

Who Will Tell Our Story?

The Gaza-based filmmaker Ezzedine Shallah reflects on the endless sufferings of his people



Palestinians gather to receive aid supplies in Beit Lahia, in the northern Gaza Strip, June 16, 2025.

Enemy seeking to hit Iran hard via economic pressure: Iran FM

TEHRAN – Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi says enemies are seeking to put Iran under economic pressure following their defeat in the 12-day act of military aggression against the country.

“The enemy is trying to trigger economic discontent, but as we passed through the 12-day war, we will thwart this conspiracy, too, and they will take this dream to the grave,” the top diplomat said in a meeting with economic activists in the central Iranian province of Esfahan.

“As, during the 12-day war, we managed to overcome that crisis using the missiles made by ourselves and through the resistance of the Armed forces and efforts by all people. ▶ Page 3

Israeli media alleges second Iranian spy arrest within a week; one suspect knew IDF chief

TEHRAN – On Thursday and Friday, Israeli media reported the separate arrests of two alleged Iranian spies, raising concern in the regime’s political and military circles by revealing that one detainee had met several times with the Israeli military’s Chief of Staff, Eyal Zamir, before transferring information to Iran.

The two recent apprehensions bring to 40 the number of alleged Iranian spies arrested in the occupied territories this year. Israel’s domestic intelligence service Shin Bet has said that espionage grew by 500% in 2025. ▶ Page 3

Kidnapping of Lebanese officer: Growing suspicions and unanswered questions

By Sondoss Al Asaad

BEIRUT — Political and media discourse surrounding the abduction of former General Security officer Ahmad Shukr has intensified claims that he was forcibly taken into the occupied Palestinian territories.

These reactions have revived long-standing allegations that the abduction is linked to efforts to extract information regarding the fate of the missing Zionist pilot Ron Arad, whose case has been repeatedly used as a pretext for covert operations inside Lebanon.

Ron Arad went missing on October 16, 1986, after his aircraft was shot down over southern Lebanon during an Israeli air operation.

Homs mosque massacre exposes fatal flaws in Jolani’s security apparatus

TEHRAN — A devastating explosion, described as a terrorist attack, tore through the Imam Ali bin Abi Talib Mosque in Homs’ Wadi al-Dahab neighborhood during Friday prayers on December 26, killing at least eight worshippers and injuring dozens more.

The apparent targeted strike on this Alawite and Shia sanctuary represents a catastrophic failure of Ahmad al-Sharaa’s (formerly Abu Mohammad al-Jolani) transitional regime to provide even basic security for religious groups.

Video circulating online captured scenes of absolute chaos as worshippers rushed out of the mosque in panic.

Syria under the weight of Israel’s occupation

By staff writer

TEHRAN – Israel continues its military strikes in southern Syria nearly a year after the fall of former president Bashar al-Assad and the rise of Western-backed interim leader Ahmed al-Sharaa, also known by his nom de guerre Abu Mohammad al-Jolani.

According to Syria’s state news agency SANA, Israeli forces shelled the Tal al-Ahmar al-Sharqi area in southern Quneitra on Friday using artillery shells and machine-gun fire. Earlier in the week, Israeli troops also fired at civilians near three villages in the region. These attacks reflect a pattern of ongoing Israeli violations, according to Damascus.

The strikes come amid evidence that Israel has expanded its influence in southern Syria beyond military operations. A Washington Post investigation revealed that shortly after Assad’s ouster in December 2024,

Trump’s Nigeria attack: Evangelical politics weaponized against reality

By Shahrokh Saei

TEHRAN – The United States carried out strikes in northwestern Nigeria on Christmas Day, nearly two months after President Donald Trump warned he might intervene militarily, accusing the West African nation of failing to stop attacks against Christian communities.

The Thursday strikes represent Trump’s newest overseas military action, despite his 2024 campaign pledge to pull the United States out of decades of “endless wars.”

Trump said the strikes were aimed at the ISIL terror group, also known as ISIS and Daesh. “Tonight, at my direction as Commander in Chief,

Iran’s export to Eurasia increases 16% in 7 months on year

TEHRAN- The value of Iran’s export to the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) member countries rose 16 percent during the first seven months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21-October 22), as compared to the same period of time in the previous year, the acting secretary of the Secretariat of Iran’s Free Trade Agreement with the Eurasian Economic Union announced

Elham Haji-Karimi put the worth of Iran’s export to the mentioned countries at \$1.261 billion during the said seven-month period.

She also announced the holding of the “Fourth Eurasia Expo,” which will host high-ranking officials and trade delegations from member and influential countries in the region.

She stated: “The highest export growth was to Belarus with 50 percent and Armenia with 35 percent. This is while Iran’s exports to other countries worldwide did not grow during this period, indicating the positive impact of the agreement in maintaining the export trend.” ▶ Page 4

12th Andrei Stenin International Press Photo Contest calls for submissions

TEHRAN – The Andrei Stenin International Press Photo Contest has opened the call for submissions for its 12th edition.

The annual contest, held in memory of Andrei Stenin, a photojournalist with the Rossiya Segodnya Media Group who was killed near Donetsk in the summer of 2014, traditionally launches on his birthday, December 22. This year’s edition has officially opened in Moscow, with submissions now underway, Mehr reporeted

“For the 12th time, the Andrei Stenin Contest is preparing to open submissions, a moment that is always joyful and exciting. This year is particularly special, as we have prepared a surprise that we are confident will delight participants. We are pleased to announce a new category, ▶ Page 8



President Masoud Pezeshkian visited the family of the Christian martyr Razmik Khachatoorian in Tehran on Christmas eve.

Top officials join Iran’s Christians in celebrating Jesus’ birth

TEHRAN – On Wednesday and Thursday, Iran’s top authorities issued Christmas messages and visited prominent Christian families in the country to share their joy for the birth of Christ, an event honored by approximately 600,000 people in Iran every year.

The most senior official to offer Christmas greetings was the Leader of the Islamic Revolution, Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei, in his customary annual message. This year, his message was distinctly inspired by his own profound religious and theological beliefs, as he chose to move beyond long seasonal congratulations, and instead articulate the importance of Prophet Jesus’ (PBUH) birth for humanity. ▶ Page 2

Jakarta intends to foster sci-tech co-op with Tehran

TEHRAN – Highlighting Iran’s extensive capabilities in science and technology, Roliansyah Soemirat, the Indonesian ambassador to Tehran, has said the new Indonesian administration intends to develop scientific and technological ties with Iran.

“The administration is looking forward to the expansion of international collaborations, particularly in fields of science and technology, which opens up new opportunities for cooperation between the two countries. The main focus of the interactions will be centered around sharing technology and emerging innovations, as well as boosting technological cooperation,” IRNA quoted Soemirat as saying.

The official made the remarks in a meeting with Hossein Roozbeh, the head of the Organization for the Development of International Cooperation in Science and Technology, on Wednesday. ▶ Page 7

TEHRAN PAPERS

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

Silent veto

In an article, Hamshahri addressed the positions of China and Russia since the launch of the “snapback” mechanism in support of Iran. It wrote that both countries have repeatedly emphasized that Western powers, having failed to uphold their commitments under the nuclear agreement (JCPOA), have no right to reimpose sanctions. This stance effectively disrupts the enforcement of sanctions, because if Russia and China refuse to cooperate in committees or reduce their participation to mere formality, the sanctions machinery essentially grinds to a halt. In such a scenario, sanction lists remain outdated, oversight of trade with Iran weakens, and ultimately, sanctions exist only on paper without real impact. Western powers will, of course, attempt to find ways to bypass Russia and China. Yet this approach carries its own problems, since any mechanism outside the framework of the UN Security Council would undermine the foundations of international law. Such a move would establish a dangerous precedent, potentially allowing other countries in the future to disregard UN rules and seek ways to circumvent the law.

Siasat-e-Rooz: A fruitless session

Siasat-e-Rooz examined the UN Security Council meeting on Resolution 2231 and Western claims against Iran. It noted that the meeting was held under circumstances where one of the key points was Iran's steadfastness on its principled positions, remaining unaffected by threats and unimpressed by hollow smiles. The meeting ultimately concluded without a joint statement or new resolution, which on the one hand reflects the deep divisions among permanent members of the Security Council over the Iran nuclear file—a trend favorable to Tehran's interests—and on the other hand exposes the emptiness of claims about the Islamic Republic's global isolation and the West's ability to build consensus. The session revealed that the Western narrative depicting Iran as isolated because of its limited ties with the West is flawed, since the West is no longer a decisive actor in global affairs, and its decline has accelerated. A new world order is emerging in which the West has no formidable place, and overcoming challenges will depend on reliance on internal strengths, convergence within an Eastern-oriented paradigm, and turning away from the West's false promises.

IRGC intercepts smuggling tanker in Iran's territorial waters



TEHRAN – Iran's Islamic Revolution Guard Corps (IRGC) has seized a foreign tanker carrying millions of liters of smuggled fuel in the Persian Gulf, detaining its crew and transferring the vessel and its cargo to government ownership, Iranian officials said.

According to the IRGC's news outlet, the tanker was intercepted on Wednesday inside Iran's territorial waters while transporting around 4 million liters of smuggled fuel. The operation was carried out by naval units of the IRGC in the waters near Qeshm Island, a strategically important area in the southern province of Hormozgan.

Brigadier General Abbas Gholamshahi, commander of the IRGC's First Naval Zone, said 16 crew members, all foreign nationals, were arrested during the seizure and later handed over to judicial authorities.

Two days after the operation, Hormozgan Prov-

Iran: Unlocking diplomacy through corridor capacity

In an interview with Dr. Marjan Badiee, professor of geopolitics at the University of Tehran, the Iran newspaper examined the importance of Iran's geographical position within the region's corridor map. According to Dr. Badiee, Iran's unique location—linking East and West, North and South—gives it significant potential to become one of the world's main transit hubs. With access to two seas and connections to Central Asia, the Caucasus, the Persian Gulf, and the Middle East, Iran can serve as a vital junction between East and West. Realizing this potential requires, above all, active diplomacy, institutional coordination, and a strategic view of corridors as instruments of foreign policy. Over the past year, Iran's Ministry of Foreign Affairs has sought to move transit and corridor routes from the margins of economic discussions into the core of national diplomacy. Priorities have included neighborhood diplomacy, active pursuit of North-South and East-West corridors, project-based engagement with port and border chokepoints, and strengthening institutional coordination.

Arman-e-Emrooz: Shared interests depend on reducing sanctions

Arman-e-Emrooz analyzed Iran's role in energy supply. It argued that amid nuclear and regional tensions, Iran can leverage its position as a reliable energy provider to bring the West back to the negotiating table. If sanctions are reduced, Iran could not only expand production but also invest in infrastructure such as pipelines to Europe or Asia, transforming itself into a regional energy hub. This would generate shared benefits: the West would gain access to cheap and diversified energy, while Iran would secure stable revenues and integration into the global economy. Iran's role in energy is not merely economic but also strategic, since disruptions in the Strait of Hormuz or Iranian exports could destabilize global markets. For this reason, Western powers prefer to maintain stability through diplomacy. Iran's energy capacity thus serves as a lever to reshape equations. By using this potential wisely, Iran can push Western powers toward flexibility, reduce sanctions, and create conditions for easing long-term tensions. This approach benefits not only Iran but also global energy stability, opening the door to a new chapter in international relations.

Top officials join Iran's Christians in celebrating Jesus' birth

TEHRAN – On Wednesday and Thursday, Iran's top authorities issued Christmas messages and visited prominent Christian families in the country to share their joy for the birth of Christ, an event honored by approximately 600,000 people in Iran every year.

The most senior official to offer Christmas greetings was the Leader of the Islamic Revolution, Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei, in his customary annual message. This year, his message was distinctly inspired by his own profound religious and theological beliefs, as he chose to move beyond long seasonal congratulations, and instead articulate the importance of Prophet Jesus' (PBUH) birth for humanity.

“I congratulate all Christians and Muslims, particularly our fellow Christian countrymen, on the anniversary of the birthday of great divine prophet, Jesus Christ,” his message read. “Jesus Christ was sent to save humanity from ignorance and oppression and to guide them to the light of knowledge, justice, and servitude to God. He never paused in his fight against evil and in invitation to goodness. This is a lesson for Christians and Muslims believing in his prophethood.”

While differences exist between Muslim and Christian beliefs, Jesus and his mother Virgin Mary (PBUH) are highly respected figures in Islam. Mary is the most frequently mentioned woman in the Quran, and Jesus is mentioned numerous times in the Holy Book, where he is described as the Messiah, and portrayed as the “true servant of God”, as well as a prophet capable of performing miracles, such as healing the sick.

Despite the minimal religious animosity between followers of Abrahamic religions in Iran, insulting Jesus remains a crime under Iran's blasphemy laws and can be severely punished. There are two main groups of Christians in the country – Assyrian Christians, and Armenian Christians. Each of these groups has one reserved seat in the Iranian parliament, alongside three other reserved seats designated for Iranian Jews and Zoroastrians.

President Masoud Pezeshkian was the second most senior Iranian official to honor Christmas. He sent a message to Roman



Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi (center) visited the Vank Cathedral in Esfahan on Christmas

Catholic Leader Pope Leo XIV on the merry event on Wednesday.

Also on Christmas Eve, Pezeshkian visited the family of the Christian martyr Razmik Khachatourian in their home. Christians fought alongside their Muslim comrades during Iraq's invasion of Iran in the 1980s.

During the meeting, the president commemorated the martyr and praised the essential role of all religious communities in defending the country's independence, dignity and territorial integrity.

Military leaders have also paid tribute to the Christian community, with top commander Rear Admiral Habibollah Sayyari, for instance, visiting Christian former POW and disabled war veteran Samik Vartanian in Tehran.

Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi spent time with Iranian Christians in Esfahan, visiting the historical Vank Cathedral in the city to mark Christmas Day. The Vank Cathedral is renowned for its astonishing architecture, which uniquely blends Christian and Iranian elements, as well as its decorated interior filled with vibrant frescoes that depict biblical scenes. It's one of the most famous Christian sites in the country. The cathedral was built in 1606 by order of Abbas the Great, a Safavid Shah who tasked Armenian Iranians with overseeing the silk trade with Europe.

Residents join their Christian neighbors

Christian neighborhoods across Iran are adorned with

decorations from mid-December to mid-January, and serve as popular sightseeing destinations for non-Christians fascinated by the historical culture of their compatriots.

One such neighborhood is Mirzaye Shirazi in central Tehran, where Christian residents actually hold their largest celebrations after the New Year. The area is primarily inhabited by Armenian Christians who—unlike



A Christmas tree set up by the Tehran municipality in Mirzaye Shirazi

Former Iranian FM says Israel drives US policy, calls Netanyahu main obstacle to peace

TEHRAN – Former Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said Israel exerts decisive influence over U.S. policy and remains the main source of instability in the region, calling Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu the biggest obstacle to peace.

In an interview with Al Araby Television, Zarif said that “even Americans themselves now acknowledge that it is Israel that controls the United States,” arguing that Netanyahu makes key regional decisions on Washington's behalf and that Israel's only regional strategy is war.

He said Israel's actions in Gaza, including the killing of civilians and efforts to force Palestinians from their land, must be central to any diplomatic negotiations. Zarif added that Israeli attacks across the region, including in Syria and Doha, should be addressed in international forums.

“The two-state solution is the only path to peace, but Netanyahu rejects it,” Zarif said, adding that nuclear technology cannot be eliminated through military strikes or sanctions and that regional engagement and co-operation remain the only viable way forward.

Zarif stressed that Israel's hostility is directed primarily at Arab countries, saying Iran's policies have aimed to counter Israeli expansionism, support Arabs and Muslims, and combat terrorism in the region. While acknowledging that mistakes may have occurred, he said Iran's core objective has remained unchanged.

He also said that over the past nearly 45 years, no Arab country or faction has fired a single bullet in support of Iran, adding that none has confronted Israel on Iran's behalf either. Zarif pointed to the billions of dollars provided by some Arab states, including Saudi Arabia and other Persian Gulf countries, to Saddam Hussein during the Iran-Iraq war, describing those actions as being directed against Iran.

Turning to his departure from the Iranian government, Zarif said he was asked to leave because of a parliamentary law barring officials whose family members hold dual nationality. He rejected claims that he holds U.S. citizenship or a Green Card, noting that while his children have U.S. citizenship because they were born there, they live in Iran. He also said he was sanctioned during the U.S. president Donald Trump's first term and remains banned from traveling to the United States.

Zarif said diplomacy is the only way out of the current regional impasse, though he cautioned that the opposing side has repeatedly failed to honor its commitments and that this reality must be reflected in diplomatic engagement.

Zarif noted that some Arab states opposed the 2015 nuclear deal, or JCPOA, as strongly as Israel did, and said several regional actors—including Qatar—believe continued hostility between Iran and the United States serves their interests.

“If the region faces instability, everyone will suffer,” he said.

On Syria, Zarif said Iran entered the country at the official invitation of the Syrian government to prevent occupation, not to occupy territory itself. He said Iran has never annexed or seized any part of Syrian land and that Iran's position remains that the Syrian people must determine their own future, both in the past and following recent political changes.

He added that Iran has no negative stance toward the “new Syria” and would welcome dialogue with its new authorities if they seek engagement.

Zarif also warned against allowing Netanyahu and Trump to shape the region's future, claiming Trump intends to directly govern Gaza and has tasked former British prime minister Tony Blair with implementing that plan.

“We should not accept a region that is humiliated and submissive before the United States and the West,” Zarif said, adding that when the United Nations and Western powers are involved in decision-making, the outcome must not be allowed to serve Netanyahu's interests.

Israel launched an unprovoked attack on Iran on June 13, triggering a 12-day war that claimed the lives of at least 1,064 Iranians, including military commanders, nuclear scientists, and civilians. The United States also joined the hostilities by bombing three Iranian nuclear facilities—a move Tehran condemned as a flagrant violation of international law.

(See full text at tehrantimes.com)

Israeli media alleges second Iranian spy arrest within a week; one suspect knew IDF chief

From Page 1 ▶ Hebrew media reported Thursday that an Israeli man had been arrested on charges of conducting surveillance near former Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett's home and passing information to Iranian intelligence.

The man, identified as Vadim Kupriyanov in his early 40s, was apprehended in the central city of Rishon LeZion. Investigators allege he conducted surveillance near Bennett's home and was instructed by his alleged Iranian handlers to purchase a dash camera to film specific locations.

The investigation further claims that over the past two months, the suspect carried out several security-related tasks. These included photographing sites in his city of residence and other locations before transferring the images in exchange for money. An indictment is expected to be filed in a local court.

This arrest follows a similar case in May involving an 18-year-old Israeli accused of spying on Bennett. It also comes shortly after the hacking of Bennett's Telegram account—an incident initially downplayed by his office before later being acknowledged.

A pro-Palestinian group called Handala took credit, releasing thousands of phone numbers and documents from Bennett's phone. The leak, described by the group as "Operation Octopus," included partial correspondence dating back to 2022. Among those exposed were contact de-



One alleged spy conducted surveillance near former Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett's home

tails linked to foreign leaders, senior officials, journalists, and Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Rafael Grossi.

Spy worked in IDF Chief's office, visited command center in Kirya

Reports on Friday revealed the arrest of another alleged spy who had met multiple times with Israel's military chief, Chief of Staff Eyal Zamir, and accessed a secure command center. Israel's Kan network said the individual, accused of espionage for Iran, met with Zamir while performing maintenance work in his office and also gained entry to a secure command center at the Kirya military headquarters.

While espionage has grown significantly in the past year, it has been an upward trend in Is-

rael for several years. Hebrew media reports that Iran has repeatedly obtained Israeli military and security intelligence through various means—from gathering classified data on equipment and bases to infiltrating the offices and command centers of high-ranking officials. Israeli security analysts warn these alleged breaches have significantly strengthened Iran's regional intelligence capabilities and strategic planning.

Iranians have not commented on any of the reported arrests or cyber operations, but Iran's Intelligence Minister Esmail Khatib stated last summer that the country has "thousands of Jewish collaborators" in the occupied territories. He said they work for Iran either for money—often small sums—or out of hatred for

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who has plunged the regime into an endless cycle of war since October 2023.

Earlier this month, Hebrew media published text messages it claimed were sent by Iran to numerous Israelis, reading: "Iranian intelligence agencies are ready to receive your intelligence cooperation."

The Israeli regime has taken steps to deter its people from spying for Iran. In mid-July, it launched a public awareness campaign titled "Easy Money, Heavy Price," with ads across radio, websites, and social media. A cabinet press release stated the initiative seeks to "raise awareness of the phenomenon of Israeli citizens cooperating with Iran, carrying out security missions for Iran inside Israel."

Enemy seeking to hit Iran hard via economic pressure: Iran FM

From Page 1 ▶ now it is also essential that we join hands and foil enemies' efforts to impose tough economic conditions on the Islamic Republic of Iran," he explained.

He said the war ended with pride and dignity for Iran and showed resistance against foreign pressure can result in victory.

The Tel Aviv regime launched a flagrant and unprovoked act of military aggression against Iran on June 13, 2025, touching off a 12-day war that killed well over 1,000 people in the country, including military commanders, nuclear scientists, and ordinary civilians. The United States also got involved in the war by bombing three Iranian nuclear sites in gross violation of international law. Washington had been scheduled to attend a sixth round of nuclear talks with Iran just days ahead of the day the war began—a move analysts say was aimed at deceiving Tehran.

In response, the Iranian Armed Forces struck strategic sites across the occupied territories as well as the al-Udeid air base in Qatar, the largest American military base in



Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi speaks during a gathering in the city of Esfahan on December 25, 2025.

West Asia.

The war's minimal objective was to dismantle Iran's nuclear program indefinitely, and its maximal one was to overthrow the Iranian government. Neither was achieved. Israel and the U.S. were ultimately forced to seek a ceasefire once it became clear their primary objectives had failed and the impact of Iranian missiles had proven catastrophic. Since then, they have ratcheted up economic

pressure against the country, hoping it might paralyze Iran's economy.

A key tool in this pressure campaign is sanctions, which have been in place since Donald Trump took office and withdrew from the Iran nuclear deal in 2018. In August, France, Britain, and Germany invoked the so-called "snapback mechanism," a provision designed to reinstate pre-JCPOA UN sanctions. The Trump administration has also introduced new unilateral embargoes in recent months, targeting vessels and companies it claims facilitate Iranian oil transfers—the primary source of the country's income.

While these post-war economic measures have yet to yield their intended practical results, they have still impacted Iran's currency market. The market is highly sensitive to psychological pressure, and the volatility ultimately contributes to rising inflation rates.

Iranian lawmakers are pressuring the government to introduce economic relief measures, and the cabinet says it is preparing plans to be announced soon.

ing at sea.

The Navy commander also stressed the importance of protecting the marine environment, calling it a top priority and a growing global challenge faced by all countries. He said efforts to enhance maritime security and seafarer safety are being pursued with equal seriousness.

On Early December, the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Navy launched a large-scale military exercise in the Persian Gulf, unveiling advanced AI-enhanced defensive and offensive systems in what marked the country's second major naval drill since it fought a war against the U.S. and Israel in June.

During the drill, advanced air defense systems, including Nawab, Majid, and Misagh were also deployed in electronic warfare conditions.

Also on August, Iran Navy showcased its formidable and expanding military capabilities during the "Sustainable Power 1404" missile exercise, conducted across the strategic northern Indian Ocean and the Sea of Oman.

Rear Admiral Irani added that, alongside international drills, the Navy has also planned to conduct exercises in neighboring countries and in oceanic regions.

He further announced plans for a trilateral naval exercise to be hosted by Iran, saying the drill will be expanded in the near future to include more participating countries.

Highlighting the strategic importance of maritime research, Irani said research achievements unveiled during Research Week—focusing on maritime security, seafarer safety, and marine environmental protection—will guide the Navy's scientific and operational activities in the coming years, in line with the country's nine-point maritime-oriented development policies.

He explained that the studies presented were the result of a year-long research effort and that this process will continue. According to Irani, maritime development has become one of the most significant pillars of national policy, with a strong emphasis on ensuring maritime security for all seafarers operat-

Persepolis edge Mes in 2025/26 PGPL

TEHRAN – Persepolis football team edged past relegation-threatened Mes 1-0 on Friday at the 2025/26 Iran's Persian Gulf Professional League (PGPL).

Soroush Rafiei scored the winner for the visiting team in the 24th minute in Rafsanjan.

Mes defender Amirhossein Sedghi was shown his second yellow card in the 70th minute.

Earlier in the day, Tractor and Shams Azar played out a goalless draw in Qazvin.

Malavan earned a late win over Aluminum in Arak and Foolad defeated Fajr Sepasi 1-0 in Shiraz.

On Saturday, Paykan will host Kheybar and Sepahan meet Chadormalou in Isfahan.

Persepolis sit top with 28 points, one point above Sepahan who have two games at hands.

Gholami wins Sunway Sitges Chess Festival

TEHRAN – Iranian GM Mahdi Gholami Orimi won the 12th Sunway Sitges Chess Festival concluded with a closely contested open tournament in the Catalanian seaside town.

After ten rounds, first place was shared before a blitz play-off decided the title, while an additional knockout determined third place. Gholami Orimi emerged as overall winner, ahead of Spanish GM Josep Manuel López, with French GM Jules Moussard completing the podium.

After ten rounds of play, first place was shared on points by two players, both finishing on 8/10. Gholami Orimi, seeded seventh, and Spanish GM Josep Manuel López, the ninth seed, emerged at the top of the standings.

Going into the final round, Gholami was the sole leader on 7½ points, with a large, eight-player chasing group only half a point behind.

In the decisive tenth round, Gholami opted for a solid approach with the white pieces and drew against top seed SL Narayanan, ensuring at least a share of first place.

Among the eight players still in contention, only López managed to convert his chances, scoring a win with white against China's fifth seed Li Di to join Gholami at the top.

Tournament regulations required a two-game blitz play-off between Gholami and López to determine the overall winner.

Gholami took the initiative by winning the first game with the black pieces, and then secured the title by holding a draw with white in the second encounter. This result crowned him champion of the 2025 Sunway Sitges Chess Tournament.

Win over Al-Muharraq belongs to players: Ricardo Sa Pinto

TEHRAN – The Esteghlal football team's head coach expressed his satisfaction with his team's victory over Al-Muharraq and said this win belongs to the players.

Esteghlal made their way into the Round of 16 with a comprehensive 3-0 win over Al-Muharraq in its final AFC Champions League Two 2025-26 Group A tie.

Esmail Gholizadeh, Duckens Nazon and Jansir Asani scored for Esteghlal at the Sheikh Ali Bin Mohammed Al Khalifa Stadium.

"I have to say about the game, we played well and achieved a tough victory. Considering that we played every three days, we had good training throughout the week," Sa Pinto said.

"We knew Al-Muharraq well and used their weaknesses. We were the dominant team during the game but we could have played more calmly in the first half. I am very happy about this win. This win belongs to the play-

ers," the Portuguese coach added.

Iran holds talks with opponents for 2026 FIFA World Cup

TEHRAN – Iran football federation is finalizing its list of opponents as part of preparations for the 2026 FIFA World Cup.

Team Melli have been drawn in Group G along with Belgium, Egypt, and New Zealand.

Iran are close to reaching a final agreement with Portugal, with only contract signatures remaining to confirm a friendly match against Cristiano Ronaldo's side at Lisbon's Estádio da Luz.

Meanwhile, Scotland have been dropped from consideration after failing to respond to Iran's correspondence.

For upcoming FIFA windows in March, April, and June, the federation is holding talks with several nations, including North Macedonia, Serbia, Iceland, Ghana, Tunisia, and Colombia.

Esteghlal, Sepahan in Pot Two of ACL Two 2025/26 knockout stage

TEHRAN – Esteghlal and Sepahan football teams of Iran are placed in Pot Two of the AFC Champions League Two (ACL Two) 2025-26.

The remaining 16 teams will discover their Knockout Stage opponents on December 30 (Tuesday) in Kuala Lumpur.

Eight teams each from the West and East successfully progressed from the Group Stage, which concluded on Wednesday, to seal their Round of 16 berths in the 21st edition of the Continent's second-tier men's tournament and keep their hopes of glory alive.

The Knockout Stage cast features one Continental debutant in Cong An Ha Noi FC and nine more teams that have reached this stage of the ACL Two for the first time: Al Nassr Club, Al Wasl FC, Al Ahli SC, Esteghlal, Arkadag, Foolad Mobarakeh Sepahan, Gamba Osaka, FC Pohang Steelers and Ratchaburi FC.

The draw will see the teams of each region placed into two pots—Pot 1 for the group winners and Pot 2 for the runners-up—as below:

- West**
- Pot 1:** Al Wasl FC (UAE), Al Ahli SC (QAT), Al Hussein (JOR), Al Nassr Club (KSA)
 - Pot 2:** Esteghlal FC (IRN), FC Arkadag (TKM), Foolad Mobarakeh Sepahan SC (IRN), Al Zawraa SC (IRQ)
- East**
- Pot 1:** Macarthur FC (AUS), Gamba Osaka (JPN), Persib Bandung (IDN), Tampines Rovers FC (SGP)
 - Pot 2:** Cong An Ha Noi FC (VIE), Ratchaburi FC (THA), Bangkok United (THA), FC Pohang Steelers (KOR)

Joint sitting volleyball camp of Iran and Russia to be held in Mashhad

TEHRAN – Jalil Koohpayehzadeh, head of Iran's Sports Federation for the Disabled, said that joint sitting volleyball training camp of Iran, Kazakhstan, and Russia will be held in Mashhad, Iran.

Koohpayehzadeh said that as part of the preparation program for Iran's national men's and women's sitting volleyball teams, negotiations were held with Kazakhstan and Russia to organize a joint training camp hosted by Iran.

"Both countries have agreed to participate, and the camp is scheduled to be held in Mashhad in February," he said.

The Iran sitting volleyball team is the most decorated team in the world, having won the Paralympic gold medal eight times.

Iran to host trilateral naval exercise, says navy commander



Commander of the Iranian Army Navy, Rear Admiral Shahram Irani, speaks to the reporters on December 26, 2025.

TEHRAN – Iran will host a trilateral naval exercise in the near future, with plans to expand participation to additional countries, the commander of the Iranian Army Navy said on Friday.

Speaking to reporters on the sidelines of the Navy Research Conference in the northern city of Nowshahr, Rear Admiral Shahram Irani said the Navy has taken part in 12 international events so far in the Iranian year 1404.

These activities have included scientific, technical, and sports programs, as well as participation in regional and extra-regional naval drills.

He noted that under existing economic agreements, the Navy's Task Force 103 is set to join one of these exercises soon. The flotilla is currently en route to the exercise area, and Iran's Navy is expected to formally take part within the next week.

South Azadegan oil field's production capacity hits 160,000 bpd

TEHRAN- The managing director of Petropars Group announced an increase in the operational capacity of the South Azadegan joint oil field to 160,000 barrels per day (bpd) and stated: "With the launch of the second train of the central processing unit and the gradual return of wells to the production stream, the trend of stable production in this field has accelerated."

Hamidreza Saqafi, referring to the importance of developing processing infrastructure in the South Azadegan field, said: "The central processing unit of this field is designed in four 80,000-barrel trains and is responsible for processes such as separation of water, salt, and sediments, controlling hydrogen sulfide levels, and regulating vapor pressure. With the commissioning of the second train, the operational capacity of this center has reached 160,000 barrels per day, and the two remaining trains will also be completed in the coming months."

He added: "Over the past 15 months, Petropars Group, in cooperation with the Oil Ministry, the National Iranian Oil Company, and the Oil Engineering and Development Company, has executed numerous projects in the fields of drilling, completion, and acid



stimulation of 12 wells, and the commissioning of wellhead facilities for 30 wells, the result of which has been an increase of approximately 60,000 barrels in daily production."

Referring to complementary measures in the field of wells, he said: "The operation of Electrical Submersible Pumps (ESP) will begin next week, and with the gradual return of wells experiencing production decline or stoppage to the production stream, the field's production capacity will sustainably increase."

India's 8-month exports to Iran stand at \$1.3b

TEHRAN- India exported non-oil products worth \$1.327 billion to Iran during the first eight months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21-Novemembr 21), the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA) announced.

The IRICA report said that India was Iran's fourth source of non-oil imports during the eight-month period.

At a conference on commercial opportunities between Iran and India, held on the sidelines of Iran Expo 2025, in early May, officials and business representatives from both countries emphasized the need to diversify trade and familiarize Iranian businesses with international trade models.

According to Iran's Trade Promotion Organization (TPO), the "Iran-India Trade Opportunities and Capacities Conference" brought together Hossein Bamiri, Iran's commercial attaché in India; Khalid Khan, a member of the Iran Trade Center in Mumbai; and several trade delegations from both nations.

Bamiri said Iran's exports to India over the past decade have largely been limited to a narrow range of products including dates, pistachios, almonds, and petrochemicals, with little diversification in the export basket.

Highlighting the mismatch between the two countries' trade potential and current volumes, Bamiri urged Iranian businesses to pursue not just goods exports but also services. "This requires a stronger Iranian presence in international trade fairs," he added.

He also stressed that Iranian traders and manufacturers must align their corporate structures with global standards and gain a deeper understanding of international trade models. "Proper marketing and consistent participation in international events are key," Bamiri said.

Khalid Khan said efforts are underway to usher in a new phase of commercial relations between India and Iran. "We aim to showcase the capabilities of both nations on a broader scale," he said, adding that India-Iran trade could flourish further if Chabahar Port became more accessible to Indian traders. "Such progress depends on sound policies and timely cooperation," he noted.

Also speaking at the event, Masoud Ebrahim Shah, a former advisor to the Malaysian prime minister, called India's export potential "unparalleled" and described trade exhibitions as a strategic platform for future commercial development.

Meanwhile, Head of the Tehran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (TCCIMA) Mahmoud Najafi Arab met with Indian Ambassador Rudra Gaurav Shresth to explore avenues for expanding economic ties between Iran and India, with both sides emphasizing the need to prioritize the exchange of non-sanctioned goods.

The meeting, held at the Tehran Chamber of Commerce, also included the TCCIMA

Secretary General and the head of the South Gujarat Chamber of Commerce, who accompanied the Indian ambassador. Discussions focused on enhancing provincial-level economic cooperation led by business chambers.

According to a statement from the TCCIMA, Najafi Arab said that the longstanding historical and economic ties between the two countries provide a strong foundation for deeper cooperation, especially if international sanctions on Iran are fully lifted.

He called for swift finalization of a preferential trade agreement between the two countries and emphasized the importance of tariff reduction. Najafi Arab also highlighted joint opportunities in food security, organic production, smart agriculture, biotechnology, blockchain, and fintech.

He further proposed forming a joint consortium between Iranian and Indian private sectors for maritime and transit corridor projects, including trilateral cooperation with Russia to develop the International North-South Transit Corridor (INSTC). Participation in trade and industrial expos in both countries was also encouraged.

Fereydoon Vardinejad, Secretary General of the Tehran Chamber, reiterated the importance of subnational economic cooperation and expressed readiness to collaborate with Indian provincial chambers. He proposed holding virtual meetings to identify mutual business opportunities and suggested establishing a "green channel" between the chamber and the Indian embassy to expedite visas for businesspeople.

Ambassador Shrestha noted that U.S. sanctions on Iran have also had negative repercussions for the Indian economy. He explained that while the Indian government cannot mandate private sector activity, its investment in Iran's Chabahar Port was a clear signal encouraging Indian firms to engage with the Iranian market.

He acknowledged the limited scope of current bilateral trade, which has hovered around \$5.0 billion in recent years, and said that with a broader focus on sanction-free goods, trade could double to \$10 billion within the next three to four years.

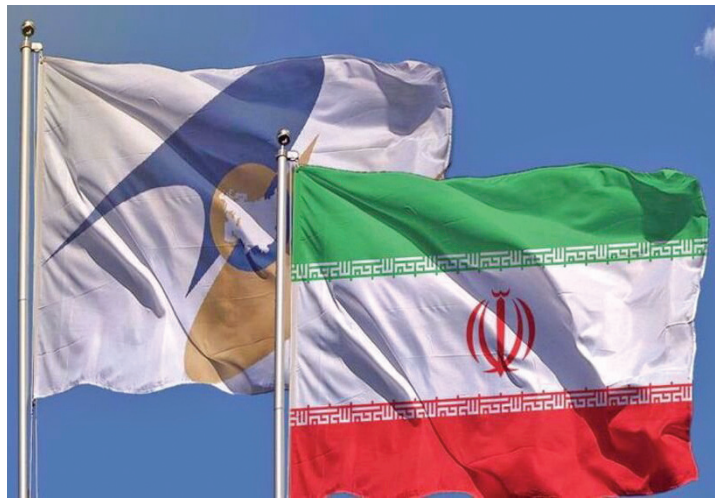
The ambassador said India remains a key market for agricultural and food products, and proposed converting the preferential trade agreement into a free trade pact covering food, agriculture, and pharmaceuticals—sectors not targeted by international sanctions.

Also speaking at the meeting, the president of the South Gujarat Chamber outlined the region's main industries, including textiles, diamond polishing, agricultural products, and handicrafts. He proposed signing a cooperation agreement with the Tehran Chamber and invited an Iranian trade delegation to an investment and tourism expo scheduled for August in South Gujarat.

Iran's export to Eurasia increases 16% in 7 months on year

From Page 1 ► Furthermore, "a three-year roadmap for economic and trade cooperation" was signed between the two ministers, which is the future action plan within the framework of the agreement and defines the tasks of the executive bodies of both sides, she added.

Referring to the details of the Eurasia Expo, she said: "Trade delegations from Asian and regional countries will participate in this exhibition, and a 'High-Level Officials Meeting' will also be held with the attendance of ministers and high-ranking officials to discuss major issues of trade and economic co-



operation, such as the performance of the free trade agreement since its implementation, future areas of co-operation, joint investment projects, and emerging areas such as e-commerce."

Referring to last year's specialized panels in the fields of standards, customs, transportation, and the agreement itself, Haji-Karimi emphasized: "These panels were held with the presence of Eurasian experts and officials and representatives of domestic organizations. The presentations by the Eurasian side were practical and of interest to the private sector."

Approximately 600 MW of wind power plant capacity to be achieved in a year

TEHRAN- The head of the Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Organization of Iran (SATBA), referring to the organization's plans for developing wind power plants, said: SATBA has a serious and extensive program for developing wind energy, especially in the eastern region of the country, and it is hoped that by the month of Dey next year (starts on December 22, 2026), a capacity of approximately 500 to 600 megawatts of installed wind power plants can be achieved in the country."

Mohsen Tarzatab, referring to the commencement of the executive operations of

the 100-megawatt wind power plant by the MAPNA Group in the Mil-e Nader area, continued: "The executive operations of this project officially began today [December 25]. It is hoped that a portion of the capacity of this 100-megawatt wind power plant by the MAPNA Group can be integrated into the grid for operation during the peak consumption period of the summer and assist the country's power grid."

He added: "The MAPNA Group had previously built a 50-megawatt wind power plant in the Mil-e Nader area, and the current proj-

ect, as the second phase with a capacity of 100 megawatts, is underway. According to the provided commitments, it was planned that a portion of this power plant would become operational by the peak of the summer next year."

The head of SATBA stated that the investment for this project is approximately 60 million dollars and emphasized: This investment has been made entirely by the private sector, which highlights the important role of non-governmental investors in the development of the country's renewable energy.

Iran exports non-oil goods worth \$1.66b to Afghanistan in 8 months

TEHRAN- Iran exported non-oil commodities valued at \$1.66 billion to Afghanistan during the first eight months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21-November 21), the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA) announced.

According to IRICA, Afghanistan was Iran's fifth top non-oil export destination in the mentioned period.

On November 27, Iran's minister of industry, mining, and trade, during a meeting with his Afghan counterpart in Istanbul, emphasized the removal of trade barriers between the two countries.

During the meeting between Nooruddin Azizi, the minister of commerce and industries of Afghanistan, and Seyed Mohammad Atabak, the minister of industry, mining, and trade of Iran, the two sides discussed and exchanged views on the development of trade cooperation between Iran and Afghanistan.

Atabak, in this meeting, emphasized the necessity of expanding trade relations between the two countries and called for the removal of trade barriers between them.

Azizi, for his part, stated: "Border trade with Iran is on the agenda, and we call for the facilitation of trade in this regard."

In this meeting, the two sides emphasized the removal of trade barriers and efforts to increase the volume of trade between Iran and Afghanistan, and understandings were reached in this regard.

The Iranian minister, had traveled to Istanbul to participate in the fifth meeting of ECO trade ministers.

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 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.

Who Will Tell Our Story?

By Ezzedine Shallah
Palestinian filmmaker and researcher

DEIR AL-BALAH -- In the early days of the war on Gaza—in a time that can only be described as genocide—I found myself trapped in emotions that defied language: disorientation, anxiety, fear, grief, and a pain so heavy it blurred reality itself. Life became a haze, yet I knew, with painful clarity, that unimaginable days were approaching—days we would be forced to live through, whether we could comprehend them or not.

What haunted me was not only the question of how we would survive the coming days, nor even whether our extermination was inevitable. At times, it felt as though our annihilation was merely a matter of time. But alongside this fear grew another, equally devastating question—one born of my faith in cinema as memory, testimony, and resistance:

Who will tell our story?

Who will document our pain and expose the brutal face of occupation?

Who will create films that tell the stories of Alaa, Mohammed, Samia, Umm Al-Abd, and Haj Kamel? Each of them carried a life rich enough for a cinematic epic—stories capable of revealing crimes against humanity, stories that could shake the conscience of the world and challenge its silence.

I still remember the day I heard a bombing nearby. Moments later,



screams echoed through our alley. At first, I could not identify their source, though I knew those voices intimately. That familiarity only deepened my terror. When I rushed outside, I saw people gathered in front of my brother's house. Inside, grief had already arrived before me—cries, sobs, and a truth too heavy to absorb.

Alaa was thirty years old. His son Khaled was seven. Their bond went beyond fatherhood; it was a friendship. Alaa believed in building a different model of parenting—one rooted in respect and dialogue. He spoke to his son as an equal, carried him along on visits, and made him part of his world.

That day, father and son visited Mohammed's home. Khaled later asked to go play at his uncle Osama's nearby house. As he walked away, a bombing erupted. He turned instinctively toward the sound—only to see the house where his father and uncle stood

reduced to rubble. No one else was inside.

Alaa was killed instantly. Mohammed was rushed to intensive care.

Alaa's absence was incomprehensible. He was the laughter of the family, the one whose humor filled every room. They called him the fruit of the house—because life tasted sweeter when he was present.

Mohammed was different—quieter, more serious. Eight years of imprisonment had shaped him. He lost his youth behind bars, and when he was finally released, his family rushed to give him the life he had been denied. He married, became a father, and built a home filled with care—choosing colors for his children's rooms, planning a future with tenderness and intention.

Because of his years in prison, everyone treated Mohammed with exceptional gentleness. He, in turn,

revered his parents, knowing the suffering they endured visiting him in jail. He was known as the compassionate one. And so, day and night, prayers surrounded him as he lay in intensive care.

No one could visit him—the hospital lay in a zone of constant danger. News came only through a nurse who lived nearby. For weeks, we were told he was improving.

After twenty days, the truth arrived: Mohammed had been killed.

How could a father survive the loss of two sons within one month?

This was not only a war of extermination—it was a war of starvation. Bread became a dream. Hours of waiting for a single bundle felt like receiving a doctorate—except this joy was soaked in blood.

It was also a war of forced displacement. A phone call ordered me to evacuate my home in Rafah. We were “lucky” to be warned. Most homes were erased without notice, their inhabitants buried beneath furniture and stone. Forty years of labor could vanish in seconds. Dreams collapsed. Life stopped. And somehow, you were expected to begin again.

One night, in the Nuseirat refugee camp, my nephew prepared to sleep with his wife and four daughters as bombing surrounded them. There was nothing to do but wait—to be killed or spared by chance. His daughter asked to switch places with him, believing his spot was safer. He agreed.

(See full text at tehrantimes.com)



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Afula operation a natural response to ongoing Israeli crimes: Hamas

TEHRAN – Hamas declared Friday's Afula operation an “expression of accumulated popular anger” resulting from the Israeli occupation regime's daily crimes.

The movement emphasized that resistance remains a legitimate right under international law against persistent aggression.

This follows a multi-stage operation in Bei-

san and the Jezreel Valley by a Palestinian man, which left two Israelis dead.

These developments occur amidst intensified Israeli land seizures and systemic violence in the West Bank.

Israeli forces began punitive home demolitions in Qabatiya, further fueling the cycle of defiance against the decades-long occupation.

S. Arabia accused of striking UAE-backed STC forces in Yemen

TEHRAN – UAE-backed separatists in southern Yemen accused Saudi Arabia on Friday of launching airstrikes against their forces in Hadramout province, allegations Riyadh has not confirmed amid rising tensions over recent territorial gains.

The reported strikes followed a sharp warning from the Saudi Foreign Ministry, which labeled the recent escalation of the Southern Transitional Council (STC) an “unjustified escalation.” Riyadh has urged the group to pull out of the two eastern provinces it captured earlier this month.

Reports indicate the strikes targeted Hadr-ami Elite Forces in areas including Wadi Nahb, after clashes with Saudi-aligned groups and a Saudi demand for withdrawal from newly seized areas in Hadramout and al-Mahra.

The separatist sweep across the two eastern governorates has placed key energy infrastructure under southern control, displacing Saudi-aligned units.

Yemen's wider conflict traces to Ansarullah's 2014 Sanaa advance against foreign interference.

Homs mosque massacre exposes fatal flaws in Jolani's security apparatus

From page 1 ► Some carried the wounded on makeshift stretchers, while others transported victims, shrouded in cloaks, toward waiting ambulances.

The explosion appeared to erupt from a corner of the main prayer hall, gouging a crater into the wall and scorching its surroundings.

Prayer rugs lay torn and scattered amid debris, with religious texts and fragments strewn across the floor. Local officials told Reuters the blast was likely triggered by a suicide attacker or explosives planted inside the sanctuary.

While the Syrian Foreign Ministry issued a statement condemning the “cowardly act” as an assault on human values and said it “continues to combat terrorism in all its forms,” critics argue that official rhetoric has yet to be matched by effective field protections.

Reports have noted a concerning trend of

instability since the December 2024 transition, including incidents of Alawite families in Damascus suburbs being pressured to vacate their homes and reports of targeted violence against Shias.

This security vacuum has coincided with a resurgence in ISIS activity, which many analysts attribute to the rapid dismantling of previous security frameworks.

The current environment recently prompted Alawite spiritual leader Ghazal Ghazal to call for a general strike, citing a fundamental failure to prevent the displacement of minority neighborhoods.

Critics say the new regime's dismantling of state protections and reliance on radical militias has left communities such as Alawites exposed, fueling a resurgence of unchecked sectarian violence and terrorism.

Syria under the weight of Israel's occupation

From page 1 ► Israeli helicopters conducted nighttime airdrops of weapons, ammunition, and body armor to a Druze militia known as the Military Council. These shipments were intended to counter the rise of al-Sharaa, whom Israeli officials reportedly view with deep suspicion due to his past leadership of an al-Qaeda-linked group.

While lethal weapons transfers were later reduced, Israel has continued to supply nonlethal military equipment, medical aid, and monthly stipends to thousands of Druze fighters, effectively creating a parallel security structure that undermines Damascus' efforts to consolidate authority, according to the Washington Post report. Israeli officials describe these measures as protective of minority groups and defensive, yet analysts argue that they reflect a broader ambition to fragment Syria and maintain strategic control over its border regions.

Al-Sharaa has sought to project moderation and national unity after Assad's fall. However, he remains constrained by unresolved ties to extremist factions and his limited ability to im-

pose central authority across the country. These weaknesses have allowed Israel to exploit divisions and continue its interventions with minimal resistance, further destabilizing Syria.

Israel's combination of airstrikes, territorial occupation, and support for separatist militias has transformed the post-Assad landscape into a zone heavily influenced by external actors. Analysts describe these moves as part of a long-standing “Greater Israel” strategy, aimed at weakening neighboring states, fragmenting political authority, and securing long-term strategic depth.

One year after Assad's removal, Syria's sovereignty remains compromised, and its post-war recovery is stalled. The ongoing Israeli presence and support for armed groups illustrate that foreign intervention, rather than domestic leadership, increasingly shapes Syria's political and military environment. In this context, Israel's actions stand as the most disruptive factor to the country's stability and territorial integrity, threatening to entrench fragmentation for years to come.

Summoning Epstein's ghost at the White House

By Dr. Mahdi Zolfaghari

TEHRAN – The Jeffrey Epstein affair has once again returned to the spotlight—this time not merely as a moral scandal, but as a political lever shaking the White House. The main concern at present is focused on Donald Trump and the “MAGA” movement within the Republican Party.

“Epstein-gate” has turned into a nightmare for Trump, as polls indicate that the issue has created a deep rift among his supporters and put their loyalty to the test. Part of the decline in the Republican vote share in sensitive and decisive states such as Arizona and Georgia (traditionally Republican strongholds) is attributed to the scandals surrounding the Jeffrey Epstein

case that have come to haunt the current president of the United States.

The equation is clear: Trump knows well that this scandal could evolve into a serious crisis for his electoral campaign. He is concerned that the continuation of this situation will not only destabilize his core support base, but also deprive him of the opportunity to attract undecided voters. Meanwhile, Democrats have not remained idle and have no intention of allowing Trump to escape this predicament easily. They are fully aware that “Epstein-gate” represents a golden opportunity to weaken Trump and the Republicans.

(See full text at tehrantimes.com)

Kidnapping of Lebanese officer: Growing suspicions and unanswered questions

From page 1 ► Ron Arad went missing on October 16, 1986, after his aircraft was shot down over southern Lebanon during an Israeli air operation.

According to non-official sources, the abduction of Shukr was carefully orchestrated through intermediaries.

Two Syrian individuals, reportedly holding Swedish citizenship, are believed to have lured Shukr to the Bekaa Valley and subsequently toward the Mount Hermon area.

Although they entered Lebanon through Beirut International Airport using Syrian passports, information suggests they were operating as part of a wider intelligence network.

It is widely suspected that a unit of Israeli intelligence took custody of Shukr in the Mount Hermon area and transferred him into the occupied territories. Security leaks further indicate the involvement of a network composed of Lebanese and Syrian operatives linked to the Mossad.

Official silence upon a familiar pattern

Meanwhile, Tel Aviv has imposed strict media blackout on the incident, while Beirut has so far remained largely silent. The absence of official clarification has fueled public anger and speculation.

The case is not without precedent: similar incidents have occurred in recent years, including the abduction of Mohammad Srour, a Lebanese currency exchanger, who was found murdered in a Beirut villa three days later.

The unresolved abduction of Imad Amhaz also stands as a troubling reminder of repeated security breaches and foreign interference.

The central question remains unanswered: Is Ahmad Shukr still on Lebanese soil, or has he been transferred into the occupied territories?

If so, how was this carried out, and through which channels of coordination and collaboration?

A carefully planned trap

According to Abdel Salam Shukr, the victim's brother, the chain of events began when a Lebanese expatriate residing in Kinshasa contacted Ahmad Shukr to rent his apartment in Choueifat, south of Beirut.

The deal was concluded months earlier, with a payment of 500 dollars. The expatriate visited Lebanon several times and met Shukr at his home.

Later, he claimed to represent a wealthy African investor named “Salim Kassab,” a name later revealed to be fictitious, who was allegedly

interested in purchasing land in Zahle.

After inspecting the land, the expatriate informed Shukr that the buyer had agreed to the purchase and would visit Lebanon. He insisted on a meeting at 4:30 p.m. on the day of Shukr's disappearance, despite Shukr's objections that darkness would prevent proper inspection.

The expatriate then withdrew from the meeting, claiming a broken foot, and insisted that Shukr accompany the supposed buyer alone.

That was the last confirmed sighting of Ahmad Shukr.

Security and judicial leaks later revealed that the kidnappers had rented a house in Zahle and erased all forensic evidence after the abduction.

Surveillance cameras tracked the vehicle toward Saghbine and later Srayeh in the western Bekaa, after which all traces disappeared. The area has historically been used as a smuggling route between southwestern Damascus and Lebanon.

As days pass without official answers, the abduction of Ahmad Shukr stands as a grave security incident, exposing the depth of foreign intelligence penetration and raising serious concerns over sovereignty, accountability, and the safety of Lebanese citizens.



Nigeria, however, presents a far more complicated picture. The country is officially secular, with its population split almost evenly between Muslims (53 percent) and Christians (45 percent). While attacks on Christian communities have drawn international headlines, analysts stress that violence in Nigeria is rarely driven by religion alone. Deadly clashes between Muslim herders and Christian farmers are often rooted in disputes over land and water, though ethnic and religious differences sharpen the conflict. Kidnappings of priests, meanwhile, are typically motivated by ransom demands, as clergy are seen as influential

figures whose congregations can quickly mobilize funds.

By framing Nigeria's turmoil primarily as religious persecution, Trump risks deepening sectarian divides and undermining local efforts to present the crisis as a shared national struggle. His intervention reflects less the realities on the ground than the imperatives of American politics: it turns Nigerian suffering into a rallying cry for his evangelical base, reduces complex conflicts into a simplistic narrative of Christian victims versus armed extremists, and threatens to destabilize Nigeria's fragile religious balance by exporting a divisive lens from Washington.

Trump's Nigeria attack: Evangelical politics weaponized against reality

From page 1 ► the United States launched a powerful and deadly strike against ISIS Terrorist Scum in Northwest Nigeria, who have been targeting and viciously killing, primarily, innocent Christians, at levels not seen for many years, and even Centuries!” he wrote on Truth Social.

The U.S. military's Africa Command confirmed the operation took place in Sokoto state in coordination with Nigerian authorities, killing multiple ISIL militants. Nigerian Foreign Minister Yusuf Mai-tama Tuggar told the BBC it was a “joint operation” and had “nothing to do with a particular religion.”

The Nigerian government argues that armed groups attack both Muslims and Christians, warning that U.S. claims of Christian persecution oversimplify the country's complex security challenges while overlooking its efforts to protect religious freedom.

Peace and conflict analyst Bulama Bukarti told Al Jazeera that Trump's characterization of the violence in northwestern Nigeria is a “fundamental misrepresentation of reality on the ground.” He explained that in Sokoto State, where

80 to 90 percent of the population is Muslim, attacks often take the form of suicide bombings in crowded markets, indiscriminately killing both Muslims and Christians. Bukarti added that Nigeria avoided naming ISIL in its confirmation of the strikes because “it is aware that there isn't a significant ISIS presence in that part of Nigeria.”

Trump's decision to single out Nigeria appears driven less by foreign policy concerns than by U.S. domestic politics. For years, conservative voices in America have amplified claims that Christians are under relentless attack in Nigeria. In September, Senator Ted Cruz called for sanctions against Nigerian officials he accused of enabling violence against Christian communities. Then, on October 31, after lobbying from Republican lawmakers and Christian advocacy groups, Trump formally designated Nigeria a “Country of Particular Concern” under the U.S. International Religious Freedom Act. Within days, he instructed the Pentagon to begin drawing up military options, warning publicly that he might go in “guns a blazing” if Abuja failed to halt what he described as the slaughter of Christians.

Araghchi: Preserving Zayandeh-Rood River a national and international necessity



TEHRAN--Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi emphasized the historical and cultural status of Isfahan, and said that Isfahan is not just a city, it is a symbol of Iranian civilization, and preserving Zayandeh-Rood River, its historical heritage, and boosting its tourism are considered a national and international necessity.

Speaking at the opening ceremony of the first specialized exhibition of green technologies and clean energy in Isfahan on Thursday, he stated that Zayandeh-Rood River is not just a river, but a part of Iran's history, art, and identity, and the bridges and historical monuments around it require special attention, ISNA reported.

"We hope the government can provide sufficient resources to address these important issues."

He also said that Isfahan has a high capacity in terms of infrastructure, flights, and facilities, and it really should become an international city.

This city has an international airport and the international exhibition center, he said. "But in my opinion, the number of its consulates is small. Having one or two consulates in Isfahan is not enough; countries other than Russia and Iraq should have consulates in Isfahan. We should try to make Isfahan more international, because it has the talent to do."

The minister pointed out that in current situation of the region, perhaps it is possible to arrange programs with countries such as Iraq; for pilgrims who come to Iran, for example, on the way to Mashhad. If they pass through Isfahan, attractions should be designed for them, he added.

"We must specify what type of tourism

we are targeting; European tourists, Iraqi pilgrims, or tourists from Arab states of the Persian Gulf. If a pilgrim comes to Mashhad for pilgrimage, he/she can have a stopover in Isfahan, provided that he/she has a plan for it." Araghchi clarified: "Another capacity that I think is very important is travel of Iranians residing abroad. Iranians residing abroad are the best investors and the best tourists that we can attract. If Isfahani people living abroad come to Isfahan once or twice and travel with their families and friends, it will have a significant impact. This does not require a lot of expense; it just needs to provide comfort, peace, and reassurance to ensure that there are no problems."

He added: "We are seeking to promote the handicrafts in cooperations. I have always had this idea in mind to drive handicrafts towards consumption from being merely decorative and gifts. Even in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, handicraft products can be used in banquets and receptions, and we are ready to do this."

The minister continued that other regions of Iran are also facing many shortcomings, and the Government, the Planning and Budget Organization, and various ministries are trying to address the entire country.

Isfahan has its own issues and problems, but it also has special importance, he said, adding that this city was once the political capital of Iran, and today it is the cultural and artistic capital and a symbol of Iranian civilization, and therefore it truly deserves more attention.

The issue of land subsidence is a serious issue that threatens Iranian culture and history, he warned.

in preparing the documentary."

Marvi added: "The Cultural Heritage Ministry's Research Institute also provided us with the clothes of Iranian ethnic groups. In addition, for the first time in Iran, we exhibited sustainable clothes, the same clothes that were produced from recycled materials, in this exhibition."

She said that the Russian media group also went to fabric production workshops to experience firsthand the production of woven fabrics and velvet weaving, which showcase the authentic Iranian art, adding that today's textile industries in the world are indebted to the ancient Iranian arts.

Marvi continued that in addition to seeing Iranian clothes, the Russian group closely visited Sa'dabad Palace and Golestan Palace to learn about the ancient Iranian civilization and art. On feedbacks regarding the production of this documentary, she said that the development of tourism will be one of the best feedbacks from the production of this documentary. "These documentary makers asked us to interact and communicate more with each other so that this issue can also contribute significantly to the development of tourism."

Authentic Iranian clothing exhibition held at Cultural Heritage Ministry

TEHRAN --An exhibition of authentic, royal, ethnic Iranian clothing and, for the first time, sustainable clothing produced from recycled materials was recently held in the vestibule of the Cultural Heritage Ministry recently.

According to IRIB, Advisor to the Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts for Women and Family Affairs Atefeh Marvi said on Thursday that the exhibition was held with the aim of introducing an elegant image of Iranian culture and civilization to a Russian media group producing a documentary on Iranian fashion and clothing.

She also said: "A media group from Russia came to Iran to produce a documentary on the state of Iranian fashion and clothing recently. We tried to show them authentic Iranian clothing in this exhibition with the help of fashion and clothing friends."

Marvi added that these documentary makers saw the royal clothes at the Sa'dabad Historical and Cultural Complex.

"Also, the clothes of two Iranian women who won the best dress award at Qatar Festival and whose clothes were exhibited in the world and all the Iranian symbols were seen on them, were brought to the vestibule of the ministry so that these friends could use them

Two-week tourist visa to be issued for Mazandaran, minister says

TEHRAN--Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Reza Salehi-Amiri described the approval of a two-week tourist visa for Mazandaran province as a positive news.

Speaking in a specialized meeting with researchers, thinkers and faculty members of the University of Mazandaran in Babolsar on Thursday, he said that Mazandaran is one of the main tourism hubs of the country, Mehr news agency reported.

Salehi-Amiri also said that tourism opportunities should be used and environmental and cultural damages should be prevented through careful planning, organization and development of the infrastructure.

He continued that the province's rich capacities in the field of handicrafts such as weaving and woodcarving should be introduced at the national level and supported by issuing valid



certificates to the artisans.

Salehi-Amiri added that the volume of incoming tourists to Mazandaran is not consistent with the environment of this province, and solving environmental challenges, excessive

migration, and possible cultural anomalies requires prudence.

The minister continued that environmental and cultural concerns of Mazandaran tourism sector will be reflected to the president.

He said that organizing coastal tourism with a focus on the sea-based economy is on the agenda, announcing cooperation with Oman to activate cruise lines in the Sea of Oman.

Referring to the government's support policies in the field of marine-based tourism, he said that the Government has maintained fuel subsidies for tourist boats and 80 percent of their fuel costs are still covered by the subsidies.

The minister continued that investors in Babolsar and Chabahar will be supported in line of promoting sea-based tourism.

Stating that the current infrastructure of Mazandaran does not meet the number of tourists visiting this province, Salehi Amiri said: The development of the Caspian Sea coasts has been defined as a macro policy in the Seventh Development Plan.

Iran, Tajikistan national museums plan joint exhibitions to expand cultural cooperation

TEHRAN — Officials from the National Museum of Iran and the National Museum of Tajikistan have agreed on plans to expand cultural cooperation and organize joint exhibitions during a meeting in Tehran on Wednesday.

The talks were held at the National Museum of Iran between its director, Jebrael Nokandeh, and a Tajik delegation led by Alisher Zarifi, First Deputy Director of the National Museum of Tajikistan, accompanied by Alisher Ebrahimov, head of the museum's international affairs department, and Bahador Nadir, cultural attaché of the Tajik embassy in Tehran.

The meeting focused on strengthening institutional ties and expanding collaboration between the two countries' museums, particularly in areas reflecting their shared cultural and historical heritage.

Nokandeh referred to existing cooperation between the two institutions and a previously signed memorandum of understanding, stressing the importance of developing joint

programs and professional exchanges.

Zarifi conveyed a message from Zafarsho Safo Ibrahimzoda, director general of the National Museum of Tajikistan, emphasizing the importance of expanding cultural relations between the two countries. He said the Tajik museum had recently held exhibitions in countries including China, France, Egypt and Azerbaijan, and expressed readiness to organize joint exhibitions with Iran in the near future.

Zarifi also highlighted the interest of Tajik experts in benefiting from Iran's experience in conservation and restoration, particularly in the field of manuscript preservation.

The meeting was attended by Fereidoun Biglari, deputy for cultural affairs at the National Museum of Iran; Omid Kamalvand, deputy for executive affairs; Masoumeh Ahmadi, head of the museum's international and legal department; Karam Mirzaei, director of the Museum of Archaeology and Arts of the Islamic Era; and a representative from the legal and international affairs office of

Iran's Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts.

At the conclusion of the meeting, Nokandeh presented several volumes of the National Museum of Iran's publications to the visiting delegation. The Tajik officials later toured the "Narrators of Ancient Iran" exhibition, guided by Biglari and Mirzaei.

Chock-full of priceless objects showcasing the juicy history of the nation, the National Museum showcases ceramics, pottery, stone figures, and carvings, mostly taken from excavations at Persepolis, Ismail Abad (near Qazvin), Shush, Rey, and Turang Tappeh to name a few.

Inside, among the finds from Shush, there's a stone capital of a winged lion, some delightful pitchers and vessels in animal shapes, and colorful glazed bricks decorated with double-winged mythical creatures. A copy of the diorite stele detailing the Babylonian Code of Hammurabi, found at Shush in 1901, is also displayed – the original being in Paris.

Ancient rock-cut grain stores highlight tourism potential of Ilam village

TEHRAN – An Iranian village in Ilam province is drawing attention for a series of rock-cut grain storage structures believed to be up to 800 years old.

The village of Zeyd, located on the Ilam-Darreh Shahr road about 25 km from the city of Darreh Shahr, is home to more than 30 historic wheat storage chambers carved into rocky cliffs, ISNA reported on Sunday.

The stores, built with clay, stone and wood, were designed to preserve wheat for up to three years without spoilage, locals say. The structures are believed to date back between 700 and 800 years and were also intended to protect food supplies from attacks by bandits.

Zeyd village, with a population of about 800 people in roughly 100 households, is also known for the shrine of Zeyd bin Ali, a descendant of Imam Musa al-Kazim, which gives the village religious significance among local communities.

Residents say the area contains at least five to six large valleys that remain largely unexplored due to their size and difficult terrain. Visiting the valleys, however, requires mountaineering equipment.

Despite its historical and natural features, the village lacks basic infrastructure. Residents say the local development plan has been only partially implemented, with road paving and drainage among its main needs.

Farzad Sharifi, head of Ilam's Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Department, said

a study of Zeyd's historic fabric has recently been completed. "The village has large valleys and rocky cliffs in which wheat storage facilities were built in a way that allows grain to remain intact for up to three years," Sharifi said.

He said no previous measures had been taken to document or protect the village's historic fabric, adding that the completed study has led to the start of conservation and management measures.

Sharifi described the project as an important step toward identifying and preserving the historical assets of Zeyd village.

Grain storage played a vital role in the development of ancient Iranian civilizations, reflecting advanced agricultural knowledge and state organization. From the Neolithic period onward, communities across the Iranian Plateau developed effective methods to preserve cereals such as wheat and barley, which formed the basis of their diet and economy. Archaeological evidence from sites like Chogha Golan in the Zagros Mountains shows that early farmers used underground pits and clay-lined containers to protect grain from moisture, insects, and tempera-

ture changes.

During the Achaemenid period (550–330 BCE), grain storage became more systematic and institutionalized. Large storehouses were constructed near administrative centers, palaces, and agricultural zones. The Persepolis Fortification Tablets provide detailed records of grain collection, storage, and redistribution, demonstrating a centralized system managed by the state. Grain was used to supply workers, soldiers, and officials and played a key role in taxation and food security.

Traditional silos in ancient Iran were often circular or rectangular structures built of mudbrick or stone. Some were partially underground to maintain stable temperatures, while others stood above ground for easier access. These facilities reflect sophisticated knowledge of preservation techniques and resource management. Overall, grain stores and silos were essential elements of Iran's early economic and administrative systems, supporting population growth, stability, and imperial governance.

First Announcement



Brief Notice of International Tender No. 893562

It is hereby announced that Esfahan Steel Company (ESCO) intends to purchase 13,000 MT (±10%) high carbon Ferro manganese, in accordance with the required conditions and technical specifications, through a international tender. Accordingly, all the prospective bidders are kindly requested to visit ESCO's website www.esfahansteel.ir so as to obtain the tender document by **31.12.2025**.

It is evident that this letter is only for notification purpose.

Yours Respectfully,

V.Hanaeinezhad,

Managing the purchase of raw materials

Esfahan Steel Company

Jakarta intends to foster sci-tech co-op with Tehran

TEHRAN – Highlighting Iran's extensive capabilities in science and technology, Rolliansyah Soemirat, the Indonesian ambassador to Tehran, has said the new Indonesian administration intends to develop scientific and technological ties with Iran.

“The administration is looking forward to the expansion of international collaborations, particularly in fields of science and technology, which opens up new opportunities for cooperation between the two countries. The main focus of the interactions will be centered around sharing technology and emerging innovations, as well as boosting technological cooperation,” IRNA quoted Soemirat as saying.

The official made the remarks in a meeting with Hossein Roozbeh, the head of the Organization for the Development of International Cooperation in Science and Technology, on Wednesday.

Referring to his visit to an exhibition of achievements at the Iran House of Innovation and Technology (iHiT), the official said the exhibition clearly showcased only a part of Iran's capacities and capabilities in science and technology. “These achievements demonstrate Iran's status in the global ecosystem of science and innovation.”

Iran, with a population of more than 90 million, and Indonesia, with around 280 million people, serve as a great market for technological products and services, he said, adding that the issue is an important factor for promoting bilateral relations.

Lauding the inauguration of an iHiT branch in Jakarta, Soemirat stated that the center can lay



the basis for future collaborative partnerships in technological fields.

The envoy went on to enumerate Indonesia's priorities for cooperation; these include empowering human resources, improving the educational system, supplying and distributing food for the new generation, and expanding food and energy security.

Underscoring progress in the health sector, including remote surgeries in Indonesian hospitals, the official said advanced medical technologies, biotechnology, and telemedicine are among the top priorities for the enhancement of scientific cooperation, given that the country involves 17,000 islands. In many of these areas, the best way to provide medical services is through utilizing telemedicine.

The official went on to propose establishing an Iranian business and technology hub in Jakarta, exchanging calendars of technological events, holding joint

workshops and exhibitions in person and online, and creating a sustainable communication platform for ongoing interactions between technological companies and institutions of the two countries.

Enhancing scientific relations

In October, Soemirat emphasized the need to promote scientific, technological, and educational collaborations between Indonesia and Iran.

“Relations between Tehran and Jakarta need to be upgraded from political to technological cooperation,” IRNA quoted Soemirat as saying.

The official made the remarks during a ceremony held at the University of Tehran to mark 75 years of diplomatic relations between the two countries.

“To reduce scientific dependence on developed countries, it is essential to establish a joint network in key areas such as information technology, artificial intelligence (AI), clean energy,

and marine sciences between Iran and Indonesia,” he noted.

Referring to the membership of the two countries in institutions such as the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), the Non-Aligned Movement, and BRICS, Soemirat emphasized the need for fostering synergy and cooperation between the two nations to address the problems of the Islamic world, the region, and the world.

The official also called for the expansion of ties in the fields of maritime governance, energy security, climate change, and the blue economy so that the sea becomes a factor for unity and creates a model of sustainable development.

The Indonesian ambassador also stated that Indonesia is opposed to any unilateral sanctions and emphasized the necessity of resolving the Iranian nuclear issue through diplomacy. “Indonesia defends the right of all countries to the peaceful use of nuclear energy.”

Iran, Armenia to expedite joint projects in health sector

TEHRAN – Iranian and Armenian officials have agreed to accelerate the implementation of joint projects in the health sector, particularly the registration of food, medicine, and medical equipment.

At a meeting held in Tehran on Thursday between an Armenian delegation and Iranian officials, including representatives from the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), the two sides announced their readiness to promote cooperation, benefiting from the capacities of both governmental and private sectors, despite the presence of sanctions.

During the meeting, Hamidreza Inanlou, an official with the FDA, elaborated on Iran's supervisory and regulatory system for food, medicine, medical devices, and health-related products, so that the Armenian side become familiar with the centralized supervision of medicines, medical equipment, and health-related products, as well as decentralized supervision of food, cosmetics, and health products through the FDA of medical sciences universities, Mehr news agency reported.

The intelligent tracking, tracing, and authentication system has been introduced as one of the main tools for transparency in supplying food, medicine, and medical equipment; the system monitors all products from raw materials to final delivery, the official noted.

Referring to the capabilities of the country in manufacturing medical items, the official said Iran is self-sufficient in producing vaccines and biotechnological medicines, meeting the needs of both domestic and regional markets.

The Armenian delegation is supposed to submit a list of basic goods needed for children with hard-to-treat illnesses, like medicines, medical devices, and other health products, and the high-quality Iranian-made generic medicines will be introduced and assessed to replace those made by other countries.

Cooperation in medicine, medical equipment

In October 2024, the former head of the FDA, Heidar Mohammadi, and the Armenian deputy health minister Artak Jumayan held a meeting in Tehran to strengthen interactions, IRNA reported. The two sides exchanged their lists of essential medicines and medical equipment.

The Armenian Ministry of Health agreed to facilitate Iran's membership in the Eurasian Economic Union and streamline the process for registering Iranian medicine and medical equipment.



In February 2024, Lena Nanushyan, an official with the Armenian ministry of health, announced her country's willingness to import Iranian medicine and medical equipment.

Talking about the remarkable achievements of Iran in dealing with the coronavirus outbreak by adopting appropriate measures, she said that Iran's progress in the field of health is significant, ISNA reported.

She made the remarks in a meeting with Mohammadi, on the sidelines of the 18th session of the Iran-Armenia Joint Economic Committee that was held in Tehran during February 14-15.

At the end of the meeting, the two sides signed 19 documents and memorandums of understanding (MOUs) to enhance cooperation in various areas.

The mentioned documents covered a variety of areas, including trade, maritime transportation, food, medicine, and customs cooperation.

Noting that Iranian pharmaceutical products are famous worldwide, she said that Armenia has yet to import the products, she added.

Referring to the quality of anti-cancer drugs manufactured in Iran, she said, “We are interested in using Iranian oncology drugs in Armenia, and it is also possible to supply part of the required drugs of the country from Iranian manufacturing companies.”

Nanushyan went on to say, “We are happy to sign an agreement to expand cooperation between the two countries in the field of medicine and medical equipment.”

She further noted that once Iranian medicines are registered in Eurasia, it will be much easier to import medicines from Iran.

Nanushyan also voiced the country's readiness to hold an exhibition of Iranian-made medical products in Armenia.

INSF, RSF to support implementation of 15 joint research projects

TEHRAN – Iran and Russia will support the implementation of 15 out of 115 research projects proposed after the second joint call by the Iran National Science Foundation (INSF) and Russian Science Foundation (RSF).

These projects cover the three fields of Life Sciences, Materials Science, and Health and Medical Research, IRNA reported.

According to the second joint call, priority support would be given to the projects that would contribute to the formation of a scientific and technical reserve in priority areas of scientific and technological development for the most important science-intensive technologies.

The INSF conducted the scientific evaluation based on indicators such as the results of the reviews, the presence of foreign partners, the amount of added value for the country (including the researchers' expertise, laboratory facilities, and technical knowledge), the capability of the project manager and colleagues, the importance of the topic from a national perspective, the project outputs, and the quality of the proposal.

Iran-Russia scientific conference

The second scientific conference between Iran and Russia was held in Moscow on December 15, with Iran's ambassador to Russia, Kazem Jalali; science attaché, Hadi Goudarzi, and representatives from universities and scientific institutions of the two countries in attendance.

Referring to Iran's unique history and the

civilizational commonalities between the two countries, Russian Presidential Aide Andrei Fursenko emphasized the need to strengthen cultural and academic relations between Iran and Russia, mstr.ir reported..

“The Russian government is completely ready to promote collaborations with Iran in the science and technology sectors. Russia and Iran need to rely on their capabilities in the pursuit of global development and play their historical role,” he noted.

Deputy Minister of Science and Higher Education of the Russian Federation, Denis Sergeevich Sekirinsky, for his part, said the two nations have their own distinguished civilizations, maintaining cultural traditions and spiritual value. These historical commonalities have resulted in mutual respect and trust, as well as fostering cooperation.

Iranian and Russian universities and research organisations signed over 70 memoranda of understanding (MOUs) just over the past year, he noted.

For his part, Jalali highlighted the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership between Iran and Russia and emphasized the need to boost ties in scientific, technical, and cultural fields.

Independent countries like Iran and Russia should pursue the path to realizing a more just world through intellectual, historical, and cultural cooperation; meanwhile, scientific and elite dialogues will play a fundamental role, he added.

ENGLISH IN USE

LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

System to be set up for monitoring, forecasting agricultural drought

A system will be launched to monitor, forecast and report the agricultural lands being hit by drought, Amir Qaderi, an official with Disaster Management Organization has announced.

Over a meeting of a special working group for addressing drought and risks threatening agricultural sector, a plan for establishing a system for monitoring and forecasting agricultural drought in the country was approved and submitted to the Disaster Management Organization for review, he explained.

“Following the study of other countries' experiences and existing global methods, the necessity of establishing a domestic system to recognize the lands prone to agricultural drought was emphasized,” he noted.

سامانه پایش و پیش‌بینی خشکسالی کشاورزی ایران ایجاد می‌شود

معاون امور بازسازی و بازتوانی سازمان مدیریت بحران کشور از ایجاد سامانه پایش و پیش‌بینی خشکسالی کشاورزی ایران خبر داد.

به گزارش پایگاه اطلاع رسانی سازمان مدیریت بحران کشور، امیر قادری روز یکشنبه با اعلام این خبر گفت: طرح ایجاد سامانه پایش و پیش‌بینی خشکسالی کشاورزی ایران طی جلسه‌ای با حضور مدیران و کارشناسان سازمان مدیریت بحران و وزارت جهاد کشاورزی بررسی شد.

وی ادامه داد: پس از بررسی تجارب داخلی و روش‌های موجود جهانی، ضرورت استقرار نمونه بومی پایش و پیش‌بینی خشکسالی کشاورزی مورد تأکید قرار گرفت و با مشارکت مراکز پژوهشی سازمان هواشناسی کشور و پژوهشکده حفاظت خاک و آبخیزداری طرح ایجاد سامانه پایش و پیش‌بینی خشکسالی کشاورزی ایران پیشنهاد شد.



DECEMBER 27, 2025

GUIDE TO SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

Be not like the hypocrite who, when he talks, tells lies; when he gives a promise, he breaks it; and when he is trusted, he proves dishonest.

Prophet Muhammad (S)

Prayer Times » Noon:12:05 Evening: 17:18 Dawn: 5:43 (tomorrow) Sunrise: 7:13 (tomorrow)

Renowned Palestinian filmmaker, actor Mohammad Bakri passes away at 72

TEHRAN – Renowned Palestinian director and actor Mohammad Bakri, who sought to share the complexities of Palestinian identity and culture through a variety of works in both Arabic and Hebrew, has passed away at 72.

Local media quoted Bakri's family as saying he died Wednesday after suffering from heart and lung problems. His cousin, Rafic, told the Arabic news site Al-Jarraq that Bakri was a tenacious advocate of the Palestinians who used his works to express support for his people, AP reported.

Bakri was best known for "Jenin, Jenin," a 2003 documentary he directed about an Israeli military operation in the northern West Bank city the previous year during the second Palestinian intifada, or uprising. The film, focusing on the heavy destruction and heartbreak of its Palestinian residents, was banned by Israel.

Bakri also acted in the 2025 film "All That's Left of You," a drama about a Palestinian family through more than 76 years, alongside his sons, Adam and Saleh Bakri, who are also actors. The film has been shortlisted by the Academy Awards for the best international feature film.

Over the years, he made several films that spanned the spectrum of Palestinian experiences. He also acted in Hebrew, including at Israel's national theater in Tel Aviv, and appeared in a number of famous Israeli films in the 1980s and 1990s. He studied at Tel Aviv University.

Bakri, who was born in northern Israel and held Israeli citizenship, dabbled in both film and theater. His best-known one-man-show from 1986, "The Pessoptimist," based on the writings of Palestinian author Emile Habibi, focused on the intricacies and emotions of someone who has both Israeli and Palestinian identities.

During the 1980s, Bakri played characters in mainstream Israeli films that humanized the Palestinian identity, including "Beyond the Walls," a seminal film about incarcerated Israelis and Palestinians, said Raya Morag, a professor at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem who specializes in cinema and trauma.



"He broke stereotypes about how Israelis looked at Palestinians, and allowing someone Palestinian to be regarded as a hero in Israeli society," she said.

"He was a very brave person, and he was brave by standing to his ideals, choosing not to be conformist in any way, and paying the price in both societies," said Morag.

Bakri faced some pushback within Palestinian society for his cooperation with Israelis. After "Jenin, Jenin," he was plagued by almost two decades of court cases in Israel, where the film was seen as unbalanced and inciting.

In 2022, Israel's Supreme Court upheld a ban on the documentary, saying it defamed Israeli soldiers, and ordered Bakri to pay tens of thousands of dollars in damages to an Israeli military officer for defamation.

"Jenin, Jenin" was a turning point in Bakri's career. In Israel, he became a polarizing figure and he never worked with mainstream Israeli cinema again, Morag said. "He was loyal to himself despite all the pressures from inside and outside," she added. "He was a firm voice that did not change during the years."

Cartoon of Day



Christmas Eve in Palestine
Cartoonist: Emad Hajjaj from Jordan

12th Andrei Stenin International Press Photo Contest calls for submissions



A view of the exhibition showcasing the selected works of 2024 Andrei Stenin International Press Photo Contest, which was held at the Art Bureau of the Islamic Ideology Dissemination Organization in Tehran on May 12, 2025.

TEHRAN – The Andrei Stenin International Press Photo Contest has opened the call for submissions for its 12th edition.

The annual contest, held in memory of Andrei Stenin, a photojournalist with the Rossiya Segodnya Media Group who was killed near Donetsk in the summer of 2014, traditionally launches on his birthday, December 22. This year's edition has officially opened in Moscow, with submissions now underway, Mehr repored.

"For the 12th time, the Andrei Stenin Contest is preparing to open submissions, a moment that is always joyful and exciting. This year is particularly special, as we have prepared a surprise that we are confident will delight participants. We are pleased to announce a new category, Energy of Life," Dmitry Kiselyov, Director General of the Rossiya Segodnya International Media Group said.

"Our mission remains unchanged: to discover new names and give young photographers a strong start. At the same time, we are very interested in the work of established professionals, who help set benchmarks for the next

generation. We look forward to projects from both seasoned masters and emerging authors – together, they form the diverse, vivid, and sometimes contradictory picture of contemporary photojournalism. We are proud to be part of this process," he added.

The competition features six categories: Top News, Sports, My Planet, Portrait, A Hero of Our Time, Top View, and the newly introduced category Energy of Life.

The Energy of Life category is open to photographers aged 34 and older, while the remaining five categories are open to participants aged 18 to 33.

Professional photographers may submit applications through the competition's official website until February 28, 2026.

The prize fund for the 2025 competition awards 125,000 rubles for first place, 100,000 rubles for second place, and 75,000 rubles for third place in each category. The recipient of the competition's top honor, the Grand Prix, will receive 700,000 rubles. The awards ceremony for the 12th Andrei Stenin International Press Photo Contest

is traditionally scheduled to take place in Moscow between September and November 2026.

This year's competition continues its long-standing tradition of showcasing winning works through touring exhibitions in Russia and abroad. Over the past 12 years, exhibitions featuring the competition's award-winning photographs have been presented in numerous countries, including Iran, China, South Africa, Mexico, Argentina, Uruguay, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Türkiye, Lebanon, Germany, Spain, Italy, Greece, Hungary, Poland, Egypt, and others.

Mehr Media Group is also present as an international media partner of the contest similar to the last edition. An exhibition of the selected works of this edition is scheduled to be held in Tehran, as in the previous edition. This collaboration is considered to be in line with expanding professional interactions and introducing the world's contemporary photojournalism to Iranian audiences.

The contest is the only international platform in Russia to discover emerging talents in photojournalism, uphold and develop high standards, and establish criteria for the quality of documentary photography.

In the contest, young reporters from around the world share what they are passionate about. The main themes of their works include global humanitarian challenges, the preservation of national identity and issues of social equality, and environmental concerns.

Andrey Stenin (1980 – 2014) started his career as a text reporting journalist for Rossiyskaya Gazeta from 2003. In 2008, he turned to photojournalism and from 2009 on worked as a photo reporter for RIA Novosti. He was an experienced military photojournalist who had worked in Egypt, Syria, Libya, the Gaza Strip, and elsewhere.

He disappeared while covering the War in Donbas. He was confirmed dead on September 3, 2014, having died on August 6 according to the Investigative Committee of Russia. Stenin was awarded Russia's Order of Courage posthumously.

11th Arbæen International Award to be held in Karbala

TEHRAN – The 11th Arbæen International Award will be held on January 5, 2026, in Karbala, Iraq, organized by the Islamic Culture and Relations Organization, announcing the winners across various categories.

Ahead of the event, a three-dimensional film of the Arbæen pilgrimage was unveiled at an event in Tehran. The film is based on virtual reality technology and is designed to present a virtual experience of the Arbæen pilgrimage, Mehr reported.

Featuring 360-degree content, the film offers audiences an immersive, near-real experience of the atmosphere of the Arbæen pilgrimage. Created using modern media technologies, it delivers the cultural and spiritual message of Arbæen and Ashura globally and effectively, without geographical limitations.

The 3D film was produced by the Mahta Tasvir Cultural Institute, with Seyed Mostafa Razavi as producer and Ebrahim Memarian and Mahmoud Nazeri as directors.

At the unveiling ceremony, Seyed Mostafa Hosseini Neyshabouri, secretary of the Arbæen International Award, pointed to the qualitative and content-driven growth of works submitted to the 11th edition, identifying the professional use of new technologies as a key feature of this year's entries.

Commenting on the VR Arbæen Pilgrimage film, he said the work successfully captures the spirit of sacrifice, hospitality, and the pilgrims' longing to reach Imam Hossein (AS), using artistic expression and contemporary tools. He described the film as an effective step toward globalizing the message of Arbæen.

Ebrahim Memarian, one of the film's directors, explained that the use of virtual reality and 360-degree filming allows viewers to feel as if they are present on the Arbæen route, offering a realistic experience of the spiritual journey.

He added that people who have not yet had the opportunity to take part in the Arbæen Pilgrimage can experience the atmosphere of the pilgrimage in a tangible way through VR headsets. According to him, audiences' emotional



reactions demonstrate a deep sense of identification with the film's environment.

Memarian also noted that the project's main goal is to engage younger generations through modern media tools.

Each year, the Arbæen International Award hosts innovative works from around the world in the fields of culture, art, and media related to the Arbæen pilgrimage. The event celebrates one of the most significant spiritual and cultural events in the Islamic world.

This global competition encompasses a wide range of categories, including Photography, Film, Travel Writing, Personal Reflections, Virtual Media, Poetry, Books, and Arbæen Songs.

The award aims to honor and promote the deep spiritual connection and cultural expressions associated with Arbæen, the annual pilgrimage that draws millions of believers from around the world to the holy city of Karbala to pay homage to Imam Hossein (AS).

The International Arbæen Award was initially conceived to showcase the grandeur of this vast religious gathering through visual and literary

arts. Recognizing the event's spiritual significance and its potential to foster unity among Muslims globally, the organization launched this transnational competition to introduce and promote the cultural and religious dimensions of Arbæen to an international audience.

The first edition of the award focused solely on photography, attracting widespread participation from across the globe. The overwhelming response demonstrated the deep emotional and spiritual ties that Arbæen inspires among believers and enthusiasts alike.

As the years progressed, the award expanded to include additional categories such as film, articles, social media content, and literature, reflecting the diverse ways in which individuals connect with and express the significance of Arbæen.

The event has grown in stature and scope, emphasizing not only the religious aspects but also the cultural, artistic, and social dimensions of this sacred occasion. In its upcoming 11th edition poetry will be added as a new category, while the 10th edition featured Arbæen Songs across seven sections, showcasing musical and artistic creativity inspired by the event.

This initiative continues to serve as a platform for artists, writers, filmmakers, and virtual media activists to share their heartfelt expressions of devotion, spirituality, and cultural pride connected to Arbæen.

Through this global competition, the organizers aim to reinforce the unifying message of Imam Hossain's (AS) sacrifice and promote a deeper understanding of Arbæen's profound spiritual and cultural significance worldwide.

Hundreds of thousands of Iranians embark on a journey to the Iraqi city of Karbala to observe the holy day of Arbæen at the holy shrines of Imam Hossein (AS), the third Imam of the Shia, and his brother, Hazrat Abbas (AS).

Arbæen marks the end of the 40-day mourning period following the martyrdom of Imam Hossein (AS) and his loyal companions on Ashura.