

## President Pezeshkian vows overhaul of Iran's transport network

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian addresses a ceremony on Transport Week in Tehran, December 20, 2025. Tehran, IRNA – President Masoud Pezeshkian says his administration is determined to reform and expand Iran's main transport network in line with the latest international standards, stressing that the high number of fatalities in road and air transport is unacceptable. Speaking on Saturday at a ceremony marking Transport Week, Pezeshkian described routes and access ways as the country's vital arteries.

## Iran aims to overtake regional rivals in technology in three years

Iran's government has adopted a strategy to compensate for its technological lag behind regional countries and overtake them within the next three years. First Vice President Mohammad Reza Aref said on Saturday. Speaking at a meeting of the board of trustees of the National Library and Archives of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Aref highlighted the administration's resolve to accelerate the country's scientific and technological development. He stressed that the role of the National Library in advancing science and technology, and in helping Iran reach an influential global position in this field, needed to be clearly defined. The 12-day Israeli-imposed war in June was "a battle of science against science and advanced technology against advanced technology," he said, adding that Iran had gained the upper hand in areas where it has invested in knowledge and innovation.

## Israeli threats signal disarray as Iran closely monitors developments

Deputy Chief of General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran General Ahmad Vahidi Tehran, IRNA – The deputy chief of General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran has said that repeated threats by the Israeli regime are a sign of turmoil and weakness, stressing that Iran is closely monitoring all regional and international developments. In an interview with the Lebanese Al Mayadeen TV network on Saturday, Brigadier General Ahmad Vahidi commented on the anticipated visit of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to the United States and the regime's escalating rhetoric against Iran. He said the Israeli regime is facing serious and evident challenges and has failed to achieve its objectives.

Vahidi emphasized that Israel has not succeeded in realizing any of its goals in the June aggression against Iran. He added that Tehran is carefully tracking all developments and assessing the situation with full awareness. The commander also said that Israeli officials are attempting to project an image that differs from reality in order to conceal their vulnerabilities. This is being pursued through media and psychological warfare aimed at Iran, he said.

Vahidi noted that Israeli claims and propaganda would not yield tangible results. He further stated that Israel is increasingly isolated on the international stage and is making futile efforts to overcome its current dilemma. According to Al Mayadeen, Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) had previously announced that the Israeli military managed to destroy less than three percent of Iran's missile launch platforms, adding that the Islamic Republic's missile capabilities remain operational and ready.

# Araghchi underscores importance of strengthening Iran - Belgium relations

This photo, released by the Foreign Ministry on December 21, 2025, shows Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi (L) meeting with Iran's Ambassador to Belgium, Mohammad-Ali Rabat-Jazi, in Tehran. Tehran, IRNA – Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi has emphasized the importance of strengthening Iran's relations with Belgium and making effective use of the country's capacity within the European Union. Araghchi made the remarks during a meeting with Iran's Ambassador to Belgium, Mohammad-Ali Rabat-Jazi, according to a statement released on Sunday via the Foreign Ministry spokesperson's Telegram account. During the meeting, the ambassador presented a report on the latest state of bilateral relations between Iran and Belgium, as well as recent developments within the European Union. Referring to Iran's approach to expanding relations with various regions of the world, including Europe, based on mutual respect and shared interests, the foreign minister stressed the importance of maintaining and further strengthening Iran-Belgium ties. He also highlighted the need to broaden communications and consultations across different fields and to make use of Belgium's role and potential at the EU level. This photo, released by the Foreign Ministry on December 21, 2025, shows Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi (L) meeting with Iran's Ambassador to Belgium, Mohammad-Ali Rabat-Jazi, in Tehran. Tehran, IRNA – Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi has emphasized the importance of strengthening Iran's relations with Belgium and making effective use of the country's capacity within the European



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## Yalda Night:

# Ancient celebration of year's longest night

**Yalda Night:** Ancient celebration of year's longest night TEHRAN, Dec. 21 (MNA) – Every year on the last day of autumn, Iran marks Yalda Night, an ancient festival celebrating the winter solstice, the rebirth of the sun, and the symbolic triumph of light over darkness. Known as Shab-e Yalda or Shab-e Chelleh, the celebration spans the time between sunset on the final day of autumn and sunrise on the first day of winter. With roots stretching back centuries, Yalda Night has long been regarded as one of the most significant cultural observances in Iranian history. Historical records indicate that it was officially included in the calendar of ancient Iran in 502 BC during the reign of Darius I, commonly known as Darius the Great. Both before and after the advent of Islam, Yalda Night has maintained a central place in Iranian cultural life. Traditionally, it has served as an occasion for families—near and far—to gather, reinforcing social bonds through shared rituals that have endured across generations. The night symbolizes the gradual lengthening of days following the solstice, which Iranians interpret as the renewal of the sun and the victory of light over darkness. **Yalda Night:** Ancient celebration of year's longest night In ancient times, darkness was believed to be associated with evil forces, prompting people to remain awake throughout the longest night of the year and light fires for protection. While the symbolism has evolved, the essence of the celebration—staying together until dawn—remains intact. On the eve of Yalda, a palpable sense of excitement fills Iranian

households as families prepare for the night. While ancient gatherings centered around open fires, and later around the traditional korsi—a low table with a heater beneath and blankets draped over it—modern celebrations typically take place indoors using contemporary heating devices. Today, Yalda is commonly observed as an overnight family gathering, often hosted by grandparents or elderly relatives. **Yalda Night:** Ancient celebration of year's longest night A family sits on the floor around the Korsi during the 'Yalda Night' celebration. Storytelling is a central feature of the night. Elders recount tales and anecdotes, creating an atmosphere of warmth and continuity. Literary traditions also play a key role, particularly the reading of verses from Ferdowsi's Shahnameh and the Divan-e Hafez. A popular ritual involves each participant silently making a wish before opening the Divan-e Hafez at random. The eldest person present then reads the selected poem aloud, and its verses are interpreted as a symbolic response to the wish. Food and fruit are among the most cherished elements of Yalda Night. Families typically prepare a generous dinner, but greater emphasis is placed on fruits and nuts. Watermelon and pomegranate are the most iconic, both valued for their red color, which symbolizes the sun. Pomegranate, in particular, has long been regarded as a symbol of fertility, blessing, happiness, and sacredness. Watermelon, despite being a summer fruit, is traditionally eaten on Yalda Night with the belief that it protects against cold and illness

during the winter months. **Yalda Night:** Ancient celebration of year's longest night Other fruits commonly served include oranges, citrus fruits, apples, persimmons, pears, and pumpkins. Nuts such as pistachios, walnuts, almonds, and hazelnuts are essential, often accompanied by dried figs and berries. Across Iran, each region incorporates its own local foods and customs, reflecting diverse cultural identities. Regional traditions add further richness to the celebration. In eastern Iran, particularly Khorasan, an old custom involves preparing kaf, a foam-like sweet. In some areas, special rituals are observed for newly engaged couples. Shahnameh recitation ceremonies have also traditionally been held in Khorasan on Yalda Night. In Tabriz, street musicians known as Ashiq roam neighborhoods singing, playing music, and narrating legends. In Lorestan, young people climb onto neighbors' rooftops after sunset to sing a traditional song called Shov-e Avval-e Qâreh, lowering scarves to receive treats. **Yalda Night:** Ancient celebration of year's longest night Zanjan remains one of the few regions where the korsi is still widely used, and Yalda gatherings there feature local sweets such as window-shaped pastries and baklava. In Sanandaj, the capital of Kordestan Province, families prepare dolma and sangak bread, rotating hosting duties among households each year. Recognizing its cultural significance, Yalda Night was officially registered on Iran's List of National Treasures in 2008.

