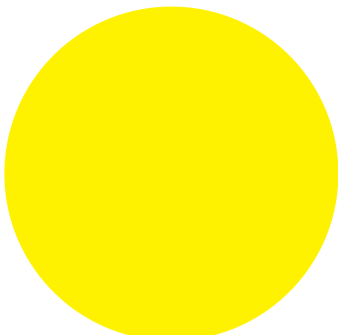


Yalda Night, timeless celebration of 'togetherness', reflection of cultural heritage: Minister



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Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian (R) addresses the 11th summit of the leaders of the D-8 Organization for Economic Cooperation in the Egyptian capital, Cairo, on December 19, 2024. [president.ir](#)



## Pezeshkian: New bonds needed to advance D-8 shared interests

### D-8 can help Iran offset sanctions



By Ara Shaverdian  
Iranian lawmaker

#### OPINION EXCLUSIVE

The 11th summit of the D-8 Organization for Economic Cooperation took place in Egypt where leaders and high-ranking officials from the eight Muslim-majority countries—Bangladesh, Egypt, Indonesia, Malaysia, Nigeria, Pakistan, Turkey, and the Islamic Republic of Iran—came together. This group is significant from various perspectives, especially economically. Since its formation in 1997, the D-8, with a population of 1.4 billion, represents about 60% of the world's Muslim population and collectively accounts for 15% of the global population. These figures highlight the vast potential of the D-8 in various fields. There are diverse interactions among D-8 members; for instance, Iran is both an economic rival and partner with countries like Turkey and Egypt, depending on the context. The D-8 includes countries from East and West Asia and North Africa, each at different stages of growth and development and excelling in various sectors.

Some of Iran's neighboring countries in this group are now prominent as transit and tourist hubs. Given that Iran also has huge potential in tourism and transit, it can benefit greatly by working with other members. Countries like Indonesia in Southeast Asia have shown successful economic performance in recent years and Iran can learn from their experiences. The summit also provides a good opportunity to attract foreign investment from Muslim countries to Iran, particularly in developing the country's infrastructure, including airports, ports, railways, and roads. Conversely, other D-8 members can benefit from Iran's natural resources and technical expertise as Iran is ready to offer its technical, engineering, and specialized services. Membership in regional and international groups has always been beneficial. Over the past few years, Iran has joined various groups such as BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. The parliament is also working with the government to facilitate Iran's accession to other groups. For instance, the Parliaments' Economic Committee has approved Iran's observer status in the Eurasian Economic Union. [Page 8 >](#)



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## Efficient consumption leads to saving 50 mcm of gas: **NIGC**

The managing director of the National Iranian Gas Company (NIGC) announced that 95% of the country's population uses natural gas, emphasizing that optimizing gas consumption could lead to saving of 50 million cubic meters. Speaking on Friday, Saeid Tavakoli noted that Iran possesses huge gas reserves but consumes gas at a rate 3.3 times the global average due to inefficient usage," Tavakoli said. Currently, Iran operates 20 natural gas processing plants, about 40,000 kilometers of high-pressure pipelines, 94 pressure-boosting stations, and 459,000 kilometers of urban gas networks, according to Tavakoli. He added that 860 mcm of gas are currently injected into the national grid daily. During winter, around 80% of this supply is consumed by households, commercial establishments, and small industries due to higher seasonal demand. "During the cold season, with significant temperature drops, the NIGC is working to adjust supply by shifting the fuels used by manufacturing and power plant industries to liquid fuels to stabilize the network," he explained. Tavakoli emphasized that curbing excessive consumption requires adhering to consumption patterns. He pointed out that a comfortable room temperature is between 18 and 22 degrees Celsius, and wearing warmer clothing at home can help reduce gas use. "Expert studies show that lowering household temperatures by just one degree Celsius reduces gas consumption by 6%," the NIGC head stated. Referring to a campaign launched by the president to reduce room temperatures by two degrees, Tavakoli said such an initiative could save 50 million cubic meters of gas, adding that this amount is equivalent to the production of two phases of the South Pars Gas Field and meets the needs of three provinces. He further noted that, based on statistics, residential, commercial, and small industrial gas consumption in northwestern Ardebil Province amounts to 11 million cubic meters daily. Despite the growing demand, Tavakoli stressed that the NIGC's efforts have ensured uninterrupted gas supply across the country, even in the most remote regions.

# SCO official in Iran: China ready to invest in combined-cycle power plants in Khuzestan

### Economy Desk

The executive director of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)'s Iran Office announced that Chinese economic agents are ready to invest in constructing combined-cycle power stations in the southwestern Iranian province of Khuzestan. This initiative aims to address the country's severe energy shortages while leveraging the province's vast oil and gas reserves, contributing to sustainable energy supply and economic development in the region, IRNA reported. On Thursday, Zhao Bin He, during a meeting with Mohammadreza Maavizadeh, the governor-general of Khuzestan and a number of senior officials in Ahvaz, stated, "We are here to pay our respect to the province's leadership and present the China-Iran Economic and Trade Ex-

change Center's programs under the SCO framework, focusing on strengthening bilateral ties between Iran and China, especially in Khuzestan." He emphasized the deep historical ties between Iran and China, rooted in mutual respect, economic cooperation, cultural exchange, and long-standing partnerships. Zhao noted the growing need for stronger collaboration between the two countries amid the Middle East's complex challenges and significant transformations. "Khuzestan, with its strategic location in southwestern Iran and substantial economic potential, plays a key role in advancing Iran-China relations. Its access to the Persian Gulf and proximity to the strong economies of the southern Persian Gulf states provide incompatible opportunities for

developing port infrastructure and maritime transport." He expressed China's readiness to actively participate in expanding Khuzestan's infrastructure, particularly in port development. The official also highlighted opportunities for collaboration in energy, industry, and agriculture. Furthermore, Zhao announced China's willingness to assist in developing the province's sports infrastructure as he praised Iran's remarkable scientific, economic, and political progress despite sanctions, attributing these achievements to the determination and capabilities of its people. To strengthen ties, he proposed a sister-state partnership between Khuzestan and Shandong Province of China, a region renowned for its economic and industrial advance-



ments, noting, "Such a partnership could be instrumental in Khuzestan's growth and development." Joint efforts in technology transfer and experience-sharing, as Zhao explained, could enhance

economic progress and bolster defense capabilities in both provinces. "We believe that by harnessing existing capacities and fostering close cooperation between our two countries, we can achieve

a brighter and more fruitful future," Zhao said, affirming the China-Iran Economic and Trade Exchange Center's commitment to comprehensive and enduring cooperation with Khuzestan.

## CBI says inflation down to lowest in four years



Figures released by the Central Bank of Iran (CBI) showed the country has managed to bring down inflation to its lowest since 2020 when prices started to rise because of US sanctions and the economic impacts of the coronavirus pandemic. CBI figures covered by the IRIB News showed that Iran's annual inflation rate had dropped to 37.3% in the calendar month to November 20. The CBI said the figure was the lowest reported in four years, Press TV reported.

It said the Consumer Price Index (CPI), measured on a point-to-point scale, had increased 35.3% in November this year compared to November 2023. Monthly inflation in the calendar month to late November was 3%, up 0.5% from the previous month, it said. CBI chief Mohammad Reza Farzin used the data to defend the country's economic records in recent months, saying that a closer look at the Producer Price

Index (PPI) in November showed that the government's anti-inflation policies were on the right track. Farzin, who was re-appointed to his post after an administration change in mid-summer, said that the average PPI in November was 27.6%, the lowest reported since February 2019. He said point-to-point PPI was 27.6% in November while monthly PPI, which he said is a gauge of inflation, was 2.4% in the same month. Iran has been grappling with high but controlled levels of inflation since 2020, a year after the US toughened its sanctions on Iranian oil exports and when the country was starting to feel the economic impacts of the global spread of the coronavirus. Iran's annual inflation rose to nearly 49.1% in May 2023, just shy of an all-time record reported some three decades ago.

## Government prioritizes realization of blue economy: **Minister**

### Economy Desk

The Minister of Industry, Mine, and Trade highlighted blue economy initiatives as a top priority for the government, stating that the current administration plans to operationalize a sea-based economy as well as activating a fund to guarantee marine works. On Thursday, during a visit to Lamerd in southern Fars Province, Mohammad Atabak visited industrial projects in the Lamerd Special Economic Zone, and held a meeting on investment and infrastructure progress, ISNA reported. The Lamerd Special Economic Zone has significant advantages compared to other regions due to its competitive features, available facilities, investment infrastructure, and proximity to the sea, the minister said at the meeting. A designated representative of the president has been appointed in industrial zones, he noted, adding that the Lamerd Special Economic Zone, must expand in line with blue economy plans. The minister acknowledged shortcomings in the development stage of Lamerd's infrastructure and emphasized the need to address energy deficits. Atabak stressed the importance of advancing aluminum and copper



industries as promising economic metals. "An aluminum smelting factory cannot operate without a power plant. We demand IMIDRO, in coordination with the Ministry of Defense and Ghadir Investment Company, to expedite the construction of a power plant," he said. The minister further noted the necessity of constructing a railroad to connect the Lamerd and Parsian special zones in Hormozgan Province, southern Iran. "If this project is realized, investor costs will decrease. Therefore, efforts should be made to accelerate its implementation and connect it to the national railway network," Atabak said. The minister also announced plans to discuss the acceleration of a seawater transportation pipeline to Fars Province, with Lamerd as its initial destination, in Iran's Economic Council.

## US imposes sanctions on companies over Iran's oil trade

In the final days of President Joe Biden's government, US Department of State, by intensifying its sanctions against the Islamic Republic of Iran, imposed sanctions on Iran's Ghezel Hesar Prison and institutions due to what was claimed to be their connection with Iran's oil trade.

The Department of State has imposed fresh sanctions on entities that are engaged in transporting Iranian oil and alleged violations of human rights, IRNA reported. The department levied bans on four entities that were said to have transported Iranian oil, and identified six ves-

sels as their blocked property. US Department of State announced in a statement that Washington is taking action to stem the flow of revenue that Iran uses to "support military groups abroad." According to the statement, Iran's Ghezel Hesar Prison has been deter-

mined by the Secretary of State to be subject to section 106 of CAATSA. Accordingly, Ghezel Hesar Prison is being listed by the Department of State and designated by the Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) pursuant to section 106 of CAATSA.



# Enchanting Polond Desert; nature’s playground in Ferdows



**Iranica Desk** *The Polond Desert, also known as the Mozaffari Protected Area, stands out as one of the prominent tourist attractions in South Khorasan Province, located in Ferdows. This region’s unique desert and mountainous topography creates optimal conditions for various wildlife species, including the Iranian zebra. Spanning an impressive 92,808 hectares, the Polond Desert is characterized by the convergence of desert and wasteland with highlands and mountains, resulting in a breathtaking landscape. Visitors can find sandy hills, salt flats, low-lying salt pans, and desert regions interspersed with mountainous terrains, including sandy hills that resemble a cheetah’s tail and striking sand dunes.*



One notable feature of the desert is the Dom Yuz Dune (literally meaning “cheetah’s tail”), which resembles a cheetah resting in the heart of the desert, its head nestled among the mountains. To stabilize this dune, earthen barriers have been constructed at its eastern end. Nearby, areas with low and clayey surfaces are home to ancient water reservoirs that once served weary travelers and caravans in need of refreshment. Another fascinating natural sight in the Polond Desert is Sang Sorakh (literally meaning Hollow Rock). This geological phenomenon features a 20-meter diameter hole created by water erosion in limestone, providing stunning views from above in the heart of the desert. Sang Sorakh is located along the route to the Polond Desert and the Dom Yuz Dune, approximately 500 meters from the old Ibrahimabad road leading to Kajeh village and Chahe Now. Near Sang Sorakh, a water cave can also be found, offering a unique caving experience in the desert. The desert marks the end of the earth, the boundary of life. In the Polond Desert, as in every

corner of the world, life thrives. The presence of various animal species, including the Arabian Oryx and the Iranian zebra, makes Polond a prime location for wildlife observation. The region’s plant species include sand sagebrush, tamarisk, locust, thornbush, wild almond, and wild barberry. The diversity of animal species in the area is remarkable, featuring mouflon, ibex, wolves, gazelles, and over 33 species of reptiles. Tourists who choose Polond as their travel destination can create unforgettable memories in this beautiful desert through a variety of activities, outlined below: **Wildlife watching:** The unique connection between the desert and mountains in Polond, combined with the presence of a protected area home to rare wildlife species, makes Polond Desert an important site for wildlife observation and bird-watching enthusiasts. **Camel riding:** With both wild and domestic camels bred in the region, camel riding is a popular activity that allows visitors to explore the desert in a traditional manner. **Desert night sky:** The clear,



pristine night sky of the desert provides an ideal setting for stargazing. Spending the night in the desert allows you to fully appreciate its stunning celestial beauty. **Hiking:** One of the most enjoyable activities in the desert is walking on the soft, warm sands and exploring the captivating sand dunes. **Off-roading, quad biking, safari, and zip lining:** These exhilarating activities are also popular in the Polond Desert and attract many adventure enthusiasts. **Best time to visit:** The ideal time for desert exploration and

adventures is during autumn, winter, and early spring. We recommend visiting the Polond Desert during these seasons, particularly in autumn and spring. Near the Polond Desert lies a village of the same name, featuring eco-lodges designed with traditional desert architecture. After a day of remarkable desert exploration, you can spend the night in one of these lodges or set up camp under the stars. This experience allows you to enjoy the luminous skies of the desert while immersing yourself in its tranquility and silence.

## Historical significance of unique qanat of Dezful

**Iranica Desk** Did you know that our ancestors devised various solutions to secure water in Iran that has always faced scarcity? The construction of qanats was one such solution, enabling them to transport groundwater from kilometers away to their desired locations through precise engineering, maximizing the use of available resources. Now, we are planning to visit Dezful, a city in Khuzestan Province, which is home to one of these qanats. However, it’s important to note that in Dezful, qanats have a different name and somewhat different characteristics, IRNA wrote. Dezful, known as the “Brick City” of Iran for its authentic architecture and layout, is renowned as the land of resistance. If you travel to Dezful, you won’t regret your choice; you will create wonderful memories while exploring various attractions, such as the watermills and the Shevi Waterfall. Another intriguing site to explore in Dezful is a historical qanat, also known as Qomesh Choqabafan. This unique tourist

attraction dates back approximately 400 years. In the local dialect of Dezful, the underground water tunnels



known as qanats and karizes are referred to as *qomesh*. Near this qanat, there is a mosque that was struck by missile fire during the Iran-Iraq War, resulting in the martyrdom of several individuals. The custodian of this mosque was a man named Sadeq-Qoli Choqabafan, whose name has now been given to this qanat. To see this qanat, you must pass through the entrance known as sarbataq. After descending 74 steps, you arrive at the Choqabafan

bafan Qomesh, where you are greeted by a stunning space that stands out amidst a rainbow of colors, enveloping you in a cool



and pleasant atmosphere. Throughout the qanat, you will find statues of men and women holding jars and water bags. If

you are a local of Dezful, these figures will evoke memories of the past. In various corners of qomesh, you can see old items



such as bowls, plates, lamps, and jars, lovingly contributed by the townsfolk to preserve their ancestral heritage. You might be curious about how deep this qomesh is and how long it stretches. This historical qanat is one of the main qanat systems in the region, with a depth of over 50 meters below the surface. Its length, along with other qanats, extends to 8,100 meters, of which 300 meters have been excavated and are now accessible to tourists. This qanat

has provided drinking water and irrigation for 1,200 hectares of agricultural land in the area for the past 400 years. In the city of Dezful, aside from the Choqabafan Qomesh, there are nearly 14 other qanats that have lost their vitality due to urban development and the modern water supply network. These qanats continued to function until the 1950s and 1960s. In Khuzestan Province, the presence of surface waters like the Dez River allows for the possibility of digging qanats to transfer water from the river to the city for utilization. Our ancestors took advantage of this opportunity by excavating underground channels, which were essentially river qanats, to extract the necessary water, showcasing the intelligence and precise engineering of the people of that time. Although these qanats function similarly to plumbing systems in transferring water, they actually differ from one another. The distinction lies in that traditional qanats collect groundwater, while qomesh (as they are termed here) harvest surface waters from rivers.

## INTERVIEW

*In less than a month, the West Asia region has seen major developments. First, there was the cease-fire between Israel and Hezbollah after the former started massacring the Lebanese civilians and destroying their homes and infrastructure. Then, an Al-Qaeda affiliate led the Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) militant group in capturing city after city in Syria. Syrian president Bashar al-Assad soon left Damascus for Moscow, hanging a huge question mark over the future of his country. Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi sat with the Lebanese newspaper Al-Nahar to discuss these events and more in an interview, parts of which are translated from Arabic below.*

# Rapid fall of Assad 'not unexpected': FM

## Iran been in direct contact with Syrian opposition since Astana

**AL-NAHAR:** The Middle East has witnessed rapid and highly complex transformations since October 7, 2023, with the recent collapse of Bashar al-Assad's regime in Syria being a significant turning point. How did this rapid collapse of one of Iran's most important regional allies happen?

**ARAGHCHI:** Contrary to popular belief in the media, the rapid collapse of the Syrian regime was not unexpected for me. Understanding why the collapse happened so quickly, however, requires a study of three elements: the ground, the timing, and the context. These transformations, which appeared to be very rapid and surprising on the surface, had real underlying causes with a long history of at least 10-12 years. The continuous attacks by the Zionist regime on Syria's defensive infrastructure over the past 14 months were carried out with the aim of weakening the Syrian government. The presence of multiple external actors with overlapping and sometimes opposing objectives, all of whom shared the common goal of toppling the regime, ultimately led to the rapid events we witnessed. We had been assessing the regional dynamics, especially after October 7, and concluded that conditions for the Syrian government would become difficult and that governing Syria would become a fundamental challenge. We frankly conveyed these views to the Syrian prime minister in September this year. The issue was that plans were drawn outside the region. We had substantial and numerous intelligence about the movements and outgoing calls in the capitals of neighboring countries aimed at seeking support from Syria's neighbors. The US policy of threatening and enticing regional countries to get involved in a major conflict to save Israel is no secret, even to the media. It was expected that the decision-making authorities in the Syrian government would show flexibility in adopting diplomatic initiatives and proposals to bring the opposition into power, but this was not the case. The Islamic Republic of Iran, from the start of the Astana process, had direct communications with the Syrian opposition, conducting hours of talks with them, in addition to engaging in trilateral negotiations with Turkey and Russia as part of the process. We also presented the opposition's proposals alongside our consultations at the highest levels during the Astana process in Damascus.

**Iran's support was a key factor in the Syrian regime's survival in the face of the uprising against it in 2011. Why did Tehran not support the regime in repelling the Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS)?**

Our support for Syria was support for a country at the formal request of its established government and to prevent the spread of the brutal and horrific terrorism of ISIS. This intervention was also to preserve an important regional country from crimes, genocide, and ultimately falling into the chaos of a failed state, as well as to maintain regional security, which we consider integral to

our national security. Remember that at the time, Syria was facing a threat to its existence and territorial integrity from the surge of the terrorist group ISIS. Iran's red line, as I stated before my last trip to Syria, has always been the preservation of the political borders and national sovereignty of regional countries. We followed the same policy in the difficult conditions that our neighbor Turkey faced on July 15, 2016, when we stood against the coup that could have threatened Turkey's national sovereignty. I was the deputy foreign minister at the time and witnessed the lengthy phone calls between the officials of the two nations and numerous coordinative efforts between their military counterparts in the crisis room that was set up. Therefore, while we do not have the obligation to fight another country's war, we will stand by our neighbors in the face of national security threats from terrorist and separatist movements, upon our neighbors' request. This is a recognized principle under international law. Unlike the US, which has occupied a significant part of Syria without any authorization or legal basis, we have never gone there without the request and permission of the Syrian government.

country to advise another, but the level of our consultations with Syria had risen to a high level over the past years of economic, industrial, cultural, and political cooperation, so we spoke sincerely and compassionately but frankly as in all our consultations.

In that last meeting, my conversation had both public and private parts. In both parts, I was very clear and precise, explaining the situation and emphasizing that for Iran, the territorial integrity of Syria, the well-being of its people, and the stability of its government are a set of principles in regulating bilateral relations, and we will strongly support these three principles. We have always highlighted for the Syrian government, in all our consultations since 2011, the necessity of initiating political talks with those groups of the opposition that do not have terrorist affiliations.

**For talks with the ruling faction that holds power in Syria, which path do you prefer?**

We prefer the official and diplomatic channels, and this is contingent upon the necessary coordination and guarantees according to the Vienna Convention for the presence of a technical delegation from the Ministry of Foreign



People pick up metal and unexploded ordnance from the site of the previous evening's Israeli airstrike in Qamishli, in mainly Kurdish northeastern Syria, on December 10, 2024.

● DELIL SOULEIMAN/AFP

Our view of Syria is the same, although I must admit that there has been a significant misrepresentation of Iran's regional policy in the media, which is partly due to our own shortcomings and partly due to the wave of misinformation by global media that began with Iran's Islamic Revolution. The construction of an incorrect image of Iran has become a business that now affects the entire Islamic world, and many are exploited daily from a place of Islamophobia.

**A lot has been written about what happened during your last meeting with the Syrian president in Damascus a few days before the collapse. Can you tell us specifically what happened? Did you advise the Syrian President not to resist?**

Diplomatic decorum does not allow one

Affairs, along with accredited diplomats. The assessment of damages to our embassy and reporting to Syrian authorities, the preparation of the embassy in Damascus and the consulate in Aleppo by the technical team, and simultaneously, the initiation of political talks and evaluations by diplomats with officials in charge according to their usual duties will be carried out.

**What do you expect the new government in Syria to be like?**

Like any country, a government that is in line with the will of its people and encompasses all virtuous individuals and groups, capable of representing Syrian society. It should pave the way for national dialogue and provide a path for building a united and cohesive Syria within its political borders. I



Abbas Araghchi, then-nominee for Iran's Foreign Ministry, attends a parliament session in the capital Tehran, on August 17, 2024, as Iran's President defends his cabinet selection.

● AFP

believe a government that can protect borders and enforce sovereignty with social consent over Syrian territory has two essential internal components, and a government that creates good neighborliness while maintaining independence in managing international relations has two necessary external indicators that can save Syria.

**What is your recommendation for a successful path out of the crisis, the return of peace and stability to Syria, and the establishment of a national government?**

Several steps should be considered. First, at the domestic level, a national Syrian-Syrian dialogue should be initiated so that all diverse and different segments of the Syrian people feel involved. Alongside this, efforts to help refugees return should be prioritized. Second, at the international level, a conference should be held with the presence of all contributing countries to reconstruct Syria and repay its debt so that all countries that have claims on this country also contribute to its future. In this conference, installments for repaying debts should be determined, and aid should be committed and pledged. It is very important that the economic stabilization of Syria is given special and immediate attention. Another step necessary for the success of these two measures is to have the ac-

tive participation of the United Nations and the Security Council in creating an obligation for the liberation of the occupied Syrian territories and their return to the people of this country. The integrity of Syria must be respected.

**The Leader of Iran's Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei blamed an unnamed country for the change in the Assad regime. Was he referring to Turkey, and have there been any contacts between Tehran and Ankara regarding Syria's future?**

Consultations between the two neighboring countries, Iran and Turkey, on regional issues have been ongoing throughout the long history of relations. My trip from Damascus to Ankara also showed a clear approach, indicating a high level of continuous cooperation and consultation, even in times of differing views and interests. These consultations have been ongoing in recent years, especially as the Syrian crisis escalated, through the Astana process in trilateral or bilateral contacts between the two countries' officials.

We have shared our concerns about the impact of the Syrian transformations with our Turkish counterparts in numerous meetings, and we believe that no country in the region is independent of its neighbors; The security of the two neighbors is interdependent. Regarding the statement of the Leader, I draw your attention, not to a paraphrase of his words, but rather to his words, which emphasized that what is happening in Syria is an American-Israeli plan in which another country also has a clear role. The crucial point he explicitly stated was that "the main conspirator, the main planner, and the main command center are in America and the Zionist regime."

In my view, considering the context, your reference should be to the entire statement to understand its meaning. Otherwise, you risk misinterpreting the strategic view of Iran. It is important to note that the leader emphasized the word "main" three times. Therefore, from my perspective, the implication of your question is not based on the explicit content of his statement.

**I want to ask you a question about Lebanon that was repeatedly asked during the past war. Does Iran really see Hezbollah as something to negotiate over?**

I was a bit surprised by your question because you know Hezbollah better than I do. Hezbollah has always been an integral



The photo shows a massive explosion from an Israeli airstrike on a munitions depot in the Syrian port city of Tartus on December 16, 2024.  
● AP



Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi in a televised interview with the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) on November 4, 2024.  
● IRNA

part of Lebanese society and has played a role in shaping the historical transformations of Lebanon over the past three decades. Our view of Hezbollah has always been based on the principles that its martyred leader and his brothers-in-arms held. Today, with the new leadership at its helm, we maintain the same perspective. Hezbollah has always been, for us, an influential social force, a defensive military power, and a political movement that maintains national cohesion, stabilizes security, and is a defensive and supportive element. This is the fundamental basis of our view of Hezbollah.

Of course, Hezbollah has also played an essential role alongside other Muslim and Arab nations in defending Palestine and resisting the aggressive and boundless expansion of Israel, which is a shared cause with us. I believe that all regional nations are indebted to the resistance of Hezbollah and the Lebanese people. Iran stands alongside the collective forces of the anti-Zionist Resistance Front and certainly supports all Islamic and Arab forces that are part of this axis. Again, I emphasize that resistance against occupation and continuous expansion by Israel is not just a matter of belief but a reality; This resistance is also the most important tool for maintaining the security and stability of the entire region.

**The cease-fire agreement between Lebanon and Israel gives Israel the room to move and act. How do you evaluate this agreement?**

First, I believe Israel accepted this agreement because it lacked the resilience and ability to sustain direct conflict. For over a year, the Israeli army has been targeting defenseless and innocent men, women, children, the elderly, the sick, and the disabled in Gaza, making them the primary targets of the most severe attacks and perpetrating a real genocide, which has been a tragedy for the contemporary world. What has been the outcome of such barbarism? Dragging the war to Lebanon and now attacking Syria? What benefits have these attacks brought to Israel? Has it left behind anything other than widespread global hatred and the exposure of the true face of the Zionist entity as a genocidal and war-criminal regime? Its leaders are now wanted by the International Criminal Court and admonished by the International Court of Justice. This is a harsh and unabating price that the Jewish people have been paying as prisoners of Zionist ideology. Zionism, yesterday in the form of Golda Meir and Sharon and today in the guise of Netanyahu, has violated both the faith of Prophet Moses and the Jewish identity. My assessment is that when Netanyahu violates the May 31, 1974 agreement and UN Security Council Resolution to halt the conflict with Syria and shows no commitment to any principles, he will not be loyal to the cease-fire. From this perspective, we believe countries should stand united and strong based on their national capabilities and the strength of their youth against this destructive and demonic force.

**Will Iran help in the reconstruction of Lebanon?**

Iran has shown its support for Leba-

non's survival in the most difficult conditions. Iran demonstrated its resolve on the day of the fuel crisis in Lebanon, which placed the country's economy on the brink of collapse and disintegration. There is no doubt that in that specific case, secretary-general Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah played an effective role, but aside from that, the historical ties and cultural interactions between the people of Iran and Lebanon, despite geographical distance, have established an essential historical empathy. For eight centuries, the poet Saadi, who wrote in both Persian and Arabic, has vividly described the behavior of our people: "If you have no sympathy for human pain. The name of human you cannot retain."

**Iran has taken significant steps towards reconciliation with the Arab countries of the peninsula. There have also been efforts to normalize relations with Egypt. Will the new developments affect this?**

The impact of regional developments on the normalization of relations between countries in the region is obvious, especially since all countries in the region have had bitter experiences from transformations resulting from interventions by extra-regional powers. The collective security and destiny of the region's nations require governments to take essential steps in organizing sustainable relations.

grams the focus of their actions. Activities of terrorist and separatist groups, drug trafficking, illegal migration, and environmental problems are clear examples of issues that no country can solve alone without elevating the level of political interactions.

A destructive element in the region, the Zionist regime, has been openly and continuously, for over a year, pursuing a colonial eradication project and destroying all basic living infrastructure in Gaza. Now, with the start of recent developments in Syria, this regime has violated agreements and UN Security Council resolutions, extending its aggression towards Syria. Attacks on defensive structures, scientific resources, development resources, cities, ports, transportation lines, and the massacre of defenseless civilians over the past few days have become a pattern for the regime to shift the overflow of Syria's problems to neighboring and regional countries. The destructive impact of such actions on the collective destiny of the major and minor countries of West Asia and North Africa is undeniable. So, prudence dictates that regional countries enhance the level of cooperation and the depth of relations between governments and peoples.

**Some analysts believe that the current Iranian government has a reformist orientation. It is striving to**

from Afghanistan to Iraq and Syria, and all the countries of West Asia. This unity in domestic politics has extended to our diplomacy and the implementation of our foreign policy.

Therefore, in our peaceful and civilian nuclear program, we have acted in accordance with accepted laws, and if there is no improper behavior, we have no intention to change our policy. Even when the JCPOA was agreed upon as a joint plan between us and the 5+1 countries, we took significant steps based on the same spirit of unity and agreement. Now, there is little doubt about our intention. This global model of unity suffered a blow when the US decided to withdraw from the agreement, and despite all the difficulties, we and some other members have worked to preserve it. From the perspective of the Islamic Republic of Iran, reviving the nuclear agreement and maintaining the spirit of trust and unity among the 5+1 members is the appropriate approach to initiating a new phase and achieving a fruitful outcome.

**Do you have any thoughts on the future of relations between Tehran and Washington with the arrival of President-elect Donald Trump to the White House next month?**

I'm not in the habit of judging based on imagination and speculation, but for evaluation and prediction purposes,

that have consistently trapped passengers in this kind of steep and dizzying slope. Paradoxically, sometimes an incomplete game or experience creates more awareness, leading to a brave decision to exit this road and, like a precise strike, put the ball in the hole. I see the leadership of the US during the 45th presidency of the country as a continuation of the traditional system of American politics, but for this upcoming period, some words and decisions are being discussed that need attention in the evaluation of our prediction.

For example, when an observer hears that an efficiency measure is planned in the implementation of government programs, they ask: What is the necessity of efficiency? Will the benefits and costs of the programs be considered? If this is truly the case, it means that the harm to the US from confrontation with Iran will be calculated, and the benefit of correcting the policy will be carefully examined, like a driver considering a change of road and choosing a new route. This route, even if it is longer than the steep and dizzying mountain road, allows for accelerating progress and bringing tired and anxious passengers to their destination in peace. Nevertheless, I believe we should remain cautious and wait for practical actions and the answer to the question of whether the 47th presidency of the United States will mark a distinct era in the country's history.

**Is there a final message you want to send, in the midst of the changes we are witnessing, to the Middle East and the world? Who is the audience, and what is the content?**

The fate of the West Asia region is shaped by the actions and behaviors of each country in the region. We are all responsible for not choosing a bitter fate in the difficult conditions that Syria faces. A destructive and highly brutal force has been targeting the people of this region for over a year, dismantling the defensive capabilities of countries, destroying scientific, educational, transit, industrial, and capital infrastructure, and violating the territorial integrity of countries as part of its strategy. These actions, which began in Gaza and extended to Lebanon, have targeted Iran and now, in an unfair manner, are pursuing a demonic and destructive plan on Syrian soil while the Syrian people need peace to make crucial choices. Israel stands against all of us and all the people of the region.

Regardless of whether we are in Tehran, Cairo, Beirut, Riyadh, Ankara, Abu Dhabi, Doha, or Baghdad, we are a diverse historical community with diverse languages — Persian, Arabic, Turkish, Kurdish, Coptic, and Aramaic — that needs to engage in dialogue. The language of this dialogue is no longer important; rather, we need to find the foundations of this dialogue. Our peoples want peace and cooperation and hope that major countries understand this message and act responsibly towards their past. Therefore, looking at the world as you requested, I would like to say: "Recompensing for the past is an opportunity that the near future is giving to the world."



Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) leader Abu Mohammed al-Jolani (c) speaks to a crowd at Ummayyad Mosque in Damascus, Syria, on December 8, 2024, after the militant group announced that it had ousted president Bashar al-Assad.  
● MAHMOUD HASSANO/REUTERS

For decades, we have witnessed the destructive effects of the "divide and rule" policy pursued by colonial powers in the 19th century and global powers in the 20th century on regional convergence. After that, in specific periods, the shared realization was that enhancing the level of constructive cooperation has led to an improvement in formal interactions, which has had a constructive impact on the social exchanges of the region's nations.

From this perspective, it is important to note that there are internal regional threats that, if ignored, can cause significant damage to the stability and development of our neighbors, who have made some important economic pro-

**improve its relations with the West and is also interested in reviving the nuclear agreement. What is your view on this perspective?**

The current government of Iran has based its domestic policy on one principle: national unity. It has shown that, despite political diversity, religious distinctions, and ethnic differences, a united and cohesive government can be formed, and diverse and different segments of the population can be invited to collaborate and cooperate in steering the country's destiny. This model of comprehensive governance is being implemented in Iran and is the same model we have applied in our compassionate consultations with our neighbors,

I pay attention to plausible signs and their analysis. Generally, regarding the 47th presidency of the United States under Trump, we need to wait for more signs. The fundamental change and transformation in the power structure of the US, which occurs with four-year elections, always allows the country's governments to review sometimes successful and sometimes ineffective policies. It is generally a good thing that the ruling body of a country can escape the steep and dizzying slope of chosen policies or the overwhelming approach of imposed policies.

From my perspective, the direction of US relations with Iran throughout the modern era has been guided by drivers

# Yousefi offers ray of hope for rejuvenated Iranian weightlifting

## Sports Desk

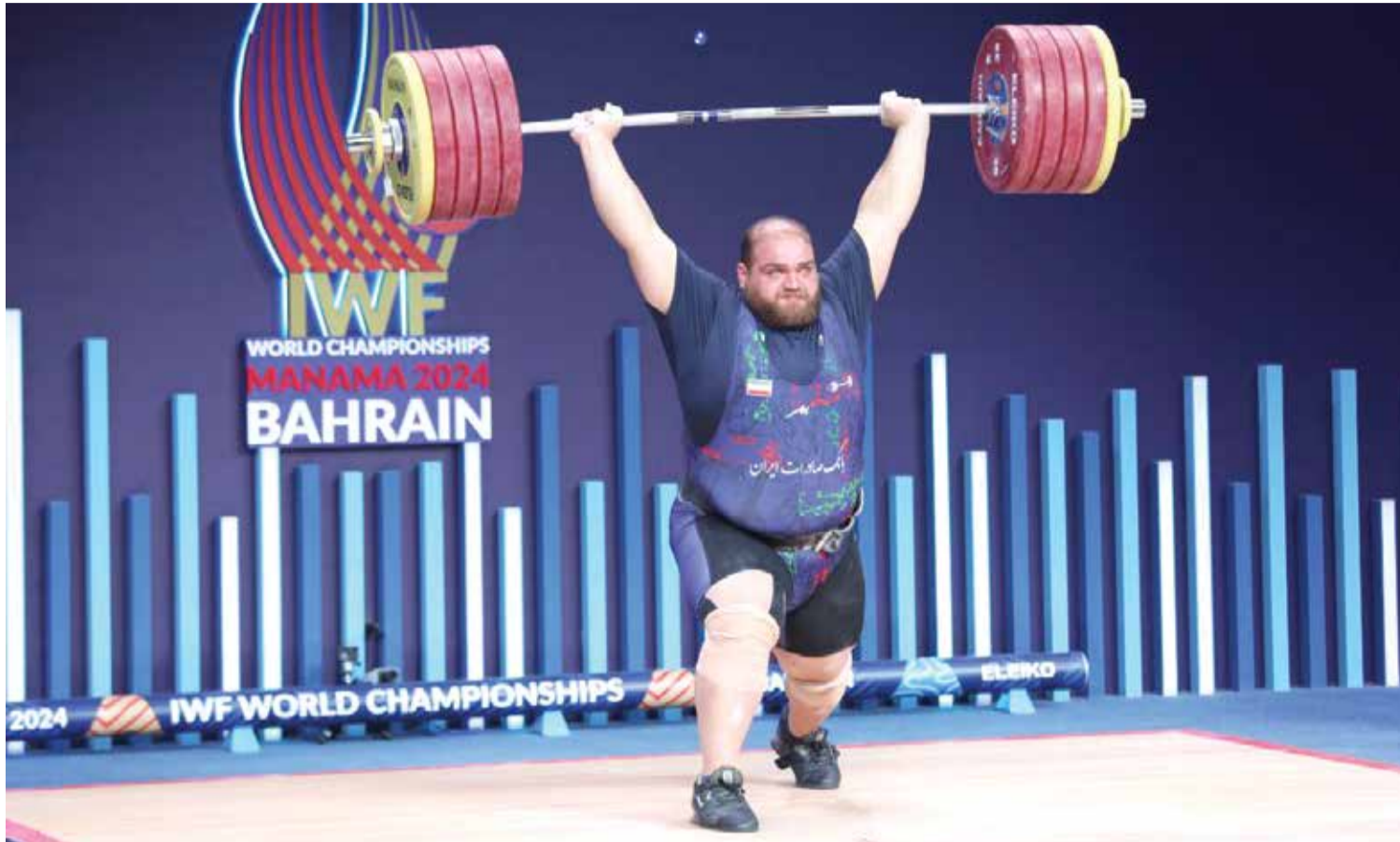
Iran's campaign at the recently-finished IWF World Championships was hardly deemed as prolific, but there were still some positives to cheer about for the country's revitalized men's squad.

Of the men's 30 medals up for grabs in Manama, Iranian men accounted for 10, with superheavyweight prodigy Alireza Yousefi spearheading the haul with a gold and a bronze on the final day, as head coach Navvab Nasirshahal's team collected 560 points to finish runner-up to China.

The race for the +109kg glory was always going to be wide open in the absence of reigning three-time Olympic champion Lasha Talakhadze, with Armenian Varazdat Lalayan and the host's Gor Minasyan – silver and bronze winners in the Paris Games – as well as Iranian Ali Davoudi the favorite trio to end the Georgian sensation's nine-year dominance in the weight class.

Lalayan completed all three attempts to come out on top in the snatch contest with a best lift of 215kg, leading the Bahraini silver medalist by 10 kilograms, while Davoudi settled for the bronze with 206kg.

Yousefi missed out on the snatch podium after registering 194kg in his third



Iran's Alireza Yousefi makes a clean & jerk lift in the men's +109kg contest of the IWF World Championships in Manama, Bahrain, on December 15, 2024.  
● IWFIR

attempt to stand fifth – next to Iraq's world junior record holder Ali Ammar Rubaiawi – but went on to steal the show in the clean & jerk event. The two-time world junior champion began his campaign with a 248kg attempt and made a quick work of securing the C&J

gold with a second effort of 258kg.

A sensational 262kg lift saw the 21-year-old tally 456kg for the total bronze, while Davoudi finished on 206-253-459 to add the C&J and total silvers to his snatch bronze, thanks to a new personal total high.

"When I first joined the national team's training camp my personal records were 170kg and 220kg but I had to work hard for four months with an injured knee, though I was blessed with coaching staff's great support throughout that period. I can't still believe I did such a great job

here," Yousefi said, though he acknowledged he would still need to "improve my snatch performance." "I'll keep training hard as I'm keen on overtaking all my rivals in the future competitions and ultimately succeed in the Olympics," added the Iranian young gun.

Lalayan, meanwhile, took the C&J bronze before grabbing a second gold in the Bahraini capital with a 215-252-467 record – a first world super-heavyweight champion other than Talakhadze since Russian Ruslan Albegov made a clean sweep of triple golds in 2014.

The final-day triumphs came after Ali A'alipour, Alireza Moeini, and Mahdi Karami had collected five medals for Iran earlier in the competition.

A'alipour and Moeini won three medals – the snatch silver plus the C&J and total bronzes – between them in the 96kg weight class, with Karami taking the snatch and total bronzes of the 109kg contests.

With an average age of 22 years and 10 months, the 10-man squad, which also included teenagers Alireza Nassiri, Abolfazl Zare', and Ariya Paydar, was the youngest Iranian team to ever finish on the world podium, much to the delight of Nasirshahal.

"This is one of the youngest squads in the history of the Iranian weightlifting and has much more room for improvement. All the team members put in their best effort during six months of training. I think the runner-up spot was a decent outcome for them, given the Iranian team had won only a couple of medals last year," said the head coach.

## FIFA Men's World Ranking:

## Iran remains 18th, finishes on all-time yearend high

### Sports Desk

The Iranian national football team retained its 18th spot in the latest FIFA Men's World Ranking, released on Thursday. December's ranking marked an all-time best finish in the year-end list for Team Melli, which had moved up by one spot to reach its highest spot in 19 years in the monthly ranking in November.

Amir Qalenoee's men, however, remained second to Japan among the Asian teams as the Blue Samurai stood in the 15th place.

Following the top two in the list of AFC's member states are South Korea (23rd), Australia (26th), and Qatar (48th). Iran clinched 15 victories, in-

cluding a shootout win against Syria in the AFC Asian Cup last 16, in 18 games in the calendar year, starting with back-to-back friendly wins against Burkina Faso (2-1) and Indonesia (5-1) in January.

Team Melli then went on to beat Palestine (4-1), Hong Kong (1-0), and the United Arab Emirates (2-1) to win the Asian Cup group in Qatar, before reaching the last eight at the expense of Syria.

The year's most memorable triumph for Iran came in the Asian Cup quarterfinals, where Qalenoee's side came from behind to defeat Japan 2-1, thanks to Alireza Jahanbakhsh's spot-kick in stoppage time.

Iran still failed to end a 48-year title drought in the flagship

continental event, suffering a 3-2 defeat against ultimate champion Qatar in the semifinals – Iran's sole loss in 2024. On return to World Cup qualifiers, the Asian powerhouse defeated Turkmenistan twice and walked away with a 4-2 win at Hong Kong before a goalless home draw against Uzbekistan secured the top spot in the preliminary group.

Team Melli began the third round of the qualifiers with a shaky 1-0 home victory over Kyrgyzstan in September and defeated the UAE by one goal in Al Ain, but shared the spoils with Uzbekistan in a second goalless encounter in four months, this time in Tashkent. Iran took revenge for the Asian Cup setback by hammering Qa-

tar 4-1 in the neutral venue of Dubai's Al Rashid Stadium in October, gaining momentum in its qualification campaign.

In the latest international break in November, Iran defeated North Korea 3-2 in Laos and went on to beat Kyrgyzstan in Bishkek by the same scoreline to maintain its hold on the top spot in Group A of the World Cup Asian qualifiers with 16 points – three clear of second-placed Uzbekistan and six above the UAE – with four games to spare.

With the top two of the group progressing to the World Cup finals, Team Melli can clinch a place in the 2026 showdown in North America when taking on the UAE and Uzbekistan in late March.



● FFIRI



● JED JACOBSON/AP

## James sets new NBA record in Lakers win

**BBC** – LeBron James broke the record for the most minutes played in NBA history as he helped the Los Angeles Lakers beat the Sacramento Kings.

The 39-year-old American surpassed Kareem Abdul-Jabbar when he completed his 57,447th minute on court in the 113-100 victory on Friday.

James, who eclipsed Abdul-Jabbar for the NBA all-time scoring record earlier this year, scored 19 points while teammate Austin Reaves led with 25 points.

"It's just a commitment to the craft and to the passion and love I have for the

game," said James.

"I don't take much time in the off-season, a little bit more time now."

Elsewhere, Brooklyn Nets centre Nic Claxton was ejected from the court for throwing a ball into the crowd during his side's 101-94 win over the Toronto Raptors.

Claxton showed his frustration after being fouled on his way to the basket before being escorted off court by officials after attempting to throw a cushion.

Meanwhile, Zach LaVine scored a season-high 36 points as he guided

the Chicago Bulls to a 117-108 win over defending champions the Boston Celtics.

LaVine sunk six three-pointers while adding six rebounds and four assists as the Bulls recorded their third straight victory.

French star Victor Wembanyama scored 42 points to help the San Antonio Spurs to a 133-126 overtime triumph over the Atlanta Hawks, while Shai Gilgeous-Alexander's 35 points led Oklahoma City Thunder to a 105-99 win over Orlando Magic.

# Pezeshkian: New bonds needed to advance D-8 shared interests



Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian (R) speaks at a meeting to review the situation in Gaza and Lebanon on the sidelines of the D-8 Developing summit in Cairo, Egypt, on December 19, 2024. [president.ir](#)

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian on Thursday urged the group of D-8 countries to “forge new bonds” to foster development and advance shared interests during a summit in the Egyptian capital Cairo.

“The importance of maintaining friendships and forging new bonds through multilateral cooperation among Islamic countries, based on development and the

pursuit of shared interests, is felt more than ever,” Pezeshkian told the gathering of the D-8 Organization for Economic Cooperation, also known as the Developing-8. According to IRNA, Pezeshkian also called on D-8 member states to move multilateralism and set up what he called “smart economic and trade networks.” He further said that Iran was ready to undertake joint actions

within the framework of the D-8 to collectively support young entrepreneurs.

The Iranian president suggested that the D-8 Technology Transfer Network, with its secretariat located at Pardis Technology Park in Tehran, could be key in advancing joint youth-related initiatives.

Pezeshkian, however, expressed concern that member states still had a long way to go to reach the

D-8’s 2030 vision.

He also announced that the next meeting of the “D-8 Permanent Committee on Communications and Information Technology” would soon be hosted by Iran and that Tehran could begin working on this directive in collaboration with the member states.

The D-8 Organization for Economic Cooperation is a group for developing cooperation among Bangladesh, Egypt, Indonesia, Iran, Malaysia, Nigeria, Pakistan and Turkey.

Leading a high-profile delegation, President Pezeshkian flew to Cairo on Wednesday to take part in the D-8 summit. It was the first visit by an Iranian president to Egypt in 11 years.

**Stopping Israeli aggression**

Later in the day, Pezeshkian addressed a meeting on the situation in the Gaza Strip on the sidelines of the D-8 summit where he said the top priority for the West Asian countries must be to stop the Israeli aggression in Gaza and attacks on Lebanon and Syria.

“Today, we have gathered under circumstances where the West Asia region is experiencing a sensitive, complex, and unstable

situation,” he said, according to Press TV.

Pezeshkian stressed that acts of aggression by the occupying regime in the past year have not only deprived the Palestinian people of their rights, such as the right to independence, self-determination, security, welfare, and education, but today it has also taken away their right to life, food and water, and shelter.

The Iranian president also stressed that there must be no delay whatsoever in confronting such crimes and widespread acts of aggression, urging that actions in this regard must be prioritized through cooperation and coordination.

“The first step to stop these acts of aggression is to pressure this regime for a cease-fire in Gaza and to halt its attacks on Lebanon and Syria. This issue must be the most important human and ethical priority for the countries of the region and members of the D-8 organization,” Pezeshkian emphasized.

“I would like to emphasize that the Islamic Republic of Iran welcomes and supports any Palestinian-Palestinian agreement that is endorsed by the Palestinian people

and has the consensus of all Palestinian groups. The right of the Palestinian people to self-determination must be respected, and their intellectual and political maturity in determining their own future and destiny must be honored,” Pezeshkian added.

He called on the D-8 organization to create a support program for facilitating Palestine’s development and reconstruction, establishing a contact group to collaborate with the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) in halting the war on Gaza and providing humanitarian aid, and setting up a fund for rebuilding Gaza and Lebanon.

Pezeshkian also urged the organization to support the recognition of Israel as an apartheid entity and work to revive UN Resolution 3379, while forming a joint legal committee to support Palestine in international legal actions, including in prosecuting Israeli officials for the deaths of over 17,000 Palestinian children.

Regarding Israel’s devastating attacks against Syria’s infrastructure, particularly its military, he stressed that Iran strongly condemns the regime’s attacks on the Arab country’s infrastructure, property, and assets.

## During bilateral meetings on sidelines of D-8 summit Tehran, Cairo discuss restoration of ties after four decades

International Desk

Iran’s President Masoud Pezeshkian and his Egyptian counterpart, Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, expressed their hope that the recent positive steps taken to restore ties between the two countries will continue until full bilateral relations are established.

The two presidents met on Thursday on the sidelines of the 11th summit of the leaders of the D-8 Organization for Economic Cooperation in the Egyptian capital, Cairo, according to Press TV.

Pezeshkian emphasized the necessity of promoting economic cooperation, and the continued talks between Tehran and Cairo, which have not had political ties for more than four decades.

For his part, Sisi described the latest Israeli aggression on Syria as unprecedented, expressing his country’s support for the formation of an inclusive government in Syria.

Mehdi Sanaei, a senior political aide to Pezeshkian, had noted earlier that “good dialogue” was held between

the two countries’ presidents, adding that “political talks and appropriate actions have started between the two countries.”

**Stressing Syria’s integrity to Erdogan**

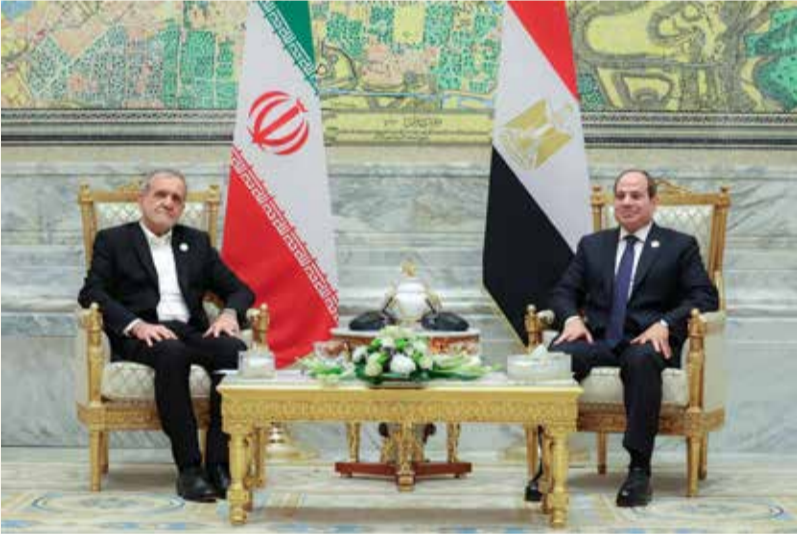
Pezeshkian, in his meeting with Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan on Thursday, underscored the need to safeguard Syria’s territorial integrity amid recent developments in the Arab country.

“Any changes in Syria must respect its territorial integrity, and even the slightest violation of its sovereignty is completely unacceptable,” Pezeshkian said, according to ISNA.

Pezeshkian also called for an immediate halt to Israeli aggression in the region. He urged Islamic nations to fulfill their responsibility in countering Israeli actions, stating, “If there is unity and solidarity among the Islamic community, the regime will not dare to commit such atrocities.”

“We are waiting for the implementa-

Iran’s President Masoud Pezeshkian (L) and his Egyptian counterpart Abdel Fattah el-Sisi meet on the sidelines of the D-8 summit in the Egyptian capital, Cairo, on December 19, 2024. [president.ir](#)



tion of agreements and the realization of trade targets set between Iran and Turkey,” Pezeshkian added.

For his part, Erdogan said, “Preserving Syria’s territorial integrity is crucial for Turkey, and we hope joint efforts will soon restore peace and security in Syria.”

He described enhancing Iran-Turkey cooperation as vital for regional stability and expressed hope that the High Council for Strategic Cooperation meeting would be held next year.

**Calling for unified currency among Muslim nations**

In a separate meeting in Cairo on the same day, Pezeshkian held talks with Pakistan’s Prime Minister Muhammad

Shehbaz Sharif.

The Pakistani premier expressed his support for Pezeshkian’s idea of creating a unified currency and utilizing the capacities of shared markets among Muslim nations.

Pezeshkian and Sharif also addressed issues concerning delays faced by Iranian trucks at the Pakistan border. Sharif assured his Iranian counterpart that the problem would be resolved promptly, according to Tasnim.

Mohammad Ali Rajabi  
Cartoonist



## Tehran rejects baseless claims by UK, Australia against Iran

Iran’s Foreign Ministry dismissed recent claims by the UK and Australia as “baseless, unrealistic, and irrelevant” and called for a reconsideration of policies that interfere in regional affairs.

Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Esmail Baghaei criticized the UK and Australia for their “unwavering support” of Israel’s criminal actions in the occupied Palestinian territories and West Asia, according to Tasnim.

He condemned their stance against Iran’s defensive operations in response to Israel’s attack on its embassy in Damascus, emphasizing that Iran’s operations — known as “True Promise 1” and “True Promise 2” — were in full compliance with international law and the UN Charter’s right to self-defense.

Addressing the UK and Australia’s claims of Iran’s ballistic missile export

to Russia, Baghaei called the accusations part of US and UK efforts to “securitize international relations” and “globalize” the Ukraine conflict.

He noted that even Ukraine’s president had denied such claims.

The spokesperson further blamed the root of instability in West Asia on Israel’s “occupation and expansionism,” sustained with support from the US, UK, Australia and some other Western nations.

Baghaei also criticized the UK and Australia for “systematic human rights violations” in their treatment of asylum seekers in prisons and detention facilities, rebuking them for hypocrisy.

The Foreign Ministry official also slammed Australia’s activities and the continuance of colonial-era policies against Indigenous Australians, urg-



ing both countries to abandon their “instrumental and hypocritical” approaches to human rights.

Referring to comments by the UK Foreign Secretary that genocide in Palestine requires “millions” of deaths, Baghaei called the UK’s policy of “genocide denial” in Gaza shameful and devoid of moral credibility to lecture on human rights.



# Yalda Night, timeless celebration of 'togetherness', reflection of cultural heritage: *Minister*

Iran's Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance, Abbas Salehi, conveyed warm wishes to his fellow citizens on Yalda Night, calling it a "symbol of Iran's rich and ancient culture." In his message, he shared, "Yalda Night, this mysterious and delightful evening, holds a special place in our history." He emphasized that for many older generations, Yalda is not merely a calendar event, but a representation of human values and cultural heritage that has taken root in the history of the land, IRNA reported.

Salehi reflected on the significance of



family gatherings during Yalda, stating, "On this night, we remember how being together can be uplifting and remarkable."

He noted that Yalda has the power to "wipe away the dust of old grievances" and deepen bonds within the family. This tradition, he said, serves as a reminder that "togetherness is not just a tradition but a human necessity in our current circumstances."

The celebration of Yalda Night was further held during a gathering hosted by the Iranian Embassy in Islamabad, Pakistan. This event saw the participation of diplomats from various countries in the cultural sphere, including Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkey, and Iraq.

Iran's Ambassador to Pakistan, Reza Amiri Moghadam, welcomed the attendees, stating, "The ancient tradition of Yalda, celebrated on the longest night of the year, dates back over 7,000 years

and is one of the most valuable traditional teachings of ancient Iranians."

The envoy highlighted the values celebrated during Yalda, which include cultural identity, respect for nature, and the honor bestowed upon the elderly, women, and children within families.

He asserted that Yalda represents a shared cultural heritage among the nations, proudly announcing, "In 2022, this cultural event was inscribed in UNESCO's list of intangible cultural heritage."

The event also featured remarks from ambassadors of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, who expressed gratitude for the hospitality of the Iranian Embassy and shared insights into the common traditions associated with Yalda in their own countries. They emphasized the gathering as a proof for their mutual heritage, stating, "The celebration of Yalda signifies our shared commitment to the victory of goodness over evil and the celebration of light."



In addition to the speeches, cultural representatives from Iran, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan organized an exhibition showcasing handicrafts, local delicacies, and Yalda-themed tables, introducing the rich traditions of their nations.

The celebration of Yalda Night not

only reinforces the cultural ties between Iran, Pakistan, and Central Asia but also reminds communities of the beauty of shared traditions, as Pakistan itself embraces a similar celebration known as "Meh-Fang," marking the arrival of winter.

## Children's 'The Little Black Fish' opens with Yalda theme

A week-long group painting exhibition titled 'The Little Black Fish,' dedicated to Persian celebration of Yalda Night opened on December 20 and will run through December 26. This showcase features the works of 15 young artists, who have brought their creativity to life using innovative printing techniques and the exquisite art of Eco-line under the guidance of facilitator Maliheh Darbandsari.

The exhibition aims to capture the essence of Yalda, known as the longest night of the year in Iranian culture—a time when stories blossom from the darkness, and legends come alive. The narrative echoes the tales of Samad Behran-

gi, a beloved storyteller whose voice resonates through the memories of this special night. His stories of courage, embodied in the smallest of fish, inspire young hearts to seek out vast oceans of hope and freedom.

"Even the smallest light can pierce the darkest of nights," Behrangi once wrote, and this exhibition seeks to illuminate that truth. With pomegranates symbolizing life and resilience, each piece in the exhibition tells a story of struggle against darkness and the breaking of walls of doubt. The night of Yalda, adorned with the red of pomegranates and the magic of Samad's tales, takes on a vibrant hue as the hopes and



dreams of both small and large beings come together.

The exhibition, featuring creative prints by illustrator Farshid Moqaddam, blends themes of bravery, freedom,

and the joy of life. The children, like the little black fish, dive into the depths of Iranian traditions and myths, painting new vistas of hope, courage, and the discovery of the unknown.

## Iran's health minister urges eco-friendly waste solutions

### Social Desk

In a visit to the 22nd International Environmental Exhibition, Iranian Health Minister Mohammad Reza Zafarghandi emphasized the crucial role of efficient and environmentally friendly waste management in safeguarding the planet. Joined by Shina Ansari, head of the Environmental Protection Organization, Zafarghandi explored innovative solutions presented by over 250 exhibitors, advocating for a collective approach to achieving a sustainable future, ILNA reported.

The event, which began on December 18 and runs for five days, is themed "Universal Participation, Green Economy, Sustainable Future".

"The more efficiently we handle waste using environmentally friendly methods, the more effective our efforts will be in preserving and maintaining our environment," Zafarghandi stated.

The exhibition serves as a valuable platform for showcasing advancements and exchanging experiences aimed at sustainable development and environmental protection. It emphasizes the critical role of social responsibility in environmental conservation and aims to raise public awareness about pressing ecological issues.

In addition to waste management, the event features specialized booths on solar energy, underscoring the importance of adopting innovative technologies to reduce fuel and energy consumption.

## D-8 can help ...

Iran's strategic position, which I refer to as the "Heartland," endows it with significant potential. Engaging with Iran is crucial for other nations due to its vast energy reserves and strategic location, which serves as a corridor for East-West and North-South routes.

On the other hand, given recent regional developments, Iran needs to solidify its position, both economically and politically. I believe that this summit offers a good opportunity for increased engagement and cooperation with member countries. While there are differences in political views and international issues between Iran and some D-8 members, I hope that the dialogues and consultations at the summit will help resolve these disputes, particularly the issues that have long overshadowed relations between Iran and Egypt, as Iran need to enhance its standing in the Middle East and North Africa.

In my view, Pezeshkian has demonstrated a sound approach in foreign policy and diplomacy during his tenure as Iran's president, prioritizing the development of ties and cooperation with regional and neighboring countries, which is a continuation of the foreign policy of president Ebrahim Raisi's government.

Pezeshkian's participation in the D-8 summit fosters closer cooperation, especially in the economic sphere. Iran's engagement with these countries can help mitigate the

impact of cruel sanctions imposed on the Islamic Republic over the past four decades. President Pezeshkian's approach to expanding external interactions, followed by Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi, indicates the government's commitment to attracting foreign investment and cooperation. Since taking office in August, Araghchi has spent much of his time abroad, demonstrating his active engagement in foreign policy. Additionally, the government's economic team has also been very active internationally. Iranian ministers have been working diligently through negotiations with regional and global partners and by participating in regional and international summits to improve Iran standing both regionally and globally.

Pezeshkian's approach to engaging with other countries can indeed contribute to the well-being and comfort of our people, as small and large economic entities in our country are likely to see greater growth and development as a result of these interactions.

I am confident that Pezeshkian will return to Tehran with fruitful outcomes from Cairo, further solidifying our country's position in the region.

Beyond the usual sessions at international summits like the D-8, we often see side meetings and discussions between presidents and leaders, which can help resolve issues and strengthen regional cooperation.



### Extension of Announcement for Graphite Electrode Manufacturers and Suppliers

**Arvand Jahanara Company**, located near the city of Khorramshahr in Khuzestan Province in southwestern Iran, intends to invite quality suppliers/manufacturers to collaborate in supplying 1000 tons of electrodes according to the specifications in the table below.

Therefore, any interested company can submit its bid application along with its list of references to the email address below by December 25, 2024.

Ebrahimian-E@ajs.co.ir

For more information, you can contact us through the following means of communication.

Contact number: +9861-53512371

[www.ajs.co.ir](http://www.ajs.co.ir)