

# TEHRAN TIMES

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## Talking to Pirates Is Neither Wise Nor Productive



*Iran says it holds the 'upper hand' and will not allow the US to turn negotiations into a 'surrender table'*

### Documents on US-Israel war crime in Minab sent to international legal bodies

TEHRAN – The judiciary department of Hormozgan Province has sent documents to international legal bodies regarding the US-Israeli crime in launching a missile attack on an elementary school in the city of Minab, killing at least 168 students on February 28.

The documents, containing 337 pages, have also been submitted to national courts for further investigation, Fars news agency reported.

The deadly strike on Shajareh Tayyebeh elementary school on the first day of the imposed war is known as the most heinous massacre of innocent children in the world, killing school children, mainly girls aged between 7 and 12. ▶ Page 7

### Iran's trade with ECO members rises 82% in 5 years

By Mahnaz Abdi

TEHRAN – Iran has recorded an 82 percent growth in trade with members of the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) over the past five years, a senior trade official announced this week, reaffirming Iran's commitment to strengthening regional economic ties despite ongoing challenges.

Elham Hajikarimi, director of the Revival Office of Trade Agreements and International Organizations at the Iran Trade Promotion Organization, made the announcement during the first meeting of the "Technical Committee for Negotiations on the ECO Trade Agreement (ECOTA)" in Tehran.

"Despite the oppressive sanctions and the imposed war against our country, which has damaged some of our trade and economic infrastructure and created limitations, Iran is fully prepared to actively participate in the ECO and to help formulate a new trade agreement," Hajikarimi stated. ▶ Page 4

### Athens exhibit highlights damage to Iranian cultural sites

TEHRAN – An exhibition and expert panel held in Athens from April 14 to 16 focused on damage to Iranian cultural and historical sites, with organizers saying the event aimed to raise awareness in Europe about the issue and its broader implications.

According to a statement from Iran's Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts, the program combined a photo exhibition titled "bombing of culture and civilization; when destruction targets human heritage" with a panel discussion examining attacks by the United States and Israel on Iranian cultural sites. ▶ Page 6

### Geography is Iran's strongest weapon

By Batool Subeiti

LONDON — The nature of the confrontation between the United States and Iran has undergone a fundamental transformation, shaped by the harsh realities of a "new war." At the center of this shift is the Strait of Hormuz, which has surged to the forefront of the global agenda, eclipsing the traditional "big three" issues that once dominated diplomatic discourse: the nuclear program, ballistic missiles, and the so-called "regional proxies".

Before the current escalation, U.S. pressure campaigns were largely focused on technical and regional containment. However, the Strait of Hormuz has now become more significant than all these issues combined.

This development was not accidental; it was a clever strategic pivot by Tehran. Historically, the U.S. avoided the rhetoric of naval blockades to deny Iran a justification for weaponizing the waterway. That restraint vanished during the "Trump war" era. By pushing Iran into a corner, the U.S. inadvertently forced Tehran to incorporate the Strait into its strategic bargaining toolkit,

### The components of "a strong Iran"

TEHRAN – A professor of history says having efficient, intelligent, and predictable governance structures plays a decisive role in strengthening the concept of "a strong Iran".

Gholamreza Zarifian discusses the multifaceted nature of the concept of "a strong Iran," explaining its various dimensions.

"One of the most important components of a strong Iran is political stability and resilience. Having efficient, intelligent, and predictable governance structures plays a crucial role in reinforcing the concept of a strong Iran; as the governance system demonstrates greater resilience in facing crises, it will enhance public trust and increase social cohesion," the history professor tells ISNA.

On the dimensions of the concept of a strong Iran, Zarifian mentions events from at least two wars have demonstrated essential capacities within Iranian society, some of which have become apparent while others remain unknown.

Israel and the U.S. have launched two unprovoked and illegal wars against Iran in less than nine months. The first one happened in June 2025, and the current one which was launched on Feb. 28.

### Russia: US-Israeli strikes on Iran undermine NPT

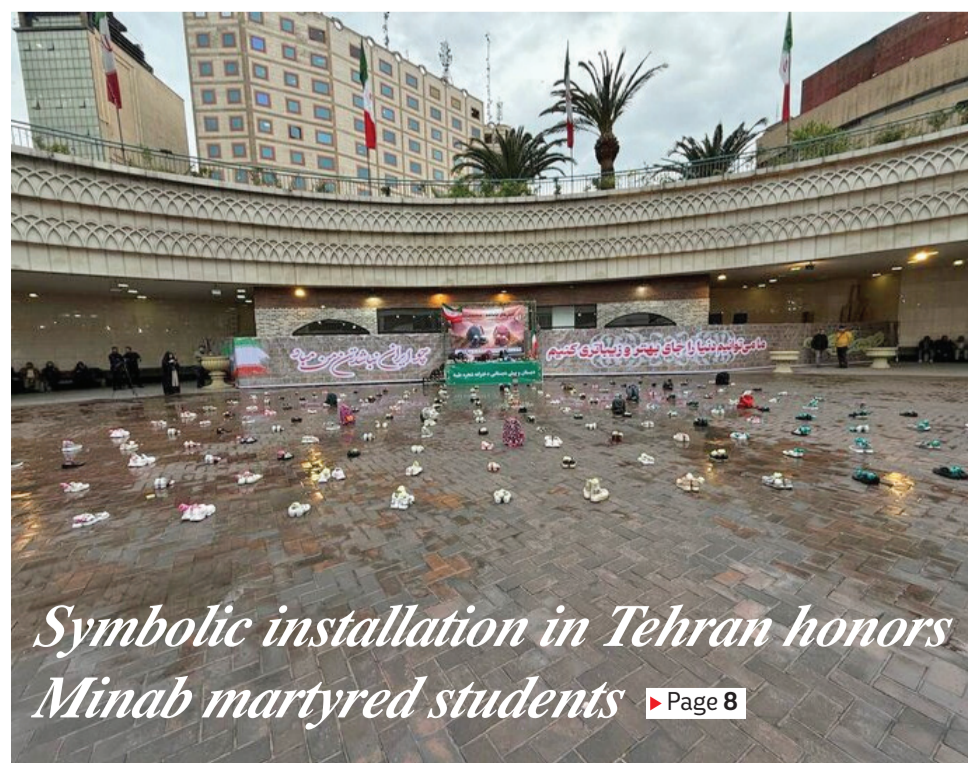
TEHRAN- Russia has condemned the U.S.-Israeli military aggression against Iran, warning that the attacks have severely weakened the global nuclear nonproliferation regime and the IAEA safeguards system.

Speaking in Moscow, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov described the strikes as unprovoked, unjustified, and illegal, a cynical abuse of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) for political gain. He noted that the attacks were carried out primarily in Israel's interest, despite Israel having historically ignored the NPT.

The United States, a founding father and depository of the treaty, supported the aggression, the veteran Russian diplomat regretted.

Highlighting the gravity of the situation, Ryabkov said the strikes were conducted while negotiations were underway to verify the peaceful nature of Iran's nuclear program, negotiations that already went beyond NPT requirements.

▶ Pages 2-3



*Symbolic installation in Tehran honors Minab martyred students* ▶ Page 8

### 66 American veterans and relatives arrested in Capitol protest against the war on Iran

TEHRAN — The rotunda of the Cannon House Office Building became a somber stage for dissent on Monday, April 20, as 66 U.S. military veterans and their family members were arrested for protesting the U.S.-Israeli campaign of aggression against Iran.

Clad in fatigues and holding red tulips, the demonstrators unfurled banners reading "End the War on Iran" and "We Can't Afford Another War."

The group performed a solemn flag-folding ceremony to honor the American service members killed since Washington and Tel Aviv started the war on February 28, standing in silent formation before Capitol Police moved in to charge the participants with crowding and obstructing. ▶ Page 5



## TEHRAN PAPERS

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

## Two sides of the national interest coin

The Iran newspaper, in an analysis, discussed the country's current approach, and quoted former representative Mansour Haghghatpour as saying: The battlefield and the negotiating table are two sides of the same coin. On one side lies power and steadfastness in the arena of conflict; on the other, diplomacy and dialogue. What links the two is their shared objective: securing the maximum possible national interest. In the realm of foreign policy and national strategy, Iran selects the appropriate tool according to circumstances. At times, conditions require a presence on the battlefield to demonstrate strength and defend national interests. At other times, circumstances call for sitting at the negotiating table. Negotiation does not mean retreating from principles. Thus, the battlefield and diplomacy are two different forms of engagement serving a single purpose — two strategic behaviors aimed at fulfilling one shared demand. This realistic, situational approach is the key to preserving Iran's dignity and standing on the international stage.

## Farhikhtegan: Europe's shift after Iran's surprises

Farhikhtegan, in an editorial, examined Europe's stance toward Donald Trump following the war against Iran. According to the paper, after the US and Israeli war on Iran, Europe gradually began contemplating independence from Washington. Initially, European leaders not only refrained from serious opposition to the war but even sought to place part of their military capacity at the disposal of the US and Israeli forces. However, once Iran's 'surprises' emerged — including 360-degree blows to Washington's interests and those of its allies — Europeans took a major step back and left their old partner standing alone. Trump, who had been pressuring Europe through various levers such as Ukraine, Greenland, tariffs, and NATO membership, did not expect his requests for assistance to be rejected. Nevertheless, Iran's diplomatic and operational conduct in the Persian Gulf led Europeans to value chemical

fertilizers and oil more than Trump's promises, prompting them to withdraw from a conflict that had begun to take on a global character.

## Ettelaat: The naval blockade still obstructs negotiations

Ettelaat, in an article, examined Iran's presence in the negotiations. It wrote: The issue of the naval blockade remains a major and fundamental obstacle in the talks. In addition to the blockade, the Americans have made further excessive demands in the exchanged messages, leaving little hope for a clear path forward. Accordingly, the Iranian delegation believes that as long as the United States does not adopt a realistic view of the situation — and continues to approach the negotiating table with the same flawed calculations that led to its heavy defeat on the battlefield — the talks will be nothing but a waste of time. Iran will not accompany the US in this time-wasting process. Iran also considers the possibility that the media reports about negotiations may be deceptive, and it remains prepared for military confrontation and renewed punitive action against the United States.

## Hamshahri: More prepared than before for war with the enemy

Repairing inflicted damage, strengthening defensive and security infrastructures, improving economic capacities, and even enhancing urban and medical preparedness are among the measures pursued during the ceasefire period — steps that have significantly increased the country's readiness. In assessing the balance of power in the Third Imposed War, both field and political indicators point to the superiority of the Islamic Republic of Iran over the opposing front. This superiority is most evident in the behavior and positions of the hostile parties. The demand for a ceasefire by the United States and Israel is itself clear evidence of their inability to achieve their declared objectives. Naturally, a party that considers itself in a dominant position feels no need for a temporary halt in hostilities or a return to negotiations.

## US abandoned deterrence, failed in its war on Iran: MEI analysis



TEHRAN - A detailed analysis published by the Middle East Institute (MEI) concludes that the United States abandoned deterrence as the core of its Persian Gulf strategy, leading to a failure in the war on Iran and leaving the Persian Gulf Arab states worse off than before the conflict began.

For over 30 years, US military bases in the Persian Gulf monarchies served as an effective deterrent, shielding these nations from conventional state attacks. Even during the June 2025 "12-Day War" between Israel and Iran, Tehran largely refrained from retaliating against countries in the region, launching only a symbolic missile strike at a US base in Qatar.

However, the current war proved differ-

ent. According to the analysis, this was not a defensive war but an offensive one aimed at regime change in Tehran or stripping Iran of its military power. Once Washington and its Israeli ally decided to forcibly upend the Iranian status quo, the Islamic Republic retaliated without restraint.

The article notes that when the US used military threats to preserve the Persian Gulf status quo, deterrence worked. But when Washington became a regional aggressor and then, unlike in Iraq in 2003, failed to achieve its regime change objectives, Iran had every reason to escalate and bring the fight directly to the Persian Gulf monarchies.

The results reveal a clear US weakness. Iran, though bloodied, remains unbowed and now asserts a right to control the Strait of Hormuz — something it never attempted before. Meanwhile, the US faces a critical challenge: whether it can restore the pre-war status quo in this vital waterway.

The analysis further questions whether countries in the region, after seeing their security compromised by reckless American-Israeli warfare, can still trust Washington to return to its former role as a reliable provider of deterrence rather than a foolhardy disruptor of peace. The answer, the report concludes, will determine the future of US bases and the broader American-Persian Gulf alliance.

Iran began on February 28, resulting in the assassination of Iran's Leader, Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei, as well as strikes on schools, hospitals, residential houses, nuclear facilities, infrastructure projects, and a synagogue in Tehran.

## The components of "a strong Iran"

TEHRAN - A professor of history says having efficient, intelligent, and predictable governance structures plays a decisive role in strengthening the concept of "a strong Iran".

Gholamreza Zarifian discusses the multifaceted nature of the concept of "a strong Iran," explaining its various dimensions.

"One of the most important components of a strong Iran is political stability and resilience. Having efficient, intelligent, and predictable governance structures plays a crucial role in reinforcing the concept of a strong Iran; as the governance system demonstrates greater resilience in facing crises, it will enhance public trust and increase social cohesion," the history professor tells ISNA.

On the dimensions of the concept of a strong Iran, Zarifian mentions events from at least two wars have demonstrated essential capacities within Iranian society, some of which have become apparent while others remain unknown.

Israel and the U.S. have launched two unprovoked and illegal wars against Iran in less than nine months. The first one happened in June 2025, and the current one which was launched on Feb. 28. A fragile two-week ceasefire has been in effect since April 8. However, the U.S. has openly violated the truce by introducing a naval blockade against Iran, and on April 19, it fired and seized an Iranian-flagged vessel in the Gulf of Oman.

The Iranians have demonstrated exemplary resistance, both in terms of retaliation and public support, especially in the ongoing war.

"By examining the resilience of the people during these two wars, we can gain a deeper understanding of the elements to which Iranian society is attached and those it distances itself from.

"The most significant historical factor of cohesion for this nation, which has persisted for hundreds and even thousands of years, is 'Iran' as an identity concept," explains Zarifian, a professor emeritus from the University of Tehran.

He adds, "Iran has always func-



tioned as a stable historical entity, possessing a history spanning several millennia compared to many countries in the region and even worldwide that have shorter historical backgrounds. This historical continuity has been both a factor in societal stability and a foundation for the transmission of beliefs and values."

In the course of the current war, U.S. President Donald Trump threatened to send Iran "back to the Stone Ages" and even threatened to destroy Iran's "whole civilization" if it did not accept the U.S. conditions. His reckless and ill-advised remarks drew sharp criticisms from top scholars who say Iran's ancient civilization is rooted in history. UN Secretary General António Guterres also said he was "deeply troubled" by such statements, and Pope Leo XIV called his remarks "unacceptable".

The professor says this characteristic has created "a profound, vibrant, and structured bond among Iranians, especially in times of crisis and difficulty."

"Therefore," he adds, "paying attention to Iran and its capacities and identities is considered one of the fundamental components in forming a 'strong Iran.'"

## Iranians have experienced about 1,200 wars in the course of history

According to the historian, based on research that has been conducted, Iranians have experienced about 1,200 wars throughout history.

"What has contributed to the

survival and continuity of this land has been the patience, attachment, and reliance of the people on their national identity, as well as their spiritual and religious identities," he notes

The history professor also says there has been no serious confrontation between "national identity and religious identity" before and after Islam.

"Throughout history, both before and after Islam, there has not been serious conflict between national identity and religious identity; rather, these two have consistently coexisted, fostering tolerance, acceptance of others, and cooperation under various circumstances."

The professor says the "concept of Iran" has fostered unity among Iranians with different ethnic, religious, and cultural backgrounds.

"Strengthening the concept of Iran is significant not only from material aspects but also from identity and theoretical perspectives. If we divide issues into 'software' and 'hardware,' the software aspect, which connects Iranians despite their diversity and multiplicity, plays a crucial role," the history professor notes.

Zarifian, a pro-reform political activist, adds it seems at certain points in time, there has been neglect of this great capacity known as "Iran" and its spiritual and material potentials. Therefore, he suggests, it is "essential that this issue receive more attention."

By insisting on the importance of focusing on the concept of "Iran,"

he states that it is "necessary to pay attention to Iran as a theoretical concept as well as to the ideals and values that have historically connected Iranians despite ethnic and religious diversity."

Such an approach, the history professor suggests, will lead to more cohesion and unity in society.

"The more we distance ourselves from this concept, the more we witness an increase in emigration and a decrease in social cohesion; conversely, whenever attention to this concept has strengthened, social unity has significantly increased."

For example, he says that during the current war, "contrary to the expectations of some experts and media, especially foreign media, that such a war would lead to a widespread wave of emigration, predictions turned out to be incorrect and yielded the opposite result.

"It is reported that during the war, despite existing transportation issues and other restrictions, the number of Iranians who returned to the country exceeded those who left. This highlights the significance and function of this concept in strengthening national cohesion."

A few days before the current war, as certain Western media outlets were quoting anonymous sources that the aggression on Iran was gaining momentum, Turkey reinforced border security to stop a possible flow of Iranians to the country.

Elsewhere in the interview, he noted that in today's world, no country can distance itself from international interactions. In this context, he argues, it is essential to distinguish between "positive dependence" and "negative dependence."

In his view, positive dependence refers to establishing deep connections and relationships with the outside world, while negative dependence refers to a situation where a country's interests and decisions are shaped from abroad.

"The modern world is highly interconnected, and countries are inevitably required to engage in interaction, dialogue, and cooperation with one another," he opines.

## Strait of Hormuz: Man-made crisis and the plight of stranded seafarers

TEHRAN - 20,000 seafarers and 2,000 ships trapped in the Persian Gulf's waterway bottleneck. UN calls for immediate aid to sailors, and Qatar believes that resolving the crisis is not the responsibility of one country alone.

As the ongoing US-Israeli war against Iran continues and Washington's so-called naval blockade of the Strait of Hormuz remains in place, the International Maritime Organization (IMO) has reported that approximately 20,000 seafarers and 2,000 ships are now stranded in this vital waterway.

IMO Secretary-General Arsenio Dominguez, speaking at a maritime conference in Singapore, expressed deep concern over the dire situation of the stranded sailors, stating that they are suffering from severe stress and fatigue. He urged shipping companies to provide remote support to the seafarers, particularly in the area of mental health.

Dominguez noted that some countries have established 24-hour helplines for the sailors,

while others have been providing food aid. However, he emphasized that more can be done on a human level, such as proactively reaching out to sailors to listen to them and help reduce their sense of isolation.

The Strait of Hormuz, through which 20% of the world's energy supply passes daily, is currently under Iranian military control. This measure comes in response to US and Israeli attacks against Iran. Meanwhile, the United States claims to have imposed a naval blockade on Iran, which effectively means blocking this strategic waterway.

In a related development, Qatar has warned that the continued closure of the Strait of Hormuz threatens to turn a regional crisis into an international one. A spokesperson for Qatar's Ministry of Foreign Affairs stressed: "Resolving the Strait of Hormuz crisis is not the responsibility of one country alone, but of all countries."

Pakistan's army chief, Field Marshal Asim Munir, has told President Trump by phone

that the US blockade on Iranian ports is a major obstacle to resuming talks between the US and Iran in Islamabad. Reuters also reported on Monday.

A Pakistani security source told the outlet that Trump told Munir he would consider his advice, but so far, there's no sign the US intends to ease the blockade, which dramatically escalated on Sunday as US forces in the Gulf of Oman attacked and seized an Iranian cargo ship.

The source told Reuters that Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif had spoken to Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian and asked whether he would send a delegation to Islamabad, but Pezeshkian said it would not happen unless the blockade is lifted.

These developments come as the US-Israeli imposed war on Iran has not only destabilized the region but also cast the lives of thousands of innocent seafarers into a shadow of uncertainty and suffering.

## US estimates Iran retains 70% of pre-war missile stockpile

TEHRAN - Despite repeated claims by Washington that its war on Iran has severely degraded the Islamic Republic's ballistic missile capabilities, U.S. intelligence estimates suggest that Tehran retains access to the vast majority of its missiles and launchers, according to a report by The New York Times.

Citing multiple U.S. officials familiar with intelligence and military assessments, the newspaper claimed that Iran has used the ongoing ceasefire to excavate its underground military sites that had been blocked by rubble.

According to the newspaper, the United States now believes

that Iran has access to 70 percent of its missiles, 60 percent of its launchers, and 40 percent of its drones.

These estimates stand in sharp contrast to the narrative emanating from the White House. Earlier this month, US Secretary of War Pete Hegseth claimed that Tehran's missile program had been "functionally destroyed."

The Times report comes as the U.S. itself faces mounting strains on its own military stockpiles. After nearly two months of war, American forces have depleted significant portions of their offensive missiles and interceptors. Following just two weeks of



fighting, the U.S. had expended nearly half of its ATACMS missiles and 40 percent of its THAAD interceptors.

The Pentagon is also confronting shortages of Tomahawk

missiles, JASSM cruise missiles, SM-3 interceptors, and Patriot missiles. At current production rates, experts estimate it would take years to replenish American arms stockpiles.

Iran says it holds the 'upper hand' and will not allow the US to turn negotiations into a 'surrender table'

By Shahrokh Saei

TEHRAN - Iran has reiterated its position that it will not hold negotiations with the United States under coercion or pressure as President Donald Trump intensifies military threats against Tehran.

In an interview with CNBC on Tuesday, the US president said he does not want to extend a two-week ceasefire with Iran that will expire at midnight GMT on Wednesday (around 3:30 AM Thursday in Iran), amid Washington's violation of the truce.

Trump claimed that Washington is in a strong negotiating position and would end up with what he called a great deal.

He threatened that the US would resume war on Iran in the absence of a deal.

"I expect to be bombing because I think that's a better attitude to go in with. But we're ready to go. I mean, the military is raring to go," he said.

### Taunting Trump

Following Trump's interview, Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf, Iran's Parliament speaker and top negotiator, took a jab at him and other US leaders over their warmongering approach.

"They will sell the war to make what great again?" he wrote on X, before adding four ironic options:

- Inflation (MIGA)
- Unaffordability (MUGA)
- Oligarchy (MOGA)
- Epsteinocracy (MEGA)

Qalibaf suggested that a new war with Iran would lead to higher inflation and further undermine affordability for Americans. He also pointed to the growing power of oligarchs, and referenced the Epstein scandal—around which Trump has faced various accusations—implying that such networks would benefit from continued conflict.

### Fragile ceasefire

The two-week ceasefire was reached on April 8 to pave the way for ending the joint US-Israel war on Iran and halting Iran's retaliatory strikes.

The truce followed Trump's acceptance of Iran's 10-point conditions. The plan includes demands for reparations for damages caused during the conflict that began on February 28, guarantees that the United States and Israel will not launch future attacks against Iran, and the lifting of sanctions.

On this basis, Iran and the US held talks in Islamabad through



Pakistan's mediation on April 11 and 12. But the talks collapsed due to what Tehran calls Washington's "excessive, unrealistic, and unacceptable" demands.

### US naval blockade

After the failure of the talks, Trump imposed a naval blockade on Iranian ports, and on Sunday, the US military seized an Iranian vessel, *Touska*, in the Sea of Oman after opening fire on it.

US Marines, deploying from the USS *Tripoli* amphibious assault ship by helicopter, boarded the vessel and seized it.

### US piracy

Iran's Foreign Ministry issued a strongly worded statement on Tuesday denouncing the US seizure of the vessel.



zure of the vessel as "a terrorist act".

"This action, accompanied by the intimidation of the ship's sailors and crew, as well as their families, constitutes piracy and a terrorist act... and violates the fundamental principles and rules of the UN Charter and international law," the Iranian Foreign Ministry statement said, calling for their immediate release.

It added that the measure is a violation of the two-week ceasefire and amounts to "an act of aggression against the Islamic Republic of Iran."

The ministry demanded that "international bodies and responsible governments strongly condemn and respond decisively to the United States' criminal action against international commercial shipping."

The statement added: "Iran will use all its capacities to de-

pend its national interests and security, and to safeguard the rights and dignity of its people. It is clear that the United States bears full responsibility for any further escalation of the situation in the region."

### 'Necessary action' awaits US Army

On Monday, Iran's military also denounced the seizure of the Iranian vessel.

The spokesperson for the Khatam al-Anbiya Central Headquarters, which coordinates operations between Iran's Army and the Islamic Revolution Guard Corps (IRGC), warned that Iran will deal decisively with the American "aggressor forces".

Lieutenant Colonel Ebrahim

Zolfaghari said, however, that due to the presence of several family members of the ship's crew—whose lives and safety were at constant risk—Iranian armed forces faced certain limitations.

"Given the current situation, once the safety of the families and crew of the vessel targeted by American aggression is ensured, the powerful armed forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran will take the necessary action against the terrorist US Army," Zolfaghari said.

### Iran's 'new cards'

Iran has stressed that it is open to talks with the US, but negotiations must preserve its national interests, and Tehran will not succumb to bullying. This position has been highlighted by Qalibaf.

"By imposing a blockade and violating the ceasefire, Trump wants—in his own delusion—to

turn the negotiating table into a table of surrender or to justify renewed warmongering," Qalibaf wrote on X on Tuesday. He added, "In the past two weeks, we have prepared to reveal new cards on the battlefield."

Iran's Foreign Ministry Spokesman Esmail Baghaei also said in his weekly press briefing on Monday that the US will face decisive retaliation if it renews war on Iran.

Iran's military has adopted a similar stance, highlighting consensus between Iran's political and military echelons.

### Iran's 'upper hand'

On Tuesday, Major General Ali Abdollahi, commander of Khatam al-Anbiya Central Headquarters, warned of "firm, decisive, and immediate responses to any threats or hostile actions by the enemy."

He added: "The Iranian Armed Forces have the upper hand and will not allow the lying and delusional US president to exploit and fabricate narratives about the battlefield situation during the period of military silence, particularly regarding the management and control of the Strait of Hormuz. They will respond appropriately and decisively to any violation of commitments."

### Trump's missteps

Iran has asserted full control over the Strait of Hormuz since the outset of the war on February 28. On Friday, Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said Iran has decided to allow commercial vessels to transit the strategic waterway through coordination with Iran. But Iran once again closed it after Trump intensified his rhetoric and threats.

It appears that Trump, instead of using Araghchi's call for de-escalation, decided to escalate further, declare victory, and double down on his claims that Iran has surrendered.

But this is no more than a miscalculation. Iran holds talks with the US based on mistrust, which is rooted in Washington's bad faith. In June last year, Tehran and Washington were engaged in talks when the US and Israel launched a war on Iran. A similar situation was repeated on February 28.

Some Iranian officials and analysts warn that Trump wants to repeat the same scenario and turn the negotiations into a cover for a new act of aggression.

(See full text at [tehrantimes.com](http://tehrantimes.com))

## Geography is Iran's strongest weapon

It is the U.S. that pushed Tehran to choke the global economy



By Batool Subeiti

LONDON — The nature of the confrontation between the United States and Iran has undergone a fundamental transformation, shaped by the harsh realities of a "new war." At the center of this shift is the Strait of Hormuz, which has surged to the forefront of the global agenda, eclipsing the traditional "big three" issues that once dominated diplomatic discourse: the nuclear program, ballistic missiles, and the so-called "regional proxies".

Before the current escalation, U.S. pressure campaigns were largely focused on technical and regional containment. However, the Strait of Hormuz has now become more significant than all these issues combined.

This development was not accidental; it was a clever strategic pivot by Tehran. Historically, the U.S. avoided the rhetoric of naval blockades to deny Iran a justification for weaponizing the waterway. That restraint vanished during the "Trump war" era. By pushing Iran into a corner, the U.S. inadvertently forced Tehran to incorporate the Strait into its strategic bargaining toolkit, a move that has turned a theoretical threat into a functional reality.

The pivot toward a maritime standoff is, in many ways, an admission of failure regarding previous U.S. strategies. The push for a naval blockade emerged only after several other avenues proved ineffective:

- \* Failed regime change: Efforts to topple the Iranian government did not materialize.
- \* Social disconnect: Attempts to separate the Iranian public from their leadership failed to gain traction.
- \* Internal destabilization: U.S.-backed internal agents were unable to mobilize enough domestic unrest to threaten the system.
- \* Military limitations: Following the strategic lessons of Isfahan, it became clear that a

ground invasion was neither feasible nor sustainable.

### Geography as the ultimate deterrent

Iran's greatest asset is its geography. By overseeing a transit point for nearly 20% of the world's energy supply, Iran holds the keys to the global economy. This geographic leverage grants Tehran a unique privilege: it must be treated with extreme caution.

The counter-blockade paradox: In this new landscape, any U.S.-led blockade on Iran can be met with an Iranian "counter-blockade." Because Iran controls the Strait, it can exert more economic pressure on its southern neighbors and transit-dependent nations than the U.S. can exert on Tehran.

If a country complies with U.S. sanctions, they risk losing access to the Strait entirely. For many, the cost of Iranian retaliation is far higher than the price of defying Washington.

The United States now faces a profound dilemma. As Iran refuses to yield to threats, the prospect of a comprehensive naval blockade—a total shutdown of the Strait—has moved from a "worst-case scenario" to a primary concern.

The global community must now grapple with several unsettling questions:

1. Global endurance: How long can the world economy survive a total closure of its most vital energy artery?
  2. Market shockwaves: What would be the true cost to oil prices, transportation, and international shipping?
  3. The ripple effect: Beyond energy, how would such a disruption affect the global trade of food, agricultural products, and industrial raw materials?
- In its attempt to isolate Iran, the U.S. has instead highlighted Iran's ability to isolate the world.

## Iran condemns Israeli move in Somaliland as a threat to regional stability

TEHRAN- Iran has strongly condemned Israel's appointment of a diplomatic envoy to the breakaway Somaliland region, calling it a flagrant violation of Somalia's sovereignty and a conspiracy to destabilize Islamic countries.

The Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman, Esmail Baqaei, stated that Israel's action contradicts the UN Charter and international law, warning that Tel Aviv seeks to sow division among regional states. He called on the UN, the African Union, and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation to confront Israeli expansionism and interference in the internal affairs of sovereign nations. Arab and Islamic countries in West Asia have previously declared their opposition to Israeli influence in Somaliland. On 26 December 2025, Israel became the first regime and UN member state to officially recognize the Republic of Somaliland as a sovereign and independent state.

Somaliland, a self-declared region in northwestern Somalia, lies along the Bab el-Mandeb Strait—"one of the world's most critical maritime chokepoints. This narrow waterway connects the Red Sea to the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean, serving as the gateway to the Suez Canal.

Approximately 10% of global maritime



trade, including a significant portion of oil and natural gas destined for Europe and Asia, passes through the Bab el-Mandeb. Any disruption to this strait directly impacts global energy security and supply chains. Somaliland's long coastline along this strategic artery gives any power with a foothold there the ability to monitor, influence, or potentially threaten one of the world's most sensitive maritime routes.

Israel has long sought to expand its strategic footprint in the Horn of Africa, and Somaliland has emerged as a key target. By strengthening its presence in this breakaway region, Israel aims to establish a foothold near the Bab el-Mandeb Strait to counter Iran, secure its maritime lanes, and expand regional alliances.

## LATES NEWS

### AL meets to discuss war, says Qatar

Qatar participated in a virtual session of the Arab League to discuss what it described as "unlawful and reprehensible" attacks on Persian Gulf countries, the country's Ministry of Foreign Affairs said.

### Pakistan urges US and Iran to extend ceasefire

Pakistan has called on the United States and Iran to extend their two-week ceasefire. Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar, in a meeting with the US Chargé d'Affaires, stressed the need for engagement between the two sides and urged them to consider prolonging the truce.

### Ex-CENTCOM commander warns against US ground operation in Iran

Former CENTCOM Commander General David Petraeus has cautioned against a US ground operation in Iran, describing it as "exceedingly risky."

He warned that such an operation could result in heavy casualties, adding that assassinating Iranian officials would not resolve the crisis.

### Pakistani minister says Iran's response to talks with US 'still awaited'

Pakistani Minister of Information Attaul-

lah Tarar has said Iran's formal response on whether it will attend the next round of talks with the United States in Islamabad is "still awaited."

### Iran slams UAE for arrests on 'groundless' pretexts

Iran has condemned the UAE's detention of several individuals on what it called baseless pretexts. Foreign Ministry Spokesman Esmail Baqaei said such anti-Iranian narratives cannot distract from the UAE's support for US and Israeli aggressors.

### China criticizes US for lack of 'sincerity' on Iran nuclear issue

China has urged the United States to demonstrate greater "sincerity" in resolving Iran's nuclear file. In a report related to the NPT, Beijing described Washington's 2018 withdrawal from the JCPOA as the root cause of current tensions and condemned US-Israeli strikes on Iran as violations of international law.

### Iran moves to establish new 'legal regime' in Strait of Hormuz

The Iranian Parliament's National Security Committee has approved a motion to establish a new legal regime governing the Strait

of Hormuz.

The 12-article bill, titled "The Law on Establishing Iran's Sovereignty over the Strait of Hormuz," would allow Iran to levy tolls on passing vessels for environmental and security services. The motion will now be sent to the Parliament's Presiding Board for public debate.

### 40 Israelis detained at Moscow Airport, reportedly over war with Iran

At least 40 Israeli citizens were detained and later released after arriving at Moscow's Domodedovo Airport from Tel Aviv. Russian security forces reportedly held them on suspicion of links to Israel's war against Iran, stating that "anyone who is an enemy of Iran is our enemy as well."

### FM Araghchi: Iranian diplomats empowered by the nation's military strength

Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi stated that the strength of Iran's Armed Forces provides solid backing for diplomats in safeguarding national interests.

During a meeting with Deputy Commander of the Iranian Navy Rear Admiral Faramarz Bemani, Araghchi also paid tribute to sailors martyred in a US attack off Sri Lanka's coast.

## Iran's trade with ECO members rises 82% in 5 years

By Mahnaz Abdi

TEHRAN – Iran has recorded an 82 percent growth in trade with members of the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) over the past five years, a senior trade official announced this week, reaffirming Iran's commitment to strengthening regional economic ties despite ongoing challenges.

Elham Hajikarimi, director of the Revival Office of Trade Agreements and International Organizations at the Iran Trade Promotion Organization, made the announcement during the first meeting of the "Technical Committee for Negotiations on the ECO Trade Agreement (ECOTA)" in Tehran.

"Despite the oppressive sanctions and the imposed war against our country, which has damaged some of our trade and economic infrastructure and created limitations, Iran is fully prepared to actively participate in the ECO and to help formulate a new trade agreement," Hajikarimi stated.

She emphasized that all member countries, beyond the current ECOTA members, can use the existing ECOTA text as a framework to move toward a more comprehensive agreement—one that addresses both present needs and future requirements.

Hajikarimi underscored the necessity of cooperation among all members to realize the ECO 2035 vision, noting that Iran has focused its economic and trade diplomacy on maximum engagement with friendly countries, including ECO member states.

### Strategic regional bloc

The Economic Cooperation Organization, with its permanent secretariat located in Tehran, comprises 10 member nations: Iran, Turkey, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan.

The organization represents over 500 million people and spans a vast geographic region connecting Central Asia, the Caucasus, the West Asia, and South Asia.

The ECO's primary objectives, outlined in its charter and the 2035 Vision, include facilitating intra-regional trade, improving



transportation networks, and eventually establishing a common market. Key frameworks like ECOTA aim to liberalize and boost commerce among members.

### Transport connectivity

In a related development last August, Iran's Transport and Urban Development Minister Farzaneh Sadegh announced that Iran is prepared to provide facilities for landlocked ECO member states to develop multimodal transport links.

Speaking at a meeting of ECO landlocked countries in Turkmenistan, Sadegh highlighted that strengthening transport and transit connections between landlocked and coastal ECO countries is a priority under the Izmir Treaty, the organization's founding document.

Sadegh noted that Iran's strategic location at the crossroads of north-south and east-west transport corridors, combined with 250,000 kilometers of roads, 15,000 kilometers of railway, and 16 commercial ports, positions the country to play a constructive role in regional connectivity.

The recent launch of an ECO freight train connecting Turkey, Iran, and Turkmenistan—part of the Almaty-Tashkent-Ashgabat-Tehran-Istanbul corridor—was cited as a milestone in linking landlocked ECO states to global markets.

Iran has also drafted an "ECO Gate" document aimed at granting landlocked members access to open seas with special port and maritime concessions from coastal members, a proposal awaiting implementation with support from the ECO Secretariat and relevant UN offices.

## Preparation of 51,000 hectares of land for housing projects underway

TEHRAN- The managing director of the National Land and Housing Organization, explaining the organization's performance in the field of land preparation, announced the payment of contractors' claims in the land preparation sector from the organization's resources.

According to a report by IRNA on Tuesday from the Ministry of Transport and Urban Development, Ali Nabian, emphasizing that in the 14th government, land preparation along with land supply has been seriously pursued and implemented by the organization, said: "With the emphasis of the Minister of Transport and Urban Development that prepared land

should be delivered to applicants, this task was seriously pursued and carried out in the organization."

He stated: "With double effort, even in the difficult conditions of the last month of last year, the claims of contractors in the land preparation sector were paid."

The managing director of the National Land and Housing Organization continued: "The volume of land preparation operations has reached an unprecedented record of over 51,000 hectares across the country."

According to him, land preparation operations are ongoing without interruption throughout the country.

## Stock market likely to reopen within 10 days: SEO head

TEHRAN- The head of the Securities and Exchange Organization (SEO) announced the possibility of the stock market reopening within the next 10 to 12 days, emphasizing that this will be done all at once, and a phased approach is not on the agenda.

According to IRNA, the capital market experienced numerous ups and downs over the past year due to political and international conditions, the effects of which still persist, despite one month having passed since 1405 [Iranian calendar year].

Hojjatollah Seyyedi stated in an interview with IRNA, that on March 9th, about 40 minutes after the start of the third imposed war, they immediately decided to halt capital market activity. This speed in decision-making stemmed from the experience of the 12-day war. Since it is said that every war or injury also presents an opportunity, the 12-day war provided a chance to review events and pre-

pare for more difficult situations, so that in the months following the war, they could think about emergency issues or events like war, intensified sanctions and restrictions, and ways to resolve these problems.

He added that while the 12-day war was naturally surprising, it is not acceptable afterwards to say that everything is over. The ceasefire after the 12-day war was ambiguous, and the possibility of its violation existed at any moment. Therefore, our colleagues in research, legal, and issuer units of the Securities and Exchange Organization, in cooperation with financing institutions, funds, and legal entities, held weekly meetings. Eventually, after several months, they prepared a guideline on how the capital market should operate in emergency conditions. These meetings began in late July of last year, and in the autumn, a roughly 40-page guideline for special conditions was prepared in the Supreme Council of the Stock Exchange.

# Strait of Hormuz crisis: A looming food security time bomb

TEHRAN- The world is holding its breath. With the escalation of the US-Israeli war on Iran, the strategic Strait of Hormuz, a narrow waterway through which a fifth of global oil passes, has effectively been closed. While the immediate crisis is measured in halted tankers and rising energy prices, the United Nations warns that the real detonation will be a "food security time bomb" felt not just at gas pumps, but in supermarket aisles worldwide.

According to reports from the UN and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the closure has already triggered a surge in energy and fertilizer prices, impacting the cost of everything from wheat to corn. However, the worst is yet to come. As FAO Chief Economist Maximo Torero recently stated, "The clock is ticking." Ships carrying critical agricultural inputs must start moving through the strait immediately to ward off a dangerous spike in food price inflation later this year.

The mechanics of this crisis are simple but devastating. Between 20 and 45 percent of key agrifood inputs, primarily fertilizers and fuel for irrigation and transport,



transit the Strait of Hormuz.

Unlike the COVID-19 pandemic, which disrupted supply chains gradually, this blockade is an abrupt amputation. Fertilizer and energy markets are notoriously inelastic, meaning prices can skyrocket far beyond what the reduction in volume suggests.

For farmers in developing nations, the timing is catastrophic. Crop calendars do not wait for diplomacy. As the FAO notes, farmers are currently making critical

decisions about which crops to plant. Facing scarce and prohibitively expensive fertilizer, many will reduce yields or switch to less nutrient-dependent crops. Others may abandon food crops entirely to grow biofuels, seeking to capitalize on high oil prices, thereby shrinking global food supplies further.

The ripple effects will be felt within months. Lower yields in 2026 will lead to higher commodity prices and retail food in-

flation for the next several years. We risk a repeat of the post-pandemic crisis, where trade restrictions and panic buying worsened global conditions, pushing millions into hunger. "We are in an input crisis," warns FAO Director David Laborde. "We don't want to make it a catastrophe."

Unlike a natural disaster or an El Niño weather pattern, this blockade is man-made. As Torero noted, it "is something governments can resolve and have to resolve." The conditions are ripe for a "perfect storm." If the standoff continues, the international community must consider anticipatory actions, including emergency financing through the IMF to help at-risk nations purchase essential fertilizers without triggering distorting subsidy wars.

The silence from the Strait of Hormuz is deafening. But if the passage remains closed, that silence will soon be broken by the sound of empty shelves and rising interest rates. The world must act now to defuse this bomb, before the next harvest is lost.

## 'Petro-Yuan': A silent earthquake in global economy

TEHRAN- Simultaneously with the escalation of geopolitical tensions in the Persian Gulf and the halt of vessel traffic in the Strait of Hormuz, media outlets have reported on China's decision to conclude oil contracts based on the Yuan with Persian Gulf countries, a move that analysts have interpreted as a challenge to dollar hegemony and a silent earthquake in the global economy.

According to a report by IRNA, since the beginning of the US-Zionist coalition's aggression against the Islamic Republic of Iran and Iran's action to prevent the passage of hostile nations' vessels and warships through the Strait of Hormuz, economic analysts have spoken about the diminishing dominance of the dollar, especially over the global energy market. Paying tolls in Yuan, allowing passage to ships that have transacted in Yuan, settling payments for purchased shipments from Iran in Yuan, Russia's decision to settle its oil contracts with China's currency, and similar news have drawn the attention of global economic media during this period, although some of this news has never been confirmed by official authorities and has remained at the level of media speculation.

In more recent news, media outlets have announced that China has replaced "Petro-Dollar" transactions with "Petro-Yuan" contracts with Persian Gulf countries, and it was even reported that in an unprecedented move, Indian refineries have also settled payments for oil shipments purchased from Iran using China's Yuan.

Additionally, The Wall Street Journal reported on urgent negotiations between Abu Dhabi and the United States for financial support and economic guarantees to prevent the financial collapse of the UAE, revealing: While there are concerns about the prolongation of the US-Israel conflict and the continuation of the Strait of Hormuz crisis, the United Arab Emirates is worried about the escalation of the consequences of this potential war and is therefore holding urgent negotiations with the United States, requesting immediate financial support and economic guarantees from Washington.

According to this newspaper, the UAE has informed Washington that if it is not provided with sufficient dollar reserves, it may be forced to sell part of its oil in other foreign currencies, primarily China's Yuan, which would be a significant blow to the dominance of the US currency in global markets. Emirati officials noted that President Trump's decision to attack Iran has plunged the region into a devastating conflict whose consequences could last for years.

The reality is that, in the opinion of energy market observers, these developments represent a serious wake-up call for the decades-long dominance of the dollar in the global oil market, and experts are announcing the beginning of a new era in the international financial system, just as The Wall Street Journal in its report affirmed the speed with which West Asian countries are abandoning the dollar and believes this is moving the

world toward a multipolar financial system.

### A strategic shift in oil & energy purchase settlement system

The truth is that for years, countries such as Russia, China, Iran, and also emerging economic powers have spoken about the necessity of reducing dependence on the dollar and have even sought alternatives such as a BRICS common currency, but what is happening today is a strategic and practical shift in Persian Gulf oil transactions.

Now the most important question that arises is: how is China seeking to overcome the dollar by entering the energy world? In response, it can be argued that with this move, it wants to reduce vulnerability to US sanctions because, in China's belief, the dollar is a dangerous political and economic weapon in Washington's hands, and any country that experiences tension with the US may be deprived of the SWIFT system and access to the dollar. Accordingly, Beijing does not want the world's second-largest economy to be at the mercy of White House decisions.

International observers also believe that with this move, China wants to increase the global power of the Yuan, and for this reason, it wants to turn its currency into an international one. If the world's oil is bought and sold in Yuan, it will lead to an increase in China's economic value and influence.

On this basis, the most important question is: if the Yuan replaces the dollar, what will happen to the dollar market? Some economic experts, in response to this question, believe that this will cause a collapse in global demand for the dollar. Therefore, if oil is purchased in Yuan, countries will no longer need to hold billions of dollars in foreign exchange reserves to secure oil. A decrease in demand for the dollar means a decrease in its value against other currencies. It is also important to note that US financial markets, including treasury bonds, stocks, and real estate, are heavily dependent on foreign capital that recognizes the dollar as a safe currency. As the dollar's credibility declines, capital will move toward the Yuan, gold, or other currencies, which would mean a stock market crash, rising interest rates, and a deep recession in the United States.

### Who loses from fall of Petro-Dollar?

Replacing the Yuan in oil contracts, especially in a region where a significant portion of its shipments is destined for East Asia, is not limited only to the US. Rather, some countries will also lose from this decision. These include Persian Gulf oil-exporting countries such as Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Kuwait, Qatar, Oman, and Bahrain. These countries must decide whether to convert their foreign exchange reserves from dollars to Yuan or not, and this decision could severely overshadow their political relations with the United States. This issue is clearly visible in The Wall Street Journal's report and the correspondence the UAE has conducted with Washington.

Although the White House has not yet an-

nounced a position on this matter, analysts at J.P. Morgan believe that the US will certainly impose secondary sanctions on India and countries that buy oil in Yuan. Also, trying to strengthen the dollar through interest rate hikes and starting a currency war against China through financial and trade instruments will be among the most important likely options on the table.

Another point that J.P. Morgan mentioned in its report is that, given China's economic influence and the gradual joining of countries to the "Petro-Yuan," it seems the US does not have the ability to completely stop this process. Ultimately, changing the oil payment system from the dollar to the Yuan is undoubtedly a silent earthquake in the global economy — something China has dreamed of for years and is now being realized due to the conditions created in the world's economic and energy system following the US-Israeli aggression against Iran.

### Is Petro-Dollar being pushed to margins?

After the collapse of the Bretton Woods gold standard for valuing the US dollar, which occurred in the early 1970s, the US agreed with Saudi Arabia that the standard for oil pricing would be the dollar. After that, the global energy market witnessed the phenomenon of the "Petro-Dollar," which not only made the US dollar the world's premier reserve currency but also allowed White House rulers to create a fluid source of liquidity by printing unbacked money and absorb oil sale revenues in the form of foreign investment.

Nevertheless, reputable media such as Reuters and Bloomberg last week, during the China-UAE business conference held in Beijing, reported the signing of 24 memorandums of understanding for economic and commercial cooperation, the focus of which was settlement in Yuan and Dirham currencies. A point emphasized in the final statement of this conference was the issue of financial settlements for oil transactions in Yuan.

The latest data on SWIFT financial transactions also shows that the share of China's Yuan in total global oil trade settlements in March of this year has reached over 14 percent, and in fact, the Yuan has become the second currency for oil transactions. That is why, as Reuters reported, senior Wall Street analysts believe that the dollar's dominance over global trade is being destroyed, and in this process, the US-Israeli war of aggression against Iran was the White House's biggest strategic mistake in the Middle East because it accelerated the "replacement of the Yuan instead of the dollar" in oil and energy contracts.

It seems that given China is the world's largest oil importer and, on the other hand, is the largest buyer of oil from West Asian countries including Iran, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Iraq, and even buys Russian oil in Yuan, we should witness fundamental changes in the currency settlement system of the global energy market in the not-too-distant future.

By Wesam Bahrani

TEHRAN – Iraq advances toward selecting a prime minister as political factions intensify negotiations following the presidential appointment.

Iraq is edging closer to breaking its political deadlock more than five months after parliamentary elections, as momentum builds toward forming a new government.

Recent developments, most notably the appointment of a president, have cleared a key procedural hurdle, allowing the next phase of the process to begin.

Attention is now focused on the Coordination Framework, the largest bloc in parliament, which is working to settle on its nominee for prime minister. While Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani is seeking a second term, he faces competition from within the alliance, particularly from former Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, who continues to wield significant influence.

A third figure, Bassem al-Badri, has emerged as a serious contender. A senior member of Nouri al-Maliki's Islamic Dawa Party, al-Badri is seen by some as a potential consensus choice. He currently heads the Accountability and Justice Commission, the body responsible for implementing de-Baathification measures aimed at removing members of Saddam Hussein's former Ba'ath Party from state institutions.

According to political sources, al-Badri has secured the support of seven of the Coordination Framework's 12 committee leaders. He needs one more vote to reach the required two-thirds majority under the bloc's internal rules and formally clinch the nomination.

The bloc, which controls around 185 of the 329 seats in parliament, is required to name a prime minister by April 26 under Iraq's constitutional framework.

Although the government formation process has been lengthy, several institutional steps have gradually fallen into place. Parliament elected its speaker and two deputies in late December.

More recently, on April 11, Kurdish politician Nizar Amidi was chosen as president after months of negotiations among



Kurdish factions following the November elections.

Amidi, the candidate of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, was elected during a parliamentary session held on Saturday, succeeding former President Abdul Latif Rashid. His appointment followed a prolonged dispute among Kurdish parties over who should take on the largely ceremonial but constitutionally essential role. The vote itself had been delayed twice, with 16 candidates initially in the race.

In the second round, Amidi won decisively, securing 227 votes. His rival, Muthanna Amin, received 15 votes, while seven ballots were ruled invalid. After being sworn in, Amidi pledged to uphold the principle of "Iraq First."

His election effectively unlocks the next stage of government formation.

Under Iraq's power-sharing system, the presidency is reserved for a Kurdish figure, the premiership for a Shia politician, and the speakership of parliament for a Sunni.

Crucially, the constitution requires that a president be in office before the largest parliamentary bloc can formally nominate a prime minister. The president must then approve that nomination, enabling the formation of a government.

With this requirement now fulfilled, the Coordination Framework has a 15-day window to agree on its candidate.

Amidi brings decades of experience to the presidency. He became a close aide to former President Jalal Talabani. Between 2008 and 2014, he managed Talabani's office, further consolidating his role within Iraq's political establishment.

He later served as director of the President's Office under three successive presidents, Fouad Massoum, Barham Salih, and Abdul Latif Rashid, giving him extensive experience within the workings of the position.

With the presidency settled, internal negotiations within the Coordination Framework have intensified. The bloc held a key meeting on Monday at the residence of Ammar al-Hakim, leader of the National State Forces Alliance, to discuss potential candidates.

According to the bloc's Secretary-General, Abbas Radi, the talks were constructive but inconclusive. "All views regarding the candidate for prime minister were presented and discussed, but the issue requires more time," he said in remarks to the Iraqi News Agency.

Another Coordination Framework meeting was scheduled for Tuesday, before an announcement was expected on Wednesday, as the bloc works to bridge differences and reach an agreement within the constitutional timeframe.

Alongside al-Sudani and former Premier al-Maliki, several other names are reportedly under consideration. These include former Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi, who served from 2014 to 2018, former Planning Minister Ali al-Shukri, and Mohammed Sahib al-Darraj, a technical adviser in the current government.

The outcome of these deliberations will shape Iraq's political trajectory at a critical moment. The next government will be tasked with tackling persistent economic challenges, improving public services, and maintaining stability.

This comes against the backdrop of unprecedented regional tensions that continue to place Iraq in a delicate position. Iraqi officials have repeatedly raised objections over American violations of national sovereignty, including the illegal use of its airspace.

At the same time, resistance factions operating under the banner of the Islamic Resistance in Iraq have launched attacks targeting U.S. military bases and Zionist-linked interests following the illegal U.S.-Israeli war against neighboring Iran, which began on February 28.

These operations were paused under a two-week ceasefire agreement between Iran and the United States on April 8. However, the truce is set to expire on Wednesday, raising the prospect of renewed escalation.

Resistance factions have already warned that they will resume and expand their operations if the aggression against the Islamic Republic of Iran starts again.

Several Iraqi resistance groups have also warned they are closely monitoring American movements in the Iraqi Kurdistan region amid reports that the U.S. and Zionist regime are arming terrorist groups in the area to stage ground operations in Iranian territory.

Iraqi officials have warned that any attempts by the United States or the Zionist regime to destabilize the Islamic Republic could have serious consequences that extend beyond Iran and directly affect Iraq's security and stability. They emphasize that the two countries are deeply interconnected, meaning that tensions in one country can quickly spill over into neighboring states, particularly Iraq, which continues to face a sensitive and complex security environment.

They further stress that Iraq has a strong interest in regional calm and de-escalation. In their view, any actions aimed at destabilizing neighboring Iran risk triggering a chain of events that could undermine Iraq's security, disrupt internal stability, and complicate ongoing efforts to maintain calm after the defeat of Daesh, a key challenge for the next government.

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Straight Truth  
TEHRAN TIMES

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## Pakistan and Iran: Two brotherly nations

By Muhammad Mehdi

It is a great honor for Pakistan that, in these most difficult circumstances, Iran has trusted Pakistan to stop the U.S. war on the Islamic Republic. Along with the honor, this is also a great test for Pakistan, and every step has to be taken with gusto, because nations face difficult times in history. During this time, whoever supports them becomes a part of the memory of the nations.

The current atmosphere of trust between Pakistan and Iran is not sudden or a result of a series of successive events in the past few days. This amity is rooted in the relations between the two neighboring countries. Schoolchildren in Pakistan have read in textbooks that the first country in the world to recognize Pakistan in 1947 was our great neighboring brother country of Iran.

Similarly, this relationship came to the fore when Iran, under the direction of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini (Imam Khomeini), led the Islamic Revolution in February 1979. The world was on edge and was ready to oppose it. But at that time, Pakistan became the first country to recognize the Islamic Republic of Iran and did not care about the opposition from the outside world. Immediately after the victory of the revolution, Pakistan's Foreign Minister Agha Shahi visited Iran in March 1979 and met with the highest Iranian officials, including Ayatollah Khomeini. The visit set the stage to push the relations to new levels. Iran's Islamic Revolution had been facing opposition from the Western world from the very beginning, but Pakistan did not notice the Western opposition. In April 1979, Pakistan's President General Zia issued a statement praising the Islamic Revolution in Iran under the Leadership of Imam Khomeini.

Ayatollah Khomeini wrote a letter to General Zia in response, saying that "ties with Pakistan are based on Islam." Also in 2017, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the Leader of the Islamic Revolution, highlighted Kashmir, Pakistan's most sensitive issue. Ayatollah Khamenei called on the Iranian Judiciary to "legally intervene" and voice support for "Muslims in Myanmar and Kashmir."

Similarly, in his speech at the end of Ramadan, the Supreme Leader called on the Muslim world to support the people of Bahrain, Yemen, and Kashmir. The reason for repeating all these incidents is to understand the depth of relations between Pakistan and Iran. Just as the Kashmir issue is of utmost importance to Pakistan, in the same way, the nuclear program is of utmost



importance to Iran for peaceful purposes.

As a Pakistani, I am very happy to write that Pakistan has always supported Iran's right to have a nuclear program. It was only last year when the Zionist regime was engaged in war against Iran, then in May 2025, Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif, without caring about any country in the world, even if it claims to be a superpower, stood on the soil of Tehran and openly supported Iran's nuclear program. And then, when Iranian President Massoud visited Pakistan in August 2025, Shahbaz Sharif reiterated Pakistan's position without caring about anyone. Slogans of "Tashakkur Pakistan" (Thank You Pakistan) echoed in the Iranian parliament. This is the sentiment of every citizen of Pakistan, and there is no Shia-Sunni distinction, as the people of Pakistan consider an attack on Iran as an attack on Pakistan and cannot tolerate it under any circumstances.

It is because of these historical facts and emotions that Pakistan's Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister, and Chief of Defense Forces and Army Chief Field Marshal Asim Munir made every effort to prevent the imposition of war on Iran before it was launched on Feb. 28. And since then, it has sought to end it.

The U.S. and Zionist regime's attacks against Iran have been condemned more than once in the United Nations Security Council. Now Pakistan wants to take every possible step to protect all of Iran's international rights, including its nuclear program, and remain diplomatically active.

Another thing that is being vigorously discussed in Pakistani circles is that after the end of this war, a new security framework should be formed to permanently end Israel's daily aggression and bullying in the Middle East, which includes Pakistan, Iran, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt. This is a very popular idea, and work on its details should begin soon because the survival of all of us lies in unity. Otherwise, those with temporary ties will side with Netanyahu in an instant.

## 66 American veterans and relatives arrested in Capitol protest against the war on Iran

TEHRAN — The rotunda of the Cannon House Office Building became a somber stage for dissent on Monday, April 20, as 66 U.S. military veterans and their family members were arrested for protesting the U.S.-Israeli campaign of aggression against Iran.

Clad in fatigues and holding red tulips, the demonstrators unfurled banners reading "End the War on Iran" and "We Can't Afford Another War."

The group performed a solemn flag-folding ceremony to honor the American service members killed since Washington and Tel Aviv started the war on February 28, standing in silent formation before Capitol Police moved in to charge the participants with crowding and obstructing.

The protest, coordinated by a coalition including Veterans For Peace, About Face, and the Center on Conscience and War, represents a deepening rift between the military community and the Trump administration.

Among those zip-tied was Mike Prysner, an Iraq War veteran who described the war as "already deeply unpopular" and a burgeoning crisis for the White House.

This sentiment is manifesting within the active-duty ranks, where more than 100 service members have already filed for conscientious objector status.

Prysner also highlighted the "legal right" of objection, backed by a team that will "fight to ensure" service members are successfully "kept from deployment."

Christina Sarson, an Army veteran from Pennsylvania, emphasized the human toll, noting she was there to protect her sons from the "moral injury" and lifelong trauma inherent in such escalations.

Protesters also pointed to the deaths of Ira-

nian civilians in strikes on homes, schools, and hospitals.

According to Iran's Forensic Medicine Organization, American and Israeli strikes have martyred 3,375 Iranian civilians during the 40 days of the 2026 war. This figure includes 496 women and 383 children, though the highest concentration of casualties, 969 people, is among young adults aged 19 to 30.

This act of civil disobedience echoes the 1971 Vietnam-era occupation of the Capitol, signaling a profound exhaustion with "forever wars" that many veterans believe are being waged at the expense of the interests of the American people.

The timing of the arrests is critical, as a Pakistan-mediated ceasefire is set to expire this Wednesday.

President Trump has remained characteristically aggressive as a claimed U.S. military blockade continues to escalate threats.

He has made numerous fallacious and contradictory statements, especially regarding Iran's positions for a possible deal, and has also threatened to "blow up" the entire country if Tehran does not submit to Washington's demands.

Recent polling indicates that 66 percent of Americans want an end to the war, driven by both ethical concerns and staggering economic anxieties. With the Strait of Hormuz closed, gas prices have surged past \$4 a gallon, and consumer prices rose 3.3 percent in March alone.

Beyond the economic strain, the opposition is increasingly nationalistic and moral.

Many veterans characterize the war as an "Israel first" priority that neglects "America first" domestic needs, arguing that the tens of billions spent could have instead repaired crumbling infrastructure or expanded healthcare.

## The sledgehammer that crystallized Israel's war on Christianity

From Gaza's bombed churches to a decapitated Jesus in Lebanon, Israel's aggression reveals a systematic assault on the Levant's Christian soul

By Garsha Vazirian

TEHRAN — The image lands like a physical blow: An Israeli soldier in full uniform stands outside a family home in the Maronite Christian village of Debel, six kilometers from the border, and swings a sledgehammer straight into the head of a Jesus statue on its crucifix.

It was a deliberate, almost theatrical act of contempt, captured on camera and hurled across social media, where it racked up millions of views in hours.

Local priest Fadi Falfel spoke for all the outraged Lebanese villagers: "This horrible thing, this desecration of our holy symbols."

The Israeli military confirmed the photo's authenticity the next day and rolled out the familiar script, calling the soldier's conduct "wholly inconsistent with the values expected of its troops," promising an investigation, and assuring the world that harsh measures would follow.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu posted that he was "stunned and saddened." Foreign Minister Gideon Sa'ar offered a quick apology to "every Christian whose feelings were hurt."

These words contradict Israeli conduct and feel empty with every repetition. Following

global outcry, the Israeli military claimed it had "punished" those involved. Yet, the reality of this discipline, removing two soldiers from combat for a mere 30-day detention, only serves to embolden the next offender.

**The spectacle of digital iconoclasm**

What makes Debel so damning is the pride with which it was documented. Israeli soldiers have turned religious desecration into content, filming themselves as they smash symbols and staging mockery inside churches, then broadcasting the footage like battlefield trophies.

In nearby Deir Mimas, other videos showed troops dancing and performing a mock wedding inside a sanctuary. This also looks like performance art for a domestic audience that cheers the humiliation of Christian faith.

Knesset members Ayman Odeh and Ahmad Tibi cut to the heart of it: those who spit on priests in the streets of al-Quds (Jerusalem) and vandalize churches in Gaza without consequence will naturally graduate to swinging hammers in Lebanon.

On X, the reaction was immediate and furious: users shared the Debel image alongside Gaza sniper clips and West Bank arson



videos.

Cardinal Pierbattista Pizzaballa, speaking for the Assembly of Catholic Ordinaries of the Holy Land, issued a statement of "profound indignation and unreserved condemnation." Church leaders worldwide echoed the outrage, describing the act as a direct assault on the sacred.

**Gaza's ancient faithful driven toward extinction**

The pattern was forged in Gaza, where the Christian community, roughly one thousand strong before October 2023, has been systematically hollowed out.

By late 2025, at least 53 had been killed directly or indirectly, the population had been halved, and the rest were scattered or starving.

(See full text at [tehrantimes.com](http://tehrantimes.com))

## Emergency restoration begins at damaged historic sites in Isfahan



TEHRAN – Emergency restoration work has begun on damaged historical monuments in Isfahan province, a provincial official said on Monday, following the US-Israeli attacks that affected dozens of heritage sites.

“Preliminary estimates indicate that the extent of damage is rising, and urgent measures are needed in three areas: structure, decorations and technical assessments,” Amir Karamzadeh, head of the provincial department of the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts, said on Monday.

He said a provincial technical council has been formed with the participation of experts from the ministry and the Research Institute of Cultural Heritage and Tourism to assess the damage. Early findings suggest that many historic buildings have sustained structural damage, while deterioration of decorative elements is continuing.

Karamzadeh said detailed technical and decorative studies would be the first step in the restoration process.

He added that funding has been allocated by the governor-general office of Isfahan to support emergency interventions aimed at stabilizing vulnerable structures and preventing further deterioration.

“With the governor-general’s support, funds have been allocated to carry out emergency restoration so that stabilization and protection can begin quickly in some locations. These measures are limited to urgent interventions to prevent further damage,” he said.

According to Karamzadeh, the initial phase of emergency restoration will focus on several key sites, including Ashraf Hall, Rikabkhaneh, Jebek Khaneh, Chehel Sotoun Palace and the Naqsh-e Jahan Square complex.

He said additional national funding is ex-

pected to be allocated next week following instructions from the minister, which would allow for more comprehensive restoration work beyond emergency measures.

Karamzadeh also said that Isfahan University of Art is cooperating on specialized restoration studies, with separate funding provided by the Ministry of Science for academic involvement in technical and decorative assessments.

He added that six official experts from Iran’s judiciary have been tasked with determining the precise extent of the damage, although a final report has not yet been completed.

One of the considerable damages was reported near the Naqsh-e Jahan Square, where tiles from the northern and western iwans of the Imam Mosque were dislodged in some areas due to blast waves. The mosque is part of the UNESCO-listed square, which officials say was affected by nearby explosions.

Authorities said further damage occurred following a separate strike on the Isfahan governorate building, located within the Safavid-era state complex area, which lies within protected zones of both Naqsh-e Jahan Square and Chehel Sotoun Palace.

Several prominent landmarks within the Safavid complex, including Ali Qapu Palace, Chehel Sotoun Palace, Ashraf Hall, Rikabkhaneh and Jebek Khaneh, sustained damage from blast waves, according to officials.

Provincial authorities said a total of 28 historical sites in Isfahan province were affected by the US-Israeli strikes.

Additional damage was reported in other counties of the province, including historic buildings in Shahreza, Kuhpayeh and Khansar, such as caravanserais, mosques, schools and residential houses.

## Foreign ambassadors, media tour Tehran to inspect damage to civilian sites

TEHRAN – More than 50 foreign ambassadors and around 80 domestic and international media representatives toured parts of Tehran on Monday to inspect sites affected by recent attacks on civilian infrastructure.

Ali Tolouei, head of the Tehran provincial office of Iran’s Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts, said the program was designed as part of a broader public diplomacy initiative to present what he described as documented accounts of damage to non-military locations.

“In this program, more than 50 ambassadors based in Tehran, along with about 80 domestic and international media outlets, participated in a Tehran tour to visit key locations across the capital,” Tolouei said.

He said the initiative sought to provide first-hand observation of the impact of recent developments on cultural, residential, medical and academic sites.

According to Tolouei, the itinerary included visits to historical landmarks such as [the UNESCO-listed] Golestan Palace, religious sites including a synagogue, medical facilities such as Gandhi Hospital, residential complexes in urban areas, and academic institutions including Sharif University of Technology.

“All these locations have a civilian nature and were affected during recent events,” he said.

Tolouei said the main objective of the program was to provide a direct and observable account of damage to civilian and cultural spaces, which he said are protected under

international frameworks.

“This initiative can be viewed as an effort to present documented evidence of violations of international norms,” he said.

He added that the presence of both foreign diplomats and international media was intended to expand the reach of the information presented during the tour.

“The synergy between official diplomacy and media capacity is a key component of this program. The simultaneous presence of international media alongside foreign ambassadors enables broader and more accurate reflection of these observations in global public opinion,” Tolouei said.

The program was organized with the cooperation of Tehran provincial authorities, including the governor-general’s office and other executive bodies, he said, adding that coordination was aimed at presenting a clear and consistent account of the situation.

Tolouei said the initiative was not limited to information sharing but sought to create what he described as a “shared understanding based on observed realities.”

Officials said the program is part of ongoing efforts to engage international audiences and document the impact of the recent developments on non-military infrastructure.

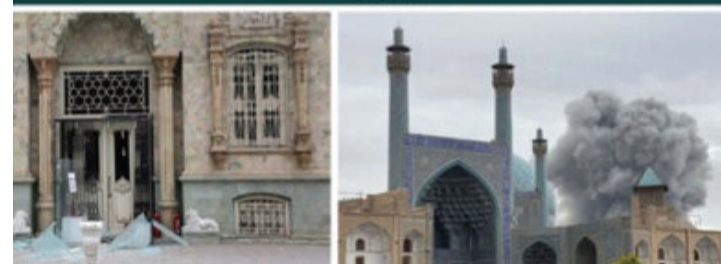
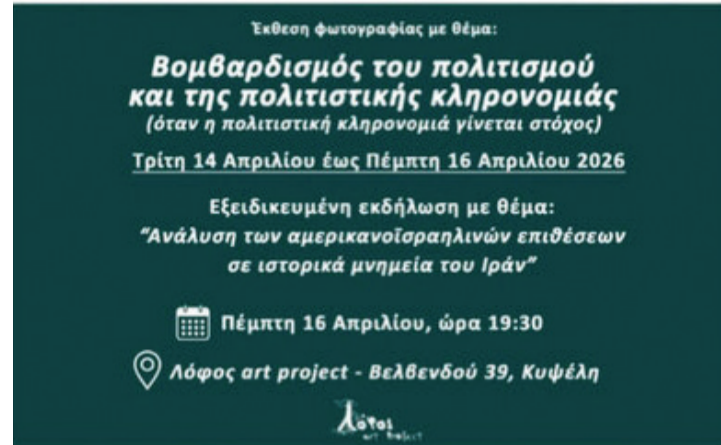
# Athens exhibit highlights damage to Iranian cultural sites

TEHRAN – An exhibition and expert panel held in Athens from April 14 to 16 focused on damage to Iranian cultural and historical sites, with organizers saying the event aimed to raise awareness in Europe about the issue and its broader implications.

According to a statement from Iran’s Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts, the program combined a photo exhibition titled “bombing of culture and civilization; when destruction targets human heritage” with a panel discussion examining attacks by the United States and Israel on Iranian cultural sites.

The event took place at the Lofos Art Project center in Athens in cooperation with Iran’s cultural office in Greece. Organizers said the initiative sought to address what they described as limited international reactions to damage affecting cultural heritage and to frame the issue as a global ethical concern.

The exhibition featured documentary images of Iranian cultural and historical locations that, according to organizers, were damaged during missile strikes and aerial bombardments attributed to the United States and Israel. The images were presented as evidence of both physical damage and disruption



to what organizers described as historical continuity and national identity.

Organizers said the visual presentation was intended to

illustrate the broader impact of damage to cultural heritage, describing it as an issue affecting collective memory and shared human history.

The panel discussion was held with participants from fields including philosophy, civilization studies and international law. Speakers addressed legal, cultural and political aspects of the reported damage.

One of participants in the panel, described the destruction of historical sites as “the burning of time,” presenting a philosophical interpretation of the issue and referring to literary traditions in her remarks, according to the statement.

Mohammadreza Bahmani, Iran’s cultural attaché in Greece, said the reported attacks constituted what he called “identity terrorism,” describing them as attempts to erase or alter historical experience. He also criticized what he described as ineffective diplomatic mechanisms and called for broader international efforts to protect cultural heritage.

Another speaker, Eleni Trova, discussed legal aspects, pointing to what she described as gaps in international conventions governing the protection of cultural property. She said the concept of “military necessity” could be used to justify attacks on cultural sites and called for clearer safeguards.

(See full text at [www.tehrantimes.com](http://www.tehrantimes.com))

## Zanjan province: Medicinal plant cultivation seen as driver of health tourism growth

TEHRAN – Expanding the cultivation of medicinal plants in Iran’s west-central province of Zanjan is emerging as a potential driver for health tourism, as officials and experts point to the region’s climatic diversity, natural resources and traditional knowledge as key assets for attracting domestic and foreign visitors.

Local authorities say the development of medicinal plant farming could help link agriculture, traditional medicine and tourism, creating new opportunities for economic growth while promoting natural therapies that are increasingly in demand worldwide.

Zanjan province, which benefits from a “four-season climate,” fertile lands and rich vegetation, has the capacity to cultivate a wide range of medicinal plants, including borage, thyme, lavender, mint, yarrow and chamomile.

Officials say this natural advantage, combined with a longstanding cultural reliance on herbal remedies, could support the creation of health tourism routes where visitors can experience both natural attractions and indigenous healthcare methods.

According to provincial data, 68 plant families comprising 220 species of medicinal plants have been identified in Zanjan, underscoring the region’s biodiversity and its suitability for cultivation and processing.

Authorities report that 600 hectares of land have been allocated to medicinal plant cultivation in the current Iranian crop year, with the area expected to expand further. The initiative follows earlier efforts to diversify agricultural patterns, during which about 1,500 hectares were dedicated to crops such

as balangu (Lallemantia), green and black cumin, and Damask rose.

Peyman Haeri, deputy head of plant production improvement at the provincial agriculture organization, said the expansion of medicinal plant cultivation is being actively pursued as part of broader agricultural development strategies.

“These plants have significant health benefits,” Haeri said, noting that balangu contains high levels of omega-3, omega-6 and omega-9 fatty acids, making it a potential natural alternative to dietary supplements.

He added that four support companies are currently operating in the province, assisting farmers with seed supply, cultivation and post-harvest purchasing. The seeds are distributed in a targeted manner to ensure structured and efficient production.

While precise production volumes are not yet available, officials say the sector is gaining momentum, supported by both domestic demand and export potential. Haeri noted that some Iranian factories already process plant extracts for export, while countries such as Germany remain global leaders in medicinal plant production and processing.

Zanjan is also positioning itself as a producer of high-quality Damask rose and saffron. Haeri said that due to the province’s climatic conditions, particularly cooler nighttime temperatures, the quality of its products may surpass those produced in traditionally renowned regions such as Kashan, Yazd and Khorasan.

In addition to cultivated crops, a wide variety of wild medicinal plants grow in Zanjan’s rangelands, particularly in the northern

mountainous areas. These include species such as kakuti, mountain savory, wild thyme, artichoke and various edible herbs. Because many of these plants grow naturally across national lands, officials say it is difficult to provide precise estimates of their volume.

To address water scarcity, authorities are also promoting rain-fed cultivation of medicinal plants. Haeri said a “megaproject for sustainable production” has been launched, targeting 5,000 hectares of rain-fed medicinal plant cultivation this year.

“Due to limited water resources, expansion in irrigated lands will not be pursued,” he said, adding that the focus will be on drought-resistant crops that require minimal water.

Officials say medicinal plant cultivation not only meets local demand but also supports exports. In the case of Damask rose, for example, producers extract rose oil, which commands high prices on international markets due to its concentrated nature.

Behnam Farrokhi, an official with the provincial agricultural extension office, described medicinal plants as a viable alternative to water-intensive crops.

“These plants require little water and are highly resistant to drought,” he said. “They can produce high-quality yields even under harsh conditions, making them economically viable and low-risk for farmers.”

Farrokhi added that cultivating medicinal plants alongside dryland cereals can help reduce soil erosion and improve land management.

(See full text at [www.tehrantimes.com](http://www.tehrantimes.com))

### AUCTION SJSICO. D140502

Sirjan Jahan Steel Company is pleased to announce the sale and export of 25,000 tons DIRECT REDUCED IRON (DRI), with the option to increase the contract quantity by up to 20% on basis of FAS at the Buyer’s warehouse in Bandar Abbas, IRAN (Other ports are negotiable) according to INCOTERMS 2020. Interested applicants are hereby invited to obtain the tender documents by visiting the official website of Sirjan Jahan Steel Company at [sjsco.ir](http://sjsco.ir), through the Sales and customer portal, Tender and Foreign Tender section. All documentation will be provided electronically. All bids on conformity to tender instruction should be submitted no later than **Monday, April 27, 2026**. For more information, please contact us at: Tel: +2186084642



### AUCTION SJSICO. B140502

Sirjan Jahan Steel Company is pleased to announce the sale and export of 10,000 tons STEEL BILLET (Size 150 x 150 mm), with the possibility of increasing the contract amount to 30,000 tons on basis of FOB Bandar Abbas according to INCOTERMS 2020. Interested applicants are hereby invited to obtain the tender documents by visiting the official website of Sirjan Jahan Steel Company at [sjsco.ir](http://sjsco.ir), through the Sales and customer portal, Tender and Foreign Tender section. All documentation will be provided electronically. All bids on conformity to tender instruction should be submitted no later than **Monday, April 27, 2026**. For more information, please contact us at: Tel: +2186084642



# Documents on US-Israel war crime in Minab sent to international legal bodies

TEHRAN – The judiciary department of Hormozgan Province has sent documents to international legal bodies regarding the US-Israeli crime in launching a missile attack on an elementary school in the city of Minab, killing at least 168 students on February 28.

The documents, containing 337 pages, have also been submitted to national courts for further investigation, Fars news agency reported.

The deadly strike on Shajareh Tayyebeh elementary school on the first day of the imposed war is known as the most heinous massacre of innocent children in the world, killing school children, mainly girls aged between 7 and 12.

Large parts of the school building were destroyed while classes were underway.

“We will keep following up on the issue till the last moment to ensure the realization of the rights of parents of martyred students in the city of Minab, and punishment of the perpetrators

of the heinous war crimes,” Fars quoted Mojtaba Qahramani, the head of the provincial judiciary department, as saying.

Despite attempts by US and Israeli authorities to distance themselves from the carnage as images of the tragedy spread across social media, detailed forensic and digital investigations have painted a starkly different picture.

The Minab tragedy has caught the imagination of people worldwide in the past 50 days and brought to light the horrendous war crimes of the US-Israeli war machine.

Be “the voice for our voiceless children”

In a letter to Pope Leo XIV, a group of families of the students martyred in Minab expressed their appreciation for the Pontiff and asked him to be the voice of their voiceless children.

They have called upon Pope to use his influence to press world powers for the opening of “all paths of dialogue” in the pursuit



of lasting peace, saying his message of peace has “offered a healing touch to our broken hearts.”

The signatories described the crime as “a direct result of the provocation and support of senseless warmongers who unleashed destruction upon our innocent children,” Press TV reported.

They appealed to the Pope to be “the voice for our voiceless chil-

dren” and, through his enlightening words, help create a world where no parent “is ever forced to whisper a nightly lullaby over the cold gravestone of their child.”

The signatories also expressed gratitude to the Pope for having reminded the whole world through his message that lasting peace would be achieved “not through force and weapons, but through the path of dialogue.”

## IRCS proposes an “addendum to Geneva Conventions” to limit use of AI in warfare

TEHRAN – The Iranian Red Crescent Society (IRCS) has proposed the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent (IFRC) for an “addendum to Geneva Conventions” to limit the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in warfare.

The proposal has been put forward by the head of the IRCS, Pirhossein Kolivand, in a meeting with the IFRC undersecretary-general for national society development and operations coordination, Xavier Castellanos Mosquera, on Sunday.

The IFRC official welcomed the proposal, promising to put it on the agenda, and follow up on its implementation through official international channels.

“Today, the world is facing a new version of threats which challenges the enforcement of the existing international humanitarian law,” Kolivand highlighted.

“The proposed addendum focuses on updating and regulating specific rules on utilizing AI in attacks, combined wars, as well as modern technologies in armed conflicts.

Without any legal and ethical framework, the use of AI in conflicts can lead to unprecedented human catastrophe. Therefore, it is essential that international organizations, particularly the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent, be in front line of developing deterrent, transparent and binding regulations,” Kolivand further noted.

A typical example of catastrophic AI scenario occurred during the US-Israeli imposed war against Iran.

On the first day of the illegal war against the

country, February 28, American forces struck the Shajareh Tayyebeh primary school in Minab, in southern Hormozgan province, hitting the building at least two times during the morning session. American forces killed between 175 and 180 people, most of them girls between the ages of seven and 12.

The building in Minab had been classified as a military facility in a Defense Intelligence Agency database that had not been updated to reflect that the building had been separated from the adjacent Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps compound and converted into a school, a change that satellite imagery shows had occurred by 2016 at the latest.

A chatbot did not kill those children. People failed to update a database, and other people built a system fast enough to make that failure lethal.

By the time the war began, “AI safety” and “alignment” and “hallucination” had become the terms of every argument about artificial intelligence. When the school was bombed, those were the terms people reached for, despite the fact that this critical apparatus offered a poor fit for the older, more mature stack of technologies involved in targeting.

IRCS is IFRC’s reliable global partner

“The Iranian Red Crescent Society is our reliable global partner; the international societies should know that during the 40-day [US-Israeli imposed] war more than 100,000 rescuers volunteered to provide relief services,” IRNA quoted Castellanos Mosquera as saying.

The official made the remarks in a meeting



with Kolivand, on Saturday.

The IRCS measures and activities over the past years and the forty-day war have been brilliant. The IRCS is a valuable society in the region, “We are proud of you,” he stated.

The official went on to say that the IRCS has observed all the humanitarian principles in its missions while maintaining the quality of services provided to those affected by the war has been its top priority. “You have a golden society, and it is an honor to learn so many new things from you,” he noted.

The IFRC has put the priority on showcasing the IRCS capabilities, specialized staff and professional volunteers to international societies.

Castellanos Mosquera also highlighted that the IFRC and other international societies will do their best to assist the IRCS. He said the IRCS is not alone. The IFRC is the representative of 191 national societies, and they will support the IRCS based on humanitarian principles.

## Meadow Pipit spotted in Gandoman wetland

TEHRAN – A Meadow Pipit (*Anthuspratensis*) bird has been spotted for the first time in Gandoman international wetland, in Borujen county, southwestern Chaharmahal-Bakhtiari province.

With the new bird recorded, the total number of bird species in the wetland amounts to 306 species, which indicates ecological dynamics and the habitat health of the wetland, IRIB quoted Mohsen Karimi, the head of the provincial department of environment, as saying.

About seven months ago, another bird species named the Indian pond-heron *Ardeolagrayii* was identified in the wetland for the first time. The record of the new bird species highlights the importance of constant field monitoring.

In February 2025, Gandoman wetland was registered as Iran’s 27th wetland of international importance. Stretching to 1,070 hectares, it is one of Iran’s top five birdwatching sites and the country’s most important permanent habitats for migratory birds.

The shallow depth and diverse vegetation of the wetland have made it a crucial stopover point for migratory birds, hosting some



40,000 birds from across the globe.

The site is particularly notable for its plant diversity, with 129 species from 32 families and 87 genera identified. It is one of the most important habitats in Iran for the endemic Zagros pupfish.

All these features have made the wetland a favorable location for birds to stop by the wetland on their long journey from southern Africa and India to the north and Siberian regions, annually, IRIB reported.

Moreover, around 5,000 migratory birds, including ducks, herons, and sandpipers, are nesting and breeding in Gandoman wet-

land. The birds fly to the wetland all year long, using it as their temporary habitat.

As fall approaches, a new wave of migratory birds wing to the wetland, and the migration will go on till the beginning of winter.

The wetland is an important wintering habitat for several bird species, including the critically endangered sociable lapwing and the vulnerable common pochard.

While drought, climate change, fire, and pollution pose threats to the wetland, experts regularly monitor the site in accordance with the Gandoman Wetland Management Plan. Moreover, local communities play a role in

mitigating such threats due to the wetland’s importance to their livelihoods and spiritual beliefs.

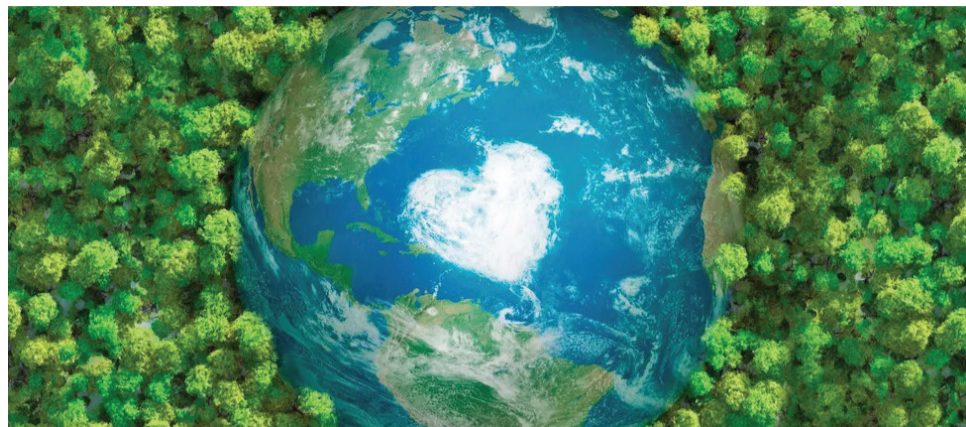
Gandoman Wetland is not only of environmental and ecological importance, but it also plays a key role in preserving the biodiversity of the region and the country. It is an excellent destination for birdwatchers and nature enthusiasts. Protecting this international wetland will greatly help maintain local ecosystems and mitigate environmental threats.

In Iran, 141 wetlands with ecological value, with an area of over 3 million hectares, have been identified, 27 of which were listed in the International Ramsar Convention.

The DOE has announced the beginning of a new phase of the wetlands conservation project (2025–2028) to strengthen sustainable livelihoods and alleviate pressure on the wetlands ecosystem.

In February 2025, the DOE and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) extended their partnership by signing a three-year memorandum of understanding (MOU) to conserve Iranian wetlands projects in the country.

## World Earth Day: war reveals bitter and contradictory reality



By Mehdi Garshasbi

TEHRAN – Every year on April 22, Earth Day reminds us of the power we have to protect our planet and in 2026, that message feels more relevant than ever.

The official Earth Day 2026 theme is “Our Power, Our Planet.” The theme highlights a simple but powerful idea: meaningful environmental change doesn’t rely on governments alone; it’s driven by the everyday actions of people around the world.

Rather than focusing on a single issue, the 2026 campaign emphasizes collective action, encouraging communities, schools, businesses and individuals to take practical steps to protect the environment where they live.

Bitter and contradictory reality

However, this year, the concept of this day is tied to a bitter and contradictory reality in Iran. While the world seeks unity and solidarity to protect its planet, the massive and brutal military invasion of the United States and the Zionist regime against the country has not only endangered the lives of thousands of people, but has also inflicted the deepest and most toxic wounds on the region’s environment.

The aggression on Iran is the exact opposite of Earth Day goals. This brutal attack clearly proves how war contradicts any peaceful co-existence with nature and the environment.

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.

An initial research analysis by Queen Mary University of London, in collaboration with the Climate and Community Institute London and Lancaster University, found that in just the first 14 days of the war, approximately 5–5.6 million tons of CO2 equivalent were released into the atmosphere, roughly equal to Iceland’s total annual emissions or the output of 1.1 million gasoline cars.

The aggression violates both the Geneva Protocols and the Convention on the Prohibition of Military or Any Other Hostile Use of Environmental Modification Techniques (ENMOD). Long-term consequences include air pollution, acid rain, public health threats, and regional crises affecting water and electricity supplies.

ENMOD, adopted in 1976, bans the use of en-

vironmental modification techniques as a tool of warfare and prohibits any action that could cause “widespread, long-lasting, or severe damage to the natural environment,” emphasizing state responsibility.

Protocol I of the Geneva Conventions, an amendment to the original conventions, includes Articles 35 and 55, which obligate countries to protect the environment during armed conflicts. Additionally, the First and Second Additional Protocols of the 1977 Geneva Conventions emphasize environmental protection and civilian safety during war.

Article 55 of the First Protocol specifically prohibits actions that could lead to “widespread, long-term, and severe damage to the natural environment.” These protocols provide an initial legal framework for assessing environmental damage in wartime, though enforcement has always been challenging.

Without a doubt, the US-Israeli military invasion of Iran is also considered a war crime and a clear crime against the environment. In the face of this disaster, international organizations must examine its legal and moral dimensions and prosecute the main perpetrators, because many of the environmental effects of the war and the process of cleaning up and returning nature to its original state will be a very long, costly, and sometimes impossible, and may remain in the region for decades.

Nature is suffering

What began as a grassroots environmental protest in 1970 has grown into a global movement uniting more than a billion people worldwide. Earth Day serves as a reminder that small, meaningful actions taken by individuals and communities can create a big impact.

Mother Earth is clearly urging a call to action. Nature is suffering. Oceans are being filled with plastic, turning more acidic. Extreme heat, wildfires and floods, have affected millions of people.

Climate change, man-made changes to nature as well as crimes that disrupt biodiversity, such as deforestation, land-use change, intensified agriculture and livestock production or the growing illegal wildlife trade, can accelerate the speed of destruction of the planet.

That is why we need to recover our ecosystems. Ecosystems support all life on Earth. The healthier our ecosystems are, the healthier the planet – and its people. Restoring our damaged ecosystems will help to end poverty, combat climate change and prevent mass extinction. But we will only succeed if everyone plays a part.

For this International Mother Earth Day, let’s remind ourselves – more than ever – that we need a shift to a more sustainable economy that works for both people and the planet. Let’s promote harmony with nature and the Earth. Join the global movement to restore our world!



## IFRC officials visit IRCS rescue drill in Tehran

The Iranian Red Crescent Society (IRCS) held a rescue drill on Sunday, April 19, at Shahriar complex, west of Tehran. Xavier Castellanos Mosquera, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent (IFRC) undersecretary-general and some of his colleagues paid a visit to the rescue drill.

Castellanos Mosquera highlighted that the IFRC and international Red Crescent societies will do their best to assist the IRCS.



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APRIL 22, 2026

## GUIDE TO SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

*One who imagines himself to be all-knowing will surely suffer on account of his ignorance.*

Imam Ali (AS)

Prayer Times > Noon:12:03 Evening: 19:02 Dawn: 3:51 (tomorrow) Sunrise: 5:22 (tomorrow)

## Tennessee Williams's "Suddenly Last Summer" published in Persian

TEHRAN – The Persian translation of the play "Suddenly Last Summer" by Tennessee Williams has been released in the Iranian bookstores.

Translated by Masoud Khayyam, the book has been brought out by Ghatreh Publication in 156 pages, ISNA reported.

"Suddenly Last Summer" is one of Williams's most haunting and psychologically charged one-act plays, blending Southern Gothic intensity with themes of repression, desire, violence, and the brutal instinct for self-preservation.

First performed in 1958, the play explores the aftermath of a mysterious death and the desperate attempts of a family to silence the only witness who knows the truth.

The story centers on Mrs. Violet Venable, an aristocratic and domineering matriarch, who is consumed by the memory of her son, Sebastian. She summons Dr. Cukrowicz, a neurosurgeon specializing in lobotomies, hoping he will "cure" her niece Catherine Holly. Catherine has recently returned from a traumatic trip to Europe with Sebastian—one that ended with his horrifying death. Violet insists that Catherine is insane, but Catherine claims she is being punished for telling the truth about what happened "last summer."

Much of the play unfolds as a tense interrogation, with Dr. Cukrowicz trying to determine whether Catherine is genuinely mentally ill or whether her family is attempting to silence her. Through Catherine's fragmented recollections, Williams slowly reveals the disturbing reality of Sebastian's final days. She describes being used by him as a social lure, drawing young men who would in turn satisfy his unspoken desires. During their trip, this pattern escalates until Sebastian is ultimately chased and killed by starving boys in a violent, symbolic reversal—the prey becoming the predator's victim.

This revelation shatters Violet's carefully constructed mythology of her son as a sensitive poet. Her desperate need to control the

narrative highlights a central theme in Williams's work: the clash between truth and illusion. Violet prefers a comforting fantasy to the unbearable reality of her son's exploitation of others, and she is willing to sacrifice Catherine's sanity—and possibly her life—to preserve it.

Williams also uses the play to explore deeper social and psychological issues: the dangers of denial, and the predatory nature of human relationships. The lush, almost surreal setting—the Venus flytrap garden—symbolizes a world where beauty masks violence, reinforcing the play's atmosphere of lurking menace.

"Suddenly Last Summer" remains a powerful study of memory, trauma, and the destructive lengths people go to in order to protect their illusions. In a single act, Williams creates a gripping drama that is both emotionally unsettling and thematically rich, leaving audiences to question where madness truly lies: in speaking the truth, or in refusing to hear it.

Thomas Lanier Williams III (1911-1983), known by his pen name Tennessee Williams, was an American playwright and screenwriter. Along with contemporaries Eugene O'Neill and Arthur Miller, he is considered among the three foremost playwrights of 20th-century American drama.

At age 33, after years of obscurity, Williams suddenly became famous with the success of "The Glass Menagerie" (1944) in New York City. It was the first of a string of successes, including "A Streetcar Named Desire" (1947), "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof" (1955), "Sweet Bird of Youth" (1959), and "The Night of the Iguana" (1961).

Much of Williams's most acclaimed work, including "Suddenly Last Summer," has been adapted for the cinema. He also wrote short stories, poetry, essays, and a volume of memoirs.

# Symbolic installation in Tehran honors Minab martyred students

TEHRAN – A field installation titled "The Left-behind Shoes: In Memory of the Jasmines of Minab" has been set up at the Eivan-e Entezar of Valiasr Square to pay tribute to the students and staff martyred in the recent tragic attack on the Shajareh Tayyebah school.

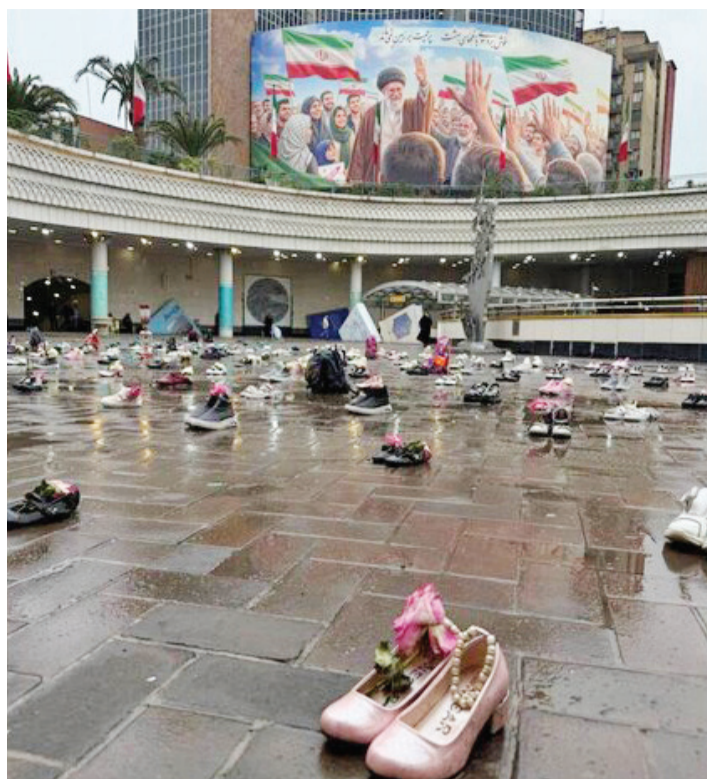
The executive director of the project, Mehdi Maqsoomi, stated that the installation opened on Sunday to coincide with the birth anniversary of Hazrat Masoumeh (SA) and the National Girl's Day. The exhibition is scheduled to run until Friday, Mehr reported.

Describing the artistic concept, Maqsoomi said the arrangement was inspired by the familiar atmosphere of a school morning assembly. "We have placed rows of shoes in an orderly fashion, reflecting the silence of students who are no longer with us. Inside each shoe, a flower has been placed to symbolize the 'fallen flowers' of this horrific war crime," he explained.

A particularly moving element of the installation is a deliberate void in the middle of the orderly rows. This empty space, marked by a single red geranium, serves as a memorial for Makan Nasiri, a child martyr whose body remains missing. Maqsoomi noted that this gap is intended to confront the audience with the profound absence and the unfinished lives of these innocent children.

He emphasized that the installation reflects 168 victims, including students, teachers, parents, and school staff who lost their lives during the assault on the Shajareh Tayyebah school in Minab.

"This event is one of the bitterest examples of the violation of



children's rights in the context of conflict," Maqsoomi said. He added that the installation follows a global tradition of using symbolic art to highlight the plight of children in war zones, connecting the local tragedy of Minab to international concerns.

Maqsoomi also drew parallels between the suffering in Minab and the ongoing violence against children in Gaza and Lebanon. He stated that the project seeks to remind the world that the rights of children remain a serious humanitarian concern, which he claimed has been "repeatedly violated throughout history by the child-killing Zionist regime and its master, criminal America."

The organizer concluded by

stating that the goal is not merely a symbolic act, but to create a space for reflection and dialogue regarding the collective responsibility toward children whose lives are cut short by the aggression of warmongers against peaceful nations.

On February 28, the Shajareh Tayyebah girls' elementary school in Minab, Hormozgan province, became the site of a devastating massacre as the United States and Israel initiated their strikes against Iran.

While dozens of girls and boys aged between 7 and 12 were beginning their lessons, the school was targeted by a missile strike that caused the building to collapse, trapping children and teachers be-

neath the rubble. Iranian authorities confirmed a final death toll of 168 people, with at least 95 others wounded, marking one of the most harrowing incidents of the conflict's opening day.

Despite attempts by US and Israeli authorities to distance themselves from the carnage as images of the tragedy spread across social media, detailed forensic and digital investigations have painted a starkly different picture.

An analysis by Al Jazeera's digital investigations unit, utilizing over a decade of satellite imagery and recent video clips, revealed that the school was a clearly distinct civilian facility, separated from any adjacent military sites for at least ten years. Furthermore, witness accounts and satellite-based analyses confirmed that the school was triple tapped by three separate, deliberate strikes, leaving no doubt about the nature of the attack.

The international community has faced mounting evidence regarding the responsibility for this atrocity, with investigations from major global outlets including The New York Times, BBC Verify, CBC, and NPR all concluding that the United States was responsible for the strike.

These findings have raised fundamental questions about the intelligence used to justify the bombing, as the patterns of the strike suggest a direct targeting of a civilian educational institution. The Minab school tragedy now stands as a somber testament to the immense human cost of the aggression and a focal point for those demanding international accountability.

## Tehran's City Theater hosts "Iran. Theater. City Theater" to honor martyred children, war-affected artists

TEHRAN – The lobby of the Main Hall of the City Theater in Tehran hosted a cultural event titled "Iran. Theater. City Theater" on Monday afternoon, bringing together a large group of artists and cultural officials to express solidarity and commemorate those affected by the recent conflict.

The ceremony was attended by high-ranking officials including Mehdi Shafiei, the Deputy Culture Minister for Artistic Affairs; Reza Mardani, Director General of the Performing Arts Center; Saeed Asadi, Managing Director of the Association of Performing Arts; and Kourosh Soleimani, the Director of the City Theater Complex, Mehr reported.

The event opened with a musical performance by Mohammad Fereshtehnejad, followed by a moving testimony from Soheila Javadi, the widow of the late actor Ali Soleimani. She shared a report-style account detailing the extensive damage caused to her residence during the recent aggression, representing the strug-



gles of many in the artistic community.

Following a collective rendition of the patriotic anthem "Ey Iran," the program paid tribute to the thespians who passed away over the last year through a memorial video clip. Later, actor Mehrdad Ziaei took the stage to deliver an epic, heroic performance centered on the themes of national identity and the historical significance of the City Theater, which drew an emotional response from the audience.

A major portion of the evening was dedicated to the memory of the martyred children of the Shajareh Tayyebah school in Minab, who lost their lives in the recent strikes by the Zionist regime and US forces. Fereshtehnejad performed a dedicated musical piece for the young victims, accompanied by a video featuring the voice of renowned singer Roozbeh Bemani.

In the closing segment, the host of the event, Alireza Saeidi, read out a list of prominent artists whose homes were damaged or destroyed during the Ramadan War attacks. The list included names such as Kourosh Narimani, Behnam Tashakor, Jalal Tajangi, Maral Farjad, Vahid Lak, Hamid Goli, and Hormoz Hedayat, among others.

The event concluded with a formal dedication to the martyred children of Minab, emphasizing the theater community's resilience and its role in reflecting the nation's grievances and endurance during times of war.

## City Theater to restage Neil Simon's "The Prisoner of Second Avenue"

TEHRAN – The 1971 American black comedy "The Prisoner of Second Avenue" written by Neil Simon will be restaged at the Tehran's City Theater from Wednesday after its successful performance in February.

Seyed Javad Roshan has directed the 80-minute play that has Khayyam Vaghar Kashani, Elaheh Shahparast, Marzieh Sadraei, and Vahid Nafar in the cast, Mehr reported.

Neil Simon's gut-busting comedy about a Manhattan executive's nervous breakdown and subsequent recovery is a laugh-a-minute look at middle age and modern life.

The story revolves around the escalating problems of a middle-aged couple living on Second Avenue on the Upper East Side of Manhattan, New York City.

Mel Edison is a middle-class advertising account executive and he is having a very bad time. His em-

ployer is on the verge of bankruptcy and as a result Mel loses his job after 22 years of faithful service. Now, he has to cope with being unemployed at middle age during an economic recession.

The action occurs during an intense summer heat wave and a prolonged garbage strike, which exacerbates Edison's plight as he and his wife Edna deal with noisy and argumentative neighbors, loud sounds emanating from Manhattan streets up to their apartment. Mel's 14th floor apartment is cracking and he can't sleep because the air conditioning is faulty.

When Mel loses his job and gets robbed in the same week, he loses his ability to cope and becomes a prisoner in his Second Avenue apartment, pacing the walls in his pajamas and listening to talk back radio for hours on end. He believes that there is a conspiracy afoot, "The deterioration of the spirit of Man. Man undermining himself, causing a self-willed, self-im-

posed, self-evident self-destruction!"

Mel can't find a job, so Edna goes back to work. Mel eventually suffers a nervous breakdown, and it is up to the loving care of his brother Harry, his sisters, and, mostly, Edna, to try to restore him to a new reality.

Written over 50 years ago, Neil Simon's play still resonates strongly today. In "The Prisoner of Second Avenue," Simon's comedy turns darker as he explores the devastating effect that city life can have on a middle-aged couple.

In the early 1970s, when the play takes place, New York City was beset by financial problems, high crime, and strikes that made daily life often inconvenient and sometimes dangerous.

In 1975, "The Prisoner of Second Avenue" was adapted into a movie of the same name, directed and produced by Melvin Frank and starring Jack Lemmon and Anne

Bancroft. Neil Simon wrote the screenplay.

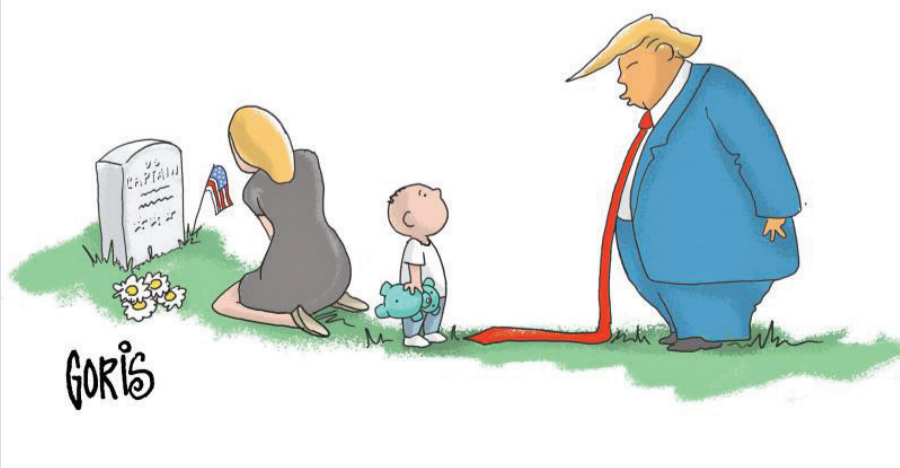
Neil Simon (1927-2018) was an American playwright, screenwriter, and author. He wrote more than 30 plays and nearly the same number of movie screenplays, mostly film adaptations of his plays. He received three Tony Awards and a Golden Globe Award, as well as nominations for four Academy Awards and four Primetime Emmy Awards. He was awarded a Special Tony Award in 1975, the Pulitzer Prize for Drama in 1991, the Kennedy Center Honors in 1995, and the Mark Twain Prize for American Humor in 2006.

One of the most popular of 20th-century American dramatists, Neil Simon is known for his comedies that often examine the tensions that can arise among family members or between men and women living in New York.

City Theater is located in Daneshjoo Park, at the intersection of Valiasr and Enghelab streets.

## Cartoon of Day

Great news. The strait is open!



So Great  
Cartoonist: Dennis Goris from the US