



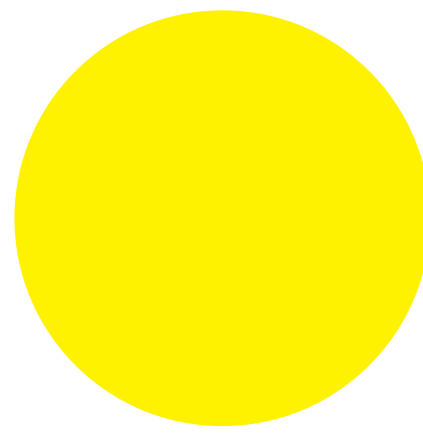
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Iran raps US veto of new UNSC resolution on Gaza cease-fire

Washington's move provokes int'l criticism

Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi said a US decision to veto a UN Security Council resolution calling for an immediate cease-fire in Gaza indicates Washington's responsibility for the continuation of Israeli war crimes against Palestinians.

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Hezbollah, a widespread fear in Israel



By Sabah Zanganeh

Mideast affairs expert

OPINION
EXCLUSIVE

Over the past few days, the Israeli army's strikes on the southern regions of Lebanon and the retaliatory acts by the Lebanese Hezbollah have escalated, fueling speculation

about a potential direct ground conflict between Israel and Hezbollah.

For decades, Israel has pursued aggressive policies toward Lebanon, with past attempts to dominate large swathes of the country through proxies, even reaching Beirut. Despite their efforts, the desired outcomes eluded them, leading to a direct occupation of southern Lebanon. The national and Islamic resistance in Lebanon firmly resisted these aggressions and successfully ousted the Israeli occupiers from southern Lebanon in 2000.

Israel has learned important lessons from its history of conflict with Lebanon and Hezbollah. While parts of southern Lebanon remain under Israeli occupation, recent skirmishes between Israel and Hezbollah post-October 7 have intensified. Hezbollah's support for Gaza and Hamas has further stoked tensions along Israel's northern borders.

In the recent days, Israeli attacks on Hezbollah's positions in the north have intensified, alongside its ongoing massacre of the people in the Gaza Strip. At the same time, Israel's threats of a ground assault on Rafah in southern Gaza and as well as its threats of launching larger attacks on Hezbollah in Lebanon loom large. Such acts and sporadic attacks on Hezbollah serve as a cautionary message to the Lebanese organization, deterring them from escalating tensions further. The Israelis know that the northern areas bordering the strongholds of Hezbollah are very vulnerable. Therefore, the Israeli army wants to create a form of deterrence for itself with its attacks on Hezbollah.

Reports emerging from Israel express concerns over the ramifications of heightened conflicts with Hezbollah, particularly for the northern occupied Palestinian territories. The potential escalation could disrupt essential services like electricity, communication networks, and fuel supplies, jeopardizing fragile security in the border regions. Consequently, a prevailing sense of apprehension and phobia grips Israel regarding a potential escalation with Hezbollah. Meanwhile, Netanyahu faces mounting pressure both domestically and internationally due to unfulfilled promises and the ongoing plight of the Palestinian people. The fear of repercussions, including potential removal from power and legal consequences, drives Netanyahu to perpetuate the war on Gaza. The recent surge in attacks on Hezbollah could be a reflection of this stance. Hezbollah has always maintained a stance of deterrence against Israel. Recent Israeli acts targeting civilian positions alongside military sites controlled by Hezbollah have resulted in civilian casualties. This departure from previous understandings may compel Hezbollah to hit back with a stronger response. The trajectory of the conflict between Israel and Hezbollah hinges on the internal dynamics within Israel and global circumstances. Continued internal and external pressure on Israel may force Netanyahu to reconsider a full-scale war with Hezbollah.



Distinguished professor of sociology at the University of California, Santa Barbara:

Israel Was Founded on Ethnic Cleansing, Violence, and Terrorism

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Iran raps US veto of new UNSC resolution on Gaza cease-fire

Washington's move provokes int'l criticism

International Desk

Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi said a US decision to veto a UN Security Council resolution calling for an immediate cease-fire in Gaza indicates Washington's responsibility for the continuation of Israeli war crimes against Palestinians.

Addressing a cabinet session on Wednesday, Raisi lashed out at the US for vetoing the UNSC resolution and blocking the demand for immediate cease-fire in the besieged strip, which Israel has been pounding for over four months.

Washington on Tuesday vetoed a UN Security Council resolution drafted by Algeria, which demanded an immediate humanitarian cease-fire in war-torn Gaza and the "unconditional" release of all prisoners abducted in the October 7 attacks. Linda Thomas-Greenfield, Washington's ambassador to the UN, called the vote "wishful and irresponsible" as it could put negotiations to free hostages in Gaza "in jeopardy".

The Iranian president also slammed the US government as the main sponsor of the Israeli regime's crimes and genocidal atrocities in Gaza and the one that gets the blame for the continuation of crimes against Palestinians.

He called for the entire world to condemn the Israeli crimes and the United States' support for them. Washington also sent top White House official Brett McGurk

to Cairo for renewed talks involving mediators and Hamas.

Hamas said the US veto amounted to "a green light for the occupation to commit more massacres".

Hamas chief Ismail Haniyeh was already in Cairo for talks, the resistance group said - days after mediators warned that prospects for a truce had dimmed despite repeated talks. Qatar and Egypt have proposed a plan to free prisoners in return for a pause in fighting and the release of Palestinian prisoners, but Israel and Hamas have so far failed to agree on a deal. McGurk will hold talks "to see if we can't get this hostage deal in place," Kirby told reporters.

'Even more dangerous'

Also, China warned Wednesday that the US decision to veto the resolution pushed the conflict into an "even more dangerous" situation.

The veto provoked criticism from countries including China, Russia, Saudi Arabia and even close US allies France and Slovenia.

"China voted in favor of the draft resolution," Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning told a regular briefing on Wednesday.

"The United States has once again single-handedly vetoed it, pushing the situation in Gaza into an even more dangerous situation, in which all parties concerned... have expressed their strong disappointment and dissatisfaction," she added. "The humanitarian situation in

Gaza is becoming extremely serious, and regional peace and stability have been severely impacted," Mao said.

"The Security Council must take action as quickly as possible to bring a halt to hostilities. This is a moral obligation that cannot be put off," she said. "We will continue to work with all parties in the international community to push the Security Council to take further responsible and meaningful actions and make unremitting efforts to quell the war in Gaza at an early date," Mao added.

Hunger grips Gaza

Meanwhile, heavy fighting rocked besieged Gaza on Wednesday as aid agencies warned of looming famine.

Global concern has spiraled over the high civilian death toll and dire humanitarian crisis in the war.

Combat and chaos again stalled the sporadic aid deliveries for desperate civilians in Gaza, where the UN has warned the population of 2.3 million is on the brink of famine and could face an "explosion" of child deaths.

The UN World Food Programme said it was forced to halt aid deliveries in north Gaza because of "complete chaos and violence" after a truck convoy encountered gunfire and was ransacked by looters. More Israeli strikes pounded Gaza, leaving 103 people dead during the night, according to the Health Ministry in the



The UN Security Council meets to debate resolution to demand an immediate humanitarian cease-fire in Gaza, at UN headquarters in New York, US, on February 20, 2024.

REUTERS

Hamas-run territory, which put the overall death toll at 29,313. Particular concern has centered on Gaza's far-southern Rafah area, where 1.4 million people now live in crowded shelters and makeshift tents, fearing attack by nearby Israeli ground troops.

Aid groups warn a ground offensive could turn Rafah into a "graveyard" and the US has said the vast numbers of displaced civilians

must first be moved out of harm's way. US National Security Council spokesman John Kirby said that "without properly accounting for the safety and security of those refugees, we continue to believe that an operation in Rafah would be a disaster".

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has insisted the army will keep fighting until it has destroyed Hamas and freed the remaining 130 prisoners, around 30 of whom are feared dead.

War cabinet minister Benny Gantz has warned that unless Hamas releases the captives by the start of Ramadan, around March 12, the army will keep fighting during the Muslim holy month, including in

Rafah. The World Health Organization called the devastation "in-describable" around Nasser Hospital in the southern city of Khan Younis, where it said it managed to evacuate some 32 patients.

"The area was surrounded by burnt and destroyed buildings, heavy layers of debris, with no stretch of intact road," WHO said. The clinic has no power or running water, it added, and "medical waste and garbage are creating a breeding ground for disease".

Major powers have tried to navigate a way out of the crisis, so far without success.

president.ir, AFP, and REUTERS contributed to this report.

Iran invites IAEA chief to attend conference in May

Iran has invited the head of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Rafael Grossi to visit the country in May, said the head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI).

The head of the IAEA "has expressed his desire to go to Iran and this trip is on his agenda," Mohammad Eslami told reporters on Wednesday, IRNA reported.

"We have invited him to give

a speech at the international conference on nuclear energy," which will be held from May 6 to 8 in the central city of Isfahan, he added. Eslami said a visit next month was unlikely due to a "busy schedule".

Grossi said on Monday that Iran continues to enrich uranium well beyond the needs for commercial nuclear use despite UN pressure to stop it, adding that he wanted to visit Tehran next



Rafael Grossi

REUTERS

month for the first time in a year to end "drifting apart".

Speaking to Reuters after he briefed EU foreign ministers on the subject, Grossi said that while the pace of uranium en-

richment had slowed slightly since the end of last year, Iran was still enriching at an elevated rate of around 7kg of uranium per month, to 60 percent purity. Eslami told reporters on

Wednesday, "Iran's interactions with the IAEA continue as normal, and discussions are held to resolve ambiguities and develop cooperation".

He said that the IAEA sends a report on Iran's nuclear activities to the Board of Governors and the UN Security Council every three months and six months, respectively.

Iran and the IAEA are in a dispute triggered by the agency's Israeli-influenced accusations, which were leveled against Tehran's peaceful nuclear activities. The IAEA insisted on investigating what it claims to be "uranium traces" found at "undeclared nuclear sites" in Iran.

The row turned into a sticking point in the talks aimed at reviving the US-abandoned 2015 nuclear agreement, known as

the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

Eslami asserted that Iran's nuclear measures are in line with the JCPOA's Articles 26 and 36 amid the non-compliance of other parties to their commitments under the deal.

The measures, he emphasized, also abide by the Strategic Action Plan to Counter Sanctions, which was adopted by the Iranian Parliament in December 2020. The law was approved to counter illegal sanctions imposed on Iran by the US and its Western allies.

Iran suspended its compliance with limits on its nuclear activities after then US president Donald Trump unilaterally pulled out of the agreement in 2018 and reimposed sweeping sanctions.

Mohammad Ali Rajabi
Cartoonist



Israel behind Iran gas pipeline blast: Minister

Iranian Oil Minister Javad Owji said on Wednesday that Israel was behind twin sabotage attacks against gas pipelines in southwestern Iran last week.

The February 14 explosions hit pipelines in the cities of Safashahr, in the southern province of Fars, and Borujen, in the southwestern province of Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari. The sabotage attacks against pipelines in southwestern Iran caused a temporary disruption to gas supplies. "The explosion of the country's gas lines was the work of Israel," Owji told reporters, adding, the plot

was foiled because only a few pipelines were damaged.

"The enemy intended to disturb gas service in the provinces and put people's gas distribution at risk."

"The evil action and plot by the enemy was properly managed," IRNA quoted Owji as saying. Owji said the gas supply network is operating normally. The minister said the gas pipelines were immediately fixed and the plot could not affect the situation in the cities and villages. Israel has not acknowledged carrying out the attack, though it rarely

claims its espionage missions abroad. The office of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, a longtime foe of Iran, did not immediately respond to a request for comment, AP reported.



Flames leap into the air after a natural gas pipeline explodes outside the city of Borujen in Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari Province, Iran, on February 14, 2024.

REZA KAMALI DEHKORDI/FARS



Distinguished professor of sociology at the University of California, Santa Barbara:

Israel was founded on ethnic cleansing, violence, and terrorism



By Ali Amiri
Social critic

INTERVIEW EXCLUSIVE

William I. Robinson, a distinguished professor of sociology at the University of California, Santa Barbara, is not only a scholar whose research encompasses globalization, transnationalism, political sociology, and development and social change, but also an activist, who endeavors to link his academic work with global movements striving for social justice, popular empowerment, participatory democracy, and people-centered development.

In the following in-depth interview, Professor Robinson details the influential Israel lobby within American universities, political institutions, and corporations. He then provides a profound historical analysis of how Zionists have shaped and controlled the narrative surrounding the Palestine-Israel conflict. Furthermore, he sheds light on the rise of fascism in Israel as a political tool for their overt apartheid and explores the racial nationalism inherent in Zionism and the fabricated mythology Zionists use to justify their occupation of Palestine. The interview concludes on a hopeful note, as Professor Robinson expresses his belief that as long as the Palestinians continue to breathe on their land, they are resisting the Zionists, their oppression, and their apartheid.

IRAN DAILY: As I understand, this particular book, 'We Will Not Be Silenced', attempts to document, frame, and contextualize the silencing of pro-Palestinian voices, as well as the voices of critics of Israel, by an entity referred to throughout the book as the Israel lobby. Is that correct?

ROBINSON: That is correct, but it's a little more expansive than that. It has been going on for a very long time, obviously, since 1948. But this has intensified in the past 20 to 30 years, as gradually, the legitimacy of the Zionist project and the Jewish state has been challenged. The censorship and repression of anyone who criticizes Israel has been intensifying. And right now, we're seeing a wave of censorship, a wave of repression on university campuses, public institutions, the government, the media, across the board; a wave of censorship and repression against anyone now criticizing not only Israel but also, of course, the genocide taking place in Gaza.

So, this hit me, in particular, in 2009. You may remember Operation Cast Lead, which was an earlier attack on and siege of Gaza. It was nothing compared

to what's going on now, and I publicly spoke against that on my campus. The University of California was infiltrated by this Israel lobby that we refer to — I want to get back to the Israel lobby in just a minute. They went after me and tried to get me fired from the university. That is when I became involved in Palestinian solidarity and, more broadly, in this fight against censorship and repression by the Israel lobby in the United States.

But this has been going on since before 2009, before that book, and it has intensified since then, and now it has reached levels never before seen. What I want to say about the Israel lobby is that it does exist in the United States and is a strong pressure group, which involves a lot of financial blackmail, purchasing of candidates in the political system, financing of the election of those senators or Congress members or local elected officials who are going to defend Israel politically and diplomatically, the US support for Israel, and the suppression of any solidarity with Palestine. It is an extremely strong lobby, but here is the point: it's not just in

the United States. It is what we could call the US branch of the larger global Zionist project that suppresses any critique of the project and any solidarity with Palestine. It's not restricted to the United States and Europe at all. It's worldwide.

For instance, the presidents of the universities of Pennsylvania and Harvard were both forced to resign. Not because they support Palestinian freedom, but because they did not crack down hard enough on Palestinian solidarity activities on their respective campuses.

Those solidarity activities were carried out especially by two organizations: one is Students for Justice in Palestine, and the other is Jewish Voices for Peace. These are anti-Zionist Jews in the United States. The younger Jewish population in the United States is increasingly turning to anti-Zionism. They're increasingly saying "not in our name," and they are protesting. They're leading this mass wave of protest and solidarity with Palestine that's taking place across the United States right now. And that, in turn, means that the Zionist lobby and all of their political representatives in the US po-

litical system and economy need to intensify their crackdown, their repression, and their censorship. So, everything laid out in that book is now multiplied a thousand times over amid this genocide.

For instance, you cannot get a job on university campuses if you have previously participated in Palestine Solidarity. The Zionist network and the Israel lobby will block you from getting a job, and if you are a professor, you won't get tenure. Their influence comes from donating a lot of money to universities and to other organizations and, as I've mentioned, political campaigns. More and more, corporations are firing their employees who speak out in favor of Palestine or simply against the genocide.

If you were familiar with the term Hasbara, then you would know that it's literally a branch of the Israeli Ministry of Defense, it's public, and it's the whole of Israel's political diplomatic apparatus around the world. It's systematic propaganda and systematic targeting of any of Israel's critics around the world, and this is how it works.

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Courage immortalized in words

'We Will Not Be Silenced: The Academic Repression of Israel's Critics', edited by William I. Robinson and Maryam S. Griffin, contains thirteen testimonials from figures like Richard Falk and former US congresswoman Cynthia McKinney, as well as professors, postgraduates, and activist alumni of American universities, who were targeted by the Israel lobby for speaking out against Israeli apartheid and violations of Palestinian human rights. The struggle of these individuals to defend their academic freedom has garnered widespread public and international attention.



◀ Palestinian civilians and medics run to safety as Israel shells a UN school in Beit Lahia, northern Gaza Strip, with what is suspected to be white phosphorous bombs on January 17, 2009.
● MOHAMMED ABED/ AFP

It is evident that achieving such influence and control requires significant effort and strategic maneuvering. How do you explain the success of the Israeli lobby in maintaining its influence for such an extended period, considering the challenges involved in unilaterally shaping and influencing the narrative on a topic as divisive and controversial as the Israel-Palestine conflict?

That's an extremely important question, and in order to answer it, we need to focus on the historic alliance — which continues today into the early 2020s — between the Zionist project and what has been Western imperialism, especially US imperialism (or the US Empire). The United States and Western Europe supported the formation of the Jewish state, specifically as an outpost for the expansion of world capitalism into the Middle East at a time when the Middle East was going through decolonization; when Arab nationalism and even socialist and communist and other revolutionary movements and popular mass struggles were taking off in the Middle East. Israel became the outpost to keep control over the Middle East.

That alliance was forged very early on between the larger project of US foreign policy, which has since become a policy of promoting global capitalism around the world and defending global capitalism, and the Zionist project as a representative of that US foreign policy in the Middle East at this time.

So, we cannot understand the power of the Israel lobby outside the relationship of Israel to what we can call historical imperialism and to global capitalism now in the Middle East. That's a giant part of the story.

The other part of the story, again, is that their control over financial levers is very powerful. I can try and put forth a discourse of support for Palestine, a discourse that critiques Zionism as a right-wing, racist, and imperialist project, but I don't have financial support behind me. So, I can't translate my own discourse into financial leverage and therefore into political leverage. That's not so in the case of the Zionist discourse and of the discourse of the Israel lobby.

I want to add one other point here, i.e., historically, something else has been going on. The Holocaust involved the murder of six million Jews. But before I explain to you why I'm mentioning the Holocaust, I want to say that, of course, that was not the only holo-

caust in the last few hundred years. There's the holocaust of the indigenous people in the Americas with 100 million victims, and the holocaust of the victims of colonialism all around the world, et cetera, et cetera.

But when we just speak about 1939 to 1945, that Nazi Holocaust took the lives of six million Jews. And that Holocaust and the Jewish suffering around the Holocaust have been manipulated and incorporated into the Zionist project, and, on that basis, Zionism was able to move from a minor ideology in the world Jewish community to the hegemonic ideology. That takes place in 1945, and especially 1948, and on through the state of Israel.

I'm saying all of this and going into the background to answer your question of why is this discourse so powerful. The biggest reason is that the discourse is aligned with US imperialism, intervention, and foreign policy and now, the larger global capitalist interests in the Middle East. But secondly, because an unbelievably powerful lobby group has been created among the Jewish American community, by manipulating Jewish suffering around the Holocaust. That is changing now because a significant portion of young Jews, as I just mentioned, are saying "not in our name," and turning their back on all of this. So, it's a very interesting and important time here in the US because these battle lines are being drawn now, very, very clearly.

Based on your explanation, it seems clearer now why the term "decolonization" as it pertains to Palestine provokes such strong opposition from Zionists, leading them to coerce social media platforms like X into banning the use of terms like "decolonization" or "from the river to the sea".


Absolutely. Actually, what we are seeing inside Israel now is fascism, and I don't use the term lightly — just like we don't use the term genocide lightly. Genocide, however, has a specific definition: it's the attempt to eliminate, in whole or in part, a people. So, it's correct to use the term genocide regarding what Israel is doing in Gaza. But the other term I want to use, which is fascism, has an intellectual, analytical, and scholarly history as well. And everything indicates that fascism is now a project that is gaining domination, or hegemony, inside Israel, and it means political suppression. Our colleagues in Israel tell us you can be arrested if you talk

inside Israel about the genocide going on in Gaza. But if you make Nazi-like statements about the need to totally wipe out Palestinians, call them animals, and so forth, you're within the hegemonic discourse. So, there's actually fascism emerging in Israel, and we have had the inklings of a fascist project here in the United States as well. I'm mentioning all of that because it's true that speaking about decolonization, about apartheid, about genocide, will run you into big trouble with the powers that be, both in the US and especially in Israel.

I want to note something else as well: I want to go back to the point I was previously making that one of the key strategies in the Zionist lobby, and the US government, is to equate anti-Zionism with anti-Semitism. I just want to hammer home that point again: the reason they can try and make that equation is because they're manipulating the Holocaust and the feelings around the Holocaust, of course, and no one wants to be anti-Semitic. People who believe in justice, freedom, and equality don't want to be anti-Semitic. So, Israel's whole legitimating discourse, the discourse that legitimizes the existence of a Jewish state, is based on manipulating the Holocaust and the feelings around it. So, if you keep hammering home that criticizing Zionism is anti-Semitic and is embracing the Holocaust, then you have a very powerful propaganda instrument.

Now that you've mentioned the rise of fascism in Israel, it seems like a good starting point for our audience to understand why Israel is often referred to as an apartheid state. Could you please elaborate on the pillars of apartheid and the similarities between today's Israeli apartheid and the historic apartheid in South Africa?

Yes, apartheid is considered a crime against humanity, and there's an international convention against it. In fact, early on after South Africa became liberated from apartheid in 1994, they sent delegations to Israel. They studied Israeli apartheid and discovered that it has four pillars. One is the systematic segregation of different populations; then there's the subordination of one of those populations through its segregation, a different set of rights for two different groups. So, Israeli Jews have a whole set of rights that Palestinians — either in Israel or in the occupied territories — don't have, i.e., one set of legal, civil, political, and social rights that are

Activists from Jewish Voice for Peace occupy the pedestal of the Statue of Liberty in New York City, the US, on November 6, 2023. 





given to one group and not to the other. All of the pillars of apartheid are defined in international conventions against apartheid. All of those pillars are in place in Israel. What is remarkable is that the South Africans who have now sent multiple delegations to Palestine have repeatedly pointed out that Israeli apartheid is worse than South African apartheid ever was.

I want to go back to fascism because, of course, the only way you can maintain a system of apartheid, a system of settler colonialism, a system of Zionist racism and exclusion is through permanent repression at all levels. That includes, of course, the repression of free speech and political mobilization, political organization, and civil and political rights that we've been discussing, but it also means actual permanent physical repression. So, Israel has always been a police state. It's been a police state right from the start. It was founded on ethnic cleansing, violence, and terrorism, and that is all documented.

When we talk about fascism in Israel, we want to say that the only way this system can be reproduced from one day to the next is through an all-out police state. And that police state really came into existence in 1948, and it has never gone anywhere. Now, it's evolving from a police state into an outright fascist system. So, you're getting even the breakdown of democratic constraints for the Jewish population itself.

One of the definitions of fascism is extra-democratic or extra-legal mechanisms of ruling when democratic or consensual mechanisms break down. So, of course, there were always extra-legal terroristic mechanisms of control over the Palestinians, but Israeli Jews enjoyed within their own Jewish rights minimal amounts of democracy, and that's being broken down. I'm not just referring to removing the power of the Supreme Court in Israel to control the executive — which is the actual government in Israel, and the current government is the most extreme rightwing fascist we've ever seen, literally, since 1948. But the other thing going on, I want to reiterate, is that the civil and political rights of Israeli Jews are now simply being undermined. As I pointed out, you can be arrested for simply condemning the genocide. For any dissent right now, mobs of people will attack you.

Could you please explain the concept of racial nationalism, which Israel was built

upon and centered around right from its inception? How did this ideology come to be and what does it entail, particularly in terms of creating an ethnically homogeneous nation?

Absolutely. Racial nationalism is an ideology that swept through Europe in the late 1800s. It's an ideology that says that all peoples on the planet are divided into biologically determined racial groups and that each biologically determined racial group has its historic homeland, its historic territory, a place from where it has always been from and evolved, and that these territories should be biologically or racially pure. So, this was an ideology that, of course, underpins Nazism. That's the first example that comes to mind. The Nazi program said there was a biologically pure German race that belongs to German soil. So, here's the whole ideology of blood and soil and defending that soil with blood, and the mythology that the pure-blooded German Aryan race goes back to Teutonic tribes thousands of years ago.

This is known as racial nationalism, and it swept Europe. It was not just limited to the most egregious example of Nazism. There was also French racial nationalism, which said there's a biologically pure French group that belongs to the French soil and dates back to the Gauls and the Roman times. Then there's the Saxons, of course. The Anglo-Saxon racial nationalist ideology first emerged in England and then in the United States. We had our own version of racial nationalism in the 1800s, which became known here as the Manifest Destiny, claiming that the Anglo-Saxon race transplanted into the Americas was destined to create its racial national empire.

But here's the point: Zionism grows out of, and is an integral part of, this racial nationalism. Zionism is the Jewish version of this historic racial nationalism. We have studied the whole history of Zionism and have all the historical records. It says that Jews are a specific race, a biologically distinct race. And now, before we continue this explanation, I want to fast-forward to the second decade of the 21st century and point out its absurdity: right now, Zionists are becoming desperate and are talking about a Jewish gene, as if human beings are biologically categorized into biological races on the basis of genes. So, they're absolutely desperate to perpetuate this absurd Zionist ideology.

But let me go back to the story. So, early Zi-

onism says that Jews are a particular race of people, and they're a race that, just like racial nationalism calls for, needs their own land and their own territory. Let's remember that Theodore Herzl, the founder of the Zionist movement, once said that they needed a territory anywhere in the world, and he first proposed Argentina. He also proposed Uganda. The only reason that Zionists then focused specifically on Palestine was that other early Zionists of this racial nationalist movement said, "Well, we need to somehow legitimate creating a nation for a Jewish race, and the way we can find that legitimacy is through the Old Testament."

This mythology that Jews all over the world originally occupied and owned and lived in Israel and were displaced by the Romans and then wandered the world until they would come back home is the Zionist mythology. It actually has nothing whatsoever to do with the historical record. First of all, we know that Judaism is an ancient religion originating in what was today's Palestine and other parts of the Middle East. But Judaism spread through conversion from 200 BCE to 300 AD — that 500-year period — into the larger Mediterranean area into North Africa, into what is today southern Yemen, into Iran, and so forth. It spread through conversion. So, you never had a single Jewish tribe or anything of the sort. And then, in the eighth century, the Khazar Empire, which ruled the land between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea, converted to Judaism.

The empire had Slavic origin. Today's Russians, Slavic and Eastern Europeans, and Ukrainians are their descendants. The rulers of the Khazar Empire adopted Judaism completely through conversion because they wanted to carve out their political autonomy as an empire, and, in order to do so, they wanted to distinguish themselves from the Arab empires, the Persian empires, and the Byzantine empires that were Christian and Muslim. Therefore, they adopted Judaism, and that's the biggest way that Judaism spread around the world. Judaism has always been a faith community, not a people, much less a race. Human races don't exist. We're all the same biological race.

So, the Zionist project was to create the myth of the Jewish people, a Jewish race, which then, through this racial nationalist ideology, needed a specific homeland. The legitimating discourse for all of that became the Old Testament and, therefore, specifically Palestine.

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A girl stands behind the metal window covering of a building hit by Israeli bombardment in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip on October 31, 2023.
● MOHAMMED ABED/AFP



A Palestinian gunman fires in the air at the funeral of a man killed during an Israeli army military operation in Tulkarm on January 17, 2024.
● MARCO LONGARI/AFP

Let's shift the focus back to the present. When discussing Zionism and its seemingly absurd ideology, there appears to be a sense that the US's unwavering support for Israel should have been reevaluated at some point. Is it fair to say that the world is finally realizing the absurdity of this unconditional support and that it's time for it to stop? Or do you believe this support will continue for a while longer?

Well, US support is going to go on for a lot longer. But what is correct is that the pressures against that support, the opposition to that unconditional support, is growing very rapidly. It has already exceeded the bounds of anything we have previously seen. I mean, ever since I was a teenager, as soon as I learned about this, I've been in solidarity with Palestine. But it was really in 2009 when I actually became involved in it. And of course, that was the year of the book, 'We Will Not Be Silenced'. But since 2009, and even prior to that, I've never seen anything like what's taking place right now in the United States, in Europe,

and of course, all around the world in the former Third World, Africa, Latin America, and, especially, the Middle East. There's always been rock-solid support for Palestinians, for the decolonization of Palestine, for Palestinian liberation, but I've never seen anything like what's taking place in the United States and in Western Europe right now.

So, there is great pressure to end unconditional US and Western support for Israel, but that's not going to have any effect in the short term, absolutely not, because you're trying to peel away at something that goes to the very core of US foreign policy establishment ever since the 1940s and, especially, since 1967.

What is going to happen, though, is that as this rock-solid support for Israel and, more generally, for interventionist and aggressive US foreign policy around the world is increasingly challenged, you're going to have more and more political crises in the United States. You're going to have the system continue losing its legitimacy. President Biden has already jeopardized his possibilities for reelection next November because he's lost so

much legitimacy due to his administration's association with genocide. Of course, the South African suit in the International Court of Justice is aggravating all of these contradictions.

So, in essence, you're suggesting that there might be no hope for Palestine due to this undying support.

It's very important what you're asking, but let me first say there most certainly is hope for Palestine. If I gave that impression, it is because, first, we have to make an objective analysis of what's going on. Then, we can have a political assessment of where the hope lies. There absolutely is hope for Palestine, and that's what I was trying to get at with the mass uprising here in the United States, the likes of which we've never seen in support and defense of Palestine and against genocide.

Secondly, we have to remember that even though Palestinians in Gaza are being subjected to genocide right now, the military resistance to the Israeli siege is quite significant. It's not clear that Israel is going to win the military battle. Even if it wins the

military battle, at what cost?

Ultimately, I want to make this point crystal clear: the source of all the hope for Palestine is the resistance of the Palestinians themselves. And I'm not just talking about Hamas, and I'm not just talking about the military resistance. Every single Palestinian with every single breath they take in Palestine is resisting the occupation, is resisting Zionism, is resisting genocide. That's where it starts. If Palestinians laid their hands down and said, "Oh, well, we've lost and we'll march to Jordan and to Egypt and elsewhere," sure, then there would be no hope. But Palestinians aren't doing that. It's Palestinians' steadfast resistance that sparks Israel to commit genocide, which, in turn, spurs solidarity with Palestine worldwide.

Right now, Israel and the United States are losing. They have lost the war of legitimacy. They've lost legitimacy. Their policy, their practices, the genocide. They have lost legitimacy in world public opinion. They might temporarily be winning on the military battlefield, but they're losing on the political battlefield. So, there is a lot of hope here.

Now, something else may take place. We are seeing plenty of resistance in the West Bank, but we haven't seen a full-scale Intifada yet. But the pressure is building. The West Bank is under complete siege, and resistance there is growing. But if this breaks out into an all-out Intifada, and if Palestinians inside Israel are pressured to the point where they join an Intifada, then you would have another change in the political-military equation or, at least, the political correlation of forces in the political equation.

The battle for legitimacy has already been lost by the Zionists and by Washington, and there most certainly is hope for Palestine. The role of us, who are not Palestinian and not directly struggling inside Palestine, is to step up our support for Palestinian freedom in every way possible because what's at stake in Palestine right now is all of humanity. The Palestinian resistance has become a symbol that has touched a raw nerve all around the world because we see ourselves in it, and this crisis imposed on us by global capitalism is reflected in what's happening in Palestine.

SPECIFIC PROCUREMENT NOTICE Invitation for one stage Bidding

Islamic Republic of Iran
FARS Six Cities Sanitation Improvement Project
Invitation for Procurement of:
DESIGN, BUILD AND OPERATION OF NEYRIZ WASTE WATER
TREATMENT PLANT

Second Announcement

IsDB Financing No. IRN-0107

The Government of Islamic Republic of Iran has received financing from the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB) towards the cost of the Fars Six Cities Sanitation Improvement Project, and it intends to apply part of the proceeds of this financing to payments under the contracts for Neyriz wastewater treatment plant. The Fars Water and Wastewater Company (FWWC) now invites sealed bids from eligible bidders for Procurement of: DESIGN, BUILD AND OPERATE NEYRIZ WASTE WATER TREATMENT PLANT as described in the following table:

No	City	Description of Package
1	NEYRIZ	Design, Build, Commissioning and Operation of Neyriz Wastewater Treatment Plant with capacity 9,400 M3/day

Bidding will be conducted through the National Competitive Bidding (NCB) procedures using Post-Qualification as specified in the IsDB's Guidelines for the Procurement of Goods, Works and Related Services under IsDB Project Financing (April 2019), and is open to all eligible bidders as defined in the guideline and Bidding Documents. In addition, please refer to paragraphs 1.18 -21 setting forth IsDB's policy on conflict of interest.

Interested eligible Applicants may obtain further information and inspect the bidding documents from the Fars Water & Wastewater Company (address below) as from the date of SPN Publication.

A complete set of the Bidding document in English may be purchased by interested Applicants (a) on the submission of a written application to the address below and upon payment of a nonrefundable fee of 40,000,000 Iranian Rials for each package. The method of payment will be direct deposit to Account No. 0111930032008, Bank Saderat Iran, Payment ID No. 13132990014005, in the name of Fars Water and Wastewater Company. Applicants can get the Bidding documents from Fars Water and Wastewater Company upon receipt of the cash deposit as indicated above.

All bids accompanied by a bid security must be submitted in sealed envelopes, and delivered to the address below no later than 10:30 a.m. 21/April/2024 (02/02/1403).

The Bids will be opened at 10:30 a.m. on 21/April /2024 (02/02/1403) in the presence of bidders' representatives, who choose to attend, at the address below. Late bids will be rejected and returned unopened.

The payment security to participate in the work process:

72,316,000,000 I.R.Rial (Seventy-two billion three hundred sixteen million Iranian Rials)

Address: Secretariat Office, First Floor, Fourth Street (Sobhani St.), West Ghoddousi Blv, Shahid Mottahari Square, Shiraz

Postal Code: 71868-98465

Tel: +98 (71) 38435167

Facsimile: +98 (71) 38435162

Email: pmu.abfars2023@gmail.com

Website: www.abfa-fars.ir

The Cost of advertising the SPN shall be borne by the successful bidder.

Fars Water and Wastewater Company (FWWC)



آگهی تدارک خصوصی (فراخوان مناقصه یک مرحله‌ای)

جمهوری اسلامی ایران

پروژه بهسازی بهداشت ۶ شهر استان فارس

دعوت برای تدارک طراحی، ساخت و بهره‌برداری تصفیه خانه فاضلاب شهر نیریز

شماره اعتبار سرمایه بانک توسعه اسلامی: IRN-0107

نوبت دوم

تاریخ دوم

تاریخ سوم

تاریخ چهارم

تاریخ پنجم

تاریخ ششم

تاریخ هفتم

تاریخ هشتم

تاریخ نهم

تاریخ دهم

تاریخ یازدهم

تاریخ بیستم

تاریخ سی و یکم

تاریخ سی و دوم

تاریخ سی و سوم

تاریخ سی و چهارم

تاریخ سی و پنجم

تاریخ سی و ششم

تاریخ سی و هفتم

تاریخ سی و هشتم

تاریخ سی و نهم

تاریخ سی و دهم

تاریخ سی و یازدهم

تاریخ سی و چهاردهم

تاریخ سی و پانزدهم

تاریخ سی و شانزدهم

تاریخ سی و هجدهم

تاریخ سی و نوزدهم

تاریخ سی و بیستم

تاریخ سی و یکم

تاریخ سی و دوم

تاریخ سی و سوم

تاریخ سی و چهارم

تاریخ سی و پنجم

تاریخ سی و ششم

تاریخ سی و هفتم

تاریخ سی و هشتم

تاریخ سی و نهم

تاریخ سی و دهم

دولت جمهوری اسلامی ایران اعتباری از بانک توسعه اسلامی (IsDB) جهت اجرای پروژه ارتقای بهداشت ۶ شهر استان فارس دریافت داشته و در نظر دارد بخشی از این اعتبار را به منظور پرداخت‌های قراردادهای احداث تصفیه‌خانه‌های فاضلاب شهرهای مربوطه به مصرف برساند. شرکت آب و فاضلاب استان فارس هم اکنون از پیشنهادات لاک و مهر شده پیمانکاران واجد صلاحیت جهت تهیه طراحی، ساخت و بهره‌برداری تصفیه خانه فاضلاب شهر نیریز که در جدول زیر تشریح شده است، دعوت می‌کند.

ردیف	نام شهر	شرح کار
۱	نیریز	طراحی، ساخت و بهره‌برداری تصفیه خانه فاضلاب شهر نیریز به ظرفیت ۹۴۰۰ متر مکعب در شبانه روز

مناقصه از طریق فرآیند پس ارزیابی تعیین شده در دستورالعمل تأمین کالا و اجرای کار بانک توسعه اسلامی (آوریل ۲۰۱۹) برای مناقصه رقابتی داخلی (NCB) انجام خواهد شد و در دسترس تمامی پیشنهاددهندگان از شرکت‌های واجد شرایط بنحوی که در دستورالعمل بانک مذکور تعریف شده، می باشد. علاوه بر این، لطفاً به پاراگراف ۱۸-۲۱ که سیاست IsDB را در مورد تعارض منافع ارائه می‌دهد، مراجعه کنید. متقاضیان علاقه‌مند واجد شرایط می‌توانند برای بررسی و کسب اطلاعات بیشتر، اسناد مناقصه را در ساعات اداری از شرکت آب و فاضلاب استان فارس به آدرس زیر از تاریخ انتشار آگهی دریافت نمایند. متقاضیان می‌توانند مجموعه‌ای کامل از اسناد مناقصه به زبان انگلیسی و فارسی (نسخه فارسی صرفاً جهت اطلاع) را با درخواست کتبی در مقابل پرداخت ۴۰/۰۰۰/۰۰۰ ریال (غیرقابل برگشت) برای هر بسته خریداری نمایند. نحوه پرداخت به‌صورت واریز مستقیم وجه به حساب شماره ۱۱۱۹۳۰۰۳۲۰۰۸ بانک صادرات به شناسه پرداخت ۱۳۱۳۲۹۹۰۰۱۴۰۰۵ به نام شرکت آب و فاضلاب استان فارس می‌باشد. متقاضیان می‌توانند اسناد مناقصه را از شرکت آب و فاضلاب استان فارس در قبال ارائه رسید پرداخت وجه یاد شده دریافت نمایند. کلیه پیشنهادات همراه با ضمانت‌نامه شرکت در مناقصه باید در پاکت‌های مهر و موم شده حداکثر تا ساعت ۱۰:۳۰ صبح روز دوم اردیبهشت ۱۴۰۳ (۲۱ آوریل ۲۰۲۴) به آدرس زیر تحویل داده شود.

پیشنهادها از ساعت ۱۰:۳۰ صبح روز دوم اردیبهشت ۱۴۰۳ (۲۱ آوریل ۲۰۲۴) با حضور نمایندگان که از طرف پیشنهاد دهندگان انتخاب می‌شوند، در آدرس زیر باز گشایی خواهند شد. پیشنهاداتی که دیرتر از زمان تعیین شده ارسال گردند، باز نشده عودت داده خواهد شد.

مبلغ تضمین برای شرکت در فرآیند اجرای کار: ۷۲.۳۱۶.۰۰۰.۰۰۰ ریال (هفتاد و دو میلیارد سیصد و شانزده میلیون ریال)

نشانی: شیراز- میدان مطهری - بلوار شهید قدوسی غربی، خیابان چهارم (سبحانی)، طبقه اول، دبیرخانه - کدپستی ۷۱۸۶۸-۹۸۴۶۵

تلفن: ۳۸۴۳۵۱۶۷۰۷۱

نمابر: ۳۸۴۳۵۱۶۲۰۷۱

پست الکترونیکی: pmu.abfars2023@gmail.com سایت الکترونیکی: www.abfa-fars.ir

هزینه انتشار آگهی به‌عهده برنده مناقصه خواهد بود.

شرکت آب و فاضلاب استان فارس

Iranian shooter Tavassolikhah targets grandest prize of them all



By Amirhadi Arsalanpour
Staff writer

High-profile Iranian shooter Abdolreza Tavassolikhah says he has already set sights on the ultimate prize at the Los Angeles Paralympics in four-years' time. A mixed trap world No. 5 in the latest ranking released by the global governing body of the sport, Tavassolikhah has numerous world titles under his belt but is "unfortunate to play no part in this summer's Games in Paris after the discipline was not named in the event's program." "I'll still keep working hard to make sure I'll be part of the Iranian squad in LA 2028," said the 44-year-old, who will have a shot at adding further glory to his decorated trophy cabinet in June, when he takes part at the WSPS World Championships in Granada, Spain – a familiar territory for the former world number one. Tavassolikhah won the silver at the tournament in Al Ain, the United Arab Emirates, in 2022. The Iranian's maiden

international appearance came in an international Grand Prix in Italy in 2014, where he won the silver before claiming the WSPS World Cup gold three years later. Representing the country in the PT1 trap seated mixed SG-S contests, Tavassolikhah delivered a perfect performance in the final two rounds in the Italian city of Lonato, finishing with 40 points – a world record in the discipline to date. "There are few disabled trap shooters in the country, which is why I've had to compete with non-disabled contestants and I even managed to win several medals at the national events," said Tavassolikhah, also a 2022 World Cup champion in South Korea. "The global regulations of the sport do not keep the disabled shooters from competing with the able-bodied athletes," added the Iranian. A former member of the Iranian alpine ski team, before a car accident in 2007 changed his life forever, says the new chapter in his career all started with watching the

Olympic Games. "I was recovering from a plastic surgery on my bedsores and had to be quarantined in my room, where most of my time was spent in front of the television," said Tavassolikhah, adding: "I was watching the shooting contests of the London 2012 and that's when I first thought of embarking on a new sporting challenge in my life." Only five months on and Tavassolikhah was taking on non-disabled shooters in a grade B national competition. "I won the gold medal, much to the surprise of everyone at the tournament, and during the following six months I collected several more medals in the grade A competitions in the country," said the Iranian shooter. "The journey has been full of twists and turns. It was quite a daunting challenge to learn the trades of the sport, as there was no trap shooter on a wheelchair in Iran prior to me," said Tavassolikhah, who has been no stranger to overcoming the obstacles toward success.

Second Announcement

SPECIFIC PROCUREMENT NOTICE Invitation for one stage Bidding

Islamic Republic of Iran
FARS Six Cities Sanitation Improvement Project
Invitation for Procurement of:
DESIGN, BUILD, INSTALLATION AND OPERATION OF FASA WASTEWATER
TREATMENT PLANT
IsDB Financing No. IRN-0107

The Government of Islamic Republic of Iran has received financing from the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB) towards the cost of the Fars Six Cities Sanitation Improvement Project, and it intends to apply part of the proceeds of this financing to payments under the contracts for Fasa wastewater treatment plant. The Fars Water and Wastewater Company (FWWC) now invites sealed bids from eligible bidders for Procurement of: Design, Build, Installation And Operation Of Fasa Wastewater Treatment Plant as described in the following table:

No	City	Description of Package
1	FASA	Design, Build, Installation And Operation Of Fasa Wastewater Treatment Plant with capacity 20.000 M3/day

Bidding will be conducted through the National Competitive Bidding (NCB) procedures using Post-Qualification as specified in the IsDB's Guidelines for the Procurement of Goods, Works and Related Services under IsDB Project Financing (April 2019), and is open to all eligible bidders as defined in the guideline and Bidding Documents. In addition, please refer to paragraphs 1.18 -21 setting forth IsDB's policy on conflict of interest.

Interested eligible Applicants may obtain further information and inspect the bidding documents from the Fars Water & Wastewater Company (address below) as from the date of SPN Publication. A complete set of the Bidding document in English may be purchased by interested Applicants (a) on the submission of a written application to the address below and upon payment of a nonrefundable fee of 40,000,000 Iranian Rials for each package. The method of payment will be direct deposit to Account No. 0111930032008, Bank Saderat Iran, Payment ID No. 13132990014005, in the name of Fars Water and Wastewater Company. Applicants can get the Bidding documents from Fars Water and Wastewater Company upon receipt of the cash deposit as indicated above.

All bids accompanied by a bid security must be submitted in sealed envelopes, and delivered to the address below no later than 10:30 a.m. 23/April/2024 (04/02/1403).

The Bids will be opened at 10:30 a.m. on 23/April/2024 (04/02/1403), in the presence of bidders' representatives, who choose to attend, at the address below. Late bids will be rejected and returned unopened.

The payment security to participate in the work process:

93,589,000,000 Rials (Ninety-three billion five hundred eighty-nine million Iranian Rials)
Address: Secretariat Office, First Floor, Fourth Street (Sobhani St.), West Ghoddousi Blv., Shahid Mottahari Square, Shiraz

Postal Code: 71868-98465

Tel: +98 (71) 38435167

Facsimile: +98 (71) 38435162

Email: pmu.abfars2023@gmail.com

Website: www.abfa-fars.ir

The Cost of advertising the SPN shall be borne by the successful bidder.

Fars Water and Wastewater Company (FWWC)



آگهی تدارک خصوصی (فراخوان مناقصه یک مرحله‌ای)

جمهوری اسلامی ایران

پروژه بهسازی بهداشت ۶ شهر استان فارس

دعوت برای تدارک طراحی، ساخت، نصب تجهیزات و بهره‌برداری تصفیه‌خانه فاضلاب شهر فسا

شماره اعتبار سرمایه بانک توسعه اسلامی: IRN-0107

دولت جمهوری اسلامی ایران اعتباری از بانک توسعه اسلامی (IsDB) جهت اجرای پروژه ارتقای بهداشت ۶ شهر استان فارس دریافت داشته و در نظر دارد بخشی از این اعتبار را به منظور پرداخت‌های قراردادهای احداث تصفیه‌خانه‌های فاضلاب شهرهای مربوطه به مصرف برساند. شرکت آب و فاضلاب استان فارس هم اکنون از پیشنهادات لک و مهر شده پیمانکاران واجد صلاحیت جهت تهیه طراحی، ساخت، نصب و بهره‌برداری تصفیه‌خانه فاضلاب شهر فسا که در جدول زیر تشریح شده است، دعوت می‌کند.

ردیف	نام شهر	شرح کار
۱	فسا	طراحی، ساخت، نصب تجهیزات و بهره‌برداری تصفیه‌خانه فاضلاب شهر فسا به ظرفیت ۲۰۰۰۰ متر مکعب در شبانه‌روز

مناقصه از طریق فرآیند پس ارزیابی تعیین شده در «دستور العمل تأمین کالا و اجرای کار» بانک توسعه اسلامی (آوریل ۲۰۱۹) برای مناقصه رقابتی داخلی (NCB) انجام خواهد شد و در دسترس تمامی پیشنهاددهندگان از شرکت‌های واجد شرایط بنحوی که در دستور العمل بانک مذکور تعریف شده، می‌باشد. علاوه بر این، لطفاً به پاراگراف ۱۸-۱، IsDB را در مورد تعارض منافع آرا نه می‌دهد، مر اجعه کنید.

متقاضیان علاقه‌مند واجد شرایط می‌توانند برای بررسی و کسب اطلاعات بیشتر، اسناد مناقصه را در ساعات اداری از شرکت آب و فاضلاب استان فارس به آدرس زیر از تاریخ انتشار آگهی دریافت نمایند.

متقاضیان می‌توانند مجموعه‌ای کامل از اسناد مناقصه به زبان انگلیسی و فارسی (نسخه فارسی صرفاً جهت اطلاع) با درخواست کتبی در مقابل پرداخت ۴۰/۰۰۰/۰۰۰ ریال (غیر قابل برگشت) برای هر بسته خریداری نمایند.

نحوه پرداخت به صورت واریز مستقیم وجه به حساب شماره ۱۱۹۳۰۰۳۳۰۰۸ بانک صادرات به شناسه پرداخت ۱۳۱۳۲۹۹۰۰۱۴۰۰۵ به نام شرکت آب و فاضلاب استان فارس می‌باشد. متقاضیان می‌توانند اسناد مناقصه را از

شرکت آب و فاضلاب استان فارس در قبال ارائه رسید پرداخت وجه یاد شده دریافت نمایند.

کلیه پیشنهادات همراه با ضمانت‌نامه شرکت در مناقصه باید در پاکت‌های مهر و موم شده حداکثر تا ساعت ۱۰:۳۰ صبح روز ۴ اردیبهشت ۱۴۰۳ (۲۳ آوریل ۲۰۲۴) به آدرس زیر تحویل داده شود.

پیشنهادها از ساعت ۱۰:۳۰ صبح روز چهارم اردیبهشت ۱۴۰۳ (۲۳ آوریل ۲۰۲۴) با حضور نمایندگان که از طرف پیشنهاددهندگان انتخاب می‌شوند، در آدرس زیر باز گشایی خواهند شد. پیشنهاداتی که دیرتر از زمان تعیین شده ارسال گردند، باز نشده عودت داده خواهد شد.

مبلغ تضمین برای شرکت در فرآیند اجرای کار:

۹۳٬۵۸۹٬۰۰۰٬۰۰۰ ریال (نود و سه میلیارد و پانصد و هشتاد و نه میلیون ریال)

نشانی: شیراز - میدان مطهری - بلوار شهید قدوسی غربی - خیابان چهارم (سبحانی)، طبقه اول، دبیرخانه - کدپستی ۷۱۸۶۸-۹۸۴۶۵

تلفن: ۳۸۴۳۵۱۶۷۰۷۱ - نامبر: ۳۸۴۳۵۱۶۲۰۷۱

پست الکترونیکی: pmu.abfars2023@gmail.com

سایت الکترونیکی: www.abfa-fars.ir

هزینه انتشار آگهی به‌عهده برنده مناقصه خواهد بود.

شرکت آب و فاضلاب استان فارس

Sri Lanka's Ambassador to Iran:

Tehran, Colombo support each other during difficult times

Iran's president will visit Sri Lanka soon



By Sadeq Dehqan
 Staff writer

INTERVIEW

Despite what most expect, relations between Iran and Sri Lanka have a long history, dating back to ancient times and the construction of the historical Silk Road. Situated on opposite sides of the Indian subcontinent, the two countries have always enjoyed beneficial, friendly political and economic ties. Evidence of Iranian influence can still be found in ancient inscriptions discovered in Sri Lanka, indicating the Iranian heritage of

some of its people. However, in recent years, the friendly relations between the two countries have become particularly entangled in the issue of oil more than any other matter in commercial and political spheres. In an exclusive interview with Iran Daily, the Sri Lankan Ambassador to Iran G.M.V. Wishwanath Aponu noted that following conflicts between the Sri Lankan army and Tamil separatists and the subsequent economic crisis in Sri Lanka, Iran continued to export oil to the country without receiving any payment. Recently, Sri Lanka has undertaken a policy of tea-for-oil exchange to repay its \$250 million debt to

Iran. Although the initial basis of the bilateral agreement was the oil-for-tea exchange, Iranian traders faced significant difficulties in making monetary transactions with Sri Lanka due to sanctions imposed on Iran, effectively leading to the suspension of their involvement in trade with Sri Lanka. However, the economic relations and cooperation between the two countries are not limited to oil and tea. For several years, Iran has been involved in one of the largest water supply and power projects in Sri Lanka, known as the "Uma Oya" project. This multi-purpose development project encompasses the construction of two dams, a power plant, and a water transmission line. The project has had several technical and engineering phases, all of which have been carried out by Iranian companies that utilized the expertise of Iranian specialists. The Uma Oya project is soon to reach its operational phase in the near future, and that would be when, according to the Sri Lankan ambassador, Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi is expected to visit Sri Lanka to meet with Sri Lankan authorities and possibly participate in the inauguration ceremony of the project. Following is a summary of Iran Daily's exclusive interview with G.M.V. Wishwanath Aponu.

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Sri Lankan Ambassador to Iran
 G.M.V. Wishwanath Aponu
 ● IRAN DAILY

IRAN DAILY: Could you please elaborate on the history and quality of relations between the two countries?

Wishwanath Aponu: I am pleased to say that the relations between Iran and Sri Lanka are not recent. Fortunately, we have very old and even ancient relations with Iran. Commercial relations between the two nations were established before Sri Lanka gained independence in 1948. Sri Lankan archaeologists have discovered inscriptions in one of the southern ports of the country that depict religious rituals written in three languages: Chinese, Persian, and Tamil, indicating the depth of our relations. Thousands of years ago, many Iranians, who were Aryans, traveled from Persia to Sri Lanka and settled there. There is a large household called "Choksy" in Sri Lanka, whose origin dates back to Iran. The Choksies in Sri Lanka have always held very important positions. For example, Sri Lanka's former minister of Finance was a member of this family. As you know, part of the historical Silk Road passed through Iran when it was known as "Persia". Sri Lankan archaeologists have found ancient artifacts such as coins and other items, indicating that Iranians had commercial interactions in Sri Lanka since ancient times, and trade groups and delegations have been exchanged between the two countries. These interactions have certainly expanded significantly after Sri Lanka gained independence, and the two countries have always had very good amicable, official relations with each other. Overall, the two countries are closely tied in all political, economic, and cultural fields.

What are some fields wherein the two countries have manifested these friendly relations in the form of cooperation in recent years?

Currently, Iran provides very good services, especially in the technical and engineering services sector, to the people of Sri Lanka and has taken steps to

wards the development of our country. Iran is the only country that has built an oil refinery in Sri Lanka. Moreover, Iranian companies have been actively involved in the Uma Oya project, a large and multi-purpose devel-

well. Colombo has always been supportive of Tehran during sensitive situations when strategic policies were adopted. Whenever a vote was called in the United Nations and international organizations on various political

cooperation of my team and officials of both countries, we finally managed to settle these debts. A tea-for-oil exchange agreement was reached and signed by both parties some months ago, and the issue of debts was resolved.

the field of tourism?

As I have noted, numerous meetings have been held between the two countries in the tourism sector, leading to an increase in the number of tourists and the enhancement of bilateral tour-

not have a direct flight from Iran to Sri Lanka. However, the Sri Lankan government granted a license and permission to Mahan Airlines to launch a direct flight from Tehran to Sri Lanka. The license was granted to Mahan Air several months ago, but so far, this direct route has not been launched. Mahan Air has the necessary permits. So, whenever an initiative is taken, direct flights between the two countries will become available to passengers.

When will the Uma Oya project become operational, and what plans do you have for its inauguration?

The Uma Oya project has been completed with the cooperation of Iran and will be inaugurated soon. However, the economic relations between the two countries will not end with that project. Sri Lankan officials are currently negotiating with Iranian companies involved in this project to take on the responsibility of another water supply project



Sri Lankan Ambassador to Iran G.M.V. Wishwanath Aponu (2nd-L) accompanies Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian (2nd-R) to Tehran's Mehrabad Airport before the top diplomat leaves for Colombo on February 19, 2024.
 ● mfa.gov.ir

opment project in Sri Lanka. Iran has always been supportive of Sri Lanka during difficult times and provided considerable assistance to our country. As an example, when Sri Lanka was facing an economic crisis last year, Iran donated a large shipment of medicines to Sri Lanka. Furthermore, when Sri Lanka was engaged in an internal conflict with Tamil Tigers, Iran continued to export its oil to Sri Lanka without receiving any payment.

However, the friendly and supportive relations between the two countries were mutual, and Sri Lanka has provided assistance to Iran in various ways as

issues, Sri Lanka always voted in favor of Iran, and its positions have been aligned with Iran. In other areas, Sri Lanka has shown its friendship, too. For example, our country donated a pair of elephants to Iran a few years ago, which now have a calf are kept in Eram Park.

What actions have you taken during your tenure in Tehran to address Sri Lanka's oil debts to Iran?

Regarding the settlement of oil debts, the two countries have been negotiating for years. Since I came to Iran as ambassador, I have made efforts to resolve the issue. With my efforts and the

Furthermore, after I arrived in Iran in August 2021, many meetings on tourism development and economic relations were held at the embassy with Iranian parties. These meetings were aimed at enhancing cooperation and relations in various sectors because both countries are facing economic challenges and need to stand together and help each other. In the academic and university sectors, too, both countries have been laying the groundwork for scientific and cultural cooperation for several years by providing scholarships.

What have been the results of your efforts and meetings in

ism relations. As a result of these efforts, the number of Iranian tourists who traveled to Sri Lanka in March 2023 saw a 140% increase compared to March 2022. In 2023, more Iranian tourists traveled to Sri Lanka than any other nation in the Middle East. Iranians have also been reportedly very interested in traveling to Sri Lanka during the upcoming Nowruz holiday, as many Iranians have already booked hotels, leaving no vacancies in our hotels.

What flight routes have been designated for Iranians looking to travel to Sri Lanka?

There was a time when we did

in Sri Lanka. For the inauguration of the Uma Oya project, it is likely that either Iran's president or its minister of foreign affairs will travel to Sri Lanka. The visit of the Iranian president to Sri Lanka has been scheduled to take place soon, but the exact date has not yet been finalized. Earlier, the presidents of both countries had invited each other to visit their respective countries, but since the Sri Lankan president visited Iran in 2017, according to diplomatic protocol, it is now the Iranian president's turn to visit Sri Lanka. However, before that visit takes place, the Iranian foreign minister has just taken a trip to our country.