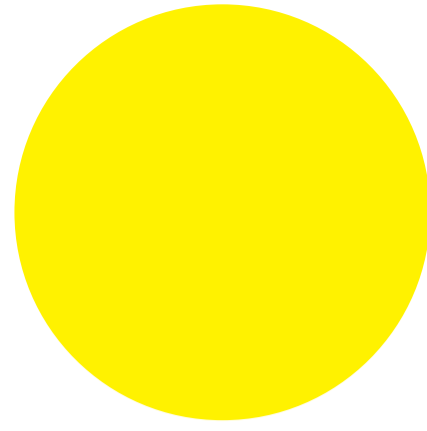


Turkey-Egypt rapprochement:

A forced pragmatism

SPECIAL ISSUE

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Iran Daily



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UN chief: Gaza situation 'appalling' sign of deadlock in global relations

Antonio Guterres says the level of death and destruction in Gaza is shocking in itself, and the war is also spilling over borders across the region and affecting global trades.

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A world of inaction

EDITORIAL

Nearly four and a half months have passed since Israel launched a full-blown war on the Gaza Strip to take revenge against a surprise strike by the Palestinian resistance group Hamas. The devastating invasion which has sparked outcries from several Western nations and non-Muslim countries, appears to have become a marginal issue for the majority of the Muslim world. The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), which came into existence in 1969, in the first place to throw the weight of Muslim nations behind the people of Palestine in their battle to end the Israeli occupation of their motherland, has failed to take any practical measures to stop the Israeli death and destruction in Gaza. The Arab League, another major Muslim organization, has merely issued a few statements without making any real steps to put an end to the plight of their Arab comrades.

Egypt, a key state in the Arab world, is the only nation sharing a border with the war-battered Gaza Strip. But the country, which once led a military coalition to fight Israel, now even refused to open the Rafah border crossing to let in a million and a half people displaced by the Israeli aggression to take refuge in the border area in order to be safe from unabating bombardments.

Except for a few nations such as Iran, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Yemen, the rest of the Muslim states have preferred to remain in their comfort zones, turning almost a blind eye to the Israeli massacre of the Palestinians in Gaza. Thumbs up for some non-Muslim states like Colombia and Chile, who recalled their ambassadors from Israel, and Bolivia that cut ties with the regime over its "aggressive and disproportionate Israeli military offensive."

South Africa put up a legal fight against Israel at the International Court of Justice over "genocide" in the Palestinian enclave. Moving to Europe, Spain and Ireland called for an investigation into "possible" Israeli violations of human rights in Gaza and revision of an economic agreement with Tel Aviv in case breaches are proven.

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Iran resumes gas supply to Iraq: Envoy

Iran's ambassador in Baghdad announced the resumption of exporting natural gas to Iraq under the current agreement on a daily supply of 40 million to 50 million cubic meters (mcm).

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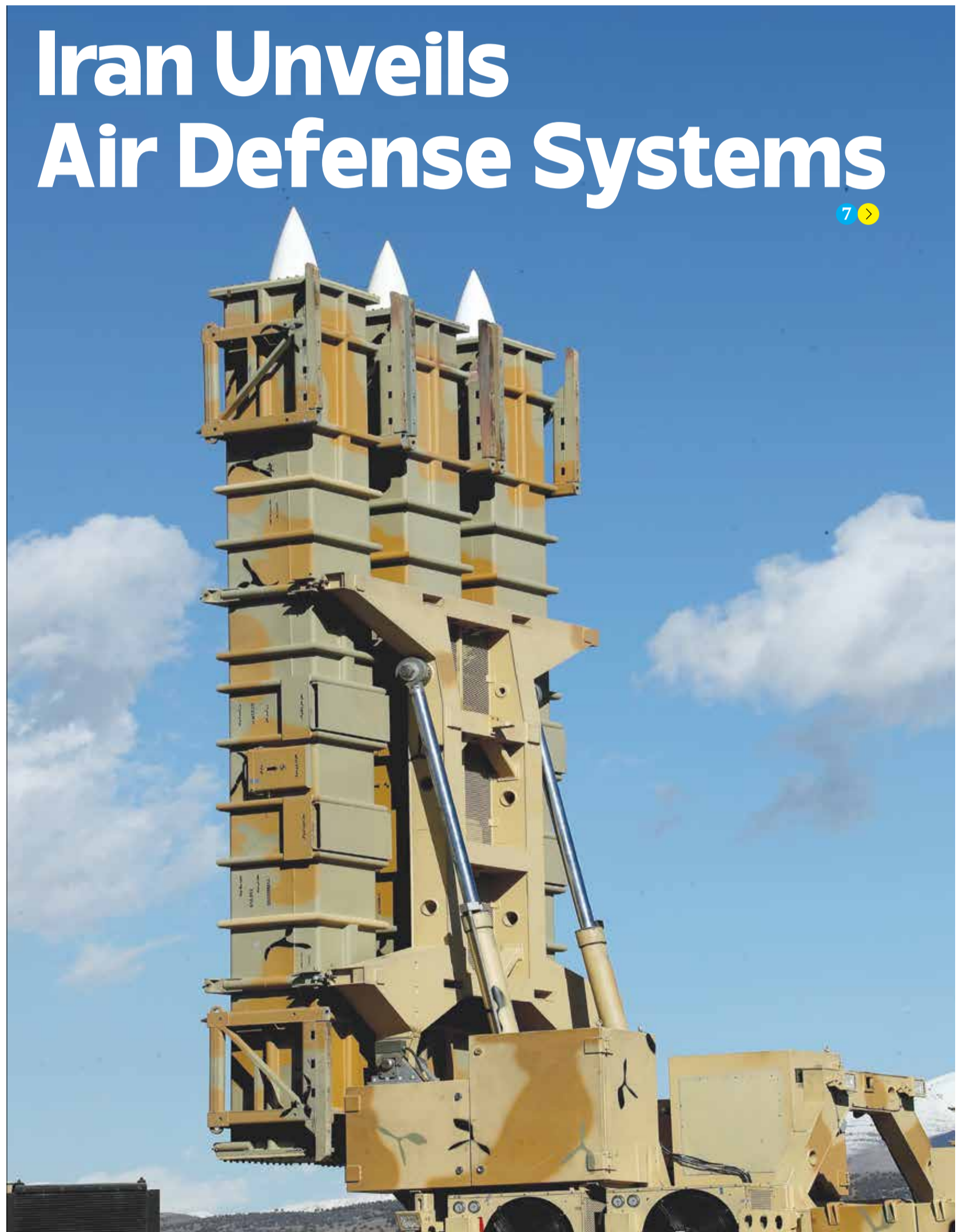
Iran Media Expo to welcome 1,700 media people

The 24th edition of the Iran Media Expo will open today, welcoming 1,700 media people nationwide over the four-day event.

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Iran Unveils Air Defense Systems

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EU cuts growth, inflation forecasts for 2024

The European Commission cut both its growth and inflation forecasts for the eurozone in 2024, as it warned geopolitical tensions spelled rising uncertainty for the single-currency area's economy.

The forecasts by the EU's executive arm demonstrate the impact of the European Central Bank's interest rate-hiking campaign last year: a welcome fall in inflation, predicted to drop to 2.7 percent, but also worryingly sluggish growth, expected to reach just 0.8 percent, AFP wrote.

Although the Frankfurt-based ECB has held rates steady so far in 2024, it is widely expected to begin cutting rates later this year in the face of slowing consumer prices and a weakening eurozone economy.

Reflecting lower energy prices, the commission revised its inflation forecast sharply down from 3.2 percent – although it still remains above the ECB's two-percent target.

"Lower energy commodity prices, weaker economic momentum and recent inflation outturns set inflation on a lower path, lower than was anticipated last autumn," the EU's economy commissioner, Paolo Gentiloni, told reporters in Brussels.

The commission's 2024 growth forecast for the 20-country eurozone, at 0.8 percent, also marks a sharp downward revision from the previous forecast of 1.2 percent.

"After narrowly avoiding a technical recession in the second half of last year, prospects for the EU economy in the first quarter of 2024 remain weak," it said.

But Gentiloni tempered the gloomy outlook by stressing that "the conditions for a gradual acceleration of economic activity this year are still in place."

Brussels expects growth to reach 1.5 percent next year, with Gentiloni pointing to "a strong labour market, easing inflation, rising wages, the expected gradual easing of credit conditions" as factors likely to support growth.

For now, however, EU officials consider that the eurozone is underperforming compared to the rest of the world. The United States' full-year economic growth accelerated to 2.5 percent last year.

The reason for this, Gentiloni said, was that US consumers benefited from a larger pandemic stimulus than in Europe, adding that the bloc was also hit harder by the impact of the war in Ukraine on energy prices.

"The EU underperformed the US in 2023 and is set to do so again this year," he said.



Iran's ambassador in Baghdad announced the resumption of exporting natural gas to Iraq under the current agreement on a daily supply of 40 million to 50 million cubic meters (mcm). Recently, Iran carried out annual maintenance operations on gas pipelines used for exports to Iraq, as there was a drop in gas flow, but the flow did not reach zero, and has now returned to its normal state.

Mohammad Kazem Al-e Sadeq said that Iran always supports Iraq in the energy field and pro-

vides its services to the Arab country whether through the export of gas or the direct export of electricity.

Iran emphasizes that there will be an increasing trend of gas flow to Iraq next year (to start March 20, 2024), the envoy added.

Earlier, a member of the Presiding Board of the Iran-Iraq Joint Chamber of Commerce said that Iran's exports of products to neighboring Iraq will reach \$12 billion by the end of the current Iranian year (March 19, 2024).

In May 2023, Iran and Iraq

signed a major petroleum cooperation agreement amid expanding ties between the two energy-rich neighbors.

Iraq's Prime Minister Mohammad Shia al-Sudani watched on as Iranian and Iraqi oil ministers signed a deal in the Iraqi capital Baghdad to facilitate bilateral cooperation on petroleum industry projects.

Iranian Oil Ministry's news service Shana said that a joint working group will pursue the implementation of the agreement during regular meetings

in the future.

It said Oil Minister Javad Owji had held extensive talks with premier Sudani earlier to discuss an array of petroleum industry issues ranging from oil fields shared between the two countries to Iraq's access to technical and engineering services from Iranian companies. A separate report said that Sudani and Iraqi oil minister Hayan Abdul Ghani had emphasized in their meetings with Owji the need for increased cooperation with Iran on the issue

of natural gas.

Iran is a major supplier of natural gas to Iraq as the Arab country, which is the third largest crude oil exporter in the world, still struggles with rising demands for natural gas in its power plants.

Recent reports have suggested there has been an increase in the supply of natural gas from Iran to Iraq.

Iranian authorities say Iraq has settled a part of the huge debts it owed to Iran for previous gas supplies.

Iran-UK trade hits \$105m in 2023: Statistics



The UK Department of Trade and Industry announced a boom in trade with Iran in 2023, saying the two countries' trade exchanges reached \$105 million last year. In its latest report, the department put the value of the trade exchanges between Iran and the UK in 2023 at £83 million (\$105 million), showing a four-percent growth compared to a year earlier, reported Tasnim News Agency.

Iran and the UK had exchanged over £80 million from January to December 2022.

According to the report,

the UK imported £16 million (\$20 million) from Iran in 2023. The country had imported £1 million worth of non-oil products from Iran between January and December 2022.

Regarding the export of

products, the UK exported £67 million (\$85 million) to Iran in 2023, registering a 6% hike compared to a year before.

The UK had exported £63 million worth of products to Iran from January to December 2022.

Tehran, Havana keen to expand collaboration in agricultural sector



Tehran and Havana are keen to expand collaboration in the field of agriculture, an official at Iran's Ministry of Agriculture said in a joint meeting held between members of the Board of Directors of the Agricultural Support Services Company (ASSC) and the Iran-Cuba Agricultural Cooperation Development Group.

Deputy CEO of the ASSC for Trade Affairs Ali Alizadeh noted that given the high capacities of Iran for exporting urea fertilizers to other countries and also the export-based approach of most companies producing bio- and organic fertilizers, the ground

has been set for the country to expand its cooperation with the agricultural sector of Cuba in this area, reported Mehr News Agency.

During the meeting, the Iran-Cuba Agricultural Cooperation Development Group presented a comprehensive report on the situation of agriculture in the Latin American country and called on ASSC to pave the way for the expansion of bilateral cooperation.

The Iranian side hailed the determination of the Cuban officials to expand cooperation with Iran in the field of trading agricultural products.

Over \$731m tons of commodities traded at IME

The Iran Mercantile Exchange (IME) witnessed trade of 3.18 million tons of commodities with a total trading value of more than \$731 million on its physical market.

The exchange saw on its metals and minerals trading floor trade of 2.7 million tons of commodities valued at nearly \$506 million, reported ime.co.ir on Saturday.

On this floor the IME sold

1,210,277 tons of cement, 745,000 tons of iron ore, 392,000 tons of sponge iron, 344,103 tons of steel, 8,660 tons of copper, 7,880 tons of aluminum and 250 tons of molybdenum concentrate.

Moreover, the IME witnessed on both domestic and export rings of its oil and petrochemical trading floor 469,613 tons of commodities worth more than 219 million USD.

Commodities traded on this floor included 167,000 tons of vacuum bottom, 101,918 tons of polymeric products, 100,342 tons of bitumen, 53,000 tons of lube cut, 33,608 tons of chemicals, 9,150 tons of sulfur, 4,133 tons of oil, 260 tons of feedstocks and 100 tons of waterproofing materials.

The IME also traded within the same week 2,861 tons of goods on its side market.



Explore the enchanting Mohammad Ali Khan Fortress in Dezful



● borna.news



● iribnews.ir

Iranica Desk

Dezful, in Khuzestan Province, boasts a history of several thousand years, making it one of the oldest cities in Iran. The city and its surrounding areas are home to numerous natural and historical attractions that are essential to explore when visiting this remarkable region.

One of the most spectacular places to visit in Dezful is the Mohammad Ali Khan Fortress and the beautiful road leading to it. Also known as Ali Mardan Khan, this fortress is among the most magnificent and ancient sites in Dezful.

Traveling along a winding and verdant road, visitors can behold a breathtaking and picturesque landscape, complete with waterfalls, streams, and the splendid Mohammad Ali Khan Fortress. This natural fortress, situated on the mountain walls at an elevation of 1,550 meters, and nestled alongside the Haft-Tanan Mountains, captivates with

its beauty, IRNA wrote.

Local guides in the area explain that the towering walls of this mountain, coupled with the challenging access to its peak, led to the formation of a natural fortress that served as a refuge or military structure in the past. They also mention the existence of a castle-like structure atop the fortress in ancient times.

Route to the fortress

Dezful is located in the southwest of Iran, and it is one of the northern cities of Khuzestan Province, hosting some of the most important tourist attractions in the region. The city is 721 kilometers from Tehran, and 155 kilometers from Ahvaz. The Mohammad Ali Khan Fortress is also located 25 kilometers north of Sardasht, and 65 kilometers northeast of Dezful.

From Dezful to Sardasht is approximately 45 kilometers, and from there, a 25-kilometer mountainous route leads to Mohammad Ali Khan Fortress.



● iribnews.ir

From the beginning of this mountainous route, you can enjoy the extraordinary view of the Haft-Tanan Mountains and take incredible photos.

Surrounding landscapes

There is a twin waterfall at the foot of the mountain where the fortress is located. The waterfall on the right side, with less water flow, is hidden behind a tree, but

the one on the left side is fully visible. The color of Mohammad Ali Khan Fortress is earthy, and in some parts, it is dark and black, which enhances the grandeur of this massive wall. The surrounding vegetation and the waterfall add to the natural beauty of this area.

Accommodation options

Camping in front of this twin waterfall is one of the

best accommodation options recommended for nature enthusiasts. In this part of the Mohammad Ali Khan Fortress, there are several small stone-roofed chambers that tribes used for residence or rest. These chambers can be used as a refuge in suitable weather conditions and with safety considerations. However, it should be noted that spending the night in these chambers is not possible;

their roofs do not fully protect against raindrops.

If you aim to capture the complete view of Mohammad Ali Khan Fortress in your photo, it is best to start taking pictures from a distance. The fortress is quite large, and as you get closer, it may not all fit into the frame.

Hiking and access tips

To find the ideal starting point for your hike, consider seeking assistance from a local guide, or using a map for navigation. You can approach the Mohammad Ali Khan Fortress from both sides of the twin waterfalls and enjoy the stunning scenery of the area from above. The length of this route is approximately 20 to 30 minutes, and whether you approach it from the right or left side of the waterfall, there is no significant difference in time.

Depending on your hiking plan, you can cover a longer distance and reach the fortress from various points. The route to Mohammad Ali Khan Fortress is relatively easy and

mostly flat, making it accessible for mountaineers and nature enthusiasts. The only potential challenge may arise from rain or strong winds, so be sure to check the weather conditions in advance.

As there are no shops along this mountainous route, ensure you bring all necessary supplies and personal items with you. Pack essentials such as sunscreen, sunglasses, a hat, water, and any required medications in your backpack.

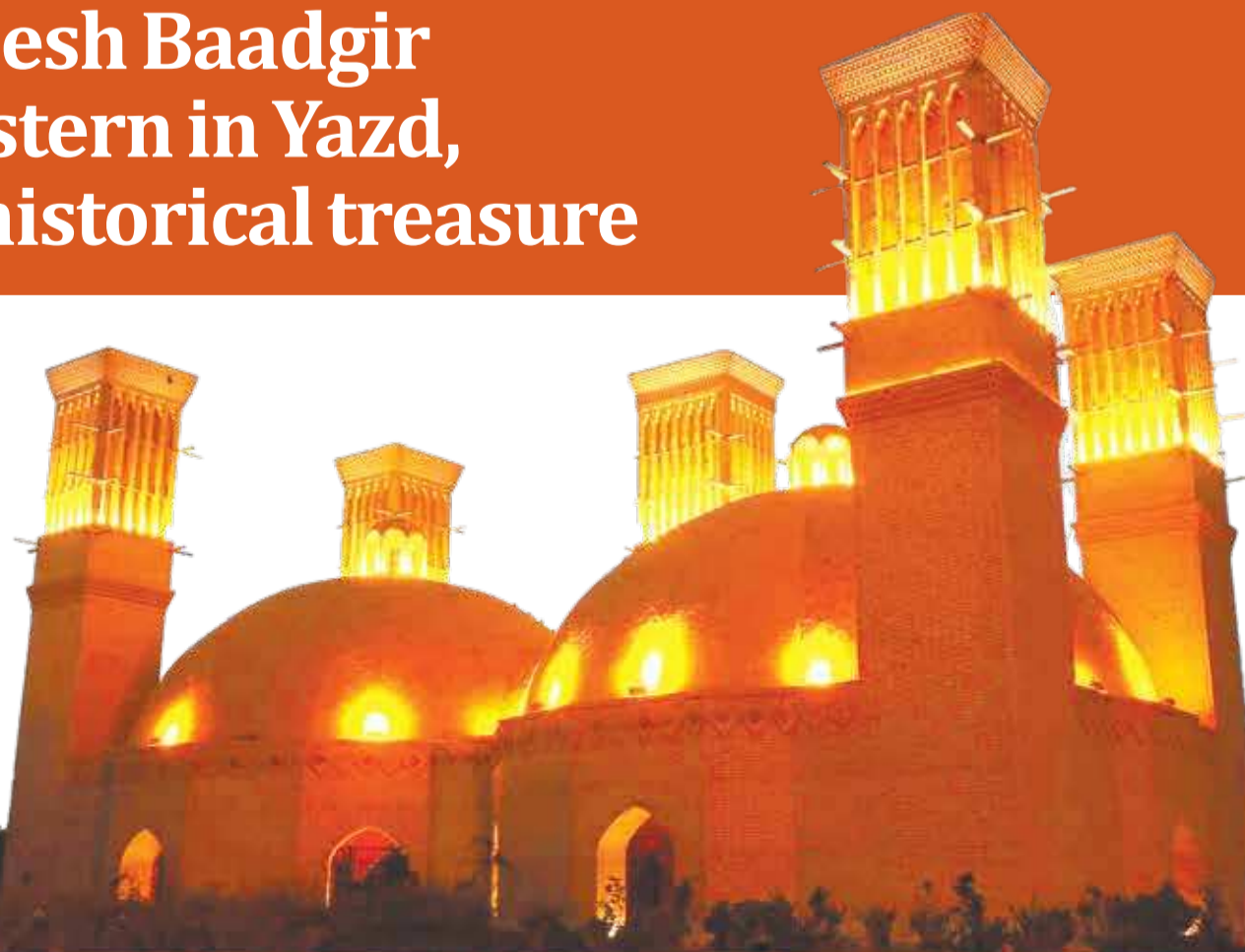
Best time to visit

During the rainy season, the area showcases beautiful small and large water streams and waterfalls on this mountain and the surrounding mountains, adding an extraordinary charm to this natural fortress.

The best time to visit Mohammad Ali Khan Fortress is from late autumn to early spring. The plains filled with yellow wildflowers are one of the most beautiful attractions of this area in the spring season, which should definitely not be missed.

Shesh Baadgir Cistern in Yazd, a historical treasure

● halitour.com



Iranica Desk

The city of Yazd is often referred to as the city of cisterns, owing to its dry and desert climate. Situated in a neighborhood of the same name, the Shesh Baadgir Cistern is a historical treasure. It boasts six wind catchers (referred to as baadgir in Persian) constructed in an octagonal shape to optimally utilize the region's climatic conditions and wind direction. This ancient structure has been recognized as a national heritage of Iran.

The Shesh Baadgir Cistern is a prominent tourist attraction in Yazd, dating back to the Qajar period. It is distinguished by its elegant, octagonal wind catchers and a large egg-shaped dome. The cistern's

height, the exquisite architecture of the wind catchers, graceful entrances, and decorative brickwork and captivating design are its defining features.

Previously serving as a water source for the people, the cistern has now transformed into a historical attraction. The cistern features a northern and a southern entrance, each with two staircases and two water outlets. It is presumed that the southern entrance was used by Muslims, while the northern entrance was for Zoroastrians, although this has been disputed in some sources.

Notably, the staircase of the cistern is divided into two parts, with one part being open and consisting of 55 steps leading to its dome, while the covered part continues beyond the dome. The dome of the cistern has an egg-shaped form, lending a unique beauty to its architecture. The height of the water tank is 12.6 meters, and the height of the wind catchers is 10 meters.

Turkey-Egypt rapprochement: A forced pragmatism



By Hoda Yousefi
Middle East affairs
expert

OPINION EXCLUSIVE

The events known as the Arab Spring, or the Islamic Awakening, created new regional alignments that had no precedent. Turkey, due to its support for Islamist groups in the region, especially the Muslim Brotherhood, incurred the wrath of many Arab countries. However, Erdogan's strategy was successful in one country: Egypt. In Cairo, Mohamed Morsi, a member of the Muslim Brotherhood, came to power and convinced the leaders of Qatar and Turkey that despite the failure in cases like Syria, the Egypt issue had been resolved successfully and in the interests of these two countries. However, Turkey's success in Cairo did not last long, and after a short time, Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, the current president of Egypt, came to power through a military coup. This event marked the beginning of a period of tension in Egypt-Turkey relations. In the following years, Ankara's continued financial and military support for various branches of the Muslim Brotherhood in the region deepened the rift between the two countries. Additionally, General Sisi's actions in establishing close relations with Greece and Cyprus, which are enemies of Turkey, were seen as driving a final nail into the coffin of the two countries' relations.



Egypt's President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi (L) greets Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan at Cairo Airport, Egypt, on February 14, 2024.
● REUTERS

The Libyan issue is another point of contention between the two countries. Turkey has supported the Government of National Accord (GNA) in western Libya, led by the Libyan branch of the Muslim Brotherhood, and has provided them with military drones on numerous occasions in recent years. However, the party led by Fayeze al-Sarraj uses these weapons against the eastern Libyan government led by Khalifa Haftar, who is supported by Egypt. Therefore, it can be argued that the conflict between Ankara and Cairo in Libya has even reached the stage of military confrontation.

Gradual demise of an ideology
Now, after more than a decade of tension between the two countries, Recep

Tayyip Erdogan visited Cairo last week. This move is seen as the final step in normalizing Turkey-Egypt relations after the exchange of ambassadors last year and the meeting of the two countries' leaders on the sidelines of the Qatar World Cup opening ceremony. Such a clear shift has occurred following multiple events. With the continuation of Israeli attacks on Gaza, regional alignments are once again transforming, and this is considered to be against the interests of many countries, including Turkey. Turkey is one of the biggest losers of the Gaza war, and if it is unable to compensate for the losses of such an event and adopt an appropriate foreign policy approach, it will experience a shaky regional position in the long run. The situation for Egypt is not much

different. In addition to the unstable regional situation, Egypt is experiencing one of the most serious economic crises in its recent history. This makes it even more focused on attracting investments from any possible country, even Turkey, which was previously considered an enemy and rival. In the current regional equations, the two countries are forced to put aside the ideologies that have caused a decade of tension between them. Now, a logical foreign policy is one based on pragmatism, so that in a situation where the war by Israel is destroying all the infrastructures that have been formed in the regional balances over the years, countries do not suffer further. The improvement of relations between

the two countries will also have other consequences. Given the high capacity of Egypt and Turkey in regional relations, their cooperation in the field of negotiations with Israel may, along with the mediation efforts of Qatar, lead to a cease-fire in the ideal case, or a short-term break in the war. On the other hand, since humanitarian aid to Gaza only passes through a crossing in Egypt, the improvement of Ankara's relations with Cairo will increase Turkey's ability to send humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip. In the field of energy as well, the improvement of Egypt-Turkey relations can lead to changes in the Eastern Mediterranean. Turkey is seeking to play a role and exploit the oil and gas resources in the Mediterranean, and it is

unlikely that such a factor did not influence its decision to normalize relations with Egypt. We may witness a decrease in the level of Egypt's relations with Greece and Cyprus in the Mediterranean in the short term. Overall, it seems that the two countries are serious about improving their relations. This can be inferred from the statements of the Turkish foreign minister about negotiating with Egypt to export Turkish Bayraktar drones. While the normalization of relations between the two countries can lead to peaceful events in the Palestine and Libya issues, it should be noted that the Islamic Republic of Iran should be more aware than ever and not cause the country's isolation in regional events with a passive foreign policy.



Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan shows the Rabia sign at a rally in Samsun Cumhuriyet Square, Turkey, on February 15, 2024, symbolizing solidarity with the toppled Muslim Brotherhood government in Egypt.
● worldofturkiye.com

From enemy to 'brother' Erdogan's reconciliation with Sisi causes a stir

TURKISH MINUTE—Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has turned his back on years of harsh criticism and extended an olive branch to Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, marking a significant turning point in diplomatic relations between Turkey and Egypt. Erdogan, who once labeled Sisi a "murderer, oppressor, and putschist" for his role in the 2013 military coup that ousted the Muslim Brotherhood

from power in Egypt, called Sisi "my brother" during a landmark visit to Cairo after an 11-year hiatus. This diplomatic U-turn comes after a decade of strained relations following the coup, which Erdogan vehemently opposed and often used the Rabia sign—a four-fingered gesture symbolizing solidarity with the toppled Muslim Brotherhood government—as a symbol of his government's opposition to Sisi's regime.

Turkey-Egypt normalization: Historic milestone in bilateral ties



By Murat Yeşiltas
Director of foreign
policy research
at SETA

OPINION

Turkey and Egypt stand at a pivotal historical moment in the evolution of their bilateral relations. Following 12 years marked by rivalry and conflict, the visit of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan to Egypt has the potential to open a new chapter in Ankara-Cairo relations. This visit offers both nations the opportunity to forge a novel model of cooperative relations on numerous contentious issues. More importantly, it could herald the onset of strategic cooperation in the realms of defense and security, areas in which such collaboration was previously nonexistent. Before the joint news conference in Cairo, the two leaders signed the Joint Statement on the Restructuring of High-Level Strategic Cooperation Council Meetings, signifying both countries' readiness to recalibrate their relations.

Relations between Turkey and Egypt have been among the most significant influences on developments in the Middle East over the last decade. Both countries possess the potential and capacity to lead the region. However, the past decade has been dominated by confrontational rivalry between them. They have consistently found themselves at odds over issues such as Libya, the Eastern Mediterranean, and the Muslim Brotherhood, each supporting rival factions in Libya and attempting to form counterbalancing coalitions against one another.

Nevertheless, as new challenges have emerged in the Middle East, North Africa, and the Horn of Africa, threatening both countries and rekindling common interests, both have opted to set aside their decade-long rivalry in favor of opening a new chapter in their relations. To facilitate the recent rapprochement, both sides have chosen to separate areas of disagreement, allowing time to gradually find solutions.

The reasons behind the normalization differ for each country. For Egypt, emerging regional conflict dynamics, Ethiopia's new policy direction, the Russia-Ukraine conflict, and the economic crisis represent increasing threats. Beyond economic concerns, Egypt faces significant geopolitical risks, including ongoing attacks in Gaza and Israel's plans to relocate Gazans to the Sinai Peninsula. This poses a major threat to both the Palestinian cause and Egypt's national security. Other significant concerns for Egypt include threats to its water security from Ethiopia's Renaissance Dam on the Nile River, internal conflicts in Sudan, and the absence of a stable order in Libya.

Turkey, while grappling with its economic challenges, is endeavoring to reduce its current account deficit and enhance its foreign currency reserves through policy shifts. It seeks to re-

solve political issues with regional countries and boost their economic welfare through the opportunities presented by normalization. Specifically, export-oriented growth and development form a key part of its economic strategy. Geopolitically, Turkey aims to prevent the formation of an anti-Turkish alliance in the Eastern Mediterranean and secure a share of the region's energy resources. Like Egypt, Turkey is disturbed by the instability in its near abroad, the Ukraine-Russia war, and Israel's attacks on Gaza. Consequently, in addition to shared interests, the unique problems, regional developments, and common challenges facing both countries necessitate collaboration.

Common agenda

An analysis of the foreign policies of Egypt and Turkey reveals significant overlaps. Egyptian foreign policy places great importance on the Eastern Mediterranean, Arab geography, and Africa. Similarly, the core parameters of Turkey's foreign policy have evolved, from a unilateralist approach to a paradigm that balances Eastern and Western interests, including those in the Islamic world, the Middle East, and Africa. This convergence provides a foundation for cooperation between the two countries through positive diplomacy.

In Africa, both countries could collaborate on resolving the water dispute between Egypt and Ethiopia over the Renaissance Dam. Additionally, they can jointly work toward ending the civil conflict in Sudan and ensuring the country's political stability. The Libyan issue, in particular, has been a major point of contention in North Africa. However, with relative peace achieved, there is potential for Turkey and Egypt to collaborate closely on Libyan politics. Economic interests also play a crucial role in the relations of both



● isp.page

countries with Africa, with Turkish and Egyptian investments on the continent amounting to significant figures.

In the context of the Eastern Mediterranean, the determination of maritime jurisdictions and borders, as well as the exploitation of energy resources, are critical issues. Despite past tensions, a cooperative approach could stabilize the region and enhance opportunities for joint energy ventures. Despite tensions, Egypt has taken a cautious approach to certain issues, keeping avenues for dialogue open.

One of the primary areas for potential common policy between Turkey and Egypt is the Palestinian issue. Both nations are advocating for an immediate cease-fire in Gaza and support a two-state solution, emphasizing the importance of improved bilateral relations. In fact, the cease-fire in Gaza and the pursuit of a two-state solution were prominent topics in the discussions between Turkish President Erdogan and Egyptian President el-Sissi.

The economic dimension stands as another common agenda between the two countries. Despite political tensions over the past decade, economic and trade exchanges have persisted without interruption. The normalization of relations since 2020 has further bolstered these economic ties. In 2022, trade between the two nations saw a 14% increase, Turkish investments in Egypt surged by 30.3%, and Egyptian exports to Turkey grew by 32.3%. Moreover, Turkish investments in Egypt have continued at a steady pace, with Turkish firms making substantial contributions totaling \$2.5 billion (TL 76.87 billion) across 790 companies in diverse sectors. These financial engagements mark a strategic pivot toward enhancing bilateral trade and economic cooperation, with both nations committed to significantly elevating trade volumes in the forthcoming years.

Cooperative security agenda

In the Middle East, characterized by weakening state sovereignty, an arms race among the regional countries, and expanding proxy wars, establishing a stable security architecture is critically important for both Turkey and Egypt. One area of potential security cooperation is military collaboration, especially in the defense industry. Both countries are significant players in the Middle East's defense industry, with Egypt seeking to benefit from Turkey's advancements in military technology. The diversification of weapon sources is a key strategy for Egypt, and its interest in Turkish drones could enhance defense cooperation between the two nations. The drone agreement between Turkey and Egypt is anticipated to catalyze broader cooperation that extends well beyond defense, promising to enhance mutual economic and strategic

interests. This collaboration is poised to foster a comprehensive partnership, facilitating advancements in various sectors and reinforcing the bilateral ties between the two countries.

In conclusion, President Erdogan's visit to Egypt represents a historic milestone in the evolution of bilateral relations between the two nations. This visit lays the foundational principle for an approach centered on cooperation in areas of mutual agreement, while strategically deferring areas of contention to future discussions. Consequently, Erdogan's visit to Cairo signals the potential for significant advancements in previously contentious issues. However, the capacity of the two countries to implement a cooperative security strategy appears to be closely linked to the trajectory of regional developments.

The article first appeared on Daily Sabah.



Displaced Palestinians talk to Egyptian soldiers at the border fence between Gaza and Egypt, on February 16, 2024, in Rafah, the southern Gaza Strip, amid the ongoing conflict between Israel and the Palestinian resistance group, Hamas. Nearly 1.5 million displaced Palestinians are trapped in Rafah — more than half of Gaza's population.

● MOHAMMED ABED/AFP

During their meeting, Erdogan and Sisi signed a number of agreements and held a joint press conference where they focused on expanding trade and military relations and discussed the current situation in Gaza, among other regional issues.

Prior to the visit, Erdogan expressed a desire to "turn a new page" in relations with Egypt, emphasizing their shared history and cultural ties that date back over a millennium. The two leaders agreed to work toward increasing bilateral trade to \$15 billion and to cooperate on investments in the defense sector.

After Sisi, then Egypt's defense minister, toppled Islamist President Mohamed Morsi, a Turkish ally and member of the Muslim Brotherhood, in 2013, Erdogan said he would never talk to anyone like Sisi.

However, Ankara has been trying to repair its broken relations with Sisi since 2020.

The first signs of a thaw came in May 2021, when a Turkish delegation visited Egypt to discuss a possible normalization.

In November 2022, Erdogan and Sisi shook hands in Qatar, which the Egyptian presidency heralded as a new beginning in their relations.

After Turkey was hit by two devastating earthquakes in February 2023, the two heads of state spoke on the phone.

The normalization of relations was crowned by the mutual appointment of ambassadors from both countries in July.

Mayor of Istanbul Ekrem İmamoğlu from the main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) has criticized President Erdogan's meeting with Sisi, describing it as a political U-turn typical of the Turkish political landscape.

"We are used to U-turns, but we will not even give a chance to those who behave like this against our country," İmamoğlu said, underlin-

ing his commitment to a consistent stance in political dealings.

This remark comes against the backdrop of Erdogan's previous campaign rhetoric, in which he compared İmamoğlu to Sisi in order to sway public opinion ahead of the 2019 local elections, which the current mayor won against Binali Yıldırım, the candidate of Erdogan's ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP). President Erdogan's use of the Rabia sign at a rally in Samsun, immediately after his meeting with the Egyptian president, is a striking contradiction that has not gone unnoticed. This gesture, symbolizing solidarity with the Muslim Brotherhood and rejection of Sisi's seizure of power through a military coup, contrasts with his recent diplomatic engagement with Sisi and underscores a mixture of political pragmatism and ideological signaling.



After Sisi toppled Islamist President Mohamed Morsi, a Turkish ally and member of the Muslim Brotherhood, in 2013, Erdogan said he would never talk to anyone like Sisi.

Persian Gulf Pro League wrap-up:

Mahdipour stunner sends Esteghlal clear on top

Sports Desk

Esteghlal moved four points clear on top of the Persian Gulf Pro League after Mahdi Mahdipour's superb strike helped the Tehran Blues edge out San'at Naft Abadan 1-0 at Tehran's Azadi Stadium on Friday.

There was little to separate the two sides in the first half but Mahdipour broke the deadlock with a sizzling strike from 20 yards out as Javad Nekounam's men kept a perfect home record in the ongoing Iranian top-flight campaign.

Meanwhile, a ninth defeat of the season – in head coach Sohrab Bakhtiarizadeh's first game in charge – saw San'at drop into the relegation zone.

Esteghlal is top of the table with 35 points – four points clear of Sepahan, which had its away fixture against Tractor postponed due to AFC Champions League involvement.

The Blues' triumph came a day after third-placed archrival Persepolis blew the chance to overtake Sepahan in the table, as new Brazilian coach Osmar Loss Vieira, a number two to ex-manager Yahya Golmohammadi, got off to a losing start on the Reds bench.

Amir Nouri scored the only goal of the game with a screamer 15 minutes from normal time as Iralco inflicted a second loss of the season on the defending champion.

Elsewhere, Mahdi Tartar's Malavan FC continued its impressive run with a massive 1-0 away victory over Zob Ahan in Isfahan, courtesy of Reza Ja'fari's composed finish with three minutes left on the clock.

Shams Azar, the surprise package of the season, shared the spoils with bottom club Esteghlal Khuzestan in a goalless stalemate in Qazvin – the same scoreline for Mes Rafsanjan and new manager Moharram Navidkia at home against Masoud Shojaei's Havadar.

Paykan and Nassaji Mazandaran played to a 1-1 draw in Tehran. Mohammadreza Azadi headed home on the half-hour mark to put Nassaji in front, only to see his goal canceled out by Hamed Pakdel's 57th-minute equalizer from the spot.

In the opening fixture of the Iranian league after a six-week Asian Cup pause, Golgozar Sirjan walked away with a 1-0 win at Foolad Khuzestan, thanks to a Saeid Saharkhizan's close-range volley in the first half.



Esteghlal midfielder Mahdi Mahdipour (2nd L) celebrates with teammates after scoring the winner in a 1-0 victory over San'at Naft Abadan in the Persian Gulf Pro League at the Azadi Stadium, Tehran, Iran, on February 16, 2024.
● SADEQ NIK-GOSTAR/FARS

Conceicao tells Porto fans to 'respect' Taremi amid Inter transfer saga



● HUGO DELGADO/EPA

Sports Desk

Porto head coach Sergio Conceicao came to Mahdi Taremi's defense, urging the Dragons supporters to show "respect" for the Iranian striker ahead of his imminent free transfer to Serie A giant Internazionale in the summer.

Italian journalist Fabrizio Romano wrote on X last Monday that the verbal agreement between the Nerazzurri and Taremi has been in place for a month over a two-year contract with the option to be extended for an additional season, which will see the Iranian earn €3 million per season.

The 31-year-old Iranian international was to undergo medical tests at Inter this week, but the proceedings were reportedly called off after Porto fans showed their frustration with the striker, feeling betrayed given Taremi will be under contract with the Portuguese club until the end of June.

However, speaking ahead of Porto's home league game

against Estrela Amadora on Saturday, Conceicao said Taremi deserves more admiration for what he has achieved throughout the four years at the club.

"Taremi has a contract until June and respects the club," the former Portugal international and Lazio winger said.

"There is no one who has stronger feelings for the club and if I felt that a player was not committed – even if he was called Maradona – he wouldn't be with me.

"We're talking about a player who is in the top three of the club's all-time top scorers. He's only behind Jardel and Jackson [Martinez], and ahead of Hulk, but people seem to forget Taremi's goals and assists.

Having joined from Rio Ave in July 2020, Taremi has bagged 86 goals, while providing his teammates with 53 assists, in 172 appearances for Porto across all competitions before Saturday's game.

He finished as the leading marksman of the Portuguese top flight last season with 22

strikers, though a below-par campaign, by his own standards, has seen the Iranian find the net only on three occasions in 16 league games this term, plus a couple of goals in the Champions League group stage.

Taremi returned to the club last weekend to make a cameo appearance in the 3-2 defeat at Arouca, following four weeks on international duty at the AFC Asian Cup in Qatar, where Iran was beaten by the host in the semifinals.

"He took a trip back from Qatar and made himself available for team selection against Arouca without any rest. Taremi can give you all sorts of solutions upfront," added the Porto manager.

A Primeira Liga champion with Porto in 2022, Taremi was on the verge of joining Inter archrival Milan last summer, only to see the deal fall through on the transfer deadline day after the striker's camp and the Rossoneri failed to reach agreement on personal terms.

Iran's Hashemi wins Asian shot put bronze

Sports Desk

The first day of the Asian Indoor Athletics Championships in Tehran saw Iranian Elham Hashemi claim a bronze medal. Representing the country in the women's shot put final, Hashemi

registered a best throw of 14.27m to finish on the third podium.

China's Sun Yue tallied 17.65m to walk away with the ultimate prize, with Nasriddinova Malika of Uzbekistan settling for the silver with 15.42m.

Elsewhere on Saturday's

morning session, Shiqi Xiong won the women's long jump with 6.55m – five centimeters clear of her fellow-Chinese Tan Mengyi in the second place. Indian Harmilan Bains clocked 4:29.55 for the women's 1500m gold.

Qassemppour dealt fresh surgery blow to quest for Olympic berth

Sports Desk

Kamran Qassemppour suffered yet another blow to his quest for a freestyle wrestling place in the Paris Olympics after being forced to undergo a hernia surgery on Friday – caused by the immense training pressure in recent weeks.

Having missed last September's World Championships with a groin injury, the two-time world 92kg champion made a first in-

ternational appearance in more than a year in the Zagreb Open Ranking Series event in January, where he took part in the Olympic 97kg weight class.

The Iranian fell to a last-four defeat against American great Kyle Snyder before setting for a consolation bronze, courtesy of a 3-1 victory over Turkish Erhan Yaylaci.

Young Iranian prodigy Amir-Ali Azarpira, meanwhile, came from behind to beat Snyder in

the final showdown to introduce himself as the country's frontrunner in the Olympic qualifying events in the coming months.

The latest injury setback will sideline Qassemppour for two to four weeks, meaning he will be ruled out of Turkey's Yasar Dogu & Vehbi Emre tournament in early March, which will also serve as the Iranian trials for the Olympic qualifiers as well as the Asian Championships in April.



● FARSHAD BANDANI/iw/ir

Iran unveils air defense systems

National Desk

Iran unveiled two new air defense systems on Saturday manufactured by the country's Defense Ministry's experts.

The Arman anti-ballistic missile defense system and the Azarakhsh low-altitude air defense system were showcased during a ceremony in the capital Tehran on Saturday, attended by Iran's Defense Minister Brigadier General Mohammad-Reza Ashtiani.

Ashtiani said the Arman missile system has a medium range and a high altitude that can identify targets at 180 kilometers and engage and destroy them at 120 kilometers.

The system could take on "six targets simultaneously" while the Azarakhsh defense system can be mounted on multiple vehicle types and "uses radar, electro-optical system and thermal seekers to detect and track its target," according to IRNA.

The Azarakhsh missile system can identify and destroy targets... up to a range of 50 kilometers, with four ready-to-fire missiles.

The Azarakhsh defense system is

said to be responsible for providing close-in, low altitude, surface-to-air weapons fires in defense of forward combat areas, maneuver forces, vital areas, installations and/or units engaged in special or independent operations.

Iranian military experts and engineers have in recent years made remarkable breakthroughs in manufacturing a broad range of indigenous equipment, making the armed

forces self-sufficient.

Iranian officials have repeatedly underscored that the country will not hesitate to strengthen its military capabilities, including its missile power, which are entirely meant for defense, and that Iran's defense capabilities will never be subject to negotiation.

With the entry of new systems into the country's defense network, the air defense capability of the Islamic Republic of Iran will increase significantly.

In June, Iran presented its first domestically-made hypersonic ballistic missile, named Fattah, with a range of 1,400 kilometers.



The Arman anti-ballistic missile defense system is showcased during a ceremony to unveil new missile defense systems by Iran's Defense Ministry in Tehran, Iran, on February 17, 2024.

defanews.ir

Israel behind gas pipeline explosions inside Iran: Report



International Desk

Israel reportedly carried out attacks on two major natural gas pipelines inside Iran this week, disrupting the flow of gas to several provinces with millions of people.

Citing two Western officials, The New York Times reported on Friday that Israel also caused a separate blast on Thursday inside a chemical factory on the outskirts of Tehran that rattled a neighborhood and sent plumes of smoke and fire into the air. But local officials said the factory explosion stemmed from an accident in the factory's fuel tank.

"The enemy's plan was to completely disrupt the flow of gas in winter to several main cities and provinces in our country," Iran's Oil Minister, Javad Owji, told Iranian media on Friday.

Owji, who had previously referred to the blasts as "sabotage and terrorist attacks," said that the goal of the attack was to damage Iran's energy infrastructure and stir domestic discontent.

National Iranian Gas Company (NIGC) manager Saeed Aghli said, "This act of terrorism and sabotage was carried out in two locations at around 1 a.m."

The saboteurs hit pipelines in the cities of Borujen in the southwestern province of Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari, and Safashahr in the southern province of Fars, Aghli said.

It disrupted gas supplies in at least three provinces - North Khorasan in the northeast, Lorestan in the west, and Zanjan in the northwest.

One Western official called it a major symbolic strike that was fairly easy for Iran to repair and caused relatively little harm to civilians, according to The New York Times.

Israel has long targeted military and nuclear sites inside Iran, and assassinated Iranian nuclear scientists and commanders, both inside and outside of the country. Israel has also waged cyberattacks to disable servers belonging to the Oil Ministry, causing turmoil at gas stations nationwide.

But blowing up part of the country's energy infrastructure, relied on by industries, factories and millions of civilians, marked an escalation in the covert war and appeared to open a new frontier.

UN chief: Gaza situation 'appalling' sign of deadlock in global relations

Hamis leader insists on complete cease-fire

International Desk

The UN chief said the situation in Gaza is an appalling indictment of the deadlock in global relations, warning about the expansion of war in the Palestinian territory into the region.

"The situation in Gaza is an appalling indictment of the deadlock in global relations. The level of death and destruction is shocking in itself, and the war is also spilling over borders across the region and affecting global trades," UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said in his address to the 60th Munich Security Conference on Friday.

Guterres said the humanitarian aid operation is no longer on life support in Gaza but is barely functioning.

"Humanitarians are working under unimaginable conditions, including live fire, multiple physical obstacles — and these are all

restrictions — as well as the breakdown of public order."

Military action in Rafah

Guterres also referred to Israel's planned military offensive on Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip, saying that the military action on the densely populated city should never take place.

"Rafah is at the core of the entire humanitarian aid operation. An all-out offensive on the city will be devastating for the 1.5 million Palestinian civilians there, who are already on the edge of survival."

The UN chief reiterated his call for the immediate and unconditional release of all captives held by the Hamas resistance group and a humanitarian cease-fire in the besieged Palestinian territory.

Efforts are underway by regional mediators to establish a new cease-fire in Gaza to end the terrible

carnage in the besieged territory.

No temporary truce

US President Joe Biden has called for a temporary truce, but Hamas chief Ismail Haniyeh on Saturday reiterated the group's demand of a complete cease-fire in Gaza.

High-level negotiations to pause Israel's war on Gaza were held this week in Cairo but their outcome is still unclear.

In a statement issued on Saturday, Qatar-based Haniyeh reiterated the group's several demands, including an end to fighting in Gaza.

"The resistance will not agree to anything less than cease-fire, withdrawing of the occupying army from the strip, lifting the oppressive blockade, and providing safe shelter for the displaced people," he said.

Haniyeh insisted that those displaced from the north be returned to their

areas in the territory. He also called for the release of Hamas prisoners sentenced to long jail terms in Israel.

On Friday, Biden called for a temporary truce in Gaza to get captives held by Hamas out of the Palestinian territory under a potential deal swapping them for prisoners held in Israel.

More Palestinians killed

The regime continued its brutal strikes on Palestinians on Saturday, killing more Palestinians trapped in the coastal territory.

The Health Ministry in Gaza said on Saturday that more than 100 people were killed in 24 hours alone.

At least 28,858 people have been killed, most of them women and children, since Israel began its attacks on Gaza in October. Israel also said it had taken into custody 100 people at one of Gaza's main hospitals after troops raided the facility, with fears mounting Saturday for patients and staff trapped



UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres delivers his speech during the opening of the 60th Munich Security Conference at the Bayerischer Hof Hotel in Munich, southern Germany, on February 16, 2024.

THOMAS KIENZLE/AFP

inside.

At least 120 patients and five medical teams are stuck without water, food and electricity in Nasser Hospital in Gaza's main southern city of Khan Younis, according to the Health Ministry.

Israel has for weeks concentrated its military operations in Khan Younis. This week, intense fighting has raged around Nasser Hospital - one of the Palestinian territory's last remaining major medical

facilities that remains even partly operational.

The power was cut and the generators had stopped after the raid, leading to the deaths of six patients due to a lack of oxygen, according to Gaza's Health Ministry.

The raid has been criticized by medics and the United Nations.

A witness, who declined to be named for safety reasons, told AFP the Israeli forces had shot "at anyone who moved inside the hospital".

Mohammad Ali Rajabi
Cartoonist



A world of...

On the other hand, Muslim and Arab nations have largely remained on the fence. Those having diplomatic relations with Israel kept them intact and none of them even brought back home their envoys. Some of them even refuse to speak out against the Israeli atrocities. And certain nations filled up the Israeli war machine by keeping their bilateral trade with the regime up and running.

For instance, Azerbaijan significantly boosted its oil exports to Israel in January by shipping over 523,000 tons of crude oil. And on Friday, Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev met with his Israeli counterpart Isaac Herzog in Munich as if nothing were happening in Gaza. The only Muslim state that rolled up its sleeves to face off Israel on the battlefield was Yemen, where the ruling Ansarullah movement has been

targeting Israeli-bound ships as well as US and British vessels in the Red Sea with missiles and drones to mount pressure on Tel Aviv and its main supporters to give in to a permanent cease-fire.

The latest Israeli bloodshed, which has so far killed nearly 29,000 people, will go down in history, so will Muslim nations' inaction and indifference that helped fuel the flames of war.

Piano solo by Moritz Ernst gets kudos in Iran



● BORNA

Arts & Culture Desk

Moritz Ernst, a renowned German pianist, staged a solo piano performance at the 39th Fajr International Music Festival held at Tehran's Vahdat Hall on February 16, and his performance was highly welcomed by

the audiences. He performed pieces from world-famous composers such as George Frideric Handel, Beethoven, Chopin, Francis Poulenc, Emmanuel Melik Aslanian, and Sergei Rachmaninoff. This marks Moritz Ernst's third appearance at the

Fajr Music Festival in Iran. His previous performances in 2020 and 2021 were conducted online due to the COVID-19 pandemic. On his performance, Ernst expressed that the Fajr International Music Festival is a significant event in Iran, bringing together

various music genres, including pop, local, traditional, and classical, as well as featuring international musicians. He added, "Organizing such musical events plays a vital role in connecting the cultures and arts of different countries."

Iran Media Expo to welcome 1,700 media people



● IRNA

Arts & Culture Desk

The 24th edition of the Iran Media Expo will open today, welcoming 1,700 media people nationwide over the four-day event. The expo is set to take place at Tehran's Imam Khomeini Mosalla from February 18 to 21, marking its return after a six-year break, IRNA wrote. Mehdi Ebdali, Deputy Director General of Domestic Press and News Agencies, announced that

media representatives from 32 provinces have been formally invited to attend the expo. The invitation, extended in coordination with the cultural and Islamic guidance departments, encourages the active involvement of media entities. According to Ebdali, participants are expected to engage not only in visiting the main exhibits but also in taking advantage of the various side events and educational programs offered during

the expo. In addition, one outstanding media figure from each province will be commemorated on the day representatives from that province visit the exhibition. A section will also be dedicated to Gaza and renowned international media outlets have been invited to join the expo, with specific focus on European media activists who have been engaged in coverage of Gaza over the past four months.



Iran, Italy confer on expanding science, academic ties

Iran's Ambassador to Italy, Mohammad-Reza Sabouri, and Luiss University Rector Andrea Principe discussed enhancing bilateral ties in science, academia, and technology. During the meeting, the Iranian envoy highlighted Iran's academic strengths in economics, management, political science, and international relations. He expressed Iran's willingness to improve collaboration by facilitating the exchange of university instructors and students with Luiss University in Rome. In response, Rector Principe welcomed the ambassador's proposals, expressing the university's keen interest in expanding scientific and academic cooperation with Iran. He affirmed Luiss University's readiness to accept more Iranian students. Luiss University, originating from the Pro Deo International between 1974 and 1978, operates independently and spans four departments: Economics and Finance, Business and Management, Law, and Political Science. The university is known for its innovative and sophisticated educational approach.

Over 135k contract cancer in Iran per year: Professor

Over 135,000 people are diagnosed with cancer annually in Iran, with estimates indicating a probable 100% increase by 2042, as announced by Mohammad Reza Sohrabi, Vice Chancellor for Research of Shahid Beheshti University of Medical Sciences. Sohrabi said that skin, breast, colon, and gastric prostate cancers as the most common types in the country, IRNA wrote. A mid-November 2023 report by IRNA revealed that, of 122,000 premature deaths under 70 years, 34,000 were attributed to cancer. Also, cancer accounted for 11,000 out of 85,000 premature deaths under 50 years in the previous year. Sohrabi emphasized the importance of preventive measures and early cancer detection, making it a healthcare priority. Screening for common cancers like breast, colon, and cervical cancer is

carried out in health facilities along with self-care education. Cancer was identified as the second leading cause of death globally after cardiovascular diseases, affecting approximately 20 million people annually. Sohrabi attributed the rise in cancer cases to increased life expectancy, lifestyle changes, and environmental factors. The deputy director pointed out that life expectancy has risen from around 58 years in the early 1980s to 76 years for men and 78 years for women today. Unhealthy habits such as smoking, consumption of salty, fatty, high-calorie foods, and seden-

tary behavior were cited as contributing factors to the increase in certain cancers. Sohrabi called attention to the significance of tobacco use as a major avoidable risk factor for cancer. Environmental factors like increased fossil fuel consumption, pollutants, and harmful chemicals in the workplace were also identified as cancer-causing factors. Despite the growing cancer incidence, Sohrabi said advancements in treatment methods that have improved patient survival rates. He noted that "public awareness," "early detection methods," and "screenings for identifying cancer in its early stages." Motivating citizens to adopt a healthy lifestyle, Sohrabi urged people to use healthcare facilities, comprehensive health service centers for screening and early recognition of cancers.



Iran, Tajikistan discuss making joint cinematic works

Officials from Iran and Tajikistan discussed the possibility of jointly producing cinematic works during a meeting held at the Farabi Cinema Foundation (FCF) in Tehran. The talks, which took place between the Managing Director of FCF, Majid Zeynolabedin, and the Head of Cinematography Affairs in Tajikistan, along with the director of Tajik Film and several filmmakers from Tajikistan, highlighted the potential for collaborative film projects, ILNA wrote. The meeting, held during the 42nd Fajr International Film Festival in Tehran, focused on the shared cultural heritage of the two nations. Zeynolabedin expressed optimism about the prospect of Persian-speaking filmmakers from Tajikistan making joint works. "We should unlock the potential for collaborative productions that, while showcasing the shared culture of Iran and Tajikistan, are also engaging and attractive to the audience," stated Zeynolabedin, outlining the vision for future collaborations in the realm of cinema.