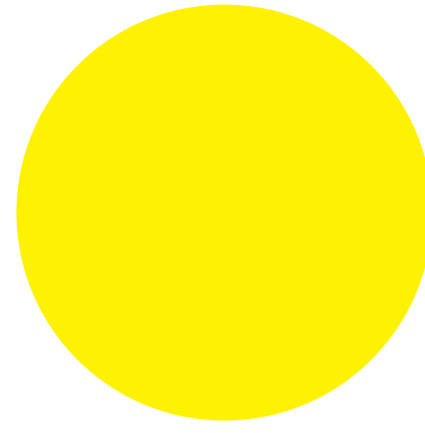




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Israel pounding Gaza as pressure grows for truce



Farewell to War Heroes



Iranians hold funeral processions nationwide, including in Tehran, to bid farewell to almost 280 unidentified soldiers of the Iraqi imposed war in 1980s whose remains have been retrieved from the battlefields as well as 11 victims of a recent terrorist attack in the southeastern county of Rask on December 17, 2023. The ceremonies, held in 29 provinces on Sunday, coincided with the martyrdom anniversary of Lady Fatima (PBUH), the revered daughter of Islam's Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).
● IRNA



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Iran's eight-month exports to neighboring states up 9%: IRICA



Iran's non-oil exports to the neighboring countries increased by nine percent during the first eight months of the current Iranian year (March 21-November 21), announced the head of the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA). Mohammad Rezvani-Far said that Iran exported 48 million tons of non-oil goods, worth \$18.38 billion, to its neighbors during the period, indicating a 21 percent growth in terms of weight, year-on-year, IRNA reported. The official said that Iran had exported 40 million tons of non-oil commodities valued at \$16.9 billion to those countries in the first eight months of the previous year.

The IRICA head also announced that Iran imported 14.6 million tons of non-oil goods, worth \$20 billion, from the neighboring countries in the eight months to November 21, which is 14 percent up in terms of value, and registers a seven percent rise in terms of weight, compared to the same period last year.

Increasing non-oil exports to neighboring countries is one of the major policies that the Iranian government has been pursuing in recent years.

Iran shares land or water borders with 15 countries, namely, the UAE, Afghanistan, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Iraq, Kuwait, Kazakhstan, Oman, Pakistan, Qatar, Russia, Turkey, Turkmenistan, and Saudi Arabia.

According to data released by IRICA, the value of Iran's non-oil exports exceeded \$32 billion in the first eight months of the current Iranian year.

Based on the IRICA data, Iran exported 90.044 million tons of non-oil commodities, worth \$32.243 billion, in the eight months. Non-oil exports in the period increased by 27 percent in terms of weight, and 1.6 percent in terms of value, year-on-year.

Liquefied natural gas, liquefied propane, methanol, petroleum bitumen, and liquefied butane were the five main exported goods in the period under review. Iran's top export destination during this period was China with \$9.158 billion worth of imports from the Islamic Republic, followed by Iraq with \$6.023 billion, the UAE with over \$4.162 billion, Turkey with \$3.028 billion, and India with \$1.466 billion.

Iran, EAEU to sign FTA in coming days: *Official*

Deputy head of the Iran-Russia Joint Chamber of Commerce announced that Tehran will ink a free trade agreement (FTA) with the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) in the coming days.

Kambiz Mirkarimi pointed to advantages of signing the much-awaited FTA between Iran and the EAEU's member states and added, "Since the member states of the union have a high population, inking the agreement will be an incentive to spur exports to these countries," IRNA reported.

He noted that the problems of Iranian traders in the fields of customs, tariffs and competitive market will be solved with the development of trade between Iran and the EAEU by the end of the current Iranian year, which ends on March 19, 2024.

In addition, the forex revenues of the country will increase following the promotion of trade cooperation between Iran and EAEU member states, Mirkarimi underlined.

The official stated that the member states of the

union highly welcome high-quality Iranian products, including industrial parts and the machinery that meets international standards.

He finally called on government officials to allocate greater support for the private sector, with the aim of getting the lion's share of the lucrative markets available in the EAEU countries.

The trade between Iran and the EAEU has doubled over the past four years, announced EAEU Minister of Trade Andrey Slepnev. Talking to IRNA in July, Slepnev said that bilateral cooperation with the Islamic Republic is actively expanding in various spheres.

The figures indicate that trade between the union and Iran surged by 22% in 2022, added the official. He noted that agricultural products account for 75% of the bloc's trade with Iran.

Industrial commodities play a pivotal role in the cooperation between the two sides, the minister said, adding that the trade in the areas of minerals,



industries, and chemicals is about to be expanded. Slepnev termed Iran as a key partner in the International North-South Transport Corridor (IN-

STC), calling the corridor a solution in transportation and logistics. The project will not only help expansion of regional trade, but it will also bring

about cooperation in the field of industry and joint production, he further noted.

The EAEU was founded in 2015 at the initiative

taken by the Russian Federation, Kazakhstan, and Belarus. The Republic of Armenia and Kyrgyzstan are other members of the union.

Iran's crude oil production exceeded 3 mbd in November: *OPEC*



Iran's crude production volume in November 2023 reached 3.128 million barrels of oil per day (mbd), showing a hike of 7,000 barrels compared to a month earlier, according to the latest report released by the secretariat of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC).

The 13 members of the oil group produced 27.837 mbd in November, registering 57,000 barrels of oil less than

that of October, Tasnim news agency reported.

The 13 OPEC members produced 27.895 million barrels of oil in October 2023, the report said.

Saudi Arabia, Iraq and Iran stood in the first to third places by producing 8.998 million, 4.278 million and 3.128 million bpd, respectively, OPEC added.

The National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) managing director said last week that

the country's oil production has jumped 60 percent since the incumbent administration took office in August 2021. Mohsen Khojasteh-Mehr added NIOC has carried important measures during the period, which have led to increase in oil production and exports.

The NIOC CEO, who made the remarks in a session on the occasion of Research and Technology Week, put great emphasis on expansion of relations between industries and universities.

He said NIOC has promoted its scientific and technological cooperation with universities and research centers. Khojasteh-Mehr also stressed the need for digitalization of oil and gas fields, adding 15 fields will be digitalized with the aim of reducing costs, monitoring all stages continuously, finding problems, and sustaining oil and gas production.

Iran, China to jointly produce EVs: *Deputy minister*

Iranian automakers will produce electric cars (EVs) with China jointly within the framework of the 25-Year Strategic Plan, announced Iran's deputy minister of industry, mine and trade for transportation affairs. Talking to IRNA, Manouchehr Manteqi said six Iranian auto manufacturing companies including the country's two largest automakers Saipa and Iran Khodro Industrial Group (IKCO) have inked a contract with Chinese firms for joint production of cars. China is currently considered the leading country in the field of producing EVs, he said, adding that other countries are interested in cooperating with China for EV manufacturing and concluding technological contracts with the East Asian coun-

try. The Iranian Ministry of Industry has compiled a comprehensive program for the competitiveness of the EV production industry, the official said adding that using EVs accurately as well as taking its advantages in minimizing fuel consumption and benefits for air pollution have been taken into consideration in the first stage.

Manteqi pointed to the after-sales service of the cars, adding that a customer who uses EV should be fully supported, as steps have been taken to gain the satisfaction of customers.

The official also noted that charging stations will be set up with the cooperation of municipalities, while observing requirements of the national standard.



Rasht-Astara railroad construction to start soon



Iran's deputy minister of roads and urban development said the construction of the railroad connecting Rasht to Astara in the northern province of Gilan will kick off in the coming weeks.

Speaking at a televised program, Shahriar Afandizadeh said the construction of the 162-km long

railroad will begin within the next 45 days, IRNA reported.

He noted that completion of the project will play a leading role in the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC).

Once the INSTC is launched, a great economic capacity will be brought

about for the neighboring and regional states, the deputy minister added.

Iran proposed the idea of the international "Iran Road" project during a tripartite summit with India and Russia in April 2023. The INSTC is a 7,200-km long multi-mode network of ship, rail and road route for moving freight

between India, Iran, the Republic of Azerbaijan, Russia, Central Asia and Europe, he stated.

Iranian officials have estimated that the Rasht-Astara railroad will allow for the transportation of one million passengers as well as 10 million tons of cargo in the first year of service.

Enchanting history and architecture of Grand Mosque of Yazd



Iranica Desk

A large number of Yazd's tourist attractions are historical sites, each of which tells a fascinating story about the city's history. One of the most famous historical buildings located in the city center is the Jaame (Grand) Mosque of Yazd. This magnificent mosque is a combination of three separate mosques that were built in different historical periods, making it a unique and culturally significant site. The initial structure of the mosque was constructed on top of a Sassanid fire temple, adding to its rich historical background. The Jaame Mosque of Yazd has a history of 900 years, and is considered one of the most beauti-

ful and breathtaking historical buildings in Yazd Province. The mosque boasts tall minarets that add to its grandeur and charm. In the past, the mosque was located amidst the walls of the old city, serving as a prominent landmark for the residents. The foundation of the mosque spans an impressive area of approximately 9,800 square meters, with 500 square meters adorned with intricately designed tiles and inscriptions. With a length of 104 meters and a width of 99 meters, the Jaame Mosque of Yazd features seven entrances that are connected to several alleys and exit routes. This architectural design allows for easy access and a smooth flow

of visitors. It holds significant historical value, representing the oldest example of architecture from the 15th century CE in the religious district of Yazd. Many locals believe that the tiles and materials used in the construction of the Jaame Mosque were sourced from Karbala soil, further adding to its cultural significance. (Karbala, a city in Iraq, is home to the shrines of Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) grandsons, Imam Hussein (PBUH) and his brother Abul Fazl Al-Abbas (PBUH)). This mosque was officially registered on Iran's National Heritage List, highlighting its importance in preserving the country's heritage. The construction and completion of the Jaame Mosque of Yazd spanned over a century and took

place during various historical periods, including the Ilkhanid, Safavid, Timurid, Muzaffarid, and Qajar dynasties. Each part of this historical building has been meticulously constructed and restored by numerous builders throughout time. Notably, during the reign of Fat'h-Ali Shah Qajar, extensive demolition and reconstruction operations were carried out to restore and repair the mosque, resulting in its current appearance, which differs from the original structure. The design of the Jaame Mosque consists of a combination of a domed sanctuary and a long rectangular porch, showcasing a harmonious blend of architectural elements. The main plan of

the mosque is square, mimicking the layout of the Kaaba, the holiest site in Islam. The interior of the mosque is illuminated indirectly through the reflection of light from the white plaster of the dome and walls, creating a serene and peaceful ambiance. Within the mosque, there are two remarkable marble columns with slightly concave upper surfaces. Carved animal and plant motifs can be observed on the body of these columns, adding to their artistic appeal. Unfortunately, two lines of poetry in Naskh script that were inscribed on the columns have become illegible due to damage, diminishing their readable beauty. In conclusion, the Jaame Mosque of Yazd is a true gem among the historical sites of Yazd. Its rich history, magnificent architecture, and exquisite decorations make it a must-visit for tourists and history enthusiasts alike.



[wikimedia.org](https://www.wikimedia.org)

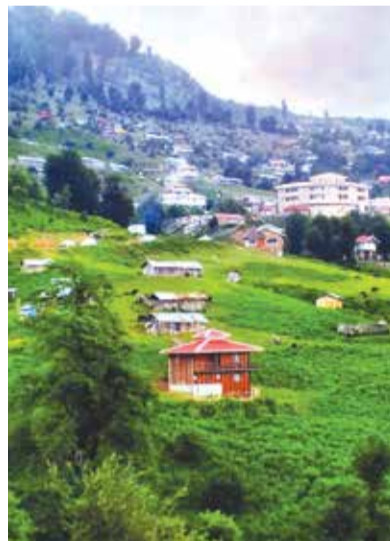
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Breathtaking beauty of Halu Dasht village in Gilan Province

Iranica Desk

Halu Dasht, a picturesque village nestled in the lush Gilan Province, is a haven for nature enthusiasts and adventure seekers. Situated in the city of Amlash, this village boasts breathtaking landscapes and an abundance of natural wonders, making it a must-visit destination for travelers. Geographically located in the southwestern region of Rudbar among the Alborz Mountains, Halu Dasht spans approximately 435 hectares. Its unique geographical position, coupled with its unparalleled nature and mountainous climate, has earned it a special place among nature lovers. The area is adorned with dense forests, sprawling pastures, and diverse flora and fauna, creating a captivating environment for visitors.



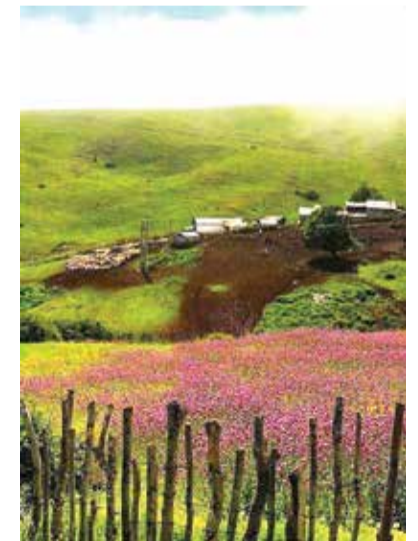
As travelers embark on the paved route from Amlash to Halu Dasht, they are treated to a scenic journey through verdant forests and mangrove areas. The mountain road leading to Halu Dasht is characterized by winding paths and spectacular vistas, offering a truly immersive experience. Due to its proximity to the Alborz Mountains, Halu Dasht enjoys a cool and refreshing mountainous climate, further enhanced by its lush forests and elevated altitude. The dominant alder trees and expansive tea plantations add to the area's natural charm, while snow-capped peaks provide a stunning backdrop to the picturesque

forest park. The village and its surrounding areas have become popular tourist destinations, attracting visitors with their mountainous terrain and forested landscapes. Local residents are primarily involved in livestock farming and the production of dairy products, contributing to the region's rich agricultural heritage. The best time to explore Halu Dasht is during the first half of the year, when the weather is most favorable for outdoor activities. While the village's beauty is ever-present, winter visits may pose challenges due to the mountainous terrain. However, the allure of



snow-covered landscapes during this season is a compelling draw for some travelers. In addition to its natural splendor, Halu Dasht is known for its vibrant local celebrations, offering visitors a glimpse into the unique traditions and culture of the area. To fully enjoy the village's breathtaking scenery, travelers are advised to pack appropriate footwear and clothing, especially if planning to camp overnight. Despite being nestled in a mountainous region, the village offers Internet access and accommodation options, including villa rentals and eco-friendly residences, ensuring a comfortable and connected stay for

visitors. For those seeking accommodation, suites near the traditional coffee house and country houses along the valley provide convenient lodging options. The village also offers ecological residences for a comfortable and enjoyable stay amidst the stunning surroundings. The beauty of Halu Dasht unfolds from the moment travelers set foot on its enchanting path. As they ascend through the mountains, they are greeted by awe-inspiring vistas and a sense of tranquility that permeates the high-altitude surroundings. The village's elevated position and humidity often



give the impression of being among the clouds, adding an ethereal quality to the experience. From its panoramic viewpoints to its unique climate, Halu Dasht offers a paradise-like setting that captivates the imagination. Visitors can revel in the sensation of walking amidst the clouds, experiencing a sense of wonder as they become immersed in the sky-high beauty of the village. Additionally, the village's elevated vantage points provide stunning views of the surrounding areas and the city, offering a truly unforgettable experience for all who venture to this captivating destination.

Circling ghosts that will not cease

"Every beautiful poem is an act of resistance."

Mahmoud Darwish



By Ali Amiri

Staff writer

On the evening of October 29, 1956, the villagers of Kafr Qasim, after spending a hard day working in the fields, longed to return to the

comfort of their homes. Little did they know that the Israeli authorities had imposed a 5 p.m. curfew with a shoot-to-kill order on Palestinian villages. When the unsuspecting Palestinians attempted to return, they were ruthlessly shot down, resulting in the heartrending death of forty-eight innocent villagers.

While this incident may have gone down in the annals of Palestinian history and faded as yet another atrocity committed by the murderous Israeli army, it is immortalized in Samih al-Qasim's poem, 'Kafr Qasim'. Reading this powerful poem is akin to being struck by a fast-moving

train. It comes as no surprise, as he was one of Palestine's most proficient, beloved poets of resistance, whose steadfast voice resonated for decades from within the occupied land.

Poetry, as the 18th-century German philosopher Johann Georg Hamann once put it, "is the mother-tongue of the human race." The primacy that Hamann attributes to passion, symbolism, imagery, and metaphor in his discourse on language is perhaps most apparent in Palestinian poetry of resistance, where each word becomes a bullet teeming with the distilled complexities of the Palestinian experience under occupation and suppression.

In the introduction to his book, 'A Map of Absence: An Anthology of Palestinian Writing on the Nakba', Atef Alshaer states that literature for Palestinians "has been a source of national rebirth, documentation and emancipation, engaging with a burdened reality and an ongoing tragedy." Palestinian literature, Alshaer argues, emerged as a response to the colonization of their land, with a focus on asserting historical continuity and the connection to the wider Arab world. Over time, Palestinian liter-

ature evolved in response to internationalism and modernization, going beyond strict nationalist loyalties. This evolution liberated the literature from ideological constraints, enabling it "to express the plight of humankind – all of our struggles, frustrations, insecurities and aspirations – in fluid, and sometimes subversive, ways."

Poetry, for as long as it has existed, has been a powerful tool in the hands of the oppressed and marginalized, allowing them to rise above adversity and reclaim their agency.

In this special issue, we commemorate the resilience and fortitude of Palestinian poets who have made out of their words mighty weapons of defiance. Each poem in this anthology serves as a testament to the unconquerable spirit of resistance, confronting the injustices of the Israeli occupation and illuminating the struggle of the Palestinian people. May these poems awaken our conscience and ignite within us a sense of urgency to pursue justice for all the oppressed, wherever they may be.



Samih al-Qasim (1939-2014)

Was a prominent contemporary Palestinian poet, who wrote prolifically throughout his life, exploring various literary forms and leaving behind a vast collection of over seventy published books. Despite facing persecution from Israeli authorities for his activism against the mandatory conscription law imposed on Druze Arab youth and his involvement in politics, al-Qasim's poetry gained international recognition. His powerful verses captured the essence of his people's struggle, finding their way into popular songs and chants.



Kafr Qasim

No monument raised, no memorial, and no rose.
Not one line of verse to ease the slain
Not one curtain, not one blood-stained
Shred of our blameless brothers' clothes.
Not one stone to engrave their names.
Not one thing. Only the shame.

Their circling ghosts have still not ceased
Digging up graves in Kafr Qasim's debris.

Fadwa Tuqan (1917-2003)

Was a contemporary Arab Palestinian poet, whose verse is known for distinctive chronicling of the suffering of her people, the Palestinian, as well as representations of resistance to Israeli occupation. She has sometimes been referred to as the "Poet of Palestine."



Labour Pains

The wind blows the pollen in the night
through ruins of fields and homes.
Earth shivers with love,
with the pain of giving birth,
but the conqueror wants us to believe
stories of submission and surrender.

O Arab Aurora!
Tell the usurper of our land
that childbirth is a force unknown to him,
the pain of a mother's body,
that the scarred land
inaugurates life
at the moment of dawn
when the rose of blood
blooms on the wound.

**Refaat Alareer (1979-2023)**

Was a prominent Palestinian writer, poet, professor, and activist from the Gaza Strip, who taught literature and creative writing at the Islamic University of Gaza. On December 6, 2023, around 6 p.m. local time in Gaza, Alareer was murdered in a surgical Israeli airstrike along with his brother, sister, and her three children.

If I Must Die

*If I must die,
you must live
to tell my story
to sell my things
to buy a piece of cloth
and some strings,
(make it white with a long tail)
so that a child, somewhere in Gaza
while looking heaven in the eye
awaiting his dad who left in a blaze –
and bid no one farewell
not even to his flesh*



*not even to himself –
sees the kite, my kite you made, flying up
above
and thinks for a moment an angel is there
bringing back love
If I must die
let it bring hope
let it be a tale.*

Hiba Abu Nada (1991-2023)

Was a Palestinian poet, novelist, nutritionist. Her novel 'Oxygen is not for the dead' won second place in the Sharjah Award for Arab Creativity in 2017. She was killed in her home in the Gaza Strip by an Israeli airstrike in the 2023 Israel-Hamas war. Her final post to X on October 9, 2023 was in Arabic and reads: "Gaza's night is dark apart from the glow of rockets, quiet apart from the sound of the bombs, terrifying apart from the comfort of prayer, black apart from the light of the martyrs. Good night, Gaza."

**I Grant You Refuge**

1
*I grant you refuge
in invocation and prayer.
I bless the neighborhood and the minaret
to guard them
from the rocket
from the moment
it is a general's command
until it becomes
a raid.
I grant you and the little ones refuge,
the little ones who
change the rocket's course
before it lands
with their smiles.*

2
*I grant you and the little ones refuge,
the little ones now asleep like chicks in
a nest.
They don't walk in their sleep toward
dreams.
They know death lurks outside the
house.
Their mothers' tears are now doves
following them, trailing behind
every coffin.*

3
I grant the father refuge,

*the little ones' father who holds the
house upright
when it tilts after the bombs.
He implores the moment of death:
"Have mercy. Spare me a little while.
For their sake, I've learned to love my
life.
Grant them a death
as beautiful as they are."*

4
*I grant you refuge
from hurt and death,
refuge in the glory of our siege,
here in the belly of the whale.
Our streets exalt God with every bomb.
They pray for the mosques and the
houses.
And every time the bombing begins in
the North,
our supplications rise in the South.*

5
*I grant you refuge
from hurt and suffering.
With words of sacred scripture
I shield the oranges from the sting of
phosphorous
and the shades of cloud from the smog.
I grant you refuge in knowing
that the dust will clear,
and they who fell in love and died
together
will one day laugh.*

Mahmoud Darwish (1941-2008)

Was a renowned Palestinian poet and author, widely recognized as Palestine's national poet. In 1988, he penned the Palestinian Declaration of Independence, formally establishing the State of Palestine. Darwish's works garnered numerous awards, and he skillfully employed Palestine as a metaphor to explore themes of loss, rebirth, dispossession, and exile. Known as a poet of faction, he embodied the Islamic tradition of the politically engaged poet. Additionally, Darwish served as an editor for various literary magazines in Palestine.

**To Our Land**

*To our land,
and it is the one near the word of god,
a ceiling of clouds
To our land,
and it is the one far from the adjectives of
nouns,
the map of absence
To our land,
and it is the one tiny as a sesame seed,
a heavenly horizon ... and a hidden chasm
To our land,*

*and it is the one poor as a grouse's wings,
holy books ... and an identity wound
To our land,
and it is the one surrounded with torn hills,
the ambush of a new past
To our land, and it is a prize of war,
the freedom to die from longing and burning
and our land, in its bloodied night,
is a jewel that glimmers for the far
upon the far and illuminates what's outside
it...
As for us, inside,
we suffocate more!*

Dareen Tatour (b. 1982)

Is a Palestinian poet, photographer, and social media activist. Writing in her native Arabic, she has become a symbol of artistic resistance. However, in 2018, Tatour faced trial, conviction, and a five-month prison sentence by an Israeli court for charges of "inciting violence" and "supporting a terrorist organization" due to her social media posts, including a video featuring a reading of one of her poems. Despite these challenges, in 2019, Tatour received the prestigious Oxfam Novib/PEN Award for Freedom of Expression, highlighting her commitment to artistic freedom and her unwavering voice.

Resist, My People, Resist Them

*Resist, my people, resist them.
In Jerusalem, I dressed my wounds and
breathed my sorrows,
And carried the soul in my palm
For an Arab Palestine.
I will not succumb to the
'peaceful solution',
Never lower my flags
Until I evict them from my land.
I cast them aside for a coming time.*

*Resist, my people, resist them.
Resist the settlers' robbery
And follow the caravan of martyrs.
Shred the disgraceful constitution
Which imposed degradation
and humiliation
And deterred us from restoring justice.
They burned blameless children;
As for Hadil, they sniped her in public,
Killed her in broad daylight.
Resist, my people, resist them.
Resist the colonialist's onslaught.*

*Pay no mind to his agents among us
Who chain us with the peaceful illusion.
Do not fear doubtful tongues;
The truth in your heart is stronger;
As long as you resist in a land
That has lived through raids and victory.
So Ali called from his grave:
Resist, my rebellious people-
Write me as prose on the agarwood;
My remains have you as a response.
Resist, my people, resist them.
Resist, my people, resist them.*

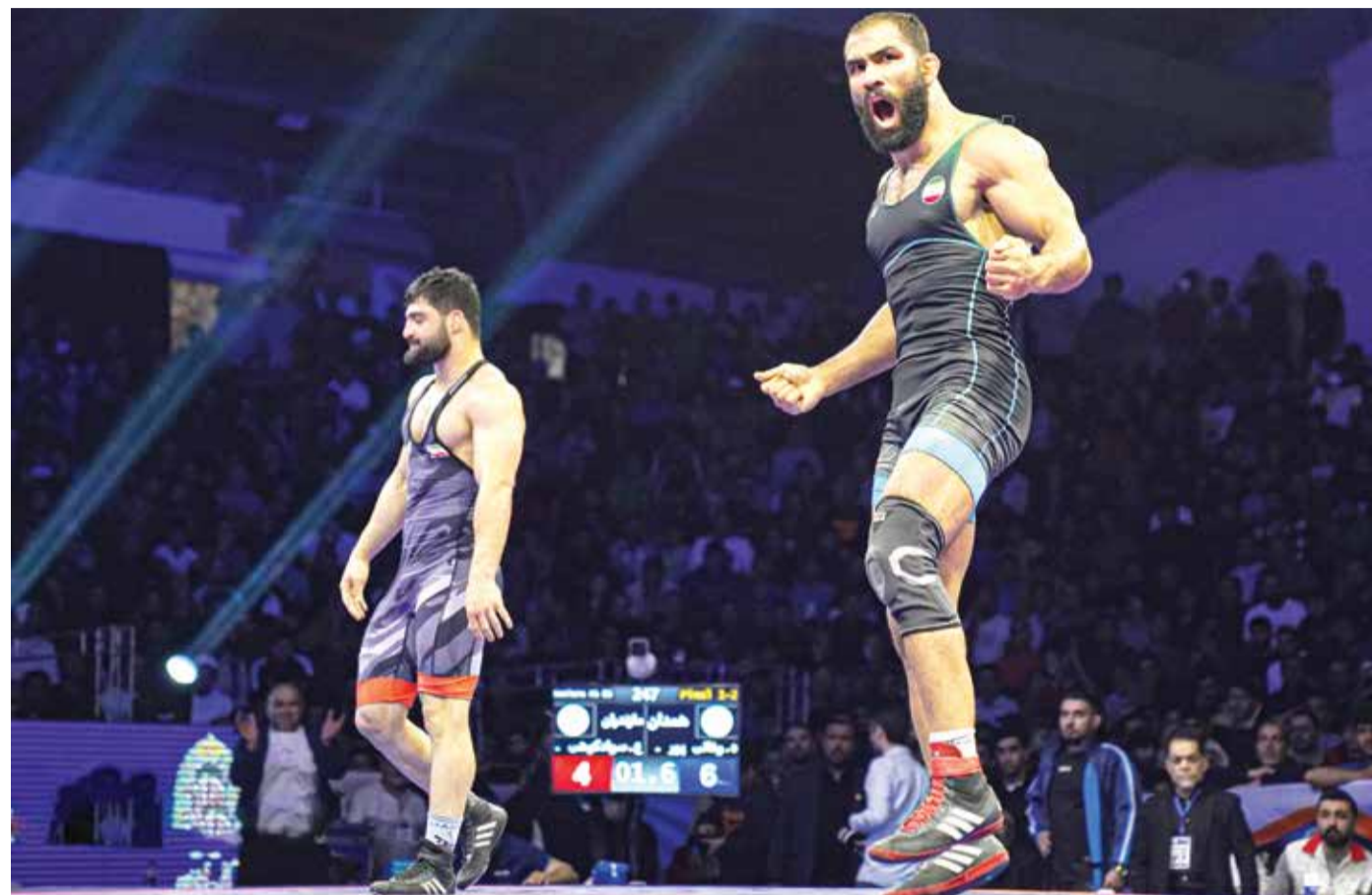


Poetry, for as long as it has existed, has been a powerful tool in the hands of the oppressed and marginalized, allowing them to rise above adversity and reclaim their agency.

Freestyle Wrestling National Championships: Contenders emerge for Iran's Olympic berths

Sports Desk

Some new faces and surprise winners will be looking to go all the way to book a place in the Iranian squad for next year's Paris Olympics after coming out on top at the Freestyle Wrestling National Championships in Sari, northern Iran. Three of the four Iranian world medalists in September – Hassan Yazdani (86kg), Amirhossein Zare' (125kg), and Mohammad Nokhodi (79kg) – were absent in the event, while Amir-Mohammad Yazdani had a disappointing run in the Olympic 74kg weight class. A world 70kg silver winner in Belgrade, Yazdani had to settle for a joint-third spot finish alongside fellow Mazandaran teammate Erfan Elahi after suffering a 4-1 defeat against Adel Panahian, who was beaten by Hossein Abouzari in the final showdown. Abouzari and Nokhodi will participate in an international tournament to decide who will represent the country in April's Asian Championships in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, as well as the Olympic qualifiers. Superheavyweight prodigy Amir-Reza Ma'soumi – a winner of four world age-group golds – again threw down the gauntlet to reigning world senior champion Zare' for a place in Paris by standing on the top podium in the 125kg contests, thanks to a final victory over Mahdi Hashemi. A former world U20 and U23 bronze medalist, Ahmad Mohammadnejad Javan dominated the 57kg contests, defeating 2021 world silver medalist Alireza



Hadi Vafaeipour (R) celebrates after coming from behind to beat fellow-Iranian Ali Savadkouhi in the 86kg final at the Freestyle Wrestling National Championships in Sari, Iran, on Dec. 15, 2023. [iwjfir](#)

Sarlak in the final, and will likely be Iran's top choice to chase the Olympic quota in the coming months. Stepping into September's world event as the defending 65kg champion, Rahman Amouzad had

a below-par run in Belgrade but a fifth-place finish was enough for the 21-year-old to secure the Olympic berth. However, 'Ruthless Rahman' will still have to see off Abbas Ebrahimzadeh, who came out victori-

ous against Ali Khorramdel in the 65kg final in Sari. With Hassan Yazdani racing against time to be fit for the Olympics after a surgery on his injured shoulder, Ali Savadkouhi and Ali-reza Karimi fancied their chances

of replacing the 86kg sensation in Paris when they started their campaigns in Sari. Best known for his famous triumph over American 79kg great Jordan Burroughs in last year's FS World Cup, Savadkouhi outmus-

pled three-time world medalist Karimi 3-0 in the third round but was stunned in the final by Hadi Vafaeipour, who overcame a four-point deficit – courtesy of a take-down and double gut wrenches with less than a minute left on the clock – for a 6-4 win and the gold medal.

Kamran Qassempour is to compete in the 97kg weight class next year as he will be looking to add the Olympic glory to his double world 92kg gold medals. However, and untimely hamstring injury ruled him out of the Iranian Championships and two-time world under-23 champion Amir-Ali Azarpira made the most of the opportunity to win the gold.

Mohammad-Hossein Mohammadian, who was the Iranian 97kg wrestler at the Tokyo Olympics, looked to be the favorite for the top spot after a first-round victory over injury-hit Mojtaba Goleij but came short against Azarpira in the final showpiece.

In the non-Olympic categories meanwhile, Reza Atri – a 2022 world runner-up – beat Yassin Rezaei in the 61kg final, with Mohammad-Ali Amouzad defeating Mojtaba Amouzad for the 70kg gold.

Abodallah Sheikh A'zami claimed the 79kg title thanks to a win against Jamal Ebadi, while two-time world junior champion and an under-23 gold medalist last year Amirhossein Firouzpour continued his impressive run in the senior competitions with a victory over Mahdi Hajilouieian in the 92kg showdown.

Iran's Barkhordari wins World Taekwondo GS gold, punches ticket for Paris

Sports Desk

Iranian Mehran Barkhordari sealed a second taekwondo quota for the country in next year's Paris Olympics after grabbing the gold at the World Taekwondo Grand Slam Champions Series in Wuxi, China. On Sunday, a thrilling final showdown of the men's -80kg contests saw Barkhordari come out on top against Jasurbek Jaysunov in three rounds and make amends for the setback against the Uzbekistani opponent in the first series of the event earlier this year. A World Grand Prix champion in September, Barkhordari joins Nahid Kiani in representing Iran at the Olympic Games, with a men's and women's slots still up

for grabs for the country in the continental contests in the coming months. A gold medalist in June's World Championships in Baku, Kiani had already secured a women's -57kg berth through the World Taekwondo Ranking system. Meanwhile, Aryan Salimi failed to win a quota for Paris after a defeat against Russian Rafail Aiukaev, participating as a neutral athlete, saw him crash out of the men's +80kg contests. Matin Rezaei also missed out on a podium finish in Wuxi after a straight-round loss to host's Xiao Chenming in the men's -68kg bronze medal bout. Abolfazl Zandi, however, finished his campaign in Wuxi with a consolation bronze in the men's -58kg competitions.



[WORLDTAEKWONDO.ORG](#)

Iran's Mojallal grabs Asian U23 rowing gold

Sports Desk

The fourth day of the Asian Junior & U23 Rowing Championships saw Iranian girl Ftemeh Mojallal walk away with a precious gold medal in the under-23 single sculls contest in Pattaya-Rayong, Thailand.

Mojallal crossed the finish line in 9:07.445 minutes to take her personal gold tally at the event to two, having teamed up with Kimia Zarei for the ultimate prize in the double sculls contest.

The result also meant a second top-podium finish for Zarei, who had clocked 8:07.452 minutes for the under-23 lightweight single sculls.

Meanwhile, Amir-Reza Abdali settled for the sixth place in the men's under-23 lightweight single sculls event after registering an 8:39.621-minute record in the final, with rowers from Vietnam, Hong Kong, and Uzbekistan finishing first to third respectively.



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Israel pounding Gaza as pressure grows for truce

International Desk

Israel kept up deadly strikes on the besieged Gaza Strip on Sunday despite growing international calls for a cease-fire.

Fighting raged on in the bloodiest ever Gaza war, now in its third month, that started with the Hamas attacks on October 7, and has devastated much of the Palestinian territory, sparking global concern.

Israel also came under growing pressure to secure the release of captives still held in the Hamas-run territory.

The regime stepped up its bombardment of Gaza overnight and into Sunday, killing at least 40 people, Palestinians said, after Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu argued that the only way to secure the release of captives was intense military pressure on Hamas.

The Israeli attacks took place amid fierce fighting in the length of the coastal enclave, according to residents and militants, with communications down for a fourth day, making it hard to reach the wounded.

Call for durable truce

French Foreign Minister Catherine Colonna, the latest foreign envoy visiting Israel, called for an "immediate and durable" truce leading to a lasting cease-fire, stressing that "too many civilians are being killed".

Her British and German counterparts, David Cameron and Annalena Baerbock, also bemoaned the high civilian toll but voiced a different stance on the conflict, in a joint Sunday Times article. The pair wrote that they "support a cease-fire, but only if it is sustainable... We do not believe that calling right now for a general and immediate cease-fire, hoping it somehow becomes permanent, is the way forward".

'Breakdown of civil order'

Israel's bombardment of Gaza has left much of the territory in ruins, with the UN estimating 1.9 million Gazans have been displaced by the war and warning of a "breakdown of civil order".

"I would not be surprised if people start dying of hunger, or a combination of hunger, disease, weak immunity," said Philippe Lazzarini, the head of the

UN agency for Palestinian refugees.

"The communication blackout in #Gaza is the longest since the start of the Israeli escalation," the Palestinian Red Crescent said on X, adding that its teams were also hampered by shelling.

WHO sounds alarm

The UN's World Health Organisation also sounded the alarm over Gaza's humanitarian disaster after visiting the largest hospital, Gaza City's Al-Shifa, weeks after it was raided by Israeli forces.

The visiting WHO team "described the emergency department as a 'blood-bath', with hundreds of injured patients inside, and new patients arriving every minute", the organization said.

"Patients with trauma injuries were being sutured on the floor," it said, while "tens of thousands of displaced people are using the hospital building and grounds for shelter" amid "a severe shortage" of water and food.

The Israeli regime has come under growing pressure, including from its top ally, the United States, but also from families of captives, to either slow, suspend or end the mili-



Palestinians inspect the site of an Israeli strike on a house, amid the ongoing war on Gaza, in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip, December 17, 2023. REUTERS

tary campaign.

Relatives of captives again rallied in Tel Aviv on Saturday to call for an urgent deal to release them after the army admitted to mistakenly killing three captives in Gaza.

Israel kills captives

Israel Defense Force troops mistakenly identified three Israeli captives in northern Gaza's Shejaiya neighborhood as a threat and opened fire on them, killing them, IDF spokesman Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari said Friday evening.

Netanyahu said the killing of the three hostages "broke my heart". But he added, "With all the deep sorrow, I want to clarify: the military pressure is necessary both for the return of the kidnapped and for achieving victory over our enemies". Nonetheless, according to reports, talks involv-

ing mediator Qatar have resumed toward another truce after a week-long cease-fire last month allowed for the prisoner swap.

Qatar in a statement on Saturday reaffirmed its "ongoing diplomatic efforts to renew the humanitarian pause". But Hamas said on Telegram it was "against any negotiations for the exchange of prisoners until the aggression against our people ceases completely". The Gaza war has also seen violence spiral in the occupied West Bank.

Israeli losses

Israel's military said on Sunday that 121 soldiers had been killed since the ground campaign began on Oct. 27, when tanks and infantry began to push into Gaza's cities and refugee camps. Netanyahu read out a letter at his weekly cabinet

meeting on Sunday which he said was written by relatives of dead soldiers. The toll is already almost twice as high as during a ground offensive in 2014, a reflection of how far it has pushed into the enclave and of Hamas' effective use of guerrilla tactics and an expanded arsenal. In a talk with an American media outlet on Sunday, the IDF spokesman admitted that Israeli soldiers are tired and suffering from the heavy burden of war, and some of them have been in the battlefield for more than a month and a half. The regime's Agriculture Minister Avi Dichter also said that Israel has paid very high costs in the Gaza war.

The Israeli military said its ground troops had found weapons and a tunnel used by militants to attack troops in Shejaiya, a suburb east of Gaza City in

the north, and destroyed a weapons storage facility in the home of a Hamas operative.

The armed wing of Hamas ally Islamic Jihad said its fighters targeted Israeli forces in Zeitoun neighborhood, in northern Gaza City, with mortar bombs. Fighters also fought Israeli troops in the center of Khan Yunis in the south, residents said, while Israeli tanks shelled the eastern villages of Mughraqa and Juhr Eldeek in the central Gaza Strip, where fighting has intensified with Hamas fighters in the past days.

In Khan Yunis, in southern Gaza, residents reported hearing Israeli planes and tanks bombing and shelling and the sound of rocket grenades, apparently fired by Hamas fighters.

AFP, REUTERS, AP, and IRNA contributed to this report.

Raisi, FM offer condolences to Kuwait over Emir's death



Kuwait's late Emir, Sheikh Nawaf al-Ahmad al-Jaber al-Sabah. ANADOLU AGENCY

President Ebrahim Raisi and Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian of Iran have extended their condolences to Kuwait on the passing of Emir Sheikh Nawaf al-Ahmad al-Jaber al-Sabah.

In a message on Saturday, Raisi offered his condolences to the new Kuwaiti Emir Sheikh Mishal al-Ahmad al-Jaber al-Sabah and the country's government as well as its Muslim nation, Press TV reported.

In another message, Amir-Abdollahian also extended his condolences to the Kuwaiti nation and government on the loss of the Emir. He left Tehran on Sunday for the Persian Gulf country to express solidarity with the government and people of Kuwait on this occasion.

In late November, Sheikh Nawaf was rushed to a hospital for an unspecified illness. State-run news agency KUNA previously reported that he traveled to the United States for unspecified medical checks in March 2021.

Sheikh Nawaf ruled Kuwait from September 29, 2020 to his death, at age 86, on December 16, 2023. He had succeeded to the throne following the death of his half-brother Sabah al-Ahmad al-Jaber al-Sabah.

Nawaf, who was the crown prince between 2006 and 2020, was the son of the 10th ruler of Kuwait, Sheikh Ahmad al-Jaber al-Sabah, who ruled the country for almost 30 years in the first half of the 20th century. He served in various cabinet positions throughout his life, including leading the ministries of defense, the interior and social services.

UN Security Council condemns terrorist attack in southeast Iran

The members of the UN Security Council have strongly condemned the terrorist attack on a police station in Rask County, Sistan and Baluchestan Province, calling for the prosecution of the perpetrators and sponsors of such "cowardly" acts of terror.

"The members of the Security Council condemned in the strongest terms the cowardly terrorist attack on the Rask police station in Sistan and Baluchestan Province, Iran," read a statement released on Saturday.

At around 2 a.m. local time on Friday, the police headquarters in Rask County was targeted in a terrorist attack, later claimed by the Pakistan-based Jaish ul-Adl terrorist group, Press TV reported. The members of the Security Council underlined the need to hold the "perpetrators, organizers, financiers and sponsors of these reprehensible acts of terrorism accountable and bring them to justice." They also urged all states "to cooperate

actively" with Iran and all relevant authorities, in accordance with their obligations under "international law and relevant Security Council resolutions."

Iran's ambassador and permanent representative to the United Nations, Amir Saeid Iravani, in a post on the X platform expressed appreciation for the Security Council's condemnation of the terrorist attack. Iravani had earlier called on UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres as well as the rotating President of the Security Council José de la Gasca to condemn the terrorist attack. Iranian Interior Minister Ahmad Vahidi has called on Pakistan to avert insecurity along the common border. He has paid a visit to the Police headquarters in Rask. Initial reports said eleven police forces were killed and seven more wounded, some in critical condition, in the attack.

"We call on the government of Pakistan to take action to protect and secure

its border and not allow the terrorist groups to create dens on its soil," Tasnim news agency quoted the minister as saying.

The United Nations also denounced the deadly terrorist attack on Friday, emphasizing that all perpetrators must be brought to justice.

"The United Nations strongly condemns the attack today on a police headquarters in Sistan and Baluchestan Province, the Islamic Republic of Iran," Stéphane Dujarric, a spokesman for the UN secretary-general, said in a statement. Meanwhile, Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi has ordered swift measures to identify the perpetrators and masterminds of the attack as quickly as possible so that they "can be punished for their disgraceful act."

The attack was one of the deadliest in years for the region, which is close to Iran's border with Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Mohammad Ali Rajabi
Cartoonist



Iranian films win at Indian festival



ISNA – Two Iranian animations were awarded at the second edition of the Animators Guild India Fest. The festival awarded 'Lovely Sky,' directed by Amir Mehran and 'Anita Lost in the News,' directed by Behzad Nalbandi, both with special mentions in the Best Animated Short Film (under 45 minutes) category.

'Lovely Sky,' portrays a fighter pilot who, after each mission of bombing cities, returns home to his young daughter with dreams of flight. However, the father, haunted by the bitter memory of his wife's death, never fulfills his daughter's wish to soar the skies together. The looming war draws closer to their lives, leading to a life-altering incident.

'Anita Lost in the News' had previously made appearances at the Jihlava International Documentary Film Festival in the Czech Republic and the Birmingham Film Festival in England. The film, which runs for 17 minutes, revolves around the tragic story of a Kurdish-Iranian family's perilous journey seeking a better life.

The film explores the tragic incident where a sailboat, carrying 19 illegal immigrants, including the Irannejad family, overturned in the English Channel, resulting in the drowning of seven migrants.

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Amirhadi Arsalanpour
Leila Imeni
Hamideh Hosseini
Ali Amiri
Ali Mehran

Address: 208, Khorramshahr Ave., Tehran, Iran

- Editorial Dept. Tel: +98 21 84711171
- ICPI Publisher: +98 21 88548892-5
- Advertising Dept. Tel: +98 21 88500601
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Tehran Auction wraps up with over \$123m in sales

Arts & Culture Desk

The 18th edition of Tehran Auction, a prominent event showcasing contemporary Iranian art, concluded on December 15 with an online sale totaling \$123,552,000.

This edition of Tehran Auction marked a departure from its traditional format, combining the contemporary and modern art auctions into a single online event, IRNA reported.

This year, 55% of the participating young artists presented their works in the Iranian art market for the first time, achieving admirable sales.

One distinctive feature of this auction was the significant presence of female artists, with 41 women showcasing their artworks during the event, contributing to the diverse range of offerings. Renowned figures in Iranian art, such as Parviz Tanavoli, Aydin Aghdashloo, Mohammad Ehsaei, Masoud Arabshahi, Parviz Kalantari, and Parvaneh Etemadi, also participated, presenting

contemporary art pieces alongside emerging talents.

In contrast to previous years, the Tehran Auction introduced an online auction to bridge the gap between separate contemporary and modern art events held in the summer and winter.

During this auction, out of 114 artworks, 112 works were successfully sold, with 33 pieces exceeding the maximum bid range. Most of these successful bidders were emerging artists making their mark in the Iranian art market.

A total of 79 artworks were sold within the bid range, and 13 pieces fetched thousands of dollars. The four-day event, held at Agora Complex and online simultaneously, showcased 88 paintings, 16 sculptures, six photographs, and four calligraphy pieces.

Overall, the 18th edition of the Tehran Auction witnessed the sale of 13 artworks with prices exceeding \$20,000.

Despite the diverse range



of artists and genres, the highest demand and price growth were observed for works by emerging artists in the art market.

The highest-priced item in the auction was a piece by Parviz Tanavoli, titled 'Farangi (Foreign) Woman on Persian Carpet II,' which

sold for \$110,000. This distinctive work by the veteran sculptor and painter, blending Iranian carpet art with contemporary pop art, marked this artwork's first appearance in the art market.

Following closely, 'Enigma 92' by Aydin Aghdashloo

and an untitled painting by Masoud Arabshahi secured the second and third positions, selling for \$92,400 and \$83,600, respectively. Among other notable sales were two artworks by different generations of Iranian contemporary artists: an untitled painting by the

late Parviz Kalantari and a piece from the 'Ancient Arts Alchemy' collection by Shahriar Ahmadi, both purchased for \$68,200.

In the fifth position among the auction's top sellers was a sculpture titled 'Pion' by Timo Nasser, fetching \$44,000.



Portuguese translation of 'Cell No. 14,' unveiled in Lisbon

The Portuguese version of the memoirs of the Leader of the Islamic Revolution, titled 'Cell No. 14,' was unveiled in Lisbon. The book's presentation

took place at a ceremony attended by dignitaries, media personalities, Portuguese and Iranian researchers, along with ambassadors and foreign business

figures residing in Lisbon on December 14. During the event, various speakers, including Iran's Ambassador to Portugal Majid Tafreshi, emphasized

the theme of resistance as depicted in the memoirs, Tasnim news agency reported.

Tafreshi stated, "This book is themed around the subject of resistance. Many nations, such as Algeria, Cuba, and South Africa have achieved their goals through resistance. Similarly, the memoirs of the Leader of the Islamic Revolution show that the Iranian Revolution attained victory alongside resistance."

He added, "Today, the power of logic must be clarified more than ever for people around the world, and people need to stand up against any abuse of power."

The Palestinian Ambassador to Lisbon, Nabil Abu Zneid, shared historical perspectives, noting, "In 1979, after the Islamic Rev-

olution, we were demonstrating in Washington when Ayatollah Khomeini decided to reopen the Palestinian Embassy in Tehran in the presence of Yasser Arafat. That event was the greatest change."

The South African Ambassador Mmamokwena Gaoretelelwe, drew parallels, stating, "What is happening to the Palestinian people today is understandable for us Africans. The concept of resistance is very important for us, and victory is certain for the Palestinian people."

Ambassador Shakib Rashid of Algeria expressed solidarity, stating, "Algeria was occupied from 1830 to 1962 and had more than 1.5 million martyrs. We understand the Palestinian situation very well. Our

young generation in Algeria has been raised within a cultural environment of resistance, and we believe that Palestine will be victorious."

Maria Dominguez, the Cuban Ambassador in Lisbon, highlighted the enduring spirit of resistance, saying, "After being colonized by Spain, Cuba was able to conquer it, but it was captured again by the US. Our people decided to determine their own system of governance just as the Iranian people had during the 1979 Islamic Revolution."

Mohammad Akhgari, vice president of the International Affairs of the Islamic Revolution Research and Cultural Institute, emphasized the book's central theme, stating, "This book depicts the history of the

Iranian people's resistance in order to achieve victory. Today, after 50 years, we are still witnessing the killing of Palestinians. Resistance is the main concept of this book, and 'victory comes with patience and resistance' is the key to the victory of the Palestinians."

The ceremony concluded with the unveiling of the Portuguese version of 'Cell No. 14' in the presence of the Iranian ambassador, ambassadors from Palestine, Cuba, Algeria, South Africa, and representatives from various countries, as well as distinguished figures from Portugal, including the vice president of the Islamic World Observatory and the editor of the magazine Diplomatico, alongside academics from Iran and Portugal.

Reading print improves comprehension far more than looking at digital text: Study

Reading print texts improves comprehension more than reading digital materials does, according to a new study.

Researchers at the University of Valencia analysed more than two dozen studies on reading comprehension published between 2000 and 2022, which assessed nearly 470,000 participants. Their findings suggest that print reading

over a long period of time could boost comprehension skills by six to eight times more than digital reading does.

"The association between frequency of digital reading for leisure and text comprehension abilities is close to 0," said Ladislao Salmerón, a professor at the University of Valencia who co-authored the paper. This may be because the "linguistic

quality of digital texts tends to be lower than that traditionally found in printed texts", he added. Text on social media, for example, may be conversational and lack complex syntax and reasoning, The Guardian reported.

Salmerón said that the "reading mindset" for digital texts also tends to be more shallow than that for printed materials, with

scanning being more common. This can mean the reader "doesn't fully get immersed in the narration, or doesn't fully capture the complex relations in an informative text".

The study, published in the Review of Educational Research, also found that while there is a negative relationship between digital reading and comprehension for primary school

students, the relationship turns positive for secondary school and undergraduate students.

Salmerón suggests that this may be because young children are less able to navigate the distractions, such as incoming messages, that might come with reading on a digital device. "We know that our ability to regulate our cognition evolves during adolescence," he said. Young children "may not be fully equipped to self-regulate their activity during digital leisure reading".

The authors also said that

young children engaging in frequent digital reading may learn less academic vocabulary "in a critical period when they are shifting from learning to read to reading to learn".

The researchers are not "against digital reading", said Lidia Altamura, a Ph.D. student who co-authored the paper. "It's just that, based on what we have found, digital reading habits do not pay off as much as print reading. That is why, when recommending reading activities, schools and school leaders should em-

phasise print reading more than digital reading, especially for younger readers." Salmerón added that one surprising finding was that the relatively small association between digital reading for leisure and comprehension stands regardless of the type of reading people engage in, across both social media and educational websites such as Wikipedia. "We expected that the latter would be much more positively associated with text comprehension, but our data says that is not the case."