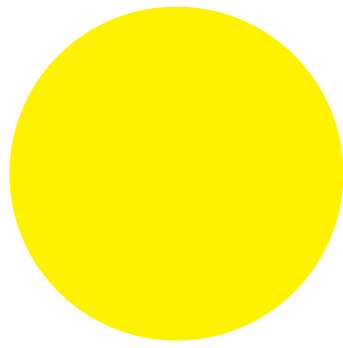


Leader lauds Safieddine as 'constant companion of Nasrallah'



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Israeli, Hamas delegations head to Cairo  
**Fresh efforts to revive Gaza ceasefire negotiations**

International Desk

Diplomatic efforts to establish a ceasefire in Gaza seem to be gaining momentum. Despite more than a year of aggression and ongoing Israeli assaults on Gaza and southern Lebanon, attempts to bring the war to an end have been unsuccessful. However, a temporary ceasefire was brokered between Hamas and Israel from November 24 to 30, 2023, which included a prisoner exchange between the two sides. Since then, various proposals have been put forward, but Israel and Prime Minister Netanyahu have refused to agree on a truce. Now, following the assassination of Hamas leaders, particularly Yahya Sinwar, the head of Hamas's military wing, Western countries and Israel's allies have expressed hope that Netanyahu will accept a proposed ceasefire. The families of Israeli prisoners have also increased pressure on Netanyahu to accept a lull in fighting and secure the release of their loved ones. However, many are skeptical about Netanyahu's willingness to accept a deal, especially given rumors that he hopes to continue his hardline policies and aggression if Donald Trump wins the US presidential election. Nevertheless, according to media reports, there are whispers of a newly-drafted proposal. Apparently, this proposal, dubbed a «minor deal,» has been put forward by Egypt and the US and is now on the negotiating table. Under this proposal, a number of Israeli prisoners held by Hamas would be released in exchange for a two-week ceasefire, with further negotiations to follow for a permanent ceasefire. [Page 7 >](#)

# Israeli Strike on Lebanon Journos 'War Crime'

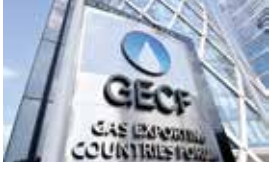
Lebanon accused Israel of targeting journalists in a "deliberate" attack that killed three media workers in the country's south on Friday, calling the incident a "war crime." 7 >



A damaged car marked "Press" is seen at the site of an Israeli airstrike that targeted an area where a number of journalists were located in the southern Lebanese village of Hasbaya on October 25, 2024. **ALI HANKIR/AFP**



**GECF meeting postponed due to regional conditions: Official**



The 26th ministerial meeting of the Gas Exporting Countries Forum (GECF) will be held later due to the conditions of the region and with the reschedule of the secretariat of the forum. Announcing the above, Ali-Akbar Dijaz Khalili, the caretaker of the Department of OPEC Affairs, Assemblies and International Organizations of the Ministry of Oil told Shana on Friday that the meeting was scheduled for October 28-30 in Tehran.

On September 9, Iranian Oil Minister Mohsen Paknejad held a meeting with Mohamed Hamel, the secretary general of the GECF in Tehran.

Their discussions included a comprehensive review of the GECF's activities, with Hamel highlighting key milestones and strategic achievements.

The 25th Ministerial Meeting of the GECF was held on October 10, 2023 in Malabo, the Republic of Equatorial Guinea.

According to the closing statement of the 25th Ministerial Meeting, member states emphasized the GECF's steadfast objective of supporting the permanent sovereignty of GECF countries over their natural resources, with the view to independently and sustainably plan, develop, manage, utilize, and conserve their natural gas resources for the benefit of their citizens.

**Iran keen on collaboration with China in renewables**

Iranian Deputy Energy Minister Homayoun Haeri announced on Thursday that his country is looking to leverage Chinese expertise and technology to advance its renewable energy sector.

Negotiations between Iran and China regarding the utilization of Chinese capabilities in the renewable energy sector have become more serious following the recent visit of Iran's energy minister to China, the official said during the opening ceremony of the 24th Iran International Electricity Exhibition (IEE 2024), IRNA reported.

Haeri emphasized the significance of private sector participation in the electricity industry, stating, "Industrialists have always been supporters of the power industry, as we owe the self-sufficiency of the electricity industry to the country's private sector."

# Cargo transit via Iran up 42% in seven months: **IRICA**

According to figures by the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA), cargo transit via Iran increased by 42% year on year in the seven months to October 21 to reach a total of 13.239 million metric tons (mt).

Iran's largest container port and two border crossings in the west of the country were responsible for a bulk of cargo transit via Iran in April-October, said IRICA, Press TV reported.

It said that the Port of Shahid Rajaei, located near the southern port of Bandar Abbas on the Persian Gulf, had processed 3.5 million mt of cargo arriving or leaving Iran for the purpose of shipment to other countries over the seven months to late October.

The border crossings of

Parviz Khan and Bashmaq, both located on Iran's border with Iraq's semi-autonomous Kurdistan region, had handled 3.3 million mt and 1.8 million mt of cargo transit, respectively, in April-October, said the Iranian customs office.

Cargo transit via the Sarakhs border crossing, on Iran's border with Turkmenistan and a gateway to trade to Central Asia, rose by 184% year on year in the seven months to late October, the highest increase in 10 major border crossings involved in international cargo transit in Iran, showed IRICA figures.

Transit at Parviz Khan and Bashmaq also rose by 85.4% and 84.9%, respectively, over the same period, IRICA said, adding that the largest amount of car-



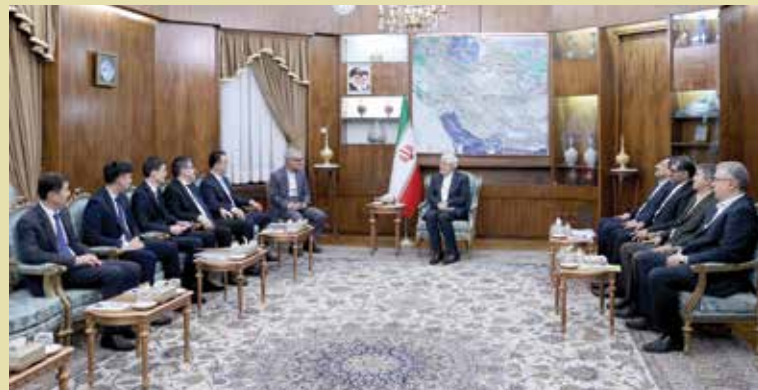
go arriving in Iran for transit to other countries had been processed at Sarakhs. Iran has eased restrictions

on foreign cargo transit in recent years while it has also introduced plans to improve its railways and

roads infrastructure. That has come as the country seeks to obtain more hard revenues from a

growing freight transport activity on the regional north-south and east-west trade corridors.

## Uzbekistan-Iran ties to grow in trade, investment sectors



Uzbekistan's Minister of Investment, Industry and Trade Laziz Kudratov discussed boosting cooperation with Iran in trade, economic, investment, and transport sectors during a working visit to Tehran on Thursday. The Uzbek minister held meetings with Mohammadreza Aref, Iran's vice president, and Mohammad Atabak, the minister of industry, mines and trade, according to fvpresident.ir.

During the negotiations, the parties reviewed the current state of trade and economic cooperation between

Uzbekistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran, including the implementation of existing agreements and joint projects, and together identified priority areas for further cooperation.

Joint steps were agreed upon to increase the volume of mutual trade. Among the key measures is the expansion of opportunities for entrepreneurs within the framework of the preferential trade agreement (PTA) between the two countries.

Both sides reaffirmed

their commitment to deepening bilateral relations and determined the dates for the next 16th meeting of the Intergovernmental Joint Commission between Uzbekistan and Iran, as well as a joint business forum within its framework in the first quarter of 2025.

As a result of the negotiations, a bilateral statement was signed, including the agreements reached on the further development of Uzbek-Iranian cooperation in trade, economic, investment, and transport sectors.

## Minister touts investment potentials in Iran's energy sector

Iran's Energy Minister Abbas Aliabadi said the country has some appealing investment opportunities in its automotive electrification and renewables sectors.

Addressing the Third Belt and Road Energy Ministerial Conference in China's Chingdao, Aliabadi said that Iran has a comprehensive plan to expand its renewables sector in the next five years, Press TV reported.

"The government of Iran plans to increase at least 30 gigawatts (GW) to its renewables capacity in the next five years through supporting and encouraging investment in this sector," said the minister. He said that Iran has opened its arms to foreign investors seeking to become involved in the country's renewables sector by presenting a series of "attractive investment models."

On automotive electrification, Aliabadi said that investment in the sector has become a priority for Iran, adding that the country has launched some major plans to expand electric vehicle charging infra-



structures and its fleet of electric buses.

"Iran's big and untapped market presents various promising opportunities for investment and for partnership with Iranian companies in the field of manufacturing electric vehicles and locomotives," said the minister in his address to the Belt and Road conference.

Iran still relies on fossil fuels for a bulk of its energy needs although the country has introduced some ambitious plans to increase electricity generation from the renewables.

The country has an electricity generation capacity of 93-98 GW with thermal power plants responsible for more than 75 GW of the output. That comes as

actual electricity production in Iran is well below 60 GW with a peak demand that reaches nearly 70 GW in summer months when demand for cooling hits record high.

Aliabadi said in a conference in Tehran last months that Iran seeks to increase its total electricity generation capacity from the renewables to 50 GW in the next five years. In the same speech, the minister dismissed concerns raised about Iran's ambitious automotive electrification plans and its impact on the country's electrical grid.

He said that adding some 100,000 electric taxis to Iran's commercial fleet in the near future will only increase demand by 0.2 GW.

## Economy minister calls for boosting Iran's role in BRICS

Abdolnaser Hemmati, Iran's economy minister, stated that his country should bolster its position in BRICS as he believes the group will become a prominent economic and political force in the world in the future.

The recent BRICS summit in Kazan was accompanied by important sideline meetings for Iran that included discussions on economic relations with the presidents of Russia, China, South Africa and the prime minister of

India, IRNA reported on Friday. The sideline meetings resulted in green lights of assistance from the heads of state regarding offering solutions to economic problems and relations, which were favorable for the Iranian government, the minister stated. Hemmati went on to say that Russian President Vladimir Putin assured to address the issue of the trade imbalance between his country and Iran, as President Xi Jinping vowed to follow up on

joint projects that Iran has proposed to work with China. On BBRICS Plus meeting, more than 30 presidents and leaders of nations are against the hegemony of the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the dominance of the US dollar, he said, noting that BRICS includes two of the world's five largest economies, China and India, as well as two emerging economic powers, South Africa and Brazil, along with other powerful nations such as Russia.

According to Hemmati, BRICS will become an important economic and political center of power in the world.

Hemmati noted that Iran faces the pressure of sanctions, as well as FATF regulations that prevent its banks from connecting with other banks. While the country is working on these issues, Hemmati believes that Iran should simultaneously bolster its role in BRICS.



It is necessary to provide the necessary framework so that the country can make the most of the recent global summit, while also resolving its problems, Hemmati concluded.



# Ezmighan; the unexpected paradise of South Khorasan Province

## Iranica Desk

Deserts are among the most captivating natural phenomena that attract tourists. Typically defined by their dryness and scarcity of water, most travelers do not expect to encounter rivers or lush rice paddies in a desert region. However, Ezmighan, a village in South Khorasan Province, defies this expectation. Nestled in a desert area, it features flowing rivers and verdant landscapes, with fertile rice paddies flourishing among desert palm groves. Located approximately 40 kilometers from Tabas, Ezmighan village serves as a refreshing summer resort. Thanks to its favorable cli-

mate, it is considered one of the best destinations for recreation and exploration. Along the route from Tabas to Mashhad, signage for Ezmighan appears after 50 kilometers. At an altitude of 1,000 meters above sea level, Ezmighan's exceptional climate can be attributed to its elevation. This shallow, mountainous village is rich in gushing rivers despite its arid surroundings, resulting in two types of climate: hot and humid, and hot and dry. The fertile soil of Ezmighan village supports the cultivation of rice and the nurturing of fruit orchards in its warm desert setting. Nature's artistry is vividly displayed in this charming village, where

lush rice paddies coexist with the parched desert. Exploring Ezmighan offers a unique experience, merging the essence of northern Iran's rice fields with the towering palm trees characteristic of the south. The village features stone-paved paths and homes constructed in a traditional desert style using mud bricks, clay, and wood. The locals primarily engage in agriculture and horticulture, benefiting from the perennial rivers. Livestock farming, traditional carpet weaving, and raising native chickens are also common practices. Key crops include rice, dates, melons, and citrus fruits. Farming in Ezmighan village is centered around rice

cultivation, which begins in April and May, with seedlings transplanted to main fields by late June. Harvesting occurs in early autumn, employing traditional methods for both harvesting and threshing. The ideal times to visit the village are in spring and autumn, when it enjoys a mild climate. Travelers looking to experience moderate weather and witness the rice harvest should consider visiting in September and October. Ezmighan's summers, too, possess a unique charm, showcasing stunning natural beauty. Despite the warm weather, many tourists flock to enjoy the breathtaking landscapes during these months.



## Attractions

Alongside its scenic beauty and unique climate, Ezmighan village offers a variety of natural and historical attractions. Its desert setting allows for adventurous excursions. The fertile lands of Ezmighan, enhanced by a humid climate, are lush and inviting. Tourists are captivated by the sight and aroma of the rice paddies, while the nearby palm trees add an indescribable charm. The palms grow in irregular clusters, indicating their wild growth, and the terraced groves attract

nature enthusiasts eager to photograph their beauty. Ezmighan is home to diverse fruit orchards, showcasing crops such as apples, oranges, tangerines, plums, apricots, peaches, persimmons, pears, and nectarines. Additionally, one can observe remarkable trees, including 300-year-old wild figs and tall pines. The village boasts rich flower fields, particularly narcissus, which thrive due to the region's favorable climate, creating a heavenly landscape filled with their sweet fragrance. Roses are also cultivated in Ezmighan.



## Waterfall

A beautiful waterfall is accessible via a 30-minute walk from the village, passing through rice paddies and fruit orchards. Swimming in the heart of the desert is an unparalleled experience for tourists in



Ezmighan. However, caution is advised; the rocky edges of the gorge can be submerged and not visible, making swimming potentially dangerous for the unskilled.

## Kal Jeni Valley

Situated 33 kilometers from Tabas and near Ezmighan, Kal Jeni Valley is one of Iran's premier trekking destinations. The Ezmighan River has sculpted the valley over time, enhancing its depth and creating a picturesque gorge as it encounters rocky resistance along its path.

## Fish Spring

Cheshmeh-ye Mahi (Fish Spring) near Ezmighan is renowned for its therapeutic waters. This spring attracts health tourists seeking skin healing. If you

dip your feet into the water, fish will congregate around you, feeding on dead skin cells and providing a natural cleansing experience.

## Dokhtar Castle

Five kilometers from Ezmighan, the hand-carved houses known as Dokhtar Castle date back to ancient times. Arabic inscriptions found here are believed to date back to Ja'far al-Tayar. Sadly, these beautiful structures are not well-preserved and are now used for storage or to house animals.

## Tomb of Seyyed Muhammad ibn Ja'far al-Tayar

In Ezmighan village, you can find a mausoleum attributed to Seyyed Muhammad ibn Ja'far al-Tayar, located on a hill overlooking the mountain. A dirt

road off the main route leads to this mausoleum, which dates back to the early Islamic period in Iran. The original tomb has been destroyed and rebuilt numerous times throughout history, particularly after the earthquake hit the village in 1978.



## Restoration efforts underway in Tafresh's ancient structures



Imamzadeh Mohammad

## Iranica Desk

The city of Tafresh, situated in Markazi Province, is one of Iran's most pristine

and picturesque destinations. With a population of approximately 33,500, this historic city is an ideal host for summer trips, show-

ing not only its stunning natural landscapes but also its rich historical attractions. Mahmmod Moradi Nara-

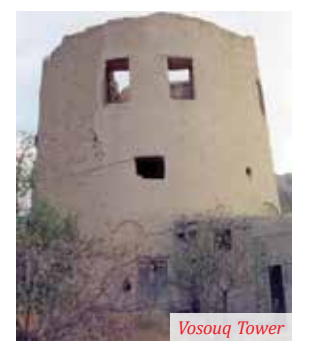
ghi, the director general of the provincial Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts Organization, announced that restoration and reconstruction efforts for valuable historical sites in Tafresh are underway. He emphasized that the protection of cultural heritage is a collective responsibility. Naraghi highlighted commendable restoration projects, including the dome of the shrine of Imamzadeh Mohammad (PBUH), the Khanak Caravanserai, and the Zagharm Tekyieh (tekyieh is a venue where Shia Muslims gather for religious ceremonies).

"Tafresh boasts numerous extraordinary historical and ancient buildings, each with its unique stories and cultural significance. Re-

storing these structures is a priority, and with the positive outlook of local authorities toward tourism and cultural heritage, these projects will soon be implemented." He added that, because the historical Vosouq Tower is situated on private property, the legal process for its restoration will be pursued through the city's Cultural Heritage Department, the Public Prosecutor's Office, and the Tafresh Municipality. "The protection of cultural heritage is a collective responsibility, and we urge all citizens to cooperate in preserving and maintaining these valuable sites. We are working to create suitable conditions for tourism development and

attracting investors to the region, enabling us to uphold our cultural and historical identity." Situated at an elevation of about 2,000 meters above sea level, Tafresh encompasses seventy villages, including Kabouran, Naqusan, Bazarjan, Farak, and Joftan. To reach Tafresh, you must travel through the arid plains of Saveh, head towards Arak, and, after Rahjerd, take a turn north off the main road. Continue your journey through the rugged mountain passes to finally arrive in Tafresh. Summer temperatures can peak at 32°C, while winter lows drop to around 15°C. In the northern part of Tafresh, you will find Gandomkuh Mountain. This

conical mountain rises to an elevation of 2,156 meters and is visible from nearly all parts of the city. In Persian, *gandom* means wheat, and *kuh* means mountain. From the heights of Kharazan Pass, Gandomkuh appears like a pile of unharvested wheat, giving it its distinctive name, Gandomkuh (meaning wheat mountain).



Vosouq Tower



# Would Saudis and Emiratis broker a deal between Iran and Trump?

## International Desk

### ANALYSIS

*There is a glimmer of hope that if Trump regains power, not only will Saudi Arabia and the UAE refrain from actively pushing an anti-Iranian agenda, but Iran may also be able to capitalize on its improved relations with these countries to create a breathing room for its economy to counter potential US actions. After years of hostility against Iran, these two countries have come to realize that the only way to achieve regional stability and development is to accept Iran's power and sphere of influence in the region and strive to iron out misunderstandings through dialogue and negotiation.*

These days, a moderate government led by Masoud Pezeshkian has taken the reins in Iran, bringing a glimmer of hope to the country's efforts to break free from the shackles of sanctions. The political will demonstrated by the new government, as well as the overall makeup of its foreign policy team, has sparked a great deal of optimism that Iran may once again be able to wriggle out from under the weight of sanctions and gradually move towards economic repair and rebuilding. However, while creating a political will to tackle foreign policy issues, particularly sanctions, is crucial, the other side of the coin is the United States, which is currently on the cusp of a critical election, with a high likelihood of Donald Trump, who pulled out of the JCPOA and applied maximum pressure on Iran, taking the helm.

A Trump victory would undoubtedly pose a significant challenge to the Pezeshkian government, as a Kamala Harris victory would not necessarily put the brakes on the Iran-US negotiations that had already gained momentum during the late Ebrahim Raisi administration. However, a Trump win would undoubtedly turn the ta-

bles and raise new concerns for the Iranian side. Nevertheless, it's worth noting that Iran has experience dealing with Trump and can better navigate the potential challenges with a deeper understanding and more precise planning.

Separate from Iran's approach, another crucial question is whether a Trump administration would be willing to negotiate with Iran or continue to ratchet up sanctions and apply maximum pressure. While a Trump victory would be a significant challenge, it's worth noting that Trump has shown a willingness to negotiate in the past, and if his foreign policy team, including the likes of John Bolton and Mike Pompeo, hadn't thrown a spanner in the works, a different path might have been taken. One of Trump's most notable efforts was in June 2019, when he asked the late Japanese Prime Minister Abe Shinzo to visit Iran and mediate between Iran and the US. Although the mediation failed, it showed that the door to negotiation remained ajar. Therefore, if Trump selects a more moderate foreign policy team, the prospects for negotiation may be more promising than during his previous term.



Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (L) and Abu Dhabi's Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan are seen in this undated photo.  
● SAUDI ROYAL PALACE



A Trump win would have a different dynamic than in previous periods. Notably, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Saudi Arabia, unlike during Trump's first term, do not have a hostile policy towards Tehran.

However, a Trump win would have a different dynamic than in previous periods. Notably, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Saudi Arabia, unlike during Trump's first term, do not have a hostile policy towards Tehran. The anti-Iranian group, known as the "B-Team," comprising Benjamin Netanyahu, Mohammed bin Salman, John Bolton, and Mohammed bin Zayed, no longer has the same level of coordination as they did from 2016 to 2020. Bolton has now become one of Trump's most vocal critics. Netanyahu is grappling with numerous internal problems and may be pushed out of the political scene once the Gaza war is over. More importantly, Iran's relations with Saudi Arabia and the UAE have improved significantly. The two sides have adopted a more friendly and non-hostile approach towards each other.

In fact, there is a sense of optimism that if Trump were to regain power, not only would Saudi Arabia and the UAE not be actively involved in the anti-Iranian axis, but Iran may also be able to tap into its improved relations with these countries to create a safety valve for its economy to mitigate potential US actions. After years of hostility and proxy wars against Iran, these two countries have come to realize that the only way to

achieve regional stability and development is to accept Iran's power and sphere of influence in the region and strive to iron out misunderstandings through dialogue and negotiation.

Another crucial factor that might prevent Saudi Arabia and the UAE from reactivating their anti-Iranian stance, as they did during Trump's first term, is that they have officially abandoned their sectarian and confrontational policies in the region in favor of a more national and development-oriented approach. Saudi Arabia is attempting to invest in technology and renewable energy sectors to chart a new course for the country in the digital age. This is evident in Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 and the futuristic city of NEOM on the Red Sea coast. These ambitious plans and goals require foreign investment, which in turn requires regional security and stability, which Saudi Arabia has been striving for in recent years. Therefore, any conflict or instability between Iran and the US that could compromise regional security and stability would be counterproductive to the mid-term goals that Saudi Arabia and other regional countries have set for themselves. This is especially true since the 2019 attack on Aramco by Yemeni forces and the US's lack of response have made these

countries skeptical of US support against regional threats and more inclined to avoid regional conflicts.

However, it's essential to note that while we should consider the new regional dynamics and take advantage of all opportunities, we shouldn't be overly optimistic about the potential role of the UAE and Saudi Arabia in helping Iran counter US actions. If Trump were to win, the foreign policy of these countries would likely undergo changes. Trump might try to reactivate the anti-Iranian stance of these countries by offering military and security incentives, which they have been seeking to normalize relations with Israel. This scenario, although unlikely at present, is possible, and we should be aware of it.

In conclusion, it seems that Iran should prepare itself with a coherent strategy for various scenarios that might unfold if Trump wins, taking into account its understanding of Trump's behavior and its experience with maximum pressure. However, it's worth acknowledging that if a national will to lift sanctions is formed, Iran can overcome the challenges posed by Trump and reach an agreement that won't fall apart.

The article first published by Persian language news website Entekhab.



Republican presidential nominee former President Donald Trump speaks during a commercial break during a Univision town hall, on Oct. 16, 2024, in Doral, Fla.  
● ALEX BRANDON/AP



# A Mideast shift is underway, without Israel

By Maria Abi-Habib & Ismaeel Naar\*

## OPINION

*A year ago, Saudi Arabia was preparing to recognize Israel in a normalization deal that would have fundamentally reshaped the Middle East and further isolated Iran and its allies while barely lifting a finger to advance Palestinian statehood.*

*Now, that deal is further away than ever, even after the killing of the Hamas leader, Yahya Sinwar, which has been widely seized upon as a potential opening for a peace deal. Instead, Saudi Arabia is warming relations with its traditional rival, Iran, while insisting that any diplomatic pact now hinges on Israel's acceptance of a Palestinian state, a remarkable turnaround for the kingdom.*



Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi (L) meets with his Saudi counterpart, Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia on October 9, 2024.  
● SAUDI PRESS AGENCY

A diplomatic détente is underway in the Mideast, but not the one envisioned by the Israeli prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, who continues to say that his cabinet can clinch a deal with Riyadh. This month, the foreign ministers of the Persian Gulf states met for the first time as a group with their Iranian counterpart. It is a shaky, early-stage rapprochement that will only chip away at centuries of sectarian antagonisms, but it represents a sharp shift in a region where the rivalry between Riyadh and Tehran has drenched the region in bloodshed for decades.

Tehran's outreach continued after that, with the Iranian foreign minister, Abbas Araghchi, visiting Saudi Arabia before heading to other countries in the region, including Iraq and Oman, in an effort to ease tensions. He also visited Jordan before traveling to Egypt and Turkey. The visit to Egypt was the first by an Iranian foreign minister in 12 years, according to the Iranian news media.

"In the region, we now have a common grievance about the threat of the war spreading, and the wars in Gaza and Lebanon and the displaced people," Araghchi said on Friday, when he landed in Istanbul.

While Netanyahu continues to reject the creation of a Palestinian state, Saudi officials have taken to newspapers and public speeches to put a two-state solution on the negotiating table. That, the kingdom has said, is the only way at this point for Israel to win favor with Saudi Arabia, largely seen as the leader of the Arab world.

What changed? Images started streaming out of Gaza of children buried alive under rubble, mothers grieving over their dead babies and Palestinians starving because Israel had blocked aid from entering the territory — all of which made it impossible for the Saudi leadership to ignore the issue of Palestinian statehood.

"What Gaza has done is set back any Israeli integration into the region," said Ali Shihabi, a Saudi businessman who is close to the monarchy and sits on the advisory board of NEOM, a futuristic city that is the pet project of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, the kingdom's future ruler. "Saudi Arabia sees that any association with Israel has become more toxic since Gaza, unless the Israelis change their spots and show a real com-

mitment to a Palestinian state, which they have refused to do." For now, Saudi Arabia and its Persian Gulf partners remain skeptical about the sincerity of Iran's diplomatic overtures. While two of Iran's resistance allies, Hamas and Hezbollah, have been hammered by Israel, Iran still supports its third ally, the Houthis in Yemen, which have attacked Saudi Arabia. But "as long as the Iranians are reaching a hand out to Riyadh, the Saudi leadership will take it," said Mr. Shihabi, adding that, if Iran is serious, "that would be a true realignment of the Mideast."

The war in Gaza has been raging for over a year, started after Hamas launched a bloody attack on Oct. 7, 2023, that killed some 1,200 Israelis and kidnapped over 200 more. That prompted Israel to launch an invasion of Gaza that has been criticized for its indiscriminate bombing and catastrophic death toll: over 40,000 dead, many of them civilians.

And while palace insiders like Shihabi admit that Saudi Arabia is no democracy, Prince Mohammed is sensitive to public opinion, which has hardened toward Israel over the past year.

The Persian Gulf region has one of the world's youngest popula-

tions; the average age of Saudis was 29 in 2022. Many of its citizens are transfixed by the endless stream of horrific images coming out of Gaza on their social media feeds, changing many of their once positive, or at least ambivalent, attitudes toward a deal with Israel.

In the months before Oct. 7, Saudi Arabia was planning an agreement with Israel that would have given Riyadh an expanded defense pact with the United States and support for a civilian nuclear program in exchange for normalizing ties. While some other Persian Gulf countries opened diplomatic relations with Israel in 2020 in a deal known as the Abraham Accords, they did not use their leverage to push Israel to create and recognize a Palestinian state.

While Riyadh has long been a vociferous supporter of a two-state solution, that goal became less of a foreign policy priority in recent years, as the crown prince solidified his power and shaped the nation's regional and domestic policies. In last year's talks to normalize ties with Israel, a Palestinian state was never raised as a condition. Instead, Riyadh demanded that Israel allow for the Palestinian Authority — which governs the West Bank — to expand its territorial



The war in Gaza has also forced countries that have signed on to the Abraham Accords to start advocating for Palestinian statehood, possibly because they worry about public opinion at home.



A child carries wood planks amid rubble after an Israeli strike in Gaza in October.  
● YEAD BABA/AFP

control and power, according to Shihabi and Arab diplomats with knowledge of the talks. But the situation in Gaza has upended that ambivalence.

In his first public comments advocating for a Palestinian state, Crown Prince Mohammed was unequivocal about Riyadh's new demands.

"The kingdom will not cease its tireless efforts to establish an independent Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital, and we affirm that the kingdom will not establish diplomatic relations with Israel without one," the crown prince said on Sept. 18 to his senior advisory council, in a speech akin to the US State of the Union address.

The Abraham Accords have been criticized for not delivering the peace to the region promised by former President Donald J. Trump, whose administration brokered the deal. None of the Arab states that signed on have fought a war with Israel in decades, and the deal did not include Iran and Syria, which are in active conflict with Israel.

The historic meeting between Iran and the Persian Gulf countries this month came a day after

Tehran launched 180 ballistic missiles at Israel. The attack was revenge for last month's killing of Hassan Nasrallah, the leader of Hezbollah, and the assassination of Hamas's political chief, Ismail Haniyeh, earlier this year, key Iranian allies.

Observers wonder if Iran is now more eager to thaw relations with the Persian Gulf because of Israeli operations that have killed most of Hezbollah's top leadership in recent weeks. The Lebanese resistance group has long been Iran's most powerful Arab ally, long feared by Israel. The war in Gaza has also forced countries that have signed on to the Abraham Accords to start advocating for Palestinian statehood, possibly because they worry about public opinion at home.

While the United Arab Emirates, the Persian Gulf's second-most powerful player, has maintained links to Israel over the last year, the relationship has come under increasing stress.

"The United Arab Emirates is not ready to support the day after the war in Gaza without the establishment of a Palestinian state," the Emirati foreign minister, Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed, said last month, referring to Israel's demands that the UAE shoulder the burden of rebuilding Gaza after the war ends.

While Netanyahu continues to claim that a monumental deal is in the works with Riyadh, Saudi officials have pushed back, highlighting the widening divide between their nations.

"The Abraham Accords were cosmetic; there was nothing substantive about them when it comes to a real, enduring regional peace agreement. Many of the states that signed on did so because they see Israel as a path to influence in Washington," Shihabi said.

"But now we see that the US has no power or influence over Israel — to a humiliating degree," he added, "and that the Israelis have no intention to create a Palestinian state."

The full article first appeared on The New York Times.

\*Maria Abi-Habib, based in Mexico City, is an NYT's investigative correspondent reporting on Latin America. Ismaeel Naar, based in Dubai, is an international reporter for The Times, covering the Persian Gulf states.





# Greco-Roman triumph in Tirana as Iran keeps excelling in age-group wrestling

## Sports Desk

It might be a decade since Iran last won a team title at the Seniors World Championships but the Greco-Roman under-23 crown in Tirana, Albania, on Wednesday night marked the latest episode in the country's ongoing success in age-group wrestling.

Iranian young guns notched up triple gold medals and four bronzes to lift a 14th team trophy in five years for the country across different youth-level world championships.

Fardin Hedayati brought down the curtain on yet another glorious campaign for the Iranians by walking away with the 130kg crown.

The 21-year-old rounded off his dominant run with a 6-0 victory over Russian Dmitrii Baboryko, participating as a neutral athlete, in the superheavyweight final.

Hedayati won three of his five bouts by technical superiority, while Mykhailo Vyshnyvetskyi of Ukraine was the only opponent to score against the Iranian, though he eventually fell to a 12-4 defeat.

With last year's world junior title also under his belt, Hedayati, who stole the headlines when he stunned Turkish great Riza Kayaalp in June's Ranking Series event, will now set his sights on further success in the seniors' competitions, though standing between him and a place in the national team is Amin Mirzazadeh, the reigning world champion and a bronze medalist at the Paris Olympics.

Ali Ahmadi Vafa won a first gold medal for Iran on the final day of the Greco-Roman contests, adding the 55kg glory to his world under-17 and under-20 golds. Ahmadi Vafa was up against Rashad Mammadov of Azerbaijan in the final and fought back from a 3-0 deficit in the first period to outclass the European silver medalist after the break, with a sensational four-pointer on the edge sealing a 11-3 win for the Iranian teenager. Ahmadi Vafa credits his training this year and his study of his opponents as the major factors for his improvement after suffering close losses in the age-group World Championships last year.

"I spent a full year in training camp and put in a lot of effort. A thorough analysis of all my opponents with the coaching staff contributed to this achievement. I was able to reap the rewards of all my hard work over the past year," said Ah-



madi Vafa, who trained with the senior team in the 45-day break between the U20 and U23 World Championships.

"A few days after we returned to Iran, we went to the senior camp," he said. "We were under a lot of physical strain, so the coaching staff decided to make our training sessions a bit lighter than the others."

"Our bodies responded well. I always felt deep inside that I could do it. I always say that I'm the best in my weight class."

"The decision of the coaches is that I have to move up to the 60kg category, which will be a lot tougher. But I need to work harder to be able to win the gold at the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics." Elsewhere on Wednesday, Erfan Jarkani

and Ali Oskou added a couple of bronze medals to Iran's Greco-Roman haul in Tirana.

Representing the country in the 63kg contests, Jarkani bounced back from a last-eight 3-2 loss to eventual gold medalist Vitalie Eriomenco of Moldova to defeat Armenia's Arman Vardanyan 8-0 and share the third podium with Polish Mairbek Salimov.

Oskou, also beaten by a Moldovan wrestler in Alexandrin Gutu, eased past opponents from Colombia and the host country in repechage before coming out victorious (6-4) against Uzbekistan's Doniyorxon Nakibov for a joint bronze in the 77kg event – alongside Khasay Hasanli of Azerbaijan – while Gutu went on to beat German Samuel Bellscheidt

in the final.

Wednesday's results came after Mohammad Naqousi, Danial Sohrabi, and Shayan Habib-Zare' had won three medals at the Feti Borova Sports Hall on the preceding night.

Naqousi, who was only handed a place in the Iranian team when world U20 champion Alireza Abdevali suffered an eye injury, defeated American Beka Melelashvili 4-3 for to claim the 82kg crown.

A 67kg gold medalist in the competition in 2022, Sohrabi recovered from a fall defeat against Armenian Shant Khachatrian in the quarterfinals to finish with a consolation bronze in the 72kg class, thanks to an emphatic victory (9-0) over Georgios Barbanos of Sweden.



Iranian Greco-Roman wrestler Fardin Hedayati makes his entry for the superheavyweight final at the U23 World Championships in Tirana, Albania, on October 23, 2024.

UWW

Habib-Zare' began his 97kg campaign in despair, falling to an 8-0 defeat against Abubakar Khaslakhanaou, but made the most of his second chance when the Belarusian reached the final, beating Estonian Richard Karelson 8-5 in a thrilling third-place bout.

Hassan Rangraz's men collected 149 points to stand atop the team table – 28 points clear of runner-up Georgia – with Armenia finishing third on 93 points.



## Asian Youth Beach Handball Championship:

# Iran beats Thailand to win men's title

## Sports Desk

Iran lifted the men's trophy at the Asian Youth Beach Handball Championship in Bangkok, Thailand, thanks to a final-day victory over the

host. Stepping into the game on the back of five successive wins, Iranian boys defeated their crown in emphatic fashion, coming out on top in straight sets against

Thailand – the champion in the inaugural edition of the competition in 2016.

Iran began its campaign in the third edition of the competition with a 2-1 win against Oman.

Iranian boys went on to beat Jordan (2-0), China (2-1), and Qatar (2-1) before defeating Indonesia in straight sets on the penultimate day of the event. Iran had already secured a place in next year's

World Championship with a place in the top three of the competition's seven-team table. Iran defeated France to win the men's bronze in the 2022 World Championship in Greece.

## Mancini out as Saudi Arabia coach after 14 months in charge

REUTERS – Roberto Mancini has left his role as coach of Saudi Arabia after his contract was ended by mutual agreement, the national team announced on Thursday. The 59-year-old Italian took the helm of the Saudi national team in August 2023, replacing Herve Renard.

Under Mancini, the Saudis were knocked out of the Asian Cup in the last 16 earlier this year after losing in a penalty shootout to South Korea. "The Saudi soccer federation's Board of Directors and the national team coach, Italian Roberto Mancini reached a joint agreement

on Thursday to end the contractual relationship," the national team posted on social media platform X. The Saudis are third in Group C of Asia's third round of World Cup preliminaries with five points. They are five points adrift of group leaders Japan after four matches. They lost 2-0 at home to Japan

on Oct. 10 before being held to a scoreless draw by Bahrain five days later.

The top two in each group advance automatically to the World Cup while the third and fourth-placed sides go into another round of preliminaries with the bottom two finishers eliminated.



REUTERS



# Pezeshkian: BRICS members mull creation of alternative to IMF

## International Desk

Iran's President Masoud Pezeshkian said members of the BRICS group of emerging economies discussed the establishment of a new fund in the face of the International Monetary Fund to counter US unilateral actions.

Pezeshkian made the remarks upon his return to Tehran from the 16th BRICS Summit in Russian city of Kazan, where he said "security, economic, and social issues" were central to discussions.

"BRICS seeks to counter US unilateralism tied to the dollar, as it imposes sanctions at will, exacerbating global economic challenges," he said, adding that a decision was made to establish a new fund in the face of the International Monetary Fund to counter US unilateral actions,

aiming to neutralize sanctions policies and bolster financial security in member nations' monetary exchanges.

The Iranian president said that the enactment of BRICS 2024 decisions will "gradually thwart the conspiracy of the US and its allies."

He also referenced the summit's 32-page final declaration, which covered a range of significant issues, including the Israeli crimes in Gaza.

"The final statement was notably strong, condemning the killings and atrocities committed by Israel in Gaza and Lebanon," Pezeshkian stated.

The declaration, he continued, "underscored the need for member countries to strengthen financial, economic, cultural, scientific, and security cooperation."

"I believe that if we can implement the goals of this organization and the discussions and agreements made at this meeting, the conspiracy by the United States and its allies will gradually be neutralized," he stressed.

The Kazan Declaration, themed "Strengthening Multilateralism for Just Global Development and Security," emphasized BRICS solidarity and strategic partnerships, with leaders committing to fostering peace, a fairer international order, and sustainable development. Pezeshkian described the Islamic Republic's participation as "an excellent opportunity for bilateral talks with various countries." He also quoted UAE President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, who expressed a desire to visit Iran, highlighting the

importance of resolving bilateral issues independently and avoiding external interference.

Pezeshkian and Sheikh Al Nahyan met for the first time on Wednesday on the summit's sidelines.

He also highlighted his meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping, noting that both sides agreed to move forward with the implementation of Tehran-Beijing agreements and emphasized strengthening bilateral ties.

The meeting, held on the sidelines of the summit, marked Pezeshkian's first face-to-face talks with Xi since taking office.

Pezeshkian arrived in Kazan on Tuesday night to attend the summit following an official invitation from Russian President Vladimir Putin.

During the 16th BRICS Summit, the Iranian presi-



dent held discussions with the presidents of Russia, China, Egypt, South Africa, Belarus, Venezuela, Bolivia, and the UAE, as well as with the prime ministers of India and Ethiopia.

Iran officially joined BRICS at the beginning of 2024, five months after being accepted as a full member alongside Argentina, Egypt, Ethiopia, the UAE, and Saudi Arabia.

Originally formed by Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa, BRICS represents approximately 40% of the global population and a quarter of the world's GDP.

## Israeli strike on Lebanon journos 'war crime'

Lebanon accused Israel of targeting journalists in a "deliberate" attack that killed three media workers in the country's south on Friday, calling the incident a "war crime."

Lebanese television channel Al Mayadeen said cameraman Ghassan Najjar and broadcast engineer Mohammad Reda were killed in the strike on a compound housing the journalists in Hasbaya, south Lebanon.

Another TV outlet, Al-Manar, run by Hezbollah, said video journalist Wissam Qassem was also killed in the strike on a bungalow located in a resort that several media organizations covering the Israeli war had rented out.

The strike "targeting journalists" was, according to Prime Minister Najib Mikati, among the "war crimes committed by the Israeli enemy." He also said the attack was "deliberate."

Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesperson Esmail

Baghaei strongly condemned the Israeli airstrike, denouncing it as a "deliberate" attack on media personnel. In a post on X, Baghaei said that the attack was "another instance of Israel's atrocious war crime."

Journalists from other media organizations, including Lebanese broadcaster Al-Jadeed, Sky News Arabic and Al Jazeera English, were also resting nearby when the strike hit, in an area outside Hezbollah's traditional strongholds.

Friday's deaths are the latest in a long list of journalists who have been killed by Israel in the past year in Gaza and Lebanon, with media reports putting the number of fatalities among reporters and journalists at north of 180.

After nearly a year of war in Gaza, Israel expanded its focus to Lebanon and last month launched a massive bombing campaign across the country, sending in ground troops



on September 30.

The regime's savage attacks have so far killed around 3,600 civilians in Lebanon, leaving over 12,000 others injured.

### Strikes in Gaza

Israeli strikes in the southern Gaza Strip city of Khan Yunis killed at least 38 Palestinians and Israeli forces launched a night-time raid on a hospital in the north, Palestinian officials said.

The Gaza Ministry of Health said many of the casualties from the Israeli strikes on houses in southeast Khan Yunis were women and children, with approximately 28 from the Alfarra family. The Israeli attack, which

included airstrikes and shelling, according to health officials, targeted several residential buildings in neighborhoods east of Khan Yunis. Six members of the Abdeen family were also killed, according to health officials.

### 'Ethnic cleansing'

Jordan's Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi called for pressure on Israel to end "ethnic cleansing," in strong remarks as he met US Secretary of State Antony Blinken in London. Deploing the humanitarian situation in northern Gaza, Jordan's Ayman Safadi told Blinken, "We do see ethnic cleansing taking place, and that has got to stop."

## Leader lauds Safieddine as 'constant companion of Nasrallah'

Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei paid tribute to Hashem Safieddine, a top-ranking Hezbollah leader recently assassinated by Israel. "He was one of Hezbollah's most prominent figures and a constant companion of Syyed Hassan Nasrallah. It was through the wisdom and courage of leaders like him that Hezbollah was able to

shield Lebanon from the threat of disintegration and collapse, successfully neutralizing the threat posed by the occupying regime, whose brutal army at times trampled as far as Beirut," Leader said in the message issued on Thursday, Press TV reported.

"His courage and sacrifices and those of other commanders and fighters of the Nasrallah axis

were key in averting the threat of the occupation and annexation of southern Litani, Tyre, and other cities in the region by the Zionist regime," the message added.

Hezbollah on Wednesday confirmed that Safieddine, who was touted as the likely replacement for Nasrallah, had been assassinated in an Israeli attack several weeks ago.

## Saudi Arabia proposes joint naval drills with Iran in Red Sea

Saudi Arabia has proposed joint naval exercises with Iran in the Red Sea, a move that has caught global attention.

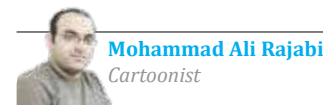
Iranian Navy Commander Shahram Irani on Wednesday confirmed the proposal, stating, "Saudi Arabia has requested joint exercises with Iran," and noted that both nations have extended invitations

for naval port visits. Irani added that the exercises might include participation from other countries, with coordination efforts already in progress.

In response, Saudi Defense Ministry spokesman Turki Al-Malki told AFP that the Saudi and Iranian navies had recently completed joint drills with other nations in the Gulf of Oman.

Last week, Iran conducted joint naval drills involving Russia and Oman near the Gulf of Oman, with observers from countries such as Saudi Arabia, India, and Pakistan.

Saudi Arabia and Iran cut diplomatic ties in 2016. However, they restored relations in March of last year following mediation by China.



Mohammad Ali Rajabi  
Cartoonist



## Fresh efforts to ...

In this context, Hebrew-language sources have reported that David Barnea, the head of Mossad, has traveled to Cairo with representatives from Israel's Shin Bet security agency and met with General Hassan Rashad, the head of Egypt's intelligence agency. Meanwhile, it has been reported that a Hamas delegation, representing Khalil al-Haya, has also arrived in Egypt. According to the Qatari website Al-Araby al-Jadid, the Hamas delegation's visit to Egypt was at the request of Cairo and took place on Thursday, lasting around five hours. During the meeting, the Egyptian and American proposal for a truce was discussed.

Meanwhile, a Hamas official told AFP that the resistance movement is ready to stop the war if Israel commits to a truce, withdraws from the Gaza Strip, allows the return of refugees, implements a prisoner exchange, and sends aid.

The presence of Israeli and Hamas delegations in Cairo is apparently a preliminary step towards resuming official ceasefire negotiations in Doha, Qatar. Al-Araby al-Jadid reported that over the next few days, mediation and negotiation teams will travel to Doha to hold meetings with the participation of Mohammed bin Abdul Rahman Al Thani, Qatar's prime minister and foreign minister, Hassan Rashad, head of Egypt's intelligence

agency, William Burns, head of the CIA, and David Barnea, head of Israel's Mossad.

This comes as US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, who recently visited Israel and Saudi Arabia, met with the Emir of Qatar on Thursday in Doha. Previously, Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi had also visited Doha as part of a regional diplomatic tour, discussing regional developments and the need for a ceasefire with Qatari officials. Araghchi's tour also included visits to Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Oman, Kuwait, Bahrain, Jordan, and Egypt, with the main item on agenda being negotiations to stop the war and establish a truce.



# Iran, Turkmenistan hold joint tourism event to boost cultural ties

## Arts & Culture Desk

The second Turkmen-Iranian Tourism Festival was held at the Exhibition Hall of the Academy of Arts in Ashgabat, the capital of Turkmenistan, with the aim of strengthening cultural and economic ties between the two countries. The festival, which took place from October 22 to 24, was attended by high-ranking officials, including the head of the Ministry of Culture of Turkmenistan, Akiniyaz Agamuradov, Ali Mojtaba Rouzbehani, Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran to Turkmenistan, Navid Rassouli, Cultural attaché of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Turkmenistan, and diplomats from various countries, as well as representatives of 23 tourism and handicraft companies from Iran and Turkmenistan. The festival aimed to promote cultural exchange, tourism cooperation, and economic ties between Iran and Turkmenistan, and to strengthen the friendly relations between the two neighboring countries. Agamuradov expressed his satisfaction with the growing tourism industry in Turkmenistan, which he attributed to the country's rich cultural heritage and historical landmarks, such as the ancient city of Nisa, the fortress of Dehistan, and the historical site of Merv. He noted that the number of foreign tourists visiting these sites is increasing day by day. Agamuradov also highlighted the im-

portance of promoting Turkmenistan's tourism potential worldwide and expanding cooperation with neighboring countries. He mentioned that Turkmenistan is located on the ancient Silk Road and has been a crossroads of seven roads connecting East and West. He emphasized that the country's goal is to attract more foreign tourists and develop its tourism industry. Rouzbehani emphasized the multifaceted nature of tourism, which not only promotes cultural exchange and understanding but also generates significant economic benefits. He noted that the tourism industry is considered the largest service industry in the world, with over 1.5 billion international travelers and a revenue of over \$2 trillion annually. He also highlighted Iran's rich cultural and natural attractions, including Persepolis, the city of Isfahan, and its diverse cultural heritage. Rouzbehani expressed his hope that the festival would contribute to the growth of tourism cooperation between the two countries and promote people-to-people exchanges. He noted that Iran and Turkmenistan have had a growing trend of cultural and tourism cooperation in recent years, including people-to-people exchanges, tourism exhibitions, and cultural events. One of the directors of the Turkmen State Institute of Culture, highlighted the historical and cultural ties between the



two countries. He noted that culture has always been a bridge between people and that Turkmenistan and Iran have a long history of cultural exchange. He emphasized the importance of cultural events, festivals, and exhibitions in promoting cooperation between the two countries. He also mentioned that Turkmenistan has a rich cultural heritage, including historical sites such as Nisa, Dehistan, and Merv, as well as natural attractions. He noted that Iran is famous for its cultural and historical sites, such as Persepolis and the city of Isfahan. He expressed his hope that joint tourism programs could attract not only local tourists but also foreign tourists,

contributing to the development of economic and cultural ties between the two countries. Rassouli emphasized the importance of tourism as one of the most important industries in the world, with significant economic and social benefits. He noted that tourism is the largest service industry in the world, accounting for one-third of global service trade. He highlighted the growth of the tourism industry in both Iran and Turkmenistan, which have rich cultural and natural attractions. Rassouli expressed his hope that the festival would promote cultural exchange and understanding between the two countries and contribute to the growth of tourism cooperation.

He noted that Iran and Turkmenistan have a common history, culture, and traditions, which could be showcased through joint tourism programs. The first Turkmen-Iranian Tourism Festival was held in October last year. Visitors familiarized themselves with unique items of traditional folk crafts, handmade art products, national heritage, and modern trends of Turkmen and Iranian art masters. The festival featured an exhibition of tourism companies from both countries, showcasing their capacities and potential. The event was attended by ambassadors and diplomats from several countries, including Russia, Azerbaijan, Pakistan, Japan, Uzbekistan, Palestine, and Libya.

# Curtains down on 41st Tehran International Short Film Festival

## Arts & Culture Desk

The closing ceremony of the 41st Tehran International Short Film Festival (TISFF) was held on October 23 at the Milad Tower in Tehran and the winners were announced. This year, the festival received 13,651 submissions from more than 30 countries. The number



of submitted films was a new record in the history of the event, about twice the number of submissions last year. The line-up includes 59 short fiction films, 21 animated movies, 18 documentaries, and nine experimental films. The submitted works are from India, China, Poland, the US, Egypt, Greece, France, Pales-

tine, Turkey, Spain, Argentina, Brazil, Russia, Australia, Japan, Germany, Italy, and Cuba among others. The ceremony then paid tribute to the martyrs of resistance, including Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, Ismail Haniyeh, Yahya Sinwar, and Qassem Soleimani, with a slideshow of images from the Israeli regime's brutal attacks on Palestine and Lebanon, ILNA wrote. A memorial ceremony was also held for Mehdi Ashiri, a member of the Iranian Youth Cinema Society who was martyred in the imposed war. The ceremony was attended by Raed Faridzadeh, head of the Cinema Organization of Iran (COI), the festival's secretary Mehdi

Azarpendar, and Mohammad Ali Bashe Ahangar, a film director. Faridzadeh then took the stage and said, "When someone returns to his home, the Iranian Youth Cinema Society (IYCS), after 23 years, they cannot remain silent. The enthusiasm and excitement we witnessed during the festival has increased our responsibility." He added, "The Tehran International Short Film Festival has reached its 41st year and has matured. With over 12,000 submissions from around the world, this year's festival has become a major international event. We have also held various workshops and showcased new and innovative topics,

demonstrating that the short film festival is a pioneering event that has incorporated modern technologies." At the end of the ceremony, Shahab Hosseini, a jury member in the national competition, said, "Outside of the judging process, I witnessed some films being appreciated in this ceremony, but they were not good films. If they were good, we would have noticed them in the judging process. My advice to filmmakers is to work with new and talented actors instead of relying on professional actors, which can harm your work." The Golden Leaf and a \$2,000 cash prize for the best international film, which will be intro-

duced to the Academy Awards, went to Ibrahim Handel for the narrative film 'A Short Film about Children' from Palestine. The members of the jury panel of the International Section include the Indian musical composer and record producer A. R. Rahman, Ghanian-Belgian director Anthony Nti, Bangladeshi screenwriter and film critic Sadia Khalid Reeti, Italian filmmaker Maja Costa, and Russian festival producer Ekaterina Yakovleva, as well as Iranian filmmakers Ahmad Reza Mo'tamedi and Masoud Madadi. The Golden Leaf for Best Film from the Audience's Perspective went to Mohajer Tohidparast and Fuad Javdan for the film 'Art Festival'.

# Iran sees decline in hepatitis B after widespread vaccination

## Social Desk

The acting head of the Iranian Center for Communicable Disease Control at the Ministry of Health, Treatment, and Medical Education announced a significant decline in the prevalence of hepatitis B in Iran, thanks to the country's vaccination efforts. Ghabad Moradi stated that prior to the vaccination program, the prevalence of hepatitis B was over 2.5%, but with the vaccination of all individuals under 37 years old, the prevalence of the disease

has dropped to nearly 1% across the entire population, ISNA reported. Moradi pointed out that the National Hepatitis Prevention Week, observed from October 22 to 28, aims to prevent the disease by promoting public awareness and strengthening preventive programs, screening, and control of viral hepatitis. He emphasized that viral hepatitis is one of the major public health problems worldwide, with millions of people contracting the disease every year, leading to severe consequences, includ-

ing death. According to Moradi, the World Health Organization (WHO) has been focusing on hepatitis B and C in recent years, encouraging governments to step up efforts to combat the diseases. He noted that the most effective intervention in controlling hepatitis B is vaccination, which has been successful in Iran, allowing the country to be listed among those that have eliminated mother-to-child transmission of HBV. Regarding hepatitis C, Moradi stated that the prevalence of the disease in



Iran is estimated to be around 0.1% to 0.3%, with the highest prevalence found among high-risk groups such as injecting drug users and individuals with high-risk behaviors. Although there is no vaccine for hep-

atitis C, Moradi emphasized that new and effective treatments have made it possible to control the disease, and Iran can work towards eliminating hepatitis C in the near future by expanding access to treatment.