



▶ Page 3

US 'Piracy': Iran Locks the Sea Gates of Hormuz

Leader: Islamic Revolution ended a period of "imposed weakness" on military

TEHRAN – Iran's Leader, Ayatollah Seyyed Mojtaba Khamenei, in his message on the occasion of Army Day, described the 1979 Islamic Revolution as a historic turning point that ended an era of "imposed weakness" on the military.

Iranian political and military leaders marked National Army Day on Saturday, issuing messages that praised the country's armed forces as a pillar of national security and stability. Senior officials, including the Leader of the Islamic Revolution, the president, the parliament speaker, the foreign minister, and the judiciary chief, emphasized that Iran's strength and regional standing are deeply rooted in the sacrifices and resilience of its military personnel. ▶ Page 3

High-stakes gamble of a Persian Gulf blockade

TEHRAN- Regarding the recent move by the U.S. President to enforce a naval siege of the Persian Gulf aimed at political and economic strain on the Iranian people, analysts warn that if such a measure is implemented, it will have a direct and severe impact on the global energy sector.

Only authorized vessels will be permitted to pass—meaning ships that have traded with Iran or are not deemed acceptable will be halted. This strategy, while intended to isolate Tehran, risks triggering an unprecedented energy crisis.

In effect, this would restrict or cut off the flow of oil, energy, and goods from the Persian Gulf, a waterway through which nearly one-fifth of global petroleum passes. ▶ Page 4

SNSC: No reopening of Hormuz Strait amid US ceasefire violations

TEHRAN - Iran's top security body said on Saturday that the Strait of Hormuz will remain closed as long as Washington continues to violate the two-week ceasefire with Tehran.

In a statement, Iran's Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) said the US naval blockade on Iranian ports and the disruption of vessel navigation amount to a breach of the truce.

"As long as the enemy intends to disrupt vessel traffic and use methods such as a naval blockade, the Islamic Republic of Iran will consider it a violation of the ceasefire and will prevent the conditional and limited opening of the Strait of Hormuz," the statement said.

It also said Iran will maintain control of all traffic through the strategic waterway until a negotiated end to the US-Israeli war on Iran that began on February 28.

The SNSC argued that most American military equipment in the Persian Gulf passes through the Strait of Hormuz. ▶ Page 2

Former Iranian FM warns Bahrain: 'Next time we'll make you forget your name'

TEHRAN- Iran's former foreign minister, Manouchehr Mottaki, launched a blistering attack on Bahrain during a regional parliamentary gathering in Turkey on Saturday, accusing Manama of bankrolling American "terrorists" for decades and warning of an unprecedented military response if Bahrain facilitates any future US attack on Iran.

Speaking at the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) meeting in Istanbul, Mottaki was responding to "insulting remarks" by a Bahraini lawmaker earlier in the session.

The former top diplomat, who served as foreign minister from 2005 to 2010, accused the tiny Persian Gulf kingdom of effectively acting as a proxy for Washington and Tel Aviv.

"The disrespectful words of the Bahraini representative sounded as if an American or Israeli agent was speaking," Mottaki charged. "Why did you establish the terrorist American Fifth Fleet base in Bahrain?" ▶ Page 2

From Congress to think tanks: A rare consensus against Trump's policies

By Maedeh Zaman Fashami

TEHRAN - In recent years, and especially with the beginning of Donald Trump's second presidential term, the political and social landscape of the United States has entered a new phase of deepening tension and polarization. This phase is characterized not only by opposition from traditional Democratic critics, but also by growing concern among some Republicans, conservative analysts, mainstream think tanks, and even former allies of Trump regarding the direction of his governance. A wide range of media reports, official statements, academic analyses, and public opinion data suggests that these criticisms cluster around four main themes: foreign policy—particularly the war and tensions with Iran—democratic institutions and concentration of power, press freedom and the information environment, and the economic consequences of government decisions. ▶ Page 2

Lebanon ceasefire: A new impasse or a lifeline?

By Wesam Bahrani

TEHRAN – The Zionist regime's prime minister is not expected to easily surrender his plans and aspirations in Lebanon.

Doing so would not only destroy his future but also his legacy and his past. Therefore, traps remain present in the paths of the ceasefire agreement between Lebanon and the Israeli regime, which Benjamin Netanyahu tried to avoid as much as possible.

Before the truce came into effect, a consensus prevailed among most specialists and stakeholders within the Zionist regime: it was undisputed that Netanyahu's interest lay in continuing the war, even on a single front, and obstructing negotiations whenever possible until he achieves his goals. This concerns surviving the challenges that confront him and his struggle for political survival. ▶ Page 5

Intl. academics warn of deliberate destruction of Iran's cultural sites

TEHRAN – A group of 218 international academics and researchers has warned of what it described as the deliberate destruction of Iran's cultural heritage and scientific centers following recent US-Israeli attacks, calling the actions illegal and a threat to human history.

In a statement published in scientific journals, the signatories said recent military actions against Iran had caused widespread damage to research institutions and heritage sites, raising concerns about their impact on global scientific work and shared cultural memory.

The bombing of Iran amounts to erasing part of humanity's memory and poses a serious threat to global scientific research, the statement said. ▶ Page 6



© ISNA/Mostafa Shalchi

Reception ceremony for "hero survivor of Dena destroyer" held in Sari

A reception ceremony was held in a village in the northern Iranian city of Sari on Saturday for Navy Lieutenant Majid Omrani, one of 32 survivors of the Dena destroyer.

The vessel was attacked by a US Navy submarine in early March while returning from the international "Milan 2026" exercise in India.

The attack killed 104 people and injured 32, with 20 still missing in action. The event was attended by local residents and provincial officials.

Committing war crimes under the name of religion

TEHRAN – Donald Trump and his War Secretary Pete Hegseth are portraying themselves as Messiah in the war against Iran.

Probably, under this banner, committing war crimes is permissible or even necessary.

Trump posted an image of himself with Jesus-like healing powers. This happened after Pope Leo criticized his "madness of war" against Iran.

The United States has constitutionally made a separation between church and state, but the Trump administration is defying that law.

As the ISIS, commonly known as Daesh, felt and still feels it has a divine obligation to counter what it calls infidels –including Muslims, Christians, and Jews – Trump and his religious fanatics, to a lesser extent, also think or pretend they have a similar obligation. However, there are binding laws in the U.S. which restricts them. ▶ Page 5



TEHRAN PAPERS

In the following column, we take a look at some important contents and views in yesterday's Iranian newspapers.

Dignified defense and courageous negotiations

Arman-e-Emrooz, in an editorial, examined Iran's assertive approach both on the battlefield and at the negotiating table. In recent days, the simultaneous use of the two concepts 'dignified defense' and 'courageous negotiations' has drawn attention in the country's political discourse. Within the framework of dignified defense, the emphasis is that the country defends its interests with honor and strength, refusing to surrender to threats or compromise its principles. In this view, peace itself is considered a form of wise national defense, and efforts to reach a sustainable agreement are part of the same strategy. Ultimately, these two approaches operate in a reciprocal and complementary relationship to ensure effective national defense while compelling the other side to respect Iran's rights, independence, and territorial integrity.

Sobh-e-No: Activating northern transit routes

Sobh-e-No analyzed the US naval blockade and outlined two actions Iran should take in response. According to the paper, the first reaction would naturally be military: Iran would completely close the Strait of Hormuz. If ships bound for Iranian ports are prevented from passing, then the strait will not remain open for other regional ports either. Reopening the Strait would have no military solution unless adversaries were prepared to launch a massive and extremely costly ground invasion against Iran. Second, Iran must redirect part of its trade — especially essential goods currently transported through southern ports — toward land routes, a point emphasized even before the conflict. At present, some essential goods purchased from Russia are first shipped to the UAE and then imported into Iran's southern ports, a policy the paper calls misguided. Iran can instead make use of northern rail corridors.

Kayhan: Do not reopen the Strait of Hormuz

Kayhan, commenting on the renewed opening of the Strait of Hormuz, wrote that reopening this vital artery before receiving compensation, the definitive lifting of sanctions, and other rightful demands amounts to giving the enemy breathing space in the middle of a confrontation — an enemy that cannot be trusted. According to the paper, the crushing pressure created by the closure of the strait tightened the physical oil market day by day and reduced US strategic reserves to a minimum. This was the point at which the adversary became desperate and pleaded to return to the negotiating table. Therefore, this freedom of passage must not become a permanent practice unless

Iran's legitimate rights are fully secured. The enemy must understand that this is not a free concession. It notes that Donald Trump reacted hypocritically by thanking Iran for reopening the strait. These 'deceitful messages,' the paper said, are nothing but traps. Trump attacked Iran twice during the previous negotiations and is not trustworthy.

Hamshahri: Why was the Strait of Hormuz reopened?

Hamshahri writes that the Iranian foreign minister's Friday announcement regarding the reopening of the Strait of Hormuz to commercial vessels, strictly along routes designated by Iran, along with the start of a ceasefire in Lebanon, should be seen as two new signs of Iran imposing its will on the US-Israeli axis. Although after the announcement, the US president attempted to impose his own narrative on the situation, the paper argues that the reality is clear: the strait was not reopened — even under the threat of a 'naval blockade of Iran' — until the United States accepted Iran's conditions for a ceasefire. A review of recent developments shows that the Strait of Hormuz was reopened only for commercial shipping, only along Iran-designated routes, and only until the end of the ceasefire period, after the opposing side retreated from its positions regarding the war in Lebanon and accepted a ceasefire shaped by Iran. Under these circumstances, the paper concludes, despite Trump's rhetoric, an agreement to end the war will remain achievable only if the other side continues to adhere to Iran's outlined framework.

Javan: National interests come first

Javan, in an analysis about prioritizing Iran's national interests above everything else, wrote: We have entered an important phase of geopolitical changes, and we intend to make our national interests and national power our top priority — just as global powers do. Today, in our foreign policy and international relations, we must move beyond seeking approval and instead base everything on securing national interests. The principle should be that we treat any country that respects Iran's national interests with reciprocal respect. Instead of joining conventions that serve the interests of major powers, our foreign relations should proceed through anti-hegemonic alliances and bilateral agreements. Now is the time to move past approval-seeking and to establish an operational model based on indigenous norms and insistence on our natural rights.

Former Iranian FM warns Bahrain: 'Next time we'll make you forget your name'

TEHRAN - Iran's former foreign minister, Manouchehr Mottaki, launched a blistering attack on Bahrain during a regional parliamentary gathering in Turkey on Saturday, accusing Manama of bankrolling American "terrorists" for decades and warning of an unprecedented military response if Bahrain facilitates any future US attack on Iran.

Speaking at the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) meeting in Istanbul, Mottaki was responding to "insulting remarks" by a Bahraini lawmaker earlier in the session.

The former top diplomat, who served as foreign minister from 2005 to 2010, accused the tiny Persian Gulf kingdom of effectively acting as a proxy for Washington and Tel Aviv.

"The disrespectful words of the Bahraini representative sounded as if an American or Israeli agent was speaking," Mottaki charged. "Why did you establish the terrorist American Fifth Fleet base in Bahrain?"

"The small country of Bahrain has given the United States three million square meters of its land — plus airport facilities, hotels, and everything else — from which our country has been bombed," he said.

He added that US operations from Bahrain have targeted not only military objectives but

also "civilian, industrial, economic, and welfare" infrastructure inside Iran.

"For 40 years, you have been paying the salaries of American terrorists on your soil — even the wages of their cooks and the cost of their military equipment," Mottaki said. "Today it has become clear that these bases were established solely against Iran's security and interests."

The former foreign minister issued a stern warning regarding potential future hostilities.

"If we have not taken action until now, it was because we were waiting to see how these bases would be used," he said. "Now that you are facilitating them, you are effectively partners in their aggressive war."

Mottaki warned that US officials, realizing they cannot defeat Iran militarily, have sought negotiations through intermediaries, including Egypt, Oman, Pakistan, and Turkey.

However, he warned: "If, like previous negotiations, they bomb the negotiating table for a third time and restart the war, and if you provide the US with facilities to attack Iran, you will receive a response that will make you forget your name."

From Congress to think tanks: A rare consensus against Trump's policies

By Maedeh Zaman Fashami

TEHRAN - In recent years, and especially with the beginning of Donald Trump's second presidential term, the political and social landscape of the United States has entered a new phase of deepening tension and polarization. This phase is characterized not only by opposition from traditional Democratic critics, but also by growing concern among some Republicans, conservative analysts, mainstream think tanks, and even former allies of Trump regarding the direction of his governance. A wide range of media reports, official statements, academic analyses, and public opinion data suggests that these criticisms cluster around four main themes: foreign policy — particularly the war and tensions with Iran — democratic institutions and concentration of power, press freedom and the information environment, and the economic consequences of government decisions.

In the realm of foreign policy, the war and escalating tensions with Iran have become one of the central focal points of criticism. Many senators and members of Congress, both Democratic and Republican, have warned about the lack of a clear, long-term strategy in these conflicts. Reports from congressional hearings repeatedly emphasize that the Trump administration has entered or escalated military engagements without presenting a defined endgame, raising serious concerns about the risk of a prolonged, draining war. Senators such as Elizabeth Warren and Bernie Sanders have described these policies as not only morally and humanly problematic but also as a direct threat to domestic economic stability in the United States. They argue that rising military spending and increasing energy prices place significant pressure on the middle and working classes. On the Republican side, figures such as Josh Hawley have also raised concerns about the lack of transparency in war objectives, warning that continued ambiguity could reduce political support for the administration in Congress.

Heads of Iran's religious, scientific bodies laud Pope's stance on US-Israeli war

TEHRAN - The chairmen of Iran's religious and scientific institutions have praised Pope Leo XIV for his "courageous stance" on the ongoing US-Israeli conflict, expressing hope that his position will help bring an end to hostilities.

In a joint letter addressed to the head of the world's Catholic Church, and released on Saturday, the Iranian officials wrote, "Your condemnation of the US-Israeli attacks against Iran and the killing of innocent people has been a source of pride for religious communities worldwide."

The letter added that the Pope's resistance to political pressure from the US president sets "an example for scholars and clerics of all faiths."

Iran's judiciary chief says aggressors must pay war reparations

Iran's Judiciary Chief, Gholamhossein Mohseni-Eje'i, has stated that the United States and the Israeli regime must be held legally accountable by competent international bodies for war crimes and must pay full war reparations to Iran.

Mohseni-Eje'i made the remarks on Saturday during a meeting in Tehran with senior members of the High Council of the Judiciary and provincial judicial chiefs.

He argued that the United States and the Israeli regime initiated the conflict and caused extensive material and moral damage to the Iranian nation. According to the Judiciary chief, multiple deliberate war crimes were committed during the attacks, including the killing of civilians and children, as well as strikes on protected sites such as hospitals, schools, universities, and residential areas.

Citing provisions of the 1949 Ge-



Cory Booker, Senator from New Jersey, added: "Even Trump knows Congress can hold him accountable. It is time for Republicans in the House and Senate to wake up and restrain him before this turns into another forever war."

Alongside political figures, military and international relations analysts have also highlighted that the United States is trapped in a complex situation with no clear horizon. Some argue that the government is neither in a position to achieve a decisive military victory nor capable of presenting a dignified exit strategy. This condition has been described by several think tanks and international media outlets as a "strategic deadlock." European analysts have also warned that such conflicts could trigger severe shocks in global energy markets and lead to sustained price increases worldwide.

Trump has recently made numerous controversial statements regarding the war with Iran and ceasefire prospects. He had promised a quick end to the conflict, yet the war has kept energy costs high, fueling widespread reactions across American society. Several Republican senators have warned that unless the president clearly outlines his plan, they may increasingly oppose him, including withholding support for military action against Iran after 60 days of conflict.

Senator Josh Hawley said: "I hope we are moving toward a strategy for exiting this war so we can end it in a way that protects our security interests and reduces gas prices. Time is running out for this war."

Trump also sparked controversy after posting an AI-generated image depicting himself in a Christ-like figure. This followed his earlier comments criticizing Pope Leo XIV, whom he described as weak on crime and "terrible" in foreign policy.

Christian activist Sean Feucht called the image "completely unacceptable" and demanded its removal. Riley Gaines warned that "God should not be mocked." Archbishop Paul Coakley and Bishop Robert Barron also criticized Trump, calling his remarks "inappropriate and disrespectful," and urged him to apologize. The controversy even extended into Trump's evangelical support base, where some conservative Christians expressed discomfort at imagery portraying him as a messianic figure. David Brody, a pro-Trump commentator, wrote: "Take this down, Mr. President. You are not God. None of us are. This goes too far."

Beyond these issues, criticism of Trump also extends to democracy and governance structures. Multiple reports from major international think tanks such as V-Dem, Freedom House, and Bright Line

Watch indicate a declining trend in democratic indicators in the United States in recent years. These reports point to increased concentration of power in the executive branch, reduced congressional oversight, growing pressure on independent institutions, and weakening accountability mechanisms. Some of these organizations have even warned that the United States is approaching levels of democratic fragility seen in less stable political systems. While the Trump administration rejects these reports as biased and political, the convergence of multiple independent studies has made these concerns widely discussed in academic and media circles.

Another major area of criticism concerns press freedom during Trump's current presidency. Reporters Without Borders and similar organizations have reported increased pressure on critical media outlets and reduced journalistic access to government information. Measures such as limiting press attendance at official briefings, revising White House media access rules, and pursuing legal actions against certain outlets have been cited as evidence of an effort to control the information environment. Critics interpret these developments as attempts to restrict media independence and shape public narratives.

(See full text at tehrantimes.com)

nating the Leader of the Islamic Revolution, Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei, and by striking civilian infrastructure, including universities, schools, and charity centers.

The authors argued that resources currently devoted to conflict should instead be used to promote moral values and alleviate human suffering.

The Iranian officials' remarks followed earlier comments by the Pope, who warned of escalating violence in West Asia and urged restraint. "Stability and peace are not built with mutual threats or weapons," he said, calling instead for "reasonable, authentic, and responsible dialogue." He also cautioned that further escalation could lead to a major humanitarian crisis.

SNSC: No reopening of Hormuz Strait amid US ceasefire violations

TEHRAN - Iran's top security body said on Saturday that the Strait of Hormuz will remain closed as long as Washington continues to violate the two-week ceasefire with Tehran.

In a statement, Iran's Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) said the US naval blockade on Iranian ports and the disruption of vessel navigation amount to a breach of the truce.

"As long as the enemy intends to disrupt vessel traffic and use methods such as a naval blockade, the Islamic Republic of Iran will consider it a violation of the ceasefire and will prevent the conditional and limited opening of the Strait of Hormuz," the statement said.

It also said Iran will maintain control of all traffic through the strategic waterway until a negotiated end to the US-Israeli war



on Iran that began on February 28.

The SNSC argued that most American military equipment in the Persian Gulf passes through the Strait of Hormuz, saying "this is a threat to the national security of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Persian Gulf region."

Citing such a threat, it added, "Iran is determined to maintain oversight and control over traffic through the Strait of Hormuz until the war has definitely ended and lasting peace is achieved in the region."

US 'piracy': Iran locks the sea gates of Hormuz

TEHRAN – Iran has reasserted full control over the Strait of Hormuz following US breaches of commitments related to a fragile two-week ceasefire.

Reports on Saturday suggested that Iranian naval forces intercepted two vessels that attempted to transit the strategic waterway without coordination with Iranian authorities.

Iran has denounced the US for violating the truce, while media reports have also cast doubt on the likelihood of a new round of talks with Washington amid a US naval blockade on Iranian ports. On Saturday, the US Central Command (CENTCOM) doubled down on enforcement of a naval blockade. CENTCOM stated that the United States is continuing to enforce its declared "maritime blockade against ships entering or exiting Iranian ports and coastal areas."

Earlier, Iranian officials had strongly rejected President Trump's social media chatter, reiterating that they were based on "false claims" and political misrepresentation.

President Trump, in a series of posts on Truth Social on Friday, made several claims regarding the status of the Strait of Hormuz, Iran's enriched uranium stockpile, and the Lebanon ceasefire. He stated that Iran had "agreed to never close the Strait of Hormuz again," and added that the United States would retrieve Iran's enriched uranium. Trump also said the US naval blockade would remain in full force despite the ceasefire.

These remarks followed comments by Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi on X, in which he stated that "the passage for all commercial vessels through the Strait of Hormuz is completely open," describing it as coordinated in the wake of ceasefire understandings.

Iranian officials have accused the US president of selectively inter-



preting Araghchi's statements for political purposes. It appears that Trump's remarks misrepresented the conditions attached to maritime arrangements and were intended to deflect attention from growing criticism of US policies in the region following the joint war it launched against Iran on February 28.

According to the Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesperson, the reopening and regulated transit through the Strait of Hormuz remains contingent on US compliance with the terms of the two-week ceasefire agreement between Tehran and Washington reached on April 8. Esmail Baghaei further stated that Iran's decisions regarding maritime passage are based on coordinated mechanisms. He warned that the US naval blockade and maritime restrictions would be considered a violation of ceasefire understandings, and would prompt reciprocal measures. Baghaei firmly rejected Trump's claims regarding Iran's enriched uranium, stressing that such materials will remain within Iranian territory and will not be transferred abroad under any circumstances.

Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, speaker of the Iranian Parliament and top negotiator, also dismissed Trump's statements as "false," arguing that the United States has failed to achieve its objectives through military action and will similarly fail in diplomatic negotiations. He em-

phasized that passage through the Strait of Hormuz will operate under a "designated route" and will require Iranian authorization, adding that the final determination over maritime rules remains a matter of national sovereignty. "Whether the strait remains open or closed, and the rules governing it, will be determined on the battlefield, not on social media."

On Saturday, the Islamic Revolution Guard Corps (IRGC) also dismissed the US naval blockade as "piracy."

"Until America allows full freedom of navigation for vessels traveling from Iran to destinations and vice versa, the situation in the Strait of Hormuz will remain under strict control and in its previous condition," Lieutenant-Colonel Ebrahim Zolfaghari, the spokesperson for the Khatam al-Anbiya Central Headquarters, said.

Iranian political figures also continued to respond sharply. Ebrahim Azizi, head of the National Security Committee of Iran's Parliament, wrote on X: "We warned you, but you ignored it. Now enjoy the Strait of Hormuz returning to the status quo." In an earlier post, he stated that "the time has come to comply with the new maritime regime of the Strait of Hormuz," adding that such regulations are determined by Iran rather than social media declarations.

The developments come amid

discussions over a potential new round of talks between Tehran and Washington in Islamabad. However, Iranian media outlets have reported uncertainty over the next phase of negotiations, citing US "excessive demands" and recent announcements from Washington regarding maritime pressure measures.

Tasnim News Agency reported that Iran has not agreed to proceed with further rounds of talks, stating that Tehran is not interested in "fruitless or attritional negotiations."

Saeed Khatibzadeh, Iran's deputy foreign minister, said on Saturday that no date has been set for the next round of negotiations between Iran and the United States. The first round of talks between Tehran and Washington was held through Pakistan's mediation in Islamabad a week ago.

Analysts argue that Iran's control over the Strait of Hormuz and the failure of the joint US-Israel military campaign have strengthened Iran's strategic position. They maintain that attempts to exert pressure through maritime measures, including the US naval blockade, have proven ineffective and strategically futile in altering Iran's stance or limiting its regional influence.

At the same time, regional diplomacy continues, with Pakistan's Chief of Defense Forces (CDF), Field Marshal Syed Asim Munir, concluding a three-day visit to Tehran, where he met senior Iranian officials. Parallel diplomatic engagements have also taken place between Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Turkey aimed at supporting broader de-escalation efforts.

Iranian officials maintain that any future negotiations with the United States will depend on respect for Iran's national interests and recognition of its regional position, framing diplomacy as a continuation—not a concession—of Iran's strategic and military resilience.

Iran-Puerto Rico friendly in jeopardy amid new demands

TEHRAN – A highly anticipated friendly match between Iran and Puerto Rico, slated for June on U.S. soil, is reportedly facing cancellation.

The Football Federation of Iran had previously confirmed the fixture as part of Team Melli's preparations for the 2026 FIFA World Cup.

Head coach Amir Ghalenoei is prioritizing optimal readiness for the global tournament, with less than two months until kickoff. This friendly was intended as a key component of that preparation.

Sources indicate that the Puerto Rico Football Federation has sent a letter to its Iranian counterparts, requesting a new memorandum of understanding and suggesting the match could be called off. This development casts uncertainty over the fixture.

Meanwhile, Iran's national team are set to commence their training camps. Domestic league players will join Ghalenoei's initial sessions, which will run in two stages until May 8. The final pre-World Cup camp is scheduled to begin on May 9, with the team then traveling to Turkey for their last preparation phase abroad.

Iran's PGPL faces a risky plan to resume after 2026 World Cup

TEHRAN – Uncertainty around the future of the Persian Gulf Professional League (PGPL) has turned into a serious challenge for Iranian football. With the season left unfinished due to exceptional conditions of the country and the 2026 World Cup approaching, the idea of resuming the league after the tournament raises more questions than answers.

Mehdi Taj, president of the Football Federation of Iran, recently admitted that given the unpredictable situation, continuing the league right now may not be the right decision. At the same time, plans are already being discussed to restart the competition after the World Cup. This contradiction shows just how unclear the overall strategy is.

Even in the best-case scenario, if Iran are eliminated in the group stage, the league would only restart in mid-July. That leaves organizers with eight remaining rounds plus domestic cup matches to be played in a very tight schedule. Compressing so many games into a short period is difficult and risks lowering the quality of football.

But the biggest issue is not timing, it is fairness. The Asian Football Confederation (AFC) requires Iran to nominate its representatives for the AFC Champions League Elite and AFC Champions League 2 by early June. This means teams may be selected for Asia before the league is actually finished!

Such a situation is highly unusual and, frankly, difficult to justify. Football competitions are built on results earned on the pitch. Deciding Asian representatives based on an incomplete table goes against the basic idea of fair competition.

There are also serious sporting consequences. If the top teams secure their continental spots early, their motivation in the remaining matches will naturally drop. That directly affects teams fighting for survival at the bottom of the table, where every point matters. In other words, the competitive balance of the league would be damaged.

On top of that, clubs themselves are divided. Some prefer the league to end now, while others insist on continuing. This disagreement reflects a deeper problem: the lack of a clear and consistent plan from decision-makers.

If the league does resume after the World Cup under these conditions, the remaining matches may lose much of their meaning. At that point, the competition risks becoming just a formality, played mainly to officially name a champion for the record books.

Iranian football now faces an important decision. Continue with a flawed plan, or protect the integrity of the league. Because when key outcomes are decided before the season is completed, it is fair to ask: does continuing the league really make sense?

Iran come second at 2026 World Taekwondo Junior Championships

TEHRAN – Iran finished in second place at the Tashkent 2026 World Taekwondo Junior Championships.

Among the awards, host nation Uzbekistan ranked first in the men's team standings for the first time at a junior or senior World Taekwondo Championships. Uzbekistan came first with 404 points, winning two gold medals, two silvers and one bronze.

They were followed in the standings by Iran (397 points – three golds), Russia (two golds, one silver), Korea (one gold, two silvers) and Thailand.

China topped the women's team standings, followed by Croatia, Korea, Iran and Chinese Taipei.

The tournament attracted over 960 athletes representing 127 Member National Associations (MNAs) in Tashkent, Uzbekistan.

Iran U18 girls' volleyball team launch training camps

TEHRAN – The Iran women's U18 national volleyball team have kicked off their training and selection process in Sari, Mazandaran Province, under the guidance of head coach Fariba Sadeghi, as part of preparations for the 2026 Asian U18 Girls' Volleyball Championship set to be held from June 30 to July 6 in Thailand.

Sadeghi announced that three selection camps are being held in Sari to evaluate players from recent national championships, academy tournaments, and Division Two competitions. She noted that the participants were chosen by technical experts, with additional promising talents introduced through provincial associations.

"These camps will run until April 18," Sadeghi said. "Throughout this period, the players will be assessed by the national coaching staff. After comparing performances across the three groups, a number of players will advance to the next camp. Following one or two additional cuts, we will finalize the 14-player squad for the Asian Championship, with 25 others placed on the reserve list."

Highlighting the significance of the continental event, Sadeghi emphasized that 16 teams will compete in this edition, which takes place every two years.

Despite current wartime conditions in the region, Sadeghi praised the federation's decision to move forward with preparations. "Given the war situation and the overall climate at the start of the year, I believe the federation made a very positive and courageous decision to organize these camps," she said. "Fortunately, the response has been excellent – all invited players reported for duty despite the long distances."

Sadeghi added that the federation carefully chose a safe location to ensure smooth progress in the selection process. "We have just over two months to prepare," she concluded, "and it's crucial that we make full use of this time."

Leader: Islamic Revolution ended a period of "imposed weakness" on military

From Page 1 ▶ In a message on the occasion, Ayatollah Seyyed Mojtaba Khamenei, the Leader of the Islamic Revolution and commander-in-chief of the armed forces, congratulated army personnel, their families, and the Iranian nation. He described the 1979 Islamic Revolution as a turning point that ended a period of "imposed weakness" on the military, enabling the army to assume a "central and honorable role" in the country.

The Leader highlighted the army's close bond with the people in the years following the revolution, noting its decisive role in confronting external threats and internal challenges. Referring to recent regional developments, he underscored the armed forces' effectiveness in defending Iran's territorial integrity and sovereignty through coordination among various branches.

"The continuous development of military capabilities and sustained readiness across all domains remain essential," the message said, concluding with tribute to fallen commanders, servicemen, and their families.

Parliament Speaker Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf described the Army of the Islamic Republic of Iran as "a symbol of strength, security, and guardianship" over the nation. He said the army, deeply rooted in the hearts of the people, has consistently played a vital role in safeguarding territorial integrity and national security through sacrifice and selflessness.

"The Army's dedicated commanders and personnel have always been present wherever they were needed," he added. "Whether on the battle-

field, in the aftermath of natural disasters, or in service to the people, they have remained on the front lines."

President Masoud Pezeshkian also praised the armed forces, saying that at a time when Iran faces "aggression and mounting pressure" from adversaries, the army, alongside the Islamic Revolution Guard Corps and other military entities, has demonstrated coordination, readiness, and sacrifice.

"With an intelligent, decisive, and unified presence, they have shown unwavering resolve in defending the country's security, dignity, and independence, as well as its Islamic and Iranian identity," he said.

(See full text at tehrantimes.com)

LATES NEWS

A senior Hezbollah official, Nawaf al-Mousawi, said Iran's show of power during the recent US-Israeli war has further strengthened the resistance front.

He also warned that any direct meeting between Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Lebanon's president would undermine Lebanon's political legitimacy.

■ **Minister visits damaged aerospace institute after US-Israeli strikes**

Minister of Science, Research and Technology Hossein Simayi Sarraf visited the Aerospace Research Institute of Iran, which sustained heavy damage in recent US-Israeli strikes.

During the visit, he reaffirmed the government's commitment to restoring and maintaining the country's scientific and research infrastructure.

■ **Fourth maritime incident reported in Gulf of Oman**

A fourth maritime security incident has been reported in the Gulf of Oman, near the strategic Strait of Hormuz, as regional tensions continue to rise.

■ **Pakistani daily: Islamabad to host 'crucial' round of Iran-US talks**

Pakistan's Express Tribune newspaper, cit-

ing diplomatic sources, reported that communication channels are helping steer Iran-US negotiations back on track.

According to the report, a series of confidence-building measures by both sides has revived prospects for a potential agreement. Islamabad is expected to host a decisive round of talks between Tehran and Washington.

■ **Tehran mayor: enemy gravely mistaken**

Tehran Mayor Alireza Zakani warned that Israel and the United States are "gravely mistaken" if they believe they can target Iran's leadership and then dictate the timing of war or ceasefire.

"They must be held accountable," Zakani said.

■ **Iranian elections likely to be postponed amid wartime conditions**

Iran's upcoming city council, Assembly of Experts, and parliamentary midterm elections, initially scheduled for May 1, are likely to be postponed due to wartime conditions, Tasnim News Agency reported.

Officials have proposed holding the elections three months after the end of the war. The proposal is currently under final review.

■ **Deputy FM: US bid to treat Iran as 'exception' blocked agreement**

Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister Saeed Khatibzadeh said Washington's attempt to turn Iran into an "exception" under international law prevented the two sides from reaching an agreement.

"I must state clearly that Iran will not accept being treated as an exception in international law," Khatibzadeh said, adding that any commitments undertaken by Tehran will remain strictly within the framework of established international regulations.

■ **IRGC dismantles enemy-linked cells in three provinces**

The Islamic Revolution Guard Corps (IRGC) announced it has dismantled mercenary networks linked to the United States, Israel, and Britain in East Azerbaijan, Kerman, and Mazandaran provinces.

According to the IRGC, the cells were engaged in espionage, arms smuggling, market disruption, and efforts to incite unrest ahead of the recent US-Israeli war on Iran. Dozens of suspects were arrested, and weapons along with telecommunications equipment were seized.

■ **Hezbollah official: Iran's wartime power display strengthens resistance**

Wheat production, harvest increase

TEHRAN- A member of the Pricing Council for Basic Agricultural Products has announced an increase in wheat production for the 2025–2026 crop year, predicting that approximately 14 million tons of wheat will be harvested in the country this year.

Ata Hashemi, a member of the Pricing and Support Policy Council for Basic Agricultural Products, spoke to Mehr News Agency about the status of wheat production in the 2025–2026 crop year, stating: "Wheat harvesting has begun in the south of Kerman province, and harvesting will soon take place in Bushehr, Khuzestan, and Sistan-Baluchestan provinces as well."

He reported an increase in wheat production for the current crop year and said: "It is forecast that Khuzestan will have a harvest of at least 2.2 million tons, of which between 1.7 and 1.8 million tons will be purchased as guaranteed procurement."

He added: "Wheat production in the farms of Kurdistan is also on the rise, and it is predicted that this figure will be between 1.45 and 1.5 million tons, of which 1.2 million tons will ultimately be purchased as guaranteed procurement."

The head of the National Wheat Farmers Foundation, noting that last year's wheat cultivation was not good, clarified: "But this year, it is predicted that just the two provinces of Khuzestan and Kordestan will account for about 3 million tons of guaranteed wheat



purchases."

The member of the Pricing and Support Policy Council for Basic Agricultural Products announced: "In the 2025–2026 crop year, at least 14 million tons of wheat will be produced in the country, of which between 10.5 and 11 million tons will be delivered to the government by farmers. As a result, the wheat and flour for traditional bakeries will be fully supplied from domestic sources."

Hashemi concluded by saying: "1.5 million tons of domestically produced wheat will also cover the needs of industry. If rainfall is favorable and agricultural inputs are supplied on time, guaranteed wheat purchases could reach as high as 12 million tons."

Agricultural, border cooperation between Iran, Turkey expands

TEHRAN- Iran's Minister of Agriculture, referring to his trip to Turkey, announced an agreement to expand agricultural and border cooperation between the two countries.

According to IRNA, Gholamreza Nouri, speaking at the Bazargan border crossing and in a conversation with reporters, detailed his recent trip to Turkey and participation in the meeting of Agriculture Ministers of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) in Kyrgyzstan, stating: "During this multi-day trip, extensive meetings were held with Turkish officials, particularly the Minister of Agriculture."

He added: "Given the significant increase in Iran-Turkey agricultural relations over the past year, both sides emphasized the continuation of this trend and greater utilization of existing capacities. The Turkish side also declared its full readiness to expand cooperation."

Referring to his meetings with the governors of Turkey's Agri and Iğdir provinces during this trip, he said: "In joint meetings with officials of these two provinces, issues related to border and provincial cooperation were examined."

The Minister of Agriculture Jihad stated: "In these meetings, it was announced that measures would soon be taken to develop inter-provincial relations through free trade zones, and the Turkish side declared its readiness to cooperate in this area."

Nouri also reported that both sides emphasized the establishment of a joint free zone, saying: "This issue was seriously emphasized both in meetings with Turkish national officials and in meetings with border province governors."

Referring to the government's policies on developing border relations, he added: "The President places special emphasis on strengthening interactions between border provinces and neighboring countries, and the necessary authorities have been delegated to the provinces in this regard, which can help facilitate relations and develop cooperation, including border marketplaces."

According to a report released by the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA), Turkey was the third top destination of Iran's non-oil products in the past Iranian calendar year 1404 (ended on March 20).

In early December 2025, a Tehran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (TCCIMA) delegation, visiting the Plast Eurasia 2025 exhibition in Istanbul, met with a group of board members and manag-

ers of the Istanbul Chamber of Commerce.

In this meeting, both sides, referring to the longstanding friendly, cultural, and economic relations between Iran and Turkey, emphasized strengthening connections through the exchange of trade delegations, participation in exhibitions, and joint investment.

Munur Ustun, a member of the executive board of the Istanbul Chamber of Commerce, referring to the memorandum of understanding signed between the two chambers last year, described the presence of Iranian companies in Turkey and specialized exhibitions as valuable and stated: "The current volume of trade between the two countries falls short of the existing potential."

He then addressed the impact of global economic developments and the constraints caused by sanctions, and emphasizing the need to facilitate the foreign trade environment and create a secure path for private sector cooperation, said that direct meetings between merchants are an important step to compensate for shortcomings.

Addressing the meeting, Hervik Yarijaniyan, head of the TCCIMA Industry and Mining Committee, stated that with over 47,000 members, this chamber has extensive capacity for cooperation with Turkish economic actors, adding: "The social, political, and cultural relations between the two countries are at a high level, but the level of trade exchange does not correspond with these realities. Therefore, through the exchange of trade delegations, participation in exhibitions, and joint investment, cooperation between the two countries can be strengthened."

He also invited the Istanbul Chamber of Commerce to travel to Tehran as a trade delegation to further expand the grounds for joint cooperation.

Further in his remarks in the interview by the press in Bazargan border crossing on April 17, Iranian Agriculture Minister said: "At the meeting of Agriculture Ministers of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization issues related to the agricultural sector of member countries were discussed and examined, especially given that over 40% of the world's population is members of this organization, and food security was one of the main focuses of this summit."

He also noted: "On the sidelines of this summit, discussions were held with representatives of 12 countries and organizations, all of which condemned the aggression of the United States and the Israeli regime against our country and declared their support for the people, government, and armed forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran."

High-stakes gamble of a Persian Gulf blockade



TEHRAN- Regarding the recent move by the U.S. President to enforce a naval siege of the Persian Gulf aimed at political and economic strain on the Iranian people, analysts warn that if such a measure is implemented, it will have a direct and severe impact on the global energy sector.

Only authorized vessels will be permitted to pass—meaning ships that have traded with Iran or are not deemed acceptable will be halted. This strategy, while intended to isolate Tehran, risks triggering an unprecedented energy crisis.

In effect, this would restrict or cut off the flow of oil, energy, and goods from the Persian Gulf, a waterway through which nearly one-fifth of global petroleum passes.

This would naturally drive up global energy and oil prices and could serve as Iran's strongest source of leverage against Trump's policies, giving Tehran a

powerful retaliatory tool.

An intensification of naval blockade threats could disrupt energy export routes and push oil prices to record levels—a development with far-reaching consequences for global markets, the U.S. economy, and inflationary pressures, potentially derailing any hopes for near-term interest rate cuts.

Suppose Trump could pull off such a blockade—it would carry an extremely steep price.

Some secondary statistics suggest that Iran has roughly 80 to 120 million barrels of crude floating at sea, being transported to various destinations, especially China. Additionally, Iran is selling about two million barrels per day at current prices near \$140 per barrel, generating around six to seven billion dollars in monthly revenue. Iran's monthly oil income has risen two to three times compared to the pre-war period, and even if a blockade is enforced, Iran could

sustain high-level exports for one to two months.

It is unlikely that Trump could keep the blockade going for more than a month, because the expense of closing the Strait of Hormuz is extremely high for both the U.S. and the world.

During the recent 40-day conflict, even with only partial disruptions to energy transit, enormous pressure was created—let alone if the strait were completely sealed off, which could spark a global recession. Citing Morgan Stanley's projection that countries' strategic energy reserves will remain adequate only until April 20, one can explain: At the onset of the war, Trump announced that the conflict would not be prolonged, and strategic reserves would be tapped in a limited manner to keep markets calm.

But now the situation has shifted, and countries realize the war will be drawn out, possibly continuing for one or two years.

As a result, they have pulled back from releasing reserves, fearing they would have nothing left for a real emergency.

The U.S. has also released its reserves only to a very limited degree.

The market has recognized this reality, and the price gap between the physical market and the paper market reflects this—where prices in the physical market have climbed to around \$140 due to rising demand and constrained supply.

In sum, the market has come to understand that the war will be lengthy and that reserves are no longer sufficient to cope with the situation.

Thus, previous forecasts have been abandoned, and the market environment has entered a new phase—one defined by sustained volatility, where any miscalculation at sea could send oil prices soaring past \$200 a barrel, with no easy off-ramp in sight.

'Global energy markets future: Capital flight from Persian Gulf energy industries'

TEHRAN- An international expert on oil and energy, emphasizing that due to domestic conditions in the U.S., Trump wants nothing more than to end the Strait of Hormuz issue as quickly as possible with a triumphant display, said: "Beyond current prices, capital flight from the oil and gas industries of Persian Gulf countries is now a larger problem, fueling uncertainty about the future of the energy market."

Fereydoon Barkeshli, speaking to IRNA, commented on the past week's developments in global energy markets and the future of prices, stating: "After the announcement that talks between Iranian and American delegations in Islamabad had failed, Trump declared that he would block the entrance to the Strait of Hormuz in the Persian Gulf. Initially, markets interpreted this as a total closure of the strait for all traffic, but it gradually became clear that the target is to stop all ships and tankers carrying goods and crude oil from Iranian ports or bound for Iranian ports."

He added: "A look inside the cycle of these talks shows that they were not truly diplomacy, but rather a path designed for confrontation under the guise of diplomacy. The U.S. Vice President had come to deliver a statement, which Trump impatiently announced just hours later. In fact, the Iranian delegation entered Islamabad with full authority, but the American side had to consult Trump at every step. The composition of the U.S. team also indicated this: a real estate deal advisor, a presidential son-in-law who has now become a politician, and of course the Vice President, whose background is well known to most Americans."

Two factors that prevented prices from jumping even higher

Barkeshli, noting the shocks the global oil market has experienced in recent decades, said: "The global oil market has experienced five major shocks before: in 1973 with the Arab oil embargo, in 1979 with the Iranian Revolution, in 1990 with the U.S. invasion of Iraq, in 2008 with the recession in the U.S. and globally, and in 2022 with the start of the Ukraine war."

This energy analyst added: "Among these crises, the U.S. invasion of Iraq caused the largest supply disruption—5.5 million barrels per day of Iraqi and Kuwaiti production were halted. The global market became turbulent, and Brent crude surpassed \$46 per barrel,

nearly doubling, to the point where Zaki Yamani (late), the former Saudi energy minister, declared that oil would cross \$100."

Barkeshli recalled that during the 1973 crisis, oil prices also multiplied several times, and added: "In the recent crisis, which followed the U.S. and Israeli attack on the Islamic Republic of Iran and led to the blocking of the Strait of Hormuz, about 10 million barrels per day of regional oil supply were cut off, but prices at their peak only reached \$119 per barrel for a short period."

Explaining why oil prices did not set record highs for futures during the recent crisis, he said: "The first reason was the high level of stockpiling by countries, such that China's strategic and commercial reserves reached 1.2 billion barrels, and the U.S., the European Union, and other industrialized countries also had high reserves. Only India lagged somewhat because, due to its proximity to the Persian Gulf, it had not built sufficient storage capacity."

Barkeshli cited the second factor as supply overhang from previous OPEC+ decisions. "According to the International Energy Agency, in the fourth quarter of 2025, there was about 3.6 million barrels per day of excess oil in the market—the OPEC secretariat had estimated this figure at less than 1.2 million barrels, but in any case, there was some excess supply."

This energy market expert added: "Thus, the shock of the attack on Iran and the conditional closure of the Strait of Hormuz occurred in a context where the market was prepared to face a major shock."

Capital flight from Persian Gulf energy industries lies in wait

The international oil and energy analyst believes that beyond prices, capital flight is a larger problem lying in wait for the energy market, as oil companies have become hesitant to invest in Persian Gulf countries—which implies uncertainty about the future of investment.

Barkeshli added: "Currently, Oman is the only country continuing to some extent with normal investment in the downstream sector, while the UAE is the most vulnerable because it is heavily dependent on the Strait of Hormuz."

This oil expert noted: "On the other hand, high oil prices are politically problematic for

the U.S. and could threaten Trump's electoral success. But they are also dangerous for OPEC+ members, because prolonged high prices accelerate investment in renewable energy."

He also referred to the U.S. President's announcement that the naval blockade of Iran would continue despite the strait being open to commercial vessels, and said: "Implementing the U.S. threat to attack tankers carrying Iranian oil is possible, but very difficult. Even if only one ship is attacked or stopped, the resulting insecurity would deter other vessels from approaching the region, and insurance companies would not accept the risk. Under these circumstances, we would see a chaotic situation."

Barkeshli commented on China's stance regarding the U.S. decision: "Many world leaders have realized that an unusual person is in the White House, and that one cannot reason with Trump using normal logic. Therefore, negotiation and messaging tactics may need to change constantly."

Trump's hands under guillotine of U.S. elections

The international oil and energy analyst also pointed to U.S. domestic problems that affect the future of its conflict with Iran, saying: "The U.S. midterm elections will be held in November 2026. Trump currently has a weak majority in both chambers and is likely to lose it. Given the lag in election activities, he wants to end the Strait of Hormuz issue as soon as possible with a triumphant display."

He added: "Trump is set to travel to Beijing in late May, and this meeting is very important to him. This meeting has already been postponed once, and it is also important for China. But if the U.S. is entangled in war, Trump's position will be weakened. On the other hand, his plan to create a new layer of control and blockage of the Strait of Hormuz also threatens China's oil supply routes."

Barkeshli emphasized: "It seems the U.S. intends to impose a ceasefire similar to past ones on Iran and the region—a ceasefire that benefits the U.S. and Israel but does not secure Iran's long-term interests. Trump, by manipulating data, has created a new statistical regime and hidden oil exchanges behind statistical walls. This can also be seen in the market for floating oil sales, which are trading more than \$30 above Brent."

Committing war crimes under the name of religion

Hegseth glorifies war and violence

TEHRAN – Donald Trump and his War Secretary Pete Hegseth are portraying themselves as Messiah in the war against Iran.

Probably, under this banner, committing war crimes is permissible or even necessary.

Trump posted an image of himself with Jesus-like healing powers. This happened after Pope Leo criticized his “madness of war” against Iran.

The United States has constitutionally made a separation between church and state, but the Trump administration is defying that law.

As the ISIS, commonly known as Daesh, felt and still feels it has a divine obligation to counter what it calls infidels – including Muslims, Christians, and Jews – Trump and his religious fanatics, to a lesser extent, also think or pretend they have a similar obligation. However, there are binding laws in the U.S. which restricts them.

Fortunately, the Western society is chiefly intolerant of such superstitions. Facing a growing backlash, Trump deleted a post on his Truth Social account depicting himself as a Jesus-like figure. Even his ardent supporters reacted to the depiction.

Speaking at a special prayer vigil in St. Peter's Basilica on April 11, Roman Catholic Pope Leo decried the use of religious language to justify war and said a “delusion of omnipotence that surrounds us ... is becoming increasingly unpredictable.”

War Secretary Hegseth likes to talk about how the Christian God is on his side.

“The providence of our almighty God is there protecting those troops, and we're committed to this mission,” Hegseth said. during an interview with CBS News in March.

A few days later, he said U.S. troops “need a connection with their almighty God in these moments.”

A couple of days later, at another event, Hegseth quoted Psalm 144 at a Pentagon press conference, saying: “Blessed be the Lord, my rock, who trains my hands for war and my fingers for battle.”



Probably, striking a primary school in Minab with Tomahawk missiles in the early hours of the aggression on Iran on Feb.28, which led to death of over 160 students with their teachers, can be justified under Hegseth's bigoted religious views.

If not so, why haven't Trump and his Pentagon chief have so far remained unapologetic about this tragedy that amounts to war crime and crime against humanity?

Being a Christian, Muslim, Jew, or Buddhist is shaped by geography or what religion a person's parents follow. Therefore, this statement by Hegseth at a National Prayer Breakfast that “It remains a Christian nation in our DNA, if we can keep it” is fundamentally misleading and wrong.

Since long decades ago people with different religions have been immigrating from one country to another, or from one part of the world to another such designations have lost their meaning.

Also, Hegseth's remarks that U.S. forces are armed with the “arsenal of faith” and his description on X in which he says American troops are “war fighters of faith” are like what Al-Qaeda or ISIS say about their operatives.

The Trump administration, in full cooperation the Netanyahu regime, made an illegal aggression against Iran while negotiators from Iran and the United States were crafting a blueprint to resolve the disputes over Tehran's nuclear program. Their joint attack shocked the world, particularly Washington's allies in the world, including those in the West.

“We Christians — alongside

our Jewish friends and their remarkable army in Israel — need to pick up the sword of unapologetic Americanism and defend ourselves,” Hegseth wrote, according to CNN.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, another bigoted Zionist religionist who is also wanted for war crimes and crimes against humanity in Gaza, told i24 TV news in August 2025 that he feels he is on a “spiritual mission” for a Greater Israel project and that he is “very” attached to this vision.

Also, Trump's ambassador to Israel Mike Huckabee, a self-described Christian Zionist, said a few days before that start of the war on Iran that “it would be fine” if Israel controls much of the Middle East under a biblical interpretation of its borders.

“Christian Zionist”

During his confirmation hearing last year, Sen. Tom Cotton, an extremist Republican, asked Hegseth if he considered himself a Christian Zionist. Hegseth said, “I am a Christian, and I robustly support the state of Israel and its existential defense and the way America comes alongside them as a great ally.”

The Military Religious Freedom Foundation (MRFF) reported last month it is being inundated with more than 110 complaints from U.S. service members stationed across the Middle East, including one non-commissioned officer who reported that his commander told troops this war was “all part of God's divine plan,” citing the Book of Revelation and declaring that “President Trump has been anointed by Jesus to light the signal fire in Iran to

cause Armageddon.”

Such description prompted more than two dozen Democratic Congress representatives to request an investigation into the report.

Hegseth is treating the Pentagon as an instrument of holy war.

Riaz Khokhar, an independent researcher who wrote an article on the Al Jazeera website last month, said Hegseth has described his tattoos, the Jerusalem Cross and Deus Vult (“God wills it”), as emblems of the “modern-day American Christian crusade.”

Hegseth also boasts about bearing the Arabic word kafir (“infidel”), a deliberate provocation of non-moderate Muslims.

Former Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu, writing an article in Middle East Eye on April 5, said the U.S. must abandon ideological war against Iran. He said the Netanyahu-Trump alignment, supported by Zionist and Christian-Zionist ideological networks, “has replaced geopolitical rationality with a theopolitical war logic.”

As Trump himself is not fit for the job, his war secretary also does not deserve to lead the Pentagon. Hegseth is a person who has dismissed “tepid legality” in favor of “maximum lethality” by openly expressed little regard for the safety of Iranian civilians.

He has also declared that “no quarter” would be given to enemies in Iran, something that legal experts say amounts to war crimes.

In his war against Iran, Trump has portrayed himself as a savior who wants to bring prosperity to Iranians, but has penalized them through his “maxim pressure” campaign for many years. Now, facing a censure from the Pope who has criticized the “madness of war,” he is depicting himself as a messenger of God. He adapts to the evolving situations to achieve his avaricious goals and ordered his prejudiced and flattering war secretary to implement the mission. The mission includes glorifying war and violence under the name of religion to showing no respect for international humanitarian law.



with the public. The scale of discontent accompanying and following the ceasefire with Lebanon is evident, both among the opposition and the government coalition. The flood of news and data in recent hours and days calls for an attempt to redraw the scene away from distracting factors.

Over the past weeks, Israeli officials have emphasized that the war in Lebanon would continue even if it stopped on the Iranian front. Zionist officials kept repeating these promises to their public until just days ago. In contrast, Iran announced its commitment not to abandon its allies and not to allow Lebanon to be singled out. In the end, Iranian prevailed, evidenced by the regime authorities' embarrassment at not ratifying the Lebanese truce in the last cabinet meeting.

The regime's Channel 14 noted that ministers were informed of the ceasefire via a phone call it described as a “foregone conclusion,” without being given the right to object, calling it “amazing and shameful.”

(See full text at tehrantimes.com)

Cuba on the brink of Washington's predatory play

Desperate for a win after the Iran war quagmire, the U.S. tightens the noose on Havana

By Garsha Vazirian

TEHRAN — Cuba is living through a nightmare of its own making, if you ignore America's fingerprints. Blackouts that stretch sixteen to twenty hours a day have become ordinary.

Hospitals postpone surgeries, food rots without refrigeration, and families huddle by candlelight while the grid groans under daily deficits that routinely top fifteen hundred megawatts.

The trigger was not a natural disaster. On January 29, President Trump declared a national emergency and slapped secondary tariffs on any country selling oil to the island nation.

Venezuelan shipments, once a subsidized lifeline of twenty-five to thirty-five thousand barrels a day, had already been severed after U.S. special forces illegally snatched Nicolás Maduro on January 3.

The result is a deliberate and clinical suffocation that the U.S. labels as progress.

Hemispheric capture, 21st-century style

At the heart of the campaign sits the Donroe Doctrine, Trump's blunt rebrand of the old Monroe playbook.

Secretary of State Marco Rubio steers this approach with personal fervor; as the son of Cuban immigrants, he views the campaign against Havana as a generational inheritance. For him, neutralizing Cuba is a crusade to dismantle the ideological nerve center of the Americas, finally closing the Cold War's Caribbean chapter.

This is also a calculated political anchor. By architecting a “free Cuba,” Rubio cements his Florida base and builds a formidable “America First” resume, strategically positioning himself as a premier contender for a 2028 presidential run or subsequent election cycles.

Ninety miles from Florida, the island's symbolic weight as the last major survivor of the 1959 revolution makes it irresistible.

Control Havana, the thinking goes, and Washington locks down resources, shipping lanes, and political loyalty across Latin America.

Just as we saw in Venezuela, Trump has shown little interest in democratization. This is about raw primacy, access to resources, and domestic politics. Florida's exile community cheers every tough word; a visible win against the old revolutionary order would be pure electoral gold.

Venezuela's model and the costly Iran war quagmire

Trump's confidence rests on the Venezuela precedent. The swift special-forces raid that removed Maduro cut Cuba's oil lifeline and proved, in the White House view, that decades of sanctions could be leapfrogged by bold action.

The administration believes the same formula can work in Havana: an economic chokehold plus the threat of targeted extraction. Central to this strategy is a transactional deal with the elites, modeled on the quiet pacts made with Venezuelan officials before and after the raid, offering military and political “pragmatists” a path to survival if they abandon the old guard.

Yet the war on Iran has become a grinding, expensive stalemate that has drained resources and public patience.

With naval assets stretched across the Caribbean, the Pacific, and the Arabian Sea, Cuba suddenly looks like the low-cost victory the administration craves to offset its Middle East headaches.

Leaks about stepped-up Pentagon contingency planning, first reported April 15, aim to keep Havana off balance while the real game, coercive bargaining, plays out.

The engineered humanitarian crisis

The blockade has already delivered immense pain. Nationwide blackouts hit hard in March, one lasting nearly thirty hours after a boiler failure at the Antonio Guiteras plant in Matanzas.

Tourism plunged fifty-six percent in February. Nighttime satellite imagery shows a thirty-eight-point-five percent drop in light emissions, a cold technical proof of societal paralysis.

The government has imposed four-day workweeks, fuel rationing, and shortened school hours. United Nations officials warn of a potential humanitarian collapse touching hospitals, water systems, farms, and transport.

This is asymmetric infrastructure warfare. Washington aims to ensure the island cannot function properly. Regional leaders worry about



migration spillover. Cuban officials have floated limited private fuel sales to stave off total breakdown, but the pressure remains relentless.

Dual-track diplomacy

Beneath the public threats lies a shadow negotiation that is anything but equal. Since February, Rubio's team has met repeatedly with Raúl Guillermo Rodríguez Castro, known inside Cuba as El Cangrejo, Raúl Castro's grandson and reportedly a trusted security chief.

Talks in St. Kitts during the CARICOM summit and later in Havana have focused on a simple, lopsided bargain: economic openings in ports, energy, and tourism in exchange for political concessions.

According to an Axios report on April 17, a senior State Department delegation recently flew into Havana, the first U.S. government plane to land there since Barack Obama's visit a decade ago.

President Miguel Díaz-Canel has publicly acknowledged the talks while insisting sovereignty is non-negotiable. Cuban forces are reportedly drilling and invoking the Bay of Pigs spirit.

Yet an intercepted attempt by El Cangrejo to bypass Rubio with a personal letter to Trump in Miami showed how tightly Washington controls the script.

The emerging aim could be to sideline Díaz-Canel, reduce the Castro family to a symbolic presence, and push for intrusive American influence over key sectors, potentially resembling a Chapter 11-style reorganization of the Cuban state.

Military signals meet hard limits

Pentagon leaks suggest White House orders to ramp up contingency planning, focused less on full invasion than on special-operations scenarios reminiscent of Maduro's removal.

Cuban deputy foreign minister Carlos Fernández de Cossío warned in March that the military is preparing for possible aggression. But real constraints are obvious.

The campaign of aggression against Iran, Pacific commitments, and ongoing Caribbean operations have stretched U.S. forces thin.

Senior military officials have avoided talk of active rehearsals. What we see instead is classic gray-zone coercion: leak the threat, watch Havana sweat, then extract concessions at the table.

The most probable near-term outcome is a predatory deal heavily skewed toward Washington. The blockade eases in phases. American capital gains preferential access to strategic sectors. Cuban leadership is reshuffled but not toppled outright.

A prolonged stalemate remains possible if limited Russian or Chinese fuel slips through despite the tariffs.

A limited snatch-and-grab operation triggered by a staged incident cannot be ruled out. Full invasion stays improbable given overstretch, international backlash, and Cuba's defensive preparations.

What makes the episode especially cynical is the instrumentalization of a population's basic vulnerabilities. The human suffering, families without power, farmers without diesel, patients without reliable care, has become the pressure point.

Cuba has survived worse, from the Special Period (Período especial) after the Soviet collapse to decades of embargo.

Whether that legendary resilience can withstand a declining empire that has decided the island's time is over is the brutal question every Cuban now faces in the dark.

The coming weeks will show whether the administration settles for a coerced corporate victory or risks turning its Caribbean “backyard” into another costly quagmire.

Lebanon ceasefire: A new impasse or a lifeline?

By Wesam Bahrani

TEHRAN – The Zionist regime's prime minister is not expected to easily surrender his plans and aspirations in Lebanon.

Doing so would not only destroy his future but also his legacy and his past. Therefore, traps remain present in the paths of the ceasefire agreement between Lebanon and the Israeli regime, which Benjamin Netanyahu tried to avoid as much as possible.

Before the truce came into effect, a consensus prevailed among most specialists and stakeholders within the Zionist regime: it was undisputed that Netanyahu's interest lay in continuing the war, even on a single front, and obstructing negotiations whenever possible until he achieves his goals. This concerns surviving the challenges that confront him and his struggle for political survival.

In the original war plan, everything on paper promised him a celebration after he succeeded in convincing Donald Trump to wage an illegal war on Iran. The plan was to topple the Islamic Republic, then focus on eliminating Hezbollah once it became isolated, besieged, and cut off from its roots, followed by Yemen and Iraq. Only one step separated him from achieving “absolute victory” and “changing the face of the Middle East” forever, establishing a “Greater Israel.”

Achieving this goal would not only allow him to capitalize on these accomplishments in the elections scheduled to take place a few months later, but also enhance his chances of deflecting the charges against him in the trial he is currently undergoing. It would also erase the stigma resulting from the consequences of the October 7, 2023 attack, which

occurred during his tenure and under his leadership.

On this matter, he still insists today on refusing to form an official government committee to investigate the attack, which, from the perspective of his opponents and part of the Israeli public, places him under suspicion and an attempt to evade responsibility. So what if new dilemmas were added to these challenges, such as failing to achieve the war's objectives against Iran and the emergence of a complex predicament on the regime's northern front that has effectively compounded his losses?

On one hand, it has become clear that the achievements he touted over the past months regarding the final dismantling of Hezbollah's capabilities and the shift in the balance of power and deterrence on the northern front are weak. On the other hand, he must now deal with this predicament, as a significant portion of the Israeli regime's public, particularly settlers in the north, insist on the need to eliminate this threat.

Netanyahu's personal record is now at stake: he wanted to inscribe it in gold as one of the kings of the Zionist regime who succeeded in turning the defeat of October 7 into a historic and final victory. Instead, he may become a cautionary tale: the man who wanted everything lost everything.

But the matter does not stop here. From Hormuz to Bint Jbeil: the story is not just about Netanyahu.

The issue transcends being a crisis specific to Netanyahu, revealing instead a broader predicament involving the regime's army, security, and military establishments, along

Iran, Russia urge UNESCO action over damage to Tehran heritage site



TEHRAN – Iran and Russia have sent a joint letter to the UNESCO Director-General Khaled El-Enany protesting damage to civilian infrastructure and cultural heritage in Tehran following airstrikes.

Ahmad Pakatchi, ambassador and permanent representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the UN cultural body, along with Russia's envoy Rinat Alyautdinov, submitted an urgent letter outlining what they described as destructive consequences of the [US-Israeli] attacks, IRNA reported on Saturday.

The letter cited documentation indicating that an area near the Saint Nicholas Orthodox Cathedral in Tehran was hit during missile strikes on the morning of April 1, 2026. The cathedral, designed by Russian architect Nikolai Markov and listed on Iran's national heritage register, sustained structural damage.

The envoys said the explosions caused widespread shattering of windows and destruction of doors at the religious site. A neighboring building used as a Russian retirement home also suffered severe damage, including a partial roof collapse, according to the letter.

The letter noted the incident occurred during Lent and ahead of Easter, underscoring the religious significance of the site.

Pakatchi and Alyautdinov said targeting areas near cultural sites and civilian humanitarian infrastructure constituted a violation of international humanitarian law, particularly the Hague Convention of 1954.

The two diplomats condemned what they described as military actions by the United States and the regime of Israel against Iran and warned that such attacks threatened cul-

tural identity and regional stability.

They called on UNESCO's Director-General to formally condemn the incidents and support international efforts to prevent further damage to cultural property and protect religious and historical heritage.

In the span of just over a month, from February 28 to April 8, more than 130 cultural sites, museums, and historical monuments across Iran were damaged or destroyed, largely as a result of the massive shockwaves caused by airstrikes.

In early March, the Golestan Palace in downtown Tehran, a UNESCO World Heritage site, along with a number of other historical sites nearby, was severely damaged by debris and the shock wave following an airstrike. The palace complex, one of Iran's most significant historical monuments, suffered damage to arches, wooden doors and windows, stained-glass panels, among others.

Taken together, Tehran and Isfahan account for more than 64 percent of all documented cases. When provinces such as Khuzestan and Kordestan are added, the concentration rises to over 80 percent. The clustering is difficult to ignore: the damage appears focused on areas where historical density is greatest, where monuments, museums, and historic urban fabrics converge.

The largest group of damage properties consists of historical houses and residential mansions, which is 33 in total. They are structures that often form the backbone of historic neighborhoods. Civic and institutional buildings follow, along with mosques, palaces, bathhouses, mills, and fortifications.

UN Tourism opens applications for Best Tourism Villages 2026

TEHRAN – The UN Tourism has opened applications for its Best Tourism Villages 2026 initiative, inviting member states to nominate rural destinations that promote sustainable tourism and community development.

The agency said countries can submit up to eight candidate villages through their national tourism administrations, with applications closing on June 9, 2026. The selected villages will be announced in the third quarter of the year during an official UN Tourism event.

Launched in 2021, the Best Tourism Villages programme has attracted more than 1,000 applications from 100 countries. The initiative's global network currently includes 319 rural destinations across 65 countries, spanning Africa, the Americas, Asia-Pacific, Europe and the Middle East. Of these, more than 230 villages have been formally recognized, while 83 are participating in an upgrade programme designed to help them meet the required standards.

"Tourism is a proven game changer for rural communities," said Shaikha Al Nuwais. "With our Best Tourism Villages we are showcasing the very best examples, where it's keeping traditions alive, supporting small businesses or preserving nature. Now we want to expand our network and give tourists even more chances to enjoy authentic experiences that make a real difference when they travel."

According to UN Tourism, the initiative is part of its broader Tourism for Rural Development Programme, which aims to use tourism as a driver of economic diversification, resilience and well-being in rural areas. The programme promotes the protection of cultural heritage, landscapes and traditional knowledge, while encouraging tourism models aligned with

the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

Applications will be assessed by an independent advisory board composed of global experts. Evaluation criteria include sustainability, governance, the safeguarding of cultural and natural heritage, infrastructure, and community well-being.

The initiative is built around three core components. The first is formal recognition as a Best Tourism Village, awarded to destinations that demonstrate strong performance in preserving heritage, supporting local communities and advancing sustainable practices across economic, social and environmental dimensions.

The second component, the Upgrade Programme, provides technical assistance and tailored guidance to villages that do not yet meet all the criteria for recognition. The aim is to help these destinations address gaps and strengthen their tourism development strategies.

The third component is the Best Tourism Villages Network, which connects recognized villages and those in the upgrade track. The network serves as a platform for knowledge-sharing, partnerships and capacity-building across regions.

UN Tourism said the initiative reflects growing global interest in rural tourism as travelers increasingly seek authentic experiences while contributing to local economies. The agency added that expanding the network would provide more opportunities for communities to benefit from tourism while preserving their cultural and natural assets.

Intl. academics warn of deliberate destruction of Iran's cultural sites

TEHRAN – A group of 218 international academics and researchers has warned of what it described as the deliberate destruction of Iran's cultural heritage and scientific centers following recent US-Israeli attacks, calling the actions illegal and a threat to human history.

In a statement published in scientific journals, the signatories said recent military actions against Iran had caused widespread damage to research institutions and heritage sites, raising concerns about their impact on global scientific work and shared cultural memory.

The bombing of Iran amounts to erasing part of humanity's memory and poses a serious threat to global scientific research, the statement said.

The researchers said that, beyond causing loss of life, the targeting of cultural heritage risked destroying what they described as humanity's shared memory.

Referring to a fragile ceasefire between Iran and the United States on April 8, the statement said recent attacks appeared aimed at "erasing traces of the past" and warned of risks to the continuity of the region's cultural history.

According to the signatories, a large-scale bombing campaign by the United States and Israel, violated international law. They expressed solidarity with the people of Iran and said the damage had significant human and cultural consequences.

Several international organizations, including UNESCO and heritage bodies such as Europa Nostra, ICOM, ICOMOS and the U.S. Committee of the Blue Shield, have issued separate statements condemning the attacks, the letter said.

The statement added that, in addition to major landmarks such as Golestan Palace,



Chehel Sotoun Palace and Naqsh-e Jahan Square in Isfahan, more than 120 other heritage sites in Iran had been damaged.

Some of the attacks were described by the authors as intentional and aimed at destroying institutions responsible for heritage protection and training future specialists.

The statement also referred to strikes on March 8 targeting offices of Iran's cultural heritage organization in Khorramabad, reporting destruction of the building, injuries to staff and damage to the Falak-ol-Aflak fortress and a nearby museum. It said the status of scientific documents and archaeological archives in the area remained unclear.

The researchers noted that Iran has more than 29 UNESCO World Heritage sites and over 40,000 nationally registered heritage properties, describing them as irreplaceable records of the country's past for present and future generations.

They said Iran's cultural heritage forms

part of global history and that its destruction would constitute a loss for humanity as a whole.

In the final section of the statement, the signatories, most of whom affiliated with French universities, highlighted more than 150 years of scientific cooperation between Iran and France and called for efforts to preserve academic ties.

They proposed emergency funding for research and digitization of historical archives, expansion of international exchange programs and visa facilitation for Iranian researchers, and continued training of young specialists through doctoral and postdoctoral scholarships.

The statement concluded that preserving scientific dialogue and understanding the past are essential beyond national borders, warning that damage to cultural heritage risks undermining historical continuity in West Asia.

Minister calls for accelerated restoration of war-damaged heritage sites



TEHRAN – Iran's Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts, Seyyed Reza Salehi-Amiri, on Saturday called for accelerated restoration of cultural heritage sites damaged during recent war with the US and Israel and the expansion of restoration workshops across the country.

Speaking at a ceremony in Tehran marking the International Day for Monuments and Sites,

Salehi-Amiri said restoration work and training programs for a new generation of specialists should be prioritized nationwide.

"At each province I visit, I inspect restoration and training centers due to the importance of this issue," he said, IRNA reported.

The minister said Iran faces a shortage of master artisans in some fields, adding that their ex-

perience must be transferred to younger generations.

"In some specialties, we have fewer than a handful of masters. They are part of our identity, and their knowledge must be passed on," he said, calling on authorities to prioritize recruitment of individuals trained under experienced craftsmen.

Salehi-Amiri also urged timely payment for master artisans and restorers, describing them as key contributors to preserving the country's cultural heritage.

He said the ministry had launched a national and international campaign to support restoration of historical buildings and to attract contributions from academic experts.

Provincial officials were instructed to convert historical buildings into restoration workshops in cooperation with experts, with a goal of completing reconstruction work within a year.

"We believe that, at the earliest opportunity, restoration of damaged monuments will begin with the cooperation of experts and scientific groups," he said.

Salehi-Amiri said restoration centers and training facilities should be established across the country within three months and that progress reports should be submitted to the ministry.

He added that cultural heritage plays a key role in national identity and said damage to historical sites affects the nation as a whole.

The ceremony, held at the ministry's Fajr Hall, included recognition of selected master artisans and restorers.

The International Day for Monuments and Sites, proposed by the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) and adopted by UNESCO, is observed annually to promote awareness of cultural heritage and the need for its protection.

Human chain formed in Shiraz to support cultural heritage protection

TEHRAN – A human chain was formed in Shiraz on Saturday at the Fars Education History Museum, which was damaged by recent airstrikes, to mark the International Day for Monuments and Sites and support the protection of cultural heritage.

The gathering brought together restoration specialists, members of the provincial technical council, cultural heritage advocates, and experts in restoration and handicrafts, who called for broader public participation in safeguarding cultural assets.

Speaking on the sidelines, Sadeq Zare', deputy head of cultural heritage at the Fars Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Department, said the building, which previously served as Shiraz's first municipality office and was registered on the national heritage list in the 2000s, had suffered damage mainly to its wooden elements and deco-



rations, while structural damage was limited.

"Cultural heritage is a trust that we safeguard in times of peace and protect in times of war," he said.

He added that a working group comprising the cultural heritage department, the provincial technical council, and the education department had been formed to plan restoration and reconstruc-

tion of the building.

Ali Ta'abodi, a senior handicrafts expert, said Shiraz and Fars province have significant capacity in crafts related to architecture and called for greater involvement of local artisans in restoration efforts alongside engineers and conservation specialists.

Mehdi Najafi, head of the pro-

vincial museums department, referred to the 1954 Hague Convention, describing it as the first international framework addressing the protection of cultural property during armed conflict.

He said the convention emphasizes that safeguarding cultural heritage requires planning both in times of peace and war.

ISNA reported that participants also presented proposals to local, national, and international authorities, including increasing support for scientific research, assessing damage to cultural heritage, adopting stricter protective legislation, and integrating heritage management plans.

At the end of the event, attendees issued a joint statement condemning attacks on Iran's historical sites and called for international cooperation to protect cultural heritage.

JANFADA girls show support for armed forces in defending homeland



On Friday, April 17, thousands of girls participated in a rally in Tehran under a campaign titled "JANFADA", literally meaning "ready to sacrifice life", showing their allegiance to the Leader of the Islamic Revolution and support for the armed forces in defending the country against any aggression.

Launched on March 29, the campaign has exceeded expectations with a staggering figure of over 27 million volunteers registered so far.

IFRC supports relief operations in Iran with emergency funding

TEHRAN - The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) has announced its support for relief operations of the Iranian Red Crescent Society (IRCS) by approving a disaster response emergency fund (DREF) and issuing an international appeal in this regard.

Continuing its support for relief operations in Iran, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies approved the disaster response emergency fund to support the Iranian Red Crescent Society's actions and officially published the international appeal.

The first part of the IFRC's aid included 200 specialized first aid kits that were delivered to the IRCS. These kits were provided to operational teams with the aim of improving the quality of relief services and increasing the speed of providing first aid in emergency situations, the IRCS website reported.

Also, the supply and delivery of specialized rescue equipment, including CombiTools, concrete breakers, harnesses, helmets, and pneumatic sets, is on the agenda and will soon be made available to operational teams, which plays an important role in increasing the accuracy, safety, and efficiency of search and rescue operations.

In addition to such equipment, the provision of biological relief items such as blankets, carpets, and other emergency shelter necessities has also been planned to support the affected people and improve their temporary shelter conditions.

These measures were taken to strengthen response capacity, increase operational readiness, and support humanitarian services in Iran, and reflect the continuation of targeted and constructive cooperation between the IFRC and the IRCS in crisis management, reducing human suffering, and enhancing the resilience of vulnerable communities.

Earlier this month, the IFRC issued an emergency appeal, urging international community to support the Iranian Red Crescent Society during the imposed war by the United States and Israel against the country.

"In Iran, the humanitarian situation is deteriorating. In almost one month, more than 1,900 people have been killed, including women and children, and at least 20,000



people have been injured," Jagan Chapagain, the secretary general of the IFRC, said in a post on X.

The official went on to laud the courageous acts of IRCS staff as they rush in to provide rescue services to those affected by the war, highlighting "Despite fear and uncertainty, Iranian Red Crescent Society staff, and volunteers continue to respond with remarkable courage, providing emergency care and health services across the country," IRNA reported.

"The IFRC is supporting this response by scaling up critical resources. We launched an emergency appeal aiming to provide support to the Iranian Red Crescent respond efforts, through operational support, and international procurement of critical supplies.

I call on the international community to show solidarity, and support our emergency appeal and the operation in Iran."

Meanwhile, the IFRC regional director for the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), Hossam Elsharkawi, in a letter to the head of the IRCS, Pirhossein Kolivand, announced solidarity with the IRCS.

"On behalf IFRC MENA Regional Office, I wish to reiterate our strong condemnation of any violence directed against humanitarian workers and volunteers, as well as against the services and infrastructures that support the delivery of humanitarian assistance.

Please be assured of our continued solidarity with the Iranian Red Crescent Society and our steadfast support for your vital humanitarian mission," he said.

Ecocide in an unjust war

TEHRAN - The US-Israeli attacks, with the widespread explosion of oil storage facilities in Tehran and Alborz provinces, the release of large amounts of air pollutants, and the encirclement of Tehran with a layer of smoke, are a clear example of "ecocide" or "environmental crime."

This inhumane act represents a serious threat to the lives of innocent people and civilians who, in addition to severe mental and emotional trauma, must endure the dangerous environmental consequences of this unjust imposed war, Shina Ansari, the head of the Department of Environment, has said.

These two warmongering regimes, of course, have a long history of using environmentally destructive methods in the region and the world. The use of Agent Orange by the United States in the war with Vietnam, which destroyed the country's rainforests, marked one of the most significant environmental disasters in the history of the world, she highlighted.

The use of weapons containing depleted uranium and white phosphorus by the Zionist regime in Gaza, which caused severe water and soil pollution, making the lands of northern Gaza practically uncultivable, as well as the use of chemical herbicides and the deliberate burning of Gaza's historic palm groves, are examples of the failure of these two warring states to adhere to the fundamental principles of international conventions, including the Geneva Convention, Ansari added.

"According to Article 55 of the 1977 Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions, the natural environment must be protected against widespread, severe and long-term damage in armed conflict. The 1976 Convention on the Prohibition of Military or Hostile Use of Environmental Modification (ENMOD) also prohibits any hostile use of en-

vironmental modification with widespread, long-lasting or severe effects.

It should be noted that experiences from previous military conflicts in the region over the past decades by the Zionist-American regimes, including attacks on oil and industrial facilities, have shown that the environmental consequences of such actions are not limited to a specific time or territory, and their effects can last for years; from widespread oil pollution to the release of toxic pollutants, the destruction of natural areas, the destruction of biodiversity, and threats to human health.

With such a history of violating environmental rights, the Department of Environment made official correspondence with the environment ministers of regional countries, as well as the Secretary-General of the United Nations and the Executive Secretary of the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP), and warned about the environmental consequences of the war in the region.

The correspondences emphasized that any military action in a region with vast oil, gas, petrochemical, and maritime infrastructure is considered an example of creating a dangerous situation for regional and global peace, security, and the environment. A study of the environmental situation in war zones shows that despite claims by international institutions to prevent environmental disasters in wars, wherever the interests of global powers are at stake, these actions are unfortunately met with overlooking by international organizations, while the neglect of international organizations and countries claiming human rights in this regard not only leads to a threat to the global environment, but also ignores the rights of humans who are victims of wars."



Managing Director: **Mohammad Mahdi Rahmati**
Editor-in-Chief: **Mohammad Sarfi**

Editorial Dept.: Fax: (+98 21) 43051601
Email: info@tehrantimes.com
Switchboard Operator: Tel: (+98 21) 43051000
Advertisements Dept.: Tel: (+98 21) 43051430
Public Relations Office: Tel: (+98 21) 43051505
Subscription & Distribution Dept.: Tel: (+98 21) 43051430



No. 18, Moghadasi Alley, Nejatollahi St., Tehran, Iran P.O. Box: 14155-4843 Zip Code: 1599814713

APRIL 19, 2026

GUIDE TO SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

It is not right that a creature should be sure of two things: health and wealth. For, when you feel certain of your health, you fall ill, and as soon as you are wealthy, you go towards poverty.

Imam Ali (AS)

Prayer Times > Noon:12:03 Evening: 19:00 Dawn: 3:56 (tomorrow) Sunrise: 5:26 (tomorrow)

Stencil artist grieves Anzac graves destroyed in Gaza



A stencil artist has called out the “mindless destruction” of a commonwealth cemetery in Gaza where the graves of Australian soldiers were desecrated.

Former Canberra Luke Cornish won the \$20,000 Gallipoli Art Prize on Wednesday for his canvas No Rest (The Vandalism of Deir al-Balah) pointing to Israeli forces destroying nearly 150 out of 263 graves in its protracted bombing campaign.

More than 72,000 Palestinians have been killed including more than 20,000 children in a sustained retaliatory assault, after the October 7.

“The whole embodiment of the Anzac spirit is to stand up for your mates, stand up for the people who can’t stand up for themselves – whether that’s a bunch of dead guys in a cemetery or a population of Palestinians,” he told AAP.

“If we call out our own war criminals, we should be calling our war crimes across the board and destroying a war cemetery is the least Israel has done.”

His great-uncle Alfred Cook of the Australian Light Horse Regiment was buried in Deir al-Balah after his death in World War I aged 21.

Using traditional composite techniques, the artwork is painted on board and then rendered with acrylic cement to give the appearance of sandstone to replicate headstones.

Black dripping paint at the edges, a core element of graffiti culture, drives the point home

that they have been vandalized in act of “mindless destruction”, Cornish said.

“The destruction of a war cemetery is more than damage to stone and soil. It is a violation of memory,” the 47-year-old said.

“When the resting place of the dead is disturbed, it unsettles the living as well. It tells us even in death there is no refuge from violence.”

Anthony Albanese raised the destruction of the graves during Israeli president Isaac Herzog’s visit in February, which he pledged to investigate. Asked about fears of a backlash after other Australian artists and authors have been cancelled for explicit criticisms of Israel, Cornish said creative producers cannot and should not be silenced.

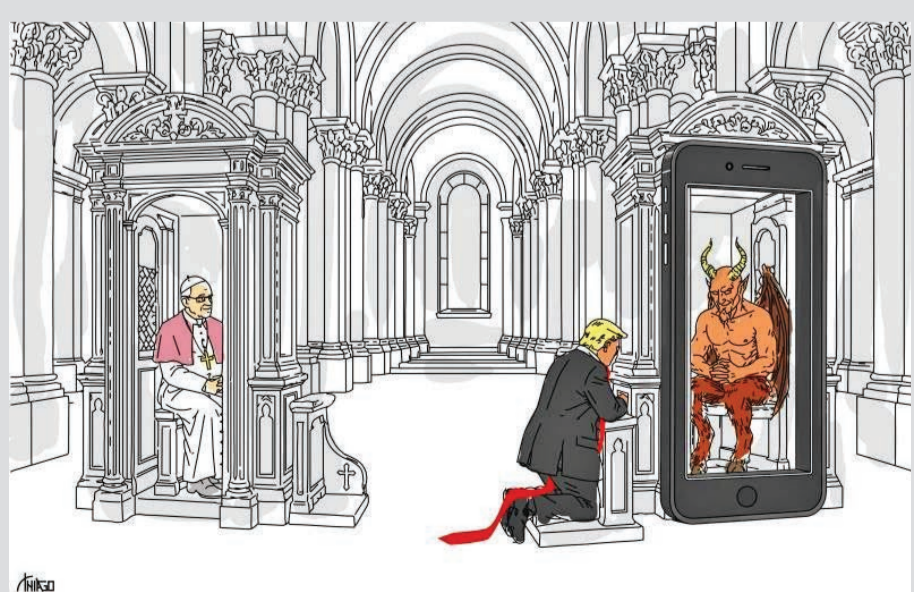
“We should be encouraging dialogue, not shutting it down or else we end up with fascism,” he said.

Cornish also won the prestigious prize in 2024 with an artwork entitled The Pity of War, depicting a woman and a hooded figure huddled together wearing gas masks.

His works have been exhibited at the National Portrait Gallery and the Australian War Memorial.

Israel always promises to investigate when it gets caught out committing war crimes with various breaches of international. We never hear anything further. Has Israel offered to meet the cost of restoring the war cemetery?

Cartoon of Day



Confession
Cartoonist: Thiago Lucas from Brazil

New documentary provides evidence of Iran’s sovereignty over Persian Gulf islands

TEHRAN – The research-based documentary “Occupation of Islands,” directed by Davoud Moradian, has begun its online screening, offering a meticulous historical analysis of Iran’s sovereignty over the three Persian Gulf islands of Bu Musa, Greater Tunb, and Lesser Tunb.

Produced by the Owj Arts and Media Organization, the film utilizes rare historical documents and maps to examine the geopolitical history of the region, Mehr reported on Friday.

It specifically focuses on the legacy of British colonial strategies and provides a detailed rebuttal to the claims made by the United Arab Emirates regarding the ownership of the trio of islands, the report added.

The documentary aims to present a well-reasoned narrative of Iran’s national sovereignty and territorial integrity, featuring rare-seen footage of the islands. By tracing the historical roots of the dispute, Moradian’s work highlights how colonial powers influenced regional narratives to serve their own interests.

“Occupation of Islands” previously garnered attention during its participation in the 19th Cinéma Vêrité Documentary Film Festival and the 44th Fajr Film Festival.

Audiences can now stream the documentary on several major Iranian VOD platforms.

The long-standing dispute over the three Persian Gulf islands—Bu Musa, Greater Tunb, and Lesser Tunb—is a geopoliti-



cal issue deeply rooted in the era of British colonial withdrawal. Historically, these islands have been under Iranian sovereignty for centuries, supported by extensive administrative records from the Safavid and Qajar eras. Although Great Britain occupied the islands in the early 20th century, Iran re-established its control in 1971 following a memorandum of understanding just before the official formation of the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Legal experts emphasize that as British colonial rule ended, the newly established nations—including the UAE and Bahrain—effectively saw the islands return to their rightful owner, as all historical records and maps affirm their Iranian heritage.

Despite this, the UAE, often backed by regional and international allies, continues to challenge Iran’s sovereignty. A significant escalation occurred on October 17, 2024, during a joint summit in Brussels between the leaders of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and the European Union. The final statement of the gathering included unfounded claims regarding Iran’s territorial integrity, calling for an end to what it termed an “occupation.” The EU-GCC statement asserted that Iran’s presence violates UAE sovereignty and contravenes the United Nations Charter—a move that Tehran has vehemently rejected as a violation of international law and a provocation.

In response, the Islamic Republic of Iran maintains that its sovereignty over the islands is “eternal and unquestionable,” dismissing the EU-backed claims as baseless and historically illiterate. Iranian officials reiterate that the islands are an inseparable part of Iranian soil and reject any form of international arbitration. Following the European Union’s alignment with these claims, a widespread wave of national solidarity emerged within Iran. Artists, social media activists, and various segments of society launched campaigns to reaffirm the islands’ Iranian identity, utilizing historical documents to defend the nation’s territorial integrity against foreign-led narratives.

James Bassett’s “Iran, the Land of the Imams” published in Persian

TEHRAN – The Persian translation of the book “Iran, the Land of the Imams,” by the Canadian Orientalist James Bassett has been released in the bookstores across Iran.

Navid Fazel Bakhsheshii has translated the book Behnashr Publications has brought it out in 352 pages, IRNA reported.

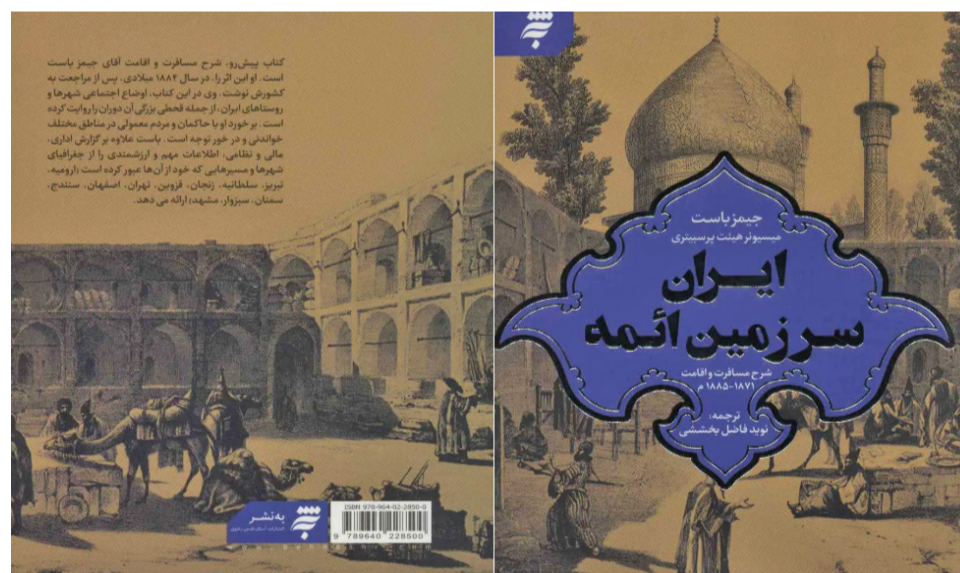
The introduction to the book states: Foreign travelers, in the travelogues they have written about countries, have depicted various scenes of the social lives of the people. In these travelogues, one can observe the socio-cultural conditions, customs, and sometimes the characteristics of individuals. Although the descriptions and perceptions of travelers are not without flaws, and despite personal or political motives, as well as errors and misinterpretations, leading to differences and contradictions, studying such travelogues and memoirs offers many benefits that can be utilized for societal improvement.

History researchers, among others, greatly benefit from these types of works, as research into any historical event requires various and numerous documents and references. A travelogue itself serves as a reference and document encompassing all dimensions of a society’s life.

Due to its significant geographical, political, and economic position during the Qajar period, Iran became a focal point of attention and competition among other countries. Consequently, various individuals, as political agents, world travelers, and religious missionaries, journeyed to Iran with diverse goals and motivations. This era is distinguished by the sheer volume of travelogues and reports from Orientalists.

The increased presence of foreign travelers in Iran during the 19th century, the development and widespread adoption of printing, and the continuity of the Qajar period with our present day are among the most important factors that, on one hand, led to an increase in the number of travelogues by foreign travelers about Iran and, on the other hand, ensured the preservation of these works, making them accessible to modern researchers.

The present book is also the travelogue of one such foreign traveler. In 1832, when a mission of missionaries was formed in America to conduct necessary investigations



for spreading Christianity in Syria, Asia Minor, Armenia, and Iran, it was decided that missionaries would be sent to Iran among the Assyrians of Urmia to promote Christianity.

Initially, in 1870, an Assyrian Christian evangelist was tasked with coming to Tehran to establish a center for distributing the Bible. Two years later, this office commissioned James Bassett (the author of the book) to study the feasibility of establishing a mission branch in Tehran or Hamedan and to provide his opinion. He arrived in Tehran with his wife and three children on November 29, 1872 (during the reign of Nasser al-Din Shah Qajar). After his investigations, he deemed Tehran more important and suitable than Hamedan.

The present book is a narrative of Bassett’s journey to and stay in Iran. He wrote this work two years after returning to his country in 1884.

In this book, Bassett recounts the social conditions and the atmosphere prevailing in the cities and villages of Iran at that time, particularly the famine that occurred in Iran then. His interactions with rulers and ordinary people in various regions are noteworthy.

In addition to administrative, military, and financial reports, the author provides important and valuable information about the geography of cities such as Urmia, Tabriz, Zanjan, Qazvin, Tehran, Isfahan, Sanandaj, Semnan, Sabzevar, and Mashhad. Furthermore, his depiction of the holy shrine of Imam

Reza (AS) and the explanations he provides about this sacred place are unprecedented in any of the travelogues by foreign travelers that have been translated to date.

He also touches upon the situation of the Turkmen east of the Caspian Sea after their separation from Iran. It is worth mentioning that even after returning to his country and writing his memoirs, Bassett continued to monitor events in Iran, making implicit references to them.

In the preface of the book “Iran, the Land of the Imams,” quoting the author, it is stated: “Iranians generally call their country the land of the Twelve Imams, meaning the 12 Imams from the lineage of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Those who travel to this land can witness the profound impact of this religious force on the people. People from all strata and classes invoke the names of the Imams; dervishes cry out their names day and night, and the shrines of the Imams sanctify many mountainous and valley regions. Consequently, I have named this book “Iran, the Land of the Imams,” which seems to be a fitting title, referring to the most prominent characteristic of the country today. In the first eleven chapters, I have described many journeys and presented information that I found most interesting and useful. In the remaining five chapters, I have attempted to comparatively present the information gathered during my eleven-year stay in Iran. Therefore, my source of information is my own observations.”