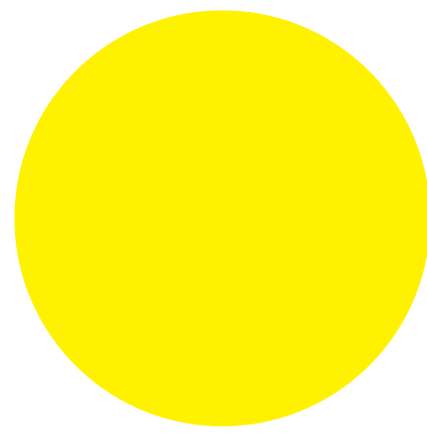


# Will Cairo stand by or act?

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SPECIAL ISSUE



## Conservatives leading in parliamentary elections

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### An electoral wake-up call

EDITORIAL

Months before the March 1 elections in Iran, a campaign had been launched on social media and anti-Iran media outlets to boycott the votes for Parliament and a key clerical body. The so-called "no to vote" movement sought to dissuade eligible voters from showing up at polling places over economic hardships and "a lack of social and political freedoms".

The campaigners particularly highlighted street protests that gripped Iranian cities for months in late 2022 after the death of Mahsa Amini, a young woman arrested by the morality police over improper hijab. They accused the government of mishandling the tragic incident with a heavy-handed crackdown on the protests.

Some political activists also called for a boycott over what they called "mass disqualifications" of moderate and reformist hopefuls by the Constitutional Council, an electoral body that vets candidates.

Boycotters tried to insinuate that voter turnout would hit rock bottom of around 30%. A survey conducted by the Netherlands-based pollster Gamaan estimated that turnout would be between 25% to 30%.

Despite the all-out effort aimed at delegitimizing the Islamic Republic, about 41% (of 61 million eligible voters) cast ballots in a move also seen as support for the Islamic Republic, according to unofficial reports by local media.

Turnout in the latest parliamentary polls, if confirmed by the officials, would be the lowest since the 1979 Islamic Revolution. In the last parliamentary elections in 2019, 42% of eligible voters headed to polling stations amid an emerging coronavirus pandemic.

Now, the authorities need to see it as a wake-up call and redouble their efforts to fortify their support base among the public and hear the voices of those 36 million people who didn't turn out for any reason. In a country where turnout for parliamentary votes once surpassed the 70% milestone, a 30% drop must raise red flags.

As repeated on countless occasions by the Leader of the Islamic Revolution, elected lawmakers and presidents represent the whole nation and must listen to their legitimate demands. No doubt, there will be plans to investigate the root causes of the relatively low turnout in order to remedy shortcomings and live up to the demands of all Iranians with various political inclinations. This will hopefully help restore popular support and bring back on board some of those who have turned their back to the Establishment. At a time when Iran is fighting back against overt and covert enemies, national unity is much needed to weather hard days.

## Iran Ready to Become Gas Hub: Raisi

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Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi (front row 2nd-R) poses for a family photo with heads of states and high-ranking officials attending the 7th GECF Summit the Algerian capital Algiers on March 2, 2024. [president.ir](#)



### Aliakbari beats Bhullar, keeps ONE Championship streak going

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### Historical landmarks and architecture of Qasr-e Shirin

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### Archaeologists unearth traces of 14,000-year-old site in Fars Province

After a month-long archaeological expedition in the rock shelter of "Pir Qooch" in Iran's south-central city of Arsanjan, Fars Province, the head of the excavation team said that the region's history dates back approximately to 14,000 years ago. Hassan Afshari stated, "Stone tools and bone remains were discovered in this area during the excavation."

EXCLUSIVE

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## NEWS IN BRIEF

**Iran-Turkey trade tops \$500m in January: Statistics**

The value of the trade exchanges between Iran and Turkey in January 2024 surpassed \$500 million, registering a two-percent hike compared to January 2023, the Turkish Statistical Institute (TURKSTAT) said. The institute put the value of the trade exchanges between Iran and Turkey in January 2024 at \$501 million, reported Tasnim News Agency.

According to the report, the two countries had exchanged \$493 million worth of non-oil goods in January 2023.

Turkey exported \$324 million worth of products to Iran in January 2024, showing a 35 percent growth compared to last year's corresponding period.

The neighboring country had exported \$240 million worth of goods to Iran in January 2023.

Iran was Turkey's 7th export target market in the first month of the current year, with 1.6% of Turkey's total exports sent to Iran.

According to statistics, Turkey had imported \$253 million worth of goods from Iran in January 2023.

The trade exchanges between Iran and Turkey in 2023 hit \$5.49 billion, showing a 14 percent decline compared to a year earlier, the report added.

**IRAN EXPO 2024 provides opportunity to spur exports of gems, precious stones: Official**

The IRAN EXPO 2024 provides a suitable opportunity for the participation of activists working in the field of gems and precious stones, the head of the Trade Promotion Organization of Iran (TPOI) for technology-based products and services export promotion office said.

The industrialists will showcase their export potential and capabilities to the visiting foreign delegations, Mohammadreza Karimzadeh noted, IRNA reported.

He emphasized that Iran, benefiting from diversified mineral resources and precious stones also has experts in the field of designing, manufacturing and exporting. The 6th Export Potentials Exhibition of the Islamic Republic of Iran will be held in Tehran during April 27 to May 1.

**Iran ready to become Gas hub: Raisi**

Iran is ready to become an energy hub and a safe route for distribution and transit of natural gas between producers and consumer markets, President Ebrahim Raisi said on Saturday. With its vast natural gas reserves, technologies and geographic location, Iran plans to develop bilateral and multilateral relations with gas market countries, the president said, adding that Tehran is particularly interested in countries from Central Asia to the Persian Gulf, and its eastern and western neighbors, according to IRNA.

"Iran's strategic approach is based on increasing the production and export of natural gas and providing access to this type of energy to as many people in the region as possible," Raisi said in his address at the 7th Gas Exporting Countries Forum (GECF) summit.

"I am using the opportunity to invite international investors and investors from member countries of the forum to participate in the projects of Iran's energy sector, including the projects of the natural gas industry," he added.

Raisi arrived in the Algerian capital Algiers on Saturday morning to attend the 7th GECF Summit of Heads of State and Government.

The Iranian president was welcomed by Algerian Prime Minister Nadir Larbaoui at Houari Boumediene International Airport.

During the visit, which comes at the official invitation of Algerian President Abdelmadjid Tebboune, the Iranian chief executive is scheduled to meet with other top officials from the 19-member gathering of the



Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi (L) speaks at the 7th Gas Exporting Countries Forum (GECF) Summit of Heads of State and Government as Oil Minister Javad Owji (C) looks on in the Algerian capital Algiers on March 2, 2024. [president.ir](https://www.president.ir)

world's leading natural gas producers.

The two presidents are also set to sign several memoranda of understanding on the sidelines of the international meeting.

Raisi's trip marks the fourth visit of Iranian presidents to the North African country, which took place with a gap of about 14 years after former president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's visit in 2010.

The GECF, which is comprised of 13 permanent members and seven observers, was estab-

lished in 2008 based on an initial proposal by Iran as one of the world's largest holders of natural gas reserves.

Raisi's trip comes on the backdrop of Iran's efforts to boost relations with countries in North Africa, including Sudan, with which Iran had strained relations in recent years, and with Egypt, a country that has had no diplomatic relations with Iran since 1979.

On the second day of his visit, the Iranian president will be officially welcomed by Tebboune.

In addition to the Raisi-Tebboune talks, the two countries' high-ranking delegations will meet and sign several cooperation documents.

**Meeting with Qatari Emir**

Raisi also met Qatari Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani on Saturday on the sidelines of the GECF summit.

During the meeting, they discussed bilateral cooperation between the two countries and ways to strengthen and develop them. They also discussed

the latest developments in the Gaza Strip and occupied Palestinian territories, in addition to regional and international developments of common concern.

From Qatari side, the meeting was attended by Chief of the Emiri Diwan Sheikh Saoud bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani and Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Sultan bin Saad Al Muraikhi.

On the Iranian side, the meeting was attended by the Minister of Foreign Affairs Hossein Amir-Abdollahian and a number of senior officials.

**Iran's thermal power plant electricity generation capacity crosses 75,000 MW**

The electricity generation capacity of thermal power plants in Iran topped 75,000 megawatts following the connection of the first gas unit of the Sabzevar Power Plant to the nationwide electricity grid, announced an official at the Thermal Power Plants Holding Company (TPPH).

The director general of the macroplanning office of the TPPH pointed to the synchronization of the 183-MW gas unit of the

Sabzevar Combined-Cycle Power Plant, and said 29 gas units with an electricity generation capacity of 3,935 megawatts, along with 13 steam units with a generation capacity of 2,136 megawatts, have been connected to the nationwide electricity grid during the current administration, which took office in August 2021,

reported Tasnim News Agency. It is expected that 3.25 million cubic meters of fuel will be saved annually as a result of the construction of the aforementioned units, Hadi Modaeq stated.

The 624 thermal electricity generation units in 142 power plants of the country have been tasked with supplying 93 percent of the electricity needed by subscribers across the country, more than 68 percent of which is supplied by the private sector, he noted.

**Iran, Russia agree on new energy contracts**

Iran's oil minister and Russia's energy minister agreed on signing new contracts to develop oil and gas fields.

Javad Owji and Nikolai Shulginov exchanged views on the implementation of oil and gas contracts the two countries signed before on the sidelines of the 7th Gas Exporting Countries Forum (GECF) Summit of Heads of State and Government in the Algerian capital Algiers, Shana wrote.

Representatives of some Russian companies, including Gazprom and Zarubezhneft, also attended the meeting, during which establishment of a gas hub within the framework of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) in the Eurasian region, gas trade between Iran and Russia as well as other countries in the region, construction of infrastructure needed for brisk trade, and connection of electricity grids

of Iran and Russia were also discussed.

**Talks with OPEC secretary general**

On Saturday, Owji and OPEC Secretary General Haitham Al Ghais exchanged views on developments of the global oil market in Algiers.

The two officials discussed factors influencing the oil market, the oil industry's role in the OPEC member states' budgets, and prediction of oil prices in 2024.

Geopolitical impacts on global oil prices, increase in global demand for oil stemming from economic growth, investments in the OPEC member states' oil projects, and their commitment to the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and particularly to the OPEC+ alliance were also among the topics Owji and Al Ghais discussed.



# Historical landmarks and architecture of Qasr-e Shirin



Khosrow Palace  
● wikipedia.org

## Iranica Desk

Qasr-e Shirin is a city in the western part of Kermanshah Province, near the border between Iran and Iraq. Notable for both historic landmarks and towering palm groves, this picturesque locale bears its name from the renowned historical palace commissioned by Khosrow Parviz — one of ancient Persia's monarchs — for his spouse, Shirin. Despite references to this city in diverse historical records as Dastjerd and Dastgerd, its prominence primarily stems from Khosrow Palace, famously referred to as Qasr-e Shirin and Khosrow Parviz's estate. The remnants of Khosrow Palace, visible today, constitute a notable attraction in Qasr-e Shirin and lie approximately 180 kilometers northeast of the provincial capital city of Kermanshah. The is among the structures erected in Kermanshah during the Sassanid period under the

directive of Khosrow Parviz. Also known as Khosrow II, he reigned from 590 to 628 CE, and is acknowledged as the 24th Sassanid monarch. Scholars suggest that the construction of numerous palaces in Kermanshah was influenced by his inclination to reside in this area rather than Ctesiphon. Interestingly, it appears that this palace was not utilized as a permanent residence. It seems that owing to hasty construction, essential structural reinforcement was overlooked, causing the palace to fall into disuse shortly thereafter. Within the complex, vestiges of prior edifices consist of a handful of stone walls and fractured pillars. Paleontological evidence derived from plant root and animal fossils implies that the pyramidal form of the described palace may have previously functioned as an early zoological garden, per historians. The remnants of Khosrow Palace reveal that this architectural

marvel measured 370 meters in length and 190 meters in width. Designed with a rectangular layout, the palace was constructed from east to west, adjacent to a terraced wall standing at a height of eight meters. The construction materials employed in this edifice comprised limestone, brick, and plaster. The layout of the palace appears to have been divided into internal and external sections to maintain a distinction between private and public areas. The exterior part, designated for formal events, featured a columned hall, vaulted chamber, reception room, and *ivan* (portico). Notably, the grandest dome of the Sassanid era stood here until the 18th century CE. Access to the palace's general vicinity was facilitated by dual staircases on the northern, southern, and eastern facades. The internal, private segment of the palace once comprised various residences, both small and large, all of which have since vanished.

## Nearby attraction

Chahar Qapi Fire Temple is regarded as one of the most significant historical sites in Qasr-e Shirin. Initially, many archaeologists thought this structure belonged to the Islamic period due to its dome and vaulted façade, common features in post-Islamic architectural monuments. The history of this precious edifice, recognized as a national heritage of Iran, traces back to the late Sassanid era.

Abbasid Caravanserai: The Abbasid Caravanserai in Qasr-e Shirin, dating back to the Safavid era, is a registered tourist attraction on the National Heritage List. Throughout history, this caravanserai served as a crucial lodging for pilgrims journeying to the holy shrines of Iraq. Regrettably, the earthquake that struck Kermanshah Province in November 2017 caused substantial damage to this structure, resulting in a decline in its safety.



Chahar Qapi Fire Temple  
● IRNA



Abbasid Caravanserai  
● yjc.ir

## Reviving historical bathhouses in Rasht to help develop tourism

### Iranica Desk

In the city of Rasht, the capital of Gilan Province, there are several historical bathhouses that have been abandoned. Repurposing these historical bathhouses and focusing on their anthropological approach can help develop tourism in the area. In the not-so-distant past, the most significant feature of each neighborhood was the presence of one or more public buildings, with mosques and bathhouses being the most important. They were usually constructed in close proximity to each other. According to the travelogue of Mirza Ibrahim, Rasht had 17 public baths around the year 1859. A map of Rasht drawn in 1877 indicates that there were 18 public baths in the city at that time. Upon examining the oldest map of Rasht, it becomes evident that there were several public bathhouses located in the city center. Two were situated at the beginning of Sa'adi and Shariati streets. Additionally, two bathhouses were found near the



Haj Agha Bozorg Bathhouse  
● gilebraz.ir

Sabzeh Meydan Square, with one of them being demolished and replaced by a commercial store. The Kiab Bathhouse was later renamed Roshan Bathhouse, and continued its operations. The Golzar Bathhouse in the Pirsara neighborhood, the Sajadian Bathhouse in the Baqerabad neighborhood, the

Shahriar Bathhouse in Rasht Bazaar, and the remnants of a bathhouse in the Aliabad neighborhood are among the oldest in Rasht, ISNA wrote. Between 1911 and 1921, public bathhouses were closed due to being considered unhygienic, and some were transformed into private bathhouses. Historically, bathhouses were heated using firewood, but as oil, diesel, and gas became



Golzar Bathhouse  
● IRNA

available, the fuel source for them evolved. In 1921, Rasht was home to 10 public bathhouses as per historical maps. Presently, several historic bathhouses in Rasht have garnered the attention of the Cultural Heritage Organization of Gilan Province due to their age, with some designated

as national treasures. Although the Haj Agha Bozorg Bathhouse in Afkharay neighborhood was initially recognized as a national heritage site, it was later delisted due to owner dissatisfaction and a legal complaint. The Haj Agha Bozorg Bathhouse remains the only one with an active men's section. Public bathhouses not only promoted physical cleanliness but also catered to the well-being of the mind.

Dr. Seyyed Hashem Moosavi, an anthropologist and faculty member at the University of Gilan, said, "The most overlooked function of public bathhouses was their role in bringing joy and promoting mental health." He added that studying the bathing customs of the past reveals that bathhouses were a central hub for people's recreation, leading to the organization of various ceremonies within their walls. Events such as bridal baths, baby showers, and even rituals to help bereaved families cope with grief were integral parts of the ancient bathing culture. The anthropologist referred to the medical uses of old bathhouses and said, "Part of our medical history is hidden in these very public baths. The practices of wet cupping therapy, relieving muscle stiffness, or therapeutic massages performed in baths have been neglected. In my opinion, reviving old bathhouses could reintroduce some of their joyous functions and their psychological effects to society."



# Cairo's souring relations with Tel Aviv



Then-president of Egypt Anwar al-Sadat (L), then-president of the United States Jimmy Carter (C), and then-prime minister of Israel Menachem Begin sign the preliminary Camp David Accords in 1978.

● WALLY MCNAMEE/GETTY IMAGES



By Syed Ali Hassan  
Iran Daily's correspondent  
in Pakistan

## OPINION

Under President El-Sisi's leadership, ties with Israel have increasingly focused on economic and energy cooperation, aligning with Egypt's attempts to overcome its economic challenges. Since El-Sisi took power in a coup in 2013, Egypt has worked with Israel on security measures such as dismantling tunnels used to smuggle commodities and weapons into Gaza and establishing a buffer zone along the Egypt-Gaza border. Despite this collaboration, Egypt condemned Israeli officials' claims of Hamas weapons being smuggled across Egyptian borders. President El-Sisi

Egypt's relationship with Israel endured several challenges during the Middle East conflict, including Palestinian uprisings and Israel's occupation of the West Bank, East Al-Quds (Jerusalem), and military operations in Gaza.

criticized the widespread devastation and civilian fatalities in Gaza and expressed support. Cairo is also presently facilitating several rounds of discussions between Israeli and Hamas representatives, aiming to secure a cease-fire in Gaza. However, the support has been limited to mere rhetoric and discussions, as Egypt passively watches the escalating genocide in Gaza, refraining from taking any significant action.

### Egypt-Israel peace deal

Former US president Jimmy Carter arranged the Camp David Accords, which were

a series of peace talks held at Camp David, a presidential retreat outside Washington, D.C., between Egypt's then-president Anwar Sadat and Israel's former prime minister Menachem Begin. These accords set prerequisites for a peace treaty between Egypt and Israel, as well as a framework for Israeli-Palestinian peace, and were based on UN Resolution 242, which called for Israel's departure from lands captured during the 1967 Six-Day War.

According to the deal, Israel committed to remove its soldiers from the Sinai Peninsula

in exchange for diplomatic ties with Egypt and access to the Suez Canal, a crucial trade route. Egypt seized the canal in 1956, prompting a failed invasion by Israel, the United Kingdom, and France in an effort to reclaim it.

Despite demands, many believe Cairo is unlikely to forsake the Camp David Accords. Egypt receives substantial help from the United States as part of the deal and maintains tight military connections with Washington. Furthermore, a large military expansion would put further burden on Egypt's already ailing economy.

By Hassan Zaidi  
Guest contributor

## EXCLUSIVE OPINION

As global outrage grows over Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's vow to carry out a ground invasion against the southern Gaza city of Rafah, all eyes turn to Egypt. The pressing question arises: Would the North African powerhouse continue to be a silent spectator, enabling the Tel Aviv regime to intensify its unabated crimes in Gaza, or will it follow through its threat to revoke the so-called "peace treaty"?

### Egypt's role in Gaza crisis

## Will Cairo stand by or act?

It's important to note that Egypt was the first Arab nation to establish diplomatic ties with Israel in 1979, following the Camp David Accords. However, Israel's involvement in the Gaza conflict has soured relations between the two countries.

This month, Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry rejected reports that Cairo intends to withdraw from the 1979 peace agreement. However, he made it clear that Egypt would only uphold the contract if the other party reciprocated.

Authorities in Cairo are fully aware that Israel's plans to create Jewish settlements in Gaza are dependent on Egypt's aiding in moving Palestinian refugees to parts of the Sinai Peninsula. This effectively amounts to the

ethnic cleansing of 2.3 million Palestinians from Gaza, opening the door for a Jewish-only settlement zone. Nonetheless, a huge impediment remains in Rafah, where over a million and a half Palestinians forcefully driven from the north live in appalling conditions in makeshift shelters, suffering constant bombing, deprivation, and an absence of medical supplies.

The threat of military action looms large, with fears that it will escalate into some of the most intense violence witnessed in a conflict that has already claimed over 28,000 Palestinian lives.

### Egypt's response so far

Since the recent conflict started, President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi has continuously rejected the idea of

accepting Palestinian refugees, expressing worry that doing so would weaken the Palestinian cause and jeopardize Egypt's national security. El-Sisi has urged for a cease-fire to prevent a humanitarian disaster, despite the possible impact on diplomatic ties with Israel.

Recent developments indicate a shift in Egypt's standpoint. According to reports from Egypt's local rights organizations, Egypt is reportedly building a "buffer zone" in the Sinai area to house Palestinians who may evacuate Rafah. However, the claims need formal confirmation from Egyptian officials. Furthermore, CIA Director William Burns' recent visit to Cairo indicates talks on a possible interim truce to facilitate negotiations between

Hamas and Israel for the exchange of prisoners.

Another significant factor is that since Israel launched its onslaught on Gaza on October 7, prominent Israeli officials' rhetoric asking Palestinians to "emigrate" from Gaza — a thinly veiled reference to forcible displacement — has alarmed Egyptians. There is concern about a potential influx of refugees crossing the border into Egypt. Egypt, along with numerous Arab countries, is concerned that Israel could ban displaced Palestinians from returning to Gaza. The concern is heightened by the historical context: nearly 750,000 Palestinians were evicted from their homes during the 1948 ethnic cleansing (Nakba), that preceded the formation of

Israel. Despite worldwide pleas for their right to return, Israel has continuously blocked the return of Palestinians who were displaced during the Nakba.

Furthermore, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's suggestion in December, indicating his desire for authority over the Philadelphi Corridor, which serves as a short corridor dividing Egypt and Gaza, sparked Egyptian outrage. Diah Rashwan, the chairman of Egypt's State Information Service, condemned the idea, noting that the "occupation" of the 14-kilometer-long and 100-meter-wide corridor would violate the Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty. Since Israel's disengagement from Gaza in 2005, Egypt has retained authority over this territory.



The file photo shows Egyptian soldiers patrolling a road parallel to the Philadelphi Corridor buffer zone between Gaza and Egypt on March 19, 2007.

● CRIS BOURONCLE/AFP





People ferry water at a makeshift tent camp for displaced Palestinians in Rafah near the border with Egypt in the southern Gaza Strip on January 24, 2024.



## Will Egypt sell out Palestinians for \$10b loan package?

By Mike Whitney  
Political, economic analyst

### PERSPECTIVE

On Saturday, western news agencies reported that closed-door negotiations took place in Paris that were aimed at reaching an agreement on a cease-fire in Gaza. According to Reuters, the talks represented “the most serious push for weeks” to halt the fighting in the battered Palestinian enclave and see Israeli and foreign captives released. Regrettably, the reports from Paris were largely a media-engineered deception intended to divert attention from the real purpose of the confab. Keep in mind that the primary attendees of the gathering were not senior-level diplomats or trained negotiators, but the directors of the Intelligence services including the head of Israel’s Mossad, David Barnea, Egyptian spy chief Abbas Kamel, and CIA Director William Burns. These are not the men one would choose to hammer out a captive exchange or a cease-fire deal, but to implement electronic surveillance, espionage, or black ops. Thus, it is extremely unlikely that they met in Paris to settle on a plan for the cessation of hostilities. The more probable explanation is that the respective spy chiefs are putting the finishing touches on a collaborative plan to breach the Egyptian border wall so that one and a half million severely traumatized Palestinians can flee into Egypt without any serious opposition from the Egyptian army.

Such an operation would require considerable coordination in order to minimize the casualties while, at the same time, achieving its overall objective. Naturally, any breach would have to be blamed on Hamas who will undoubtedly be the convenient scapegoat for blowing up a section of the wall creating an opening for thousands of stampeding Palestinians. In this way, Israel could characterize the mass expulsion as a “voluntary migration,” which is the cheery-sounding Zionist sobriquet for ethnic cleansing. In any event, the bulk of Gaza’s Muslim population will have been evicted from their historic homeland and forced into refugee camps scattered across the Sinai Desert. This is Netanyahu’s endgame, which could take place at any time. There is some doubt as to whether Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi will cooperate with Israel and allow the Palestinians to enter Egypt en masse, but those doubts are based on speculation, not fact. For those who care to dig a bit deeper, there’s a clear money trail connecting the dodgy Egyptian president to a policy change that will more than accommodate Netanyahu’s ambitious ethnic cleansing plan. In other words, the fix is already in. This is from Reuters: “Talks with Egypt to boost its International Monetary Fund loan program are making excellent progress,” the IMF said on Thursday, adding that Egypt needs a “very comprehensive support package” to deal with economic challenges, including pressures from the war in Gaza. Asked about the impact on the talks from challenges posed by the expected entry of Gaza refugees into Egypt, Kozack said: “There is a need to have a very comprehensive support package for Egypt, and we’re working very closely with both the Egyptian authorities and their partners to ensure that Egypt does not have any residual financing needs and also to ensure that the program is able to ensure macroeconomic and financial stability in Egypt.” Repeat: “to ensure that Egypt does not have any residual financing needs”? What in the world? So, the IMF now provides financial support for ethnic cleansing? It certainly looks that way. The IMF wants to make sure that el-Sisi has sufficient

money to cover the costs of feeding and housing one and a half million refugees. But is that where those billions of dollars will actually go; to the starving Palestinians who have lost their homes and all their material possessions, or will it vanish into the offshore accounts of corrupt Egyptian politicians just as it has in Ukraine? We’ve all seen this movie many times before, and it doesn’t end well. According to the Financial Times, Kristalina Georgieva, managing director of the International Monetary Fund, “made clear that the war in Gaza was the main reason why the IMF was pushing ahead with an expanded loan deal, despite having stopped disbursements on an earlier \$3b loan.” “Analysts say the Egypt-IMF discussions have focused on a package of at least \$10b, some of which would come from the lender and the rest from other donors, likely to include the World Bank. Let me get this straight: The IMF halted payouts on a \$3 billion loan to Egypt, but now they are prepared to hand over \$10 billion to a debt-ridden, credit-risk nation whose currency suffered a 40% devaluation last year and whose economy is presently in the dumps? Does that make sense? Of course, not. The Cradle also wrote, “The International Monetary Fund (IMF) says there is ‘excellent progress’ in talks with Egypt over a loan program that seeks to ‘support’ the country in weathering its financial woes and handling a potential deluge of Palestinian refugees that Israel seeks to ethnically cleanse from Gaza.” So, someone finally has the courage to say what everyone knows to be true already, that the IMF is financing the ethnic cleansing of Gaza. Here’s more from the same article: “IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva said in November that the agency was ‘seriously considering’ a possible augmentation of Egypt’s loan program due to ‘economic difficulties posed by the Israel-Gaza war.’ “The loan could reach up to \$10 billion to help the Egyptian economy survive amid local and external factors, including the Israeli onslaught on the neighboring Gaza Strip and tensions in the Red Sea.” The article continued, “This coincided

with the start of construction work on an ‘isolated security zone’ in the eastern Sinai Desert on the border with the Gaza Strip, which many expect will serve as a buffer zone for displaced Palestinians.” “The construction work seen in Sinai along the border with Gaza — the establishment of a reinforced security perimeter around a specific, open area of land — are serious signs that Egypt may be preparing to accept and allow the displacement of Gazans to Sinai, in coordination with Israel and the United States.” It’s worth noting, that by accepting the IMF loan of \$10 billion, el-Sisi has agreed to peg Egypt’s currency to black market rates, which means its value will be cut in half on the day the deal is consummated. Egyptian working people — half of whom already live below the poverty line — will be severely hurt by the bailout, although not nearly as much as the Palestinians who will be left to rot in tent cities in the desert.

allies. They apparently found their man in el-Sisi. This may also help to explain why Egypt is currently clearing a vast tract of land just a stone’s throw from the Gaza border. Cairo is preparing the land to accommodate the burgeoning flow of refugees who will soon be pouring into the country. This is from Forbes: “Egypt is setting up a camp near its border with Gaza as a contingency for a potential exodus of Palestinians from the enclave if Israel goes ahead with a ground offensive on Rafah, the border region where more than half of Gaza’s population is taking refuge, Reuters reported.” “Citing four unnamed sources, Reuters reported Egypt is preparing a ‘desert area with some basic facilities’ to shelter potential refugees as a ‘temporary and precautionary measure.’ “The human rights group, the Sinai Foundation, has shared images of the purported camps, showing trucks and cranes in



These satellite images taken on February 10 (l) and February 15, 2024, show before and after the construction of a miles-wide buffer zone and border wall by Egypt along its border with Gaza.

MAXAR TECHNOLOGIES

Also, it appears that the IMF will continue to dangle the \$10 billion loan (bribe?) beneath el-Sisi’s nose until the Palestinians finally cross over into Egypt and the operation is concluded. This is how Western oligarchs use international institutions like the IMF to coerce their puppets to do what they want. In this case, they needed a pliable Judas who would be willing to double-cross his fellow Muslims in order to line his pockets and those of his closest

the area setting up a ‘high-security area’ surrounded by concrete fences.” Finally, the report said, “The New York Times corroborated the images and spoke to contractors at the site who said they had been hired to build a 16-foot-high concrete wall around a five-square-kilometer patch of land near the border.”

The full article first appeared on Eurasia Review.



# Aliakbari beats Bhullar, keeps ONE Championship streak going



## Sports Desk

Iranian mixed martial arts fighter continued his impressive run in the heavyweight division of the ONE Championship by beating Indian Arjan "Singh" Bhullar in ONE 166: Qatar in bizarre fashion, as the former world champion was disqualified for inactivity. Aliakbari moved for Bhullar's head all night long at Lusail Sports Arena, but the latter looked to be more interested in avoiding those hits rather than fighting back. The Indian was shown yellow cards in each of the first two rounds but that barely changed his approach. With the bout approaching the end of the third round, referee Herb Dean seemed to have had enough as he showed Bhullar the red card on the 4:15 mark. The result saw Aliakbari celebrate a fourth successive victory in the MMA promotion

Iranian Amir Aliakbari (R) lands a punch on Indian Arjan "Singh" Bhullar in a heavyweight MMA bout in ONE 166 at Lusail Sports Arena, Lusail, Qatar, on March 1, 2024. **ONE CHAMPIONSHIP**

– moving to 13-3 overall. Victorious over Italian Mauro Cerilli, Filipino Brandon Vera, and Canadian Dustin Joynson over the past 18 months, the former world Greco-Roman wrestling champion now hopes his latest triumph will earn him a shot at the world heavyweight title against Anatoly "Sladkiy" Malykhin, who made history in Friday's main event. The unbeaten Russian defeated Dutch fighter Reinier de Ridder – taking his record to 6-0 since joining the promotion in 2021 – to claim the ONE middleweight MMA world championship and become the first man in the sport to win world titles across three different weight classes. In a rematch of the pair's light heavyweight showdown in December 2022, Malykhin repeated his victory over the Dutchman thanks to a technical knockout at the 1:16 mark of round three. Aliakbari, who was knocked out by Malykhin in his second ONE outing in September 2021, said earlier this week that the winner of his fight against Bhullar would "deserve a title shot against the ONE heavyweight world champion."

## Asian Age Group Aquatics Championships: Iranian prodigy Vajer excels with five diving medals



15-17 age group contests, Vajer scored 382.45 points to walk away with the ultimate prize of the board level 3m event on Friday – a second gold for the Iranian following a board level 1m triumph on the preceding night. Vajer also settled for a silver in the boys' platform contest with 357.30 points earlier in the 11th edition of the competition. He was also part of the Iranian duo – alongside Kiumars Aslani – that grabbed the 3m synchronized springboard silver medal, while finishing on the third podium at the synchro board level final. Aydin Nosrati was the other Iranian to win a diving medal in Capas, taking the silver in the boys' board level 1m event of the 13-14 age category. Iranians had enjoyed a glorious campaign in the swimming competitions with an impressive eight medals. Samyar Abdoli headlined the country's swimming run with a men's 50m freestyle gold in the over-18 class, and teamed up with Homer Abbasi, Mehrshad Afghari, and Matin Sohran for the 4X100m freestyle relay. Meanwhile, Mohammad-Mahdi Gholami enjoyed a prolific campaign with five medals in the 13-14 age category despite failing to win a gold. The Iranian boy bagged a couple of silvers in the 200m individual medley and 200m butterfly events, while taking the bronzes of the 50m backstroke and 100m backstroke contests. He was in the Iranian bronze-winning team – also featuring Yashar Soleimani, Rayan Zare', and Shantia Nazari – in the 4X100m freestyle relay final.

## Sports Desk

Iranian boy Sam Vajer stole the headlines at the Asian Age Group Aquatics Championships by claiming the best diver award of his age class in the Filipino city of Capas. Representing the country in the

Iran's Sam Vajer poses with his medals and the best diver award at the Asian Age Group Aquatics Championships in Capas, Philippines, on March 1, 2024. **IRSF**

## Majidi sacked by Ittihad Kalba

## Sports Desk

Iranian head coach Farhad Majidi was shown the exit door by Ittihad Kalba FC, the Emirati top-flight club announced on Friday. The 47-year-old coach leaves the UAE Pro League side "by mutual agreement", the club's statement read, after his team managed a single victory – a 3-0 win against second-tier outfit Dibba Fujairah in the UAE President's Cup in mid-February – in eight matches, suffering five defeats. In Majidi's final game on the bench on Thursday, Ittihad Kalba took the lead against Al Bataeh at home through Mahdi Qayedi's sublime finish in the first half before the visitors bounced back to score twice and inflict an eighth league defeat on the home side. Having steered Esteghlal to a historic title in the Iranian Persian Gulf Pro League two years ago – going a whole campaign without a defeat – Majidi took charge in Ittihad Kalba for the start of the previous season and led the club to a best-ever ADNOC Pro League finish, when his side stood eighth in the table. However, the tide turned for Majidi and his men in the ongoing season as a run of only three wins in 15 matches, the last of which came away to Emirates Club (4-2) on December 1, has left Ittihad Kalba struggling right above the relegation zone in the 14-team standing. Citing an interview with his agent, sports news website Varzesh3 reported later on Friday that Majidi "has no intention of returning to the Iranian league in the near future" as he will be looking to continue his managerial career in the United Arab Emirates by joining a top-flight side "in the coming days."





# Conservatives leading in parliamentary elections

## National Desk

Iran began counting ballots on Saturday after a vote for Parliament and Assembly of Experts, with preliminary results showing that the conservatives are grabbing most of the seats in the Iranian Parliament.

Officials have not yet released the total voter turnout. However, preliminary results from the elections show that 41 percent of eligible voters went to the polls during the Friday elections.

Citing unofficial statistics, Iranian media reported that the rate of participation in the vote for the 12th term of the Iranian Parliament and the 6th term of the Assembly of Experts was over 40 percent.

The polls opened at 8 a.m. local time (04:30 GMT) on Friday and the voting began at 59,000 polling stations across the country, with over 15,000 candidates competing for 290 seats in the Iranian Parliament, and 144 candidates vying for positions for the eight-year-term Assembly of Experts, an 88-member body in charge of overseeing the activities of the Leader of the Islamic Revolution, with a position of authority to either appoint or dismiss the Leader.

Voting for the two elections ended at midnight local time.

A total of 61.17 million people, comprising 30.94 million men and 30.22 million women, were eligible to vote in the two elections, with the Iranian Interior Ministry saying more than 25 million cast their ballots at the polls.

The voting was initially scheduled to end at 18:00 local time but was extended three times, with each extension lasting for two hours.

In a message on Saturday, President Ebrahim Raisi expressed gratitude to the Iranian people for their remarkable turnout.

Raisi said the enthusiastic and conscious presence of Iranians in Friday's vote was a "big no" to global arrogance after its historic defeat in last year's riots, which broke out following the death of a 22-year-old woman in the capital Tehran.

"The ill-wishers of our beloved Iran had mobilized all their power so that the March 1 elections would be held without fervor," he said.

Candidates for Parliament are vetted by the country's Constitutional Council. It approved a total of 15,200 candidates, out of nearly 49,000 applicants, to run



Election officials begin counting votes cast at the parliamentary and the Assembly of Experts elections in Tehran on March 2, 2024. **TASNIM**

for seats in Parliament.

A total of 144 candidates were also competing for the Assembly of Experts seats. Former president Hassan Rouhani, a current member of the assembly, was banned from standing again in the election for the Assembly of Experts.

The elections took place amid crippling international sanctions and mounting economic hardship in Iran, where inflation has hovered around 50 percent, and the rial has sharply declined against the dollar.

The problems had caused concern among the country's officials

about the low participation of the people in the elections.

Before the elections, Iranian officials had called on people to participate in the polls.

Iran's last parliamentary elections in 2020 had a voter turnout of 42.57 percent - the lowest since the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

## Sistan and Baluchestan hit by severe floods



## National Desk

Rescue teams have been dispatched to the south-eastern province of Sistan and Baluchestan, which has been hit by severe floods in recent days.

Head of the country's national crisis management organization, Mohammad Hassan Nami, said floods caused by heavy rains since Wednesday have hit 16 cities and 1,947 villages in the province. Vast areas in the province have been inundated by floods. The floods have led to the closure of many roads and caused power outage in many cities and villages. However, Nami said most of the roads have been reopened and power has been restored in many cities and villages.

Nami said that the rescue teams have provided emergency accommodations for more than 8,000 people in the flood-hit areas. They have been also provided with tents and food packages. There has been no report of casualties so far.

Nami said that north of the Chabahar region in south of the province is the hardest-hit region.

The country's Red Crescent Society said more than 150 rescue teams are present in the region and are providing relief to people affected by the floods.

The intensity of the rains has been such that several dams have overflowed. The heavy rains over the past month have so far caused about 40 million dollars of damage to infrastructure and roads and the agricultural sector.

Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi, who is on a trip to Algeria to participate in the 7th GECF Summit, has ordered the Interior Minister Ahmad Vahidi to visit the flood-affected areas to speed up relief to people in need.

## UN says large number of Palestinians shot in Gaza aid incident

## International Desk

A United Nations team and medical officials have reported seeing "a large number" of gunshot wounds among Palestinians in Gaza after Israeli troops opened fire near an aid convoy, which has triggered global condemnation.

Their claims confirm numerous testimonies by witnesses that Israeli gunfire killed and wounded scores of Palestinians desperately seeking food aid on Thursday, contradicting Israel's initial claims people were hurt due to a stampede and trampling.

Israeli troops opened fire as Palestinian civilians scrambled for food supplies during a chaotic incident in Gaza City that the Health Ministry in the Palestinian territory said killed 115 people and wounded more than 750.

The Israeli military has claimed that a "stampede" occurred when thousands of Gazans surrounded the aid convoy. However, an Israeli source ac-

knowledged troops had opened fire on the crowd, believing it "posed a threat".

On Friday a UN team visited some of the wounded from the aid incident, in Gaza City's Al-Shifa Hospital, and saw a "large number of gunshot wounds", UN chief Antonio Guterres's spokesman said.

The hospital received 70 of the dead, and around 200 wounded were still there during the team's visit, spokesman Stephane Dujarric said.

Hossam Abu Safiya, director of Gaza City's Kamal Adwan Hospital, said all the casualties it admitted were hit by "bullets and shrapnel from occupation forces," a reference to Israel. The aid convoy deaths helped push the number of Palestinian death toll in Gaza to 30,320, mostly women and children, according to the Health Ministry.

## Dying from malnutrition

On Saturday, the Health Ministry also said thousands of people in north Gaza "are at risk

of dying from dehydration and malnutrition," and the World Health Organization said it had delivered treatment for 50 acutely malnourished children in the north.

The ministry on Friday reported a total of 10 children had died of "malnutrition and dehydration". Meanwhile, Hamas's military wing said Friday that seven more captives held by the resistance group had died because of Israeli military operations.

## Air-dropping relief supplies

US President Joe Biden has said his military would start air-dropping relief supplies into the Palestinian territory.

Biden said Washington would begin deliveries from the sky "in the coming days".

The International Rescue Committee said the very fact air-drops were "being considered is testament to the serious access challenges in Gaza". But the group said parachut-



A man grimaces as he receives medical attention at the Kuwaiti hospital for wounds sustained in an Israeli bombardment that hit a camp sheltering displaced Palestinians near the Emirati hospital, in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip on March 2, 2024. **AFP**

ing aid is not the solution and distracts "time and effort from proven solutions to help at scale".

The United Nations has particularly cited restrictions on access to northern Gaza, where residents have been reduced to eating animal fodder and even leaves.

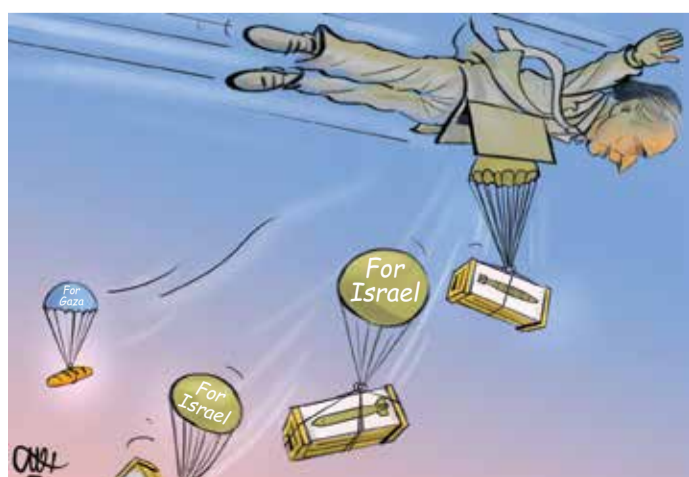
Hisham Abu Eid, 28, of Zeitun in the Gaza City area, said he got two bags of flour from an aid distribution and gave one

to his neighbors.

"Everyone is suffering from famine. Aid that is getting into Gaza is rare and not enough for even a small number of people. Famine is killing people," Abu Eid said.

Mediators have also been trying to secure a cease-fire, and Biden on Friday said he was "hoping" it could still be reached by the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, which is due to start on March 10 or 11.

Mohammad Ali Rajabi  
Cartoonist



## IRGC advisor, Hezbollah members killed in Israeli attack in Syria

A member of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Navy serving as a military advisor was killed in an Israeli strike on Syria.

In a statement on Friday, the IRGC Navy said its member - Reza Zarei - was assassinated along with two members of the Lebanese Hezbollah resistance movement on Friday. They were killed in an Israeli attack on Syria's northwestern Baniyas port earlier in the day, it added.

Israel frequently targets military positions inside Syria, especially those of resistance fighters, who have played a key role in helping the Syrian army in its fight against

foreign-backed terrorists.

Iran maintains an advisory mission in Syria at the request of Damascus to help the war-torn Arab country defeat the foreign-backed militants who have been fighting the democratically-elected Syrian government since 2011.

Back in January, five IRGC military advisors along with several Syrian forces were assassinated in an Israeli strike in the Syrian capital, Damascus.

The attack targeted a three-story residential building in the city's Mezza neighborhood which houses several diplomatic missions.

**Notice of Public Tender No:**

**TEG1402/3001-22**

The Saipa Expansion Engineering Corporation Company (SEECO) intends to "RFP" for an T.A.R Oxidizing System through the bidding process among qualified contractor (s). The qualified applications are invited to visit our website: [www.seeco.ir](http://www.seeco.ir) for further information and send their technical/commercial proposal separately (two separate emails) till dated 11.03.2024 (16:00 PM) via email to the below mentioned email address: [tender@seesaipa.com](mailto:tender@seesaipa.com).



## Asghar Farhadi receives Belgrade Victor Award



Iranian filmmaker Asghar Farhadi has been honored with the Belgrade Victor Award for Outstanding Contribution to Film Art at the 52nd Belgrade International Film Festival.

The prestigious award ceremony, held annually to recognize influential contemporary artists worldwide, presented this year's accolade upon Farhadi for his remarkable role in the field of cinema, ISNA wrote.

The festival, taking place from February 23 to March 3, attracts a diverse audience, including filmmakers, enthusiasts, and the general public.

The Belgrade Victor Award, previously granted to notable figures such as Costa Gavras, Alexander Sokurov, Carlos Saura, John Malkovich, Emir Kusturica, Richard Dreyfuss, and others, highlights Farhadi's impact on the global cinematic landscape. The festival organizers praised Farhadi's screenplay, noting its profound societal, psychological, and philosophical insights into universal challenges.

The celebration, attended by Farhadi, witnessed the enthusiastic participation of audiences, filmmakers, and cinema aficionados appreciative of Farhadi's work. Currently, Farhadi is actively preparing for the production of his 10th film in the US, marking his ongoing commitment to the world of filmmaking.

# Archaeologists unearth traces of 14,000-year-old site in Fars Province

### Arts & Culture Desk

After a month-long archaeological expedition in the rock shelter of "Pir Qooch" in Iran's south-central city of Arsanjan, Fars Province, the head of the excavation team said that the region's history dates back approximately to 14,000 years ago.

Hassan Afshari stated, "Stone tools and bone remains were discovered in this area during the excavation."

Conducted with the permission of the Research Institute of Cultural Heritage & Tourism and the support of the Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Department of Fars Province, as well as the Heritage Protection Unit, the excavation involved a team of 10 individuals working for a month, IRNA reported.

The head of the excavation team continued, "This historical shelter, near the village of Qasr Jamal, is considered one of the important and valuable sites with significant archaeological evidence. However, due to looting by cultural heritage raiders in recent years, exploring this site is crucial and necessary to understand the cultural layers, craft industries, and the ancient climate of the region."



Mohammad Sadeq Eqlidi said, "This shelter, with a history dating back between 7 to 12 years before Christ, was investigated by archaeologists

for the first time. According to archaeological evidence from prehistoric periods and continuous human presence in the Fars region, engaging

in archaeological activities and completing these studies is essential for understanding historical periods." Eqlidi stated, "The recent ex-

ploration in the Pir Qooch rock shelter in Arsanjan aimed at studying the prehistoric archaeological period and yielded significant results."

## Mental health challenges on rise in Iran: Hospital president



By Sadeq Dehqan  
 Staff writer

The director of Roozbeh Hospital, Amirhossein Ja'fari, highlighted the increasing trend of mental health disorders in the country.

He emphasized that approximately one in every four to five Iranians is affected by a psychiatric illness. Roozbeh Hospital serves as the oldest and primary center for the treatment and education of individuals with mental health issues in the country. Ja'fari, in an interview with Iran Daily, referred to various studies indicating that 20 to 25 percent of the Iranian population aged 18 and above are grappling with at least one mental health disorder.

He linked the rise in psychiatric disorders to issues such as suicide rates. According to Ja'fari, the causes of mental health

disorders are diverse and cannot be attributed solely to one factor. Social, economic, and cultural factors are intricately involved in this matter.

Speaking about the increase in psychiatric disorders, Ja'fari explained that stigma or social judgment towards individuals with mental illnesses is a significant barrier to seeking professional help.

He expressed concern that many affected individuals avoid consulting mental health specialists due to fear.

Ja'fari exemplified individuals facing sexual problems might lack the courage to consult a specialist, or those with other mental disorders may choose unrelated healthcare providers to avoid facing the stigma associated with mental health issues.

He emphasized that the lack of proper understanding about mental health in society hinders the treatment of psychiatric illnesses in Iran.

Ja'fari outlined the broad

spectrum of psychiatric disorders, including phobias, obsessive-compulsive disorder, sexual and marital issues, depression, bipolar disorders, and schizophrenia.

He noted that mental illnesses can occur at any age, with conditions such as hyperactivity being more prevalent among children.

Ja'fari pointed out that the prevalence of mental illnesses highlights the need for increased attention to mental health. Unfortunately, many people do not prioritize their mental well-being because mental illnesses are not visibly apparent and do not manifest physical pain like other health problems.

He stressed the misconception that associates personality traits with mental illnesses, explaining that behaviors like constant worry or mood fluctua-

tions might be indicative of depression or bipolar disorder rather than inherent character traits. Ja'fari urged for more awareness and emphasis on mental health, emphasizing the importance of vigilance, especially for individuals with a family history of mental disorders.

He noted that depression has a higher frequency among women, influenced by biological, hormonal factors, as well as environmental stressors like social and economic issues.



## Iranian cinemas break 23-year audience record



### Arts & Culture Desk

Iranian cinemas achieved a 23-year audience record in the current year (starting from March 21, 2023), attracting over 27.5 million viewers, a milestone not reached in the past two decades.

Iran's cinemas, after the peak of 33 million viewers in 1979, have not experienced such audience numbers until this year, IRNA reported.

During the spring, cinemas attracted 6.3 million viewers. In the summer, due to the overlap with the months of Muharram and Safar, the number of cinema-goers decreased to 4.5 million. The audience num-

bers reached 9.5 million in the fall and 6.5 million until March 1. Additionally, 715,000 people watched films left over from last year in the early months of this year, bringing the total cinema audience for the year to 27.515 million.

Iranian cinemas have achieved over 27.5 million viewers, surpassing last year's figure of 13.7 million, a doubling in audience numbers for the current year.

In addition to the massive audience attraction and strong box office performance, Iranian cinemas have also set other records. On November 14, 2023, they achieved the highest number of viewers in one

day during the past four years, with 282,000 attendees. Although this day is likely the most attended in the past decade as well.

The latest statistics on the increase in cinema audiences date back to 1979 when 33 million people attended cinemas during that year. If there was proper planning for the summer season, the most lucrative screening period after Nowruz (Persian New Year), and considering the strong film lineup during February and March, the industry could exceed the 33 million mark of 1979. However, it lost the summer season as well as February and March and it is highly unlikely to achieve the goal.