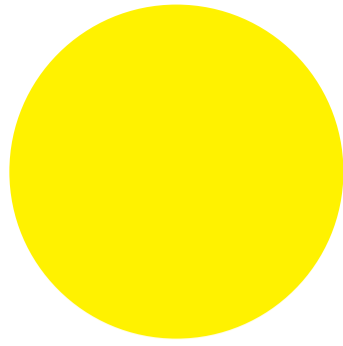


Iran-E3 to hold fresh round of nuclear talks on January 13



7 >



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Iran-Bahrain détente to catalyze strategic balance in Persian Gulf

By Ashkan Pirzadeh
Strategic affairs expert

OPINION
EXCLUSIVE

With the conspiracy of the United Kingdom and the collaboration of the Pahlavi regime, Bahrain separated from Iran in the 1970s. Since then, the relations between Iran and the breakaway region that was once known as Iran's "fourteenth province" have experienced many ups and

downs. The deepest rift in relations between the two countries dates back to January 4, 2016, following Saudi Arabia's unilateral severance of diplomatic ties with the Islamic Republic of Iran under the pretext of an attack on its embassy in Tehran. At that time, Bahrain's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, following Saudi Arabia's policies, announced the severance of its diplomatic relations with Iran through an official statement. Now, with the resumption of rela-

tions between the Islamic Republic of Iran and Saudi Arabia and their agreement to restore their friendly relations, a new chapter of reduced tension and balance in the Persian Gulf has opened for other countries in the region. The relations between the Islamic Republic of Iran and Bahrain, based on their shared history and commercial and cultural connections, hold strategic and geopolitical importance, to which Iran has always paid attention. [Page 2 >](#)



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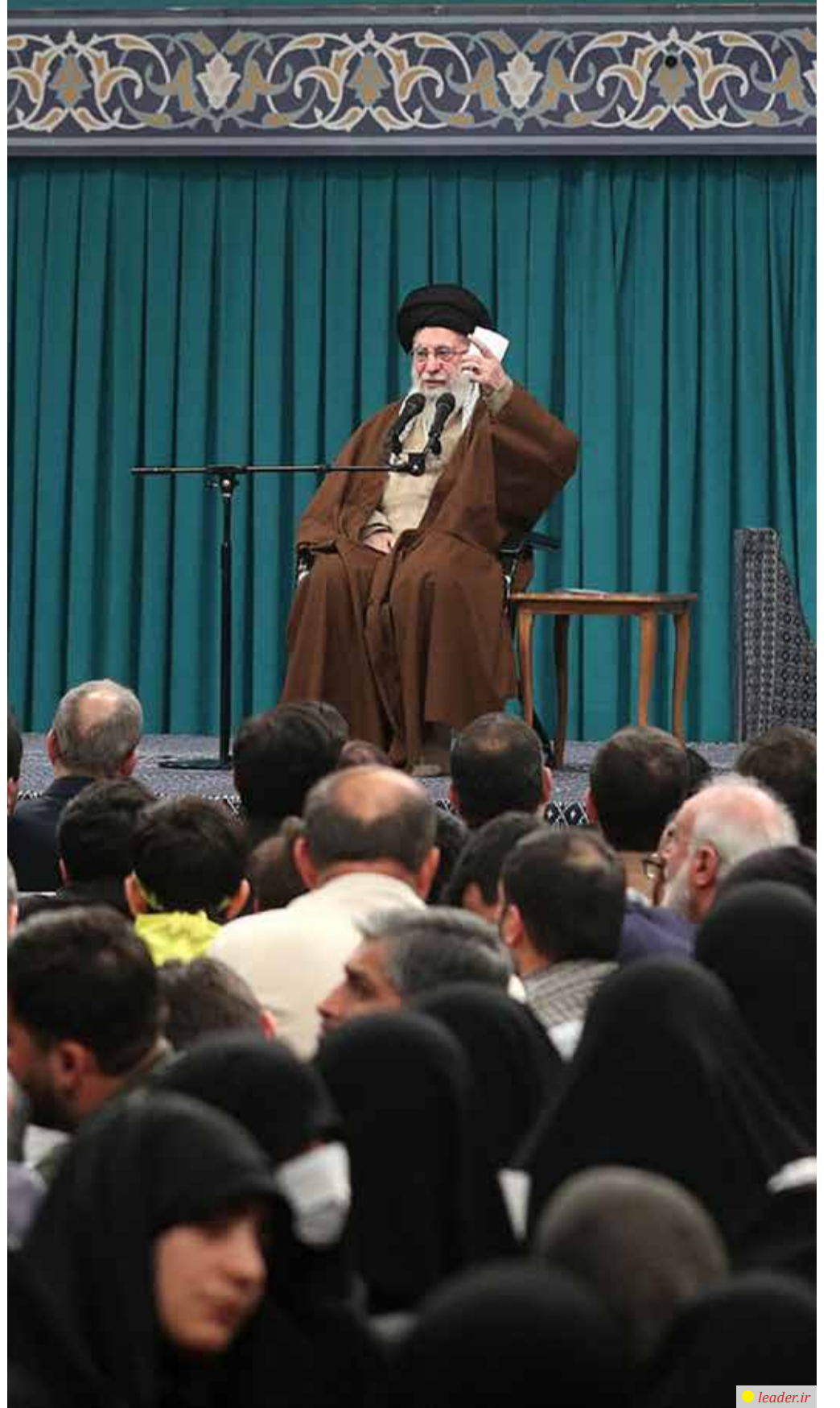
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leader.ir

Aref highlights FTA role in expansion of Iran's exports

Economy Desk

Iranian Vice President Mohammad Reza Aref said that free trade agreement (FTA) would play a crucial role in expanding the country's exports.

Speaking at the High Council for Non-Oil Exports meeting on Wednesday, Aref said that non-oil exports are a priority for the current government, which is committed to strengthening trade ties with neighboring countries.

The meeting, which marked the first session in nearly four years, was attended by ministers and top officials from organizations involved in export activities.

The vice president stressed that the development of non-oil exports is vital for the government's economic strategy, saying, "With the establishment of official relations through international and regional mechanisms, now is the time to push for a real export boom."

Aref pointed to Iran's active participation in international bodies such as Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and BRICS, as well as key regional agreements, which have led to valuable connections.

He noted that even countries previously uninterested in expanding relations are now eager to engage, creating an op-

portunity to significantly boost exports.

"Signing FTA will provide the framework to seriously advance Iran's exports and improve the country's foreign trade status," Aref said.

During the meeting, seven proposed initiatives to boost exports were discussed, with attendees offering their own suggestions for export development and strategies within their respective sectors.

Incentives for exporters, technical services export

In his remarks, Aref highlighted the importance of reviving export incentives that are attractive to exporters.

"We must learn from past experiences to identify the obstacles that hindered the effectiveness of these incentives," he said, adding that these measures must be quickly operationalized to see tangible improvements in export growth.

Aref also emphasized the need to expand Iran's export of technical and engineering services, a sector where Iranian professionals have a strong track record.

"This is an important area for our country's exports, and we must take it seriously and work towards its development," he said.

The vice president also noted



the importance of setting export targets and identifying specific markets.

"We need to define our export goals and target markets as soon as possible. Are we focusing on increasing exports within the region, or do we aim to expand markets from Asia to Africa?"

Aref asked.

Leveraging provincial capacities for export growth

Aref underscored the need to utilize the capacities of provincial governments, particularly in border regions.

"When we selected governors for border provinces, we made it clear that they must actively work on developing cross-border trade, whether through border markets or economic agreements with neighboring countries," he said.

The vice president also called

for strengthening the role of trade attachés in target export markets, stressing the importance of private sector cooperation.

"To achieve the export leap we are aiming for, we must fully engage the private sector," he concluded.

Minister: Petro-refineries could help cut sales of unprocessed commodity



The minister of oil announced plans to reduce crude oil exports as he emphasized the importance of petrochemical refineries and mini-refineries.

Mohsen Paknejad noted that these initiatives are part of a framework

outlined in the Seventh Development Plan (2024-28), saying that, "Efforts are underway to maximize the activation of these capacities," Shana reported. Paknejad, addressing the Oil Ministry's plan under the current administration, reiterated that petrochemical

refineries and mini-refineries play a critical role in reducing crude exports. The minister of oil also stressed that clarifying the status of fuel smuggling in the country is a public demand.

He added that the Ministry of Oil, alongside other relevant bodies, has a duty to assist in addressing this issue. Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian on Tuesday emphasized the government's commitment to combating daily fuel smuggling, calling it a significant waste of national wealth.

Speaking at a meeting of the Headquarters to Combat the Smuggling of Goods and Currency, Pezeshkian described the current state of fuel smuggling — tens of millions of liters per day — as both a catastrophe and evidence of inefficiency.

He remarked, "As an Iranian citizen, not just as president, I find it completely unacceptable that, within a production and distribution system controlled by us, 20 to 30 million liters of fuel are smuggled daily." Pezeshkian dismissed long-term plans as inadequate, stressing the need for

immediate, practical solutions to the crisis.

"When such a massive amount of fuel is being smuggled and we cannot stop it, can we reasonably expect the public to accept measures like cutting energy, gas, or electricity supplies to industries to manage consumption?" he asked.

The president stressed that effective solutions should address the root causes rather than targeting those at the lower end of the smuggling chain.

"We must avoid creating new problems by threatening the livelihoods of those involved at the final stages of this cycle. Instead, we need to reform the underlying sources of the issue," he said.

The president tasked the Headquarters to Combat the Smuggling of Goods and Currency with holding regular meetings over the next month to conduct expert analysis, identify the root causes of fuel smuggling and design practical solutions.

He urged the use of academic and student expertise, noting that their inde-

pendence allows for clearer problem analysis and solution development.

He called on every organization to take decisive steps within their power to prevent the waste of the nation's resources.

The president also urged the identification of inactive entities, vehicles, equipment, or units that consume subsidized fuel inefficiently or fail to meet activity benchmarks.

"I am sure we will stop this waste and the smuggling of the country's wealth," Pezeshkian affirmed.

"We must adopt proven scientific methods for optimal fuel management. My aim is to reform and improve the country's administration. With God's help and public support, we will amend ineffective laws and resolve these issues."

During the meeting, a detailed report was presented on the methods, routes, and origins of the daily smuggling of 20 to 30 million liters of fuel. Relevant bodies also shared their views and proposed strategies to combat the problem.

Iran-Bahrain détente ...

In recent days, Bahrain's Ministry of

Foreign Affairs has announced coordination with Iran's Foreign Ministry to "establish the necessary legal frameworks" for the resumption of diplomatic relations between the two countries. This indicates a serious desire and intention from both countries to restore friendly and systematic relations after years of severance. This interaction is significant as it highlights the efforts of both countries to achieve balance and establish new connections in the Persian Gulf region.

The historical interactions and commercial and cultural ties between Iran and Bahrain are highly significant and can strengthen and develop economic relations, enhance cultural exchanges, and ensure sustainable security in the Persian Gulf region.

In the current critical period, when the West Asia region is experiencing rapid challenges and transformations, it is essential to consider national interests as a set of desires and objectives that a country aims to achieve to maintain and enhance its security, welfare, and interests. By pursuing active and smart

diplomacy, the restoration of relations with the countries of the Persian Gulf should be regarded as a logical and unavoidable policy.

The establishment of friendly relations between Iran and the Persian Gulf countries will challenge the "Iranophobia" project of the Zionist regime, which seeks to infiltrate the Persian Gulf countries. This will also enable the Islamic Republic of Iran to focus on more serious regional issues, particularly the Zionist regime.

Moreover, by advancing economic diplomacy, Iran can shape a new chapter

in relations with Bahrain by defining mutual economic interests. This can pave the way for strategic cooperation in trade development, joint investments, and collaboration in energy, oil, and gas sectors. This could lead to the continuation of friendly relations between the two countries and contribute to sustainable security in the region.

Considering that relations between Iran and Bahrain in recent decades have been influenced by various factors and affected by regional and international developments, it is now an

opportune time to define a roadmap for strategic cooperation between the two countries in areas of mutual interest. This can create a favorable model for other countries in the region. It will establish strategic balance in the Persian Gulf and limit the activities of extraregional actors who have always sought to create tensions in the region with the "Iranophobia" card. It will also demonstrate that guaranteeing sustainable security in the Persian Gulf is only possible through the participation and cooperation of regional countries.

Semnan's handicrafts as a path to job creation



Iranica Desk

Handicrafts are recognized as a low-cost industry in the production process, but they carry high added value. Semnan Province has taken significant steps toward developing creative handicrafts to promote the livelihoods of artisans in this field, aiming for job creation while preserving this enduring and historical art. The province is known for its rich heritage of handicrafts, including pottery, carpet weaving, and traditional textiles, which reflect the unique culture and craftsmanship of the region.

Handicrafts are among industries that, in addition to having historical and cultural backing, play an effective role in job creation, improving livelihoods, and generating income. The productivity of this industry requires securing a sales market, which in turn needs attention to the tastes and needs of consumers, IRNA wrote. Currently, artisans in Semnan Province prioritize innovation and pro-

duction tailored to community needs in the field of handicrafts, as well as the creation of high-quality artistic works. This approach enhances collaboration and synergy between graduates of artistic disciplines and traditional artisans, fostering a vibrant creative ecosystem.

The production of creative handicrafts is effective in securing and guaranteeing a sales market, and holding unveiling ceremonies for these works plays an important role in encouraging artists toward innovative production and drawing the attention of officials and the public to handmade items. This strategy is pursued alongside efforts to obtain the National Seal of Excellence, which will further elevate the status of local artisans and their crafts.

Deputy Head of Semnan Province's Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicraft Organization, Samaneh Soltanipour, stated that four innovative and creative works by handicraft artists from this province were

unveiled for the first time. She added that these works include a leather candy dish and sugar bowl, an engraved board titled "A Piece of Heaven," a ceramic piece representing the Saqqa Khaneh (public drinking place) of the holy shrine of Imam Reza (PBUH), and a *shomareh-duzi* (a type of embroidery) tablecloth.

Soltani-Pour further announced that from now on, innovative and creative products from the handicrafts of Semnan Province will be unveiled monthly with the aim of encouraging and promoting the introduction of artists.

She invited all artists in the province to submit their creative and innovative works that have not yet been presented through the district offices, so they can be reviewed and evaluated for introduction at the unveiling event of innovative works. This initiative will not only showcase the talents of local artisans but also help preserve and promote the unique cultural heritage of Semnan Province.



Gohar Tappeh in the context of Bronze Age



Gohar Tappeh is a prehistoric site located in the Mazandaran Province of Iran, specifically in Behshahr, about 2km northwest of Rostamkola and 30km from Sari. Nestled in a plain surrounded by forested pastures and lush mountains, Gohar Tappeh has a rich historical significance.

The story of Gohar Tappeh traces back to the inhabitants of the ancient caves in Mazandaran Province, who gradually transitioned from cave dwelling to settling in the Gohar Tappeh area. During the Neolithic era, this site was characterized by rural life, and it later became a center for urbanization during the Bronze Age.

The geological history of the area has

created numerous caves, which served as dwellings. Gohar Tappeh itself is one of Iran's notable prehistoric settlements, with its origins dating back to the Copper and Stone ages.

Positioned among ancient valleys and caves — such as Hoto Cave, Kamarband Cave, and Kumishan Cave — its importance is further enhanced. The region's abundant water sources, forests, caves, and favorable conditions contributed to the gradual development of Gohar Tappeh, which expanded into a large city covering around fifty hectares during the Bronze Age.

Artifacts from Gohar Tappeh reveal a diverse range of items from the Copper, Stone, and Bronze ages, including

pottery, bronze objects, seals, decorative items, architectural structures, and weapons such as bayonets and daggers. The site also yielded pointed pendants, necklaces, bracelets, stone beads, and clay figurines of animals and humans, as well as clay rattles and various spindle types.

The architectural remains at Gohar Tappeh indicate the use of brick and stone construction, featuring wooden horizontal beams and reed coverings. Numerous stone tools have been discovered, including blades, chips, and mortars, which were utilized for harvesting grains, cutting plants and animal meat, and grinding wheat and other grains.



Global model for resistance, justice

'Soleimani Doctrine' foils Greater Middle East Plan



TEHRAN TIMES



The pinnacle of Soleimani's strategic success in countering the American-imposed regional order was the defeat of Daesh (ISIS), which was intended to be the primary executive tool of this plan. Daesh was meant to facilitate regional fragmentation through its self-proclaimed caliphate, but Soleimani's intelligent leadership in coordinating resistance forces led to its defeat.



By Navid Kamali
Foreign affairs expert

OPINION
EXCLUSIVE

In today's turbulent era, where the hegemonic system of the West attempts to impose its will on independent nations through military and economic power, the emergence of influential figures like Martyr General Qassem Soleimani marks a turning point in the history of freedom-seeking movements. The Soleimani school of thought, derived from the experiences and ideas of this distinguished commander, is now recognized as a global model for resistance and justice.

General Qassem Soleimani, as one of the most prominent military-political strategists not only in Iran but in the 21st century, played a pivotal role in neutralizing America's ambitious project. This plan, known in regional political literature as the "Greater Middle East Plan," was part of the United States' grand strategy to redesign the political and geopolitical map of West Asia (the Middle East).

In June 2006, Condoleezza Rice, Secretary of State under George W. Bush, introduced the concept of "Constructive Chaos" in her historic speech in Dubai. This term, later repeated in a joint press conference with then-Israeli prime minister Ehud Olmert, implicitly referred to America's strategy of creating controlled instability in the region. This strategy was based on the theory of "Controlled Instability," theorized by American think tanks like RAND and Brookings.

The main objectives of this project, formulated under the "Middle East Partnership Initiative," included: Fragmenting large and influential regional countries into smaller, controllable

units; systematic weakening of independent regional powers; expanding Israeli influence as America's strategic ally; controlling energy resources and transit routes; and establishing permanent military bases under the pretext of fighting terrorism.

General Soleimani, deeply understanding the nature of this project and its devastating consequences for the region, designed a multi-layered strategy to counter it. His approach, later known in global academic literature as the "Soleimani Doctrine," was an intelligent combination of military operations, active regional diplomacy, and mobilization of popular forces. This doctrine was based on four funda-

mental principles:

- Strengthening the Resistance Axis as a geopolitical bloc;
- creating strategic alliances beyond religious and ethnic boundaries;
- developing indigenous defense capabilities of regional countries;
- and countering takfiri terrorism as the main tool of destabilization.

The pinnacle of Soleimani's strategic success in countering the American-imposed regional order was the defeat of Daesh (ISIS), which was intended to be the primary executive tool of this plan. Daesh was meant to facilitate regional fragmentation through its self-proclaimed caliphate, but Soleimani's intelligent leadership in coordinating

resistance forces led to its defeat.

The Soleimani school of thought is founded on principles such as faith in God, love for people, courage, humility, and service. He demonstrated a practical model of popular leadership through his continuous presence on the frontlines and close connection with people. Emphasis on human dignity even when dealing with enemies and avoiding partisan political games are other distinctive features of this school.

The global nature of the message of the Soleimani school has made it a source of inspiration for all oppressed nations. This school, emphasizing self-reliance and trust in domestic capabilities, provides prac-

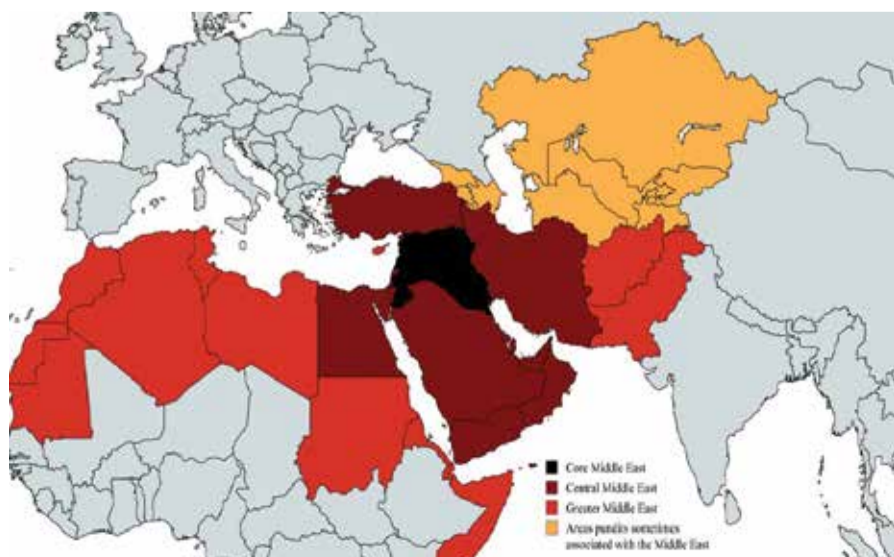
tical solutions for resisting the West's hegemonic system. The successful experience of the Resistance Axis in combating terrorism and defeating separatist projects testifies to the effectiveness of this approach.

Unity and cooperation among nations and resistance groups were key principles that Soleimani consistently emphasized. Through resistance diplomacy and efforts to reduce ethnic and religious differences, he created a powerful network of resistance forces that now serves as a strong barrier against global arrogance.

The Soleimani school demonstrates that fighting oppression is not limited to the military sphere and requires utilizing all cul-

tural, political, and media capacities to advance resistance objectives. This comprehensive approach, combined with an emphasis on human and moral principles, has made the Soleimani school a successful and replicable model for all freedom-seeking movements.

In conclusion, Soleimani's legacy transcends a military doctrine; it is a humanitarian and global school whose message is standing against oppression, believing in justice, and striving for a better future for coming generations. This school continues to shine as a guiding light for fighters of truth and justice worldwide and inspires freedom movements globally.



The photo shows a map of the Middle East as envisioned according to various concepts and definitions.
● REDDIT



A poster of Iranian general Qassem Soleimani hangs in Italy. It reads, "In the honor of General Qassem Soleimani."
● X

'National Hero Day': Remembering how Gen. Soleimani plotted downfall of Daesh

By Mohammad Homaeefar

Journalist

OPINION

In a famous letter on November 21, 2017, Iran's iconic anti-terror commander Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani declared the fall of Daesh, a group whose reign of terror gripped West Asia for years. The letter was addressed to Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei, announcing that the "devastating storm" inflicted upon the Muslim world was over. To honor this monumental achievement, Iran officially designated November 21 as "National Hero Day" last year, celebrating the late anti-terror commander's pivotal role in ending a dark chapter for the region and marking one of his most significant contributions to regional peace and stability. "This humble person, as a soldier called upon by Your Eminence to serve on this battlefield, announces the termination of the rule of this vicious cursed entity, following the completion of the liberation operation of Abu Kamal as Daesh's last stronghold," reads an excerpt from the letter.

Rise, reign of Daesh

Daesh, also known as ISIS or ISIL, emerged from the remnants of Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), a local offshoot of the Al-Qaeda terrorist group, in the wake of the 2003 US invasion and occupation of Iraq. However, it wasn't until 2011 that the group and its affiliates managed to take advantage of growing instability in Iraq and a Western-engineered crisis in Syria to consolidate their power in the two neighboring Arab countries.

By 2014, Daesh had taken control of Mosul and Tikrit in Iraq, as well as Raqqa and oil-rich Deir ez-Zor in Syria. It then declared the formation of its so-called caliphate stretching from Syria's Aleppo to Iraq's Diyala, with Raqqa as its capital.

Notably, the dreaded terror group had already become so rigid in its ideology and so aggressive in its approach that even al-Qaeda disavowed any ties with it in February 2014.

In his letter, General Soleimani laid out horrendous crimes committed by Daesh in Syria and Iraq, including the beheading of children, skinning men alive in front of their families, taking young girls and women hostage and raping them, burning people alive, and massacring young people. He said the terrorist group destroyed thousands of factories, roads, bridges, refineries, wells, gas and oil lines, power plants, and historical sites, as well as thousands of mosques, sacred Islamic sites, schools and hospitals in the two Arab countries before it was eliminated.

Rise of national hero

Confronting such atrocities required unprecedented synergy among regional resistance forces.



Late Iranian general Qassem Soleimani (front-L) receives Iran's highest military honor, the Order of Zolfaghar, from the Leader of the Islamic Revolution Seyyed Ali Khamenei (front-R) in March 2019.

FLICKR

To defeat Daesh, while international coalitions carried out widely advertised airstrikes in Iraq and Syria, regional resistance fighters and their heroes like General Soleimani were the ones who rose to the occasion and ended the group's evil reign.

The famed Iranian anti-terror general, in turn, played a central role in strengthening the Axis of Resistance in the West Asian region.

With his personal charisma, his ability to unite diverse forces, and his strategic brilliance, he coordinated between resistance forces as well as the Iraqi and Syrian government troops to confront Daesh during its peak from 2014 to 2017.

"Iran is the heart of resistance," he once said while speaking about the Islamic Republic's regional posi-

tion. Leader of Lebanon's Hezbollah resistance movement Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, who was assassinated by Israel in late September this year, had repeatedly lauded General Soleimani's key role in coordinating and leading efforts by regional resistance groups against Daesh.

In Iraq, the Iranian general worked closely with the Popular Mobilization Units (PMU), Kurdish forces, and government troops in key operations such as the breaking of the siege of Amirli in 2014 and the liberation of Tikrit in 2015. His efforts helped stabilize areas like Diyala and Saladin provinces, ensuring that Daesh could not maintain its territorial gains.

In Syria, he played a decisive role in military campaigns in Aleppo and Palmyra, aligning efforts with

Russian air support to reclaim critical territory. He also visited Russia and reportedly convinced Russian President Vladimir Putin to join the military campaign against Daesh in the Arab country.

Defeat of US creation

Curiously, what stands out in the letter is General Soleimani's emphasis on the fact that the "devastating and poisonous sedition", namely Daesh, was created by the enemies of Islam, particularly the United States and the Israeli regime, with the aim of "initiating widespread war within the Islamic world and a fight among Muslims."

"All these crimes have been designed and implemented by US leaders and organizations, according to the acknowledgment of the highest-ranking US official

who is currently president of the United States," he wrote, invoking then-US president Donald Trump's remarks.

He then warned that the same scheme is "still being modified and implemented by current American leaders."

Another noteworthy point in General Soleimani's letter is his selfless attribution of credit for defeating Daesh to others, without taking any credit for himself despite his heroic endeavors.

He gracefully thanked top Iraqi Shia cleric Ayatollah Ali Sistani for his wise leadership and guidance, the Iraqi and Syrian governments and resistance forces, Hezbollah and its leader, and the nation and government of the Islamic Republic of Iran for their admirable support in the fight against Daesh.

In response to his letter

later that day, Ayatollah Khamenei specifically thanked General Soleimani for his invaluable service "not only to regional countries and the Islamic world but also to all of humanity." He, too, underscored that Daesh was created and supported by the United States and its vassal regimes in the region, saying the terrorist group was formed with the aim of bolstering the occupying Zionist regime's strategic influence and control over the region.

Tragically, General Soleimani's life was cut short on January 3, 2020, when a US drone strike near Baghdad assassinated him, some two years after his historic declaration.

Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, the deputy chief of the PMU and an iconic Iraqi resistance commander, who played an equally important role in the decimation of the notorious terrorist group, was also assassinated along with General Soleimani.

Despite this monumental and irreparable loss, General Soleimani's legacy endures, celebrated by millions who regard him as a symbol of resistance and peace in the region.

'National Hero Day' stands as a reminder of his contributions, honoring a man whose determination and sacrifice helped bring hope to a region scarred by foreign-sponsored terrorism.

Perhaps General Soleimani's famous quote — "We are the nation of martyrdom; we are the nation of Imam Hussein"—best encapsulates the spirit of heroic sacrifice and resistance that he embodied.

The article was first published on presstv.ir.



"We are the nation of martyrdom; we are the nation of Imam Hussein"—best encapsulates the spirit of heroic sacrifice and resistance that General Soleimani embodied.



General Qassem Soleimani (c) walks with allied forces in Iraq in this undated photo.

PRESS TV



Late Iranian general Qassem Soleimani (front-2nd L) poses for a photo with a group of peshmerga fighters in Kurdistan.

THE GUARDIAN



Esfandiar's club form a boost for international duty

Sports Desk

Amirhossein Esfandiar's recent form in the Chinese Volleyball League offers an integral role for the Iranian when the national team takes part in two major international tournaments in 2025. The Iranian outside-hitter has chipped in 185 points for Tianjin Food Group this season, standing 15th in the league's top scorers' chart. The pinnacle of Esfandiar's contribution, however, has come from the service line. The 25-year-old, whose MVP performance inspired Iran to the world under-21 title in 2019, has registered a league-high 35 aces in the ongoing season – including five in Tianjin's

victory last time out. Esfandiar scored 19 points to help the Chinese club beat Beijing BAIC Motor 3-1 in Group D of the Chinese league on Sunday. Esfandiar's impressive stats is a major boost for Iran's new head coach Roberto Piazza. The Italian coach will be looking to build on a combination between overseas players – including Esfandiar, skipper Milad Ebadipour, as well as prolific duo Amin Esmailnejad and Pouria Hosseinkhanzadeh – to end the country's below-par international run over the past couple of years. Having finished in the bottom three in the preliminary 16-team table of the past two editions, Iran will get its VNL cam-

paign underway against Brazil in Rio de Janeiro on June 11. A second outing for Iran in Pool 2 will come against another volleyball powerhouse in USA, followed by encounters with Slovenia and Ukraine. Iran will head to Belgrade, Serbia, for Week 2 of the competition, starting with an encounter against the host on June 25. Piazza's side will then play Argentina and Germany before the Italian reunites with his former team, the Netherlands, in the Serbian capital on June 29. The third and the final week of the preliminary phase in Gdańsk, Poland, will see Iran square off against European powerhouses Poland (July 16) and France (July 19), who met in

the Olympic final in August, either side of an all-Asian battle against China. Iran will hope to be in contention for a place in the VNL Finals when going head-to-head with Bulgaria in their final Week 3 game on July 20. The top eight teams of the preliminary-round table will progress to the VNL Finals – starting with the quarterfinals on July 30 – with the host city yet to be announced by the FIVB, the international governing body of the sport. A second major event for Piazza and his team will be September's World Championship in the Philippines, where Iran is drawn in Pool A – also featuring the host, Egypt, and Tunisia.

● volleyballworld.com

Urunov extends Persepolis deal until 2027

Sports Desk

Uzbekistan international Oston Urunov signed a new two-year contract with Persepolis, extending his commitment to the Persian Gulf Pro League champion until June 2027. "I am very happy to continue my path with you @persepolis," the 24-year-old wrote in an Instagram post on Tuesday. "I had offers from numerous clubs but Persepolis has been like a home to me, and the fans have been great. That's why I decided to sign the extension," the wizard winger, who is best known for his exceptional dribbling skills, told

reporters after the club confirmed the contract through a #URUNOV2027 on the screen during a press conference in Tehran. Having joined the club in February last year, Urunov played an integral part in the Tehran Reds' league campaign with six strikes in 13 matches, as Persepolis went on to lift a seventh top-flight trophy in eight years. Urunov's contribution in the ongoing season, however, has been hampered by a couple of groin and hamstring injuries, which ruled him out of seven games in all competitions – including September's 1-0 win against Esteghlal in the Capital Derby, as well as AFC

Champions League Elite games against Qatari clubs Al Sadd and Al Rayyan in October and November. Persepolis supporters will be thrilled by the news after their club failed to find a proper replacement for the other prolific winger Mahdi Torabi, who left the Reds in the summer to join Tractor.

● Oston Urunov (L) poses with a Persepolis shirt alongside club CEO Reza Darvish after signing a two-year extension to his contract with the Persian Gulf Pro League champion in Tehran, Iran, on Dec. 31, 2024. ● fc-persepolis.com



Liverpool reject Real Madrid move for Alexander-Arnold

THE GUARDIAN – Liverpool have rejected Real Madrid's attempt to sign Trent Alexander-Arnold in the January window. The 26-year-old defender will be out of contract in the

summer, and is free under regulations to sign a pre-contract deal for next season from New Year's Day. Madrid have long been linked as his eventual destination but an attempt to pre-empt that process has fallen flat, with Liverpool rejecting the move. Madrid's approach for Alexander-Arnold was rebuffed before any financial package for buying out the remainder of his contract could be offered. Liverpool's executives continue to be in negotiation with Alexander-Arnold's advisers and family, with little indication, public or otherwise, that he would like to leave his boyhood club. The Alexander-Arnold situation continues to be without

a long-term solution, while the club are also still to reach agreements to extend the contracts of Mohamed Salah and Virgil van Dijk. If Liverpool's desire is to keep all three, then finances, profitability and sustainability regulations and wage structure may be issues. Last summer, Liverpool made only one senior addition to the squad Arne Slot inherited from Jürgen Klopp; the Italian Federico Chiesa, who has struggled with injuries. Selling Alexander-Arnold in January would release funds as it represents "pure profit" for a former youth-team player but that avenue has been rejected. Madrid's intention is for the England international to be an immediate replacement for veteran right-back Dani Carvajal, 32, who is set to miss the rest of the season with a cruciate knee ligament injury.

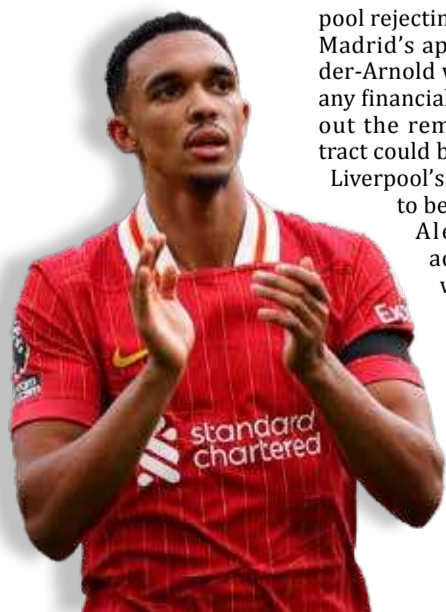
James, 40, makes more NBA history in Cavs defeat

BBC – LeBron James became the first person in NBA history to play as a teenager and past the age of 40 as the Los Angeles Lakers lost to the Cleveland Cavaliers. James, who made his NBA debut as an 18-year-old in 2003, turned 40 on 30 December. He scored 23 points in the 122-110 defeat at the Crypto.com Arena in LA, but 27 from Jarrett Allen helped Cleveland to an eighth straight win. Widely regarded as one of the greatest basketball players of all time, James last year became the NBA's all-time leading points scorer. He has won four NBA Championships, been named Most Valuable Player four times and is in his 22nd season in the NBA, a record he shares with the now retired Vince Carter. The Cavs remain top of the

Eastern Conference and the Lakers are seventh in the West. Elsewhere, Giannis Antetokounmpo finished with 30 points, 12 rebounds, five assists and two steals in the Milwaukee Bucks' comeback win over the Indiana Pacers. The Bucks were 19 points adrift late in the third quarter but rallied to win 120-112 in Indianapolis. Shai Gilgeous-Alexander led the Oklahoma City Thunder to a 113-105 home victory over the Minnesota Timberwolves with 40 points, three rebounds, two assists and two steals. It was a 12th straight win for the Thunder, who remain top of the Western Conference.



● GARY A. VASQUEZ/IMAGN IMAGES



● AFP

Leader: Syria invaders will be forced to retreat by Syrian youth

Ayatollah Khamenei lauds Gen. Soleimani's role in reviving Resistance Front



Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei speaks during a meeting with a group of families of martyrs, veterans, and resistance fighters in Tehran on January 1, 2025. [khamenei.ir](#)

International Desk

Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei said those who have invaded the Syrian territory will be forced to retreat in the face of the power of the Arab country's youth. Addressing a group of families of mar-

tyrs, veterans, and resistance activists ahead of the fifth martyrdom anniversary of General Qassem Soleimani, Ayatollah Khamenei said, "Syria belongs to the Syrian people, and those who invade Syrian soil will undoubtedly one day be forced to retreat in the face of the power of the valiant Syrian youth."

Referring to the establishment of new US bases in the Arab country, the Leader emphasized that the aggressors should leave the territory which belongs to a nation or they will be expelled; therefore, the American bases in Syria would be trampled upon under the feet of Syrian youth.

Since the beginning of foreign-backed war in Syria in 2011, the US have established several military bases in north-eastern part of Syria and deployed around 900 troops on the pretext of fighting Daesh terrorist group.

On December 9, a day after the fall of the government of former president Bashar al-Assad, the US President Joe Biden said that US troops will remain in Syria to fight Daesh, with the Pentagon revealing that there were around 2,000 US troops in the Arab country.

Ayatollah Khamenei also praised as "unique" the sacrifices of Iran's top anti-terror commander, who was assassinated in 2020.

The US assassinated General Soleimani, former commander of the Quds

Force of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps, and Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, deputy commander of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Units, in a drone strike near Baghdad International Airport on January 3, 2020.

"Martyr Soleimani's constant strategy was to revive the Resistance Front. He always tried to revitalize the resistance," the Leader said.

The Leader described the top Iranian commander's role in the fight against terrorism as "matchless" and said his sacrifices and services "must remain in our political teachings."

He said defending the holy sites was a "tenet" for Martyr Soleimani, who invariably referenced Iran as a "sacred shrine."

"If these lives had not been lost, if this struggle had not been fought, and if Hajj Qassem Soleimani had not marched through the mountains and deserts of this region so bravely..., there would be no sign of these holy sites today," the Leader said.

Ayatollah Khamenei said a very important characteristic of General Soleimani

was his assessment of the country's issues with a global perspective and avoiding a closed and limited outlook. "He believed that every important regional and global incident had an impact on the issues in our country, and with this perspective and assessment, he detected the danger from outside the borders and took action to prevent and remedy it."

Underlining that the developments in the past few years and defending the holy shrines in Iraq, Syria and across the region prove that the Islamic Revolution is "alive," Ayatollah Khamenei promised that "the truth front" will definitely emerge victorious.

"The defenders of shrines showed that despite the hefty investments and expenses of ill-wishers, the flag of resistance is still flying high and the enemy has not been able to and will not be able to pull down the flag of resistance in Lebanon, Palestine, Syria, Iraq, and Iran," he said.

"Lebanon is a symbol of resistance, it will be victorious, [and] Yemen is a symbol of resistance, it will be victorious."

Tens of thousands stage anti-Israel rallies worldwide on New Year's Eve

International Desk

On the last night of 2024, as fireworks lit up skies across the globe, a large crowd gathered in downtown Tunis to send a different message, chanting, "No celebration while Gaza burns."

"We chose to end this year by raising our voices for the Palestinians," said Jawaher Shanna, a member of the Joint Action Coordination for Palestine, which organized the protest.

"They've faced annihilation for over a year, living in tents under relentless bombardment, while the world watches in silence."

Similar protests unfolded in cities across Tunisia, including Sousse and Sfax, with activists calling for an immediate and lasting cease-fire in the Gaza Strip.

Across the Maghreb, Morocco's Tangier also held a significant protest on New Year's Eve, urging Rabat to revoke its 2020 normalization accord with Israel.

Meanwhile, tens of thousands of people gathered on Istanbul's Galata Bridge on New Year's Day on Wednesday to express solidarity with Palestinians in Gaza.

Demonstrators waved Turkish and Palestinian flags and chanted "Free



People demonstrate in solidarity with the Palestinian people in Istanbul, Turkey, on January 1, 2025. [AP](#)

Palestine" in the protest, organized by the National Will Platform, a coalition of more than 300 pro-Palestinian and Islamic groups.

Drone video showed thousands of people filling the bridge and the adjacent Eminönü and Sirkeci districts. Pro-Palestinian protesters also took to the streets of Stockholm to call for a cease-fire in Gaza.

Israel's war on Gaza continued into 2024, claiming 23,842 lives and wounding 51,925 people this year alone, according to the Gaza Health

Ministry. These casualties brought the official death toll since the start of the conflict to 46,376.

Rights groups and United Nations legal bodies have accused Israel of committing genocide, citing its siege tactics, indiscriminate bombardment, and systematic targeting of hospitals, displacement shelters, aid workers, journalists, and designated "safe zones."

"Our role is to stand by Palestinians, to amplify their voices, and to remind the world of their struggle," Hicham Aadi, member of The Moroccan movement of Nosra, said at Tangier's protest.

The Moroccan pro-Palestine group has also condemned the international silence surrounding attacks on hospitals and medical workers in Gaza.

For weeks, as fighting escalated near Kamal Adwan Hospital in northern Gaza's Beit Lahia, hospital director Hosam Abu Safiya issued desperate appeals for international intervention to halt the violence "before it is too late."

On December 27, the Israeli military launched a major raid on the hospital, claiming it killed over 20 fighters and arrested more than 240 people, including Abu Safiya, whom they accused of being a Hamas operative. Since his arrest, the 51-year-old doctor's whereabouts remain unknown. The World Health Organization reported that Kamal Adwan Hospital has been out of service ever since — a catastrophic blow to northern Gaza's healthcare system, where tens of thousands remain under relentless bombardment.

Iran-E3 to hold fresh round of nuclear talks on January 13



International Desk

Deputy Foreign Minister for Legal and International Affairs Kazem Gharibabadi said Iran will hold a new round of nuclear talks with France, Britain, and Germany on January 13 in Switzerland.

Gharibabadi said on Wednesday that the talks were only "consultations, not negotiations."

According to him, the pending talks would feature defining of the standing issues and further consultations "so we get to know within which frameworks and through which method we should conduct any [potential] negotiations if there were going to be any."

The latest round of talks between Iran and the three countries, known as E3, was held in November in Geneva, which Gharibabadi at the time described as "candid." The January 13 talks will take place one week before Donald Trump's return to the White House.

In 2015, Iran and world powers — including France, Britain and Germany — reached an agreement that saw the easing of international sanctions on Tehran in exchange for curbs on its nuclear program.

But the United States, during Trump's first term in office, unilaterally withdrew from the

accord in 2018 and reimposed biting economic sanctions.

Tehran adhered to the deal until Washington's withdrawal, and then began rolling back on its commitments.

Tensions between Iran and European countries have escalated over the past two years due to European accusations of Iran's uranium enrichment as well as delivery of missiles and drones to Russia.

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 also 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.

Iran insists on its right to nuclear energy for peaceful purposes and has consistently denied any ambition of developing nuclear weapons capability.

Mohammad Ali Rajabi
Cartoonist



Iranian cinema breaks 24-year audience record

Arts & Culture Desk

The Iranian cinema industry achieved a remarkable feat, surpassing its highest audience figures in over two decades. Up to December 31, the number of cinema-goers in Iran exceeded 28.6 million, breaking the record set in 2000.

This surge in attendance has also boosted box office revenues to an impressive \$200 million. With several months left in the Iranian calendar year, there is potential for this figure to rise even further, possibly surpassing the 33-million audience record from 2000, IRNA reported. Currently, three comedy films are drawing significant crowds: 'Seventy Thirty', 'Pressure Cooker', and 'Breakfast with Giraffes'. 'Seventy Thirty', with its later release compared to the other two, has the potential to attract more viewers in the coming weeks and months.

This strong lineup, combined with the upcoming Nowruz (Iranian

New Year) screenings, which are expected to begin in mid-March, suggests that both audience numbers and box office earnings could climb even higher, setting new milestones for Iranian cinema.

So far in 2024, six films have grossed over \$12.5 million, and ten films have attracted millions of viewers. Leading this list is the comedy 'Texas 3', which drew 4,446,000 viewers and grossed \$31.25 million, accounting for 16% of this year's total audience.

Another comedy, 'Pressure Cooker', which was expected to perform even better, has sold 3,730,000 tickets and grossed \$26.12 million, representing 13% of the total audience so far. 'Seventy Thirty' has sold 3,050,000 tickets and grossed \$21.5 million, capturing 11% of the total audience.

These three popular and high-grossing films have collectively accounted for 40% of the total audience and \$77.87 mil-

lion in box office sales.

The Iranian cinema has attracted 28.6 million viewers so far this year, compared to 28.26 million last year.

If the industry surpasses the 33-million audience mark from 2000, which is within reach, the next milestone would be the 33.9-million audience from 1999. The real challenge, however, lies in matching the 39.9-million audience from 1997, which would require a strategic distribution of various film genres throughout the year.

A drawback in 2023 was the limited success to just two films, 'Fossil' and 'Hotel'. This year, the number of impactful films has increased, with a focus on comedies. Maintaining a diverse range of influential films, including social and children's films, could lead to an even more successful year in terms of box office sales and audience numbers.

The production trends over the past months suggest that



social and children's films will have a more significant pres-

ence in next year's screenings, potentially giving comedies a

run for their money in terms of popularity.

Street art: Vibrant expression of life and community



By Niloufar Mansouri
 Guest contributor

Artists are eager to showcase their work, prompting them to immediately share images and videos on social media. The sweet sounds of a harmonica played by a woman in light clothing in the subway, a young man playing a *santur* (a hammered dulcimer of Iranian origins) by the water's edge, a young woman painting in a street corner, or a group of young men harmonizing with various instruments—even in the cold—make us feel alive, providing a momentary escape from the monotony of daily life. Nowadays, watching street musicians or painters brings passersby into a beautiful world of art. Urban life takes on a new hue as enthusiasts flock to their favorite hangouts, such as Bagh-e-Ferdows, Iranian Artists Forum, and Qeytariyeh Park, where nightlife thrives. They can be seen in every corner of the city, offering their art to the eyes and ears of those

passing by. Some sociologists believe that this style of art serves as a social phenomenon for visibility. Street art is an expanding trend that is gaining momentum each day.

As dusk approaches, artists arrive with their luggage from various corners of Bagh-e-Ferdows, preparing their setups. They announce their performance locations in advance on social media. Paintings and charcoal works are arranged side by side, and the sounds of music and singing create a romantic atmosphere. The diversity of art caters to every taste. Sara, one of these street artists, captivates passersby with her paintings. She states, "An artist must be present in society and among the people. An artist who interacts with the community can discover great artistic ideas. Painting is my profession, and I accept commissions based on the skills I've learned, such as creating murals in indoor spaces."

Having grown up in Mazandaran, Sara has developed a strong connection with nature and animals, often

reflecting them in her works. She shares, "I've painted several collections featuring the nature and various animals found in my northern home, from chickens and roosters to different birds and insects."

Fatemeh Rahimi, a 28-year-old graduate of the Painting Department at Shiraz University, has experienced various jobs, including street vending, kindergarten teaching, and dental assisting. Yet, she believes that painting represents another aspect of life: "At the suggestion of a friend who was street vending, I ventured into street painting. Although I had held several exhibitions before, I was initially quite anxious. However, once I gained confidence, I decided to stay. Painting on the streets elevates my capacity and teaches me a lot. This style of painting confronts us with the realities of society, helping us understand our place and what is happening around us."

Fatemeh describes her interactions with people on the streets: "Painting in public is intriguing for people, and they look at me and my artworks with great affection. They say that these paintings beautify the city and the streets. They thank me for bringing art to the streets. However, there are occasional disturbances; some people kick over my works, damaging them. There was a time when many of my pieces went missing and were never found. Sometimes, the municipality obstructs our work. Yet, when I set up in recreational or historical sites, the responsible authorities often try to assist us."

A box, an easel, some painting supplies, paint, and fabric are the tools Fatemeh sets up daily in a corner of the street to create beautiful images on the city walls. She remarks, "I don't disturb anyone in the street or historical sites. People come to watch

and sometimes sit down to share their thoughts. I provide materials to those interested in painting so they can create whatever they like, from the elderly to children and teenagers. Some even come to recite poetry or play music. This interaction is incredibly enriching—an engagement I have never experienced in enclosed spaces."

Sound of street music

The chill in the air prompts passersby to quicken their pace. Amidst the cacophony of horns, the cries of taxi drivers, and the hustle and bustle of urban life, the sound of an instrument draws attention. As I get closer, the music grows louder. A young man plays softly, performing pieces that gradually attract a crowd around him. In keeping with the tradition of street performers, his instrument case lies open for passersby to contribute based on their interest.

"Playing music on the street isn't easy. You might go unnoticed and be overlooked, especially if you are a beginner. But when you finally find an audience, you realize that enduring the neglect is worthwhile," says Reza Nikpour, a 22-year-old music student and *santur* instructor. When asked about his income and why he chose to play in the street, he explains, "I enjoy playing music for people, and music is not as accessible to everyone in today's society. People need to hear it and incorporate it into their lives." Reza reflects on the music of decades past, noting, "There was a radio program that introduced people to authentic and folkloric Iranian music. It aired in five parts, covering local music from Khorasan, poetry recitals, instrument and vocal introductions, and contemporary music. Unfortunately, this program was discontinued. During that time, people

listened to it frequently, and in a society where 80% of the populace was illiterate, many could recite selected poems by Saadi, Hafez, Rumi, and other poets by heart, demonstrating their familiarity with Iranian music. My grandfather may not have formally studied music, but he can distinguish between Dashti and Homayoun just by hearing them, thanks to that radio program in the past. However, such programs are no longer common, leading to a disconnection from our true and authentic music."

Reza has been playing the *santur* in the street for five years, striving to resonate this instrument's sound with the spirits of passersby, even if only for a brief moment. He says, "I derive satisfaction from the idea that the sound of the *santur* might linger in people's auditory memory, and if just one person shows interest among many, that's enough for me. There have been instances where someone who heard the violin on the street became interested and is now taking violin classes. The same happened to me. One day, while I was playing the *santur*, a young man approached, asked me questions about the instrument, and showed such enthusiasm that he is now learning it."

He adds that performances should not exceed an hour and a half, as both the performer and listener's ears become fatigued after about 45 minutes. "This was also the case with the old radio music programs, typically running between 18 and 50 minutes. Moreover, the *santur* is quite sensitive to the weather, so I usually don't play for more than an hour in this environment." Regarding his street music earnings, Reza states, "The income is quite unpredictable, ranging from \$0.5 to \$61 at the least and, if the songs are popular, sometimes reaching up to \$24."