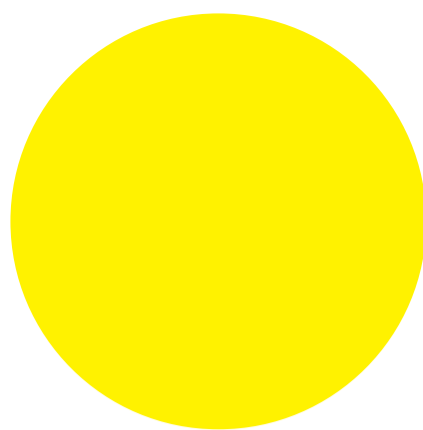




Energy Ministry starts construction of renewable power plants

2 >



Iran Daily



irandaily.ir | newspaper.irandaily.ir

Vol. 7468 • Tuesday, December 26, 2023 • Dey 5, 1402 • Jumada al-Thani 12, 1445 • 100,000 rials • 8 Pages

Senior Iranian Officer Killed in Israeli Strike in Syria

7 >

IRGC vows revenge



Christians mourn for Gaza

EXCLUSIVE

This year, celebrating Christian festivities and the upcoming New Year has been eclipsed by the war in Gaza and the inhumane massacre of Palestinians at the hands of the Israeli regime. Any fair human, regardless of their political or religious views, cannot stay indifferent to what has happened in the last three months in the Gaza Strip. How timeless are the famous lines that the Iranian poet Sa'di wrote centuries ago, which translate as follows:

7 >



Christ under Rubble

7 >



EXCLUSIVE

4-5 >

Iran signs free trade pact with EAEU

Iran and the member states of Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, and Armenia, signed a free trade agreement (FTA) in a ceremony in St. Petersburg on Monday. Iranian Minister of Industry, Mine and Trade Abbas Aliabadi signed the agreement, which is the result of over two years of negotiations, on behalf of Iran, IRNA reported.

On behalf of the EAEU, the deputy prime ministers of the member countries signed the agreement.

The signing ceremony was attended by Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister for Economic Diplomacy Mehdi Safari, EAEU Minister in Charge of Trade Andrey Slepnev, Iran's Ambassador to Russia Kazem Jalali, and a number of EAEU officials.

After signing the pact, it needs to be approved by the parliaments of six countries (Iran and five EAEU member states) in order to become law to become operational.

According to IRNA, the parties will completely lift tariffs for 87 percent of goods in their trade exchanges.

Last week, Slepnev said that Iran will become one of the most important trade partners of the Eurasian Economic Union with the signing of an FTA between the two sides.

He made the remarks in a meeting with Iranian Ambassador to Moscow Kazem Jalali.

He also called the agreement the most important cooperation document between the two sides.

Jalali, for his part, said the free trade agreement is the result of intensive negotiations and the will of the two sides to develop their relations.

Energy Ministry starts construction of renewable power plants

Iran to set record in building power stations by March



The Iranian Energy Ministry on Monday unveiled a plan for the construction of 95 renewable power plants in a ceremony attended by President Ebrahim Raisi. The plan is aimed at removing the imbalance of electricity and power outages, according to IRNA. The total amount of electricity generated by the power plants (11,000 megawatts) will be 11

times that of the electricity generated at the Bushehr Power Plant.

In his address to officials of the Energy Ministry, Raisi said, "In addition to paying attention to improving productivity, paying serious attention to energy generation from renewable sources is another important point as we witnessed the start of the implementation of wind and solar power

projects."

If the improvement of productivity is not taken into consideration along with the increase of capital attraction, it can make the attracted capital ineffective, the president added.

Meanwhile, Deputy Head of Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Organization of Iran (SATBA) for Investment Affairs Arash Omid pointed to a contract

concluded with the private sector for constructing renewable power plants and said that the largest contract for simultaneous construction of renewable power plants in the Middle East will be inked in Iran. The nominal electricity generation capacity of the renewable power plants in the country stands at 30,000 MW currently, he added.

Also, Deputy Energy Minister of Planning and Economic Affairs Yazdan Rezaei announced that his ministry will set a new record in construction of power stations by the end of the current Iranian year (March 19, 2024).

Simultaneously with the plans that have been implemented in the field of power station construction and increasing the power

generation capacity, there are also extensive programs aimed at developing power generation capacity through increasing efficiency and energy efficiency, he noted.

Experts believe that the development of renewable power plants in the country can help remove the electricity imbalance to a great extent and also assist the stability of the power grid.

China's exceptional economy means a rosy future

China's economy is "exceptional" owing to its history, culture and policymaking, said a senior Iranian business leader in a recent interview with Xinhua.

"China's exceptional economy is neither like what happens in Europe and the United States nor in developing countries," said Majidreza Hariri, president of the Iran-China Chamber of Commerce and Industries, noting that this distinction

is attributed to the country's history and culture, coupled with its flexible decision-making and policy implementation system, which makes the country "more flexible in the face of crises".

He added that combined with China's economic model, the policymaking system "has helped the country achieve its present economic status".

Hariri predicted that the

country's annual economic growth rate could stand at around five percent, which, he said, "is quite significant".

"It is not possible to expect an economy constituting close to 18 percent of the world's economy to continue maintaining a growth rate of 10 percent, as its size has increased considerably," said Hariri.

Chinese modernization

encapsulates a political commitment to equitable income distribution, peaceful national development and ecological sustainability, said Hariri, noting this sets it apart from the historical trajectory of modernization in developed Western countries.

According to him, these concepts and terms are expected to impact the global economy.

Iranian shipping on frontline against US sanctions

Iran's launch of its first shipping line in the Caspian Sea in July 1989 shortened the country's export route to Europe by about 4,000 kilometers. The activation

of the line had a significant impact on the transit of goods, marking an important shipping achievement after the victory of the Islamic Revolution.

The role of the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Line Group as the country's national fleet during the eight years of war with Iraq in the 1980s was so important, essential and influential that it earned the title of the

country's second line of defense, Press TV wrote.

Those trying years saw the national fleet, commonly known by its business name as IRISL Group, continuously dispatch ships and carry out the relevant tasks in line with the goals of the nascent Islamic Revolution with desired efficiency, providing essential and strategic goods and participating in the defense of the country.

Some of the feats included the haulage of over 67 million tons of goods, keeping

the strategic Imam Khomeini Port operational and active in the most fraught period of the region and helping the government save money under war conditions against an enemy that enjoyed all kinds of military and political support provided by the world arrogance.

After the war, the sprawling shipping fleet of the Islamic Republic has been and is at the top of the enemy's sanctions list, given the importance and vital position of

this strategic asset of Iran.

The sector is playing a strategic role at a time of the most extensive sanctions ever imposed on a country, targeting Iran, forming the first line of defense where it has thwarted the US bid to bring Iranian oil exports down to zero, and never allowed its production sectors face shortages.

Thanks to the national fleet, basic goods, which are the first livelihood needs of the people, have reached Iran's ports on time under the most draconian sanctions regime.

Both during the sanctions and during the previous and current negotiations to remove them, the fleet was at the disposal of Iranian negotiators as a strategic and resistance tool against the pressure of the enemies and helped to increase their bargaining power.

Currently, up to 100% of logistics, from providing manpower to carrying out

periodical and travel repairs, insurance, training and fueling ships is provided domestically. More than 83% of the fleet's needs are being met internally, which is unique in the world's shipping industry. Part of the remaining 17 percent is related to the ships that do not ply domestic ports.

The nature of the shipping industry is international. Hence, most of the needs of the shipping companies are met internationally. However, the IRISL Group, according to its national role and duties, provides the needs of the fleet inside the country as much as possible.

Under this strategy, the group has saved the country \$330 million dollars in transit costs in recent years. Also, more than 98% of the company's personnel are Iranian.

The Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Line is ranked 14th in Alphaliner's list of the world's top 100 shipping lines, published on January 2022, accounting for 0.6% of the container carrying capacity of 15,004

TEU in the world.

According to IRISL head Mohammad Reza Modares Khiabani, the group currently has 150 active vessels, of which 32 are bulk carriers, 30 container vessels, 22 cargo carriers of general goods, 18 service and passenger vessels, two roll-on/roll-off ships, and three barges.

In 2021, a knowledge-based company succeeded in indigenizing the ship design for which Iran had been dependent on South Korea and Germany before.

Previously, Iranian researchers had achieved self-sufficiency in ship building, and more than 800 parts of ships and the production of giant vessels had also been indigenized. After making parts, the construction and design of ships was a major achievement.

As of 2021, knowledge-based Iranian companies and manufacturers had provided parts to nearly 200 small and large vessels, dredges, tugboats and fireboats.





● IRNA



● IRNA

Engross yourself in rural life, natural splendors of Sar Aqa Seyyed village



● IRNA



● virgoolio



● IRNA

Iranica Desk

The picturesque village of Sar Aqa Seyyed in Kuhrang is one of the most captivating natural attractions in Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari Province, nestled amidst the verdant Zagros Mountains. The stepped architecture, authentic traditional clothing, and customs of the rural inhabitants, along with its unspoiled and awe-inspiring natural surroundings, are some of the village's outstanding features. In recent years, owing to the growing interest from nature enthusiasts, the village has gained recognition, with even foreign tourists making their way to this area.

With its limited amenities, this village is an ideal destination for those seeking tranquility in secluded rural areas. During the colder seasons, the village's population dwindles, while in warmer times, it sees an influx of tourists.

Despite the area's potential for tourism, the residents lead traditional lives due to the limited facilities. According to archaeologists, Sar Aqa Seyyed village, like many others nestled in the mountains, served as one of the earliest human settlements, dating back thousands of years. Presently, the only historical record available for the village is a genealogy of the Imamzadeh buried there, indicating that a person named Isa and his relatives lived in this village over 600 years ago.

Architecture

The indigenous architecture of Sar Aqa Seyyed village still stands, and its inhabitants make a living through agriculture, animal husbandry, and salt extraction. The region's economy has seen improvement in recent years due to the growing tourism sector. Presently, the villagers meet all their needs locally and have put in place relatively good facilities to accommodate tourists.

Rural houses are designed to effectively block the penetration of cold winds. Situated at an elevation of 2,500 meters above sea level, the village is renowned as one of the prime summer pastures for Bakhtiari nomads.

The houses are divided into residential and animal and poultry housing sections, with the former incorporating guesthouses and living rooms. Despite recent reconstruction efforts, the village still retains an overall historical and ancient structure. Regrettably, the village has suffered two fires in the past decade, resulting in the complete destruction of some houses.

Imamzadeh Aqa Seyyed Shrine

Imamzadeh Aqa Seyyed Shrine, located at the base of the village, is a focal point, with the doors and windows of the rural houses opening toward it. This orientation offers picturesque views to the north and south, attracting photography enthusiasts. At sunset, the illuminated houses enhance the scenic beauty of the village.

In the past, nomads and villagers used to visit Imamzadeh Aqa Seyyed Shrine

for pilgrimage, leading some locals to believe that this was the reason behind the village being named Sar Aqa Seyyed. The shrine holds a special place among the villagers, who hold it in high esteem, believing that the arrival of Aqa Seyyed has brought blessings and prosperity to the area.

Villagers

The villagers, who are from the Bakhtiari tribe, uphold their traditional and authentic culture, speaking the Lori dialect and adorning traditional attire. They are known for their warm hospitality towards tourists.

Traditional cooking methods persist among rural women, who prepare food over wood fires and bake bread in homemade ovens. Meanwhile, the men are occupied with agriculture, livestock breeding, and salt extraction from the nearby salt pans. The village's primary agricultural products include wheat, potatoes, and dairy items.

In Sar Aqa Seyyed village, rural women work alongside men, engaging in various activities such as weaving tents and rugs with woolen thread, which are common handicrafts in the area. Additionally, the residents of the village participate in playing the Sorna (a local instrument) and singing local songs during various ceremonies and celebrations.

The people of Sar Aqa Seyyed village hold strong adherence to religious ceremonies and beliefs. Magnificent religious events are held at the shrine

of Imamzadeh Aqa Seyyed, creating a unique atmosphere during the holy month of Ramadan and the mourning days of Muharram, the first month of the lunar calendar marking the anniversary of the martyrdom of Imam Hussein (PBUH), the third Imam of Shia Muslims, and his companions.

Nature

The village boasts unspoiled natural surroundings, adorned with oak and plane trees that are utilized extensively by the residents. Additionally, walnut, pomegranate, and local mulberry trees are prevalent. The villagers believe that the walnut trees surrounding the village are over 300 years old. The foothill areas are adorned with mountain shrubs and fragrant, edible plants such as sumac, wild garlic, mushrooms, wild leeks, and mountain celery.

Best time to visit

The best time to visit Sar Aqa Seyyed village is during the first six months of the Iranian year. In the spring, the weather is cool and pleasant, and as the season begins, the snow starts to melt, bringing the surrounding nature to life. Moving towards summer, the lushness of the village and its surrounding summer pastures becomes even more pronounced. Spring is also the best time to witness the migration of nomads to this village.

With the increasing influx of domestic and international tourists to the village, local rental homes and ecotourism accommodations have been es-

tablished in recent years. If you desire to stay close to nature, you can bring your own supplies and camp in the surrounding natural areas of the village. However, keep in mind that the nights in this area can be cold.

Sar Aqa Seyyed village has limited facilities, and the variety of shops is not extensive. In some parts of the village, mobile phones may not have reception; therefore, it's advisable to bring enough cash for renting houses. By staying in rental homes in Sar Aqa Seyyed village and shopping at the small stores, you can contribute to the improvement of the local economy and the flourishing of tourism in the village. The experience of staying in the rural homes of Sar Aqa Seyyed village is unique and enjoyable. However, it is also possible to visit this village in one day and allocate a day to explore the area while staying in other cities in Kuhrang County.

Location

The road to the village starts from the west of Chelgard, about 50 kilometers away. At the beginning of the road, you'll come to the village of Sheikh Ali Khan. Once the paved road ends, you'll have to navigate a winding dirt road. Local vehicles travel from Chelgard to Sar Aqa Seyyed, so you can park in Chelgard and catch a local ride to the village. The dirt road to the village was built in 1984, and is the main connection for the villagers to other areas. It is closed in the cold seasons due to icy conditions and the risk of falling rocks.

● IRNA



Milk on the School Menu

An overview of milk and its distribution in schools worldwide, objectives and achievements

Social Desk

Iran's school lunch program, with its accompanying glass of milk, dates back to the late 1950s. During that time, poverty was widespread in Iran, and many children experienced poor living conditions, malnutrition, and lacked food security. As a result, there were sparks of a school meal initiative inspired by leading industrialized countries, which also took root in Iran. The goal of this initiative was to ensure basic nutritional necessities for students. Over time, in the 1970s, the program expanded to include a glass of milk, biscuits, fruits, and bean stew.

According to available accounts, it appears that during the 1950s, 1960s, and the first half of the 1970s, free meals for students in Iran didn't follow specific rules or patterns. However, since 1977, the distribution of free meals became more organized and expanded nationwide. This policy continued for several years following the Islamic Revolution of 1979. However, in the early 1990s, due to severe government budget restrictions, the free meal program for students came to an end.

Years later, as the country began to experience economic growth and improved living conditions, the long-abandoned school meal program was replaced with the free distribution of milk in schools, commonly known as "school milk." The program was initially implemented on a trial basis in 2000, covering 420,000 students. In 2001, the plan was officially put into effect, starting in elementary schools in Tehran and gradually expanding nationwide to eventually cover 1,200,000 students who received free milk.

However, Iran's school milk program faced various challenges and setbacks over the years, and in 2017, it came to an abrupt halt due to budgetary issues.

Now, after a six-year interruption, the country's school milk program has been reinstated, with the aim of improving the physical and mental health of students. Aligned with the country's Fundamental Reform Document of Education, the initiative focuses on promoting a culture of milk consumption. A culture much needed in Iran, since despite having the biggest capacity for producing dairy products in the Middle East, Iran has a per capita consumption of about 50 kilograms a year, which is approximately one-third of the global average. In the current phase of the program, elementary school students nationwide receive milk twice a week.

Sources proclaim that the current administration has allocated a budget of \$50 million until mid-March 2024, sourced from the Targeted Subsidies Organization, and the milk containers provided to students will be unsalable and will feature printed messages regarding culture, health, and hygiene.

This offers a good opportunity to dig a little deeper into milk, posing questions like why milk is considered a superfood these days, why it is a dietary staple in many advanced countries, and why drinking it is considered imperative for young children.

White elixir

First, let's take a look at the origins and reasons for consuming this wholesome drink. According to Hannah Velten, author of 'Milk: A Global History,' humans are "the only species to consume milk past weaning."

One reason why milk came to be considered a favorable food can be traced back to our ancient ancestors who had access to it. The domestication of various animals like sheep, goats, cows, water buffaloes, reindeer, camels, horses, and donkeys provided our ancestors with a limited but valuable supply of milk. This modest resource, although incomparable to today's standards, granted humans significant survival advantages.

For starters, milk served as a lifeline during times of food and water scarcity in Africa and the Middle East, offering sustenance when resources were scarce. It also offered crucial additional nutrients to diets that primarily relied on cereals. Moreover, milk provided a source of vitamin D and served as an alternative to strong sunlight. Additionally, it proved to be a safer alternative to water, free from parasites that could pose health risks. (Velten, 2010)

Ancient civilizations like the Sumerians, Egyptians, Persians, and Greeks obtained milk from domesticated animals and recognized its nutritional value, especially for infants. In the Classical Era, Hippocrates praised milk for its nourishing properties. Velten writes, "Milk

was the 'white elixir' in many countries and mythologies." She points out that even today, "people who have trouble sleeping are advised to drink a soothing mug of warm milk before bed to help ease them into sleep."

During the Middle Ages, milk consumption continued, with monasteries playing a major role. The "white liquor" served as a crucial source of animal protein for individuals who couldn't afford meat. While cows were the primary source, drinking milk from goats and sheep was also customary. However, fresh milk was typically reserved for the very young or elderly, with adults consuming it only if they were poor or sick. Instead, poor adults would often opt for buttermilk, whey, soured milk, or diluted milk. The limited availability of technology to prevent spoilage made fresh milk less common compared to other dairy products. In upper-class kitchens, fresh milk occasionally found its way into stews, although maintaining its freshness in large quantities proved to be a challenge, leading to the use of almond milk as a substitute. However, cheese held far greater significance as a staple food, particularly among the plebeian.

The major shift, however, came with the Industrial Revolution when, through increased production and better preservation methods, milk became more widely available and started appearing on more tables.





Nutrition facts

At this point, one might wonder what is in a glass of cow's milk that makes it such an important beverage for us. Certainly, there must be something in this sweet, white thirst quencher that cannot be found elsewhere.

The nutritional composition of the white elixir is highly complex, as it contains nearly every essential nutrient for the body. A cup of whole cow's milk, with 3.25 percent fat, provides 152 calories, 88 percent

water, 8.14 grams of protein, 12 grams of carbohydrates (mainly in the form of lactose), 12 grams of sugar, and eight grams of fat.

Milk proteins, including casein and whey proteins, are of excellent quality. They are rich in essential amino acids and are easily digestible. Casein, which accounts for 80 percent of milk proteins, has the ability to enhance mineral absorption and may promote lower blood pressure. On

the other hand, whey proteins make up the remaining 20 percent and are particularly high in branched-chain amino acids. These proteins have been associated with various health benefits, such as decreased blood pressure and improved mood.

Milk fat is also complex, consisting of numerous fatty acids, with saturated fats comprising about 70 percent of its content. However, whole milk contains small amounts of beneficial

trans fats, such as conjugated linoleic acid.

Finally, carbohydrates in milk are mainly lactose, which is broken down into glucose and galactose in the body.

Therefore, not only does milk provide the body with the energy it needs to operate, but it also optimizes the body's operation in many ways. Hence, it should truly be classified as a superfood.

Not for everyone

However, despite all its benefits, whole cow's milk is not suitable for everyone. While it may be appropriate for some individuals, countless others either cannot digest it or choose not to consume it. Approximately 65

percent of the global population is affected by lactose intolerance, which makes them unable to digest lactose, a sugar present in milk and dairy products. Additionally, some people opt out of consuming milk or dairy due to

dietary restrictions, health concerns, or ethical reasons.

Nevertheless, today, lactose-free milk is a reality, and there is a wide range of nondairy milk alternatives available. These include almond milk, coconut

milk, cashew milk, soy milk, hemp milk, oat milk, and rice milk. Any one of these beverages, provided that they come with the same or similar nutrition facts, can serve as good replacements for the heavenly drink.

School milk

How students came to be served milk in schools needs a little bit of an introduction. As we all know, during the early days of the Industrial Revolution, child labor was a widespread practice. Young children were subjected to long hours of work in hazardous conditions, often for minimal or no pay. Poverty-stricken families would send their children to work in order to make ends meet, while orphaned or abandoned children had no one else to care for them. Factory owners willingly exploited children due to their perceived cheapness and disposability, paying them lower wages compared to adults. The rise of new technologies and factories created a demand for workers who could operate the machinery, leading to the employment of children who were small and nimble.

The young ones working in factories faced numerous health risks and poor living conditions. Due to insufficient funds to buy proper food and the physically demanding nature of their work, malnutrition and exhaustion

were common among them. Working long hours in unsafe conditions, coupled with inadequate nutrition, made them susceptible to illness and serious injuries. At the time, little was done to protect children from its dangers. It was not until the 1870s, with the introduction of compulsory education laws, that child labor was finally outlawed, first in Britain, and then gradually the rest of the civilized world.

With child labor being banned and the rise of mandatory education for children, state-sponsored schools emerged. At first, these schools hosted students who lived nearby and would return home for lunch. However, as more and more kids enrolled in schools, some living at far distances and unable to return home for lunch and then come back for afternoon classes, a lunch break was devised. At this point, school authorities could observe which children were going hungry and suffering from malnutrition. Thus, they advocated for school meal programs

that would provide a free meal to all students, regardless of their parental income.

Soon, such programs took root in various countries, including the UK, US, some European countries, Japan, and others. These programs aimed to provide children with adequate nutrition for their physical and mental growth, as well as their overall performance in school. Milk, being a wholesome and nourishing food, played a vital role in these programs.

In the UK, school milk schemes were introduced over a century ago to combat child malnutrition. The government viewed milk as the cheapest available food and aimed to increase its consumption among infants, children, and adults. Subsidized school milk became an important component of these initiatives, following the concept of "welfare milk" for economically disadvantaged households.

Similarly, in Japan, the school milk program was established after World War II in response to child malnourishment. Donations of milk were pro-

vided initially, and later, the School Lunch Law was passed to ensure the supply of locally produced liquid milk in schools with subsidies for farmers. School lunches in Japan have significantly improved the health and growth of school children.

Today, approximately 100 countries worldwide celebrate World School Milk Day annually, emphasizing the significance of children having access to proper nourishment for their physical and mental progress. Milk continues to play a vital role in school meal programs, providing essential nutrients that contribute to children's learning and academic performance. Low-income children in many countries rely on these programs to meet their daily milk and dairy needs.

Iranian experience

Mohammed, born in 1952, recalls his second grade experience in 1960 when some children were given white cans of foreign oil, known as margarine, with its distinct taste, to take home. These nutrition programs during that time were an extension of a plan implemented in impoverished allied countries of the United States after World War II.

Mohammad Hassan also remembers his time in school, where the school caretaker would boil powdered milk in a large pot. The children would line up in the school corridor with plastic glasses, patiently waiting for their turn to receive a serving of milk.

However, children born in the 1960s had a slightly different perspective, as the nutrition and health situation of the country had slightly improved during their time.

Amine, who attended elementary school in Khuzestan Province, also recalls students being provided with bread and butter at school.

With the increase in oil revenues during the 1970s, the nutritional status of Iranian families improved compared to previous years. In 1977, the provision of free meals for young children in schools and infants up to two years old, along with their mothers, was put on the agenda, entitling over six million students across the country to receive free meals. As part of this program, students were provided with a daily morning meal consisting of milk, biscuits, and fruit, with the Ministry of Education in charge of the provision.

Now, with the long-established relationship between being well-fed and better performance at school, as well as the proven effects of dairy products against air pollution, which millions of Iranian kids are currently living with, we can only hope that not only will this round of the school milk program not face the same fate as the previous ones, but also that it expands to include a serving of milk every day children are in school.



Iran women, Tavassoli nominated for Futsalplanet Awards



● AFC

Sports Desk

Iran women's national team and international female keeper Farzaneh Tavassoli are among the nominees for the annual Futsalplanet Awards.

Iran will vie with Brazil, Hungary, Iraq, Italy, Paraguay, Portugal, Spain, Thailand, and Ukraine for the Best Women's National Team in the World prize.

Playing for Iranian club Nasr Fardis Karaj, Tavassoli is nominated in the Best Women's Goalkeeper – alongside Italian Ana Carolina, Portuguese duo Ana Catarina and Maria Rocha, Ukrainian Viktoriia Kyslova, Silvia Agüete Outón of Spain, Hungary's Lilla Torma, as well as Brazilian trio Bianca Castagnaro, Desirée da Silva, and Joziane de Oliveira.

The winners of the 23rd edition of the awards are expected to be announced in the early days of January.

Dolphins beat Cowboys to make NFL play-offs



● GETTY IMAGES

BBC – The Miami Dolphins got the big-game win their season needed as they booked their play-off spot with a dramatic late victory over the Dallas Cowboys on Christmas Eve in the NFL.

Jason Sanders kicked a field goal as time expired to give the Dolphins a 22-20 victory over the Cowboys.

Joining Miami in the play-offs are the Detroit Lions who claimed a divisional title for the first time in almost 30 years, while the Cleveland Browns are also nearly there after an impressive win over the Houston Texans.

The Seattle Seahawks and the Green Bay Packers came out on top in wild late finishes to keep their wildcard hopes alive, while the Tampa Bay Buccaneers are one of the form teams in the league after winning four in a row.

Iran in talks with Italian Lorenzetti for volleyball team job



● MICHELE BENDA/BENDA

Sports Desk

Vahid Moradi, the caretaker of the Iranian Volleyball Federation, is in negotiations with Italian coach Angelo Lorenzetti over the men's national team job.

The position has been vacant since October, after Behrouz Ataei stepped down from his role in the aftermath of a 3-1 defeat against the Czech Republic midway through the FIVB Olympic Qualifying Tournament in Rio de Janeiro. An ex-head coach of the Italian under-21 team, Lorenzetti, 59, has spent the best part of his managerial career with the clubs in his home country – including Modena, Verona, Piacenza, and Trentino Itas. The Italian steered Sir Sicoma Perugia to the Club World Champs crown earlier in December, thanks to a straight-set victory over Brazil's Itambe Minas in the final in Bangalore, India.

Lorenzetti is the latest name in the list of the candidates for the Iranian job, also featuring former national team skipper and world-class setter Saeed Ma'rouf, Russian Vladimir Alekno, who was in charge of Iran at the Tokyo Olympics, as well as Italian Gianlorenzo Blengini and high-profile Belgian Vital Heynen – world champion with Poland in 2018.

The Iranian volleyball governing body said on Sunday that Moradi, who took over from Mohammadreza Davarzani after his four-year reign came to an end in November, will also have online sessions with a couple of the other coaches – including Heynen – in the coming days as the new head coach is expected to be unveiled before mid-January.

The new coach, whoever he might be, will be facing a mammoth task to lead Iran to a place in next summer's Paris Olympics following a disappointing run in October's qualifiers, which saw the Asian powerhouse finish second from bottom in the seven-team table. With Germany, Brazil, Poland, Canada, USA, and Japan guaranteed an Olympic quota – courtesy of a top-two finish across the qualification pools – five remaining slots will be decided through the FIVB Men's World Ranking by the end of the Volleyball Nations League preliminary round – starting May 21. Egypt will likely take the African berth for the Games, with the other spots going to the four highest-ranked teams not qualified yet. As it stands, Italy (third), Argentina (sixth), Slovenia (seventh), and Serbia (ninth) are the favorites to qualify, with Iran lagging behind in the 15th place.

Iran will be back in Rio de Janeiro for the VNL Week 1, drawn in the same pool with the host and 2021 champion Brazil, Japan – which marched to last year's Finals before finishing third – Cuba, Germany, Serbia, Italy, and Argentina.

Week 2 of the preliminary phase puts Iran in the same pool with Japan, Brazil, newcomer Turkey, reigning champion Poland, Bulgaria, Slovenia, and Germany – starting June 4 in Japan, with the host city yet to be confirmed.

The third and the final week (June 18-25) will see Iran visit Manila in the Philippines, where massive showpieces against Japan, Canada, USA, the Netherlands, Brazil, Germany, and France could be on the cards for the Asian side.

Ratcliffe's investment signals fresh start in Man United's recovery plan

REUTERS – Jim Ratcliffe becoming a minority shareholder in Manchester United finally ended the drawn-out ownership saga and while the deal will not give supporters their desired clean break from the unpopular Glazer family, it signals a fresh start for the club.

The deal is far from the multi-billion dollar takeover initially expected but supporters will welcome his input as they look forward to their club regaining their position at the peak of English and European football.

The British billionaire and owner of petrochemicals giant INEOS bought a 25% stake for \$33 per share, United said on Sunday, following a bidding process that lasted more than 12 months.

The 71-year-old is also investing \$300 million intended to upgrade the club's ageing infrastructure that invariably has visiting fans, often soaked by water pouring through the holes in the roof, chanting "Old Trafford is falling down".

Ratcliffe's investment means he has been given the responsibility of running the sporting side of the business, which is welcome news for a club that stumbled to their worst start to a season since 1962 and have not won a league title since Alex Ferguson retired as manager in 2013.

The Glazers will remain in con-



● PETER BYRNE/PA IMAGES

trol, but how the dynamic between them and Ratcliffe will unfold is one of the great unanswered questions of the new arrangement.

Ratcliffe grew up in a council house in the Manchester area, where his fascination with industry reportedly grew from the factory smoke stacks he could see from his bedroom window.

Richest businessmen

After studying chemical engineering at Birmingham University he did an MBA at London Business School and went on to

become one of Britain's richest businessmen, founding INEOS in 1998.

He is the chemical company's chairman and chief executive officer with a two-thirds stake, and Forbes pegs his net worth at about \$19 billion.

Ratcliffe is well versed in sports ownership as INEOS owns French Ligue 1 club Nice, Swiss Super League side FC Lausanne-Sport, and works with Racing Club Abidjan in the Ivory Coast.

His attempt to buy Chelsea, when former owner Roman

Abramovich's assets were frozen following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, failed to work out.

He is also in control of the INEOS Grenadiers cycling team, who as Team Sky were one of the world's most successful teams. He is also a one-third shareholder of Mercedes-AMG Petronas Formula One team and competes with sailing crew INEOS Britannia in the America's Cup. United's American owners the Glazers had announced about a year ago that they would seek outside investment, to the delight of supporters. Fans have

been crying out for new owners for years as they blamed the Glazers for burdening the club with debt and their chants of "Glazers out" can be regularly heard at games.

Qatar's Sheikh Jassim bin Hamad al Thani was also looking to buy the club but dropped out of the process, saying he would not be raising his \$6 billion offer. Adding to the misery is United's decline on the pitch since Ferguson's retirement. United appeared to be turning the tide after Erik Ten Hag guided them to their first trophy in six years when they captured the League Cup last season.

They went on to finish third in the Premier League, 14 points behind champions and cross-town rivals Manchester City, who have not only taken United's role as the country's most successful club, but also leapfrogged them in terms of spending power.

This season they got off to an abysmal start losing five of their first 10 league games, and have already been eliminated from the League Cup and Champions League, leaving Ten Hag looking vulnerable 16 months into the job.

But for a club that claims more than 650 million global fans and own a record 20 top flight English titles, Ratcliffe's arrival will at least give fans some hope that 2024 could see the start of the long-awaited turnaround.

Christ under Rubble



By Zohreh Qanadi
Staff writer

"If Jesus were to be born today, he would be born under the rubble in Gaza." This is an excerpt from a congratulatory speech delivered by a Palestinian Christian theologian Munther Isaac. Christmas Eve in Gaza marked one of the enclave's deadliest nights in the 11-week-old war, with 100 lives lost in Israeli airstrikes. Heart-wrenching scenes unfolded: One man hugged a dead child and others were hysterical. Gaza remains entrenched in bloodshed, hunger, and rubble, with over 20,000 casualties and many bodies feared trapped beneath the debris. Almost all of Gaza's 2.3 million people have been displaced. Miles away in Bethlehem, the birthplace of Jesus (PBUH), there was little for Christians to celebrate. Palestinian Christians earli-

er held a Christmas vigil in Bethlehem, West Bank, with candle-lit hymns and prayers for peace in Gaza instead of the usual celebrations. Hamas commended the Palestinian Christians' decision to limit their Christmas celebrations to religious rituals, saying, "The holidays of our Christian people come this year amid a continuing fascist aggression launched by the occupation (forces) against all components of our Palestinian people, targeting both mosques and churches." "We appreciate the position of the Christians of our honorable national Palestinian people who limit their celebrations this year ... and stand united with our people in the Gaza Strip, which is subjected to brutal Zionist aggression," the statement said. It added that the decision "confirms that our people ... Muslims and Christians alike, are united on the path of resilience, preserving their identity, and protecting their Islamic and Christian sanctities."

There were no trees, no lights, no choirs or celebrations for the first time in Palestine's history since the Nakba of 1948. Nativity figurines in churches were placed amid rubble and barbed wire in solidarity with the people of Gaza. Instead of a manger, at the Lutheran church in Bethlehem, the baby Jesus lies swaddled in a keffiyeh, half buried in a pile of rubble. Many here have ties to Gaza through loved ones and friends, and a sense of misery has fallen upon the city revered by Christians as the birthplace of Jesus Christ (PBUH). Decorations that once adorned neighborhoods have been removed. The parades and religious celebrations have been canceled. "It's impossible to celebrate when there's a massacre, a genocide, taking place in Gaza with our people," Pastor Munther Isaac tells Al Jazeera. Ali Thabet tells CNN: "My son asked me why there's no Christmas tree this year, I

don't know how to explain it." Father Spiridon Sammour, a Greek Orthodox priest at the Church of the Nativity says, "I have never seen it like this." "Christmas is joy, love, and peace. We have no peace. We have no joy," he says solemnly. "It is out of our hands, and we pray for the leaders who will make the decisions all over the world, to God to help them, give them his light to make peace here and all over the world." In the US, the home to the world's largest population of Christians, some Christians are following suit. "The only gift that Palestinians want to have is a Christmas cease-fire," said the Rev. Khader Khalila, who grew up in Bethlehem, and is now at The Redeemer-St John's Lutheran church in Brooklyn. Khalila will not be exchanging gifts this year, even with his own two children, and will instead donate money to organizations helping children in Gaza and rebuilding efforts. "It's impossible to celebrate" resonates as a sentiment, re-

flecting the grim reality of the Gaza war and exposing divisions among US Christians. A very different letter was sent to President Joe Biden on November 9 from Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) and 30 American Christian leaders, calling for the administration to "support an immediate cease-fire, de-escalation, and restraint by all involved". It was signed by representatives of the Presbyterian, Methodist, Episcopalian, United, Lutheran, and Orthodox churches, among others. In his Christmas message on Monday, Pope Francis kicked off global Christmas celebrations with a call for peace, as the war cast a shadow over one of the world's favorite holidays. "Tonight, our hearts are in Bethlehem, where the Prince of Peace is once more rejected by the futile logic of war, by the clash of arms that even today prevents him from finding room in the world," the Catholic leader said. He said that children dying

in wars, including in Gaza, are the "little Jesuses of today" and that Israeli strikes there were reaping an "appalling harvest" of innocent civilians. "I plead for an end to the military operations with their appalling harvest of innocent civilian victims, and call for a solution to the desperate humanitarian situation by an opening to the provision of humanitarian aid," he told thousands of faithful gathered in Saint Peter's Basilica in the Vatican. Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi, in a message to the pontiff on Sunday, urged "the international community and all the truthful people of the world" to help bring an "immediate end" to the Israeli aggression on the Gaza Strip in the New Year. Raisi said Israel killed thousands of innocent people in Gaza amid the inaction of international organizations and the support of the US and some European nations. The Latin patriarch of Al-Quds (Jerusalem), Pierbattis-

The Christmas nativity scene at the Evangelical Lutheran Christmas Church in Bethlehem this year. **GETTY IMAGES**

ta Pizzaballa, arrived Sunday at the Church of the Nativity, clad in the traditional black and white keffiyeh. "Our heart goes to Gaza, to all people in Gaza but a special attention to our Christian community in Gaza who is suffering," he said. Yet, the world remains shrouded in silence. Amidst the chaos, the only discernible sounds are only empty calls for cease-fire. Churches stand as silent witnesses, leaders observe without decisive action, and the people in Gaza 'are sending live images of their own execution'. As the Palestinian Christian theologian said during his Christmas sermon "The Christmas message is not about Santa, trees, gifts, lights." The true message of Christmas would be that "this genocide must stop now."

Christians mourn for Gaza

By Robert Beglarian
Iranian Christian MP

OPINION EXCLUSIVE

This year, celebrating Christian festivities and the upcoming New Year has

Mohammad Ali Rajabi
Cartoonist



been eclipsed by the war in Gaza and the inhumane massacre of Palestinians at the hands of the Israeli regime. Any fair human, regardless of their political or religious views, cannot stay indifferent to what has happened in the last three months in the Gaza Strip. How timeless are the famous lines that the Iranian poet Sa'di wrote centuries ago, which translate as follows: "Human beings are members of a whole

In creation of one essence and soul If one member is afflicted with pain Other members uneasy will remain" Christians in Bethlehem, which is the birthplace of Jesus Christ in the West Bank, were not alone in marking these days not as a time for celebration but as a time for mourning. Palestinian Christians, wherever they were around the world, grieved the grueling deaths and displacement of their fellow innocent children, women, and men. Palestine has always been home to Christians, Muslims, and Jews who were happy to have a peaceful co-existence for years, only to see their peace broken following the emergence of Zionism there. It seems that these days, no one can really feel the negative and inhumane aspects of the Israeli regime as well as its clear clashes with the divine teachings of Abrahamic religions in their bones better than Christian Palestinians residing in the occupied territories. As such, these Christians must not be indifferent to the Israeli oppression of Palestinians, especially in the Gaza Strip. That's what we have seen: this year's festivities in Bethlehem have been imbued with expressions of sympathy with the Muslims of Gaza and bereft of the joyous celebrations that were the norm for many years. Celebrations and events were

held across the world, but they were either limited in scale or accompanied by sympathies with Gazan Muslims and, in some cases, criticism of the global silence toward Israeli crimes. Christians had condemned past Israeli genocides in Gaza as well. Iranian Christians, just like other peoples of faith, are moved by the extreme oppression of Palestinians, and this will be reflected in their special plans for the upcoming New Year's Eve. Surely, they will not forget the people of Palestine in their prayers. Thanks to the work of various media outlets as well as social media, the ongoing genocide of Israel in Gaza has not been overlooked. Therefore, it is only natural that New Year's Eve will be significantly affected by the people's response to that genocide. Describing the atrocities that he witnessed in Gaza, Father Munther Isaac started his address during the service at the Evangelical Lutheran Christmas Church in Bethlehem by saying, "If Jesus were to be born today, he would be born under the rubble in Gaza." In the Christian faith, the resurrection is a major event. Three days and three nights after Christ was crucified, his rock tomb was opened, but there was no sign of Christ's body, signaling that he had been resurrected. A religious and apocalyptic message is embedded in this. I think that the Bethlehem pastor wanted to say that the extent of Israel's killings and destruction in Gaza is such that it is as if Israel wants to stop the resurrection and prevent the words of Abrahamic religions from being heard.

IRGC vows revenge after Israeli strike kills officer in Syria



International Desk

A senior officer of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guard Corps has been killed in an Israeli "missile strike" in a suburb of the Syrian capital, Damascus, the IRGC said in a statement on Monday. Seyyed Razi Mousavi, a veteran brigadier general who was serving as a military adviser in Syria, was one of the close companions of the assassinated Iranian commander, Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani, Tasnim News Agency reported. "The usurping, savage Israeli regime would undoubtedly pay for this crime," the IRGC statement read. On December 2, 2023, two IRGC brigadier generals, named Mohammed-Ali Ataei and Panah Taghizadeh, were killed after Israel bombed the same Sayyidah Zaynab neighborhood of Damascus.



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.

- License Holder: Managing Director
- Editor-in-chief
- Int'l & National Desk
- Economy Desk
- Sports Desk
- Iranica Desk
- Arts & Culture Desk
- Social Desk
- Language Editor

Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA)
Ali Kakadezfuli
Mostafa Shirmohammadi
Javad Mohammad Ali, Zohreh Qanadi,
Ebrahim Beheshti, Amir Mollae Mozaffari
Reza Abesh Ahmadlou, Sadeq Dehqan
Amirhadi Arsalanpour
Leila Imeni
Hamideh Hosseini
Ali Amiri
Ali Mehran

Address: 208, Khorramshahr Ave., Tehran, Iran

- Editorial Dept. Tel: +98 21 84711171
- ICPI Publisher: +98 21 88548892-5
- Advertising Dept. Tel: +98 21 88500601
- & Email: irandaily@iranagahiha.com
- Website: www.irandaily.ir
- Email: newspaper.irandaily.ir
- Email: irandaily@icpi.ir
- Printing House: Iran Cultural & Press Institute

Mismanagement of insurance resources affects doctors' tariffs

Social Desk

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

Social Desk

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.

