



Ukrainian servicemen in the frontline city of Kostyantynivka in the Donetsk region of eastern Ukraine on November 16.

How the West Has Thrown Ukraine Under the Bus

Trump's 28-point plan pressures Zelenskyy to give up territory, shrink military, and abandon NATO hopes—or risk losing U.S. support

► Page 5

New opportunities emerging for investors: Pezeshkian

TEHRAN – Iranian president pointed to the country's active presence in BRICS, SCO, and EAEU, and emphasized that these diplomatic interactions strengthen economic relations with neighbors and create a large market and new opportunities for merchants and investors.

Addressing Iran Annual Capital Market Conference, titled "Resilience, Innovation, Growth", held at the IRIB International Conference Center on Saturday, Masoud Pezeshkian stated that the discussed issues regarding the capital market and the country's macro-economy are of great importance, adding: ► Page 4

Iran inks 6-nation pact in Istanbul, bolstering its role as key transit gateway

TEHRAN – Iran, China, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Turkey signed a multilateral agreement in Istanbul aimed at expanding rail freight movement along the southern branch of the Eurasian transit corridor, reinforcing Iran's position as a core gateway for container traffic between China and Europe.

The participating countries agreed to implement coordinated measures to streamline rail transit along the route.

The commitments include applying unified and competitive tariffs, shortening travel times for container trains, cutting auxiliary and customs-related costs, and upgrading rail infrastructure across the corridor.

The objective is to significantly raise the southern route's share of international container transport between East Asia and Europe. ► Page 4

Brig. Gen. Jahanshahi takes helm of Iran Army Ground Forces

TEHRAN – Brigadier General Ali Jahanshahi has been appointed as the new commander of the Iranian Army Ground Forces, succeeding Brigadier General Kioumars Heydari.

Jahanshahi previously commanded the 77th Thamen al-A'emmeh Division and also served as the Ground Forces' coordinating deputy, as well as deputy for assessment at the Khatam al-Anbia Central Headquarters. ► Page 2

Iran as civilization – history and identity, and the making of a political vision

By Ranjan Solomon

GOA –To assert that "Iran is a civilizational entity" highlights its long history and cultural depth, dating back to ancient civilizations like the Elamites and Achaemenids, which goes beyond the modern nation-state of Iran.

This perspective emphasizes Iran's continuous influence, cultural legacy, and role as a historical crossroads, including its contributions to art, philosophy, and science. It also shapes modern Iranian identity and foreign policy, which often references this grand civilizational heritage.

This gives to the affirmation that Iran is not merely a nation-state; it is a civilizational entity whose political horizons are inseparable from its vast historical, cultural, and philosophical inheritance. ► Page 3

Intl. tribunal in Spain probes Israeli war crimes

A forum on Israel's war crimes in Palestine began Saturday in Barcelona, Al Jazeera reported.

Called the International People's Tribunal on Palestine, the two-day forum aims to probe war crimes by Israel and its supporters with witness and expert testimony.

Organized by the International League of Peoples' Struggle, International People's Front and People's Coalition on Food Sovereignty, it will "present evidence from key witnesses and experts to expose the extent of the Zionist occupation's genocidal use of ecocide and forced starvation against Palestinians." It also seeks to demonstrate "the complicit role of the U.S. and other backers like the UK, France, Germany, and private entities such as the U.S. and Zionist-led Gaza Humanitarian Foundation."

The tribunal comes amid mounting outrage over Israel's ongoing assault on Gaza and the deepening humanitarian catastrophe faced by Palestinians. By gathering testimonies from survivors, witnesses, and experts, it seeks to expose the brutality of Israeli occupation, amplify grassroots Palestinian voices, and intensify pressure on complicit governments and institutions that enable these crimes.

Lebanon's independence discourse: Between symbolism and strategic realities

By Sondoss Al Asaad

BEIRUT — Lebanon's 82nd Independence Day speech was made amid a national climate marked by uncertainty, sacrifice, and a persistent longing for a tangible, "third" independence, one defined by security, territorial integrity, and genuine sovereignty.

President Joseph Aoun's address, delivered from the South Litani Sector in Tyre, was largely rhetorical, resembling the perennial declarations of the Arab League since 1948 — deeply symbolic, yet disconnected from the concrete realities on the ground.

While the speech evoked historical pride and national sentiment, its framing of Lebanon's Resistance as "some actors in denial of regional changes" directly reverses reality.

Israel threatens Syrian lifeline

By Wesam Bahrani

TEHRAN – Recent developments in southern Syria highlight a sharp escalation in military actions by the Israeli regime, accompanied by a systematic expansion of its illegal presence across the provinces of Quneitra, Daraa, and adjoining highland areas.

Local accounts report that Israeli occupation forces (IOF) advanced from Western Tal Ahmar toward Eastern Tal Ahmar in Quneitra with armored vehicles and tanks, reinforcing a pattern of deepening entrenchment across key strategic hills.

The reactivation of the Hod Ha-Hanit reserve brigade under the regime's 210th Division further underscores an operational shift from sporadic raids to permanent positioning, with IOF units conducting wide-ranging search operations and detentions in Quneitra, including the seizure of civilians in Khan Arnabah.

Since the collapse of the previous Syrian government in late 2024, Israel has intensified its violations of Syrian territorial sovereignty. Hundreds of incursions, widespread arrests, military road deployments, and fresh checkpoint networks have effectively redrawn parts of southern Syria without any legal mandate.

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S. Korean envoy says visit to southeastern Iran deepened his understanding of region's cultural heritage

TEHRAN – The South Korean ambassador to Iran has said his recent personal visit to southeastern Iran, including a tour of the regional museum in Zahedan, gave him a deeper insight into the area's cultural legacy and its connections to ancient Iranian traditions.

Referring to the visit, Ambassador Kim Junpyo wrote that he was grateful for the hospitality and guidance he received at the museum, calling the visit an impactful experience during his trip to the province, ISNA reported on Saturday. ► Page 6



Iran come third at 2025 Riyadh

TEHRAN – Iran ended their journey at the sixth edition of the Islamic Solidarity Games (ISG), finishing in third place.

"Hope of Iran" wrapped up 81 medals (29 gold, 19 silver, 33 bronze medals) in the Game, which were held in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia from Nov. 7 to 21.

Turkey dominated the Games, collecting 155 medals, 72 gold, 44 silver, and 39 bronze. Uzbekistan came second with 29 gold, 35 silver and 32 bronze medals.

The event brought together more than 3,000 athletes from 57 nations, competing across 25 sports in pursuit of glory at one of the Islamic world's premier multi-sport events.

Host Saudi Arabia came fourth place, earning 18 gold, 12 silver and 27 bronze medals.

TEHRAN PAPERS

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

Iraq's elections: A strategic defeat for the United States

The Iraqi parliamentary elections, held under highly sensitive circumstances, have been described by the Javan newspaper as a strategic defeat for the United States and Israel. The elections took place amid threats from the Israeli regime and intense pressure from Washington, yet the outcome revealed a decisive shift in Iraq's political landscape. According to the paper, the project designed to contain Iran's influence in Iraq has collapsed entirely. Netanyahu's vision of a "New Middle East" and America's attempt to reassert dominance in the region now face formidable obstacles. Israel had openly declared Iraq to be the "next front" after Gaza and Lebanon, with Netanyahu repeatedly insisting that "Iran's influence in Iraq must be cut off." Instead, Iraq now presents a reality in which resistance forces have achieved legal, parliamentary, and popular legitimacy. The widespread propaganda campaigns against Iran's role in Iraq backfired, as parties aligned with Tehran won significant public support. When Israeli leaders consistently repeated that "after Gaza and Lebanon, Iraq will be next," the Iraqi people understood that their destiny was intertwined with that of Gaza, Beirut, Sana'a, and Tehran. This collective awareness undermined pro-Western and pro-American currents, redirecting votes toward resistance-oriented groups.

Kayhan: 22 years of talks and a clear outcome for Iran

In a note, Kayhan reflected on Iran's approach to negotiations with the United States. The paper argued that for the Islamic Republic, decisions about dialogue with Washington are neither emotional nor temporary, but rather the product of a long and turbulent experience spanning more than two decades. Over the past twenty-two years, Iran has endured extensive American pressure: unprecedented sanctions, the assassination of nuclear scientists, repeated sabotage of nuclear facilities, military attacks, and even a twelve-day war. The article claimed that U.S. President Trump attempted to spread the false narrative that "Iran is eager for an agreement" to conceal his own failures. In reality, Iran today occupies a position of strength, stability, and deterrence, with no need for negotiations that would compromise its sovereignty. Kayhan emphasized that it was the United States that abandoned talks and resorted to aggression, while Iran stood firm with resilience and honesty. This steadfastness has become evident to the international community, which now recognizes that Iran has not been the party seeking concessions but rather the one defending its independence against external pressure.

Hamshahri: No reason for Iran to uphold the Cairo agreement

Hamshahri examined the breaches of the Cairo agreement related to inspection of Iran's nuclear sites by heavyweight western countries and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). Following attacks on Iranian territory, Tehran had signed the Cairo agreement with the IAEA, reopening the path for dialogue. However, the European troika, the United States, and the IAEA demonstrated that they approached international issues with political motives rather than legal principles. The paper argued that political agendas have now overshadowed international law, with the IAEA functioning as an executive arm of the West. From this perspective, once an agreement loses its legal foundation and becomes politicized, there is no reason for Iran to remain committed to it. Hamshahri concluded that the credibility of the Cairo agreement has been eroded, and Iran cannot be expected to adhere to its provisions when the other parties have abandoned the legal and technical framework in favor of political maneuvering.

Ham Mihan: War is ruled out for now

Ham Mihan assessed the possibility of war between Iran and Israel backed by the United States. Citing international relations scholar Ali Bigdeli, the paper argued that current circumstances make renewed conflict unlikely. The United States is entangled in the consequences of wars in Gaza and Ukraine, as well as tensions with Venezuela, leaving little capacity for military confrontation with Iran. Moreover, Washington views instability in the Middle East as contrary to its economic interests. While some political and media circles raise concerns about war, these serve specific agendas. The upcoming UN Security Council meeting will be crucial for Iran, as any new punitive resolution could bring further threats and restrictions. Ham Mihan stressed that Iran must seek common ground with Europe to avoid undesirable outcomes. Observations suggest that Iran does not favor continued confrontation with the United States, but insists its rights should be acknowledged. This greater flexibility indicates that Iran and Washington are engaged in covert dialogue, since all parties know the current situation cannot last indefinitely. On one hand, Iran faces a serious economic crisis; on the other, the United States sees Middle East instability as conflicting with its strategic goals. Thus, both sides are compelled to explore ways of negotiation, even if unofficial. The paper concluded that while war is not imminent, the fragile balance requires careful diplomacy, as neither Iran nor the United States can afford prolonged escalation under current conditions.

MPs ponder response to IAEA's anti-Iran resolution

President's appointees meet with lawmakers for consultations

TEHRAN – The National Security and Foreign Policy Committee of the Iranian Parliament categorically condemned the recently adopted anti-Iran resolution by the Board of Governors of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), after beginning the process to devise an appropriate response.

Ebrahim Rezaei, the spokesperson for the committee, dismissed the resolution as politically motivated and illegal, highlighting the need to show a strong and deterrent reaction to the move. He made the comments following an extraordinary session of the committee attended by Iranian deputy foreign minister and the deputy head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran. Rezaei had previously suggested that Tehran leave the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

"This session was held in order to review the IAEA's recent resolution against the Islamic Republic of Iran," he explained.

The IAEA's Board of Governors on Thursday narrowly approved the resolution drafted by the European Troika – France,



Iranian MPs discuss IAEA's recent anti-Iran resolution on November 22, 2025.

Germany and the UK – and the United States—passing 19–3 with 12 abstentions—that urges Tehran to "without delay" report on its enriched uranium stockpile and facilities damaged in the June military aggression by Israel and the U.S., while omitting any mention of Iran's longstanding cooperation with the agency.

"In the meeting [of the committee], Deputy Foreign Minister Kazem Gharibabadi presented a report on the trend of

the adoption of the [IAEA's anti-Iran] resolution and called it illegal," added Rezaei. He added Iran will definitely give the necessary response.

The Iranian Foreign Ministry has already condemned the move, saying it proves that the U.S. and the European Troika are bent on misusing the IAEA to mount pressure on Iran.

In a statement, the ministry said the resolution violates the fundamental principles of the NPT, which grants member

states the right to use nuclear energy for peaceful purposes.

Separately, Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said the United States and the European troika "killed" a new co-operation agreement Iran had signed with the IAEA in Cairo through their provocative actions. In a post on his X account on Friday, Araghchi accused the U.S. and the E3 of assaulting diplomacy at every step and of bringing about the collapse of the Cairo agreement.

The accord established a new framework for cooperation after Iranian lawmakers suspended engagement with the IAEA following the U.S.-Israeli strikes in June. Several Iranian officials have revealed that the locations of many attacked sites were known only to Iran and the IAEA, and that the UN nuclear watchdog leaked that information to the regime. Iranians also reported finding confidential letters Tehran had sent to IAEA Director General Rafael Grossi in the occupied territories during an intelligence operation carried out before the war.

Israel undergoing an 'epidemic of infiltration', says Iran intelligence minister



TEHRAN — Iran's Intelligence Minister says Israel is undergoing an "epidemic of infiltration," as multiple Israeli media outlets report unprecedented levels of espionage cases linked to Iranian intelligence, including penetration of one of Israel's largest air force bases.

During a provincial visit to Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad, Hojjatoleslam Seyyed Esmail Khatib said the Zionist regime has publicly acknowledged deep security breaches, including the arrest of an Air Force officer accused of transferring nuclear-related documents and classified military material to Iran.

"These developments reflect the capability and power of the Iranian nation and its military, intelligence, and security institu-

tions," Khatib said.

He added that the 12-day confrontation between Iran, the United States, and Israel had exposed deep vulnerabilities within the Israeli security establishment, resulting in a decline in the regime's "standing, popularity, and prestige" internationally.

On June 13, 2025, the Israeli regime launched an unprovoked attack on Iranian territory, triggering a 12-day war that claimed the lives of well over 1,000 Iranians, including military commanders, nuclear scientists, and civilians. The United States also got involved in the war by bombing three Iranian nuclear sites. The stated justification for the aggression was to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons, a claim for which neither Israel nor

the U.S. provided any evidence.

Following the arrest of the spy, Israel's Channel 15 reported that Iran has infiltrated some of the Israeli army's most sensitive and strategic military installations, including the Hatzertim Airbase—one of the largest air force bases in the country.

Channel 14's military desk described the extent of Iranian infiltration as "truly unbelievable and astonishing."

Halil Biton Rozin, the military and security correspondent for Channel 14, said the pace at which Israelis are being arrested for spying for Iran is unprecedented.

"The number of Israelis arrested for spying for Iran is unbelievable and astonishing. It shows how dire the situation is," he said on air. "We are dealing with a serious phenomenon, and harsh punishments must be imposed for espionage—perhaps then this phenomenon will stop."

Israeli outlet Ynet reported Thursday that 22-year-old Rafael Reuveni of Be'er Sheva was indicted for communicating with an Iranian handler via Telegram and providing sensitive military information in exchange for money.

He reportedly shared personnel estimates, emergency procedures, and details about his military base, and pledged to alert his

Iranian contact if the base moved to wartime readiness.

The case is being investigated by Shin Bet and the police.

Earlier this week, i24News reported that 27-year-old Shimon Azarzar from Kiryat Yam was charged with prolonged contact with Iranian intelligence agents, transmitting photos and coordinates of sensitive Israeli sites. He is accused of exploiting his girlfriend, an IDF reservist, to obtain information about Air Force installations.

In another case from November, 23-year-old Yosef Ein Eli of Tiberias was arrested for receiving thousands of shekels to collect intelligence for Iran on hotels, IDF soldiers, and senior officials. He was detained in a joint Shin Bet-Lahav 433 investigation.

Khatib said Iran had acquired a "treasure trove" of intelligence from inside Israel, including millions of pages of documents covering nuclear weapons projects—past and present—joint programs with the U.S. and European states, and the internal structure of Israeli nuclear institutions.

He claimed that both personnel inside Israeli institutions and ordinary civilians cooperated with Iranian intelligence out of financial motives or resentment toward the Israeli prime minister.

Brig. Gen. Jahanshahi takes helm of Iran Army Ground Forces

From page 1 ► In his first remarks to senior commanders, Jahanshahi said the Army Ground Forces are fully prepared to counter any potential threat, backed by capable and committed personnel, modern equipment, and the experience gained from the "12-day imposed war." According to the Army's Public Relations Office, he emphasized that the force's operational roadmap has been designed around five strategic principles—leadership-centeredness, justice, efficiency, technology and skills enhancement—based on the guidance of the Commander-in-Chief and the lessons of Iran's recent military engagements.

Jahanshahi said his appointment decree underscores the need to improve the Army's mobility, efficiency, human capital, and weapons and equipment to match evolving threats. "We have charted our course according to these directives," he said, "and God willing, we are moving toward a bright horizon."

He noted that the Ground Forces have significantly strengthened their combat capability in

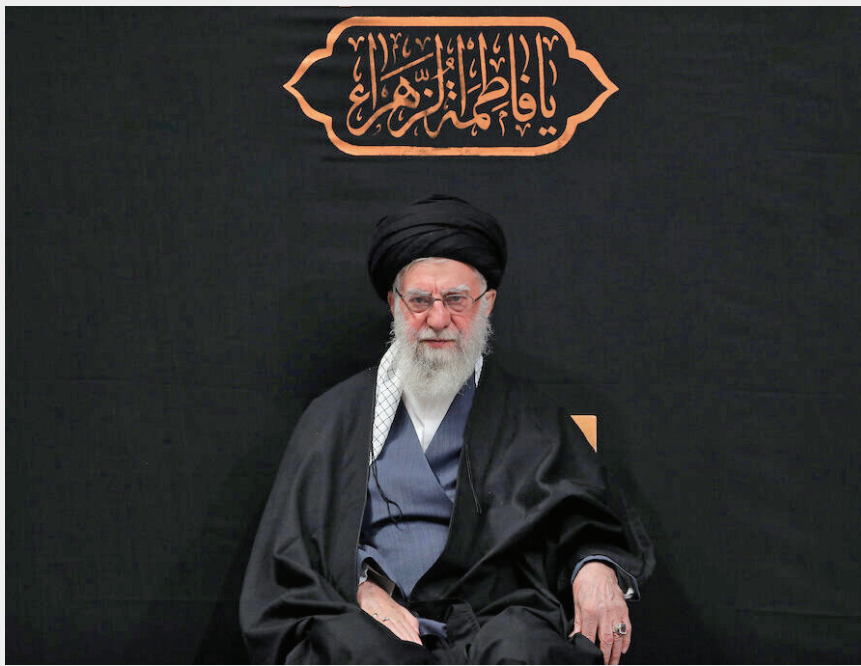
recent years by incorporating scientific talent, knowledge-based companies, and emerging technologies, particularly artificial intelligence. With well-trained and devoted personnel, he said, and with modern equipment and veteran experience, the Army Ground Forces stand ready to respond to any hostile action.

Jahanshahi warned that Iran is now facing cognitive and hybrid warfare. He said that when Iran's adversaries failed to achieve their objectives through military pressure, they shifted to soft and psychological forms of confrontation. He expressed confidence, however, that with divine assistance, the leadership of the Commander-in-Chief, the unity of the Iranian people, and the strength of the Armed Forces, Iran will once again neutralize enemy schemes.

Reviewing recent operations, Jahanshahi said the Army Ground Forces played an active and decisive role in the 12-day conflict in June. He pointed to the deployment of multiple brigades to secure the country's borders, the use of Arash-1 and Arash-2 drones to strike targets

in the occupied territories, and the integration of air-defense systems into the country's unified air-defense network to support both the Air Defense Force and the IRGC Aerospace Force. He also highlighted the use of new air-defense platforms to shoot down enemy drones and prevent them from achieving their objectives, saying the force's drone and air-defense units performed effectively throughout the confrontation.

Looking to the future, Jahanshahi said the Ground Forces intend to modernize their weapons and equipment by relying on domestic expertise, knowledge-based industries and new technologies. He said efforts are underway to enhance the Army's combat readiness, expand multi-skill training for personnel, improve the welfare and morale of troops, and prepare a more mobile, agile and efficient Ground Force. He added that upgrades to electronic warfare, missile systems, artillery, and command-and-control capabilities are also part of the force's ongoing development program.



Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei attended a mourning ceremony for Lady Fatimah (PBUH) on November 21, 2025. Lady Fatimah was the daughter of Prophet Mohammad (PBUH). She is a highly revered figure in Shia Islam.

Araghchi says no need for mediators after Lebanese FM makes public call for negotiations

TEHRAN – Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi stated that Tehran is ready for dialogue aimed at boosting bilateral relations with Lebanon, while stressing that Iran does not interfere in the country's internal affairs, and that it does not require a third party to arrange discussions with Beirut.

Iranian officials are indeed in close contact with their Lebanese counterparts on a regular basis. Araghchi's official visit to Beirut in June, where he met with Lebanon's leadership, followed similar visits earlier in the year by the Iranian parliament speaker and security chief.

"My dear friend Youssef Rajji, the foreign minister of Lebanon, has invited me for negotiation in an interview with MTV Lebanon," Araghchi wrote in Arabic on his account on X in response to an invitation by Rajji for talks. "We do not interfere in the internal affairs of Lebanon but we welcome any dialog with the aim of advancing bilateral relations between Iran and Lebanon," he said.

It is unclear why Rajji saw the need to ask Araghchi to initiate talks on television, given that his country already maintains close, ongoing communication with Iran.

In his post on X, Araghchi added that "there is no need for a third country. I invite my colleague Youssef to travel to Tehran, and if I am invited to travel to Beirut, I will gladly accept."

Arab media with ties to the West and Western blocs have actively tried to drive a wedge between Iran and Lebanon over the past several years.

Last week the Asas Media news portal quoted Lebanese President Michel Aoun as saying he had used "very harsh" words



Iranian FM Abbas Araghchi (L), Lebanese President Joseph Aoun (C), and Lebanese FM Youssef Rajji pose for a picture in Beirut on June 3, 2025.

toward Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council (SNSC). Ali Larijani, during Larijani's visit to Beirut in August. The outlet claimed Larijani had tried to intervene in affairs of Lebanon's Shia community but Aoun told him that the Lebanese Shias are his responsibility, not Iran's.

Although Asas Media deleted the report shortly after publication, Iran still reacted. Iran's ambassador to Lebanon said the outlet was "known for attempts to muddy Iran-Lebanon ties". Al-Mayadeen quoted Iran's SNSC denying the alleged encounter and calling on the president to release the meeting's video footage.

Aoun's office has yet to publish the footage, but a video filmed by a journalist after the meeting resurfaced following last week's controversy. In the video, Larijani is seen telling Aoun that he

is "sorry he had to be frank" and thought Lebanon "must be aware of everything." Aoun is seen smiling and dismissing his concerns.

In separate remarks to Lebanese journalists during that trip, Larijani said certain media outlets are trying to provoke enmity between Iran and Lebanon and to pit the two countries against each other, while the real enemy of both is someone else.

Lebanon is currently grappling with near-daily air assaults by Israel despite a ceasefire that came into effect in November 2024. The regime has also occupied several positions in southern Lebanon, and reports suggest it is preparing to launch a new, massive wave of aggression against the Lebanese, after its previous one killed thousands of people.

Israelis say they will continue

to attack the country and kill Lebanese people until Hezbollah has been disarmed. Hezbollah has been the most formidable force defending Lebanon against the regime over past decades. It was formed in 1982 in response to an Israeli invasion that reached Beirut. The group made its first ties with Iran roughly two decades after its formation. Israel, however, appears to believe that weakening Iran-Lebanon ties would lead to Hezbollah's dismantlement. Iranians have repeatedly said that, while they back anti-imperialist and anti-Israeli forces in the region, they are not those forces' arms suppliers or policy makers.

Israelis are ultimately looking to establish "Greater Israel," a vision of a Jewish state that includes several Arab territories, including the entirety of Lebanon.

Iran as civilization - history and identity, and the making of a political vision

From Page 1 ► For millennia, Iran has produced ideas, poets, statesmen, mystics, and movements that have shaped the intellectual geography of West Asia and far beyond. This deep civilizational self-awareness gives Iran a political posture fundamentally different from that of states built on narrower identities or recent colonial boundaries. Its modern policies, be they in diplomacy, resistance, regional engagement, or cultural outreach, each of these draw from this longue durée of identity, memory, and moral imagination. To understand Iran's strategic decisions is therefore to understand a civilization that sees itself not as a peripheral actor, but as a central, enduring force in the region's historical continuity and its future possibilities.

Long-lasting distorted international narratives on Iran

Who stands to gain from this distortion? Slanted narratives persist because long-standing strategic frames (nuclear threat, regime irrationality, terrorism links) are repeatedly recycled by policy communities, media gatekeepers, and think-tanks; these frames are amplified by political actors who profit from a simple, securitized storyline. Bureaucratic incentives (funding, careers), partisan politics (domestic opponents who want confrontation), and private security/energy interests that gain from instability all lock the narrative in place. The benefit is diffuse: hawkish policymakers, arms and intelligence contractors, and political constituencies who win domestically from portraying Iran as an existential threat. Scholars call this a durable "Iran narrative" that domestic politics in consumer states also exploit.

Where Iran's pluralism is most visible, global discourse tries to erase it. Iranian pluralism shows up in competing political blocs (reformists, pragmatists, conservatives), vibrant urban social movements, a lively public sphere in Persian literature and cinema, and autonomous provincial economic networks; these fault lines drive policy debate inside Tehran as much as ideological rivalry does. Global discourse flattens that complexity because it favours easily communicable dichotomies (friend/enemy, nuclear/non-nuclear) and because external analysts often privilege elite security sources over ethnographic or

local reporting — which makes nuance politically and commercially inconvenient. The erasure is therefore structural: it's cheaper and safer for audiences and policymakers to package Iran as monolithic.

Simultaneously with this demonization campaign, there are neo-colonial efforts to gain control over West Asia's resources. Under these circumstances, Tehran would likely pursue a multiform strategy.

First, Iran should opt for diversification, expanding and deepening economic partnerships beyond Western markets. Straightforward options include reinforced ties with China, regional trade corridors, and non-Western financial mechanisms.

Secondly, Iran could choose to harden and disperse critical energy infrastructure while retaining export resilience. This would further economic sustenance and sustainability.

Thirdly, Iran should assume facilitative and direction in prime regional multilateral arrangements that legitimize Iranian stewardship of shared resources. Diplomatically, Iran could combine de-escalatory confidence-building with public technical transparency that are geared to blunt pretexts for perceptible interventions while using cultural and trade diplomacy to make isolation both costly and less credible. Recent analyses of sanctions and strikes show how damaging economic isolation is, so resilience and regional integration are core priorities.

Legitimate human-rights advocacy vs. geopolitical weaponization

Iran must assert that there be consistent standards with the core being rootedness in human-rights claims. The spillover should be grounded in transparent, methodologically rigorous documentation and routed through independent monitors, not partisan briefings.

Accompanying must embrace privilege of domestic civil-society voices and corroborated testimony rather than anonymous intelligence leaks. A factor that is non-negotiable is that Iran insulates humanitarian channels from coercive sanctions that overwhelmingly punish civilians.

An ultimate political form should condi-

tion international advocates who couple to name-and-shame with concrete support for accountability mechanisms (legal aid, forensic documentation, UN processes) so rights work advances justice rather than becoming an instrument of geopolitical leverage. This is not to downplay genuine abuses, but to preserve credibility and avoid the instrumental use of human-rights language.

In this regard, West Asia's colonial-era cartography and the mandating of boundaries have set structural fault lines (identity, minority/majority cleavages, artificial states) and created long-term vulnerabilities. But contemporary geopolitics — great-power rivalry, resource competition, and state policies since the Cold War — have activated and reshaped those fractures repeatedly.

In short: colonial architectures created the map of problems; recent strategic choices and interventions have frequently deepened and weaponized them. Addressing instability therefore requires both structural historical reckoning and immediate diplomatic reforms.

The most harmful double standards include: the selective enforcement of non-proliferation and sanctions (punishing some actors while excusing allies' transgressions), asymmetrical human-rights scrutiny, and tolerance of proxy networks when they serve certain strategic interests.

Diplomatically, confronting these requires coalition-building among non-aligned and middle powers to insist on uniform norms, pushing for institutional reform in multilateral bodies (more representative mechanisms for assessments), and public diplomacy that calls out inconsistencies while proposing concrete, rule-based alternatives. Naming double standards plainly, backed with practical proposals (inspection regimes, impartial monitoring, equal application of sanctions criteria), is more effective than rhetoric alone.

In the arena of diplomacy, cultural diplomacy is a natural strength for Iran: poetry, cinema, music, and scholarship can humanize Iranians across audiences unreachable by statecraft.

(See full text at tehrantimes.com)



SPORTS

Iranian girls, boys on podium with support from FIVB

TEHRAN – FIVB Volleyball Empowerment supported teams from Thailand, Iran, Indonesia and Pakistan earned medals in volleyball and beach volleyball at the Asian Youth Games in Bahrain.

Five of the six Asian Youth Games medals in volleyball went to teams benefiting from FIVB Volleyball Empowerment. Iran, Indonesia and Thailand lined up on the girls' podium, while Pakistan and Thailand took silver and bronze, respectively, on the boys' side. The boys' title also went to the representatives of Iran.

Volleyball Federation of Iran has so far received USD 168,000 in coach support for their women's national volleyball teams, benefiting from the expertise of Korean coach Lee Do-Hee, in addition to another USD 83,500 in volleyball equipment.

FIVB Volleyball Empowerment has so far invested USD 52,500 for coach support of the Indonesian women's national volleyball teams, making use of Brazilian coach Marcos Sugiyama's expertise. In addition, Persatuan Bola Voli Seluruh Indonesia has been allocated USD 75,000 in volleyball equipment. The Thailand Volleyball Association has been granted a total of USD 294,000 in FIVB Volleyball Empowerment coach support for their national volleyball teams, in addition to USD 138,000 worth of volleyball equipment. Their women's teams are working under the supervision of coach Kiattipong Radchata-griengkai, while the men's teams train under the guidance of legendary Korean player and coach Park Ki-Won. The Pakistan Volleyball Federation has so far been allocated a total of USD 290,500 worth of FIVB Volleyball Empowerment coach support for their men's national volleyball teams, now training under Iranian coach Hamid Jafarzadeh Fard. In addition, FIVB Volleyball Empowerment provided USD 11,500 worth of volleyball equipment. Another USD 6,000 has been granted for a national team coach development knowledge transfer program.

The Iranian girls' team won all seven of their matches in Manama. They dropped only a set on the way to the semifinals. In a duel for a spot in the final, Iran achieved a 3-1 (26-28, 25-18, 25-19, 25-18) victory over the Philippines, and in the gold medal showdown, they squeezed out a nail-biting 3-2 (28-26, 20-25, 18-25, 25-17, 16-14) win over Indonesia.

In the other semifinal, Indonesia produced a 3-0 (26-24, 27-25, 25-17) straight-setter against Thailand. The Thai girls bounced back with a hard-fought 3-0 (26-24, 25-20, 26-24) sweep of the bronze medal game against the Philippines to make the podium.

China, Chinese Taipei, Hong Kong, Qatar, Korea, Bahrain, Jordan and Kazakhstan, in that order, lined up in the places from fifth to 12th in the final standings.

Women's futsal team ready to impress the world

TEHRAN – Iran will want nothing more than to impress on the global stage when they compete at the FIFA Women's Futsal World Cup Philippines 2025.

Head coach Shahrzad Mozafar's task will be to restore confidence in a side that finished third at the AFC Women's Futsal Asian Cup China 2025 and look to prove they remain Asia's best.

Mozafar led Iran to glory when they retained the AFC Women's Futsal Asian Cup in 2018 with a 5-2 win over Japan in the final – a result that cemented her status as one of the continent's top women's futsal coaches.

Spearheading Iran's charge is 22-year-old Marel Torkman, who starred at Hohhot 2025 with six goals to secure the Top Scorer award.

Torkman's court presence had been the highlight of Iran's campaign in Hohhot, with

the forward stepping up when called upon, taking over the goal scoring duties from in for Sara Shirbeigi, who was recovering from injury during the tournament.

With Torkman deployed as the target person and with a fit Shirbeigi firing on all cylinders, Iran can match any side on the world stage.

The heartbreak of losing their AFC Futsal Asian Cup crown will serve as motivation for the two-time continental champions as they prepare for a challenging Group D campaign starting with Brazil, followed by Panama and Italy.

"If you want to be the best, you've got to beat the best," said Torkman on facing Brazil and eight-time Best Women's Player – Amandinha. "I'm very happy and motivated to be able to play against such a strong team (Brazil) and show them the abilities of Iranian girls."

"Every girl admires Amandinha's game, and I'm one of those people. I'm happy that I'll have the chance to compete against her."

Torkman, however, is confident that Iran have the quality and resilience to progress with the likes of Farzaneh Tavasoli shouldering the goalkeeping responsibilities.

"Because our last game is against Italy, there is already a promise of a very beautiful and difficult game awaiting both teams. Italy are one of the world's futsal powers right now. Iran's goal is to advance from our group."

Golshadnezhad aims for more success in upcoming events

TEHRAN – Iranian karate athlete Atousa Golshadnezhad, who won a gold medal at the 2025 Islamic Solidarity Games (ISG) last week, is looking to achieve further success in upcoming competitions.

She defeated Tunisian Wafa Mahjoub 7-4 in the women's -61kg final in Riyadh. Golshadnezhad also expressed her hope that karate will return to the Olympics.

"In my opinion, the level of the Islamic Solidarity Games was very high, and I fought well to win the gold medal," Golshadnezhad stated. "The finalist in the competition is ranked No. 4 in the world, but I managed to defeat her and secure the gold."

"We will participate in the World Championships hosted in Egypt next week. I hope we can also deliver our best performance there and return to our country with a strong showing," she added.

Expressing hope that karate will return to the Olympic Games, Golshadnezhad said, "I truly hope this happens, and with the efforts that the World Karate Federation is making, perhaps we will again become an Olympic sport. The absence of karate in the Olympic Games is truly a great loss."

Persepolis eye Brazilian forward Guilherme Bissoli

TEHRAN – Iranian football club Persepolis have reportedly shown an interest in signing Brazilian forward Guilherme Bissoli.

The 27-year-old striker currently plays at Buriram United.

Persepolis coach Osmar Loss has worked with his compatriot in the Thailand's side.

In the 2024–25 season, Bissoli notably scored 43 goals for Buriram United, sparking comparisons with Japanese Tomoyuki Doi, who went on to score 50 goals in the same season while playing for Singaporean club Geylang International.

Bissoli started his playing career in 2017 in São Paulo and has also played in Athletico Paranaense and Cruzeiro.

Persepolis parted ways with Turkish-German forward Serdar Dursun in the summer and has failed to find a replacement for him.

Ashgabat to host 16th 'Iran Project' exhibition in late January 2026

TEHRAN – The 16th edition of the specialized Iran Project exhibition, focused on engineering and technical services, will be held in Ashgabat from January 28 to 30, 2026, after receiving official authorization from the Trade Promotion Organization of Iran (TPO).

The event is being organized with support from the Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The exhibition aims to expand the export of Iranian technical and engineering services and offers a structured platform for companies seeking to enter or deepen their presence in Turkmenistan's growing market.

With an 18-year track record in the region, Iran Project is recognized as a key international venue for showcasing capabilities across oil, gas and petrochemicals, water, electricity and energy, construction, and a wide range of engineering services.

By bringing together major Iranian exporting firms and project developers, the event is expected to facilitate contract negotiations, technical partnerships and regional cooperation in large-scale infrastructure and industrial projects. It also creates a direct channel for Iranian companies to gain access to oil and gas opportunities, petrochemical developments and broader international tenders in Turkmenistan.

Officials say the Ashgabat exhibition will provide an important opportunity to highlight Iran's engineering expertise and reinforce commercial ties with a neighboring market seeking reliable partners for its long-term development plans.

In late May, Iran and Turkmenistan signed a commercial roadmap aimed at boosting bilateral trade to \$3.0 billion.

The agreement was signed in Tehran by Iran's Minister of Transport and Urban Development Farzaneh Sadeh and Turkmenistan's Foreign Minister Rashid Meredov



following the 18th session of the Iran-Turkmenistan Joint Economic Committee.

Sadeh said the recent committee meeting marked a new chapter in bilateral cooperation, stressing that intensive talks had yielded fresh approaches and agreements to expand trade. "The trade roadmap is expected to be finalized before the Iranian president's upcoming visit to Turkmenistan," she added.

The minister highlighted the strategic location of both countries within the North-South and East-West corridors, describing them as critical to regional connectivity. She noted that Iran and Turkmenistan had agreed to aim for 20 million tons in transit volumes, with a 16-million-ton target set for 2028.

Other key understandings included plans to establish joint free trade zones in Sarakhs-Sarakhs and Lotfabad-Artiq, strengthen border markets—especially in Incheh Borun—and prepare a bilateral gas contract. The roadmap also calls for constructing the Qamdaq-Atrak road toward the Iranian border and building a gas pipeline to Turkmenistan.

Agreements were also reached on developing a third electricity transmission line between Mary and Sarakhs and launching feasibility studies for a fourth. "If both sides follow through, the 18th committee will open up new avenues for economic and cultural cooperation," Sadeh said.

New opportunities emerging for investors: Pezeshkian

TEHRAN – Iranian president pointed to the country's active presence in BRICS, SCO, and EAEU, and emphasized that these diplomatic interactions strengthen economic relations with neighbors and create a large market and new opportunities for merchants and investors.

Addressing Iran Annual Capital Market Conference, titled "Resilience, Innovation, Growth", held at the IRIB International Conference Center on Saturday, Masoud Pezeshkian stated that the discussed issues regarding the capital market and the country's macro-economy are of great importance, adding: "We in the government must take effective actions to facilitate your activities, and we will try in the first stage to prevent the process of budget deficit by making ourselves more efficient; because one of the factors causing inflation is the policies and programs related to the government. Of course, this has happened over many years."

The president, emphasizing the necessity of aligning budget allocation and government revenue, stated: "In this year's budget, we will try, through the meetings we hold in the economic sector, to make the budget and revenue compatible and control expenses."

Pezeshkian, pointing out that the imbalances in the water, electricity, and gas sectors are real, added: "We are striving to provide the energy required by industry in any way possible so that industrialists and producers can work. In this regard, through publicity and dialogue, we seek to control and reform the pattern of energy consumption. Proper consumption is a necessity, and measures in the field of energy productivity need to be revised. For example, if every person, family, or entity can save just 10 percent in energy consumption, we can save 800 to 900 thousand barrels of oil per day. Fortunately, good developments have occurred in this area, but more effort is needed. With this saving, part of people's livelihood will be organized, and development will find meaning."

Capital market rebounds as Tehran targets deeper reforms

Addressing the same conference, the head

of Securities and Exchange Organization (SEO) announced that Iran's capital market has expanded by roughly 20 percent in the past four months, a gain that says reflects renewed public confidence after the downturn triggered by the regional war.

Hojatollah Seyedi said the organization is preparing a series of new measures to deepen the market and accelerate primary offerings.

Seyedi noted that Iran's exchange market is still far smaller than advanced economies and said the goal is to raise its size to at least \$400 billion over time.

He added that the path is challenging, but the SEO intends to expand the market through more initial public offerings and long-term financing instruments.

He said many companies remain outside the exchange and that speeding up IPOs is essential for stabilizing the market.

According to Seyedi, the capital market has progressed through four key phases: safeguarding public assets, improving liquidity, restoring balance and now consolidating that balance. With a more stable environment and wider investor participation, the SEO aims to strengthen IPO activity so that real capital formation occurs in the primary market and projects can later move to the secondary market for broader public access.

Seyedi also highlighted plans to reinforce project-based investment funds and stressed the need for better balance between government-issued and private-sector debt securities to ensure that businesses can secure financing through the market.

He added that the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Finance has launched a strategic program called "Rouyesh," with implementation led by the SEO. The initiative is designed to aggregate dormant household savings and channel them into productive sectors of the economy.

Seyedi expressed hope that, like other new financial instruments introduced recently, this program will gain traction and reach its intended scale.

Iran inks 6-nation pact in Istanbul, bolstering its role as key transit gateway

TEHRAN – Iran, China, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Turkey signed a multilateral agreement in Istanbul aimed at expanding rail freight movement along the southern branch of the Eurasian transit corridor, reinforcing Iran's position as a core gateway for container traffic between China and Europe.

The participating countries agreed to implement coordinated measures to streamline rail transit along the route.

The commitments include applying unified and competitive tariffs, shortening travel times for container trains, cutting auxiliary and customs-related costs, and upgrading rail infrastructure across the corridor.

The objective is to significantly raise the southern route's share of international container transport between East Asia and Europe.

The agreement comes against the backdrop of substantial China-Europe rail trade, which last year approached 60 million tons carried by roughly 20,000 container trains.

Officials expect that full implementation of the Istanbul commitments will redirect a larger portion of this strategic volume through the Islamic Republic of Iran, generating meaningful eco-



nomics and commercial gains.

On November 17, Iran's transport minister said progress on the strategic Marand-Cheshmeh-Soraya railway is accelerating, paving the way for a continuous China-Europe rail route that would place Iran at the heart of a major new transit corridor.

During her visit to China for the second China-Europe Rail Connectivity Forum, Minister Farzaneh Sadeh outlined Iran's long-term strategy to become a key connector between Asian and European markets.

She said efficient rail transport is essential for sustainable development, regional integration and trade expansion, noting that rail systems remove physical

bottlenecks, simplify procedures and reduce logistics costs for businesses across the region.

Sadeh added that strengthening Iran's east-west transit capacity aligns with the Belt and Road Initiative and remains a firm priority for the ministry. Efforts include upgrading infrastructure, eliminating chokepoints, modernizing border logistics and coordinating with neighboring countries through bilateral and multilateral agreements.

The minister highlighted the Marand-Cheshmeh-Soraya line as a core component of Iran's transit strategy. The route will connect Iran's rail network to Turkey, creating a continuous corridor linking China to Europe

'Iran can be a good partner to develop transit in Afghanistan'

TEHRAN – Mahmoud Siadat, Head of the Iran-Afghanistan Joint Chamber of Commerce, has identified the development of transit and the smooth flow of customs procedures as one of Afghanistan's priorities, and said: "Afghanistan is ready for a leap forward and must prepare the ground by relying on the transfer of knowledge and modern technology; in this regard, Iran can be a good helper."

Spoking about social and cultural commonalities that should form the basis of agreements and cooperation, Siadat sated that a follow-up mechanism must be established, and efforts must be results-oriented, adding, "Perhaps we reach good agreements during negotiations and consultations, but what matters is the successful implementation of projects and achieving results."

Also, Hamidreza Salehi, the Secretary-General of the Federation for the Export of Energy and Related Industries of the Tehran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines, and Agriculture (TCCIMA), noting that suitable infrastructure for a leap in relations between Iran and Afghanistan has not been provided, emphasized: "The private sectors of the two countries must pressure their governments to focus on necessary areas and provide the infrastructure."

He believes, "The capacities in both countries are high, and we must be able to meet each other's needs through proper needs assessment."

Salehi evaluated Iran's LPG production as being at a high level and added: "The groundwork for LPG exports exists, and we know that Afghanistan has an urgent need for it. Therefore, the best decision is to strive for a proper needs assessment and to plan for timely export and import."

He deemed it necessary to define a framework for joint investment in production through the cooperation of the private sectors of Iran and Afghanistan, relying on chambers, associations, and joint chambers.

During a meeting between members of the Iranian Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines, and Agriculture (ICCIMA)'s trade delegation and the head of the Afghanistan Chamber of Commerce and Investment, in Kabul on November 17, the need to develop relations between the chambers of both countries was highlighted, and major Iranian companies were invited to invest in Afghanistan.

Members of the Iranian Chamber's trade delegation, accompanied by the Iranian ambassador in Kabul, met with the head of the Afghanistan Chamber of Commerce and Investment. This meeting focused on three key areas in Iran-Afghanistan relations: investment, exports, and transportation.

In all three of these areas, the two countries have not succeeded in having continuous and stable cooperation; therefore, it was emphasized that the chambers of commerce

of the two countries should become active in these fields.

Furthermore, it was stressed that currently, numerous companies from various countries have invested in Afghanistan; however, Iran's presence in the country is very limited. This is not satisfactory for the Afghan side.

Additionally, it was mentioned that there are very high export capacities, but the inability to utilize them exists due to the lack of certain infrastructures, such as transportation and logistics.

Given these points, greater connection between the private sectors of Iran and Afghanistan, with the chambers of commerce setting the priorities, was confirmed. This is because it is essential to identify and resolve challenges online and in a timely manner, and in this regard, the chambers can play a key role.

At the beginning of this meeting, Alireza Bigdeli, the Iranian Ambassador to Kabul, pointed to some of the capabilities and capacities of the two countries for deepening trade and investment relations between Iran and Afghanistan.

He said: "Above all, Iran and Afghanistan should utilize their potential for neighborliness, proximity, and religious, cultural, and historical commonalities to become each other's primary partners in trade and investment."

Subsequently, Niloufar Asadi, the Director General of Asia and Oceania at the International Department of the Iran Chamber, stated that developing relations with Afghanistan is a priority in the Iran Chamber's work program. She emphasized: "The Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines, and Agriculture seeks to develop a roadmap to pave the way for advancing the level of relations based on a precise plan."

She also pointed out the necessity of using the capacity of joint chambers, saying: "It is necessary for us to participate more robustly in the joint committees of the two countries and use this position to the advantage of removing legal obstacles and creating the necessary infrastructure."

A high-ranking Iranian economic delegation led by Industry, Mining and Trade Minister Seyed Mohammad Atabak arrived in Kabul on November 17 for talks on boosting trade and investment with Afghanistan.

Afghan Ministry of Industry and Commerce spokesman Abdul Salam Jawad Akhundzada said the visit aims to identify obstacles hindering bilateral trade and to improve cooperation in transport and joint investment.

The delegation also met officials from the prime minister's economic office, as well as the ministries of industry and commerce, mines and petroleum, and public works, along with Afghan private sector representatives.

Atabak told reporters upon arrival that Iran

through Iranian territory. Once completed, she said, the southern branch of the historic Silk Road will become a modern, end-to-end rail system enabling faster, low-cost freight movement with minimal stops.

Sadeh emphasized that Iran's geography, infrastructure and human capacity make it uniquely positioned to serve as the principal gateway between East and West. By connecting Asian supply hubs to European markets, she said, the corridor will support trade expansion, increase regional competitiveness and contribute to economic development across participating countries.

Sadeh stated that Iran is ready to share all available logistical capabilities with regional partners to advance the joint objective of developing China-Europe rail transit. Coordinated regional actions, she added, can generate substantial benefits for trade, industry and regional connectivity, building a more resilient and efficient transport network across Eurasia.

She also thanked China for hosting the forum in Xi'an and expressed hope that the platform would help participating countries consolidate practical steps toward enhancing rail cooperation.

and Afghanistan share deep historical and cultural ties. He said the Pezeshkian administration has prioritized stronger relations with all neighbors, with Afghanistan regarded as a particularly important partner.

The delegation, which includes Iranian lawmakers and private sector members, will also travel to Herat province to inspect the railway, mines and the Islam Qala border crossing.

On the second day of the visit, Atabak met Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, deputy prime minister for economic affairs, along with Afghan ministers of commerce, energy and water, mines, and public works. He welcomed Afghanistan's stance during Iran's recent 12-day conflict with Israel and said the upcoming seventh session of the Joint Economic Committee would be an opportunity to advance cooperation in rail, road and trade.

Talks also covered banking ties, greater use of Iran's Chabahar port, expansion of cargo movement via the Khaf-Herat railway, and joint work in the mining sector. Atabak is due to continue his trip with a visit to Herat's industrial city.

Senior representatives from Iran's Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (ICCIMA) and multiple Afghan economic bodies signed a series of cooperation agreements, on November 18, during a high-level visit to Kabul and the Imam Abu Hanifa International Exhibition, signaling a broad effort to expand trade, investment and technical collaboration across mining, agriculture, energy and healthcare.

At the exhibition's second day, ICCIMA Deputy Head Qadir Qiyafeh and Karim Hashemi, head of Afghanistan's Chamber of Commerce and Investment, signed a cooperation agreement aimed at raising bilateral trade and strengthening institutional ties between the two chambers.

A separate agreement valued at \$100 million was concluded between Mohammad Reza Salehi, head of Iran's Energy Federation, and Habibi, chairman of Afghanistan's Union of Construction Companies, covering a five-year cooperation framework. Another deal was signed to construct a 100-megawatt solar power plant worth \$40 million by an Iranian energy developer.

During his visit to Afghanistan, Qiyafeh met the country's Minister of Mines and Petroleum, Hedayatullah Badri, where both sides discussed a proposal to establish a joint processing center at the border to refine Afghan minerals using Iranian technology and expertise.

The ICCIMA deputy head said Afghanistan's vast mineral reserves require high-level exploration and modern processing capabilities to unlock value.

He said Iranian companies possess long-standing industrial expertise, particularly in steel and mining technologies, which could be transferred to Afghan partners.

How the West has thrown Ukraine under the bus

Trump's 28-point plan pressures Zelenskyy to give up territory, shrink military, and abandon NATO hopes—or risk losing U.S. support

By Shahrokh Saei

TEHRAN – Nearly 1,370 days into the Russia–Ukraine war, President Donald Trump's 28-point peace plan has laid bare the contradictions of Western policy. For years, the United States and Europe encouraged Ukraine to confront Russia, promising NATO membership and protection. Now, as the war drags on, those same powers step back, leaving Ukraine to face the consequences of a fire lit by the West itself.

Trump's proposal, reported by multiple outlets, is striking because it mirrors Russia's long-standing demands:

Territorial recognition: Crimea, Luhansk, and Donetsk would be formally acknowledged as Russian. Kherson and Zaporizhzhia would be frozen along the current line of contact, effectively locking in Moscow's control.

Military limits: Ukraine's army would be reduced to 600,000 soldiers, far fewer than its current strength. NATO would pledge not to expand into Ukraine, and no NATO troops would be stationed there.

Diplomatic reintegration: Russia would be welcomed back into the G8, sanctions lifted, and \$100 billion in frozen Russian assets directed toward rebuilding Ukraine. Another portion would be invested in a joint US–Russia fund to strengthen ties.

Security guarantees: Ukraine would receive vague promises of protection, but the real military presence would be European jets stationed in Poland, not in Ukraine itself.

Social measures: Ukraine would hold elections within 100 days, and both sides would introduce educational programs aimed at promoting tolerance and reducing prejudice.

Trump's proposal is a settlement that reflects demands Moscow has been making since the early stages of the conflict — demands that go back to 2014 with the annexation of Crimea and have remained consistent ever since.

What is new is that these demands are now being placed before President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, who must decide whether to accept them under pressure from Washington.

Putin's calculated welcome

President Vladimir Putin welcomed the proposal, calling it “a modernized version” that could form the basis of peace. He noted that Ukraine still resists, but argued that Kyiv and its European allies are clinging to illusions of defeating Russia on the battlefield.

Putin's envoy Kirill Dmitriev re-



portedly spent several days negotiating with US officials, showing Russia's willingness to engage seriously. The Kremlin's reaction was measured but clear: Russia sees the plan as validation of its long-standing demands. For Moscow, this is not a concession but confirmation that its patience and persistence have paid off.

Zelenskyy's tightrope

President Zelenskyy appears to have been caught between a rock and a hard place. He insists that any peace must be “dignified” and respect sovereignty. Yet he admits the pressure from Washington is immense. In his words, Ukraine risks either “losing its dignity or losing a key partner.”

Trump has demanded an answer within a week. Some Ukrainian officials have denounced the plan as “capitulation” and “the end of Ukraine as an independent country.” But Zelenskyy knows that rejecting the plan could mean losing American support, while accepting it would mean surrendering territory and abandoning the dream of NATO membership.

Even as Zelenskyy struggles abroad, a domestic crisis has erupted at home.

Corruption scandal

Ukraine has been rocked by its biggest corruption scandal under Zelenskyy. Investigators have uncovered bags of cash hidden in Kyiv apartments, a golden toilet installed in one residence, and recordings of massive kickbacks tied to government-backed energy projects. The fallout forced the resignations of Justice Minister German Galushchenko and Energy Minister Svitlana Hrynychuk, while sanctions were imposed on Timur Mindich, a close associate accused of laundering \$100 million. Public anger is rising, with headlines accusing figures close to the presidency of stealing from the country during wartime. Critics argue Zelenskyy's response has been slow and weak, raising fears of political instability. The twin pressures of diplomacy abroad and corruption within his own administration now

threaten Zelenskyy's credibility.

Europe's hollow support

European leaders were caught off guard by Washington's initiative. Germany's Friedrich Merz, France's Emmanuel Macron, and Britain's Keir Starmer quickly assured Zelenskyy of their “unchanged and full support.” They welcomed US efforts but stressed that Ukraine's armed forces must remain capable of defending sovereignty.

Their words were carefully chosen. Europe cannot afford to openly challenge Washington, yet it also cannot ignore the risk that Trump's plan undermines Ukraine's independence. This cautious diplomacy reveals Europe's weakness: it follows the US lead, even when that means endorsing a plan that validates Russia's gains.

Behind the rhetoric lies impotence. Europe has neither the military strength nor the political unity to shape outcomes independently. Its role has been reduced to applauding American initiatives, even when those initiatives contradict Europe's own stated principles.

Roots of the fire: Bucharest 2008

The war did not begin in 2022. Its roots stretch back much further, to the NATO summit in Bucharest in April 2008. At that meeting, Western leaders issued a declaration that Ukraine and Georgia “will become members of NATO.” For Moscow, this was a red line drawn across its security map.

Russia had long warned that NATO's expansion toward its borders would be unacceptable. President Putin, who had attended the summit in person, delivered a stark message to allied leaders: admitting Ukraine and Georgia, he argued, would be a “huge strategic mistake” that would destabilize the region. His intervention underscored Russia's determination to resist what it saw as encirclement.

The United States, under President George W. Bush, pressed hard for immediate steps toward membership through a Membership Action Plan (MAP). Washington

believed that anchoring Ukraine and Georgia firmly in NATO would consolidate democratic reforms and deter what he called Russian “aggression.”

Yet Germany and France resisted, fearing that such a move would provoke Moscow and fracture European stability. Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany and President Nicolas Sarkozy of France argued that neither Ukraine nor Georgia was ready for NATO integration, citing internal political fragility and unresolved territorial disputes.

The outcome was a compromise that satisfied no one: NATO promised eventual membership but offered no timeline, no roadmap, and crucially, no security guarantees. This halfway measure created what many analysts later called the “worst of both worlds” — raising expectations in Kyiv and Tbilisi while leaving them exposed to Russian pressure.

In the years that followed, the consequences of Bucharest became clear. Georgia faced war with Russia just months later in August 2008, when Russian forces intervened in South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Ukraine, meanwhile, remained in limbo — promised eventual NATO membership but denied real protection. This vulnerability paved the way for Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 and culminated in the full-scale war of 2022.

Many historians and strategists now view the Bucharest summit as a turning point. By offering Ukraine and Georgia a distant promise without immediate safeguards, NATO inadvertently created a dangerous vacuum. It signaled commitment without capacity, leaving both countries in a precarious position — a gap between words and deeds that helped set the stage for the current war.

Promises without protection

Ukraine's predicament today is the direct result of misplaced trust in the West. The US and Europe encouraged Kyiv to fight, but now they negotiate terms that validate Russia's gains. What is called a “peace plan” is really a settlement of Ukraine's fate, decided by Washington and Moscow, with Europe trailing behind.

The West lit the fire in Bucharest in 2008, fanned the flames in Crimea in 2014, and left Ukraine to burn in 2022. Today, Ukraine pays the price for Western hubris and hypocrisy. Trump's plan only makes clear what has been true all along: the West pushed Ukraine into confrontation, but when the war dragged on, it threw Ukraine under the bus.



central objective.

In essence, the expanded Israeli regime occupation in southern Syria is not merely a breach of sovereignty; it is part of a broader campaign to command the region's most valuable natural resource.

By tightening its grip over southern Syria's water resources, the regime weakens the Arab nation's collective capacity, transforms water into a tool of strategic pressure, and positions itself to dictate the hydrological future of the Levant.

Epstein case and Israel's influence on US

TEHRAN – Jeffrey Epstein, 66, was an American financier and convicted sex offender who was accused of serial sex trafficking of women and girls.

Through his successful financial career, Epstein became a multimillionaire and developed a social circle that included extremely wealthy individuals, prominent politicians, and even royalty.

While jailed and awaiting a federal sex-trafficking trial, Epstein allegedly killed himself by hanging on August 10, 2019.

Epstein had already been convicted by a Florida state court of soliciting prostitution from a minor, serving 13 months in 2008 in a sentence widely denounced as extremely lenient.

Writing an article on Middle East Eye, Soumaya Ghannoushi, a British Tunisian writer and expert, says the Epstein leaks show how a foreign influence network – AIPAC – governs the United States, the world's most powerful nation, through seduction, dependence and capture.

In the article headlined “Epstein saga exposes Israel's iron grip on U.S. power”, Ghannoushi notes the Epstein leaks “expose not a single predator, but a system built on moral decay, foreign influence, intelligence engineering and elite complicity.”

She says American “foreign policy remains bent to Israeli priorities.”

The following is the text of the article:

The Epstein leaks have reopened a door many in Washington hoped would remain sealed. Not the door of gossip – though the media is content to drown the public in that – but the door that leads into the machinery of American power.

These leaks do not merely reveal the fall of disgraced financier Jeffrey Epstein. They expose an unholy triangle of money, politics and sex, whose central thread leads to a foreign influence network that has learned to govern the world's most powerful nation through seduction, dependence and capture.

This is not a conspiracy theory. It is not an antisemitic delusion. It is what the documents show, and what Washington's behavior confirms. And it is what the Epstein files illuminate with violent clarity.

They show, firstly, that Epstein was never simply a brilliant fraud who climbed from obscure math teacher to wealthy elite. He was a facade – the social face of an intelligence apparatus designed to corrupt, compromise and control.

(See full text at tehrantimes.com)

Lebanon's independence discourse: Between symbolism and strategic realities

From page 1 ► In practice, Hezbollah alone demonstrates a pragmatic acknowledgment of shifting regional dynamics.

The Resistance continuously recalibrates strategies, monitors evolving threats, and adjusts its posture to preserve Lebanon's security. It is a perspective thoroughly documented in its recent Open Book.

Moreover, the speech emphasizes negotiations as primary tool for addressing external threats. Yet, historical experience repeatedly demonstrates the limits of such approaches.

From the Oslo Accords to the Beirut Initiative, the current ceasefire arrangements, and every so-called “peace agreement” has failed to prevent Israeli expansionism, territorial violations, or threats to Lebanese civilians.

The Israeli enemy keeps strategic areas of Lebanon under its occupation, reinforces settlements, and maintains military positions that jeopardize national sovereignty.

Civilians remain under persistent threat, and communities, particularly in border regions and the Bekaa Valley, are subject to harassment and displacement by both external actors and extremist proxies.

The speech fails to recognize these realities or honor the sacrifices of those Lebanese citizens forced to endure occupation and incursions.

The address also invoked the Gaza agreement as a model for conflict resolution. Yet, it overlooks the daily violations and human cost in Gaza, systematic killings, restrictions on Palestinian identity, and the looming threat of renewed hostilities.

By portraying such agreements as ideal models, Aoun's speech overlooks the core lesson highlighted in Hezbollah's Open Book: only agreements anchored in enforceable deterrent

power can truly safeguard sovereignty and protect civilians.

Similarly, Aoun praises engagement with the Syrian state as constructive. In reality, this overlooks the persistent threat posed by al-Julani's extremist factions, which continue to terrorize and forcibly displace dozens of families from their homes and lands on the eastern borders.

Under these circumstances, such engagements cannot strengthen Lebanese sovereignty; instead, they expose the state's vulnerability to external manipulation and underscore the ongoing human cost borne by ordinary citizens.

Likewise, references to economic recovery — often attributed to Banque du Liban policies — fail to acknowledge that many measures disproportionately target communities supporting Resistance, while obstructing post-conflict reconstruction.

Diplomatic gestures, such as high-profile visits from regional leaders like bin Salman, was presented by the President as an achievement to be celebrated.

Yet, in reality, this visit serves primarily to bolster Saudi influence and pursue transactional interests, such as arms deals or potential normalization with Israel rather than producing any genuine gain for Lebanon, or the Arab nation's sovereignty.

Structurally, the President's speech oscillated between symbolism and optimism but rarely bridged the gap to actionable policy. Emotional rhetoric, while unifying, cannot restore displaced populations, rebuild infrastructure, or secure the nation.

The enduring work of armed Resistance, rooted in strategic foresight and operational preparedness, remains the real guarantor of Lebanon's security and autonomy.

“This G20 is not about the US”: Ramaphosa signals shift from American dominance

South Africa's President Cyril Ramaphosa delivered a pointed message during Africa's first G20 summit, declaring: “This G20 is not about the US. It's about all the members.” His remark came as leaders adopted a declaration on climate change, renewable energy, and debt relief — despite U.S. opposition and boycott.

Washington denounced the text as “shameful” for recognizing the scientific consensus on global warming and attempted to block references to climate action. South Africa rejected America's effort to downgrade the handover by sending a junior diplomat, calling it a breach of protocol.

Ramaphosa emphasized “overwhelming consensus” among members, underscoring Africa's determination to lead. The adoption of the declaration without U.S. input highlighted Pretoria's defiance and the global community's willing-



ness to move forward without Washington.

By insisting the summit was not about the United States, Ramaphosa's words underscored a broader snub: America's obstructionism was sidelined, and its absence became symbolic of declining influence in shaping solutions to urgent global crises.

3.5 million religious tourists visited Iran last year



TEHRAN – Tourism Minister Reza Salehi-Amiri has said that 3.5 million religious tourists from Iraq, the Persian Gulf region, Central Asia, and the Caucasus traveled to Iran during the past Persian year (1403), which ended on March 20, 2025.

According to data compiled by the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts, Iran registered 7.3 million foreign tourist arrivals in 1403. The ministry said the figures follow internationally recognized tourism definitions, counting anyone who spends at least one night in Iran as a traveler, including Iranian expatriates and foreign nationals.

The ministry also reported record domestic travel during the two-week Nowruz holidays of 1404, with more than 36 million trips documented. It said the data was collected through mobile phone tracking to determine travelers' final destinations, reducing errors and duplicate counts.

Earlier this year, Salehi-Amiri has underlined that the ministry's data-gathering methods are based on scientific and verifiable sources. "We speak the language of statistics, and our data is rooted in reliable and verifiable sources," he said. He added that the ministry will hold a technical meeting with private-sector representatives to review the figures further.

Previously published data showed 6.38 million foreign arrivals in 1402 and 4.23 mil-

lion in 1401.

According to the minister, some 4.5 million tourists visited the Islamic Republic during the first half of the current Iranian year (March–September 2025). Speaking to reporters on the sidelines of a Cabinet meeting, he said tourism flows in October and November had returned to conditions seen before the 12-day Israeli war, according to the Mehr news agency.

He said he expected an increase in tourist numbers by the end of the year compared with 1403.

Salehi-Amiri said developing health tourism is a priority for the ministry. "A comprehensive medical tourism system has been designed in collaboration with the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Labor, the Social Security Organization, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and other relevant agencies, which will be unveiled soon," he said.

He said Iran currently receives more than one million health tourists each year and aims to double that number and generate €6 billion by the end of the Seventh National Development Plan.

Iran seeks to capitalize on its tourism assets, including bazaars, museums, mosques, bridges, bathhouses, madrasas, mausoleums, churches, towers, and mansions, 29 of which are listed as UNESCO World Heritage sites.

Isfahan firms to promote Iran's heritage at Madrid's Fitur fair

TEHRAN—Five travel agencies from Isfahan province have been selected to participate in the Iranian pavilion at the Madrid International Fitur 2026 exhibition to introduce the city's cultural and historical capacities to the global tourists, said Amir Karamzadeh, tourism chief of the province.

He told ISNA that FITUR, or the International Tourism Trade Fair, which is held every year in Madrid, is the second largest tourism market in the world after ITB Berlin.

This event provides a unique platform for introducing the tourism, cultural and historical capacities of the countries, establishing professional interactions with international activists, and developing business and investment cooperation in the field of tourism, he said.

Karamzadeh emphasized that active presence in Fitur not only enables the development of the foreign tourist market, but also provides the basis for presenting a true and positive image of Iran to the global audience.

He added that participating in Fitur expo is a golden opportunity to develop the tourism market. For this event, investment packages have been prepared in Arabic and English, and special content has been produced in Spanish to be presented at the Iranian pavilion, he said. These measures will allow the private sector to introduce its capabilities and services internationally and establish direct contact with foreign agencies, he pointed out.

The tourism chief stated that no major challenges have been observed in the path of introducing Isfahan's cultural heritage and tourism attractions. Minister of Cultural Heritage and Isfahan Governor-General have full support for these activities, he added.

Karamzadeh stated: "The biggest challenge we may face is the issue of Iranophobia, but with a smart presence, effective advertising, and the experience of foreign tourists, we are trying to gradually resolve this issue and present the true image of Iran to international audiences."

this historical monument every year."

Shirzad continued that, in addition to Bastam Castle, tourists also visited other natural and historical attractions around the castle, such as the Aghchai River, the Kasian Bridge, the Churs Mosque, the Tekyeh of Hazrat Abolfazl (AS), and the Beig Javan Bath.

He noted that private investors have begun constructing an ecotourism residence in Churs village and a traditional restaurant in Bastam village, aiming to encourage longer stays by tourists in this historical location and provide them with necessary amenities.

Shirzad added that 300 billion rials (\$300,000) is required for the construction of the ecotourism residence in Churs village and 500 billion rials (\$500,000) for launching a traditional restaurant in Bastam village.

He also noted that Omid Entrepreneurship Bank has allocated 40 billion rials (\$40,000) for the traditional restaurant of Bastam village and 40 billion rials (\$40,000) for the ecotourism residence of Churs village.

He noted that construction of the specialized archaeological museum at Bastam Castle, which began in previous years, has seen a physical progress

South Korean ambassador says southeast Iran visit enriched his heritage insight

TEHRAN – The South Korean ambassador to Iran has said his recent personal visit to south-eastern Iran, including a tour of the regional museum in Zahedan, gave him a deeper insight into the area's cultural legacy and its connections to ancient Iranian traditions.

Referring to the visit, Ambassador Kim Junpyo wrote that he was grateful for the hospitality and guidance he received at the museum, calling the visit an impactful experience during his trip to the province, ISNA reported on Saturday.

He said he had been eager to visit the region because of its association with Rostam, the central hero of the Shahnameh, adding that Sistan is traditionally considered the birthplace of the legendary figure.

Kim said a prominent statue of Rostam in the museum lobby was his first impression of the site. He wrote that the artworks related to the Shahnameh demonstrated that locals regard Rostam not only as a mythological figure but as a symbol of regional identity and pride.

The ambassador also recounted a visit later that evening to a separate historic venue, where he received a detailed explanation of the "Seven Labors of Rostam" (The Tale of the Haft Khan) from a local historian. He said the narration helped him understand the moral themes, human challenges and symbolic meanings embedded in the epic.

Kim wrote that the stories highlighted qualities such as courage, wisdom, patience and responsibility, which he said continue to resonate among residents of the region.

He said the museum's section on Shahr-e Sukhteh, a UNESCO World Heritage site, was another significant part of his visit. He



noted that viewing original artefacts clarified the site's role as a major center of the ancient Helmand civilization from 3200 to 1800 BCE, connected to cultures in Mesopotamia, the Indus Valley and Central Asia.

Among the artefacts, Kim cited an artificial eye dating to around 2800 BC and the so-called "animated goat cup," often described as an early example of animation when rotated. He said the pieces reflected the technical skill and creativity of ancient Iranian societies.

He also noted imported materials from the Indus Valley, Afghanistan and Turkmenistan, indicating long-distance trade networks. A stone hand mill on display reminded him of similar traditional tools in Korea, a resemblance he said underscored shared aspects of daily life between the two cultures.

Kim wrote that the museum visit offered insight into the living memory of ancient civilizations, the identity of Sistan-Baluchestan's people and Iran's narrative traditions.

He expressed hope that Republic of Korea and Islamic Republic of Iran would expand cultural and historical cooperation, adding that the Southeast Regional Museum would continue to serve as

a meaningful cultural bridge.

The following are excerpts from the ambassador's written reflections on the trip:

When I entered the museum, the first thing that caught my attention was the striking statue of Rostam in the main lobby. His powerful stature and symbolic presence seemed to embody the spirit and cultural identity of Sistan and Baluchestan. Throughout the visit, I encountered many artefacts related to Rostam and the Shahnameh, and I clearly understood that the people of this region regard Rostam not only as a mythological hero but also as a symbol of local identity and pride.

That same night, at another historical site, I had a special opportunity to hear a detailed explanation from a local historian about the Seven Labours of Rostam. If what I observed in the museum was the starting point of my understanding of Rostam's character, the historian's engaging narration gave me the chance to grasp this charming epic on a deeper level. He beautifully explained not only Rostam's battles but also the moral lessons, human challenges and symbolic meanings behind each labour. His reflections on Rostam's virtues—such as courage, wisdom, patience and responsibility—and on how

these valued qualities continue to resonate in the character of local people were deeply impressive. This reminded me that Rostam is not merely a mythological figure but a lasting cultural pillar of Iranian heritage.

After passing through the section filled with the spirit of the Shahnameh and Rostam, we reached the "Shahr-e Sukhteh" section of the museum, which became another highlight of my visit.

Although I knew that Shahr-e Sukhteh was inscribed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2014, seeing the collection of actual surviving artefacts made it clear to me that this ancient settlement was not simply a local site, but truly an early centre of human civilization and long-distance cultural exchange.

I learned that Shahr-e Sukhteh, the principal center of the Helmand Civilization, thrived between 3200 and 1800 BC and maintained an active network with the civilizations of Mesopotamia, the Indus Valley and Central Asia. The artefacts displayed in the museum show that ancient eastern Iran possessed an independent and sophisticated civilization—something often overshadowed by the better-known cultures of Elam or Susa in western Iran.

The name "Shahr-e Sukhteh" comes from evidence of multiple widespread fires. Whether these fires were caused by warfare, natural disasters, or the gradual abandonment of the city remains a topic of scholarly debate, adding further intrigue to the visit.

One of the most astonishing artefacts was an artificial eye dating to around 2800 BC. Made from natural bitumen and delicate gold threads, it demonstrates the advanced medical and ornamental technology of the people of that era.

Minister emphasizes restoration of UNESCO-registered Soltaniyeh Dome

TEHRAN—Minister of Cultural Heritage Seyyed Reza Salehi-Amiri has emphasized restoration of the UNESCO-registered Soltaniyeh Dome in Zanjan during his visit to this province.

He announced the government's serious planning to strengthen scientific, research, and restoration activities for this world-class monument and said that preservation of the Soltaniyeh Dome is a national and historical responsibility, IRIB reported.

Salehi-Amiri also said: "An amount of 300 billion rials (\$300,000) was approved for restoration of Soltaniyeh Dome, and we are committed to spending this credit in full on this building at the earliest opportunity. Of course, the restoration needs of this complex are much more extensive than this amount, but the Government and Governor-General's Office consider it their duty to use all their power to protect, restore, and revive this enduring heritage."

Stressing the need to strengthen the province's role in the field of specialized studies, he added that the Cultural Heritage Ministry's Research Institute should undertake research and restoration activities with the province's management and scientific capacities, and the ministry will support this

process with all its might.

He called Soltaniyeh Dome 'a shining jewel in Iranian history and identity' and stated: "Be assured that this huge dome will continue to shine in Iran and inhabitants of the world will be proud of it."

Soltaniyeh Dome is one of the architectural masterpieces of the Islamic era in Iran, located in Soltaniyeh county, Zanjan province. This building was built as the tomb of Oljaytu, one of the Ilkhanid kings, in the early 14th century CE. This dome is considered one of the most important brick domes in the world due to its unique design and large dimensions. The height of this dome reaches about 48 meters and with its beautiful decorations and colorful tiling, it has given this historical monument a special look.

Also, during his visit to Katala-Khor Cave, the minister called this natural heritage as a symbol of the beauties of creation.

Emphasizing the need to develop infrastructure and attract investment, he announced that the ministry's definitive policy is to directly transfer the benefits of tourism in this region to the people of Garmab and the surrounding villages.

Referring to the unique capacities of the

cave, he said: "We were able to visit this beautiful and amazing cave together with the provincial officials. I invite the dear people of Iran to experience firsthand this cave at least once; because the unique manifestations of nature and the most beautiful landscapes of creation can be seen in this place."

Salehi-Amiri emphasized that the development of the Katala-Khor cave is a serious demand of local people and managers, adding: "This cave must be developed, its new capacities identified, and the possibility of its wider exploitation provided to tourists from all over the country. The ministry considers itself obliged to support this process with all its might."

He continued by pointing out the need to improve access routes and said that completing the road leading to the cave is one of the serious prerequisites for developing tourism in Garmab. "I will follow up on this issue with the relevant minister and at national level."

He also emphasized the need to provide conditions for presence of investors in developing the cave's tourism facilities, adding that creating welfare infrastructure and facilitating the presence of tourists is being pursued seriously.

The ancient city, situated in north-central Iran near the Alborz Mountains, is known for monuments clustered around the tomb of Bayazid al-Bastami, a poet and mystic who died in 874 CE.

The town contains a mausoleum, a 12th-century minaret and mosque wall, a 1313 portal, and a 15th-century college. Nearby ruins include a mosque and cloister with stucco work.

Much of Bastam's historic architecture was built under the Mongol rulers Mahmud Ghazan (r. 1295–1304) and Oljaytu, also known as Mohammad-e Khodabandeh (r.1304–1316).

Bastam Castle, a lesser-known destination for domestic and foreign tourists

TEHRAN— Bastam Castle, in the north-central Semnan Province, is a lesser-known destination for both domestic and foreign tourists.

Some 37,000 tourists have visited the historical castle since the beginning of the current calendar year (March 20), IRNA quoted Gholam Shirzad, the head of Bastam Castle National Base, as saying on Saturday.

He stated that most foreign tourists were from Austria, Sweden, and Germany, adding that, given that German and Austrian archaeologists have more knowledge of this historical monument, their experts and specialists visit

of 75 percent and requires 20 billion rials (\$20,000) of credit to complete.

Shirzad continued that a private investor is developing the Bastam tourism camp site, adding that the site will include sanitary facilities, parking spaces, residential units, a restaurant, and various other facilities to provide services to the tourists.

The inscription discovered from this castle, written in the Urartian language, is kept at the National Museum of Iran for study and use by researchers.

This historical monument was reg-

istered on the National Heritage List in 1975.

Bastam, a tourism destination near Shahrud, has recently been added to Iran's list of historical cities during the second conference of Iran's historical cities held in Yazd.

The conference brought together representatives from 43 cities to discuss strategies for preserving and promoting urban heritage, according to organizers.

Bastam is one of 54 cities now registered as historical cities in Iran, officials said at the event.

DOE calls for implementing regional action plan to save Caspian Sea

TEHRAN – Sediqeh Torabi, an official with the Department of Environment (DOE), has called for implementing a regional action plan drafted by five littoral states for the conservation of the Caspian Sea.

“It’s not just a scientific statistic, but a real threat to the economy, ecosystem, and social security of coastal residents,” IRNA quoted Torabi as saying.

The official made the remarks on Monday, November 17, while addressing a high-level panel discussion on the critical decline of the Caspian Sea. The panel was held on the sidelines of the 2025 United Nations Climate Change Conference, known as COP30, which was held in Belém, Brazil, from November 6 to 21.

“No single coastal country will be able to manage the consequences of the crisis; a collective response is what is needed,” she noted.

The official also proposed the establishment of a permanent joint scientific institution for precise monitoring, modeling, and forecasting of fluctuations in the sea’s water level.

Integrated watershed management, fair water management of the rivers flowing into the Caspian Sea, and the implementation of collaborative projects to restore coastal wetlands and create alternative habitats for endangered species



were among other issues raised by the official.

The high-level event, ‘Caspian Sea Level Decline: Joint Efforts Toward Preservation and Resilience’, was organized by the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Tehran Convention Secretariat and concluded with the adoption of a Declaration, signaling a strengthened regional commitment to collaborative action.

In addition to Torabi, high-level representatives from four other Caspian littoral states, as well as the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP), UN-Habitat, and World Meteorological Organization (WMO), delivered key speeches.

It successfully fostered crucial dialogue among the Caspian littoral states and international partners.

The discussion underscored the urgency of addressing the trans-boundary environmental challenge and charted a course for future co-operation.

Climate action impossible without financing

On November 18, Torabi also delivered a speech at a plenary session, emphasizing the need for sufficient and predictable funding for implementing climate actions by developing countries.

Referring to the intensifying impacts of climate change in one of the world’s driest and most sensitive regions, Torabi said that frequent droughts, water scarcity, extreme heat, forest fires, as well as sand and dust storms have adversely affected Iran.

The official noted that Iran cannot

support raised ambition in emissions reductions or new targets unless financing, technology transfer, and capacity-building for developing countries are fully and reliably provided. She said that ambition must be matched by the means of implementation.

Adaptation is a vital priority for Iran and other developing countries, she said, highlighting the need to strengthen early warning systems, protect water resources, and support vulnerable communities.

The indicators of the global adaptation target should be designed in a way that does not impose an additional reporting burden on developing countries, she stressed.

Referring to the Common But Differentiated Responsibilities and Respected Capabilities (CBDR-RC) principle, Torabi called unilateral coercive measures the main obstacle in advancing the climate action agenda, warning that these measures hinder developing countries’ access to financial resources, low-carbon technologies, and international co-operation.

The official went on to announce the country’s readiness for constructive cooperation to achieve a balanced, fair, and credible outcome, which will fairly promote adaptation, emission reduction, technology transfer, capacity building, and prevent politicization of negotiations.

Iran explores potentials to boost tech ties with Algeria, Kenya

TEHRAN – The Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Minister, Sattar Hashemi, has held separate meetings with his Algerian and Kenyan counterparts, discussing ways to develop markets and enhance synergy to promote collaboration on smart government, space industry, digital economy, and cybersecurity.

The officials met on the sidelines of the World Telecommunication Development Conference 2025 (WTDC-25), being held from November 17 to 28 in Baku, Azerbaijan, ISNA reported.

During the meeting with the Algerian Minister of Post and Telecommunications, Sid Ali Zerrouki, the two sides highlighted fostering cooperation in fields like smart government, digital economy, space industry, cyber security, and regional connectivity, as well as improving communication infrastructures.

Referring to the 2023 memorandum of understanding signed between Algeria and Iran’s nano-technology park, Zerrouki called for the expansion of joint efforts in artificial intelligence, space and cyber security, and undersea cables.

For his part, Hashemi elaborated on the country’s priorities in digital transformation, saying that Iran is planning to raise the share of the digital economy to 10 percent of gross domestic product (GDP), and develop a smart government ecosystem, as one of its main pillars.

Referring to Iran’s reliable progress in the space industry, the official said the two countries can also expand cooperation in designing satellites, ground stations, and space-based services.

The ICT minister went on to propose implementing cooperation in Fiber to the Home (FTTH), fixed access network, modern platforms, and infrastructures. He also invited Zerrouki to pay a visit to Iran to become more familiar with the ca-

pabilities of Iranian companies, smart government projects, and communication infrastructures.

Holding a meeting with William Kabogo Gita, the Kenyan Cabinet Secretary for Information, Communications, and the Digital Economy, the talks focused on sharing policymaking experiences and developing joint economic projects.

Gitau stressed the need for promoting cybersecurity, data networks, platform regulations, and communication crisis management. He called for developing technical interaction between experts of the two countries in the digital economy and data centers.

For his part, Hashemi voiced Iran’s readiness for cooperation in fields of Internet governance, network resilience, countering hybrid threats, and cybersecurity.

Digital economy growth in Africa provides a strategic opportunity for Iranian companies and innovative Kenyan centers to conduct collaborative projects, Hashemi said.

He offered to share expertise and knowledge through organizing joint educational courses and specialized meetings.

Expanding technological diplomacy

An Iranian delegation led by Hashemi is participating in the WTDC-25, being held under the theme ‘Universal, meaningful, and affordable connectivity for an inclusive and sustainable digital future’.

On the sidelines of the conference, Hashemi is scheduled to hold meetings with his counterparts and many other high-level delegates to share expertise and foster technological collaborations in different fields like fiber optic networks, G5 technologies, and AI.

Hashemi met Doreen Bogdan-Martin, the Secretary-General of the International Telecommu-

nication Union (ITU), on the sidelines of WTDC-25.

The officials discussed ways to promote collaborations in different fields, including artificial intelligence (AI), communication infrastructure, digital multilateralism, and communication security.

During the meeting, Hashemi expounded on the country’s achievements in information technology, AI, and communication. Highlighting the role of ITU as the primary platform for global coordination, he said that fostering multilateralism and promoting cooperation with specialized institutions are among Iran’s priorities in its digital foreign policy.

Bogdan-Martin, for her part, lauded Iran’s active participation in the meetings, committees, and programs of ITU, saying that Iran is one of the influential members in policymaking and technical discussions.

Iranian experts’ regular presence and the quality of their participation in meetings play a crucial role in pursuing the goals of ITU, she noted.

She voiced the Union’s readiness for the expansion of ties in technical skills development, human resource empowerment, and knowledge exchange in emerging technologies through joint efforts.

Referring to Iran’s high capacities in AI, communication infrastructures, and digital service development, Bogdan-Martin said Iran can play a more prominent role in developing new standards and international programs.

Moreover, she welcomed the invitation of the ICT minister to visit Iran, underlining that cooperation between Iran and the Union can set a role model for the sustainable development of communications in the region and the expansion of digital inclusion in countries; it will enhance networks’ resilience and smart economy.

National HIV testing campaign underway

TEHRAN – A national HIV testing campaign, organized by the health ministry, is being held for a month, starting from November 11, across the country.

Titled ‘I will take HIV test, too’, the campaign aims to increase HIV testing uptake in key populations through increasing the capacity of testing centers, as well as reducing stigma and expanding universal access to HIV education and diagnosis, the health ministry reported.

Human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) is a virus that attacks the body’s immune system. Acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) occurs at the most advanced stage of infection.

HIV targets the body’s white blood cells, weakening the immune system. This makes it easier to get sick with diseases like tuberculosis, infections, and some cancers.

According to the latest report, a total of 41,059 individuals are infected with HIV in the country, of which 25,870 have been definitively registered. The gap indicates that some of the infected people have not yet been identified, and there is a need for active HIV detection in the country, Mehr news agency reported.

By age group, in the Iranian year 1403 (March 2024 – March 2025), people aged 20 – 45 accounted for 73 percent of the diagnosed cases. Those people aged 45 and above, as well as those under 20, represented 24 percent and 3 percent, respectively.

The commemoration of World AIDS Day takes place on December first under the theme ‘Overcoming disruption, transforming the AIDS response’, calling for sustained political leadership, international cooperation, and human-rights-centred approaches to end AIDS by 2030.



After decades of progress, the HIV response stands at a crossroads. Life-saving services are being disrupted, and many communities face heightened risks and vulnerabilities. Yet amid these challenges, hope endures in the determination, resilience, and innovation of communities that strive to end AIDS.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), HIV remains a major global public health issue, having claimed an estimated 44.1 million lives to date. Transmission is ongoing in all countries globally.

An estimated 40.8 million people were living with HIV at the end of 2024, 65 percent of whom are in the WHO African Region.

In 2024, an estimated 630,000 people died from HIV-related causes, and an estimated 1.3 million people acquired HIV.

There is no cure for HIV infection. However, with access to effective HIV prevention, diagnosis, treatment, and care, including for opportunistic infections, HIV infection has become a manageable chronic health condition, enabling people living with HIV to lead long and healthy lives.

In 2024, of all people living with HIV, 87 percent knew their status, 77 percent were receiving antiretroviral therapy, and 73 percent had suppressed viral loads.

Tehran, Soul to beef up sci-tech co-op



TEHRAN – Farhad Yazdandoost, an official with the Ministry of Science, Research and Technology, and Kim Junpyo, South Korea’s ambassador to Iran, have discussed ways to promote scientific and technological collaborations between the two countries.

During a meeting held on Saturday, the two sides agreed to expand ties in key sectors, including the establishment of a digital museum of science and technology in cooperation with Korea Advanced Institute of Science & Tech-

nology (KAIST), IRNA reported.

The officials also highlighted the need to launch Persian and Korean language and literature chairs in top universities in each country, as seen at Seoul National University and Hankuk University of Foreign Studies in South Korea, and Shiraz University and Isfahan University in Iran.

Exchanging professors and students, as well as granting annual scholarships to post-graduate students, were among other measures to boost scientific interactions.

The two sides have also agreed to develop a strategic plan in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) to train specialized human resources to meet the needs of the labor market.

The two sides provided a draft of a memorandum of understanding to be signed in the near future.

ENGLISH IN USE

LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

Tehran to host INOTEX 2020 in June

The 9th International Innovation and Technology Exhibition (INOTEX 2020) will be held at Tehran Permanent International Fairground on June 7-10.

It is expected that more than 18,000 people will attend the event which is aimed to attract investment for startups and introduce investment opportunities to them.

Over 500 companies, startups, and investors will set up booths at the exhibition representing their latest achievements, with more than 600 B2B sessions and 20 side events to be held during the three-day event.

INOTEX is a platform for innovation and technology, which seeks to introduce latest technologies to large and medium-sized industries and also introduces opportunities to invest in technological projects or startups.

تهران میزبان نمایشگاه اینوتکس ۲۰۲۰ در خرداد

نهمین نمایشگاه بین المللی نوآوری و فناوری (اینوتکس ۲۰۲۰) با شعار «اکوسیستم نوآوری و فناوری زیر یک سقف» ۱۸ تا ۲۱ خرداد ماه سال ۹۹ در محل دائمی نمایشگاه‌های بین‌المللی تهران برگزار می‌شود. به گزارش ایرنا، نمایشگاه اینوتکس با هدف اصلی «جذب سرمایه برای استارت‌آپ‌ها و شرکت‌ها و نیز معرفی فرصت‌های نوین سرمایه‌گذاری» برگزار می‌شود.

پیش‌بینی می‌شود بیش از ۱۸ هزار نفر از این نمایشگاه بازدید خواهند کرد. بیش از ۵۰۰ شرکت، استارت‌آپ، و سرمایه‌گذار در این نمایشگاه غرفه خواهند داشت و بیش از ۶۰۰ جلسه B2B و بیش از ۲۰ رویداد جانبی برگزار خواهد شد.



Torbat-e Heydarieh farmers harvesting saffron

Farmers in Torbat-e Heydarieh County, northeastern Khorasan Razavi Province, are harvesting saffron, a vital source of income in the region.

Iran exported more than 99.5 tons of saffron, valued at over \$94 million, in the first half of the current Iranian year (March 21–September 22), mainly to the United Arab Emirates, Spain, China, Afghanistan, India, Germany, and the United Kingdom.



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NOVEMBER 23, 2025

GUIDE TO SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

The least you may do for God is, not to resort to sin through His blessings.
Imam Ali (AS)

Prayer Times > Noon:11:50 Evening: 17:13 Dawn: 5:20 (tomorrow) Sunrise: 6:48 (tomorrow)

Iranian movie “Ropewalker Memories” wins at Rojava International Film Festival

TEHRAN – The Iranian film “Ropewalker Memories” directed by Hamed Rajabi won an award at the 5th Rojava International Film Festival, which was held from November 13 to 20 in Qamishlo, Syria.

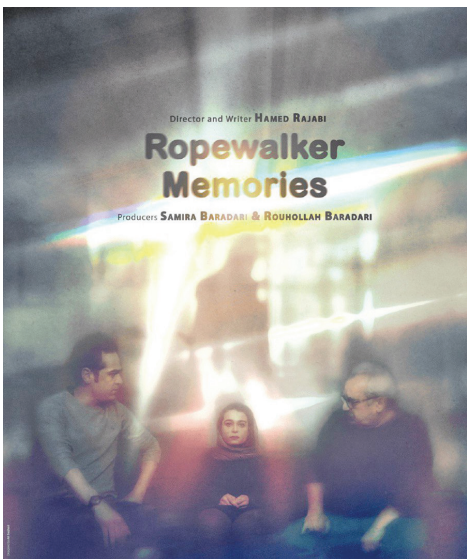
Rajabi’s second feature film received Serri Sureya Award for Democracy and Human Rights at the festival, IRNA reported.

“Ropewalker Memories” is about a young man and his father, who share a close living arrangement in the same apartment. Despite his son’s objections, the father invites call girls into their home. One day, he brings home a woman who refuses to leave. Both father and son join forces to persuade her to depart. However, when she finally departs of her own accord, her absence becomes unbearable for the two men.

With a deep, different reflection on the ropewalker and the Übermensch in Nietzsche’s “Thus Spoke Zarathustra,” “Ropewalker Memories” predicts how the uprising of the women individuals can teach the people in a country to fight for their rights. This way, it develops in a defamiliarized world, keeping its distance from the conventional dramatic solutions and turning the film into an allegory for a patriarchal world, where some women try to teach others to struggle for freedom.

The film has been previously screened at Pune IFF 2024, Dhaka IFF 2024, Latur IFF 2024, Festival Cinéma(s) d’Iran 2024, Asian Film Festival Barcelona 2024, and Wales IFF 2024.

Hamed Rajabi is an Iranian screenwriter and director. He holds a master’s degree in cinema from the University of Tehran. In addition to writing the scripts of “Rainy Seasons” and “Parviz,” he has also directed eight short films. “A minor leap down” is his first experience in making a feature film, which won the FIPRESCI Award from the Panorama section of the 65th Berlin International Film Festival. “Ropewalker memories” is his sec-



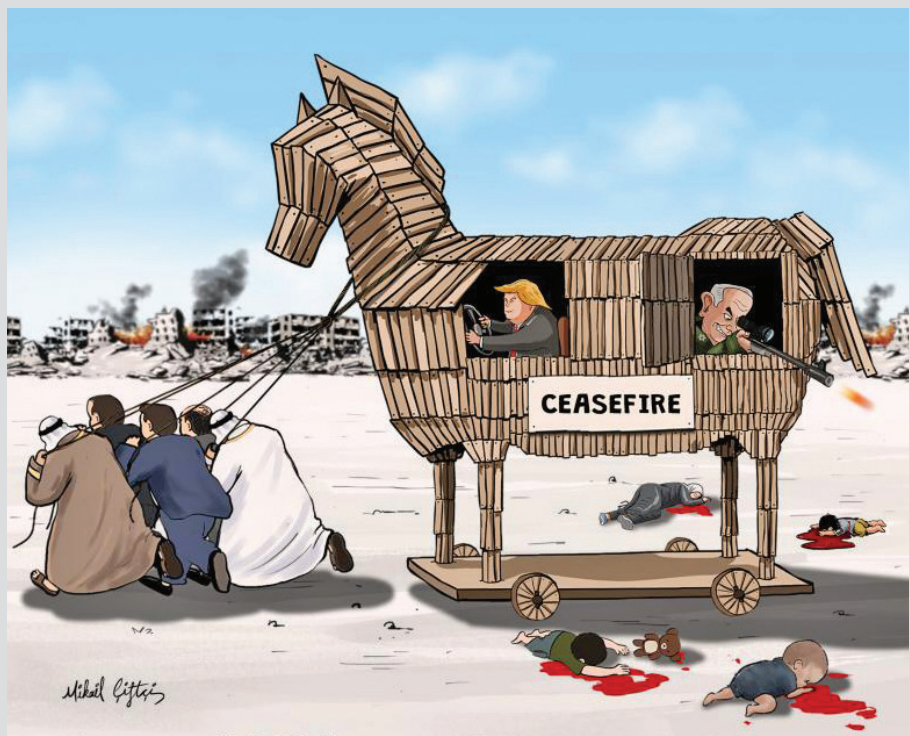
ond experience in making a feature film.

The 5th Rojava International Film Festival, held under the theme “Shared Stories and Free Cinema,” went beyond being merely an artistic gathering, bringing the region’s collective memory, culture of resistance, and understanding of free cinema to the audience.

Featuring a total of 81 films, the festival included 21 documentaries, 7 feature-length Kurdish films, 8 Syrian productions, 8 international feature films, and 37 short films. 22 of the screened films were directed by women. This year’s selection prominently highlighted themes such as resistance, the pursuit of freedom, migration, and social struggle.

Women directors and a women-centered cinematic language defined the spirit of this year’s festival. According to the festival committee, women have played an active role in every stage of the process, and the festival’s films carried this perspective, highlighting that the Rojava Revolution itself is a women’s revolution.

Cartoon of Day



A Ceasefire?

Cartoonist: Mikail Çiftçi from Turkey

Avaye Mahan Orchestra performs Malaysian composer P. Ramlee’s songs in Tehran

By: Mohamadreza Seyedagha

TEHRAN – The Embassy of Malaysia in Tehran organized the program “Irama Malaysia,” an orchestral rendition of selected P. Ramlee’s songs, on November 20 and 21, at the Nemaud Performing Art Center.

At the event, Avaye Mahan Orchestra, conducted by Nima Fatehi, performed eight pieces composed by the renowned Malaysian composer P. Ramlee for the first time in Iran.

In his opening remarks on Friday, Khairi Omar, the Ambassador of Malaysia to Iran, said: “Tonight, we gather together to experience the soul of our nation – Malaysia – not through a speech, but through a symphony which is without doubt closer to the harmony of life among humans all around the globe.”

“We are here to celebrate the immortal legacy of Malaysia’s greatest artistic/musical icon, P. Ramlee, as he was commonly known, through a breathtaking journey, that is, his most beloved compositions, re-imagined through a full orchestral rendition,” he added.

“This performance is more than a concert, it is a story of endless practicing with undefined challenges for an artist who over the years had become an icon not only for Malaysia, but undisputedly as part of Asian music’s history,” the ambassador noted.

“Through this orchestral tapestry, we witness the full spectrum of P. Ramlee’s creativity and ingenuity, a man who gave voice to our deepest emotions, from the most personal to the universally Malaysian.”

Teuku Zakaria bin Teuku Nyak Puteh, better known by his stage name P. Ramlee, (1929-1973) was



Khairi Omar, the Ambassador of Malaysia to Iran, speaks at “Irama Malaysia” on November 21 in Tehran.

a Malaysian actor, filmmaker, musician, and composer. Born in Penang, Malaya, he is regarded as a prominent icon in Southeast Asia.

P. Ramlee’s career in the entertainment industry spanned from the late 1940s until his death in 1973. He made significant contributions to the Malayan-Singaporean film industries, starring in and directing numerous films that are considered classics today.

In addition to his film career, P. Ramlee was also a prolific musician, composing over 350 songs. His music often incorporated traditional Malay elements and became immensely popular across Southeast Asia. His versatility and talent earned him numerous awards and accolades throughout his life.

P. Ramlee’s legacy continues to

influence and inspire new generations of artists in the region. His films and music remain beloved, and his contributions to the cultural heritage of Malaysia, Singapore and the broader Malay-speaking world (Nusantara) are celebrated to this day.

At the end of the performance, Khairi Omar said, in his closing remarks, “you have journeyed with us through the heart of Malaysian symphonic culture, not as observers, but as honored guests within a living legacy.”

“Through the genius of P. Ramlee, reborn through the power of a complete orchestra, you have experienced the full spectrum of our national spirit — from the playful and comedic to the deeply poetic and profound numbers,” he underlined.

“It was a testament to the timeless power of art that tran-

sends generations and borders. You heard the universal languages of love, hope, and longing, all woven into the unique and beautiful tapestry that is Malaysia,” the ambassador emphasized.

Nima Fatehi, 44, is an Iranian choir director, composer, conductor, and pianist. He holds a master’s degree in music composition from the University of Tehran. He founded Avaye Mahan in 2007. He has participated with this team in several international festivals and held several concerts in diverse styles at different venues.

He has participated in classes and workshops, studied choir and orchestra with masters like Nader Mashayekhi, Nasir Heydarian, Thomas Caplin, Henry Pompido, John Schumacher and Wolfgang Vangeroth. He has written and arranged many songs for choir, piano, ensemble, and orchestra.

“On the Shoulders of Tears” photo exhibition celebrates Iranian martyrs

TEHRAN- The “On the Shoulders of Tears” photo exhibition, a visual narrative depicting Iran’s national ceremonies honoring and mourning its martyrs, including their funerals, is currently being held at the Palestine Museum of Contemporary Art in Tehran.

Organized by the Office of Artistic and Cinematic Affairs of the Sacred Defense and Resistance in collaboration with the Palestine Museum of Contemporary Art, the photo exhibition was inaugurated on Wednesday in the presence of a distinguished gathering of commanders, cultural and artistic officials, and prominent artists, ISNA reported.

Speaking at the event, Brigadier General Nabi Sohrabi, Deputy of the Foundation for the Preservation of Sacred Defense and Resistance Values, emphasized the importance of timing for this exhibition. He stated, “Unknown martyrs brought victory to our nation during their lifetime; the feeling we experience upon seeing these images stems from their sacrifice for independence.”

“These martyrs have earned Iran twofold honor—once through their sacrifice and again through their present-day presence, which fosters hope, unity, and solidarity among the people,” he added.

Citing recent statistics, he noted that over 12,000 mourning ceremonies have been held across cities and villages nationwide in the past year. Additionally, next Monday, coinciding with the martyrdom anniversary of Lady Fatemeh Zahra (SA), 100 martyrs will be mourned in Tehran, and 200 esteemed martyrs in provincial centers.

“These martyrs come back to reaffirm the nation’s resilience against enemies,” he concluded.

In another part of the ceremony, Mohammad Samadi, Director of the Visual Arts Center of the Sacred Defense Organization, explained the development process of this collection. “Out of 11,000 submitted photographs, only 110 were chosen for the exhibition. This demonstrates the meticulous, strict, and professional nature of the selection process.”

Iranian short named best at Southampton Film Week

TEHRAN- Iranian director Mikael Dayani’s short film “School Principal” received the Best Fiction Award at the 18th edition of the Southampton Film Week: Shorts 2025, which was held in Southampton, UK, from November 14 to 23.

In a statement released by the festival, it was announced that although the director was not present at the award ceremony, his work had a lasting impression on the audience and judges, Mehr reported.

“School Principal” tells the story of three female high school students who organize street protests. The principal becomes aware

of their activities through social media. Recognizing the potential risks they face, she calls the students to her office and decides to protect them.

She discreetly removes any evidence linking them to the protest call. When the police arrive to investigate, the principal deletes security camera footage and refuses to surrender it. Taking full responsibility to shield the students from punishment, she ultimately sacrifices herself, leading to her arrest instead of the three students.

Southampton Film Week is a prominent festival in the South of England’s grow-

ing production scene. It offers filmmakers opportunities through networking events, workshops, and masterclasses, while showcasing diverse films to the public and industry. The festival features a broad selection of classic and contemporary UK and international cinema, focusing on films that are often less accessible.

Its program includes features, shorts, documentaries, dramas, music and artist works, and a Youth Film Festival. Led by City Eye, Southampton Film Week supports emerging talent and film culture through education, production, and screenings.



Farhad Soleimani, Photography Department Head at the Faculty of Fine Arts, who played a role in the initial organization of the related pictorial book, discussed the delicate characteristics of these works. “A key feature of this collection is the indigenous perspective of the photographers and the geographical diversity of the images. The non-stereotypical approach to mourning ceremonies has elevated these photos from mere

documentation to cultural artifacts.”

Soleimani summarized the core of these works: “Although the images are linked to martyrdom and mourning, their underlying spirit is not sorrow but heroism, dignity, and the Ashura-inspired culture. This is what many visitors feel when viewing the collection—peace, pride, and spirituality.”

“On the Shoulders of Tears” exhibition will be running until December 1.