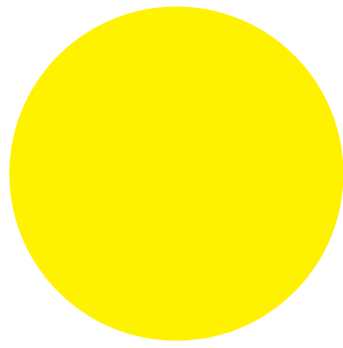


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OPINION Belgrade, a city of history and nature, lies at the confluence of the Danube and Sava rivers in the Balkan Peninsula. It is the new destination for a foreign mission aimed at advancing relations focused on technology diplomacy. This city, with its captivating blend of modern structures, historical landmarks, churches, and fortresses from the Ottoman and European eras, bridges the past and the future. Its strategic and geopolitical position makes it a gateway to the European continent. Following visits to Cuba, Venezuela, Kazakhstan, and the United Arab Emirates, we now head to Serbia—a vibrant and motivated country. Thanks to the calm in diplomatic relations, Serbia has become Iran's largest trading partner in the Balkan region. [See page 3 >](#)

New US sanctions bespeak 'hostility' to Iranian nation: *FM spox*

International Desk

The spokesperson for Iran's Ministry of Foreign Affairs strongly denounced new US sanctions targeting dozens of brokers, tanker operators, and shipping companies for their role in selling and transporting Iranian petroleum.

"Making decisions about economic and commercial interactions with countries is part of the legal right of nations to self-determination," Esmail Baghaei said on Tuesday night, adding that no party has the right to use political excuses to obstruct or disrupt their commercial and economic relations. Baghaei further pointed out that the imposition of new sanctions by the US against Iran's foreign trade is contrary to the principles of the United Nations Charter, especially "the principle of respect for national sovereignty and self-determination of nations," as well as against international laws governing free trade among countries.

"Therefore, it is considered unjustified, illegitimate, and a violation of the human rights of the Iranian people," he said, calling for international accountability of the US government.



The spokesperson for Iran's Ministry of Foreign Affairs Esmail Baghaei

● IRNA

The spokesperson pointed to assertions by some US officials about their willingness to engage in talks with Iran, describing the new sanctions as the strongest evidence of their insincerity and "hostility to the well-being, development, and happiness of the great Iranian people."

"The Iranian nation — fully aware of the United States' long history of hostile and interventionist policies as well as its repeated breaches of commitments toward Iran — will continue on its path toward progress, dignity, and independence," Baghaei stated.

The US Treasury and the US State departments on Monday sanctioned a combined total of 22 persons — including the heads of Iran's National Iranian Oil Co., and the Iranian Oil Terminals Co. — and identified 13 vessels as blocked property, across multiple jurisdictions, for their involvement in brokering the sale and transportation of Iranian oil.

This is the second round of sanctions imposed on Iranian



oil sales since US President Donald Trump issued the so-called National Security Presidential Memorandum 2, which

seeks to bring Iran's crude exports to zero. Iran has long been subjected to Western sanctions over its

nuclear activities and other pretexts. The Trump administration has escalated these measures since

taking office, reinstating the so-called maximum pressure policy, a campaign of hybrid warfare targeting Iran.

Tehran to hold talks with European troika in coming weeks



International Desk

A senior Iranian diplomat said Tehran and the European troika — France, Germany, and Britain — would likely hold meetings within the next three weeks.

Kazem Gharibabadi, Iran's deputy foreign minister for legal and international affairs, made the remarks on Tuesday, stressing that Iran's talks with any country are solely based on the national interests and security of the Islamic Republic.

Referring to the latest round of talks with political directors of the three European countries, he added that they were conducted as a continuation of the discussions from the three previous rounds held in Geneva and New York. "We agreed to continue our interactions. The issue is of importance, covering the lifting of sanctions as well

as the nuclear issue and the expectations of both sides," Gharibabadi said in an interview with Iran's Tasnim news agency.

"After the Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei announced the principled policy regarding negotiations with the United States, this has become a policy and a line that we must all follow. Naturally, the Islamic Republic of Iran has always rejected negotiations under sanctions and pressure, and this time as well, this stance must be pursued with strength," he further said.

Back on February 7, the Leader rejected holding talks with Washington, stressing that experience has shown that negotiations with the US have no effect on solving Iran's problems.

"Of course, this does not mean that we will not have dialogues with other coun-

tries, including the Europeans. Therefore, on the sidelines of [Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas] Araghchi's trip to Geneva to attend the Disarmament Conference and the Human Rights Council, I held a meeting with the political directors of the three countries," Gharibabadi added on Wednesday.

He noted that both sides agreed to continue the discussions at a more technical and specialized level, and that the two sides would probably "meet again within the next three weeks, while our experts continue to engage in further discussions and evaluations."

"However, our efforts are not solely limited to negotiations with the European parties; we are also pursuing other initiatives," Gharibabadi emphasized, adding, "We do not link our policies to the positions of other countries; we pursue our own interests."

"We do not put all our expectations and hopes into the basket of a potential rift between Europe and the United States. We always plan for worst-case scenarios."

In 2015, Iran proved the peaceful nature of its nuclear program to the world by signing the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) with six world powers. However, the US's unilateral withdrawal in 2018 and its subsequent re-imposition of sanctions against Tehran left the future of the deal in limbo.

Top Iranian officials meet Hezbollah chief in Beirut

International Desk

Iran's Parliament Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf and Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi held talks with the secretary general of Lebanon's resistance movement Hezbollah in Beirut.

Lebanon's al-Manar media outlet reported on Wednesday that Qalibaf and Araghchi met with Sheikh Naim Qassem before leaving Lebanon. Mojtaba Amani, Iran's ambassador to Beirut, also attended the meeting.

The Iranian officials and the Hezbollah leader exchanged views on the latest developments in Lebanon and the broader region.

Qalibaf and Araghchi were in Lebanon to attend the funeral ceremony of Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, the long-time leader of Hezbollah, and the chief of the resistance movement's Executive Council, Sayyed



Hashem Safieddine, which was held in the Lebanese capital on Sunday.

Nasrallah, who had been the leader of Hezbollah for over 30 years, was killed in an Israeli air strike on southern Beirut on September 27 last year. The same large-scale air strike also resulted in the death of Abbas Nilforoushan, a high-ranking commander in Iran's Quds Force.

Safieddine had been selected to succeed Nasrallah but was later killed in another Israeli strike.



Iran's Parliament Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf (c) and Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi (l) meet with Sheikh Naim Qassem, the secretary general of Lebanon's resistance movement Hezbollah, in Beirut, Lebanon, on February 25, 2025.

● IRNA

In response to their deaths, Iran launched approximately 200 missiles at Israel in October as an act of retaliation. Hezbollah postponed funeral ceremonies for both leaders due to fears of Israeli attacks on the ceremony.

Nuclear chief calls on IAEA to act professionally

International Desk

Mohammad Eslami, head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI), urged the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to maintain professional conduct and avoid politicized approaches. Speaking to reporters on the sidelines of a weekly cabinet meeting in Tehran on Wednesday, Eslami said the AEOI is in contact with the UN nuclear agency and is being monitored by it. He noted that the IAEA inspectors conduct their rou-

tine inspections in Iran on schedule and on a daily basis. Deploring the attempts by the European troika to mount pressures on the IAEA to prepare a report against Iran, Eslami called on the UN nuclear agency to protect the rights of all member states in accordance with the law.

He further emphasized that the IAEA should act professionally, refrain from politicization and political bias, and ensure its actions are guided by legal frameworks. Eslami expressed hope that the IAEA would not become

a tool for exerting pressure or implementing illegal measures against Iran.

Tehran has consistently emphasized the peaceful nature of its nuclear programs, asserting compliance with international regulations.

Historically, Iran has allowed extensive IAEA inspections, demonstrating its commitment to transparency and peaceful nuclear activities. Even after the US withdrew from the JCPOA in 2018, Iran maintained cooperation with the IAEA while urging the agency to remain impartial.

Iran chairs TRACECA intergovernmental commission

Roads minister stresses integration of corridor infrastructure

Economy Desk

The minister of roads and urban development emphasized the integration of corridor infrastructure among TRACECA member states during the 17th meeting of the group hosted by Tehran, where the members highlighted the importance of unifying transportation processes and digitizing them.

On Wednesday, Farzaneh Sadeq-Malvajerd, speaking at the meeting of the heads of the Intergovernmental Commission of the Europe-Caucasus-Asia Corridor (TRACECA), told reporters that achieving this goal would lead to increased transit and transportation, ultimately fostering regional development.

Sadeq-Malvajerd noted that Iran's hosting of the TRACECA conference and the organization of related meetings and events demonstrate the initiative of the Ministry of Roads and Urban Development in advancing transit and managing regional transit relations to enhance regional connectivity and solidify development.

The minister pointed out that the TRACECA corridor comprises 14 countries from Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, and Central Asia, with 12 members attending the 17th meeting hosted by Iran. Starting today, the Islamic Republic of Iran will chair TRACECA for one year.

She emphasized that when discussing the groundwork

and integration of transportation processes, facilitating customs procedures in Iran and other member states will be one of the most critical areas of cooperation.

Sadeq-Malvajerd also stressed that Iran's primary agenda during its TRACECA chairmanship will be completing transit infrastructure in the country to facilitate the integration and digitization of processes.

She stated that due to Iran's central role in this matter, the result will undoubtedly be an increase in transit through the country.

Sadeq-Malvajerd added that unjust sanctions have not hindered Iran's initiative in regional transit, and the presence of TRACECA members in Iran is proof of this. She said that all 14 TRACECA members, including Iran, aim to achieve significant growth in regional transit by completing the North-South and East-West corridors.

The minister emphasized that affordable and smooth transit through Iran is one of the most important objectives being pursued.

She noted that due to Iran's unique geopolitical position, it is naturally the preferred choice for transit by many countries.

Sadeq-Malvajerd stated that increasing the share of rail transport would lead to safer and more reliable transit, along with fuel savings. However, transit development encompasses road, rail, and mar-

itime routes, and plans must be made in all these areas.

The cabinet member highlighted that securing resources in development budgets will help complete the mentioned corridors, utilizing both domestic and foreign investments and asset optimization.

Establishment of TRACECA investment fund

In response to a question about the establishment of a TRACECA investment fund, Sadeq-Malvajerd said the proposal was put forward by representatives from Romania, Turkey, and two other countries and will be discussed, reviewed, and examined by the TRACECA secretariat.

She emphasized that the establishment of this joint fund would help develop economic and trade relations among member states.

When asked about India's involvement in Chabahar Port following the Trump administration's taking office in January, the minister clarified that Iran's communications with India regarding the development of Chabahar Port continue.

Iran as key link in TRACECA

Also on Wednesday, the TRACECA secretary-general stated that Iran serves as a vital link among TRACECA member states, providing access to the Persian Gulf for member countries.



Minister of Roads and Urban Development Farzaneh Sadeq-Malvajerd speaks at the meeting of the heads of the Intergovernmental Commission of the Europe-Caucasus-Asia Corridor (TRACECA) in Tehran on February 26, 2025. MRUD

On the sidelines of the 17th TRACECA Intergovernmental Commission meeting, Asset Assavbayev thanked Iran for hosting the high-level sessions and noted that this is the first time Iran has hosted the TRACECA Intergovernmental Commission meeting since joining the organization. He highlighted the importance of Iran's agenda during its one-year chairmanship of the TRACECA Intergovernmental Commission, emphasizing Iran's role as a connecting link among member states and its provision of access to the Persian Gulf.

The secretary-general expressed hope that during Iran's chairmanship, favorable conditions for transit, exports, and imports among member states would be established. Assavbayev stated that to better utilize transit routes through Iran, border crossings, rail, and maritime infrastructure must be improved to encourage member states to prefer transit through Iran.

He added that the approval of a transit agreement among TRACECA member states would facilitate the smooth transportation of goods across their borders.

The secretary-general noted that harmonizing customs tariffs and border crossings for cargo transit from Kazakhstan to Turkey and then to Europe would increase other countries' interest in using Iran's routes.

He emphasized that since Central Asian countries lack access to open waters, Iran's route and infrastructure development would provide member states with access to open seas for cargo transport. The TRACECA Intergovernmental Commission includes 14 members from Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, Iran, Central Asian countries, and Turkey, collectively forming this East-West corridor network.

This marks the first time Iran has hosted the meeting of the TRACECA.

Pursuing Iran's technology diplomacy in Europe



By Seyed Sattar Hashemi
Iran's minister of ICT

OPINION Belgrade, a city of history and nature, lies at the confluence of the Danube and Sava rivers in the Balkan Peninsula. It is the new destination for a foreign mission aimed at advancing relations focused on technology diplomacy.

This city, with its captivating blend of modern structures, historical landmarks, churches, and fortresses from the Ottoman and European eras, bridges the past and the future. Its strategic and geopolitical position makes it a gateway to the European continent.

Following visits to Cuba, Venezuela, Kazakhstan, and the United Arab Emirates, we now head to Serbia—a vibrant and motivated country. Thanks to the calm in diplomatic relations, Serbia has become Iran's largest trading partner in the Balkan region.

Trade between the Islamic Republic of Iran and Serbia reached €120 million in 2023, marking a 100% growth. Coupled with Serbia's average GDP growth rate of over 3% in the past five years, this sets a logical and evident expectation for continued economic growth and expanded cooperation between the two nations.

Over the past six months, the Ministry of ICT has repeatedly demonstrated its commitment to leveraging technology diplomacy to enhance economic and trade collaborations. During this visit to Serbia, we aim to deepen cooperation between technology companies in the fields of information and communications, as well as to pursue shared interests.

Meetings have been arranged with Serbian counterparts, including the Minister of Information and Telecommunications and the Minister of Science, Technological Development, and Innovation. These discussions will highlight Iran's readiness to exchange experiences, deepen collaborations, and provide diverse infrastructure for digital transformation and the promotion of a digital economy. Additionally, the implementation of previous memoranda of understanding, such as increasing postal traffic between the two countries, will be pursued.

Proposals from Iran in the upcoming negotiations include establishing a joint investment fund to support digital innovations, facilitating e-commerce processes, increasing imports and exports of technological products, launching and maintaining data centers, fostering cooperation between technology parks, and developing joint solutions to enhance cybersecurity. In this context, the signing of a joint cooperation document between Tehran and Belgrade, focused on creating and expanding cloud infrastructure and defining joint projects in artificial intelligence, underscores the determination and interest of both countries in building strong bilateral relations.

Serbia's current presidency of the Global Partnership on Artificial Intelligence (GPAI) and the activities of the Iran Chamber at the Department of Oriental Studies at the University of Belgrade over the past five years provide additional platforms for shaping and enhancing scientific and research collaborations between the two nations. The Islamic Republic of Iran's approach to bilateral relations with Serbia emphasizes respect for the 87-year history of their ties and mutual respect despite differences, aiming to maintain stability and sustainability. Capacity-building for expanding cooperation in less-explored areas of communications and information technology is crucial, especially given that the economic prosperity of both countries depends heavily on advancing technological and innovative developments in the ICT industry. Key potential opportunities in the bilateral relationship include visa-free travel for Serbian citizens to Iran with a one-month stay allowance, Serbia's position as Iran's largest trading partner in the Balkans, and the readiness to implement joint projects in nanotechnology, biotechnology, and academic exchanges.

We hope that these potentials, through expanded interactions and continued negotiations in the coming months, will create fruitful opportunities and complement the capacities of Iran and Serbia in new areas of information and communication technology. With a focus on technology diplomacy, we believe that ICT can serve as a facilitator and accelerator for Tehran-Belgrade relations.

BRICS members emphasize trade in local currencies



Economy Desk

Central Bank of Iran (CBI)'s Deputy Governor Asghar Abolhasani, highlighted the pivotal role of BRICS members in the global economy during an international meeting of BRICS central bank deputies in Cape Town, South Africa.

The meeting, held alongside the G20 summit and chaired by Brazil, focused on operationalizing agreements from the recent Moscow summit of BRICS central bank governors, IRNA reported.

Key discussions included the use of national currencies for trade settlements, the creation of an independent financial messaging system as an alternative to

SWIFT, the integration of payment systems, and the potential development of central bank digital currencies (CBDCs) among BRICS members. Abolhasani emphasized the need for a permanent secretariat or an independent financial institution within BRICS to enhance monetary and banking relations. He noted that BRICS has become a significant global economic force, with collective efforts addressing economic cooperation, financial stability, and sustainable development. He also proposed establishing a non-banking developmental entity under BRICS to facilitate in-depth studies on critical issues using

the expertise of member countries. The deputy governor outlined practical solutions for using national currencies in trade settlements, creating an independent financial messaging system, and integrating payment systems. These measures, he argued, could transform the international monetary and financial system, fostering stronger banking and trade ties among BRICS members.

BRICS, comprising Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, Egypt, Ethiopia, the UAE, Iran, Indonesia, Bolivia, Saudi Arabia, and Nigeria, aims to strengthen unity and efficiency amid rapid global financial changes.

BRICS, comprising Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, Egypt, Ethiopia, the UAE, Iran, Indonesia, Bolivia, Saudi Arabia, and Nigeria, aims to strengthen unity and efficiency amid rapid global financial changes.

Iran, Philippines ink MoUs for agriculture cooperation

Iran and the Philippines signed two cooperation agreements in the field of agriculture as the two countries express their willingness to expand bilateral ties in economy and trade.

The two memoranda of understanding were inked on "agricultural cooperation" and "plant inspection and quarantine" following a meeting between Iranian Agriculture Minister Gholamreza Nouri-Qezeljeh and Philippine's Agriculture Undersecretary Zamzamin Ampatuan in the Iranian capital of Tehran on Tuesday, wrote Press TV.

"We have close ties with the Philippines as a country with similar international views and are eager to expand our relations in various fields," Nouri-Qezeljeh said.

Pointing to the various capacities of Iran and the Philippines, Nouri-Qezeljeh underlined, "These capacities can provide the basis for deepening relations between the two nations. Iran's strategic geographical location is such that it can be considered a route and gateway to Europe for the Philippines, and the Philippines also has a similar position for Iran in relation to East Asia."

The Iranian minister also stressed that his country has made great progress in the agricultural sector in recent years,



especially in the production of various fruits, and is one of the leading countries in the world in the production of apples, kiwis, dates, pistachios, and saffron.

The Philippine official, for his part, expressed Manila's interest in expanding trade relations with Tehran, saying, "We are willing to open the Philippine market to Iranian fruits, especially Iranian red and yellow apples, which are produced in world class."

Stressing that the Philippines has always been by Iran's side in times of challenges and has kept its doors open for Iran, Ampatuan said the export of bananas to Iran is a 30-year business.

"We import oil and petrochemicals from Iran, but unfortunately, now the only commodity in our country is bananas that we can continue to trade," he added. Ampatuan said most of the Philippine bananas exported to Iran are grown in a predominantly Muslim region and are produced by Muslims in the southeast Asian country.

Feasibility study of 'Riviera of Middle East' plan

Is Trump bluffing
or aiming to reshape Palestine?By Sadeq
Dehqan
Staff writerINTERVIEW
EXCLUSIVE

Trump's proposed plan, commonly referred to as the "Riviera of the Middle East," is basically the expulsion of Palestinians from Gaza and the seizure of their lands. Riviera, for context, refers to certain coastal tourist and recreational areas and cities.

According to this plan, Palestinians are to be relocated to either Jordan or Egypt, and the lands of Gaza are to be transformed into a tourist area through long-term contracts with American companies. Trump claims this will include advanced infrastructure, luxury hotels, and economic development in Gaza.

The US president has spun the forced relocation of Gaza Strip residents as a solution for rebuilding Gaza. However, the plan has faced strong opposition from Arab and Islamic countries, with many viewing it as an act of ethnic cleansing.

The implementation of this plan primarily depends on the complete evacuation of the Palestinian population from Gaza and the forced displacement of its residents to areas such as Jordan and Egypt. It would require at least two million Palestinians to leave their homes and settle in the mentioned countries, leading to significant consequences. This partly explains the opposition from regional countries, especially those two nations.

To examine the various dimensions of Trump's plan for the forced relocation of Gaza residents, its feasibility, and the consequences of its implementation, Iran Daily has conducted an exclusive interview with Mansour Barati, an expert on Middle Eastern and Israeli affairs. The full text of the interview follows.



Palestinians walk through the destruction caused by the Israeli air and ground offensive in Jabaliya, north of Gaza city, on January 19, 2025, after a cease-fire agreement between Israel and Hamas came into effect.

● ABED HAJJAR/AP

● Mansour Barati

IRAN DAILY: First, please provide your assessment of the implementation of Trump's proposed plan for Gazans. To what extent do you think such a plan is feasible?

BARATI: If we want to examine Trump's plan, known as the Riviera of the Middle East, we need to consider several points. First, the plan is very vague. So far, only a few interviews that Trump himself has given about the plan constitute its entirety. In other words, no document has been written yet that clearly and precisely outlines what is supposed to happen.

We can compare this plan to the previous plan Trump proposed in 2020 for resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, known as the "Deal of the Cen-

ture". Although that plan was also very general and required negotiations and detailing, it was a plan for which a document had been written, and its objective was clear. However, the current plan is very vague. Another issue is that the same emphasis Trump previously placed on the forced relocation or migration of Gaza's Palestinian residents is present in this plan. Trump has announced that they want to build a Riviera in Gaza. Riviera was originally referred to an island in Italy where the world's super-rich spend part of their time vacationing there each year. Therefore, if such a plan is to be implemented in Gaza, it would require the construction of an ultra-luxurious area, which, in the first place, would necessitate a significant

reduction in Gaza's population because Gaza is a very densely populated area. Currently, in the Gaza Strip, we see a high population density, with approximately 2.3 million people living there. In such a densely populated area, implementing such a plan is unfeasible, and thus, to execute this plan, at least one million Gazans would need to leave.

Therefore, the next issue is the forced relocation of the population. Transferring such a population poses many problems and challenges, and the next question is where they could be relocated.

Trump has mentioned Jordan and Egypt for this relocation. How do you assess the potential transfer of Gazans to these two regions?

Would these two countries agree to such a thing?

First, let's talk about Jordan. In Jordan, the number of Palestinian refugees or asylum seekers already exceeds the number of Jordanians, and further increasing the Palestinian population in this country would be difficult for Jordan. The ruling authority in Jordan would be under severe security risk because we know that the political inclination of Gazans is either Islamist or Salafist, and ultimately, the number of Islamists in Gaza is much higher than secularists. This is while Jordan has had many conflicts with the Muslim Brotherhood in recent years. In the recent elections in Jordan, the Muslim Brotherhood managed to secure many seats in the Jordanian parliament as the leading party. Now, if a large number of Gazans were to be added to Jordan, this would pose a security risk for Jordan. After the aforementioned elections, the alarm has already been raised for the ruling authority and the Jordanian monarchy that Islamists are gaining too much power in Jordan. This threatens the survival of the political establishment in Jordan.

Therefore, Jordan fundamentally lacks the capacity to accommodate a large number of migrants from Gaza. During

King Abdullah II of Jordan's recent visit to Washington and his meeting with Trump, he initially said he agreed with the plan but ultimately stated that they could only accommodate two thousand patients for treatment. Thus, Jordanians are under significant security pressure in this regard.

The situation in Egypt is somewhat different. Egypt is a country with a population of 100 million, and even if one million people were added to its population, it wouldn't be very noticeable. However, they would still need to think daily about feeding and organizing these individuals. If Trump's plan is truly intended to be implemented and lead to the relocation of Gazans, its execution would require substantial financial allocations from the United States for the settlement and hosting of this population.

Would Egypt not face security risks with the migration of Gazans to this country?

Of course, if a large population of Gazans were to enter Egypt, Cairo would also face numerous problems in this regard. That is why Egyptians have so far reacted much more strongly to the implementation of this plan. In this context, a large number of Egyptian military forces have been sent to the Sinai Desert because Cairo believes that the entry of Gazans into Egypt would endanger the country's sovereignty and could violate the 1978 Camp David Accords between Egypt and Israel. We saw that Egyptian President



In the case of Trump's current plan, the details of its implementation are non-existent. As for whether Trump is bluffing about raising such an issue, it is also unclear, but what is certain is that raising this plan has so far worked in favor of Netanyahu within Israel.



President of the Palestinian Authority Mahmoud Abbas holds a map of Israel and Palestine released as part of Trump's previous plan, dubbed "Deal of the Century," at the UN Security Council on February 11, 2020.

● AFP

Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, who intended to travel to Washington, canceled his trip to the US in reaction to this plan, indicating that Egyptians strongly oppose the implementation of it in their country.

Egyptians themselves are currently facing many security problems in the Sinai Desert as Sinai is the main birthplace of Salafist groups in Egypt. Currently, Islamist groups reside in, for example, the Al-Arish region of Egypt, which is predominantly Salafist. If a large number of Gazans were to be added, this would undoubtedly multiply the problems between the Egyptian government, which is secular, and the Islamists. This is an

other reason why Egyptians have reacted more harshly to Trump's plan. Overall, it seems that the plan cannot be implemented at this time.

It seems that Trump is also aware of the difficulties in implementing this plan and perhaps does not expect it to be operationalized.

He proposed another plan in 2020 related to this, known as the "Deal of the Century," which was fully outlined in legal terms. However, all Palestinian parties, even the Palestinian Authority, opposed that plan and refused to come to the negotiating table. But in the case of the current plan, the details of its implementa-

tion are non-existent. As for whether Trump is bluffing about raising such an issue, it is also unclear, but what is certain is that raising this plan has so far worked in favor of Netanyahu within Israel.

When the cease-fire between Hamas and Israel was established, we saw that the extremist right-wing party of Itamar Ben-Gvir, the then-Israeli national security minister, left its coalition with Netanyahu. They further declared their opposition to the cease-fire and stated that the war should not have been halted until Hamas was completely destroyed. Bezalel Smotrich, the Israeli Finance Minister, who belongs to another far-

right faction, is still part of Netanyahu's coalition, and if he also leaves Netanyahu's cabinet, it will collapse.

After prisoner exchanges with Palestinian detainees took place and humanitarian aid was allowed in, Smotrich declared that Israel should re-enter the war with Hamas; Otherwise, he would also leave the cabinet. This is while we are gradually moving towards the second phase of the cease-fire agreement, and the significant event that should occur in the second phase is the official announcement of the end of the war, which should happen in the second six weeks. In such conditions, Smotrich might leave the cabinet, leading to its

collapse. If, however, Netanyahu had backed out of the cease-fire agreement and re-entered the war then, it would have incurred serious security and other costs for him, creating many complexities in violating the cease-fire. However, with the introduction of Trump's plan, a sense of satisfaction and euphoria seems to have emerged within the Israeli political sphere for Netanyahu, and all opposition against him has temporarily calmed down. Now, Smotrich no longer expresses dissatisfaction, and Ben-Gvir has stated that the likelihood of his return to the cabinet has increased. Therefore, the forced relocation plan has, in the current situation and

in the short term, positively impacted Netanyahu within Israel. However, we do not know how long this impact can last.

Thus, the main goal of the forced relocation plan might have been to reduce pressure on Netanyahu, and it may not necessarily lead to new changes in the region. Of course, there is also the possibility that Trump proposed this plan to test its feasibility and see the reactions to it. If, perchance, it did not face strong opposition, he would implement it and change the political geography of Palestine; Otherwise, by making gestures and bluffing, he aimed to improve the situation for Netanyahu.

Ethnic cleansing under guise of security, reconstruction

Trump, by reintroducing the idea of American ownership over Gaza, has stated that the people of Gaza should be settled in Arab countries and reiterated his intention to forcibly displace Gaza's residents, aiming to take over the region and initiate a large-scale real estate project in Gaza. Egypt, Jordan, and other Arab countries have recently expressed their clear opposition to the plan, while the US president has threatened to cut off financial aid to Egypt and Jordan if they do not accept Gaza's residents.

Israel, over the course of more than 15 months, dropped over 85,000 tons of bombs on the Gaza Strip, martyred around 50,000 people, and imposed various blockades, leading to the spread of numerous diseases in Gaza and leaving the people in dire conditions. But did the people of Gaza leave? No. In fact, as soon as the most recent cease-fire agreement was implemented, the people of Gaza enthusiastically returned to Gaza, to a city that had been turned into a pile of rubble with no homes left to live in. Regardless, the people of Gaza had emphasized that they would come back and rebuild their homes right there, and that it is Israel who should think about leaving.

Trump now claims that this plan will turn the Gaza Strip into the Riviera of the Middle East (Riviera is a very beautiful and scenic region in Italy that has become a symbol of tourism) and a tourism hub in the region. Behind the scenes, the reality is different: The goal is to annex the Gaza Strip to Israel since, compared to the total land area of the Middle East, the land currently under Israel's control is very small, and this land must be expanded. That is why they have set their sights on Gaza. However, this plan is in stark contradiction with the realities within Palestine and among resistance groups, and it is simply not feasible to implement this plan. It has also faced widespread backlash within the US from American senators and the public. The first reason why this plan



US President Donald Trump (R) and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu
● ELIZABETH BROCKWAY/
THE DAILY BEAST

is not feasible is that American legislators have stated that the forced displacement of Gaza's residents constitutes ethnic cleansing as it involves displacing an ethnicity and a nationality from their own land, which is a war crime. The second reason is that they want to relocate Palestinians to Egypt and Jordan, but Egypt has clearly stated that it will not accept them. Jordan also cannot accept them under any circumstances as 70% of Jordan's population consists of Palestinian refugees who migrated there in the past. Now, imagine adding another million

people from Gaza to Jordan's two million, turning them into a new threat to the Zionist regime. The wave of opposition in the region against the plan to relocate Gaza's population is unprecedented. We see that, apart from regional countries that are all against this plan, countries like France and China have also opposed it. Within the US, apart from the hardline circle around Trump, there is no support. Resistance groups and Arab countries, including Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and even Qatar as key players in the region, have firmly opposed this

plan. Saudi Arabia has clearly expressed its opposition to this plan, stating that it will normalize relations with Israel only after the establishment of a Palestinian state. A Saudi official has also said that the Palestinian people are not illegal migrants to be relocated to other lands. Arab countries are well aware that if they allow the residents of the Gaza Strip to be displaced, it would mean the end of the plan to establish a Palestinian state. If there is no Gaza, the West Bank, much of which is under Israeli control, has just a few villages, not enough to make a Palestin-



Displaced Palestinians return to their homes in the northern Gaza Strip following the establishment of cease-fire, on January 27, 2025.
● JEHAD ALSHRAFI/AP

OPINION *The Palestinian issue has now become a global concern. The recent plan that Donald Trump has repeatedly emphasized at various events, stating that the residents of the Gaza Strip must move out of Gaza and relocate to Jordan and Egypt since it is purportedly "much safer and maybe even much better and more comfortable," has been met with widespread criticism.*

This plan has been so absurd and insane that even American officials themselves consider it unrealistic and fantastical. The plan has faced a wave of international backlash, with over 90 international organizations and allied countries condemning the forced displacement of Gaza's population. These organizations have labeled Trump's statements as explicit claims of ethnic cleansing, and the UN secretary-general has once again warned against ethnic cleansing in Gaza. Former German chancellor Olaf Scholz has called Trump's plan a "scandal".

ian state.

A concession like forced displacement, which Netanyahu managed to secure from Trump during his visit to the US, is not feasible in reality and has only provided short-term media fodder for Netanyahu's opponents. Perhaps Netanyahu wanted to use this plan to maintain his hold on power as he well knows that the end of his political career would mean trial and imprisonment.

The cease-fire agreements, which even the Zionists admitted were a major victory for Hamas, as well as the specifics of the prisoner exchange, demonstrated Hamas's distinct power. The Palestinian Islamic Jihad movement has also emphasized that 15 months of relentless Israeli bombing with American weapons did not displace the people of Gaza. Does Trump think that his racist and deceptive statements, disguised as humanitarianism, can achieve this?

A senior Hamas official has also said that they see these requests as "a recipe for creating chaos and tension in the region," and that Palestinians in the Gaza Strip "will not allow these plans to pass". The residents of Gaza have also stated in recent days that, even if given the opportunity to live in other countries, they will not leave Gaza, to prevent another catastrophe in Palestinian history, similar to the Nakba Day and the establishment of the Zionist regime in 1948, which led to the displacement of at least 700,000 Palestinians who were forced to leave their homeland forever.

The article first appeared in the Persian-language newspaper Jam-e Jam.



As soon as the most recent cease-fire agreement was implemented, the people of Gaza enthusiastically returned to Gaza, to a city that had been turned into a pile of rubble with no homes left to live in. Regardless, the people of Gaza had emphasized that they would come back and rebuild their homes right there, and that it is Israel who should think about leaving.

Persian Gulf Pro League:

Title hopes, reputation on the line
in 105th Tehran Derby

Sports Desk

Persepolis will be looking to salvage its dismal season, while Esteghlal will fight for its reputation when the city rivals square off in the 105th Tehran Derby today.

A hard-fought 1-1 draw at Iralco last time out saw Persepolis fall further behind in the title race. The third-placed Capital Reds are now trailing Tractor and Sepahan by six and five points, respectively, at the top of the Persian Gulf Pro League table and any result other than maximum points could all but finish the champions' bid for an eighth top-flight trophy in nine seasons with nine games remaining in the campaign.

Persepolis has managed a single victory in six games across all competitions under new head coach Ismail Kartal, crashing out of the Iranian Hazfi Cup and the AFC Champions League Elite in the process.

Another disappointing result and performance today could pile pressure on the Turkish manager in the early days of his Persepolis reign, leaving the club on course to finish the season without silverware.

Kartal went on to rue his injury-hit, narrow squad after the Iralco stalemate, and with Oston Urunov, Saeed Sadeqi, and Farshad Ahmadzadeh missing today's game, skipper Omid Aalishah will be the only recognized



● ALI KARIMI/IRNA

winger available for selection. Sitting seventh in the table, Esteghlal has long been out of the title run-in, while having its own injury, and coaching, crises to deal with in recent weeks. However, the Tehran Blues will be eager to build on a decent run of results to chase a first derby triumph since March 2018.

Esteghlal defeated Nassaji Mazandaran 1-0 in the league on Saturday, days after a 2-0 win at Al Rayyan sent the Blues into the round of 16 in the Asian elite clubs' competition. Alireza Koushki was Esteghlal's star of the show with two goals and an assist in the previous two games, while captain and goal-

keeper Seyyed Hossein Hosseini played his part by producing numerous saves to keep back-to-back clean sheets.

Interim coach Sohrab Bakhtiarzadeh walked away from his role after the Al Rayyan game, with the club reaching agreement with former Esteghlal Khuzestan boss Miodrag Bo-

zovic for the job until the end of the season and today's game will be the Montenegrin's first game in the Blues dugout.

Esteghlal's realistic hopes for glory this season lies in the domestic cup, but a derby victory will be a perfect morale-boost for the Blues ahead of Monday's home game against Sau-

di heavyweight Al Nassr in the Asian competition.

Crunch clash in Tabriz

All eyes might be on the game at Tehran's Azadi Stadium, but the Iranian fans could get a glimpse of the next Iranian top-flight champion when Tractor and Sepahan square off in Yadegar-e Imam Stadium in Tabriz earlier in the day. Separated by one point, both sides are in flying form heading into the game, knowing a victory will give them the momentum in the title race.

Sepahan has suffered a single defeat in 20 league games this term, though it came in the reverse fixture earlier in the season when 10-man Tractor had an Amirhossein Hosseinzadeh's strike for the massive 1-0 won.

Tractor, however, has looked vulnerable at times on home turf this season with three of the Tabriz-based club's four league defeats happening in the Yadegar-e Imam Stadium.

Elsewhere, Mes Rafsanjan will host Chadormalou, while Es. Khuzestan welcomes Malavan to Ahvaz.

Fourth-placed Foolad Khuzestan will visit Zob Ahan on Friday, with Nassaji and Shams Azar going head-to-head in Qaemshahr in what will be a decisive encounter in the relegation battle. Iralco will play away to Khaybar, and bottom-club Havadar hosts Golgozar Sirjan.

Asian Water Polo Championship:

Iran hammers Uzbekistan
to continue perfect run

Sports Desk

Iran hammered Uzbekistan 33-9 on Wednesday to continue its perfect start to the Asian Water Polo Championship campaign in Zhaoqing, China.

Amir Qavidel and Alireza Mehri contributed with six goals apiece to top the scoring chart as Iran celebrated a third successive vic-

tory in the competition.

Iran began its Group B campaign with a 19-6 victory over South Korea before routing the Chinese Taipei 37-5 on the preceding day Zhaoqing.

Sitting atop the group, Iran will take on three-time champion Japan today ahead of Friday's likely quarterfinal clash with Singapore or Hong Kong.

Runner-up to China in the previous edition in 2023, Iran will be chasing a maiden Asian title at this year's event, having won double bronze medals in 1984 and 1995.

The Asian championship will also serve as the qualification for the water polo event at the World Aquatics Championships – starting July 11 in Singapore.



● irsf.ir

Iranian Volleyball Cup:

Foolad beats familiar foe
Shahdab for title

Sports Desk



● Veteran middle-blocker Seyyed Mohammad Mousavi hoists the trophy as Foolad Sirjan players and coaching staff celebrate winning the Iranian Volleyball Cup title in Tehran, Iran, on Feb. 25, 2025. ● volleyball.ir

Foolad Sirjan claimed the Iranian Volleyball Cup trophy thanks to a straight-set victory (25-23, 25-21, 25-21) over Shahdab Yazd in the final showpiece in Tehran on Tuesday. Opposite spiker Ali Hajipour stole the show with a game-high 25 points as Behrouz Ataei's men came out on top against their familiar foes in a third major final in less than 12 months.

Foolad had beaten Shahdab in the Iranian Super League final last April, before coming out victorious in the AVC Asian Club Championship showdown in September.

Doncic helps Lakers beat
former team Mavericks

● AP

Luka Doncic's triple-double helped the Los Angeles Lakers to a 107-99 win over former team the Dallas Mav-

ericks in the NBA. The 25-year-old guard joined the Lakers as part of a three-way trade this

month after six seasons at the Mavericks.

Playing against Dallas for the first time since that move, Doncic scored 19 points and made 15 rebounds and 12 assists at Crypto.com Arena.

"In the first quarter, second quarter, I didn't know what was happening. It was just different. I can't even explain how I felt," he told TNT.

"I am just glad we got a win. I can't wait to go to sleep." LeBron James scored 27 points for the Lakers, who are fourth in the Western Conference after a third

straight win, while Kyrie Irving scored 35 for the ninth-placed Mavericks.

The Memphis Grizzlies required overtime to beat the Phoenix Suns 151-148 at home.

The Grizzlies are second in the Western Conference and the Suns 11th.

The Cleveland Cavaliers tightened their grip on top spot in the East with a 122-82 win at the Orlando Magic, their 10th successive victory. Giannis Antetokounmpo's 27 points could not prevent the Milwaukee Bucks from losing 100-97 at the Houston Rockets.

Rock houses of Bibi Kand; A blend of nature, ancient engineering

Iranica Desk

Rock architecture has a long history in Iran and around the world, shaped by various climatic, defensive, and cultural factors that have led to the emergence of some of the most beautiful examples of this architectural style. They are located southwest of Shahin Dej in the southern part of West Azarbaijan Province. While the exact time of their construction is unknown, some experts estimate it to have been between 3,000 and 3,500 years ago. This site, dating back to the first millennium BCE and registered on Iran's National Heritage List, features 13 rooms carved into the mountain, offering stunning views for visitors.



West Azarbaijan Province, situated at the intersection of the Alborz and Zagros mountain ranges, boasts a mountainous landscape and has been home to civilizations such as the Medes and other tribes, resulting in pristine examples of rock tomb architecture. Shahin Dej, located in the northwest of Iran and the south of West Azarbaijan Province, attracts tourists and visitors every year with its natural and historical attractions. Among these, the rock houses of Bibi Kand stand out, consistently drawing many visitors, IRNA wrote.

This ancient manmade cave, situated near Bibi Kand village, is carved into a mountain of the same name, located 16 kilometers from the city of Shahin Dej. Excavating such places in the mountains was common in ancient times, serving various purposes, including religious functions and as residences or retreats. While the exact age of this cave, also known locally as Farhad Cave, is unclear, some estimates suggest it is over three thousand five hundred years old.

The rock houses of Bibi Kand consist of several interconnected rooms linked by winding, narrow corridors. The entrance to the complex features a porch where water from a spring emerging from the heart of Bibi Kand Mountain was historically channeled through a narrow pathway. Rocky platforms at the entrance are beautifully and delicately carved. Inside the rooms, hollows serve as niches or ledges, and some rooms feature stunning skylights.

In certain areas, stairs complement the corridors, creating connections between different sections. Accessing this valuable historical site can be somewhat challenging, which has hindered its introduction to enthusiasts of ancient artifacts.

Architectural features

The rock houses of Bibi Kand comprise three levels and five interconnected rooms linked by a tunnel. These features demonstrate precision and expertise in the design of this rock structure, attesting to the knowledge and engineering

skills of past civilizations. The rooms are carved into natural stones, resulting in walls formed directly from rock. These rooms have ceilings that rest naturally on the outer stones, likely designed to protect inhabitants from cold and heat. The rock structure not only provides resistance against weather conditions but also offers concealment from enemies.

Connections and tunnels

One of the unique features of Bibi Kand is the connecting tunnels that link the rooms. These tunnels are designed to provide access to all rooms through underground passages. This design served not only as a defensive feature but also as a means of transporting people and essential materials during natural or human-made threats.

Entrances

The entrances to the rocky structure are constructed to limit access from the outside, allowing only those familiar with the environment to enter. This feature was particularly important in historical

periods when the likelihood of enemy attacks was higher. The ventilation system has been naturally integrated into the design of the complex, allowing interior spaces to be indirectly ventilated through air currents and surrounding open spaces. Additionally, the area surrounding this rock structure boasts beautiful natural scenery, combining mountains, valleys, and agricultural lands. These features enhance the significance of the rock complex, both historically and in terms of natural beauty. Given the historical and cultural values of the rock houses of Bibi Kand, protecting this site is essential to prevent destruction and damage. Developing tourism infrastructure in this region could attract more visitors and further promote this historical site. Today, the rock complex is recognized as a tourist attraction in West Azarbaijan Province, offering history and archaeology enthusiasts the opportunity to explore one of the region's most unique historical treasures.



● neshan.org

Trekking through enchantment of Tang-e Solak

Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad Province has many natural attractions due to its location in the mountainous region of Zagros and also abundant rainfall. The presence of roaring rivers, beautiful villages and lakes are among the attractions of this province, which has caused

many enthusiasts to travel during the year, especially in spring. Among the attractions of Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad Province are its many valleys that can be seen throughout the province. In the west of this province and on the border of Khuzestan Province, one of

these famous and beautiful valleys is located. Tang-e Solak or Tang-e Sorouk is located in Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad Province, but the closest city to it is Likak, which is located in Khuzestan Province. Tang-e-Solak is a very beautiful valley with mountainous nature, which is

covered with many trees, including oak. In the middle of the valley, beautiful views can be seen. But the beautiful nature of Tang-e-Solak is not the only reason for its fame. Rather, in the middle of this valley, there are a number of stones with ancient motifs and in-

scriptions that many enthusiasts enter to visit this valley. These motifs are related to the Parthian era. Tang-e-Solak reliefs depict various scenes of magnificent ancient customs, religious symbols, cavalry and infantry battles, coronation and crowning and holding the ring of power, royal

hunting, ceremonies and welcome in the heart of the mountains for the future. It is a bit difficult to visit the stone carvings and you have to walk a distance of about 3km, which takes at least one hour. For this reason, it needs proper physical preparation along this path. There are no

amenities along this route and around the ancient carvings, and it is essential to bring all the necessities for a few hours of mountaineering. The best time to visit this area is late winter and early spring. Early summers in the tropics make it difficult to walk.



● wikipedia.org

Minister: Cultural weeks invaluable opportunity to strengthen bilateral ties

Arts & Culture Desk

Iranian Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance, Abbas Salehi, said that holding cultural weeks is an invaluable opportunity to strengthen bilateral interactions. He made the remarks during the opening of the Qatar Cultural Week initiative, where he stressed the potential of mutual cultural events to enhance understanding and collaboration between the two nations, IRNA reported. The Qatar Cultural Week, runs from February 26 to 28. "The cultural relations between our two countries are rooted in brotherhood and friendship," Salehi stated, expressing

hope that this event would serve as a turning point for cultural cooperation. The Qatar Cultural Week, featuring over 100 Iranian artists and athletes, is showcasing Iranian culture, art, and traditions across more than 30 disciplines, further enriching the cultural landscape of the region. Salehi underscored the importance of reciprocal cultural weeks, particularly in light of the significant cultural activities held in Doha in the past year. Such events, he argued, play a crucial role in the context of Islamic countries and the broader region. He called for the signing of a memorandum for the sister-city relationship

between museums in Iran and Qatar, emphasizing the need for a practical program to advance various aspects of cultural collaboration, including cinematic partnerships, artist exchanges, and shared exhibitions. Moreover, Salehi expressed his desire for the Qatar Cultural Week to be held in Iran soon, hoping it would mirror the success of the previous Iranian cultural showcase in Doha. He extended an invitation to the Qatari cultural leaders to visit Iran and explore its rich cultural offerings, advocating for research initiatives alongside operational activities to better understand the cultural capacities of both nations.

As a focal point of this cultural dialogue, Salehi spotlighted the Iranian film industry, noting the high caliber of its directors, producers, and actors who have made a significant impact both regionally and globally. This acknowledgment underscores the importance of cinema as a pivotal aspect of Iran's cultural identity. During his visit to Qatar, Salehi also toured the Sheikh Faisal Museum, where he reiterated the necessity of enhancing cultural interactions between the two countries. He noted that developing museum collaborations and organizing joint exhibitions are vital for fostering deeper cultural connections.



Russian conductor: Iranian musicians exemplify extraordinary skill, dedication



Arts & Culture Desk

Russian conductor Yaroslav Zaboyarkin praised Iranian musicians for their adaptability and dedication to excellence. He added that "they demonstrated remarkable adaptability and commitment to refinement," IRNA reported. The recent joint concert between Russia and Iran showcased the high caliber of Iranian musicians, underscoring their dedication to artistic excellence and cultural exchange. The concert, performed

by the New Chamber St. Petersburg Philharmonic Orchestra and the Tehran Symphony Orchestra, took place on Monday at Tehran's Vahdat Hall. Conducted by Zaboyarkin, the event featured solo performances by cellist Dmitry Ganenko and was part of the 'Musical Bridge: Tehran-St. Petersburg' project. This initiative, supported by the Russian Presidential Foundation for Cultural Initiatives, seeks to deepen cultural relations between the two nations through music. Dmitry Ganenko, who also managed the project, described the event as the second installment of a broader cultural exchange, following an initial concert in Russia last year. He said that while preparations for the concert were intensive, "the success of the performance proves that both Russian and Iranian musicians were well-prepared for this collaboration." Ganenko emphasized that the very

name of the initiative, 'Musical Bridge: Tehran-St. Petersburg,' encapsulates its essence—fostering artistic integration between the two cultures. He further underlined that in light of the current geopolitical climate, "strengthening cultural ties between our countries is of utmost importance, and music serves as a powerful unifying force." The concert featured 52 musicians, with equal representation from Iran and Russia. Ganenko, who took on the role of cello soloist, commended Iranian performers for their responsiveness. "When the conductor gives an instruction, Iranian musicians immediately implement it," he observed, describing the collaboration as an enriching experience. Beyond the concert itself, the Russian musicians expressed a keen interest in Iranian composers. Ganenko cited his admiration for contemporary Iranian composer Behzad Abdi and his familiarity with Iranian maestro Ali Rahbari,

whose contributions to classical music have been well-recognized in Russia. Zaboyarkin provided insights into the background of the New Chamber St. Petersburg Philharmonic Orchestra, a relatively young ensemble formed to broaden the scope of orchestral performances in Russia. While the orchestra is only five years old, its members are seasoned musicians drawn from prominent Russian symphony orchestras, with extensive experience in international collaborations. Reflecting on the significance of this partnership, Zaboyarkin noted that joint rehearsals underscored the potential for a "shared musical language" between Russian and Iranian artists. He expressed optimism about future engagements, stating, "We are eager to continue collaborating, exploring both classical and contemporary compositions from our respective traditions." The performance program featured

a distinguished repertoire, including Mikhail Glinka's 'Kamarinskaya' and 'Valse-fantaisie,' Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky's 'Nocturne' and 'Variations on a Rococo Theme' for cello, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's 'Symphony No. 40,' and Behzad Abdi's 'Elegy' for cello. The event drew distinguished attendees, including ambassadors from Russia, Kazakhstan, Belarus, Tajikistan, Azerbaijan, and Uzbekistan, as well as key figures from Iran's Ministry of Culture and the Rudaki Foundation. Ardavan Jafarian, International Affairs Adviser at the Rudaki Foundation, highlighted the strategic role of cultural diplomacy. "Artistic exchanges serve as a catalyst for strengthening international relations," he added, noting that such initiatives elevate Iranian musicians' exposure to global audiences while fostering a deeper appreciation of Russian classical traditions in Iran.

AI; new tool in service of resistance cinema



Mohammad Ali Shojaei Fard

Arts & Culture Desk

The 2025 International Resistance Film Festival has made history by marking the first official presence of artificial intelligence (AI) in cinematic productions, with a dedicated section showcasing the potential of this emerging technology. Mohammad Ali Shojaei Fard, Assistant Secretary of the festival, highlighted AI's growing role in enhancing resistance-themed cinema and emphasized the importance of overcoming

external sanctions and strengthening local infrastructure to fully harness its capabilities, according to the festival's official website. Speaking on the topic of "Artificial Intelligence in the Service of Resistance Cinema: An Opportunity or a Challenge?," Shojaei Fard called AI a "great opportunity" for producing films focused on themes of resistance. He explained that AI has already begun to play a role in shaping the future of cinematic production within the resistance genre, which spans documentaries, short films, and feature films. "This year, for the first time, we are proud to have a section of the festival dedicated entirely to artificial intelligence," Shojaei Fard noted. "The Resistance Film Festival has always provided a platform for films with powerful resistance narratives, and now, this new technological tool will further support and amplify these messages." Shojaei Fard revealed that the use of AI in resistance cinema has been underway for several years, but it has now reached a stage where it can significantly contribute to the produc-

tion of feature films. Looking forward, he expressed confidence that AI will be central to future cinematic projects, predicting that it would soon be involved in the creation of high-quality, feature-length films. However, the Assistant Secretary also emphasized the need for local development to support this technological evolution. "To maximize the benefits of AI, two key steps must be taken," Shojaei Fard added. "First, officials must prioritize the development of the necessary technical infrastructure. Second, professionals in the field need to actively work on localizing the technology to reduce reliance on foreign tools." By doing so, he argued, AI can be turned into a strategic asset for what he referred to as "soft warfare," using the power of film to challenge global narratives and promote resistance movements. This year's festival serves as a significant step in the intersection of cinema and cutting-edge technology, setting the stage for a new era in resistance media production.

Iranian film awarded at UAE festival

Arts & Culture Desk

The Iranian film 'Bruise-Lips Tulip,' directed and produced by Mehrshad Karkhani, has clinched the top prize at the 9th Exposure Festival in the United Arab Emirates, winning the Best Cinematic Arts Award and a cash prize of 3,000 dirhams. The festival, which celebrates cultural and artistic achievements, is set to take place from February 20 to 26, 2025, in Sharjah, Mehr News Agency reported. Karkhani's film competed in the Best Cinematic Arts category, emerging victorious among numerous entries. The film, which premiered in the summer of this year under the "Art and Experience" cinema group, features performances by a talented ensemble cast, including Mohsen Ghafari, Mahtab Navidi, Shakila Samavati, Sougal Khaleghi, Hossein Zeynali, Saba Fadaei, Hamid Rahimi, Amir Navidi, Bashir Edrisi, Roya Mohammadi, and Mehdi Bigdelia. International distribution for the film is managed by Bahar Film's international department, led by Maryam Bahralouloumi.

