

By Ebrahim Beheshti
Staff writer

PERSPECTIVE

After French President Emmanuel Macron expressed his desire to strengthen ties and cooperation with Masoud Pezeshkian in a phone call, European Council President Charles Michel has also conveyed the willingness of European countries to enhance relations with Tehran in a phone conversation with the Iranian President.

Recent developments suggest that Europe is leaning toward fostering stronger ties with Iran. In a phone call with Masoud Pezeshkian, French President Emmanuel Macron conveyed his desire to bolster cooperation between France and Iran. The sentiment was further emphasized by European Council President Charles Michel, who, in a conversation with the Iranian president, expressed the willingness of European nations to enhance relations with Tehran.

During their phone conversation on Sunday evening, Pezeshkian and Michel spoke about various topics, including Iran-Europe relations, initiatives on restarting talks for the revival of the 2015 nuclear deal (JCPOA), and the crisis caused by the Zionist regime's atrocities in the Gaza Strip, as well as Israel's terrorist activities in the region.

Pezeshkian said that the double standards employed by the US and certain Western nations had only served to embolden the Zionist regime in perpetuating terror and committing crimes in Gaza and beyond, thereby further jeopardizing regional and global peace and security.

In response to Michel's willingness to resume negotiations on the JCPOA, Pezeshkian underscored the importance of trust and ensuring mutual interests as the bedrock of any enduring agreement.

"If both sides fulfill their commitments and establish trust, we can not only resuscitate the nuclear agreement but also discuss other subjects of mutual concern," Pezeshkian said.

Michel expressed his optimism for the resumption of meaningful engagement between Iran and the European Union, founded on mutual interests, and the removal of obstacles to broader collaboration.

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Pezeshkian, VP defend new 'cross-party' cabinet lineup

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian and his First Vice-President Mohammadreza Aref defended the new cabinet lineup after the proposed list of ministers came under criticism. Pezeshkian submitted the list of his new cabinet members to Parliament on Sunday, less than two weeks after he was sworn in before the country's legislators.

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Iran developing age-old oilfield for 'sustainable' production



Economic Desk

Iran is working on developing a century-old oil field to extract crude oil "sustainably" after several failed attempts to tap into the reserve, a senior manager at the National Iranian South Oil Co. (NISOC) said on Monday.

The age-old Solabdar oilfield is located in the southwestern Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad Province.

Drilling began in Solabdar in 1925 with wells 1 and 2, but the oil wells turned out to be "uneconomical" and were quickly abandoned, Shana News Agency reported.

It was not until 1972 that the field's oil potential was proven with the drilling of well 3. Well 4 came along in 1979 as part of the field's development plan, and between 1994 and 2002, two workovers were carried out, but production never took off due to the "complexities" of the well's underlying reservoir. "Developing this oilfield was risky due to its complex geology," said Karim Hamid, the head of the NISOC's Reservoir Operation Engineering Department.

"Drilling for well 5 in 1995 was also inconclusive due to structural uncertainties and the well had to be put on hold," Hamid added.

Despite difficulties, Solabdar's well 4 went under another workover which led to the production of 1,000 barrels per day (bpd) on a test run in 2020.

Hamid hailed crude oil extraction from the well as a "turning point" for the Solabdar field's development.

The results from well 4's repair reduced the reservoir risks, giving the go-ahead for further development, including digging new wells. Well 6 was drilled in 2022, and now it is churning out 1,000 bpd, raising the field's total daily output to 2,000 barrels. "Well 6's productivity is a testament to the successful planning for the Solabdar field's development," Hamid pointed out.

The drilling of Solabdar well 7, which started last year in the field's western section, is now in its final stages.

The NISOC official said "sustainable production" from the Solabdar field would be achieved after the remaining two wells are drilled and processing facilities are installed.

Iran sets new record in foreign direct investment

Iran saw a new record in foreign direct investment (FDI) in the calendar year to late March despite sanctions imposed by the US.

Head of Iran's Organization for Investment & Economic and Technical Assistance (OIETA) said that the net FDI attracted to Iran in the past calendar year had reached a total of \$5.5 billion, Press TV reported.

Ali Fekri said the figure was a record in the 16-year history of the OIETA, adding that the organization had issued permits for other FDI projects but they were removed from the tally because investors had failed to bring funds into the country. Fekri said that another \$2.5 billion worth of foreign investment had been attracted to Iranian projects over the past calendar year which were not authorized or registered by the OIETA.

China was responsible for \$2 billion worth of investment in Iranian projects last year, he said, adding that Turkey, the United Arab Emirates and Iranians living abroad had the largest share in foreign investment in the country after China over the same period.

He dismissed reports suggesting that the increase in Iran's



FDI was because of new inflows from Afghanistan, saying that the entire investment by the Afghans in Iran had not exceeded \$35 million in the year

to March.

A bulk of FDI attracted to the Iranian economy over the past calendar year went to manufacturing or mining and metals

projects, he said.

Fekri said the total FDI authorized by the OIETA during the three years of the outgoing administration had reached

\$11 billion, adding that oil and gas sector in the country had attracted the largest share of foreign investments over the period.

Iranian NGOs outperform contractors in various fields



Economic Desk

The role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) as a consultative and supervisory body was discussed at a meeting in Tehran to mark the National NGOs Day on Monday.

During the meeting, it was emphasized that NGOs could replace contractors in Iran in many areas. Speaking in the event, Mohammad Abouei, the secretary of Tehran-based NGOs Headquarters stated that, "We do our utmost to make the words of NGOs reach the officials and public."

The empowerment of NGOs along with boosting logistical infrastructure is one of the demands of the members of Iranian NGOs, he noted.

Stating that NGOs should play a key role in planning and monitoring in the country,

Abouei said the government should work to take advantage of the capacity of NGOs. The regulations regarding the activities of NGOs are facing many challenges as no decision has been made for the ratification of a draft on NGOs by the Parliament, he criticized, noting that the organizations are working under the framework of a bill which was approved by the cabinet.

Speaking at the event, Alireza Atashak, the managing director of Iran NGO Network urged the Iranian government to stop receiving tax from bank deposits of NGOs. According to the tax laws of NGOs, which stipulates their tax exemption, and considering the restrictions that these organizations are facing, Atashak said it is necessary to remove collecting tax from their bank deposits.

Iran's home-made plane undergoing type certification

Head of Iran's Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) announced that the domestically-designed Simorgh aircraft is undergoing various tests to receive a type certificate.

Mohammad Mohammadi Bakhsh said that a prototype version of Simorgh had successfully undergone flight tests, adding that various other tests have been carried out on the aircraft in recent months to prove its airworthiness, according to Press TV. Mohammadi Bakhsh said the CAA has been closely monitoring the tests and has received graphs and documents containing precise information about Simorgh's performance. Simorgh was unveiled in May 2022 as the first Iranian light transport aircraft. The plane is a modified version of IrAn-140, an Iranian-Ukrainian joint project which is based on Antonov An-140.

The new plane carried out a first successful flight in May



2023, nearly a year after it did a fast-taxi test.

Iranian defense ministry, which is in charge of manufacturing Simorgh, said just after the test flight that it had started the process to receive a test certificate for the plane. Mohammadi Bakhsh said Simorgh is quite different from IrAn-140 because its engine and fuselage have been modified.

He said that a second Simorgh aircraft is being built and technicians are attaching wings, landing gears and engines to the plane.

The official said Iran is now in control of a home-grown

plane-manufacturing industry which can join partnerships with international plane-makers.

He said that Simorgh is essentially a cargo plane but can join Iran's fleet of short-haul regional jets in the future. Reports in recent years have pointed to a major progress in Iran's aircraft production and maintenance sector.

That comes against the backdrop of sanctions imposed on the country by the United States as Iranian airlines have been barred from purchasing new planes.

Iran's legumes exports stood at 91,000 tons last year

The chairman of the Board of Directors of the Iranian Legumes Association said that 91,000 tons of cereals were exported from the country in the past Iranian calendar year (March 21, 2023, to March 20, 2024).

Davoud Lapehchi put the annual consumption of cereals and legumes in Iran at between 950,000 tons and one million tons, reported Tasnim News Agency.

Speaking in a news conference, he added that according to the statistics, the per capita consumption of legumes in Iran is between 8 and 10 kilograms, while the rate stands at 13 kg in the global average.

Lapehchi noted that between 650,000 and 700,000 tons of different types of cereals were produced in the country last year (ended March 20, 2024), and it is expected to increase

in the current Iranian calendar year (started March 21, 2024). According to the statistics, about 199,000 tons and 243,000 tons of cereals were imported into the country in 2021 and 2022 respectively, he said.

He further pointed out that about 50,000 tons of cereals were imported into the country in the first four months of the current Iranian year (March 21 to July 22, 2024).

Embracing the cultural and economic heritages of Tabriz Bazaar



islamicarchitecturalheritage.com



iranwonders.com



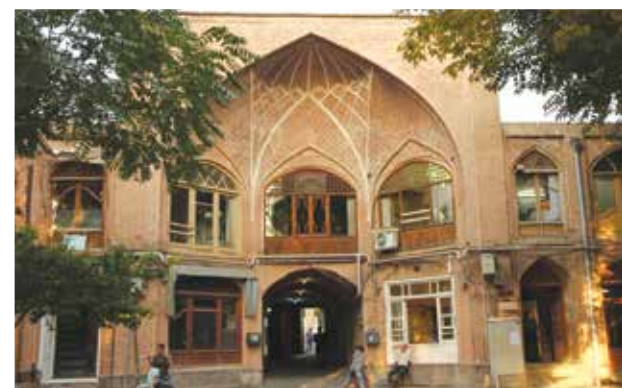
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IRNA



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Iranica Desk

The city of Tabriz, the capital of East Azarbaijan Province, is renowned for its unique historical attractions and invaluable intangible heritage, earning it the title of the City of Historical Houses in Iran. Among its treasures, the historic Tabriz Bazaar stands out as one of the most significant and largest covered bazaars in the world, playing a vital economic, cultural, historical, and social role in the region.

With its intricate structure and stunning architecture, the Tabriz Bazaar symbolizes Iranian art and culture. Home to over 5,500 shops, 26 caravanserais, 20 corridors, 30 smaller sections, 33 passageways and 28 mosques, it ranks among the largest commercial and architectural complexes globally. Its strategic location along the Silk Road has historically made the Tabriz Bazaar a hub for trade and the exchange of diverse goods, chn.ir wrote.

As a traditional Iranian market, the Tabriz Bazaar features distinctive characteristics that set it apart from other historical bazaars. The use of brick and plaster, complemented by exquisite arches, domes, and tile decorations, reflects the artistry and taste of Iranian architects. Moreover, the bazaar incorporates public spaces such as mosques, baths, and schools, highlighting its consideration for social and cultural dimensions alongside commercial activities.

Given the historical and cultural significance of the Tabriz Bazaar, there is

a pressing need for focused attention on the preservation and restoration of these invaluable structures. Additionally, further research into the history, architecture, and socio-economic roles of the Tabriz Bazaar could deepen our understanding of this unparalleled complex.

Naser Rezai, the director of the Research Institute of Cultural Heritage and Tourism's Department for Tour and Natural Heritage Groups, emphasized the importance of conducting research and addressing tourism issues: "The benefit of the local community from development programs is a crucial factor in their success, and for sustainability, we must also consider environmental capacities. Moreover, in the realm of environmental design and man-made attractions, the significance of engaging with existing tourism sites becomes even more pronounced. This necessitates foundational studies and attention to infrastructure."

"It is important to note that tourism attractions only hold value when they are transformed into tangible properties, which is achieved through precise planning. Tourism impacts not only the local economy but also the security and cultural development of the environment," he said. He noted that today, Tabriz is recognized as one of Iran's major cities, making strides toward development while preserving its historical and cultural values. With a population exceeding 1.5 million, Tabriz stands as a significant industrial, commercial, and cultural hub in the country. The

city plays a vital role in the national economy and scientific advancement, hosting universities, research centers, and large factories.

However, maintaining the cultural heritage of Tabriz, particularly its historical bazaar, should be viewed not only as a national responsibility but also as an investment in attracting tourists and ensuring sustainable urban development. Further research in this area can enhance our understanding and protection of this invaluable heritage.

Seyyed Ramin Asbaqi, the head of Tabriz's Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts Organization, highlighted the unique potential of East Azarbaijan Province — especially Tabriz — in introducing this proud ancient city to younger generations.

He stated, "Tabriz Bazaar, as a UNESCO World Heritage site, represents a significant asset. Additionally, the intangible cultural heritage, along with tangible sites like globally registered caravanserais, the first global tourism village, the Arasbaran forests, and the designation of Tabriz as a World Craft City for Carpet Weaving, showcases valuable historical homes, special sweets, and a rich culinary diversity. All of these factors indicate the immense potential of East Azarbaijan Province, particularly Tabriz, to be recognized as a national and global tourism destination."

"East Azarbaijan boasts a rich cultural and civilizational heritage, featuring historical landmarks such as the Tabriz Bazaar, St. Stephanos Church, the Blue Mosque, and the Ali Shah

Citadel. Additionally, it is home to a vibrant culture of Ashiq music, carpet weaving, beautiful handicrafts, and religious ceremonies, establishing it as one of Iran's most important tourist destinations. The province attracts many domestic and foreign tourists with its stunning natural landscapes, including the Arasbaran forests and Lake Urmia, along with its unique cultural and linguistic diversity," he said.

Seyyed Alireza Qahari, head of the Association of Iranian Architectures, emphasized the importance of designating a province as a "Province of the Year" to promote the historical, social, and cultural potentials of its various regions and to familiarize young people with the attractions of each province.

He remarked, "this initiative, which began in 2007 has provided a unique opportunity to showcase the attractions, heritage, civilizational, cultural, and tourism features of that province." East Azarbaijan Province was selected as the eighteenth province by the Iranology Committee of the association.

"After enduring natural disasters such as devastating earthquakes, the Tabriz Bazaar has been repeatedly reconstructed through the dedication and efforts of the people of Tabriz, returning to its former glory and prosperity. These efforts reflect the deep cultural and communal significance of the bazaar, as locals view it not just as a marketplace, but as an integral part of their identity and history, which they have lovingly restored. The Tabriz

Bazaar serves as the beating heart of the city, symbolizing the unbreakable bond between its people and their cultural heritage.

Hossein Esmaeili Sangari, a faculty member of the Research Institute of Cultural Heritage and former president of the Tabriz Bazaar's World Heritage Site, highlighted the notable features of the bazaar, noting its inscription as a World Heritage Site due to its significant criteria. This recognition underscores the monument's immense potential on a global scale. The developmental trends of the Tabriz Bazaar throughout various periods — especially following the severe earthquakes — demonstrate its resilience. The bazaar has consistently managed to regain its identity after these devastating events, illustrating its vital role in social interactions and in shaping the urban landscape and quality of life for its inhabitants.

Khosrow Rafiei, head of the Association of Public Relations, commented on the historical bazaar's social significance, saying that the bazaar has been the largest hub for communication among people, facilitating face-to-face interactions.

In addition to its main role as a venue for financial transactions, the bazaar holds special value by fostering connections among people. Before the foundation of the public relation department, they were intrinsically present in the large bazaars of Iran, where people, alongside trade and commerce, engaged in mutual problem-solving, reciprocal communication, and information-sharing.

Remarkable downfall of Bangladesh's iron lady

How grassroots uprising toppled Sheikh Hasina

People gather around the residence of the Bangladeshi prime minister in Dhaka, Bangladesh, on August 5, 2024.

AFP

By Ali Riaz
Scholar

OPINION

In a move that would have seemed unimaginable just a few weeks ago, Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina ended a decade and a half of uninterrupted rule on August 5, resigning her post and fleeing the country. The military, which has seized power in Bangladesh on several occasions, urged Hasina to leave as a popular nationwide uprising threatened to overwhelm security forces. In surreal scenes, protesters wandered through the rooms of the prime minister's residence in the capital, Dhaka, lounging on its furniture, posing for photos, and stealing. For now, reports suggest that Waker-uz-Zaman, the army chief, has taken the reins. He has pledged to form an interim government ahead of fresh elections, although how such a government will be put in place remains unclear.

Hasina's downfall closes an up-and-down chapter in Bangladeshi history. In recent decades, the country has been celebrated as a poster child of globalization and development, with the economy growing briskly, incomes on the rise, and various social indicators moving in positive directions. And yet all the good news obscured abiding weaknesses, including widening economic disparities, high youth unemployment, and a turn to autocracy under Hasina and her party, the Awami League. Dissatisfaction with the government and economy fueled protests that erupted in Dhaka in early July before spreading around the country. As she has done in the past, Hasina suppressed the demonstrations ruthlessly. Security forces killed hundreds of people in just a few weeks, and charity groups were left to gather the unidentified bodies of protesters. Authorities cracked down again on a fresh wave of demonstrations in early August, killing 90 more people. But that carnage was the final straw. The public had had enough, and Bangladeshis flooded the streets, forcing Hasina's hasty evacuation via military helicopter to India. The last few days in Bangladeshi politics will be fodder for scholars for years to come. They revealed the fundamentally brittle nature of Hasina's regime, which had seemed for so long adamant and impervious to opposition challenge but ended up collapsing in a matter of mere hours. Her exit also punctures the cult of personality she wove around her father, the country's founder whose mantle she claimed; amid the tumult of August 5, protesters burned the memorial museum Hasina had built for her father. But most importantly, the toppling of Hasina came at the hands of a force not seen before in Bangladesh: a mass grassroots movement unaffiliated with any party and yet capable of reshaping the country's political landscape. It is inspiring that genuine people power could do away with a seemingly invincible autocrat. But such an inchoate popular uprising also brings great uncertainties about the day after. Even as Bangladeshis celebrate the end of the Hasina regime, they may also have reason to worry about what is about to come.

Pressure cooker

Hasina, the daughter of the charismatic nationalist Sheikh Mujibur Rahman (called Mujib) who led the country's 1971 war of independence against Pakistan, was until her resignation the world's longest-serving female head of state. Time and Forbes repeatedly named her one of the world's most powerful people. Also described as "Asia's iron lady" by The Economist, she often used that power for the ill. Since she started her second stint as prime minister in 2009, Bangladesh has plummeted in various democracy indexes and measures of press freedom. Hasina presided over the removal of key democratic guardrails, the restriction of the independence of the judiciary, and a clampdown on civil society and the press. Bangladeshi opposition parties and young people tried to push back against these trends on several occasions, but Hasina's government met such demonstrations with heavy-handed force. Hasina's growing authoritarianism coincided with a turn for the worse in the country's economy. In past decades, Bangladesh seemed to have achieved significant economic growth and was held up as a success story. But many economists now question the reliability of government-provided statistics that undergird these claims. And no matter what growth the country has achieved, its benefits remain concentrated at the top. The wealthiest 10 percent of Bangladeshis receives over 41 percent of the country's total income,



Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus (C) takes the oath of office as the head of Bangladesh's new interim government during a ceremony administered by President Mohammed Shahabuddin (L) in Dhaka on August 8, 2024.

MUNIR UZ ZAMAN/AFP

while the bottom 10 percent receives just over one percent. The popular uprising in July reflected the convergence of two strands of discontent. The first was disquiet among students about a quota system that reserved 56 percent of civil service jobs for particular groups of people, including 30 percent of all civil service jobs for descendants of veter-

ans of the 1971 war of independence against Pakistan. The system, which Hasina had scrapped in 2018 after months of protests, was reinstated by the High Court in June. Exasperated students took to the streets, and their protests intensified after Hasina likened them to Razakars — a hated paramilitary force that supported the Pakistani army during the war of independence. This incen-

diary comment questioned their patriotism, infuriating students and drawing more to the streets. For them, the quota issue was merely the tip of an iceberg, a symbol of a system stacked against them. Youth unemployment has more than doubled since 2010, from around six percent to over 15 percent. More than 40 percent of Bangladeshis between the ages of 15 and 24 are not studying, employed, or training for jobs. Those realities drove hundreds of thousands to join the movement. In response, the police, as well as students who backed the ruling party, attacked the demonstrators, further inflaming the situation. The second source of discontent, which brought thousands of ordinary citizens to the streets, was a deep-seated sense of economic and political disenfranchisement. In recent years, price hikes on essential commodities, such as electricity, have hurt average Bangladeshis. Meanwhile, citizens have seen corruption among government officials proceed unabated as the government ordered a proliferation of large vanity infrastructure projects. Bangladeshis and international observers, including the World Bank, are convinced that these large building projects have enabled no small amount of graft as their costs skyrocketed beyond initial estimates. For instance, the Padma Bridge southeast of Dhaka cost twice its original budget. At the same time, citizens felt increasingly unable to influence the country's direction. The last plausibly free and fair election was held in 2008. Since then, Hasina and her allies have found

ways to place their thumbs on the scale for the Awami League, her ruling party, by changing the ways elections are managed. Local and international observers have also found many irregularities in the staging of elections in the past decade. The popular uprising was neither organized nor steered by the opposition political parties, but Hasina resorted to the familiar narrative of blaming the opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party and the Islamist Jamaat-e-Islami party for fomenting the protests. She insisted that “terrorists” had unleashed the violence. By blaming these groups, Hasina tried to cast the domestic crisis as a battle to protect a secular state from Islamist forces and thereby convince the West either to come to her aid or stay on the sidelines. But that gambit failed to convince either Bangladeshis or the country’s outside partners.

Downfall of autocrat

The immediate events that precipitated Hasina’s downfall began to unfold on August 3, when students held a massive rally in Dhaka that was

joined by hundreds of thousands of people from all levels of society. The rally was a testament to the fact that despite hundreds of deaths in the previous weeks, the government had not quelled the unrest. Protesters called for nothing less than Hasina’s resignation. Initially, she and party leaders did not take the demands seriously, expecting that activists loyal to her, along with the police, would be able to suppress the latest agitation. But after the atrocities of recent weeks, the students called for a national march on Dhaka, which brought thousands more to the capital and forced Hasina to flee.

The speed with which Hasina went from being Bangladesh’s longtime ruler to an exile is just incredible. It suggests that the regime was very brittle. Patronage networks among the bureaucracy and the military kept the regime afloat, but these beneficiaries’ commitment to the regime was abysmally weak. Over the years, the country’s power brokers became alienated from the public and entirely dependent on the coercive institutions of the state. They could not withstand the

challenge of the mass upsurge that threatened to overwhelm those institutions.

Hasina leaves not just with her reputation tattered but with the cult of personality around her father, which she had assiduously cultivated, more or less wiped out. Hasina sought to make Mujib, who was assassinated in 1975, immortal in the minds of the people and emblematic of the valor of her rule and that of her party. But now with Hasina expelled, that cult of personality is shorn of its power and will not wield the same influence over Bangladeshi politics.

And yet amid the optimism that has greeted Hasina’s downfall, there are several reasons to be concerned. The military now effectively runs the show, as it did between 2007 and 2008. It claims to care for the best interests of Bangladeshis, but it is really intent on ensuring that the state works to its benefit. Its interests are often inimical to the principles of accountability. The military would like to see much of the status quo maintained and will not countenance major reform; in the absence of such re-

form, Bangladesh may end up in the same place in a few years.

It is more than likely that in a few months, the military could manage to hold fresh elections, and a new elected civilian government could rise to power. But without more meaningful change, that may constitute a return to the past. The problem with the broad, amorphous force that has toppled Hasina is that it has yet to offer a clear vision of the future beyond calls for a new kind of political settlement. Bangladesh needs focused and decisive leadership to strengthen its democracy (quite possibly through constitutional reform), to cut through the networks of patronage through which the state operates, and to make sure the institutions work for the people. The energies of the popular movement may dissipate and fail to guide the country toward the change it needs. In a heroic effort, Bangladeshis brought down the Hasina regime. But what now will emerge from the rubble?

The full article first appeared on Foreign Affairs.

Sheikh Hasina’s downfall and exile of her own making



By Arafat Kabir
Author, investment banker

OPINION

After weeks of anti-government protests, on August 5, Bangladesh’s prime minister Sheikh Hasina stepped down and fled the country in a spectacular turn of events. Until the last moments of her rule, her grip on power seemed all but absolute even after the deaths of hundreds of students who hit the streets demanding reform of civil service job allocations first and then her resignation.

Hasina’s stubborn refusal to compromise, overreliance on state violence, and deep patronage ties to a privileged clientele class had long disconnected her from the Bangladeshi public. She perhaps did not see the extent to which she had lost the support of the majority until the very end, leaving her with no choice but to flee the country. The collapse of her 16-year rule renders both a cautionary tale to dictators worldwide and a proof of the sheer willpower of a nation’s disillusioned youth.



A mural of Bangladeshi prime minister Sheikh Hasina was vandalized by protesters a day after her resignation, in Dhaka on August 6, 2024.
● MOHAMMAD PONIR HOSSAIN/REUTERS

People vandalize a statue of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the father of Sheikh Hasina and the first leader of independent Bangladesh, in Dhaka on August 9, 2024.

● MOHAMMAD PONIR HOSSAIN/REUTERS

The irony is that Hasina herself rode the wave of young people’s support when she led the Awami League party in contesting the 2008 elections, which it won with a landslide.

During her first term, she capitalised on youth sentiments in order to go after political leaders accused of committing war crimes during Bangladesh’s war of independence in 1971. She started executing opposition leaders while sparing the guilty of the same sin in her party. In 2013, she ordered a brutal crackdown on a sit-in by religious school students, whom she had labelled radical Islamists, resulting in dozens of deaths.

In hindsight, that should have been a warning sign to the Bangladeshi public. But they chose to keep faith in Hasina, who promised shiny new infrastructure and more employment.

She did not spare any opportunity to trumpet her family tragedy and attacks on her life. Her family, including her father, Mujibur Rahman, the founder of the nation, was slain in a military coup in 1975. That she had no one but the people of Bangladesh to serve became her rallying cry; and it was too raw, too powerful to defy.

Drawing on the wellspring of family lores and legacy, she relentlessly assailed her detractors, often calling them spawns of “razakars”, a derogatory term used to describe the abettors of the Pakistani military during the war of independence. Last month, she resorted to her time-tested rhetoric again, which provoked outrage among the protesters and demanded for an apology from her. She, of course, found it too beneath her to apologise for or even acknowledge the harm her words had caused.

Hasina’s refusal to listen to what people wanted stemmed from her long-held belief in her own political invincibility. As the scion of Bangladesh’s

founding father, she had cultivated an image of herself as an unassailable, almost deity-like figure — the undisputed daughter of democracy.

Compromising, in her mind, would have been an unthinkable sign of weakness that could have undermined the cult of personality she had built around herself over her 15 years in power. Even as her grip on the country slipped, Hasina remained convinced that her legacy and the loyalty of her core supporters would ultimately shield her from having to make such a humbling concession.

Hasina’s fall from disgrace is of her making only. In pursuit of total power, she alienated her allies both at home and abroad. She went after those she held grudges against, from the ailing former prime minister Khaleda Zia to the nation’s only Nobel Laureate, Professor Muhammad Yunus, putting them under house arrest.

Countless political activists, writers, and intellectuals were either imprisoned or disappeared during what can justifiably be called a “reign of terror”. Even sympathisers who attempted to offer her good-faith counsel were not spared from her wrath.

Under Hasina’s leadership, Bangladesh was once seen as a model for those countries struggling to straddle competing powers in their neighbourhoods. But that balancing act imploded, too, as she fully entrenched into India’s orbit, unnerving China.

Western countries also grew frustrated with Hasina’s flagrant violation of democratic and human rights principles. The United States started to show its displeasure with her government, sanctioning in 2023 government officials found responsible for impeding the democratic process or involved in corruption.

But a defiant Hasina wore the American reprieve as a badge of honour and repeatedly mocked Washington for falling short on issues like public safety. Her bloody crackdown on the student protests from their start only deepened the diplomatic rift.

Hasina assumed excessive force would do its work as it had done before. But she could not fathom the depth of discontent among the people over myriad issues, over the system of which she was the face. Student protests soon morphed into a mass movement, a Generation Z revolution.

Hasina was inclined to apply even more force in a desperate attempt to cling to power, but her closest advisers warned against it, fearing the potential for even greater bloodshed. Her own son later revealed that she did not want to leave, but ultimately decided to do so on the insistence of her family, perhaps saving her from an even more humiliating end.

Indeed, her authoritarian rule had alienated not just the public, but also key international allies, and fleeing the country to India was her best option.

Sheikh Hasina’s precipitous downfall in Bangladesh represents a pivotal moment, not just for the country, but for the broader global struggle between democracy and authoritarianism. The Bangladeshi youth have delivered a striking rebuke to those seeking to snuff the democratic aspirations of the people. Their victory serves as a powerful rejoinder to dictators who believe their grip on power is unassailable.

As the world watches the unfolding events in Bangladesh, leaders across the globe must heed this cautionary tale. The lesson is clear: Underestimate the power of your citizens at your own peril.

This triumph for democracy in Bangladesh offers a glimmer of hope at a time when the forces of autocracy appear to be on the march. The Bangladeshi youth have proven that even the most entrenched of dictators are vulnerable to the collective power of a mobilised citizenry. Their struggle has demonstrated that the human thirst for freedom and self-determination is a potent force, even against the most formidable political machines.

The article first appeared on Al Jazeera.

Leader extols Iran's performance at Paris Olympics



Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei has expressed his heartfelt gratitude for the remarkable performance of Iranian athletes, leaders of federation and coaches who participated at the Paris 2024 Olympics.

The Leader on Monday responded to a message sent by President of National Olympic Committee of the Islamic Republic of Iran Mahmoud Khosravi Vafa, who explained the sports and cultural achievements of the Iranian teams participating at the international event.

Ayatollah Khamenei acknowledged the dedication and resolve of the "dear athletes," the presidents of the federations and coaches as well as the National Olympic Committee of Iran.

Ayatollah Khamenei thanked them for bringing joy and pride to the Iranian nation through their impressive sporting achievements and wished them success.

Iranian Olympians secured a total of 12 medals—comprising 3 gold, 6 silver, and 3 bronze—across freestyle wrestling, Greco-Roman wrestling, and taekwondo, finishing 21st out of over 200 participating nations.



● WORLD TAEKWONDO



● IAWF



Sports Desk

It was more or less business as usual for Iran at the Paris Olympics as the country again had wrestling and taekwondo representatives to thank for the taste of glory in the sporting extravaganza.

Eight of the 11 wrestlers left the French capital with a medal, while all four members of the taekwondo squad finished on the podium as Iran's 40-athlete delegation stood 21st in the medal table – six places better off than the Tokyo Olympics three years ago, where Iran had to settle for seven medals despite sending 65 athletes to the Games.

Elsewhere in Paris, the weightlifting contests – Iran's second-most prolific event throughout the previous editions – turned out to be an absolute disappointment, while the results indicated much more work needs to be done if the country is to succeed in other sports, when the Games return to Los Angeles in four-years' time.

Meanwhile, the Iranian four-man saber team – beaten by the host in the third-place matchup – regretted some controversial refereeing in the last-four game against Hungary for eventually missing out on the podium, with speed climber Reza Alipour also filling unlucky to leave the Games empty-handed after American Sam Watson clocked a world-record 4.74 seconds to pip the Iranian to the bronze.

Taekwondo landmark

Iran's taekwondo campaign

was one for the ages after the team made a clean sweep of four medals.

Young gun Arian Salimi came out victorious against British fourth-seed Caden Cunningham 2-1 to walk away with the ultimate prize of the men's +80kg contests on Saturday night, rounding off a thrilling, action-packed four days for the Iranians in the French capital's Grand Palais – a first Olympic taekwondo gold for the country since Hadi Saei's triumph in Beijing 2008.

The most-decorated Iranian in the Olympic history with double golds and a bronze, Saei also played his part in the latest success as the head of the sport's national governing body.

Nahid Kiani and teenage sensation Mobina Ne'matzadeh made history in the women's competitions as the former became the first Iranian girl to reach the final showdown in any Olympic event before taking the -57kg silver, while the latter's -49kg bronze meant this year's Games were the most productive for the Iranian female athletes.

Mehran Barkhordari also produced some magnificent performances to end Iran's 12-year wait for a men's final spot, though he eventually finished as the runner-up to Tunisian Firas Katoussi in the -80kg showdown.

Wrestling roller-coaster

The wrestling contests were filled with highs and lows for Iran.

While the country enjoyed the

introduction of some up-and-coming stars, not to mention sensational victories over high-profile opponents, there was a disappointing conclusion to Iran's quest for a first free-style gold since Rio 2016.

Looking to dethrone Saei as Iran's all-time greatest Olympian, Hassan Yazdani headed to Paris in pursuit of a second gold despite spending eight months on the sidelines after a surgery on his shoulder last October.

He showed no signs of an injury struggle throughout his 86kg campaign, but the problem flared up in the untimeliest fashion imaginable – the early seconds of the final showdown against Bulgaria's Magomed Ramazanov, which saw the Iranian suffer a 7-1 defeat.

Stepping into the 125kg contests as the reigning world champion, Amirhossein Zare' was the ultimate favorite for the superheavyweight crown in Paris and delivered a familiar composed display against Turkish great Taha Akgül for a place in the final.

However, A crazy three minutes of action in the final saw the 24-year-old Iranian trail Georgian Geno Petriashvili by nine points at the break and the second-period surge proved too little too late as it finished 10-9. The story was the same for Rahman Amouzad, who ran riot against two world champions in American Zain Retherford and Bulgaria's Ismail Musukaev but was stunned by low-profile Japanese Kotaro Iyooka in the 65kg final 10-3 to take Iran's silver tally to three.

In the 97kg class, young Iranian Amir-Ali Azarpira fell to a first-round defeat against eventual gold medalist Akhmed Tazhudinov but still capped his decent run with a consolation bronze thanks to a massive win against American Kyle Snyder. There was more joy for the Iranian fans in the Greco-Roman competitions, with Saeid Esmaili and Mohammad-Hadi Saravi emerging as surprise gold medalists.

Having outclassed Cuban world champion Luis Orta by technical superiority in the quarter-finals, Esmaili, turning 21 last month, rallied from behind twice to beat Tokyo silver medalist Parviz Nasibov of Ukraine 6-5 in a thrilling 67kg final at the Grand Palais Éphémère, a day after Saravi had notched up his first win in four career meetings with Armenian superstar Artur Aleksanyan for the top prize in the 97kg class. Alireza Mohmadi, 21, will also have every reason to be proud of his Olympic debut despite an 87kg final setback against Bulgarian Semen Novikov, while 130kg bronze medalist Amin Mirzazadeh would have definitely finished with a more prestigious medal, had it not been for a second-round loss to legendary Cuban Mi-jalín López, who went on to grab an Olympic-record fifth successive gold.

At the end, the haul of 12 medals – three golds, six silvers, and three bronzes – was the second best for Iran in 19 Olympic participations as London 2012 remains the most prolific with 13, including seven golds.



Eight wrestlers as well as all four members of the taekwondo squad finished on the podium as Iran's 40-athlete delegation stood 21st in the medal table – six places better off than the Tokyo Olympics, where the country won seven medals despite sending 65 athletes to the Games.



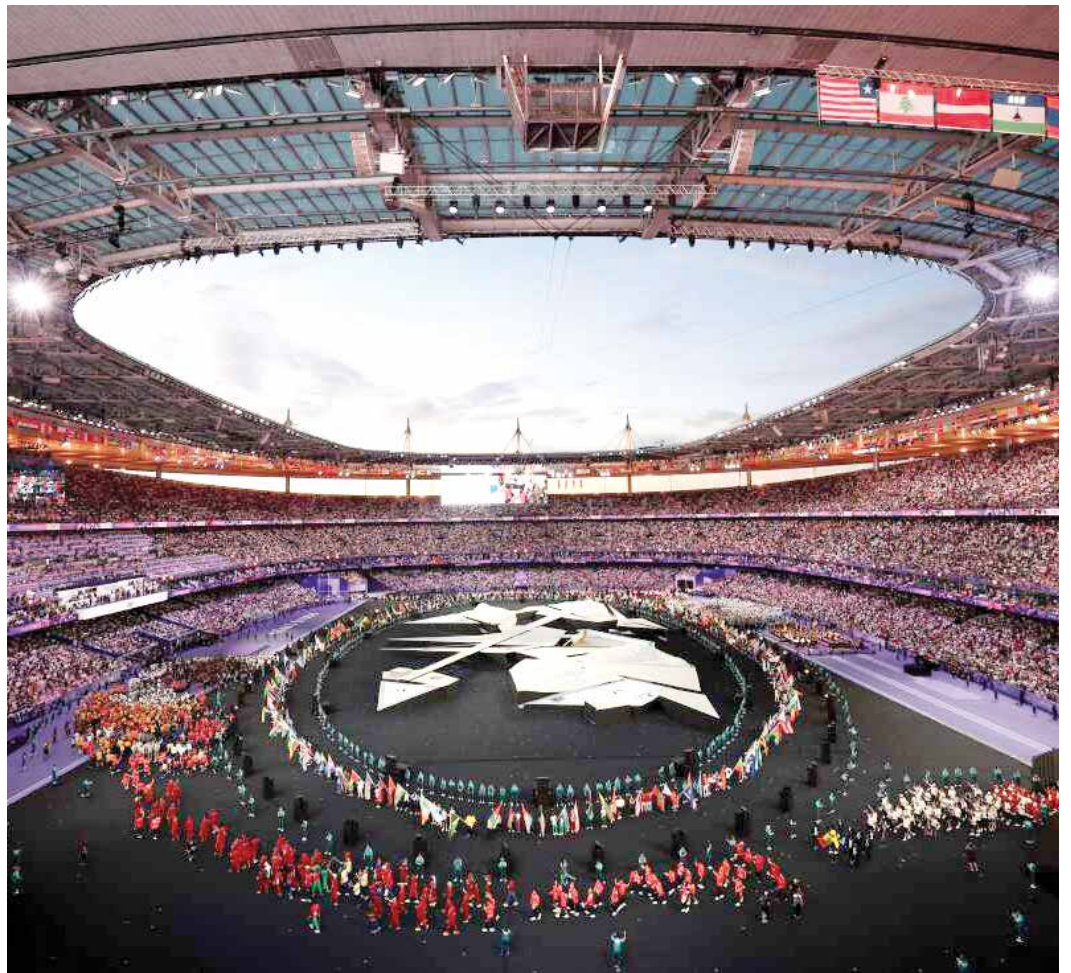
● WORLD TAEKWONDO



● WORLD TAEKWONDO



● WORLD TAEKWONDO



The closing ceremony of the Paris Olympics is held at the Stade de France, Saint-Denis, France, on Aug. 11, 2024.

● LUKE HALES/GETTY IMAGES

Paris Olympics:

Wrestling, taekwondo save the day as Iran tops Tokyo haul

Pezeshkian, VP defend new 'cross-party' cabinet lineup



Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian (R) and his First Vice-President Mohammadreza Aref attend a cabinet meeting on August 11, 2024. president.ir

National Desk

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian and his First Vice-President Mohammadreza Aref defended the new cabinet lineup after the proposed list of ministers came under criticism. Pezeshkian submitted the list of his new cabinet members to Parliament on Sunday, less than two weeks

after he was sworn in before the country's legislators. The proposed list drew criticism from a number of individuals in Iran's Reformist camp. During separate meetings on Sunday with representatives from the provinces of Fars, Sistan and Baluchestan, and Kerman, the president said that one of the cabinet's main features is its

cross-partyiness, adding that the formation of the cabinet focused on the criteria of capability, expertise, and relevant experience of individuals. On Sunday, the president presented his cabinet's lineup in a letter to Iranian Parliament Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf, with the legislative body officially commencing the process

of reviewing the proposed ministers' qualifications. Pezeshkian urged all members of Parliament and national elites to assist the government in appointing managers and officials of executive agencies based on the stated qualities. In response to the issues raised by the representatives, the president emphasized that the new gov-

ernment will allocate the country's resources with care and precision, considering priorities and areas of deprivation in pursuit of justice and rights. He added that addressing the provinces and deprived regions is a fundamental principle of this government. He regarded national consensus and setting aside differences as the key to advancing matters and achieving success in the country, stressing that in the new administration, the core of actions will be laws, documents, and national macro-policies. Pezeshkian also said that any identified shortcomings in these documents and policies would be addressed. Meanwhile, the first vice-president said on Monday that the strategy for selecting managers and ministers in the new government does not focus on political ideology. "Instead, the new administration's leaders must strive to fulfill the ideals and values of the holy establishment of the Islamic Republic

of Iran, as well as the demands of the people and the promises made by the president, with the foremost priority being the resolution of the people's economic and living challenges," he added. Iran's former foreign minister Javad Zarif announced on Monday that he had resigned from his new post as a presidential aide in strategic affairs. He cited several reasons for his resignation, most notably his disappointment with the lineup in the newly-proposed 19-member cabinet, however, he supported the new president, saying that, "My message... is not a sign of regret or disappointment with dear Dr. Pezeshkian or opposition to realism; rather it means doubting my usefulness as a vice president for strategic affairs." Zarif noted that he would return to academia and focus less on Iran's domestic politics. He was Iran's top diplomat between 2013 and 2021 in the Moderate government of former president Hassan Rouhani.

EU should ban Israeli ministers for 'incitement of war crimes': Borrel

The European Union foreign policy chief said the bloc should consider sanctioning far-right Israeli ministers Itamar Ben Gvir and Bezalel Smotrich, after they said aid to Gaza should be blocked and the starvation of two million people in the territory could be justified. "While the world pushes for a cease-fire in Gaza, Min. Ben Gvir calls for cutting fuel and aid to civilians," he said on X. "Like Min. Smotrich sinister statements, this is an incitement to war crimes. Sanctions must be on our EU agenda." Ben-Gvir said in a post on social media platform X on Sunday that the transfer of humanitarian aid and fuel to the Gaza Strip should be stopped "until all our captives" held by Hamas are released. In the same post, Ben-Gvir also called for the permanent occupation of Gaza. His comments after Israeli Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich said last week that he believes blocking humanitarian aid to Gaza is "justified and moral" even if it causes two million civilians to die of hunger in the coastal Palestinian slier. Borrel's call came as an increasing number of states have threatened to impose sanctions on senior Israeli officials over their conduct during the Gaza war. Ben-Gvir and Smotrich are considered to be among the ministers most likely to face sanctions.

'No further delay' to cease-fire
Meanwhile, the leaders of France, Germany and Britain said Monday that "there can be no further delay" in negotiating a cease-fire in Gaza. The joint statement came after one of the deadliest reported Israeli strikes on the besieged Gaza Strip in more than 10 months of war. "The fighting must end now, and all hostages still detained by Hamas must be released," French President Emmanuel Macron, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz and British Prime Minister Keir Starmer said in a joint statement. "The people of Gaza need urgent and unfettered delivery and distribution of aid," the statement said. "There can be no further delay." International mediators have invited Israel and Hamas to resume negotiations towards a long-sought truce and prisoner-release deal, as the fighting in Gaza and the killings of resistance leaders have sent tensions soaring across the region. Hamas on Sunday called on US, Qatari and Egyptian mediators to implement a cease-fire plan for Gaza put forward by US President Joe Biden, instead of holding "more negotiations."

'Comprehensive, impactful' diplomacy tops Araqchi's agenda

National Desk

Abbas Araqchi was introduced to Parliament on Sunday as the nominee for Minister of Foreign Affairs by President Masoud Pezeshkian, with "comprehensive, active, and impactful" diplomacy being as his core program. The nominee outlined his plans during a Monday morning session of the Parliament's National Security and Foreign Policy Commission. A "comprehensive, active, and impactful" diplomacy with a balanced and functional approach was announced as the cornerstone of Araqchi's agenda. His agenda calls for dignified and pragmatic



engagement with Europe, preventing efforts to build a consensus on portraying Iran as a security concern again at the UN Security Council, and honorably lifting sanctions through "purposeful and unprotracted" negotiations. These items define Araqchi's strategy for direct-

ing Iran's foreign policy apparatus. Araqchi joined the Iranian Foreign Ministry in 1989 and served as chargé d'affaires at the Permanent Mission of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the Organization of Islamic Conference in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, in the early 1990s. He also served as ambassador to Finland from 1999 to 2003, and to Japan from 2007 to 2011. The senior diplomat worked as the former political deputy at the Foreign Ministry from 2017 to 2021, also serving as Iran's chief nuclear negotiator in talks with the P5+1 during former president Hassan Rouhani's administration.

Europe inclined to ...

He also emphasized the readiness of European nations to fortify relations with Iran. Addressing the situation in Gaza, Michel underscored the imperative of respecting humanitarian rights, ceasing attacks, enforcing a cease-fire, extending comprehensive aid to the people of Gaza, and recognizing an independent Palestinian state. The European official's aspiration to solidify ties with Iran resonates with the sentiments conveyed by other European officials in their congratulatory messages to Masoud Pezeshkian. This signifies that Tehran and Brussels stand on the precipice of a new era, shaped by the Iranian presidential election and the triumph of a reformist president espousing a platform of "constructive engagement" with the international community. While Europeans may have been initially reserved in their embrace of Pezeshkian's victory, they did not overlook this major domestic event. EU Spokesperson Nabila Massrali took to the social network X to extend her congratulations to Pezeshkian, affirming, "We are ready to engage with the new government in accordance with the EU's policy of critical engagement." Enrique Mora, deputy to the EU's foreign policy chief, graced the inauguration of Iran's new president and held a meeting with Abbas Araqchi in Tehran who is set to become Iran's foreign minister in the new government. Following their talks,

Mora conveyed his satisfaction with the conversation via Twitter, expressing his anticipation for future collaboration. Over the past three years, a confluence of factors has contributed to a chill in Iran-Europe relations, including the impasse in JCPOA revival talks, the Ukraine war, accusations of Tehran providing military aid to Russia, Europe's failure to uphold commitments to Iran following the 2018 US withdrawal from the nuclear deal, the 2022 protests in Iran, and the responses from European nations to these developments. However, there is now a glimmer of hope for a potential thaw in these relations. Jalal Sadatian, a former Iranian diplomat, expresses this optimism in an interview with Iran Daily. "With the election of a reformist president who has underscored the importance of mending relations with the world, Europeans, too, are hopeful for a rapprochement with Iran, as stronger ties benefit both parties." Sadatian, the former Iranian chargé d'affaires in the UK, highlights the detrimental impact of certain stances taken by officials in the foreign ministry of Iran's previous government, particularly their threats to Europe regarding energy supplies in the wake of the Ukraine war, with warnings of "a tough winter for Europe." "Such stances effectively kept the Europeans away from Iran and sowed seeds of distrust. In contrast, during Hassan Rouhani's

administration, Europeans enjoyed amicable relations with Iran. While Iran was justifiably displeased with their lack of fulfillment of JCPOA commitments, Europeans refrained from joining then US president Donald Trump in his efforts to isolate Iran, notably at the UN Security Council," Sadatian said. According to Sadatian, Iran presents several advantages for Europeans, including its strategic geographical location and its ability to influence developments in the volatile West Asia region. Moreover, Tehran holds considerable economic allure for Europeans, both as a supplier of energy and as a vast consumer market. He underscores that boosting relations with Europe would also yield diverse economic and political advantages for Iran. "Regardless of the political landscape following the US election," he asserts, "cementing ties with Europeans can bolster Iran's position in its dealings with the US." Just as the Iranian presidential election has paved the way for a normalization of relations between Iran and Europe, so too can the ascendancy of the left (the Labour Party) in the UK and the rejection of far-right candidates in France contribute to this trajectory, despite the German government's persistent headline stance on Tehran. Nonetheless, the overtures made by European nations, exemplified by Michel's expression of willingness to strengthen bonds with Iran, herald the potential for a gradual yet significant improvement in their frosty relations.

Mohammad Ali Rajabi
Cartoonist





Iran opens first three-story bridge in NW

Sareyn bridge, a turning point for tourism in Ardebil: *Zarghami*

Arts & Culture Desk

A three-story bridge, the first of its kind, was inaugurated on Monday in Iran's northwestern Sareyn County, in Ardebil Province.

The bridge is expected to boost tourism in the region known for its natural beauty and hospitable culture.

Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts, Ezzatollah Zarghami, inaugurated the bridge, emphasizing its potential to draw visitors. "The Sareyn bridge, with its height, length, and mountainous setting, offers a unique attraction and is a turning point for tourism in Ardebil," he said.

Several suspension bridges have been constructed in the province, including in Meshginshahr, Hir, and Azna, to boost tourism but this is the first three-story bridge. The minister highlighted the bridge's role in creating new tourism opportunities, similar

to the successful 'Ardebil 2023' event, which continues to bear fruit. He predicted that images of the bridge would go global, attracting international attention to the region.

The construction of the bridge involved a significant investment of over \$4.1 million from the private sector, and an additional \$4.1 million are planned for further development of the surrounding area and accommodation facilities.

He emphasized the importance of bringing joy to people, which is one of the necessities of today's society, and how this project contributes to that goal.

The minister also highlighted the potential for the bridge to transform the surrounding villages, stating that a new design is needed to accommodate the expected influx of tourists.

He expressed confidence in the region's ability to cater to tourists, given its well-known hospitality and natural attractions.



Iranian short film 'Until Mina' sweeps awards at US festivals



Arts & Culture Desk

Iranian short film 'Until Mina,' written, produced, and directed by Mehdi Arhami, has been racking up awards and nomina-

tions at various American film festivals. The film, which marks Arhami's second directorial work, garnered critical acclaim and multiple accolades.

'Until Mina' recently scooped

up the Best Film award at the 20th Accolade Global Film Competition in the US. It also took home the same honor at the 13th Best Shorts Film Festival in San Diego. Plus, the short film has been nominated for Best Film at the 7th Boston International Film Festival, which will take place in late September.

The film has also been selected to compete in the 10th Shimla International Film Festival in India, chosen from among 1,600 submissions. The festival aims to showcase the best of world cinema and foster a taste for quality filmmaking among young audiences, while also providing a platform for independent filmmakers.

'Until Mina' tells the story of a young girl who, due to harsh

economic circumstances, finds herself working in a mortuary. With a compelling narrative and strong performances, the film has resonated with audiences and critics alike.

The cast of 'Until Mina' includes Zahra Behrouzmanesh, Marjan Khaksari, Behrad Selahvarzi, Delsa Khoroush, Saeed Salemi, Raheleh Heidari, and Touran Ramezani. The film is being internationally distributed by RH Film, introducing Iranian cinema to global audiences.

'Until Mina' continues to make waves on the festival circuit, with additional selections at the 7th Asia Short Film Festival in India, the 6th Duemila30 Festival in Milan, and the 2nd Taiga International Film Festival in Russia.

Iran, Iraq to run weekly pilgrim trains



Iran and Iraq agreed to a weekly train service for pilgrims traveling between Tehran and Karbala. This announcement was made by Mohsen Tabatabaei, the Director General of Planning and Passenger Services of the Islamic Republic of Iran Railways (RIA), Mehr News Agency reported.

According to Tabatabaei, passengers will travel by train from Tehran to the Shalamchah sta-

tion, where they will go through customs and then be transported by bus to Basra. From Basra, Iraqi trains will take them to the Karbala Railway Station.

"A train will depart from Tehran to Karbala every Saturday, and we can increase the frequency if demand grows," Tabatabaei said. This agreement between Iran and Iraq will facilitate easier travel for pilgrims wishing to visit the holy city of Karbala.

Caspian Sea Day

Social Desk

On Caspian Sea Day, an international conference hosted by Turkmenistan emphasized the responsibility of littoral states to protect the sea from pollution.

Ali Mojtaba Roozbahani, Iran's ambassador to Turkmenistan, highlighted the importance of balancing economic development with environmental protection in the region, IRNA wrote.

Roozbahani addressed dele-

gates at the conference, titled "The Caspian Sea - Cooperation for Sustainable Development," emphasizing the Caspian Sea as a shared heritage and a source of friendship and prosperity for over 270 million people in the region.

He likened it to a "valuable divine gem" that needs to be protected for future generations, just as their ancestors had safeguarded it for them.

The Tehran Convention, a frame-



work for protecting the marine environment of the Caspian Sea, was cited as evidence of the priority given to environmental protection in the region.

Roozbahani also noted the potential impact of industrial activities, cabling, transportation, and hydrocarbon extraction on the sea, stressing that neglecting commitments to combat pollution threatens the very life cycle of the area.

Iran offered to host the 7th con-

ference of the parties to the Tehran Convention in Tehran, underscoring its commitment to the environment and the agreements made between the littoral states. The conference, held in the Avaza tourist zone, brought together representatives from the Caspian Sea countries and international organizations to discuss environmental challenges and explore avenues for cooperation and sustainable development in the region.