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SPECIAL ISSUE



Iran Daily



irandaily.ir | newspaper.irandaily.ir

Vol. 7464 • Thursday, December 21, 2023 • Azar 30, 1402 • Jumada al-Thani 7, 1445 • 100,000 rials • 8 Pages

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Unacceptable

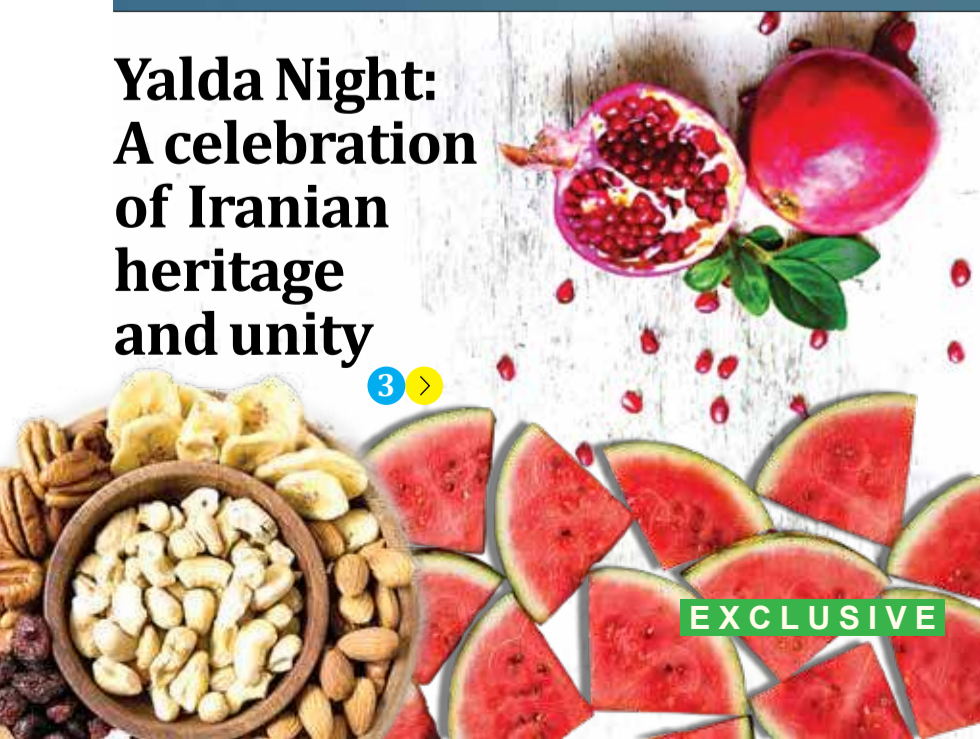
A group of people gathered outside of the Sweden Embassy in Tehran, Iran, on December 20, 2023 to protest over a Swedish court's verdict against the former Iranian judiciary official, Hamid Nouri, who has been illegally incarcerated.

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Israel, Hamas working toward new truce, prisoner deal

Hopes rose Wednesday that Israel and Hamas may be inching toward another truce and prisoner release deal in the Gaza war, following secret talks as the head of the Palestinian resistance group visited Egypt. The leader of Hamas made his first visit to Egypt for over a month on Wednesday, a rare personal intervention in diplomacy amid what a source described as intensive talks on a new cease-fire to let aid reach Gaza and get prisoners freed.

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Raisi urges Pakistan to improve border security



International Desk

Iranian president called on Pakistan to make greater efforts to improve security at its border following a terrorist attack in southeastern Iran. Ebrahim Raisi made the remarks in a phone conversation with his Pakistani counterpart Arif Alvi on Wednesday. Eleven Iranian police forces were killed and seven more wounded in the terrorist attack that targeted the police headquarters in Rask County, Sistan and Baluchestan Province on Friday. The so-called Jaish-ul-Adl terrorist group, based in Pakistan, claimed responsibility for the assault. The Pakistani president expressed sympathy with the Iranian president, government and people over the deadly terrorist attack. He emphasized that his government will do its best to improve the security of the common border and prevent the activities of hostile and terrorist groups in the areas. Also on Wednesday, Iran's police chief, Brigadier General Ahmad Reza Radan, said Iran expects the Pakistani government to strictly control the borders to prevent the repetition of such terrorist acts. In a statement on Saturday, members of the UN Security Council strongly condemned the terrorist attack, calling for the prosecution of the perpetrators and sponsors of such "cowardly" acts of terror. The world body's members asserted that terrorism in all its forms and manifestations constitutes one of the most serious threats to international peace and security.

Nouri verdict 'unacceptable'

National Desk

Iran has condemned as "unacceptable" a Swedish court's verdict against a former Iranian judiciary official, Hamid Nouri, who has been illegally incarcerated in Sweden. A Swedish court on Tuesday upheld a controversial life sentence for 62-year-old Nouri, who was arrested in 2019 under unfounded allegations of rights abuse and for what was claimed to be his alleged role in the deaths of prisoners in Iran in the 1980s. The Iranian Foreign Ministry on Wednesday vehemently condemned as "fundamentally unacceptable" the verdict issued by the Stockholm Court of Appeals. "The Islamic Republic of Iran regards the primary and appeals court's verdict concerning Iranian citizen Hamid Nouri to be fundamentally unacceptable and strongly condemns it," said Nasser Kanaani, the Iranian Foreign Ministry's spokesman, Press TV reported. "It is regrettable that the Swedish court, disregarding the standards of a fair trial, has moved to issue such a destructive verdict." He underlined that Sweden had sided with anti-Iran terrorist groups by such a ruling and has jeopardized Tehran-Stockholm relations. "Unfortunately, Sweden's judicial system, by siding with the terrorist groups that have been engaged in the most heinous terrorist and inhumane acts against the people of Iran,

Iraq, and even Europe for decades, has endangered the interests of the two nations as well as the old, historical and deep-rooted relations between the two countries," Kanaani said.

"In light of its inherent duties in defending the rights of its citizens, the Islamic Republic of Iran has used all legal capacities and facilities to free the said citizen from the grip of injustice and will continue its efforts until the fulfillment of the rights of its citizens," he added.

The Foreign Ministry's spokesman also stressed that the Islamic Republic reserves the right to take "appropriate" steps in that regard.

The former Iranian judiciary official has been placed in solitary confinement since his illegal arrest.

'Unfair' verdict

Also, Iran's judiciary said the Swedish court's verdict is unfair and that no ruling but the exoneration of the 62-year-old will be acceptable.

"The verdict against Hamid Nouri is unfair but predictable," Massoud Setayeshi, the judiciary spokesman was quoted as saying by ISNA.

"We will not recognize any verdict except the acquittal verdict regarding Hamid Nouri's innocence."

Nouri was arrested upon arrival at Stockholm Airport in November 2019 and was immediately imprisoned.

He was put on trial on unfounded allegations staged against him by elements



● MIZAN

representing the Mujahedin-e-Khalq Organization (MKO) terrorist group that has openly boasted about carrying out terrorist operations against Iranian officials and civilians perceived to be supporters of the government. The terrorist group had falsely claimed that Nouri was involved in the execution and torture of MKO members in 1988, baseless charges he has vehemently rejected.

In July last year, a Swedish court sentenced Nouri to life imprisonment. The court, which was described by Iran as illegitimate in the first place, convicted Nouri of "war crimes and crimes against humanity" entirely based on claims made by MKO terrorists living in exile across Europe.

The former Iranian judiciary official has been placed in

solitary confinement since his illegal arrest.

As Nouri's lower court trial was underway in Stockholm in April 2022, Iran arrested Johan Floderus, a Swede working for the EU's diplomatic service on espionage charges, as he was returning from a trip to Iran with friends.

The Iranian judiciary spokesman also said that the case of Johan Floderus was being investigated at an official court.

On Wednesday, a court session dealing with the charges against the Swedish national was held at the Islamic Revolutionary Court in the presence of the Swedish Embassy official in Tehran, IRNA reported.

The third session of hearings was held on December 18, according to the judiciary spokesman.

"The legal proceedings for the case are underway in a court," he said.

He has been in temporary detention since last year.

Iran's Intelligence Ministry announced in March last year that it had arrested the Swedish national, who had been visiting the country, on espionage charges after having him under surveillance for some time.

The Intelligence Ministry stressed that the Swedish suspect had re-entered Iran several months earlier following the arrest of "another European spy" in order to acquire information about the identity of the detained European person and how he had been arrested by the ministry.

The suspect had had a history of traveling to the Israeli-occupied territories before leaving for Iran.

Israel, Hamas working toward new truce, prisoner deal

International Desk

Hopes rose Wednesday that Israel and Hamas may be inching toward another truce and prisoner release deal in the Gaza war, following secret talks as the head of the Palestinian resistance group visited Egypt. The leader of Hamas made his first visit to Egypt for over a month on Wednesday, a rare personal intervention in diplomacy amid what a source described as intensive talks on a new cease-fire to let aid reach Gaza and get prisoners freed. Ismail Haniyeh, who normally resides in Qatar, typ-

ically intervenes in diplomacy publicly only when progress seems likely. He last traveled to Egypt in early November before the announcement of the only agreement on a cease-fire in the war so far, a week-long pause during which more than 100 prisoners were released.

A source briefed on negotiations said envoys were discussing which of the prisoners still held by Hamas in Gaza could be freed under a new truce agreement, and what prisoners Israel might release in return. Israel was insisting that all remaining women and in-



firm men among captives be released, the source said, declining to be identified.

Palestinians convicted of serious offences could be on the list of prisoners to be freed.

President Isaac Herzog also said Israel was "ready for another humanitarian pause and additional humanitarian aid in order to enable the release of hostages".

The bloodiest ever Gaza war began when Hamas attacked on October 7, killing around 1,140 people in Israel, and abducting about 250, according to an AFP tally based on Israeli figures. Israel launched a military campaign that Gaza's Hamas-run Health Ministry says has killed 19,667 people, mostly women and children, while also cutting off most water, food and power supplies.

Firm on battlefield

Ahead of the Egypt visit, Haniyeh held talks with

Iran's Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian in the Qatari capital Doha.

During the meeting, he said the Palestinian resistance stands "firm on the battlefield" despite two and a half months of Israeli war crimes in the besieged Gaza Strip. Haniyeh said the volume of the Israeli military's aerial, naval, and ground attacks on the besieged Gaza has been unprecedented.

"The resistance has still stood firm and steadfast on the battlefield and inflicted heavy damage on the Zionist regime after 75 days of Israeli crimes and mass murders as part of its scorched-earth policy."

Haniyeh also hailed the Palestinian nation for showing unique resilience and standing by the resistance while paying a heavy price for their position. Amir-Abdollahian, for his



An Israeli military vehicle drives near damaged buildings in the Gaza Strip, amid the ongoing war on the besieged strip, as seen from southern Israel, on December 19, 2023.

● REUTERS

caught in the conflict.

The UN estimates 1.9 million of Gaza's 2.3 million residents have been forced to flee their homes, many sheltering in tents amid dire shortages and the biting winter cold.

"Amid displacement at an unimaginable scale and active hostilities, the humanitarian response system is on the brink," said Tor Wennesland, the UN's special coordinator for the Middle East peace process.

Israel, which declared a total siege on Gaza at the start of the war, has since allowed in aid trucks through the Rafah border crossing with Egypt and, as of this week, its own Kerem Shalom crossing.

The UN's World Food Programme said Wednesday it had delivered food through the crossing in a first direct aid convoy from Jordan. Aid groups have warned the humanitarian goods fall far short of the dire need, and the UN children's agency said that "child deaths due to disease could surpass those killed in bombardments".

Inside Gaza, Reuters saw wounded victims of Israeli bombing, including at least two small children covered in blood and dust, carried into the Nasser Hospital in Khan Younis. At the hospital morgue, women wearing black abaya robes wailed by bodies laid out in black bags and white shrouds.

Mohammad Ali Rajabi
Cartoonist



Yalda Night: A celebration of Iranian heritage and unity



By Leila Imeni
Staff writer

Yalda Night, also known as Shab-e Chelleh, stands out as one of the most significant ancient Persian festivals celebrated annually on December 21 by the Iranians worldwide. This special night boasts a rich history that dates back to centuries ago, when society was primarily centered around agriculture and the sun, along with its illuminating rays, symbolized life, energy, and spirituality.

Interestingly, Yalda Night is just one minute longer than the preceding nights. Archaeologists believe that this celebration traces its roots to over 7000 years ago.

A glimpse into Iran's socio-cultural history unveils captivating depictions of the rituals and customs associated with the Yalda Night's celebration, underscoring its millennia-old heritage.

While this ceremony has changed across various cultures over the passage of time, it has remained unwavering and enduring, with these traditions transmitted from one generation to the next.

Ancient people relied on animal husbandry and agriculture, shaping their lives according to nature. The seasons and length of day and night greatly influenced their daily routines. They valued the light, warmth, and longer days, viewing them as positive and enjoyable. However, winter, with its cold and long nights, was not to their liking.

Time of sun's rebirth

Ancient people perceived the last night of autumn as a time of the sun's rebirth. A few, even chose to spend this night on the foothills of the Alborz Mountains, waiting for the dawn and the sun's renewed birth.

People of various Iranian cities celebrate the Yalda Night according to their own culture and geography, each with its own unique attractions; although some of them have been forgotten and only memories of them remain.

Reading Hafez's poems

On this magical night, it is a tradition for families to engage in the ancient practice of fortune telling by reading the poetry of Hafez, a great Iranian poet of 14th century. Those with a taste for poetry recite the verses for others to enjoy. This tradition, passed down from ancient culture, is performed every year on Yalda Night.

Family gathering

Presently Yalda celebration is also held in a family gathering similar to other Iranian festivals and ceremonies, in which a table of special foods is seen.

In most regions, these foods mainly consist of nuts, fruits, and various traditional and non-traditional pastries.

Watermelon and pomegranate

Watermelon is among the main fruits served in Yalda Night, symbolizing protection from winter's cold by consuming a fruit associated with summer. Pomegranate serves as a symbol of joy and new life, prominently featured during the Yalda celebration.

This delicious, juicy fruit aids in blood formation and provides a significant energy boost and energy to individuals, with its abundance of vitamin C

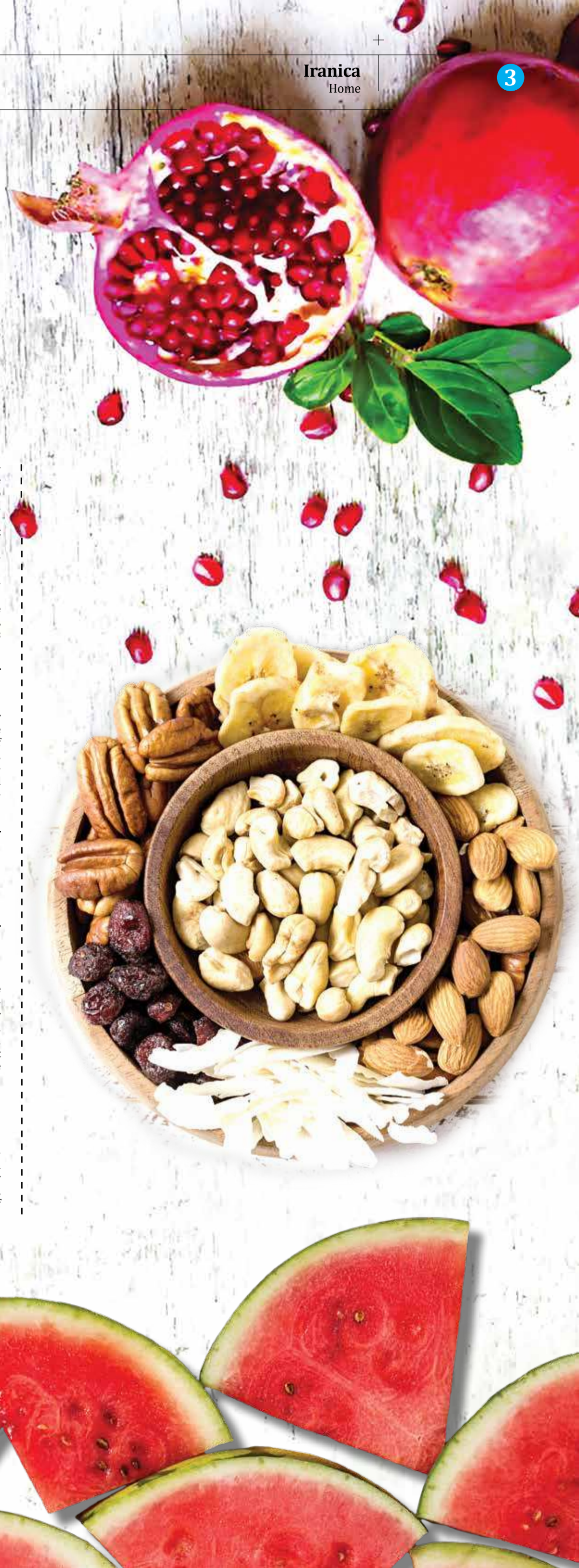
and other beneficial properties.

Iranians are very cultured and civilized people who have a history of several thousand years. Yalda Night is also one of their ancient cultures, only purpose of which is to bring people together and show them that happiness and joy can be achieved with very simple things, and the only requirement is that the people be together, hold hands, and take steps towards happiness.

A memorable night

Being with family is one of the great blessings of God that everyone should appreciate. Yalda Night is an opportunity for us to spend a night together with our family. It is good to learn from this historical tradition and try to practice being together on other days of the year as well.

Time passes very quickly. Yalda Night, no matter how long it is, will eventually come to an end and will be replaced by winter. Yalda or any other occasion, if filled with love and affection, will be memorable and unforgettable for all of us.





REUTERS

Israel-Palestine issue: Alternatives beyond two-state solution



By Zohreh Qanadi
Staff writer

In the turbulent landscape of the Middle East, tensions flared up on October 7, when the Hamas resistance group attacked southern Israel, killing 1,200 people. The attack was a result of decades of pent-up anger of the oppressed Palestinians. The Hamas attack and Israel's violent response reignited a bloody conflict in the Middle East that has been going on for decades.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict traces its origins to the mid-20th century, reaching a turning point with Israel's occupation of Palestinian territories following the Six-Day War in 1967. In 1917, the British government issued the Balfour Declaration, supporting the establishment of a "national home for the Jewish people" in Palestine. This declaration laid the groundwork for a series of events that have shaped the conflict, including the establishment of Israel in 1948 and the mass displacement of Palestinians, known as the "Nakba," or "catastrophe". This occupation also led to the establishment of Israeli settlements in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, which have significantly contributed to the suffering of the Palestinian population.

The Oct. 7 attack ignited this crisis that has been marked by periods of violence and shifting land boundaries, but rarely prolonged periods of peace. The decades-long crisis has entangled regional states and global powers, raising complex questions surrounding the rights of self-determination.

Two-state solution

Meantime, as a means to address this conflict, international actors and negotiators suggested a two-state solution. The outlines of the two-state process were the result of negotiations between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), mediated by Norway in 1993. In these talks, Israel and the Palestinians, led by Yasser Arafat of the Fatah organization,

pledged to recognize each other formally. The two-state solution that would divide the land between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean to carve out two independent, sovereign Israeli and Palestinian states existing side by side – has repeatedly been endorsed by world leaders. However, the Oslo process never reached its logical conclusion and even left behind more challenging issues.

Issue of land

The issue of land is at the core of the conflict. For a long time, the efforts aimed at achieving a settlement to the conflict were based on the principle of "land for peace," meaning that if Israel withdraws from the occupied Arab territories, including the occupied Palestinian land, the Arabs will make peace with Israel. The agreement led to the establishment of Palestinian self-governing entities in areas that Israel had occupied during the 1967 war. However, military occupation and the construction of Jewish settlements persisted, leaving the final status issues to future negotiations.

Israel has also been keen to pursue more peace deals with Arab states without giving up land, having won normalization from the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain, and upgraded ties with Morocco and Sudan, in 2020 despite talks with the Palestinians having been frozen for years.

In general, it has proved impossible for Israel and the Palestinians to reach an agreement. And, since talks brokered by John Kerry, the then US secretary of state, collapsed in 2014, and as Jewish settlements continue to expand in the West Bank and East Al-Quds, the consensus has been that the two-state solution is dead.

Obstacles: Israel itself

Why hasn't this suggestion been realized yet? The main obstacle to this solution at the first step has been Israel itself. Most international supporters of the two-state solution favor returning Israel to the borders that it had before territory annexations after the 1967 war. But Israel opposes relinquishing the lands it occupied and returning to the borders before 1967. The term "occupied territories," and Israel's obligation to withdraw from them, was first used in UN Resolution 242 after the 1967 war. It refers to the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. While Israel calls these "disputed territories," its policies have indisputably led to dispossession, settler violence, creeping annexation, and charges of apartheid in the

West Bank.

The challenges, however, are significant. Palestinians and Israelis currently live within the borders of what could become the other's potential future state. Many Palestinian families seek to return to areas lost during the 1948 war.

President of the Palestinian Authority Mahmoud Abbas, who governs Palestinian-controlled areas of the West Bank, has accused Israel of "systematically destroying the two-state solution."

"Whoever thinks that peace can prevail in the Middle East without the Palestinian people enjoying their full and legitimate national rights is delusional," Abbas said at the UN General Assembly in September, before the current war began. Abbas, who is supported by the West, has been in office since 2005 but remains unpopular among many Palestinians.

Hamas

Just as the PLO turned to pragmatism, however, a new organization, Hamas, rejected the Oslo Accords.

However, the Palestinian resistance group that controls the Gaza Strip said in 2017 that it was prepared to accept a Palestinian state along the 1967 borders. However, its then-leader, Khaled Meshal, said the group would not recognize Israel or cede any rights.

Netanyahu

At present, Israel's far-right cabinet is viscerally opposed to the very idea of an independent Palestinian state, and its leader, Benjamin Netanyahu, has blocked progress on the issue for many years. Few expect him to survive as prime minister once the war is over, but there is no obvious pro-peace alternative in waiting. In and out of office, Netanyahu has worked consistently hard to thwart Palestinian independence. It is safe to say he is not about to change his mind. If the two-state solution can be revived, it won't happen while he is prime minister.

Netanyahu said during a 2015 re-election campaign that there would be no indepen-

dent Palestinian state as long as he holds office. However, since then, he has appeared more receptive to the idea, but with major caveats on security. He told CNN earlier this year: "I'm certainly willing to have them have all the powers that they need to govern themselves, but none of the powers that can threaten us."

This underscores Israel's concerns about the future leadership of the official state of Palestine.

Illegal settlements

A two-state solution is no longer possible, said Mark LeVine, a history professor at the University of California at Irvine.

"Just look at the map," said the chair of the program in global Middle East studies at the university, referring to the hundreds of Israeli settlements across the West Bank.

In 1993, when the first Oslo agreement was signed, these settlers numbered around 130,000. Today, according to the UN, there are almost 700,000.

Before the October 7 war, Israel's expansion of settlements in the West Bank posed a significant barrier to peace for Palestinians. With a surge in settler violence, West Bank Palestinians now face heightened concerns about potential new displacements. Many in the international community consider these settlements illegal under international law, a view disputed by the regime. The expansion of settlements further complicates the prospects for a two-state solution.

Achcar, the SOAS professor, said that the Oslo Accords contained no provision to stop settlement building, which has exploded in the intervening decades. "To have the Palestinians accept something like a two-state solution, you would need a full withdrawal of the settlements," he said. Yossi Meikelberg, an associate fellow at the London-based think tank Chatham House, noted that the Israeli withdrawal of just 8,000 settlers from Gaza in 2005 "tore apart Israeli society." Many Israelis see the Gaza pullout as a big mistake.

As prime minister, Yitzhak Rabin had put a freeze on new Israeli settlements in the



PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat (R) shakes hands with Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin (L), as US President Bill Clinton stands between them, after the signing of the Israeli-PLO peace accord, at the White House in Washington September 13, 1993.

●REUTERS

occupied territories. His cabinet undertook secret negotiations with the PLO that culminated in the Israel-PLO accords (September 1993), in which Israel recognized the PLO and agreed to gradually implement limited self-rule for Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. In October 1994, Rabin and King Hussein of Jordan, after a series of secret meetings, signed a full peace treaty.

In 2000, US President Bill Clinton unsuccessfully attempted to reach a deal with Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat at Camp David. Months later, clashes broke out after an Israeli politician visited an Al-Quds (Jerusalem) site venerated by both Jews and Muslims. A Palestinian intifada, or uprising, gripped the region for years.

Al-Quds

Al-Quds (Jerusalem) is another major difficulty. Palestinians see East Al-Quds, which was annexed by Israel, as the capital of a future Palestinian state. The situation was further complicated by US President Donald Trump's decision to recognize Al-Quds as Israel's capital in 2017.

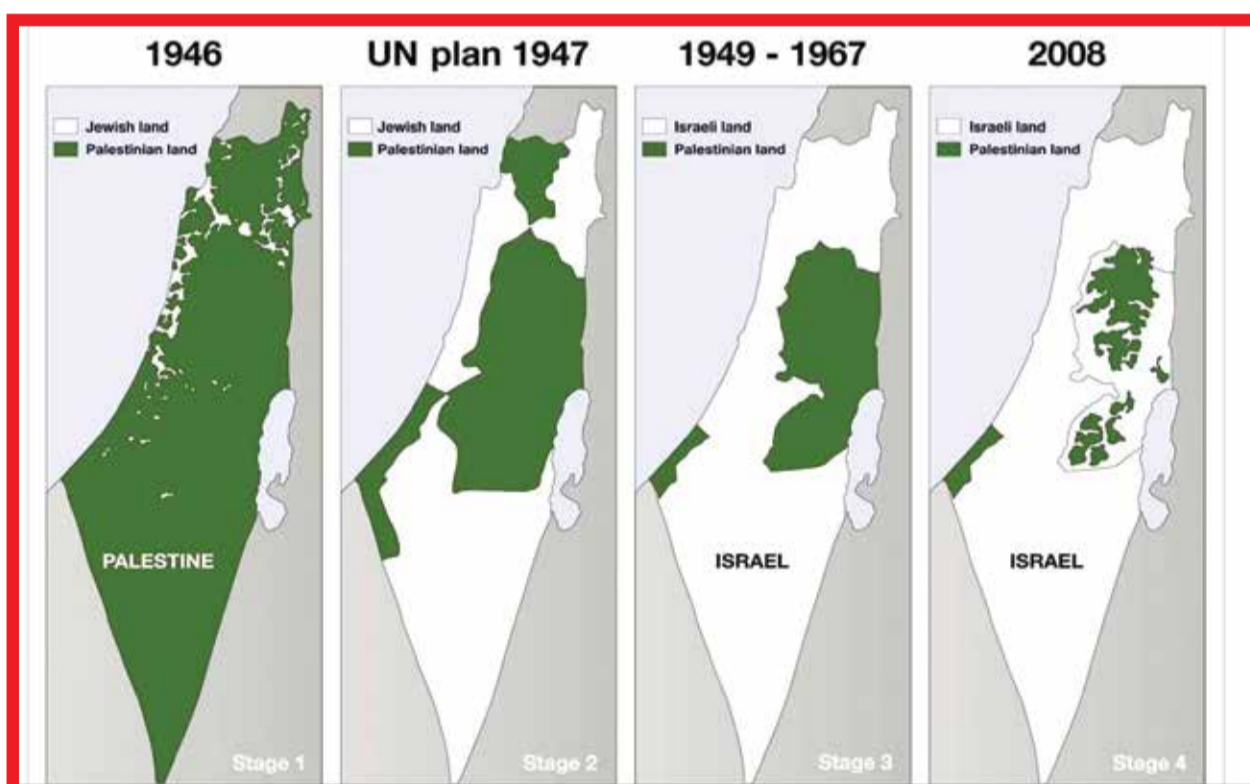
Coexistence or non-coexistence

Once all obstacles to this solution are eliminated, a pragmatic concern that remains is the prospect of coexistence – whether it is feasible for populations and states to peacefully coexist side by side. A notable instance is a survey conducted recently by the Ramallah-based Arab World for Research and Development, revealing that 98 percent of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip harbor sentiments of not “forgiving nor forgetting” Israel's assault on the besieged coastal enclave.

In Israel, the non-coexistence view has also been reinforced by opinion polls conducted shortly before the October 7 attack. In September, a Pew Research Center survey found that only 35% of Israelis believed “a way can be found for Israel and an independent Palestinian state to coexist peacefully” – a decline of 15 percentage points since 2013.

A Gallup poll found that just 24% of Palestinians living in the West Bank, Gaza, and East Al-Quds supported a two-state solution, down from 59% in 2012. Young Palestinians were significantly less enthusiastic than their parents.

If it is possible for people on both sides of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to envision coexistence, a two-state solution could potentially provide a framework for shared living. Such an arrangement would require mutual recognition, respect for borders, and a commitment



to resolving the longstanding issues that have fueled the conflict. The challenge lies not only in the diplomatic negotiations but also in fostering an environment where both sides can coexist harmoniously, sharing resources, and ensuring the well-being of their respective populations. It hinges on the willingness of leaders and communities to embrace the concept of peaceful coexistence and work towards a sustainable resolution for the benefit of future generations.

To these realities, other obstacles to the two-state solution have now been added. Isafías Barreñada, an international relations professor at Madrid's Complutense University cites two. The first is that the “extreme violence with which Israel is acting in Gaza” ruins “any chance of the parties sitting down together for the next 50 years.” The second is, “the willingness of the parties to negotiate” after the war.

Palestine's gradual triumph

While the end of the current war remains still unknown, in the unfolding process of the conflict and warfare, what is happening is the gradual triumph, or, at the very least, the emergence of the Palestinian narrative against the Israeli algorithm – despite its difficulty to be seen in the political arena.

Peace needs more blood!

Many diplomats and analysts agree that lasting peace must follow the bloodiest fighting between Israelis and Palestinians for decades.

Moreover, advocates of the two-state solution believe that the violence has contradicted the ideals they strive to promote. However, it doesn't seem like an appropriate prelude for an agreement that resolves the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as Israel's assault on Gaza has killed more than 18,800 people, mostly children and women, during nearly three months.

But according to Aaron David Miller, an adviser on the Middle East to both Democratic and Republican administrations, there are numerous obstacles in the way of a two-state solution, not least that, in the immediate aftermath of the war, “we will be left with two deeply traumatized societies.”

Unlikely prospect

Now as Israel presses its bombardment and ground invasion of Gaza in the aftermath of the Hamas attack, some global leaders are also returning to the stalled diplomatic effort from decades ago to possibly shape postwar policies: the two-state solution.

In the US, traditionally a key backer of the two-state process, Joe Biden's energies will inevitably be absorbed in fighting to retain his presidency over the next

months. If he loses to Donald Trump, the chances of reviving the solution are close to nil.

Biden has recently said that the “day after” the war in Gaza may still be weeks or months away. But it will come. “When this crisis is over, there has to be a vision of what comes next.” “And in our view, it has to be a two-state solution.”

British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak has also discussed the “long-term goal of the two-state solution” on a call with Netanyahu. The European Council in October reaffirmed its commitment to a “lasting and sustainable peace based on the two-state solution.” Pope Francis, in an interview with Italian media, called for “that wise solution, two states.”

Despite the public endorsements, some scholars say the two-state solution is an increasingly unlikely prospect.

Is confederation an alternative?

Mark LeVine, a history professor at the University of California at Irvine, has said “We all wish that the two-state solution was possible because it would be easy to do. ‘Okay, you take this part, you take this part,’ like a divorce,” he said. However, “there's no selling the house and splitting up,” he added.

LeVine envisions a sort of hybrid model: “shared, overlapping, or what we call ‘parallel states’” that isn't defined by the

connection between territory and sovereignty. “Israel could remain a Jewish state, Palestine could be a Palestinian state, but Jews and Palestinians could live anywhere,” he said.

He's not alone in thinking beyond the traditional two-state model. Some Israelis, Palestinians, and outside scholars have supported the idea of a confederation as an alternative.

Under the confederation plan, Israelis living in settlements deeper in the West Bank would be able to choose whether to relocate to homes inside Israel or stay where they are as Israeli citizens who are permanent residents of Palestine, agreeing to abide by the new state's laws. A comparable number of Palestinian citizens would be able to move to Israel on the same terms.

However, Rand Corp. focus groups in 2018 and 2019 found significant opposition to several possible solutions, including a two-state solution and a confederation.

“On both sides, there's no leadership that believes in peace,” said Mekelberg.

Still, he said, the concept is viable. But “the two-state solution in 2023 would look very different from the two-state solution in 1993,” he said.

Iran's referendum proposal

If the only viable solution, as even Israeli allies opt for, was the two-state process, Israel would not give in to it.

As Iran's Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian recently said, the only thing that Iran and Israel have in common is that they both do not believe in a two-state solution.

At an online international forum in Doha, Qatar, on December 12, he reiterated Iran's proposal that a referendum be held to determine the fate of Palestine, with only descendants of those who lived there before 1948 being permitted to vote.

As mentioned, critics of Israeli policy also say its actions are intended to make the two-state solution impossible.

As a key player, Iran has proposed a significant solution for the issue of Palestine, and that is to hold a referendum among all indigenous Palestinians, including Jews, Christians, and Muslims. It is their right, after seventy-five years, to express their opinion on their destiny through a referendum conducted by the United Nations, and based on the results, bring an end to this matter.

A somewhat aligned perspective with this proposal would be the dream of a Palestinian child: to live in his land with equal rights without considering nationality and religion, but just humanity.

Persian Gulf Pro League roundup:

Esteghlal, Sepahan flying high; Persepolis hits rock bottom in Ahvaz

Sports Desk

The latest round of the Persian Gulf Pro League fixtures on Tuesday was one to forget for Persepolis supporters. As if a frustrating afternoon in Ahvaz's Ghadir Stadium, which led to a 2-2 stalemate against the bottom-side Esteghlal Khuzestan, was not enough, Sepahan and Esteghlal ran riot against their opponents - a day after Tractor and Malavan had won their games against Paykan and Mes Rafsanjan respectively to overtake the Tehran Reds in the Iranian top-flight standing. Javad Aqaiepour gave Esteghlal Khuzestan - yet to win a game in 13 outings this season - the lead twice in the early stages of the two halves, only to see the defending champion draw the scoreline level on both occasions, courtesy of a Hossein Kan'anizadegan's spot-kick as well as a first goal in nine appearances for Swedish summer signing Nabil Bahoui. The result, coupled with an inept performance, was the latest episode in a below-par

run for Yahya Golmohammadi and his men, who have had a single victory in nine matches across all competitions since early November, while crashing out of the AFC Champions League group stage. Having lifted six top-flight trophies in the previous seven seasons, Persepolis is fifth in the table with 22 points - six adrift of the league leader Esteghlal with a game in hand. Unlike their archrivals, the Tehran Blues proved to have recovered from the emotional burden of last Thursday's Capital Derby when they welcomed Nassaji Mazandaran to the Azadi Stadium later on Tuesday. Armin Sohrabian headed home late in the first half before Mehrdad Mohammadi, Arman Ramezani, and Abolfazl Jalali added three in six minutes after the break as the 4-0 triumph saw Javad Nekounam's side leapfrog Sepahan to the top spot, hours after the Isfahan-based club had walked away with a 5-0 win at Havadar. There were consequences



Esteghlal fullback Abolfazl Jalali (33) celebrates with teammate Arman Ramezani during a 4-0 victory over Nassaji Mazandaran in the Persian Gulf Pro League at the Azadi Stadium, Tehran, Iran, on Dec. 19, 2023. **PAYAM SANI/IRNA**

for an ex-Blue goalkeeper in Mahdi Rahmati, who stepped down from his role as the Nassaji head coach after a seventh defeat of the cam-

paign left the club struggling in the relegation zone. Meanwhile, a fifth league victory on the bounce - 10th in 12 games - again showcased

Sepahan's determination to win a first top-flight title since 2015, despite Jose Morais's side being deducted four points by the Iranian

football governing body for a 'budget cap violation' earlier in the season. In-form international full-back Ramin Rezaeian got Sepahan off the mark nine minutes into the game and Shahriyar Moghanlou added a double - the second coming from the spot - to steer his side to a three-goal lead at the break and move atop the league's leading marksman chart with eight goals - alongside teammate Reza Asadi who rounded off the victory six minutes from normal time, following substitute Kaveh Rezaei's second strike in as many games. There were no goals elsewhere in the other three fixtures on Tuesday, as Iraco and Golgohar played to a draw in Arak, the same outcome in Shams Azar's home encounter with San'at Naft Abadan, while Zob Ahan shared the spoils with Foolad Khuzestan to sit behind Persepolis in the table. On Monday, Mahdi Abdi - on a season-long loan from Persepolis - bagged a brace late in the game as Tractor beat Paykan 2-0 at home, despite playing with 10 men for

the best part of the second half after Iraqi midfielder Safa Hadi was shown a second yellow card four minutes after the interval. A third victory in a row lifted Paco Jemez's side to the third spot with 24 points - two above Mahdi Tartar's Malavan FC, which continued its fairy tale run with a 4-1 thrashing of Mes in Rafsanjan. Pedram Qazipour was on target twice in six minutes before Brazilian Luciano Pereira pulled one back for the host right before half-time. Mes midfielder Jaleddin Alimohammadi received his marching orders for a second bookable offence on the hour mark and things went from bad to worse for the home side 12 minutes later when Mohammadreza Soleimani restored the two-goal cushion for Tartar's team with a spot kick. Pouria Pournali's composed finish secured a sixth win for fourth-place Malavan, which tallied five victories across the whole of the previous campaign to only avoid relegation.

SPECIFIC PROCUREMENT NOTICE

Islamic Republic of Iran
Fars Six Cities Sanitation improvement Project
Sector: sanitation
Mode of Financing: Istisna'a
Financing No.: IRN-0107
Contract Title:

Second Announcement نوبت دوم

Lot1: Remaining Works of Procurement, Construction, Test and Commissioning of Trunk Main, Laterals & Interceptors of Zones C and D of Darab Wastewater Project
Lot2: Remaining Works of Procurement, Construction, Test and Commissioning of Laterals & Interceptors of Zones E and I and L of Darab Wastewater Project
NCB Reference No.: DA-SL1 & DA-SL2

- Fars Water and Wastewater Company has received financing from the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB) toward the cost of the Fars Six Cities Sanitation improvement Project, and intends to apply part of the proceeds toward payments under the contract for Remaining Works of Trunk Mains, Interceptors and Laterals of Darab Wastewater Collection Network.
- Fars Water and Wastewater Company now invites sealed bids from eligible bidders for:
LOT1:
Procurement and construction of about 49 Km of wastewater collection network with diameters of 200 to 800 mm in form of trench and tunnel; Procurement and construction of about 900 m3 brick and concrete manholes; Procurement and construction of about 4000 house connections with diameters of 125 and 160 mm.
LOT2:
Procurement and construction of about 74 Km of wastewater collection network with diameters of 200 to 700 mm in form of trench and tunnel; Procurement and construction of about 4000 house connections with diameters of 125 and 160 mm.
- Bidding will be conducted through the National Competitive Bidding (NCB) procedures (Post-qualification Method) as specified in IsDB's Guidelines: Procurement of Goods, Works and related services under Islamic Development Bank Project Financing 2019 ("Procurement Guidelines"), and is open to all eligible bidders as defined in the Procurement Guidelines. In addition, please refer to paragraphs 1.18 -21 setting forth IsDB's policy on conflict of interest.
- Interested eligible bidders may obtain further information from Fars Water and Wastewater Company, and email to pmu.abfafars2023@gmail.com (PMU Unit) and inspect the bidding documents during office hours 08:00 to 14:00 at the address given below for clarification purposes.
- A complete set of bidding documents in English may be purchased by interested eligible bidders upon the submission of a written application to the address below and upon payment of a nonrefundable

fee of 25,000,000 IR Rial. The method of payment will be direct deposit to account number 1528936404 Bank Mellat, Moalem Square (Code: 240008037112). The document shall be purchased from Fars Water and Wastewater Company (FWWC).

- Bids must be delivered to the address below at or before 11:00 a.m. January 10, 2024. Electronic bidding will not be permitted. Late bids will be rejected. Bids will be publicly opened in the presence of the bidders' designated representatives and anyone who choose to attend at the address below on 11:00 a.m. January 10, 2024.
- All bids must be accompanied by a Bid Security as follows:
Lot 1: 58,000,000,000 IR Rials
Lot 2: 79,000,000,000 IR Rials
- The addresses referred to above are:
Clarification Purposes Address
For clarification purposes only, the Employer's address is:
Contract Affairs Office, 2nd Floor, Fars Water and Wastewater Company, Corner of Shahid Sobhani Street, Ghodoosi Garbi Blvd., Motahani Square, Shiraz, Iran.
Postal Code: 71868-98465
Telephone: +987138435153
Facsimile number: +987138435166
Electronic mail address: pmu.abfafars2023@gmail.com
Requests for clarifications should be received by the Purchaser no later than 14 days prior to the deadline for submission of Bids.
Bid Submission Address
For bid submission purposes only, the Employer's address is:
Address: Secretariat, Room No.108, 1st floor, Fars Water and Wastewater Company, Ghodoosi Garbi Blvd., Motahani Square, Shiraz, Iran
Postal Code: 71868-98465
Telephone: +987138435153
Facsimile number: +987138435154
Bid Opening Address
The bid opening shall take place at:
Conference hall, sixth floor, Fars Water and Wastewater Company, Ghodoosi Garbi Blvd., Motahani Square, Shiraz, Iran.

آگهی فراخوان مناقصه

جمهوری اسلامی ایران
پروژه بهسازی بهداشت شش شهر استان فارس
بخش: فاضلاب
نحوه تأمین مالی: استصناع
شماره تأمین مالی: IRN-0107
عنوان قرارداد:

لات 1: باقیمانده کارهای تدارکات، ساخت، آزمایش و راه اندازی «خط انتقال و خطوط اصلی و فرعی زون های C و D شبکه جمع آوری فاضلاب داراب»
لات 2: باقیمانده کارهای تدارکات، ساخت، آزمایش و راه اندازی «خط انتقال و خطوط اصلی و فرعی زون های E و I و L شبکه جمع آوری فاضلاب داراب»
شماره مرجع مناقصه ملی: DA-SL1 & DA-SL2

- شرکت آب و فاضلاب فارس از بانک توسعه اسلامی (IsDB) بابت هزینه بهسازی بهداشت شش شهر استان فارس تسهیلاتی دریافت کرده است و قصد دارد بخشی از آن را صرف پرداخت های قرارداد باقیمانده کارهای «خط انتقال و خطوط اصلی و فرعی شبکه جمع آوری فاضلاب داراب نماید.
- شرکت آب و فاضلاب استان فارس اکنون از مناقصه گران واجد شرایط دعوت می نماید پیشنهادت مهر و موم شده خود را برای:
لات 1: تدارکات و ساخت 49 کیلومتر شبکه فاضلاب با قطر لوله 200 تا 800 میلی متر به شکل ترانشه و تونل، تدارکات و ساخت 900 متر مکعب منیول بتونی و آجری، تدارکات و ساخت حدود 4000 انشعاب خانگی با قطر 125 و 160 میلی متر
لات 2: تدارکات و ساخت 74 کیلومتر شبکه فاضلاب با قطر لوله 200 تا 700 میلی متر به شکل ترانشه و تونل، تدارکات و ساخت 4000 متر مکعب منیول بتونی و آجری، تدارکات و ساخت حدود 4000 انشعاب خانگی با قطر 125 و 160 میلی متر، را به آدرس ذیل ارسال نمایند.
- پیشنهادات از طریق روش مناقصه رقابتی ملی (داخلی) (NCB) و به صورت پسا ارزیابی، همانطور که در دستورالعمل تدارکات کالا، کارها و خدمات مربوطه تحت تأمین مالی بانک توسعه اسلامی (نسخه آوریل 2019) مشخص شده است انجام خواهد شد. برای کلیه پیشنهاد دهندگان واجد شرایط که در دستورالعمل تدارکات مذکور تعریف شده اند، آزاد می باشد. علاوه بر این، لطفاً به یادگرفایده های 18، 19 تا 21 سیاست IsDB را در مورد تضاد منافع از آن می دهد. مرجع شود.
- مناقصه گران واجد شرایط می توانند در ساعات اداری 08:00 الی 14:00 اسناد مناقصه را از شرکت آب و فاضلاب استان فارس به آدرس زیر تهیه و بررسی کنند. همچنین، مناقصه گران می توانند جهت کسب اطلاعات بیشتر به آدرس زیر مراجعه یا از طریق ایمیل pmu.abfafars2023@gmail.com یا واحد مدیریت پروژه تماس بگیرند.
- مناقصه گران واجد شرایط علاقه مند می توانند یک مجموعه کامل از اسناد مناقصه به زبان انگلیسی یا از آن در خواست کنند. به آدرس زیر و یا پرداخت هزینه غیر قابل استرداد 25,000,000,000 ریال، خریداری نمایند. روش پرداخت واریز مستقیم به حساب شماره 1528936404 بانک ملت شعبه میدان معلم (کد 240008037112) خواهد بود. اسناد باید از شرکت آب و فاضلاب استان فارس (FWWC) خریداری شود.

Tehran's air pollution equals smoking 7 cigarettes a day

Social Desk

Inhaling Tehran's extremely polluted air is equivalent to smoking at least seven cigarettes for the entire population exposed to pollution, including children, announced Abbas Shahsavani, the head of the air health and climate change group at the Ministry of Health.

Constant coughing, redness and burning of the eyes have troubled many BRT passengers in Tehran, and everyone seems to have their own way of coping with this situation, Fars News Agency reported.

In the face of air pollution, it is recommended that individuals with respiratory conditions, lung and heart problems, vascular issues, pregnant women, children (especially those with respiratory diseases), immunodeficiency problems, and the elderly, among others, avoid being outdoors. These individuals belong to the sensitive groups who are particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of air pollution.

The primary causes of air pollution in the country are motor-cycles and old cars, which are responsible for 88 percent of the air pollution in Iran. The remaining 12 percent is attributed to fixed sources and industries.



Shockingly, the Ministry of Health has reported that 20,000 deaths in Iran can be attributed to air pollution. In Tehran alone, more than 3,700 people die every year due to this issue.

Mohammadreza Masjedi, the Secretary General of the International Union against Tuberculosis and Lung Diseases, reveals recent research indicating that air pollution claims the lives of nine million people worldwide each year. While deaths caused by strokes outnumber those caused by air pollution, it is

worth noting that one-third of stroke-related deaths are still linked to air pollution.

Mehdi Kamari, a health expert from Shahid Beheshti University of Medical Sciences, emphasizes that a person's genetics, underlying diseases, and diet can influence their sensitivity to air pollution.

"Staying at home is the best solution for those who can avoid going outside during periods of high air pollution," says Kamari.

Health experts also highlight

the risks faced by the elderly in relation to air pollution. With weaker immune systems and potential underlying health conditions, the elderly are less capable of coping with suspended particles and air pollution. These particles can exacerbate heart diseases and even lead to strokes and other cardiac issues. It is advisable for the elderly to stay hydrated, use masks suitable for air pollution and take necessary precautions to protect their health.

Pooya Shahr centers in Tehran cover 7k working children

Social Desk

Pooya Shahr (Dynamic City) is an initiative aimed at supporting and training working children in Tehran. The goal of this initiative is to help these children lead normal lives by equipping them with different skills. Currently, 280 working children have been identified in District 1 of the capital city. They are being provided with support through diverse cultural, literary, artistic, and sports training programs. The ultimate objective of these programs is to reintegrate these children back into society.

There are currently 36 Dynamic City centers in Tehran dedicated to the education, training, talent identification, and empowerment of working and street children. These centers provide services to approximately 7,000 identified working and street children, Tasnim News Agency reported.

Over the course of seven months this year, half of the working and street children have been identified and have had the opportunity to participate in professional skill training workshops. These workshops cover a wide range of areas including handicrafts, embroidery, hairdressing, tailoring, leather embroidery, knitting, carpet weaving, and computer skills. Salimeh Rudaki, the deputy of social and cultural affairs of District 1, announced that the Pooya Shahr center in their area has

identified and provided support to 280 working children. The center offers training and empowerment in various fields such as singing, theater, writing, public speaking, pottery, painting, and crafts.

"The aim is to provide these children with a social identity and an opportunity to reintegrate into society," she said.

Rudaki also highlighted the collaboration with IRIB, an organization with experience and media influence, to gain the trust of the families of working children. "Through their efforts, the necessary training is provided, and the works produced by these children are planned to be displayed in an exhibition during a cultural and social event," she said.

Pooya Shahr centers, which focus on prevention, psychological support, and empowerment, are centers that provide social services to children and their families, particularly working children. Managed by specialized NGOs in collaboration with Tehran Municipality, these centers offer a range of services including employment assistance, healthcare, education, support services, and advocacy for children's rights.

Pooya Shahr centers in Tehran prioritize the prevention of social problems and harm among children, with a special focus on working children. Their goal is to reduce vulnerability and empower these children, thus facilitating their reintegration into society.

SPECIFIC PROCUREMENT NOTICE

Islamic Republic of Iran
Fars Six Cities Sanitation improvement Project
Sector: sanitation
Mode of Financing: Istisna'a
Financing No. IRN-0107
Contract Title:
Remaining Works of Trunk Mains, Interceptors
and Laterals of Firoozabad Wastewater Collection Network
NCB Reference No.: Fi-SL3



Second Announcement نوبت دوم

آگهی فراخوان مناقصه

جمهوری اسلامی ایران
پروژه بهسازی بهداشت شهر فارس
بخش: فاضلاب
نحوه تأمین مالی: استصناع
شماره تأمین مالی: IRN-0107
عنوان قرارداد:
باقیمانده کارهای «خط انتقال و خطوط اصلی و فرعی شبکه جمع آوری فاضلاب فیروزآباد»
شماره مرجع مناقصه ملی: Fi-SL3

- 1 Fars Water and Wastewater Company has received financing from the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB) toward the cost of the Fars Six Cities Sanitation improvement Project, and intends to apply part of the proceeds toward payments under the contract for Remaining Works of Trunk Mains, Interceptors and Laterals of Firoozabad Wastewater Collection Network.
- 2 Fars Water and Wastewater Company now invites sealed bids from eligible bidders for: Procurement and construction of about 51 Km of wastewater collection network with diameters of 200 to 1000 mm in form of trench and tunnel; Procurement and construction of about 1255 m3 brick and concrete manholes; Procurement and construction of about 10350 house connections with diameters of 125 and 160 mm; Remedying the defects of constructed network with a length of about 65 kilometers including: completing of implemented manholes, installation of manholes stairs, implementation of non-installed manhole gates, implementation of non-installed house connections for the constructed network, washing, videometry, preparation of as-built drawings and GIS maps of constructed network.
- 3 Bidding will be conducted through the National Competitive Bidding (NCB) procedures (Post-qualification Method) as specified in IsDB's [Guidelines, Procurement of Goods, Works and related services under Islamic Development Bank Project Financing](#) 2019 ("Procurement Guidelines"), and is open to all eligible bidders as defined in the Procurement Guidelines. In addition, please refer to paragraphs 1.18 -21 setting forth IsDB's policy on conflict of interest.
- 4 Interested eligible bidders may obtain further information from Fars Water and Wastewater Company, and email to pmu.abfafars2023@gmail.com (PMU Unit) and inspect the bidding documents during office hours 08:00 to 14:00 at the address given below for clarification purposes.
- 5 A complete set of bidding documents in English may be purchased by interested eligible bidders upon the submission of

a written application to the address below and upon payment of a nonrefundable fee of 25,000,000 IR Rial. The method of payment will be direct deposit to account number 1528936404 Bank Mellat, Moallem Square (Code: 240008037112). The document shall be purchased from Fars Water and Wastewater Company (FWWC).

6 Bids must be delivered to the address below at or before 11:00 am January 09, 2024. Electronic bidding will not be permitted. Late bids will be rejected. Bids will be publicly opened in the presence of the bidders' designated representatives and anyone who choose to attend at the address below on 11:00 am January 09, 2024.

7 All bids must be accompanied by a Bid Security of 59,200,000,000 IRR Rial.

8 The addresses referred to above are:
clarification purposes address
For clarification purposes only, the Employer's address is: Contract Affairs Office, 2nd Floor, Fars Water and Wastewater Company, Corner of Shahid Sobhani Street, Ghodousi Gharbi Blv.- Motahari Square, Shiraz, Iran.
Postal Code: 71868-98465
Telephone: +987138435153
Facsimile number: +987138435166
Electronic mail address: pmu.abfafars2023@gmail.com
Requests for clarifications should be received by the Purchaser no later than 14 days prior to the deadline for submission of Bids.
Bid Submission Address
For bid submission purposes only, the Employer's address is: Address: Secretariat, Room No. 108, 1st floor, Fars Water and Wastewater Company, Ghodosi Gharbi Blv., Motahari Square, Shiraz, Iran
Postal Code: 71868-98465
Telephone: +987138435153
Facsimile number: +987138435154
Bid Opening Address
The bid opening shall take place at: Conference hall, sixth floor, Fars Water and Wastewater Company, Ghodosi Gharbi Blv, Motahari Square, Shiraz, Iran.

- 1 شرکت آب و فاضلاب فارس از بانک توسعه اسلامی (IsDB) بابت هزینه بهسازی بهداشت شهر فارس استان فارس تسهیلاتی دریافت کرده است و قصد دارد بخشی از آن را صرف پرداخت‌های قرارداد باقیمانده کارهای «خط انتقال و خطوط اصلی و فرعی شبکه جمع آوری فاضلاب فیروزآباد» نماید.
- 2 شرکت آب و فاضلاب استان فارس اکنون از مناقصه‌گران واجد شرایط دعوت می‌نماید پیشنهادات مهر و موم شده خود را برای تدارکات و ساخت ۵۱ کیلومتر شبکه فاضلاب با قطر لوله ۲۰۰ تا ۱۰۰۰ میلی متر به شکل تراشه و تونل؛ تدارکات و ساخت ۱۲۵۵ متر مکعب منهل بتونی و آجری؛ تدارکات و ساخت حدود ۱۰۳۵۰ انشعاب خانگی با قطر ۱۲۵ و ۱۶۰ میلیمتر و رفع نواقص شبکه ساخته شده فعلی با طول تقریبی ۶۵ کیلومتر مشتمل بر تکمیل منهل‌های اجرا شده، نصب پله منهل‌ها، اجرای درجه منهل‌های نصب نشده، نصب درجه انشعاب‌های خانگی نصب نشده، اجرای انشعاب‌های خانگی نصب نشده برای شبکه ساخته شده، شست و شو، ویدئومتری، تهیه نقشه‌های ازبیلد و GIS شبکه ساخته شده را به آدرس ذیل ارسال نماید.
- 3 پیشنهادات از طریق روش مناقصه رقابتی ملی (داخلی) (NCB) و به‌صورت پسا ارزیابی، همانطور که در دستورالعمل تدارکات کالا، کارها و خدمات مربوطه تحت تأمین مالی بانک توسعه اسلامی (نسخه آوریل ۲۰۱۹) مشخص شده است انجام خواهد شد و برای کلیه پیشنهاددهندگان واجد شرایط که در دستورالعمل تدارکات مذکور تعریف شده اند، آزاد می‌باشد. علاوه بر این، لطفاً به پاراگراف‌های ۱۸، ۱۸ تا ۲۱ که سیاست IsDB را در مورد تضاد منافع ارائه می‌دهد، مراجعه شود.
- 4 مناقصه‌گران واجد شرایط می‌توانند در ساعات اداری ۰۸:۰۰ الی ۱۴:۰۰ اسناد مناقصه را از شرکت آب و فاضلاب استان فارس به آدرس زیر تهیه و بررسی کنند. همچنین، مناقصه‌گران می‌توانند جهت کسب اطلاعات بیشتر به آدرس زیر مراجعه یا از طریق ایمیل pmu.abfafars2023@gmail.com با واحد مدیریت پروژه تماس بگیرند.
- 5 مناقصه‌گران واجد شرایط علاقمند می‌توانند یک مجموعه کامل از اسناد مناقصه به زبان انگلیسی یا از راه درخواست کتبی به آدرس زیر و یا پرداخت هزینه غیر قابل استرداد ۲۵۰,۰۰۰,۰۰۰ ریال خریداری نمایند. روش پرداخت واریز مستقیم به حساب شماره ۱۵۲۸۹۳۶۴۰۴ بانک ملت شعبه میدان معلم (کد ۲۴۰۰۰۸۰۳۷۱۱۲) خواهد بود. اسناد باید از شرکت آب و فاضلاب استان

Iran's 'The Old Bachelor' picked for Int'l Film Festival Rotterdam



IRNA - Iranian film 'The Old Bachelor,' directed by Oktay Baraheni, was chosen to participate in the 53rd International Film Festival Rotterdam (IFFR), scheduled to be held from January 25 to February 4, 2024, in Rotterdam.

The film will compete with 15 other films in the Big Screen Competition section tackling the topics of choice, identity and society.

The IFFR, recognized as one of Europe's major cinematic events, aims to present a curated selection of independent and creative films of high quality on a global scale. The festival provides a platform for filmmakers to showcase their innovative works to an international audience. Directed by Baraheni, 'The Old Bachelor' marks his second directorial experience into the world of cinema. The film, written by Baraheni himself, was brought to life with the support of investors Arsalan Baraheni and Amirhossein Abdollahi.

The cast includes acclaimed actors such as Leila Hatami, Hamed Behdad, Mohammad Valizadegan, Reza Rooygari, and Hassan Pourshirazi.

Iranian children honored at Bulgarian art exhibition



IRNA - Seven young talents from Iran's Institute for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults were awarded at the 25th International Youth Art Exhibition Nova Zagora 2023 in Bulgaria.

A group of 15 Iranian children showcased their paintings with various themes at the exhibition. Notably, seven of them were awarded diplomas of honor.

This recognition highlights the artistic achievements of these Iranian children and teens on the international stage, promoting cultural exchange and celebrating creative expression.

The recipients of the plaques include Asma Zarei from Hamedan, Yasna Safa-pour from Khuzestan, Nikoo Nassirzadeh from Khorasan Razavi, Faezeh Fat'hi from Fars, Raha Hosseinpour from East Azarbaijan, and Elnaz Sharifian from Isfahan. Their ages range from 6 to 14.

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newspaper.irandaily.ir
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● Printing House: Iran Cultural & Press Institute

Iran Daily



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Vol. 7464 ● Thursday, December 21, 2023 ● 100,000 rials ● 8 Pages



● REUTERS

German Academy of Arts criticises 'dangerous' violations of artistic freedom

Germany's Academy of Arts said a fraught political climate in the country has led to "violations of civil liberties that are unacceptable for a democratic country" and warned against "hasty red lines drawn on the basis of political statements by artists".

The academy's statement follows a number of exhibition cancellations since Hamas's terror attacks against Israel on October 7 and the Israeli military response in Gaza because arts institutions perceived comments by featured artists or curators as antisemitic or anti-Israel, *The Art Newspaper* wrote.

Most recently, the Heinrich Böll Foundation, which is affiliated with the German Greens, withdrew from a ceremony awarding the Hannah Arendt prize to the Jewish Russian American writer Masha Gessen



Masha Gessen

after the publication of an article in *The New Yorker* in which Gessen compared Israeli military action in Gaza to the Nazis clearing Jewish ghettos. Gessen nonetheless received the prize on December 15. In an interview with *Der*

Spiegel magazine, Gessen described "a culture of silencing" in Germany.

"The political and cultural climate is escalating," Jeanine Meerapfel, the president of the Academy of Arts, said in a statement. "The current discussions about artistic freedom and so-called cancel culture are dangerous. Public discourse is increasingly characterised by an inadmissible mixing of topics and tendentious claims. This confusion has led to violations of civil liberties that are unacceptable for a democratic nation."

In November, the Saarland-museum in Saarbrücken cancelled an exhibition of a work by Candice Breitz, saying it would not showcase any artist "who does not clearly recognize Hamas's terror as a breach of civilization".

Breitz, who is Jewish, said she had clearly denounced Hamas's attacks and "the climate in Germany at present is such that many Germans feel absolutely justified in violently condemning Jewish positions that are not consistent with their own."

On Instagram, Breitz criticised the academy's statement as "vague and toothless" and "too little, too late". It did not specifically mention the debate over the Middle East, nor did it express solidarity with the artists whose shows had

been cancelled, she said. Breitz added she is withdrawing her active membership from the academy until its leadership changes.

"Our collective defence of civil rights... should be prioritised above differences that may exist at the level of individual political stances," Breitz said.

A week before Breitz's exhibition was scrapped, the Biennale für aktuelle Fotografie, a contemporary photo exhibition which was due to be held in Mannheim, Ludwigshafen and Heidelberg in March 2024, was cancelled after one of the curators posted content on social media that the cities' authorities described as antisemitic. In another case, a major literary prize due to be



Sharon Dodua Otoo

awarded to Berlin-based, British writer Sharon Dodua Otoo did not go ahead over a petition she had signed eight years ago that critics said supported a movement to boycott Israel, AFP wrote. Much of the sensitivity is driven by a desire to ensure security for Germany's Jewish population

amid the spate of antisemitic attacks, including the targeting of a Berlin synagogue in October.

In a statement sent to AFP, Culture Minister Claudia Roth said that "Israel's security is a fundamental principle" for Germany, but stressed it was important to try to keep cultural spaces "open and safe for everybody".

"I would hope that we can move away from fear and move towards dialogue and discourse," she said, adding that cancelling events or revoking awards should be "the last step, not the first".

Plans for the next Documenta, the vast contemporary art show that takes place in Kassel every five years, are in disarray after the finding committee responsible for selecting the next artistic director resigned en masse because one of their members was forced to withdraw. Ranjit Hoskoté left the panel



Ranjit Hoskoté

amid pressure from German media and the government over a statement he had signed in 2019 that they viewed as antisemitic. The four remaining panel members said they

did not see "appropriate conditions" for "diverse perspectives, perceptions and discourses" in Germany.

The debate over what criticism of Israel is permissible and what institutions view as antisemitic and therefore unacceptable has caused a rift at the highest levels of the German arts world. A day before the Academy of Arts statement, the German Kulturrat, which represents cultural employers in Germany, chose instead to send a statement reaffirming its adherence to the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance definition of antisemitism.

This states that "Antisemitism is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities."

In a list of examples of antisemitism, the IHRA says "Manifestations might include the targeting of the state of Israel, conceived as a Jewish collectivity. However, criticism of Israel similar to that levelled against any other country cannot be regarded as antisemitic."