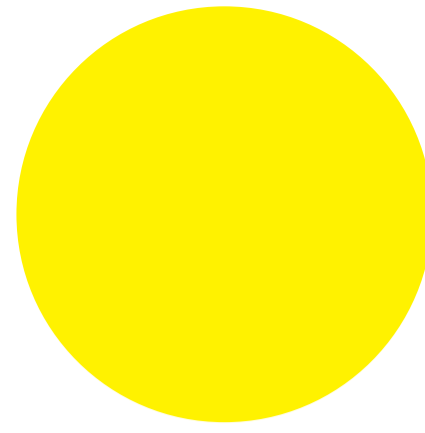


FM: Regional efforts ramped up to stop war on Gaza 7 >



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Operation True Promise Was to Bypass Israel's Fake Deterrence

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Major General Gholam-Ali Rashid,
a leading commander of Iran's strike on Israel:

Operation True Promise was to bypass Israel's fake deterrence

INTERVIEW EXCLUSIVE

Operations Al-Aqsa Storm and True Promise, which were carried out by Hamas and Iran, respectively, can be considered turning points in the developments of the region and changes of the international order. On the one hand, these events proved how fake is Israel's deterrence by relying on all its allies, and on the other hand, made the struggle for the liberation of Palestine from the clutches of the Zionist usurper regime to be noticed by the nations of the world as an ideal. After Operation True Promise, which was carried out by the Islamic Republic as a legitimate defense in response to the Zionist regime's aggression against the Iranian consulate in Syria, the power and authority of the discourse of the Islamic Revolution became clear to the world, especially to the arrogant leaders in the West. Nevertheless, Israel and the media hegemony ruling the international space tried to censor various aspects of the operation and make it look like a small action — an attempt that, of course, failed. Iran Daily has conducted an exclusive interview with Major General Gholam-Ali Rashid to inform Iranian and international audiences about the dimensions of Iran's operations against Israel. Considered to be one of the main commanders of Operation True Promise, Major General Rashid was one of the senior commanders of the IRGC during the holy defense period and held responsibilities such as the replacement of the commander of the IRGC's ground forces and the IRGC operations deputy. After the war, Major General Rashid became the deputy for information and operations of the General Staff of the Armed Forces and then the deputy of that staff.



IRAN DAILY: How do you evaluate the October 7 operation by Hamas, and what do you think was its most important achievement?

RASHID: The primary achievement of this operation was the exposure of Israel's vulnerability. The foundations of the Israeli army were revealed as being boastful and deceitful — a military that, over the past 70 years, falsely claimed victories over Egypt, Jordan, and Syria crumbled. This is a fabricated regime, which in recent years has been tasked with vilifying us. Martyr General Qassem Soleimani used to say that every government in the world has an army, but in Israel, it's the opposite; there's an army that has fabricated a pseudo-state. Therefore, we are only confronting a military force and nothing more. They have come here and planted something that they believe could become a country; Israel is akin to a dental implant in dentistry that the English and Western countries have implanted, and Israel's existence depends on the West. Meaning that if one day the West is

not there, Israel will collapse, and vice versa; if Israel collapses, the West will collapse too. Israel has no embassy in Iran, but all Western embassies assist it. They provide them with information and any assistance, whether political, military, media-related, etc., that they may require.

So, do you believe that the reality of Israel is not consistent with what it portrays in the media?

Yes. The image that Israel creates of itself in the media never aligns with the actual situation inside the occupied Palestinian territories. It fabricates a false image of being defenseless and having no enemies. In the October 7 operation, all of its false pretenses were shattered by 1,100 to 1,200 fighters of a group that everyone knows has the combat skills and maneuverability of an infantry battalion. These 1,100 or so individuals attacked Israel's vaunted army; some Hamas fighters say that the Israelis were asleep or drunk in tanks and bases, adding that they could not believe that the Israeli army

would collapse to this extent in just a few hours.

Even Americans themselves say that Anthony Blinken, the US secretary of state who is frequently traveling to Arab countries, told the Iraqi prime minister that the Israeli army had collapsed and its work was almost done. He reportedly said that the US went and helped them, lifted their army from the ground and kept it up so that it would not be completely destroyed, and tried to persuade them to stand and continue their work while relying on Americans. Therefore, the Zionist regime, economically and militarily, stands upright with the direct support from Americans and Europeans, who freely provide any means the Israelis need, even weapons of mass slaughter, namely atomic bombs.

The Islamic Republic of Iran has repeatedly stated that Israel, as an occupier and aggressor, must be eradicated. To what extent is this ideal achievable in reality?

I would like to clarify that, unfortunately, some university professors



and intellectuals have misconstrued our statements that the Islamic Republic of Iran intends to destroy the occupying Israel. However, the leadership and authorities of the Islamic Republic of Iran have always emphasized that Iran, as a political system, must defeat and destroy the occupying and aggressive Israel, which has occupied the first Qibla of Muslims and the land of the Palestinian people, with the help of all governments and Muslim nations.

This is deeply unsettling and a nightmare for Israeli commanders. Their vulnerability is what shakes them. The nightmare for Israeli commanders is that they say only 1,100 individuals attacked us and scattered us like this; while Hamas has 30,000 fighters; if 10,000 of its fighters again attacked us unexpectedly, along with 10,000 fighters from Lebanon's Hezbollah and two or three thousand youths from its western shores, Israel's work would be finished. This figure is just a small portion of their power.

Israel has a very small land area. Once in June of last year, in one of the frequent meetings we had with senior commanders of the IRGC and the army, I made a comparison between our action in this operation and Israel's situation. The scope of our Operation Beit ol-Moqaddas in the war against Iraq was 6,000 square kilometers. That is, we liberated the geographical scope of the occupied Palestinian territories in this operation. We placed this region



on the geographical map of the occupied Palestinian territories, covering the northern half of the southern border of Lebanon, covering the western shores and up to Ashdod; That is, we saw that executive centers, military centers, population centers, and economic centers are all in this area. The remaining areas of southern Israel are mostly desert. Areas like the Negev Desert and around Gaza are all deserts, and there is no significant population there. The bulk of the Jewish and ancient Arab population in 1948 is in this area. All Israeli cities, executive centers, the Ministry of Defense, Army Headquarters, industrial centers, etc., were accounted for.

A reporter had previously asked Commander-in-Chief of the Islamic Republic of Iran Army Sayyed Abdolrahim Mousavi, "What if a war breaks out between Iran and Israel? How can Iran's army, the IRGC, and armed forces defeat Israel?" He replied that if there is a situation where these forces fight together against the Israeli army, we will end Israel's work with just one operation on the same scale as operations like Fath ol-Mobin and Beit ol-Moqaddas and no more; That is, if forces from southern Lebanon, the Golan Heights, the West Bank and Gaza, to the extent of these operations, attack Israel, their work is done and the Israeli army is destroyed. The October 7 incident was an example of this. Israel could not even act properly against a group of fighters, let alone a regular army. It was an attack that lasted about 16 to 20 hours. So, this vaunted army's self-created image is false.

How do you view the current situation of Israel in terms of geographical and demographic factors? To what extent do you think the various crises that the Israeli regime faces have weakened and destabilized this country?

We should not think that Israel is what it portrays itself and what Western media depicts. Sometimes Israel carries out actions in Iran, for example, assassinating our nuclear scientists or conducting explosions in a limited area, and then it magnifies these actions to appear much larger than they were. The entire Western media empire supports this. Because Israel stands with direct support from the US and Europe, they provide all resources for free — money, equipment, state-of-the-art weapons, and any assistance needed. Currently, CENTCOM has established an operational headquarters in Tel Aviv and is commanding operations up close. French, British, and American soldiers are fighting alongside Israeli soldiers; this shows that Israel is a fabricated regime.

There is a book titled *The Middle East and North Africa: A Political Geography* written by Alasdair Drysdale and Gerald Henry Blake,

two English geographers, in the 1980s. I recommend reading it. In the second part of the book, Israel is discussed. It says Israel is a paradox and the result of an extremist ideology called Zionism. It faces very serious issues and is never able to unify its people, who were gathered from all over the world. This book mentions that the Jewish population of Israel has been brought from 102 different countries worldwide and gathered there. This collected population is multilingual and speaks at least 15 languages — Hebrew, Arabic, English, Polish, Russian, German, Iranian, Spanish, African, etc. The reason for this failure that has become apparent in Israel and can-

es are utilized to enhance solidarity and unity. In fact, this diversity and differences have strengthened intimacy among us. All these ethnicities and diverse groups in Iranian society remain united and stand together as one heart and one voice whenever they sense any danger, coming together to defend Iran. Factors such as strategic geographical location, territorial integrity, ancient historical roots, cultural structure, political ideals, a strong central government, and linguistic, religious, racial, and ethnic cohesion are internal factors. Meanwhile, external threats, provoked by the global arrogance, contribute to the creation and enhancement of solidarity, unity, and

decade foresees the dominance of the resistance axis. History is being rewritten.

The oppressed nations of the region, particularly the oppressed Muslim nations of Palestine and Lebanon, have learned the path of resistance against the Zionist occupier. With the help of Allah Almighty and support from all Muslim governments and nations, including the Islamic Republic of Iran, they will overcome the Zionist occupier regime and defeat it. The true characteristics of America and the Zionist regime are seen by all nations in the region: their occupation of Muslim lands, the displacement of the Palestinian people, coercion,

America, with complete and selective support from NATO powers, especially the UK, France, and some regional countries, deployed multiple defensive layers against Iran's missile and drone attacks over a geographical area spanning at least one million square kilometers across Iraq, Jordan, the Red Sea, the Eastern Mediterranean, Cyprus, and occupied Palestine. Despite these defensive measures in support of the Zionist regime, powerful Iranian missiles breached the missile defense shields and destroyed the military centers of Nevatim and Shlagim. The Zionist regime dared not show recent images of these two military bases to the world. If it weren't for the Americans, British, and French, and CENTCOM rushing to Israel's aid, Iran's missiles would have certainly devastated 80% of the Zionist regime's military bases. Through Operation True Promise, the strategic landscape once again shifted in favor of the Islamic Republic of Iran. This change occurred at a time when America promised Israel "ironclad" US support. America and the Zionist regime, along with other Western powers who came to Israel's aid, spent 10 hours in fear, anxiety, and turmoil, witnessing the imposition of Iran's national will and the defeat of Israel's deterrence. Iran's power received widespread admiration, having punished the Zionist regime decisively and without surprise, flooding the shameless and criminal elements of the region with torrents and solid fists, and reinstating order.

This offensive operation was carried out in response to the Zionist regime's crime against its commanders at the Iranian consulate and embassy in Damascus, who were there at the request of the Syrian government. The offensive operation was conducted by the IRGC Aerospace Force, which utilized only a small part, about 20 percent, of its offensive capability. In contrast, the US, NATO, CENTCOM, and the Zionist regime deployed 240 fighter jets and numerous missile defense systems stationed on American aircraft carriers in the Mediterranean and Red Seas, along with the missile defense systems of the Zionist regime, in a defensive posture due to their fear. A small portion of the IRGC Aerospace Force, with 80 percent of its offensive capability ready, was prepared to initiate an attack according to subsequent orders, but Iranian commanders determined that the punishment of the Zionist regime was sufficient at this level. Meanwhile, the support for such a regime from America, the UK, France, and European governments, was not acceptable to the Western people. Are there any wise and reasonable people in Western society who will prevent their governments from supporting the occupation and its destructive policies against the oppressed Palestinian people?



not be rectified is nothing other than the fact that this army, this fabricated Israeli cabinet, and the society gathered in this occupied land are devoid of identity and lack the essential existential elements that constitute a nation and a state — they lack national identity, cultural coherence, and none of the important components that a state and nation should have. They lack identity; they have no cultural identity, no national identity, and no coherence among them; that is, there is no cohesion or connection among them. The situation of its population is not comparable at all to the situation of the people of Iran. The people of Iran have strong and cohesive bonds with each other. Factors such as religious homogeneity, racial homogeneity, linguistic homogeneity, and ethnic homogeneity that exist in Iran are hardly found anywhere else in the world. Enemies and hostile media in the West try to suggest that ethnic diversity in Iran has created rifts within our society, while in reality, this is not the case. Indeed, in Iran, this diversity and differenc-

cohesion among the inhabitants of the land of Iran. However, in Israel, none of these things exist; none of these bonds exist. Israel lacks any of the components that are the reason for the existence of a country and based on which a country is formed.

Would you illuminate some of the significant internal and international dimensions of Operation True Promise?

Operation True Promise was a significant military action undertaken directly by Iran against the Israeli regime. It was a response that surprised all adversaries, demonstrating Israel's vulnerability. This operation, along with other recent events like Operation Al-Aqsa Storm carried out by Hamas, clearly showed that Israel is now facing a new reality after Operation True Promise and other direct military actions. Any form of response by the regime to extricate itself from the quagmire it finds itself in will only lead to further collapse. The axis of resistance holds the upper hand, and the horizon of the next

extortion, crimes, genocide, and massacres over the past 70 years. The Muslim nation of Palestine is not willing to surrender to America and the Zionist regime.

The most prominent aspect of Operation True Promise was the manifestation of Iran's leadership will and determination, catching all enemies off guard. Israel, which thought itself an impregnable military fortress, came under attack and penetrated by missiles and drones. The Iran's will and the determination of the great Iranian nation, embodied in the revolutionary leadership, hold strategic importance. The degree of accuracy of Iran's missile strikes on targets is far less important than this strategic significance.

Operation True Promise crossed its self-imposed barriers and shattered the illusion of the Zionist regime, which believed its deterrence was guaranteed by the US and NATO powers. When they realized that Iran's leadership had decisively chosen to punish Israeli aggression, they all rushed in fear to aid Israel.





Landscape of Iran-Pakistan relations



By Zohreh Qanadi
Staff writer

The Peace Pipeline, still hindered by US sanctions, has remained a major concern for Iran and Pakistan over the past decade. The long-term gas pipeline project is deemed essential for enhancing ties between the two neighbors. A landmark visit by Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi to Pakistan last week once again put the spotlight on stalled gas supply deal. Recent border tensions, which were judiciously resolved by authorities on both sides, underscored the importance of cooperation.

Currently, the two nations are involved in bilateral trade exceeding \$2 billion, with a mutual commitment to elevate it to \$10 billion annually following Raisi's two-day visit.

Pakistan, as a developing country, has been enduring decades of internal political disputes, low levels of foreign investment, and costly and continuous confrontations with its eastern neighbor, India. Due to foreign aid provided by the International Monetary Fund, Pakistan's access to global markets strengthened since the early 21st century. Moreover, economic policy reforms such as energy sector reforms have led to improvements in its macroeconomic indicators.

Leading international economic organizations have pictured a positive and rather ambitious outlook for Pakistan's economy and ranked Iran's eastern neighbor as the sixth largest economy in the world by 2075. The forecast is not unrealistic considering the average economic growth of 4% from 2012 to 2022 and an average inflation rate of 8% during that period. As per World Bank data in 2022, Pakistan's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita stood at \$1696, with a total GDP of \$375 billion, 6.4% unemployment, an inflation rate of 19.8%, and the government's overall debt reaching \$274 billion (73% of the country's GDP).

The United Nations, in its World Economic Situation report, predicts a 2% GDP growth for Pakistan in 2024, rising to 2.3% in 2025. Exports have dwindled since the military ousted Imran Khan's government. Remittances hit a three-year low in June 2023, with a 6.8% decrease to \$13.4 billion in the first six months of FY24.

Iran-China economic corridor

Pakistan can also be considered as a key country to the Iran-China trade corridor. China's ambitious plans and its huge impact on the global economy have led to the establishment of programs aimed at boosting commodity transit. One remarkable program is the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which involves a massive investment of \$1 trillion from the world's second-largest economy. China started the BRI in 2013, with the participation of about 150 countries, including Iran.

In recent years, discussions have focused on reevaluating the China-Iran road corridors. Other international transit projects, such as Pakistan's port of Gwadar, have been proposed as an alternative corridor for Iran's Chabahar Port. Gwadar has also been considered as a substitute destination for the ports of Jabal Ali and Fujairah in the United Arab Emirates and the port of "Um Al-Qasr" in Iraq. It is natural that countries involved in the BRI route

act in their own interests, seeking to activate their desired corridors. Given the importance of Pakistan as a key country in the economic corridor between Iran and China, it is crucial also for Iran to take into account the significance of the Chabahar Port in the southeast.

Raisi's visit of great importance

The Iranian president's recent visit to Pakistan, the first in eight years, is of great importance for several reasons, particularly in light of Iran's retaliatory strike against Israel and terrorism threat at the borders in past months.

Opening a new chapter in Iran-Pakistan relations, Raisi's two-day visit concluded with the two countries announcing plans to raise the volume of bilateral trade to \$10 billion annually over the next five years, up from the current \$2 billion.

The two sides reiterated the importance of cooperation in the energy domain, including trade in electric-

ity, power transmission lines and the Iran-Pakistan (IP) gas pipeline project.

The delegations signed eight accords on various subjects to enhance cooperation in the different fields including trade, science technology, agriculture, health, culture, and judicial matters. The establishment of free trade zones at border crossings, cooperation in the cinema and media sector, security, legal and judicial assistance in civil and commercial affairs were among main issues of the documents they signed.

Raisi also put the spotlight on the gas pipeline deal which has faced delays due to geopolitical issues and international sanctions.

Pakistan faces a difficult decision: Penalties for failing to lay the pipeline to receive Iran natural gas, or US sanctions for building it. Iran can take Pakistan to an international court and fine the country. Local media has reported that Pakistan can be fined up to \$18 billion for not holding up its half of the agreement.



The completion of the Peace Pipeline and improvement of economic relations between Iran and Pakistan will not only increase the Iran's foreign exchange income but also potentially thwart US policies aimed at removing Iran from the oil and gas market.





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IP project

Signed in 2010 and launched in 2013, the long-awaited pipeline deal envisaged the supply of 750 million to a billion cubic feet per day of natural gas for 25 years from Iran's South Pars gas field to Pakistan to meet the neighboring country's rising energy needs. The pipeline was to stretch over 1,900 kilometers - 1,150 km within Iran and 781 km within Pakistan. Iran has already invested \$2 billion to construct the pipeline on its side of the border, making it ready to export. Pakistan, however, did not begin construction and shortly after the deal said the project was off the table for the time being, citing international sanctions on Iran as the reason.

Iran at the time responded by saying that it carried out its commitments and expects Pakistan to honor its own, adding that Pakistan needs to pick up the pace of work.

In 2014, Pakistan asked for a 10-year extension to build the pipeline, which expires in September this year.

Pipeline key to both countries

Iran has the world's second-largest gas reserves after Russia but sanctions by the West and Pakistan's construction delays have slowed its development as an exporter.

In the other hand, Pakistan, whose domestic and industrial users rely on natural gas for heating and energy needs, is in dire need for cheap gas with its own reserves dwindling fast and LNG deals making supplies expensive amidst already high inflation.

More than 40 million people remain without access to electricity in Pakistan, while businesses experience productivity losses due to power shortages. According to National Electric Power Regulatory Authority's 2022 yearly report, Pakistan's total installed power generation capacity is 43,775 MW, of which 59% comes from thermal (fossil fuels), 25% from hydro, 7% from renewable (wind, solar and biomass), and 9% from nuclear. The country has been trying to cut down on using furnace oil for power generation and boost natural gas-fired electricity production.

In March, Islamabad said it would seek a US sanctions waiver for the gas pipeline. However, later that week, the US said

publicly it did not support the project and cautioned about the risk of sanctions in doing business with Tehran.

Pakistan on April 26 again disclosed that it is actively communicating with the United States regarding its energy requirements.

Great opportunity for Iran

In 2015, Pakistan had about 25 million cubic feet of gas reserves, but due to heavy reliance on gas by its industries, the country started importing gas for the first time. Therefore, completing the Peace Pipeline presents a significant opportunity for Iran to address Pakistan's growing energy needs.

By 2021, official reports indicated that Pakistan had imported over 7 million tons of liquefied gas, with the majority coming from companies like Qatar Energy, ENI, and Gunvor, based in Singapore. Despite these substantial imports, Pakistan continues to face energy shortages. Currently, a large portion of urban household consumption in Pakistan relies on liquefied gas cylinders, while industries primarily use diesel and gas. To meet its energy demands, Pakistan requires increased gas imports and investments in gas production. Strengthening bilateral relations and attracting foreign investments will not only help Pakistan address its energy needs but also enable Iran to boost its foreign exchange earnings.

Political significance

The completion of the pipeline and improvement of economic relations will not

only increase the Iran's foreign exchange income but also potentially thwart US policies aimed at removing Iran from the oil and gas market. Additionally, Iran can benefit from Pakistan as a bridge to accessing East Asian markets. Originally, the deal also involved extending the pipeline to India, but Delhi later dropped out of the project.

Exporting fuel

Pakistan imports about \$25 billion worth of fuel, with Iran's share not even reaching \$600 million. According to official statistics, the share of Iran's mineral fuel exports in Pakistan is nearly 2%. However, considering fuel smuggling from Iran to Pakistan, the eastern neighbor's fuel demand from Iran will be more than 15%.

Despite the exact amount of gasoline and diesel consumption in Pakistan not being available, recent reports from Pakistan's intelligence service indicate that nearly 30% of vehicle fuel is supplied through Iran. This amounts to over 2.8 billion liters per year (around 5.7 million liters daily) being smuggled from Iran to Pakistan.

Iran needs to change its fuel pricing policies to hike prices to match with those of neighboring countries to minimize fuel smuggling and boost its fuel export to increase its share of the Pakistani energy market.

Boosting cross-border employment

In total, the 900-kilometer border with



Pakistan imports about \$25 billion worth of fuel, with Iran's share not even reaching \$600 million. According to official statistics, the share of Iran's mineral fuel exports in Pakistan is nearly 2%.



IRNA, Reuters and Pakistan's Dawn have contributed to the statistical data to this article.



Persepolis scapegoat Zahedi relishing in life in Japanese top flight



By Amirhadi
Arsalanpour
Staff writer

The wonder goal against Gamba Osaka in the J1 League on Friday was the latest episode in a roller-coaster season for Avispa Fukuoka's Iranian striker Shahab Zahedi.

The Iranian picked up the ball midway through his own half, saw the keeper off his line, and suddenly unleashed a left-footed strike from over 70 yards out which found the back the net as Avispa went on to win 1-0 and end a run of four successive draws.

When Zahedi, 28, decided to leave Persian Gulf Pro League giant Persepolis in March to become the first Iranian to play in the Japanese top flight, few fans and pundits fancied him to find instant success in the Far East.

However, being no stranger to twists and turns throughout his career, Zahedi has enjoyed a flying start to life in the J1 League as his goal against Gamba was his sixth in eight matches for Avispa.

Zahedi, whose previous spell in the Tehran Reds shirt had finished with four cameo appearances a decade ago, rejoined the Iranian capital side on loan from Ukrainian club Zorya Lugansk in the summer with high expectations weighing on his shoulders. He returned to the Iranian league after six impressive seasons across Europe – during which he bagged 50 goals and 14 assists in an overall 148 games for Iceland's IBV, Zorya and Olimpik Donetsk in Ukraine, as well as Hungarian side Puskás



● J.LEAGUE

Akadémia.

With Issa Alekasir and Mahdi Abdi leaving Persepolis for the start of the new season, Zahedi was left with the enormous task of leading the line for the defend-

ing league and cup champion, which has been crying out for a prolific marksman ever since Ali Alipour left for Portuguese league in September 2020. It took Zahedi five games into the

season to get off the mark for the Reds – the winner in the home victory over Golgothar last October which was followed by a hat-trick in the 3-1 win at Paykan. The Iranian had to wait another

seven matches to find a league goal, when he headed home on the half-hour mark to secure maximum points against Nassaji Mazandaran before he netted a sublime scissor kick in the 1-1

draw at Mes Rafsanjan on the following matchday.

Finding the net once in the Reds' ill-fated AFC Champions League campaign – a header in the 2-1 home defeat against Al Duhail which saw Persepolis crash out of the group stage – Zahedi had seven goals and two assists under his belt and was the club's top scorer for the season when he made his final appearance for the club against Mes on the first day of the new year.

Still, constantly blamed for the team's lack of efficiency in front of the goal, Zahedi hardly won the Persepolis supporters over and his decision to skip a couple of training sessions to force a winter exit did not seem to disturb any of the Reds faithful, who were welcoming back Alekasir from Sepahan, while new Uzbek signing Oston Urunov added more depth to the frontline.

Zahedi, meanwhile, wasted no time in making his mark for the new employers as he contributed with an assist in his debut as a substitute against FC Tokyo before scoring in back-to-back matches, the later coming in a 1-0 triumph over former Asian champion Kashima Antlers in April.

For all their unimpressive campaigns in Europe this season, Porto talisman Mahdi Taremi and Roma striker Sardar Azmoun may still be the favorites to make a frontline partnership for the national team, but few would argue against in-form Zahedi – capped only once by Iran – deserving a call-up by head coach Amir Qalenoee for the World Cup qualifiers against Hong Kong and Uzbekistan in June.

Iranian Esmaili heads into Asian youth boxing final

Sports Desk

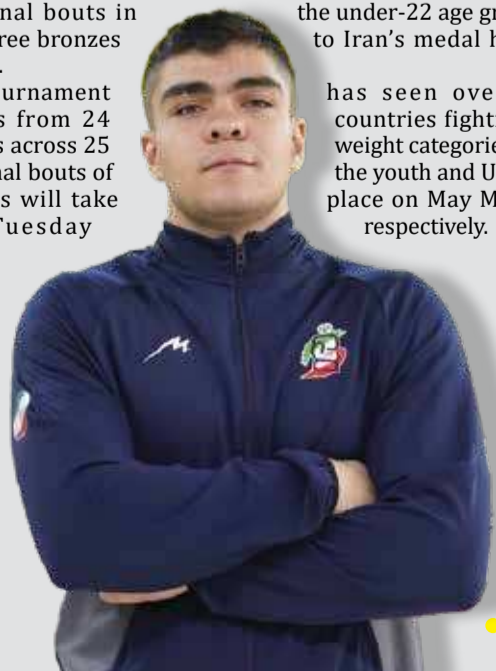
Iranian boxer Amir Esmaili marched into the final showpiece of his respective weight class at the ASBC Asian U22 & Youth Boxing Championships in Astana, Kazakhstan.

Representing the country in the men's youth 92kg contests, Esmaili knocked out high-profile Indian boxer Aryan in the first round to book a final place.

Meanwhile, Amir-Reza Soltani (54kg) and Amir-Reza Malk-Khat-abi (86kg) fell short in the last-four bouts against opponents from Uzbekistan to finish their campaigns with a couple of bronze medals.

Mohammad Mahshari (75kg), Ali Seyyed-Sadri (86kg), and Reza Khalilzadeh (+92kg) also suffered defeats in their semifinal bouts in the under-22 age group to add three bronzes to Iran's medal haul in Astana.

The tournament has seen over 390 boxers from 24 countries fighting for medals across 25 weight categories. The final bouts of the youth and U22 categories will take place on May Monday and Tuesday respectively.



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James favored to stay with Lakers as potential suitors emerge

REUTERS – LeBron James is going to take some time away from the court to decide where – and even if – he will play his 22nd NBA season.

The Lakers were back in the news with Friday's firing of coach Darvin Ham after two seasons. Who general manager Rob Pelinka tabs to replace Ham could also weigh heavily on James' decision.

James could choose to become a free agent, or he could decide to pick up his \$51.4 million player option for the final year of his current contract. At 39, he could even opt to retire.

The Lakers are the -500 favorite at DraftKings to be the team James begins the 2024-25 season with, but the sportsbook is also offering odds on nine other potential NBA destinations in Cleveland Cavaliers (+1200), Golden State Warriors (+2000), New York Knicks (+2500), Oklahoma City Thunder (+4000), Phoenix Suns (+4000), San Antonio Spurs (+4500), Chicago Bulls (+10000), and Portland Trail Blazers (+20000).

A return to the purple and gold remains the heavy favorite, and the public has backed that likelihood with 32 percent of the money wagered at the book. However, the second-most popular choice has been a move to Oklahoma City to pair with star Shai Gilgeous-Alexander. At



● JACK DEMPSEY/AP

+4000 longshot odds, the Thunder have attracted 26 percent of the money. Tied for third is Golden State and Philadelphia, with both backed by 13 percent. James just completed his 21st NBA season, which included his 20th consecutive All-Star Game selection. He is a four-time NBA champion, a four-time NBA Finals MVP and a four-time regular-season MVP. Asked about taking any confidence moving forward from the Lakers pushing the defending champion Denver Nuggets in the series that went five games,

much thought," and his priority was returning home to spend time with his family. James declined to address his future following the Lakers' first-round playoff exit, offering only that, "I haven't given it

James said, "No, 'cause we lost. ... I'm not a 'participation' guy. We lost and you move on and see how you can get better. "Our season has been derailed all season with ... injuries and guys in and out. I talked about it all year. ... It's hard to say who we are, what we can be 'cause we have yet to be whole. I think we were only probably whole one or two times this year. I know one of them was during the in-season tournament, we got whole and we showed what we (are) capable of doing.

FM: Regional efforts ramped up to stop war on Gaza



discussions with his Saudi and Egyptian counterparts, Faisal Ben Farhan and Sameh Shoukry, respectively, addressing mutual relations and the latest developments concerning Israel's devastating conflict in Gaza. The foreign ministers of Iran and Egypt discuss possible ways to put an end to Israel's crimes against the people of Palestine, particularly in the Gaza Strip. They expressed hope that the OIC summit would consolidate solidarity and unity in the Muslim world to support the Palestinian people and solve regional problems. The Iranian foreign minister hailed Egypt's bids to stop Israel's genocide in Gaza and called on Cairo to help Tehran dispatch humanitarian aid to the war-stricken people in the Strip. Concomitantly with the

electricity, and water into the Palestinian territory into a trickle. At least 34,654 Palestinians, mostly children and women, have been killed and 77,908 wounded in the war that Israel began on October 7, 2023, following a retaliatory operation by the Palestinian territory's resistance movements. For his part, the Egyptian foreign minister warned against the consequences of the continuation of Israel's war in Gaza, particularly the massacre of civilians, and expressed hope that the ongoing political bids would cease the war and restore Palestinians' rights. He once again condemned Israel's airstrikes on Iran's diplomatic premises in Syria last month and outlined Egypt's stance on the need to prevent the escalation of tensions in the region. Under the slogan "Enhancing Unity and Solidarity through Dialogue for Sustainable Development," the OIC session opened in Banjul on Saturday. The participants plan to discuss a variety of issues about the Muslim world, including the developments in Palestine, particularly Israel's war on the Gaza Strip.

Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian (3rd L) meets his Saudi counterpart, Faisal bin Farhan (2nd R), in Banjul, Gambia, on the sidelines of the 15th annual Islamic Summit Conference of the OIC on May 4, 2024. **IRNA**

International Desk
Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian said on Saturday that

regional efforts to stop the war and genocide in Gaza have become more serious. The foreign minister, who is currently in Gambia's

capital Banjul to participate in the 15th annual meeting of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), posted on his official X ac-

count about the specifics of his official visit. On the sidelines of the two-day conference that started on Saturday, he engaged in

war, the regime has been enforcing a near-total siege on the coastal territory, which has reduced the flow of foodstuffs, medicine,

Shahid Mahdavi warship sails into Southern Hemisphere



The domestically-developed Shahid Mahdavi oceangoing warship operated by Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Navy **IRNA**

A domestically-developed oceangoing warship operated by Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Navy has crossed the line of zero degrees latitude, the Equator, and sailed into the Southern Hemisphere. The Shahid Mahdavi, which is a multipurpose vessel designed for long-range operations, registered the achievement on Friday as Iran's naval forces are expanding their presence in the international waters and high seas. The 2,100-tonne vessel, which is 240 meters in length and 27 meters in width, joined the IRGC's naval fleet in March 2023.

The oceangoing warship is equipped with a three-dimensional phased array radar, sea-to-sea and sea-to-air missiles, and sophisticated telecommunication systems for electronic warfare.

The Shahid Mahdavi is capable of carrying various types of attack helicopters, combat drones as well as fast attack craft. In February 2024, the IRGC Navy launched two ballistic missiles from inside two containers on board the warship.

Iranian military experts and engineers have in recent years made remarkable breakthroughs in manufacturing a broad range of indigenous equipment, making the armed forces self-sufficient.

Iranian officials say the Islamic Republic will not hesitate to strengthen its military capabilities, including its missile power, which are entirely meant for defense. Iran has made it clear that its defense capabilities are not subject to negotiation. Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei has repeatedly called for efforts to maintain and boost Iran's defense capabilities.

Turkey freezes trade with Israel over 'worsening humanitarian tragedy'

International Desk
Turkey suspended all trade with Israel over its offensive in Gaza, citing the "worsening humanitarian tragedy" in the strip. The Turkish Trade Ministry said the measures would be in place until Israel allowed an "uninterrupted and sufficient flow" of aid into Gaza. Trade Minister Omer Bolat said on Friday the country will not resume trade with Israel, worth \$7 billion a year, until a permanent cease-fire and humanitarian aid are secured in Gaza, becoming the first of Israel's key commercial partners to take such a step, Reuters reported. Israel's "uncompromising attitude" and the worsening situation in Gaza's Rafah region, a refuge for displaced people that Israel

has threatened to storm – prompted Ankara to halt all exports and imports, Bolat said. Also, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Friday said Turkey's move to halt trade with Israel was designed to force the regime to a cease-fire in Gaza. The decision is the latest indication of deteriorating Turkey's relations with Israel, AFP reported. "We have taken some measures to force Israel to agree to a cease-fire and increase the amount of humanitarian aid to enter" Gaza, Erdogan told a group of businessmen in Istanbul. "We will oversee the consequences of this step we have taken in coordination and consultation with our business world." Turkish-Israeli trade volume amounted to \$9.5 billion, Er-

dogan told journalists after Friday prayers in Istanbul. "We closed that door." Turkish officials would coordinate with Palestinian authorities to ensure that Palestinians are not affected by the suspension of imports and exports, the trade ministry said. The ministry described the step as the "second phase" of measures against Israel, adding that the steps would remain in force until Israel "allows an uninterrupted and sufficient flow of humanitarian aid to Gaza." Already in April Turkey announced it was restricting exports to Israel, covering 54 products from iron and steel to jet fuel. "We do not run after hostility or conflict in our region," Erdogan said Friday. "We do not want to see conflict, blood or tears in our geogra-

phy, adding that, "We know now that we did the right thing." The Gaza Strip is suffering a humanitarian crisis caused by Israel's war against Hamas that has been raging since October 7, with the United Nations and aid agencies warning of impending famine. The Health Ministry in Gaza said Saturday that at least 34,654 people have been killed since October 7, when Hamas launched an unprecedented attack on Israel that resulted in the deaths of 1,170 people. Israeli Foreign Minister Israel Katz on Thursday accused Erdogan of breaking bilateral agreements after Ankara announced the trade freeze. But Erdogan said: "We have one goal here, and that's to force the Netanyahu cabinet, which went out of control with the unconditional mili-



tary and diplomatic support of the West, to a cease-fire." **REUTERS**

Truce attempts
According to Egyptian state-linked media Al-Qahera News, a Hamas delegation arrived Saturday in Egypt for the latest round of talks on a proposed truce and prisoner release in Gaza. However, a top Israeli official on Saturday said Israel will send a delegation to Cairo for talks on a Gaza truce only if it sees a "positive movement" on a framework for a hostage deal. "The indication for positive movement over a framework would be if we send

a delegation led by Mossad chief to Cairo," the official told AFP on condition of anonymity. Mediators from Qatar, Egypt and the US have been waiting for Hamas to respond to a proposal that, according to details released by Britain, would halt fighting for 40 days and exchange Israeli captives for Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails. If they manage to reach a deal, it would be the first since a week-long truce in November, when Hamas released 105 captives, the 80 Israelis among them in exchange for 240 Palestinians held by Israel.

Mohammad Ali Rajabi
Cartoonist



IRGC captures key sponsors of Jaish al-Adl terror group

Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Ground Force managed to capture primary sponsors of the Pakistan-based so-called Jaish al-Adl terrorist group in the country's southeastern province of Sistan and Baluchestan close to the border with Pakistan. The IRGC Ground Force's Quds Base said in a statement on Saturday that the IRGC servicemen could capture the terrorists during two separate joint operations by intelligence and security forces, Press TV reported. They had hidden among ordinary students of Anwar al-Haramain seminary school

in Pashamagh village of Rask County, and were sponsoring Jaish al-Adl terror activities. Back on April 9, at least five Iranian police officers were killed in a terrorist attack by members of the so-called Jaish al-Adl terrorist group in the southeastern Iranian province. Late on January 16, two major strongholds of the terrorist group in Pakistan's southwestern province of Balochistan were precisely struck and completely wiped out by a salvo of missiles as well as a squadron of combat drones. The bases were specifically targeted and successfully de-

molished in the Koh-e-Sabz area of the province, which is known to be among the main bastions of Jaish al-Adl terrorists. Jaish al-Adl is a notorious terrorist group with headquarters in Pakistan, and has been involved in numerous terror attacks against Iran.

A terrorist attack on two police cars in Iran's southeastern province of Sistan and Baluchestan left five officers dead on April 9, 2024.



Tehran, Cairo discuss expansion of tourism ties



Iran FM Hossein Amir-Abdollahian (r) shakes hands with his Egyptian counterpart Sameh Shoukry in the Gambian capital Banjul on May 4, 2024. ● IRNA

Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian met with his Egyptian counterpart Sameh Shoukry in the Gambian capital Banjul on Saturday. The two foreign ministers held talks ahead of the 15th Heads of State and Government Summit of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) with an emphasis on the strengthening of people-to-people and tourism relations, IRNA reported.

At the beginning of the meeting, the FMs, while conveying the warm greetings of the presidents of the two countries to each other, emphasized the special efforts of the leaders of the two countries to pursue the strengthening of bilateral relations. Shoukry and Amir-Abdollahian agreed to "continue consultations to address all outstanding topics and issues toward normalizing relations." Tehran and Cairo have increased their interactions since the Israeli regime launched its war on Gaza in early October.

Iran's monthly foreign trade up around 48%: IRICA



Iran's foreign trade registered about 47.63 percent hike in the first month of the current Iranian year (March 20 to April 22). The country's foreign trade, including the crude oil, gas condensates, techno-engineering services and electricity included, reached \$10.42 billion during the month to April 22, showing a 47.63 percent growth compared to the same period last year, IRNA reported. In the period, Iran exported \$7.68 billion worth of products. In return, the

country imported \$2.74 billion worth of goods, the report added. Iran's trade balance, with the crude oil, gas condensates, techno-engineering services and electricity included, turned positive as much as \$4.94 billion in the first month of the current Iranian year (started March 20). According to the report, Iran exported \$4.18 billion worth of crude oil, gas condensates and fuel oil from March 20 to April 22. In addition, 9.7 million

tons of goods were exported from the country between March 20 and April 22. China, Iraq, the UAE, Turkey, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Oman were of Iran's main export target markets in the first month of the current Iranian calendar year. Regarding the foreign goods transited from the country, the report added that 1.6 million tons of foreign products were transited through the Iranian land and territory in the first month of the cur-

rent Iranian year.

Iran-EU's trade up 30%: Eurostat

Also, according to the statistical office of the European Union (Eurostat), the trade between Iran and 27 EU members has grown by 30% in February 2024 compared to the same month last year. In February, Germany's exports to Iran grew by 46 percent while Italy's import of products from Iran showed a 96-percent hike. The figures also show

that the value of trade exchanges between Iran and 27 EU member states in January and February 2024 reached €847 million, showing an eight-percent increase compared to the last year's corresponding period. The EU members have imported €144 million in goods from Iran in January and February 2024, indicating a three percent growth compared to the same period in 2023. Italy's import of non-oil products from Iran in

February 2024 has doubled, the Eurostat added. German exports to Iran in February this year grew by 46 percent and reached €141 million as France's exports to Iran have also increased by 37 percent to €33 million. According to Eurostat, Romania's exports to Iran in February 2024 witnessed an eye-catching rise compared to the same period last year and increased from €2.5 million in February last year to €57 million in February in 2024.

Iran, EAEU to launch FTA in two months

A member of Iran-Russia Joint Chamber of Commerce predicted that more than 88% of commodities will be exchanged between Iran and the Eurasian Economic Union's member states with zero tariffs within the next two months.

The free trade agreements between countries will facilitate the exporters' access to the target market, member of the board of directors of Iran-Russia Joint Chamber of

Commerce, Kambiz Mirkarimi said. He noted that a Free Trade Agreement between Iran and the Eurasian Economic Union's members, including Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Armenia, was one of the most important deals signed by the country in recent years.

Iran's exports to the EAEU members stood at about \$260 million until 2018, but after the implementation of the FTA

in 2019, the country's exports to these countries immediately increased to above \$400 million, he said.

It is expected that the FTA will be ratified by the parliaments of all members states of the union within the next two months, he said.

This development will increase the competitiveness of Iranian products against the goods made in China, India and other rivals, Mirkarimi stated.

Afghanistan's second rail cargo to depart for Turkey via Iran

The Afghanistan railway administration announced plans for the departure of the country's second rail shipment to Turkey passing through Iran.

Head of Afghanistan's railway administration Bakht Rahman Sharafat posted a message on X about the second Afghan rail cargo being prepared to go to Turkey via Iran, reported Tasnim News Agency. He said Afghanistan is commit-

ted to the principles of connected world and fast transportation facilities. "We not only transport goods, but also connect the hearts," he added.

Afghanistan's railway authority has not provided details of the shipment. Afghanistan's first export cargo, including 1,100 metric tons of mineral ore, was exported by train from the Roznak station in Herat to Turkey through Iran on April 23.



The shipment was destined for the coastal city of Mersin in southern Turkey.

Astana keen on developing relations with Tehran: Envoy



Kazakhstan is keen on boosting ties with Iran, said Ontalap Onalbayev, the Kazakh ambassador to Iran on the sidelines of a ceremony for the opening of Shanyrak National Kazakh Corner at the embassy of the country in Tehran on May 1.

Speaking in the event which was held in conjunction with the Day of Unity of the Peoples of Kazakhstan, the envoy focused

on political and economic reforms, new international initiatives of the President of Kazakhstan Kassym-Jomart Tokayev.

He also paid special attention to the statement of the Kazakh president regarding the major natural disaster - floods that occurred in a number of regions of the country.

"As President said, within the framework of the unity and cooperation of

the people of Kazakhstan, the threat of floods is behind us. Government, state agencies, competent institutions and volunteers worked together. Thanks to that, more than 119,000 people were moved to a safe place in time. About 45 thousand of them are children. Most importantly, all efforts were focused on saving human lives." Onalbayev stated that May 1 - the day of the unity of

the peoples of Kazakhstan is of special importance for our country, thanks to unity and harmony, Kazakhstan has achieved significant achievements in creating an independent state. It was noted that by the initiative of Tokayev starting from this year, Nauryz (Nowrouz) holiday in Kazakhstan has been organized around the following themes: Day of meeting, Day of kindness, Day of Culture and national traditions, Day of Shanyrak, Day of national clothing, Day of

renewal, Day of national sports, Day of cooperation, New year and Day of purification.

During the event, a special exhibition was opened in order to widely introduce the national jewelry and handicrafts of the Kazakh people to the guests and to promote the culture and art, customs and traditions of the people, to show the current level of development of the applied and decorative arts through the works of the craftsmen of Kazakhstan.