

Iran short of breath

Offices, schools shut due to air pollution

Social Desk

The worsening air pollution in Tehran and other cities prompted authorities to announce that schools, universities, and public offices would be closed today and Thursday, December 12. This decision follows previous closures of elementary schools and kindergartens over the weekend, as air quality in the capital continues to deteriorate. The Air Quality Index (AQI) in Tehran reached 165, a level considered unhealthy for all individuals. "Due to the persistence of air pollution, all educational levels of schools, universities, administrative offices, and both national and provincial government

bodies, as well as public and non-governmental institutions, except for banks, essential services, and health centers, will be closed in Tehran, excluding the cities of Damavand and Firuzkuh, on December 11 and 12," according to the Deputy Coordinator for Urban Affairs of Tehran Province. Online schooling will continue during the closure. The air quality in Tehran remains critically poor, classified as unhealthy for all individuals. Visibility was reported to be low, prompting authorities to warn vulnerable groups, including the elderly, sick, and children, to take extra precautions. Traffic restrictions are being tightened to curb pollution.

Firooz Kashir, Social Deputy of Tehran's Traffic Police, announced a 48-hour ban on diesel trucks in the capital. An emergency meeting of the Emergency Air Pollution Committee was convened to address the situation and decide on the necessary closures. The committee's decision to close educational and administrative institutions is based on the orange alert issued by the Meteorological Organization, which warns of a sustained decline in air quality and rising air pollutants in several Iranian cities, including Isfahan, Arak, Tabriz, Tehran, Urmia, Qazvin, Karaj, and Qom. If left unchecked, pollution levels

could reach dangerous thresholds in high-traffic areas. The Governorate confirmed that banks and the stock market will remain operational during the closures. Alireza Raisi, Deputy Health Minister, criticized the implementation of the "Clean Air" law approved in 2017, which assigns 174 tasks to 23 entities, with 11 responsible for enforcement. "It is expected that once a law is passed, it will be implemented correctly," Raisi stated. He emphasized the critical impact of air pollution, attributing approximately 30,000 to 35,000 deaths per year to air pollution, with around 7,000 of those occurring in Tehran. The health



costs associated with air pollution in central provinces are estimated at over \$2.5 million in some regions.

Russian cruise ships set to enter Iran



Social Desk

The Deputy Minister of Roads and Urban Development held several meetings with Russian officials to facilitate the entry of large Russian cruise ships into Anzali. Ali Akbar Safaei stated, "The necessary coordination has been completed, and we are hopeful to welcome cruise ships as soon as possible. The presence of these cruise ships will significantly enhance maritime tourism for both Iranian citizens and foreign tourists." Iran announced the inauguration of a new maritime route connecting the ports of Anzali, Caspian, and Chamkhaleh in the Gilan province. The initiative, spearheaded by the Ports and Maritime Organization and the Gilan Port and Maritime Administration, is set to enhance regional connectivity and attract both domestic and international tourists, ISNA wrote.

Ali Akbar Safaei, who is also the CEO of the Ports and Maritime Organization, stated, "Following the directives of the Minister of Roads and Urban Development, we are committed to developing maritime tourism and passenger travel in the Gilan province, particularly in Anzali. Preparations are underway to launch these routes, and we are optimistic about their timely inauguration." He stated that the necessary coordination has been completed and expressed hope that cruise ships will be welcomed to the port as soon as possible. The minister added that the arrival of these ships could facilitate maritime tourism for both domestic and international visitors. Safaei further expressed his optimism, saying, "With proper planning and feasibility studies, we aim to initiate maritime tourism and travel on the Caspian Sea. The focus is on establishing routes between Anzali, Caspian, and Cham-

khaleh, which will be the first phase of our broader plans." Hossein Younesi, the Director-General of the Gilan Ports and Maritime Administration, emphasized the importance of maritime development in line with the government's overall policies. Regarding the specifics of maritime tourism, Younesi explained, "Maritime tourism involves short cruises where vessels take passengers on a brief journey in the sea and return to the dock. These activities are already underway in Anzali. However, we also plan to introduce passenger routes, such as the one from Anzali to Caspian, which is about 10 miles apart. These routes will facilitate travel to free trade zones and other tourist destinations." Younesi also addressed the current lack of suitable vessels for passenger transport, stating, "The vessels currently used for maritime tourism, with a capacity of 40 to 50 passengers, can be utilized for these routes. Plus,

we are negotiating with shipbuilders to purchase larger vessels with a capacity of 80 passengers, which will be integrated into our network." He also mentioned ongoing negotiations with Russia to establish a passenger route from Anzali to Astrakhan, Russia, and other ports in the region. "The Russians have expressed readiness to send cruise ships to Iran, and we are introducing a local shipping company to facilitate this process," Younesi said. When asked about the operational timeline for the Anzali-Astrakhan route, Younesi explained, "The launch of this route depends on several factors, including the availability of a suitable cruise ship with a capacity of 300 passengers. Once this is secured, we can proceed with detailed planning. Additionally, diplomatic negotiations with neighboring countries are necessary to ensure that passengers can easily obtain visas for their travel."

Three Iranian films to be screened at Chennai festival

Three films from the Farabi Cinema Foundation will be showcased at the 22nd Chennai International Film Festival in India. This year's festival will feature 'Sima's Unfinished Narration,' directed by Alireza Samadi and produced by Majid Reza Bala, in the competitive section. Meanwhile, 'Hook,' directed by Hossein Rigi and produced by Ali Ashtiani Pour, along with 'Captain,' directed by Mohammad Hamzeh and produced by Saber Emami, will be

part of the World Cinema section, IRNA reported. Last year, the Farabi Cinema Foundation also participated in the festival with 'Captain' and 'Leather Jacket.' Due to the positive reception that 'Captain' received, the film has made a return to this year's selection. Notably, 'Sima's Unfinished Narration' will serve as the opening film for the event. The 22nd Chennai International Film Festival is scheduled to run from December 12 to December 19.

Iran, Serbia seek to strengthen scientific, medical cooperation

Social Desk

Iran's Health Minister Mohammad Reza Zafarghandi emphasized the country's significant advancements in cell therapy and organ transplantation, advocating for enhanced scientific and academic collaboration with Serbia during a meeting with Serbian Ambassador to Tehran, Damir Kovacevic. The meeting, held on Tuesday, was seen by Zafarghandi as an invaluable opportunity to broaden cooperative efforts across various sectors, particularly in health, medicine, and medical sciences, IRNA wrote. Zafarghandi underscored the necessity of introducing each country's health systems

and medical education capabilities to foster mutual opportunities for capability exchange. "We are working to finalize a memorandum of understanding for joint health cooperation between Iran and Serbia as soon as possible," he stated. Ambassador Kovacevic acknowledged the positive and constructive high-level political discussions between the two nations and reiterated the intent to elevate cooperation in health and medical education to new heights. He highlighted the contents of the forthcoming MoU, which encompasses a wide array of topics, including the exchange of expertise and information, sending specialists, transferring medical equipment, sharing

technological advancements, developing pharmaceuticals, enhancing health tourism, providing long-term care for patients, conducting joint research, and organizing scientific congresses. The ambassador expressed admiration for Iran's notable medical progress, particularly in stem cell research, stating that these achievements present a significant opportunity for collaborative efforts between Serbia and the Islamic Republic. Kovacevic concluded by affirming Serbia's readiness to expand health-related ties with Iran, emphasizing the mutual benefits that could arise from deepening cooperation in the medical field.

Resistance costs less...

This time, the situation was different, and the Syrians paid no attention to Iran's advice. Naturally, Iran cannot and does not wish to engage directly in a situation where its interests are not being met. Thus, it can be said that the Syrian regime's disregard for Iran's demands was one of the reasons for the fall of the Assad regime. During recent trips by Iranian officials, including Ali Larijani's

visit to Syria, it became apparent that Assad had fallen for the promises of others—promises of support for him if he were to abandon cooperation with Iran. At first glance, the developments leading to the regime change in Syria seem to have unfolded quickly, but the lack of resistance from the army indicates that these developments were the result of long-term planning. Moreover, it is clear that Assad refused to hear the demands

of his own people, who were under economic and livelihood pressure. Consequently, the people did not resist and looked satisfied with the ouster of the Assad government. However, in my view, the people were also deceived. In the northern regions of Syria, under Turkish and some Arab countries' influence, better conditions were provided to the population. The Syrians under Assad's rule compared their situation with these

regions and were thus content with the regime change. In summary, the fall of the Assad regime was due to Assad's own deception, the people's frustration with the current situation, the disregard of Iran's advice and warnings, and the long-term planning and conspiracies by external forces. Regarding the future of Syria and Iran's relations with the country, we must wait and see how events unfold. Afghanistan

serves as a good example. Today, Iran does not have major issues with the Afghan government, but Afghanistan is not considered a close ally of Iran. Our relationship with the current Afghan government is certainly not comparable to our very close ties with Iraq. Some believe Iran has incurred significant costs and suffered losses due to the regime change in Syria. However, However, it should not be assumed that the

costs we have borne for resistance are greater than those we would pay for any compromise. Iran's measures over the years in the war against ISIS and terrorist groups in Syria and Iraq have prevented their influence from spreading to our country and other regions, keeping our enemies at bay. In the case of today's development in Syria, if we wait a little longer, it will become clear that Iran will not be a loser in this scenario either.