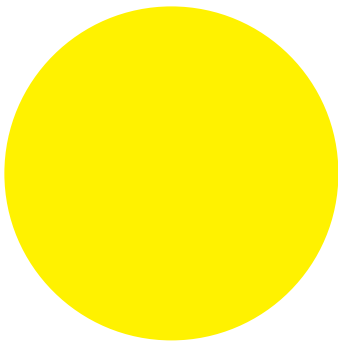


Iran warns about 'untrustworthiness' of Israel, US in Gaza cease-fire talks

7 >



irandaily.ir

newspaper.irandaily.ir



IranDailyWeb

Parliament Starts Debating Ministerial Picks

Pezeshkian casts new cabinet as gov't of national consensus

7 >



Iran's President Masoud Pezeshkian addresses Parliament in the capital Tehran, on August 17, 2024, as he defends his cabinet lineup.
● ATTA KENARE/AFP

9th Caspian Media Forum

Envoy: Iran, Russia reject clash of civilizations, advocate for intercultural dialogue

8 >



Persian Gulf Pro League roundup:

Late VAR drama seals opening-day win for Esteghlal

6 >



Iran condemns Afghan violation of railway territory

2 >



Israel trapped in psychological warfare's quagmire

SPECIAL ISSUE 4-5 >



The road to national unity a one-way or two-way street?



By Mohammad-Ali Vakili
Former Iranian MP

EXCLUSIVE
OPINION

Iran's political landscape has witnessed a potential game-changer with President Masoud Pezeshkian's introduction of the concept of a "national accord" government. However, in recent weeks, two distinct interpretations of this idea have emerged, sparking a lively debate. One school of thought advocates that the cabinet and the president's key associates should predominantly belong to the political faction supporting him, namely the Reformists, and that the spirit of national accord should be reflected in the plans and policies enacted. On the other hand, there are those who believe that true national accord is best embodied by a cabinet that includes representatives from across the political spectrum, sending a powerful message of unity and compromise. Mr. Pezeshkian appears to lean toward the latter interpretation, as evidenced by his cabinet proposals, which feature individuals from various political backgrounds. This inclusive approach, however, has not sat well with some of the president's allies and supporters, particularly political activists and reformist parties, who have voiced their criticism. Yet, it is worth noting that for the general public, the performance and results delivered by ministers may ultimately carry more weight than their political affiliations. As things stand, the fate of this cabinet now lies with Parliament. The critical question remains: Is the road to accord that Pezeshkian has courageously embarked upon a one-way street, or is there room for reciprocity? Should Parliament, with its conservative majority, embrace the president's accord slogan and bestow a vote of confidence upon the cabinet, especially the reformist nominees, it would signify a two-way journey toward national unity, with legislature and the president working in harmony. However, should partisan considerations prevail and lead MPs to obstruct the path of the proposed reformist nominees, Pezeshkian's mission will undoubtedly become more challenging, facing mounting pressure from supporters. Saturday marked the first day for reviewing cabinet picks in the legislative chamber, and early signs suggest that Parliament is inclined to cooperate with the government, as reflected in the distribution of support for the cabinet's generalities.

ident's allies and supporters, particularly political activists and reformist parties, who have voiced their criticism. Yet, it is worth noting that for the general public, the performance and results delivered by ministers may ultimately carry more weight than their political affiliations. As things stand, the fate of this cabinet now lies with Parliament. The critical question remains: Is the road to accord that Pezeshkian has courageously embarked upon a one-way street, or is there room for reciprocity? Should Parliament, with its conservative majority, embrace the president's accord slogan and bestow a vote of confidence upon the cabinet, especially the reformist nominees, it would signify a two-way journey toward national unity, with legislature and the president working in harmony. However, should partisan considerations prevail and lead MPs to obstruct the path of the proposed reformist nominees, Pezeshkian's mission will undoubtedly become more challenging, facing mounting pressure from supporters. Saturday marked the first day for reviewing cabinet picks in the legislative chamber, and early signs suggest that Parliament is inclined to cooperate with the government, as reflected in the distribution of support for the cabinet's generalities.

Page 7 >

NEWS IN BRIEF

Iran stands as 12th largest producer of shoes in world

Iran is the 12th largest producer of various types of shoes across the world, said a member of the Footwear Industry Association on Saturday.

Ali Lashgari added that shoe production units manufactured 270 million pairs of various types of shoes, ranging from casual footwear to specialized shoes last year, IRNA reported.

He noted that there are 12,000 active industrial production units and 50,000 distribution networks in the footwear sector in Iran.

Notably, 95% of production units employ fewer than 50 workers, with the majority of footwear being manufactured by small enterprises.

Lashgari added that the current capacity of production units could elevate the country's shoe production to the 8th position in the world with appropriate government support.

Mobile Internet penetration rate in Iran tops 132%: Regulator

Figures released by Iran's Communication Regulatory Authority (CRA) indicated that mobile Internet penetration rate in the country has exceeded 132%.

CRA figures covered in a Saturday report by IRNA showed that the number of high-speed mobile Internet subscribers in Iran had reached a total of 112.644 million in the year to March 19, up more than 7% from the figure for preceding year. The figures showed the number of mobile users in Iran also rose by more than five million to 152.755 million at the end of the year to March 19, bringing the mobile penetration rate in the country to over 179%, which is 3.4% more than the related figure to the year ending March 20, 2023.

However, the CRA said there was a slight decrease of 1.7% in the number of Iran's fixed broadband subscriptions last year which was 28.763 million. The figures come amid plans by the Iranian government to further boost access to mobile and fixed Internet services. The Iranian government also plans to connect over 20 million homes and businesses to the high-speed fixed fiber network by mid-2025.

Iran eyes threefold rise in cargo transit on INSTC in 2024



Iran has set an ambitious target to increase cargo transit along the eastern branch of the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) by threefold in 2024, aiming to reach two million tons. According to Kazem Jalali, Iran's Ambassador to

Russia, in 2023, Iran commenced cargo transportation operations along this eastern route with the assistance of Russia, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan. "The capacity was 650,000 tons in 2023. Considering the potential of this branch, Iran and Russia

have agreed to aim for 2 million tons in 2024," he was quoted by report.az. Jalali emphasized that the eastern branch of the INSTC has a capacity of 15 million tons of cargo, and efforts should be made to fully utilize this potential. The INSTC connects north-

ern Europe with the countries of the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean via Russia, the Caucasus, and Central Asia. The agreement to establish this multimodal corridor was signed in 2000 between Russia, Iran, and India. Today, 12 countries

are participants in the INSTC. The corridor includes three routes: the western route along the western shore of the Caspian Sea, the eastern route along the eastern shore through Kazakhstan, and the trans-Caspian route across the Caspian Sea.

Russia hosts 8th BRICS Industry Ministers' Meeting



The 8th BRICS Industry Ministers' Meeting has been held in the western city of Nizhny Novgorod as part of Russia's BRICS Chairship in 2024.

The meeting was convened on Friday with Iran's Deputy Industry, Mine, and Trade Minister Mohammad Mousavi in attendance, IRNA reported.

The Iranian official, during the meeting, elaborated on the country's breakthroughs in the domains of new technologies, such as artificial intelligence, and the Internet of Things.

He also outlined the achievements of the Islamic Republic in the fields of blockchain, cloud computing, robotics, and medical and genetic engineering.

Mousavi described Iran's membership in the BRICS group as a valuable opportunity to exchange experiences and facilitate industrial and commercial interactions.

The program featured

a BRICS-EAEU-UNIDO roundtable devoted to the synergy of developing economies and international organizations to speed up industrial development and improve competitiveness. Speaking at the event, Russian Minister of Industry and Trade Anton Alikhanov noted that the BRICS expansion is a reflection of the formation of a new multipolar world order.

He stressed that the countries of the association now account for almost 34 percent of the world's territory and more than 45 percent of its population. In 2023, BRICS contributed about 36 percent to the global GDP in purchasing power parity. Initiatives in the chemical industry, pharmaceuticals, the mining sector, intelligent manufacturing and robotics were identified among the promising areas of cooperation.

They also discussed the initiative to establish a BRICS Centre of Industri-

al Competence on the basis of the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), which is at the final stage of preparation. Alikhanov said that Russia, China and India are already ready to finance the project on creation of the BRICS Centre of Industrial Competences on the basis of UNIDO.

BRICS is a bloc of the world's emerging economies. It was founded in 2006 by Brazil, Russia, India, and China under the name of the "BRIC" group. South Africa joined in 2010, making it "BRICS". BRICS seeks alternatives to existing Western-dominated world policies including those on economy, which the bloc sees as unilateral.

Iran became an official member of BRICS in January this year after the bloc invited the Islamic Republic and five more countries to join during its 15th annual summit in South Africa in August 2023.

Iran condemns Afghan violation of railway territory



The Islamic Republic of Iran Railways in a statement announced that it does not allow encroachment on the railway territory of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The statement was released following the encroachment of the private railway company known as "Afghanistan Railway Consortium" into Iran's railway territory, IRNA reported. The traffic of any railway vehicles, including loco-

motives, wagons, etc., in the railway territory of the Islamic Republic of Iran is possible only with permission and under the laws of the Islamic Republic of Iran Railways, the statement reads.

No individual or legal entity and no Iranian or non-Iranian private company is exempted from the above rule, it added.

During the past few days, agents affiliated to the private company of the Af-

ghanistan Railway Consortium took illegal actions in Iran's railway territory, it noted.

Unfortunately, the agents of this consortium beat Iranian railway personnel and broke their car windows. Agents of Afghanistan Railway Consortium Private Company illegally entered the station by breaking the lock of the building.

The locomotive was stopped and there was no danger to the locomotive.

Annual tea exports hit 12,000 tons

Head of Iran's Tea Organization (ITO) Habib Jahansaz has stated that Iran exports nearly 12,000 tons of tea per year.

During his visit to the Fuman tea factories in Iran's northern Gilan Province on Saturday, Jahansaz noted that following the removal of bans on tea exports, the tea factories in Gilan have

resumed exports of the product, reported Mehr News Agency. Referring to Iran's tea export to 23 countries including neighboring countries and European countries, he added that the country exported 15,000 tons of tea last year. Tea exports to neighboring countries and Europe brings in \$20 million an-

nually, he stated. Tea harvest season in Iran starts in farmlands across the northern provinces of Gilan and Mazandaran in early May.

More than 55,000 families grow tea in over 28,000 hectares of farmland in the two provinces, accounting for 90 percent of the country's total tea production.



Nature’s gems along Firuzkuh Road

Iranica Desk

Firuzkuh Road is a vital transportation route that connects Tehran to the picturesque town of Firuzkuh nestled in the Alborz Mountains. This scenic road is renowned for its stunning landscapes, which feature lush green valleys, rugged mountains, and charming villages. Historically, Firuzkuh has been a key passageway not only for travelers but also for trade, linking central Iran to the northeastern regions. The road is also significant for its cultural and historical sites, attracting visitors interested in the rich heritage of the region. As it meanders through the diverse terrain, Firuzkuh Road offers a glimpse into the vibrant life and traditions of the Iranian people, making it an essential part of the country’s infrastructure and cultural landscape. We have already introduced some of the attractions along this road; now, let’s take a brieflook at additional sights that make this beautiful route even more remarkable.

Lajvard Castle

Lajvard Castle is an important historical site located along the Firuzkuh Road, dating back to the pre-Islamic period. According to historical texts, it was also used during the Sassanid period. The castle is situated in the northeast of Firuzkuh, and access to it is via the Firuzkuh-Semnan Road. To visit Lajvard Castle, one must enter the Semnan’s road four kilometers after the city of Firuzkuh and continue for about 15 kilometers. The castle lies beside the road, and to reach it, you need to walk a path of about 30 to 40 minutes, which is not particularly difficult. The structure used sarooj (a type of mortar) and gypsum in its construction, and the outer facade showcases sedimentary stones. There are no facilities around Lajvard Castle, as it is situated on a dirt hill. From the top of this hill, you will have a complete view of the surrounding villages and areas. The only entrance to Lajvard Castle is located on its eastern side, which was also the main gate of the castle in the past.



● anyja.ir

Arfاده Forest



● IRNA

Arfاده Forest is an area of interest for nature enthusiasts in the village with the same name in Savadkuh, featuring numerous springs, rivers, and waterfalls. This forest is home to various wild trees and shrubs, and a wide diversity of animal species also inhabit the area. In Arfاده Forest, there are natural attractions such as a spring and a cave, which provide great enjoyment for nature visitors. As you move towards the higher elevations of this region, you will reach pristine highland pastures and villages, many of which are uninhabited for half the year. Access to Arfاده Forest is via a side road after Varesk and Sorkhabad villages, located on the west side of the Firuzkuh Road. For accommodation in the villages of this forest, you have options to rent local houses and eco-lodges, which offer basic facilities. However, for camping in Arfاده Forest, you will need to bring all of your camping gear and supplies with you.

Simindasht village



● safarmarket.com

Simindasht village is one of the most beautiful villages in Firuzkuh, boasting significant tourism potential and hosting many visitors throughout the year. The flowing Hableh Rud River enhances the greenery of this settlement. The surrounding mountains of Simindasht provide excellent opportunities for hiking, and the

high meadows in this area are filled with colorful wildflowers in spring. Simindasht is located a short distance from Zarindasht village, allowing visitors to plan a day trip to explore both villages. Some of the most famous attractions in Simindasht include the Ahanak Lake, Bala Cheshmeh, and Mount Anar.

Rudafshan Cave

Rudafshan Cave is one of the largest natural caves in Iran, located near a village with the same name in Damavand. Its short distance from Tehran makes it a popular destination for tourists from the capital. The entrance of Rudafshan Cave reaches a height of 12 meters and a width of 40 meters, making it the third-largest cave entrance in Iran. Many areas within Rudafshan Cave are inaccessible, and only about 780 meters of the internal pathways can be traversed. The entrance to this limestone cave is situated on a slope of the mountain and is not visible from a distance; thus, it has earned the nickname Hidden Cave. Inside Rudafshan Cave, it is dark and lacks facilities. The best way to explore this cave is through group caving with appropriate equipment; however, visiting the entrance and the first section does not require special gear. The side



● alibaba.ir

road leading to Rudafshan village and the cave is located on the right side of the Firuzkuh Road, heading from south to north, after the villages of Sarbandan and Seyyedabad.

Valila Waterfall

Valila Waterfall is one of the most beautiful natural attractions along the Firuzkuh Road, located in the Anjili Forest in Zirab. This waterfall is situated a short distance from a village with the same name and reaches a height of 25 meters in the spring season. To visit Valila Waterfall, you should prepare for an enjoyable hike through Anjili Forest. This forest offers stunning natural beauty and views, and traversing it requires appropriate hiking gear and a moderate level of physical fitness. Accessing Valila village is possible via the Lajim road in Zirab, located on the eastern side of the Firuzkuh Road, between Firuzkuh and Qaemshahr. To reach Valila Waterfall, you need to walk approximately one kilometer through the forest along the river



● delgarm.com

of Valila Village. The village provides basic facilities for tourists. Visiting Valila Waterfall and the Anjili Forest can be included in a one-day picnic program; however, if you wish to stay overnight in the area, options such as rural houses, traditional accommodations, eco-lodges, and camping in nature are available.

Lazur Lake



● iranwonders.com

Lazur Lake, also known as the Siahrud Lake, is one of the natural attractions along the Firuzkuh Road, situated in the heights overlooking the area near Lazur Village. Surrounding this lake are charming summer villages with pleasant climates, including

Varzaneh and Arjmand village. Some of the best nature trails are located around Lazur Lake, drawing the attention of nature enthusiasts. Many tourists enjoy climbing in the mountains above the lake and take breaks or relax around Lazur Lake. Fishing, boating, cycling around the lake, photography, exploring Lazur Village, and camping in nature are among the main recreational activities at Lazur Lake. Lazur Lake is approximately 15 kilometers northwest of the village. You can plan a one-day picnic to visit the lake, but if you wish to stay overnight, you should bring complete camping gear. Lazur Lake has limited facilities for tourists, and to enhance your comfort, you can choose rural houses and local accommodations in Lazur Village for your stay.

Gazou Waterfall

Gazou Waterfall is located in a mountainous and pastoral area in the city of Savadkuh, near the Firuzkuh Road. This waterfall is one of the most beautiful natural attractions of the Lafour Forest, requiring visitors to trek about half an hour through the forest with a steep incline. This distance may not be suitable for children and the elderly. Gazou Waterfall consists of two cascades, with the first one reaching a height of five meters and the second about 43 meters. Beneath this waterfall, there is a clear pool, which offers a refreshing place for tourists to swim. The surrounding views of Gazou Waterfall are among the most stunning scenes of the Hyrcanian forests in northern Iran, offering great enjoyment for resting and exploring. The area around Gazou Waterfall is very pristine, and for overnight stays in these regions, complete camping equipment is necessary. Local



● rasekhoon.net

houses, eco-lodges, and forest cabins are other accommodation options available in nearby villages. To reach Gazou Waterfall, take the secondary Alasht road on the western side of the Firuzkuh Road, and after the Pol Sefid, head toward the Karmozd village and then make your way to the waterfall.

Israel trapped in psychological warfare's quagmire



By Faezeh Sadat Yousefi
Guest contributor

OPINION EXCLUSIVE

This "assassination" strategy employed by the Zionist regime and its staunch ally, the United States, is less about showcasing achievements and more about finding an escape from the severe disarray in decision-making bodies in Washington and Tel Aviv. In the meantime, the Zionist regime, by leveraging Western media giants, seeks to wage a psychological war against the Resistance and ultimately, hide its own weaknesses in the Gaza war and surrounding developments. However, there are multiple factors at work that have turned this psychological war against them: the revelation of the United States's intentions in supporting Israel's genocide, Israel's failure in achieving its intended objectives, the uncertainty within the American-Zionist front, the strategic ambiguity of the Resistance's next moves, and the Resistance's ability to take the initiative in the Gaza war.

A man readies a bomb shelter in Ashdod, southern Israel, on August 4, 2024, when the city ordered its public shelters to open after a barrage of rockets were fired at the southern port city.
● TSAFRIR ABAYOV/AP

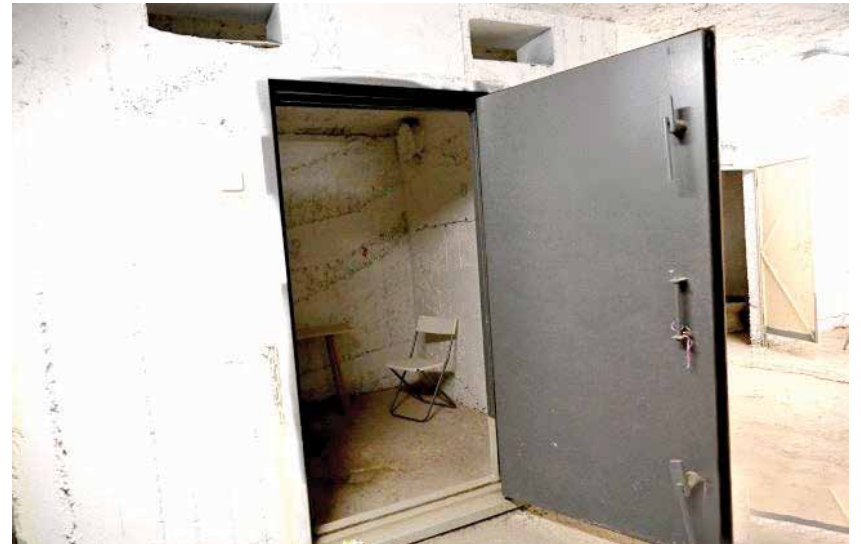
Fragile strategy to weaken Resistance
The primary goal of the Zionist regime in resorting to assassination is to project victory and dominance over the Resistance Front in the eyes of the public. However, many analysts view this move as an attempt to overcome the anguish caused by the lack of achievements during 10 months of intense bombing and killing of Gazans. In essence, assassination is seen as the only available option to compensate for the military and political defeats in Tel Aviv's strategic circles. Many political observers acknowledge that the outcome of the Gaza war, whatever it would be, will be a complete defeat for Israel. On the one hand, the regime cannot accept its defeat, and on the other, it is forced to negotiate with the Resistance. Thus, to avoid admitting its defeat, it resorts to assassination, mass

killing, destruction, and devastation. Moreover, assassination plays a crucial role in igniting and reinforcing the Resistance's motivation and that of the people, making it a catalyst on the warfront. Therefore, contrary to the belief of Israeli officials, assassination not only fails to be effective as a tool of psychological warfare against the Resistance but is also a clear sign of the declining military and political strength of both Israel and the United States.

Initiative in hands of Iran, Resistance Front

The most pivotal factor driving the psychological war against Israel is the Resistance Front's control over the initial calculations and decision-making power. In other words, the Resistance is acting, while the Zionist-American front is

reacting. Being in anticipation of retaliatory attacks in response to their assassinations has created a hybrid war against the Israelis. Their inability to foresee these unpredictable developments has only added to their fear and psychological pressure. Since the beginning of Operation Al-Aqsa Storm, the Resistance groups have based their operations on a gradual and phased escalation of attacks. Over time, missile and drone attacks of Hezbollah and Yemen's Resistance groups have penetrated the occupied territories more effectively as they showcase new advanced weapons such as Yemeni unmanned underwater vehicles (UUVs). The Iraqi Resistance has also intensified its attacks on American bases in Iraq and Syria, with the recent attack on the Ain al-Assad base, which resulted in the



The photo shows the inside of a communal bomb shelter opened by the Al-Quds (Jerusalem) Municipality for the public as Israel readies for a possible multi-front military attack from Iran and its backed groups, in Al-Quds (Jerusalem) on August 14, 2024.
● DEBBIE HILL/UPI

killing and wounding of five American soldiers, serving as an example of the increasing assaults on the United States by the Resistance. These factors have not only created a deterrence effect in Tel Aviv but have also compromised their strategic calculations in the war. At this point, following the assassination of Hamas's political leader in Tehran, the Resistance has control over the rules of engagement. The strategic planning of Iran and the Resistance forces, combined with the current air of ambiguity and uncertainty regarding the nature and scale of their response, has instilled fear in the United States and its Zionist allies. As a result, the latter side is attempting to promote narratives such as "both sides should exercise restraint," "tensions can be avoided," "the world needs stability and peace," and "the goal should be a cease-fire in Gaza," alongside claims that "Israel has the right to defend itself". This is part of their psychological operations aimed at deterring the Resistance from retaliating for Haniyeh's martyrdom. Meanwhile, Iran and Hezbollah have emphasized their commitment to responding to Haniyeh's assassination and severely punishing the occupiers.

Gaza cease-fire: New US strategy

After Iran and the Resistance Front officially announced their intention to retaliate against the Zionist regime, the United States, alongside Cairo and Doha, hastily devised a plan for a cease-fire in an attempt to overshadow this response. Soon after, the Israeli prime minister's

The strategic planning of Iran and the Resistance forces, combined with the current air of ambiguity and uncertainty regarding the nature and scale of their response, has instilled fear in the United States and its Zionist allies. As a result, the latter side is attempting to promote narratives such as "both sides should exercise restraint," "tensions can be avoided," "the world needs stability and peace," and "the goal should be a cease-fire in Gaza," alongside claims that "Israel has the right to defend itself".



Israeli soldiers operate amid a billowing smoke in the Gaza Strip on January 21, 2024.
● REUTERS

office issued a statement indicating that their representatives would be heading to Cairo to participate in discussions aimed at finalizing the details and implementing a “framework agreement”.

However, Iran’s stance on the cease-fire put an end to this American maneuver. The Permanent Mission of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations stressed that the recent terrorist act by the Israeli regime violated Iran’s security and sovereignty and that the right to self-defense is reserved for Iran. This, the mission added, is unrelated to the Gaza cease-fire, and Tehran’s response will be carried out in a way and at a time that does not undermine the potential cease-fire.

Failure of US strategies in West Asia

One of the roots of the current psychological warfare, strongly pursued by the United States, is its failure to implement its strategies in West Asia and the systematic decline of its influence in one of the world’s most strategic regions. This decline has been evident, both overtly and covertly, for decades, with prominent examples including the US withdrawal from Afghanistan and the defeat of the global war against Syria. Operation Al-Aqsa Storm also marked a significant turning point in this downward trajectory, followed by the Resistance’s rise to establish security and stability in West Asia and to curb the Zionist regime.

Moreover, the growing public disgust in Arab and other regional countries toward US policies in support of Israel has impacted the effectiveness of US policies in the region. The US support for the crimes of the Zionist regime has clearly demonstrated to people and leaders alike the stark contradiction between America’s professed human values and its interventionist and warmongering approaches. This is evident in the repeated US vetoes of cease-fire resolutions in the UN Security Council, and the prolonged and fruitless cease-fire proposals put forth by the US government, which have only served to buy time for the Zionist regime to carry out massacres and genocide. Many experts believe that the US, as a supporter and even overseer, has the ability to pressure Tel Aviv into accepting a cease-fire, but in practice, it does not wish to do so.

Meanwhile, the extensive attacks by the Resistance on US bases and interests in West Asia, which pose a serious threat to Washington, have further diminished American influence. Overall, the United States, currently in disarray regarding its presence in West Asia, is now facing the rejection of public opinion and, consequently, psychological pressure from the people, the Resistance, and some regional leaders.

Yahya Sinwar’s leadership intensifying pressure on Israel

One of the key elements that have put psychological pressure on the Zionist regime has been the surprising selection of Yahya Sinwar as the political leader of Hamas and the integration of the political and military branches of the movement in order to confront the occupiers. Now that the Zionist regime has failed to achieve its declared objectives, such as eliminating Hamas or even more modestly, containing Hamas, this news — indicating a more military-heavy approach by Hamas — has sent a terrifying message to them. Sinwar has seriously challenged all of Tel Aviv’s policies over the past 10 months, and his astuteness has kept the Hamas Resistance Front alive. Therefore, Yahya Sinwar is not only a heroic figure for Palestinians but also for all supporters of Palestine. He is the one whom Palestinians believe gives true promises; Sinwar stated in 2023 that he would soon confront the Israelis and lead Palestine toward liberation.

Fear in occupied territories result of psychological warfare

In conclusion, the impact of psychological warfare can now be seen in the occupied territories, where fear of Resistance attacks has become widespread. According to Zionist sources, all residents are anticipating an attack from Iran. In a document sent to the mayors of northern cities, officials have been asked to prepare for potential disruptions to water and electricity supplies, as well as for emergency rescue operations. The Shin Bet security agency has also opened underground bunkers for commanders and senior officials.

Is US willing to pay price of Iran-Israel escalation?



By Hannan Hussain
International
affairs expert

OPINION

As the world waits to see how Iran responds to two recent assassinations of key leaders by Israel, the United States must carefully weigh its role in what happens next. US President Joe Biden’s administration has been preparing for “a significant set of attacks” from Iran and its backed groups following the murder of Ismail Haniyeh, a former top Hamas politburo leader assassinated in Tehran last month, as well as the death of senior Hezbollah military commander Fuad Shukr in Beirut. Increased US military support for Israel suggests rising alarm. Biden has sent warships and a submarine to the Middle East in preparation for an Iranian response, and also sanctioned billions of dollars in arms sales to support what it justifies as “Israel’s capability to meet current and future enemy threats”. But further arming Israel is unlikely to dial down threat perceptions among Iran and its backed groups.



Activists protest against war in Gaza as Secretary of State Antony Blinken (front-R) testifies during a Senate Appropriations Committee hearing about the United States sending aid to Israel and Ukraine on Capitol Hill in Washington, DC, on October 31, 2023.
● JABIN BOTSFORD/WASHINGTON POST

At the same time, in apparent hopes of warding off any sort of retaliation, Biden has renewed his push for a Gaza cease-fire, which Iran has said could delay its actions. However, Israel has consistently stonewalled the Gaza cease-fire process. And the message from Tehran has been loud and clear: it will not bow down to Western pressure. “Such demands (to avoid retaliation) lack political logic, are entirely contrary to the principles and rules of international law, and represent an excessive request,” Iran’s foreign ministry spokesperson Nasser Kanani said this week. So, is Washington willing to pay the price of an Israel-Iranian escalation in the Middle East?

Indefinite engagement

To Tehran, an attack is necessary because Haniyeh’s assassination took place on its soil. Meanwhile, Israel is likely to try to justify its response to this potential attack as necessary “self-defense”. An attack and counter-attack could ignite a cycle of aggression that drags Washington deeper into an escalating regional war.

The US says it doesn’t want this. After Israel killed two Iranian generals in Syria in April, the US pressured Israel to avoid an all-out attack on Hezbollah — Iran’s chief ally — and determined Israel wouldn’t prevail in a long-term confrontation. Indeed, a conflict on multiple fronts between Israel and Iranian-backed groups, chiefly Hezbollah, could test the limits of unconditional US support to Israel and its own crisis diplomacy in the region. Consider the ambiguous nature of Iranian attacks and their timing as well. Iranian-backed armed groups could take part in any attack of Tehran’s choosing, making it difficult for Washington to predict and preempt possible attacks from Lebanon, Iran, Syria, Iraq, or Yemen against Israel. There are also diplomatic costs. The Biden administration is putting its weight behind an “urgent”

diplomatic solution between Israel and Hezbollah and considers the deal as critical to avoiding a larger regional war.

However, it risks losing hard-won diplomatic momentum if Israel pursues a disproportionate military response against Iran, or implements “multi-front battle plans” to justify offensive attacks “anywhere and in any region”.

Souring public sentiment

Another factor to consider is public sentiment. There is very little appetite among Americans for the US to get involved in another war. Polls show most Americans are against sending US troops to defend Israel. Public support for such a move has steadily declined since Israel’s onslaught on Gaza began last year.

Thus, any Iran-Israel escalation could raise the stakes in Washington when considering whether to participate in an unpopular war and risk alienating scores of young voters ahead of the November presidential polls.

Taxpayer dollars are an additional limiting factor. Congress and the US public have been increasingly at odds over Washington’s spending on “endless wars” — a reference to years of US invasion in Afghanistan and Iraq that has yielded little tangible benefit.

US-Iranian escalation could prompt Washington to beef up its military finances for Israel and use up hard-earned taxpayer money to fight another war. Israel’s war on Gaza has prompted thousands of Americans to protest US funding for the war, with many refusing to pay their taxes. All these factors could make it difficult for Washington in the event of Israeli-Iranian escalation.

Endangering US troops

Iran-Israel escalation could also endanger US military assets in the region. This includes scores of US

troops stationed across small-scale military bases in the region.

Regional escalation and a widening of Israel’s 10-month war could inject significant intensity into future attacks. After all, Iran-aligned armed groups attacked US forces dozens of times in Iraq throughout the opening months of Israel’s war on Gaza.

The widening of Israel’s war with Iran could signal the entry of more powerful actors, such as Hezbollah, raising serious questions about Washington’s strategic interests in the Middle East.

Can it stop Israel from attacking Hezbollah, the same group that the US seeks to engage diplomatically? And what is Washington’s own endgame amid Israel’s raging war on Gaza and beyond?

Alternative options

Rather than continuing to generously arm Israel, the Biden administration has some immediate response options at its disposal. It can use weapons sales as leverage to pressure Israel towards a cease-fire.

For months, billions of dollars in unrestricted military aid have hardened Israeli attitudes towards a Gaza truce and spurred a significant trust deficit between Israel and Hamas. Now, that trust deficit risks upending high-stakes mediation efforts in Doha.

Thus, holding back Israeli weapon supplies could send a powerful signal to far-right Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s leadership that the US now wants the raging war to end on its own terms.

The US should also impose long-overdue penalties on Israel for its systemic violations of international law and torture committed by military units in Gaza. All these are gross violations of the Leahy Law, which requires the US by law to end assistance for military units involved in rights abuses.

Time running out

Time is running out. Washington joined Egypt and Qatar for a new round of cease-fire talks this week to end the war in Gaza, an outcome Biden claims could prevent an Iranian attack on Israel.

But much of the optimism over a US-brokered cease-fire is overblown. Tehran has refused to take part in direct talks toward a cease-fire, and officials close to Hezbollah confirmed to Reuters that an Iranian retaliation was incoming.

This is important because Washington is pushing for more lines of communication with Tehran to limit or prevent an Iranian strike at all costs. But it is counting on a cease-fire process that lacks credibility and has been used by Israel to pursue assassinations and stonewall mediation progress.

Today, the US failure to rein in its major ally Israel is putting its own interests on the line. The threat of a wider regional war is undermining Washington’s crisis diplomacy, risks long-term damage to US military assets in the region, and has left little leverage to prevent Iran’s imminent attack on Israel. Washington shoulders blame for the same escalation it seeks to avoid.

The article first appeared on TRT World.



US President Joe Biden (C) and the first lady, Jill, watch as the body of Sgt Kennedy Sanders, one of three US personnel killed in a drone strike in Jordan in January 2024, is brought home.
● MICHAEL REYNOLDS/EPA

Persian Gulf Pro League roundup:

Late VAR drama seals opening-day win for Esteghlal

Sports Desk

Esteghlal got off to a winning start in the new Persian Gulf Pro League season, thanks to Mohammad-Hossein Eslami's last-gasp strike at Shams Azar, while Persepolis began its title defense with a 1-1 draw against Zob Ahan. New Tractor head coach Dragan Skocic announced his return to Iranian top flight in style as his Tractor side defeated Mes Rafsanjan 2-0, with Sepahan bouncing back from an ACL Elite play-off humiliation against Shabab Al Ahli with a 3-1 home victory over newly-promoted Chadormalou SC.

In Qazvin, Arman Ramezani gave Javad Nekounam's Esteghlal the lead 10 minutes after the break before Amir-Mohammad Nessaei drew the home side level courtesy of a VAR-given spot-kick in the 89th minute.

Summer-signings Ramin Rezaeian and Eslami combined as the latter found the net in third minute of stoppage time but the celebrations were cut short after the flag was raised, deeming the former to be in an offside position.

The linesman's decision, however, was overturned by the video assistant ref and the Tehran Blues walked away with the maximum points.

The result came a night after Esteghlal's city rival Persepolis was held by Zob Ahan in Arak's Imam Khomeini Stadium – serving as the Reds' home venue.



⬆️ Mohammad-Hossein Eslami (80) scores Esteghlal's late winner in a 2-1 victory over Shams Azar in the Persian Gulf Pro League in Qazvin, Iran, on August 16, 2024.
● HOSSEIN GHOLIKHANI/IRNA

Having a new head coach in Juan Carlos Garrido, the champion was stunned when Majid Aliyari headed home Mohammad Qoreishi's long throw less than a minute into the game.

Saeid Sadeqi celebrated his return from injury with a brilliant strike right before the interval, though Garrido will still have to address his wasteful frontline ahead of Thursday's much-antic-

ipated visit to Tractor. Tractor's summer of spending spree quickly paid off, with former Persepolis players Mahdi Torabi and Danial Esmailifar playing their part in giving the

club a first opening-day win in a decade. Torabi teed up Amirhossein Hosseinzadeh, who tapped in from close range in the 10th minute, before Esmailifar's low cross let

Croatian Tomislav Strkalj found the net on his Tractor debut to double the visitors' lead in the first half.

In Isfahan's Naqsh-e Jahan Stadium, Sepahan was desperate to open its campaign with a win after its hopes of a place in the revamped Asian elite clubs' competition had been wrecked two weeks ago.

Jose Morais's side had to wait till the 55th minute to get off the mark against the newcomers, when Kaveh Rezaei scored from the spot, only to see his goal canceled out by Chadormalou's Mohammad Papi seven minutes later. Skipper Mohammad Karimi's effort from inside the box went into the bottom corner off the defender to restore the one-goal cushion for Sepahan and substitute Reza Shekari secured all points in added time.

Elsewhere, Omid Nour-Afkan's second-half penalty saw Malavan come out on top against Golgozar Sirjan at home, while Esteghlal Khuzestan and Iralco shared the spoils in a goalless contest in Ahvaz.

Kheybar Khorramabad celebrated its top-flight debut with a 1-0 win away to Havadar, with Mehrdad Qanbari finding the net in the second half.

In Qa'emshahr's Shahid Vatan Stadium, a repeat of last season's final day drama saw Foolad Khuzestan defeat host Nassaji Mazandaran 1-0 in Yahya Golmohammadi's first game in charge of the visiting side.



● AFC

Iran names provisional squad for Futsal World Cup

Sports Desk

Head coach Vahid Shamsaei named Iran's provisional 22-man squad ahead of the upcoming FIFA Futsal World Cup – starting September 14 in Uzbekistan.

The players will have to report for a first training session in Tehran today.

Stepping into the competition as the reigning Asian champion, Iran is pitted against Venezuela, Guatemala, and France in Group F.

Venezuela will be making only a second World Cup appearance after reaching the last 16 in Lithuania three years ago, while Guatemala – beaten by Iran in all six previous meetings – has failed to go beyond

the group stage in five attempts. France, meanwhile, will be a debutant in Uzbekistan courtesy of an elite-round group win in the European qualifiers.

Making a ninth World Cup appearance in the upcoming edition, Iran, whose best finish came in 2016 thanks to a shootout victory over Portugal in the third-place play-off, will begin its campaign against Venezuela on September 16. Shamsaei's men will face Guatemala on September 19 before squaring off against the European opponent three days later.

The top two of the six groups will be joined by the four best third-placed finishers in the last-16 round.

The following is the Iranian 22-man World Cup squad:

Saeid Mo'meni, Sajjad Babaei, Behzad Rasouli (goalkeepers), Mohammadreza Sangsefidi, Mohammad Shajari, Mahdi Asadshir, Alireza Rafieipour, Mohammad-Hossein Derakhshani, Ali-Asghar Hassanzadeh, Salar Aqapour, Ali Akrami, Amirhossein Davoudi, Mohammad-Hossein Bazayr, Mahdi Karimi, Moslem Oladqobad, Masoud Yousef, Sajjad Yousefkhah, Hamzeh Kadkhoda, Hossein Tayyebi, Saeid Ahmad-Abbasi, Behrouz Azimi, Amirhossein Abtahi.

Eight players will be omitted for the visit to the Central Asian country.

Maresca calls for patience as he seeks to turn around Chelsea's fortunes

REUTERS – New Chelsea head coach Enzo Maresca has asked for patience ahead of their Premier League opener against reigning champions Manchester City, as the Italian tries to turn around the west London side's fortunes after a series of underwhelming seasons. Chelsea, who finished sixth last campaign and 12th in the 2022-23 season, hired the 44-year-old Maresca in June after he guided Leicester City to the English Championship title in his first season in charge. Chelsea have gone big again in

the transfer window, splashing out around 160 million pounds (\$206.50 million) on signing players such as Portuguese winger Pedro Neto, midfielder Kieran Dewsbury-Hall and Swedish-Danish goalkeeper Filip Jorgensen.

"We are going to try and do our best to win games," Maresca, who had a spell as one of Pep Guardiola's assistant managers at City, told reporters on Friday.

"The big difference between us, in this moment, and other teams is that it is just a matter

of time. Some clubs work with a manager for eight years, so with time we will close the gap and hopefully that can happen soon.

"Sometimes it (time) sounds like an excuse from managers and I know timing in football is difficult, but in our case with the process and ideas we will close the gap.

"We need their (fans) support because when you are on the pitch and you can hear the fans behind the team it is like 12 players. If they support us and be patient then we will pay

them back with performance and results."

Chelsea will be without captain Reece James after the 24-year-old right back picked up a hamstring injury.

Maresca said midfielder Conor Gallagher, 24, was training apart and would not be available for today's clash at Stamford Bridge. Gallagher was close to a move to LaLiga club Atletico Madrid but British media reports said it had been put on hold.

"He is trying to find a solution with the club," Maresca said.



● DARREN WALSH/GETTY IMAGES



Iran's President Masoud Pezeshkian addresses Parliament in the capital Tehran, on August 17, 2024, as he defends his cabinet lineup.
● ATTA KENARE/AFP

National Desk

Iran's Parliament officially started reviewing the qualifications of proposed ministers in the new administration, with President Masoud Pezeshkian throwing his weight behind his 19 ministerial picks. "The cabinet that was introduced to the parliament today is the government of national unity; the govern-

ment of national unity is a government that considers itself the government of all Iranian people. The national unity government is obligated to secure the citizenship rights of all Iranians and is committed to the prioritization of national interests over any other interest," Pezeshkian told an open session of the Parliament on Saturday. He also underscored the

importance of maintaining unity and cohesion among the three branches of government to resolve the country's problems. Pezeshkian called for amicable solutions to address the national and international challenges instead of resorting to harsh measures. The president said the Islamic Republic is suffering "imbalances" in the eco-

Parliament starts debating ministerial picks

Pezeshkian casts new cabinet as gov't of national consensus

conomic, societal, environmental, educational and cultural fields but, "Our people showed that they love their country, and if effective procedure is pursued to solve the problems, they will turn out with all their strength." He underlined the significance of policy- and decision-making based on a scientific approach, as well as solving problems in light of collective wisdom instead of relying on personal opinions and tastes. Pezeshkian also emphasized his resolve to fight against corruption and respect freedom of speech as well as criticism and national dialogue. "Economy is the cornerstone of the country's problems, but dissociating the economy from other areas and reducing it to conventional economic issues is a big mistake. Today, simultaneous reforms in international relations and internal reforms are the only way out of the

current situation," Pezeshkian said. He submitted the list of his new cabinet members to the Parliament on August 11, less than two weeks after he was sworn in before the country's legislators. Pezeshkian's cabinet lineup has ruffled the feathers of a number of individuals in the Reformist camp but he has defended his proposed ministers and has called on critics to "wait for the cabinet to start work and criticize it based on its performance."

Opponents and supporters

During the Saturday's session, opponents and supporters of the president's cabinet lineup also expressed their views on the proposed ministers and the government's plans. The opponent lawmaker, Hosseinali Haji-Deligani, said the legislators expected the president to unveil his detailed plans for resolving issues such

as housing, subsidies and foreign nationals living in Iran. Another lawmaker Moslem Salehi pointed to the ministers' experiences, saying that some of the proposed ministers have weak resumes. Majid Nasirpour complained about the high average age of the proposed ministers, which is about 60. Pezeshkian's supporters hailed his cabinet lineup. Reza Alizadeh described the formation of the national unity government by the president as an unprecedented move, saying that it is happening in the country after several decades and we should appreciate it. Rahim Zare appreciated the government's proposed economic team. Mehrdad Goodarzvand Chegini said Pezeshkian proved that by choosing a cross-party cabinet, he is actually seeking to live up to his election promises.

Iran warns about 'untrustworthiness' of Israel, US in Gaza cease-fire talks

International Desk

Iran warned about "the deceit and untrustworthiness" of the Israeli regime and its most important supporter, the United States in the Gaza cease-fire talks. Iran's Acting Foreign Minister Ali Bagheri Kani issued the warning in a telephone conversation with Qatari Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani

on Friday. Kani wrote in a post published on the social media platform X on Friday evening that he and the Qatari prime minister exchanged opinions "about the developments of the second day of talks to stop the genocide by the Zionists in Gaza." "Referring to the aggression and criminal nature of the Zionists in Gaza, I warned about the deceit and untrustworthiness of

the criminal gang ruling Tel Aviv and their most important supporter, the United States, at the negotiating table," he stated. Bagheri Kani also said that the United States, which is present in the cease-fire talks, is providing weapons to Israel which makes it "an accomplice, not a neutral mediator." Earlier in the day, the US, Qatar and Egypt issued a joint statement saying they

held Gaza cease-fire talks in a positive atmosphere in the Qatari capital Doha. They added that the talks were "serious and constructive." The mediators put forward a "bridging proposal" that would allow the "swift" implementation of a deal that would end the war in Gaza and see the release of Israeli captives, the joint statement said. The mediating trio claimed

that their proposal "narrows the gaps between the parties," referring to the Palestinian resistance movement Hamas and the Israeli regime. Meanwhile, US President Joe Biden said, "We are closer than we have ever been." A senior Hamas official on Saturday dismissed optimistic talk by Biden that a Gaza truce is nearer after negotiations in Qatar. "To say that we are getting close to a deal is an illusion," Hamas political bureau member Sami Abu Zuhri told AFP. "We are not facing a deal or real negotiations, but rather

the imposing of American diktats." Hamas did not attend the Doha talks. An official of the movement, Osama Hamdan, had told AFP the group would join if the meeting set a timetable for implementing what Hamas had already agreed to. Despite the cease-fire talks, the Israeli regime is pushing ahead with its air and artillery attacks in the besieged Gaza Strip as the genocidal war enters its eleventh month. The latest massacres have raised the number of Palestinian deaths to over 40,000 and left more than 92,400 others injured.

Mohammad Ali Rajabi
Cartoonist



The road to ...

The cooperative spirit is indeed a rational approach, given the current challenges facing Iran. However, should partisan and factional interests take precedence over national interests within Parliament, and lawmakers fail to embrace the concept of a national accord government, the consequences could be far from desirable. An excellent opportunity for national collaboration to tackle pressing issues affecting the Iranian people

could be lost, and the existing polarization within Iran's political arena would only deepen. In the highly polarized political landscape of Iran, Pezeshkian represents a potential bridge toward healing and unity. Should this opportunity be squandered, and other powerhouses, including Parliament, fail to lend their support to his efforts, political confrontations will likely intensify. With Iran facing countless challenges, from economic woes and relative dissatisfaction to a rift

between the people and the government, ongoing sanctions, and a volatile regional situation, fostering internal cohesion is of paramount importance. The concept of a national accord government is a prudent and commendable approach to addressing these issues. Given the expected rationality and wisdom within Parliament, it is unlikely that legislators will choose to face off the government and allow Iranian society to descend into a quagmire of escalating disputes and polarization.

Israel's strike kills 10 Syrians in Lebanon



● AFP

Lebanon's Health Ministry said an Israeli air strike on Saturday in southern Lebanon killed 10 Syrians. The toll from the strike in the Wadi al-Kafur area of Nabatieh is one of the largest in southern Lebanon since Hezbollah and Israeli forces began exchanging near-daily fire after war in the Gaza Strip began in October, according to AFP. The death toll from the latest strike included "a woman and her two children" while five other people were wounded, most of them also Syrian, Lebanon's Health Ministry said in a statement. The official Lebanese National News Agency reported that the casualties were Syrian refugees and workers. Israel's military, on its Telegram channel, claimed that the air force had struck a weapons storage facility of Lebanon's Hezbollah overnight "in the area of Nabatieh", which is about 12 kilometers (seven miles) from the nearest point of the border. Following the deaths in Wadi al-Kafur, Hezbollah said it responded with a volley of Katyusha rockets on Ayelet HaShahar, a community in northern Israel. None of the roughly 55 projectiles caused any reported injuries but they sparked "multiple fires", Israel's military said. Earlier, around 20 kilometers to the north "a projectile that crossed from Lebanon" wounded two soldiers, one of them severely, in the Misgav Am area, Israel's military said. The killings in quick succession in late July of Fuad Shukur, a top operations chief of Hezbollah in south Lebanon, and Hamas political chief Ismail Haniyeh, led to vows of vengeance from Hezbollah, Iran and other resistance groups in the region which blamed Israel. Israel claimed the killing of Shukur, in a strike on south Beirut, but has not commented directly on the killing of Haniyeh while he visited Tehran. In an effort to avert a broader conflict, Western and Arab diplomats have been shuttling around the region. The cross-border violence between Lebanon and Israel has killed 580 people in Lebanon, mostly Hezbollah fighters but including at least 128 civilians, according to an AFP tally. On the Israeli side, including in the annexed Golan Heights, 22 soldiers and 26 civilians have been killed, according to army figures.



9th Caspian Media Forum

Envoy: Iran, Russia reject clash of civilizations, advocate for intercultural dialogue



Arts & Culture Desk

Iran's Ambassador to Russia, Kazem Jalali, emphasized that both Iran and Russia oppose the concept of a clash of civilizations and believe in respecting all cultures. Speaking at the 9th Caspian Media Forum in Astrakhan, Russia, Jalali criticized the idea of one civilization's superiority, saying it is rejected by nations with rich, ancient cultures like Iran and Russia, IRNA wrote. He emphasized that intercultural dialogue and respect for all civilizations are essential. Jalali pointed to the concept of clash of civilizations predicated on the notion of one civilization's superiority, emphasizing that nations like the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Russian Federation reject such views. He highlighted that nations with rich, ancient cultures advocate for intercultural dialogue and respect for all civilizations, asserting that no civilization should be subjected to insult. While criticizing the recent events at the opening ceremony

of the 2024 Paris Olympics, the Iranian envoy to Russia said, "What happened in the Paris Olympics is worth considering. One day Christianity is insulted, the next day Islam is insulted, the next day the Prophet of Islam and the next day the Qur'an is insulted. Such issues have been theorized in the issue of the clash of civilizations." Referring to the consequences of a unipolar world and the genocide in Gaza, he said that Iran and Russia oppose such issues, noting that the architects of a war of civilizations bear responsibility for the massacre in Gaza. Jalali emphasized that the media should strategize towards establishing a multipolar world and asserted that the Caspian field does not require the involvement of extra-regional powers. He also highlighted the strengthening ties between Iran and Russia, noting that under the administration of the late Ebrahim Raisi, Iran-Russia relations significantly broadened, assuring that Iran will maintain and develop its relations with Russia

and other neighboring nations with its new government. The Caspian Media Forum, which is held annually, has become a platform for strengthening dialogue and cooperation among media professionals in the Caspian region. The one-day conference, which focuses on "cultural dialogues" between the littoral countries of the Caspian Sea, is attended by about 120 foreign guests, including government officials, representatives of regions, expert community, and mass media. Representatives from the Caspian Sea littoral states, as well as delegations from Moldova and Uzbekistan, participated in the conference. Astrakhan Governor Igor Babushkin, who also spoke at the forum, said that the event aims to promote the dialogue of cultures and share working tools and mechanisms to improve its quality. "I am sure that today's platform will become a good place for media interaction and a point of unity for the peoples of the Caspian Sea," he said.

Iranian students win bronze medal at international AI Olympiad

Social Desk

Iran's national team won a bronze medal and ranked 18th overall at the first International Olympiad in Artificial Intelligence in Bulgaria. The team of four students — Mohammad Sadra Kouhestani, Amir Hossein Zarei, Parsa Sadeghi, and Alireza Rahimi Yazdi — demonstrated exceptional skills in the competition, which drew around 40 teams from 33 countries, Mehr News Agency reported. In one of the three scientific challenges, the Iranian team provided the best solution, surpassing not only their competitors but also the problem's designer. The event aimed to highlight the importance of artificial intelligence education and



competition at the high school level. The first International Olympiad in Artificial Intelligence took place from August 9 to 15 in Burgas, Bulgaria. Teams from

Poland, Singapore, and other countries won gold medals in the competition. Iran's Education Minister, Reza Moradi Sahraei, congratulated the team on their achievement,

expressing hope that the establishment of a national artificial intelligence organization will help Iran compete with other countries in scientific competitions.

Russia's Altyn festival to showcase Iranian films

Arts & Culture Desk

The 20th Altyn Minbar International Film Festival in Russia is set to kick off on September 6, featuring a lineup of Iranian films, including the opening film 'In the Arms of the Tree'. Directed by Babak Khajeh Pasha, 'In the Arms of the Tree' will be screened on September 6 as the festival's opening

film. The movie, a product of the Soureh Cinema Organization and the Institute for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults, was previously nominated for seven Simorgh awards and won the Crystal Simorgh for Best Screenplay at the 41st Fajr Film Festival. In addition to 'In the Arms of the Tree', two Iranian animated

films will also be showcased at the festival. 'Loupetoo', directed by Abbas Askari and produced by Mohammad Hossein Sadeghi, and 'A Passenger from Ganora', directed by Ahmad Alamdar and produced by Mohammad Hossein Alamdar, will both be screened during the festival. The international distribution of these films is handled by the Soureh Cinema

Organization. The festival, which runs from September 6 to 11, aims to promote cultural exchange between Russian and international artists, showcase films that promote kindness, peace, and justice, and highlight the achievements of filmmakers who create movies that promote spiritual and cultural values.

Iranian mosques eyed for UNESCO World Heritage List

Arts & Culture Desk

Iran has begun work on a UNESCO registration dossier for the "Iranian Mosque" as a global cultural heritage site, with hopes of completing the process by the end of the Iranian year. Abdolrasoul Vatandoust, manager of the project, said that the file is one of Iran's most important in the past 50 years. He noted that preliminary studies have started, but fieldwork has not yet begun, ISNA wrote. The project involves studying around 34 mosques in 12 provinces, which represent the evolution of mosque architecture

in Iran from the Islamic period to the present day. However, the number of mosques may change during the process, which is expected to take around two years. Vatandoust expressed hope that the project would be completed quickly, pending sufficient funding and cooperation from provincial authorities and other organizations. He also confirmed that mosques previously recognized by UNESCO, such as the Jameh Mosque of Isfahan, would be included in the dossier, as they are part of a "chain" of mosques that showcase the evolution of Iranian mosque architecture.

