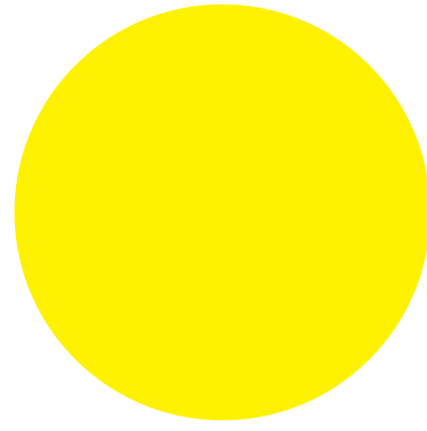


## Two-state illusion has fallen

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SPECIAL ISSUE



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## Security will make tourism boom



By Moslem Shojaei

Tourism Ministry official

PERSPECTIVE

Countries' social situations and political developments in the world, especially in security issues, have direct impact on their

tourism industries.

The industry is of great importance for governments as it accounts for a significant share of their gross domestic product (GDP), and accounts for close to 10% of the world's employment.

Every year at this time, which coincides with the Chinese New Year, Iran's tourism industry usually counts on the large number of Chinese tourists for whom Iran has been one of the main destinations for their holidays over the past years.

In the early days of the Iranian year, our country was one of the main destinations for Chinese tourists, after the end of coronavirus pandemic, and the opening of borders by the Chinese government. Given the fact that Iran usually hosts a low number of tourists this time of year, which coincides with the Chinese New Year, Iran has chosen China as one of the markets for attracting foreign tourists.

Given the good political relations between Tehran and Beijing, as well as the measures taken by the two countries on scrapping visa requirements, every year this month, many Chinese tourists used to travel to Iran in a way that Iran had become one of their destinations for their New Year trips. But this year was totally different.

Iran's tourism industry is now experiencing a considerable decline. The ongoing conflicts in the Middle East and other political developments have had a direct impact on Iran's tourism, as the country's travel agencies have seen almost total cancellations of tours from many countries, especially from China.

Despite taking successful measures in recent years to attract Chinese tourists during their New Year holidays, Israel's devastating war on the Gaza Strip and January's terrorist attack in Iran's eastern city of Kerman caused travel agencies to cancel their tours to Iran this year. The war in Gaza has also affected the tourism industry in many Persian Gulf countries.

However, Iran has plans to prevent the continuation of this negative trend. Iran has invited foreign social media influencers with large followings to boost tourism in the country. The influencers are set to travel to Iran in the coming months to visit the country's tourist attractions and introduce them to the world - a measure which is aimed at reversing the current adverse trend.

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### Iran among world's top 10 countries in maritime sector: *PMO*

Iran's maritime transport fleet is among the leading 10 countries worldwide, announced the chief executive of Iran's Ports and Maritime Organization (PMO).

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### Iran aims to launch foreign satellites

Iran plans to blast foreign satellites into space from its launch bases using indigenous carriers "within the next two years," Communications Minister Issa Zarepour said on Monday.

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## NEWS IN BRIEF

**GDP at \$1.81 trillion, making country 19th economy in world: PBO**

Iran is now the 19th largest economy in the world, with a gross domestic product (GDP) of \$1.81 trillion, based on the purchasing power parity (PPPs), announced Head of Iran's Plan and Budget Organization (PBO) Davood Manzour. Manzour made the remark on Monday in a post on X, formerly known as Twitter, IRNA reported. He said in his post that the country plans to increase its current GDP to \$2.5 trillion based on the PPPs within the next five years, which will fall on the 50th anniversary of the Islamic Revolution. In comments on his post, the PBO head explained that the ranking based on PPPs is determined by international bodies using a common currency which is different from the foreign currency rate announced by countries.

**Industry Ministry to import 2,500 electric vehicles by yearend**

The director of electric cars' project at Iran's Ministry of Industry, Mine and Trade said 2,500 electric vehicles (EVs) will be imported into the country by the end of the current Iranian year (March 19, 2024). Karim Sanjari added that all of the 2,500 electric cars will join the public transportation fleet, IRNA reported. He went on to say that 600 EVs have so far been cleared from the country's customs offices. Sanjari further pointed out that two electric car models will hit the domestic car market next year. A total of 12 public and private sector car manufacturers will embark on importing electric cars into the country, he continued. The official pointed to the battery needed for charging the electric vehicles, adding that two major companies will make enormous investments on manufacturing batteries for EVs. He harbored hope that, with proper planning, the necessary infrastructures will be provided for manufacturing electric vehicles. Iran's Ministry of Industry, Mine and Trade, in cooperation with other bodies and domestic automakers, will take giant strides in developing the urban transportation fleet, he added.

**Iran among world's top 10 countries in maritime sector: PMO**

Iran's maritime transport fleet is among the leading 10 countries worldwide, announced the chief executive of Iran's Ports and Maritime Organization (PMO). Ali Akbar Safaei made the remarks in a conference on Iran's Sea-based Economy with a focus on the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC), adding that the presence of the international fleet with more than 80,000 vessels in the world, and the transit of more than 11,000

tons of goods is the main factor behind the integration of the economy, IRNA reported. Maritime transportation is still dependable and businessmen use this mode of transportation around the globe because it is cheap and safe, the deputy minister of roads and urban development emphasized. Today, the markets of maritime transportation are different in a way that renting vessels and tankers is high, while the rate has sharply de-

creased in the container section, Safari added. He further pointed out that 140,000 vessels are transiting in Iranian ports annually, adding that Iran's maritime fleet is among the 10 largest shipping countries in the world. Iran's sea trade registered an eight percent growth in the first 10 months of the current Iranian year (March 21, 2023, to January 22, 2024), compared to the same period last year, the official added.

**Self-sufficiency of power plant construction industry at over 91%: Report**

Presently, more than 91% of the components and equipment needed in the power plant construction industry are manufactured by domestic engineers in Iran, obviating the need for imports, according to a report by IRNA. Iran is among the leading five countries in the field of manufacturing power plant turbines, thanks to the nonstop and unflinching efforts of its domestic experts after the victory of the Islamic Revolution. Electricity generation is considered as one of the vital and infrastructural in-

dustries which plays a key role in the development of other industries and the economic growth. A glance at the trend of development of thermal power plants in Iran before and after the Islamic Revolution shows that the installed capacity of these units has surpassed 74,000 megawatts since 1979, registering a 16-fold increase compared to the pre-revolution period. Presently, 623 thermal electricity generation units in 141 power plants fulfill more than 94 percent of the country's demand for

electricity. Given the significance of sustainable electricity generation, the relentless efforts of local experts and engineers have put Iran among the world's top five countries in the field of manufacturing steam turbines. Iran used to import the smallest components required for the construction of power plants from abroad before the Islamic Revolution, but presently, the country is able to manufacture various power plant parts and equipment by itself.

**China to finance Persian Gulf Bridge project**

The Persian Gulf Bridge will be constructed on Qeshm Island using China's financing scheme, announced the secretary of Iran's Supreme Council of Free and Special Economic Zones. Hojatollah Abdolmaleki put the estimated cost needed for the completion of the construction operation of the bridge at \$700 million, reported Tasnim News Agency. A part of the bridge will also be constructed using financial resources through the bartering of oil, he added. Speaking on the sidelines of a conference on Iran's Sea-based Economy, he pointed to the latest situation of the construction of the Persian Gulf Bridge and said all the feasibility studies have been conducted. A part of the financial resources for constructing the bridge will be provided by the Qeshm Free Zone Organization, while another part will be provided through the bartering of oil, the secretary added. According to the scheduled program, the construction operation of the bridge will become operational within the next three years. Abdolmaleki pointed to the negotiation with the Chinese contractors and added that a number of contractors have voiced their readiness to finance the project.

**Many idle plants return to production: Spokesman**

The Iranian government spokesman said many inactive industrial units in the country have resumed production activities since President Ebrahim Raisi assumed office in August 2021. Ali Bahadori Jahromi said the current administration has taken effective steps in reactivating the stagnant industrial and production units in the country, reported Tasnim News Agency. According to a report from the Statistical Center of Iran (SCI), the country's economy has registered a significant growth under the current administration's term compared to the previous years, the spokesman added. He went on to say that the administration has made huge investments in the field of energy, reiterating that many inactive industrial and production units have returned to the production cycle. Bahadori Jahromi pointed to the administration's support for the new technology-based companies, saying that backing for knowledge-based firms has tripled compared to the previous years. Supporting technology-based companies in the country has been emphasized by President Raisi, he stressed. Backing the elites in the country in various fields, in line with materializing most economic objectives, has also been put at the focal attention of the administration, the official added.



# Efforts underway to enhance tourism infrastructure of Mazandaran Province

Farahabad ancient site, a great destination for Nowruz travelers



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## Iranica Desk

Mazandaran Province has always been a popular destination for travelers from all over the country throughout the year. As a result, ensuring the necessary infrastructure for accommodating these travelers has consistently been a top priority for officials.

According to the Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts, and Tourism Organization of Mazandaran Province, following the lifting of COVID-19 restrictions, Iranians from across the country began to travel, resulting in approximately 15 million people

staying in Mazandaran Province.

During the last Nowruz holidays (March 21-April 2, 2023), a record number of overnight stays were registered in Mazandaran Province, marking a significant milestone in the country's history of Nowruz travels.

Given the substantial influx of travelers to this region, located in the northern part of the country, it is crucial for officials to anticipate the requirements for providing even better hospitality in the province, ensuring that the Nowruz trip becomes a memorable experience for all travelers. The

preparations and necessary measures for this purpose are always carried out months before the Nowruz holidays to ensure that any shortcomings in hosting millions of travelers are avoided. This includes taking action to prepare historical and tourist sites.

In addition to the lush green forests and the stunning seaside, historical and ancient monuments are other attractions of the province.

Alongside the natural beauty of the forests and the sea, the historical and ancient attractions of this province are unique in their own and represent another ca-

capacity to attract more travelers and tourists.

In this regard, head of Farahabad National Heritage site, which dates back to the Safavid era, referred to the necessary measures taken for preparing the site to host tourists during Nowruz, and said, "Various measures have been planned to ensure a warm and proper welcome for travelers in the historical city of Farahabad."

Mohammad Arman Ershadi added, "The historical city of Farahabad dates back to the Safavid era, and we can utilize this historical and cultural potential for the development of

tourism."

He went on to emphasize the potential of the Tajan River and the seaside as key attractions for both foreign and domestic tourists. He outlined various measures being undertaken to prepare the complex, including enhancement of interior and external lighting, installation of guide signs on the main road, updating of old signs, and the construction of benches that complement the architectural space. Additionally, the establishment of woodcarving workshops is part of the preparation efforts for the complex.

He also mentioned that hand-

craft artists will be invited to showcase their products at the Shah Abbasi mosque and school. The historical complex of Farahabad includes the remains of the old city of Farahabad, consisting of a mosque, school, parts of the Shah Abbasi Bridge, and the remaining walls of a palace and bathhouse dating back to the Safavid era.

Farahabad was considered a bustling port during the Safavid period, and it was referred to as Dar al-Surur and Dar al-Sultan. Many of the buildings in the old city of Farahabad were destroyed due to the Russian invasion.

# Vakil Bazaar, a timeless journey through Shiraz's history

## Iranica Desk

Step into the heart of Shiraz, the capital city of Fars Province, and experience the living history of the enchanting Vakil Bazaar. More than just a marketplace, this bustling hub is a testament to the Karim Khan Zand era, inviting you to immerse yourself in its captivating narrative.

Delve into the origins, architecture, and enduring significance of Vakil Bazaar, a historical masterpiece that transports you back to 1773 CE, when Karim Khan Zand's vision brought it to life. Influenced by the Qeisariyeh Bazaar of Lar and the Safavid Bazaar of Kazerun, this architectural gem reflects the genius of its creators, preserving a chapter of history in stone



and stories.

Vakil Bazaar stands out as a blend of Safavid influences, with a unique identity, showcasing intricate designs that capture the essence of a bygone era. Craftsmanship from cen-

turies past adorns its walls, offering a glimpse into the artistic brilliance of yesteryear.

Step into a design masterpiece where practicality meets aesthetics, with wind towers and strategically placed windows



● itto.org

creating a comfortable ambiance under majestic domed ceilings. As sunlight streams through the shop windows, the bazaar comes alive as a vibrant haven, a true marvel of architectural ingenuity.

Witness the evolution of Vakil Bazaar through the Qajar era, welcoming new additions that enhance its vibrancy while preserving its timeless charm. This commercial heartbeat of the city continues to thrive, blend-

ing commerce and culture seamlessly.

Embark on a journey through time as you explore Vakil Bazaar, where each corner whispers stories of bygone eras. From Safavid and Zand influences to the vibrant Charsooq, the bazaar's history unfolds before your eyes, turning you from a mere visitor into a custodian of its legacy.

Immerse yourself in this timeless journey, where the echoes of history resonate through the bustling lanes, inviting you to embrace its enchantment and become a part of its living narrative. Come, stroll through its vibrant lanes, and let Vakil Bazaar transport you to a world where past and present converge in a harmonious blend of tradition and modernity.

# Palestinians, Israelis

## had been coexisting peacefully

### Their leaders have failed them



By Tim Costello

Former CEO of World Vision Australia

#### OPINION

From the relative comfort and safety of Australia, it has become almost unbearable to watch the news from Israel and Palestine.

Hamas will not surrender, Israeli Prime Minister

Benjamin Netanyahu has doubled down on this opposition to a two-state solution, and so after a seven-day cease-fire and a hostage exchange, bombing, and bloodshed resumed.

There has been much suffering in the Middle East in past decades. To watch the suffering of Israelis, with approximately 1,200 killed and around 200 captives captured on October 7, and the death toll from Gaza growing every day and already surpassing 25,000 lives, it's easy to believe that peace is no longer possible and that Israelis and Palestinians cannot co-exist without violence.

But the truth is, the two-state solution is the only viable option for a lasting peaceful future without tensions always escalating to war. And what's easy to forget from our relative distance is that for so many Israeli and Palestinian people before October 7, living peacefully was a reality already in practice.

I have been to Israel and Palestine many times and seen peace in practice over and over again at a grassroots level. Yes, there is profound trauma and unforgettable experiences that both sides will carry with them throughout their lives. These experiences are not diminished, but they are not the only reality.

I have sat with the Circle of the Bereaved in Jerusalem, with Palestinian parents who have lost children killed by the Israel Defence Forces, and Israeli parents who have lost children in Hamas attacks. United in their grief, they comfort each other. In their suffering, friendships blossom.

I have seen a network of Israeli and Arab volunteers ferry Palestinians to the West Bank for urgent medical treatment. Project Rozana, of which I am a patron, is run by Jews, Christians, and Muslims to bring those in need from Gaza and the West Bank to Jewish hospitals in Israel. It recognises that the little people have no control over their political leaders' choices, the dire health needs of Palestinians, and the outstanding medical services offered in Israel's hospital system. It is peacemaking work, building grassroots contact between people

of the two states who, though they live side by side, do not know each other except through the lens of tribal political caricatures.

In Gaza, I visited projects growing flowers and strawberries that had an Israeli partner helping Palestinians export them to Europe to try to reduce Gaza's youth unemployment rate. These projects are small, yet these partnerships between Jews and Muslims gave jobs and hope.

There are so many examples of Israelis and Palestinians building bridges and uniting through what they have in common, not what they differ on. In these environments, away from politicians and strategists with their own agendas, people can simply look into each other's eyes, hear their stories, and see humanity.

It's also easy to forget that 1.7 million Palestinians live in Israel. A population of that size alone proves the two can and do peacefully coexist; it really challeng-

es the argument that peaceful coexistence is some kind of fanciful utopia that could never exist in a practical sense.

Christian leader and activist Shane Claiborne once said, "Peacemaking doesn't mean passivity. It is the act of interrupting injustice, the act of destroying evil without destroying the evildoer, the act of finding a third way that is neither flight nor fight, but the careful arduous pursuit of reconciliation and justice. It is about a revolution of love that is big enough to set both the oppressed and the oppressor free."

What is desperately needed for the two-state solution to work is a long-term policy that is backed by both sides and supported by respective allied nations. That may not sound particularly impressive, but policy is so fundamentally im-

Two-state solution has failed

## True democracy is Middle East's only hope



By Sarah Leah Whitson

Executive director for DAWN

#### OPINION

Following the catastrophic war in Gaza and Hamas' shocking October 7 attack on Israel, there is a fresh recognition that the historic status quo of Israel "managing the conflict" is no longer an option.

Regardless of its merits, and whatever chances for success it may have previously had, the death of the Oslo Peace Process in 2000 left a massive void where once there was an imaginable path toward a more just future.

But like any challenge to powerful oppression, in this case Israel's over Palestinians, just reaching the point where a viable alternative plan to the two-state solution might be seriously considered will require sufficient pressure.

There is no shortage of proposals and visions for the future of the region — two states, one state, or a confederation of some kind — of what a just and lasting resolution might look like in the region, where Israel has effective sovereignty over seven million Palestinians and seven million Israelis.

Even before the events of October 7, a growing number of Israelis were starting to see the connection between apartheid and the troubling authoritarianism of the Netanyahu cabinet. On October 7, a different realisation struck many Israelis in a tragic way: that it's simply impossible to go back to occupation, apartheid, and siege, while enjoying the relative quiet and safety they had come to expect. Combined with the uncertainty of what comes next, the realisation that change must occur creates an opportunity.

In its current format, the two-state solution model is no longer viable. Yet, the main obstacle in the US revising its position and support for Israel and the two-state solution remains: the massive resources of pro-Israel lobbying groups that support elected US officials who remain blindly allied with the Israeli cabinet.

Instead, an alternative peace plan is required. One such plan that my colleague, Michael Omer-Man, and I have been designing as part of our work with Democracy for the Arab World Now (DAWN) consists of ensuring both Israelis and Palestinians can determine democratically how they wish to organise their governance, ending the Israeli occupation of Gaza and its apartheid rule over Palestine, and establishing a transitional government tasked with transforming the existing regime to one based on principles of equal rights.

We call our plan "the Blueprint". The first and most important initial step for ending ongoing human rights violations, it will create the conditions where all people — Israeli, Palestinian, Bedouin, Druze, Armenian, and others — may freely decide whether the lands should be divided formally into different states, merged into a single state, or conjoined in some other configuration like the cantons of Switzerland. The Blueprint provides a detailed three-year plan for how this initial phase of transformation can take place. This includes establishing

a single civilian legal system; ending abusive military rule and emergency and counter-terrorism laws over Palestinian territories; allowing all people under Israeli rule to vote and have equal rights, representation in an interim government and freedom of movement; and the creation of a new Israeli and Palestinian security force with a new security doctrine.

Most significantly, this plan flips the long-held script that insists that Palestinian rights to equality, freedom, and self-determination must wait until representatives of two diverse blocs of people achieve a negotiated peace through a process that hasn't existed for at least a decade. This was the failed approach of the Oslo Peace Process in 2000, wasting decade after decade, bemoaning the absence of Palestinian "partners" with the legitimacy and capacity to negotiate with Israel, all while Israel and much of the international community ensured that no such partners could ever emerge.

By keeping Palestinians locked down under a ruthless military occupation, divided among increasingly isolated cantons, while expanding settlements and co-opting the Palestinian Authority with funding and military support, no legitimate elected leadership has been able to emerge.

Oslo's negotiated two-state plan denies the status of Palestinians and Israelis as individuals with rights vis-à-vis the state that governs

# Two-state illusion has fallen

Now we look for a less redemptive dream



By A. Dirk  
Moses  
Scholar

## OPINION

that the two-state solution — a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza — was no longer viable. There were simply too many settlers, settlements, and an all-pervasive Israeli military presence.

The following year, I returned as part of a delegation of foreign academics for a study tour of the country. Part of the itinerary included a memorable helicopter ride over the Old City of Al-Quds (Jerusalem) and central Israel. The aim, the pilot explained, was to demonstrate the precariously small size of the country and thus elicit our sympathy. When looking down on the windy route of the relatively new separation wall, I couldn't miss how it intruded into Palestinian territory and snaked around the Palestinian town of Qalqilya, effectively cutting off its inhabitants from their agricultural lands and the rest of the West Bank. Matters have escalated since then. According to the UN, between 2012 and 2022, the number of Israeli settlers living in the 279 illegal settlements increased from 520,000 to 700,000 people. Of these settlers, 229,000 reside in 14 settlements in occupied East Jerusalem.

As a map of the West Bank reveals, the settlements are spaced to shatter Palestinian territory into disconnected parcels, making land swaps all but impossible — an outcome that is no accident.

Killing off the two-state solution became the political consensus among all major Israeli political parties after the Second Intifada (2000–2005). Since 2009, the Israeli public has continued to elect a leader — Benjamin Netanyahu — who had campaigned against the Oslo Accords with the Palestinian Liberation Organization.

Across his three terms as prime minister, Netanyahu has tried to prevent the realisation of a two-state solution by entrenching the West Bank occupation to the extent that some Israeli human rights organisations have joined Palestinian and international bodies in categorising the system of institutionalised inequality as “apartheid”. Most recently, he advocated for the Nation-State Law that restricts self-determination solely to Jewish people, and that legalises systematic discrimination against Palestinian citizens of Israel.

In other words, Israeli policy has produced a one-state reality from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea: Israeli power determines the lives of all people, whether Jewish, Muslim, or Christian, in the West Bank and Gaza in grossly unequal legal arrangements. If Hamas governs Gaza internally, Israel retains control of its borders, air-space and sea access, thereby remaining the occupying power under international law.

This reality is unstable for two reasons. First, Hamas resolved to place the Palestinian question back on the geopolitical agenda with its attack on southern Israel on October 7, which killed an estimated 1,200 Israelis and guest workers. In response, Israel has killed more than 25,000 Palestinians in Gaza and laid waste to much of the strip.

In the West Bank, the Israeli cabinet is implementing what the French government has called a “policy of terror” to drive out as many Palestinians as possible. The UN estimates that, acting in concert, the Israeli military and settler militias have killed over 300 West Bank Palestinians since October 7, arrested thousands more, burned agricultural land, destroyed property, and driven out shepherds and villagers.

Observing the looming destabilisation, Western leaders are now dredging up the two-state solution, by which they mean merely the granting of local autonomy to Palestinian enclaves, not meaningful sovereignty. In other words, this “solution” is the continuation of inequality and discrimination by other means.

In those circumstances, Palestinian resistance will continue because Palestinians say they want what Zionists want: to return to their independent homeland from which they were expelled.

If Western leaders want to address Palestinian resistance, they need to confront this historical injustice and the current Israeli “policy of terror”. Since the two-state solution is an illusion, the only option is granting political equality for everyone living in the region.

This is not a new idea. It has been conceptualised in different ways. Resisting the partition of their country, Palestinians have advocated for a democratic non-sectarian state for Muslims, Christians, and Jews since the 1930s. Also with long histories are binational confederal proposals that reconcile the existence of autonomy for Jewish and Palestinian nations in a single state with security and political equality. It is often forgotten today that Zionist thinkers toyed with similar ideas in the 1930s.

The minority report of the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine also advanced such a plan in 1947. But the Committee's majority report, which was ultimately adopted, recommended partitioning the British Mandate against the wishes of the Arab population and allotted most of the land to the minority Jewish population. One year later, 700,000 Palestinians were expelled from or fled their homes during the Nakba, becoming refugees in the region. By December 1948, the UN General Assembly passed a

motion declaring that Palestinian refugees “wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbours” should be able to do so. But Israel has always refused because reversing the long-sought demographic advantage is interpreted as national suicide.

To ensure Jewish security, Israel expelled and rules over Palestinians, resulting in their insecurity. To this end, Netanyahu is now declaring permanent occupation of all territory west of the Jordan River, where Israeli and Palestinian populations are roughly equal. Meanwhile, religious zealots in his coalition are urging “voluntary” emigration of Palestinians — an echo of the Nakba.

Understanding that this stance cannot guarantee security in the long-run, a growing number of Israelis are having second thoughts, especially as their cabinet prioritises destroying Gaza over negotiating the release of captives.

A new poll indicates that a small majority of Israelis support a two-state solution if Palestine is “demilitarised”. It is unclear where Palestinians stand on the subject, but they are not going to tolerate Israeli control, however “lite” or indirect.

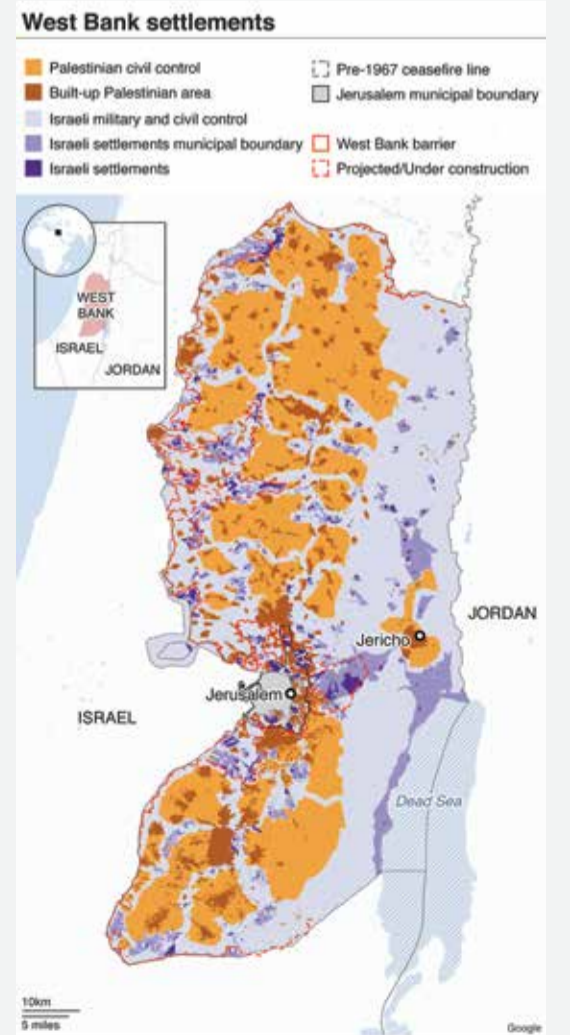
Meanwhile, Hamas sends mixed signals, either seeking the expulsion of Israelis from illegal settlements or provisionally accepting Gaza and the West Bank as the site of a Palestinian state. It is likely to oppose any arrangements in which Palestinians cannot protect themselves, meaning it will likely oppose demilitarised “solutions”.

This lack of basic trust on all sides is the outcome of Israel's violent foundation, and the catastrophic horrors that led to it. It is naive, then, to expect that confederal or binational arrangements will be met with majority support from Israelis. But as the European Union's foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said this week, if the world wants to see peace achieved, “the solution has to be imposed from outside because the two parties will never be able to reach an agreement.”

Recognising Palestinian equality is the way forward. While there are those who believe this solution equates to the destruction of Israel, that is not true. But it would mean substantial change, and a different Israel to the one we know today.

Yet, it is hard to see how that solution can be achieved. The dream of self-determination, meaning separation and control, is intrinsic to Israeli nationality. And yet, forcing a fake two-state solution on Palestine will only ensure everyone's continuing insecurity. As Borrell noted, “If this tragedy doesn't end soon, the entire Middle East might end up in flames.”

The article first appeared on the *Brisbane Times*.



A wall separating Palestine from Israel in Bethlehem is covered with peace-themed graffiti.  
SHUTTERSTOCK

portant because it is the basis from which those small and everyday social changes grow, and these are the building blocks of long-term and lasting peace.

In this respect, leaders from both sides have failed. There's been a long and concentrated effort from those in power to create a picture of “the enemy”. But when you step back from the top and look at things on a day-to-day level, we see that is not true and that peace is achievable.

At the height of apartheid in South Africa, many — myself included — believed it could only end in bloodshed; there was so much hatred. And yet, Nelson Mandela was able to show the world what the right leadership at the right time could do for the long walk to peace.

From this war, there will be a generation of Israelis and Palestinians who are deep-

ly traumatised and shaped by what they have seen and experienced. And while projects and initiatives that support peace can act as a template for these people, they will only work with the right leadership. It is sad to think that the one thing Hamas and the Israeli extreme right seem to agree on is undermining the two-state solution. A one-state constitution where Israelis, Arabs, and Palestinians are not equal would never be accepted, and it would be seen as an apartheid state.

I have seen Palestinians and Israelis rise above tribalism and become peacemakers. Now, those in charge must do the same.

Indeed, as Jesus said, “Blessed are the peacemakers”.

The article first appeared on the *Brisbane Times*.

them, and with varying opinions about how they wish to be governed. Instead, the Blueprint demands that the basic, inalienable human rights of all Palestinians are acknowledged, and that the question of how the territory is organised be answered by an enfranchised electorate.

Critically, what's still missing is the international pressure to force the Israeli cabinet to start considering alternatives outside what's on the table. Just as it took both domestic resistance to apartheid rule in South Africa and international sanctions to pressure the ruling white Nationalist Party to reform itself, so too do Palestinians need the international community to step up to demand that Israel's cabinet changes.

The absence of international accountability is primarily due to successive US administrations supporting Israel militarily and shielding it from meaningful global pressure. This includes blocking UN Security Council resolutions for sanctions and cease-fire and pressing the International Criminal Court to slow-walk its ongoing investigation of abuses in Palestine. But the dramatic changes in US public opinion, increasingly supportive of Palestinians and critical of the Biden administration's persistent cover for Israeli abuses, can and should translate into a shift in the US government's historical unconditional support for Israel.

But a path out of this quagmire isn't just possible, it's essential. The decades-long period of death and destruction in Israel and Palestine is a problem that the international community helped create and one it is responsible for solving.

Millions of Palestinians and Israelis are fed up with living and dying in permanent conflict. Now, we must press the United States and Western governments to do their part to fix it.

The article first appeared on the *Brisbane Times*.



Late PLO chairman Yasser Arafat (C) talks with then-Israeli prime minister Yitzhak Rabin (R) and then-Israeli foreign minister Shimon Peres during a meeting at the Erez checkpoint near Gaza on January 19, 1995.  
REUTERS

## Ezzatollahi set to join Shabab Al-Ahli: *Report*

### Sports Desk

Iranian midfielder Saeid Ezzatollahi is closing in on a move to Emirati club Shabab Al-Ahli Dubai "in the coming days", according to Varzesh3.

Should the deal go through, it will be a third spell in the Persian Gulf club football for the 27-year-old Iranian, who also played for Qatar's Al-Gharafa on loan from Danish side Vejle BK for the second part of the 2021/22 season.

Introduced to the Iranian top flight with Malavan FC in 2012, Ezzatollahi was also on Esteghlal head coach Javad Nekounam's wish list during the mid-season transfer window but refused to return to the Persian Gulf Pro League.

Shabab Al-Ahli is third in the UAE's ADNOC Pro League with 24 points after 12 rounds of matches, six points adrift of Al Wasl on top.

Having joined Vejle in August 2020, the former Rostov and Reading player has bagged a goal and assist piece in 11 appearances in the Danish Superliga this season, where his team is second from bottom in the 12-team table.

Ezzatollahi has 66 caps for the national team under his belt, playing an integral part as a number six since making his international debut in 2015.

Ezzatollahi was part of the Iranian squad at the 2018 and 2022 World Cups, as well as the AFC Asian Cup in 2019.

His latest international outings came in the recently-finished Asian Cup in Qatar, where Iran made it to the semifinals before suffering a 3-2 defeat against the host and eventual champion.



## Iranian girls crowned CAFA futsal champions



Iranian players celebrate a goal during a 9-0 victory over Tajikistan at the CAFA Women's Futsal Championship in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, on February 11, 2024. **FFIRI**

### Sports Desk

A 9-0 hammering of host Tajikistan saw Iran claim a third successive title at the CAFA Women's Futsal Championship in Dushanbe.

Sara Shirbeigi bagged five goals with Maral Torkaman, Fatemeh Rahmati, Fereshteh Khosravi, and Fatemeh Hosseini also on the scoresheet

to make a clean sweep of four victories for Foruzan Soleimani's girls at the annual Central Asian event.

Missing high-profile Fereshteh Karimi, who underwent surgery on her knee before the tournament, the Asian powerhouse began its campaign with a 5-1 victory over Uzbekistan before coming out on top against the

Kyrgyz Republic (11-0) and debutante Turkmenistan (9-0) prior to Sunday's triumph. Shirbeigi topped the scoring chart with 12 goals, followed by fellow-Iranian Hosseini, who finished on six strikes. Uzbekistan finished second to Iran in the five-team competition with nine points, with the Kyrgyz Republic in third with on six points.

## Iran confirms 12-man squad for Beach Soccer World Cup

### Sports Desk

Head coach Ali Naderi announced Iran's 12-man squad for the upcoming FIFA Beach Soccer World Cup, starting Thursday in Dubai, the United Arab Emirates. Stepping into the event as the reigning Asian champion, courtesy of a final victory over Japan in Thailand last March, Iran is in Group B of the competition – also featuring two-time runner-up Tahiti, Spain, and Argentina.

Goalkeepers Hamid Behzadpour and Mahdi Mirjalili will be joined by skipper Moslem Mesigar, Amirhossein Akbari, Mohammad-Ali Mokhtari, Ali Mirshekari, Mohammad Ma'soumizadeh, Movahed Mohammadpour, Reza Amirzadeh, Mo-

hammad Moradi, Mahdi Shirmohammadi, and Saeid Piraoun in the Iranian squad, which will begin its campaign against Spain, finalist in the 2013 edition, on the opening day of the tournament. Iran, a four-time Intercontinental Cup champion, will then take on Argentina on Saturday, before squaring off against Tahiti – in a repeat of a 2017 semifinal – two days later.

Piraoun joined up with the rest of his teammates in Dubai on Monday after recovering from a groin injury. In a final friendly before the tournament, Nadri's men came out on top against Colombia with a 3-2 victory in Dubai on Friday, thanks to a Ma'soumizadeh's double plus a Mokhtari's strike.

The top two of each of the four groups will progress to the quarterfinals with the final showdown set to be staged at the Dubai Design District Stadium on February 25.

The host country is pitted against Egypt, the United States, and Italy in Group A, with Senegal, Belarus, Colombia, and Japan – runner-up to Russia in 2021 – battling it out for last-eight spots in Group C. Brazil – the most decorated team in the competition with five trophies – Oman, Portugal – two-time champion in 2015 and 2019 – and Mexico are in Group D. Iran's best result in the sport's flagship international event came in the 2017 edition in Bahamas, where the Asian side defeated Italy 5-3 to finish on the third podium.



FFIRI

## Kenyan Kiptum, marathon world record holder, dies in road accident



JAMIE SABAU/USA TODAY SPORTS

**REUTERS** – Kenya's marathon world record holder Kelvin Kiptum and his coach were killed in a traffic accident in the Rift Valley on Sunday, cutting short the promising career of the only man to have run the endurance classic in less than two hours and one minute.

The 24-year-old set the world record, opens new tab at the Chicago Marathon in October with a time of two hours and 35 seconds to surpass the mark of 2:01:09 run by compatriot Eliud Kipchoge in Berlin in 2022.

Kiptum, who clocked three of the seven fastest marathon times in history, had been hoping to become the first man to run the marathon in under two hours in race conditions at Rotterdam in April as well as make his Olympic debut in Paris

in July.

"We are shocked and deeply saddened to learn of the devastating loss of Kelvin Kiptum and his coach, Gervais Hakizimana," World Athletics President Sebastian Coe said in a statement.

"On behalf of all World Athletics, we send our deepest condolences to their families, friends, team mates and the Kenyan nation.

"An incredible athlete leaving an incredible legacy, we will miss him dearly." According to the police report, Kiptum was driving his Rwandan coach and a woman in a car near the Rift Valley village where he was born when the accident occurred.

The athlete lost control of the vehicle and veered off the road into a ditch, travelling

for about 60 metres along it before crashing into a large tree.

Kiptum and Gervais Hakizimana died at the scene but the woman, 24-year-old Sharon Chepkurui Kosgei Keiyo, survived with serious injuries and was treated at a local hospital.

Despite the late hour, tributes were paid to Kiptum by senior Kenyan politicians and government officials.

"Devastating news as we mourn the loss of a remarkable individual, Kelvin Kiptum, World Record holder and Kenyan athletics icon," former Kenya prime minister Raila Odinga said on social media platform X. "My deepest condolences to his loved ones, friends, and the entire athletics fraternity. Our nation grieves the profound loss of a true hero."

# Around 100 killed in Israeli strikes in Rafah: *Ham*

Israel urged 'to stop and think seriously' before further action

## International Desk

Predawn Israeli strikes in the southern Gaza city of Rafah killed "around 100" people on Monday, the Health Ministry in Gaza said in a statement.

British Foreign Secretary David Cameron on Monday urged Israel to "stop" its latest military action in war-torn Gaza's Rafah, after deadly overnight bombing and fears of a looming ground incursion.

"We are very concerned about the situation and we want Israel to stop and think seriously before it takes any further action," Cameron told reporters during a visit to Scotland.

"We think it is impossible to see how you can fight a war amongst these people. There's nowhere for them to go."

"But above all, what we want is an immediate pause in the fighting and we want that pause to lead to a cease-fire."

Israel's military said airstrikes had coincided with the raid to allow its forces to be extracted.

People in Rafah said two mosques and several residential buildings were hit in more than an hour of strikes by Israeli warplanes, tanks and ships, causing widespread panic among Gazans woken from their sleep.

Some feared Israel had begun a long-expected ground offensive in the city, where more than a million people displaced by Israel's war on Hamas are sheltering with nowhere else to go.

Meanwhile, Egypt has sent about 40 tanks and armored personnel carriers to northeastern Sinai within the past two weeks as part of a series of measures to bolster security on its border with Gaza, two Egyptian security sources said.

The deployment took place ahead of the expansion of Israeli military operations around Gaza's southern city of Rafah, where much of its population has sought safety, sharpening Egyptian fears that Palestinians could be forced en masse out of the enclave.

Israeli warplanes struck Rafah, which adjoins the border, on Friday.

After Israel began drawing up an evacuation plan to allow it to defeat Hamas in the area, the UN said Palestinian civilians in Rafah in the Gaza Strip need to be protected, but there should not be any forced mass displacement.

"We're extremely worried about the fate of civilians in Rafah," UN spokesman Stephane Dujarric said on Friday.

Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu ordered the country's



Palestinians inspect the site of an Israeli strike on a mosque in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip, on February 12, 2024.

REUTERS

military on Friday to draw up a dual plan to evacuate Palestinian civilians from Rafah in southern Gaza and to defeat the last Hamas fighters there.

More than half Gaza's 2.3 million

people are sheltering in Rafah, many of them penned up against the border fence with Egypt and living in makeshift tents.

Since the Gaza war erupted on Oct. 7, Egypt constructed a con-

crete border wall that reaches six metros into the ground and is topped with barbed wire. It has also built berms and enhanced surveillance at border posts, the security sources said.

## Iran aims to launch foreign satellites



## National Desk

Iran plans to blast foreign satellites into space from its launch bases using indigenous carriers "within the next two years," Communications Minister Issa Zarepour said on Monday. "We are trying to enhance the country's space industry to a level where we can confidently put other nations' satellites into space from Iranian launch sites," Zarepour was quoted as saying by IRNA.

He hailed Iran's progress in the space industry over the past two years, when the country "had more launches and space-related events compared to a decade earlier".

According to the minister, Iranian launchers can ferry satellites weighing between 100kg and 200kg. Moreover, he added, Iran has ground stations for receiving satellite signals. Zarepour also said that Iran has reached self-sufficiency in manufacturing imaging and remote sensing satellites and that it is working on improving the accuracy of Iranian satellites.

"This indicates that the space industry has become indigenous in our country, as we are currently utilizing the complete cycle of space technology to improve the quality of life for our people in various sectors," the minister pointed out.

## US blurs Israel's 'total collapse': *FM*



Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian (r) meets with officials from different Palestinian groups in Damascus, Syria, on February 11, 2024.

The Iranian foreign minister said if it were not for the United States' all-out support, Israel would have faced "total collapse" following a historic operation by the Palestinian resistance more than four months ago.

Hossein Amir-Abdollahian made the remarks during a meeting with about 15 officials from different Palestinian groups in the Syrian capital Damascus on Sunday, Press TV reported.

"The Israeli regime totally collapsed after Operation Al-Aqsa Storm, and if it were not for the US's all-out meddling in the field in support of the Zionist regime and its efforts to resurrect and save it, this collapse would have been completely visible," he said.

Amir-Abdollahian said many believe that "the Israeli regime and the US government achieved none of their declared goals since the beginning of the war on Gaza, and they are now forced

to hold political talks with Hamas, whose demise Tel Aviv and Washington had called for."

The top Iranian diplomat also noted that the struggle and resilience of the resistance groups, as well as the sacrifices of people in Gaza and the West Bank, and the practical unity of the Axis of Resistance in solidarity with Palestine helped the nation defeat the occupying regime.

The Palestinian officials, for their part, hailed Iran's support for the Palestinian issue as "outstanding and distinct and practical and real."

Also, in a joint press conference on Sunday with his Syrian counterpart Faisal Mekdad, Amir-Abdollahian said the besieged Gaza Strip has turned into a graveyard for Israeli regime soldiers more than four months into the war. He also blamed the US and its supply of weapons to Israel for the continuation of hostilities in Gaza.

## Pakistani envoy reaffirms 'unbreakable bonds' with Iran amid terrorism threats



By Sadeq Dehqan  
Staff writer

Pakistani Ambassador in Tehran Muhammad Mudassar Tipu describes the bonds between Iran and Pakistan as strong enough not to be broken by the threat of terrorism.

In an interview with Iran Daily, Tipu called terrorism a significant threat to the entire region and to Iran-Pakistan ties, saying, "Terrorists want to derail the relationship between Pakistan and Iran. This is their primary agenda and we have to be very careful in that regard," the Pakistani ambassador said.

Acknowledging external support for terrorism, Tipu expressed full confidence in the leadership of both countries and their societies, stating that both sides "are capable enough to understand their long-term strategic interests, and to understand that we have unbreakable bonds." Earlier last month, Iran and Pakistan experienced an escalation of cross-border tensions due to Tehran's counter-terrorism operations.

To address these tensions, Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian made an official visit to Pakistan, reaching constructive agreements on enhancing bilateral relations and combating terrorism.

Regarding these developments, the Pakistani ambassador expressed satisfaction with the wise and judicious leadership of both sides, saying that the efforts made "for rapprochement" are

truly remarkable.

"I am very hopeful that now Pakistan and Iran have a very strong roadmap to pursue their diplomatic, political, economic, and trade ties. We have a great deal of confidence in each other," he said.

"Our destinies are collective. So, we must both work together to fight terrorism and to build a better and stronger future," the envoy added.

On January 16, Iran launched simultaneous drone and missile attacks on two bases of Jaish al-Adl terrorist group that claimed responsibility for an attack in December 2023 on a police station in the southeastern city of Rask, killing 11 Iranian police officers. On January 10, another attack by the group on a police station in the city killed one officer.

Also, characterizing it as a response to Tehran's operation against terrorist bases inside Pakistan, nine people, including four children, were killed after Islamabad admitted attacking a village in Saravan in Iran's southeastern Sistan and Baluchestan

Province. Pakistan carried out the strikes on January 18 against what it called bases of the separatist Baloch Liberation Front and Baloch Liberation Army in regions close to Iran's border.

Regarding these tensions, the ambassador reiterated that the enemies seek to create disruption between the two countries. According to the Pakistani official, preventing such disruption is crucial, considering the complexity of terrorism.

"They [enemies of the two countries] wanted to create turbulence among the two historic neighbors, who have been very peaceful, and who are deeply connected to each other. This is what we now have to guard against," he said.

There is a need to educate people, societies, and institutions for greater collaboration, Tipu said. "I think more collaboration at a political level, at a diplomatic level, and at an intelligence level. And to have a robust mechanism where we can share information in a timely manner," the ambassador concluded.



Pakistani Ambassador in Tehran Muhammad Mudassar Tipu

IRAN DAILY

## EU: NATO cannot be 'a la carte' military alliance

NATO cannot be an 'a la carte' military alliance dependent on the whims of the US president, the European Union's foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said on Monday, as he responded to comments made by Donald Trump regarding NATO over the weekend.

Former US president Trump had suggested the US might not protect NATO allies which don't spend enough on their own defense from a potential Russian invasion.

Asked to respond to Trump's comments, Borrell said: "NATO cannot be an 'a la carte' military alliance... depending on the humor of the president of the US."

# Raisi: Tourism 'accelerator' of economic development

Over 50% of global population have visa-free access to Iran: *Minister*

President Ebrahim Raisi emphasized the crucial role of tourism in boosting the economy of all countries.

He asserted that tourism is a sector with the potential to drive economic growth, emphasizing Iran's capacity to develop this aspect of its economy.

He made the remarks during the opening ceremony of the 17th International Exhibition of Tourism and Related Industries, which was attended by Secretary-General of UN World Tourism Organization Zurab Pololikashvili; Iran's Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts Ezzatollah Zarghami; and Iran's Deputy Tourism Minister Ali-Asghar Shalbafian.

Addressing the opening ceremony, Zarghami declared that the cancellation of visas for 33 countries now allows over 50% of the world's population to travel to Iran with just a single ticket. Zarghami praised the government's successful efforts in the tourism sector over the past two years.

Shalbafian announced a 52% growth in foreign tourist arrivals to the country during the first 10 months of the current Iranian year (March 21, 2023, to January 20, 2024).

Shalbafian reported that 5.4 million foreign tourists visited Iran in the first 10 months of the current year.

The UN tourism chief announced that world tourism is gradually recovering from the impacts of COVID-19.

Pololikashvili said that in Iran, the number of tourists has in-

creased by 5% compared to the same period before the pandemic.

The UN official highlighted that global tourism has reached 84% of its pre-pandemic levels and is on a path to restoration.

The president underscored the importance of leveraging Iran's ancient civilization, cultural heritage, and diverse natural attractions to attract global visitors.

In his address, Raisi referred to verses from the Qur'an, stating that Islam encourages travel with study and reflection to enhance people's awareness of their predecessors' conditions.

President Raisi applauded the recent abolition of visas for citizens of 33 countries as a significant step toward attracting more tourists.

He discredited claims that reconsidering principles and foundations is necessary for activating tourism, asserting that Iran's attractions are compelling without compromising its values.

To further enhance tourism, Raisi highlighted the need for improved transportation, accommodation, and culinary offerings. Raisi urged officials to facilitate tourists' movement within the country, considering it a vital advertisement for attracting more visitors.

The president emphasized streamlining administrative processes and improving interactions with tourists as crucial factors in enhancing the country's tourism appeal.

Raisi stressed that tourism can play a pivotal role in conveying the correct image of the Islamic

Republic of Iran and countering negative media portrayals.

Referring to a reported 50% increase in tourist arrivals, the president urged an increase in incentives for tourism industry stakeholders.

He identified cultural heritage and handicrafts as integral components for tourism development, emphasizing the need to preserve and showcase them.

Raisi highlighted the potential of cultural, natural, and health tourism, citing Iran's prominence in medicine and medical products. He called for active promotion of technological tourism through science and technology parks.

Pilgrimage, according to Raisi, is another significant tourism capacity, urging officials to safeguard investors' capital and profits in the tourism sector.

The president concluded by advocating comprehensive planning to enhance the quality of each tourist's experience from origin to destination.

## Visa waiver boosts tourism

The tourism minister highlighted the resumption of tourist visa issuance in November 2021, which had been halted for about 21 months due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite conservative approaches, the government's effective decision allowed for the resumption of visa issuance.

Zarghami emphasized the historic decision to unilaterally cancel visas, undertaken with the president's insight and executed in collaboration with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. With current statistics, over 50% of the global



President Ebrahim Raisi (R) and Secretary-General of UN World Tourism Organization Zurab Pololikashvili meet on February 12, 2024 on the sidelines of the 17th International Exhibition of Tourism and Related Industries being held at the Tehran International Permanent Fairgrounds from February 12 to 15. [president.ir](http://president.ir)

population can now travel to Iran without obtaining visas, experiencing the country's tourist attractions with just the purchase of a ticket.

He stated, "We have opened Iran's doors to the world, despite negative propaganda from enemies. However, to further open Iran's doors, proper tourism infrastructure must be prepared."

## New programs

Shalbafian added that the exhibition featured 50 specialized programs, and concurrently with the 17th edition of the exhibition, 20 influencers entered the country to produce content in the tourism sector.

Shalbafian highlighted the signif-

icance of health tourism, mentioning that 1,300 square meters of space in the exhibition were dedicated to the tourism sector, and 70 hospitals actively participated in the event.

He pointed out the presence of foreign countries at the exhibition, with 12 countries owning booths, and 13 foreign delegations visiting. Additionally, 68 booths from various countries actively participated in the exhibition.

## Restoration of world tourism

In both December and October, the number of Iranian tourists exceeded the figures from the corresponding period before the

virus outbreak, Pololikashvili said.

Pololikashvili also praised Iran's visa waiver for 33 countries, emphasizing that this move will facilitate travel and contribute to the growth of Iran's tourism sector.

Iran, with its rich cultural heritage and numerous attractions, welcomes visitors from around the world, he said.

He said that tourism plays a crucial role in Iran's economy, providing employment opportunities and fostering solidarity among people.

The international event that kicked off at Tehran International Permanent Fairgrounds on February 12 will run until February 15.

## Curtains down on 42nd Fajr International Film Festival

The 42nd Fajr International Film Festival concluded with a gala closing ceremony at the Milad tower in Tehran,

honoring films and artists. The wartime drama 'Majnoon,' directed by Mehdi Shamohammadi and pro-

duced by Owj Arts and Media Organization, received the Crystal Simorgh for the best film. The film depicts

Martyr Major General Mahdi Zeinoddin's courageous actions during the Iran-Iraq war, particularly on Majnoon Island, [fajriff.com](http://fajriff.com) wrote.

During the festival's closing ceremony at Milad Tower on Sunday evening, Majid Entezami received the Crystal Simorgh for best composer for his work on 'Majnoon.' Behzad Khalaj and Shabnam Qorbani were awarded best supporting actor and actress for their roles in the same film.

Behrouz Afkhami secured the best director award for 'The Morning of the Execution,' which delves into the final moments of Tayyeb Haj Rezaei and Esmail Rezaei after the 1963 uprising. Arastou Khoshrazm won the best actor award for the film, and Maral Bani-Adam received the best actress award for her role in 'Parvin,' directed by Mohammadreza Varzi, depict-

ing the life of the renowned Persian poet Parvin E'tesami.

Kouhyar Kalari was honored as the best cinematographer for 'Summer of the Same Year' by Mahmoud Kalari, while Kamyab Amin Ashayeri and Mehrnoush Bayani won best set design and best costume design awards for their collaboration on the film.

Hassan Hassandoust received the best editor award for 'Parviz Khan,' directed by Ali Saqafi, who also received an honorable mention for best screenplay. In the New Outlook Section, 'Parviz Khan' was named the best first film, and Javad Ezzati received the Crystal Simorgh for the best director for his debut directorial 'Blood Alligator.'


In the Cinema Salvation international section, the best film award went to 'Bhaga's Lessons,' directed by Stephan Komandarev from

# War drama 'Majnoon' crowned best



Bulgaria, narrating the story of a widow facing moral dilemmas after falling victim to telephone scammers. Alejandro Rojas and Juan Sebastián Vasquez from Spain were honored with the best director award for 'Upon Entry,' portraying the challenges faced by Diego, a Venezuelan urbanist, and Elena, a contemporary dancer, at Newark Airport while starting a new life in the United States. 'The Best Century of My

Life' from Italy earned director and writer Alessandro Bardani the Crystal Simorgh for the best script, and Angelo Rallis received the award for outstanding artistic contribution for 'Mighty Afarin: In Time of Flood,' a co-production from Greece and Bangladesh. In this section, Mahmoud Kalari from Iran received the special jury award for his film 'Summer of the Same Year.'

 **Mohammad Ali Rajabi**  
 Cartoonist

