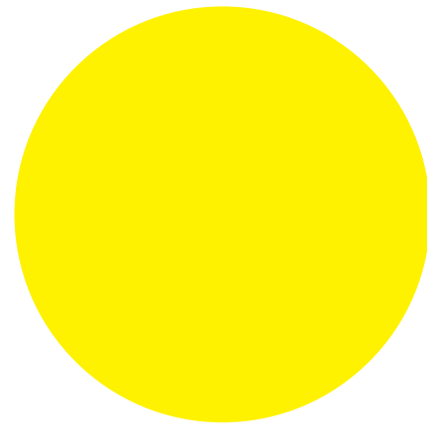


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US President Joe Biden speaks to the press as he departs from the South Lawn of the White House in Washington, D.C., on January 13, 2024. **ANDREW CABALLERO-REYNOLDS/AFP**



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Iranian Leader's representative in SNSC

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CBI to implement monetary pacts with Afghanistan, Russia



The deputy governor of the Central Bank of Iran (CBI) for international affairs said the ground has been paved for the exchange of goods using the Iranian rial with Afghanistan and Russia, which have signed bilateral monetary pacts with Iran. Given that Iranian businesspersons have to exchange goods with the currencies of other countries, in dollars and euros, for imports and exports and face problems in the currency rate fluctuations, suitable ways have been created to gradually expand transactions using rials, Mohsen Karimi stated, reported Tasnim news agency.

He pointed to the 'offshore rial' initiative, which has recently been launched by the CBI, and said it paves the way for traders to do their business in rials instead of other currencies. In most countries, exporters are duty bound to provide currency for their countries. For this reason, exporters in some countries including Iran are committed to returning the currency to the country which is called a 'currency pact', he said, adding, "As long as exporters carry out their export activities using rial, they will not face any problem in this respect."

Afghanistan and Russia have signed bilateral monetary pacts with Iran, he said, expressing hope that the necessary platforms will be paved for importing and exporting goods with neighboring Iraq in rial as well.

Earlier, Karimi said that the offshore rial will become operational within the next few months to help economic activists of the country do their transactions with any country in the national currency. The feasibility studies for the launch of this plan started six months ago and it is hoped that this comprehensive plan will become operational within the next few months, the deputy CBI added.

In November, the governor of CBI announced the sidelining of the US dollar in trade-economic exchanges between Tehran and Damascus.

In a meeting with Syrian Prime Minister Hussein Arnous in Damascus, Mohammadreza Farzin pointed to the development of banking and monetary relations between the two countries and emphasized the removal of the American Greenback in mutual trade.

Raisi briefed on measures aimed at boosting manufacturing sector



Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi was briefed on measures for boosting the production sector in a meeting with his economic deputies and ministers on Saturday. Assessing the latest situation of agricultural, industrial and mining production units, the president called for taking the necessary measures to continue promoting production as well as improving the production units, wrote president.ir. In the meeting, the ministers and vice presidents presented reports on measures taken to meet the needs and solve the problems of various production sectors. It was also decided to strengthen coordination between ministries and other state-run bodies in order to make maximum use of the existing capacities along with meeting the financial and energy needs of these units in the remaining months of the current Iranian year.

Iran to invest \$275b in developing oil, gas fields by 2041: NIOC



Iran will invest about \$275 billion by 2041 for the development of its oil and gas fields, announced the deputy head of the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) for planning.

Speaking at the First Conference of Managers of the National Iranian Oil Company, Ahmad Rajabi stated that strategic plans have been defined and are on the agenda of the NIOC and the Ministry of Oil for increasing the production of crude oil and gas, Shana reported. He said there are plans to raise the country's oil production to 5.5 million barrels of oil per day (bpd) by 2031, with a total investment of about \$150 billion. Also, the production volume of raw natural gas is planned to increase to 1.5 billion cubic meters in 2031, with a total investment of about \$125 billion, he noted. The official pointed to the investment activities in the oil sector and also the increase of oil production in the current year and next year, and predicted that Iran's oil production volume will reach 3.6 million bpd by the end of the current year (to end March 19, 2024) if about \$600 million is invested in this sector."

With steps taken in the administration of President Ebrahim Raisi in the oil and gas sectors, the oil production volume rose from about 2.1 million bpd to about 3.4 million in two years, the NIOC manager added.

Iran's nine-month exports of aquatics tops 100k tons

Iran exported 102,352 tons of fishery products worth \$228.332 million in the first nine months of the current Iranian year (March 21-December 21, 2023), announced the spokesman of the International Relations and Trade Promotion Committee of Iran's House of Industry, Mine and Trade.

According to Rouhollah Latifi, the country exported 328 tons of ornamental fish, 14,036 tons of carp, 10,765 tons of trout, 349 tons of halwa fish and 5,672 tons of flounder in the above-mentioned nine months, IRIB reported.

Iran's aquaculture industry is on a wave of progress and has world ranking in the production of some fishery products. According to the head of the Iran Fisheries Organization (IFO), the country exported \$600 million worth of fishery products in the previous Iranian year.

Announcing a positive balance of \$520 million in the previous year, Hossein Hosseini said that there is a capacity of up to \$2 billion in exports for the country's fishery industry. It is worth mentioning that the growth and development of Iran's aquaculture industry has reached a point where the country has become a model for the countries of the region and the world.

The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) believes that Iran plays a pivotal role in the fishing and aquaculture industry in the region, so, for this reason, it can be considered a model for the countries of the region.



China's 2023 oil imports hit record



China's annual crude oil imports hit an all-time high in 2023, customs data showed, as fuel demand recovered from a pandemic-induced slump despite economic headwinds. China imported 11% more crude oil last year versus 2022 at 563.99 million metric tons, equivalent to 11.28 million barrels per day (bpd), up from a previous record of 10.81 million bpd in 2020, data from the General Administration of Customs showed, Reuters reported. Imports in December totalled 48.36 million tons, or 11.39 million bpd, up from November's 10.33 million bpd. Domestic passenger transport levels increased steadily through 2023 following the country's abrupt exit from pandemic restrictions in Novem-

ber 2022. China's highway traffic for 2023 jumped 43.6% from the previous year in passenger kilometres for the January to November period, according to Ministry of Transport data.

Domestic air traffic also recovered rapidly, rising 27% on the previous year to reach a new record in December, according to data from aviation analytics firm OAG. International travel saw a more muted recovery, with December flight volumes still down 39% on the same month in 2019, shortly before borders were closed. Domestic diesel demand was weaker amid an on-going slowdown in the construction sector and an uncertain outlook for the manufacturing sector. China's oil demand growth has been forecast by ana-

lysts to slow to around 4% in the first half of 2024 due to the country's property market woes, although moderating growth in domestic output will continue to support import levels.

The primary drivers for oil imports in 2024 are expected to be aviation demand for kerosene and demand in the petrochemical sector for high-end chemical products used in the manufacture of key goods such as solar panels and electric vehicles. China's demand for naphtha, a key feedstock for petrochemicals, is forecast by the International Energy Agency to grow 13.3% through this year. Customs data also showed China's natural gas imports, comprising both liquefied natural gas (LNG) and piped gas, rose 9.9%

to reach 119.97 million tons in 2023. That's the second highest on record after 2021, when China imported 121.4 million tons.

Imports in December at 12.65 million tons hit a record monthly high, up from November's 10.95 million tons, to meet strong heating demand amid colder-than-usual weather. Growing pipeline gas supplies from Russia also helped bolster the imports. China last year exported a total of 62.69 million metric tons of refined fuel products, which include diesel, aviation fuel, gasoline and marine fuel, up 16.7% on the previous year, the data also showed. December exports at 4.64 million tons were the lowest since last June as companies ran short of export quotas.

Starry nights in the **deserts** of Iran

Iranica Desk

A country steeped in rich history and culture, Iran boasts

an incredibly diverse array of landscapes. One of the most enthralling experiences one can have is stargazing in its deserts.

Thanks to the vast expanse of deserts and arid areas, Iran offers stargazing enthusiasts an exceptional opportunity to

marvel at a sky filled with stars. From the Lut Desert to the Kavir Desert, known as Iran's central desert, the absence of city lights

and unique natural features make these places popular destinations for stargazing enthusiasts from around the world.



arasbaran.org

Maranjab Desert

Situated close to Kashan and bordering a national park, Maranjab Desert is one of Iran's prime locations for stargazing. This desert attracts desert trekkers and astronomy enthusiasts with its stunning sandy landscapes and dunes. It becomes an even more appealing destination thanks to its well-equipped desert camp, offering suitable facilities and exciting activities.

This makes it a popular choice for desert tours departing from Tehran and Isfahan. Here, astronomy enthusiasts have a fantastic chance to admire a star-studded sky, along with other attractions like the underground city of Nushabad, the Salt Lake, aqueducts, caravanserais, and the desert's unique vegetation. When stargazing and traveling the road leading to Maranjab Desert, exercise extreme caution and never leave the main road. Swampy areas in the vicinity can be hazardous.

Mesr Desert

Situated in Mesr village in Isfahan Province, Mesr Desert is an extraordinary destination for stargazing. The area's vastness, along with its sandy dunes and hills, makes it an ideal location for those interested in astronomy and nighttime sky watching. Thanks to its clear skies, Mesr Desert provides excellent conditions for observing stars and even planetary astronomy. This is why it ranks high among

popular destinations for astronomy tours, surfiran.com wrote.

Accommodations in the village have expanded, with multiple guesthouses and eco-lodges available. If you're in the area, you can also visit the nearby village of Farahzad. While traveling from Semnan and Jandaq, you might even have the opportunity to see the Jandaq waterfall on your way.



IRNA

Matinabad Desert

Located in Isfahan Province near the village of Matinabad, this desert offers another excellent choice for desert aficionados and stargazers. Many groups and individual travelers from Teh-

ran and Isfahan come here to enjoy the starry nights away from urban clamor. For accommodations, you can stay at a desert camp equipped with appropriate facilities for travelers.



iranroute.com

Mazinan Desert

Mazinan Desert in Khorasan Razavi Province serves as another exceptional location for sky observation. Situated on the northern edge of Kavir Desert, it's recognized as a captivating historical and desert area perfect for night sky watching. Limitless landscapes of sands and hills on one side, and a grand sky on the other, create a unique experience for astronomy enthusiasts. The desert's geography sets the stage for excellent stargazing conditions. Aside from sky observation, you can explore salt flats and salt marshes near the Kaal Shur River.



yjc.ir

Shahdad Kaluts

The Shahdad Kaluts Desert is another mesmerizing destination for stargazing. It is located in South Khorasan Province, north of the Lut Desert. Access to this area is also available from Kerman. The kaluts are unique mountains formed by the cohesion of sand over time. Shahdad kaluts make for an excellent choice for stargazing, offering a fantastic opportunity to observe stars in a star-studded sky. For accommodations, you can stay in desert camps set up for travelers. Besides enjoying the endless night sky and the silence of the desert, you can explore nearby attractions like underground reservoirs, Sirch's cold regions, elevated gardens, and mud-brick cities.



IRNA

Zamanabad Desert

If stargazing amid sweeping sand dunes has been on your bucket list, Zamanabad Desert in Turan, or Khaar-Turan, a vast area of 1,400,000 hectares in Semnan Province, is the destination for you. This desert forms part of Iran's central desert (Kavir Desert), and is an ideal location for overnight stays while taking in the celestial canvas. Situated near Zamanabad village, this desert is a protected area, making it one of the top choices for desert trekking and astronomical observation.

In the absence of city lights, Zamanabad Des-

ert becomes a tranquil oasis for skywatchers. During your stay, expect to be mesmerized by the endless sky and its dazzling stars.

Luckily, reaching Zamanabad is straightforward. The roads are paved, so you can easily drive to this haven. Once there, immerse yourself in the local culture by staying in a community-based accommodation in Zamanabad village. Additional activities you can indulge in include camel riding and desert trekking. If you venture away from the village with a guide, you can achieve an unparalleled stargazing experience.



kojaro.com

Khor Desert

Khor village in South Khorasan Province is one of the best desert areas for night sky observers. The village has a single desert area and is a great destination for trekking and star watching. Low population density and the rustic desert setting create a perfect atmosphere for nature and astronomy lovers. You'll find the narrow, winding alleys of this and surrounding villages, like Hemat Abad, filled with mud-brick homes and wind-catchers, irresistibly enchanting. Iran's desert regions, with their infinite allure and star-filled skies, are a paradise for night sky observers. From south to north and east to west, the captivating natural vistas these areas offer are satisfying for anyone.



kindiran.com

Gaza Storm has turned the tide



By Saeed Jalili
Iranian Leader's
representative in SNSC

**EXCLUSIVE
OPINION**

The United States had established global dominance with a soft image and imposing authority, maintaining its power by keeping a distance from others.

The resistance against the dominators was fearless and uncompromising; it rose and progressed. Operation Al-Aqsa Storm shattered the shining example of America's prestige and authority, delivering irreparable blows to the dynamics of the previous soft and hard order. Order and transformation do not happen spontaneously; they are constructed through proactive actions. If we do not realize the correct foundation of principles, goals, and interests through cooperation, promotion, and dynamic engagement, the wounded hegemony will actively guide the transformations among the ruins toward a new order with a renewed language and explicit goals and actions.

This article comprises three sections. Firstly, we will identify the previous order, examining the thoughts and behaviors that governed the world. Subsequently, by reviewing reactions to the previous order, we will narrate the story of the conflict between the dominator, the dominated, and the disruptor (hegemony, oppression, and resilience). Then, from within that understanding, we will discuss how to seize the opportunities of this era for proactive architecture, finally warning how threats and negligence might again impose the danger of a new order, just like a century ago.

Hegemonic order: A blend of prestige and authority

The current historical order is a fusion of prestige and authority, coupled with a sense of legitimacy and power. Over the centuries, the West followed a path characterized by the expansionist agenda of ruthless colonialism on one hand, and the other, self-centered ideological thoughts. Whenever the balance of power shifted or a new self-centered ideological thought emerged, the self-serving spirit of aggression would prevail, imposing dominance over others. Fatigued from wars and reluctant reconciliations, self-centeredness would retreat, giving rise to a situation called "global order" through a facade of compromise. Thus, each era of the order consists of two pillars: a balance of forces and reconciliation of ideologies; one providing a necessary common understanding for accepting soft relations, and the other ensuring the hard relations to keep the situation in check.

The post-Soviet order aimed for a power that sought to maintain its stability by keeping a distance, and subordinates willing to submit, either willingly or forcibly, driven by the desire for prestige or the fear of authority. Two world wars and a Cold War shaped the prevailing order: soft prestige with the rhetoric of democracy, human rights, freedom, and trade; and hard authority with demonstrations of nuclear capabilities, military alliances, political coups, and economic treaties. Soft prestige accommodated ideologies, while hard authority maintained discipline, ensuring that the dynamics did not spiral out of control. America

envisioned its leadership over the world for the next hundred years through a combination of freedom rhetoric and the image of a superpower. In this way, political coups guaranteed democracy, war crimes ensured human rights, and economic sanctions safeguarded free trade.

This continuum of contradictory behaviors not only has its roots in ideologies but also reveals that there is no inherent contradiction in the history of these actions! John Locke sees the end of a state of war as an exit from the natural state by accepting a social contract whose authority must protect the assets of civil society. Anyone outside the civil state of nature has no right to security and participation, even if they are slaves submitting to absolute power. With this situation, it is not surprising that the shareholders of slaveholding companies are called the fathers of freedom and the contradiction does not seem amusing. With this description, when the veto power in the Security Council aligns with despots and discriminatory freedom for a uniformity contract of global civil society, resolutions against technology, coups against democracy, and silence in the face of chemical bombings become the natural state.

The Zionist regime serves as a prominent example to understand these relations; on one side, it is introduced as a "shining example of democracy," and on the other, it takes on the appearance of the world's fourth-largest army to recreate the soft and hard relations of the hegemonic order in the global arena. The credibility of the global order's prestige is also

clearly tested here: the same actors who, in the first act, cry out against peaceful scientific activities through resolutions or shed tears for freedom in the face of an incident, in the second act, instead of resolutions, they take souvenir photos with the worst bombers and commemorate the agents of hospital bombings. Here, Jürgen Habermas, in the role of John Locke, steps in to warn against judging child killers. Yes, resolutions and tears are for the preservation of the assets of civil society, and indigenous nations in the natural state have no right to complain about misconduct!

Operation Al-Aqsa Storm and the resilience of Gaza shattered this deceptive prestige and false authority, shaking the foundations of the current global order. Hegemony had constructed a strategic depth with a deceptive prestige and false authority that gained worldwide support through either terror or willingness. Part of the grandeur of Operation Al-Aqsa Storm was in its soft conquests in the hearts and minds of people worldwide, shattering the foundations of the global order in their minds and extending the alignment of right and wrong to the streets worldwide. The hard conquest of Operation Al-Aqsa Storm brought irreversible blows to the current world order, but the soft conquest of Operation Al-Aqsa Storm planted an undeniable belief against the prevalent beliefs supporting the global order in the hearts of tired and strained people. Thus, examining the historical trend of events clarifies how the soft conquest of Operation Al-Aqsa Storm is historically more significant than its hard conquest.

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The current change in the global order benefits all independent and free republics and must be directed towards establishing the foundations of a just global order with faith in the power of free nations.

An Israeli tank burns after it was hit by Palestinian fighters infiltrating areas of southern Israel, at the Israeli side of Israel-Gaza border, on October 7, 2023.

REUTERS



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Operation Al-Aqsa Storm and the resilience of Gaza shattered the deceptive prestige and false authority of the US, shaking the foundations of the current global order.



Rockets are fired from Gaza City toward Israel on October 7, 2023.
AFP

Conflict narrative: Tale of hegemony, subjugation, and resilience

The soft origin and the hard land are the sources of power for nations. The secret of aggression against the identity and lands of free and independent nations lies in the essence of the hegemonic order, which maintains its stability by weakening others. Identity and land are the two fundamental components introduced by nation-states. However, hegemonic powers are only satisfied with a nation-state that accepts their soft and hard relations; otherwise, they not only do not recognize the right to the identity of nations but also have no qualms about their oppression and occupation. The hegemonic agenda over the past century has been soaked in blood as it sought to weaken the identity and lands of the region. Thus, World War I not only ended with the disintegration of the multi-part Islamic lands but also laid the foundation for the imposition of the fabricated identity of Zionism on the region.

World War II handed over the legacy of colonization in the region to American hegemony. The Zionist regime, along with its relations that monopolized arms and nuclear weapons, declared its existence. What America sought in Iran after World War II ranged from coups against national movements to economic dependency and widespread corruption in culture—a series of long-term plans aimed at stabilizing Zionist hegemony by weakening the foundations of identity and territorial power. In the cold of suppression of movements and the warmth of servitude to puppet rulers, amid the decline of internal movements succumbing to collusion with the relations of superpowers, the echo of the awakening cries of Imam Khomeini swept the Islamic world out of its wanderings, revealing the designs of the global order planners and sowing the seeds of resistance across the region.

What the US wanted in establishing Zionist dominance over the Islamic world was, on one hand, a liberal Islam to give in to its relations, and on the other hand, an isolated Islam to suppress. Imam Khomeini challenged both forms of American Islam with pure Islam.

The post-Soviet American era is a close experience for us, wherewith the face of a liberating force of freedom, the US was determined to repeat its military and political gains in Eastern Europe in West Asia.

However, against its escalating arrogance, which became bolder with the weakness of nations, the resistance mentality not only did not retreat with fears and temptations but advanced steadily towards the forefront of the decisive battle against the declining superpowers.

The high spirit of resistance led the dreams of American superiority from the wicked laughs in Afghanistan and Iraq to the broken cries of defeats in Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, and Gaza. Despite sanctions, scientific and technological advancements tarnished the tale of the “knowledge gap” and forced the acknowledgment of the “economic superpower” to the humiliating failure of the sanctions tool. Standing firm on the principles of the people and the independence of regional nations contradicted the American democracy’s contradictions in coups against popular rule and collusion with dictators, and support for the formation of ISIS was exposed. Thus, unlike the good times when America accepted division and retreat with deviance and withdrawal from the struggle and progress, the logic of resistance neither trembled with fears nor deviated with temptations, and with resilience in the path of continuous progress, it shifted the balance of power towards the destiny-making battle.

Resistance is an active response to the ambitions of those who, to sustain their hegemonic order, accept fear or temptation towards others while maintaining a weak distance. This succinct narrative is the story of resistance against the hegemony of the ruling power and the subjugation of the dominated. Operation Al-Aqsa Storm must be seen as the latest radiance in the extension of this century-old conflict. What today takes the arrogance of Western superiority, the determination of the region’s achievements, which rises from Gaza one time and then from Yemen, Lebanon, Iraq, and Syria another time, exposes the reality of force and deceit of the superior pretenders. The high determination and belief in the power of faith of the people are two soft forces of pure Islam that never fit into the foundations of submissive fear and the troubled mindset of terrorism. Resistance, with the efforts of the youth eager for martyrdom over these years, gradually overturned the balance of hard powers and transformed its soft power into the backbone of global developments.

Opportunities for future in proactive architecture

The transformation of the global order is not something to merely observe; rather, the order is shaped through proactive architectural actions, and every one of our behaviors contributes to a part of it. While gradual trends bring about the global order, pivotal moments define its face, much like how Zionists and Americans imposed current relations on the next hundred years of the world after World Wars I and II. What determines future relations in pivotal moments is a clear and robust logic beyond events that guides tough pinpoint actions. For the proactive architecture of the global order, there needs to be a recognition of principles, goals, and interests with a dedicated intellectual foundation and a literary discourse. This enables the harmonization of synergistic forces and the promotion of a new perspective among the nations of the world, preparing minds and hearts for an order without the presence of the arrogant, and ultimately directing timely pinpoint actions towards the course of transformative developments.

Minds must be prepared. This foundation gives meaning to principles, goals, and interests, shaping the literature of the future order. Soft forces in the Islamic world must, along with hard forces of resistance, “prepare the hearts and minds of the people worldwide,” as Imam Khomeini

stated, “to reach a peaceful life accompanied by peace and freedom without the dominance of the arrogant powers.” This is the duty of the soft forces of the Islamic Revolution, demonstrating the possibility of a world without American and hegemonic domination and without a security order supportive of oppressors. However, soft warfare is not without substance. The soft forces of the revolution must enhance their foundation and skills for effective participation in this pivotal era. The foundation of soft warfare is “awareness, narrative, and insight,” and the skill of soft warfare is the “art of expression and language.” The futures shaped by pure Islam must be expressed artistically with comprehensive awareness of the narrative of the global order and in the language of each region’s people.

Perspectives must be aligned. Synergistic forces must be recognized and enhanced. The current change in the order benefits all independent and free republics and must be directed towards the foundations of a just global order with faith in the power of free nations. The soft forces of the Islamic Revolution must take advantage of unprecedented opportunities to connect with the hearts of restless people, enabling Islamic nations to actively strive for independence and freedom from the shackles of political tyranny that passively align with global injustice. The soft forces of

the Islamic Revolution must take the initiative and, with an understanding of the historical narrative of the global order and regional dynamics, convey the inspiring vision of pure Islamic thought tailored to the conditions of each group of people worldwide, shaping innovative architecture for the future.

This pivotal moment demands timely pinpoint actions. Operation Al-Aqsa Storm was a momentous pinpoint strike at the crossroads of the world, drawing attention to a reassessment of the global order by scattering the chessboard of old and new plans. Although Operation Al-Aqsa Storm unraveled the schemes, a moment of hesitation, weakness, doubt, or complacency is sufficient for the arrogant powers to once again impose a new order on the next hundred years. History has shown that even amid the ruins of previous orders, the arrogant powers do not shy away from designing a new order for their benefit. The active enemy, witnessing the decline of its former prestige and dignity, will embark on more secure actions toward its explicit goals with the same intellectual foundation but with a new discourse and renewed dignity. The mistake is to remain within the outdated imported literature and become engrossed in short-sighted goals and fleeting interests with a confused intellectual foundation, missing out on profound and extensive developments.

Soft victory of Operation Al-Aqsa Storm

The soft victory of Operation Al-Aqsa Storm is more historically significant than its hard conquest. Apart from blatant crimes and endless indecencies, there is nothing left for the swaggering display of false glory and the pretense of dignity by the claimants of civilization and global order. The courage of resistance and vigilant pa-

tience have permanently nullified appeasement and suppressibility, marking a new era in the demise of the oppressive order. Now, without hesitation and with proactive measures, historical oversights must be rectified, or else the active enemy and the passive friend will, at will, construct a new order from the ruins of the previous

order using more astute forces. This is an instructive story that “it is a peace that blows away all peace.” It serves as a beacon for the repetition of a burst of light that, contrary to the aspirations of the arrogant, steers the course of developments toward the future of Islam, confounding the perplexed eyes of the global populace.

Zagreb Open Ranking Series: Mohmadi bags GR 87kg silver



IWF

Sports Desk

The first day of the Greco-Roman competitions at the season-opening Ranking Series event saw Iranian Alireza Mohmadi take the 87kg silver at the Zagreb Open.

Elsewhere on Day 1, Amir Abdi – a 77kg gold medalist in December's National Championships – suffered an early exit from the Croatian capital after a first-round 11-3 defeat against the host's Antonio Kamenjasevic.

An 82kg silver winner in last September's World Championships, Mohmadi was on a high heading to Zagreb after grabbing the national gold with a victory over Nasser Alizadeh – in what was the first episode of the head-to-head between the two in leading the line for the country in the Olympic qualification events in the coming months.

Mohmadi began his campaign in Zagreb with 5-0 win against China's Chengwu Wang and went on to defeat Venezuelan Luis Avedaño (9-2) and Georgian Achiko Bolkvadze (3-3) for a place in the semifinals against Russian Alan Ostae, who took part as a neutral competitor.

A closely-fought clash saw the Iranian edge his opponent 2-1 and head progress into the final against Russia's former world under-23 champion Milad Alirzaev, also representing the neutral athletes team. Mohmadi got a par terre advantage and managed to throw Alirzaev but failed to get a correct throw. Alirzaev blocked him during the throw to score two points, a decision which Iran challenged and lost, giving Alirzaev a 3-1 lead.

The Iranian reduced the deficit with a stepout but that was only after Alirzaev was awarded a point for par terre, making the final scoreline 4-2.

Iran's Kiani seeking redemption in Paris after securing Olympic taekwondo berth



WORLD TAEKWONDO

Kiani retained the fourth spot in the women's -57kg class of the latest Olympic kyorugi rankings to become the second Iranian to seal a taekwondo quota for the Games, following Mehran Barkhordari.

Sports Desk

Nahid Kiani will be chasing her Olympic dream in August as the Iranian girl officially punched her ticket for Paris through the World Taekwondo Rankings on Friday.

Kiani retained the fourth spot in the women's -57kg class of the latest Olympic kyorugi rankings – standing behind China's Zongshi Luo, Team GB's Jade Jones, and Canadian Sky-

lar Park – to become the second Iranian to seal a taekwondo quota for the Games, following Mehran Barkhordari, who won a gold in the Grand Slam Champions Series in Wuxi, China, in December to guarantee a men's -80kg slot.

Two more berths will still be up for grabs for the Iranians when the Asian Qualification Tournament gets underway in Tai'an, China, on March 15.

Chasing redemption

Kiani will head to the Olympics as the reigning world -53kg champion and will be among the favorites to leave the French capital with the ultimate prize of the -57kg contests.

The 25-year-old girl defeated China's Zuo Ju in straight rounds for the country's first-ever women's world gold in Baku last June – a third major medal for the Iranian in an impressive 2023 campaign,

which saw her also bag a couple of Grand Prix silvers in Rome and Taiyuan.

As if the Iranian needed more reasons to give it all out for the Olympic success, the occasion in Paris will provide Kiani with the opportunity to get over the bad memories of her participation at Tokyo Games. Kiani suffered an early exit from the Games three years ago following a first-round defeat against her fellow-Iranian Kimia Aliza-

deh – a bronze winner for Iran in Rio 2016 who took part at the Tokyo event as a member of the IOC Refugee Team after leaving her birth country a year before. In an interview with Varzesh3 earlier in January, Kiani opened up about her mental struggles after the setback.

"The bout was a one-off in the history of the Olympics and overcoming the unpleasant circumstances in the aftermath of the de-

feat was one of the hardest things to do in my life," Kiani said.

"I was devastated by the fact that a part of my compatriots cheered my opponent's victory and that's why I had to seek professional help from a therapist."

Kiani wrote in an Instagram post last week that she would leave the social media until the event in Paris to stay focused on "making my Olympic dream come true."

Thompson, Curry lead Warriors to win over Bulls



REUTERS

BBC – Klay Thompson and Stephen Curry led the Golden State Warriors to a much-needed 140-131 victory against the Chicago Bulls on Friday. The Warriors had lost their two previous games and made another sluggish start to trail the Bulls 75-62 at half-time. But 48 points in the third quarter put Golden State in control heading into the closing stages in Chicago. Thompson finished with 30 points

and six assists and Curry added 27 points.

"I think we got off-track emotionally, spiritually, the last couple games," Warriors coach Steve Kerr said.

"Our fans could feel it. We got booed for the first time since I've been here, and as I said both nights, we deserved it because our energy and our competitive spirit was not there. "We found that again tonight."

Elsewhere, San Antonio Spurs rookie Victor Wembanyama scored 26 points and claimed 11 rebounds as they thrashed the Charlotte Hornets 135-99.

In Detroit, the Houston Rockets edged past the Detroit Pistons 112-110, with Fred VanVleet scoring 17 of his 20 points in the second half. The defeat was the Pistons' seventh in a row since they ended their record-equalling 28-game losing streak against the Toronto Raptors last month.

Also, reigning champions Denver Nuggets beat the New Orleans Pelicans 125-113 thanks to Nikola Jokic's 12th triple-double of the season and the 10th of his career.

The Serb, who is a two-time NBA Most Valuable Player, scored 27 points with 10 rebounds and 14 assists.

Qatar's Afif still dreams of European return but country comes first

REUTERS – Akram Afif still harbours hopes that he will be given another chance to shine at a European club but for now the Al Sadd playmaker has no plans to leave his homeland, saying it his duty to help Qatar retain their Asian Cup crown.

Afif stole the show with two goals in Friday's Asian Cup opener as hosts Qatar beat Lebanon 3-0 while he was also the busiest attacking player on the pitch, creating numerous chances for his team mates. Lebanon coach Miodrag Radulovic said Afif proved to be the difference in the game, describing him as "one of the best players in Asia" and that he would not be out of place at a European side.

The 27-year-old has already had a taste of European football, playing for Eupen in the Belgian Pro League before signing for Villarreal, where he was sent out on loan to Sporting Gijon and back to Eupen. He returned to Qatar in 2018 to join Al Sadd, where opportunities were plentiful and the goals started to flow, even



THAIER AL-SUDANI/REUTERS

earning the Asian Player of the Year award in 2019.

"Every player wishes to play in Europe. I want to play in Europe tomorrow if possible," Afif told reporters after being named Player of the Match against Lebanon.

"But it's not about Akram. I can't go out of the country and go sit on the bench (when in Europe)."

"I'm helping my country. But if you ask me, I do wish (to go play in Europe)."

Not just a terrific finisher, Afif is also a creator of goals, topping the assists charts at

the 2019 Asian Cup with 10 – more than twice as many as any other player as Qatar won the title.

The 27-year-old has also struck up a lethal partnership with striker Almoez Ali, who was top scorer in 2019, but when asked about their chemistry on the pitch he stayed true to his 'team first' mentality.

"It can't be me and Almoez against 11. Others are also involved, they defend and try to play the ball to us," he said. "We are all brothers helping each other."

Iran slams 'unwarranted' war on Yemen

US not in proxy war with Iran: *Biden*

International Desk

Iran lambasted the United States and Britain for their "unwarranted" war on Yemen as a US-led coalition carried out a new strike on the Arab country on Saturday. On Friday, a US-led coalition launched its first military strike on Yemen after the United Nations Security Council on Wednesday passed a resolution condemning "in the strongest terms" the multiple attacks by the Yemeni forces on Israel-bound ships. During recent months, Yemen's armed forces have been staging missile and drone strikes against vessels linked to the Israeli regime or those heading to Israeli ports in support of war-hit Palestinians in Gaza, which has been under Israel's brutal attacks since October 7. "This unwarranted war violates Yemen's sovereignty, international law, the UN Charter, and Security Council resolutions, jeopardizing regional peace and security," the Permanent Mission of Iran to the United Nations said in a statement on Friday, posted on X. Iran slammed the US and UK's "illegal actions," saying that "their opposition to Russia's amendments to the [UN] resolution hints at a premeditated intention to commit this aggression." Iran's Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian also wrote on X: "Instead of a military attack on Yemen, the White House should immediately stop all military and security cooperation with Tel Aviv

against the people of Gaza and the West Bank so that security returns to the entire region." The United States has been providing Israel with unbridled military and political support in its onslaught against Gaza, arming Tel Aviv with more than 10,000 tons of military hardware. The US has also cast its veto against all United Nations Security Council resolutions that have called for a permanent cease-fire in Gaza. Referring to the Yemeni strikes, Amir-Abdollahian wrote, "Yemen's measure in support of Gaza's women and children and confrontation against the Israeli regime's genocide is commendable."

Fresh strikes

The US carried out a fresh strike Saturday on Yemen, targeting a radar site after the Ansarallah resistance movement in Yemen warned of further attacks on ships in the Red Sea. The strike came a day after US and British forces hit scores of targets across the country, heightening fears that Israel's onslaught on the Gaza Strip could engulf the wider region. The US Central Command said Saturday's strike was "a follow-on action on a specific military target" related to the previous day's strikes. Ansarallah's official media earlier said, Al-Dailami airbase in Yemen's capital of Sana'a had been struck in the latest bombardment. "All American-British interests



This satellite picture shows destroyed shelters in Hodeida airfield in Hodeida, Yemen, on January 12, 2024, after airstrikes by the United States and Britain. ● MAXAR TECHNOLOGIES/AFP

have become legitimate targets" following the strikes, Ansarallah's Supreme Political Council said. Ansarallah's Deputy Foreign Minister Hussein al-Ezzi said the United States and Britain would "have to prepare to pay a heavy price". UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres called on all sides "not to escalate" in the interest of regional peace and stability, his spokesman Stephane Dujarric said. Many regional countries, even US allies, have condemned the coalition's attacks and expressed concern about the extension of the conflict across the region.

Division in West

Meanwhile, Italy, Spain and France

stood out by not taking part in US and British strikes against Yemen and not signing a statement put out by 10 countries justifying the attacks. The divergence highlights divisions in the West over the US-led strikes on Yemen. US President Joe Biden called the strikes a successful "defensive action" after the "unprecedented" Red Sea attacks and said he would act again if the Ansarallah movement continued what he called their "outrageous behavior". But Nasser Kanaani, spokesman for Iran's Foreign Ministry, said the Western strikes would fuel "insecurity and instability in the region" while "diverting" attention

from Gaza.

Biden said Friday he's delivered a message to Iran with Thursday's airstrikes. "I've already delivered the message to Iran," Biden said when asked his message during a tour of a coffee shop in Allentown, Pennsylvania. When Biden was asked if the US is in a proxy war with Iran, he said "No. Iran does not want a war with us." The US National Security Council coordinator for Strategic Communications John Kirby also said that the US is "not looking for conflict with Iran," which is supporting the resistance groups across the Middle East region.

Danish court upholds jail terms for anti-Iran separatists

A Danish appeals court on Friday upheld the sentences of three members of an Iranian separatist group convicted of promoting terror in Iran and gathering information for an unnamed Saudi intelligence service. The three had been convicted and sentenced in a lower court in 2022 to six, seven and eight years in prison, respectively. They will be expelled from Denmark for good, the Eastern High Court in Copenhagen ruled, AP reported. The appeals court did not release the men's names. They will serve their time in Danish prisons, but it was unclear when they would be expelled. The three were arrested in February 2020 in the town of Ringsted, 60 kilometers (40 miles) southwest of the Danish capital of Copenhagen, and subsequently convicted of promoting terror for their roles in a deadly attack on a military parade in the southwestern Iranian city of Ahvaz in September 2018. The Eastern Court found Tuesday that the men belonged to the Arab Struggle Movement for the Liberation of Ahvaz and had been gathering information about individuals and organizations in Denmark and abroad, as well as on Iranian military affairs, and passing it on to Saudi intelligence.

The court said one of the men who had Danish citizenship will have it revoked.

Earlier this week, the court confirmed the men's February 2022 guilty verdicts by the District Court in Roskilde, which convicted them of financing and attempting to finance terrorism by obtaining 15 million kroner (\$2.2 million) and trying to obtain at least another 15 million kroner from Saudi Arabia for the separatist group. Iran has accused the separatist group of the Ahvaz terrorist attack, which killed at least 25 people. The group's ringleader Farajollah Chaab, also known as Habib Asyud, was arrested in November 2020 on the back of a set of "specialized and combined measures" by Iranian intelligence forces. The Swedish-backed terrorist was executed on May 6, 2023.

Israel presses on with Gaza offensive as war enters 100th day

International Desk

Today marks 100 days since Israel continues its deadly war in the Gaza Strip with no end in sight. Israel kept up bombardments in the besieged strip on Saturday as the Health Ministry in Hamas-run Gaza said at least 23,843 have been killed in the territory in 99 days of war. The ministry said it had regis-

tered 60,317 wounded since war erupted on October 7, while thousands remain trapped under rubble. In the southern city of Rafah, an Israeli airstrike on a house sheltering two displaced families killed 10 people, the ministry said. Holding up a photo of a dead girl with a piece of bread in her hand, Bassem Arafah, a relative, said the

families in Rafah had been eating dinner when the house was struck on Friday night. "This child died while she was hungry, while she was eating a piece of bread with nothing on it, where is the International Criminal Court to see how the children die?" Arafah said. "Where are the Muslims ... and the world leaders?" Israel claims it targets militants and does all it can to minimize harm to non-combatants as it wages urban warfare against Hamas in the densely populated Palestinian enclave. But the scale of the killing in Gaza and the dire humanitarian situation has shocked world opinion and fueled growing calls for a cease-fire. In the central Gaza Strip, residents reported intense gunbattles and tank shelling and Israeli airstrikes in Al-Bureij, Al-Nusseirat and Al-Maghazi, areas housing refugees and descendants of the 1948 war.

Israel blocks aid

Israel's latest attacks on Gaza have killed at least 151 people, including 11 in a single house, Palestinian health officials said on Friday, while the UN humanitarian office accused Israel of blocking its efforts to send aid to the north. The office said Israeli authorities were blocking its efforts to help people who had stayed in the north for fear the militants would seize supplies. "We have systematic refusal from the Israeli side of our effort to get there," said Andrea De Domenico, Head of Office for the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. "In particular, they have been very systematic to not allowing us to support hospitals, which is something that is reaching a level of inhumanity that, for me, is beyond comprehension," he said.

German intervention

Meanwhile, a day after South Africa argued that Israel had committed genocidal acts in Gaza with intent from "the highest levels of state", the German government announced it will intervene as a third party at the International Court of Justice in defense of the regime. The intervention came after Israel's legal team delivered its defense at the UN court in the Hague on Friday. Israel's ally the US have also dismissed the case as groundless and vowed a robust defense. Jordan said on Friday Israeli "war crimes" against Palestinians were to blame for heightened regional tension and violence in the Red Sea which it said threatened to ignite a wider war in the Middle East. Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi voiced support for South Africa's "genocide" case against Israel at the UN's top court over the Gaza war, and said Amman was ready to submit legal documents and appear in court if the case proceeds.



People mourn over the shrouded bodies of loved ones killed during Israeli bombardment in a hospital in the southern Gaza Strip on January 13, 2024. ● AFP

Iran, Pakistan to hold naval drill in Persian Gulf

National Desk

A Pakistani naval flotilla has docked at Iran's southern port city of Bandar Abbas and is set to hold a joint military exercise with Iranian forces in the Persian Gulf near the Strait of Hormuz. The expansion of friendly ties between the two neighbors and the promotion of cooperation in the naval training field are among the other purposes of the Pakistani flotilla's three-day visit to Iran.

The Pakistani flotilla, comprising the Madadgar warship and Zhub maritime security vessel, was welcomed by the commanders of Iran's Navy in southern Hormuzgan Province. Rear Admiral Farhad Fattahi, a navy commander in the province, said the presence of Pakistan's training combat group in Iran will help both sides to share their naval experiences. Iranian naval forces have held several joint military drills with

foreign countries in recent years with the purpose of improving the security of international maritime trade, countering piracy and maritime terrorism, exchange of information in naval rescue and relief operations, and exchange of operational and tactical experiences. The Iranian Navy has also achieved self-sufficiency in manufacturing surface and sub-surface vessels in recent years. It has also increased its presence

in international waters to protect naval routes and provide security for merchant vessels and tankers.



Three Iranian films to be screened in India

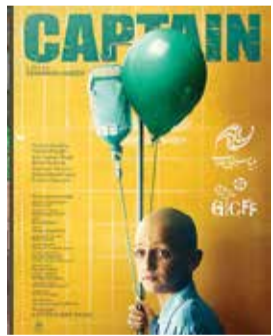


ILNA - Three Iranian films are set to participate in the third Guwahati International Children Film Festival in Assam, India, from January 21 to 24.

The film 'Captain,' directed by Mohammad Hamzei, along with 'Wolf Cubs of Apple Valley' directed by Fereydoun Najafi, and 'Mehran' by Roghayeh Tavakoli, will represent Iran in the third edition of the Indian festival.

'Captain' tells the story of Isa, a teenage boy battling cancer, who dreams of seeing the sea. The film was previously showcased at the 41st Fajr International Film Festival and awarded at the 35th International Film Festival for Children and Youth. 'Wolf Cubs of Apple Valley' was selected as the Best Film in the Iranian cinema section at the 33rd International Film Festival for Children and Youth, receiving four golden butterflies. The film narrates the tale of Ashu, a teenage boy who believes his father is accused of murder and has gone into hiding. His journey unfolds new truths and introduces him to untold stories.

'Mehran,' which was screened at the 39th Fajr International Film Festival, is the story of tensions and sorrow of a family from a border town called Mehran as they sought solace in Yazd's bustling city center. Unexpectedly, their safe haven also brought them into a complex web of personal matters when their hosts asked for help finding a new wife for their beloved son who had been left widowed by war.



Mohammad Ali Rajabi
Cartoonist



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Iran's arts, culture flourishing: Minister



Iran's Culture Minister Mohammad-Mehdi Esmaeili speaks at a press conference in Tehran on January 13, 2024. ● farhang.gov.ir

Arts & Culture Desk

Iran's Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance Mohammad-Mehdi Esmaeili highlighted the flourishing arts and culture sector during a press conference held in Tehran on January 13. He emphasized that de-

spite facing challenges, the government is taking significant steps to support the livelihoods and well-being of artists through various programs. Esmaeili discussed the ministry's initiatives amid the COVID-19 pandemic, stating that cultural, ar-

tistic, and media activities were affected by the pandemic, farhang.gov.ir reported. Regarding the ministry's performance, Esmaeili highlighted efforts to improve budgets and infrastructure, allocating nearly \$180 million for cultural

and artistic development projects. He emphasized a special focus on rural areas as part of their current plans. Speaking about the 42nd Fajr International Film Festival, Esmaeili noted that over 100 films have been submitted, with eval-

uations reflecting qualitative growth in various genres.

Esmaeili also discussed the government's role, shifting from control to facilitation, and collaborations with the private sector.

He expressed satisfaction with the fact that over half of the Iranian films in the Fajr International Film Festival were associated with the private sector, indicating economic growth in the cinema industry.

The minister addressed the significance of visual arts, stating that plans are underway to enhance the visual arts sector, including calligraphy, photography, sculpture, and the like. Esmaeili touched upon cooperation with Turkey, acknowledging the shared cultural heritage between the two nations and ongoing collaborations in the field of arts and culture.

He also emphasized the cultural ties with Afghanistan, expressing support for Afghan artists and ongoing media collaborations while emphasizing the sensitivity towards preserving Afghanistan's cultural heritage.

Tehran Symphony Orchestra to perform Tchaikovsky's 'Symphony No. 5'

Arts & Culture Desk

The Tehran Symphony Orchestra, under the baton of conductor Manouchehr Sahbai, is slated to perform on January 24 at Vahdat Hall a repertoire that includes works by Iranian and international composers, notably Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky's 'Symphony No. 5.'

In this concert, the Tehran Symphony Orchestra will present Tchaikovsky's renowned composition alongside Morteza Hannaneh's 'Hezar Dastan' (overture) and Claude Debussy's 'Petite Suite,' IRNA reported. Established in 1943 by Parviz Mahmoud, the Tehran Symphony Or-

chestra experienced its golden era from 1972 to 1979 under the leadership of Farhad Meshkat. Currently operating under the Roudaki Artistic Cultural Foundation, the orchestra continues its activities under the permanent conductorship of Sahbai. As of September, 2023, the Tehran Symphony

Orchestra has captivated audiences with notable performances featuring works by prominent Iranian and international composers such as Hossein Dehlavi, Hossein Nasr, Ludwig van Beethoven, Antonio Vivaldi, Antonín Dvořák, Franz Schubert, Dmitri Shostakovich, and Johann Strauss.



New words added to Oxford English Dictionary

"Wokery," and "forever chemical" have been added to the Oxford English Dictionary in its latest update.

The OED is updated quarterly with new words, senses and revisions to entries, to reflect changes in word usage and to include new terms relating to current events and trends. The December 2023 update, announced, features new words related to technology, polluting chemicals, politics, and literature. "Wokery" and "wokeism," disparaging nouns meaning "progressive or leftwing attitudes or practices, esp. those opposing social injus-

tice or discrimination, that are viewed as doctrinaire, self-righteous, pernicious, or insincere," were added. Another definition of "wokery," denoting a restaurant, food counter, or kitchen serving dishes using a wok, was also included in the update, The Guardian reported. Another politics-related term, "chumocracy," also features. It is said to mean a culture characterised or dominated by "influential networks of close friends," and has previously been used to describe British politics. A number of technology- and internet-related words were added, including "screen-

share," "generative artificial intelligence" and "talkboard," meaning an online forum or chat room.

"Forever chemical" and "PFAS" were also added. These words describe synthetic compounds, for example those used in cookware for their non-stick properties, that do not break down in the environment. Literary terms also made it into this update. One was "Gradgrindian," an adjective used to describe something that is characteristic of Thomas Gradgrind, the schoolmaster in Charles Dickens's novel 'Hard Times,' or "hard and cold,

and solely concerned with facts; oppressively utilitarian".

A second bookish term was "Chekhov's gun", a literary principle articulated by the Russian writer Anton Chekhov which holds that unnecessary elements should not be introduced into a story. Chekhov said that, as an example, a gun should not be mentioned in a play if it is not going to be fired later. The OED notes that the principle has been often criticised, and "some have also observed that it does not seem to be applied consistently even in Chekhov's own output".