



VP urges national library to counter Iranophobia, boost cultural diplomacy



Iran's First Vice President Mohammad Reza Aref (4th L) visits the National Library and Archives of Iran (NLAI) in Tehran on December 20, 2025.

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pushes to narrow the region's technology gap within three years. Speaking at a meeting of the organization's board of trustees in Tehran, Aref said the library must move beyond a custodial role and define a measurable contribution to national science and technology policy, aligned with Iran's long-term development documents and the Seventh Development Plan (2023-2027), fvpresident.ir reported. "The national library is not merely a repository of valuable books and manuscripts," Aref said. "It is a strategic scientific institution with the capacity to shape knowledge production, international engagement and Iran's global academic standing." Aref said the government's strategy aims to compensate for technological lag behind regional peers and move

ahead of them within three years, underscoring the need for scientific institutions to reposition themselves accordingly. He called on the national library to clarify its role within Iran's research ecosystem and expand cooperation with universities and scientific bodies. Referring to recent conflicts, Aref said modern warfare has underscored the centrality of advanced science and technology, adding that Iran has gained the upper hand in areas where it invested in knowledge-based capacity. He said the administration is steering higher education toward third- and fourth-generation universities, with leaner structures and stronger links to innovation, while pursuing scientific authority as a national priority. He also reiterated the leadership's call to elevate Persian as a global scientific language through sustained advances in research output. Aref highlighted cultural and scientific diplomacy as effective tools for international engagement, particularly with neighboring states and countries shar-

ing historical and civilizational ties, including Central Asia. He said the NLAI could anchor academic cooperation with regional blocs such as the Economic Cooperation Organization, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and BRICS. Despite what he described as the exposure of hostile narratives against Iran, Aref said some foreign scholars remain reluctant to visit the country due to lingering Iranophobia. He argued that targeted international outreach by the National Library, including hosting foreign researchers, could help shift perceptions. "Direct engagement with Iran's scientific and cultural institutions changes mindsets," he said. Aref also stressed the need to accelerate digitization of manuscripts and archival materials while safeguarding data security. He said physical works would retain their intrinsic value but that digital technologies and artificial intelligence were indispensable for access, preservation and global visibility.

Social Desk

Iran's First Vice President Mohammad Reza Aref said on Saturday the Nation-

al Library and Archives of Iran (NLAI) should play a frontline role in scientific and cultural diplomacy, including countering Iranophobia, as the government

Hanukkah light serves as justice, humanity in today's world



By **Farhad Aframian**
Iranian Jewish lawyer and journalist

PERSPECTIVE EXCLUSIVE

As a lawyer and journalist with two decades of professional experience, I have consistently sought to understand identity not as a fixed or static phenomenon, but as something shaped at the intersection of lived experience, legal and ethical responsibility, and historical context. For me, Hanukkah is far more than a traditional ritual. It represents a miracle that reveals the power of preserving light and justice under the most difficult conditions, and it reminds us that every individual, within their professional, social, and legal sphere, can take small yet meaningful steps toward the promotion of justice. This article is written with the aim of drawing the attention of human rights advocates and globally concerned readers to the importance of justice and the imperative to resist violence. Hanukkah, also known as the Festival of Dedication or the Festival of Light, commemorates the historical rededication of the Holy Temple and the symbolic triumph of light over darkness. The miraculous continuity of a small flame in a modest menorah became, over time, a powerful symbol of hope, spiritual resilience, and the preservation of cultural identity across generations. In Jewish tradition, this celebration is associated with purity and illumination, and more than anything else, it embodies the safeguarding of truth and human dignity against the turbulence of history. This ritual is not rooted in narratives of conquest or domination, but in the miracle of endurance, a light that teaches us that even a small flame of justice, when sustained with sincerity

and integrity, can transcend material calculations and pierce the darkness. The miracle of Hanukkah, the survival of a single flame in a time of hardship, stands as a symbol of resilience grounded not in force or domination, but in commitment to reason, ethics, and the rule of law. This light reminds us that justice and ethical-legal responsibility, whether at the individual, social, or international level, require constant care. Neglecting these principles risks weakening the rule of law, expanding inequality, and undermining the fundamental rights of human beings. Within this framework, the historical experience of Iranian Jews can be understood as part of Iran's, and the contemporary world's, moral and civic capital. This experience reflects sustained civic participation, the preservation of cultural institutions, and active engagement in urban and economic life. From the perspective of social rights and historical analysis, it demonstrates how a community can endure without resorting to violence, relying instead on law and ethical commitment. This small yet influential community, with a history spanning several millennia, stands as a living example of the possibility of coexistence and cultural cooperation. Hanukkah is not only a narrative of liberation from imposed constraints; it is also a legacy that places an added ethical and legal responsibility on today's Jewish generations. A community shaped by historical memories of violence and discrimination bears a particular duty to ensure that this spiritual heritage and collective memory of suffering are never transformed into a justification for the violation of others' rights. Jewish identity must not become an excuse for injustice; rather, it should serve as a guiding principle for unwavering commitment to justice and respect for the rights of all human beings. Such an approach not only prevents the repro-

duction of cycles of injustice, but also protects faith and tradition from being reduced to instruments of inhumane objectives. This idea finds further expression in the symbolic convergence of Hanukkah with Yalda Night and Christmas, traditions that, each in their own language and symbolism, speak to humanity's endurance in the face of darkness. Yalda, rooted in ancient Iranian culture, marks the passage through the longest night of the year and affirms belief in the birth of light at life's darkest moments. Christmas signifies renewal, hope, and peace. Hanukkah recalls the perseverance of a light that refuses to be extinguished. What unites these traditions, all celebrated around the winter solstice, is a shared belief that light is the product of ethical conduct, inner resilience, and human responsibility. This message offers clear guidance to all who seek a world free from violence and grounded in respect for human rights. When we speak of violence and the erosion of justice, it is essential to consider all its forms, from the overt violence of war to economic pressure, legal restrictions, or imposed peace arrangements that lack a foundation in dialogue and fairness. The repetition of these rituals reminds us that light and justice endure only when rooted in human dignity and the protection of rights. Genuine security and peace, whether at the individual, social, or international level, are not achieved through coercion or the denial of agency, but through mutual respect, trust-building, respect for rights, and dialogue. Even in the most difficult circumstances, it remains possible to chart a path guided by reason, human dignity, and the rule of law, a path that prevents the reproduction of new cycles of violence. It is equally important, in the current context, not to remain indifferent to international sanctions imposed on

Iran. According to official reports by the United Nations and human rights bodies such as the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR), these sanctions have resulted in serious restrictions on people's access to essential goods, healthcare services, and economic opportunities. Such pressures have had a direct impact on the quality of life of ordinary citizens and clearly undermine the principles of social justice and economic and social human rights. The Iranian Jewish community, as part of the broader society, has also been affected by these constraints, an experience that offers a tangible example of how sanctions policies impact minorities and underscores the necessity of upholding human rights and justice at both national and international levels. These legal findings highlight the importance of adherence to justice and human dignity in the face of pressure and sanctions, and demonstrate that any political or economic measure that restricts people's rights carries long-term consequences for social stability and the prospects for peace. For me, Hanukkah today is not merely a commemoration of the past, but an opportunity to reconsider our legal and ethical responsibilities in the present. Yalda, Hanukkah, and Christmas remind us that lasting peace is not achieved through pressure or imposition, but through human dignity, the protection of rights, and dialogue. In a world where silence can reproduce cycles of violence, lighting these candles becomes a symbol of commitment to awareness and responsibility. It is hoped that individuals, societies, and even the wider world may find a new path, one grounded in justice, ethics, and humanity, and capable of creating shared meaning for all people, regardless of identity or geography. It is a legacy that can inspire future generations more deeply than ever before.

Mokri's 'Black Rabbit, White Rabbit' earns Kerala jury citation for technical excellence

Arts & Culture Desk

Indian festival jurors awarded Iranian filmmaker Shahram Mokri's 'Black Rabbit, White Rabbit' a special jury mention for technical excellence at the 30th International Film Festival of Kerala, which wrapped up in Thiruvananthapuram on December 19. The Tajikistan-United Arab Emirates co-production was cited for its "exploration" and "pursuit" of new cinematic forms, the jury said, recognizing Mokri's formally rigorous approach as the film screened in the international competition during the December 12-19 event. The film's international sales are handled by DreamLab Films, led by Nasrin Mirshab, according to ISNA. Three seemingly unrelated narratives gradually interlock, combining dark humor with flashes of magical realism. The screenplay was co-written by Mokri and Nasim Ahmadpour, with Negar Eskandarfarid producing. Shot in Tajik and Persian with the support of Tajikfilm Studio, the project underscores Mokri's reputation for technical bravura. Kerala's top prize went to Japan's 'Two Seasons, Two Strangers' by Sho Miyake, which also previously secured the Golden Leopard at Locarno. The NETPAC Award was claimed by 'Cinema Island' by Gözde Kural, a Turkey-Iran-Bulgaria-Romania co-production. Argentina's 'Before the Body' won best director, India's 'Shadow Box' took best first director alongside an acting citation, and India's 'If on a Winter's Night' received the FIPRESCI award. The Kerala citation follows a strong festival run for 'Black Rabbit, White Rabbit'. At the Hainan International Film Festival in China, the film won the Golden Coconut for best film, with jury president Juliette Binoche and artistic director Marco Müller presenting the honor. The jury also singled it out in Hainan's Emerging Talents section. Mokri, attending the Red Sea Film Festival at the time, sent a message read on his behalf, calling the recognition a "significant" milestone for the production. The film has screened at Busan and other Indian festivals and is slated for further showings in London and Chicago, before a China-wide tour. Tajikistan has selected the title as its official submission for the Academy Awards' best international feature category.