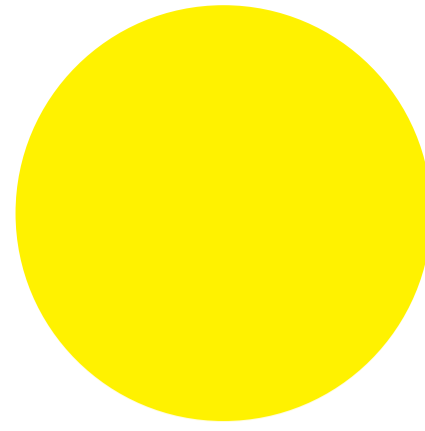


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in Gaza, Daesh
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Iran Daily



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NEWS IN BRIEF

Tehran's membership to boost BRICS capacities: Deputy FM

Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister for Coordination on Economic Diplomacy Mehdi Safari said that Iran's membership in BRICS, which is a bloc of emerging economies, can significantly boost capacities of the organization in the fields of transit, energy, oil, gas and modern technologies.

In a recent interview with the Russian news agency RIA Novosti, Safari said that BRICS is becoming a market half the size of the world. He said the bloc now includes the biggest producers and consumers of oil and gas in the world, adding that it will play an important role in the global energy market.

He also referred to the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), which Iran joined in 2023, as a regional market that can create a win-win situation for all member countries.

Both BRICS and SCO have proposed that Iran take over a leadership role in some of their committees, the Iranian diplomat said.

The bloc was originally composed of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa.

Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates joined the organization on January 1, 2024.

Ministry bolstering supports for cotton growers

Chief contractor for Iran's Ministry of Agriculture's Cotton Project Ebrahim Hezarjaribi said that efforts are underway to reach self-sufficiency in the production of cotton through increased support for farmers.

According to the ministry's official website, Hezarjaribi said that supportive programs for cotton cultivators is being implemented in Iran, including the use of micro-irrigation systems, no-till farming, low-interest loans for harvester purchases, and encouraging the use of high-yielding varieties of cotton.

He said that in more than 70% of countries in the world, subsidies are given to cotton farmers so that they can benefit from the added value of the crop.

The official noted that the average cotton yield in Iran has reached above 3,000 kg/hectare.

Hezarjaribi added that cotton production in Iran doubled over five years of the country's Sixth National Development Plan, which ended two years ago, adding that raw cotton production increased from 150,000 metric tons (mt) to more than 300,000 mt.

Iran calls for its removal from FATF recommendations



In a letter of protest to the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), Iran's Finance Minister Ehsan Khandouzi called for the Islamic Republic of Iran's name to be removed from Recommendation 7 and other documents related to UN Security Council Resolution 2231. FATF Recommendation 7

requires countries to implement targeted financial sanctions to prevent proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and their financing in compliance with UN Security Council resolutions, IRNA reported on Monday. UN Security Council Resolution 2231—adopted in 2015 to implement

the Iran nuclear deal known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) – terminated previous UN resolutions on Iran (1373, 1747, 1803, and 1929) but introduced restrictive measures, including targeted financial sanctions.

The resolution's provisions would be applica-

ble to Iran based on one of two conditions: up to eight years after the approval of the JCPOA, or upon the International Atomic Energy Agency's (IAEA) verification. Given the JCPOA's approval date of October 18, 2015, the first condition applies to the Islamic Republic.

Iran received a note from the UN Security Council Secretariat on October 19, which declared an end to restrictions the council had imposed on Iran's missile program. The FATF is a non-binding regulatory institution formed by the United States and its Western allies, supposedly to count-

er terrorism financing and safeguard the integrity of the international financial system.

Critics, however, say the organization reflects the interests of powerful countries seeking to impose preferences on other jurisdictions, and depends on funds from Western governments.

Agri-food exports up 22% in nine months: Official



Iran exported agricultural and food products worth more than \$4.3 billion to 130 countries during the first nine months of the current Iranian year (March 21, 2023 to December 21, 2023), announced an Iranian official. Spokesman for the Trade Promotion Commission of Iran's House of Industry, Mine and Trade Rouhollah

Latifi said on Monday that more than six million metric tons (mt) of agricultural, horticultural, livestock, fishery, and food products, worth \$4.31 billion, were exported during the nine-month period, adding that the shipments had increased by 7.2% in volume, and by 22% in value year-on-year. Latifi added that some

4.36 million mt of products worth \$2.56 billion were agricultural, horticultural, and summer crops, which showed a 25.4% growth in value, and a 1.6% decrease in volume, compared to the same period last year, IRNA reported.

Moreover, some 627,000 mt of dairy, fisheries, and livestock products, worth \$914 million, were exported in the nine months to late December, a 27% growth in weight, and a 13.3% growth in value, compared to the same period last year, he said. The official added that some 1.0 million mt of industrial foods, worth \$836 million, were also exported during the same period, indicating a 26% growth in weight, and a 21% growth in value year-on-year.

Iranian economic growth beats that of 99 countries in 2023: UN data

The United Nations announced a three-percent economic growth for Iran in 2023, saying it surpassed the economic growth rates of 99 countries and stood in the second rank in the Middle East region.

The UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs in its latest report on "World Economic Situation and Prospects 2024" put Iran's economic growth in 2023 at three percent and expected that Iran's economy will grow by 2.4 percent in 2024, reported Tasnim News Agency. Among the 180 countries in the world, Iran's economic growth was higher than that of 99 countries in 2023, the report stated, adding that Iran stood in the 81st place in terms of economic growth.



Guyana had the maximum economic growth among countries in the world in 2023 with a 32.5-percent growth rate. Timor-Leste, a Southeast Asian nation, had the lowest economic growth in the world in 2023, the report added. The statistics of the United Nations indicate that the average economic

growth of 12 Middle Eastern countries in 2023 was less than one percent. So, Iran's economy grew three times that of the average economic growth in the region. After Bahrain with a 3.1 percent economic growth, Iran had the highest economic growth last year compared to other countries in the Middle East.

NIGC to invest up to \$2b in technology-based sector: CEO

The National Iranian Gas Company (NIGC) has plans to invest up to \$2 billion in the technology-based sector within the next few years, Shana reported. Talking to reporters on the sidelines of a signing ceremony of a memorandum of understanding by the NIGC and the Department of Science, Technology and Knowledge-Based Economy, NIGC CEO Majid Chegeni added, "Based on the MoU, 12 groups of strategic products, worth over \$500 million, will be

made as we hope most of them will be produced by the end of the 13th administration's term (August 2025)." He said the Oil Ministry is one of the pioneers of the technology-based sector and the NIGC has taken appropriate measures in this field over the past years. "We have made essential gas equipment and items domestically and the pace of indigenization will be accelerated following the signing of this cooperation



agreement," the official concluded.

Speaking at the ceremony, Iran's Vice-President for

Science, Technology and Knowledge-Based Economy Rouhollah Dehqani Firouzabadi said technology-based companies need a large and stable market. He added no support is more real and purposeful than the development of a large, permanent and steady market, underlining that aimless support may keep a company going but will not stabilize it. The official said his department has divided technology-based companies into three categories

of start-up, innovative, and technological. The opportunity created today for cooperation with knowledge-based companies is unprecedented in the past 44 years, pointed out the vice president, adding 10 percent of the work has remained. He promised that technology-based companies, which are doing research for and having technological cooperation with the gas industry, would make great achievements in the near future.

Magnificent Dokhtar Castle in Fars Province

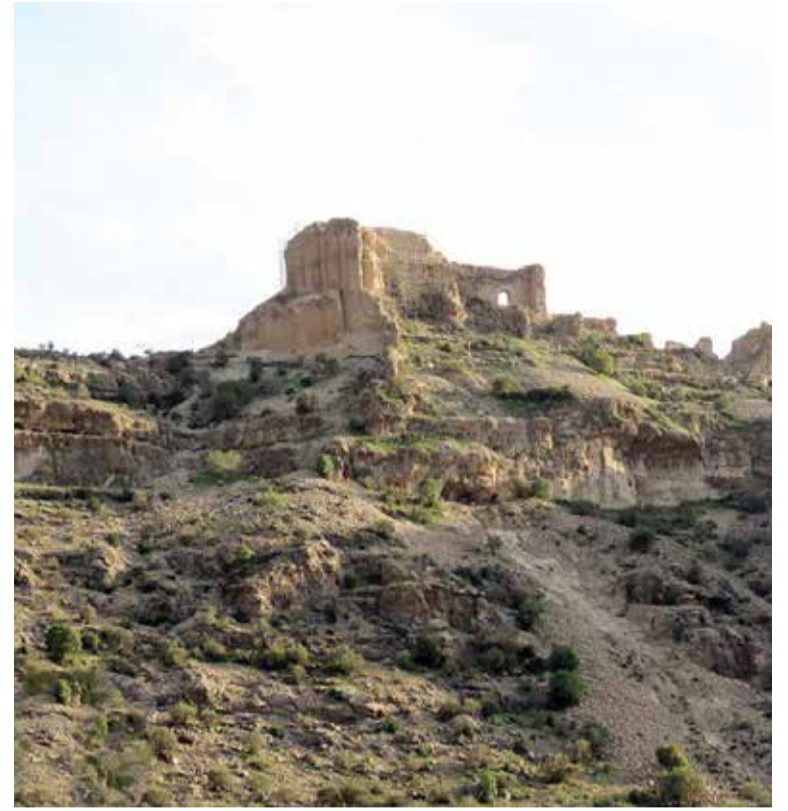


Iranica Desk

The southwestern province of Fars, as the old capital of the Sassanid dynasty, is home to a significant number of historical monuments from that era. This collection, comprising cities, architectural structures, and stone carvings, spans the years of the Sassanid government from 224 to 651 CE. Among the eight registered sites in the region is Dokhtar Castle of Firuzabad.

This defensive fortress was constructed by the founder of the Sassanid dynasty to safeguard the initial capital of his government. Dokhtar Castle is a notable attraction of Firuzabad, situated near the modern city of Firuzabad, and has been listed on the National Heritage List.

Located 110 kilometers south of Shiraz, Firuzabad serves as the center of a county of the same name in Fars Province. The castle is positioned north of the city, atop a mountain overlooking the road from Firuzabad to Kavar. Its purpose was to protect the historical city of Gur (modern-day Firuzabad), the capital of the Sassanids, and it is situated near the prominent bas-reliefs of the Tangab valley.



Firuzabad

The city of Firuzabad was nestled in a valley of the same name, which, due to its geographical features, provided natural protection with its high mountains and rocky structures. This characteristic, coupled with its proximity to rivers, captured the attention of ancient kings. Evidence indicates that centuries before the onset of the Sassanid era, the Achaemenid kings established a thriving city with formidable walls in the region. When Alexander the Great, in his campaign in Iran, was unable to breach Gur, he diverted a river toward the city to flood it.

During the Parthian era, the fame and prosperity of Gur waned, until in the Sassanid era, following Ardashir Babakan's triumph over Ardavan V, the ancient city experienced a revival and regained its former glory.

Architectural overview

Dokhtar Castle, spanning over 2,000 square meters, begins from the lower parts of the narrow valley and extends to the highest point of the mountain. The main structure of this castle is situated at the mountain's peak and is constructed with plaster and rubble stone. The surrounding walls of Dokhtar Castle are strategically placed based on the natural topography of the mountain and its steep rocky slopes. It appears that this defensive fortress had a height of approximately six to seven meters.

Dokhtar Castle is impregnable, as it is enveloped by high mountain rocks from the north, west, and south. A robust stone wall, visible from the east at a distance of one kilometer, effectively prevented infiltration from that side. Watchtowers were strategically positioned on all surrounding rocks to safeguard the central building, and the sole entrance to the fortress remains a staircase in the southern part of the castle.

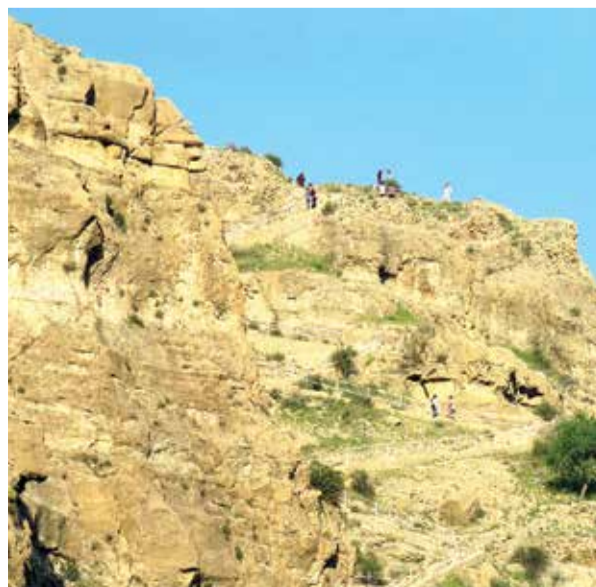
In a section of Dokhtar Castle, a cave entrance is visible, which, according to excavations, served as a hidden route connecting to the ancient city of Gur. This route was utilized to transport manpower and food to the castle during enemy invasions.

The primary residential and royal section of the castle comprises three staircase-like structures. This edifice, measuring 120 meters in length and 40 meters in width, boasts a rectangular shape. Each of these three sections exhibits unique architecture and is interconnected to the others via a spiral staircase. At the highest section and the end of the palace, remnants of a magnificent ivan (portico) and hall are visible, along with traces of a domed structure. Dokhtar Castle features walls extending from the rocks towards the river, designed to protect the passing road alongside the castle. Both

Dokhtar Castle, spanning over 2,000 square meters, begins from the lower parts of the narrow valley and extends to the highest point of the mountain.



iranwonders.com



the outer and inner walls are adorned with plaster decorations reminiscent of those used by the Achaemenids at Persepolis.

The castle comprises various sections including a hall, ivan, interconnected rooms, watchtowers, corridors, water reservoir, central courtyard, and spiral staircase. Initially surveyed by researchers from Switzerland and UNESCO, the castle later underwent restoration by the Fars Province Cultural Heritage Organization following a severe earthquake. Unfortunately, many rooms, corridors, and walls have been destroyed or suffered serious damage over time due to the pressure exerted on them.

Middle level

The middle level features a central courtyard surrounded by halls with barrel vaults, some of which have platforms. One of the halls in the central building includes a space for cooking. In the east of the central courtyard, a platform and a spiral staircase provide access to the highest floor of the Dokhtar Castle complex, featuring a vaulted ceiling. The middle level of Dokhtar Castle contains private rooms that likely served as accommodations for guests, guards, and watchmen.

Highest level

The highest part of the castle boasts a large ivan and a hall with a dome, indicating it is likely the royal residence. Remnants of ceremonial benches can still be found in parts of this hall, and the main hall of the third section is surrounded by rectangular halls with outer walls designed in a circular fashion.

Adjacent to the eastern wall of Dokhtar Castle lies an area that, based on archaeological findings, once functioned as a royal bathhouse. This space maintains a constant temperature of about 30 degrees Celsius throughout the winter and summer seasons. Although few remnants remain today, evidence suggests that water was always present, keeping the interior space humid.

Best time to visit

Fars Province experiences a warm climate in the summer and a cold, dry climate in the winter, with low precipitation. Therefore, the best time to visit the castle is during the spring when the weather is moderate and pleasant for tourists. For a visit to Dokhtar Castle, it is advisable to opt for the early hours of the day to take advantage of daylight and avoid the midday heat. Given the mountainous location of the castle, it is recommended to have appropriate equipment for a regular walk, such as ample water, suitable footwear, a sun hat, sunglasses, and sunscreen. The path to the castle is dusty and rocky, but not overly challenging or long, and doesn't require specialized equipment.

First level

The lowest level of Dokhtar Castle, serving as the entrance to the palace, is located in the southwest corner. This section leads to a hall with platforms on both sides of its entrance. At the end of this hall, a semi-circular bench with five decorated armrests is visible. To the right of the hall, a doorway leads to the middle level of the palace via a spiral staircase.

On the first floor, there are towers in various directions for surveillance purposes, with walls featuring spaces for archery. Additionally, there is a cistern and two hidden wells, which are remarkable given the facilities available at that time.

No justification left for US military presence in Iraq



Zohreh Qanadi
Staff writer

Iraq's government is taking decisive steps to "put an end" to the presence of soldiers from a US-led coalition against Daesh in the country, amid heightened tensions. Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani announced the decision on Friday after a US strike in the capital Baghdad killed an Iraqi commander.

Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani announced the decision on Friday after a US strike in the capital Baghdad killed an Iraqi commander.



US Army soldiers are seen at an airbase northwest of Kirkuk in northern Iraq in March, 2021.
● AHMAD AL-RUBAYE/AFP

The determination marks a significant geopolitical shift, as the initial collective effort apparently to address security concerns and stabilize the region has not substantially reduced tensions.

The ongoing conflicts between Iraqi militia and US troops, along with the persistent attacks or assassinations by the United States within Iraq's territory targeting individuals of external origins as well as Iraqi nationals and sites, are fueling tensions and hindering the desired stability. It has been more than 20 years since the United States invaded Iraq under the alleged claim that the country possessed weapons of mass destruction (WMD).

The 2003 invasion set in motion the American war machine in the country and the wider Middle East region. The protracted aggression extended to 2011, causing heavy casualties with some estimates putting the death toll at 1,033,000 deaths – a clear indication of the harm inflicted upon Iraq.

The rationale for the Iraq War faced heavy criticism both domestically and internationally. Kofi Annan, then the secretary-general of the United Nations, called the invasion illegal under international law, as it violated the UN Charter. The invasion was justified on the grounds of eliminating perceived threats, such as WMD. However, the prolonged military campaign sparked debates about its effectiveness, Iraq's sovereignty, and the broader ramifications for the region. Under former president Barack Obama, US troops were officially withdrawn in 2011.

The Daesh terrorist group began a brutal terror campaign in 2014, overrunning vast swathes of Iraq in lightning attacks. The United States became reinvolved in 2014 leading a new Western coalition.

The war against Daesh in Iraq, which

is considered a domino effect of the invasion and occupation, caused at least 155,000 deaths and internally displaced more than 3.3 million Iraqis until 2017.

Furthermore, while the United States led the coalition intending to combat terrorism and promote stability, certain American politicians, both from the Democratic and Republican parties, have emphasized the US role in the establishment of the Daesh terrorist group. Back in August 2016, Donald Trump, then-Republican presidential nominee, stated that Daesh was honoring

Obama as "He's the founder of ISIS (Daesh)."

"I would say the co-founder would be 'Crooked' Hillary Clinton," he hastened to add.

Also back in March 2023, Robert F. Kennedy Jr., an American politician, environmental lawyer, and activist, said that the US created Daesh, blaming Washington for crimes perpetrated by the terrorist group and the influx of millions of refugees to Europe. "The police are corrupt. We created ISIS. We drove two million refugees up into Europe," he said then.

Eventually, Iraq declared victory over the terrorist group in December 2017 following a three-year counter-terrorism military campaign in which the Popular Mobilization Forces (known in Arabic as Hashd al-Sha'abi) – assisted by Iranian military advisers – played a major role. However still, Daesh's remnants keep staging sporadic attacks across Iraq and Syria while they have been increasingly active in Afghanistan in the past years, especially since the US "irresponsible" withdrawal of forces from the war-torn country in 2021.



A US soldier aims his weapon at a man who had just been shot in the neck in Mosul, Iraq on July 23, 2003.
● AP

The US currently maintains 2,500 troops in Iraq on a mission it says advises and assists local forces trying to prevent a resurgence of Daesh. However, the Iraqi government now requests the departure of these soldiers.

In recent weeks, Sudani has consistently voiced his desire for foreign troops to leave Iraq. His main rationale is the confidence in his country's ability to handle the situation effectively.

"We stress our firm position in ending the existence of the international coalition after the justifications for its existence have ended," he said, pointing to "the presence of capable Iraqi forces".

Sudani's statement on Friday came on the heels of a US strike that killed a militia leader in Baghdad, prompting anger among groups calling for the government to terminate the coalition presence in Iraq. According to the Pentagon, the US military launched the strike on Thursday in retaliation for recent attacks on US military forces. The Pentagon declined to respond to Iraqi government comments suggesting the slain commander was part of its security forces, which include formal, legitimate institutions like the police and the army.

Now, the question arises whether the US will give in to the host country's demand to withdraw or adhere to its established nature of "invasion and occupation". In 2020, the Iraqi Parliament voted to expel American forces in the wake of the US assassination of Iran's General Qassem Soleimani as well as Iraq's top mobilization commander Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis outside Baghdad's airport. The bold move was given the cold shoulder by Trump who once again revealed US true colors in longing occupation by saying "It isn't the right time for the US to pull out of Iraq."

Israel's violation of sovereignty and the West's support

International Desk

PERSPECTIVE

During its short-term history, Israel has consistently demonstrated a troubling disregard for the sovereignty of others. Let's not forget that the establishment of Israel was based on the displacement of the native inhabitants of the land of Palestine. In today's carefree world, the unruly child also occasionally launches attacks on neighboring territories, spanning Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq. In addition to these aggressive acts, it engages in territory annexations and expands settlements in the West Bank.



The photo shows an Israeli missile attack on the positions of the Syrian troops near Damascus.
● OMAR SANADIKI/AP

Israel is internationally recognized as the occupying power in the West Bank, including East Al-Quds (Jerusalem), as well as in Syria, including Golan Heights, without any punishment. Israel captured the Golan in the 1967 war and formally annexed the territory in 1981, prompting the UN Security Council to unanimously pass a resolution condemning the move and reasserting the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by force.

Its breach of walls of sovereignty has consistently been met only with expressions of regret or occasional condemnation; however, no consequential punishment has ensued. The Security Council has not issued any punitive resolution, which would be impactful, as decisions from the council are legally binding upon all UN member states.

The United States, a permanent member of the Security Council, notably supported Israel in recognizing Israeli claims to Syria's occupied Golan Heights during the Trump presidency in 2019. The decision, widely denounced, has not been reversed by the Biden administration, indicating continued US support for Israel in this matter.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken told the United Nations Security Council last May, when powerful states flout the rules of international law, "it sends the message that others can break those rules with impunity".

Also, under the pretext of self-defense, the regime conducts attacks on the territories of other states. Its most recent aggression involved airstrikes targeting southern Syria,

near the capital Damascus. The regime has for years targeted what it calls Iran-linked positions in Syria. As a sign of the terrorist nature of the Zionist regime, a veteran member of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC), serving as a military adviser in Syria, was killed in an Israeli attack. This incident follows previous attacks in December that claimed the lives of two military advisers. Syrian air defenses have successfully intercepted most Israeli missiles near the capital, highlighting an escalation in the regime's aggressive actions against the country. The strike occurred a day after the reopening of Damascus International Airport, which had faced repeated Israeli attacks.

Israel rarely comments on strikes targeting Syria, but it has repeatedly said it will not allow Iran, which backs President Bashar al-Assad's government, to expand its presence

in the country. Iran maintains an advisory mission in Syria at the request of the Arab country with the aim of helping Damascus get rid of the foreign-backed militants who have been fighting the democratically-elected government there since 2011. Many see the Israeli move as a knee-jerk reaction to the Syrian government's success in confronting and decimating terrorism. In Lebanon, Israel also wants the Hezbollah resistance movement to abide by a 2006 UN cease-fire agreement that states the border area in southern Lebanon must be "free of any armed personnel, assets and weapons" other than Lebanese government forces and UN peacekeepers. Under the resolution, Hezbollah should not have a military presence in the border region.

Lebanon, meanwhile, argues that Israel violates the resolution with its air force's frequent entry into Leb-

anese airspace and by its presence in Chebaa Farms, a disputed area along the country's border with the Golan Heights.

In continuation of its support for Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, Hezbollah fighters have been attacking Israeli posts along the border. Israeli tanks, artillery and aircraft have been striking areas on the Lebanese side of the border. The fighting has been mostly brief, but almost daily. Human rights groups and local officials have also accused Israel of hitting Lebanese border areas with shells containing white phosphorus, a controversial incendiary munition. The strikes have burned hundreds of hectares of farmland and woodland and injured civilians. Israel claims all its actions conform with international law.

Israeli Foreign Minister Eli Cohen has recently said that Hezbollah must respect the 2006 cease-fire.

Otherwise, he warned, Nasrallah "must understand that he's next."

The regime also on Jan. 2 orchestrated another terrorist act in Lebanon that resulted in the death of prominent Hamas figure Saleh al-Arouri.

In another apparent threat, former prime minister Naftali Bennett threatened Iran, saying "The US and Israel must set the clear goal of bringing down" the Islamic Republic.

With Israel itself being the source of endless war and terror, Bennett points accusatory fingers at Iran in an article, considering it "the center of most of the Middle East's problems and much of global terror".

"There are many ways to weaken Iran: empower domestic opposition, ensure internet continuity during riots against the regime, strengthen its enemies, increase sanctions and economic pressures. But Israel can't and shouldn't do this alone. The US should be leading the effort," he wrote.

He also acknowledged that Israel destroyed a UAV base on Iranian soil, another case of its sovereignty violation. The former prime minister also confessed to the assassination of a commander in the center of Tehran, claiming he was a member of an Iranian team that had a role in a failed attempt to kill Israeli tourists in Turkey in March 2022.

All this horror, terror, and violation of countries' sovereignty go unanswered by the international community, without a serious reaction. The ongoing question revolves around whether the West, particularly the United States, has an obligation to support Israel.



Smoke rises over the village of Marwahin in southern Lebanon after an Israeli bombardment across its northern border.
● AFP

Arteta fears mental block after FA Cup exit



● REUTERS

THE GUARDIAN – Mikel Arteta fears his Arsenal players have developed a psychological block in front of goal and has called on them to reset after Sunday's 2-0 home loss to Liverpool in the FA Cup.

Arsenal dominated for the opening hour, spurning numerous chances – particularly in the first half. And they were reeled in by Liverpool who scored their goals late on; first through a Jakub Kiwior own goal and then Luis Díaz.

Arsenal have won only one of their past seven games in all competitions, with this a third defeat in a row – after those in the Premier League against West Ham and Fulham.

“Probably it has,” Arteta said, when asked whether the missed chances were becoming a psychological issue. “Especially after today – more than it was against Fulham or West Ham before that. That’s why I think we need to reset.”

“It is very difficult. But if the team is getting hammered and not playing well and not deserving to win football matches I’d be much more worried. I’m worried because I love winning and we have to win many more games. That’s the thing we have to change and probably what has to be reset is up here.”

Jürgen Klopp was delighted to advance, especially as he missed the ill Virgil van Dijk and Mohamed Salah, who is on Africa Cup of Nations duty – among many others. He saluted his players for their resilience. But it was Arteta that was the more quotable afterwards, especially when he cast doubt on Arsenal’s ability to sign a new No 9 in January. A section of the fanbase believe this is the only answer to the current issues.

“At the moment it does not look realistic,” Arteta said. “What my job is and what we have to do is improve our players and try to get better results with the players we have.”

“I haven’t seen a team in the past six months that has generated what we have done against Liverpool in the last two games [including the 1-1 league draw at Anfield on 23 December]. We haven’t capitalised. Not just today but in the last few games as well.”

“Merit-wise there is no question that we deserve to win the games but the results are very different.”



● IWF

Zagreb Open Ranking Series: Qassempour to chase a tilt at Olympic berth in wrestling season opener

Sports Desk

With the Olympic wrestling qualifiers getting underway in two months, Kamran Qassempour will be looking to have a statement performance at the season-opening UWW Ranking Series event when the Zagreb Open kicks off on Wednesday.

The Iranian will make only a second appearance in the 97kg weight class as he is eager to add the Olympic glory to his two world 92kg titles in Paris next summer. The campaign in the Croatian capital could be quite a daunting task for the Iranian as his sole bout in the Olympic weight division saw him fall to a comprehensive defeat against decorated American Kyle Snyder at the 2022 Freestyle World Cup, no to

mention he has been sidelined for months with a groin injury, which kept him out of last September’s World Championships in Belgrade as well as the Hangzhou Asian Games. Meanwhile, Iranian prodigy Amir Ali Azarpira – a winner of double world under-23 golds – will be aiming to throw down the gauntlet to his fellow 97kg countryman ahead of the qualification events following a dominant campaign at the National Championships in December.

Superheavyweight rivalry

A domestic superheavyweight rivalry for the Olympic spot could be settled in Zagreb as the two Iranian young guns Amirhossein Zare’ and Amir-Reza Ma’soumi will be a part of the 125kg contests.

Having bagged a second world gold in three years in September – defeating high-profile wrestlers Taha Akgül and Geno Petriashvili in the process – Zare’ is widely regarded as the favorite to walk away with the ultimate prize in Paris but will first have to see off competition from 19-year-old Ma’soumi – a world champion in all age groups – who is in dazzling form after cruising to the top podium at the National Championships.

Elsewhere, Rahman Amouzad is desperate to bounce back from a below-par run in the international events last year.

The Iranian was from his ruthless form when began his world title defense in Belgrade and only managed to finish fifth to secure an Olympic 65kg quota for the country.

He then represented Iran in the Asian Games but settled for an unimpressive silver, courtesy of an 11-1 loss to Mongolian Tömör-Ochiryn Tulga.

Joining Amouzad in the 65kg contests is Abbas Ebrahimzadeh, who was handed a spot in Zagreb after a final victory over Ali Khorramdel in the national event. Two-time world bronze medalist Younes Emami and national champion Hossein Abouzari will take part in the 74kg competitions – in what will likely decide who will be the Iranian contestant at the Olympic qualification tournaments in the coming months. American sensation Jordan Burroughs pulled out of the 74kg event last week but there will be a number of up-and-coming faces competing in the Olympic class,

including Azerbaijan’s Dzhabrail Gadzhiev and Georgios Kougioumtsidis of Greece.

Hadi Vafaeipour punched his Zagreb ticket after a surprise 86kg national title in December – coming out on top against Ali Savadkouhi in the final – but surely knows he will be out of contention for Paris once nine-time world and Olympic medalist Hassan Yazdani is back on the mat following a surgery on his injured shoulder in November.

In the non-Olympic 79kg contests, meanwhile, Iran will be represented by reigning world bronze medalist Mohammad Nokhodi and national champion Abodallah Sheikh A’zami, though the former could still move to a lower weight class after the tournament to take a shot at an Olympic quota.

James scores 25 points, Lakers hold off Clippers to snap losing streak

AP – LeBron James had 25 points, eight rebounds and seven assists, Taurean Prince hit a tiebreaking 3-pointer with 1:17 to play and the Los Angeles Lakers snapped a four-game losing streak with a 106-103 victory over the Los Angeles Clippers on Sunday night.

Anthony Davis had 22 points and 10 rebounds for the Lakers, who beat the surging Clippers for the second straight time after losing 11 in a row to their hallway rivals.

While James and Davis carried them, Prince and D’Angelo Russell also made key plays down the stretch as the Lakers hung on for just their fourth victory in 14 games since winning the NBA’s Inaugural In-Season Tournament.

“We played like we needed to win, like it was a must-win,” Davis said. “We competed on both

sides of the basketball. We’ve just got to build off of it. We know what we have in the locker room. We know what it takes to win, and we displayed that tonight.” James set the tone shortly after halftime with a ferocious dunk on Paul George, and the Lakers never trailed in the fourth quarter despite blowing a 10-point lead. They still couldn’t exhale until Norman Powell’s 3-point attempt rattled in and out at the buzzer. “Overtime,” James said when asked what he was thinking while he watched Powell’s shot. “It looked like it was good for sure. Right on line. ... We’ve got to continue to get better. Try to use this to catapult (us to play) a little bit better. Better play from us, but it still don’t take away from the fact of how we’ve been playing like the last 11, 12 games.” Paul George scored 22 points and Ivica Zubac had 22 points and 19

rebounds for the Clippers, whose five-game winning streak ended. Kawhi Leonard scored 15 points, and James Harden had 15 points and nine assists in the childhood Lakers fan’s first game against them since getting traded home to the Clippers, who have still won 14 of their last 17. Neither team took a double-digit lead until Russell’s third 3-pointer put the Lakers up 92-82 early in the fourth. The Clippers rallied with nine consecutive points down the stretch, and they tied it on Powell’s three free throws with 2:19 to play while the Lakers went into a 2-for-7 slump with six turnovers.

▶ **Lakers’ LeBron James dunks during an NBA victory over the Clippers at Crypto.com Arena, Los Angeles, CA, U.S., on January 7, 2024.**
● ALLEN J. SCHABEN/
LOS ANGELES TIMES



Danger of famine in Gaza

NGO warns Israel persists in starvation policy

International Desk

A human rights group has said that the starvation of people in Gaza is “not a by-product of war but a direct result of Israel’s declared policy.”

“The horror is growing by the minute, and the danger of famine is real. Still, Israel persists in its policy,” said the Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories, B’Tselem.

“The images of children begging for food, people waiting in long lines for paltry hand-outs, and hungry residents charging at aid trucks are already inconceivable.”

After Hamas attacked Israel on Oct. 7, Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant on Oct. 9 ordered “a complete siege on the Gaza Strip,” saying “there will be no electricity, no food, no fuel, everything is closed.” UN officials say a humanitarian cease-fire and the safe and unrestricted flow of supplies into Gaza, including commercial goods, are vital to avert famine. Israel should facilitate the entry and delivery of commensurate aid, Laurence

allow rapid and unimpeded passage of humanitarian aid, including food.”

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says, adding that “failure to act in line with these obligations may have serious consequences under international law.”

The World Health Organization said on Sunday that it had been compelled to cancel a mission to bring medical supplies to northern Gaza after failing to receive security guarantees. It was the fourth time WHO had had to call off a planned mission to bring urgently needed medical supplies to Al-Awda Hospital and the central drug store in northern Gaza since Dec. 26, it said.

Meanwhile, majority of medical staff, as well as around 600 patients, from Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital in central Gaza have been forced to leave the complex to unknown locations with no information of their whereabouts, the WHO and the UN said on Monday.

The hospital is struggling to cope amid intense airstrikes across the enclave.

The two institutions note chaotic scenes as the remaining staff at the hospital continues to try to cope with an influx of injured people as “heavy Israeli bombardment from air, land, and sea intensified across much of the Gaza Strip.”

The Health Ministry in Gaza said Monday at least 23,084 people have been killed in the besieged Palestinian territory since war with Israel began on October 7.

Meanwhile, the US and its allies in the Group of Seven were seeking a quick way out of the military phase of the Gaza conflict, Italy said on Monday, as US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and his EU and German counterparts toured the region.

He began a five-day Middle East diplomatic effort in Jordan and Qatar on Sunday, his fourth visit to the region since Oct. 7.

Germany’s Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock was in Israel on Monday and the EU’s top diplomat Josep Bor-



rell was in Lebanon in a sign of international concern.

Pope Francis, tackling conflicts in the Middle East and Ukraine in his yearly address to diplomats, said on Monday that “indiscriminately striking” civilians is a war crime because it violates international humanitarian law. Expressing concern that the war in Gaza could spread in the wider Middle East, he called for a “cease-

fire on every front, including Lebanon.”

Speaking at a weekly press conference in Tehran on Monday, Iran’s Foreign Ministry spokesman Nasser Kanaani described recent incidents in the Red Sea as “an outcome of the situation in Palestine.”

Al Jazeera, Reuters, AFP, and Press TV contributed to this report.

Israeli strike on Lebanon kills senior Hezbollah commander

International Desk

A senior commander of the Lebanese resistance movement Hezbollah has been assassinated in an Israeli airstrike on southern Lebanon.

Wissam Hassan al-Tawil was killed when the strike hit the vehicle transporting him in the village of Khirbet Selm on Monday, Press TV reported.

The commander served with Hezbollah’s elite Radwan ground force.

Israel has been desperate in its ground invasion of the besieged Gaza Strip since early October. The regime has achieved no objectives in Gaza, killing more than 23,000 people notwithstanding.

Southern Lebanon has also been tense ever since, with Hezbollah and Israeli forces exchanging fire across the border on a daily basis.

On Monday, another Hezbollah member was also killed in an Israeli airstrike on the village of Majdal Selm.

Israeli bombardment has killed more than 130 Hezbollah fighters in southern Lebanon since cross-border shelling began in the aftermath of Hamas’s attack on Israeli territory on Oct. 7. Another 19 have been killed in Syria.

Hezbollah has already warned the regime of the consequences of further escalation in the region.

Hezbollah’s secretary-general Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah has warned Israel in two televised addresses last week not to launch a full-scale war on Lebanon.

“Whoever thinks of war with us – in one word, he will regret it,” Nasrallah said, Reuters reported.

On Friday, Nasrallah said Israel is concealing the “heavy losses” it has suffered in southern Lebanon since the Lebanese resistance movement’s operations against the occupying regime are “very exhausting.”

The Israeli military has admitted that its strategic air base on Mount Meron was “seriously damaged” in a recent missile strike by Hezbollah.

Like Zionists in Gaza, Daesh massacres innocents

Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi said the Daesh terrorist group seeks to kill women and children just like the Israeli regime that is massacring innocent people in Gaza.

Raisi made the statement in a meeting with Chairman of Tajikistan’s National Assembly Rustam Emomali in Tehran on Monday, Press TV reported.

He said all regional countries should actively counter terrorist groups such as

Daesh, which is nurtured by the US and Israel. He emphasized that Iran and Tajikistan must promote cooperation in the fight against terrorism, organized crime and smuggling of illicit drugs.

The president hailed the appropriate level of growing relations between Tehran and Dushanbe in the past two years and said the expansion of parliamentary ties would play a key role in boosting cooperation in the

political and economic sectors as well.

Emomali, for his part, said Tajikistan supports the establishment of an independent Palestinian state and condemns Israel’s killing of more than 23,000 Palestinian civilians in Gaza since the beginning of its war against the Gaza Strip in October.

The top Tajik parliamentarian described insecurity as an issue of common concern between Tehran and

Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi (R) meets Chairman of Tajikistan’s National Assembly Rustam Emomali in Tehran on January 8, 2024. © president.ir

Dushanbe and a danger to promotion of bilateral trade cooperation.


Heading a high-ranking parliamentary delegation, Emomali arrived in Tehran on Monday morning.

MoU signed to boost parliamentary cooperation



Iranian Parliament Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf and Emomali signed a memorandum of understanding to improve parliamentary

cooperation. They said Iran and Tajikistan should make use of their capacities to further expand relations.



Notice of cancellation the tender No. 14/1402/Z (renewed)

Hereby Golgohar Mining & Industrial Co. announces cancellation of renewed Tender No. 14/1402/Z “70.000 metric tons of Pellet (%Fe:65.00) on basis of F.O.B at Barco Jetty Bandar Abbas – Iran” until further notice.

Meanwhile the second tender renewal will be informed in newspaper and Golgohar website as www.geg.ir subsequently.

Transactions Commission of Golgohar Mining & Industrial Co.

Americans played Dutch over Stuxnet: Report

International Desk

According to the investigative journalists of the newspaper Volkskrant, the Dutch intelligence services knew they were participating in the sabotage of the Iranian nuclear program in 2008 but not that their agent was bringing in Stuxnet. “The Americans used us,” one intelligence source told the Volkskrant.

In 2008, a Dutchman played a crucial role in the United States and Israeli-led operation to sabotage Iran’s nuclear program. The then 36-year-old Erik van Sabben infiltrated an Iranian nuclear complex and released the infamous Stuxnet virus, paralyzing the country’s nuclear program.

A few years ago, Volkskrant revealed that the Dutch

intelligence services AIVD and MIVD had recruited the infiltrator in this sabotage operation. But at the time, it was believed to have been an Iranian engineer. Dozens of people involved, including 19 employees of the AIVD and MIVD told the newspaper that Dutchman Van Sabben infiltrated the underground nuclear complex in the city of Natanz and installed equipment infected with the highly sophisticated Stuxnet virus. Van Sabben immediately left Iran after sabotaging the country’s nuclear program, the researchers concluded. He died two weeks later in a motorcycle accident near his home in Dubai. Nothing points to foul play, the Volkskrant said.

Iranian and Dutch officials did not immediately re-

spond to the report, and Iran Daily cannot inde-

pendently verify claims made by the report.



Mohammad Ali Rajabi
Cartoonist



Iran seeks quick resolution of issues preventing Umrah pilgrimage



REUTERS - Iran hopes technical problems preventing Iranian Muslims from making the Umrah pilgrimage to Saudi Arabia will soon be resolved, Foreign Ministry spokesperson Nasser Kanaani said on Monday.

Iran initially announced in December that the first Umrah pilgrims would travel on Dec. 19, following an agreement between Tehran and Riyadh to allow the pilgrimage to take place after a pause of eight years.

However, the first flight and subsequent ones were cancelled due to Riyadh failing to provide the "necessary final permits" for the entry of Iranian planes into Saudi airports, the spokesman of Iran Air Hessem Qorbanali had told national TV.

"The relevant authorities have announced that it is just a technical issue and that there is no political dispute as the bilateral agreement regarding Umrah pilgrimage is well-established and Saudi Arabia is committed to it," Kanaani said during a televised press conference on Monday.

Saudi Arabia did not comment on the matter. Kanaani added that Iran's head of Hajj and Pilgrimage was in Saudi Arabia with a team of experts to resolve the problems. According to Tasnim news agency, representatives of Iran's Civil Aviation Organization are also in Saudi Arabia working on the issues.

China mediated an agreement in March under which Iran and Saudi Arabia resumed full diplomatic relations which were cut in 2016 over Riyadh's execution of a Shia Muslim cleric and the storming of the Saudi Embassy in Tehran.

Umrah, known as the "lesser pilgrimage", can be undertaken at any time of the year and is not generally deemed compulsory in Islam.

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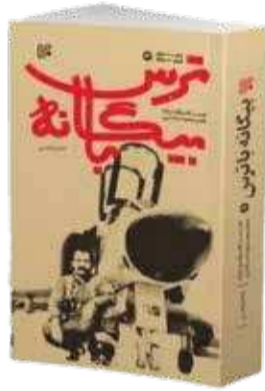


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Book 'Without Fear' unveiled

A tale of patriotism, bravery of an Iranian pilot



By Ebrahim Beheshti
Staff writer

The book 'Without Fear' was unveiled at the Iran Cultural & Press Institute on Monday, recounting the life and operations of Mahmoud Eskandari, one of the fighter pilots of the Islamic Republic of Iran's Air Force.

The ceremony was attended by family members, as well as some veteran pilots and comrades of Eskandari.

Born in 1950, and tragically passing away in 2001 in a car accident, Eskandari dynamically participated in numerous operations, notably during the Iraqi invasion of Iran in 1980. Among the most significant was the Liberation of Khorramshahr, the operation known as "H-3," and the Baghdad Operation.

Operation H-3 stands out as one of the world's largest and most complex aerial operations, in which eight Iranian Phantom aircraft penetrated 1,000 kilometers into the westernmost point of Iraq, bombing Iraqi airbases near the Jordanian border and returning safely.

Published by Iran Publications, the 496-page book features eight interviews and roundtable discussions with Eskandari's comrades. Farajollah Baratpour, Ali-Akbar Zamani, Mahmoud Zarrabi, Esmaeil Omid, Rouhollah Abutale-



● SAJJAD SAFARI/IRAN DAILY



His abilities, and flying skills were remarkable and courageous. He possessed all the qualities a fighter pilot should have.

bi, Fereidoun Samadi, Nasser Baqeri, Mohammad-Reza Qarebaqi, Asghar Shafiei, and Mohammad-Reza Maleki, all former Air Force pilots during the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988), share various aspects of life and different operations of this heroic Air Force figure.

The common theme in these recounted memories, as expressed by the program's attendees, was the depiction of Eskandari's courage, chivalrous spirit, and love for Iran.

Zarrabi, who died a few months before the book's release, men-

tioned in one of these interviews, "Mahmoud made no claims. He simply said, 'I am an Iranian soldier.' His abilities, and flying skills were remarkable and courageous. He possessed all the qualities a fighter pilot should have."

Sadeq Vafaei, who interviewed people who knew Eskandari, emphasized in his remarks the extensive discussions and side studies about Eskandari, highlighting his exceptional patriotism and devotion to Iran.

Amir Baratpour, another guest at the book unveiling ceremony, briefly addressed the initial mili-

tary imbalance between Iran and Iraq at the start of the war.

He underscored the significance of the Air Force throughout the conflict, especially in the war's early stages, stating that without the aerial skills displayed by Iranian forces, the Iraqi forces could have conquered at least Khuzestan Province.

As a former commander during Eskandari's tenure, Baratpour concluded by sharing personal memories of trusting difficult operations to Eskandari, confident in his ability to perform them in the best possible way.

Blood reserves double, lasting eight days in Iran



Social Desk

The blood reserves in the country have doubled, increasing from four to eight days, said the CEO of the Blood Transfusion Organization.

According to the Ministry of Health and Medical Education, the improvement is attributed to the implementation of molecular screening tests capable of detecting viral factors such as HIV in less than three to four days, IRNA reported.

Jamali stated, "We have successfully met 100% of the country's blood and its re-

lated product needs, eliminating any shortages."

The CEO highlighted that the Blood Transfusion Organization of Iran handles an annual influx of 2.7 million visitors, with 2.22 million individuals donating blood last Iranian year.

Jamali emphasized, "Blood donation is a charitable and humanitarian act, and it is our duty to facilitate blood donation conditions across the country."

He added, "Currently, the country's blood reserves exceed eight days, a significant improvement from the previous three to

four days. The recent terrorist attack in Kerman serves as evidence to provincial self-sufficiency as the blood reserves of that province alone proved effective, although we also sent O-negative blood reserves from other provinces."

Jamali assured that continuous field visits are conducted to all blood donation centers nationwide to address any problems.

He noted, "Blood donation indices in Iran are comparable to advanced countries; last year, we achieved the top ranking in blood health in Asia."

Iran registers over 29,000 multiple births in nine-month period

Social Desk

The National Organization for Civil Registration announced that there were over 29,000 multiple births in the country in a nine-month period, from March 21 to December 21, 2023 (first nine months of the Iranian year). The provinces of Tehran, Khorasan Razavi, and Khuzestan recorded the highest number of multiple births.

According to the data released by the country's Civil Regis-

tration Organization, a total of 29,728 cases of multiple births were registered, of which 28,148 were twins, 1,506 triplets, 64 quadruplets, and 10 quintuplets, IRNA wrote.

The registration report emphasized that approximately 7.3% of the births in the nine-month period were multiple births. Tehran Province had the highest number of multiple births, with 4,318 cases, followed by Khorasan Razavi, with 2,622, and Khuzestan, with 2,351.

Furthermore, the organization's report indicated that during the nine-month period, the highest number of births, totaling 296,886 infants, belonged to the second-born children. The distribution of births by birth order was 4.36% for the first child, 9.38% for the second child, 6.17% for the third child, 1.5% for the fourth child, and 2% for the fifth child.

In the last Iranian year, there were 38,321 multiple births in the country. Tehran had the

highest number, with 6,093 cases, followed by Khorasan Razavi with 3,096, Khuzestan with 2,864, and Isfahan with 2,121 cases.

Two years ago, a total of 18,205 twins, 602 triplets, and 25 quadruplets were registered in the Civil Registration Organization. Tehran Province led with 2,918 cases of twins, while Tehran and Khorasan Razavi had the highest number of triplets. Golestan Province held the record for the highest number of quintuplets.

