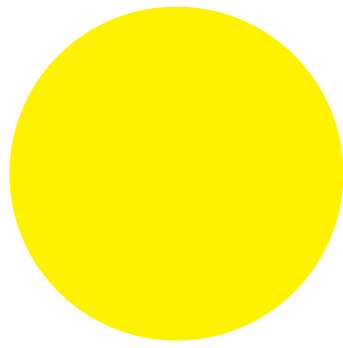


Presidential aide says NBC to air 'important message' by Pezeshkian



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Iran-Russia treaty to cement economies, defense capabilities: *Lavrov*

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Tehran-Moscow long-term deal a game changer

PERSPECTIVE

International Desk

On January 17, Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian will set out on a groundbreaking visit to Moscow, the Russian capital, to ink the "Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Treaty" with his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin at the Kremlin. The treaty, a revamped version of a pact put together 24 years ago, aims to turn the tide on the bilateral relationship. Back in 2001, a decade-long contract laid the groundwork for Iran-Russia ties, which has since been extended twice for five-year periods.

The upcoming Iran-Russia comprehensive treaty, encompassing over 30 key areas, is a long-term commitment rooted in the principles of the UN Charter, bilateral rights and a balanced approach to obligations and territorial integrity. The treaty takes in crucial aspects such as politics, economy, transportation, transit corridors, finance, investments, energy, agriculture and food security.

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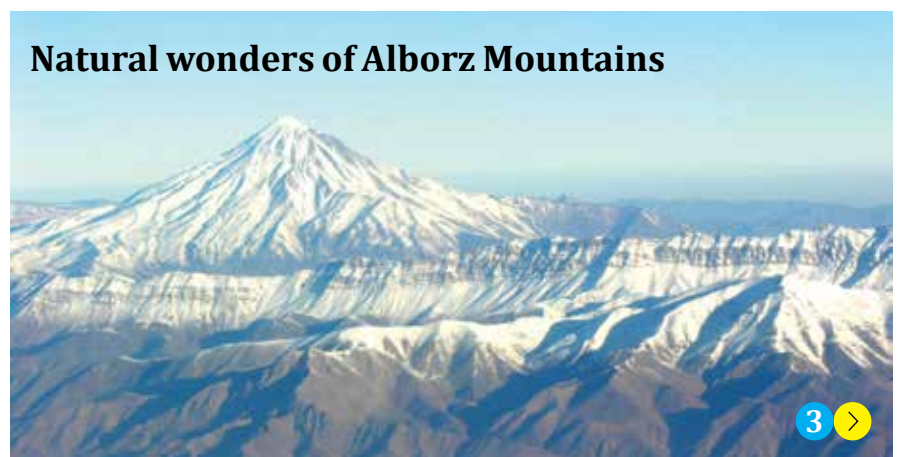


Iran, European troika hold 'constructive' nuclear talks

Iran and European powers said they held "frank and constructive" talks on Monday about Tehran's nuclear program, just a week before US President-elect Donald Trump takes office.

It was the second round of such talks in less than two months, following a discreet meeting in Geneva last November between Tehran and the three European powers, Britain, France and Germany, known as the E3.

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Tehran, Seoul discuss cooperation in AI, smart governance

Iran's minister of communications and information technology emphasized the need to implement previous agreements between Tehran and Seoul, outlining potential areas of collaboration in Artificial Intelligence (AI), smart government initiatives and fiber optic technology. During a meeting on Monday with Kim Junpyo, South Korea's ambassador to Iran, Sattar Hashemi highlighted the importance of executing existing agreements. "If these agreements require further action, they should be prioritized," he said. Hashemi noted past cooperation between the two countries in smart government projects, which had stalled in recent years and expressed hope that the collaboration would resume with the necessary measures in place. The minister also identified the digital economy and optical fiber projects as additional areas for cooperation, saying, "Given South Korea's expertise in optical fiber projects, we are keen to leverage this experience for the development of Iran's optical fiber infrastructure." Hashemi raised the issue of 5G connectivity, pointing out that newer Samsung models now support 5G in Iran.

He also asked the South Korean ambassador to explore the possibility of enabling 5G support for older South Korean-made phone models.

The minister described AI as a promising field for bilateral cooperation, stressing the importance of acting during the current "golden window of opportunity." He added, "We can actively collaborate and make significant progress in this area."

Ambassador Kim Junpyo echoed the sentiment, describing the potential for cooperation between Tehran and Seoul as vast and expressed hope that the two countries could share their experiences, particularly in e-government and smart government initiatives.

Kim highlighted South Korea's advancements in AI, noting that the country currently ranks sixth or seventh globally and is aiming to reach third place, saying, "We can collaborate with Iran in this field as well." The ambassador also mentioned past efforts to train specialized ICT personnel and emphasized the potential to continue such cooperation.

The meeting was attended by Hamid Fattahi, deputy minister and head of the Communications Regulatory Authority, and Mohammad-Mohsen Sadr, head of the Information Technology Organization, who discussed potential areas of collaboration with the South Korean ambassador.

€10b invested in Chabahar petchem projects to end unprocessed sales

The CEO of Negin Mokran Petrochemical Development Company (NMPC) of Chabahar announced that approximately €10 billion has been invested in the third petrochemical hub to build petrochemical complexes and complete the value chain for methane gas.

The investment aims to eliminate the sale of raw petrochemical products once the industrial park's phases are completed. Alireza Moniri-Abianeh told IRNA on Tuesday that the Makoran Petrochemical Industrial Park includes six mega-projects and 22 downstream petrochemical units.

He said that, according to the planned timeline, the necessary utilities—such as water, electricity, steam, and other support services—along with two petrochemical units, will be operational by summer 2025.

He emphasized that the knowledge generated in the country's third petrochemical hub is a valuable asset. "Iran's petrochemical industry, now 63 years old, previously established two hubs in Mahshahr and Assaluyeh under relevant governments." Moniri-Abianeh highlighted that one of the key initiatives of the Makoran Petrochemical Industrial Park is the employment of local workers. Over 5,000 people are currently employed at the site, with more than 50% being local hires.

He added that, in addition to employing local workers, the project has established technical and vocational training centers



and a petrochemical high school in Chabahar to empower the local community and provide skilled labor for the region's industries.

Moniri-Abianeh recounted the history of the Makoran Petrochemical Industrial Park, noting that its development began after Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei's directive to develop the Makoran coast.

In spring 2011 (Iranian calendar year of 1390), during a provincial cabinet visit to Sistan and Baluchestan,

the government approved the establishment of the country's third petrochemical hub in the Chabahar Free Trade Zone, a site previously designated by the Oil Ministry.

He explained that in the same year, following the government's approval, an agreement was reached between the then-ministers of oil and defense to assign the Ministry of Defense as the chief developer for the project. The Ministry of Defense utilized the capabilities of Shastan Company, owned by the Armed Forces

Pension Fund, and established NMPC to build the industrial park with private sector involvement.

Moniri-Abianeh noted that the Makoran Petrochemical Industrial Park in Chabahar, known as the country's third petrochemical hub, marks the first experience of private sector-led petrochemical development in a free trade zone.

Over the years, the project has also developed and formalized the rules governing such developments.

He added that the industrial park includes 18 investment and infrastructure projects, seven of which are petrochemical projects being implemented in partnership with companies and investment holdings. The park spans 1,260 hectares.

The CEO stated that the majority of products from the Negin Makoran Petrochemical Complex will be exported, while the remainder will serve as feedstock for downstream petrochemical complexes and industries in domestic markets.

Iran-Europe flights to resume on January 31



Head of Iran's Civil Aviation Organization (CAO) Hossein Pourfarzaneh announced that the Islamic Republic would resume flights to Europe late this month. Pourfarzaneh made the announcement during a news conference in Tehran on Monday, saying that the first flight will be carried out from Tehran to Paris on January 31, IRNA reported. The Tehran-Paris flight is set to be carried out by Iranian private airline, Iran Airtour Airlines, the

official said. Another Iranian airline, Qeshm Air, will also carry out flights to "two European destinations," he said, adding that further details will be announced later. Flights between Iran and Europe were suspended in mid-October 2024 after the EU imposed sanctions on the Islamic Republic over allegations that it had sent drones to Russia for use in the Ukraine war. Iran vehemently denied the allegations. Pourfarzaneh described

the embargo as unprofessional and cruel, saying that the resumption of flights is the result of a month of efforts made by the Iranian Foreign Ministry, CAO, and Iran Airtour. He said that the flights were required to be established again in order to assist people on health issues, and procurement of medicines. There are currently no flights between Tehran and London, but the Iranian authorities are making efforts to re-establish them, he added.

Daily gasoline output up by 10m liters in four months: NIORDC



The National Iranian Oil Refining and Distribution Company (NIORDC) announced that gasoline production increased daily by more than 10 million liters in the four months ending December 20, 2024 owing to technical measures. According to the company's report, the average daily production of motor gasoline in the first five months of the year (March 20 to Aug. 21, 2024) was 97.5 million liters. This figure rose to an average of 107 million liters per day by the ninth month of Iranian calendar year, IRNA reported. The increase in daily gasoline production

was distributed as follows: Isfahan Refinery (1.8 million liters), Imam Khomeini Shazand Refinery (3.3 million liters), Bandar Abbas Refinery (0.8 million liters), Tabriz Refinery (0.3 million liters), Tehran Refinery (0.5 million liters), Persian Gulf Star Refinery (3.2 million liters), Shiraz Refinery (0.1 million liters), and Lavan Oil Refinery (0.1 million liters). In a related development, Mohsen Paknejad, during a meeting of the Oil Ministry's deputies on Jan. 11, attended by First Vice President Mohammadreza Aref, stated that the increase in crude oil feedstock for refineries led to a daily production boost

of 10 million liters of gasoline and 11 million liters of diesel. Paknejad emphasized that the rise in petroleum product production has prevented significant foreign currency outflows for imports of these products. Mohammad-Sadeq Azimifar, CEO of the NIORDC, also noted during the meeting that the current administration's refining projects, such as the Shiraz Refinery's isomerization unit, the Abadan Refinery's hydrocracker unit, and process improvements in refineries, have added 10 million liters to gasoline production and 11 million liters to diesel production.

Natural wonders of Alborz Mountains



Alborz Mountains

The Alborz Mountains are one of the most recognized landmarks in Iran's geography. This mountain range stretches like a great wall from the Republic of Azerbaijan in the northwest to Afghanistan and Turkmenistan. The peaks of the Alborz Mountains line the southern shores of the Caspian Sea, creating a climatic barrier that separates the lush northern regions from the arid central deserts of Iran. This geological feature significantly influences the country's climate and weather conditions. The most notable peak in this range is Mount Damavand, which is Iran's highest mountain, located in Central Alborz. The name Alborz has its origins in the Avestan language. The Zoroastrian Avesta refers to a mythical mountain called Hara Berezaiti, regarded as the center of the world. In Middle Persian, it evolved into Hara Berez and Harborz, where "hara" means "guard" and "Berezaiti" means "tall." Zoroastrians believed this mountain served as a gateway to the afterlife, destinationiran.com wrote. Numerous legends in Iranian literature, including the Shahnameh (Book of Kings), feature Mount Damavand, highlighting its historical significance among Iranians, including followers of Zoroastrianism and Mithraism. This importance extends beyond mythology; the Alborz region plays a crucial role in Iran's ecology and environment.

Located in northern Iran along the southern shores of the Caspian Sea, the Alborz Mountains act as a natural barrier, preventing the sea's humidity from reaching Central Iran. This extensive mountain range spans several provinces, including Mazandaran, Gilan, Golestan, Ardebil, Zanjan, Tehran, Semnan, Qazvin, and Alborz provinces. Major cities near the Alborz Mountains include Amol, Larijan, Damavand, Firuz Kuh, and Lar. Archaeological expeditions in the Alborz Mountains have uncovered evidence of human settlements dating back to the Lower Paleolithic era, approximately 200,000 to 250,000 years ago. Findings from the Darband Rashi Cave in Gilan Province include stone tools and remains of hunted animals. Additionally, traces of Neanderthals have been found in various sites along the mountain range. Notable Paleolithic sites include Kiaram Cave in Gorgan, Golestan Province, and Buzeyir Cave in Dalikli Dash Mountain in Azerbaijan, both containing Neanderthal remains. Kiaram Cave also yielded bones of an extinct rhinoceros species, indicating their presence in the region around 200,000 years ago. Evidence of early Neanderthal settlements has been found in Garm Roud, where primitive humans lived and hunted from 200,000 years ago until the end of the Second Ice Age. This extensive history underscores the Alborz Mountains' significance in the development of civilization in Iran. The Alborz Mountains represent the highest land mass in the Iranian plateau. The eastern peaks of the Alborz Mountains are generally lower than 4,000 meters, while the central region features higher elevations. The Alborz range is divided into three sections: western, central, and eastern. The western Alborz Mountains lies between the Sepid Rud Valley and the Astarachay River, encompassing a significant portion of the Talesh Mountains. The central Alborz Mountains extends from the Sepid Rud Valley to the Talaar River and Firouz Kuh Valley. The eastern Alborz Mountains stretches from Golestan Province to the Firouz Kuh Valley. The northern section of the Alborz, characterized by dense vegetation, boasts stunning natural landscapes and fertile soil. These areas rise to about 2,500 meters above sea level and are adorned with picturesque mountain forests. The Alborz Mountains are the source of many significant rivers in Iran, with several permanent rivers flowing from melting ice and springs in this mountain range. Below are some of the most

important rivers that originate from the Alborz Mountains:

Jajrud River

Jajrud is a well-known river in northern Tehran and is considered a permanent river. It flows from the Alborz Mountains, specifically the Kharsang and Kolon Bastak mountains.

Karaj River

The Karaj River is one of the most water-rich rivers on the slopes of the Alborz Mountains. It originates from Kharsang Mountain and eventually joins the Qom Salt Lake.

Sefidrud

The Sefidrood River, located in Gilan Province, is another important river in northern Iran. It is formed by the confluence of the Qazal-Ozan and Shahroud rivers.

Tajan River

Originating from the heights of Alborz Mountains in the Sorkheh and Darab Kuh regions, the Tajan River ultimately flows into the Caspian Sea.

Vegetation

The central Alborz Mountains are divided into two sections: the northern and southern slopes. These areas are rich in plant and tree diversity, with many flora species classified as part of Iran's biosphere reserves, necessitating their protection. The northern slopes, exposed to heavy snowfall, rain, and humidity, are particularly lush and green.

Here are five notable biosphere reserves in the Alborz Mountains:

Golestan Biosphere Reserve: Located in Golestan Province, this reserve is known for its diverse plant and animal species, including various endemics. It features mixed forests, temperate rainforests, and a range of ecosystems.

Alamut: Renowned for its historical significance and rich biodiversity, the Alamut region features mountainous terrain and unique geological formations.

Hyrcanian forests: Extending along the Caspian Sea and including parts of the Alborz Mountains, these ancient forests are known for their diverse flora and fauna.

Talesh: While primarily located in the Talesh Mountains, this reserve extends into parts of the Alborz Mountain range and is recognized for its biological diversity and cultural heritage.

Its lush forests are home to a variety of flora and fauna, making it a vital ecological zone. Additionally, the region hosts

numerous traditional villages where local customs and crafts thrive, reflecting the rich cultural tapestry of the area.

Unfortunately, the Hyrcanian forests, a prominent vegetation cover in the area, have been largely destroyed due to unsustainable development and industrial activities. In these regions, herbaceous plants are more prevalent than trees and shrubs. The beech marten population has rapidly declined in the Alborz region, making them an officially endangered species.

The dense forests on the slopes of the Alborz Mountains provide a habitat for various animal species. The specific topographic and ecological conditions support a diverse range of mammals, birds, reptiles, and amphibians. Some notable wildlife includes:

Birds

Over 156 bird species inhabit the area, including the common kestrel, falcon, partridge, golden eagle, Caspian partridge, and common partridge.

Mammals

Forty-eight mammal species have been identified in the Alborz Mountains. Key species include: Beech marten, red deer, wolf brown bear, mouflon and sheep, wild goat and ibex, wild cat, hedgehog, leopard, amphibians and reptiles.

In these humid areas, 26 species of reptiles and seven species of amphibians inhabit the mountain range. Notable reptiles include: Alborz viper, Caucasian viper, saw-scaled snake.

The northern regions of the Alborz Mountains are home to various aquatic species, contributing to the marine life of the Caspian Sea.

Skiing, hiking, and climbing

The Alborz Mountains are a premier destination for winter skiing, with the top three ski resorts in Iran — Dizin, Darbandsar, and Shemshak — located on its slopes. Additionally, there are numerous scenic hiking trails and mountain climbing routes, such as Tochal and Kolakchal.

The Alborz Mountains are defining landmarks in Iran's geography, playing a crucial role in the development of civilization in northern Iran and serving as natural fortifications in historical battles. This mountain range is also home to indigenous species of flora and fauna that are part of Iran's natural heritage. Mount Damavand, Iran's highest peak, symbolizes perseverance and strength, celebrated in Persian literature throughout the ages.



Karaj River



Golestan Biosphere Reserve



Hyrcanian forests



Alamut

To be or not to be part of FATF: What opponents and proponents say



By Zohreh Qanadi
Staff writer

Iran is among three countries named by the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) as high-risk jurisdictions. The sanctions and the failure to join the FATF have resulted in the country being unable to utilize its revenues abroad, making it necessary to incur additional costs for transferring these funds.

The only way to capitalize on the economic opportunities available globally is by joining the FATF. The FATF comprises four conventions, all of which approved by Iran's Parliament but two are on hold in the Expediency Council [a legislative body with supervisory powers over all branches of government].

It seems that over the past few years, failure to approve these two remaining conventions has piled up significant costs for the country. Staying out of the FATF has not completely deprived Iran of banking transfers and the like; rather, the issue is that the costs associated with Iran's economic ties have soared significantly.



Masoud Pezeshkian's government announced upon taking office in mid-summer that it would seek to sort out differences with the FATF as part of efforts to open up to the world and fix the country's economic problems.

The opponents and proponents of aligning with the task force's requirements have, in the meantime, presented their respective viewpoints, each of which may deserve consideration in its own right.

Supporters of the alignment have expressed that the country need not be concerned about fully adopting the FATF rules, as the country has strict controls on money laundering and financing of terrorism.

That comes as some in the country still believe that certain governments, especially the United States which maintains a harsh regime of sanctions on Iran, would benefit from Iran's decision to completely accept all FATF conventions and rules.

Opponents argue that the FATF is merely a two-faced coin, presenting itself as a transparent room for combating money laundering and terrorism while being a black box for recording financial information and monitoring the monetary transactions of governments and numerous economic entities. They view it as a radar that claims to fight money laundering and track illicit funds from trafficking, bribery, and drug sales on paper, but its effectiveness in preventing these funds from entering the global monetary and financial systems is questionable.

On the other hand, proponents of Iran's full accession to the FATF argue that there are numerous benefits to joining this global treaty. They believe that

the FATF, in its essence, aims to combat money laundering as an economic crime that significantly and negatively impacts the economic growth and development of countries worldwide. By joining the task force, proponents argue, Iran can prevent unequal income distribution, financial market disruption, illegal capital flight, exchange and interest rate instability, deterioration of the country's foreign economic relations, reduced money demand, private sector bankruptcy, declining economic productivity, and increased privatization risks. Additionally, they believe that accession will lead to enhanced economic and financial transparency, increased tax revenues, foreign investment growth, and higher economic growth rates.

However, is there any hope that the Expediency Council will soon resolve the ongoing

debate about whether to join the FATF? Political figures in the country have voiced their opinions both in support of and against this issue.

Sadeq Amoli Larijani, the head of the Expediency Council, commented on joining the FATF, stating: "Joining the FATF is a technical issue. If it comes to the council, we will examine it. However, it must be clarified how much benefit we will gain from accepting it." He added, "In a sanctions environment that has created numerous problems for Iranian traders, including in currency transfers, will the US lift its restrictions if we accept the FATF?"

Certainly, Larijani is not the first member of the council to raise concerns about the risks associated with this bill. Many members of this body have spoken out regarding the FATF and its drawbacks.

Saeed Jalili, a member of the

council, stated on January 1, "At the end of 2018, the then-government wrote a letter saying that if the FATF was not signed, we wouldn't even be able to pay the salaries for a month. If you do not define the subject and the scene correctly, your analysis will also be flawed. We need to look at the dimensions of these issues precisely and clarify them for discussion."

In Parliament, Amir Hossein Sabeti, a representative from Tehran, has invited the Minister of Economy Abdolnaser Hemmati to debate the FATF. Additionally, Vahid Ahmadi, a member of the National Security Commission of the parliament, remarked: "Some of our officials have repeatedly stated in previous years that we must comply with the FATF; it should be noted that we have adhered to 39 out of 41 of its requirements. The question is, what benefits have we gained

from complying with 39 FATF stipulations that some are now waiting for us to implement the remaining two?"

Mostafa Mir Salim, another member of the Expediency Council, has also stated, "If our joining this treaty leads to a setback for liberation movements, then naturally, joining these programs would not be correct. However, if everyone collaborates and acts against terrorism, and if these treaties are not used as tools to suppress those who are genuinely fighting against terrorism, the chances of success will increase. This is the main issue, and we must not fall into the US' trap."

Banking transactions pending decisions on FATF

Mostafa Hashemi Taba, a reformist politician, pointed to the positive aspects of relations with neighboring countries, identifying economic exchanges as the primary focus in this regard. In the Shargh newspaper, he writes that a look at Iran's neighbors reveals that the potential of these neighboring countries to enhance the level of trade is not particularly significant, especially at the level and extent required by Iran. This is particularly true given that banking transactions are stalled pending decisions regarding the FATF, and even a country like Iraq is using this as an excuse for not settling its debts to Iran.

The former minister of industries states, "We want to focus on the positive aspects of neighboring relations. The primary thought in this regard is economic exchanges that neighbors can easily carry out, as proximity has re-



Supporters of joining the FATF argue that it would enhance international credibility, provide access to global financial markets, prevent further sanctions, strengthen the domestic financial system, and promote international cooperation.

Conversely, opponents express concerns about the potential loss of financial and security independence, the complexity and costs associated with implementing the standards, pushbacks within the country, and adverse effects on relations with specific countries. They assert that these adverse effects could even lead to a decline in Iran's economic and political cooperation with some regional nations.



solved many transportation and communication issues. However, for us, neighbors have largely become intermediaries for purchases and smuggling from other countries, such as the UAE, which sells goods from those who have imposed sanctions on Iran. We either pay them in cash or provide goods, such as agricultural products that conceal significant water content, or, in the case of Iraq, our couriers resort to the informal market for goods.

Development hinges on global exchanges

Morteza Alviri, a reformist figure, in an interview with Khabar Online acknowledges the significant risks of not joining the FATF.

"There is no doubt that the continuation of the current situation will lead the country towards devastation, and Iran will face complete bankruptcy. Even friendly countries can no longer engage with us, and our cooperation with Europe must be completely disregarded."

The former parliament member finds the arguments of opponents unconvincing, stating that "Some believe that if we implement contractionary policies and adopt a self-sufficiency strategy, we can achieve development by relying solely on ourselves. However, global experiences demonstrate this undeniable reality: development depends on international exchanges. In other words, if we do not engage with the global community and fail to expose our products to the global market, and conversely, do not define our domestic products in competition with advanced technologies, we will face chronic underdevelopment."

"The FATF is an intergovernmental organization that has the capacity to monitor money laundering and the financing of terrorism. Almost all countries in the world are defined within this framework, and if they do not accept such arrangements, their banking operations and trade with one another will encounter difficulties. Unfortunately, for various reasons, Iran was not included in this framework and ultimately ended up on the FATF's blacklist. As a result, our exchanges with the world have become significantly more challenging. However, the issues we face in global transactions are not solely due to the FATF; sanc-

tions themselves are another factor contributing to these problems. In other words, even if we accept the FATF but remain under sanctions, our global trading issues will persist. However, accepting the FATF is a significant step, as even countries under sanctions have recognized the FATF and have overcome some hurdles."

The reformist politician, in response to the opponents, who say that the country's development should not be tied to global exchanges or sanctions, states that "If we look at various countries around the world, we can see how those countries, like Cuba or North Korea that have been caught in global sanctions have remained off the path of development."

Alviri warns that rejecting membership in the Palermo Convention, the UN Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime, could lead to not only economic constraints but also security challenges for Iran. "While we do not assert that joining will solve all of the country's problems, it can at least facilitate the process of addressing issues and moving towards a more normalized situation."

Increasing costs of exchanges

Davood Danesh-Jafari, a member of the Expediency Council, believes that resolving the FATF issue does not necessarily lead to the lifting of sanctions; however, failing to address it could cast a shadow over Iran's economy even after sanctions are lifted, increasing the costs of economic exchanges with the outside world by about fifteen to twenty percent.

Hamid Mirzadeh, the former head of the Organization of Planning and Budget, writes in Etemad newspaper that removing Iran from the FATF blacklist would improve banking standards, reduce both trade costs and risks associated with Iran, and prevent the re-imposition of countermeasures.

He lists several advantages of this development, including enhancing Iran's financial legitimacy, gaining access to international financial systems, lowering commercial risks, facilitating foreign investment, and strengthening economic relations. He also points to the improvement of the sanction's environment as another benefit of Iran's membership in this international organization.



The photo shows the last June FATF plenary in Berlin in 2022.

Membership could alleviate impact of sanctions

Although Mirzadeh agrees that joining the FATF will not lead to the lifting of sanctions, he states, "it can open avenues for negotiation and dialogue concerning existing economic sanctions, potentially leading to more favorable conditions." Furthermore, he notes that FATF membership would diminish the effects and scope of new sanctions and neutralize the justifications used by sanctioning entities.

According to Mirzadeh, joining the FATF would enable foreign purchases with greater selection and lower costs, eliminating the burden of higher expenses, which currently can reach up to 30%. He identifies securing new financial resources for the government as the final advantage of FATF membership, suggesting that it could facilitate the reintegration of Iran's economy into the global economy and strengthen its economic ties with other countries, thereby creating more opportunities for national growth and development and providing new financial resources for the government.

Lastly, he expresses concern that some analysts advocate for unilateral policies that are certainly contrary to the country's independence. These individuals passionately argue for Iran's membership in a specific bloc while perceiving FATF membership as a plunge into the embrace of the West. In reality, joining an intergovernmental body accepted by 200 countries, much like Iran's participation in various international organizations, serves to protect national interests and unlock economic barriers, particularly regarding the banking system. Currently, only three countries—Iran, North Korea, and Myanmar—are not members of this organization and are on its blacklist.

In contrast, as mentioned, critics of joining the FATF, despite supporting the fight against money laundering and wanting increased financial and economic transparency in the country, believe that given Iran's struggle against the United States and the sanctions imposed upon it, the country is inevitably forced to circumvent these sanctions. They argue that joining the FATF and accepting all its

conditions would essentially mean shackling ourselves and exposing our strategies for evading sanctions.

Nailing one's own foot

Mehr News Agency, quoting critics of FATF membership, states that despite rising import costs, as long as the issue of the unilateral sanctions imposed by the United States and the pressure on other countries to avoid economic cooperation with Iran remain unresolved, accepting all the FATF stipulations is merely "nailing one's own foot." They also contend that joining the FATF and adhering to all its conditions would effectively complicate support for groups, forces, and nations fighting for legitimate self-defense against Western powers and aggressors in the region. Critics assert that even with the implementation of FATF provisions by countries worldwide, the level of money laundering in international economic transactions remains high, with approximately 5% of global GDP being laundered—significantly occurring within Western nations themselves. Therefore, they argue that this treaty, contrary

to its proclaimed goals, has not effectively addressed financial crime and money laundering. They believe that, similar to the United Nations and the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty within the atomic agency, the FATF exhibits a double standard and a colonial approach to issues, not only failing to assist independent nations but also trapping them in self-imposed constraints.

Opponents of joining this convention express grievances regarding the lack of transparency surrounding the Financial Action Task Force, claiming that accepting FATF is a form of significant and compounded self-sanctioning. Despite these considerations, the head of the government's information council states that Iran's accession to the FATF should be examined away from political controversies and should rely on specialized discussions among economic experts.

Elias Hazrati wrote on his account on the social media platform X: "I humbly invite all political activists to avoid political polarization for the dignity of Iran and to take steps towards convergence. Together, we stand for Iran."



Iranian teams clear to host in AFC competitions, Taj confirms

Sports Desk

Iranian national team and the Persian Gulf Pro League clubs have been given the go-ahead by the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) to play on home soil again, Mahdi Taj, the head of Iranian Football Federation, confirmed.

Iranian teams were forced to play their home games in the continental events in neutral venues after the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) launched a missile strike on targets in the Israeli-occupied territories on October 1 last year – days after the assassination of Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah in an Israeli air strike in Beirut, Lebanon. Iran faced Qatar in the World Cup qualifiers in Dubai on Oct. 15, coming out 4-1 winner, while Persepolis, Esteghlal, Tractor, and Sepahan also had to fly to Dubai and Doha for their home games in the two Asian club competitions.

"We received the good news from the AFC hours ago, and Persepolis and Esteghlal are clear to play their home games [in the AFC Champions League Elite] in Tehran's Azadi Stadium," Taj said on Monday, adding: "The situation will be reassessed by the AFC representatives in Tehran on February 11, though I'm confident

there won't be a problem regarding Iran's home games in the World Cup qualifiers."

Sitting eighth in the west zone's 12-team table with five points, Esteghlal will be back in the Asian elite clubs' competition against Iraqi bottom-club Al Shorta on Feb. 3, hoping to remain in contention for a knockout spot ahead of the visit to Al Rayyan of Qatar on the final day of the league phase.

Sixth in the table with six points, Persepolis will play away to Saudi powerhouse Al Hilal, before welcoming Cristiano Ronaldo's Al Nassr on Feb. 17.

Tractor is the Iranian team in the AFC Champions League Two knockouts, hosting Bahrain's Al Khaldiya SC in the second leg of their last-16 tie in Tabriz's Yadegar-e Imam Stadium on Feb. 18 – a week after the first leg in Riffa.

Iran, meanwhile, is top in Group A of the qualifiers with 16 points – three clear of Uzbekistan and six points above the United Arab Emirates with four games to spare – and with the top-two securing direct qualification for the 2026 finals, Team Melli is on the verge of progress ahead of the home fixtures against the UAE and Uzbekistan on March 20 and 25.



● ALI SHARIFZADEH/IRNA

Australian Open: Medvedev advances after meltdown, red-hot Fritz through

REUTERS – Three-times finalist Daniil Medvedev allowed his frustrations to boil over in a Melbourne Park meltdown before advancing to the second round on Tuesday while Taylor Fritz made a strong start in his bid to end a 22-year Grand Slam drought for American men.

Danish 13th seed Holger Rune was pushed all the way to five sets and Emma Navarro also had a tough time in one of three all-American ties, the women's eighth seed surviving a major scare to beat Peyton Stearns 7-6(5) 6-7(5) 7-5.

It was plain sailing for former Wimbledon champion Elena Rybakina as she blitzed Australian wildcard Emerson Jones 6-1 6-1 with new coach Goran Ivanisevic watching on impressed. In a French thriller on Court Three, experience got the bet-



● FRANCIS MASCARENHAS/REUTERS

ter of potential as Gael Monfils edged Giovanni Mpetshi Perricard 7-6(7) 6-3 6-7(6) 7-6(5) 6-4, while there were also wins for 2021 U.S. Open champion Emma Raducanu, ninth seed Daria Kasatkina and former men's world number six Matteo Berrettini. Russian Medvedev, runner-up last year, smashed his racket and a net camera after dropping serve in the third set but rallied

for a 6-2 4-6 3-6 6-1 6-2 win against Thai wildcard Kasidit Samrej.

The frustrated fifth seed's behaviour earned him a code violation for racket abuse as play was held up before the fourth set as staff swept up debris from the court but he cut a happy figure after the match.

"At the end of last year, this match I probably would have

lost," said Medvedev. "Now it's a new year and new energy ... So I'm happy to win this match."

Fourth seed Fritz stayed cool throughout his match against compatriot Jenson Brooksby, the U.S. Open finalist easing to a 6-2 6-0 6-3 win that showed why he is now considered best placed to end America's 22-year wait for a major men's prize.

The 27-year-old played an integral part in the United States winning the United Cup to begin the new season and continued his fine form within 106-minute drubbing of Brooksby on John Cain Arena.

Brooksby, returning from two years on the sidelines after having operations on both wrists and serving a 13-month doping suspension, fought until the bitter end but was no match for Fritz, who sealed the victory with his 34th winner.

"I'm super happy with how the match went today," said Fritz, who will next face qualifier Cristian Garin.

"It's never easy playing that first match in a slam so there were some nerves."

Iranian Majidi named head coach of Al Bataeh in UAE Pro League

Sports Desk

Iranian Farhad Majidi was appointed as the new head coach of UAE Pro League club Al Bataeh, the Emirati side announced on Monday.

Majidi, 48, took over from Croatian Goran Tomic, whose contract was terminated by the club last week, following a poor run of results in Emirati league.

Al Bataeh has managed only a couple of victories in 12 league games this season, suffering eight defeats, an is 12th in the 14-team table with eight points – two above the relegation zone.

This will be a second spell in the Emirati top flight for the Iranian, who parted ways with Ittihad Kalba in March last year, after leading the club to 17 wins in 51 outings in all competitions across two seasons, steering his team to an all-time best finish (eighth) in the league table in the 2022/2023 campaign.

Widely regarded as an Esteghlal legend, Majidi was also in charge of the Tehran Blues' bench when they went a whole campaign without a defeat to lift a first Persian Gulf Pro League trophy in nine years in the 2021/22 season.



● AFC

Fury announces retirement from boxing again

BBC – Former world heavyweight champion Tyson Fury has announced his retirement from boxing.

Fury last fought in December when he lost his rematch against WBA (Super), WBC and WBO champion Oleksandr Usyk.

The 36-year-old Fury previously announced his retirement after beating Dillian Whyte in April 2022 but returned six months later.

The Briton has enjoyed two stints as heavyweight champion and holds a record of 34 wins, two defeats and one draw.

"Hi everybody, I'm going to make this short and sweet," Fury said.

"I'd like to announce my retirement from boxing, it has been a blast, I've loved every single minute of it and I'm going to end with this; Dick Turpin wore a mask."

The Briton shocked long-reigning world champion Wladimir Klitschko in 2015 to



● FRANK AUGSTEIN/AP

win the WBA (Super), IBF, WBO, IBO, and The Ring heavyweight titles.

After over two-and-a-half years out of the ring, during which he tackled mental health issues, Fury returned to action in 2018 and became a two-time champion by beating Deontay Wilder to claim the WBC belt in 2020.

Fury's decision to retire denies fans the chance to see a long-anticipated clash with fellow Briton Anthony Joshua.

Matchroom's Eddie Hearn, who promotes Joshua, has however questioned the legitimacy of Fury's announcement.

"We've been here before. If that is the end, congratulations on a great career," Hearn told BBC Sport.

"One of the best heavyweights of this generation and made a bucket load of money. If your hearts not in it, if the fight has been punched out of you, it's definitely time to call it quits.

"A few people will always suggest that he could be calling a bluff, but I don't know him well enough to give you an answer. If you don't want it anymore, if your hearts not in it anymore, if you've had the fight punched out of you – it's a dangerous game."

Iran-Russia treaty to cement economies, defense capabilities: *Lavrov*

International Desk

Russia's foreign minister said a long-term cooperation agreement, which is set to be signed between Tehran and Moscow on Friday, aims to strengthen both countries' economies, solving social issues, and ensuring their defense capabilities.

Sergey Lavrov told a news conference on Tuesday that the strategic partnership treaty will not be aimed against any country.

"This question is usually asked by our Western colleagues because they always want to find some topic in any issue to show that Russia, Iran, China, or North Korea are constantly preparing something against someone. However, this document, like the agreement with North Korea, is not directed against any country and is constructive in nature."

Russian President Vladimir Putin and Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian will meet in Moscow on Friday to sign

the long-awaited strategic partnership agreement.

"On January 17, Vladimir Putin will hold talks with the President of the Islamic Republic of Iran Masoud Pezeshkian, who will come to Moscow on an official visit," the Kremlin said in a statement on Monday.

"Following the talks, Vladimir Putin and Masoud Pezeshkian will sign the Treaty on Comprehensive Strategic Partnership between Russia and Iran," the statement added.

The two leaders will discuss expanding cooperation between Moscow and Tehran, including in "trade, investment, transport, logistics, humanitarian sphere, and current issues on the regional and international agenda," the statement said.

'Important event'

Meanwhile, the Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov underscored the importance of the agreement, saying, "It is a

very important event for us."

Iran's ambassador to Moscow Kazem Jalali also said the cooperation agreement will shape relations between the countries for twenty years.

"After the agreement is signed, it must be ratified by Iran's Parliament. Once ratified by the Parliament, it will be in effect for 20 years," he said on Iranian state television.

The ambassador did not say whether the treaty could be extended automatically.

'Balanced' treaty

Jalali also described the long-awaited historic agreement between Tehran and Moscow as "balanced."

The Russian Federation has signed similar agreements with the likes of China, Belarus, India and a host of former Soviet Union countries.

In 2001, Tehran and Moscow signed a long-term cooperation deal, officially known as the Treaty of the Foundation



Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov delivers his annual end-of-year press conference at the Russian Foreign Ministry headquarters in Moscow on January 14, 2025.
● NATALIA KOLESNIKOVA/AFP

of Mutual Relations and the Principles of Cooperation. It was initially set for 10 years but was extended up until 2026.

Iran and Russia are both subject to illegal Western sanctions. They have over

the past years deepened their cooperation in various fields.

Iran has also signed a long-gestating 25-year cooperation accord with China as both countries remain under United States sanctions.

Iran, European troika hold 'constructive' nuclear talks



Iran and European powers said they held "frank and constructive" talks on Monday about Tehran's nuclear program, just a week before US President-elect Donald Trump takes office.

It was the second round of such talks in less than two months, following a discreet meeting in Geneva last November between Tehran and the three European powers, Britain, France and Germany, known as the E3, AFP reported.

Few details were revealed about the topics discussed Monday or even the venue of the talks, but both sides said they were "constructive" and that the parties agreed to carry them on.

Iran's ISNA news agency reported that Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Majid Takht-Ravanchi met "his counterparts from the E3."

"They discussed issues of mutual interest, including negotiations for lifting sanctions, the nuclear issue and the worrying situation in the region," it added without elaborating.

Later, Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister for International Affairs Kazem Gharibabadi termed the talks as "serious, frank, and constructive."

"We discussed ideas involving certain details in the sanctions-lifting and nuclear fields that are needed for a deal," he said in a post on X.

"Sides concurred that negotiations should be resumed and to reach a deal, all parties should create and maintain the appropriate atmosphere. We agreed to continue our dialogue," he added.

British, French and German foreign affairs representatives afterwards called the talks "serious, frank and constructive."

"Against a challenging context, we discussed concerns and reiterated our commitment to a diplomatic solution. We agreed to continue our dialogue," they said in a statement posted on their X accounts.

Before the meeting, the German Foreign Ministry told AFP that the talks were "not negotiations" while Iran said they were merely "consultations."

The talks, scheduled for Monday and Tuesday, will cover a "wide range of topics," Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmaeil Baqaei said during a weekly press briefing.

"The primary objective of these talks is to remove the

sanctions" on Iran, he noted, adding that Iran was also "listening to the topics that the opposite parties want to raise."

ISNA reported that Takht-Ravanchi will meet on Tuesday separately with the European Union diplomat Enrique Mora in Geneva.

On Thursday, France's Foreign Ministry said the meeting was a sign that the E3 countries were "continuing to work towards a diplomatic solution to the Iranian nuclear program, the progress of which is extremely problematic."

The talks come with Iran's nuclear program under renewed focus in light of Trump's return to the White House on January 20.

During his first term, Trump pursued a policy of "maximum pressure," withdrawing the United States from a landmark nuclear deal which imposed curbs on Iran's nuclear program in return for sanctions relief. Tehran adhered to the deal until Washington's withdrawal, but then began rolling back its commitments.

Presidential aide says NBC to air 'important message' by Pezeshkian

International Desk

Mohammad-Mehdi Tabatabaai, an aide to the Iranian president, said NBC television will broadcast an "important message" from the President Masoud Pezeshkian on January 15.

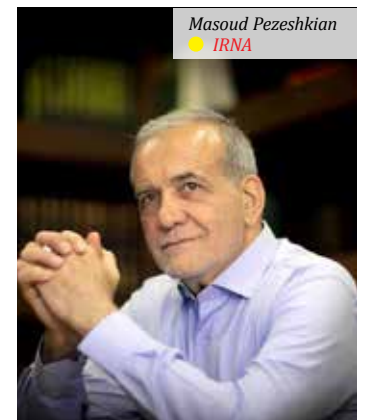
Tabatabaai, deputy director of communication and information at the presidential office, made the remarks in a message posted on his X account on Tuesday.

In his message, Tabatabaai said Iran seeks peace and de-escalation in the region and the world, condemns warmongering, encroachments, and genocide by the Israeli regime and is ready for equal and honorable negotiation. Pezeshkian has consistently advocated for regional and global peace.

"We desire friendly relations with the countries of the region and the world, and we are striving to establish peace and security both inside and outside the country," he said last month during a visit to North Khorasan province.

Since taking office in July, the Iranian president has also repeatedly called for negotiations with the West and easing tensions over the country's nuclear program in order to remove illegal sanctions imposed on Iran.

Pezeshkian's interview with the



Masoud Pezeshkian
● IRNA

American television comes days before the beginning of the US President Donald Trump's new term.

During his first term, Trump ordered the withdrawal of the US from the UNSC-endorsed 2015 nuclear agreement between Iran and world powers and re-imposed severe economic sanctions against Tehran while Iran was adhering to its commitments under the deal and even continued to do so for a year after the US withdrawal.

Tehran scaled back its commitments to the agreement in a series of pre-announced and clear steps after witnessing the other parties' failure to secure its interest under the agreement.

Mohammad Ali Rajabi
Cartoonist



Tehran-Moscow long-term ...

Given their huge gas reserves, Iran and Russia are poised to join forces in international trade and energy sectors. The agreement also opens the door for cooperation in technology, particularly new technologies, information security and cybersecurity. Peaceful nuclear energy, defense and military cooperation, as well as joint efforts in combating terrorism, environmental challenges, money laundering and organized crime, are other key components of this pact. While immediate gains from this treaty might not be around the corner, it holds the promise of significant medium to long-term benefits for Iran. Thus, the treaty is expected to go the extra mile beyond addressing current needs and capabilities, charting out a course for the

coming decades.

Mahmoud Reza Sajjadi, Iran's former ambassador to Russia, believes that the long-term economic, political and security cooperation agreement between Iran and Russia is "the largest deal" Iran has made with one of its most important neighbors that will give a boost to the Iranian economy.

"The current policies of countries in the region and much of the world are focused on moving away from a unipolar world and creating a balance of power. In this context, the Middle East and Asia, particularly Iran's position, play a crucial role," Sajjadi points out.

He highlights the economic importance of this comprehensive agreement for Iran.

"Russia, being a country with a major

economy, holds special significance for Iran as a target market."

Despite the market's allure, Sajjadi notes that Iran has yet to hit its stride and tap into its full potential due to various factors. Nevertheless, the economic opportunities between Iran and Russia are vast and Tehran should seize the moment to take advantage of these prospects.

He underscores that Iran's quest for geopolitical stability, development and strength depends on building bridges with neighboring countries through similar long-term economic and political ties. "These relationships bring about social connections, economic growth and enhanced export performance. Such a strategy can help stabilize the currency, attract foreign investments and accelerate Iran's overall economic growth."

India, Iran could bolster tourism relations with new business chamber in Isfahan

Arts & Culture Desk

The Indian Ambassador to Iran, Rudra Gaurav Shresth, announced that the establishment of an Indian Chamber of Commerce in Isfahan could enhance tourism and business communication between the two countries and facilitate the presence of investors.

During a meeting with Isfahan's Governor General, Mehdi Jamali Nejad, Shresth stated, "I am very pleased to be in Isfahan, which has been introduced to me as a major tourist destination." *ostan-es.ir* reported.

He emphasized the importance of collaboration in various sectors, asserting, "We wish to cooperate with Isfahan in all areas mentioned." He noted that despite the governor's relatively recent tenure, he would be "the best advisor for us in expanding communications."

The envoy pointed out that while political relations between India and Iran have flourished, "economic ties between our two coun-

tries have not grown as much." He expressed a desire for advancements in traditional steel knowledge, technology, and IT in Isfahan. Shresth also mentioned that many Indian families, due to the close cultural ties, have a strong interest in sending their daughters to study in Isfahan, which he labeled as a "multicultural city" that could attract Indian students.

During his visit, Shresth toured the historic Naqsh-e Jahan Square, calling it "truly unique," and believed it could serve as a central point for attracting tourists and boosting the local economy. He highlighted the potential for serious cooperation, stating, "Our economic advisor is present in Iran, and we can work together on how to attract tourists and develop the economy."

The envoy proposed that Indian companies could find market opportunities in Isfahan and welcomed the idea of joint business ventures. He stated, "We can coordinate delegations to travel to Isfahan,"

and expressed support for the establishment of a joint chamber of commerce between India and Isfahan.

In addition, Shresth mentioned the need to improve awareness of Iran among Indian tourists, suggesting that engaging Indian sports figures and filmmakers to promote tourism would be beneficial.

He noted, "Hindis do not have much information about Iran, but we can leverage the influence of cultural figures to attract tourists."

Governor Jamali Nejad welcomed the Indian tourism ambassadors to the upcoming "World Professional Tour Guides" event, set to take place in Isfahan in March. He remarked on the cultural closeness between India and Iran, expressing hope for a "bright horizon and close relationship in tourism, economic exchanges, and culture."

Despite the solid bilateral relations, Jamali Nejad pointed out that inbound tourism to Iran remains low, stating, "We have



Indian Ambassador to Iran, Rudra Gaurav Shresth (L), and Isfahan's Governor General, Mehdi Jamali Nejad, discuss ways to expand bilateral ties in Isfahan on January 13, 2025. *ostan-es.ir*

cancelled visa requirements with several countries to increase tourism to Iran, but it seems that Iran remains unknown." He urged the Indian ambassador to look more deeply into Isfahan's tourism potential. The governor emphasized Isfah-

an's historical significance, saying, "Isfahan has been recognized as a historical city and has served as the capital of Iran during three different periods." He showcased the province's rich cultural heritage, its famous artisans, and the diverse climate that

enhances its tourist appeal. In a symbolic gesture of friendship, the meeting concluded with the Indian ambassador planting a rose in the Global Peace Garden, representing the enduring ties and cooperative spirit between India and Iran.

Art one of influential areas for strengthening Iran-Turkey ties: *Official*

Arts & Culture Desk

One of the important and high-impact fields for strengthening the ties between Iran and Turkey is art, said Iran's Cultural Attaché in Turkey Qassem Nazemi.

He made the statement in the opening of a calligraphy exhibition featuring the poetry of renowned Persian poet Rumi in Ankara, Turkey.

The exhibition, which highlights works of calligraphy, gilding, and miniature painting, was inaugurated by Nazemi alongside prominent figures including Mohammad Hossein Shojaei, Deputy Ambassador of Iran, and Barış Demirci, Vice Rector of Ankara Music and Fine Arts University, IRNA reported.

He noted that both countries share numerous commonalities, particularly in traditional art forms such as calligraphy, gilding, and miniature painting.

Nazemi described the exhibition as a "bright manifestation of these valuable cultural collaborations," facilitated by the Iranian Academic Center for Education, Culture, and Research (ACECR) in partnership with Ankara university.

In a statement read at the event, Amin Mokhtari, the head of ACECR, highlighted the organization's commitment to promoting Iranian-Islamic culture and art



internationally. "One of the key priorities of our organization in the arts sector is to support the development of the cultural economy and create pathways for mutual flourishing," he remarked.

Mokhtari further elaborated on the exhibition's significance, stating it is a valuable opportunity to showcase Iranian calligraphy and introduce Rumi's timeless poetry to a global audience.

He expressed hope that the event would serve as a catalyst for expanded cultural and artistic exchanges between the two nations.

Barış Demirci emphasized the importance of academic training for artists, noting that events like this exhibition are integral to the university's mission. He expressed gratitude

to the Iranian artists for choosing the Ankara Music and Fine Arts University as the venue for this exhibition.

The exhibition features 40 works by 16 distinguished calligraphers, each proficient in various styles, including nasta'liq and shekasteh nasta'liq scripts. These creations were meticulously crafted over six months under the artistic guidance of Hamid Reza Jamshidi.

Visitors can also enjoy selected verses from Rumi in both Persian and Turkish, accompanied by soothing music, creating an immersive experience that invites them to explore the profound thoughts and messages of the poet.

The exhibition opened on January 13 and will run through January 15.

Iran ranks 1st in Mideast on medical ethics research: *Minister*

Social Desk

Iran's Health Minister Mohammad Reza Zafarqandi announced that Iran ranks first in the Middle East for its adherence to medical ethics. This distinction not only highlights the country's commitment to ethical healthcare practices but also positions Iran as a potential destination for medical tourism.

He made the remarks in a recent address at the 11th Annual Iranian Congress of Medical Ethics and the 8th Nursing Ethics Congress in Tehran, IRIB News reported.

Zafarqandi emphasized that medical and nursing ethics transcend

mere professional standards, asserting that the country has established a commendable reputation in this domain.

He noted that promoting respect and kindness within healthcare could enhance social capital, which is crucial for attracting international visitors seeking medical services.

Zafarqandi highlighted the direct correlation between ethical practice and social trust, stating that if the government lacks sincerity and compassion towards its citizens, effective treatment cannot occur. According to surveys, the medical and nursing communities are among the top three trusted social authorities in Iran, a factor



that can enhance the country's reputation as a medical tourism hub. The minister also critiqued media outlets that undermine the healthcare sector, asserting that such actions diminish social trust and patient confidence in the healthcare system.

He called for a deeper integration of ethics into professional prac-

tice, especially in educational contexts, to solidify this foundational aspect of healthcare. Reflecting on the dedication shown by medical personnel during the COVID-19 pandemic, Zafarqandi acknowledged their sacrifices and commitment, which further solidifies Iran's reputation as a caring and ethical healthcare provider.

PHOTO OF THE DAY



Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian brings early Father's Day cheer to a Tehran foster home on January 13, 2025. *president.ir*