Karen, who first feel compelled to choose sides, and then begin to question the strength of their own seemingly



tranquil marriage. They also begin to see the real meaning behind their friendships with Tom and Beth.

It is a modern-day masterpiece on the destruction of today’s marriage. Through Margulies’s flawless use of language and his ability to convey the truest of dialogue and characterization, we watch, as the two couples do, our closest friends going through a wrenching breakup. Not only does he create vivid detail of a marriage in decline, he also brilliantly depicts the couple’s closest friends, and how this new mirror to their own marriage sends them through a whirlwind of raw emotion and self-reflection.

The play received numerous awards, including the American Theatre Critics Association New Play Award, the Dramatists Guild/Hull-Warriner Award, the Lucille Lortel Award, the Outer Critics Circle Award and a Drama Desk nomination, and has been produced all over the United States and around the world. I

Donald Margulies, 70, is an American playwright and academic. Elected to the Dramatists Guild Council in 1993, Margulies has received grants from Creative Artists Public Service (CAPS), New York Foundation for the Arts, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the John Simon Guggenheim Foundation. His plays have premiered at Manhattan Theatre Club, South Coast Repertory, The New York Shakespeare Festival and the Jewish Repertory Theater.

The play will remain on stage at Qazvin City Theater, located at Mellat Park in Qazvin, through February 3.

Cartoon of Day



Never Again

Cartoonist: Daniel Medina from the U.S.

Fajr Music Festival to honor resistance with new award

TEHRAN- The upcoming edition of the International Fajr Music Festival will feature an award named “Peace and Resistance,” the organizers have announced.

The award will be dedicated to the performances centered on the theme of the Resistance Front, the public relations office of the 40th edition of the festival said on Wednesday.

The festival will be held in two competitive and non-competitive sections from February 11 to 17 in ten halls throughout Tehran as well as 20 provinces across the country.

the provinces of East Azarbaijan, Ardabil, Khuzestan, Zanjan, Markazi, Fars, Lorestan, Kermanshah, Khorasan Razavi, Kerman, North Khorasan, Golestan, Mazandaran, Kohgiluyeh-Boyer-Ahmad, Alborz, Sistan-Baluchestan, Bushehr, Hamedan, and Kordestan will organize provincial Fajr Music Festivals.

This year, East Azarbaijan will hold its fourth provincial Fajr Music Festival in Tabriz and other cities within the province, showcasing performances in five musical styles: traditional, pop, ethnic, fusion, and Western classical music.

Ardabil, entering its eleventh provincial Fajr Music Festival, will host the event simultaneously in Ardabil and other cities, featuring performances from provincial music groups in five categories: traditional, ethnic, and local styles, including Azari and Ashiq, classical, pop, and fusion.

Khuzestan will present its provincial Fajr Music Festival titled “Pioneers of the Land of Resistance” in the cities of Abadan and Khorramshahr. This year’s festival will be non-competitive and will showcase group performances across traditional, pop, local, orchestral, and children’s music.

Zanjan will hold its provincial Fajr Music Festival with group performances in sections including Iranian classical music, Azari



music (Mugham), pop, Iranian, Western classical, and fusion music.

Markazi province will host its Fajr Music Festival in Arak. This festival will have both main and side sections, with the main competitive section featuring three age categories, including rhythm and Iranian classical music performances. The side section will be non-competitive, centered around traditional Iranian music group performances.

Kerman province will also celebrate its fourth provincial Fajr Music Festival in Jiroft and Kerman, emphasizing research and youth-focused initiatives to identify, empower, and support the

creative endeavors of local music groups, ensuring artistic quality in each musical branch.

Fars will conduct its nineteenth provincial Fajr Music Festival in Shiraz. This non-competitive festival will prioritize participation from local groups.

Lorestan will host the provincial Fajr Music Festival, featuring competitive and non-competitive sections in Khorramabad and other cities.

Kermanshah will present its thirteenth provincial Fajr Music Festival, comprising both competitive and non-competitive sections in Kermanshah. In the competitive segment, groups and artists will perform in re-

gional styles, traditional music, and pop, while the non-competitive section will showcase solo performances by esteemed local musicians during a celebratory evening.

Khorasan Razavi will hold its first provincial Fajr Music Festival in Neyshabur, featuring a special award, open to all music groups nationwide with works related to Imam Reza (AS).

North Khorasan will host artists from the provincial music festival for four nights, featuring performances in local, traditional, and pop music, with one night dedicated to youth and teenagers.

Golestan will be featuring 40 music groups across 14 counties in the region.

Mazandaran will host its provincial Fajr Music Festival in the cities of Sari, Amol, Behshahr, Savadkuh, and Tonekabon.

Kohgiluyeh-Boyer-Ahmad will also host the Fajr Music Festival in the cities of Dehdasht, Gachsaran, and Yasuj.

Alborz, Sistan-Baluchestan, Bushehr, Hamedan, and Kordestan will host their provincial Fajr Music Festival, featuring local music groups performing various musical genres.

The 40th International Fajr Music Festival, organized by the Deputy of Artistic Affairs of the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, in collaboration with the Music Office of the Culture Ministry, the Iran Music Association, and the Rudaki Foundation, aims to showcase and honor the best works of Iranian musicians, promote the art of music, enhance the audience’s taste and listening culture, preserve national identity rooted in religious and Iranian teachings, support creative art—especially ideas and performances by the younger generation—and identify and strengthen the quality of form and content in various genres of music.

Iranian films line up for Poland’s Zoom-Zblizenia festival



A scene from “Alone Together” by Omid Mirzaei

TEHRAN- Six films by Iranian directors will be competing in the 28th edition of International Film Festival Zoom-Zblizenia, which will take place from March 3 to 9 in Jelenia Góra, Poland.

“Haze Over” directed by Seyyed Ali Ghaseemi, “Blur” by Sahra Asadollahi and “Inside the skin”, co-directed by Shafagh Abosaba and Maryam Mahdieh, are among the films.

“Haze Over” follows Musa, who takes his cousin Vahid to a forest path under the pretext of wood smuggling. However, their car accident with a doe forces them to confront

their past wounds.

The story of “Blur” revolves around Marzieh, who presents a borrowed child to her husband in the moments before his death to ease his troubled mind. She uses this child as a stand-in for their lost child, hoping to alleviate the guilt he harbors over their tragedy.

“Inside the Skin” follows a teenage football player named Ali as he prepares for an important match while struggling to keep a secret hidden. However, when Hamed discovers the truth, Ali’s future becomes uncertain and filled with doubt.

The festival will also screen “The Mold” by Mohammadreza Nourmandipour, “Oscar” by Ali Asghari and “Alone Together” by Omid Mirzaei.

“The Mold” follows Reza, who faces challenges with his only son after the death of his wife, as he tries to raise his child in his own way.

The primary theme and focus of “Oscar” is the family and the role of the father. The film showcases the significance of family in Iranian culture as the safest, most appealing, beau-

tiful, warmest, and most nurturing refuge in the world.

“Alone Together” follows the journey of a young boy traveling alone on a bus. One winter night, he draws the attention of the police, the driver, and fellow passengers at a roadside checkpoint.

The International Film Festival Zoom-Zblizenia is one of the largest and most important independent cinema festivals in Poland. It is organized as part of the project, Polish-Czech Close-Ups, which is co-financed by the European Union within the European Regional Development Fund and the state budget through the Euroregion Nysa.

Its aim is to present the author’s cinema, ambitious, high artistic value, moving independent and original subject matter, as well as the promotion of independent film art.

Because the main aim of the festival is the presentation of the filmmakers’ accomplishments, coupled with any new trends and ideas in the independent movie-making scene, the character of the festival makes room for a variety of forms. There are no restrictions on themes and topics.

Han Kang’s “Greek Lessons” published in Persian

TEHRAN-The Persian translation of the novel “Greek Lessons” written by the South Korean author Han Kang has been released in the bookstores across Iran.

The book has been translated into Persian by Fariba Arabzadeh and published by the Tehran-based Lega Press, Mehr reported.

Originally Published in South Korea in 2011, the book is about a young, recently mute woman, who begins taking a class in Ancient Greek language in an effort to reclaim language in some way. Her teacher, who is slowly going

blind, draws closer to her over the course of their classes.

As they become more intimately connected, they explore their inner pains and tensions together.

Soon the two discover a deeper pain binds them together. For her, in the space of just a few months, she has lost both her mother and the custody battle for her nine-year-old son.

For him, it’s the pain of growing up between Korea and Germany, being torn between two cultures and languages, and the fear of losing his independence.

“Greek Lessons” tells the story

of two ordinary people brought together at a moment of private anguish—the fading light of a man losing his vision meeting the silence of a woman who has lost her language.

Yet these are the very things that draw them to each other. Slowly the two discover a profound sense of unity—their voices intersecting with startling beauty, as they move from darkness to light, from silence to breath and expression.

It is the story of the unlikely bond between this pair and a tender love letter to human intimacy

and connection—a novel to awaken the senses, one that vividly conjures the essence of what it means to be alive.

Han Kang, 54, rose to international prominence for her novel “The Vegetarian,” which became the first Korean language novel to win the International Booker Prize for fiction in 2016.

In 2024, she was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature, a first for an Asian woman and for a Korean, “for her intense poetic prose that confronts historical traumas and exposes the fragility of human life.”