

Committees formed to examine capital relocation: **Gov't spokesperson**

7 >



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7 >

Tehran's Trump card

**Zarif: Iran will dictate US course**

By **Maryam Salari**  
Staff writer

**INTERVIEW EXCLUSIVE**

The world has undergone many changes over the last few years, some truly big and some smaller than what they appear to be. Even experts are prone to overvalue some past and future changes, while others disregard them completely. It takes one who has first-hand experience in dealing with similar changes in the past to correctly identify challenges and opportunities. That is why Iran Newspaper sat with Mohammad Javad Zarif, Iran's former foreign minister who now serves as the country's vice president for strategic affairs, in an exclusive interview to discuss foreign affairs.



● REZA MOATTARIAN / IRAN DAILY

these issues for nearly 40 years, both as an academician and as someone practicing his profession. I do not know of any group that has acted on behalf of our country. This is a misconception, whether it is held by those within the country and those without. For example, the US barracks in Beirut were destroyed in 1982 because they had occupied the Lebanese territory. No one acted because of Iran. Did Hamas carry out its attack on October 7 for us?

**Did they not coordinate either?** No, there was no coordination. Therefore, the notion that we ever had a proxy force is incorrect. This implies that our power had not diminished either after the fall of those forces because they were not tools of our power. We supported them and continue to do so. This support gives us symbolic power, but they were not our tools for wielding power because they never acted on our behalf.

So, it should not be assumed that we are now weaker against Trump. Everything depends on our own agency. Now, states are no longer the only actors on the international scene, and non-state actors have gained agency and no longer depend on anyone else. Thus, the notion that we have lost our power today is a false perception.

**What kind of agency do you expect from us during Trump's second term?**

Iran is considered an important regional actor and an influential country that can still be effective. No problem in the region will be resolved without Iran, and Iran is part of the solution in the region. When Iran entered the field under the leadership of Martyr General Qassem Soleimani, we were able to combat extremism in the region together. I am not saying Iran fought against extremism alone, but Iran's presence played a major role in this regard. These challenges in our region have not been resolved. We must realize that we are valuable and have the capability for active agency.

**IRAN DAILY: How do you think Trump's second term as president play out?**

**ZARIF:** Trump's personality will not change in his second term, so he will remain self-centered. This time around, however, he would be very powerful because he has both chambers of Congress, Supreme Court judges, and a significant portion of the states on his side. He has also managed to personally gain the favorable opinion of a large part of the American public without utilizing party resources. Therefore, he will be a powerful president. In my opinion, Trump himself is less inclined to collectivism. I do not believe in the claims that he is essentially a businessman. To me, only his individual character is significant, but I also believe Iran is a more significant actor; that is to say, we determine how Trump will approach us.

**Considering the developments surrounding the Resistance Axis in the region, a viewpoint has emerged indicating that Trump would have an easier time negotiating with Iran compared to his first four years in office. Do you agree with this view?**

In my opinion, it all still depends on Iran. Your power is based on the narrative you hold about yourself, and I believe the Leader of Iran's Islamic Revolution's statement clarifying that Iran never had proxy forces captures the correct reality, and I have always expressed this in my own statements. Proxy forces are said to make moves at least whenever it is beneficial to you, but this has never happened. There has not been a time when we needed one of our foreign allies to act on our behalf. They acted against the Occupation based on their own interests and beliefs. I have been closely following

From ashes to eternity, Rumi's legacy lives on in marionette opera

## **Iranian Playwright: Rumi Conveys Timeless Message of Love, Peace**

**EXCLUSIVE** 8 >



● ALI HASSANPOUR / IRAN DAILY



**Israel's weaponization of Gaza aid system**

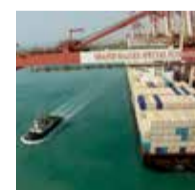
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**IRGC launches military drills near Natanz nuclear facility**

7 >



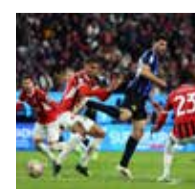
**Iran's trade balance improves by \$5.5b:**  
**IRICA**

2 >



**Economic and cultural significance of Behbahan's Narcissus Festival**

3 >



**Italian Super Cup final: Taremi stars but Inter undone by Milan fightback**

6 >

# Iran's trade balance improves by \$5.5b:

## IRICA

The Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA) announced that the country's trade balance improved by \$5.5 billion under the current administration (from August 22, 2024, to January 4, 2025). During the period, non-oil exports totaled \$22.5 billion, reflecting a 24% rise compared to the same period the previous year. In terms of weight, non-oil exports reached 59 million tons,

an 18% increase year-on-year. The report also noted that imports during this time amounted to \$25 billion, a 4.5% decrease compared to the same period in the previous year. By weight, imports totaled 12.8 million tons, down 20.5% year-on-year. Overall, Iran's total trade volume, including both exports and imports, grew by 7% to \$47.5 billion during the incumbent

administration. By weight, trade volume increased by 8.5% to 71.8 million tons. IRICA statistics reveal that the country's trade balance improved by 69%, or \$5.5 billion, from August 22, 2023, to January 4, 2024. The report added that during the same period in the previous year, non-oil exports stood at \$18 billion, while imports totaled \$26 billion.



## ISPA: Energy shortages taking heavy toll on steel output capacity



The head of the Iranian Steel Producers Association (ISPA) stated that the country's annual steel production capacity stands at 50 million tons, but due to energy shortages, only 30 million tons are being utilized. Speaking at the inauguration of the 6th National Iranian Steel Festival and Exhibition on Tuesday, Bahram Sobhani highlighted that production limitations and the failure to maximize capacity stem from energy supply challenges,

particularly shortages and disruptions in gas and electricity during various seasons. He noted that the steel industry accounts for only 5% of the country's gas consumption. If energy deficits are resolved, Iran could become the seventh steelmaker in the world by producing 36 million tons of steel annually. Sobhani emphasized the localization of the steel industry, stating that domestic companies and producers have reduced reliance on

imports by manufacturing components and equipment locally. He added that steel festivals have fostered collaboration between new technology-based firms (NTBFs) and the steel industry, resulting in over 400 memoranda of understanding worth \$1.7 billion signed so far. Also, agreements worth 70 million euros are expected to be signed between steel companies and domestic producers by late March, the ISPA head noted. Sobhani pointed out that 128 equipment manufacturing companies, half of which are NTBFs, are participating in this year's exhibition. He also unveiled the Iran National Atlas of Steel Industries, describing it as a roadmap for the country's steel supply chain. The atlas provides information on capacities, projects, and the status of production units, while also addressing optimal resource management, planning for the steel industry, and infrastructure

development. Additionally, a national platform has been launched to manage the needs and capabilities of steel producers and suppliers. The platform enables component manufacturers to assess and produce parts based on industry demands. Sobhani highlighted that despite sanctions and energy imbalances, the steel industry generates approximately \$8 billion annually in foreign exchange earnings. He stressed the need to increase the industry's share of non-oil exports to over 20 million tons, noting that steel accounts for 16% of Iran's non-oil exports and plays a significant role in the national economy. The ISPA head proposed designating January 12 as National Steel Day in the Iranian calendar, recognizing the industry's importance to the country.

### \$2.5b saved through localization

Mohammad Aqajanlou, head of

the Iranian Mines and Mining Industries Development and Renovation Organization (IMIDRO), announced that \$2.5 billion has been saved through domestic production of parts and equipment since 2020. Speaking at the same event, Aqajanlou stated that indigenization in the steel industry has enabled the production of components using advanced technology. Plans are in place to save an additional \$800 million this year through further localization. The deputy minister of industry, mine, and trade added that a comprehensive steel industry platform, developed in collaboration with 1,430 domestic companies, has been launched. The platform includes data on 27,000 localized parts and identifies 300 strategic needs prioritized for domestic production. He emphasized that the platform has facilitated connections between steel producers and equipment manufacturers, enabling

NTBFs to enter the steel industry, reduce costs, and increase foreign exchange earnings. Aqajanlou stressed the importance of investing in engineering knowledge, technology, and domestic production to achieve sustainable development and enhance Iran's position in the global steel industry. He called for advancing green steel technologies to reduce emissions and align with global standards, noting that optimizing energy consumption is a top priority for the industry. Aqajanlou also highlighted the importance of addressing bottlenecks in the industry and fostering collaboration between producers and consumers of components and equipment. He mentioned the signing of a memorandum to improve standards in the steel sector and the implementation of major projects, such as utilizing waste energy from reduction units, which will help reduce imports in this field.

### ADVERTORIAL

## 17 reasons why Shahab Moradi is popular

*There is not always a direct relationship between reputation and popularity. Shahab Moradi is one of the most popular and influential clerics among Iranians and Farsi speakers. Contrary to many religious figures, he has been able to connect with a wide range of audiences, from the younger generation to families. The reasons for Shahab Moradi's popularity go beyond his mastery of religious teachings and are attributed to his style of interaction with the audience, personality traits, and communication methods. Tabnak's News Agency's editorial team has listed an interesting review of the popularity dimensions of this celebrity cleric:*

**1. Approachable and Friendly Attitude:** Shahab Moradi communicates with people in a warm, simple, and relatable way, avoiding overly formal or distant tones.

**2. Avoiding Judgment and Prejudice:** He respects diverse opinions and beliefs, creating a safe and welcoming space for everyone, regardless of their background.

**3. Effective Social Activities:** From charity foundation and providing food for needy children to releasing birds into the wild, he promotes the idea that faith and spirituality should manifest in real-world actions, not just words.

**4. Emphasis on Kindness and Humanity:** His teachings consistently stress kindness, empathy, and mutual respect, making him a symbol of compassion in society.

**5. Simplifying Complex Ethical and Religious Concepts:** He explains deep and complex ideas in a straightforward, practical way that resonates with people from all walks of life.

**6. Connection with Young People:** By understanding the emotional and spiritual concerns of youth, including issues like relationships and identity, he has built strong trust and rapport with them. His Q&A sessions chiefly known as "Class Mojarradha" are particularly popular among university students, including both religious and secular individuals, showcasing his ability to bridge divides.

**7. Flexibility and Holistic Thinking:** Instead of adhering to rigid perspectives, he approaches issues with an open mind and seeks comprehensive, balanced solutions.

**8. Honesty and Transparency:** Shahab Moradi's sincerity in speech and behavior has earned him significant trust and credibility among his audience.

**9. Use of Modern Communication Tools:** He actively engages with audiences on social media and other modern platforms, ensuring his messages reach a wide

audience.

**10. Focus on Family and Its Values:** He emphasizes the importance of family bonds and emotional well-being, offering practical advice on maintaining healthy relationships.

**11. Work Ethic and Positive Energy:** His tireless efforts in various fields, from public speaking to social projects, reflect a highly energetic and passionate personality.

**12. Commitment to Environmental Preservation:** Actions like planting trees, and promoting eco-friendly behaviours by giving tips on watershed management, demonstrate his concern for environmental issues. His campaigns encourage community participation, such as stop-hunting, or organizing tree-planting events with his university students at Class Mojarradha that bring people together.

**13. Attention to Social Issues and Real Needs:** He addresses societal challenges like addiction, divorce, and mental health issues, offering both support and actionable solutions.

**14. Bridging Tradition and Modernity:** He seamlessly combines traditional values with modern life, presenting timeless ethical teachings in a way that feels relevant and accessible to contemporary audiences.

**15. Charismatic and Likable**

**Personality:** His polite, humble demeanor, combined with a sense of humor and genuine emotional connection, has made him a beloved figure across generations.

**16. Intellectual Excellence Coupled with Humility:** Shahab Moradi is highly knowledgeable in various fields, including psychology, counseling, Islamic jurisprudence (Fiqh), mysticism, art, and Persian literature. Despite his expertise, he never displays arrogance or elitism, which is often common among academics. This humility makes him even more respected and admired by intellectuals and ordinary people alike.

**17. Inclusivity Across Diverse Audiences:** One of his remarkable traits is his ability to connect with a wide range of people, from devoutly religious individuals to secular and non-religious groups. His open Q&A sessions at universities and public forums attract people from all walks of life. Many participate in his community-driven initiatives, such as environmental projects, showcasing his ability to unite people around shared values.

This list highlights not only Shahab Moradi's personal qualities but also his ability to connect deeply with society and inspire collective action.



# Economic and cultural significance of Behbahan's Narcissus Festival

## Iranica Desk

Holding tradition-based and local events is an effective strategy for showcasing the untapped capacities of Khuzestan Province and its cities.

According to Mojtaba Gaheshtooni, a journalist, events play a significant role across various fields worldwide, and one of the key outcomes of organizing such events is the transformation in different economic sectors.

Notably, these events are characterized by their expanding scope and diversity each year, which helps attract larger audiences. This increased interest leads to substantial investments in the region, ultimately resulting in significant transformations in the area's infrastructure.

The Behbahan's Narcissus Festival is a prime example of this phenomenon. After several successful iterations, this festival has established itself as a staple event. This season, it is anticipated that Behbahan will yield approximately 80.5 million cut flowers. The festival has the potential to evolve into a creativity-driven event that serves as a catalyst for tourism development in the region.

The Behbahan Narcissus Festival presents an excellent opportunity to promote this event on both provincial and national levels, enhancing the visibility of Khuzestan and Behbahan.

The festival aims to complete the value-added chain by supporting the local community and encouraging investments in processing and packaging industries.

Currently, the Narcissus Festival is being organized with minimal funding, and it is crucial to ensure that the benefits of such events reach the narcissus growers, local stakeholders, and active members of the tourism industry.

Tourism officials in Khuzestan Province, along with provincial and city authorities, must recognize that a tourist destination can only stand out and succeed when it offers unique and innovative experiences to travelers. While similar events can effectively mitigate the seasonal effects of tourism and contribute to a more equitable distribution of resources, event-driven tourism is a modern form of tourism that is interconnected with other types. This market consists of travelers who specifically seek to see or participate in events.

In the narcissus fields of Behbahan, four distinct types of narcissus have been identified. These flowers find applications in various industries, including ornamental plants, perfumery, traditional medicine and herbalism, cosmetics and hygiene, as well as pharmaceuticals and medical fields. Behbahan is home to some of the oldest narcissus fields in Iran, with a



borna.news

long history and it is crucial to prioritize their preservation. The narcissus flower thrives in the plains and foothills of the Zagros Mountains across several provinces, including Ilam, Lorestan, Khuzestan, Fars, and Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad

provinces. In Khuzestan Province, while Behbahan remains a major cultivation hub, smaller quantities are also grown in other cities.

According to several local flower growers, the area dedicated to narcissus flower farms in Be-

hbahan has drastically declined from over 700 hectares in 1971 to around 70 hectares today. Notably, in the 1960s, Dutch visitors to Behbahan's narcissus fields took bulbs back to the Netherlands for propagation and cultivation, showcasing the

flower's international appeal. On each stem of the Behbahan narcissus, one can observe between two and ten blossoms, with some stems producing over twenty. The Dutch people, who have a particular fondness for this flower, even named one of their streets "Behbahan" in its honor. If attention is given to the cycle of employment and investment surrounding this flower, "flower tourism" could emerge as a viable sector. However, several challenges hinder the recognition and true value of the narcissus flower, including the multiple occupations of producers, inadequate marketing efforts, a lack of government purchases, high costs imposed on farm owners, neglect of tourism aspects, and the absence of a supportive research institution focused on the narcissus flower. Addressing these issues could help elevate the status of this beautiful flower and its associated industries.



eneshat.com



ISNA

## Architectural wonders of Tizno House in Dezful

Dezful, a city in Khuzestan Province, is one of those cities that has preserved its original form, earning it the nickname "Museum of Brick." When you explore the old districts, you feel transported back in time, near the calm yet roaring Dez River.

In the historical district, you'll find the grand Tizno House, located just steps from the new bridge along the coastal street. This house, the most famous in Dezful, belonged to a merchant named Tizno Beig and was originally built during the Safavid era, later restored and reconstructed in the Qajar period, visitiran.ir wrote.

The grand entrance features *kha-jeh neshins* — stone stands on either side of the door, historically used for sitting and socializing with neighbors or resting for passersby. Upon entering, you

find the *hashti*, an entryway designed to conceal the inner parts of the house.

Descending the stairs leads you to two basements. The first, the *shabestan*, is situated one and a half meters below the yard and has three entrances. The second, the *shovadoun*, is a hallmark of Dezful architecture. Dug by hand, shovadouns are slightly deeper, helping residents escape the summer heat. In Tizno House, the shovadoun is 25 stairs below the yard.

Inside, several rooms feature grid windows, and from the roof, you can enjoy a stunning view of Dezful and the bridge. The house is nationally recognized and open to the public on select days during Nowruz.

Another attraction in Dezful is the Souzangar House, located just five minutes from Tizno

House in Kalantarian Alley. The best times to visit this southern city are during Nowruz, autumn, or winter.

Traveling from Tehran to Dezful takes about eight hours by road. The journey begins on the Tehran-Qom highway, reaching Borujerd after passing Arak. After two hours of driving from Khorramabad, you'll see signs for Dezful. Alternatively, air travel offers a more convenient option.



tasnimnews.com

# How Israel admits to blocking aid to Gaza without saying it



Trucks carrying aid queue on the Egyptian side of the Rafah border crossing with the Gaza Strip on September 9, 2024.  
● AFP



By **Stephen Semler**  
Co-founder of  
Security Policy  
Reform Institute

## OPINION

After temporarily vanishing from the news cycle, humanitarian assistance to Gaza is back in the spotlight.

The Biden administration drew attention to the subject in mid-October when it issued demands for Israel to improve humanitarian access, and again in mid-November when it chose not to hold Israel accountable after it failed to meet any of those demands. Late November, the International Criminal Court (ICC) issued arrest warrants for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and former military chief Yoav Gallant for the war crime of starvation as a method of warfare, among other charges.

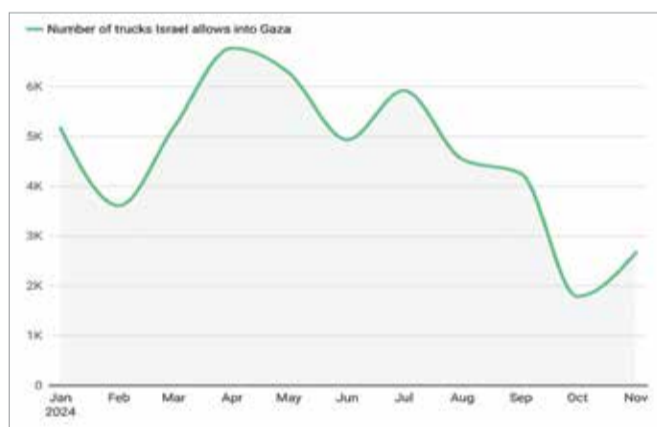
Their conduct, according to the ICC, “led to the disruption of the ability of humanitarian organizations to provide food and other essential goods to the population in need in Gaza”. In December, Amnesty International concluded that Israel is committing genocide in Gaza, citing Israel’s obstruction of humanitarian aid as evidence that it is “deliberately inflicting on Palestinians in Gaza conditions of life calculated to bring about their physical destruction,” one of three genocidal acts Amnesty documented Israel committing in its report.

In addition to slandering the international justice and human rights organizations, Israeli authorities denied the accusations that Israel is obstructing humanitarian assistance to Gaza. As evidence, they boast impressive-sounding figures from the Coordination of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT) — the Israeli military (IDF) unit overseeing all humanitarian operations in the besieged enclave — and flaunt cabinet-sponsored media depicting a seeming abundance of aid in Gaza, waiting to be delivered.

Ironically, these boasts from Israeli officials are in fact admissions of war crimes. Israel’s intent with these social media posts is to be exonerated in the court of public opinion — and perhaps international courts as well — but it’s effectively acting like its own star witness.

### Israel’s own data says it’s blocking aid

“Israel...does not impose any restrictions on the quantity of aid entering the [Gaza] Strip,” claimed spokesperson of the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs Oren Marmorstein on December 3. Israel’s own data says otherwise. Facing international backlash after it killed World Central Kitch-



The graph shows the number of aid trucks that Israel has allowed into Gaza since January 2024. IDF/COGAT inflates its aid data by counting commercial cargo as humanitarian aid and counting half-full aid trucks as full trucks.  
● IDF/COGAT

en workers, the IDF announced new humanitarian measures in April 2024, pledging that we should expect to see “the daily average of trucks of food, water, medicine, and shelter supplies going into Gaza to go up... to around 500 per day”. This falls well short of the 600 daily aid truck quota that USAID assessed is needed to avert famine in Gaza, but it is still a welcome improvement considering that the average daily ingress of trucks into Gaza to that point (January–March 2024) had been a measly 153, according to my analysis of data from the IDF’s COGAT unit. The daily average since then has been 152 trucks per day. My analysis of IDF/COGAT data also shows that incoming aid reached a low point on October and November, as the graph below indicates. Israel let in just 1,789 trucks into Gaza in October and 2,670 in November — the lowest and second-lowest monthly amounts in 2024, respectively. That works out to be 58 trucks per day in October and 89 in November.

What explains this shortfall in aid? It’s not a supply problem — on a given day, there are several

hundred to several thousand aid trucks awaiting Israel’s permission to enter Gaza. Israel’s cabinet press office recently posted that 900 aid trucks were idling outside one crossing alone. Declining relief can’t be attributed to demand, either, because humanitarian needs in Gaza are higher than ever. Rather, there was a dramatic shortfall in aid because Israel has apparently decided there should be one, which violates international law. Article 8(2)(b)(xxv) of the 1998 Statute of the International Criminal Court says “intentionally using starvation of civilians as a method of warfare by depriving them of objects indispensable to their survival, including willfully impeding relief supplies as provided for under the Geneva Conventions” is a war crime.

### Self-incrimination

Israel tacitly admits to willfully impeding humanitarian aid on social media. In an apparent bid to reject the charges that it’s obstructing food and other relief to Gaza, Israeli cabinet-run accounts post regular updates on its humanitarian activities. A typical post includes the quanti-

ty of incoming aid on a given day and a photo showing an apparent abundance of aid in Gaza. The irony is by publishing this promotional content, Israel admits to obstructing humanitarian aid on a near-daily basis. First, by highlighting a daily incoming truck count several times lower than what humanitarian needs demand. Second, by providing visual evidence that it’s artificially inflating its aid totals by counting half-full trucks as full truckloads — IDF/COGAT typically limits humanitarian trucks to 50 percent capacity, purportedly for security reasons. (IDF/COGAT also inflates its aid figures by including commercial cargo as humanitarian aid, even though the former is prohibitively expensive for most people in Gaza and only the latter is geared toward humanitarian needs.) Israeli authorities’ self-incrimination doesn’t end there. In recent posts from IDF international spokesperson Nadav

Shoshani, he shares videos of aid awaiting pickup at Israeli border checkpoints to argue that humanitarian groups, not Israel, are responsible for a lack of aid reaching Palestinians in need. “Israel has done its part, it’s time the international organization [sic] do theirs [sic],” Shoshani wrote in a November post. In each of his attacks on UN officials and aid agencies, Shoshani unwittingly admits that Israel is in violation of its legal obligations under international law. The Fourth Geneva Convention requires that the occupying power ensure that food and medical supplies reach the population in need. Article 55 of the Convention says: “To the fullest extent of the means available to it, the Occupying Power has the duty of ensuring the food and medical supplies of the population; it should, in particular, bring in the necessary foodstuffs, medical stores, and other articles if the

resources of the occupied territory are inadequate.”

Crucially, international law demands more of the occupying power than merely acquiescing to humanitarian aid entering the territory it occupies — it must ensure that the aid actually gets delivered. Article 59 of the Convention states:

“If the whole or part of the population of an occupied territory is inadequately supplied, the Occupying Power shall agree to relief schemes on behalf of the said population, and shall facilitate them by all the means at its disposal.”

The International Committee of the Red Cross’ authoritative commentary on the laws of war clarifies that the Fourth Geneva Convention “not only lays down that the occupying power must ‘agree’ to relief schemes on behalf of the population but... must cooperate wholeheartedly in the rapid and scrupulous execution” of relief operations. Israel is a signatory to this Convention.

Israel is doing the opposite of ensuring aid can be delivered to Palestinians in need. For example, a UN memo recently obtained by the Washington Post concluded that the armed gangs looting aid convoys could be “benefiting from a passive if not active benevolence” and “protection” from Israel’s military, and that a gang leader had a military-like compound in an area “restricted, controlled, and patrolled” by the Israeli military. The gangs operate in areas under Israeli control, often within eyeshots of Israeli forces. When convoys are looted, Israeli forces watch and do nothing, even when aid workers request assistance. Israeli forces refer to one area about a kilometer from its Kerem Shalom border checkpoint as “the looting zone”. The IDF-designated looting zone



This post on X (formerly, Twitter) by the Israeli COGAT arm shows that the regime sends half-full aid trucks into Gaza and counts them as full trucks to inflate data.  
● X

might be the only place in Gaza where Israeli forces won't shoot an armed Palestinian. Additionally, Israeli forces frequently take it upon themselves to attack aid workers. In a previous article for Responsible Statecraft, I list 14 instances in which humanitarian organizations were attacked by Israeli

forces after sharing their coordinates with the IDF. Israel deploys more passive strategies to obstruct humanitarian assistance as well. Here is one example I discussed in a recent report for Security in Context: "Because Israeli forces have cut off northern Gaza from the south, any humanitarian

movements that must travel between those two areas must pass through an IDF checkpoint. The IDF has two checkpoints between the north and south, but it refuses to operate more than one at a time. This means that all humanitarian missions — responding to massive humanitarian demands in Gaza —

must use the same checkpoint, resulting in bottlenecks that prevent delivery of urgently needed assistance. When an IDF checkpoint gate broke in late September, Israeli forces did not open the other checkpoint. As a result, various humanitarian teams were stranded in the north for 13 nights before they

were able to cross back to the south. These delays disrupt essential missions, eat up scarce resources, and make personnel and transport unavailable for other aid missions." Not unlike the Biden administration, the Israeli cabinet believes it is entitled to violate international law, but desperately

wants to avoid being seen as the type of country that violates international law. Embracing this sort of hypocrisy is a recipe for self-incrimination, as Israel's cabinet-run social media accounts frequently demonstrate.

*The full article first appeared on Responsible Statecraft.*

## Cyprus-Gaza maritime aid corridor was harmful publicity stunt



By Androulla Kaminara  
Former Ambassador of EU to Pakistan

By Sultan Barakat  
Scholar



O P I N I O N

*Since Hamas's October 7, 2023, attacks on southern Israel and the beginning of the latest Israeli military offensive on Gaza, the calls for unhindered delivery of humanitarian aid to the Palestinians in the besieged strip have remained tragically unanswered. Over the past 15 months, more than 45,000 Palestinians — two-thirds of whom were women and children — have been killed, many more have been gravely injured and most of Gaza's civilian infrastructure has been reduced to rubble. The situation on the ground today is nothing short of apocalyptic. As the violence continues with no end in sight, the need for humanitarian aid in Gaza has drastically increased. Not only bombs and bullets but also a chronic lack of food, clean water, and basic healthcare are threatening the lives of the population. "People in Gaza are facing catastrophic levels of hunger. Famine looms. This is intolerable. Crossing points must open immediately, and bureaucratic impediments must be removed," United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres stated on October 17. This was neither the first nor the only request made of Israel to meet its obligations under international law and ensure Palestinians in Gaza have access to adequate aid amid relentless military aggression.*



A satellite image on May 29, 2024, shows a view of the remaining section of the dysfunctional pier that was damaged by high winds and heavy seas the week before on the Gaza shoreline. **MAXAR TECHNOLOGIES/REUTERS**



Palestinians storm trucks loaded with humanitarian aid brought in through the US-built pier, in the central Gaza Strip on May 18, 2024. **ABDEL KAREEM HANA/AP**

In January, the International Court of Justice ordered Israel to "take immediate and effective measures to enable the provision of urgently needed basic services and humanitarian assistance to address the adverse conditions of life faced by Palestinians in the Gaza Strip". So far, Israel has refused to heed these calls and maintained strict restrictions on the flow of aid into the besieged Strip. Unable to compel Israel to declare a cease-fire or open borders for aid and facing growing domestic pressure to ease the suffering of the Palestinian population, several governments in the region and across the West have embarked on often symbolic aid delivery operations that regrettably have failed to make much difference to the situation on the ground. Aid packages airdropped by Jordan and France, for example, provided temporary relief to a limited number of people, who were lucky enough to get their hands on them but did nothing to ease the suffering of the masses in the long term. In many cases, these initiatives served only to provide political capital for responsible governments, allowing them to appear engaged while avoiding the difficult decisions and actions necessary to make a real difference. The most high-profile, costly, and overall harmful example of such symbolic aid initiatives was the United States-led effort to establish a temporary maritime corridor between Cyprus and Gaza to deliver aid. Initially hailed as a vital humanitarian lifeline that would allow aid deliveries to bypass heavily contested land routes and swiftly reach target popu-

lations, the project has proven fraught with inefficiencies and complications. Known as the Joint Logistics Over-the-Shore modular system, the initiative aimed to transport aid from Cyprus to Gaza via a series of vessels, a floating platform, and a temporary pier affixed to the beach. Reportedly, the idea of a maritime aid corridor was first proposed to US President Joe Biden and Cypriot President Nikos Christodoulides by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu within the first few weeks of Israel's all-out assault on Gaza. According to the Reuters news agency, Israel believed this would be an "important step" towards disengaging economically from the enclave. After months of political wrangling, the corridor became operational in May, nearly seven months after the beginning of the conflict. The launch of the aid operation received much fanfare across the world and was applauded by the US and its European allies alike as an important step to prevent famine in the besieged Strip. The cost of the project was also considerable. The US government allocated about \$230m to the operation, deploying 1,000 US soldiers and sailors along with 16 ships. The United Kingdom government is also known to have contributed to the mission. Despite its high-profile launch and considerable price tag, the humanitarian impact of the maritime corridor has been extremely limited. Due to various issues, the corridor operated effectively for only 20 days before it was officially abandoned. According to a report by the US Agency for International Development's Office of the Inspec-

tor General, the US expected to deliver enough aid to feed 500,000 people for 90 days. However, in the end, only about 8,100 metric tonnes of aid — equivalent to just one day's worth of pre-war aid deliveries by truck — was delivered through the corridor during its brief operational window. Additionally, most of the aid that managed to reach Gaza through this route did not make its way to its intended recipients. One key objective of the initiative was to provide aid to northern Gaza, where hundreds of thousands of civilians were trying to survive under a near-complete siege and relentless bombardment with little access to food. To this end, humanitarian organisations active on the ground had suggested that the temporary pier for the aid deliveries be built in the north. However, the Israeli military demanded that it instead be located on a beach in central Gaza. The US agreed, demonstrating clearly that in this operation, its priority was not delivering humanitarian aid efficiently but rather responding to Israel's military concerns and strategic demands. Arriving in central Gaza, aid had to travel a long way to reach the masses in need up north. This caused major logistical and operational issues with hungry crowds diverting trucks carrying supplies and looting the goods whenever they were able. Meanwhile, bad weather repeatedly damaged the pier, eventually leaving it permanently unusable. All these issues suggest that the real purpose of this initiative was not to feed hungry Palestinians but to ease the in-

creasing diplomatic pressure on Israel to follow international law and open land routes for aid deliveries. The entire project was more of a publicity stunt than a serious effort to ensure the survival of a besieged population. In the end, the cost of the maritime corridor was not only financial. This stunt, which, at every step, put Israel's interests above the needs of Palestinians, also had a heavy humanitarian cost because it politicised aid and helped Israel undermine with impunity international humanitarian law (IHL), which clearly forbids the blocking of aid to a civilian population. Not only was the Israeli military, which is the very reason why Palestinians are in need in the first place, given a say in how and where this aid was delivered, but it was also allowed to inspect aid packages in Cyprus before they began their journey to Gaza. All this raised serious questions about the impartiality of the mission. Furthermore, it created the impression that certain actors can

disregard IHL, or worse, try to use it to reach their political and military objectives. The humanitarian crisis in Gaza continues to escalate with 95 percent of the population displaced and nearly 80 percent of civilian infrastructure destroyed. As the death toll rises and suffering deepens, the international community must focus on more effective and politically neutral aid delivery that complies with IHL. To prevent the complete erosion of trust in humanitarian aid, it is crucial that the international community — and the humanitarian organisations themselves — reaffirm that they abide by the principles of neutrality, impartiality, and independence when delivering much-needed aid to Gaza. Humanitarian agencies must take a firm stand against any form of aid manipulation and make it clear that they will not be co-opted into political or military strategies. The global community, which has a responsibility to uphold international humanitarian law to ensure all civilians in need

have unimpeded access to aid, also has a responsibility to protect humanitarian workers. There were 161 humanitarian aid workers killed by Israel in Gaza in the last three months of 2023 alone, and many more have since fallen victim to this conflict. The global community must hold all parties — whether Israeli or Palestinian — that harm aid workers accountable. The failure of the Cyprus-Gaza maritime corridor and other similarly symbolic initiatives in Gaza do not harm only the Palestinians left without aid. They also harm everyone, everywhere affected by conflict because they undermine the very foundations of humanitarianism and humanitarian law. The people of Gaza, like everyone affected by conflict everywhere in the world, deserve more than symbolic gestures. They deserve a truly impartial, efficient, and unhindered flow of assistance to alleviate their suffering.

*The article first appeared on Al Jazeera.*



Soldiers and sailors assemble a sprawling at-sea discharge platform in the Mediterranean Sea off the Gaza Strip in April 2024. **AP**

might be the only place in Gaza where Israeli forces won't shoot an armed Palestinian. Additionally, Israeli forces frequently take it upon themselves to attack aid workers. In a previous article for Responsible Statecraft, I list 14 instances in which humanitarian organizations were attacked by Israeli

forces after sharing their coordinates with the IDF. Israel deploys more passive strategies to obstruct humanitarian assistance as well. Here is one example I discussed in a recent report for Security in Context: "Because Israeli forces have cut off northern Gaza from the south, any humanitarian

movements that must travel between those two areas must pass through an IDF checkpoint. The IDF has two checkpoints between the north and south, but it refuses to operate more than one at a time. This means that all humanitarian missions — responding to massive humanitarian demands in Gaza —

must use the same checkpoint, resulting in bottlenecks that prevent delivery of urgently needed assistance. When an IDF checkpoint gate broke in late September, Israeli forces did not open the other checkpoint. As a result, various humanitarian teams were stranded in the north for 13 nights before they

were able to cross back to the south. These delays disrupt essential missions, eat up scarce resources, and make personnel and transport unavailable for other aid missions." Not unlike the Biden administration, the Israeli cabinet believes it is entitled to violate international law, but desperately

wants to avoid being seen as the type of country that violates international law. Embracing this sort of hypocrisy is a recipe for self-incrimination, as Israel's cabinet-run social media accounts frequently demonstrate.

*The full article first appeared on Responsible Statecraft.*

## Cyprus-Gaza maritime aid corridor was harmful publicity stunt



By Androulla Kaminara  
Former Ambassador of EU to Pakistan

By Sultan Barakat  
Scholar



O P I N I O N

*Since Hamas's October 7, 2023, attacks on southern Israel and the beginning of the latest Israeli military offensive on Gaza, the calls for unhindered delivery of humanitarian aid to the Palestinians in the besieged strip have remained tragically unanswered.*

*Over the past 15 months, more than 45,000 Palestinians — two-thirds of whom were women and children — have been killed, many more have been gravely injured and most of Gaza's civilian infrastructure has been reduced to rubble. The situation on the ground today is nothing short of apocalyptic. As the violence continues with no end in sight, the need for humanitarian aid in Gaza has drastically increased. Not only bombs and bullets but also a chronic lack of food, clean water, and basic healthcare are threatening the lives of the population.*

*"People in Gaza are facing catastrophic levels of hunger. Famine looms. This is intolerable. Crossing points must open immediately, and bureaucratic impediments must be removed," United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres stated on October 17.*

*This was neither the first nor the only request made of Israel to meet its obligations under international law and ensure Palestinians in Gaza have access to adequate aid amid relentless military aggression.*



A satellite image on May 29, 2024, shows a view of the remaining section of the dysfunctional pier that was damaged by high winds and heavy seas the week before on the Gaza shoreline.  
● MAXAR TECHNOLOGIES/REUTERS



Palestinians storm trucks loaded with humanitarian aid brought in through the US-built pier, in the central Gaza Strip on May 18, 2024.  
● ABDEL KAREEM HANA/AP

In January, the International Court of Justice ordered Israel to "take immediate and effective measures to enable the provision of urgently needed basic services and humanitarian assistance to address the adverse conditions of life faced by Palestinians in the Gaza Strip".

So far, Israel has refused to heed these calls and maintained strict restrictions on the flow of aid into the besieged Strip.

Unable to compel Israel to declare a cease-fire or open borders for aid and facing growing domestic pressure to ease the suffering of the Palestinian population, several governments in the region and across the West have embarked on often symbolic aid delivery operations that regrettably have failed to make much difference to the situation on the ground. Aid packages airdropped by Jordan and France, for example, provided temporary relief to a limited number of people, who were lucky enough to get their hands on them but did nothing to ease the suffering of the masses in the long term. In many cases, these initiatives served only to provide political capital for responsible governments, allowing them to appear engaged while avoiding the difficult decisions and actions necessary to make a real difference.

The most high-profile, costly, and overall harmful example of such symbolic aid initiatives was the United States-led effort to establish a temporary maritime corridor between Cyprus and Gaza to deliver aid. Initially hailed as a vital humanitarian lifeline that would allow aid deliveries to bypass heavily contested land routes and swiftly reach target popu-

lations, the project has proven fraught with inefficiencies and complications.

Known as the Joint Logistics Over-the-Shore modular system, the initiative aimed to transport aid from Cyprus to Gaza via a series of vessels, a floating platform, and a temporary pier affixed to the beach.

Reportedly, the idea of a maritime aid corridor was first proposed to US President Joe Biden and Cypriot President Nikos Christodoulides by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu within the first few weeks of Israel's all-out assault on Gaza. According to the Reuters news agency, Israel believed this would be an "important step" towards disengaging economically from the enclave. After months of political wrangling, the corridor became operational in May, nearly seven months after the beginning of the conflict.

The launch of the aid operation received much fanfare across the world and was applauded by the US and its European allies alike as an important step to prevent famine in the besieged Strip. The cost of the project was also considerable. The US government allocated about \$230m to the operation, deploying 1,000 US soldiers and sailors along with 16 ships. The United Kingdom government is also known to have contributed to the mission.

Despite its high-profile launch and considerable price tag, the humanitarian impact of the maritime corridor has been extremely limited. Due to various issues, the corridor operated effectively for only 20 days before it was officially abandoned.

According to a report by the US Agency for International Development's Office of the Inspec-

tor General, the US expected to deliver enough aid to feed 500,000 people for 90 days. However, in the end, only about 8,100 metric tonnes of aid — equivalent to just one day's worth of pre-war aid deliveries by truck — was delivered through the corridor during its brief operational window.

Additionally, most of the aid that managed to reach Gaza through this route did not make its way to its intended recipients.

One key objective of the initiative was to provide aid to northern Gaza, where hundreds of thousands of civilians were trying to survive under a near-complete siege and relentless bombardment with little access to food.

To this end, humanitarian organizations active on the ground had suggested that the temporary pier for the aid deliveries be built in the north. However, the Israeli military demanded that it instead be located on a beach in central Gaza. The US agreed, demonstrating clearly that in this operation, its priority was not delivering humanitarian aid efficiently but rather responding to Israel's military concerns and strategic demands.

Arriving in central Gaza, aid had to travel a long way to reach the masses in need up north. This caused major logistical and operational issues with hungry crowds diverting trucks carrying supplies and looting the goods whenever they were able.

Meanwhile, bad weather repeatedly damaged the pier, eventually leaving it permanently unusable.

All these issues suggest that the real purpose of this initiative was not to feed hungry Palestinians but to ease the in-

creasing diplomatic pressure on Israel to follow international law and open land routes for aid deliveries. The entire project was more of a publicity stunt than a serious effort to ensure the survival of a besieged population.

In the end, the cost of the maritime corridor was not only financial. This stunt, which, at every step, put Israel's interests above the needs of Palestinians, also had a heavy humanitarian cost because it politicized aid and helped Israel undermine with impunity international humanitarian law (IHL), which clearly forbids the blocking of aid to a civilian population.

Not only was the Israeli military, which is the very reason why Palestinians are in need in the first place, given a say in how and where this aid was delivered, but it was also allowed to inspect aid packages in Cyprus before they began their journey to Gaza. All this raised serious questions about the impartiality of the mission.

Furthermore, it created the impression that certain actors can

disregard IHL, or worse, try to use it to reach their political and military objectives.

The humanitarian crisis in Gaza continues to escalate with 95 percent of the population displaced and nearly 80 percent of civilian infrastructure destroyed. As the death toll rises and suffering deepens, the international community must focus on more effective and politically neutral aid delivery that complies with IHL.

To prevent the complete erosion of trust in humanitarian aid, it is crucial that the international community — and the humanitarian organizations themselves — reaffirm that they abide by the principles of neutrality, impartiality, and independence when delivering much-needed aid to Gaza. Humanitarian agencies must take a firm stand against any form of aid manipulation and make it clear that they will not be co-opted into political or military strategies.

The global community, which has a responsibility to uphold international humanitarian law to ensure all civilians in need

have unimpeded access to aid, also has a responsibility to protect humanitarian workers.

There were 161 humanitarian aid workers killed by Israel in Gaza in the last three months of 2023 alone, and many more have since fallen victim to this conflict. The global community must hold all parties — whether Israeli or Palestinian — that harm aid workers accountable. The failure of the Cyprus-Gaza maritime corridor and other similarly symbolic initiatives in Gaza do not harm only the Palestinians left without aid. They also harm everyone, everywhere affected by conflict because they undermine the very foundations of humanitarianism and humanitarian law.

The people of Gaza, like everyone affected by conflict everywhere in the world, deserve more than symbolic gestures. They deserve a truly impartial, efficient, and unhindered flow of assistance to alleviate their suffering.

*The article first appeared on Al Jazeera.*



Soldiers and sailors assemble a sprawling at-sea discharge platform in the Mediterranean Sea off the Gaza Strip in April 2024.  
● AP

## Italian Super Cup final:

## Taremi stars but Inter undone by Milan fightback

Sports Desk

Inter striker Mahdi Taremi excelled with a goal and an assist but a Tammy Abraham's last-gasp winner saw AC Milan pull off a 3-2 comeback win over its archrival in the Italian Super Cup final in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

Inter drew first blood right before the interval in Tuesday's Derby della Madonnina, when Taremi teed up Lautaro Martinez with a pass across the box and the Argentine skipper deceived Malick Thiaw before his low effort went through the legs of Theo Hernandez and beat Mike Maignan at his near post. Named in the starting XI to fill in for injured Marcus Thuram, Taremi was on the scoresheet two minutes after the break.

The Iranian controlled Stefan de Vrij's long ball behind Milan backline and drilled his shot into the bottom corner to double Inter's lead – a second goal for Taremi with the Nerazzurri colors since joining the club in July. Hernandez gave Milan a lifeline with a well-taken freekick shortly afterwards, and then Christian Pulisic controlled a cross from the French fullback and steered his shot into the far corner to restore parity 10 minutes from normal time.



Inter's Mahdi Taremi (2nd R) is seen in action against AC Milan in the Italian Super Cup final at Al Awwal Park, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, on January 6, 2025.  
● CLAUDIA GRECO/REUTERS

Just when all spectators at Al Awwal Park expected the tie to be decided by a shootout, with no extra time to be played, Portuguese winger Rafael Leao found fellow-substitute Abraham in the six-yard box, before the Englishman's simplest of tap-ins completed the Rossoneri's sensational comeback in the third minute of added time.

The result denied Inter what would have been an unprecedented fourth consecutive Super Cup silverware, while it saw Milan equal the city rival's haul of eight wins in the competition, with new manager Sergio Conceicao, Taremi's former coach in Porto, lifting a trophy in his second game in charge.

When questioned on what the Portuguese coach had changed since replacing sacked Paulo Fonseca last week, American Pulisic said: "He told us we need to have more hunger and that that's more important than tactics."

After the semifinal victory over Juventus, Conceicao had been



asked if he embraced his players. "I'm not so nice and I'm not

someone who hugs," he said. "I'm not here to make friends. I'm here to win."

after the final showpiece, however, Conceicao was seen dancing with his players and smok-

ing a cigar in the changing room, as Milan celebrated a first title since winning Serie A in 2022.



● IAWF

## Iranian Geraei to vie in domestic three-way battle at Zagreb Open

Sports Desk

Former world and Olympic champion Mohammadreza Geraei will be part of the Iranian Greco-Roman 72kg trio, alongside Iman Mohammadi and Danial Sohrabi, at the Zagreb Open – starting February 5 – looking to secure a place in March's Asian Championships.

Geraei, who was ruled out of the National Championships in late December with an injury, will have to better the results of his two fellow-Iranians in the UWW Ranking Series season opener, according to the selection process of the national team, to be given a shot at Asian glory in Amman.

A world junior and under-23 champion in 2022, Mohammadi, who also has the 2023 Asian senior gold under his belt, edged out Mohammad-Javad Rezaei 4-3 to walk away with the Iranian gold and punch his ticket for the Croatian capital. Sohrabi, meanwhile, was exempt from the national event, thanks to a bronze-winning campaign in last October's U23 Worlds in Tirana, and will begin the new international season on his return to Zagreb, where he suffered a last-16 exit in the 67kg contests last year.

Also a former world silver and bronze medalist, Geraei decided to move up to higher weight class after missing

out on defending his Olympic title in Paris, courtesy of a defeat against wrestling prodigy Saeid Esmaili in the Iranian trials for the Games.

Geraei, however, had a disappointing start to the new chapter of his career, suffering a first-round 11-3 loss to Benji Peak in last year's World Championships, though many believe some contentious referring decisions cost the Iranian underdog.

"This was Geraei's first international event in the 72kg class. There is no doubt he had technical flaws against the American wrestler, but let's not forget that he already has four precious world and Olympic medals

under his belt and remains highly-motivated to succeed in the new category," Iran head coach Hassan Rangraz said after the world event. "It might have been a bit too late, but he still made the right decision to change the weight class and I'm confident he has much more to offer in the future World Championships before gradually moving to the 77kg class for the next Olympic Games."

Geraei was also part of the Iranian team in November's Poddubny Wrestling League 7 in Moscow, pulling off a criteria win (1-1) against European bronze medalist Narek Oganian to help the country beat the Russian squad on its home turf.

## Antetokounmpo posts triple-double as Bucks beat Raptors

BBC – Giannis Antetokounmpo registered 11 points, 12 rebounds and a season-high 13 assists as the Milwaukee Bucks beat the Toronto Raptors 128-104 in the NBA.

Damian Lillard added 25 points in Toronto for the Bucks, who had lost four of their previous five games, all to teams with losing records.

Antetokounmpo suffered a cut finger in the first half that required stitches, but was able to continue before being rested in the fourth quarter as the Bucks secured a comfortable win.

"He set the whole tone to our team," Bucks coach Doc Rivers said of Antetokounmpo's performance.

"When your best player does that it becomes contagious and the ball just moved."

Zach LaVine notched up 35 points, 10 rebounds and eight assists as the Chicago Bulls fought back from 19 points down in the third quarter to beat the San Antonio Spurs 114-110.

Victor Wembanyama starred in a losing cause for the Spurs, with 23 points, 14 rebounds, four assists and eight blocked shots.

The Dallas Mavericks, who were without Luka Doncic and Kyrie Irving, suffered a fifth successive defeat, losing 119-104 to the Memphis Grizzlies.

After winning nine matches in a

row, the New York Knicks have now lost their past three after slipping to a 103-94 defeat by the Orlando Magic.

Bradley Beal came off the bench to score 25 points as the Phoenix Suns beat the Philadelphia 76ers 109-99 to end a run of four straight defeats.

The Sacramento Kings needed double overtime to edge the Miami Heat 123-118, while the Detroit Pistons beat the Portland Trail Blazers 118-115.



Bucks forward Giannis Antetokounmpo (C) drives to the basket during an NBA victory over the Raptors in Toronto, Ontario, Canada, on January 6, 2025.  
● NICK TURCHIARO/IMAGN IMAGES



# Tehran ready to negotiate within JCPOA framework: *Deputy FM*

Majid Takht-Ravanchi  
IRNA

## International Desk

Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister Majid Takht-Ravanchi said Tehran is ready to negotiate on its nuclear program within the framework of the 2015 deal, known as the Joint Comprehensive of Action (JCPOA), in order to remove sanctions illegally imposed on the country. In an interview with Italy's Radio Radicale, Takht-Ravanchi said Iran has repeatedly announced its readiness to negotiate despite the maximum

pressure policy which was adopted by the US President Donald Trump during his first term and continued under his successor's administration. Trump undertook the strategy after ordering the withdrawal of the US from the nuclear agreement in 2018. "At the time, the European countries that were still members of the JCPOA asked Iran not to withdraw from the deal in response to the US decision and told us that if Iran did not withdraw from its obligations under

the JCPOA, they would compensate for the damages caused by the US violation of the JCPOA", Takht-Ravanchi said. He said that Iran waited for a year, but the European countries failed to live up to their commitments. Therefore, Iran was forced to roll back the limits it had accepted under the landmark accord. Iran's new government has repeatedly announced its readiness to begin negotiations aimed at removing the sanctions. Iran has already held two

rounds of talks with the three European parties to the deal — Germany, France, Britain — since November and is scheduled to hold another one on January 13. "We are a member of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT)", Takht-Ravanchi said, adding that, "Nuclear weapons have no place in the country's defense doctrine. Numerous reports from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) show that Iran has 100% fulfilled its commitments."

## Committees formed to examine capital relocation: *Gov't spox*

'Joining FATF aimed at helping investors'

### National Desk

Iran's government spokeswoman Fatemeh Mohajerani reiterated the issue of capital's relocation, saying that two committees have been formed to look into issues related to the hotly-debated plan.

Speaking during her weekly press conference on Tuesday, Mohajerani said that moving the capital from Tehran is not a new issue and has been discussed for more than three decades as there are growing concerns about its biological capacities such as water.

Mohajerani said that the government is trying to get help from academics, elites and experts in this field.

She said that coastal region of Makoran in southern Iran is considered as one of the options for the new capital. However, she underlined that the issue of the relocation of the capital is not high on the agenda for the government.

Since taking office in July, Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian has repeatedly raised the issue, citing economic inefficiencies and regional disparities.

"One of the reasons that has led us to consider relocating the capital is the imbalance between resources and expenditures in Tehran," he said earlier this month.



"Transporting raw materials from the south to the center, processing them, and then returning them south for export drains our competitive capacity. We must shift the country's economic and political center to the south and closer to the sea," he said.

For decades, the idea of relocating Iran's political and economic capital from Tehran, located in the heart of the central plateau, to another region — especially the southern coasts — has been a recurring topic. This proposal stems from the ongoing crises facing Tehran, including water shortages, excessive population density, traffic congestion, and air pollution.

### Joining FATF

Regarding Iran's decision to re-examine the FATF conventions, Mohajerani said that the government is doing its utmost to help the investors. However, the spokesperson said that this is a long road which she hoped would be beneficial for the country's people.

Pezeshkian said on December 31 that Iran's Expediency Council, a body responsible for decision-making on overarching issues and policies of the country, will re-examine FATF conventions in a bid to allow Iran to officially accept them.

The comments came hours after Iran's Economy Minister Abdolnasser Hemmati said that the country's top leadership had allowed renewed discussions on FATF conventions in the Expediency Council several years after the body stopped such debates fearing that the conventions may undermine Iran's financial independence. FATF restrictions imposed on Iran's banking system will be removed once the country enacts the Palermo and the Combating the Financing of Terrorism (CFT) conventions.

The Iranian Parliament has approved the Palermo and the CFT, but Iran's Guardian Council, which is responsible for vetting parliament legislation, has refused to ratify them, citing the need for some amendments.

## IRGC launches military drills near Natanz nuclear facility

### National Desk

The Aerospace Force of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) launched a large-scale military exercise in the central province of Isfahan.

The first stage of the exercise, codenamed Eqtedar (Authority) 1403, began on Tuesday on the periphery of the Natanz uranium enrichment facility upon the order of Brigadier General Qader Rahimzadeh, commander of the country's Khatam al-Anbia Air Defense Base.

During this phase of the military exercise, air defense units of the IRGC Aerospace Force are providing a complete protection of Shahid Ahmadi Roshan nuclear site, also known as Natanz site, against a multitude of aerial threats under critical electronic warfare conditions.

The air defense units managed to intercept and destroy a projectile mirroring the features of a hostile bunker buster dropped from a warplane with the homegrown Dey-9 air defense missile system.

The homegrown air defense system could track, intercept and destroy the bunker buster in less than 15 seconds at a distance of 17 kilometers away from the nuclear site.

The air defense division of the IRGC Aerospace Force employed point-defense tactics to protect the nuclear



site in Natanz by engaging with 30 aerial targets in the exercise.

The military drill came as a commander of Iran's Armed Forces on Sunday announced the beginning of two-month drills by the country's military across the country. Brigadier General Ali Shadmani said for two months, Iran's sky, lands, and seas will host the Armed Forces' Eghtedar (Authority) Exercises. The drills are part of the ongoing exercises of the Armed Forces and are carried out annually, but this year, some of the drills were postponed in order to maintain and enhance the readiness of the Armed Forces.

Shadmani said on the ground, elite units of the Army's Ground Forces in the west and east of the country, special units of the ground forces of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC)

in the west, southwest, and south of the country, and tens of thousands of voluntary forces will do counter-terrorism practices.

He added that in the sky, the Army's Air Force and Air Defense Force, along with the IRGC Aerospace Force, will practice air defense of important centers in the country using modern equipment and at the sea, the Army's Navy will hold exercises in the northern Indian Ocean and the Sea of Oman, with the IRGC Navy focusing on the three Persian Gulf islands of Abu Musa, the Greater and Lesser Tunbs as well as the strategic Strait of Hormuz.

Iranian military forces hold routine exercises according to a detailed schedule in various parts of the country in order to test their weaponry and equipment and evaluate their combat readiness.

Mohammad Ali Rajabi  
Cartoonist



## Iran pursuing release of own frozen assets: *Araghchi*

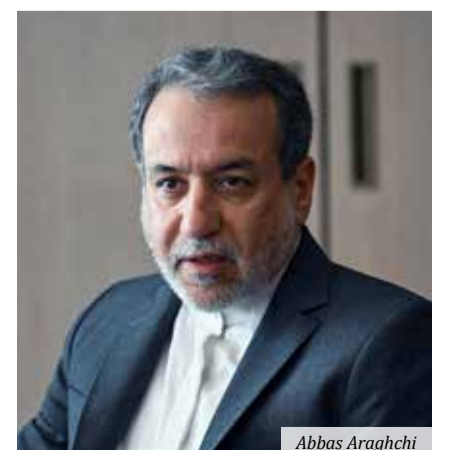
Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said on Tuesday that the release of the country's frozen assets is a permanent priority for the Foreign Ministry and relevant institutions.

The top Iranian diplomat noted that some parts of the frozen assets have been released due to ongoing efforts while another portion remains blocked in several countries, IRNA reported.

Araghchi emphasized that administering the country's foreign economic relations under economic pressure requires special measures. Tens of billions of dollars owed

to Iran for oil and other exports have been frozen in bank accounts across the world since 2018, when US President Donald Trump abandoned an international nuclear deal with Iran and reinstated US sanctions. Almost \$2 billion of Iranian assets are frozen in the United States.

In August last year, some assets were released from South Korea and were transferred to accounts held by six Iranian banks in Qatar. Iranian Foreign Ministry continues to work on securing the release of other frozen funds through legal channels.



Abbas Araghchi



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# From ashes to eternity, Rumi's legacy lives on in marionette opera

## Iranian playwright: Rumi conveys timeless message of love, peace

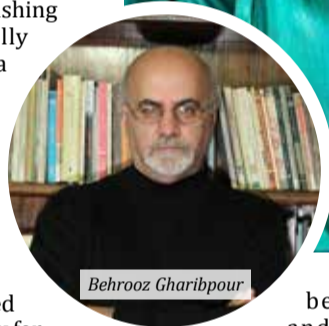
**Mehrnoush Khalaj**  
 Guest contributor

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Opera begins with the Mongol conquest of Iran. The Mongol forces are laying waste to the homeland of the towering Persian poet, Jala al-Din Muhammad Rumi, killing everyone including the elderly, women and children. "They burned everywhere! They killed everyone! Oh my God! Oh my God!" a man shouts. The Mongol forces are invading, picturing the darkest eras in the history of Persia. A period that etched a permanent fear and substantial hate in the collective subconscious of Iranians. Epic music accompanies. A Mongol commander on a neighing horse turns a deaf ear to the begging women, appealing to him not to kill children. He commands mercilessly and violently, "The old, the children, the young, shed their blood. Set every land on fire." This is the bitter beginning of 'Mowlavi (Rumi)', an opera theatre written, designed and directed by Behrooz Gharibpour, a noted Iranian director and produced by Roudaki Artistic and Cultural Foundation. Since November 12, about 150 spectators sit around 6 pm every evening in Ferdowsi Hall to watch this opera whose performers are not people but marionettes. The opera is performed by

Gharibpour's Aran National Opera Group (formerly Aran Puppet Theatre Group) with more than 100 marionettes. Its music is composed by Behzad Abdi in collaboration with conductor Vladimir Sirenko, the National Orchestra of Ukraine and renowned vocalists as late Es'hagh Anvar, Homayoun Shajarian and Mohammad Motamedi. 'Mowlavi' narrates the life of the 13th century poet Rumi starting from his emigration to the Turkish city Konya after the Mongol blitzkrieg to meeting his spiritual instructor Shams-e Tabrizi. Gharibpour has written the opera based on the poems of Rumi in Masnavi (more than 25,000 verses) and Divan-e Shams Tabrizi (over 36,000 verses). In an interview with Iran Daily, Gharibpour explains why he and his Aran Group have chosen to reperform 'Mowlavi' after a five-year hiatus instead of their other operas for marionettes and how 'Mowlavi', which was staged first in 2009 and last in 2019, remains relevant today. "[The mankind] is experiencing a very difficult and critical condition. Different territories, if not involved in a war, are ... [facing the risk of] civil wars," says Gharibpour. When the Mongol general, in response to the appeals for mercy, sheds blood and destroys everything, this resonates with what the human being is experiencing in 21st century as the lives of the children and families

are being devastated in conflicts. Gharibpour has combined Persian poetry and classical music, Ta'zieh religious opera, with his interest in marionette theatre to help revive a national opera while relying on global experience. "I have always believed that Iranian music, Iranian singing has the potential to be the basis of opera singing. I even told many times that the oldest opera writer and screenwriter of Iran is Hakim Abol-Qasem Ferdowsi (Persian poet and author of 'Shahnameh' (Book of Kings)," he says. He started with establishing a theatre hall specially for marionette opera theatre. In 2003, he converted a deserted place owned by Roudaki Artistic and Cultural Foundation into Ferdowsi Hall, which he says is one of a kind because very few countries have allocated a theatre hall exclusively for marionette opera theatre. He and the then Aran Puppet Theatre Group performed their first marionette opera 'Rostam and Sohrab' in Ferdowsi Hall in 2004. Aran National Opera Group is also the brainchild of Gharibpour, founded in 2003. Over the past two decades, Gharibpour has defined a mission for the group which is educating young manipulators for the world of puppetries and theatre. Gharibpour says, this has been an onerous task but he has never been afraid of walking into difficult roads because they will bring about "great results". "The marionettes must have biofeedback, live actions and reactions with the eleven main strings attached to them that should move simultaneously," he explains. "Based on my method ...these are ... not strings but nerve cords. This is very difficult," he adds. Gharibpour can say his mission is accomplished. Some 80 percent of members of Aran Group are young now. They are aged



Behrooz Gharibpour

between 20 and 25 years old. These young people have gradually gotten to know Persian culture, mysticism, philosophy and the impact a play can have on society while their talents are shown. The 74-year-old researcher, playwright and a director and Aran Group have so far performed marionette operas such as 'Macbeth' (2007), 'Ashura' (2008), and 'Hafez' (2012). Their works have been on stage in different Iranian cities and countries such as Italy, France, Czech Republic, the UAE and Georgia. Gharibpour plans to re-perform 'Hafez' soon. His group is working to stage this opera in the next Iranian year (to start on March 21, 2025) with Alireza Ghorbani, reputed Iranian traditional music vocalist, as singer and Amir Pourkhalaji as composer. Gharibpour is grateful to the Roudaki Foundation for allocating Ferdowsi Hall to the group, but complains about not receiving financial support for production of his works. He has a new work about Persian poet Khwaju Ker-

mani (1280-1352). Its music is recorded but Roudaki Foundation cannot afford the cost of production. A connoisseur of Persian literature, music and theatre, Gharibpour also regrets that no publisher has embarked on publishing operas he has painstakingly written. Now, it has been about two months that the 105-minute 'Mowlavi' has captivated the audience. The tickets are sold out up to January 10. It is not clear for how many more days it will remain on stage. When asked about the main audience of his operas, Gharibpour says, "The vast majority of our audience consists of girls and women who come to watch our works with their families or alone." "It is extremely valuable that the young generation gets to know the old and ancient literature of Iran," he stresses. In the waiting room of Ferdowsi Hall, Maryam, a young university instructor of Persian literature, is waiting with a friend to watch 'Mowlavi'. Maryam wants to see 'Mowlavi' because she is fasci-

nated by Rumi's poetry and his transformation after knowing Shams. Shams taught Rumi to walk in the path of love for God rather than fear. This is why Rumi can relate with the human being after hundreds of years, she says. "Definitely, Mowlavi (Rumi) is always alive...Of course, he is physically mortal like other humans, but his message remains... immortal and eternal," says Gharibpour and explains that the eternal message of Rumi as it is reflected in 'Mowlavi' opera is "the message of love, ...peace and friendship". In the closing minutes of the opera, the spectators see the Mongol general again and he commands: Shed the blood of the old, the children and the young and set every land on fire. But this time is different. Rumi's poetry has given mankind a guide: The serenity of Love. As the opera closes, the marionettes of Rumi and his followers do Sema (whirling dance) and sing: "O Love, scatter your essence on our fortune!" ... "Come! Let us begin to be Lovers again!" ... "Come! Let us be the new spring of Love!"



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**Notice of tender for export sale No. 28/1403/Z**

Hereby Golgohar Mining & Industrial Co. announces selling and export 140,000 metric tons of Iron Ore Pellet (%Fe:65) on basis of F.O.B at Barco. Jetty Bandar Abbas - Iran. Interested bidders should find tender documents at Golgohar website: [www.geg.ir](http://www.geg.ir). All bids on conformity to tender instructions must be submitted no later than 09:00 A.M. on 21. Jan.2025 to to Golgohar complex in sirjan (50 km in shiraz road). Bidders are invited to the transactions commission department of the seller with an introduction letter of interested buyer and personal identification of the representative. Tender results shall be announced at 09:00 A.M. on 21.Jan.2025 at the office of the Seller.

**GOLGOHAR MINING & INDUSTRIAL CO.**

Analysis %		
Fe	65.00	Min
FeO	1.0	Ave
P	0.05	Max
S	0.01	Max
SiO2	3.5	Max
Al2O3	0.7	Max
CaO	0.9	Max
MgO	2.5	Max
CCS (kg/p)	Ave 250	
8-16 mm%	Min 90	
-6 mm%	Ave 5	
A.I%	Max 3.8	
T.I%	Min 95	
Prosity%	19-24	
Reducibility%	Min 90	

### Iranian director Hosseinpour wins two awards at NY festival

Arts & Culture Desk

Iranian filmmaker Ramin Hosseinpour received the Best Director of a Short Film and the Best Short Screenplay awards for his short documentary 'Sculpture' at the New York International Film Awards (NYIFA). The awards were presented in December 2024 and January 2025, marking the sixth year of the NYIFA. The festival, known for showcasing some of the best short films each month, selects films through a rigorous three-stage process involving preliminary, semi-final, and final rounds of judging. 'Sculpture' is a historical documentary that delves into the lives of Rumi and Shams, set in the year 642 AH (1245 CE). The film is based on real historical accounts and has

been recognized for its compelling storytelling and direction. 'Sculpture' has already secured a place among the top 50 short films, documentaries, and music videos on IMDB for 2025 and is currently in contention for the 2026 Academy Awards, Canadian Academy Awards, and BAFTAs. In addition to his recent accolades, Hosseinpour's 'Sculpture' was selected for the Best Short Documentary category at the Rhode Island International Film Festival in 2022, where it placed third. The film was also nominated for Best Short Documentary at the 78th Festival Internazionale del Cinema di Salerno in 2024 and won the Best Director of a Short Film award at the Crown Point International Film Festival in Chicago in September 2024.