

# IAEA chief eyeing 'real results' in talks with Pezeshkian



Culture minister inauguration:

## Salehi Vows to Counter 'Iranophobia'

### New opportunity for nuclear diplomacy



By Ebrahim Beheshti  
Staff writer

#### OPINION

The quarterly meeting of the IAEA Board of Governors commenced on Monday in Vienna and will continue through Friday. In the lead-up to the gathering, IAEA Director General Rafael Grossi asserted in a report to the board that Iran's stockpile of enriched uranium has risen in recent months. He also alleged that Iran has not enhanced its cooperation with the agency despite the issuance of a resolution by the board during its previous session. The current session addresses Iran's Safeguards Agreement and NPT obligations with the IAEA, nuclear verification, and monitoring in Iran, alongside several other matters unrelated to Iran. Between the previous and current Board of Governors meetings, Iran underwent a significant political transformation. The election of reformist Masoud Pezeshkian as the new president, advocating for constructive engagement with the world, marked a pivotal moment. Simultaneously, Abbas Araghchi, a prominent figure in Iran's

Ebrahim Beheshti  
The quarterly meeting of the IAEA Board of Governors commenced on Monday in Vienna and will continue through Friday. In the lead-up to the gathering, IAEA Director General Rafael Grossi asserted in a report to the board that Iran's stockpile of enriched uranium has risen in recent months. He also alleged that Iran has not enhanced its cooperation with the agency despite the issuance of a resolution by the board during its previous session. The current session addresses Iran's Safeguards Agreement and NPT obligations with the IAEA, nuclear verification, and monitoring in Iran, alongside several other matters unrelated to Iran. Between the previous and current Board of Governors meetings, Iran underwent a significant political transformation. The election of reformist Masoud Pezeshkian as the new president, advocating for constructive engagement with the world, marked a pivotal moment. Simultaneously, Abbas Araghchi, a prominent figure in Iran's

former nuclear negotiation team, now assumes the role of foreign minister. Following Pezeshkian's victory, Grossi expressed his desire to visit Iran and engage in discussions with the new president, a request readily approved by Pezeshkian. Grossi reiterated this wish yesterday, telling reporters, "I encourage Iran to facilitate such a meeting in the not-too-distant future so that we can establish a constructive dialogue that leads swiftly to real results." While Grossi repeated his previous claims about Iran's nuclear activities, he expressed optimism that his meeting with the Iranian president would herald a new chapter of mutual cooperation. Iran, on the other hand, has consistently critiqued the director-general's reports for their political undertones overshadowing the technical facets. Nonetheless, the political shift in Iran, with a reformist government espousing dialogue to resolve disputes, presents a fresh opportunity for the IAEA and Western parties to the nuclear deal, namely the US and the E3 (Germany, France, and the UK), to embrace positive change.

### 'Fifteen years in the making': Aminzadeh revels in coveted Paralympic gold



### Fencing border to secure Iran against threats

### Iran highlights opportunity to revive JCPOA

Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman Nasser Kanaani said there is an opportunity to revive the 2015 Iran nuclear agreement if the parties to the landmark deal adhere to their commitments. Kanaani said that Tehran has never distanced itself from the negotiating table and sees the negotiations as a diplomatic solution to realize its interests.

## Annual exports by Iranian cooperatives to hit \$2b: Deputy minister

The Ministry of Cooperatives, Labour, and Social Welfare has plans to increase exports by Iranian cooperative companies, said a deputy minister, adding that the related figure is expected to hit \$2 billion per annum by the end of the current Iranian year (March 20, 2025).

Hamed Veys-Karami, the deputy labor minister, stated on Monday that the cooperative sector enjoys high social and economic capacities, as it has a significant contribution to economic growth, creating stable employment and boosting gross domestic product of the country, ISNA reported. "With the efforts made during the past Iranian year, we achieved a 15% growth in the export of cooperatives," the official said. Out of a total of 104,000 active cooperatives across the country, 39% pertains to the industry sector, 37% to the agricultural sector and the rest to the services sector, he noted.

Cooperative companies are enterprises that identify export target markets and develop the country's exports. Today, most of Iran's non-oil exports, including caviar, pistachios, saffron, and carpets, are through cooperatives.

In Iran, the cooperatives of border residents play a significant role in the export of various food products, industrial products, dry fruits, spices, medicinal plants, handicrafts, mining industries, rice, tea and edible oil.

According to experts, considering the high potential of cooperatives, especially in the field of export under the economic conditions of the country, it is necessary to use the export capabilities of the cooperative sector.

# Iran maintains geopolitical role in energy transit in West Asia

Iranian Oil Minister Mohsen Paknejad said in Tehran on Monday that his country enjoys geopolitical role for the transit of energy in the Middle East.

Speaking in a meeting with Mohamed Hamel, the secretary general of the Gas Exporting Countries Forum (GECF), Paknejad added that considering the current conditions of the world's gas markets, special support should be given to the GECF today, so that the group can play a prominent role in stabilizing the world's energy security with the comprehensive cooperation of its members, Shana reported.

The minister said that the role of gas in addition to energy security is very important in proceeding world climate policies, especially during the transition to clean energy.

Paknejad added that Iran is preparing to organize the 26th ministerial meeting of the Gas Exporting Countries Forum.

He noted that the GECF in coordination with the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) can play an effective role in the meetings and discussions at COP29, which will be held on November 11-22 in

Iran's Oil Minister Mohsen Paknejad (L) talks with Mohamed Hamel, the secretary general of the Gas Exporting Countries Forum (GECF), in Tehran on September 9, 2024. **SHANA**



Azerbaijan. "The Oil Ministry has set Tehran as the venue for the meeting, and invitations will soon be prepared

and sent to members and observer members. It is hoped that this meeting will be held with the maximum number of representa-

tives of members and observers and will be a turning point in the history of the Gas Exporting Countries Forum," the minister stated.

The 26th Oil Ministerial Meeting of the Gas Exporting Countries Forum member countries will be held in Tehran on October 27-29.

## Contracts signed for development of Iranian petchem industry



The Petrochemical Special Economic Zone (PSEEZ) signed five contracts for development of Iranian petchem industry on the sidelines of the 18th International Exhibition of Plas-

tic, Rubber, Machinery, and Equipment (IRAN PLAST 2024).

The deals were signed on Monday in a ceremony attended by Morteza Shahmirzaei, the managing

director of the National Petrochemical Company (NPC), Shana reported.

The NPC CEO said that Iran's industrial capacity for production of petrochemicals will reach above

100 million tons per year (mpta) this calendar year (to end on March 20, 2025). He added that some 13 petrochemical plants or new units in existing factories will be opened in Iran until the end of the year to late March.

Shahmirzaei said current output capacity of Iran's petrochemical sector is around 96 mpta in 80 plants, adding that the equivalent of 1.7 million barrels per day of oil is used as feedstock in the sector. He said more than 85% of the equipment and material used in the Iranian petro-

chemical plants are sourced from domestic suppliers, adding that the industry will become completely self-sufficient in the next five years by relying on the know-how of local startups and technology firms.

The official, who also serves as a deputy Iranian oil minister, said that Iran is currently exporting various types of technologically-complicated catalysts used in the petrochemical industry, adding that many of those devices have been developed and manufactured inside Iran in the past three years.

Shahmirzaei made the remarks in a speech delivered at the opening of the 18th edition of IranPlast, a major international exhibition held by the NPC which attracts hundreds of companies from Iran and around the world.

A sum of 288 foreign firms and 525 companies from Iran are represented at IRAN PLAST 2024.

Some 150 business representatives are also present at the fair as part of delegations from 12 countries to hold talks and sign deals with Iranian and foreign counterparts.

## Wheat self-sufficiency: A requisite for Iran's security

Iran's wheat production is expected to reach 15 million metric tons for the 2023-2024 harvest year, the Agriculture Ministry says.

The government has already purchased 11.9 million metric tons from farmers, a 16% increase from the previous year. With an annual requirement of 11.5 million metric tons, Iran is on the path to self-sufficiency in wheat, Press TV wrote.

Given the strategic importance of wheat in food security and its role in the livelihood of Iranians, the government has always tried to provide the platform and necessary conditions to boost production in order to achieve self-sufficiency and maximize the welfare of the society.

The fact that about 52% of the food in the diet of Iranians consists of products derived from wheat calls for strategic support and strategy to ensure and modify production and consumption patterns where the wastage of agricultural products is said to

be enough to provide food for a country of 15 million people.

According to president of the National Foundation of Wheat Farmers Ataollah Hashemi, 90% of food security in Iran depends on wheat self-sufficiency.

Food security is a key policy area for global state planners, and for Iran, it is additionally crucial in the face of a protracted drought where falling water tables are adversely affecting harvests and the basket of agricultural products is narrowing.

Iran's self-sufficiency in wheat production, while providing food security, has positive security and political consequences. The country is the target of intensified sanctions which often hit the people's means of sustenance in the most difficult times.

Regardless of its health, social and economic benefits, food has always been used as a weapon. A review of the history of human wars indicates that the most lethal weapon used in certain

junctions has been the public nutrition.

Russia's launch of "military operation" in Ukraine in 2022 sent wheat prices to new highs as the two countries account for nearly 30% of global exports. Concerns over production and export potential have lingered ever since.

Under the circumstances, the vitality of strategic products such as wheat is quite evident in economic planning.

Iranians are among the biggest consumers of bread in the world, where households draw 47% of their daily calorie from wheat products. Iranians account for 1% of the world population, but they consume roughly 2.5% of wheat produced worldwide.

There are around 350 operational flour mills in the country with a milling capacity of 24 metric tons per annum. Current milling consumption is around 12 metric tons per year, and total domestic consumption is reportedly around 12.5 metric tons.

Millions of Afghans have also arrived in Iran in recent years, whose main staple is bread, putting Iran's inventories under pressure.

The idea of self-sufficiency in wheat production has been on the Iranian government's agenda since 1980, and the state's intensive role and intervention in the wheat market has gradually turned into the most important economic agent.

The bulk of the crop depends on seasonal precipitation, where irrigated wheat covers only one-third of the total area of 6.5 million hectares used for harvest, making yields subject to cycles of boom and bust.

The Iranian government buys wheat from domestic farmers at a guaranteed price to build its strategic reserves and regulate the market.

Self-sufficiency in wheat has been a cornerstone of the country's food security policy in recent years. The Rouhani administra-

tion snapped the achievement in 2020 when Iran imported more than 3 million metric tons of the strategic staple food at a cost of \$3.8 billion. Security is the main cornerstone of a country's strength and progress. Food security as an economic and social factor has a special place in strengthening national security, the absence of which will put the overall security of the country at risk.



# Adventure, history, and shopping await in Kish Island

Nestled gracefully in the stunning waters of the Persian Gulf, Kish Island in Hormuzgan Province epitomizes luxury and natural beauty. Its oval shape spans 89.7 square kilometers, creating an exclusive and tranquil retreat that entices visitors. Once a secluded haven for the wealthy, Kish has transformed into a sophisticated hub of progress and now proudly stands as the premier destination among Iran's islands. Kish Island boasts some of the finest beaches in Iran, eagerly inviting travelers to discover its many wonders. Much like its neighboring Qeshm, Kish operates as a free-trade zone, offering an exciting shopping experience. Travelers, both domestic and foreign, will appreciate the ease of access to this idyllic getaway—no visa is required! Upon arrival at Kish International Airport, visitors are greeted with a swift and seamless entry process: a quick photograph, fingerprinting, and a passport stamp provide you with a comfortable 14-day stay. This streamlined process allows guests to fully embrace the warmth of Persian culture and hospitality, making Kish Island a compelling destination for those in search of a unique experience. Let's explore the island's premier attractions together:

## Greek Ship

On the southwest coast of Kish Island lies an intriguing artifact of maritime history—the Greek Ship. Once known as the cargo steamship Khoula F, this rusting vessel has been perched on the island's shores since 1966, evolving into an iconic landmark. Affectionately called the Greek Ship, it has become a favored attraction for many tourists. Its weathered frame tells stories of days gone by, set against the breathtaking backdrop of the Persian Gulf. At sunset, when the sky is ablaze with gold and crimson hues, the Greek Ship becomes a mesmerizing sight that draws visitors



● alibaba.ir

from near and far to appreciate its enduring beauty. Among Kish Island attractions, the beach surrounding the Greek Ship stands out not only for its

historical significance but also for its tranquil ambiance, offering guests a chance to experience its spellbinding charm firsthand.

## Kariz Underground City

Approximately two decades ago, the island initiated a remarkable creation—the underground tunnels known as the kariz, designed to provide access to drinking water. The term 'kariz,' derived from Persian, means 'aqueduct,' reflecting the brilliance of Iran's historical engineering. Comprising three aqueducts and 274 wells, this underground marvel allows visitors to delve into the ancient channels that once facilitated the region's water supply. While some wells retain their historical form, others have been adapted for improved ventilation and lighting.



● halitour.com

A striking feature of the kariz is its eight-meter-high ceiling, which is adorned with fossils and seashells dating back millions of years. Although not the longest or deepest aqueduct in

Iran, the kariz in Kish stands as a testament to ancient engineering prowess, inviting visitors to journey through time and history in this captivating underground world.

## Dolphin Park

Located in the southeast corner of Kish Island, Dolphin Park spans 70 hectares, embellished with over 22,000 palm trees, and boasts Iran's first dolphinarium. This expansive park offers a variety of attractions, including a butterfly garden and a bird garden. Covering a total of 100 hectares, Dolphin Park is home to

marine mammals such as dolphins and sea lions, all expertly trained by Iranian instructors. The park's pools hold 21 marine mammals in a vast volume of 18,000 cubic meters of seawater, providing these animals with a spacious habitat. The lush landscape features over 100 species of plants that flourish in

the island's unique climate and soil. The park's bird garden is a haven for more than 50 species of birds, creating a natural setting for their breeding and living needs. Featuring an array of wildlife and exquisite scenery, Dolphin Park exemplifies one of the best experiences Kish Island has to offer.



● lidomatrip.com

## Ocean Water Park



● poolticket.org

For thrill-seekers, Kish Island's Ocean Water Park presents an exciting realm of adventure. Opened in January 2017, this enchanting

outdoor attraction immerses visitors in a magical adventure inspired by the Mystery of the Sun Castle. Designed by Ahmad Jafari,

an expert who has collaborated with Disney, the park features 13 exhilarating rides, four swimming pools, a spa, two restaurants, several refreshment stands, and inviting shopping areas. With a dedicated staff of over 400, the Ocean Water Park is designed to ensure delightful experiences for everyone. Boasting a popularity that has drawn over 80,000 visitors since its inception, this captivating park is a must-visit for anyone seeking fun, adventure, and a sprinkling of magic. Don't miss the excitement; make sure Ocean Water Park is on your list of things to do on Kish Island!

## Harireh Ancient City



● wikipedia.org

Kish Island is rich with history, and the Harireh Ancient City is a testament to its vibrant past. Situated along the island's northern coast,

this archaeological site dates back to the 8th century and spans approximately three square kilometers. As you wander through the ruins,

you are tracing the footsteps of a thriving ancient settlement that once buzzed with life and activity. Harireh was a significant hub of commerce and culture, with stories that resonate through its stones. Today, the sun's rays illuminate the remnants, prompting visitors to forge a connection with a heritage that refuses to fade. The Harireh Ancient City whispers tales of bygone eras, inviting you to weave your personal narrative into the rich tapestry of history that surrounds you.

## Coral Beach



● pinoreest.com

Marjan Beach, often affectionately referred to as Coral Beach, stands out as one of the top attractions on Kish Island. Conveniently located near Marjan Bazaar, it serves as a picturesque connection

between the bustling marketplace and the serene beach. The waters of Coral Beach are strikingly clear and a brilliant shade of blue, allowing visitors to catch glimpses of various underwater creatures

with ease. As you stroll along the shoreline, you'll be enchanted by the colorful corals decorating the seabed, as well as the exquisite oyster shells and a variety of snails and sea stones that the Gulf generously washes ashore. Year after year, this vibrant beach draws both tourists and locals alike, who gather to revel in the stunning views and the relaxing ambiance that Kish Island offers. Whether you wish to enjoy a leisurely day by the water or simply soak in the natural beauty, Coral Beach is a delightful destination that leaves a lasting impression.

## Aquarium



● alibaba.ir

Another captivating attraction on Kish Island is its remarkable aquarium. Dedicated to showcasing freshwater fish, the Kish Aquarium boasts a generous capacity of 20,000 liters and

features nearly seventy different species of rare and unique decorative fish. Each specimen presents an incredible variety of shapes, colors, and scales, highlighting the beauty of

aquatic life. The aquarium is thoughtfully divided into distinct sections, with some areas housing rare saltwater and freshwater fish, while others are home to intriguing reptiles such as snakes and alligators. You'll also find sections dedicated to showcasing rare birds and mammals, adding to the diverse array of life within the aquarium. For nature enthusiasts and anyone with a fascination for the wonders of the animal kingdom, Kish Aquarium is a must-see destination that brings you face-to-face with the enchanting richness of the underwater world and its unique inhabitants.

## Shopping Malls

Kish Island is a renowned hub for shopping and trade, uniquely characterized by its status as

a trade-free zone. This makes it an attractive destination for shoppers seeking a variety of

goods, including clothing, electronics, and cosmetics, all available at lower prices compared

to other parts of Iran. The eastern side of the island is dotted with grand shopping centers that cater to diverse tastes and preferences. Most shops tend to close during

the sweltering afternoon hours, allowing for a respite from the heat, but a number remain open late into the night, ensuring that visitors have ample opportunities to indulge in retail therapy.



● nedabal.com

# Fencing border to secure Iran against threats



By Navid Kamali  
Foreign affairs expert

## OPINION EXCLUSIVE

*In the contemporary era, border security has become one of the main priorities in the national security agenda of almost all countries. Safeguarding borders is not only essential for maintaining territorial integrity and preventing external threats but also directly impacts internal security and social stability. For this reason, many countries, especially in consistently tense regions like West Asia, have seriously prioritized the implementation of plans to seal off borders. These plans are designed and executed to control illegal immigration, prevent the entry of weapons and terrorist groups, combat drug trafficking, and curb fuel smuggling.*

*In general, border-fencing plans are recognized as one of the primary strategies for countering external threats and preserving domestic security in most countries. For Iran, in particular, considering its unique geopolitical position and its proximity to countries lacking sufficient political and security stability, these plans hold even greater significance. In this context, the plan to erect an impenetrable barrier along Iran's eastern frontiers, particularly those shared with Afghanistan and Pakistan, has become a central pillar of national security. This plan includes the construction of concrete walls, barbed wire, fencing, and strategic roads aimed at countering threats such as illegal immigration, the influx of weapons and terrorists, and the smuggling of drugs and fuel.*



An Afghan man walks at the Afghanistan-Iran border crossing of Islam Qala on November 24, 2021.  
● PETROS GIANNAKOURIS/AP

However, achieving desirable outcomes from the implementation of border-fencing plans necessitates attention to a set of factors and prerequisites. First, the utilization of advanced equipment and technologies is crucial. In today's world, such technologies play a vital role in enhancing border security. The use of modern technologies including artificial intelligence (AI), surveillance systems, and smart drones can significantly contribute to identifying and countering threats effectively. Incorporating these technologies into the border-fencing plan will markedly increase the precision and efficiency of the measures taken.

Additionally, strengthening intelligence and security capabilities is fundamental. No border-fencing plan can succeed without a robust intelligence foundation. Enhancing intelligence capa-

bilities through increased inter-agency cooperation and utilizing local and international intelligence sources can aid in the timely identification and prevention of threats.

The development of border infrastructure is another key factor in the success of this plan. Border infrastructure, including access roads, border outposts, and monitoring centers, must be developed to enable comprehensive border management and control. These measures not only increase the speed and efficiency of countering threats but also improve the living and working conditions of border security forces.

Furthermore, the development of neighborly policies and constructive engagement with neighboring countries are among the essential strategies for enhancing border security. Regional cooperation and diplomatic and para-diplomatic interactions with neighboring countries can lead to reduced tensions and increased border cooperation.

It is crucial to note that a smart and multifaceted approach to the root problems of border areas is key to the long-term success of any plan. Many border threats stem from deep-seated issues such as poverty, unemployment, and underdevelopment in these regions. Therefore, for the successful and effective implementation of border-fencing plans, it is necessary to address these problems at their core. This can be achieved through economic development, increased job opportunities, and the enhancement of social welfare in border areas.

### Challenges facing plan

Iran's eastern border fence is one of its most significant national measures aimed at ensuring the country's security, having been launched in earnest since last year. This plan entails the construction of four-meter-high concrete walls, barbed wire, fencing, and strategic roads along the country's borders, especially those shared with Afghanistan, and is scheduled to be completed over the next three years.

Despite the importance and necessity of finalizing the border-fencing plan, it faces numerous challenges. One of the most significant challenges revolves around the political and social pushback it received from countries that share bor-

ders with Iran. For example, the spokesperson of the Afghan government has conditioned the execution of this plan on a joint agreement, emphasizing that Afghanistan is now secure and that there is no need for restrictive measures by Iran. Moreover, some experts argue that sealing off the border alone cannot resolve all border issues. These experts believe that in order to completely eliminate border threats, the root causes of these problems must also be addressed. For instance, controlling terrorist movements in border regions cannot be achieved solely through building border walls; it requires international cooperation and broader political and security measures. In conclusion, while the border-fencing plan is considered one of the main strategies for enhancing the national security of any country and countering external threats, achieving desirable outcomes necessitates paying attention to a set of factors and prerequisites. The use of modern technologies, strengthening intelligence and security capabilities, developing border infrastructure, fostering neighborly policies, and adopting a comprehensive and intelligent approach to the root problems of border areas are among the factors that can contribute to the success of this national plan in the case of Iran.

Iran's eastern border fence is one of its most significant national measures aimed at ensuring the country's security, having been launched in earnest since last year. This plan entails the construction of four-meter-high concrete walls, barbed wire, fencing, and strategic roads along the country's borders, especially those shared with Afghanistan, and is scheduled to be completed over the next three years.



Iranian military officials visit a border area where concrete walls have been constructed.

# Iran's border wall: Shield against terror?

By Samit Gupta  
Columnist

## OPINION

Iran's recent decision to construct a 295 km wall along its border with Afghanistan is a stark reminder of the regional and global anxieties surrounding the rise of terrorism under Taliban rule. This wall is not just a physical barrier but a symbol of Iran's growing concerns about the spread of extremism and instability from its eastern neighbor. As the world watches Afghanistan transform into a sanctuary for terrorist organizations, Iran's move underscores a collective regional response to a shared threat. The decision to build the wall resonates with the concerns already expressed by Pakistan and other neighboring countries. Since the Taliban's return to power, Pakistan has consistently voiced alarm over the surge in cross-border terrorism. The rise of groups like Fitna-e-Khawarji and ISKP, which have carried out numerous attacks in neighboring countries, further validates Pakistan's concerns. Iran's construction of the wall is a tangible acknowledgment that Afghanistan under Taliban rule has become a breeding ground for extremist activities that threaten regional stability.

The international community has not been silent on this issue. The United Nations and other global organizations have documented the resurgence of terrorist groups such as Al-Qaeda, ISIS-K, and others in Afghanistan. These reports highlight the dangers posed by the Taliban's inability or unwillingness to curb these groups' activities. Iran's decision to fortify its border is a proactive step in line with these global concerns, aiming to protect its citizens from the ever-present threat of terrorism.

Iran is not alone in taking such measures. Pakistan has already invested heavily in fencing its border with Afghanistan, a move driven by the same fears that now prompt Iran to build its wall. The porous nature of the Afghan border has long been a source of concern for both countries, with militants exploiting the lack of secure boundaries to launch attacks and evade capture. By erecting these barriers, Iran and Pakistan are sending a clear message: the threat from Afghanistan is real, and decisive action is necessary to counter it.

The implications of this move extend beyond Iran and Pakistan. The entire region is grappling with the consequences of a resurgent Taliban and the spread of terrorist ideologies. Central Asian countries, too, have expressed concerns about the infiltration of extremist groups

from Afghanistan. Iran's wall, therefore, is not just about national security; it is a regional measure reflecting a broader consensus on the dangers emanating from Afghanistan.

The construction of the wall also highlights the limitations of diplomatic engagement with the Taliban. Despite numerous attempts by regional and global powers to engage with the Taliban and encourage them to rein in terrorist groups, the reality on the ground suggests that these efforts have largely failed. The Taliban's governance, marred by internal divisions and a lack of control over various factions, has allowed terrorist organizations to operate with relative impunity. In this context, Iran's wall is a pragmatic response to an increasingly untenable situation.

However, the wall is not without its challenges. The rugged terrain of the Iran-Afghanistan border presents significant logistical difficulties, and the construction process is likely to be fraught with obstacles. Moreover, the wall's effectiveness in preventing the infiltration of terrorists is not guaranteed. Terrorist groups have historically shown a remarkable ability to adapt to new challenges, and it remains to be seen whether the wall will be able to stem the tide of cross-border terrorism.

The wall also raises questions

about the humanitarian impact on the Afghan population. Many Afghans have historically relied on cross-border trade and movement for their livelihoods, and the construction of the wall could disrupt these traditional patterns. Iran will need to carefully consider the balance between security and the potential hardships imposed on ordinary Afghans.

In conclusion, Iran's decision to build a 295 km wall along its border with Afghanistan is a significant development in the ongoing struggle against terrorism in the region. It reflects the growing realization among neighboring countries that Afghanistan, under Taliban rule, poses a serious threat to regional stability. The wall is a defensive measure, a recognition that diplomatic efforts alone have not been sufficient to address the dangers emanating from Afghanistan. As Iran joins Pakistan in fortifying its border, the region must come together to address the shared threat of terrorism and work towards a collective security framework that can effectively counter the challenges posed by the Taliban's Afghanistan.

The article first appeared on Eurasia Review.



## Danger of distrust on Iran-Pakistan border



By Seamus Duffy  
Scholar

## OPINION

On August 26, the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA), a Baloch terrorist organization, launched a series of attacks across Pakistan's Balochistan province, killing more than 70 citizens and military personnel. Such attacks come on the heels of protests over the last few weeks across the province. The attacks themselves represent a new level of sophistication for the BLA, not only in their coordination but also in their targeting of vital infrastructure, such as railway links leading to the city of Quetta. They also represent a continuing commitment on behalf of the BLA to wage its insurgency campaign in the southwestern province. Viewed in a vacuum, these attacks may seem to be an internal security challenge for Pakistan but not a source of instability in its regional security environment. Yet, the attacks are part of a broader insurgency on both sides of the Iran-Pakistan border.

The last year has witnessed several attacks by Baloch terrorists operating within Iran. In response to these attacks, the Iranian military launched a series of deadly strikes in January on Pakistan, reportedly targeting insurgents that had slipped through the two nations' common border. In retaliation, Pakistan launched a series of its own tit-for-tat strikes on suspected BLA militants residing in Iran. Although both powers restored diplomatic relations and agreed to coordinate counterterrorism efforts in the aftermath of the strikes, the incidents highlighted the sensitivity of both nations to the perception that insurgents launching attacks within their respective borders might be operating within their neighbor's. It also highlighted their willingness to use unilateral force in addressing this issue.



People inspect a burned-out vehicle torched by members of the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) terrorist organization after they killed passengers on a highway in Musakhail, Pakistan, on August 26, 2024.

● RAHMAT KHAN/AP



Members of Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) terrorist organization

● THE KASHMIR PRESS

In the weeks leading up to Monday's attacks, several incidents suggested that insurgents were operating on both sides of the porous border.

For one, on July 19, Wahid Kambar, a prominent leader of the Balochistan Liberation Front (a predecessor to the BLA), was arrested by Pakistani security forces. On its face, this may not seem all that troubling, but there has been widespread speculation that the abduction took place on Iranian soil, suggesting that Balochi militants can easily cross the border into Iran and operate there. Moreover, his abduction by Pakistani (instead of Iranian) personnel highlights Islamabad's distrust of Iran's cooperation in counterterrorism efforts.

Another sign pointing toward a cross-border insurgency came in Quetta on August 16. Five bullet-ridden bodies were found hanging from electrical poles. The bodies, identified as Afghan nationals, were just 20 days earlier featured in a hostage video released by Jaish-ul-Adl (JUA), the most prominent of the Baloch insurgent groups operating on the Iranian side of the border. The message JUA is trying to send here is unmistakable: We can operate all across Balochistan, and there is little Pakistani security forces can do to stop us. In light of these incidents, it would be hard for ei-

ther Pakistan or Iran to argue that their respective Baloch insurgent groups were not operating within the other's territory. It would also be hard for either to argue that their counterparts were waging a successful counterterrorism campaign against such groups within their own borders.

One might reasonably point out that such cross-border terrorist ties do not necessarily mean increasing tensions between Iran and Pakistan. There is, after all, a long history of militants operating on either side of the porous border. Furthermore, the agreement on counterterrorism between Iran and Pakistan earlier this year would seem to underscore the degree to which both countries recognize the necessity of cooperation, however imperfect.

Yet, the history of the insurgency on either side of the border demonstrates that these commitments do not necessarily translate into sustained success. Both countries have been aware of the problem of cross-border militants for quite a while, yet engage in recriminations more often than cooperation. In 2009, after Baloch militant groups with links to Pakistan launched attacks in Iran, Tehran accused Islamabad of supporting the militants. After a deadly attack in 2013 that killed 13 Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) members, Iran went so far as to

launch missile strikes on Pakistan in order to target those responsible for the attack. After four Iranian soldiers were kidnapped by Baloch militants in 2014, Iran threatened to send troops into Pakistan. The tensions between the two countries on the Baloch issue have not abated in recent years, either. Rocket attacks by Iran on Pakistan in 2017, Pakistan's alleged downing of Iranian drones in 2017 and 2019, and accusations by Pakistan of Iranian support for Baloch militants as recently as 2023 all underscore the degree of mistrust that undergirds the relationship. Most notably, as Matthew Elliott pointed out in his thesis on the subject, such periods of heightened tensions are almost always followed by some commitment by both parties to jointly address the insurgency, and yet such commitments are rarely enough to prevent the next outbreak of violence.

This history of tit-for-tat retaliation over the failure of joint counterterrorism efforts between Iran and Pakistan, then, is worrying, especially given the sophistication and scope of the August 26 attacks and the failure of both countries' intelligence establishments to stop cross-border terrorist activities in the last few months. Certainly, there is evidence already to suggest that Pakistan's intelligence es-

tablishment does not view this problem as strictly internal, with defense officials pointing toward "hostile intelligence agencies" trying to disrupt Pakistan's infrastructure in the province, centered around the Chinese-owned port of Gwadar and its associated China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). This speculation that the militants are targeting CPEC infrastructure was repeated by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on August 27.

Although such comments do not necessarily point the finger at Iran, they do suggest that Pakistan believes 1) international actors are partially responsible for the attack and 2) such actors are opposed to the success of the CPEC corridor.

These attacks represent, if nothing else, a novel and profound blow against Pakistan's strategic efforts to develop and pacify Balochistan. Shocked by the sophistication of the August 26 attacks, distrustful of its neighbors, and looking for a culprit, there is a real possibility that Pakistan may view counterterrorism cooperation with Iran with increasing suspicion. It certainly would not be the first time Pakistan decided to take a more unilateral approach to the Balochistan insurgency.

The full article first appeared on The Diplomat.

# 'Fifteen years in the making': Aminzadeh revels in coveted Paralympic gold

## Sports Desk

Powerlifter Ahmad Aminzadeh was thrilled to see "years of hard work" pay off as the Iranian walked away with the last gold medal up for grabs at the Paris Paralympics.

Aminzadeh bagged a third powerlifting gold for the country in the French capital's La Chapelle Arena on Sunday, finishing atop the podium in the men's +107kg contests.

Also a gold medalist in last year's Asian Para Games, the Iranian began his campaign with a 253kg lift and then went on to register 258kg and 263kg efforts to finish 12 kilograms clear of Ukrainian silver medalist Anton Kriukov, with Akaki Jintcharadze of Georgia taking the bronze with 250kg.

"This gold medal was 15 years in the making. I have been through a lot to get to this point. Thank God all those years of hard work and dedication were worth it," an emotional Aminzadeh said.

"I suffered an injury in the chest area during a training session in Paris and I have to thank [team physician] Dr. Barati, as well as my coaches Hossein Tavakkoli and Ahmad Mollahosseini for helping me make it to the event," added the Iranian, who also grabbed the gold in the 2021 World Championships.

"My personal best is 280 kilograms and I won the gold in March's World Cup in the UAE by a 25kg margin. I'm sure I would have repeated my records, had it not been for the untimely injury. I'm still grateful to have landed the gold," said Aminzadeh, dedicating his medal to "the great people of my country who deserve the best."

Aminzadeh's superheavyweight gold in the Paralympics was a first won by an Iranian since 2016, when late powerlifting legend Siamand Rahman lifted a remarkable 310kg – a world record intact to date – in Rio de Janeiro.

"There have been some great Iranians in Kazem Rajabi, Siamand Rahman, and Mansour Pourmirzaei in the class over



Iranian powerlifter Ahmad Aminzadeh celebrates after winning the men's +107kg gold medal in the Paris Paralympics on September 8, 2024. GETTY IMAGES

the previous Paralympics and I'm glad to bring the superheavyweight crown to the country again," added Aminzadeh.

### Record haul

Aminzadeh's triumph, coupled with fellow-powerlifter Aliakbar Gharibshahi's gold earlier on the final day of the Games, rounded off the sporting extravaganza for Iran with 25 medals – an all-time high for the country since the first participation in Seoul 1988.

Joining the two powerlifters in winning a gold medal for Iran over 11 days of action were Rouhollah Rostami, also a powerlifting champion in the -80kg class, shooting sensation Sareh Javanmardi, who won a third successive women's 10m air pistol title, as well as Saeid Afrooz (men's javelin throw F34), Yassin Khosravi (men's shot put F57), Amirhossein Alipour (men's shot put F11), and the men's sitting volleyball team, which won a magnificent eighth crown, as Iran

finished 14th in the overall medals table – dropping by a spot from the previous Games in Tokyo, where the Iranians won 12 gold medals.

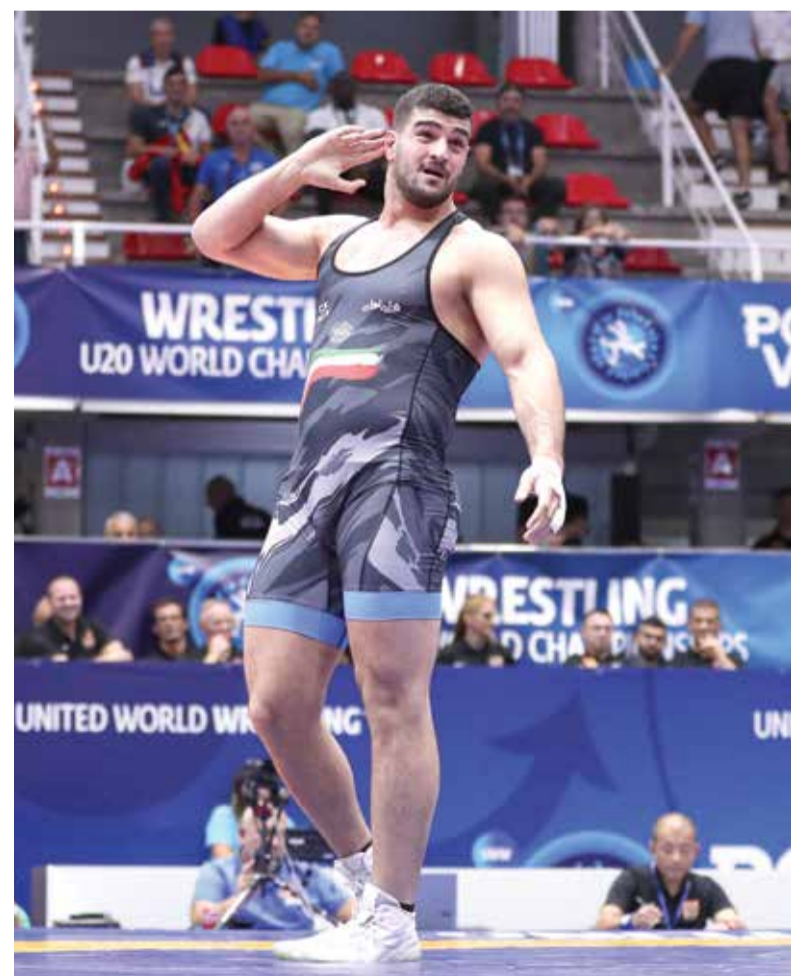
The para athletics event was again the most productive one for Iran with 12 medals, including three golds, though the number would have been even better, had Sadegh Beit Sayyah not been stripped of the javelin throw F41 gold for celebrating with a religious flag, which was deemed a violation of the Games'

code of conduct.

Zahra Rahimi (taekwondo, women's 52kg), Parastoo Habibi (women's club throw F32), Fatemeh Hemmati (women's individual compound open) won silver medals in their respective events – with the latter also part of the silver-winning mixed duo in the team compound contest – and Elham Salehi won a javelin throw F54 bronze as the girls took credit for seven of Iran's medals in the French capital.

## Wrestling U20 World Championships:

# Ma'soumi, Rezaei collect golds but Iran finishes freestyle runner-up



Iranian Amirreza Ma'soumi gestures towards the crowd after winning the freestyle 125kg final at the U20 World Championships in Pontevedra, Spain, on September 8, 2024. JAKE KIRKMAN/UWW

## Sports Desk

Amirreza Ma'soumi and Ali Rezaei won double gold medals on the final day of the Wrestling U20 World Championships in Pontevedra, Spain, but Iran missed out on the freestyle team title for the first time since 2019, settling for the runner-up place behind Team USA.

Elsewhere on Sunday, Ebrahim Khari suffered a technical fall against Japanese Masanosuke Ono in the 61kg final, while Abolfazl Rahmani defeated Italian Gabriele Niccolini 9-2 for a consolation bronze in the 86kg contests, as the Iranian 10-man squad tallied 160 points thanks to three golds and bronzes apiece as well as one silver.

Ali Khorrdel had walked away with the ultimate prize of the 65kg event on the preceding night, courtesy of a 10-2 victory Makoto Hosokawa of Japan, with Ali Karampour (70kg) and Mahdi Yousefi (79kg) finishing their campaigns with two bronze medals in their respective classes.

The Americans won a single gold, through Luke Lilledahl (57kg), across 10 weight classes – plus four silver and bronze medals apiece – but still managed to claim the team title

with 175 points.

Four medals, including double golds, saw Japan finish third with 90 points.

Ma'soumi retains dominance Ma'soumi might be behind fellow-Iranian Amirhossein Zare' in the pecking order for the 125kg spot of the senior national team, but the super-heavyweight prodigy again proved to be in a league of his own when it comes to age-group world championships. Standing between Ma'soumi and a third world under-20 title in the 125kg final was American Benjamin Kueter, who won the 97kg gold in the event in 2022.

Having conceded a single point on his way to the final, Ma'soumi took a 4-0 lead with a takedown, a point for Kueter's passivity and a stepout, before the American caught the deficit to two in the final 30 second, though it was too little too late as the Iranian teenager bagged a fifth world age-group gold in three years.

"My opponent in the final is a high-profile wrestler as he won the world gold two years ago," Ma'soumi said. "He had taken a year off from wrestling but had improved a lot since then. He's a skilled and accomplished wrestler. Thank God I

was able to use my knowledge of him to wrestle smartly and win."

While he won his four bouts outscoring his opponents 32-3, Ma'soumi had only one technical superiority win. In 2022, when he won both the U20 and U23 world titles, he won all but one of his matches via superiority.

"I had an injury in my hand and it was broken, so I tried to be careful with it," he said. "Otherwise, I'm always aggressive and a fighter."

Ma'soumi insisted he remains fixated on making the Iranian senior team.

"In the match against Amirhossein Zare' in Croatia, I lost," he said of his 5-0 loss to the Olympic silver medalist in January's Ranking Series event in Zagreb. "Some might say that I have settled, but no, I'm not satisfied at all. I'm preparing myself for the World Championships in Zagreb, aiming for the national team selection." Earlier on Sunday, Rezaei came from behind to beat American Ladarion Lockett – a world U17 champion last year – on criteria in a thrilling showdown, becoming the first world U20 champion from Iran in the 74kg class in 15 years.

Lockett was leading the final

3-1 after scoring a takedown in the second period and Rezaei, who won a silver medal last year, needed at least a takedown to win.

It came in the fifth minute of the bout when Lockett missed a sweep single and Rezaei showed exceptional speed to get him a bodylock and finish with a takedown.

Last year, Rezaei dropped the 70kg final against American Meyer Shapiro 11-6 and was desperate to make up for the setback this time around.

"I've been waiting for this moment for about a year and a half, and thankfully, in the final, my opponent was again an American, and I managed to beat him. This journey continues."

The freestyle runner-up finish came after the Iranian 10-man squad had dominated the Greco-Roman competitions last week. Ali Ahmadi Vafa (55kg), Mohammad-Mahdi Gholampour (60kg), Ahmadreza Mohsennejad (67kg), and Alireza Abdevali (77kg) pocketed four golds, while Abolfazl Fat'hi took the 130kg silver and Erfan Jarkani won a 63kg bronze, as Iran tallied 147 points for a fifth world under-20 title in a row, with Kazakhstan (100pts) and Turkey (98pts) in the following spots.

# IAEA chief eyeing 'real results' in talks with Pezeshkian

Rafael Grossi, the director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency, attends the IAEA's Board of Governors meeting at the agency's headquarters in Vienna, Austria on September 9, 2024.  
JOE KLAMAR/AFP



UN nuclear watchdog chief Rafael Grossi hopes to hold talks with new Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian by November on improving Iran's cooperation with his agency, he said on Monday. "He (Pezeshkian) agreed to meet with me at an appropriate juncture," Grossi said in a statement to a quarterly meeting of his agency's 35-nation Board of Governors, referring to an exchange after Pezeshkian's election in July. "I encourage Iran to facilitate such a meeting in the not-too-distant future so that we can establish a constructive dialogue that leads swiftly to real results," he said. With nuclear diplomacy largely stalled between the Iranian presidential election and the US one on Nov. 5, Grossi said he wanted to make real

progress soon. Asked at a news conference if his reference to the "not-too-distant future" meant before or after the US election, Grossi said, "No, hopefully before that." Iran has stepped up nuclear work since 2019, after then-US President Donald Trump abandoned an agreement reached under his predecessor Barack Obama under which Iran agreed to restrictions on its nuclear activities in return for the lifting of international sanctions. Iran has repeatedly called on the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to observe impartiality in its reports on the country's nuclear activities. Back in June, the IAEA chief repeated his previous claims about the lack of cooperation on Iran's side

on certain issues, including its refusal to allow several agency inspectors to continue to carry out missions in Iranian nuclear sites. Iran and world powers reached a landmark nuclear agreement in 2015, under which Tehran curbed parts of its nuclear program in exchange for the removal of sanctions imposed on the Iranian economy. Tehran started to suspend some of its obligations under the agreement in 2019, a year after the Trump administration abandoned the deal and reinstated sanctions on the country. Iran then agreed to some additional IAEA inspections under the Joint Statement and resolved issues related to one of the three sites and the alleged presence of uranium particles there.

## 18 killed in Israeli strikes on Syria



International Desk

Syria's Health Minister Hassan al-Ghabash said Monday that overnight Israeli strikes in central Hama Province killed 18 people and wounded 37 others. Syria's official news agency SANA citing a military source reported that at "around 11:20 pm (2020 GMT) on Sunday, the Israeli enemy carried out an air attack" from the direction of northwest Lebanon "targeting a number of military sites in the central region". "Our air defense systems confronted the aggression's missiles and shot down some of them," a military source told SANA. This was "one of the most violent Israeli attacks" in Syria in years, the head of the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights war monitor, Rami Abdel Rahman, told AFP. Syria's Foreign Ministry condemned the raids, accusing Israel of trying to "provoke a further escalation in the region". Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Nasser Kanaani strongly condemned the "criminal attack by the Zionist regime on Syrian soil". He also called on Israel's backers to "stop supporting and arming it". "We do not confirm what was reported by media outlets linked to the Zionist regime [Israel] about an attack on an Iranian center or a center under Iran's protection," Kanaani added. Israel frequently targets military positions inside Syria, especially those of the Lebanese resistance movement Hezbollah which has played a key role in helping the Syrian army in its fight against foreign-backed terrorists. The Tel Aviv regime rarely comments on its attacks on Syrian territories, which many see as a knee-jerk reaction to the Syrian government's phenomenal success in confronting and decimating terrorism. Sunday's attack comes amid Israel's bloody onslaught against Palestinians in the besieged Gaza Strip. The regime has launched relentless air and ground attacks on the coastal territory, including hospitals, residences, and houses of worship, since Palestinian resistance movements launched their surprise attack, dubbed Operation al-Aqsa Storm, against the regime on October 7. At least 40,972 Palestinians, most of them women and children, have been killed.

## Iran highlights opportunity to revive JCPOA

International Desk

Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman Nasser Kanaani said there is an opportunity to revive the 2015 Iran nuclear agreement if the parties to the landmark deal adhere to their commitments. Kanaani said that Tehran has never distanced itself from the negotiating table and sees the negotiations as a diplomatic solution to realize its interests. Iran's stance on the agreement, also known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), is clear, Kanaani said during his weekly press conference on Monday. The Foreign Ministry's spokesman said the JCPOA is a multilateral agreement and all signatories to the deal had obligations, of which Iran was the only member that fulfilled its commitments. He added that good consultations have been held between Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi and the European Union

foreign policy chief Josep Borrell regarding the revival of the JCPOA, adding that upcoming international events would be a good opportunity for talks on the issue. Meanwhile, an EU official confirmed that Borrell is actively engaging with parties involved in the JCPOA to explore the possibility of resuming Iran nuclear negotiations. In an interview with ISNA on Monday, EU's spokesman Peter Stano highlighted the EU's commitment to a comprehensive policy of mutual respect and open communication with Iran. He emphasized that the EU's position remains clear, and they are prepared to consider all options for cooperation. Hopes for the revival of the deal have increased after the victory of Masoud Pezeshkian in Iran's presidential election. Iran's new government has said that it will do its utmost to remove sanctions imposed on Iran.

"I will not stop trying to remove the oppressive sanctions," Pezeshkian said during his swearing-in ceremony in July. "I am optimistic about the future." Under the agreement, the US and the EU agreed to remove a number of anti-Iran sanctions imposed over the years, in exchange for Iran limiting its uranium enrichment and reducing its existing stockpile. The deal was eventually violated by the US in 2018, during the administration of former US president Donald Trump, even though Iran fully adhered to its share of commitments. Europeans also did not fulfil their commitment under the deal and failed to salvage the accord. Trump officially announced that he was withdrawing the US from the JCPOA and imposed the "strongest sanctions in history" on Iran under the so-called "maximum pressure" campaign.

## Kremlin rejects US claims about missile supplies from Iran

International Desk

Queried on Monday about a Wall Street Journal report that Iran has sent short-range ballistic missiles to Russia, the Kremlin asserted, "It is not every day that this kind of information is true." The Journal on September 6 cited unidentified US and European officials as saying that Iran had sent short-range ballistic missiles to Russia. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said that, "We have seen this report, it is not every day that this kind of information is true." "Iran is our important partner, we are developing our trade and economic relations, we are developing our cooperation and dialogue in all possible areas, including the most sensitive ones," Peskov told reporters. A senior commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps also reacted to the news on Sunday, calling it "psychological warfare." "No missile has been sent [by Iran] to Russia and such



claims are part of of psychological warfare," Deputy Commander of Iran's Khatam al-Anbiya Headquarters Fazlollah Nozari said. In recent days, many Iranian officials have repeatedly denied the Wall Street Journal report. On Monday, Iran's Foreign Ministry once again dismissed the accusation. "We strongly reject the claims on Iran's role in exporting arms to one side of the war," Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Nasser Kanaani said during a weekly press conference. Kanaani pointed to Iran's stance on the developments in Ukraine and said, "It is unfortunate that some

parties who are looking for conflict and war are leveling accusations against Iran." "On the issue of Ukraine, we are not a part of the war and believe in a political strategy to end the war," he added. However, the European Union also on Monday repeated the accusations against the Islamic Republic. "We are aware of the credible information provided by allies on the delivery of Iranian ballistic missiles to Russia," EU spokesman Peter Stano said. "We are looking further into it with our member states and if confirmed, this delivery would represent a substantive material escalation in Iran's support for Russia's illegal war of aggression against Ukraine." Stano added that, "the EU leaders' unanimous position has always been clear. The European Union will respond swiftly and in coordination with international partners, including with new and significant restrictive measures against Iran."

Mohammad Ali Rajabi  
Cartoonist



## New opportunity for ...

Experience has shown that adhering to past approaches and solely focusing on the agency's demands without considering Iran's legitimate interests and concerns end up nowhere. Politically motivated resolutions issued by the Board of Governors in previous sessions have elicited reciprocal responses from Iran, including the escalation of nuclear activities. Grossi hinted at the possibility of a joint statement by the US and the E3 regarding Iran's nuclear pro-

gram but made no mention of draft resolutions against Iran's nuclear program at the Board of Governors meeting. This could be a welcome sign, paving the way for constructive dialogue. These conversations are anticipated during Grossi's visit to Iran and his meeting with the president. Moreover, the Iranian president, accompanied by a delegation that includes the foreign minister, is set to attend the UN General Assembly in New York. Crucial discussions and negotiations with West-

ern counterparts on the nuclear issue are likely to unfold on the sidelines of this assembly. Iran's foreign minister and the EU's foreign policy chief have already agreed to resume these talks during a recent phone conversation. A new opportunity to bolster diplomacy and resolve differences appears on the horizon. Any claims, positions, or non-constructive actions before these talks, especially ahead of Grossi's meeting with Pezeshkian, may undermine the positive momentum and the opportunity at hand.

## Culture minister inauguration: Salehi vows to counter 'Iranophobia'

### Arts & Culture Desk

Iran's new Culture and Islamic Guidance Minister, Seyyed Abbas Salehi, was officially introduced on Tuesday, replacing Mohammad-Mehdi Esmaeili, who bid farewell at a ceremony attended by First Vice President Mohammad Reza Aref. Salehi, who took office as part of President Masoud Pezeshkian's new cabinet, emphasized the importance of countering "Iranophobia" and promoting national unity in his inaugural speech, adding that the ministry can serve as a "pioneer" to this end, [farhang.gov.ir](http://farhang.gov.ir) reported. "The new administration has two major missions," Salehi said. "First, it must promote national unity, and second, it must counter Iranophobia and the country's isolation on the international stage."

The new minister also touched on the country's international isolation, saying that Iran's rich cultural heritage, including its arts, literature, and poetry, can serve as a bridge to connect with the world. "Iran is known for its rich cultural heritage, including its arts, literature, and poetry," Salehi said. "We can use this heritage to connect with the world and counter Iranophobia." The newly-appointed head of the ministry called on artists and intellectuals to participate in the decision-making process and to use their talents to promote the country's cultural heritage. He noted that the ministry can play a crucial role in fostering dialogue and understanding between different parts of society, including the government, the people, and the media. Iran's culture minister urged a boost in funding for the arts, say-



ing the current budget is woefully inadequate. Even in the most market-driven economies, culture is a priority, he noted. Iran's per-capita cultural spending is just \$16, compared to over \$180

in the US. Salehi said. "We need to increase our budget allocation for culture and arts to support our artists and intellectuals." Esmaeili, who served as cul-

Iran's new Culture and Islamic Guidance Minister Abbas Salehi (2nd L) stands by First Vice President Mohammadreza Aref (C) and his predecessor Mohammad-Mehdi Esmaeili (2nd R) during an inauguration ceremony at Tehran's Vahdat Hall on September 9, 2024. ● IRNA

ture minister in the previous government, was praised by Salehi for his efforts to promote the country's cultural heritage.

## Iran's capital dilemma: Relocation or reform?

 **By Zohreh Qanadi**  
Staff writer

The idea of relocating Iran's capital away from Tehran has been floated by President Masoud Pezeshkian due to the city's mounting challenges. "Tehran, as the country's capital, grapples with water crisis, land subsidence, air pollution, and other issues. The continuation of existing policies and actions will only exacerbate these problems, and the only viable solution is to relocate the political and economic center," Pezeshkian said. The president emphasized that persisting with the current approach will render Tehran's crises intractable. According to Pezeshkian, any efforts to expand Tehran under the current water scarcity conditions are a waste of time. He proposed that the government should lead the way in relocating, encouraging the public to follow suit. Pezeshkian's statement comes amidst years of expert warnings about Tehran's problems and the lack of resources for its large population, estimated to be more than nine million in 2024. While some believe that relocating the capital is the solution, others advocate for balanced development across the country and avoiding political centralization. Former Tehran mayor Gholamhossein Karbaschi doesn't share the president's enthusiasm for the relocation, attributing Tehran's woes to political entanglements. "Where do you intend to go?!" Karbaschi quipped in an interview with Sharq newspaper. "If Mr. Pezeshkian's administration aims to address issues outside of political and emotional discourse and emphasizes expertise, they should consider the extensive professional work conducted on Tehran in the past. Unfortunately, the city's management has become entangled in political complexities." The ex-mayor believes that Tehran's challenges have become more intricate since the formation of the

first Tehran City Council in 1999. He shares that the late president Aliakbar Hashemi concurred, advocating for a gradual approach to implementing the law on councils, starting with smaller areas, and then extending it to larger cities after evaluating the performance of the councils. Acknowledging the complexities of managing a metropolis like Tehran, Karbaschi says, "Running a city, particularly a sprawling urban center like Tehran, is an immensely intricate task. A myriad of management entities with divergent agendas shouldn't meddle in a mayor or city council's affairs, tasked with the arduous job of untangling these interferences." Critiquing the centralization of power in Tehran, the former governor of Isfahan says, "Currently, we have a centralized government, verging on authoritarianism, that concentrates all administrative, political, cultural, and economic authorities in Tehran." Karbaschi went on to say, "Wherever in the world centralized governments have existed, devolving power to provinces and various regions has not yielded successful outcomes." He advocates for "administrative federalism," where centralized government authorities are delegated to managers across the nation. Karbaschi, who considers Tehran's population to be its most pressing issue, believes that if the Pezeshkian administration embraces decentralization, at least a third of Tehran's population could be redistributed to other parts of the country, benefiting the government without incurring additional costs. Additionally, Karbaschi maintains that there is no need for independent governmental organizations, such as the National Steel Company, the Tea Organization, the Tobacco Company, the Fisheries Organization, and dozens of other large public

and governmental institutions, to be headquartered in Tehran. He emphasizes that if the government decides to relocate all 160 predominantly governmental organizations, mostly affiliated with ministries, whose records have been scrutinized by the Ministry of Interior, and whose presence in Tehran is deemed unnecessary, to their primary locations in other provinces, it will foster employment opportunities and regional development beyond Tehran. Arash Hosseini Milani, the head of the Environment Committee of the Fifth Tehran City Council, describes the project of relocating the capital from Tehran as "an immensely ambitious and challenging endeavor." In an interview with Sharq, Milani says, "In the current economic, social, and political atmosphere of the country, embarking on such projects necessitates extensive groundwork and foundation-laying, neither of which I foresee on the horizon. Among these prerequisites

is robust financing to underpin the capital's relocation." "Since the 2000s, it has been proposed in Tehran that the city can only sustainably provide water for a population of 7 million. To accommodate a larger population, it was suggested that water sources and catchment areas surrounding Tehran be redirected to the city, effectively reducing the environmental flow and agricultural and industrial water rights in the source basins," he says. Reacting to the president's statement, Tehran City Council President Mehdi Chamran weighs in, "There's no need for all the country's issues to be centralized in Tehran. We have active ports in the south and north, capable of steering significant segments of our economy and industry." Chamran points out that various administrations have broached this subject in the past, without reaching definitive conclusions. He underscores the importance of distributing the country's affairs across all provinces

and cities, deeming it a necessary step. Chamran, too, identifies water scarcity as one of Tehran's significant challenges. Former Tehran Municipality deputy mayor Abdolreza Golpayegani shared his insights with Entekhab on the topic of relocating the capital and the imperative to reform Tehran's structures, saying, "Regarding the proposal to relocate the capital, which was raised in the previous two parliamentary terms, and for which the Ministry of Roads was tasked with conducting a study, the ministry's conclusion was that instead of moving the capital, Tehran needed to be reorganized." Golpayegani added, "Considering all the government employees, we're talking about a maximum of 1 million people who would need to relocate. So, the problem lies elsewhere. Consequently, the idea of relocating the capital, which pertained to the political capital, was abandoned." He continued, "I believe the focus should be on rehabilitating Tehran. Any proposal to relocate the capital ought to be rooted in sound methodology and sustainable development principles. Iran's Seventh National Development Plan has created capacities that could potentially be harnessed to decentralize Tehran. If we shift the focus of development and job creation to smaller cities, we will resolve a significant portion of Tehran's issues." Drawing attention to 15 global precedents of capital relocation, Golpayegani prompts a reflection on the country's managerial and financial capacities, questioning whether they are robust enough to undertake such a move. The notion of relocating Iran's capital from Tehran to another city has been floated numerous times, both before and after the Islamic Revolution (1979). During the Islamic Republic's era, this topic resur-

faced at the governmental level around 2013. In the same year, members of the parliament discussed the generalities of the "Bill for the Organization and Relocation of the Political and Administrative Capital," which even reached the Guardian Council, but it failed to gain serious traction afterward. Although none of these instances entailed in-depth studies or identified candidate cities capable of absorbing some of the country's political and administrative centralization, some officials, including former Tehran mayor Pirouz Hanachi and former interior minister Ahmad Vahidi, have estimated the relocation cost to be between \$70 billion and \$100 billion. A review of expert viewpoints here and the hefty price tag attached to this project suggests that adopting a decentralization policy regarding Tehran may be a more feasible course of action. "Administrative federalism," which Karbaschi also emphasizes, could be a viable approach, implying that each region should enjoy administrative, cultural, and political autonomy, empowering them to manage their own affairs. If governors are to function as the presidents of their respective provinces, they ought to be endowed with the requisite authorities, rather than having to refer all matters to Tehran. Studies indicate that countries that have undertaken capital relocation grapple with twofold challenges: the old capital city remains saddled with all its problems, and the new capital, due to the concentration of authorities and administrative, political, cultural, and economic clout, becomes a new set of issues. Moreover, relocating the capital doesn't necessarily entail abruptly shifting all political, economic, and administrative entities from Tehran to another city. Given the rapid evolution of communications, it is conceivable to envisage dispersing Tehran's centralization across multiple cities and provinces. All of this calls for extensive and protracted research and studies, which successive governments have yet to seriously undertake.

