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What is meant by Iran having no proxy forces?



By Ali Kakadezfuli
Managing director

OPINION EXCLUSIVE

A proxy force refers to a group or organization that conducts military, political, or propaganda operations on behalf of a more influential nation or political actor, either directly or indirectly. Such entities typically receive financial, military, intelligence, or political assistance from their patron and work to further objectives aligned with the patron's strategic interests. Patron states often utilize proxy forces to achieve their goals without becoming directly involved in conflicts or bearing responsibility for the actions of their proxies.

While Iran extends support to groups such as Hezbollah in Lebanon, Hamas, the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, Iraq's Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF), Ansarallah in Yemen (commonly known as the Houthis), Kata'ib Hezbollah, and Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq in Iraq, it cannot be asserted that these groups function as Iranian proxies. The distinctions underlying this assertion are explored in detail in this editorial.

Distinctive national priorities and independent objectives

Hezbollah and Hamas pursue objectives rooted in their respective local and national priorities. Hezbollah's core mission is to defend Lebanon against Israeli aggression and protect the interests of the Shia community within Lebanon. Similarly, Hamas is dedicated to resisting Israeli occupation and advocating for Palestinian rights.

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Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian (R) discusses the expansion of bilateral relations with visiting Russian Deputy Prime Minister for Transport Vitaly Gennadyevich Savelyev in Tehran on December 23, 2024. president.ir

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Aref urges focus on finishing incomplete refinery projects

Iran's vice president stated that the refining industry is considered a strategic industry for the country, emphasizing that priority in expanding refinery capacity should be given to incomplete development projects.

Mohammadreza Aref made the comments on Sunday evening during a meeting to review the performance and strategic plans for the development of the country's refining and distribution industry, attended by several officials in the field as well as representatives from refineries, Shana reported. He praised the efforts of managers and workers in this sector, describing their works as significant and added that the oil industry is a driving force for the nation, along with the upstream sectors like refineries, which are considered strategic industries.

The vice president further noted that, under current circumstances, priority should be given to expanding existing refineries and completing incomplete projects rather than starting new ones. Addressing refinery managers, Aref urged them to step forward with motivation and exploit high-tech technologies, as well as the potential and talent of young Iranian experts.

He recalled that in the past, top high school graduates often prioritized studying at Petroleum University of Technology among their top three choices, stating, "Today, we need to create the same environment again so that talented graduates will actively get engaged in this industry." Aref assured that the government would offer full cooperation in addressing customs issues related to the equipment and modernization of refineries. However, he emphasized that environmental issues and related permits must be handled in a way that they do not harm the environment.

Aref reiterated the need to prioritize incomplete and developmental projects when expanding refinery capacity and mentioned that increasing productivity—set by law to grow by 2.8 percent across targeted eight units—can be achieved through modern and high-tech technologies, stating, "You should head in that direction."

The VP expressed concern that some priorities in this industry have not been correctly identified, pointing out that several decades ago, the cost of desulfurization in refineries was significantly lower, but resistance to this change has led to substantially higher costs today.

Pezeshkian: Iran bent on completion of INSTC with Russia

Economy Desk

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian said on Monday that his government is determined to complete the International North South Transit Corridor (INSTC).

Pezeshkian made the announcement in a meeting with Vitaly Gennadyevich Savelyev, the Russian deputy prime minister for transport, as both sides discussed the expansion of bilateral relations and strategies for accelerating the completion of the strategic INSTC project, reported president.ir.

Pezeshkian highlighted the priority of implementation of the Rasht-Astara railway project as a part of INSTC

under the Iran-Russia agreement.

He stated that Iran is committed to the terms of the agreement and called on the Russian side to begin mapping the route and preparing for project implementation as soon as possible.

"The Iranian government emphasizes the execution of this agreement, and our Minister of Roads and Urban Development [Farzaneh Sadeq-Malvajerd] is responsible for overseeing its implementation," Pezeshkian said.

For his part, Savelyev, extended warm regards from the Russian president and prime minister to Pezeshkian and invited him to visit Russia in early 2025,

saying that the Russian government is preparing for this visit and the associated negotiations.

Highlighting the Rasht-Astara railway project, Savelyev reaffirmed his government's commitment to its execution.

He noted that Russia has secured the necessary line of credit and is collaborating with Azerbaijan on the INSTC.

Savelyev also expressed the Russian government's desire to expedite the implementation of the project, stating that Russia and Azerbaijan have agreed to modernize the portion of the railway located in their territories and called on Tehran to pave the ground for upgrading its section of



the railway. He described the increase in cargo transport between Russia and

Iran as growing and expressed optimism that the implementation of the Astara-Rasht railway

agreement could initially facilitate the transfer of 15 million tons of goods between the two countries.

Telecom 2024 kicked off in Tehran

VP says at least 20% of job creation should be attributed to IT sector



Economy Desk

The 25th International Exhibition of Telecommunications, Information Technology and Digital Economy, known as Telecom 2024 opened in Tehran on Monday, featuring 148 domestic and foreign companies.

Speaking at the opening ceremony, Vice President Mohammadreza Aref highlighted the advantages of the information technology sector in the country, particularly the presence of motivated and intelligent personnel with strong scientific capabilities.

Aref referred to certain challenges, noting that efforts to involve the private sector in the information technology domain were met with legal barriers in the third development plan.

"Our expectation from this exhibition is to take a step forward in the technology industry after showcasing domestic and foreign achievements and comparing the results of these challenges," the VP said.

He noted that emerging high-tech and converging technologies primarily stem from the information technology sector, emphasizing the need to identify its significant role in employment, especially for graduates.

Aref anticipates that at least 20 percent of job creation should be attributed to the IT sector.

The vice president also highlighted the importance of assessing the contribution of the IT sector to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), stating that at least 10 percent of the GDP should derive from this area.

He criticized the underutilization of Iran's capacities within the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) in the past years, underlining that many member countries are eager to collaborate and adopt Iranian technologies.

The VP pointed out that Iran's presence in organizations such as EAEU, SCO, and BRICS offers a substantial market opportunity, urging the need to learn from past failures to capital-

ize on the ECO's capacity.

Aref reiterated that the government's strategy revolves around cooperation with regional countries, emphasizing the necessity of balancing domestic needs with regional and global interactions and collaborations.

He noted that Iran is benefiting from the latest technological advances thanks to domestic researchers and has established strong collaborations with international scientific entities and distinguished Iranian scholars abroad.

"The contributions of Iranian scientists abroad and their scientific services at home are significant," Aref added.

He also stressed the importance of utilizing artificial intelligence (AI) while adhering to its principles, declaring that the government's serious strategy involves exporting technical and engineering services, where telecommunication has traditionally played a prominent role.

Hemmati: Forex rate cannot be fixed amid 30% inflation



Economy Desk

Iran's Economy Minister Abdolnaser Hemmati said fixing the forex rate can lead to corruption while maintaining a stable exchange rate under a 30% inflation is impossible.

Speaking during a session of the Parliament's Economic Committee on Monday, Hemmati also said it is estimated that people hold about \$20 billion to \$40 billion in cash, explaining that this accumulation of cash is aimed at preserving their assets against inflation.

He pointed out that the rise in the dollar price has not addressed the nation's non-oil trade deficit, which reached \$17 billion in the previous year, marking an unprecedented level. Hemmati indicated that while the nominal exchange rate [NIMA system] remained stable in the last Iranian year, the country experienced inflation rates of 42% to 52%.

He argued that having four different exchange rates is untenable, advocating for a regulated floating exchange rate in accordance with parliamentary law, where the Central Bank of Iran can manage rates within a 3% fluctuation.

He highlighted that the official exchange rate was approximately 40,000 toman per dollar last year, while the free-market rate reached as high as 68,000 toman in the first month of Iranian calendar (March 20-April 19) before retracting.

Hemmati pointed out that the 40% disparity between market and nominal rates leads to substantial economic rents, and supported the Central Bank of Iran's recent establishment of a negotiated currency market, warning that if the exchange rate remains fixed, the country would face reduced exports, increased import demand, and further corruption.

While stressing the need for increased efforts to reduce inflation, Hemmati defended the government's performance, stating that the CBI is striving to stabilize the real exchange rate to align it closer to market rates and expressed hope that this would soon occur.

Iran achieves know-how to extract shale oil from reservoirs

Researchers from the Technical Faculties Campus of University of Tehran, in collaboration with the Exploration Department of the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC), developed a technology to extract shale oil from reservoirs. For the first time in Iran, a research project has developed the necessary technology for extract-

ing shale oil from reserves using toxic coke technology at the laboratory and in semi-industrial scales, IRNA reported on Monday. This technological initiative was led by Ali Shekarifard, an associate professor at the Technical Faculties Campus of University of Tehran, in collaboration with Estonia's Tallinn University of Technology,

aimed to conduct expert studies for the exploration and evaluation of the exploitability of oil shales in Ghalikouh, located in the western Lorestan Province. According to Shekarifard, this research has laid the groundwork for establishing a new oil shale industry in Iran by acquiring essential technical knowledge.

Iran found shale oil reserves of two billion barrels of light crude in its western Lorestan Province in February 2017. Shale oil is an unconventional oil produced from oil shale rock fragments by pyrolysis, hydrogenation, or thermal dissolution. These processes convert the organic matter within the rock (kero-

gen) into synthetic oil and gas. The resulting oil can be used immediately as a fuel or upgraded to meet refinery feedstock specifications by adding hydrogen and removing impurities such as sulfur and nitrogen.

The refined products can be used for the same purposes as those derived from crude oil.

Rich souvenir heritage of Qom

Qom, recognized as Iran's second most significant religious city, attracts countless visitors and pilgrims each year. While many people associate Qom, the capital city of Qom Province, primarily with its famous sweet, sohan, the city boasts a rich array of souvenirs that reflect its unique culture and heritage. Exploring these diverse offerings can help you discover a wider selection of interesting gifts for your loved ones during your visit.

If you're pondering what to bring back from Qom for family and friends, you might be surprised to learn that the city offers far more than just a couple of souvenir options. From delectable treats to exquisite handicrafts and stunning jewelry, Qom's souvenirs are as varied as they are captivating. Let's delve into some of the most remarkable items you can find in this vibrant city.

Sohan

Sohan stands out as the most renowned and cherished souvenir from Qom. This traditional sweet, often likened to halva, has been crafted in the city since the Qajar era. Its popularity extends beyond local residents, as many tourists eagerly purchase this delightful treat during their stay. Sohan is widely available, with numerous shops throughout Qom offering this sweet delicacy.



Kasmeh bread

Another delightful edible souvenir from Qom is *kasmeh* bread. This unique bread is made from a blend of flour, egg yolk, saffron, sugar, turmeric, and milk, and is available in three distinct varieties: sesame, sugary, and premium. If you're seeking something distinctive to bring home from Qom, *kasmeh* bread is a fantastic option.

Silk carpet

Qom is renowned for its exquisite handwoven silk carpets, which are regarded as some of the finest in the country. After enjoying a meal at one of Qom's esteemed restaurants, take a stroll through the expansive carpet markets to admire the stunning array of patterns, colors, and designs. Due to the high quality of the silk used, these carpets can be quite luxurious and are among the most prestigious souvenirs you can acquire.



Pottery

For those interested in beautiful yet affordable handicrafts, Qom's pottery is a perfect choice. Local artisans skillfully use high-quality clay sourced from the surrounding areas to create stunning pottery items, often adorned with intricate designs that reflect the region's artistic heritage.

Morvar-bafi

Another notable handicraft from Qom is *morvar-bafi*, which involves weaving wicker wood that grows in the region into a variety of products, including baskets, chandeliers, containers, and even chairs. These items, usually found in a vibrant yellow hue, are not only affordable but also cherished for their traditional craftsmanship.



Gaz

You may be curious to know if *gaz* (Persian nougat) is produced in Qom, and the answer is a resounding yes. The *gaz* from Qom is exceptionally delicious and often regarded as a serious contender to the more famous *gaz* of Isfahan. It's easy to find freshly made *gaz* in Qom, and its delightful flavor is sure to please anyone who receives it.



Kharmohreh

Dating back to the Achaemenid period, *kharmohreh* is a charming souvenir that is recognized as part of Iran's cultural heritage. Typically blue in color, *kharmohreh* is believed to possess protective properties against negative energy and the evil eye. You can find over 160 different types of *kharmohreh* in Qom's souvenir shops, making it a meaningful gift option.

Marquetry

Marquetry panels offer another excellent souvenir choice. This intricate craft involves creating elaborate designs on wood using chisels and hammers, with artists filling the spaces with colored wood, metals, gemstones, ceramics, and shells to enhance the artwork's beauty. Prices for marquetry panels can vary based on size, materials, and craftsmanship.



Traditional painting

Traditional painting is a well-established craft in Qom, with many local artists producing stunning works on wood, glass, pottery, leather, and other materials. These traditional paintings come in various styles, allowing visitors to select pieces that resonate with their personal tastes and preferences.

Handmade rings

Handmade rings are another popular souvenir option in Qom, celebrated for their exquisite craftsmanship. These rings come in a variety of settings and gemstones, with the seven-gem ring being particularly unique and sought after. Currently, there are over 1,000 workshops in Qom dedicated to the production of these stunning rings. In summary, Qom is a treasure trove of unique souvenirs that reflect the city's rich cultural heritage. Whether you're drawn to its delectable sweets, exquisite handicrafts, or beautiful artwork, you're sure to find the perfect memento to share with family and friends.



Importance of food in Kermanshah's tourism strategy

Iranica Desk

Alireza Moradi Bisotuni, the head of the Tourism Affairs Department at Kermanshah Province's Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicraft Organization, emphasized that Kermanshah's designation as "Creative City of Gastronomy" presents a significant oppor-

tunity for the development of tourism in the region. He pointed out that the province's diversity and exceptional quality of food could effectively serve as a brand for its tourism industry. Moradi Bisotuni highlighted the importance of food as a priority for tourists during their travels. He noted that while a tourist might choose not to stay in hotels

or other accommodations, they cannot overlook the significance of food in their travel experience. Consequently, focusing on culinary offerings is both crucial and necessary for successful tourism, *chtn.ir* wrote.

He drew attention to the global surge in food tourism, explaining that Kermanshah's varied climate — ranging from tropical to cold — supports a wide array of plants and livestock. Moreover, the presence of different ethnic groups contributes to a unique and rich culinary landscape, further establishing Kermanshah as a global hub of gastronomy. He also stressed that food plays a pivotal role in extending tourist stays, and maintaining a quality focus on this aspect is vital, especially given the province's culinary diversity.

Additionally, Moradi Bisotuni noted that throughout the year,

numerous events centered around food and agricultural products have been organized in Kermanshah, all of which have garnered a positive response from both tourists and tour operators. He underscored the importance of proper planning to make the most of the province's resources in organizing such events effectively.

He further suggested that a key action moving forward should be the inclusion of the province's unique culinary items — more than 60 of which are nationally recognized — in the menus of local restaurants.

In conclusion, he expressed optimism that the enthusiastic reception of these events by the private sector and local communities indicates a promising future for their continued success and potential annual expansion.



● Abbasali aash



● Dandeh kebab

Is Syria involved in corridor war?

By Gholamreza Mansouri
Political science researcher

OPINION
EXCLUSIVE

that with the increase in oil production in the United States itself in the past few years, the importance of Middle East oil has gradually decreased. That is why the United States has been trying to withdraw from this region. However, it must be honestly admitted that the problems of the Middle East are not just the fault of global powers. Competition between the local powers in this region also plays an important role in the emergence and occurrence of crises.

Development is not possible without considering the role of global powers and the existing rifts in the region. It goes without saying that the Middle East is full of irreparable rifts of different sorts: Ethnic, religious, cultural, etc.

Although all of these issues play a significant role in creating tensions in the Middle East, but in this short article, I will try to examine the current crises from another perspective, from the perspective of the war for corridors.

Corridors play a fundamental role in the development of countries. Europe has always needed the energy of the region, especially after the war in Ukraine. As such, the importance of the Middle East for Europe has increased dramatically. This also adds to the strategic advantage of being located along transit routes. On the other hand, with the spread of liberal capitalist thinking in all parts of the world, consumer culture has become more prevalent. Cheap goods produced in countries such as China, India, and Vietnam must be transported to other countries all over the world, especially in Europe and America, to reach consumers. So, transit routes of goods becomes fundamental and shapes the global competition.

During the Arab Spring that started in 2011, the old order in the region collapsed. This became another reason why some of the more powerful countries in the Middle East tried to increase their share of the region. For example, Turkey sought to abuse the power vacuum in Syria and dominate the northern region of Syria. Meanwhile, countries such as Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates also tried to use the crisis in Syria and Iraq to extend their dominance to these countries to take advantage of the new realities on the ground. Now that more than 10 years has passed since the Arab Spring, we can go back in time and take a look at Syria and Iraq again through the lens of what was to come. For example, in retrospect, one might notice that ISIS forces and rebel forces supported by Turkey operated in those areas of Syria that were to be rule in the future by

The Middle East has been involved in security-political and military struggles for decades. In fact, it can be said that crisis has become an inseparable part of the identity of this region.

Of course, the role of global powers in the region's turmoil should not be overlooked. The interests of global powers are closely related to the Middle East crisis. However, it should be noted



Opposition fighters drive past tanks abandoned by the Syrian military on the outskirts of Damascus.
● HUSSEIN MALLA/AP

the HTS forces.

My assumption in this article is that the efforts of regional powers to penetrate Syrian territory are mostly to gain a kind of strategic advantage to guide political decisions in the war-torn country. Decisions that for example can be manifested in the construction of new corridors. It should be noted that all these transit projects have within them a logic of regional competition.

In the case of Turkey, I believe that the successful Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline project has led Erdogan to the conclusion that the Development Road project can also be implemented to enhance Turkey's strategic role in the region.

On the other hand, the occupation of territory in Syria by Turkish-backed groups could be a means of pressuring Iran to agree to the Zangezur corridor in Armenia. This corridor could provide a major leap forward for the Turks' position in global transit.

A critical point to note is that Iran and Turkey, as two local powers in the region, are trying to control or build corridors. In the following, I will go into more details of the three corridors that Turkey is interested in.

Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil, gas project

The Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline is a 1,768 km long crude oil pipeline, which starts from the Azeri-Chirag-Gunashli oil field in the Caspian Sea and continues to the Mediterranean Sea.

The construction of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline was a strategic move for the Republic of Azerbaijan, aiming to eliminate its dependence on Iran and Russia in the exports of its oil. Despite predictions that the construction of the pipeline would be impractical and impossible, the project was successfully completed in the end. As a result of this project, Azerbaijan's relations with Europe, Turkey, and Georgia were strengthened, and Baku became more confident in its moves in its domestic and foreign affairs.

According to data from the Turkish oil company Botas International, 210,767,244 barrels of crude oil extracted by the Republic of Azerbaijan from the Caspian Sea were transported through this pipeline in 2020. This proved to be a reliable route for transferring energy to the energy-hungry Europe. Of course, the importance of this line has increased sharply after the war in Ukraine.

Turkey-Iraq Development Road

The Development Road project, which runs from Iraq to Turkey and from there to Europe, is one of the multi-purpose regional projects that, if successful, could diminish Iran's geopolitical role.

In an interview with Anadolu Agency, Dr. Farhan Al-Fartousi, director general of the General Company for Ports of Iraq (GCPI), said about the construction of the Faw Grand Port and the Development Road project to which the

port is connected: "These are inseparable and complementary projects. All products that come to this port go to Turkey through the Development Road."

The Faw Grand Port, which is being built by South Korea's Daewoo with a contract worth approximately \$5 billion, is located at the mouth of the Shatt Al-Arab, where the Euphrates and Tigris rivers meet before flowing into the sea. Since the Faw Port has access to open waters, it can host large container ships. The first phase of the port project is expected to be completed and put into operation by the end of 2025. Turkey is also participating in the construction of the large port of Faw.

The development road project will start from the port and extend through Diwaniyah, Najaf, Karbala, Baghdad, and Mosul to the Turkish border. It will include 1,200 kilometers of two-way roads and railways and is intended to access Europe from the Turkish ports of Mersin and Istanbul. The Development Road will be one of the new trade bridges between Asia and Europe.

Zangezur Corridor

According to the Russia in Global Affairs journal, the corridor will run across the 40-kilometer zone of Armenia's Syunik region bordering Iran. The new road corridor is expected to be part of a longer route from Central Asia or China to Turkey and from there to Europe. The new overland

route in the South Caucasus may be connected to the Trans-Caspian International Transport Corridor. Such logistics promises obvious economic dividends for some countries in the region, while at the same time bearing political constraints that may impede the project's implementation. "Political constraints" refers to Iran's concerns. Iran is concerned about its geopolitical strangulation and therefore opposes the corridor.

As mentioned, Europe needs cheap goods and energy. This increases the importance of corridors. Exploiting the religious and identity rifts in the region, the major powers of the region are trying to influence the territory of other countries to shape the future. On the other hand, this type of influence puts pressure on competitors to change their own political plans. Turkey, despite the opposition of Russia and some other countries in the region, implemented the Baku-Ceyhan project by approaching Azerbaijan.

The Development Road project connecting Iraq to Europe complements the successful Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline project. Both of these corridors (one for energy and the other for goods) will play an important role in enhancing Turkey's geopolitical position. Ultimately, it seems that Turkey has a plan to pressure Iran to drop its opposition to Zangezur by seizing territory in Syria. However, this is no simple matter and will not be said and done.



Workers are constructing the tunnel that will connect Iraq's coastal region to international trade links through Turkey, in al-Faw, Iraq, on February 8, 2024.
● MOHAMMED ATY/REUTERS



Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline
● minenergy.gov.az

Persian Gulf–Black Sea corridor

New era for Iran-Europe trade or just another risk?



By Umud Shokri
Energy strategist

OPINION

In 2016, Iran proposed a regional initiative to develop the Persian Gulf–Black Sea International Transport and Transit Corridor (ITC), which would include Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Bulgaria, and Greece. This multi-modal corridor will begin in Iran at Bandar Abbas, head north through the country, and continue into Armenia or Azerbaijan, connecting four key maritime basins: the Persian Gulf, the Oman Sea, the Caspian Sea, and the Black Sea. Although not yet implemented, the initiative remains relevant today in the context of strategic competition, as it offers Iran and participating countries an alternative trade route that bypasses traditional Western-dominated shipping lanes, potentially reshaping regional economic dynamics and geopolitical influence. Eight years on, the Persian Gulf–Black Sea corridor remains largely conceptual, with progress limited to feasibility studies and diplomatic discussions and hampered by minimal infrastructure development. There is no rail connection between Iran and Armenia, and the crucial 165-kilometer rail section connecting Iran and Azerbaijan remains unbuilt. As a result, there is no fully functional multimodal corridor, and transport times exceed anticipated efficiencies. Geopolitical tensions, particularly between Armenia and Azerbaijan, alongside international sanctions on Iran, hinder the project's viability. At the same time, despite its potential to save time and costs, the corridor's feasibility is undermined by high expenses and the lack of significant progress, with no completion schedule or detailed cost projections available as of 2024.

A final set of significant challenges that continue to impede the ITC's development relates to international sanctions, particularly those imposed by the United States. US sanctions on Iran's financial and banking systems have severely limited progress on the project, unlike the International North-South Transportation Corridor (INSTC), which also traverses Iran but has alternative banking mechanisms.

trade and investment opportunities at home while enhancing its economic resilience. Yet the project's strategic-level benefits would not be limited to just the Iranian economy. The corridor also offers landlocked countries in the South Caucasus and Central Asia a strategic alternative for trade.

Diversification of trade routes

Iran views the Persian Gulf–Black Sea corridor as vital for enhancing econom-

cluding disputes over transit fees, leading to significant border congestion, and a notable decline in trade volumes with Turkey — down to approximately \$1 billion in early 2020, a 73% decrease since US sanctions were reimposed in 2018.

Economic integration

The corridor's potential would be further enhanced by Iran maximizing its import-export exchange with the Russia-led Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) as an alternative to trade with the EU. In particular, Iran stands to benefit from preferential trade agreements enacted by the EEU in October 2019 that reduced tariffs on 862 types of commodities, including 502 products exported from Iran. Additionally, the agreement provides lower customs duties for 360 products sent from EEU countries to Iran. This arrangement is expected to boost mutual trade, particularly with Russia, by tens of millions of dollars. And the December 25, 2023, signing of a full EEU-Iranian free trade agreement (FTA), further enhances the importance of and justification for developing the ITC on the one hand and the importance of the complementary INSTC on the other.

Regional tensions

Sustained management of regional tensions among Turkey, Iran, Armenia, and Azerbaijan will be critical for the success of the Persian Gulf–Black Sea corridor project. Armenia's attempts to exclude Azerbaijan from the corridor exacerbate existing conflicts. From Iran, the corridor could branch off into two primary routes: one through Armenia, in the direction of the Black Sea, and another through Azerbaijan, linking into the INSTC and connecting Iran with Russia. Regional disputes, such as Azerbaijan and Armenia's border clashes and ongoing tensions regarding the Zangezur Corridor, have hampered trade — while Russia's uneven support to the two South Caucasus rivals and Turkey's close alliance with Azerbaijan have further undermined incentives toward regional economic cooperation.

Infrastructure gaps

A significant material impediment to intra-regional trade is the lack of rail connections between Iran and Armenia, with neither side eager to contribute the estimated \$3.5 billion required to solve the problem. Currently, road transportation accounts for most of the trade between Iran and Armenia, but existing infrastructure is inadequate for large-scale business. Similarly, despite a 2023 financing deal between Russia and Iran, geopolitical challenges hinder the completion of the 165-kilometer rail link between the Iranian city of Rasht and Astara,

at the Azerbaijani border. This critical gap has forced trade along the INSTC to follow a combination of road transit and sea routes across the Caspian. Without substantial investment in rail infrastructure, neither the ITC nor the INSTC can realize their full potential as a commercial route.

Implications for Iran-Europe trade

If realized, the Persian Gulf–Black Sea corridor could significantly reduce transportation costs and time for trade between Iran and Europe. While precise statistics for this corridor are currently unavailable, similar initiatives like the INSTC have shown potential savings of up to 30% in costs and 40% in time compared to conventional routes, according to research conducted by the Federation of Freight Forwarders' Associations in India (FFFAI).

with an alternative route to Europe that bypasses Turkey, the corridor may diminish Western leverage and complicate sanctions enforcement. It could also inadvertently strengthen the positions of Russia and China by increasing their access to the region, with Russia seeking to extend its influence in the Black Sea as a counter to Western dominance.

This situation may further strain the strategic positioning of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), complicating the alliance's efforts to deter Russian aggression and maintain political cohesion among its members. While the corridor could diversify oil channels for its participants, it may also increase European dependence on Iranian petroleum supplies, complicating geopolitical dynamics, particularly if tensions between Iran and the West escalate. Additionally, if, as noted above, the



The map depicts some of the proposed routes for the Persian Gulf–Black Sea International Transport and Transit Corridor (ITC).
● railfreight.com

Countries like Bulgaria, Greece, and Georgia, though interested in participating in the development of the ITC in partnership with Iran, have struggled to navigate the sanctions environment. Moreover, the US withdrawal from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in 2018 complicated projects like India's investment in Iran's Chabahar Port, a key entry point for the corridor. Although India received exemptions in 2019, persistent concerns over secondary sanctions have impeded private investment in the necessary infrastructure. The same has been true regarding potential investments and cooperation on constructing the missing Iran-Armenia rail link. Those concerns are likely to grow with the return of Donald Trump to the White House, given his administration's expected return to a "Maximum Pressure" campaign against Iran.

Potential game-changing aspects

If the above-mentioned obstacles do not fully derail the ITC, the project could dramatically change the regional geo-economic and geopolitical situation. As project coordinator, Iran is leading efforts to integrate with the wider Mediterranean commercial network and boost its trade with the European Union, while also potentially drawing in economies from further afield, such as India. By streamlining the transregional movement of goods through the proposed ITC, Iran obviously seeks to boost

ic relations with neighboring or nearby countries, including by strengthening trade ties with Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Russia, and Azerbaijan, as well as project participants Armenia, Georgia, and EU members Bulgaria and Greece.

The corridor also aims to diversify Iran's transit options, reducing reliance on traditional routes through Turkey and lessening the impact of international sanctions. Although the European bloc as a whole represents a significant trading partner for Iran, with their imports and exports totaling more than \$5 billion in 2023, extensive sanctions imposed by the EU and the US severely limit this relationship by restricting financial transactions and specific goods due to concerns over the Iranian nuclear program.

To navigate these challenges, Iran has sought to boost non-oil exports, including petrochemicals and agricultural products northward, to Armenia and Georgia, while importing industrial machinery and high-tech goods. Yet despite showing modest growth in trade with these two South Caucasus neighbors since 2016, sanctions and infrastructure deficiencies continue to limit the full potential of this strategy. Developing the ITC would help address such hindrances as well as reduce Iranian dependence on Turkey and mitigate ongoing transit conflicts that strain bilateral relations while also reinforcing Iran's role as a logistical hub in the region. However, challenges remain, in-



● ABCMEDIA



The 37-kilometer railway connecting the Iranian city of Rasht to the country's port of Anzali on the Caspian Sea.
● X

By circumventing Russia and the Suez Canal, the corridor offers viable alternatives for countries like India seeking new commercial routes to Europe. Additionally, China stands to benefit from a faster, more economical route to Europe, as evidenced by its involvement in projects like the Anaklia port in Georgia. However, geopolitical tensions and China's hesitancy to acknowledge separatist regions where Russia maintains a military presence complicate Georgia's participation. Moreover, Iran must overcome substantial infrastructural, political, and economic challenges to fully realize the corridor's potential. Without stability in the region, lifted sanctions, and non-Western investment, the project risks remaining an unfulfilled geopolitical ambition given the need for international collaboration and financing for its success.

US, EU interests in strategic competition

The ITC poses certain challenges to US and EU interests within the context of strategic competition. By providing Iran

corridor enables Iran to evade international sanctions, this situation would undermine US and EU diplomatic initiatives.

Though its success is not assured, the Persian Gulf–Black Sea corridor has the potential to drastically change trade between Iran and Europe. Iran is making a bold strategic move with this endeavor to strengthen ties with its neighbors and expand its commercial influence. But there are critical obstacles to its success, including a lack of financing, difficulties with infrastructure, and serious geopolitical risks. The development of the corridor is further complicated by the consequences of international sanctions and conflicting regional interests. Although it holds potential advantages, the ITC raises concerns about shifting power dynamics in the region that could complicate NATO operations and jeopardize Western diplomatic and economic leverage.

The full article first appeared on The Middle East Institute.

Bagheri given interim role as Persepolis begins hunt for permanent coach

Sports Desk

Former Iran international midfielder Karim Bagheri was appointed as the interim coach of Persepolis for the club's remaining two fixtures until the mid-season break of the Persian Gulf Pro League.

An assistant to ex-head coach Juan Carlos Garrido, Bagheri, 50, takes the caretaker role after the Spaniard parted ways with the Tehran Reds by mutual consent on Sunday in the aftermath of a 3-1 home loss to Mes Rafsanjan in the Iranian top flight.

A fourth defeat in six league outings left the defending champion in the fourth place of the table with 23 points – five points adrift of top two Tractor and Sepahan and one behind Foolad Khuzestan.

Having joined Persepolis in June, Garrido is the third head coach to leave the club over the past 12 months – following Yahya Golmohammadi and Brazilian Osmar Vieira – after leading his team to nine wins and six defeats in 20 games across all competitions.

Persepolis will take on Khaybar at home on Friday and then plays away to bottom side Havadar on January 1.

The club hierarchy will be looking to name a permanent replacement for Garrido before Persepolis visits Zob Ahan on return to league action on January 21.



● fc-perspolis.com

Change of fortunes
Few would have anticipated

a short-lived tenure for Garrido, given his impressive start on Persepolis bench. The Reds began their title defense with back-to-back draws against Zob Ahan and Tractor

but went on a five-game winning streak without conceding a goal, including a 1-0 victory over archrival Esteghlal in the Capital Derby in September.

Even the 1-0 away defeats against Al Ahli Saudi and Al Sadd in their first three AFC Champions League Elite fixtures did little to raise doubts over the Spaniard's tactical acumen.

His team dominated the best part of the games against the two star-studded oppositions and was unlucky to leave the pitch empty-handed after missing numerous scoring opportunities.

portunities.

However, a significant slump in the Reds' form and performance – starting with a first domestic defeat of the campaign against Esteghlal Khuzestan on Oct. 30 – coupled with constant rotations to the starting XI and set-piece vulnerability, brought Garrido's coaching methods under massive scrutiny from the fans and pundits.

Expectations were always high at Persepolis, the dominant force in the Iranian league with seven titles in eight seasons, and the latest setback against Mes was the final nail in the coffin for Garrido's six-month stint.

Whoever the next head coach is, he will have to make an instant impact to keep up with in-form Tractor and Sepahan, as well as Golmohammadi's Foolad, in the league title race, while also facing a daunting task to secure a spot in the last 16 of the Asian top-tier club competition.

With the top eight of the league phase table going through, six-place Persepolis is well in contention for a knockout spot, but the stern tests against Saudi heavyweights Al Hilal and Al Nassr in February could still leave the Reds' campaign in jeopardy.

Asian Youth and Junior Weightlifting Championships: Girls shine, Iran wins more medals

Sports Desk

Iranian girls impressed on the third day of the Asian Youth and Junior Weightlifting Championships, collecting eight more medals for the country in Doha, Qatar.

In the men's draw, meanwhile, Mehrab Davasari registered 123-160-283 to win the clean & jerk gold and total silver in the youth 67kg contests, shattering five national youth and junior records in the process. Hanieh Sharifi enjoyed a remarkable run in the women's youth competitions on Sunday, bagging double golds and a silver in the 71kg weight class. Sharifi lifted 88kg to settle for the runner-up spot in the snatch discipline, but went on to raise 112kg above her head for the ultimate prize in the C&J event, before claiming a second gold with 200kg in total. Reihaneh Karimi also had a decent finish in the women's junior 71kg contests, grabbing triple bronze medals with a 91-120-211 record.

There was also a couple of medals for Iran in the women's youth 64kg category, where Alma Hosseini's bronze-winning 101kg effort in the clean & jerk event, was followed by a third-place finish in total with 183kg.

Iranian girl Hanieh Sharifi is seen in action at the Asian Youth and Junior Weightlifting Championships in Doha, Qatar, on December 22, 2024.
● IWFIR



Slot warns Liverpool against complacency after thrashing of Spurs



● GETTY IMAGES

REUTERS – Liverpool head coach Arne Slot was full of praise for his side's devastating attacking performance at Tottenham Hotspur, but warned the Premier League leaders against complacency after Spurs briefly threatened an unlikely comeback. The Reds were 5-1 up and cruising thanks to a quickfire second-half double from Mohamed Salah with just over an hour played, before Dejan Kulusevski and former Liverpool striker Dominic Solanke pulled it back to 5-3. Luis Diaz scored his second five minutes from time to make it 6-3 and finally end a crazy contest, which Slot said was Liverpool's best away per-

formance of his tenure. "Until 60-65 minutes (in), I really, really, really enjoyed what I saw," Slot told reporters. "But then you also saw that, no matter how much quality players have, they think they don't have to run anymore. "In this league, especially against Tottenham because they are so good with the ball as well, they immediately start to create. And that's what they did, and they scored two goals. I was happy that the sixth one went in, to be fair." The Liverpool boss, who has enjoyed a near-flawless start to life at Anfield, accepted that "maybe it is human that

if you are 5-1 up, you think 'OK'". But Slot said his players needed to be more ruthless, telling reporters: "You have to be on top of your game every second of the game. And if you're not 100%, then it immediately hurts you." Slot, who won the Dutch league with Feyenoord before joining Liverpool, was happy to be top of the league at Christmas but said there was a long way to go. "Of course it means something, because you always prefer to be where we are at the moment ... but you know just as well as I know, because I've won the [Dutch] league once, how hard it is to win it," he said.

Iran, E3 to resume nuclear talks in mid-January

International Desk

Iran's Foreign Ministry's spokesman Esmail Baghaei said a fresh round of talks between Iran and the European troika – Britain, France, and Germany – regarding Tehran's nuclear program and regional issues is likely to kick off in mid-January. During a weekly press briefing in Tehran on Monday, he noted that Iran and the three European countries, also known as E3, initially agreed to carry on with talks following the previous format and context. The latest round of talks between Iran and E3 was held in November. Iran has consistently stayed committed to negotiations over the past two decades in an ef-

fort to address concerns and has never abandoned the negotiating table, he highlighted. Baghaei emphasized that Iran's decisions will be based on the attitudes and actions of the parties involved. Tensions between Iran and European countries have escalated over the past two years due to European accusations of Iran's delivery of missiles and drones to Russia as well as Iran's uranium enrichment. The European countries and the United States have also sanctioned several Iranian individuals and institutions over the issues. European countries claim that Iran has supplied ballistic missiles to Russia for use in the Ukraine conflict, an allegation that Tehran has categorically

rejected. In a recent action against Tehran, the European troika pushed the adoption of a resolution in the Board of Governors of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in November. The resolution accused Tehran of poor cooperation with the agency and demanded a "comprehensive" report on its nuclear activities by spring 2025.

Developments in Syria

In response to a question about developments in Syria after the fall of president Bashar al-Assad, Baghaei said Syria should not become "a haven for terrorism," saying such an outcome would have "repercussions" for countries in the region. "Our principled position on

Syria is very clear: preserving the sovereignty and integrity of Syria and for the people of Syria to decide on its future without destructive foreign interference," Baghaei said. According to Baghaei, Iran has been in contact with the opposition groups in Syria for a long time and its presence in Syria was aimed to prevent the advances of Daesh terrorists and the spread of terrorism throughout the region. He added that Iran has contributed to "developing political processes" in Syria while clarifying that there is "no direct affiliation with the current administration" in the Arab country. Assad left Syria earlier this month as militants led by the Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS)



Esmail Baghaei
ISNA

group entered the capital Damascus after a lightning offensive. The takeover by HTS – proscribed as a terrorist organi-

zation by many governments including the United States – has sparked concern, though the group has in recent years sought to moderate its image.



IRGC chief says Iran's power exceeds borders

Hossein Salami
IRNA

The chief commander of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) said on Monday that the dimensions of Iran's might and strength exceed the Islamic Republic's borders, advising the country's enemies to set up their arrangements in line with the country's power. "Our power exceeds Iran's borders, and all our enemies have to arrange their calculations in line with this very momentous power since their first mistake [against us] might constitute their last one," Major General Hossein Salami said on Monday, Press TV reported. Salami identified the IRGC's level of strength as superior to that of all other powers. "I daresay that no power across this world is capable of conquering this power, neither on the ground, nor at sea, or in the air." He also hailed the sacrifices that had been made by the IRGC servicemen for the people and in the battlefield. Elsewhere in his remarks, the com-

mander asserted that members of the regional Axis of Resistance produced their own weaponry. "Everyone fights using their own capability, and no one relies on others. We support the Resistance Front, using all our capacity, but they produce their own weapons. Their tactics belong to themselves [too]. So do ours." As a case in point, the commander pointed to the IRGC carrying out the country's Operation True Promise against the Israeli regime, using its own weapons instead of conveying them to the Resistance Front for deployment against the regime. "We struck [the regime] ourselves, and we are going to do the same from now onward." Salami considered the Islamic Republic to be in possession of the same causes and beliefs as those of the Lebanese and Yemenis people, who are fighting the Israeli regime's aggression and occupation. "Our enemies are common too," he added.

UNRWA chief: Israel violates all rules of war in Gaza

Attacks on schools, hospitals 'commonplace'

International Desk

Philippe Lazzarini, the head of the UN's agency for Palestinian refugees (UNRWA), said attacks on schools and hospitals have been commonplace in Gaza, stressing that Israel has violated all the rules of war in the Palestinian territory. "Attacks on schools and hospitals have been commonplace. The world must not become numb. All wars have rules. All of those rules have been broken," Lazzarini said in a post on his X account. Lazzarini reiterated his calls for a cease-fire in Gaza. "A cease-fire is long overdue—a respite for civilians wherever they are including across Gaza & the immediate release of hostages. Enough time was wasted," he stated. The head of the UN's agency said "one child gets killed ev-

ery hour" in Gaza by Israeli attacks. "These are not numbers. These are lives cut short. Killing children cannot be justified." "Those who survive are scarred physically and emotionally," he added. Lazzarini warned that the clock was ticking for these children. "They are losing their lives, their futures and mostly their hope." An official from one of only two functioning hospitals in northern Gaza said on Monday that Israeli forces were continuing to target his facility and urged the international community to intervene before it is "too late." Hossam Abu Safiyeh, director of Kamal Adwan hospital in the city of Beit Lahia, described the situation at the medical facility as "extremely dangerous



AFP

and terrifying" owing to shelling by Israeli forces. Safiyeh reported that the hospital, which is currently treating 91 patients, had been targeted on Monday by Israeli drones. "This morning, drones dropped bombs in the hospital's courtyards and on its roof," said Safiyeh in a statement. "The world must understand that our hospital is being tar-

geted with the intent to kill and forcibly displace the people inside." On Sunday, Safiyeh said he received orders to evacuate the hospital, but the military denied issuing such directives. The health ministry in Gaza said on Monday that 58 people were killed in the Palestinian territory in just 24 hours, bringing the overall war death toll to 45,317.

What is meant...

Iraq's Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) were formed to defend Iraq against terrorism and combat extremist groups. In Yemen, Ansarallah focuses on domestic objectives, including resisting foreign intervention and preserving Yemen's territorial integrity. These goals extend beyond the influence or strategic interests of any foreign state, including Iran.

Ideological affinity and strategic convergence without dependency

Iran's relationships with these groups are primarily founded on ideological alignment and mutual objectives. Iran extends support to organizations such as Hezbollah, Hamas, Ansarallah, and Iraqi factions like Kata'ib Hezbollah and Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq due to their roles in opposing Israeli policies, countering extremist groups, and reinforcing the "Axis of Resistance" in the region. Nevertheless, these relationships do not imply absolute control or dependency. These groups often make independent decisions, guided by their own strategic priorities and distinct from Iranian directives.

Grassroots origins and localized support bases

These organizations are firmly embedded within their respective local communities. Hezbollah and Hamas are acknowledged as key domestic actors in Lebanon and Palestine, respectively. The PMF consist of grassroots Iraqi groups that enjoy strong backing from both the Iraqi government and its citizens. Similarly, Ansarallah is a native Yemeni movement with deep historical ties to Yemen's Zaydi Shia community. Their legitimacy and longevity are sustained primarily by social support from their local societies, rather than relying exclusively on external aid. This local foundation affords them significant autonomy in their decision-making processes.

Divergent tactical choices and strategic autonomy

There have been occasions when these groups have diverged from Iranian policies, either tactically or strategically. For example, Hamas has at times adopted positions that differ from Iran's stance on specific regional matters. Similarly, the PMF operate

within the framework of Iraq's internal political dynamics, which do not always align with Iranian directives. Ansarallah in Yemen prioritizes its own peace agreements and domestic issues, which may diverge from Iran's broader regional strategies. Although these groups receive support from Iran due to ideological and strategic commonalities, they remain autonomous actors with distinct objectives and agendas. Characterizing them solely as Iranian proxies oversimplifies their complex relationships with Iran and the broader regional dynamics. Moreover, the term "proxy" is often employed as a political tool to undermine the legitimacy of these groups in international discourse. While Iran's support for them is undeniable, categorizing them purely as proxies fails to acknowledge their independent origins, objectives, and operational frameworks. They are independent entities operating within their respective regions, cooperating with Iran based on shared interests and ideological alignment, rather than functioning under Iranian command.

Mohammad Ali Rajabi
Cartoonist



Legendary Iranian actress, voice artist Zhaleh Olov dies



Arts & Culture Desk
 In a deep loss for the Iranian art community, celebrated actress

and voice artist Zhaleh Olov died on Monday at the age of 97 after a period of illness. Her son, Shahrokh Razmjoo,

confirmed her death, which occurred around noon at Shahram Hospital in Tehran, IRNA reported. Olov, a towering figure in Iranian cinema, theater, television, and radio, began her artistic journey at a young age, nurtured by a family deeply appreciative of culture. Born in 1927 in the Sangelaj neighborhood of Tehran, she was introduced to the works of prominent Persian poets like Hafez and Ferdowsi by her father, an army officer passionate about the arts. By the age of seven, her love for literature had already taken root, setting the stage for her illustrious career. Starting her professional life in radio shortly after her teacher training in 1948, Olov quickly

became a fixture in Iranian radio drama, particularly known for her work on the 'Night Story' program. She made her film debut in 'The Tempest of Life' (1948) and went on to star in various television series and films, leaving an indelible mark with roles in 'Once Upon a Time' and 'Mum's Guest.' Notably, she was also a pioneer in dubbing, bringing beloved Disney characters to life for Iranian audiences in films like 'Cinderella' and 'Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs.' Her passing has prompted an outpouring of condolences from officials and the artistic community alike. The Iranian Ministry of Culture expressed its sorrow, stating, "Iranian art is forever indebted to luminaries like the late Zhaleh Olov, who faced the chal-

lenges of the path and worked tirelessly for its advancement." Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance, Abbas Salehi, highlighted her nearly eight decades of artistic contribution, underscoring her status as a cherished and capable artist. Nadereh Rezaei, the deputy minister for artistic affairs, also extended her condolences, remarking, "Olov was undoubtedly one of the enduring voices and memorable actors of theater and cinema, embodying a brilliant era of contemporary Iranian art." The Board of Directors of Iranian Film Actors Association also mourned her loss, stating, "We express our heartfelt condolences on the passing of our esteemed colleague, Zhaleh

Olov, who illuminated the fields of cinema, theater, radio, and dubbing with her unforgettable performances." Prominent figures in the industry have shared personal reflections as well. Akbar Zanjani, a voice actor and actor, stated, "She was a great actress; since I can remember, she has been either on the cinema screen or the theater stage." He expressed his sorrow over her absence, noting that while her age had led her to step back from the spotlight, her legacy would endure. Behrouz Razavi, a veteran radio announcer, emphasized Olov's significance in the medium. He praised her dedication to the craft and the impact she had on generations of artists.

Iranian medicine backbone of contemporary Western medicine

By Sadeq Dehqan
 Staff writer

EXCLUSIVE

Iranian medicine, one of the oldest medical practices globally, significantly influenced the foundation of Western medicine. However, some nations attempt to claim this ancient practice as their own. This traditional approach to healthcare focuses on treating diseases and physical ailments through observation and the examination of the four temperaments.

This medicine, also known as traditional or Islamic medicine and other names, is considered one of the oldest and most ancient medical schools in the world, according to Arman Zargaran, head of the history of medicine department at the University of Tehran.

Its history dates back several thousand years, and even the main structure of Western medicine, which is now called modern medicine, is based on it. He believes that despite all the advantages that make Iranian medicine stand out compared to many medical schools in the world, it has not been well introduced to the world. Our weakness in introducing and identifying it has led many countries to try to appropriate Iranian medicine in their own name by changing its name.

In this exclusive interview, Iran Daily reporter spoke with Zargaran, a renowned expert in traditional pharmacy and assistant professor at the School of Traditional Medicine, Tehran University of Medical Science (TUMS). Zargaran also serves as the head of the History of Medicine Department at the University of Tehran and as an international advisor to the Iranian and Complementary Medicine Office of the Ministry of Health and Medical Education.

IRAN DAILY: Could you first give us some background on Iranian medicine and its history?

ZARGARAN: Iranian medicine is one of the oldest human civilizations, with its roots dating back several thousand years. Archaeological findings and pre-historic periods reveal evidence of medical and pharmaceutical tools from around seven thousand years ago in the Iranian plateau. Written records from various periods also indicate that

the origins of Iranian medicine are ancient, making it one of the oldest and most venerable medical schools in the world. Iranian medicine in the Iranian plateau and the Middle East has had extensive interactions with other civilizations such as Mesopotamia, Greece in the West, and India and China in the East since ancient times. Furthermore, Iran has been a scientific hub and even a political center in certain historical periods, which has resulted in a strong scientific foundation in medicine. Iran was prominent in the medical field during the Achaemenid period and later in the Sassanid era when Jundishapur University was established as one of the world's significant scientific centers and the first major university in the world. The first training hospital associated with a medical school was also founded in Jundishapur during this period.

It was in this free-thinking atmosphere in Iran that professors and students from various nationalities and religious backgrounds gathered, fostering a rich intercultural environment among different medical schools in Iran and creating connections between them. The medical school we know as Iranian medicine reached its zenith during the Islamic period, leading to the Golden Age of Islamic civilization between the 9th and 13th centuries.

During this era, scholars such as Avicenna, Al-Akhawyni Bokhari, Zakariya Al-Razi, and Ismail, who were mostly Iranian, brought this medical school to its pinnacle, to the extent that it can be said that the foundation of Western medicine and the roots of modern medicine trace back to Iranian medicine. As I mentioned, Iranian medicine had exchanges with Greek medicine in the West and Indian medicine in the East, but nonetheless, the books of our scholars like Avicenna's 'Canon' and Al-Razi's 'Al-Hawi', along with other works, constituted the majority of medical texts in the Western world until the 16th and 17th centuries. Many prominent and serious medical texts, including pharmacopoeias (books containing a complete list of drug information, including type, side effects, storage, and analysis methods) from that era, are related to Iran. The origins of many pharmacopoeias or pharmaceutical texts can be traced back to Iran, such as the Qarabadin Shifai, which was

printed in Latin in France during that period as Pharmacopoeia Persica and inspired medical and pharmacopoeia writing in Europe. Iranians also played a significant role in the development of the scientific and medical field during the Islamic period. Today, we are the inheritors of this medical school globally, and this legacy can play a crucial role in shaping the identity and history of our society, as well as in the advancement of healthcare and treatment in our country.

Despite our significant scientific and medical background in the world, why is Iranian traditional medicine not as well-known globally?

The matter of introducing Iran's medical background and our traditional medicine to the world is a matter of policy and the politicians' perspective. To make a topic globally known, you need to invest properly in it, and so far, we have not invested well in this regard. However, Iran is currently one of the leading countries in medicine, and our medical identifiers and traditional medicine have been incorporated into the medical subject headings of the world.

Currently, many short courses on Iranian traditional medicine are being held outside Iran, and our medicine is being taught in countries like Austria, Greece, Tunisia, South Korea, and various other places in short courses. Either our professors go to these countries to conduct these courses, or their students come to Iran to participate. Nevertheless, we are still far from our goal of adequately introducing Iranian traditional medicine centers around the world. Achieving this goal requires our policymakers, especially in the Ministry of Health, to pay attention to promoting and developing Iranian traditional medicine globally. Our neglect in this regard has led to many countries trying to appropriate our traditional medicine as their own or introducing it under different names. For instance, Greek medicine in India is the same as Iranian traditional medicine, which was brought to India by our physicians during the Safavid era. Similarly, in Turkey, Iranian traditional medicine is promoted as Anatolian medicine.

What are the characteristics of



Iranian medicine and how can it be distinguished from other medical schools of thought around the world?

Iranian medicine is a temperamental medicine, and its treatment is based on the identification of the four temperaments: Choleric, Sanguine, Phlegmatic, and Melancholy. Its roots can be traced back to the ancient Iranian science of Avicenna. The Indian government has invested \$250 million in traditional medicine and has established a global center for traditional medicine in Gujarat, India, under the supervision of the World Health Organization. This investment will yield significant returns in terms of identity, culture, health development, and tourism over time. As one of the leading countries in traditional medicine, we should also invest in this field. We need to separate the non-essential elements that may have been incorporated into Iranian medicine and develop its principles and advantages.

Some criticize traditional medicine, claiming it lacks a solid scientific foundation. What is your opinion on this?

These criticisms stem from a lack of knowledge among critics to analyze the subject properly. Iranian traditional medicine is based on personalized medicine, which is a new concept in medical science. The identification of temperaments in Iranian medicine and the treatment based on the phenotype (the characteristics and features that appear in the appearance of organisms) of individuals is rooted in their genetics. Therefore, the identification of diseases based on appearances in Iranian medicine is not very different from genetic testing. In fact, traditional and modern medicine view diseases from different perspectives, but the outcome is the same, and both are used for treatment. Thus, neither is wrong, and in my opinion, if a connection is established between modern and traditional medicine, they will complement each other.

Pezeshkian commits to halt 'Tehran's expansion', promote decentralization



Social Desk

In a decisive move to address the pressing challenges faced by the capital, Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian announced on Monday that his government is committed to halting the expansion of Tehran.

The president emphasized the critical shortage of resources and inadequate infrastructure as key factors driving this policy, president.ir reported.

During a meeting focused on decentralizing Tehran, Pezeshkian highlighted the repercussions of imbalanced development, stating, "The continuation of the current trend is impossible, and the capital's expansion must be stopped as the first step to rectify the situation." This clear stance aims to alleviate the serious problems that residents of Tehran have been grappling with due to rapid urban growth without proper planning. To support this initiative, the government is prepared to transfer administrative processes and distribute authority among other provinces.

Pezeshkian underscored the need for universities to step up their involvement in research and studies, which are crucial to devising effective solutions for organizing the situation in Tehran, preventing further expansion, and evaluating the feasibility of relocating the capital.

"We will allocate budgets to universities based on research that provides precise and practical solutions to the country's challenges," he asserted, stressing the importance of academic contributions in tackling urban issues. In line with this directive, Pezeshkian tasked the Ministry of Roads and Urban Development with the urgent development of a comprehensive plan aimed at organizing, decentralizing, and assessing the viability of moving the capital. Moreover, the president urged the ministry to consider previously made decisions and present a detailed plan to the government for approval and subsequent implementation.