

# Grossi's Dream for UN Leadership

How the IAEA chief's aspirations are influencing his stance on Tehran's nuclear activities

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IAEA Director General Rafael Grossi entered the Foreign Ministry for talks with Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi on Wednesday, April 16, 2025.

## Internal progress not dependent on Tehran-Washington talks: Pezeshkian

TEHRAN – Iran's President Masoud Pezeshkian has reassured the public that the country's internal affairs are progressing without any delays or interruptions, despite ongoing negotiations between Iran and the United States.

Speaking during a Cabinet session on Wednesday morning, Pezeshkian emphasized that the nation's daily activities and policies are moving forward as planned, unaffected by the diplomatic discussions.

"The country is continuing its work in a steady and natural course, and the negotiations are being carried out in the usual manner," Pezeshkian said. "We are not letting these talks cause any pause in the country's affairs. However, we welcome any agreement that could come from these discussions, as long as it benefits our nation."

Additionally, President Pezeshkian welcomed the recent appointment of Mohsen Esmaili as the new Deputy for Strategic Affairs and Parliamentary Relations. He expressed gratitude to the outgoing officials, Mohammad Javad Zarif and Shahram Dabiri, for their efforts in managing the country's foreign relations. ► Page 3

Scan this QR code to watch the video.



## Araghchi to deliver Leader's message to Putin

TEHRAN – Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi is set to travel to Moscow on Thursday to deliver a message from the Leader of the Islamic Revolution, Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei, to Russia's Vladimir Putin.

Araghchi will briefly meet with his counterpart before being received by the president, reports say.

The top diplomat will then travel to Italy's capital, where he will engage in indirect talks with U.S. Special Presidential Envoy Steve Witkoff. The two countries held the first round of their indirect negotiations in Muscat last week, with Oman's foreign minister acting as go-between. They discussed Tehran's nuclear program as well as anti-Iran U.S. sanctions.

The first Iran-US encounter ended on a positive note, with both sides describing the talks as "positive" and "constructive". However, subsequent remarks by Witkoff, stating that Iran "must stop and eliminate" its nuclear enrichment program to reach a deal with Washington, may have dampened prospects for similar results in the upcoming round. ► Page 2

## Iran ready to help seal Armenia-Azerbaijan peace

TEHRAN – After decades of tensions over Nagorno-Karabakh, a peace agreement between Armenia and Azerbaijan seems imminent. Iran, a neighbor with friendly ties to both nations, has offered to facilitate the signing of the finalized treaty.

Deputy Foreign Minister Majid Takht-e-Ravanchi emphasized Iran's commitment to good neighborliness and its willingness to assist Yerevan and Baku in reaching a deal.

Takht-e-Ravanchi highlighted the agreement's importance for regional stability and urged both countries to focus on the future, stating the document is ready for immediate signing. He condemned any violations of territorial integrity, stressing that military force should not be used to occupy another nation's territory.

He called for regional cooperation based on mutual respect and international law to secure a peaceful future. The Armenian Foreign Ministry previously announced the finalized draft peace agreement, signaling readiness to discuss signing details, further indicating a potential resolution to the long-standing conflict.

## The well-balanced arms and diplomacy

By Batool Subeiti

LONDON – A military confrontation with Iran remains unlikely for now, but negotiations are expected to be lengthy and complex. Whether the United States continues its talks with Iran or instructs the Israeli occupation entity to initiate a military offensive, in both scenarios, it will be the entity that ultimately bears the cost.

Pursuing negotiations is, in itself, an acknowledgment of Iran's growing influence and an implicit recognition of its strength. While Trump appears content with the ongoing dialogue, Netanyahu is not. Through these negotiations, Iran gains legitimacy, while the Israeli occupation entity finds itself increasingly constrained, accelerating internal fragmentation due to its failure to achieve any military goal.

What's currently preventing this disintegration is the ongoing war. If the ceasefire had continued, Netanyahu's political survival would have been in jeopardy, and the national budget would likely have failed to be passed in the Knesset at the end of March. By breaking the ceasefire, the U.S. has effectively delayed the entity's further disintegration and contradictions surfacing, although these realities are still present.

## Riyadh interferes in Lebanon's municipal elections, excludes Hariri

By Sondoss Al Asaad

BEIRUT — Not satisfied with the political quarantine it imposed on Lebanon's former Prime Minister Saad Hariri more than two years ago, Saudi Arabia is seeking to sideline him as he announced his intention to return to political life by actively contesting the municipal elections scheduled for May 2025.

Saad Hariri announced his plan during an event commemorating the anniversary of his father's assassination.

However, Riyadh, which, along with Washington, has imposed a supreme guardianship over Lebanon, is trying to prevent Saad Hariri from participating in the municipal elections in the capital, Beirut.

Reportedly, the Saudi veto also includes Al-Jama'a al-Islamiyah (the Islamic Group). This indicates that Riyadh is determined to shape the municipal council.

This move inevitably means that Hariri will also be barred from participating in the parliamentary elections scheduled for May 2026.

## Gaza turns into a "mass grave"

By Wesam Bahrani

TEHRAN – Doctors Without Borders has issued a strong warning over the Israeli regime's ongoing genocide against civilians in Gaza.

The International humanitarian organization, also known as MSF, has accused Israeli occupation forces of deliberately blocking aid and forcibly displacing Palestinians, creating unlivable conditions in Gaza.

Amande Bazerolle, MSF's emergency coordinator, said, "Gaza has become a mass grave for Palestinians and those trying to help them. We are witnessing, in real time, the destruction and forced displacement of Gaza's entire population."

She noted that the already catastrophic security situation has worsened significantly over the past three weeks.

MSF has reported several incidents in which humanitarian and medical workers were killed.

Sites used for aid, including health centers, MSF offices, and staff housing, whose locations had been formally shared with Israeli authorities, have been shelled or fired upon.

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## Representatives from 30 countries to attend Iran's oil investment transformation event

TEHRAN – Representatives from 30 countries across Europe, South America, Asia, and Africa have confirmed their participation in the upcoming "Transformation in Upstream Oil and Gas Investment" event in Iran.

According to Shana, the oil industry is considered the most investment-attractive sector in both Iran and the world. Due to the capital-intensive nature of upstream operations—from exploration to production—as well as the high cost of required technologies, prioritizing investment in this field is essential to ensure Iran keeps pace with global developments. ► Page 4



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Anti-war protests in Washington in solidarity with Palestinian mothers on Tuesday, April 15, 2025.

## Global voices unite for Gaza in mass demonstrations

TEHRAN – As the atrocities in Gaza go unabated, rallies are spreading across the globe with thousands gathering to express solidarity and demand an end to violence. These demonstrations reflect a growing international outcry against Israel's barbaric acts in Gaza.

In Berlin, Germany, thousands gathered for an anti-Israel rally, chanting "Stop the genocide" to show their anger at Israeli military actions in the coastal enclave.

In Ancona, Italy, residents joined a solidarity march, underscoring the broadening European support for Palestinians. Similarly, Stockholm, Sweden, saw demonstrations that emphasized international solidarity with the Palestinians. ► Page 5

TEHRAN PAPERS

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

Benefits of excluding Europe from negotiations

In an analysis, Sobh-e-No addressed the exclusion of Europe from the negotiations and wrote: From the view of many experts and analysts of international issues, removing Europe from the Iran-U.S. negotiations process not only means reducing diplomatic complexities but also brings strategic benefits for both sides of the negotiation, especially Iran. One of the most important benefits is freedom from time-consuming and fruitless European processes. Analysts believe that Europe was not only not neutral at many points but also practically acted in coordination with the United States in its positions. In recent years, instead of playing the role of a facilitator, Europe has acted more as a pressure tool; from issuing political statements to imposing symbolic sanctions. Without Europe's involvement, Iran will have more space to pursue its diplomatic initiatives. Some analysts consider the exclusion of Europe a strategic move to break the fake power structure in the West. For years, Europe tried to control the situation and maintain its diplomatic image by pretending to be multilateral, but in reality, it played no effective role. Removing them would also open the field for a franker dialogue.

Siasat-e-Rooz: Negotiations are not everything

Siasat-e-Rooz said it is essential not to tie the country's economy to negotiations and wrote: Linking the country's economic issues to negotiations (during the Rouhani administration) was a big mistake because whenever there was a disruption in the negotiation process or a disagreement arose, the first sector affected was national economy, which influenced the livelihood of the people. The other side of the negotiations also realized this issue, which made it a tool to put more pressure on Iran. The negotiations are for the lifting of the illegal inhuman sanctions that the United States has imposed on Iran, and it is unthinkable that this country will play a fundamental role in the progress and development of Iran, even with a possible dismantling of peaceful nuclear technology in Iran or dismantling of military weapons, especially missiles. If the negotiations do not go well on Saturday (April 19) or if there is no positive sign, it will affect the livelihoods of the people. To prevent this, an economic plan must be ironed out to control the situation.

Shargh: The opportunity should be used in the best way

In its editorial, Shargh described these days as historic in the country's foreign policy. It said: On

the first day of this week (April 12), high-ranking diplomats of Iran and the United States held (indirect) talks. The high significance of this contact is that it took place with the representative of a radical Republican government in the United States. Given the developments and experiences of the last few decades, as well as the positive contact between representatives of Iran and the United States on Saturday (April 12), Iran, instead of just focusing on the nuclear program and sanctions related to the nuclear program, it should propose that the two countries should have the opportunity to raise all their concerns during the talks for the complete lifting of all U.S. sanctions, both primary and secondary under all claims. Other issues could at most include the missile program (of Iran), which, considering the military programs of other regional countries, Iran has the ability to defend its rightful missile program. Regional issues are also another issue, an important part of which has been forgotten in the last two years.

Kayhan: National dignity and interests must be preserved

Although negotiations with the United States are raised by some groups with the slogan of lifting sanctions and improving livelihoods, the experience of the past years has shown that these talks have always been a tool for imposing America's hegemonic will and gaining concessions from Iran.

The failure of Washington's maximum pressure policy, the retreat from military threats, and ultimately the return to the negotiating table have once again proven that the strategy of active resistance and relying on domestic capacities can help the country more than "trusting in political smiles." Negotiations with the United States, although carried out with the slogan of lifting sanctions and securing the interests of the nation, have always been a tool for pressure, influence, and imposing the will of the arrogant hegemonic system of the United States and the West on Iran.

The historical experience of the Iranian nation has proven that trust in the United States has not only brought no benefit for the country but has instead paved the way for increased pressure and further audacity from the enemy. Islamic Iran, relying on its internal capacities, regional power, and popular support, has proven that it does not need Washington's deceptive smiles, and any negotiation only makes sense when national dignity and interests are preserved.

Iran parliament greenlights membership in Asia-Pacific Accreditation Cooperation (APAC)



TEHRAN – The Iranian Parliament has officially approved a bill allowing the country to join the Asia-Pacific Accreditation Cooperation (APAC), a prominent regional organization focused on enhancing accreditation standards and fostering cooperation among member states.

During a public session on Wednesday, lawmakers reviewed and debated the bill, with the Parliamentary Committee on Industries and Mines presenting a detailed report on its provisions. After thorough deliberation, the bill was approved by 184 votes in favor, 14 votes against, and 2 abstentions, with 212 members of parliament present for the vote.

The newly approved legislation will empower the Iranian government to officially join APAC, in line with the organization's charter, which aims to promote uniform accreditation standards across the Asia-Pacific region. The bill also mandates that Iran make the necessary payments for mem-

bership fees and outlines the government's role in determining and, if necessary, changing the executive body responsible for overseeing the country's participation in the organization.

One key amendment to the bill, proposed by Mansour Alimardani, the representative from Abhar, introduced a new requirement for the government to submit an annual report to Parliament. This report will provide a detailed overview of the financial expenditures, obligations, and benefits associated with Iran's membership in APAC, offering greater transparency and oversight into the country's involvement in the organization.

Additionally, the bill includes a provision ensuring that all actions taken under this new law comply with Iran's Constitution. Specifically, the principles outlined in Articles 4, 77, 125, and 139 of the Constitution must be respected throughout the implementation process, reinforcing the legal framework and ensuring the law's compatibility with national regulations.

The passage of this bill marks an important milestone in Iran's efforts to strengthen its ties with regional organizations and enhance its role in global accreditation and standardization processes.

APAC was established in 2019 following a merger of two regional organizations, the Asia-Pacific Laboratory Accreditation Cooperation (APLAC) and the Pacific Accreditation Cooperation (PAC). The organization is focused on promoting mutual recognition of conformity assessments, which helps facilitate trade and enhances trust in the products and services of member states.

Araghchi to deliver Leader's message to Putin

From page 1 ▶ Speaking to reporters on the sidelines of a cabinet meeting on Wednesday, Araghchi said enrichment of uranium as part of Iran's peaceful nuclear program is "non-negotiable".

"Iran's enrichment [program] is a real and genuine matter, and we are ready to build trust regarding potential concerns, but the issue of enrichment is non-negotiable," Araghchi told reporters.

Pointing to the continuation of the so-called U.S. pressure campaign on Iran during the negotiations, the Iranian foreign minister said, "Both our position and our actions are clear.

They will not achieve anything through pressure. If the negotiation is based on an equal footing and is carried out in a respectful



environment, it can progress, but nothing will be achieved through pressure and imposition of their positions, and we have proven this both in our actions and in our positions.

We will participate in the talks

with complete calmness and tranquility, without being influenced by any pressure or current."

Araghchi also censured the "contradictory and conflicting positions" coming out of the Trump administration ahead of Satur-

day's talks.

"As I mentioned, during this time we have heard contradictory and conflicting positions, and Mr. Witkoff has spoken in several ways so far; the real positions will be clarified at the negotiation table," said the top Iranian diplomat.

"However, we need to be cognizant of the genuine opinions of the American side during the negotiation session.

If they come with constructive positions, I am hopeful that we can begin negotiations on the framework of a potential agreement.

If not, if the positions remain contradictory and conflicting, it will be difficult."

Iran summons Argentine diplomat over unfounded AMIA bombing allegations

TEHRAN – Iran has formally summoned the Argentine chargé d'affaires in Tehran to strongly protest against recent accusations made by Argentine judicial authorities, which targeted senior Iranian officials over the 1994 AMIA bombing.

On Tuesday, Iran's Ministry of Foreign Affairs called in Jorge Mariano Jordan, Argentina's chargé d'affaires in Tehran, to express Tehran's firm objection to a decision by Argentine prosecutor Sebastián Basso, who issued arrest warrants for several high-ranking Iranian officials in connection with the bombing of the Argentine Israelite Mutual Association (AMIA) building in Buenos Aires.

In a statement released on Wednesday, Iran's Foreign Ministry stated: "In response to the unlawful and internationally improper actions taken by the Argentine Prosecutor's Office, the chargé d'affaires of Argentina in Tehran was summoned by Issa Kameli, Director General for the Americas at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Kameli delivered the Islamic Republic of

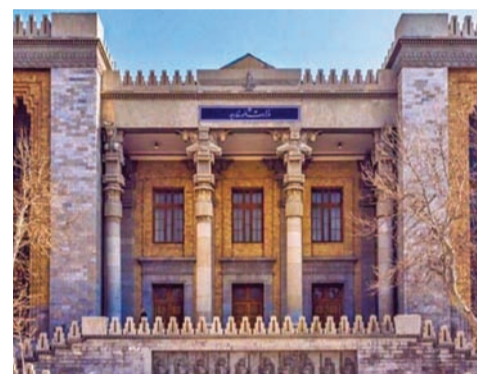
Iran's official protest note to the Argentine diplomat."

Back in July 1994, the Argentine Israelite Mutual Association (AMIA) Jewish center in Buenos Aires was targeted by a bomb attack, in which 85 people were reportedly killed and some 300 others wounded.

Although the bombing remains unresolved and unclaimed, Israel has repeatedly accused Iran of being behind the attack—a claim Tehran has steadfastly denied for over three decades.

During the meeting with the Argentine diplomat, Kameli firmly rejected the accusations made by the Argentine judiciary. He denounced the charges as baseless and asserted that they represented a significant deviation from the prolonged and unresolved judicial process related to the bombing.

He further pointed out that the blame placed on Iran only served to deepen the ambiguities surrounding the case—ambiguities that have long been exacerbated by external influences, particularly those associated with



the Zionist regime, which has used the case for its political advantage.

Kameli also emphasized that the Argentine prosecutor's actions contravened core principles of international law, particularly those regarding the sovereignty and political independence of states.

He warned that such actions could set a dangerous precedent in international relations and cautioned that Iran would take necessary legal and political measures to protect its interests under international law.

Tehran Times highlights shared commitment to Palestinian cause during Al Jazeera visit



DOHA – A delegation from Iran's Tehran Times and Mehr Media Group visited Al Jazeera Media Network's headquarters in Doha, Qatar, on Wednesday, engaging in discussions on collaborative journalism and the critical role of media in exposing the Israeli regime's genocidal crimes in Gaza and across West Asia.

The delegation's visit, marking the second such trip since November 2024, provided an in-depth look at Al Jazeera's newsrooms, editorial workflows, and production studios.

Beyond technical insights, the discussions revolved around the shared perspective of the two media groups and the Qatari network's historical role in shaping political, cultural, and social narratives in the Arab world, with a particular emphasis on the Palestinian struggle.

Mehr Media Group, one of Iran's primary media outlets, includes the country's leading international daily newspaper, the Tehran Times, alongside Mehr News Agency.

The group traces its origins back to the 1979 Islamic Revolution and operates offices in all 31 provinces of Iran, as well as in several neighboring states.

Al Jazeera Media Network, a key

player in the regional media landscape, operates a diverse range of news and broadcast channels, including its flagship Al Jazeera Arabic and Al Jazeera English.

Founded in 1996, the network is headquartered in Qatar and maintains a presence across West Asia and beyond, delivering coverage on global and regional affairs through its various platforms.

During the Iranian delegation's visit, both sides emphasized the importance of amplifying voices against Israeli occupation and systemic violence.

Delegates from the Tehran Times outlined their coverage of anti-Zionist perspectives worldwide, citing the newspaper's founding principle set by Ayatollah Seyyed Mohammad-Hossein Beheshti in 1979: "The Tehran Times is a loud voice of the Islamic Revolution and the oppressed people of the world."

Meanwhile, Al Jazeera staff detailed their heightened focus on Gaza and the Palestinian cause.

Al-Aqsa Storm: A turning point for Al Jazeera

The visit highlighted Al Jazeera's dramatic shift in coverage following Operation Al-Aqsa Storm, the Palestinian Resistance's operation

against the Israeli regime on October 7th, 2023.

Staff revealed that routine programming was halted to prioritize real-time reporting from Gaza.

"Since October 7th, we've stopped our usual programming," one Al Jazeera journalist told the Tehran Times.

Popular morning shows, including one produced in "Studio 14," were suspended, with resources redirected to chronicling Tel Aviv's military atrocities.

The Iranian delegation was also briefed on increased Israeli pressure on the network, including office closures and restricted journalist access to conflict zones.

In May 2024, the regime shut down Al Jazeera's office in the Occupied West Bank, citing "biased reporting," while journalists in Gaza continue to face grave dangers—an unmistakable attempt to silence Palestinian voices

The Bronze Tree of Martyrs

In Al Jazeera's courtyard, a striking bronze tree stands as a testament to journalists killed in conflict zones.

Every leaf bears the name of a journalist who was killed while reporting from the frontlines, covering conflicts from the U.S. invasion of Iraq to Israel's war on Gaza.

Since 2003, 18 Al Jazeera journalists have lost their lives in the line of duty, including Tareq Ayyoub, who was killed in Baghdad when a U.S. ground attack aircraft fired missiles at the network's headquarters in April 2003.

More recently, Hossam Shabat was killed in March 2024 by an Israeli airstrike, after the regime broke the January ceasefire and resumed its assault on Gaza's population.

Shabat is one of at least 232 journalists and media workers killed by Israel over the past 18 months.

"They are our fallen heroes," an Al Jazeera staffer explained. "We etched their names to show they're still with us—martyred while pursuing truth."

The memorial deeply resonated with Iranian delegates, who recalled their own martyred journalists, including Mahmoud Saremi—executed by terrorists in Afghanistan in 1998 and honored annually on Iran's Journalist Day—and Mohsen Khazaei, who was martyred in 2016 by shrapnel from a mortar explosion fired by Takfiri terrorists in Aleppo, Syria.



Al Jazeera's Bronze Tree of Martyrs

Additionally, Tehran Times representatives honored the late Iranian journalist Mohammad-Hossein Navab, martyred during the Bosnian War by extremist Bosnian Croat forces.

(See full text at [tehrantimes.com](http://tehrantimes.com))

# Grossi's dream for UN leadership

How the IAEA chief's aspirations are influencing his stance on Tehran's nuclear activities

By Soheila Zarfam

TEHRAN – When thinking about Iran's nuclear program and all the drama surrounding it, it's easy to also think of a list of names belonging to those who wouldn't exactly mind if things went south. Israel, for instance, is at the top of this list. Amidst all the usual suspects, however, there is a figure often overlooked by most observers: the very head of the UN nuclear watchdog, Rafael Grossi.

Iranian officials have long accused the Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) of making unprofessional and political statements. Last year, Iran's nuclear chief, Mohammad Eslami, publicly urged the UN official to snap out of it, reminding him that his role was technical, not political.

New information obtained by the Tehran Times shows Grossi's shenanigans have not been due to his interest in politics or potential hostilities towards Iran; rather, he is trying to gain something by rebuking Tehran, a reward mainly promised to him by the European Troika.

**Grossi's past, hopes for the future**

The 64-year-old owns a long career that spans both Argentinian diplomacy and the United Nations. At some point within Ar-



gentina's foreign ministry, Grossi managed to rise to the position of Deputy Foreign Minister. He then became involved with the United Nations for a few years before marking his first association with the IAEA, becoming his country's ambassador to the organization in 2013.

In December 2019, a year after the United States withdrew from the Iran nuclear deal (JCPOA) and left it in shambles, Grossi assumed the role of the IAEA's Director General. Throughout his latest tenure, he has been fantasizing about bigger leaps and more prominent roles. The Tehran Times has learned that one of Grossi's dream positions is the Secretary-Generalship of the United Nations, which has been

promised to him by Germany, the UK, and France.

Ahead of Iran and the United States' second round of indirect nuclear talks, Grossi spoke to France's *Le Monde*, telling the publication that Tehran is "not far" from having nuclear weapons. This comes after he said last month that the country is currently capable of developing 6 to 7 nuclear bombs. None of these assertions have been verified by Grossi's own past reports, nor the IAEA inspectors who have been vigorously monitoring Iran's nuclear sites since 2015.

It remains unclear how Grossi's recent statements will impact the progress of ongoing Iran-US talks. Sources familiar with

the matter have told the Tehran Times that the IAEA chief's primary concern lies elsewhere. Allegedly, he has been tasked with further demonizing Iran and its nuclear program to justify a critical report on the country's nuclear activities later this year. Such a report would then provide the justification for European nations to threaten the activation of the "snapback" mechanism, which would reinstate pre-JCPOA UN sanctions against Iran. Currently, only the E3 (France, Germany, and the UK) possesses the political will and practical means to trigger this snapback.

Unhappy with their exclusion from the indirect nuclear talks that began on April 12th, the E3 aims to leverage the threat of snapback sanctions to pressure both Iran and the U.S. to include them in the negotiations, the Tehran Times has learned. London, Berlin, and Paris have offered Grossi their support in his ambition to become the next UN Secretary-General in exchange for his assistance in achieving this objective.

Iran has always maintained close ties and cooperation with the IAEA, according to a high-ranking source speaking to the Tehran Times. But Grossi's dishonest conduct risks spoiling everything the two sides have worked for, the source said.

## Internal progress not dependent on Tehran-Washington talks: Pezeshkian

From Page 1 ▶ Pezeshkian expressed his hope that Zarif's experience and expertise would continue to be utilized in future diplomatic efforts. In his remarks, Pezeshkian reiterated the government's commitment to focusing on domestic priorities while remaining open to international dialogue. He underlined the importance of balancing external negotiations with internal development, particularly in the face of challenges posed by economic sanctions and regional tensions.

**VP stresses balanced approach to negotiations and domestic priorities**

In a related development, Vice President Mohammad-Reza Aref addressed concerns over the government's approach to the ongoing negotiations with the United States.

In an exclusive interview with the media outlet of the Leader of the Islamic Revolution, Khamenei.ir, Aref was asked about the possibility of repeating past mistakes by overemphasizing the importance of these talks and sidelining the country's domestic issues.

Aref assured that the government's strategy, as outlined by the Leader, ensures that the focus remains on internal progress, and that negotiations will only be pursued under favorable conditions.

"The government has made it clear that it does not rely solely on negotiations with any external party, including the United States," Aref explained.

"We engage in dialogue with countries when it is in our best interest, but we do not base our policies solely on the outcome of these talks. We prioritize our internal capabilities and resources to address the needs of the country."

Aref emphasized that while Iran is open to constructive engagement with all countries—except the Israeli regime—its primary focus remains on strengthening ties with neighboring nations and key global economic players.

He noted that the country's long-term strategy prioritizes regional cooperation and the development of economic partnerships with nations that have a proven track record of success.



In light of public expectations surrounding the negotiations, Aref urged caution against both excessive optimism and undue pessimism.

"It is important to maintain a balanced perspective," he said. "Too much optimism or pessimism can be harmful. The public must understand that negotiations are a complex process that requires careful deliberation."

The negotiators should have the full support of the people, but we must avoid creating unrealistic expectations that could lead to disappointment."

Aref concluded by emphasizing the need for a supportive environ-

ment for negotiators.

He urged the public and experts to provide constructive input through proper channels to help guide the negotiation process.

"The government's approach is to safeguard Iran's interests and achieve positive outcomes through dialogue, without overinflating or deflating public expectations," he said.

This approach, according to Aref, ensures that Iran remains focused on its internal growth and development while engaging with the international community in a way that benefits the country and its people.

## Russia's Federation Council approves strategic comprehensive treaty with Iran



TEHRAN – On Wednesday, the Federation Council of Russia approved the Strategic Comprehensive Treaty between Russia and Iran, cementing the growing partnership between the two nations.

The agreement, which was signed during Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian's official visit to Moscow in January 2025, outlines a long-term framework for enhanced cooperation across various sectors,

According to reports from the Russian news agency TASS, the treaty marks a significant step in strengthening Russia and Iran's strategic alliance. The agreement aims to foster collaboration in defense, counter-terrorism, energy, finance, transportation, agriculture, culture, science, and technology.

The treaty redefines the two countries as strategic partners,

setting the stage for a broad expansion of ties that will address mutual concerns and enhance joint efforts in tackling common security threats. Both nations have agreed to exchange intelligence on these security matters and assist one another in case of external aggression, explicitly prohibiting any support for aggressors against the other.

This landmark treaty, following ratification by Iran's Parliament and Russia's legislative bodies—the State Duma and the Federation Council—will provide the legal foundation for deepening cooperation between Tehran and Moscow.

The treaty's approval comes on the heels of an earlier endorsement by the State Duma on April 9, which solidified the government's position on this critical international partnership. The treaty encompasses a range of collaborative efforts, from military defense strategies to tech-

nological exchanges, underscoring a shared vision of mutual support in challenging international climates.

On the day the treaty was signed, both Russian and Iranian leaders heralded it as a "breakthrough" in their bilateral relations. Russian President Putin praised it as a pivotal document that will guide future cooperation, while Iranian President Pezeshkian called it the beginning of a new chapter in relations between the two countries, spanning all areas of mutual interest.

One of the key features of the treaty is its emphasis on joint development in energy sectors, particularly oil, gas, and peaceful nuclear energy. The agreement also calls for the establishment of an independent payment system, free from external influence, using the national currencies of both nations.

### Esteghlal lose to Gol Gohar: PGPL

TEHRAN – Gol Gohar and Esteghlal football teams shared the spoils in a 1-1 draw in the 2024/25 Iran Persian Gulf Professional League (PGPL) on Wednesday.

In the match held in Sirjan's Gol Gohar Sport Complex, Esteghlal forward Mohammadreza Azadi scored an own goal in the ninth minute.

Esteghlal winger Ramin Rezaeian leveled the score from the penalty spot in the added time.

On Thursday, Aluminum will host Chadormalou in Arak, Zob Ahan face Esteghlal Khuzestan and Kheybar meet struggling Nassaji in Khoramabad.

Tractor will play Malavan in Tabriz on Friday, while Persepolis host Sepahan in Tehran. Foolad also play Shams Azar in Ahvaz.

### Iran determined to shine in 2025 Beach Soccer World Cup: Dastan

TEHRAN – Beach soccer goalkeeper Mohammad Dastan expressed hope that Iran's impressive performance in the 2025 AFC Beach Soccer Asian Cup will be repeated in the 2025 World Cup in Seychelles.

Dastan was a standout player in this year's Asian Cup and played a significant role in Iran's championship victory.

"Regarding the Asian Cup, I must first say that I am very happy to have participated in this tournament. Second, we were able to lift the championship trophy with great confidence, which was very gratifying," Dastan said in an interview with Tehran Times.

"It is everyone's dream to play for their national team, and I hope this trend continues in the World Cup. Considering the talent of the players in our team, such an achievement is not out of reach."

Iran, under the leadership of Ali Naderi, have been drawn in Group B of the World Cup alongside Mauritania, Portugal, and Uruguay.

"The level of competition in the World Cup is not comparable to that in Asia. However, I hope that with the efforts of the players and the coaching staff, we can be successful in this competition and bring joy to our people," Dastan stated.

### Iran defeat Syria in FIBA Asia Cup Division B Qualification for Women

TEHRAN – Iran defeated Syria 65-55 Tuesday night in the 2025 FIBA Women's Asia Cup Div. B – WABA Qualification Tournament.

Roksana Berahman led Iran with 25 points.

Eleni Kapogianni's girls are scheduled to face Jordan on Thursday.

The top-performing team will book their place in the 2025 FIBA Women's Asia Cup Division B.

The competition takes place in Amman, Jordan.

The qualification process typically involves a round-robin format, where teams compete in a series of games.

### Maghsoodloo wins 2025 Reykjavik Open

TEHRAN – Parham Maghsoodloo of Iran finished in first place in the 2025 Reykjavik Open.

Maghsoodloo won six and drew three games to tally 7.5 points in the prestigious event.

In his last match, Maghsoodloo drew with Indian GM Gupta Abhijeet.

The Reykjavik Open is an annual chess tournament that takes place in the capital city of Iceland. It was held every two years up to 2008, currently it runs annually.

The first edition was held in 1964 and was won by Mikhail Tal with a score of 12.5 points out of 13. The tournament is currently played with the

Swiss system, while from 1964 to 1980 and in 1992 it was a round-robin tournament.

### Iran snatch bronze in 2024 AVC Beach Tour

TEHRAN – Iran's Abbas Pourasgari/Alireza Aghajani won a bronze medal in the AVC Beach Tour 24th Samila Open at the Samila Beach on Wednesday.

Team Melli defeated Indonesia's Bintang Akbar/Sofyan Rachman 2-0 (21-18, 25-23) in the bronze medal match.

The competition is being held in Songkhal, Thailand from April 13 to 16.

Beach volleyball is a team sport played by two teams of two to four players each on a sand court divided by a net.

Similar to indoor volleyball, the objective of the game is to send the ball over the net and to ground it on the opponent's side of the court.

Each team also works in unison to prevent the opposing team from grounding the ball on their side of the court.

### Iranian champion named Saudi Arabia's wrestling team coach

TEHRAN – In a historic move, former Iranian Olympic and world wrestling champion Komeil Ghasemi has been appointed head coach of Saudi Arabia's national freestyle wrestling team.

Komeil Ghasemi, a former world and Olympic champion in the heavyweight category of freestyle wrestling, has officially accepted the role of head coach of Saudi Arabia's national freestyle wrestling team.

This marks the first time in history that an Iranian coach has been appointed to lead a national team of athletes from Saudi Arabia.

### Chess players secure three spots in FIDE World Cup

TEHRAN – Iranian chess players delivered an outstanding performance at the West Asian Zonal Championships, earning three coveted spots in the upcoming FIDE World Cup.

The landmark achievement marks one of Iran's strongest showings in international chess competition.

In the men's division, Grandmaster Pouya Idani claimed first place, followed by International Master Bardia Daneshvar in second.

The women's competition saw Woman FIDE Master Anahita Zahedifar take top honors, securing her position in the World Cup alongside the two male qualifiers.

The nine-round Swiss-system tournament, which concluded on Tuesday, featured 46 male and 20 female competitors from across West Asia. Notable achievements included Zahedifar earning her Woman International Master title and Anousha Mahdian obtaining a WIM norm. Armin Samimi also gained recognition as a FIDE Master during the event.

### Historic runner-up finish for Iranian squash player

TEHRAN – Iranian squash player Fereshteh Eghtedari made history by finishing as runner-up at the Women's World Ranking Tournament in Yokohama, Japan — a milestone achievement for Iranian women in the sport.

Competing with a world ranking of 263, Eghtedari advanced to the final of the \$6,000 PSA tournament after impressive victories over opponents from Japan, Malaysia, and South Korea.

In the final, she was defeated 3-0 by Malaysia's Ainaa Amani Kumar but secured the silver medal and her first-ever finals appearance at this level of international competition.

## Iran aims to equip 70,000 hectares of farmland with modern irrigation systems in 2025

TEHRAN – Iran's Agriculture Ministry plans to implement modern irrigation systems across 70,000 hectares of farmland in the current Iranian calendar year (started on March 20), amid efforts to boost water efficiency in the face of growing shortages, a senior official said.

According to the ministry, Fariborz Abbasi, director of the Modern Irrigation Systems Development Project, said the Water and Soil Department has set the 70,000-hectare target for the Iranian calendar year 1404 (March 2025–March 2026).

"For the current year, we've planned to implement modern irrigation systems across 50,000 hectares, and 15,000 to 20,000 hectares of sub-surface irrigation methods," he said, noting that execution depends on the allocation of necessary funds.

Abbasi emphasized that due to limited water resources, priority is being given to high-efficiency irrigation methods that enhance productivity.

He said around 3.1 million hectares of agricultural land in Iran have so far been equipped with modern irrigation systems.

Despite delayed budget allocations last year, modern systems were implemented on nearly 30,000 hectares—over 80 percent of the ministry's initial target.

He also announced a 20 percent increase in the public budget allocated for irrigation modernization and noted that Iran's parliament has approved a separate funding stream from the National Development Fund for this purpose.

"With the advantages of sub-surface irrigation methods, the government is accelerating efforts to expand this specific technique using funds from the National Development Fund," Abbasi added.

He said 2.5 million hectares of irrigable farmland still need to be upgraded to modern irrigation systems.

Due to reduced rainfall, Abbasi warned of increased water scarcity this year and urged optimal use of available water through careful planning.

He also pointed to recent decisions made by Iran's Supreme Water Council on spring planting and water use, which are now under review by the Cabinet for final approval.

## ICCIMA proposes joint trade committee with Slovakia

TEHRAN – The head of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (ICCIMA) has proposed the formation of a joint trade committee with Slovakia, aimed at strengthening economic cooperation between the two countries.

Speaking in a virtual meeting with his Slovak counterpart Peter Mihok on Monday, Samad Hassanzadeh, said the proposed committee could pave the way for smoother business collaboration.

Iran's private sector, alongside the government and the ruling establishment, is eager to enhance ties with all countries, especially Slovakia, Hassanzadeh said. "We believe no nation can achieve economic development in isolation — mutual cooperation is essential."

He underscored the importance of coordinated efforts between the two chambers, adding that Iran would welcome Slovak trade and economic delegations, particularly at the upcoming Iran Expo 2025, scheduled to begin on April 28. The event aims to showcase Iran's industrial and production capabilities.

Iran has significant potential in petrochemicals, refining, pharmaceuticals and medical industries, food processing, steel, auto parts, knowledge-based sectors, and technical and engineering services, Hassanzadeh said. "Closer ties between our cham-



bers can help meet the economic needs of both countries."

In response, Mihok said Iran and Slovakia had complementary economies and highlighted the potential for joint ventures.

The first step to expanding cooperation is to facilitate regular exchanges of business delegations, Mihok stated. "Through greater collaboration between our chambers, we can usher in a new chapter of bilateral relations."

He added that increasing bilateral visits and updating commercial information between both countries could help boost trade volumes.

Slovakia will remain a reliable partner for Iran, Mihok said.

## Iran's annual non-oil export to UAE stands at \$7.2b

TEHRAN – Iran exported non-oil commodities valued at \$7.2 billion to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in the past Iranian calendar year, which ended on March 20, 2025, according to an official with the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA).

Abolfazl Akbarpour, the deputy head of IRICA for planning and international affairs, said that the UAE was Iran's third top export destination in the previous year.

Exporting commodities valued at \$21.9 billion to Iran, the United Arab Emirates was Iran's top source of non-oil import in the said time span, the official further added.

Iran and the United Arab Emirates signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) for expanding economic cooperation in a variety of areas at the end of the two countries' third Joint Economic Committee meeting in May 1, 2024.

The MOU was signed by former Iranian Transport and Urban Development Minis-

ter Mehrdad Bazrpash and UAE's Economy Minister Abdullah bin Touq Al Marri, who co-chaired the joint meeting.

During the mentioned committee meeting, the two sides stressed the need for further expansion of economic cooperation between Tehran and Abu Dhabi.

Speaking at the end of the meeting, Bazrpash said: "We have held the joint committee between the two countries after 10 years, which is an opportunity to develop the commercial and economic relations between the two countries."

"The UAE, as Iran's second biggest trade partner, has great strategic importance for us", the minister said.

Referring to the location of Iran and the UAE in the International North-South Transit Corridor (INSTC), Bazarpash said: "Access to the markets of the north and south can create an opportunity for the two countries to cooperate."

## Representatives from 30 countries to attend Iran's oil investment transformation event

From Page 1 ▶ Oil remains a major driver of Iran's economy, contributing significantly more to GDP than other sectors. There is a strong positive correlation between oil sector growth and overall economic performance: whenever Iran's oil production and exports increase, economic growth follows. Conversely, declines in production and exports—mainly due to unilateral sanctions—have had a negative impact on growth.

To achieve the eight percent economic growth target outlined in Iran's Seventh National Development Plan, prioritizing investment in the oil and gas sector, particularly its upstream segment, is critical. In line with



this goal, the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) will host the investment transformation event on Tuesday, April 23, to unveil over 200 upstream oil and gas investment opportunities and integrated value-chain projects.

While Iran's economic resilience strategy emphasizes utilizing domestic capacity, the participation of foreign investors remains a strategic focus. Oil Minister Mohsen Paknejad has confirmed Iran's willingness

to welcome international investors, especially from neighboring countries.

Thanks to the Ministry of Oil's proactive energy diplomacy under the 14th government, the event has attracted unprecedented attention from energy sector stakeholders and financial markets. So far, delegates from 30 countries have announced plans to attend.

The event will offer a comprehensive platform for foreign investors to explore NIOC's investable projects, understand regulatory frameworks, and learn about the incentives and facilitation measures available for upstream oil and gas ventures.

## Thermal power plants break electricity generation record

TEHRAN – Iran's thermal power plants set a new electricity production record in the Iranian calendar year 1403 (ended March 19, 2025), exceeding 350 million megawatt hours (MWh), according to the Thermal Power Plants Holding Company (TPPH).

Nasser Eskandari, deputy head of generation operations at TPPH, said thermal electricity output grew by 2.1 percent year-on-year, reaching 351 million MWh. Remarkably, this increase was achieved with only a 0.9 percent rise in fuel consumption, indicating improved efficiency through the use of

high-efficiency plants and expansion of the steam sections in combined-cycle power plants.

Combined-cycle units, which accounted for 57.6 percent of total thermal output, generated 202 million MWh—up 2.1 percent compared to the previous year. Eskandari noted that these plants typically operate with thermal efficiency rates between 45 and 55 percent and are considered more environmentally friendly.

"Converting simple gas turbines into com-

ined-cycle systems remains one of the most effective strategies for improving the overall efficiency of Iran's thermal power fleet," Eskandari said. "This not only benefits the power sector but also reduces fuel consumption and environmental impact, with long-term effects expected in the coming years."

Thermal plants are responsible for 94 percent of Iran's total electricity production. Within this segment, gas units produced 67 million MWh—an increase of 4.4 percent—while steam units accounted for 82 million MWh.

## Iran eyes re-export of Brazilian meat under 'Halal Iran' brand to Islamic markets

TEHRAN – Iran's Agriculture Minister says the country may leverage infrastructure developed in Brazil to re-export red meat under the "Halal Iran" brand to Islamic countries, even as domestic meat production improves and direct imports from Brazil gradually decline.

Speaking during a visit to the Iran Halal Center in São Paulo, Agriculture Minister Gholamreza Nouri Ghezaljeleh—who is in Brazil for the BRICS Agriculture Ministers' Summit—highlighted a shift in Iran's meat import strategy.

"With rising domestic output and increased imports from neigh-

boring countries, which benefit from geographic proximity and cultural ties, Iran may reduce its meat imports from Brazil," he said, according to a statement from the ministry.

Nonetheless, he emphasized that Iran will continue to utilize the halal meat supply infrastructure established in Brazil. "Once we reach self-sufficiency, we won't abandon these facilities. Instead, we can use them for the re-export of halal red meat to Islamic nations and other interested markets under the 'Halal Iran' label," Nouri Ghezaljeleh said.

He explained that Iran's recent

meat imports were largely driven by currency shocks that disrupted local production, forcing the government to turn to foreign suppliers to address shortages.

In recent years, countries closer to Iran have also entered the red meat export market. Their cultural and religious similarities, along with shorter transportation routes, have made them more favorable trade partners. This has, in turn, reduced operational demands at the São Paulo halal center.

Nouri Ghezaljeleh noted that Iran now prefers to import frozen beef—particularly veal—from Bra-

zil, as part of its evolving procurement strategy.

"The Halal Iran center will remain active for as long as necessary," he stated, "and we will continue to tap into its commercial capacity for re-exports and halal certification services to other countries."

The minister concluded that exporting red meat and poultry under the "Halal Iran" brand can serve both religious obligations and generate foreign revenue. He also praised the São Paulo center's role in ensuring Iranian consumers have access to verified halal products.

## Over \$440m of capital attracted for National Housing Movement Scheme

TEHRAN – Iran has mobilized 220 trillion rials (around \$440 million) through bank loans and applicant contributions in the Previous Iranian calendar year (ended on March 20, 2025) to finance the construction of housing units in new towns under the National Housing Movement scheme, a senior official said.

According to the New Towns Development Company, Mehdi Mirjavadi, Director General of Housing Development Affairs, said the funding supports ongoing work on approximately 140,000 active housing units in new towns across the country, 91,000 of which have already received bank financing.

Speaking in a virtual meeting with subsidiary companies, Mirjavadi stated that efforts are underway to secure additional 65-billion-rial (\$130,000) loans for remaining

units, in accordance with the country's housing leap legislation.

He also noted that, in addition to the 220 trillion rials raised this year, a cumulative total of 310 trillion rials (over \$620 million) has been contributed by applicants since the program's launch, with 130 trillion rials of that amount collected during the previous year.

Mirjavadi emphasized the importance of maintaining transparent communication with applicants throughout the construction process, suggesting this could include text message updates and in-person project site visits. "Transparency in financial planning and implementation is critical," he said.

He urged applicants to make timely payments to prevent delays, noting that nearly

20,000 housing units are nearing completion and will be gradually handed over once essential infrastructure is in place.

Iran's National Housing Movement is a pivotal initiative by the 13th government, aiming to address the housing needs of the nation's growing population by constructing four million residential units over four years. This ambitious plan seeks to provide affordable housing solutions, particularly for low-income citizens, with 3.2 million units designated for urban areas and 800,000 for rural regions.

As of July 2024, the Minister of Transport and Urban Development announced that 2.6 million units are currently under construction across the country.

## Armenian ambassador calls for boosting trade with Iran to \$3b

TEHRAN – Armenia's ambassador to Iran Grigor Hovhannisyán has called for expanded bilateral cooperation to raise trade volume between Tehran and Yerevan to \$3.0 billion, stressing that current economic ties fall short of the two nations' strong political relations.

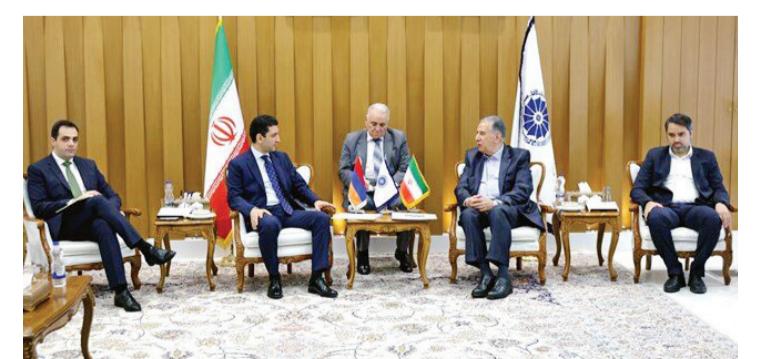
According to Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (ICCIMA), Hovhannisyán made the remarks during a meeting with the chamber's president, saying Armenia places high priority on ties with Iran and is eager to strengthen cooperation across economic, political, and cultural spheres.

"We face no restrictions in

deepening our relations. To reach our initial goal of \$1.0 billion in trade and eventually hit the three billion mark, we need joint efforts, especially between the chambers of commerce of both countries," the ambassador said.

He emphasized the need to facilitate trade delegations and promote investment opportunities in Armenia, adding that the Armenian embassy is ready to assist Iranian investors in exploring the market.

Hovhannisyán highlighted the vital role of the private sector in advancing bilateral economic relations and invited Iranian businesses to participate in expos and ex-



plore joint venture opportunities.

He also called for the creation of mechanisms between the two chambers to resolve challenges hindering trade.

Pointing to Iran's observer

status in the Eurasian Economic Union and the prospects of free trade with the bloc, he said the two countries could jointly manufacture goods for export to the Eurasian market.

# Global voices unite for Gaza in mass demonstrations

TEHRAN - As the atrocities in Gaza go unabated, rallies are spreading across the globe with thousands gathering to express solidarity and demand an end to violence. These demonstrations reflect a growing international outcry against Israel's barbaric acts in Gaza.

In Berlin, Germany, thousands gathered for an anti-Israel rally, chanting "Stop the genocide" to show their anger at Israeli military actions in the coastal enclave.

In Ancona, Italy, residents joined a solidarity march, underscoring the broadening European support for Palestinians. Similarly, Stockholm, Sweden, saw demonstrations that emphasized international solidarity with the Palestinians.

In the UK, a British citizen was arrested during a rally while shouting, "Long live Palestine... Long live Gaza," reflecting the fervor of pro-Palestine supporters.

In France, demonstrators carried a shroud to symbolize the tragic loss of children's lives in Gaza, a poignant gesture that resonated with onlookers.

Meanwhile, Vienna, Austria, saw



Protest in Canada



Protest in Idaho

citizens protest through symbolic acts, condemning the massacre of Gaza children and calling for humanitarian intervention.

In Morocco, demonstrations voiced strong opposition to the normalization of relations with Israel. The protests, attended by diverse groups, reflected broader regional sentiments against Israeli policies and the ongoing conflict.

In Canada, a national rally in Ottawa drew thousands demanding

an immediate end to the war and an arms embargo against Israel.

Earlier on April 14, the movement reached a high-profile political event when pro-Palestine protesters unfurled a "Free Palestine" banner at U.S. Senator Bernie Sanders' rally in Idaho. The protesters were promptly arrested by police, while some in the crowd booed, others joined in chanting "Free Palestine," reflecting the deepening divide within the American public over the issue of U.S. support for Israel.

The wave of protests underscores a unified global demand for justice and an end to the violence in Gaza. From symbolic shrouds in France to chants of resistance in Berlin and policy demands in Canada, the rallies reflect a shared commitment to addressing the humanitarian crisis in Gaza.

These demonstrations signal that international attention remains firmly fixed on Gaza, with calls for accountability and peace growing louder across continents.

## Gaza turns into a "mass grave"

From page 1 ▶ Some MSF teams have been forced to flee, while others remain trapped inside medical facilities with patients, unable to evacuate safely for hours.

"The brutal killing of aid workers is yet another example of the blatant disregard shown by Israeli forces for the protection of humanitarian and medical staff. The silence and unconditional backing of Israel's closest allies only encourages these actions," said Claire Magone, General Director of MSF France.

"Aid workers are watching people die while struggling to provide help without supplies, all while facing constant danger themselves," Bazzerolle emphasized.

MSF further stated, "This is not a humanitarian failure. It is a political decision and a deliberate attack on a people's ability to survive, carried out with impunity."

The Israeli occupation regime continues its widespread attacks on the Gaza Strip, hitting various areas and escalating its genocide against the Palestinian population.

At least six Palestinians were killed and eight others injured when Israeli forces bombed a family home in Gaza City's al-Tuffah neighborhood.

In a separate strike, three more Palestinians were killed and several wounded when Israeli warplanes hit a home in Jabalia, northern Gaza.

Israeli naval forces also fired on a fishing boat off the coast of Khan Younis, causing multiple casualties.

At the same time, an Israeli quadcopter drone dropped explosives on a group of civilians in the same area, resulting in additional injuries.

In eastern Khan Younis, Israeli artillery shelled the city of Abasan al-Kabira, while military vehicles opened fire.

Meanwhile, Israeli aircraft struck the center of Rafah city in southern Gaza.

According to Gaza's Health Ministry, 25 civilians were killed and 89 wounded in the last 24 hours. Since the start of the genocidal war on October 7, 2023, 51,025 Gazans have been killed, and the number of people injured has reached 116,432.

Meanwhile, Hamas's armed wing, the al-Qassam Brigades, said it has lost contact with a unit holding Israeli-American captive Edan Alexander following what they said were "direct Israeli strikes" on the location where he was being held.

(See full text at [tehrantimes.com](http://tehrantimes.com))

## Riyadh interferes in Lebanon's municipal elections, excludes Hariri



From page 1 ▶ It is worth noting that former Prime Minister Najib Mikati attempted to intervene, seeking to form a municipal council coalition representing Beirut's senior families and non-partisan figures, but his initiative was thwarted.

As for the Shiite duo, Hezbollah and the Amal Movement, who decided to form an alliance decades ago, it is obvious that they have become more committed to this option in light of the ongoing hostile escalation against the Shiites and the major challenges they face, foremost among which is reconstruction of what has been destroyed by the U.S.-led Israeli aggression on Lebanon in late 2024.

In 2010, Hezbollah's martyr Secretary-General Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah proposed to Parliament Speaker Nabih in his capacity as the head of the Amal Movement, the possibility of running in the municipal elections by presenting a joint list of candidates.

Accordingly, this understanding was consolidated in a written agreement consisting of eight clauses and has become the reference point for the Shiite duo in each municipal election.

In an interview, Berri stressed holding the elections on time, confirming that postponing it is "absolutely unacceptable and not on the table at all. We see no technical, logistical, legal, political, or municipal grounds for postponing the elections, even for a single minute."

Regarding the municipal elections in Beirut, Berri emphasized the need to maintain parity between Muslims and Christians on the capital's municipal council.

"All parties must strive to achieve this goal and not compromise it," stated Berri, who is focusing his efforts with all parties involved in the Beirut municipal elections on achieving

consensus that leads to parity, contributing to the activation of municipal work.

Berri warned against the sectarian rhetoric used by some political forces (foremost the Lebanese Forces) calling for dividing the capital's council into eastern and western districts, a revival of the situation that existed during the civil war (1975-1990).

Further, Lebanon's Grand Mufti Sheikh Abdul Latif Derian emphasized the need to preserve diversity in Beirut, and that no Islamist party is working to exclude the Christian component in the capital.

For their part, President Joseph Aoun and Prime Minister Nawaf Salam emphasized that the municipal and mayoral elections will be held on time, and that any postponement would be a political and constitutional setback for Lebanon.

In the past, Hariri played a major role in achieving a consensus list in Beirut, as a key political player in the Sunni community, so what kind of council will Washington and Riyadh, which are so brazenly interfering in all the affairs of Lebanon, produce?!

## The well-balanced arms and diplomacy

From page 1 ▶ There remains the possibility that, should the negotiations with Iran collapse, the U.S. may push the Israeli occupation entity into launching an attack.

However, such a move would be self-destructive; Iran would retaliate heavily, and the entity would receive serious blows. In this scenario, Trump would be seen as limiting the entity's role — recognizing, after 18 months, that it has become more of a regional liability than an asset, having failed to meet its objectives.

This could be interpreted as a strategy of initiating a war to limit the entity and reshape the region's power dynamics. Trump, by nature, seeks to influence the power balance through practical outcomes on the ground. He sees that the entity failed to defeat the resistance in Gaza and Lebanon, while Yemen continues to strike at its core.

Trump has praised Yemen's ability to produce advanced missiles, suggesting that he

does not seek to escalate war, but rather to put closures on them.

Notably, when he discusses Yemen, his focus is not on halting their attacks on the entity, but reopening the Red Sea. Despite the significant military firepower used by the U.S. and the occupation entity, there have been no decisive results.

The ongoing war is the main factor holding the occupation entity together. Trump, in his typical fashion, gives it free rein to act, ready to stamp any of its achievements.

But if it fails, it must bear the consequences alone. Before October 7th, the entity was perceived as strong and capable of fulfilling its goals, hence why Trump supported its ambitions, including the Abraham Accords and moved the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem.

The American establishment, represented by institutions like the Pentagon and the White House, follows a long-term strategic vision. It

maintains hundreds of military bases worldwide and pursues a structured political strategy across various regions.

In contrast to the deep state's approach, where a weakening Israel prompts the search for regional substitutes, Trump's stance is more transactional. If there is no significant opposition, he will stamp Israel's territorial gains. But if the costs outweigh the benefits, he will incrementally end support for the occupation entity.

At that point, the U.S. may conclude that its best option is to negotiate with the dominant force in the region. This would mean ending the failing wars in Gaza, Lebanon, and Yemen. The key difference between Trump and the American deep state lies in their approach to adversaries: Trump is willing to negotiate with the strong, even if they are technically enemies, while the deep state is not.

(See full text at [tehrantimes.com](http://tehrantimes.com))

## US in talks with Yemeni forces on land offensive against Ansarullah

Yemeni forces opposed to Ansarullah are in talks with the U.S. and Persian Gulf Arab allies about a possible land offensive to oust the group from the Red Sea coast, according to people involved in the discussions.

The conversations come about a month into a U.S.-led aerial assault against Ansarullah ordered by President Donald Trump, an operation yet to achieve its aim of ending the group's attacks on shipping in the Red Sea, a vital trade route, and Israel.

A Yemeni ground offensive, which could include an attempt to recapture the capital Sanaa after more than a decade under the Ansarullah control, would significantly broaden and intensify that campaign. It would not involve U.S. troops, the people said.



The head of U.S. Central Command, Michael Kurilla, held talks in the Saudi Arabian capital of Riyadh this month with the chiefs of staff of the Saudi and Yemeni armed forces, Bloomberg News reported.

The generals discussed ongoing efforts against Ansarullah, the Pentagon said, without elaborating.

## Palestinian Photographer killed in Israeli attack on Gaza

Israeli airstrikes in the early hours of Wednesday morning killed renowned Palestinian photographer Fatima Hassouna, along with several members of her family, in a targeted attack on their home in Gaza City.

The killing of Hassouna adds to the growing list of journalists and media workers who have lost their lives during the ongoing Israeli assault on Gaza, raising further concerns about press freedom and the targeting of civilian infrastructure.



## US could cancel 'almost all' NATO funding

The administration of U.S. President Donald Trump is considering a budget proposal that would eliminate "almost all funding for international organizations like the United Nations and NATO," the New York Times reported on Monday, citing officials and an internal memo.

The initiative is part of a plan that would see the State Department's budget reduced by nearly 50%, two unnamed officials told the outlet. It also reportedly suggests curtailing international peacekeeping operations, all of the State Department's educational and cultural exchanges, and defunding humanitarian assistance and global health programs by more than 50%. It is unclear whether Secretary of State Marco Rubio is on board with the plan.

AP sources have confirmed the proposal but stressed that it must undergo multiple rounds of review before being submitted to Congress for approval. One senior official cited by the agency called the budget outline "aggressive" in its cost-cutting goals.

Responding to questions about the report-

ed plan to cut NATO funding, State Department spokeswoman Tammy Bruce insisted that the U.S. remains fully committed to the military bloc. She stressed, however, that Washington does not see NATO as a tool for waging war, but rather as a deterrent.

"We want to make sure... that the nations in NATO can actually deliver on the mission of NATO, which is to be a deterrent. It is not to help with wars or to help fight them... NATO was meant to be a collection of entities that would stop the bad actors from doing the bad thing," she said.

The Trump administration has repeatedly pushed NATO members to increase their defense spending, arguing the U.S. bears a disproportionate share of the burden. Trump has warned that the U.S. might not defend NATO members who fail to meet spending targets.

On Monday, Vice President JD Vance said Europe cannot remain a "permanent security vassal" of the US, arguing that the current situation benefits neither America nor European countries.

## Pentagon to reduce military footprint in Syria, officials say

The Trump administration has decided to reduce the number of U.S. troops in Syria, officials and a source familiar with the planning said on Tuesday, according to Al Arabiya.

In December, the Pentagon revealed that there were around 2,000 U.S. troops in Syria, about 1,100 more than it had previously

disclosed. At the time, the Biden administration said the fluctuation in the number of troops was in part due to the fall of the Assad regime.

The new plans are expected to be announced in the coming days, and they will reduce the total number of troops to around 1,000.

## Maldives bans Israelis in protest against Gaza's 'ongoing genocide'

The Maldives has banned Israelis from entering the country in protest against Israel's war on Gaza and in "resolute solidarity" with the Palestinian people, MEE reported.

President Mohamed Muizzu signed the legislation on Monday after it was passed by the People's Majlis, the Maldivian parliament.

Muizzu's cabinet initially decided to ban all Israeli passport holders from the idyllic island nation in June 2024 until Israel stops its attacks on Palestine, but progress on the legislation stalled.

A bill was presented in May 2024 in the Mal-

divian parliament by Meekail Ahmed Naseem, a lawmaker from the main opposition, the Maldivian Democratic Party, which sought to amend the country's Immigration Act.

The cabinet then decided to change the country's laws to ban Israeli passport holders, including dual citizens. After several amendments, it passed this week, over 300 days later.

"The ratification reflects the government's firm stance in response to the continuing atrocities and ongoing acts of genocide committed by Israel against the Palestinian people," Muizzu's office said in a statement.

## Tehran to host UN Tourism's inaugural forum dedicated to urban attractions

TEHRAN - Tehran has been selected to host UN Tourism's first-ever urban forum dedicated to urban attractions, following a key agreement reached on the sidelines of a regional conference organized by the UN body in Indonesia.

According to the Abbasabad Cultural and Tourism Zone's public relations office, Seyyed Mohammad-Hossein Hejazi, CEO of the Abbasabad tourism zone, announced the development during his visit to Jakarta for the UN conference.

An agreement in that regard was signed by Iran's deputy tourism minister Anoushirvan Mohseni-Bandpey, and UN Tourism Secretary-General Zurab Pololikashvili on Tuesday.

Under the terms of the agreement, the inaugural tourism forum will be held in Tehran on June 24-25, with the Abbasabad Cultural and Tourism Zone, affiliated with Tehran Municipality, serving as the host venue.

During the signing ceremony, Pololikashvili highlighted the vital role of urban tourism in boosting city economies and improving the quality of life for residents. He also praised the Iranian government, Tehran Municipality, and especially the Abbasabad district for their significant efforts and investments in enhancing urban tourism infrastructure, amenities, and services.



Pololikashvili further emphasized Iran's rich cultural and civilizational heritage and its immense tourism potential, expressing hope that Tehran and other Iranian cities will gain the recognition they deserve on the global tourism stage.

The Abbasabad Cultural and Tourism Zone spans 560 hectares and is known as the "green jewel" of the Iranian capital. It is recognized as a major tourism and recreational hub in Tehran and is one of the city's most famous and frequently visited attractions.

nificant efforts and investments in enhancing urban tourism infrastructure, amenities, and services.

## ECI head visits Milad Tower

TEHRAN -- ECO Cultural Institute (ECI) president Dr. Saad S. Khan visited Milad Tower and a number of cultural attractions in Tehran on Wednesday.

During his visit, he expressed admiration for the country's cultural richness and its achievements in modern architecture, IRNA reported.

Khan, who is also a researcher in the history field and deeply interested in cultural heritage, visited the various parts of Milad Tower, including observation platforms with panoramic views of Tehran city, and appreciated holding a cultural-artistic exhibition there.

He expressed his sincere congratulations on the occasion of Nowruz, wishing continued harmony and prosperity in the whole ECO region.

This visit showed sustainable ties of ECO Cultural Institute with cultural heritage of the host country and emphasized on its commitment to promote common values and enhance regional unity.

The Economic Cooperation Organization is an intergovernmental organization that promotes economic, technical, and cultural cooperation among its member states.

Established in 1985 by Iran, Pakistan, and Turkey, the organization's other member states include Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan.

The ECO is a successful and promising regional organization, and Iran has a serious interest in strengthening intra-regional cooperation and promoting the position of ECO as an effective regional mechanism for economic connectivity.

The international position of the organization is growing.

The importance of the organization became more apparent when the United Nations approved in 1985 that ECO become an observer member of the United Nations, as did the Or-



ECO Cultural Institute (ECI) president  
Dr. Saad S. Khan

ganization of Islamic Cooperation.

The ECO Region shelters more than 460 million inhabitants and expands over 8 million square kilometers of land, connecting the north to south, south, and east to the west, Asia to Europe, and Eurasia to the Arab World. Composed of some Caucasus, South, West, and Central Asian countries, ECO is one of the oldest intergovernmental organizations.

The founding and fundamental goal of the Organization is to create amenable and conducive conditions for the continued promotion of sustainable economic development in the region, aiming at joint welfare and well-being of the Member States.

The ECO stretched the fabric of its cooperative partnership in the early 1990s, welcoming the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the Republic of Azerbaijan, as well as five Central Asian nations, including the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Republic of Kyrgyzstan, the Republic of Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and the Republic of Uzbekistan, as its members.

The ECO Member States, bearing their shared cultural and historic affinities in mind, appear to be always ready, receptive, and forthcoming to complement each other, intensifying their collaboration with action and result-oriented motives to achieve the perceived target of greater connectivity and integration in the region.

## Over one million tourism destinations identified in Iran

TEHRAN - Iran's Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts, Seyyed Reza Salehi-Amiri, has announced the identification of more than one million tourist destinations across the country.

Speaking at a recent ceremony honoring contributors to the nation's Nowruz travel initiatives, he attributed Iranians' enthusiasm for travel to the country's inherent allure and diverse attractions, Mehr reported.

Salehi-Amiri expressed gratitude to the 1.2 million individuals involved in organizing Nowruz trips, including local officials from various levels of government and represen-

tatives from 28 agencies.

He remarked, "The government is fully committed to serving the people of Iran, prioritizing their comfort and well-being above all else."

The minister emphasized that fostering a sense of security among citizens is even more crucial than providing services.

Reflecting on this year's coordination efforts, the minister noted that challenges were minimal compared to previous years, resulting in heightened public satisfaction. "This demonstrates that the government views its role as solely serving the people," he added.

# Researchers uncover key paleolithic findings in cave, western Iran

TEHRAN - A recent archaeological excavation in Ghamari Cave in Lorestan province has drawn considerable domestic and international attention.

The project, a collaborative effort between Sonia Shidrang of Shahid Beheshti University and Fereidoun Biglari of the National Museum of Iran, was conducted between late February and early April.

The findings have been widely reported across Iranian and global media, highlighting the site's importance in understanding prehistoric human activity in the Khorramabad Valley of Lorestan, Biglari told the Tehran Times.

"Ghamari Cave forms part of a cluster of six prehistoric caves and rock shelters in Khorramabad Valley that are currently being considered for UNESCO World Heritage status," explained Shidrang. "ICOMOS specifically recommended further research at Ghamari Cave to understand its cultural sequence better, as this site remained one of the less studied locations within the proposed heritage area."

Regarding the excavation process, she noted: "With authorization from the Research Institute of Cultural Heritage and Tourism, we conducted the first phase of excavations from late February through early April. Our team made several significant discoveries that shed new light on the region's prehistoric occupation."

"The most significant findings



An archaeological team explores Ghamari Cave in Lorestan province, western Iran.

demonstrate clear evidence of Neanderthal occupation," Shidrang explained. "We uncovered distinct layers containing Neanderthal lithic assemblages in direct association with processed game remains - particularly ibex and red deer - showing clear signs of butchery and thermal alteration. Charcoal concentrations within these living surfaces confirm controlled fire use, offering valuable insights into their behavioral patterns. Later occupation layers revealed remains from Chalcolithic period pastoral communities."

Commenting on the pottery analysis, she added: "Initial examination of the painted pottery shows interesting stylistic parallels with contemporary traditions in Khuzestan, suggesting possible cultural connections or exchange networks during that

period."

Globally, the discoveries captured the attention of specialized archaeology and science publications. In the United States, the Archaeology News Network highlighted the compelling evidence of Neanderthal habitation within the cave.

Meanwhile, Greek media, particularly Creta Post, focused on the revelation of human traces dating back thousands of years. French outlets, including *Le savoir perdu des anciens* and *Le Nouvel Ordre Mondial*, provided a detailed analysis of the 40,000-year-old Neanderthal remains, framing them within broader discussions of human evolution. From Spain, *Red Historia* corroborated the significance of the Neanderthal evidence found in Iran, while Turkish publications such as *Anatolian*

Archaeology and Arkeonews went further, suggesting that these findings could potentially reshape our understanding of prehistoric human migration and settlement patterns.

The breadth of coverage—spanning North America, Europe, and Asia—underscores the global scientific importance of the Ghamari Cave discoveries. By shedding new light on early human history, particularly the presence and activities of Neanderthals in the region, these findings have sparked renewed interest in Iran's archaeological record and its role in the broader narrative of human prehistory. These discoveries not only enhance our understanding of early human settlement patterns in Iran but also reinforce the archaeological significance of Ghamari Cave and the surrounding region. The widespread media interest underscores the global relevance of such findings in piecing together humanity's prehistoric past. Further research is expected to yield even deeper insights into the cultural and evolutionary history of the area.

Dr. Sonia Shidrang, a faculty member at Shahid Beheshti University (SBU), is one of the leading researchers on Iran's Paleolithic period. She played a pivotal role in preparing the 2024 ICOMOS nomination dossier for "Prehistoric Caves and Falak-ol-Aflak Ensemble of Khorramabad Valley".

## Isfahan to host UN Tourism gathering for East Asia

TEHRAN -- The ancient city of Isfahan, with a positive vote of over 30 member states of the UN Tourism Commission, has become the host of the 38th gathering of the Regional Commission of East Asia in 2026, said Isfahan Governor-General Mehdi Jamalnejad.

The 37th gathering of the Regional Commission of East Asia was held in Jakarta during April 15-16, Mehr news agency reported.

The privilege was announced at the end of a meeting attended by UN Tourism Secretary-General Zurab Pololikashvili and a delegation of Iranian experts headed by the deputy tourism minister, Anoushirvan Mohseni Bandpei.

The deputy tourism minister called this success a turning point in Iran's tourism diplomacy policies.

He added that promoting Iran's position



Isfahan has long been nicknamed as *Nesf-e-Jahan*, which translates into "half the world", meaning seeing it is relevant to see the whole world.

in the international arena through hosting tourism events is a significant approach in the tourism ministry, which will continue in the next stages.

Also, a video of the cultural and tourism attractions of Isfahan was shown, which was

warmly welcomed by representatives of the countries.

It is a chance for Iran show Isfahan attractions to the participants from East Asia.

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 ancient city has long been nicknamed as *Nesf-e-Jahan*, which translates into "half the world", meaning seeing it is relevant to see the whole world. The city is home to many versatile artisans who underpin its reputation as a living museum of traditional culture.

## Palangan to hold traditional music festival

TEHRAN -- Hezar- Daf Festival is to be held in Palangan village, Kordestan province, in late April, said the director general of the province's Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Department.

Mansour Mehrzad told ISNA that this year may be the last chance for a possible registration of Palangan on the World Best Tourism Villages list.

Iranian Association of Architects has named this year as Kordestan province to have more introduction of this western province, because Kordestan boasts numerous historical and ancient monuments and villages with valuable texture.

He explained that close to 300 hectares of Sanandaj texture is historic type. In addition, Bijar and Saqqez are also considered historic sites, he added.

This indicates that Kordestan is valuable in terms of architecture and historical texture, he said. Today, the province has turned into a tourist destination, he added.

Fortunately, 12 million tourists visited Kordestan province

during past Iranian year (ended on March 20, 2025). In addition, nearly 534,000 tourists visited the province from March 15 to April 4, showing an 18-percent rise year-on-year.

He put the number of foreign tourists at 44,734.

He continued that currently, Kordestan boasts 6,000 residential beds for tourists, which can not address the needs of all guests.

"We have raised the residential bed capacity to 41,000 persons with the help of formal and informal ecotourism sites."

Mehrzad pointed out that six tangible and intangible heritages of Kordestan province have been registered on the National Heritage List this year.

He said backgammon has been registered on the National Heritage List. "We proposed backgammon for national registration in 2011. The backgammon geography was titled by the name of Kordestan province in 2016."

The echoes of the ancient melodies resonated, in Palangan,



Being celebrated each year with particular grandeur and attended by tourists from both within and outside the province, the Hezar-Daf is one of the most beautiful customs of this historic village.

one of the Kordestan's oldest villages, enriching the spirits of thousands of fellow countrymen.

The historic village of Palangan, a nominee to be on the World Best Tourism Villages list, played host to approximately 50,000 tourists and travelers from across Iran, in April 2024.

The Hezar-Daf Festival, which means one thousand drums in Persian, was organized with the presence of provincial officials and media groups.

The inaugural Hezar-Daf Festival in Palangan took place tree

years ago, the cultural ceremony, serving as a spiritual and cultural heritage, is held on the last Friday of the very first month of the Persian calendar, with the participation of various drumming and artistic groups in the tourist village.

Being celebrated each year with particular grandeur and attended by tourists from both within and outside the province, the Hezar-Daf is one of the most beautiful customs of this historic village.

# DOE developing action plan for conservation of sharks, rays

TEHRAN – The Department of Environment (DOE) is drafting an action plan for the preservation of sharks and rays.

“It is a national document, and its implementation will be mandatory for the related organizations,” IRNA quoted Shahram Fadakar, an official with the DOE, as saying.

Referring to the key role of cartilaginous fish in marine ecosystems, Fadakar said sharks and rays sit at the top of the ocean food web; they play a vital role in maintaining biological balance. The decline in the population of sharks and rays impacts the survival of marine communities.

Unfortunately, overexploitation and illegal fishing, their late maturity, and low breeding have threatened these species with extinction.

More than a third of cartilaginous fish species are on the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List; among them, rays are critically endangered.

Adopting a participatory approach, the action plan aims to identify threats, reduce conflicts, promote preservation culture,



and determine priority actions for a five-year period, the official stressed.

Fadakar went on to say the DOE has so far conducted 48 educational and participatory workshops in coastal provinces.

The latest workshop was held with the participation of representatives from Iran Fisheries Organization, the Ministry of Industry, Mining and Trade, Iran's Customs Administration, and the National Planning and Budget Organization, to strengthen collaborations among these institutions.

Rays or skates are an order of cartilaginous fish that includes

various types of rays, skates, and some other similar fish. They mostly feed on smaller fish, invertebrates, and benthic organisms, searching for food at the bottom of the seas, and with their mouth located on the underside of their bodies, they easily catch the prey and eat them.

Overfishing, marine pollution, and habitat loss are among their main threats. Conservation efforts include restricting hunting and protecting their habitat.

Sharks are a large group of cartilaginous fish, half of which are listed in the IUCN Red List as endangered species. There are 7 types of sharks in the Persian Gulf, including the basking shark,

the basking shark, the whale shark, the thresher shark, the bull shark, the shark catfish, and the zebra shark. Four species of sharks in the Persian Gulf and the Sea of Oman are now critically endangered, and 13 species are on the IUCN Red List.

Overfishing, inappropriate fishing methods, and habitat loss are among the factors responsible for the extinction of sharks in the Persian Gulf.

**Action plans to conserve species**

The DOE has developed action plans for the conservation of 23 endangered species and the plans are being implemented in the country.

The plans intend to address species such as cheetah, brown bear, leopard, black bear, Persian yellow deer, Persian zebra, and hunting birds from among 86 endangered species.

According to the DOE's latest report, 86 species in the country are in danger of dying out.

The Department of Environment is planning to create action plans for 20 more endangered species.

## WFP releases March report on Iran

TEHRAN – The World Food Program (WFP) has released a report, expounding on activities in Iran over the month of March.

In March, WFP food assistance reached 33,269 beneficiaries, which included Afghan and Iraqi refugees as well as Iranian teachers. Refugees are assisted with a staple food basket which includes fortified wheat flour (12 kg per person per month) and vegetable oil (810 ml per person per month).

Under cash-based transfers, following the revision of WFP's Minimum Expenditure Basket (MEB) conducted in November 2024, the Centre for Aliens and Foreign Immigrants Affairs (CAFIA) confirmed adjustments to cash transfer values starting in January.

In March, WFP continued to provide the increased cash transfers to better support essential living costs. The amount doubled from IRR 2.5 million (US\$ 3.6) to IRR 5 million (US\$ 5.3) for men-headed households and from IRR 3 million (US\$ 4.4) to IRR 6 million (US\$ 8.7) for women-headed households.

WFP provided 2,596 refugee girls with a monthly cash incentive of IRR 1 million (US\$ 1.4) transferred to their bank accounts. This is a part of WFP Iran's efforts to promote education for refugee girls by providing them with cash for each month of regular school attendance.

By March, WFP Iran helped ease the financial burden associated with the gluten-free dietary needs of 52 refugee celiac patients from WFP's beneficiaries by providing them with an extra cash amount of 7.7 million rials (US\$ 11.27) per person as a replacement for their usual food entitlement.

WFP supported 373 refugees with disabilities in March across nine settlements, each



receiving an additional monthly cash support of IRR 3 million (US\$ 4.4), on top of their regular aid. In March, assistance covered Kerman, Lorestan, West Azerbaijan, Fars, Khuzestan, Markazi, Khorasan Razavi, and Semnan provinces after initially being introduced to two refugee settlements across two provinces.

In March, a total of 23 WFP-supported livelihood activities including welding, tailoring, baking, farming, remained functional and sustained their operations across 17 settlements, supporting 329 refugees (53 percent women and 47 percent men).

In 2024, WFP provided a combination of in-kind and cash assistance to address the food needs of over 33,000 vulnerable refugees in Iran. As a result, 70 percent of them were able to consume food at an acceptable level, a figure that remains nearly stable compared to the previous year.

Since August, WFP successfully increased the value of the cash transfer entitlement by 25 percent, actively helping to mitigate the immediate economic challenges reported by refugees.

WFP has maintained a presence in Iran since 1987, primarily focused on addressing the food security needs of refugees mainly

from Afghanistan. Iran has hosted refugees for over four decades. Most refugees, along with those in refugee-like conditions, reside in urban, peri-urban, and rural areas, often integrated with host communities. However, the most vulnerable refugees living in 20 settlements across 13 provinces, face a precarious food security situation that necessitates continued humanitarian assistance by WFP.

WFP provided food assistance, educational support, and livelihood opportunities through in-kind food distributions, unconditional cash transfers, and capacity-strengthening initiatives to eligible refugees who live in settlements.

Given the economic situation in Iran in recent years, Afghan refugees have also faced many challenges, including reduced income opportunities and diminished purchasing power, which have impacted their food security and well-being, particularly among those in settlements. In response, WFP adjusted its Interim Country Strategic Plan (ICSP 2023-2027) to align with the need by modifying cash entitlements and food rations, adjusting the number of beneficiaries, and extending the duration of the ICSP by two years to align with the United Nations Sustainable Development Framework (UNSD 2023-2027), ensuring uninterrupted assistance.

WFP implemented activities under the ICSP to sustain its support to these refugees and address their increasing humanitarian needs. There are around 35,000 most vulnerable documented refugees who live in 20 settlements across 13 provinces in Iran and are benefitting from WFP-provided food assistance.

## Knowledge-based companies to attend EXPO MED 2025

TEHRAN – Supported by the Organization for Development of International Cooperation in Science and Technology, Iranian knowledge-based firms will participate in EXPO MED 2025, which is planned to be held from April 24 to 26, in Istanbul, Turkey.

Bringing together the latest trends and cutting-edge technologies of the medical industry, the exhibition will welcome more than 35,000 visitors from over 120 countries.

The event will serve as a key platform for showcasing not only medical products and services but also ground-breaking innovations that shape the future of the industry.

Leading companies in healthcare will come together with key decision-makers and industry professionals at this prominent event.

The exhibition will feature a wide range of product groups, including electromedical equipment, laboratory technologies, hospital infrastructure, medical facility management solutions, medical consumables, orthopedics, physical therapy and rehabilitation products, Over the Counter (OTC) products, wellness solutions, herbal medicines, dietary supplements, personal care, dermo-cosmetics, and natural products.

**Self-sufficiency in medicine, medical equipment is a priority**

The issue of medicine and medical equipment production and self-sufficiency in these areas is one of the government's priorities, Health Minister Mohammad-Reza Zafarqandi has said.

Medicine and medical equipment are two im-

portant areas related to people's health, he said, adding: “We are trying to reach self-sufficiency for the supply of medicine and medical equipment,” IRNA reported

On January 13, the head of Iran's Union of Medical Equipment Manufacturers and Exporters said that medical equipment worth around \$20 million is exported to more than 60 countries annually.

More than 70 percent of medical equipment and 100 percent of normal hospital beds are domestically made, IRNA quoted Abdolreza Yaqoubzadeh as saying.

Also, over 95 percent of specific ICU and CCU beds and more than 85 percent of operating room medical equipment such as anesthesia machines and other equipment are manufactured with cutting-edge technology in the country, he added.

Yaqoubzadeh went on to say that the country's need for medical equipment production is three to four billion dollars per year, some one billion dollars of which is imported.

Some 600 medical equipment companies are active in the country, producing around 99 percent of the medicine supplied to the domestic market.

Medical equipment manufacturers in the country produce and supply over 10,000 types of medical equipment to domestic and foreign markets. Now, various pieces of laboratory equipment are manufactured at prices much lower than the same foreign products.

## First yellow deer born in Karkheh this year

TEHRAN – A Persian yellow deer was born in Karkheh National Park, Khuzestan province. It was the first yellow deer born in the current Iranian year, which started on March 20.

In addition to breeding species in protected areas in captivity, the Department of Environment (DOE) aims to promote natural breeding in natural habitats, ISNA reported.

The forests around Karkheh and Dez rivers in Khuzestan province are the primary habitats of the Persian yellow deer. Luckily, the number of deer increased from five in 2019 to 15 in 2024, which indicates the success of the DOE policies and the effective management of the region.

Almost half a century ago, it was thought that the yellow deer species was extinct in the world. However, about 50 years ago, four yellow deer were observed in Dez and Karkheh forests. They were released in different regions of Iran for better reproduction.

Creating a safe and comfortable breeding environment is a key factor for boosting the deer population in the center.

According to the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List, the Iranian yellow deer is categorized as an endangered species.



Endangered species

There are many threats to endangered wildlife species, including mammals, reptiles, amphibians, fish, and birds.

Habitat destruction, fragmentation, and modification caused by human-led activities such as industrial and residential development, logging, crop farming, livestock grazing, mining, road and dam building, and pesticide use have taken an extreme toll on threatened and endangered wildlife populations at an alarming rate.

Currently, about 128 species of animals and vertebrates in the country are at risk of extinction, some of which are not in good condition, and amphibians are the most vulnerable ones. Persian zebra, Asiatic cheetah, black bear, and Persian yellow deer are in danger of extinction.

## ENGLISH IN USE

### LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

## 'City-friendly schools' scheme launched in Tehran

The “city-friendly schools” scheme was launched in the capital to promote environmental protection and urban development issues among students, ISNA reported on Wednesday.

Mojtaba Daneshvar, director general of citizenship education at Tehran Municipality, said that the project covers more than 550 schools, consisting of 160,000 students.

It aims to familiarize students with the rights and duties of citizens, the environment, waste, transportation and traffic, safety and security, crisis management, he explained.

The training programs will be in the form of workshops, role plays, cultural and educational camps, production of educational content such as books, brochures and posters, he concluded.

## آغاز طرح «مدارس دوستدار شهر» در تهران

طرح «مدارس دوستدار شهر» با هدف آشنا کردن دانش آموزان با حقوق و تکالیف شهروندی، محیط زیست و پسماند، حمل و نقل و ترافیک، و ایمنی و مدیریت بحران در مدارس منتخب شهر تهران آغاز شد.

به گزارش ایسنا مجتبی دانشور، مدیرکل آموزش‌های شهروندی شهرداری تهران، گفت این طرح بیش از ۵۵۰ مدرسه شامل ۱۶۰ هزار دانش‌آموز را در بر می‌گیرد.

برنامه‌های آموزشی این طرح در قالب برگزاری کارگاه‌های آموزشی، تولید محتوای آموزشی در قالب کتاب، بروشور و پوستر، اجرای نمایش و برگزاری اردوهای فرهنگی و آموزشی خواهد بود.



## Rescue, relief, and crisis management drill held

The Crisis Management Organization, affiliated with the Ministry of Interior, held a rescue, relief, and crisis management drill on Wednesday at the place of the Red Crescent Society.



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APRIL 17, 2025

## GUIDE TO SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

*He who adopts cupidity as motto in life will be disliked by people, and he who reveals his distress, abases himself before all, and he who is ruled by his tongue has no worth in his own eyes and those of others.*

Imam Ali (AS)

Prayer Times > Noon:12:04 Evening: 18:58 Dawn: 3:59 (tomorrow) Sunrise: 5:28 (tomorrow)

## “The Dictator’s Last Night” at Iranian bookstores

TEHRAN—A Persian translation of Algerian author Yasmina Khadra’s book “The Dictator’s Last Night” has recently been published by Vazn-e Donia Publications in Tehran.

The book has been translated into Persian by Zeinab Kazemkhan.

In “The Dictator’s Last Night,” author offers a compelling fictional portrayal of Colonel Gaddafi on the eve of his downfall. Set against the backdrop of an apocalyptic landscape—where rebel bullets and NATO bombs illuminate the sky—Gaddafi finds himself confined in a disused school in Sirte, surrounded by treachery and chaos, as his generals either flee or collapse from exhaustion.

With a personality as colorful and contradictory as the tyrant himself, Gaddafi reflects on his life, characterized by a blend of sentimentality and brutality.

Through a turbulent narrative, the novel captures the complexities of Gaddafi’s character—his journey from a poor Bedouin upbringing to becoming a megalomaniacal leader.

The story oscillates between Gaddafi’s grandiose self-perception and moments of vulnerability, exposing a man driven by the need for approval yet capable of horrific violence.

Khadra infuses the narrative with humor, highlighting Gaddafi’s absurdities and overblown rhetoric, showcasing sentences laden with megalomaniacal diction that reveal his delusions of grandeur.

As Gaddafi indulges in heroin during his



last night, he reminisces about his past conquests and love affairs, weaving together a tapestry of memories that includes romanticism juxtaposed with brutal acts.

This conflicting nature of the dictator allows readers to glimpse the terrifying charisma that defined his reign while probing the psychology behind his tyrannical rule. The narrative features surreal elements, including dream sequences with figures such as a ghostly Saddam Hussein and the

painter Vincent van Gogh, emphasizing the hallucinogenic nature of power.

Khadra’s novel artfully balances entertainment with a deeper commentary on dictatorship and the responsibility that comes with power.

As Gaddafi debates revolution with his officers, the reader is reminded of the Libyan people’s plight amidst the unfolding chaos. Although not as epic or experimental as other celebrated dictator novels, “The Dictator’s Last Night” stands as a unique exploration of one of history’s most infamous leaders, effectively capturing the complexities and contradictions of Gaddafi in his final moments.

Mohammed Moulessehoul, better known by the pen name Yasmina Khadra, is an Algerian author living in France, who writes in French. One of the most famous Algerian novelists in the world, he has written almost 40 novels, and has published in more than 50 countries.

Khadra has often explored Algerian and other Arab countries’ civil wars, and conflicts between East and West.

## Cartoon of Day



Gaza

Cartoonist: Mikail Çiftçi from Turkey

# 13th Flying Turtle Awards concludes without golden prize winner

TEHRAN— The 13th edition of the Flying Turtle Awards took place on Tuesday evening, with no announcement made by the jury for a winner of the golden prize.

The Book City Institute and the Children’s Literature Studies Periodical are the organizers of the Flying Turtle Awards, which are presented annually to top children’s books in Iran.

The jury bestowed silver prizes on only three books, including “Son of the Ocean” by Mehdi Rajabi, recognized for its artistic storytelling that emphasizes the subtleties of Iranian life and social issues. An honorable mention was also given to Haleh Ghorbani, the book’s illustrator.

The book tells the imaginative journey of a young boy named Samir, who aspires to write his own life story. Living in a village affected by a devastating flood, Samir and his family choose to stay behind while the rest of the villagers leave. To cope with his loneliness and fears, he creates imaginary friends—miniature animals that become his closest companions.

As he navigates the challenges of his reality, Samir envisions himself as the captain of the ocean, embarking on grand adventures aboard a ship with his whimsical gang of friends. Despite the presence of dark clouds, floods, and thunder that



This combination photo shows the front covers of the winning books at the 13th edition of the Flying Turtle Awards.

instill fear in him, Samir remains steadfast in his dreams and resilience.

Another Silver Award was granted to Zohreh Parirokh for her impactful narrative that intertwines local art with a child-friendly language in “Dotok: The Little Baluch Doll.” An honorable mention was also given to the researchers Afsaneh Ehsani and Sepideh Shahbazi for their contributions to this title.

The story of “Dotok: The Little Baluch Doll” revolves around a charming little doll named Dotok, who lives in a village in Baluchestan. Throughout the narrative, Dotok encounters various adventures, facing challenges and obstacles that prompt her to reflect and actively seek solutions.

The tale imparts valuable lessons about friendship, empathy, and the importance of striving to achieve goals, encouraging children to think deeply about these themes.

The third Silver Award, recognizing creative engagement with Iranian myths, went to Marjan Fouladvand, author of “The Seven Eternals” series.

The series, comprising three books, is set in an apocalyptic world where ash falls from the sky and serpents emerge from the ground, signaling an impending doom. The cosmic mirror has gone dark, time has halted, and destruction looms. Jamshid, perceiving the curse and decay as the work of evil spirits and the serpent-slaying man, realizes

that his people blame him for their plight. What must be done to save them?

Determined to break the curse, Jamshid embarks on a perilous journey through seven labors. However, his struggle alone is not enough; the people must also discover and confront their own seven labors.

The book depicts a land where people are trapped between serpents and Jamshid’s sunless remnants. Jamshid, grappling with past hubris, reflects on how their circumstances have deteriorated. Ultimately, his doubts compel him to take a final step in hopes of redemption—a step that leads him into the realm of the dead.

## Iranian theater director Amir Reza Koohestani to lead 34th Ecole des Maîtres

TEHRAN—Iranian theater director and playwright Amir Reza Koohestani has been invited to direct the 34th Ecole des Maîtres (School of Masters), which is an advanced theatre training project, set to be held in various European cities from August 26 to October 3.

Koohestani’s workshop is entitled “Daily Life as Performance: Crafting Narratives from Everyday Experiences,” Mehr reported.

In the workshop, Koohestani invites the artists to explore the performative potential of everyday life. By transforming ordinary events into compelling dramatic narratives, the workshop emphasizes the power of personal experience as raw material for theatrical creation. Participants will reflect on their daily routines, environments, and interactions to uncover their dramatic possibilities.

A key part of the workshop focuses on journal entries written by participants, capturing the details of a single day. These journals, written in the first person and simple past tense, will serve as the foundation for creating narratives. To enrich their storytelling, participants are encouraged to bring a physical object connected to the day described in their journal—anything from a household item to a meaningful artifact.

The workshop offers a unique approach to theater-making, encouraging participants to view their daily lives as an artistic canvas and to experiment with innovative forms of storytelling.

The 34th edition of School of Masters will start in Liège, Belgium, on August 26 and will continue with work stages and public presentations in the different European venues.

It will be in Lisbon, Portugal, from August 31 to September 5, in Coimbra, Portugal, from September 6 to 11, in Milan, Italy, from September 12 to 16, in Udine, Italy, from September 17 to 26, and in Angers, France, from September 27 to October 3.

This year there will be 16 participants selected, four from each Ecole des Maîtres partner country, to which will be added some participants from the 2025 guest country, Slovenia. The group will be as diverse as possible in terms of gender, origin, and culture.

The Ecole des Maîtres is an advanced theater training project conceived by Franco Quadri in 1990. The training objective of the project is to initiate a relationship between young actresses and actors, trained at drama academies and theater schools in Europe and already working as professionals, and renowned directors of the international scene,



in order to give life to a work experience strongly aimed at comparing and exchanging skills on staging methods and practices, starting from different texts, languages and artistic languages, during itinerant ateliers.

Born in Shiraz, Fars Province, Amir Reza Koohestani, 46, is considered one of the most important Iranian theatre makers of his generation.

At the age of 16, he began publishing short stories in local newspapers. Attracted to cinema, he took courses in directing and cinematography. Koohestani studied Cinema at the University of Tehran. Later on, he continued his studies at the University of Manchester in the field of theater.

After creating two unfinished films and a brief experience as a performer, he devoted his time to writing his first plays “And the Day Never Came” (1999) and “The Murmuring Tales” (2000).

He founded the Mehr Theater Group in Tehran in 2001 and with his third play, “Dance on Glasses” (2001), Koohestani gained international fame and found the support of several European theatrical artistic directors and festivals. This was followed by the plays “Recent Experiences” (from the original text by Canadian writers Nadia Ross and Jacob Wren, 2003); “Amid the Clouds” (2005); “Dry Blood & Fresh Vegetables” (2007); “Quartet: A Journey North” (2008); “Where Were You on January 8th?” (2009); “Ivanov” (2011); and “The Fourth Wall” (from the original play “En-

gland” by Tim Crouch, 2012)

In 2012, the movie “Modest Reception,” which was co-written by Koohestani and Mani Haghighi – actor and film director – won the Netpac Award at the Berlin International Film Festival. In 2013, the Festival Actoral in Marseille (France) commissioned Koohestani to write and stage a new play, “Time-loss” (based on his previous play “Dance on Glasses”). From October 2014 to March 2015, during a residency at the Akademie Schloss Solitude, in Stuttgart, Germany, Koohestani wrote the play “Hearing.”

Since 2006, Koohestani has worked frequently in Germany where he has created more than 15 productions.

In September 2018, he was invited along with other directors for the opening of La Comédie de Genève in Switzerland, where he created a short play in French based on “Miss Julie” by August Strindberg.

“Summerless,” premiered in May 2018 at the Kunstenfestivaldesarts in Brussels, Belgium, and presented at the Festival d’Avignon in 2018 – is the third part of a trilogy about time and memory, following “Timeloss” and “Hearing.”

In May 2023, Koohestani created “Blind Runner,” which premiered in Brussels as part of the Kunstenfestivaldesarts. A new collaboration with Mani Haghighi resulted in the release of the film “Subtraction” in July 2023.