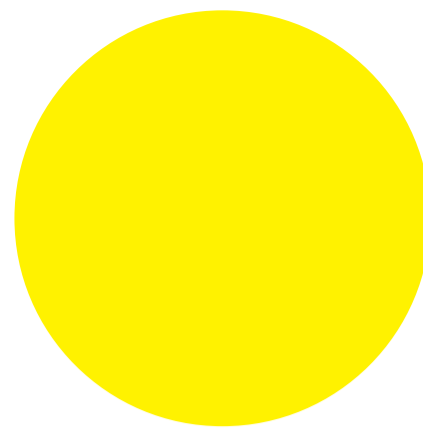


A high-value target for Israeli army

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This screen grab shows a huge fire at an unknown location in Yemen following overnight strikes by the US and UK against the country on January 12, 2024.

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## Tehran-Baku nine-month exchange of goods via rail up 33%:

Official



The director general of Iran's North Railway Administration-2 said that the exchange of goods between Iran and the Republic of Azerbaijan registered a 33-percent growth in the first nine months of the current Iranian calendar year (started March 21, 2023). While expounding on the nine months' performance of imports, exports and the transit of cargo at the Astara Border Terminal, Gholam Hossein Valadi said the exchange of non-oil products via rail between Tehran and Baku increased 33% from March 21 to December 22, 2023 compared to the same period last year, reported Tasnim News Agency. About 498,000 tons of goods were exchanged between the two countries at the Astara Border Terminal, he noted. Valadi put the weight of products exchanged between Iran and the Republic of Azerbaijan from March 21 to December 22, 2022 at 374,454 tons. The official went on to say that 152,268 tons of non-oil products were imported into the country from the Republic of Azerbaijan via rail in the first nine months of the current Iranian calendar year, showing about a 63 percent hike compared to last year's corresponding period, the website of Iran Ministry of Roads and Urban Development (MRUD) reported. More than 93,000 tons of goods had been imported into the country from the Republic of Azerbaijan from March 21 to December 22, 2022, he stated. He further noted that more than 136,000 tons of goods were exported from the country via the Astara Border Terminal through the rail network between March 21 and December 22, 2023. Cement, chemicals, tiles and food products were among the main products exported to the Republic of Azerbaijan via rail, Valadi added. In return, wood, lumber, chemicals, grains, etc. were among the most important products imported from the Republic of Azerbaijan to the country, he added.



# Iran's Navy seizes oil tanker in court-mandated retaliation

*Seizure lifts crude prices*



The Islamic Republic of Iran Navy announced the seizure of an American oil tanker by court order in the Sea of Oman on Thursday. The United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations (UKMTO) identified the tanker Marshall Islands-flagged St. Nicholas, saying it was boarded at about 7:30 a.m. (0330 GMT) off Sohar in Oman and changed course towards Bandar-e-Jask in Iran, Press TV wrote. A British maritime risk company, Ambrey, said the recently renamed tanker was previously prosecuted and fined for carrying Iranian oil, which was confiscated by US authorities. "Iran has previously taken action against those it has accused of

cooperating with the US," it added. The vessel had been loaded with 145,000 tons of crude oil in Basra, Iraq, and was destined for Aliaga in Turkey, via the Suez Canal, said the tanker's Greece-based management company Empire Navigation. The United States condemned what it called an "unlawful seizure" and demanded that Iran "immediately release the ship and its crew". "No justification whatsoever to seize it, none whatsoever. They need to let it go," said Coordinator for Strategic Communications at the National Security Council in the White House John Kirby. "Following the violation of the Suez Rajan

in April and the theft of Iranian oil by the United States, the oil tanker renamed St. Nicholas was seized in retaliation this morning by court order and the approval of the Ports and Shipping Organization by the strategic Islamic Republic of Iran Navy and transferred to Iranian ports," Iran's Fars news agency reported. The tanker, it said, had stolen the cargo of oil belonging to the Islamic Republic of Iran under the direction of the United States and transferred it to the country's ports and put it at the disposal of American authorities. Oil prices gained about 1% on Thursday after Iran seized the oil tanker off the coast of Oman. Brent futures rose 61

cents, or 0.8%, to settle at \$77.41 a barrel, while US West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude rose 65 cents, or 0.9%, to settle at \$72.02. Last August, the US Navy unloaded a tanker of stolen Iranian oil worth around \$56 million off a Texas port, despite warnings from Iran and after American oil firms had resisted the temptation of touching the 800,000-barrel tanker for fear of Iranian retaliation in the Persian Gulf waters. The decision came as Iran was marking the 70th anniversary of the CIA-engineered military coup against Iran's then-prime minister Mohammad Mosaddeq. The Marshall Islands-flagged Suez Rajan tanker carrying

Iranian oil was illegally seized by Washington in April 2023 under the guise of "a sanctions-enforcement operation" and guided toward the Texas port. It came days after a group of US senators and House representatives, at the behest of the Israeli lobby in Washington, began mounting pressure on the Joe Biden administration to unload the tanker, without considering its possible repercussions. It was not the first time the US had resorted to the unconventional step of seizing a sovereign country's cargo in international waters. In May 2022, the US seized a Russia-operated ship, the Pegas, carrying Iranian oil off the

shore of Karystos near Greece to dispatch the oil cargo to the US, but the Greek court ruled against the move. In February 2021, Washington seized a tanker carrying Iranian oil off the coast of the Emirati city of Fujairah and sold more than a million barrels of oil confiscated from it for \$110 million, or \$55 a barrel. The United States has also regularly stolen Syrian oil in recent years under the guise of anti-terror operations in the Arab country. In August 2022, the Syrian Oil Ministry accused the US and its mercenaries of stealing 66,000 barrels of oil per day, accounting for almost 80 percent of the country's oil production.

## Owji: \$20b investment in needed SP gas pressure boosting projects

Iran's Oil Minister Javad Owji on Thursday stressed the need for investing \$20 billion in gas pressure boosting projects in the South Pars (SP) field. Delivering a speech at the National Conference on Production Growth, Inflation Control with Governance Model and Roadmap for Having Knowledge-Based Big Industries by Taking Opportunities to Produce National Brands to Compete at Regional Level, the minister added, "To this end, there is a need to use domestic expertise and therefore 753 contracts were signed with knowledge-based companies involved in oil industry last year." The number of domestic knowledge-based firms cooperating with the government stood at 150 when the 13th administration took over, but the figure has now risen to 650, he was quoted as saying by Shana. Touching upon domestic oil industry's achievements, he said enemies failed to prevent its development in spite of sanctions, add-

ing, "Investment of around \$150 billion in the Pars Special Economic Energy Zone (PSEEZ) in recent years and exports of technical and engineering services to other countries are among the major achievements." Owji said the development process has taken place under all governments, but it has been fortunately accelerated under the 13th administration. The country was faced with big challenges to oil exports in August 2021, when the 13th administration took office and sanctions were ramped up, recalled the minister, adding the challenges were beaten off and completion of 133 partly-finished key projects worth \$28.5 billion was put on the agenda, with the aim of increasing production. Elaborating on oil industry's achievements under the 13th administration, he said, "Oil production has jumped 60 percent, natural gas and gas condensate outputs have topped one billion cubic meters (bcm) and 760,000 barrels per

day, respectively, petrochemical production capacity has soared to 95 million tons per year, oil refining capacity has witnessed a 230,000-barrel increase per day by launching Phase 2 of the Abadan Refinery development plan, and gas processing capacity has increased by 50 million cubic meters per day (mcm/d) as part of a plan to boost production and processing capacities by putting the refinery of SP Phase 14 into operation." He also referred to implementation of 50 new projects aimed at increasing output and creating added value in upstream and downstream sectors, underlining, "Around 2.2 million barrels will be added to the country's refining capacity when the new projects come on stream." Projects for promoting quality of products have started, said Owji, naming the project for improving quality of Isfahan Refinery's diesel by applying expertise of domestic knowledge-based companies and experts.



Shifting to the SP Phase 11 development project at the zero-border point, the oil minister said all operations were carried out by Iranian experts under the 13th administration. Five wells have become operational and 12-15 mcm/d have been added to the country's gas recovery capacity, explained Owji, stating the added figure will soar to 50 mcm/d when the operations of its wells are completed. **APG collection, economic growth** Approximately 11 mcm of

associated petroleum gas (APG) are now captured per day, said the oil minister. The volume of APG to be gathered daily will reach around 17 mcm by the end of this winter and will jump to about 40 mcm by the end of the 13th administration's term (August 2025), he continued. Talking about oil and gas industry's economic growth, Owji said, "According to the reports of the Statistical Center of Iran (SCI) and the Central Bank of Iran (CBI), the in-

dustry's economic growth surpassed 25 percent in summer 2023, which will, hopefully, not be less than 20 percent in the Iranian calendar year (ending March 19, 2024)." Predicting an annual eight percent growth in the country's Seventh Five-Year National Development Plan (2023-27), a roadmap for around 5.5-million-barrel-per-day output has been provided, he pointed out, and that participation of Iran's big contractors is required for achieving that goal.

# Efforts underway to promote unknown attractions of Mazandaran Province

## Iranica Desk

The roads in northern Iran that connect to Mazandaran Province boast numerous historical, natural, and cultural attractions, making them some of the busiest routes in the region. The province is home to a vast number of sightseeing spots, so much so that visiting even a third of them would take months. Official statistics indicate that over 2,800 cultural heritage landmarks in the province are registered on the National Heritage List, establishing it as a unique collection of tourist destinations. However, the distribution of visitors to these must-see locations is significantly unbalanced.

An analysis of the travel statistics for Mazandaran Province reveals an imbalance between the number of trips and the attention given to the various attractions. For instance, during the Iranian New Year Holidays (Nowruz) in 2022, out of 4.5 mil-

lion visits to the province's tourist destinations, 2,255,273 were to natural sites. During the same period, 289,990 visitors explored the historical attractions, while 182,406 people toured the province's museums. The recreational infrastructure of Mazandaran Province also recorded 1,440,427 visits.

The released official figures indicate that the majority of visitors travel to Mazandaran Province to visit the shores of the Caspian Sea and the nearby forests. As a result, the four main roads leading to the province are primarily seen as transit routes, leading to a situation where a large number of historical and cultural landmarks located along these roads receive less attention.

The officials of the Mazandaran Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts Organization have decided to prioritize this highly important tourist potential of the province and concentrate on promoting the must-see spots situated along the roads.

Hossein Izadi, the head of the organization, believes that Mazandaran Province has a wealth of cultural, recreational, and historical attractions that have the potential to attract travelers. However, these attractions remain largely unknown and untapped, despite their significant tourism potential.

In an interview with IRNA, he emphasized the importance of taking a long-term approach in this regard, which would help create economic development in the surrounding communities. He pointed out that the villages along Chalus, Haraz, Savadkuh, and Kiasar roads have the potential to attract a large number of travelers.

Izadi also noted that there are many natural and historical sites in the area that are still undiscovered by most tourists. He said that efforts will be made to promote these attractions as travelers enter the province in order to increase their visibility and draw in more visitors.



Chehel Sotoun Garden, Behshahr  
wikimedia.org



House of Nima Yushij, Baladeh  
tehranpicture.ir

## Historical significance of Shahrestan Bridge in Isfahan

The city of Isfahan, the capital of Isfahan Province in central Iran, boasts numerous attributes that justify its status as one of Iran's most visited cities. It is renowned as one of the best places to explore the grandeur of Persian history, architecture, and culture. In addition to the breathtaking beauty of Naqsh-e Jahan Square, Isfahan is famous for its stunning bridges. Eleven bridges span the Zayandeh Rud, a 400-kilometer river flowing from the Zagros Mountains to southern Isfahan, providing life to the city and its surrounding villages. Among the most famous bridg-

es such as Si-o-Se Pol and Khaju Bridge, Shahrestan Bridge also holds significant historical importance. The oldest among the eleven, this bridge was constructed during the Sassanid Empire, making it approximately 14 centuries old. Although Zayandeh Rud no longer passes under the bridge due to re-direction, an artificial lake surrounds it, protecting the ancient structure from potential damage. Shahrestan Bridge, also known as the City Bridge, is situated in the eastern part of Isfahan. In ancient times, the city was referred to as "Jay," leading to the bridge's previous name "Jay Bridge". Its

foundation dates back to the Sassanid Empire, which ruled over Persia from the 3rd to the 7th century. This bridge was the first to be constructed over the Zayandeh Rud and remains the only historical bridge in Isfahan built before the Safavid era. Throughout history, it served as a vital passage for caravans and pedestrians commuting between Isfahan and the southern villages.

The architectural style of Shahrestan Bridge reflects the Sassanid era, distinct from the Safavid influences seen in most historical sites in Isfahan. The bridge's design, with a length

of 107.8 meters and an average width of 5.2 meters, incorporates a two-level structure, with 13 arches on the bottom and eight on the top level. The bridge's foundation, consisting of 12 large stone foundations and 11 waterspouts, were directly laid on the natural stones of the riverbed.

Notably, the bridge features two parabolic structures to enhance stability and resistance to river flow. The vertical parabolic structure elevates the middle point of the bridge to alleviate pressure from passing caravans, while the horizontal parabolic structure creates a bend to

increase resistance to the river current. Additionally, hollow structures called "Kaneh" were strategically integrated to reduce the weight of the bridge and bolster its resilience, particularly during floods.

Despite being less renowned than Si-o Se Pol and Khaju Bridge, Shahrestan Bridge holds immense historical significance and was inscribed on Iran's National Heritage List in 1970. Visitors can explore this ancient marvel free of charge. While located in the southeastern part of Isfahan, away from the historical city center, the bridge is easily accessible by taxi or nearby

bus stations.

Although the southeastern location may not be the most convenient for short-term accommodation, the bridge's proximity to historical and archaeological sites, such as Al-Rashid Mausoleum, Ashraf Historical Hill, and Mehrbin Fortress offers additional cultural exploration opportunities. Moreover, its close proximity to the historical center and Naqsh-e Jahan Square, reachable in about 15 minutes by taxi, makes it a worthwhile destination for visitors seeking a deeper understanding of Isfahan's rich history and heritage.



wikimedia.org



MEHR

A high-value target for Israeli army

# Truth dies with journalists in Gaza

By Reza Raadfar  
Political analyst

## EXCLUSIVE OPINION

Why would a commander order a targeted airstrike on a certain individual or class of individuals during a war? After all, rockets and artillery munitions aren't cheap — far from it! Producing one used in modern combats costs at least a thousand US dollars and usually even more. So, you have to make every munition count. There are going to be all kinds of accountability later on, too, whether they be on domestic or international political and moral grounds. So, a commander's probably not going to order the killing of any one target in particular for anything less than convincing reasons.

Let's make our commander's work easier. Assume that he's not going to be questioned for ordering a strike on any ground other than how much it furthered their war effort and brought them closer to victory in any capacity. That presumption would untie his hands to even target children if he wanted to — as abhorrent as that is in real-world circumstances — but he still has to answer how killing a child would have helped. By just playing the devil's advocate, I can imagine some commanders saying that a particular child was wearing a bomb, but even that argument loses its steam if the commander has mass murdered a large group of children. So, targeting a whole group of individuals needs sounder, reasonably generalizable reasons than targeting one or two individuals. Even then, accusing certain groups of individuals of working for or against a country during a war doesn't hold well. Babies, children, women, the disabled and the elderly, embassy staffers, employees of UN and various relief groups, nurses, doctors, and members of the press are some such groups that readily come to mind — bonus point if they are a citizen of other countries that are in no shape or form a party to that war.



Palestinian journalists attend a gathering in Nablus city, West Bank, to denounce the killing of Palestinian journalists in early October in an Israeli airstrike on Gaza City.  
ZAIN JAAFAR/AFP

### Why are war correspondents protected?

Even though it is common knowledge that during wartime, war correspondents enjoy some kind of "immunity" — which we will show is not an accurate description — as evidenced by their easily identifiable, obligatory protective attire, many of our readers probably do not really know why that is the case. To be fair, the reason is not explicitly stated in any legal document. However, the fact that almost every country in the world has recognized the necessity of giving war correspondents a special status must amount to something. Legal scholars, attorneys, and special interest groups would argue that no journalist in their right mind will seek the most dangerous places a modern human being can be if it was up to them. They are there to fulfill their job duties. Hopefully, they get paid handsomely for their sacrifices, as well. As such, it's merely in their job descriptions to be there and report the news of the war from the ground. That may well be true, but it would not merit their presence by itself. After all, many organizations would probably love to have their employees in war zones to perform non-hostile duties and generate profit. That doesn't mean that the warring parties would or should give them free, protected access. There must be more to it than simply meeting job requirements. Interestingly, just showing your journalist badge won't get you anywhere and everywhere in peace time, either. Generally, members of the press are allowed wherever the public is allowed, but private, military, and crime scene grounds are off-limits. There certainly is a vetting process for news agencies that wish to work in another country. Some countries re-

quire individuals who wish to work in the media, in particular journalists, to obtain official permission before commencing their activities. But once you have the permission, you are again treated as a foreign national, enjoy the same rights, and are allowed wherever the public is allowed. The more common and acceptable argument that follows from the "they're-just-there-to-do-their-job" argument is that war correspondents are not working for or against any warring party and do not intend harm on anyone, especially soldiers as that would put the correspondents themselves in danger. While true, this doesn't give us the whole picture. That same flaw can be found in this argument: there are many individuals, national or foreign, that do not intend any harm and are working for any warring party, but they don't have the privilege of getting special treatment — however minor that privilege currently is for war correspondents, as you will see. So, why did world leaders agree that journalists should be protected during wars, considering that it may someday be the turn for their country to be engaged in a war? I believe that has to do with what journalists should stand for, not necessarily for what any one journalist or news organization stands for. To be sure, journalists are humans, not saints, and heads of media corporations often think more about how reports do to increase sales and ratings. But in this case, a few rotten apples do not spoil the bunch. Quite the contrary, only one or two good, honest journalists are enough to redeem the whole line of work. One need not look at it in such black and white terms, though. Representing the distribution of honest and dishon-

est workers of any profession on a graph generally results in a bell-shaped curve: most would fall in the middle and be considered rather honest. So, what do journalists conceptually and ideally stand for? The clue is not found in the denotation of being a 'journalist'; rather, it is found in the connotation that journalism has with holding state or non-state figures and agencies accountable, and rendering them transparent. For one thing, journalists strive to bring transparency into issues of public interest. If that is not achieved by a direct, if sometimes driving line of questioning, journalists will hopefully turn to investigative journalism to uncover the truth that was not willingly made public. The world 'public' turns up time and time again in discussing matters of journalism — as it just did in the span of the last two sentences — because even though journalists are paid by news agencies or news outlets to report facts and figures, they are essentially working for the service industry. The people have a need to know the latest and/or most impactful factual information for various reasons, and journalists meet that need. If by any chance, the public loses interest in knowing these pieces of information, it's hard to imagine that the press will still linger, even with state funding. Not to mention that states benefit heavily from outsourcing the more mundane parts of their intelligence gathering to local and international news agencies. Combined, the need for transparency and availability of information is among the principal reasons why there's a consensus that we need the press. Holding organizations and people in power accountable is another goal of

journalism. It's worth noting that journalists do not always get the chance to be the one to do it. Rather, they are most likely the first or one of the first links in that chain. Even by disseminating a piece of information matter-of-factly, they can set off a chain of events that leads to a measure being taken in the interest of the public or state(s). That's why we need journalists on battlefields and war zones. They are the places most susceptible to breaches of international laws — humanitarian or otherwise. Long gone are the times when history was exclusively "written by victors". Nowadays, with the advances in technology, every citizen with a mobile phone can effectively play the role of a journalist and undermine the narratives of the supposed victors by increasing transparency that hopefully will result in increased accountability. But since journalists are professionally trained to gate-keep against fake or unverifiable news and more connected to means of general broadcasting, their continued presence is crucial.

The number of media workers killed by Israel in approximately three months exceeds the total count of journalists (69) killed throughout the entire six-year span of World War II.

### How are war correspondents protected?

What has been done to protect reporters that work in the most dangerous places on earth to provide an essential service to the public? Very little, arguably. The myth that wearing a vest and helmet with the word 'PRESS' written on it makes a reporter immune to harm has to be debunked for everyone.

War correspondents are "protected" by the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their additional protocols. Now, what does this loose term of 'protection' entail? Under Articles 79.2 and 51.3 of Protocol I, journalists enjoy the protection afforded by international humanitarian law, provided that they do not take a direct part in the hostilities. So much is common sense. It's extremely unprofessional, to say the least, and foolhardy for a war correspondent to make an aggressive move toward any warring party.

According to the Commentary of Article 51.3, "direct participation in the hostilities" means "acts of war, which by their nature or purpose are likely to cause actual harm to the personnel and equipment of the enemy armed forces." The words "actual harm" make an important distinction, the willful neglect of which, as we will see, is the basis of many arguments for harming war correspondents. Even if a journalist engages in propagan-



▶ Palestine TV correspondent Salman Al-Bashir (R) removes his protective flak jacket and helmet during his reporting from Nasser Hospital in the southern Gaza Strip on November 2, 2023, after learning of colleague's death live on-air.  
● PALESTINE TV/AP

da — which, by the way, is not a crime and not something that can be ascertained unilaterally — it cannot be considered di-

rect participation. "It is only when a journalist takes a direct part in the hostilities that he loses his immunity and becomes

a legitimate target," the French Attorney Alexandre Balguy-Gallois writes. Under the law, journalists of all kinds are

civilians. Civilians do enjoy target immunity at the very least, meaning they cannot be directly attacked unless they take a direct part in hostilities. So, directly targeting journalists "constitutes a grave breach of the Geneva Conventions (of 1949) and Additional Protocol 1". Moreover, intentionally directing an attack against a civilian, including journalists and media personnel, "amounts to a war crime under the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court".

The only difference between 'war correspondents' and other journalists and civilians is that if captured, they enjoy a prisoner-of-war status, "provided that they have received authorization from the armed forces which they accompany, who shall provide them for that purpose with an identity card". This narrows the scope of protections to include only certain journalists; others are just considered civilians. Having a prisoner-of-war status means that they must be released at the end of the hostilities, may mail a 'capture card' to their family from detention, and the detaining power must inform the state of which the correspondent is a citizen, and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) of the detention, according to NewStraitTimes. You will find that this does not account to much if you get detained for the unforeseeable future, but it's at least something.

### Israel's targeting of journalists in Gaza

Now, this wouldn't be a discussion if journalists were not directly targeted in war zones ever, but astute readers would probably guess that this is not the case. The warring parties understandably deny that such attacks were deliberate, but many facts falsify those denials. The bombing of the Serbian state radio and television building in Belgrade by North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) forces in 1999, and the United States targeting of Al Jazeera offices in Kabul in 2001, and in Baghdad in 2003, were previous examples of direct attacks on the media. (As an aside, see if you can find a common perpetrator.)

The unfortunate events that inspired the writing of this piece were the unprecedented killings of 109 journalists (at the time of writing) in the Gaza Strip during the recent Israeli airstrikes and ground assaults that commenced in response to Hamas's surprise attack on October 7, 2023. While there's a substantial case to be made about Israel's use of AI, dumb bombs, and inhumane tactics of denying access to water, food, fuel, and electricity to maximize civilian casualties in Gaza, there's another case to be made about why this war has had the highest death toll of media workers in any recent conflict, and it's not even over yet.

First, the facts and figures. The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) — an American independent non-profit, non-governmental organization — has accused the Israeli military of targeting journalists and their families in Gaza. The New York-based CPJ said at least 68 journalists and other media workers had been killed in Gaza, Israel, and southern Lebanon since October 7, and the subsequent Israeli assault, the Guardian reported. By December 21, 2023, 61 of the journalists killed were Palestinian and three Lebanese. In addition, four Israeli journalists were among the people killed by Hamas in the October attack.

"More journalists have been killed in the first 10 weeks of the Israel-Gaza war than have ever been killed in a single country over an entire year," it said. For that matter, the number of media workers killed by Israel in approximately three months exceeds the total count of journalists (69) killed throughout the entire six-year span of World War II, according to the Freedom Forum. Let's see how the Israeli army pulled off this terrible feat.

Earlier this month, an Al Jazeera cameraman, Samir Abudaqa, was wounded in a drone strike and trapped in a UN school. When people attempted to rescue Abudaqa and take him for treatment, they too were shot. He died of his injuries several hours later.

"In at least one case, a journalist was killed while clearly wearing press insignia in a location where no fighting was taking place. In at least two other cases, journalists reported receiving threats from Israeli officials and Israel Defense Forces officers before their family members were killed," according to the CPJ. The non-profit also said there was a "pattern of journalists in Gaza reporting receiving threats, and subsequently, their family members being killed." It said the 90-year-old father of the Al Jazeera journalist Anas al-Sharif was killed by an Israeli airstrike on his home after multiple threats were made to his son. "The journalist told Al Jazeera that he had received multiple phone calls from officers in the Israeli army instructing him to cease coverage and leave northern Gaza. Additionally, he received voice notes on WhatsApp disclosing his location," it said.

another. Since 7 October, the Palestinian territory has been subjected to a veritable eradication of journalism," it said. The Paris-based NGO said December 22 that it has filed a second complaint with the International Criminal Court (ICC) on seven Palestinian journalists killed in Gaza from October 22 to December 15, according to Anadolu Agency. The "RSF has reasonable grounds to believe that the journalists named in this complaint were the victims of attacks amounting to war crimes," it said. The non-profit added the "journalists may have been deliberately targeted as journalists," which is why it is describing these deaths as "intentional homicides of civilians." Its first war crimes complaint since October 7 was filed with the ICC on October 31, and concerned the deaths of seven other journalists. Human Rights Watch and other groups found that an IDF attack that killed Re-

ist and the eldest son of Wael Dahdouh, the face of Al Jazeera's 24-hour coverage of this war. Witnesses told the AFP news agency that two rockets were fired at a car carrying the reporters — one hit the front of the vehicle and the other hit Hamza Dahdouh, who was sitting next to the driver.

"Last year, we had the killing of Shireen Abu Akleh, the Al Jazeera journalist who was a US citizen, and again we've really seen no accountability. She was killed in

ally the ones that the public looks up to in order to hold powerful figures and organizations accountable, are now calling for accountability for the arguably established pattern of the Israeli army threatening and then killing their colleagues, or worse, their family members.

Israel is picking off our sources of information on what is happening in Gaza, and why? As we've established in length, it's not because they pose any harm to its army. It's not because they report mislead-



▶ Al-Jazeera correspondent Wael Dahdouh (C) mourns his wife, son, daughter, and grandson, killed in an Israeli airstrike on Nuisserat refugee camp on October 26, 2023. Dahdouh's eldest son, a photojournalist, was also killed in an Israeli air strike on January 7, 2024.  
● ALI MAHMOUD/AP

Reporters Without Borders (RSF) has warned that "journalism is in the process of being eradicated in the Gaza Strip as a result of Israel's refusal to heed calls to protect media personnel". "Reporters there have no safe refuge and no way of leaving. They are being killed one after

others journalists Issam Abdallah and injured six others in southern Lebanon was probably a deliberate assault by the IDF on civilians.

Al Jazeera has accused Israel of the targeted killing of two of its journalists in Gaza, one of whom was a photojournal-

what seems to have been a targeted attack because she was shot in the neck between her helmet and her press jacket," Jodie Ginsberg, the CPJ president, maintained.

Ginsberg's use of the word "accountability" was perfect. Journalists, who are usu-



▶ The photo shows the funeral ceremony held for Palestinian journalists Saeed al-Taweel and Mohammad Sobh, who were killed in Israeli airstrikes while filming the targeting of a residential building by Israeli warplanes in Rimal district, in Gaza on October 10, 2023.  
● ASHRAF AMRA/ANADOLU

ing or false information. It's not because the IDF is exclusively targeting Hamas and those journalists were simply at the wrong place at the wrong time. In fact, if you look at the pattern of threats to their lives, you can claim that it's because they were at the right place at the right time.

Israel is killing journalists because they are making dangerous pieces of information about the horrendous state of the streets of Gaza available for the world. It can be argued that for Israel, removing journalists has a higher value than eradicating Hamas, which admittedly seems unlikely in the coming months. With the chess piece of independent journalists on the board, Israel can't ideally go for any other piece except for Hamas lest it risks international backlash; but with journalists gone, the truth is whatever Israel says it is. The transparency that these journalists are promoting by doing their jobs will make it hard for Israel to escape responsibility for its actions. No warring party in modern history has killed so many journalists over such a short time because no warring party in modern history had so much to hide and to lose in public opinion.

## Brazil has 'an obligation' to win again, new coach Dorival says



● AFP

ESPN – New Brazil coach Dorival Júnior has declared the national team has an “obligation” to win again. Dorival, 61, signed a contract on Thursday with the Brazil Football Confederation (CBF) through the 2026 World Cup.

“I am here today representing the winningest team on the planet, the one that inspires many around the world,” Dorival said at his unveiling.

“And it has an obligation to win again. Brazilian football is very strong, it reinvents itself. We can’t go through the moment we’re going through. We learned the way to victory from Brazilian football. And we need to find that moment again. What we need from now on is to look for solutions.”

Dorival joins the national team following the sacking of Fernando Diniz and after preferred choice Carlo Ancelotti turned down the job, choosing to extend his contract with Real Madrid. Under Diniz, Brazil won only two and lost three of their six World Cup qualifiers.

The five-time world champions are sixth in the South American World Cup qualifying standings.

“It’s a difficult moment,” Dorival said. “But it’s nothing that cannot be reversed quickly. I’m counting on all of you, so that Brazilian football can return to have great momentum.”

“We need to deliver a reliable national team, which gives credibility to all of us. We have to play great games again. We all need to understand a little more what this national team represents. Above all, let each one take on a little more responsibility when called upon.”

Dorival stepped down from São Paulo earlier this week to take the national team reins.

He had led Flamengo to the Copa Libertadores title and the Brazilian Cup in 2022 before joining São Paulo.

“I have the president’s trust to do my job from now on, prepare the team, win games and reach a World Cup that will be hard-fought,” Dorival said.

“I will work in this direction, I prepared a lot to be here. I have a strong conviction that the Brazilian team will achieve its goals.”

Dorival has called for everyone to play a part.

“I’m here to make the first call: to the Brazilian fans,” he said. “May they believe more in the team, may they live the team more. From now on it’s not Dorival’s team, it’s the Brazilian people’s team.”

# Zagreb Open Ranking Series: Azarpira stuns Snyder; no superheavyweight surprise as Zare’ dominates

Sports Desk

Iranian wrestling’s rising star Amir-Ali Azarpira showcased his resolve to go all the way to book a place at the Paris Olympics by coming from behind to beat American great Kyle Snyder 6-3 for the freestyle 97kg gold in the Zagreb Open Ranking Series.

Reigning world champion

Amirhossein Zare’ picked up where he left off last year as he walked away with an easy 5-0 victory over fellow-Iranian Amir-Reza Ma’soumi – national gold winner in December – in the 125kg final, which settled the country’s superheavyweight berth for the Games in the French capital. Walking into Thursday’s final on the back of double tech-

nical-superiority wins, Zare’ proved to be in a league of his own in the weight class and remains the ultimate favorite to grab the gold in Paris. This was Iran’s third gold in Zagreb following Mohammad Nokhodi’s triumph in the non-Olympic 79kg contests, thanks to a 6-0 victory over Georgian Avtandil Kentchadze. The two-time world silver

medalist stepped into the final after a grueling semifinal against American Evan Wick, in which he gave away a six-point lead but still managed to win on point criteria. The Iranian scored six points in the first period against Kentchadze and then held off the Georgian’s desperate attacks after the interval to take the gold.



Iran’s Amir-Ali Azarpira (blue) celebrates his victory over American Kyle Snyder in the freestyle 97kg final at the Zagreb Open Ranking Series in Zagreb, Croatia, on January 11, 2024.

● UWW

### Game-changing victory

All the Iranian eyes were on the 97kg contests in Zagreb, where Kamran Qasempour, looking to add the Olympic glory to his double world 92kg golds, made a first appearance on the mat since the Freestyle World Cup in December 2022, in which he suffered a comprehensive defeat against Snyder in his sole 97kg outing prior to the Zagreb Open before a groin injury kept him out of last September’s World Cham-

pionships as well as the Hangzhou Asian Games. Qasempour had an easy job against opponents from China and Turkey to reach the semifinals on Thursday but was given a reality check by the four-time world and Olympic gold winner Snyder, suffering a 4-0 defeat. Awaiting Snyder in the final showdown was the former world under-23 champion Aazarpira, in a repeat of last year’s showdown in Zagreb, which the American

had won 3-0. Snyder looked to be on his way to another victory over Azarpira when he scored an early takedown in the second period to take a three-point lead but the young Iranian had other ideas. “I had already thought about the final,” Azarpira said after the final, adding: “I had practiced with the other guys [on the Iran team] for a long time to prepare for this competition. I had lost to Snyder last year in the final but this year,

I was confident that I could defeat him.” Azarpira reduced the deficit with a takedown and added a stepout, which Snyder challenged but lost. With just over a minute remaining, the American came close to retaking the lead twice but saw his stepout attempts well defended by Azarpira, who sealed the victory with another late takedown. “I was three points behind but I didn’t lose my focus because I

## With Gaza in their hearts, Palestinian squad seek first win at Asian Cup

REUTERS – The Palestinian squad at the Asian Cup in Qatar hope to bring honour to their compatriots in the war-ravaged Gaza Strip with their first victory at the tournament since the team’s debut in 2015. Israel has killed more than 23,000 people in its more than three-month-old offensive, according to Palestinian health authorities in the Hamas-ruled enclave. “For us, the message we are here to deliver through football is to qualify for the second round because Palestine and its people want to live. This is what we can offer,” midfielder Oday Kharoub told Reuters on Thursday. The 26-member squad play Asian powerhouse Iran on Sunday followed by the United Arab Emirates and Hong Kong, hoping to advance to the knockout stage.

Kharoub said it has been difficult for players, especially those with families in Gaza, to focus

on training when their eyes are glued to the news between sessions, keenly following what is happening back home. “Our hearts are with them and we can only pray for them,” Kharoub said. “Inshallah, we can make them happy, even if it’s just a little bit, by qualifying for the next round. This is our ambition.” Defender Mousa Farawi said they have steeled themselves to play in high spirits despite the situation in Gaza. “The group we have is really special, so we hope for God to give us good fortune and give each player the bravery to deliver on a high level. I see Palestine in the second round, God willing.” Defender Yaser Hamed said: “The whole team is motivated with what’s happening in Palestine, it’s a difficult time for all families. But we’re professional players, we should keep it up the same way as we’ve been work-



● THAIER AL-SUDANI/REUTERS

ing in the last few weeks.” Israel were once Asian Cup champions when they hosted

the tournament in 1964. But amid political tension and boycotts by Middle East nations,

Israel made the switch to European confederation UEFA in 1994.

had a plan,” Azarpira said. “I knew that even if I was six points behind, I could win it. I came here with high confidence and knew I was going to win the gold.”

The massive triumph gave Azarpira a domestic edge over Qasempour in the quest for an Olympic quota, while it also came as a relief for the young wrestler after a forgettable World Championships.

Having been called up late to replace injured Qasempour in Belgrade, Azarpira struggled in the 92kg class and was knocked out by American Zahid Valencia to finish eighth.

“I’ve been wrestling at the 97kg class for three to four years and I fit in this weight,” he said.

“The Iranian technical staff decided that I had to participate at the 92kg contests at the world event but, given the weight loss that I had and the lack of preparation, I wasn’t at my best [in Belgrade].” Azarpira will now have his sights set on April’s Asian Olympic Qualifiers in Bishkek, where another gold-winning campaign will all but punch his ticket for Paris.

“The 97kg class is arguably the toughest in the world and Olympic events but I have high hopes to succeed.”

Qasempour, meanwhile, left Zagreb with a consolation bronze – courtesy of a 3-1 victory over Turkey’s Erhan Yaylaci – but will face a daunting task in chasing his Olympic dream.

Elsewhere in Zagreb, Rahman Amouzad did well to bounce back from a below-par run in 2023 to reach the 65kg final with four technical fall victories – including a 12-4 triumph over Abbas Ebrahimzadeh in an all-Iranian semifinal – but had to pull out of the showpiece against Armenian Vazgen Tevanyan through injury and settled for silver.

Ebrahimzadeh bounced back from the last-four setback with a 10-0 win against Turkey’s Abdullah Toprak in the bronze medal bout. In the 74kg event, Hossein Abouzari was the second best against American Jason M. Nolf, falling to a 10-1 loss in the final, while two-time world bronze medalist Younes Emami – beaten by Abouzari in the semis – was ruled out of the repechage bout due to an injury.



A warplane takes off from RAF Akrotiri Airbase in Cyprus to join US-led airstrikes against targets in Yemen on January 12, 2024. ● REUTERS

# Yemen brushes off US, UK raids

## Houthi vow to continue attacks on Israel-bound ships

### International Desk

Yemen's Ansarallah movement on Friday vowed to continue attacks against Israel-bound ships in the Red Sea despite strikes by US and British forces on the Arab country.

Early on Friday, the US and Britain launched military strikes on Yemen in response to Ansarallah's attacks on Israeli-bound ships in the Red Sea in recent weeks.

US officials said targets included logistical hubs, air defense systems, and weapons storage locations. US media reported that the strikes involved fighter jets and Tomahawk missiles.

The overnight strikes followed weeks of missile and drone attacks by Yemen on Israeli-bound ships in the Red Sea in solidarity with Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, which has been under Israel's deadly bombardment in recent months.

"Yemen was subjected to a blatant US-British aggression to protect Israel and to stop Yemen's operations in support of Gaza," Ansar-

allah's spokesman Mohammed Abdulsalam wrote on X.

"They committed foolishness with this treacherous aggression, and they were wrong if they thought that they would deter Yemen from supporting Palestine and Gaza," he said, adding that the movement will continue its attacks on Israeli ships and those heading to Israel's ports.

### No justification for strikes

He said there was no justification for the strikes on Yemen because its actions do not threaten international shipping.

Yahya Saree, spokesperson for the Ansarallah movement, said the US and UK bear full responsibility for "criminal aggression" against the Yemeni people and their attacks will not go unanswered or unpunished. Saree said in a statement that the US and UK targeted the capital, Sana'a, and the governorates of Hodeida, Taiz, Hajjah, and Saada, killing five individuals and wounding six others.

### Condemnations

The strikes on Yemen drew condemnations from many countries in the Middle East, including some US allies. Iran on Friday lambasted the strikes, saying that the attacks were "arbitrary" and a "violation" of international law.

Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Nasser Kanaani said in a statement strongly condemning the attacks, saying that the strikes were "an arbitrary action, a clear violation of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Yemen, and a violation of international laws and regulations".

Kanaani warned that the attacks "will have no result other than fueling insecurity and instability in the region" as well as "diverting the world's attention from the crimes" in Gaza, where Israel has launched brutal attacks on the Palestinians since October 7.

### Turning Red Sea into 'bloodbath'

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said the US and British strikes were

"disproportionate," alleging the US and Britain wanted to turn the Red Sea into a "bloodbath".

"First of all, they are not proportional. All of these constitute disproportionate use of force," Erdogan told journalists after Friday prayers in Istanbul.

"It is as if they aspire to turn the Red Sea into a bloodbath."

### Risk of escalating conflict

Oman also condemned the attacks, warning of the risk of escalating conflict in the region.

"Oman has warned several times about the risk of the extension of the conflict in the region due to the ongoing Israeli aggression against the Palestinian territories," Oman's Foreign Ministry spokesman said.

Kuwait's Foreign Ministry also expressed "great concern" about the strikes, echoing the view of Yemen's neighbor Saudi Arabia. The kingdom voiced its own concern after the UK and US military action, calling for "self-restraint and avoiding

escalation".

Hamas resistance group in Gaza warned of "repercussions" following the attacks. "We vigorously condemn the flagrant American-British attack on Yemen. We hold them responsible for the repercussions on regional security," Hamas said on Telegram.

### 'Illegitimate' strikes

The Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov condemned the "illegitimate" strikes by the United States and Britain on Yemen.

"From the point of view of international law, they are illegitimate," he added.

### 'United, resolute' response

However, US President Joseph Biden defended the strikes, saying that they represented a "united and resolute" response to Ansarallah's attacks on international ships and that the US would "not hesitate to direct further measures" against Yemen.

In a statement released by the White House, Biden said the US and UK strikes were

carried out with support from Australia, Bahrain, Canada, and the Netherlands.

In a separate statement, British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak also confirmed the strikes, saying the UK took "limited, necessary and proportionate action in self-defense" in order to degrade Ansarallah military capabilities and protect global shipping.

The Ansarallah resistance movement has said it is targeting Israeli-linked vessels in support of Palestinians in Gaza. It says its attacks aim to end the pounding Israeli air-and-ground offensive targeting the Gaza Strip.

The Red Sea links the Middle East and Asia to Europe via the Suez Canal, and its narrow Bab el-Mandeb Strait. The strait is only 29 kilometers wide at its narrowest point, limiting traffic to two channels for inbound and outbound shipments, according to the US Energy Information Administration. About 10% of all oil traded at sea passes through it and an estimated \$1 trillion in goods pass through the strait annually.

## Israel accused of 'incontrovertible' intent to commit genocide in Gaza at ICJ

South Africa accused Israel of "chilling" and "incontrovertible" intent to commit genocide in Gaza on the opening day of a landmark case before the UN's top court at The Hague.

Calling on the International Court of Justice (ICJ) to order Israel to cease military operations in Gaza, lawyers for South Africa said that Israel has gone beyond its intention to eradicate Hamas and is aiming to bring about the "destruction" of the besieged territory's population. Israel was accused of breaching the UN Genocide Convention, with lawyers saying that even the October 7 attack by Hamas on the occupied territories – during which around 1,200 people were killed – could not justify such actions, according to The Independ-

ent newspaper. South Africa's Justice Minister, Ronald Lamola, opened Thursday's session saying that Israel has "crossed the line" with its bombardment of Gaza, with health officials in the Palestinian territory putting the death toll at over 23,700 people. "The intent to destroy Gaza has been nurtured at the highest level of state," Tembeka Ngcukaitobi, advocate of the High Court of South Africa, told the court. "The evidence of genocidal intent is not only chilling, it is also overwhelming and incontrovertible," Ngcukaitobi said.

Israel said Friday it was not seeking to destroy the Palestinian people, as it hit back at what it called a "profoundly distorted" and "malevolent" genocide case against it.

Tal Becker, a top lawyer representing Israel, said South Africa had "regrettably put before the court a profoundly distorted factual and legal picture".

### Destruction of Palestinian life

Lawyers for South Africa told the court that Israel's military response to Hamas attack has gone beyond what is reasonable. "This killing is nothing short of destruction of Palestinian life," Adila Hassim, a South African lawyer and member of the delegation, said. "It is inflicted deliberately. No one is spared. Not even newborn babies." Post-apartheid South Africa has long defended the Palestinian cause. Although the court's findings are considered binding on parties, including both

South Africa and Israel, the court has no way to enforce them.

The court is expected to rule on possible emergency measures to halt Israel's military activities in Gaza later this month, although it will not rule at that time on the genocide allegations. Those proceedings could take years.

In an 84-page filing to the ICJ, South Africa argued that Israel is committing genocide by killing Palestinians in Gaza, causing serious mental and bodily harm, forced evacuation, widespread hunger, and by creating conditions "calculated to bring about their physical destruction." It also accused Israel of failing to stem incitement to genocide in the public pronouncements of its officials.



### Record daily death toll

The Health Ministry in Gaza said Friday at least 23,708 have been killed in the territory in nearly 100 days of Israel's onslaught.

The charity Oxfam International said on Thursday that the daily death toll in Gaza was higher than any other major conflict this century. Oxfam's Sally Abi Khalil said it is "unimaginable" that the international community stands by as the killing unfolds.

Israeli strikes killed at least 59 people in Gaza overnight Thursday-Friday.



South Africa's Ambassador to the Netherlands Vusumuzi Madonsela (R) and the country's Justice Minister Ronald Lamola (2nd R) attend the hearings in South Africa's genocide case against Israel at the International Court of Justice at The Hague, the Netherlands, on January 11, 2024.

● SELMAN AKSUNGER/ANADOLU AGENCY

## A historic opening to stop Israeli genocide

By Mehdi Shakibaei  
Expert on Israeli affairs

### OPINION EXCLUSIVE

South Africa has filed a case against Israel at the International Court of Justice (ICJ), accusing it of crimes of genocide against Palestinians in Gaza. While many states and peoples from around the world have voiced their support of the move, some including Washington have condemned Pretoria.

South Africa may be the most perfect country to make such a case since its people have suffered immense harm under the apartheid regime as a result of its racist policies and massacres. What has made them a global role model for resisting discrimination and massacre is the laudable fight that South Africans put up against the oppression of their ruling white class under the leadership of the late Nelson Mandela.

Now, their proven track record in overthrowing an apartheid regime is coming to the aid of Palestinians who have been oppressed for decades. In the last three months, Israel has committed war crimes and genocide against Palestinians. Although the evidence of this atrocity has been readily available to everyone, South Africa's lawyers in this trial made sure to cite the tangible instances of Israel's genocidal acts. After all, killing more than 23,000 people in Gaza, two-thirds of whom were women and children, is not something that can easily be swept under the rug.

The same longing for bringing Israel to justice was expected from many European and Islamic countries, but the former group is too politically tied to Israel to do anything and the latter group do not have the jurisdiction to prosecute it. Now that South Africa has courageously stepped forward, it's only fair that these countries show the same level of enthusiasm that their peoples have shown in supporting Palestinians. It's no secret that an Israeli prime minister, whose days in office are numbered, is spearheading this genocide, as everyone including his staunchest allies are already criticizing him and planning to replace him with his leftist or centrist alternatives after the war is over.

This goes to show that the people of any country that is currently going through a period of tyranny and discrimination can take advantage of South Africa's lived experience of successfully toppling an apartheid regime. But more than that, the ICJ genocide trial presents itself as a historic opportunity to challenge Israel and its allies and stop their genocidal war machine in its tracks.

## Iran identifies 1,200 donors of rare blood types



### Social Desk

Iran identified 1,200 donors of rare blood types, making it the first Muslim country to join the International Rare Donor Panel, the Iranian Blood Transfusion Organization (IBTO) said on Thursday. IBTO's Deputy for Technical and Innovative Technologies, Ebadollah Salekmoqaddam, speaking on the National Rare Blood Day, said that Iran had successfully registered 354 units of rare frozen blood, stored at a chilling -80 degrees Celsius, reserved for emergency injections to patients in need, IRNA reported.

Out of around 40,000 nationwide blood donors examined, 1,200 have been recognized as donors of rare blood type, comprising 95% men and 5% women, Salekmoqaddam added.

"If a person's blood group is found in only one to five individuals per thousand, it is considered rare. If it is not found in a population of 5,000 or more, it is considered extremely rare," he said.

Iran becomes the 16th country to join the 27 nations capable of technologically and scientifically distinguishing rare blood types.

Regarding the process of rare blood supply and maintenance, Salekmoqaddam said that after identifying individuals with rare blood type, their donated blood would undergo special preparation methods.

"Preservatives are added, and the blood is stored at -80 degrees Celsius to be readily available for patients in need."

Currently, 100 units of extremely rare blood types are stored in the IBTO's rare blood bank, with 170 donors identified.

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Amirhadi Arsalanpour  
Leila Imeni  
Hamideh Hosseini  
Ali Mehran

Address: 208, Khorramshahr Ave., Tehran, Iran

- Editorial Dept. Tel: +98 21 84711171
- ICPI Publisher: +98 21 88548892-5
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# Shiraz designated as Asian Capital of Environment in 2024



### Arts & Culture Desk

Asian Mayors Forum (AMF) has designated the Iranian city of Shiraz in southern Iran as the Asian Capital of the Environment in 2024. The decision was announced

by the AMF, which is an international non-governmental organization that seeks to expand and exalt relations and cooperation between mayors and city managers in Asia.

Eram Garden, Afif-Abad Gar-

den, Tomb of Hafez, Tomb of Sa'di, Jaame Mosque of Atiq, and Persepolis are among the historical, cultural, and ancient sites of Shiraz that are of interest to domestic and foreign tourists.

In addition, the AMF also

picked Hamedan as the Asian Capital of Tourism in 2024, Press TV reported.

Hamedan's Mayor Masoud Hosseini, while announcing the news at a press conference, hailed the efforts made by the Hamedan City Council

to introduce the city's tourism potential to the world. He also praised activities undertaken by the city's Municipal Tourism Headquarters in urban tourism, saying that the center has so far taken significant steps toward introducing the city's tourism potential.

Hosseini also expressed hope that with the close cooperation of the Hamedan Municipality and the AMF, the city can introduce its tourism capacities better than before.

Believed to be among the oldest Iranian cities, Hamedan is the capital city of an eponymous province in western Iran, offering an enormous wealth of tourist attractions, including Ali-Sadr Cave, Tomb of Abu Ali Sina, Ganjnameh Ancient Inscriptions, and Alaviyan Dome, which guarantee a rewarding visit.

Mohammad Javad Zarei, the director of Communications and International Affairs of Hamedan Municipality, said the AMF also picked the city of Ghoheiry in Lebanon as the Cultural Capital of Asia for the year 2024.

## Palestine to be highlighted in Fajr Int'l Film Festival

### Arts & Culture Desk

The 42nd Fajr International Film Festival (FIFF) is set to highlight the talents of filmmakers from around the globe, with a total of 621 films submitted by 87 countries. According to the festival's secretary, this year's In-

ternational Section features a diverse selection of films.

In a recent interview on the "Film Critique" program, Mojtaba Amini discussed the festival's unique features, emphasizing the significant participation from various nations, IRNA reported.

He noted that in response to the injustices posed by Israel and support for the Palestinian people, a special section will be dedicated to Palestine, catering to the concerns of filmmakers worldwide. Amini expressed satisfaction with the widespread interest in the National



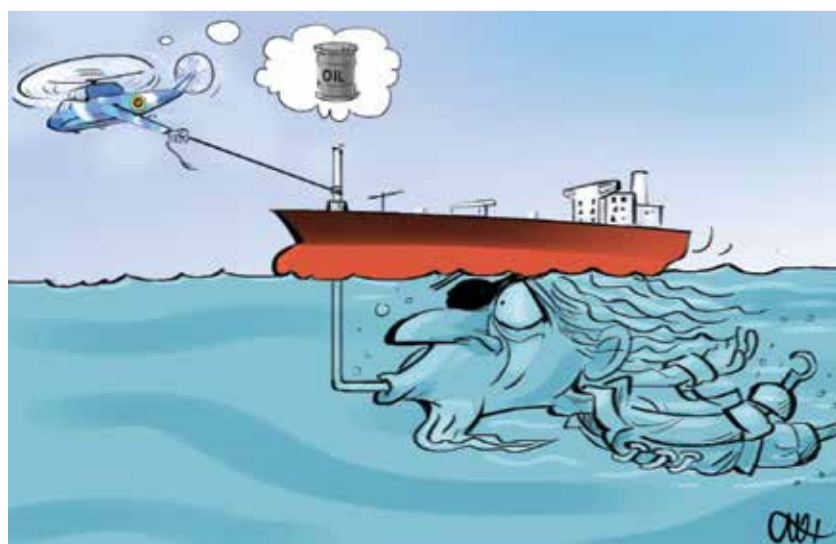
Section, revealing that 106 films have registered this year, indicating an increase in film production. Despite the challenges posed by the pandemic in recent years, this edition

of the festival has witnessed a coordinated effort between the government and private sectors to boost film production. The festival's president also explained the selec-

tion process, saying that out of 106 entries, 51 are debut films, indicating the possibility of discovering new talents in the days to come.

Acknowledging the difficulty in the selection process, Amini assured audiences that this year's jury faced a tough task, and the festival promises to showcase outstanding works. Amini concluded by announcing the reintroduction of the New Perspective Section and the inclusion of four animated films that bring good news for families, particularly in the children and adolescent categories.

Mohammad Ali Rajabi  
Cartoonist



## Cultural relics show ancient Iran's glory at Beijing Palace Museum

An exhibition titled "The glory of the ancient Persia: Exhibition of Iranian cultural relics" has opened at the Beijing Palace Museum in China in a ceremony attended by Iran's Deputy Tourism Minister Ali Darabi, Iranian Ambassador to China Mohsen Bakhtiar, and Chairman of the National Cultural Heritage Administration of China Li Chun. Running from January 12 to April 11, 2024, the exhibition showcases 216 cultural relics from various Iranian museums, offering

a glimpse into the artful charm of ancient Iran.

The artifacts demonstrate the country's rich history and its role as a hub for East-West cultural exchanges, China Daily reported. The event aims not only to introduce the cultural heritage of Iran but also to encourage Chinese tourists to visit the country. Recognizing the impact of exhibitions on attracting foreign tourists, the display from Iran's National Museum in China seeks to enhance cultural under-

standing and foster tourism between the two nations.

