

TEHRAN TIMES

8 Pages | Price 100,000 Rials | 1.00 EURO | 4.00 AED | 45th year | No. 14662 | Thursday | December 14, 2023 | Azar 23, 1402 | Jumada al-Awwal 30, 1445

Shejaiya Nightmare

Israeli elite army unit stuck in northern Gaza



TEHRAN- The Israeli military has announced that eleven more of the regime's troops have been killed, including a lieutenant colonel who commanded a Golani Brigade regiment.

A spokesperson for the Israeli military also announced that at least seven other Israeli troops had sustained injuries. According to Israeli media reports, many of them are in critical condition.

The Israeli war cabinet minister Benny Gantz acknowledged the regime's war on Gaza is "taking a heavy, painful, and difficult price from us".

Most of the troops have been killed in the Shejaia neighborhood near Gaza City. Shejaia is in northern Gaza, just south of Jabalia.

The Palestinian resistance had earlier announced that it was engaged in

fierce street-by-street battles with the invading Israeli ground forces in Shejaiya and had inflicted heavy losses on the regime's troops and military vehicles.

Israeli media say most of the troops, who belonged to the elite Golani Brigade, were killed in combat with the Palestinian resistance.

As one of the Israeli military's most highly decorated infantry units, the Golani Brigade is often one of the first brigades to be called to duty. It is part of the Israeli special forces, and most (of the latest Israeli military fatalities), have been killed in Shejaiya.

Since the start of the Israeli ground offensives in Gaza, the Palestinian resistance has inflicted heavy losses on troops serving under the Israeli Golani Brigades across the enclave. ▶ Page 5

Russia says Moscow working on 'new major accord' with Tehran

TEHRAN- Russia has said that it is working on a new major agreement with Iran, following the ratification of a bill by the Iranian parliament concerning cooperation in information security with Moscow.

According to Russia's Foreign Ministry, as the two long-standing allies develop tighter bilateral ties, Moscow and Tehran intend to expedite work on a "new major interstate agreement."

The news was announced by the Russian Foreign Ministry in a brief statement on Tuesday, stating that the foreign ministers of the two nations has decided over the phone to go forward with the agreement more quickly, citing it as being at "a high stage of readiness."

The nature of the deal was not specified in the announcement, but it comes amid strengthening of political, commercial, and military connections between Moscow and Tehran, both of which are sanctioned by the U.S. and oppose Western unilateralism. ▶ Page 2

Tehran, Minsk sign technological MOU

TEHRAN – Iran and Belarus signed a memorandum of understanding on boosting technological cooperation on Wednesday.

Amin-Reza Khaleqian, the head of Pardis Technology Park's department for international affairs, and Oleg Tabanyukhov, the deputy head of Belarus Great Stone Industrial Park, signed the agreement, IRIB reported.

The MOU highlights expanding technological cooperation, holding joint events, participating in mutual exhibitions, sharing technical knowledge, dispatching technological delegations, and making joint investments.

The agreement was reached following a comprehensive cooperation roadmap signed in March by Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi and his Belarusian counterpart Alexander Lukashenko.

Sanctions lead to scientific progress

In March, Iran's first vice president said that Western powers' unilateral sanctions on countries that seek independence have provided a great chance to rely on their own scientists' expertise.

The comment was made by Mohammad Mokhber at a meeting with Alexander Lukashenko, the president of Belarus, who made a two-day visit to Tehran.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran has been able to break considerable grounds in the fields of science and technology by overcoming these sanctions," Mokhber said.

He stated that the two nations may leverage Iran's experience coping with sanctions to strengthen their collaboration. ▶ Page 7

Support for Hamas in occupied West Bank tripled in last 3 months: poll

The survey from prominent Palestinian pollster Khalil Shikaki – the first since October 7 – shows support for Hamas has also risen in the Gaza Strip.

Support for the Palestinian Authority (PA) has dropped significantly, as demand for its dissolution rose to nearly 60 percent, the highest percentage ever recorded in polls conducted by Shikaki. The poll also showed that in the West Bank, 70 percent said they believe armed struggle is the best way to end Israel's occupation.

Since the Hamas attacks, support for armed resistance has risen in many parts of the West Bank - in places like Nablus and Jenin, BBC said in a report on Wednesday.

"I see it in the voices of people, in the music they play in their cars, from Facebook or social media posts, from my debates with my students," said

Raed Debiy, a political scientist and youth leader for the West Bank's ruling party, Fatah, told the BBC correspondent Lucy Williamson that the attacks were "a turning point" for Palestinians, just as they were a shocking turning point for Israelis. ▶ Page 5

Could Al-Aqsa Storm bring a change to Saudi foreign policy?

By Mona Hojat Ansari

TEHRAN – Before the October 7 operation by the Hamas resistance movement, many believed a normalization deal between Saudi Arabia and Israel was around the corner.

The first time Saudi Arabia's crown prince and de facto leader acknowledged that the kingdom was moving towards normalization with Israel, was on September 20, 2023. "Every day we get closer," Mohammad Bin Salman said during an interview with Fox News. He added that such a pact would be "the biggest historical deal since the Cold War".

While Palestinians have vehemently condemned previous Arab-Israeli normalization agreements, labeling them as treacherous stabs in the back and betrayals to the Palestinian cause, Bin Salman argued that his deal with the Israelis would "ease the life of the Palestinians".

Since the 1980s, Saudi Arabia has been a vociferous advocate of the two-state solution. The Fahd Peace Plan in 1981 and the Arab Peace Initiative proposed by ▶ Page 5



Israel war on Gaza divided U.S. society: expert

By Soheila Zarfameh

TEHRAN - The U.S. has been under growing criticism for its steadfast support of Israel in the face of the regime's brutal war crimes in the besieged Gaza Strip.

Some analysts believe the current conflict might precipitate a change in U.S.-Israel relations and also alter the future of Biden and his proteges' political careers. To understand the situation better we spoke to Amir Ali Abol Fath, an expert on the U.S. and Canada.

U.S. President Joe Biden has criticized Israel in an unprecedented move, saying the regime is losing global support due to its relentless attacks on Gaza's civilians. He has also asked Netanyahu to change his cabinet members. Do you think he is looking to lead Netanyahu out of office?

American Democrats are in general opposed to the current group of Politicians holding power in Israel. They believe that West Asia can only move towards sustainable peace once Israel allows a Palestinian state ▶ Page 3

TPPH achieves knowledge for domestic manufacturing of over 800,000 power plant parts

TEHRAN – Iran's Thermal Power Plant Holding (TPPH) has managed to achieve the knowledge for the domestic production of more than 800,000 power plant parts and equipment over the last five years, an official with the company said.

"Over the past five years, more than 800,000 strategic parts have been manufactured in the thermal power industry of the country, which is the result of the training of expert employees, and we hope that this movement will continue," Naser Eskandari said.

In the past, the power plant industry was highly dependent on foreign sources, but currently 91 percent of power plant parts in the country are produced by domestic manufacturers, ▶ Page 4



KSA, Iran share same stance on Gaza war

TEHRAN- Saudi Arabia's foreign minister has stated that the kingdom shares Iran's position over the Gaza issue and that further international efforts are needed to put a stop to Israel's assault on the Palestinian people.

Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian and his Saudi counterpart Faisal bin Farhan Al-Saud held a meeting on the sidelines of the Global Refugee Forum (GRF) in Geneva on Wednesday.

During their discussion, the two senior diplomats talked about a variety of bilateral, regional, and global topics, with a focus on finding a solution to stop the Zionist regime's attacks on Gaza.

Saudi Arabia, according to Bin Farhan, agrees with Iran on the need of supporting the Palestinian people, establishing a prompt truce in Gaza, and delivering humanitarian relief to the beleaguered enclave. ▶ Page 2

In landmark decision, Iran approves visa exemptions for 32 nations

TEHRAN – The Iranian government has agreed to abolish visa requirements for passport holders from 32 countries, the tourism minister has said.

"The Ministry of Tourism's proposal to cancel visas for some countries has been approved by the government," Ezzatollah Zarghami told reporters on the sidelines of the government session on Wednesday.

"The unilateral cancellation of visas, in line with priorities set by the ministry, was ratified today in the government session."

"The government intends to open the country's doors to the world... And this decision is both courageous and deliberate by the government."

The official welcomed that border-easing policy and said: "We have dealings with the people of the world, ▶ Page 6

TEHRAN PAPERS

JCPOA without sanctions lifting was not an achievement

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

Kayhan analyzed the JCPOA issue and wrote: The JCPOA document was a document with which the Western leaders of the international system found a solution to reach an understanding with Iran. But in the international scene, the Israelis worked against it with all the diplomatic, political and influence they had. Saudi Arabia and some other Arab countries also worked against this document with all their means until finally, Trump withdrew from the nuclear deal. The JCPOA was invalid because it fell under the feet of America and Europe from the very beginning and became a document of more bullying and blackmail by the West, and not a barter agreement for a balanced and respectful interaction. After Trump, the Biden administration continued the same path of distrust and blackmail; because the JCPOA was, in its nature, an injurious agreement and gave the leverage of distrust to the old enemy of the Iranian nation. However, the approach of the 13th government is to be able to achieve its goal, which is the cancellation of sanctions through the JCPOA framework negotiations. Because Iran believes that this issue is important and has nothing to do with the diplomatic, security, military and legal aspects of the JCPOA.

Vatan-e-Emrooz: The start of the extinction of the MKO group

In a note, Vatan-e-Emrooz discussed the first court session of the members of the MKO terrorist group in Tehran and said: In recent years, due to the hybrid warfare of the United States and the Zionist regime against Iran, these terrorists have been tried to be acquitted in the minds of the new generation. But holding this court is a good basis to familiarize the new generations with the inhuman actions of the criminals of this cult. One of the most important achievements of this court is the documentation the crimes of this cult and prosecuting the leaders of this group and its members abroad. Because these terrorists will face many limitations outside of Iran, Iran can extradite these criminal terrorists and punish them through Interpol and international courts. Also, the leaders of the Western countries, who have sheltered these terrorists and used them to weaken Iran and create insecurity in Iran, will not have the freedom of action they had in using them against Iran. According to experts, this court is the beginning of the extinction

Russia says Moscow working on 'new major accord' with Tehran

From page 1 ▶ Tehran and Moscow agreed to a 10-year cooperation agreement in 2001, which was extended by two further five-year periods to a 20-year agreement.

A bilateral long-term strategic cooperation agreement between the two nations is about to be signed, and this agreement could shape their future ties for the next 20 years.

Presidents of Iran and Russia had lengthy discussions in the Kremlin last week, with Vladimir Putin praising Tehran-Moscow relations as "very good."

"We have very good relations with Iran. And we will enhance them in every possible way... That is why we do our utmost in order to develop relations with Iran, and will keep this up in the future," Russia's TASS news agency quoted Putin as saying.

At the meeting, the Iranian president said it is "essential" to immediately stop the Israeli "genocide" in the Gaza Strip.

He also said what is more painful is that the United States and other Western countries are backing the Zionist regime in its crimes in Gaza and the international bodies and the self-proclaimed human rights organizations have lost their relevance.

The Iranian president said the cruelty against the people of Gaza has "turned into the greatest headache for humanity in today's world".

He added, "Gaza is a land in which one child is martyred every 10 minutes."

The president went on to say that unilateralism and unfair global order are "causing pain for humanity" that an example of which can be clearly noticed in the war on Gaza.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Raisi said Iran

and destruction of this criminal and terrorist cult.

Arman-e-Melli: White House's message to Iran

In an article, Arman-e-Melli addressed the important message of the White House to Iran during the Gaza war. It wrote: U.S. military bases in Iraq and Syria have been targeted by drone, rocket, and missile attacks since October 7. The Yemeni naval forces have also warned that they will continue military operations against Israeli ships until its violations in Gaza and its crimes against the Palestinian nation are stopped. Following these events, the United States accuses the Islamic Republic of Iran of supporting Islamic resistance groups to carry out these attacks while the Tehran authorities have repeatedly denied this claim. But after the difficult conditions created for America in the region, John Kirby, the strategic communications coordinator of the U.S. National Security Council, said that we have publicly and privately told our partners and Iran that we do not want to see more conflicts in the region. We are very concerned about the spread of the conflict and we do not want to see the creation of a second front in the north between Israel and Lebanon, he added.

Shargh: IAEA has become a tool in the hands of Western powers

In a commentary, Shargh dealt with the position of the International Atomic Energy Agency towards Iran and quoted Mohammad Eslami, head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran, as saying: The Zionist Minister not only threatened Gaza with nuclear weapons, but they also threatened Iran. In a letter to the International Atomic Energy Agency, Iran pursued this issue and warned the regime that is neither a safeguards member nor a member of the NPT. Although this issue was not included in the agenda of the Board of Governors this year, the countries addressed this issue. It seems that if this situation continues, the agency will be considered a tool in the hands of the Western powers, which should really stay away from this path. Even in the issue of negotiations, the U.S. withdrew from the JCPOA and did not allow others to fulfill their commitments. They should lift sanctions because Iran has no activities beyond the safeguards and the NPT framework.

and Russia have established good cooperation in areas of energy, agriculture, and knowledge-based companies and "better steps can be taken in line with the interests of the two countries and nations."

Expressing delight over the growing ties, Raisi said cooperation with Russia is "highly important" in line with Iran's "policy of neighborliness."

Last week, Hossein Amir Abdollahian, the Foreign Minister of Iran, and Sergei Lavrov, the Foreign Minister of Russia, inked a deal to work together to oppose the unilateral sanctions placed on their respective nations.

During the phone call, Abdollahian expressed regret over the U.S. veto of the United Nations Security Council resolution and evaluated such action as permission for the continuation of the genocide against the residents of Gaza by the United States.

He also underscored the necessity of immediate action to halt war crimes and increase humanitarian aid to the narrow strip of Gaza.

Lavrov, expressing satisfaction with the ongoing bilateral cooperation, emphasized the need for continued international efforts to achieve a ceasefire, increase humanitarian aid to the residents of Gaza, and establish an independent Palestinian state in light of the current developments in the occupied territories of Palestine.

In September, Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu, accompanied by a senior military delegation, visited Tehran at the invitation of Major General Mohammad Baqeri, the Chief of Staff of the Iranian Armed Forces.

As the globe shifts to a more multipolar order, Baqeri stated at the time that Tehran and Moscow are trying to draft a long-term military cooperation deal soon.

KSA, Iran share same stance on Gaza war

From page 1 ▶ The Saudi minister praised the improving relations between Riyadh and Tehran, calling them "on the right track," and stated that his nation supports the growth of political and economic cooperation with Iran.

He called for the fulfillment of the accords, hailing the two countries' cooperation agreements as a strong point.

Amir Abdollahian expressed gratitude to Saudi Arabia for hosting the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) summit to discuss the Gaza conflict.

He also condemned the ongoing war crimes and genocide committed by the Israeli regime in Gaza and the West Bank, calling for concerted efforts from Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the other Muslim and regional states to put pressure on the U.S. and Zionist regime to guarantee an immediate ceasefire in the Gaza Strip and provide humanitarian aid to the Palestinian people.

"Israeli war in Gaza may spark regional burst"

Amir Abdollahian and his Lebanese counterpart Abdallah Bou Habib held a meeting on the sidelines of the GRF in Switzerland on Tuesday.

The foreign minister of Iran issued a warning, stating that if the Zionist regime's military attacks on Gaza continue, it could escalate tensions and lead to a regional explosion.

"Iran and Lebanon are on the same front, and Iran only wants the best interests of the Lebanese government, nation, and resistance front," Amir Abdollahian said, praising the ongoing discussions on a range of bilateral and regional issues between Tehran and Beirut.

Touching on the critical circumstances in Palestine, the senior Iranian diplomat said, "It is necessary that the United States put an end to its unlimited support for the Zionist regime and its war crimes against the Palestinian nation."

"Lebanon has always been one of the key pillars of anti-Zionist resistance in the region," Amir Abdollahian continued, emphasizing the necessity for joint efforts to stop the Zionists' genocide in Palestine.

Israel emboldened to commit genocide amid U.S. rejection of Gaza truce: envoy

TEHRAN - Iran's permanent representative to the United Nations has said that Israel is at ease to carry on its genocide of civilians in the blockaded Palestinian territory because of the United States' hostility to a humanitarian ceasefire in the Gaza Strip.

Amir Saied Irvani made the comments early Wednesday following the overwhelming approval of a resolution mandating an immediate humanitarian ceasefire in Gaza by the 193 members of the UN General Assembly. Only 10 member states, including the U.S., voted against it, while 23 abstained. A resounding 153 member states supported the resolution.

The full text of Irvani's speech is as follows:

I am taking the floor in explanation of Vote after the Vote. The situation before us is quite clear.

One member state, a permanent member of the Security Council, misusing its unequal authority of veto power, and in clear disregard to the united will of the international community, has decided to stand with Israeli criminal regime, and materially enable this regime in its ongoing massacre against civilians in Gaza. The United

States blatantly opposing a cease fire, which means prescribing war, violence and eventually more death for children and women in Gaza.

As highlighted by the Secretary-General in his recent briefing before the Security Council, no place in Gaza is safe, and there is an imminent risk of a total collapse of the humanitarian support system. The Secretary-General, using his authority under Article 99 of the United Nations Charter, has urgently called upon the Security Council to intervene and bring a halt to the Israeli regime's attacks in Gaza. This call received full support from the international community.

The United Nations Charter initially predicted the power of veto as a tool to maintain and ensure international peace and security. However, today, this authority is frequently abused to obstruct the very establishment of peace and security. This trend is a clear alarm, signaling the imperative need to eliminate such discriminatory practices.

Over the past two months, we have witnessed a violent act of aggression carried out by the Israeli armed forces in the Gaza Strip, resulting in the death of more than seventeen thousand Pal-



For his part, the Lebanese foreign minister expressed satisfaction with the meeting with his Iranian counterpart, stating that "consultations between the two sides have always been fruitful and constructive."

Bou Habib also spoke on the situation in Lebanon, namely the situation along the country's southern borders with territories under occupation.

Iran warns of U.S. post-war plot for Gaza

Amir Abdollahian held talks with his Tunisian counterpart Nabil Ammar on the sidelines of the GRF in Geneva on Tuesday.

Iran's foreign minister asserted that in order to make up for the Zionist regime's inability to crush the Palestinian resistance groups, the U.S. administration is orchestrating political schemes for the Gaza Strip's post-war destiny.

Amir Abdollahian emphasized the need for Islamic countries to resolutely stand with Palestine in opposition to the Zionist regime's ongoing war crimes and brutal attacks in Gaza and the West Bank.

He further highlighted the blow to the Zionist regime's dignity on October 7 and its inability to produce meaningful results despite committing heinous war crimes against Palestinian citizens over the last two months.

Ammar, for his part, underlined the need of working together to raise relations to a higher level.

He also advocated for more effective measures to strengthen relationships, notably in the economic and commercial domains, in line

with their political ties.

The Tunisian foreign minister praised Iran for its constant support for Palestine, saying, "In Tunisia, we ardently support the cause of Palestine, firmly believing that killing the Palestinian nation will not lead to any gains."

Iran appreciates Vatican for stances on Gaza war

In a meeting with the Vatican Prime Minister, Cardinal Pietro Parolin, on Wednesday, Amir Abdollahian, expressing satisfaction with the meeting, pointed to the recent important telephone conversation between President Raisi and Pope Francis and welcomed the continuation of such talks between Iran and the Vatican in various fields.

He also regarded the religious and scientific dialogues between Iran and the Vatican vital and substantial, adding that Tehran always supports such dialogues.

Iran's top diplomat appreciated the Vatican's good positions regarding Palestine and said, "We believe that the Vatican can play an effective role in ending the genocide in Palestine."

For his part, Cardinal Parolin expressed concern on the current situation in Palestine and said that "Vatican supports the establishment of a ceasefire and an immediate end to the war in Palestine."

He emphasized that Pope Francis has repeatedly emphasized the necessity of stopping the war and establishing a ceasefire, sending humanitarian aid to the Palestinian people, and finding a political solution to the crisis.

"Concerted efforts required to end Gaza war"

In another meeting with his Jordanian counterpart, Ayman Safadi, on Wednesday, Abdollahian thanked Jordan for its efforts to support Palestine, establish a ceasefire and end the genocide of Palestinians.

He also pointed to the evil plans of the Zionist regime to advance its expansionist plans and displace the Palestinian people from Gaza and the West Bank, noting that it is necessary to shore up extensive efforts to support the Palestinian people, strengthen their stability, and send large-scale humanitarian aid.

Safadi, for his part, also expressed satisfaction with the meeting, stating that the Palestinian people are not only killed by bombing, but also by the lack of food and medicine and the devastation of places and hospitals.

He also described the dire situation in Gaza as "tragic" where lots of people have been stuck under the rubble.

Iran appreciates Kuwait strong positions on Gaza

In yet another meeting with his Kuwaiti counterpart, Salem Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, on Wednesday, Amir Abdollahian appreciated the strong supportive positions of the government, the parliament and the people of Kuwait toward Palestine.

Emphasizing the importance of continuous consultations between the two countries at different levels, he described them as "important and effective" in the development of relations between the two countries.

For his part, the top Kuwaiti diplomat welcomed the joint efforts to develop relations between the two countries.

He underscored the Kuwaiti government's position in support of the Palestinian nation and the establishment of a Palestinian state in the Palestinian territories as a fixed and unchangeable position of Kuwait.

He emphasized the necessity of trying to thwart the Israeli regime in pursuing expansionist plans and ending the attacks against Gaza and establishing a ceasefire.



estonian civilians. The situation on ground entails all risk factors for genocide and definitions under Article II of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, which bear responsibility for all member states to impede and prevent its occurrence.

Despite major objections from nations around the world, the Israeli regime has deliberately pursued and perpetrated the actions that entails war crimes. The regime has been pursuing the scorched-earth policy by deliberately destroying infrastructures and residential buildings in manner that there is no place to live in the north of Gaza.

(See full text at tehrantimes.com)

Iran to produce helicopters: Defense Minister



TEHRAN - Iran's Defense Minister, Brigadier General Mohammad-Reza Ashtiani, has announced the initiation of homegrown helicopter production within the country.

Ashtiani shared this development during a press briefing on the sidelines of a cabinet meeting on Wednesday, revealing Iran's ongoing efforts in building helicopters locally, with the work being carried out at the Iran Aircraft Manufacturing Industrial Company (HESA).

In addition to the helicopter initiative, Ashtiani addressed the replacement of G3 rifles with the newly developed Masaf rifles. He empha-

size that Masaf is an advanced weapon crafted by the Ministry of Defense, and units requiring it will be equipped with these rifles progressively.

Regarding the Yasin jet trainers, Brigadier General Ashtiani highlighted their significance in compensating for gaps in the training process. Yasin, being one of the most advanced training jets, is versatile enough to conduct combat missions and various tactical aerial warfare actions, including close air support (CAS) for air-to-ground operations against hostile targets near friendly forces.

In response to inquiries about homegrown hypersonic ballistic missiles, Ashtiani clarified that the Ministry of Defense is actively engaged in upgrading systems, exploring new options, and defining new systems. These endeavors will

be gradually revealed, signifying ongoing tasks within the ministry.

Over the past few years, Iranian military experts and engineers have made significant strides in creating a wide range of homegrown equipment, fostering self-sufficiency within the armed forces.

Officials in Iran have consistently stressed the necessity of boosting the nation's military capabilities, especially in missile technology, to strengthen defense capabilities. They have explicitly asserted that negotiations will never jeopardize the non-negotiable defense capabilities of the country.

Israel war on Gaza divided U.S. society: expert

From Page 1 ▶ to be established in the occupied territories. The current Israeli cabinet consists of religious and far-right individuals, who believe in the "greater Israel". That means that they not only wouldn't allow the evacuation of the West Bank and East Jerusalem in favor of a Palestinian state, they actually advocate for more annexation of land by the Israeli regime. Biden wants to see these people gone in order to finally settle the Palestinian dispute. But demanding a cabinet reshuffle from Netanyahu does not necessarily mean he has to exit the picture. Whether he would be able to form a new cabinet with less hawkish individuals is something he needs to worry about and not the American politicians.

Israeli lobbies in the U.S. believe and advocate that Israel is a "special" ally for Washington. They argue that Israel is so beneficial to the U.S. that the regime should be protected no matter what.



But recent developments and growing international criticism towards the U.S. has prodded many into rethinking the U.S.-Israeli relations, pointing to the fact that the regime now acts like a burden rather than an asset. Do you think U.S. support for Israel will begin to wane?

I think what should be taken into account is that the U.S. and Israel have a close ideological

relationship. There are millions of hardline Christians in the U.S. that believe Israelis are the chosen people who are supposed to create a "nation" in the Palestinian land so they can facilitate the return of Jesus. These people hold significant clout in U.S. Congress and would support Israel no matter what. So, I think that while Washington may be critical of Israeli tactics in some instances, it is unlikely that the U.S. would

pull the plug on Israel and cease its unflagging support for the regime. The Israeli lobby and the ideology endorsing Zionism is too powerful to vanish anytime soon. Biden and the president that came before him are Zionists in nature, and wouldn't dream of leaving Israel no matter what the consequences of supporting the regime would be.

Do you think Biden risks losing the 2024 elections due to his unflagging support for Israel?

The issue of Israel has widened the chasm between different groups in the U.S. like many other issues. There is a group of people who believe Biden is not showing sufficient support for Israel. There is the other side of the ledger, where people believe the U.S. government should not support Israel's genocidal attacks on Gaza. But the latter is not too populous, and hence would not have a meaningful effect on the results of the 2024 elections.

Defense Ministry advances 'Sarir' satellite launcher for space exploration program



TEHRAN - The Iranian Defense Ministry aims to reach geostationary orbit with the 'Sarir' satellite launcher in its space exploration endeavors, according to a spokesperson.

During a televised appearance about the successful launch of the biological capsule "Kavos," Spokesperson for Iran's Defense Ministry's Space Division Ahmad Hosseini Mounes underscored the significance of the Sarir satellite launcher, affirming its completion in design and the initiation of construction phases for its subsystems, stating the 'Sarir' satellite launcher marks the initial step towards reaching the geostationary orbit. He also highlighted the strides in stabilizing the Simorgh launcher for future use.

Acknowledging the collaborative efforts within the space sector, he emphasized the active involvement of various organizations operating under the Supreme Space Council, highlighting the Defense Ministry's integral

role in overseeing the comprehensive stages of space technology development over the past 15 years.

Detailing the complexities in launcher technology, Hosseini Mounes emphasized the critical nature of this element within the space cycle, citing Iran's self-sufficiency in multiple engineering disciplines and the stringent regulations governing the sector.

Discussing the functionality of different launchers, he differentiated between the capabilities of the Simorgh and Salman launchers, revealing the Space Organization's directive for the next launcher to carry a 1.5-ton payload into space.

Highlighting the transition from suborbital to orbital launches, Hosseini Mounes outlined the technical requirements for satellite placement in orbit and emphasized the pivotal role of various satellite carriers in different orbital altitudes. "Our upcoming launches will be orbital, requiring us to reach speeds of 3,600 meters per second to place a satellite in orbit. In the Low Earth Orbit (LEO), the satellite carriers 'Safir' and 'Qased' have been positioned for satellites weighing below 50 kilograms.... The Simorgh carrier can place 250 kilograms at 500 kilometers, and the Zoljanah carrier can position 200 kilograms at a 500-kilometer orbit," he added.

Emphasizing the pivotal role of the Sarir satellite carrier, he delineated its capabilities

and the prospects for advancing towards the geostationary orbit, pointing to the ongoing development phases for its subsystems. "Sarir, developed based on Simorgh, can carry a payload of 1500 kilograms in a 200-kilometer orbit. By utilizing orbital transfer blocks currently under development in the country, we can move from the LEO to the geostationary orbit and transport a 100-kilogram satellite into a geostationary orbit," he said.

Addressing governance in the space sector, he stressed the need for coherence and cohesive policy-making under the Supreme Space Council, referencing its recent sessions and the anticipated positive outcomes from the ten-year program.

Highlighting the significance of launch bases, he outlined the strategic development of the Imam Khomeini Spaceport and future plans for a base in Chabahar, offering increased capabilities for Iran's space launch endeavors.

"Launch bases, in addition to the launcher, are critical, with only seven countries possessing this technology. In the Ministry of Defense, we built the Imam Khomeini Spaceport, from which the Safir, Simorgh, Zoljanah, and Salman satellites were launched. The next base is in Chabahar, which is located along the Indian Ocean, allowing Iran to conduct launches in this area without fear of the launcher falling or associated risks," Hosseini Mounes added.

Parliament Speaker stresses significance of economic development

TEHRAN - Iranian Parliament Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf says that addressing the country's economic challenges is a strategic approach that helps neutralize the United States' pressures on Iran.

Speaking at a conference on Wednesday, he emphasized the need to increase production, identifying this as a focal point in the economic battle with the United States.

Qalibaf stressed the importance of taking a stand precisely where the U.S. wishes Iran not to strengthen, declaring economic activists as "the true warriors in this economic war."

Qalibaf discussed the challenges

and opportunities faced by Iran, asserting that these challenges are not insurmountable. He pointed out that the failure to act stems from either a lack of will or a lack of understanding. Drawing attention to the diminishing economic growth over the past decade, he emphasized the annual outflow of billions of dollars in capital from the country which are mostly due to sanctions imposed on Iran by the United States. Qalibaf also attributed these issues to shortcomings in policymaking or failures within the private sector, emphasizing the necessity for a common understanding to address these

challenges effectively.

Addressing economic targets, Qalibaf emphasized the need for an annual 8% economic growth and a reduction in inflation to single digits, aligning with the country's general policies. He also highlighted the predicted 2.8% productivity growth as part of Iran's economic growth strategy.

Qalibaf also acknowledged that Iran possesses abundant human and material resources that are not fully utilized. He concluded by expressing confidence in the nation's ability to resolve its problems through better planning. Referring to practical initiatives already undertaken,



he emphasized the potential for transformation by leveraging opportunities in the mining sector and capitalizing on transportation possibilities dictated by Iran's geopolitical situation.

Iran's top lawmaker envisioned a transformative program capable of achieving economic stability, asserting that this goal is well within Iran's reach.

Increasing awareness most important element of foiling enemy's plots: IRGC

TEHRAN - The spokesman for Iran's Islamic Revolution Guard Corps Brigadier General Ramezan Sharif pointed to the influential role of public relations in countering the combined and cognitive warfare of enemies.

During a ceremony on Wednesday, the general stated that in the face of the enemy's combined warfare, everyone's responsibility becomes heavier. He further emphasized that the IRGC's public relations is one of the main drivers in countering the psychological and media operations of the enemy against the Islamic Revolution Guard Corps.

The general has noted that one of the tactics used by enemies in combined war is to spread false information about the IRGC, intending to create a divide between the people, particularly the younger generation, and the IRGC.

General Ramezan Sharif described the presentation of a true, correct, and accurate picture of the positions, stances, and functions of the IRGC in various fields as an "antidote" to the enemy's destructive media scenarios.

He called public relations "one of the main drivers of dealing with psychological operations of enemies."

Some sections have shortages and incapacities in public relations, which are the root causes of enemy media's ability to affect public opinion, according to the general.

The senior military official also criticized the absence of a well-structured media strategy and ineffective collaboration between managers of public relations and media affairs in both the country's civilian and military sectors.

As per the senior commander, such inefficiencies have resulted in poor performance in terms of communication and engagement with the public and their opinions.

SPORTS

Persepolis, Esteghlal meet in potential title decider: PGPL

TEHRAN - There is a long way to go but the match between Persepolis and Esteghlal football teams could be decider in the 2023/24 Iran's Persian Gulf Pro League (PGPL).

The crucial match was supposed to be held on Aug. 3 but was rescheduled for Dec. 14.

Esteghlal lead the table with 24 points and Persepolis are fourth with 20 points and have one game in hand.

Esteghlal, headed by Javad Nekounam, have shown stability in the current season but they have been held two times in their recent matches. Yahya Golmohammadi's Persepolis have been recently kicked out of the AFC Champions League but they emerged victorious over Havadar in their last match in the league.

The Video Assistant Referee (VAR) has been also confirmed for the derby, which has always been controversial.

The match will be held in Tehran's Azadi Stadium on Thursday.

Mooud Bonyadifar has been appointed as referee and he will be assisted by Saeid Ghasemi and Alireza Ildorom.

Bijan Heydari is the fourth official.

Esteghlal and Persepolis have met each other 101 times in Tehran derby. Persepolis have won 27 matches, while Esteghlal emerged victorious 26 times and 48 matches ended in draw.

Star-studded Sepahan are also favorites to win the title and the result of the Tehran derby could affect the fate of the Isfahan-based football team.

Referee and VAR confirmed for Tehran derby

TEHRAN - The Video Assistant Referee (VAR) has been confirmed for the Tehran derby between Persepolis and Esteghlal football teams.

The match will be held in Tehran's Azadi Stadium on Thursday.

Mooud Bonyadifar has been appointed as referee and will be assisted by Saeid Ghasemi and Alireza Ildorom.

Bijan Heydari will be the fourth official.

Esteghlal and Persepolis have met each other 101 times in Tehran derby. Persepolis have won 27 matches, while Esteghlal emerged victorious 26 times and 48 matches ended in draw.

Iran handball finish 31st at 2023 IHF Women's World Championship

TEHRAN - Iran defeated Greenland 28-23 on Wednesday to finish 31st in the 2023 IHF Women's World Championship.

It was Iran's first win in the competition.

Team Melli had also finished 31st in the previous edition held in Spain.

With the win, Iran secured 31st place for the second time at the World Championship and also claimed their first-ever win.

Greenland, on the other hand, returned to the World Championship after a 22-year hiatus and closed their Denmark/Norway/Sweden 2023 journey finishing on the last place, just like they did back in 2001, failing to seal their maiden win.

Iran lost to Poland, Germany, and Japan in the IHF Women's World Championship preliminary stage and also lost to Chile, Congo and Kazakhstan in the President Cup.

Seven Iranians shortlisted for Beach Soccer Stars 2023

TEHRAN - Six Iranian players as well as a coach have been nominated for the Beach Soccer Stars 2023 awards.

The clock is ticking for the 2023 best players and coach to be known. The final list of the 100 best male players, 50 best female players and 40 best coaches has been announced.

The categories to be voted are Best Coach, Best Women's Goalkeeper, Best Women's Player, Best Men's Goalkeeper, Men's Best 5 players and Best Men's Player.

Votes will be submitted until 11 January by the coach and the captain of all the Football Associations and the coach and captain of the Beach Soccer Clubs that have participated in at least one of the following competitions: World Winners Cup Alghero 2023, Americas Winners Cup 2023 or the Euro Winners Cup 2023.

In case there is no women's beach soccer national team active in the federation, then the men's team captain and coach will vote for the best women's player and best women's goalkeeper.

Ali Mirshekari, Moslem Mesigar, Mohammadali Mokhtari, Amirhossein Akbari, Mohammadjavad Khosravi and Mohammad Moradi have been nominated for the Best Men's Player.

Also, Iran coach Ali Naderi will have to vie with 39 other coaches to win the Best Coach accolade.

Taremi among 2023 AFC Asian Cup's Players to Watch

TEHRAN - Strikers from Iran have long had to live in the shadow of those who have gone before them, such is the depth of historic talent to have led the line for Team Melli.

But over the last eight years Mehdi Taremi has established himself as a star in his own right for both club and country, joining the greats of Iranian football.

The former Persepolis and Al Gharafa forward is not only seen as one of the best of his generation; he is widely viewed as one of Asian football's most potent attacking forces ever.

His statistics speak for themselves: no player turning up at the AFC Asian Cup Qatar 2023 has scored more goals in the UEFA Champions League than Taremi's nine in 24 games, the most ever netted in the competition by any player from Asia.

The 31-year-old is considered one of the most potent forwards in European club football, scoring regularly at domestic and continental level for Portuguese giants FC Porto since joining the club after a one-year stint with Rio Ave in 2020.

Taremi started his career with his hometown club, Shahin Bushehr, before a switch to Iranjavan, where the goals started to flow prompting Tehran giant Persepolis to sign the forward in 2014.

Eight goals in his debut season for the club saw Taremi earn a call-up for the national team and over the next three seasons, the striker was to grow ever more prolific, encouraging Al Gharafa to sign the then 25-year-old.

An 18-month stay in Qatar was followed by his switch to Rio Ave, where 21 goals in 37 games encouraged Porto to take him to the Estadio Dragao, where he has since won the 2021-22 league title and was last season's leading scorer.

The goals have flowed for Iran, too, with 41 in 74 games placing him fourth on his country's all-time list behind the iconic Ali Daei, legendary goal-scoring midfielder Karim Bagheri as well as his teammate and strike partner Sardar Azmoun.

He scored twice at the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022, striking twice against England having failed to find the net in his debut at the tournament four years earlier, the-afc.com wrote.

Taremi's strengths lie in his ability to play as a central striker or in a deeper role behind a partner. Alternatively, he can also cut in from a position wide on the left, providing his team with significant tactical flexibility.

TPPH achieves knowledge for domestic manufacturing of over 800,000 power plant parts



From page 1 and this success is the result of the courage and timely decisions and experience of experts in this field.

According to the official, all of the country's power plants were 99 percent on the grid during the current year's summer peak consumption period, while the figure is at most 95 percent worldwide.

Back in November, the managing director of Iran Power Plant Repairs Company (IPRC) said his company managed to achieve the knowledge for the domestic production of

more than 6,300 power plant parts and equipment in the first eight months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21-November 21).

According to Masoud Moradi, the production of the mentioned parts saved the country over \$2.6 million.

"Today, specialized repairs in the power plant industry using the modern science and knowledge of equipment manufacturing is the most important necessity to completely solve the concerns of this industry," Moradi said.

Earlier this year, Deputy Energy Minister Homayoun Haeri had said that most of the power plant parts are made domestically and few imports are done because some parts are more efficient to be imported than produced.

"More than 90 percent of the parts are produced inside the country and we are known as a self-sufficient and high-level country in this industry," Haeri told IRNA.

Kharg terminal's oil storage capacity to rise 2m barrels

TEHRAN - The head of Iranian Oil Terminals Company (IOTC) said the crude oil storage capacity of Kharg Oil Terminal is going to increase by two million barrels, IRNA reported.

"With the completion of the repairs of tanks 25 and 26, two million barrels will be added to the storage capacity of this terminal," Abbas Gharibi said on Wednesday on the sidelines of a visit to the terminal.

Having modern infrastructures including wharves, loading arms, flow pipelines,

storage tanks and measurement systems, this strategic terminal plays a significant role in the country's oil industry in terms of crude oil storage and export and helping to complete the oil and gas value chain, the official said.

Due to its close distance to oilfield regions, its good offshore position and suitable depth for gigantic oil vessels berthing, Kharg Island Oil Terminal has been recognized as one of the country's most suitable places for crude oil export and loading sites.

Oil Ministry begins completing \$47.5b of projects to boost output

TEHRAN - Iranian Oil Minister Javad Oji said the ministry has started completing 50 projects in the oil industry with a total investment of \$47.5 billion to increase the country's oil and gas output, Shana reported.

Speaking in a meeting with Ahmadreza Dastgheyb, the head of the Supreme Audit Court of Iran, on Tuesday, Oji presented a report on the two-year performance of the Oil Ministry in the 13th government and said the most important issue in the country's oil and gas industry is investment.

"A country that ranks first in the world in terms of total oil and gas reserves has a good capacity for investment," Oji said.

According to Oji, one of the positive measures taken by the Oil Ministry in the current government administration has been the increase in investment in the industry, which has been in line with the increase in production in the fields of oil, gas, as well as petroleum and petrochemical products.

Oji pointed to some of the key projects

implemented by the ministry to increase production in various fields, saying: "Maintaining production, increasing oil and gas production, boosting joint fields' output, increasing gas storage, making new discoveries, increasing the country's oil and gas refining capacity, improving the quality of petroleum products, increasing the production of petrochemical products and increasing the capacity of gas refineries have been among our key projects."

"So far, we have implemented 132 projects, which were mainly semi-finished projects in the oil industry. In [the Iranian calendar year] 1401 (ended on March 20), 48 projects were put into operation, and this year 67 projects have been put into operation or will be put into operation," the official said.

"Completion of 50 new projects has started in line with the increase in production, which are worth 47.5 billion dollars. The total investment made in the projects that have been completed or started so far is 76 billion dollars," he added.

TEDPIX falls 3,000 points on Wednesday

TEHRAN- TEDPIX, the main index of the Tehran Stock Exchange (TSE), dropped 3,173 points (0.15 percent) to 2,158,092 on Wednesday, which is the fifth day of the Iranian calendar week.

TSE is one of the four Iranian stock exchanges, and the most important one. The other three ones are Iran Mercantile Exchange (IME), Iran Energy Exchange (IRENEX), and Iran's over-the-counter (OTC) market, known as Iran Fara Bourse (IFB).

Head of Iran's Securitax and Exchange Organization (SEO) Majid Eshqi has said that using the capacities of the country's private sector in the stock market has been one of the main strategies of the organization over the past year.

"One of the main approaches of the Securitax and Exchange Organization during the past year has been to use the power of the private sector, because government entities and the public sector do not have the necessary characteristics for economic prosperity, so we must increase the share of the private sector in the capital market," Eshqi said in a conference in Khorasan Razavi Province.

Large industries have their own problems and fluctuations, but small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) can compensate for these fluctuations, the official said, adding that the main part of the world economy is moving towards small and medium-sized companies because value, employment, and innovation lie in such companies.

The SEO head further noted that the stock market should mainly focus on investment and financing, saying: "We need to direct the liquidity flow towards production."

Emphasizing the important role of the seventh National Development Plan (2022-2026) in securing the future of the capital market, Eshqi stated: "One of the major indicators of investment is predictability, so more action should be taken in the seventh development plan to make the economy more predictable."

He pointed to the holding of investment and financing conferences in provinces as a starting point for a new movement towards promoting investment and said: "Economic enterprises do not have enough familiarity with the capital market and such conferences are bridges that provide the necessary platform in this regard."

TPO attracts \$1.4b of investments in Iran's ports

TEHRAN - Deputy Head of Iran's Ports and Maritime Organization (PMO) Jalil Eslami said his organization has managed to attract 700 trillion rials (about \$1.4 billion) of foreign and domestic investment in the country's ports, IRNA reported.

According to Eslami, 200 trillion rials (about \$400 million) of the mentioned figure is going to be invested by the country's private sector and the rest is supplied by foreign investors.

Underlining the government's serious determination for the development of the country's maritime economy, the official said: "In this regard, a conference dubbed maritime-oriented development is going to be held by the PMO on the occasion of National Transportation Day on December 19."

Referring to the 13th



government's measures to increase the loading and unloading capacity of the country's ports, he stated: "The realization of the general policies of maritime-oriented development requires the synergy of all executive, government and

maritime bodies."

While Iran is combating the U.S. unilateral sanctions on its economy, the country's ports as the major gates of exports and imports play a significant role in this battle. This role makes all-out support to

ports and more development of them serious and vital.

Such necessity has led the government to define projects for more development of the ports and also take some measures to encourage investment making in ports, in addition to facilitating the loading and unloading of goods, especially basic commodities, there.

It is worth mentioning that Iran's Ports and Maritime Organization has defined a high number of projects to develop and improve the country's ports, as the country aims to double the capacity of its ports in a course of five years.

According to the PMO, the capacity of the country's ports has increased from 180 million tons in the Iranian calendar year 1392 (ended in March 2014) to 250 million tons in 1399 (ended in March 2021).

TCCIMA holds conference on transportation, economic development

TEHRAN- The Tehran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (TCCIMA) held a conference dubbed Transportation and Economic Development on Wednesday, before the National Transportation Day (December 17).

In addition to honoring the entrepreneurs and investors of this industry, the conference provided a platform for raising the concerns and problems of those active in various fields of

transportation.

As reported, Iranian Parliament Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf delivered a speech at this conference.

He asked the elites of the private sector to think of solutions for the challenges of the transportation industry together with the government.

Qalibaf, who spoke as a special guest at this

conference, complained: "Our challenges have been standing for several decades in various economic fields, including transportation."

"The issues and challenges of the country, including the challenges of the transportation industry, should be considered by the private sector as a national issue, and our elites should think of solutions for these national issues", the official further reiterated.

Iran exports non-oil goods worth \$116.3m to Ghana in 7 months



TEHRAN- Iran exported non-oil commodities valued at \$116.3 million to Ghana during the first seven months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21-October 22), the spokesman of Trade Development Committee of Iran's House of Industry, Mining and Trade announced.

Ruhollah Latifi also announced that the Islamic Republic imported products valued at \$5.9 million from Ghana in the seven-month period.

Among the African trade partners of Iran in the first seven months of this year, Ghana was the first export destination of the Iranian products, and the third source of import to the country, he added.

As the official has announced, Iran exported 1.205 million tons of non-oil commodities valued at \$434 million to Africa during the first seven months of the current Iranian calendar year.

Latifi said that the country's seven-month export to Africa fell 53 percent in value, and 33 percent in weight, year on year.

The official also announced that Iran imported 38,122 tons of goods valued at \$47,434 million from Africa in the first seven months of the present year, with 21 percent drop in worth and 42 percent fall in weight, as compared to the same period of time in the past year.

Over the past 40 years, the Islamic Republic of Iran has never given up on its principled policy towards Africa due to political and cultural commonalities, despite the sanctions, pressure and disruptions of the West, and has always maintained itself alongside the people and countries of Africa.

As reported, during the Iranian calendar years 1384 and 1385 (March 2005-March 2007), the relations between Iran and the African continent increased in

terms of trade, but since 1386, the economic relations between Iran and Africa have decreased due to the economic crisis and cruel sanctions against Iran.

Surveys show that in the past years, due to the lack of restoration of economic relations with Africa, the amount of trade with the countries of this continent has remained at the level of \$1.2 billion, but according to Mohammed-Sadeq Qanadzadeh, the director general of the Africa Department of Iran's Trade Promotion Organization (TPO), facilitating the trade route with Africa is happening now and it is expected that the trade figure with this continent will reach \$10 billion in the next three years.

In fact, good steps have been taken to use Africa's capacity, and Africa can be a suitable market for Iranian goods, Qanadzadeh stated.

Last year, the official referred to the beginning of the 13th government's measures to develop relations with the African continent, and said: "Over the past [Iranian calendar] year 1400 (ended on March 20, 2022), a series of measures have been initiated, which were resulted in the visit of about 60 African trade delegations, active presence in the exhibitions of this continent, the opening of 10 trade centers, and the dispatch of three commercial attachés."

"As the result of these measures, Iran's trade with Africa experienced a 100-percent growth from \$650 million in the Iranian year 1399, and also in the first nine months of the year 1401, Iran-Africa trade was equal to the total trade of the previous year, and we also experienced a growth of about 700 percent in the export of technical and engineering services", he added.

Also as announced by Ruhollah Latifi, the value of trade between Iran and Africa rose two percent in the past Iranian calendar year 1401

(ended on March 20).

He put Iran-Africa annual trade at 2.545 million tons worth \$1.278 billion.

Iran exported 2.452 million tons of products valued at \$1183 billion to 49 African countries in the past year, showing one percent fall, and imported 92,898 tons of goods worth \$95.316 million from 23 African countries, indicating 59 percent growth, year on year, according to Latifi.

Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister for Economic Diplomacy Mehdi Safari has said that the economies of Iran and the African continent are complementary to each other, and due to their abundant capacities, significant achievements can be achieved in this due.

He made the remarks at the Scientific and Economic Cooperation Meeting Between Iran and West African Countries (IRAN WAC) which was held in Tehran in mid-March.

As reported, 20 multilateral and bilateral cooperation agreements were signed between Iran and West African countries in the first day of the mentioned event, and the expansion and deepening of comprehensive economic cooperation was emphasized.

Addressing that meeting, President Raisi emphasized Tehran's readiness to comprehensively expand cooperation with African countries, especially countries in the west of this continent.

He also said that the current level of trade between Iran and Africa is not acceptable, and according to the capacities and efforts of the authorities of the Islamic Republic of Iran and West African countries, it is expected that the cooperation and economic relations between them will change even more.

As stated by the experts, in order to increase the level of trade with Africa certain infrastructure including transportation and direct shipping lines, as well as proper legal, commercial, monetary, and banking relations must be provided.

It is said that in the near future, the African continent will become a great power in the world due to having 18 percent of the world's population and increasing population growth.

Statistics show that the African

continent has 30 percent of mineral reserves, 40 percent of gold, and 90 percent of chromium and platinum in the world. The continent also has the largest reserves of cobalt, diamonds, platinum and uranium in the world.

Also, Africa has 65 percent of the world's arable land, 10 percent of renewable fresh water resources, and 12 percent of the world's oil reserves.

As stated by Mehrad Ebad, a member of the board of representatives of Tehran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines, and Agriculture (TCCIMA), in the last 20 years, Africa's foreign trade has grown significantly, but Iran has not yet been able to use this capacity.

According to Ebad, one of the issues that caused the African market to be neglected was the lack of proper introduction of this market to Iranian traders and businessmen.

"In order to develop trade and relations with African countries, it is suggested the activity of joint chambers of commerce to introduce target markets and existing risks will be increased; Because our exporters are not interested to go to African markets due to lack of knowledge", he commented.

He also considered the cruel sanctions as another problem of trade with Africa and said that the traders are forced to send their goods to these countries through neighboring countries such as the UAE, Oman and Turkey in order to export their goods to African countries. It will cause re-export of goods and increase costs.

Despite existence of some barriers in the way of expanding trade between Iran and Africa, the visit of Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi to three African countries (Kenya, Uganda, and Zimbabwe) in mid-July proves that the current government is serious about developing cooperation and communication with the African continent in order to secure the country's economic interests.

Economic experts believe that the president's visit to Africa provided the basis for increasing Iran's presence in the 60-billion-dollar economy of the African continent and will increase the level of activity of Iranian traders and businessmen in this continent.

Shejaiya Nightmare

From page 1 ▶ In the latest battles in Shejaiya, at least seven of them were from the Golani Brigade. At least two were also from the 669 Special Search and Rescue Unit.

Another soldier who served under the Israeli combat engineering corps was killed in a separate battle with the Palestinian resistance in a different area of the northern Gaza Strip. Among the latest Israeli military fatalities are:

Lieutenant Colonel Itzhak Ben Basat, aged 44, head of the Golani Brigade's commander's team. Itzhak Ben Basat is the most senior regime military commander to have been killed in the Israeli ground offensives to date.

Lieutenant Colonel Tomer Grinberg, aged 35, another high-ranking senior commander of the Golani Brigade.

Major Roei Meldasi, a company commander in the Golani Brigade's 13th Battalion. Major Moshe Avram Bar On, a company commander in the Golani Brigade's 51st Battalion.

Captain Liel Hayo, a platoon commander in the Golani Brigade's 51st Battalion. Major Ben Shelly, a squad commander in the Israeli Air Force's Unit 669.

Another three were from the Special Rescue Tactical Unit and the School of Combat Engineering.

According to Israeli media and accounts of the Golani Brigade in Hebrew, four troops had entered several buildings that they believed had been abandoned.

The armed wing of Hamas, the al-Qassam brigades, then ambushed them by opening fire and according to Israeli reports hurled grenades, whilst detonating an explosive



device. Contact with the Israeli troops was lost, and out of fear that they had been taken hostage, more troops were sent to rescue them.

During the botched rescue attempt, other troops from the Golani Brigade as well as the elite rescue units came under heavy gunfire from the al-Qassam brigades who had by now entered the buildings.

The armed wing of Hamas then killed and injured more Israeli troops from zero distance.

In Shejaiya, Hamas fighters surprised Israeli troops by using the Israeli army's uniform, which made it impossible for the invading Israeli forces to distinguish between Hamas fighters and Israeli troops.

The Israeli military claims 436 troops have been killed since the start of Operation al-Aqsa Storm on October 7.

Since the start of the Israeli ground offensives on October 20, more than 120 troops have been killed, according to the Israeli military.

Yet, experts say the regime is

known to downplay its military death toll and reveal the true extent of casualties once a war is over. It is a matter that has been backed up by Israeli media.

The occupying regime also claimed on Wednesday that 1,704 Israeli soldiers have been injured since the start of the Israeli war on Gaza. Israeli media say this figure contradicts hospital data, which suggests a much higher number of soldiers have been injured since the regime began its war on the besieged coastal enclave.

Many of the regime's troops are in critical condition.

Shejaiya is part of the same areas where the Israeli military first began its ground offensives.

Whilst the regime is now focusing its ground offensives in the southern Gaza Strip, it is evident that the Israeli military has done little to dent the strength of the Palestinian resistance in the north.

In essence, Palestinian resistance factions are still operating with the same power and resilience across the entire blockaded Gaza Strip

since Operation al-Aqsa Storm on October 7.

Contrary to Israeli propaganda, there is no Israeli military edge against the Palestinian resistance in the Gaza Strip.

The is whilst Tel Aviv's stated goal of eliminating Hamas is evidently a task that has proven to be too difficult for the Israeli military.

In man-to-man combat with the Palestinian resistance, more Israeli troops have been killed than armed members of the Palestinian resistance factions in the coastal enclave. It has led many to speculate that the real goal of the Israeli regime is one of a genocidal nature against the civilian population of the Gaza Strip. Tens of thousands of Israeli airstrikes have killed nearly 20,000 Palestinian civilians and reduced the Gaza Strip's residential buildings to rubble.

According to UN agencies, the regime is also using starvation as a weapon of war against the civilian population of Gaza.

The strict Israeli ban on food and water to enter the strip has sounded alarm bells among UN bodies and international humanitarian agencies who say, at this rate, many of Gaza's civilian population will starve to death. As more images emerge of traumatized and injured Palestinian children being treated on the ground by doctors with basic supplies in overcrowded hospitals, the majority of the international community is turning in favor of the Palestinians.

This is something that was reflected by the latest UN General Assembly vote in the early hours of Wednesday morning (occupied al-Quds time).

WORLD HEADLINES

Support for Hamas in occupied West Bank tripled in last 3 months: poll

From page 1 ▶ "The people, especially the new generation, are backing Hamas now, more than at any other moment," he told me.

"Palestinian youth had priorities and wish lists about owning a house, or getting a degree," explained West Bank political scientist Amjad Bushkar.

"But after 7 October, I think these priorities have totally changed. There are rising voices for full liberation of the homeland through resistance - whether that resistance is peaceful or armed."

Dr Bushkar told me that he had spent a total of nine years in Israeli jails, and had been a member of Hamas's student wing in the past. Seven members of his family had been arrested since the 7 October attacks, he added.

Hamas members in the West Bank have regularly been targeted by Palestinian security forces - not just Israeli ones - since the group took control of Gaza by force in 2007, a year after it won parliamentary elections. But now, Dr Bushkar said, something had changed. "Both Fatah and Hamas are well aware that they are complementary to each other, and I think we'll see real integration between the two movements."

"The Palestinian Authority realised that targeting Hamas would not eradicate it because it's an ideological movement rooted within the Palestinian people; and Hamas is fully aware that it cannot establish an independent [Palestinian] state without the help of Fatah."

in the zone of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

As many as 153 member nations, including Russia, China, Brazil, Iran, Spain, Canada, Cuba, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, France, Switzerland, and Sweden, voted in favor of the resolution, ten countries, including Austria, Israel, the United States, and the Czech Republic, were against, while twenty-three, including the United Kingdom, Germany, and Ukraine, abstained.

Earlier, the UN General Assembly voted down the US-initiated amendment condemning Hamas' actions. It also turned down Austria's amendment specifying that the hostages are being held by Hamas and other groups.

The draft resolution generally repeats the text of a document initiated by the United Arab Emirates at the UN Security Council last week, which was vetoed by the United States. Several dozen states, including Russia, Belarus, China, Malta, and Portugal, were among the co-authors. The resolution demands an immediate humanitarian ceasefire and the release of all hostages. Apart from that, the document urges all parties to the conflict to observe international humanitarian law.

Pope calls for immediate ceasefire in Gaza

Pope Francis has renewed his call for an "immediate" ceasefire in Gaza and pleaded for an end to suffering for both Israelis and Palestinians.

"I renew my appeal for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire," the leader of the Catholic Church said.

"May this great suffering for the Israelis and the Palestinians be over." The secretary general of the Executive Committee of the PLO, Hussein al-Sheikh, has also urged President Biden to call for an immediate ceasefire following his comments on Tuesday that Israel risks losing international support over its "indiscriminate bombing" of civilians.

He added that Biden should put forward "a comprehensive political plan based on international legitimacy and international law, ending the occupation and establishing an independent Palestinian state".

Israel trades fire with Lebanon's Hezbollah on northern border

Israel traded fire with Lebanon's Hezbollah on the northern border on Wednesday at noon.

All along Israel's northern border, there are plenty of checkpoints to ensure that no one enters what has now become a military zone, Al Jazeera reported.

Israel begins pumping seawater into Hamas's Gaza tunnels

Israel's military has begun pumping seawater into Hamas's vast complex of tunnels in Gaza, according to U.S. officials briefed on the Israeli military's operations, part of an intensive effort to destroy the underground infrastructure that has underpinned the group's operations.

A spokesperson for the Israeli war minister declined to respond to the newspaper's request for comment. Critics have warned that flooding the tunnels could hurt Gaza's freshwater supply.

Tanker in Red Sea targeted by speedboat gunfire and missiles -sources

A tanker in the Red Sea off Yemen's coast was fired on by gunmen in a speedboat and targeted with missiles, maritime sources said on Wednesday, the latest incident to threaten the shipping lane after Yemeni Houthi forces warned ships not to travel to Israel. A second vessel was also approached by the speedboat in the same area but was not attacked, British maritime security firm Ambrey and other sources said.

The Yemeni army has sought to support the Palestinians in the Gaza war by firing missiles at Israel and so far it has targeted a number of Israeli commercial ships or Israeli-linked ships in the busy Bab al-Mandab Strait, next to Yemen at the southern entrance to the Red Sea. There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the latest incident in the busy shipping route off Yemen's coast.

"Houthi continue to attack international shipping focusing on ships which in their opinion have a link to Israeli interests or nationals," Jakob Larsen, head of safety and security at shipping association BIMCO, told Reuters. Larsen added, "It is pure luck no seafarers have been killed yet."

UN General Assembly passes resolution on Palestine demanding immediate ceasefire

The United Nations General Assembly on Tuesday passed a resolution proposed by Egypt and Mauritania that demanded an immediate ceasefire

Insighters Could Al-Aqsa Storm bring a change to Saudi foreign policy?

From page 1 ▶ Riyadh in 2002, which also garnered endorsement in 2007 and 2017, both proposed that Israel become a state recognized by the Arab League, contingent upon Israel withdrawing its forces from the territories it occupied following the Six-Day War in 1967. Additionally, the peace initiatives stipulated that Israel permit the establishment of an independent Palestinian state, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

"Despite the widespread embrace of the Saudi peace plan by the majority of Arab states, Israel's reaction to both Saudi initiatives was unfavorable. Israel insisted on maintaining Jerusalem as a unified capital and also rejected the right of return for Palestinian refugees, impacting hundreds of thousands of individuals," said Foad al-Ibrahim, a seasoned expert on Saudi Arabia.

The expert further noted that with the passage of time and Israel's firm rejection of the two-state solution, Saudi Arabia appears to have become less enthusiastic about championing the Palestinian cause. Instead, it seems to be prioritizing the advancement of its ties with Israel, potentially seeking stronger rapport with Washington.

"It seems that solidifying ties with Israel has become a prerequisite for maintaining a strong relationship between Saudi Arabia and the U.S. government. MBS appears to be actively fostering this relationship with Israel in order to secure his political career," the expert remarked.

Reports indicate that as part of any potential normalization agreement with Israel, Saudi Arabia has pursued added concessions from Washington, such as a security pact, the sale of advanced weaponry, and assistance in developing a civilian nuclear program. Allegedly, Riyadh has also requested that Israel uphold the possibility of a two-state solution, although given recent events and the situation in Gaza, it seems impossible to envision Israel endorsing the establishment of a Palestinian state.

Following Israel's aggressive actions against Palestinians in Gaza, Riyadh declared that the potential deal is on hold. Nonetheless, Israeli reports contend that Bin Salman has agreed to "build on"

the US-mediated discussions aimed at normalizing relations with Israel once the conflict in Gaza is over. However, in light of shifting public opinion against the regime, it may prove challenging for the custodian of Islam's holiest sites to resume talks with Israeli officials.

"From my perspective, Operation Al-Aqsa Storm and Israel's subsequent response to the offensive create obstacles for MBS and others to move forward with normalization with Israel, potentially endangering their credibility and political careers. Nevertheless, this may be a transient situation, contingent upon the political dynamics within Israel and the military landscape in Gaza and the broader region," emphasized al-Ibrahim.

Waters murkier between Riyadh and Washington after Hamas operation

Israel's disproportionate response to the October 7 Hamas attack might have also served as a wake-up call for Saudi's ruling family.

That's because Riyadh, like everyone else, noticed that Washington's reaction to the killing of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi and its reaction to the slaughter of thousands of civilians in Gaza were undeniably disparate. After Western media outlets turned the screw on the Saudi prince for his involvement in the murder of a royal insider-turned-critic, who was killed at the kingdom's Istanbul consulate in 2018, Washington decided that backing its traditional West Asian ally in the particular case would be too costly. U.S. President Joe Biden promised to turn the kingdom into a pariah during his presidential campaign and proceeded to release a declassified U.S. intelligence assessment, confirming the crown prince's complicity in the killing. Though Bin Salman was able to avoid reckoning, his reputation was severely damaged as someone who liked to tout himself as a bold reformer pursuing new freedoms in the Saudi kingdom.

Meanwhile, the U.S. has shown unequivocal support for Israel's killing campaign in Gaza, and refrained from blaviating its usual slogans of human rights to let Israel finish its stated mission of "eradicating Hamas". Washington was willing



to help the Israeli regime omit its opponents, not caring that it had to stand against the entire world to make it happen. The Khashoggi case was not an outlier. The U.S. pulled the plug on Riyadh when Yemen's Ansarullah movement decided to attack Saudi Arabia's main oil processing facilities in 2019, making no concrete efforts whatsoever to help its ally prop up its security apparatus. That's while the Democrats and Republicans are working in tandem to secure a \$14.5 billion military aid package for Israel, amid a budget deficit crisis in home.

Gaza has brought Saudis closer to China

Saudi Arabia has already begun to buttress its relations with China after getting a stiff arm from the U.S. during the two instances. But the kingdom seems to have shifted even more towards Beijing's orbit with the occurrence of the latest war in West Asia. A delegation of Arab and Muslim ministers, including Saudi Arabia's Faisal bin Farhan Al-Saud, travelled to Beijing in November to push for an end to the war in Gaza with China's aid.

The move largely sidelined the U.S., which has been the target of scathing criticism from its Arab allies since the beginning of the latest wave of Israeli attacks on Gaza. Operation Al-Aqsa Storm seems to have defied previous predictions on many levels. Saudi Arabia may have to recalibrate its foreign policies, considering the amount of hate it may receive from Muslim masses across the world once it decides to move forward with normalization talks with Israel. It might also be less willing than before to count on the U.S. as a reliable partner, given Washington's penchant for leaving Saudi Arabia alone, when a crisis strikes.

Trade Revenues from Eilat Port Drop 80%

A report published by an Israeli media outlet on Wednesday indicates that the revenues of Israel's [occupied] port of Eilat have dropped 80% during the past month. This is tragic news for the Israeli regime, as this port serves as its third most important after Haifa and Tel Aviv.

The southern gate of international trade for the Zionist regime has been damaged dramatically since the beginning of the invasion of Gaza. It reached its peak this week after Yemeni Resistance attacked a Norwegian oil tanker destined to dock in Eilat.

The report quotes the Director General of the port as saying, "Due to the escalation of the crisis, the port's management will ask for compensation because of losing a significant amount of its revenues. The ships are afraid of heading towards Eilat through the convenient route which was the Red Sea and have to join a route which goes around the African continent. This increases the travel time for up to 20 days".

But the prolonged travel time of the ships is not the main problem of Eilat port. The ships

which choose to go around Africa (to avoid facing the Yemeni Resistance) will pass through the Mediterranean and dock either in Haifa or Ashdod, as these ports are much closer than Eilat. Should they choose to dock in Eilat, they have to pass through the Suez Canal and go around the Egyptian Sinai desert to the Gulf and Aqaba and finally to Eilat. This prolongs the travel time and cost even further. That said, Eilat port is effectively inconvenient in terms of economy and security until the Yemeni Resistance consents to keeping the Red Sea safe

for shipping towards the Occupied Palestine.

This critical situation is described in the report by providing the data about what is exported to the Occupied Palestine through this port. "Eilat is the southern gate and the only gate for trade with Far East countries and Australia without having to cross the Suez Canal", the report said, emphasizing that "its activity is mainly associated with exporting minerals to China and India and importing commodities like cows from Australia and automobiles from China, South Korea and Japan". For the Zionist regime, Eilat

port is of specific importance because it is the most active port in the south. More than 75% of the car imports of the regime are done through Eilat. The drastic drop in Eilat's activity, against this background, also means an immediate disturbance in Israel's transportation system. In line with this assessment, it was reported earlier this month that one of the ships which was destined to dock in Eilat but was intercepted by Yemeni Resistance in the Red Sea, was carrying a gigantic shipment of cars to the Occupied Palestine.

Beijing museum to hold loan exhibit of Persian treasures



TEHRAN – On Wednesday, Iran's Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts revealed that a grand exhibition named "glory of Persia" is scheduled to launch in a Beijing museum in December.

Ezzatollah Zarghami highlighted the significance of that exhibition, emphasizing its potential to shed light on Iran's history and culture, captivating the interest of Chinese tourists.

"This exhibition promises to play a pivotal role in introducing Iran's history and civilization, and it is expected to attract some Chinese nationals to visit Iran."

The loan exhibit will feature 211 valuable historical artifacts, ranging from the Iron Age to the Safavid era, he said.

While specific details regarding the exact dates and the museum hosting the exhibition were not disclosed, the minister underscored the importance of this cultural exchange.

"This exhibition not only aims to showcase Iran's historical significance but also serves as an influential tool for promoting the country's tourism advantages and strengthening cul-

tural ties between Iran and China."

He said as part of a mutual agreement with China, an exhibition showcasing their cultural treasures will also be held at the National Museum of Iran.

Zarghami's deputy for tourism in October said Chinese arrivals in Iran had been soaring at a faster pace even when compared to pre-pandemic levels.

"The demand for visiting Iran has been soaring among Chinese nationals," Ali-Asghar Shalbfafian said. He made the remarks in a meeting with his Chinese counterpart Lu Ying Chuang held in Tehran's Sa'dabad historical complex.

Shalbfafian said some 50,000 travelers from China visited the Islamic Republic during the first seven months of the year (started on March 21).

The Islamic Republic in 2019 waived the visa requirement for Chinese nationals willing to visit the country. The decision was made to attract more foreign tourists to the country. However, it was a unilateral measure, because Iranian tourists visiting China still need visas.

Archaeologists unearth 'most shocking example of Roman slavery' at Pompeii

A bakery where enslaved people were imprisoned and exploited to produce bread has been discovered in the ruins of Pompeii in what has been described as the most shocking example of slavery in the ancient Roman city.

The cramped bakery with small windows barred with iron was part of a home that emerged during excavations in the Regio IX area of the Pompeii archaeological park in southern Italy.

The discovery provides more evidence on the daily life of Pompeii's enslaved people, often forgotten about by historical sources but who made up most of the population and whose hard labor propped up the city's economy as well as the culture and fabric of Roman civilization.

The home is believed to have been undergoing renovations when it was destroyed by the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 CE. But the remains of three victims were found in one of the bakery's rooms in recent months, indicating the home still had occupants.

Markings used to coordinate the movement of enslaved workers and blind-folded animals were found on the bakery's floor. The home was divided into a residential part adorned with lavish frescoes, and the bakery, where enslaved people were forced to grind the grain needed to produce bread. The bakery was cut off from the outside world, with the only exit leading to the main hall of the house.

"It is, in other words, a space in which we have to imagine the presence of people of servile status whose freedom of movement the owner felt the need to restrict," said Gabriel Zuchtriegel, the director of Pompeii archaeological park. "It is the most shocking side of ancient slavery, the one devoid of both trusting relationships and promises of manumission, where we were reduced to brute violence, an impression that is entirely confirmed by the securing of the few windows with iron bars."

In 2021, a room that had been lived in by enslaved people containing three wooden beds, a chamber pot and a wooden chest was found in what had been a sprawling villa in Civita Giuliana, a suburb of ancient Pompeii. The remains of two victims, believed to have been a master and a person he enslaved, were found in the same villa a year earlier.

The partly mummified remains, including hair and bones, of a former enslaved person who had risen through the ranks were found in a tomb at the necropolis of Porta Sarno, one of the main gates into Pompeii, in 2021. The tomb is believed to date from the decade before the city was wiped out.

An exhibition dedicated to the enslaved people of Pompeii will begin at the archaeological park on 15 December.

(Source: The Guardian)

Glimpses of World Heritage sites

Białowieża Forest

The Białowieża Forest World Heritage site, on the border between Poland and Belarus, is an immense range of primary forest including both conifers and broadleaved trees covering a total area of 141,885 hectares.

The UNESCO-designated property is a large forest complex located on the border between Poland and Belarus. Thanks to several ages of protection the Forest had survived in its natural state to this day. The Białowieża National Park, Poland, was inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1979 and extended to include Belovezhskaya Pushcha, Belarus, in 1992. A large extension of the property in 2014 results in a property of 141,885 ha with a buffer zone of 166,708 ha.

This property includes a complex of low-

land forests that are characteristics of the Central European mixed forests terrestrial ecoregion. The area has exceptionally conservation significance due to the scale of its old growth forests, which include extensive undisturbed areas where natural processes are on-going. A consequence is the richness in dead wood, standing and on the ground, and consequently a high diversity of fungi and saproxylic invertebrates. The property protects a diverse and rich wildlife of which 59 mammal species, over 250 bird, 13 amphibian, 7 reptile and over 12,000 invertebrate species. The iconic symbol of the property is the European Bison: approximately 900 individuals in the whole property which make almost 25% of the total world's population and over 30% of free-living animals.

(Source: UNESCO)

In landmark decision, Iran approves visa exemptions for 32 nations

From Page 1 ▶ and this unilateral visa cancellation is essentially communicating with the global community."

"The Islamic Republic has shown its readiness to open doors to people worldwide and provide more facilities for them so that they can easily visit our country and benefit from its advantages."

The scheme is expected to usher in a new era of tourism development for Iran; a new chapter of prosperity and tourism development that puts an end to negative propaganda and Iranophobia.

"The decision helps foil negative advertisements, rumors, and fear-mongering about Iran," Zarghami said.

"For years, the European Union has established integration in the field of communications and tourism through the Schengen visa. Recently, Persian Gulf countries have also defined visas for themselves. It is commendable that this government, with prudence and courage, is taking such measures using the importance of tourism," Zarghami emphasized.

He added, "I stress tourism because our perspective is that tourism is the right of all people worldwide, and Iran, in terms of historical significance, nature, ecotourism, hospitality, and health tourism, is one of the most scenic countries."

The visa-waiver program was reportedly approved for India, United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait, Indonesia, Brunei, Ja-



pan, Singapore, Cambodia, Malaysia, Vietnam, Brazil, Peru, Cuba, Mexico, Bolivia, Venezuela, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Croatia, Belarus, Lebanon, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Tunisia, Mauritania, Tanzania, Zimbabwe, Mauritius, and Seychelles.

Moreover, the Iranian government agreed to abolish visa requirements for tourist groups from Russia.

The Islamic Republic had previously had visited cancellations with some countries like Turkey, the Republic of Azerbaijan, Oman, China, Armenia, Lebanon, and Syria, in various forms - unilateral, bilateral, and group visa cancellations, including airport visas, which were implemented in some cases.

Based on an initial proposal, the tourism ministry requested abolishing visa requirements for passport holders from 68 countries, including Finland, Cyprus, and Luxembourg.

According to Ali-Asghar Shalbfafian, who is Zarghami's deputy for tourism, the number of tourist arrivals is estimated to reach six million by the end of the current year (March 19, 2024). "With the [steady] increase in the arrival of foreign tourists, it is expected the number of international arrivals will reach about 6 million by year-end."

The latest data provided by the tourism ministry suggests the number of foreign arrivals in the country reached 4.4 million during the first eight months of the current Iranian year (started on March 21), which shows 48.5 percent compared to that of last year.

"Iran's tourism experienced a growth of 48.5% in the first eight months of this year, attracting 4.4 million and 400 thousand visitors motivated by trade, medical treatment, pilgrimage, and tourism," Moslem Shojai, who presides over the

ministry's foreign tourism marketing and development office, said on Tuesday.

Based on the statistics, some 1.8 million visitors from West Asia traveled to Iran in the first seven months of this year, showing a growth of about 31% compared to the same period last year. This growth surpassed that of Bahrain, Kuwait, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia.

In addition, some 258,000 visitors from Turkey arrived in the Islamic Republic in the first six months of this year, which shows a 36% growth compared to the same period last year.

Moreover, countries within the ECO (Economic Cooperation Organization), including Tajikistan, Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Afghanistan, also saw a 55% growth with 1.1 million visitors in the first six months of this year, the statistics suggest.

Referring to Chinese nationals, who enjoy visa-free travel to Iran, Shajai said: In the first six months of this year, the number of Chinese arrivals increased by 67% compared to the pre-pandemic period. The official added that traveling from Russia to Iran increased by approximately 14% with the entry of 21,200 people.

The Islamic Republic expects to reap a bonanza from its numerous tourist spots such as bazaars, museums, mosques, bridges, bathhouses, madrasas, mausoleums, churches, towers, and mansions, of which 27 are inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage list.

Archaeologists to document ancient petroglyphs in Iran's Tuiserkan

TEHRAN – A team of archaeologists and cultural heritage experts has commenced work to study and document arrays of ancient petroglyphs scattered across the Tuiserkan county of Iran's Hamedan province.

Tuiserkan's tourism chief Es'haq Torkashvand on Wednesday announced the commencement of the process of studying and documenting the rock reliefs of the county, CHTN reported.

"There are numerous rock reliefs and petroglyphs in various parts of Tuiserkan county that bear witness to the ancient history of the region and indicate that these areas were once inhabited by humans."

To safeguard that heritage, the process of studying and documenting these rock reliefs, aimed at identification, dating, preservation, and ultimately registering these artifacts, has begun by Tuiserkan's department for cultural heritage,

tourism, and handicrafts, the official explained.

He emphasized, "These petroglyphs hold significant historical values, and contrary to some beliefs, they have no connection to buried objects."

Iran seeks UNESCO recognition for its millennia-old petroglyphs situated in Teymareh of Khomein county in Markazi province, and other ones located in the provinces of Isfahan and Lorestan, etc.

Teymareh, for example, is home to numerous petroglyphs that provide insights into past eras and cultures both by tools utilized for carving and themes being carved.

International experts Jan Brouwer and Gus van Veen have examined the Teymareh site, estimating its carvings were made 40,000-4,000 years ago. Prehistoric rock art provides insights into past eras and cultures as archaeologists classify the tools for the carvings by specific eras. Incising tools include

flint, metal, or thigh-bones of hunted prey.

According to the available data, the first well-documented evidence of human habitation on the Iranian Plateau was found in several excavated caves and rock shelters, located mainly in the Zagros Mountains of western Iran, dating to the Middle Palaeolithic or Mousterian period (c. 100,000 BC).

From the Caspian in the northwest to Baluchestan in the southeast, the Iranian plateau extends for close to 2,000 km. The land encompasses the greater part of Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan west of the Indus River, containing some 3,700,000 square kilometers. Despite being called a "plateau", it is far from flat but contains several mountain ranges, the highest peak being Damavand in the Alborz mountain range at 5610 m, and the Dasht-e Lout east of Kerman in Central Iran, falling below 300 m.

Gates of Old Tehran on view at Golestan Palace



TEHRAN – The Golestan Palace, a magnificent testament to Iran's rich history and culture, is playing host to a captivating exhibition of massive linked with Old Tehran.

Scheduled to take place from Dec. 12 to 20, the exhibition is aimed at providing a fascinating glimpse into the Old Tehran and its iconic gates, offering visitors a unique opportunity to delve into the city's past.

Tehran, the bustling capital of Iran, has undergone remarkable transformations over centuries, evolving from a small village into a thriving metropolis. Throughout its history, the city has been fortified with gates, serving as both defensive structures and symbolic landmarks.

The ancient gates of Tehran, each with its distinct architectural style and historical significance, have

stood witness to the city's evolution. Among these gates are notable entrances, such as Darvazeh Dowlat, Darvazeh Shemiran, Darvazeh Qazvin, Darvazeh Ghar, etc. each reflecting the diverse eras and influences that have shaped Tehran's identity.

These gates, once integral to the city's defense and commerce, now symbolize Tehran's historical legacy, preserving tales of bygone eras and the cultural heritage of Iran. The exhibition at the Golestan Palace aims to showcase the architectural grandeur and historical significance of these gates through artifacts, photographs, and informative displays.

Golestan Palace once served as the official residence of Qajar monarchs who ruled Persia (Iran) between 1789 and 1925. It exemplifies the architectural and artistic

achievements of the Qajar epoch, as well as the introduction of European motifs and styles into Persian art.

Experts say it displays a remarkable mixture of ancient Persian and contemporary European architectural styles, which characterized much of Iranian art in the 19th and 20th centuries.

The property embodies a successful integration of earlier Persian crafts and architecture with Western influences. Over the past two centuries, it has become a center of arts and architecture, a source of inspiration for Iranian artists and architects to this day.

The complex consists of eight key palace edifices mostly used as museums and the eponymous gardens, a green shared center of the complex, surrounded by an outer wall with gates.

China's domestic tourism to recover to 90% of pre-pandemic level this year

China's domestic tourism is expected to recover to 90 percent of the pre-pandemic level in 2019 this year, according to a report by the data center of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism.

China's domestic tourism revenue will likely reach CNY5.2 trillion (USD725.8 billion) this year, accounting for 91 percent of the total in 2019, the report released yesterday by the China Tourism Academy showed. Meanwhile, domestic trips are expected to reach 5.4 billion, recovering to 90 percent of the level in 2019.

The CTA-TEP, an index measuring the develop-

ment of China's tourism economy, came in at 111.1 in the first three quarters of the year, thanks to the innovative supply of cultural tourism and policies to boost tourism consumption confidence, according to the report.

More than 90 percent of the people surveyed by the China Tourism Academy plan to travel during off-peak periods this quarter.

Domestic tourism consumption is concentrated on scenic spots, resorts, and shopping districts, while tourist destinations and projects are more diversified, the report showed. All parts of China are

integrating sports, music festivals, concerts, science, and technology into tourism to create a new growth point for cultural tourism consumption.

In terms of industrial development, the prosperity of the tourism industry and entrepreneurs' confidence have significantly rebounded. In the nine months ended Sept. 30, there was a strong demand for financing from tourism firms, listed companies, and tourist attractions.

(Source: Yicai Global)

Iran attending Global Refugee Forum 2023

TEHRAN – An Iranian delegation, headed by Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, is participating in the second Global Refugee Forum which is being held from December 13 to 15 in Geneva, Switzerland.

The delegation will also participate in related roundtables and give speeches on the sidelines of the Forum, IRNA reported.

The head of the National Organization for Migration, Abdollah Mobini, who is also attending the Forum, had previously announced that nearly 670,000 out of around 4,300,000 authorized foreigners are students, some 200,000 of them are university and seminary students, and some 35 percent, that is 1,500,000, are women.

More than 300,000 registered nationals are children who are under six. The majority of the refugees are Afghan nationals, but there are also nationals of other countries such as Iraq, Pakistan, and Bahrain. Foreign nationals in Iran are from about 80 countries, and non-Afghans nationals make up almost 10 percent of all foreign nationals in Iran.

Global Refugee Forum

Held every four years, the Forum is the world's largest international gathering on refugees. It is designed to support the practical implementation of the objectives set out in the Global Compact on Refugees: Ease pressures on host countries, enhance refugee self-reliance, increase access to third-country solutions, and improve conditions in countries of origin.

It provides the opportunity for States and stakeholders to announce concrete pledges and contributions, highlight progress made, share good practices, and take stock of the challenges and opportunities ahead.

The 2023 Forum is co-convened by five States – Colombia, France, Japan, Jordan, and Uganda, and co-hosted by the Government of Switzerland and UNHCR.

This forum is considered the most important meeting at the global level in the field of responding to the refugee situation in the world, and the representatives of the countries hosting the refugees, as well as the representatives of the governments and non-governmental organizations, are present in this meeting.

IOM to share Iran experiences with other nations

On November 26, the chairman of IRCS, Pir-Hossein Kolivand, said the Iranian Red Crescent Society (IRCS) is ready to cooperate with other nations and share its experiences in providing services to refugees and immigrants.



gees and immigrants.

He made the remarks in a meeting with Lalini Veerassamy, the Chief of Mission of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in the Islamic Republic of Iran, IRNA reported.

Stating that the IRCS continues supporting and implementing activities in favor of refugees, he added, "Today, international institutions have a political attitude towards refugees and immigrants, and a fair approach has not been adopted in this regard yet."

The officials discussed the international challenges regarding refugees in this meeting. "Despite all these issues, Iran, particularly the IRCS, is trying to provide the best services to refugees and immigrants. A typical example is the services provided to Afghan refugees," Kolivand said.

He went on to say, "Today, Afghan refugees are provided with the same services as Iranian citizens in health, treatment, social and cultural fields. Therefore, it can be said that the provided services to refugees in Iran are unparalleled in the world."

Kolivand stressed that all these are done without any expectations, merely out of a humanitarian perspective. While other countries, receiving substantial funds from international organizations to help refugees, fail to provide the same services.

Appreciating the services provided to Afghan refugees, Veerassamy stated Iran hosts millions of immigrants and refugees.

Although managing and organizing these foreign nationals is very difficult, the immigrants are well-treated in Iran.

She added that the International Organization of Migration will help the IRCS because of common objectives. "We will try to alleviate the sufferings and hardships of the refugees through favorable cooperation."

"We will make efforts to introduce Iran's exceptional services to refugees to the world and introduce Iran as a leading and successful country in managing immigrants," Veerassamy concluded.

Official statistics say around five million Afghan nationals live in Iran, about one million of them live in Khorasan Razavi province, mostly in the capital city of Mashhad.

For over four decades, Iran has been hosting one of the largest and most protracted refugee situations in the world and has provided asylum to refugees, mostly from Afghanistan.

The recent fast-paced turn of events in Afghanistan has the potential to create additional population movements; internally displacing families and potentially driving them to neighboring countries to seek refuge.

No more capacity for refugees

In November, Mobini said Iran no longer has the capacity to accept new immigrants, and if the international community does not bear the responsibility for supporting refugees in Iran, most of them will migrate to European countries.

He made the remarks at the 114th Session of the Council of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in Geneva, held from November 27-29, IRNA reported.

Highlighting the disproportionate burden of hosting refugees by the international community, Mobini said, "Iran has far exceeded its share in hosting and supporting refugees; the international community should consider the fair distribution of this international responsibility."

ity and economic problems and constraints such as banning male and female students from studying have been among the reasons for the displacement of Afghan nationals and their migration to neighboring countries."

For over four decades, Iran has been hosting one of the largest and most protracted refugee situations in the world and has provided asylum to refugees, mostly from Afghanistan.

Iran is home to over 800,000 registered refugees and some 2.6 million undocumented Afghans. Today, more than 500,000 Afghan children- including undocumented Afghans and those who have newly arrived in Iran are benefitting from Iran's inclusive education policies, one of the most progressive in the world.

Despite the sanctions and economic pressures, Iran continues its comprehensive policy of providing services to refugees, and this is appreciable, UNHCR's Officer in Charge, Inna Gladkova, said in November 2022.

The best solution and the most stable support system for refugees is that have access to schools and education just like Iranian nationals, she stated, IRNA reported.

Iran has taken effective and continuous measures to include all refugees, and the UNHCR also declares its readiness to fulfill its obligations, she noted.

In the provision of educational services, there are different aspects, she said, adding, "School construction, equipping schools, providing teachers and human resources, and providing quality educational services are the main and important work done by the Ministry of Education."

In protecting refugees and asylum seekers in Iran, since 1984 UNHCR has worked closely with the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran, national and international NGOs, and UN agencies providing a multitude of services.

Ivo Freijsen, the former representative of UNHCR in Iran, has said Iran is an exemplary country that has acted very well in hosting refugees and has been hosting them for a long time.

Forty years have passed since Iran started hosting them [refugees]. As we have always said, Iran has had positive approaches toward refugees, we appreciate that, and we are honored to support Iran's efforts, he said in an exclusive interview with Iran Newspaper published on September 4, 2022.

Mobini went on to say, "Security and economic problems and constraints such as banning male and female students from studying have been among the reasons for the displacement of Afghan nationals and their migration to neighboring countries."

For over four decades, Iran has been hosting one of the largest and most protracted refugee situations in the world and has provided asylum to refugees, mostly from Afghanistan.

Iran is home to over 800,000 registered refugees and some 2.6 million undocumented Afghans. Today, more than 500,000 Afghan children- including undocumented Afghans and those who have newly arrived in Iran are benefitting from Iran's inclusive education policies, one of the most progressive in the world.

Despite the sanctions and economic pressures, Iran continues its comprehensive policy of providing services to refugees, and this is appreciable, UNHCR's Officer in Charge, Inna Gladkova, said in November 2022.

The best solution and the most stable support system for refugees is that have access to schools and education just like Iranian nationals, she stated, IRNA reported.

Iran has taken effective and continuous measures to include all refugees, and the UNHCR also declares its readiness to fulfill its obligations, she noted.

In the provision of educational services, there are different aspects, she said, adding, "School construction, equipping schools, providing teachers and human resources, and providing quality educational services are the main and important work done by the Ministry of Education."

In protecting refugees and asylum seekers in Iran, since 1984 UNHCR has worked closely with the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran, national and international NGOs, and UN agencies providing a multitude of services.

Ivo Freijsen, the former representative of UNHCR in Iran, has said Iran is an exemplary country that has acted very well in hosting refugees and has been hosting them for a long time.

Forty years have passed since Iran started hosting them [refugees]. As we have always said, Iran has had positive approaches toward refugees, we appreciate that, and we are honored to support Iran's efforts, he said in an exclusive interview with Iran Newspaper published on September 4, 2022.

Mobini went on to say, "Security and economic problems and constraints such as banning male and female students from studying have been among the reasons for the displacement of Afghan nationals and their migration to neighboring countries."

For over four decades, Iran has been hosting one of the largest and most protracted refugee situations in the world and has provided asylum to refugees, mostly from Afghanistan.

Iran is home to over 800,000 registered refugees and some 2.6 million undocumented Afghans. Today, more than 500,000 Afghan children- including undocumented Afghans and those who have newly arrived in Iran are benefitting from Iran's inclusive education policies, one of the most progressive in the world.

The Global Refugee Forum aims to erase pressures on host countries, and enhance refugee self-reliance.

Tehran, Minsk sign technological MOU

From page 1 ► Mokhber noted that Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi has stressed the need to swiftly put the Iran-Belarus accords into effect. He added that "the North-South Transportation Corridor provides a great potential for collaboration between the two states."

A foundation for a new level of reciprocal ties in various sectors will be established as the two countries signed a comprehensive cooperation roadmap and seven MOUs, the vice president remarked.

Scientific co-op for a better world

On November 3, Vice President for Science, Technology, and Knowledge-based Economy, Rouhollah Dehqani-Firouzabadi, condemning unilateral coercive measures against Iran's knowledge-based and scientific companies, announced Iran's readiness for scientific and technological cooperation with other countries to make a better world.

Referring to the significant role of knowledge and innovation and their tremendous impact on the progress of nations, Firouzabadi said Iran's civilization has honored knowledge throughout history.

"Our ancient teachings and the contributions we have made to the advancement of science and technology is a proof of that saying."

He made the remarks at the 15th session of the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) Social Forum held from November 2 – 3, in Geneva, IRIB reported.

Iran's developments in the field of science and technology, improving people's welfare by using science and technology capacities, Iran's strategies in dealing with the coronavirus, Iran's technological solutions to improve the health of society, technological employment and solving social problems with soft technologies were among the most important topics of Firouzabadi's speech.

"Since the establishment of the United Nations, Iran has remained committed to multilateral cooperation, including global cooperation through



the United Nations.

"We are keen to engage with the international community and share our research with them while benefiting from the best practices, developments, and achievements of other countries in the fields of science, technology, and innovation," IRIB quotes Firouzabadi as saying.

The innovation ecosystem and knowledge-based companies in Iran are a testimony of the sustainable potential of our youth and the pivotal role of women in management levels, he said.

He went on to say that knowledge-based companies play a key role in developing new technologies and solutions to face today's challenges, they have a profound impact on the preservation of basic human rights such as the right to life, health, work and development, and at the same time they deal with inequalities, poverty and unemployment in society.

"Despite unilateral economic sanctions and challenges in accessing coronavirus vaccines and related medical equipment, Iran has achieved an impressive 76 percent vaccination rate among its population against COVID-19," Firouzabadi added.

Iran's active participation in international cooperation and sharing knowledge and initiatives to strengthen the global response to this epidemic, especially in developing and less developed countries, demonstrate its unwavering commitment to promoting human rights and improving the well-being of communities around the world.

Despite sanctions, Iran has been able to break considerable ground in science and technology.

Tehran, Moscow to enhance co-op in crisis management

TEHRAN – Iran and Russia in a meeting on Monday discussed ways to expand cooperation in all fields of crisis management and natural hazards within the framework of signing a memorandum of understanding.

Mohammad-Hassan Nami, the head of the National Disaster Management Organization, conferred with Alexi Dedov, the ambassador of Russia to Iran, and Yuri Alexeev, the official representative of the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs, on ways to expand cooperation for boosting resilience to natural disasters, ILNA reported.

Dedov, talking about Russia's previous cooperation with Iran to provide better relief responses in emergencies, announced Russia's readiness to strengthen cooperation in various fields, and exchange knowledge and experiences about preparedness for crisis management.

Nami, for his part, referring to the fact that Asia is one of the most disaster-prone regions of the world, called for strengthening relations with neighboring countries, especially Russia, for crisis management in critical situations.

"Nowadays, exchanging knowledge in dealing with natural hazards and avoiding them can reduce human and financial loss due to disasters," ILNA quoted Nami as saying.

Iran is ready to cooperate with the Russian Federation in conducting joint production and exchanging knowledge on disaster management, such as earthquake early warning systems, meteorological equipment, and cloud fertility; expanding green spaces and planting trees; and developing agriculture, Nami added.

He went on to propose holding joint crisis management drills with Russia and called for the establishment of a new organization or union with the membership of Iran, Russia, Central Asia, and the Caucasus for better relief services in emergencies.

Iran's potential in dealing with natural disasters

In 2022, Stefan Priesner, the United Nations Resident Coordinator for Iran, said, "Iran has the potential to deal with natural disasters broadly and the United Nations is willing to document these valuable experiences."

In case of natural disasters, the United Nations

is ready to provide services by forming a permanent working group with representatives of the UN, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the National Disaster Management Organization, IRNA quoted Priesner as saying.

He made the remarks in a meeting with Nami, suggesting that the two sides should hold meetings every three months for further coordination.

For his part, Nami said all nations have a sense of philanthropy and kindness, but they will face sanctions if they want to provide help. So, this issue should be resolved.

In June, Priesner said the United Nations will use all its power and capacity to assist Iran in dealing with natural hazards by increasing operational performance and improving safety in specialized areas.

"Expressing the desirable capacities of Iran in dealing with natural hazards, he said that we will do everything to assist Iran. In this regard, we can increase operational performance and improve safety in the sector to enhance cooperation."

The Iranian plateau, with its location between two vast expanses of water as well as the intersection of the Eurasian plateau and Saudi Arabia, has always been exposed to numerous natural hazards and disasters.

According to UN surveys this year, the main natural disasters listed for Iran are drought, floods, and earthquakes. Subsidence is also a phenomenon that has emerged as one of the consequences of drought along with the aforementioned three challenges.

Earthquake, as one of the main natural challenges, occasionally becomes an uninvited guest of Iranian homes. On the other hand, the existence of important rivers and water reservoirs in the country has also increased flood risk.

Land subsidence, a gradual settling or sudden sinking of the Earth's surface due to subsurface movement of earth materials is mainly caused by aquifer-system compaction, drainage, and decomposition of organic soils, underground mining, oil and gas extraction, hydro compaction, natural compaction, sinkholes, and thawing permafrost. Iran is greatly affected by the phenomena, as 29 provinces of the country are affected.

ENGLISH IN USE

LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

Iran exports medical equipment to 55 countries worldwide

Some 105 medical equipment produced by 23 Iranian companies are exported to 55 countries across the world, Reza Masaeli, an advisor to the health minister said on Sunday.

"Currently, a total of 280,000 medical equipment is produced in the country," Fars quoted Masaeli as saying.

"In recent years, the production of medical equipment in Iran has increased by 9 percent," he added.

One of the main strategies of the Health Ministry is to boost exports, he said, adding that Iran exports medical equipment to 55 countries including Russia, Germany, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands and Croatia.

تجهیزات پزشکی ایرانی به ۵۵ کشور دنیا صادر می شود

مشاور وزیر بهداشت گفت: در حال حاضر ۱۰۵ محصول تجهیزات پزشکی ایرانی که توسط ۲۳ شرکت ایرانی تولید می شود، به ۵۵ کشور جهان از جمله کشورهای روسیه، آلمان، ایتالیا، بلژیک، هلند و کرواسی صادر می شود.

به گزارش گروه اجتماعی خبرگزاری فارس، رضا مسائلی، اظهار داشت: در کشور بیش از ۲۸۰ هزار قلم تجهیزات پزشکی در کشور وجود دارد و در سال های اخیر، تولیدات تجهیزات پزشکی در جمهوری اسلامی ایران، ۹ درصد افزایش داشته است.

وی توجه به صادرات را یکی از مهمترین راهبردهای اساسی وزارت بهداشت در راستای حمایت از تولیدات داخلی دانست و افزود: در حال حاضر تجهیزات پزشکی ایرانی به ۵۵ کشور جهان از جمله کشورهای روسیه، آلمان، ایتالیا، بلژیک، هلند و کرواسی صادر می شود.



Managing Director: **Mohammad Mahdi Rahmati**
Editor-in-Chief: **Mohammad Sarfi**

Editorial Dept.: Fax: (+98 21) 88808214 — 88808895
Email: info@tehrantimes.com
Switchboard Operator: Tel: (+98 21) 43051000
Advertisements Dept.: Telefax: (+98 21) 43051430
Public Relations Office: Tel: (+98 21) 88805807
Subscription & Distribution Dept.: Tel: (+98 21) 43051603
Printed at: Jame Jam Bartar Borna - 44197737



No. 18, Moghadasi Alley, Nejatollahi St., Tehran, Iran P.O. Box: 14155-4843 Zip Code: 1599814713

DECEMBER 14, 2023

GUIDE TO SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

A usurped stone in a house causes the ruin of that house.

Imam Ali (AS)

Prayer Times > Noon:11:58 Evening: 17:12 Dawn: 5:35 (tomorrow) Sunrise: 7:05 (tomorrow)

Athol Fugard's "Hello and Goodbye" on stage at Hafez Theater Hall

TEHRAN-The play "Hello and Goodbye," written by South African playwright Athol Fugard and directed by Shahabeddin Hosseinpour is on stage at Hafez Theater Hall in Tehran.

The deceptively simple play, written in 1965, tells the story of a brother and sister who delayed the responsibility of becoming adults to the point they lost the purpose of existence. Now, facing the death of their father, they realise they do not know how to live with others, the world, nor build their own future.

The audience is called to listen to the stories of a painful family past, the history of a country marred by war, inequality and misery, and the history of religion in western cultures. It is the story of those who find themselves orphans of parents and nation, and are left with nothing but the questioning of their identities.

Fugard, 91, is an internationally acclaimed playwright, novelist, actor, and director widely regarded as South Africa's greatest playwright. He is best known for his political and penetrating plays opposing the system of apartheid in South Africa and for the 2005 Oscar-winning film of his novel "Tsotsi".

Educated at the University of Cape Town, he was an adjunct professor of playwriting, acting and directing in the Department of Theater and Dance at the University of California, San Diego. Acclaimed as "the greatest active playwright in the English-speaking world" by Time in 1985, Fugard continues to write and has published more than 30 plays.

Mehdi Farizeh, Hediye Azidhak, and Amir Sedighian perform in the play that will remain on stage until the end of December at the Hafez Theater Hall located on Shahriar St., across from Vahdat Hall.

Simorgh Theater Group to perform at Indian festival

TEHRAN- Simorgh Theater Group from Iran will perform the play "Noruz" written and directed by Mohammad Boroumand at the 20th Ryan International Children's Festival in New Delhi, which started on December 13.

The show takes a new look at the old legend of Amu Noruz and Nane Sarma (Iranian mythical characters) whose affection towards each other makes them young. The two characters as well as the rituals of welcoming Noruz (Iranian New Year) in the north and south of Iran are introduced in the play, which will be performed in English, ILNA reported.

Parnian Babapour, Arnica Boroumand, Mehra Javadani Irandoost, Yekta Jalalzadeh Firouzabadi, Parveen Kheradmand, Hasti Rahimifar, Zahra Abdolamir Ebrahim, Mahsa Qadamyari, Hasti Qorbani, Kiana Qalambar, Saba Kianmanesh, and Hasti Mahmoud Sani are in the cast.

Simorgh Theater Group has so far performed seven

plays in the previous editions of the Indian festival, which is dedicated for identifying and supporting the talents among children and young adults.

Theater groups from 20 countries including Germany, Norway, Denmark, Italy, Canada, Thailand, Malaysia, Nepal, India and Iran participate in this year's edition of the festival, which is the largest puppet theater festival in India.

In addition, Boroumand along with Simorgh Theater Group will set up a mobile museum of Iranian traditional, ritual and performance dolls.

In order to better introduce the ritual and theatrical puppets and dolls of Iran, the story of each doll will be narrated and performed in the museum by the artists of Simorgh Group. Ritual games and local dances of the rural people of Iran will be performed too. Moreover, the festival audience will have the opportunity to play with the dolls and puppets.

Ryan International Children's Festival will run until December 17.

Cartoon of Day



Yemen

Cartoonist: Osama Hajjaj from Jordan

Tehran Auction being held online

TEHRAN-The 18th edition of Tehran Auction, a prestigious event dedicated to contemporary art in Iran, is being held online for the first time.

The three-day event kicked off on Wednesday, featuring 114 artworks by 113 artists specializing in painting, sculpture, and photography, with female artists having a strong presence in this edition, IRNA reported.

In previous years, Tehran Auction held separate contemporary and modern art auctions in summer and winter, but this year, they have included an online auction to bridge the gap between the two events, the report added.

The 18th edition of Tehran Auction showcases a noteworthy list of artists, many of whom are participating for the first time or have only participated a few times before.

This edition features a standout bid on two pieces by the late Parviz Kalantari, which hold the highest estimated value of 55 billion rials (\$110,000). With this valuation, Kalantari reigns as the most expensive artist in the current event.

In addition to works from renowned artists such as Parviz Habibpour, Mohammad Ehsai, Parviz Kalantari, Parviz Tanavoli, Parvaneh Etemadi, Yadollah Derakhshani, Kamran Diba, Masoud Arabshahi, Kurosh Shishegaran, and Farshid Mesghali, works from young artists such as Zahra Sadri, Hossein Mohammadi, Savalan Jama'ati Samarin, Faramarz Khani, Mostafa Chubtarash, Zahra Amir-Yeganeh, Maedeh Amiri, Taher Purheidari, Zahra Shafi, and Roshana Rostami will also be showcased.

The two untitled artworks by Parviz Kalantari consisting of oil and wheat bran on canvas, with an estimated value of 30 to 40 billion rials (\$60,000 to 80,000), and a combination of materials on canvas with an estimated value of 10 to 15 billion rials (\$20,000 to



30,000), are the most expensive pieces in this event.

The lowest estimated values are for artworks such as Roshana Rostami's acrylic on canvas untitled piece and Zahra Sadri's oil on canvas "Fever", both valued at 400 to 600 million rials (\$800 to 1,200).

The proliferation of e-commerce has provided new opportunities for art exchanges, the organizers announced in a press release and added: "Online art purchasing, which has become increasingly popular among art enthusiasts in recent years, has gradually become a significant part of the art market. Large auction houses such as Christie's, Sotheby's, Phillips, and Bonhams, especially since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, have increasingly turned to online auctions to provide convenience and advantages for art exchanges."

"The Tehran Auction also aims to make more efforts to utilize modern solutions for presenting and selling artworks."

The exhibition of these artworks will be underway in Tehran's Agora building until Friday.

Back in July, an untitled painting by Sohrab Sepehri sold at 17th Tehran Auction for 213 billion rials

(\$426,000) establishing a new record for an artwork in national sales.

The 80x130-centimeter oil painting was created in the 1960s and was gifted to previous owner by UK-based Iranian filmmaker and literary figure Ebrahim Golestan.

Sepehri's another painting also fetched 124 billion rials (\$248,000), making it the third most expensive work sold in the auction.

The 72x72-centimeter oil painting done in the 1960s is from Sepehri's Tree Trunk series.

The second most expensive work sold at the sale was a 130x320-centimeter untitled oil painting by Kurosh Shishegaran. It sold for 170 billion rials (\$340,000).

The 17th edition of the Tehran Auction collected 2.1 trillion rials (\$4.2 million) by selling 100 artworks.

Only 10 works, including a photo print by world-renowned Iranian filmmaker Abbas Kiarostami, an oil painting by Jazeh Tabatabai and a bronze sculpture by Bahman Dadkhah failed to find a buyer at the auction.

The 16th edition of the Tehran Auction fetched 781 billion rials (over \$2.44 million based on Iran's free-market exchange rate: \$1

= 320,060 rials at that time) by selling 117 artworks at its second sales of the year.

"The Simorgh Hunting", a mixed media on canvas by Reza Derakhshani, sold for 80 billion rials (about \$ 250,000), a price that made it the most expensive artwork sold at the national sale.

The 198x625-centimeter painting done in 2016 is from Derakhshani's series "Hunting", which has been inspired by elements from Iranian miniature - Persian painting and stories from Persian literature.

The 15th edition of the Tehran Auction collected 1588.9 billion rials (over \$5.9 million based on Iran's free-market exchange rate: \$1 = 265,660 rials at that time). All 80 artworks offered at this auction were sold.

"Seated Poet", a bronze sculpture by Parviz Tanavoli, sold at the auction for 146 billion rials (about \$550,000) setting a record for an artwork in national sales.

The 14th Tehran Auction took in 421.8 billion rials (about \$1.6 million based on Iran's free-market exchange rate: \$1 = 246,000 rials).

The 13th Tehran Auction grossed about 880 billion rials (about \$4 million based on Iran's free-market exchange rate: \$1 = 221,000 rials).

Iran's national library denounces Israel's crimes in Gaza



TEHRAN- The National Library and Archives of Iran (NLAI) condemned the inhumane and anti-cultural actions of the Zionist regime in Gaza, in a statement published on Wednesday.

"The recent act of aggression by the illegitimate, rootless, and occupier Zionist regime against the National Archive and Central Library in Gaza, which housed thousands

of historical documents and ancient books spanning over 150 years, is a heinous crime," reads part of the statement.

"The regime's objective is to attack the culture and historical heritage of the Palestinian people in Gaza, as well as other Islamic lands. This invaluable and irreplaceable repository is an integral part of the history and culture of the Palestinian people. Sadly, with the damage inflicted upon this center, many historical documents and artifacts, as well as plans for the preservation of ancient and historically valuable structures, have been lost," it added.

This act once again reveals the barbaric, criminal, and inhumane nature of the Zionist regime to the world, it concluded.

On October 7, Israel started a deadly war on Gaza after the territory's Palestinian resistance group, Hamas, launched a surprise retaliation strike against the occupying regime, codenamed

Operation Al-Aqsa Storm.

The Israeli regime's offensive has claimed the lives of nearly 18,000 individuals in Gaza, with a significant majority being women and children. Furthermore, over 49,000 people have suffered injuries as a result.

Israeli officials, including the prime minister, have made public statements endorsing or pledging to carry out acts of genocide against Palestinians throughout the course of this conflict. These alarming declarations have raised serious concerns regarding the protection of human rights and the safety of the Palestinian population.

Tel Aviv has also imposed severe restrictions on essential resources such as water, power, and gasoline in one of the world's most densely populated areas. This deprivation has resulted in a scarcity of medical supplies and food, leaving 2.3 million Palestinians at risk of starvation.

Laleh Art Gallery to host Handprint Exchange Exhibition

TEHRAN-The 9th Annual Handprint Exchange of Laleh Art Gallery will open at the gallery in Tehran on Friday, December 15.

The exhibition will showcase more than 180 hand-printed works by Iranian and international artists, IRNA reported.

According to the manager of the gallery and the head of the annual exhibition Mohammad Ali Saeedi, the event seeks to introduce and expand the activities of artists in the field of hand printing and share valuable experiences in this field.

Iranian artists whose hand-printed works will go on display

include Nasser Ovissi, Reza Bangiz, Ebrahim Haghighi, Mansour Ghandriz, Ardeshir Mohassess, Bahman Mohassess, and Morteza Momayez among others.

Moreover, for the first time, the art event will host the works of 35 international artists, including Pablo Picasso, Edvard Munch,

Claude Monet, Vincent Van Gogh, Jean Cloteau, Rembrandt, Max Ernst, Kate Kloits, Salvador Dali and René Magritte.

The exhibition will run through January 8, 2024 at Laleh Art Gallery located on Fatemi Street, on the north side of Laleh Park.

Iranian "Giselou" among finalists of TRT International Documentary Awards

TEHRAN-The Iranian documentary "Giselou" directed and produced by Mohammad Sadegh Esmaili is among the finalists of the international category of the 14th TRT International Documentary Awards, set to be held from December 14 to 17 in Istanbul, Turkey.

A 2022 production, the 59-minute film shows Zahra, a young woman, whose husband abandoned her and her children five years ago. In order to acquire her children's birth certificates

and finalize her divorce, she is forced to go looking for her husband in Afghanistan.

The film follows Zahra on a brave and harrowing journey to gain independence and secure a future for her children, ILNA reported.

"Giselou" will compete in the international category with seven other films from Russia, Poland, South Korea, Burkina Faso, and the U.K.

TRT International Documentary Awards is

an annual documentary festival organized by Turkish Radio & TV Corporation. Its aim is to support the amateur and professional documentary filmmakers, enable audiences to view documentary films from various countries and form the groundwork where documentary filmmakers will meet and exchange their ideas.

Besides screening films, the 14th edition of the event presents various workshops, special events and meetings.