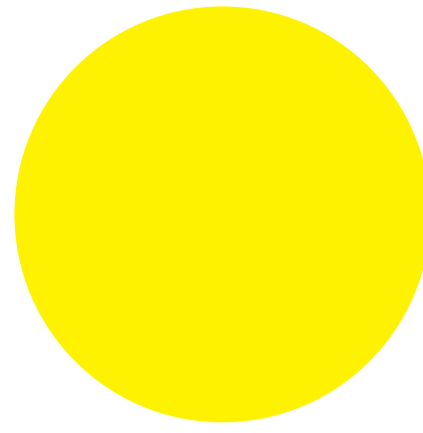


Raisi: Enmity toward Iran due to its support for Palestinians

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Iran Daily



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Hezbollah Showers Israel with Rockets

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This photograph taken on January 5, 2024 from the southern Lebanese village of Dhayra along the border, shows buildings in the Lebanese town of Tair Harfa as smoke billows over northern Israel, amid ongoing cross-border tensions.

AFP

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OPEC Dec. oil output rises before new cuts



OPEC oil output rose in December, a Reuters survey found, as increases in Iraq, Angola and Nigeria offset ongoing cuts by Saudi Arabia and other members of the wider OPEC+ alliance in support of the market. The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries pumped 27.88 million barrels per day (bpd) last month, up 70,000 bpd from November, according to the survey that tracks a wide array of shipping, flows and production data. Output is down more than 1 mbd from the same month a year ago.

The boost comes ahead of further OPEC+ cuts in 2024 and Angola's exit from OPEC, which are set to lower January output and market share. OPEC's market share has already been falling due to output restraint and the departure of some members.

In December, the biggest increases of 60,000 bpd came from Iraq and Angola, which both boosted exports, the survey found. Nigeria also shipped more crude abroad without, as yet, beginning oil products output at its new Dangote refinery.

Angola's increase was seen by two sources in the survey as a one-off and likely not sustainable into January, while Iraq still has a sizeable amount of production offline because of the ongoing halt in its northern crude exports via Turkey.

Among those showing lower output, Saudi Arabia trimmed production slightly below 9 mbd, the survey found, as the top exporter extended a voluntary 1 mbd output cut to provide extra support for the market.

Iran lowered exports in December, the survey found, with Iranian production falling slightly from a five-year high reached in November. Iran posted one of OPEC's biggest output increases in 2023 despite U.S. sanctions still being in place.

OPEC's output is still undershooting the targeted amount by almost 600,000 bpd, largely because Angola and Nigeria lack the capacity to pump at current targeted levels.

Angola's exit from the group and a new Nigerian quota for 2024 should bring actual output closer to the target level.

The Reuters survey, which aims to track supply to the market, is based on shipping data provided by external sources, Refinitiv Eikon flows data, information from companies that track flows such as Petro-Logistics and Kpler and information provided by sources at oil companies, OPEC and consultants.

Iran-Russia annual trade beats \$5b: *Lawmaker*

By Sadeq Dehqan & Reza Abesh Ahmadlou

Staff writers

The annual bilateral trade of Iran with Russia stands at over \$5 billion, announced the deputy head of the Iran-Russia Parliamentary Friendship Group, adding that both countries enjoy great potentials which can help increase the level of Tehran-Moscow ties. Talking to Iran Daily, Mojtaba Yousefi criticized the volume of current exchanges between Iran and Russia, noting that the ground should be paved for a significant increase in the level of commercial exchanges.

According to official statistics, trade exchanges between Iran and Russia increased from \$2.22 billion in 2020 to \$4.6 billion in 2022.

Referring to the policies adopted by the incumbent government, he said that Iran has prioritized increasing relations with regional countries as well as signing new regional and international agreements.

"Decided by the new government, our foreign diplomacy, especially towards friendly and allied countries, came out of passivity, as we followed a very active diplomacy in this field, and we joined important groups in line with a win-win approach to issues. We signed a lot of cooperation with different countries."

In this regard, close relations were formed between Tehran and Moscow, but despite all efforts, the current level of cooperation is not satisfactory, the lawmaker said.

"We should move towards the use of national currencies in financial exchanges between the two countries in order to speed



up the increase of trade relations and investment between the two countries."

Supporting investors, establishing bank branches to facilitate financial transfers, and optimal use of capacities of private sectors of the two countries are other ways to improve the level of economic and commercial exchanges, Yousefi stated.

Bilateral consortia have been formed between the commercial and agricultural sections of the two countries, he said, adding that the two sides are also trying to focus more on international corridors crossing through Iran

and Russia.

"We can extend collaboration in the field of technologies that require long-term investment which provide the common interests of both parties, such as the development of power plants and other infrastructures, also the two countries can supply basic goods needed by each other if necessary."

Iranian investors have made great efforts to establish a brand name in the Russian market, but the problem that has existed is that, for example, in the field of exporting food and agricultural products, certain protocols and

standards for exporters were not defined, the MP criticized.

"We have missed many opportunities in the field of using the capacities of the Russian market, so we must take more serious action in the near future."

In the past challenges between European countries and Russia that led to sanctions against Moscow by Europe, we could have acted better and more actively in the field of supplying the goods needed by the country, especially food and agricultural products, Yousefi said.

However, due to the lack of some infrastructure, including the lack

of refrigerated trucks, we could not achieve success in the field of exporting agro-products.

Referring to the geopolitical features of Iran, he explained that Iran has a unique position in establishing connections between East and West as well as North and South, and Russia can access the Sea of Oman and high seas through Iran.

The two factors of distance and cost of transportation are very important, the lawmaker noted, adding that our country can provide the best route for regional countries to access a 650-million-people market.

Iran to launch joint investment funds with Russia, Oman, Saudi Arabia



A member of the Board of Executive Directors of the National Development Fund of Iran (NDFI) said the country has plans to set up joint investment funds with the Russian Federation, Oman and Saudi Arabia. The NDFI is after cooperating with the funds of the neighboring states and negotiations are underway with Russia to launch a joint investment fund, Hossein Eyvazlou stated, reported Tasnim news agency.

Highlighting the cooperation of the NDFI with the wealth funds of other countries, he

noted that the NDFI is tasked to cooperate with other funds throughout the world and priority has been given to the wealth funds of the neighboring countries.

Positive signals have been received from Russia, showing that the country is keen on setting up a joint investment fund with Iran, Eyvazlou added.

In this regard, the NDFI has prioritized launching joint investment with the neighboring states in the oil, gas, petrochemical and pharmaceutical fields, he said.

The official pointed out that his

fund has also held negotiations with the Sultanate of Oman and Saudi Arabia and it is hoped that the sides to join joint venture projects.

The NDFI has also concluded agreements with African states, he said.

There are ways other than SWIFT in the international payments, he said, stressing that the Central Bank of Iran has defined special methods for establishing relations with the brokerage companies of other countries and this mechanism has started among Iran's neighboring states.

Metals, minerals worth \$350m traded in IME

The Iran Mercantile Exchange (IME) announced that a total of 2.43 million tons of various products, worth about \$350 million, were traded at IME's domestic and export metal and mineral trading hall in the week closing on January 5.

According to a report by ime.co.ir on Saturday, over

3.11 million tons of commodities, worth over \$624 million, were traded in its domestic trading and export halls.

Among the traded products were 255,597 tons of steel, 792,000 tons of iron ore, 119,000 tons of sponge iron, 2,510 tons of zinc, 12,095 tons of aluminum ingots, 10,121 tons of cop-

per, 200 tons of molybdenum concentrate, nine tons of precious metals, and 1.25 million tons of cement. In addition, 667,115 tons of various commodities, valued at over \$270 million, were traded at IME's domestic and export oil and petrochemical trading halls.

Other traded items were

100,623 tons of polymeric products, 176,900 tons of vacuum bottom, 57,000 tons of lube cut, 44,697 tons of chemical products, 13,570 tons of sulfur, 3,818 tons of base oil, 500 tons of insulation, 380 tons of feedstocks, 5,560 tons of petroleum products and 265,011 tons of bitumen.



Rich history and architectural significance of Seh Koohe Castle



visitiran.ir



HAMED GHOLAMI/IRNA

Iranica Desk

Sistan and Baluchestan Province is renowned for its rich historical heritage and boasts several significant landmarks. Among its notable attractions are Shahr-e Sookhteh (Burnt City), Gholaman Castle, and Jalal Abad Citadel, which draw in tourists from far and wide.

In the Sistan region, just under 50 kilometers from Zabol, stands the historic Seh Koohe Castle (literally meaning three-mountain castle), steeped in ancient history and local legends. The second tallest structure in the expansive Sistan plain, this fortress holds a special place as a national heritage.

This rectangular and elevated castle

spans approximately 3,700 square meters and features two entrances from the east and west. The western entrance, unfortunately, is impassable due to extensive damage, while the eastern entrance is characterized by steep slopes.

Situated along the path of the Hirmand River, Seh Koohe Castle was once submerged before re-emerging as three mountains on the dry plain of Sistan.

The architectural features of this monument have led many to believe that this castle dates back to the Achaemenid period. The peak of the political and military importance of the castle is attributed to the rule of Nasser al-Din Shah Qajar.

During the colonial struggles of the

British government and the separation of parts of Iran, the castle played a significant role and was instrumental in the military campaign to Herat. Sardar Ali Khan Sardari was the first to submit to the central government of Iran and raised the Iranian flag over this castle. This historical monument is the last fortress in which the ruler of that region was settled.

It is known as a symbol of Sistan's architecture and is among the last buildings constructed based on this traditional style. Next to Seh Koohe Castle in Zabol, there is a small citadel on the third mountain, with an area of 2,000 square meters. This small citadel is only 20 meters from Seh Koohe Castle. This short distance has led a large number of histo-

rians to suggest that the citadel and the castle are two parts of a complex. Traces of human life are clearly visible in this citadel; however, it is not known exactly who lived there and when.

According to village elders, this castle was once a mint for coins. Additionally, there was a deep well on the southern side, where the bodies of war victims were disposed of. The depth of the well was such that no sound could be heard when stones were thrown into it. Today, only a hole remains at this place. Nevertheless, this castle is an integral part of Sistan's history, witnessing numerous political and social developments. Seh Koohe Castle consists of three main parts:

The northern citadel: This area served

as the resting place for the ruler and his companions. The northern citadel features a multi-sided exterior, with a domed surface and tall chambers, and it is notably smaller in area compared to the southern citadel. It is also known as Melksar or Felksar.

The central citadel: This section of the castle contains numerous small and large chambers that provided resting places for the ruler's servants and guards. It is situated between the northern and southern citadels.

The southern citadel: This part of the castle is exclusively reserved for the ruling authority and resembles a royal palace, featuring a narrow and tall portico, a small courtyard, and several rooms in the northern part of the courtyard.

Preserving traditional water distribution system of Gilan Province is crucial

Iranica Desk

Agriculture is the most important economic activity in Gilan Province, as stated by the head of the Committee for Research and Registration of Gilan Province Intangible Cultural Heritages, Sepideh Ashoftehpour.

She emphasized that the livelihood of a significant portion of the population in the province is dependent on agricultural activities. While Gilan Province is generally recognized as fertile land suitable for agriculture, the environmental conditions such as climate, altitude, the type of soil, and access to water varies across different areas, ISNA wrote.

Ashoftehpour highlighted the long-standing significance of rice cultivation as a fundamental pillar of the agricultural economy in Gilan Province. Rice holds a crucial place in the local culture, being an essential food item and influencing Gilaki stories, customs, and traditions. The continuous demand for water in rice farming has underscored the importance of water



management in the region, leading to a complex customary system based on certain rights and regulations.

She further explained that the tradition of water distribution is widespread in Gilan Province. A *mirab* is a person chosen by farmers to facilitate the distribution of water to the rice fields. In return for their work, *mirabs*

receive compensation based on agreements with the farmers.

Mirab utilizes a two-meter tree trunk, known as *kal*, to evenly distribute water into each field from the springs. Once the fields directly benefiting from this water have been irrigated, the remaining water must be directed to the next land.



isna.ir

During severe droughts, all channels are closed by the *mirab*, and the water is redirected towards the main stream. After inspecting the fields, priority is given to the driest fields by closing the channels belonging to other fields in a specific order. Presently, the *mirab* is typically selected from the elderly and experienced individuals in the village,

often in mosques or coffee houses. She pointed out that the advancement of technology and changes in lifestyle have also impacted customs, traditions, and ceremonies, influenced by various factors including the environment. Additionally, due to the demanding nature of the *mirab's* work and the lack of necessary skills among the younger generation, it appears that the youths are reluctant to take on such a heavy responsibility. Consequently, with the older age of those involved in this field, there is a possibility that this tradition and skill may be forgotten as each individual passes away.

"On the other hand, given the significance of rice in the culture of the people of Gilan Province, it is essential to examine the specific cultural customs related to this field. Therefore, the study, preservation, and identification of this human knowledge can be a step towards safeguarding the intangible cultural heritage. As a result, this tradition was registered on Iran's National Heritage List in 2022.

Iran-Egypt rapprochement



By Javad Mohammad Ali
Staff writer

Public outcry against Israeli war crimes in the Gaza Strip is visibly evident across various cities in the United States, a staunch supporter of Israel. From large-scale street protests to online advocacy campaigns, there has been an unprecedented display of solidarity with Palestinians since Israel waged a devastating war against the besieged enclave in a disproportionate response to a surprise attack by Hamas on October 7. Surprisingly, findings from a survey conducted by Harvard University revealed that 51% of American youths desire the dismantling of the "state" of Israel, favoring its replacement with a Palestinian state. Could the influential role of public opinion potentially instigate changes in American policies? Iran Daily has spoken with Jahanbakhsh Izadi, an international relations expert and university lecturer to get his take on this matter.

Since the thaw in relations between Tehran and Riyadh, the wider region has been witnessing a series of rapprochements between countries. Apart from Saudi Arabia and Iran, Egypt has reconciled with both Turkey and Qatar, and the Arab League welcomed Syria back as a member after more than a decade. It also led to the end of a war between Yemen and Saudi Arabia.

Now, there are reports of the exchange of ambassadors between Cairo and Tehran after decades.



Iran's President Ebrahim Raisi (L) meets with his Egyptian counterpart Abdel Fatah al-Sisi on the sidelines of a meeting of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, on November 11, 2023. [president.ir](https://www.president.ir)

A high-ranking Egyptian official said on Friday that the African country and Iran are expected to fully restore diplomatic ties and exchange respective ambassadors in the near future.

Member of the Egyptian Council for Foreign Affairs, Rakha Ahmad Hassan, said in an interview with the Arabic service of Russia's Sputnik news agency that an exchange of ambassadors is likely to happen soon.

While the two countries have kept diplomatic channels open in recent years, they have not exchanged ambassadors.

He pointed out that Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi's congratulations to Al-Sisi after his victory in the recent presidential elections means that relations have reached the highest level.

In recent months, several Iranian officials, including Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei and President Raisi, have publicly endorsed efforts to mend ties between Tehran and Cairo.

In May, Ayatollah Khamenei endorsed normalizing ties with Egypt, the most populous Arab country, saying that Iran "welcomes Egypt's interest in restoring relations".

He made the remarks after a meeting with visiting Oman's Sultan Haitham bin Tariq.

Ayatollah Khamenei said that the Omani leader had told him that Egypt would be willing to resume relations.

"We welcome the Omani Sultan's statement about Egypt's willingness to resume relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran and we have no problem in this regard," Ayatollah Khamenei said.

The Sultan of Oman's visit came about a week after his visit to Egypt, during which he met the Egyptian president.

Diplomatic talks between Iranian and Egyptian officials in recent years and mediatory efforts by some regional countries, especially Oman and Iraq, have yielded results and have removed first obstacles on the path of reconciliation between Tehran and Cairo.

There have been several meetings between officials from both countries, mainly on the sidelines of regional and international events, that indicate their desire to restore relations.



Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian (R) shakes hands with his Egyptian counterpart Sameh Shoukry on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly meeting in New York on September 20, 2023. [mfa.gov.ir](https://www.mfa.gov.ir)

Meeting between Iran's Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian with the Egyptian president at the Baghdad Conference for Cooperation and Partnership in 2021, Amir-Abdollahian's talks with his Egyptian counterpart Sameh Shoukry on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly in September, Shoukry's meeting with Iranian Vice President Ali Salajegheh in Egypt in 2022, as well as Raisi's meeting with Al-Sisi on the sidelines of a meeting of Organization of Islamic Countries in Saudi Arabia are among the most important meetings which have been held between the two countries' officials in the past two years. During the talks, Iranian officials have repeatedly announced their country's readiness to take new steps to improve relations between the two Muslim countries. The issue of Israel's massacre of Palestinians in the Gaza Strip has also brought the two countries closer together.

Since the beginning of Israel's attacks on Gaza in October, Iran's top diplomat has held phone calls with his Egyptian counterpart regarding developments in the region, especially the Palestinian territory. Egypt is the only Arab state to share a border with Gaza and has been used by countries to deliver humanitarian aid to the people in the besieged Palestinian territory, which has been under Israel's heavy bombardment in recent weeks. Analysts believe that expansion of relations between the two countries can benefit their economies and people. Jafar Ghanadhashi, an Iranian political analyst, says that friendship between Iran and Egypt is necessary for the Arab country's national interest. On the other hand, Egypt can be a gateway for economic cooperation between Tehran and the rest of Africa, because Egypt is one of the most important countries in this continent.



Since the thaw in relations between Tehran and Riyadh, the wider region has been witnessing a series of rapprochements between countries. Apart from Saudi Arabia and Iran, Egypt has reconciled with both Turkey and Qatar, and the Arab League welcomed Syria back as a member after more than a decade. It also led to the end of a war between Yemen and Saudi Arabia.

Iran's upcoming elections and people's participation



By Reza Abesh Ahmadlou
Staff writer

With the elections nearing in Iran, competition is gradually tightening among different political factions to emerge victorious in the polls.

Iran will hold 12th parliamentary elections on March 1 – the day which also sees elections for the Assembly of Experts which is responsible for electing and overseeing the activities of the Leader of the Islamic Revolution, and is in a position of authority to either appoint or dismiss the Leader.

Members of the assembly are directly elected to office by the people for an eight-year term. The body holds biannual meetings to review major national issues and every other year to appoint a new chairman.

The government certainly has plans to encourage people to actively participate in the upcoming elections which some analysts and foreign media believe might be overshadowed by the economic problems in the country and last year's unrest, which erupted following the death of a 22-year-old girl in police custody.

In recent years, Iranians have been grappling with high inflation partly caused by the illegal US sanctions imposed after the US's unilateral withdrawal from the 2015 nuclear agreement in 2018.

Western media have been trying to exaggerate Iran's problems caused by the policies of their governments, to keep the people away

from polling stations. They aim to discourage people from voting.

Iran's economic problems, which have greatly affected people's lives in recent years, have mainly been caused by the economic pressure which Western countries have exerted on Iran due to its nuclear programs.

But the Western media want to indicate that the government in Iran is to be blamed for the people's problems.

Hopes for a high turnout

However, the number of candidates who have registered to run in the parliamentary elections have raised hopes for a high turnout in the elections.

This year saw 10,000 more people registering for the 2024 elections compared to the previous polls, in which 14,088 people registered for the elections.

About 250 current members of the 290-seat Parliament have also registered.

According to the country's Constitutional Council, a 12-member clerical body with half of its members directly appointed by the Leader, and half elected by the people, the final list of the qualified contenders for parliamentary elections will be announced on January 5.

To secure victory and serve as a lawmaker for a four-year term in the 290-seat Parliament, a candidate needs to attain a minimum of 20 percent of the votes cast in its constituency. Should candidates fall short of the required percentage, there is a possibility of a second round of elections to determine the outcome for undecided seats.

Assembly of Experts vote

Iran's Assembly of Experts is composed of 88 qualified Islamic jurists and clerics who, based on the Constitution, are responsible for appointing, supervising, and dismissing the Leader. All candidates must possess high-level clerical knowledge to be eligible to run for the Assembly of Experts elections.

According to Iran's election headquarters, 510 candidates have registered for the election, which takes place every eight years. About 52 percent of the candidates participated in the previous elections, and the rest are running for the first time.

Both President Ebrahim Raisi and former

president Hassan Rouhani are currently members of the body, and have registered to run again.

President Raisi has recently said that the government is trying hard to hold passionate, competitive and healthy elections, with maximum participation of the people.

Former president Hassan Rouhani recently said that we should try to encourage people to participate in the elections and vote for at least a few people instead of casting blank ballots.

He warned that the people's poor participation in the elections will not be in favor of the country.

Calls for high turnout

Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei has also encouraged high participation.

"If participation is weak, 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," he said during a meeting with a group of visitors from Kerman and Khuzestan provinces in Tehran on Saturday.

Ayatollah Khamenei said scholars, university professors, seminary instructors, radio and television journalists, young people and people within their families have a duty to invite others to participate in the elections.

He underlined that the solution to Iran's problems is elections, warning against certain efforts to discourage people from the ballot boxes.

"Some people constantly remind people of

the country's problems to discourage people, while the solution to the problems is participating in elections," he said.

"Elections are the basis of transformation. Elections prevent dictatorship, chaos and insecurity," Ayatollah Khamenei added.

Iran's Interior Minister Ahmad Vahidi also called on the heads of the country's executive institutions to encourage and invite people to take part in the elections. He said that anyone who wants a powerful Iran should also pursue the maximum participation of the people in elections.

However, he noted that there are people who are trying to disappoint Iranians, saying that people should be vigilant against such actions.

Vahidi expressed that democracy in Iran is moral, real, humane and a religious democracy.

Some people try to induce the idea that elections in Iran are not real, it is a big lie and playing in the enemy's court, he said.

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The government certainly has plans to encourage people to actively participate in the upcoming elections which some analysts and foreign media believe might be overshadowed by the economic problems in the country and last year's unrest.



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Brazilian football legend Zagallo dies aged 92



ANTONIO SCORZA/AFP

BBC – Brazilian football legend Mario Zagallo, who won four World Cups as a player and coach, has died aged 92. Zagallo was a winger in the Brazil team who won back-to-back World Cups in 1958 and 1962, starting in both finals. He managed the side widely regarded as the greatest international team of all time, including Pele, Jairzinho and Carlos Alberto, to glory in 1970. Zagallo's final World Cup triumph came as Carlos Alberto Parreira's assistant coach in 1994. He returned as Brazil manager after that tournament and led them to the final in 1998, where they were beaten by hosts France. Zagallo was the first person to win the World Cup as both a player and a manager – a feat that has since been matched by Germany's Franz Beckenbauer and France's Didier Deschamps. "With enormous sadness, we inform you of the death of our eternal four-time world champion Mario Jorge Lobo Zagallo," a statement on his official Insta-

gram account said. "A devoted father, loving grandfather, caring father-in-law, faithful friend, victorious professional and a great human being. Giant idol. A patriot who leaves us a legacy of great achievements." Brazil are the most successful nation in World Cups, with five titles, and Zagallo is one of the most instrumental figures in that history. As a teenager on national service he was one of nearly 200,000 in the Maracana Stadium who saw hosts Brazil stunned by Uruguay in the decisive final match of the 1950 World Cup. Speaking to BBC Sport in 2013, Zagallo said: "That day has never left my mind." The tactically astute Zagallo, nicknamed "The Professor" and "Old Wolf", pulled together a side filled with the attacking talents of Pele, Jairzinho, Gerson, Tostao and Rivellino and made them irresistible. Brazil won all six of their games in the 1970 World Cup and swept to a 4-1 victory over Italy in the final.

Iran needs to be 'more clinical', Qalenoeei says after Burkina Faso win

Sports Desk

Iran head coach Amir Qalenoeei warned his men against wasting chances in front of the goal, which could be "dangerous" for the team at the upcoming AFC Asian Cup.

The Iranian was speaking after a 2-1 victory over Burkina Faso on the Kish Island on Friday. Mohamed Konaté gave the African visitors a surprise lead 12 minutes into the game, only to see Porto striker Mahdi Taremi draw Iran level three minutes before the break.

Veteran midfielder Omid Ebrahimi bagged the winner 20 minutes from normal time for the home side, which had all 11 players changed at halftime. This was a final friendly for Iran before leaving for the continent's flagship international event in Qatar.

"It was a good game for us as the opponent played with high intensity and pace. We only had a couple of training sessions before the match and wanted to test our two gameplans, which is why we played with two different lineups. Our goal is to have the players in their best form and harmony for the first game [in the Asian Cup]," said Qalenoeei, whose team is to play Indonesia in a friendly, presumably behind closed doors, before beginning the Asian Cup campaign against Palestine in Group C in Al Rayyan's Education City Stadium next Sunday.

"We did a good job in creating chances today but failed to convert them, which could be dangerous for us in Qatar. We'll have to make sure we'll be more clinical in front of the goal, as there will be few opportunities coming our way in the latter stages of the competition." Meanwhile, the Iranian coach was full of praise for Brentford midfielder Saman Qoddous, who has enjoyed a rebirth in the No. 10 role for the national team since Qalenoeei took over from Portuguese Carlos Queiroz last March. "Saman is a great midfielder



Iran's Mohammad Mohebbi (21) goes up for a header during a victory over Burkina Faso on the Kish Island, Iran, on January 5, 2024. MOHAMMADREZA ALIMADADI/IRNA

with top qualities in our squad and delivered some superb through balls today. I'm sure he would have had more to offer had he been given proper attention in the past. He is the kind of playmaker I've always used in my teams," said the former manager of Sepahan, Esteghlal, and Tractor in the Iranian top flight. Asked about the contribution made by the 36-year-old Ebrahimi – for whom Friday's game was only the second international appearance in more than a year – Qalenoeei said: "I was on the receiving end of a lot of criticism for giving him a call-up but

I choose the players in accordance with my tactical requirements and you could see he put in a great performance and was our matchwinner today." Chasing a first Asian Cup title since last lifting the trophy on home soil in 1976, three-time champion Iran will also face Hong Kong on January 19 before playing the United Arab Emirates in the final round of the group fixtures four days later. The top two of the six groups will be joined by four best third-place teams in the last-16 round, with the final showpiece to be staged at the Lusail Stadium on February 10.

Nadal's Australian Open return in doubt after injury scare



Spain's Rafael Nadal is in action against Australia's Jordan Thompson during their men's singles match at the Brisbane International in Brisbane, Australia, on January 5, 2024. AFP

AAP – Rafael Nadal's grand slam return at the Australian Open is up in the air following an injury scare to the same hip that required career-saving surgery. The Spanish great's promising Brisbane International comeback was ended in a gruelling three-and-a-half hour quarter-final loss to Australian Jordan Thompson as Nadal was hampered by a leg issue on Friday night. The former world No 1 is hopeful the injury concern amounts to nothing and that he can line up at the Australian Open when it begins on 14 January. But he admitted his fear, given the proximity of the soreness to the hip that was operated on in June. "Yeah, it is a very similar place to what happened last year, but different," Nadal said post-match. "I feel more muscle, last year was tendon. "For sure it's not the same like last year at all because when it happened

last year I felt something drastic immediately. "Today, I didn't feel anything. The only problem is because the place is the same you are a little bit more scared than usual. "I hope it's not important and I hope to have the chance to be practising next week and to play Melbourne. Honestly, I am not 100% sure of anything now." Nadal had three match points in the second set but Thompson benefited from a handful of uncharacteristic errors, and played brilliant tennis of his own, to win 5-7 7-6 (8-6) 6-3 at a raucous Pat Rafter Arena. The 22-time grand slam winner Nadal had impressed in Brisbane while disposing of Dominic Thiem and Jason Kubler to reach the quarter-finals. Nadal made his return to action at the tournament following the injury that forced him off the ATP Tour after an early exit at Melbourne Park last year.

The Spanish star said ideally the latest issue was just fatigue after back-to-back matches, with a tip of the cap to 29-year-old Thompson who is set to return to the world's top 50 thanks to his campaign in Brisbane. "From this perspective you don't know all the information that I have," Nadal said. "The only thing that probably you see is I have been playing very well the last two matches. It's true, I have been playing well. "A lot of things can be happening in a body like my body, after a year without playing tennis. "So hopefully it is just that, just a muscle that is supercharged ... if that's the thing, everything perfect." "That's why ... I have been talking with a lot of precaution. "If things happens, if I have one problem there, one problem to the other part of the body, I need to accept."

Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi said the animosity toward the Islamic Revolution is due to the Islamic Republic's support for the rights of the oppressed Palestinians.

The enemies' animosity toward the Iranian nation, the 1979 Islamic Revolution, the Islamic establishment and late top anti-terror commander Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani is due to the fact that the Islamic Republic as well as Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei attach special importance to the rights of the oppressed Palestinians, Raisi told people in the northwestern city of Zanzan on Saturday.

Raisi said the late founder of the Islamic Republic, Imam Khomeini, brought up the issue of supporting the Palestinian cause and stressed the need for the liberation of the holy city of Al-Quds and elimination of the Israeli regime as a cancerous tumor more than four decades ago.

Iran's "insistence on the legitimacy of Palestine after four decades has become clear to the whole world," he said.

Raisi said that while the Iranian people's support for the Palestinians has generated enmity and verbal attacks against them over the past four decades, they have remained steadfast in their backing.

"During these four decades,



Raisi: Enmity toward Iran due to its support for Palestinians

the enemy created enmity with the Iranian nation. It sanctioned and threatened, imposed an economic blockade, and waged enmity of various kinds, but the Iranian nation won in this war of wills," he said. The president said the enemies, in spite of numerous attempts and threats,

have miserably failed in their anti-Iran plots, while young Iranian specialists have acquired and employed cutting-edge technologies.

"They thought they could get us away from the nuclear industry, but they couldn't. It was the same in the military industry,

but many great works have been done and many works are in progress."

He said that the Israeli regime will definitely disappear despite all the unconditional support it receives from global arrogant powers.

"The fake Zionist regime, which draws support from

the global arrogant powers, will certainly disappear. Injustice and oppression can never last forever, and this is a divine pledge. What will last is justice," he said.

"This is the emphasis of our religion and our policy is to defend the oppressed people of the world," Raisi said.



Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi speaks during a ceremony in the northwestern Iranian city of Zanzan on January 6, 2024.

● president.ir

Death toll in Kerman terrorist attack rises to 91



● IRNA

National Desk

The death toll from the twin suicide bombings that ripped through south-eastern Iran's Kerman city on Wednesday rose to 91 after two more victims succumbed to their injuries in hospital.

Seyyed Mohammad Saberi, the head of the Medical Emergency Organization in Kerman, said an eight-year-old child and a 60-year-old man died in hospital on Friday.

The suicide bombings struck crowds in the southern city, where many had gathered to mark the fourth anniversary of the US assassination of Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani – the commander of Quds Force of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC).

The victims include multiple women and children and at least a dozen Afghan nationals.

Hezbollah fires over 60 rockets at Israeli military base

Lebanon's Hezbollah resistance movement on Saturday fired more than 60 rockets at an Israeli military base, the group said, describing the barrage as a response to the killing of Hamas's deputy leader in Beirut.

"As part of the initial response to the crime of assassinating the great leader Sheikh Saleh al-Arouri... the Islamic resistance (Hezbollah) targeted the Meron air control base with 62 various types of missiles," the group said in a statement.

The Lebanon border with the occupied territories has seen regular exchanges of fire, mainly between Israeli forces and Hezbollah, since the Israel-Hamas

war broke out on October 7, according to AFP.

Arouri's assassination on Tuesday in southern Beirut, which a US defense official has told AFP was carried out by Israel, has raised fears of further escalation.

Israel has not claimed responsibility for the strike, the first on the Lebanese capital since hostilities began last year.

The Israeli military said it had identified around 40 rocket launches from Lebanese territory on Saturday morning, adding in a statement that its forces had struck a cell responsible for some of the launches shortly thereafter.

Air raid sirens went off in towns and cities across

northern Israel, later also blaring in the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights.

Later on Saturday, Hezbollah said it launched additional attacks on Israeli troops and positions, with the Israeli army saying it had retaliated.

In a speech Friday, Hezbollah leader Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah warned Israel that the group will respond swiftly "on the battlefield" to Arouri's assassination.

Nearly three months of cross-border fire have killed 175 people in Lebanon, including 129 Hezbollah fighters, but also more than 20 civilians including three journalists, according to an AFP tally.

In northern Israel, nine soldiers and at least four



● AFP

civilians have been killed, according to Israeli authorities.

The escalation forced the European Union foreign policy chief Josep Borrell to visit Lebanon on Saturday. Borrell warned against a regional conflict that

would involve Lebanon.

"It is imperative to avoid regional escalation in the Middle East. It is absolutely necessary to avoid Lebanon being dragged into a regional conflict," Borrell said during a press conference in Beirut with Leba-

non's foreign minister.

"I am sending this message to Israel too: nobody will win from a regional conflict," he added.

Lebanon's Hezbollah resistance group and Israel have exchanged near-daily cross-border fire since

Hamas's unprecedented October 7 attack on southern Israel.

But a strike that killed Hamas's deputy leader intensified fears of a wider conflagration.

"I think that the war can be prevented, has to be avoided and diplomacy can prevail," Borrell told reporters. Earlier Saturday, Borrell met Lebanese Prime Minister Najib Mikati, United Nations peacekeeping force (UNIFIL) commander Aroldo Lazaro and the influential speaker of parliament Nabih Berri.

His visit is part of a diplomatic push to avoid further regional escalation and call for a solution to the Gaza war.

"Diplomatic channels have to be open to signal that the war is not the only option but it is the worst option," he said.

Mohammad Ali Rajabi
Cartoonist



IRGC adds new warship, fast-attack vessels to naval fleet

The Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Navy took delivery of a range of domestically-designed and manufactured military equipment, including Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis warship that features sophisticated radar-evading technologies, and 100 fast-attack vessels.

The Abu Mahdi Muhandis has been named after the former deputy head of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Units who was assassinated along with top Iranian anti-terror commander Lieutenant General Qassem

Soleimani in a US drone strike ordered by former President Donald Trump at Baghdad airport in early January 2020, Press TV reported.

Speaking at the ceremony, IRGC Navy chief Rear Admiral Alireza Tangsiri said the warship has a naval endurance of 14 days, and can cruise within a radius of 2,000 nautical miles without being detected by enemy radars and reconnaissance systems.

It relies on four home-grown propulsion systems, and can stay afloat under

force six conditions and carry out naval missions under force five conditions

thanks to its advanced homegrown hull design, he added.



● TASNIM

Ayatollah Khamenei urges promotion of prayers among youths



IRNA - Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei has stressed the pivotal role of prayers in the lives of the youth, calling on relevant authorities to promote the divine practice. Ayatollah Khamenei made the remarks on Saturday in a message addressed to the 30th nationwide summit on prayer. He underscored the importance of extending this divine blessing and ensuring its rightful place in society. Ayatollah Khamenei urged those responsible for youth affairs to genuinely practice and instill the habit of prayer among the young generation. "It (prayer) should be regarded as the soul for the human body or like air in comparison to other material needs," he noted.



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Minister: Regional music represents rich cultural diversity in Iran

Arts & Culture Desk

Iran's Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance highlighted the significance of regional music as an expression of the country's cultural diversity.

In a message to the 16th Iran's Regional Music Festival, Mohammad-Mehdi Esmaeili stated, "Culture and arts have long established an inseparable bond with the perspectives and beliefs of our people, and regional music is one of the apparent and rich aspects of cultural diversity."

"The essence of regional music, beginning from the eager narrators in the northernmost region of Iran and crossing the east, west, and central areas before concluding in the south, narrates the cultural history and geography of our nation through a spectrum of melodies. These expressions of authenticity and knowledge have been safeguarded by culturally conscious individuals, passed down through generations to present an opportunity for showcasing indigenous culture and arts with the participation of enthusiastic youths, continuing the legacy of pioneers through the course of history." The 16th Iran's Regional Music Festival, adopting a fresh approach, is taking place nationwide with the collaboration of all provinces and the presence of folk music artists.

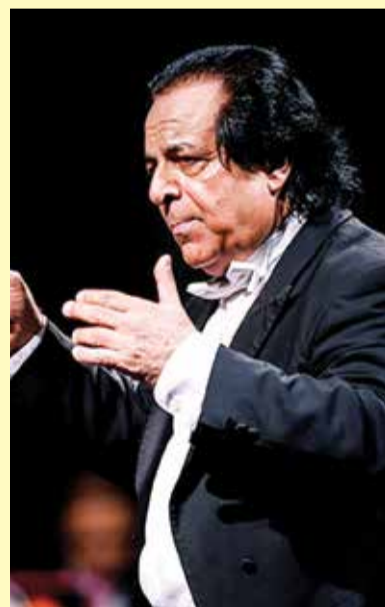
The national phase of the 16th Iran's Regional Music Festival, January 6-8, under the supervision of Mohammad-Ali Merati and organized by the Iranian Music Association, will be hosted at Tehran's Roudaki Hall. The nightly performances will showcase musicians from various regions of Iran in four sections.

The first part of the 16th Iran's Regional Music Festival, in a national scope took place regionally and non-competitively. It was held from June 27 to July 14, with Golestan, Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari, East Azarbaijan, Kermanshah, and Kerman provinces hosting the events.



● ISNA

Ali Rahbari, Valery Gergiev to stage joint concert in Iran



Arts & Culture Desk

Valery Gergiev, a globally renowned conductor and the chief conductor of the Mariinsky Opera in St. Petersburg and the Bolshoi Opera Theater in Moscow, will be visiting Iran alongside Ali Rahbari, the guest conductor of the Tehran Symphony Orchestra.

Rahbari said, "Maestro Gergiev has agreed to come to Iran and perform along with me, and we plan to organize a concert with the Iranian Youth Symphony Orchestra at an appropriate time," according to IRNA.

He continued, "This project has been planned with Susan Taqipour, and we just need to choose a suitable date for it. In this concert, I will lead the first part with dotar (a folkloric plucked musical instrument with two strings) and the symphony orchestra, featuring the performance of Aidin Olyanasab

and Azin Rastegar. In the second part, Maestro Gergiev will be the conductor."

The orchestra conductor provided further details about the project, adding that "A year ago, Taqipour contacted me, stating that there is a considerable interest among the youth and professors to work with me in Iran. Therefore, they asked me to establish a new orchestra. As I have always wished for Iran to have a youth symphony orchestra like many advanced countries, I gladly accepted the proposal."

Speaking about Gergiev's friendly viewpoint towards Iran, Rahbari stated, "During a televised program last summer, when Gergiev appreciated my two years of collaboration with him, he concluded by saying, 'Hopefully, in Iran!' I knew that Gergiev loves Iran, so I took the opportunity to promise him that one day we would stage a program

together whose date has yet to be announced."

Speaking about the purpose of coming to Iran, Rahbari said that, "The primary goal of this project is to elevate the level of musical performance among students and even their professors in the orchestra. Gergiev's visit to Iran, not only motivates the youth but also has a global impact. Furthermore, if our youths can receive his positive feedback, the chances of inviting this orchestra to St. Petersburg and Moscow, where Gergiev is the artistic director, will increase."

Gergiev, winner of the Herbert von Karajan Conducting Competition in Berlin, has led numerous renowned orchestras and major operas worldwide. Rahbari, during the years 2014 to 2016, served as the artistic director and permanent conductor of the Tehran Symphony Orchestra.

Microsoft, OpenAI sued by book authors for copyright infringement

United States-based tech firm Microsoft and artificial intelligence (AI) research company OpenAI were sued by two non-fiction book authors for copyright infringement.

Authors Nicholas Basbanes and Nicholas Gage claimed in the lawsuit, filed in a Manhattan federal court on Friday, that their work has been "systematically pilfered" by Microsoft and OpenAI, The Sun

wrote.

The lawsuit, in addition, argued that OpenAI depends on "massive amounts of written material" that includes books written by the authors.

The move comes a week after The New York Times sued OpenAI for billions of dollars in damages for copyright infringement in a lawsuit filed in New York.

The newspaper argued that Microsoft

and OpenAI used its content to train the company's systems and help develop its AI model, since Chat-GPT analyses massive amounts of data online.

OpenAI also faces multiple lawsuits from pop culture figures, such as Game of Thrones author George R.R. Martin and comedian Sarah Silverman, who argue that their work has been used improperly for the company's AI training.

