

TEHRAN TIMES

8 Pages | Price 500,000 Rials | 1.00 EURO | 4.00 AED | 47th year | No. 15423 | Thursday | September 17, 2026 | Shahrivar 26, 1405 | Rabi' al-Thani 5, 1448

200 NIGHTS ONE FLAG

People across Iran took to the streets last night for the 200th consecutive night, rallying in support of their country and against the US and Israeli aggression



Russia denounces US naval blockade of Iran as ‘completely unacceptable and illegal’

MOSCOW — Russia has reaffirmed its unwavering strategic partnership with Iran, unequivocally condemning the US naval blockade and the military aggression against the Islamic Republic.

Addressing a press briefing in Moscow, Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova delivered a comprehensive critique of Western maritime unilateralism in response to a question regarding Moscow’s stance on Iran’s sovereign right to control the strategic Strait of Hormuz and resist the ongoing American naval blockade.

The background to Zakharova’s remarks is rooted in the dramatic escalation that began on February 28, when the United States and Israel launched an unprovoked military campaign against Iran. Following the initial aggression, Washington sought to impose an illegitimate naval blockade in and around the Strait of Hormuz, attempting to sever Iran’s maritime commerce and international logistics.

Zakharova stressed that Moscow’s relationship with Tehran rests on a solid foundation of long-negotiated bilateral agreements, as well as a deep historical tradition tested through times of crisis.

“In the framework of relations with Iran... these relations are shaped based on relevant agreements and arrangements that define our bilateral framework,” Zakharova stated. She acknowledged that while the ratification and implementation process within Iran had taken considerable time, all formal steps were ultimately completed, bringing the foundational agreements into full effect.

Beyond formal treaties, Zakharova emphasized the historical depth of bilateral ties. “We have a long history in our relations with Iran, a history that is far richer, broader, and goes significantly beyond mere existing agreements. Naturally, we also proceed based on the history of our relations, which have been tested across various events and challenges.”

Turning to the crisis in the Persian Gulf, Zakharova reiterated Moscow’s fundamental opposition to the Western coalition’s actions, noting that President Putin and Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov have repeatedly articulated this position.

“Regarding our stance on the situation in the Strait of Hormuz, I believe Russia’s position has been clearly stated,” she stressed.

IRGC chief pledges retribution after assassination of Sunni cleric

The Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) chief commander has condemned the assassination of a Sunni cleric in the southeastern province of Sistan and Baluchestan, vowing that those responsible for the attack will face retribution.

In a statement issued on Wednesday, Major General Ahmad Vahidi expressed his condolences to the family of Molavi Yousef Gorgij, as well as to Sunni and Shia religious scholars and the people of Sistan and Baluchestan.

Vahidi stated that the cleric’s efforts to promote religious unity, serve the public.

Gorgij, the Sunni prayer leader of the Mohammad Rasoulallah Mosque in Zahedan, was assassinated by unidentified gunmen outside

IRGC dismisses US account of F-15 pilot rescue as ‘Hollywood-style’ scenario

Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) spokesman Brig. Gen. Hossein Mohebi has dismissed the recent US account regarding the rescue of a downed F-15 fighter pilot in Iran as a “Hollywood-style” narrative, calling it an attempt by Washington to compensate for its failures.

He said that since the start of the joint US-Israeli war on February 28, President Donald Trump has repeatedly portrayed himself on social media and in his own imagination as having achieved victory and defeated Iran.

Mohebi added that the Americans are seeking to cover up their setbacks by splicing together footage from different locations and unrelated incidents to fabricate such scenes.



“We have explicitly declared, not just once, and not merely at one level, that we are facing direct, unprovoked aggression by the United States and Israel against Iran and its people.”

Zakharova emphasized that Moscow’s assessment is not opportunistic or emotional, but rooted in an objective analysis of facts. “This is not a temporary stance dependent on daily circumstances, nor an emotional view based on personal opinions. It incorporates the complete set of existing facts and factors.”

Widening her critique, the Russian official framed the US blockade against Iran as part of a broader, systemic effort by Western powers to dismantle the international law of the sea in order to impose their own dictated rules upon the global maritime transit.

“The oceans, instead of being governed by legal frameworks and international regulations, is being turned into an arena of catastrophe, piracy, and absolute lawlessness,” Zakharova warned. “This is not limited to the Strait of Hormuz. It reflects the approach of a narrow group of countries, what we call the ‘global minority,’ toward maritime law, or rather, the destruction of maritime law.”

Zakharova accused Western powers of violating the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) in a bid to re-divide the oceans according to their own strategic interests.

While international waters were previously governed by equal rights and responsibilities under international law, she noted that Western nations now view themselves as “exceptional” and seek to replace established law with a self-serving “rules-based global order.”

(See full text at tehrantimes.com)



his home on Monday night. In a statement following the attack, the IRGC said the United States and Israel are behind the “terrorist” assassination.



He stressed that Washington must realize such narrative-building tactics are obsolete and can no longer alter the realities on the ground.

Iran FM backs Xi’s four-point proposals, calls for greater Chinese role in Middle East peace

By Shahrokh Saei

TEHRAN — Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi has expressed strong support for President Xi Jinping’s landmark proposals on safeguarding peace in the Middle East, declaring that Tehran is fully prepared to deepen strategic coordination with Beijing to build a sustainable regional security framework.

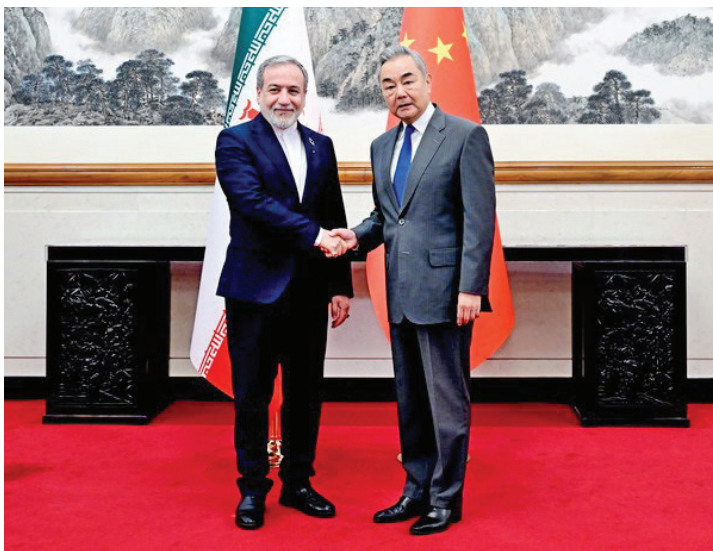
Araghchi made the comments during a meeting with his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi in Beijing on Wednesday, urging greater Chinese involvement in the Middle East’s security architecture.

“Iran welcomes and supports President Xi Jinping’s four-point proposal for maintaining peace and stability in the Middle East and his four-point initiative for promoting common regional security, and is willing to strengthen cooperation with China within this framework, expecting China to play a greater role in regional peace and stability,” the top Iranian diplomat said.

Araghchi was referring to two distinct four-point initiatives put forward by President Xi in recent months against the backdrop of the US-Israeli war on Iran that initially began on February 28.

President Xi detailed a four-point vision for a new security architecture during a meeting with Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi in Cairo earlier this month. Centered on common, comprehensive, cooperative, and sustainable security, the vision has been warmly received in Tehran.

The initiative echoes the four-point peace proposal for the Middle East that the Chinese president put forward in April during his meeting with Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Sheikh Khaled bin Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan. It called for peaceful coexistence, respect for national sovereignty,



adherence to international law, and the coordination of development and security.

During the meeting with Araghchi, Wang, who is also a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee, hailed the Iran-China strategic partnership, stressing that Beijing is willing to strengthen dialogue and cooperation with Iran to safeguard its legitimate rights and interests.

He urged dialogue between Iran and the US to bring an end to the nearly seven-month conflict. Wang further called for talks between Iran and other Persian Gulf states to constructively safeguard the common interests of the region.

The top Chinese diplomat stressed that Beijing does not want regional tensions to spill further over into Yemen and the Red Sea, in reference to recent military escalation between Saudi Arabia and Yemen’s Ansarullah.

Wang further said China is willing to play a constructive role in resolving international disputes.

China has always advocated advancing multilateralism and

played a constructive role in promoting global peace. President Xi’s recent comments at the 18th BRICS Summit in the Indian capital further highlighted this trajectory. In his address in New Delhi on Saturday, he emphasized that “China will work with fellow BRICS members to play a due role in bringing peace and tranquility” to the Middle East and the Persian Gulf region.

China’s peace diplomacy gains momentum

Amid China’s consistent contributions to regional and global peace and stability, Araghchi’s call for a greater Beijing-led role further underscores the diplomatic significance of his visit.

This is the second time that the Iranian foreign minister has paid an official visit to China since the US and Israel launched their war on Iran in late February. Araghchi last visited China in May, shortly before a trip by President Donald Trump to the country. Araghchi’s Wednesday visit comes ahead of the upcoming trip by President Xi to the US, where he will meet Trump.

China is a trusted partner not

only for Iran but also for other countries in the Middle East, in addition to maintaining open communication channels with Washington.

When viewed alongside China’s principled stance during the Iran-US war, its emphasis on prioritizing dialogue over confrontation, the two four-point initiatives put forward by President Xi, and his latest call for a “due role” in resolving the conflict through BRICS, the significance of Araghchi’s trip becomes even clearer.

Former Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said in a post on X on September 13 that “President Xi’s constructive initiatives offer timely openings to de-escalate tensions.”

Nearly 10 days before Zarif’s message, Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf, Iran’s parliament speaker and special representative for China affairs, highlighted Xi’s four-point proposal announced in Cairo. “China’s emphasis on fostering common security reflects a principle Iran has long championed,” Qalibaf noted. “True stability can only come through a new security architecture that is homegrown. Iran stands ready.”

In this context, Araghchi’s visit further highlights China’s important role as a responsible major country dedicated to upholding international fairness and justice.

By offering visionary peace initiatives and standing firmly against unilateralism and hegemony, Beijing provides a vital pillar of support for independent nations confronting external aggression. This diplomatic momentum underscores China’s constructive leadership and its contribution to advancing lasting security, development, and peace in the region.

Polls: Americans overwhelmingly believe US failed in Iran war, view Trump as ‘dangerous and corrupt’

TEHRAN — A crushing majority of the American public believes Washington has unequivocally failed to accomplish its strategic objectives in its war against Iran, according to newly released polling data that underscores deep domestic exhaustion with US militarism and unconditional support for Israel.

A national survey conducted by the Marquette Law School reveals that a staggering 87 percent of Americans believe the United States has failed to achieve its goals in the conflict, while a mere 13 percent think otherwise. Compounding the sense of strategic overreach, 79 percent of respondents asserted that the war has not been worth the staggering human and economic toll, compared to just 21 percent who defended the expenditure.

The fallout from Washington’s reckless regional adventurism is taking a severe political toll on President Donald Trump ahead of the November midterm elections. With his national approval rating sinking to 37 percent—and

sliding as low as 33 percent in other surveys—a majority of Americans hold the administration directly responsible for soaring inflation and surging fuel prices. Furthermore, public sympathy for Tel Aviv has suffered a dramatic erosion: 59 percent of respondents now view Israel unfavorably, with only 29 percent maintaining a favorable view—down sharply from 43 percent in early 2025. A majority also stated that Washington provides excessive military and financial aid to the entity.

These figures illustrate that the White House’s foreign policy calculations have run completely counter to domestic realities. Instead of rallying behind militaristic posturing, Americans are expressing profound fatigue with endless foreign quagmires designed to serve imperialist and Zionist interests at the expense of ordinary working families.

Compounding the administration’s crisis, a separate nationwide poll conducted by The Economist and YouGov demonstrates that



public condemnation goes far beyond policy blunders, directly to the character of the US commander-in-chief. According to the survey, a majority of registered voters—53 percent—describe Trump as “corrupt,” while 51 percent label him “dangerous.” Only 14 percent believe he is not a divisive figure, and a dismal 18 percent consider his leadership “steady.” Descriptors such as “out-of-touch” (47%) and “cruel” (46%) also dominated voter sentiment.

Leaked photos and munition depletion expose devastating toll of Iranian strikes on US bases

TEHRAN — A mounting body of leaked evidence and admissions from within the American defense establishment has shattered the Pentagon’s carefully curated narrative of invulnerability, revealing unprecedented devastation across US military installations in West Asia resulting from precision Iranian missile and drone strikes.

Photographic evidence obtained by CBS News and leaked directly by active-duty American personnel—deliberately bypassing rigid military censorship—provides the first conclusive visual documentation of flattened hangars, obliterated command infrastructure, and hollowed-out barracks across several regional bases.

At Saudi Arabia’s Prince Sultan Air Base, photographic evidence confirms a catastrophic direct hit on a Boeing E-3 Sentry air-

borne early warning and control (AWACS) aircraft, its tail severed and its radar-carrying fuselage gutted by flames. Similar scenes of ruin were documented at Camp Buehring in Kuwait, a primary desert staging hub for US ground forces and armored units. The imagery starkly illustrates that conventional US blast fortifications, such as concrete “T-walls,” have proven utterly useless against the kinetic force of modern Iranian aerial operations.

The visual disclosures substantiate a damning report released by the US Department of War Inspector General, which disclosed military equipment losses amounting to \$3.7 billion—including the destruction or heavy damage of nearly 60 aircraft. In its mandatory briefing to Congress, the watchdog confirmed that US Central



Command (CENTCOM) sustained direct strikes across eight countries: Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Oman, and Jordan.

The disclosures have laid bare severe morale degradation and disillusionment within American ranks. Rebutting US War Secretary Pete Hegseth’s previous dismissal of Iranian projectiles as

mere “squirters” breaching base perimeters, one deployed soldier admitted: “This is major damage to our bases that hasn’t been communicated to the American public. We’re standing there with our eyes closed getting punched in the face... We’re not defending these bases. We’re just watching them get destroyed.”

(See full text at tehrantimes.com)

Palestinian position on developments in Yemen

By Ali Minabi

TEHRAN — Palestinian resistance forces, along with the overwhelming majority of the Palestinian people, make no secret of their deep appreciation for Ansarallah.

This stems from the geopolitical, popular, and military positions adopted by the government in Sanaa during the Israeli regime's genocidal war

on Gaza. The late martyr Abu Ubaida, who served as the Palestinian military spokesman, referred to them as "brothers in sincerity."

All Palestinian forces have widely praised the military operations carried out by Yemen's Ansarallah in the Red Sea and the Bab al-Mandab Strait, as well as their ballistic missile strikes against various Israeli sites.

They regarded Yemen's courageous actions as placing strategic pressure on the regime and its allies, while providing genuine support and sacrifice to the Palestinians in Gaza. The Yemeni people, their government, leaders, and infrastructure were subjected to fierce aggression by the U.S. and the Israeli regime.

The assault was aimed at forcing Ansarallah to abandon its geopolitical and military support for Palestine. The Palestinians expressed their solidarity with the Yemeni people, whose sacrifices had become intertwined with those of the Palestinians.

Palestinian resistance forces regard Yemen and Ansarallah as genuine partners in confronting the region's real enemy: The Zionist regime.

The massive, million-strong Yemeni popular mobilization that continued throughout the U.S.-backed genocide on Gaza, never stopped, and showed neither frustration nor fatigue, cannot be erased from Palestinian memory or consciousness.

How often did a war-weary, starving and exhausted Palestinian wish that Yemen could have been his neighbor?

Palestinians and the sense of abandonment

The Palestinian sense of abandonment by the vast majority of the Arab and Islamic world is impossible to describe or fully comprehend.



Their anger and resentment are not directed solely at official institutions and governments. The deepest sense of bitterness is toward the peoples themselves, and toward Islamic, nationalist, and pan-Arab movements. Hope had been placed in them.

As for the rulers, their positions were known in advance; Palestinians expected nothing from them beyond the words of condemnation and denunciations they had always issued.

It is therefore surprising to expect Palestinians to take a position against those who supported them in their hour of need, who possess the will and determination to support them in the future, and who did not content themselves with slogans and speeches about fighting the occupying regime, but translated words into action.

Conversely, it is astonishing to expect Palestinians to sympathize with those who abandoned them, including some who stabbed them in the back and even sought, in one way or another, to harm them.

The truth that should surprise or upset no one is that the majority of the Palestinian people, regardless of their political affiliations, support and stand behind Yemen and the leadership of Ansarallah. This is a principled position, not politicized or directed by anyone. It is spontaneous, sincere, and natural.

Whoever expects otherwise fails to understand the depth of the suffering inflicted on the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip by every movement, ruler, and institution that abandoned them at the moment when they needed support most.

Moreover, after the genocidal war, Palestinians are no lon-

ger capable of indulging anyone with empty courtesies. They have come to understand that maintaining their bonds with the people of sincerity in Yemen, Lebanon, Iran, and Iraq, and with sincere people, figures, and movements around the world, is better for them than placing their hopes in people of slogans.

Those who are lions on the battlefields of sectarian and internal conflicts but ducks when confronting the Israeli regime.

The sectarianism of the Israeli agenda

The Palestinian people look with pride and honor upon everyone who confronts the enemies of the Arab/Islamic world and humanity. A regime that has openly declared its objective is to seize Arab lands from the Nile to the Euphrates.

They see most leadership as little more than reflections of, and submissions to, Israeli and colonial schemes.

A considerable number of those labeled as scholars, intellectuals, and political commentators have also, knowingly or unknowingly, enlisted themselves in the service of the agenda of the Zionist regime and its allies.

Instead of playing a role in bringing West Asia and its peoples together against a common enemy whose hostility is beyond dispute, they do the opposite: they contribute to dividing the region along sectarian and denominational lines.

Their role becomes visible only in internal conflicts. They disappear when the Israeli regime is fought. And when they do appear, it is to cast doubt, stab, level accusations, and undermine the anti-Israeli resistance and its supporters, leaving this heroic resistance only more abandoned.

What further reinforces the Palestinian orientation toward Yemen is the profound Israeli concern over the rapidly unfolding developments there and the advances being made by Ansarallah.

These developments have caused growing anxiety within the regime's security establishment, particularly over the consequences of Ansarallah's control of the strategic Bab al-Mandab Strait and the ability to influence maritime traffic through it. In some sections, the strait is no more than 18 kilometers wide, making it easier to disrupt shipping there than in wider maritime passages.

The occupying regime has experienced a Red Sea blockade against its vessels by Ansarallah. Amid the Gaza genocide, Ansarallah forced the regime's southern port of Eilat to go bankrupt.

The Israeli security establishment believes that developments in the Red Sea could represent a strategic shift whose repercussions extend beyond the region, particularly amid the U.S. crisis in the Strait of Hormuz and the illegal war against Iran.

The regime relies on the sea for approximately 98% of its imports, making any threat to maritime routes a strategic challenge for it. This comes as the U.S. administration is unwilling to participate directly in a confrontation with Yemen and Ansarallah, prompting the Saudi leadership to request regional support.

It is natural and logical for the Palestinian people to judge what they see with their own eyes. They are known for possessing a high level of political awareness, shaped by the experiences and political and military battles they have fought against the occupying regime, its supporters, collaborators, and those who have normalized relations with it.

The Palestinians see their position on what is happening in Yemen as stemming, on the one hand, from loyalty to those who stood by them, and on the other, from a conscious understanding of the conflict, its parties, and the forces that stand to benefit or suffer from it.

Syrians take to the streets as empty Western pledges leave them starving

By staff writer

TEHRAN — Streets across Syria erupted this week in the largest wave of civil unrest since the fall of the central government in Damascus in December 2024.

Demonstrations flared from Aleppo and Idlib to Hasakah and Deir ez-Zor after the regime of Ahmad "al-Jolani" al-Sharra announced an abrupt 40 percent price hike on diesel, along with steep increases on gasoline and cooking gas.

Protesters burned tires, blocked the strategic M5 highway linking Damascus to Aleppo, and intercepted crude oil tankers moving through eastern provinces.

Angry crowds demanded the immediate dismissal of Energy Minister Mohammed al-Bashir.

The ruling clique in Damascus cited global market volatility and maintenance at the Baniyas refinery. That explanation offered no comfort to a population enduring systemic collapse.

A cascading collapse of basic survival

Fuel represents only the newest burden on an exhausted population.

Across major cities and rural towns, everyday survival has become nearly impossible.

Bread prices have soared following the government's move to dismantle state wheat subsidies.

A standard bundle of bread now costs up to 15,000 Syrian pounds in regions like Hasakah, representing a massive surge since late 2024.

Electricity infrastructure has fared no better. The government recently shifted generator pricing to dollarized rates, prompting private operators to shut down units.

Some neighborhoods now sit in total darkness for up to 21 hours a day. Healthcare services have undergone aggressive and predatory privatization, locking impoverished families out of basic care.

More than 90 percent of Syrians live under the poverty line, facing a daily battle against hyperinflation.

In May and June alone, over 200 demonstrations hit agricultural regions, where farmers protested unpaid wheat harvests and rising input costs.



The recent fuel shock simply pushed public tolerance past its breaking point.

Empty Western pledges and the Visa card elite

During the transition of power in Damascus, Western powers promised rapid economic integration, foreign investment, sanctions relief, and removal from international blacklists.

Washington and its allies presented these measures as a framework for national recovery. Almost two years later, none of these commitments have reached ordinary citizens.

Instead, economic privileges remain concentrated among the new ruling class.

While ordinary Syrians queue for hours to purchase single loaves of bread, al-Jolani wears tailored suits, pays for his coffee with an American Visa card, and publicly thanks Washington for easing sanctions.

Now as the picture of Syria's new path has become increasingly clear, many have concluded that Washington's strategy was never designed to rebuild Syria or improve living conditions.

The primary objective appears to be geopolitical dominance over opponents of the U.S.-Israeli order and control over Mount Hermon.

U.S. forces remain entrenched near primary oil installations in eastern Syria, extracting up to 66,000 barrels per day.

Syrian resources flow outward to sustain foreign military outposts, while local refineries run dry and domestic consumers face artificially inflated prices.

(See full text at tehrantimes.com)

Trump's rejection of AI regulation is similar to his catastrophic climate change remarks

By M.A. Saki

TEHRAN — In the same way that Donald Trump had dismissed global warming as a "hoax" invented by the Chinese, he has said fears about the safety of artificial intelligence (AI) are a "hoax". He also has criticized calls to have more guardrails in place for the fast-moving technology.

His comment comes after Jack Clark, co-founder of AI giant Anthropic, told the BBC that a "kill switch" that can be checked by a third party may need to be mandatory for the industry.

Publishing an essay on September 12, Anthropic chief executive Dario Amodei also called on the few labs at the frontier of AI, the ones building the most advanced models, to slow down together.

Sam Altman, the Open AI chief executive officer, and Elon Musk have both backed Amodei's call. Altman wrote, "I agree with Dario that we need to pace the frontier," and Musk replied to Amodei's post with "Dario is right."

In a series of social media posts, Trump compared warnings about AI to what he called "Global Warming Scam" which he claimed was "being perpetrated by the Radical Left Democrats".

His hubristic nature is always fresh, saying the only "guardrails" needed for AI was a "strong and smart" president.

As usual, Trump's mind is fraught with angst of China, writing, "There is a SICK conspiracy going on against AI and Data Centers, and the only one that is happy about it is China. WHOEVER WINS AI, WINS!"

Now that calls have risen by a considerable

number of AI executives and political figures on the need to regulate AI, Trump is feeling badly uncomfortable.

There remains no doubt about the dangers of an unregulated AI. For example, Bill Gates, writing an article in Gates Note on August 26, suggested that "we need a plan to ensure that the good outweighs the bad." Also, former President Barack Obama on Sept. 15 urged government regulation amid "serious safety concerns" about the technology.

Trump suffers from the illusion that he knows fully well about many things. His excessive egoism prompts him to imagine that he knows better than climatologists and better than AI researchers and developers.

Since he has been elected president twice through populist slogans, he thinks that he is a superhuman. In the recent history many have won the votes or backing of the masses through demagogic speeches but their record have proven disastrous.

Even now, he is too stupid to realize that his views about rejection of climate change have proven catastrophically wrong.

It is necessary to note the statement by the outgoing UN Secretary General António Guterres who told the Climate Ambition Summit in Sept. 2023 that "humanity has opened the gates to hell" and in July 2023 declared that "the era of global warming has ended" and "the era of global boiling has arrived."

Just as Trump's views on global warming are fundamentally wrong, leading him to roll back numerous U.S. measures designed to protect the planet, his approach to AI must be restrained through effective oversight by AI companies and Congress.

Two nations, two gates, one golden key

By Syeda Farheen Naqi Mossavi

TEHRAN — For six months, Washington's story stayed the same: Iran and its allies are isolated, the resistance is finished, and the oil routes are safe under American control. Trump and his officials claimed all this happened in days, not years.

Ignore the press conferences and look at the map instead. Yemen's Ansarallah now control Mocha. They hold Dhubab, the last mainland town facing the island across the Bab el-Mandeb strait. They hold Perim, the rocky island that splits the strait into two narrow shipping lanes. The Hanish islands appear to have gone the same way. That would put the entire Yemeni Red Sea coast under one authority.

This is the same movement that was supposed to be wiped out after seven years of Saudi bombing, joint American and British strikes, and Israeli air raids and assassinations. Boats crossed the water. An island changed hands almost overnight.

Mocha is not just a trophy — it is a working port. Dhubab is the last real stretch of mainland facing the narrows. Perim sits in the middle of the Bab el-Mandeb Strait itself: eighteen miles of water squeezed into two tight lanes with a rock in the center.

Hold all three and you do not just threaten the strait — you own the checkpoint.

Washington wanted a war short enough to fit a news cycle. Tehran took the first punch, kept its underground capabilities intact, and let the real cost fall later on the Persian Gulf capitals that bankroll the project. What is happening on the Yemeni coast is not a coincidence. It is the second half of the same plan.

A short war favors air power and press briefings. A long war favors whoever is still standing once the cameras leave. Iran and Yemen are still standing.

Since fighting with Iran began in February, Washington and Tel Aviv have tried to weaken Iran from the air and sea. Iran's response stayed simple: no tanker leaves the Persian Gulf without its permission. The Strait of Hormuz stopped being an open shipping lane and became a checkpoint. That pushed Riyadh, Kuwait, and Abu Dhabi onto their backup route — overland to Yanbu, then south through Bab el-Mandeb. That backup route now runs straight past Yemeni-held ground.

Ansarallah closed the loop. Mocha, Dhubab, Perim — three positions, one chokepoint. The backup plan is gone too.



The Persian Gulf has only one real exit. For decades, Riyadh and Abu Dhabi assumed Washington would keep that exit open forever. When that failed, the Red Sea corridor became the fallback. That fallback is now compromised as well.

Tanker lanes were already only a few miles wide. Now they run under the watch of a force that has spent a decade learning this exact stretch of water. The roughly four million barrels a day the Saudis used to reroute around Hormuz now has to cross contested waters. Add the rest of regional shipping and the figure easily reaches six million barrels a day. This is no longer a footnote — it is the headline. Oil is already above \$100 a barrel.

Insurance markets will price this risk in long before Washington issues a statement. Shipping

companies do not answer to the Pentagon. They reroute, pay higher premiums, or stop sailing. A warship on a map does not set insurance rates. Whoever holds the shoreline and the island does.

American naval doctrine was never really about "freedom of navigation." It was about keeping navigation under American supervision. When that model breaks at two of the world's three key chokepoints at once, it is not bad luck. It is the postwar maritime order coming apart.

Malacca is a separate issue for another day. What matters now is that the old belief — that global chokepoints ultimately answer to Washington or its allies in Tel Aviv — has taken a serious hit at both ends of the Persian Gulf's main export route.

(See full text at tehrantimes.com)



200 NIGHTS ONE FLAG

People across Iran took to the streets last night for the 200th consecutive night, rallying in support of their country and against the U.S. and Israeli aggression

By Fardin Molaei

TEHRAN — Night falls differently across Iran.

On Kharg Island, the darkness settles over the humid waters of the Persian Gulf. In Shiraz, the lights of the squares come on beneath the evening sky. In Sanandaj, people make their way toward Azadi Square. In Birjand, families gather in the cold. In Tonekabon, on the Caspian coast, an elderly war veteran walks slowly toward the crowd.

And in Arak, beneath the lights of Martyrs Square, a woman sits behind a sewing machine.

Her name is Zahra Fattahi.

For almost 200 nights, she has brought the machine with her, repairing damaged Iranian flags and preparing them to be raised again.

That image — a woman, a sewing machine, a piece of torn fabric and a square filled with people — may say more about these nights than any official statement.

Two hundred nights have now passed since nightly gatherings began in cities across Iran following the outbreak of war. What started in the immediate aftermath of the conflict has, according to reports by Mehr News Agency correspondents, continued through heat, humidity, rain and winter cold.

The gatherings have been different from city to city. Some have centered on mourning. Others have included cultural programs, Quran recitations, music, children's activities, food and tea booths, speeches and family gatherings.

But beneath the differences is one recurring image: people returning to the same public spaces night after night.

For many participants, these nights have also carried a second, more intimate meaning — the absence of Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei, the former Supreme Leader who was killed during the war.

His absence is visible in photographs, banners, conversations and moments of silence. For some of those interviewed by Mehr, the nightly gathering has become a place where grief and public presence exist side by side.

On March 12, 2026, in his first wartime message, Ayatollah Seyyed Mojtaba Khome-

nei called on people to help one another during difficult days. On April 9, he said that the announcement of negotiations should not lead people to conclude that public presence in squares, neighborhoods and mosques was no longer necessary.

The 200 nights that followed have now become a vast collection of local stories.

The following is a journey through some of them.

Arak: Three generations beneath one flag

In Arak, capital of Markazi Province in central Iran, the camera finds a mother holding her child.

There is nothing spectacular about the image at first glance. No speech. No stage. No dramatic gesture.

Just a mother, a child and a crowd gathered at night.

Yet that is precisely what gives the photograph its emotional weight.

For 200 nights, the square has seen families arrive together. Parents have brought children into a public space where different generations stand side by side.



Arak: A mother holds her young child during a nightly gathering at Martyrs Square in Arak, where families have been among the recurring participants over the past 200 nights.

Another photograph tells a different version of the same story.

Women from different generations stand together beneath a banner. Older women and younger women occupy the same frame, their faces separated by decades but brought together by the same night.

Then comes the sewing machine.

Every night, Zahra Fattahi brings hers to the square. She repairs flags damaged during the gatherings and prepares them to be raised again.

She told Mehr that she had attended almost all 200 nights.

Her contribution is small in physical scale:



Arak: Women from different generations stand together at Martyrs Square in Arak, creating a single frame that spans generations of Iranian women.

thread passing through cloth, a needle moving back and forth, a torn edge being joined.

But repeated night after night, it has become a symbol in the visual record of Arak.

There is something quietly mournful about the image, too.

A flag can be repaired.

A torn piece of cloth can be stitched.

But a person who has been lost cannot be brought back.

For some participants, that is the deeper emotional landscape of these nights: continuing to gather while remembering a leader whose absence has changed the meaning of the gathering itself.

Shiraz: A city that remembers

In Shiraz, the capital of Fars Province in southern Iran, the night begins with lights.

Imam Hussein Square, Moallem Square and Vali Asr Square gradually fill with people.

Families arrive. Young people stand beside older residents. Flags rise above the crowd.

Mehr's account describes a city whose nightly gathering has been repeated for 200 nights.

The scene has its own rhythm.

People arrive.

Yet the local account describes residents continuing to gather during the 200-night period.

At night, the oppressive heat does not disappear completely. The humidity remains in the air. The sea remains beyond the lights of the gathering.

And still, people come.

There is something elemental about that scene: an island surrounded by water, a city accustomed to heat, and people gathering after dark.

Birjand: A teenager among the generations

In Birjand, capital of South Khorasan Province in eastern Iran, the gatherings have been held in Maalem, Abuzar and Modarres squares.

Children stand beside adults. Older people watch the programs. Flags and cultural booths become part of the nightly landscape.

Fourteen-year-old Maedeh Fayazi is among those reported to have attended most nights.

Mahdi Rahimabadi, 42, was present on the 200th night.

Their ages are separated by almost three decades.

But the photograph of them in the same story captures something repeated throughout the country: the coexistence of generations in the same public space.

We will trample America underfoot

From the first night of the 'Ramadan War' to the 200th night of nightly gatherings across Alborz Province, residents of Karaj have continued to gather through heat and cold, rain and, in the early days of the war, amid bombings and missile attacks.

In Gohardasht, residents make their way to the nightly gathering along familiar routes. In Azimiyeh, people follow another established path, while Karaj, the provincial capital, has hosted the largest gatherings night after night.

Mr. Akbari, another participant, who says he has attended the neighborhood and street gatherings for exactly 200 nights, describes the period as "200 nights of estrangement and separation from our beloved Imam."

The lights brighten.

Programs begin.

Voices fill the square.

And eventually, late at night, people go home.

Then the next night comes.

And they return.

The emotional force of such repetition is not necessarily in the size of the crowd but in the passage of time. A single night can be an event. Two hundred nights become a memory.

Kharg: Heat, humidity and the lights of the Gulf

On Kharg Island, the story takes place against one of Iran's most important oil landscapes.

The island lies in the Persian Gulf, in Bushehr Province, and is closely associated with Iran's oil export infrastructure.

It is also hot and intensely humid.



Mahmoud Moradpour, a Karaj resident holding a handwritten sign that reads, “We will trample America underfoot,” says the people will stand by the Islamic Republic, their Islamic identity and their Iranian identity to their final breath.

For those gathered across Karaj, the passage of 200 nights has become a record of continued presence — shaped by the changing seasons, difficult circumstances and a shared determination to remain together.

Sanandaj: When a square becomes a memory

In Sanandaj, capital of Kurdistan Province in western Iran, Azadi Square has become one of the most recognizable settings of the 200-night story. It is the square that was once simply a square becomes a place people remember because they have returned to it so many times.

The gatherings have included children, teenagers, young people and families.



Mehdi, a 20-year-old participant, says that throughout the 200 days during which Iranians have taken to the streets, a sense of national honor has risen above differences in beliefs and backgrounds.

But the square has also become a cultural space.

Student anthems, Quran recitations, daf music, public booths and other activities have accompanied the gatherings. On some occasions, wedding ceremonies have also been held there.

Thirty-five-year-old Mortaza Sharaf-Bayani told Mehr that he had attended all 200 nights and had helped with programs and Quran recitation.



Kharg: Residents gather at night on Kharg Island in Bushehr Province, where the 200-night gatherings have continued despite the island's intense heat and humidity.

Zahra Jafari a university student in Sanandaj, another participant in the nightly gathering said that students cannot remain indifferent to events unfolding in their country. The younger generation must understand political issues and be able, under different circumstances, to distinguish between various issues and political currents.

“Steadfastness is not a habit, but a belief”

In Shirvan, North Khorasan Province in northeastern Iran, the story has unfolded around Imam Khomeini Mosque and Revolution Square. As the seasons changed and summer heat gave way to winter cold and rain, the nightly gatherings continued.

For Fatemeh, a teacher and mother of three, taking part has become far more than simply attending a nightly gathering. She recalls that the gatherings initially began in an atmosphere of mourning and remembrance, but gradually took on a different character.

“Every night, I saw more women joining us and the voice of solidarity growing stronger,”



Sanandaj: Zahra Jafari a university student. The younger generation must understand political issues and be able, under different circumstances, to distinguish between various issues and political currents

she says. “What began as small groups of just a few people has now become a regular nightly gathering. I feel that we have become one large family, coming together every night to raise our voices in solidarity and steadfastness.”

One of her most vivid memories is of a cold, rainy night when she expected the heavy downpour to keep many people away.

“I thought to myself, ‘Perhaps no one will

come tonight,” she recalls. “But when I arrived at the mosque, I saw that our gathering was just as full and as warm as ever.”

For Fatemeh, that night gave a deeper meaning to being present. As she later told Mehr, “Steadfastness is not a habit, but a belief.”

Around Revolution Square, tea and food

booths have remained open, while exhibitions, children’s drawing stations, books, photographs, and cultural programs have filled the surrounding space.

On cold nights, warm tea has become part of the visual memory: steam rising from cups, people gathering around the booths, children staying close to their parents, and the lights remaining on as the square prepares to welcome another night.

Qom: Grief and continuity

In Qom, one of Iran’s major religious cities in central Iran, gatherings have taken place in several locations, including Mofid Square, Tawhid Square, Army Square and Imam Khomeini Square, as well as routes toward the shrine of Hazrat Masoumeh.

Samira Zangi, 33, told Mehr that she had attended from the first night.

She spoke of attending with her family despite heat, cold and having a young child.

Her account reflects one of the recurring themes of the 200-night reports: the gathering as a family experience.

But Qom also carries another emotional layer.

For many people there, as elsewhere, the gatherings have taken place in the shadow of mourning.

The faces in the crowd are not only faces of participation. Some are faces of remembrance.

Tonekabon: The veteran who still comes

On Iran’s northern Caspian coast, Tonekabon in Mazandaran Province offers perhaps one of the most poignant images of the entire story.

A 69-year-old man stands among the crowd. His name is Abolfazl Mirzaei. He is a 50-percent disabled war veteran. He has lived long enough to carry the physical memory of



Mohammad Hassan, an 11-year-old boy from Kurdistan who had attended the gathering with his family, told Mehr correspondent: “I have come to this gathering to seek justice for the martyred leader and to express my support for this demand.”

one war into another period of conflict.

Yet night after night, he makes his way toward Imam Khomeini Square.

The photograph needs little explanation.

The man’s age tells one story.

His disability tells another.

His presence tells a third.

The 200-night story is therefore not only about young faces or large crowds. It is also about people carrying memories from decades past into the present.

What does it mean to be proud?

The word “pride” is often used loosely when discussing nations.

But in the Iranian case, it has a deeper historical and cultural context.

The Encyclopaedia Iranica notes that a strong sense of pride in Iran’s cultural heritage, with Persian literature at its core, together with a consciousness of historical continuity and the belief that Iranians can survive recurrent periods of upheaval, has served as a cohesive force in Iranian identity.

That idea can be found across centuries of Persian literature.

Ferdowsi’s Shahnameh preserved stories of kings, warriors, loss, endurance and the survival of a cultural memory across generations. Simin Behbahani, discussing Ferdowsi, described the Shahnameh as having helped revive a sense of pride and unity among Iranians.

Saadi, writing centuries earlier, reduced the idea of shared humanity to one of the most enduring images in Persian literature: human beings as members of one body.

These are literary traditions, not political instructions.

But they help explain why words such as

dignity, endurance, homeland and memory carry such emotional weight in Iran.

Modern observers have noticed that characteristic as well.

On May 6, 2026, US President Donald Trump, speaking about negotiations with Iran, said of Iranians: “should raise the white flag of surrender” but that it is “too arrogant to do so.”

He added that they can fight or cry when

For some participants, the squares have become places to remember Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei.

His name appears on banners.

His image appears in the visual landscape.

And for those who came to regard him as their leader, his martyrdom left behind a form of absence that cannot be filled simply by another speech or another gathering.



Arak: Zahra Fattahi brings her sewing machine to Martyrs Square almost every night, repairing damaged Iranian flags and preparing them to be raised again.

wounded and described their pride as particularly strong.

It was a striking acknowledgment from an American president of a characteristic frequently associated with Iranian national identity.

Two hundred nights

The 200 nights can be read in many ways.

Government officials have described them as a demonstration of national resolve. Critics of the gatherings may interpret them differently. The reports from Mehr, however, provide something more concrete: photographs and conversations with people who repeatedly returned to public squares.

A mother holding a child.

Women from several generations standing beneath one banner.

A woman repairing a flag with a sewing machine.

Children drawing.

A teenager returning to the same square.

A 35-year-old man helping with Quran recitation.

A 69-year-old veteran walking into the

That may be why some of the photographs feel quieter than the slogans surrounding them.

A mother holds her child.

An old veteran stands among younger people.

A woman bends over a sewing machine.

The flag is torn, and someone repairs it.

The night grows late.

Then people begin to leave.

The square becomes quieter.

But the story does not end there.

Two hundred nights are not two hundred identical nights.

They are two hundred evenings of changing weather, changing faces, changing emotions and repeated memories.

They are 200 nights in which a country at war has watched its people return to the same public spaces.

Whether viewed as political expression, mourning, communal ritual or a manifestation of national identity, the gatherings have produced a remarkable visual archive.



Tonekabon: Abolfazl Mirzaei, 69, a 50-percent disabled war veteran, attends a nightly gathering at Imam Khomeini Square in Tonekabon despite his physical condition.

crowd despite his physical limitations.

And, everywhere, the night.

There is also grief.

The photographs contain smiles, flags, and gatherings, but they cannot entirely conceal the absence around which much of this period has been emotionally organized.

And perhaps the most powerful image is still the simplest one:

the lights of an Iranian square at night,

people slowly arriving,

and a flag — sometimes worn, sometimes torn, sometimes repaired by hand — rising once more above the crowd.

Special working group formed for Chabahar-Zahedan railway operation

TEHRAN- The Deputy Minister of Transport and Urban Development announced the formation of a working group to monitor and follow up on the operation of the Chabahar-Zahedan railway and described this rail project as a golden page in the country's development history.

According to an IRNA report from the Specialized Mother Company for Construction and Development of Transportation Infrastructure of the Country, Hooshang Bazvand, in the first meeting of the working group for monitoring and following up on the operation of the Chabahar-Zahedan railway, referring to the special emphasis of the government and the president on completing this project, said: The Chabahar-Zahedan railway currently holds special importance for the government and the country, and the president also has a special sensitivity toward the completion and operation of this project. The importance of this plan is such that in the current conditions, its implementation goes beyond a merely economic project.

Bazvand, emphasizing that this working group has been formed with the aim of turning plans into operational and measurable actions, said: The purpose of forming this working group is for the project implementation process to be continuously and precisely monitored and followed up, and for the obstacles ahead to be removed in the shortest possible time.

He continued: From now on, it must be clear what plan each part of the project has, how much of the plan has been realized, and what action must be taken to compensate for possible delays.

The Deputy Minister of Transport and Urban Development, referring to previous com-



mitments to complete the project, added: Based on previous commitments and minutes, a specific timetable had been set for completing the project, and we cannot easily pass by these commitments. Our expectation is that all executive bodies adhere to their commitments and mobilize existing capacities to reach the designated deadline.

Referring to the president's demand for finalizing this project, he stated: This issue is also being seriously pursued by the president, and the government's demand is that the Chabahar-Zahedan railway become operational in the shortest possible time, and we too must pursue this demand as a serious priority until the final result is achieved.

Bazvand, emphasizing the necessity of cooperation among all bodies and groups participating in the project, noted: Khatam al-Anbiya Construction Headquarters has so far borne considerable efforts for the implementation of this project, and an important part of the operations has progressed under difficult conditions; but at the current stage, the main issue is for all capacities to be brought together and for the project to continue with greater speed and coherence.

Iran's date production exceeds 1.9m tons

TEHRAN- The Head of the Center for Development of Mechanization and Agricultural Industries of the Ministry of Agriculture, stating that more than 1.9 million tons of dates are produced in the country, said: Iran is among the top four countries in the world in terms of production of this product.

According to a Wednesday report by IRNA from the Ministry of Agriculture, Karim Zolfaghari, on the occasion of National Date Day, added: The future of Iran's date industry depends on moving beyond raw selling and developing the production chain, and processing and complementary industries can be the link connecting producers to domestic and international markets.

The Head of the Center for Development of Mechanization and Agricultural Industries of the Ministry of Agriculture considered dates one of the strategic and export products of the agricultural sector and stated: Strengthening Iran's presence in target markets requires improving quality, appropriate packaging, standardization, and producing products suited to the needs and tastes of consumers in these markets.

Zolfaghari, stating that dates, in addition to high nutritional value, have significant capacity for foreign exchange earning, employment creation, and development of food industries, emphasized: Moving toward processing and producing diverse products can significantly increase the economic value of this product.

The Head of the Center for Development of Mechanization and Agricultural Industries of the Ministry of Agriculture Jihad, referring to the capacity of date processing industries in the country, said: Currently, 654 date processing and complementary units have operating licenses from the Ministry of Agriculture Jihad, with a nominal capacity of more than 820 thousand tons.

He stated: The production of products such as date paste and syrup, liquid sugar, chocolate and combined products, compote, lavashak, vinegar, and alcohol shows that dates are not just a raw agricultural product and can become the raw material for a wide range of industries.

Zolfaghari emphasized: Development and completion of export infrastructure, support for knowledge-based companies and

startups, creation of specialized towns and export terminals in production hubs, as well as reconstruction and renovation of worn-out processing units, are among the most important priorities in this field.

He added: Dates can turn from a traditional agricultural product into the axis of development of food, pharmaceutical, and new products, and investment in processing, technology, and market-making, while increasing the income of palm growers, creates sustainable employment and enhances Iran's position in the global date trade.

Iran is among the world's leading producers of dates, and the steady growth in exports highlights the product's importance in the country's non-oil trade basket.

The country is renowned for its diverse range of date varieties, with major production centered in the provinces of Kerman, Sistan-Baluchestan, Hormozgan, Khuzestan, Bushehr, and Fars.

Domestically, Iranians consume about 70 percent of the harvest, with a significant surge in demand during the holy month of Ramadan. The remaining 30 percent or roughly 350,000 tons, is exported annually, generating substantial revenue of around \$400 million.

Key international markets for Iranian dates include India, Iraq, Pakistan, Turkey, Russia, and countries in East Asia and the European Union.

To further enhance the sector's value and reduce post-harvest losses—historically estimated at 30 percent—there is a growing focus on processing dates into value-added products such as syrup, paste, and chocolate for both domestic use and export.

Iran's agriculture sector is a cornerstone of its economy and a key player in its non-oil exports. The country produces a vast array of crops, thanks to its diverse climate zones, and is making significant strides in boosting its international trade.

Iran's agricultural sector is substantial, with an annual production volume estimated between 125 and 130 million tons. This output is valued at over \$70 billion and enables the country to meet about 83% to 90% of its domestic food requirements. The sector contributes 11-14% to Iran's GDP and employs around 18% of the national workforce.

'Iran has agreements with BRICS members for cooperation in various fields'

TEHRAN- Iran's Minister of Economic Affairs and Finance said at the Supreme Council of the Stock Exchange meeting: At the BRICS summit, we received very good feedback both from the heads of member states and in the meetings held with the countries present at this summit, very useful grounds for cooperation in various economic fields were understood and agreed upon.

According to an IRNA report from the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Finance, the 318th meeting of the Supreme Council of the Stock Exchange was held under the chairmanship of Seyed Ali Madanizadeh, Minister of Economic Affairs and Finance; in this meeting, while reviewing the capital market situation, items from the agenda were raised and approved.

At the beginning of the meeting, Madanizadeh presented a



report on the achievements of the trip to Russia and India and the BRICS economic ministers meeting to the Supreme Council of the Stock Exchange.

The Minister of Economic Affairs and Finance, noting that the summary of the news and events of the BRICS summit and the understandings of this meeting have been reflected in the media, said: In these meetings, we re-

ceived very good feedback both from the heads of BRICS member states and in the meetings held with the countries present at this summit, very useful grounds for cooperation in various economic fields were understood and agreed upon.

Madanizadeh considered the creation of the necessary grounds for interactions with BRICS member banks, including Russian

banks, as another achievement of this trip and added: These agreements will definitely be path-breaking for the private sector and the country's economy.

Ultimately, for Iran, BRICS is more than politics: it is a vast market and network of trade, finance, and transit routes. Iran joined in 2024, but already trades heavily with members—about \$23.7 billion in exports and \$38.8 billion in imports. The main obstacle is not buyers but payments, banking, insurance, and sanctions. BRICS efforts on local currencies and payment connectivity matter greatly. China dominates Iran's BRICS trade, so diversification is essential. Iran can also become a North-South transit route. Membership alone is insufficient; real gains require contracts, payments, investment, balanced higher-value trade, and real goods flows.

Northern ports; driver of Iran's trade development with Eurasia

TEHRAN- CEO of Mazandaran Free Zone Organization Amin Ofoghi stated: The Mazandaran Free Zone, whose establishment began last year, is considered a valuable gift from the 14th government to the people of Mazandaran Province and has created new hope in the province.

Ofoghi added: Today I am speaking about the northern free zones and the northern ports of the country. In this region, Amir Abad Port, Nowshahr Port, Babolsar Port, as well as the separated area between Juybar and Babolsar, include an area of about 460 hectares, which in the future will be connected to the trade, tourism, and technology sectors.

Referring to the share of northern ports in the country's maritime exchanges, he stated: About 65% of Iran's maritime exchanges in the Caspian Sea take place in Amir Abad and Nowshahr ports, and another 27% takes place in Anzali and Caspian ports; therefore, about 92% of the country's maritime exchanges are carried out in the ports of free zones.

The CEO of the Mazandaran Free Zone Organization continued: These ports are either sovereign or ownership-based, and what we hope to resolve today with the presence of officials is the issue of integrated management and unified governance in these ports; because integrated management can play a very important role in developing exchanges and using existing capacities.

Goal of the northern free zones; developing relations with Eurasia

Ofoghi, referring to the philosophy behind the establishment of the northern free zones, said: The goal of establishing the northern free zones is to develop relations with Eurasian countries, and our plan is to turn the northern free zones into a hub for transit and goods exchange in the CIS and Eurasia by developing logistics infrastructure, both in hardware and software, activating economic diplomacy, and international corridors.

He added: One of the tasks the government assigned to the northern ports during the recent war events and conditions was supplying essential goods, and fortunately the Mazandaran free zones succeeded in supplying about 70% of the essential goods needed by the north of the country through the northern ports.

The CEO of the Mazandaran Free Zone Organization, referring to the unused capacities of the northern ports, stated: Today we are talking about a capacity of about 30 million tons for which investment has been made, but in the best case, about 9 million tons of it is operational. That is, the infrastructure has been created and the laws also exist, but we need integrated management to activate this neglected capacity.

Ofoghi stated: We believe the northern ports can directly, by eliminating intermediary countries, conduct exchanges related to food and needed goods with Russia and Kazakhstan, which are among our most important partners in the Caspian Sea.

Referring to the experience of free zones in creating direct trade routes, he said: During the time of the late Engineer Torkan, a project was carried out in the free zones to supply goods from China without intermediaries, and we were able to import 15,000 containers through the China and Kazakhstan route into Caspian Port.

The CEO of the Mazandaran Free Zone Organization continued: I have had the honor of working in free zones for 23 years, and at

that time our view was to create routes as economic defense so that we could supply goods, raw materials, and intermediate inputs.

Ofoghi added: In Anzali there were two ports; Caspian Port and Anzali Port, both of which were within the free zones. 15,000 containers with two-way cargo entered Caspian Port, but not even one container went to Anzali Port. The reason was clear; in Caspian Port, integrated management and free zone laws were applied, but in Anzali Port we were sovereign and ownership was in the hands of another body.

He said: This experience showed us how much integrated management in ports can help the development of trade exchanges.

The CEO of the Mazandaran Free Zone Organization stated: I hope today we can give the northern free zones at least one year to activate existing capacities by applying Article 65 and integrated management, and show the results in practice.

Ofoghi added: We have problems in the tanker and maritime transport sector with the Iranian flag. Many times we have taken cargo to Chabahar, the northern free zones, Solyanka Port in Astrakhan—the only port more than 50% of which Iran owns outside the country—and even toward European ports such as Hamburg, but these routes have not continued.

He considered the reason for this to be the necessity of applying the incentives and exemptions of free zones and said: For an investor and a foreign company, it is very important that the company's activity be carried out in a free zone and benefit from legal exemptions and incentives.

The CEO of the Mazandaran Free Zone Organization continued: If we can regain the trust of investors and cargo owners, there is great capacity to activate trade routes. Two weeks ago, on the same China-Kazakhstan route, cargo entered Amir Abad Port.

Ofoghi, referring to the legal capacity of free zones, said: In free zones, we can accept ships entering from around the world under different flags without waiting and more quickly; because the law has defined free zones as enclosed customs areas.

He added: Naturally, other bodies should operate within their legal boundaries, and customs, quarantine, and standards affairs can be carried out within the free zones themselves.

The CEO of the Mazandaran Free Zone Organization said: In the current war conditions, goods must be able to enter the free zones, and the cargo owner should have a tradable warehouse receipt, and customs, quarantine, and standards should also be carried out in the same area.

Ofoghi stated: In Article 14 of this matter, permission for the entry of goods into free zones is foreseen, and in Article 24 there are issues in this regard, but in the discussion of determining duties, the legal authorities of free zones must also be considered.

Time, cost, and security; three factors in activating corridors

Stating that cost, time, and security are the three main factors in activating trade corridors, he said: We believe that with the authority the law has given to free zones in determining tariffs and costs, we can be influential in reducing the time and cost of routes.

The CEO of the Mazandaran Free Zone Or-

ganization continued: The routes we have tested so far are very important for cargo owners, and the route must be reliable for the foreign cargo owner. We believe that if the northern free zones can reduce the multiplicity of decision-making bodies and the existing bureaucracy, the advantages of free zones can provide the basis for their role-playing; especially in the area of the country's logistics resilience.

Ofoghi, referring to the late Torkan's view, said: The late Engineer Torkan always emphasized that in free zones, projects should be implemented as models. If we succeed, we are ready to implement the integrated management plan for the northern ports, which the law has foreseen and the government has approved, and if successful, to apply the same model in other free zones as well.

Emphasizing the capacity of the northern ports to become third-generation ports, he said: We can turn the northern ports into third-generation ports. All over the world, production units are located in the hinterlands of ports, and this significantly reduces logistics costs.

The CEO of the Mazandaran Free Zone Organization added: In this model, raw materials are imported, production takes place, and the final product is prepared for export or entry into the mainland or target countries. We can do this in the northern ports as well, but the authority issuing the license, production certificate, and value-added certificate must be one organization.

Ofoghi stated: The law has given this permission to free zones, and we ask the government to help free zones implement this legal capacity.

Referring to the capacity of free zones for developing joint transport companies, he said: In banking, fuel, and other services, we can also succeed. Many times in joint commissions, the creation of joint transport companies has been approved, but in the past 15 years this phrase has been repeated many times, and ultimately very few of these companies have been formed, and no successful joint logistics transport company has been created.

The CEO of the Mazandaran Free Zone Organization continued: I believe that in free zones, because it is possible to register a company and a foreign investor can own 100% of the company's shares, and there is also the possibility of land ownership and capital entry and exit, we can also launch joint logistics companies if we have management of the ports.

Ofoghi, referring to the importance of Amir Abad Port, said: Amir Abad Port is one of the very important ports of the Caspian, but unfortunately we do not have enough ships and tankers under the Iranian flag in the Caspian Sea, and for more than 20 years, a pier opposite Amir Abad has not been fully used.

He added: Today we need this capacity more than ever. The private sector investor is ready to carry out the rail project, bring it into operation, and even hand it over to the government.

The CEO of the Mazandaran Free Zone Organization continued: Two important Caspian ports, namely Amir Abad Port and Caspian Port, are connected to the rail network, but the share of rail transport is very low, especially in the north of the country, which faces traffic problems.

(See full text at tehrantimes.com)

GFEAI 2026: science minister warns AI potential to become an invisible dictatorship

TEHRAN – Science, Research and Technology Minister Hossein Simaei-Sarraf has warned that the growing use of artificial intelligence (AI) in data analysis could pave the way for a shift from data control to human control, potentially giving rise to what he described as “an invisible dictatorship.”

Simaei-Sarraf made the remarks while addressing the 4th Global Forum on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence (GFEAI 2026), held in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, from September 14 to 17, IRNA reported.

Leading an Iranian delegation to the forum, the minister stressed the need to give serious consideration to the ethical implications of emerging technologies.

“Technology is not neutral, and artificial intelligence does not operate fairly on its own. Sometimes, algorithms destroy more than they build, and platforms become sources of harm rather than development,” he said.

Enhanced transparency and oversight of governments and those in power are essential. However, when the surveillance is directed at ordinary citizens, tracking their behavior, relationships, and intentions, it can turn into an invisible dictatorship, he added.

Referring to the ethical responsibility of AI platforms and developers, the science minister said, “Today, data is being used in ways that violate human rights and even lead to the death of



children, thereby raising a significant question: do AI platforms accept the responsibility for how their technologies are used?”

Numerous chatbots refuse to answer questions about suicide—and rightly so—yet AI can be employed to identify and precisely target human beings with missiles, as the elementary school in Minab was targeted by US missiles, killing 168 students while they were studying.

According to Simaei-Sarraf, inequality is another fundamental challenge of the AI era. Unequal knowledge and capabilities have always created disparities. AI can widen the gap more than any other technology. Hence, the ethical framework should not be merely limited to preventing harm, but to ensuring equal access.

Developing countries should have the opportunity to develop their own AI systems tailored to their languages and cultures,

and international organizations are ethically responsible to help these nations realize this goal. Technology must serve humanity, and AI should enhance human freedom, not limit it, he further noted.

In response to a question about the country's most important measure to strengthen Iran's capacity in responsible AI, Simaei-Sarraf said if this question was raised before June 2025, he would have definitely said targeted and sustainable investment in water and energy sectors, followed by strengthening collaborations within Iran's AI ecosystem.

Regarding the shift in regional priorities, the science minister went on to say that “today, I think the removal of coercive measures and the establishment of peace in the region are the top priorities for Iran as well as the whole region. These sanctions are unethical, and establishing

security and peace is a moral imperative.”

The Global Forum serves as a key platform to advance the implementation of the Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence across all Member States of UNESCO. It supports the exchange of knowledge and experiences across regions in the development of AI policies, regulatory frameworks, and institutional capacities, to foster inclusive and sustainable social and economic development while safeguarding human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Launched in 2022, the Global Forum was previously hosted by the Czech Republic, Slovenia, and Thailand, with co-funding support from the European Union since 2024.

The 2026 edition of Global Forum aims to create an engaging environment with high-level ethical reflection, bridging discussions on governance with technological innovation. The science minister is scheduled to attend specialized meetings, panel discussions, and hold meetings with representatives of other countries.

Co-hosted by UNESCO and Saudi Arabia, represented by the Saudi Data and AI Authority and the International Centre for AI Research and Ethics, the event has brought together global leaders, policymakers, experts, and stakeholders to strengthen dialogue and promote practical and sustainable approaches to the ethics and governance of AI.

RoboCup IranOpen competition 2026 underway

TEHRAN – Tehran is playing host to the 20th edition of the RoboCup IranOpen competition, which started on Wednesday and will wrap up on Friday.

Over 400 teams, comprising some 2,000 participants, are competing in 30 specialized leagues, including Rescue Maze, Rescue Line, Design and Construction, Student 2D Soccer, Student Flying Robots, Student Soccer Player, Rescue Simulation, and Soccer Simulation leagues, IRNA reported.

Self-driving car, Rescue Virtual Robot, and Rescue Agent Simulation, creativity, and innovation leagues are among other parts of the competition.

RoboCup is an international initiative covering the areas of artificial intelligence and robotics, with the ultimate goal of developing a team of humanoid robots that is able to defeat the official human World Soccer Champion team by 2050.

The initiative is a platform for testing technologies such as real-time decision-making, multi-agent collaboration, sensor data processing, and navigation in complex environments.

The event was first launched in 1997 and was inspired by the victory of a computer chess player against the then world chess champion, Gary Kasparov.

RoboCup (Originally called the Robot World Cup Initiative) is an international research and education initiative. It is an attempt to foster AI and intelligent robotics research by providing a standard problem where a wide range of technologies can be integrated and examined, as well as being used for integrated project-oriented education.

Recent achievements

Thirteen Iranian students under the age of 12 showcased their scientific, technical capabilities, and creativity, ranking second and

third in different leagues of the RobotChallenge 2026 which was held in Beijing, China.

Each year, RobotChallenge, one of the world's largest artificial intelligence robotic championships, brings together people from all over the world who compete with self-made, autonomous robots in various competitions.

Kicked off on August 8, the event brought together participants from some 48 countries, including China, Russia, Romania, Iran, Japan, Germany, and South Korea, IRNA reported.

Iranian students ranked second in the Technical Report league, third in Robot Rugby senior, and Innovation.

The achievement demonstrates the capabilities and proficiency of Iranian students in constructing and operating robots, the design process, problem-solving, and the effectiveness of technical presentations.

At the Rayan 2025 international artificial intelligence and programming competition, known as the World Finals, Iranian students showcased strong performance in both the AI and programming sections. In the programming section, Ali Safari placed first. China secured second and third place, followed by India, Vietnam, Armenia, Serbia, and Pakistan, respectively, ISNA reported.

In the AI section, Iranian teams, namely No Trust issues here, Pileh, AI Guardians of Trust, AIUoK, red-serotonin, Persistence, and GGWP were placed first to seventh.

The final round of the Rayan international artificial intelligence and programming contest was held on Friday at Sharif University of Technology in Tehran, with participants from 25 countries.

Supported by the Vice Presidency for Science, Technology, and Knowledge-Based Economy, the event kicked off on November

25, attracting hundreds of contestants from the U.S., Russia, China, India, Italy, Chile, Australia, Armenia, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Belarus, Afghanistan, Ukraine, Taiwan, Romania, Singapore, Poland, Slovakia, Vietnam, Serbia, Argentina, Colombia, Kazakhstan, and Ethiopia, as well as the host, Iran.

The solo programming section was held with 60 Iranian and foreign participants who worked individually to solve nine complicated algorithmic problems within a duration of three to four hours.

The scientific competition aimed to promote knowledge, foster international networking, and establish scientific authority in AI and programming.

Enhancing algorithmic thinking, problem-solving skills, teamwork, developing innovative ideas, starting new businesses, and expanding AI engineering and programming were among the other objectives of the contest.

Iranian robotics team, called Mositto, managed to win a gold medal at the 8th edition of RoboCup Asia-Pacific (RCAP) 2025.

The competition was held in Abu Dhabi, the United Arab Emirates, from November 10 to 15, 2025. Hosted by Khalifa University of Science and Technology, it brought together over 160 teams and more than 700 participants with nearly 2,000 researchers, industry professionals, students, and visitors from around the globe, to witness the competition in AI-driven autonomous robotics challenges, with eight leagues and 15 sub-leagues, including soccer and rescue.

The event highlighted themes like smart mobility, AI for sustainability, and technologies addressing regional challenges.

The team, comprising eight students, secured first place at RoboCup Junior Rescue, Rescue Line, and Secondary League, showcasing Iranian students' talents and creativity to the world.

Richter scale.

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

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

A total of 2,380 earthquakes with a magnitude of more than 2.5 on the Richter scale were recorded across the country over the past calendar year (March 2025–March 2026), according to the Seismological networks of the Institute of Geophysics of the University of Tehran, Mehr news agency reported.

Out of recorded earthquakes, 910 had a magnitude greater than 3, 130 had a magnitude greater than 4, and 15 had a magnitude greater than 5 on the

magnitude of 4.4 on the Richter scale, which occurred on September 6th in Kordestan province.

Among the provinces of the country, Khorasan Razavi experienced the highest number of earthquakes with 13, followed by Yazd with 10, Semnan and Fars each with 9 earthquakes.

During the same period, two earthquakes hit Tehran. No earthquakes were recorded in Ardabil, Alborz, Chaharmahal-Bakhtiari, Zanjan, Gilan, and Hamedan provinces.

Iran shakes with 94 earthquakes in a week

TEHRAN – A total of 94 earthquakes have been recorded across the country in a week from September 5 to 11, according to the seismological networks of the Institute of Geophysics of the University of Tehran.

Statistically, 85 earthquakes with magnitudes smaller than 3, six earthquakes with a magnitude between 3 and 4, and three earthquakes with a magnitude between 4 and 5 have occurred in the country, irsc reported.

Of the total quakes, one had a

Over half of eligible Iranians join Jan Fada campaign

TEHRAN – The “Jan Fada” (self-sacrificing volunteer) campaign officially launched on March 29 as a spontaneous public movement in response to persistent threats and aggression by the United States and Israel against Iran's territorial integrity and sovereignty.

More than half of the country's eligible citizens have registered for the initiative, according to Jan Fada spokesperson Sasan Zare, making it one of the largest public mobilization drives in the country in recent years.

Speaking at a press conference in Tehran on Wednesday, Zare said more than 31.3 million people had registered so far. He described the campaign as an initiative aimed at demonstrating public readiness to defend the country and contribute to various national sectors.

“Of the 31 million people who took part in the campaign, 32 percent were women and 68 percent were men. Notably, the participants were predominantly young, with more than 60 percent under the age of 46,” he said.

According to Zare, 26 percent of volunteers expressed an interest in military and security activities, while 20 percent opted for relief and rescue operations and assistance to those affected. Another 20 percent select-

ed social services, 17 percent volunteered for cultural, artistic, and media activities, and 13 percent offered to provide ongoing financial support. The remaining five percent were classified under miscellaneous services.

Organizers have described Jan Fada as a contemporary expression of Iran's long-standing tradition of national resilience. The initiative, launched to demonstrate public readiness to defend the country amid heightened geopolitical tensions, quickly attracted millions of registrants nationwide.

The campaign has since expanded from a public registration drive into a broader framework for organized civic participation and national solidarity, bringing together volunteers from diverse communities.

The Jan Fada headquarters has also announced the launch of training and organizational preparations for 1,000 national resistance battalions.

The announcement follows strong public interest and repeated appeals from citizens seeking to stand alongside the country's armed forces in defending the nation.

According to the organizers, close coordination with military authorities has paved the way for translating the campaign's broad public participation into structured tactical units.

Deputy youth minister remembers Minab schoolchildren at IYF in Russia



By Mehdi Soltani

YEKATERINBURG, Russia – Alireza Rahimi, Iran's Deputy Minister of Sports and Youth Affairs and Chairman of the Supreme Council of Youth, began his address at a meeting of youth ministers from countries participating in the International Youth Festival (IYF) in Yekaterinburg by remembering Iranian schoolchildren killed in recent attacks.

The IYF is being held in Yekaterinburg from September 11 to 17, bringing together young people and officials from participating countries.

Rahimi particularly recalled the students of Shajareh Tayyebeh girls' elementary school in Minab, southern Iran, who were killed when the school was targeted. He also referred to attacks in Lamerd and Kuhestak, where civilians, including children and teenagers, were among the victims.

Speaking on behalf of Iranian youth and the Iranian people, Rahimi condemned the US and Israeli military attacks against Iran, particularly attacks targeting civilians, children, schools and public gatherings.

“No political dispute, military calculation or strategic objective can justify the shedding of the blood of children and civilians,” Rahimi said, stressing that schools, homes, sports facilities and family gatherings should never become battlefields.

He said, however, that the message of Iranian youth was not one of hatred, but a call to defend independence and national dignity while pursuing just peace, lasting security

and dialogue based on mutual respect.

Turning to broader youth challenges, Rahimi identified unemployment, the gap between education and future employment, unequal access to opportunities and the limited participation of young people in decision-making as major concerns.

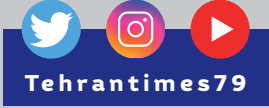
He called for a shift from policies designed “for young people” to policies developed “with young people,” emphasizing meaningful youth participation, decentralization and cooperation between governments, universities, the private sector and civil society.

Rahimi also proposed the establishment of a Joint Youth Action Network among countries participating in the festival, with initial working groups focusing on future skills and artificial intelligence, entrepreneurship and social innovation, and voluntary participation and youth diplomacy.

He said Iran was ready to host the network's first specialized meeting or one of its working groups.

Referring to recent discussions between Iran and Russia, Rahimi said the two countries had emphasized strengthening their joint youth platform and developing a joint action plan, adding that such cooperation could serve as a model for broader international youth cooperation.

“The future belongs to countries that trust young people sooner,” Rahimi said, calling on participating countries to turn youth dialogue into practical cooperation and joint action.



SEPTEMBER 17, 2026

GUIDE TO SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

Overlook and forgive the weaknesses of the generous people because if they fall down, Allah will help them.

Imam Ali (AS)

Prayer Times > Noon:11:59 Evening: 18:27 Dawn: 4:25 (tomorrow) Sunrise: 5:49 (tomorrow)

Iranian short documentary “Bablooi” wins at 12th Moscow International Documentary Film Festival Doker

TEHRAN – The Iranian short documentary “Bablooi” directed by Mohammad Ehsani won an award at the 12th Moscow International Documentary Film Festival Doker, which was held from September 3 to 13 in Moscow, Russia.

A production of 2026, the film, which was competing with 11 films in the Short Film Competition, Doker Shorts, received the Jury Award for the Best Short Documentary, ILNA reported.

According to the local beliefs of the people in Khuzestan Province, southwest of Iran, there is a creature living in rivers that resembles a human in every way. The people of this region believe that this creature pulls humans—especially children—underwater, drowns them, and then sucks their blood. For this reason, they generally forbid their children from swimming in these rivers. They call this mythical creature “Bablooi.” However, today this mythical creature has taken a new form in the eyes of the locals

Mohammad Ehsani is a member of the Iranian Documentary Filmmakers Association. He has made several award-winning documentary and fiction films, such as “The Lovers: The Victims,” “Tabriz: Images from the forgotten world,” “Enamel Dome,” “Lady Urmia,” “Once Hamoun,” and “Karun” among others. His films deal with historical-drama and social-environmental issues in Iran.

This year’s edition of the Moscow International Documentary Film Festival Doker had an Iranian filmmaker in its jury panel too.

Yaser Talebi is a director, screenwriter, producer, editor, and founder of Sunrise Film was one of the nine jurors of the festival. A graduate in Cinema, he is a member of the Iranian Documentary Filmmakers Association, the Iranian Documentary Producers Guild, and the Documentary Association of Europe.

Over the past two decades, Talebi has written, directed, produced, filmed, and edited award-winning observational documentaries exploring human resilience, cultural heritage, and the relationship between people and nature.

His films have screened at major international



al festivals including IDFA, Berlinale, Hot Docs, Krakow, Shanghai, DMZ Docs, DOC NYC, and Thessaloniki, and have been broadcast by ARTE, NHK, Al Jazeera Documentary, Rai, and LCP.

His awards include the Silver Dragon for Best Documentary Director at the 63rd Krakow Film Festival for “Destiny” (2023), the Audience Award at Hot Docs for “Beloved” (2019), the DocsBarcelona Pro Award for “No Friend but the Mountains” (2026), and the Tokyo Docs Grand Prize for “Two Sisters” (2026).

Talebi has also served as a jury member at several international festivals, including the TRT International Documentary Awards (Turkey), OUTDOCS (China), Pambujan International Film Festival (Philippines), Diogenes International Short Film Festival (Georgia), and now the Doker International Documentary Film Festival.

Doker was created to bring wonderful independent documentary films from all over the world to the Russian audience and provide a discussion platform for authors, experts and spectators.

Doker has stemmed from the project of the same name which screens independent non-fiction. The festival focuses on independent documentary cinema that incorporates both poetic narrative and social blockbusters; footage and mockumentary; art-house and science-fiction; classic and experiment.

It screens films about real people from every corner of the world — stories that break down stereotypes and let the audience see the world through someone else’s eyes.

Filmmakers, human rights NGOs support “NAZA” directors following threats, accusations by Israeli authorities

TEHRAN – More than 1,500 film industry figures, including prominent Israeli filmmakers, and over 40 local human rights organizations have expressed solidarity with filmmakers Yuval Abraham and Rachel Szor, the creators of the documentary “NAZA” that features testimony from Israeli military and intelligence personnel about the army’s operations in Gaza.

According to various media reports, backing comes after the directors were threatened by Israeli authorities with having their citizenship revoked and accused of treason.

In a joint statement, the humanitarian organizations urged Israeli authorities to stop the incitement and threats, and to refrain from prosecuting the filmmakers or their sources, the latter being military intelligence officers who provided anonymous testimony.

“The institutional response to the film and the threats against its creators are characteristic of dictatorial regimes,” stated the petition signed by NGOs including Peace Now, Adalah, B’Tselem, Physicians for Human Rights Israel, and Breaking the Silence.

Another petition, signed by prominent directors including Nadav Lapid, Hagai Levi, Liran Atzmor, Orna Ben Dor, Netalie Braun, Rani Blair, Ari Folman, Shlomi Elkabetz, Ran Tal, and Michal Aviad among others, stated: “We, filmmakers, call on all who are still fighting for freedom of expression and creation to join in expressing support and solidarity with Rachel Szor and Yuval Abraham. The central role of art and journalism is to hold a mirror up to the society in which they exist, to create discourse and discussion without assumptions, even when the reality is difficult.”

The documentary received a 25-minute standing ovation at its premiere at the 83rd Venice International Film Festival, a festival record, and won the Special Jury Prize at the closing ceremony.

When accepting the Special Jury Prize, Yuval Abraham said in his acceptance speech: “We believe that the denial of a crime is what helps it persist and this is why it is especially important for us that Israelis watch this film, it is our country that is doing these crimes.”

Some figures on the Israeli left praised the film and its directors. The former lawmaker Yousef Jabareen, chair of the leftwing Hadash party, congratulated the directors on the award, thanking them for bringing “these horrific crimes and the brutal reality in Gaza” before millions of people.

Anat Saragusti, the head of press freedom at the Union of Journalists in Israel, said: “The Israeli public has not received anything close to adequate coverage in Hebrew of what has happened in Gaza. For much of the war, Israeli media barely showed the Palestinian side of the story – the civilian casualties, the children killed, the destruction. People could find that information elsewhere if they actively looked for it, but they were not seeing it in the mainstream Hebrew-language media.”

In an editorial, the Haaretz



Directors Yuval Abraham (left) and Rachel Szor win the special jury prize for the film “Naza” at the 83rd Venice Film Festival in Italy on September 12, 2026.

newspaper urged Israelis to confront what it described as the reality of Israel’s actions in Gaza. “By screening their film at the Venice film festival, Abraham and Szor are trying to force Israelis to confront what they already know: that there’s a black stain on the way Israel is conducting war in Gaza, to put it mildly,” Haaretz wrote.

The Gaza health ministry has reported more than 74,000 deaths in the three years of Israeli bombardment, since October 2023, the vast majority of which have been civilian casualties.

Organizations including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and the United Nations have described Israel’s actions as “genocide” – as well as a report published in June by a UN independent commission which found that “Israeli authorities and security forces have deliberately targeted Palestinian children, resulting in genocide and atrocity crimes in the Gaza Strip and war crimes in the West Bank.”

The 80-minute hot-button documentary, produced by British newspaper The Guardian and JW Films, was shot in secrecy at night on the rooftops of Tel Aviv during the ongoing Gaza war, featuring interviews with 24 anonymous Israeli military and intelligence insiders about surveillance, target selection, and strikes in Gaza, which have killed tens of thousands of civilians. The participants’ faces and voices were digitally altered to protect their identities. In one interview, a source claims that approval had been given to kill 500 NAZA in order to kill one Hamas member.

The film takes its name from the Hebrew military abbreviation for “collateral damage,” referring to the estimated number of civilians expected to be killed in an attack.

Interviewees describe the use of artificial intelligence and mass surveillance to identify targets as well as attacks approved despite anticipated civilian casualties.

Abraham and Szor said the documentary focuses on institutional policies, orders, and operational practices rather than isolated misconduct by individual soldiers.

The Israeli army rejected the film’s allegations and questioned the reliability of testimony from anonymous sources whose identi-

ties, ranks and areas of responsibility could not be verified.

It also denied that artificial intelligence determines which targets are attacked, saying strike selection and authorization decisions are made by human personnel in accordance with military directives.

After the film premiere in Venice, there have been criticism and threats directed at the film’s creators. Israeli Culture and Sports Minister Miki Zohar branded the filmmakers’ work an act of “treason” and said he would seek to revoke their Israeli citizenship. Zohar accused the directors of being willing to “harm their homeland in order to receive applause from antisemites around the world.”

However, the culture minister does not have the power to revoke citizenship unilaterally. Such a measure would require a formal legal process involving the interior minister and the courts under Israeli law.

Other Israeli ministers as well as the prime minister have also taken aim at the directors and condemned the film.

Far-right Minister of National Security Itamar Ben-Gvir also used the platform X for a post in which he called the two filmmakers “a disgrace and an embarrassment” to Israel.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu called the documentary a “shocking” film and accused it of being part of a wave of global anti-Semitic incitement.

The chief of staff at the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) has ordered a legal review of the documentary “NAZA” to assess the possibility of legal action against its filmmakers and those involved with it.

Calling the film “an attack on the State of Israel,” IDF chief Eyal Zamir claimed “NAZA” defamed the military, though he acknowledged he has not seen the movie in full. He separately ordered an investigation into the leaking of classified material used in its production.

Comparing the claims made in the film to “blood libels,” Zamir said the Israeli military would use “every tool at our disposal” against it.

In a monologue delivered at the opening of his show on Channel 14, an Israeli right-wing and conservative commercial television chan-

nel, on September 14, broadcaster Yehuda Schlesinger called on Israel’s Jewish public to hunt down the creators of the film “Naza”. Schlesinger addressed the camera directly and urged viewers to “hunt them, chase after them, don’t give them a moment’s peace, if they dare set their filthy foot in Israel. Don’t give them a single minute. Outside their homes, at work, in cafés, out and about.”

Schlesinger previously called for the systematic, institutionalized abuse and rape of Palestinian terror operatives as a means of revenge and deterrence, and even volunteered to abuse detainees himself.

Channel 14 is known as a channel that routinely broadcasts incitement to violence, racism and war crimes, government propaganda serving the Netanyahu government, and fake news.

A Guardian News & Media spokesperson said: “The Guardian is disturbed to see the authoritarian response to NAZA in Israel. Yuval Abraham and Rachel Szor are brave journalists and filmmakers. The attacks against them come from people who have not yet seen the film. “NAZA” is based on more than three years of investigative journalism. The testimonies it contains are true and we believe they deserve to be heard. The interviews were given by confidential journalistic sources. We will robustly defend “NAZA” – and the team behind it – from any attacks or attempts at censorship.”

The Union of Journalists in Israel, in a statement, said freedom of expression is critical to the functioning of democracy, and condemned the threats of violence against Yuval Abraham and Rachel Szor.

“The Union of Journalists joins creative organizations in expressing shock at the violent reactions and the threats faced by the creators of the ‘NAZA’ film,” the statement says. “Freedom of expression is meant particularly to allow a discussion of opinions, positions and statements that challenge the discourse and various institutions.”

“Without freedom of expression there is no democracy, and without democracy the State of Israel will not survive,” it continued.

Abraham and Szor previously worked on the Academy Award-winning documentary “No Other Land” alongside Palestinian filmmakers Basel Adra and Hamdan Ballal.

Abraham’s family home was targeted by a rightwing mob after the world premiere of 2024’s “No Other Land,” which focused on the destruction of Palestinian villages in the occupied West Bank.

“We’re taking risks in a system that privileges us, that has Jewish-Israeli supremacy as its founding characteristic,” he said. “For so many Palestinians, it’s not a right-wing mob that’s coming to their home: it’s US-funded bulldozers and weapons. Imagine if a Palestinian journalist in Gaza tried to do what we did and called up senior Israeli officials. There is no comparison. They would most likely be murdered.”

“Together for Iran” illustration exhibition to open in Tehran

TEHRAN– A group illustration exhibition titled “Together for Iran,” featuring more than 80 works by 64 illustrators from different Iranian cities, will open at Tehran’s Book Garden on Thursday evening.

Organized by Ketabara Group in collaboration with Soore-ye Omid Institute and Book Garden, the exhibition is the outcome of an open call inviting artists to reflect on recent events and the experiences of Iranian people during the war.

The selected works explore themes including homeland, resilience, resistance, courage, social solidarity, the national flag, experiences of war, the future and hope. The artists

have also addressed the funeral processions held for the martyred Leader of the Islamic Revolution, Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei and the public’s participation in bidding farewell to the country’s heroes and martyrs.

A special section of the exhibition, titled “Angels of Minab,” is dedicated to children and students who lost their lives in the war. Through a human-centered approach that seeks to go beyond geographical boundaries, the section presents artists’ responses to the suffering of children and the devastating consequences of armed conflict.

The Minab tragedy took place in southern Iran during the Ramadan War, when an at-

tack struck a school in the city of Minab, resulting in the deaths of a number of students and teachers. The incident drew widespread attention and prompted artistic and cultural responses commemorating the young victims and reflecting on the impact of war on civilians, particularly children.

In recent months, the memory of the Minab children has also been reflected in exhibitions and other cultural events in Iran and abroad, with artists using visual art as a means of remembrance and as a call for greater attention to the human cost of war.

(See full text at tehrantimes.com)

Cartoon of Day



Gaza

Cartoonist: Kenny Tosh from Nigeria