



SPECIAL ISSUE

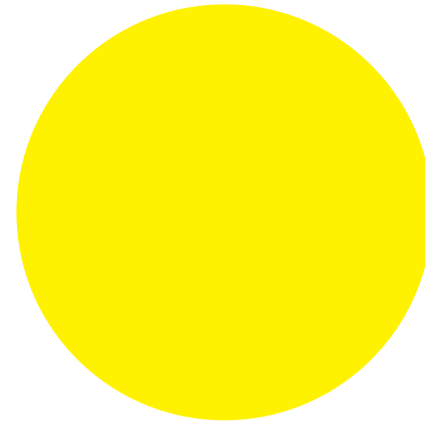
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# Iran Daily



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# Up for Iran to Decide Now

## Iran seizes Israeli-linked cargo ship in Strait of Hormuz

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This image grab taken from a video posted on social media on April 13, 2024, shows a member of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps rappelling down onto a container ship named, MSC Aries, near the Strait of Hormuz.

● AFP



### Asian Wrestling Championships:

### Firouzpour, Zare' grab golds as Iran reclaims freestyle title

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### EDITORIAL

In the wake of Israel's terrorist attack which killed several Iranian military advisers at Iran's consulate in Damascus, the ball is now in Tehran's court to determine its course of action. The brazen act of aggression by Israel has not only showcased the regime's blatant disregard for international norms but has also triggered a flurry of deliberations about Iran's possible retaliation as well as concentrated diplomatic efforts. Additionally, the incident has instilled a sense of anxiety and dread among Israelis in the occu-

pied territories. Several key points merit attention in this unfolding scenario: It is crystal clear that Israel's unwarranted assault on the Iranian consulate in Syria violates international law, especially given the absence of direct hostilities between Iran and Israel. Consequently, Tehran's response to this act of terrorism falls within the realm of legitimate self-defense, aimed at bolstering its deterrent capabilities against potential future transgressions. Recent days have witnessed a surge in speculative narratives propagated

by Western media outlets, largely in line with Israel's interests. These conjectures have painted Iran's response as a precursor to a regional conflict or an extension of the ongoing Gaza war. Certain Western states have exacerbated these apprehensions by closing their embassies in Iran and cautioning against travel to the country. In stark contrast, Iran has reiterated its commitment to averting war with Israel, emphasizing its diplomatic efforts to broker peace in the Gaza Strip over the past seven months. This stance underscores Iran's proactive approach to

conflict resolution while safeguarding its national interests against external infringements. Iran, as a sovereign nation, functions within the parameters of its national interests, a principle that guides its response to Israel's provocations. Contrary to speculations, Tehran's decision-making process regarding its response to Israel's aggression will be meticulously crafted in accordance with Iran's strategic imperatives. External consultations, recommendations, or threats hold little sway over Iran's deliberations, as Tehran's actions will be predicated

on internal security assessments and political considerations tailored to safeguard its national interests. Iran's strategic maneuvers appear to have yielded dividends in the intricate geopolitical chess game it has orchestrated. The occupied territories have been gripped by anxiety for over two weeks, anticipating Iran's next move. Domestically, dissent against Benjamin Netanyahu's policies has surged, widening the gap between proponents and detractors of the belligerent Israeli prime minister.

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## IEA trims crude demand forecast on weakness in wealthier countries



The International Energy Agency (IEA) trimmed its forecast for 2024 oil demand growth, citing lower than expected consumption in OECD countries and a slump in factory activity.

The Paris-based energy watchdog lowered its growth outlook for this year by 130,000 barrels per day (bpd) to 1.2 million bpd, adding that the release of pent-up demand by top oil importer China after easing COVID-19 curbs had run its course, Reuters reported.

"Delivery data for many countries came in on the soft side, as unusually warm late-winter weather curtailed OECD heating fuel use by more than normal," the IEA said in its monthly oil report.

"Additionally, the protracted factory slump in advanced economies continued to depress demand for industrial fuels."

The outlook falls far short of OPEC's forecast on Thursday of 2.25 million bpd this year based on robust fuel use in summer months, but exceeds the U.S. government's energy forecast of growth at a more modest 950,000 bpd.

Demand growth in 2025 will edge down to 1.1 million bpd, the IEA added, with global GDP growth forecast to remain steady and electric vehicle expansion expected to gather pace, it said.

After emerging later than other countries from COVID-19 movement restrictions, China is expected to account for less of the world's demand growth.

The IEA noted that China's contribution to the global increase in oil demand is set to weaken from 79% in 2023 to 45% in 2024 and 27% next year.

"Despite the (global) deceleration that is forecast, this level of oil demand growth remains largely in line with the pre-COVID trend, even amid muted expectations for global economic growth this year and increased deployment of clean energy technologies," the IEA said.

Growth in global supply, the IEA said, will hit 770,000 bpd to reach a total of 102.9 million barrels per day, led by countries outside the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and allies (OPEC+).



## Iran produces over 90% of global saffron

According to data by the Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines & Agriculture, more than 90 percent of the world's saffron is produced in Iran, but Spain has become the largest re-exporter of Iranian saffron.

The European country exported saffron worth €51.2 million in 2023,

while its imports of the product stood at €41.8 million, ISNA reported.

Iran, Afghanistan, Greece, the UAE and Denmark were the main suppliers of saffron for Spain during last year as the US, Italy, Sweden and France were the main destination of the EU country for the product.

In January, Iran's First Vice President Mohammad Mokhber issued a decree ordering the removal of tariffs on saffron exports.

The decree was addressed to the Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Industry, Mine, and Trade, and the Finance Ministry, ordering them to remove saffron from a list of export items

subject to payment of a 0.5% virtual water tax. Saffron is one of the most important export products of Iran. The country aims to increase overseas shipments of the spice by easing restrictions on exporters.

Iran's saffron export has experienced remarkable growth of \$73 million,

accounting for an overwhelming 55%, in the Iranian calendar year which ended on March 20, 2023. The cultivation of saffron, colloquially known as "the red gold" in Iran, dates back to several millennia ago, with a staggering 120,000 hectares out of the 18 million hectares of arable land being utilized

for the cultivation of this coveted commodity.

The largest contributor to the production of saffron is Khorasan Razavi Province in the northeast, boasting an impressive 82,000 hectares. Other notable provinces with significant production include North Khorasan, South Khorasan, Isfahan, Kerman, and Yazd.

## Iran's exports to India top \$2.2b: TPOI

The export of non-oil products from Iran to India in the previous Iranian calendar year (March 21, 2023 to March 19, 2024) hit \$2.217 billion, showing a two-percent growth compared to a year earlier, according to the Trade Promotion Organization of Iran (TPOI). Stating that Iran's balance of trade with India turned positive last year (ended March 19, 2024), the organization noted that Iran's export of products reached from \$2.175 billion in 2022 to \$2.217 billion in 2023, showing a 2% growth in value,

Tasnim News Agency reported. However, Iran's export volume of products reached from 5.460 million tons in 2022 to 6.962 million tons in 2023, registering a 27 percent growth in weight. Iran imported \$2.942 billion and \$1.916 billion worth of products from India in 2022 and 2023 respectively, showing a -35% growth in value. Iran imported 1.926 million tons of products from Iran in 2022, the report added. The value of each ton of the country's export product hit \$312.

## Tehran to host Iran Oil Show 2024

The 28th edition of the 28th Iran International Oil, Gas, Refining and Petrochemical Exhibition, also known as Iran Oil Show 2024, having the motto "Oil Industry; Surge in Production, Technological Optimization", will be held in from May 8-11.

More than 1,500 domestic and 250 foreign companies will take part in the 28th Iran International Oil, Gas, Refining and Petrochemical Exhibition, Shana reported.

Foreign companies from Russia, China, Germany,

France, Japan, Canada, Italy, Turkey, Belarus, India, Austria, and Argentina, will attend Iran Oil Show 2024.

The Iranian companies will also put their latest achievements, products, and innovations in one of the biggest energy events. The National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC), which will host the event, the National Iranian Gas Company (NIGC), the National Iranian Oil Refining and Distribution Company (NIORDC), the National Petrochemical Company (NPC), their

subsidiary companies, and oil industrialists from Iran and other countries will have a strong presence in the exhibition.

The latest information and news are available on the National Iranian Oil Company and exhibition websites, [www.nioc.ir](http://www.nioc.ir) and [www.iran-oilshow.ir](http://www.iran-oilshow.ir).

The poster of the 28th Iran International Oil, Gas, Refining and Petrochemical Exhibition having the motto "Oil Industry; Surge in Production, Technological Optimization" was unveiled on Wednesday.



## Dar es Salaam expo could become gateway to East African market: Official

The 48th Dar es Salaam International Trade Fair (SabaSaba) of Tanzania is an opportunity for Iran to enter the East African market, said the head of the Iran-Tanzania Trade Center.

Seyyed Ra'ed Mousavi told IRNA on Saturday that the port city of Dar es Salaam serves as a hub for access to countries such as Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Zambia, Malawi, Zimbabwe and Botswana. The 48th Dar es Salaam International Trade Fair (48th DITF) will be held from June 28 to July 13. The Theme is

"Tanzania; Your Best Destination for Business and Investment". Which means there are Abundant Opportunities, Stable and Conducive Business Environment suitable for Business and Investment growth.

DITF is a general trade fair which brings together both Local and International Exhibitors from Public and Private sectors to show case their products and engage with their esteemed customers. The last DITF edition attracted 3500 Local Exhibitors and 267 Foreign Exhibitors from 23 countries and more than 350,000

visitors.

During the fair, Business-to-Business (B2B) and Buyer Seller meetings will be organized to suite participant's interests. Other meetings will also be organized for products and services with high potential in

this market. A special mobilization campaign will be initiated to ensure that relevant businesspersons visit the fair. To support this initiative, two days of the fair will be designated as "Traders Days" to achieve the desired objective.





# Meybod Ice House, an ancient marvel of Persian engineering



## Iranica Desk

*Meybod Ice House (Yakhchal-e Meybod) is an ancient refrigerator located just outside the city of Meybod in central Iran. This impressive structure was built around 400 CE to store ice during the hot summers.*

*Meybod Ice House is a testament to the engineering ingenuity of ancient Persia. In a region with hot summers and no electricity, storing ice was a difficult task. The designers of the Meybod Ice*

*House came up with an effective solution by constructing a large, insulating structure to preserve ice throughout the summer.*

*The ice house is a massive domed structure, approximately 5,000 cubic meters in volume. The walls are made of a special mortar call *sarooj*, composed of sand, clay, egg white, lime, goat hair, and ash. This mortar was resistant to heat transfer and provided excellent insulation, amazingiran.media wrote.*

## Ingenious architecture

The architecture of the ice house utilizes some clever designs for storing and insulating ice. The domed structure has a deep subterranean storage chamber, accessed by a long corridor. This underground chamber stayed cool year-round, providing natural refrigeration.

The walls of the ice house are over two meters thick at the base. This thickness decreases progressively towards the top to minimize heat conduction from outside. Small holes and windows throughout the structure also aided in airflow and ventilation.

At its peak, the Meybod Ice House could store up to 5,000 metric tons of ice. The ice was brought to the ice house during winters from nearby mountains. It was packed with insulation and preserved for use during the summers.

## Ancient air conditioning

In the scorching summers of central Iran, temperatures can routinely exceed 40°C. Storing ice wasn't just for food preservation – the ice made it possible to cool air and water for air conditioning in ancient Persia.

The ice was used to cool homes and palaces in Meybod. Using a traditional Iranian system known as *yakhchal*, people could circulate cool air from the ice house throughout homes. Tall windcatchers on rooftops funneled warm air out and pulled cool air in from the ice house. Fountains and pools in homes were also cooled with ice. By cooling the circulating water, it was possible to provide a cold bath even in peak summer. This ancient form of air conditioning brought relief to people in Meybod over 1,600 years ago.

## Restoration

The Meybod Ice House is incredibly well preserved despite its old age. The structure underwent major restoration work in the 1990s to preserve it as a relic of ancient Persia. UNESCO also named it a World Heritage Site in 2016.

The restoration was meticulous—many original materials were maintained during repairs. The walls were reinforced, cracks filled, and drainage improved, but the overall structure was kept intact. Modern materials

were avoided to prevent damage. Thanks to these efforts, visitors can see the ice house almost exactly as it was centuries ago. It remains one of the oldest and largest ice houses in the world. The impressive architecture and ingenious engineering make it a popular tourist attraction.

## Awe-inspiring experience

Seeing the Meybod Ice House in person is an awe-inspiring experience. Its sheer size and advanced engineering make it hard to believe it was built over 1,600 years ago. Climbing down the access corridor, you feel like you're entering an ancient freezer.

Looking up into the soaring dome overhead, one can only imagine the busy activity of workers filling it with ice during winters. The ice would have glistened and shone through semi-translucent openings in the dome. In the hot summers, weary workers would have trekked down to chip off ice and transport it to homes. The steady supply of ice made life tolerable in the arid climate. The ice house is a lasting legacy of Persian ingenuity. It attests to the advanced civilization that

flourished in ancient Iran. For any enthusiast of history or architecture, it is a fascinating peek into the past.

## Legacy of ancient refrigeration

Few ancient structures serve their original purpose so well millennia later. While no longer storing ice, the ice house remains remarkably well-preserved. It represents how past civilizations adapted to challenges in remarkable ways.

The designs perfected in Persia continued to inspire ice storage around the world until modern refrigeration. Similar ice houses have been found in India, Pakistan, Uzbekistan, Lebanon, and Morocco. The basic concept was used globally for centuries. Today, we owe a debt to the innovators who dreamed up the first ice houses. Their vision paved the way for ubiquitous refrigeration and air conditioning in the modern world. The Meybod Ice House stands as a monument to the human drive to overcome nature and find clever solutions. Its ancient stones can inspire innovative thinking even today.



## Epic narratives and heroic deeds in South Asia and Afghanistan

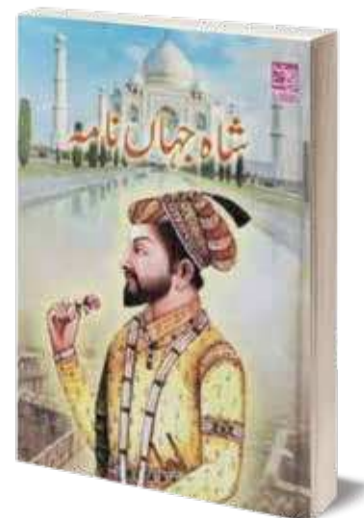
In South Asia, the Book of Kings (Shahnameh, a long epic poem written by the Persian poet Ferdowsi between c. 977 and 1010 CE) served as model to be replicated for recounting the heroic deeds of Mughal rulers as well. The court poets Kalim (died in 1651) and Qudsi (died in 1646), who both migrated to South Asia from Iran, composed long poems in the epic style of Ferdowsi to narrate the events of Shah Jahan's reign (1628–58) and imperial realm. Their works appeared under various grandiose titles like Book of Kings (Padshahnameh), Book of Shah Jahan (Shahjahannameh) and Victory Book of Shah Jahan (Zafarnameh-yi Shahjahan). The practice of situating contemporary events according to the Book of Kings' model was accompa-

nied by a general reverence for the work in South Asia, which, like elsewhere, included the production of exquisitely illuminated manuscripts and the appearance of court-sponsored 'Book of Kings-reciters' (Shahnam-khwāns) as well as others outside the court who memorized the text. The impact and proliferation of the Book of Kings model during Mughal times and after made the Subcontinent one of the more robust places for the re-imagining and circulation of the text. For example, The Heart-Opening History, for Shamsir Khan, a prose summary of the Book of Kings commissioned in Ghazni during Shahjahan's reign, circulated widely throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and elicited multiple illuminated manuscripts, both

during the time of Shahjahan and as late as the nineteenth century. Its massive circulation throughout South Asia caught the attention of British Orientalists: The Persianist James Atkinson regarded it as the best-known version of the Book of Kings in South Asia. Such features of the impact and reception of the Book of Kings in South Asia explain the viability of the transregional and interconnected market of the war-ballads of the first Anglo-Afghan War in the nineteenth century. Finally, in Afghanistan, several works drawing on the epic tradition of the Book of Kings predate the war-ballads of the first Anglo-Afghan War. The Shahnameh-yi Ahmadi concerns the deeds of Ahmad Shah Durrani (ruled from 1747–72), celebrated as the

founder of the modern Afghan state. Another work dedicated to many of Ahmad Shah's victories on the battlefield is simply titled Book of Conquest. A major feature of the texts listed above was that they were composed within the confines of a royal court. In couching their patron's glorious deeds (most notably on the battlefield) within the Book of Kings model, these poets honoured their patron's regal stature by linking it to monarchical prestige in a widely disseminated and respected epic tradition. One of the unique features of the war-ballads of the first Anglo-Afghan War is that praise for a particular individual patron did not appear to be of primary concern. As Nolle-Karimi has demonstrated, a strong and unified state

structure did not truly exist in mid-nineteenth-century Afghanistan, deeply affecting prospects for patronage. One finds heroes throughout these Anglo-Afghan war-ballads, but such heroes were not necessarily the patrons of poets, a practice quite atypical in the history of war-ballad production. While the Anglo-Afghan War ballads were not altogether disconnected from modes of patronage, as will be seen with The Victory Book of Kabul, they were more concerned with representing events and creating literary products than royal praise. The terms and circumstance of their production fell outside the strict confines of a particular court as they dedicated themselves to the narration of a recent event, not the deeds of a regal patron.



Shahjahannameh



# Lavender unveiled

## Oblivion of human dignity in Israel's war policy on Gaza



Adrián Agenjo  
Researcher

### PERSPECTIVE

The Israeli military campaign on Gaza continues to defy all expressions of human dignity. A revealing journalistic investigation by +972 Magazine (cited throughout the text) has uncovered the deployment of a sophisticated AI-driven system, known as "Lavender", which has been instrumental in guiding Israel's intensive bombing campaigns in the region. The revelation of the Lavender system's role in these operations marks a significant escalation in the automation of military targeting processes, raising critical ethical and legal questions. This mechanized approach to conflict, while not unprecedented in the arsenal of modern military technologies employed by Israel (take the Gospel or the War Dome systems as examples), has been extensively scrutinized under the lens of international humanitarian law (IHL). My intention here is not to replicate such legal analysis; rather, I aim to argue how the utilization of Lavender demonstrates the continuation of Israel's policy of oblivion towards human dignity in the war on Gaza, manifested through two key aspects: depersonalization and the elimination of human intervention in targeting.



The Palestinian al-Naji family eats an iftar meal, the breaking of fast, amidst the ruins of their family house, on the first day of the Muslim holy fasting month of Ramadan, in Deir al-Balah in the central Gaza Strip in March 2024.

AFP

The principle of human dignity stands as a fundamental pillar in the protection of individuals in modern international law. Echoed in the preamble of the United Nations Charter, there is a declared commitment to "faith in fundamental human rights and in the dignity and worth of the human person". This ethos is further embodied in Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, asserting that "all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights". The preamble of the ICCPR also refers to dignity as the source of the rights that it covers and, despite not being listed as a substantive right, it is intertwined with other prerogatives. It is also indisputable that the

protection of human dignity is one of the main aims of international human rights law (IHRL) as well as IHL, and their commonality and synergistic relationship is — at least partially — based on that principle (p. 312). Furthermore, the imperative to uphold human dignity is recognized in several national constitutions (see, for instance, Article 1 of the Basic Law for the Federal Republic of Germany of 1949) and domestic case law (for a review, see McCrudden and Carozza). Human dignity, while subject to various interpretations across religious and philosophical doctrines, fundamentally revolves around the notion of the inherent and immeasurable worth of

each individual, according to Schlink (p. 632). AI target-selection technologies, such as Lavender, bloodless and without morality or mortality, cannot fathom the significance of using force against a human person and cannot do justice to the gravity of the decision. Unlike human decision-makers, these technologies cannot engage in appeals to humanity or exercise discretion based on contextual, emotional, and ethical nuances. Indeed, this is also one of the main concerns referred to similar systems, such as Lethal Autonomous Weapons, as Asaro synthesizes (pp. 693–704). The utilization of Lavender reduces individuals to "objects to be destroyed". The

2.3 million Palestinians in Gaza being subjected to AI surveillance are treated as plagues, as a nuisance that must be gotten rid of, stripping them of their intrinsic dignity. This dehumanization is exacerbated by the statistical nature of the Lavender system's operations. By assigning every individual in Gaza a rating based on their perceived likelihood of being a militant (see paras. 13–48 of the investigation, referring to "Step 1: Generating Targets"), the system categorizes human lives into numerical probabilities. As soon as they enter the system, they are transformed into bits and data. As the investigation recalls, the operators recognize that "everything was

statistical, everything was neat — it was very dry" (para. 33). Despite alleged "internal checks" revealing a 10% margin of error in Lavender's calculations, the system operates with clinical detachment. The disregard for the consequences of inaccuracies underscores a systemic failure to uphold the principle of human dignity in the pursuit of military objectives. This undeniably jeopardizes the historically accepted concept of human dignity, which emphasizes that humans may not be treated as objects or means, a notion that is universally shared — even in war (exemplified, for instance, through the prohibition of human shields).



Palestinians try to rescue survivors and pull bodies from the rubble after Israeli air strikes hit buildings near Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital in Deir al-Balah, central Gaza, on October 22, 2023.

MOHAMMED ZAANOUN/ACTIVESTILLS

### Bypassing human judgment

The Lavender system not only raises concerns regarding the violation of human dignity by depersonalizing individuals targeted but also by circumventing human involvement in the targeting process. As individuals are targeted based on pre-set rules and abstract hypotheticals determined by algorithms, the nuanced considerations of individualized circumstances are disregarded. This mechanized approach to decision-making fundamentally undermines the principles of human dignity by depriving individuals of the right to have their fate determined through a deliberative process involving human considerations.

Irrespective of the exigency to make quick decisions during armed conflicts against combatants, it does not necessarily follow that such decisions can be made in an abstract or theoretical manner, with no human authorization (as defended by Ulgen, pp. 14–15). The possibility of a deliberative process somewhere down the line, where a change of mind and fate is possible, is almost ruled out in advance by the introduction of the

Lavender system since human control is sacrificed in the process. The research highlights a concerning reality where human personnel serve merely as a "rubber stamp" for the decisions made by AI systems (para. 4), devoting minimal time to verifying targets before authorizing bombings.

In spite of the evident margin of error in Lavender's calculations, the human oversight focuses on superficial checks, like verifying the target's gender, rather than conducting thorough assessments of the target's legitimacy. As detailed in the investigation (paras. 45–47), the supervision protocol before targeting suspected militants involves confirming the AI-selected target's gender, with the assumption that female targets are erroneous and male targets are appropriate, according to an interviewed official.

"I would invest 20 seconds for each target at this stage and do dozens of them every day. I had zero added value as a human, apart from being a stamp of approval. It saved a lot of time. If [the operative] came up in the automated mechanism, and I checked that he was a man, there would be permission to



bomb him, subject to an examination of collateral damage" (para. 47). This reduction of human involvement to a cursory gender verification process reflects a systemic failure to incorporate human judgment.

As Asaro recalls, justice requires a human duty to "consider the evidence, deliberate alternative interpretations, and reach an informed opinion". For instance, irreducible sentences of life imprisonment have been found to violate human dignity since it means "writing off" the person, deciding on a merely abstract basis and not leaving space for change or hope. Certainly, the structure of law and the processes of justice need the presence of a human as a legal agent and this lack of human control leads to an inherent violation of the human right to dignity. In no way can the Lavender system be said to comply with this standard.

Another pressing concern regarding Lavender lies in its opacity, as the al-

gorithms it employs are being shielded from public scrutiny (either due to legal protection or simple inaccessibility). Insufficient accessibility obstructs comprehension and oversight of the targeting process, a critical aspect especially relevant when international law mandates investigations for violations of its own rules (pp. 199–210). Furthermore, as AI increasingly relies on neural networks, which are particularly deep learning algorithms inherently lacking transparency, users frequently struggle to grasp the underlying reasoning behind each particular decision made by these systems. While some scholars, such as Chehtman, argue that introducing human oversight may not fully address these challenges, this would, at the very least, provide more information on why and how the targeting selection was conducted and finalized.

In this matter, algorithm-based decision-making is often touted as objec-

tive and impartial, but writing unbiased algorithms is a complex task and programmers may, by mistake or even by intentional design, build in misinformation, racism, bias, and prejudice. Potential discrimination is exacerbated by the opacity of the programs and a social tendency to assume a machine-made decision is more likely to be objective and efficient. While there has been significant scholarly and increasingly policy-focused work directed towards solutions for creating fair algorithms, there are no firmly established international standards for audit, accountability, or transparency. I do not deny here that there may be (limited) benefits in introducing AI and algorithmic targeting systems in modern warfare, such as the ones listed by Heller (pp. 31–49). Nevertheless, none of these advantages can plausibly justify the use of Lavender, a system where all the mentioned concerns are significantly amplified.

### Concluding remarks

While the world watches the ongoing assault on Gaza, broadcasted globally, and witnesses the profound devastation inflicted upon the Palestinian people, Israel's deadly imagination regarding destructive and unlimited warfare becomes evident. The Lavender system, characterized by the depersonalization of individuals, emerges as another inventive method of extermination. This dehumanizing tactic erases the intrinsic value and dignity of human life.

As AI and robotics become increasingly integrated into warfare, they have the power to redefine our approach to conflict in the future. However, it is imperative that we question the necessity of proceeding down this path. Instead, the adoption of such technologies should prioritize the protection of human life, aiming to minimize casualties and civilian harm, rather than perpetuating further dehumanization. In the narratives of futuristic books, films, and media, a timeless battle appears

between AI and humanity. Yet, what unfolds before us today is a stark departure from fiction — a chilling reality where humanity wields AI as a weapon against itself, against its own kin, or rather, against certain peoples defined by their national origin and belonging to a group. The use of Lavender in Israel's military campaign on Gaza not only evokes profound ethical and legal concerns but also strikes at the very core of human dignity. By reducing individuals to mere data points and relinquishing human judgment in favour of mechanized decisions, these technologies strip away the essence of humanity, leaving behind a desolate landscape where lives are measured in statistics, devoid of intrinsic worth and value. This serves as yet another piece of evidence of Israel's lawless and brutal war policy. One must question: what will be the tipping point in humanity's struggle against its own dehumanization?

The article first appeared on *Opinio Juris*.

## How US intelligence, an American company feed Israel's killing machine in Gaza



James Bamford  
Best-selling author

### PERSPECTIVE

By far, the most secret of Israel's intelligence installations in Camp Moshe Dayan is the headquarters of Unit 8200, which specializes in eavesdropping, codebreaking, and cyber warfare — Israel's equivalent of the American National Security Agency. One of Unit 8200's newest and most important organizations is the Data Science and Artificial Intelligence Center, which, according to a spokesman, was responsible for developing the AI systems that "transformed the entire concept of targets in the IDF". Back in 2021, the Israeli military described its 11-day war on Gaza as the world's first "AI war". Israel's ongoing invasion of Gaza offers a more recent — and devastating — example.

More than 70 years ago, that same patch of land was home to the Palestinian village of Ajleel, until the residents were killed or forced to abandon their homes and flee in fear during the Nakba in 1948. Now, soldiers and intelligence specialists are being trained at Camp Moshe Dayan to finish the job — to bomb, shoot, or starve to death the descendants of the Palestinians forced into the squalor of militarily occupied Gaza decades ago.

Earlier this month saw a continuation of that effort, with the targeting of three well-marked and fully approved aid vehicles belonging to World Central Kitchen, killing their seven occupants and ensuring that the food would never reach those dying of starvation. The targeting was precise — placing missiles dead center in the aid agency's rooftop logos. Israel, however, said it was simply a mistake, similar to the "mistaken" killing of nearly 200 other aid workers in just a matter of months — more than all the aid workers killed in all the wars in the rest of the world over the last 30 years combined, according to the Aid Worker Security Database.

Such horrendous "mistakes" are hard to understand, considering the enormous amount of advanced targeting AI hardware and software provided to the Israeli military and spy agencies — some of it by one American company in particular: Palantir Technologies. "We stand with Israel," the Denver-based company said in posts on X and LinkedIn. "The board of



The photo shows the destroyed vehicle that was carrying the seven employees of the World Central Kitchen when it was hit directly by a bomb during an Israeli air raid in Deir al-Balah in the central Gaza Strip on April 1, 2024.

● AHMED ZAKOT/REUTERS

directors of Palantir will be gathering in Tel Aviv next week for its first meeting of the new year. Our work in the region has never been more vital. And it will continue". As one of the world's most advanced data-mining companies, with ties to the CIA, Palantir's "work" was supplying Israel's military and intelligence agencies with advanced and powerful targeting capabilities — the precise capabilities that allowed Israel to place three drone-fired missiles into three clearly marked aid vehicles.

Last January, Alex Karp, co-founder and CEO of the company, traveled to a military headquarters where he signed an upgraded agreement with Israel's Ministry of Defense. "Both parties have mutually agreed to harness Palantir's advanced technology in support of war-related missions," said Executive Vice President Josh Harris.

The project involved selling the ministry an Artificial Intelligence Platform that uses reams of classified intelligence reports to make life-or-death determinations about which targets to

attack. In an understatement several years ago, Karp admitted, "Our product is used on occasion to kill people," the morality of which even he himself occasionally questions. "I have asked myself if I were younger at college: 'Would I be protesting me?'" Recently, a number of Karp's employees decided to quit rather than be involved with a company supporting the ongoing genocide in Gaza. And in London's Soho Square, dozens of pro-Palestine protesters and health workers gathered at Palantir's UK headquarters to accuse the firm of being "complicit" in war crimes.

Now, with Israel's ongoing war in Gaza, critical information from NSA continues to be used by Unit 8200, according to a number of sources, to target tens of thousands of Palestinians for death — often with US-supplied 2,000-pound bombs and other weapons. And it is extremely powerful data-mining software, such as that from Palantir, that helps the IDF to select targets. While the company does not disclose operational details, some indications of

the power and speed of its AI can be understood by examining its activities on behalf of another client at war: Ukraine. Palantir is "responsible for most of the targeting in Ukraine," according to Karp. "From the moment the algorithms set to work detecting their targets [i.e., people] until these targets are prosecuted [i.e., killed] — a term of art in the field — no more than two or three minutes elapse," noted Bruno Macaes, a former senior Portuguese official who was given a tour of Palantir's London headquarters last year. "In the old world, the process might take six hours."

The company is currently developing an even more powerful AI targeting system called TITAN (for "Tactical Intelligence Targeting Access Node"). According to Palantir, TITAN is a "next-generation intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance ground station enabled by artificial intelligence and machine learning to process data received from space, high altitude, aerial and terrestrial layers". Although

designed for use by the US Army, it's possible that the company could test prototypes against Palestinians in Gaza. "How precise and accurate can you know a system is going to be unless it's already been trained and tested on people?" said Catherine Connolly of the Stop Killer Robot coalition, which includes Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International.

The most in-depth examination of the connection between AI and the massive numbers of innocent Palestinian men, women, and children slaughtered in Gaza by Israel comes from an investigation recently published by +972 Magazine and Local Call. Although Palantir is not mentioned by name, the AI systems discussed by the journalists appear to fit into the same category. According to the lengthy investigation, Unit 8200 is currently using a system called "Lavender" to target thousands of alleged Hamas fighters. But the magazine also reported that, while before the brutal attack on October 7, Israel's rules of engagement tightly restricted the numbers of non-combatant casualties allowed in targeting a single alleged Hamas militant, such limitations have been loosened in the months since, to the point of allowing for the slaughter of dozens of Palestinian non-combatants (including women and children) for each targeted individual. President Joe Biden's December warning that Israel was losing international support because of its "indiscriminate bombing" of Gaza appears to have had no effect.

Such actions were likely contributing factors in the recent decision by the United Nations Human Rights Council to adopt a resolution calling for Israel to be held accountable for possible war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in Gaza. Twenty-eight countries voted in favor, with only six voting against the resolution. Still, in the White House and on Capitol Hill, there seems little concern for the dangers of Israel's deadly weaponization of AI and the technology's connection to the staggering numbers of innocent men, women, children, and whole families massacred in Gaza.

Israel's indiscriminate killing in Gaza offers the perfect example of why it's time to also begin far stricter regulation of the export of AI systems, like those developed by Palantir. Systems that, as Karp suggested, are the digital equivalent of a weapon of mass destruction. After all, it's not just the bomb that kills, but the list that puts you and your family under it.

The full article first appeared on *The Nation*.



## Asian Wrestling Championships:

Firoozpour, Zare' grab golds  
as Iran reclaims freestyle title

Amirhossein Firoozpour (L) and Amirhossein Zare' celebrate with the Iranian flag after grabbing the freestyle 92kg and 125kg gold medals respectively at the Asian Wrestling Championships in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, on April 12, 2024.

UWW

## Sports Desk

Five gold medals and three bronzes across 10 weight classes saw Iran lift the freestyle trophy at the Asian Wrestling Championships in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. Having seen a run of four successive titles come to an end by Kazakhstan last year, Mohsen Kaveh's squad tallied 190 points to finish above Japan (130 points) and the host country (121 points) in the team table.

On Friday, reigning world superheavyweight champion Amirhossein Zare' brought the curtain down on a glorious campaign for Iran by easing to a 11-0 technical fall victory over home-favorite Aiaal Lazarev with 32 seconds left on the clock in the 125kg final – a first Asian title for the 23-year-old Iranian, who has double world golds and a

bronze under his belt as well as a bronze at the Tokyo Olympics.

Zare' proved to be in a league of his own in the Kyrgyz capital as he scored 26 points without giving away a single point across the three bouts and showcased his dazzling form with less than four months to go until the Paris Olympics.

"This was my last competition before the Olympics and I needed the ranking points for the event, not to mention the Asian medal is precious for my country so I'm so grateful that I will not leave empty-handed," said a humble Zare', who also won the gold at last year's Asian Games as well as the Zagreb Open Ranking Series event in January.

Meanwhile, Amirhossein Firoozpour, a four-time world gold medalist in three age groups, won his second Asian se-

nior gold in emphatic fashion by outmuscling Uzbekistan's Sherzod Poyonov 8-3 – following three technical-fall victories en route to the 92kg final showpiece.

Firoozpour scored three stepouts in the first period, while giving up one himself, and then added three more in the second before finally scoring a takedown off an underhook. Poyonov scored a takedown in the closing seconds.

Elsewhere, Hadi Vafaeipour bounced back from a last-eight defeat against two-time world bronze medalist Azamat Dauletbekov of Kazakhstan to beat China's Li Peilong 10-0 for a consolation bronze at the 86kg contests – alongside Tatsuya Shirai of Japan – though his failure to win the gold will virtually mean the end his quest for a shot at the Olym-

pic berth against Iranian sensation Hassan Yazdani.

Dauletbekov went on to defeat Uzbekistan's Javrail Shapiev 5-2 in the final for his third Asian gold in a row.

Hossein Abouzari added another bronze to Iran's medal haul, courtesy of a 5-2 win against Kazakhstan's Syrbaz Talgat in the 74kg weight class.

Japanese wrestler Kota Takahashi, victorious over Abouzari in the semifinals, came out on top against Viktor Rassadin of Tajikistan in the final.

Friday's results came after the Iranians had won three golds and a bronze on the preceding night in Bishkek.

In a repeat of last year's 65kg final, former world champion Rahman Amouzad defeated Tulga Tumor Ochir to walk away with a second consecutive Asian gold, while making amends for his set-

back against the Mongolian in the Asian Games final last October.

Two-time world silver medalist Amir-Mohammad Yazdani picked up the first gold in his senior career thanks to a 13-9 triumph over world under-23 silver medalist Yoshinosuke Aoyagi of Japan in a thrilling 70kg showpiece, while Mohammad Nokhodi, winner of back-to-back world silvers before a bronze in Belgrade last year, made a light work of Mongolia's Byambadorj Enkhbayar with a 12-2 technical fall in the 79kg final.

Two-time Asian champion Mohammad-Hossein Mohammadian recovered from an 8-2 defeat against world champion Akhmed Tazhudinov of Bahrain in the semifinals to beat Japanese Hibiki Ito in the bronze medal contest of the 97kg event.

## Persian Gulf Pro League roundup:

Esteghlal edges out Iralco  
to maintain grip on top spot

Esteghlal striker Gustavo Blanco (R) celebrates with injured teammate Mahdi Mahdipour's No. 9 shirt after scoring the winner in a 1-0 victory over Iralco in Arak, Iran, on April 12, 2024.

ALI KARIMI/IRNA

## Sports Desk

Argentine striker Gustavo Blanco headed home his third goal in two games to help Esteghlal walk away with a 1-0 victory at Iralco in the Persian Gulf Pro League.

Having seen their lead on archrival Persepolis on top of the table reduced to a single point after a 2-2 home draw against Mes Rafsanjan last week, Javad Nekounam's Blues held out a desperate push by the home side in the closing stages to stay atop with 50 points with seven games to spare.

Later in the day, Persepolis, chasing a seventh league crown in eight years, had Issa Aleksir to thank for a 1-0 win against a brave Malavan side at Tehran's

Azadi Stadium.

Aleksir, who rejoined the Reds from Sepahan in the mid-season transfer window, headed in the winner on an Omid Alishah's cross four minutes into the second half but Malavan, which would have moved up to third in the standings with maximum points, felt unfortunate to concede as the Persepolis striker looked to be just off-side.

The Reds also had to hold off a late surge by the opponent to secure a massive victory, while under-23 shot stopper Amir-Reza Rafiei, filling in for injured international keeper Alireza Beiranvand, was delighted to keep a third clean sheet in as many appearances.

Elsewhere on Friday, third-place Tractor was hammered 4-1 at home by Zob Ahan to see the gap on the second spot extended to nine points.

Mohammad-Hossein Eslami scored twice with Mohammad-Javad Mohammadi and Amirhossein Jeedi also on the scoresheet before Mehdi Abdi's stoppage-time consolation from the spot as Mohammad Rabiei's side claimed a first league win in eight matches.

Once regarded as the ultimate favorite for the title, Sepahan suffered another blow to its quest for a first league crown since 2015 after a frustrating goalless stalemate at home against bottom-side Nassaji Mazandaran left the Isfahan-based club in the fourth place with 39 points.

Meanwhile, Pouria Sarabadani's strike with 20 minutes left on the clock saw Shams Azar defeat Foolad Khuzestan at home, with Havadar beating visiting Golgozar Sirjan by the same scoreline, courtesy of an in-form Dariush Shojaeian's goal midway through the first half.

Mes and Paykan played to a 2-2 draw in Rafsanjan, while in a decisive survival battle, Iraqi forward Aso Rostam bagged a 91st-minute winner to steer Esteghlal Khuzestan to a 2-1 victory at home over San'at Naft Abadan.

The win lifted the southern Iranian Blues to third from bottom – three points clear from relegation candidates San'at and Nassaji.

Wembanyama stars  
as Spurs beat Nuggets

BBC – Victor Wembanyama scored 34 points as the San Antonio Spurs stunned the Denver Nuggets to open up the race for top seed in the Western Conference.

Denver knew two wins from their final two games would secure top spot and home advantage in the play-offs. But their defeat plus wins for the Minnesota Timberwolves and the Oklahoma City Thunder leaves the trio level.

It is the first time in NBA history there has been a three-way tie for top spot with one game left.

Wembanyama, 20, added 12 rebounds, five assists and two blocks, while Devonte' Graham hit the decid-

ing jumper with 0.9 seconds left on the clock to seal victory.

Despite the win, San Antonio remain level with the Portland Trail Blazers at the foot of the Western Conference. At the top, Oklahoma City beat the Milwaukee Bucks 125-107 while Minnesota were 109-106 winners against Atlanta.

Oklahoma City lead the Conference because of their superior head-to-head record between the other two sides, with Minnesota second and Denver third.

The only way Denver can regain top spot is if both Oklahoma City and Minnesota lose in their final games today.



REUTERS



# Iran seizes Israeli-linked cargo ship in Strait of Hormuz

## International Desk

Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) seized an Israeli-linked cargo ship in the Strait of Hormuz on Saturday, days after Tehran warned it would retaliate for an Israeli strike on its Syria consulate.

Iran's IRNA news agency reported that an IRGC helicopter had boarded and taken into Iranian waters the Portuguese flagged MSC Aries, saying it was linked to Israel.

MSC, which operates the Aries, confirmed Iran had seized the ship and said it was working "with the relevant authorities" for its safe return and the wellbeing of its 25 crew.

MSC leases the Aries from Gortal Shipping, an affiliate of Zodiac Maritime, Zodiac said in a statement, adding that MSC is responsible for all the vessel's activities. Zodiac is partly owned by Israeli businessman Eyal Ofer.

The incident comes amid rising regional tensions since the start of Israel's genocidal war on Gaza in October, with Israel or its ally the United States clashing repeatedly with resistance groups in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq and Yemen.



Iran has threatened to retaliate for Israeli airstrike on its consulate in Syria's capital Damascus on April 1 that killed seven IRGC members including two senior generals.

US President Joe Biden said on Friday he expected Iran to attack Israel "sooner, rather than later" and warned Tehran not to do so. "Don't," he said when asked

by reporters if he had a message for Iran.

Israel's military spokesperson, Rear Admiral Daniel Hagari, said "Iran will bear consequences for choosing to escalate this situation

any further", in response to reports of the seizure of MSC Aries.

## Israel panicking

However, an adviser to Iran's Leader said Satur-

day that Israel is panicking over a possible retaliatory response from Iran.

"It has been a week that the Zionists are in complete panic and are on alert," Yahya Rahim Safavi, senior adviser to Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei, was quoted as saying by the ISNA news agency.

"They don't know what Iran wants to do, so they and their supporters are terrified," ISNA quoted him as saying.

"This psychological, media and political war is more terrifying for them than the war itself, because they are waiting for an attack every night and many of them have fled and gone to shelters," Safavi added. The US military is moving more military assets to the Middle East as it anticipates an Iranian response to the Israeli attack on the consulate in Syria.

US media confirmed the move but the Pentagon has not officially said which assets it is moving to the region.

The Wall Street Journal quoted unnamed US officials as saying on Friday that it includes repositioning two destroyers, with one of the warships already in the region and

another redirected there.

## Diplomatic efforts

Meanwhile, diplomatic efforts are underway to prevent a possible Iran's response.

German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock called on her Iranian counterpart Hossein Amir-Abdollahian to urge "maximum restraint" to avoid further escalation.

Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov said that, "Right now it's very important for everyone to maintain restraint so as not to lead to a complete destabilization of the situation in the region, which doesn't exactly shine with stability and predictability."

British Foreign Secretary David Cameron also called the Iranian foreign minister to appeal for "restraint" by the Islamic Republic.

Italian Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani called on Iran to show restraint over the expected response.

"We cannot risk escalation at such an extremely volatile stage. All regional actors must show responsibility," the top Italian diplomat said.

The US has also asked China and other countries, including Turkey and Saudi Arabia, to urge Tehran not to launch a retaliatory attack on Israel.

Other western and Arab governments have also sought to convince Iran to show restraint.

## Up for Iran ...

The heightened state of alert within the echelons of the Israeli regime underscores the palpable impact of Iran's response, potentially exacting a toll on Israel's strategic calculus.

In recent days, the US government has been pulling out all the stops in its efforts to dissuade Tehran from retaliating against Israel, even resorting to China to help talk Iran out of hitting back. President Joe Biden has made it clear that the US stands with Israel in the escalating situation. The White House's intervention adds fuel to the

fire of their longstanding unresolved issues.

Over the past two years, Iran and the United States have been treading carefully to keep tensions in check, as neither side wants a direct clash, especially with the crucial presidential election looming on the horizon in the US. The dynamics of the Iran-Israel conflict differ significantly from the Iran-US standoff, making it imperative for Washington not to stir the pot further in support of Israel. Recent reports have shed light on the back-and-forth messaging between Tehran and Washington on the

matter.

A crucial aspect to consider is Iran's stance on maintaining its autonomy and not getting entangled in the games of its adversaries or rivals. The delayed response from Iran can be attributed to Tehran's logical decision-making process, rooted in its own strategic calculations and interests. The Islamic Republic is well-versed in crafting responses to threats, drawing from past crises to shape its policies. Iran's approach involves thorough consideration of all angles, avoiding actions that may not yield results. Its strategy en-

compasses the flexibility of giving quick, indirect, or delayed responses, as well as exploiting ambiguity to its advantage. The key in this unique scenario lies in Tehran taking the lead and controlling the narrative.

As intense talks go on and various tactics are employed to dissuade Iran from retaliating against Israel, it becomes evident that Tehran is in the driver's seat. The psychological warfare and media campaigns aimed at restraining Iran highlight Tehran's strategic advantage and its adeptness at playing its trump card effectively.

## Israeli settlers storm West Bank villages



Hundreds of armed Israeli settlers attacked Palestinian villages in the occupied West Bank as a missing teenage settler is found dead. The settlers set fire to several homes and cars in

one of the largest attacks by settlers this year. At least one Palestinian man was killed by gunfire in the village of Al-Mughayyir, east of Ramallah, according to the head of the village council

Amin Abu-Allia, who is related to the deceased.

About 25 others were also injured in the rampage, according to the Palestinian Ministry of Health in Ramallah, the scale of which has not been seen since hundreds of settlers stormed through the villages of Turmusayya and Huwara in two separate incidents last year.

According to Abu-Allia, Israeli security forces had informed Palestinian officials that the settlers were looking for an Israeli teenager who had gone missing earlier in the day.

Mohammad Ali Rajabi  
Cartoonist



## Pro-Palestine rallies held in London, New York

### International Desk

Thousands of people gathered in central London to protest against Israeli attacks and demand an immediate ceasefire in the Gaza Strip. Carrying Palestinian flags, the demonstrators chanted slogans such as "Free Palestine" and "Stop the genocide" as they marched from Russel Square towards Parliament Square. "Israel has been occupying so many years, and killed so many people," Steve, a 31-year-old protester, told Anadolu news agency, criticizing the international community for not doing enough. "So the only way we can do is

to make our voices heard."

In the US, demonstrators took to the streets of New York to demand end to Israel's genocide in Gaza. The protest resulted in numerous arrests as dozens of marchers marched through midtown Manhattan calling for an end to the violence.

The nearly daily pro-Palestinian protests in New York and other cities against the war in Gaza have caught many politicians and police officials off guard in the growing support the movement has gathered.

In Germany's capital, Berlin, police interrupted and cancelled a pro-Palestinian con-

ference less than an hour after it started on Friday, citing concerns about anti-Semitic statements. Officers initially halted the congress because one of the speakers was subject to a ban on political activity in Germany, police wrote on X, formerly Twitter. Police did not give the name of the speaker, but participants in the congress wrote on X that it was Palestinian researcher Salman Abu Sitta. Police then later wrote on X that they had banned the remainder of the conference, which was due to last until Sunday.

Berlin police on Friday said they had dispatched 930 of-

ficers, including reinforcements from other regions of Germany, to secure the event. On the congress website, the organizers denounce "Israeli apartheid and genocide" and accuse Germany of "being complicit". The organizers on Friday wrote in a Telegram post that Ghassan Abu Sitta, a Palestinian doctor specializing in plastic and reconstructive surgery, had been denied entry into Germany to attend the conference.

The outbreak of the war in Gaza has roiled Germany, where Berlin's staunch backing for Israel has prompted protests that pro-Palestinian voices are being marginalized.



# Iranian poet Attar commemorated



Every year, a number of literati, scholars and people gather at the mausoleum of the Persian poet, mystic, and philosopher Attar of Nishapur to mark National Day of Attar, which was on

April 13. On the reconciliation of classic poets and new generation, poet and literary researcher Reza Esmaeili emphasized the need to update classic poetry, saying,

"If we translate Attar's poetry into today's language, people will communicate with its creations better." Iranian composer and orchestra conductor Farhad Fakhreddini announced

the completion of his latest work, 'Simorgh Collection' based on Attar's 'Manteq-ot-Tayr' (The Conference of the Birds). He made the announcement on April 13, which

coincides with National Day of Attar on the Iranian calendar.

He said he began writing this collection three years ago, considering his enduring affinity and collaboration with his heritage and his profound respect for classical literature. He described "Attar as a well-known figure in our literature, renowned for his sweet and pleasant poetry, with 'The Conference of the Birds' undoubtedly being Attar's finest work and I decided to select excerpts from his poems and start the music composition process."

Known by his pen name Farid-oddin Attar Nishapuri, the prominent Iranian poet was born in 1142 and died at the age of 75 in Nishapur, in northeastern Khorasan Razavi Province, during the Mongol invasion of Iran.

Attar is one of the most famous mystic poets of Iran. His works were the inspiration of Rumi, Hafiz, and Jami, and many other mystic poets.

Attar is the author of numerous books and works of literature, most important of which are 'Tazkerat al-Owliya' (Biographies of the Saints), 'Manteq-ot-Tayr', 'Asrar Nameh', 'Elahi Nameh', and 'Mokhtar Nameh'.

## Five Iranian short movies selected for 5th Fotofilm festival



**Arts & Culture Desk**

Five Iranian short films have been chosen to

participate in the 5th Fotofilm International Short Film Festival.

The 5th edition of the festival will be held jointly with the French event Youality and Castel Lagopesole in Italy, scheduled from April 24 to 26, at Gelişim University in Istanbul, ISNA wrote. The festival, in collaboration with Fotofilm Festival, will showcase a selection of finalists from recent years, comprising five Iranian and five international films. The selected Iranian films include 'Shutter Gun' directed by Ramin Rastad, 'The Savior' directed by Soheila Pourmohammadi, 'Identibye' directed by Sajjad Shahhatami, 'Home is Home' directed by Mohammad Safaiepour, and the short documentary 'Soil Flavored Bread' directed by Himan Alani.

This cinematic event, organized by the initiative of Fotofilm Festival Secretary Mehmet Ofazoglu, Turkey Festival Director Özlem Tuğçe Keleş, Youality International Short Film Festival Secretary Kamran Rasoulzadeh, and Castel International Short Film Festival Secretary Giuseppe Arcieri, will take place in Turkey.

## Cinema for Gaza auction raises over \$316,000 for relief efforts

Cinema for Gaza, a group launched by a small group of female filmmakers and film journalists, has successfully raised more than \$315,000 to support medical aid for the civilian population in Gaza. A celebrity auction, organized by Cinema for Gaza, and supported by the likes of Tilda Swinton, Annie Lennox, Joaquin Phoenix, Spike Lee and Guillermo del Toro, raised some \$316,778 for Medical Aid for Palestinians (MAP), a U.K.-based charity that provides on-the-ground

medical support, from sterile water to cancer drugs, for those on the Gaza Strip. The celebrities donated personal items — from signed film posters to personal Zoom chats to, in the case of Lennox, the handwritten lyrics to her Eurythmics hit 'Sweet Dreams' — to be sold off to the highest bidder. The Hollywood Reporter wrote. "The Zone of Interest" filmmaker Jonathan Glazer, who referenced the Gaza conflict in his 2024 Oscars acceptance speech, offered to

donate seven posters from the film, signed by himself, Zone composer Mica Levi and producer James Wilson, as well as a selection of posters for his 2014 feature 'Under the Skin', to raise funds for the MAP charity. Glazer's speech galvanized Hollywood by drawing praise from those urging a ceasefire amid the ongoing Israel-Hamas war and sharp criticism from some pro-Israel and Jewish leaders in Hollywood. His donation to the Cinema for Gaza auction raised \$13,702.



## Iran preparing files of eight villages for world heritage listing



**Arts & Culture Desk**

Iran is in the process of drafting files for the global registration of eight villages to be submitted to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) by May 7, announced Ali-Asghar Shalbafian, Deputy Minister of Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts, and Tourism.

Shalbafian stated that Iran has the opportunity to submit eight files to the UN tourism organization in 2024, ISNA wrote.

Following evaluations, several villages will be introduced as candidates, including Abyaneh (Isfahan), Kandulus (Mazandaran), Palangan (Kurdistan), Bisheh (Lorestan), Meymand (Kerman), Fahraj (Yazd), Asfak (South Khorasan), and Qaleh Bala (Semnan). Additionally, Soheili (Hormozgan Province - Qeshm) and Qasemabad (Gilan Province) are included in the supportive list.

Currently, assessments and field visits are being conducted for the nominated villages. Strategic com-

mittees for rural tourism development have been formed in provinces, and files are being compiled in collaboration with the cultural heritage, tourism, and handicrafts departments of provinces, he said.

Shalbafian added that the initiative proposed by the UN tourism organization aims to capitalize on tourism industry capabilities to bring about rural development, increase welfare, and enhance community well-being.

Regarding the requirements for applicant villages, he mentioned population criteria, engagement in traditional activities such as agriculture, forestry, livestock farming, and fishing, preservation of cultural diversity and values, and the role of tourism as an economic driving force.

The evaluation of village files is based on nine indices of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including cultural and natural resources, promotion and preservation of cultural resources, economic sustainability, social stability,

environmental sustainability, tourism potential and development, value chain integration, governance and tourism prioritization, infrastructure and communication, health, safety, and security.

Moreover, in addition to the evaluation criteria, programs must include a justification form explaining the village's initiative to become a global village, he added.

The tourism deputy highlighted the benefits of selecting villages for global listing, such as receiving a diploma or plaque signed by the Secretary-General of the UN tourism organization.

Shalbafian recalled that since the initiation of this project in 2021, Iran has prioritized rural development based on the criteria announced by the UNWTO. After evaluations, 130 villages were identified as most compatible. Following discussions in national rural tourism meetings and cooperation with executive agencies in the rural sector, files for a number of villages are submitted annually.