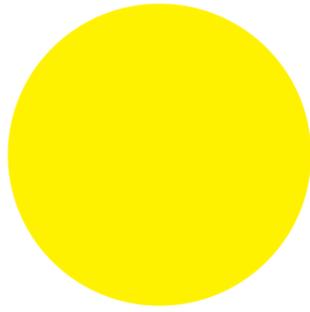


VP urges collaborative action to strengthen social capital for sustainable development

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Past approaches unable to bring about regional cooperation



By Hassan Beheshtipour
Foreign policy expert

OPINION

In the relationships among countries in the Middle East, the United States stands on one side, while on the other side are the regional countries, particularly Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, Oman, Qatar and Kuwait, which are actively engaged in regional cooperation. Only the United States or Israel can stir up these countries to avoid regional collaboration with Iran and be wary of forming joint efforts. When it comes to regional issues, Iran needs to identify common grounds and then declare its willingness to cooperate on these issues for mutual security and shared benefits. Such cooperation could help defuse tensions in the region, prevent war and bloodshed, and reduce interference from external powers in regional affairs. While it sounds appealing for Iran and the regional countries to work together and form a united front, the crucial question remains: what topics should be discussed, and how should the dialogue unfold? Should Iran start with economic cooperation? The region is moving toward increased tensions. Given the current circumstances, these tensions are detrimental to the countries involved. The only beneficiaries of this unrest are those outside the region. The more tension within the region, the more it benefits powers like Israel. Westerners believe that it is good for these countries to weaken each other, allowing Israel's enemies to be weakened. The US also knows that in the event of a war, their major arms companies can make huge profits. They come in with technology and arms, destroy the region and then rebuild it. A clear model for engaging with regional countries must be presented. What matters is that Iran to gather regional countries to foster collective cooperation under the 2+6 model, which involves cooperation between Iran, Iraq, and the six Persian Gulf Cooperation Council countries.

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Paknejad: Oil production capacity to increase by 250,000 bpd

Iran's oil minister announced his plans on Saturday to increase the country's oil production capacity by approximately 250,000 barrels per day (bpd).

Discussing plans by the current administration's Oil Ministry to boost output, Mohsen Paknejad said, "Based on a plan submitted to and approved by the Economic Council of Iran, it was decided to raise production capacity by about 250,000 barrels per day," Shana reported. He went on to say that funding for the initiative is expected to be provided through the National Development Fund of Iran (NDFI), and that we are pursuing the implementation of the plan.

The Economic Council of Iran, relying on Article 12 of the Law on Removing Barriers to Competitive Production and improving the country's financial system, approved an emergency plan to raise crude oil production by 250,000 barrels per day during its session on August 12, 2024, following a proposal by the Oil Ministry.

The oil minister also on Friday announced that the country's daily diesel production had increased by 10-12 million liters and assured the continuation of efforts to meet the fuel needs of power plants amid approaching colder weather.

Speaking at a meeting on the energy crisis management chaired by President Masoud Pezeshkian and attended by top officials, including ministers and provincial governors via videoconference, Paknejad presented a report on his ministry's recent fuel supply status.

Paknejad noted that gas and diesel deliveries to power plants have been satisfactory in the past week (ended Friday), with diesel reserves at power plants also showing a rise. "With colder temperatures expected next week, coordinated measures between the Ministries of Oil and Energy will help us overcome the upcoming challenges," he said.

The minister emphasized the effectiveness of implementing strategic closures to reduce energy consumption, adding that diesel storage levels have remained stable, with no significant decline in reserves at power plants.

He further stated that diesel supply operations are ongoing, with substantial efforts to ensure uninterrupted provision.

"Daily diesel production has seen a significant increase of 10-12 million liters, and these measures will continue until we overcome the current period," Paknejad said.

Non-oil exports hit \$43.14b in nine months, up 18%: **IRICA**

Economy Desk

The head of the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA) released the country's foreign trade report in the last nine months, stressing that non-oil exports reached \$43.14 billion, marking an 18% increase compared to the same period last year.

Speaking on Saturday, Foroud Asgari said imports, including gold bullion, amounted to \$50.89 billion during March 20-December 20. In terms of weight, the country's imports fell by 3.16%, totaling 27.94 million tons, IRNA reported.

Asgari noted that the weight of non-oil exports in the first nine months of the current Iranian year reached 116.35 million tons, reflecting a 13.77% increase compared to the previous year. The average customs value of each ton of exported goods rose by 3.74% to \$371.

According to Asgari, petrochemical products com-

prised 50.7 million tons of the exports, valued at \$19.7 billion, representing a 33.25% increase in weight terms and a 32% rise in value terms.

Top export destinations

China topped the list of Iran's major export destinations in the nine-month period with \$11 billion, followed by Iraq (\$9.4 billion), the United Arab Emirates (\$5.3 billion), Turkey (\$5.2 billion), Afghanistan (\$1.7 billion), Pakistan (\$1.7 billion), and India (\$1.4 billion). These seven countries accounted for 82.4% of the weight and 82.85% of the total value of Iran's non-oil exports, Asgari said.

Major import partners

Regarding imports, Asgari noted that the largest volume of goods came from the UAE (\$15.3 billion), China (\$13 billion), Turkey (\$8.9 billion), Germany (\$1.8 billion), India (\$1.1 billion), Russia (\$1.1 billion), and Hong Kong (\$1 billion). Collectively, these seven



countries provided 75% of the weight and 83% of the value of total imports. The average customs value of each ton of imported goods was \$1,821, an 8.4%

increase compared to the same period last year.

Key export, import items

Asgari highlighted lique-

fied natural gas (\$6 billion), liquefied propane (\$2.5 billion), and methanol (\$1.9 billion) as Iran's top three export items during this period.

On the import side, raw gold (\$5.6 billion), livestock corn (\$2.1 billion), and smartphones (\$1.7 billion) ranked as the top three imported goods.

Iran retains world's 10th spot as crude steel output hits 28m tons



Economy Desk

Iranian steel producers manufactured 28 million tons of crude steel in the first 11 months of 2024, reflecting a 0.5% increase compared to the same period last year.

According to the Iranian Mines and Mining Industries Development and Renovation Organization (IMIDRO), citing the World Steel Association's latest report, Iran maintained its position as the world's 10th-largest steel producer from January through November 2024. In November alone, Iran produced 3.1 million tons of crude steel, a 0.1% increase compared to November 2023.

The World Steel Association reported global crude steel production for the first 11 months of 2024 at over 1.694 billion tons, reflecting a 1.4% year-on-year decline. November's global output reached 146.8 million tons, an increase of 0.8%.

Notable regional trends included a 4.1% production drop in North America (97 million tons) and the Russia-Ukraine-Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) region (approximately

80 million tons). Meanwhile, non-EU European countries reported a 5.2% increase (40 million tons), and EU member states posted a 2.2% rise (119 million tons).

China, the world's top producer, recorded a 2.7% decline in production to 929 million tons in the first 11 months of 2024. Among other leading producers:

- India produced approximately 136 million tons, marking a 5.9% increase.
 - Japan's output fell 3.6% to 77.1 million tons.
 - The United States recorded a 2.2% drop, producing 72.9 million tons.
 - Russia's production declined 3.6% to 64.9 million tons.
 - South Korea saw a 4.9% decrease, with 58.3 million tons produced.
 - Germany's production rose by 5.3% to 34.5 million tons.
 - Turkey recorded the highest growth among the top 10, with an 11.2% increase to 33.9 million tons.
 - Brazil produced 32.5 million tons, reflecting a 5.6% rise.
- These countries ranked first through ninth in global steel production during the period.

Guild head says industries suffer \$11b in losses due to power outages



Economy Desk

The head of the Iranian National Union of Alternative Fuels and Related Services reported that the country's industries suffered \$11 billion in damages last year due to power outages, resulting in significant consequences.

Speaking at an official ceremony on energy innovations and clean transportation, Ali Mahmoudian highlighted the critical role of Compressed Natural Gas (CNG) in the 2000s when gasoline demand surged, ISNA reported.

"The development of the CNG industry at that time resulted in substantial achievements for the country," he added. Addressing current challenges in the CNG sector, Mahmoudian noted obstacles such as tax barriers, business restrictions and unmet government commitments, yet acknowledging the sector's resilience in overcoming these difficulties.

"Iran is rich in resources but poor in energy governance," he said, emphasizing that despite the country's immense underground energy production potential, various challenges persist.

Mahmoudian warned that by 2031, Iran would face a daily shortfall of 150 million liters of gasoline.

Regarding the proposed 2025 budget plan, the union head pointed out that over 70% of the country's budget is allocated to current expenses. He contrasted this with countries like Singapore, South Korea, and Japan, where significant portions of budgets are invested in education, research, and infrastructure development—critical factors in their economic success.

Mahmoudian also reiterated the economic damage caused by power outages in 2023, stating, "Industries and production units suffered \$11 billion in losses due to electricity shortages last year, leading to unemployment and broader repercussions for the country." Discussing the declining share of CNG in Iran's fuel mix, he stated that CNG currently accounts for only 17% of the market.

"In a country that produces natural gas and has infrastructure capacity for 50 million cubic meters, such figures are unacceptable," the union said. Mahmoudian highlighted

Iran's unique technical and engineering achievements, such as connecting 2,500 CNG stations to the national gas network, a feat unparalleled globally. However, he questioned why the industry has not progressed further.

He stressed that expanding CNG under government direction could resolve numerous issues, including eliminating the need for gasoline imports. "If CNG development continues as planned, 20 million liters of gasoline will be saved annually within three years, effectively curbing imports," Mahmoudian stated.

Highlighting the importance of renewable energy development, Mahmoudian warned that failure to transition to renewable energy sources could bankrupt the nation's production sector within a few years. "Plans are in place to create 13,000 megawatts of solar power capacity, financed domestically and slated for implementation over three years with support from local banks," the union head stated. This initiative targets small- and medium-scale production units, which Mahmoudian said will yield significant positive outcomes upon completion.

From Azar to Shahrashb; evolution of a historic village

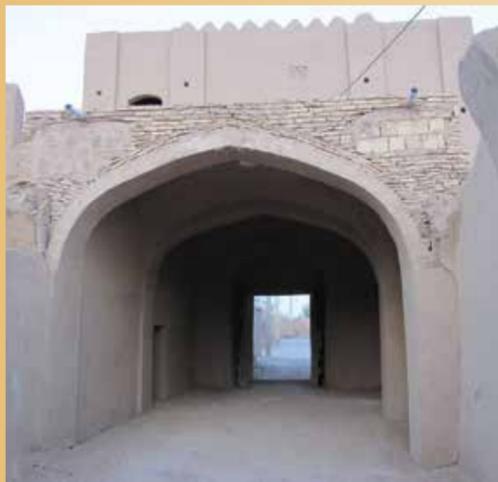


Iranica Desk

The Arg of Shahrashb in Abarkuh, Yazd Province, spans 17,000 square meters and exemplifies ancient residential complexes in Iran, where noblemen and common people coexisted, with class distinctions primarily reflected in the decorations of their homes. Shahrashb is a historic and scenic village holding significant cultural and tourism value due to its long history and notable historical sites, ISNA wrote. Historically, the village was known as Azar, a name that evolved over time to Shahrashb. This name is believed to originate from a period when a thousand horses (ash in Persian) were kept in the village, owned by local khans (nobles). Additionally, Shahrashb may derive from one of the Iranian notables from the Hazaraspid tribe (Thousand Horses), mentioned in connection with the historical site Gonbad Ali. Furthermore, Shahrashb is the name of a character in the Shahnameh (Book of Kings), who served as a confidant and guide to Tahmuras. Throughout various periods, Shahrashb has been inhabited by different civilizations, preserving elements of earthen and desert architecture that make it particularly appealing to tourists and historical researchers. As a prominent tourist destination in the country, the village presents significant opportunities for investment in

the tourism sector and cultural research, serving as a gateway to discovering Iran's ancient heritage. Among the most important attractions of Shahrashb are its adobe castles, old houses, and narrow, winding streets, all of which reflect the traditional desert architecture of Iran and its adaptation to climatic conditions. These adobe structures have withstood the desert's climatic changes and now symbolize the intelligent architectural methods of past generations. One significant historical edifice in the village is Shahrashb Castle, which, according to existing evidence, was one of the residential complexes of ancient Iran. This massive castle is constructed in the form of two concentric squares, making it one of the largest historical citadels in Iran after the Bam Citadel. The central castle dates back to the Safavid era, while the surrounding structures span from the Safavid to the Qajar period. Interestingly, within the castle are graves that, contrary to Islamic tradition, are not oriented towards the qibla, suggesting that the castle may have been built on the remains of an earlier structure from the pre-Islamic era. Built from materials such as raw clay, mud, stone, wood, and baked brick, this castle is one of the few historical buildings in Yazd province where a significant portion of the structure

remains intact. The walls and towers are also made of adobe and mud, common in many historical buildings across Iran's central desert. The houses in Shahrashb were constructed from mud brick and featured domed roofs, as the use of adobe not only provided accessibility but also facilitated air ventilation and kept the buildings cool. The domed roofs allowed sunlight to consistently strike one side, reducing heat absorption. In the Shahrashb citadel, local lords and peasants lived side by side, with class differences clearly visible in the intricate plasterwork and arches adorned with floral arabesques and muqarnas. Registered as a national monument in 2005, the Shahrashb castle holds both historical and cultural significance, representing construction methods and lifestyles from past eras, making it especially appealing to those interested in Iranian history and architecture. With its hospitable people and rich local culture, Shahrashb offers visitors a unique blend of historical, natural, and cultural attractions. Its ancient relics, desert landscapes, and high-quality agricultural and handicraft products have transformed this area into an attractive destination for culture and history enthusiasts, playing an important role in the sustainable development of tourism in Yazd Province.



A fusion of history, creativity in Honarmandan Park of Tehran

Iranica Desk

In the midst of Tehran's bustling streets lies Honarmandan Park (Artists' Park) — a unique fusion of nature, culture, and creativity. Located on Iranshahr Street, it offers much more than just a green retreat. With its shaded pathways, impressive sculptures, and vibrant artistic atmosphere, Honarmandan Park is a beloved destination for both locals and tourists seeking

a moment of peace or a burst of inspiration. The park presents a variety of experiences, whether you are interested in enjoying the tranquility of nature, engaging with local artists, or participating in community events that showcase the diverse culture of Tehran. It creates a sanctuary amid the city's hustle and bustle, allowing visitors to step away from the noise and immerse themselves in an environment that fosters

creativity and relaxation. Honarmandan Park's story is deeply rooted in Tehran's history. The land it occupies once belonged to Fisherabad Garden during the Qajar era, owned by Prince Kamran Mirza, the son of Nasereddin Shah. During World War II, it served as a military depot for Allied forces. Years later, the Tehran municipality transformed this historical site into the cultural hub we see today, blending its rich

past with a contemporary artistic spirit. This transformation involved not only landscaping but also a commitment to preserving the cultural identity of the area while providing an accessible space for art and creativity to flourish. In 1998, the House of Artists (Khaneh Honarmandan) was established near the park, adding further cultural depth. Designed by architect Bijan Shafiee, it serves as a hub for art exhibitions,

theater, and intellectual gatherings, making it a core component of Tehran's creative landscape. Today, the Khaneh Honarmandan remains a vibrant center where both emerging and established artists can present their works and exchange ideas, fostering an ever-growing community of creative individuals.

Sculptures and installations

Art forms the soul of Honar-

mandan Park. Scattered throughout the space are sculptures and installations by some of Iran's most celebrated artists. Notable pieces include works by Parviz Tanavoli and Morteza Ne'matollahi's which provide an interactive element to the park, allowing visitors to not only view art but also experience it within the context of the natural surroundings. Each piece tells its own story, contributing to the larger narrative of

Iranian artistic expression.

Recreational spaces

Beyond the art, Honarmandan Park offers areas for relaxation and leisure. These include sports facilities like a basketball court and fitness equipment, encouraging physical activity amidst the creative environment. The blend of sports and culture makes the park an inclusive space that caters to a wide range of interests while fostering a rich historical legacy.



Talks about end of Iran's role in Syria, 'sign of naivety'

The Islamic Republic of Iran pursued several goals in assisting Syria and aimed to prevent the collapse of governments in the region. Over the past decade, Syria has become the focal point of regional and international crises. The civil war in the country has not only been catastrophic from a humanitarian and social perspective but has also led to significant shifts and displacements in the political and military equations of the Middle East. One of the complex aspects of this crisis is the change in the power structure in Syria and the influence of foreign actors. While at the beginning of the war, Bashar al-Assad held power, but over time, with the increase in foreign interventions, the situation in the country became significantly more complicated. Sabah Zangeneh, an international affairs expert, had a discussion about the post-Assad developments in Syria. The full text of the interview follows below:

International Desk

INTERVIEW



AFP

Today, we are facing a post-Assad Syria. Do you think each of the actors in the new Syrian scene has carved out a specific role for themselves, and what changes have occurred in their positions?

SABAH ZANGANEH: Currently, multiple groups hold power in Syria. One of these groups is the Syrian Kurds, who are not unrelated to the Kurds of Turkey and Iraq. These groups have political and military organizations and have long sought a role in the Syrian government, aiming for a degree of autonomy in their regions. These Kurdish forces, who oppose the Turkish government but maintain ties with

the Kurds in Iraq and Turkey, have established their own organizations and have occupied parts of Syria. These forces are currently under American control.

Another significant power is held by Daesh terrorists, who are present in eastern Syria and the oil-rich areas near the Iraqi border. These forces are also controlled by the Americans and are managed, often through the Kurdish Democratic Party or sometimes with the help of Arab tribes in the region, according to the plans the US deems appropriate. A portion of the power in Syria is also held by the Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham, which consists of about 30 varied groups.

These groups do not have a complete understanding of each other and each applies its own policies and methods. Some of the groups are still part of Al-Qaeda, while others are extreme religious organizations.

Another group that holds power in Syria is the Alawites, who are located in the west of the country, particularly in the regions of Latakia, Tartus, and Banyas. They have 60 years of experience in governing Syria and are unwilling to easily relinquish this position.

Another group is the Shia forces, who may make up about 8 to 10 percent of Syria's population. These forces are located in the Homs region and around

the Zainabiyeh area, with some also present in Aleppo, where they were effectively displaced by the arrival of Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham. The Shia groups are also seeking to secure their place in Syria's future.

The province of Idlib is another region that remains a source of tension. This area has been under Turkish control and continues to be so. The armed groups in this region have received military, social, and cultural training from Turkey and are at odds with Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham.

Another region of significant importance is Quneitra and the Golan Heights. These areas were part of the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights,

and after Assad's withdrawal and the entry of Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham into Damascus, Israel had the opportunity to expand and occupy more territory in this region. This area is strategically important due to its water resources, fertile land, and high elevation. By controlling this region, Israel has gained dominance over other areas east and north of Mount Hermon, which stands at 2,800 meters, the highest elevation in Syria and the entire region.

With this diverse array of forces and power currents, the US will naturally face numerous challenges in shaping the political structure of Syria.

Sabah Zangeneh

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Given the diverse array of powerful forces and currents at play in Syria, the US will face numerous challenges in shaping the political structure of the country.



Syria's de facto leader Ahmed al-Sharaa attends a meeting with former rebel faction chiefs, as he reached an agreement with them to dissolve all groups and consolidate them under the Defence Ministry, according to a statement from the new administration, in Damascus, Syria, in this handout image released on December 24, 2024.

SANA/HANDOUT VIA REUTERS

The most critical aspect in the professional arena is the Iranian role in the Syrian conflict. What are your thoughts on the policies of Iran in Syria over the past decade?

The Islamic Republic of Iran pursued several goals in assisting Syria. Iran aimed to prevent the collapse of governments in the region. With foreign aggression or extremist groups, governments often fall apart and the region plunges into turmoil. Just as is happening now, with the entry of extremist forces, Israel has effectively invaded more territories of Syria and brought them under its occupation. Iran emphasizes in its policies that there should be no foreign aggression in the region, similar to what the United States did during the presidencies of Barack Obama and Donald Trump. Iran has opposed and continues to oppose such external actions aimed at regime change. Iran was also against aggressions like those we are currently witnessing, such as

attacks by forces from Idlib or organizations like Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham.

On the other hand, Iran was keen to keep religiously sacred areas in Syria safe from harm. Additionally, due to its strategic location and historical ties with ancient Syria or the Levant, access to the Mediterranean is considered one of Iran's long-term goals, just as Iran had a presence on the Mediterranean shores in the past. With all these considerations, the time had come to support a government that had backed Iran during crises such as Saddam's invasion [in 1980s] and had prevented the formation of an Arab alliance against Iran.

Lebanon is also one of the regions that has received support from Iran both before and after the [Islamic] Revolution (1979). Iranians have always felt a sense of kinship and friendship towards Lebanon and its people, and they have always been willing to help Lebanon, especially when it has been attacked by a racist

and occupying power like Israel. This set of goals was on Iran's agenda, but if we pay attention, the distance of Syria from Iran and the presence of another country in between made the realization of all these goals problematic in the medium term, and that is exactly what happened. Meanwhile, Turkey, which considers itself a rival of Iran and seeks to revive a form of Ottomanism, had better conditions for its presence in Syria, given that it shares a border with Syria and the entry of Turkish forces into this country occurs easily and rapidly.

The next important point is that Iran's attention to Syria has primarily focused on military support, while in the contemporary world, what holds more utility and impact, and possesses greater speed and depth, is the soft power of countries. In my opinion, there has been a lack of effort in this regard, and insufficient attention has been paid to developing soft power in line with military capabilities.

Syrian rebel fighters fire a heavy machine gun against Daesh positions from a location west of Kobani during fighting on November 4, 2014.

YANNIS BEHRAKIS/REUTERS



What changes do you anticipate in Iran's share, role, and position in post-Assad Syria? Figures such as Abu Mohammed al-Jolani from the new government, along with

the new foreign policy chief of the European Union and US officials as foreign actors, believe that Tehran will no longer maintain its previous standing in Syria. What

are your thoughts on this issue?

It is too early to make such statements, whether they come from Americans, Europeans, or from the Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham or any other

force. Expressing these words is a sign of naivety.

The historical relationship between Iran and Syria will not be diminished by the presence of a number of extremist armed forces. Iran has contributed to the economy, agriculture, water, electricity, and various other sectors in Syria, and the people of this country have felt these services. The people of Syria are aware of the multitude and diversity of Iran's services in their country. Culturally and ideologically, Iran has not had issues with the Syrian people, although it did not approve of some behaviors of the former government and tried to make that system aware of its shortcomings, while also advising or attempting to create a new intellectual and social atmosphere for the Syrian government. However, it maintained very good relations with the people. Therefore, predicting that Iran will

no longer have a role in Syria is an immature statement.

It seems that Turkey has disrupted the equations of many other prominent regional players, especially Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Iran, and Russia, in Syria. In such circumstances, how much do you think Tehran can turn the developments in Syria into a subject for greater joint cooperation with Saudi Arabia and its allies in this matter?

Our friends and brothers in Turkey will soon realize how the situation will unfold. Addressing economic, social, political, and cultural issues in Syria by a neighboring government, along with strange consequences such as the occupation of southern Syria, are not minor matters that a single country can manage alone. The costs that these developments will impose on

Turkey will gradually become apparent. Issues such as maintaining the value of the Syrian pound, providing safe drinking water, ensuring electricity, and many other matters will arise. Turkey's presence in Syria will raise many questions. Will the mindset of the Syrian people and the Arab populations, including those in Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Iraq, Lebanon, and Palestine, accept the repetition of occupation and the dominance of the Ottoman Empire over Arab countries? The regional developments will be so diverse that many alliances and coalitions in the area will be disrupted. Certainly, many countries in the region will reassess their calculations in light of the developments in Syria, each considering their own security for the future.

The interview was published by the Persian service of the Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA).

Israel's violation of Syrian sovereignty and contradictions with international law



By Abbasali Kadkhodaei
Member of Iran's Expediency Council

OPINION

From the perspective of international law, the sovereignty of nations remains a fundamental pillar. Accordingly, Article 2(1) of the United Nations Charter recognizes all states, regardless of their political system, economic power, or internal stability, as possessing a distinct legal status in the international community.

This principle guarantees that the sovereignty of no country, despite its internal challenges, can be subject to the arbitrary will of another state. Moreover, the absence of a central government does not undermine the sovereignty or the protected legal status of the country in the international system.

International law has defined the criteria and legal elements for recognizing a state through the 1933 Montevideo Convention, which, under Article 1, stipulates that the formation and recognition of a state's sovereignty depends on having a defined territory, population, government, and the ability to engage in relations with other states. However, this mechanism applies solely to the establishment and recognition of a state, not to the continuation

of its sovereignty following significant changes in its political system or internal stability. Thus, the sovereignty of an already-established state cannot be questioned due to internal political changes or instability. Therefore, according to the views of international legal scholars, the sovereignty of a state is not dissolved by fundamental changes in its territorial population or central authority. This rule, based on the principle of the permanence of state sovereignty, ensures the stability of the state-centered international community and promotes international peace and security through the survival of state entities and the equality of sovereigns.

Thus, the logical consequence of the existence and continuity of a country's sovereignty, even in the absence of an effective central government, is the protection of its territorial integrity and political independence. Accordingly, any use of force against it and interference in its internal affairs is explicitly prohibited under Articles 4 and 7 of the UN Charter.

Consequently, from the international perspective, the sovereignty of Syria, which currently lacks a functional central government, remains protected against any form of armed aggression or use of force. This cannot be violated by any other entity within the international

system. Any notion aimed at undermining Syria's sovereignty, leading to military aggression or the use of force against it, is invalid and cannot be justified. As international practice confirms, the prohibition of intervention and the use of force prevents any state from launching armed aggression against another.

In line with the above argument, any military intervention in countries without a central government can only occur following decisions by the UN Security Council and within the framework of Chapter VII actions of the UN Charter. Forceful interventions in countries like Syria, which are sometimes referred to as "failed states" by other countries or international organizations, have only taken place under UN Security Council resolutions. Notable examples include the UN operations in Somalia under Security Council Resolution 794, the UN mission in Liberia under Resolution 1509, and the UN mission in Sierra Leone under Resolution 1270.

These cases demonstrate that the international community and the Security Council still uphold the international sovereignty of "failed states," respecting their territorial integrity and immunity from armed aggression by other states. Such states are still entitled to the rights outlined in Articles 4 and 7 of the UN Charter.

Furthermore, many Chapter VII Security Council resolutions, while acknowledging the absence of a central government, explicitly reaffirm the right of these countries to sovereignty and territorial integrity. For example, Security Council Resolution 897 regarding UN operations in Somalia (UNOSOM II) emphasizes respect for Somalia's sovereignty and territorial integrity in accordance with the UN Charter.

In other words, the Security Council's reliance on Chapter VII resolutions further supports the notion that states lacking effective central governments continue to benefit from the protections afforded by Articles 4 and 7 of the UN Charter. Without this, such resolutions under Chapter VII would be meaningless and ineffective.

Moreover, many Chapter VII resolutions explicitly include a condition for the country in question to consent to UN operations on its soil, further reinforcing the international sovereignty of these states within the international system. Detailed discussions during the adoption of Security Council Resolution 1851 show that countries such as the UK, China, Russia, and Germany insisted on the necessity of the Transitional Government's consent before allowing foreign intervention in Somalia, thus confirming the respect for Somalia's sovereignty.

Therefore, the repeated affirmations by the Security Council and the practice of states concerning the continued international sovereignty of "failed states" and the necessity of their consent for any military intervention highlight the prohibition of any armed aggression or interference against these countries. This principle is starkly violated by the recent widespread Israeli aggression against Syria, which constitutes an illegal occupation of Syrian territory.

Israel's justification for its attack on Syria, claiming preemptive disarmament, is in direct contradiction with international law. According to Ben Saul, Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and the fight against terrorism, there is no accepted legal basis under international law for preemptive disarmament. This represents a clear breach of the foundational principles of international law, one which Israel has continued for over a decade in Syria.

Israel's aggression and illegal occupation of Syrian territories, including the violation of its 1974 agreement with Syria, are part of a broader pattern of illegal occupation in Palestine and Lebanon. This disregard for international law, human rights, and UN resolutions is evident in Israel's defiance of the International Court of Jus-

stice's advisory opinion, which called for the end of the occupation of Palestinian territories, and its ongoing actions in Syria. Israel remains confident that under the protection of the United States, it is immune from any consequences or accountability. Following the 1967 war, Israel occupied most of the Golan Heights, and in an illegal and globally unrecognized action, annexed these territories. This act has never been recognized by the international community and remains a clear violation of international law.

Sovereignty and territorial integrity are fundamental and foundational principles in the structure of international law. They are not subject to the will or interpretations of certain states, but are based on the consensus of the international community. Therefore, it must be emphasized that Israel or the United States cannot redefine these concepts to undermine their significant implications.

Syria's sovereignty, like that of Lebanon, Palestine, and any other country in the region, is inviolable, and any attempt to threaten or alter its territorial integrity or destroy its infrastructure by the Israeli occupying regime is strictly prohibited and will lead to international responsibility for Israel and its supporters.

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Israel's justification for its attack on Syria, claiming preemptive disarmament, is in direct contradiction with international law.

Israeli soldiers ride armored vehicles during an exercise in the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights, near the cease-fire line between Israel and Syria on June 17, 2015.

REUTERS/HOSAM KATAN



Persian Gulf Pro League review: Limouchi hits hat-trick, Sepahan routs Havadar to go top

Sports Desk

Mahdi Limouchi scored a sensational hat-trick to inspire Sepahan to a 5-0 home demolishing of Havadar in the Persian Gulf Pro League on Friday.

Mohammad-Mahdi Mohebbi and Reza Asadi were also in the scoresheet, the latter finding the net from the spot, as Sepahan overtook Tractor on top of the league table with 31 points, while Havadar, which had Omidreza Ravankhah as the new head coach on the bench, remained rock-bottom with eight points. Stunned by a 1-0 home loss to Shams Azar last time out, Tractor left the pitch without a win for a second running after a 1-1 away draw against Nassaji Mazandaran.

Nassaji defender Amirmohammad Houshmand headed home on a corner kick with 19 minutes into the first half, before Mahdi Torabi bagged an equalizer 17 minutes from normal time.

A heated quarrel between Tractor's Mahdi Hashemnejad and Nassaji center-back Vahid Mohammadzadeh led to chaotic scenes in the stoppage time at the Vatan Stadium, with the former and his head coach Dragan Skocic receiving their marching orders.

The result saw Tractor drop to second in the table with 29 points, with Nassaji sitting 12th on 14 points.

Caretaker contribution

Interim coach Karim Bagheri got off to a winning start on Persepolis bench as the Tehran Reds



▲ Sepahan's Reza Asadi (5) and Mahdi Limouchi celebrate a goal during a 5-0 victory over Havadar in the Persian Gulf Pro League at the Naqsh-e Jahan Stadium, Isfahan, Iran, on Dec. 27, 2024.
● SAJJAD HOSSEININEJAD/FOOTBALL.NET

came from behind for a hard-fought 2-1 victory over Khaybar at home.

The visitors were rewarded for their brave start at the Shahr-e Qods Stadium when they took a shock lead through Aref Rostami's point-blank header midway through the first half, piling fur-

ther pressure on the defending champion, which had stepped onto the pitch on the back of four defeats in six league outings.

Under-fire strikers Ali Alipour and Isa Alekasir, however, came to the Reds' rescue in the second half to avoid a third con-

secutive home defeat for Persepolis.

Having missed a couple of clear-cut chances earlier in the game, Alipour held his nerve when he was sent through on goal by Soroush Rafiei's long ball in the 53rd minute to draw the home side level.

Desperate for his first goal of the campaign, Alekasir ended his 10-game drought with four minutes left on the clock, tapping into the roof of the net on Oston Urunov's low cross.

Alipour thought he had his second of the night in added time, only to see his strike ruled out

by a VAR review for an Abolfazl Babaei's foul in the buildup to the goal.

Maximum points saw Persepolis overtake Foolad Khuzestan, which had shared the spoils with Esteghlal Khuzestan in a goalless Ahvaz Derby on the preceding night, and move up to third with 26 points.

Khaybar, meanwhile, is third from bottom in the 16-team standings, standing just above the relegation zone thanks to a better goal difference on Shams Azar.

Elsewhere, Omid Latifi and Mohsen Azarbad scored second-half goals to lead Zob Ahan to 2-1 away win against Mes Rafsanjan.

Mahdi Sharifi caught the deficit to one in the 91st minute, but it proved too little too late for Masoud Shojaei's men, who are 13th in the table – equal on 13 points with Khaybar.

In Qazvin, an Ali Qorbani's last-gasp header gave Golgozar a 1-0 win against Shams Azar, while Malavan played to a 1-1 home draw against Iralco at home.

Reza Ghandipour found the net for the home side in the 21st minute, before Amin Kazemian restored parity with a stunning strike 12 minutes later to join Limouchi on top of the league's leading marksmen chart with six goals.

On Thursday, Esteghlal played to a goalless stalemate on the road against Chadormalou to remain 10th in the table with 17 points – a third league draw in a row for the Tehran Blues ahead of the highly-anticipated visit of Sepahan.

Greco-Roman National Championships:

Yousefi wins 130kg title to make case for national team spot

Sports Desk

Former world champion Ali-Akbar Yousefi showcased his credentials for a place in the Iranian squad by winning the 130kg gold at the Greco-Roman National Championships – the opening phase of the national team trials for next year's World Championships – on Friday. Outscoring his three opponents 23-1 en route to the final, Yousefi dominated Morteza Alghousi by a 10-1 superiority to secure

the ultimate prize of his weight class, throwing down the gauntlet to fellow-superheavyweight Iranians Amin Mirzazadeh and Fardin Hedayati, who are the reigning world senior and under-23 gold medalists respectively. Elsewhere in the three-day event, Iman Mohammadi – a world junior and U23 champion in 2022 – edged out Mohammad-Javad Rezaei 4-3 in a thrilling 72kg final, with Mohammadreza Gholami overcom-

ing Armin Moheb-Sabet 5-2 in the 67kg showdown. Gholamreza Farrokhi cruised to a superiority win (8-0) against Mohammadhossein Azarm-dokht for the 82kg title, while a cagey 97kg final saw Hamidreza Badkan beat Mohammad-Hadi Seydi 2-1. Friday's results came after Mahdi Ahadi had walked away with the 55kg gold on the preceding night in Shiraz, thanks to a 3-1 victory over Kianoush Shamshiri.

Pouya Nasserpour defeated Mohammad-Javad Aboutaleb 4-0 in the 60kg final, and Mohammad-Mahdi Keshtkar won the 63kg gold, courtesy of a 6-1 win against Ali Hajivand. Amin Kavianinejad – an Asian Games silver winner last year – rounded off his campaign with a 5-4 win against Ali Abdi in the 77kg final, with reigning four-time Asian champion Nasser Alizadeh beating Behrouz Hedayat 6-3 for the top podium in the 87kg event.



Iranian wrestler Ali-Akbar Yousefi reacts after the victory in the 130kg final in the Greco-Roman National Championships in Shiraz, Iran, on December 27, 2024.
● IAWF

Court rejects Barcelona appeal for Olmo registration



● MARCA

BBC – Barcelona's appeal for the precautionary registration of Dani Olmo for the rest of the season has been rejected, meaning the Spain international may not be able to play for the club from 1 January.

Olmo, 26, was signed from German side RB Leipzig for a reported 60m euros (£51m) in August. However, the attacking midfielder was registered only for the first half of the season as Barcelona could not meet La Liga's wage cap restrictions. La Liga welcomed a court's decision to reject the club's

appeal.

"La Liga has today learned of the ruling... rejecting the request for the provisional registration of Dani Olmo until June 30, 2025, on the grounds that none of the necessary conditions for the adoption of an interim measure have been met," said the Spanish league.

"The ruling also stresses that 'the purpose of allowing additional spending is so that a long-term injury does not weaken the team's competitiveness, not to use a long-term injury to allow the registration of players whose salaries exceed the limit,

which is what FC Barcelona is attempting"

Barcelona registered Olmo after their squad was hit by long-term injuries, allowing the club to allocate a portion of their wages to register the player. His four-month allowance will expire at the end of December and the Commercial Court number 10 of Barcelona rejected the club's request to provisionally register him.

Spanish media reported Barcelona have filed an appeal to the magistrate court which will be heard on Monday, a day before the deadline.

La Liga said the decision not to register Olmo, who was a youth player at Barcelona but left for Dinamo Zagreb aged 16, was initially taken by its Budget Validation Body.

It was then confirmed three times by its Financial Fair Play Committee, its Social Appeals Committee and by the Uefa Second Instance Licensing Committee of the Spanish Football Federation.

Olmo, who helped Spain win the European Championship in the summer, has scored six goals in 15 appearances for Barcelona this season.

Araghchi: Iran-China partnership 'strong foundation' for enhancing ties

International Desk

Iran's foreign minister said Tehran considers a 25-year comprehensive strategic partnership between Iran and China as a "strong foundation" for enhancing bilateral relations.

Abbas Araghchi made the remarks in a meeting with his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi in the capital Beijing on Saturday.

Referring to the long-standing and robust relationship between Iran and China as two ancient civilizations in Asia, Araghchi said the Islamic Republic will do its utmost to take advantage of high capacities of the collaboration with China.

Tehran and Beijing signed the comprehensive strategic partnership agreement in 2021 to reinforce their long-standing economic and political alliance. China is Iran's largest trade partner. Both states are subject to different levels of illegal sanctions imposed by the United States.

During their meeting on Saturday, both sides reviewed the current status of their relations in areas such as economy, trade, investment, energy, and transportation, discussing ways to enhance bilateral relations and ex-

pand cooperation within the framework of the comprehensive cooperation plan.

The Chinese foreign minister, for his part, said that boost in cooperation between China and Iran not only benefits the peoples of both countries, but will also contribute to promoting regional and global peace, stability, and development, according to a statement released by China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs on Saturday.

Historic relations

China and Iran established a comprehensive strategic partnership and are important members of the Global South. The relationship between the two countries has a long history, rooted in the strong and deep traditional friendship between their peoples, mutual trust and support since the establishment of diplomatic relations more than half a century ago, the Chinese top diplomat said.

Wang emphasized that both countries should closely coordinate within the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), jointly promote the Shanghai Spirit, facilitate more cooperative projects, and build closer SCO community with a shared future.

He added that Iran and China should also work together to enhance BRICS cooperation, cultivate new areas of cooperation, further strengthen BRICS, and better safeguard the common interests of the Global South, Wang said. Wang also emphasized that, in the face of today's world of instability and uncertainty, "We must strengthen unity and cooperation, oppose hegemonic and bullying actions, and jointly advocate and practice true multilateralism, working to build a more just and reasonable global governance system."

Iran nuclear issue

The two top diplomats also exchanged their views on the Iranian nuclear issue.

Wang emphasized that China has always advocated for addressing the Iranian nuclear issue through political dialogue and upholding the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action. China opposes the frequent use of sanctions and pressure and firmly supports Iran in safeguarding its legitimate rights and interests.

The Iranian foreign minister told reporters that 2025 will be an important year for Iran's nuclear issue. A nuclear agreement signed between



Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi (3rd L) and his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi (3rd R) meet in Beijing on December 28, 2024.
Iran's Foreign Ministry

Iran and world powers in 2015, from which the US unilaterally withdrew in 2018, expires on October 25, 2025. The US withdrawal put the agreement in limbo.

Middle East developments

The two sides also had an in-depth exchange of views on the current situation in the Middle East. The top diplomats of China and Iran agreed that West Asia is "not a battleground for the big powers" and should not be an arena of geopolitical competition

between countries outside the region. They agreed that "the international community should respect the sovereignty, security, stability, unity and territorial integrity of Middle East countries," according to a readout from Beijing's Foreign Ministry.

The two major trading partners reiterated calls for a cease-fire in Gaza, the proper implementation of the cease-fire in Lebanon, and the "integrated promotion of counter-terrorism, reconciliation and humanitarian processes in Syria," according to the readout.

Regional countries pillory Israel's burning of Gaza hospital

International Desk

Israel's burning of the only operating hospital in the northern Gaza Strip and forcing patients and medical staff to evacuate the health facility has drawn condemnations from regional countries, which called the move a serious crime and a flagrant violation of international law.

The hospital in northern Gaza was forcibly evacuated by the Israeli military on Friday after dozens of people were reportedly killed in Israeli strikes targeting the area.

Medical staff, including the director of the Kamal Adwan Hospital, have also been detained. Gaza health officials said on Saturday.

Hussam Abu Safiya, the hospital director, was among the first to report that about 50 people had been killed in Israeli air strikes targeting the vicinity of the hospital on Friday.

The Israeli military claimed it was carrying out an operation in the area, alleging the hospital was a Hamas stronghold.

On Friday, patients at the hospital were forcibly moved to the nearby

Indonesian Hospital which doctors warn is damaged and unsuitable due to a lack of power generators and water.

Seriously ill patients were moved to the nearby Indonesian Hospital, itself evacuated earlier in the week, which medics have described as non-functional.

"You can't call it a hospital, it's more of a shelter. It's not equipped for patients," Gaza's deputy minister of health, Abu-Al Rish, said on Friday. Sabbah, from Kamal Adwan Hospital, said, "It's dangerous because patients in the ICU department are in a coma and in need of ventilation machines and moving them will put them in danger."

The World Health Organization said the raid "has put this last major health facility in north Gaza out of service."

"Initial reports indicate that some key departments were severely burnt and destroyed during the raid," it posted on X on Friday.

Kamal Adwan hospital in Beit Lahia has been under a tightening Israeli blockade imposed on parts of north-



ern Gaza since October, when the military said it had launched an offensive to stop Hamas from regrouping there. The UN has said the area is under a "near-total siege" as the Israeli military heavily restricts access of aid deliveries to an area where an estimated 10,000 to 15,000 people remain. The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) strongly condemned the Israel's attack on the hospital, saying that it is part of Israel's ongoing war crimes and genocide against the Palestinian people.

Many regional countries including Iran, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar as well as the Palestinian presidency strongly condemned the Israel's attack on the hospital.

IRGC chief: Yemenis will ultimately emerge victorious

The chief commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) praised the Yemeni nation for courageously and valorously defending the Palestinian nation amid the bloody Israeli onslaught in Gaza, stating that the people will ultimately emerge triumphant. Major General Hossein Salami made the remarks in an interview with Yemen's Arabic-language al-Masirah television channel on Saturday, as reported by Press TV.

"The Yemenis, as they have resisted with dignity and honor up until today, will continue their resistance by the grace of God and will ultimately emerge victorious."

He added, "The Resistance Front has not weakened, and everyone is witnessing how Yemenis are competently defending Palestine and staging marches every Friday in support of Gaza."

The Yemeni Armed Forces announced on Friday that they launched a "hypersonic ballistic missile" targeting Israel's Ben Gurion Airport in Tel Aviv, asserting it had hit its target.

Military spokesperson Brigadier General Yahya Saree said in a televised statement that the strike caused casualties



and disrupted air traffic at the airport. "The missile succeeded in reaching its target despite the enemy's secrecy. The operation resulted in casualties and the suspension of air traffic at the airport," Saree noted.

Yemen's Ansarullah resistance movement has been also targeting ships linked to Israel, the United States, and the United Kingdom to force an end to the Tel Aviv regime's genocidal war on Gaza.

The Yemeni military forces have said they will not stop their operations until Israel's ground and aerial offensives in Gaza end.

So far, Israel has killed at least 45,3436 Palestinians, mostly women and children, and injured another 108,038 individuals in Gaza.

Mohammad Ali Rajabi
Cartoonist



Past approaches unable ...

First, discussions for cooperation should be started. For example, these countries should initiate periodic dialogues in their capitals to identify pathways to mutual understanding. Approaches must also change; you cannot expect others to come to the table with past approaches and tell them to think like Iran, especially when prior methods have not yielded results. Iran should not think like them either, but the expectation that they think like Iran is unrealistic.

Regional countries need to define a set of common interests and adjust their approaches to steer toward comprehensive cooperation. Dialogue is the first step; if an agreement is reached, they can then advance toward economic and cultural cooperation. These partnerships are much more attractive and

sustainable. When countries' interests are intertwined, they are less likely to create crises for each other, as doing so would directly harm their own partners. Once economic and cultural cooperation is established, the focus can shift to political and security collaborations, which, in my view, has often been the reverse of what should happen. Unfortunately, discussions often begin with security cooperation, which is a mistake; security collaboration is a high-level partnership. However, this cooperation must be genuine and not merely contractual, as a simple security agreement alone will not resolve issues. Building such cooperation is not easy, but it can start with regional dialogue before progressing to security and political collaboration.

If we are to speak realistically, there are

serious obstacles to such cooperation, with the United States being one of the most crucial. Iran's allied countries maintain extensive relations with the US, and these collaborations must be structured in a way that does not pose a threat to American interests. If Washington feels threatened or perceives that its interests are at risk, it will do its utmost to prevent such cooperation from materializing. Given its hegemony in the region, the US is a major obstacle. Therefore, cooperation must be transparent, precise, and agreeable to all parties, taking US interests into account, ensuring they are not jeopardized. In rhetoric, Iran can claim to have no business with the US and to pursue its own agenda, but in practice, cooperation must be shaped so that Iran does not overtly position itself against American interests.

VP urges collaborative action to strengthen social capital for sustainable development

Social Desk

Iran's Vice President Mohammadreza Aref emphasized the necessity of leveraging historical opportunities for sustainable development while addressing the pressing need to enhance the nation's social capital. Aref made the statements during a meeting with social scientists and prominent academics, adding "We welcome any strategies that contribute to preserving the social capital of the system." During the gathering, Aref highlighted the imperative that solutions proposed by social and economic elites should not be limited to academic discourse but should also embrace practical, field-based approaches. Reflecting on the socio-political landscape of the early 2000s, he noted, "Some elites should have stepped forward and taken responsibility during

that time, as the weaknesses in political performance were not adequately analyzed." Aref pointed out that the failure to address these shortcomings has resulted in lost opportunities for social capital over the years. He stressed the importance of a thorough analysis of past actions and urged political figures to accept their roles in the collective failures. "Instead of wasting social capital in previous years, we must identify and rectify the loss of certain opportunities," he asserted. The official also discussed how certain decisions and policies have inadvertently led to crises at different points in time, stating that such mismanagement leaves a lasting impact on the collective memory of society and exacerbates generational divides between the government and future generations. He emphasized the need to prevent

confrontational behavior and labeling of well-meaning individuals and experts in the country. He noted that while the filtering of social media networks may not have initially appeared significant, it has become a contentious issue, and the government is committed to addressing this matter through national consensus. He reiterated that the government is focused on ensuring the sustainability of its actions and achievements, stating, "Instead of temporary solutions and 'band-aid' fixes, we are seeking fundamental remedies." Aref recognized the discourse of national unity as a historic opportunity for the administration to correct past mistakes and achieve sustainable economic development. In his concluding remarks, Aref called on social scientists to provide actionable solutions to bridge generational



gaps and restore hope within society. He underscored the urgent need for a robust plan to attract an estimated \$150 billion in investments, which is crucial for achieving an eight percent growth rate, sustainable employment, poverty reduction, and stabilizing inflation.

Persian short film 'Maral' picked for Stuttgarter festival



The Iranian short film 'Maral' has been selected, as the only Iranian film, to compete at the 38th Stuttgarter Filmwinter - Festival for Expanded Media, marking its debut at this festival. The Stuttgart Film Festival, also known as Stuttgart Film Winter, is an annual event held in Stuttgart, Germany, during the month of January. For over 35 years, the festival has been dedicated to transcending the boundaries between cinema and media art, featuring an adventurous international program of films, workshops, media exhibitions, and performances for all ages. From December to February, the city's events revolve around the festival's theme, which this year is "Breathe the Air of Another Planet."

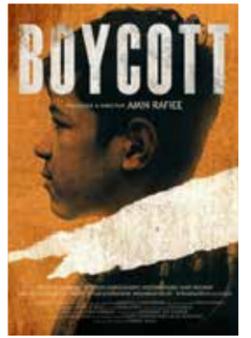
From January 15 to 22, all films, media, exhibitions, and performances will explore this thought-provoking theme. 'Maral' has previously been screened at the 30th German Short Film Week, the 22nd Tirana International Film Festival, and the 1st National Iranian Ethnic Film Festival. Written and directed by Parinaz Mehri and produced by Amir Etminan, 'Maral' tells the story of a 15-year-old girl who, in the absence of her father, is forced by her grandfather and uncle to marry her cousin, who has an intellectual disability. The film stars Firouz Agheli, Samaneh Nourivand, Hadi Eftekhazadeh, and Bahram Nobaripour, among others.

Iranian 'Boycot' awarded at Italian film festival

Arts & Culture Desk

The short film 'Boycot', directed and produced by Amin Rafiee, has once again made a remarkable achievement by winning the Best Short Film award at the 5th Nostalgia Film Festival in Italy. The festival, held in Rome from November 15 to 17, showcased cinematic works from around the world. 'Boycot', which previously participated in the 13th Crime and Punishment Film Festival in Turkey, focuses on the themes of peace and reconciliation. The film's

powerful narrative and the compelling performances by its cast caught the attention of the festival's jury. The short film features talented actors such as Abolfazl Shirzad, Mostafa Ahadi, Amir Moghimi, Farshad Khorsand, Ali Valiani, Ehsan Azar Bahram, Mohammad Baghi, Mohammad Reza Alizadeh, and Setayesh Sadeghzadeh, whose performances greatly contribute to the film's impactful message. Solmaz Etemad handles the international distribution of 'Boycot', and her efforts have led to the film's successful presence in various international festivals.



Iranian children shine at abacus competition in Taiwan



Five Iranian smart kids from Kish Island achieved outstanding success at the AIAMA 2024 WAPR Q1-Q4, hosted by Taiwan. The young minds secured one first-place and four second-place honors, bringing pride to their country. The AIAMA 2024 WAPR Q1-Q4 saw participation from over 1,200 children and teenagers across 13 coun-

tries, including the US, Japan, Indonesia, South Africa, India, Panama, Malaysia, Singapore, and Sri Lanka, IRNA reported. Maryam Akbarpour, the coach of these talented students and the director of Zehn-e No institute in Kish—which represents the PAMA Global Abacus Mental Arithmetic Association in Iran—expressed her delight at the achievements of these young prodigies. "The success of our students on an international stage highlights the educational potential of Kish," she stated. Among the notable achievements, Yasna Pajoochi claimed the top posi-

tion in the world, while her peers—Parmis Ekhlaspour, Bahar Shiraali, Seyedeh Sedna Kamakeli, and Seyed Hossein Moravej Al-Ali—each secured second-place honors in various categories of the competition. Akbarpour emphasized that these students had previously excelled in national selection competitions, paving their way to this global event. The young champions from Kish, aged between 6 to 13 years, are currently honing their skills in abacus classes at the cultural centers on the island, laying a strong foundation for future successes.

Iran's minister champions strategic tourism development, reinforcing nat'l identity

Arts & Culture Desk



Iran's Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts, Reza Salehi Amiri, emphasized the importance of strategic tourism development on Hendorabi Island, highlighting its potential to reinforce national identity during a recent visit to Kish. The minister's review of a tourism plan, presented by local officials, aims to elevate Hendorabi into a major tourist destination, reflecting the Iranian government's dedication to enhancing the cultural and economic vitality

of its islands, ILNA reported. The minister issued critical recommendations and directives to enhance the island's tourism framework, highlighting the need for collaborative efforts among stakeholders. In his remarks, Salehi Amiri emphasized the importance of a holistic approach to the development of the Persian Gulf region. "In the island development plan, the comprehensive development of the Persian Gulf must be taken into account," he stated, noting that the progress of Hendorabi would be supported by a dedicated committee

formed specifically for island development. The minister also referenced the "sea-oriented development" directive. "We are seriously pursuing the development of a sea-oriented economy, with tourism being one of its most vital components," he added. Furthermore, Salehi Amiri called for the identification of the unique capacities of Hendorabi Island, emphasizing the importance of branding it effectively to achieve targeted and impactful results. "We should leverage the special features of Hendorabi to drive its develop-

ment in a focused and effective manner," he remarked. The minister reiterated the significance of Iranian islands as a matter of national identity, stressing that their development carries added importance. "The issue of Iranian islands is tied to our national identity, and the development of these islands is of paramount importance," he stated. The tourism development plan for Hendorabi Island is currently being executed by Macan Company, which aims to enhance the island's appeal and infrastructure to attract more visitors.