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Narrative of weakened Iran overlooks its resilience



By Sasan Karimi

Director of Int'l Politics program at Nuclear Watch Network

OPINION EXCLUSIVE

Recently, E3 and Iran were engaged in three rounds of discussions. It seems that the nuclear issue is still occupying a paramount place in any new negotiations. Iran has repeatedly said that it stands ready to engage in a fair and objective negotiation. This readiness emanates exclusively from the self-confidence in Tehran — a fact that the global community, especially European administrations, should recognize. Should political will be lacking in European capitals, there exists a risk that unconstructive and hostile narratives may emerge, falsely depicting Iran as a weakened state desperate for negotiations. Such misrepresentations not only distort Iran's stance but also overlook its resilience. Despite enduring decades of intense pressure and its accompanying costs, Iran has consistently demonstrated its refusal to capitulate under coercion. This resistance is not merely a strategic choice but a deep-seated principle, derived from the nation's recent history. Iran's resilience has led it to a pivotal juncture characterized by two competing narratives: The first, a misleading and detrimental narrative propagated by Israel, portrays Iran as economically and militarily weakened, with its regional alliances affected and political influence waning. This view suggests that Iran's alleged vulnerabilities and supposed escalation of nuclear ambitions necessitate military intervention due to diminished deterrence. Conversely, the second narrative acknowledges Iran's achievements over four decades of unwavering resistance and self-reliance in security measures, culminating in a position of stability, self-sufficiency, and confidence. The regional resistance movements often linked with Iran are not merely extensions of its influence. Many of these groups, having predated the Islamic Republic, are driven by their own distinct objectives, shaped by decades of foreign occupation and systemic injustice. Their persistence highlights a broader regional ethos of resistance to inequality. Analysts need to recognize that these movements are not conventional proxies but legitimate entities pursuing their own aims. While Iran has provided support, this assistance aligns with their similar values and goals rather than implying direct control. Iran's inherent capabilities, including its nuclear potential, vast natural resources, military strength, and, most importantly, its national unity, remain robust. Underestimating this unity fails to appreciate the resilience of a nation that has faced significant challenges over centuries. [Page 2 >](#)



South Africa open to nuclear project bids from Russia, Iran: **Minister**

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Iran's optimal strategy against Trump, regional dynamics

INTERVIEW

Iran's regional diplomacy is a delicate balancing act, especially with the return of the US maximum pressure campaign. Tehran aims to foster friendly ties with neighbors, ensuring they do not perceive Iran as a threat. The current focus is on diplomacy, even if negotiations are off the table now due to US pressure. [See page 4 >](#)

Cognizant of Iran's prowess, enemies resorting to soft war: **Leader**

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Leader of Iran's Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei addresses a group of people from East Azarbaijan Province in a meeting in Tehran on February 17, 2025. khamenei.ir

Perpetrators of Gaza massacres accuse Iran of rights abuse: **Pezeshkian**



Iran's President Masoud Pezeshkian (L) walks toward a hall to attend a ceremony on science and research in Tehran on February 17, 2025. president.ir

International Desk

Iran's President Masoud Pezeshkian said those who have massacred more than 28,000 women and children in Gaza, portray themselves as defenders of human rights and accuse Iran of rights abuse.

"It is utmost unfairness," Pezeshkian said on Monday while addressing an official ceremony on science and research in Tehran.

Pezeshkian said that they have wreaked havoc on the region and easily bomb and bury people under rubble but no one criticizes their actions. But, when a small incident happens in Iran, they cry out that human rights have been violated in Iran. Pezeshkian said that it is obvious that Iran, like other countries, have some problems. But, the fact that such people "claim that they respect human rights and are defenders of human rights and we are not, this is the utmost unfairness."

Referring to the images of horrific bombing of residential areas in Gaza and Lebanon by the Israeli regime, Pezeshkian said that "people's hearts shiver when they see those images, and they see with their own eyes how much the human rights advocates lie."

Since October 2023, the Israeli regime has killed more than 47,000 people, mostly women and children, in Gaza and more than 3,700 people in Lebanon.

FM spox says 'US words cannot be taken seriously'

International Desk

Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baqaei reacted to the recent remarks by the US officials on Washington's eagerness for negotiations with Iran, saying, "US's words cannot be taken seriously."

Speaking at a weekly press conference on Monday, Baqaei said that, "These words cannot be taken seriously because words must be proportionate to actions. You cannot threaten to destroy on one hand and on the other hand claim that you are interested in dialogue and talks."

Since taking office in January, US President Donald Trump has frequently expressed his eagerness for talks with Iran on its nuclear program.

However, tensions between Tehran and Washington have worsened after Trump reinstated his "maximum pressure" policy on Iran over its nuclear program.

At the same time, he has called for striking a deal with Iran.

"I would like a deal done with Iran on non-nuclear. I would prefer that



to bombing the hell out of it," Trump told the New York Post, adding, "If we made the deal, Israel wouldn't bomb them."

On Wednesday, President Masoud Pezeshkian said the US president wants to negotiate with Iran while closing all the doors for negotiations. He threatens the world not to establish relations with Iran and on the other hand, he suggests that we negotiate. Pezeshkian added that Iran will not back down and will not surrender in the face of any threat.

Berri: Tehran-Beirut flight tension should be resolved via negotiation

International Desk

Lebanese Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri emphasized that a recent dispute between Tehran and Beirut over flights must be resolved through direct dialogue between the two countries.

Nabih Berri told the Lebanon's Al Joumhouria newspaper that the issue surrounding Tehran-Beirut flights should be resolved responsibly and wisely. He stressed that mistakes in this regard could plunged Lebanon into tensions that the country does not need. Berri also asserted that it is absolutely unacceptable for Israel to make decisions for Lebanon, particularly as it tries to prevent Iranian planes from landing in Lebanon.

"We are not Israel's colony, and we will not become one," Berri firmly stated. "We reject any foreign dictates that may harm our national sovereignty."

On Thursday, Lebanon's Directorate General of Civil Aviation said it had "temporarily rescheduled" some flights including from Iran until February 18 as it was implementing "additional security measures."

However, Lebanese authorities extended the suspension of inbound and outbound flights to Iran indefinitely. On Friday, two Iranian flights were barred from landing in Rafic Hariri international Airport – a move that has sparked several protests by the Lebanese people in Beirut.

Iran said in turn it would not allow Lebanese flights to land until its own flights were cleared to land in Beirut. The developments coincided with Israel's threats against Iranian planes landing in Lebanon.

Israeli military spokesman Avichay Adraee had warned the army was prepared "to thwart" any attempts to transfer funds or weapons to Hezbollah resistance group in Lebanon.



Mohammad Ali Rajabi
Cartoonist



Cognizant of Iran's prowess, enemies resorting to soft war: *Leader*



Leader of Iran's Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei greets a group of people from East Azarbaijan Province in Tehran on February 17, 2025.
president.ir

International Desk

Leader of Iran's Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei said the country's enemies have waged a soft war against the Islamic Republic as they are cognizant of Iran's "excellent" capabilities in countering harsh threats.

Addressing a group of people from the East Azerbaijan Province on Monday, Ayatollah Khamenei referred to the massive turnout in the 46th anniversary of the victory of the Islamic Revolution on February 10, saying that, "The massive march of the nation on February 10th showed that the enemy's soft threats have been ineffective against this country and this nation."

"Soft threats mean manipulating the public opinion; it means creating division; it means creating doubt in the fundamental principles of the Islamic Revolution; it means creating

doubt about steadfastness against the enemy. They are doing this," he said.

"By God's grace [however], they have not succeeded until today; until today, the enemy's temptations have not been able to shake the hearts of our people or deter our youths from their resolve and moving [forward]," the Leader added.

Ayatollah Khamenei advised the people functioning within the country's media industry, including broadcast apparatuses, authors, knowledgeable figures, cyberspace specialists, and authorities serving the education, science, and arts sectors across the nation as well as the country's youths to "focus their efforts on confronting the enemy's soft threats."

He commended the country's sufficient capability to fend off the enemies' "hard threats," noting, "Today, we have no concerns or issues re-

garding hard defense and the enemy's hard threats."

"Our ability to counter hard threats is at an excellent level, and the people feel secure in this regard."

Elsewhere during the speech, the Leader acknowledged that the Iranian people had some legitimate problems and expectations.

The predicaments, though, do not prevent the people from defending their Revolution, Ayatollah Khamenei underlined.

Ayatollah Khamenei, meanwhile, identified "the reason for the anger of the [world's] arrogant powers and colonialists towards the Islamic Republic" as "the steadfastness and resistance of the Iranian people."

He was pointing to the nation's unfaltering march towards the country's betterment and welfare in the face of illegal economic sanctions and mounting political pressure by the US and its allies.

Narrative of weakened ...

Iran's current stability and confidence are the results of a tumultuous history marked by territorial losses and periods of foreign dominance. Post-revolution, Iran has endured an eight-year war, prolonged economic sanctions, and relentless security challenges. Today, this resilience underpins its focus on development and the optimization of national interests across various domains. This strategic orientation aligns with President Pezeshkian's administration, which emphasizes growth and opportunity. Two irreversible developments since 2018 have made reaching an agreement more challenging: Firstly, Iran's advancements in nuclear technology, which are now ingrained knowledge rather than mere material or machinery, cannot be limited or reversed. Secondly, the impact on the Iranian economy and its related sectors such as development and healthcare has been profound.

Despite the sanctions of the past five years, Iran's economy has grown to a scale that defies easy disruption. Iran,

with its full spectrum of capabilities, is distinct from nations like Libya, Iraq, and Afghanistan. The only viable approach to engaging with Iran is from a stance of fairness, respect, and equality. Any deviation leads to a deadlock.

Should the West fail to seize this moment, it risks repeating historical errors, influenced not just by misperceptions but also by undue Zionist lobbying. Western policies over the past four decades have inadvertently bolstered the positions of Russia and China in Iran. By neglecting opportunities for constructive engagement, the West has relinquished influence to these powers, thereby fostering dynamics that disproportionately benefit Moscow and Beijing.

Iran presents substantial potential for regional and global collaboration. Its highly educated workforce, advanced engineering capabilities, esteemed universities, and nuclear expertise make it a valuable partner. Iran's cooperative initiatives with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) underscore its capability for meaning-

ful partnerships. Furthermore, Iran represents an untapped market and investment opportunity for Western and non-Western actors in today's post-polar world.

It is crucial to bridge the gap in mutual understanding between Iran and its counterparts. The Islamic Republic is prepared to leverage its hard-earned, self-reliant security for broader national and regional benefits. A critical step lies in the nuclear domain, where Iran's adherence to the framework of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) provides a viable pathway for progress. Instead of unnecessary escalation, constructive measures can transform this sector into a scenario beneficial for all, steering clear of historically futile confrontations.

Iran's administration envisions the future with a focus on opportunities — a moment ripe for all parties to engage constructively and achieve mutually beneficial outcomes. Parties would be better to use the opportunity of Iran's compliance with the deals and inspections.

Veep urges deepening economic ties with Turkmenistan, Tajikistan

Economy Desk

Iran's vice president described Turkmenistan as a friendly, brotherly, and neighboring country, emphasizing the need to elevate trade and economic relations through the determination of the leaders of both nations.

Mohammadreza Aref highlighted the shared civilization, history, and culture as the foundation for deepening cooperation.

The VP, speaking on Monday on the sidelines of the third Caspian Sea Economic Forum during a meeting with Khojamurad Geldimuradov, deputy chairman of the Cabinet of Ministers of Turkmenistan, stressed the Islamic Republic of Iran's serious priority to develop relations with neighboring countries.

He noted that Turkmenistan holds a special place in this strategy, citing the Leader's description of Iran and Turkmenistan as not only neighbors but also relative countries.

Aref pointed to the diplomatic and political exchanges between the high-ranking officials of both countries, stating that there are no limitations to enhancing Tehran-Ashgabat relations.

He expressed hope that the agreements and negotiations during the Turkmen delegation's visit to Iran would be operationalized and finalized as soon as possible.

The vice president proposed expanding trade exchanges between the two countries, deepening economic and trade relations with a focus on the private sector, and facilitating government support on both sides.

He also emphasized the development of relations in energy, transportation, transit, and tourism, given the cultural and civilizational commonalities between the two nations.

Aref described the Caspian Sea



Iran's Vice President Mohammadreza Aref (R) speaks with Tajikistan's Prime Minister Kokhir Rasulzoda in Tehran on February 17, 2025.
● fvpresident.ir

Economic Forum as a highly strategic opportunity to expand economic relations among the Caspian littoral states and enhance bilateral cooperation.

He noted that the forum in Tehran would address the development of relations in trade, economy, environment, tourism, and investment among the Caspian Sea countries.

The veep also stressed the importance of holding regular meetings of the Iran-Turkmenistan Joint Economic Cooperation Commission.

For his part, Geldimuradov conveyed warm and sincere greetings from the national leader and the president of Turkmenistan.

He stated that the Islamic Republic of Iran is one of Turkmenistan's largest and closest neighbors, with serious priority given to enhancing cooperation in various fields.

Geldimuradov added that diplomatic visits between the two countries' officials not only create significant opportunities but

also contribute to expanding industrial, production, investment, and trade cooperation.

He highlighted the importance of increasing the current favorable trade volume between the two nations, describing Iran as Turkmenistan's priority, strategic, long-term, and forward-looking economic partner. He also expressed gratitude for Iran's efforts in hosting the third Caspian Sea Economic Forum and expressed hope that the results of multilateral and bilateral cooperation in the Caspian region would improve the welfare of the people in the Caspian littoral states.

Expansion of economic ties with Tajikistan

Also, in a joint press conference with Tajikistan's prime minister on Monday, Aref emphasized the necessity of strengthening the Joint Economic Cooperation Commission between Iran and Tajikistan.

He stated that the commission should pursue a comprehensive



Iran's Vice President Mohammadreza Aref (R) meets with Khojamurad Geldimuradov, the deputy chairman of the cabinet of ministers of Turkmenistan in Tehran on February 17, 2025.
● fvpresident.ir

strategic plan to enhance Tehran-Dushanbe relations, aiming to significantly increase trade and economic ties in parallel with political relations.

Aref noted that the political relations between the two countries are at their best, highlighting the memorable visit of Iran's president to Tajikistan last month.

During the visit, strategic agreements for comprehensive cooperation were signed and approved by the leaders of both nations. He added that today's discussions focused on operational and executive measures to advance these agreements. The VP elaborated on the objectives of the Tajik prime minister's visit, stating that, in addition to bilateral meetings, the Tajik delegation was invited as a special guest to the Caspian Sea littoral states summit.

Aref emphasized that the economies of Iran and Tajikistan are complementary and can meet each other's needs. He stressed the importance of the private sector's involvement from both

countries, urging efforts to activate the private sector's activities and facilitate government support.

He also noted that the recent visa waiver agreement has eased travel for citizens and businesspeople between the two nations. Highlighting the capabilities of prominent Iranian companies in the region, particularly in techno-engineering services, Aref expressed Iran's readiness to cooperate with Tajikistan in these areas.

He added that high-ranking delegations from both countries will hold productive talks to further deepen bilateral cooperation.

Aref also pointed to the cultural commonalities between Iran and Tajikistan, emphasizing the need to prioritize joint tourism initiatives, given the mutual interest of citizens in visiting each other's countries.

Tajikistan's Prime Minister Kokhir Rasulzoda, during the press conference, expressed gratitude for the Islamic Repub-

lic of Iran's special attention to Tajikistan. He noted that negotiations between the two countries have always taken place in a friendly atmosphere of mutual trust and respect.

Rasulzoda referenced constructive talks between Iran and Tajikistan, particularly during last month's visit by Pezeshkian.

He stated that following the Iranian president's visit and discussions with Tajikistan's President Imomali Rahmon, bilateral relations have entered a new phase of development.

He expressed confidence that the agreements signed during that visit will provide a solid foundation for expanding cooperation in the coming years.

The Tajik PM also highlighted the increase in trade transactions, the regular meetings of the Joint Economic Cooperation Commission, and the Investment Committee between Iran and Tajikistan.

He stressed the importance of implementing a long-term trade program between the two countries until 2030 and executing a joint roadmap.

Rasulzoda reiterated Tajikistan's interest in expanding and strengthening cooperation with Iran, citing the free economic zones of both countries as key opportunities for development. He called for deeper collaboration in technical and engineering services, pharmaceuticals, technology, agriculture, energy, transportation, tourism, and the utilization of southern ports such as Chabahar and Bandar Abbas.

He concluded by emphasizing the need to develop relations in education and research, given the shared cultural, historical, and linguistic ties. He expressed his wishes for peace and stability for the people of Iran and its nation with an ancient civilization.

Hemmati: Iran fully braced for any US-orchestrated scenario

Iran's Economy Minister Abdolnaser Hemmati said the Islamic Republic has prepared various scenarios to overcome future challenges.

Hemmati made the remarks during an interview with Saudi Arabia's Al-Sharq News Network late on Sunday.

While referring to the imposition of illegal sanctions and the so-called maximum pressure campaign during the previous term of US President Donald Trump, the Iranian economy minister said that it was a bit natural the Islamic Republic implemented various methods to neutralize Washington's cruel measures.

He emphasized that both positive economic growth and ever-expanding cooperation with various countries in the region and the world have been the outcome of Iran's measures.

So far in the current Iranian calendar year, which will end on March 20, "we have had an 18-percent growth in non-oil

trade, and oil exports are also on a good trend," Hemmati said, adding that Iran has been able to leave the main stage of pressure behind and will make more efforts in this regard in the future.

"In terms of exports, we have had the experience of 2018-2020, the period when Trump was in power, and our oil exports decreased sharply, and of course, the Corona factor [COVID-19 pandemic] was added to it, and Corona too increased the pressure on our economy," the minister acknowledged, saying that these pressures somewhat affected people's lives.

Hemmati, however, looked optimistic when he said that the Islamic Republic also came up with the necessary planning to mitigate the effect of the sanctions. "We have prepared various scenarios so that we can implement our own economic agenda, and we are prepared for any situation."

He also touched on the resil-



ience of emerging economies in the face of pressures and shocks, and said, "All countries today resort to a type of cooperation and coordination against unilateral US pressure, and alliances such as BRICS and D8 are what we are trying to expand." Hemmati expressed readiness for closer cooperation with neighboring countries, saying that regional stability lies in good economic relations with each other.

Meanwhile, on the sidelines of the Conference for Emerging Market Economies, which was held in the Saudi city of Al-Ula on February 16-17, Hemmati and his Saudi counterpart Mohammed Aljadaan discussed ways to expand economic cooperation between their countries.

On Sunday evening, Hemmati and Aljadaan emphasized the importance of developing trade and customs cooperation, bilateral investment and avoiding double taxation.

They also emphasized facilitating financial processes related to Iranian Hajj pilgrims.

The Iranian economy minister traveled to Saudi Arabia on Saturday to attend the Al-Ula Conference for Emerging Market Economies co-organized by the Saudi Finance Ministry and the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

Iran and Saudi Arabia restored their relations in March 2023 under a China-brokered deal, following a seven-year hiatus. The two sides have ever since worked on expanding their ties in various sectors including politics, economy and culture.

South Africa open to nuclear project bids from Russia, Iran: Minister



South Africa (SA) could turn to Russia or Iran to expand its civilian nuclear power capacity, a senior government minister said.

SA, which operates Africa's only nuclear power plant, Koeberg, plans to add 2,500 megawatts of new capacity to tackle electricity outages that have plagued the economy and to reduce emissions, according to Reuters.

"We can't have a contract that says Iran or Russia must not bid, we can't have that condition," Minister of Mineral and Petroleum Resources Gwede Mantashe said.

"If they are the best in terms of the offer on the table, we'll take

any (country)," he told Reuters. The country is under scrutiny from Washington after US President Donald Trump issued a far-reaching executive order this month halting aid. Among other criticisms, the order claimed, without providing evidence, that SA was "reinvigorating its relations with Iran to develop commercial, military, and nuclear arrangements."

An SA tender for nuclear projects, initially planned for last year, has been delayed for further consultation following legal challenges led by the then opposition Democratic Alliance party, now part of the coalition government.

Iran's optimal strategy against Trump, regional dynamics

INTERVIEW

"In these complex and sensitive conditions, diplomacy must take precedence, and today we need this concept more than ever," emphasized Mohammad Ali Sobhani, the former Iranian ambassador to Lebanon and Qatar, highlighting the particular circumstances in the region concerning the United States. "Diplomacy is a comprehensive matter, one aspect of which is dialogue." The widespread backlash and cohesive opposition from many countries around the world—especially regional states—against the latest proposal from the US and the Israeli regime regarding the forced relocation of Gaza's population to other countries significantly diminishes the feasibility of such plans. However, it is also essential to investigate the roots and motivations behind these types of proposals. To explore the dimensions, motivations, and consequences of the troublesome schemes put forth by US President Donald Trump and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, IRNA held talks with the expert on regional affairs and former ambassador.



● MOHAMMAD ALI SOBHANI

Donald Trump's proposal for the forced relocation of Gaza's residents to Jordan and Egypt, along with Netanyahu's parallel suggestion to allocate parts of Saudi territory to the Palestinian people, has met with a unified response from Arab and Islamic countries. How do you assess the reasons behind this stance?

The existing equations among Arabs, Israelis, Palestinians, and the region were disrupted following the events after October 7. After October 7, the Israelis launched a large-scale and devastating war against the people of Gaza, conducting operations without any consideration for the Palestinians. Israel could not endure or manage this operation, which was carried out without accounting for its consequences, as it had done in the past with more limited conflicts. Consequently, in a different decision and action, they prolonged the war in Gaza for over a year until reaching this cease-fire.

The current perception among Israelis regarding the regional situation, which they have also communicated to Americans, is that the region has significantly weakened. The Palestinians have suffered a severe blow and are experiencing internal divisions. Hezbollah, which was seen as a supporter of the Palestinians, has effectively been sidelined from projecting power and support due to the cease-fire and developments in Lebanon. This perception extends to Iran, which has always played a significant role; Israel believes that Iran has also been weakened. On the other hand, Syria, given its current conditions, lacks the capability to support the resistance against Israel, and even parts of Syrian territory have been occupied in these developments.

The analysis by Israelis, along with its projection and generalization to Americans, combined with the presence of controversial figures and extremists such as Netanyahu and Trump, has resulted in a new situation. I believe that the partnership between Netanyahu and Trump poses a challenge for the entire region. This perception has led Americans and Israelis to conclude that, given the increased room for maneuver, it is opportune to undertake a larger endeavor and transform their military victory into a historic, political, and strategic achievement, thereby seeking to find lasting tranquility concerning Gaza. From their perspective, there are pathways to achieve this, one of which involves transferring Gaza to the Palestinian Authority and Mahmoud Abbas. It seems that, at this juncture, the US and Israel have moved past this solution, whereas un-



Palestinians walk past the rubble of buildings destroyed during the Israeli offensive, on a rainy day, amid a cease-fire between Israel and Hamas, in Gaza, on February 6, 2025.

● DAWOUD ABU ALKAS/REUTERS

der President Biden, there was a greater inclination towards establishing a Palestinian-Israeli state.

Another recent proposal from the US president regarding the forced relocation of Gaza's population appears to be a precursor to a larger conflict. As of now, the Egyptians, despite US proposals, are not prepared to accept Palestinians into their territory.



Egypt's Foreign Minister Badr Abdelatty (c) heads a meeting with ministers from Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the UAE to discuss US President Donald Trump's proposal for Egypt and Jordan to host Palestinians displaced from the Gaza Strip, in Cairo, Egypt, on February 1, 2025.

● KHALED DESOUKI/AFP

The forced relocation of Gaza's population could only realistically take place in Egypt due to the shared border, and the idea of relocating them to other territories such as Saudi Arabia does not seem credible. This forced relocation hinges on an agreement between Egypt and the US. If such an agreement materializes, the narrative of 1948, 1967, 1973, or even 1982 may repeat itself. In 1948, coinciding with the establishment of the Israeli state, the forced displacement of Palestinians from various ar-

eas, house-to-house seizures, massacres, and their expulsion occurred, followed by events in Jordan and the establishment of camps in all neighboring countries surrounding the occupied Palestinian territories.

At present, the question arises: will such an event be repeated, with Egypt retreating in the face of such demands and collaborating with the United States? Will Saudi Arabia accept this? My response to this issue, based on my assessment of the current conditions, is negative. This means that the Egyptians have shown absolutely no flexibility regarding such atrocities and widespread changes, and other Arabs and Muslims will not accept this either. Unfortunately, the reality is that perhaps at no other time has there been such a fragmented stance against occupation as there is today. This period can be compared to the time when Israel occupied two-thirds of Lebanon and demanded the expulsion of armed Palestinians from Lebanon. After this condition was met, they withdrew from Lebanon. Similar events occurred during the four previously mentioned periods, all of which faced the physical defeat of Arab countries and Palestinian forces, leading to a sense of Israeli victory. Currently, Tel Aviv shares this sentiment and aims to turn it into a tangible achievement.

Iran has called for an emergency meeting of Islamic countries. Given your background in the region and close cooperation with Arab and Islamic nations, what do you think the



The current perception among Israelis regarding the regional situation—and one they have communicated to the Americans—is that the region has been significantly weakened, the Palestinians have suffered severe blows, and internal divisions exist. In their view, Hezbollah, once deemed a supporter of the Palestinians, has effectively been sidelined from asserting power and support due to the cease-fire and developments in Lebanon.

diplomatic apparatus should do to counter these plans, and what agendas should be prioritized in consultations with other Islamic and Arab countries, as well as internationally?

The initiatives available to Iran and Islamic countries are currently limited. There exists a low level of trust among Islamic and Arab nations, along with various weaknesses. Syria, at present, has lost its ability to participate actively in the resistance, and due to these cumulative factors, no real initiative or operational plan has yet been formulated. At this stage, the forced relocation of people from Gaza, or potentially annexing this region to the territories occupied by Israel or turning it into an area under US control, represents a strategic transformation for which the conditions have not yet been established by either the US or Israel, nor has there been a serious initiative from countries like Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, the current Syria, or even Lebanon. A consensus and common stance among countries like Iran, Saudi Arabia, neighboring states of Palestine, as well as Turkey, Indonesia, and Malaysia, could form a powerful axis that would serve as an impactful initiative and a barrier against Israel and the US. These countries have the capability to create a broad force and alter the equation, but unfortunately, signs of this are currently absent. Both Iran's previous request for an Islamic countries conference and the recent proposal from the foreign minister to hold such a meeting are positive steps, allowing Islamic nations to present their viewpoints. However, proposing further initiatives under the current circumstances is quite challenging.

One sign of this initiative could be the establishment of robust relations between Iran and Egypt and extensive cooperation between the two countries. Neighboring countries of the occupied territories must also enhance their collaborations and reduce their differences. The firm stance of Turkey and Iran is a serious and strategic opposition to such demographic and geopolitical changes in the region; these countries must engage in serious dialogue and stand firm against any alterations. The proposal to hold this meeting and the consultations that Islamic nations provide in response to the actions of the Israeli regime and the US could be pivotal, as these threats could manifest for each country in the region. Such an agreement, if accepted by Egypt, would have significant repercussions for Cairo and would potentially destabilize the country. This means that the entry of Palestinians into Egypt, given the population and current conditions, would not be

without tension and difficulties, and numerous issues would undoubtedly arise.

How serious do you think Trump is in this positioning, and to what extent are these continuous statements part of his transactional policy aimed at applying maximum pressure in one area and maneuvering around it to gain further concessions from the opposing side, in a manner akin to the carrot and stick approach?

The negotiation method employed by the US and Israel is based on pressure, bargaining, and securing maximum demands. However, given the current conditions, I believe these statements do not seem very genuine. If they were to occur, it would likely lead to a confrontation between the US and Egypt, in which case other Islamic and Arab countries would, to some extent, stand behind Egypt. Therefore, under the current atmosphere and conditions, this forced relocation to Egypt or the claims made regarding Saudi Arabia will not be feasible.

On the other hand, it is essential to note that Turkey, Qatar, and the new Syria are currently pursuing a kind of Muslim Brotherhood inclination, which has always been problematic for Egypt. Ultimately, the internal issues of these countries will determine their positions. We are faced with diverse and complex contradictions both domestically and throughout the region, which could prove dangerous and place countries in a race to get closer to the Israeli regime and the US, revealing a significant vulnerability in the process.

We are witnessing a new directive from Trump to strictly enforce the policy of maximum pressure against Iran. As time progresses, we will need to confront increased US involvement in the Iran-phobic and re-securitization of the Iran issue. Given the regional developments and the evolving relationships between Iran and certain Arab countries, including Saudi Arabia, since 2015, do you think these countries will have the motivation to align with the US on this policy, or will they seek to ease tensions between Tehran and Washington, or at least manage them?

First, we need to assess how and to what extent the regional countries position themselves alongside Iran. I believe that if hostility between Iran and the US escalates, the regional countries will urge Trump to pursue dialogue with Iran to safeguard their own security. However, how much they are willing to invest in this effort requires careful consideration, as their stance is not solid enough to effect significant change. Over the years, Iran has sent positive messages to the regional countries, but it remains to be seen whether these messages have been sufficient to alleviate their concerns. Some regional countries feel pressure and danger from Iran, and despite knowing that any problems in the region would also harm them, they might not mind that pressures on Iran continue, as long as they do not escalate into war. Such behavior in foreign policy can be seen as competitive; while maintaining camaraderie and shared perspectives on many issues, these countries may welcome US pressures against Iran to gain more leverage and protect themselves

from threats, but only to the extent that it does not lead to conflict—rather, they seek pressures that redefine Iran's position so it no longer poses a threat to them. The policy of this government [Pezeshkian's administration], as well as those of previous administrations focused on reform, construction, and hope, is to cultivate a brotherly, friendly, and non-threatening relationship with neighbors and regional countries, ensuring that they do not genuinely perceive a threat from us and are reassured that Iran's economic strengthening will also benefit them. In contrast to this perspective, there exists another belief that neighboring countries should feel threatened and humiliated for Iran to progress; however, such an approach is not in anyone's interest. The priority is for others, especially neighbors, not to feel threatened by us, so they do not collaborate with our adversaries or condone pressures against us. This is a delicate balancing act that our policymakers must pay attention to at this stage. Currently, we are faced with specific conditions in the region and in relation to the US. In these complex and sensitive circumstances, diplomacy must take precedence, and today, we need this concept more than ever. Diplomacy is a comprehensive endeavor, one that involves dialogue, whether we are negotiating or not. At this moment, Trump has signed his specific order for maximum pressure against Iran, and Tehran has explicitly stated that it will not negotiate under such conditions. However, this does not signify the end of diplomacy; if the US and Iran find themselves on equal footing, negotiations could once again take shape, allowing us to return to a diplomatic framework.

What impact do you think Trump's proposal and Netanyahu's insistence will have on the normalization project between Islamic and Arab countries and Israel, known as the Abraham Accords? Will these stances set countries like Saudi Arabia back a few steps on this path?

It is highly likely that if the Americans attempt to operationalize their announced intentions regarding the relocation of the people of Gaza, the so-called Abraham Accords will collapse, and the concept will cease to exist. The relationship between Arabs and the US will not progress in any shared space. The Abraham Accords were founded on the basis of two independent states, Palestine and Israel, UN Security Council resolutions, and the Oslo peace negotiations. However, the current position being articulated by the US and Israel involves abandoning Gaza and relocating its people to other territories, which has no connection to the negotiations that took place previously. That said, we must see how firmly the Arabs will stand against these positions. Nonetheless, I fundamentally believe this plan somehow circles back to the Abraham Accords, as it suggests that the US and Israel want Hamas to have no presence in Gaza, and this region would ostensibly fall under the control of the Palestinian Authority. It does not seem that this forced relocation plan for the people of Gaza is the endpoint.

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

Dangerous project of Israel, US been revealed

By Mostafa Najafi
Regional affairs expert

ANALYSIS

In a rare occurrence, these statements elicited fierce reactions from Saudi Arabia. In a statement by the Saudi Foreign Ministry, while categorically rejecting Netanyahu's demands, phrases such as "ethnic cleansing," "extremist, occupying mentality," "brutal Israeli occupation," and "systematically practicing injustice towards the Palestinian people for more than 75 years" were used. At the same time, most Arab countries have also condemned Netanyahu's and Trump's statements in their own statements and have adopted a unified position against the American-Israeli plan to forcibly relocate Gaza's people.

It appears that Netanyahu's visit to America and Trump's stances regarding Iran, Gaza, and Arab countries are meaningfully linked, and a far-reaching American-Israeli plan for the entire region can be gleaned. As such, a few key points are worth mentioning:

1. Trump has repeatedly emphasized that Israel is small and needs to grow, and Netanyahu has echoed Trump's statements, saying that Israel cannot become smaller than it is. This means that Israel is unlikely to withdraw from some of the Occupied Territories and will pursue a policy of "Occupation and Annexation" with American backing. Gaza and the West Bank are the most critical points in this occupation-driven plan.
2. Behind this plan, figures such as Jared Kushner, Trump's son-in-law, likely play a significant role. In fact, Kushner had previously stated in an interview: "Gaza's waterfront property, it could be very valuable, if people would focus on building up livelihoods. It's a little bit of an unfortunate situation there, but from Israel's perspective, I would do my best to move the people out and then clean it up."
3. The "Peace Through Power" strategy seems to have made its way to the Middle East before anywhere else. There, it encompasses two major projects: the first project, "The Iran containment project," appears to have gained momentum, and we may witness major developments between Iran and the America-Israel axis in the coming months. The second project, the project to normalize relations between Arabs and Israel, which is known as "The Abraham Accords," seems to have undergone significant changes compared to the past, including increased pressure on Arab countries to abandon the independent Palestinian state project.
4. Containing and confronting Iran by America and Israel likely serves as the precursor

Recent statements by Trump and Netanyahu regarding the future of Gaza, the relocation of its people to Arab countries, and the establishment of a Palestinian government on Saudi soil have deeply shocked Arab leaders, particularly the Saudis.

Trump recently described Gaza as a "big pile of rubble" and claimed that America would take over the Gaza Strip, take responsibility for cleaning out the unexploded ordnances and other dangerous munitions left behind in the area, and develop it economically.

Trump's plan for the takeover, ownership, and violation of the sovereignty of Gaza's people, which has been met with enthusiasm by Netanyahu and Zionists, has stunned Arab and even Western leaders. A plan that has pleased Netanyahu so much that he, in his own colonialist statements, has demanded that the people of Gaza be taken to Saudi Arabia, where a Palestinian government could be established.



US President Donald Trump (R) meets with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in the Oval Office of the White House, in Washington, on February 4, 2025.
● EVAN VUCCI/AP

to the normalization project. Netanyahu's statements could confirm this claim. He said: "It's peace through strength. When we are very strong and we stand together, the objections that are raised now that it's insurmountable are going to change. When we complete the changeover in the Middle East, when we cut the Iranian axis down even further, that will set the stage for an additional agreement with the Saudis and with others." Therefore, in the new regional plan proposed by Israel and America, all obstacles and challenges must first be overcome to impose peace on the Arabs. The same "Peace Through Power"!

5. This position of America and Israel has made Arab countries more concerned than ever before as they now perceive Trump and Netanyahu's threats to their regional interests. That is why they have tried to oppose it with a

Palestinians return to the northern Gaza Strip on January 27, 2025.
● KHALIL KAHLOUT/FLASH90



Containing and confronting Iran by America and Israel likely serves as the precursor to the normalization project. Netanyahu's statements could confirm this claim. He said: "It's peace through strength. When we are very strong and we stand together, the objections that are raised now that it's insurmountable are going to change. When we complete the changeover in the Middle East, when we cut the Iranian axis down even further, that will set the stage for an additional agreement with the Saudis and with others."

public statements of Netanyahu, Trump, and American and Israeli officials.

8. It appears that Netanyahu does not want to miss the opportunities Trump's America has offered him. In such a situation, the likelihood of growing tensions and major clashes in the region is very high. Despite the current calm, it seems that Israel's security and military plans, with Trump's backing, are entering a new phase in the region.

The article first appeared in Persian on IRNA.

AFC U20 Asian Cup:

Iran eager to end the title drought, Zamani says after Yemen hammering

Sports Desk

Iran's Abolfazl Zamani hopes his team can build on a flying start to the AFC U20 Asian Cup in China to walk away with the elusive crown on the final day. The Esteghlal midfielder found the net twice in the first half, with Esmail Qolizadeh, Reza Ghandipour, and Abolfazl Zoleikhaei also on the scoresheet, coupled with a Mohammed Moqbel's own goal, as Iran routed 10-man Yemen 6-0 in its second game in China. The victory left Hossein Abdi's boys, who had beaten Indonesia 3-0 in their opener, on top of the Group C table with six points – thanks to a superior goal difference over defending champion Uzbekistan. "The team's effort was amazing. I'm happy I could contribute to this victory. I hope we can score more goals in the next game and advance to the next stage with a strong goal difference," Zamani said after the game. "Our main focus is to maintain a solid defense, avoid conceding goals, and defeat our opponents with as many goals as possible. Yemen is a good team, but we performed better. Hopefully, with the team's continued effort, we can

continue the perfect run to finish atop the group," added the Iranian. The top spot in the group will be on the line when Iran and Uzbekistan square off in Shenzhen on Wednesday. The top two in each group will progress to the last-eight round, with the four semifinalists qualifying for September's U20 World Cup in Chile. "Our goal is to qualify for the under-20 World Cup and become Asian champions once again," Zamani added. Iran dominated the Asian competition in the 70s by winning four titles, but have only managed to reach the last four on three occasions since lifting a last trophy in 1976. Meanwhile, head coach Hossein Abdi, who led Iran to the U17 World Cup last 16 in 2023, was pleased with his team's defensive solidity against Yemen. "We were prepared for a tough match, as we knew Yemen would put up a strong resistance. But after they were reduced to 10 men, it became easier for us to secure the three points," said Abdi. "It would have been a good contest to face a full-strength Yemen team, as they were a very confident team. "We scored some good



goals, but football at this stage is also about development, and we would have preferred to face Yemen with all their players on the pitch. "I told my players to take their feet off the gas and

control the game after the sixth goal [in the 72nd minute] as we wanted to avoid bookings and injuries ahead of our future games in the tournament," added the Iranian coach. Yemen head coach Mo-

ammed Hasan Ali cut a despondent figure after seeing his side eliminated from the tournament. "I'm proud of my players even though we lost today," said Ali. "We played really well and controlled the

game at the start, but after the red card, my players found it tough to cope. "After trailing by five goals, the players were really demotivated, and it was hard for them to stay focused in the second half."



Iranian midfielder Abolfazl Zamani (16) celebrates after scoring a goal during a 6-0 victory over Yemen at the AFC U20 Asian Cup in Shenzhen, China, on February 16, 2025. ● AFC



2025 World Rowing Indoor Championships: Iranians grab double golds on first weekend

Sports Desk

Iranians collected four medals, including double golds, on the first weekend of action at the 2025 World Rowing Indoor Championships, which is held virtually using ergometer machines. Amirreza Ebdali clocked 01:23.1 minutes to take the bronze medal in the men's lightweight 500m final, finishing behind Finland's Joonas Makipelto (01:21.9) and Egyptian Adham Mahgoub

(01:22.5). Ebdali's record saw the Iranian beat Egypt's Youssef Moursy to the gold medal in the 19-20 age group of the category. A second gold medal for Iran came in the women's 19-20 age class, where Saqi Maleki walked away with the ultimate prize in the lightweight 500m event, thanks to a fastest time of 01:38.3 minutes, while finishing fourth in the overall standings.

Meanwhile, Mohammad-Ebrahim Doulabi, representing Iran in the para athletes' competitions, settled for a third-place finish in the men's PR2 500m final with 01:48.2 minutes, trailing Yigit Dogukan Bozkurt of Turkey (01:39.7) and Latvia's Kristis Mickēvičs (01:43.5). The eighth edition of the annual event will continue with the second and final weekend on February 22-23.

CAFA Women's Futsal Championship: Iran routs Tajikistan to lift fourth successive title

Sports Desk

Iranian women cruised to a fourth title in as many CAFA Futsal Championship editions thanks to a 10-1 hammering of host Tajikistan at the Dushanbe Indoor Hall on Saturday. Fereshteh Karimi and Maral Torkaman scored twice apiece, with Zahra Kianimanesh, Mahtab Banaei, Roqayyeh Some'eh, Fatemeh Hosseini Nasimeh Gholami, and Mahsa Ali-Madadi also finding the net as Iran made a clean sweep of four victories in Tajiki-

stan. Iran was in a league of its own in the competition – featuring five Central Asian teams in a round-robin format – as Forouzan Soleimani's girls scored 34 goals, while conceding only twice, across the four games. Iran began the event with a 9-0 rout of eventual runner-up Uzbekistan, and then eased to comfortable victories over the Kyrgyz Republic (10-0), Turkmenistan (5-1). Torkaman picked up the Best Player prize, while finishing atop the top scorers' chart with 10 goals.

The event was part of the Iranian girls' preparation for May's AFC Women's Futsal Asian Cup, which will resume after a seven-year hiatus in China. Soleimani's side will begin its bid for a third successive title with a game against the Philippines on May 7, before squaring off against Vietnam and Hong Kong in Group B. The top three of the 12-team tournament will punch their tickets for the inaugural FIFA Futsal Women's World Cup – starting November 21 in the Philippines.



Olasbelangah, where clouds embrace highlands



Iranica Desk

Olasbelangah village is one of the lush and picturesque highlands in northern Iran and a notable site in Masal, located 80 kilometers west of Rasht and 30 kilometers southwest of Masal. With its unique beauty and ocean of clouds, Olasbelangah is considered one of the best destinations for nature tourism. Spring and summer are the ideal times to visit, offering the chance to enjoy the pristine nature of the region. Situated at an altitude of 1,489 meters above sea level, Olasbelangah boasts enchanting landscapes. The highland is under the supervision of Natural Resources Organization, and construction with materials other than wood is prohibited, which helps preserve the area's natural beauty. Additionally, Olasbelangah is not connected to an electricity grid; the electricity needed in the village is

supplied by generators and solar panels. The village also lacks piped water, relying instead on fresh, flowing springs. Interestingly, Olasbelangah plunges into silence and tranquility after midnight, so if you plan to wander around at this hour, it's advisable to bring a flashlight, kojaro.com wrote. The captivating nature of Olasbelangah invites visitors to spend the night under its starry sky. Camping in this highland is a delightful experience, promising a unique night in its embrace. For those who prefer accommodations, Olasbelangah offers several hotels and lodges for a memorable stay. You can also rent a cabin, allowing you to connect with the warm-hearted locals of the region. The residents of Olasbelangah lead a simple lifestyle, reflected in their modest homes. While exploring the lush surroundings, you may see horses

grazing freely and cows feeding on the fresh grass, which provides delicious milk, yogurt, butter, buttermilk, and cheese. During your trip to Olasbelangah, you can purchase fresh, natural products from the village, such as honey and dairy items, to take home as souvenirs for friends and family. The entire highland is teeming with greenery and freshness, featuring wooden cottages, herds of wild and domestic horses, and the village's cows, creating a stunning picturesque scene. One of Olasbelangah's attractions is its pristine, untouched rural atmosphere, characterized by simple wooden houses. The wooden cottages built on the slopes, with their sloping roofs, offer beautiful views alongside mountains filled with beech trees. The beauty of Olasbelangah is significantly enhanced when enveloped in soft, velvety white clouds. The ocean of clouds is

most prominent from mid-May until the end of summer, with May and June being the best months to witness this dreamy landscape.

Activities

Photography: There are numerous subjects to capture, including herds of wild horses, wooden houses and cottages, the ocean of clouds, mist-covered mountains, and the warm-hearted locals.

Horse riding: You can often ride the domestic horses of the region. Be cautious, as some areas have steep slopes.

Nature walks: Exploring the natural surroundings is another enjoyable activity in Olasbelangah. Stroll through different parts of this beautiful highland and breathe in the fresh air.

Picnicking: Don't miss the opportunity to relax in the beautiful nature of Masal. Just lay out a mat and enjoy traditional bread and tea with your loved ones.

Olasbelangah, regarded as one of the scenic spots around Rasht, showcases its enchanting beauty in every season. The best time to travel to this dreamy highland is during spring and summer, particularly from mid-May after the spring rains have concluded.

In autumn, the natural beauty of this highland transforms into a colorful and picturesque landscape, making it a delightful sight. However, during winter and autumn, Olasbelangah experiences very cold weather, so if you plan to visit during this time, be sure to bring warm clothing and necessary equipment.

Whether you choose to camp under the stars or stay in local accommodations, Olasbelangah promises a unique and memorable experience, allowing you to connect with the stunning nature and kind-hearted people of the region.



Shokatieh School; a pillar of knowledge in South Khorasan Province

Iranica Desk

The Shokatieh School is one of the historical buildings in the city of Birjand, South Khorasan Province. Recognized as the third Iranian school established in the modern style, it follows the traditional *maktab khaneh* (educational institutions). Currently, the building is 124 years old. Construction of the Shokatieh School began in 1890, funded by the endowments of Amir Esmail Khan, known as Shokat al-Mulk I, and was completed in 1894. After the Dar ul-Funun Higher School and shortly after the Roshdiyeh Primary School in Tabriz, the Shokatieh School in Birjand is acknowledged as

the third school of this new type in Iran. Initially functioning as an elementary school, a high school was later added, and in 1922, the Emarat Qaleh Girls School was opened, ISNA wrote. The historic Shokatieh School is located adjacent to Montazeri (Khaki) Street within the historical fabric of Birjand. The building is situated in an alley with a relatively steep incline, positioned lower than the street level, with entrances found at its lowest point. Constructed in the Iranian desert architectural style, the Shokatieh School is designed for four seasons, featuring a central

courtyard surrounded by connected spaces. The courtyard occupies a significant portion of the building, paved with bricks, and in the center lies a pond with a platform approximately 30 centimeters high. The entrance boasts a vaulted arch decorated with intricate stucco work. This school is a single-ivan structure with a tall and magnificent ivan. Its architecture includes elements typical of Iranian design, such as the entrance, vestibule, corridors, ivan, rooms surrounding the courtyard, *shahneshin*, and a bath. The building has two entrances: one on the southern side and the other on the western side.

The design of the Shokatieh School, utilizing the central courtyard, achieves optimal functionality and creates balanced environmental conditions. Inside, a beautiful *kolah firangi* (a hexagon shaped building) can be found in the hall, adorned with exquisite decorative patterns. Additionally, the building features stunning stucco work, decorative brackets, and intricate brickwork. The Shokatieh School has played a significant role in enriching the science and culture of Birjand, Greater Khorasan, the East, and other regions of the country. Many of its graduates have excelled on national and international stages, contributing valuable services to the academic community.





Iran to deploy tourism, handicraft attachés in embassies: *Minister*



Arts & Culture Desk

Iran's Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts Reza Salehi Amiri announced a plan to deploy tourism and handicraft attachés in select embassies worldwide. This initiative, which is set to be executed in collaboration with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, is expected to target key countries to promote exports and support the labor force in the sector. Salehi Amiri elaborated on this plan in an interview with ILNA, revealing that discussions had already been held with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. "We have had multiple meetings with Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi, where we

presented both written and oral proposals to establish specialized efforts in promoting handicraft exports in several countries," Salehi Amiri said. "These countries include those in the Nowruz region, the Persian Gulf, as well as India, China, Pakistan, Turkey, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Russia." One of the key issues the minister raised was the lack of job security for workers in Iran's handicraft sector, particularly women. "Among the 573,000 individuals working in this field, 80 percent are women," he explained. "In addition, around one million housewives are producing handicrafts from their homes, contributing to the sector." The minister also pointed to

the challenges in marketing and exporting Iranian handicrafts. "Producers lack the necessary resources for marketing, and it is essential that the government steps in to support them," he said. "We must help these artisans develop products that meet modern tastes. For example, some modern Iranian garments now feature traditional embroidery, a great example of the blend of tradition with current fashion." Salehi Amiri highlighted the issue of foreign exchange constraints, which is preventing many artisans from obtaining the raw materials needed for production. "We need to address the bottleneck caused by currency restrictions. Our

handicraft sector is looking for solutions to make the export process more efficient," he stated. In addition to addressing these internal challenges, Salehi Amiri noted the importance of promoting the Persian rug industry, which, although not under the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts at the moment, may eventually fall under its jurisdiction. "We are currently in discussions with the Ministry of Industry, Mine, and Trade to bring the National Carpet Organization under our ministry," he revealed. "There are technical issues that still need to be resolved, but we are hopeful for a positive outcome."

Fajr festival unites Armenia, Iran through shared musical heritage



Arts & Culture Desk

The 40th International Fajr Music Festival has provided a platform for deepening cultural ties between Armenia and Iran, with a memorable performance by Armenian musicians Levon Tevanyan and Aram Asatryan. Armenia's Ambassador to Iran, Grigor Hakobyan, who attended the concert alongside Ahmad Sadri, the head of the Music Office at the Iranian Ministry of Culture, praised the event as a vital step toward

enhancing bilateral cultural and artistic relations. Speaking to IRNA, Hakobyan stressed that there are no limitations on developing cultural and artistic collaborations between the two nations. "Such joint events allow both countries to appreciate each other's arts and culture, and I believe they bring us closer," he added. He noted that the performance, which blended Iranian and Armenian music, offered a beautiful opportunity for Armenian musicians to showcase

national and folk music alongside the rich musical traditions of Iran. "It was a wonderful fusion," Hakobyan said, "and the similarities between Iranian and Armenian melodies were striking." The ambassador expressed hope that similar programs will be held more frequently in the future, as there are no barriers to further artistic cooperation. "We're already working on laying the groundwork for more cultural initiatives, and soon you will see these ideas come to life," Hakobyan added. Meanwhile, Sadri discussed the importance of musical dialogue between the two nations, citing the shared presence of the duduk, a traditional Armenian woodwind instrument, as an example of the common musical ground between Iran and Armenia. "The presence of duduk in

both countries makes for an interesting exchange of musical dialogue, especially with Iran's western regions, where such instruments are also popular," Sadri explained. Sadri, who is also working closely with Hakobyan, revealed plans to organize future musical festivals and joint performances. "Our initial talks have been promising, and we hope to collaborate on festivals that bring together musicians from both cultures," he said. "This is just the beginning." During the concert, Tevanyan and Asatryan showcased works by famed Armenian composer Komitas, along with traditional Armenian folk pieces and medieval Armenian music. Tevanyan expressed his admiration for the Fajr Festival, noting the significance of being invited to perform at such a well-regarded event.

Iranian short film 'Ant' sweeps three awards at India's Paridrishya festival

Arts & Culture Desk

The Iranian short film 'Ant' triumphed at the Paridrishya Film Festival, in India, winning all three major awards in the main competition. Directed, written, and produced by Farhad Shantiaei, the film earned widespread recognition at the festival, which took place on February 1-2, 2025, in Karnataka, India, ILNA reported. 'Ant', Shantiaei's directorial debut, was nominated for three major awards in the festival's primary categories. The film went on to win Best Actor for Mehdi Ghorbani, Best Screenplay for Shantiaei himself, and

Best Sound Design, awarded to Sadegh Nikfarman, Omid Mohammadi-Pour, and Hossein Mashal. The 30-minute film, which portrays the emotional journey of a deaf young man who regains his hearing only to retreat into silence after hearing the secrets of his closest relatives, has earned praise for its poignant storytelling and powerful performances. Ghorbani's role as the protagonist, struggling with the newfound burden of his hearing, played a key part in the film's success. Following its international debut and a string of accolades at both domestic and international festivals, Ant



is set to be screened soon in the Art and Experience section of Iranian theaters. This win at Paridrishya Film Festival comes after 'Ant' also clinched two awards at the 8th Human Cinema Festival held in Chelyabinsk, Russia, in April 2024. At the Russian festival, the film won the Best Foreign Film award in the main competition and was also honored with the Best Feature Film award by the student jury.

Iran's health official warns of polio threat from neighboring countries

Social Desk

Iran's Deputy Health Minister Alireza Raisi expressed concerns over the growing risk of polio entering Iran from neighboring Afghanistan and Pakistan, where the disease remains a significant challenge. Raisi highlighted the rapid increase in polio cases in these countries, signaling an urgent need for enhanced vaccination efforts across Iran, especially in high-risk areas. Raisi explained that the proximity of Iran to two polio-endemic nations—Afghanistan and Pakistan—places the country at constant risk. The ongoing flow of both legal and illegal migrants between these countries

and Iran contributes to the danger, with frequent border crossings raising the likelihood of the virus spreading into Iran. "Given the political upheavals in Afghanistan in recent years and the persistent circulation of the virus in both Pakistan and Afghanistan, the threat of polio entering Iran has escalated," Raisi said. He pointed to a dramatic 12-fold increase in polio cases in Pakistan and a fourfold rise in Afghanistan in 2024, compared to the previous year. The deputy minister also emphasized the importance of Iran's long-standing polio eradication strategy, noting that supplementary immunization campaigns, carried out since 1994,

have been crucial in maintaining Iran's status as a polio-free country since 2000. He confirmed that these year's vaccination efforts will continue in the form of active, house-to-house campaigns aimed at children under five in high-risk areas. These efforts will employ oral polio vaccine (OPV) drops, and both Iranian and non-Iranian children in the targeted regions will be vaccinated. "The first phase of this year's campaign took place between January 4 and 6 in 22 medical universities across provinces such as Sistan and Baluchestan, Hormozgan, South Kerman, and Khuzestan," Raisi added. "The second phase is underway from February 15 to 17."



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