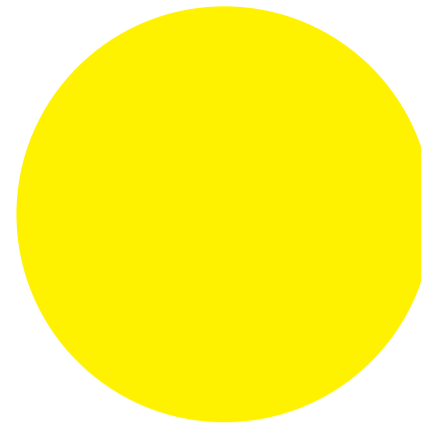




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Iran's President Ebrahim Raisi (C-L) and Russia's President Vladimir Putin (C-R) walk together following a meeting in the Kremlin in Moscow on December 7, 2023. **AFP**



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Taxidermy Olaf

The canine detective participated in 1,600 operations during his 9-year tenure with the Iranian police, uncovering a total of 10,200 kilograms of drugs.

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Iran, Oman mull trade in local currencies

The Governor of the Central Bank of Iran and Oman's Minister of Commerce, Industry, and Investment Development emphasized the importance of strengthening monetary ties between the countries by using their national currencies in commercial transactions rather than the US dollar.

CBI Chief Mohammad Reza Farzin highlighted the historical context of economic ties between the two countries, stating, "We welcome any measure that leads to the expansion of monetary and banking cooperation between Iran and Oman," Tasnim news agency reported.

Farzin emphasized the importance of bolstering monetary and banking connections alongside other bilateral relations. He suggested specialized sessions between banking and economic bodies as a means to increase financial transactions, acknowledging new prospects in recent Iran-Oman relations.

Oman's Minister of Commerce, Industry, and Investment Development Qais bin Mohammed Al Yousef, for his part, emphasized strengthening monetary and banking relations to ease trade, pointing to Oman and Iran's economic potentials.

Al Yousef highlighted the significance of using national currencies in economic collaborations, noting a 41-percent trade volume growth in the current year's first eight months.

He stressed the importance of infrastructure development and Omani investment participation in Iranian projects, particularly in the energy and gas sectors. He also expressed Oman's readiness to boost economic cooperation through various methods, emphasizing the necessity of financial transfers to achieve mutual investments and collaborations.

In November, top Iranian and Omani trade officials held a meeting in Muscat to discuss the implementation process of mutual agreements previously signed between the two countries. The meeting was held between Iran's Secretary of Supreme Council of Free Industrial-Trade and Special Economic Zones Hojatollah Abdolmaleki and Oman's Chairman of the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones Ali bin Masoud Al Sunaidy.

In the meeting, the two officials exchanged viewpoints about how to implement the trade agreements.

In January, 2022, Abdolmaleki had stressed the necessity of accelerating the process of signing a memorandum of understanding on cooperation in free trade zones.

According to Abdolmaleki, Iran-Oman cooperation in the free zones would pave the way for further imports and exports and an increase in employment and investment.

President inaugurates highway, hospital in Alborz Province



Economy Desk

Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi inaugurated a highway and a 260-bed hospital along with some other projects during his visit to Alborz Province on Friday.

During his visit, Raisi, who was accompanied by some of his cabinet members and their deputies, was welcomed by the province's people and officials and inaugurated several major

projects, according to president.

Speaking to the people of the province, the Iranian president stated that the provincial trips to different cities are a unique opportunity to get to know the issues, problems, and capabilities of different regions.

The president said the government has identified and prioritized the major development needs of the province during the meetings with local officials

and experts, and will closely monitor the progress of the previously-approved projects in the province.

Raisi underlined the significant role of local officials in the success of the approved projects in the province, and noted that provincial officials and authorities should strongly pursue the fulfillment of their tasks along with a follow-up on the completion of the projects in their affiliated areas.

Iran ready to complete construction of Tehran-Damascus railway: Roads minister

Iran's minister of roads and urban development said his ministry is ready to complete the construction operation of the Tehran-Damascus railway.

Mehrdad Bazrpash, who is also the chairman of the Iran-Syria Joint Economic Cooperation Commission, expressed his satisfaction with the pace of implementation of agreements previously inked between Tehran and Damascus.

He made the remarks in a meeting with Syria's economy and

foreign trade minister.

Bazrpash proposed setting up a joint permanent working committee in the field of energy in order to pursue the implementation of agreements in the fields of gas and electricity.

The minister pointed to the necessity of completion of a rail line between Tehran and Damascus and acknowledged that the Islamic Republic of Iran Railway is fully prepared to conduct feasibility studies for the reconstruction of the rail lines dam-

aged during the war in Syria.

He also announced the operationalization of the launch of a bank branch, insurance company, and joint free trade zones between the two countries.

Syria's Economy and Foreign Trade Minister Muhammad Samer al-Khalil, for his part, hailed the effective measures the officials of the two countries have taken in launching a free trade agreement (FTA) and cooperation in tourism and transit.



Ashgabat, Ankara discussing shipments of Turkmen gas to Turkey via Iran

The possibility of supplying Turkmen natural gas to the Turkish market via Iran was discussed at the meeting of the intergovernmental Turkmen-Turkish Commission on Economic Cooperation in Ashgabat, said the Turkmen Foreign Ministry's website.

During the meeting, a wide range of issues related to the development of cooperation between Ashgabat and Ankara in the energy sector was discussed, Interfax reported.

"In particular, the parties discussed the possibility of supplying Turkmen natural gas to the Turkish market. With this in mind, the relevance of the project for shipping gas from Turkmenistan to Turkey through Iran was emphasized,"

the Turkmen Foreign Ministry said in a statement.

"Noting the promise of the above-mentioned project, the sides agreed to begin negotiations in the near future at the level of heads of relevant agencies and companies," the statement said.

Deputy Prime Minister Batyr Atdayev headed the Turkmen delegation, while the Turkish delegation was led by Turkish Vice President Cevdet Yilmaz. Members of the commission outlined a number of steps to diversify interaction in all promising areas. Following the meeting of the commission, a final protocol was signed, the Turkmen Foreign Ministry said.

Issues related to Turkmen gas shipments to Turkey were recently discussed during a meeting between the presidents of the two countries, Serdar Berdimuhamedov and Recep

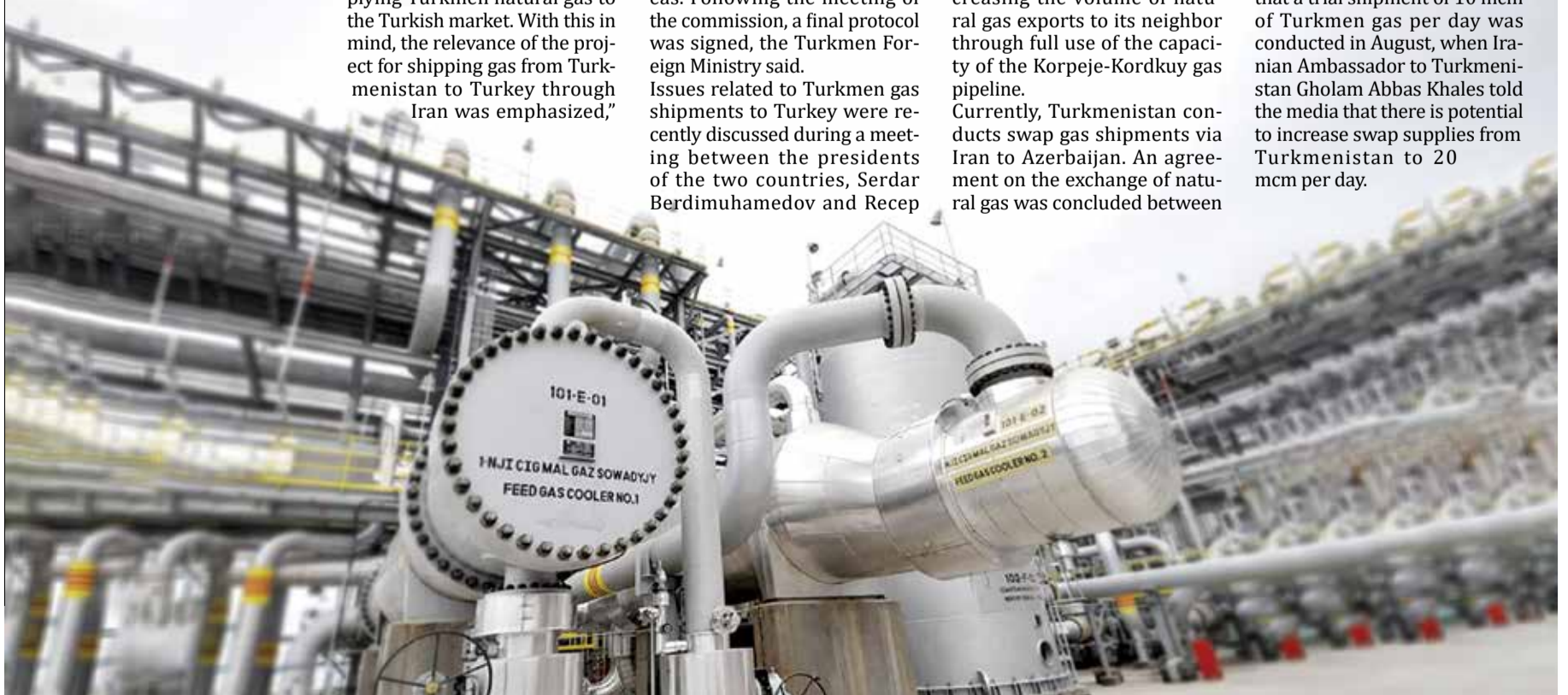
Tayyip Erdogan in Ankara. They discussed transporting gas to Turkey through the Caspian Sea. In this context, the importance of cooperation between Ashgabat, Ankara and Azerbaijan, which has access to the Caspian Sea and shares a common border with Iran, was mentioned. Turkmenistan and Iran, at a meeting of the intergovernmental commission on economic cooperation held on November 18, confirmed their readiness to develop partnership in the gas sector.

Ashgabat is interested in increasing the volume of natural gas exports to its neighbor through full use of the capacity of the Korpjeje-Kordkuy gas pipeline. Currently, Turkmenistan conducts swap gas shipments via Iran to Azerbaijan. An agreement on the exchange of natural gas was concluded between

Iran, Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan in November 2021. The agreement provides for Iran to supply 1.5-2 bcm of Turkmen gas to Azerbaijan in exchange for the supply of a similar volume from Turkmenistan.

In August 2023, the General Director of the National Iranian Gas Company (NIGC), Majid Chegeni, speaking about the gas swap agreement with Turkmenistan, said that the volume of gas that Iran receives from them has increased from 4.5 mcm to 8 mcm per day.

At the same time, he reported that a trial shipment of 10 mcm of Turkmen gas per day was conducted in August, when Iranian Ambassador to Turkmenistan Gholam Abbas Khaled told the media that there is potential to increase swap supplies from Turkmenistan to 20 mcm per day.



Explore Kandolus village, a sanctuary of beauty, history and culture

Iranica Desk

Kandolus is a remarkably beautiful village with a rich history spanning several thousand years. Nestled in the lush foothills of the majestic Alborz Mountains in the Kajoor region, this village offers a unique experience for travelers who have explored various villages in Iran. The first thing that captivates visitors is the village's unwavering commitment to cleanliness and adherence to health principles. Every corner is adorned with well-placed garbage bins, and all residents take pride in preserving the pristine beauty of their surroundings.

The roots of Kandolus village can be traced back to different civilizations throughout history, and it proudly showcases remnants of pre-Christian, pre-Islamic, and post-Islamic eras. As one of the oldest human settlements in the region, Kandolus sits gracefully in the foothills of the Alborz Mountains, acting as a gateway to the enchanting Zanoos valley, IRNA wrote.

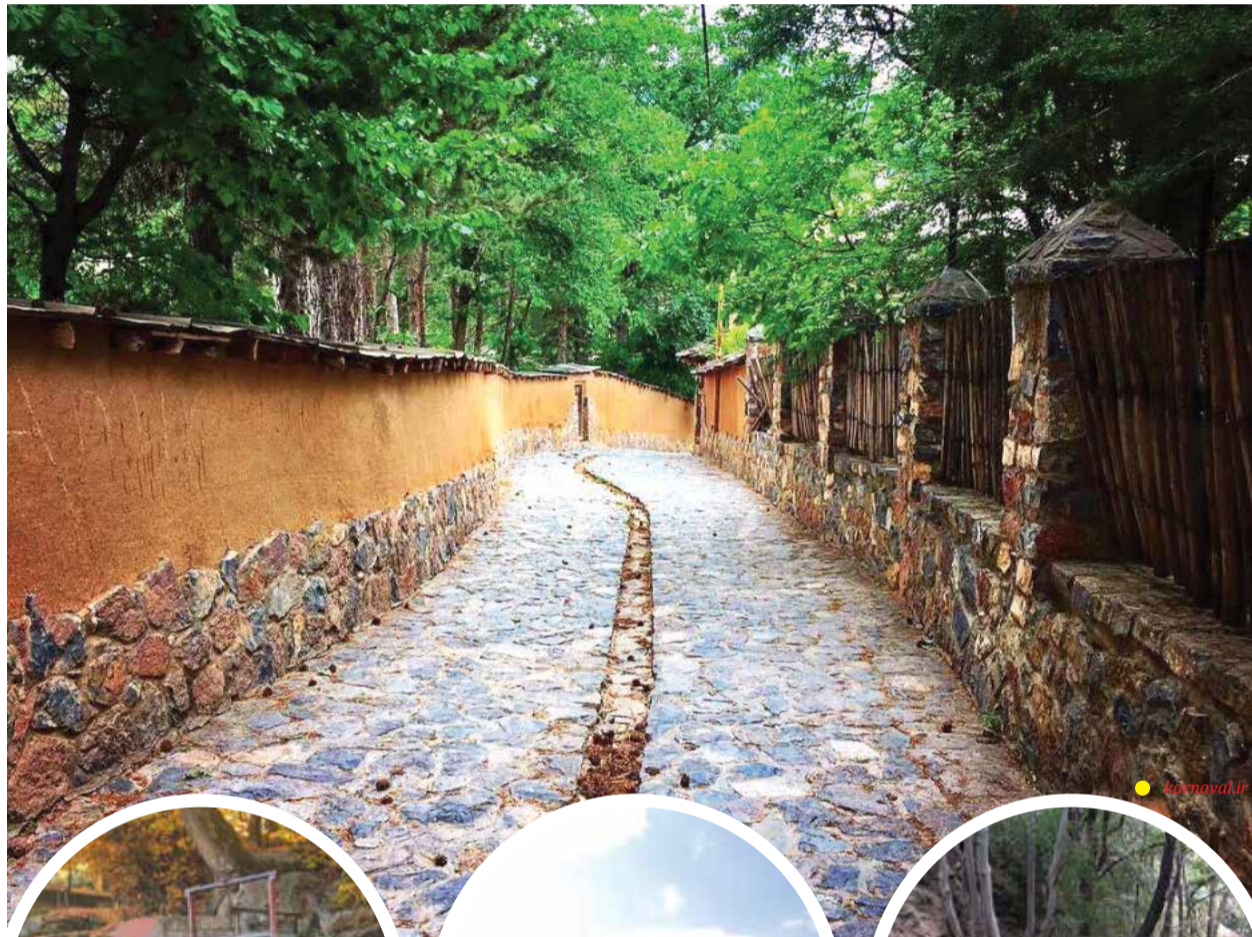
For centuries, the villagers have been engaged in woodcutting and charcoal production during the winter months, while focusing on farming during the summer. However, in line with forest conservation laws, the residents have diversified their occupations to include tailoring and carpentry. The village's handicrafts are diverse and exquisite, ranging from the intricate weaving of *ajim* (a type of traditional Iranian fabric) to the creation of knitted socks, gloves, embroidered floral woolen sweaters, and even the art of felt-making. Musical traditions also flourish in Kandolus, with the *Ney*, *Daf*, and *Sorna* holding deep historical significance in the region. The *sorna*, a wind instrument made of expertly carved mulberry wood, adds its melodious notes to the village's cultural tapestry.

Remarkably, there are no beggars in Kandolus, as the locals embrace hard work and contentment. Theft, murder, and crime have never tainted the village, despite many houses remaining unoccupied for nine months of the year, their doors left open as a testament to the trust and security within the community. One of the most cherished celebrations in Kandolus is Nowruz, the Persian New Year, which is marked by special customs and traditions that bring the entire village joyously together.

Adding to Kandolus's allure is the pres-



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ence of two ethnographic museums and a medicinal plant museum, which contribute to its fame and offer visitors an immersive experience into the village's rich heritage and cultural treasures. Amidst its natural beauty, Kandolus stands as a testament to the harmony between human endeavors and the preservation of its timeless charm.

Kandolus Anthropology Museum

The Kandolus Anthropology Museum is a collection of preserved objects that are classified in various sections. These objects include rural textiles, clothing, and jewelry, sculptures, traditional paintings, metal and wooden utensils and tools, pottery and chinaware, as well as rural instruments and tools from the second millennium BCE to the Qajar period. Written documents, manuscripts, the Qur'an, poetry collections, marriage contracts, and decrees are also part of this treasure trove.

In every corner of the museum, artworks are displayed beautifully alongside their certificates and detailed information. They serve as narrators of the culture of Mazandaran Province. In short, the Kandolus Cultural Center is an exhibition full of beauty and the history of Mazandaran's people.

Kandolus Medicinal Plants Museum

The Kandolus Medicinal Plant Museum was established in 1986 as part of the Kandolus Agricultural Complex with the goals of cultivation, breeding, production, and packaging of major medicinal and aromatic plants, as well as the production of plant essences and oils.

For the first time in Iran, a botanical garden was established on a ten-hectare land, where over 250 valuable genetic plant species were cultivated for the production and supply of various products in different fields. This collection now exports its products to most countries around the world.

Kandolus is always beautiful, but a visit to this village in the spring and summer brings a more memorable experience. From April to November, there is no trace of cold weather that could hinder the enjoyment of nature.

Furthermore, the lushness of spring, the abundance of summer, and the beauty of autumn leaves alone can make Kandolus a destination for your travel once again.

Remarkable findings uncovered at Hasanlu Hill

Iranica Desk

In the archaeological study of Suldouz Valley in West Azarbaijan Province, focusing on Hasanlu Hill, remarkable findings have been uncovered. The research team, led by Ali Sadraei, has identified and analyzed 117 historical sites spanning prehistoric, historical, and Islamic periods.

The objectives of this study are manifold. Firstly, it aims to identify satellite sites related to Hasanlu Hill, providing valuable insights for the management and preservation of this historical landmark. Additionally, the gathered information will contribute to the preparation of a dossier for the world registration of Hasanlu Hill, ensuring its recognition on a global scale. The establishment of a pottery bank at the national historical site of Hasanlu is planned, allowing researchers access to pottery collections from various areas within the Suldouz plain. This initiative will further en-



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rich our understanding of the region's rich heritage. Suldouz Valley's Cultural Landscape has long captivated human societies, thanks to its abundant water and fertile lands. Consequently, it stands as one of Iran's most archaeologically significant plains. There-

fore, studying and recognizing the cultural landscape of this valley, with a particular emphasis on the historical Hasanlu Hill, is crucial and highly significant. Located approximately 80 kilometers from Urmia, and nine kilometers from Naqadeh, Hasanlu Hill represents a remarkable

archaeological site, with a settlement history spanning 8,000 years. Notably, the discovery of a golden cup, dating back 3,000 years, on the site has garnered immense attention. Although the cup is now housed in the National Museum of Iran, it remains a testament to the historical signifi-

cance of Hasanlu Hill. Designated as a national monument in 1965, Hasanlu Hill has become a hub for scientific, technical, and research activities. Its importance is further evident by the continuous influx of both domestic and foreign tourists who visit this cap-

tivating site every year. Through this ongoing archaeological exploration, the treasures of Hasanlu Hill and the broader cultural landscape of Suldouz Valley come to life, offering a glimpse into the ancient civilizations that thrived in this vibrant region.

Injectable anti-cancer drug unveiled in Iran



IRNA

An Iranian knowledge-based company developed an injectable drug used in the treatment of a broad range of cancers.

The pharmaceutical product named "cyclophosphamide" has been unveiled by an Iranian company based in the province of Alborz, Tasnim news agency reported.

The unveiling ceremony was attended by Iranian Vice President for Science, Technology and Knowledge-Based Economy Ruhollah Dehqani Firouzabadi.

In comments at the ceremony, the head of the Science and Technology Park of Alborz, Mahdi Abbasi, pointed to the effects of the injection of the newly-developed medicine in the treatment of a wide spectrum of cancers, saying the drug is used to treat many diseases including ovarian cancer, breast cancer, blood cancer and eye cancer.

Until recently, 100 percent of Iran's demand for this widely-used drug was met through imports, Abbasi stated, noting that the mass production and supply of the homegrown drug will settle the problems facing cancer patients and prevent the high exchange rate used for importing the product.

The provision and supply of the anti-cancer drugs have always been one of the major concerns of health officials and patients in Iran, he added.

The production of cyclophosphamide inside Iran and the patients' sustainable access to this anti-cancer drug will be facilitated optimally from now on, he stated.

Cyclophosphamide is used to treat cancers of the breast, blood and lymph system, and nerves (mainly in children). Cyclophosphamide is also used for retinoblastoma - a type of eye cancer mainly in children - and multiple myeloma, cancer of the bone marrow.



Putin hosts Raisi for talks on trade

National Desk

Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi met his Russian counterpart, Vladimir Putin, in Moscow on Thursday to discuss trade and economic sectors.

During a five-hour meeting, they addressed bilateral relations, including banking and monetary affairs, transit, railways, power plant cooperation, agriculture, energy, scientific collaboration, university partnerships, technology, tourism, and industry. The ongoing situation in Gaza was also a significant topic, president. ir reported.

Both heads of state emphasized regional and international collaboration.

Raisi highlighted the strong relations between the two countries, expressing that there is definitely room for further development.

Putin also touched on growing trade and economic cooperation between the two countries, saying under the current plan, signing of a free trade agree-

ment between Iran and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) mission is on Russia's agenda.

He cited transportation and energy, noting signed contracts for railway construction and oil and gas field development.

"We also have good relations in the field of education, as Iranian and Russian students study in each other's universities, and we actively work in all fields to move forward," added Putin.

Following the bilateral meeting, a joint meeting of high-ranking economic and political delegations took place in the presence of the presidents. During this joint session, discussions and exchanges of views on mutual interests occurred.

The two countries also have closer military relations. Last month, Iran finalized arrangements for the delivery of Russian-made Sukhoi Su-35 fighter jets and helicopters, along with jet trainers. Plans for these aircraft to

join the combat units of the Iranian Armed Forces were confirmed by Iran's Deputy Defense Minister Brigadier General Mahdi Farahi.

In the Thursday meeting, President Raisi called for an immediate stop to Israeli "genocide and crimes against humanity" in the besieged Gaza Strip, Press TV reported.

"Gaza is a land where a child is martyred every ten minutes, so it is necessary to stop these bombings as soon as possible and find a quick and immediate solution," he said, adding, "What is happening in Palestine is a genocide and a crime against humanity".

"The Zionist regime's crime in Gaza is supported by the US and Western countries, and it is unfortunate that international organizations claiming to advocate human rights have lost their effectiveness," he added.

"What is afflicting humanity today is unilateralism and the unjust global system, and its manifestation can be seen in Gaza," Raisi said.

Israel sharply ramps up Gaza strikes ahead of rare UN vote

International Desk

Israeli forces squeezed Gaza's main cities Friday, ahead of an extraordinary UN bid for a cease-fire between Israel and Hamas resistance group.

The UN extraordinary bid was set for a vote on a resolution urging an immediate cease-fire in Gaza, after UN chief Antonio Guterres took the extraordinary step earlier in the week of invoking the UN charter's Article 99 to call the vote.

The Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman, in a statement on Thursday, welcomed the UN chief's move to wield his power under Article 99 of the UN Charter to urge the Security Council to halt Israel's onslaught on Gaza.

On Friday, Israel sharply ramped up strikes on the Gaza Strip, pounding the

length of the Palestinian enclave and killing hundreds in a new, expanded phase of the war that Washington said veered from Israeli promises to do more to protect civilians.

Israel's assault on Gaza that started on October 7 by Hamas's deadly attack have left at least 17,487 people dead, mostly women and children, according to the latest toll from Health Ministry in the besieged strip.

Vowing to destroy the resistance movement, Israel has relentlessly bombarded Gaza and sent in tanks and ground troops since the war began by Hamas fighters that killed about 1,200 people in Israel.

On the verge of collapse

With the vast majority of Gazans now displaced and

unable to access any aid, hospitals overrun and food running out, the main UN agency there said society was "on the verge of a full-blown collapse".

Residents and the Israeli military both reported intensified fighting in both northern areas, where Israel had previously said its troops had largely completed their tasks last month, and in the south where they launched a new assault this week.

Thomas White, Gaza head of UNRWA, the UN aid agency for Palestinians, wrote on X: "Civil order is breaking down in Gaza - the streets feel wild, particularly after dark - some aid convoys are being looted and UN vehicles stoned. Society is on the brink of full-blown collapse."

Ramy Abdu, head of the Geneva-based Euro-Med-

iterranean Human Rights Monitor, posted pictures showing severe damage to the vast medieval Great Omari Mosque, the most important landmark in Gaza's Old City, apparently hit for the first time. There was no immediate comment from the Israeli military.

US alarms

"As we stand here almost a week into this campaign into the south... it remains imperative that Israel put a premium on civilian protection," US Secretary of State Antony Blinken told a press conference in Washington on Thursday.

"And there does remain a gap between... the intent to protect civilians and the actual results that we're seeing on the ground." In a phone call Thursday with Israeli Prime Minister



Smoke rises over Gaza, amid the ongoing war on the besieged strip, as seen from southern Israel, on December 8, 2023. HASSAN SHIRVANI

Benjamin Netanyahu, US President Joe Biden, whose country provides billions of dollars in military aid to Israel, "emphasized the critical need to protect civilians and to separate the civilian population from Hamas," the White House said.

Biden also called for "corridors that allow people to move safely from defined areas of hostilities."

With the fighting now extended across both halves of the Gaza Strip at the same time, residents say it has become almost impossible to find refuge. Israel says it is providing more detail than ever about which areas are safe and how to reach them, and blames Hamas for harm that befalls civilians by operating among them, which Hamas denies.

Mohammad Ali Rajabi
Cartoonist



Syrian PM in Tehran to boost cooperation

Syrian Prime Minister Hussein Arnous began his three-day official visit to Tehran to discuss ways to promote economic cooperation with Iran.

Heading a high-ranking delegation, Arnous arrived in the Iranian capital on Friday evening, receiving a warm welcome from Iranian Minister of Justice Amin Hossein Rahimi.

The visits takes place at the invitation of Iran's First Vice President Mohammad Mokhber, who will officially welcome the Syrian official today, IRNA reported. Mohammad Jamshidi, the Iranian president's deputy



chief of staff for political affairs, said Arnous plans to take part in the 15th meeting of the High Committee of Iran-Syria Economic Cooperation. He would also hold talks with President Ebrahim Raisi, Parliament Speaker Mohammad Baqer



Syrian Prime Minister Hussein Arnous (2nd L) is welcomed by Iranian Minister of Justice Amin Hossein Rahimi (2nd R) upon his arrival in Tehran on November 8, 2023. HASSAN SHIRVANI/IRNA

Qalibaf and Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council Ali Akbar Ahmadian.

In line with the implementation of agreements inked during President Raisi's visit to Damascus in May and the topics agreed upon, the Iranian and Syrian authorities would sign documents for the enhancement of relations of cooperation, Jamshidi said.

On May 3, Raisi and his Syrian counterpart Bashar al-Assad signed an agreement on "long-term strategic comprehensive cooperation" between the two countries.

Yemen, a new front against Israel



By Javad
Mohammad Ali
Staff writer

Following Israel's brutal onslaught on the Gaza Strip and the killing of thousands of Palestinians in response to Hamas's October 7 attack, anti-Israel sentiment has once again bubbled up in the Middle East region.

By launching strikes on Israel's positions and targeting its assets, resistance groups, which represent a large part of people in the region, are reminding Israel that they still consider it an occupying regime, and that they will not be silent over its atrocities in the region.

Crimes committed by Israel and its main ally, the United States, throughout the decades have forced the resistance movements to gradually strengthen their military powers. Now, the time has come to flex their muscles and show the Israeli regime that they will not forsake the Palestinians, and will not let Israel do whatever it wants.

Resistance groups are now active in many regional countries including Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, Palestine and Yemen, which has now become one of the main fronts in the region of resistance against Israel and the US.

Like other Middle Eastern countries, Yemen has also become furious at the new Israeli atrocities in the Palestinian territories, which has claimed the lives of more than 17,000 Palestinians just in two months.

Years of fighting against military aggression by Saudi Arabia have turned the resistance movement in Yemen into a powerful military force in the region.

Along with its brave fighters, the Yemeni Army is now in possession of ballistic missiles and long range combat drones, which are capable of hitting Israel.

From the early days of the conflict in the Gaza Strip, the Ansarullah group, which overthrew the government and gained control of the country in 2014, following the Arab Spring uprisings in the region, has time and again warned the Israeli regime over its crimes in the Palestinian territories.

Attacks on Israel

Yahya Saree, military spokesman for the Yemeni Armed Forces, announced on October 31 that the movement launched a "large number" of rockets, ballistic missiles and drones towards Israel.

More strikes would follow "until the Israeli aggression stops," he said.

By sending missile and drone strikes against Israel, Yemen's Army aims to send a message of support for Palestinians and a signal to Israel that it can now reach it, and that they will not hesitate to use this capability in the future.

Some Yemeni missiles have the capability of reaching Israel despite a long distance between Yemen and the Palestinian territories. Israel has forced to deploy its "Arrow" defense system which is designed to take out ballistic missiles outside of the Earth's atmosphere.

It has also deployed missile boats that could also indicate that Israel may be concerned about the possibility of attacks from Yemen on Israeli ships passing through the Red Sea.

Extra cost for Israel

Confronting the resistance groups' attacks has inflicted extra cost on Israel's regime which is heavily reliable on military assistance from the United States.

On November 19, Yemen's Armed Forces seized an Israeli ship named the "Galaxy Leader" and detained dozens of its crew members in the Red Sea following warnings by the Ansarullah movement that the force will target any Israeli ship crossing the country's territorial waters.

Meanwhile, the Yemeni Armed Forces took responsibility for attacking two ships in the Red Sea on December 3, saying the country was blocking Israeli ships from passing through the Red Sea until Israel halted its military operations in Gaza.

The US Central Command claimed that American forces shot down ballistic missiles and drones used by the Yemenis in the attack.

The US, which is concerned about the spill-over of the conflict in Gaza, has sent two aircraft carriers and supporting ships to the region to support the Israeli regime.

Yemen is effectively setting their sights on one of the world's busiest shipping routes, where goods and oil are transported in large quantities.

By focusing on Bab al-Mandeb – and launching earlier attacks in the Red Sea and southern Israel – the resistance movement in Yemen appears to be trying to impose hefty financial costs on Israel, in addition to undermining its security if it chooses to prolong the war.

The Palestinian cause is important to Yemen, the full entry of which in the conflict could be concerning for Israel, as it is already engaged in border fighting with the Hezbollah resistance group in southern Lebanon, which has already entered the war.

In addition to the attacks by Hezbollah and Yemenis, other resistance groups have carried out dozens of attacks against US military forces spread throughout the Middle East in recent weeks.

If the conflict escalates into a regional war, the Ansarullah movement, which is part of the "axis of resistance," will most likely keep launching more missiles and drones at Israel.

Galaxy Leader cargo ship is escorted by Yemeni boats in the Red Sea in this photo released November 20, 2023.
REUTERS

Bayat shows contradictions in Habermas' views on Gaza

Jürgen Habermas has been widely criticized for his recent statements on the Gaza war. In this open letter, renowned Iranian-American sociologist Asef Bayat sets out to show how Habermas fails to apply his own ideas to the case of Israel-Palestine. It is a critique from within the logic of Habermasian thought. This gives it a force that will — or should — resonate with Habermas and his defenders. It is more of an invitation than a polemic. It is an attempt to engage, and New Lines Magazine published the full letter in hopes that it will do just that. A slice of that letter is reprinted below.

Dear Professor Habermas,

I read your co-authored "Principles of Solidarity" statement on the Gaza war with more than a little concern and alarm. The spirit of the statement broadly admonishes those in Germany who speak out, through statements or protests, against Israel's relentless bombardment of Gaza in response to Hamas' attacks of Oct. 7. It implies that these criticisms of Israel are intolerable because support for the state of Israel is a fundamental part of German political culture, "for which Jewish life and Israel's right to exist are central elements worthy of special protection". The principle of "special protection" is rooted in Germany's exceptional history, in the "mass crimes of the Nazi era". It is admirable that you and your country's political-intellectual class are adamant about sustaining the memory of that historic horror so that similar horrors will not befall the Jews (and, I assume and hope, other peoples). But your formulation of and fixation on German exceptionalism leaves practically no room for conversation about Israel's policies and Palestinian rights. When you confound criticisms of "Israel's actions" with "anti-Semitic reactions," you are encouraging silence and stifling debate.

academic, I am stunned to learn that in German universities — even within classrooms, which should be free spaces for discussion and inquiry — almost everyone remains silent when the subject of Palestine comes up. Newspapers, radio, and television are almost entirely devoid of open and meaningful debate on the subject. Indeed, scores of people, including Jews who have called for a ceasefire, have been fired from positions, had their events and awards canceled, and been accused of "anti-Semitism." How are people supposed to deliberate about what is right and what is wrong if they are not allowed to speak freely? What happens to your celebrated ideas of the "public sphere," "rational dialogue," and "deliberative democracy"?

The fact is that most of the critics and protests you admonish never question the principle of protecting Jewish life — and please do not confuse these rational critics of the Israeli government with the disgraceful far-right neo-Nazis or other anti-Semites, who must be vigorously condemned and confronted. Indeed, almost every statement I have read condemns Hamas attacks on Israel. These critics are not disputing the protection of Jewish life. They are

disputing the denial of Palestinian lives and Palestine's right to exist. And this is something about which your statement is tragically silent.

There is not a single reference in the statement to Israel as an occupying power or to Gaza as an open-air prison. There is nothing about this perverse disparity. This is not to speak of the everyday erasure of Palestinian life in the occupied West Bank and east Jerusalem. "Israel's actions," which you deem "justified in principle," have entailed dropping 6,000 bombs in six days on a defenseless population; well over 15,000 dead (70% of them women and children); 35,000 injured; 7,000 missing; and 1.7 million displaced — not to mention the cruelty of denying the population food, water, housing, security, and any modicum of dignity. Key infrastructures of life have vanished.

While, as your statement suggests, these may not technically amount to "genocidal intentions," United Nations officials have spoken in unequivocal terms of "war crimes," "forced displacement," and "ethnic cleansing." My concern here is not about how to judge "Israel's actions" from a legal perspective, but how to fathom this moral coldness and indifference you exhibit in the face of such staggering devastation. How many more lives should perish before they become worthy of attention? What meaning does the "obligation to respect human dignity" that your statement emphatically underlines have in the end? It is as though you fear that speaking of the suffering of Palestinians would diminish your moral commitment to Jewish lives. If so, how tragic it is that the righting of a colossal wrong committed in the past

should be tied to perpetuating another monstrous wrong in the present.

I fear that this twisted moral compass is related to the logic of German exceptionalism that you champion. Because exceptionalism, by definition, allows for not one universal standard but differential standards. Some people become more worthy humans, others less worthy, and still others unworthy. That logic shuts down rational dialogue and desensitizes moral consciousness; it erects a cognitive block that prevents us from seeing the suffering of others, impeding empathy.

But not everyone succumbs to this cognitive block and moral numbness. My understanding is that many young Germans privately express quite different views on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict from those of the country's political class. Some even participate in public protests. The young generation is exposed to alternative media and sources of knowledge and experiences different cognitive processes from the older generation. But most maintain silence in the public realm for fear of reprisal. It appears as though some kind of "hidden sphere" is emerging, ironically in democratic Germany, similar to pre-1989 Eastern Europe or under despotic rule in the Middle East today. When intimidation shuts down public expression, people tend to forge their own, alternative narratives about key social matters in private, even as they go along with the officially sanctioned views in public. Such a hidden sphere can explode when the opportunity arises.

These are unsettling times, Professor Habermas. It is precisely at such times that the wisdom, knowledge, and

above all, the moral courage of thinkers like you are most needed. Your seminal ideas about truth and communicative action, cosmopolitanism, equal citizenship, deliberative democracy, and human dignity remain immensely important. However, your Eurocentrism, German exceptionalism, and the closure of free debate about Israel and Palestine, to which you contribute, would appear to contradict these ideas. I fear that mere knowledge and awareness may not be enough. After all, how can an intellectual "know" without "understanding" and understand without "feeling," as Antonio Gramsci wondered? Only when we "feel" the suffering of one another through empathy might there be hope for our troubled world.

To quote the 13th-century Persian poet Saadi Shirazi:

Human beings are members of a whole,

In creation of one essence and soul.

If one member is afflicted with pain,

Other members uneasy will remain.

If you've no sympathy for human pain,

The name of human you cannot retain!



Philosopher Jürgen Habermas (L) and sociologist Asef Bayat
LOUISA GOULIAMAKI/AFP

Pacers, Lakers into NBA in-season final



Pacers' Myles Turner (33) blocks a shot by Bucks forward Marjon Beauchamp in Las Vegas, NV, US, on Dec. 7, 2023.
● USA TODAY SPORTS

REUTERS – Bruce Brown gave Indiana the lead for good with 6:15 remaining, Tyrese Haliburton capped a monster performance with a back-breaking 3-pointer, and the Pacers surprised the top-seeded Milwaukee Bucks 128-119 Thursday in the semifinals of the NBA's inaugural in-season tournament in Las Vegas.

The victory places the Pacers in tonight's final against the Los Angeles Lakers, who beat the New Orleans Pelicans 133-89 in Thursday's other semifinal.

Haliburton finished with a team-high 27 points and a game-high 15 assists for the Pacers, who had beaten the Boston Celtics at home in Tuesday's quarterfinals to earn the trip to Las Vegas.

Myles Turner also notched a double-double for Indiana with 26 points and 10 rebounds, while Buddy Hield grabbed a team-high 11 rebounds to go with eight points.

Going 13-for-19 from the field and 11-for-13 from the free-throw line, Giannis Antetokounmpo scored a game-high 37 points to complement a team-high 10 rebounds for the Bucks, who earned a flight west by beating the New York Knicks at home in Tuesday's quarterfinals.

Meanwhile, LeBron James recorded 30 points and eight assists to lead the Lakers to a victory over the Pelicans.

Austin Reaves had 17 points and seven assists, and Anthony Davis added 16 points and 15 rebounds for the Lakers, who won for the 11th time in their past 15 games.

Trey Murphy III scored 14 points and Zion Williamson added 13 for the Pelicans. Herbert Jones added 10 points and seven rebounds as New Orleans lost for the fourth time in its past seven games.

Brandon Ingram had just nine points on 4-of-13 shooting for the Pelicans. New Orleans hit 35.8 percent of its shots and was 7-of-31 from behind the arc.

Taurean Prince scored 15 points, D'Angelo Russell had 14 and Rui Hachimura added 12 for the Lakers, who made 54.7 percent of their shots and 17 of 35 from 3-point range.

'He is the best choice': Golmohammadi unfazed by Ivankovic return rumors

Sports Desk

Yahya Golmohammadi shrugged off rumors of the Persepolis head coach being replaced by Branko Ivankovic in the near future, describing the Croatian as "the best choice for the club."

Tuesday's 2-1 loss to Qatari champion Al Duhail at the Azadi Stadium, which led to the group stage exit for the Reds in the AFC Champions League, piled the pressure on Golmohammadi, with sections of the crowd being vocal in their chants against the manager and club chairman Alireza Darvish after the final whistle.

Recent reports in the Iranian media have suggested that Ivankovic is being considered for a dramatic return to the Persian Gulf Pro League champion's bench, once his contract with the Oman Football Association comes to an end following the conclusion of the AFC Asian Cup in February.

An ex-manager of Iran national team in the early 2000s, Ivankovic has been widely regarded as the linchpin of the Tehran Reds' dominance over the Iranian top flight in recent years, which has seen the club lift six league trophies in the previous seven seasons.

Ivankovic steered Persepolis to three league titles and a Hazfi Cup triumph, as well as a runner-up finish in the AFC Champions League, before parting ways with the Reds in 2019.

Asked about the rumors during a press conference before today's league game against Havadar, Golmohammadi said: "Some people bring up his name to



Persepolis manager Yahya Golmohammadi reacts during a 2-1 defeat against Al Duhail in the AFC Champions League at the Azadi Stadium, Tehran, Iran, on December 5, 2023.
● MOHAMMADREZA ALIMADADI/IRNA

upset me, but I don't have a problem with his return to the club. Even if he were on his way to Tehran tonight, I would make way for him right away. He is the best choice for the club."

"He has been a master to me and Persepolis owes most of its achievements in recent years to him," added Golmohammadi, who played under the Croatian at the 2006 World Cup.

The Iranian coach has en-

joyed his own fair share of success since taking over at Persepolis in January 2020, winning triple league trophies – including last season's domestic double – while leading his team to the final showpiece of the Asian elite clubs competition in his first campaign, only to suffer a 2-1 defeat against Ulsan Hyundai.

However, Golmohammadi is enduring a worst spell on the Reds bench as the

setback against Al Duhail extended the club's winless streak to six matches across all competitions.

Some pundits and former Persepolis players argue that the manager's ongoing rift with the chairman has done little to help the Reds campaign, though Golmohammadi believes the poor run is down to injuries for key players.

Iranian international center-back Morteza Poura-

liganji and midfielder Yassin Salmani will likely be out for the rest of season with the anterior cruciate ligament injuries, while Vahid Amiri has been struggling with a hamstring problem.

"Untimely injuries have cost us dearly. Morteza and Yassin were essential players in the backline and up front. Vahid has also been out for a long time, with Omid A'alishah, [Mahdi] Torabi, and [Milad] Sarlak

also missing a number of games on different occasions. Their absence has surely had a negative impact on our performances," said Golmohammadi.

Persepolis will be chasing a first victory since October 2 when taking on Havadar today, with an eye on Thursday's clash with archrival Esteghlal in what already looks to be a season-defining derby for Golmohammadi and his men.

Saudi World Cup sportswashing claims 'very shallow', sports minister says

BBC – Saudi Arabia's sports minister says claims of 'sportswashing' against the country are "very shallow", as he defended its right to host the men's football World Cup.

Speaking to the BBC in Jeddah, Prince Abdulaziz bin Turki Al Faisal said: "A lot of the people that accuse us of that haven't been to Saudi, or seen what we are doing."

Critics say unprecedented spending on sport has been used to improve the oil-producing kingdom's reputation over its human rights record and its environmental impact.

But the Saudi government insists the investment is boosting the economy, opening it up to tourism and inspiring people to be more active.

Saudi Arabia has invested around £5bn in sports since 2021, when the country's Crown Prince made it a key part of his strategy to diversify the economy, with a host of major sporting events



● MOLLY DARLINGTON/REUTERS

brought to the kingdom, including high-profile boxing and Formula 1.

The country's Public Investment Fund has also launched the breakaway LIV golf series, taken control of four Saudi Pro League clubs and purchased Newcastle United. But campaigners claim this vast state investment into sport is being used to distract from long-stand-

ing reputation issues such as Saudi Arabia's human rights record, the 2018 murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi, and the war in Yemen – a process known as 'sportswashing'.

"Twenty millions of our population are below the age of 30, so we need to get them engaged – we are playing our role to develop sports within the world and to be part

of the international community," Prince Abdulaziz said.

When asked if his country would be a suitable host of the 2034 World Cup, he added: "We've showcased that – we've hosted more than 85 global events and we've delivered on the highest level. We want to attract the world through sports. Hopefully, by 2034, people will have an ex-

traordinary World Cup." FIFA has been urged to secure commitments to improving human rights before formally confirming a Saudi World Cup next year. According to FIFA guidelines, countries bidding to host the event must commit to respect human rights.

"Any country has room for improvement, no-one's perfect. We acknowledge that and these events help us reform to a better future for everyone" claimed Prince Abdulaziz.

It is widely expected that the 2034 tournament will be in winter to avoid the country's extreme summer temperatures, as with the 2022 World Cup in Qatar.

But Prince Abdulaziz said organisers were "definitely studying" whether it could be staged in summer.

"Why not see what the possibilities are to do it in the summer? Whether it is summer or winter it doesn't matter for us, as

long as we make sure that we [deliver] the right atmosphere to host such an event," he said.

Saudi Arabia is already building three new stadia for the 2027 AFC Asian Cup, but must have 14 venues with capacities of 40,000 or more for the World Cup.

In October, human rights group Amnesty raised concerns over the treatment of migrant workers in the kingdom.

When asked if there could be similar issues to the controversy that dogged the Qatar World Cup over workers' rights, Prince Abdulaziz said: "I assure you it's not going to be repeated."

"We have 10 years to work on that, we already started in a lot of the venues, so we have a long time to do it in the right time, in the right process... We're already developing infrastructure... so we are not required to build a lot more to host such an event."

Gray skies devoid of rain

MP points out shortcomings of executive officials in Tehran's life-threatening air pollution



By Sadeq Dehqan
Staff writer

In the morning, as usual, I prepare myself for work, and along the way, I also have the responsibility of dropping off my daughter at school. As we step out of the house, I notice that the weather is not its typical clear self. Initially, I perceive the sky to be cloudy, indicating an imminent rain shower. Considering this, I contemplate returning to fetch an umbrella. However, I notice a slight sensation of burning in my eyes. The color of the clouds is peculiar, distinct from the shades witnessed on rainy days; they have transformed into a somber gray. The entire city seems enveloped in darkness, as if black clouds have descended upon the landscape. The air is thick with smoke, making it difficult to catch even a glimpse of the Milad tower, an iconic landmark visible from almost every corner on ordinary days. Today, however, it is shrouded in a haze of smoke. It appears that the tower's soaring height of 435 meters is insufficient to escape the pollution emanating from the city's surface. Amidst this sea of

pollution, we find ourselves struggling to stay afloat, unable to catch a breather. We hadn't yet arrived at the school when I notice a text message on my phone that had been sent late the previous night: "All schools in Tehran Province will be closed tomorrow, except Firuzkuh." Naturally, I take my daughter's hand once more, and we make our way back home. It seems we must now prepare for at least a week of remote learning. Upon reaching home, I switch on the tablet and log into the Shad program, the student educational network. A sense of relief washes over me as I hear the teacher's voice calling the roll. Now, I can proceed to work. Memories of days plagued by air pollution flood my mind as I hoist my bag onto my shoulders and head toward the bus station. Once again, I find myself running late today.

This description surely resonates all too well with the citizens of the capital and many other major cities in the country. They encounter similar situations each year, particularly during the colder months.

Allahverdi Dehqani, a member of the Parliament's Industries and Mines Commission, explains the cause of air pollution in big cities these days. According to him, most of the air pollution in Tehran and other major cities could be attributed to industries and automobiles. The

impact of these factors becomes more pronounced during the colder seasons, largely due to the phenomenon known as air inversion.

Air inversion refers to a condition where, contrary to the natural state, temperature rises with increasing altitude. As a result, the lower levels of the atmosphere experience lower temperatures compared to the upper layers. In simpler terms, a layer of warm air gets trapped between two layers of cold air in the Earth's atmosphere. It is important to note that temperature inversion itself is a natural occurrence and does not inherently pose a threat to humans and animals. However, in densely populated and industrialized cities, the presence of this phenomenon leads to the concentration and escalation of air pollution.

He added, "According to the statistics from the Department of the Environment, cars account for over 70 percent of pollution in big cities, while the remaining pollution is attributed to industries, including household, commercial, and manufacturing centers located within or on the outskirts of these cities. The majority of these industries should be relocated away from the city centers and outskirts. The failure to implement such measures actually indicates the shortcomings of the executive officials."

Dehqani emphasized that the pollution caused by industries and cars originates from the type of fuel used. He stated, "Our fuels, industrial systems,

and cars fall far behind global standards. Nowadays, countries around the world are shifting towards the production of low-consumption cars or vehicles that utilize clean energy, such as electric or hybrid cars. Even the use of CNG in cars and vehicles contributes to a reduction in pollution, as CNG fuel emits fewer unburned carbon particles into the air."

The MP continued, "Furthermore, a significant number of our industries rely on diesel fuel, which is known for its high emissions. Even the use of other conventional fuels, such as gasoil, contributes to air pollution. Considering this, it is crucial that factories and industries are established far away from the vicinity of large cities. Additionally, their systems should be upgraded to minimize pollution."

Mohammad Hassan Asafari, a member of the Commission for Internal Affairs and Councils in the Parliament, also addressed the issue of air pollution and the need to address it with responsible agencies. He stated, "We have identified weaknesses in the legal and regulatory aspects concerning this matter. For instance, when pollution occurs, the Parliament should have the ability to directly intervene and engage with the responsible agencies. Additionally, we need to determine the level of authority that the head of the Department of the Environment possesses to effectively address pollution issues."

Asafari further commented, "We are receiving conflicting news regarding the

fuel used in power plants, which directly impacts air pollution. While the country's oil and gas officials have stated that there is no shortage of gas fuel for factories, we are facing a situation where, despite not even entering winter, the Ministry of Petroleum has cut off gas supply to several power plants, leaving them with no choice but to resort to using mazut."

Referring to the impact of worn-out motorcycles and cars on air pollution, he stated, "The low capital available to many citizens for vehicle ownership necessitates government intervention. Therefore, the government should provide incentives and solutions to enable people to afford newer and more environmentally friendly cars. This will allow us to take prompt action in phasing out old vehicles from our cities."

It should be noted, however, that due to the monopolistic nature of the automobile industry and market in Iran, low-quality, pollution-inducing cars are being sold to Iranians at prices higher than the global average. Perhaps it would be more beneficial to address this issue first, without resorting to worn-out socialist solutions that would only benefit a few and potentially create even more economic disparities.

Asefari further added, "In addition to this, another contributing factor to the worsening pollution in various cities and regions of the country in recent years is the decline in rainfall. Rainfall, especially during the cold months, plays a crucial role in reducing air pollution and purifying the air."

Taxidermy Olaf

The canine detective participated in 1,600 operations during his 9-year tenure with the Iranian police, uncovering a total of 10,200 kilograms of drugs.

Social Desk

EXCLUSIVE

Iran plays a crucial role as one of the primary transit routes for drug smuggling from Afghanistan to European countries.

Its efforts in preventing the international spread and distribution of drugs are immensely significant. Without Iran's proactive measures, there is a high likelihood that drugs would have inundated Europe and the United States.

In the fight against drug trafficking, it is essential to acknowledge the pivotal role of drug-sniffing dogs. According to law enforcement statistics, 15 percent of the country's drug discoveries are attributed to these highly trained canine units. Their importance was highlighted in a recent exhibition organized by the Anti-Drug Headquarters in Tehran to combat addiction. One such undercover dog, Taxidermy Olaf, was prominently featured at the exhibition entrance, symbolizing a decade of dedicated service.

Up close, Taxidermy Olaf, with his tightly bound paws, conjures images of patrolling the arid and remote border areas of Sistan and Baluchestan. The dog's keen senses, especially when sniffing around stationary vehicles at border checkpoints, play a crucial role. His sudden barking serves as an alert to authorities about the pres-

ence of smuggled drugs.

Major General Younes Abdi, head of the Center for Foreign Nationals Affairs under the command of the Islamic Republic's law enforcement and the official in charge of the law enforcement booth at the exhibition, explained Olaf's significance.

"Olaf is a prime example of dogs that have genuinely assisted law enforcement officers in combating smugglers. These dogs have not only reduced the financial and human costs of police operations but have also contributed to the increased accuracy and success of these operations," he said. Abdi detailed Olaf's impressive record, participating in 1,600 drug discovery operations in the eastern part of the country during his nine years of service. He uncovered a total of 10,200 kilograms of drugs. After years of service in challenging border areas and harsh weather

conditions, Olaf, in old age and facing illness, is taxidermed. Instead of burial, his taxidermy is displayed, acknowledging his services to the police and the people. The history of using detection dogs in tracking smugglers in Iran dates back to more than two decades ago. Collaborating with France, trainers and foundation dogs were sent to establish the main drug-sniffing dog center. The subsequent year saw the inauguration of the training and education center for drug-sniffing dogs in Karaj city. Since then, these dogs have played a significant role in various operations, assisting police officers in combating drug traffickers.

Abdi shed light on the law enforcement's specialized unit called SAPKA. Operating under the Anti-Drug Police, SAPKA is one of the specialized units that fulfill its duties in various law en-

forcement missions.

Dogs in the SAPKA unit undergo training in various branches to participate in different missions. For example, in drug detection training, the dogs' noses become sensitive to various drugs such as heroin and methamphetamine, and they react by barking when confronted with these substances.

Abdi clarified a common misconception that dogs become addicted to finding drugs.

"This is not true. Dogs only become sensitive to drugs through reward-based methods, such as providing them with food. Forced drug consumption would shorten a dog's lifespan and diminish its effectiveness," he said.



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'Radif of Iranian Music for Piano' unveiled



Arts & Culture Desk

IRNA – The book, 'Radif of Iranian Music for Piano' by Javad Maroofi, edited and reviewed by Pouyan Azadeh, was officially unveiled. The event, attended by artists and musicians including Keivan Saket and Reza Khorram, coincided with the 30th death anniversary of Maroofi, a prominent composer and master of Iranian *radifs*.

Radif is the total collection of more than 200 *gushehs* – traditional melodic entities – in all 12 *dastgahs*.

During the ceremony, the CEO of the Iranian Music Association emphasized the significance of publishing the mentioned book, expressing satisfaction that Azadeh has successfully brought this collection to print, addressing a long-standing gap in written documentation of these musical *radifs*.

Amir-Abbas Setayeshgar acknowledged the breakthrough achievement of Azadeh, stating that the publication of this book fulfills Maroofi's aspiration. He further highlighted the importance of documenting musical works, referring to the 2003 UNESCO convention on intangible cultural heritage, where Iranian musical compositions were recognized and later sent for approval.

Radif of the original Iranian music was inscribed in 2009 on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in UNESCO.

A notable figure in Iranian music research, Azadeh has contributed significantly to the national heritage by registering five cases, including the first one titled, 'Iranian Piano Notation' in 2012, in the list of intangible cultural heritages in Iran.

In his remarks, Alireza Miralinaghi, a music writer and researcher, shared his memories of Maroofi and praised Azadeh's dedication in preparing the book. He emphasized the unique approach of Azadeh, bridging the gap between written notation and spontaneous playing, which is a valuable contribution to advancing the Iranian piano tradition.

Azadeh expressed his delight during the ceremony, stating that after years of effort, classical Iranian piano music has found its identity.

He also addressed the need for revisiting techniques mentioned in the book, aligning them with the audio samples released by Maroofi.

Azadeh, a pupil of Maroofi, reaffirmed his commitment to preserving the authenticity of Iranian piano *radifs* and the performance of Maroofi's works, emphasizing the importance of support for this unique style of musical expression.

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Oscars releases eligible films list for three sections

Iran's 'The Night Guardian' included



The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences unveiled the films eligible for consideration for the 2024 Oscars in the categories of Documentary Feature Film, International Feature Film, and Animated Feature Film. Iran's 'The Night Guardian', directed by Reza

Mirkarimi, is also in the International Feature's Section of the lineup, deadline.com reported. Mirkarimi's film, which debuted at the Fajr Film Festival last year, received nine award nominations and ultimately won the best director category.

Co-written by Mirkarimi and Mohammad Davoud, 'The Night Guardian' follows the story of an innocent village boy whose carefree life is disrupted by his trust in a construction engineer. After leaving his village due to drought, Rasoul is relieved to find em-

ployment as a night guardian at a construction site. However, he soon discovers that something sinister is happening at the seemingly deserted location. As he becomes ensnared in the peculiar circumstances surrounding him, Rasoul finds himself trapped and in danger.

A total of 167 documentaries have made the cut for the 96th Academy Awards, while 88 countries are eligible for the International Feature. Shortlists of 15 films in both categories will be revealed December 21. In the Animated Feature race, 33 films are eligible for the 2024 race.

Final Oscar nominations will be revealed January 23, 2024, with the 96th Oscars to air Sunday, March 10 on ABC, hosted by Jimmy Kimmel. AMPAS noted that not all the films have had their qualifying release yet, a requirement to advance in the voting process



Dilemma of cover music: Preserving nostalgia or stifling creativity?

Arts & Culture Desk

In recent times, a trend has emerged in the Iranian music industry where contemporary pop artists choose to cover songs from the past, aiming to evoke nostalgia among their audience. However, as the frequency of cover songs increases, questions arise about whether this practice kills creativity, or serves as a nostalgic homage to the musical heritage. A cover, in musical terms, refers to a rendition or reinterpretation of a pre-existing piece, performed by different artists. While covers may involve variations in arrangement, octave, and the use of different instruments, the fundamental melody remains unchanged. Musicians, both novices and seasoned professionals, commonly engage in covering existing songs, providing their own interpretation of the music, according to an article published on the Persian news website Iran Online (ion.ir). Many musicians choose covers over original compositions, driven by personal preferences, a desire to connect with a broader audience, or as a tribute to

iconic works. The emotional resonance of nostalgia plays a significant role in this choice, as artists aim to transport listeners to bygone eras, eliciting positive memories and emotions associated with the original pieces. Prominent musicians, even those skilled in crafting lengthy melodies and lyrics, often recreate masterpieces. This practice, prevalent since the early days of recorded music, continues today. Take, for example, the song 'Morgh-e Sahar' first sung by Moluk Zarrabi. Subsequently, many artists, including the late Gholam-Hossein Bannan and Mohammadreza Shajarian, have covered or reinterpreted this piece. Lack of original melodies challenges contemporary music artists. Previous composers like Homayoun Khorram, Ali Tajvidi, and Morteza Khan Mahjoubi created enduring melodies. Today's young artists, despite their knowledge and literacy, find their music lacking public appeal. Consequently, they turn to covering or recreating older works. Instances of this trend are evident in international

pop culture, such as One Direction's version of the 'Friends' TV show theme at their concert, or Charlie Puth's tribute performance of the same theme following Matthew Perry's death. However, the problem arises when artists rely excessively on the past and paying homage, while simply resorting to familiar tunes for popularity becomes negatively apparent in their works. While covers can be a genuine form of artistic expression, concerns arise about the impact on creativity within the music industry. Some argue that the frequency of covers addresses commercialized music industry, where record labels prioritize profit over artistic innovation. The pressure to conform to a prescribed approach and produce highly profitable music within a short timeframe may hinder true creative exploration. The commercialization of the music industry is identified as a significant factor contributing to the lack of creativity. Record labels often dictate the creative process, instructing artists to follow predetermined formulas to capture the

audience's attention quickly. This rigid approach can limit the artist's ability to explore and experiment, ultimately compromising the quality and originality of the music produced. Independent artists face a different set of challenges, balancing the desire for artistic freedom with the need for recognition and financial stability. While some may choose to collaborate with major record labels for being seen, they often find their creative input restricted, leading to disillusionment and, in some cases, contract termination. The ongoing debate about whether covered music stifles creativity or serves as a tribute to the past highlights the complexities within the music industry. The tension between commercial interests and artistic freedom underscores the need for a balanced approach that allows artists to express themselves authentically while catering to audience expectations. Ultimately, the music industry's evolution requires a delicate equilibrium between preserving musical heritage and fostering innovation for the future.