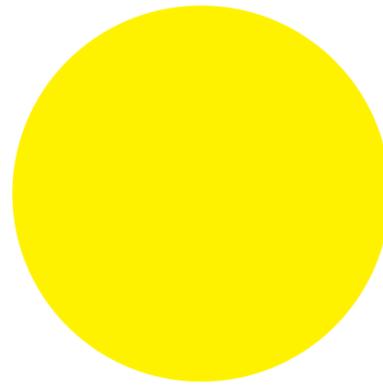


Leader calls for efforts to make Iran's Navy a strategic force

5 >



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Deylaman

New Generation of Iranian Destroyers

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4-5 >

SPECIAL ISSUE



Development of nuclear power plants strengthens Iran: VP



2 >

Halvan Desert: A pristine oasis of tranquility and adventure

South Khorasan Province is renowned for its pristine and picturesque deserts, making it a top destination for nature enthusiasts, particularly during the autumn, winter, and early spring.

3 >

AFC Champions League: Reds rue missed opportunity; Sepahan staves off late Air Force scare



6 >

IAEA chief: Tehran possesses no nuclear arms



7 >



Iran's saker falcon population at risk

8 >

China's central bank head pledges to support growth



China's central bank governor said on Tuesday that monetary policy will remain accommodative to support the economy, but he urged structural reforms over time to reduce a reliance on infrastructure and property for growth.

Pan Gongsheng told the HKMA-BIS High-Level Conference in Hong Kong that economic momentum in recent months suggested China would achieve its 2023 growth target of around 5%, reported Reuters.

"I'm confident that China will enjoy healthy and sustainable growth in 2024 and beyond," he added.

Pan said he expected consumer inflation to pick up in the coming months as drops in food prices, especially pork, will not be sustained. He also pointed to green shoots in China's purchasing manager's index of business activity.

China's government launched a slew of policy measures this year to shore up a feeble post-pandemic economic recovery impacted by a property sector downturn, local government debt risks, slow global growth and geopolitical tensions.

In October, China unveiled a plan to issue 1 trillion yuan (\$139.84 billion) in sovereign bonds by the end of the year, raising the 2023 budget deficit target to 3.8% of gross domestic product (GDP) from the original 3%.

The PBOC has also implemented modest interest rate cuts and pumped more cash into the economy in recent months, pledging to sustain policy support.

"Going forward, the PBOC will continue to keep its monetary policy accommodative to provide support to the economy," Pan said.

Pan said it would be far more important for China to pursue high-quality and sustainable growth.

"The traditional model of relying heavily on infrastructure and real estate might generate higher growth, but would also delay structural adjustment and undermine growth sustainability," he said.

"The ongoing economic transformation will be a long and difficult journey, but it's a journey we must take."

Beijing has been trying to reduce the economy's reliance on property, channeling more resources into high-tech manufacturing and green industries.



Development of nuclear power plants strengthens Iran: **VP**

Economy Desk

The second meeting of the working group for the development of Iranian nuclear power plants for the production of 20,000 megawatts was held on Tuesday, under the chairmanship of First Vice President Mohammad Mokhber.

In the meeting, a report was presented on the construction of units 2 and 3 of the Bushehr Nuclear Power Plant, with a total investment of \$476 million, which was halted for five years, according to fvpresident.ir.

Speaking at the meeting, Mokhber described the construction of nuclear power plants as an important and necessary step towards providing stable electricity, saying that it is also a strong movement in the direction of making Iran a strong country, so all organizations must provide the necessary support for the project.

The construction of nuclear power plants with a total production capacity of 20,000 megawatts is one of the signs of the country's authority, the top official noted.

The construction of a nuclear power plant has a great importance for Iran in

order to provide health, food security, pharmaceutical security, scientific promotion, and economically, as it has constructive effects.

"According to the reports, each 1,000 MW of electricity produced by nuclear power plants can save about €1 billion per annum in the consumption of fossil fuels."

He emphasized the need to prepare a comprehensive plan for the construction of nuclear power plants based on land-use planning, adding that it is necessary for the Ministry of Energy and the Atomic Energy Organization to hold joint meetings

on developing the plan.

In general, the development of renewable energies and the construction of nuclear power plants is a necessary, useful and beneficial measure for the country, as has been prioritized by the current government, Mokhber said.

In the meeting, which was attended by the ministers of energy and economy, Mohammad Eslami, the head of the Atomic Energy Organization presented a report on the development of the Bushehr Nuclear Power Plant, saying that 3,000 people are currently working on the project.



Raisi to submit budget bill to Parliament next week: **PBO**

Economy Desk

Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi will submit a bill to Parliament outlining a draft budget for the Iranian year 1403, which will start on March 20, 2024, announced the head of the Plan and Budget Organization (PBO) on Tuesday.

Davoud Manzour added that the budget bill of 1403 has been prepared in compliance with the goals of the Sev-

enth Economic Development Plan of the country, IRNA reported.

According to the draft budget, oil exports have been projected at a price of \$71 per barrel, said the PBO head, noting that the budget bill is aimed at reduction of inflation next year.

Manzour went on to say that a total of 980 unfinished projects will be completed next year.

Tax revenues will increase by 42% compared to the current Iranian year,

as oil revenues will drop by 3%.

The general budget resources in the bill have been targeted at about \$49.24 billion (24.62 quadrillion rials), which has increased by 18% compared to the figure for current year's budget bill.

Oil revenues of the country is estimated at \$11.7 billion (5.85 quadrillion rials) according to the bill, as tax revenues of the government will be \$29.92 billion (14.96 quadrillion rials).

Iranian NTBFs ready for energy cooperation with Tajikistan

Iranian new technology-based firms (NTBFs) expressed their readiness to enhance cooperation with Tajikistan in all areas, especially in the energy sector. A conference entitled, "Introducing Iran's Investment Opportunities in Tajikistan," was held at the Nirro Research Institute (NRI) in Tehran on Tuesday, reported Tasnim news agency.

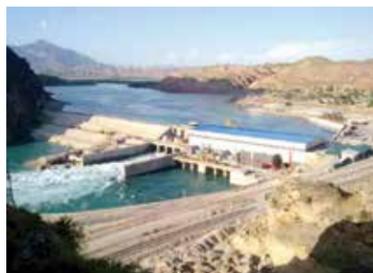
Chairman of Nirro Research Center Majid Amidpour was the first speaker at the conference. He pointed to the amicable and friendly relations between Iran and neighboring countries, including Tajikistan, and said that the two countries share abundant commonalities, especially in the cultural field.

The Nirro Research Institute, affiliated to the Ministry of Energy, is keen on establishing close ties with neighboring states, he said, adding that Iran has good experiences in technology and training fields and Tajikistan can use Iran's experience optimally.

Iran is home to many competent knowledge-based companies that are active

in the water and electricity industry, Amidpour said, emphasizing that Iranian knowledge-based firms are ready to broaden their cooperation with Tajik companies in these fields.

Since the institute has forged very close cooperation with Iranian academic centers in the field of water and electricity, "We can link Tajik companies to the academic centers and scientific-educational bodies of the country so that they (Tajik companies) can take strides towards the development of their technologies," he added.



Iran, Iraq keen on enhancing ICT ties

Officials from Iran and Iraq stressed the need to strengthen cooperation in the field of Information and Communications Technology (ICT).

Iran's Minister of Information and Communications Technology Issa Zarepour, in a meeting with his Iraqi counterpart in Baghdad, pointed to the high capabilities and potential of Iran in the field of implementing communications projects in Iraq, and called for the continuation of cooperation in this sector, Tasnim news agency reported. The two countries share ample commonalities that can be used for the development of relations in different fields, including ICT, he said. Turning to the implementation of the previous agreements inked between the two countries in the ICT sector, Zarepour emphasized that the Islamic Republic is ready to participate in mega Internet and communications projects in Iraq.

The minister pointed to the launch of a direct link between Iran and Iraq during Arbaeen ceremonies as well as the eye-catching improvement of the quality of communications and emphasized that

the direct communications link between Tehran and Baghdad should be further strengthened.

Iraqi Minister of Communications Hiyam al-Yasiri, for her part, appreciated Iran's achievements in the ICT sector and added that the result of close cooperation between the ICT ministries of the two countries was observed during Arbaeen ceremonies. Favorable services were rendered to the pilgrims during the Arbaeen rituals and it seems necessary that the two countries should continue their cooperation in this field, she underlined.



Halvan Desert: A pristine oasis of tranquility and adventure

Iranica Desk

South Khorasan Province is renowned for its pristine and picturesque deserts, making it a top destination for nature enthusiasts, particularly during the autumn, winter, and early spring.

Among the province's remarkable desert landscapes is Halvan Desert, spanning an expansive area of 750 square kilometers.

Located just 80 kilometers from Tabas, near the historic village of the same name, Halvan Desert was officially recognized as a national natural heritage site in 2018.

A network of accessible dirt roads allows easy access to this captivating desert. Travelers can reach Halvan Desert through various routes, ensuring convenience and flexibility in their exploration.

Nestled in the outskirts of the central desert, Halvan Desert is surrounded by sand dunes, salt marshes, and clay deserts, alongside the majestic salt lake named Khur.

The sand dunes of Halvan Desert stretch im-

pressively from north to south, spanning approximately 40 kilometers, while the east-west distance measures around 14 kilometers in the central parts, and five kilometers in the northern areas. The highest peaks of the sand dunes can be found in the eastern regions, reaching heights of approximately 80 meters before gradually decreasing towards the west.

Halvan Desert's allure lies not only in its vast expanse of sand dunes but also in the harmonious merging of these dunes with the neighboring mountains.

In the southeastern regions, the interplay between the sand dunes and mountains creates a captivating and picturesque scene. Furthermore, the convergence of mountains, valleys, and sand dunes in Halvan Desert forms enchanting passageways that are truly unique to Iran.

Whether you seek adventure, tranquility, or breathtaking scenery, Halvan Desert offers a remarkable experience for all nature lovers. So, come and immerse yourself in the beauty and serenity of Halvan Desert, where the wonders of the desert

landscape and the majesty of the surrounding mountains merge to create a truly unforgettable journey. In the vast deserts and wilderness areas, such as Halvan Desert, a diverse array of flora and fauna thrive, creating a harmonious ecosystem. Within Halvan Desert, you can encounter an impressive range of wildlife, including snake and scorpion species, falcons, sand grouses, desert larks, bee-eaters, desert sparrows, golden eagles, vultures, wolves, jackals and sand foxes.

To help you explore and experience the wonders of Halvan Desert, professional experts in the field of desert tours offer a variety of programs in Iran's desert and wilderness areas. By participating in these programs, you can embark on a unique and thrilling adventure, providing you with a truly unforgettable recreational experience.

Within Halvan Desert, you will have the opportunity to engage in various activities, ranging from camel riding to hiking and safari adventures. Camel riding in the heart of Halvan Desert allows you to immerse yourself in the rich history of

past caravans and travelers. The sheer pleasure of riding this native desert animal provides a connection to the past that cannot be replicated by modern recreations. The night sky in Halvan Desert offers an unparalleled stargazing experience. Nowhere else will you find a sky as resplendent, bright, and unpolluted.

For a tranquil and rejuvenating experience, indulge in sand bathing. Taking a bath in the soft, warm sands of Halvan Desert offers a unique sensation and a profound sense of tranquility.

Immerse yourself in the serene beauty of Halvan Desert by spending time walking on its expansive sand dunes. Allow yourself an hour of solitude as you traverse these captivating landscapes, admiring the breathtaking desert scenery that surrounds you.

If you seek a more challenging adventure, the eastern margin of Halvan Desert provides an ideal location for organizing desert hiking events. Immerse yourself in the rugged terrain and natural grandeur as you embark on a journey through the captivating wilderness.

Should you wish to extend your stay and experi-

ence a night in the heart of the desert, camping options are available, allowing you to fully embrace the desert environment and indulge in stargazing at its finest. Nearby, you will find the village of Halvan, boasting traditional accommodations that blend seamlessly with its historical charm. This village, once situated along a prominent caravan route, is renowned for its beautiful palm groves and high-quality dates. The castle and five watchtowers of the village, which have stood the test of time, serve as alluring attractions.

As you wander among the palm trees and immerse yourself in the village's old-world ambiance, you may find yourself tempted to extend your stay after your desert exploration.

Lastly, a must-visit destination near Halvan Desert is the Halvan Cave. Dating back 160 million years, this cave is located just 15 kilometers from the village. Its ancient allure and geological wonders make it a fascinating site to explore and appreciate.

With an abundance of natural splendor, unique wildlife, and a multitude of engaging activities, Halvan Desert invites you to discover the magic and tranquility it has to offer.

Emergence of 'realist school' and continuities in early poetry

Founded in the first quarter of the sixteenth century, the 'realist school' is a poetic style examining 'anew the amatory origins of the ghazal, and one that reduced 'the idealization of the beloved in the interest of depicting the full range of psychological negotiations of mundane love'.

Stylistically, it sought to express love and the lover in 'a simple unvarnished poetry, absent of flowery language and hyperbole'. The style situates the topics of love, lovers and amorous relationships in more earthly, rather than ethereal, contexts.

In this regard, poets sought to portray the relationships between 'all-too-human lovers' and their 'mood swings, tantrums, evasions and elations'. Shams-Langarudi aptly refers to the style as the 'bazaarisation' of the 'Iraqi style'.

In Safavid Isfahan it became a favoured style of the urban classes of poets populating the coffee houses.

The recognition that some poets of Safavid Isfahan were producing a simpler poetic style, by imitating classical masters like Sa'di and Hafez, should give pause to the argument that the 'literary return' movement suddenly arose in post-Safavid times. The argument that the 'literary return' movement emerged with a newfound laser focus on imitating the stylistics of the 'masters' is further undercut by the diverse forms of poetry produced by its early members, including many participants of Seyyed Ali Mushtaq Isfahani's literary society. Beyond producing lyrics and odes in imitation of classical styles, they offered praise for religious figures and rulers as well as poetry in commemoration of architectural achievements.

Mushtaq's oeuvre contains odes for various rulers during the Afsharid period (including Nadir Shah), poems on the occasion of a ruler's coronation, elegies for historical figures, works in commemoration of victories in Qandahar and India and the history of architectural works. Other early 'literary return' poets composed equally diverse types of verse.

This variation in their poetry points to a literary circle in its infancy still searching for its footing, rather than one invariably wedded to a particular poetic form and style. As Matthew Smith has recently shown, early 'return' poets like Azar, Hatif and Sabahi could equally 'draw inspiration from forms and genres popularized under the Safavids and Mughals ... rather than from the earlier poets whom they are accused of imitating'.

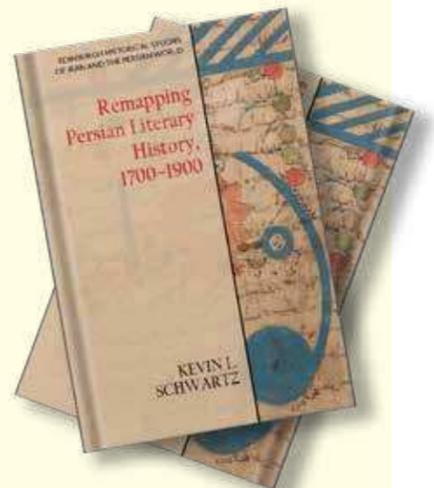
Isfahan may have been severely destroyed and ravaged in the early-to-mid eighteenth century, but it was by no means forgotten. In keeping with Isfahan's literary centrality during Safavid times, members of the early Isfahani Circle flocked from elsewhere

to partake in its literary life.

Azar made his way back to Isfahan, the place of his birth, after much travel around the country. The poet and calligrapher 'Abd al-Majid Darvish, another member of this early cohort, came to Isfahan from nearby in search of science and learning. Moreover, he most certainly arrived in Isfahan prior to the establishment of Karim Khan Zand's rule. Even during this difficult period in the early-to-mid eighteenth century, poets made their way to Isfahan, once again reaffirming that the city maintained its identity as a cultural centre.

Although political conditions changed after the fall of Isfahan, the makeup of the early 'literary return' movement as expressed through Mushtaq's literary society and the larger Isfahani Circle displayed many social and poetic continuities with the late Safavid period. Contrary to later impressions of how and why the 'literary return'

movement emerged, it was neither disconnected from earlier poetic trends of Safavid Isfahan nor wedded to one particular style of poetry.



The above is a lightly edited version of part of a chapter, 'Reformation and Reconstruction of Poetic Networks: Isfahan c.1722-1801', from a book entitled, 'Remapping Persian Literary History, 1700-1900', written by Kevin L. Schwartz, published by Edinburgh University Press.

Deylaman new generation of Iranian destroyers

Deylaman is the latest model of the Mowj-class (Wave-class) destroyers that have been domestically developed in Iran. On Monday, November 27, 2023, the Iranian destroyer Deylaman joined the Northern Fleet of the Army Navy during an official ceremony that was held in Anzali Port in the presence of the Chief of Staff of the Iranian Armed Forces Major General Mohammad Hossein Baqeri.

National desk

A momentous family

Wave-class destroyers are approximately 94 meters long and 11 meters wide and weigh between 1300 and 1500 tons.

The first in line was the Jamaran destroyer, which joined the southern fleet of the Islamic Republic of Iran Navy in 2009. Jamaran's equipment was changed and upgraded in the following years. At the time of its unveiling, Jamaran was equipped with anti-ship cruise missiles, naval artillery, torpedoes, defensive missiles, and 3D radar systems. Damavand was the second Wave-class destroyer built with the same equipment as the Jamaran destroyer. It joined the Northern Fleet of the Army Navy in 2014. Damavand was similar to Jamaran in terms of its physical and weapon features, but the notable feature of Damavand was that it was the first destroyer of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the Caspian Sea.

The third Wave-class destroyer in the Army Navy was Sahand. Jamaran and Damavand were built by the Defense Ministry's Marine Industries Organization, but Sahand was built in the Army Navy factories for the Southern Fleet. It was the first Wave-class destroyer to be fitted with a Kamand close-in (point-defense) weapon system that could protect itself and its accompanying units from low-altitude threats such as cruise missiles.

Sahand was different from Jamaran and Damavand in its body design as well. In its design, Sahand achieved more concealment and less radar reflection by making the body surface uniform. Furthermore, larger helicopters such as the SH-3 can land on Sahand's bigger flight deck, making it more advantageous to send Sahand instead of Jamaran and Damavand when the mission calls for carrying larger aircraft. Sahand, like Damavand, is equipped with anti-ship cruise missiles, naval cannons, torpedo launchers, anti-aircraft guns and missiles, and various electronic warfare and radar technologies.

Dena was the fourth generation of the family of homegrown destroyers. It can and has undertaken a 360-degree mission as part of Iran's 86th naval fleet, which brought this destroyer world-

class fame. The weapons outfit of the Dena destroyer is the same as Jamaran and Damavand, with the difference that Dena is equipped with more advanced electronic warfare systems.

Damavand destroyer joined the Northern Fleet of the Army Navy in 2013 but was rendered out of service due to an accident in July 2018. After that, the construction of a new destroyer in the Caspian Sea was added to the agenda of the Army Navy and the Ministry of Defense. However, the development of Iran's technological and manufacturing capabilities in the marine industries over the past years prompted the experts of the Iran Navy and the Ministry of Defense to design a more advanced version of the Mowj-class destroyers. This led to the birth of the Deylaman destroyer, which is the most advanced and best-equipped destroyer produced by the Islamic Republic of Iran so far.

A leap in radar capabilities

The Deylaman destroyer features a phased array radar system, the most up-to-date radar system that has ever been installed on Iranian destroyers. It has the ability to detect and intercept surface and air targets such as airplanes, drones, helicopters, and surface vessels. What is more, it can guide surface-to-surface and surface-to-air missiles.

The main advantage of this radar system compared to that of the Jamaran and Damavand destroyers or the AWS radar of other Wave-class destroyers is that it does not need to rotate. This allows the components of the radar to be removed, which facilitates its maintenance and reduces related costs.

Each of the four array faces of this radar has 1000 elements, which amounts to four thousand radar elements in total. The system has the ability to track several targets simultaneously because the update rate of this radar is a fraction of a second.

Among other prominent features of this radar are its unique capabilities for electronic warfare and electronic counter-countermeasures (ECCM) including transmitting random pulses, switching quickly between frequencies, jamming analysis (electronic warfare), sensitivity time control (STC), compressing pulses, and rapidly changing

the pulse repetition frequency.

Another difference between Deylaman and other Wave-class destroyers is in their engines. Deylaman has four engines with four separate shaft lines and propellers, which gives it greater mobility and maneuverability in the Caspian Sea.

Using this power, Deylaman can sail up to a maximum speed of 26 knots. Another advantage of Deylaman over other Wave-class destroyers is its weapon outfit and configuration. Deylaman can be called the most armed destroyer produced by the Islamic Republic of Iran so far.

Compared to other destroyers of the Mowj class, Deylaman's mast is designed differently as well. The mast of this destroyer has a four-sided and uniform design.

Enemies beware

Its weapons outfit covers the four areas of subsurface, surface-to-surface, surface-to-air, and anti-missile warfare. In the subsurface area, Deylaman is equipped with three torpedo launchers on its fantail. The destroyer can use these torpedoes to deal with various surface and subsurface targets.

In the field of surface combat, Deylaman holds the record for carrying the most cruise missiles among Iranian destroyers because they each carry a smaller number of anti-ship cruise missiles. It relies on having a suitable number of Qadir and Qader anti-ship cruise missiles on board. Deylaman can also use domestically manufactured naval cannons for surface combat, but that is not unique to this generation of Iranian Wave-class destroyers.

The same level of similarity cannot be found in the field of air defense as this destroyer is supposed to be the first Wave-class destroyer to be equipped with a vertical launching system (VLS) for air defense. The system is supposed to be installed in the fore-castle of Deylaman in the near future. The destroyer also enjoys an advanced surface-to-air missile system, which is going to be installed soon. This system is capable of engaging air targets at range to keep the destroyer and the crew members safe from aerial threats. Moreover, a point-defense system has been installed on the fantail of Deylaman to

protect the destroyer against low-altitude threats such as cruise missiles. As a Gatling gun, this weapon system has a very high firing rate.

In the field of anti-missile warfare, Deylaman is also well-equipped and can shoot and deflect missiles fired by the enemy. However, this is not a capability that Deylaman does not share with other generations of domestically-made Wave-class destroyers.

In general, it is quite evident how advanced and prominent Deylaman is, both in its design and subsystems. After all, it belongs to the latest generation of Iranian Wave-class destroyers that were already making waves.





Leader calls for efforts to make Iran's Navy a strategic force

Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei hailed achievements made by the Iran Navy after the 1979 Islamic Revolution, calling for efforts to make the Iranian Armed Forces' naval division a comprehensive strategic force. Ayatollah Khamenei made the remarks during a meeting with a group of Navy commanders and officials on Tuesday, on the occasion of Iranian Navy Day, PressTV reported.

"In the early years after the revolution, the presence of the Islamic Republic of Iran's Navy beyond territorial waters was unimaginable, but now the Navy makes a 360-degree voyage around the globe powerfully and returns to the country with pride." The Leader added that the Navy's advances after the 1979 Islamic Revolution was "unbelievable and remarkable," calling for efforts to make the Iranian Armed Forces' naval division a

comprehensive strategic force. Ayatollah Khamenei noted, "One day, it was not imagined that the Islamic Republic of Iran Navy would be able to be present in the Caspian Sea, but now destroyers are built on the shores of the Caspian Sea and set afloat." During a ceremony on Monday, a new domestically-designed and manufactured destroyer, dubbed Deylaman, joined Iran's northern naval fleet to strengthen security in the Caspian Sea.

Deylaman is the 5th wave-class destroyer, the first of which was the Jamaran destroyer. It is equipped with various types of domestically-manufactured defense systems and equipment. It has the capability of navigating for a long time, searching, discovering, identifying, monitoring and confronting, and, if necessary, repelling any air, surface and subsurface threats. Deylaman is also capable of carrying helicopters on its deck.



Deylaman features a phased array radar system, the most up-to-date radar system that has ever been installed on Iranian destroyers.



Deylaman can be called the most armed destroyer produced by the Islamic Republic of Iran so far.



Guardiola hints at extending City contract



● ADAM DAVY/PA

THE GUARDIAN – Pep Guardiola has revealed he could extend his tenure as the Manchester City manager when his contract ends in the summer of 2025.

City beat Internazionale in the Champions League final in June to seal the treble last season and it was thought that Guardiola was almost certain to leave at the end of his current deal.

That contract was signed a year ago after those close to him had been unsure if he would do so. This followed the strong expectation that, on arriving at City in the summer 2016, he would not extend his stay beyond the three-year term agreed at the time.

After Ilkay Gündogan and Riyad Mahrez departed, and with Kevin De Bruyne out since the opening game of the season with a hamstring injury, Guardiola is evolving City having recruited Jérémy Doku, Josko Gvardiol and Matheus Nunes in the summer window. Asked before RB Leipzig's visit in the Champions League on Tuesday if this process might entice him to prolong his time at the club, Guardiola suggested he was open to that possibility.

"I have energy. I'm not going to answer," he said. "One year and a half is a lot of time in football. I arrived here with long hair and look what happened." Pressed if remaining in situ beyond his current deal was a possibility, Guardiola said: "Yeah of course – I can leave tomorrow [too]. I would have loved the team that won 100 points [in the 2017-18 season] to stay eternally. At all the clubs this happens."

If Guardiola does agree fresh terms it would allow him the chance to continue an already supremely successful era at City. In his seven full seasons at the club, they have claimed five Premier Leagues, two FA Cups, four League Cups, the Champions League and the Super Cup.

De Bruyne said on Sunday that he hopes to return from surgery on his hamstring injury "close after the new year". Asked about this, Guardiola said: "If he [De Bruyne] said 'January' it will be January. If he said 'end of December or the new year' it will be a happy new year for everyone."

AFC Champions League: Reds rue missed opportunity; Sepahan staves off late Air Force scare

Sports Desk

The penultimate round of the group stage at the AFC Champions League saw Persepolis share the points with Al Nassr in a goalless stalemate in Riyadh.

Sepahan, meanwhile, held off a late pressure from Iraq's Air Force Club, despite going down to nine men, to claim a massive 1-0 victory at Tehran's Azadi Stadium.

Reds regret

Perhaps Persepolis players would have been more than satisfied with a fourth draw in a five-game winless streak prior to the kickoff against their formidable host, which stepped onto the pitch at Al Awwal Park on the back of a 19-game unbeaten run.

However, the Tehran Reds were eventually left ruing the chance to walk away with maximum points after Al Nassr was reduced to 10 men with 17 minutes into the contest, when Saudi center-back Ali Lajami was sent off for a harsh tackle on Reds midfielder Milad Sarlak, who was on the receiving end of a red card in the reverse fixture in September.

Yahya Golmohammadi's men delivered a brave performance throughout the 90 minutes but failed to capitalize on long spells of the ball possession and find a way through Al Nassr backline, despite testing goalkeeper Nawaf Al-Aqidi on a couple of occasions. Al Nassr superstar Cristiano Ronaldo was kept at bay for the best part of the game but had the opportunity to break the duck in a third head-to-head with Iranian international keeper Alireza Beiranvand in the second half, only to see his low drive from the edge of the box go just wide.

The Portuguese was substituted late in the game after suffering a neck injury earlier in the second period, but his performance will be remembered by the sportsmanship he showed in the early stages of the contest. Chinese referee Ma Ning pointed to spot when Ronaldo appeared to have been

brought down in the box by Soroush Rafiei in the second minute, before the 38-year-old approached the ref, wagging his finger, to tell him that it was 'no penalty.'

The official still had to review the incident on the pitch-side VAR monitor to be convinced to overturn his decision. Persepolis boss Golmohammadi was frustrated with his side's lack of penetration afterwards, saying: "We were able to create opportunities but we had problems with the final pass and the buildup play when going forward."

"We played against a really professional and strong team. Any team playing against Al Nassr will face problems even if they have 10 players," added Golmohammadi.

The result secured a place in the last-16 round for the Saudi club as the Group E winner with 13 points, while second-placed Persepolis – on eight points – will be looking to beat Qatari champion Al Duhail at the Azadi Stadium next week to qualify as one of the three best runners-up across the five West Zone groups.

"A draw at Al Nassr's stadium is valuable. We have to prepare ourselves for Al Duhail. We have only one way to progress and that is by winning," said Golmohammadi, who steered the Reds to the final showpiece of the Asian elite clubs competition in 2020.



Persepolis fullback Ali Ne'mati (4) is seen in action against Al Nassr's Cristiano Ronaldo during a goalless draw in the AFC Champions League at Al Awwal Park, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, on November 27, 2023.

● AFC

Sepahan avoids setback

When Farshad Ahmadzadeh gave Sepahan a fourth-minute lead at the Azadi Stadium, it looked to be an easy afternoon for the Isfahan-based club, but the following incidents forced Jose Morais's men to make a hard work of the much-needed victory. Iranian prodigy Mohammad-Javad Hosseinejad was shown a straight red right before the interval after a late challenge on Mustafa Saadoun.

Sepahan defender Hadi Mohammadi also received his marching orders in the 90th minute due to a physical altercation with Shareef Abdulkadhim but the Iranian team managed to hold out against Air Force's desperate push for an equalizer during an edgy 10 minutes of stoppage time to move three points clear of the Iraqi side in Group C.

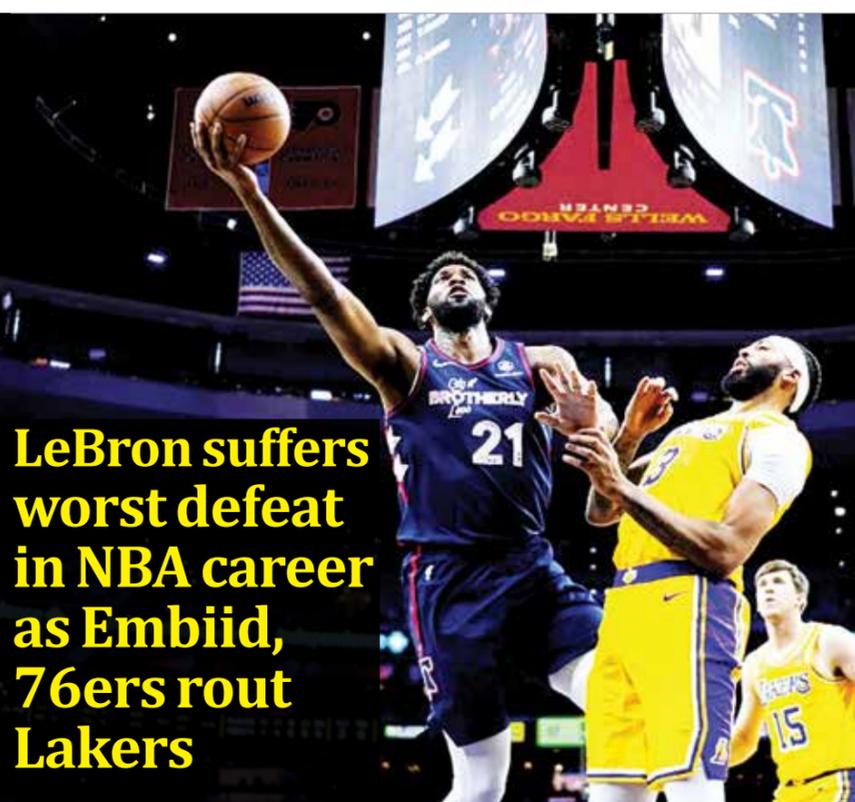
"Congratulations to my players and the team because it was not an easy game. The players performed with quality. Their focus was on the field," Portuguese Morais said. "When you run with one less player, it be-

comes difficult, and when you run with two less players, it becomes more difficult. The players knew how to focus and what to do. I am grateful to the players for their concentration, calmness and good knowledge, and in the end they got their reward which was winning the game," added the Portuguese.

The victory means Sepahan – now on 10 points – is in pole position to progress as one of the three runners-up, though Morais and his men will even fancy their chances of winning the group next week, when playing away to Al Ittihad. The Saudi club defeated Uzbekistan's AGMK 2-1, thanks to Moroccan Abderrazak Hamdallah's first-half brace, to stay atop the table with 12 points.

"Today's game is over. Ittihad is another game and another team. They have an advantage over us and we need to organize, analyze and be able to give our best.

"If we give our best and that's enough, I'm happy. If it is not enough, I am still happy."



LeBron suffers worst defeat in NBA career as Embiid, 76ers rout Lakers

AP – LeBron James never endured a lopsided basketball defeat like the one he suffered with Los Angeles in Philadelphia.

James has lost big before. His Miami Heat once got trounced by 36 points in the NBA Finals. The Indiana Pacers beat James and the Lakers by 42 in 2019.

But this blowout was an all-timer: By the time Joel Embiid clinched a triple-double in the third quarter, the 76ers were on their way to a 138-94 win over the Lakers on Monday night, the 44-point loss now the worst in James' career that dates to 2003.

"What needs to change in order for that to not happen again? A lot," James said, without elaboration.

The miserable milestones piled up for the Lakers. It was their worst loss to the 76ers in 290 games in the series.

It was so bad, James didn't even grab a rebound.

OK, one more: The 76ers beat the Lakers for the seventh straight time.

"That's my favorite team," Embiid said, again noting he learned of basketball

through Kobe Bryant. "Any time I play against them, you want to get the win. But I do it every night anyways against every other team."

The box score tells part of the story. The 76ers hit 22 3-pointers to just seven for the Lakers, and even when Embiid sat out the entire fourth quarter, the 76ers still outscored them 40-14.

The reigning NBA MVP, Embiid finished with 30 points, 11 rebounds and 11 assists for his sixth career triple-double. It was Embiid's first of the season and his seventh career game with 10-plus assists.

Embiid's anticipated showdown with James never really materialized. James scored 18 points in 29 minutes but nothing he did could make a dent in the 76ers' lead. He has now played more minutes than any player in NBA history, with playoff time included.

"That doesn't mean much to me," James said.

Tyrese Maxey scored 31 points for the 76ers. Anthony Davis had 17 points and 11 rebounds for the Lakers.

76ers' Joel Embiid (21) goes up for a basket during an NBA victory over the Lakers in Philadelphia, PA, US, on November 27, 2023.

● MATT SLOCUM/AP

IAEA chief: Tehran possesses no nuclear arms

International Desk

International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) chief Rafael Grossi has said Tehran possesses no nuclear arms, expressing concern about some of its nuclear capabilities.

"Iran does not have nuclear weapons, but it has certain nuclear capabilities that are a source of concern," Grossi told FRANCE 24 in an interview.

Grossi said that there are many questions about Iran's nuclear program that the agency and the country have tried to solve, adding that the two sides have solved some cases while some other issues are still outstanding.

He acknowledged that after the United States' withdrawal from the nuclear deal known as the Joint Compre-

hensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in 2018, the agreement "entered a sort of a limbo," with Iran taking some retaliatory measures "by ceasing to abide by this agreement, thereby, reopening the possibility they would do a number of things which could be of some concern".

"Iran is not a nuclear weapon state," the IAEA chief asserted, clarifying further that "Iran is a party to the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT)".

Turning to the upcoming COP28, the UN Climate Change Conference, Grossi was thrilled to share the key role nuclear energy has been playing in the world's efforts to protect the environment, battle climate change, and transition to cleaner energy across the globe.

"For the first time, at the COP, the countries that use nuclear energy are going to say, 'nuclear energy is part of the solution we really need,'" he said.



Iran finalizes deal on Russian Su-35 jets, choppers

Iran has finalized arrangements for the delivery of Russian-made Sukhoi Su-35 fighter jets and helicopters, and jet trainers, said the deputy defense minister on Tuesday.

As Tehran and Moscow forge closer military relations, Brigadier General Mahdi Farahi said plans have been finalized for Sukhoi Su-35 fighter jets, Mil Mi-28 attack helicopters, and Yak-130 jet trainers to join the combat units of the Iranian Armed Forces, Tasnim news agency reported.

He said those three advanced military aircraft will be definitely at Iran's disposal and the process is underway.

The general noted that Iran has the strongest fleet of military helicopters in the region, in terms of quantity, and has upgraded the capabilities of the chopper after carrying out several projects.

Iran hasn't acquired any new fighter aircraft in recent years, other than a few Russian MiG-29 Fulcrum fighters in the 1990s.

Iran and Russia have

signed major deals to boost their economic, trade, energy and military cooperation.

In September, the Iranian Air Force received its first Russian-made Yak-130 jet trainers.

Developed by Russia's Yakovlev and Aermacchi, the Yak-130 is a subsonic two-seat jet trainer and light combat aircraft.

The advanced aircraft would allow Iranian military pilots to undergo training in operating 4+ and fifth-generation fighter jets, like Sukhoi Su-57.

FM: US sought Iran's help to contain Gaza war

National Desk

Iran has received a flurry of messages from the US over the past weeks to help prevent a spillover of the Gaza war, Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian said.

When asked in an interview with Qatar-based Al Jazeera television network if there were communication channels with the US to ensure the prevention of the spread of the war, Amir-Abdollahian said his country has received messages through diplomatic channels, explicitly conveyed via the Swiss Embassy in Tehran, which safeguards US interests.

"The Americans consistently emphasized in their messages that they were not seeking to expand the scope of the conflict. We responded that they effectively escalated the war by aligning with the Israeli regime and extensively supplying weapons and financial support to Tel Aviv.

He also said the recent expansion of the conflict in the region in the past weeks is seen as a natural response by resistance forces against this unilateral action and the full military support of the US for Israeli attacks, resulting in the killing of Palestinian women and children.

"It is important that the aggression and crimes must halt and that the temporary cease-fire must become a permanent one. Otherwise, the region will face new conditions," he said.

The four-day cease-fire in Gaza, which expired on Monday, was extended for two more days. It led to a cessation of Israel's devastating war on Gaza as well as a swap of Palestinians incarcerated in Israeli jails and captives held by Hamas.

Elsewhere in his interview, Amir-Abdollahian said Iran had no proxy groups in the region, adding that resistance movements are operating to protect the interests of their own countries, preserve regional security, and defend the Arab-Muslim Ummah.

"Hamas is a reality that is rooted inside Palestine. Hamas is part of the Palestinian resistance. We believe that the future of Gaza will be decided by the Palestinian people and resistance."

The Iranian foreign minister also described Lebanon's Hezbollah as one of the most powerful resistance groups in the region.

The US and some Western countries sent 28 messages to Hezbollah in the six past weeks, urging the resistance movement to exercise restraint and prevent the expansion of the Gaza war, he said.

Israel not letting enough fuel into Gaza: EU

Disease could be bigger killer than bombs: WHO

International Desk

Israeli restrictions on fuel supplies to Gaza are hampering aid deliveries and humanitarian access required under a UN resolution, an EU commissioner, Janez Lenarcic, said Tuesday.

Lenarcic - who is in charge of crisis management - was speaking as the EU countries and aid organizations scrambled to provide relief to Gaza's 2.3 million population under a truce agreed by Israel and Hamas.

"We are calling for the in-

crease of fuel supplies to the (Gaza) strip," Lenarcic told journalists in Brussels. "The humanitarian access should be based on the needs, and not on some restrictions," he said.

Much of Gaza's population has been displaced by Israel's war, and the narrow coastal territory's health system has been brought to its knees, while water, food, medicine and power supplies have been all but exhausted.

Israel launched its war on Hamas in retaliation for

the movement's October 7 attack on Israeli cities close to Gaza, which Israel says killed 1,200 people.

Authorities in Gaza say the relentless Israeli bombing and ground offensive has killed 15,000 people, thousands of them children.

Lenarcic said aid deliveries to Gaza were encountering two bottlenecks.

One is that trucks needing to enter Gaza via the Rafah crossing with Egypt - the only entry not giving onto Israeli territory - had to undergo screening at a point



90 minutes' drive away. The other is that Israel is allowing only restricted amounts of fuel to go into Gaza which are "still not sufficient for the needs" of the territory.

Critical infrastructure in the besieged territory has been crippled by fuel and supply shortages and targeted attacks on hospitals and United Nations facilities.

Bigger killer

The World Health Organization (WHO) has said more people could die from disease than from bombings in the Gaza Strip if the health and sanitation systems are not repaired.

Margaret Harris, a spokesperson for the WHO described the collapse of Shifa Hospital in northern Gaza as a "tragedy" and voiced

concern about the detention of some of its medical staff by Israeli forces who took over the complex earlier this month.

Her remarks came a day after Israel and Hamas agreed to extend an initial four-day truce which has facilitated the release of dozens of people from both sides. It has also helped surge in humanitarian aid delivery into the Gaza Strip, which has been under a total siege by the Israeli regime since the beginning of the conflict on October 7.

Short truce

United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres described the extended truce as "a glimpse of hope and humanity," but warned it was not enough time to meet the aid needs

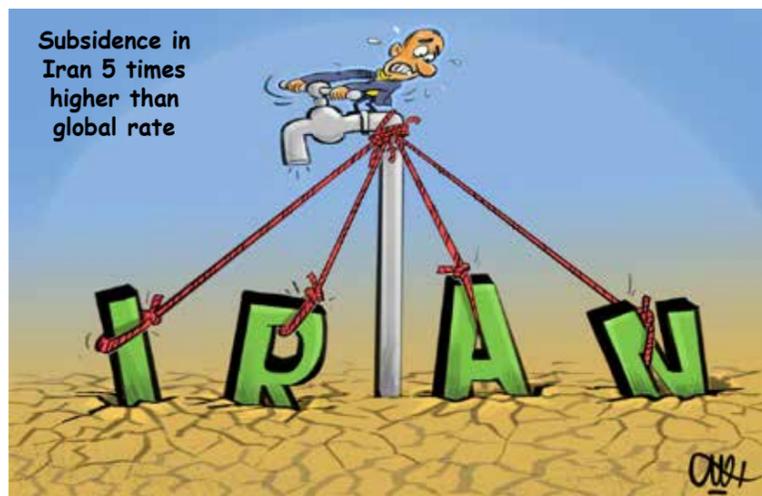


A convoy of trucks carrying fuel and aid drive in Gaza City's Zeitoun district on November 25, 2023. **MAHMUD HAMS/AFP**

of the Gaza Strip. Mediator Qatar said on Monday that the initial four-day truce had been extended by two days, continuing a pause in seven weeks of warfare that has killed thousands and laid waste to the Palestinian territory.

"I strongly hope that this will enable us to increase even more the humanitarian aid to the people in Gaza that are suffering so much - knowing that even with that additional amount of time, it will be impossible to satisfy all the dramatic needs of the population," Guterres told reporters.

Mohammad Ali Rajabi
Cartoonist



Subsidence in Iran five times higher than global standards



Social Desk

The Director General of Geodetic and Land Mapping of Iranian Mapping Organization has raised concerns about the growing number of land subsidence cases in Iran, particularly in the Kerman Province.

"We need to take this warning seriously," said Abdolreza Sa'adat Mirmoqaddam, IRNA reported. During a meeting of the infrastructure affairs working group in Arak, Markazi Province, he emphasized the importance of preventing the spread of land subsidence into cities. He mentioned that Isfahan and Arak are already experiencing the encroachment of land subsidence from surrounding areas, necessitating appropriate measures to combat this phenomenon.

Mirmoqaddam noted that Markazi Province is affected by land subsidence by approximately five percent, slightly higher than the national average of 2.70 percent. In Arak city, the highest subsidence rate is recorded at 15.8 tenths of centimeters per year within an area of approximately 450 square kilometers.

The director general highlighted the urgency of taking preventive measures to stop the subsidence from reaching the inner city of Arak. He also pointed out other affected cities in the province, including Saveh and Komijan, where varying degrees of subsidence have been reported. Currently, around 300 plains in Iran are facing a crisis of land subsidence, with some areas reaching critical stages that can lead to the formation of sinkholes.

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Address: 208, Khorramshahr Ave., Tehran, Iran

- Editorial Dept. Tel: +98 21 84711171
- ICPI Publisher: +98 21 88548892-5
- Advertising Dept. Tel: +98 21 88500601
- & Email: irandaily@iranagahiha.com
- Website: www.irandaily.ir
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The hunting bird is exceptionally popular in Persian Gulf Arab countries

Iran's saker falcon population at risk

Social Desk

Each year, between 6,000 to 12,000 mammals and birds are captured alive in Iran and are brought to the market or smuggled out of the country, announced the deputy director of natural environment and biodiversity at Iran's Department of the Environment (DoE).

"The number is high, and the majority of these captured animals leave the country," said Hassan Akbari, according to IRNA.

During the inaugural meeting on the management and prevention of wildlife species smuggling, held on Sunday, November 26, Akbari identified four valuable native species in Iran, namely the Falcon, Saker Falcon, Peregrine Falcon, and Bustard, which have the highest smuggling

statistics.

He expressed concern about the saker falcon's declining population, emphasizing that its situation is worse than that of the cheetah, with a significant decrease worldwide, pushing it to the brink of extinction.

"These birds are particularly sought after by Arabs from Persian Gulf countries, resulting in a sharp decline in their population," Akbari said. He pointed out the importance of leveraging international treaties to demand action from Persian Gulf countries.

The environmental official described the saker falcon's behavior as a remarkable phenomenon of nature, noting its incredible speed of over 200 km/h during attacks. He stressed the importance of these birds in main-

taining balance in nature and pointed out that most saker falcons are smuggled from Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iran. "Unfortunately, these birds often suffer severe injuries during capture and are sometimes kept in plastic tubes by smugglers."

Akbari also shed light on the fact that Iran has become a destination for the smuggling of ornamental birds entering the country through the eastern borders.

The DoE deputy attributed the surge in wildlife trafficking to poverty in local communities and a lack of awareness about the consequences of such activities. Moreover, Iran's vast territory, paired with the prevalence of live capturing animals across various regions, contributes to the difficulty in apprehending smugglers.

Akbari further highlighted that local individuals are hired for the live capturing of animals, which has led to the formation of an illegal market for wildlife trade, particularly in Tehran. He emphasized the difficulty of dealing with the legal aspects of wildlife smuggling and the need for stronger deterrent laws and increased cooperation from judges.

"As long as the Khalij-e Fars Wildlife Market remains active in Tehran, it would be challenging to tackle the smugglers," he said.

He suggested that training programs, enhanced coordination with law enforcement agencies, and intelligence cooperation in apprehending wildlife smuggling ringleaders can effectively reduce such illegal activities.

Regarding biodiversity, Ak-

bari revealed that Iran is one of the world's 20 richest countries in terms of biodiversity, with 8,660 identified plant species, one-third of which are endemic.

Iran has 1.5 million hectares of wetlands and 13.5 million hectares of protected reserves. However, the decrease in wildlife populations is attributed to factors such as illegal hunting, road accidents, invasive species, wildlife diseases, and climate change, as well as land use changes and vegetation destruction.

Wildlife smuggling ranks as the fourth largest illegal trade globally, with Iran experiencing the highest number of wildlife smuggling cases and discoveries in provinces such as Bushehr, Hormozgan, South Khorasan, and Sistan and Baluchestan.

All Alone

There is a growing concern about the increasing number of single elderly individuals in Iran

Social Desk

In the past, grandchildren couldn't wait for the hours to pass until it was time to meet their grandparents again. Things were very different, as elders played important roles in young people's lives, either making decisions for them or helping them make all the big decisions of their lives.

Today, however, many elderly people are left alone, leading to increasing loneliness among them. In Iran, there are 80,000 unmarried elderly individuals, and this number is projected to exceed 2.5 million in the next decade.

Loneliness among the elderly poses risks to their mental and physical health, including depression and dementia. Efforts to address this issue in our country have been lacking, and the welfare and social security system have not effectively supported the elderly. Abandonment, property theft,

violence, and even murder are some of the consequences faced by lonely seniors.

To alleviate these challenges, comprehensive policies and programs are needed to enhance the well-being and social integration of the elderly. Upholding Article 29 of the Constitution, addressing declining social capital, and tackling institutionalized poverty are crucial steps. It is essential to act now to prevent this issue from becoming a crisis as the aging population continues to grow.

In an interview with ISNA, Hassan Mousavi Chelak, head of Iran's National Association of Social Workers, discussed the longstanding concern of population aging in Iran, primarily attributed to increased life expectancy and declining fertility rates.

"This issue has been addressed through population and family policies, as seen in the establishment of the National Council of

the Elderly and the national document on the elderly in the Ministry of Health," he said.

The aging population challenge has become more significant in recent years due to prolonged life expectancy and reduced marriages and childbirth. While measures have been taken to support families and the younger population, solutions for the growing number of unmarried elderly individuals, particularly in rural areas, remain unaddressed.

Mousavi Chelak further pointed out Iran's current demographic window, which presents opportunities for economic growth. However, factors like declining fertility rates and challenges related to marriage have led to a rise in the elderly population, blocking the full potential of this demographic window.

"The position of the elderly in families and society has evolved over time, with disparities in the

care provided, especially in urban areas. Addressing the challenges faced by the elderly, particularly those who are single or unmarried, is crucial."

According to the official, comprehensive policies and programs must be developed to enhance their well-being and social integration, ensuring they continue to play a vital role in society. Mousavi Chelak pointed out the inefficiency of the welfare and social security system, expressing concerns about the livelihood and access to essential services for the elderly.

"Article 29 of the Constitution guarantees social security rights, but its effective implementation remains a challenge," he noted. Mousavi Chelak went on to highlight the consequences of elderly individuals being alone, including abandonment, property theft, violence, and even murder. Loneliness among the elderly leads to decreased attention and inter-



actions, increased risk of mental disorders and depression, and a distressing sense of isolation. He also stressed the need for policies that alleviate the worries associated with aging, addressing the inefficiency of the welfare and security system, changes in family structures, and communication patterns.

In terms of solutions, Mousavi Chelak emphasized the need for the welfare and social security system to prioritize the needs of elderly citizens. The social support and social health systems should be adequately prepared to

meet these needs and effectively respond to elderly-related problems.

"There's a need to address the decline in social capital, and combating institutionalized poverty are areas that require attention and action."

Mousavi Chelak urged proactive measures to address the challenges faced by the elderly population, emphasizing the need to avoid allowing problems to escalate into crises. With the aging population projected to increase significantly in the next 30 years, it is crucial to tackle this issue before it becomes a crisis.