

BRICS International School Steps Up Training of Experts



October 1-3

BRICS INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL
MOSCOW

MOSCOW (Dispatches) – The BRICS International School is a major initiative that trains young experts on BRICS topics. The program aims to develop a professional community of young BRICSologists and educate a new generation of experts.

The BRICS International School has been held annually since 2017 with the sup-

port of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation.

In 2024, the initiative will take place as part of the official calendar of Russia's BRICS Chairmanship and will be implemented with the support of the Gorchakov Public Diplomacy Fund and MGIMO University as part of the Russian government's

Priority 2030 university support program. TV BRICS is the international media partner for the event.

Participants of the school, young people aged 18 to 35, including university students and doctoral candidates, academics and researchers, diplomats and civil servants, journalists from the BRICS group, and others from other countries, receive knowledge from leading experts in the BRICS field.

Graduates of the school will become part of a network of international contacts, share their experiences, and work on new projects that will contribute to further international cooperation between the BRICS countries.

The program is run in English, and participants are selected on a competitive basis.

Fajr Theater Festival Announces Call for Entries



TEHRAN -- The call for submissions for the 43rd Fajr International Theater Festival (FITF), set to take place in Tehran from January 21 to February 2, 2025, has been officially announced.

Led by Kheirollah Taqianipour, this year's festival is organized by the Directorate General of Performing Arts of the Ministry

of Culture and Islamic Guidance in collaboration with the Iranian Association of Performing Arts.

The festival aims to show high-quality performances with a focus on joy, solidarity, and hope, iFilm reported.

The 43rd edition will feature a diverse array of sections, including stage performances, street

performances, alternative performances, Theater of Nations, a playwriting competition, a scientific-research seminar, a theater photography competition and exhibition, and a poster and promotional items competition and exhibition.

Notable changes in this year's festival include the return of the photography section and the introduction of an advertising section.

The call for the international section of the festival was also issued on July 22, with a submission deadline of August 30, 2025. Interested participants can submit their works to Dramatic.artcenter.iran@gmail.com.

For further details, visit the official Fajr International Theater Festival website at <https://fitf.theater.ir>.

Makhunik: A Real Lilliputian Village in Eastern Iran

TEHRAN -- Up until a century ago, residents of Makhunik were half a meter shorter than the average Iranian.

In the first part of Jonathan Swift's book Gulliver's Travels, Lemuel Gulliver washes ashore on the island country of Lilliput, where he encounters the Lilliputians, who stand barely taller than 15cm.

While Swift's Lilliput is merely a fantasy, a comparable village exists in the eastern extremities of Iran. Up until around a century ago, some of the residents of Makhunik, a 1,500-year-old village roughly 75km west of the Afghan border, measured a mere meter in height – approximately 50cm shorter than the average height at the time, according to BBC.

In 2005, a mummified body measuring 25cm in length was found in the region. The discovery fuelled the belief that this remote corner of Iran, which consists of 13 villages, including Makhunik, was once home to an ancient 'City of Dwarfs'. Although experts have determined that the mummy was actually a premature baby who died roughly 400 years ago, they contend that previous generations of Makhunik residents were indeed shorter than usual.

Malnutrition significantly contributed to Makhunik residents' height deficiency. Raising animals was difficult in this dry, desolate region, and turnips, grain, barley and a date-like fruit called jujube constituted the only farming. Makhunik residents subsisted on simple vegetarian dishes such as kashk-beneh (made from whey and a type of pistachio that is grown in the mountains), and pokhtek (a mixture of dried whey and turnip). Arguably the most astonish-



ing dietary anomaly was a disdain for tea – one of the hallmarks of Iranian cuisine and hospitality.

"When I was a kid no-one drank tea. If someone drank tea, they'd joke and say he was an addict," recalled Ahmad Rahnama, referring the stereotype that opium addicts drink a lot of tea. The 61-year-old Makhunik resident runs a museum dedicated to Makhunik's historic architecture and traditional lifestyle.

In the mid-20th century, the construction of roads and the proliferation of vehicles allowed Makhunik residents access to ingredients found in other parts of Iran, such as rice and chicken.

"When the vehicles came, people could bring food from nearby towns so there was more to eat than just kashk-beneh and bread," Rahnam said.

Although most of Makhunik's 700 residents are now of average height, reminders of their ancestors' shorter statures still persist. Of the roughly 200 stone and clay houses that make up the ancient village, 70 or 80 are exceptionally low, ranging between 1.5 to 2m – with the ceilings of some as low as 1.4m.

"Stooping down, I followed Rahnama into one of Makhu-

nik's 'Lilliputian' homes, ducking through the wooden door that was located on the house's southern side to let in more light and protect the home's single room from strong northerly winds," BBC correspondent Shervin Abdolhamidi wrote.

"I found myself in a small living quarters known as the 'sitting room' – aptly named as I was forced to sit due to the low ceiling. This roughly 10- to 14-sq-m space consisted of the kandik (place for storing grain and wheat), a karshak (a clay stove for cooking) and a sleeping space."

Constructing these tiny homes was no easy feat, Rahnama said, and residents' short stature wasn't the only reason to build smaller houses. Domestic animals large enough to pull wagons were scarce and proper roads were limited, meaning locals had to carry building supplies by hand for kilometers at a time. Smaller homes required fewer materials, and thus less effort. Additionally, although cramped, smaller houses were easier to heat and cool than larger ones, and blended in more easily with the landscape, making them harder for potential invaders to spot.

Life in the village still isn't easy; the little agriculture that

existed has declined in recent years due to drought, forcing younger residents to look elsewhere for work.

"Nowadays young people go to nearby cities for work and bring back money and food. The women do some weaving, but aside from that there is no work," Rahnama said. Meanwhile, older residents have had to rely heavily on government subsidies.

Despite the difficult circumstances, Rahnama is hopeful that interest in the village's unique architecture will lure visitors and that tourism will create more jobs and business. For now, though, "it is what it is," he told me with a resigned smile.

"But," he added, chuckling, "things are better now than they used to be before. Before people were short and stocky, and now they're tall and lean."

Armenians of Isfahan Condemn Insult to Christianity at Olympics



Exterior view of the Holy Savior Cathedral in the New Julfa district of Isfahan.

TEHRAN -- The Armenian community of the Iranian city of Isfahan has strongly criticized the opening ceremony of the 2024 Paris Olympics for a performance that was deemed disrespectful to Christianity.

The ceremony was widely condemned for its depiction of Leonardo da Vinci's painting "The Last Supper" with a "drag queen" performance, which many saw as disrespectful to Christian religious beliefs.

In a statement, the Armenian Apostolic Diocese of Isfahan and Southern Iran highlighted

the moral decline and social disintegration prevalent in what is often referred to as a "progressive" and "tolerant" world.

They asserted that the events witnessed are indicative of a disturbing trend away from divine and human values.

The statement further criticized the inappropriate portrayals and the offensive depiction of Jesus Christ, along with attacks on sacred family values, describing them as a disgraceful aspect of the Olympics that has caused pain to believers worldwide.

Picture of the Day



Khusf is an ancient city with an area of about 20 hectares containing many valuable historical and cultural buildings in South Khorasan province.

Photo by IRNA