

Iran Fights Back to Send Japan Packing

Alireza Jahanbakhsh scored from the spot in the sixth minute of stoppage time as Iran came from behind to beat Japan 2-1 and head into the AFC Asian Cup semifinals.

Russian PM says Iran-EAEU FTA should be put into effect soon

Russia's prime minister emphasized the need for completing all procedures for a free trade agreement (FTA) concluded between the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) and Iran to come into force as soon as possible.

"A free trade agreement with Iran was signed at the end of last year (December 25, 2023). Its execution will create numerous prospects for our companies to supply the market in this country. All procedures must be completed as soon as possible in order for the document to take effect," Mikhail Mishustin said, reported Tasnim News Agency

He also stated that talks for a temporary free trade deal with Mongolia and an improvement to the existing accord with Vietnam are underway. "We've made considerable progress in our conversation with Egypt. Negotiations are continuing with the United Arab Emirates and Indonesia. All of this is especially important in the context of reorienting Eurasian trade flows toward the most promising markets and friendly states," the Russian prime minister stated.

He put the significant emphasis to improving the alliance's relations with China. "We need to make every effort to successfully implement the measures provided for in the roadmap for the development of economic cooperation with our Chinese friends," he said.

Furthermore, he noted that relations with regional organizations, particularly the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), are also strengthening, TASS reported.

On December 25, 2023, the EAEU countries signed a full-scale free trade agreement with Iran. "The agreement officially comes into force from the moment it is ratified by the member states. I think that their parliaments will not delay this process and will carry it out quickly enough," Chairman of the Board of the Eurasian Economic Commission (EEC) Mikhail Myasnikov told reporters after the signing ceremony.

According to him, now the parties should carry out practical work on the formation of mechanisms for the implementation of both trade and investment provisions of the agreement.

The temporary agreement on creation of a free trade zone between the EAEU and Iran was concluded on May 17, 2018 and came into force on October 27, 2019, the report added.

BRICS states will continue trade in local currencies: *Deputy FM*



Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister for Economic Diplomacy Mehdi Safari said that members of the BRICS grouping of emerging economies will continue to carry out trade in local currencies.

Trade exchanges are being carried out through local currencies by the members in a bid to ditch the US dollar, Safari told IRNA on the sidelines of the BRICS Sherpas and Sous-Sherpas meeting held in Moscow from January 29 to February 2.

He said, however, that BRICS will continue efforts to create a joint currency in the long-run to become completely free of the need to rely on major international currencies.

During the three-day meeting, all events scheduled to be held in 2024 were re-

viewed and 239 programs were approved, said the Iranian official.

He said that BRICS members also discussed multilateral cooperation in the fields of finance, banking, energy, transportation, artificial intelligence, politics, security and cultural relations in the meeting. Russia will chair BRICS in 2024 under the slogan "Strengthening Multilateralism for Equitable Global Development and Security."

Last year, Iran, along five other countries, were invited to join BRICS, which comprises of Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa, from January this year. A new government in Argentina, which was one of the invitees, has notified BRICS that it will not join the bloc.

Transit of goods via Iran up 40.5% in 10 months: *Deputy minister*



Iran's deputy minister of roads and urban development said there was a 40.5% growth in the transit in the country in the first 10 months of the current Iranian calendar year (started March 21, 2023). According to the statis-

tics of the Ministry of Roads and Urban Development, 12.661 million tons of goods were transited from the country between March 21, 2023, and January 22, 2024, showing a 40.5 percent hike compared to the

same period last year, Kamal Hadianfar stated, reported Tasnim News Agency.

The deputy roads minister went on to say that 4.1 million tons of oil products were transited via Iranian land, showing an 88.5 percent hike compared to the same period last year.

Meanwhile, 8.561 million tons of non-oil products were transited through Iran's territory from March 21, 2023, to January 22, 2024, registering a 25.2 percent growth compared to last year's corresponding period, he said. The secretary of the

Transportation Coordination Supreme Council further noted that 11.2 million tons and 1.261 million tons of goods were transited via Iran in road and rail sectors respectively.

The road and rail transit of goods via Iranian land registered a 46 and a one percent growth compared to the same period last year, the deputy roads minister added.

The development of transit is one of the main pillars of the general policies stipulated in the 7th Five-Year Socioeconomic and Cultural Development Plan.

Iran's 10-month steel exports rise 21%: *ISPA*

The Iranian Steel Producers Association (ISPA) said over 24 million tons of steel products were exported from the country in the first 10 months of the current Iranian calendar

year (started March 21, 2023), showing a 21% growth compared to the same period last year. The association put the value of the steel products exported from the country between March

21, 2023, and January 22, 2024, at \$6.2 billion, IRNA reported. In this period, Iran's export of iron ore concentrate considerably increased as much as 10fold, IRNA reported.

Earlier, ISPA announced that Iran's export of semi-finished steel products from March 21 to December 22, 2023, registered a 7.6 percent hike compared to last year's corresponding period.

Specialized working group formed to solve energy shortage



A specialized working group was formed by the order of Oil Minister Javad Owji to redress energy shortage.

Owji assigned the ministry's affiliated companies and departments to sum up proposals for fixing energy imbalance and offer a pragmatic approach, Shana reported.

The incumbent government inherited an imbalance in the gas sector due to insufficient investment when it took office in August 2021. The imbalance

caused widespread power blackouts in households in 2020. Hence, the incumbent government has implemented several projects to rectify the imbalance.

The imbalance, however, exists as the country is witnessing a jump in energy use in different sectors. Iran's energy consumption intensity is the highest in the world rankings as a major of the huge amount of energy produced in the country is consumed lavishly.

Russia top foreign investor in Tehran: *Official*

The head of the Iran Investment Organization said the Russian Federation stood in the first place in terms of foreign investment made in the country in the current Iranian calendar year (started March 21, 2023). Deputy Minister of Economy Ali Fekri said, "A total of 578 investment projects have now been launched in the country within the framework of the Foreign

Direct Investment," IRNA reported. Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi has emphasized removing the trade barriers in line with attracting more foreign investment in the country, he said. It is expected that the total value of foreign investment in these projects will reach \$10.608 billion, he added. The maximum foreign investment has been made

in the oil and gas sectors of the country, reaching \$4.8 billion, he noted. Russia has had the maximum investment on the projects over the past three months, accounting for more than 31% of the total foreign investment, followed by the United Arab Emirates (UAE), China and Iranians residing abroad respectively, he said, Mehr news agency

reported. According to him, about 10 percent of these projects under FDI will be invested by Iranians residing overseas.

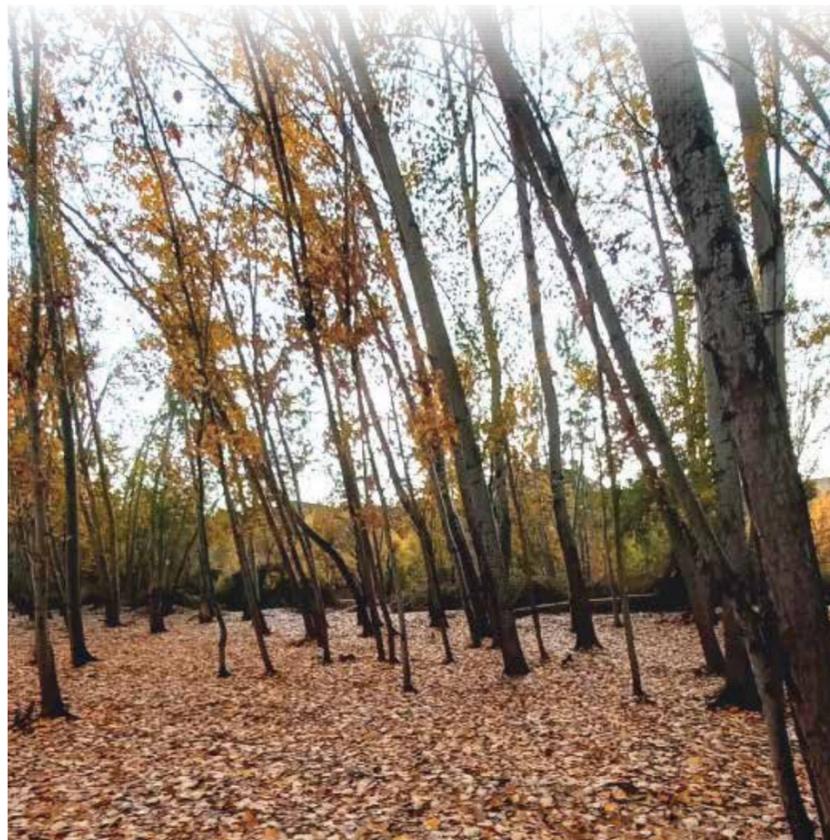
Turning to the mechanism of foreign investment in the country, Fekri said effective steps have been taken in the current administration in line with boosting foreign investment.



Enjoy wildlife, hiking, and photography in Khojir National Park



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Khojir National Park, situated in Tehran and adjacent to Sorkheh Hesar National Park, is a significant natural area in the city. Despite their close proximity, Khojir has maintained a pristine and unspoiled environment due to its greater distance from Tehran. This article delves into the remarkable features of this national park in Iran.

Spanning from 1,200 to 2,138 meters in elevation, Khojir National Park comprises high and semi-high hills as well as tall mountains. Notable peaks within the park include Zelzeleh Peak, Barjamali, Zirak Chal, Sarukoh, Aseman Kuh, Gavi Dagh, Jangal Sookhteh, and Darbandak.

balad.ir

History

Located to the east of the city, Khojir National Park has been designated as a national park since 1982, covering an area of approximately 10,013 hectares. It is part of the Jajrud protected region, which has historically served as a royal hunting ground for nearly 200 years and is the oldest no-hunting zone in the country.

Flora and fauna

Khojir National Park is home to a diverse array of wildlife, with species thriving in the park's varied environments. Notably, the park, along with Sorkheh Hesar and Jajrud Protected Area provides habitats for numerous animal species, some of which are considered habitat regions due to their reliance on the ecosystem. The animals in the area include wolves, martens, foxes, jackals, rabbits, otters, hyenas, badgers, wildcats, leopards, ibex, and gazelles.

Birds

The park's diverse ecosystems, which encompass rivers, mountains, steppes, farms, and gardens, provide a haven for various migratory bird species. Notable avian inhabitants include partridges, mallards, teals, shovellers, buntings, golden orioles, hoopoes, rollers, and the eastern imperial eagle. Collectively, Khojir, Jajrud Protected Area and Sorkheh Hesar National Park account for 22.6% of Iran's bird species.

Reptiles

The combined Sorkheh Hesar, Khojir, and Jajrud protected areas are home to 27 known species of reptiles, including nine species of lizard, 17 spe-

cies of snake, and one species of turtle.

Plants

Khojir National Park boasts the best wild pistachio forest in the Alborz Mountain region, along with other important tree species such as peanut, *Prunus scoparia*, *Celtis australis*, and juniper. The park also features a range of pharmacological, industrial, and edible plant species, including *Cotoneaster*, *Sophora*, *Rubia tinctorum*, plane trees, barberries, white poplar, *Paliurus spina-christi*, *ephedra*, maple, pine, hawthorn, European ash, tree of heaven, locusts, *Prunus lycioides*, cornflower, tamarisk, and common couch. Additionally, the area is known for wild poppies, which bloom in mid-spring.

Unique geological features

Khojir National Park is notable for its distinctive geological characteristics, encompassing a variety of soils and rocks, ranging from sandstone to volcanic formations.

Location

Situated to the east of Tehran, adjacent to Sorkheh Hesar Park, Khojir National Park is accessible via the Pasdaran Road to Parchin. The park is approximately 42km from Tehran and can be reached by private vehicle, with access points via Pasdaran Highway and the road from Tehran to Damavand.

Best time to visit

The recommended visiting period is from early July to early November, taking into account the wildlife's breeding and reproduction season and minimizing human disturbance.

Activities and attractions

Khojir National Park is primarily a scientific park, offering opportunities to observe and learn about unique and valuable plant and animal species. Notable activities and attractions within the park include:

Wildlife spotting: Visitors can observe a variety of animals in their natural habitat, surrounded by lush vegetation.

Hiking trails: The park features scenic trails suitable for hiking, jogging, or running, providing an opportunity to immerse oneself in the natural beauty and observe wildlife.

Photography: The park offers excellent subjects for photography, including natural landscapes and diverse wildlife.

Visitors should note that the park does not provide extensive facilities, with only a few local houses available for rent and limited sanitary facilities at the park entrance. Camping is allowed within the park.

Sights around

In addition to exploring Khojir National Park, visitors can visit Sorkheh Hesar National Park, which offers various recreational activities. Nearby attractions include guest houses, hotels, and facilities for leisure activities. The Jajrud area and its river, as well as the Latyan Dam, provide additional opportunities for outdoor recreation, such as sailing, water skiing, and cycling along the Lavasan Road to the Latyan section.

By offering a rich array of flora, fauna, and geological features, Khojir National Park stands as a testament to Iran's natural beauty and ecological diversity.

A poet's journey through turbulent times

Lutf Ali Azar Bigdeli was born into an Isfahani family that included officials who reached high positions under the Safavids. His birth in 1,722, however, occurred nearly simultaneously with the Afghan invasion of Isfahan, leading the entirety of his family to flee to Qom. Before he eventually returned to Isfahan his travels took him to Bandar Abbas (where his father was appointed to a position by Nader Shah), 'Iraq-e 'Ajam, Fars, Sham, Mecca, Mashad and Azerbaijan. After the assassination of Nader Shah in 1747 he served various rulers: the Afsharids 'Adil Shah and Ibrahim Shah, and the Safavids Isma'il III and Sulayman III.

In short, he experienced at first hand the vagaries of a chaotic time in Iran's history and was cognizant of the consequences that years of political upheaval and turmoil could have for family and professional prospects. Azar's keen awareness of the shifting fortunes of Isfahan and his utmost admiration for that city can be seen elsewhere in his poetry. In his introduction to the section dealing with

the poetry of his contemporaries in his Firetemple, Azar's understanding of the effect of Iran's chaotic recent history upon literary activities is on full display:

For many years, on account of the revolution of the time, at once the customs of poetic compositions are nullified and poets, from great anguish, are changed. The resolve of poets is corrupted. The scattering of easy circumstances and state of confusion are such that no one is in the state of reading or composing poetry.

Azar notes that for fifty years the condition of his contemporaries was defined by the tyranny, oppression and evil that reigned over all parts of Iran, once the paragon of the garden of heavens. During this torturous time Iran saw its 'wealth plundered — her daughters massacred, or sold to bondage — and the denizens of the once-smiling gardens ... exiled and wandering in a foreign clime'. Azar is adamant not only in detailing the sorry state of affairs in eighteenth-century Iran, but also in justifying the poetry and position of his contemporaries, which

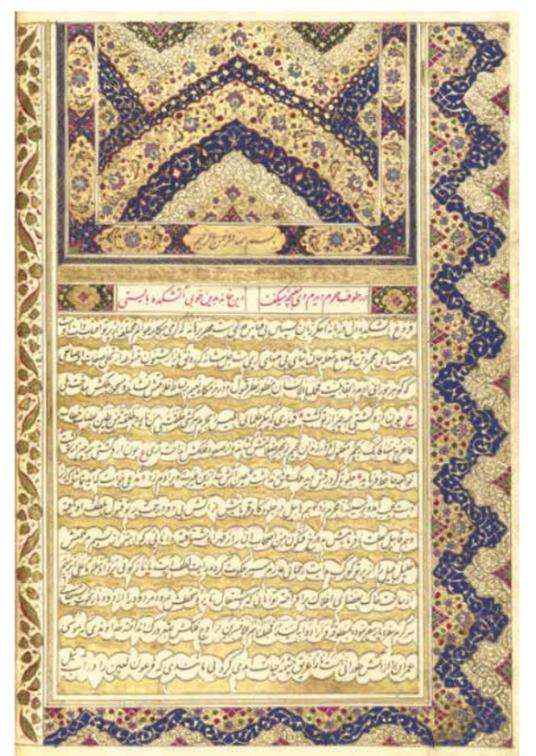
must be viewed with consideration of these debilitating social and economic conditions. He juxtaposes the amicable social conditions of the ancient poets with the tumultuous times of his contemporaries, thereby indicating that any comparison between the two would not be fair. The ancient poets were 'nurtured in the cradle of prosperity and peace, and obtaining every want and wish beneath the shadow of the protection of the monarchs of the age'. Contemporary poets, on the other hand, were left at the mercy and whim of oppression and misfortune, heavily restricting their ability to compose poetry.

As Azar describes the arrival of Karim Khan Zand, he references the beneficial conditions more amenable to literary production, as witnessed in the case of Mirza 'Abd al-vahhab. But this did not mean Azar or his contemporary cohort were to be entirely immune from the social and political vicissitudes during the time of Karim Khan Zand's rule, nor necessarily able to cope with the loss of their patron Mirza 'Abd al-Vahhab.

With the death of Mirza 'Abd al-Vahhab, patronage for the Isfahani Circle was disrupted remapping Persian literary history and fractured. Faced with uncertainty following the loss of their patron, many of the formative members of this literary circle travelled elsewhere in Iran in an effort to seek new opportunities.

This interregnum between Mirza 'Abd al-Wahhab's death in 1770-1 and the establishment of Fat'hali Shah's literary society in Tehran, when the 'literary return' style achieved supremacy, is a crucial period for understanding how the early movement developed.

During this period one gains a better insight into the understandings and perceptions of the 'literary return' movement, the social conditions of which it was a part and the manner in which the poets viewed themselves. Several rich poetic sources from this time, including letters and elegies, capture some of the attitudes of the Isfahani Circle during a period when the formative stage of their movement ended and a new stage was to begin.



By hurting UN agency, West sides with genocide



By Jonathan Cook
Award-winning
journalist

OPINION

There is an important background to the decision by the United States and other leading Western states, the UK among them, to freeze funding to the United Nations' Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), the main channel by which the UN disseminates food and welfare services to the most desperate and destitute Palestinians. The funding cut — which has been also adopted by Germany, France, Japan, Switzerland, Canada, Netherlands, Italy, Australia, and Finland — was imposed even though the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruled on Friday that Israel may be committing genocide in Gaza. The World Court judges quoted at length UN officials who warned that Israel's actions had left almost all of the enclave's 2.3 million inhabitants on the brink of a humanitarian catastrophe, including famine. The West's flimsy pretext for what amounts to a war on UNRWA is that Israel claims 12 local UN staff — out of 13,000 — are implicated in Hamas' break-out from the open-air prison of Gaza on October 7, 2023. The sole evidence appears to be coerced confessions, likely extracted through torture, from Palestinian fighters captured by Israel that day.

The UN immediately sacked all the accused staff, seemingly without due process. We can assume that was because the refugee agency was afraid its already threadbare lifeline to the people of Gaza, as well as millions of other Palestinian refugees across the region — in the West Bank, Lebanon, Jordan, and Syria — would be further threatened. It need not have worried. Western donor states cut their funding anyway, plunging Gaza deeper into calamity.

They did so without regard to the fact their decision amounts to collective punishment: some 2.3 million Palestinians in Gaza face starvation and the spread of lethal disease, while another 4 million Palestinian refugees across the region are at imminent risk of losing food, health care, and schooling. According to law professor Francis Boyle, who filed a genocide case for Bosnia at the World Court some two decades ago, that shifts most of these Western

states from their existing complicity with Israel's genocide (by selling arms and providing aid and diplomatic cover) into direct and active participation in the genocide, by violating the 1948 Genocide Convention's prohibition on "deliberately inflicting on the group [in this case, Palestinians] conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part". The World Court is investigating Israel for genocide. But it could easily widen

its investigation to include Western states. The threat to UNRWA needs to be seen in that light. Not only is Israel thumbing its nose at the World Court and international law, but states like the US and UK are doing so too, by cutting their funding to the refugee agency. They are slapping the court in the face, and indicating that they are four-square behind Israel's crimes, even if they are shown to be genocidal in nature.

Israel's creature

The following is the proper context for understanding what is really going on with this latest attack on UNRWA: The agency was created in 1949 — decades before Israel's current military slaughter in Gaza — to provide for the basic needs of Palestinian refugees, including essential food provision, health care, and education. It has an outsize role in Gaza because most of the Palestinians living there lost — or are descended from families that lost — everything in 1948.

That was when they were ethnically cleansed by the fledgling Israeli military from most of Palestine, in an event known to Palestinians as the Nakba, or Catastrophe. Their lands were turned into what Israel's leaders described as an exclusively "Jewish state". The Israeli army set about destroying Palestinians' towns and villages inside this new state so that they could never return. UNRWA is separate from the UN's main refugee agency, the UNHCR, and deals only with Palestinian refugees.

Although Israel does not want you to know it, the reason for there being two UN refugee agencies is that Israel and its Western backers insisted on the division back in 1948. Why? Because Israel was afraid of Palestinians falling under the responsibility of the UNHCR's forerunner, the International Refugee Organisation. The IRO was established in the immediate wake of the Second World War, in large part to cope with the millions of European Jews fleeing Nazi atrocities. Israel did not want the two cases

treated as comparable because it was pushing hard for Jewish refugees to be settled on lands from which it had just expelled Palestinians. Part of the IRO's mission was to seek the repatriation of European Jews. Israel was worried that the very principle might be used both to deny it the Jews it wanted to colonise Palestinian land and to force it to allow the Palestinian refugees to return to their former homes. So, in a real sense, UNRWA is Israel's creature: it was set up to keep the Palestinians a case apart, an anomaly.

Prison camp

Nonetheless, things did not go exactly to plan for Israel. Given its refusal to allow the refugees to return, and the reluctance of neighbouring Arab states to be complicit in Israel's original act of ethnic cleansing, the Palestinian population in UNRWA's refugee camps ballooned. They became a special problem in Gaza, where about two-thirds of the population are refugees or descended from refugees. The tiny coastal enclave did not have the land or resources to cope with the rapidly expanding numbers there. The fear in Israel was that, as the plight of the Palestinians of Gaza became more desperate, the international community would pressure Israel into a peace agreement, allowing

for the refugees' return to their former homes. That had to be stopped at all costs. In the early 1990s, as the supposed Oslo "peace process" was being unveiled, Israel began penning the Palestinians of Gaza inside a steel cage, surrounded by gun towers. Some 17 years ago, Israel added a blockade that prevented the population's movement in and out of Gaza, including via the strip's coastal waters and its skies. The Palestinians became prisoners in a giant concentration camp, denied the most basic links to the outside world. Israel alone decided what was allowed in and out. An Israeli court later learnt that from 2008 onwards the Israeli military put Gaza on what amount-

ed to a starvation diet by restricting food supplies. There was a strategy here that involved making Gaza uninhabitable, something the UN started warning about in 2015. Israel's game plan appears to have gone something like this: By making Palestinians in Gaza ever more desperate, it was certain that armed groups like Hamas willing to fight to liberate the enclave would gain in popularity. In turn, that would provide Israel with the excuse both to further tighten restrictions on Gaza to deal with a "terrorism threat," and to intermittently wreck Gaza in "retaliation" for those attacks — or what Israeli military commanders variously called "mowing the grass" and "return-

ing Gaza to the Stone Age". The assumption was that Gaza's armed groups would exhaust their energies managing the constant "humanitarian crises" Israel had engineered. At the same time, Israel could promote twin narratives. It could say publicly that it was impossible for it to take responsibility for the people of Gaza, given that they were so clearly invested both in Jew-hatred and terrorism. Meanwhile, it would privately tell the international community that, given how uninhabitable Gaza was becoming, they urgently needed to find a solution that did not involve Israel. The hope was that Washington would be able to arm-twist or bribe neighbouring Egypt into taking most of Gaza's destitute population.



Refugees live in tents at Rafah, Southern Palestine, between 1948–1949.
UN



▶ Palestinian school children attend mathematics lesson in a class in UNRWA Gaza Elementary School in Gaza City in May 2010.
● SUHAIR KARAM/IRIN

Maskripped off

On October 7, Hamas and other armed groups achieved what Israel had assumed was impossible. They broke out of their concentration camp. The Israeli leadership's shock is not just over the bloody nature of the break-out. It is that on that day, Hamas smashed Israel's entire security concept — one designed to keep Palestinians crushed, and Arab states and the region's other resistance groups hopeless.

Last week, in a knockout blow, the World Court agreed to put Israel on trial for genocide in Gaza, collapsing the moral case for an exclusively Jewish state built on the ruins of the Palestinians' homeland.

The judges' near-unanimous conclusion that South Africa has made a plausible case for Israel committing genocide should force a reassessment of everything that went before. Genocides don't just emerge out of thin air. They happen after long periods in which the oppressor group dehumanises another group, incites against it, and abuses it.

The World Court has implicitly conceded that Palestinians were right when they insisted that the Nakba — Israel's mass dispossession and ethnic cleansing op-

eration of 1948 — never ended. It just took on different forms. Israel became better at concealing those crimes until the mask was ripped off after the October 7 break-out.

Israel's efforts to get rid of UNRWA are not new. They date back many years. For a number of reasons, the UN refugee agency is a thorn in Israel's side — and all the more so in Gaza.

Not least, it has provided a lifeline to Palestinians there, keeping them fed and cared for, and providing jobs to many thousands of local people in a place where unemployment rates are among the highest in the world.

It has invested in infrastructure like hospitals and schools that make life in Gaza more bearable, when Israel's goal has long been to make the enclave uninhabitable. UNRWA's well-run schools, staffed by local Palestinians, teach the children their own history, about where their grandparents once lived, and of Israel's campaign of dispossession and ethnic cleansing against them. That runs directly counter to the infamous Zionist slogan about the Palestinians' identity-less future: "The old will die and the young forget."

Divide and rule

But UNRWA's role is bigger than that. Uniquely, it is the sole agency unifying Palestinians wherever they live, even when they are separated by national borders and Israel's fragmentation of the territory it controls.

UNRWA brings Palestinians together even when their own political leaders have been manipulated into endless factionalism by Israel's divide-and-rule policies: Hamas is nominally in charge in Gaza, while Mahmoud Abbas' Fatah pretends to run the West Bank.

In addition, UNRWA keeps alive the moral case for a Palestinian right of return — a principle recognised in international law but long ago abandoned by Western states.

Even before October 7, UNRWA had become an obstacle that needed removing if Israel was ever to ethnically cleanse Gaza. That is why Israel has repeatedly lobbied to stop the biggest donors, especially the US, from funding UNRWA.

Back in 2018, for example, the refugee agency was plunged into an existential crisis when US President Donald Trump acquiesced to Israeli pressure and cut all its funding. Even after the decision was reversed, the agency has been limping along financially.

Now Israel is in full attack mode against the World Court and has even more to gain from destroying UNRWA than it did before. The freeze in funding, and the further weakening of the refugee agency, will undermine the support structures for Palestinians generally. But in Gaza's case, the move will specifically accelerate famine and disease, making the enclave uninhabitable faster.

But it will do more. It will also serve as a stick with which to beat the World Court as Israel tries to fight off the genocide investigation. Israel's barely veiled claim is that 15 of the International Court of Justice's 17 judges fell for South Africa's supposedly anti-Semitic argument that Israel is committing genocide.

The court quoted extensively from UN officials, including the head of UNRWA, that Israel was actively engineering an unprecedented humanitarian crisis in Gaza. Now, as former UK Ambassador Craig Murray notes, the coerced confessions against 12 UNRWA staff serve to "provide a propaganda counter-narrative to the ICJ judgment, and to reduce the credibility of UNRWA's evidence before the court."

Extraordinarily, the Western media have done Israel's PR work for it, happily focusing more attention on Israel's claims about a handful of UNRWA staff than it has on the World Court's decision to put Israel on trial for genocide.

Equally a boon to Israel is that leading Western states have so quickly pinned their colours to the mast. The funding freeze cements their fates to Israel's. It sends a message that they will stand with Israel against the World Court, whatever it decides.

Their war on UNRWA is intended as an act of collective intimidation directed towards the court. It is a sign that the West refuses to accept that international law applies to it, or its client state. It is a reminder that Western states refuse any restraint on their freedom of action — and that it is Israel and its sponsors who are the true rogue states.

The article first appeared on Consortium News.

Amnesty: Cutting off aid to UNRWA while arming Israel 'stark' hypocrisy

COMMON DREAMS — Amnesty International on Monday joined the growing global chorus denouncing Israel's allies for suspending aid to the United Nations' Palestinian refugee agency even as they continue to support the Israeli military's war on the Gaza Strip, risking complicity in genocide.

Agnès Callamard, Amnesty's secretary-general and the former UN special rapporteur on extrajudicial killings, said that while Israel's claim that a dozen staffers at the refugee agency played a role in Hamas' October 7 attack is "serious and must be independently investigated," the "alleged actions of a few individuals must not be used as a pretext for cutting off lifesaving assistance in what could amount to collective punishment".

"Some of the very governments that announced they will cut off funds to UNRWA over these allegations have, in the meantime, continued to arm Israeli forces despite overwhelming evidence that these arms are used to commit war crimes and serious human rights violations," said Callamard. "Rushing to freeze funds for humanitarian aid, based on allegations that are still being investigated, while refusing to even consider suspending support for the Israeli military is a stark example of double standards."

"Instead of suspending vital funding to those in need," Callamard added, "states should be working to halt arms transfers to Israel and Palestinian armed groups and pushing for an immediate and sustained cease-fire and full humanitarian access to help alleviate devastating suffering." "The humanitarian crisis has reached catastrophic levels, and any additional limitations on aid will result in more deaths and suffering." The United States announced last week that it would temporarily cut off UNRWA funding as it reviews Israel's allegations against the low-level agency employees — a decision that came just hours after the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruled that Israel must ensure the provision of humanitarian aid to Gazans, tens of thousands of whom have been killed or wounded by Israeli bombs and shells in less than four months.

need assistance in Gaza actually get it".

"No one else can play the role that UNRWA's been playing, certainly not in the near term," he added. "That only underscores the importance of UNRWA tackling this as quickly, as effectively, and as thoroughly as possible, and that's what we're looking for."

At least a dozen countries — including the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, Germany, Italy, and the Netherlands — have joined the US in suspending aid to the UNRWA, the most critical humanitarian aid organization in the famine-stricken Gaza Strip.

The moves have put the UNRWA's operations in jeopardy, with the UN chief warning that the agency's current funding levels won't be enough to meet all of its requirements in February. The agency has no strategic financial reserves.



▶ A displaced Palestinian boy, who fled his house due to Israeli strikes, sits on a water canister at a tent camp, in Rafah, the southern Gaza Strip, on January 18, 2024.
● IBRAHEEM ABU MUSTAFA/REUTERS

Francesca Albanese, the UN special rapporteur for the occupied Palestinian territories, said that "defunding UNRWA at this critical time overtly defies" the ICJ's ruling.

Médecins Sans Frontières, also known as Doctors Without Borders, similarly warned Monday that "the consequences these cuts in funding will have on the ground contradict the provisional measures issued by the International Court of Justice."

"The humanitarian crisis has reached catastrophic levels," the group added, "and any additional limitations on aid will result in more deaths and suffering."

Just over a week before the Biden administration decided to suspend its UNRWA contributions, a spokesperson for the US State Department described the agency's work as "invaluable" and "lifesaving"

On Monday, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken acknowledged that the UNRWA "has played and continues to play an absolutely indispensable role in trying to make sure that men, women, and children who so desperately

Amnesty said the countries that have suspended aid to the UNRWA thus far provided more than half of the agency's budget in 2022.

Several major nations, including Norway and Spain, have refused to join the US-led freeze of aid to the UNRWA, which the Israeli government has been targeting for years and is hoping to push out of Gaza entirely. The UNRWA quickly fired nine of the 12 workers that Israel accused of taking part in the October 7 attack and has launched an investigation.

On Monday, Spanish Foreign Minister José Manuel Albares said his country will not suspend UNRWA funding, which he said helps "alleviate the terrible humanitarian situation in Gaza".

Albares also pledged to continue pushing for an end to Israel's assault on Gaza, the release of hostages, and a lasting diplomatic solution.

"We will not resign ourselves to watching more innocent women, men, and children killed in Gaza and more suffering of Palestinian families," he said. "We will not resign ourselves to keep watching the suffering of the families of hostages. The violence must stop."

Iranian Parliament investigating fraud at the Equestrian Federation



By Sadeq Dehqan
Staff writer

The vice-chairman of the Iranian Parliament's investigation board said he and his fellow-lawmakers have been looking into reports of misconduct and fraud in the country's Equestrian Federation. "We delved into the matter and realized that several violations have taken place at the federation over the past years, including unauthorized import of cheap breeds of horses that have undermined the integrity of the Iranian purebred horse," Mohammad Vahidi told Iran Daily. "There have also been cases of financial breaches, with regards to sending horses to global events, which have jeopardized the export of Iranian horses in the global market, while leading to the country's suspension from international competitions," Vahidi added. Regarding the microchips injected under the horses' skin, Vahidi said: "Our investigations showed that identification microchips are being smuggled into country and repeatedly used on different horses, which is blatantly against the domestic and international regulations, damaging the pedigree and reputation of the Iranian purebred horse." "The federation defended its actions in the Cultural Committee of the Parliament, though the

lawmakers were eventually convinced of the wrongdoings through compelling evidence and documents presented by the investigation board." Vahidi said a summary of a 700-page report on the matter was read to the lawmakers, with a case of charges on eight counts of financial and managerial fraud in the federation being referred to the Iranian Judiciary.

"The members of the Parliament will put in all the efforts into protecting the identity of the Iranian purebred horse," Vahidi insisted, while praising the Sports Ministry for offering full cooperation on the matter.

However, Vahidi was still critical of the country's sport governing body for appointing a number of caretakers for the Equestrian Federation over the past 20 months, no of whom have managed to comprehensively deal with the managerial defects in their organization – a massive blow for the horse owners and breeders in the country.

"There have been major shortcomings in issuing birth certificates and pedigree documentation for Iranian horses, which massively harm the Iranian horse's identity," said Vahidi, adding: "That is why we insist the Sports Ministry should deploy the concrete measures on the matter."

Underlining the country's high potentials in horse export, Vahidi said: "Horse breeding is widely re-



Iranian lawmaker
Mohammad Vahidi



garded as a profitable, job-creating business all around the world, even overtaking the fashion industry in some countries."

Vahidi says different breeds of Iranian horses enjoy the attributes to shine in the global equestrian events.

"The breeding business is of high importance to Iran as a hub for pure breeds – including Turkoman, Arabian, Caspian, and Kurdish horse – making massive contribution to the economy.

"Different types of Iranian horses possess various characteristics, which suit different purposes in racing, show jumping, endurance riding, and dressage," Vahidi said.

"Many countries are eager to import Iranian horses, which provides us with the opportunity to position them as a highly valuable export commodity for the nation, yielding substantial profits."



Son says 'no excuses' after firing South Korea into Asian Cup semis



AFP – Son Heung-min said South Korea have "no excuses" not to win the Asian Cup after he scored an extra-time winner to beat Australia 2-1 on Friday and set up a semi-final against Jordan.

It was another great escape for the Koreans, who needed a 96th-minute penalty from Hwang Hee-chan to stay alive after Australia took the lead in the first half through Craig Goodwin.

Tottenham's Son, Asia's best player and South Korea's skipper, had yet to fully make his mark at the tournament in Qatar but he delivered when it counted.

First he won a penalty when Lewis Miller brought him down in injury time at the end of normal time, then he stepped up to curl home a sublime free-kick from the edge of the box in the 104th minute.

South Korea have not won the Asian Cup in 64 years and Son said he would accept nothing less than the title.

"There are only going to be four teams left in Doha (after the weekend), and only one is going to lift the trophy," he said.

"Fatigue, whatever – there are no excuses. We're just trying to win the trophy and bring it back home."

Son is South Korea's regular penalty-taker but he handed the ball to Wolverhampton Wanderers forward Hwang after winning the spot-kick.

"At that moment I was a little tired and Hee-chan was confident, so I said 'fine,'" said Son.

"He's an important player and it was a good chance to prove it."

Coach Jurgen Klinsmann, who has been under fire for South Korea's performances in Qatar, led his team in a wild celebration at the end.

It was the fourth time in five games that the Koreans had scored in second-half injury time.

"I don't want to leave it so late all the time,

believe me," said Klinsmann, a World Cup winner with Germany as a player.

"I would be happy to get it done earlier, but it is maybe our story in this tournament to leave it late."

Australia 'devastated'

Australia finished the match with 10 men after Aiden O'Neill was red-carded for lunging at Hwang at the end of the first period of extra time.

"We're devastated at the moment, quite emotional for all the players and the staff," said Australia's coach Graham Arnold.

"For the first 90-odd minutes we did very well until giving that penalty away. It's been a great tournament for a lot of my players."

South Korea's semi-final opponents will be Jordan, who beat tournament surprise packages Tajikistan 1-0 earlier in the day's other quarter-final.

The Koreans will have to play without Kim Min-jae after the Bayern Munich defender picked up his second booking of the tournament.

"Not having Min-jae is obviously not good for us because he is our leader at the back and a fantastic professional," said Klinsmann.

"But we have a number of excellent players."

Australia came into the match with two days' extra rest, with South Korea also battling the effects of a gruelling penalty-shootout win over Saudi Arabia in the last 16.

South Korea dominated the first half but it was Australia who opened the scoring in the 42nd minute.

Hwang In-beom gave the ball away in defence and Connor Metcalfe floated the ball to the back post for Goodwin to volley home.

The Socceroos had chances to double their lead but failed to take them and the Koreans made them pay with the equaliser from the spot deep into injury time. Son then completed the turnaround, curling the ball inside Maty Ryan's post for the winner.

Navidkia named new Mes Rafsanjan manager

Sports Desk

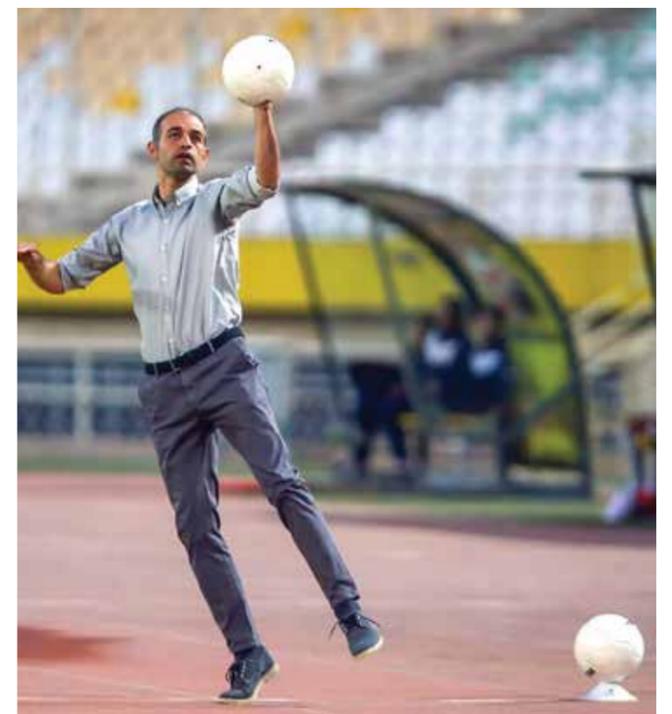
Sepahan legend and former international midfielder Moharram Navidkia has made a dramatic return to the Iranian top-flight football as he was appointed as the new head coach of the Persian Gulf Pro League club Mes Rafsanjan.

Navidkia takes over from Saket Elhami, who stepped down from his role in the midseason, following a run of below-par results and performances in the league. Mes last played to a 1-1 draw at home against defending champion Persepolis on January 1, which ended the club's five-game losing streak.

Mes is 10th in the league table with 15 points, five points above the relegation zone.

A five-time Iranian champion and an AFC Champions League finalist as the Sepahan player, Navidkia made his managerial debut in 2020, steering Sepahan to a runner-up finish in the league before paring ways with the club after his team stood third in the table by the end of the following campaign.

He led Sepahan to 41 wins in 75 outings, while leaving the pitch empty-handed on 16 occasions. Navidkia's first game on Mes bench will come at home against Esteghlal in the last 16 of the Iranian Hazfi Cup on Friday.



Son Heung-min celebrates scoring South Korea's second goal in a 2-1 victory over Australia in the AFC Asian Cup in Al Wakrah, Qatar, on February 2, 2024.
● THAIER AL-SUDANI/REUTERS

Iraq, Syria accuses US of violating their sovereignty

Iran calls attacks 'strategic mistake'

International Desk

Iraq and Syria strongly condemned the US airstrikes on their soils, accusing Washington of violating their sovereignty and undermining the stability of the region.

The US launched deadly overnight airstrikes against what it called Iran-backed groups in Iraq and Syria and promised more to come in retaliation for a deadly attack on US troops in Jordan on Sunday.

Washington blamed Iran for the Sunday's drone attack on its forces in Jordan, but did not strike inside Iranian territory, with both Washington and Tehran seemingly keen to avoid all-out war.

US National Security Council spokesman John Kirby claimed the warplanes struck more than 85 targets at seven facilities utilized by Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps and the groups that they sponsor, three of them in Iraq and four in Syria.

"These targets were carefully selected to avoid civilian casualties," he added.

But Iraqi government spokesman Bassem al-Awadi said civilians were among at least 16 people killed in the US strikes in western Iraq.

General Yehia Rasool, a spokesman for Iraq's Prime Minister Mohamed Shia al-Sudani, in a statement on Saturday condemned the US strikes as a "violation of Iraqi sovereignty", warning of "disastrous consequences" for the country and beyond.

The Syrian Foreign Ministry also on Saturday lashed out at the US for its attacks in eastern Syria, ac-



A destroyed building is pictured at the site of a US airstrike in Al-Qaim, Iraq, on February 3, 2024. **REUTERS**

cluding Washington of being a primary source of global instability. In a statement, the ministry said the US military forces are threatening international security and peace through attacks on nations, peoples, and sovereignty, and escalating conflicts in the Middle East.

The ministry accused the US of attempting to revive terrorist activities in the region.

The Syrian army said "a number of civilians and soldiers" were killed in the strikes in eastern Syria.

'Strategic mistake'

Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Nasser Kanani said the overnight operation was "another strategic mistake by the US government, which will have no result other than intensifying tension and instability."

"The US military attacks on Iraq, Syria and Yemen merely provide for the goals of the Zionist re-

gime," he said, referring to US ally Israel.

The American strikes were "a violation of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Iraq and Syria, of international law and a flagrant violation of the United Nations charter", Kanani added.

Palestinian resistance group Hamas on Saturday condemned US strikes, saying Washington had poured "oil on the fire" in the Middle East.

The US "bears responsibility for the consequences of this brutal aggression against both Iraq and Syria, which pour oil on the fire," the group said in a statement issued in English.

"We confirm that the region will not witness stability or peace except by stopping the Zionist (Israeli) aggression and the crimes of genocide and ethnic cleansing against our people in the Gaza Strip."

Russia also reacted to the attacks, accusing the US of "sowing chaos

and destruction" in the Middle East.

"Washington, confident in its impunity, is continuing its sowing of chaos and destruction in the Middle East," Moscow's Foreign Ministry said, adding that it "decisively condemned" the strikes.

US President Joe Biden underlined that the overnight strikes were only a beginning. "Our response began today. It will continue at times and places of our choosing," he said in a statement. His National Security Council spokesman said Washington "did inform the Iraqi government prior to the strikes," but his remark drew an angry denial from Baghdad.

'Unfounded claim'

The Iraqi government spokesman called it an "unfounded claim crafted to mislead international public opinion" and the foreign ministry said it would call in the US charge d'affaires in Baghdad to

deliver a formal protest.

Relations between the two governments have soured in recent months after Washington carried out previous airstrikes against resistance groups in Iraq in response to a flurry of attacks on US-led troops.

The two governments opened talks on the future of the US-led troop presence late last month after repeated demands from Prime Minister Al-Sudani for a timetable for their withdrawal.

The United States has some 900 troops in Syria and 2,500 in Iraq as part of an international coalition against the Daesh, a terrorist group that once controlled swathes of both countries.

Its troops in Iraq are deployed at the invitation of Baghdad, but those in Syria are deployed in areas outside the control of the Damascus government.

They operate out of bases in the Kurdish-held northeast or in a small pocket of territory along the borders with Iraq and Jordan. The Syrian military demanded on Saturday that Washington withdraw its troops.

"The occupation of parts of Syrian territory by US forces cannot continue," it said.

US and coalition troops have been attacked more than 165 times in Iraq, Syria and Jordan by the resistance groups since the beginning of Israel's onslaught on the Gaza Strip, which has killed more than 27,000 Palestinians so far.

The attacks are in support of Palestinians in Gaza.

The soldiers killed Sunday were the first American military deaths from hostile fire in the upsurge of violence.

Iran fights back to send Japan packing



Sports Desk

Alireza Jahanbakhsh scored from the spot in the sixth minute of stoppage time as Iran came from behind to beat Japan 2-1 and head into the AFC Asian Cup semifinals.

It was a game of different halves in Al Rayyan's Education City Stadium as the Blue Samurai - the most decorated team in the competition with four trophies - drew the first blood through Hidemasa Morita's 28th-minute strike from inside the box in a cagy first half before a much-improved performance saw Iran dominate after the break.

Amir Qalenoee's men were rewarded for their brave display 10 minutes into the second period when Sardar Azmoun's pinpoint pass released Mohammad Mohebbi behind the Japanese backline before the Rostov winger's low drive went past goalkeeper Zion Suzuki into the bottom corner.

Azmoun thought he gave Team Melli a well-deserved lead with a remarkable finish in the 63rd minute, only to see his goal chalked off by the linesman for a marginal offside, and Mohebbi could have doubled his tally for the night but his free header on the far post hit the side netting four minutes later.

Iran kept digging in for the winner and just when the two sides seemed to be heading into an additional 30 minutes of extra time the pressure paid off as Hossein Kan'ani was brought down in the box by Kou Itakura, convincing the referee to blow in his whistle for a spot kick.

While sections of Iranian fans turned their back to the Japanese goal as they couldn't bear to watch the penalty being taken, Feyenoord midfielder Jahanbakhsh kept his composure to bury the ball into the top-left corner, sending his fellow citizens in the stands into raptures. Having played to a nervy and frustrating shootout victory over Syria less than 72 hours before the game, not to mention missing prolific striker Mahdi Taremi through suspension, Iran was clearly the ultimate underdog heading into Saturday's game, but Qalenoee and his men deserve all the credit for outplaying the pretournament favorites in the second half and staying on course for a first trophy in the continent's flagship international tournament since 1976.

Raisi: Iran among world's top 10 in space technology

Satellite launches foil plots to isolate Iran

National Desk

Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi said the country is now among the world's top 10 countries in the field of aerospace technology following the latest successful launch of satellites into space.

Addressing a Saturday

ceremony in commemoration of the National Space Technology Day, Raisi praised the latest launch of homegrown satellites as a major development that neutralized Western sanctions and foiled enemy plots to isolate the nation. Iran successfully sent homegrown Mahda re-

search satellite, along with two research cargos, to space onboard the domestically developed and manufactured Simorgh (Phoenix) satellite launch vehicle (SLV) late last month.

Mahda reportedly weighs 32 kilograms and its primary task is to test the

satellite-related subsystems, verify the function of Simorgh SLV in dispensing space cargos, and evaluate the performance of new designs and the reliability of indigenous technologies in space.

The president said Iran's progress in the field of aerospace was a realization of the "we can" motto, and a definite sign of turning sanctions and threats into opportunities.

He said Iranian scientists are presenting noteworthy innovations, achievements and products at the same time that enemies are trying to foster a sense of despair by means of their mainstream media.

Raisi said the Iranian nation is after establishing a strong presence in space and will succeed against all odds.

The president thanked the Iranian Space Agency (ISA) for its steady progress in the aerospace sector.

Raisi said Iran is utilizing space technologies in various spheres, including agriculture, management of water and natural resources, identifying min-

eral deposits, and ensuring the security of borders.

Commercializing space technology

The Iranian president also underlined the necessity of commercializing the space technology in order to create wealth for the country.

He also called for stronger presence of private knowledge-based firms in the aerospace field, stating that those companies must contribute their share more than ever.

Raisi also praised the cooperation among the Iranian Armed Forces, the Defense Ministry, Ministry of Information and Communication Technology and other institutions involved in the aerospace, stating that Iran's Supreme Space Council directs all the related bodies.

Earlier, the Aerospace Force of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) had successfully put Soraya satellite into an orbit 750 kilometers above Earth in 11 minutes. The research satellite, manufactured by the ISA, was launched with a

Qaem-100 space launch vehicle (SLV). Qaem-100 is a three-stage SLV with solid fuel developed by the IRGC Aerospace Force.

Following the satellite launch, the UK, France and Germany in a joint statement criticized the launch of the Soraya satellite.

"We have longstanding concerns over Iran's activity related to ballistic missile technologies that are capable of delivering nuclear weapons. These concerns are reinforced by Iran's continued nuclear escalation beyond all credible civilian justification," read the statement. "We remain committed to taking every diplomatic step to prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons and to hold Iran to account for its destabilizing activity in the region and internationally."

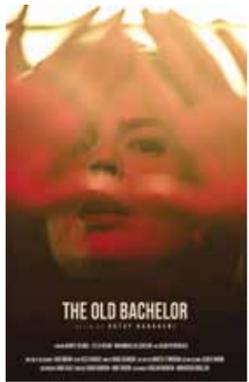
In response, Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman Nasser Kanaani decried an "interventionist" stance of the three European countries, saying Iran is entitled to use peaceful technologies for scientific advances in accordance with international law.

Mohammad Ali Rajabi
Cartoonist





Iran's 'The Old Bachelor' wins Rotterdam's Grand Prix



Arts & Culture Desk

The Iranian film 'The Old Bachelor', directed by Oktay Baraheni, grabbed the Grand Prix at the 53rd International Film Festival Rotterdam (IFFR).

Competing in the Big Screen Competition, 'The Old Bachelor' earned the title of Best Film in its category.

The festival, renowned as one of Europe's significant cinematic events, runs from January 25 to February 4 in the city of Rotterdam, showcasing a diverse selection of independent and creative films of global quality.

Oktay Baraheni, in his second directorial venture, wrote the screenplay for 'The Old Bachelor' himself. The film received financial backing from investors Arsalan Baraheni and Amirhossein Abdollahi. The international poster design for the film was created by Hanif Sarvari and Fatemeh Hassanvand.

Starring prominent actors Leila Hatami, Hamed Behdad, and Mohammad Reza Golzar, 'The Old Bachelor' premiered on January 30 and will continue its screenings until the festival concludes on February 4.

The IFFR plays a crucial role in providing a platform for independent and creative films, solidifying its reputation as a significant cinematic celebration in Europe.

Visual arts drive force behind promotion of related art forms: Minister



Iran's Culture Minister Mohammad-Mehdi Esmaeili visits the 16th Fajr Visual Arts Festival in Tehran on February 2, 2024. farhang.gov.ir

Arts & Culture Desk

Iran's Culture Minister Mohammad-Mehdi Esmaeili called visual arts as the

drive force behind the development all other similar categories of art as he visited the 16th Fajr Visual Arts Festival in Tehran on

Friday. "Whenever the visual arts thrive and prosper, all related arts originating from and connected to the visual

realm will also be elevated. Esmaeili extended gratitude to all the artists of visual arts who curated a "one-of-a-kind festival."

"The number of artworks has more than doubled compared to previous periods, with renowned artists participating in the competitive sections. New and exquisite works have been publicly exhibited at the Fajr visual festival. I invite everyone to admire these creations," he told reporters.

The minister hailed the festival for putting on display works that deals with "day-to-day concerns" including the Israeli ongoing war on the Gaza Strip.

"Visual artists, as exemplified in this exhibition, have focused on day-to-day concerns and issues, including their attention to the situation in Gaza, which has been portrayed through innovative art forms. Furthermore, I saw valuable artworks addressing youths, population growth,

and the overall progress of the nation," Esmaeili said. The culture minister also pointed to the increase in awards and funds for the Fajr Visual Arts Festival saying: "Last year, we expanded the number of awards. God willing, despite the challenges we face this year, we will try to honor the selected artists in the best way possible."

Speaking about plans to provide more support to young artists, the minister said, "This year, with a commendable initiative taken, we will offer special support to visual arts associations. Further details will be announced soon."

In response to a question about the timing of the Fajr Visual Arts Festival and its overlap with other festivals like Fajr theater and film, Esmaeili said, some of our Fajr festivals, such as music, fashion, and clothing, are scheduled with a gap of 10 days from the Fajr period. Our colleagues should address this issue," he said.

Iran adds Barm Alvan Wetland to Ramsar Convention List

Social Desk

Iranian Department of Environment (DOE) successfully registered the Barm Alvan Wetland in the southern Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad Province under the Ramsar Convention, expanding the protection of Iranian wetlands to 26 sites covered by this international environmental treaty.

Arezoo Ashrafizadeh, the director of the Wetlands Conservation and Restoration Office at the Iranian Department of Environment, announced that Barm Alvan Wetland is a distinctive long-lasting lake with brackish shores, span-

ning 20 hectares. She highlighted its unique location surrounded by almond and oak trees in the Zagros mountain range and its rare biodiversity. The Barm Alvan Lake, situated near the protected zone of the Tang-e-Sulak watershed, plays a crucial role in water storage to support the wildlife within and around the protected area, she added.

Ashrafizadeh pointed out that Barm Alvan Wetland boasts 170 species of birds, mammals, fishes, reptiles, amphibians, submerged aquatic vegetation (SAV), and flowering plants. The Ramsar Convention, an intergovernmental treaty

adopted in 1971 in Iran's northern city of Ramsar, focuses on the conservation and sustainable use of wetlands. It currently covers 2,412 sites spanning over 254,000 hectares in 171 countries.

The Director-General of the Department of Environment in Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad, Eslam Javedan-Kherad, emphasized the convention's emphasis on the reasonable conservation and utilization of wetlands, particularly in providing habitats for aquatic birds and fauna.

Javedan-Kherad highlighted the broader perspective of the convention, encom-



passing all aspects of protection and sustainable utilization of wetlands, recognizing them as ecosystems crucial for biodiversity conservation and human well-being.

By registering Barm Alvan Wetland under the Ramsar Convention, Javedan-Kherad stated that it opens avenues for allocating additional funds for

necessary infrastructure development in the region. This registration can also enhance accessibility to wetlands, establish educational centers for informing the public and tourists, and utilize the allocated funds to protect and improve these valuable natural reserves.

Javedan-Kherad concluded that the funds result-

ing from the registration of wetlands in the Ramsar Convention could be utilized for scientific research, regular monitoring to observe and control wetland conditions, constructing natural habitats for wildlife protection, and promoting public awareness about the importance of preserving natural resources.

Iran culture event draws visitors in Qatar amid AFC Asian Cup



Arts & Culture Desk

Qatar has planned various cultural events on the sidelines of the AFC Asian Cup 2023 to spice up the football tournament with festivals including the "Hello Asia" campaign.

Hello Asia aims to acquaint Qataris as well as football fans visiting the tiny Persian Gulf nations for the major sports event with the culture, art, and customs of

the participating countries including Iran. As part of the initiative, the "Cultural Month of Iran in Qatar" has been organized. The highlight of Iran's cultural involvement in Qatar's Hello Asia is its pavilion set up by the country's culture center in the northern city of Lusail for a month which attracts a large number of visitors from various nations. The pavilion offers pro-

grams to introduce the Iran's culture, art, and customs, complemented by performances of traditional Iranian music and shows. Additionally, visitors have the opportunity to explore and purchase Iranian handicrafts and cultural products, which have received great acclaim. The pavilion itself boasts a unique decoration, featuring the design of the Azadi Square tower on the right

side. The distinctive touch adds an attractive and proud ambiance to the cultural event. In front of the tower, there is a stage where local shows and Iranian music performances take place. Throughout the month-long sports competition, visitors are always greeted by the symbol of the capital of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Another notable aspect of pavilion is the presence of a group of Iranian artists, in-

cluding three music bands, as well as artists involved in Iranian and Islamic handicrafts and fashion. They showcase a diverse range of programs, captivating the audience.

Among the popular programs at the Iran pavilion are the live performances of traditional Iranian music by the artistic band 'Soroosh-e Mowlana' and the showcasing of clothing representing different ethnicities of Iran.