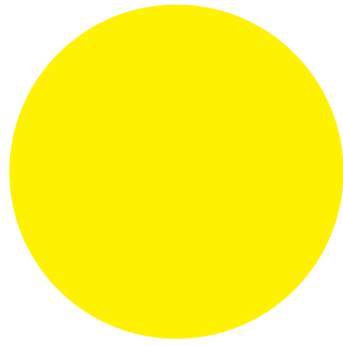


Iran, Russia to ink historic cooperation agreement in mid-January

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Aref voices Iran's readiness for talks on sanctions removal

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Iran should negotiate with US, European talks won't lift sanctions

By Nasser Imani
Political analyst

OPINION

The world today has undergone serious shake-up. The global relations of two decades ago no longer prevail and things have changed. High-ranking Iranian officials are surely aware of the extent of these shifts, as global issues have created new polarizations.

In the long-term foreign policy of the United States, all positions have undergone transformations. For instance, the Persian Gulf no longer holds the role it had for many years. On the other hand, China, Russia and Middle Eastern countries have turned the tables. Iran needs to factor in these twists and turns and negotiate accordingly. Incoming US President Donald Trump is dead set against wars anywhere in the world.

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Armenians in Iran Celebrate Christmas

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Archbishop of the Armenian Diocese of Tehran heads a mass at the Saint Sarkis Cathedral in the Iranian capital to celebrate the Armenian Christmas, on January 6, 2025. AFP



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Strengthening nat'l media to ensure Iranians receive reliable narratives

By Mohammad Mirzaei
Head of IRIB Supervisory Council

OPINION EXCLUSIVE

Iranians should receive their primary narratives on various domestic and global issues from the national media. To achieve this, the national media must operate in a way that establishes it as the main and credible source of news and programming, thereby preventing an environment that drives people towards foreign media outlets. This initiative not only enhances public trust in the media but also preserves the integrity of information and accurate representations of reality.

The recent launch of Persian-language television channels by foreign governments, such as the TRT network in Turkey, underscores a significant media

concern for us. Naturally, in the international arena, all countries pursue their national interests beyond their borders, and Turkey, too, has specific objectives in introducing a Persian-language channel. The broadcasts of foreign networks within our borders have unique influences, especially those that produce content tailored to our language and culture. The establishment of such networks by various countries is certainly not without intention; they primarily target specific audiences to present their narratives and steer public opinion in their direction. Consequently, we must respond to these cultural and media maneuvers by initiating channels in other languages. We are committed to pursuing this goal and possess the necessary media and broadcasting capacities to counteract these influences.

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NIGC: Sweet gas output set record four times in as many months

Economy Desk

The CEO of the National Iranian Gas Company (NIGC) emphasized that gas production in the country has broken records four times since the beginning of the incumbent administration. Saeid Tavakoli stated on Sunday that more than 872 million cubic meters of gas are currently produced and injected into the network daily, Shana reported. He added that, through collaborative efforts and expert management decisions, many parts of the network have been operating and providing services beyond their designed capacity for an extended period.

Addressing gas supply shortages, Tavakoli said that during cold seasons, consumption paradigm worldwide shift in favor of the household sector. Industries and power plants, which can use alternative or secondary fuels, must demonstrate flexibility in such situations.

ICOFC daily gas output rises

The CEO of the Iranian Central Oil Fields Company (ICOFC) announced that the company has increased daily gas production from onshore fields by 10 million cubic meters (mcm) while crude oil production increased by 13,000 barrels over the past four months. Peyman Imani, during a media tour of

the Varavi Gas Pressure Boosting Station in the southern province of Fars on Monday, noted that the commissioning of the Varavi station, which has a normal operational capacity of 7 million cubic meters per day, can be increased to 9 million cubic meters.

Other achievements that Imani highlighted include the completion and installation of wellhead facilities at six gas well locations in the Dalgan, Aghar, Tang Bijar, Dey, and Khanjiran fields, the construction of access roads to the Khartang gas field wells, and the repair and preparation of the Sarajeh Qom storage well No. 2.

He also pointed out the company's progress in crude oil production, including the commissioning of the Khash Oil Field with a daily output of 10,000 barrels, the activation of three wells in the Dehloran Oil Field producing 3,000 barrels per day, and the startup of four wells in the Khash Oil Field. A crude oil pipeline from the Khash field to consumption hubs has also been established.

Imani mentioned that the development of 16 gas fields, including Halgan, Eram, Pazan, Gordan, Aghar, and Tang Bijar, is underway with the involvement of private contractors and investors.

He confirmed that the company has exceeded its gas production targets by over 103% this year and last year.



However, he cautioned that without consumption control, increased production alone cannot resolve energy shortages.

Gas consumption for three sectors up 20%

The spokesperson for the NIGC said Sunday that gas consumption in the residential, commercial, and small-scale

industrial sectors increased by 20% compared to the same day last year. Hassan Mousavi noted that 643 million cubic meters (mcm) of gas were allocated to these sectors.

He added that 871 mcm of sweet gas were delivered to the national network Sunday, with 74% allocated to residential, commercial, and small-scale industrial consumers.

Following a cold snap and forecasts of further temperature drops, Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian, Oil Minister Mohsen Paknejad, and other officials urged the public to participate in the "2 Degrees Less" campaign. Through video and written messages, they called for optimal energy use and cooperation in ensuring sufficient winter fuel supplies.

Iranian delegation to settle truckers' dispute in Turkey



Economy Desk

Esmail Baghaei, the spokesman of Iran's Foreign Ministry, said that a delegation from the country would head to Turkey to solve the problems that Ankara created for Iranian truck drivers at its border crossing. During a press conference on Monday, Baghaei added that the problem is not political but rather technical and that the relevant authorities, mainly from the transportation and fuel supply sectors, are addressing the issue, according to Mehr news agency.

"We, and Turkey, have been trying to solve this issue over the past few days, given that cargo transportation is important for both countries," he stated. Following Turkey's decision to scrap the tax exemption on fuel for transit truck drivers, over 1,000 trucks have been stuck at the Bazargan border crossing since December 8 and remain so to this day. Prior to the implementation of this recent policy change, 300 trucks would cross the Bazargan border daily. The revocation of the fuel tax

exemption for transit truck drivers means that Iranian trucks must pay a tax equivalent to their fuel tank capacity upon entering Turkey, which could increase transit costs by up to 50% for Iranian transporters and render cross-border trade economically unfeasible.

MP: We will not allow any disrespect

In an interview on Monday, a member of the Iranian Parliament's presiding board maintained that Iran has always been open to interaction and dialogue with its neighboring countries but stressed that the interaction must be based on mutual respect. "We will not allow our drivers to be disrespected, and we will reserve the right to a fitting response on this issue," Mojtaba Yousefi maintained. "Iran has always supported neighboring countries in times of crisis, and creating such disputes will have serious consequences for the merchants and economic activists of both countries."

The Iranian MP also criticized the performance of the country's various ministries, saying, "Some truck drivers have faced problems crossing into Turkey or registering their purchased trucks due to the inaction of the Ministry of Commerce. In such circumstances, it is expected that the Foreign Ministry and other relevant authorities will seriously address the drivers' problems."

Yousefi also complained about the coverage of the news by some media outlets and the statements of some officials. "Some media outlets seek to polarize every issue, but they have been silent on the truck drivers' problems," he added. "I tell the officials of the Ministry of Commerce and the media outlets that only seek to attract followers: Doesn't the truck drivers' halt in subzero temperatures deserve enough attention for you to take action or even react?" Yousefi called on the relevant authorities to seriously pursue this issue and emphasized that consulates must protect national interests and support invest-

tors, tourists, and pilgrims. He announced that Parliament is seriously pursuing the amendment of the Iran's transportation law and reinforcement of the government's support for the livelihood of drivers, including their supplemental health insurance, "which will be raised in the parliament soon."

Selective reciprocity

According to reports on Turkish media, this decision was made by the Turkish government based on the principle of reciprocity. As such, truck drivers must pay 28 lira per liter of fuel tank capacity (whether full or empty), or approximately 60 to 80 million tomans per tank. The implementation of the law requiring the payment of customs tax based on vehicle fuel tank capacity in Iran was adopted to prevent fuel smuggling, given that diesel fuel prices in Iran are significantly lower than in Turkey. Meanwhile, Turkey continues to exempt Iranian passenger buses from similar taxes, ostensibly to preserve its tourism industry. This selective policy exposes Ankara's prioritization of tourism revenues over equitable trade relations. The Road Maintenance and Transportation Organization (RMTTO) and the National Iranian Oil Products Distribution Company (NIOPDC) told Mehr that this issue is not within their jurisdiction. Some of the truck drivers stuck at the Bazargan border crossing have stated that they have been waiting for over a week in harsh weather conditions and without necessary facilities, and their situation remains unclear.

Tehran-Riyadh talks on AI cooperation underway



Economy Desk

Iran's deputy minister of communications said negotiations with Saudi Arabia to collaborate on Artificial Intelligence (AI) and information technology are underway.

Mohammad Mohsen Sadr expressed hope that by exchanging resources and assigning a share of the projects in Saudi Arabia to Iranian experts, we can put a stop to the migration of specialized forces, according to IRNA.

He emphasized the importance of privatizing the economy and the key role of the private sector in various projects during a meeting with a group of private sector activists on Monday. The deputy minister also reported on the progress of IT diplomacy with other countries and the export of Information Technology and Communications (ICT) technical services.

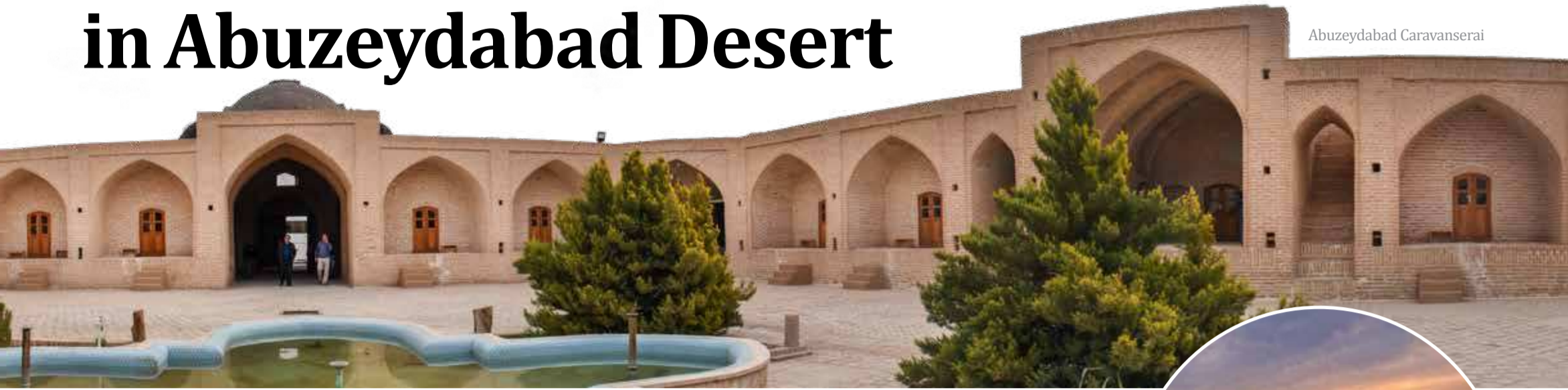
Sadr stated that investing in the field of information technology can give rise to employment opportunities. Announcing his ministry's support for startups and innovation funds, he also called

Iranian Deputy Minister Mohammad Mohsen Sadr (L) meets with Mohammed bin Saud Al-Tamimi, the head of the Communications, Space, and Technology Commission (CST) of Saudi Arabia in Riyadh on the sidelines of the Saudi Arabia Internet Governance Forum (Saudi IGF), which took place from December 15-19, 2024. ito.gov.ir

on the private sector to get on board and cooperate in this field.

"The Ministry of Communications is ready to back up the private sector in the field of infrastructure," he added. The head of the Information Technology Organization of Iran listed plans such as the Smart Government and Government Cloud as important programs of the ministry. Sadr maintained that efforts have been made to centralize AI processing infrastructure and prevent parallel work between executive bodies. Stressing that the digital transformation plan is of special importance to President Masoud Pezeshkian's administration, he noted that the entry of various industries into this field leads to the growth of the country's digital economy.

Adventure and tranquility in Abuzeydabad Desert



Abuzeydabad Caravanserai

Iranica Desk

The Abuzeydabad Desert is part of the expansive Maranjab Desert, situated north of Abuzeydabad and northeast of Kashan in Isfahan Province. It is considered one of Kashan's main attractions. Like other parts of the desert, Abuzeydabad reveals its true beauty in its profound silence, hot, shifting sand dunes, and breathtaking landscapes. The vastness of the desert offers a unique opportunity for visitors to connect with nature and experience tranquility away from the hustle and bustle of city life.

Alongside other desert destinations in Iran, such as the Maranjab and Mesr Deserts, Abuzeydabad is a popular choice for tourists interested in exploring desert scenery. The mesmerizing sunsets and starry nights create a magical atmosphere, making it an ideal spot for photographers and nature enthusiasts. Additionally, Abuzeydabad is regarded as the capital of ancient dialects in Iran, with the unique dialect and culture of its residents being significant draws for visitors. Engaging with the local community can provide deeper insights into the rich history and

traditions that have shaped the area.

The Abuzeydabad Desert is approximately 270 kilometers from Tehran, making it accessible in about three hours of driving. Visitors can also reach the desert from other cities, particularly through Natanz and Kashan. Depending on your location, you can choose the best route to reach either of these cities. Most of the key attractions in the Abuzeydabad area are located along a 25-kilometer dirt road to the north. About eight kilometers from the city, you'll encounter sandy dunes and rolling hills. To access the larger, more striking dunes, follow the desert path alongside the Chaleh Arous Salt Lake.

The Abuzeydabad Desert is a small segment of the larger Band-e Rig Desert. In addition to its stunning natural attractions, it is renowned for the historical and archaeological sites it features. Many tourists who plan to visit the Abuzeydabad Desert take advantage of its high tourism potential by also scheduling visits to nearby historical landmarks, such as ancient caravanserais and traditional Persian gardens. This blend of natural beauty and cultural heritage

makes the area a rich destination for exploration.

The best seasons to explore the Abuzeydabad Desert are autumn, winter, and early spring. Like other desert regions, the climate here can be very hot during the summer months. Nature tours to the Abuzeydabad Desert and the Noushabad Underground City are typically organized during the cooler months of the year, allowing visitors to fully enjoy the outdoor activities without the discomfort of extreme heat.

For accommodation in the Abuzeydabad Desert, you can set up your camp among the sand dunes. A night spent amidst the quiet and serene sandy hills can be truly memorable, offering a chance to witness the beauty of the desert under a blanket of stars. Alternatively, the Abuzeydabad Caravanserai offers another lodging option in the desert.

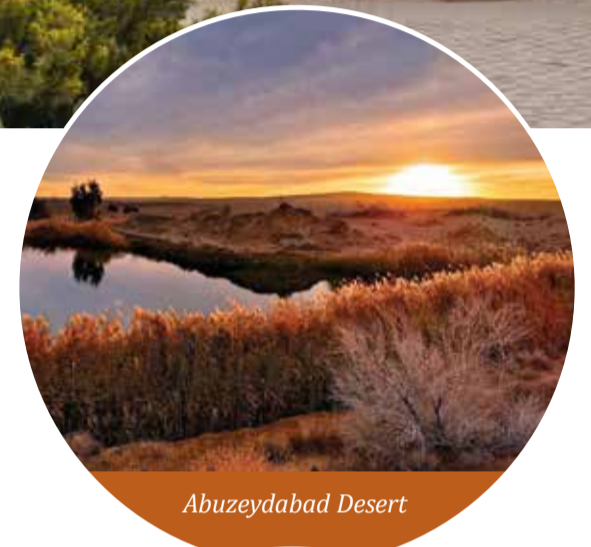
Abuzeydabad Caravanserai

The Abuzeydabad Caravanserai, with its four-ivory layout and over four centuries of history, dates back to the Safavid era. Initially, this caravanserai served as a resting place for caravans and their mounts. Up until 60 years ago,

camel drivers from Yazd, Isfahan, and other cities would rest here. The Shah Abbas Caravanserai in Abuzeydabad was registered on Iran's National Heritage List on August 23, 1999. This caravanserai has been welcoming travelers for nearly 400 years. It has remained active since its construction during the Safavid period and continues to provide a suitable resting space with good amenities today.

Activities in the Abuzeydabad Desert include desert trekking, photography, off-roading, camel riding, stargazing, and ATV riding. The diverse landscapes offer a backdrop for adventure and exploration, catering to both thrill-seekers and those looking to relax.

The desert features a variety of vegetation that supports diverse wildlife. The fauna includes species such as falcons, eagles, rabbits, sand foxes, sand cats, jackals, wolves, jerboas, hubara, various agamid lizards, snakes, and the Maranjab lizard. This rich biodiversity adds another layer of intrigue for nature lovers and wildlife enthusiasts, making the Abuzeydabad Desert a truly captivating destination.



Abuzeydabad Desert



Abuzeydabad Desert

Historical and artistic importance of Isfahan carpets



If you want to explore a complete archive of Iranian carpets, be sure to visit the Isfahan Carpet Bazaar, located near Imam Khomeini Square. This market has experienced various ups and downs throughout history. Most members of the Isfahan Carpet Union have been engaged in this craft for generations, inheriting the secrets of their trade from their ancestors. Here, you can find a range of carpet-related

jobs still practiced, including spinning, dyeing, drawing, weaving, craftsmanship, polishing, trading, and repair.

Isfahan carpets are known for their balanced texture, using materials like wool, silk, and natural dyes that provide both durability and beauty. They represent the aesthetic identity of Iranian carpets and serve as a reference for artists and researchers. The designs of Isfahan carpets are

inspired by old maps that adorn the city's buildings, and significant innovations continue to emerge from new artists.

The Isfahan Carpet Market is a relic of the Safavid era, featuring a brick-built structure with two-story shops lining both sides of the bazaar path. The dome roofs, adorned with tiles and plaster, include skylights that provide ventilation and lighting. Each dome arch



typically accommodates two shops facing each other. These ceilings help regulate the market's temperature throughout the seasons. Interestingly, these roofs also serve as nesting sites for red-breasted swallows, which migrate to Isfahan due to the favorable climate and the Zayandeh Rud river during their breeding season. Locals consider the swallow to be an omen, and in ancient times, it

was affectionately referred to as "Pisoor," a term that has fallen out of use. Keep an eye on the sky during your visit; you might be lucky enough to spot one of these birds.

The bazaar is home to several notable sites, including *saqakhaneh*, *ab anbar* (cistern), bathhouse, a mosque, caravanserai, coffee house, stable, *zurkhaneh*, and a school. Additionally, Amin Carpet Bazaar is a contemporary

structure that harmonizes with the market's texture and cultural identity.

Isfahan carpets come in various shapes, with the most common being rectangle, square, circle, and octagon, available in sizes ranging from small to large.

We recommend that you not only visit this market but also consider purchasing souvenirs to decorate your home with original Iranian art.

Palestinian year in review

Genocide, resistance, and unanswered questions



By Ramzy Baroud
Author, journalist

PERSPECTIVE

The story of the Israeli war on Gaza can be epitomized in the story of the Israeli war on Beit Lahia, a small Palestinian town in the northern part of the Strip. When Israel launched its ground operations in Gaza, Beit Lahia was already largely destroyed due to many days of relentless Israeli bombardment that killed thousands. Still, the border Gaza town resisted, leading to a hermetic Israeli siege, which was never lifted, even when the Israeli military redeployed out of much of northern Gaza in January 2024.

Beit Lahia is largely an isolated town, a short distance away from the fence separating besieged Gaza from Israel. It is surrounded mostly by agricultural areas that make it nearly impossible to defend.

Yet, a year of grisly Israeli war and genocide in Gaza did not end the fighting there. To the contrary, 2024 has ended where it started, with intense fighting on all fronts in Gaza, with Beit Lahia, a town that was supposedly 'conquered' earlier, still leading the fight.

Beit Lahia is a microcosm of Israel's failed war in the Strip, a bloody grind that has led nowhere, despite the massive destruction, the repeated ethnic cleansing of the population, the starvation, and the genocide. Every day of Israel's terrible war on the Palestinians serves as a reminder that there are no military solutions and that the Palestinian will not be broken, no matter the cost or the sacrifice.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, however, remains unconvinced. He entered the new year with more promises of 'total victory,' and ended it as a wanted criminal by the International Criminal Court (ICC).

The issuing of an arrest warrant for the Israeli leader was a reiteration of a similar position taken by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) at the start of 2024. The ICJ's position, however, was hardly as strong as many had hoped or wanted to believe. The world's highest court had, on January 26, ordered Israel "to take action to prevent acts of genocide," but stopped short of ordering Israel to halt its war.

The Israeli objectives of the war remained unclear, although Israeli politicians provided clues as to what the war on Gaza was really all about. Last January, several Israeli ministers, including 12 from Netanyahu's Likud party, took part in a conference calling for the resettlement of Gaza and the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians. "Without settlements, there is no security," extremist Israeli Minister of Finance Bezalel Smotrich said.

For that to happen, the Palestinian people themselves, not merely those fighting on the ground, had to be tamed, broken, and defeated. Thus, the 'flour massacres,' a new Israeli war tactic that was centered around killing as many Palestinians as possible while waiting for the few aid trucks that were allowed to reach northern Gaza.

On February 29, more than 100 Gazans were killed while queuing for aid. They were mowed down by Israeli soldiers, as they desperately tried to lay their hands on a loaf of bread, baby milk, or a bottle of water. This scene was repeated, again and again in the north, but also in other parts of the Gaza Strip throughout the year. The aim was to starve the Palestinians in the north so that they would be forced to flee to other parts of the Strip. Famine actualized as early as January, and many of those who tried to flee south were killed, anyway.

From the early days of the war, Israel understood that to ethnically cleanse Palestinians, they must target all aspects of life in the Strip. This includes hospitals, bakeries, markets, electric grids, water stations, and the like.

The Gaza hospitals, of course, received a large share of Israeli attacks. In March, once more, Israel attacked the Al-Shifa Medical Complex in Gaza City with greater ferocity than before. When it finally withdrew, on April 1, the Israeli army destroyed the entire compound, leaving behind mass graves with hundreds of bodies, mostly medical staff, women, and children. They even executed several patients.

Aside from a few statements of concern by Western leaders, little was done to bring the genocide to an end. Only when seven international aid workers with the charity, the World Central Kitchen, were killed by Israel, did a global outcry follow, leading to the first and only Israeli apology in the entire war.

Desperate to distract from its failure in Gaza, but also Lebanon, and keen on presenting the Israeli public with any kind of victory, the Israeli military began escalating its war beyond Gaza. This included



Palestinians attend the Friday noon prayers in front of the ruins of the al-Faruq mosque, destroyed in Israeli strikes on Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip on March 1, 2024.
● STRINGER/APA

Palestinians walk through the destroyed Al-Shifa Hospital, in northern Gaza, on April 1, 2024. Gazan health workers told CNN they exhumed the first bodies from mass graves dug by Israeli forces.
● MOHAMMED HAJJAR/AP

the strike on the Iranian Embassy in Syria on April 1. Despite repeated attempts, which included the assassination of the head of Hamas's Political Bureau, Ismail Haniyeh, in Iran on July 31, an all-out regional war has not yet come to pass.

Another escalation was taking place, this time not by Netanyahu but by millions of people around the world, demanding an end to the Israeli war. A focal point of the protests was student movements that spread across US campuses and, ultimately, worldwide. Instead of allowing free speech to flourish, however, America's

largest academic institutions resorted to the police, who violently shut down many of the protests, arresting hundreds of students, many of whom were not allowed to return to their colleges.

Meanwhile, the US continued to block international efforts aimed at producing a cease-fire resolution at the United Nations Security Council. Ultimately, on May 31, US President Joe Biden delivered a speech conveying what he termed an "Israeli proposal" to end the war. After some delay, Hamas accepted the proposal, but Israel rejected it. In his rejection,



Israel's frustration grew by leaps and bounds throughout the year. Its desperate attempt to control the global narrative on the Gaza genocide largely failed. On July 19, and after listening to the testimonies of over 50 countries, the ICJ issued a landmark ruling that "Israel's continued presence in the Occupied Palestinian Territory is illegal."

Netanyahu referred to Biden's speech as "incorrect" and "incomplete". Strangely, but also unsurprisingly, the White House blamed the Palestinians for the failed initiative.

Losing faith in the American leadership, some European countries began changing their foreign policy doctrines on Palestine, with Ireland, Norway, and Spain recognizing the State of Palestine on May 28. The decisions were largely symbolic but indicated that Western unity around Israel was faltering.

Israel remained unfazed and, despite international warnings, invaded the Rafah area in southern Gaza on May 7, seizing control of the Philadelphi Corridor — a buffer zone between Gaza and the Egyptian border that extends for 14 kilometers. Netanyahu's cabinet insisted that only war could bring their captives back. There was very little success in that strategy, however. On June 8, Israel, with logistical support from the US and other Western countries managed to rescue four of its captives held in the Nuseirat refugee camp in central Gaza. To do so, Israel killed at least 276 Palestinians and wounded 800 more.

In August, another heart-wrenching massacre took place, this time in the Al-Tabaheen school in Gaza City, where 93 people, mostly women and children, were murdered in a single Israeli strike. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, women and children were the main victims of the Israeli genocide, accounting for 70 percent by November 8.

An earlier report by the Lancet Medical Journal said that if the war stopped in July, the true death toll could reach "186,000 or even more". The war, however, went on. The rate of genocide in Gaza seemed to maintain the same killing ratio, despite the major regional developments including the mutual Iranian-Israeli tit-for-tat strikes and the major Israeli ground operation in Lebanon.

In October, Israel returned to the policies of targeting or besieging hospitals, killing doctors and other medical staff, and targeting aid and civil defense workers. Still, Israel would not achieve any of its strategic goals of the war. Even the killing of Hamas' leader, Yahya Sinwar, in battle on October 16 would not, in any way, alter the course of the war.

Israel's frustration grew by leaps and bounds throughout the year. Its desperate attempt to control the global narrative on the Gaza genocide largely failed. On July

19, and after listening to the testimonies of over 50 countries, the ICJ issued a landmark ruling that "Israel's continued presence in the Occupied Palestinian Territory is illegal."

That ruling, which expressed international consensus on the matter, was translated on September 17 to a UN General Assembly resolution "demanding an end to Israel's occupation of Palestine within the next 12 months".

All of this effectively meant that Israel's attempt at normalizing its occupation of

Palestine, and its quest to illegally annex the West Bank was considered null and void by the international community. Israel, however, doubled down, taking its rage against West Bank Palestinians, who, too, were experiencing one of the worst Israeli pogroms in many years.

According to the Palestinian Health Ministry, by November 21, at least 777 Palestinians had been killed since October 7, 2023, while thousands more were wounded and over 11,700 arrested.

To make matters worse, Smotrich called,

on November 11, for the full annexation of the West Bank. The call was made soon after the election of Donald Trump as the next US president, an event that initially inspired optimism amongst Israeli leaders, but later concerns that Trump may not serve the role of the savior for Israel after all.

On November 21, the ICC issued its historic ruling to arrest Netanyahu and his Defense Minister Yoav Gallant. The decision represented a measure of hope, however faint, that the world is finally

ready to hold Israel accountable for its many crimes.

2025 could, indeed, represent that watershed moment. This remains to be seen. However, as far as Palestinians are concerned, even with the failure of the international community to stop the genocide and reign in Israel, their steadfastness, sumoud, will remain strong until freedom is finally attained.

The article first appeared on Ramzi Baroud's website.

Year of shame, many more to come



By Jonathan Ofir
Israeli conductor,
blogger

OPINION

The shame concerning Israel's genocide against the Palestinians, specifically in Gaza, is an issue likely to dominate both the international conscience as well as the Israeli psyche for the coming century.

I will be addressing it from two angles: the external shaming, and the internal shame — the act of shaming Israel from without, and the sense of shame by Israelis themselves, forming itself after the nationalist hubris has been worn down.

First, the external shame.

Israeli Jews know very well what ongoing, inter-generational shaming of those who commit genocide is like. Until now, they have societally relished in doing this to Germany.

Let me demonstrate this with a personal story. In the summer of 2002, when Germany was competing against Brazil in the football World Cup, I was on a family visit in Israel. Ahead of the match, my late wife, who was Danish, said that she was hoping Germany would win. A certain stillness took over, and a 'friendly suggestion' came from the side, that someone tell her 'how things work here'. In other words, it is a problem to root for Germany, no matter who plays against them. This precise idea was echoed by the Israeli sports commentators covering the match itself: "Of course, we root for Brazil because we don't root for Germany".

That was well over half a century after the Holocaust, but the shaming over it is everywhere and down to sports. It's a national norm, and Israeli Jews do not seem very shy about it. As Golda Meir once told Shulamit Aloni, "After the Holocaust, Jews can do whatever they want."

The Holocaust came to be a singularization of genocide — the genocide of genocides. While Israel was apparently interested in the term Genocide entering the sphere of international law (signing the Genocide Convention of 1948 in 1950), it was certainly not interested in becoming accused of it. That other countries could be accused of it was another matter. But that the country which has established itself with such centrality for the Nazi genocide itself become a genocidal culprit — that was not the idea.

Israel itself committing genocide, constitutes a breaking of the singularity of Jewish victimhood relating to the Holocaust. The Holocaust has been a central instrument of protecting Israel against critique and condemnation, and now it risks losing its singular power. In other words, Israel risks losing its monopoly on genocide.

Now, the internal shame.

So, through the Holocaust, Israel has been shaming the world in the manner referenced above, for decades, shielding itself from any forms of criticism or accountability. But the idea that Israel itself is committing genocide against the Palestinians, turns all this shame backward and inward. After having internalized the idea that we, Jews, are the singular victims of genocide, having applied eternal shame to those who committed it, the sword of shame turns the other way. And this is something that apparently very few Israelis are able to deal with.

This is the explanation behind why the Israel chapter of Amnesty International could not accept the Amnesty International report on the Israeli genocide and went against it. It did not have any serious arguments to rebuff the 296-page report with, just the claim that there was not sufficient evidence and that perhaps Israel was involved in ethnic cleansing (a term that currently doesn't have a very clear definition in international criminal law, and therefore is sometimes used to tone down the Genocide claim, in a somewhat shallow manner) — but that it requires further investigation (which the report meticulously conducts). For Israelis, the recent statement of former defense minister Moshe Ya'alon, that Israel is committing ethnic cleansing in northern Gaza, was perhaps a shock to many, but it's still not as abhorrent as the crime of crimes — genocide.

For Israelis, having the world call them genocidaires is akin to calling them Nazis because that's what they've often internalized as the main representation of genocide. Shame is not a rational matter; it is an emotional one. It is an emotional condemnation, a condemnation Israeli society is wholly unprepared and unwilling to confront. Israel has, as mentioned, strategically applied the notion of antisemitism and the Holocaust as a means of averting critique and condemnation. Since these have historically been effective to a large degree, Israelis have become quite used to the privilege of being able to rebuff critique that easily. Such a re-

ality can create hubris — anything you do, you are immune. Lack of accountability creates and perpetuates a reality of injustice.

In 2002, Shulamit Aloni was asked by Amy Goodman on Democracy Now about people expressing "dissent against policies" of the Israeli cabinet and being called "antisemitic". Aloni, the late Israeli minister, responded:

"Well, it's a trick. We always use it. When from Europe somebody is criticizing Israel, then we bring up the Holocaust. When in this country (USA) people are criticizing Israel, then they are antisemitic.... and that justifies everything we do to the Palestinians".

Since the Israeli response has so regularly been to shame criticism and condemnation back with accusations of antisemitism, the Israeli societal psyche has accustomed itself to see pretty much any such criticism and condemnation as a manifestation of antisemitism, or at least anti-Israel bias, which under the notion of "the new antisemitism," is anyway akin to hate of Jews. So, the challenge for many Israelis is now not only the international shaming but the ability to measure reality beyond their own mental shields of bias, where "the world is against us." Although Netanyahu's likening of the ICC prosecutor to Nazi judge for requesting arrest warrants against himself is a caricature of this perception, still, many Israelis seem to be in the mindset that if the world sees crimes against humanity in Israel's deeds, it is the world that is wrong, not Israel.

There is also a pushback of anger against all those many decades of impunity. After all, the ethnic cleansing of Palestine is by now a pretty mainstream understanding of what happened in 1948 — and Israel has en-

Members of the Jewish Voice for Peace and the If Not Now movement, two Jewish activist groups, stage a rally on October 18, 2023, in Washington, D.C., to call for a cease-fire in the Israeli war on Gaza. Their matching t-shirts read, "Not in our name."

● ALEX WONG/GETTY IMAGES



An aerial view shows activists painting a mural denouncing Israel's attacks on Gaza, next to the Rio Grande in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico, on November 12, 2023.

● EPA

joyed great impunity for not rectifying that. The distance between that and genocide is actually not that great, and elements of ethnic cleansing are arguably genocidal in their very nature.

The anger is inter-generational, not just about what Israel did and does, but about how little it has had to pay for it. This matter has been a persistent aggravation for Palestinians, but their rightful anger has been seen by many Israelis and Zionists as an annoying unwillingness to accept compromise, and unreasonable hate of Israel. This has been formulated as "the new antisemitism" by the Israel lobby. The man who pushed the "new antisemitism" idea in the 1970s, Israel's foreign minister Abba Eban, also quipped that the "Arabs don't miss an opportunity to miss an opportunity." Such taunting of the victims has been going on for decades, and so, the spilling-over of shame may be much more than just a reaction to what is occurring now in isolation.

The "new antisemitism" is Israel's means of conflating critique and condemnation of Israel, and hate of Jews. It claims that Israel is the "Jew among the nations," and that Israel simply represents the Jew that was once discriminated against. Israel claims itself to be a representation of Jews internationally, as in the self-proclaimed "The Jewish State".

The notorious IHRA definition of antisemitism only exacerbates the problem, with examples such as "accusing Jewish citizens of being more loyal to Israel, or to the alleged priorities of Jews worldwide, than to the interests of their own nations", or "holding Jews collectively responsible for actions of" Israel.

This is a problem that is inherent to Zionism, which seeks to define Jews as a nation. Zionists themselves exaggerate the manifestation of Zionism among Jews worldwide, so as to say that Jews and Zionism are one and the same. But if they are one and the same, then critique and condemnation of Israel is tantamount to personal animosity against Jews. So how can anyone differentiate between the two (Jews and Israel),

and is it antisemitic to do that?

And if the same shaming that Israelis know all about is to be applied against them, in as unnuanced a manner as they shame Germans for the Holocaust, will it be because they are Jews or because they are Israelis? And if people worldwide take the word of Zionists (who also created the IHRA definition) and believe that basically all Jews stand with Israel, will it be any surprise that some of them also end up shaming Jews?

It is precisely Israel that is making all this so confusing. And this is the point of it all — in the confusion, people get worried that they might be considered antisemitic if they criticize or condemn Israel, and many avoid it for that reason.

I do not want to suggest an outpouring of shame against Israel for the next century, like Israel has done with Germany, as my first story described. Israel actively applies Holocaust guilt against Germany, at the state level, for political reasons. I do not think that shame and guilt should be drivers of foreign relations, and Israel's shaming tactics should not be a model for the future.

I prefer justice to revenge, and I believe Israel must be brought to justice for its crimes against humanity — the current arrest warrants from the ICC against Prime Minister Netanyahu and former Defense Minister Gallant are just the beginning and cover the tip of the iceberg. But I do want to point out that the court of public opinion is another arena. Israelis have wanted to be spectators in that arena while it is only others who are being thrown to the lions. But no empire lasts forever, and no emperor's legacy is eternal glory. At some point, Karma steps in.

The article first appeared on Mondoweiss.



Gholamreza Takhti; Iran's wrestling legend acclaimed on 57th death anniversary



By Reza
Abesh Ahmadlou
Staff writer

A ceremony commemorating the 57th anniversary of the death of Gholamreza Takhti, the legendary Iranian wrestler, was held Monday at his gravesite in Ebn Bebvayh Cemetery in Shahr-e Rey. The event was attended by athletes, sports veterans, officials, Takhti's family, and members of the public.

The titles of Pahlavan (champion) and Jahan Pahlavan (world champion) are often heard today, but they signify more than just athletic achievement or Olympic success. These titles are deeply rooted in Iranian and Islamic culture, requiring a unique code of conduct and character that sets a Pahlavan apart from others.

During the ceremony, officials, veterans, wrestling champions, and admirers of Takhti's legacy gathered at his gravesite, as they have in previous years.

They recited prayers, laid flowers, and honored the memory of Iran's celebrated champion. Takhti's enduring popularity stemmed from his connection to the people, as he fought for them in the wrestling arena.

Whether he won or lost, the public celebrated and mourned with him. Though he was unmatched against great rivals, he remained humble and grounded among the people.

Takhti was a respected figure for both friends and foes alike. His popularity is undeniable, as many of his contemporaries define fame by his name. His widespread admiration became even more evi-



dent after his passing. Gholamreza Takhti was born on August 27, 1930, into a religious, middle-class family in Tehran's Khaniabad neighborhood. His father, Rajab Khan, had two sons and two daughters, all older than Takhti. He began wrestling at the age of 20 at Poulad Club. From 1950 to 1959, Takhti won eight national championships and earned the title of Pahlavan three times. He made his international debut at the 1951 World Championships in Helsinki, winning a silver medal in the 79 kg

weight class. At the 1952 Helsinki Olympics, he claimed another silver medal after losing to a Soviet wrestler.

His accolades continued at the 1959, 1961, and 1962 World Championships in Tehran, Yokohama, and Toledo, where he won two gold medals and one silver. He also earned a gold and a silver medal at the 1956 and 1960 Olympics in Melbourne and Rome, respectively, and a gold medal at the 1958 Asian Games in Tokyo. Takhti last competed for the national team at the 1966 World Championships.

Takhti was the first Iranian wrestler to win medals in three weight classes and remains Iran's most decorated Olympic wrestler.

Throughout his 14-year international career, Takhti faced formidable opponents, including Sweden's Viking Palm, Turkey's Adil Atan, Russia's Boris Kulayev, the US's Peter Blair, Germany's Dietrich, Russia's Vakhtang Balavadze, Turkey's İsmet Atlı, Turkey's Hasan Güngör, Belarus's Alexander Medved, and Turkey's Ahmet Ayık.

Takhti ranks 13th on the International Wrestling Hall of Fame's

list of the greatest wrestlers of the century and was honored as one of the sport's legends at the 2007 World Championships in Baku. Alexander Medved, a renowned wrestler, once described Takhti as a kind and lovable person. "He was so strong that it was impossible to plan against him. You couldn't gain an advantage over him with any specific technique," Medved said.

During the 1962 World Championships in the US, Medved suffered a knee injury, and Takhti, upon learning of it, avoided targeting the injured area during

their match. Medved later called it the cleanest fight of his career.

Takhti married in November 1966, and his son Babak is his only surviving legacy. Born on August 27, 1930, in Tehran, Takhti passed away on January 7, 1968, at the former Atlantic Hotel when Babak was just four months old. Gholamreza Takhti embodied the aspirations of a nation—a man who lived among the people, died among them, and now rests in Ebn Bebvayh Cemetery in Shahr-e Rey.

Bafq handball team wins postponed match in Women's Premier League

Sports Desk

The Bafq handball team secured a victory against Ghadir Malayer in a postponed match from the first week of the Women's Handball Premier League.

According to IRNA, the match, part of the 20th season of the league, was held Monday in Malayer.

With this win, Bafq increased its points tally to 10. The team defeated Ghadir Malayer 34-20, marking its fifth victory of the season. Meanwhile, Ghadir Malayer suffered its seventh consecutive loss in the first half of the league.

With this result, Bafq solidified its position in third place in the league standings

at the end of the first half of the season. Ghadir Malayer remains at the bottom of the table as Shahid Chamran Larestan, with 14 points, and Naft o Gas Gachsaran, with 11 points, currently hold the top two spots in the league standings.

The Women's Handball Premier League is one of Iran's most competitive sports leagues, featuring teams from across the country. The league has grown significantly in recent years, with increased participation and viewership, reflecting the rising popularity of women's sports in Iran.

Bafq's handball team, known as Sang Ahan Bafq, has been a consistent performer in the league, often finishing in the top tiers of the standings. The team's success is attributed to its strong roster and strategic gameplay, making it a formidable contender in the league.

Ghadir Malayer, on the other hand, has struggled this season, failing to secure a win in its first seven matches. The team's performance highlights the challenges faced by some clubs in maintaining competitiveness, particularly in a league with a growing level of talent and intensity.



Man City's Grealish must fight for spot, says Guardiola

Jack Grealish must fight for his place in Manchester City's starting line-up and rediscover the level he showcased during the club's treble-winning season, manager Pep Guardiola said.

The 29-year-old made 50 appearances in City's 2022-23 campaign, scoring five goals and registering 11 assists to help his side win the Champions League, Premier League and FA Cup, Reuters reported on Monday.

However, the England international has failed to impress this season and was dropped to the bench in Saturday's 4-1 league win over

West Ham United, with Brazilian Savinho starting instead.

"Savinho is in better shape and everything than Jack, and that's why I played Savinho," Guardiola told reporters.

"Do I want the Jack that won the treble? Yeah, I want it, but I try to be honest with myself for that. They have to fight. You can say it's unfair: 'If you think that, then it's fine, but you have to prove (to me), 'Okay, I'm going to fight with Savinho, to deserve to play in that position', every single day, every single week and every single month."

Grealish, who also

spent a spell on the sidelines this season due to injury, has made just six starts for City in the league.

"Two weeks ago, he was injured and he needs rhythm, and to play, but players need training," Guardiola said.

"I don't have any doubt about the quality of Jack or any of these players. They would not be here (otherwise).

"I know that he can do it because I saw him. I saw his level and I want that, every single training session and every single game."

City next host fourth-tier side Salford City in the FA Cup on Jan. 11.



Aref voices Iran's readiness for talks on sanctions removal



Mohammad Reza Aref
IRNA

International Desk

Iran's Vice President Mohammad Reza Aref said Tehran is ready for negotiations to remove sanctions illegally imposed on the country for its nuclear program. Addressing a meeting held at the Foreign Ministry on foreign economic relations on Monday, Aref said that the Islamic Republic is not interested in the continuation of the sanctions which the United States reimposed on Iran after its unilateral withdrawal from the Iran 2015 nuclear agreement. "We have not chosen sanctions. The import of medicine and basic goods is prevented by the sanctioning countries, although

they say that their target is the Iranian government, but this is not the case. The people are the first to suffer from this issue (sanctions)," Aref said. He called on the international community to pursue the lifting of the sanctions. In 2015, Iran and world powers – including France, Britain and Germany – reached an agreement that saw the easing of international sanctions on Tehran in exchange for curbs on its nuclear program. But the United States, during US President Donald Trump's first term in office, unilaterally withdrew from the accord in 2018 and reimposed biting economic sanctions. Tehran adhered to the deal un-

til Washington's withdrawal, and then began rolling back on its commitments after witnessing the other parties' failure to secure its interest under the agreement. However, 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 since November and is scheduled to hold another one on January 13. Despite Iran's efforts to reach a new agreement with the West on its nuclear program and the sanctions, France, which is also part of the negotiations, has said

that European partners to the nuclear deal should consider reimposing sanctions if there is no progress with Tehran. French President Emmanuel Macron warned on Monday that Iran's nuclear program is nearing the point of no return. "In the coming months we will have to ask ourselves whether to use ... the (snapback) mechanism to restore sanctions," Macron said, referring to October 2025 when the 2015 accord formally expires. The so-called snapback mechanism allows for the return of anti-Iran sanctions suspended under the deal. Macron also described Iran as the main "strategic and security challenge" for France and Europe.

Iran, Russia to ink historic cooperation agreement in mid-January

'Important documents' to be signed during Pezeshkian's visit to Tajikistan

The presidents of Iran and Russia will sign a comprehensive agreement for long-term cooperation in Moscow in mid-January, Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baghaei said. Speaking to reporters at his weekly press conference in Tehran on Monday, Baghaei said the agreement has different aspects. "An important part of the agreement includes trade, economy, energy and the environment sectors as well as issues pertaining to defense and security matters," he added, Press TV reported.

He noted that Iran and Russia had approved the document in early summer and were waiting for the right time to sign the deal by the two countries' presidents.

Pointing to bilateral negotiations about the agreement at different times in the past, Baghaei stressed the need to update the previous document to further strengthen Tehran-Moscow relations.

Iran and Russia, as two close and strategic allies, have over the past years deepened their relations in various fields, despite being under heavy Western sanctions.

In 2001, Tehran and Moscow signed a long-term cooperation deal, officially known as the Treaty of the Foundation of Mutual Relations and the Principles of Cooperation. It was initially set for 10 years but was extended up until 2026.

Now, the two capitals are making final arrangements for the comprehensive partnership pact, which may determine their bilateral ties in all fields for the next 20 years.



Esmail Baghaei
mfa.gov.ir

Pezeshkian's visit to Tajikistan

Baghaei also referred to an upcoming two-day visit by the Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian to Tajikistan, saying that during this visit, important documents in the economic, commercial, and cultural fields will be signed by the both sides.

The spokesperson also said Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia' al-Sudani is scheduled to visit Tehran at the invitation of Pezeshkian in line with diplomatic interactions between the two countries.

The Iraqi premier and Iranian president will discuss ways to promote mutual relations in various fields and the implementation of the agreements previously signed by the two countries, he added. "The developments in the region, especially in Syria, will definitely be among the topics on the agenda of this trip given their importance and sensitivity," Baghaei said.

European leaders hit back in Elon Musk meddling row

European leaders expressed growing frustration with tech billionaire Elon Musk on Monday, as a major row escalated between members of Britain's government and US president-elect Donald Trump's key ally.

UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer slammed those "spreading lies and misinformation" following days of incendiary posts by Musk on his X platform over historical sex offences against children in northern England, AFP reported.

Musk, who is set for a role in Trump's administration, then accused the center-left Labour leader of being "deeply complicit in the mass rapes" and "utterly despicable".

European leaders including French President Emmanuel Macron have also weighed in against Musk.

He said the SpaceX boss was "directly intervening in elections", including in Germany where Chancellor Olaf Scholz has condemned the Tesla boss for backing an extreme-right party.

Scholz on Saturday condemned Musk for "erratic" comments after the billionaire labelled the German leader an "incompetent fool" and came out in support of the Alternative for Germany (AfD) ahead of



Elon Musk
GETTY IMAGES

snap elections on February 23. Norwegian Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Store said Monday he found it "worrying" that someone with so much wealth and influence was getting involved in the politics of European countries.

Much of Musk's focus in recent days has been on Britain and historical scandals involving grooming gangs that first emerged during Starmer's 2008-2013 tenure as the country's top prosecutor.

The comments pose a major challenge for Starmer's government, as it tries to fend off growing support for the far-right while also seeking to maintain good relations with Trump's incoming administration.

Musk's tirade, which included demands for a new public inquiry into the scandal, has prompted some UK opposition politicians to join in the

criticism and call for a fresh national probe.

The issue has long been seized upon by far-right figures including the imprisoned Tommy Robinson, one of Britain's best known far-right agitators, whom Musk has praised and said should be released from jail.

Responding to media questions on the topic, Starmer insisted he was "not going to individualise this to Elon Musk" but said "a line has been crossed" with some of the online criticism.

The grooming scandal involved the widespread abuse of girls in northern English towns, including Rochdale, Rotherham and Oldham.

A series of court cases eventually led to the conviction of dozens of men, mostly of South Asian origin. The victims were vulnerable, mostly white, girls.

Mohammad Ali Rajabi
Cartoonist



Iran should negotiate ...

Trump's focus for securing American interests lies elsewhere, on issues that may not be as important to Iran. Therefore, new negotiations between Iran and the West should be tailored to these fresh circumstances. Global relations have changed since Iran signed the JCPOA in 2015. It might be necessary to go back to the drawing board and Iran should pursue its national interests based on global changes, and naturally, it needs to have some give

and take. The sanctions and the benefits of lifting them should be the crux of the negotiations. Iran wants to cash in on the benefits of lifting sanctions, such as the removal of sanctions on the banking system, oil sales and Iranian shipping companies, from the other side. It should demand the benefits of sanctions relief in the short term. If Iranian foreign policy officials conduct negotiations in a way that preserves the country's national interests, the world

is ready to roll out these changes. Tehran should get down to brass tacks with Washington to lift sanctions. The reality is that the sanctions Iran is grappling with are mainly imposed by the US, which are the most diverse and complex in their kind. Therefore, the main party in Iran's negotiations should be the US. One of the significant changes on the global stage is that Europe's role is fading. Although Iran is negotiating with Europe, the idea that Iran

can seal a deal with the US through Europe is a pipe dream. Iran should engage with the US. However, the Islamic Republic should also stand its ground. Iran's foreign minister has recently made it clear that Iran is ready to return to its JCPOA commitments regarding enrichment and more, provided the West also pulls its weight under the nuclear deal. But Iran should bear in mind that negotiating with Europe will not lead to a complete lifting of sanctions.

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Iranian children shine in painting competition in China

Arts & Culture Desk

Thirteen Iranian children and adolescents were awarded honorary diplomas at the International Painting Competition held in China.

The competition, themed "The Silk Road in Children's Eyes," was organized by the Friendship and Cooperation Commission of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), IRNA reported.

The Institute for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults submitted 39 artworks to this year's competition. Among 1,700 entries from 21 countries, 10 participants from the institute's cultural and artistic centers, along with three independent entrants, received honorary diplomas.

The awarded participants are: 16-year-old Mohaddeseh Dadkani from the Khash center in Sistan and Baluchestan, 8-year-old Kian Qaini

from Bojnourd in North Khorasan, 16-year-old Masoumeh Sobhaninia and 14-year-old Diana Qalyani from the Mahabad center in West Azarbaijan, 7-year-old Elnaz Kazemi from the Parsabad center in Ardabil, 11-year-old Mohammad Hassan Hashemi Nejad from the Kerman center, 11-year-old Mehrana Toloo from the Tehran center, 13-year-old Mahshid Qasemi from the Kahrizsang center in Isfahan, 13-year-old Abbas Shahbazi from the Bileh Savar center in Ardabil, 7-year-old Zahra Javadinia from Semnan, and 11-year-old Hadis Salimi, an independent participant from Ardabil.

In addition, China awarded honorary diplomas to 10-year-old Parsa and Dorsa Nikbayan, independent participants from Khuzestan province, in recognition of their collaboration in the closing ceremony of the event.



Iranian film 'Like Deliberately' to compete at India's Frames Film Festival



The short film 'Like Deliberately', directed by Farzin Azizi, was selected for the 22nd edition of the Frames Film Festival in India.

The film, which narrates the suspicious death of Mr. Shahkarmi, is set to compete with other films from January 8 to 10 in New Bombay, India, IRNA reported.

The cast of 'Like Deliberately' includes Amir Khanzadeh, Mehdi Janabi, Zeynab Izadpanah, Shayan Azizi, Ghazaleh Amiri, Sadi Khezri, Amir Mohammadi,

and the young actor Arshia Aminiyan. The film will be screened internationally by First Screen.

The Frames Film Festival is one of the largest film festivals in India, receiving entries not only from prestigious colleges and institutions across the country but also from various international locations such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Italy, Iran, and others. The festival has become a platform for nurturing new filmmaking talent.

Armenians in Iran celebrate Christmas

Each year, Armenians in Iran commemorate Christmas on January 6, a celebration deeply rooted in their cultural and religious traditions for over 1,700 years. This date coincides with the Feast of the Epiphany, marking the visit of three wise men, to the newborn Jesus. Some historians suggest that these wise men may have had Iranian origins, further intertwining the rich heritage of Armenia with that of Iran.

The Armenian community observes this festive occasion with a period of fasting leading up to the celebration, followed by joyous feasts featuring traditional dishes such as rice, nuts, desserts, and sweets. The festivities not only honor the birth of Jesus Christ but also the significance of baptism, as the Armenian Apostolic Church celebrates both events on the same day.

Historically, the presence of Armenians in the region dates back to 3,500 years before Christ, with archaeological evidence supporting their existence since the Stone Age. Following centuries of foreign rule, including governance by Pompey in the 2nd century AD and the establishment of



the Arshakuni dynasty, Armenia embraced Christianity as its state religion in 301 AD, becoming the first nation to do so.

Unlike other Christian denominations that celebrate Christmas on December 25, Armenians have maintained their tradition of celebrating on January 6. This divergence stems from the early Christians in Armenia choosing to honor the birth and baptism of Christ together, rather than aligning their celebrations with the Roman festival of Sol Invictus.

On the morning of January 6, Divine

Liturgy is held in Armenian Apostolic churches across the globe. Following the service, a ceremonial Water Blessing takes place, symbolizing Jesus' baptism in the Jordan River. The liturgist blesses the water, which is then taken home by the faithful as a sacred blessing and healing remedy.

As Armenians in Iran and around the world come together to celebrate this significant occasion, they not only honor their faith but also preserve the unique cultural identity that has sustained their community through centuries of change.

Strengthening nat'l media ...

However, our approach will be soft, and we will respond appropriately to these media initiatives.

It is clear that those who create Persian-language networks are monitoring developments in Iran and are subsequently looking to exert influence in this arena. Therefore, we, in the Parliament, Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) Supervisory Council, and the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, will examine these matters and consider specific measures.

It is also important to note the changing landscape of media competition. Previ-

ously, our media rivals were foreign opposition networks in the satellite realm, but today, these networks have lost their competitive edge. Our primary competitors now include domestic reference groups that have gained prominence through IRIB. These are well-known individuals and personalities whose online presence has become a platform for criticizing IRIB. As the saying goes, these individuals have bitten the hand that fed them.

Regarding foreign Persian-language television networks, we must ensure that they cannot impose Western standards

on our nation through their cultural influence. Some of these networks promote not only cultural infiltration but also divisive and subversive narratives against Iran.

In reality, we do not face issues like separatism or coups in Iran. Our people and the various pillars of our country and system are committed, devoted, and passionate about Islam, the Qur'an, and their nation. While it is true that we currently face several challenges, including economic hardships, the different branches of government—executive, legislative, and judicial—are united and determined

to resolve these issues.

Furthermore, I would like to highlight the recent message from the Leader of Islamic Revolution Seyyed Ali Khamenei regarding the transformation of national media. In this message, he emphasized the importance of accurate storytelling, message management, and its impact on public opinion. The Leader consistently stays ahead of other officials, often suggesting to various organizations the advice they should be providing him.

Ultimately, IRIB and our other media outlets must act cohesively and powerfully to counter the malicious intentions of ad-

versaries. Therefore, a budget has been allocated for media countermeasures against hostile media campaigns.

Our people deserve to receive first-hand narratives about events in Iran and around the world from the national media. The national media should not operate in a way that compels the public to seek news and programming from foreign outlets, allowing them to disseminate misinformation. As members of IRIB Supervisory Council, we are committed to strengthening national media, and if necessary, we will intervene to highlight any issues that require attention.