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Palestinian children in Gaza play with traditional lanterns in the city of Rafah on March 2, 2024 as Muslims prepare for the holy month of Ramadan. **SAID KHATIB/AFP**

Trump and Biden: What are the differences with four years ago?

American youth challenging supportive policies towards Israel

By Ebrahim Beheshti
Staff writer

It seems that Donald Trump and Joe Biden will once again face each other for the presidency of the United States. Is it possible for any changes to occur in the main candidates before the elections? How will the rematch between these two differ from the previous term? Will the Gaza conflict have an impact on the elections? Iran Daily has discussed these questions with Ali Nazifpour, an expert on American affairs.

After the event known as the Great Tuesday in the United States, should we consider Biden and Trump as the main candidates for the presidential elections, or could something else happen considering their age?

The path to selecting party nominees is established and lengthy, and I doubt that the party nominees, namely Donald Trump for the Republicans and Joe Biden for the Democrats, will change. Biden, despite criticisms regarding his health and age, managed to secure intra-party support for his candidacy in the elections. However, age and health remain significant concerns for him and the Democrats in the elections. Nevertheless, he has time until the elections to change nega-

tive perceptions about himself, as he tried to do in his annual speech by speaking passionately and demonstrating that he is in good physical condition. Therefore, the definite choices are Trump and Biden, unless an unforeseeable event such as the sudden death of one of them occurs. Even the possibility of replacing a Democratic nominee in place of Biden has been ruled out.

What differences does the rematch between Trump and Biden have from four years ago?

One of the differences is the age of both candidates. Whichever wins the election will be considered the oldest president in American history. Another significant issue is the matter of democracy and the health of the elections, which is more serious compared to the previous term. In the previous elections, Donald Trump did not accept the election results, and concerns about the decline of democracy in the country have been raised following subsequent events and the attack by protesters on the US Capitol. Additionally, since then, Trump has heavily emphasized the health of the elections, effectively challenging it. Another new component in the current elections is the issue of abortion. The US

Supreme Court has rejected federal-level abortion freedoms, which could be a priority for certain segments of voters, particularly women.

Considering the repeated criticisms of both candidates, how likely is it to consider the influence of a third party or independent candidates?

The next US president will either be Trump or Biden, and it's unlikely for a third-party candidate to win. However, a question arises here: which main candidate's votes could independent candidates reduce, and in reality, who could they work to the advantage of? I also find this scenario unlikely because independent candidates won't have significant impact on influential states or on the ballot papers. For example, Robert Kennedy, who is ahead of other independents, has only appeared on ballots in three states so far, and it's uncertain whether his votes would be to the detriment of Trump or Biden. With months left until the elections, the votes for independent candidates in polls aren't bad, but as we approach the elections, their votes in polls decline. Third-party or independent candidates have not been effective so far.



We've witnessed in the past few months in American society large protests in support of the Palestinian people and criticism of America's supportive policies towards Israel. Even a Harvard University poll showed that 51% of American youths support the destruction of Israel. Do you think the Gaza conflict will have an impact on the US elections? I don't think the Gaza conflict will have a significant impact on the US elections. Supporters of Palestine within the Democratic Party are powerful and significant, and their power increases year by year. Despite the protest

votes that Palestine supporters in Michigan gave, I still think their votes won't have a significant impact on the elections. If the votes of those who are independent, meaning not supporters of the two main parties, turn against Biden and some Democrats, including these Palestine supporters, don't vote for Biden, it could lead to Biden's downfall. Supporters of Israel fervently vote for Trump in the elections because he is seen as a better option for Israel. There's a difference between the Republican and Democratic parties in this regard. Republicans are unified in their support for Israel, but Biden faces a party that has older sup-

porters in favor of Israel and younger supporters more in favor of Palestine. The Harvard University poll also showed that significant portions of American youth support Palestine. I believe if this trend of American youth inclination towards Palestine continues in the next 10-15 years and their numbers increase, America will be forced to reconsider its supportive policies towards Israel.

Trump is a tested option in America. Especially considering the concerns about exacerbating social divides and damaging democracy resulting from Trump's policies, why is he still a primary election

candidate and has enthusiastic supporters? One reason is that Trump has still retained the support of conservative Americans. Another point is that in some issues where he could be troublesome for Republicans, who have stricter policies, Trump shows flexibility. For example, in the conservative Republican Party, Trump defends universal healthcare insurance, which is appealing to the general public and especially to workers. Although Trump is often staunch, he is conservative in the economic realm, and this quality might even attract some hesitant or independent voters towards him.

BRICS' plan of an independent payment system becomes operational

Economy Desk

The Central Bank of Iran announced on Monday that the BRICS group's plan to launch an independent operational payment system has become operational. This system is based on cryptocurrencies and operates on a blockchain

platform, ISNA reported. This system is a formal declaration of war against the dollar and Western hegemony, contributing to the surge in demand for bitcoin and other currencies. The five major emerging economies – Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa put on the

agenda the Central Bank of Iran's proposal to set up the group's own equivalent to the SWIFT payment system and create an organization to fight money laundering and terrorist financing that would be similar to Intergovernmental Financial Action Task Force.

Mohammad Ali Rajabi
Cartoonist



Oil minister: Iran's crude production at five-year high despite sanctions



Iran's oil minister said the country's production of crude oil has hit a five-year high since 2018 despite sanctions imposed by the United States on the Iranian energy sector. Javad Owji made the remarks in a Sunday interview, saying that despite all obstacles created to impede Iran's oil exports in 2023, the country's crude exports have reached their highest in the past five years, Press TV reported. Stressing that Iran is still facing sanctions that are tougher than those which existed in 2018, the minister said,

"However, our oil exports have reached the highest level since that year." "At the beginning of this administration, oil production in Khuzestan Province stood at 1.7 million barrels per day, which has now reached 2.7 million barrels per day," Owji said. He added that natural gas production has also grown by five percent, and production capacity of many Iranian refineries has been boosted through projects implemented by Iranian specialists after foreign companies left the country due to US sanctions.

The United States under former president Donald Trump reinstated crippling sanctions on Iran after unilaterally walking out of the 2015 nuclear deal in May 2018, despite Iran's full compliance with the terms of the agreement, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). One of the stated goals of Trump's sanctions, which were maintained by his successor, was to reduce Iran's oil exports to almost zero. Iran has repeatedly denounced the sanctions as an act of "economic war" and

"economic terrorism." Responding to a question about the possible impact of Trump's reelection as the US president on Iran's oil production, the minister said the return of Trump to power will have no effect on the country's crude output. "International organizations have admitted that Iran is currently facing no obstacles for selling its crude oil," Owji said. "I also reject reports about Iran selling its oil at a discounted price; the price of Iran's exported oil is close to global rates." Last month, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) revised up its previous economic growth projection for Iran in 2023, attributing it to a higher-than-expected increase in the country's oil production. Releasing its latest quarterly report, the IMF said Iran's economy grew 5.4 percent in 2023, showing a remarkable boost compared to the preceding year. The international agency had previously predicted a three-percent growth for the country's economy in that year.

Charshanbe Suri, bridging tradition and modernity

Iranica Desk

In the ancient land of Persia, a tapestry of rituals and traditions weaves a rich cultural heritage that has withstood the test of time. Among these cherished customs, the Charshanbe Suri celebration stands as a beacon of tradition, deeply rooted in history and revered to this day.

As the people of Iran eagerly approach the joyous occasion of Nowruz, the Persian New Year, this year celebrated between March 20th and April 1st, Charshanbe Suri emerges to infuse a vibrant hue into the lives of the people on the evening of the Tuesday before the final Wednesday of the year.

In anticipation of the Charshanbe Suri festivities, as the last Wednesday of the year draws near, individuals of all ages hasten to make preparations for their forthcoming Nowruz celebrations. On the eve of Charshanbe Suri, it is customary for the younger generation to gather at the homes of their elders, reveling in each other's company. Marketplaces bustle with activity as people flock to procure supplies and provisions to host their guests.

Various combustible materials are readily available for purchase, while wish balloons adorn the market stalls, symbolizing hopes and dreams taking flight. Both the young and the old meticulously prepare themselves, striving to ensure that the night is one to be remembered — a night where bonds are strengthened, memories are forged, and traditions are upheld with reverence and joy.

Lighting bonfires

With arms laden with light, this celebration casts a spell of illumination amidst the encroaching darkness. The sky may darken at night, but bonfires ablaze everywhere kindle a legion of lights, piercing through the veil of night. People joyfully leap over the flames and sing: "My yellowness for you, your redness for me."

This verse once served as a prayer recited by Persians in ancient times, beseeching the fire to carry away the ailments and worries of the past year, paving the way for a new year brimming with joy and happiness. Charshanbe Suri also serves as the inaugural step in heralding the arrival of spring, a season of renewal and rebirth.

The ancient and enchanting tradition of the Charshanbe Suri celebration centers around the ritual of lighting the fire. Following the burning of shrubs and the extinguishing of flames, the remaining ashes are meticulously poured behind the houses. A gentle knock on the door signals the next phase of the ceremony.

From within, a voice asks, "Who is there?" The visitor outside responds, "It is me." Further inquiry follows, "Whence do you come?" The reply echoes, "From the wedding feast." The voice asks, "What tidings do you bring?" The answer rings out, "Good health." In that moment, the door swings open, ushering in the embodiment of good health with a warm embrace.



YJC



fararu.com

Problem-solving nuts

Following the conclusion of the fire-jumping festivities on the eve of Charshanbe Suri, family members assemble to partake in a time-honored tradition: roasting *ajil-e moshkel gosh*, or problem-solving nuts, over the flames. These nuts and seeds, seasoned with salt, would be savored by all in attendance.

The assortment of nuts and seeds include pumpkin seeds, pistachios, watermelon seeds, wheat, hazelnuts, almonds, chickpeas, and sesame seeds. It was believed that consuming these delectable snacks would instill kindness and compassion within the individual, dispelling any lingering feelings of animosity or envy. This act of communal snacking served not only to nourish the body but also to nurture the spirit, fostering a sense of harmony and goodwill among loved ones gathered together on this auspicious occasion.

Shahnameh reciting

Reading poetry from the Shahnameh (a medieval epic written by the poet Abolqasem Ferdowsi) on the eve of Charshanbe Suri around the fire is another tradition carried out by the elders of the family on this night. Individuals with skills in music also showcase their art with their instruments and recite poems describing the arrival of spring. This practice, which is also performed in other celebrations such as the Yalda Night ceremony, is usually considered an integral part of ancient Iranian rituals.

salameno.com

Pot breaking

In the annals of Charshanbe Suri traditions, a member of the household would carefully fill a clay pot with water, carrying it to the rooftop or the highest point in the village. With a steady hand and a firm heart, the person would release the pot, letting it plummet to the ground below. As the pot shattered upon impact, the water within would cascade onto the earth.

Ancient wisdom dictated that this ritual act served as a protective measure against misfortunes, with the breaking of the pot symbolizing the dispersal of calamities. The flowing water, a beacon of light and purity, was believed to cleanse away any lingering misfortunes, carrying them far from the realm of the living. This symbolic gesture of renewal and purification held a profound significance in safeguarding the household.



fardanews.com

Spoon banging

One of the other interesting customs in Charshanbe Suri is the tradition of spoon banging, referred to in Persian as *qashoq zani*, which was widely used in ancient times. According to this custom, girls and boys would cover their faces with a veil and go to their neighbors' houses, collecting nuts and sweets.



ILNA

Shawl throwing

Shawl throwing, *shal-andazi* in Persian, is another tradition of Charshanbe Suri that has been prevalent in some villages and cities.

In this custom, young people make a long rope by tying several silk and satin scarves together and go to the roof through the stairs; they lower the rope into the house through the chimney opening and grab its end on the roof. Then, with a few loud coughs they make the homeowner aware of their presence.

As soon as the homeowners see the colorful rope, they put something into the corner of the shawl and tie a knot. With a gentle shake, they inform the other party that their Charshanbe Suri gift is ready. Then the shawl thrower raises the shawl. If the gift is bread, it symbolizes blessings; and if it is sweets, it symbolizes sweetness and joy.



IRNA

Changes

Charshanbe Suri, like any other cultural ceremony, has undergone changes over time and taken on a completely new face. Perhaps the fire is still lit and people jump over it in a few places, but more prevalent is the use of explosives and firecrackers on the streets.

The old and interesting ceremony has been replaced by terrifying sounds of explosions. Every year, many people fall victim to mischief; they may even lose an eye or burn their skin while walking through an explosion.

This ancient tradition, which was supposed to be a gathering for bringing health and prosperity, has now become a reason for fear, endangering people's lives.

If this celebration had a purpose other than bringing joy to hearts and purifying the soul from evil and providing a sense of peace, it would have disappeared by now.

What's Netanyahu's plan for post-conflict Gaza?

Does it rule out a workable cease-fire?



US Secretary of State Antony Blinken (L) meets with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu at a military headquarters in Tel Aviv, on November 3, 2023.
● AMOS BEN GERSHOM/GPO



By John Strawson
Emeritus professor of Law, Author

INTERVIEW

Joe Biden has been promising that a deal for a cease-fire is very close to agreement, but at the same time, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has revealed his vision for Gaza once the fighting stops, which appears to rule out Palestinian sovereignty on the strip. The Conversation spoke with John Strawson, a Middle East expert at the University of East London, who has been researching and publishing on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict for several decades.

THE CONVERSATION: After weeks of wrangling, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu published his vision for a post-conflict Gaza. How compatible is it with the idea of a two-state solution? To what extent is his tough line influenced by the more hawkish members of his cabinet who take a hardline attitude to Palestinian sovereignty?

JOHN STRAWSON: Netanyahu's plan for a post-war Gaza is simply not practical and does not rise to the political challenges of the times. It is based on two principles: Israeli security control over Gaza and a civil administration run by non-Hamas officials.

However, there has been Israeli security control over Gaza in one form since 1967, and it has not brought security for either Israel or Palestinians. There is no reason to think that the Israel Defense Forces can do better now, especially after this catastrophic war. At the same time, it is difficult to see where the non-Hamas Palestinian officials will come from. Hamas has had a tight grip on Gaza since 2007, and anyone with any experience in administration is likely to be a member of Hamas, a sympathiser, or someone used to working with Hamas.

While there is opposition to Hamas in the Gaza Strip, there is little organised political opposition that could replace them. Like the US and Britain in Iraq after the 2003 invasion, when they banned officials from the Ba'athist party from the administration, chaos will follow. The only realistic option is to extend the power of the Palestinian Authority — presently based in Ramallah — into Gaza. But Netanyahu and his far-right allies think it will advance pressure for a two-state solution — something they are opposed to.

To what extent is this a starting point for Netanyahu? Has he left himself the political space to manoeuvre, given the pressure from the US and other international allies?

The plan was provided mainly due to international pressure — especially by the Americans. It should be noted that the US Secretary of State Antony Blinken has been raising the issue of post-conflict Gaza with the Israelis since November, and it still took months to produce this flimsy document.

This gives us an insight into how difficult it is in practice for the US administration to use its apparent power over the Israeli cabinet. Netanyahu has much experience in dealing with American politicians and plays the system very well. He knows that Biden needs a calmer Middle East as a background to his re-election bid in November. As a result, the bargaining relationship is quite complex.



Netanyahu clearly thinks he has time on his side. The nearer it gets to the US election the more difficult it gets for Biden to please the progressive Democrats who want a cease-fire and the more traditional Democrats who have Israel's back. What Netanyahu is doing is the minimum in the hope of hanging on, hoping for a Trump win.

Does Netanyahu's vision reflect the feelings of the Jewish community in Israel? What about Arab voters? The prime minister appears deeply unpopular among most voter groups. Is his intransigence more about maintaining his hold on power than about seeking a workable long-term solution?

While Netanyahu is deeply unpopular with all sections of the Israeli public, we have to be careful in reading the public mood on policies for a post-war dispensation. Polling suggests that support for a two-state solution is declining. Israelis have been so traumatised by October 7 that there is little support for Palestinian empowerment.

To some extent, this is the result of the way that the Israelis view their country's disengagement from Gaza in 2005. It is often presented as an example of what happens when Israel ceases to occupy Palestinian land. In this account, Israel leaves Gaza, and Gaza becomes an armed encampment with the aim of destroying Israel — and indeed this remains Hamas's policy, despite the group releasing an amended charter in 2017.

But the 2005 disengagement, which included dismantling all Israeli settlements in the strip, was not the result of negotiations, but a unilateral act. The then-prime minister Ariel Sharon did not want to hand over power to the elected Palestinian Authority, thinking it would boost the PA's for statehood. Instead, Israel just left — and that allowed Hamas, the major political force in Gaza, to claim that Israel has "retreated under fire". Hamas then capitalised on the situation and went on to win the Palestinian legislative elections in 2006.

The lesson of this is that Israel needs proper negotiations that can lead to a sustainable future — and that can only mean a Palestinian state alongside Israel. That is not merely right for the Palestinians but essential in any plan to defeat Hamas. It's not only a military operation but a political one, and Palestinians need to be offered a peaceful and just alternative.

US President Joe Biden has been talking up the idea of a cease-fire deal in recent days, but Netanyahu's plan seems to make the deal brokered in Qatar an impossibility. Is Netanyahu serious about bringing an end to the conflict? Or is talk about a possible deal more about Israel's need to be seen to be playing the game as well as optimism from a US president who needs to be able to show to his own voter base that he is getting results? Former Israeli prime minister Ehud Olmert argues that Netanyahu is dragging Israel into a long-term war to save himself. Olmert draws some drastic conclusions from his analysis suggesting that Netanyahu and his far-right allies want a permanent war that would also see Palestinians driven out of the West Bank. That might seem too apocalyptic — but it does convey a sense of the mismatch between US aims and the Israeli political dynamic.

What is quite clear is that both Israel and Hamas have been dragging their feet as each thinks it is gaining the advantage by continuing the fighting. But with the arrival of the month of Ramadan (beginning March 10 — the date that Israel plans to begin its ground assault on the city of Rafah) there is some likelihood of a Ramadan truce.

The full article first appeared on *The Conversation*.

What are Village Leagues Israel is reviving to replace Hamas?



By Amr Salahi
Journalist

PERSPECTIVE

Israel intends to maintain "security control" over Gaza while giving few details. However, there have been reports about how Israel is planning to administer the Gaza Strip, or at least the parts that it manages to occupy.

Israel's brutal war on Gaza and its land reoccupation of large parts of the Palestinian territory, despite continued resistance by Hamas and other groups, has left it with a dilemma.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has put forth little in the way of a "day after" plan for Gaza and has said that

Netanyahu has already ruled out allowing President Mahmoud Abbas's West Bank-based Palestinian Authority to take over the administration of Gaza. Israel appears to be planning to allow what it calls "influential family clans" to play a role in those areas of Gaza it controls. The Jerusalem Post reported that Israel wants to use these clans as a "shield" against Hamas attacks, saying that "even Hamas fears angering large families that have influence and power and may have

weapons as well". The clans' envisaged role appears to be limited to providing services and running local affairs, as well possibly as acting as local enforcers for the Israeli military. However, Israel has tried a similar experiment before in the West Bank, and it ended in utter failure. In the 1980s, in order to counter the influence of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) in the occupied territory, Israel set up the Village Leagues.



Any leadership appointed by Israel will almost certainly face rejection and contempt.



What were Village Leagues?

After Israel occupied the West Bank and the Gaza Strip in 1967, the territory stayed relatively quiet for a number of years. However, the PLO remained armed and active outside Palestine's historic boundaries, occasionally carrying out attacks on Israel, first from Jordan and then from Lebanon. In 1976, Israel organised local elections in the West Bank, hoping to give some legitimacy to its occupation and create a "moderate" Palestinian local leadership willing to accept autonomy under Israeli rule. However, this plan backfired when pro-PLO candidates won sweeping victories in all the towns of the

West Bank. Rather than securing a pliant Palestinian political class ready to do its bidding and accept its occupation, Israel inadvertently gave legitimacy to an enemy that it was refusing to recognise at the time.

It, therefore, encouraged the formation of the unelected Village Leagues, which were presented initially as "non-political entities", concerned with agricultural affairs and representing Palestinians living in rural areas not served by the municipal councils, which were now dominated by pro-PLO elected officials.

A stillborn alternative

In reality, Israel was setting them up as an alternative to the PLO and their supporters, and it later imprisoned or deposed the pro-PLO mayors who were elected in 1976. The head of the Village Leagues was Mustafa Dudeen, a local notable, who was previously a Jordanian cabinet minister. Jordan had ruled the West Bank before the 1967 Israeli occupation, and Israel had hoped that it could find collaborators among pro-Jordanian traditional leaders. When Israel militarily defeated the PLO in Lebanon in mid-1982, the Village Leagues began to be reported on in the press at the time as a serious alternative with which Israel could do business. However, de-

spite trying to ingratiate themselves with rural Palestinians by handing out money, the Village Leagues were an utter failure. Opinion polls conducted at the time showed that they had the support of 0.2% of the Palestinian population in the West Bank, while the PLO enjoyed 86%, despite its Lebanon setback. The Village Leagues were seen as little more than traitors and local thugs, and in the end, Israel withdrew support. By the end of 1982, they had sunk into irrelevance, and in 1987, the Palestinian population in the West Bank rose up against Israeli rule in the First Intifada. Israel then had to negotiate with the PLO, signing the ill-fated Oslo Accords in 1993.

Can Israel re-create Village League experiment?

The kind of local leadership that Israel is proposing for the Gaza Strip appears to be remarkably similar to the Village Leagues — pliant, non-political, and concerned only with local affairs. The circumstances, however, are very different. Israel has utterly devastated the Gaza Strip in its indiscriminate war but still faces fierce armed resistance across the territory. These conditions are very different from the West Bank of the 1970s. While Gaza's population is weary of war and faces starvation and disease, and many Gazans had expressed discontent with Hamas's 15-year rule of the territory long before the events of Oc-

tober 7, any leadership appointed by Israel will almost certainly face rejection and contempt. Its members will also likely face physical attacks by Hamas and other armed groups that are still active in the territory.

Israel's previous failure to impose an administration on the West Bank and Gaza compelled it to agree to the Oslo Accords in 1993 and withdraw from Gaza in 2005. It is likely to face a similar scenario if it appoints a leadership made up of collaborators.

The article first appeared on The New Arab.

A person walks out of the destroyed Palestinian Legislative Council building in Gaza City on November 26, 2023.

● OMAR ISHAQ/GETTY IMAGES

Israel's 'day-after' plan for Gaza is brutal occupation



An Israeli soldier is seen looking over the leveled buildings of the northern Gaza Strip in a military tank. ● AFP



By Anna Saif
Independent researcher

OPINION

Netanyahu is taking Israel's war on Gaza to a final terrifying stage, promising that total victory is at hand and using 1.5 million Palestinians in Rafah as hostages. If he can't force them out into Sinai, he wants to take over complete control of the Rafah crossing from Egypt, destroy Hamas, and obliterate its leadership.

This is a mission impossible. Whatever new genocidal acts Israel commits in the coming days, the Palestinians will continue their resistance among the ruins of Gaza and once it is rebuilt.

If Israel has its way, however, and Western powers continue to enable its ethnic cleansing project, the bombs that have destroyed Gaza will be replaced by a new weaponised form of urban planning. Israeli scenarios envisage post-war Gaza as a more militarised version of the West Bank with thousands of hectares of land under direct Israeli occupation. Apparently, orders have been given to determine the locations for permanent army stations. The shape of the new urban landscape will be minutely planned by Israel, if it is given a free hand, to lock Gaza into a grid of surveillance and control.

This is not a new phenomenon in the Israeli mindset. The mechanisms of 'Israel's architecture of occupation' have been unpacked in the work of Eyal Weizman in his book *Hollow Land*. Weizman is Director of Forensic Architecture and Professor of Spatial and Visual Cultures at Goldsmiths College.

The book explores the planning history of Zionism and notes how from the start, the Zionist project enlisted architects from the UK to plan Tel Aviv and other Zionist settlements. Having ethnically cleansed Palestine of the majority of its people in 1948 and levelled 500 villages, the Zionists could transform the landscape as they wished. Today, 75 years on, Israel's determined destruction of the entire infrastructure of Gaza is callously planned so it can be rebuilt as an optimum site of occupation.

In the West Bank, this has been an ongoing project, at least since the time of Ariel Sharon with the massive settlement building, which started in the 1970s. This was organised for defence and colonisation, taking strategic hilltops and developing a network of roads to facilitate military manoeuvres which became effective instruments for possessing occupied Palestinian land.

Sharon announced, on one of his reconnaissance trips to the West Bank, that the Palestinians should see "Jewish lights every night from 500 metres". Later, the building of Israel's apartheid wall gobbled up huge swathes of Palestinian land, impeding freedom of movement along with hundreds of checkpoints. Today, strategic mechanisms of subjugation intersect all coordinates in the West Bank, forming a matrix of control with on/off valves to regulate the movement of the occupied.

Israeli planning policy, on the micro and macro level, creates isolated Palestinian zones, watched over by militarised settlements and outposts. These colonising devices are "intended to make the colonised internalise the facts of their domination". In 1971, Ariel Sharon bulldozed wide

roads through Gaza's refugee camps, Jabalia, Rafah, and Al-Shati. He wanted to cut up the camps into smaller neighbourhoods that could be easily accessed by the military.

This was the beginning of a strategy Sharon envisioned for Gaza, similar to that of the West Bank. He planned to build five wedges of settlements in what he called the '5-finger plan' to break up the Strip into controllable sections. He also planned new neighbourhoods for the refugees in order to destroy the fabric of the social life of the Palestinian camps.

Sharon never completed his plans for Gaza. What Netanyahu has done in the last four months, however, would outstrip Sharon's wildest fantasies. The carpet bombing of Gaza, the murder of over 30,000 Palestinians, and the destruction of every aspect of Palestinian life in Gaza is almost complete.

Weizman, in his analysis of the architecture of occupation in the West Bank, uses ideas from French philosopher Michel Foucault's *Power and Knowledge*. Foucault describes that authority changed how power was exerted on the public with the rise of institutional forms of power, such as the hospital, the asylum, the police, and the prison, where the bodies of the masses were codified and observed through new disciplines of observation.

Instead of power being exerted through public executions and torture, power transmuted into capillary power, micropower that ran through every institution of society. Foucault gives the ultimate metaphor for this: the panopticon. The panopticon is the ultimate tool of surveillance, a prison where the staff could observe all the inmates at once. The prisoners would not know if they were being watched and so they would always discipline their own behaviour under a faceless gaze.

This concept gave rise to the idea of panopticism, where every aspect of social life could be similarly designed to facilitate the exertion of power and its control in spatial and surveillance terms. How, then, would Israel plan a new Gaza, if it could? Would it cut it into five zones, as envisioned by Sharon, with settlements or military bases? It would, no doubt, try to organise the urban environment of Gaza in a way that would give maximum spatial domination to facilitate military incursions, to access every street and every house.

The planning will ensure that these zones will be under constant observation, through technological apparatus, installed everywhere.

Another key element of panopticism is the isolation of individuals. Preventing horizontal relations avoids the formation of groups — divide and rule.

The obliteration of neighbourhoods in Palestinian towns and refugee camps has already shattered communities, which once fostered support and solidarity. This has realised Sharon's idea whereby new neighbourhoods would break up the Palestinian camps to compartmentalise the Palestinians of Gaza, to cut social bonds, and to fragment them as a society and people.

Whatever form the new Gaza will take, the Palestinians will rise to continue their struggle. As Foucault said, "Where there is power, there is resistance."

The full article first appeared on The New Arab.

Yasar Dogu & Vehbi Emre tournament: Vafaeipour clinches 86kg gold as Iran wins freestyle title

Sports Desk

Hadi Vafaeipour rounded off a dominant campaign at Yasar Dogu & Vehbi Emre tournament with the 86kg gold as Iran claimed the freestyle team title in Antalya, Turkey.

Days after the country's Greco-Roman glory had been marred by Mohammadreza Mokhtari's brawl with the host's Yuksel Sariccek in a 77kg semifinal, Iranian wrestlers bagged triple golds, coupled with double bronzes, to finish atop the freestyle table with 115 points, with Kyrgyzstan (110 points) and Mongolia (108 points) in the following spots.

Having eased to victories over opponents from Ka-

zakhstan, Japan, and Georgia, Vafaeipour outmuscled Mongolian Byambadorj Bat Erdene by technical superiority (10-0) to walk away with the ultimate prize - keeping his slender chances of a place in the Paris Olympics alive.

Freestyle sensation Hassan Yazdani is the favorite to headline the Iranian squad in the French capital in August but the nine-time world and Olympic medalist is yet to return to full training following a shoulder surgery that has kept him out of action since last October.

A national champion in December, Vafaeipour, meanwhile, will be on the lookout for a late call-out, should Yazdani fail to chase a third Olympic med-

al in Paris.

Elsewhere in Antalya, Amir-Reza Ma'soumi bounced back from a setback against fellow-Iranian Amirhossein Zare' in January's Ranking Series event in Zagreb - which saw him miss out on the Olympic superheavyweight berth - by winning the 125kg gold, thanks to a 4-3 victory over the 2022 world silver winner Mönkhörtiin Lkhagvagerel of Mongolia in the final showdown. Amirhossein Firouzpour - a former world cadet, junior, and under-23 champion - continued his impressive run among the seniors as the young Iranian hammered Moldovan Andrian Grosul 11-1 for the 92kg gold.

Elsewhere, Amir-Moham-

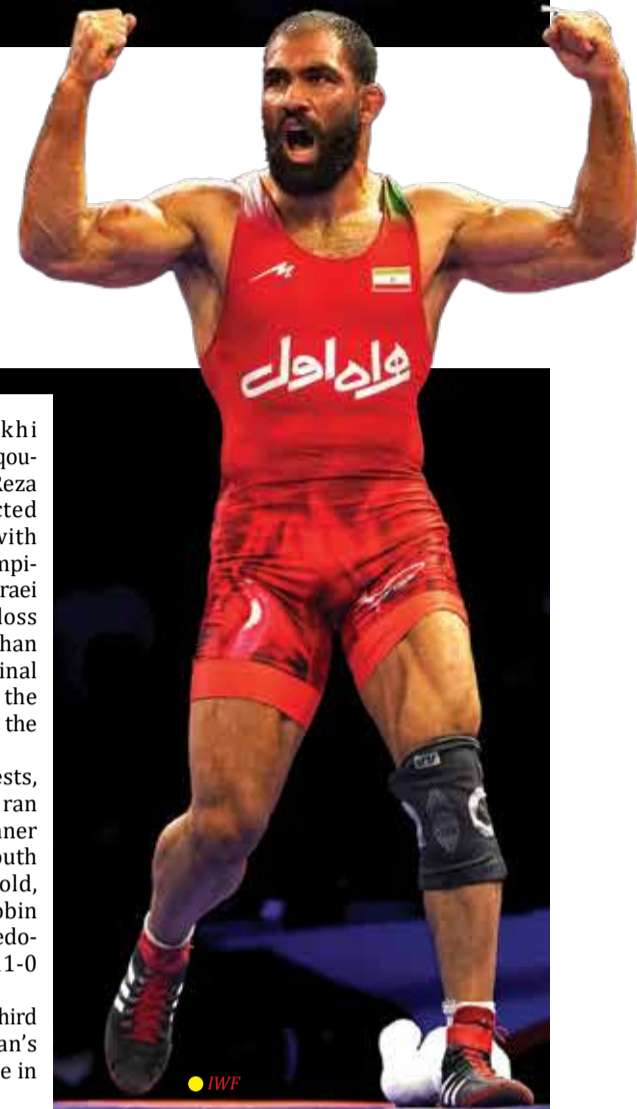
mad Yazdani, runner-up in last September's World Championships, recovered from a shock last-four defeat against Mongolia's Tulga Tumur Ochir to beat Azerbaijani Magomed Bashir Khaniev 11-2 for a consolation bronze in the 70kg weight class. Mohammad-Mahdi Palangvar also left Antalya with a bronze, courtesy of a 7-6 win against Adlan Askarov in the 65kg contests.

Medals in Sofia

Meanwhile, Iranian wrestlers finished their campaigns at the Dan Kolov and Nikola Petrov tournament in Sofia with seven medals across the Greco-Roman and freestyle competitions.

Gholamreza Farrokhi (77kg), Mohammad Naqouisi (82kg), and Amir-Reza Akbari (97kg) collected three gold medals, with reigning Olympic champion Mohammadreza Gerai stunned by a pinfall loss to Kazakhstan's Adilkhan Satayev in the 72kg final as Iran stood third in the Greco-Roman event in the Bulgarian capital.

In the freestyle contests, Abbas Ebrahimzadeh ran away comfortable winner over Yun Jun-sik of South Korea for the 65kg gold, while Mohammad-Mobin Azimi outclassed Macedonian Redjep Hajdari 11-0 in the 92kg final. Yassin Rezaei added a third freestyle medal to Iran's haul, taking the bronze in the 61kg class.



● IWF

Taremi eager to make his mark against Arsenal

Sports Desk

Iranian striker Mahdi Taremi will be hoping to regain his place in Porto's starting XI when the Dragons play away to Premier League giant Arsenal in the UEFA Champions League last-16.

Porto will take a 1-0 aggregate lead to London's Emirates Stadium after Brazilian Galeno's stunner deep into stoppage time secured a massive home win for Sergio Conceicao's men three weeks ago.

Taremi has only made a cameo appearance for the Portuguese club since returning from international duty at the Asian Cup in February - missing six games, including the first leg against the Gunners, with a groin injury. The leading marksman in

the Portuguese top flight last season with 22 strikes, Taremi has endured a below-par run, by his standards, in the ongoing campaign as he has only managed six goals in 25 games with Porto across all competitions. His last club goal came in a 2-1 victory over Leixoes in the Portuguese Allianz Cup on December 23. The Iranian still played an instrumental part in helping Porto progress to the Champions League knockouts by bagging two goals and assists apiece in six group outings.

Chasing an 11th goal in the fourth season at the European elite clubs' competition, Taremi has fond memories of playing against the London clubs as his stunning overhead kick against Arsenal's archrival Chelsea

in the 2020/21 quarterfinals earned him nomination for the FIFA Puskas Award.

Set to join Inter as a free agent in the summer, the Iranian will also be eager to make the most of tonight's occasion to repair his relationship with a section of Porto faithful, who showed their frustration at the reports of their prolific striker's imminent medicals at the Nerazzurri last month.

Porto manager Conceicao was quick to come to Taremi's defense at the time, urging the supporters to "show respect" for their talisman, who is the club's third all-time top scorer with 86 goals - standing behind retired strikers Mario Jardel (136) and Jackson Martinez (92).



● MIGUEL RIOPA/AFP

Second Announcement

N.I.S.O.C
NATIONAL IRANIAN SOUTH OILFIELDS COMPANY
AHVAZ-IRAN

TENDER NO.: 08-21-0140009

National Iranian South Oilfields Company (NISOC) intends to purchase the following goods

Items	Material Description	Quantity
1	TUBING 2-7/8 IN", API GRADE L-80 SEAMLESS "EU" THREAD, RANGE 2, 6.5 PPF	10,000LE

Vendors who intend to participate in aforesaid tenders are requested to send their "Intention To Participate" letter via fax to the following number along with their resume according to Qualitative Assessment Form no. 1, available at: www.nisoc.ir, not later than 14 days after the second announcement, otherwise, their requests for participation in the tender will be disregarded. The applicants should have relevant background in supplying the required goods and capability to provide and submit a bid bond of 117,227/81 EURO or 50,245,361,792 RIAL, in favor of NISOC. Tender documents including the materials through technical specifications and Qualitative Assessment Forms can be accessed via: www.nisoc.ir-material-procurement-management.tab.

ONLY ACCEPTABLE DELIVERY TERM IS D.D.P., NISOC'S WAREHOUSE, AGHAJARI, IRAN. PAYMENT TERM IS C.O.D., SUBSEQUENT TO NISOC'S MATERIAL APPROVAL.

NOTE: Based on enactment notified by Nisoc's Tender committee, foreign companies must submit a Bid Bond Guarantee amounting to aforementioned (paragraph 2) Euro amount. Otherwise, their quotations will not be considered.

FOREIGN PURCHASING DEPARTMENT
Bldg. No. 104, Material Procurement Management Complex, Kouy-e-Fadaeian Islam (New Site), Ahvaz, Iran
Tel. No.: 061 34 12 4644
Fax No.: 061 34 45 74 37

PUBLIC RELATIONS
www.shana.ir www.nisoc.ir <http://lets.mporg.ir> 1680100

Second Announcement

N.I.S.O.C
NATIONAL IRANIAN SOUTH OILFIELDS COMPANY
AHVAZ-IRAN

TENDER NO.: 08-38-9940004

National Iranian South Oilfields Company (NISOC) intends to purchase the following goods

Items	Material Description	Quantity
1	SLICKLINE, SPOOLED ON IRON REEL H2S, CO2 AND CHLORIDE ION TRIM TYPE: SUPA-75 OR SANICRO-26 STAINLESS STEEL UNS N08926 (ALLOY 25-6 MO) REF. "SANDVIK (ZAPP-GROUP)", "BRIDON" SIZE 0.082 INCH X 15000 FEET	47 RL

Vendors who intend to participate in aforesaid tenders are requested to send their "Intention To Participate" letter via fax to the following number along with their resume according to Qualitative Assessment Form no. 1, available at: www.nisoc.ir, not later than 14 days after the second announcement, otherwise, their requests for participation in the tender will be disregarded. The applicants should have relevant background in supplying the required goods and capability to provide and submit a bid bond of 39,655/60 EURO or 16,927,189,996 RIAL, in favor of NISOC. Tender documents including the materials through technical specifications and Qualitative Assessment Forms can be accessed via: www.nisoc.ir-material-procurement-management.tab.

ONLY ACCEPTABLE DELIVERY TERM IS D.D.P., NISOC'S WAREHOUSE, AGHAJARI, IRAN. PAYMENT TERM IS C.O.D., SUBSEQUENT TO NISOC'S MATERIAL APPROVAL.

NOTE: Based on enactment notified by Nisoc's Tender committee, foreign companies must submit a Bid Bond Guarantee amounting to aforementioned (paragraph 2) Euro amount. Otherwise, their quotations will not be considered.

FOREIGN PURCHASING DEPARTMENT
Bldg. No. 104, Material Procurement Management Complex, Kouy-e-Fadaeian Islam (New Site), Ahvaz, Iran
Tel. No.: 061 34 12 4016
Fax No.: 061 34 45 74 37

PUBLIC RELATIONS
www.shana.ir www.nisoc.ir <http://lets.mporg.ir> 1680098

'We have been fasting for five months'

Gazans fasting in Ramadan under starvation

International Desk

Palestinians began fasting for Ramadan on Monday as the Muslim holy month arrived with cease-fire talks at a standstill, hunger worsening across the Gaza Strip and no end in sight to the Israel's brutal strikes on the besieged territory. Prayers were held outside amid the rubble of demolished buildings late Sunday. Some people hung fairy lights and decorations in packed tent camps, and a video from a UN-school-turned-shelter showed children dancing and spraying foam as a man sang into a loudspeaker. But there was little to celebrate after five months of war that has killed over 31,000 Palestinians and left much of Gaza in ruins. Families would ordinarily break the daily fast with holiday feasts, but

even where food is available, there is little beyond canned goods and the prices are too high for many. "You don't see anyone with joy in their eyes," said Sabah al-Hendi, who was shopping for food in the southernmost city of Rafah. "Every family is sad. Every family has a martyr." In the ruins of Gaza, many living under plastic tents and facing a severe shortage of food. "We made no preparations to welcome Ramadan because we have been fasting for five months now," said Maha, a mother of five, who would normally have filled her home with decorations and stocked her refrigerator with supplies for the evening Iftar celebrations when people break their fast. Israel has blocked the entry of food and aid supplies into Gaza draining its limited health services.

Extreme hunger

The head of the UN agency for Palestinian refugees (UNRWA) said Ramadan comes in Gaza at a time when "extreme hunger spreads, displacement continues, and fear and anxiety prevail."

"This month should bring a cease-fire for those who have suffered the most," Philippe Lazzarini wrote in an X post.

The United States, Qatar and Egypt had hoped to broker a cease-fire ahead of the normally joyous month of dawn-to-dusk fasting that would include the release of dozens of Israeli captives and Palestinian prisoners, and the entry of a large amount of humanitarian aid, but the talks stalled last week. Hamas is demanding guarantees that any such agreement will lead to an end to the war, while Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin



Palestinians mourn the death of a family member in the courtyard of the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital in Deir Al-Balah in the central Gaza Strip, after he was killed in Israeli strikes on the makeshift Al-Mawasi camp for displaced people west of Khan Yunis on March 10, 2024.

AFP

Netanyahu has vowed to continue the offensive until "total victory" against the resistance group and the release of all the remaining captives.

The war has driven around 80% of Gaza's population of 2.3 million people from their homes and pushed hundreds of thousands to the brink of famine. Health officials say at least 25 people, mostly children, have died from malnutrition and dehydration in north-

ern Gaza.

Israeli forces have largely sealed off the north since October, and aid groups say Israeli restrictions, ongoing hostilities and the breakdown of law and order have made it nearly impossible to safely deliver desperately needed food in much of the territory.

Israel has meanwhile vowed to expand its offensive to the southern city of Rafah, where half of Gaza's population has sought refuge, without saying where civilians would go to escape the onslaught. US President Joe Biden has said an attack on Rafah would be

a "red line" for him, but that the United States would continue to provide military aid to Israel. The United States and other countries have begun airdropping aid in recent days, but humanitarian groups say such efforts are costly and insufficient.

This is while, the US has been providing crucial military support to Israel since the beginning of the war and shielded it from international calls for a cease-fire.

Gaza's Health Ministry said Monday that at least 31,112 Palestinians have been killed since the war began.

Iran, Russia, China to hold naval drills in Gulf of Oman



IRNA

International Desk

Naval forces from Iran, Russia and China will begin military drills in the Gulf of Oman on Tuesday. Russia's Defense Ministry said a group of its warships had arrived in Iran to take part in drills with Iran and China in the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea.

The joint exercises, called "Maritime Security Belt - 2024," will involve warships and aviation, the Russian Defense Ministry said in a statement quoted by state media on Monday. "The main purpose of the maneuvers is to work out the safety of maritime economic activity."

Russia's grouping is led by the Varyag, a missile cruiser from its Pacific Fleet, the ministry said. It said representatives from the navies of Pakistan, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Oman, India and South Africa would act as observers.

The naval and airborne units of Iran's Navy will participate in the joint naval drills. Naval delegations from Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Oman, Pakistan and South Africa have taken part as observers in the exercises.

The Maritime Security Belt - 2024 naval drills are meant to beef up security and its fundamentals in the region, enhance multilateral cooperation among the participating countries, and to demonstrate the goodwill and ability of the participants to jointly safeguard global peace and maritime security.

The exercises are also intended to strengthen the security of international maritime trade, combat piracy and maritime terrorism, and provide an opportunity for the exchange of information in the field of maritime rescue as well as operational and tactical experiences.

The Iranian naval forces and their Chinese and Russian counterparts have held several military drills in recent years to enhance the security and stability of international maritime trade.

They have also been involved in joint efforts aimed at countering piracy and maritime terrorism, exchanging information in naval rescue and relief operations as well as sharing operational and tactical experience.

In March 2023, the Iranian, Chinese and Russian naval forces staged the 2023 Marine Security Belt war game in the northern parts of the Indian Ocean, which was the fourth joint exercise in recent years.

Kazakhstan-Azerbaijan relations: growing prospects for cooperation

Against the background of regional tensions and economic instability, the relevance of integration within the framework of various international organizations and cross-border routes is growing. In addition, the development of socio-economic and cultural-humanitarian relations underpins successful interaction within the framework of bilateral cooperation between the countries of the region. In this context, today the littoral states of the Caspian Sea determine the trajectory of regional cooperation and security aimed at ensuring the maintenance of a sustainable dialog between the states.

Historically, the strategic interaction between the countries of the region is based on close humanitarian ties. Thus, Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan are united by centuries-old friendship, common history, language, culture and religion.

Experts note that the upcoming state visit of President of Kazakhstan K. Tokayev to Azerbaijan will be another leap towards more fruitful relations between the two countries. Economic relations between the two countries have been developing rapidly in recent years. Kazakhstan is also one of the most important partners of Azerbaijan in CAR, where more than 900 companies with Azerbaijani capital are registered, operating in the sphere of trade and intermediary activities, road and capital construction, processing and logistics. In turn, about 150 Kazakh companies operate in Azerbaijan, covering the spheres of industry, agriculture, trade, services, construction and transportation.

Huge natural resources, maritime borders, and geostrategic location on the historic Silk Road are the main drivers of bilateral relations between Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan. Trade, industry, energy, transportation and agriculture are the priority areas of mutual cooperation.

Today, there is a sufficiently developed legal framework between Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan. In the field of economic relations, about 40 important bilateral documents have been signed over the past year and a half, which have a positive impact on the development of mutual trade.

Along with this, international logistics projects are an effective tool for entering new markets, which is especially important during crisis periods in the global economy. Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan have unique opportunities to intensify bilateral trade and improve trade turnover, including through

international transport corridors. At the same time, in the context of declining world energy prices, it is important to increase trade in non-raw materials. Given these favorable conditions, the role of the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route (TITR) in the relations between the two countries is significantly increasing.

At the same time, the development and functioning of transportation corridors is one of the priority areas of Iran's foreign policy. Thus, the increasing role and participation in trade and transit routes can help Iran reduce the impact of Western economic sanctions and allow the country to trade more freely with the world's leading countries, including the Central Asian states. Astana is considering TITR in the transportation of oil, uranium, wheat, and the construction of a fiber-optic communication line along the Caspian Sea bed. In turn, expanding the capacity of the TITR and laying fiber-optic cables is crucial for Baku to ensure long-term economic prosperity and political influence in the region, as well as active interaction with Kazakhstan.

Economic observers note that taking into account the direct participation of the Azerbaijani side in the functioning of TITR, the organization of work on the universalization of electronic cargo clearance and synchronization of digital solutions with countries in the directions of major transit corridors will expand the capabilities of this route, track cargo flows along the route and reduce delays at the borders.

Relations between the two countries are also developing within the framework of international organizations. Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan are members of a number of universal and regional organizations, including the UN, CIS, OSCE, ECO and the Organization of Turkic States (OTS), which underscores the growing cooperation between the Caspian littoral states and the potential for regional integration.

At present, given the emerging global trends, as well as the growing importance of cross-border routes, there is a need for the countries of the region to increase bilateral relations and mutual integration. In this regard, according to journalistic circles, the visit of the President of Kazakhstan K. Tokayev to Azerbaijan confirms the commitment of the parties to expanding bilateral relations and will give fresh impetus to new joint projects in various areas of economic cooperation.

Iran calls US airdrop of aid into Gaza 'ridiculous, symbolic' move



mfa.gov.ir

International Desk

Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman Nasser Kanaani slammed the US airdrop of humanitarian aid into Gaza as "a merely symbolic" move.

Kanaani said Washington vetoed three resolutions calling for an immediate end to the war in the besieged strip and, at the same time, is sending its weapons to Israel.

He emphasized that the US resorts to "ridiculous and bitter" measures in an effort to rectify and justify its warmongering policy.

However, the people of the world are aware of the realities on the ground, he said.

The US Central Command has announced that together with Jordan's Air Force it had "conducted a combined humanitarian assistance airdrop into Gaza ... to provide essential relief to civilians affected by the ongoing conflict."

Kanaani also said that the US is the main party responsible for the start and continuation of Israel's war on the people of Palestine in the Gaza Strip.

"The American government stood by the Zionist regime in words and deeds," Kanaani said.

Since the beginning of Israel's war in October, the US has been providing the regime with large-scale shipments of weapons, he added.

He noted that the US has been exerting pressure on the Palestinian people, slamming the "painful inaction" of the international community, particularly the United Nations, over the past five months about the Israeli regime's brutal attacks against Gaza.

Iran's 'Being Ten' competing in Lisbon Animation Festival



Arts & Culture Desk

Iranian animated film 'Being Ten,' created by Fatemeh Ja'fari, is participating at the competition part of the Perspective Section of the 23rd Lisbon Animation Festival known as Monstra, running from March 7 to March 17, 2024, in Portugal. The 18-minute animated film is a production of the Institute for the Intellectual Development of

Children and Young Adults (IIDCYA), utilizing the stop-motion technique, ISNA wrote. The films selected for this edition of the Lisbon Animation Festival's competition section are divided into seven separate categories, including feature-length animation, short animation, very short animation, student films, children and youth films, perspective, and Portuguese films.

The selected films in the Perspective Section consist of seven feature-length animations and 25 short animated films, competing for awards presented by the festival audience. The short animation 'Sympathy Syndrome' directed by Maral Alizadeh, another production of the IIDCYA, participated in the 21st Lisbon International Animation Festival in 2022.

Iran unveils 35 billion-word Persian macro-corpus

Arts & Culture Desk

Iran unveiled a massive Persian language corpus, consisting of 35 billion words. The unveiling occurred during a conference on the requirements for developing the Large Language Model (LLM) for Persian, IRNA wrote. The Persian macro-corpus, a product of artificial intelligence, was crafted by the private-sector company Targoman Intelligent Processing. This dataset is designed to support the development of advanced language processing through the innovative Large Language Model (LLM), which employs neural networks with extensive parameters in the field of AI.

This Persian macro-corpus, released as open source, offers high diversity and preserves the text structure for public accessibility. LLM, or Large Language Model, represents a groundbreaking AI approach utilizing neural networks with extensive parameters for advanced language processing. The conference highlighted the prominent role of artificial intelligence generators in recent advancements, particularly attributed to Large Language Models (LLMs). LLMs, a type of AI model, demonstrate significant capabilities in processing mul-



tifaceted information, providing optimized and improved responses to various user queries. During the event, an artificial intelligence professor Behrouz Minaei emphasized the crucial role of data in the utilization of large language models, noting that nations with more data hold greater power. He underscored the importance of having a native LLM to enhance the capabilities of governments. The secretary traced the evolution of AI technology from expert systems in the 1970s-1980s to the advent of data mining in

the 1990s. He also discussed the emergence of deep learning systems, specifically highlighting the development of language models in the period of 2012-2018. The secretary stressed the advantages of the new generation of AI systems, praising their non-domain-specific capabilities and expanded horizontal power in semantic circuits and content comprehension. The significance of having a native Persian language model was emphasized for its cultural and value-based contributions to diverse perspectives.

Iranian musician Ghamsari to perform with Moscow Symphony Orchestra

Arts & Culture Desk

Ali Ghamsari, nominated for the international Bravo Award, will perform alongside the Moscow Symphony Orchestra during Nowruz (Persian New Year). The Bravo Award, a global recognition in arts and culture, aims to strengthen Russia's position as the cultural center of Eurasia. Ambassadors from various countries participate, and honorary guests attend the awards ceremony, according to ILNA. This year marks the first invitation for an Iranian



artist, Ghamsari, to the international event. He will not only be a nominee but also perform with the Moscow Symphony Orchestra. Ghamsari expressed in a brief note, "I am honored to be a nominee for one of the most prestigious global awards. It is the first time an Iranian representative is nominated for this event. Creating music and playing for you is the best gift from God to me." He continued, "Simultaneously, I consider the coincidence of this event with Nowruz as a good omen. I hope not to return from

this event empty-handed and, with the unity of your energy, play the piece 'Leaf' in the historic Bolshoi Theatre with the Moscow Symphony Orchestra. May art echo the cry for lasting peace, and may the Iranian strings be the resounding voice of our Iran. I aim to present a gift in the moment of the new year's bloom for you." Qamsari, known for his diverse performances in Iran and several other countries, has made significant contributions to the study of harmony in Iranian traditional music. His activ-



ities include the publication of the book 'Harmony in Iranian Music' in 2012 and conducting educational workshops. His unique style of harmonizing instruments, such as the use of four *kamancheh* (an Iranian spiked fiddle) in the album 'Sarv-e Ravan,' sets him apart in the field of music composition.

Celebrities at Oscars wear red pins to support Gaza cease-fire calls



Several celebrities attending the 96th Academy Awards wore red pins to show support for a cease-fire in Gaza, as pro-Palestinian protesters blocked roads nearby and delayed the start of the ceremony. The red pins were distributed by Artists4Cease-fire, a group of celebrities and entertainment industry members who collectively signed a letter late in October asking US President Joe Biden to demand a cease-fire as well as the safe

release of captives in Gaza. The pin design shows a red glossy circle with a hand and a black heart, aljazeera.com reported. "The pin symbolizes collective support for an immediate and permanent cease-fire, the release of all of the hostages, and for the urgent delivery of humanitarian aid to civilians in Gaza," Artists4Cease-fire said in a press release. "Compassion must prevail," it added. The more than 380 signatories include Cate Blanchett,

Ben Affleck, Jennifer Lopez and Bradley Cooper. "We are asking for an immediate and permanent cease-fire in Gaza," actor and comedian Ramy Youssef told US media. "We are asking for justice and peace for the Palestinian people and also, you know, a really universal message, which is let's just stop killing the children," he added. Prior to Sunday's ceremony, the red pins were seen at the Grammys and the Directors Guild of

America (DGA) Awards in February. During that time, actor Mark Ruffalo was also spotted wearing the pin. "We're not going to bomb our way to peace, and all we're saying is, what's wrong with giving a cease-fire a chance?" Ruffalo said on the DGA red carpet. Outside the Dolby Theatre, some groups held up placards and chanted for a cease-fire in Gaza, blocking several lanes of traffic. Among the protesters was

SAG-AFTRA Members for a Cease-fire, a group of working actors. The demonstrators said they sought to ensure that Israel's assault on the southern Gaza city of Rafah was not ignored, even amid the glitz and glamour of the evening. More than 31,000 Palestinians have been killed so far in five months of the Israeli military offensive, which has prompted concerns over the risk of genocide and famine.