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Leader to Qatari Emir: Hopefully, Iran and Qatar Would Further Fulfill Neighborly Duties

IRGC says 'inferno' to ensue any nuclear site strikes as Israeli media rolls out alleged assault plans

TEHRAN – Brigadier General Amir Ali Hajizadeh, commander of the Islamic Revolution Guard Corps (IRGC) Aerospace Division, warned that a devastating response would follow any strikes on Iranian nuclear sites, regardless of their success.

"If the Americans and Zionists try to strike our nuclear centers, the fire we ignite in the region will be of unquantifiable scale and scope," he said during an interview aired on Tuesday.

Recently, Western news outlets, notably The Washington Post, highlighted alleged U.S.-backed Israeli plans to target Iran's nuclear sites "in the first half of 2025."

This development aligns with recent threats of military action against Iran from key U.S. and Israeli figures, including President Donald Trump, National Security Advisor Mike Waltz, and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. ▶ Page 2

Coastal wonders: The beauty of Persian Gulf islands

TEHRAN - Iran is home to some of the most breathtaking islands in the Persian Gulf, offering a perfect blend of natural wonders, rich history, and unique cultural experiences.

From the luxurious charm of Kish Island to the striking red beaches of Hormuz, these islands present diverse landscapes and activities suited for many types of travelers. Whether you seek adventure, relaxation, or a deep dive into Iran's coastal beauty, these islands should be on your travel list.

Here are brief introductions for a selection of five islands in the Persian Gulf:

Kish, a luxury destination

Often referred to as the "Pearl of the Persian Gulf," Kish Island boasts crystal-clear waters, vibrant marine life, and a rich historical background.

Kish is known for its upscale resorts, duty-free shopping centers, and stunning beaches, making it a prime destination for both tourists and business travelers. As one of Iran's most developed islands, it offers a range of activities, including scuba diving, jet skiing, and historical explorations. ▶ Page 6

Iran, Russia sign 2025 transport, transit cooperation roadmap

TEHRAN – Iran and Russia signed the 2025 transport and transit cooperation roadmap, along with an addendum for engineering studies on the Rasht-Astara railway project.

The agreement was signed by Iran's Minister of Transport and Urban Development Farzaneh Sadegh and Russia's Minister of Transport Roman Vladimirovich Starovoyt.

According to Iran's Transport and Urban Development Ministry, the bilateral meeting took place on Tuesday at the ministry's headquarters in Tehran.

The meeting was attended by senior Iranian transport officials, including Saeed Rasouli, Deputy Minister of Transport and Acting Head of the Ports and Maritime Organization; Jabarali Zakeri, the head of Iran's Railway Company; Houshang Bazvand, head of the Transport Infrastructure Development Company; and Amin Tarafo, head of the International Affairs Center at the ministry.

Minister Sadegh welcomed the Russian delegation, emphasizing the importance of regular meetings to enhance bilateral cooperation.

She highlighted that continued discussions would help both countries achieve their objectives in completing the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC). ▶ Page 4

Rights group: Israel tortured Gaza medical workers

Medical workers taken from Gaza to Israeli detention centers have been subjected to widespread torture, psychological abuse, medical neglect and the provision of insufficient food rations, according to a report by the Physicians for Human Rights Israel (PHRI).

The Israeli monitor has based its report on testimonies provided by 24 detainees to PHRI lawyers during visits to military detention centers or Israel Prison Service facilities, the Times of Israel said.

"I was suspended by my wrists from the ceiling, my legs forced backward, and left in that position for hours. They humiliated me and spat on me ... During the interrogation in Ofer Prison, they extinguished cigarettes on my head and poured coffee over me. I was brutally beaten," said a 38-year-old nurse who is still incarcerated.

Dr Khaled Alser, a 32-year-old surgeon who worked at Nasser hospital in Khan Younis, stated that after being detained in Gaza, soldiers transporting him and other detainees "humiliated and beat us, sitting on us, kicking us with their boots, and striking us with their rifle barrels. We begged them to stop, but they continued."

Hezbollah's Odaisseh Ambush Operation humiliated the Zionists

By Sondoss Al Asaad

Beirut – While settlers in northern Israel are still on the run after losing trust in the Netanyahu cabinet, the people of Odaisseh liberated the Lebanese town on Tuesday morning, February 18, 2025, after a forced absence of more than a year.

The Israeli army radio had previously stated: "Odaisseh will remain firmly rooted in the Israeli collective memory as the village that witnessed one of the most difficult battles in the war, where 6 Egoz unit fighters fell in an ambush set by Hezbollah."

MaskafAm's settlers were amazed at the speed with which Odaisseh's villagers began to rebuild their village.

Israel Today said: "The residents of the north are worried: How will we return when there is no infrastructure, and many homes in many settlements have not yet been renovated, and the education systems are not ready? Will we return to seeing convoys of Hezbollah flags in the villages near the fence?"

Israel's psychological warfare: Hamas rejects disarmament call, removal from Gaza

By Shahrokh Saei

TEHRAN- Israel failed to defeat Hamas following 15 months of war on the Gaza Strip; however, the regime is attempting to project an image of superiority over the resistance movement.

Israel signed a ceasefire with Hamas that went into effect in January 19. The truce agreement has so far led to the release of 25 captives held in Gaza in exchange for the freedom of hundreds of Palestinians from the regime's jails.

The agreement has highlighted Israel's failure to achieve its goals through military means. Nevertheless, Israeli officials persist in issuing threats against Hamas.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has not ruled out a return to war in Gaza. War minister Israel Katz has echoed Netanyahu's stance. Besides, Foreign Minister Gideon Saar has said that Israel "will not accept the continued presence of Hamas" in Gaza.

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NIGEB, University of Peshawar sign MOU to foster scientific ties

TEHRAN – Iran's National Institute of Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology (NIGEB), and the University of Peshawar, a top public university in Pakistan, have signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) to expand scientific cooperation.

The MOU also involves exchanging professors and students, and conducting joint scientific projects, Mehr news agency reported.

On Tuesday, a Pakistani delegation headed by Ali Muhammad, the president of the University of Peshawar, paid a visit to the NIGEB. They commended the scientific, research progress, and laboratory infrastructure of the institute as being remarkable. ▶ Page 7



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End of Israeli aggressions necessary for regional peace, Qalibaf tells Asian parliamentarians

TEHRAN – At the 15th session of the Asian Parliamentary Assembly held in Baku on Wednesday, Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf, Speaker of the Iranian Parliament, strongly asserted that the future of Palestine will not be decided by the United States or any other colonial power.

He emphasized that the right to self-determination rests solely with the Palestinian people.

During his speech, Qalibaf acknowledged the significant challenges Palestinians face, particularly in the wake of the continued violence inflicted by the Israeli regime. ▶ Page 3

TEHRAN PAPERS

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

Iran's path passes through the sea

In a commentary, the Iran newspaper discussed the two-day Caspian Economic Forum meeting hosted by Tehran, attended by officials from the five Caspian littoral countries. The paper stated that the event not only highlighted the Caspian Sea's role as a cooperation area but also positioned the conference as a potential permanent institution for promoting regional economic cooperation.

Ham Mihan: Moscow-Tehran rapprochement

In an article, Ham Mihan addressed the recent agreement between Iran and Russia, stating that it establishes a framework for bilateral cooperation over the next two decades. It wrote: According to published reports, the agreement's military component encompasses strategic consultations on shared security concerns, joint military exercises, and collaborative efforts within the defense industry.

Sobh-e-No: opposition becomes dead wood

In a statement, Sobh-e-No highlighted the anti-Iran groups' persistent failures, stating: "The opposition's disgraces seem endless. Yet, some bankrupt figures persist in their adventurism and

fantasies." The statement continued, pointing out the diminishing support for Reza Pahlavi in Europe: "Despite the hostile positions and ongoing antagonism from some European nations towards the Islamic Republic of Iran, recent events indicate a growing disillusionment. The Germans did not welcome Reza Pahlavi at the Munich Conference, the Dutch parliament canceled a joint meeting with him, and even the British refused to grant him an audience. The reality is that these spent forces within the opposition have lost their appeal, even to European countries."

Arman-e-Emrooz: the ambiguous future of Iran and U.S.

Arman-e-Emrooz talked about the potential future of Iran-US engagements. It seems Trump is gradually and progressively increasing his pressure and trying to close the routes for Iran's oil exports with China. In the meantime, it is unlikely that the Iranian-European dialogue will have a specific result because Europe and the United States do not have any particular differences about Iran. It is most likely that Tehran will try to prevent the activation of the trigger mechanism by giving concessions to the European parties and even the Agency in bilateral talks.

IRGC says 'inferno' to ensue any nuclear site strikes as Israeli media rolls out alleged assault plans

From page 1 ▶ Trump issued numerous inflammatory statements regarding the possibility of "obliterating" and "bombing the hell out of Iran."

Waltz reiterated the overused and aggressive mantra frequently employed by U.S. officials in various administrations: "All options are on the table," while the convicted war criminal Netanyahu crowed about "finishing the job" against Iran.

Hajizadeh, who oversees Iran's advanced missile and drone programs, dismissed such threats as "psychological warfare."

"What our enemies are really seeking is psychological intimidation, not war," he stated.

The general warned that the country possesses "sufficient regional targets" for low-cost missile strikes, mocking adversaries: "If we deploy 500 or 1,000 drones instead of 150, what could they possibly do?"

"War won't occur because our enemies know the folly's price," Hajizadeh asserted.

Operational readiness and True Promise III Hajizadeh confirmed that Operation True Promise III — Iran's pending third direct retaliatory strike against the Israeli regime — will materialize.

This follows True Promise I on April 2024, launched in response to Israel's bombing of Iran's consulate in Damascus, and True Promise II on October 2024, which targeted Israeli military bases after the assassinations of Hamas chief Ismail Haniyeh, Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah, and IRGC General Abbas Nilforoushan.

These operations, which surprised many analysts, demonstrated Iran's strategic resolve and ability to defend its interests in the region.

"The Zionists miscalculated, assuming Iran would avoid direct confrontation," Hajizadeh stated, referencing Tel Aviv's April 2024 attack.



"Our operations are based on consensus and red lines they failed to recognize," the commander added.

He highlighted that 75% of missiles in True Promise II struck targets, overwhelming Israel's defense systems and exposing their "collapsing radar networks" as panic-induced interceptor missiles misfired.

Strategic shifts and regional fallout

The senior commander linked recent developments in West Asia to Operation AL-Aqsa Storm, Hamas' October 2023 offensive, which he described as a "strategic, irreparable defeat for Israel."

Hajizadeh stressed that despite the sacrifices of numerous martyrs since then, the operation "awakened global solidarity with Palestine" and hastened the "collapse of the Zionist regime's legitimacy."

He further noted that U.S. warships in the Mediterranean and the Red Sea — deployed for "anti-ballistic defense" after October 2023 — failed to counter Iran's missile salvos, underscoring Tehran's "unmatched defensive capabilities"

Regional radar networks, he added, coordinated with U.S.-Israeli forces but proved ineffective against Iran's operations.

According to the IRGC, at least ten countries assisted the Israeli regime during Iran's Operation True Promise I.

The U.S. played a central role by coordinating multinational air defense efforts from Qatar's Al Udeid Air Base.

The United Kingdom deployed fighter jets, attempting to shoot down Iranian drones over Iraqi and Syrian airspace, working in close coordination with U.S. forces.

Meanwhile, France tried to intercept missiles and drones, deploying naval assets for radar coverage and responding to Jordan's request for airspace defense.

Jordan, which hosted the United States Central Command (CENTCOM) General Michael E. Kurilla, actively tried to intercept Iranian projectiles passing through its airspace.

Military advancements and defense innovations

Hajizadeh detailed Iran's evolution from a "second-hand arms importer" to a global exporter of advanced defense systems, including the domestically designed "358" defensive drone.

"Capable of covering 120 km with engine propulsion, this system has apparently inspired foreign replication," the commander noted.

He also said Iran's ballistic missile range now extends to 2,000 km, with no technical barriers to further increases.

"If we unveil a new missile city weekly, it would take two years to exhaust our arsenal," Hajizadeh boasted, referencing the country's strategically situated and concealed underground missile and drone facilities all over the country.

He also revealed ongoing development of anti-ballistic defense systems, slated for deployment in Tehran and major cities by 2026.

While reaffirming military preparedness, Hajizadeh urged a domestic focus on economic resilience: "Our main challenges lie here, not in war. We must mobilize to strengthen this front."

Iran unveils more homegrown weapons on day 3 of Ground Force drill

TEHRAN — The Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Ground Force has showcased a range of domestically developed smart missiles and combat drones as part of an ongoing large-scale military readiness exercise in Iran's southwestern Khuzestan province.

This unveiling occurred during the second phase of the Payambar-e-Azam 19 (The Great Prophet 19) drills, which began on Monday in the Shaveriyeh combat zone.

Among the notable new additions to Iran's arsenal are the BM-450 ballistic missile, capable of striking targets up to 200 kilometers away, and the Fath-360, a short-range satellite-guided tactical missile. The Fajr-5, a 333 mm long-range multiple launch rocket system (MLRS) with pre-



cision accuracy systems, was also put to the test.

Additionally, guided 122 mm rockets, a key component of the IRGC's offensive capabilities, were deployed during the drills.

In the realm of drone technology, Iran revealed upgraded versions of the Mohajer-6 and

Mohajer-10 unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), alongside numerous indigenous kamikaze drones capable of carrying payloads between 50 and 60 kilograms. These drones are part of Iran's expanding capabilities in both surveillance and targeted strikes.

One of the standout technologies showcased was the Hadid-110 kamikaze drone, which had previously been unveiled during a defense exhibition attended by the Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei earlier this month. This advanced drone, designed for precision attacks, was tested as part of the exercise and later renamed after Dalahoo Mountain in Iran's Kermanshah province.

The unveiling ceremony of these new military systems was attended by Major General Mohammad Baqeri, Iran's Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces, who observed the capabilities of the IRGC Ground Force's latest advancements in indigenous military technology.

(See full text at tehrantimes.com)

At UN, Iran slams 'colonial' US plan to displace Palestinians from Gaza



TEHRAN — Iran's permanent ambassador to the United Nations, Amir Saeid Iravani, has strongly condemned a US plan to forcibly displace Palestinians from the Gaza Strip, calling it a blatant violation of international law and human rights.

Speaking at a UN Security Council debate in New York on Tuesday, Iravani rejected the notion that Gaza could be taken from Palestinians, emphasizing the region's rightful status as Palestinian land. He criticized the Security Council for not being able to resolve conflicts effectively, citing the need for reform to make it more democratic and representative of global power shifts, particularly those affecting the Global South.

The Iranian diplomat further accused the United States of using its veto power to protect Israel from accountability for its actions against Palestinians. "The US consistently shields Israel from facing consequences for its violations of international law, including its crimes against Palestinians and acts of aggression against other nations," he said

Iravani also condemned the US for pushing a "colonial" plan to displace Palestinians, a move he called an "assault on fundamental human rights." He called on the US and its Western allies to be held accountable for the suffering and destruction caused by their unilateral coercive measures.

The plan, which US President Donald Trump discussed with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu earlier this month, proposes taking control of Gaza, potentially with US military involvement, to transform the region into a "Riviera of the Middle East." Trump's suggestion that displaced Palestinians be resettled elsewhere has been met with widespread criticism from human rights groups, activists, and even some of the US's allies.

The US has sent billions in military aid to Israel during the ongoing Gaza conflict, which began in October 2023. The violence has resulted in the deaths of over 48,000 Palestinians, with more than 111,000 others wounded, according to the latest reports from the Israeli Ministry of Military Affairs.

Palestinian Islamic Jihad discusses future with Iran's security chief

TEHRAN — Ziad al-Nakhala, the Secretary-General of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad Movement, met with Ali-Akbar Ahmadian, the Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council of Iran, in Tehran.

During Wednesday's meeting at the Secretariat of the Supreme National Security Council, al-Nakhala and Ahmadian discussed a range of critical issues, including regional security and the ongoing situation in Gaza. Nasser Abu Sharif, another key representative of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad Movement, was also present at the discussions.

On Tuesday, al-Nakhala and his delegation had a significant meeting with the Leader of Islamic Revolution, Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei, where they received a warm reception.

During the meeting, Ayatollah Khamenei congratulated al-Nakhala and the resistance forces for their success in Gaza, praising the significant victory as a historic milestone in



the ongoing resistance against occupation. The Leader highlighted that this victory had raised the bar for future Resistance efforts and would serve as a symbol of hope for other struggles in the region.

Al-Nakhala, in turn, briefed the Iranian leadership on the latest developments in

Gaza and the West Bank, providing an update on the ongoing negotiations and recent agreements. He reaffirmed the commitment of his movement to the Resistance cause, stating: "We will never forget the path of Resistance, and as soldiers of the resistance, we will continue this path with resolve."

Leader to Qatari Emir: Hopefully, Iran and Qatar would further fulfill neighborly duties



Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei received a high-ranking Qatari delegation at his Tehran office on February 19, 2025

TEHRAN – Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei told Qatari rulers on Wednesday that Iran prioritizes ties with its neighbors and hopes for reciprocal commitment.

Ayatollah Khamenei met with the Qatari Emir, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, who visited Tehran as the head of a high-ranking delegation, in his personal office in Tehran. President Masoud Pezeshkian was also present during the meeting.

"One of the announced policies of Mr. Pezhkian's government is to expand relations with neighbors. By the grace of God, good work has been done in this area and progress has been made. Mr. Araqchi, the respected Foreign Minister, is active and dynamic in this field," the Leader stated, adding that expanding relations with neighbors has become a definitive policy of the Islamic Republic.

Referring to the agreements concluded between the Emir and other Iranian officials on Wednesday, the Leader expressed his hope that Iran and Qatar would enhance their neighborly cooperation and effectively utilize the agreements for mutual benefit.

The details of the agreements were not specified. However, Ayatollah Khamenei noted that Qatar has not yet implemented previous agreements regarding the \$6 billion in Iranian funds held in Doha following their release from South Korean banks. "We consider Qatar a friendly and brotherly country, even though there are still unre-

solved and ambiguous issues such as the return of Iran's funds that were transferred from South Korea to Qatar," he said, adding, "We also know that the main obstacle to implementing the agreement reached in this regard is the United States."

The Leader stated that, had he been in the Qatari rulers' position, he would have disregarded pressure from Washington and honored the agreement. "We continue to expect such action from Qatar," he added.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Ayatollah Khamenei emphasized that "there is no difference between the [different] Presidents of the United States."

For his part, Sheikh Tamim expressed his pleasure at meeting Iran's Leader and lauded the Islamic Republic's support for the oppressed worldwide, particularly the Palestinian people.

"Your steadfast support for the people of Palestine will never be forgotten," the Emir told Ayatollah Khamenei.

Addressing the "challenging" regional landscape, the Emir emphasized the need for increased cooperation among regional nations.

The Qatari Emir also highlighted existing agreements between Iran and Qatar, including a proposed underwater tunnel connecting the two countries. He noted that a joint commission between the two nations would soon be activated, with expectations for a significant increase in economic exchange



Iran's President Masoud Pezeshkian and Qatari Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani attend a joint press conference in Tehran on February 19, 2025

es in the near future, based on agreed-upon plans.

"New avenues for cooperation"

Before attending the meeting with Ayatollah Khamenei, Pezeshkian and the Emir held their own talks and announced significant decisions aimed at strengthening bilateral relations and fostering regional stability.

Speaking at a joint press conference, Pezeshkian emphasized Iran's commitment to comprehensive relations with neighboring countries, stating, "Iran believes regional countries can, based on good neighborliness, mutual respect, and constructive interaction, take steps towards maintaining regional stability and security and lay the groundwork for creating a joint cooperation framework." He added that the talks covered bilateral issues crucial to the interests of both nations.

The Qatari Emir echoed this sentiment, underscoring "the necessity of creating new opportunities for cooperation" between Iran and Qatar, according to Pezeshkian. Sheikh Tamim also expressed satisfaction with his visit, stating that such trips "can help expand the brotherly and historical relations between the two countries, which are based on good neighborliness." He highlighted discussions on cooperation across various fields, particularly in commercial and economic sectors.

The leaders further addressed regional issues, including the situation in Syria. Pezeshkian stated that

he "emphasized the preservation of the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Syria and the participation of all its people in determining their fate."

Both leaders acknowledged the ongoing Israeli war in Gaza, with Pezeshkian praising "Qatar's mediation efforts to achieve a ceasefire in Gaza and the release of oppressed Palestinian abductees." He also stressed the urgent need for Islamic countries to take "more coherent measures...to defend the oppressed people of Palestine, notably Gaza," adding that Palestinians in Gaza must be able to lead a "safe life in their historical land."

The Qatari Emir affirmed Qatar's commitment to mediating a lasting ceasefire in Gaza, stating, "Today, I assured the President of the Islamic Republic of Iran that Qatar and its partners are committed to mediating for the successful implementation of this agreement." He expressed his belief that this mediation would be "a fundamental step towards witnessing a permanent and sustainable ceasefire in Gaza and ensuring the delivery of humanitarian aid without any obstruction."

Sheikh Tamim concluded by emphasizing the importance of dialogue in resolving regional disputes, stating, "We agreed that the best way to resolve current disputes is through constructive dialogue." He reiterated Qatar's support for agreements that lead to stability and prosperity in the region.

End of Israeli aggressions necessary for regional peace, Qalibaf tells Asian parliamentarians

From Page 1 ▶ Despite the genocide committed by the Zionist regime, he noted, the Resistance Front had managed to impose a strategic defeat on Israel. He further criticized the United States and its allies, observing that despite their military and strategic failures in Gaza and Lebanon, they have not ceased their efforts to undermine the region's stability. Instead, they are orchestrating new political conspiracies to further their own agendas.

Qalibaf also expressed strong opposition to recent statements by U.S. President Joe Biden, which suggested that the United States should take control of Gaza and facilitate the forced displacement of Palestinians.

He described these remarks as a continuation of colonialist ideologies and as blatant examples of the ongoing violation of Palestinian rights. "The statements regarding the forced control of Gaza and the displacement of the Palestinian people reflect a disregard for the Palestinian people's rights," he said.

In his address, the Iranian Speaker criticized former U.S. President Donald Trump's peace plan for West Asia, labeling it as a form of ethnic cleansing and modern occupation.

He described Trump's plan as an apartheid initiative designed to align with Zionist interests, aimed at eroding Palestinian identity and suppressing their will. Qalibaf warned that such inhumane policies could destabilize the region further, exacerbating existing crises.

The senior politician reiterated Iran's firm stance against any plan that disregards the will of the Palestinian people, reaffirming that the future of Gaza and Palestine should be determined by Palestinians themselves, through their right to vote and decide their own destiny.



He emphasized, "The only way to resolve the current crisis in West Asia is through the complete and sustainable establishment of Gaza, the withdrawal of the Zionist occupying forces from Palestinian, Lebanese, and Syrian lands, and the immediate, unhindered delivery of humanitarian aid to Gaza. Furthermore, the safe and unrestricted return of Palestinian refugees to their homes is essential."

At the Assembly, Qalibaf also highlighted the critical role of Asia in fostering a new era of peace, security, and multilateral cooperation. He called for stronger trade and economic ties among Asian countries, emphasizing the importance of collaborative efforts to create mechanisms that facilitate trade, investment, and infrastructure development. According to Qalibaf, such cooperation is vital for achieving inclusive growth and ensuring the development of all nations in the region.

Qalibaf noted that the Iranian Parliament has consistently championed multilateralism

within the Asian Parliamentary Assembly. He reaffirmed Iran's commitment to promoting sustainable cooperation across the region and ensuring that all Asian nations benefit from such collaborations.

Tehran firm on policy of strengthening relations with neighbors: Qalibaf

In a meeting with Khalid bin Hilal bin Nasser Al-Maawali, the Speaker of the Omani Parliament, Qalibaf reiterated Iran's firm policy of strengthening relations with neighboring countries.

The two officials discussed their countries' long-standing ties and expressed mutual support for continued cooperation. Qalibaf commended Oman for its clear and firm stance against the Zionist regime and its unwavering support for Palestine. He expressed hope that the relationship between Iran and Oman would continue to grow in all aspects.

Al-Maawali, for his part, praised the bilateral relations between Oman and Iran, crediting the efforts of both the late Sultan of Oman and the leadership of the Islamic Republic of Iran. He emphasized the importance of dialogue based on logic, equality, justice, and respect for each other's sovereignty. The Speaker of the Omani Parliament also confirmed Oman's readiness to collaborate constructively with Iran on a range of issues.

Both parties condemned the recent actions taken by the United States and Israel, particularly the call for ethnic cleansing in Gaza. Al-Maawali highlighted the importance of unity among Islamic countries, reiterating that the international community, including the United Nations, had condemned the actions of the Zionist regime.

SPORTS

Ex-Iran and Esteghlal player Farzami dies

TEHRAN – Gholamhossein Farzami, a former player for both Iran and Esteghlal football club, passed away on Wednesday at the age of 79 due to a heart attack.

Farzami was a member of the Iran national team that clinched the title at the 1968 AFC Asian Cup. He scored his only international goal in that tournament against China, helping Team Melli to a 4-0 victory.

In addition to his football career, Farzami served as the president of the Squash Federation for a period and was also a member of Esteghlal's board of directors.

The Tehran Times offers its deepest condolences to Farzami's family, loved ones, and friends during this difficult time.

Turkish wrestling legend Akgul to come to Tehran

TEHRAN - Turkish freestyle wrestler and current president of the Turkish Wrestling Federation Taha Akgul will travel to Tehran to attend the World Club Wrestling Cup.

Akgul, winner of 11 world and Olympic medals, will be a special guest in Tehran.

He plans to retire soon after the 2024 Olympic Games.

The event features six foreign and two local teams, with Turkey being one of the participating teams.

The legendary Turkish wrestler has faced Amir Hossein Zare of Iran in the heavyweight class several times.

Bakhtiarzadeh to remain Esteghlal coach

TEHRAN – Sohrab Bakhtiarzadeh will continue as the head coach of the Esteghlal football team.

Under his guidance, Esteghlal have secured a spot in the quarterfinals of the Iran's Hazfi Cup and also qualified for the 2024-25 AFC Champions League Elite Next Stage.

On Tuesday night, Esteghlal triumphed over Al Rayyan of Qatar, advancing to the next stage of the competition.

Esteghlal had previously initiated talks with Italian coach Walter Mazzarri, but the two parties failed to reach an agreement.

FIBA Asia Cup 2025: Aghajanzadeh among Players to Watch

TEHRAN - Teams will be shifting into high gear as the qualification to FIBA Asia Cup 2025 heads into the home stretch with Window 3 fast approaching.

It would also mean another opportunity to witness which players will step up to the plate as all competitors are sure to go all out, most especially those who are in must-win situations in order to keep the dream alive in reaching the continental meet.

Not to be forgotten during Qatar's thrilling win was the valiant effort Matin Aghajanzadeh put up that truly made it a challenging night for the home team, fiba.com wrote.

He was actually responsible for extending the match, nailing the triple under duress with 6.6 seconds left in regulation that eventually led to OT - and brought flashbacks of their Window 1 encounter at the Azadi Basketball Hall in Tehran.

Iran didn't get the result it wanted but it was nonetheless a night to remember for the 23-year-old, who finished with 31 points, spiked by a 7-of-10 clip from deep, to tie the second-most points in a game in the present Qualifiers.

Team Melli is carrying a 3-1 card in Group E and are looking to sweep their Window 3 games

against India and Kazakhstan, and Aghajanzadeh is once again seen to deliver solidly especially after that sterling performance in Doha.

Hashem Eskandari attends ACBS General Assembly

TEHRAN - Hashem Eskandari of Iran attended the 39th General Assembly of the Asian Confederation of Billiard Sports (ACBS) in Doha, Qatar.

The assembly featured the presidents of 37 member countries, showcasing strong participation from the members and the federation's preparedness for the event, as emphasized by ACBS Secretary General Michael Alkhoury.

Additionally, it is worth noting that the Central Asia meeting, chaired by Eskandari, is scheduled to take place on Thursday.

Iran victorious over Uzbekistan in 2025 AFC U20 Asian Cup

TEHRAN - Iran beat Uzbekistan 2-1 in their final AFC U20 Asian Cup China 2025 Group C tie at the Shenzhen Youth Football Training Base Pitch 1 on Wednesday.

Iran, in winning all three group matches, will meet the runners-up of Group D in the quarter-finals while defending champions Uzbekistan will play the top team.

With both teams having already qualified prior to their clash, Uzbekistan started without striker Muhammadali Urinboev while Iran kept Esteghlal midfielder Abolfazl Zamani, who scored a brace in their 6-0 win over Yemen, on the bench.

Yousef Mazraeh was on target for Iran in the 52nd minute and Esmail Gholizadeh made it 2-0 from the penalty spot in the 64th minute.

Urinboev made his appearance in the 69th minute, and made his presence felt 10 minutes later when half-volleyed the ball from the center of the box past a diving Arsha Shakouri to pull one back for Uzbekistan.

Iran team lauds China's hospitality at 2025 Asian Winter Games

TEHRAN - The Iranian ski mountaineering team has had a rewarding experience at the 9th Asian Winter Games in Harbin, China. With ski mountaineering making its debut at the 2025 Asian Winter Games, this competition marks a significant milestone for athletes worldwide, and Iran's national team embraced the opportunity to compete on this prestigious stage.

Competing for the first time in the Winter Games, the Iranian team, led by manager Mahmoud Hashemi, faced strong competitors from China, Japan, and the Republic of Korea. Yet, despite the challenges, the team is optimistic about the future.

"We hope to be better in the future and aim for a podium finish in the finals," Hashemi remarked after a competitive mixed-relay event. "We're up against very strong teams that have had more exposure to international competitions, but we are hopeful."

China's meticulous event organization and warm hospitality stood out to the Iranian team.

Hashemi praised the host nation for its efforts, "Everything here is fine. The event organization, food, transportation - everything is well-managed. I know it's a hard job, but the arrangements have been excellent." His sentiments were echoed by the athletes, who shared their appreciation for the high standards of the competition.

Iran's ski mountaineering team is a blend of experience and youthful talent, including two male and two female athletes. Among them is 22-year-old Ali Kalhor, who has quickly risen through the sport's ranks. Transitioning from alpine skiing to ski mountaineering in 2018, Kalhor has already achieved significant milestones, including a medal at the Asian Championships and a Youth Olympic bronze.

CBI chief visits Russia to boost banking ties

TEHRAN – Central Bank of Iran (CBI) Governor Mohammad Reza Farzin traveled to Yekaterinburg, Russia, to meet with his Russian counterpart and advance monetary and banking cooperation between the two countries, as well as discuss continued collaboration within the BRICS group.

According to the Central Bank of Iran, Farzin's visit follows an official invitation from Elvira Nabiullina, head of Russia's central bank.

Talks will focus on strengthening the Iran-Russia monetary pact and expanding economic, financial, and banking ties with BRICS members.

During a recent visit to Moscow with Iran's president, Farzin stated that the Iran-Russia monetary agreement had been implemented,

with the two countries' currencies being settled based on a market-determined exchange rate.

Another key Iran-Russia project is the integration of the Mir and Shetab payment networks. The first phase has been launched, with the second and third phases underway.

The two central banks have also finalized a joint action plan covering three key areas: the use of national currencies in bilateral trade, linking domestic financial messaging systems—known as SEPAM and SPFS—and integrating the two countries' card payment networks.

Yekaterinburg, the capital of Russia's Sverdlovsk province, serves as the industrial hub of the Ural Federal District.

Iran's power plant efficiency surpasses 39.6% amid fuel challenges

TEHRAN – The average efficiency of Iran's power plants has exceeded 39.6 percent, with efforts underway to sustain the upward trend, a senior official at the country's Thermal Power Plants Holding Company said.

According to the Energy Ministry, Nasser Eskandari, deputy head of power generation operations, stated that optimized power plant utilization, the integration of steam units in combined-cycle plants, and the use of more efficient generation units have helped the electricity sector curb fuel consumption.

Despite a 1.8 percent increase in electricity production, equivalent fuel consumption rose by only 0.7 percent.

"This indicates a steady improvement in the efficiency of Iran's thermal power plants, allowing us to generate more electricity with less fuel," Eskandari noted.

Improved efficiency and better consumption management resulted in lower fuel usage at thermal power plants in January and February compared to the same period last year.

Daily fuel consumption in January fell to 214 million cubic meters from 218 million cubic meters a year earlier, while in February, it decreased from 209 million to 208 million cubic meters.



Eskandari emphasized that the reduced gas supply this winter limited the ability of power plants to stockpile liquid fuel. "Thermal power plants were supposed to receive more gas to store liquid fuel for winter, but due to lower gas deliveries, most of the available fuel was consumed immediately, leaving little room for storage," he said.

Designed to operate primarily on natural gas, Iran's thermal power plants can use liquid fuel only as a temporary measure, with dedicated storage tanks at plant sites. Eskandari noted that in previous years, over three billion liters of liquid fuel were stored annually for winter use, but this year, the reduced gas supply has forced power plants to rely more on liquid fuel.

Transit of goods via Astarra border rises 34.7%

TEHRAN – Transit of commodities through Astarra border in the northwest of Iran has increased by 34.72 percent during the first 10 months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20, 2024-January 19, 2025), as compared to the same period of time in the past year, based on a report released by the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA).

The IRICA report said that 596,000 tons of goods were transited via this border in the ten-month period of this year, while the figure was 442,000 tons in the first ten months of the previous year.

Based on this report, transit of goods through Iran has increased by 28.79 percent during the first 10 months of the current Iranian calendar year, as compared to the same period of time in the past year.

The IRICA report said that 18.4 million tons of goods were transited via the country in the mentioned ten-month period.

Also, as announced by an official with Iran Road Maintenance and Transportation Organization (RMTO), transit of commodities through the roads of Iran is anticipated to reach 17.5 million tons by the end of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20).

Javad Hedayati, the director-general of the Transit Office of the organization, has stated that 15 million tons of goods were transited via the roads of the country during the first ten months of the current Iranian calendar year, with a growth of 27 percent as compared to the same period of time in the past year.

The official said that the figure should reach 40 million tons per year based on the country's Seventh National Development Plan.

Also, Mehdi Khezri, the deputy for transportation at the organization, has stated that the highest record for transit transport was achieved in the previous Iranian year, with 14.75 million tons of goods carried by 636,000 trucks and trailers.

(See full text at tehrantimes.com)

Iran, Russia sign 2025 transport, transit cooperation roadmap

TEHRAN – Iran and Russia signed the 2025 transport and transit cooperation roadmap, along with an addendum for engineering studies on the Rasht-Astara railway project.

The agreement was signed by Iran's Minister of Transport and Urban Development Farzaneh Sadeqh and Russia's Minister of Transport Roman Vladimirovich Starovoyt.

According to Iran's Transport and Urban Development Ministry, the bilateral meeting took place on Tuesday at the ministry's headquarters in Tehran.

The meeting was attended by senior Iranian transport officials, including Saeed Rasouli, Deputy Minister of Transport and Acting Head of the Ports and Maritime Organization; Jabbari Zakeri, the head of Iran's Railway Company; Houshang Bazvand, head of the Transport Infrastructure Development Company; and Amin Tarafo', head of the International Affairs Center at the ministry.

Minister Sadeqh welcomed the Russian delegation, emphasizing the importance of regular meetings to enhance bilateral cooperation.

She highlighted that continued discussions would help both countries achieve their objectives in completing the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC).

Sadeqh also pointed to the ongoing third Caspian Economic Forum, hosted by Iran with Russia's participation, describing it as a pivotal event for strengthening economic, trade, and transport ties between the two nations and other Caspian region countries.

The Iranian minister expressed hope that the final contract for the Rasht-Astara railway project would be signed by the end of the current Iranian year (late March), following the finalization of project volumes and costs.

She noted that land acquisition for the railway was progressing rapidly and would be completed within a year.



Iran's Transport Minister Farzaneh Sadeqh (L) and Russia's Minister of Transport Roman Vladimirovich Starovoyt sign transport roadmap documents in Tehran on Tuesday.

Sadeqh welcomed Russian President Vladimir Putin's approval of engineering studies for the Rasht-Astara railway before the finalization of the land acquisition schedule, calling it a positive step toward accelerating the project.

She also highlighted the upcoming trilateral meeting between Iran, Russia, and Azerbaijan, where the three countries would define cooperation levels for the western branch of the INSTC in the Caspian Sea's western region. Additionally, she stressed the importance of focusing on the corridor's eastern branch, identifying transit costs for both routes, and addressing bottlenecks.

Sadeqh emphasized the potential for Russian cargo to reach Pakistan via Iran, reaffirming Tehran's commitment to maximizing its transit capabilities.

She also called for simplifying visa procedures for truck drivers, increasing the use of the Caspian Sea for freight and passenger transport, and expanding air transport cooperation, including flight frequency increases, airline partnerships, new routes, airport collaboration, and aircraft maintenance experience exchanges.

Russia proposes Caspian consortium

In response, Russian Transport

Minister Starovoyt supported Iran's proposals and suggested establishing a Caspian transport consortium.

Minister Sadeqh welcomed the idea, stating that Iran and Russia should take the lead in implementing the initiative.

She concluded that close Iran-Russia cooperation had been consistently encouraged by both countries' leaders and would benefit their respective populations.

Iran, Russia plan comprehensive Caspian maritime roadmap

Also on the sidelines of the Caspian Economic Forum, Dmitry Azarov, Russia's Deputy Minister of Transport, met with Saeed Rasouli, Iran's Deputy Transport Minister and Acting Head of the Ports and Maritime Organization, to discuss expanding combined transit through the Caspian Sea and facilitating container shipping.

Plans for launching a cruise route between Iran's Anzali Port and Russia's Astrakhan Port were also discussed.

Azarov stated that Moscow is ready to address logistical challenges in Caspian maritime transport, including streamlining vessel scheduling and expediting the handling of perishable and sensitive cargo.

He noted that Russia is en-

hancing the infrastructure of Makhachkala Port to improve docking and cargo operations and expressed interest in reaching a comprehensive maritime and port cooperation agreement with Iran.

Tehran's readiness for a maritime cooperation summit

Rasouli, for his part, said Iran seeks to enhance maritime and shipping cooperation with Russia through a joint action plan.

He emphasized that Iran is pursuing simultaneous development in rail-port and road-port connectivity.

Highlighting the need for a comprehensive Caspian maritime roadmap, Rasouli called for harmonizing port tariffs, facilitating multimodal transit via the Caspian route, and improving container transit operations between Iranian and Russian ports. He announced Iran's readiness to hold a maritime cooperation summit with Russia to finalize a joint maritime roadmap.

128% growth in Iran's maritime transit

Jalil Eslami, Deputy Head of Iran's Ports and Maritime Organization, revealed that maritime transit via Iranian ports had surged by 128 percent over the past year, with Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan accounting for most of the cargo.

However, Eslami noted ongoing issues with Iranian shipping in Russian ports, including scheduling inefficiencies, inadequate port services such as pilotage, and strict inspections. He called for improved conditions for handling hazardous and perishable goods.

Eslami also announced Iran's readiness to launch cruise and passenger shipping services with Russian ports, urging Russia to allocate a suitable cruise vessel for the route.

Additionally, he highlighted the prolonged six-year delay in finalizing a maritime safety agreement for search-and-rescue operations and ship inspections between the two countries, calling for swift resolution.

Iran calls for expansion of Caspian energy cooperation

TEHRAN – Iran's Deputy Minister of Oil for International Affairs and Commerce emphasized the need for greater energy cooperation among Caspian Sea littoral states, highlighting Iran's readiness to collaborate on major oil and gas projects with regional partners.

Speaking at the Caspian Economic Forum's energy session on Tuesday, Seyed Ali-Mohammad Mousavi stated that Iranian oil and gas companies possess advanced capabilities to engage in large-scale projects with neighboring countries under international standards and highly competitive costs.

Mousavi underscored the Caspian region's extensive cultural and historical ties, as well as its long-standing economic and political connections. He noted that the Caspian littoral states are situated within a globally strategic energy zone, blessed with vast oil and gas reserves that serve as a crucial economic asset for their populations.

Also, Iran's Minister of Industry, Mining and Trade Mohammad Atabak said: "Iran declares its readiness to develop the infrastructure of the Caspian-Persian Gulf corridor and create the necessary facilities for the establishment of logistics bases and the exploitation of Iran's southern ports for the Caspian Sea littoral states."

Making the remarks in the third Caspian Economic Forum, the official stated: "The activation and development of infrastructure in

upgrading corridors and logistics and digitalization of processes, creation of joint industrial and technology parks, facilitation of financial and banking exchanges based on the successful experiences of members based on the national currency of the Caspian countries, creation of green customs corridors and joint free zones, according to the successful experiences of member countries in the field of understanding of long-term bilateral or multilateral cooperation were emphasized in the event."

The third Caspian Economic Forum kicked off in Tehran on Monday with the presence of the officials of the Caspian Sea littoral states.

The two-day event is being held with the aim of presenting solutions to increase the economic and commercial cooperation between the Caspian Sea littoral states.

According to Iran's Trade Promotion Organization (TPO), Akbar Godari, Director General for Central Asia, the Caucasus, and Russia at the TPO, the key topics include healthcare, energy, finance, tourism, investment in free trade zones, and logistics.

Godari noted that Iran's Trade Promotion Organization has organized seven specialized panels for the first day of the event, covering areas such as trade, industry, and agriculture (Ministry of Industry, Mine, and Trade); economic, customs, banking, and investment cooperation (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Finance); transportation, transit, and engi-

neering services (Iran's Transport and Urban Development Ministry); environmental, health, and tourism cooperation (Department of Environment); energy collaboration, including oil, gas, electricity, and renewables (Ministry of Oil and Ministry of Energy); scientific and technological cooperation (Vice Presidency for Science and Technology); and discussions among the heads of chambers of commerce (Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines, and Agriculture).

On the second day, the prime ministers of the five Caspian littoral states will sign a final declaration outlining measures to strengthen cooperation and implement agreements through periodic ministerial follow-ups.

The first Caspian trade and economic cooperation agreement was signed in August 2018 in Kazakhstan and ratified by Iran's Parliament in January 2023. Under Article 5 of the agreement, the Caspian Economic Forum is to be held periodically in each of the coastal nations.

The inaugural Caspian Economic Forum and exhibition took place in August 2019 in Awaza, Turkmenistan, with the participation of prime ministers and trade delegations.

The second forum was held in Moscow in October 2022, attended by Iran's former First Vice President Mohammad Mokhber and other leaders. During that meeting, it was agreed that Iran would host the third edition in 2024.

Private sector urges tax reforms at TCCIMA meeting

TEHRAN – Private sector representatives highlighted major tax challenges facing businesses at the 24th monthly meeting of the Tehran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (TCCIMA)'s tenth-term board, attended by Mohammad-Hadi Sobhanian, head of Iran's Tax Administration.

They proposed solutions to ease tax burdens, urging the government to eliminate discretionary and extralegal tax practices.

Sobhanian welcomed the chamber's engagement and reaffirmed the government's intention to shift tax collection toward consumption-based taxation. He

emphasized that private sector organizations, such as the Tehran Chamber of Commerce, play a key role in improving tax transparency and accuracy.

At the start of the meeting, the head of the Tehran Chamber of Commerce's Money and Capital Market Committee, as the

first pre-agenda speaker, stated that the commission's new term has prioritized the use of modern financing tools. This initiative comes amid the tightest liquidity conditions in the country's banking system and challenges in granting loans.

Israel's psychological warfare: Hamas rejects disarmament call, removal from Gaza

From page 1 ▶ Hamas issued a statement on Wednesday throwing cold waters on Israel's calls for its disarmament and removal from Gaza.

"The occupation's condition of removing Hamas from the Gaza Strip is a ridiculous psychological war, and the withdrawal or disarmament of the resistance from Gaza is unacceptable," Hamas spokesman Hazem Qassem said.

Hamas has flexed its military muscles during six captive handover ceremonies held in Gaza to free captives. Palestinians have also held gatherings during these ceremonies in the enclave to express their unwavering support for resistance groups.

Hamas is anticipated to release the remaining captives in the second stage of the three-phase ceasefire agreement which should also result in the full withdrawal of the Israeli army from Gaza.

"We are ready for a second phase in which the prisoners will be exchanged in one go, within the criterion of reaching an agreement that leads to a permanent ceasefire and a complete withdrawal from the Strip," Hamas spokesman Hazem Qassem said



Hamas has demonstrated its military prowess during captive handover ceremonies in the Gaza Strip

in the statement.

During a recent meeting, Netanyahu informed cabinet ministers that Israel's stipulations for the forthcoming negotiations regarding the second phase of the ceasefire include the disarmament of Hamas and the complete absence of its presence in Gaza.

The Israeli opposition leader has lashed out at the Netanyahu cabinet accusing it of hindering the second phase of the truce for "political reasons".

Yair Lapid told broadcaster Kan that Hamas will not agree to the deal's second phase if the Israeli cabinet demands that the resis-

tance group leave the Gaza Strip.

Meanwhile, US President Donald Trump has taken a step further calling for the relocation of Gaza's entire population.

Trump floated the idea during a joint press conference alongside the visiting Israeli premier on February 4 in the White House, saying, "The US will take over the Gaza Strip and we will do a job with it too."

He has exerted pressure on regional countries, in particular Jordan and Egypt, to embrace a forced removal of Palestinians.

Trump's proposal has elicited strong opposition from Palestin-

ians, regional nations, and certain Western allies of Washington.

Protests have also emerged worldwide in opposition to Trump's suggestion.

Palestinians maintained their unity in the face of Israel's war on Gaza that began on October 7, 2023. Israel killed nearly 62,000 people in Gaza but was unable to bring the Palestinian resistance to its knees.

During the course of the Gaza conflict, Netanyahu had repeatedly vowed to continue fighting until eliminating Hamas and securing the release of captives.

Israel's genocidal war started shortly after Hamas carried out the Al-Aqsa Storm operation, a surprise military operation in southern Israel. More than 1,100 people were killed and 250 others were taken captive during the Hamas attack.

More than 500 days after launching war on Gaza, Israel's war ambitions have gone up in flames. The threats issued by Israeli officials, along with Trump's proposal, seem to be strategies aimed at redirecting focus from the military setbacks experienced by the Netanyahu regime.

Hezbollah's Odaisseh Ambush Operation humiliated the Zionists

From page 1 ▶ Yediath Ahronoth in turn wrote: "A long convoy of cars lined up at the entrance to the village of Odaisseh. Engineering machinery was busy removing the rubble and working to restore the village's infrastructure."

"I vowed to sacrifice my son as a martyr just like Sayyedah Zahraa. Thanks to his blood and sacrifices, we have emerged victorious. If I had more sons, I would have sacrificed them all. No one will take away the resistance's weapon," said one of the mothers of the heroes of the Odaisseh Ambush, Sayyed Mahdi al-Moussawi, a missed martyr (Shaheed Gomnam).

On the other side of the border, Libi Fox, a member of Kibbutz Maskaf Am, said: "I don't see here the image of victory for Israel." Ofer Moskowitz, another member also commented: "This takes me back to 2006, when we left Lebanon after the war in exactly the same way," it added.

Odaisseh is the closest Lebanese point to Palestine. It was the first town occupied by the Israeli enemy in 1977, and the last village to be expelled from it in May 2000. To the north, it is bordered by Kfar Kila; to the south, Markaba and Hounin (one of the seven occupied Lebanese villages).

In 1920, according to the San Remo Agreement and the Paulet-Newcombe Agreement, 7 Lebanese border villages were annexed to Palestine: Hounin, on whose ruins the settlement of Margaliot was established; Salha, on whose ruins the settlements of Yiron and Avivim were established; Al-Malikiyah, on whose ruins the settlement of Malikah was established; Ibl al-Qamh, on whose ruins the settlement of Yoshav Yuval was established; Al-Nabiyusha, on whose ruins the settlement of Ramot Naftali was established; Qadas, on whose ruins the settlement of Yiftach was established; Tarbikha and the settlement of Shumra was built on its ruins.

Before Hezbollah's Odaisseh Ambush Operation, the Washington Post revealed an Israeli army official saying: "Our forces carried out 70 secret operations in Lebanon over the past year." However, Hezbollah's heroes humiliated the elite forces.

According to Hezbollah's military media, in the early hours of October 1, 2024, the Mujahideen monitored reconnaissance movements of the Israeli enemy army in Odaisseh. They were able to set up an advanced ambush. In



the next day, more than 30 officers & soldiers silently infiltrated the ambush area. With the call of "Labbaik Ya Nasrallah", the Mujahideen showered them with a hail of bullets from their light weapons, machine guns, and rocket-propelled grenades at zero distance, "which resulted in many dead and wounded who were screaming and wailing."

It continued: "At the same time, the resistance's close support groups targeted the enemy's supply lines in Misgav Am, Kfar Giladi and Matla with mortar shells and missiles," noting that the Israeli helicopters immediately intervened to evacuate the dead and wounded.

Despite the Israeli attempt to cover up the large number of losses, Israeli Ziv Hospital confirmed that it received 39 wounded, including 3 in critical condition. Yediath Ahronoth described what happened as a "catastrophe."

The timing of the operation is highly significant, given that it occurred a few days after the assassination of Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah. It revealed the failure of the Israeli assessment and its inability to penetrate the ground despite its intensive bombardment of the area since October 2023, while Western envoys were threatening Hezbollah.

Channel 13 reported that Odaisseh Ambush Operation "showed that Hezbollah's defensive formations operate and fight like an army."

Indeed, this confirms the great influence of the Galilee in northern occupied Palestine –strategically, politically, economically and socially – in the long term on the collective consciousness of the colonial entity.

Galilee is an integrated quasi-state that extends from the Golan Heights and Upper Galilee in the north to the Beisan Valley and Ramot Menashe in the south on an area of 3,324

square kilometres (without the Golan).

It is considered an economic, security and military tributary to the temporary entity. Its topographical nature also ensures the geographical expansion of "Greater Israel" in addition to its military importance as it includes strategic heights.

By the end of the 19th century, the Galilee was the centre of kibbutzim occupied by veteran Jews who were brought from Syria and Lebanon as it is a fertile agricultural land containing underground water reservoirs that made it a major base for food security in the temporary entity.

The 417 settlements in the north comprise 34.6% of all settlements. Before October 2023, they were inhabited by about 1.52 million people. Those settlers complained about the absence of an organized evacuation plan that had shaken the Zionist communities.

In light of the inability to adapt to society, since the majority of families are of a rural agricultural nature. They currently suffer from high rates of mental illness, sexual assault, domestic violence, moral decadence, and the dissolution of family ties. They feel that they are merely "cannon fodder for Tel Aviv, Haifa, Beersheba and Eilat."

It is believed that any harm that affects the northern kibbutzim is a harm to the foundations of the Hebrew colonial "state". Their factories were closed. Plains and farms were abandoned. Commercial activity declined by 75% and several investment companies moved outside occupied Palestine.

Armoured personnel carriers caused damage to roads, water and sewage pipes, gas and orchards. Many homes, shops, educational institutions and recreational facilities were severely damaged.

The Bank of Israel had estimated that the absence of 57,600 settlers in the north from work costs the Israeli economy – weekly – about \$63.2 million.

Annually, the Galilee is visited by about 1.5 million tourists; its only ski resort annually receives about 400,000 visitors. Its closure caused a huge economic loss and the dismissal of about 400 employees.

These damages raise the possibility that the northern colonial settlers will not return with the same momentum as the Lebanese on the other side of the border.

China's Belt and Road Initiative: The art of exploiting threats and opportunities

By Dr. Amir Azizi

TEHRAN- Since its launch in 2013, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has encountered numerous challenges and developments. Nevertheless, the initiative continues to be one of the most important strategies of the People's Republic of China. The following sections briefly explain how China has established the BRI despite

all the transformations it has gone through.

The Green Silk Road

One of the most significant criticisms of the BRI since its inception has been the inadequate attention given to environmental standards in its projects. Furthermore, the Paris Agreement has compelled China to adopt a more responsible approach to

climate change. In addition, the surge in fossil fuel prices, driven by increased demand following the reopening after the Covid-19 pandemic, coupled with heightened geopolitical risks stemming from Russia's invasion of Ukraine, has increased the need to enhance energy efficiency and diversify the energy portfolio, with a particular focus on renewable energy sources. On the other

hand, many BRI countries face substantial challenges in sustainable development, creating a considerable market for Chinese goods and services related to the green economy. Such factors have prompted Chinese policymakers to prioritize a green and sustainable BRI, leading to the Green Silk Road (GSR).

(See full text at tehrantimes.com)

More than \$50bn needed to rebuild Gaza

Reconstruction efforts in Gaza will require more than \$50bn after 15 months of Israel's devastating war, according to a new assessment by the United Nations, the European Union and the World Bank, Al Jazeera reported.

The figures come as Arab countries continue to scramble to find a viable recovery plan as an alternative to the mass displacement of the Palestinian enclave's 2 million residents proposed by United States President Donald Trump.

The Gaza & West Bank Interim Rapid Damage and Needs Assessment (IRDNA), published on Tuesday, calculated that Israel's war on Gaza caused \$49bn in destruction between October 8, 2023 and October 8, 2024.

Researchers concluded that \$53.2bn is now needed for the recovery and reconstruction of the Palestinian territory over the next 10 years, with about \$20bn of the full amount required in the first three years alone.

"Funding will require a broad coalition of donors, diverse financing instruments, private sector resources, and significant improvements in the delivery of reconstruction materials to Gaza in the post-conflict period," the joint report states.

More than half the total estimated cost of rebuilding, or \$29.9bn, is needed for damaged buildings and other key infrastructure, while funds to replenish Gaza's destroyed residential housing stock form the bulk of that figure – \$15.2bn.

Housing suffered the most during Israel's



15-month-long attack on the territory, with the report writers estimating that it accounted for 53 percent of the total destruction wrought by Israeli forces in Gaza, amounting to more than 292,000 homes destroyed or damaged.

Another \$19.1bn is required to make up for social and economic losses resulting from severe damage to Gaza's health, education, commerce and industry sectors, the report estimates.

The researchers also state that 95 percent of Gaza's hospitals are now non-functional, while the local economy has contracted by 83 percent.

The IRDNA is a follow-up to the Interim Damage Assessment (IDA) published by the UN, EU and World Bank in April 2024, which estimated about \$18.5bn in damages after just four months of Israel's war.

Years of clearing unexploded ordnance and removing millions of tons of rubble also lie ahead as part of the reconstruction efforts.

Trump blames Ukraine over war with Russia

President Donald Trump has criticized Volodymyr Zelenskyy, saying he was "disappointed" that the Ukrainian leader complained about being left out of talks between the US and Russia over ending the Ukraine war.

Trump also seemed to blame Kyiv for Moscow's invasion – even as he said he was more confident of a deal to end the war after US-Russia talks – claiming Ukraine could have "made a deal" to avert war, the Guardian reported.

"I'm very disappointed, I hear that they're upset about not having a seat [at the talks]," Trump told reporters at his Mar-a-Lago resort in Florida when asked about the Ukrainian reaction. The US president said a "half baked" negotiator could have secured a settlement years ago "without the loss of much land".

"Today I heard, 'oh, well, we weren't invited'. Well, you've been there for three years ... You should have never started it. You could have made a deal," he said.

Speaking in Florida on Tuesday night, Trump increased pressure on Zelenskyy to hold elections – echoing one of Moscow's key demands.

The US president also suggested that he could meet Russian President Vladimir Putin before the end of the month as Washington overhauls its stance towards Russia in a shift



that has alarmed European leaders.

Zelenskyy had earlier on Tuesday criticized the US-Russia talks for excluding Kyiv, saying efforts to end the war must be "fair" and involve European countries, while postponing his own trip to Saudi Arabia, where the US-Russia talks took place.

Talks "are taking place between representatives of Russia and representatives of the United States of America. About Ukraine – about Ukraine again – and without Ukraine," he said.

The Ukrainian president's comments appeared to anger Trump, who proceeded to launch a series of attacks on Zelenskyy, who has led Kyiv's fight against Russia's February 2022 invasion.

Israeli army's Jenin raid enters 2nd month

The Israeli army has continued with its large-scale military raid in the northern occupied West Bank city of Jenin and its refugee camp, forcing thousands to flee their homes, Al Jazeera reported.

Wednesday marked 30 days since Israeli forces began their assault on Jenin which then spread to other parts of the northern West Bank, including Tulkarem and its Nur Shams refugee camp. At least 26 Palestinians have been killed in Jenin since January 21.

The army has also deployed hundreds of soldiers and bulldozers that demolished houses and tore up vital infrastructure in the overcrowded camp, forcing almost all of its residents out.

"We don't know what's going on in the camp but there is continuous demolition and roads being dug up," said Mohammed al-Sabbagh, head of the Jenin camp services committee.

Speaking to reporters on Tuesday, Jenin Mayor Mohammed Jarrar said the Israeli army "adopted a pattern of random destruction" in the camp and its surroundings in order to make the camp "uninhabitable".

The mass displacement of Palestinians from various parts of the West Bank in recent weeks marks the largest displacement operation in

decades.

The camps, built for descendants of Palestinian refugees who fled or were driven from their homes in the 1948 Nakba around the creation of Israel, have long been major centers for resistance groups fighting Israeli occupation.

They have been raided repeatedly by the Israeli military but the current operation, which began as the ceasefire was agreed in the besieged and bombarded Gaza Strip, has been on an unusually large scale.

According to figures from the Palestinian Authority, about 17,000 people have now been forced out of Jenin refugee camp, leaving it almost deserted. In Nur Shams, 6,000 people, or about two-thirds of its population, have been forced out, with another 10,000 leaving from Tulkarem camp.

"The ones who are left are trapped," said Nihad al-Shawish, head of the Nur Shams camp services committee. "The Civil Defense, the Red Crescent and the Palestinian security forces brought them some food yesterday but the army is still bulldozing and destroying the camp."

Israeli raids have demolished dozens of houses and torn up large stretches of roadway as well as cutting off water and power.

(See full text at tehrantimes.com)

Rediscovering Sepandarmazgan: Iran's forgotten day of love

TEHRAN - Before Valentine's Day, there was Sepandarmazgan, an occasion dedicated to cherishing women and love.

Sepandarmazgan, also known as Esfandegan, is still celebrated annually on the 5th of Esfand (which falls on February 23 this year). Originally, it honors Spenta Armaiti, a divine figure in Zoroastrianism associated with devotion and the earth.

Dating back to the Achaemenid era, Sepandarmazgan was a day to express gratitude to women, particularly wives, and mothers, with men offering gifts as tokens of appreciation. According to medieval historians such as Al-Biruni, Gardizi, and Mas'udi, this celebration was widely observed, with women resting from daily work while men took on their responsibilities and presented them with gifts.

Although Sepandarmazgan was once a widely cherished celebration, its prominence has diminished over time. However, in recent years, efforts have been made to revive this ancient Persian tradition as a cultural alternative to Valentine's Day. With Western influences growing, some advocates of Iranian heritage encourage celebrating Sepandarmazgan as an authentic expression of Per-



sian love and appreciation for women.

In its historical context, the festival involved feasting, exchanging of gifts, and communal gatherings. Common foods included raisins and pomegranate seeds, which symbolized prosperity and love. Today, while the festival is not as widely practiced, some Iranians seek to restore its significance, reminding people of its deep historical roots.

As awareness grows, many hope to see this ancient festival reclaim its place as a meaningful day of love and appreciation in Persian culture.

Glimpses of World Heritage sites: Asante Traditional Buildings

Near Ghana's Kumasi, a group of traditional buildings are the last remaining testimony of the great Asante civilization, which reached its peak in the 18th century. The buildings include ten shrines/fetish houses (Abirim, Asawase, Asenemaso, Bodwease, Ejisu Be-sease, Adarko Jachie, Edwenase, Kentinkrono, Patakro and Saaman). Most are to the north-east of Kumasi, and Patakro, to the south.

Arranged around courtyards, the buildings are constructed of timber, bamboo and mud plaster and originally had thatched roofs. The unique decorative bas-reliefs that adorn the walls are bold and depict a wide variety of motifs. Common forms include spiral and arabesque details with representations of animals, birds and plants, linked to traditional "Adinkra" symbols. As with other traditional art forms of the Asante, these designs are not merely ornamental, they also have symbolic meanings, associated with the ideas and beliefs of the Asante people, and have been handed down from generation to generation.

The buildings, their rich color, and the skill and diversity of their decorations are the last surviving examples of a significant traditional style of architecture that epitomized the influential, powerful and wealthy Asante Kingdom of the late 18th to late 19th centuries. Asante Traditional Buildings reflect and reinforce a complex and intricate technical, religious and spiritual heritage.

The traditional religion, still practiced in the Asante shrines, takes the form of consulting with the deities to seek advice on specific situations, or before an important initiative. That is why the shrines have been maintained complete with all their symbolic features.

Between 1960 and 1970 the buildings were acquired by the Ghana Museums and Monuments Board (GMMB) and scheduled as a National Monument under the Law of Ghana NLC Decree 387 of 1969.

Therefore, the instruments for the protection of the Asante Traditional Buildings operate on two levels. The first is a prescription of customary regulations, prohibitions and penalties that have been handed down through generations from the past. The second is the modern statutory regulations enacted by Government. The two sets of laws complement each other, and are a generally effective means of protection although the modes of enforcement are different. The long-term challenges for the management of the Asante Traditional Buildings are to ensure regular maintenance in order to mitigate the impacts of the warm humid climate and to put in place a long-term strategy to secure a sufficient supply of organic materials for their repair.

(Source: UNESCO)

Echoes of Iran



The centuries-old Jameh Mosque of Yazd is graced with a giant dome, an elevated portal surmounted by two lofty minarets, and many spacious halls, all covered with intricate tilework.

100 tour operators from 25 countries gather in Isfahan for major event

By Afshin Majlesi

ISFAHAN - A five-day major tourism event kicked off on Wednesday morning in the ancient city of Isfahan, gathering 100 tour operators from 25 countries across the globe.

The gathering is set to offer an in-depth familiarization tour, allowing the visiting experts to explore the city's historical sites and connect with local stakeholders. It also includes discussions on enhancing the region's tourism infrastructure and fostering stronger global tourism relations.

The event is of immense significance not only for Isfahan but also for the broader Iranian tourism industry. With its rich history, stunning architecture, and globally renowned artisanship, Isfahan stands as a beacon for cultural tourism.

Named "Isfahan Tour Operator Meeting", the event is organized by Isfahan Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture in close collaboration with several governmental bodies and the private sector.

In that regard, Isfahan's mayor Ali Qasemzadeh emphasized that the gathering of 100 international tour operators serves as a major investment in the city's tourism. He noted that such events foster significant interaction between tourism stakeholders, which acts as a driving force for the development of the sector.

The mayor pointed out that Isfahan has long been a city of cultural exchanges, having attracted travelers and scholars from around the world throughout history, many of whom have expressed their admiration for the city's beauty in their travelogues.

"The event is seen as a way to



International tour operators pose for a photo at the main courtyard of the UNESCO-registered Jameh Mosque of Isfahan on the first day of a five-day fam tour of the ancient Iranian city, Feburary 19, 2025.

unlock the full potential of Isfahan's tourism assets, offering a unique opportunity to enhance its global standing," Qasemzadeh said.

Mariam Jalali-Dehkordi, the deputy minister for handicrafts, praised the event for its potential to revitalize Iran's tourism industry. She highlighted that the gathering not only boosts the nation's tourism but also introduces a new narrative that links Iran's rich handicraft tradition with tourism.

She emphasized that modern travelers are seeking new and captivating stories, and Isfahan, as a city of craft and culture, is perfectly positioned to offer these fresh narratives.

Jalali-Dehkordi also noted that the event would help dispel misconceptions about Iran and showcase the country's hospitality, security, and unique artistic heritage, which are key elements in attracting international tourists.

Ali-Asghar Shalbafian, the head of investment and economic affairs at the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, also emphasized that this event plays a crucial role in dispelling negative perceptions about Iran, particularly in light of the recent global media coverage.

By inviting tour operators from across the world, the event aims to present a true picture of Iran, focusing on its safety, stability, and the warmth of its people. Shalbafian noted that tourism

professionals are vital in shaping the global narrative, and their positive experiences in Isfahan could help counter the Iranophobia propagated by some international media outlets.

In addition, the spokesperson for the Department of Cultural Heritage in Isfahan underscored the significance of the event in countering the harmful impact of "Iranophobia".

"With participants from 25 countries, the event offers an invaluable opportunity for tour operators to experience the city's cultural and historical offerings firsthand," the official said.

He emphasized that this event helps reinforce the global image of Isfahan as a center of cultural preservation, tourism, and handicrafts, while also combating unfair political narratives by showcasing the true face of Iran.

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.

7,000-year-old Godin Tepe has tourism potential, archaeologist says

TEHRAN - Iranian archaeologist Morteza Geravand has emphasized the untapped potential of Godin Tepe, an ancient settlement dating back to 5,000 BC, as a significant cultural and tourism destination.

Situated in Kangavar Valley between Hamadan and Kermanshah, this historical site "has been largely neglected for nearly six decades, despite its importance in Iran's archaeological heritage".

Speaking to local media, Geravand, who also heads the Anahita Temple National Base, highlighted Godin Tepe's role as a major trade hub in ancient times. "This site was situated along a key commercial route, serving as a trading post for exchanges between Mesopotamia and even southern Iran," he explained.

Excavations at Godin Tepe have revealed evidence of human occupation from prehistoric periods through the Islamic era. During the Median period, a fortress was constructed at the site, likely serving as an administrative or military center. Despite its historical significance, Geravand expressed concern over the site's current state, noting that while other ancient sites from the same era, such as Tepe Sialk in Kashan, Nushijan in Malayer, and Hasanlu in West Azarbaijan province, have been developed into research and tourism centers, Godin Tepe has been left unattended.

The site was excavated by a Canadian archaeological team nearly 60 years ago. Since then, no further excavations have taken place,



and many of the structures uncovered at that time have deteriorated. Recent efforts have been made to define the site's boundaries, but funding constraints have hindered conservation work.

Geravand estimated that an initial budget of approximately one billion tomans (some \$11,000) is required for site preservation and interpretation, with further investments needed for its full development as a research and tourism hub. He stressed that with adequate support, Godin Tepe could become a major cultural attraction, bringing economic benefits to the underdeveloped eastern region of Kermanshah province.

"While Kermanshah is known for [treasured] sites like [the UNESCO-registered] Bisotun and Taq-e Bostan, many important historical landmarks in the eastern part of the province

remain underappreciated," he noted, calling for greater attention to the region's cultural heritage.

Godin Tepe, also known as Tappeh Imamzadeh, is located near the town of Godin in Kangavar county. It was registered on Iran's National Heritage List in 1965.

Advocates like Geravand hope that with further investment and recognition, it may one day receive UNESCO World Heritage status, placing it among Iran's most valued archaeological sites. "Godin Tepe is worthy of gaining a UNESCO status," the archaeologist announced in October 2023.

The major occupation periods at Godin have been classified as Periods XI-VI (c. 5200-3800 BC); Period VI: phases 3-1 (c. 3800-3000 BC) (note that Period VI:1 was called Period V in early reports of the site); Period IV: phases 2-1 (c. 2800-2600 BC); Period III: phases 6-1 (2600-1400 BC); and Period II: phases 2-1 (c. 800-500 BC).

According to World History Encyclopedia, the site was a Sumerian settlement first inhabited c. 5000 BC, which comprised a village and a fortress. It became an important stop along the Great Khorasan Road trade route, better known as the Silk Road, which was the major avenue for trade for close to 3,000 years. (The term "Silk Road" was first coined in 1877 by the German geographer Baron Ferdinand von Richthofen in reference to the trade of Chinese silk).

Lasers reveal 15th-century fortified Zapotec city in Mexico

Lasers shot from an aircraft have revealed the remains of a 600-year-old Zapotec city in southern Mexico, a new study finds.

The technique, known as lidar (light detection and ranging), works by having a machine aboard an aircraft send millions of laser pulses toward the ground and then calculating how long it takes for the lasers to bounce back. With

this information, scientists can map the topography of the land.

To learn more about a 15th-century city known as Guiengola, a team led by Pedro Guillermo Ramón Celis, a post-doctoral fellow at McGill University in Canada, used lidar to map out the site in December 2022. The results were published by Celis on Nov. 8, 2024, in the journal *Ancient Mesoamerica*.

The Zapotecs are an Indigenous people that continue to thrive in Mexico. In the 14th and 15th centuries, some of the Zapotec migrated to the southern Isthmus of Tehuantepec, where they established Guiengola close to the Pacific Ocean. Although its existence was mentioned in historic Spanish texts and archaeologists have conducted work at the site, the city's full extent was not known until scientists used lidar to map it.

They found that "it covered 360 hectares [890 acres], with over 1,100 buildings, four kilometers [2.5 miles] of walls, a network of internal roads and a clearly organized urban layout with temples and communal spaces such as ballcourts, and the elites and commoners lived in separate neighborhoods," according to a statement describing the research. There is a river that runs near the city.

(Source: Live Science)

NIGEB, University of Peshawar sign MOU to foster scientific ties

TEHRAN – Iran's National Institute of Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology (NIGEB), and the University of Peshawar, a top public university in Pakistan, have signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) to expand scientific cooperation.

The MOU also involves exchanging professors and students, and conducting joint scientific projects, Mehr news agency reported.

On Tuesday, a Pakistani delegation headed by Ali Muhammad, the president of the University of Peshawar, paid a visit to the NIGEB. They commended the scientific, research progress, and laboratory infrastructure of the institute as being remarkable.

During a meeting, Muhammad said that the University of Peshawar has long been providing education in different fields like Chemistry, Plant Protection and Agriculture, Botany, Veterinary Medicine, Environmental Management, Microbiology, Biotechnology, and Environmental Engineering.

Highlighting the scientific commonalities between the two organizations, Muhammad proposed boosting scientific inter-



actions by dispatching Pakistani professors and students to Iran to benefit from NIGEB training courses in genetic engineering and biotechnology, as well as implementing scientific projects in these fields.

The head of NIGEB, for his part, said that the institute is the main center of genetic engineering and biotechnology in Iran and the region. The scientific activities in the institute focus on meeting the needs of the country and the region.

The official went on to elaborate on a wide range of activities being carried out in different fields including early diagnosis

of cancer, fundamental studies on olive fruit, cultivation of salt-tolerant grains and wheat, development of diagnostic kits for human, livestock, and poultry, as well as various vaccines like HPV and influenza.

National Institute of Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology

NIGEB was established in 1989 under the supervision of the Ministry of Science, Research and Technology. Since then, NIGEB has been given a mandate to undertake original, state-of-the-art research activities.

It was established with dual purposes of promoting research in avant-garde areas of biolog-

ical sciences and biotechnology as well as providing advanced training and educational programs for scientists and students from other universities and academic institutions.

NIGEB is a pivotal hub for advancing the field of biotechnology in Iran, notable for its focus on multidisciplinary collaboration and ethical progress.

Impressively, they engage in both basic and applied research across various biotechnology sectors while considering the implications of technological commercialization and socio-economic impacts.

NIGEB's commitment to global cooperation and knowledge sharing is essential, particularly in a domain as fast-evolving and globally connected as genetic engineering and biotechnology.

Their work not only propels the scientific community within Iran but also makes significant contributions to international efforts addressing complex issues in agriculture, industry, the environment, and health. This reflects a comprehensive approach to research and education in the field.

Over 100 earthquakes shake Iran in a week

TEHRAN – A total of 105 earthquakes were recorded across the country in the 4th week of Bahman, the 11th Iranian calendar month, which falls from February 8 to 14, according to the seismological networks of the Institute of Geophysics of the University of Tehran.

Statistically, 92 earthquakes with magnitudes smaller than 3; 12 earthquakes with magnitudes between 3 and 4; and one earthquake with magnitude between 4 and 5 have occurred in the country, IRNA reported.

Of the total quakes, 1 had a magnitude of 4 on the Richter scale which occurred on February 10 with the epicenter in Kangavar, western Kermanshah province.

Among the provinces of the country, Khorasan Razavi with 17 experienced the highest number of earthquakes, followed by Fars and Bushehr, each with 10, and Kermanshah with 9 earthquakes.

During the same period, no earthquakes were recorded in East Azarbaijan, West Azarbaijan, Ardabil, Alborz, and Kohgiluyeh-Boyerahmad, Markazi, Qom, Gilan, Qazvin, and Zanjan provinces.

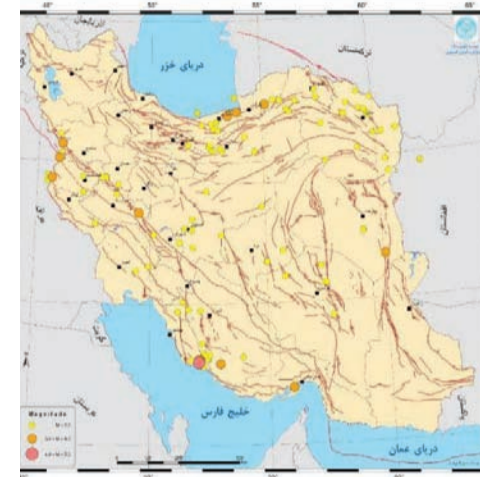
A total of 6,949 earthquakes were recorded across the country over the past calendar year (March 2023–March 2024) according to the Seismological networks of the Institute of Geophysics of the University of Tehran.

12 earthquakes with magnitudes between 3 and 4; and one earthquake with magnitude between 4 and 5 have occurred.

Most of the earthquakes happened respectively in the north-eastern Khorasan Razavi, south-eastern Kerman, north-western West Azarbaijan, and eastern South Khorasan provinces, ISNA reported.

Statistically, 2,268 earthquakes were less than 2 on the Richter scale; 3,685 were between 2 and 3; 796 were between 3 and 4; 181 were between 4 and 5; 22 were between 5 and 6; and 5 were between 6 and 7.

The Iranian plateau is located in a very seismically active region of the world and is known not only for its major catastrophic earthquakes but also for the disasters relating to natural hazards, especially earthquakes.



About 2 percent of the earthquakes in the world occur in Iran but more than 6% of the victims of the world earthquakes during the 20th century are reported from Iranian earthquakes.

This shows the high level of vulnerability in Iran, according to Mehdi Zare, a professor of engineering seismology

Iran has entered a decade of earthquakes since the [Iranian calendar] year 1396 (March 2017–March 2018), as the Iranian plateau is shrinking by 30 millimetres per year, Mehdi Zare, professor of engineering seismology at the International Institute of Earthquake Engineering and Seismology (IIEES), has said.

The Strait of Hormuz region in the south of Iran has the highest seismic activity in the region and its formation is related to the continuation of the convergent movement between the Arabian plate and the central continental plate of Iran.

Tehran is also one of the most hazardous metropolises in the world in terms of the risk of different natural disasters, such as earthquakes, floods, subsidence, drought, landslides, fire following an earthquake, etc.

On the other hand, Tehran has a night-time population of over 8,300,000 with a mixture of old non-resistant structures as well as modern high-rise buildings that affect the vulnerability of this city.

Health ministry, UNICEF join hands to help children with Severe Acute Malnutrition

TEHRAN – The Ministry of Health and Medical Education (MoHME) in cooperation with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) is providing medical care to children under the age of five who are suffering from Severe Acute Malnutrition (SAM) in Zabol, south-eastern Sistan-Baluchestan province.

Funded by the European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO), UNICEF has been providing free treatment to these children since September 2024, the UNICEF website announced in a press release on February 17.

At Amir Almommenin Hospital, more than 54 children with SAM have already received critical medical care, ensuring they get the life-saving treatment they need. The initiative not only enhances access to curative services but also focuses on children with disabilities and those most in need, ensuring no child is left behind.

Recognizing the deeper issues of food insecurity, this project will continue throughout 2025. In just three months, a complementary social protection programme will provide households with SAM cases cash cards, helping families purchase nutritious food and improve overall well-being.

A 2021–2022 food and nutrition surveillance study confirmed that moderate and severe wasting remains a major challenge in Sistan-Baluchestan.

While free treatment is available, many malnourished children are not covered under the Universal Public Health Insurance (UPHI), and dietary supplements are not included. To bridge these gaps, UNICEF has strengthened the identification and referral system in Primary Health Care (PHC) settings, ensuring



that children receive timely treatment and continuous follow-up care.

By tackling severe malnutrition through both medical treatment and social protection, UNICEF is not only saving lives today but also helping build a more resilient future for the children and families of Zabol. As part of its social protection interventions, UNICEF Iran plans to address food insecurity among eligible households in Zabol.

Recent services in Sistan-Baluchestan

Following the devastating floods that struck Sistan-Baluchestan province, specifically in Chabahar and its vicinity, at the end of February 2024, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) has been providing critical assistance, including access to safe water, to the affected communities.

Access to clean and safe water has long been a challenge in the region, even before the floods.

Recognizing the urgent need to address this hazard, UNICEF in collaboration with the Ministry of Health and Medical Education and the Ministry of Energy, initiated a comprehensive program to improve access to safe water, the UNICEF website announced in a press release on December 22, 2024.

This initiative aims to reduce waterborne illnesses, protect vulnerable families, and build resilience in the region's communities, ensuring sustainable access to clean and safe water.

UNICEF's response to the water crisis included critical support for water safety testing and purification efforts. "Forty water disinfection devices have been procured and distributed. These devices, which operate on solar energy, provide drinking water for approximately 200,000 people," explains Siavash Oveisi Arian, a UNICEF volunteer Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) officer.

"In addition, water quality testing laboratory equipment was distributed across the province," he added.

The laboratory equipment provided by UNICEF plays a crucial role in ensuring water safety for a large population in Sistan-Baluchestan province. Fatemeh Fadaee, Water and Wastewater Quality Control Manager of Chabahar County, explains, "We assess the water quality in the cities and villages of Chabahar, Dashtiari, Konarak, Zarabad, Ghasreghand, and Nikshar, with a population of one million people, to ensure the safety and quality of the water."

This enhanced capacity for water quality testing helps protect the health of communities across the province, reducing the risk of waterborne diseases and improving resilience against future public health challenges.

UNICEF's support to the flood-affected children and their families in Sistan-Baluchestan, including the provision of hygiene kits, prefabricated latrines and showers, laboratory equipment, and water disinfection devices, was made possible through generous financial aid from EU Humanitarian Aid.

ENGLISH IN USE

LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

Ministries ink MOU on out-of-school children

The Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Cooperatives, Labor and Social Welfare have signed a memorandum of understanding aiming to bring out-of-school children back to school.

The memorandum of understanding will pave the way for future steps, ISNA news agency quoted Education Minister Mohammad Bat'haei as saying on Sunday.

He made the remarks over the 8th session of council meeting for improving educational standards in underprivileged and underdeveloped areas at the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare. "The meeting is aiming to live up to educational standards, however, the current conditions are unjustifiable, and we should move faster," he added.

تفاهم وزارتخانه ها برای بازگرداندن کودکان بازمانده از تحصیل به مدارس

وزارت آموزش و پرورش تفاهم نامه مشترکی با وزارت رفاه برای بازگرداندن کودکان بازمانده از تحصیل امضا کردند.

به گزارش روز یکشنبه ایسنا، محمد بطحایی وزیر آموزش و پرورش گفت: امروز تفاهم نامهای امضا می شود که نقشه کار برای ادامه مسیر کاملاً مشخص شود.

بطحایی در هشتمین جلسه شورای هماهنگی بهبود و ارتقای شاخص های آموزشی و پرورشی مناطق محروم و کمتر توسعه یافته که در وزارت رفاه برگزار شد گفت: هدف اصلی این برنامه و شورای هماهنگی ارتقای شاخص ها بود، هرچند این روند قابل قبول نیست و باید با سرعت بیشتری حرکت کنیم.

Integrating "just transition" principles into both global, national policies

By Maryam Tavassoli

TEHRAN – Observed on February 20 annually, the World Day of Social Justice highlights the importance of integrating social justice into global efforts to address inequities, promote peace, and achieve sustainable development.

According to the UN website, this year, the day focuses on 'strengthening a just transition for a sustainable future this year, making sure our move toward low-carbon economies benefits everyone, especially the most vulnerable.

Organized by the United Nations (UN) in 2007, the day promotes equal access to education, employment, healthcare, and many other things, regardless of race, religion, sexuality, gender or class.

It requires a holistic approach that weaves environmental sustainability with social justice, ensuring that workers, indigenous peoples, and marginalized communities receive the support they need—through retraining, job creation, and strong social protection measures.

In other words, decarbonization and economic transformation should go hand in hand with policies that fight poverty, reduce inequality, and open up opportunities for all.

At the heart of this vision is the idea of integrating "just transition" principles into both global and national policies. When these principles are built into sustainable development agendas—such as those discussed at the Second World Summit for Social Development (WSSD2)—policymakers can create a fairer environment where the costs of change are shared equitably.



For example, targeted green skills training, comprehensive social protection, and community-led economic diversification can help ensure that the decline of fossil fuel industries doesn't lead to long-term unemployment or increased social inequality. Instead, these measures redirect investments into emerging green sectors, building a resilient workforce and a more equitable society.

Ultimately, strengthening a just transition is about re-imagining our economic and environmental systems to prioritize people as much as the planet. It's a call to shift the focus from simply decarbonizing to also redistributing opportunities and resources so that sustainable growth benefits everyone.

Through collective action and inclusive policies, we can create a future where environmental integrity and social equity go hand in hand, forming the foundation of a truly sustainable global economy.



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FEBRUARY 20, 2025

GUIDE TO SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

The most deserving person is he who can punish the guilty, but shows indulgence and forgiveness.

Imam Ali (AS)

Prayer Times > Noon:12:18 Evening: 18:09 Dawn: 5:21 (tomorrow) Sunrise: 6:44 (tomorrow)

Tehran Auction undergoes scrutiny amidst claims of illegal art sale

TEHRAN- Following the sale of a historical artwork attributed to the renowned Safavid-era artist Reza Abbasi, controversies arose regarding the legality of the sale and its authenticity.

The sale, which took place at the 22nd Tehran Auction on Friday, has drawn criticism from cultural heritage officials and raised questions among art experts, Mehr reported.

Hours before the auction's commencement, Leila Khosravi, Acting Director General of Museums, voiced concerns over the sale of traditional artworks, some dating back over a century, the report added.

Citing the 1930 Law on the Protection of National and Cultural Heritage, Khosravi emphasized that the export and sale of artifacts older than 100 years are strictly prohibited without explicit permission from the Deputy of Cultural Heritage of the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts.

She further clarified that such artworks can only be sold within Iran after official identification and certification by the ministry.

The Tehran Auction, in its recent edition, showcased a collection of traditional, classical, and modern Iranian arts, including 25 traditional and 75 modern pieces.

Auction organizers, however, asserted that they had secured the necessary permits from the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, as well as specific authorization from the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts for the sale of artworks exceeding a century in age.

Mahmoud Nourai, public relations director for the Tehran Auction, defended the artwork's provenance, stating that the "Portrait of a Seated Girl" possesses a documented history, tracing back to a gift from the Safavid rulers of Isfahan to a prominent family.

Despite these assurances, Khosravi later is-

sued a statement deeming the artwork's sale illegal.

Adding to the complexity, questions have been raised regarding the authenticity of the Abbasi attribution. Art experts have pointed to discrepancies in handwriting, the absence of certain characteristic techniques, and inconsistencies in the artwork's purported creation date and style.

Despite the concerns, the Tehran Auction has maintained that expert analysis, including paper and color testing, has been conducted.

Furthermore, the auction catalog featured an image of another Reza Abbasi artwork, sold at Christie's in 2018, highlighting the longstanding issue of valuable artworks leaving the country.

This incident underscores the need for stronger measures to control the export of national treasures. By displaying and auctioning the artwork within Iran, the Tehran Auction has seemingly thwarted any attempt to smuggle the artifact out of the country, as well.

The painting "Portrait of a Seated Girl" by Reza Abbasi was the highest-grossing piece at this edition of the auction, which was sold for \$264,000 (224.4 billion rials). The second-highest sale was a pair of engraved candlesticks by Hossein Alaghmandan, fetching \$134,588 (114.4 billion rials). The third place was shared between the paintings "Genesis" by Mahmoud Farshchian and "Forgiveness" by Wahed Khakdan, both selling for \$121,647 (103.4 billion rials).

The first of its kind in Iran, the Tehran Auction was launched in 2012 as an independent and private initiative to introduce the best in Iranian art, ranging from established and emerging Iranian artists to art collectors and the global audience.

It aims to address the increasing interest in modern and contemporary Iranian art and facilitate the acquisition of quality works in reliable ways.

Storytelling Festival crowns top talents in Yazd

TEHRAN- The 26th International Storytelling Festival, organized by Iran's Institute for Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults (IIDCYA), concluded in Yazd with the announcement of winners across various categories on Tuesday.

The festival, aimed to promote storytelling and identify emerging talents, featured participants from Iran and eight other countries.

The ceremony, featuring music and awards for national and international winners, also paid tribute to veteran storyteller Maryam Nashiba for her decades of contributions to storytelling and the promotion of culture and literature.

In the international section and Traditional Classic for Grandparents category, Hassan Jafari from East Azarbaijan province, Hamideh Abrishami from South Khorasan province, and Soghara Khajojnejad from Kerman province were honored.

In the Traditional Classic category for ages 17 and above, the winners were Zeinab Rajabi from Yazd province, Faezeh Khosravi from Kerman province, and Fatemeh Mohammadi from Qazvin province. Djuma Kadjudja from Congo received an honorable mention.

In the Traditional Classic category for ages 12 to 17, Mohammad Taha Etemadian from Yazd and Kiarash Rahbari from Semnan were recognized.



Veteran Iranian storyteller Maryam Nashiba receives recognition at the closing ceremony of the 26th International Storytelling Festival in Yazd, on February 18, 2025.

In the Modern and Innovative Storytelling category for ages 17 and above, Ali Kalout from Lebanon, Armaghan Sadat Hosseini from Qazvin, Mahdieh Keshvari Moqadam from Yazd, and Hadi Rafiei from Zanjan were selected as winners.

In the 12 to 17 age group of the same category, Fatemeh Sadat Mirzababai from Yazd was the winner.

For Traditional Ritual Storytelling, Sara Hosseini from Hamedan, Sahar Keikhai Javan from Sistan-Baluchestan, and Seyyed Ali

Mousavi from Yazd were the winners.

In the 12 to 17 age group of the same category, the winners were Fatemeh Mousavi Hakimabadi from Khorasan Razavi, Iman Qassemi from Isfahan, and Sarina Seifi from Tehran.

The Storytelling with Sign Language section saw Marzieh Aqakhani from Alborz, Zeinab Sabbagh from Tehran, and Leila Arzhangi from Tehran emerge as winners.

In the Sacrifice and Resistance Storytelling category, Fatemeh Bahrani and Naimeh Bidmesh-

ki-Yazdi, both from Yazd, alongside Maryam Mehdipour from Alborz, were recognized for their contributions. In the 12 to 17 age group, Sayda Sabzevari from Ilam and Tahouira Mahzadeh from Khorasan Razavi were announced as the winners.

The 26th edition of International Storytelling Festival themed "The Secret of Stories Shapes Life" and judged by prominent figures in the fields of literature and storytelling, awarded cash prizes, trophies, and opportunities for the winners to participate in national and international programs.

Iran's National Library up for closer cooperation with IFLA in digitization, document preservation

TEHRAN-The National Library and Archives of Iran (NLAI) seeks to benefit from the support of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institution (IFLA) in the fields of digitization and document preservation and foster more active collaboration.

Gholamreza Amirkhani, the head of the NLAI, made the remarks in a virtual meeting with Vicki McDonald, President of IFLA, and Sharon Memis, IFLA's Secretary General, on Tuesday, IRNA reported.

During the meeting, Amirkhani outlined the role and achievements of Iran's National Library in the field of librarianship and information science. Discussions included Iran's active participation in the upcoming IFLA World Library and Information Congress in Kazakhstan (2025), expanding research on artificial intelligence in libraries, and cooperation in digitization and document preservation.

Amirkhani highlighted the long-standing presence of the NLAI, stating: "Iran's National Library is a cultural institution with an 87-year history that has maintained continuous engagement with the IFLA since the 1960s."

"Over the years, we have established various forms of collaboration with the IFLA, including regular participation in its congresses and translating and publishing key articles and announcements from the IFLA into Persian since the 1990s. Furthermore, the National Library of Iran has hosted several regional IFLA meetings in Tehran," he added.

He also emphasized the prominent role of Iran's National Library in West Asia, noting that the institution is academically active, with over 30 faculty members and researchers contributing to its research division. This makes it one of

the leading cultural organizations in the country and West Asia.

Amirkhani discussed the NLAI's commitment to international publishing standards, explaining that: "For nearly 30 years, all books published in Iran must first receive a CIP (Cataloging in Publication) record from our institution. Additionally, the National Library of Iran holds one of the world's largest collections of Persian and Arabic manuscripts."

He further expressed Iran's strong interest in strengthening its cooperation with the IFLA, emphasizing that: "This year, Iran has the opportunity for a more significant presence at the upcoming IFLA conference in Kazakhstan. Visa challenges that previously prevented some countries from participating have now been resolved, allowing for broader engagement."

Amirkhani also stressed the importance of collaboration in emerging fields, stating: "We are currently conducting research on artificial intelligence and the future of knowledge management. Some of our findings have already been published as scientific papers, and we are eager to share these insights in upcoming IFLA congresses."

In conclusion, he reiterated Iran's commitment to digitization and document preservation, noting that with the resources available, Iran hopes to gain IFLA's support to further enhance these efforts and play a more active role in international collaborations.

For her part, Vicki McDonald expressed satisfaction with the meeting, saying: "We appreciate Iran's active role in translating IFLA articles into Persian. We are also delighted that Iran will be able to participate in IFLA's 2025 conference in Kazakhstan, especially since it was unable to do

so last year."

She also mentioned IFLA's upcoming centennial celebration, stating: "In 2027, we will celebrate IFLA's 100th anniversary, and we look forward to closer collaboration with our Iranian colleagues for this significant event."

Touching on artificial intelligence, McDonald noted: "AI is becoming a central topic in the field of librarianship, and it is essential for libraries to thoroughly examine its implications. We are very interested in receiving Iran's research on AI and learning from its findings."

She also pointed out that IFLA elections are currently underway, encouraging Iranian professionals to nominate themselves for various committees, particularly those focusing on AI and digitization, as these present significant opportunities for Iran.

Also speaking at the meeting, Sharon Memis also emphasized the importance of Iran's involvement in international library and digitization projects, stating: "IFLA's Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Regional Committee represents Western Asia and North Africa, offering an excellent opportunity for Iran to collaborate in areas such as digitization, preservation, and archiving."

At the end of the meeting, Vicki McDonald expressed her appreciation for Amirkhani's expertise in librarianship and formally invited him to attend the upcoming IFLA meeting in Kazakhstan.

"We look forward to enhancing cooperation with Iran, particularly in the fields of artificial intelligence and digitization. If possible, we would love to benefit from Iran's valuable experience in these areas," she concluded.

Amir Kabir Publishers to release Persian translation of "A Psychology of Culture"

TEHRAN-The Persian translation of the book "A Psychology of Culture" written by Michael B. Salzman has been translated into Persian and will soon be published by Amir Kabir Publishers.

Mohaddeseh Ahi and Raziye Gharahi are the translators of the book that was originally published in 2018, Mehr reported.

This thought-provoking treatise explores the essential functions that culture fulfills in human life in response to core psychological, physiological, and existential needs. It synthesizes diverse strands of empirical and theoretical knowledge to trace the devel-

opment of culture as a source of morality, self-esteem, identity, and meaning as well as a driver of domination and upheaval.

Extended examples from past and ongoing hostilities also spotlight the resilience of culture in the aftermath of disruption and trauma, and the possibility of reconciliation between conflicting cultures. The stimulating insights included here have far-reaching implications for psychology, education, intergroup relations, politics, and social policy.

"A Psychology of Culture" takes an uncommon tour of the human condition of interest to clinicians,

educators, and practitioners, students of culture and its role and effects in human life, and students in nursing, medicine, anthropology, social work, family studies, sociology, counseling, and psychology. It is especially suitable as a graduate text.

Michael B. Salzman is professor and chair in the Department of Educational Psychology. He has published in the areas of cross-cultural psychology, cultural psychology, intercultural training and counseling.

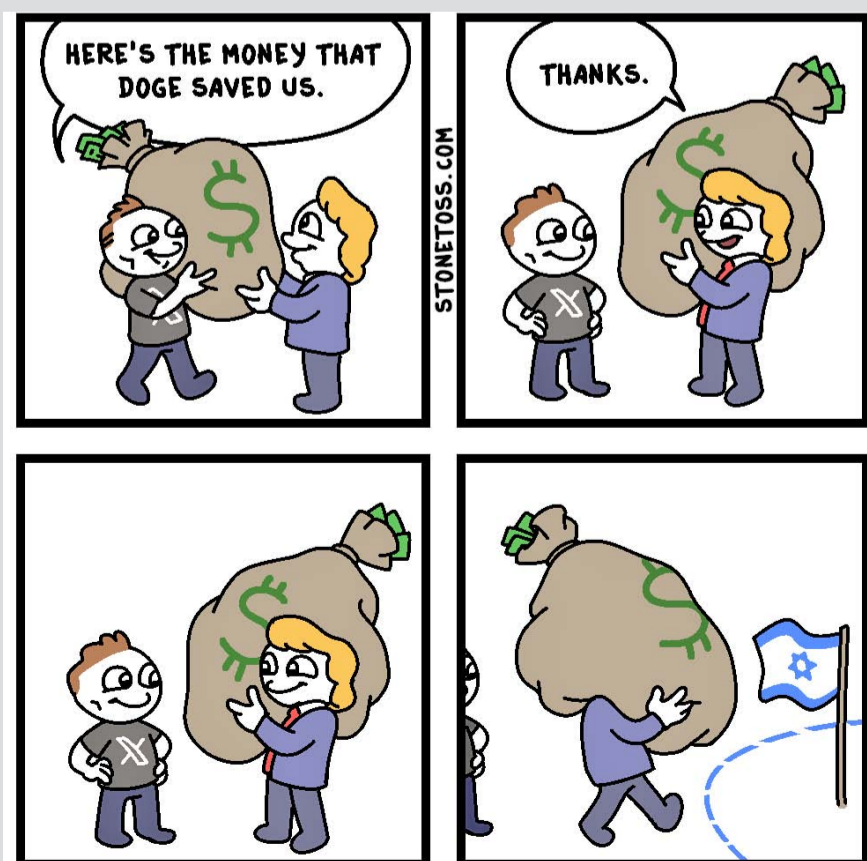
A licensed psychologist, he has worked with culturally diverse populations as a teacher in "inner city"

Brooklyn, counseling in the Navajo Nation, and serving as a clinician in a CMHC in South Tucson, AZ.

He has worked with Alaska Natives coordinating a model rural mental health program and most recently with the Native Hawaiian Leadership Project and the Native Hawaiian Education Association.

Salzman is interested in psychological functions of culture, consequences of traumatic cultural disruption, intercultural conflict, indigenous psychologies, movements of cultural recovery, and processes of psychological decolonization.

Cartoon of Day



Trump, Musk, Israel
Cartoonist: Stonetoss