



Social Desk

On December 26, a significant day marked by the anniversary of the devastating 2003 Bam earthquake, our nation comes together to observe the National Day of Earthquake Safety and Reducing the Effects of Natural Disasters. This annual commemoration serves as a vital reminder to the public about the perils posed by natural phenomena such as earthquakes, floods, storms, and droughts. Its primary objective is to draw attention to the identification of preventive measures and the reduction of damages caused by these calamities, with a particular focus on safeguarding lives and fostering a culture of safety within our society.

Our country, with its diverse landscapes, is no stranger to the risks associated with earthquakes. These seismic events occur when the earth's crust, composed of colossal tectonic plates, abruptly releases the accumulated pressure that has built up over time. These plates, constantly shifting—moving slowly atop, beside, and beneath one another—occasionally become locked, unable to discharge the immense energy they harbor. When the force becomes overwhelming, the plates rupture, causing an earthquake. The impact of such events, depending on their magnitude, can result in human casualties and staggering financial losses, especially if they strike densely populated regions. While the timing and precise locations of earthquakes remain beyond the current reach of human prediction, their potential devastation can be mitigated through adequate preparedness and preventive measures. By taking proactive steps to enhance earthquake readiness, we can significantly reduce the loss of lives and the extent of damages caused by these seismic occurrences. Although we cannot avert earthquakes altogether, we can bolster our resilience by implementing strategies that bolster public awareness, establish robust infrastructure, and promote comprehensive emergency response plans. On this day, let us unite in our commitment to prioritize preparedness, education, and the dissemination of knowledge about earthquake risks. By doing so, we can empower individuals and communities to take the necessary precautions, enhancing our collective ability to confront and withstand the unpredictable forces of nature. Through our collective efforts, we can build a safer, more resilient society that stands ready to face the challenges posed by natural disasters, reducing their impact and safeguarding the well-being of our fellow citizens.

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Address: 208, Khorramshahr Ave., Tehran, Iran

- Editorial Dept. Tel: +98 21 84711171
- ICPI Publisher: +98 21 88548892-5
- Advertising Dept. Tel: +98 21 88500601
- & Email: irandaily@iranagahiha.com
- Website: www.irandaily.ir
- Email: newspaper.irandaily.ir
- Email: irandaily@icpi.ir
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Mismanagement of insurance resources affects doctors' tariffs

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The head of Iran's Medical Council stated that the problem of imposing unrealistic tariffs on doctors for health services lies with the insurance companies' inadequate management of resources. He further emphasized the importance of establishing a bilateral agreement between doctors and insurance companies, as opposed to the current unilateral imposition on doctors, Tasnim News Agency reported. During the press conference held by the country's Medical Council, Mohammad Raiszadeh addressed the issue of setting medical tariffs based on the actual cost of services. He responded to a reporter's question regarding the challenges faced by insurance companies in compensating doctors for medical fees by expressing his disagreement with the notion that insurance companies are unable to afford increased and fair tariffs based on the final price. He believed that the lack of tariff increase stems from incorrect measures and unnecessary biases, rather than insufficient funds within the insurance companies. "The issue of not setting proper tariffs for health services does not stem from a lack of financial resources or budget. Instead, we are confronted with mismanagement and resource misallocation within the insurance system," Raiszadeh said, adding, "Therefore, attributing the problem to a lack of budget is an incorrect assertion." Currently, less than 10 percent

of the health system's budget is allocated to medical fees. The remaining funds in the health sector are utilized for administrative services, unnecessary prescription of drugs and equipment, and induction services. Insurance companies should actively monitor these concerns, including the indiscriminate prescriptions. "But unfortunately, they fail to do so. The excuse of budget constraints is often used to justify the lack of tariff increases." By stating that they insist on separating the professional component, which refers to the salaries of service providers and doctors, from the technical component, Raiszadeh explained, "A significant portion of the medical service tariff is allocated to the technical component, which includes expenses related to accommodation and patient care. This component is unrelated to the doctor's salary." He pointed out that the price growth of the technical component has been in line with the country's inflation rate and even higher. In recent years, the average tariff growth has been nearly 21 percent, while the inflation rate has been around 40 percent. However, the professional component has only seen an average growth of 11 percent in the last 5 years. "In fact, the professional component has become a victim of the technical component in diagnostic and treatment service tariffs. I am worried that our health system will be managed in a manner similar to a car wash. This



means that due to the low wages of service providers, hospitals may struggle to handle both the technical and professional aspects." In such a case, there may be a reduction in doctor's salaries since the hospitals lack the financial resources to pay them. Consequently, the financial relationship between the doctor and the patient might occur directly. Asked whether the realistic adjustment of tariffs would not give way to the issue of increased out-of-pocket payments due to the absence of contracts between certain private sector doctors and insurance compa-

nies or not, Raiszadeh clarified, "Presently, as the tariffs are not reflective of reality, individuals are compelled to make unofficial payments to certain doctors, resulting in a rise in out-of-pocket expenses." He continued by stating, "On the other hand, insurance companies have declared their logistical incapacity to enter into contracts with all medical centers and the healthcare community. Additionally, signing a contract between doctors and insurance companies should ideally be a bilateral agreement. However, in our country, this contract is imposed upon doctors by insur-

ance companies. The insurance companies have the authority to determine the tariff, and they often delay payments to doctors without facing any penalties for this delay." The head of the country's Medical Council stated, "In such a situation, a law has been enacted requiring all doctors to sign contracts with insurance companies. However, these contracts are one-sided, outdated, and unfair. It is important to note that this law is implemented despite its lack of enforceability. The contract should consider the parties involved and their expectations before being finalized."

Children had 'one of the most difficult' years in 2023

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The year 2023 will be remembered as "one of the most difficult" years for children worldwide, according to UNICEF. The child mortality rate in Gaza is reported to be "twice" as high as what UNICEF has observed in over 40 conflicts, according to Ted Chaiban, the deputy executive director of UNICEF, Anadolu reported. Chaiban also highlights the impact of insufficient funding on humanitarian groups. He further mentions the challenging situations in Gaza, Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and the Sahel as we enter 2024, and emphasizes the need for continued support and attention to crises in these regions. In Gaza, the violence has been unprecedented, with over 40 percent of the total death toll being children. The indiscriminate level of

violence in Gaza is deeply concerning. Chaiban also draws attention to the ongoing crises in Sudan, including targeted violence leading to child displacement, as well

as the long-standing conflict in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of Congo, where children face sexual and physical violence. Despite the challenges, Chai-

ban emphasizes the importance of every dollar in making a difference for children. UNICEF's appeal for emergency funding in 2023 was roughly 50 percent funded, leading to a reduction in the 2024 appeal by 16 percent. The focus is on being more efficient and targeting the most at-risk children. However, Chaiban emphasizes that "you cannot do more with less" and appeals to donors not to turn their attention away from children. As we approach 2024, Chaiban recognizes the difficult situations in Gaza, Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and the Sahel. He urges the world not to forget other crises, such as the displacement from Syria, the Rohingya in Bangladesh, and the situation in Haiti. Despite the challenges, Chaiban also highlights situations of hope, such as the averted famine in Somalia and the progress made in the Horn of Africa.

Looking ahead to 2024, UNICEF has launched a \$9.3 billion emergency funding appeal to reach at least 93.7 million children in 155 countries. The top five appeals by funding requirements are for Afghanistan, Syrian refugees and other vulnerable populations, Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Ukraine and the refugee response. UNICEF's goals include vaccination against measles, treating severe acute malnutrition, and providing education and mental health support to millions of children. Critically underfunded emergencies include Sudan, Burkina Faso, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Myanmar, Haiti, Ethiopia, Yemen, Somalia, South Sudan, and Bangladesh. UNICEF's work continues to make a positive impact, and the organization calls for ongoing support to provide hope for children facing these challenges.

