

Trump–Netanyahu Persistent Delusions

Iran warns that its armed forces will unveil “new surprises” amid renewed US-Israeli war rhetoric



People gather to view the wreckage of a downed U.S. aircraft loaded onto a trailer

Araghchi holds intensive diplomatic talks as regional tensions escalate

TEHRAN – Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi held a series of telephone conversations with his counterparts from South Korea, France, Turkey, and Qatar on Sunday, focusing on regional tensions, diplomatic efforts, and the security situation in the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz.

During a phone call with South Korean Foreign Minister Cho Hyun, Araghchi stressed that the United States and the Israeli regime must be held accountable by the international community for ‘acts of aggression against Iran and the resulting instability in the Persian Gulf region.’

The two diplomats reviewed bilateral relations and highlighted the importance of strengthening long-standing ties between Tehran and Seoul through a forward-looking approach.

Referring to the situation in the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz, Araghchi said the insecurity affecting the region and its broader global consequences stem from the aggressive actions of Washington and Tel Aviv against Iran.

Iran submits response to latest US proposal, rejects compromise on enrichment rights

TEHRAN – Iran’s Foreign Ministry spokesman said on Monday that Tehran has submitted a response to Washington’s latest proposal to bring a permanent end to the US-Israeli aggression that initially began on February 28.

“After Iran sent its 14-point plan, the US side conveyed its considerations. We also presented our views in return. Although the American side publicly rejected this plan, we received a set of revised points and considerations from the Pakistani mediator,” Esmail Baghaei said in his weekly press briefing.

Baghaei emphasized that Iran will certainly not negotiate or compromise on its rights. He said Iran’s right to uranium enrichment has been recognized under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and does not need to be recognized by other parties.

A ceasefire on April 8 paused the US-Israeli war, but Iran says the US’s “excessive” demands have derailed efforts aimed at permanently ending it. President Donald Trump, meanwhile, has renewed threats of military action if Iran does not comply with his conditions. Iran says it will never give in to bullying and threats.

Iran announces sweeping arrests in counter-espionage and anti-terror operations

TEHRAN – Iranian security authorities have announced a series of nationwide counter-espionage and anti-terrorism operations, saying thousands of individuals accused of links to hostile foreign actors, sabotage networks, and armed groups have been arrested since the outbreak of the war.

In a statement released on Monday, the Intelligence Organization of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) said its forces had arrested several individuals allegedly affiliated with the United States and the Israeli regime across multiple provinces, including Qazvin, Kerman, and Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari.

According to the statement, IRGC intelligence units in Qazvin Province detained two alleged spies linked to Israel following “complex intelligence operations.” Authorities also said they dismantled a network involved in the distribution of military-grade weapons and seized quantities of arms and ammunition.

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Israel launches another illegal raid on civilian aid vessels in international waters

By Garsha Vazirian

TEHRAN — Israeli naval forces executed a predictable act of high-sea piracy on Monday, violently hijacking the Global Sumud Flotilla in international waters.

The civilian convoy, composed of more than 50 vessels carrying humanitarian supplies, doctors, and journalists from 70 countries, was navigating a peaceful course from the Turkish port of Marmaris.

Israeli Shayetet 13 commandos ambushed the fleet approximately 250 nautical miles from Gaza, directly within Cyprus’s search and rescue zone. ► Page 5

We will never bow before any power, says president

TEHRAN – Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian has vowed that Iran will never surrender to external pressure or compromise its national dignity in pursuit of comfort or political expediency.

Pezeshkian said Iran’s adversaries, having failed to bring the country “to its knees within three days,” are now attempting to sow division between the Iranian people and the statesmen.

“We will not bow. I will never bow before any power,” he declared. “We will not sacrifice the country’s dignity for the sake of comfort-seeking or worldly interests. At the same time, the country must be governed with prudence and wisdom.”

He further condemned ‘the unjust killing of the Leader of the Islamic Revolution, Ali Khamenei,’ saying such actions lacked any scientific, legal, or humanitarian justification. ► Page 2

Why didn’t Iraq fill its cabinet seats?

By Wesam Bahrani

TEHRAN – On Thursday, Iraq’s parliament approved only part of Prime Minister Ali al-Zaidi’s new cabinet. More than half the posts were confirmed, enough to legally seat the government.

But critical positions remain empty. Nominees for Interior Minister, Higher Education Minister, and Planning Minister failed to win approval. Voting on six other posts, including Defense, Labor, Housing, and Education Ministers, was postponed indefinitely. The result is a government that meets the legal threshold but cannot fully secure or govern the country. ► Page 5

Why renewed war on Iran would shatter global markets more than Tehran

By Mir Mohammad Alikhani

ISLAMABAD – I’ve spent the last two months glued to the trading screens as an investment banker, watching oil swing wildly like a pendulum in a storm. It touched \$120 a barrel amid fresh tensions, dipped back toward \$80 on de-escalation hopes, and clawed its way above \$100 again.

These aren’t abstract numbers; they’re pulses of fear and greed rippling through every portfolio, every economy.

One thing is crystal clear: another American-Israeli strike on Iran might deliver a tactical blow to the Islamic Republic, but it would unleash economic devastation that dwarfs any “victory.” ► Page 2

Iran preliminary squad for 2026 World Cup announced

TEHRAN – Iran football team forward Sardar Azmoun has been left out of Amir Ghalenoer’s preliminary World Cup squad.

Ghalenoer did not explain the reason for omitting Azmoun, who has scored 57 goals in 91 internationals, but Iranian media have reported that the former Bayer Leverkusen and AS Roma striker was left out due to injury. The 30-man squad was announced on Saturday, before Iran head to Turkey next week to continue their tournament preparations. Veterans Mehdi Taremi, who plays for Olympiacos, and former Brighton & Hove Albion winger Alireza Jahanbakhsh were included in the squad. Iran’s participation in the June 11 to July 19 tournament has been in question since the U.S. and Israel attacked Iran in late February.

Iran will take on New Zealand on June 15 and Belgium on June 21 in Los Angeles, and Egypt five days later in Seattle.



“In the Name of Iran” art exhibit underway at Niavaran Cultural Center

TEHRAN – The Niavaran Cultural Center’s main gallery is playing host to “In the Name of Iran,” a group exhibition featuring 80 works by some of the most celebrated figures in Iranian contemporary and modern art.

Curated by Elham Danesh, the exhibition aims to foster solidarity among the artistic community while bolstering the domestic economy of visual arts, Mehr reported.

The collection boasts an extraordinary lineup of masters, including Mohammad Ehsai, Nasser Ovissi, Kambiz Dermbakhsh, Sadegh Tabrizi, Jafar Rouhbakhsh, Parviz Shapour, and others. ► Page 8

TEHRAN PAPERS

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

Global economy in the shadow of the Middle East crisis

Hamshahri analyzed the surge in energy prices and the global economic crisis, writing that rising geopolitical tensions in the Middle East and the jump in energy prices have now become one of the most significant threats to the US economy. This threat has not only put pressure on the country's financial markets but has also increased the likelihood of the Federal Reserve returning to tighter monetary policies and raising interest rates again. Alongside the US, the global economy has also been directly affected by recent developments. The recent meeting between Donald Trump and China's President Xi Jinping ended without any major agreement, and there was no sign of Beijing's willingness to help reduce regional tensions. Analysts believe that if the Middle East crisis continues and disruptions in energy routes persist, a new wave of inflation could push major world economies into a new phase of instability—affecting not only financial markets but also global trade and economic growth.

Farhikhtegan: A country or an American military proxy in the region?

Farhikhtegan criticized the miscalculation of the Arab states of the Persian Gulf regarding Iran's power. The paper wrote that these governments have repeatedly experienced the impact of Iran and the resistance front—once during the war in Yemen, once during the maximum pressure campaign, and again during the recent Ramadan War. Evidence suggests that despite the risks, these states continue to pursue adventurism. The root of this miscalculation, the paper argues, lies in their disbelief: they cannot accept that a superpower like the United States has failed against Iran and the resistance front on the battlefield. They assume Washington simply did not use its full power. Before the Ramadan War, they did not believe Tehran could strike all these states simultaneously. Those who fail to learn lessons eventually wake up when it is too late. The Arab states of the southern Persian Gulf—especially Kuwait—are now exposed to this pattern of misjudgment.

Etemad: An emerging power moving toward a superior position in the global structure

Etemad interviewed Nozar Shafiee, an international relations expert, about Trump's trip to China. He argued that Iran's case is no longer a regional issue or a limited dispute but has become a subject of global-level analysis—particularly regarding the role of a regional power confronting a superpower

and its impact on global hegemonic dynamics. On the issue of Iranian oil, one of the key topics between US and Chinese leaders, Beijing did not back down. Despite US pressure to halt Iranian oil purchases, Chinese companies continue buying and even actively seek ways to bypass sanctions. Trump has even hinted at possible exemptions for China from certain sanctions. Politically, this indicates that China, as an emerging power, is gradually moving toward a superior position in the global system, while the United States—at least in some areas—is experiencing a gradual decline in influence and power.

Arman-e-Emrooz: Trump shows signs of growing frustration

Arman-e-Emrooz analyzed the deadlock between Iran and the United States, writing that Trump has shown signs of growing frustration with the ongoing 11-week crisis. However, he is not inclined to soften his tough diplomatic stance toward Iran. This reduces the likelihood of a quick agreement and raises concerns that the crisis may continue indefinitely, occasionally entering dangerous phases of escalation. During Trump's trip to Beijing, he largely avoided harsh rhetoric against Iran because he was focused on managing relations with China, a key partner and buyer of Iranian oil. Some analysts argue that if Trump truly seeks a way out of the crisis, he should moderate his tone overall. Others say Trump wants to project a dangerous and unpredictable image to pressure Tehran into concessions on nuclear and other issues. But former US officials who have negotiated with Iran believe this approach is unlikely to succeed.

Siasat-e-Rooz: One should not show mercy to a delusional America

Siasat-e-Rooz examined US conditions for reaching an agreement with Iran. The paper wrote that newly revealed details of US demands show Washington still behaves like a savage, trying to force Iran into submission. According to the article, Iran will restrain the US. The paper argues that the United States and Israel are driven by delusion, which is why they insist on unreasonable demands. Iran, it says, will not accept these conditions. What the US failed to achieve in two imposed wars, it now seeks through deceptive negotiations and diplomacy. Trump's threats, the paper claims, are meant to instill fear and force Iran to comply. But if another war occurs, the situation will be different this time, and there will be no room for tolerance or appeasement.

Iran announces sweeping arrests in counter-espionage and anti-terror operations

From page 1 ▶ According to the statement, IRGC intelligence units in Qazvin Province detained two alleged spies linked to Israel following "complex intelligence operations." Authorities also said they dismantled a network involved in the distribution of military-grade weapons and seized quantities of arms and ammunition.

The IRGC further announced the discovery and confiscation of 1,400 tons of petrochemical raw materials allegedly hoarded in an industrial facility with the intention of disrupting domestic markets and undermining economic stability.

In Kerman Province, the IRGC said eight individuals accused of involvement in terrorist activities had been arrested during coordinated security operations. The suspects were accused of attacking security personnel, opening fire on police vehicles, setting fire to the governorate building in Sirjan, and cooperating with Israeli intelligence services.

Meanwhile, in the western province, Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari, the IRGC said it had arrested 22 individuals allegedly connected to networks affiliated with anti-government groups. According to the statement, the detainees maintained contact with foreign-based operatives tied mainly to monarchist militant movements and were attempting to obtain weapons and carry out



acts of sabotage before being intercepted by security forces.

In a separate development, the IRGC announced that counter-revolutionary armed groups based in northern Iraq had attempted to smuggle a large shipment of American weapons and ammunition into Iran on behalf of the United States and Israel. The statement said the operation was thwarted in Kurdistan Province, where security forces seized a significant cache of weapons and ammunition.

Separately, Commander of Iran's Law Enforcement Force (FARAJA), General Ahmad-Reza Radan, said more than 6,500 individuals accused of espionage and collaboration with hostile actors had been arrested since the beginning of the war, adding that security operations remain ongoing nationwide.

(See full text at tehrantimes.com)

Iran submits response to latest US proposal, rejects compromise on enrichment rights

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Iran's main demands

Iran has set five main demands for holding nuclear talks with the US in a second stage of a peace proposal. Iran says the US must meet these demands in the first stage if it wants an end to the war and the reopening of the Strait of Hormuz: ending hostilities across West Asia, including the Israeli war on Lebanon, lifting sanctions on Iran, reparations for damage caused by the US and Israeli war on Iran, releasing Iran's frozen assets, and recognizing Iran's rights over the Strait of Hormuz.

New mechanism for Strait of Hormuz

Further in his remarks, Baghaei said Iran is engaged in continuous consultations with Oman to develop a new mechanism governing transit through the Strait of Hormuz.

"Iran has always made tremendous efforts to safeguard safe and secure transit through this route and continues to insist that passage through the Strait of Hormuz must take place in the best possible manner with complete safety," he said.

The official emphasized that



both Tehran and Muscat consider themselves obligated to take the necessary measures to ensure secure transit through the Strait of Hormuz, as it lies within the territorial waters of both coastal states.

He said expert-level talks between Iran and Oman were held last week in Muscat and consultations were continuing without interruption. Iran has asserted full control of the strategic waterway since the war began.

Iran says the waterway is open to trade vessels, but ships affiliated with the country's adversary are not allowed to transit it. Officials say passage through the strait is only possible

through coordination with Iran's armed forces.

According to Baghaei, the US-Israel aggression prompted Iran "to adopt a series of measures under international law to defend its national sovereignty, territorial integrity, and national security." He stresses that these actions are permitted under international law.

Israel-UAE ties

Aslo in his remarks, Baghaei reacted to reported visits of Israeli officials to the UAE during the war with Iran. "The fact that there have been many exchanges between the Zionist regime and some countries in the region

is not hidden from our view," he said.

He urged regional countries to remain vigilant against foreign plots aimed at creating division and rifts among regional states, including between Iran and the United Arab Emirates. "The military presence of the US and the Zionist regime in the region does not bring security; it brings insecurity for all countries in the region," Baghaei said.

Last week, Netanyahu said he made a secret visit to the UAE and met President Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed during the war with Iran. The meeting, according to his office, resulted in a "historic breakthrough" in relations between Tel Aviv and Abu Dhabi.

Recently, The Wall Street Journal also reported that Mossad director David Barnea had made at least two visits to the Persian Gulf state during the war to coordinate military actions.

Separately, David Zini, head of the Shin Bet domestic security agency, was also reported by Israel's Kan public broadcaster to have visited the UAE to deepen coordination between the two countries' intelligence and security agencies.

We will never bow before any power, says the president

From page 1 ▶ He further condemned "the unjust killing of the Leader of the Islamic Revolution, Ali Khamenei," saying such actions lacked any scientific, legal, or humanitarian justification.

Pezeshkian also accused Iran's enemies of targeting Iranian commanders, ministers, scientists, and innocent students, while criticizing self-proclaimed defenders of human rights and international law for remaining silent in the face of such actions.

"Those who claim to uphold

human rights and international law witnessed these crimes and merely stood by," he said.

Referring to the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, Pezeshkian added: "Look at Gaza and Palestine — see the atrocities being committed there."

He also criticized American media narratives surrounding the conflict, saying, "They justify these actions by claiming self-defense. They call genocide self-defense. They possess power and force, and they use

them accordingly."

On February 28, the United States and Israel initiated an unprovoked war against Iran with the assassination of the Ayatollah Khamenei and several high-ranking military commanders.

In response, the Iranian Armed Forces carried out 100 waves of counterattacks over 40 days, targeting US and Israeli military assets, which resulted in significant damage.

IRGC condemn Israeli assassination of Hamas commander during Gaza ceasefire



TEHRAN – Iran's top military commanders have strongly condemned the Israeli regime's assassination of Izz El-Din Al-Haddad, a senior commander of Hamas's Qassam Brigades, calling it a blatant breach of the Gaza ceasefire and a sign of Zionist treachery.

Al-Haddad was killed on Friday evening, May 15, in an Israeli airstrike that targeted the Remal neighborhood west of Gaza City, also killing his wife, daughter, and several other Palestinian civilians, medical sources and Hamas confirmed on Saturday.

IRGC Commander Brigadier General Ah-

mad Vahidi said the assassination exposed the Zionist regime's betrayal and violation of its commitments. He described Al-Haddad as a symbol of Palestinian perseverance who sacrificed his life and two sons in the fight against the occupiers.

Meanwhile, IRGC Quds Force Commander Brigadier General Esmaeil Qaani stated that the "cowardly" assassination proves the resistance remains alive, especially in Gaza, and that the blood of martyrs will inspire young fighters until the liberation of al-Quds.

Iran fully prepared to confront any renewed aggression: Defense Ministry

TEHRAN – Brigadier General Reza Talei-Nik, spokesperson for Iran's Defense Ministry, has warned that any renewed act of aggression by the United States or the Israeli regime against Iran would be met with a decisive and regrettable response, stressing that the Iranian Armed Forces are fully prepared to confront any potential attack.

Talei-Nik made the remarks on the sidelines of a ceremony held in the city of Rey to commemorate former Defense Minister Major General Aziz Nasir-

zadeh and his companions, who were martyred in a terrorist attack carried out by the United States and the Zionist regime during their recent imposed war against Iran.

He said the unprovoked war against Iran had exposed the weakness of the United States, adding that many nations and governments now recognize the decline of American hegemony and unilateralism.

Referring to the consequences of the conflict, Talei-Nik an-

nounced that freedom-seeking people around the world now view US President Donald Trump and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu as among the most hated persons because of the crimes committed in Iran and elsewhere.

The Defense Ministry spokesperson further stated that the world is entering a new phase shaped by the "Ramadan War" and the courageous resistance of the Iranian nation, paving the way for multilateralism to replace American unilateral dom-

inance.

Paying tribute to Major General Nasirzadeh, Talei-Nik said the late commander had achieved groundbreaking results during his 18 months at the Defense Ministry, particularly in military production and the defense industry.

He added that Nasirzadeh's colleagues and comrades remain determined to continue the path of the martyred commanders with the same commitment, faith, and resolve.

Why renewed war on Iran would shatter global markets more than Tehran

From page 1 ▶ The real victims? The global financial system, commodities markets, the (P) GCC states hosting U.S. bases, American taxpayers, and ordinary people worldwide. Pushing this confrontation again isn't bold leadership—it's irrational brinkmanship that ignores history and basic math.

Oil's wild ride, from recent spikes to Strait of Hormuz nightmare

Let's start with the lifeblood of the global economy: oil. In the recent flare-up earlier this year, Brent crude surged over 55% from around \$72 to nearly \$120 at peak as fears mounted over disruptions in the Strait of Hormuz, which carries about 20% of the world's oil supply. Prices then eased to the \$80s on diplomatic signals before rebounding above \$100 on renewed threats.

This volatility wasn't theoretical; it hammered refining margins, spiked gasoline prices globally (up 50%+ in some spots), and sent shockwaves through equities.

If America and Israel hit Iranian energy infrastructure again, Iran has repeatedly warned it would retaliate by targeting (P)GCC oil facilities. Why? Because U.S. bases dot the region, from Al Udeid in Qatar to facilities in Saudi Arabia and the UAE. Closing or disrupting the Strait wouldn't be a minor inconvenience; it would choke supply lines for Saudi, Emirati, Kuwaiti, and Iraqi exports too. Historical parallels scream caution: the 1973 oil embargo quadrupled prices and triggered global recession. The 1990 Persian Gulf War saw oil spike 100%+ before stabilizing. Even shorter shocks like the 2019 Aramco drone attacks briefly

jumped prices 15%.

A full escalation now, with global spare capacity already thin, could push Brent to \$150-\$200 a barrel in weeks. That isn't just higher pump prices; it's aviation fuel costs grounding airlines, petrochemical plants idling, and food inflation exploding as transport costs soar. Commodities markets would freeze; shipping insurance premiums would skyrocket. The world recovered from past spikes over years, not months. This time, with fragile post-pandemic supply chains, recovery could take a decade. Iran feels pain from lost exports, sure, but the (P)GCC's export-dependent model collapses, and importers like Europe, Asia, and the U.S. pay the ultimate bill.

(See full text at tehrantimes.com)

Trump–Netanyahu persistent delusions

Iran warns that its armed forces will unveil “new surprises” amid renewed US–Israeli war rhetoric

TEHRAN – Iran has warned its adversaries of “new surprises” as the United States and Israel once again beat the drums of war despite their military failure in the recent conflict.

President Donald Trump revived his threats to annihilate Iran after he held a phone call with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Sunday.

“The clock is ticking” for Iran, Trump said amid stalled efforts to bring a permanent end to the war that the US and Israel launched against Iran on February 28.

“They better get moving, FAST, or there won’t be anything left of them,” he wrote on his Truth Social platform. “TIME IS OF THE ESSENCE!”

Iran ‘ready for all scenarios’

Responding to Trump’s recent threats of military action, Iran’s Foreign Ministry spokesman said in his weekly press briefing on Monday that aggression against the country will not remain unanswered.

“We are fully prepared for any scenario,” Esmail Baghaei said. Referring to nearly 40 days of US and Israeli strikes, he said, “As our armed forces demonstrated in those 40 days, if any reckless action is taken, we will respond with full force. I assure you that our armed forces will certainly unveil ‘new surprises’ for the enemy.”

The Iranian Foreign Ministry official noted that “if the other side makes even the slightest mistake, we know very well how to respond.” He stressed that US threats and economic pressure against Iran have fallen flat.



Washington’s ‘unrealistic’ demands

A ceasefire on April 8 paused the US–Israel war, but Iranian officials blame Washington’s “excessive and unrealistic” demands for the stalemate in negotiations.

Iran has told Pakistani mediators that it will negotiate with the US if it meets five main demands: ending the war across all fronts, including Israeli strikes in Lebanon, lifting sanctions, releasing frozen Iranian assets, compensating for war damage, and recognizing Iran’s sovereignty over the Strait of Hormuz.

Since the start of the war, Iran has asserted full control of the Strait of Hormuz. Iran says the strategic waterway will remain closed to its adversaries, referring to US and Israeli-linked vessels and countries that have enabled the aggression against Iran.

Iran’s military might

During the war, Iran carried out 100 waves of missile and drone strikes against Israel and US bases in the Persian Gulf re-

gion. In addition to dealing severe blows to US regional installations, equipment, and aircraft, more than a dozen American servicemembers lost their lives. Iran also dealt heavy blows to Israeli strategic sites, but the Netanyahu government stands accused of covering up the extent of the damage.

US–Israel miscalculation

Trump and Netanyahu were under the illusion that they would be able to destroy Iran’s military capabilities and change the political leadership in their favor within a couple of days. But Iran’s strong military response and its resilience exposed the failure of such delusions.

According to US media, Trump and Netanyahu discussed the possibility of resuming war with Iran during their Sunday phone call.

For Netanyahu, a state of war is vital because it allows him to cover up his financial scandals. A scheduled hearing in Netanyahu’s corruption trial has been cancelled following an urgent re-

quest, according to Israeli Channel 12. Netanyahu requested the immediate cancellation of Monday’s session, citing confidential “security and political reasons” that prevented him from attending. The trial, which began in 2020, covers three cases involving charges of bribery, fraud, and breach of trust. Since last year, his defense team has successfully petitioned for delays, routinely citing wartime developments, pressing diplomatic engagements, and acute security situations. Critics, however, accuse the prime minister of deliberately using regional geopolitical tensions to stall the proceedings.

Trump, with his threats, also seeks to create a fabricated sense of victory over Iran. His popularity has hit record lows, and the impacts of war with Iran have led to rising inflation in the US and higher fuel prices.

Iran has stressed that there is no military solution to the conflict. Iran says, despite its mistrust of the US, it is ready to hold talks on the conflict to secure its national interests.

Since June last year, the US and Israel have attacked Iran twice while Tehran and Washington were holding talks.

Iran accepted the April 8 ceasefire after Trump agreed to Iran’s main conditions. However, following the truce, Trump backed down and imposed a naval blockade on Iranian ports.

In the view of Iranian political and military officials, in line with pursuing diplomacy, the armed forces remain ready, with their fingers on the trigger, to deliver a crushing response to any new act of aggression.

Afshardoust: Iran handball target 2028 Olympics berth

TEHRAN – Mahmoud Afshardoust, newly appointed Director of Iran’s Men’s National Handball Teams, has outlined an ambitious vision for the future: securing qualification for the 2028 Olympic Games in Los Angeles.

Iranian handball has experienced steady growth in recent years, with notable progress across men’s, women’s, and youth divisions. The federation is now aiming to build on that momentum at the highest international level.

Afshardoust, a former member of Iran’s men’s national volleyball team and a past Secretary General of the Volleyball Federation, was recently appointed to his new role by Handball Federation President Alireza Pakdel.

He previously served as an advisor to the federation.

“I’ve worked with the federation before in an advisory capacity, and now I’ve been given the opportunity to lead the men’s national teams’ management,” Afshardoust told Tehran Times in an exclusive interview.

“Iranian handball has made significant progress in recent years and has strong potential to achieve even greater success.”

He emphasized that developing grassroots and youth programs remains a top priority. “Our main focus is strengthening the foundation. Youth players are the future of this sport. We are in full coordination with Secretary General Ali Akbar Khoshnevis and Head of National Teams Organization Iraj Rezaei to ensure we make the best strategic decisions for the future of Iranian handball.”

Regarding Iran’s potential participation in the upcoming Asian Games in Nagoya, Afshardoust said the final decision rests with the federation in consultation with the National Olympic Committee and the Ministry of Sports.

“We are waiting for the final decision. It’s a matter that will be determined through coordination between the federation and the relevant authorities,” he explained.

Looking ahead, Afshardoust acknowledged that the road to Olympic qualification will be challenging.

“Some may consider this a dream, but our goal is clear: qualification for the Los Angeles 2028 Olympic Games,” he said. “Asian handball has become highly competitive, with strong teams such as Qatar, South Korea, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and Japan. The challenge is significant, but we will do everything in our power to turn this ambition into reality.”

“With renewed leadership and a long-term vision in place, Iran’s handball program is setting its sights firmly on the global stage,” Afshardoust concluded.

Roberto Piazza set to arrive in Iran on May 23

TEHRAN – The Italian head coach of Iran national volleyball team will likely arrive in Tehran on May 23.

The preliminary round of the 2026 Men’s Volleyball Nations League (VNL) will feature 18 teams: Iran, Italy, Argentina, Serbia, Cuba, Japan, Brazil, Turkey, Bulgaria, Germany, France, U.S., Canada, Poland, Slovenia, Ukraine, China, and Belgium.

The first training camp of Iran’s national team began on April 30 with 30 players. The second phase of training — which was originally scheduled to start on May 22 in Turkey, with the participation of foreign-based players and those competing in the Asian Club Championship alongside Foolad Sirjan in Indonesia, and led by Roberto Piazza and Tommaso Totolo — has now been restructured.

Following a request from Milad Taghavi, head of the Volleyball Federation, to cancel the Turkey camp and instead have Piazza come to Tehran, the Italian head coach welcomed the proposal and stated that, given the current situation in the Middle East, he will join the national team members in Tehran provided no restrictions arise in the coming days.

Accordingly, barring any issues, Roberto Piazza will arrive in Tehran on May 23. The final phase of Iran’s national team camp will then begin with all players present at the national volleyball team camp in Tehran’s Azadi Sports Complex. After this stage, the men’s volleyball team will travel with 14 players to a preparatory camp in Brazil, where they will play two friendly matches against the Brazilian national team.

Iran football team to hold camp in Antalya

TEHRAN – The Iran national football team’s flight landed in Antalya Monday noon.

Members of Team Melli, who departed for Turkey this morning for their final training camp before heading to the U.S. for the 2026 World Cup, arrived in Antalya after a three-hour flight.

The flight was originally scheduled to depart from Mehrabad Airport at 10:00 AM, but took off at 12:00 PM before the team finally touched down in Antalya.

Iran are scheduled to play all three of their group matches in the United States. They will take on New Zealand on June 15 and Belgium on June 21 in Los Angeles, and Egypt five days later in Seattle.

Iran Squad

Goalkeepers:

Alireza Beiranvand, Hossein Hosseini, Mohammad Khalifeh, Payam Niazmand

Defenders:

Danial Eiri, Ehsan Hajisafi, Saleh Hardani, Hossein Kanaanizadegan, Shoja Khalilzadeh, Milad Mohammadi, Ali Nemati, Omid Noorafkan, Ramin Rezaeian

Midfielders:

Rouzbeh Cheshmi, Saeid Ezatollahi, Mehdi Ghaedi, Saman Ghoddos, Mohammad Ghorbani, Alireza Jahanbakhsh, Mohammad Mohebi, Amir Mohammad Razzaghinia, Mehdi Torabi, Aria Yousefi

Forwards:

Ali Alipour, Dennis Dargahi, Hadi Habibinejad, Amirhossein Hosseinzadeh, Amirhossein Mahmoudi, Kasra Taheri, Mehdi Taremi

Iran’s U16 girls finish fourth at Asian Handball Championships

TEHRAN – On the final day of the 1st AHF Asian Women’s U16 Handball Championship in Kazakhstan, Iran team took on the host nation and suffered a loss in the third-place match.

Despite a stronger showing in the second half, they ultimately fell short and finished fourth in Asia.

The Iranian U16 girls’ team had several of their preparation camps disrupted due to the war situation and managed only two camps before traveling to Kazakhstan. Still, the federation’s focus remained on building depth and securing the future of women’s handball.

Most of the players on the squad were actually younger than the designated age group for the tournament, making Iran the team with the lowest average age among all participating nations.

Iran lost to Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and China, while recording wins over Hong Kong and Kyrgyzstan.

Lech Poznan interested in Mohammad Mohebi

TEHRAN – According to the Russian media, the Polish champions have taken an interest in Mohammad Mohebi and will try to bring him down after the world championships.

Three Iranian players have so far played at Ekstraklasa. They are Farshad Ahmadzadeh (Silesian Wroclaw), Yadegar Rostami (Pogon Szczecin) and Ali Gholizadeh (Lech Poznan). In the next season, a fourth can possibly join this group.

(See full text at tehrantimes.com)

Araghchi holds intensive diplomatic talks as regional tensions escalate

From Page 1 ▶ He emphasized that those must be held accountable for ‘violations of international law and crimes committed against the Iranian nation.’

For his part, Cho reiterated South Korea’s support for ensuring maritime security and stability in regional and international waterways and expressed hope that diplomatic efforts would soon produce tangible results.

In a separate conversation, Araghchi and French Foreign Minister Jean-Noël Barrot discussed bilateral relations, regional developments, and ongoing diplomatic processes. According to reports, the two sides exchanged views on issues of mutual interest and recent

developments across West Asia.

Araghchi also held talks with Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan, with the two diplomats discussing regional issues and diplomatic initiatives aimed at easing tensions in West Asia.

According to a statement released by the Iranian Foreign Ministry, the talks focused on the latest regional developments amid heightened tensions fueled by Washington’s threats of renewed military action against Iran over its peaceful nuclear program, as well as developments related to the Strait of Hormuz.

Iran imposed restrictions in the strategic

waterway in early March, describing the move as part of its self-defense measures following ‘the US–Israeli war of aggression’ launched against the country on February 28.

In another diplomatic exchange, Araghchi spoke by phone with Qatari Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani. The two sides reviewed the latest regional developments and exchanged views on ongoing diplomatic efforts.

The flurry of diplomatic contacts comes as regional tensions remain high and international efforts continue to prevent further escalation in the Persian Gulf and the wider West Asian region.

LATEST NEWS

Iran establishes new authority for Strait of Hormuz

Iran has officially launched the Persian Gulf Strait Affairs Authority (PGSA) to oversee navigation and security in the Strait of Hormuz. The announcement was made on May 18 via the authority’s official X account. The move comes amid heightened regional tensions following recent US–Israeli aggression against Iran, which has disrupted shipping through this vital energy transit route. Tehran states the new body will provide real time updates on operations and developments in the strategic waterway.

US accepts waiver of Iran oil sanctions in new text

A source close to the Iranian negotiating team told Tasnim that, unlike its previous texts, the United States has accepted in its new proposal to waive Iran’s oil sanctions during the negotiation period.

The source explained that waiving sanctions means the temporary relinquishment of sanctions.

Iran insists that the removal of all sanctions against the country must be part of the US commitments.

The United States, however, has proposed a waiver of OFAC (Office of Foreign Assets Control) sanctions until a final understanding is reached.

Trump’s rhetoric driven by his concern about economic woes caused by war: official

Gholamali Haddad Adel, a member of the Expediency Council, says that US President Donald Trump’s remarks stem from his deep

concern over the economic hardships that the war against Iran has imposed on Americans.

During a press conference on Monday following a memorial ceremony for the late martyr Ali Larjani, Haddad Adel said, “A new order is gradually emerging in the Persian Gulf, and Trump’s remarks are a reflection of his deep concerns about the economic difficulties that war imposes on Americans.”

He stressed the importance of national unity and cohesion, urging all political activists and factions not to tie electoral competitions to the public gatherings that have arisen after the war.

He called on them to support the armed forces in accordance with the Leader’s directives.

Lavrov affirms Iran’s right to enrich uranium for peaceful purposes

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov reaffirmed on Monday that Iran, as a member of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), has the full right to enrich uranium for peaceful purposes without additional demands. Speaking at a joint press conference, Lavrov stated that Russia will support any agreement the US and Iran accept to end the war. He noted that Russia has received no serious mediation proposals and does not intend to interfere. Lavrov also emphasized that the Bushehr Nuclear Power Plant concerns only Russia and Iran, adding that its modernization project is ongoing.

Pakistani PM optimistic on Iran–US talks

Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif

announced on Monday that mediation efforts between Iran and the United States are ongoing, expressing optimism about a new round of negotiations in Islamabad. “We are making every effort to ensure sustainable peace,” Sharif said. His remarks come despite severe threats from US President Donald Trump. An informed Pakistani source confirmed that Iran’s amended 14–point proposal was delivered to the US late Sunday, while both sides continue refining their conditions through Pakistani mediation.

Ex-Obama advisor says Trump has new chance to exit Iran war

Vali Nasr, a former advisor to ex-US President Barack Obama, stated that Donald Trump has another opportunity to negotiate an exit from the war against Iran following Tehran’s new 14–point proposal. “Trump has one more chance to negotiate his way out of the war,” Nasr wrote on X, adding that the current stalemate is unsustainable and could lead back to conflict. He noted Trump’s recent visit to China as an added factor in the diplomatic equation.

Ex-ambassador says UAE is big loser in regional shifts

Former Iranian Ambassador Mojtaba Amani stated that the UAE is the big loser in recent regional developments and the US–Israeli attack on Iran. He noted that Abu Dhabi has aligned with Israel and the US while abandoning its economic goals, predicting that this strategic blunder will ultimately lead to its defeat.

ICCIMA holds board of representatives meeting on economic challenges, industrial chains

TEHRAN- The 23rd meeting of the Board of Representatives of the Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (ICCIMA) was held with presentations on the country's special economic conditions, the latest status of the steel chain and the petrochemical industry chain, and their effects on the commodity exchange.

Addressing the meeting, Samad Hassanzadeh, the head of the Iran Chamber of Commerce, said: "We hope that the authorities act with expert prudence in all matters, especially negotiations, so that we can achieve peace of mind and lasting peace for the country while preserving the authority of the Islamic Republic of Iran."

He appreciated all economic enterprises that invested their capital and experience



during the war, and stated: "Entrepreneurs in the country, under these difficult circumstances, have shown up in all economic arenas, and despite the great damage caused to facilities and infrastructure, they have continued the production of essential goods and needed products without interruption."

Over 62m tons of iron ore pellet produced in a year

TEHRAN- According to the statistics of the Iranian Steel Producers Association (ISPA), 62.716 million tons of iron ore pellet was produced in Iran during the past Iranian calendar year 1404 (ended on March 20).

Based on the ISPA data, the country's iron ore pellet output in 1404 rose 0.1 percent from the production figure in 1403, which was 62.667 million tons.

Iron ore pellets are small, spherical balls of iron ore concentrate, typically measuring 6–16 millimeters in diameter. They are a key raw material for modern steelmaking, produced by agglomerating fine iron ore particles with binders like bentonite, then indurating them at high temperatures—either through a straight-grate or grate-kiln process.

Unlike natural lump ore, pellets offer uniform size, high mechanical strength, and superior metallurgical properties. Their high iron content (64–67%) and low impurities increase blast furnace productivity while reducing energy consumption and emissions. Pellets also perform exceptionally well in direct reduction processes to make sponge iron, a growing route for green steel.

The global shift toward cleaner steel production has boosted pellet demand, as they enable more efficient operations and allow usage of lower-grade ores after beneficiation. Major exporters include Brazil, Sweden, and Canada. With steelmaking responsible for nearly 8% of CO₂ emissions, pellets represent a crucial step toward de-carbonization—improving efficiency today while complementing hydrogen-based reduction tomorrow. As such, they are indispensable for both conventional and sustainable steel production.

It is worth mentioning that according to the statistics of the Iranian Steel Producers Association, steel production in Iran during the past Iranian calendar year 1404 has recorded a growth of over six percent.

The association has published the statistics for the year 1404 of the country's steel chain. Accordingly, despite intensified energy restrictions, due to optimal management and the introduction of new capacities—both in production and in energy self-sufficiency by steelmakers—Iran's steel production increased by 6.2 percent. Thus, Iran's steel production in 1404 reached 32.1 million tons, equaling the production level of 1402.

The total production volume of steel products in the country in 1404, however, experienced a reverse trend, declining by 1.8 percent. Meanwhile, sponge iron recorded the highest production growth among steel chain products, with a 16-percent increase. However, in the upstream of the steel chain, production of pellets and iron ore concentrate remained at the same levels as the previous year.

According to this report, the significant growth in sponge iron production—due to new capacities coming online on one hand—and the stabilization of pellet and iron ore concentrate production on the other hand, indicates a worsening shortage of raw materials for direct reduction units. However, with the shutdown of more than 14 million tons of sponge iron production capacity due to damages caused by the third imposed war, this shortage will be temporarily absent.

A 3.8-percent increase in steel ingot production against a 1.1-percent decrease in long steel product production indicates the need to develop steel ingot exports. It is noteworthy that the shutdown of more than two million tons of steel ingot capacity due to the third imposed war can

be compensated by activating idle capacities for producing this product.

Production of various steel sheets in 1404 remained almost at the level of the previous year. Meanwhile, slab production saw a double-digit growth of 10.2 percent. Unfortunately, due to the damages inflicted on slab-producing companies during the imposed war, the balance of the flat steel products chain has been disrupted, making the import of slabs and hot-rolled sheets necessary and urgent.

Iran's steel industry is a cornerstone of its non-oil economy, having grown into a significant global player. In 2025, the country produced approximately 32 million tons of crude steel, securing its position as the world's 10th-largest producer.

Beyond crude steel, Iran is a major force in the global direct reduced iron (DRI) market. The nation produced roughly 37 million tons of DRI in 2025, accounting for about a quarter of the world's total supply. This DRI is used by its modern electric arc furnace (EAF) mills, which form the backbone of its steelmaking capacity. However, the industry has faced severe headwinds. In early 2026, military strikes on key facilities, including the country's two largest steel plants, caused major disruptions. This came on top of long-standing challenges like international sanctions, domestic inflation, and energy shortages from power and gas cuts.

Despite these obstacles, the sector remains a vital export earner. It exports a significant portion of its output, with semi-finished steel products being a primary driver. While its immediate outlook is clouded by conflict, Iran's steel industry is a testament to resilience and strategic industrial development on the global stage.

Iran's steel industry produces a comprehensive range of products, from semi-finished materials to value-added goods, supporting construction, automotive, infrastructure, and manufacturing. The sector can be broken down into several key categories:

Semi-Finished Steel

The industry's backbone consists of products like billet, bloom, and slab, with Iran producing over 20 million tons of these in an eight-month period alone.

Flat Steel Products

Led by Mobarakeh Steel Company (MSC), the largest steel producer in the West Asia and North Africa, Iran's flat steel output includes hot-rolled and cold-rolled coils, as well as coated products such as galvanized and pre-painted sheets. These high-quality sheets are used in major national projects, including large-scale water pipelines.

Long Steel Products

Specialized in by companies like Esfahan Steel Company (ESCO), this segment includes:

- * Rebar (reinforcement bars) for construction
- * Structural sections like I-beams, H-profiles, channels, and angles
- * Railway rails – ESCO is Iran's sole producer of rail tracks

Tubular and Finished Steel Products

These include various welded pipes, galvanized tubes for water and gas, and advanced automotive steel grades like CK45 and S650MC high-strength sheets, which have recently been produced locally to reduce import dependence.

Overall, the diversity of products demonstrates Iran's growing self-sufficiency and its role as a significant global steel producer.

Strait of Hormuz blockade following Iran war forces global return to coal

TEHRAN- According to a report published Sunday by The Wall Street Journal, countries around the world are returning to the highly polluting but reliable fossil fuel after the Iran war effectively shut the Strait of Hormuz, severing approximately 20% of global liquefied natural gas (LNG) supplies.

The report highlights that Taiwan is restarting idled coal-fired power plants, while South Korea boosted its coal-reliant electricity by more than a third last month. In Europe, Italy has placed its coal plants on standby as it braces for a prolonged energy shock.

Prices and precedent

The Wall Street Journal notes that spot coal prices at Australia's Newcastle port—a key supplier to Asia—have jumped 12% since the war began. The benchmark briefly topped \$140 a metric ton in mid-March, reaching its highest level since late 2024. However, this remains far below the \$440 peak seen following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

That previous crisis saw Europe lead a global return to coal. But this time, the shift is most pronounced in Asia, where nations face imminent gas shortages.

Asia bears the brunt

The newspaper reports that almost 90% of LNG volumes ex-



ported via the Strait of Hormuz typically go to Asia. Since the war started, however, only three LNG ships have passed through the waterway. The last Qatari cargo destined for Asia left the Persian Gulf before the war, arriving in China on March 20.

According to data firm Vortexa, cited by The Wall Street Journal, the moving daily average of Asian LNG imports dropped to a six-year low last month—levels not seen since the height of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The report details that Taiwan, which normally generates half its electricity from LNG (with a third of that fuel coming from Qatar), is now restarting two coal-fired generators. The state-run utility Taipower explicitly cited the war's impact and the "continuing risk"

to LNG supplies in its announcement.

Similarly, India has issued an emergency coal directive forcing imported-coal plants to maximize output ahead of a hotter-than-normal summer. In late March, the state of Gujarat ordered Tata Power to restart an imported-coal facility.

Data from Electricity Maps, also quoted by the Journal, shows that South Korea generated 12.1 terawatt-hours of coal power in March and 10.7 terawatt-hours in April—increases of 36% and 39% respectively from a year ago. Thailand, meanwhile, has restarted two coal units at a power plant to offset higher gas costs.

Europe on alert

The newspaper notes that Eu-

rope has seen less switching from gas to coal so far, partly due to its investments in renewables and diversified gas imports. Carbon emissions are also more expensive to produce in Europe.

Nevertheless, the LNG crunch is prompting caution. Italy's energy minister said in March that the country's coal plants—currently on standby—could be reactivated if the West Asian conflict triggers an energy crisis. Italy, one of Europe's most gas-reliant economies (gas accounts for 40% of its energy supply), has already delayed its coal phaseout to 2038.

German Chancellor Friedrich Merz also raised the possibility last month of delaying individual coal plant closures in the event of a supply shortage.

Outlook

Quoting Martin Senior, head of LNG pricing at Argus Media, The Wall Street Journal concludes that analysts now expect global demand for seaborne coal to increase this year rather than plateau.

"Burning coal instead of gas for most countries is mostly a question of price," Senior told the Journal. "Some countries like Japan and South Korea can give priority to gas burn over coal for pollution reasons, but should gas prices remain elevated, they may continue to burn coal instead."

Strait of Hormuz revives Iran's neglected trade corridors

TEHRAN- Disruptions in the Strait of Hormuz shifted Iran's trade route toward neglected land and rail corridors, a path now activated from Pakistan and Iraq to China and Central Asia.

According to Mehr News Agency, the disruptions in commercial traffic through the Strait of Hormuz have not only affected Iran's maritime trade but have also redirected a portion of regional trade flows toward alternative land and rail routes, an event that once again highlights Iran's geopolitical importance in the region's transit equations.

Over recent decades, maritime trade has become one of the main pillars of the global economy. According to international estimates, more than 80% of global goods trade is conducted via sea. Low transportation costs, the ability to move large volumes of goods, and direct access to international waterways have kept sea routes as the main artery of world trade.

In this context, Iran, due to its geopolitical position, has always been considered a key transit player in the region. Its location at the junction of the Persian Gulf and the Sea of Oman in the south, combined with simultaneous access to the Caspian Sea in the north, has created a rare capacity to transform Iran into a transit hub between Asia, Europe, the Caucasus, India, and the CIS countries.

Washington's failure to enforce a naval blockade of Iran

However, the escalation of tensions in the Strait of Hormuz following the disruptions that began on April 13, 2026, after the failure of Iran-US peace talks in Islamabad, caused a portion of trade between Iran and the region to shift from maritime routes to land and rail corridors, a change that has revealed, more than ever, the necessity of diversifying the country's trade routes.

The Strait of Hormuz, as one of the world's most sensitive energy and trade chokepoints, is now at the center of geopolitical tensions. This has led Iran and its trade partners to pay greater attention to activating neglected transit capacities in land, rail, and even alternative maritime routes.

At the same time, many regional and international analysts believe that a scenario of a naval blockade of Iran is not fully feasible. Iran's geographical vastness, diversity of land and sea borders, simultaneous access to eastern, western, and northern corridors, and connection to regional transit networks are among the factors that make any complete closure of Iran's trade highly challenging.

Nonetheless, recent conditions have shown that relying solely on traditional routes of the Persian Gulf and southern ports cannot meet the long-term needs of the country's foreign trade. Developing land corridors, strengthening the rail network, and activating transit capacities in the north, east, and west of the

country have now become a strategic necessity.

China, Iraq, and Turkey: Iran's main trade partners

Iran currently conducts trade with more than 100 countries, but China remains Iran's largest export partner. According to data from Trade Data Monitor, in the year ending October 2025, China imported more than \$14 billion worth of goods from Iran, indicating continued economic interdependence between the two countries.

After China, Iraq ranks second with approximately \$10.5 billion in imports from Iran. The United Arab Emirates and Turkey are also among Iran's most important export destinations. Meanwhile, trade between Tehran and Ankara has been on an upward trend over the past year, with Iran's exports to Turkey rising from \$4.7 billion in 2024 to \$7.3 billion.

Activation of alternative routes following Strait of Hormuz disruption

In response to the restrictions imposed in the Persian Gulf, Pakistan announced the reopening of six key land routes for transferring goods to Iran — a move that alleviated a significant portion of the pressure on regional trade. According to reports, approximately three thousand containers that had been stranded due to maritime disruptions and the halt of operations at Karachi Port were brought into Iran via land routes.

This development showed that Iran's trade can continue through alternative routes even under maritime pressure. Meanwhile, Bloomberg reported a threefold increase in rail trade between Iran and China and announced that Pakistan has activated a new transit route for third-country goods destined for Iran.

Alternative rail-maritime routes for Iran-China trade

China, as Iran's largest trade partner, now plays a key role in redesigning regional transport routes. Experts believe that several combined routes are available for sustaining trade between Tehran and Beijing, independent of the Strait of Hormuz.

One of the most important of these is the combined rail-maritime corridor that starts from Yiwu in China, passes through Kazakhstan and the port of Aktau, and then enters Iran via the Caspian Sea. Another route is the all-rail Central Asian corridor, which connects goods from China, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan to the Sarakhs border crossing and then to Iran's rail network.

Alongside these two routes, the Pakistan maritime-land corridor has also gained special importance — a route that transports goods from China to Karachi Port and then brings them into Iran by road and rail. Additionally, some of China's trade could enter Iran overland via Turkey and the port of Mersin.

Transport experts believe that increasing

the share of land and rail trade has revealed, more than ever, the need to modernize the country's transit infrastructure. Although parts of Iran's rail network have double tracks and adequate transit capacity, some key routes remain single-track or outdated and cannot handle a surge in transit cargo.

New corridor connecting China to Europe via Iran

Concurrently with Emomali Rahmon's visit to China, the first container train on the China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan-Tajikistan route was launched — a project implemented with the participation of Chinese and Uzbek joint ventures and considered part of the strategy to develop new transit corridors in Central Asia.

Following this, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan also activated an experimental multimodal corridor: China-Tajikistan-Uzbekistan-Turkmenistan-Iran-Turkey-Europe. This route is designed to develop transport infrastructure, digitize transit, and increase border crossing capacity, and it could strengthen Iran's position in connecting East Asia to Europe.

* Full reopening of Iraqi customs for trade with Iran

In another development, the Prime Minister of Iraq announced the activation of all Iraqi customs offices for trade with Iran, a decision that could strengthen Iraq's role as a complementary land trade route for Iran under maritime restrictions.

Accordingly, the customs authorities of northern, central, western, and southern Iraq, as well as the air cargo customs and Baghdad International Airport, have been tasked with facilitating transit transport and reloading of goods related to Iran — a move that, if sustained, could reduce some of the pressure on traditional maritime trade routes.

Meanwhile, the completion of the Shalamchah-Basra and Kermanshah-Khosravi rail lines — as key arteries for developing trade and transit between Iran and Iraq — has received increased attention.

Mohammad Javad Shahjouei, a rail industry expert, told Mehr News Agency that the Shalamchah-Basra railway is one of the strategic and key projects in the region's transport sector. He stated that the project has been on the agenda for nearly two decades, but for various reasons, including obstruction by the Iraqi side and a lack of coordination among domestic institutions, it has not seen significant progress.

He added that fortunately the project is now on the right track, and the Islamic Republic of Iran Railways Company is seriously determined to accelerate its completion. Given the geographical location and advantages of this route, connecting Iran to Iraq by rail via Shalamchah is considered a key priority in international transport.

(See full text at tehrantimes.com)

From page 1 ▶ Parliament has scheduled the next vote to fill these vacancies after the Eid al-Adha holiday, which begins in late May of this year and may result in further delays. Until then, Iraq's security and economic future remain in a state of incompleteness.

The reported reason for the delay is a dispute among Iraq's ruling Coordination Framework over candidate selection. But critics across the political spectrum point to a deeper, more troubling cause: the United States, 23 years after invading Iraq, continues to hold the country's financial sovereignty hostage and is using that leverage to veto ministers it does not like. The fact that the government meets the legal threshold is cold comfort when the missing seats control the nation's police force and national army.

Widely believed to be at the heart of the current deadlock is the Popular Mobilization Forces, PMF, which was formally recognized by the Iraqi parliament as a state institution a decade ago. Its soldiers receive state salaries. Its commanders report to the Prime Minister. And, in the parliamentary elections held late last year, the political wings of PMF factions fielded candidates, campaigned, and won a record number of seats. They were democratically elected by Iraqi voters at the ballot boxes.

The fact that the U.S. has spent more than a year threatening Iraq with economic con-



sequences if the legally eligible PMF, which democratically won parliamentary seats, takes them and runs for government positions is troubling for Washington. Where, then, is Iraq's sovereignty?

While all vacancies are problematic, the absence of permanent interior and defense leaders, no matter who takes these posts, is particularly dangerous. These are not ordinary ministries. They control the army, police, counterterrorism forces, and border security. Iraq still faces periodic attacks by Daesh sleeper cells and recently saw U.S.-Israeli air raids.

Border tensions with Syria, where the PMF is also operating extensively, require coordinated military and diplomatic responses that a caretaker government cannot provide. Without a defense minister, the army cannot authorize major military operations or implement long-term security reforms. Without an interior min-

ister, police reforms stall, and the government cannot make any credible commitments.

The reason these seats remain empty is due to American pressure. Since the 2003 invasion, Iraq's oil revenue has been deposited not in Baghdad, but in an account for the Central Bank of Iraq at the Federal Reserve Bank of New York. The legal owner of the money is Iraq. But physical custody, and therefore operational control, lies in Washington.

Every month, the U.S. Treasury approves or delays dollar shipments based on Iraqi requests. This system was imposed by the U.S. after the invasion and has never been dismantled. The Federal Reserve annually ships billions of dollars in physical cash to Baghdad to sustain Iraq's dollar-dependent economy. That cash is Iraq's money. But America holds the keys.

In late April of this year, the U.S. demonstrated exactly how

that leverage works. Washington suspended a cash shipment to Baghdad and halted security cooperation, using the pause to pressure Iraq over groups with alleged links to Iran. The message was unmistakable: comply with American demands, or lose access to your own funds.

The influence remains explicit. According to reports from the parliamentary session, the gridlock was aggravated by strict diplomatic warnings from the United States stating that Washington would refuse to cooperate with Baghdad if prominent security positions were handed to politicians affiliated with groups that the U.S. alleges have links to Iran.

The U.S. has effectively given itself a veto over Iraq's most sensitive ministerial appointments based on unproven allegations. And while the cash is flowing again today, the threat of another freeze is always there, ready to be deployed if Washington dislikes the final cabinet lineup.

Under any normal definition of sovereignty, those elected representatives have the right to nominate ministers for the cabinet, including for the interior or defense portfolios. But the U.S. has declared that any candidate with alleged ties to Iran is unacceptable. Washington has not provided evidence proven in an Iraqi court of law. It has simply exercised its financial and diplomatic veto based on allegations.

(See full text at tehrantimes.com)

Persian Gulf security cannot be bought: King's College expert

TEHRAN - David B. Roberts, a reader in Middle East Security Studies at King's College London, suggests that Arab states on the southern shores of the Persian Gulf must build their own security, rather than "buy" it.

Roberts' suggestion comes as Iran targeted U.S. military bases in the UAE, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar, the very installations used by the U.S. to launch strikes against Iran during the joint U.S.-Israeli war of aggression initiated in late February.

Writing in Foreign Affairs on May 18, Roberts believes that these regional Arab states must deal with Iran themselves rather than wait for Washington to do it for them.

Roberts, also the author of "Security Politics of the Gulf Monarchies," says Iran is strategically flexible and its foreign policy has been shaped by incentives and deterrents.

An excerpt of the article titled "A New Order for the Gulf" is as follows:

The U.S.-Israeli war with Iran has put the Persian Gulf Arab states in an impossible position. The American forces they host have become the main reason their hotels and energy infrastructure are under jeopardy. Tehran retains the capacity to strike the Persian Gulf Arab neighbors, and its grip on the Strait of Hormuz is undiminished. U.S. President Donald Trump is as likely to take any deal he can call a victory as he is to escalate; either way, the Persian Gulf Arab states lose. The leaders of these countries must stop waiting for Washington to deliver an outcome that serves them.

The way out requires abandoning the assumption that has governed security for a century: that security is a commodity to be brokered rather than a capability to be built. This requires the Persian Gulf Arab states to deal with Iran themselves rather than wait for Washington to do it for them. A settlement between the Arab monarchies and Iran should take the form of a treaty in which a phased U.S. military withdrawal from its Gulf bases serves as the cornerstone of a comprehensive regional bargain. The U.S. withdrawal would be a calculated move. Iran has wanted the United States to leave the Persian Gulf for decades. To achieve this, along with phased relief from international sanctions, Tehran moves toward diplomatic normalization with its neighbors. Such a systemic reset of intra-Persian Gulf relations would mark the start of a new regional order.

For decades, the monarchies have outsourced their security to international partners, and their forces reflect that arrangement.

The illusion of protection

External patrons often betray interests of the Arab on the southern shores of the Persian Gulf. The United Kingdom ceded two-thirds of Kuwaiti territory in 1922, abandoned its allies in Yemen in the 1960s, and when withdrawing British forces from the Persian Gulf in 1971 (where they had been in one form or another for around 150 years) acquiesced to Iran's ownership of three islands in the Persian Gulf. Washington's record is little better. It liberated Kuwait from Iraqi occupation in 1991—but leaders of these countries give it too much weight. The United States intervened because doing so served American interests at a moment of bipolarity. The episode says little about what Washington will do when the interests of these



countries and America next diverge.

The failure of outside protection is just one aspect of a deeper problem. The Persian Gulf Arab states often suffer—much as Europe has—from a lack of seriousness in military affairs, luxuriating instead in the illusion that the United States will protect them indefinitely. No strategic rationale explains why these states so dependent on maritime exports.

Détente: now, or later

Some officials in these Arab states are pushing for the United States to "finish the job" against Iran—a sentiment captured in the demand, voiced privately across their capitals, that Washington not stop until Iran can no longer hold the Strait of Hormuz at risk or strike infrastructure with impunity. But the Islamic Republic survived an existential eight-year war with Iraq that wrecked its economy and killed hundreds of thousands of Iranians, decades of sanctions, and an Israeli campaign of assassinations of senior figures. Now, months into one of the most sustained bombing campaigns the region has ever seen, Iran still stands and able to launch drones and missiles at its enemies. Betting that it will collapse through pressure alone is a wager the historical record does not support.

All wars end. The only question is whether a settlement comes after months or years. Bitter rivals eventually seek accommodation, as Iran and the Persian Gulf Arab states have in the past. Before the current war becomes catastrophic, Iran and these monarchies should pursue a treaty in which the United States withdraws from its bases in the region. Such a treaty would lay the foundation for a new regional order, one in which these sheikhdoms shape the terms of their security rather than relying on patrons whose interests will not always align with their own.

A phased U.S. withdrawal over five years would remove a structural cause of insecurity in the region. This would entail the departure of U.S. forces from the major installations in the region—Al Udeid in Qatar, the Fifth Fleet's headquarters in Bahrain, Al Dhafra in the United Arab Emirates, Ali Al Salem and Camp Arifan in Kuwait, and Prince Sultan in Saudi Arabia. Iranian strategic doctrine sees the American regional military presence as a threat and the primary target of its deterrence strategy. An Iran no longer facing threats from the United States and Israel would be less driven to forever expand its military capabilities. In exchange for a U.S. withdrawal, a prize that has never before been on offer, Tehran is likely prepared to concede more than it has under any previous agreement.

(See full text at tehrantimes.com)

Israel launches another illegal raid on civilian aid vessels in international waters

Unarmed doctors and journalists are brutalized and abducted near Cyprus to enforce a criminal blockade

From page 1 ▶ The aggression underscores Tel Aviv's enduring contempt for international maritime boundaries and its reliance on a well-established pattern of lawlessness to enforce the total blockade of the Gaza Strip.

The assault began around 07:20 GMT, when Israeli warships encircled the humanitarian fleet. Commandos focused their initial aggression on the Turkish vessel, the Munki, subjecting it to close harassment before launching a forceful boarding operation.

To obscure the reality of the raid, troops systematically smashed onboard cameras and recording equipment while deploying electronic warfare to jam communication frequencies.

Despite the peaceful posture of the unarmed volunteers, Israeli forces used brutal physical violence, kicking, beating, and dragging participants across the decks with their hands bound.

Many activists sustained serious injuries, including broken noses and fractured ribs, while soldiers opened fire to terrorize the crew.

Approximately 100 international participants

were abducted and placed in a makeshift floating prison before being transported to the port of Ashdod for interrogation by Israeli intelligence.

Among those detained is Dr. Margaret Connolly, the sister of Irish President Catherine Connolly, reports say.

Flotilla legal co-leader Bader al-Noaimi emphasized that because the attack occurred deep within international waters, regional authorities were legally obligated under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea to respond to the flotilla's urgent distress calls.

The operation replicates a historical template. Tel Aviv has repeatedly used lethal and non-lethal maritime aggression to crush solidarity movements, mirroring previous naval raids near Crete, where abducted international activists like Saif Abu Keshek and Thiago Avila were subjected to blindfolding, solitary confinement, and severe sleep deprivation.

By turning to these recycled tactics of intimidation, Israel demonstrates its systemic policy

of treating humanitarian aid as a direct security threat.

The international backlash was swift, with the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs expressing condemnation, while French and Spanish lawmakers denounced the normalization of maritime terrorism.

This latest interception serves as a critical mechanism of the ongoing genocidal campaign against Gaza.

By systematically choking alternative sea routes and sabotaging overland convoys, such as the relief mission recently halted near Sirte, Libya, Tel Aviv deliberately deepens a catastrophic, engineered famine.

Israel has restricted aid entry to less than ten percent of Gaza's survival requirements, allowing under 640 of 6,000 expected trucks to pass.

The hijacking also reveals a regime terrified of global solidarity, though such repeated brutality only strengthens international resolve to break the siege.

Internal panic grips Israeli commanders as northern strategies implode

TEHRAN — At least eight civilians were killed across southern Lebanon in a wave of Israeli airstrikes, serving as the latest evidence that the "ceasefire" announced on April 16 has been systematically violated.

According to the Lebanese Ministry of Public Health's Emergency Operations Center, Sunday's brutal air raids hit residential quarters in Tayr Falsay, Tyre Debba, and Jouaiya, killing several innocent children and wounding 15 other people.

This latest onslaught pushes the total martyrdom toll close to 3,000 since early March, proving that Tel Aviv views international diplomatic agreements merely as a cynical smoke-screen to expand its illegal territorial ambitions.

Currently, the Israeli military is attempting to enforce an unlawful occupation zone extending up to ten kilometers inland, labeled a "Yellow Line" defensive buffer.

However, the resistance front has effectively converted this territory into a lethal attritional trap for the invading forces.

On Monday, Hezbollah released consecutive military statements documenting highly coordinated retaliatory operations. Utilizing advanced loitering gliders, resistance fighters achieved confirmed hits on an Israeli enemy army D9 armored bulldozer at the riverbed near Deir Seryan and a vital enemy communications vehicle at Khallet Al-Raj.

Concurrently, a precise rocket barrage target-



Funeral procession for Israeli Warrant Officer Alexander Glovanyov in Petah Tikva on May 16, 2026. He was killed by a Hezbollah explosive drone strike near the Lebanese border.

ed a dense gathering of Israeli troops and military hardware inside the town of Rashaf, while another glider strike successfully neutralized an Iron Dome platform inside the Galilee Forests camp.

These technological capabilities have caused severe operational anxiety within the highest Israeli echelons. In a leaked recording broadcast by Channel 12 News, Northern Command chief Major General Rafi Milo admitted that initial military assessments were far too optimistic, while Channel 14 reported that Milo came under intense cabinet criticism after admitting the

army had been thoroughly surprised by the resilience of the resistance.

According to intelligence reports cited by Haaretz, Hezbollah continues to operate as a highly disciplined, hierarchical force capable of drawing lessons mid-battle, maintaining an active network of specialized sector commanders, and deploying advanced anti-tank missiles to disrupt the occupation regime's logistically strained front lines.

The confrontation has also expanded across broader regional lines. Following overnight Israeli raids on Baalbek, the Palestinian Islamic Jihad movement formally mourned the martyrdom of Commander Wael Abdel Halim, underscoring the deep structural unity binding regional fronts.

Domestically, the Amal Movement warned that Tel Aviv's maneuvers are a transparent attempt to resurrect its failed 1982 occupation agenda, a strategy destined to collapse under popular resistance.

While Washington and Tel Aviv attempt to use military aggression to extract political concessions, the reality on the ground tells a different story.

The resilience of the population, combined with the intact command structure of the Islamic Resistance, ensures that any further Israeli expansion will be met with organized defiance rather than capitulation.



An aerial view captures a human tsunami filling Al-Sabeen Square in Sana'a on May 18, 2026. The massive, dense crowd stretches toward the horizon, punctuated by thousands of umbrellas, a large replica of an open Quran, and expansive flags. The Yemenis gathered to denounce violations against the holy Quran and express solidarity with Palestine and Lebanon.

Belarus, Iran discuss expanding tourism co-operation



TEHRAN - Officials from Belarus and Iran discussed expanding bilateral co-operation in the tourism sector during a meeting in Minsk, according to a report published Monday by SB News.

Kirill Masharsky, director of Belarus' National Tourism Agency, met with Alireza Sanei, ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran to Belarus, to review prospects for closer collaboration in tourism and related sectors.

The two sides exchanged views on priority areas for future interaction and discussed the possibility of launching joint tourism projects aimed at increasing tourist exchanges between the two countries.

Particular attention was given to simplifying

visa procedures, which officials described as an important factor in facilitating travel and boosting tourism co-operation.

The meeting also identified medical tourism as a potential area for collaboration between Belarus and Iran.

According to the report, Masharsky and Sanei expressed mutual interest in advancing the proposed initiatives and agreed to continue consultations aimed at preparing concrete proposals and organizing future working meetings.

The discussions took place in Minsk as both countries seek to strengthen ties in tourism and other sectors.

Glimpses of World Heritage sites: Mont-Saint-Michel and its Bay

The Fortifications on the Caribbean side of Panama: Portobelo and San Lorenzo are located along the coast of the Province of Colón. There are diverse fortification sites around the Bay of Portobelo, denominated San Fernando fortifications: Lower Battery, Upper Battery and Hilltop Stronghold; San Jerónimo Battery Fort; Santiago fortifications: Castle of Santiago de la Gloria, Battery and Hilltop Stronghold; the old Santiago Fortress; ruins of Fort Farnese; the La Trincherita site; the Buenaventura Battery; and the San Cristóbal site. Forty-three kilometers away, at the mouth of the Chagres River stands the San Lorenzo Castle (originally "San Lorenzo el Real del Chagre") with its Upper Battery as a separate structure.

The component parts of the property represent characteristic examples of military architecture developed by the Spanish Empire in its New World territories largely between the 17th and the 18th centuries. The first plans for fortifying the entrance to the Bay of Portobelo and the mouth of the Chagres River were prepared in 1586 by Bautista Antonelli. Following his recommendations, the first fortifications in Portobelo were begun in the 1590's. As a whole, these structures comprised a defensive line to protect Portobelo's harbour and the mouth of the Chagres River, which were the Caribbean terminals of the transcontinental route across the Isthmus of Panama. The defensive system includes fortifications in different styles, some of them skilfully integrated into the natural landscape as part of its military defensive design. They were also adapted to the changing needs of defensive technologies in the course of three centuries in order to protect the capital resources sent from colonial America to

Spain after crossing the Isthmus of Panama. In the earliest constructions, a military style with mediaeval features prevailed, while in the eighteenth century the structures were rebuilt in the neo-classical style, which can be observed at the forts of Santiago, San Jerónimo and San Fernando, and also at San Lorenzo.

On the regional scale, these military compounds belonged to a larger defensive system, including Veracruz (Mexico), Cartagena (Colombia), and Havana (Cuba), to protect the route of commercial trade between the Americas and Spain. Portobelo, where the famous fairs were held, was one of the principal Caribbean ports and played a leading role controlling the imperial trade in the Americas.

The site is a key element to the understanding of the adaptation of European building models and their impact on the New World transformation during the modern era. This property demonstrates the strategic organization of the territory and represents an important concept of defense and technology development mainly between the 17th and 18th centuries.

The town of San Felipe de Portobelo was founded in March 20th, 1597, as a Caribbean Terminal of the trail through the Isthmus of Panama, to replace Nombre de Dios as a port of transit and trans-shipment. The need to ease the overland path along the Isthmus during the rainy season called for an alternative route. The Chagres River-Cruces path, a mixed fluvial and land trail, was the counterpart of Camino Real from Panama City to Portobelo, built as a response to this need.

(Source: UNESCO)

Tehran launches metro-based tourism plan after wartime disruption

TEHRAN - Tehran municipality has launched a new tourism initiative allowing residents and visitors to explore the Iranian capital through its metro network, following disruptions to the tourism sector during the recent war, the head of Tehran Municipality's Tourism Headquarters said.

Amir Qasemi, head of the tourism body, told Mehr News Agency that the "Tehrangardi ba Metro" (Tehran Touring by Metro) project was designed to reactivate tourism routes across the city and encourage people to visit

attractions without using private vehicles.

"The tourism industry experienced different kinds of damage during the war," Qasemi said. "Hotels, private tourism complexes, travel agencies and tour guides all faced a sharp decline in visitors."

He said even Tehran, which usually attracts large numbers of tourists during the Nowruz holidays, experienced lower visitor numbers this year.

According to Qasemi, municipal tourism of-

ficials continued some activities during the conflict period, including monitoring tourism routes and resolving infrastructure problems to keep them operational if conditions persisted.

He added that some tourists also participated in blood donation campaigns in support of what Iranian officials described as the "resistance front."

Qasemi said the metro tourism initiative was the first project of its kind in Tehran and

involved mapping tourism, recreational and cultural sites located near metro stations across the capital.

He said 40 metro stations with nearby attractions had so far been identified, while tourism maps for 24 stations were ready for installation. Maps have already been installed at Imam Khomeini and Qaem metro stations and are available for public use.

"The aim is to reduce costs, make better use of existing infrastructure and encourage

citizens to use public transportation," Qasemi said.

He added that the initiative would allow residents to access tourism destinations and surrounding sightseeing routes without relying on private cars.

Qasemi also said Tehran Municipality planned to expand free tourism-related services for residents in the post-war period in an effort to improve public morale and social activity in the city.

Pamenar: Where painted doors speak the language of identity

By Mojtaba Gahestuni

TEHRAN - Nestled in the northern reaches of Dezful in southwestern Khuzestan province, the ancient village of Pamenar has emerged as one of Iran's most distinctive rural destinations, blending cultural heritage, environmental identity, and community-based tourism into a living narrative of local memory. In recent years, the village has increasingly drawn attention as a candidate for future international heritage recognition, not only because of its natural beauty and historical character, but also due to innovative efforts by residents to preserve and showcase their cultural identity.

Among the most notable of these initiatives is a project centered on painting the doors of village homes with motifs inspired by native wildlife, tribal symbols, oral traditions, and local folklore. What may appear at first glance to be a decorative undertaking has, in fact, evolved into a broader cultural statement about belonging, memory, and the preservation of identity in a rapidly changing world.

Pamenar lies within the mountainous and lake-filled region of Shahiyun, an area known for its dramatic landscapes, ecological diversity, and close relationship between local communities and nature. Surrounded by rugged hills, oak-covered slopes, and the waters associated with the Dez Dam reservoir, the village occupies a strategic and scenic setting that has long shaped the lifestyle and traditions of its inhabitants.

The painted-door initiative reflects this deep bond between people and environment. Images of mountain goats, wild sheep, native birds, and traditional tribal patterns now appear across the entrances of homes throughout the village. These paintings are not random artistic embellishments; rather, they serve as visual expressions of collective memory and local identity.

In Pamenar, doors have become storytelling surfaces. They represent the first encounter visitors have with the village's culture, and villagers have deliberately chosen these highly visible spaces to communicate aspects of their heritage. The project emphasizes that identity is not created through modern construction or large-scale infra-



structure alone, but through symbols and narratives that communities recognize as their own.

Environmental murals and community art projects have been used successfully in many parts of the world to revive neglected neighborhoods and strengthen local identity. Similar experiences can be seen in places such as Las Palmas, where local artists transformed aging urban districts through depictions of native people and wildlife, contributing to cultural revival and renewed tourism interest.

Iran itself has witnessed comparable initiatives in culturally significant destinations such as Abyaneh, Masuleh, and the Tis village near Chabahar, where environmental art and indigenous motifs have been used to reinforce local traditions and attract visitors interested in authentic cultural experiences.

The common message behind all these examples is that preserving local identity often begins with reviving familiar symbols — the visual and cultural signs that generations have lived alongside for centuries.

According to Hadi Ali-Bakhshzadeh, the village chief of Pamenar, the project was launched as part of broader efforts to introduce the authentic identity of the village to both domestic and international audiences. He said the initiative was carried out in cooperation with the village council and executed by Iranian artist Hamid Nourabadi, whose work focused on integrating local artistic traditions with themes drawn from Shahiyun's natural environment.

Ali-Bakhshzadeh described Pamenar as "not merely a settlement,

but part of the living history of Dezful." He explained that the goal of the project was to transform oral traditions and inherited narratives into lasting visual forms that could be seen and appreciated by both residents and visitors.

The motifs used throughout the village were inspired by indigenous legends, tribal designs, ancient symbols, and the wildlife that has historically inhabited the Shahiyun region. Mountain rams, wild sheep, and native birds appear prominently in the artwork, reflecting the ecological identity of the area alongside its cultural heritage.

Local officials believe the initiative carries significance beyond aesthetics. By visually integrating elements of nature and culture, the project reinforces the idea that the environment itself forms an inseparable part of regional identity. In this context, a painted image of a mountain animal on a house door is not merely decorative; it symbolizes the relationship between human settlement and the surrounding ecosystem.

The village chief also stressed that international recognition and sustainable tourism cannot be achieved solely through administrative procedures or lengthy heritage applications. Instead, he argued that genuine preservation begins when communities themselves actively display and protect their identity for future generations.

Tourism experts increasingly point to Pamenar as an example of low-cost, community-driven heritage preservation. Rather than relying on extensive urban devel-

opment or modern tourism infrastructure, the village has focused on highlighting existing cultural assets and reviving forgotten visual traditions. Supporters of the initiative argue that such approaches are often more sustainable and authentic than large-scale construction projects.

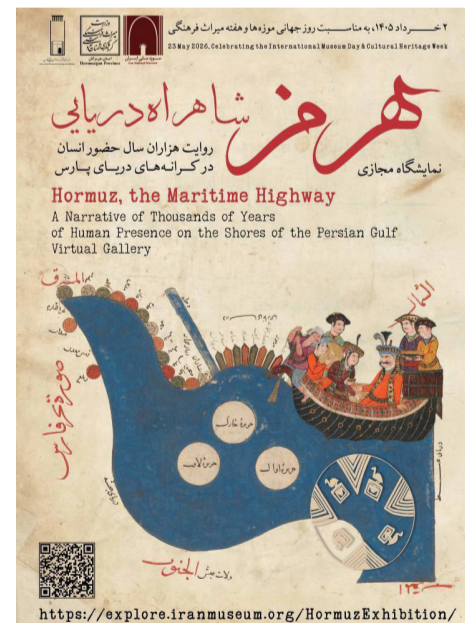
The village's wider attractions further strengthen its tourism potential. Pamenar serves as a gateway to the Shahiyun region, known for its mountainous scenery, hiking routes, traditional rural lifestyle, and access to water-based recreation near the Dez Dam lake. Visitors are also drawn to the area's indigenous architecture, local handicrafts, and opportunities to experience traditional hospitality in a relatively untouched natural setting.

As cultural tourism continues to expand across Iran, villages like Pamenar are increasingly viewed as important examples of how local communities can preserve intangible heritage while simultaneously creating new economic opportunities through tourism.

For residents of Pamenar, however, the significance of the painted doors extends beyond tourism promotion. Each door now functions as a small archive of memory — a visual reminder of stories, beliefs, landscapes, and traditions that might otherwise fade with time.

If the project continues to grow, Pamenar may gradually evolve into a living open-air gallery where every painted entrance tells a different story about the people and environment of this historic corner of southwestern Iran.

Exhibition 'Hormuz: The Maritime Highway' to be held online



TEHRAN - A virtual exhibition titled "Hormuz: The Maritime Highway - A Narrative of Thousands of Years of Human Presence on the Shores of the Persian Sea" will open on-

line on May 23, at 11:00 a. m., according to the National Museum of Iran.

Prepared in observance of Cultural Heritage Week and International Museum Day, the exhibition is organized by the National Museum of Iran and the Museum of Archaeology and Ethnography of the Persian Gulf (Hormozgan), in collaboration with the Directorate General of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts of Hormozgan Province and the Directorate General of Museums and Historical Cultural Property.

The exhibition is divided into four distinct sections: Archaeology, Natural and Cultural Heritage, Human Relationship with the Sea, and Intangible Heritage. Each section explores a different dimension of life along the Persian Gulf, offering visitors a comprehensive understanding of the region's rich history.

"Hormuz: The Maritime Highway" tells the story of human presence along this vast body of water — from the Paleolithic period to the present day — through the lens of archaeology and natural and cultural heritage. The exhibi-

tion features a diverse collection of objects, including stone tools, pottery, prehistoric art, maritime equipment, historical documents, and ethnographic materials, each shedding light on the enduring relationship between the people of the Iranian coast and the sea.

Dr. Jebrael Nokandeh, Director-General of the National Museum of Iran, stated: "This virtual exhibition brings together archaeological findings, intangible heritage, historical monuments, ethnographic evidence, and natural heritage — all of which are interconnected and have mutually shaped one another. Each artifact offers a window into how Iranians lived in Hormuz and along the shores of the Persian Gulf. Together, they form part of a shared memory and identity of a people who have lived for centuries in this land, bound to the sea by an unbreakable connection."

The virtual exhibition will be accessible online for free at <https://explore.iranmuseum.org/HormuzExhibition/>, allowing audiences from around the world to explore the history and culture of the Persian Gulf's northern shores.

Rainfall, restoration projects replenish many wetlands

TEHRAN – Recent heavy rainfall, along with restoration projects, has increased water flow into many wetlands, including Shimbar, Zarivar, Helleh, and Hour al-Azim, bringing them back to life.

Thanks to a 3.7 percent increase in average rainfall, the water inflow to wetlands across the country has improved compared to last year, IRIB quoted Arezou Ashrafzadeh, an official with DOE, as saying.

In Gilan province, Bojaq wetland is in good standing. Anzali wetland is in fair condition after the removal of invasive water hyacinths. However, Gorgan Bay, and Miankaleh wetland require additional measures to be restored. Sadly, in Golestan province, Alagol wetland is not in a favorable condition due to low rainfall, the official noted.

About 70 percent of Quri Gol wetland, the only fresh wetland, in East Azarbaijan, is filled with water. Compared to the same period last year, the water level of the wetland has increased by 27 cm, reaching 1912.43 meters now.

Presently, some 116 hectares of the wetland are filled with water. It has about 700 million cubic meters (mcm) of water, which is lower than the 3.8 mcm amount designated for the wetland.

Quri Gol wetland hosts over 92 bird species, which are all migratory birds, except redhead coots, 14 species of reptiles, 4 species of amphibians, and one species of fish, as well as 280 plant species.

In Fars province, 80, 30, and 10-15 percent of Maharloo, Arjan, and Bakhtegan wetlands are filled with water.

With an area of 600 sq. Km, Maharloo Lake in southern Fars Province is a perfect stopover for migratory birds, including flamingos. In mid-summer, the lake loses its water due to high evaporation, leaving behind a white bed and pinkish-colored water.

The Arjan restoration project is



in the beginning phase; it covers 2000 hectares. The water of the wetland depends on the amount of rainfall. The wetland is one of the main habitats for migratory birds like cranes, flamingos, wild ducks, and geese.

Bakhtegan is a Salt Lake with a surface area of 3,500 square kilometers, once Iran's second-largest lake. Several dams on the river had significantly reduced water flow into the lake, increasing its salinity and endangering the lake's populations of flamingos and other migratory birds.

In Khuzestan province, Hour al-Azim and Shadegan wetlands are in optimal shape. Until last year, Hour Al-Azim wetland, located on the border of Iran and Iraq, was grappling with water scarcity.

Bamdej wetland is being revived. The project to restore the wetland kicked off about two years ago with the help of the private sector, investing 1.3 trillion rials (around 8 million dollars), with 2 trillion rials (about 12 million dollars) more which is needed to complete the project.

Intense rainfalls have led Shimbar, Zarivar, and Helleh wetlands to be filled to 100 percent, and overflow.

Located at the foot of the Zagros mountains, Zarivar is a freshwater wetland designated as a Ramsar Site.

Marreh wetland in Qom province is in a favorable condition. Known as the "Desert Gem", the wetland stands as one of the five significant wetlands in Qom province, becoming a sanctuary for various bird species.

Sprawled about 40 kilometers north of the city of Qom and adjacent to the Qom – Tehran highway, Hoz-e-Sultan wetland, a salt lake, is struggling with water scarcity.

Miqan wetland, in Markazi province, has also revived after years of drought.

The wetland's 12,000-hectare water body has been restored following years of drought, thanks to favorable rainfall.

The last time more than 100 million cubic meters of water entered the wetland was in 2019, when the entire basin became submerged, Press TV reported.

Miqan Wetland hosts around 12,000 migratory birds annually, including species arriving from Siberia. More than 16 percent of Iran's bird species and 60 percent of the bird species recorded in

Markazi province inhabit the wetland.

Spanning over 927 hectares, Kani Barazan wetland, which is one of the most important satellite wetlands south of Lake Urmia, has also recovered.

Officials say approximately five million cubic meters of water have entered the internationally recognized wetland, potentially paving the way for ecosystem recovery in the area.

According to the head of the DOE, Shina Ansari, the increase in precipitation has increased hope to secure water rights for wetlands, but it does not obviate the need for water management.

Without sustainable management of water resources and consumption patterns, the temporary rise in water supply cannot prevent environmental crises, IRNA quoted Ansari as saying.

To handle climate change impacts, mid-term and long-term plans to reduce water consumption in agriculture and industry sectors, as well as manage water consumption, water recycling, and wastewater treatment systems, should be put on the agenda, she added.

Tripartite MOU inked for preservation of Asiatic cheetah

TEHRAN – To ensure the preservation of the Asiatic cheetah, a critically endangered species found only in Iran, the Department of Environment (DOE), the National Environment Fund, and the Conservation of Asiatic Cheetah Project have signed a trilateral memorandum of understanding (MOU).

The MOU was signed on Sunday by Hamid Zohrabi, deputy head of DOE for biodiversity, Hamed Maqsood Taleqani, chief executive of the National Environment Fund, and Baqer Nezami, the head of the Conservation of Asiatic Cheetah Project, doe.ir reported.

According to Shina Ansari, the head of the DOE, conservation of the Asiatic cheetah is one of the most prominent projects in the biodiversity sector.

Noting that the Asiatic cheetah is a symbol of the national identity of Iranians, the official said on the eve of the 2026 World Cup, it is essential to harness the power of social media to raise public awareness and promote activities that would contribute to the preservation of this valuable species.

She went on to say that utilizing the capacity of public participation is critical and one of the main policies of the DOE, and the National Environment Fund can play a key role in this field.

For his part, Taleqani highlighted the high, scientific, and executive capabilities of the DOE in preserving biodiversity, iconic species in particular, noting that the National Environment Fund will help facilitate the DOE's access to financial resources to advance the project's goals.

According to Nezami, the sub-portal of the National Cheetah Project, in which news about the project will be made available to the public, is planned to be launched on the DOE website next month.

The whole number of Asiatic cheetahs in the country's protected areas amounts to 27, with five other cheetahs living in breeding sites, and six in captivity, IRIB quoted Nezami as saying.

In September 2025, the DOE resumed the implementation of the national project to protect Asiatic cheetahs after a six-year hiatus.

One of the measures taken has been to focus on the cheetah's surrounding habitats so that these habitats can be preserved with public participation, ISNA quoted Zohrabi as saying.

In recent months, in addition to South Khorasan province, Asiatic cheetahs have been spotted in North Khorasan after several years, indicating the existence of a dynamic and active population, and the connection between ecosystems has been strengthened by a process in which conservation activities probably played a role. The cheetah is finding new habitats and spreading into them, Zohrabi explained.

In addition, special focus has been placed on recruiting rangers for all provinces where the Asiatic cheetah is found, he added.

"We have made arrangements with regional countries and other countries interested in working in this area, such as India. We are carrying out joint work with South Africa to protect the Asiatic cheetah."

Listed as one of the most critically endangered big cats in the world, saving the Asiatic cheetah from extinction has turned into a shared responsibility.

According to the head of the DOE, the extinction of the world's rarest cat has become a symbol of our challenges and responsibilities towards Iran's nature.

Preserving cheetahs is not merely an environmental concern. It is a symbol of the country's ecosystem's health, a life-balance preserver. Protecting the cheetah means ensuring the right to life for people and nature.

The DOE makes its best efforts to preserve endangered animals. However, the goal will be fulfilled only by the participation and involvement of people, media, responsible institutions, and nature lovers.

Relocating domestic animals from cheetah habitats, fencing the Tehran-Mashhad road, which is one of the most dangerous areas, and breeding in captivity are among the most recent measures the DOE has been taking to preserve cheetahs.

Also, the DOE is following up on the allocation of two trillion rials (around 1.5 million dollars) to decrease cheetah mortalities on the Tehran-Mashhad road through enhancing road lighting, reducing vehicle speeds, and fencing. Drones and other wildlife monitoring tools can also be used to conserve cheetahs in the area.

Despite worrisome facts about the speed at which species are disappearing, there has been good news of endangered species making a comeback, highlighting the role of conservation efforts in preventing extinction and helping vulnerable wildlife recover.

Iran is a rich country in terms of biodiversity, with about 37,500 animal species and more than 8,000 plant species. The country is home to 579 bird species, 214 mammal species, 284 reptile species, 23 amphibian species, 309 freshwater fish species, and 763 marine fish species in the Persian Gulf, the Sea of Oman, and the Caspian Sea.

According to the latest report by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List, about 154 vertebrate animal species, and around 25 percent of plant species in the country are at risk of extinction, with 117 species being classified as critically endangered in the national list. Persian zebra, Asiatic cheetah, black bear, great bustard, and yellow deer are among animals that are in danger of extinction.

Malaysia determined to enhance scientific co-op with Iran

TEHRAN – Malaysian Minister of Higher Education, Zambry Abdul Kadir, in a phone conversation with Minister of Science, Research and Technology Hossein Simaei-Sarraf, has said that Malaysia is determined to boost scientific ties with Iran, particularly in the higher education sector, with consultations and planning currently in progress.

The two sides explored the potential for developing scientific interactions and enhancing academic collaborations between the universities of the two countries, msrt.ir reported.

They also highlighted the need for the preservation of the scientific centers during war-time.

Referring to his trip to Tehran in 2023, Abdul Kadir said upon his return to the country, he had shared information on Iran's scientific capabilities and capacities with Malaysian universities.

The official also condemned the US-Israeli attacks, which targeted scientific centers and universities in Iran, underlining that "we must protect the scientific institutions. Regardless of any political dispute and war, scientific centers need to be safeguarded in times of conflict under the Geneva Convention."

For his part, Simaei-Sarraf highlighted that in proportion to the two nations' capacities and commonalities, the current educational, technological, and research cooperation needs to be expanded through conducting more joint research projects, and supporting research grants among universities and scientific centers of the two countries.

Developing ties between Iranian, Malaysian universities

On Monday, Iran's scientific counselor in East Asia, Australia, and New Zealand, Alireza Tavakolpour, and scientific officials of the University of Malaya (UM) explored the opportunities to expand scientific and academic ties between Iranian universities and UM.

The meeting was attended by UM officials, including Zuliana Razali, the director of the international relations centre; Mohd Faizul Mohd Sabri, the deputy dean of research and innovation at the faculty of engineering; and Fazliana binti Ismail from the faculty of medicine.



During the meeting, Malaysian officials elaborated on the scientific and research capabilities of the UM as one of the oldest and best universities in Malaysia.

For his part, Tavakolpour expounded on Iran's perspectives on the expansion of science diplomacy, presenting the capacities of Iranian elites and scientists, and shared the research fields that are a top priority for the country.

The two sides agreed to follow up on strategic cooperation within a framework of a joint action plan.

In February, Tavakolpour met the Director for the Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia Center for Shaping Advanced and Professional Education (UKMSHAPE), Lokhman Hakim Osman, in Malaysia, IRNA reported.

The meeting was centered around exploring the potential to develop scientific and research collaborations between the UKM and the Iranian universities.

During the meeting, Tavakolpour proposed allocating scholarships to post-graduate students, organizing joint meetings, holding dual/joint degree courses, signing a memorandum of understanding with top Iranian universities, conducting collaborative research projects, and exchanging professors and students.

For his part, Hakim Osman highlighted the UKM international rankings and capacities, announcing the university's readiness to attract more Iranian Students, saying that 90 Iranian students are majoring in the university now.

In December 2025, Tavakolpour held a meeting with Norazah Mohd Nordin, the director of the Centre for International Strategic Negotiation and Sustainable Development Goals at the Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, in Kuala

Lumpur, IRNA reported.

The meeting focused on developing new memoranda of understanding, following up on the situation of Iranian students in Malaysia, and resolving barriers to the accreditation and recognition of Iranian medical universities by Malaysia.

Referring to the fact that 570 Iranian students are majoring in Malaysia now, T proposed offering new intergovernmental scholarships in priority fields of study. He also elaborated on the ways Malaysian universities are assessed in Iran, highlighting the need to expand effective cooperation between the two countries.

In November 2025, Tavakolpour held a meeting with the managers of Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) to discuss ways to foster scientific and academic cooperation between Iran and Malaysia.

Tavakolpour met with Nur Azaliah Abu Bakar, the head of the UTM department for international affairs; Nor Ruwaida Jamian, the head of Malaysia-Japan International Institute of Technology; Hafiza Binti Abas, the head of the UTM department for artificial intelligence, and Basheer Al-haimi, a senior lecturer at the Azman Hashim International Business School (AHIBS), ISNA reported.

During the meeting, the two sides explored the potential for enhancing international collaborations and expanding interactions between universities of the two countries.

Highlighting the significance of conducting joint scientific and research projects, Tavakolpour suggested developing relations via establishing a collaborative research center, exchanging students and professors, granting reciprocal scholarships, publishing joint scientific articles, holding short-term professional scientific courses, industrializing products of knowledge-based companies, cooperating with technology parks, and providing sabbatical leaves.

AI, robotics, smart automation, renewable energies, and nanotechnology were among the other discussed issues.



Starting a new life in the heart of nature

Many residents of rural and nomadic areas still adhere to traditions in their lifestyle. In Vizneh village, northern Gilan province, families hold their wedding celebrations in the heart of nature, away from unnecessary ceremonies and excessive expenses.

This can be a model for preserving traditional values, turning the wedding celebration into an intimate gathering of relatives, and guiding young people toward a celebration free of luxurious rituals and beginning a life based on simplicity.



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MAY 19, 2026

GUIDE TO SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

If someone's deeds lower his position, his pedigree cannot elevate it.
Imam Ali (AS)

Prayer Times » Noon:12:01 Evening: 19:26 Dawn: 03:16 (tomorrow) Sunrise: 04:56 (tomorrow)

IAF screening anti-Zionist films

TEHRAN – The cinematheque of the Iranian Artists Forum (IAF) in Tehran is running a program titled "God of Carnage," which is dedicated to the screening of a selection of documentary and narrative films with anti-Zionist themes.

Having started on May 17, the program will run through May 22 at the IAF, showing six films, IRNA reported.

The 2014 documentary "Green Prince" by Nadav Schirman and the 2024 documentary "No Other Land" by Basil Al-Adra, Hamdan Bula, Yuval Abraham, and Rachel Szor were the movies shown on the first two days of the program.

On Tuesday, the IAF will host the screening of the 2011 documentary "Five Broken Cameras" by Emad Burnat and Guy Davidi.

The 94-minute documentary is a first-hand account of protests in Bil'in, a West Bank village affected by the Israeli West Bank barrier. The documentary was shot almost entirely by Palestinian farmer Emad Burnat, who bought his first camera in 2005 to record the birth of his youngest son. In 2009 Israeli co-director Guy Davidi joined the project.

Structured around the destruction of Burnat's cameras, the filmmakers' collaboration follows one family's evolution over five years of turmoil. The film won a 2012 Sundance Film Festival award, won the Golden Apricot at the 2012 Yerevan International Film Festival, Armenia, for Best Documentary Film, won the 2013 International Emmy Award, and was nominated for a 2013 Academy Award.

From Wednesday to Friday, narrative films "3000 Nights" by Mai Massri (2015), "Farha" by Darin J. Sallam (2021), and "The Time That Remains" by Elia Suleiman (2009) will be shown at the IAF respectively.

"3000 Nights" is an internationally co-produced drama film. It was screened in the Contemporary World Cinema section of the 2015 Toronto International Film Festival. The film focuses on a Palestinian woman, who gives birth to a son while in jail on false charges. It was selected as the Jordanian entry for the Best Foreign Language Film at the 89th Academy Awards.



An internationally co-produced historical drama film, "Farha" depicts a Palestinian girl's coming-of-age experience during the Nakba, the 1948 displacement of Palestinians from their homeland. Sallam based the screenplay on a true story that she was told as a child about a girl named Radieh. It premiered at the Toronto Film Festival in 2021.

"The Time That Remains" is a semi-biographical drama film. It gives an account of Palestinian life under Israeli occupation. Director Suleiman participated in the 2009 Cannes Film Festival, as his new film competed in the official selection category. The film was also screened at the 2009 Toronto International Film Festival.

In November 2009, the film won the Jury Grand Prize (with the Iranian film "About Elly" by Asghar Farhadi) at the Asia Pacific Screen Awards. The film won the Critics Prize of the Argentinian Film Critics Association at Mar del Plata International Film Festival.

Cartoon of Day



Trump
Cartoonist: Jawad Morad from Belgium

International literary prize launched to honor Minab victims

TEHRAN- The International Six-Word Story Award: Minab School – 168 Unfinished Short Stories was officially launched on Sunday.

Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance, Seyyed Abbas Salehi, unveiled the event's poster during his visit to the 7th Tehran Virtual Book Fair, marking the start of a global literary initiative dedicated to keeping the memory of the victims alive through the power of minimalist storytelling, IRNA reported.

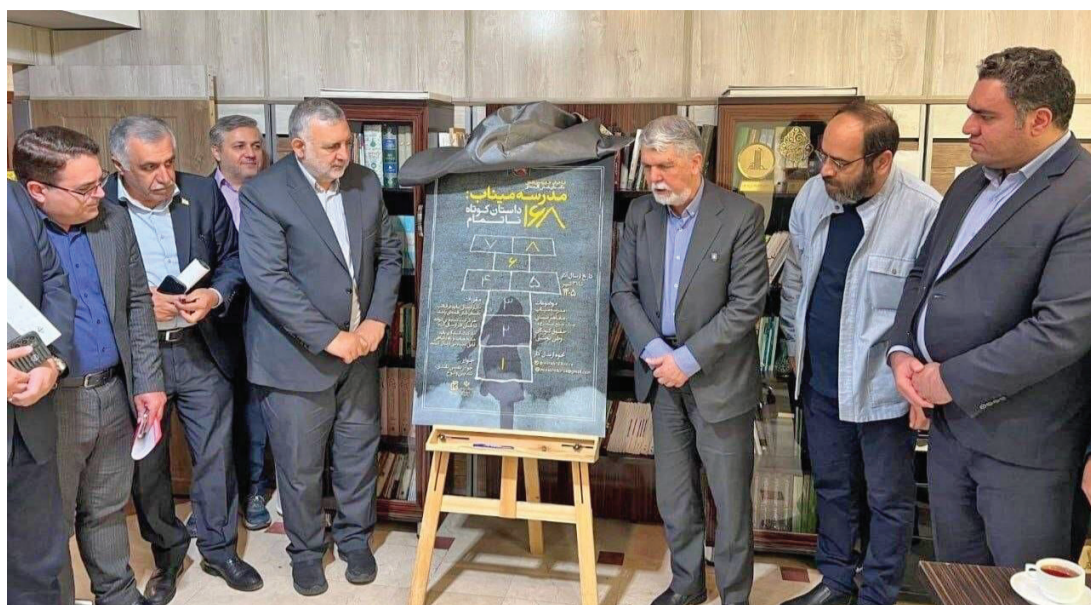
The literary event aims to foster creativity in micro-narratives while providing a platform for expressing human experiences through a concise and impactful lens, the report added.

The award's title, "168 Unfinished Short Stories," serves as a tribute to the lives lost in the Minab school tragedy, framing each victim as a story left incomplete.

The call for submissions invites writers, literary enthusiasts, and storytellers from across the globe to submit works that adhere to the six-word story format. This genre challenges participants to craft narratives that, despite their brevity, carry deep emotional weight and leave a lasting impression on the reader's mind.

According to the organizers, the themes of the competition include the Minab school incident, universal human concepts such as war, peace, hope, and suffering, as well as children's rights and patriotism.

The secretariat of the award has announced that each participant may submit a maximum of six entries. Submissions must be accompanied by the author's personal details and contact information.



The deadline for submitting entries is set for July 22. Following the deadline, a panel of distinguished domestic and international judges will evaluate the submissions. The winners will be honored at a closing ceremony, where they will receive trophies, honorary diplomas, and significant cash prizes.

By launching this international initiative, the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance seeks to utilize the power of minimalist literature to keep the memory of the Minab tragedy alive and to promote a global dialogue on peace and the protection of children in times of conflict.

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 beneath 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.

Four Iranian films receive nominations at 14th International Sound & Film Music Festival in Croatia

TEHRAN – Four films from Iran have received nominations at the 14th International Sound & Film Music Festival (ISFMF), which will be held from May 21 to 24 in Varazdin, Croatia.

The Iranian films are among the nominees of the Crystal Pine Awards for Best Picture, Best Short, and Horizon Award, IRNA reported.

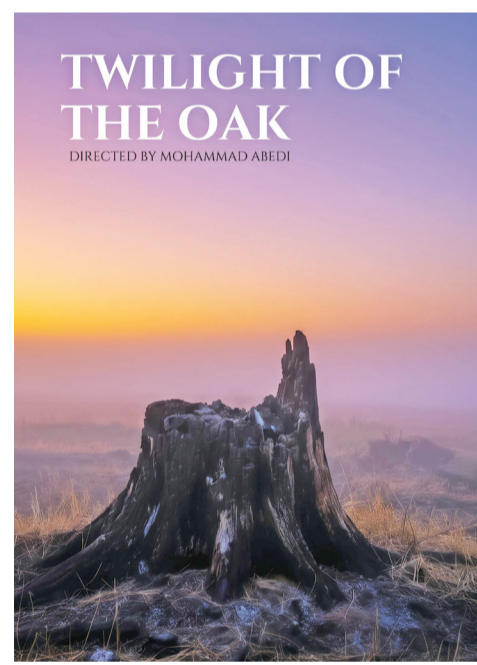
"Without Permission" directed by Hassan Nazer and "Twilight of the Oak" by Mohammad Abedi are nominated for the Best Picture, "Ker" by Sajad Soleymani is nominated for the Best Short, and "Becomes the Sun" by Ali Tabe Emam is nominated for the Horizon Award.

A 2025 Iranian-Scottish drama, "Without Permission" follows the story of an exiled Iranian filmmaker who, after being denied permission to make his scripted project, turns to children to capture their candid voices and perspectives on love, identity, and freedom. By filming secretly in hidden locations, the narrative evolves into a reflection on self-expression within a world of limitations.

"Twilight of the Oak" is a documentary shot in the heart of the Zagros, a mountain range in western Iran. Amid dust and wind, three parallel stories unfold - three facets of a single reality, from the fading oak forests, to the grueling labor of children, to a solitary man on the cold border.

The story of "Ker" revolves around a young man who must hide a woman who has fled her conservative family and sought refuge with him and even the slightest discovery of her presence could lead to a catastrophe. The mission of the International Sound & Film Music Festival is to promote the importance of film music and its composers, as well as film sound, and filmmaking in general. The festival's goals are to originate and encourage discussions, connecting people, advising, and educating young composers and filmmakers, but also other people, through discussion panels, seminars, film market, and media publishing.

The festival seeks to start and maintain creative and constructive discussions about that indelible link between film and music.



"In the Name of Iran" art exhibit underway at Niavaran Cultural Center

TEHRAN- The Niavaran Cultural Center's main gallery is playing host to "In the Name of Iran," a group exhibition featuring 80 works by some of the most celebrated figures in Iranian contemporary and modern art.

Curated by Elham Danesh, the exhibition aims to foster solidarity among the artistic community while bolstering the domestic

economy of visual arts, Mehr reported.

The collection boasts an extraordinary lineup of masters, including Mohammad Ehsai, Nasser Ovisi, Kambiz Dermbakhsh, Sadegh Tabrizi, Jafar Rouhbakhsh, Parviz Shapour, and others.

The event is a collaborative effort involving several prominent art institutions, such as Artibition,

Saless, Liam, Karchiv, Nian, and Bon Art galleries.

The opening ceremony on Friday evening was attended by a notable gathering of cultural officials and artists, including Aydin Mehdizadeh, Director General of the Visual Arts Office; Seyyed Mohsen Khatami, head of the Niavaran Cultural Center; Jafar Vahedi, CEO of the Institute for the Development of

Visual Arts; and renowned figures such as Bita Fayyazi, Arman Garsasbi, and Omid Zendegani.

"In the Name of Iran" provides a rare opportunity for art enthusiasts to view a curated selection of works that span generations, reflecting the depth and evolution of Iranian visual heritage.

The exhibition will remain open to the public until May 28.

Over 25 national pavilions shut over Israel's participation at Venice Art Biennale

In an unprecedented move, more than two dozen national pavilions at the Venice Art Biennale this week shut their doors in protest over Israel's ongoing violence in Gaza.

Countries including France, Belgium, Austria, and Italy walked out of the festival, an international cultural exhibition hosted every two years in the Italian city, The New Arab reported.

The boycott was triggered by opposition to both Israel's and Russia's participation, leading to the resignation of the international jury, co-ordinated pavilion shutdowns, artist boycotts, and protests across the Giardini, the Venice park that usually hosts the Biennale.

Israel's genocidal war in Gaza since October 2023 has killed more than 72,000 people, while Russia invaded Ukraine in early 2022. Despite a ceasefire, Israeli strikes on Gaza continue, and

Russia's war in Ukraine shows no sign of ending.

The five-member jury reportedly resigned after refusing to judge works from participants linked to Israel and Russia, whose leaders are wanted by the International Criminal Court for alleged war crimes. Their departure forced organizers to open voting to the public.

In solidarity with the jury, more than 70 artists also withdrew, and in the following days, more than 25 national pavilions either partially or fully closed.

The Palestinians, whose state is not recognized by Italy, do not have their own pavilion but are represented by an exhibition dedicated to Gaza at Palazzo Mora, titled "Gaza - No Words - See the Exhibit."

On 8 May, around 2,000 pro-Palestinian dem-

onstrators in Venice protested Israel's participation at the arts event.

The upheaval at the Biennale coincides with the 78th commemoration of the Nakba, when the state of Israel was created following the violent killing and mass expulsion of at least 700,000 Palestinians.

The crisis is unusual for the Biennale, which has traditionally remained neutral on conflicts such as those in Gaza and Ukraine.

Israel has faced increased scrutiny at several arts and sporting events amid its military campaign in Gaza and ongoing occupation of Palestinian territories. Spain, Ireland, Slovenia, the Netherlands, and Iceland boycotted this year's Eurovision Song Contest due to Israel's participation.