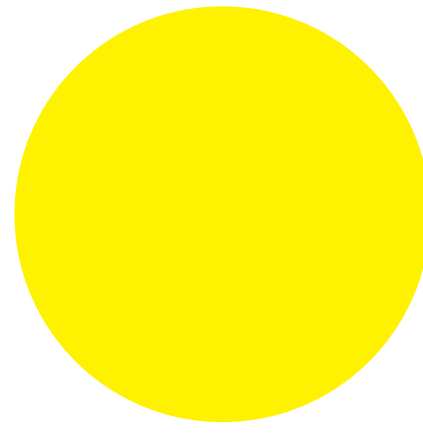




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Iran's smart diplomacy



By **Hassan Hanizadeh**
Foreign Policy Expert

OPINION
EXCLUSIVE

The diplomatic apparatus of the Islamic Republic of Iran has navigated a successful regional strategy. Embracing and toning down tensions with the Persian Gulf nations, particularly Saudi Arabia, stands out as a major accomplishment of Iran's foreign policy in the current Persian calendar year which will end on March 19. The pact between Iran and Saudi Arabia not only resolved tensions between these significant Muslim powers and key regional players but also had a ripple effect, easing Iran's relations with other regional countries and even the Arab world. The development has fostered Tehran's political, economic, and security collaborations with regional nations.

Iran's government has continued its neighborly approach this year, forging stronger ties with neighboring states, as well as China and Russia, marking another diplomatic triumph. The surge in Iran's trade and economic cooperation with neighboring countries can be attributed to the emphasis on good neighborliness.

A pressing global concern this year is the protracted Gaza conflict. Iran's foreign policy drive in recent months has been to devise solutions and measures to halt the war and avert the genocide of the Gaza Strip's population by the Israeli regime. In addition to backing Palestinians and resistance groups and proposing multiple resolutions at the Organization of Islamic Cooperation summit, Tehran has made concerted efforts to stop the bloody war, albeit stymied by the reluctance of key stakeholders to act decisively.

President Raisi's visits to Saudi Arabia, his attendance at the Organization of Islamic Cooperation meeting, negotiations with his counterparts, and Foreign Minister Amir-Abdollahian's regional trips exemplify Iran's commendable efforts to address the crisis.

On the global stage, while Iran's disputes with the United States and several European nations persist, the diplomatic efforts of the current year to reduce tensions with the West appear to have borne fruit. Despite looming risks of escalation, particularly post the Gaza conflict with the United States and Israel, the Iranian Foreign Ministry has adeptly weathered potential crises. It appears that the government has adopted a shrewd foreign policy approach.

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Iran, China, Russia Stage Joint Naval Drills in Gulf of Oman

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The picture shows an Islamic Revolution Guards Corps Navy missile corvette at sea during the "Maritime Security Belt 2024" combined naval exercise between Iran, Russia, and China in the Gulf of Oman on March 12, 2024.
● IRNA

Tehran, Ankara to launch joint free trade zone: **Official**



The chief executive of the Maku Free Zone Organization said Iran and Turkey are mulling the launch of a joint free trade-industrial zone.

Speaking in an interview with IRNA, Hossein Garousi said the feasibility studies for launching the joint free trade-industrial zone are ongoing between the two countries.

Referring to the construction of a new railway between the two countries, he said the completion of the construction operation of the railway would spur bilateral trade and economic activities.

Garousi also said the International East-Northwest Transport Corridor and the International Southeast-Northwest Transport Corridor lead to the Maku Free Zone, so this zone can play an important role in boosting the trade activities of the country.

Maku is the last connecting point between Asia and Europe, and the zone was on the Silk Road map in the past, he said, adding that this indicates its significance in the trade and business sector.

Referring to the signing of a memorandum of understanding (MoU) for the launch of a joint free trade zone between Iran and Turkey, Garousi added that the construction of the new Marand-Cheshme Soraya-Igdir-Kars line can lead to a considerable jump in the exchange of products via rail between the two countries.

Iran climbs to 9th place among top steel producers: **WSA**

Iran ranks ninth among the world's top steel-producing countries, the World Steel Association has reported.

The latest data from WSA shows that Iran produced 2.6 million metric tons (mt) of steel in the first month of 2024, IRNA reported.

According to the figure, Iran has risen one place in the list of the world's leading steel manufacturers.

Global monthly steel production reached

148.1 mt, with a 1.6% decrease compared to the same period last year, according to the latest WSA data.

The data from 71 steel-producing countries indicates a rise in steel production in Iran, Russia, India, Turkey, South Korea, and Japan.

China, India, Japan, the US, Russia, South Korea, Germany, Turkey, Iran, and Brazil comprised the top 10 steel-producing countries in January.



2.5b barrels added to Iran's crude oil, natural gas reserves in 2023: **NIOC**



The chief executive of the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) said about 2.5 billion barrels were added to the country's natural gas and crude oil reserves in 2023.

Mohsen Khojastehmehr stated that new oil fields were also discovered by the company in 2023, Tasnim News Agency reported.

The deputy oil minister said his company took effective steps in the current Iranian calendar year (began on March 21, 2023) in the oil and gas sectors.

Referring to the Arash Gas Field, shared between Iran, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, he said that Iran's sovereignty over a part of the field is undeniable.

Earlier, a foreign ministry official stated that Tehran

believes a fair agreement on the Arash Gas Field can only be achieved by fostering a constructive atmosphere and respecting the common rights and interests of all countries.

Khojastehmehr also said that the NIOC has outlined three methods to retain the production power from the South Pars Gas Field and increase the extraction of gas from the field, adding that the company is going to embark on drilling 35 new oil wells besides the previous oil wells, valued at \$1.1 billion.

He pointed to the continuation of Iran's gas exports to neighboring Iraq and said a joint working group has been set up to boost the oil cooperation between the two countries as well.

Oil explorations up

Meanwhile, the explorations manager of the NIOC said the country's oil explorations registered a 300% growth in two years of the current Iranian government, in office since August 2021. Mehdi Fakour said the oil explorations have shown a considerable hike in various sectors as compared to the past five years, Mehr News Agency reported.

He added that the oil explorations made in the first two years of the current administration have registered a 300% hike.

The feasibility studies of some explorations have started in the country, he said, adding that negotiations have been made with a number of industrial production companies.

Currently, the oil exploration activities in the country are at a satisfactory level, Fakour added.

Earlier, Khojastehmehr said that the company has a 100-year vision for exploration, emphasizing that the company is determined to carry out maximum exploration operations to discover and maintain the country's reserves.

China welcomes Iran's free zones packages: **Official**



The chief executive of the Qeshm Free Zone Organization said that Chinese investors welcome the investment packages introduced at Iran's free trade-industrial zones. Adel Payghami said that the island's trade and economic relations will be expanded with 19 countries following the implementation of the memorandum of understanding inked with the trade-economic platform of the Shanghai

Cooperation Organization (SCO), Tasnim News Agency reported.

Speaking at a meeting with a Chinese investment delegation, he said that the Qeshm Free Zone Organization welcomes investors of foreign countries who wish to invest in various economic and tourism fields on the island.

He further noted that signing a joint memorandum of understanding

between the Qeshm Free Zone and the SCO has provided a suitable ground to take advantage of the investment and economic opportunities of SCO's member states on Qeshm Island.

In the meeting, the Chinese Investment Board put forward suggestions for the creation of a green transportation platform, with the participation of companies producing electric engines, buses and cars.

Operation of the project for the development of Kaveh Port as one of the main parts of the Persian Gulf Communication Network, and also cooperation with the Qeshm Free Zone Organization to create the pilot of one of the world's largest heavy industry companies were among other issues discussed at this meeting.

Iran's smart diplomacy ...

Given the regional détente between Iran and neighboring nations, there is a window for dialogue and resolution of disagreements between Iran and the West. However, a palpable concern

for Iran and many other nations worldwide is the potential re-election of Donald Trump as US president, which could usher in new challenges for the world and the Middle East region.

Hence, the Islamic Re-

public of Iran and its diplomatic apparatus must devise soft mechanisms and rational discourse to counter Trump's aggressive policies and avert the exacerbation of tensions between Iran and the West.

Iran approves \$450m in foreign investment in 2023: **MEAF**

The Iranian Ministry of Economic Affairs and Finance (MEAF) said \$450 million in foreign investment within the framework of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) has been approved at the latest session of the Foreign Investment Board. The foreign investment under FDI was approved in industrial and pharmaceutical fields, foodstuffs, construction, tourism, road construction equipment, urban management, services and agricultural fields, IRNA reported.

At the 278th session of the Foreign Investment

Board, foreign investment, costing over \$450 million, was approved in different economic fields.

These projects were investigated by investors from various countries, including China, Turkey, Iraq, India, Afghanistan, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Saudi Arabia, Russia, and Pakistan, as well as Iranians residing overseas.

According to the report, 318 projects, valued at over \$5.5 billion, were approved in 2023, showing a considerable hike compared to a year earlier.



Mohammad Ali Rajabi
Cartoonist





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Nature's beauty and rural life in Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad Province

Roneh River, nature's hidden gem near Basht



IRNA



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Iranica Desk

The Roneh River, originating from the 3,000-meter high Khamin Mountain, Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad Province, offers a tranquil and dreamy setting for a multi-day journey in the heart of nature. Situated 10 kilometers from the city of Basht, and near the road connecting the southern provinces of the country to Fars Province, this beautiful land resembles a paradise adorned with lush greenery, fragrant wild thyme, colorful flowers, and the pleasant air of spring.

The cool shade provided by walnut, fig, and mulberry trees, coupled with the picturesque views of oak forests, creates a delightful atmosphere that can serve as a

memorable and unforgettable destination for nature enthusiasts. The presence of two famous large caves further highlights the artistic beauty of nature in this area.

Tourists selecting Roneh River as their travel destination for the first time often find themselves captivated by the natural beauty of this pristine location, turning it into their permanent haven for future travels.

Ismaeil Tavakoli, who is involved in tourism in Basht, highlighted the significance of the ecotourism lodge nestled in the heights of Khamin Mountain, offering a blend of tourism, mountaineering, and traditional cuisine in the region. Enthusiasts of mountain climbing can easily access this lodge with the guidance of tourism experts after a delight-

ful one-hour trek through the mountains. The ecotourism lodge not only provides a charming and authentic ambiance but also serves guests with local delicacies for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Tavakoli further explained that the lodge offers a variety of daily meals featuring local butter, eggs, honey, and soup to ensure a memorable culinary experience for visitors. Saeed Talebipour, the director general of the Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts Organization of Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad Province, underscored the significance of nearby attractions for overnight accommodations in the city. He highlighted, "Roneh River, in close proximity to Basht and the Gachsaran-Shiraz Highway,

stands out as a distinctive destination for nature enthusiasts." He elaborated, "The presence of an ecotourism lodge and amenities like platforms, bathrooms, and other facilities, coupled with the scenic beauty of Roneh River, have established this area as one of the most sought-after leisure spots in southern Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad, particularly during the late winter, spring, and summer seasons." In reference to the diverse programs for Nowruz (Iranian New Year, March 20-April 1) holidays in Basht, he noted, "Organizing exhibitions showcasing handicrafts and local souvenirs, along with Nowruz festivities, are the primary scheduled events for this year's Nowruz celebrations in the county."

The recreational area of Roneh River, situated in the southeast of Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad Province, 110 kilometers from Yasuj, the provincial capital, stands out as one of the most popular tourist destinations in the southern region, attracting numerous visitors each year, particularly during the spring season. Travelers opting for the banks of Roneh River and the rugged mountains not only get to indulge in sightseeing and exploration amidst the stunning landscape but also get a glimpse of the idyllic rural life in southern Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad. The sight of mud-brick houses and thatched roofs adorned with tree branches in the villages of Basht evokes nostalgia and appeals to many tourists more than the opulence

of luxury hotels. Thatched roofs, locally known as *parchin* or *chapar*, represent the traditional craftsmanship of the villagers in this province, providing a cool refuge. Additionally, traditional village life in this region showcases the use of tools like small mills for grinding wheat and other food items, along with the utilization of musk bags to keep water or yogurt cool. The allure of village life extends beyond these elements, as the indigenous traditional music, the attire of hardworking rural residents, and their relentless pursuit of livelihood have turned the villages of Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad Province into a premier destination for Nowruz tourism.

Influence of Islamic art and craftsmanship in 19th century Vienna

Broadly speaking, the 19th century witnessed a slow economic rise in Europe. Much of the rest of the world, including several Islamic countries, were to a large part integrated into the colonial empires of European powers. The Austro-Hungarian Empire possessed no overseas colonies and showed no obvious interest in acquiring any. The empire's status meant that it was a comparatively neutral trading partner for Persia, which held a relationship with the Habsburg Dynasty that dated back to the 16th century.

At that time, the Habsburgs tried to forge alliances with the Safavid Empire against their common enemy, the Ottomans. From around 1600 onwards embassies were exchanged between Vienna and Persia and friendly relations continued between the Habsburgs and the later Persian dynasties.

Although politically more and more marginalised and economically weak, skilled craftsmanship of the Islamic world continued to be appreciated in Europe. During the Biedermeier period, for instance, there was a fascination on behalf of female consumers with cashmere shawls from north India, which were then produced in Europe imitating Indian models. The Museum für angewandte Kunst includes several valuable pieces that derive from 19th-century Viennese producers. Not only were objects from the wider Persian world admired in Vienna, but they were occasionally also copied there, just like the Mamluk glass vessels by the celebrated Viennese glass manufacture J. & L. Lobmeyr.

In addition, carpets from the Islamic world con-

tinued to be revered and during the 19th century they furnished countless Viennese homes. The exhibitions of the celebrated painter Hans Makart (1840-1884) in the Wienmuseum and the Belvedere have provided a notion of what a fashionable fin-de-siècle salon looked like. In such an environment Ottoman and Persian carpets were abundant.

Industrial production heavily influenced the development of 19th-century European decorative arts. Thanks to new technologies many objects were mass-produced and could be sold at more competitive prices than handmade works. Therefore more people than ever before had access to decorative objects. As a result, during the second half of the 19th century a supposed decline of taste proliferated and was lamented in Europe, especially during the world exhibitions. In this context traditional craftsmanship from the Islamic world was seen very positively and as such played a vital role in the Viennese world exhibition of 1873 where a "Persischer Pavillon" — a space especially installed for the exhibition displaying products of Persian craftsmanship — was featured prominently.

The organizers placed a special focus on the representation of the arts that were considered to be "Oriental" because of their high quality and because they could be used as models by the Austro-Hungarian industry. Many museums acquired art at the 1873 fair as they had at previous events in London and Paris. Parts of the famous Hamzename (1558-1573), a splendid Mughal Indian manuscript commissioned by the Great Mughal Akbar, were sent from Per-

sia for the Vienna fair, and were subsequently purchased by the Museum für Kunst und Industrie.

Lavishly illustrated, this masterwork recounts the history of Amir Hamze (PBUH), an uncle of the prophet Muhammad (PBUH), and remains today one of the masterpieces of the Museum für angewandte Kunst. Interestingly, the organizer of the Persian exhibition was Jakob Eduard Polak (1818-1891), an Austro-Bohemian physician working in Persia where he reformed medical institutions.

As a consequence of the successful display of the so-called Oriental art at the world's fair, which was attended by Nasir al-Din Shah of Persia (ruled from 1848-96), the Orientmuseum was founded in 1874-75 as a private institution. It was largely the invention of its founder and long-term director Arthur von Scala (1845-1909), and it became only the second museum in Europe dedicated entirely to the arts of what was then perceived as the Orient, including East Asia and the Islamic world. In 1907 large parts of the museum collection were integrated into the Museum für Kunst und Industrie.

The later 19th century also experienced the creation of Vienna's large museums into which both the imperial and other private collections were integrated. Objects from the Islamic world, thus also modern-day Iran, that had existed in Vienna for centuries were distributed to the new museums, namely the Kunsthistorische Museum and the Naturhistorische Museum (opened in 1889). The creation of these museums was motivated by an aim to educate



A Persian carpet in a Vienna's museum

the subjects of the emperor, at this point Franz Joseph I, and to show them his splendours. By publicly displaying his possessions and sharing his knowledge with the people of Austria didactically, he became, in a way, the first teacher of his subjects.

The above is a lightly edited version of part of a chapter titled, 'Persian Art in 19th-century Vienna', from a book titled, 'The Shaping of Persian Art: Collections and Interpretations of the Art of Islamic Iran and Central Asia' edited by Yuka Kadoi and Iván Szántó, published by Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Will Joe Biden's new plan bring relief to Gaza?



Displaced Palestinian children wait in line to receive food prepared by volunteers for Palestinian families in Rafah, Gaza, on February 10, 2024.
● BELAL KHALED/ANADOLU

PERSPECTIVE

THE ECONOMIST – It was not the sort of infrastructure project that an American president would typically unveil in his state-of-the-union address. On March 7, Joe Biden announced that America's armed forces would build a pier on Gaza's Mediterranean coast. The president has pleaded for months with Benjamin Netanyahu, the Israeli prime minister, to alleviate the misery in Gaza, where hunger and disease threaten to kill thousands of people, aid groups warn. Exasperated, he is now taking matters into his own hands. "This temporary pier would enable a massive increase in the amount of humanitarian assistance getting into Gaza every day," Mr. Biden said.

The plan, as sketched out by his advisers, calls for army engineers to assemble a modular, floating dock at sea and tow it to shore. Aid would then be loaded onto ships in Cyprus, where Israeli officials would screen it for prohibited goods, and make the day's journey to Gaza. Gulf states are expected to help pay for the shipments. It could take one to two months to finish the pier and begin large-scale deliveries. Mr. Biden says no American troops will be deployed to Gaza, though they will be stationed on military vessels offshore. Cypriot officials have for months promoted the idea of a sea corridor, but the proposal went nowhere. It has gained traction now because of the growing desperation in Gaza. The UN says that hundreds of thousands of people are at risk of famine, especially in northern

Gaza, where the population is almost totally cut off from aid. One in six children under the age of two in the north is acutely malnourished; a few children have already starved to death. Last month, the World Food Programme (WFP) suspended deliveries to the north, saying they were too dangerous. Some people have resorted to foraging for edible weeds, or grinding animal feed to bake ersatz bread.

The WFP says Gaza needs at least 300 lorries a day, delivering food, medicine, and other essentials. Shipments via Gaza's two functioning land-border posts — the Rafah crossing with Egypt and the Kerem Shalom crossing with Israel — fall far short. In mid-February, an average of just 47 lorries a day entered Gaza by land, though that number has climbed of late (195 lorries made it through

on March 6). Right-wing Israeli protesters have repeatedly blocked convoys of aid through Kerem Shalom.

America has worked to negotiate a six-week truce between Israel and Hamas, which attacked Israel from Gaza on October 7. The proposed deal would include the exchange of around 40 Israeli captives for hundreds of Palestinian prisoners. A period of calm would make it easier to bring humanitarian aid to Gaza. Mr. Biden had hoped to clinch a deal before the start of the Ramadan holiday, which begins around March 10. But weeks of negotiations in Paris, Doha, and Cairo have yet to bear fruit. Arab diplomats say that Yahya Sinwar, the leader of Hamas in Gaza, is loath to commit to a deal.

On March 2, America started air-dropping food into Gaza. This was widely panned as a gimmick: airdrops are an inefficient way to deliver aid. It has carried out several such missions so far. The numbers sound impressive, but the sea route, in theory, could bring in more help. Diplomats say it could deliver the equivalent of 200 lorries of aid each day.

American officials are vague on a few important questions, though. After five months of war, the problem is not just getting aid into Gaza but distributing it around the enclave. Trucks and warehouses have been bombed; tanks have torn up the roads. Last month, after Israeli attacks on Palestinian police, who work for the Hamas-run government, policemen stopped guarding aid convoys. Criminal gangs and mobs of hungry people have attacked drivers with axes and pelted them with stones. America says it will coordinate with the UN on distribution, but the logistics are daunting.

The pier will probably be positioned in northern Gaza, which has slipped into anarchy. With no American troops on

the ground, Israel will have to secure the dock, and it has not done well at protecting aid operations. On February 29, thousands of desperate Gazans swarmed a convoy delivering food to northern Gaza. More than 100 people were killed in the mayhem, either shot by Israeli troops guarding the convoy, according to Palestinian witnesses, or trampled in the crowd, according to the Israeli army.

Israel has a moral duty to prevent famine in Gaza; it also has a legal obligation to do so, undeniably in the parts of Gaza it controls and arguably elsewhere. Senior officers in the Israel Defence Forces say they are ready to deliver aid themselves. But Mr. Netanyahu will not give the order. That Mr. Biden has now organised his own aid operation is a clear rebuke of the prime minister. His rhetoric has grown tougher. "Israel must allow more aid into Gaza," Mr. Biden said in his address. "Humanitarian assistance cannot be a secondary consideration or a bargaining chip." Kamala Harris, his vice-president, called Gaza a "humanitarian catastrophe" in a speech on March 3.

Yet the planned aid operation also points up Mr. Biden's failures. When America's army mobilises to feed starving civilians, it is usually in places that are being coerced by America's enemies: Yazidis besieged by Islamic State jihadists in Iraq in 2014, or Berliners blockaded by the Soviet Union in 1948. This time, though, America is scrambling to help people in a territory controlled by one of its closest allies, even as it continues to send weapons for Israel's war and to veto Security Council resolutions that demand a ceasefire. Mr. Biden refuses to use America's leverage to compel Israel to allow more aid to Gaza. Now, having enabled Israel's behaviour for months, he is looking for workarounds that will absolve it of responsibility.



US Army personnel are seen on a floating pier off the coast of Bowen, Australia, last July. The US plans to construct a similar pier off Gaza.
● US ARMY PHOTO

US port plans in Gaza have 'hidden objectives'

By Laith Al Joundi
Reporter

OPINION

Since the outbreak of the war on Gaza on October 7, 2023, US President Joe Biden and his administration have continued to demonstrate unwavering support for Israel, leading some critics to view Washington as a key player in the conflict.

However, a recent statement by Biden on Friday introduced a surprising development as he announced plans to direct the US military on an "emergency mission to establish a port in the Gaza Strip" to get humanitarian aid to the Palestinian enclave.

But observers see another aspect to the floating port, linked to encouraging voluntary Palestinian migration to Europe and eliminating the role of the Rafah border crossing with Egypt, essentially placing Israel in control of all Gaza crossings and ending any Palestinian sovereignty over them.

'Hidden objectives'

Hisham Khreisat, a Jordanian military and strategic affairs expert, told Anadolu that "the floating port off the shores of Gaza is a humanitarian facade hiding voluntary migration to Europe". "This military tactical port will receive Israeli approval because Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has been seeking this idea since the beginning of the war, aiming for the voluntary displacement of Gazans and their flee to Europe," he added. He considered the idea of establishing the port "not new," pointing out

that it is "an old subject raised 10 years ago". "But Avigdor Lieberman (leader of the far-right 'Israel Our Home' party) failed the idea when he was the defense minister at the time, and Minister of Transportation Israel Katz then," he added. The expert continued, "Katz re-proposed the idea again, reaching an agreement with Cyprus and Greece." He explained that "a port in Cyprus, paid for by the US, will be allocated so that it reaches the site of the American port in Gaza's Khan Younis beach".

Khreisat emphasized that "the crucial thing is that all ships sending humanitarian aid will not go directly to the American port in Gaza but will go to the Ashdod port to be checked, then sent under Israeli navy control and drones to the Palestinian territory." "The US military will remain at sea and will supervise the port because Gaza is considered a hostile environment," he said. "The ships from the Cyprus port to Ashdod will be under the control of the Israeli Navy and satellites," Khreisat elaborated.

Immediate, future concerns

The Jordanian expert said he believes that "Biden is very concerned about the consequences of the Israeli army's invasion of Rafah and the failure to end the humanitarian disaster in Gaza, which will reflect on the election results in the US." "Therefore, he (Biden) will rush to build the port," he continued, noting that "there will be no deployment of US forces in Gaza, but there will be international agencies tasked with overseeing the delivery of aid." He added, "The aid will be shipped from Larnaca Airport in (Southern) Cyprus, which is the main relief center." Khreisat confirmed that "Israel will agree to the port for two reasons: facilitating the prisoner exchange deal and the ground attack on Rafah without provoking Washington." He concluded that "the Rafah crossing will undoubtedly be out of service because Israel does not trust it and considers it the main entry point for Hamas weapons."

Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu claims that a Rafah City assault is key to victory and that Palestinian resistance groups acquire arms through smuggling through Egypt. Rafah crossing is crucial for humanitarian aid access, as Israel's restrictions threaten famine in northern regions of the enclave. Israel's planned aggression on Rafah, a last refuge for the 1.4 million displaced people, has raised regional and international concerns. Israel has waged a retaliatory offensive on Gaza since a cross-border

attack by Hamas on October 7. The offensive has killed nearly 31,000 Palestinians and injured over 72,500 others amid mass destruction and shortages of necessities. Tel Aviv has also imposed a crippling blockade on the Palestinian enclave, leaving its population, particularly residents of northern Gaza, on the verge of starvation. About 85% of Gazans have been displaced by the Israeli onslaught amid acute shortages of food, clean water, and medicine, while 60% of the enclave's infrastructure has been damaged or destroyed, according to the UN. Israel is accused of genocide at the International Court of Justice, which in an interim ruling in January ordered Tel Aviv to stop genocidal acts and take measures to guarantee that humanitarian assistance is provided to civilians in Gaza.

The article first appeared on Anadolu.



Palestinians carry bags of flour they grabbed from an aid truck near an Israeli checkpoint, as Gaza residents face crisis levels of hunger, amid the ongoing conflict between Israel and Hamas, in Gaza City, on February 19, 2024.

REUTERS

US port plan to step up aid delivery to Gaza criticised as 'distraction'

PERSPECTIVE ALJAZEERA — A United States plan to build a temporary port off Gaza's coast to step up the delivery of humanitarian aid has been criticised as an attempt to divert attention from hundreds of thousands of starving Palestinians and Israel's consistent blocking of assistance to the enclave. US President Joe Biden said in his State of the Union speech on Thursday that he was directing the US military to lead an emergency mission to set up a pier off Gaza's Mediterranean coast to receive ships carrying food, water, medicine, and temporary shelters.

Planning for the operation, which is initially to be based in Cyprus, does not envision the deployment of US military personnel in Gaza. "No US boots will be on the ground," Biden said. While there has been growing criticism from the Biden administration of Israel severely restricting the entry of humanitarian aid into Gaza by land — prompting the US to airdrop 36,000 meals in northern Gaza — it continues to supply the Israeli military with weapons and remains a staunch ally of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Biden gave few logistical details, but US officials said the operation would "take a number of weeks to plan and execute" and the required US forces are in the region or would soon begin moving there. Washington would also coordinate with the Israeli army regarding the security situation on Gaza's coast, they said.

The head of the European Commission said on Friday that a maritime aid corridor could start operating between Cyprus and Gaza this weekend. Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said a test run of food aid collected by a charity group and supported by the United Arab Emirates could be leaving Cyprus as early as Friday. "We are launching this Cyprus maritime corridor together, the European Union, the United Arab Emirates, and the United States," she said after visiting facilities in Larnaca, Cyprus. "We are now very close to opening this corridor, hopefully this Saturday, Sunday, and I'm very glad to see an initial pilot will be launched today." She gave no details on where the aid would be delivered in Gaza and made no reference to Biden's announcement about the "temporary pier" on the Gaza coast.

Gaza port plan a 'distraction'

Mustafa Barghouti, the secretary general of the Palestinian National Initiative, told Al Jazeera on Friday that the plan to build a port in Gaza "is not a new idea".

"It seems to be just another effort to divert attention from the real issue here, which is that 700,000 people are starving in north Gaza now, and Israel is not allowing humanitarian aid to them or the rest of the Gaza Strip," he said.

There are large quantities of aid waiting to get into the enclave at Gaza's border with Egypt, Barghouti said, adding that "the international community are doing nothing to pressure Israel to stop this blockade."

Al Jazeera's senior political analyst, Marwan Bishara, said Biden's announcement is a distraction from Washington's continued support for Israel.

"I think a statement like that in the State of the Union address is more theatrical and more public relations... than it is a sincere attempt at bringing an end to the suffering in Gaza," Bishara said.

Marc Owen Jones, an associate professor of Middle East studies and digital humanities at Hamad Bin Khalifa University in Qatar, told Al Jazeera

that Biden's focus on foreign policy — specifically the war in Gaza — in his speech was also him "trying to reaffirm fundamentally his support for Israel, first, and trying to assuage some of the criticism he's getting from members of his own party about the US response to Gaza". He added that the way Biden framed the war by "adopting the Israeli line that everything they are doing, the genocide, the mass killings, is a response to October 7" sent a clear message that the US still stands firmly with Israel despite its expressed frustration with the lack of aid getting into Gaza.

Sigrid Kaag, the United Nations humanitarian and reconstruction coordinator in Gaza, welcomed the US plans to provide sea access for aid delivery into Gaza.

"At the same time, I cannot but repeat — air and sea is not a substitute for land — and nobody says otherwise," Kaag told reporters on Thursday after briefing the UN Security Council.

A spokesperson for the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees said this week that "the most straightforward way of getting aid into the Gaza Strip is to use the existing crossings, namely Karem Abu Salem [called Kerem Shalom by Israel] and Rafah from Egypt."

Tamara Alrifai told Al Jazeera that the existing land crossings are "faster, safer, and more economical" than a maritime route and airdropping attempts. "Why should we reinvent the wheel? Let us use what exists and what has worked before," Alrifai said, stressing that there are "constant requests for a cease-fire that would allow an influx of humanitarian assistance". Melanie Ward, the CEO of Medical Aid for Palestinians, told Al Jazeera: "Airdrops, temporary seaports, and the like are not realistic or lasting solutions to stave off looming famine and sustain life in Gaza."

"Five months on, it is long past time for the US, the UK, and others to use their substantial weight to ensure that their ally Israel immediately reopens land crossings into Gaza," she said on Friday.

"Only an immediate and lasting cease-fire will allow us to deliver the massive humanitarian response that is required after five months of Israel's indiscriminate bombardment and siege of the people of Gaza," Ward said. Since 1967, Israel has exercised full control of Gaza's coastline and territorial waters, blocking ships from reaching the strip.

Since 2007, Israel has shut almost all of Gaza's border crossings, and its port has been under Israeli naval blockade, making it the only seaport in the Mediterranean closed to shipping. Since Israel launched its war on the enclave, it has allowed only a trickle of aid through the Karem Abu Salem crossing and the Rafah crossing with Egypt.

Israeli forces have also targeted Palestinians waiting for food aid. On February 29, at least 112 Palestinians were killed and more than 750 wounded when Israeli troops fired on hundreds of people waiting for food aid southwest of Gaza City.

Persian Gulf Pro League: Esteghlal, Persepolis eager to maintain title tilt with derby glory

Sports Desk

As if the bragging rights are not enough for Esteghlal and Persepolis players to go all out in the 103rd Tehran Derby today, the outcome of the contest at the capital's iconic Azadi Stadium will play a massive part in setting the tone in the Persian Gulf Pro League title race.

The fierce archrivals are separated by three points on top of the Iranian top-flight standing with 11 games to spare, with table-topper Esteghlal looking to build on a perfect home record this season in pursuit of a first derby victory in the league in six years.

A late drama saw the two sides play to a 1-1 stalemate in the reverse fixture in December, with Reds skipper Omid Alishah coming off the bench to find the net with 13 minutes remaining, only to see his strike canceled out by French fullback Kevin Yamga from the spot deep into stoppage time. The Blues' sole defeat of the campaign came at Sepahan last August though a shock setback at Mes Rafsanjan last week saw Javad Nekounam's men crash out of the Iranian Hazfi Cup.

Esteghlal was quick to get back to

winning ways with a hard-fought 1-0 victory at relegation struggler Esteghlal Khuzestan in Ahvaz on Friday but a defeat in today's encounter could still turn the tide in Persepolis favor in what now seems to be a two-horse race for the league crown.

Persepolis, meanwhile, is enjoying a best spell of the campaign, scoring 10 in four successive wins across all competitions under new Brazilian coach Osmar Vieira. Vieira, a number two to his predecessor Yahya Golmohammadi, knows a derby triumph is just what he needs to win the Reds faithful over following his controversial appointment during the international break last month.

The Brazilian will be eager to see his marquee winter signings Issa Alekassir, Oston Urunov, and Abdelkarim Hassan as well as a resurgent Mahdi Torabi come up with yet another impressive performance today, while he is desperate to have his international keeper Alireza Beiranvand back to his top form after his blunders in recent weeks led to conceding a couple of awkward goals against Iralco and Foolad Khuzestan.

Persepolis will be without its first-choice defensive pair of Gi-



IRNA

orgi Gvelesiani – yet to recover from a groin injury – and Iranian international Hossein Kan'anizadegan, who was unfortunate to receive a fourth booking of the season in 4-2 win against Foolad,

and Farshad Faraji and Ali Ne'mati will have to rise up to the occasion when filling in for the two absentees. Elsewhere, Sepahan will be desperate to put a lid on a five-game

losing streak when visiting Foolad in Ahvaz. Once regarded as the ultimate favorite to lift the top-flight trophy come the end of the season, Sepahan is fifth in the table, trailing the

top by 11 points – albeit with two games in hand – and any result other than maximum points will all but end the Isfahan-based giant's aspirations for a first league title in nine years.

Should Esteghlal and Persepolis share the spoils, third-place Tractor – 10 points adrift of the top with a game in hand – could launch an outside title bid with a home win against Havadar, which is unbeaten in four games under new manager Masoud Shojaei.

Paykan – fresh from a 3-2 win at Sepahan last time out – will host fourth-place Malavan, which came out on top against Golgozar Sirjan and looks to continue a fairy tale run under Mahdi Tartar.

Golgozar, meanwhile, will hope to bounce back at home against San'at Naft Abadan, which sits right above the relegation zone – a single point clear of Esteghlal Khuzestan and Nassaji Mazandaran.

Nassaji welcomes the surprise package of the season Shams Azar, with Esteghlal Khuzestan visiting Mohammad Rabie'i's Zob Ahan at the Foolad Shahr Stadium in Isfahan.

Iralco and Mes will go head-to-head in Arak.

SPECIFIC PROCUREMENT NOTICE

Islamic Republic of Iran
Fars Six Cities Sanitation improvement Project
Sector: sanitation
Mode of Financing: Istisna'a
Financing No. IRN-0107

Contract Title: Remaining Works of Trunk Mains, Interceptors and Laterals of Firoozabad Wastewater Collection Network
NCB Reference No.: Fi-SL4

1. Fars Water and Wastewater Company has received financing from the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB) toward the cost of the Fars Six Cities Sanitation improvement Project, and intends to apply part of the proceeds toward payments under the contract for Remaining Works of Trunk Mains, Interceptors and Laterals of Firoozabad Wastewater Collection Network.

2. Fars Water and Wastewater Company now invites sealed bids from eligible bidders for: Procurement and construction of about 51 Km of wastewater collection network with diameters of 200 to 1000 mm in form of trench and tunnel; Procurement and construction of about 1255 m³ brick and concrete manholes; Procurement and construction of about 4600 house connections with diameters of 125 and 160 mm; Remedying the defects of constructed network with a length of about 65 kilometers including: completing of implemented manholes, installation of manholes stairs, implementation of non-installed manhole gates, implementation of non-installed house connections gates, implementation of non-installed house connections for the constructed network, washing, videometry, preparation of as-built drawings and GIS maps of constructed network.

3. Bidding will be conducted through the National Competitive Bidding (NCB) procedures (Post-qualification Method) as specified in IsDB's Guidelines: Procurement of Goods, Works and related services under Islamic Development Bank Project Financing 2019 ("Procurement Guidelines"), and is open to all eligible bidders as defined in the Procurement Guidelines. In addition, please refer to paragraphs 1.18 -21 setting forth IsDB's policy on conflict of interest.

4. Interested eligible bidders may obtain further information from Fars Water and Wastewater Company, and email to pmu.abfafars2023@gmail.com (PMU Unit) and inspect the bidding documents during office hours 08:00 to 14:00 at the address given below for clarification purposes.

5. A complete set of bidding documents in English may be purchased by interested eligible bidders upon the submission of a written application to the address below and upon payment of a nonrefundable fee of 35,000,000 IR Rial. The method of payment will be direct deposit to account number 0111930032008, Bank Saderat, with Payment ID No. 13132990014005 in the name of the Fars Water and Wastewater

Company. The Bidding documents shall be purchased from Fars Water and Wastewater Company (FWWC).

6. Bids must be delivered to the address below at or before 10:30 am April 28, 2024. Electronic bidding will not be permitted. Late bids will be rejected. Bids will be publicly opened in the presence of the bidders' designated representatives and anyone who choose to attend at the address below on 10:30 am April 28, 2024.

7. All bids must be accompanied by a Bid Security of 59,200,000,000 IRRial.

8. The addresses referred to above are:
clarification purposes address
For clarification purposes only, the Employer's address is:
Contract Affairs Office, 2nd Floor, Fars Water and Wastewater Company, Corner of Shahid Sobhani Street, Ghodousi Gharbi Blv.- Motahari Square, Shiraz, Iran.
Postal Code: 71868-98465
Telephone: +987138435153
Facsimile number: +987138435166
Electronic mail address: pmu.abfafars2023@gmail.com
Requests for clarifications should be received by the Purchaser no later than 14 days prior to the deadline for submission of Bids.
Bid Submission Address
For bid submission purposes only, the Employer's address is:
Address: Secretariat, Room No.108, 1st floor, Fars Water and Wastewater Company, Ghodoosi Gharbi Blv., Motahari Square, Shiraz, Iran
Postal Code: 71868-98465
Telephone: +987138435153
Facsimile number: +987138435164
Bid Opening Address
The bid opening shall take place at:
Conference hall, sixth floor, Fars Water and Wastewater Company, Ghodoosi Gharbi Blv., Motahari Square, Shiraz, Iran.
The Cost of advertising the SPN shall be borne by the successful bidder.

Fars Water and Wastewater Company (FWWC)

آگهی فراخوان مناقصه

جمهوری اسلامی ایران
پروژه بهسازی بهداشت شش شهر استان فارس
بخش: فاضلاب
نحوه تأمین مالی: استصناع
شماره تأمین مالی: IRN-0107

عنوان قرارداد: باقیمانده کارهای «خط انتقال و خطوط اصلی و فرعی شبکه جمع آوری فاضلاب فیروز آباد» شماره مرجع مناقصه ملی: Fi-SL4

خریداری شود.
۶- پیشنهادهای باید به آدرس زیر تا تاریخ ۱۴۰۳/۰۴/۰۹ قبل یا رأس ساعت ۱۰:۳۰ صبح ارسال شود. پیشنهاد الکترونیکی مجاز نخواهد بود. پیشنهادهای دریافتی بعد از ساعت و روز مذکور رد خواهند شد. پیشنهادهای در حضور نمایندگان تعیین شده مناقصه‌گذاران و هر کسی که تصمیم به حضور در آدرس زیر ادا در تاریخ ۱۴۰۳/۰۴/۰۹ ساعت ۱۰:۳۰ صبح در جلسه عمومی بازگشایی خواهد شد.
۷- کلیه پیشنهادهای باید به‌همراه ضمانت‌نامه شرکت در مناقصه به مبلغ ۵۹,۲۰۰,۰۰۰,۰۰۰ ریال تحویل داده شوند.
۸- آدرس ارجاع داده شده در بالا:
آدرس جهت شفاف‌سازی و اطلاعات بیشتر:
ایران، شیراز، میدان شهید مطهری، بلوار قدوسی غربی، نبش خیابان سبحانی، شرکت آب و فاضلاب استان فارس (FWWC)، دفتر امور قراردادها
کدپستی: ۷۱۸۶۸۹۸۴۶۵
شماره تلفن: +۹۸ ۷۱۳۸۴۳۵۱۵۳
شماره نمابر: +۹۸ ۷۱۳۸۴۳۵۱۶۶
آدرس ایمیل: pmu.abfafars2023@gmail.com
هرگونه درخواست شفاف‌سازی در مورد مناقصه باید حداکثر تا ۱۴ روز قبل از آخرین مهلت تحویل پاکت مناقصه از طریق ایمیل فوق‌الذکر دریافت شده باشد.
آدرس تحویل پاکت مناقصه:
پاکت پیشنهادهای قیمت فقط باید به آدرس ذیل تحویل داده شود:
ایران، شیراز، میدان شهید مطهری، بلوار قدوسی غربی، نبش خیابان سبحانی، شرکت آب و فاضلاب استان فارس (FWWC)، طبقه اول، اتاق دبیرخانه
کدپستی: ۷۱۸۶۸۹۸۴۶۵
شماره تلفن: +۹۸ ۷۱۳۸۴۳۵۱۵۳
شماره نمابر: +۹۸ ۷۱۳۸۴۳۵۱۶۶
آدرس محل بازگشایی پاکت مناقصه: ایران، شیراز، میدان شهید مطهری، بلوار قدوسی غربی، نبش خیابان سبحانی، شرکت آب و فاضلاب استان فارس (FWWC)، طبقه ششم، سالن کنفرانس.
هزینه انتشار آگهی به‌عهده برنده مناقصه خواهد بود.

شرکت آب و فاضلاب استان فارس

۱- شرکت آب و فاضلاب فارس از بانک توسعه اسلامی (IsDB) بابت هزینه بهسازی بهداشت شش شهر استان فارس تسهیلاتی دریافت کرده است و قصد دارد بخشی از آن را صرف پرداخت‌های قرارداد باقیمانده کارهای خط انتقال و خطوط اصلی و فرعی شبکه جمع‌آوری فاضلاب فیروز آباد نماید.
۲- شرکت آب و فاضلاب استان فارس اکنون از مناقصه‌گذاران واجد شرایط دعوت می‌نماید پیشنهادهای مهر و موم شده خود را برای تدارکات و ساخت ۵۱ کیلومتر شبکه فاضلاب با قطر اولیه ۲۰۰ تا ۱۰۰۰ میلی‌متر به شکل ترانشه و تونل؛ تدارکات و ساخت ۱۲۵۵ متر مکعب منهول بتونی و آجری، تدارکات و ساخت حدود ۴۶۰۰ انشعاب خنکی با قطر ۱۲۵ و ۱۶۰ میلی‌متر و رفع نواقص شبکه ساخته شده فعلی با طول تقریبی ۶۵ کیلومتر مشتمل بر تکمیل منهول‌های اجرا شده، نصب پله منهول‌ها، اجرای دریچه منهول‌های نصب نشده، نصب دریچه انشعاب‌های خنکی نصب نشده، اجرای انشعاب‌های خنکی نصب نشده برای شبکه ساخته شده، شست و شو، ویدئومتری، تهیه نقشه‌های از بیلت و GIS شبکه ساخته شده را به آدرس ذیل ارسال نماید.
۳- پیشنهادهای از طریق روش مناقصه رقابتی ملی (داخلی) (NCB) و به‌صورت پسا ارزیابی، همانطور که در دستورالعمل تدارکات کالا، کارها و خدمات مربوطه تحت تأمین مالی بانک توسعه اسلامی (نسخه آوریل ۲۰۱۹) مشخص شده است انجام خواهد شد و برای کلیه پیشنهاد دهندگان واجد شرایط که در دستورالعمل تدارکات مذکور تعریف شده‌اند، آزاد می‌باشد. علاوه بر این، لطفاً به پاراگراف‌های ۱۸، ۱۹ تا ۲۱ که سیاست IsDB را در مورد تضاد منافع از آنه می‌دهد، مر اجعه شود.
۴- مناقصه‌گذاران واجد شرایط می‌توانند در ساعات اداری ۰۸:۰۰ الی ۱۶:۰۰ اسناد مناقصه را از شرکت آب و فاضلاب استان فارس به آدرس زیر تهیه و بررسی کنند.
همچنین، مناقصه‌گذاران می‌توانند جهت کسب اطلاعات بیشتر به آدرس زیر مراجعه یا از طریق ایمیل pmu.abfafars2023@gmail.com یا واحد مدیریت پروژه تماس بگیرند.
۵- مناقصه‌گذاران واجد شرایط علاقه‌مند می‌توانند یک مجموعه کامل از اسناد مناقصه به زبان انگلیسی یا از راه درخواست کتبی به آدرس زیر و یا پرداخت هزینه غیر قابل استرداد ۳۵,۰۰۰,۰۰۰ ریال، خریداری نمایند. روش پرداخت واریز مستقیم به حساب شماره ۰۱۱۱۹۳۰۰۳۲۰۰۸ به بانک صادرات به شناسه پرداخت ۰۱۱۱۹۳۰۰۳۲۰۰۸ به نام شرکت آب و فاضلاب استان فارس خواهد بود. اسناد مناقصه باید از شرکت آب و فاضلاب استان فارس (FWWC)

Iran, China, Russia stage joint naval drills in Gulf of Oman



Iranian seamen piloting a speedboat near a Chinese People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) type 903A replenishment ship at sea during the "Maritime Security Belt 2024" combined naval exercise between Iran, Russia, and China in the Gulf of Oman on March 12, 2024. **IRNA**

International Desk

The navies of Iran, Russia and China have begun joint drills in the Gulf of Oman, their fifth common military exercise in recent years.

The spokesman for the drills Rear Admiral Mostafa Tajeddini said on Tuesday that the exercises dubbed Maritime Security Belt 2024 will involve warships and aviation forces. He said, "This year, for

the fifth consecutive year, the trilateral joint naval exercises will be held by the Iranian, the Russian, and China navies with the slogan together for the establishment of peace and security."

The exercises are 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.

The drills, which started on Tuesday, coincide with heightened tensions in the region as Israel's war on Gaza rages for a sixth month and Yemen's Armed Forces have launched attacks on Israeli-bound

ships in the Red Sea in response.

Russia's Defense Ministry said the exercises that will run through Friday would focus on the protection of "maritime economic activity".

Russian state media reported that a grouping of ships from Russia's Pacific Fleet, led by the Varyag cruiser, arrived at the Iranian port of Chabahar on Monday ahead of the drills that will see representatives from the navies of Azerbaijan, India, Kazakhstan, Oman, Pakistan and South Africa act as observers.

For its part, China's Defense Ministry said the drills are aimed at "jointly maintaining regional maritime security".

"China will send ... guided-missile destroyer Urumqi, guided-missile frigate Linyi and comprehensive supply ship Dongpinghu to participate in the exercise," the ministry added in a statement, without providing further details.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Police foil 4,000 terrorist plots on border



The Iranian Border Police thwarted more than 4,000 terrorist operations along the country's frontiers during the current Iranian calendar year, which started on March 21, 2023, a top commander said.

Speaking at a press conference on Tuesday, Border Police Chief Ahmadali Goudarzi said his forces intercepted many terrorist groups from approaching the borders, seizing a large number of weapons, suicide vests, and remote-controlled bombs, Tasnim News Agency reported.

Goudarzi added that border guards had also busted over 70 tons of drugs along the borders this year, mostly in armed clashes with traffickers, arresting 718 of them and killing 32 others.

A total of 31 million liters of smuggled fuel have been confiscated by the Border Police this year, showing a 3% increase compared to the previous year, the commander noted.

Iran urges Israel's ouster from UN women's group over rights violations

Iranian Vice President for Women and Family Affairs Ensiyeh Khazali called on the United Nations to remove Israel from its Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) over the regime's decades-old atrocities against Palestinian women and violations of their rights.

"The free people of the world expect that the regime responsible for decades of displacement, rape and murder of millions of [Palestinian] women and children, not to have a seat in the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women," Khazali said in

her address to the CSW in New York on Monday, according to Press TV.

She said Palestinian women were struggling for survival amid an ongoing and "well-documented genocide" in the Gaza Strip, noting that more than 22,000 women and children had lost their lives as a result, while nearly 3,000 others had become widowed. She cited a CSW report that two mothers were being killed in the Palestinian enclave every hour since hostilities began on October 7 last year.

The Iranian vice president also underlined the

need for immediate action to eliminate the poverty and hunger of Palestinian women.

While the women's loyalty to the resistance front is endless, their trust in the international community is rapidly fading away, Khazali pointed out.

More than 31,000 Palestinians, most of them women and children, have been killed, and over 72,000 others injured so far during Israel's war, which began following Operation Al-Aqsa Storm by the Gaza-based resistance movement Hamas on October 7, 2023. The Israeli military cam-

paign has devastated large swathes of Gaza, destroyed hospitals and displaced half of the population of 2.4 million in the world's "largest open-air prison." Israel has also imposed a "complete siege" on the coastal sliver, cutting off fuel, electricity, food and water to the Palestinians living there.

Elsewhere in her speech, Khazali highlighted that Iranian women, irrespective of cruel and unilateral sanctions, have managed to take great strides in removal of deprivation, while the country has seen rapid progress in the years after the 1979 Islamic



Revolution.

"All Iranian pregnant women and women with infants as well as children under the age of 7 enjoy free health insurance. This service is not only offered to Iranian women but is also abundantly available for refugees, in a way that our universities of medical sciences stand first as regards the provision of such services," she said. The Iranian official also



Iran's Vice President for Women and Family Affairs, Ensiyeh Khazali, addresses a session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women in New York, the United States, on March 11, 2024. **IRNA**

noted that gender equality in education has grown to 97% in the Islamic Republic, emphasizing that 60% of Iranian teachers, and 40% of medical specialists are female.

US intelligence community says Iran not making nukes

Iran is not conducting activities required to make a nuclear weapon, the US intelligence community said in its annual report on Monday.

The 41-page report said that although Iran scaled down its adherence to a 2015 nuclear deal, largely expanded its nuclear program, and restricted inspections by the International Atomic Energy Agency, such measures could not put the country in a position to move toward building a nuclear bomb.

Iranian officials congratulate arrival of Ramadan to Muslim countries



AFP

Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi in a message on the occasion of the beginning of the holy month of Ramadan called on Muslim leaders and nations to promote peace and stand up

to oppressors, especially the Israeli regime. President Raisi stressed the duty of Islamic leaders and governments to promote peace and brotherhood among Muslims,

as well as to expand spirituality and unity among the Islamic Ummah, IRNA reported.

The usurping Israeli regime has occupied the Palestinian territory for more than seven decades and committed heinous crimes, he said.

Over the past months, he added, the regime has killed more than 30,000 innocent civilians, particularly children, in the Gaza Strip. He added that the holy month of Ramadan provides a great opportunity for all Muslims to resort to divine teachings, particularly those of the Holy Qur'an, to prepare the ground for elevation of their countries in all fields. Raeisi expressed confidence that the continu-

ation of the Muslim Palestinian people's battle against Israel and constant and firm support by the Muslim world would lead to the liberation of Palestine, al-Quds and al-Aqsa Mosque.

He hoped Muslim nations would forge their bonds and improve relations to globally promote Islam.

Iran's Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian also congratulated the Muslim world on the occasion of Ramadan, calling on Muslim countries to unite against the Israeli regime's ongoing genocidal war against the Gaza Strip.

"I cordially congratulate the honorable Iranian nation, the entire Muslims of the world, and my counterparts in Muslim coun-

tries on the occasion of the emergence of the blessed month of Ramadan," Amir-Abdollahian wrote in a post on X, formerly Twitter, on Monday.

"Gaza's developments showed that, as the common ideal of [all] Muslims, the issue of Palestine rests at the top of the Muslim world's [list of] priorities," he added.

The holy month, he added, can serve as a "premium opportunity" for Muslim countries "to effectively take the initiative, under the aegis of all-out unity and convergence, towards stopping the apartheid Zionist regime's genocide and war crimes in Gaza."

Amir-Abdollahian, meanwhile, expressed confidence that "the resistance

and the Palestinian people are the main victors of this arena."

AUCTION SJSICO. B140301

Hereby Sirjan Jahan Steel Company announces selling and export 15,000 tons

STEEL BILLET (Size 150 x 150 mm) on basis of FOB. Interested bidders are invited to get documents with send an email to sjsco.sales.info@gmail.com

All the documents will be sent VIA email. All bids on conformity to tender instruction should be submitted no later than Wednesday, April 3, 2024 (2024-04-03)

For more information, please contact us at:

Tel: +2186084642

SIRJAN JAHAN STEEL COMPLEX

CEO of Iranian Cheetah Society urges caution on collisions during Nowruz

Less than 30 Iranian cheetahs remain



In light of the increasing traffic on the country's roads during the Nowruz holidays, the CEO of the Iranian Cheetah Society, Morteza Pourmirzaei, urged drivers to be cautious of cheetah collisions while traveling on the central and eastern roads of the country. Pourmirzaei highlighted that with the rise in road trips during the Nowruz holidays, unfortunately, the rate of accidents has increased, leading to fatalities among wildlife in the country's interstitial areas. Pourmirzaei pointed out that road accidents are one of the significant factors contributing to the mortality of cheetahs in Iran. He explained that cheetah fatalities usually occur on roads passing through the neighborhood of protected areas, with the Tehran-Mashhad route between Shahroud and Sabzevar being a frequent hotspot for such accidents.

This area surrounds the Khar Turan National Park, the last and most important habitat of the Asiatic cheetah in Iran and Asia. The road exactly passes through the border of this region, and because the upper part of this road has smooth and suitable conditions, cheetahs make their way across it. Considering that our borders have no significance for cheetahs, they come onto the road, leading to road accidents. During last Nowruz holidays, a collision in this area resulted in the loss of a cheetah mother along with three unborn cubs, representing a significant blow to the already dwindling population of Iranian cheetahs. The Iranian cheetah, a subspecies on the verge of extinction, has faced substantial losses due to road accidents, claiming the lives of 13 individuals in the past decade alone. "The Iranian cheetah population is currently less than 40 individuals, and in this accident, we actually lost 10% of the cheetah population, he said.

The Iranian cheetah, or Asiatic cheetah, is one of the subspecies facing extinction in the cheetah population. It is listed on the International Union for Conservation of Nature's (IUCN) list of animals on the brink of extinction and is confined to remote areas in the central deserts of Iran. The conservation project for the Asiatic cheetah has been initiated since 2021. Pourmirzaei advised drivers to maintain a safe speed along these routes, never exceeding 85 kilometers per hour, especially at night when cheetahs, typically startled by bright lights, tend to freeze in place. He emphasized that drivers could significantly contribute to the preservation of these animals by reducing speed and using hazard lights to allow cheetahs to escape harm's way. Pourmirzaei also addressed the untimely death of Pirouz, a beloved cheetah cub known as a symbol of the Asiatic cheetah among Iranians. According to Hasan

Akbari, the deputy of Department of Environment of Iran, death of Pirouz was attributed to ingesting a small piece of plastic, a cause deemed unacceptable by the organization. Pirouz was born on May 1, 2022, at the Turan Breeding Center, along with two other cubs. However, Pirouz, ultimately, succumbed at the age of ten months on February 28, 2023 of the same year, highlighting the inadequate care and protection afforded to vulnerable cheetah cubs. Pourmirzaei criticized the lack of transparency surrounding Pirouz death, as the Department of Environment of Iran's explanation citing plastic ingestion as the cause was issued without releasing a pathology report. He emphasized that the circumstances under which Pirouz died do not align with international standards for animal care and protection, underscoring the need for more careful attention to the welfare of cheetah cubs in captivity.



Shahnameh Reading Festival to be held at Persepolis

The head of Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts, and Tourism Department in Fars Province announced the organization of a Shahnameh Reading Festival along with a light and sound program at the UNESCO-registered Persepolis in southern

Fars Province. Mohammad Sabet-Eghlidi mentioned that the festival will take place on March 15, marking the completion date of the Shahnameh's composition. Therefore, the festival will be held at the Persepolis World Heritage Site, featuring 'Shahnameh' recitations, performances, and scholarly speeches, ILNA wrote. The festival is organized by the Persepolis World Heritage Site in collaboration with the Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts, and Tourism Department of Fars Province.

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'Ujan Story' to be screened in Spain

The Iranian-Armenian coproduction 'Ujan Story,' written and directed by Shahram Badakhshan Mehr, will participate in the Madrid International Independent Film Festival (FICIMAD) in Spain, to be

slated for March 11 to 15. 'Ujan Story' recently won the Best Narrative Film award at the Aasha International Film Festival in India and received the Rising Star Award at the Better World Film Festival

(BWFF) in Munich, Germany, Mehr news agency reported. The film, which depicts the life of a family in the village of Ujan, Armenia, is Badakhshan Mehr's second independent feature film.

Society for Iranian Archaeology concerned about cultural heritage



Arts & Culture Desk
 The Society for Iranian Archaeology emphasized the need to reconsider and pay attention to the dire conditions of cultural heritage protection in the country. In a statement released recently, the society highlighted ongoing concerns despite advancements in ar-

chaeological management. The society underscored that despite progress in archaeological management, the conditions of Iran's cultural heritage remain alarming. It urged policymakers and executive officials in various sectors of the Tourism Ministry to heed the demands of archaeologists

and devise solutions to overcome the current crisis, ILNA wrote. The statement emphasized that Iran's land has been shaped by centuries of human interaction with the environment and its resources. The tangible and intangible cultural heritage serves as a link to our cultural and biological past, representing a unique aspect of our identity. Examples of neglect in heritage preservation, such as unauthorized excavations and destruction of historical sites, were cited, indicating the urgent need for review and improvement in conservation policies and practices. The society stressed the importance of sustainable development aligned with the country's environmental, geographical, cultural, and historical realities. The society called for a critical examination and optimization of heritage conservation efforts to ensure the protection of Iran's valuable assets. It expressed hope that by prioritizing cultural heritage issues, authorities could guarantee economic growth alongside the promotion and preservation of the country's rich culture.