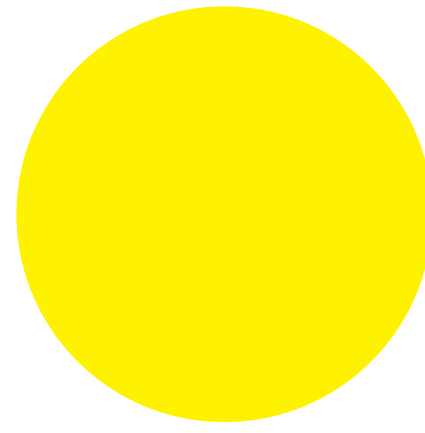


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Iran, Oman urge cementing social, cultural ties



During a meeting between Ensieh Khazali, the Vice President for Women and Family Affairs, and Oman's Minister of Social Development, Laila Ahmed Al Najjar, both parties stressed the importance of strengthening bilateral relations, particularly regarding women and family affairs.

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Iran oil output up 500k bpd in 2023: IMF



The new statistics released by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) show that Iran's oil production in 2023 saw an increase of 500,000 barrels per day (bpd) in comparison to the previous year, reaching 3.1 million bpd.

According to the new data, the oil sector of Iran's economy recorded a noteworthy growth of 15% in 2023. Over the 2.5 years of President Ebrahim Raisi's tenure, this sector experienced a double-digit growth; therefore, the oil sector saw 10.1%, 10%, and 15% growth respectively in 2021, 2022 and 2023, IRNA reported.

It is predicted that Iran's oil production will increase by another 100,000 bpd, reaching 3.2 million bpd in 2024.

Iran's gas production also increased from the equivalent of 4.8 million barrels of oil per day in 2022 to the equivalent of 5.1 million bpd in 2023. According to IMF, the figure is expected to rise by 300,000 bpd to reach the equivalent of 5.4 million bpd in 2024.

Iran exported 1.4 million barrels of oil per day in 2023, indicating an increase of 500,000 barrels compared to its oil export data in the previous year, and it is expected that in the current year, an additional 100,000 barrels would be added to Iran's oil exports, reaching 1.5 million bpd.

Iran exported gas in 2023 the equivalent of 300,000 barrels of oil per day and it is expected that the figure will remain the same in 2024.

Earlier this month, The National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) said the country has discovered shale oil deposits in 10 different locations. The director of exploration at the NIOC, Mehdi Fakour, announced that the company's specially designed model will enable the extraction of oil from these giant resources in Iran's provinces.

Fakour stated that in the previous Iranian calendar year (which ended March 19, 2024), more than 2.5 billion barrels of oil were added to Iran's crude oil and natural gas reserves with new exploration activities.

He added that the new discoveries will be announced by the oil minister soon. Domestic companies possess significant potential for extracting oil shale resources, Fakour emphasized.

Furthermore, he announced the development of a unique and localized model in the country, which has yet to be adopted elsewhere globally.

Tehran, Hanoi can raise bilateral trade to \$3b: MP



By Sadeq Dehqan & Reza Abesh Ahmadlou
Staff writers

Referring to the growing trend of trade and economic exchanges between the two countries, The head of the Iran-Vietnam Parliamentary Friendship Group said achieving the \$3 billion target for bilateral trade between the two countries in a medium-term period (five-six years) is possible.

"Talking to Iran Daily, Jalil Rahimi Jahanabadi explained about the economic exchanges between the two countries in recent years saying that the volume of exchanges had an up-

ward trend before the epidemic of the corona virus in the world, as the figure had reached about \$600 million, but the pandemic of COVID-19 reduced the volume of exchanges, so that this figure reached \$200 million post-Corona.

"By removing the obstacles related to the commercial and economic cooperation of the two countries and banking issues, it is possible to realize the common economic and commercial prospects and goals," the MP noted. Cooperation with Vietnam is important in order to develop the economic development that this country has experienced in the past few years, he said adding that for several years, Vietnam

has had an economic growth of over 7.5%, which is considered a good economic growth rate in the world.

"Also, this country has a successful performance in the commercial field at the world level as the volume of trade of the country is \$750 billion per year. The country enjoys a significant number of population which can be a good market for export products."

Jahanabadi described the current situation of political relations between Iran and Vietnam well adding that the East Asian country has a very positive political position in international



issues due to the experience that it had during the American occupation.

"Several visits have been made by officials of the two countries including the visits of the speakers of the two countries and many economic delegations from Iran and Vietnam to the two countries."

According to him, the signing of several memorandums of understanding on cooperation in various fields between Iran and Vietnam shows that there are friendly relations between the two sides.

As the head of Iran-Vietnam Parliamentary Friendship Group, I

traveled from Iran to Vietnam heading an economic delegation, the lawmaker said adding that during the visits the removal of commercial and banking obstacles caused by sanctions against Iran was discussed to establish financial mechanisms for boosting economic sectors of the two countries.

Regarding the fields of joint cooperation between the two countries, he explained: In the field of dry fruits and other agricultural products, medical goods, handicrafts and tourism cooperation, exchange of scholars, training of manpower and in the field of electronics, the two countries can extend their cooperations.

Exports of agro products top \$6.2b: Official

Iran's export of agricultural products in the previous Iranian calendar year (ended March 19, 2024) topped \$6.2 billion given an increase in demand for Iranian products at foreign target markets, an official said.

The deputy director for planning and economic affairs at Iran's Ministry of Agriculture said effective planning led to the export of more than \$2 billion of agricultural products from the country last year, reported IRNA.

According to the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA), the country's export of agricultural products topped \$6.2 billion from March 21, 2023,

to March 19, 2024, showing a \$1 billion rise compared to a year earlier, Hamed Najafi Alamdarlou added.

The value of imports in the agricultural sector fell by \$1 billion in the previous Iranian calendar year compared to a year before, he said, adding that the trade balance of the agricultural sector has improved by \$2 billion.

Earlier, the spokesman for Iran's House of Industry, Mine and Trade said the export of food and agricultural products from the country in the previous Iranian calendar year registered a 20 percent growth in value compared to a year before.



TPO to dispatch 11 commercial attachés to Africa

The head of the Trade Promotion Organization of Iran (TPO) said the organization will send 11 more commercial attachés to Africa to strengthen trade and economic ties with African states. Mehdi Zeyghami pointed to the necessity of launching a regular flight line, especially to West and South Africa and noted that his organization is determined to expand trade and economic cooperation with African countries, reported Tasnim News Agency.

He put the current number of the Iranian commercial attachés in Africa at three.

Speaking at the 2nd International Iran-Africa Conference, the deputy minister of industry pointed out that achievements obtained at the first summit of Iran and West African states last year led to good agreements between the two sides on international trade. Iran is hosting the representatives of more than 30 African states in the second edition of the Inter-



national Iran-Africa Summit, he said, adding that the TPOI has taken effective steps for holding this summit in cooperation and interaction with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, ambassadors of the African countries to Iran and also representatives of Iran in African countries. Getting familiar with the export potentials of the Islamic Republic of Iran has been put on the agenda of the summit, Zeyghami emphasized.

Iran's chambers of commerce and economic activists will exchange

their views with their foreign counterparts at the event, he continued. The TPOI chief stressed the need to increase Iran's economic ties with African states and noted that the economy of the country and many African countries are complementary. Zeyghami expressed hope that the 2nd International Iran-Africa Summit and the 6th Export Potentials Exhibition of the Islamic Republic of Iran will boost trade and economic ties between Iran and African countries significantly.

Power exchange capacity to rise to 5,000MW

The chief executive of Iran's Power Generation, Distribution and Transmission Company (known as TAVANIR) said the country's capacity for electricity exchange with neighboring countries will increase to 5,000 megawatts.

Iran does not have a common border with Europe but it is possible to exchange electricity with Europe up to 600 megawatts through an advanced back-to-back substation, Mostafa Rajabi Mashhadi stated, reported Tasnim News Agency.

He revealed the possibility of exporting Iran's electricity to Europe through Turkey in cooperation with the private sector companies active in regional electricity markets.

In this respect, an agreement has been inked between Iran's TAVANIR and the Turkish side, based on which Iran will export electricity to Turkey and then export it to the European countries through Turkey, he stated.

Enduring legacy of hasir-bafi in Iranian culture

In the vibrant tapestry of Iranian culture, few crafts have endured the test of time quite like hasir-bafi the exquisite art of mat weaving. This ancient tradition, which has been passed down from generation to generation, has not only served as a practical solution for flooring and seating but has also become a revered form of artistic expression. From the humble homes of rural villages to the lavish palaces of Persian monarchs, hasir-bafi has woven itself into the very fabric of Iranian society, embodying the country's rich heritage, cultural diversity, and unwavering spirit of craftsmanship.

Origins

The roots of *hasir-bafi* can be traced back to the ancient civilizations that once flourished on the Iranian plateau. Archaeological evidence suggests that mat-weaving was a common practice among the inhabitants of this region, who utilized locally available materials such as reeds, rushes, and grasses to create functional yet beautiful woven mats, amazingiran.media wrote.

A tradition intertwined with nature

Hasir-bafi is a testament to the deep connection between Iranian culture and the natural environment. The raw materials used in this craft are sourced from the abundant wetlands, marshes, and riverbanks that dot the Iranian landscape. Each region developed its unique style and techniques, influenced by the local flora, climate, and the ingenuity of its artisans.

The creation of a hasir, or woven mat, is a labor-intensive process that requires patience, skill, and a profound understanding of the materials being used. The art form can be divided into three main stages: gathering and preparing the raw materials, weaving the mat, and finishing touches.

Gathering and preparing the raw materials

The first step in the hasir-bafi process involves carefully harvesting the reeds, rushes, or grasses from their natural habitats. These materials are then carefully dried and sorted, ensuring that only the highest quality fibers are used for weaving. In some regions, the fibers may be dyed using natural pigments derived from plants, minerals, or even insect-based dyes, resulting in a stunning array of colors.

Intricate art of weaving

Once the raw materials are prepared, the weaving process begins. Skilled artisans, often working in groups or as part of family traditions, meticulously intertwine the fibers using a variety of techniques, including coiling, plaiting, and twining. Each region has developed its unique weaving patterns and designs, ranging from simple geometric shapes to intricate floral motifs and calligraphic elements.

Finishing touches

The final stage of hasir-bafi involves adding the finishing touches to the woven mat. This may include trimming the edges, embellishing the surface with additional decorative elements, or applying a protective coating to enhance

the mat's durability and luster.

Cultural significance

Beyond its practical applications, hasir-bafi holds a profound cultural significance in Iranian society. It is a testament to the country's rich artistic heritage and a symbol of the enduring spirit of creativity and resilience that has characterized Iranian culture for centuries.

A connection to the past

In many Iranian households, hasir mats are cherished not only for their beauty and functionality but also for their connection to the past. These woven mats have become heirlooms, passed down through generations, each one carrying the stories and traditions of those who crafted them. They serve as a tangible link to ancestral roots and a reminder of the enduring legacy of Iranian craftsmanship.

Diversity and regionalism

Iran is a culturally diverse nation, with each region boasting its unique traditions and artistic expressions. Hasir-bafi is a prime example of this diversity, as each area has developed its distinct weaving styles, patterns, and techniques, reflecting the local culture, environment, and artistic sensibilities. This regional variation has enriched the art form, creating a tapestry of diversity that celebrates the country's cultural wealth.

Hasir-bafi in the modern world

While deeply rooted in tradition, hasir-bafi has also adapted to the modern world, embracing contemporary design trends and new materials while staying true to its essence. In recent years, there has been a resurgence of interest in this art form, driven by a growing appreciation for sustainable and eco-friendly products, as well as a desire to preserve cultural heritage.

Innovation and sustainability

Contemporary hasir-bafi artisans have embraced innovation and sustainability, experimenting with new materials and techniques while maintaining the core principles of the craft. Some have incorporated recycled or upcycled materials into their designs, while others have explored the use of natural dyes and eco-friendly finishes, ensuring that their creations are not only beautiful but also environmentally responsible.

Global recognition and preservation efforts

As the world becomes increasingly interconnected, the demand



● bazaremina.ir

for authentic and culturally significant art forms has grown. Hasir-bafi has garnered international recognition, with Iranian mats being showcased in museums, galleries, and exhibitions around the globe. This global exposure has not only celebrated the artistry and cultural significance of hasir-bafi but has also inspired efforts to preserve and promote this ancient craft.

Future of hasir-bafi

As the world continues to evolve, the art of hasir-bafi remains a treasured legacy, a testament to the enduring creativity and resilience of Iranian culture. While the techniques and materials may adapt to modern times, the essence of this ancient craft remains unchanged, a profound connection to the past that continues to inspire and captivate generations to come.

In the skilled hands of Iranian artisans, hasir-bafi will continue to flourish, its intricate patterns and vibrant colors adorning homes, public spaces, and artistic installations, reminding us of the beauty and cultural significance of this timeless art form. Each woven mat is a tapestry of stories, traditions, and the enduring spirit of Iranian craftsmanship, woven together by the skilled hands of those who continue to keep this ancient art alive.

As we celebrate the enduring legacy of hasir-bafi, we are reminded that art has the power to transcend boundaries, connect cultures, and serve as a living testament to the rich tapestry of human creativity and ingenuity. Through the preservation and appreciation of this ancient craft, we not only honor the past but also pave the way for a future where the art of Iranian mat weaving continues to inspire and captivate for generations to come.



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● MEHR



● IRNA

Rafah invasion will be catastrophic



By Mitchell Plitnick
President of ReThinking
Foreign Policy

OPINION

With the page seeming to have at least temporarily turned on a direct confrontation between Israel and Iran, the promised Israeli invasion of Rafah is once again looming large. On Friday, a “high-level” Egyptian delegation arrived in Israel to continue attempts to negotiate a cease-fire, as Cairo’s fears of a large exodus of Palestinians from Gaza into the Sinai have been renewed.

Chances of success are dim, to say the least. According to reports, Egypt’s strategy is to try to first negotiate a release of some of the Israeli captives still being held in Gaza in exchange for the release of Palestinian prisoners held by Israel, another temporary “pause” in Israeli assaults, and an Israeli agreement to allow people to return to the areas they fled from in the northern part of Gaza. The idea is that if this agreement holds, it will delay the invasion of Rafah and hopefully lead to a permanent cease-fire. Meanwhile, Israel has set up thousands of tents a few miles north of Rafah to which they propose to “evacuate” people ahead of their invasion. But let’s be clear, this is not a humanitarian gesture, as Joe Biden and other American officials would present it. Israel isn’t intending an “evacuation”. It is the forced displacement of people who have already been forcibly displaced, many of them multiple times and in flagrant violation of international humanitarian law.



↑ Palestinians inspect a car hit by an Israeli strike in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip on February 10, 2024.
● IBRAHEEM ABU MUSTAFA/REUTERS

Hopeless talks

Egypt, quite understandably, is trying to prevent an attack on Rafah that is very likely to force even more Palestinians across the border. Since October, between 80,000 and 100,000 Palestinians have fled Gaza into Egypt, according to the Palestinian Authority’s Ambassador to Egypt, Diab Alouh.

It’s worth noting that many of those who have gotten out are in some way privileged, either because they have connections that could help get them out or they had the means to pay some of the profiteers circling around Gaza and squeezing large sums of money out of desperate people. Most people in Gaza do not have such means, of course, which makes Egypt even more reluctant to see them cross the border. Since the first brief pause in fighting, when Hamas released 105 of the Israeli and foreign national captives it took, cease-fire talks have been little more than political theater. Neither Israel nor Hamas is willing to concede what the other side is demanding as a minimum. Israel uses the captives as rhetorical devices but has been uninterested in stopping the slaughter in Gaza. Hamas, for its part, is unwilling to settle for less than an end to Israel’s campaign, although it is willing to release a limited number of captives in a prisoner exchange if Israel will allow Palestinians to return to their homes in the north, which Israel has been reluctant to do.

Periodically, talks have broken down, and each side blames the other, but the reality is that there is little room for an agreement. Hamas has no reason to agree to anything less than an end to Israel’s operations in Gaza. All Israel has offered is a short delay in its genocidal operation. The cabinet of Benjamin Netanyahu has vowed to “eliminate Hamas,” a goal that is and always was impossible.

While Israel and its supporters talk a great deal about the release of the captives, they have already seen that

ending the massacres in Gaza is the one and only thing that brings the captives home. They are uninterested in paying that price. Their crocodile tears for the captives are playing increasingly thin with the captives’ families and large portions of the Israeli public.

Hamas’ insistence that Palestinians be allowed to return to the areas of the north from which they had been driven out is more practical, but that, too, will yield little in terms of relieving the plight of Gaza. Israeli forces have left very little standing in the areas from which Palestinians were forced out, and the north is a virtual wasteland, where food and water are even scarcer than they are in Rafah.

This all means that even if Egypt succeeds in finding an agreement on a

delay in Israel’s invasion of Rafah, all it will do is delay the inevitable because there is no common ground to unearth between Israel and Hamas on a permanent agreement. Ultimately, it comes down to the fact that Israel simply doesn’t want one because a permanent agreement means the end of the military actions by both sides. For Netanyahu, that means that if all the rest of the captives die, if the entire Middle East becomes even more unstable, and even if the conflict widens — so be it.

Hasbara offensive

In fact, Israel, with the aid of governments at all levels in both the United States and Europe, is desperately trying to use this period before they invade Rafah to shore up their support around the world.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his supporters in Congress, from both parties, have scrambled to defend Israel, using the now-blunted weapon of characterizing protest against Israeli genocide as antisemitic.

The desperation has been apparent in the quick turn to police violence to try to quell student protests, actions which have only served to spur more students and others across the United States to join in solidarity with the people of Gaza. It is notable how much faster the turn to police violence has been this time around, as compared to protests against the Iraq War or even the Vietnam War (where demonstrations on campuses had been going on for two years before the police began using violence in 1967 at the Universi-

ty of Wisconsin).

Since the exchange of fire between Israel and Iran, Netanyahu has been hoping to recapture the false narrative that portrays Israel as a small country under siege. Others have gone even further, reviving and updating old red-baiting tactics by calling protesters agents of Hamas or of Iran. This “hasbara offensive” is meant to shore up support before the attack on Rafah, which is certain to be a calamity even by the standards of Israel’s actions in Gaza for the past six months. But it faces obstacles.

The ongoing recovery of more and more bodies in mass graves in areas that Israel has moved on from in Gaza remains in the news even though the shaded coverage of the campus protests is an open attempt to drown it out. Israel, of course, called the claims of mass graves their soldiers used to dump Palestinian bodies into “baseless,” but they are clearly anything but. Yet Israel, after that one statement, has done little so far to try to refute the facts. Instead, they are apparently hoping that driving up hysteria over “raging antisemitism on college campuses” will do that work for them.

The Biden administration, too, is trying to help. Biden himself baselessly and absurdly called the protesters antisemitic — never mind the outsized Jewish presence there. It is the latest in a long line of contentions from both Biden and Netanyahu that simply fly in the face of obvious facts but which have served for six months to maintain just enough support for Israel’s genocide to keep it going and make sure that centers of power remain disciplined in their support for Israel.

Rafah in Israel’s sights

With at least some parts of the mainstream media fully supporting the deception that the campus protests are antisemitic, Israel may well believe that, despite the ongoing negative public opinion, the atmosphere for a Rafah invasion is as good as it is likely



↑ Palestinians inspect the rubble of destroyed buildings of the Abo al Hanood family after an Israeli air strike in Rafah refugee camp, southern Gaza Strip, on April 17, 2024. Palestinian medics said several residents, including children, were killed in the air strike.
● ISMAEL ABU DAYYAH/AP

to get in the foreseeable future. There are numerous signals that the invasion is imminent: Israel has called up reserves and publicly stated that they are preparing them for an attack on Rafah; they have warned the Egyptians that the current round of talks is the last chance for an agreement before an invasion; and US Secretary of State Antony Blinken is due in Israel this coming week. In the past, Israel has taken action very shortly after Blinken's visits.

While the Biden administration maintains its public posture that they are trying to convince Israel to pursue alternative methods of "eliminating" Hamas, the recent approval of a huge amount of military aid to Israel shows where Biden's support is actually going. There is no regard there for Palestinian civilians, only an attempt to convince people that there is. Netanyahu has gotten that message loud and clear. Rafah is already besieged. A city that

was already crowded with 275,000 inhabitants now has over 1.4 million people crammed in it, and a heat wave is blistering the area. Israel has continued to bomb residential areas over the past few weeks, though few of these have made headlines in the United States. In recent days, the frequency of attacks has increased. When Israel launches its attack on Rafah, the civilian death toll will be off the charts; it's inevitable, given the conditions and the massive over-

crowding there. Civilians fleeing the area are also likely to be targeted by Israel, as they have been throughout the assault on the Strip. The results of this will undoubtedly be felt throughout the region and around the world. It seems very likely that an Israeli invasion will bring a response from the Ansarullah in Yemen (commonly called "the Houthis"), Hezbollah in Lebanon, and, quite likely, other militias throughout the region. Jan Egeland of the Norwegian Refu-

gee Council described what has already happened in Gaza. "Gaza has had a bigger bombardment than even Aleppo, even Raqqa, even Mosul," he said. The attack on Rafah promises to be the worst of all. It seems no government, least of all the one in Washington that has the power to stop it, is willing or able to do anything but watch it happen.

The article first appeared on Mondoweiss.

Siren call of an Israeli invasion of Lebanon



By Hussein Ibish
Researcher

OPINION

Although much of the world is breathing a sigh of relief that Iran and Israel appear unwilling to push their exchange of missile and drone attacks further, potentially plunging the Middle East into a wider war, the danger of another escalation has not passed. Rather, the concern has shifted to a possible Israeli offensive against Hezbollah in Lebanon. Israel has threatened this, and US officials and others in the region fear that such a plan has been in the works for months. For Israeli hawks, a major blow against Hezbollah has never seemed more opportune, but Washington dreads the prospect because the prime directive of American policy on the Gaza war has been containment of the conflict, particularly regarding Lebanon. The Biden administration's worry is that an all-out Israeli assault in Lebanon could end up dragging the US and Iran into not just a regional conflagration but a direct confrontation. Indeed, Washington fears that scenario may be just what some Israeli leaders want: Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has for years urged but failed to effect US strikes against Iran's nuclear facilities.

Israel could launch a powerful assault on Hezbollah, hoping to damage and humiliate its most potent immediate adversary, and then withdraw behind a new buffer zone. Such a campaign is particularly tempting after the trauma of the October 7 attack by Hamas because, in contrast to the nightmarish quagmire now enveloping Gaza, Lebanon seems to offer the promise of a quick and decisive victory that can set the world aright for the badly shaken Israelis. But the assumption that such an invasion will enhance Israel's sense of power and security could prove a ruinous folly.

The Biden administration's diplomatic effort to manage this crisis has chiefly relied on heavyweights such as CIA Director Bill Burns, Secretary of State Antony Blinken, and National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan. They have focused on the most high-profile issues of captives, humanitarian aid, and a cease-fire, pursuing complex indirect negotiations between Israel and Hamas. But a crucial role may now fall to the less well-known Amos Hochstein, who has taken the lead in trying to broker an understanding between Israel and Hezbollah that could prevent intensified hostilities. He is working with French President Emmanuel Macron to find such a formula. Hochstein achieved an extraordinary breakthrough in October 2022 between Israel and the Hezbollah-influenced government in Beirut over maritime boundaries that should allow both countries to exploit offshore oil fields without menacing each other. Because of that success and the ties Hochstein developed among the parties, including Hezbollah, the State Department energy adviser became the point person when the Biden administration sought to manage unrest on that border.

Hochstein's new brief is more challenging. For months, he has tried fruitlessly to achieve a limited pullback of Hezbollah's elite border force to about five miles into Lebanon. Israel was demanding a withdrawal of more like 20 miles to around the Litani River. Hezbollah flatly rejected the idea of redeploying from its southern Lebanese heartland. The group justifies maintaining its own private military — and therefore an independent foreign policy — by claiming that it is protecting southern Lebanon from Israel and trying to liberate small areas still occupied by its adversary, so Hezbollah's national power derives from its paramilitary presence there.

From the outset of the Gaza war, Hezbollah — with Iran's backing — has made it clear that it does not seek a broader war with Israel. Lebanon, mired in economic and political turmoil, is in no position to withstand an Israeli onslaught. Hezbollah could face a terrible backlash, including

within its own Shiite constituency, if it dragged the country into a point-less and devastating conflict. Tehran needs to ensure that Hezbollah's military capability remains intact so it can continue to serve as a deterrent against Israeli or US attacks on Iran itself, especially its nuclear facilities.

In any case, hawks in Tehran believe that the Gaza war has given their ally the upper hand and that the only way for Israel to alter the situation is to engineer a broader regional conflict. To preserve that advantage, they argue, Iran and its Arab-fighter clients should take care to deny Israel any opportunity to escalate and avoid overstepping.

Some Israeli leaders appear keen for such an opportunity. In mid-October, Defense Minister Yoav Gallant and others reportedly began pressing for a major preemptive attack against Hezbollah. The group had launched rocket and artillery attacks on Israeli positions on October 8, "in solidarity" with Hamas's attack on Israel the previous day. "Our history, our guns, and our rockets are with you," a senior Hezbollah official proclaimed. Forceful objections from the Biden administration and the need to focus on Gaza prevented such an attack. But Gallant and a growing group within the war cabinet continue to push for a "northern campaign". Because of Hezbollah's attacks, Israel evacuated about 80,000 residents in the border region. A similar number of Lebanese self-evacuated from southern towns and villages.

The demand for war thus became centered on the insistence that these Israelis could not return to their home not just until Hezbollah ceased its cross-border barrage, but until Hezbollah's forces were driven from the area, to prevent its immediate recurrence. This demand may be framed as a new need for border security because of the October 7 attacks, but it smacks of rationalization. The Israeli calls for a war predated the evacuations anyway, but most importantly, relocating Hezbollah commandos would not address the primary threat of the group's massive arsenal of missiles, rockets, and drones. This force, estimated at about 150,000 projectiles, is capable of striking anywhere in Israel and probably of overwhelming its air-defense systems.

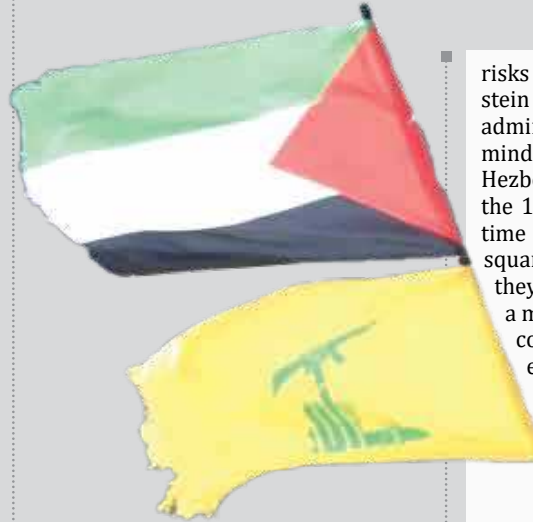
The conviction among some Israeli leaders that a decisive war with Hezbollah is inevitable and necessary explains Israel's ongoing strikes against Hezbollah; Israel claims to have eliminated fully half of the group's southern commanders. Such belligerence also explains Israel's strike on a diplomatic facility in Damascus that killed three Iranian

generals, key leaders in Tehran's regional axis. The Iranians clearly felt the need to retaliate directly against Israel for this attack on what diplomatic norms deem its own soil.

Iran's resolve to restore deterrence and bolster national morale took both the Israelis and the Americans by surprise, yet Iran was careful to telegraph the aerial attack well in advance. Almost all of its missiles and drones were shot down by US, Israeli, UK, and Jordanian forces. Israel's response attack inside Iran was also carefully calibrated. No one was killed in either attack, and both sides have been able to declare themselves vindicated and victorious. The most obvious aspect of Iran's relative restraint was that it did not unleash Hezbollah's daunting arsenal. This underscores the fact that Iran doesn't want Hezbollah drawn into conflict with Israel. But the constant threat of that arsenal remains the strongest argument of Gallant and his war party for an attack into Lebanon. Israeli leaders have a further incentive. The lack of clarity about an endgame in Gaza, and what an incontrovertible win would even look like, makes the prospect of a quick, decisive campaign against Hezbollah all the more appealing. The Lebanese resistance group is a much more conventional force than Hamas, and some Israelis argue that inflicting losses and degrading Hezbollah's military machine would be more readily quantifiable, providing a rapid, needed boost for Israel's battered national morale. In the long run, they say, degrading, deterring, and humiliating the formidable Iranian-backed group is much more important to Israel's national security than neutralizing Hamas. The logic of belligerence, however,



Hezbollah displays a Fajr 5 missile at a military parade in southern Lebanon. **AFP**



Lebanese soldiers stand on a hill that overlooks the Israeli town of Metula (background) as a man waves the Palestinian and Hezbollah flags, at the Lebanese side of the Lebanese-Israeli border in the southern village of Kfar Kila, Lebanon, on October 9, 2023. **MOHAMMED ZAATARI/AP**

risks obscuring its hubris. Hochstein and his colleagues in the Biden administration might do well to remind Israeli leaders that, ever since Hezbollah was founded, following the 1982 invasion of Lebanon, each time the Israel Defense Forces have squared off against the organization, they have consistently encountered a more disciplined, organized, and competent adversary than they expected. Much, therefore, rides on Hochstein's diplomacy to broker an Israeli-Hezbollah understanding. If that effort fails, President Joe Biden may be the only person alive who has any chance of saving Israel and Lebanon from a catastrophic and avoidable conflict.

The article first appeared on The Atlantic



Iran beats Thailand for record-extending 13th Asian futsal crown



Sports Desk

Iran defeated Thailand 4-1 to lift the AFC Futsal Asian Cup trophy in Bangkok – a record-extending 13th crown in the competition for the continental powerhouse. Having stepped into the final showpiece on the back of shootout victory over Uzbekistan, Vahid Shamsaei's men started right on the front in front of the capacity crowd at the Bangkok Arena, taking the lead in the

first minute when Mahdi Amiri's low drive found the bottom corner.

Iran, which endured some nervy moments against Bahrain and Uzbekistan earlier in the competition, was quick to double the advantage through Saeid Ahmad-Abbasi as the tournament's top scorer bagged his eighth goal in the Thai capital with a sublime backheel effort in the sixth minute.

Thai skipper Jirawat Sornwichian gave his team a lifeline with a composed finish in the 26th minute, only to see his opposite number Ali-Asghar Hassanzadeh restore the two-goal cushion for Iran a

minute later.

With the host desperately chasing a second goal with powerplay, Iranian keeper Baqer Mohammadi made the most of opponent's vulnerability in the back as his long-range effort from his own goal found the back of an empty net.

Earlier on Sunday, Uzbekistan came out on top in the shootout against Tajikistan in an all-Central Asian third-place contest, while Afghanistan made history on its Asian Cup debut by beating Kyrgyzstan 5-3 in the fifth-place playoff to join Iran, Thailand, Tajikistan, and host Uzbekistan in September's Futsal World Cup.

Iran's Mahdi Karimi (11) celebrates with teammates after scoring in a final victory over Thailand at the AFC Futsal Asian Cup in Bangkok, Thailand, on April 28, 2024.
● **FFIRI**

Asian U20 Athletics Championships: Iranians finish with two medals



Mahdi Haft-Cheshmeh won a second successive hammer throw silver in the Asian U20 Athletics Championships in Dubai, the UAE.

Sports Desk

Iranian nine-athlete squad finished its Asian U20 Athletics Championships campaign in Dubai with a couple of medals, including a historic gold in the women's event. On Saturday, Mahdi Haft-Cheshmeh registered a best throw of 66.64m to settle for the silver in the men's hammer throw contest – a second successive runner-up finish for the Iranian in the

event following last year's 63.96m tally in Yecheon, South Korea.

Ali Sarvari was the other Iranian boy in the discipline but missed out on the podium, finishing fourth.

The pinnacle of the four-day tournament for the country came on Friday when Nazanin Fatemeh Eidian made history by becoming the first Iranian girl to grab an Asian junior gold in the sport.

A silver medalist last year, the sprinter clocked a national record of 58.86 seconds in the 400m hurdles final.

This was a third major continental medal for the Iranian girl in 2024 after she walked away with the 400m silver, while being a part of the country's silver-winning quadruple in the 4x400m relay contest, in February's Asian Indoor Athletics Championships in Tehran. Melika Norouzi (women's hammer throw), Mana Hosseini (women's javelin throw), Sajjad Aqaei (men's 400m), Elnaz Mousaei (women's heptathlon), Mohammad-Hesam Mozaffari (men's 800m), and Arshia Mosaddeqi (men's pole vault) were the other members of the Iranian squad but were unlucky to leave Dubai empty-handed despite some decent performances across their respective discipline.

James scores 30 to keep Lakers play-off hopes alive



Lakers' LeBron James (23) shoots during a victory over the Nuggets in Los Angeles, CA, US, on April 27, 2024.
● **MARK J. TERRILL/AP**

BBC – LeBron James scored 30 points to help the Los Angeles Lakers beat the Denver Nuggets and keep their Western Conference first-round play-off hopes

alive. The Lakers were 3-0 down in the best-of-seven series but fought back on Saturday to win 119-108 in Los Angeles.

James was supported by Anthony Davis, who registered 25 points and 23 rebounds to end an 11-game losing streak against the Nuggets.

"We've given ourselves another life, another lifeline," James, 39, said.

"The only opportunity for us is just to play the next game." James is searching for his fifth NBA title and his first with the Lakers since 2020. The fifth game takes place in Denver tonight.

In the Eastern Conference, Jayson Tatum scored 22 points with 11 rebounds and six assists in the Boston Celtics' 104-84 win over the Miami Heat, who were at home.

The Celtics, who are the NBA's top seeds, lead the series 2-1.

The Orlando Magic beat the Cleveland Cavaliers 112-89 to level their play-off at 2-2, while the Oklahoma City Thunder took a 3-0 lead with a 106-85 victory over the New Orleans Pelicans.

Iran coach Paes shrugs off seniors withdrawal ahead of Volleyball Nations League



Iran head coach Mauricio Motta Paes (R) sits next to Vahid Moradi, the vice-president of the Iranian Volleyball Federation, during a press conference in Tehran, Iran, on April 28, 2024.
● **volleyball.ir**

Sports Desk

Iran's head coach Mauricio Motta Paes said he was unfazed by the decision by some of the senior members of the national team to withdraw from international duty ahead of the upcoming Volleyball Nations League.

Veteran middle blocker Seyyed Mohammad Mousavi and prolific opposite spiker Amir Ghafour as well as libero Mahdi Marandi were all named the provisional list for the annual event before they announced their decision in recent days.

Speaking in his first press conference in Iran, the Brazilian coach said: "I don't think the absence of star players would play a significant role as the important thing will be to build a decent squad. Many of these players were part of the team over the past two years but the results were still not good enough."

"We don't have much time to prepare and it is important for the players to play with their hearts. If a player does not believe in our goal, he would better be away from the team," added Paes.

A former number two to fellow-Brazilian Bernardo

Rezende on France bench in 2021 and 2022, Paes, 60, took over from Behrouz Ataei in February, after the Iranian stepped down from his role in the aftermath of a 3-1 defeat against the Czech Republic midway through last October's FIVB Olympic Qualifying Tournament in Rio de Janeiro, where Iran finished second from bottom in the eight-team table and failed to secure direct qualification for the Paris Olympics.

As if Iran needed more motivation to go all out for success in this year's Nations League, the remaining quotas for the Games in the French capital will be on the line when the preliminary round of the tournament gets underway in Antalya and Rio de Janeiro on May 21.

With Germany, Brazil, Poland, Canada, USA, and Japan having already joined host France, and Egypt likely to take the African slot for the Olympics, only four quotas remain up for grabs, which will be decided through the FIVB Ranking by the end of the VNL preliminary round on June 23.

As it stands in the ranking, third-placed Italy, Argentina (sixth), Slovenia (seventh),

and Serbia (ninth) are the favorites to punch their Paris tickets, with Iran lagging behind in the 15th place.

However, Paes said he is "optimistic" about the daunting task on his hands.

"Everyone knows that Iran has top-notch players, specially in the age-group levels. The mission ahead of us is surely a tough one but we all believe our goal is achievable and I feel optimistic about steering the team toward that objective," Paes said.

Asked if Iran needs a miracle to qualify for the Olympics, Paes said: "I think there is no such thing as miracle in sports and if it is going to be an impossible mission it will apply to all the other teams chasing the Olympic berth."

Paes still refused to make any promises about the quest for a place in Paris, saying: "All I can say is that I will put in all my efforts into the job. What is clear is that we will work hard together as a team and if we don't win that would probably be because our opponent has been a better team."

Iran will begin its VNL campaign against Serbia on May 22 in Rio de Janeiro before taking on Italy, Cuba, and Argentina in Week 1.



Iranian students support pro-Palestinian rallies in Western universities

Iranian university students staged mass rallies to express their solidarity with pro-Palestine academic demonstrations across the United States and Europe demanding an end to Israel's months-long genocidal war against Palestinians in the besieged Gaza Strip. The university students, professors, and personnel in Iran held gatherings on their academic campuses after noon prayers on Sunday to condemn Israeli crimes and atrocities in Gaza over the past seven

months. "Academics all over the world, especially American and Western countries, have established humanitarian movements in defense of humanity and human rights, and launched a strong wave of support for the oppressed people of Gaza," Iran's Ministry of Science, Research and Technology said in a statement. "On this occasion, our country's dear academics, by organizing large gatherings after offering prayers in mosques and main squares

of universities, will voice their support for the professors and students protesting the crimes of Israel's child-killing regime," it added. Students and staff members of the University of Tehran held a rally on Saturday in support of growing protests on US campuses where students have erected encampments over the past days to demand action to end Israel's war on Gaza. Chanting "death to America, "death to Israel" and "death to England", the demon-

strators on Saturday condemned violent US police attacks on students. More than 20 universities in the US and several others in Europe are protesting against the US-backed Israeli onslaught, which has killed over 34,000 people since October last year. The students are calling for universities to separate themselves from any companies that are advancing the regime's war on the besieged Palestinian territory. Police have arrested hundreds of protesters across

university campuses. The United States has been providing Israel with unrestrained military, intelligence, and financial support since October 7, when the regime unleashed the war against the besieged Palestinian enclave. Washington gives Israel \$3.8bn in military assistance every year, and US President Joe Biden has continued to provide staunch support to the illegal entity amid the Gaza war. On Wednesday, Biden signed into law a mas-

University students stage rallies in a university in the northwestern city of Tabriz on April 28, 2024 to express solidarity with pro-Palestine academic demonstrations across the US and Europe. **AHMADREZA TAHERI/ISNA**

sive funding package that will provide an additional \$17bn to the occupying regime. Washington has also vetoed several United Nations Security Council resolutions calling for a ceasefire in the brutal military aggression.

Iran to hold run-off parliamentary elections on May 10



A total of 90 candidates are going to run for the 45 remaining seats in the Iranian Parliament in the run-off elections slated for May 10.

The spokesperson for the Election Headquarters of Iran said on Sunday that the run-off parliamentary elections will be held in 22 constituencies across the country where the candidates had failed to receive an absolute majority (more than 50%) of votes cast during the first round held on March 1, Tasnim News Agency reported.

A total of 90 candidates will be racing for the 45 vacant seats out of 290 parliamentary seats, Mohsen Eslami said.

He noted that the upcoming run-off elections will be held with electronic voting machines in 22 districts across 15 provinces, including in the capital, Tehran, where 32 candidates will run against each other.

The spokesman noted that no paper ballots will be available in the stations with electronic ballot boxes, saying the results of e-voting will be obtained instantly. The elections will kick off at 8 a.m. on May 10 and will continue for 10 hours, but the voting period could be extended at the discretion of the interior minister, Eslami said.

The spokesman added that considering the successful process of e-voting, next year's presidential election is expected to be held with electronic voting machines across the nation.

The countrywide elections for the Parliament and the Assembly of Experts were held on March 1.

Around 61 million Iranian people were eligible to vote, including 3.5 million first-time voters.

The elections were held in around 60,000 polling stations across Iran.

US internal memo hints Israel in violation of int'l law

International Desk

Some senior US officials have advised Secretary of State Antony Blinken that they do not find "credible or reliable" Israel's assurances that it is using US-supplied weapons in accordance with international humanitarian law, according to an internal State Department memo reviewed by Reuters.

Other officials upheld support for Israel's representation. Under a National Security Memorandum (NSM) issued by President Joe Biden in February, Blinken must report to Congress by May 8

whether he finds credible Israel's assurances that its use of US weapons does not violate US or international law. By March 24, at least seven State Department bureaus had sent in their contributions to an initial "options memo" to Blinken. Parts of the memo, which has not been previously reported, were classified. The submissions to the memo provide the most extensive picture to date of the divisions inside the State Department over whether Israel might be violating international humanitarian law in Gaza. A joint submission from

four bureaus - Democracy Human Rights & Labor; Population, Refugees and Migration; Global Criminal Justice and International Organization Affairs - raised "serious concern over non-compliance" with international humanitarian law during Israel's onslaught on Gaza. The assessment from the four bureaus said Israel's assurances were "neither credible nor reliable." It cited eight examples of Israeli military actions that the officials said raise "serious questions" about potential violations of international humanitarian law.

These included repeatedly striking protected sites and civilian infrastructure; "unconscionably high levels of civilian harm to military advantage"; taking little action to investigate violations or to hold to account those responsible for significant civilian harm and "killing humanitarian workers and journalists at an unprecedented rate." The assessment from the four bureaus also cited 11 instances of Israeli military actions the officials said "arbitrarily restrict humanitarian aid," including rejecting entire trucks of aid due to a single "du-

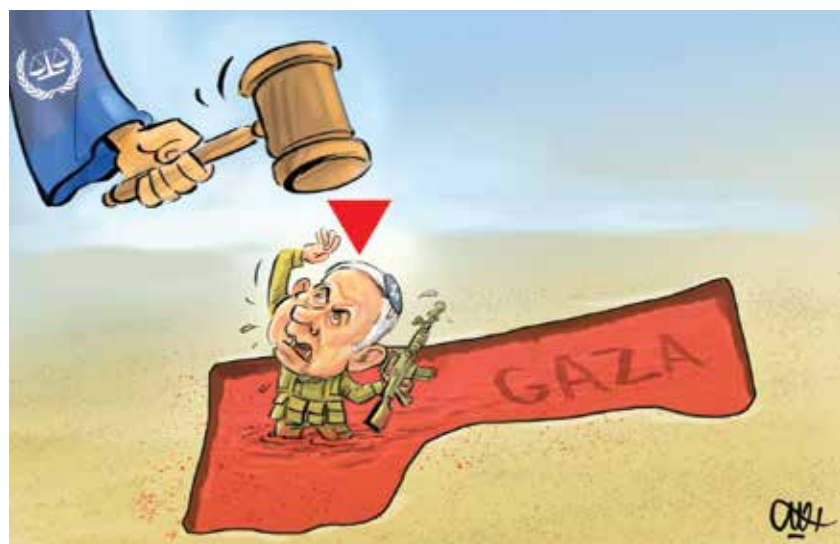


MOSTAFA ALKHAROUF/ANADOLU AGENCY

al-use" item, "artificial" limitations on inspections as well as repeated attacks on humanitarian sites that should not be hit. Since the beginning of the Israel's war on Gaza in Oc-

tober, the United Nations and many international bodies and countries have repeatedly condemned the regime for clear violations of international law in the Palestinian territory.

Mohammad Ali Rajabi
Cartoonist



Gaza 'Freedom Flotilla' blocked in Turkey

A "Freedom Flotilla" aimed at delivering aid to Gaza was blocked in Turkey Saturday after being denied use of two of its ships, which organizers blame on Israeli pressure. The coalition of NGOs and other associations said it was unable to set sail after the West African country of Guinea-Bissau withdrew its flagged vessels, according to AFP. "Sadly, Guinea-Bissau has allowed itself to become complicit in Israel's deliberate starvation, illegal siege and genocide of Palestinians in Gaza," the Freedom Flotilla Coalition said.

"The Guinea-Bissau International Ships Registry (GBISR), in a blatantly political move, informed the Freedom Flotilla Coalition that it had withdrawn the Guinea Bissau flag from two of the Freedom Flotilla's ships, one of which is our cargo ship, already loaded with over 5,000 tons of life-saving aid," their statement said. The group said the Guinea-Bissau authorities made several "extraordinary" requests for information including destinations, potential additional port calls, cargo manifest, and estimated arrival dates and times.

"Normally, national flagging authorities concern themselves only with safety and related standards on vessels bearing their flag," it said, equating it to being asked about destinations when registering a car. At an Istanbul press conference, about 280 volunteers - activists, lawyers and doctors - who had hoped to join the ships shouted slogans including "Flag the flotilla", "We will sail" and "Free Palestine". Three of the flotilla's ships have been docked for a week at the port of Tuzla, south of Istanbul. They had planned

to set sail Friday. In 2010, a previous "Freedom Flotilla" set off from the southern Turkish city of Antalya, leading to a deadly episode that soured relations between Turkey and Israel after Israeli military forces attacked one of the ships, the Mavi Marmara, leaving 10 dead and 28 wounded aboard. UN agencies have warned that maritime deliveries alone cannot deliver sufficient aid to ward off the threat of famine in Gaza and have called on Israel to open up more border crossings for road convoys.

Iran, Oman urge cementing social, cultural ties

Social Desk

During a meeting between Ensieh Khazali, the Vice President for Women and Family Affairs, and Oman's Minister of Social Development, Laila Ahmed Al Najjar, both parties stressed the importance of strengthening bilateral relations, particularly regarding women and family affairs. Al Najjar, who traveled to the Iranian capital city of Tehran, met and held discussions with Iran's Vice President for Women and Family Affairs after visiting the Iran Expo where she was briefed on the achievements of the Islamic Republic of Iran on Sunday, IRNA wrote.

Al Najjar discussed with Khazali the cultural and social similarities between Iran and Oman, proposing joint projects in family-related fields and suggesting the organization of joint exhibitions for women, especially focusing on handicrafts and knowledge-based companies.

Khazali highlighted the need for unity among Islamic countries to address the oppression and crimes perpetrated by the Zionist regime in Gaza. The meeting concluded with a mutual agreement to explore further collaborative opportunities to enhance ties between the two nations.



Iran's Vice President for Women and Family Affairs Ensieh Khazali (l) and Oman's Minister of Social Development Laila Ahmed Al Najjar discuss cultural and social cooperation in a meeting held in Tehran on April 28, 2024.



Foreign investment in Iran's tourism grew 18 times since mid-2021

Arts & Culture Desk

Iran's Deputy Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts, Ali-Asghar Shalbafian, announced a significant surge in foreign investment in the tourism sector since August 2021. Speaking at the 6th export potential exhibition of the Islamic Republic of Iran (Expo 2024), Shalbafian disclosed that foreign investment in tourism has multiplied by 18, reaching \$256 million by the end of the last Persian calendar year.

The deputy minister visited the hall of handwoven carpets, handicrafts and tourism and referred to the presentation of 600 investment packages of more than four million dollars at Iran Expo 2024.

The exhibition, which attracted over 80 countries and 2,000 foreign businessmen, serves as a platform for showcasing Iran's tourism potential and products.

Shalbafian emphasized the ministry's commitment to engaging with foreign investors to further boost tourism.

Iran Expo 2024 features 600 investment packages exceeding four million dollars each, highlighting the opportunities available in Iran's tourism sector. Shalbafian highlighted the significance of events like the expo in attracting foreign investment, portraying Iran's stability and security to the global business community.

Iranian sites compete for best tourism villages worldwide



Arts & Culture Desk

Eight villages across Iran are vying for recognition as the best tourism villages in a competition organized by the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO). Abyaneh in Isfahan, Bisheh in Lorestan, Esfahak in

South Khorasan, Ghaleh Bala in Semnan, Palangan in Kurdistan, Meymand in Kerman, Kandolus in Mazandaran, and Fahraj in Yazd are part of a global initiative to promote rural tourism development, IRNA reported. The program aims to boost

tourism as a driver for rural development and prosperity. The selected villages represent exemplary rural tourist destinations with rich cultural and natural assets, promoting values, products, and lifestyles rooted in rural communities while demonstrating a commitment to innovation and sustainability.

The selection process involves collaboration between the organization and the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts, with identified villages meeting specific criteria and standards set by the UNWTO. Previously, the village of Kandovan in East Azarbaijan province was globally recognized in 2023 as the first Iranian village for its

outstanding tourism potential. Following the submission of necessary documentation by the provinces, a virtual session will be held to review, summarize, and address any deficiencies. The process aims to ensure transparency and fairness in the selection of villages, highlighting notable aspects to the provinces for further improvement.

The UNWTO's initiative, launched in 2021, seeks to transform tourism into a catalyst for rural development and welfare, focusing on nine key indicators including cultural resources, promotion and protection, economic sustainability, environmental sustainability, social sustainability, tourism potential and development,

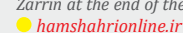
value chain integration, governance, and prioritization of tourism, as well as health, safety, and security. Over 70 villages from 40 countries have been recognized as the best tourism villages worldwide, with Iran joining this group with the registration of Kandovan.

Benefits of being selected as a global tourism village include international recognition as a distinguished rural tourist destination, receiving a certificate signed by the UNWTO Secretary-General, opportunities for knowledge exchange and training, participation in relevant rural development and tourism events, and showcasing the country as the owner of the village in various tourism dimensions.

PICS OF THE DAY



Iranian archaeologists unearthed ancient objects in Isfahan's Kamar Zarrin at the end of the first season of archaeological exploration.



Iranian exhibition in Venice Biennale stands in solidarity with Gaza: Envoy

Arts & Culture Desk

Iran's Ambassador to Italy, Mohammad-Reza Sabouri, visited the official pavilion of the Islamic Republic of Iran at the 2024 Venice Biennale, showcasing Iranian artists' works.

Sabouri emphasized the strategic depth of Iran's policies in the Middle East, noting that amid the sad conditions in Gaza, such exhibitions could provide solace to the oppressed Palestinian people and raise awareness about the nefarious goals and

crimes of the Zionist regime. Sabouri praised the exhibition's content, layout, and artistic quality, suggesting it as a profound reflection of current regional dynamics. Notably, the pavilion's theme and artworks are meticulously selected in response

to the region's transformations. He anticipated that visitors would deeply contemplate these aspects after viewing the showcased works. Iran's cultural attaché in Italy Mohammad-taqi Amini accompanied Sabouri and also

visited Iran's pavilion.

The Iranian pavilion presents works by artists such as Mostafa Goodarzi, Kazem Chalipa, Morteza Asadi, Abdolhamid Qadirian, and Gholamali Taheri, all revolving around the oppression of Gaza's children.

The pavilion features a selected piece from the media section of the 16th Fajr Visual Arts Festival, titled 'Mirrors of Light' by Maryam Safaei and Mohammad Amin Owji. This interactive installation, based on Persian architectural geometry and ancient mirror craftsmanship, creates a celestial and paradisiacal atmosphere through light reflection.