

China to marvel at 'Glory of Ancient Persia' exhibition: *Iran FM spox*



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Araghchi to Iran Daily:

No Regional Country Safe From Syria Crisis Spillover

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Iran, Russia, Turkey agree on dialogue between Damascus, opposition groups



Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi (R), his Turkish counterpart Hakan Fidan (C) and Russia's Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov (L) hold a meeting on Syria in the Qatari capital, Doha, on December 7, 2024. *AFP*

Syria's future and Iran's strategic options

By **Navid Kamali**
Senior expert in strategic affairs and foreign policy

OPINION EXCLUSIVE

The rapid developments in Syria over the past two weeks, marked by the unexpected advance of opposition forces led by Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) that resulted in the fall of Aleppo, Hama, and other Syrian cities, have fundamentally altered regional equations and shrouded the country's future in uncertainty. These developments, occurring at an unprecedented pace, have not only shifted the balance of power in Syria but could have profound strategic implications for all regional actors, including the Islamic Republic of Iran. Recent events in Syria demonstrate the fragility of the apparent stability following the 2020 ceasefire agreement, highlighting the urgent need for regional powers to reassess their policies.

The swift and unexpected collapse of Syrian army defensive lines in Aleppo and Hama, which surprised even opposition leaders, reveals deep structural weaknesses within government forces. This weakness can be analyzed from several perspectives. First, Russia's significant reduction in military support due to its involvement in Ukraine has severely limited Moscow's ability to support its longtime ally in Syria. Second, Hezbollah's weakened presence in Syria due to the recent Lebanon war has created a notable military vacuum on the frontlines. Third, the gradual erosion of Syria's military and administrative structure has intensified in recent years due to international sanctions' economic impact and the failure to modernize governance practices in line with current conditions.

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At the regional level, the continued advance of Syrian armed opposition could shift the power balance in Turkey's favor.



On Student Day

Pezeshkian urges youth to stay, make Iran strong, influential

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Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian shakes hands with a student during a ceremony marking Student Day at Sharif University of Technology in Tehran, Iran, on December 7, 2024. *president.ir*



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Iran's sustainable olive production warrants knowledge-based growth

Economy Desk

Sustainable olive production in Iran depends on knowledge-based development, said Deputy Minister of Horticulture Affairs at the Ministry of Agriculture Mohammad Mehdi Boroumandi, noting that the ministry has prioritized the improvement of olive orchards.

Speaking at an event to mark the National and World Olive Day in northwestern city of Zanjan on Saturday, Boroumandi stated that the Ministry of Agriculture is committed to effective policy-making in this sector.

He highlighted that Iran has approximately 70,000 hectares of olive orchards, with over 20,000 hectares located in Tarom County, Zanjan Province.

As a member of the International Olive Council (IOC), Boroumandi announced that Iran has assumed the presidency of the council in 2024.

He also discussed efforts to enhance mechanization in olive production, noting that, for the first time, a specialized olive harvesting combine was imported this year.

Boroumandi stressed the need to increase per-hectare yields and complete the olive value chain while promoting a shift in consumption culture toward olive oil.

Despite its high nutritional value, olive oil consumption in Iran remains low, with a per capita usage of just 200 grams, the official said.

The northwestern province of Zanjan leads the country in olive production, accounting for 43% of national output.

Araghchi to Iran Daily: No regional country safe from Syria crisis spillover

By Mokhtar Haddad
Staff writers

INTERVIEW

Iran has started intensive talks with key players, including Russia and Turkey, aimed at helping find a solution to address the Syrian crisis. These talks took Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi to a regional tour to Damascus, Ankara and Baghdad and on the last leg to Doha in Qatar. In this vein, Araghchi attended the Doha Forum and a trilateral meeting in the Astana format, alongside his Russian and Turkish counterparts Sergey Lavrov and Hakan Fidan. He also wrapped up several bilateral talks with other officials. In a brief interview with Iran Daily on the sidelines of these meetings, Araghchi shed light on the agreements reached after the talks.

Iran Daily: How do you view the ongoing Astana format talks, which coincided with the advances of armed opposition groups in Syria? Was there any common ground for cooperation?

Araghchi: Yes; today, a trilateral meeting in the Astana format was held with the foreign ministers of Iran, Turkey, and Russia in attendance. At the end of the session, Mr. [Geir] Pedersen, the UN secretary-general's special representative for Syria, also joined the meeting, and very productive discussions took place. The current situation in Syria is indeed serious, and naturally, there are differing viewpoints. However, there were a few areas of common ground that I believe are very important. First, supporting the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Syria and its government organizations. Second, the necessity of an immediate end to hostilities and conflicts. Third, respecting the UN Security Council resolutions concerning Syria. And most importantly, initiating political dialogue between the Syrian government and legitimate opposition groups, with the involvement of the Astana group and possibly other countries.

To what extent is the Syrian government aware of these agreements?

Naturally, following today's Astana meeting, both Iran and



Russia will consult and engage separately with the Syrian government to lay the groundwork for implementing these agreements. We continue to emphasize our ongoing support for the Syrian government and people, and we believe that in this unfolding political process, we should play an effective role.

You also had a separate meeting with the Turkish foreign minister. What was the main topic of discussion in this

meeting?

My conversation with the Turkish foreign minister was very frank and direct. We discussed the path forward in supporting the Syrian people and collaborating on preserving the territorial integrity of the country. We also tried to make the necessary predictions about potential developments in the region and find appropriate solutions, as the perils of the internal crisis in Syria naturally spill over into other countries and no region-

al country will be safe from the consequences of these developments. Therefore, with the aim of discussing these risks and finding a political solution to the Syrian crisis, I visited Turkey and Iraq and today I am also meeting with officials from the countries present in Qatar. In the current situation, consultations and exchanges of views are more important than ever and we are continuing our diplomatic efforts despite the rapid developments in the region.

Hemmati: Iran plans to organize not curb cryptocurrencies



Iran's Economy Minister Abdolnaser Hemmati said that the government intends to organize digital currencies and

cryptocurrencies instead of putting limitations on them. Addressing a national event on digital currency on Sat-

urday in Tehran, Hemmati stated that Iran is moving towards managing and eliminating the adverse effects of digital currency on the economy and instead using its positive effects.

He cited the advantages and progress of digital currency as the reasons behind the decision.

Digital money is within the scope of the Central Bank of Iran (CBI) authority, the minister said.

As to cryptocurrencies, he added, it is hoped that they would be developed with the aim of growing assets and youth employment, helping to

nullify sanctions and aligning Iran's activities with the global economy.

'Framework for cryptocurrencies'

Also on Saturday, the document titled "Central Bank of Iran Policy and Regulatory Framework for Cryptocurrencies", was officially published following its approval by the CBI's High Council.

This initiative aims to leverage the opportunities and potential in the development of modern financial technologies.

According to IRNA, the CBI announced that the frame-

work was formulated and approved in four sections and 19 articles.

The CBI has developed this framework to harness the potential of advanced financial technologies, enhance transparency in cryptocurrency-related activities, and instruct the public in this area.

Given the emerging nature of cryptocurrencies and the rapid developments in this field, particularly in digital assets, the CBI, in collaboration with other relevant bodies, will continue to monitor the sector. If necessary, it will revise the framework and provide updates accordingly.

Iran to open trade center in Belarus

Economy Desk

The Director General of the Central Asia, Caucasus, and Russia Department of the Trade Promotion Organization of Iran announced the opening of a trade center in Belarus during an upcoming visit by Minister of Industry, Mine, and Trade to the Eurasian country.

According to a report by IRNA, Akbar Godari emphasized the significance of trade relations with Belarus, noting that Belarus is a member of the Eurasian Economic Union, and Iran's free trade agreement with the bloc is expected to be ratified by the Iranian Parliament soon.

"This agreement provides significant competitive advantages for us. Moreover, Belarus has faced sanctions following the Russia-Ukraine war, creating new opportunities for Iranian companies," Godari said.

The official highlighted that Iran exported approximately \$20 million worth of goods to Belarus while importing around \$60 million last year.

Key Iranian exports include advanced polymers, powder paints, light oils, pistachios, and kiwis. In return, Iran imports potash fertilizers, lightweight fibers, optical lenses, and polyamide yarns.

While acknowledging a trade deficit with Belarus, Godari stressed that Iran's exports to Belarus have high added value, with an average price of over \$900 per ton—significantly higher than the \$250-\$300 average for Iranian exports overall. Imported goods, meanwhile, largely consist of essential raw materials or items not produced domestically.

The 17th Iran-Belarus Joint Commission meeting, chaired by Iran's Minister of Industry

Mohammad Atabak, is scheduled for December 9-11 in Belarus.

Godari confirmed that the Trade Promotion Organization is coordinating the event, which will include representatives from the Iranian Parliament and ministries, as well as officials such as Mohammad-Ali Dehqan Dehnavi, head of the Trade Promotion Organization, and Seyyed Mohammad Mousavi, Deputy Minister of Machinery and Equipment Industries.

Accompanying the delegation will be a private sector trade mission focused on strengthening business ties with Belarus. Godari underlined the administration's policy of involving private businesses in official visits to bolster economic cooperation.

He also noted that over the past two years, Iran and Belarus have worked to expand trade

cooperation, including participation in exhibitions.

Iranian companies have showcased their products at Belarusian events such as AgriFood and petrochemical exhibitions, while Belarus has sent delegations to Iranian fairs in sectors like oil, gas, and petrochemicals.

He also revealed plans to inaugurate Iran Trade Center in Belarus during the joint commission meeting, with both governmental and private sector representatives in attendance. Iran has obtained Belarusian automotive standards and is finalizing agreements for Belarus to invest in producing potash fertilizers within Iran, partially indigenizing the production.

Efforts are also underway in techno-engineering services, banking, and medical equipment, although Godari cautioned that achieving tangible



results will require time.

Logistics remain a significant challenge in trade with Belarus, as goods must transit through multiple countries. To address this, the official called for the involvement of Iran's Ministry of Roads and Urban Develop-

ment and a technical committee to negotiate a suitable logistics agreement.

He expressed hope that Belarus would ease visa issuance for Iranian traders, facilitating smoother business interactions between the two nations.

Beauty and diversity of Helen Protected Area

Iranica Desk

Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari Province shines like a jewel atop Iran's natural landscape, captivating nature enthusiasts from all walks of life. The winding mountain roads of this province lead to stunning sights that leave every viewer in awe. Among the many wonders of the province is an area known to locals as Helen.

The Helen Protected Area spans approximately 40,000 hectares and encompasses a diverse array of valleys, plains, elevations, villages, rivers, dense vegetation, and wildlife. This area is also home to nomadic tribes that maintain the spirit of life across this vast plain. The Helen Plain, famously referred to as "the Bride of Iran," is one of the most beautiful at-

tractions in Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari and stands out as one of the best and most pristine areas for relaxation and nature tourism in Iran, IRNA wrote.

In 1998, the Supreme Council of the Department of Environment made a decision to conserve 10% of the country's forest, leading to the selection of the Helen area for protection. Since 2001, it has

been practically managed by the provincial Department of Environmental Protection, with signage marking its boundaries. The Helen Protected Area is the second largest in Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari Province, following Sabzkouh, and is notable for being the only protected forest area in the province, with 30,000 hectares predominantly covered by western oak forests.



berkehtourism.ir



Water sources and geography

In addition to the Karun River, which stretches about 65 kilometers, the area is fed by the Armand River and several springs. Helen encompasses around 31 villages within and around its borders, with the nomadic tribes being some of the most significant residents of this vast plain and protected area.

The Helen Protected Area covers approximately 40,200 hectares, with 30 hectares designated as forest and the remainder as pastureland. The landscape is entirely mountainous, featuring Mount Bazmani as its highest point at 3,225 meters, while the lowest point is located at the edge of the beautiful Armand River, at an elevation of 1,168 meters above sea level.

Legacy of Helen Jeffreys Bakhtiar

The Helen Protected Area is named after Helen Jeffreys Bakhtiar, an American nurse who married an Iranian Bakhtiari doctor. She arrived in Iran in 1931 and, along with her husband, migrated with the Bakhtiari tribe, dedicating herself to treating the local people. This coincided with the geographic mapping of that part of Iran and the Zagros Mountains, leading to the naming of a mountain in the area in her honor. Over time, the name came to refer to the entire vast plain where the mountain is located. Although she later separated from her Iranian husband, her love for Iran remained unwavering. Eventually, she was laid to rest in the city of Tus, near the tomb of the renowned Persian poet, Abolqasem Ferdowsi.

A seasonal paradise

The Helen Protected Area experiences a semi-humid climate, characterized by hot and dry summers and cold winters, making spring the best season to visit. The region's natural beauty is especially breathtaking in May, attracting many nature enthusiasts who set up camp to enjoy its stunning scenery. However, for those who can withstand the cold of winter and have the proper equipment and experience, winter also offers a unique beauty. One of the most beautiful aspects of the winter landscape is observed between the Berenjegan and Ma'dan villages, where the slope gradually increases, leading to heavy snowfall and beautiful avalanches cascading

into the river.

The region's climatic characteristics, along with its river ecosystems, dense forests, and diverse wildlife, create ideal conditions for attracting various species, particularly birds. As you embark on your journey through the dreamy plain of Helen, you'll encounter a variety of plants and pasture species. The vast and captivating flower fields are a defining feature of spring in this area, adorning the landscape. As you ascend in elevation, forests begin to appear, existing up to an altitude of 2,000 meters. At higher elevations, resilient species like wild bushes replace the expansive western oak forests.



Adventure and ecotourism opportunities

Helen Protected Area, with its breathtaking landscapes, the presence of nomadic tribes, and its unique geographical features — including the Love Valley (Darreh-Ye Eshq) Waterfall, abundant springs like Ab-e Sefid and Ab-e Gelur, forests, and pastures — offers an excellent array of conditions for attracting tourists. The region experiences two distinct climates: semi-cold winters and mild summers, complemented by snow-fed rivers.

For adventure seekers, Helen is one of the most attractive areas in Iran for rafting and water recreation. Since the construction of the Karun 4 Dam, ecotourism in this region has flourished, allowing for enjoyable water sports such as rafting. The establishment of the Helen camp has made it possible for tourists to stay in professional tents available in the area.

One of the best recreational activities in this stunning region is shuttle rafting, an exhilarating water sport that offers an unforgettable experience. Riding the rapids and gliding through the pristine waters of Helen will undoubtedly provide you with one of your most memorable adventures.

In recent years, a 15-kilometer trail has been designed between Gandomkar and Jowzestan villages, offering a unique hiking experience for enthusiasts. This trail passes through oak forests and crosses wooden and wire bridges, stone steps, and well-trodden paths. Along the way, you'll encounter natural waterfalls, rushing rivers, and beautiful wildlife. For photography enthusiasts, the protected Helen Protected Area serves as an exceptional backdrop for capturing stunning images.

Practical tips for visiting

For those wishing to stay in the Helen Plain, camping is the most common option. If you plan to sleep in nature, be sure to follow the guidelines and pack essential equipment, including a sleeping bag, blanket, personal items, power bank, suitable swimwear, and extra clothes. Additionally, bring sunscreen, warm clothing, summer clothes, appropriate shoes or sandals, nature exploration gear, and

a folding chair to enhance your outdoor experience. Prior planning will ensure that your visit to this picturesque region is both enjoyable and memorable.

Nestled in the heart of Iran lies Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari Province, a small yet enchanting paradise that beckons travelers with its untouched and awe-inspiring natural treasures. Endowed with a pristine and beautiful nature,

this province serves as the cradle for three mighty rivers: Karun, Dez, and Zayandeh Rud. The harmonious convergence of these magnificent rivers, along with numerous springs and abundant waterfalls, have sculpted a captivating tapestry of natural landscapes that leave every viewer spellbound. The region's climate and geographical features have transformed it into an idyllic haven for

nomadic communities, particularly in the west.

Nomadic groups thrive off the pursuit of fertile pastures, as their economy revolves around husbandry. Conversely, the eastern fringes of the province are predominantly inhabited by farmers. As for the plant cover, this area boasts a diverse range of landscapes, including lush forests and verdant lawns.

Impact of FATF membership on Iran's economy



By Amin Shojaei
Guest contributor

OPINION
EXCLUSIVE

The Financial Action Task Force (FATF) is an international organization aimed at establishing and supervising standards for combating money laundering (AML) and terrorist financing (CFT). By promoting financial transparency and strengthening monitoring frameworks, the FATF plays a critical role in facilitating economic and banking interactions on a global scale. Membership in FATF enables countries to mitigate risks associated with financial crimes and build international trust in their economic systems, allowing them to leverage greater opportunities for attracting investments and engaging in global trade. Due to its position on FATF's blacklist, Iran is deprived of these advantages. This has restricted Iran's access to international financial networks and increased its economic costs and financial isolation. This article examines the reasons behind Iran's non-membership in FATF, its consequences, the reforms necessary for compliance, and the potential economic impacts of FATF membership.



UNITED WORLD INTERNATIONAL

Consequences of non-membership in FATF

Iran's non-membership in FATF has had profound consequences for its economy. One of the most significant impacts is banking isolation. Foreign banks, due to the lack of financial transparency and the high risks associated with blacklisted countries, avoid engaging with Iranian financial institutions. This has forced Iranian businesses to rely on informal and costly channels for international transactions, increasing economic inefficiencies. Reduced foreign direct investment (FDI) is another major consequence. For example, in 2022, Iran attracted less than \$1 billion in FDI, while neighboring Turkey managed to secure over

\$12 billion in the same year. This stark difference is largely attributed to concerns over financial transparency and Iran's presence on FATF's blacklist. Additionally, increased financial and trade costs have emerged as a significant challenge. Due to limited access to international banking networks, Iranian companies face transaction costs that are 15–20% higher than the regional average. These higher costs severely reduce the competitiveness of Iranian businesses in global markets. Lastly, diminished economic competitiveness is another adverse effect. The lack of financial transparency and international trust has constrained Iran's foreign trade and reduced its non-oil exports.

Reform strategies for FATF membership

To join FATF, Iran must implement a series of structural and legal reforms: Enactment and implementation of key legislation: Iran must ratify and enforce the Palermo and CFT conventions. These laws are fundamental requirements for FATF compliance in combating money laundering and terrorist financing. Enhancing financial transparency: Iran must establish advanced systems for reporting and monitoring financial transactions. Strengthening mechanisms to track suspicious activities

and creating a centralized reporting system are essential measures. Banking system reforms: Iranian banks need to adopt modern technologies to monitor and manage transactions. Implementing systems similar to SWIFT and leveraging financial technology (FinTech) can significantly improve oversight efficiency. Direct collaboration with FATF: Iran should engage in close collaboration with FATF and regularly report on the progress of its reforms. Constructive interaction with FATF can facilitate Iran's removal from the blacklist and accelerate the membership process.



Iranian MPs express their agreement or opposition to the ratification of one of the conventions related to FATF in the Parliament in Tehran, Iran, on October 7, 2018.

TASNIM

Reasons for Iran's non-membership in FATF

One of the primary reasons for Iran's non-membership in FATF is international sanctions and economic isolation. The extensive sanctions imposed by the United States and other countries have discouraged foreign banks from cooperating with Iran. Consequently, financial reforms required for FATF compliance have not been prioritized as lifting sanctions is considered a more urgent matter. Another reason is the failure to enact key FATF-related legislation. For example, Iran has not ratified the Palermo Convention (combating transnational organized crime) or the CFT Convention (combating the financing of terrorism). In 2019, Iran's accession to the CFT Convention was rejected by the country's Expediency Council, citing

security concerns and its potential impact on Iran's regional relations. Domestic political concerns also present a significant obstacle. Some political factions within the country argue that financial transparency might expose sources of funding for regional groups associated with Iran, potentially undermining its geopolitical influence. Finally, the lack of adequate banking infrastructure is a critical barrier to FATF compliance. Iran's banking system lacks advanced mechanisms to identify, track, and report suspicious transactions. For instance, in 2019, a large money laundering case involving over 20 trillion Rials (approximately \$500 million at the time) revealed serious deficiencies in financial oversight and reporting mechanisms.

Economic outlook in case of FATF membership

If Iran becomes a member of the FATF, its economy is expected to experience significant improvements. Sustainable economic growth will be one of the primary outcomes. It is projected that Iran's economic growth could increase from 2.8% to approximately 4.5% within five years of FATF membership. Moreover, foreign direct investment (FDI) in Iran is likely to see a substantial boost. FDI, which currently stands at less than \$1 billion annually, could surpass \$5 billion per year. This increase would not only bring new financial resources into the country's economy but also introduce advanced technologies and improve productivity in domestic industries.

Another major benefit of FATF membership is the reduction in financial and trade costs. With access to international banking networks, transaction costs are expected to decrease by 15–20%, enhancing the competitiveness of Iranian businesses in global markets. In conclusion, FATF membership is a strategic necessity for Iran's economy. This step will not only improve financial transparency and reduce risks but also facilitate access to global financial networks and enhance international economic relations. The Iranian government must prioritize structural reforms and constructive engagement with FATF to pave the way for the country's sustainable economic development and exit from financial isolation.



Then-presidents of FATF Juan Manuel Vega-Serrano (l) and IMF Christine Lagarde (c) attend a plenary meeting in Valencia, Spain, on June 22, 2017, where FATF sanctions on Iran were effectively extended.

FINANCIAL TRIBUNE

Why does Iran need to cooperate with FATF?



By Zeynab
Malakouti Khah
Scholar

OPINION

In the first part of this article, we will examine some of the 40 key recommendations of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) and highlight two key points: first, what are the FATF's expectations from the anti-money laundering (AML) and combating the financing of terrorism (CFT) systems, and second, how international financial institutions react to and evaluate these recommendations. In the second part of the article, we will examine the extent to which Iran is in line with FATF recommendations and whether the remaining problems can be solved.

Out of the 40 FATF recommendations, I will only refer to a few in this article and will provide a detailed examination of the problems and challenges of these recommendations in the next article.

Recommendation 1: Risk-Based Approach. All actions taken by countries should be based on the assessment of risks related to money laundering and terrorist financing. These risks vary depending on the specific characteristics and conditions of each country. For example, a country's geographical location can have a direct impact on the risk of money laundering and terrorist financing. As a result, each country needs a national risk assessment document. Iran's national risk assessment document was initiated in 2017 with international consultations but did not reach its final stage. It was re-launched in 2021 without international cooperation.

Recommendations 3 and 5: Criminalization. Countries should criminalize money laundering and terrorist financing. Given that each country may criminalize these activities differently, these recommendations specify that money laundering should be criminalized based on the Vienna and Palermo Conventions, and terrorist financing should be criminalized based on the International Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism. To properly evaluate the implementation of these two recommendations, which are among the most important FATF recommendations, countries should join these conventions. In this regard, Iran joined the Vienna Convention in 1992 with reservations but has not yet joined the Palermo Convention and the International Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism. This non-membership is one of the weaknesses pointed out by the FATF.

Recommendations 6 and 7: Sanctions. These two recommendations require countries to implement the United Nations Security Council sanctions related to combating terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, as well as the financing of these weapons. For example, Iran should refer to the list of individuals and entities designated by the Security Council and freeze the assets of these individuals in Iran. These individuals and entities include groups such as the Taliban, Al-Qaeda, ISIS, and Al-Shabaab. Unfortunately, there is no accessible documentation to accurately assess the extent to which Iran has fully implemented this recommendation.

Recommendation 10: Customer Due Diligence. Financial institutions should assess their customers based on risk and provide services and financial transactions based on the level of risk associated with each customer. Customers are divided into three risk categories: high, medium, and low. For example, customers with a high volume of transactions, or those who frequently transact with a particular party or engage in transactions without a clear economic purpose, are usually considered high-risk customers. Since Iran is considered a high-risk country, financial institutions' interactions with Iranian individuals or entities are subject to more rigorous examination, known as "enhanced due diligence". This process can create problems. For example, there are reports that Iranians living abroad face difficulties opening bank accounts or are denied services by financial institutions after a while. It is essential to note that enhanced due diligence does not necessarily mean cutting off cooperation. However, due to legal complexities, potential financial risks, and the



Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian
● IRNA

impact of international sanctions on financial institutions, they often avoid continuing financial relationships with high-risk individuals or entities.

Recommendation 14: Currency Exchange. The FATF requires countries to regulate currency exchange offices in the same way they regulate financial institutions. All currency exchange offices should be licensed or registered, which varies depending on the country's system. Currency exchange offices are also expected to comply with all recommendations related to AML/CFT. Unfortunately, in Iran, not all currency exchange offices have official licenses, and there is insufficient oversight and regulation of their activities under AML/CFT laws and regulations. Failure to comply with this recommendation can lead to serious problems in the country's financial system, particularly given the international sanctions imposed on Iran.

Recommendation 19: Countermeasures. Countermeasures include a set of measures that are not limited to a few specific actions and can lead to limiting or even completely cutting off financial relations with a target country or individual. In the case of Iran, the FATF has recommended that financial institutions implement countermeasures against the country. As a result, many financial institutions are reluctant to maintain financial relations with Iran as there is a high risk of inadvertently interacting with sanctioned individuals or entities. This interaction can lead to mistakes that result in heavy fines for financial institutions. Therefore, international financial institutions often decide to cut off cooperation with Iran to avoid the high risk of facing sanctions and paying heavy fines.

Recommendation 20: Suspicious Transaction Reporting. If a financial institution suspects that a customer's funds may have originated from criminal activities or are related to terrorist financing, it is required to report the suspicious transaction to the Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU). Unlike many countries that publish annual reports on the number of suspicious transaction reports, Iran's FIU has not published any reports on the number of reports received from financial institutions and how they are categorized. Recommendations 36-40: International

Cooperation. Since crimes such as money laundering, terrorist financing do not occur in a specific country and criminals may be present in different countries, and the proceeds of these crimes may be located in multiple countries, international cooperation between countries is essential to combat these crimes. This cooperation may include extradition or mutual legal assistance. If a country refuses to cooperate, the result may be a failure to punish criminals, failure to confiscate or freeze their assets, and failure to prevent the flow of illicit funds.

from the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund are provided as advice and are crucial for improving and making AML/CFT measures more effective.

Regarding Iran's accession to the Palermo Convention and the International Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism, Iran's Expediency Council recently put the issue on hold, apparently due to political reasons. President Masoud Pezeshkian, in his first press conference, mentioned that he would request the Expediency



Tehran police conduct a search operation to identify unauthorized currency exchange offices.
● ASR IRAN

Iran's accession path to FATF membership

The second part of the article starts by stating that to address the FATF issue, the first step is to dismiss untechnical narratives and analyses in this field as they can hinder international cooperation at any stage. Here, we intend to evaluate Iran's situation in relation to the FATF's recommendations. The national risk assessment document, which needed the final approval of the International Monetary Fund, was stopped without any reason. The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, as two reputable international institutions, have provided specific tools that have been used in over 40 countries and can be used to revisit that document. These tools and other assistance

Council to revisit the issue of Iran's accession to these two conventions.

Concerns have been raised about the negative consequences of such a move on Iran's support for liberation movements. However, Iran can join these conventions with reservations and a statement, provided that the main objective of the conventions is not undermined. For example, Egypt has joined the convention but stated in a statement that resistance movements in all their forms that fight for autonomy and freedom from occupied territories are not considered terrorist groups (although other countries can object, and this objection can only prevent the implementation of the treaty or a specific article between the two countries). Iran can also declare reservations on Article 24 of the convention and state that in

case of disputes, it does not intend to refer the case to the International Court of Justice or arbitration, as Oman, Turkey, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia have done. It is essential to note that there is no single international agreement on the definition of terrorism among countries, and countries have different approaches to identifying which groups are terrorists and which are liberation movements. Many countries have joined these conventions with reservations. Finally, it should be noted that groups such as Hamas and Hezbollah have not been designated as terrorist organizations by the United Nations either.

However, Iran should freeze the assets of individuals and groups listed on the UN Security Council's terrorism sanctions list, which includes members of the Taliban, Al-Qaeda, ISIS, and others. While implementing this recommendation may not affect Iran's national interests, its implementation is largely obscure, and accurate reporting in this area does not pose a problem for Iran.

Another important issue is customer due diligence in financial institutions and assessing their risk level. This is related to banking and the level of service provided to customers. Accurate customer identification can help control money laundering, which Iran is also facing. News about large-scale embezzlement and money laundering shows that Iran's legal procedures for combating these problems are not being adequately addressed.

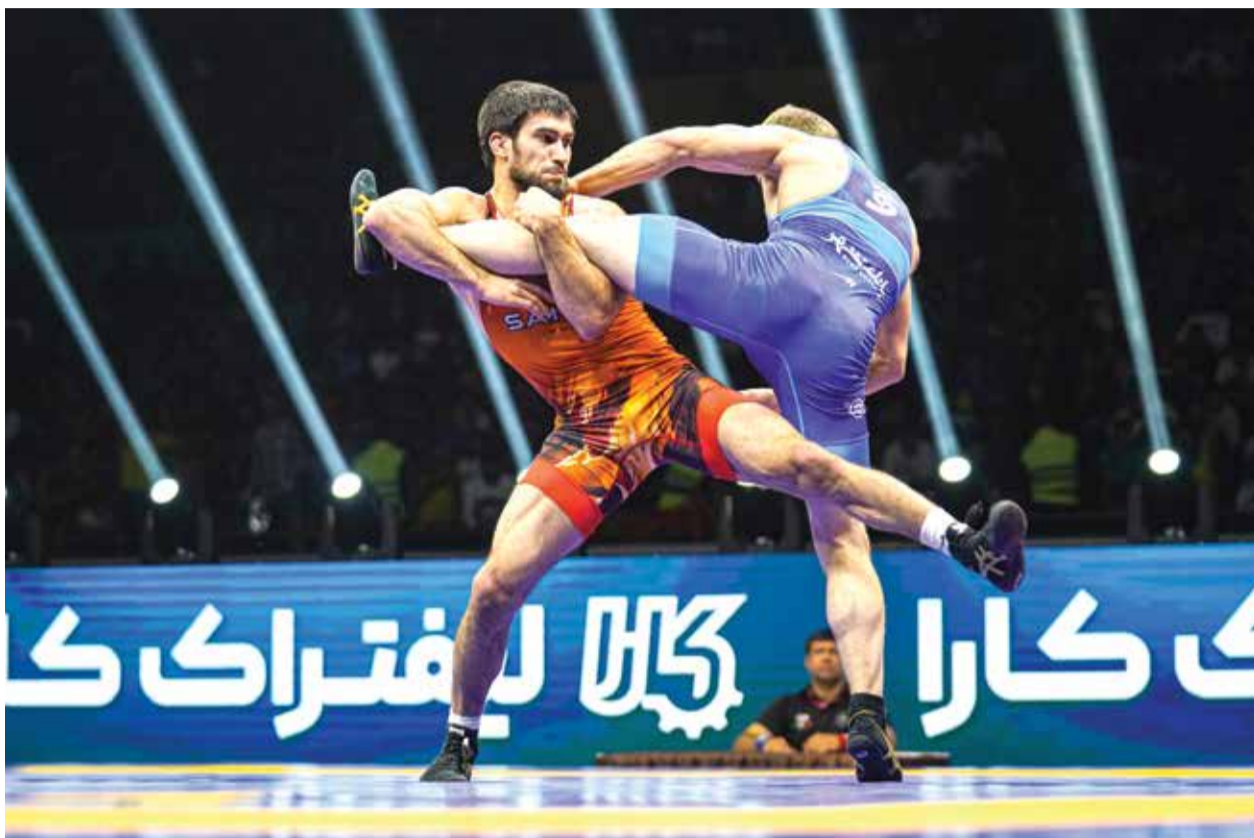
The role of currency exchange offices is also crucial. The Central Bank of Iran should regulate unauthorized currency exchange offices. These offices can become a means for transferring illicit funds and smuggling them out of the country. Currency exchange offices must have licenses and be subject to strict oversight and regulation of domestic AML/CFT laws and regulations to prevent such crimes.

The question may arise as to how the 40 FATF recommendations are evaluated. The evaluation system for these recommendations is based on four levels, and each recommendation is evaluated separately on one of these four levels: compliant, largely compliant, partially compliant, and non-compliant. This ranking is based on each country's report and then a visit by an evaluation team from experts from other countries. Usually, this team is formed from countries that have good relations with the host country. The evaluation includes examining the existence of laws and regulations and their practical and effective implementation. The evaluation team does not have unlimited access to the country's financial systems and conducts its evaluation through interviews with government officials, lawmakers, and financial institutions. There is no obligation to provide a specific report to the evaluation team unless domestic authorities want to provide detailed information about their AML/CFT efforts. For example, the team may examine the number of currency exchange licenses, the number of suspicious transaction reports, and how customers are identified and prosecuted for money laundering and terrorist financing crimes.

Finally, it should be noted that Iran has AML/CFT laws that can score well in technical evaluations, although there are challenges and criticisms about the practical implementation of these laws.

The article was first published in two separate parts in the Persian-language newspaper Etemad.

Saipa crowned freestyle champion in Iranian Premier Wrestling League



Sports Desk

Saipa lifted the freestyle trophy at the Iranian Premier Wrestling League, thanks to a victory over defending champion Shahr Bank in a start-studded final in Tehran.

It all came down to the superheavy-weight showpiece at the Azadi 12,000-seater Hall, where world champion Amirhossein Zare' outmuscled Ahmad Bazri 6-0 to seal a 6-4 triumph for Saipa.

The showdown began with a battle of former world silver medalists, with Reza Atri defeating Alireza Sarlak 2-1 in the 57kg contest to give Shahr Bank the lead.

Russian Abasgadzhi Magomedov – world champion in 2021 – came out on top against Ali Qolizadegan by fall in the 61kg bout to double Shahr Bank's advantage, before Shamil Mamedov registered a first win for Saipa after

his fellow-Russian Abdulmazhid Kudiev, who won a world bronze under the flag of Tajikistan in October, pulled out of the 65kg clash with injury while the two wrestlers were tied at 4-4.

Former world under-17 champion Sina Khalili then drew Saipa level with an emphatic 14-5 win against two-time world silver medalist Amir-Mohammad Yazdani in the 70kg bout.

Russian sensation Zaurbek Sidakov – a winner of three world titles and Tokyo Olympic champion – came out victorious 4-0 against two-time world bronze medalist Younes Emami in the 74kg clash to give Saipa the lead, but Fariborz Babaei's victory over Mahdi Yousefi in the 79kg contest leveled the scoreline at 3-3.

Russian Ibragim Kadiev put Saipa in front with a 6-0 victory over Ezzatollah Akbari in the 86kg battle, but the parity was restored again when reigning world under-23 champion Amirhossein Firouzpour defeated Hadi Vafaiepour 7-2 in the 92kg event.

Mojtaba Goleij gave Saipa the momentum in the penultimate bout, beating Mohammad-Hossein Mohammadian 6-0 in the 97kg class, before Zare' clinched the title with the 125kg win.

Saipa's Shamil Mamedov (1) is seen in action against Shahr Bank's Abdulmazhid Kudiev in the 65kg bout of the freestyle final at the Iranian Premier Wrestling League in Tehran, Iran, on Dec. 6, 2024.
● IAWF

Asian Women's Handball Championship: Iran facing mammoth task against South Korea in semifinals

Sports Desk

Iran will be facing a daunting task when taking on South Korea in the Asian Women's Handball Championship last four in New Delhi, India, today.

Iran defeated Hong Kong 26-17 at the Indira Gandhi Arena on Friday to head into a third successive semifinal as the runner-up in Group B.

Sanaz Rajabi contributed with a game-high six goals, while Iranian goalkeeper Fatemeh Khalili delivered a Player-

of-the-Match performance as Iran finished second to Japan in the group table to secure a place in next year's World Championship in Germany and the Netherlands.

Nashmin Shafeian's girls got off to losing start in the group, suffering a 34-14 defeat against Japan, but bounced back to beat the host 32-30 in their second outing before Friday's victory.

Today's opponent however has proven to be in a league of its own when it comes to the Asian Championship, as

former world and Olympic champion South Korea remains the ultimate favorite to claim a 17th title – seventh in a row – in the 20th edition of the competition.

South Korea routed Singapore 47-5 in their Group A opener, and then defeated Kazakhstan 30-20, before making a clean sweep of group victories with a 25-14 triumph over China.

Kazakhstan, which managed to beat China to the second place in the group with four points, will square off against Japan in the other semifinal.



● IRIHF

Ne'matzadeh claims statement win against Kiani in battle of Olympians



Mobina Ne'matzadeh (red) and Nahid Kiani are pictured ahead of the -57kg final in the Iranian Taekwondo Premier League in Tehran, Iran, on Dec. 6, 2024.
● TAEKWONDO.IR

Sports Desk

Mobina Ne'matzadeh walked away with a statement victory over Nahid Kiani in a highly-anticipated bout, featuring the two Iranian female medalists at the Paris Olympics, in the country's Taekwondo Premier League.

All eyes were on the -57kg final in Tehran's Taekwondo House on Friday, where Iranian

coach Mahrouz Saei in her corner, came out on top against Pars Jonoubi's Kiani – instructed by Iranian women's head coach Minoo Maddah – in back-to-back rounds for the ultimate prize.

A world junior champion in 2022, teenage prodigy Ne'matzadeh became only the second Iranian girl to win a medal in the Olympic history – following Kimia Alizadeh's taekwondo bronze in Rio 2016 – when she defeated Saudi Arabia's Dunya Abutaleb in the third-place bout of the -49kg event in August.

The 19-year-old decided to move up to a higher weight class after the Games in the French capital and marked the new chapter of her career in style with Friday's victory. Reigning world champion Kiani etched her name into history books when she became the first Iranian female athlete to make it to a final showpiece in the Olympics, courtesy of a last-four victory over Laetitia Aoun of Lebanon in the -57kg contests, though ultimately settled for a silver medal after a loss to South Korean Kim Yu-jin in the final. With both Iranians eager for further Olympic glory in four years' time, Friday's bout may well have been only the first episode of their domestic rivalry leading up to the sporting extravaganza in Los Angeles.

Wrestling glory as Iran hits 22-gold mark at Asia Pacific Deaf Games

Sports Desk

Three Iranian freestyle wrestlers walked away with the ultimate prize of their weight classes to take the country's haul to 22 golds at in the Asia Pacific Deaf Games in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

Mohammad Mohammadi Soroush defeated an Indian opponent 3-2 in the final for the gold medal of the 57kg contests, while Mohammad Siavashi

also came out in an Iranian-Indian final to win the 61kg prize.

Erfan Sattari had won a first freestyle gold for the country on Saturday, thanks to victory in the 92kg final, also featuring Iranian and Indian wrestlers.

Saturday's triumphs took Iran's tally to 50 medals – including 11 silvers and 17 bronzes – by the end of the penultimate day of the multi-sport event.



Iran, Russia, Turkey agree on dialogue between Damascus, opposition groups

International Desk

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said on Saturday that the parties to the Astana format talks agreed on the initiation of "political dialogue between the Syrian government and the legitimate opposition groups" to resolve the Arab country's new crisis.

Araghchi made the remarks after a meeting with his Turkish and Russian counterparts in Qatar's capital as they discussed a solution to the crisis in Syria, where the situation has changed dramatically in recent days after rapid gains by foreign-backed militants who oppose the Syrian government.

The three countries have been involved in the so-called Astana format talks seeking a political settlement in Syria since 2017.

Araghchi said the three countries agreed that, "The conflicts should end immediately and the territorial integrity and national sovereignty of Syria must be respected."

The Iranian foreign minister said Iran and Russia will consult with the Syrian

government on talks with opposition groups.

Araghchi said during a joint press conference with his Iraqi and Syrian counterparts in Baghdad on Friday that the offensive in Syria poses a "threat" to the whole Middle East.

Threat to region

"This threat will not be limited to Syria and will affect Syria's neighboring countries such as Iraq, Jordan, and Turkey," he added.

On November 27, a coalition of insurgents led by the militant group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) launched an offensive from its stronghold in Idlib, seizing dozens of localities and the strategic cities of Aleppo and Hama, among others. Syrian militants claimed on Saturday they had started to surround Syria's government-held capital Damascus.

"Our forces have begun the final phase of encircling the capital, Damascus," said militant commander Hassan Abdel Ghani.

He had earlier said forces had taken control of the Saasaa penitentiary in the Da-



AFP

mascus countryside.

The Syrian Defense Ministry denied the army had fled positions.

"There is no truth to news claiming our armed forces, present in all areas of the Damascus countryside, have withdrawn," it said.

The UK-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) war monitor claimed that government forces were pulling out of towns as little as 10 kilometers (six miles) from Damascus.

'Terrorist' rebels

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said Syria must not be allowed to fall into the hands of "terrorist" rebels.

"It's inadmissible to allow the terrorist group to take control of the lands in violation of agreements which exist, starting with the UN Security Council Resolution 2254 which strongly reiterated sovereignty, territorial integrity and unity of the Syrian Arab Republic," Lavrov said at an event in Qatar, referring

to a 2015 UN resolution for a political settlement in Syria.

Qatar's Prime Minister Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al-Thani said Syrian President Bashar al-Assad had failed to engage with his people and address issues like the return of refugees during a period of calm in the country's war which began in 2011.

"Assad didn't seize these opportunities to start engaging and restoring his relationship with his people, and we didn't see any serious movement, whether it's on the return of the refugees or on reconciling with his own people."

Doha had given early support to the militants since the beginning of foreign-backed war in 2011. Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, whose country has also been supporting various militant groups since 2011, said Friday he "hoped the advance of the rebels would continue without incident," openly identifying their objective as Damascus.

Turkey shares a 900-kilometre (560-mile) border with Syria and hosting nearly three million Syrian refugees.

South Korean president escapes impeachment over martial law



South Korea's embattled President Yoon Suk Yeol avoided an opposition-led attempt to impeach him over his short-lived imposition of martial law, as most ruling party lawmakers boycotted a parliamentary vote Saturday to deny a two-thirds majority needed to suspend his presidential power.

Opposition parties could submit a new impeachment motion after a new parliamentary session opens next Wednesday, AP reported.

The scrapping of the motion is expected

to intensify public protests calling for Yoon's ouster and deepen political chaos in South Korea, with a survey suggesting a majority of South Koreans support the president's impeachment. Yoon's martial law declaration drew criticism from his own ruling conservative People Power Party, but it is also determined to oppose Yoon's impeachment apparently because it fears losing the presidency to liberals. After the motion fell through, members of the main liberal opposition Democratic Party rallied inside the National Assembly, chanting slogans calling for Yoon's impeachment or resignation. The party's floor leader, Park Chan-dae, said it will soon prepare for a new impeachment motion.

"We'll surely impeach Yoon Suk Yeol, who is the greatest risk to Republic of Korea," party leader Lee Jae-myung said. "We'll surely bring back this country to normal before Christmas Day or year's end."

On Saturday, tens of thousands of people densely packed several blocks of roads leading up to the National Assembly, waving banners, shouting slogans and dancing. Protesters also gathered in front of PPP's headquarters near the Assembly, angrily shouting for its lawmakers to vote to impeach Yoon.

Earlier Saturday, Yoon issued a public apology over the martial law decree, saying he won't shirk legal or political responsibility for the declaration and promising not to make another attempt to impose martial law.

Since taking office in 2022, Yoon has struggled to push his agenda through an opposition-controlled parliament and grappled with low approval ratings amid scandals involving himself and his wife. In his martial law announcement on Tuesday night, Yoon called parliament a "den of criminals" bogging down state affairs and vowed to eliminate "shameless North Korea followers and anti-state forces."

Iran hits back at 'deceptive' remarks by British FM

Iran rejected "deceptive and divisive" remarks by British Foreign Secretary David Lammy against the Islamic Republic, saying the UK tops the list of countries stoking insecurity in the world.

Addressing a NATO meeting in Brussels on Wednesday, Lammy said the world was "living in dangerous times", but then pointed the finger at Iran for the tremendous aggression that West Asia is going through, Press TV reported.

"Whilst we acknowledge the British foreign secretary's remarks that the world is currently in a fairly dangerous period and is plagued with wars, the question is which actors have a fundamental role in the creation of this situation," Director General of the Western Europe Department at the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs Majid Nili Ahmadabadi stated late Friday.

"Without a doubt, Britain, with its long history of interfering in the internal affairs of other countries and illegal inter-

ference in the West Asian region, especially through arming and financing the only occupation and apartheid regime in the world (Israel), is at the top of the list of those accused of insecurity and instability in the world," he added.

Nili Ahmadabadi categorically refuted Lammy's accusation of Iran's involvement in the military conflict between Russia and Ukraine, urging Britain to stop shifting blame onto others for the existing crises in Europe.

He said the current problems in Europe are the result of the "arrogant and expansionist policies of Britain and some of its allies" toward other countries, advising British authorities to adopt a "realistic approach and play a constructive and helpful role in international developments."

He also dismissed the British foreign secretary's claims about Iran's civilian nuclear program and its missile capabilities, terming them as baseless and interventionist.

Syria's future and...

Ankara, which has supported armed opposition groups in recent years, can now expand its influence in northern Syria, leveraging their recent successes in capturing key provincial centers, particularly Aleppo, Syria's economic hub. This development will undoubtedly significantly impact the resistance front. Furthermore, the central government's loss of control over strategic northern regions could challenge the resistance axis's communication corridor from Iran to Lebanon and Iran's access to the Mediterranean, directly affecting our country's strategic interests in the region.

Another notable development is the evolution in the nature and approach of opposition forces, particularly HTS. This group, once known as al-Qaeda's Syrian branch, has shown significant changes in its approach in recent years. Their focus on local governance, efforts to gain minority support, and pragmatic approach to managing controlled territories indicate their evolution from a purely military organization to a political-military actor. This transformation could have important implications for Syria's future and how regional and international actors engage with this group.

In such circumstances, the Islamic Republic of Iran faces complex strategic

challenges in dealing intelligently with Syria's developments and preserving its strategic interests. Clearly, while maintaining support for the Assad government as a strategic ally and key link in the resistance axis appears necessary, field realities and existing limitations necessitate a review of regional strategy and adoption of a flexible approach. In this context, Iran faces several strategic options, each with its own implications and considerations. The first option is strengthening military support for the Assad government through increased resistance forces presence and military equipment provision. While this approach could help stabilize Syrian army defensive lines in the short term, given existing limitations, regional conflicts, and the Syrian army's weakness and low morale, it would impose significant costs on our country. Moreover, this approach could escalate regional tensions and increase the likelihood of direct confrontation with other actors.

The second option is pursuing mediation and supporting a political solution. This approach could include active participation in peace negotiations and efforts to preserve strategic interests through political agreements, as exemplified by the Doha meeting attended by foreign ministers of Iran, Turkey, and Russia. The advantage of this approach is reduced direct

costs and the possibility of preserving some interests within a comprehensive agreement. However, its success depends on cooperation from other regional and international actors and flexibility from all parties involved.

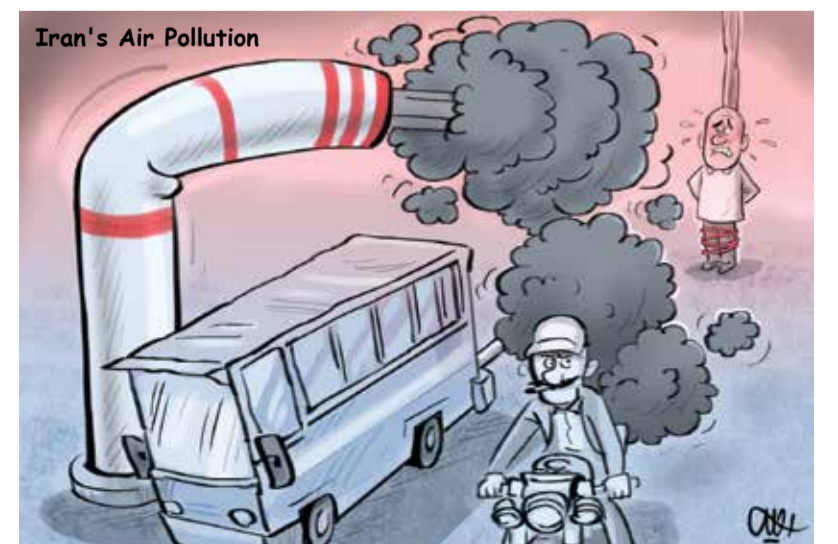
The third option is redefining regional strategy and adapting policies to new realities. This approach could include establishing connections with new actors, including moderate opposition groups, and focusing on preserving vital interests under new conditions. Although some public opinion might view this approach as a retreat from previous positions, it could help preserve our country's interests and the resistance front while preventing further losses in the current situation.

Ultimately, recent developments in Syria mark a turning point in the crisis, requiring tactful and appropriate responses from involved actors. The Islamic Republic of Iran, as a key regional player, must maintain vigilance regarding field developments while adopting a realistic and flexible approach. This approach should be based on accurate understanding of existing realities, cost-benefit analysis of various options, and efforts to preserve vital interests within the framework of available capabilities and limitations. Recent experiences show that regional

stability is more fragile than previously thought, and no situation, even apparently stable agreements, can guarantee long-term interests. In such conditions, strategic flexibility and ability to adapt to changing circumstances are key to maintaining and securing national inter-

ests. This requires increasing domestic solidarity, continuous review of past ineffective or failed policies, moving beyond outdated figures and approaches, strengthening diplomatic capabilities, and maintaining readiness for various scenarios.

Mohammad Ali Rajabi
Cartoonist



On Student Day

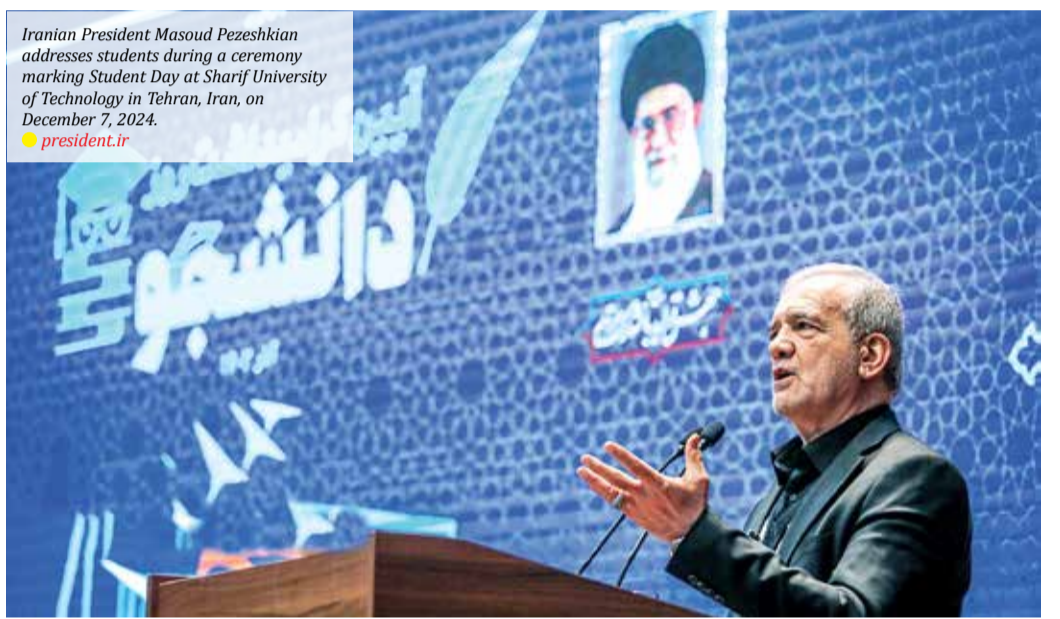
Pezeshkian urges youth to stay, make Iran strong, influential

Social Desk

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian said the future is not something to be handed over but rather constructed. The president added, "The future is not something that we will hand over to you; it is something that you will build. While leaving is an option, staying and making Iran a strong and influential country is the path to true progress." During a ceremony marking Student Day on December 7, Pezeshkian focused on the current problems facing the country, their causes, and potential solutions, emphasizing the role of the youth in building a better future, president.ir reported. He emphasized the need for

time, planning, and correct implementation to resolve these issues, adding, "We need the assistance of the people, including university students, to address these problems." Pezeshkian also highlighted the importance of the National Vision Document announced by the Leader of the Islamic Revolution, Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei. "According to this document, Iran will become a developed country with a leading position in science, economy, and technology, serving as an inspiration in the region." Pezeshkian also addressed the need for a structured and balanced society. "One of the important characteristics of developed societies is the well-structured and balanced

in terms of social classes," he noted. The president expressed his commitment to enhancing the government's relationship with academia. "We are working to create this structure and will increase our engagement with universities," he said. "I believe that our universities should evolve from Generation 2 to Generations 3 and 4, solving societal problems. Today, Generation 4 universities are embedded in society, solving its issues, and Generation 5 universities are planning for the next 100 years." Speaking about the importance of unity and collaboration, he said, "We must work together, trust each other and respect scholars. We must help each other to achieve our goal."



Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian addresses students during a ceremony marking Student Day at Sharif University of Technology in Tehran, Iran, on December 7, 2024. president.ir

Iran FM spox: China to marvel at 'Glory of Ancient Persia' exhibition



Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman announced the opening of 'Glory of Ancient Persia' exhibition in its third destination in China, saying the exhibition is expected to captivate a wide audience. "The Glory of Ancient Persia exhibition has been inaugurated in Urumqi, the capital of the Xinjiang Autonomous Region of China," Esmail Baghaei wrote on his page on the social media platform

X on Saturday, Press TV reported. "Simultaneously, an article by the Minister of Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts, and Tourism on revitalizing the ancient ties between Iran and China through enhanced cultural and tourism exchanges was published in the People's Daily in China," he said. Baghaei added that the exhibition received significant attention in Beijing and Shanghai, garnering

extensive media coverage and captivating millions of online viewers. Baghaei further noted that with the abundant cultural and historical commonalities between China and Iran, the exhibition is expected to leave a profound impression. Organized by Iran's Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts in cooperation with the Chinese government, the exhibition showcases over 280 artifacts spanning more than 3,000 years of Persian history. The collection includes treasures from prominent archaeological sites across Iran, such as the National Museum of Iran, the Persepolis Museum, and regional museums in Rasht and Gorgan. The event aims to introduce the magnificence of Persian civilization to Chinese audiences and promote tourism to Iran.

Iranian singer Fekri invited to perform at Mariinsky Opera for third time

Arts & Culture Desk

Reza Fekri, an Iranian opera singer, was invited to perform at the Mariinsky Opera in St. Petersburg, Russia, for the third time. According to ILNA, the Mariinsky Opera, under the direction of Russian conductor Valery Gergiev and with the regular guest conductor Ali Rahbari, an internationally renowned Iranian conductor, has once again extended an invitation to Fekri to perform as a tenor soloist. Fekri, who resides in Croatia, will perform the piece 'Thus Spoke Zarathustra' composed and conducted by Ali Rahbari, accompanied by the Mariinsky Theatre Sympho-

ny Orchestra on January 24, 2025. Fekri's previous performances of 'Thus Spoke Zarathustra' with the Mariinsky Theatre Symphony Orchestra were highly successful, taking place in December 2022 and March 2024. The piece was first performed and recorded in March 2022 in Zagreb, Croatia, with the Zagreb Philharmonic Orchestra, conducted by Ali Rahbari and featuring Fekri. In addition to his collaborations with the Mariinsky Opera, Fekri has also performed in notable concerts such as 'Carmina Burana' and 'Alamdari' with the Tehran Symphony Orchestra. He has also released the piece

'Mersad' through Naxos Records and recorded the role of Xerxes in the opera 'The Tragedy of the Iranians' and the role of Isaac in the opera 'Abraham.' His significant collaborations include performances with the Mariinsky Theatre Symphony Orchestra, the Helikon Opera in Moscow, the Zagreb Philharmonic Orchestra, the Croatian National Opera, the Antalya Symphony Orchestra, and the Tehran Symphony Orchestra. The Mariinsky Opera, with its 450 musicians, 250 choir singers, two opera halls, and several concert halls, is one of the largest and most prestigious opera houses in the world.

Iran, Pakistan agree on joint television, media cooperation

Arts & Culture Desk

The Cultural House of Iran and the Pakistan Media Club (PMC) agreed to collaborate on various cultural initiatives, particularly in the media and film industries. This agreement was reached during a visit by Saeid Talebi Nia, the cultural attaché and head of the Cultural House of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Karachi, to the PMC. During the meeting, television producer Agha Sherazi, Pakistan Media Club director Naeem Tahir, general secretary, and media manager Lubna, along with other PMC officials, were present. Sherazi discussed ways to enhance relations between Pakistani and Iranian media networks and television channels, ISNA reported. He proposed, "If we can send a number of Pakistani journalists and producers to Iran for short-term classes, it would be highly beneficial." Sherazi added, "We welcome hosting media professionals from Iran and are keen to strengthen media relations between Iran and Pakistan." He also highlighted the popularity of Iranian films and series among Pakistani artists, particularly the series 'Prophet Joseph (PBUH)', which has received significant acclaim. "If Iranian films and series are made available to Pakistani networks, it

would greatly enhance cultural ties," he said. Another point raised was the importance of language in fostering relations. "We can organize Persian language classes for television presenters, journalists, and media personalities, which would help in making Persian more prevalent in Pakistan," Sherazi noted. The session continued with discussions on the pivotal role of media in shaping cultural narratives and enhancing mutual understanding between Pakistan and Iran. The PMC team expressed admiration for Iran's media and film industry, particularly the work of influential directors like Majid Majidi and

Farajollah Salahshoor. They highlighted the artistic depth and commitment to storytelling that characterizes Iranian cinema and expressed a desire to draw inspiration from these qualities to improve their own media productions. The team also emphasized their interest in collaborating on projects that showcase shared narratives between Pakistan and Iran. They discussed the potential for joint production of films and television series that resonate with audiences in both countries. Talebi Nia stated, "The Islamic Republic of Iran welcomes any media cooperation with corresponding institutions in Pakistan."

He added, "Given the profound impact of media in expanding comprehensive relations between the two countries, it is essential for Pakistani media professionals to make concerted efforts to introduce the cultural, artistic, scientific, academic, commercial, and political capacities between the two nations."

