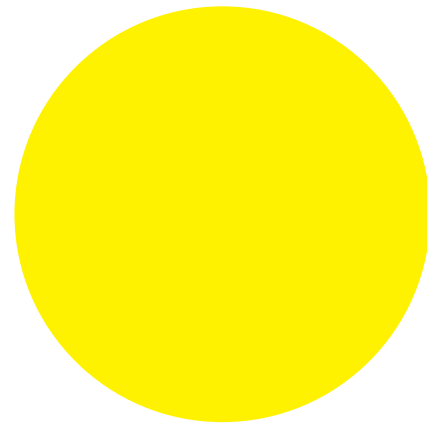




Leader calls for massive turnout at upcoming elections

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# Prospects dim for Gaza truce as US vows to veto UN resolution

Brazilian president accuses Israel of committing 'genocide'

*Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh says Hamas is an "integral part of the Palestinian political arena" and can be part of the PLO if it accepts prerequisites.*

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## Israelis fed up with Netanyahu's reign



By Ebrahim Beheshti  
Staff writer

**OPINION** "Enough blood has been spilled and a deal is on the table." This is the plea of the Israelis who have turned Paris Square in occupied Al-Quds (Jerusalem) into a sea of red in protest against the hawkish policies of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Protesters, along with the families of Israeli captives held by Palestinian resistance group Hamas, also called for snap elections to dismiss Netanyahu once for good. Polls suggest a steep drop in Netanyahu's and the ruling coalition's popularity in Israel. A recent poll has found that if elections are to be held today, opposition parties would secure 75 out of the 120 seats in the Knesset, signaling the defeat of Netanyahu's extremist coalition. However, the tide is turning against Netanyahu within the Likud party as well. Ynet, a Hebrew media outlet, cited Likud party insiders stating that Netanyahu's hold on power is untenable post-war. Some party members have even gone farther to push for early parliamentary elections. Netanyahu's stance during a press conference, refusing early elections, was a firm response to this call from his party members.

Netanyahu and his far-right cabinet find themselves increasingly isolated under mounting internal and external pressure. While the Israeli regime has long lacked credibility in the eyes of a significant portion of global public opinion, particularly in the Islamic world, Netanyahu's extreme and aggressive policies have further tarnished its image. Even American officials, Israel's key ally, are reportedly displeased with Netanyahu's strategies and are speculated to await his resignation or removal post-war.

The prime minister's self-serving and arbitrary actions in the devastating strikes on the Gaza Strip and the atrocities in the region have not only intensified global animosity toward Israel but have also become a stain on the reputation of Israel's staunch supporters like the United States and the United Kingdom.

Netanyahu, the executor of Gaza, finds himself with dwindling support, even among his most fervent backers. He is now gearing up for a ground assault on Rafah, the southern tip of the Gaza Strip, in a bid to stave off or delay his inevitable downfall as the war rages on.

It appears that Netanyahu's political life is entwined with the perpetuation of massacres and genocide. Yet, mounting internal and external pressure has made his future increasingly uncertain. An Israeli protester at Saturday's rally, as reported by Israel's channel 12, directed a message to Netanyahu: "You've had your time and wreaked havoc. Now it's time for the people to rectify all the wrongs you've committed."

These sentiments echo those of many others, both within and outside Israel, who are weary of Netanyahu and his transgressions and atrocities.

24th Iran Media Expo kicks off

## Minister: Press Event Unexpectedly Received

Media's significance, no less than battleground: *Hamas official*

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● REZA MOATTARIAN/IRAN DAILY



## Iran, Malaysia sign MoU in rice research field

A memorandum of understanding (MoU) was signed between Iran's Agricultural Research, Education and Extension Organization (AREEO) and Malaysian Agricultural Research and Development Institute to promote long-term cooperation in the rice research field.

During a visit by a Malaysian agricultural delegation to the research institutes of Iran's agricultural sector, AREEO chief Mojtaba Khayyam-Nekouei said that senior officials of the two countries are determined to broaden their cooperation in the fields of trade and economy, reported Tasnim News Agency.

The two countries are expected to upgrade their readiness for cooperation in various fields in the agricultural sector, the deputy minister of agriculture emphasized.

Khayyam-Nekouei further noted that the average rice consumption in Malaysia is about three times that of Iran.

Iran's Ministry of Agriculture is ready to launch cooperation with Malaysia in the field of rice research, he added.

It is expected that relations between Iran and Malaysia will expand in various agricultural sectors, especially in the fields of education, research and extension of agriculture, the AREEO chief noted, according to Mehr News Agency.

Khayyam-Nekouei also announced the launch of a joint production line in producing vaccines for aquatics in Malaysia.

The organization is ready to cooperate with Malaysia in the field of research activities on livestock production, the official added. He termed his organization as the largest and leading agricultural research organization in the Middle East, and noted that it benefits from the cooperation of more than 1,800 scientific figures.

For his part, Mohamad Sabu said that the two countries have high potential in the field of agriculture and can boost their bilateral cooperation in this field.

Malaysia is ready to establish cooperation with Iran in producing genetically modified chicken and pineapples, as well as the cultivation of rice, he added.

Cooperating in the field of development of investment opportunities, launching joint research cooperation, and expanding cooperation in the implementation of joint research projects were the main topics discussed between the two parties.



# Iran-EU trade topped €4.7b in 2023: Eurostat



The value of the trade exchanges between Iran and the member states of the European Union stood at over €4.7 billion in 2023, announced Eurostat, the statistical office of the European Union.

According to the report, Germany, Italy and the Netherlands were Iran's main European trade partners last year, reported IRNA.

Belgium and France were Iran's fourth and fifth European trade partners

in 2023, the report added.

The total value of the trade exchanges between Iran and the 27 member states of the union in 2023 stood at €4.732 billion, registering a 9% decline compared to a year earlier.

The value of Iran and the EU's trade exchanges was €5.244 billion in 2022, the report added.

The member states of the union exported €4.187 billion and €3.933 billion worth of products

to Iran in 2022 and 2023 respectively.

They imported €799 million worth of products from Iran in 2023, showing a 24% decline compared to a year earlier.

The European Union had imported €1.57 billion worth of products from Iran in 2022.

Eurostat further noted that Germany exported €1.199 billion worth of products to Iran and imported €233 million of products from Iran in 2023.

## Iran's 10-month export of mining, minerals tops \$11b: IMIDRO

The Iranian Mines & Mining Industries Development and Renovation Organization (IMIDRO) said the export value of the mining and mineral products in the country in the first 10 months of the current Iranian year (started March 21, 2023) topped \$11 billion.

More than \$11.1 billion of mining and mineral products were exported from the country between March 21, 2023, and January 22, 2024, registering a 10% hike compared to last year's corresponding period, IRNA reported.

In this timespan, steel products and steel chain accounted for Iran's highest export share, followed by copper and aluminum products, respectively, IMIDRO added.

More than \$4 billion of steel products were exported from the country in the first 10 months of the current

year. Iran exported more than \$1.22 billion and \$739 million of copper and aluminum products from March 21, 2023, to January 22, 2024, respectively, according to IMIDRO. Earlier, IMIDRO announced that Iran exported more than \$7.4 billion of mining and mineral products in the first seven months of the current Iranian year (March 21 to October 22, 2023).



## Tehran, Yerevan to cooperate in construction of Nurduz-Agarak Bridge



The chief executive of the Iranian Company for Construction and Development of Transport Infrastructure (CDTIC) said that Iran and Armenia will cooperate in constructing the Nurduz-Agarak Bridge.

Kheirollah Khademi made the comments in a meeting with the deputy minister of infrastructures and digital development of the

Republic of Armenia at the 18th Iran-Armenia Joint Economic Cooperation Commission, IRNA reported on Sunday.

The development of the international transport corridors between the two countries, construction of tunnels and technical infrastructures as well as exporting the technical-engineering services were

among the main topics discussed by the two sides.

Currently, the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) is under construction in Armenia, and Iran is designing the corridor for developing the transit of goods and passengers from the Persian Gulf to Georgia and the Black Sea region.

## Oil demand growth slowing as non-OPEC supply expands: IEA



Global oil demand growth is losing momentum, the International Energy Agency (IEA) said on as it trimmed its 2024 growth forecast, in sharp contrast to the view held by producer group OPEC.

The IEA, which represents industrialised countries, has predicted that oil demand will peak by 2030 as the world shifts to cleaner energy. OPEC, meanwhile, expects oil use to keep rising for the next two decades, Reuters reported.

Monthly reports this week from the two forecasters underlined their starkly different estimates for 2024 oil demand.

The IEA's monthly report said it expects global oil demand to grow by 1.22 million barrels per day (bpd) this year, slightly down from last month's estimate. OPEC on Tuesday stuck to its much steeper growth forecast at 2.25 million bpd.

In the IEA's view, the deceleration this year – about half of the growth in 2023 – is linked to a slowdown in Chinese consumption. The IEA had previously forecast 2024 demand growth of 1.24 million bpd.

"The expansive post-pandemic growth phase in global oil demand has largely run its course," the IEA said, adding that a harsher global macroeconomic climate is also likely to constrain growth this year. The Brent oil benchmark has risen about 6% so far this year as attacks on shipping in the Red Sea have raised supply fears, with January outages in major non-OPEC oil producing countries such as the United States adding to concerns alongside a fresh round of supply cuts by the wider OPEC+ group in the first quarter.

Gains, however, have been capped by worries over demand as major economies continue to grapple with high interest rates aimed at curbing sticky inflation. Japan slipped into recession

at the end of last year, surrendering its title as the world's third-biggest economy to Germany. Britain's economy, the sixth-largest, also fell into recession in the second half of 2023, official data showed on Thursday.

Oil prices traded lower on Thursday after publication of the IEA report, with Brent crude dipping 0.2% towards \$81 a barrel.

### Supply growth

On the supply side, IEA raised its projection for 2024, estimating supply will grow by 1.7 million bpd versus its previous forecast of 1.5 million bpd.

The agency cited supply from producers outside OPEC+.

The IEA now expects supply to grow to a record high of about 103.8 million bpd, almost entirely driven by producers outside OPEC+, including the United States, Brazil and Guyana.

Given the robust outlook for supply outside OPEC+, the IEA expects a slight build in inventories in the first quarter, it said, adding that OPEC+ could be pumping above requirements if the extra voluntary cuts are unwound in the second quarter.

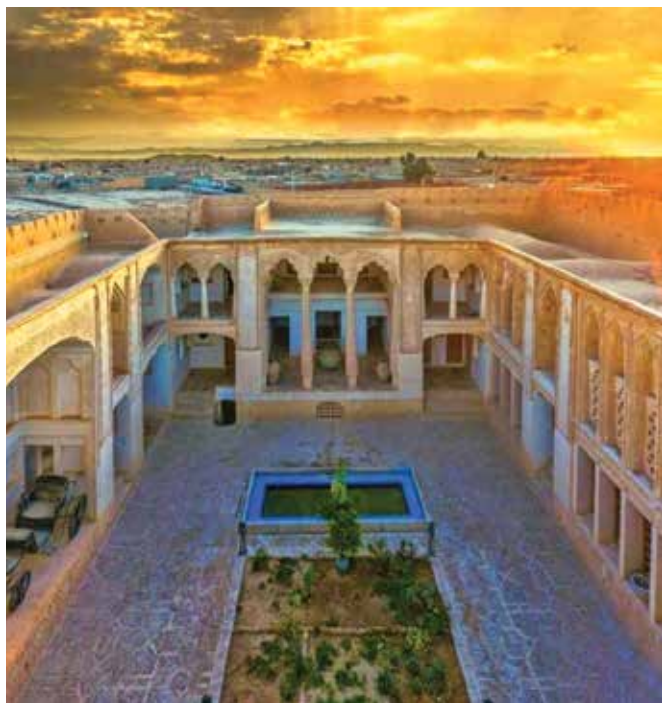
A new OPEC+ voluntary cut of 2.2 million bpd for the first quarter took effect last month.

OPEC+ crude oil output from all 22 member countries fell by 330,000 bpd to 41.52 million bpd in January, the IEA said, after protests shut in Libyan production and some of the bloc's members deepened output cuts – though not by as much as pledged.

The IEA sees demand for OPEC+ crude plus inventories averaging 41.2 million bpd in the first quarter – less than January's output – before rising to 41.5 million bpd in the second quarter.



# Magnificence of Soulat House in Abarkouh



reiseniran.de

## Significant monument

Abarkouh, located in a warm and dry desert climate, experiences hot summers and cold, dry winters. The historical Soulat House, situated on Bahonar Street in the old fabric of the city, is a significant historical and cultural monument, showcasing the traditional architecture of the region.

The house has courtyards covering an area of 150 square meters, with a total area of 1,000 square meters. The entrance door faces east and is adorned with beautiful plasterwork and exquisite *muqarnas* (a form of ornamented vaulting in Islamic architecture). The long entrance hallway is decorated with brick arches, leading to the central courtyard. Four porticos are situated in the four corners of the central courtyard.

On the northern side, there is a *panjdari* (a traditional element of vernacular Persian architecture) room, which, due to its sun-facing orientation, covered walls, and small doors, was used as a winter living space. Opposite is the southern side, which is entirely open and faces the sun. This area was used in the summer and features two beautiful plaster columns. The walls of all four sides facing the courtyard are adorned with special plasterwork.

Next to the entrance, there is a small courtyard designed for relaxation, featuring a floor paved with river stone flagstones. The courtyard encompasses the main building on the southern side, where a portico is prominently displayed. One of the striking features of the building is the exquisitely adorned plaster columns, embellished with prominent Islamic patterns of flowers, bushes, and motifs encircling the courtyard like earrings.

Moving through the vestibule, vis-



destinationiran.com



visitiran.com

Despite the prevailing desert climate in Yazd and Abarkouh, the architecture of Soulat House is designed to ensure the homeowner's comfort in both summer and winter.

itors arrive at the main entrance, where a tall tower stands guard. The intricate woodwork and plasterwork on the house's main door, along with the presence of geometric stained-glass windows, serve as

## Iranica Desk

Traditional houses are an integral part of Iranian history and culture, showcasing traditional Iranian architecture. The design and construction of these houses are tailored to the climate and culture of each region. The unique architecture of traditional houses in Yazd, in central Iran, is a prime example of warm and dry climate architecture, not only beautiful but also well-suited to the needs and climatic conditions of the region's inhabitants.

Neighborhoods in Yazd were densely built to provide maximum shade on external surfaces and for passersby to benefit from the shade. Old houses in the city are strategically built in the direction of the qibla, from northeast to southwest, maximizing space efficiency. The central courtyard is surrounded by summer and winter spaces, providing a cool retreat in the summer and warmth in the winter.

The choice of materials, such as mud bricks and wood, along with practical elements like stained glass, small windows, tree-filled courtyards, turquoise ponds, and wind catchers are all indicative of traditional architectural features. These elements reflect the expertise of architects in adapting to the desert climate.

key decorative elements for all the rooms.

## History

The late Abbas Qoli Khan Samsam Abarkouhi, also known as Samsam or Soulat, was the founder and builder of Soulat House. It is an intriguing example of an architectural style reminiscent of the Zand period, featuring a central hall and surrounding alcoves. This historical building has been listed on Iran's National Heritage List.

The Abarkouh Anthropology Museum is housed within the Soulat House, where visitors can explore artifacts related to ancient Iran. Established in 2016, the museum operates under the supervision of the Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts, and Tourism Organization of Yazd Province.

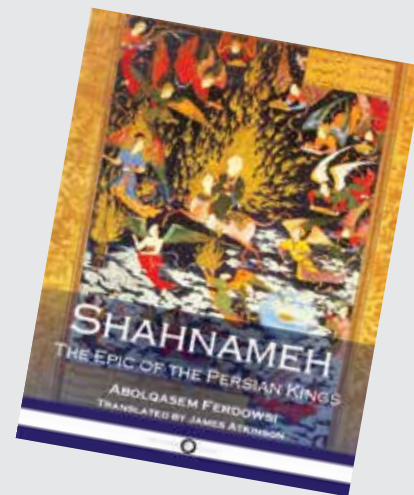
## Best time to visit

Visiting Soulat House, which showcases the pinnacle of plasterwork and decorative art, is one of the highlights of a trip to the historic city of Abarkouh.

The distance from Soulat House to several other beautiful houses, some of which are nationally renowned, is just a few steps.

In the summer, Abarkouh experiences its highest temperatures, while in the winter, it is at its coolest. Therefore, the most suitable time to visit Soulat House, considering the climate, is early spring and early autumn.

## Legacy of Ferdowsi's Shahnameh in Persian literary tradition



The impact of Ferdowsi's Book of Kings upon textual production in the Persian speaking world has resulted in an outpouring of renditions, continuations and imitations throughout history. The Book of Kings has served as a model for authors seeking to retell the tales and triumphs of various personalities contained within it and as an inspiration to create stand-alone 'cyclical' or 'secondary' epics. It has also served as a repository of style, language and metaphor to be borrowed, incorporated and sprinkled across works of multiple genres, and has had its concepts of justice and kingship utilized for didactic purposes.

By the fifteenth century, as Julia Rubanovich notes, Ferdowsi's work 'had taken its particular place in every stratum of the Persian literary system, and was to keep its singular position throughout the forthcoming centuries'. Ferdowsi's Book of Kings, it bears mention, was also part and parcel of a larger, multilingual literary universe that extended beyond Persian and commingled with like-minded epics represented in different languages.

The focus here is on the Book of Kings as a model for authors to narrate events close to their own lifetimes, either contemporaneous with their own life or in the recent past. Texts that rely on an epic tradition of the Book of Kings to narrate historical events are what the literary historian Zabihullah Safa refers to as 'historical epics'. In his work on the Persian epic tradition, Safa cites the variety of historical epics composed in different geographical and political settings from the early thirteenth century to the early nineteenth century, many of which rely on the Book of Kings as a model.

It is within this tradition of epic poetry and imitation of the Book of Kings that the war-ballads of the first Anglo-Afghan War are best understood.

The first historical epic imitating the Book of Kings model and contemporaneous with the events it described is Shahanshahnameh-ye Payizi, produced during the reign of Sultan 'Ala al-Din Muhammad Khwarazm Shah (ruled from 1200-20). It recounts the Sultan's various victories, and, like many such historical epics, was produced at the court of the patron it was praising.

The early-modern and modern periods also witnessed a prolif-

eration of similar historical epics modelled on the Book of Kings. In some cases, these imitative texts were more heavily influenced by the particular style of Nezami's (died in 1209) Book of Alexander (Eskandarnameh), itself a text focusing on one character from Ferdowsi's epic. Imitations of the Book of Kings predominated in Safavid and Ottomans domains, mainly but not exclusively at the court.

At the court of the Safavid monarch Tahmasp (ruled 1524-76), who is often portrayed as shunning non-religious poetry, the poet Qassemi composed several historical epics in praise of various rulers. Qassemi's Book of Kings (Shahnameh-Qasemi) included one part celebrating the deeds and victories of the Safavid founder Shah Isma'il (ruled from 1501-24) (entitled Shahnamah-ye Mazi) and a second part dedicated to the deeds of his son Shah Tahmasp (entitled Shahnameh-ye Navab-e 'Aali).

Later, during the reign of Shah Abbas (ruled from 1588-1629), an unknown author produced two war-ballads, entitled War-Ballad of Qeshm (Jangnameh-ye Qeshm) and Book of Jarun (Jarunnameh), in imitation of Ferdowsi's epic. These works describe battles between local forces and the Portuguese over various islands in the Persian Gulf in the early seventeenth century. The works highlight the heroic deeds of local actors, such as Imam Quli Khan of Shiraz, as well as the role played by the British East India Company (EIC).

In the eighteenth century, the poet Muhammad Ali Tusi, the self-proclaimed 'Second Ferdowsi', composed a Book of Kings-inspired epic entitled Shahnameh-ye Naderi on the triumphs and heroics of the Iranian ruler Nader Shah (ruled from 1736-47). According to Abbas Amanat, Iranian-born American historian, it is one of the first post-classical epics articulating proto-nationalist sentiments around Iranian territory and the first epic depicting a post-Safavid ruler according to 'symbolism that harks back to a mythical Iranian past'.

Such depictions would continue into the following century with the Shahanshahnameh by the poet Saba, one of the last great court-sponsored imitations of the Book of Kings in Iran, produced at the court of the Qajar monarch Fat'hali Shah (1797-1834).

*The above is a lightly edited version of part of a chapter titled, 'A Market for the Masters: Afghanistan c. 1839-1842', from a book entitled, 'Remapping Persian Literary History, 1700-1900', written by Kevin L. Schwartz, published by Edinburgh University Press.*



# Media giant Axel Springer makes money on Israel's illegal settlements

✓ A picture taken from the Palestinian village of Karmah shows the Jewish settlement of Otniel on June 22, 2020.  
● HAZEM BADER/AFP



By Hanno Hauenstein  
Independent journalist

## PERSPECTIVE

One of the ways Germany sought to deal with its dark 20th-century past is its so-called Staatsräson — literally its reason of state — to support Israel. The commitment, which permeates German mass media, intensified after Hamas's October 7 attack and the subsequent Israeli war against Palestinians in the Gaza Strip.

One of the ways Germany sought to deal with its dark 20th-century past is its so-called Staatsräson — literally its reason of state — to support Israel. The commitment, which permeates German mass media, intensified after Hamas's October 7 attack and the subsequent Israeli war against Palestinians in the Gaza Strip.

Axel Springer SE, Europe's largest publisher, typifies the approach. The owners of Bild, Germany's leading newspaper, Springer takes an unwavering pro-Israel stance. "God bless the IDF," Die Welt, a Springer-owned German daily, declared in a recent editorial. And the company's CEO wrote in Springer-owned Politico that the chants of "from the river to the sea, Palestine will be free" were tantamount to calling for genocide against Jews, a position in line with the German government's November declaration that the slogan was il-

legal.

Defending Israel against criticisms of human rights violations, however, is one thing. Making money off those violations is another. Yet that's exactly what Springer appears to be doing. Springer's Israeli classified ads website Yad2 — the largest Craigslist-like classifieds site in the country — publishes real estate listings across Israel, including rental apartments and sales in Israeli settlements that are considered illegal under international law.

## What's BDS, the movement to boycott Israel?



By Frances Vinall  
Award-winning journalist

## PERSPECTIVE

Opponents of Israel's punishing war in the Gaza Strip have called for boycotts of companies they claim support Israeli policies, and have drawn millions of views on social media. Customers, particularly in the Middle East, have refrained from patronizing companies like Starbucks and McDonald's. The coffee giant has said in response to criticism that it is against all violence, while the fast-food chain has said it doesn't support either side in the conflict.

The calls have dovetailed with an almost two-decade-old movement — called BDS for Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions — that protests Israel's actions in the Palestinian territories by targeting businesses and institutions accused of aiding violations of Palestinian rights.

Over 18 years, BDS has pressured some companies to end investment in Israel, and others to pull operations out of the occupied West Bank. But the BDS movement's overall effect on Israel's economy is hard to conclusively measure and could be minimal, analysts say.

BDS is an organization run by a committee and has specific targets and strategies. It includes a coalition of Palestinian organizations, but is decentralized by design, endorsing a system in which activists decide what to target and how if they agree with BDS's principles.

It has found an influx of new adherents. By two months after the October 7 Hamas attack on Israel and the beginning of the war, the hashtag #boycottisrael had about 340 million views on TikTok, and #BDS at least 3 billion, although the latter captures some posts on other topics. By January, there were almost half a million posts hashtagged #boycottisrael and 887,000 hashtagged #BDS on Instagram.

Some users, but not all, name-check BDS and direct followers to its website, despite largely not coordinating with its leadership. The BDS official account shared a post on Instagram last year, voicing support of recent "grassroots" social media campaigns and endorsing new boycotting targets that had emerged organically.

"All peaceful popular efforts, including boycott and divestment... are justified and called for," it said on Instagram in November, while simultaneously calling for a more targeted approach than it had sometimes seen on social media since October 7.

### What is BDS?

BDS co-founder Omar Barghouti said the movement began in 2005, inspired by the boycotts that helped end apartheid in South Africa and the nonviolent methods of the US civil rights movement. Rights groups and some international law experts have accused Israel of committing apartheid, a crime against humanity under international law. Israeli officials reject comparisons to South Africa's former regime and say Israel's tight controls on the West Bank and Gaza

are needed for security. Barghouti, a Palestinian who resides in Israel, said in an email that the BDS movement has three goals. It is focused on ending Israel's occupation of land it captured and annexed in 1967 — which includes the West Bank and Gaza — and dismantling barriers that separate the territories from Israel; gaining "full equality" for Palestinian citizens of Israel; and establishing a right of re-

turn for Palestinian refugees, he said. The movement calls for boycotts of corporations and institutions seen as supporting Israel's stance toward the Palestinians, including through the contribution of financing, goods, and services, or cultural backing. BDS also calls for a withdrawal of investment in "complicit" projects, an end to specific company activities in Israel, and sanctions against the country, according to Barghouti.

### What do BDS critics say?

The BDS movement has faced stiff opposition in the United States. The European Union also rejects the movement, and bloc countries including Germany have criticized it. Britain last month banned local councils from participating in boycotting Israel. Measures against it have passed in more than 30 US states — often prohibiting public money from going to an entity or individual involved in an anti-Israel boycott — although a few of these have been successfully challenged on First Amendment grounds. Five years

ago, the US House overwhelmingly passed a measure condemning BDS. A particular sticking point is the BDS movement's call for a right of return for Palestinians — and their descendants — who were displaced from what is now Israel during the state's creation in 1948. This seeks to "destroy the Jewish state" because it would "create a Palestinian majority" outnumbering Jews, AIPAC has said. An estimated 700,000 Palestinians fled or were expelled 75 years ago, into the West Bank, Gaza, and else-

where, and their descendants number in the millions. Barghouti said the movement is not antisemitic and opposes "all forms of racism and discrimination". BDS supporters have argued that suppressing the movement shuts down a leading path for nonviolent protest. "A boycott has a very long tradition of being something that people can do who are otherwise not necessarily very powerful," said John Chalcraft, a professor of Middle East history and politics at the London School of Economics.





◀ The entrance of the Axel Springer building in Berlin on May 6, 2019  
● SVEN BRAUN/  
GETTY IMAGES



In December, Yad2 took out its own advertisement in an Israeli business paper to promote home sales on its site. “From the River to the Sea,” the ad, which appeared in *The Marker*, says in English, depicting a map of Israel and Palestine with pins dropped all over. The map has no “Green Line” or other markings separating Israel’s internationally recognized borders and occupied Palestinian territory. Below the co-opted protest slogan, the ad continues in Hebrew: “Yad2 helps you look forward and build a future in your next home in Israel.”

Yad2’s advertisement may be, as many commenters saw it, a cheeky reference to the pro-Palestinian rhetoric, but it also points to how Springer makes money off Israel’s settlement enterprise. Like Craigslist, many individuals can post ads for free on Yad2, but some categories of advertisers — including real estate brokers or dealers — need to pay to put up listings. “Advertising on the website is free for private users,” a representative for Yad2 said in response to an inquiry. “Business users are required to pay according to the terms of the site.” Paid listings, which are highlighted on the site, allow advertisers to increase their reach, they added.

The Intercept found thousands of apartments for sale and for rent in illegal settlements in the occupied Palestinian West Bank. Of those, more than 1,000 were paid ads from brokerage houses — meaning Yad2, and therefore Axel Springer, made money on them. Some of the ads, according to an expert who scanned the listings for *The Intercept*, are for homes in so-called outposts, or settlements considered illegal under even Israeli law; other home listings appear on private Palestinian land that was seized by the Israeli military for security purposes but now hosts Jewish settlers. Publishing ads that promote real estate deals in Israeli settlements is both contributing to and benefiting from human rights

abuses, said Omar Shakir, the Israel and Palestine director at Human Rights Watch, which has concluded that Israel’s occupation and settlement enterprise contribute to an apartheid system. “The land these settlements are built on has been expropriated from Palestinians,” Shakir said. “Ultimately, our call would be for the company to end its activities that are contributing to grave human rights abuses.” Shakir noted that Palestinians — including stateless Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, as well as those from Jerusalem or Israel proper who hold Israeli IDs or citizenship — cannot in practice buy or rent in Jewish-only settlements. “Discrimination has no place at Axel Springer,” said a spokesperson for the company. “This is clearly regulated in our Code of Conduct, which applies to all companies at Axel Springer and is available in several languages, including Hebrew. Axel Springer speaks out clearly — also in the essentials — against any kind of racism. Yad2’s terms of use explicitly state that no one may be discriminated against on the basis of gender, religion, ethnicity or age.” (In fact, Yad2’s terms of use prohibit users from posting “harassing, insulting, hostile, threatening, rude, racist character or content” but don’t explicitly bar discrimination.) Springer did not respond to questions about paid and unpaid advertising for settlement homes on Yad2. For Shakir, the classified ads for homes in Israeli settlements not only profit off discrimination but also enable the entire Israeli settlement project by making housing markets in the West Bank viable. “Companies engaging in this are benefiting from a system that systematically discriminates against Palestinians, that denies them building permits and resources and roads and infrastructure,” he told *The Intercept*. “They’re also helping to make settlements more sustainable economically and thus further entrench the settlements practice.”

## Yad2 in the settlements

Since its founding in 2005, Yad2 has become Israel’s top online platform for classified ads. A user can look up anything from animals to weapons. The site’s initial growth, however, was on the strength of its property ads and used car sales — which remain its most popular categories for ads, featured prominently at the top of the site. The tab for apartment sales leads users to a huge number of real estate listings, including for approximately 1,300 apartments and commercial spaces in Jewish settlements in the occupied West Bank alone, as of mid-January. Yad2 users can also find around 1,000 available rental apartments in Jewish-only settlements. Of those, paid posts from brokerages make up more than 800 sale listings, more than 100 rental listings, and more than 100 commercial real estate listings. The website features a map searchable by region — a map where Palestinian villages and towns seem to not exist. The Yad2 listings encompass properties available for purchase or rent in some of the most ideologically extreme settlements in the West Bank, including Kochav Ha’Shachar, Kedumim, Talmon, Shilo, Eli, Psagot, Tekoa, Otniel, and Susiya. These settlements, like most of the Israeli housing development in the West Bank, exclusively cater to Jewish Israelis. Property acquisition or rentals within their gated communities often hinges on an internal approval process influenced, in part, by ideological considerations. Israeli settlements are considered

illegal under international law, which prohibits the transfer by an occupying army of its own civilians into occupied territory, according to the United Nations Security Council, other international bodies, and every nation in the world except for Israel and, as of the Trump administration, the US. The settlements are a key catalyst for escalating violence, killings, and routine house demolitions inflicted on Palestinians in the occupied territories. Israel distinguishes between settlements it considers to be legal, which make up the vast majority of settlements that exist in the West Bank, and unauthorized settlements known as outposts that are illegal even by the country’s own laws. Yad2’s real estate listings promote properties in such outposts. As of three weeks ago, for instance, there were two listings for apartments in the community Bat Ayn B, north of the Palestinian city of Hebron, which Dror Etkes, an expert on Israeli settlements, said was a West Bank outpost that is unauthorized by the Israeli government. Neither of the ads were paid listings from brokerage houses. Another posting, according to Etkes, lists land near the existing outpost Ma’ale Rehav’am, in a separate outpost unofficially named Nachal David 224, that was seized from Palestinians and put directly up for sale. (The ads for properties in Bat Ayn B and Nachal David 224 are privately placed listings, meaning the seller is not required to pay for the listing but can do so to promote it.) Etkes, who founded Kerem Navot,

an Israeli organization dedicated to monitoring settlement construction in the West Bank, also located two listings for land in settlements that were taken by the Israeli military in the 1970s for security reasons but are now being sold by brokerages in paid ads on Yad2. The failure to distinguish between outposts and those settlements considered legal by Israel itself is routine in the country, said Etkes. “Israel made a decision many years ago to sacrifice the rule of law for land grabbing and intensifying its settler presence in the West Bank,” he said. “The law is treated as less than a recommendation.” Etkes pointed out that, among other politicians, Israeli Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich and Simcha Rothman, a member of the Knesset who heads the Constitution, Law, and Justice Committee, reside in settlement homes that even Israeli law considers to be illegally constructed. Pointing to the horrors of Israel’s war in Gaza, Shakir noted that unchecked impunity for human rights abuses can escalate into even more severe violations. “We’ve repeatedly sounded the alarm on settlement construction and associated human rights abuses, which Human Rights Watch has identified as crimes against humanity, apartheid, and persecution,” Shakir said. “The key takeaway here is the imperative for ending impunity and ensuring accountability for grave abuses.”

The full article first appeared on *The Intercept*.



⬆ Muslims join in for prayer in Palu City, Indonesia, on November 3, 2023, declaring their boycott of McDonald’s over an Israeli franchise’s decision to provide free meals to Israeli soldiers.  
● AP

### What is happening now?

Calls to boycott Israel have found support on TikTok during the war, which was touched off by the October 7 Hamas raid on communities in southern Israel that killed about 1,200 people. More than 25,000 people have been killed in Gaza. Social media creators have uploaded videos explaining which brands they’ve targeted, rejecting specific products by certain brands, or walking through stores and rating brands on their approach toward Israel. BDS has called for boycotts of Puma, the sportswear brand, because it had a sponsorship deal with the Israel Football Association. Human Rights Watch has criticized the IFA for operating in Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank, and the IFA website continues to list teams from the West Bank for the

### What is the impact of BDS?

From the start of BDS’s efforts almost two decades ago until right before the war, Israel’s economy grew. Dany Bahar, an economist and associate professor at Brown University’s Watson Institute, said in a phone interview that “it’s very likely that it has had zero effect” on the country’s economy. In a 2018 Brookings Institution analysis,

2023–2024 season. On December 12, Puma said its sponsorship contract with Israel and some other countries would end in 2024 as part of a new marketing strategy. BDS called this a “win.” Puma had previously said that the Israeli national soccer teams were supplied with Puma equipment to compete in international competitions, but that it had no association with any other Israeli soccer team, in settlements or otherwise. It also said it was supporting two local aid organizations, one in Gaza and one in Israel. Ahava, a skincare and cosmetics brand that has a factory and showroom in an Israeli settlement in the West Bank advertised on its website, is a BDS target. Ahava did not respond to emailed requests for comment. McDonald’s was targeted — in a social

he and co-author Natan Sachs found that Israel’s economy is resistant to boycotts because it specializes in exports that are difficult to source elsewhere, such as advanced technologies and the intermediate goods used in the production of other goods, both of which are difficult to boycott. But the movement has had some notable successes, particularly in divest-

media campaign that was endorsed by BDS in November — because a franchise in Israel promised free meals to Israeli soldiers. In an email, McDonald’s said that it was not supporting any government involved in the conflict; that the Israeli franchise had acted independently without consent or approval from the company. Starbucks has been a popular focus of boycott calls on TikTok because of legal battles over the pro-Palestinian actions of its union. The company sued the union for trademark infringement over a since-deleted social media post made on October 9, reading “Solidarity with Palestine!” It appeared above someone else’s post of a photo purporting to show a bulldozer breaking through the barrier separating Israel and Gaza. The company said that the post was “reckless and

ment, Chalcraft said. He pointed to the French services and utilities company Veolia, which pulled out of Israel in 2015 after a years-long BDS campaign that Chalcraft said caused it to lose “billions.” Veolia denied that BDS was a factor. Maia Hallward, a professor of Middle East politics at Kennesaw State University in Georgia, wrote in an email that

reprehensible” and that its own position was to condemn violence in the region. The union has since countersued. Disney has also been criticized. It plans to feature the controversial Israeli superhero Sabra, a fictional member of the country’s real-life intelligence agency Mossad, in an upcoming Marvel film in the Captain America franchise set to premiere in 2025. BDS has called for a boycott of the specific movie, but many on social media have called for followers to boycott the company altogether. In an email, Marvel Studios said: “While our characters and stories are inspired by the comics, in the MCU [Marvel Cinematic Universe], they are always freshly imagined for the screen and today’s audience, and the filmmakers are taking a new approach with the character Sabra.”

BDS’s impact had been in bringing “issues not traditionally in the US discourse into the public eye.” She added that the number of US states passing legislation against the movement shows that “BDS is seen as a threat.”

The full article first appeared on *The Washington Post*.





## Beach Soccer World Cup: Iran beats Argentina to clinch last-eight spot

### Sports Desk

Six Iranians were on the scoresheet as the country defeated Argentina 6-3 in Group B of the FIFA Beach Soccer World Cup in Dubai to secure a place in the quarterfinals with one game to spare in the group phase. Mohammad Mokhtari bagged his fifth goal in two outings with goalkeeper Hamid Behzadpour and Reza Amiri adding a couple of wonder strikes to give the Asian champion a three-goal lead in the first period before Lucas Medero and Emiliano Holmedilla reduced the deficit to one. Mohammad Moradi scored a superb team goal for Iran's fourth of the night in the third period, though Medero's free-kick kept the Albiceleste in the contest. However, Movahed Mohammadpour restored the two-cushion with less than two minutes left on the clock and Ali Mirshekari rounded off his Player-of-the-Match performance with a goal to secure the maximum points for Ali Naderi's

men and send the Argentines packing. "I'm so thrilled to progress to the next round. We had a tough group, but we did a great job [to finish in the top two]." Mirshekari said after the game, adding: "Our ultimate goal is to win the trophy. I am also grateful to the Iranian fans for the huge support tonight. It felt like we were playing at home." The top spot of the group will be at stake when Iran and Tahiti square off at the Dubai Design District Stadium today – in a repeat of the 2017 semifinal in Bahamas, which the latter won in the shootout. Back-to-back runner-up in 2015 and 2017, Tahiti pulled off the joint-second-biggest comeback in the competition's history against Spain earlier on Saturday. Trailing by three goals midway through the match, the Tahitians eventually won 5-3 to sit atop the group table with six points, with Iran, which came out victorious in the shootout against the Spaniards in the group opener, in second on four points.

Iran's Mahdi Shirmohammadi (L) hits an overhead kick during a 6-3 victory over Argentina in Group B of the FIFA Beach Soccer World Cup in Dubai, UAE, on February 17, 2024.

● FPIRI

## Asian Indoor Athletics Championships: Fasihi retains women's 60m crown

### Sports Desk

The second day of the Asian Indoor Athletics Championships in Tehran saw Iranian girl Farzaneh Fasihi defend her 60m title in style. Fasihi equaled the championship record of 7.20 seconds to cross the finish line ahead of Kazakhstan's Safronova Olga, who clocked 7.35 seconds for the silver, while Thai sprinter Supanich Poolkerd stood third on 7.38 seconds. Sunday's final performance also saw Fasihi better the national record by 0.03 seconds. This was a fourth Asian indoor medal for the 31-year-old Iranian, who was part of the 4×400m silver-winning team in 2016 before grabbing the 60m bronze in Tehran two years later. Fasihi's fellow-Iranian Hamideh Esmaeilnejad was left empty-handed after the 60m final, finishing fifth. Elsewhere in the Aftab-e Enghelab Sports Complex, Iranians Nazanin Eidian and Kazhan Rostami won the silver and bronze medals of the women's 400m event. Eidian registered 55.33 seconds to finish second to Japan's Nanako Matsumoto (55.14 seconds) with Rostami crossing the line in 55.35 seconds. Elham Hashemi had opened the account for the Iranian women on Saturday, winning the shot put bronze with a best throw 14.27m. China's Sun Yue (17.65m) and Nasriddinova Malika (15.42m) of Uzbekistan claimed the gold and silver of the contest. In the men's competitions, meanwhile, Ali Amirian and Mahdi Saberi added a couple of bronze medals to Iran's medal haul. Amirian stood behind Kirgizstan's Nursultan Keneshbekov and Abdurahman Saeed Hassan of Qatar in the 1500m contest, while a high throw of 18.74m sealed the third podium for Saberi in the shot put event.



● olympic.ir

## Ice Climbing World Championships: Iran's Safdarian wins men's lead gold; Beheshti-Rad grabs bronze



● Mohammadreza Safdarian (L) and Mohsen Beheshti-Rad  
● UIAA

### Sports Desk

Iranian men stole the show on the second day of the UIAA Ice Climbing World Championships, snatching the speed gold and bronze in Edmonton, Canada, on Saturday. Mohammadreza Safdarian clocked 12.83 seconds to beat Mongolia's Kherlen Nyamdoo, who finished the final race in 15.03 seconds, and walk away with the ultimate prize. This was a third major medal in a month for the 32-year-old Iranian, who also came



out on top against the Mongolian climber in the UIAA World Cup final in Cheongsong, South Korea, in mid-January before taking a bronze in the event in Saas-Fee, Switzerland, two weeks later. Meanwhile, Mohsen Beheshti-Rad registered a best qualification time of 14.29 seconds but eventually settled for a third-spot finish, thanks to a victory over Andreas Gantner of Liechtenstein. Beheshti-Rad also won his international medal of the year, having grabbed the speed silver in Saas-Fee.



# Leader calls for massive turnout at upcoming elections



Leader of Iran's Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei called for massive turnout at the upcoming elections across the country, saying the path of reform passes through elections. Speaking at a meeting with a group of people from East Azarbaijan Province on Sunday, Ayatollah Khamenei said everyone should participate in the elections, Press TV reported. "Elections are the main pillar of the Islamic Republic. The way to reform the country is through elections," he said. He reminded the candidates that political differences should not affect

the national unity of the Iranian nation against the enemies. "Do not assume that the enemy is weak and incapable," the Leader asserted. "An important condition for victory is knowing the capabilities of the enemy, yet not fearing it." Iran is gearing up for parliamentary and Assembly of Experts elections slated for March 1. Almost 15,000 candidates have been approved to compete in the parliamentary elections that are held every four years. In the Assembly of Experts elections, 144 candidates are vying for

88 seats at the body, which elects and oversees the activities of the Leader of the Islamic Revolution and is in a position of authority to either appoint or dismiss the Leader. In recent months, Ayatollah Khamenei has consistently encouraged people to participate in the elections. Early last month, he said, "Anyone who opposes the elections is opposing the Islamic Republic and Islam." He also censured attempts aimed at demoralizing the people and making them distrustful by claiming that the elections in Iran are meaningless.

● khamenei.ir

## Close ties with neighbors prerequisite to US expulsion: Iran deputy FM



Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister Ali Baqeri-Kani said cordial ties with neighboring countries were a prerequisite to the ultimate expulsion of US forces from West Asia.

Speaking at a TV program on Sunday morning, Baqeri-Kani said Iran had prioritized the policy of de-escalating tensions with regional and neighboring states and would not allow foreigners to take advantage of possible gaps, Press TV reported.

"By consolidating our very strategic and deep-rooted relations with neighboring countries, including Azerbaijan, we show a serious will to create a stable region through collective cooperation and security in order to provide a basis for the US withdrawal from the region," he added.

"The US pullout from the region requires us to create a brotherly, friendly and unbreakable bond with neighbors. This is a firm and strategic decision of the Islamic Republic of Iran's government."

The senior diplomat also hailed the Iranian government's interaction with the neighboring countries.

"President Ebrahim Raisi managed to resolve obstacles hindering the expansion of ties between Iran and its neighbors," he noted. Since taking office in 2021, Raisi's government has pursued a good neighborliness policy and forged partnership with several countries.

Last March, Iran and Saudi Arabia agreed under a Chinese-brokered deal to restore diplomatic relations severed in 2016.

## Iranian, British envoys discuss Afghanistan in Doha

Iran's special representative on Afghanistan Hassan Kazemi Qomi held talks with his British counterpart on the sidelines of a meeting on Afghanistan in Qatar's capital, Doha.

The talks with the UK envoy revolved around the question of the international coordinator's efficiency in the face of the issues that had piled up in Afghanistan after decades of war, the Iranian representative said in a post on his X account, Tasnim News Agency reported. Doha is hosting a meeting of special envoys and representatives on Afghanistan on February 18 and 19.

# Prospects dim for Gaza truce as US vows to veto UN resolution

*Brazilian president accuses Israel of committing 'genocide'*

### International Desk

Prospects for a cease-fire in Gaza dimmed Sunday after the United States signaled it would veto the latest push for a UN Security Council resolution and mediator Qatar acknowledged that separate truce talks have hit an impasse. Efforts to pause the over four-month-old war languish as Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu vowed to reject international appeals to spare Gaza's southernmost city of Rafah, where around 1.4 million people have sought refuge. The Health Ministry in Gaza said on Sunday that a total of 127 people were killed in Israel's strikes in just 24 hours. So far, nearly 29,000 people

have been killed by Israel's attacks on Gaza. Egypt, which controls the Rafah border crossing from Gaza, has repeatedly warned against any "forced displacement" of Palestinians into the Sinai desert. Even if a temporary truce deal is struck, Netanyahu said the ground invasion of Rafah will go ahead. Next week's possible United Nations Security Council vote appears unlikely to advance the cease-fire effort, with Washington already voicing opposition. "The United States does not support action on this draft resolution," said US Ambassador to the UN Linda Thomas-Greenfield. "Should it come up for a vote as drafted, it will not be adopted."

Algeria's draft resolution seeks an immediate humanitarian cease-fire, but Thomas-Greenfield said the United States instead supports a truce-for-hostages deal that would pause fighting for six weeks.

### Attacks on hospitals

Israel's military on Sunday said troops in the southern city of Khan Younis are still operating "in Nasser Hospital". The ongoing raid followed a week-long siege which has left the hospital "not functional anymore" even though 200 patients remain there, World Health Organization chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus wrote on social media platform X. Gaza Health Ministry



spokesman Ashraf al-Qudra also said Nasser Hospital was out of service, after troops had turned it "into a military barracks". He said one more person had died due to lack of oxygen because power has been out for three days, bringing the total of such deaths to seven.

### 'Genocide' in Gaza

Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva accused Israel on Sunday of committing "genocide" against Palestinian civilians in the Gaza Strip and compared its actions to Adolf Hitler's campaign to exterminate Jews. "What's happening in the Gaza Strip isn't a war, it's a genocide," Lula told reporters in Addis Ababa where he was attending an African Union summit. "It's not a war of soldiers against soldiers. It's a war between a highly prepared

army and women and children," added the veteran leftist.

"What's happening in the Gaza Strip with the Palestinian people hasn't happened at any other moment in history. Actually, it has happened: when Hitler decided to kill the Jews." Lula, who met with Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh Saturday on the sidelines of the summit, reiterated his call for a two-state solution to the conflict, with Palestine "definitively recognized as a full and sovereign state."

### 'We are under occupation'

"Palestine is ready. We have the institutions, capabilities, but our serious problem is we are under occupation," Shtayyeh told the Munich Security Conference. "We are under Israeli occupation and we need it to end." When asked whether



This handout picture released by the Israeli army on February 17, 2024, shows troops on the ground in the Gaza Strip.  
● ISRAELI ARMY/AFP

bringing Hamas into the broader Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) platform would alienate international partners, he said Hamas was an integral part of the Palestinian political arena.

"In order for Hamas to be a member of the PLO there has to be prerequisites that Hamas has to accept — the political platform of the PLO, an understanding on the issue of resistance; we are calling for popular resistance and nothing else," he said. "Russia has invited all Palestinian factions who will be meeting on the 26th of this month in Moscow. We will see if Hamas is ready to come to the ground with us," Shtayyeh said.

**Mohammad Ali Rajabi**  
Cartoonist







24th Iran Media Expo kicks offs

# Minister: Press event unexpectedly received

Media's significance, no less than battleground:  *Hamas official*



Iran's Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance, Mohammad-Mehdi Esmaeili, cuts the ribbon to open the 24th Iran Media Expo in Tehran on February 18, 2024.

● REZA MOATTARIAN/IRAN DAILY



## Arts & Culture Desk

The 24th Iran Media Expo officially began on Sunday in the Iranian capital, Tehran, with the presence of Iran's Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance Mohammad-Mehdi Esmaeili and media people. The event marked the end of a six-year hiatus in holding the expo, as emphasized by the minister. Esmaeili expressed his satisfaction with the reopening of this cultural and artistic event, stating, "I am pleased that another delayed matter in the field of arts and culture, which had experienced a six-year hiatus, is now reopening with the presence of media professionals."

The minister said a total of 450 media outlets were participating in the expo. Esmaeili extended his gratitude to all attendees and apologized for the logistical challenges faced due to the unexpected high welcome by the visitors. He attributed the logistical issues to the overwhelming response from participants, stating, "This challenge is due to an unexpected and extraordinary reception that has taken place, and it is a source of pride and honor for us. I thank you all." Esmaeili expressed hope for collaboration among journalists, photographers, and media managers to properly record the greatness and achievements of the Iranian people, projecting

a bright and shining future for the country. Following the opening ceremony, Esmaeili visited the Gaza booth and added that he will return on the following days to have a comprehensive tour. In addition to local media, a dozen resistance media outlets from Afghanistan, Pakistan, Türkiye, Tunisia, Iraq, Yemen, Palestine, and Lebanon have participated in the 24th Iran Media Expo. In addition, foreign media outlets affiliated with the Resistance Front are actively participating, contributing to the dissemination of news related to regional resistance efforts, particularly the recent October 7 Operation Al-Aqsa Storm

carried out by Palestinian resistance groups. The expo is expected to be a hub for sharing ideas and promoting collaboration in the field of media. A senior Hamas official movement emphasized the significance of media activity in their fight against the Zionist regime, noting that its importance is no less than the battle on the ground. Osama Hamdan stated, "I recall the memory of the media martyrs in Palestine, their number exceeding 120 since the beginning of the Zionist regime's invasion." The senior Hamas official added, "There is no doubt that the media has played a crucial role from the past to the present.

Media activity is part of our struggle against the Zionist regime, and its importance is not less than the battle in the field. That's why the enemy targets journalists." The four-day event (February 18 to 22) provides a platform for journalists and media outlets to exchange views on the latest developments, showcasing their achievements across various mediums, including news agencies, newspapers, websites, and magazines. Next to Iranian news agencies, Al-Manar and Al-Mayadeen are also among the international news agencies present at the 24th Iran Media Expo. IRNA has dedicated a pavilion to the Organization of Asia-Pa-

cific News Agencies (OANA) during this event. As the rotating president, Iran's official news agency aims to facilitate information exchange among regional countries with the support of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). Within the OANA, IRNA, Fars, and Mehr serve as the three news agencies representing Iran. IRNA was one of the first members of the organization and previously presided over it from 1997 to 2000. Additionally, the Iranian news agency held the position of vice chairman within the regional organization in 2016 and currently serves as a member of the executive committee of OANA.

## Winners of 39th Fajr Int'l Music Festival announced

### Arts & Culture Desk

In a ceremony held on Sunday at Tehran's Vahdat Hall, the winners of the 39th Fajr International Music Festival were unveiled, celebrating the excellence and diversity within the realm of music. The event, which took place from February 12 to 17, showcased the talents of musicians across various sections. The closing ceremony, graced by the presence of Iran's Culture and Islamic Guidance Minister, Mohammad Mehdi Esmaeili, witnessed the recognition of outstanding artists with the prestigious Barbad Award, Song Award, Music and Media Award, and the Popular Song Award. Amir-Hossein Samiei, the director of the music department at the Ministry of Cul-

ture and Islamic Guidance, expressed gratitude, stating, "Thanks to the festival, effective cultural services were provided to the people from the perspective of cultural justice. This edition notably featured the separate and daily participation of women, along with the encouraging presence of children and teenagers, aiming to pave the way for future generations." Reza Mahdavi, the festival's secretary, discussed the festival's goals, stating, "We aimed to invite artists from the mainstream music scene who perform annually. At the beginning of my tenure as the festival's secretary, I mentioned a 20% potential growth this year, and I hope we have achieved that. Several ideas, such as organizing separate festivals for Iranian pop and

women's sections, and focusing more on the research and street music sections, fulfilled during this edition, with hopes of further realization in the coming years." The festival also paid tribute to three pioneers of Iranian music, honoring them in a special section attended by key figures, including Esmaeili and other high-ranking officials. The distinguished figures recognized during this section included Fazlollah Tavakol, a veteran Iranian musician, Hamayoun Rahimian, a composer and orchestra conductor, and Darvish Reza Monazammi, an acclaimed musician. Additionally, the festival presented the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance's top artistic honor symbolically to Seyyed Jalaeddin Mohammadian, an Iranian music vocalist.

## Iran ready to host Saudi cultural week: ICRO head

Head of the Islamic Culture and Relations Organization (ICRO) Mohammad Mehdi Imanipour said that Tehran is ready to host Saudi Arabia's cultural week. Imanipour and Saudi Arabia's Ambassador to Iran Abdullah bin Saud al-Anazi, met in Tehran on Sunday to discuss cultural diplomacy, IRNA wrote. The head of ICRO emphasized the importance of cultural and scientific ties between Iran and Saudi Arabia, stating that cultural ties serve as the safest way to bring the two nations closer to each other. He also pointed out that both countries face the common issue of Islamophobia, and that the world is grappling with double standards when it comes to diplomacy and media activities. A prime example of those double standards is the ongoing war in Gaza, the Iranian official said, adding that if any oth-

er party had been involved in crimes like those happening in Gaza, it would have been dealt with seriously. Saudi Arabia's envoy acknowledged the shared values between the two neighboring and brotherly countries, stating that their relations are based on mu-

tual respect and good neighborliness. He emphasized the significant role of both countries in the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, and called for the acceleration of cultural cooperation between Iran and Saudi Arabia.



Head of the Islamic Culture and Relations Organization Mohammad Mehdi Imanipour (R) and Saudi Arabia's Ambassador to Iran Abdullah bin Saud al-Anazi hold talks in Tehran on February 18, 2024.

● ICRO