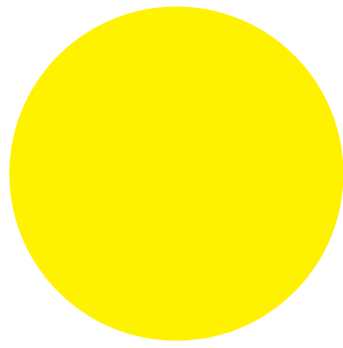


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IranDailyWeb

By Reza Nasri
International affairs expert

OPINION EXCLUSIVE

European countries appear set to adopt a resolution against Iran at the upcoming meeting of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)'s Board of Governors. However, this measure is already destined to fail, as it relies on pressure rather than constructive engagement. Iranian officials, including Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi, have made it clear that the Islamic Republic will respond with reciprocal actions if confronted with a censure resolution.

After more than two decades of negotiations, Western nations still fail to grasp that Iran does not yield to intimidation. This resilience is deeply rooted in Iranian culture, the revolutionary ethos of its political system, and Iran's regional and international standing.

Anyone remotely acquainted with Iranian culture understands that resistance to coercion is a deeply ingrained value. Iranian literature is rich with epic tales, poetry, and stories that acclaim resistance over surrender, perseverance over convenience, and death over living without dignity.

The 1979 Islamic Revolution embodies this spirit. The Islamic Republic of Iran was established on the principle of resisting foreign dominance. Its foreign policy slogan—dignity, wisdom, prudence—prioritizes dignity above all, with w i s -

d o m and prudence often viewed as tools to preserve it.

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Time for Respect

Why West's Pressure Tactics on Iran Not Working

Iran keeps door open to talks with Trump admin.
New EU sanctions will not go unanswered: **Tehran**

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Anti-Iran resolution at Board of Governors meeting to fuel disputes

Europe's choice; Cooperation or confrontation

By Ebrahim Beheshti
Staff writer

OPINION

As the Board of Governors of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) convenes for its quarterly meeting on Wednesday, all eyes are on Iran. IAEA Director-General

Rafael Grossi, who recently paid a visit to Tehran and met with Iranian officials, will present his quarterly report on Iran's Safeguards related activities and its implementation of the nuclear deal, known as the JCPOA.

However, rumors and media reports suggest that the European troika (the UK, France, and Germany) has drafted a resolution against Iran, which has sparked harsh criticism and warnings from Tehran. Mohammad Eslami, the head of Iran's Atomic Energy Organization, explicitly warned during his meeting with Grossi in Tehran that, "Any resolution on Iran's nuclear issue will be met with a swift response... Passing a resolution will naturally give us the right to take countermeasures." Nevertheless, Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian expressed Tehran's readiness to cooperate and converge with the IAEA during his meeting with Grossi.

In recent days, media outlets and nuclear experts have highlighted two contrasting views on Grossi's visit to Tehran. Some have interpreted the visit, which took place after Donald Trump's re-election as US president, as a warning from the IAEA to Tehran, suggesting that Grossi presented the European troika's draft resolution to Iran as a clear warning about the consequences of adopting the resolution.

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Rasht-Astara railway construction deal to be inked soon:

Envoy



Economy Desk

Iran's ambassador to Russia said on Monday that the Rasht-Astara railway route would not change as the ultimate expense has been determined, adding that the final agreement would be signed soon as the Iranian side is ready to finalize the project.

Talking to ILNA, Kazem Jalali also stated that Iran must accelerate its own efforts to increase its share of transit revenues with greater presence in trade routes. "The world will not wait for our inactive presence in trade routes, so we must strive to speed up our measures."

"President Masoud Pezeshkian and his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin had agreements regarding this project during Pezeshkian's recent visit to Kazan," the envoy said, adding that the Iranian president is earnestly following up on the signing of the deal.

Russia is fully interested in the Rasht-Astara railway project, Jalali stressed, noting that with the formation of the new government in Iran, the implementation of the projects will gain momentum.

The Iranian ambassador emphasized that Russians will also invest in Iran's energy projects, adding, "Russia is negotiating with Iran on the gas swap, and the talks are underway. Most of the negotiations have been finalized, and some minor issues have been raised that will be resolved in the near future."

About the amount of Russian investment in the Iranian energy sector, we do not yet have an accurate estimate, but the project is to establish a gas pipeline from Russia through Azerbaijan to Iran, Jalali concluded.

Iran and Russia see the 162 km Rasht-Astara railway as an important link in the International North-South Transport Corridor. In addition to the Rasht-Astara railway line, Russia is interested in investing in the construction of a railway with a Russian gauge from Parsabad to Bandar Abbas, Jalali said at a meeting with Pezeshkian on Saturday.

At the meeting, Pezeshkian stressed that the development of railway infrastructure from north to south will bring significant benefits to both the country's economy and its citizens, and will also meet the needs of Iran and Russia. The Iranian president instructed to speed up the implementation of the Rasht-Astara line project.

CBI to allocate \$3b to production units

Economy Desk

The Central Bank of Iran (CBI) will provide 2 quadrillion rials (approximately \$3 billion) in cash to the country's production units, according to the CBI governor.

The CBI has plans to help providing liquidity to production units, especially small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), Mohammadreza Farzin said on Monday, reported IRNA.

"For more than a year, we have been looking for a base for our policies in the currency area, and we will bring the currency to a unified market or an exchange market based on the auction price," the official stated.

Farzin went on to say that in the field of exports, measures have been designed to offer more facilities to Iranian exporters.

"The upcoming reforms by the CBI will be gradual, as we believe that there should be no shock to Iran's economy, because once a shock is created, the side effects resulting from it cannot be treated," he noted. The CBI is working to increase capital, and has announced that bank capital will increase by 2.5 quadrillion rials (approximately \$3.75 billion) this [Iranian] year, and each state-run bank must have at least 200 trillion



Governor of the Central Bank of Iran Mohammadreza Farzin (c) speaks to reporters in Tehran on November 18, 2024.
cbi.ir

rials (approximately \$300 million) in capital by the end of the year (March 20, 2025), Farzin added. The CBI governor, noting that the most burden has

been put on the banking system to provide financing, emphasized, "We are pursuing non-inflationary financing, and we are working with the Ministry

of Economy to attract foreign investment." Farzin said, "If we can issue bonds valued at \$2 billion needed for financing, we can do a lot of great things."

"Recently, the sale of bonds has begun by the CBI, and the mechanisms for this have been implemented since last year," the official stated.

Deputy minister: Iran produces 70% of gasoline with Euro-grade quality



Economy Desk

Iran meets 70 percent of its gasoline needs with

Euro-grade quality and 64 percent of produced diesel is in accordance with Euro-grade stan-

dard, as announced by the managing director of the National Iranian Oil Refining and Distribution Company (NIORDC) on Monday. Mohammad-Sadeq Azimifar, referring to the importance of implementing quality improvement projects in the oil refining industry, stated, "The Clean Air Act requires the Ministry of Oil to provide its products including gasoline and diesel

with Euro-4 and Euro-5 standards within three years," ISNA reported. The implementation of the quality improvement projects of crude oil in the refining industry, which has been halted for years, has turned into a national challenge, the deputy minister said. He went on to say that over the past three months, the NIORDC has added about eight million liters of gasoline per day, equivalent to 7 to 8

percent of the country's gasoline production, to the refineries' capacity, in order to reduce the dependence on gasoline imports and provide a better quality of gasoline to consumers. Iran's gasoline consumption averaged 124.5 million liters per day from the start of the [Iranian] year (March 20) through November 2, representing a 7.4% increase compared to the same period last year, when the

average was 116 million liters per day, according to the NIOPDC's managing director. Speaking in a press conference in Tehran on November 4, Keramat Veys-Karami also said Iran mainly imports gasoline through swap deals, with the country importing an average of 8.5 million liters of gasoline per day in the first six months of the current year (March 20-September 21).

Anti-Iran resolution...

Others, however, have taken a more optimistic view, emphasizing the director-general's meetings with Iranian officials and Tehran's promise to cooperate with the IAEA, expressing hope that Iran's differences with the agency will be ironed out through cooperation. This group of analysts has understood Grossi's unprecedented visit to Iran's two nuclear sites (Fordo and Natanz) as a sign of Iran's good faith intention to cooperate. In this context, it is expected that Grossi's report, following his visit to Tehran and consultations, will focus on the future of Iran-IAEA cooperation in a way that will prompt the European trioka to put the brakes on issuing a new resolution against Iran and escalating tensions. This is especially true given

that a new Iranian government with a platform of engagement and dialogue has taken office. Past experiences at the Board of Governors' meetings have shown that unconstructive measures, such as passing a resolution, have pushed Tehran to react by increasing its nuclear activities and limiting some of the IAEA's monitoring in Iran. Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi wrote on social media after meeting with Grossi in Tehran, referring to his frank and important discussions with the director-general and emphasizing that Iran would continue its full cooperation with the IAEA. "Now it's the turn of the European Union and the three European countries. We are ready to negotiate based on our national interests and

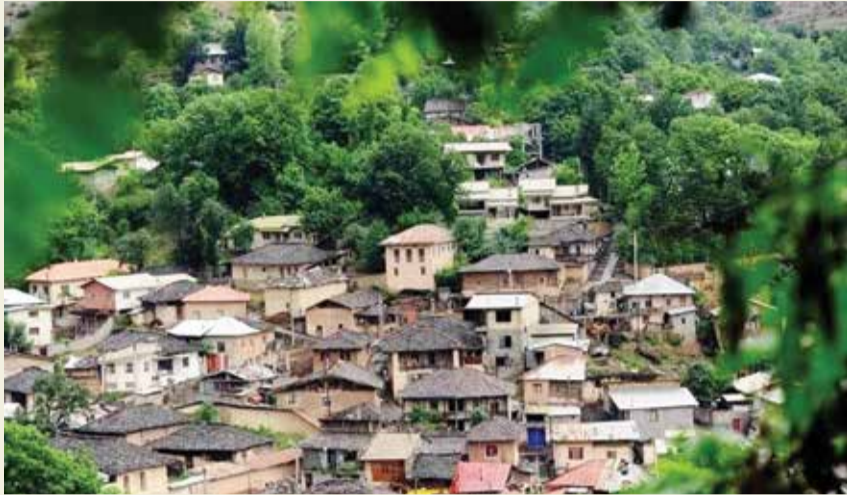
undeniable rights, but we will not negotiate under pressure and intimidation," Araghchi said. It appears that Europeans have dragged some of their non-nuclear grievances with Iran, such as allegations of Tehran's military support for Russia against Ukraine, into the nuclear file. They recently imposed sanctions on Iranian airlines and yesterday, the European Council announced that it had blacklisted Iran's shipping lines, as well as four Iranian and Russian entities, for their alleged role in transferring Iranian drones to Russia for use in the Ukraine war. Although the claims of Iran sending missiles and drones to Russia for use against Ukraine have not been proven, officials in Iran's new government have expressed their willingness to engage

in dialogue with Europeans to clear up misunderstandings on this issue. Regardless, the path Europe has chosen to take with Iran is not a recipe for resolving differences, but rather a recipe for escalating them. During his previous presidency, Trump's unilateral withdrawal from the nuclear deal burned many bridges and inflicted unnecessary costs to both Iran and the West. The JCPOA is set to expire in a year, and according to Resolution 2231, Iran's file will be removed from the UN Security Council's agenda. There are speculations that Europeans might try to use the "snapback" mechanism during the remaining time to revive the sanctions that were lifted and bring Iran's file back to the Security Council, which would mark

the beginning of a confrontational approach instead of cooperation, with negative consequences for both sides. Esmail Baghaei, the spokesperson for Iran's Foreign Ministry, emphasized yesterday during a press conference that this confrontational approach by some European countries would not benefit anyone. Meanwhile, Laurence Norman, a Wall Street Journal reporter who covers nuclear issues, tweeted on the eve of the Board of Governors' meeting: "As far as I can tell in Vienna, nothing as yet on Iran is nailed down for this week." The prospect of Donald Trump's return to the White House has raised the speculation that US-Europe differences over NATO will resurface, while the humanitarian and economic crises caused

by the Ukraine war, and the Gaza and Lebanon conflicts will continue to plague the world. It is unclear what problem Europe aims to solve in the continent or the world by adopting a confrontational approach with Iran. As Araghchi said, it is now Europe's turn to show its willingness to reduce tensions and strengthen tranquility and stability for cooperation. According to Reuters, the US has not been involved in drafting a resolution against Iran at the Board of Governors, although it will support it if it is proposed. Therefore, the Board of Governors' meeting will be a crucial test for Europe to see whether it values the opportunity to cooperate with Iran's new government or chooses a costly and turbulent path of confrontation.

Kandolus journey to world tourism village status



vigiato.net



vigiato.net



visitiran.ir

Iranica Desk

Efforts are underway to resolve the infrastructural issues hindering the global registration of Kandolus village in Mazandaran Province, according to the director general of the provincial Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts Organization, Hossein Izadi.

He stated that for the first time, Kandolus village, alongside seven others from Iran, was introduced to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) in 2023 for consideration as one of the best world tourism villages, resulting in Kandovan Village in West Azarbaijan Province being selected, chtn.ir wrote.

Izadi continued that with necessary follow-ups, the dossier for Kandolus village was resubmitted to the UNWTO in 2024, along with other selected villages from the country, for the title of World Tourism Village. He highlighted the unique features of Kandolus, including the romantic tale of Mina and the Leopard, an active workshop for medicinal and cosmetic plants, and its historic fabric, as well as the largest rural museum in the country. He noted that the narrative of Mina's love for a leopard is an important mythical belief in the village, which has been developed into a literary tourism route from the village to the forest through the efforts of the local council and administration.

Izadi emphasized that the local workshop for producing medicinal and cosmetic plants not only creates job opportunities but also revitalizes health products and supports the independent economy of rural areas — a benefit that few villages in the country enjoy. He pointed out that the village's unique architectural features, including its streets, alleys, forms, and facades, set Kandolus apart from its peers. Additionally, the presence of a museum of historical and anthropological artifacts in the heart of the village further supports its case for registration.

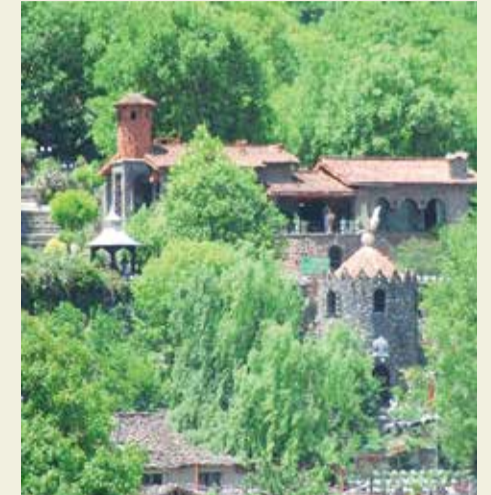
He reminded that these attributes, along with the local cuisine, beliefs, customs, and attractive natural environment, have made Kandolus one of the important rural destinations in Mazandaran Province. Consequently, tourism now plays a direct role in the employment and economy of the village.

He stated that the efforts of all officials and experts in the province are focused on resolutely addressing the existing challenges hindering the registration of the village.

Kandolus Village is a historical settlement located adjacent to the Hyrcanian forests in the Kajor district of Nowshahr, at the foot of the Alborz Mountains. It is considered one of the most significant villages in Iran, with a history spanning thousands of years. Traces of pre-Christian and Persian civilizations can be found here, both before and after the advent of Islam.

Located 75 kilometers from Nowshahr, Kandolus is distinguished by its old houses with wooden facades and ceilings, beautiful small windows, mud walls, cobblestone alleys, mineral springs, and flowing rivers. The village is also home to several attractions, including the Museum of Anthropology, abundant waterfalls, the Museum of Medicinal Plants, an old bathhouse dating back to the Qajar era, and various handicrafts and souvenirs. These features have contributed to its nomination for registration on UNESCO's World Heritage List.

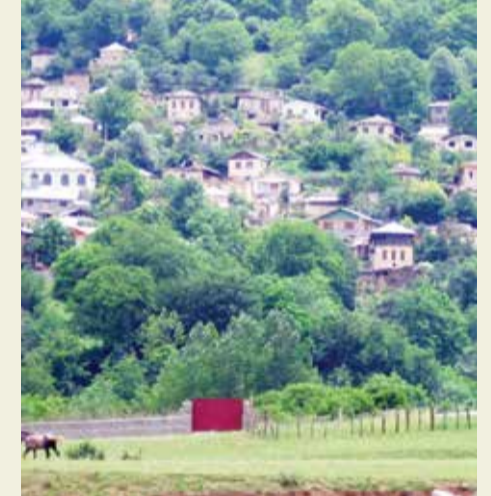
Each year, many domestic and foreign tourists visit Kandolus to experience its attractions firsthand. The customs and traditions of the village's residents further enhance the allure of traveling to this remarkable destination.



mojnews.com



vigiato.net



anahitours.ir

Maryam Castle, a blend of hand-carved tradition, ancient worship

Iranica Desk

The hand-carved site known as Maryam Castle in Sarpol-e Zahab is an ancient place of worship situated next to a spring called Sarab-e Qarah Bolagh. A structure has been constructed to conceal this pilgrimage site from the faithful.

In an interview with ISNA, Sajjad Ali-beigi, an assistant professor at Razi University in Kermanshah, noted that there are several hand-carved sites in Sarpol-e Zahab, including Dukkan-e Daud, Bard-e Asheqan, and Hoz-e Asheqan. These sites primarily serve funerary functions and clearly showcase evidence of hand-carved architectural traditions in the western foothills of the Central Zagros.

He added that among the hand-carved sites in this area, Maryam Castle possesses distinct features and a unique role, blending brick architecture with hand-carved elements. Based on historical texts and archaeological analyses, this site can be regarded as particularly significant. Maryam Castle is originally a small natural cave located on the southern slope of a mountain, positioned between the Zahab Plain and the Qaleh

Sarpol-e Zahab
itto.org

Shahin Plain. Its facade and parts of the ceiling have been smoothed out due to rock carving, giving it a resemblance to the entrance of Dukkan-e Daud. Although this similarity is evident at first glance, the two sites differ fundamentally in their nature.

Alibeigi further stated that it appears a small structure has been built in front of this man-made cave to conceal it. This raises questions about the purpose of

this structure, particularly regarding the manmade cave behind it, and the rationale for erecting such a building in front of it.

He explained that, based on archaeological analyses and references in Syriac and Islamic texts, the manmade cave likely served as an ancient place of worship. After alterations to the cave's shape and form, a structure was constructed in front of it.

Maryam Castle
abadis.ir

He emphasized that due to the sacredness of the cave and religious considerations, this site needed to be kept hidden from view. Consequently, a structure has been built in front of the cave to obscure the entry and exit points for visitors.

Sarpol-e Zahab is a city in Kermanshah Province, sharing land borders with Iraq to the west. The city is comprised of two cities and seven rural districts,

featuring a semi-warm and semi-arid climate through which the permanent river Alvand flows.

The antiquity of Sarpol-e Zahab is estimated to be around 4,800 years, based on its ancient monuments and inscriptions. Numerous historical and ancient artifacts can be found in Sarpol-e Zahab, making this region a haven for history and archaeology enthusiasts.

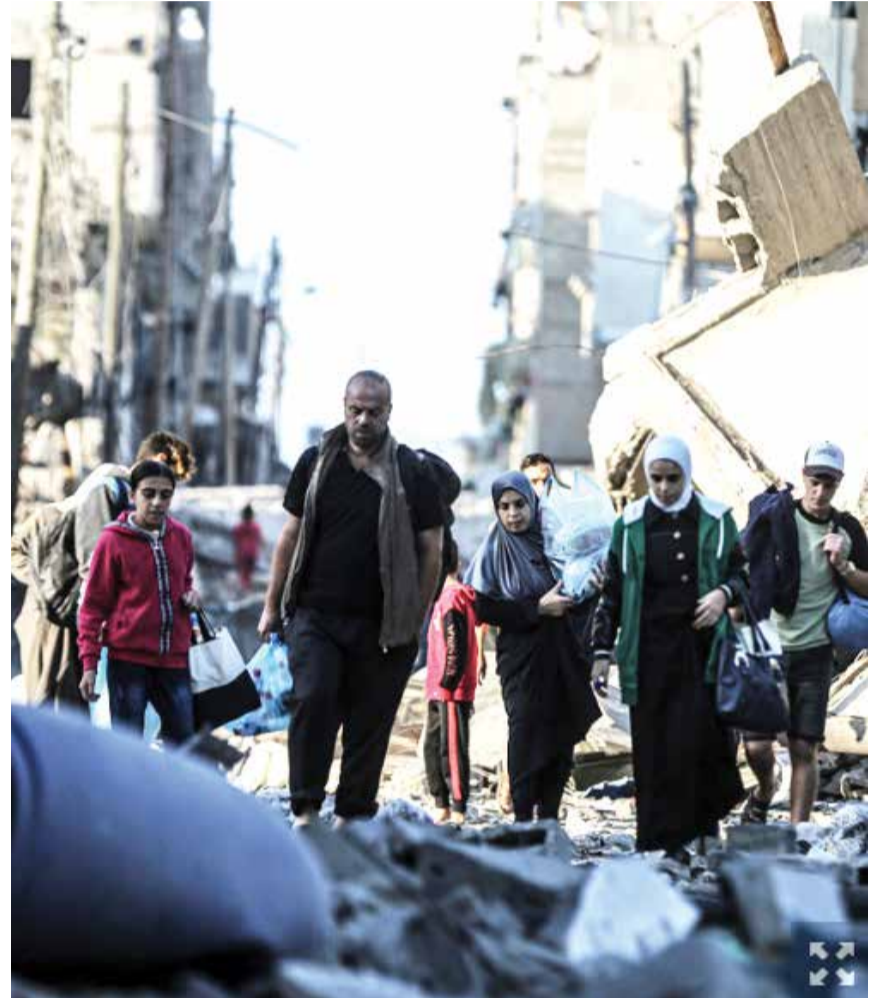
Israeli ethnic cleansing nears completion in northern Gaza



By Paul R. Pillar
Scholar

OPINION

The Israeli effort to eliminate or expel Palestinian residents of the Gaza Strip — an effort that has been apparent since early in Israel's year-long military assault on the territory — is close to achieving its goal in the northernmost portion of the Strip. Israeli officials have also let slip more indications that this is indeed their goal. Recently, a brigadier general in the Israeli Defense Forces told Israeli journalists that in expelling residents from this area, which includes the city of Beit Lahiya and the Jabaliya refugee camp, the IDF had no intention of ever letting them return. The general added that Israel would allow no humanitarian aid into this portion of the Strip because "there are no more civilians left."



An IDF spokesperson later tried to walk back the general's comments, and the Israeli cabinet has repeatedly denied conducting forced expulsions. But reports of what is happening on the ground, despite Israeli measures to impede press reporting from the conflict zone, are consistent with an ethnic cleansing campaign. Reporters from the Israeli newspaper Haaretz were able to confirm the forcible expulsions. Other reporting has confirmed an absence of aid entering northern Gaza, with the resulting prospect of famine.

The dominant images from northern Gaza are partly the ones that became familiar a year ago, of buildings reduced to rubble, and pictures of residents walking away from their homes with what few possessions they can carry. The latter images resemble those from an earlier Israeli ethnic cleansing of Palestinians — the Nakba of 1948.

Despite Israeli denials, what is happening appears to be a version of the "generals' plan," a proposal presented to Benjamin Netanyahu's cabinet in September and subsequently leaked. That proposal calls for cutting off supplies to the portion of the Gaza Strip in question and telling all who live there that they must leave or be considered combatants subject to attack. Although the current focus of Israeli operations is in the north, much of what the Israeli military has been doing throughout the Gaza Strip during the past year has been consistent with ethnic cleansing. Those residents who are not killed outright — and the actual death toll amid the rubble is probably far higher than the running official count that is now over 43,000 — are left with an unlivable wasteland. The Israeli assault has destroyed health care and educational systems and facilities, emergency services, and most other infrastructure needed for a community to exist.

Leaders of the Jewish settlement movement in the West Bank are eager to extend the settlements to the Gaza Strip. The generals' plan has more of a security focus, with the idea of turning the part of the Strip from which Hamas launched its attack on southern Israel last year into an IDF-controlled buffer. With the Net-

anyahu cabinet still subject to domestic criticism for allowing that attack, such an arrangement would be an "accomplishment" to point to despite the impossibility of ever achieving the declared goal of "destroying" Hamas, and despite that arrangement doing little or nothing to prevent other possible forms of Palestinian violence against Israel that are not duplicates of the October 7 Hamas attack. Recent political changes within Israel have made Netanyahu's cabinet all the more inclined to press forward with the ethnic cleansing in Gaza. Netanyahu fired Defense Minister Yoav Gallant, who had favored a cease-fire that would include the return of remaining Israeli captives and had said that there was "nothing left" for the Israeli military to do in Gaza. Netanyahu replaced him with Foreign Minister Israel Katz, widely considered to be a yes-man under Netanyahu's thumb. Netanyahu's cabinet changes means he is content to remain reliant not only on the ultra-Orthodox parties who favor preserving a draft exemption that Gallant opposed but also on extremists, such as national security minister Itamar Ben-Gvir, who have been explicit in calling for a Gaza with Jewish settlers and no Palestinians.

A political development in the United States — the election returning Donald Trump to power — also has given Netanyahu increased free rein to continue the ethnic cleansing. Trump's record in his first term of giving the Netanyahu cabinet almost anything it wanted made his win this month popular in Israel. Especially ecstatic about Trump's victory were Ben-Gvir and fellow extremist minister Bezalel Smotrich, with Ben-Gvir declaring that given Trump's return to office, "this is the time for sovereignty, this is the time for complete victory."

Those trying to put a different and more peace-oriented spin on the implications of Trump's win for Gaza, including some of the Arab Americans in Michigan who supported him, place hope in Trump's repeated but vague claims that he will somehow end the current war in the Middle East. There is no doubt that Trump, like any other incoming president, would like to see this mess removed from his

foreign policy plate as early in his term as possible. But seeking an end or partial end to the warfare says nothing about how it would end.

The other side of Trump's first-term Middle East policy, besides extreme deference to Netanyahu, was uniform hostility to the Palestinians, ranging from closing the Palestinian diplomatic office in Washington to eliminating funding for the United Nations agency responsible for humanitarian aid to the Palestinians. During the presidential campaign, Trump used the term "Palestinian" as a slur in applying it to his then-opponent Joe Biden.

Trump will press Netanyahu to wrap up Israel's assault on Gaza (as well as its offensive in Lebanon) sooner rather than later, but he will do so while saying and doing nothing on behalf of the Palestinians who live there. Trump's publicly expressed preference is for Israel to "finish the job" in Gaza. Ethnic cleansing is a major part of "the job" in which Israel is currently engaged. Finishing it means completing the ethnic cleansing in the northern end of the Gaza Strip, even if that means putting off to another day the realization of more ambitious Israeli plans to empty the rest of the Strip of its Palestinian residents.

In addition to the obvious moral and legal issues involved, Israel's ethnic cleansing

in Gaza has other consequences for regional stability and US interests. Violent Palestinian resistance to Israel will not end, even if it is conducted largely in exile. The extreme Israeli measures will only add to the anger and desire to strike back. Given how Israel's subjugation of the Palestinians has been the biggest single source of instability and violence in the Middle East — as demonstrated anew by how the current warfare in Lebanon and exchanges of fire between Israel and Iran grew out of the situation in Gaza — the extreme form of subjugation that is ethnic cleansing will sustain that larger instability.

Israel will become more of an international pariah as its actions become ever farther removed from anything that can plausibly be considered a just and appropriate response to the attack by Hamas last year. To the extent that the United States associates itself with those actions, through the continued provision of arms and diplomatic cover, it will increasingly be a target of international opprobrium. Specific consequences range from boycotts of US businesses to terrorism against US interests and citizens.

The article first appeared on *Responsible Statecraft*.



Palestinian refugees leave their homes, never to return, during "the Nakba" in 1948 (L) and another forced expulsion by Israel in 2023 (R).

THE NEW ARAB



Despite Israeli denials, what is happening appears to be a version of the "generals' plan," a proposal presented to Benjamin Netanyahu's cabinet in September and subsequently leaked. That proposal calls for cutting off supplies to the portion of the Gaza Strip in question and telling all who live there that they must leave or be considered combatants subject to attack



Displaced Palestinians inspect their tents destroyed by Israel's bombardment west of Rafah city, Gaza Strip, on May 28, 2024.

JEHAD ALSHRAFI/AP

'Gaza is ours, forever'

Israel's 'strategy' of ethnic cleansing in Gaza

By Ramzy Baroud
Journalist, author

OPINION

Under the slogan 'Gaza is Ours, Forever', a large number of Israeli extremists and right-wing politicians met in the settlement of Be'eri, near the Gaza border region, on October 20–21. The group represented the who's who in the Israeli right, far right, and ultranationalists. They included Israeli Ministers Itamar Ben-Gvir, May Golan, and Bezalel Smotrich, as well as

ten MKs of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's Likud party. The event, entitled "Preparing to Resettle Gaza", was organized by one of Israel's most extreme settler movements, Nachala, led by the notorious Daniella Weiss.

To appreciate how extremist this 79-year-old settler is, consider this: on June 27, the Canadian government, though one of the most stalwart supporters of Netanyahu and his wars, imposed sanctions on her, due to her "role in facilitating (...) acts of violence by Israeli extremist settlers against Palestinian civilians."

The hate-filled conference, however, was but a culmination of a year-long effort to build a case of why Israel should ethnically cleanse Palestinians in the Strip and re-establish illegal settlements.

The story, however, does not start on October 7. In 2005, Israel decided to redeploy its forces out of the tiny coastal region. That was the start of the hermetic Israeli siege on the Strip, which led to multiple wars and, ultimately, the October 7 events and the ongoing genocide.

Although the number of Jewish settlers who were evacuated from the dismantled 15 illegal settlements was fairly small — 8,500 — the sense of betrayal felt by the settlers created deep divisions throughout Israeli society.

Chaotic scenes of settlers being forcefully removed from the Gush Katif settlements bloc in Gaza created a national crisis in Israel and was compared to the forceful evacuation of the illegal Sinai settlement of Yamit, which Israel dismantled in April 1982 as part of a previous agreement with Egypt. But, why the crisis?

the war, October 7, 2023, Netanyahu made his intentions clear: "I say to the residents of Gaza: Leave now because we will operate forcefully everywhere."

On October 17, a position paper introduced by the Israeli Misgav Institute for National Security & Zionist Strategy called for the "relocation and final settlement of the entire Gaza population".

The report saw in the war "a unique and rare opportunity to evacuate the whole Gaza Strip" into the Sinai desert. Later that same month, the Israeli intelligence ministry itself became involved, with the Israeli news outlet Calcalist publishing a document "recommend(ing) the transfer of Gaza residents to Sinai."

On November 14, far-right Minister Smotrich spoke of 'voluntary migration'. In December, media reports said that Netanyahu himself had told Likud party members that Israel's real challenge is finding "countries that are willing to absorb them", meaning the people of Gaza. Conferences began to be organized to gather support around the idea of ethnically cleansing Palestinians. The first major conference was held by a coalition of settler movements last December. "A house on the beach is not a dream", an advertisement for the gathering proclaimed. The 'beach' here is a reference to the Gaza beach.

Even Jared Kushner, Donald Trump's son-in-law,



Israelis dance during a demonstration calling for Jewish resettlement of the Gaza Strip, near the border with Gaza on October 21, 2024.
● TSAFRIR ABAYOV/AP

Israel is a settler-colonial society, which has linked its colonial expansion to religious diktats and prophecies. So, the forced departure from Gaza, to most of these settlers, must have appeared to represent both national treason and a sacrilegious act.

This is why resettling Gaza became the immediate rallying cry for Israeli settlers. Compared to their limited political share of power during the redeployment of 2005, current extremists are now effectively the decision-makers.

While the army remains unclear regarding its strategic objectives in Gaza, the settlers have always been aware of the nature of their mission: the ethnic cleansing of all Palestinians from Gaza and the rebuilding of the settlements.

Thus, quickly, the likes of Weiss and many of her supporters began calling on Israelis to join the recolonization campaign. "Register, register, you'll be in Gaza," Weiss told an audience of supporters last March, joyfully declaring that 500 families had already signed up, according to a CNN report.

Weiss and Nachala are not acting independently from the overall objective of the country's leading politicians. For example, on the first day of

jumped on the opportunity. In March, he spoke of Gaza's "very valuable ... waterfront property," which required Israel to remove the civilians and "clean up the Strip".

The ongoing so-called General's Plan, aimed at the extermination and ethnic cleansing of northern Gaza, is but the military component of the settlers' vision, that of 'Gaza is ours, forever'.

But if Israel has failed to sustain its settlements in the rebellious Strip under more manageable circumstances in the past, will it succeed now? The settlers are already aware of the challenge at hand. This is why they constantly link their colonization of Gaza with the ethnic cleansing of the Strip's Palestinian inhabitants.

Israel's success and failure, however, will ultimately be determined by this maxim: as long as the Palestinian people are fighting back, Weiss and her fellow extremists will not find safety in Gaza.

Indeed, the native population of Gaza has subsisted in that historical land for thousands of years. If genocide has not forced them off their land, nothing else will.

The article first appeared on The Palestine Chronicle.

'True brutality' of ethnic cleansing now underway in Gaza

By Jake Johnson
Reporter

OPINION

Much alarm has been raised over the so-called "Generals' Plan," an ethnic cleansing proposal for northern Gaza that has reportedly garnered attention in the highest reaches of Israel.

But Israeli scholar Idan Landau argued in a column published in English by +972 Magazine that what the Israeli military is actually doing in northern Gaza "is even more appalling" than the plan

outlined by a group of retired generals. Landau argued that focus on the details of the Generals' Plan has served to obscure the "true brutality" of Israel's deadly operations in northern Gaza, which has been rendered a hellscape of death and destruction by the military assault and siege. Landau, a professor of linguistics at Tel Aviv University, opened his column — first published in Hebrew on his blog — by pointing to two photos: one showing a celebratory event at a camp built by an Israeli settler organization just outside of the Gaza Strip, and the other showing displaced Palestinians lined up at gunpoint amid the ruins of northern Gaza.



On the left, Israeli settlers gather at an event celebrating Sukkot near the Gaza Strip. On the right, displaced Palestinians line up at gunpoint in the ruins of Jabalia refugee camp.
● +972 MAGAZINE

"These photos tell a story that is unfolding so rapidly that its harrowing details are already on the brink of being forgotten," wrote Landau. "Yet this story could start from any point during the past 76 years: the Nakba of 1948, the 'Siyag Plan' that followed it, the Naksa of 1967. On one side, displaced Palestinians with all the belongings they can carry, hungry, wounded, and exhausted; on the other, joyful Jewish settlers, sanctifying the new land that the army has cleared for them."

The Israeli military's dehumanization of the people of Gaza, Landau wrote, "cannot help but trigger our associations with scenes depicting the Nazis loading Jews into cattle cars".

Landau wrote that what the Israeli army has been implementing in northern Gaza in recent weeks is "not quite" the Generals' Plan, which entails giving Palestinians still in the region a week to leave before declaring the area a closed military zone — and designating everyone who remains a militant who can be denied humanitarian assistance and killed.

The actual strategy Israeli soldiers have been deploying in northern Gaza is "an even more sinister and brutal version" of the Generals' Plan "within a more concentrated area".

"The first, most immediate distinction is the abandoning of provisions for reducing harm to civilians, i.e. giving residents of northern Gaza a week to evacuate southward," Landau wrote. "The second departure concerns the real purpose of emptying the area: while portraying the military operation as a security necessity, it was, in fact, an embodiment of the spirit of ethnic cleansing and resettlement from day one."

"As opposed to the picture painted by the army, implying that residents in the northern areas were free to move south and get out of the danger zone, local testimonies presented a frightening reality: Anyone who so much as stepped out of their home risked being shot by Israeli snipers or drones, including young children and those holding white flags," Landau noted. "Rescue crews trying to help

the wounded also came under attack, as well as journalists trying to document the events."

The scholar cites one "particularly harrowing video" in which a Palestinian child is seen "on the ground pleading for help after being wounded by an air strike; when a crowd gathers to help him, they are suddenly hit by another air strike, killing one and wounding more than 20 others."

"The Israeli Air Force usually bombs at night while the victims are sleeping, slaughtering entire families in their homes and making it more difficult to evacuate the wounded. And on October 24, rescue services announced that the intensity of the bombardment left them with no choice but to cease all operations in the besieged areas."

The deadly military assault, Landau stressed, has been accompanied by a "starvation policy" that has severely hindered the flow of humanitarian assistance to northern Gaza.

The heads of prominent United Nations agencies and human rights organizations warned recently that conditions on the ground in the region are "apocalyptic" and that "the entire Palestinian population in North Gaza is at imminent risk of dying from disease, famine, and violence."

Landau noted that on October 16, following pressure from the Biden administration, the Israeli cabinet reportedly allowed 100 aid trucks to enter northern Gaza.

"But journalists in the north were quick to correct the record: Nothing at all had entered the besieged areas," Landau wrote. "On October 20, Israel denied a further request by UN agencies to bring in food, fuel, blood, [and] medicines. Three days later, in response to a request for an interim order by the Israeli human rights group Gisha, the cabinet admitted to the High Court that no humanitarian aid had been allowed into northern Gaza up to that point. By this time, we are already talking about a three-week-long food siege."

The full article first appeared on Common Dreams.



Palestinians queue for bread at the only open bakery in Khan Younis, southern Gaza Strip, on October 24, 2024.
● ABED RAHIM KHATIB/FLASH90

World Cup Asian qualifiers:

Iran out to win over domestic critics
against Kyrgyzstan

Sports Desk

Iran will look to make a significant stride towards a place in the 2026 World Cup when playing away to Kyrgyzstan in Group A of the Asian qualifiers today. Amir Qalenoee's side is top of the group table with 13 points after five rounds of matches – three points clear of second-placed Uzbekistan, and, more importantly, six above the United Arab Emirates and Qatar.

With a top-two finish in each of the three groups securing direct qualification for the finals, maximum points in Bishkek's Dolen Omurzakov Stadium will all but guarantee Team Melli's progress to the showpiece in the United States, Mexico, and Canada. Iran defeated North Korea 3-2 in Laos as the Asian qualifiers reached the halfway point on Thursday, though a shaky second-half performance saw a significant portion of the fans and pundits in the country take a swipe at Qalenoee and his players again.

Leading by three goals at the break, Iran went down to 10 men through a straight red for defender Shoja Khalilzadeh six minutes after the restart and then conceded twice inside three minutes.

Mahdi Taremi was denied from the spot by the North Korean keeper and Iran was "fortunate not to be punished", as Qalenoee admitted after the game, by a



● AFC

late equalizer when Ri Jo-guk's strike hit the crossbar.

For all the decent run of results since Qalenoee took over on the bench after the 2022 World Cup, the Iranian head coach has hardly avoided scrutiny over the past 20 months.

The 60-year-old is on the verge

of becoming only the second home-grown coach to steer Iran to the World Cup finals – following legendary Heshmat Mohajerani in 1978 – but the imminent feat has done little to keep the critics from questioning his team's inconsistency throughout the 90 minutes, most demon-

strated against North Korea, as well as Qalenoee's overreliance on a certain group of ageing players.

When asked about the criticism in Monday's pre-match press conference, Qalenoee said: "I can only be happy that the team has scored 71 goals in 29 games

since I took the role. We managed to build an attack-minded team in such a short time, despite a whole different approach [under former coach Carlos Queiroz] for a decade."

A commanding display against Kyrgyzstan is what Qalenoee and his men need to prove

their doubters wrong until the next international break in late March.

Missing trio

Khalilzadeh, who will likely be replaced by Hossein Kan'anizadegan in the starting XI, is not the only player to have missed the visit to the Kyrgyz capital.

Ittihad Kalba midfielder Saman Qoddous sat out the North Korea win with a hamstring injury and has returned to the United Arab Emirates for further treatment, while prolific winger Mohammad Mohebbi, who found the net twice on Thursday, will also miss the game with the same problem.

Second from bottom in the group with three points, Kyrgyzstan has proved to be a favorite opponent for Team Melli, which has a 5-0 head-to-head record the Central Asian side, bagging 22 goals.

Qalenoee's men, however, had to dig deep for victory last time out against Kyrgyzstan on home soil, as a Taremi's first-half strike was the difference between the two sides in September's reverse fixture in the group.

Elsewhere in Group A, Uzbekistan will be eager to bounce back from the 3-2 loss at Qatar with a win against North Korea in Vientiane and retain the safe margin over the UAE and Qatar, which will square off in Abu Dhabi.

Daei: It's a great honour to be alongside Ronaldo and Messi

"I don't think it will ever be done," said Ferenc Puskas of the quest to reach 100 international goals in 1993. "If Pele couldn't do it, no-one will."

"The Galloping Major", registrar of 84 for Hungary, endorsed his forecast: "Football is far more defensive these days. Teams used to have four or five players in attack. It used to be about outscoring the opposition. Now the top goalscorer at a World Cup gets six. Before it was 13, 11, 10. I think 100 goals is unreachable."

That same year, a 24-year-old forward from Ardabil, by the Sabalan stratovolcano, made his international debut for Iran. Nobody could have imagined he'd challenge Puskas's tally, yet alone his prediction – not even the man himself.

Ali Daei, however, was a one-of-a-kind marksman. An immaculate finisher with monstrous aerial ability, he bagged 22 goals in only 18 games in 1996 – a tally that included four in 23 minutes against Korea Republic in an AFC Asian Cup quarter-final. Only the immortal Sandor Kocsis, scorer of 23 in 1954, has registered more in a calendar year.

The man with the moustache netted 36 goals in 36 games from 1998 to 2001 to power past Gerd Muller (68), Kocsis (75) and Pele (77) were soon in his rear-view mirror. Once Puskas was, Daei's century quest monopolised headlines.

On 17 November 2004, Daei scored four goals in a World Cup qualifier against Laos to become the first man in history to reach 100 international goals. Such was the accomplishment's magnitude that it was reported on television in over 150 countries across the planet. FIFA caught up with the former Bayern Munich striker to discuss that unforgettable achievement in Tehran, and sharing the century club with Cristiano Ronaldo and Lionel Messi.

FIFA: Ferenc Puskas, Pele, Gerd Muller and all these incredible goalscorers hadn't come close. When did you realise that reaching 100 international goals could be possible?

Daei: I think it started to feel achievable when I crossed 80 goals. Until then, I hadn't really thought about it – I was focused on winning games, helping my team, and representing my country with pride. But as I got closer, the idea became more real, and I knew it could happen if I just kept pushing.

You went into the game against Laos on 97. Did you think it was a possibility that day?

Yes, I had a feeling. Going into that game, I was confident and motivated. But football is unpredictable; you never know how a match will go. That day, though, everything came together, and I felt the support of my teammates and fans, which made it even more special.

How did it feel to become the first man in history to reach 100 international goals in front of your adoring public at the Azadi?

It was an unforgettable moment. Playing at the Azadi is always special, but reaching 100 goals there took it to a whole new lev-

el. I felt that I achieved this not only for myself but for everyone who had been there with me, supporting me. That moment was a victory for the entire nation of Iran.

What was the reaction to your accomplishment like? Did you receive any special messages?

Yes, I received many messages from team-mates, coaches and even well-known celebrities from around the world. The pride and support from people was overwhelming. Those messages showed me how football can bring people together, and how a personal achievement can mean something to everyone.

Two extraordinary players have since reached 100 international goals. First, how did you feel when Cristiano Ronaldo broke your record, and what do you think of Cristiano as a player?

Breaking records is part of football, and I'm happy that a player like Ronaldo was the one to do it. He's an exceptional and hard-working player, and he's proven those qualities throughout his career. Ronaldo is a huge role model for young players, and his record shows that anything is possible.

What do you think of Lionel Messi as a player?

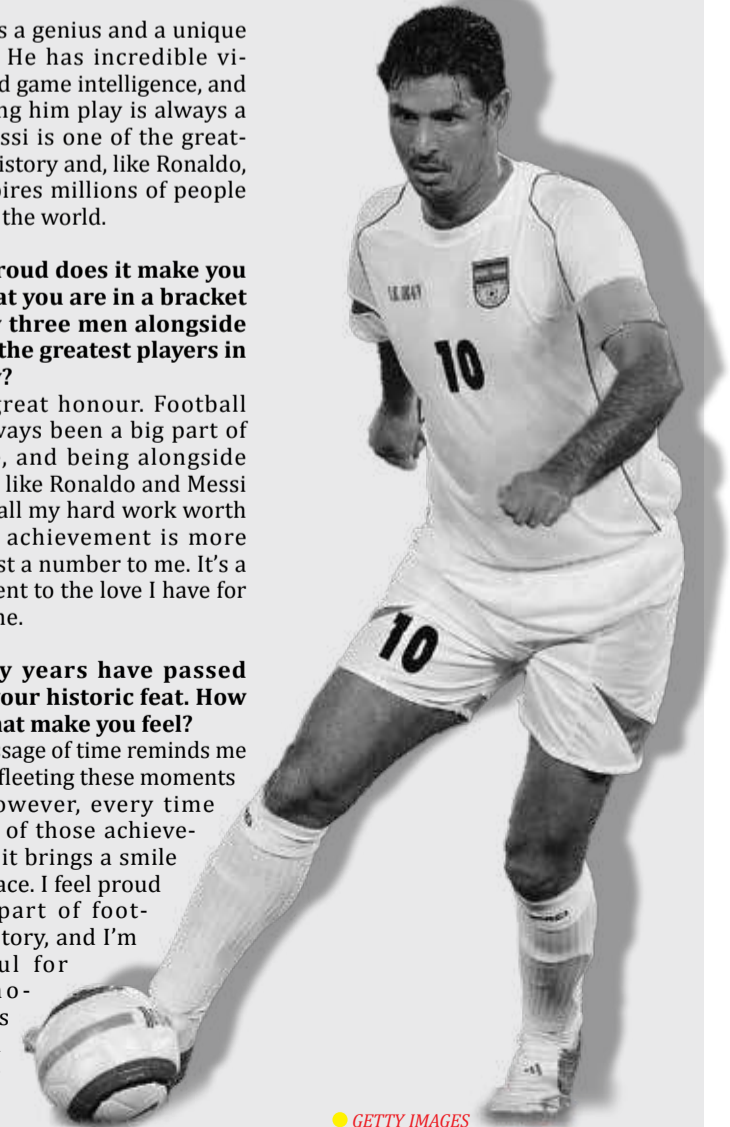
Messi is a genius and a unique player. He has incredible vision and game intelligence, and watching him play is always a joy. Messi is one of the greatest in history and, like Ronaldo, he inspires millions of people around the world.

How proud does it make you feel that you are in a bracket of only three men alongside two of the greatest players in history?

It's a great honour. Football has always been a big part of my life, and being alongside players like Ronaldo and Messi makes all my hard work worth it. The achievement is more than just a number to me. It's a testament to the love I have for the game.

Twenty years have passed since your historic feat. How does that make you feel?

The passage of time reminds me of how fleeting these moments are. However, every time I think of those achievements, it brings a smile to my face. I feel proud to be part of football history, and I'm grateful for the moments football has given me.



● GETTY IMAGES

Iran keeps door open to talks with Trump administration



Majid Takht-Ravanchi
IRNA

International Desk

Iran has kept the door open to negotiations with the incoming administration of US President-elect Donald Trump, while warning the Republican head of

state that any attempt to reimpose "maximum pressure" on the Islamic Republic would fail to extract concessions. Majid Takht-Ravanchi, Iran's deputy foreign minister for political affairs, told the Financial Times

that coercion and intimidation would prove ineffective in the long-running stand-off between Iran and the West over Tehran's nuclear program.

"As for negotiations, we need to observe US policy and decide how to respond accordingly," Takht-Ravanchi said in his office at the foreign ministry in Tehran. "Right now, the key question is how the new administration will approach Iran, the nuclear issue, regional security and the Middle East. It's premature to speculate about specific outcomes."

Takht-Ravanchi said the nuclear deal reached with the West in 2015, from which Trump later withdrew the US, "could still serve as a foundation and be updated to reflect new realities," adding that, "If the other parties return to their obligations, we

have repeatedly said that we are willing to do the same." He added, "We do favor negotiations, as we proved [with that deal]... But who sabotaged the negotiations previously? It was the Trump administration who was unwilling to negotiate."

'Maximum resistance'

At the same time, the veteran diplomat and former nuclear negotiator warned that if Trump again takes a tough approach, "maximum pressure will be met with maximum resistance."

"We will continue to work around sanctions, diversify our trade partners and strengthen regional relations to maintain calm," he added.

During his first term, Trump triggered a nuclear stand-off with Iran after he abandoned

the 2015 accord, known as the JCPOA, that Tehran had signed with world powers, and imposed waves of sanctions on the Islamic Republic in what he called a "maximum pressure" campaign. People familiar with Trump's thinking have told the Financial Times that his administration would try to "bankrupt" Iran to force the Islamic Republic into talks.

"We hope he doesn't repeat the same mistake because the outcome will be no different," Takht-Ravanchi said.

"The Trump administration claimed that it would bring Iran to the negotiating table [during his first term], but failed to do so. It is up to them to practice the same approach for another four years and fail again. But that is an irrational thing to do," Takht-Ravan-

chi said.

Reformist President Masoud Pezeshkian was elected in July on promises of resolving the nuclear crisis to secure sanctions relief.

Pezeshkian's Deputy for Legal Affairs Majid Ansari said on Monday that Iran is ready for "lawful and fair relations" with any country, including the US, based on international law and the recognition of the will of the Iranian nation, according to ISNA.

Citing Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei and President Pezeshkian, Ansari said, "We are not at war with any country." Iran and the United States have had no formal diplomatic relations since April 1980 after Iranian students stormed the US Embassy in Tehran, taking 52 Americans hostage and holding them for 444 days.

Lebanon reviews US cease-fire proposal

International Desk

Senior officials in Lebanon are reviewing a US-backed cease-fire proposal to end the war between Israel and Hezbollah.

A top government official in Beirut said on Friday that US Ambassador Lisa Johnson had presented a 13-point proposal to halt the Israel-Hezbollah conflict. It includes a 60-day truce, during which Lebanon will deploy troops to the border. The official added that Israel has yet to respond to the plan.

The proposal is largely based on UN Security Council resolution 1701, which ended the last war between Israel and Hezbollah in 2006, officials said. It calls for Hezbollah to withdraw from southern Lebanon and says only the Lebanese military and UN peacekeepers should operate in the region, which borders Israel.

Amos Hochstein, a senior US aide to President Joe Biden, is on standby, prepared to travel to Beirut based on Lebanon's official response in the coming days.

Lebanese officials are expected to respond to the proposal soon. Lebanon's parliamentary Speaker Nabih Berri, who Hezbollah said was authorized to negotiate on its behalf, said Friday that discussions were "progressing."

A lawmaker from the same parliamentary bloc as the speaker, Qassen Hashem, told local radio Saturday that the response to the draft cease-fire proposal would be ready by Monday or Tuesday at the latest, while accusing Israel of trying "to discuss the draft under fire to impose its conditions."

Israel's military has stepped up strikes on Lebanon in recent days. On Sunday, an Israeli attack on a central Beirut district killed Hezbollah's spokesman Mohammed Afif, the latest senior figure



AP

slain by Israel. Hezbollah said Monday that four members of its media office also died in the strike.

Israel launched a major offensive in Lebanon in mid-September following months of tit-for-tat border attacks which started when Hezbollah attacked Israel in solidarity with Hamas and Palestinians in Gaza.

Lebanese authorities say more than 3,480 people have been killed since October last year, with most casualties recorded since September.

New EU sanctions will not go unanswered: Tehran

EU, UK impose fresh bans on Iran's shipping, aviation sectors

International Desk

Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baghaei warned that new sanctions imposed by the European countries and the UK on the Islamic Republic will not go unanswered.

Baghaei made the remarks in a weekly press conference on Monday hours before the European Union announced new sanctions against Iran over what it claimed to be Tehran's support for Russia's war on Ukraine.

He said Iran will reciprocate any "inappropriate action" against its interests. The European Commission said on Monday it has added the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Lines (IRISL) and its director Mohammad Reza Khiabani - among others - to its sanctions list.

It also prohibited the export, transfer, supply or sale from the EU to Iran of components used to make missiles and unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs).

The commission also said it banned any transaction with ports "owned, operated or controlled" by sanctioned individuals and entities or otherwise used to supply Russia with drone- and missile-related technology and components.

"This measure includes the access to facilities of the ports and docks, such as Amirabad and Anzali, and the provision of any services to vessels," the EU said in a statement as the bloc's foreign ministers met in Brussels.

Amirabad and Anzali are two Iranian ports on the Caspian Sea.

Also on Monday, Britain announced fresh sanctions against Iran, freezing the



Esmail Baghaei
IRNA

assets of its air and shipping carriers on the same excuse.

Iranian national carrier Iran Air and the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Lines have been hit with an assets freeze, while the Port Olya-3 cargo ship would not be allowed to enter any UK port, the UK Foreign Ministry said.

The European Union, Britain and the US had already imposed sanctions on prominent Iranian officials and entities, including Iran Air over the alleged delivery of missiles to Russia.

Restrictive measures against Iran came after the United States in September claimed that Iran provided Russia with Fath-360 close-range ballistic missiles as a boost to Russia's war against Ukraine.

Tehran, however, has repeatedly rejected the accusations, saying that remarks made by Ukrainian president about the missiles are quite clear that Iran has not delivered any missile to Russia.

In September, the Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said that there was no evidence yet that Russia had used Iranian ballistic missiles against Ukraine.

Russia warns US long-range missile approval escalates Ukraine war

The Kremlin warned Monday that President Joe Biden's decision to let Ukraine strike targets inside Russia with US-supplied longer-range missiles adds "fuel to the fire" of the war and would escalate international tensions even higher.

Biden's shift in policy added an uncertain, new factor to the conflict on the eve of the 1,000-day milestone since Russia began its full-scale invasion in 2022, AP reported.

Washington is easing limits on what Ukraine can strike with its American-made Army Tactical Missile System, or ATACMs, US officials told The Associated Press on Sunday, after months of ruling out such a move over fears of escalating the conflict and bringing about a direct confrontation between Russia and NATO.

"It is obvious that the outgoing administration in Washington intends to take steps and they have been talking about this, to continue adding fuel to the fire and provoking further escalation of tensions around this conflict," spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters.

The scope of the new firing guidelines isn't clear. But the change came after the US, South Korea and NATO said recently that North Korean troops are in Russia and apparently are being deployed to help Moscow drive Ukrainian troops out of Russia's Kursk border region.

Russia also is slowly pushing Ukraine's outnumbered army backward in the eastern Donetsk region.

Peskov referred journalists to a statement made by President Vladimir Putin in September in which he said allowing

Ukraine to target Russia would significantly raise the stakes.

It would change "the very nature of the conflict dramatically," Putin said at the time. "This will mean that NATO countries - the United States and European countries - are at war with Russia."

Peskov said that Western countries supplying longer-range weapons also provide targeting services to Kiev. "This fundamentally changes the modality of their involvement in the conflict," he said. Putin warned in June that Moscow could provide longer-range weapons to others to strike Western targets if NATO allowed Ukraine to use its allies' arms to attack Russian territory. He also reaffirmed Moscow's readiness to use nuclear weapons if it sees a threat to its sovereignty.

Time for respect...

Moreover, Iran's regional and international stature also compels it to defend its rights rather than succumb to what Iranian officials often refer to as "Western excessive demands". Iran perceives any concession under duress as a critical strategic mistake. It will not show

weakness toward Western powers, fully aware of how its actions are perceived by neighboring countries. For Iran, maintaining its reputation, dignity and sovereignty is paramount, rejecting any approach that resembles coercion or bullying.

It stands out a mile that the current approach of pres-

uring Iran is not working. After so many years of using intimidation, it is time for Western countries to try something different. Instead of continuing with the same tactics that have only led to more tensions, they need to focus on respecting Iran for a change! Real progress with Iran will come from honest dialogue

and mutual respect, not from trying to force a solution.

If the West genuinely wants to find common ground, it should move away from treating Iran as a passive subject of their "diplomatic efforts" and start engaging with it as an equal partner in negotiations. This is the only way to de-escalate!

Mohammad Ali Rajabi
Cartoonist



Minister urges unity, transparency in Fajr Film Festival

Arts & Culture Desk

Iran's Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance, Abbas Salehi, emphasized the importance of unity and transparency in the upcoming Fajr Film Festival, calling for a more inclusive and harmonious approach to the event. Speaking at the first meeting of the policy-making council of the 43rd edition of the festival, Salehi noted that the festival should serve as a platform for promoting national unity and solidarity among filmmakers, IRNA reported. Salehi stressed the need to shift away from the approach, which he believes has created a rift between the film industry and decision-makers, and instead adopt a collaborative approach that fosters unity and solidarity among filmmakers. He emphasized that the festival should be a celebration of Iranian cinema, rather than a platform for promoting individual interests. The minister also addressed concerns about the festival's transparency and costs, stating that these issues should be prioritized from the outset. He emphasized that the festival should be faithful to five key aspects: The eco-

nomie, artistic, technological, international, and humanitarian dimensions of cinema. Salehi also discussed the need to rebuild trust with filmmakers who have become disillusioned with the festival, stating that "if we take positive steps, we can regain the trust that has been lost." He acknowledged that there is a deep divide between the film industry and the decision-making bodies, but expressed hope that the festival can help to bridge this gap. The minister also emphasized the importance of promoting Iranian cinema on the international stage, stating that "if we don't connect our cinema to the world, it won't be recognized domestically either." He noted that the world has become a smaller place, and that Iranian cinema needs to be showcased globally in order to be successful at home. Raed Faridzadeh, head of Cinema Organization of Iran (COI), noted that the Fajr Film Festival has maintained its position among the top 14 international film festivals, despite efforts by "the Zionist regime" to undermine Iran's cinematic achievements. Manouchehr Shahsavari, secretary of



Iran's Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance Abbas Salehi (r), flanked by Head of the Cinema Organization of Iran Raed Faridzadeh (c), and Secretary of the 43rd Fajr Film Festival Manouchehr Shahsavari (l), attend the first meeting of the festival's policy-making council in Tehran on November 18, 2024. IRNA

the 43rd Fajr Film Festival, emphasized the need for a "realistic understanding of change" and a national approach to

the festival. He called for a shift away from a passive approach to culture and towards a more

proactive and inclusive one, stating that "we can't talk about unity without a national approach."

7,500-year-old remains unearthed in western Iran



Arts & Culture Desk

A team of archaeologists has made a groundbreaking discovery in the Qeshlaq mound in Kurdistan, western Iran, uncovering remnants dating back to 7,500 years ago. The excavation, led by Mahnaz Sharifi, has shed new light on the region's rich cultural heritage and its connections to neighboring civilizations, ISNA reported. The Qeshlaq mound, which has been partially submerged due to the construction of the Talvar Dam, has yielded a treasure trove of artifacts, including architectural remains, ceramics, decorative beads, and stone tools. The findings suggest that the village of Qeshlaq was inhabited as far back as the fifth millennium BC, with evidence of cultural exchange with the Hajji Firuz and Dalma civilizations. The excavation has also revealed a complex network of trade and cultural exchange between the region and other parts of the ancient world, including the eastern Anatolia and Mesopotamia. The discovery of obsidian stones, for instance, points to

trade links with the Lake Van region in modern-day Turkey. The team has also uncovered evidence of a sophisticated social hierarchy, with the presence of seals and sealings indicating a system of ownership and local exchange networks. The discovery of Ubaid-style pottery, meanwhile, suggests connections with Mesopotamia. However, the excavation has also revealed a darker side to the region's history. The presence of heavy metals such as lead, arsenic, and cadmium in the soil and water, which has been detected in animal bones dating back 7,000 years, may have contributed to the decline and eventual collapse of the village. Sharifi believes that environmental factors, including the presence of gypsum and copper deposits in the region, may have led to the accumulation of toxic substances in the soil and water, making it difficult for the population to thrive. The discovery highlights the importance of considering environmental factors in understanding the rise and fall of ancient civilizations.

Iran's traditional medicine sector holds key to billions

By Sadeq Dehqan
Staff writer

Iran boasts an unparalleled capacity for producing herbal medicine, with over 8,000 known plant species, 2,300 of which have medicinal properties, according to Mohammad Hossein Ayati, a member of the School of Traditional Medicine at Tehran University of Medical Sciences. In an interview with Iran Daily reported, Ayati highlighted Iran's rich tradition of traditional medicine, which has a history spanning over 1,000 years and has produced some of the greatest scientists and physicians of all time, including Avicenna. He noted that Iranian traditional medicine was once considered a reference point for medical centers and scientific institutions in Europe, particularly during the 200 years when it was used as a medical reference in European scientific and medical centers. Ayati emphasized that Iran's traditional medicine has the potential to generate significant revenue through herbal medicine exports, but this potential remains largely untapped. He noted that while many countries, such as China, earn about \$30 billion from exporting herbal medicines, Iran's exports in this sector are negligible, with a mere \$500 million in revenue, mostly from the raw sale of saffron. Ayati pointed out that this type of export does not add value to the country's economy, and the profit goes to other countries. He added that some Iranian pharmaceutical companies have started producing herbal medicines, but the country still lacks standards that

meet international criteria, particularly those accepted in European countries. If this issue is addressed, Iran can capitalize on its rich herbal resources to meet a significant portion of the global demand for herbal medicines. Ayati cited the example of Spain, which recently earned over \$1 billion from exporting a single herbal medicine derived from saffron. He also mentioned that countries like China, South Korea, and Japan, which have a rich tradition of traditional medicine, are promoting its use alongside conventional medicine for economic and medical reasons. Ayati highlighted the benefits of traditional medicine, citing its lower risk of side effects compared to conventional treatments, which often involve surgery and chemical drugs. He noted that conventional treatments have not been able to effectively address

many diseases, whereas traditional medicine and herbal remedies offer a safer alternative. Ayati also mentioned a study on mortality rates in the US, which found that medical interventions and pharmaceutical side effects were the third leading cause of death, after cardiovascular and cancer diseases. This, he said, highlights the risks associated with conventional treatments. Ayati emphasized the economic benefits of traditional medicine, noting that conventional treatments are becoming increasingly expensive, whereas traditional medicine and herbal remedies offer a cost-effective alternative. He concluded that Iran needs to tap into its vast potential in herbal medicine production to generate revenue and promote public health.

