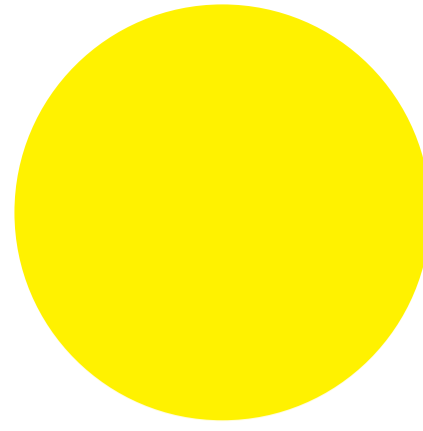


Israel's war on Gaza among 'most destructive' in recent history

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Raisi: US has blood of Gazans on its hands

International Desk

Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi expressed deep regret over the unwavering support of the advocates of human rights, especially the US, of Israel's crimes in the Gaza Strip, saying Washington has the blood of Gazan civilians on its hands. Addressing an international conference dubbed the "Tehran International Conference on Palestine" on Saturday, the Iranian president also denounced the ineffectiveness of international organizations over what is happening in Gaza. Raisi said, "Today, everyone is witnessing that the outcome of the current unjust world order is the horrific war crimes and

the massacre of women and children in Gaza," stressing that the people of the world should consider shaping a new world order. Referring to US support for the Israeli regime in its onslaught on the Gaza Strip, the Iranian president said that the US has the blood of children and women of Gaza on its hands by vetoing the UN cease-fire resolutions and military support for the Israeli regime, which has killed more than 20,000 people in Gaza since October 7. On December 8, the US vetoed a resolution at the UN Security Council put forward by the United Arab Emirates and backed by over 90 member states to establish a lasting humanitarian cease-fire in the Gaza Strip.

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World Bank: Iran successful in curbing inflation, stabilizing forex market

The World Bank said Iran's economy has continued to grow for the fourth consecutive year, highlighting the success of the Iranian administration in curbing inflation and stabilizing the foreign currency market. In a new report, the World Bank said the country will continue to experience stable economic growth in the current Iranian year ending on March 19, 2024, IRNA reported.

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NEWS IN BRIEF

Nuclear technology to have greater role in food security: AEOI**Economy Desk**

Under the 20-year strategic document of the nuclear industry of Iran, the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) will attach greater role for nuclear technology in people's lives, including food security.

Mohammad Eslami made the remarks on Saturday during his visit to the exhibition of the Agricultural Research, Education and Extension Organization (AREEO), which is affiliated to the Agriculture Ministry, IRNA reported.

"By using nuclear technology, it is possible to produce high-quality agro-products along with boosting productivity and food security," the AEOI head added.

Plans have been made for the private sector as they can develop irradiation technology for food production purposes, Eslami noted. Irradiation technology is a big step for community health and food security as the technology can prevent the waste of agricultural and food products, he explained.

Irradiation technology can remove the remaining toxins and pests from food products, the official said, adding, "We should increase productivity to ensure food security and sustainable health of Iranians."

BRICS members' trade to reach \$500b in 2024

Trade exchanges among member states of the BRICS group of Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa are expected to reach \$500 billion in 2024, showed figures by the World Bank.

According to watcher.guru website, the BRICS group experienced a rapid surge in 2023 after its member states signed new deals and renewed existing partnerships and agreements. The trade deals among BRICS members now encompass a greater share of international transactions, IRNA reported.

The vital weapon of the BRICS group is the de-dollarization initiative. The bloc plans to strengthen trade accords and to develop them in the coming years. Following a successful process in this stage, the BRICS group would be able to pursue the de-dollarization initiative and kick off trade settlements in local currencies.

Over 40 countries have expressed interest in joining the forum, according to 2023 summit chair South Africa.

World Bank: Iran successful in curbing inflation, stabilizing forex market

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In a new report, the World Bank said the country will continue to experience stable economic growth in the current Iranian year ending on March 19, 2024, IRNA reported.

The Islamic Republic's economy achieved an av-

erage growth rate of 3.8% last year, mainly because of the services and industry sectors, it said.

Both exports and imports increased this year, and strong investment in the machinery sector led to growth in investment figures, the report added.

The World Bank also predicted that the growth of Iran's GDP will continue in the medium term, and the increase in oil production and exports will act as one of the factors of growth during this period.

Iran's parliament has already come up with a plan to reduce the dependence of the economy on the dollar and pivot to national currencies in foreign trade. Currently, with the American power deemed to be fading, and many countries pushing to remove the dollar from their economic exchanges, there is a salient need and a fertile ground to put an end to the monopoly of the dollar in cooperation with countries such as China, Russia, and Saudi Arabia.

**TELECOM expo opens in Tehran**

The 24th International Exhibition of Telecommunications, Information Technology and Digital Economy dubbed "Iran TELECOM 2023" was inaugurated in Tehran on Saturday.

Deputy Minister of Industry, Mine and Trade Mohammad Mousavi addressed the inaugural ceremony of the exhibition, emphasizing the need for moving towards export-oriented produc-

tion, in line with boosting trade-economic activities of the country in international arenas, Tasnim news agency reported. He seized this opportunity to express his thanks to the activists in the field of communications and information technology (CIT). Despite the sanctions imposed against Iran over the past 44 years, giant steps have been taken in the country in the CIT

sector, the deputy minister underlined.

Mousavi pointed to the conclusion of a free trade agreement (FTA) between Iran and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), which will come into effect on December 25, 2023, and called on government officials to take effective steps in line with removing the existing barriers to spur bilateral trade.

The hi-tech products of the domestic new technology-based firms were unveiled at this edition of the exhibition.

The exhibitors have showcased their latest products and achievements at six exhibition halls in the fields of technology-based, innovation, accelerators in the area of the digital economy, technology parks, and software and hardware.

The event will run through December 26.

Tehran, Dakar sign six MoUs

Iran and Senegal signed six memoranda of understanding (MoUs) and cooperation agreements in the cultural, agricultural, legal and judicial fields.

They were inked at the 5th meeting of the Iran-Senegal Joint Economic, Scientific, Technical and Cultural Commission, IRNA reported.

Head of Iran-Senegal Joint Economic, Scientific, Technical and Cultural Cooperation Commission Mohammad-Ali Nikbakht, who is also Iran's minister of agriculture, held talks in Dakar with his Senegalese counterpart Papa Abdoulaye Seck to discuss bilateral ties and issues of mutual interest.

During the meeting the two sides emphasized their determination to expand bilateral relations in various fields.

Iran is ready to share its fruitful experiences and technical know-how



with Senegal without any restrictions, Nikbakht stressed. Inviting Senegal's minister of agriculture to visit Iran, Nikbakht pointed out that his ministry is ready to hold training courses and transfer technical know-how and knowledge to Senegalese farmers.

The agriculture minister of Senegal, for his part, hailed Iran's outstanding achievements despite the

sanctions imposed against the country and added that Iran is a symbol of resistance and independence for Muslim nations across the globe.

Not only did the sanctions imposed against Iran not create any hurdles for its development, but the country became more developed and turned the threats of sanctions into opportunities, he underlined.

**Iran's monthly steel production grows over 7%: WSA****Economy Desk**

Iran's production of steel in November 2023 reg-

istered a 7.6 percent growth compared to the same month last year, according to figures re-

leased by the World Steel Association (WSA).

The 71 major steelmakers in the world produced more than 145.5 million tons of crude steel in November 2023, showing a 3.3 percent hike compared to November 2022. Iranian steelmakers churned out three million tons of crude steel in November 2023, indicating a 7.6 percent hike compared to November 2022. Iran ranked 10th in the world in November 2023, the report added.

Major steelmakers in the world produced more than 1.71 billion tons of crude steel from January

to November 2023, showing a 0.5 percent growth compared to a year earlier.

According to the association, Iran produced 28.1 million tons of crude steel from January to November 2023, indicating a 0.6 percent hike compared to the same period last year. Iran's export of steel products in the first six months of the current Iranian year (March 21-September 22) registered a 20 percent growth compared to the same period last year, according to figures by the Iranian Steel Producers Association (ISPA).

According to statistics, the export of iron beam has increased from 56,000 tons in the first six months of previous Iranian year to 90,000 tons during the six months to September 22, 2023, showing a 60.7 percent growth. In addition, the export of rebar has dropped from 1.137 million tons to 1.123 million tons in the six month period, ISPA added. Iran exported 874,000 tons of sponge iron during H1 of the current Iranian year, 312,000 tons more than the corresponding figure for last year.

Hastijan Cave's heritages at risk



Iranica Desk

The Hastijan Cave, located in a village with the same name in Markazi Province, has captured the attention of archaeologists worldwide. While the discovery of new artifacts from this historical site brings joy to heritage enthusiasts, the unfortunate looting that has taken place in the cave has cast a shadow on its significance. As a result, Hastijan Cave is now considered an

endangered heritage site, with its inscriptions and seals having been looted and taken out of Iran, marking a tragic loss for the country's cultural heritage. This ancient cave, which dates back millions of years and exhibits no signs of recent human activity, remained largely unnoticed until a language expert abroad discovered valuable leather inscriptions. Among the discoveries within the cave are a significant collection of fabrics,

wooden tools, leather remnants, and 11 pieces of intact leather inscriptions. Notably, one of these inscriptions is a private letter from the late Sassanid era, or the beginning of the Islamic era, believed to have originated from the region between Qom and Kashan. This particular artifact sheds light on the prevalence of literacy and writing among the people of Iran in that time, offering valuable insight into the region's historical heritage.

The discovery of artifacts in Hastijan Cave by Nima Asafi, a Ph.D. student in ancient languages, has brought attention to the region's historical significance. However, the cave has been subject to unauthorized excavation for almost 70 years, resulting in the loss of many valuable artifacts. Efforts should be made to recover these assets and ensure the national registration of the cave to protect it from further harm.

Recently, archaeologist Mohammad Reza Nemati conducted excavations in the cave and noted the challenges faced, including a nine-meter rock wall and the presence of large rocks that had to be moved with pickaxes. The cave's dry and undisturbed condition indicates that it has not been accessed in years, highlighting the urgency of protecting and preserving its historical significance. Nemati explained, "The discovery of an ancient reed pen that

dates back 1,400 years is very important for us. We also obtained a large amount of animal bones." "Nearly 70 years of unauthorized excavation has been done in this cave. These findings are a small part of the objects that have been taken out of the country. During the excavation, I talked to different people and came to the conclusion that many artifacts have been taken out. Thus we need to take action to return these assets to Iran."

Qazvin, city of historical gems



↑ Salehieh School
● IRNA

Iranica Desk

Once upon a time the city of Qazvin, the capital of the north-central province of Qazvin, had 250 entrance gates, of which four remain and two are still in use. The Darb-e Koushk Gate, situated in a neighborhood with the same name, was an entrance to the first industrial township of Iran, separating flour, textile, and oil

extraction factories, as stated by Mohammad Hassan Soleymani, a history researcher. He added that in front of Kushk's gate was the Kaleskeh Khaneh Mansion, belonging to Haj Abulqassem Razavi, the owner of the flour factory. The combination of mosque and school was prevalent during the Qajar period, and Qazvin is no exception. The Salehieh School, built on three floors, holds great

historical importance. The school, which is still in operation, has 27 rooms, in which eight classes are held in two shifts. Established 191 years ago, this school was among the largest scientific centers of the country during the Qajar era. Established by Molla Mohammad Saleh Barghani, the school played a very important role in the scientific development of Qazvin. In its

heyday, Salehieh was the most important philosophy school in Qazvin, and one of the first academic centers where both men and women studied. Spanning an area of 4,000 square meters, the three-floor building was very prosperous until the Constitution era. The building was abandoned during the Pahlavi era until the 1960s, when Seyyed Hassan Mousavi Shali

made extensive efforts to revive it. The monument underwent a complete renovation in the 2000s as well. There is an old house on Mulavi Street, surrounded by an iron fence. It is a captivating monument, based on the Qajar architectural style. The monument has been renovated thanks to the efforts of its current owner, Hassan Alavi Shir Khorshidi. This is a

house with a *shahneshin* (a large room decorated with colorful glasses, delicate mirror works, and beautiful tiling), a *korsi khaneh* (a room housing a traditional low table with a heater underneath it), and a small pool in its basement. In the middle of its courtyard, there is a turquoise pool adorned with flower vases, and around the courtyard you can see cherry trees.



↑ Darb-e Koushk Gate
● IRNA



Palestinians mourn local journalists Hassouna Sleem and Sary Mansour, who were killed in an Israeli strike on a house, at a hospital in the central Gaza Strip November 19, 2023.
REUTERS

Israel **killed** more journalists than any other army in given year

97 Journalists killed in Israeli-Palestinian conflict since Oct. 7

PERSPECTIVE

The first ten weeks of Israel's war on besieged Gaza have been the deadliest recorded for journalists, with the most journalists killed in a single year at one location, the US-based Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) said.

Most of the journalists and media workers - 61 out of 68 - killed in the war were Palestinian, CPJ said.

The report said on Thursday it was "particularly concerned about an apparent pattern of targeting of journalists and their families by the Israeli military."

A spokesperson for Israel's military claimed the troops don't target journalists.

"The number of journalist martyrs has risen to 97 since the start of the [Israeli] brutal aggression on Gaza," the

Gaza-based government media office said on Tuesday. The last journalist victim was Adel Zorob who was killed in Israeli air strikes on Rafah city, southern Gaza, it said, accusing Israeli army of deliberately killing the Palestinian journalists with the aim "to obliterate the truth." Four Israeli and three Lebanese journalists, including Reuters news agency visuals journalist Issam Abdallah, were also killed between October 7 and December 20, CPJ data showed.

The group, a non-profit organization that promotes press freedom worldwide, said it was further investigating the circumstances of all journalist killings. It said such efforts in Gaza were hampered by widespread destruction and by the killing of journalists' family members, who typically serve as sources for investigators looking into how the journalists died.

'Deadly pattern'

Reporting in Gaza has been severely restricted under intense Israeli bombardment, with repeated communications blackouts and a lack of food, fuel and housing, said CPJ, adding that foreign journalists have not been able to independently access the strip for most of the war.

"The Israel-Gaza war is the most dangerous situation for journalists we have ever seen, and these figures show that clearly," said Sherif Mansour, CPJ's Middle

East and North Africa program coordinator. "The Israeli army has killed more journalists in 10 weeks than any other army or entity has in any single year. And with every journalist killed, the war becomes harder to document and to understand."

A May report by CPJ found what it called a "deadly pattern", in which Israeli soldiers had killed at least 20 journalists in the last 22 years, and none had ever been charged or held accountable.

Highest journalist death toll

Earlier this month, a Reuters investigation found an Israeli tank crew killed Abdallah and wounded six reporters in Lebanon on October 13 by firing two shells in quick succession from Israel while the journalists were filming cross-border shelling. CPJ highlighted that the first month of the war was the deadliest ever recorded since they began collecting data in 1992, with 37 journalists killed.

CPJ also mentioned that Iraq, the only country to come this close in terms of journalist casualties, had 56 journalists killed in the entirety of 2006. The Philippines saw 33 journalist deaths in 2009, while Syria had 32 in 2012, Afghanistan with 15 journalists killed in 2018, and Somalia with 12 in 2012. On Wednesday, Press For Palestine, an initiative

for Palestinian journalists, released a single-copy newspaper in Istanbul, and it mentioned that during the six years of World War II, 69 journalists were killed; 63 in the 20-year Vietnam War and 17 in the three-year Korean War. All of those events had a lower journalist death toll compared to the recent Israeli war on besieged Gaza, and they all had a much longer period

of time to unfold. The non-profit organization had a series of calls to Israel and the international community, and suggested a few recommendations to protect journalists on duty, including protecting journalists lives by allowing aid and respecting the press insignia, provide access and ability to report, investigate attacks and end impunity.

Israel's war on Gaza among 'most destructive' in recent history



PERSPECTIVE

The Israeli military campaign in Gaza, experts say, now sits among the deadliest and most destructive in recent history.

In just over two months, the offensive has wreaked more destruction than the razing of Syria's Aleppo between 2012 and 2016, Ukraine's Mariupol or, proportionally, the Allied bombing of Germany in World War II. It has killed more civilians than the US-led coalition did in its three-year campaign against Daesh.

The Israeli military has said little about what kinds of bombs and artillery it is using in Gaza. But from blast fragments found on-site and analyses of strike footage, experts are confident that the vast majority of bombs dropped on the besieged enclave are US-made. They say the weapons include 900-kilogram "bunker-busters" that have killed hundreds in densely populated areas.

With the Palestinian death toll in Gaza surpassing 20,000, the international community is calling for a cease-fire. Israel vows to press

ahead, saying it wants to destroy Hamas' military capabilities following the group's Oct. 7 rampage that triggered the war, in which it killed 1,200 people and took 240 others captive.

The Biden administration has quietly continued to supply arms to Israel. Last week, however, President Joe Biden publicly acknowledged that Israel was losing international legitimacy for what he called its "indiscriminate bombing." Here's a look at what is known so far about Israel's campaign on Gaza.

A man reacts as Palestinians search for casualties a day after Israeli strikes on houses in Jabalia refugee camp in the northern Gaza Strip, November 1. **REUTERS**

How much destruction is there in Gaza?

Israel's offensive has destroyed over two-thirds of all structures in northern Gaza and a quarter of buildings in the southern area of Khan Younis, according to an analysis of Copernicus Sentinel-1 satellite data by Corey Scher of the CUNY Graduate Center and Jamon Van Den Hoek of Oregon State University, experts in mapping damage during wartime.

The percentage of damaged buildings in the Khan Younis area nearly doubled in just the first two weeks of Israel's southern offensive, they said. That includes tens of thousands of homes as well as schools, hospitals, mosques and stores. UN monitors have said that about 70 percent of school buildings across Gaza have been damaged. At least 56 damaged schools

served as shelters for displaced civilians. Israeli strikes damaged 110 mosques and three churches, the monitors said.

"Gaza is now a different color from space. It's a different texture," said Scher, who has worked with Van Den Hoek to map destruction across several war zones, from Aleppo to Mariupol.

How does the destruction stack up historically?

By some measures, destruction in Gaza has outpaced Allied bombings of Germany during World War II.

Between 1942 and 1945, the allies attacked 51 major German cities and towns, destroying about 40-50 percent of their urban areas, said Robert Pape, a US military historian. Pape said this amounted to 10 percent of buildings across Germany, compared to over 33 percent across Gaza, a densely populated

territory of just 140 square miles (360 square kilometers).

"Gaza is one of the most intense civilian punishment campaigns in history," said Pape. "It now sits comfortably in the top quartile of the most devastating bombing campaigns ever." The US-led coalition's 2017 assault to expel Daesh from the Iraqi city of Mosul was considered one of the most intense attacks on a city in generations. That nine-month battle killed

around 10,000 civilians, a third of them from coalition bombardment, according an Associated Press investigation at the time.

During the 2014-2017 campaign against Daesh in Iraq, the coalition carried out nearly 15,000 strikes across the country, according to Airwars, a London-based independent group that tracks recent conflicts. By comparison, the Israeli military said last week it has conducted 22,000 strikes in Gaza.

What types of bombs are being used?

The Israeli military has not specified what it is using. It claims every strike is cleared by legal advisers to make sure it complies with international law.

Weapons experts have been able to draw conclusions by analyzing blast fragments found on-site, satellite images and videos circulated on social media. They say the findings offer only a peek into the full scope of the air war.

So far, fragments of American-made Joint Direct Attack Munitions (JDAM) bombs and smaller diameter bombs have been found in Gaza, according to Brian Castner, a weapons investigator with Amnesty International.

The JDAM bombs include precision-guided 450-kilogram and 900-kilogram "bunker-busters."

"It turns earth to liquid," said Marc Garlasco, a former Pentagon defense official and a war crimes investigator for the UN. "It pancakes entire buildings."

He said the explosion of a 900-kilogram bomb in the open means "instant death" for anyone within about 30 meters. Lethal fragmentation can extend for up to 365 meters.

In an Oct. 31 strike on the urban refugee camp of Jabaliya, experts say a 900-kilogram bomb killed over 100 civilians.

Experts have also identified fragments of SPICE (Smart, Precise Impact, Cost-Effective) 900-kilogram bombs, which are fitted with a GPS guidance system to make targeting more precise. Castner said the bombs are produced by the Israeli military company Rafael, but a recent State Department release first obtained by The New York Times showed some of the technology had been produced in the United States.

The Israeli military is also dropping unguided "dumb" bombs. Several experts pointed to two photos posted to social media by the Israeli Air Force at the start of the war showing fighter jets stocked with unguided bombs.



Is the strategy working?

Israel says it has two goals: destroy Hamas and rescue the 129 captives still held by fighters.

Eleven weeks into the war, Israel says it has destroyed many Hamas sites and hundreds of tunnel shafts and has killed 7,000 Hamas fighters out of an estimated 30,000-40,000. Israeli leaders say intense military pressure is the only way to free more captives. But some families of hostages worry that the bombing endangers their loved ones. Captives released during a weeklong cease-fire last month recounted that their captors moved them from place to place to avoid Israeli bombardment. Hamas says that several captives died from Israeli bombs.

The Associated Press

Greco-Roman Wrestling National Championships: Iranians to kickstart hunt for Paris places

Sports Desk

Iranian wrestlers will begin their quest for a place in next summer's Paris Olympics when the Greco-Roman National Championships kick off in Qom on Wednesday.

Iran has already booked three quotas for the Games in the French capital, thanks to medal-winning runs by Amin Mirzazadeh (130kg), Mohammad-Hadi Saravi (97kg) and Mohammadreza Geraei (67kg) in last September's World Championships in Belgrade, with the 60kg, 77kg, and 87kg slots still up for grabs.

The three world medalists as well as Danial Sohrabi (67kg) and Amin Kavianejad (77kg), who won a bronze and silver in October's Asian Games respectively, have been excluded from the event, which will serve as the Iranian trials for the upcoming Olympic qualification tournaments.

All eyes will be on the 87kg contests, where Alireza Mohmedi – an 82kg runner-up in Belgrade – and Nasser Alizadeh, who took the silver of the weight class at the Asian Games, will be the favorites for the top podium. Should both make it to the final showpiece in Qom, it will likely be the first episode of a head-to-head between the two in the coming months, which could feature international outings at the Zagreb Open Ranking Series

in January, and next April's Asian OG Qualifier in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan.

Having already secured seven Greco-Roman and freestyle spots for the Olympics, Iran hope to make a clean sweep of 12 berths before heading to Paris.

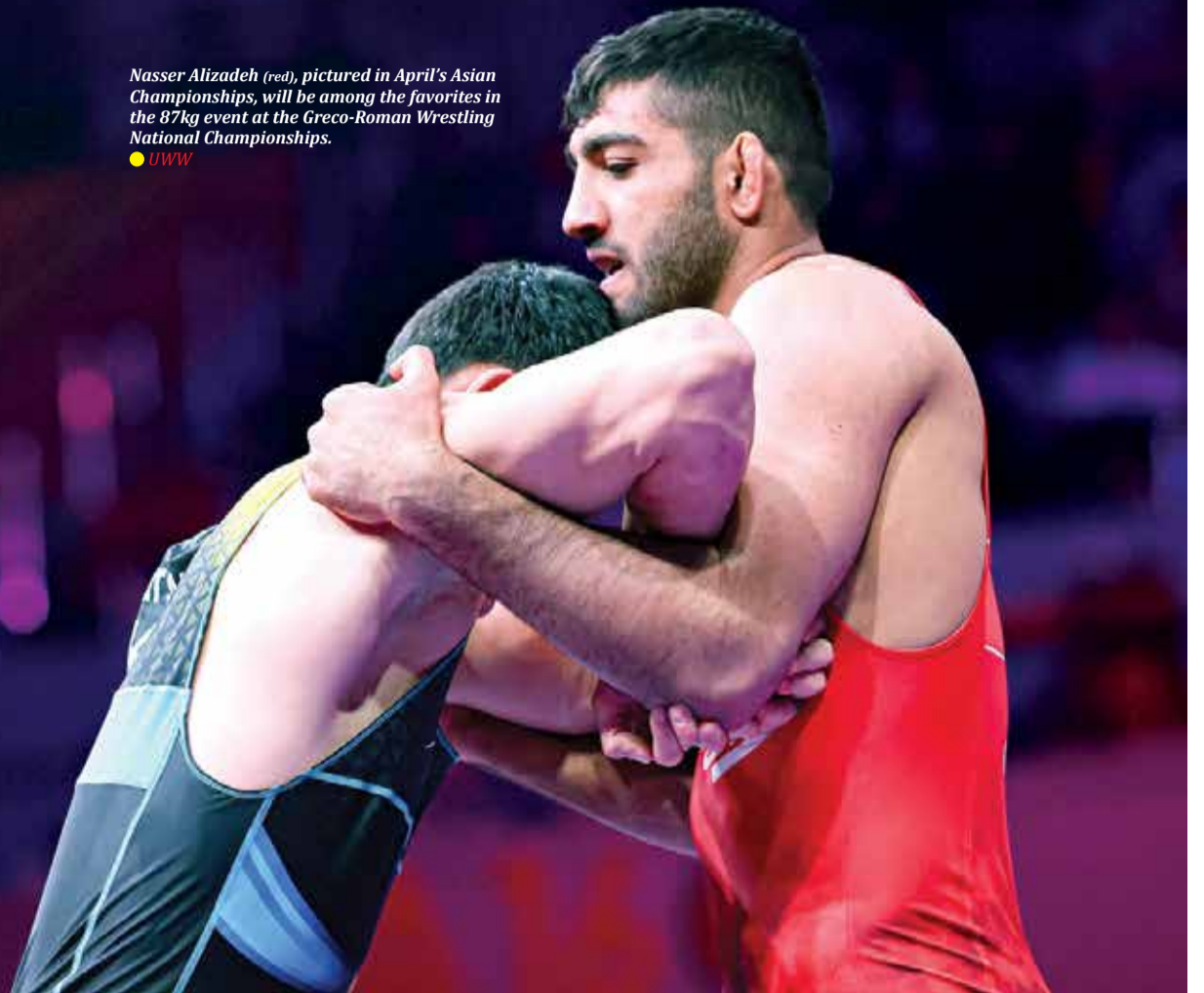
Amirhossein Zare' (125kg) and Hassan Yazdani (86kg) finished on the podium in Belgrade, while Rahman Amouzad, despite the failure in defending his world 65kg crown, managed to finish fifth to book a third freestyle spot for the country.

Kamran Qasempour missed out on the National Championships in mid-December with an injury, but has been given a second chance by the coaching staff at the Zagreb Open, where he will represent the country – alongside reigning Iranian champion Amir-Ali Azarpira – in the 97kg event, as he will be looking to add the Olympic glory to his double world 92kg golds in 2021 and 2022.

A gold winner in the National Championships, Hossein Abouzari and world 79kg silver winner Mohammad Nokhodi will be the frontrunners in chasing the 74kg quota for Iran, while Ahmad Mohammadnejad Javan will be looking to build on a dominant 57kg campaign in the national event – featuring a final victory over former world silver medalist Alireza Sarlak – to punch a ticket for Paris.

Nasser Alizadeh (red), pictured in April's Asian Championships, will be among the favorites in the 87kg event at the Greco-Roman Wrestling National Championships.

UWW



Guardiola wants more after Manchester City claim Club World Cup title



Kyle Walker holds aloft the Club World Cup trophy as Manchester City players and manager Pep Guardiola celebrate winning the final against Fluminense at the King Abdullah International Stadium, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, on Dec. 22, 2023.

JOSE BRETON/IMAGO

AFP – Pep Guardiola said Manchester City must start over and find new targets after he completed his trophy haul in charge of the English champions by thrashing Fluminense 4-0 to win the Club World Cup.

Guardiola's 16th trophy as City boss, and the 37th of his coaching career, means he has won the Champions League, Premier League, FA Cup, League Cup, UEFA Super Cup and Club World Cup since taking charge at the Etihad in 2016.

"I had a feeling we close a chapter, we won already all the titles. There is nothing else to win. I have the feeling the job is done, (it) is over," said Guardiola. However, Guardiola, whose contract runs till 2025, dismissed suggestions he could now walk away.

Time for a new Pep book

"Now it's Christmas time, buy another book and start to write it again. The last eight years it's over," he added when questioned whether he has the hunger

to continue winning silverware.

Guardiola made history in Jeddah as he became the first coach to win the Club World Cup four times and with three different clubs.

City matched the largest margin of victory ever in a Club World Cup final, also set by a Guardiola side when Barcelona beat Santos 4-0 in 2011.

European sides are unbeaten in the competition stretching back to 2012 and there was little doubt over the outcome at the King Abdullah International Stadium once Julian Alvarez opened the scoring inside the first minute.

Fortune did not favour Fluminense as captain Nino then turned into his own net after a bright spell by the Brazilians. City were able to coast to a fifth trophy of the year in the second half and rounded off victory with two more goals in the final 20 minutes as Alvarez squared for Phil Foden to score before the Argentine fired in his second of the night.

"We don't do a parade (in Manchester) but

I said to the players this trophy you will remember forever," added Guardiola.

"It means you are the best team in one year in the world. It's unique and special. It's really cool.

"I'm really pleased for many people in the club for many years. It's a beautiful day, I could never think when we arrived in Manchester we could do this and finish with the World Cup."

Meanwhile, Fluminense boss Fernando Diniz stuck by his promise to stay loyal to an attacking brand of football.

But he acknowledged the huge task facing clubs from around the globe when coming up against the financial might of Europe's elite teams at the Club World Cup.

"Money makes a lot of things easier," said Diniz.

"With money you can have the best pitches, structures, players and you put together everything you have.

"In terms of the cash flow of the clubs this is really different for our clubs compared to the Champions League."

Inter eager on Taremi deal: Report

Sports Desk

Serie A giant Inter will be looking to secure the services of Porto striker Mehdi Taremi when the Iranian international's contract at the Portuguese club comes to an end next summer, according to high-profile Italian journalist Fabrizio Romano.

"Inter are still working on deal to sign Mehdi Taremi as free agent in June 2024 – as FC Porto want to keep him in January," Romano, best known for his transfer reports and predictions, wrote on X.

"Inter wanted him last summer and they will try to push again for next season," added the Italian. Romano said Inter's top priority for the mid-season transfer window will be Canadian winger Tajon Buchanan, who has bagged three goals and four assists in 20 appearances for Belgian side Club Brugge across all competitions this season.

However, Porto could still be tempted to cash

in on its Iranian asset in January rather than let him leave for free by the end of the season.

Taremi was on the verge of signing for Inter archrival Milan last summer but a deal fell through on the deadline day after the striker's camp and the Rossoneri failed to reach agreement on personal terms.

Having finished as the leading marksman in the Portuguese top flight last season with 22 strikes, Taremi has had a below-par run in the ongoing campaign, by his own standards, as he has only managed three goals in 14 league appearances, while finding the net twice in the Champions League group stage.

Taremi, whose last league goal for the Dragons came on Dec. 2, will lead the line for the national team – alongside AS Roma forward Sardar Azmoun – in the upcoming AFC Asian Cup, starting January 12 in Qatar, where the three-time champion Iran will be chasing a first trophy in the continent's flagship international event since 1976.



GETTY IMAGES

Leader: All factions should be able to run for elections

Leader of Iran's Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei addresses a group of people from Kerman and Khuzestan provinces in Tehran on December 23, 2023.

leader.ir

National Desk

Leader of Iran's Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei said on Saturday that the ground should be prepared for the participation of different political factions in the upcoming parliamentary and Assembly of Experts elections. Addressing a group of Iranians in Tehran, Ayatollah Khamenei said that the strong presence and active participation of the people in the elections brings about national unity and

security that is the basis for scientific progress, economic prosperity and solving economic, political and cultural problems, IRNA reported. He said that the solutions to the country's problems are elections, warning against certain efforts to discourage people from the ballot boxes. "Some people constantly remind us of the country's problems in order to discourage people, while the solutions to the problems are elections, and to solve the problems, one should

participate in elections," the Leader said, according to Press TV. "Elections are the basis of transformation. Elections prevent dictatorship, chaos and insecurity," Ayatollah Khamenei added. The Leader touched on the concept of the Islamic Republic, explaining that the words "Islamic" and "Republic" are both related to elections. With Iran facing parliamentary and Experts Assembly elections on March 1, Ayatollah Khamenei said the Iranian people "should

be prepared for these two important elections in the best possible way." "One is the election of the Assembly of Experts for the Leadership, the importance of which lies in the fact that it can choose the right leader for the country when necessary, and over time it can and should take care of maintaining the vital qualifications of leadership in the person of the existing leader. The people of Iran, the people of the provinces should pay attention, be careful and hold these elections in

the best way. "And as for the election of the Islamic Consultative Assembly which is very important, according to the Constitution, the Parliament is the one that lays the rail tracks for the future of the country. "If the country has problems, to solve these problems, there is a need for legislation and the prudent presence of the Islamic Consultative Assembly. These two elections should be held with dignity," the Leader said. Ayatollah Khamenei said

scholars, university professors, seminary instructors, radio and television, journalists, young people and people within their families have a duty to invite people to participate in the elections. "If participation is weak, the Parliament will be weak, and a weak Parliament will not have full ability to solve the problems. If we want to solve the problems, we must increase participation; this is everyone's duty. Whoever wants to solve the country's problems, this is the way."



Raisi: US has blood ...



president.ir

Raisi said that the United States and Israel should be tried in international courts for committing genocide and crimes against humanity.

He said the true face of the US and many Western countries was uncovered in the course of the genocidal campaign in Gaza. "They are not a party to peace but a party to war."

The US has vetoed any UN Security Council resolution for a cease-fire in Gaza and provided the Israeli regime with weapons and financial aid, the president said. Raisi urged an immediate end to the Israeli barbarism against an "oppressed but strong" Palestinian people.

He called for an immediate end to Israel's attacks on Gaza, lifting the blockade and opening the crossings for aid delivery as well as creating a special fund to help in the reconstruction of Gaza.

The Iranian president also warned against Washington's scheme of the "forced displacement" of Palestinians from Gaza and denounced the inaction of world leaders.

He said that it is not enough to just verbally condemn the crimes happening in Gaza, stressing that the people of the world expect action from their rulers.

Raisi said that the Palestinian issue is a central topic for Muslim nations and all free people of the world. He added that the continued occupation does not grant the occupier legitimacy, and the Palestinian people have the right to defend themselves.

The Iranian president underlined that Hamas's October 7 Operation Al-Aqsa Storm came in response to the injustices to which the Palestinian people have been exposed.

The just solution for the Palestinian people is to allow them to determine their own fate, Raisi said.



AFP

Palestinians wept and prayed for their dead on Saturday after fresh Israeli strikes followed a UN Security Council resolution that demanded more aid be allowed into Gaza but did not call for an immediate halt to fighting.

Clouds of grey and black smoke rose over Khan Yunis city in the south after strikes in the morning, and live AFPTV images showed

black smoke drifting over the territory's north. The health ministry in the Gaza Strip reported 18 people killed in a strike on a house at the central Nuseirat refugee camp, and said other targets were hit up and down the Gaza Strip. The bombardments came after the Security Council approved a resolution demanding "immediate, safe and unhindered" deliveries

Israel strikes Gaza after UN calls for more aid but not cease-fire

of life-saving aid be rushed to Gaza "at scale". It also called for creation of "conditions for a sustainable cessation of hostilities," but did not seek an immediate end to combat. Members had wrangled for days over the wording. At Washington's insistence, they toned down some provisions and avoided calling for a cease-fire that would stop the Israel's attacks, which began with unprecedented attacks 11 weeks ago by Hamas resistance group against Israel. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said a "humanitarian cease-fire" is the only way for aid "to be effectively delivered". The issue is not the number of aid trucks, he said, but

"the way Israel is conducting this offensive is creating massive obstacles" to aid distribution. Guterres also has paid tribute to staff of the United Nations who have been killed in Gaza. "136 of our colleagues in Gaza have been killed in 75 days — something we have never seen in UN history," Guterres wrote on X, formerly Twitter, on Saturday. "Most of our staff have been forced from their homes." The health ministry in Gaza also said on Saturday dozens of Palestinians were killed this week and publicly "executed" during an Israeli military operation in the north of the Gaza Strip. The Israeli "massacre resulted in the death of dozens" of people in the Jabalia

camp and Jabalia town, ministry spokesman Ashraf al-Qudra said in a statement. "They also executed dozens of citizens in the streets," he added. According to videos broadcast by local media, decomposing bodies were seen strewn on the streets of Jabalia. In Beit Lahia, a city in the north of the Gaza Strip, the civil defense authority said it had found on Saturday "dozens of decomposing bodies". "Most of the bodies recovered in Beit Lahia were executed in the streets and mauled by dogs," it said. On Wednesday, the United Nations human rights office said it received "disturbing" reports that Israeli troops "summarily killed" at least 11 unarmed Palestinians

in a possible war crime in Gaza. The killings were alleged to have been carried out in the Rimal neighborhood of Gaza City this week, it added. An Israeli official, speaking on condition of anonymity, rejected the allegations as "yet another example of the partisan and prejudiced approach against Israel" by the UN body. The UN estimates the war has displaced 1.9 million of Gaza's 2.4 million population. World Health Organization chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said a majority of those uprooted from their homes were now going "entire days and nights without eating," and "famine is looming".

Mohammad Ali Rajabi
Cartoonist



Iranian, Egyptian presidents hold first phone call in decades

Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi congratulated his Egyptian counterpart Abdel Fattah el-Sisi on securing a third term in office as leader of the Arab world's most populous nation, hoping for the resolution of existing issues between Tehran and Cairo and the restoration of diplomatic ties. In the first telephone conversation between the two heads of state in more than four decades,

Raisi warmly felicitated the 69-year-old Egyptian politician on his reelection, Press TV reported. They also discussed developments in the Gaza Strip in light of the relentless Israeli strikes, which have killed more than 20,000 people, most of them women and children, and wounded another 53,320 individuals, and underlined the significance of unity among Muslim countries.



The two presidents also agreed to take tangible steps for the final resolution of issues between Iran and Egypt, and the re-establishment of diplomatic relations. Al-Sisi was elected for a third term, securing 89.6 percent of the vote in the election held between De-

ember 10 and 12. Iran cut its diplomatic relations with Egypt in 1980 after Egypt welcomed the deposed Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, as well as for having recognized the Israeli regime. Albeit the two countries have maintained some diplomatic contacts.

Iranian honored by UNICEF for capturing tales of rural empowerment



ISNA – Iranian photographer, Atefeh Alsadat Safavi Vanani, was honored at the UNICEF Photo of the Year 2023 for her compelling series titled 'Atun.' 'Atun' portrays the endearing journey of a dedicated mentor who travels from village to village in the Kohgiluyeh and Buyer-Ahmad Province, capturing moments of storytelling for children. Safavi's lens beautifully encapsulates the mentor's efforts to foster culture and education, preparing the young minds for significant roles and responsibilities, ultimately shaping their futures.

The contest serves as a global platform for photographers to shed light on diverse social issues, with Safavi's work exemplifying the profound impact of storytelling in rural communities. Her dedication to portraying the positive transformation of young lives has rightfully earned her honor in the international field.

Atefeh Alsadat Safavi Vanani, born in 1992, got her master's degree in business administration in the Faculty of Economics at the University of Tehran. Since then, she has worked as a photographer and filmmaker. She has participated in many Iranian photo and film festivals with her projects and also teaches photography at schools and other institutions in her home country.



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Iranian cinemas witness 105% growth in fall box office sales

Arts & Culture Desk

Iranian cinemas experienced an outstanding 105% increase in audience attendance during the fall season, ending on December 21, surpassing the summer figures. This remarkable growth marked a significant achievement, achieving 9.363 million viewers and a box office revenue of \$7.76 million. In the span of these three months, 209,411 screenings took place, according to IRNA.

Despite challenges such as religious observances, including the Fatemeh mourning ceremonies and Yalda Night celebrations, impacting film attendance, Iranian cinemas enter the winter season with optimism, aiming to build upon the winter record of the year.

The comedy film 'Hotel' emerged as the most popular film of the fall, drawing approximately 4.525 million viewers and generating a revenue of \$3.92 million. The film is expected to break records of the film 'Fossil'.

The second-highest-grossing film of the season, the animated feature 'Smart Kid,' surpassed expectations, attracting 1.507 million viewers and earning the title of the most-watched Iranian animation in cinema history. The film's box office revenue reached \$1 million, with expectations of continued success.

Films such as 'Hotel' and 'Coastal Villa' have the potential to exceed \$6 million in revenue, with 'Fossil' acting as a supporting factor for the success of these two films in the winter box office.

Even during the fall season, 'Fossil' enjoyed significant audience appeal, attracting

901,000 viewers and earning a revenue of \$764,000.

'Coastal Villa' premiered in the final 15 days of fall (December 6 to 21) and quickly rose to become the fourth most-watched film of the season. Within this short period, the film attracted 396,000 viewers, generating a revenue of \$352,000.

The fifth most popular film of the fall season, 'Punch Drunk,' exceeded expectations by attracting 349,000 viewers and achieving a revenue of \$296,000, setting a positive record for this season.

Iranian cinemas are celebrating a remarkable achievement as they conclude the fall season, breaking their own records with an unprecedented 9.363 million viewers. This achievement is particularly noteworthy as, in the past five years, no season has seen such a high number of viewers.

As winter begins, Iranian cinemas are filled with optimism, aiming to build on the success of the fall season in the last three months of the year. Two comedies, 'Hotel' and 'Coastal Villa,' have great potential to surpass the \$6 million in box office earnings. Alongside these releases, the continuation of screenings for films like 'Smart Kid,' 'Punch Drunk,' 'Entry and Exit Prohibited,' and other upcoming productions over the next three months are expected to solidify the realistic expectation that cinema attendance will shift in favor of a new winter record.

Iran's cinema box office is projected to reach the \$20 million by January 21 and is on track to achieve remarkable success by surpassing 30 million viewers by the end of the year. This suc-

cess aims to culminate in a spectacular record-breaking achievement, pushing the box office earnings beyond \$24 million.

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Iranian 'In the Shadow of the Cypress' to be screened at French festival



Iranian animation 'In the Shadow of the Cypress' found its way to the Young Audience Section of the 46th Clermont-Ferrand International Short Film Festival in France.

Produced by the International Affairs of the Institute for Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults (IIDCYA), the 19-minute and 33-second animation is co-directed by

Shirin Sohani and Hossein Molayemi, ISNA wrote. The film is scheduled to be screened six times during the festival according to the planned schedule.

The short animation's synopsis reads, "A former captain, suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder after an accident, lives with his daughter in a secluded house by the sea. They must face the challenges of a difficult life. Despite the captain's deep desire to be a sacrificing and caring father, he struggles to connect with his daughter in the way he wishes. One morning, an unforeseen event occurs, changing their lives

forever. Whether this event is a source of new hope or a new problem remains to be seen."

The festival accepts short narrative, animated, documentary, and experimental films up to 40 minutes in duration, receiving a record-breaking 9,400 submissions this year, marking a 14% increase from the previous year. Approximately 70 short films have been selected across various categories.

The 46th Clermont-Ferrand International Short Film Festival is set to take place in Clermont-Ferrand, France, from February 2 to February 10, 2024.

PIC OF THE DAY



8,000 pairs of shoes are placed in Rotterdam, the Netherlands, on December 20, 2023 to highlight the Palestinian children killed in Gaza since October 7, 2023.

● ABDULLAH ASIRAN/AA