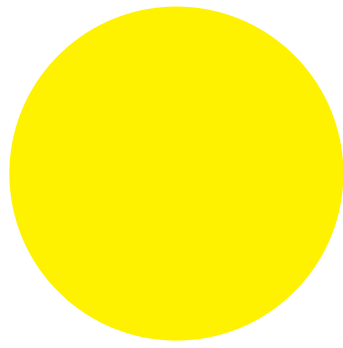


Iran urges Lebanon not to bar planes from landing in Beirut

2 >



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# Pezeshkian: If Iran's nuclear sites are targeted, thousands more will be built

2 >



Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian (2nd L) speaks during a visit to Bushehr Nuclear Power Plant in southwestern city of Bushehr, Iran, on February 13, 2025. [president.ir](#)



Industry minister says gov't aims to boost blue economy

3 >



Iran rejects 'baseless' US claim of arming Yemen's Ansarullah

2 >



Iran's oil output up nearly 13% in 2024: *OPEC data*

3 >

## Anti-Iran groups embroiled in scandal again

The Iranian opposition has put all opposition groups to shame. Recently, US President Donald Trump announced his decision to cut off millions of dollars in funding to various countries, including some anti-Iranian institutions and figures. This news sent shockwaves through the ranks of mercenaries who, for years, have been carrying out anti-Iranian activities with money from the White House and the US Congress.

[See page 4-5 >](#)



AFC U20 Asian Cup: Iran off to flyer with Indonesia rout

6 >



Untouched beauty of Chal Kandi Valley in Dezful

7 >

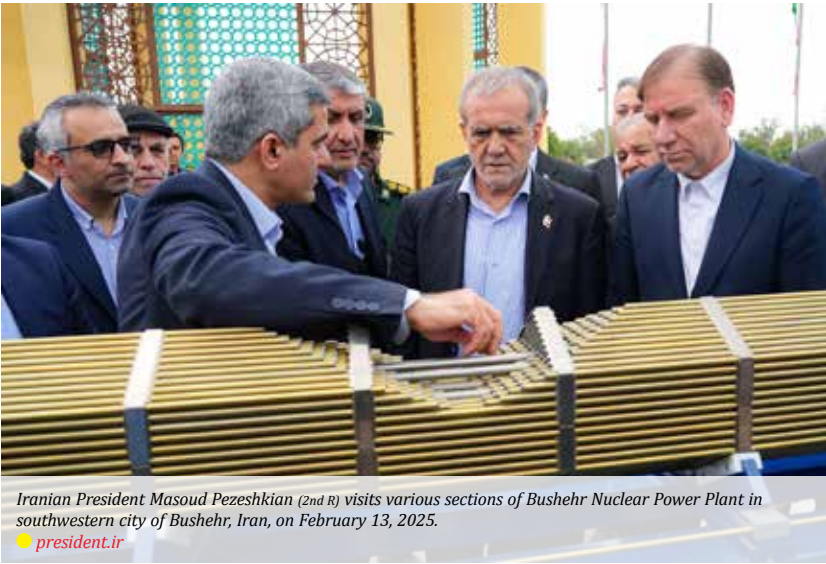


18th Tehran Int'l Tourism and Related Industries Exhibition draws crowds

8 >



# *Pezeshkian:* If Iran’s nuclear sites are targeted, thousands more will be built



**National Desk**  
Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian said the country would build thousands more nuclear facilities if they

are attacked after the US president repeatedly threatened Iran with military action on its nuclear sites. “They are threatening us that they will attack our Natanz nuclear facility.

Come and attack it. It is the brains of our children that built it,” Pezeshkian said during a visit to the southern province of Bushehr. “If you destroy a hundred (nuclear facilities), our children will build a thousand,” he said. US President Donald Trump has recently raised the possibility of Israel’s strike on Iran’s nuclear facilities if Tehran and Washington fail to reach an agreement on Iran’s nuclear program. The Washington Post also reported on Thursday, citing US intelligence, that Israel was “likely to attempt a strike on Iran’s Fordow and Natanz nuclear facilities in the first six months of 2025.” The report referred to “two potential strike options, each involving the United States providing support in the form of aerial refueling as well as intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance.” The Wall Street Journal had earlier carried a similar report.

Tensions between Tehran and Washington have worsened in recent weeks after the US president reinstated his “maximum pressure” policy on Iran over its nuclear program. At the same time, Trump called for striking a deal with Iran. “I would like a deal done with Iran on non-nuclear. I would prefer that to bombing the hell out of it,” Trump told the New York Post on Friday, adding, “If we made the deal, Israel wouldn’t bomb them.” On Wednesday, Pezeshkian said the US president says he wants to negotiate with Iran while closing all the doors for negotiations. He threatens the world not to establish relations with Iran and on the other hand, he suggests that we negotiate. Pezeshkian added that Iran will not back down and will not surrender in the face of any threat. During his visit on Thursday, Pezeshkian visited Bushehr Nuclear Power Plant, authorizing operations at Units 2 and 3 of the facility, the Islamic Re-

public’s sole nuclear power plant. He toured various sections of the first Unit of the Bushehr Nuclear Power Plant, including its control room and turbine, where plant managers and experts briefed him on the details of the plant’s operations, electricity production, and power transmission to the grid. He also visited the construction sites of Units 2 and 3 of the Bushehr Nuclear Power Plant and, at the end of the tour, ordered the installation of the first key equipment component for Unit 2’s reactor building to enhance safety standards, along with the excavation of pump house buildings for both units. The first phase of the Bushehr Nuclear Power Plant, currently operating at a capacity of 1,015 megawatts, has generated 72 billion kilowatt-hours of electricity over 11 years since its commissioning. This has prevented the consumption of 114 million barrels of crude oil, saving over \$8 billion in fossil fuel costs.

## Iran rejects ‘baseless’ US claim of arming Yemen’s Ansarullah

**International Desk**  
Iran rejected “baseless” accusations by the United States about the Islamic Republic’s military and financial support for Yemen’s Ansarullah resistance group, saying that Tehran has always supported peace and stability in the Arab country. In a letter to the United Nations chief and the president of the Security Council, Iran’s Permanent Mission to the UN emphasized that the US cannot hide its complicity in Israel’s crimes by pinning the blame on Iran for regional tensions. Iran’s reaction came after US Deputy Representative to the UN Dorothy Shea in an address to a Security Council briefing on Yemen alleged that Iran’s materiel and financial support had enabled Yemen’s Ansarullah to launch “numerous attacks on civilian infrastructure” and fire at American warships in the Red Sea. “Unlike the United States that provides weapons and extensive financial support to the Israeli regime to continue its aggression against the oppressed people of the region, the Islamic Republic of Iran has been and will keep adhering to the fundamental principles of the international law, the United Nations Charter, and Security Council resolutions,” Iran’s mission said. Tehran has adopted a “unified and stable” position on Yemen’s crisis and believes that the conflict must be resolved via a “comprehensive political

process” that guarantees the country’s independence, national sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity. The US, UK, and Israel have launched attacks across Yemen over the past months in violation of the country’s sovereignty and international law. The illegal attacks came in response to Yemen’s campaign to show solidarity with the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip amid a genocidal Israeli war. “Since the beginning of the Yemen crisis, the Islamic Republic of Iran has called for an immediate end to aggression, a cease-fire, the start of meaningful dialogue between Yemeni parties, and the peaceful settlement of the conflict with no foreign interference,” the Iranian mission said. The future of Yemen must be determined by its own people, it noted, stressing that lasting peace is only possible there “through diplomacy, respect for national sovereignty, and adherence to international law, not through military interventions or false accusations.” Since the beginning of Israel’s onslaught on the Gaza Strip, the Yemeni Armed Forces have targeted ships heading to or departing ports in the occupied territories, or those linked to Israel, in the southern Red Sea, the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, the Gulf of Aden, and even in the Arabian Sea. They have also conducted strikes against Israeli targets in the occupied lands.

**Mohammad Ali Rajabi**  
Cartoonist



## Iran urges Lebanon not to bar planes from landing in Beirut



**International Desk**  
The Islamic Republic urged Lebanon not to prevent Iranian planes from landing in the country’s airports after a decision by the Arab country barred two Iranian aircraft from touching down in the Lebanese capital. Lebanon’s Directorate General of Civil Aviation said on Thursday it had “temporarily rescheduled” some flights including from Iran until February 18 as it was implementing “additional security measures.” Iran’s Ambassador to Lebanon, Mojtaba Amani, in a televised interview on Friday, said that Tehran is trying to restore flights between the two countries, adding that the Lebanese government had requested that another plane replace the Iranian plane to evacuate the Lebanese stranded in Iran. Amani said that Tehran could agree to the Middle East Airlines evacuation flights “on the condition that they (Lebanese authorities) don’t block Iranian flights.” Late Thursday, a crowd of Lebanese people blocked the Beirut airport road and burned tires to protest the Lebanon’s decision. After the airport protests, author-

ities said they were working to bring back Lebanese passengers abandoned in Iran with planes belonging to the Beirut-based Middle East Airlines. But Saeed Chalandari, CEO of Tehran’s Imam Khomeini Airport, said on Friday that Iran had rejected the proposal. “Naturally, we do not agree to their request, because if there is to be a flight between the two countries, it must be a two-way flight,” Chalandari told Iranian news agency Tasnim. After blocking the Iranian flight, Lebanon dispatched two planes on Friday from its own national airliner Middle East Airlines to bring the stranded Lebanese home from Iran, but Iran refused to allow the Lebanese aircraft to land on its territory. Lebanon’s Foreign Minister Joe Raggi told Lebanese broadcaster Al-Jadeed that his ministry was working to resolve the issue with its Iranian counterpart. The developments coincided with Israel’s threats against Iranian planes landing in Lebanon. Israeli military spokesman Avichay Adraee had warned the army was prepared “to thwart” any attempts to transfer what was claimed to be

funds or weapons to Hezbollah resistance group in Lebanon. Adraee has claimed that Iran and Hezbollah “have been exploiting... the Beirut international airport through civilian flights, to smuggle funds dedicated to arming” the group. The Iranian foreign ministry spokesman in a statement accused Israel of disrupting flights from Tehran to Beirut. The Iranian foreign ministry Esmaeil Baqaei said that, “The threat by the Zionist regime to a passenger plane carrying Lebanese citizens has disrupted normal flights to Beirut airport.” Baqaei condemned Israel’s “gross and continuous violations of the principles and rules of international law and violations of Lebanon’s national sovereignty.” He also called for the International Civil Aviation Organization and other world bodies “to stop Israel’s dangerous behavior against the safety and security of civil aviation.” In September, Lebanon’s Transport Ministry ordered an Iranian aircraft not to enter its airspace after Israel warned air traffic control at Beirut airport that it would use “force” if the plane landed.



# Industry minister says gov’t aims to boost blue economy

**Economy Desk**

The minister of industry, mines, and trade stated that the government is determined to boost blue economy, with effective steps and plans already in place to achieve the goal. Mohammad Atabak, who attended a government event in the port city of Genaveh on Thursday, told reporters that given the current administration’s focus on transitioning to blue economy, Bushehr Province is expected to undergo significant transformation by the end of the administration’s term (2028). Emphasizing the need for special attention to the issues in the southwestern province, he expressed hope that the conditions in this resource-rich region would improve significantly. The minister noted the closure of numerous shipbuilding units in Bushehr, highlighting shipbuilding as one of the province’s key advantages. He added that necessary plans are being developed to leverage this potential. Atabak also pointed to cage fish farming as another advantage of Bushehr Province, stressing efforts to utilize existing opportunities to achieve a maritime-based economy. He mentioned that dredging the port and addressing other needs of coastal cities in Bushehr Province are being reviewed and will be presented at the provincial planning and development council meeting attended by the president. Atabak arrived in Bushehr Province on Wednesday as a government repre-

sentative to visit Genaveh and Deylam counties. During his trip, he toured production units and met with economic activists, producers, traders, and businesspeople to discuss their concerns and demands. He also attended administrative council meetings in Genaveh and Deylam, as well as provincial planning and development sessions, to make necessary decisions to address local issues.

**President visits Sadra shipbuilding site**

Meanwhile, President Masoud Pezeshkian visited various sections of the southern yard of Iran Marine Industrial Company (Sadra) in Bushehr on Thursday as part of his provincial trip. During the visit, the president was briefed on Sadra’s latest activities in shipbuilding, oil and gas platform construction, and the development of docks and other marine facilities. Established in 1968 in Bushehr, Sadra began its operations by repairing and building various marine vessels. After the Islamic Revolution, the company expanded its offshore industry activities to meet growing demands in the Persian Gulf and Caspian Sea markets. Today, Sadra is equipped with comprehensive facilities for designing, engineering, constructing, transporting, and installing various marine structures and vessels. The company operates factories and marine equipment facilities in Bushehr and the Caspian Sea (Behshahr), providing extensive services in the Persian Gulf and Caspian



Sea regions. In 1997, Sadra obtained ISO 9001 certification for designing, constructing, and installing offshore oil and gas facilities, shipbuilding, oil terminals, ports, coastal protection, and bridges. The company’s current divisions include the Offshore Factory, Sadra Industrial Island, Sadra Industrial Island Shipbuilding Factory, Bushehr Offshore Platform Factory, Bushehr Shipbuilding Factory, and Caspian Factory.

Since the 1990s, Sadra has entered the offshore phase, meeting national demands and constructing various gas and oil platforms. In recent years, the company has simultaneously built 10 South Pars platforms with the highest quality, delivering \$2.5 billion worth of projects to clients. Sadra is active in engineering services, shipbuilding, construction and installation of oil terminals, offshore oil and gas facilities, ports, coastal protection,

and dock construction. It is one of Iran’s largest contractors for offshore oil and gas projects. Some of the company’s most significant ongoing projects include the South Pars Phase 13, Phases 17-18, and Phases 22-24, as well as the development and modernization of the Reshadat Oil Field. In shipbuilding, Sadra is designing and constructing four 113,000-ton oil tankers and installing Forouzan platforms.

## Iran’s oil output up nearly 13% in 2024: *OPEC data*



Latest data from the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) indicates that Iran’s oil production rose significantly in 2024 despite US efforts to ramp pressure on the country’s energy sector through imposing back-to-back sanctions on its oil exports, Press TV wrote. OPEC data, cited in a report by the Fars news agency, showed that Iran’s oil production had reached an average of 3.257 million barrels per day (bpd) last year, an increase of 12.93% from 2023. The figures showed that Iran had ended 2024 with an average monthly production of 3.293 million bpd in December and continued to pump 3.28 million bpd in January 2025. That comes as total oil production by OPEC, a bloc that is made up of 12 countries, fell by 1.52% from 27.804 million bpd in 2023 to 26.672 million bpd last year.

A similar decline was reported for OPEC+, a broader alliance of oil-producing nations that include Russia. Iran was OPEC’s third largest oil producer in 2024 after Saudi Arabia and Iraq which both reported drops in production in 2024, the data showed. The increase in Iran’s oil production comes despite the fact that the United States toughened its sanctions on Iran’s oil industry last year by issuing penalties on individuals, entities and the tankers involved in the country’s oil exports. They are also the latest sign that US sanctions on Iran, which were enacted in 2018 with the aim of choking off the country’s oil revenues, have failed bitterly. Iranian authorities have said that the oil production in the country is expected to reach nearly 4 million bpd in the near future.

## Veep pledges to resolve water crisis via coordination, collaboration

**Economy Desk**

The vice president of Iran warned about the country’s excessive water consumption, warning that if we continue with the current consumption trends and fail to manage it properly, we will face serious crises. Mohammadreza Aref, speaking at the first meeting of the “Supreme Water Council” under the current administration, addressed the critical state of water resources after reviewing expert reports on climate conditions, the latest status of the country’s dam reserves, and discussions on land subsidence, drying lakes, and wetlands. “Over the past six months, various meetings have been held to address different challenges, but what sets this meeting apart is that while other challenges had potential solutions, the water issue is a crisis – one that is far more complex than any other. Yet, we must find a solution for this crisis as well,” he said. The meeting was attended by the heads of the Plan and Budget Organization, the Department of the Environment, the ministers of industry, mining, trade, agriculture, energy, as well as water experts. Aref said, “Our water resources are limited, and the damage caused to these resources due to poor management has led to the situation we see today.” He pointed out that Iran is among the top 10 countries facing critical water shortages globally, adding, “Climatic conditions and low rainfall have exacerbated this problem, leading to crises in water reserves and groundwater levels.” Aref stressed, “In this situation, we must find a solution to this crisis and



resolve it. We know this imbalance is different from others, such as electricity, and our only hope lies in water management. However, we have not been successful in this area in recent decades.” The VP noted that over 80% of water is consumed in the agricultural sector, yet there has been little success in controlling consumption. “We still rely on flood irrigation and water-intensive crops, and for some products, despite their high water usage, we must continue due to their strategic importance and the employment they generate in the agricultural sector.” Aref identified illegal wells as another major issue contributing to water waste, stating, “No success has been achieved in this area either. For example, while 20,000 wells may have been filled in the Lake Urmia basin or another region, 30,000 new illegal wells have been dug afterward.” He emphasized, “We are currently in

a water crisis and must manage and resolve it. We are confident we will overcome this challenge, but we need a plan and must be determined in its execution. We must set aside formalities and ensure that any decision we make is implemented. At the same time, the public must be educated on water consumption management.” Aref expressed confidence that the shortages and challenges in this sector would be resolved through coordination and collaboration among relevant agencies. “By addressing these issues, many potential disputes between provinces over water can be resolved. Our comprehensive plan is to move forward within the framework of the government’s overall goals and policies.” During the meeting, the veep also called for careful consideration of the environmental water rights, particularly for wetlands, emphasizing that this is the right of nature and future generations.



# Anti-Iran groups embroiled in scandal again

## ANALYSIS

The Iranian opposition has put all opposition groups to shame. Recently, US President Donald Trump announced his decision to cut off millions of dollars in funding to various countries, including some anti-Iranian institutions and figures. This news sent shockwaves through the ranks of mercenaries who, for years, have been carrying out anti-Iranian activities with money from the White House and the US Congress.

Trump stated that he would suspend this aid for 90 days. However, it did not end there. The US Secretary of State Marco Rubio also announced in a press conference that the main problem with these groups was their financial mismanagement. According to Rubio, for every \$1 that these groups take from taxpayers in "foreign aid," only "12 cents" of US aid ultimately went towards the actual goals of the White House, while the remaining 88 cents are pocketed.

Reports have been released showing which individuals have benefited from these funds. The website ProPublica has published detailed documents revealing the income and assets of these individuals and institutions. It appears that six of them alone have received around \$100 million in funding over the past 10 to 15 years. Of course, there are many other natural and legal persons whose receipt information is not available. What is clear is that Trump and Elon Musk are gearing up to get the most out of their resources.



Hamidreza Gholamzadeh



The photo includes the logos of some of the anti-Iran opposition groups whose funds were cut by the Trump administration.

## Be good, we'll fund you again

Trump had already announced that he would be stopping foreign aid to 200 countries for 90 days. This decision was part of Trump's efforts to reduce federal government spending, with Elon Musk at the helm of the operation. Immediately after the announcement, some people saw this as a positive signal from Trump to Iran. However, Marco Rubio put this notion to rest, stating that they had cut off funding because these groups were not doing their job properly. This move is not only not a positive signal but also an opportunity for these groups to reform and receive new funding. The US's primary goal is to review and streamline its spending, not to abandon its policies towards Iran.

## Slap in face to funding recipients

Since Iran's 1979 Islamic Revolution,

various US administrations have spent hundreds of millions of dollars supporting opponents of the Islamic Republic. However, the fact that they have stopped funding these groups suggests that their efforts have not yielded the desired results. The failure of regime-change projects, infighting within the opposition, and the lack of success in the 2022 developments have led American decision-makers to conclude that their investments have been futile. Washington is now looking to allocate its budget to media outlets and groups that have a greater impact.

However, this story is far from over. The US secretary of state has recently announced that the main problem with these groups is their financial mismanagement, and reports have been released showing which individuals have benefited from these funds. It is not only the content of these reports that is worth

examining, but also the amount of money these individuals have received over the years.

## Who pocketed the money?

One activist has written on social media about how anti-Iran funding recipients have embezzled the funds. He claims that Ladan Boroumand, one of the founders of the Abdorrahman Boroumand Center, has received around \$16 million in US government funding by the end of 2023. However, the story takes a more interesting turn when it is revealed that she registered a private company called SADA 1 LLC in Washington, D.C. in 2017. The company has been active for seven years, but there is no online presence, website, or information about its activities, and its address is the same as Boroumand's personal residence. While these vast sums of money are being spent in the name of human rights, no

one knows what this company actually does or whether it has any connection to these funds. The opposition, which has built its career on the suffering of the Iranian people, is now quietly managing a private company with no transparency whatsoever. Where do the US government's funds, allocated for human rights, ultimately end up, and in whose accounts do they land? Never mind the lack of transparency, these individuals do not even bother to explain themselves.

Similar claims have been made about the Tavaana project, which was set up by Mariam Memarsadeghi and Akbar Atri in 2009. They have picked up nearly \$14 million from the US government since 2011, but have failed to carry out their masters' orders. The Center for Human Rights in Iran has received over \$18 million in funding by the end of 2023. Its financial report outlines



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the income, expenses, and salaries paid to the organization's managers. IranWire, which is run by Maziar Bahari, has been funded with \$19 million, and the Iran Human Rights Documentation Center has received \$9 million from various sources.

## Regime change 'common goal of US left, right'

Hamidreza Gholamzadeh, an expert in international affairs, explains the difference in approach between Democratic and Republican administrations in dealing with foreign aid as such: "These expenditures have been largely within the framework of US soft power, and Democrats have used public diplomacy to advance their goals. In other words, Democrats have tried to promote their policies through soft power, regime change, and color revolutions. However, Republicans, especially under Trump, try to increase their hard power and pursue the same goals through intimidation, sanctions, economic pressure, and ultimately military action."

The shift in foreign policy under Trump, Gholamzadeh added, does not mean that the previous methods were bad, but rather that they were ineffective in Trump's view. "The goal that both parties share is regime change in countries like Iran, Venezuela, Ecuador, and Georgia. The difference lies in the method; Democrats believe that soft power works, while Republicans think that hard power yields results faster. That is the reason behind this recent cutoff of aid. The main goal remains unchanged, with an emphasis on achieving results."

## NED primary source of funding

Gholamzadeh stresses that a significant portion of these expenditures, especially in the non-governmental sector, has been carried out through the National Endowment for Democracy (NED). The story of NED's formation is that after the coup in Chile, the US Congress was upset that the government had spent money on the coup without permission. As a result, Congress banned any actions aimed at regime change or coups. After this incident, the Americans decided to establish NED.



Security personnel work as the USAID building sits closed to employees after a memo was issued advising agency personnel to work remotely, in Washington, D.C., US, on February 3, 2025.

● KENT NISHIMURA/REUTERS



“The first president of NED explicitly stated in his inaugural speech that NED was established to do the same things that the CIA used to do but was no longer allowed to do, namely, coups and regime changes that Congress had banned,” Gholamzadeh said. The expert clarifies that such costs are covered and managed by USAID. “Some of these costs are borne by government resources, which is a different story. However, NED provides a significant portion of these types of funds that are received by anti-Iran activists and discussed in the media. In other words, USAID had the budget, and NED decided how much to allocate to whom. For instance, in Yemen, between 2007 and 2011, around \$4 million was paid to 40 organizations. In Tunisia, \$2.5 million, in Libya \$1.2 million, in Lebanon, which is currently experiencing significant developments, around \$4 million, and in Jordan, up to \$4 million has been spent.”

Role in overthrow of Hosni Mubarak

Gholamzadeh explains the role of US foreign investment in interfering with the affairs of countries, citing Egypt as an example: “One of the largest expenditures of these funds was in Egypt. To better understand how it works, it’s enough to know that during five fateful years, more than \$8.5 million was paid to over 50 organizations in Egypt. What were the

of Iran, significant expenditures have been made. For example, the Boroumand Center, which has received funding from NED since Iran’s Islamic Revolution, has been active in the field of human rights.” Another example, he says, is that between 2010 and 2015, one of NED’s expenditures in Iran was to promote the idea that the Iranian government was mismanaging natural resources, specifically water. The result of this effort was Netanyahu’s famous clip, where he held up a glass of water and told the Iranian people that they deserved clean drinking water. “Similar scenarios have been implemented in Georgia, Ukraine, and other countries, often under the name of George Soros, but a significant portion of the funding came from NED,” Gholamzadeh added.

NED’s activities in Iran

Gholamzadeh believes that the goals for which these funds are spent are diverse, but the focus is mainly on Latin America, West Asia, North Africa, and the Caucasus. In other words, NED’s activities in these regions are more extensive than in other parts of the world. “In Iran, in 2021, some of NED’s expenditures were allocated to its subsidiaries. For example, one of them was related to supporting marginalized minority rights. A legal magazine related to human rights also received funding from these sources. In addition, NED has spent mon-



Center for Human Rights in Iran were all funded by NED. However, I don’t recall IranWire receiving funding from NED; it probably received direct funding from the US Department of State. During his first term, Trump tried to change USAID, but he

this change as follows: “Between 2005 and 2010, NED tried to infiltrate Iraqi society and create a social base. A person who was 20 years old in 2005 would be 30 years old in 2015 and ready to enter the government. So, NED educated, networked, and injected these individuals into the Iraqi government. At this stage, they were taught a specific language and content under the name of ‘good governance’ to enable them to achieve US interests in Iraq. The same model can be seen in Egypt, Yemen, Bahrain, and other countries.”

Footprint of US Department of State

Gholamzadeh concludes by attributing the root of the new Trump administration’s decisions, including the cutoff of foreign aid, to Trump’s strategy for a new leap forward: “The important point is that Trump is currently retreating to prepare for a leap forward. He is trying to internalize, strengthen his financial resources, and put the economy in a better shape — since the US has significant economic problems. However, this does not mean they are in a state of crisis, but rather that they need to manage and optimize their expenses to have a freer hand in pursuing their expansionist goals.” In the previous period, the Iranian expert contends, such problems did not exist to this extent, and Trump’s efforts were not very successful either. Now, he



The shift in foreign policy under Trump does not mean that the previous methods were bad, but rather that they were ineffective in Trump’s view. The goal that both parties share is regime change in countries like Iran, Venezuela, Ecuador, and Georgia. The difference lies in the method; Democrats believe that soft power works, while Republicans think that hard power yields results faster. That is the reason behind this recent cutoff of aid. The main goal remains unchanged, with an emphasis on achieving results.



A woman holds a placard outside the USAID building, after billionaire Elon Musk, who is heading US President Donald Trump’s drive to shrink the federal government, said work is underway to shut down the US foreign aid agency USAID, in Washington, US, on February 3, 2025. ● KENT NISHIMURA/REUTERS

is using coercive methods. He wanted to completely halt the working of this structure and reorganize it in a different way. However, he has exempted Israel and Egypt from this policy. Israel is a strategic ally of the US, and in the case of Egypt, its strategic importance, the US’s role in training the Egyptian army, and the fact that the US provides a significant portion of the Egyptian army’s budget are the reasons for this exemption. “The Suez Canal and Egypt’s strategic security are crucial for the US, both geographically and in terms of regional relations. Therefore, Washington does not want to put economic pressure on Egypt or lose the country under any circumstances.”

The article first appeared in the Persian-language newspaper Farhikhtegan.



US Secretary of State Marco Rubio confirms that he is now the acting director of the US Agency for International Development (USAID), during a visit to aircraft maintenance firm Aeroman in San Luis Talpa, El Salvador, on February 3, 2025. ● MARK SCHIEFELBEIN/AP



US President Donald Trump signs an executive order at the Oval Office of the White House in Washington, D.C., US, on February 4, 2025. ● ERIC LEE/THE NEW YORK TIMES

results of these expenditures? The overthrow of Hosni Mubarak and the rise of Mohamed Morsi.” He notes that the same protests that took place in Tahrir Square during Morsi’s era in 2013 were also organized by three or four organizations that had received funding from NED. Apparently, even one or two of the men behind these groups were US residents. They played a key role in organizing the protests that led to Morsi’s overthrow. This, he maintains, is a clear example of how these funds work.

NED planned Netanyahu’s jibe at Iran

The expert continues to explain NED’s role in implementing anti-Iran propaganda campaigns based on finding flaws and injecting despair, saying, “In the case

ey under the pretext of ‘environmental accountability’ and ‘checking public information to promote accountability’. In the fields of freedom of information, journalism, and human rights, NED has been active in Iran over the years. Until around 2012, NED published its financial reports in full, detailing the amount of money paid to each organization in Iran.” However, he adds, during the same period, tensions arose in Egypt, particularly during the late Mubarak era and the early Obama administration, when one of the activists associated with NED, who was the son of the then-US secretary of transportation, was arrested. He was working with one of the organizations supported by NED in Egypt. This arrest and the resulting tensions, combined with the issues that arose between Iran and Egypt, led NED to stop publishing the names of many of these organizations in its reports and to limit the financial information it released. “Tavaana, Boroumand, and the

was unsuccessful in Congress. He attempted to bring USAID under the control of the Department of State and centralize its management, but he was not authorized to do so. Now, he is effectively doing the same thing. The current head of the organization is appointed by the Department of State and manages it.” Gholamzadeh expanded his analysis to include Iraq, saying: “For example, in Iraq, NED claims to be a non-governmental organization (NGO), and its tax documents are registered as such. However, 99.8% of its budget comes from the US government, and only 0.2% comes from the sale of products, books, and other resources. However, NED highlights this 0.2% as a sign of its independence and ignores the rest of its funding.” In Iraq, between 2005 and 2015, NED’s main activities focused on empowering women and young people, as well as civil and social issues. However, after 2015, there was a change in approach, and the main focus shifted to “good governance”. He analyzes the reason for





“The first president of NED explicitly stated in his inaugural speech that NED was established to do the same things that the CIA used to do but was no longer allowed to do, namely, coups and regime changes that Congress had banned,” Gholamzadeh said. The expert clarifies that such costs are covered and managed by USAID. “Some of these costs are borne by government resources, which is a different story. However, NED provides a significant portion of these types of funds that are received by anti-Iran activists and discussed in the media. In other words, USAID had the budget, and NED decided how much to allocate to whom. For instance, in Yemen, between 2007 and 2011, around \$4 million was paid to 40 organizations. In Tunisia, \$2.5 million, in Libya \$1.2 million, in Lebanon, which is currently experiencing significant developments, around \$4 million, and in Jordan, up to \$4 million has been spent.”

Role in overthrow of Hosni Mubarak

Gholamzadeh explains the role of US foreign investment in interfering with the affairs of countries, citing Egypt as an example: “One of the largest expenditures of these funds was in Egypt. To better understand how it works, it’s enough to know that during five fateful years, more than \$8.5 million was paid to over 50 organizations in Egypt. What were the

of Iran, significant expenditures have been made. For example, the Boroumand Center, which has received funding from NED since Iran’s Islamic Revolution, has been active in the field of human rights.” Another example, he says, is that between 2010 and 2015, one of NED’s expenditures in Iran was to promote the idea that the Iranian government was mismanaging natural resources, specifically water. The result of this effort was Netanyahu’s famous clip, where he held up a glass of water and told the Iranian people that they deserved clean drinking water. “Similar scenarios have been implemented in Georgia, Ukraine, and other countries, often under the name of George Soros, but a significant portion of the funding came from NED,” Gholamzadeh added.

NED’s activities in Iran

Gholamzadeh believes that the goals for which these funds are spent are diverse, but the focus is mainly on Latin America, West Asia, North Africa, and the Caucasus. In other words, NED’s activities in these regions are more extensive than in other parts of the world. “In Iran, in 2021, some of NED’s expenditures were allocated to its subsidiaries. For example, one of them was related to supporting marginalized minority rights. A legal magazine related to human rights also received funding from these sources. In addition, NED has spent mon-



Center for Human Rights in Iran were all funded by NED. However, I don’t recall IranWire receiving funding from NED; it probably received direct funding from the US Department of State. During his first term, Trump tried to change USAID, but he

this change as follows: “Between 2005 and 2010, NED tried to infiltrate Iraqi society and create a social base. A person who was 20 years old in 2005 would be 30 years old in 2015 and ready to enter the government. So, NED educated, networked, and injected these individuals into the Iraqi government. At this stage, they were taught a specific language and content under the name of ‘good governance’ to enable them to achieve US interests in Iraq. The same model can be seen in Egypt, Yemen, Bahrain, and other countries.”

Footprint of US Department of State

Gholamzadeh concludes by attributing the root of the new Trump administration’s decisions, including the cutoff of foreign aid, to Trump’s strategy for a new leap forward: “The important point is that Trump is currently retreating to prepare for a leap forward. He is trying to internalize, strengthen his financial resources, and put the economy in a better shape — since the US has significant economic problems. However, this does not mean they are in a state of crisis, but rather that they need to manage and optimize their expenses to have a freer hand in pursuing their expansionist goals.” In the previous period, the Iranian expert contends, such problems did not exist to this extent, and Trump’s efforts were not very successful either. Now, he



The shift in foreign policy under Trump does not mean that the previous methods were bad, but rather that they were ineffective in Trump’s view. The goal that both parties share is regime change in countries like Iran, Venezuela, Ecuador, and Georgia. The difference lies in the method; Democrats believe that soft power works, while Republicans think that hard power yields results faster. That is the reason behind this recent cutoff of aid. The main goal remains unchanged, with an emphasis on achieving results.



A woman holds a placard outside the USAID building, after billionaire Elon Musk, who is heading US President Donald Trump’s drive to shrink the federal government, said work is underway to shut down the US foreign aid agency USAID, in Washington, US, on February 3, 2025. ● KENT NISHIMURA/REUTERS

is using coercive methods. He wanted to completely halt the working of this structure and reorganize it in a different way. However, he has exempted Israel and Egypt from this policy. Israel is a strategic ally of the US, and in the case of Egypt, its strategic importance, the US’s role in training the Egyptian army, and the fact that the US provides a significant portion of the Egyptian army’s budget are the reasons for this exemption. “The Suez Canal and Egypt’s strategic security are crucial for the US, both geographically and in terms of regional relations. Therefore, Washington does not want to put economic pressure on Egypt or lose the country under any circumstances.”

The article first appeared in the Persian-language newspaper Farhikhtegan.



US Secretary of State Marco Rubio confirms that he is now the acting director of the US Agency for International Development (USAID), during a visit to aircraft maintenance firm Aeroman in San Luis Talpa, El Salvador, on February 3, 2025. ● MARK SCHIEFELBEIN/AP



US President Donald Trump signs an executive order at the Oval Office of the White House in Washington, D.C., US, on February 4, 2025. ● ERIC LEE/THE NEW YORK TIMES

results of these expenditures? The overthrow of Hosni Mubarak and the rise of Mohamed Morsi.” He notes that the same protests that took place in Tahrir Square during Morsi’s era in 2013 were also organized by three or four organizations that had received funding from NED. Apparently, even one or two of the men behind these groups were US residents. They played a key role in organizing the protests that led to Morsi’s overthrow. This, he maintains, is a clear example of how these funds work.

NED planned Netanyahu’s jibe at Iran

The expert continues to explain NED’s role in implementing anti-Iran propaganda campaigns based on finding flaws and injecting despair, saying, “In the case

ey under the pretext of ‘environmental accountability’ and ‘checking public information to promote accountability’. In the fields of freedom of information, journalism, and human rights, NED has been active in Iran over the years. Until around 2012, NED published its financial reports in full, detailing the amount of money paid to each organization in Iran.” However, he adds, during the same period, tensions arose in Egypt, particularly during the late Mubarak era and the early Obama administration, when one of the activists associated with NED, who was the son of the then-US secretary of transportation, was arrested. He was working with one of the organizations supported by NED in Egypt. This arrest and the resulting tensions, combined with the issues that arose between Iran and Egypt, led NED to stop publishing the names of many of these organizations in its reports and to limit the financial information it released. “Tavaana, Boroumand, and the

was unsuccessful in Congress. He attempted to bring USAID under the control of the Department of State and centralize its management, but he was not authorized to do so. Now, he is effectively doing the same thing. The current head of the organization is appointed by the Department of State and manages it.” Gholamzadeh expanded his analysis to include Iraq, saying: “For example, in Iraq, NED claims to be a non-governmental organization (NGO), and its tax documents are registered as such. However, 99.8% of its budget comes from the US government, and only 0.2% comes from the sale of products, books, and other resources. However, NED highlights this 0.2% as a sign of its independence and ignores the rest of its funding.” In Iraq, between 2005 and 2015, NED’s main activities focused on empowering women and young people, as well as civil and social issues. However, after 2015, there was a change in approach, and the main focus shifted to “good governance”. He analyzes the reason for





## AFC U20 Asian Cup:

## Iran off to flyer with Indonesia rout

## Sports Desk

Iran's bid for a fifth title at the AFC U20 Asian Cup got off to an emphatic start as Hossein Abdi's young guns routed Indonesia 3-0 in their Group C opener in Shenzhen, China.

Goals from Hesam Nafari, Esmaeil Qolizadeh and Mobin Dehqan put Iran on top of the group table, thanks to a superior goal difference over defending champion Uzbekistan, which defeated Yemen 1-0 earlier on Thursday.

Abdi's boys started on the front foot and took the lead with five minutes into the game when the ball bounced off defender Nafari in a packed penalty box and into the net.

Iran had to wait until the 63rd minute for a second goal, with Qolizadeh unleashing a spectacular volley on Nima Andarz's cross that flew past Indonesian keeper Achmad Zidan.

Dehqan secured maximum points for Iran seven minutes later, heading home Qolizadeh corner kick.

Iran will be chasing a second victory in the tournament against Yemen on Sunday, with Wednesday's game against Uzbekistan likely to decide the group winner.



Iranian players celebrate a goal during a 3-0 victory over Indonesia at the AFC U20 Asian Cup in Shenzhen, China, on February 13, 2025.

● AFC

"In any tournament we have to take the points first. We have to see what we can do in the next match, focus on our opponents' weaknesses and use that."

"All the teams here are the best in Asia, they're trying hard and ready to win the tournament. We have to think carefully, which is why I'm taking it from match to match."

Indonesia, which was unbeaten in the qualifiers, picked up the pace in the second half, but either failed to convert its chances or found custodian Arsha Shakouri a stumbling block. "We did not play badly, but failed to anticipate Iran's set-pieces and corner kicks," said head coach Indra Syafri. "They are a good team, played a good game and had an advantage over us in their crossing and high balls."

"But on our part, we were weak in one-on-ones and failed to take advantage of our speed."

The top two in each group will progress to the last eight, with the four semi-finalists qualifying for September's under-20 World Cup in Chile.

Abdi, who led Iran to the U-17 World Cup last 16 in

2023, was pleased with the first-day result but acknowledged there is room for improvement in the

future games.

"We should have scored more goals in the first half, but the second half was an

improvement," said Abdi, adding that their opponents were strong, aggressive and good at keeping the ball.

## WTT Youth Contender Cappadocia 2025:

## Iran's Faraji, Yavari settle for runner-up trophies

## Sports Desk

Iranian table tennis players won three trophies, including two runner-up titles, at the WTT Youth Contender event in Cappadocia, Turkey.

Representing the country in the U17 boys' singles event, Benjamin Faraji, who won a historic under-15 bronze in last year's World Youth Cham-

pionships, overcame opponents from Venezuela and Azerbaijan to reach the final showpiece but fell to a 3-2 setback (9-11, 11-9, 11-5, 4-11, 12-10) against home-favorite Gorkem Ocal.

Iranian girl Vania Yavari also finished her under-17 campaign with a runner-up trophy.

Yavari defeated three players from Hong Kong

for a place in the final, before suffering defeat in straight games (11-8, 11-6, 11-6) against Loy Ming Ying of Singapore.

Yavari's fellow-Iranian girl Setayesh Iloukhani had settled for a joint third-place finish – alongside Yuen Sum Lok of Hong Kong – in the same age group after a last-four loss to the Singaporean player.



Iranian table tennis players Benjamin Faraji (2nd L) and Vania Yavari (2nd R) pose with their runner-up trophies at the WTT Youth Contender event in Cappadocia, Turkey, on Feb. 13, 2025.

● ITTF

## Sports Desk

Iranian prodigy Seyyed Mohammad Mirbaqeri won a second medal at the Asian Road Cycling Championships, grabbing the silver medal in the men's junior road race event in Phitsanulok, Thailand.

Mirbaqeri, 18, clocked 2:40:20 to finish runner-up to Hong Kong's Hon Man Yip, who crossed the finish line in 2:40:17 hours, with the host's Thanapat Sakuntae in third place.

This was a second medal for the Iranian cyclist in the competition, after he had won the individual time trial gold medal, thanks to a fastest time of 26:30.690 minutes in the final.

Koshi Narita of Japan took the silver with 26:34.216, with Indian Dendra Aditama Purniawan clocking 26:40.788 for the bronze medal.

## Asian Road Cycling Championships:

## Iranian teenager Mirbaqeri wins road race silver



## Iranian Hazfi Cup:

## Esteghlal beats Shams Azar in extra time, Foolad stunned by Paykan

## Sports Desk

Ramin Rezaeian found the net in the fifth minute of extra time to lead Esteghlal to a 2-1 victory at Shams Azar in the Iranian Hazfi Cup – Memorial of Khorramshahr Liberation on Thursday.

Winter-signing striker Mohammadreza Azadi gave the Tehran Blues a 27th-minute lead, before the host's Ahmadreza Zenderouh forced the

tie into extra time with a 94th-minute equalizer.

Alireza Koushki and Saleh Hardani received their marching orders as the visitors went down to nine men in the closing stages of extra time but held on to progress to the quarter-finals.

Elsewhere, second-tier club Paykan rallied from a two-goal deficit to beat Foolad Khuzestan 3-2, courtesy of Afshin Sadeqi's 106th-minute winner.



● FFIRI



# Untouched beauty of Chal Kandi Valley in Dezful



● youtopin.com



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## Iranica Desk

Chal Kandi is a breathtaking valley carved by the Dez River in Dezful, Khuzestan Province. Towering cliffs and the erosive power of water have sculpted stunning landscapes, making it one of Dezful's most beautiful and pristine attractions. Its moderate climate provides a welcome escape from the heat, drawing tourists during the warmer months.

Nature enthusiasts will find hiking through Chal Kandi, equipped with proper gear, a truly delightful experience. Alternatively, visitors can explore the valley by taking local boats from Dezful or Andimeshk. Photography enthusiasts will be captivated by the abundant reeds and dense grasslands that line the riverbanks. Located approximately 30 kilometers north of Dezful and 25 kilometers northeast of Andimeshk, Chal Kandi Valley is a popular recreational area in Khuzestan Province. The valley's rocky paths are adorned with lush reeds and grasslands, enhancing its natural beauty. The cliffs of Chal Kandi have been shaped over centuries by river sedimentation and high humidity. This pristine stretch of the Dez River teems with diverse plant and animal life. In the upper reaches of



● tourjor.com



● ISNA

the cliffs and foothills, you might spot jackals, foxes, and mountain goats. The clear waters of the river are home to various fish and crabs, while kingfishers and red-billed crows can be seen among the cliffs. The Dez River reaches depths of nearly 30 meters in the deeper sections of Chal Kandi. The depth, combined with the tall rocky walls, creates a significant temperature difference between the valley and the surrounding cities, resulting in a pleasantly temperate climate even on the hottest summer days. The entire Chal Kandi Valley is a showcase of natural beauty. The stunning, winding cliffs are particularly noteworthy, offering cozy spots for photography and enjoying the scenery. The transparent waters of the Dez River are teeming with fish and are a major draw

for tourists. The clarity of the Dez River allows you to see the stones at its bottom. Amidst the rocks, you can find various medicinal and aromatic plants, such as borage and wild mint, whose fragrances fill the valley in the spring. Willow trees stand tall on the heights overlooking the cliffs. Ascending to the upper reaches of Chal Kandi rewards you with breathtaking views of the river and cliffs converging below. The "kat" spots nestled among the rocks offer ideal places for rest and relaxation. Chal Kandi's serene and pristine environment, combined with its beautiful landscapes, makes it a haven for nature lovers. Professional athletes can enjoy canyoning, climbing, and rock climbing over the river's flow. Even those without peak physical fitness

can appreciate the tranquility of nature and the soothing sound of flowing water by walking along the easier paths.

## Fishing

Chal Kandi Valley is a fantastic destination for fishing enthusiasts. The variety of fish and the crystal-clear waters of the river make fishing from the cliffs of Chal Kandi a truly enjoyable experience. Remember to bring appropriate gear and equipment. Be mindful of the fish spawning season, as it is not a suitable time for fishing.

## Swimming and water activities

Swimming and splashing are popular activities in Chal Kandi Valley, especially during the warm months. However, be aware that the Dez River is quite deep in this area, so sufficient

swimming skills are necessary. Jumping from the cliffs into the water, while taking safety precautions, is another thrilling option. You can also experience other water activities such as shuttle rides, boating, jet skiing, and diving. To participate, join recreational tours departing from coastal parks along the Dez River. For adventurous activities, bring the proper equipment and, if you're unfamiliar with the area, seek assistance from local guides. Khuzestan Province, known as one of Iran's hottest southern regions, experiences high humidity in the summer due to the Dez and Karun rivers. Dezful and Andimeshk are also among the hottest cities in Iran. However, Chal Kandi Valley's unique structure creates a significant climatic contrast. The constant flow of the river and the tall rocky walls

moderate the climate within the valley. During the day, the cliffs block sunlight from reaching certain areas, keeping them cool. While you can visit Chal Kandi Valley year-round, the best time for water activities is from mid-June to mid-October. In the fall and winter, the weather in Chal Kandi Valley and its surrounding areas is cool and temperate. However, the water temperature drops significantly, making water activities less enjoyable. It's not advisable to visit during heavy rains due to the river's depth and the risk of flooding. The rocky and stony terrain of Chal Kandi valley is not ideal for camping. The weather around the valley also differs from that within, becoming very hot in the summer. For camping, it's best to limit your stay to daytime picnics and spend the night in nearby towns

and villages. Eco-lodges in the villages surrounding Chal Kandi are popular accommodation options. The village of Pamenar, a short distance from the valley, offers suitable eco-lodges. In Andimeshk, Dezful, you can also find local houses and eco-lodges. Hotels in Dezful and Andimeshk are other convenient options for accommodation near Chal Kandi. When traveling to Chal Kandi valley, it's crucial to have a local guide familiar with the route. Navigating the valley requires familiarity with the paths and swimming skills. If you plan to visit by local boat, be sure to wear a life jacket and follow all safety guidelines. Wear light clothing and comfortable shoes suitable for hiking and nature walks. If you intend to swim, bring an extra set of clothes and a towel. Sunscreen, sunglasses, plenty of drinking water, and a sun hat are essential items for your journey through Chal Kandi valley. To climb to the upper parts of Chal Kandi, bring climbing and mountaineering gear. If you lack experience with canyoning in rocky and challenging terrain, avoid unnecessary risks. If visiting during the colder seasons, wear warm and waterproof clothing.



● foroosheonline.com

## Beauty of geometric motifs in varis-bafi textile art

Technological advances and changes in today's lifestyle have led to some handicrafts losing their usage and becoming obsolete. However, they retain their value as cultural heritage. One such craft is *varis-bafi* (varis weaving), practiced by the Bakhtiari tribe in Chahamahal and Bakhtiari Province. Varis is a type of weave created to meet the needs of nomads, utilizing the technique of *kart-bafi*. The technique has been popular since ancient times, particularly among nomadic cultures. Kart-bafi is a form of strip weaving that is not performed on looms or textile machinery but rather on karts, which are cards with holes. The history of kart-bafi dates back to the 3rd to 2nd millennium BCE. Although this technique has been prevalent



● visitiran.ir

among nomadic peoples, unfortunately, no samples of kart-bafi from ancient times have survived. Research indicates that kart-bafi is still practiced by the Bakhtiari tribe, as well as the Lor tribes of Lorestan and the Shabsavan tribe, visitiran.ir wrote.

The raw materials used in kart-bafi include hand-spun wool, goat hair, silk, spun golden threads, high-quality linen, and cotton. Tools such as karts, looms, wraps, wefts, shuttles, combs, grid papers, and colorful beads are essential for this craft. The type of knot or the

way the thread passes through the karts determines the pattern. In varis-bafi, designs and patterns are created similarly, with the yarn's passage through the karts allowing for diverse designs. By twisting the karts, additional variety can be introduced. When the yarn is threaded through the kart according to the design, and the kart is moved forward or backward, similar motifs are generated along the strip. This technique allows for numerous geometric motifs to be created. Common motifs in varis-bafi include trees, birds such as peacocks and roosters, and various inscriptions, each representing a specific meaning within Iran's traditional culture. Cherry red and gray are common colors, while black and gold can also be found in some pieces.



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# 18th Tehran Int'l Tourism and Related Industries Exhibition draws crowds

## Arts & Culture Desk

People flocked to the 18th Tehran International Tourism and Related Industries Exhibition, marveling at the wonders of Iran's tourism industry. The exhibition drew an impressive 24,000 visitors within just the first day. The event runs from February 11 to 14, showcasing the vibrant potential of Iran's tourism sector, IRNA reported. According to Anoushiravan Mohseni-Bandpey, Deputy of Tourism at the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts, the exhibition features participation from 700 companies, both domestic and international. "Tourism professionals from countries including the UAE, Turkey, Madagascar, Tajikistan, Thailand, Brazil, Indonesia, Qatar, and Russia are showcasing their offerings," he said. He added that 395 square meters have been allocated for foreign exhibitors. In a bid to keep accommodation costs manageable, the government has exempted one to three-star hotel owners from paying certain taxes. Mohseni-Bandpey pointed out the need for improved advertising and marketing strategies to promote Iran's tourism industry. He added, "We must enhance public relations and marketing to develop our tourism sector."

He also pointed to the disparity in tourism advertising budgets, highlighting that while the average spending for tourism promotion abroad is around five dollars per tourist, Iran allocates nearly half a dollar. "We must leverage our beautiful coastlines, invaluable historical sites, and the potential of health tourism to attract more visitors," he added. An initiative to establish rest areas, or "Nowruzgah," has been announced to reduce traffic accidents during peak travel times, particularly around city entrances. This measure aims to provide drivers with safe stopping points during the busy Nowruz holiday season. In efforts to make travel more accessible, the ministry has partnered with pension organizations and hotel associations to offer reduced travel costs for various demographics. "There are 1,470 hotels in Iran, of which 143 are four to five-star establishments. We aim to ensure that budget hotels maintain affordable rates," Mohseni-Bandpay explained.

**Influencers at Tehran exhibition**  
A total of 20 prominent influencers from Pakistan, Kenya, and Zimbabwe visited the exhibition, invited by the Islamic Culture and Relations Organization in collaboration with the Min-

istry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts. The influencers, known for their substantial social media presence, toured five exhibition halls featuring private sector booths and provincial cultural heritage offices. During their visit, the influencers engaged in discussions about Iran's tourism potential with Moslem Shojaei, the Director General of Foreign Marketing and Tourism Development. Their week-long trip includes visits to various tourist attractions across the country, aiming to present a genuine image of Iran to the world through social media channels.

**UNESCO World Heritage plaque unveiled**  
The exhibition also saw the unveiling of a UNESCO World Heritage plaque for the historic site of Hegmataneh. The ceremony, attended by Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts Reza Salehi Amiri, marked Iran's 28th registered World Heritage site. Salehi Amiri emphasized the importance of preserving and promoting the nation's historical landmarks while thanking local authorities for their efforts in securing this recognition. "The registration of Hegmataneh is a significant step in showcasing Iran's rich history and culture to the world,"



he stated, noting that the site was officially recognized during the 46th session of the World Heritage Committee in New Delhi. In a broader context, Salehi Amiri announced plans to increase the ministry's budget by up to 60% for the upcoming year, stressing the need for innovative approaches to highlight Iran's attractions. He advocated for the use of artificial intelligence and advanced technologies to

enhance the tourism experience. "Our aim is to prepare resources that allow people to explore Iran through their smartphones," he said. Despite the challenges posed by harsh weather conditions and unsafe roadways, Salehi Amiri expressed optimism about the successful execution of the exhibition, stating, "We are focused on creating a lively atmosphere that fosters social engagement and community spirit."

## Iran, India unite to perform at Fajr music festival



## Arts & Culture Desk

The third night of the 40th Fajr International Music Festival witnessed an extraordinary concert titled 'Molaghat' (Fusion) at Tehran's Vahdat Hall. The event showcased an enchanting blend of mystical music from Iran and India, filling the venue with a Sufi spirit, IRNA reported. The concert featured performances from the Iranian group "Hello Baba", led by Master Vahid Ayrian, and the Indian ensemble. Together, they offered a rich tapestry of sounds infused with themes of love and spirituality. The diverse instrumentation included seven players on tambour, electric guitar, and daf from Iran, along with harmonium, tabla, and Amano Manish (slide guitar) from India.

Ayrian not only played and sang but also directed the ensemble, driving the performance with a passionate presence. The stage design was meticulously crafted, adorned with glowing candles and flowers at the center, creating an inviting and warm atmosphere. The audience's response was overwhelmingly positive, with Vahdat Hall completely filled, reflecting the high anticipation for this unique musical encounter. The pieces performed resonated with themes of spirituality and love, characterized by repetitive motifs and rhythmic patterns that evoked a trance-like state. This stylistic focus invited the audience into a musical meditation, effectively drawing them into the experience. Beyond the auditory experience, the concert engaged the senses on multiple levels. The

harmonious lighting and the synchrony among the musicians contributed to a cohesive and impactful environment. The tambour players, with their synchronized movements and intricate rhythms, added a visual element that enriched the overall performance. A particularly intriguing aspect of the performance was the collaboration between the electric guitar and harmonium, introducing a fresh layer to the mystical soundscape. This combination brought in harmonic and chordal elements that are often absent in traditional Sufi music, enriching the sonic texture of the pieces performed. The electric guitar contributed ethereal, pad-like sounds, enhancing the overall atmosphere of the concert. During energetic moments, the guitarist employed power chord techniques, elevating the pieces' intensity and crafting an unexpected blend of traditional and modern styles. This innovative fusion offered the audience a distinct experience of Sufi music. Another exhilarating highlight came from the solo performances of the daf player from Iran and the tabla player from India. This part, filled with dynamic and varied rhythms, injected an electrifying energy into the concert, provoking enthusiastic cheers from the audience. The 40th edition of the festival runs from February 11 to 17.

## Iran, Turkey eye cultural diplomacy opportunities

## Arts & Culture Desk

Turkish Ambassador to Iran, Hicabi Kirlangıç, met with Iran's Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance, Abbas Salehi to discuss the potentials for enhancing cultural ties between the two nations. Minister Salehi remarked that, "The language of culture has always served as a stable bridge for relations between nations." He emphasized the historical depth and breadth of Iran-Turkey relations, noting, "Throughout history, there has been a thread connecting our two peoples." He expressed optimism that the cultural and literary background of the ambassador could foster a special opportunity for advancing cultural relations. Looking ahead, Salehi pointed out that 2025 has been designated as the cultural year for both Iran and Turkey. He stated, "This presents an opportunity to initiate positive developments in our cultural ties." The minister assured that the ministry, along with other cultural institutions, is prepared to take necessary actions to realize this goal. He further highlighted the unique bond between the two nations, which have enjoyed centuries of neighborly relations without strife. "There are significant political, economic, and cultural commonalities that can assure both peoples of the continuity of our relationships," he noted. Salehi argued that literary diplomacy could open new avenues for collaboration, particularly in developing literary ties into literary tourism. Salehi added, "Both nations boast respected literary figures. While Konya holds allure for Iranians, there are places in Iran that are equally valued by the Turkish people." He mentioned that Iran hosts various literary events and book fairs, stating, "We must explore how to provide new opportunities for literary diplomacy." The minister also discussed the ongoing Fajr festivals, which could pave the way for further cultural cooperation.

He said that substantial opportunities exist in the realm of artistic diplomacy and media relations, suggesting that closer media ties could strengthen the bond between the two nations. Salehi stressed the importance of religious diplomacy as well, noting the shared religious interests between Iran and Turkey. "They are recognized by all Muslim nations, and their cooperation can help promote rational and compassionate interpretations of Islam, countering extremist narratives," he explained. He also mentioned shared challenges such as family and environmental issues, which could serve as topics for mutual understanding. He concluded by stating that the various facets of cultural diplomacy—including literary, media, artistic, and religious dimensions—can generate numerous opportunities. "Both Turkey and Iran possess vibrant cultural organizations, which can enhance cultural interactions," he said, urging for new avenues to be explored in all these areas. Ambassador Kirlangıç echoed the minister's sentiments, stating, "The two nations are very close, yet unfortunately, this closeness is not well known." He highlighted the similarities in customs, traditions, and history, despite the differences in language. "While Persian and Turkish belong to different language families, their structures share significant similarities," he noted, attributing this to the longstanding relations between the two cultures. The ambassador emphasized that Persian has profoundly influenced Turkish, particularly in religious terminology. He said, "We have learned many religious terms from Persian, and our prominent religious figures, like Imam Ghazali, hailed from the greater Khorasan region." He acknowledged the impact of Persian literature, citing figures like Saadi, Hafez, Rumi, and Ferdowsi as formative influences on Turkish culture. Kirlangıç called for enhanced collaboration, especially in archaeology, and highlighted the importance of religious and mystical tourism for Turkish citizens.