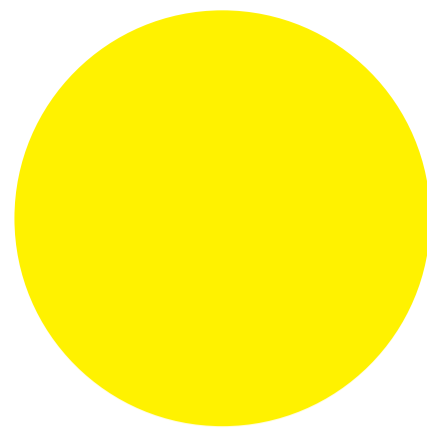


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No war on the horizon



By Ebrahim Beheshti
Staff writer

OPINION

Israel's hard-right Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir weighed in on the recent incident in the skies of Isfahan, where Iran's air defense targeted several small drones. This sheds light on two key issues. Up to now, Israel has not officially owned up to its acts of sabotage or terrorism against Iran. However, a cabinet minister has tacitly acknowledged Israel's role in the Friday attack, leaving Tel Aviv unable to escape its responsibilities and the ensuing repercussions.

But the crux of Ben-Gvir's brief yet poignant response on social media platform X was his appraisal of the effectiveness of Israel's retaliation to Iran's extensive drone and missile onslaught on April 14. The hardline member of Benjamin Netanyahu's hawkish cabinet called the move "ridiculous and weak." His criticism aligns with the desires of Israeli hardliners, who likely anticipated a more forceful and overt retaliation from Israel.

Iran has made it clear that in the face of direct military aggression, it will hit back with even greater force than the April 14 strike. A day before the Isfahan incident, Iran's Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian told a Security Council meeting that Iran's "legitimate defense and proportionate countermeasures" had ended. However, he cautioned that Iran "will not hesitate to exercise its inalienable right to swiftly, decisively, and forcefully counter any aggression."

Iranian political and military officials have also taken similar stances. Simultaneously, other nations, notably Israel's allies like the United States, Britain, and France, have been leaning on Israel in recent days to steer clear of any actions that might ratchet up tensions in the region. Hence, Israel's response to Iran's strike, as per the official Iranian account, fell short of causing substantial harm to the military facilities in Isfahan. Moreover, the small drones used in the suspected Israeli attack were also shot down.

It appears that the recent Israeli action was meant for domestic consumption and possibly stoking a media campaign to shore up its tarnished security and military credibility rather than a decisive move triggering an immediate backlash from Iran.

While this act of sabotage is condemned and would prompt an appropriate response from Iran. However, it seems that Israel has acknowledged, at least for now, it must tread carefully with Iran and heed the advice of its key allies to avoid a direct confrontation with Iran.

Ben-Gvir's labeling of this Israeli move as "ridiculous and weak" suggests that Tel Aviv meticulously strategized an action designed not to incur heavy costs or provoke a sharp retort from Tehran. This indicates that, contrary to some speculations about an imminent direct war between the two parties engulfing the region and beyond, neither side currently harbors the intent to lock horns. Israel's Channel 12 TV quoted Netanyahu as affirming that Israel was not seeking a war with Iran and Iran has declared its retaliatory strike and legitimate defense in response to Israel's terrorist attack on its consulate in Syria as concluded.

Development-heavy Agenda

Raisi inaugurates industrial projects in Semnan 2 >



president.ir

Iran oil exports hit six-year high

Iran is exporting more oil than at any time for the past six years, giving its economy a \$35b-a-year boost. Tehran sold an average of 1.56 million barrels a day during the first three months of the year, almost all of it to China and its highest level since the third quarter of 2018, according to data company Vortexa, reported FT. 2 >



Why Israel-Iran war is a lifeline for Netanyahu

SPECIAL ISSUE



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Iran's women unemployment rate drops by 2%: Official

Iran saw 2% decrease in the country's women unemployment rate, thanks to a growing trend in home-based businesses in the last Persian year ending March 19, Ensieh Khazali, the Vice President for Women and Family Affairs, announced. 8 >

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NPC's production capacity to exceed 100m tons by March



Iran's annual petrochemical production capacity will exceed 100 million tons by the end of the current Iranian year (March 20, 2025), said the National Petrochemical Company (NPC) managing director.

Morteza Shahmirzaei, who made the remarks in the National Oil and Gas Forum in the Russian capital Moscow, added Iran's petrochemical production capacity surpassed 95 million tons in the previous year, Shana reported.

"Having rich oil and gas reserves, Iran has held a special and top position in the world's energy map since long ago," said the official. He called Iran the anchor of stability and security in the region and continued, "Given its long coastlines from the Persian Gulf to the Sea of Oman and the Indian Ocean, as the extremely important waterway and means of transporting oil, gas condensates, liquefied petroleum gas, petrochemicals, and other products, Iran is playing a significant role."

The deputy oil minister said Iran's petrochemical sector is ready to export its technical and engineering services to the world and cooperate with foreign companies in the fields of production and equipment. Pointing to the variety of Iran's petrochemical basket, more than 550 grades, Shahmirzaei said Iran and like-minded countries, including Russia and the Central Asian states, have favorable cooperation and made investments in the developing hubs, particularly in Mahshahr, Chabahar, and Jask.

According to the CEO of NPC, Iran is now producing 97 percent of catalysts needed by the oil, gas, refining, and petrochemical industries.

The official expressed Iran's readiness to cooperate with neighboring and like-minded countries in the areas of designing, commissioning, exploiting, overhauling, maintaining, and producing different types of catalysts.

Iran has become completely self-sufficient in acquiring the technical know-how of producing ammonia, olefin, ethane, ethylene, converting gas to methanol, and mastering other processes, Shahmirzaei concluded.

In addition to NPC CEO Shahmirzaei's presence, Iran's Ambassador to Moscow Kazem Jalali and Russian Deputy Energy Minister Pavel Sorkin attended the forum. The forum is held annually at Expocentre Fairgrounds in conjunction with the largest international exhibition Neftegaz.

Raisi inaugurates industrial projects in Semnan



President Ebrahim Raisi (2nd L) visits an industrial unit in Semnan Province on April 18, 2024. president.ir

President Ebrahim Raisi inaugurated industrial projects including the second phase of the Semnan power plant with a capacity of 366 megawatts (MW) and Garmsar water project as well as the hand-over of residential units to people on a visit to the province on Thursday. Raisi, who arrived in Sem-

nan Province on Thursday, visited different parts of the Shahid Bakeri Combined-Cycle Power Plant in Semnan and inaugurated the second phase of this power plant with a capacity of 366 MW, according to president.ir. Semnan's Shahid Bakeri Power Plant is one of the leading power plants in

supplying electricity to industries and is a combined cycle type with a production capacity of 324 MW, including two gas units of 162 MW, the second phase of which was put into operation with a capacity of 366 MW, with the presence of the president, and the capacity of the power plant to 690 MW.

This project is one of the country's major economic projects that contribute to solving the problems of the energy sector, which was put into operation in less than a year with the efforts of the government. Moreover, a ceremony was held to mark the resumption of production for more than 200 fully stagnant

units of Semnan Province, which have returned to the production cycle during Raisi's Administration, attended by the president. Also, in a ceremony attended by the president, a sum of 2,058 residential units were handed over to applicants while some water projects were inaugurated in the province.

Iran oil exports hit six-year high

Iran is exporting more oil than at any time for the past six years, giving its economy a \$35b-a-year boost.

Tehran sold an average of 1.56 million barrels a day during the first three months of the year, almost all of it to China and its highest level since the third quarter of 2018, according to data company Vortexa, reported FT.

"The Iranians have mastered the art of sanctions circumvention," said Fernando Ferreira, head of geopolitical risk service at the Rapidan Energy Group in the US. "If the Biden administration is really going to have an impact, it has to

shift the focus to China." Analysts say Washington is disinclined to strictly enforce the "maximum pressure" sanctions regime introduced in 2018 by then-president Donald Trump, citing a reluctance by President Joe Biden's administration to introduce an inflationary choke on global oil supply in a US election year.

In Tehran, the state Tasnim news agency said on Wednesday that the country's oil industry had found ways to get around sanctions, adding that, since its main customer was China, it was largely shielded from western pressure.



Armen Azizian, a senior analyst and sanctions specialist at Vortexa, said the size of the fleet used by Iran to transport oil has grown by a fifth in the past year to 253 vessels, and that the number of supertankers carrying up to 2mn barrels of oil has

doubled since 2021. Virtually all Iranian oil sold this year has gone to China, according to Kpler, which tracks tankers around the world, and aggressively enforcing sanctions could destabilize not only the oil market but also the US-China rela-

tionship. China relies on Iran for about a tenth of its oil imports but processes the oil not through its state-owned oil and gas companies but through smaller, private, refineries. Iran's oil minister Javad Owji said last month that

oil exports had "generated more than \$35 billion" in the preceding year. On another occasion, he said that while Iran's enemies wanted to stop its exports, "today, we can export oil anywhere we want, and with minimal discounts". Soaring shale oil output over the past decade has made the US the world's biggest producer, and freed Washington to be more aggressive with sanctions on other crude exporters. On Wednesday, it reimposed sanctions on Venezuela, another member of the OPEC group.

The Biden administration has also been willing to release crude oil from its strategic stockpile, and has indicated that it could do so again if global prices move higher and push up domestic petrol costs.

Iran-EU trade tops €380m in January: Eurostat



The Statistical Office of the European Union (Eurostat) in its latest report put the total value of the trade exchanges between Iran and 27 European Union's member states in January 2024 at over €380.

According to the report, the value of products imported by Greece and the Netherlands from Iran in January registered a three- and twofold hike

respectively compared to the same period last year, Tasnim News Agency reported. Spain's export of products to Iran in January 2024 registered a 62 percent rise, the Eurostat added. In this period, the trade exchanges between Iran and the European Union indicated a 10% decrease compared to last year's corresponding period. Iran and the 27 EU mem-

ber states had exchanged over €424 million of products in January 2023. The EU member states imported €69 million of non-oil products from Iran in January 2024, showing a 15 percent drop compared to the same period last year, IRNA reported. The report put the value of products imported by the EU member states

from Iran in January 2023 at €80 million. The EU member states exported €311 million of products to Iran in January 2024, showing a 9 percent decline compared to last year's corresponding period. The 27 EU member states had exported over €344 million worth of products to Iran in January 2023, the report added.

Enchanting Hindu Temple of Bandar Abbas



● IRNA



● IRNA



● wikipedia.org

Iranica Desk

The Hindu Temple in Bandar Abbas, Hormozgan Province, stands as a poignant reminder of the Hindu community that once resided in this city between 1921 and 1965. Its distinctive architecture sets it apart as a truly unique structure, unparalleled elsewhere in the country. Designated as a national heritage site in Iran, this temple has evolved into one of the most renowned tourist destinations in Bandar Abbas.

Situated on the northern shores of the Persian Gulf, amidst the historic and bustling streets of Bandar Abbas, the Hindu Temple captivates the attention of all who encounter it. The architectural design of this edifice echoes the grandeur of Hindu temples found in India, adding to its allure and mystique.

Constructed under the patronage of Mohammad Hassan Khan Sardar Saad al-Mulk, the Hindu Temple of Bandar Abbas served a community of around a hundred individuals primarily involved in commerce during that era. Originating from the merchant town of Shikarpur in western India, these traders left

a lasting legacy with the creation of this temple, adorned with intricate sculptures and a mihrab.

Over time, the temple fell into disrepair until the intervention of the province's Cultural Heritage Organization, which oversaw significant renovations to restore its former glory. Today, this architectural gem stands as a testament to the rich cultural tapestry that once thrived in Bandar Abbas, inviting visitors to explore its history and marvel at its enduring beauty.

The Hindu Temple of Bandar Abbas stands as a living testament to the once vibrant trade ties between Indians and Iranians, a historical connection that has sadly faded from the collective consciousness today. Regrettably, the local inhabitants of Bandar Abbas remain largely unaware of the rich historical significance and architectural marvel that this temple embodies.

Constructed using a blend of limestone, clay mortar, coral stones, soil, and thick gypsum, the Hindu Temple of Bandar Abbas showcases a unique exterior design characterized by a cone-shaped structure adorned with white hues, lon-

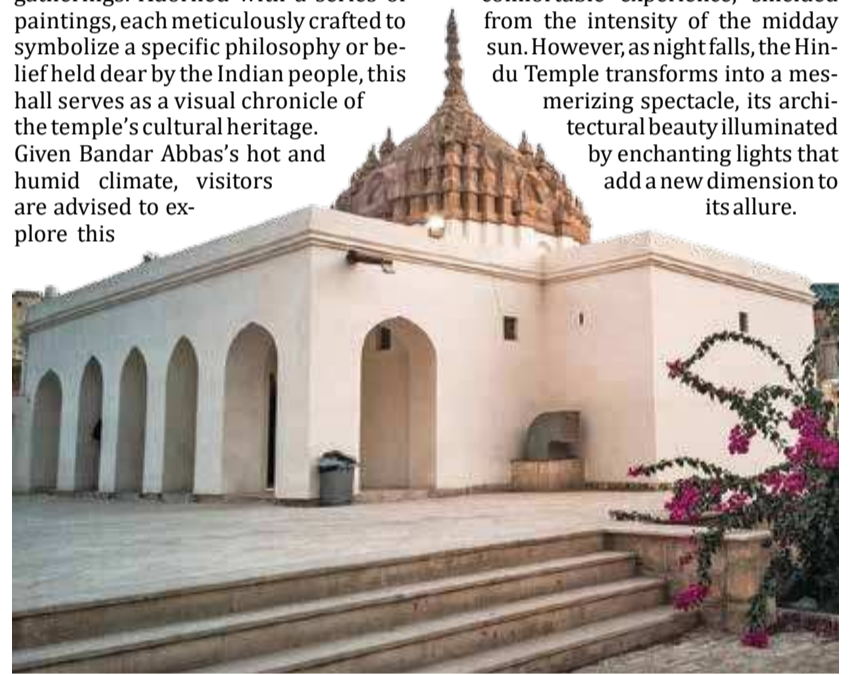
gitudinal grooves, and ridges.

The foundation of this temple comprises a central square chamber crowned by a dome. Within this chamber, the striking features of the mihrab and intricately designed blind frames catch the eye, while encircling corridors once frequented by pilgrims offer a glimpse into the temple's past. These corridors also house small rooms that once served as spaces for Brahmin school students. Adorning the walls of some rooms are religious paintings, among which a notable depiction of the Krishna, a major deity in Hinduism, playing the flute holds particular significance.

Within the confines of the western corridor of the Hindu Temple of Bandar Abbas, a fascinating journey awaits those who ascend the spiral staircases leading to the temple's roof. Here, the interplay of light and shadow is accentuated by the presence of four skylights strategically positioned on the polygonal space, casting a celestial glow upon the steps. Above, a grand dome adorned with intricate Hindu motifs and zigzag layers stands as a testament to the temple's architectural grandeur.

Beneath this resplendent dome, on the eastern side, lies a vast hall that once echoed with the voices of community gatherings. Adorned with a series of paintings, each meticulously crafted to symbolize a specific philosophy or belief held dear by the Indian people, this hall serves as a visual chronicle of the temple's cultural heritage. Given Bandar Abbas's hot and humid climate, visitors are advised to explore this

area during the cooler seasons to fully appreciate its splendor. Opting for early morning or sunset visits ensures a more comfortable experience, shielded from the intensity of the midday sun. However, as night falls, the Hindu Temple transforms into a mesmerizing spectacle, its architectural beauty illuminated by enchanting lights that add a new dimension to its allure.



● wikipedia.org

Susan Plain, a blend of nature and history in Khuzestan Province

Iranica Desk

Izeh, a city in Khuzestan Province, stands out as one of the most unique southern cities in Iran, boasting a wealth of natural and historical attractions that have elevated it to a prominent position in Khuzestan's tourism sector. The city is home to ancient artifacts and inscriptions from the Elamite and Achaemenid civilizations, adding to its historical allure.

Known as the capital of nature in Khuzestan Province, Izeh is renowned for its pristine natural landscapes that captivate visitors. The Susan Plain, located 35 kilometers northwest of Izeh, is a key tourist destination in Khuzestan Province. The picturesque and captivating Susan

Plain stands out as one of the most stunning natural areas in Izeh. The presence of the Karun River, springs, lush hills and mountains, diverse plant species such as pomegranate trees, oak trees, fig-trees, chamomile, and narcissus, along with historical attractions and charming villages, have transformed the plain into a tourism gem in Izeh.

The mighty Karun River, as it flows through the plain, has brought lushness, abundance, and fertility to the area, dividing it into two parts: the Western and Eastern sections, each boasting its own unique beauty and pristine nature. Terraced villages with traditional architecture dot the landscape, accessible only by boat across the river. The local villagers, predominantly warm-hearted Bakhtiari people,

are involved in animal husbandry and agriculture, cultivating crops like rice.

Boating: Embarking on a boat ride along the Karun River promises an unforgettable and enjoyable experience. Crossing the river is necessary to access some of the villages in the plain.

Fishing: Indulging in fishing by the river can be a relaxing pastime during your visit to the Susan Plain. Remember to bring along your fishing gear for a leisurely time by the water.

Hiking: The lush and enchanting nature of the Susan Plain, adorned with beautiful flowers, striking elevations, and the serene sounds of the Karun River, offers an ideal setting for leisurely walks amidst the tranquility and natural beauty.

Exploration: The Susan Plain is dotted

with villages inhabited by hospitable and friendly locals. Exploring these villages and immersing yourself in their customs and traditions will leave you with cherished memories.

Photography: The scenic landscapes and vistas of the plain present abundant opportunities for photography, allowing you to capture moments of joy and beauty. Don't forget to bring your camera to preserve these delightful scenes.

Susan Plain, in addition to its enchanting and eye-catching nature, also boasts a rich cultural and historical heritage. The presence of the Karun River and abundant springs has made communication and access easy, making this region a hub for human settlement throughout history. Historical struc-

tures such as ancient mounds, bridges, and tombstones in the shape of stone lions symbolizing the bravery and valor of the deceased, are among the other historical and tourist attractions of Susan Plain.

After exploring the lush Susan Plain, if you decide to stay overnight, you can immerse yourself in the beauty of the plain by setting up a tent and camping. The designated camping areas are situated away from the villagers' agricultural lands, ensuring a peaceful stay. Please note that there are no shops or stores in the villages of Susan Plain. Alternatively, staying in eco-lodges is another option for accommodation. In Susan Plain, there is an eco-lodge available, offering you the chance to spend the night in authentic architecture.



● safarzon.com



● gardeshgari724.com



● IRNA

Israel weighs response to Iran attack, with each choice a risk

By Ronen Bergman, Isabel Kershner, Julian E. Barnes and Russell Goldman
NYT reporters

PERSPECTIVE

Israeli leaders on Tuesday were debating how best to respond to Iran's unprecedented weekend air strike, officials said, weighing a set of options calibrated to achieve different strategic outcomes: deterring a similar attack in the future, placating their American allies, and avoiding all-out war.

Iran's attack on Israel, an immense barrage that included hundreds of ballistic missiles and exploding drones, changed the unspoken rules in the arch-rivals' long-running shadow war. In that conflict, major air strikes from one country's territory directly against the other had been avoided.

Given that change in precedent, the calculus by which Israel decides its next move has also changed, said the Israeli officials who requested anonymity to discuss Iran.



Israeli military spokesperson Rear Admiral Daniel Hagari (L) speaks to the media, displaying what they say is an Iranian ballistic missile that they retrieved from the Dead Sea after Iran launched drones and missiles towards Israel, at Julis military base, occupied Palestine, on April 16, 2024.

REUTERS

"We cannot stand still from this kind of aggression," Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari, the spokesman for Israel's military said on Tuesday. Iran, he added, would not get off "scot-free with this aggression". As Israel's war cabinet met to consider a military response, other countries were applying diplomatic pressure to both Israel and Iran in the hopes of de-escalating the conflict.

Almost all of the missiles and drones fired in Iran's attack early on Sunday were intercepted by Israel and its allies, including the United States and Britain.

The attack, Iran said, was a response to an Israeli air strike earlier this month, in which several armed forces commanders were killed in an attack in Syria. That attack on an Iranian embassy building in Damascus was different from previous targeted assassinations of individuals in the shadow war.

That strike destroyed a building that was part of an Iranian embassy complex, the sort of facility normally considered off-limits to attack. Israeli officials said the building was diplomatic in name only, and used as an Iranian military and intelligence base, making it a legitimate target.

Iran, which signaled that it saw the attack as an Israeli break in the norms of the shadow war, felt compelled to retaliate strongly, analysts said, in order to establish deterrence and maintain credibility with its backed groups and hard-line supporters. Israel does not want Iran to conclude that it can now attack Israeli territory in response to an Israeli strike on Iranian interests in a third country, some of the officials said, summarizing the internal Israeli debate. But, they added, Israel also does not want and cannot afford a major conflict with Iran while still fighting a war in Gaza and skirmishing with Iranian-backed groups along its borders.

The members of Israel's small but fractious war cabinet, the officials said, are considering options big enough to send a clear message to Iran that such attacks will not go unanswered, but not so big as to spark a major escalation.

The officials described the following options, and their downsides, from which the Israeli leaders are choosing a response:

Conduct an aggressive strike on an Iranian target, such as an Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corp base, in a country other than Iran like Syria. (The drawback is that it lacks the symmetry of responding to a direct attack on Israel with a direct attack on Iran.)

Strike a mostly symbolic target inside Iran. (Such a move would likely require US consultation and would risk angering the Americans who have advised against such a strike.)

Conduct a cyberattack on Iran's infrastructure. (Doing so could expose Israel's cyber capabilities prematurely and would not be an in-kind response to a major air strike.)

Accelerate small attacks inside Iran, including targeted assassinations, carried out by the Mossad. (Israel does not claim responsibility for such attacks, so they fail to match the public nature of Iran's strike.)

Other Israeli options include doing nothing — a measure aimed at leveraging the international and regional alliance that came together to help repel the Iranian attack into something more solid and permanent — or adopting a more diplomatic approach, including a boycott of Iran by the United Nations Security Council, other officials said.

At least two members of the cabinet argued at the time of the Iranian attack that Israel should respond immediately, two Israeli officials said, arguing that a rapid response in self-defense would

give such a counterstrike obvious legitimacy.

Yet after days of meetings, the cabinet has yet to decide on a response. On Tuesday, the five-member cabinet met with security officials for two hours of consultations, according to one official, and they were expected to convene again on Wednesday.

The war cabinet discussions are shrouded in secrecy and riven by old rivalries and distrust. Its members share histories of fierce competition as well as personal and political betrayal, which can sometimes color the details that leak out.

According to two officials' account, the main proponents of immediate retaliation over the weekend were Benny Gantz and Gadi Eisenkot, two former military chiefs and now centrist political allies who crossed parliamentary lines to join the cabinet in the interests of national unity after the October 7 Hamas-led attack on Israel.

But for reasons that remain unclear, no strike took place on Sunday following the Iranian attack. American officials have publicly and privately tried to persuade Israel that it does not need to retaliate for the Iranian strike. Mr. Netanyahu, they have argued, can "take the win" earned by a successful defense against the Iranian onslaught, which caused minimal damage and injured just one person, a young Bedouin girl.

But American officials have also said they understand that persuading Israel not to retaliate may be impossible. American officials have said they

understand Israeli officials believe they must respond to a direct strike from Iran on Israel in a way that the world can see. A covert attack by Israel against Iran, American officials said, would most likely not be enough to satisfy Mr. Netanyahu's coalition partners or the current Israeli cabinet.

Should that counterattack prompt another round of Iranian missiles and drones, US officials said, American warplanes and naval vessels would once again come to the defense of their ally against their chief adversary in the Middle East.

The United States is also backing diplomatic efforts to pressure and punish Iran, including by imposing tougher sanctions on the country in the coming days, Treasury Secretary Janet L. Yellen said at a news conference in Washington on Tuesday.

Ms. Yellen declined to elaborate on what form the penalties might take but suggested that the Biden administration was considering ways to further restrict Iranian oil exports. The United States is also looking at ways to cut off Iran's access to military components that it uses to build weapons such as the drones that it launched toward Israel over the weekend, according to a Treasury official, who declined to be named in order to discuss private deliberations.

"Treasury will not hesitate to work with our allies to use our sanctions authority to continue disrupting the Iranian regime's malign and destabilizing activity," Ms. Yellen said ahead of the spring meetings of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.

As Israel faces pressure from its allies to avert a broader conflict with Iran, several countries, including Russia, China, and Japan, have also been urging Iran to avoid further escalation.

And the European Union is considering expanding economic sanctions against Iran's weapons program to punish it for last weekend's attack on Israel and try to prevent any escalation of violence across the Middle East, the EU's top diplomat said on Tuesday.

"I'm not trying to exaggerate when I say that, in the Middle East, we are at the edge of a very deep precipice," Josep Borrell Fontelles, the EU foreign policy chief, said after a hastily called meeting of European diplomats to discuss the crisis.



Israel's Minister of Defense Yoav Gallant (2nd-R) attends the Israeli war cabinet meeting, held to discuss the attack launched by Iran, in Tel Aviv on April 14, 2024.

GETTY IMAGES

Netanyahu faces tough questions on Iran Israelis don't need any more forever wars



By Dahlia Scheindlin
Political analyst

OPINION

Israelis woke up on Sunday morning with a tentative collective sense of relief. For the first time ever, Iran had attacked Israel directly, sending a barrage of more than 300 drones and various missiles intended to rain down on Israel. Instead, Israel and a coalition of its allies intercepted 99% of the threats, according

to Israeli authorities — mostly before they reached Israeli territory. Those that arrived caused only limited damage.

Many Israelis felt the country had dodged a bullet. But members of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's cabinet want to fire back, which would add one more front to a war that is already dangerously overstretched. The ultra-nationalists in Netanyahu's cabinet insist that the only way to achieve fear and admiration in the Middle East is to "go berserk", in the words of Itamar Ben-Gvir, an extremist minister who holds the portfolio, ironically, of national security. He is joined by a posse of fanatical men running the cabinet who are beating war drums.

But how would that work out for Israel, founded as a safe haven for Jews (and all of its citizens, in a democratic view) to live safely and flourish? Escalation with Iran stands to suck all sides into a vortex of full-scale war. It would also be unprecedented, since the two countries have never been at war directly and openly. Such a war would drag in numerous other countries of the Middle East, and superpowers too. All-out war between the two best-armed actors in the Middle East might be someone's definition of national security, but as an Israeli citizen, it's not mine.

The dramatic Saturday night attack also distracted attention from the terrible escalation in the West Bank on Friday. A 14-year-old Israeli Jewish boy who set out from an outpost called Angels of Peace — though no such outpost is established to bring peace (it is in fact a political project to expand Israeli control of the West Bank) — was killed by Palestinians. Even before his fate was known, settlers rampaged through a nearby Palestinian town, with pogrom-like collective-punishment violence, killing one man and burning property. Yet, inconceivably, the incident feels like a new normal after similar events just over a year ago. The West Bank is in a disastrous situation, with Palestinians living under virtual lockdown for the past six months, the widespread loss of jobs since Israel cancelled their work permits and restricted crossings, and with rising settler violence backed by the army stoking fury.

In Gaza, the attention last week turned to Israel's withdrawal of a commando division from the south, but don't be fooled. The war is not over, and will not be over for as long as Israel has neither plans nor intentions to end it. The humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza won't truly end until then, and tens of thousands of Israelis displaced from the south still cannot go home. Netanyahu and his coalition partners from the Religious Zionist party and Jewish Power resist any plans that dare to consider a cease-fire, risking the lives of Israeli captives daily.

The northern border is not at all quiet; the 80,000 Israeli evacuees cannot return home there, either. Escalation with Iran bodes badly for the ongoing brinkmanship between Israel and Hezbollah. Members of Israel's cabinet have advocated escalation in the north since the early days of the war with Hamas; the majority of the Israeli public support this, and some say Iran's attack makes this more urgent. Anything less projects weakness, they say.

What's horribly ironic about this everywhere-is-war reality is how badly Netanyahu's policies have violated his own prized goals. Netanyahu boasted that he was Mr. Security, and would remove the Palestinian issue from national or international agendas, until 1,200 Israelis were slaughtered on one day in October. He basked in Israel's Middle East integration, which is now strained, or slowed at best.

Looking beyond Netanyahu, this is a failure of the dreams of Israel's founders and generations of Israelis. Whether one supports or abhors Zionism, consider its aims: a safe haven for the Jewish people (updated for a democratic country, this means a safe society for everyone). A place for the Jewish people — and everyone — to fulfil their potential, living in security. Forget the "light unto the nations" fairytale; in many ways, Zionism hoped that Jewish people would become equal to others, not better or worse. Thus, it was both a movement of exceptionalism and chosen-ness, in part aimed at becoming average.

Instead, Israel is careering towards pariah status. Israelis are cowering in shelters, forced to flee from their sovereign lands, squeezed into shrunken borders within their own country. Stalwart allies stuck by Israel during Saturday night's direct attack from Iran, but Israel's war in Gaza, following nearly six decades of occupation, has lost vast swaths of the public in the Middle East and in the West. In democratic countries where people vote freely, they will choose leaders in the future who are far less kind to Israel.

To be sure, Israel has real, sometimes implacable enemies, and not everything can be blamed on the occupation or even the Nakba (the destruction of Palestinian society from 1947 to 1949); Hamas and other armed Islamist factions are quite clear that they will not be satisfied until Israel is gone in any form. Iran hasn't extended its hand in peace lately, either.

But it is impossible to see how escalating forever wars on multiple fronts will diminish any of those threats. Too often, Israel resorts first and last to force; a popular quip holds that "whatever doesn't work through force will work through more force." This ignores the extraordinary and enduring success of peace — full, end-of-conflict peace, like with Jordan and Egypt.

On Saturday evening, Jordan stepped up to help intercept Iranian missiles, at considerable risk; now Israelis joke that they'll name their new babies "Jordan". They would do better to remember the hard power of peace, before endless wars destroy whatever is left.

The article first appeared on *The Guardian*.



People take cover in a stairway in Al-Quds (Jerusalem), as a red alert is sounded when drones and missiles are fired from Iran near Israel, on April 14, 2024.

FLASH90

Why Israel-Iran war is a lifeline for Netanyahu



By Mairav Zonszein
Senior Israel analyst at
International
Crisis Group

OPINION

Just days ago, much of the world's attention was on the impending famine in Gaza, and on Israel's failure to achieve its war objectives of toppling Hamas and returning captives more than six months into the war. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu

was under pressure from US President Joe Biden to allow in sufficient humanitarian aid and reach a cease-fire, as well as appeals from Israeli protesters to seal a captive deal and hold new elections.

But at night on Saturday, April 13, all that faded instantly as Iran launched hundreds of drones and missiles at Israel in much-anticipated retaliation for an Israeli strike that killed senior Iranian military officers in Damascus, Syria, on April 1. Israel's strike in Damascus and Iran's direct response have taken the two countries' long-standing conflict — often characterized by covert strikes and the use of backed groups — out of the shadows, sapping attention from Israel's failure in Gaza, expanding Israel's war effort to Iran, and forcing Netanyahu's critics abroad to get behind him — at least for now.



Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu visits an Air Force F-15 base on April 11, 2024.
KOBİ GIDEON/GPO

It is true that Israel has targeted Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps officers in Syria before, most recently when a missile strike killed Iranian official Sayyed Razi Mousavi in Damascus on Christmas Day last year. But the fact that the April 1 strike was on the Iranian consulate — considered by Iran and others to be a violation of international treaties — was a significant escalation.

There appears to be consensus among Israeli military experts, analysts, and some former security officials that this was a miscalculation by Israel; that it saw an operational opportunity and took it without considering all the repercussions. That is certainly plausible. Israel has become accustomed to attacking Iranian military officers without being confronted with direct retaliation from Tehran.

At the same time, the strike and Iranian retaliation have had a clear upside for Israel, reducing its growing diplomatic isolation — at least from Western capitals — and offering a lifeline to Netanyahu specifically.

Many world leaders issued statements condemning Iran and showing support for Israel. Israel was able to rely on Western and Arab support in what members of the war cabinet are saying creates the potential for a "strategic alliance" and "regional coalition" against Iran (though it's wishful thinking when it comes to Arab states, to put it mildly). Instead of the UN Security Council discussing a cease-fire in Gaza, it is debating condemnation of Iran.

This shift comes just days after the world watched as an Israeli strike on a World Central Kitchen convoy in Gaza killed seven aid workers, for which Israel has still given no good explanation. Prior to the attack from Iran, the United States'

unconditional support for Israel had looked like it might start to crack.

Open disapproval of Netanyahu was at its highest point since the start of the war, at home and abroad. Some families of the Israeli captives in Gaza have blamed Netanyahu for the failure to reach a deal, which has been echoed by statements made anonymously by members of the Israeli negotiating team, deeming Netanyahu an obstacle. Just a few weeks ago, US Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer was calling on Netanyahu to step down. Democratic senators had begun calling on Biden to condition aid to Israel. The New York Times editorial board just called for that to happen.

In sharp contrast, today, the world is waiting to see if — but more likely how — Israel will counterattack, and how far Biden will go to contain such a strike. Gaza is suddenly out of sight. Even as Gazans reported having the quietest night in six months during the Iranian attack, the urgent need to stop the famine, halt the bleeding in Gaza, return the captives, and figure out a way forward may be sidelined by the risk of an even larger and deadlier regional war.

This will be a real test for Biden's commitment to preventing regional escalation, since the United States has tied itself to Israel's defense in the region since October 7 and would likely be sucked into a wider escalation. Israel cannot effectively attack Iran without US coordination and support. Indeed, the Israel-Iran exchange would ideally accelerate the push for an end to the war in Gaza, given how clear it has become that its continuation has put the region on a knife edge.

The full article first appeared on *Foreign Policy*.

AFC Futsal Asian Cup:

Iran up to winning start against Afghanistan

Sports Desk

Iran began its quest for a record-extending 13th title at the AFC Futsal Asian Cup with a 3-1 victory over Afghanistan in Bangkok on Thursday.

Heading into the competition without injured talisman Hossein Tayyebi, Vahid Shamsaei's side dominated the early proceedings at the Hua Mark Indoor Stadium but had to wait until the closing stages of the first half to get off the mark, when a Salar Aghapour's delicate back-heel pass found Mahdi Karimi steaming through on the left to slam his strike past goalkeeper Mohammad Safari.

A second goal for the Asian powerhouse came seconds after the restart, with Saeid Ahmad-Abbasi dancing his way past a couple of Afghan players before unleashing his strike into the roof of the net.

The Iranian bagged his brace in no time, drilling home from a slight angle less than a minute later.

The Iranians took their feet off the gas afterwards but could still have extended their lead through Behrouz Azimi, whose effort hit the crossbar on 24 minutes.

Making an Asian Cup debut un-



der Iranian head coach Majid Mortezaei, Afghanistan found the courage to push forward for a maiden goal in the event and was rewarded when Mehran Gholami

fired home with 14 minutes left on the clock.

Shamsaei's side sat on the two-goal until the end and is on top of the Group D table on goal difference,

with Kuwait in second after a 2-1 win against Bahrain later in the day. "The first game is always a tough one so I'm happy it's out of the way and I was pleased with the

result against Afghanistan," said Shamsaei, whose team will face Bahrain today.

"We will do our best against Bahrain because we are aiming to go



Saeid Ahmad-Abbasi fires home Iran's second goal in a 3-1 victory over Afghanistan in the AFC Futsal Asian Cup in Bangkok, Thailand, on April 18, 2024. ● CHALINEE THIRASUPA/AFP

all the way and win this championship. We have analyzed them in detail and prepared our strategy so that we can bring all our power against them," added the Iranian coach, a three-time Asian Player of the Year, who won the competition as a player on eight occasions but had to settle for a runner-up finish behind Japan on his managerial debut on Iran's bench in 2022.

Japan, meanwhile, kicked off its title defense with a shock 3-2 defeat against Kyrgyzstan in the Bangkok Arena on Thursday.

Samat Dzhanat Uulu, Maksat Alimov and Kairat Kubanychov found the back of the net before Yusei Arai and Yuta Tsutsumi pulled two back for the champion but the Central Asian side staved off a late Japan fightback to take the maximum points in Group C. Elsewhere in the group, first-half goals from Idris Yorov and Fayzali Sardorov gave Tajikistan a 2-0 victory over South Korea.

Nagelsmann to remain Germany coach till 2026



● MATTHIAS SCHRADER/AP

AFP - German national team coach Julian Nagelsmann has signed a contract extension to remain in post until at least the 2026 World Cup, the German Football Association (DFB) said Friday.

"This is a decision from the heart. It is a great honour to coach the national team," Nagelsmann said in a statement. The announcement comes just a few weeks before Germany is set to host the 2024 European championships in June and July. Nagelsmann said he had been "moved by the enthusiasm of the fans" after victories in the recent friendlies against France and the Netherlands.

"Together, we now want to have a successful home Euros," Nagelsmann said.

The DFB was already "absolutely convinced" of the need to keep Nagelsmann beyond this year's tournament, national team director Rudi Voeller said in the statement.

The manager's decision to extend his stay to the 2026 World Cup in North America sent a "strong signal," DFB president Bernd Neundorff said in the statement.

The announcement puts to bed speculation that Nagelsmann would return to club football after Euro 2024. The 36-year-old coach was "on

the wish list" for a lot of top clubs in Europe, Neundorff said. Nagelsmann was strongly linked with a return to Bayern Munich, who parted ways with the native Bavarian last year.

The perennial winners have, however, struggled since dumping Nagelsmann, surrendering their Bundesliga crown to Bayer Leverkusen this season and ending a streak of 11-straight titles.

Despite remaining in the hunt for the Champions League, Bayern's poor league form was enough to cost Nagelsmann's replacement Thomas Tuchel his job.

Nagelsmann, who initially only signed a contract with the national team through to the end of this summer's tournament, will not however be the one to replace Tuchel.

Germany will be looking to compete at Euro 2024 after being dumped out of the 2022 World Cup in Qatar at the group stage.

A miserable run of results following the tournament was enough for DFB management to decide they could not continue with coach Hansi Flick.

Germany's fortunes have since picked up with Nagelsmann at the helm, and the team will head into the championships in good form.

Iran's Aqamirzaei bags Asian canoe sprint bronze

Sports Desk

Iran's Ali Aqamirzaei grabbed a bronze medal at the Asian Canoe Sprint Championships in Tokyo, Japan.

Representing the country in the men's K-1 200m final, Aqamirzaei clocked 39.53 seconds to finish third to gold-winning South Korean Cho Gwang-hee and Denis Onufriev of Uzbekistan.

Elsewhere, Iranian girl Elnaz Shafieian booked her place in today's K-1 500m final showpiece, thanks to a top-spot finish in the semifinals with 2:13.259 minutes.

With this year's championships serving as the qualifiers for the Paris Olympics in the summer, a top-two finish in the final will see Shafieian punch the ticket for the French capital.

Aqamirzaei will also begin his quest for an Olympic berth in the K-1 1000m contest today, with Mohammad-Nabi Rezaei chasing a place in Paris in the men's C-1 1000m event.

The Iranian duo of Adel Mojallali and Kia Eskandari failed to qualify for the Olympics after standing fifth in the men's C-2 500m final.



● JAMARAN.NEWS

James to headline another US 'Dream Team' in Paris



● MIKE STOBE/AFP

REUTERS - The NBA's all-time leading scorer LeBron James and reigning most valuable

player Joel Embiid headline an all-star lineup named to the United States men's basketball

team for the Paris Olympics, USA Basketball announced.

James, who has won two Olympic golds and a bronze but sat out the last two Games, will be joined by Los Angeles Lakers team mate Anthony Davis, Phoenix Suns three-time Olympic champion Kevin Durant and Golden State Warriors' Stephen Curry.

"We know we have a collection of incredible talent for this summer. And a lot of guys are experienced," USA Basketball men's national team managing director Grant Hill told reporters.

"They know very well just how difficult this is. We can't just show up, you know, we have to come. We have to play. We have to compete."

Also named to the squad were Bam Adebayo (Miami Heat), Devin Booker (Phoenix Suns), Anthony Edwards (Minnesota Timberwolves), Tyrese Haliburton (Indiana Pacers), Jrue Holiday (Boston Celtics),

Kawhi Leonard (L.A. Clippers) and Jayson Tatum (Boston Celtics).

All 12 members of the Paris "Dream Team" have been NBA All-Stars and it includes four NBA MVPs and six NBA champions.

Hill said that an "overwhelming" number of players wanted to be a part of the team and that James committed to competing in Paris in a passing conversation not long after breaking the all-time scoring record.

"I just went up to him and said, 'Hey, man, I need to you in Paris'. And he was like, 'I'm in'," said Hill.

"He deserves - because of all that he's done and what he's still doing - to be on this roster. And so we're thrilled."

The U.S. will play in Group C with Serbia, South Sudan and the winner of a qualifying tournament in Puerto Rico on Aug. 3.

The Paris Olympics are scheduled for July 26 to Aug. 11.

Army commander: Air defenses fire at 'suspicious objects' over Iran's airspace



TASNIM

International Desk

Iranian army chief commander said the country's air defense systems targeted several "suspicious flying objects" in the central city of Isfahan amid conflicting reports of Israel's attack.

Comments by Major General Abdolrahim Mousavi came after the sound of explosions were heard near the Isfahan Province and the northwestern city of Tabriz in the East Azarbaijan Province about 4 a.m. local time.

Mousavi said the explosions in Isfahan were due to anti-aircraft defense systems shooting down a suspicious object in the sky and that no damage was caused.

Officials said important facilities in the Isfahan Province, especially nucle-

ar facilities, are completely safe and no incidents have been reported.

The Iran Airports and Air Navigation Company said normal operations have resumed for flights at Iranian airports including Imam Khomeini International Airport and Mehrabad International Airport in Tehran after temporary delays.

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) announced in a Friday post on X that Iran's nuclear facilities were safe.

Ahmad Haqatab, who heads the nuclear protection and security corps, said on Thursday, "If the fake Zionist regime intends to resort to the threat of attacking our nuclear facilities as a means to put pressure on Iran, reviewing the current doctrine and nuclear policies of

the Islamic Republic and distancing from past considerations is possible and conceivable," Haqatab was quoted as saying IRNA.

Israel had said for days it was planning to retaliate against Iran for Saturday's missile and drone strikes, the first direct attack on Israel by Iran in decades, which was carried out in response to the regime's April 1 attack on Iran's consulate in Syria's capital, Damascus.

Israel's attack on Iran's consulate claimed the lives of seven members of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps, including two generals.

Israel said nothing about the Friday's incident. However, Israel's far-right national security minister, Itamar Ben Gvir, hinted that Israel carried out a strike against Iran. He

posted a single word on X after Friday's strikes: "Feeble".

Calls for calm

World leaders appealed for calm Friday after reported Israeli retaliation against Iran.

"In light of reports of strikes on April 19th, we urge all parties to work to prevent further escalation," foreign ministers of the Group of Seven industrialized democracies said in a joint statement at the end of a three-day meeting in Italy.

"It is absolutely necessary that the region remains stable and that all sides restrain from further action," European Commission head Ursula von der Leyen said.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on Friday called for an end to "the

dangerous cycle of retaliation", his spokesman said. On Thursday, Guterres told the Security Council that spiraling tensions could devolve into a "full-scale regional conflict".

China, Iran's largest trade partner, said Friday it will "continue to play a constructive role to de-escalate" Middle East tensions. Russia said it made clear to Israel that Iran, Moscow's ally, "does not want escalation".

Germany also pleaded for restraint. "De-escalation must be the advice of the hour," said government spokesman Steffen Hebestreit, adding: "We must prevent a conflagration at all costs, and this appeal goes to all sides".

UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak said he wants to see "calm heads prevail" in the

Middle East.

"Significant escalation is not in anyone's interest," he said during questions after delivering an unrelated speech, adding: "What we want to see is calm heads prevail across the region."

Oman "condemns the Israeli attack this morning on Isfahan... it also condemns and denounces Israel's repeated military attacks in the region", said a foreign ministry statement released on X, formerly Twitter.

Iran had warned Israel before Friday's strike that Tehran would deliver a severe response to any attack on its territory.

Iran told the United Nations Security Council on Thursday that Israel "must be compelled to stop any further military adventurism against our interests".

NEWS IN BRIEF

Iran underlines necessity of retaliation against Israel



International Desk

Iranian foreign minister underlined the necessity of Iran's retaliatory attack on April 14 against Israel during a meeting with his Jordanian counterpart in New York on Thursday.

Hossein Amir-Abdollahian told the Jordanian Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi that Iran's attack against Israel was carried out within the framework of legitimate defense after a regime's deadly attack on Iran's diplomatic facilities in the Syrian capital on April 1. Underlining that Iran's military action against Israel was "very precise and calculated," the Iranian foreign minister said, "Iran's military response to Israel's attack was only a limited and minimal operation, and in case of any further adventurism by the Israeli regime, Iran's response will be decisive, immediate and maximum."

The meeting came after Jordan intercepted Iranian drones and missiles aimed at Israel and summoned Iranian ambassador after the attack.

"The army will respond to anything that will jeopardize the security and safety of the kingdom and the sanctity of its airspace and territory in the face of any danger from any party with all the available means," Jordan's Prime Minister Bisher Khasawneh said.

US vetoes Palestinian request for full UN membership

Palestinian president condemns 'unjustified' US move

The US vetoed a Palestinian request to the United Nations security council for full UN membership, blocking the world body's recognition of a Palestinian state. The vote in the 15-member security council was 12 in favor, the US opposed and two abstentions, the

UK and Switzerland, The Guardian reported.

Before the vote, diplomats said the US mission had been trying to convince one or two other council members to abstain, to mitigate Washington's isolation on the issue, but American officials said they were re-

signed to having to wield the US veto once more in support of Israel.

Washington's position is that the emergence of a Palestinian state had to be the outcome of negotiations on all aspects of a Middle East peace settlement.

"The United States con-

tinues to strongly support a two-state solution. This vote does not reflect opposition to Palestinian statehood, but instead is an acknowledgment that it will only come from direct negotiations between the parties," deputy US ambassador to the UN, Robert Wood, told the council.

The decision to veto the request drew rebukes from across the region. The Palestinian president condemned the US veto as "unfair, unethical and unjustified", while the Egyptian Foreign Ministry said it regretted the inability of the security council to enable full Palestinian membership.

The Palestinian envoy to the United Nations, Riyad Mansour, had described the bid for full-member status as an effort "to take our rightful place among the community of nations." After the vote, Mansour delivered a passionate address asserting the Palestinian people's right to self-determination.

"Our right to self-determi-



AFP

nation is a natural right – a historical right – to live in our homeland Palestine as an independent state that is free and that is sovereign," he said.

The Hamas resistance group said in a statement that it condemns "in the strongest terms the American position biased towards the occupation", as it called on the international community "to exert pressure to go beyond the American will and support the struggle of our Palestinian people and their legitimate right to self-determination". Explaining the UK abstention, the British envoy to

the UN, Barbara Woodward, said: "We believe that such recognition of Palestinian statehood should not come at the start of a new process, but it doesn't have to be at the very end of the process."

Israel's Foreign Minister Eli Cohen said he commended the US for casting the veto. Palestinians currently have non-member observer status, granted by the UN General Assembly in 2012. An application to become a full member with voting rights would have to be approved by the Security Council and two-thirds of the general assembly.

French police detain intruder at Iranian consulate

French authorities Friday detained a man suspected of entering the Iranian consulate in Paris and claiming to be carrying explosives, police and prosecutors said. No explosives or arms were found on the man or the premises after he surrendered to police after the incident, according to AFP.

Police arrested the suspect, born in 1963 in Iran, when he exited of his own accord after appearing to have "threatened violent action" inside, the Paris prosecutor's office said.

But "no explosive materials have been observed at this stage," either on him, in his car or in the building, it said. French broadcaster BFM TV, citing a source close to the investigation, reported that the same man was due to appear in court on Monday over a fire at the consulate in September 2023.

Mohammad Ali Rajabi
Cartoonist





Iran to celebrate Saadi Day

Iranians will celebrate Saadi Day on April 20, commemorating the completion anniversary of the renowned Persian literary work 'Gulistan' or 'The Rose Garden.' Festivities include cultural gatherings and artistic performances across the country, IRNA wrote. The Iranian Artists Forum

(IAF) hosted a special session at the Shahnaz Hall on Friday, featuring speeches and musical performances inspired by the works of Saadi, a prominent figure in classical Persian poetry and literature. Notable figures such as Abdolmehdi Rezvani, Abdolmehdi Mostakin, Ali Khodai, and Sha-

hou Andalibi participated in the event. Radio Saba is also joining the celebration with programs dedicated to Saadi. The broadcast will air music centered around Saadi's poems on Saturday. This musical program, produced by Ensieh Shamsollahi, is part of the radio's daily lineup.

In addition, the fourth calligraphy exhibition opened on April 18, in honor of Saadi's cultural and artistic legacy. The event, attended by guests including Yadollah Kaboli Khansari, Hamidreza Qanei, Kourosh Kamali Sarvestani, and Mohammadreza Khalesi, marks a significant tribute to the Persian poet and scholar. Saadi, the renowned Persian poet, is considered one of the greatest literary figures in Iranian history. Born in Shiraz, Iran in the 13th century, Saadi's works have stood the test of time and continue to inspire readers around the world.

Colombian festival to pay tribute to Iran's Farhadi



Arts & Culture Desk

The 63rd edition of the Cartagena International Film Festival in Colombia will feature a special tribute to Iranian filmmaker Asghar Farhadi. The festival, scheduled from April 16 to 21 in Cartagena, Colombia, will showcase two of Farhadi's acclaimed films, 'About Elly' and 'A Separation,' as part of the tribute. Farhadi will be present at the event as a special guest, ISNA wrote. The Colombian festival will screen a total of 170 films, including 26 world premieres. The festival has previously hosted notable figures from the entertainment industry, such as Michael Douglas, Darren Aronofsky, Alejandro González Iñárritu, Susan Sarandon, Tilda Swinton, and

Gaspar Noé, who have also been honored with the festival's "Masters" award. Recently, the 52nd Belgrade International Film Festival has given its Belgrade Victor Award for Outstanding Contribution to Film Art to Farhadi. His debut as a director was with 'Dancing in the Dust' (2002). He achieved international recognition with 'A Separation' (2011), winning numerous awards, including the Academy Award. He filmed 'The Past' (2013) in France, winning awards such as Best Actress at Cannes for Bérénice Bejo. He returned to Iran to direct 'The Salesman' (2016). Farhadi is known for his ability to explore complex themes and his mastery of silence and pauses in cinematic narrative.

Iranian Film Week to be held in Sarajevo

Arts & Culture Desk

A week-long showcase of Iranian films, including animations for children and youths, photography exhibitions, and handicrafts, is set to kick off in Sarajevo, the capital of Bosnia and Herzegovina, from April 23 to 26. The cultural event will feature screenings of Iranian films such as 'Sara and Ayda,' 'Henas,' 'Romanticism

of Emad & Tooba,' and 'The Painting Pool,' ILNA wrote. According to the cultural relationship of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Sarajevo, this event is organized in collaboration with the Islamic Culture and Relations Organization (ICRO), the Cultural Center Istočno Novo Sarajevo, the Soureh Cinema Organization, Sky Frame Studio, Farabi Cinema Foundation, and Tehran Picture Agency.

Iran's women unemployment rate drops by 2%: Official

Social Desk

Iran saw 2% decrease in the country's women unemployment rate, thanks to a growing trend in home-based businesses in the last Persian year ending March 19, Ensieh Khazali, the Vice President for Women and Family Affairs, announced. During a visit to Semnan Province and while attending an exhibition showcasing the achievements of women in the historic Tadayyon House of Semnan, Khazali highlighted the government's efforts in

promoting home-based employment for women, ISNA wrote. She stated that the significant increase in cottage industries in the past year has been effective in reducing the unemployment rate. Khazali further noted that 80% of the facilities provided last year were allocated to home businesses. Additionally, agreements have been made with the Ministry of Cooperatives, Labour, and Social Welfare to allocate 10% of facilities granted to provinces to female breadwinners.

Iranian books on display at Astana fair



Iran's book and publishing industry is taking part at the 7th Astana Eurasian Book Fair 2024 with an extensive five-day program, at the Congress Center in Astana from April 17 to April 21. "If you want to compare this year's fair to last year's, it's a lot different because this year we have two artists, a lot of books, and something to show," said Ali Akbar Talebi Matin, Iran's Cultural Attaché in Kazakhstan, Astana Times wrote. At the Iran stand, attendees can learn calligraphy and the Persian alphabet and even participate in a quiz with prizes. According to Ali Akbar Talebi Matin, Iran and Kazakhstan have many similarities. For example, there are more than 3,000 words that are similar in the Kazakh and Persian languages. The event brought together approximately 70 companies from countries such as China, Iran, Kazakhstan, Russia, Spain, Uzbekistan, and Türkiye, representing publishing, book trading, scientific, educational, and

printing industries. The main goal of the fair is to popularize reading, promote book culture, and showcase the best range of book products from leading publishers. The event served as a platform for studying the experience of the global publishing and printing industry and showcasing achievements in the publishing sphere. The fair's five-day program includes presentations of literature novelties, autograph sessions with renowned writers, roundtable discussions on current publishing issues and workshops for both children and adults. Since the fair has become an annual event, many publishing houses and countries are participating not for the first time. Among other local publishing houses, Almaty Kitap annually delights its readers with literature novelties at the exhibition. Last year, they presented "Welcome, Nauryz [Nowruz]," which was published in Kazakh, English, and Russian.

"This year, we have updated the edition of Mukhtar Auezov's 'Kokserek.' Previously, there were no illustrations and pictures. Therefore, we will present this book to our readers for the first time in the school library series," said Gulnur Kudaiberger, vice president of Almaty Kitap in Astana. The Astana Eurasian Book Fair 2024 offers a chance to learn new languages and cultures for those interested. At the stand of Spain, people can participate in Spanish language lectures and quizzes and buy textbooks. "Spain has been participating in the Eurasian Book Fair for a couple of years now. What the Spanish embassy wants to communicate here is the importance of learning new languages. Kazakhstan and Spain have not been historically related. That is why it's important to promote understanding between the cultures in this globalized area," said Gadea Albaladejo, political attaché from the Spanish Embassy in Astana.

Poignant shot from Gaza wins World Press Photo of the Year 2024

Reuters photographer Mohammed Salem won this year's prestigious World Press Photo of the Year award with a depiction of loss in Gaza. The heartrending photo depicts a Palestinian woman cradling the body of her young niece, Euro News reported. The photograph, taken on 17 October 2023 at Nasser hospital in Khan Younis in southern Gaza, shows 36-year-old Inas Abu Maamar holding five-year-old Saly, who was killed along with her mother and sister when an Israeli missile struck their home. Salem, 39, who is Palestinian, described this photo filed on 2 November last year, as a "powerful and sad moment that sums up the broader sense of what was happening in the Gaza Strip." "I felt the picture sums up the broader sense of what was

happening in the Gaza Strip," Salem said when the image was first published in November. "People were confused, running from one place to another, anxious to know the fate of their loved ones, and this woman caught my eye as she was holding the body of the little girl and refused to let go." The jury said Salem's 2024 winning image was "composed with care and respect, offering at once a metaphorical and literal glimpse into unimaginable loss." This is not the first time Salem has been recognized for his work on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; he received a World Press Photo award more than a decade ago for another depiction of the human toll of conflict in the Gaza strip.

