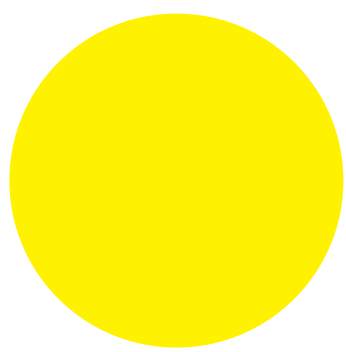


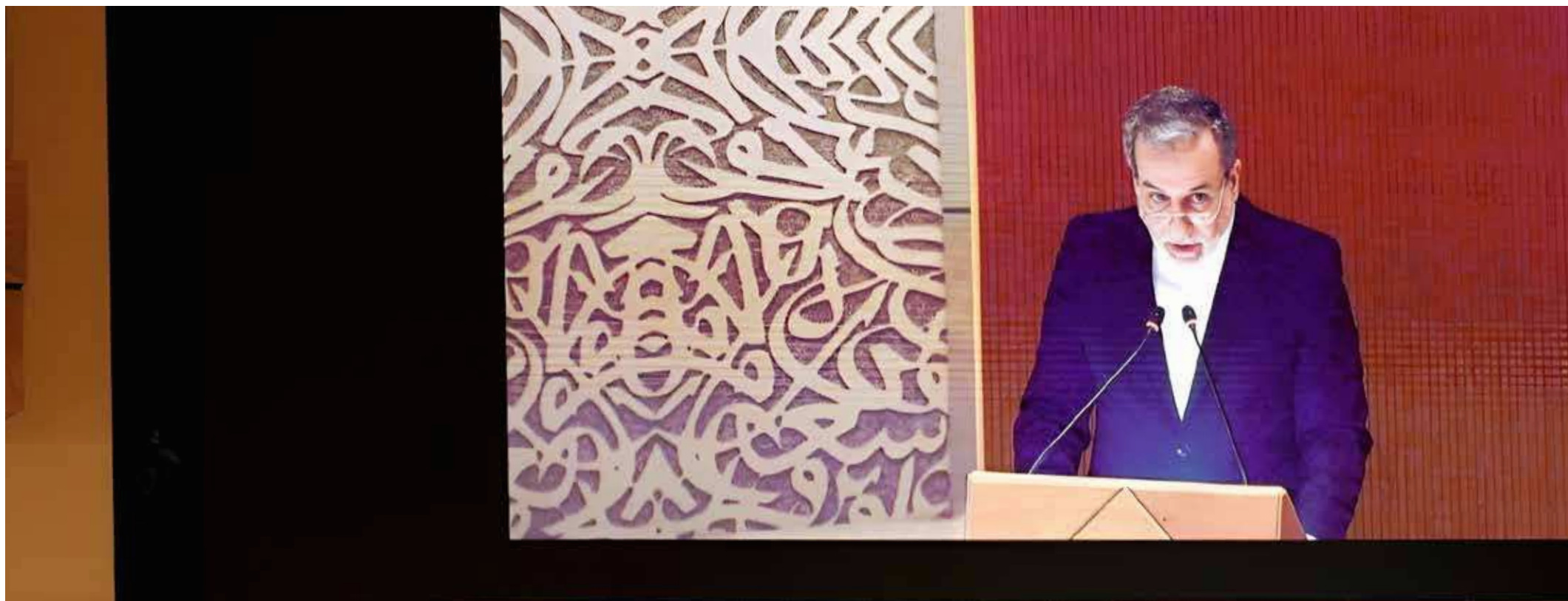
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Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi addresses a UN Conference on Disarmament in the Swiss city of Geneva on February 24, 2025. mfa.gov.ir

Iran-Russia agreement under microscope

By Gholamreza Mansouri
Political science researcher

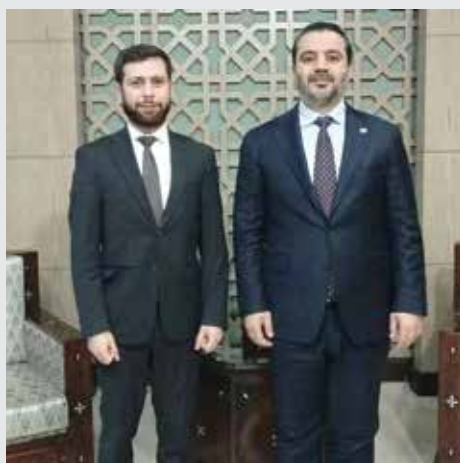
OPINION EXCLUSIVE

Iran-Russia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Agreement was signed just a few days before Donald Trump took office for the second time in the US. Before Trump's arrival, there were two main proposals for solving Iran's problems on the international scene. The first proposal, which gained momentum as a result of the victory of Masoud Pezeshkian in the latest presidential election held six months ago, suggests that the country should turn to the West.

Pezeshkian's main supporter was the reformist left wing in the Iranian political sphere. Championing de-escalation with major powers like the US and the EU, reformists believe that Iran should try to normalize its po-

sition in the world and be genuinely absorbed in the global system and organizations.

Since this formula has been tried and tested before on the global stage, the adherents to the revolutionary ideology oppose it as a deviance from the Iranian Islamic revolution in 1979. The Iranian conservatives, who are quite adamant about battling global imperialism and capitalism under the leadership of the US, believe that resistance against the world's exploiter forces, particularly "the Great Satan," is the only way Iran can triumph. They claim that Iran's strategic position provides it the advantages that we should use to get concessions and further our national interest, instead of begging America and the West for investment and a thaw in relations. These two main ideas have been competing in the country's political sphere for more than three decades. Page 2 >



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Iran warns of non-compliance with nuclear disarmament obligations

'Israel should be forced to join NPT'

International Desk

Iran warned that non-compliance with legally binding obligations related to nuclear disarmament by the world's countries would lead to weakening the disarmament and arms control convention, stressing that the United Nations should put the issue high on its agenda.

Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi in an address to the High-Level Segment of the UN Conference on Disarmament in the Swiss city of Geneva on Monday, expressed concern about the serious threat of nuclear weapons and its catastrophic human and environmental consequences, calling for maintaining the issue of nuclear disarmament as the top priority of the UN and the international community.

The Iranian minister pointed to the erosion of key nuclear arms control agreements, stressing the necessity of the conclusion

of a comprehensive convention on nuclear arms.

He warned against widespread non-compliance with legally binding obligations related to nuclear disarmament, particularly under Article VI of the NPT. "Regrettably, there is no promising prospect for change in the foreseeable future. The international community rightfully expects the nuclear-weapon states to be held accountable for their obligations," he said.

"Despite the increasing likelihood of a nuclear war - driven mainly by modernization efforts and an escalating nuclear arms race - nuclear-weapon states, in particular the United States, are significantly increasing their budgets for nuclear weapons programs." Simultaneously, he added, countries like Britain are expanding their nuclear stockpiles and lowering the threshold for possible nuclear weapon use.

The Iranian foreign minister said the world is currently wit-

nessing increasing resort to the use or threat of force, military intervention, unilateral coercive measures, and political pressure, in disregard to the longstanding commitments to disarmament and arms control. "This is an alarming trend that must be reversed immediately," he said.

"The only guaranteed safeguard against their use or threat lies in their complete and verifiable elimination, accompanied by legally binding assurances of non-production, avoidance of nuclear sharing, as well as non-formation of nuclear military alliances," Araghchi stated. The Iranian foreign minister also said the international community must push the Israeli regime to join the NPT and put all its nuclear facilities under the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Safeguards.

"The international community must hold this regime accountable, and demand that it renounce the possession of nucle-

ar weapons, accede to the NPT as a non-nuclear-weapon party, and subject all its nuclear facilities and activities to the comprehensive IAEA Safeguards," he said.

He said the weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear weapons possessed by the Israeli regime, continue to pose a grave threat to regional and global peace and security.

The minister emphasized that the Israeli regime is hindering the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in West Asia and continues to threaten others with nuclear annihilation.

Israel is estimated to possess 200 to 400 nuclear warheads in its arsenal, making it the sole possessor of non-conventional arms in West Asia.

It has refused to either allow inspections of its nuclear facilities or sign the NPT.

Araghchi cited the evil suggestion of using nuclear weapons against the people of Palestine



Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi addresses a UN Conference on Disarmament in the Swiss city of Geneva on February 24, 2025.
mfa.gov.ir

in the Gaza Strip as a vivid example of the Israeli regime's outlawed action.

UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres also addressed the conference.

He said that security arrangements that have supported global peace for decades are unravelling.

"The bilateral and regional security arrangements that underwrote global peace and stability for decades are unravelling before our eyes," Guterres said.

"Trust is sinking, while uncertainty, insecurity, impunity and military spending are all rising," Guterres added.

Tehran summons Polish envoy over 'baseless' remarks



International Desk

Iran's Foreign Ministry on Monday summoned the Polish envoy to Tehran to protest the "biased and baseless" remarks made by the European country's top diplomat against the Islamic Republic.

The summon came days after Polish Foreign Minister Radek Sikorski criticized Iran and Russia, as reported by The Wall Street Journal, saying the allies had formed "an axis of aggression." Sikorski claimed that Iran was "sending death and destruction in all directions," and urged a coordinated international response to counter its "threat."

The remarks were made after the top diplomat reportedly helped procure what he claimed was a downed Iranian

Shahed drone that was displayed at the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) in Washington, according to the WSJ. Ukraine and its Western allies have repeatedly accused Tehran of supplying Moscow with drones and ballistic missiles during Russia's war against Ukraine, now in its third year.

Iran has consistently denied allegations, stating that it has not sided with any parties in the conflict. Iran's permanent mission to the United Nations has also stressed that there is "no legal prohibition" on the sale of the country's Shahed drone to other countries.

"The Shahed drone is among the world's most advanced unmanned aerial vehicles, possessing exceptional reconnaissance, surveillance, and operational capabilities while maintaining an extremely cost-effective price," the mission said in a post on X on Friday.

"There is no legal prohibition on its sale. Any country that commits to refraining from using it in acts of aggression against another state is eligible to apply for its purchase," it emphasized.

The European Union and the United States have imposed multiple rounds of sanctions on both Russia and Iran over their alleged military activities.

Trump admin targets Iran's oil with new sanctions

International Desk

The United States on Monday announced sanctions against more than 30 Iran-linked people and vessels, including the head of the national oil company, for brokering the sale and shipment of Iranian oil.

"Iran continues to rely on a shadowy network of vessels, shippers, and brokers to facilitate its oil sales and fund its destabilizing activities," US Treasury Scott Bessent claimed in a statement announcing the designations, AFP reported.

"The United States will use all our available tools to target all aspects of Iran's oil supply chain, and anyone who deals in Iranian oil exposes themselves to significant sanctions risk," he added.

Among those targeted Monday was Hamid Bovard, Iran's deputy petroleum minister, and the chief executive officer of the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC).

The United States previously designated the NIOC for alleged providing support to the Quds Force of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC).

Others hit Monday include oil brokers based in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Hong Kong, and tanker operators and managers in India and China, the Treasury Department said.

It accused the vessels sanctioned of helping ship "tens of millions of barrels of crude oil valued in the hundreds of millions of dollars."

The State Department also announced sanctions against an additional 16 companies Monday "for their involvement in the sale, purchase, and transportation of Iranian petroleum," the Treasury Department said.

New sanctions are the second set of sanctions on Iran after the US President Donald Trump revived his so-called maximum pressure strategy against Iran.

On February 6, the US State Department announced its first set of sanctions against Iran's crude oil export to China.

According to the Treasury Department, entities and individuals in China, India and the UAE were all sanctioned.

Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Aragh-



chi in an address to a meeting of the UN human rights in Geneva on Monday deplored the illegal sanctions imposed on Iran, saying that, "In recent decades, Iran has faced various challenges, including terrorism and illegal sanctions."

Iran's top diplomat added, "Some countries are preventing the targeted countries from accessing medicine and other essential items by imposing sanctions on some other countries. We demand the removal of all unilateral sanctions. These sanctions violate the rights of Iranians."

Iran-Russia agreement ...

Now that the world is going through the abnormal condition that Trump has created for everybody, the two points of view seem to converge on the following notion: Trump is not trustworthy anymore. This convergence is not exclusive to Iran, though, since the whole world is conceiving him as a global problem instead of a solution. It seems that the second term of Donald Trump as the US president has turned out to be problematic for the whole world, exemplified by his role in the Russia-Ukraine war, EU-Russia and China-Taiwan tensions, and North Korea's threats against South Korea and Japan.

So, in Iran's case too, Trump is not part of the solution, rather he is the core of the problem. Within Iran, the conservative wing, which was very joyful about an agreement between Iran and Russia,

believes that the inevitable attack of Israel as a proxy force of America in the region on Iran has become irresponsible after the thaw in US-Russia ties; thus, that agreement can act as a deterrent power for Iran. In this scenario, Israel and America will avoid battling Russia due to the agreement's clauses. Trump will never attack Iran directly because of its heavy military and economic costs. On the other hand, reformists opine that Iran must never get closer to the East without considering the current world order which is obeyed by all powers and organizations.

In any case, we are in a new condition that may have not been predictable beforehand. The main issue is the deep intimacy between Trump and Putin. Of course, experts know that Trump is not intimate with anybody in the world, but considering America's issues with the

EU and China, he tries to get closer and closer to Russia, even at the cost of sacrificing Ukraine and the EU altogether.

What about Iran?

Our main enemy in the region, Israel, is in a very bad condition as it has sunk to new depths of moral and humanitarian depravity. But our allies are not as strong as they were two years ago, and Iran's economic condition is not good either. The regional position of our rivals, like Saudi Arabia and Turkey, improved due to how things worked out. We need to cooperate with the world, but our security is being threatened by Israel, which has the support of the US. Russia, as a global power, is in a bad economic and, more importantly, political condition. Now, it is time to pose the main question: What will Russia do about the deal it made with Iran? The answer to

this question lies in the clauses of the agreement: There's not much Moscow can do other than to commit to them.

Then there is Trump's trader personality, which is the dangerous and worrying part of the equation. He is unpredictable and uncertain, and this trait of him could affect the relationship between Russia and America. There's a speculation that Putin aims to restore the USSR territory and governance, and Trump is just seeking to make the American economy first in the world. In this regard, there is no conflict between them apparently. But Iran and its dominant ideology in international affairs could become problematic for both sides.

The main point is that Trump acts contrary to global public order, and even then, he will not be able to do all that he wants to do. His method, which is dubbed "Peace Through Strength," will

not be applicable to every situation and problem. Meanwhile, his most dangerous mistake is the reinforcement of Russia to weaken the EU, China, and Iran. So, we arrive at the paradoxical part of the equation: Iran is an enemy of America but also a friend of America's new friend, Russia. From here onwards, the future will rely on Russia's actions. However, our agreement with Russia will balance the relations and reduce the threats to Iran.

It seems that Iran's best bet is to not rely on global powers, play its own game, and try to create a new regional order in the Middle East. Our optimal way of navigating through Trump's second term is to expand bilateral cooperation with all our neighbors. The cornerstone of this policy could be based on Trumophobia; a fear that will slowly engulf the entire world.

Pezeshkian underscores implementation of maritime-based projects

National Desk

President Masoud Pezeshkian placed a premium on the promotion of sea-oriented projects in the country, calling on officials in the sector to prepare and present a detailed report on the actions so far taken.

During a meeting on Iran's blue economy development plan on Monday, a detailed report was presented regarding the development potential of maritime-based projects, environmental challenges in marine and coastal areas, sources and factors of pollution, the effects of climate change on the Caspian Sea and coastal wetlands, proposals and solutions to address the challenges ahead, and the importance of implementing a blue economy along with other related plans and programs.

Pezeshkian stressed the importance of prioritizing the people and local capacities in the implementation of sea-focused development projects.

The president also emphasized that the issue of sewage collection in coastal provinces must be addressed once and for all through a comprehensive plan.

He also addressed the issue of scrapping (decommissioning and re-

cycling of old vessels), which was discussed in the meeting, and said, "Prepare and issue precise guidelines in this area, taking into account environmental and economic considerations, and ensure strict supervision of the quality of implementation and compliance." Pezeshkian also asked the Department of the Environment to use modern technologies to monitor natural areas online and daily, and to implement policies to prevent environmental destruction and land-use changes, replacing the demolition of existing facilities and structures in these areas.

The Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei in November, 2023 announced the general policies of sea-oriented development to the heads of the three branches of government (Legislature, Executive and Judiciary) and the head of the Expediency Council for implementing them.

According to the communique, the executive branch is obligated to present a comprehensive plan to implement these policies including submitting bills, approving regulations and necessary executive measures within a six-month timeframe, with the assistance of the Iranian Parlia-



Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian chairs a meeting on the country's maritime-based development plan in the capital Tehran on February 24, 2025. [president.ir](https://www.president.ir)

ment, the Judiciary, and relevant organizations.

The draft of Iran's sea-oriented development plan was prepared by the government in October last year.

The geopolitical features of Iran

are considered one of the most important indicators of its empowerment, including turning the country into a regional magnet for commerce and investment.

The geopolitical, geostrategic and

geoeconomic advantages of Makoran Coast in the south hosting a comprehensive sea, road, rail and air transportation network along oil and gas transmission lines would enormously fortify Iran and upgrade its status.

Iran's exports to EAEU post surge in 10 months



Economy Desk

Iran's exports to the five member states of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) during the first ten months of the current Iranian year (began on March 20, 2025) grew by 27% in weight and 22% in value compared

to the same period last year, according to an official from the Iranian Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines, and Agriculture (ICCIMA). Speaking on the sidelines of the Eurasia Exhibition, Ruhollah Latifi, the spokesperson for the International Relations

and Trade Development Commission of the ICCIMA, said, "In the first ten months of this year (starting from March 20), 4.282 million tons of Iranian goods worth \$1.631 billion were exported to the five member states of the Eurasian Economic Union, marking a 27% increase in weight and a 22% increase in value compared to the same period last year." "Russia, with the purchase of 2.107 million tons of goods valued at \$889.379 million, accounted for 49.2% of the weight and 54.5% of the value of Iran's exports to Eurasia. Our exports to Russia have grown by 15.4% in weight and 16.8% in value compared to the same period last year," he added.

Regarding the second destination for Iran's exports to Eurasia, Latifi said, "Armenia, with the purchase of 1.718 million

tons of goods from Iran, accounted for 40.1% of the weight and 24.7% of the value of Iran's exports to the union. Our exports to Armenia have grown by 56.5% in weight and 20.7% in value compared to the same period last year." "Kazakhstan, as the third destination, purchased 390,462 tons of Iranian goods valued at \$227.5 million, accounting for 9.1% of the weight and 14% of the value of Iran's exports to the union. This represents a 1.4% increase in weight and a 38.7% increase in value compared to the same period last year," he continued.

The spokesperson added, "Kyrgyzstan, with the purchase of 49,400 tons of Iranian goods valued at \$95.322 million, experienced a 5.2% increase in weight and a 45.7% increase in value, accounting for 1.2% of the weight and

5.8% of the value of Iran's exports to the Eurasian Economic Union."

As to Belarus, he said, the country, "with the purchase of 17,000 tons of goods valued at \$16.565 million, saw a 2.3% increase in weight but a 3.3% decrease in value of Iranian exports to this country. Belarus accounted for 0.4% of the weight and 1% of the value of Iran's total exports to the Eurasian Economic Union." Regarding the average value of goods exported to the union, Latifi said, "The highest value per ton of goods was for exports to Kyrgyzstan, at \$1,929.50 per ton, followed by Belarus at \$969.15 per ton, Kazakhstan at \$582.64 per ton, Russia at \$422.16 per ton, and Armenia at \$234.28 per ton."

Key export categories

Pointing to the major goods

exported to Eurasia, Latifi said, "While mineral and petroleum-derived products—primarily cement, gypsum, and low-value minerals—made up 60% of the export weight (2.583 million tons), they contributed only 11% (\$175.316 million) of the total value. In contrast, food and agricultural products, comprising 20% of the volume (850,000 tons), generated \$726 million, or 44.5% of the total export value. This underscores Iran's competitive strength in agriculture, which must be further leveraged in the Eurasian market."

Other major exports included polyethylene and plastic products (\$229 million), iron goods (\$156 million), ceramics and construction stone (\$33.3 million), carpets (\$19 million), pharmaceuticals (\$11.5 million), hygiene and cosmetic items (\$3.5 million), and vehicle tires (\$1.7 million).

Stepping closer to clean energy

100 MW solar power plant to be constructed in Markazi Province

Economy Desk

Around 120 companies from the industrial poles in Iran's central province of Markazi gathered to build the 100 MW Amir Kabir Solar Power Plant.

An investment seminar for the private sector in the construction of the 100 MW Amir Kabir Solar Power Plant was held at the Arak Machinery Manufacturing Company on Monday, IRIB reported.

The construction of the power plant aims to provide sustainable energy for the industrial and economic development of the province.

Addressing the seminar, the director-general of the Office for the Development of Small Power Plants

said, "Permits for the construction of 13,000 MW of renewable power plants have been issued in the country, most of which are solar and wind."

"Of this, approximately 2,000 MW is allocated to Markazi Province, and it is projected that by next year, about 5,000 MW of this capacity will be operational," Jafar Mohammadnejad added.

Addressing the same investment seminar, the provincial governor said, "Due to the angle of sunlight and air temperature, Markazi offers the most optimal and favorable efficiency for using solar panels in the country," ISNA reported.

Mehdi Zandieh Vakili stated, "Markazi Province, with 3,800 industrial units and several mother industries, has

shaped the industrial capital of the country, with a significant portion of these industries being formed by the Arak Educational Machinery Manufacturing Company."

He emphasized that the internal potentials of the country should receive more attention, adding, "Specialized and capable forces, due to their knowledge, science, and experience, have gathered in the province, and as a result, any industry or equipment we desire can be implemented."

The governor noted that when faced with a shortage of energy, significant pressure is placed on industrial units. "About 85% of the province's electricity consumption is in the industrial and production sectors, which is not the case in almost any other province," he said.

Mohammad Ali Rajabi
Cartoonist



Main features of Armenia's Syrian policy



By Armen Petrosyan
Senior expert at
Orbeli Center

**ANALYSIS
EXCLUSIVE**

Syria, an important country in the Middle East, has just experienced first-hand the consequences of shifting tides in the world order and subsequently, the regional order. However, for the sake of doing justice, the Syrian conflict has itself significantly contributed to the geopolitical shifts of the late 2010s, intensifying both global and regional competition.

First of all, there would not have been a change of power in Syria if the process of reshaping the world order hadn't entered an active stage following the Ukraine war and the significant waning of Russia's influence. Plus, the victory of anti-government forces in Syria wouldn't have occurred if Israel, taking advantage of the reshaping of the world order throughout 2022 and especially from October 2023, hadn't consistently worked to improve its security by significantly reducing Iran's influence in the region through military operations in Gaza, Lebanon, and Syria. Finally, the overthrow of Bashar al-Assad's regime wouldn't have occurred without Turkey's revisionist ambitions amid the shifting world order, supported by several key Western and regional players.

Moreover, it is important to note that the factors mentioned above also had a negative impact on the micro-region, including the South Caucasus, Armenia, and the Armenian people. Following the start of the Ukrainian war, Azerbaijan, driven by revisionist ambitions, fully captured and depopulated the historically Armenian Nagorno-Karabakh with comprehensive support from Turkey. Subsequently, it forced Russia, which stopped the Armenian-Azerbaijani war in 2020 and had maintained a military presence in the region as part of a peacekeeping mission under the trilateral agreement, out of the region.

The main factors that play a key role in shaping the policy of the Republic of Armenia regarding Syria are as follows. First and foremost, it should be emphasized that Armenia has unique interests in this globally unmatched significant Middle Eastern country. Syria is a key country for Armenia in multiple dimensions, both for Armenia's relations with the Middle East and Arab-Muslim countries, but most importantly for the protection of its diaspora, particularly the Syrian-Armenian community. It is of strategic importance for Armenia and the Armenian people to preserve their spiritual, historical, and cultural heritage.

The Armenian community in Syria is renowned for its significant spiritual and cultural contributions. Before the war, they were estimated at 60,000 to 80,000, residing in various parts of Syria, particularly in the north, including Aleppo, Kessab, Latakia, Damascus, Kurdish Qamishli, Homs, Deir ez-Zor, and other areas. Generally, as previously mentioned, the safe and sustained presence of the Syrian-Armenian community is a matter of strategic importance not only for the Republic of Armenia but also for the entire Armenian nation.

This colony, which is the closest Armenian diaspora to the historical homeland, was established between 1915 and 1923 as a result of the Armenian Genocide during World War I. Aleppo was even referred to as the "mother colony" among diaspora Armenians due to its national, spiritual, and scientific-educational significance. Therefore, maintaining such strategic importance as much as possible has been a primary concern for Armenia throughout the Syrian conflict and remains so even today, especially considering the multifaceted involvement of the Turks in the conflict and, in the current stage, its strengthened influence.

Therefore, given the context mentioned above, the most logical and effective approach for Armenia, whose influence on the Middle Eastern processes is naturally limited, was to establish relations with forces controlling the Armenian-inhabited regions and, through them, to protect the security of the Syrian-Armenian community and its heritage as much as possible.

During the Syrian conflict, which has moved into an active military phase since 2012, most Armenian-inhabited regions were under the control of the Syrian government. Further-



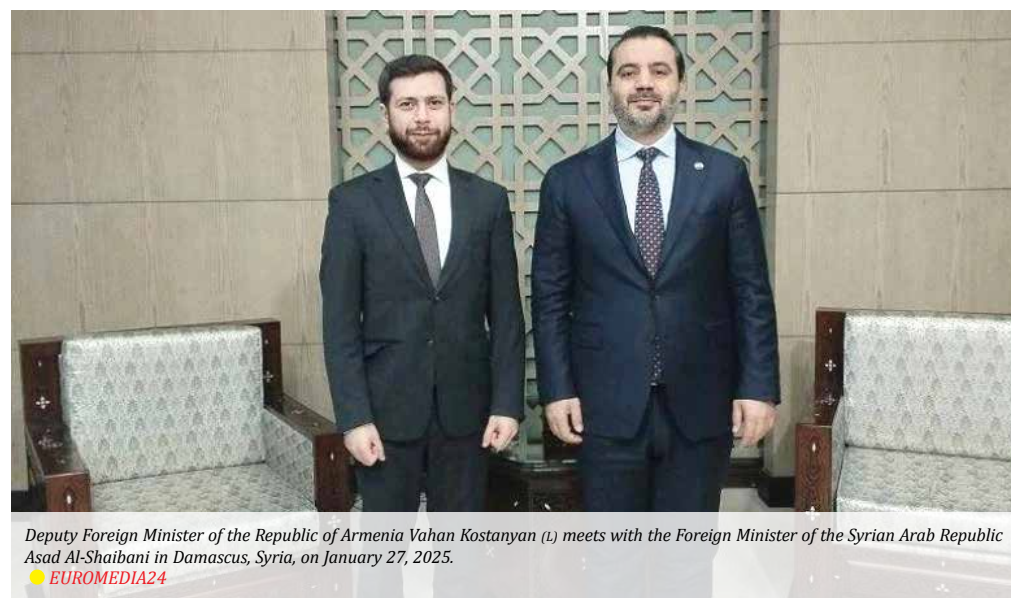
Syrian Armenians in the northeastern Syrian city of Qamishli rally to express support for Armenia in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in October 2020.
● DELIL SOULEIMAN/AFP

more, the Syrian-Armenians who fled regions controlled by various anti-government forces were mainly resettled in areas under the influence of the Bashar al-Assad regime. One of the key reasons for this is that within the geopolitical context of the Syrian conflict. Throughout its existence, on the one hand, the Syrian-Armenian community has always demonstrated pro-state behavior. On the other hand, especially during the rule of the al-Assad family, the community was afforded opportunities to preserve its broad spiritual, cultural, and national identity. That is why several important developments occurred during the active stages of the conflict. For example, the Armenian districts of Aleppo largely remained under the control of al-Assad's forces, and the Consulate General of Armenia in Aleppo never stopped its activities throughout the conflict. Furthermore, the completely Armenian-populated settlement of Kesab, which was deliberately captured and looted by pro-Turkish militants in March 2014, was liberated within three months, ensuring the safe return of its Armenian residents. Moreover, the Saint Martyrs' Church in Deir ez-Zor, a site of profound significance to Armenians, was restored by the Syrian government after the 2014 explosion by the terrorists, following the establishment of the cease-fire. In addition, on February 13, 2020, the People's Assembly of Syria unanimously adopted a resolution officially recognizing

and condemning the Armenian Genocide, thus becoming the first Muslim country in that regard — while Lebanon also recognized the Armenian Genocide in 1997, it is not considered a fully Muslim country. Another important factor in Armenia's policy toward Syria was the warm and significant relations with the former regime. This environment emerged due to a number of objective circumstances. First, the strategic ties with Syria, established during the USSR period, were maintained inertially in the post-Soviet period, including with the newly independent Republic of Armenia. Another important factor, as previously mentioned, was the presence of an influential Syrian-Armenian community, which served as a unique

bridge for the development of relations between newly independent Armenia and the outside world, particularly with Syria. Additionally, a noteworthy thematic fact is that Levon Ter-Petrosyan, the first president of the Republic of Armenia, was born in Aleppo. Another key element shaping close bilateral relations from the late 1990s and through the conflict was the complex relationship between Syria and Turkey, and Syria's strategic cooperation with Russia and Iran. Notably, a similar framework of relations exists between Armenia and these regional powers. And of course, as a key outcome of the aforementioned factors, there is bilateral, mutually beneficial cooperation in international and especially religious organizations. The latter was

crucial for Yerevan, especially given the targeted policies of Baku and Ankara in the Islamic and Arab world, presenting Armenia as an aggressor, an occupying country, and the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict as a religious conflict. Under the influence of the factors mentioned above, Armenia maintained relations with Bashar al-Assad's regime during the active stage of the Syrian conflict. This included even a number of high-ranking visits, such as those by members of the Armenian Parliament in March 2014, and then-foreign minister Eduard Nalbandyan in May 2015. Moreover, following the establishment of a cease-fire through Russia-Iran-Turkey cooperation under the Astana format, bilateral contacts intensified not



Deputy Foreign Minister of the Republic of Armenia Vahan Kostanyan (L) meets with the Foreign Minister of the Syrian Arab Republic Asad Al-Shaibani in Damascus, Syria, on January 27, 2025.
● EUROMEDIA24

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Another key element shaping close bilateral relations from the late 1990s and through the conflict was the complex relationship between Syria and Turkey, and Syria's strategic cooperation with Russia and Iran. Notably, a similar framework of relations exists between Armenia and these regional powers. And of course, as a key outcome of the aforementioned factors, there is bilateral, mutually beneficial cooperation in international and especially religious organizations.

only in the form of visits by several high-ranking Armenian officials, such as the visits of then-minister of diaspora Mkhitar Hayrapetyan in 2018, Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan 2018, Deputy Speaker of the Armenian Parliament Hakob Arshakyan in 2018, but also Armenia deployed an 83-person humanitarian mission to Aleppo in February 2019, comprising military doctors and demining personnel that oper-

ated until the end of last year's developments.

As for the current realities, it should be noted that Armenia's Syrian policy continues to prioritize the development of relations with the new Syrian authorities. After the change of power in Syria, the Armenian Embassy and the Consulate General of Armenia in Aleppo continue to function fully, and contacts have already been established with the new Syr-

ian authorities. On January 27, Deputy Foreign Minister of the Republic of Armenia Vahan Kostanyan traveled to Damascus and met with the Foreign Minister of the Syrian Arab Republic Asad Al-Shaibani. During the negotiations, all possible areas of bilateral cooperation were discussed. In turn, the new Syrian authorities met with the representatives of the Armenian community in Damascus, Latakia, and Aleppo,

assuring them of peaceful and safe living conditions. Ahmed al-Sharaa, the head of the new Syrian administration, also met with Syrian Christians, including the Armenian Apostolic Church, promising to protect their rights.

To make the policies made in this direction more effective, Armenia should also try to use the opportunities that are created by various partner states that have already established

active relations with Damascus including, for example, the UAE, Qatar, France, Germany, and the United States. Another important step in the Syrian context is Yerevan's joining the coalition against the Daesh (Islamic State) terrorist group within the framework of the recently signed Charter on Strategic Partnership between Armenia and the United States. The fight against terrorism, the restoration of the unity of Syria, and

the consolidation of the society are among the key issues facing the new Syrian authorities. Furthermore, the potential return of Armenia's humanitarian mission to Aleppo could serve as an essential step in strengthening bilateral relations with the new Syrian authorities, thereby reconfirming that Yerevan has exclusive interests in Syria, which are above the intra-Syrian, geopolitical, and regional competition.

Reasons for Yerevan's move towards Europe, its challenges

How will Moscow react?

ANALYSIS

Armenia's move towards Europe has led to the enhancement of the regional standing of Azerbaijan and Turkey and a reduction in Russia's influence, prompting the West to continue urging former Soviet countries to distance themselves from Russian influence.

Recently, the Armenian parliament approved a bill to join the European Union in its first reading. The bill was passed with 63 votes in favor and 7 against. This bill was initiated by several civil organizations through a petition that gathered enough signatures to be considered as a bill. These organizations are urging Armenian authorities to kick off the process of joining the European Union. The bill had previously been approved by the cabinet.

This move comes amid escalating tensions between Armenia and Russia, which have called into question Armenia's potential membership in the EU and forced it to choose between joining the EU or remaining part of the Commonwealth of Independent States and the Moscow-led Eurasian Economic Union (EEU). This situation adds further challenges to Armenia's accession process if it moves forward. To address these concerns, Nikol Pashinyan, Armenia's Prime Minister, announced the possibility of holding a direct public referendum on joining the EU or staying in the EEU. In any case, Armenia's decision could rebalance the power dynamics in the South Caucasus, which has been witnessing a series of complex geopolitical shifts.

Moving closer to Europe

Over the past five years, Armenia has shifted its domestic and foreign policies away from the influence of Russia, its strategic ally, especially after its defeat in the war with Azerbaijan and the loss of control over the mountainous Nagorno-Karabakh region in 2023. Armenia has accused Russia of failing to provide military support and is now seeking to strengthen its economic and military cooperation with the EU and the United States. Overall, Armenia's move towards closer ties with the EU can be summarized as follows:

- Support from political and social forces for EU membership: A group of pro-Western political parties in Armenia, including the Republican Party, the Republic Party, and the European Party of Armenia, along with several civil organizations, collected over 60,000 signatures in October 2024 to present a bill to parliament to kick off the process of joining the EU. This number exceeds the 50,000 signatures required for the petition to be considered by the parliament. If the parliament rejects a petition after discussion, another petition for a referendum will be put forward, requiring at least 300,000 signatures.

- The Armenian government's plan to open a way toward Europe: The Yerevan government announced its

support for this initiative on January 9, 2025, and referred it to the National Assembly of Armenia, where it is expected to be approved after extensive discussions. Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan emphasized that the final decision will be made through a referendum, and after the bill's approval, a roadmap for accession will be drawn up in cooperation with the EU, strengthening Armenia's foreign policy based on its interests within the framework of external balancing.

- EU efforts to strengthen ties with Yerevan: Cooperation between the EU and Armenia dates back to 2009 when the EU launched the Eastern Partnership program to strengthen cooperation and provide direct support to six former Soviet countries, including Armenia. Under this program, Yerevan was granted trade preferences with EU countries. In November 2017, the EU signed a Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement with Armenia. Subsequently, in 2021, the European Commission announced Armenia's inclusion in the next phase of the Creative Europe program (2021-2027). Pashinyan confirmed at the Global Armenian Summit at the end of 2024 that his country would not miss the opportunity to join the EU.

- Increased EU-Armenia cooperation in recent years: The EU has consistently pro-



vided economic support to Armenia, amounting to over 211 million euros from 2017 to 2020. In September 2023, the EU approved an additional 5 million euros in aid to help Armenia care for its citizens displaced from the Nagorno-Karabakh region and to enhance social resilience. Pashinyan even attended the fourth summit of the European Political Community in July 2024 and emphasized the importance of

cooperation between Yerevan and Brussels. In May 2024, the EU announced the opening of a new liaison and support office in Yerevan.

- Armenia's efforts to move away from Russian influence: The bill on Armenia's EU membership is the latest step in Armenia's policy to distance itself from Russian influence. Since its independence, Moscow has been the primary guarantor of Yerevan's sovereignty and security, a role that was weakened after Armenia's military defeat against Azerbaijan. Armenia's efforts to move away from Moscow include the ratification of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court in October 2023, which issued an arrest warrant for Russian President Vladimir Putin, indicating his potential arrest if he travels to Yerevan.

Future challenges in joining EU

Armenia's accession process to the EU will face numerous internal and external challenges, which are discussed below.

- Opposition inside Armenia: Arshak Karapetyan, Armenia's former Defense Minister and leader of the opposition group

Armenian Front, described Yerevan's current moves towards the West as a "gamble" and warned that former Soviet countries seeking integration into the EU at the expense of relations with Russia face serious threats.

- Economic consequences of leaving the Eurasian Economic Union: Andrey Klimov, Deputy Chairman of the Committee on International Affairs in the Russian parliament, emphasized that joining the EU would lead to Armenia's exit from the Commonwealth of Independent States and the EEU, with significant economic consequences.

- Regional powers' concerns: Neighboring countries such as Turkey and Azerbaijan are cautious about the increasing European influence in Yerevan, while Iran also resists the EU's presence, which could threaten its regional projects.

- Concerns over Russian retaliation: Observers speculate that Russia's lack of support for Armenia during the recent war against Azerbaijan may have been a reaction to Armenia's move towards the West, raising concerns about similar consequences if Armenia joins the EU.

- Complexities of the accession process: Analysts noted that geographical factors could hinder Armenia's accession to the EU, as the country is not directly connected to EU territory, potentially pushing its application behind other candidates.

Future scenarios

Given these dynamics, Armenia faces three potential scenarios for EU membership: 1) Acceptance after lengthy and complex negotiations, 2) Explicit rejection related to Georgia's membership, or 3) The creation of a free trade zone with Armenia while keeping it within the European framework without actual EU membership. If any of these options are implemented, they are likely to shift the balance of power in the South Caucasus, especially after the peace agreement between Armenia and Azerbaijan, which is nearly 80% complete. This would reduce Russia's influence and prompt the West to continue urging former Soviet countries to distance themselves from Russian influence.



Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan (R) shakes hands with European Council President António Costa on the sidelines of the Munich Security Conference in Munich, Germany, on February 14, 2025.

AFC U20 Asian Cup:

Iran coach Abdi 'proud' despite last-eight exit

Sports Desk

Iran head coach Hossein Abdi praised his team's performance despite a shootout defeat against Japan at the AFC U20 Asian Cup quarterfinals in Shenzhen, China. The two sides played to a 1-1 draw on Sunday but the Blue Samurai came out on top 4-3 in penalties to go through and book a place in September's U20 World Cup in Chile.

Reza Ghandipour gave Iran a fifth-minute lead, only to see his strike canceled out by Kosei Ogura on the half-hour mark.

Iran missed the first two spot-kicks, with Erfan Darivsh-Aali hitting the crossbar, before Pouria Shahrabadi's effort went wide.

Goalkeeper Arsha Shakouri converted Iran's third attempt and then denied Niko Takahashi, but his heroics did little to turn the tide for Abdi's boys as the four-time champion's bid for a first title since 1976 came to an end.

"The players tried their best, and I believe we could have won this game too. Congratulations to Japan for advancing, but I'm also proud of my team," said Abdi.

Iran enjoyed an emphatic campaign in the group stage, making a clean sweep of three victories, including a 2-1 win against defending champion Uzbekistan.

"These players have a bright future ahead of them. I've worked

with them for three years, and I have no doubt they can compete with anyone. This mentality will take them far, and they will continue to improve," added the Iranian, who led this group of players to the last-16 round at the U18 World Cup in Indonesia two years ago.

Meanwhile, Abdi's opposite number, Yuzo Funakoshi, hailed his players' fighting spirit and composure after finding themselves behind early on.

"It was a tough game, as we knew Iran would be difficult opponents but we stayed focused and didn't panic after conceding early," said Funakoshi.

"We didn't try to change anything in terms of our approach. I trusted my players and even waited for the final whistle because I knew they would get the job done in the shootout. So many fans came to cheer for our team. We made our fans smile and we are very happy about that."

Japan will take on Australia on Wednesday for a place in the final showpiece.

Elsewhere on Sunday, South Korea gave away a two-goal lead in stoppage time in a six-goal thriller against Uzbekistan, but managed to come out victorious in the shootout to set a last-four date with Saudi Arabia.



Asian Track Championships:

Teenage cyclist Mirbaqeri wins second men's junior medal

Sports Desk

Iranian cycling prodigy Seyyed Mohammad Mirbaqeri took his haul to two medals at the Asian Track Championships, grabbing a bronze in the men's junior points race event in the Malaysian city of Nilai.

Mirbaqeri, 18, scored 360 points to finish behind Japanese Sota Yoshida and South Korean Junu Jang, who finished on 450

and 405 points respectively.

The Iranian's first medal in Nilai came in the junior omnium competition, where the 18-year-old tallied 540 points for the silver, finishing runner-up to Doyun Kim (600pts) of South Korea, with Sotaro Mutsuda settling for the bronze with 480 points.

It has been a glittering two weeks for the young Iranian, after he collected a gold and a silver medal

at the Asian Junior Road Cycling Championships in Phitsanulok, Thailand, earlier in February.

Mirbaqeri won the ultimate prize in the individual time trial final, thanks to a fastest time of 26:30.690 minutes, and then went on to picked up the road race silver.

The Iranian clocked 2:40:20, with Hong Kong's Hon Man Yip crossing the finish line in 2:40:17 hours for the gold.

Liverpool's Slot warns against complacency after City win

REUTERS - Liverpool manager Arne Slot cautioned against complacency despite his side opening up an 11-point lead in the Premier League with Sunday's 2-0 win at Manchester City. Liverpool are on 64 points from 27 matches, with second-placed Arsenal, who have played a game less, on 53 points after Saturday's 1-0 home loss to West Ham United.

"In every other league, having a lead like this would be very comfortable, except for this one," Slot told reporters on Sunday.

Every game presented the potential for a slip-up, he said, pointing to Liverpool's difficult 2-1 home win against relegation-threatened Wolverhampton

Wanderers last week.

"We are in a good position but we also know how hard it is to play against Wolves," he added. Slot expects another tough game on Wednesday against fifth-placed Newcastle United, who drew with Liverpool in December and are coming off a 4-3 win over Nottingham Forest.

"Now we play Newcastle, we played 3-3 over there, which in my opinion was also a good result ... but we also experienced how difficult that one is," he said. "We work every single day to achieve this and it is three months of very hard work to maintain this. There is no secret. We are 11 points clear but Arsenal has one game in hand."

Foolad, Shahdab to square off in Iranian Volleyball Cup final

Sports Desk

The Iranian Volleyball Cup trophy will be on the line when Foolad Sirjan and Shahdab Yazd go head-to-head in a third major final in less than a year today in Tehran. Behrouz Ataei's Foolad came out on top in straight sets (25-15, 28-26, 25-22) against Mes Rafsanjan in Sunday's last-four clash in the Iranian capital.

Mehdi Mahdavi, mean-

while, will have a shot at a maiden trophy since taking charge at Shahdab, after his team also defeated Tabi'at 3-0 (25-21, 26-24, 25-14) earlier in the day.

Foolad and Shahdab squared off in the Iranian Super League final back last April and then met in the AVC Asian Club Championship showdown in September, with Ataei's men coming out victorious on both occasions.



Foolad Sirjan players celebrate a point during a straight-set victory over Mes Rafsanjan in the Iranian Volleyball Cup semifinal in Tehran, Iran, on Feb. 23, 2025. VOLLEYBALL.IR

Winter adventures across Iran

Iranica Desk

For many, winter is a time to stay indoors, curled up next to a heater or fireplace, sipping warm drinks. However, this season can also be a wonderful opportunity for memorable experiences, especially through travel. Winter travel offers a unique perspective, from engaging in winter sports like skiing and snowball fights at renowned resorts to wandering through traditional markets and enjoying hot tea in cozy cafés. Every part of Iran presents unique experiences for travelers during this season.

Iran boasts a wide array of winter travel destinations, catering to diverse tastes and interests. Some people revel in skiing, snow hiking, and other winter activities, while others prefer to stroll along sunny beaches and admire the tall, beautiful palm trees.



Frozen Shourabil Lake, Ardebil
IRNA

Tehran

Tehran, with a population of over 15 million, is located at the foothills of the Alborz Mountains and offers numerous attractions, even in winter. Be sure to include three winter resorts on your must-see list: Tochal, Shemshak, and Dizin. If you love skiing and winter sports, these locations and their ski slopes should definitely be on your radar. Activities like taking the gondola and ski lift, or hiking, can be enjoyed at the Tochal tourism complex, where a ski slope awaits at the last station of the gondola. Even if you don't venture to the ski stations, you can still enjoy breathtaking views of Tehran from the first station of the Tochal tourism center, known as the "roof of Tehran." Without a doubt, Tehran is a key destination for winter visits in Iran.

Ardebil Province

Ardebil Province, a mountainous region in the northwestern corner of Iran, is recognized as one of the country's premier winter attractions. In addition to its various historical sites that can be enjoyed year-round, Ardebil's hot springs make it a top winter tourist destination. Sarein, a small city located 30 kilometers west of Ardebil, is home to several hot springs worth considering during your visit. Highlights include the hot springs of Sarein, the frozen Shourabil Lake, and the Alvares Ski Resort at the foothills of Mount Sabalan, which is the largest ski resort in Iran.

Other attractions include the frozen waterfall in Sardabeh village, Golestan Valleys — one of the most picturesque valleys in Sarein, Gurgur Waterfall — known as one of the region's most famous springs, and the Vargeh Saran Waterfall on the lush slopes of Sabalan. These spots are just a few of the winter attractions Ardebil has to offer.

Kurdistan Province

Kurdistan Province is another mountainous region of Iran that becomes a major tourist hotspot in winter, thanks to its numerous historical attractions and the stunning Zarivar Lake. Reaching this lake by car is quite easy, but keep in mind that during winter, the lake's surface freezes. It's crucial not to walk on the ice, as it may not be stable and could break under your weight, leading to potential danger.

The Karaftu Cave, located 67 kilometers from the city of Divandarreh, dates back to the Mesozoic era. This cave maintains a warm climate in winter and a pleasantly

cool atmosphere in summer due to its airflow. Karaftu Cave consists of two sections: a natural part and a carved part. The natural section formed between 25 and 65 million years ago and is now accessible via metallic pathways. The carved section is famous worldwide for its meticulous craftsmanship.

The mountain range extending through Saqqez, Divandarreh, and Marivan is known as Mount Chlchama. Due to its elevation, this region is one of the coldest in Kurdistan Province, often blanketed in snow throughout the year. The area's diverse vegetation, including snowdrops, rhubarb, violets, ivy, and thousands of other plants, adds to its beauty. The highest peak of this mountain range, known as Shahneshin, is a coveted challenge for many climbers.

Tabriz

Tabriz is a cold city that deserves a spot among the best destinations in Iran for winter travel. With its rich cultural heritage, beautiful nature, and stunning historical sites — including mosques, churches, castles, and other attractions — Tabriz offers an excellent tourist experience year-round, with a unique ambiance in winter.

Some of the top tourist attractions in Tabriz include: Tabriz Bazaar. Recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, this bustling bazaar stretches for one kilometer and is the largest covered bazaar in the world. It features beautiful arches and domes, striking brick structures, and shops selling a variety of products, making it one of Tabriz's main attractions.

In addition, other notable sites include the Blue Mosque, Alishah Citadel, Elgoli Park, Kandovan Village (located 60 kilometers from Tabriz), and Mount Eynali. These scenic spots allow visitors to enjoy unique natural landscapes during their winter travels.

With such diverse climates and attractions, Iran offers a wealth of winter travel options that are just as exciting as those found in other seasons. Whether you're seeking winter sports, cultural experiences, or a warm escape from the chill, there's something for everyone to enjoy. So pack your bags and embrace the adventure that winter travel in Iran has to offer!

Persian Gulf islands

The islands of the Persian Gulf are among the best places to visit in Iran during winter, especially for those wishing to escape the snow and enjoy a mild and sunny climate. Kish, Qeshm, and Hormuz

can be extremely hot in the summer, but visiting them in the fall and winter can provide you with one of the best travel experiences of your life. The Star Valley in Qeshm, watching playful dolphins in Kish, the stunning natural landscapes of Hormuz Island, and the warm hospitality of the southern people, along with exploring the local markets of these islands, will make your winter sunny and delightful.

Chabahar Free Zone

Taking a nighttime stroll along the beaches of Chabahar Free Zone, Sistan and Baluchestan Province, and witnessing the glowing phytoplankton in the darkness of winter and autumn nights is one of life's most astonishing sights.

These colorful bioluminescent organisms illuminate the waves during the colder months, creating incredibly memorable and captivating visuals. This natural phenomenon has made the beaches of Chabahar a remarkable winter destination in Iran.

The city's large rock formations, shaped by water erosion, are also notable attractions. The miniature mountains known as the Martian Mountains, located near Chabahar, have taken on shapes that resemble the surface of Mars due to erosion. Additionally, the coastal markets and fishmongers are worth a visit, offering a vibrant local experience. The pleasant winter weather in Chabahar adds to the charm, making the presence of spring in its name particularly meaningful.

Khuzestan Province

Khuzestan Province showcases the first signs of Persian civilization through its ancient and historical monuments found in Shush, Dezful, and Shushtar. These sites are sure to attract history enthusiasts. The major rivers traversing the delta have created fertile lands for agriculture, while the pleasant autumn and winter climate enhances the appeal of the cities in Khuzestan Province.

Kerman Province

If exploring historical and religious sites like the Ganjali Khan Complex (which includes a market, bathhouse, and caravanserai), the cave houses in Meymand village, the historic cities of Bam and Rayen, the tomb of Shah Nematollah Vali, and the Prince Garden in Mahan isn't enticing enough, it's time to rethink your perspective on tourism.

Despite its desert landscape, Kerman Province offers a unique winter experience. All four seasons

can be enjoyed here, but winter and autumn are characterized by clear, blue skies. To immerse yourself in the desert atmosphere, the vast starlit sky of Kerman Province is a sight to behold. So, don't hesitate to add it to your list of must-see places in Iran during winter.

Yazd Province

Yazd Province is another enticing option. Situated 1,200 meters above sea level, The provincial capital city of Yazd enjoys pleasant weather throughout most of the year. Its windcatchers, among the most creative architectural structures globally, along with its diverse historical and religious sites, make this charming city a must-visit destination in winter. The Zoroastrian Fire Temple is another significant site worth exploring.

Surrounding cities should not be overlooked during your trip to Yazd. Be sure to visit Meybod, with its Abbasid Caravanserai, the Meybod Icehouse, and Narin Castle. The picturesque villages of Kharanaq and Saryazd are also worth a visit.

Shiraz

Shiraz is renowned for its pleasant weather, particularly in spring. However, visiting in winter allows you to enjoy the city's favorable climate and stunning sights while avoiding the spring tourist crowds. It feels almost unfair to describe Shiraz in just one paragraph, as this beautiful city, known for its Persian poets and magnificent Persepolis, has so much to offer. Here are some noteworthy places to visit: Persepolis, Nasir al-Mulk Mosque, Vakil Bazaar (including the mosque and bathhouse), Tombs of famous figures like Hafez and Sa'di, Eram Garden, historic houses of Qavam and Zinat al-Muluk, Shah Cheragh Shrine, Naqsh-e Rostam, Pasargadae, historical city of Darabgerd, ancient city of Bishapur

Iran's winter wonders

Tourism in Iran cannot be easily summarized. Each of these winter destinations is rich with stories and experiences waiting to be discovered. Let's not forget to explore the beauty of Iran! All you need is the enthusiasm and eagerness to travel. The excitement of visiting attractive places knows no season or reason. Iran's winters offer just as many captivating options as its other seasons, making it hard to choose among them since they are all worth seeing. With the travel options available today, there's no room for doubt.



Shemshak Ski Resort, Tehran
visitiran.ir



Zarivar Lake, Kurdistan Province
kojachetor.com



Chabahar Free Zone
cfzo.ir



Alishah Citadel, Tabriz
IRNA

Iranian Cultural Week to kick off in Doha

Culture minister to visit Qatar

Arts & Culture Desk

The Iranian Cultural Week is set to take place in Doha from February 25 to 28, with the participation of Iranian Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance, Abbas Salehi. The event will showcase Iran's rich artistic and cultural heritage to a wide Qatari audience. Hossein Divsalar, Deputy for the Development of Scientific and Cultural Cooperation at Iran's Islamic Culture and Communications Organization, confirmed the event's schedule. Sixty renowned Iranian artists and athletes will display Iran's unique artistic achievements across various fields, including painting, calligraphy, and traditional crafts, the official said. The week will feature a variety of cultural expressions, such as music, miniature painting, metalworking, textile art, and Iranian fashion. The event aims to give attendees an in-depth look at Iran's diverse cultural

legacy. Plus, Iranian films and a photography exhibition showcasing the country's tourist attractions will be part of the program. Initial reactions from the Iranian and Qatari communities in Doha have been positive, suggesting a high level of enthusiasm for the event. The Iranian Cultural Week is expected to be a vibrant and high-quality celebration of Iran's creative industries. Minister Abbas Salehi's visit to Qatar, at the invitation of his Qatari counterpart, will include meetings with top Qatari officials to strengthen bilateral cultural ties. Iran and Qatar have long had strong cultural cooperation, and this event is seen as a milestone in their growing cultural exchange. Divsalar stressed that the core goal of the event is to present "modern Iran" to international audiences, with a particular focus on creative industries and the traditional Iranian sport of zurkhaneh, which literally means 'strength house' in Persian.



'Iran, the Sacred Land' gets kudos, 'Iran, I Think of You' coming next

Arts & Culture Desk

Following the successful conclusion of the exhibition 'Iran, the Sacred Land' at the National Museum of Iran, photographer Herbert Karim Masihi announced plans for a new phase of the project, titled 'Iran, I Think of You'. The exhibition, which captured the enchanting beauty of Iran's art and architecture, wrapped up on February 23, following a visit by Reza Salehi Amiri, Iran's Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts, during the annual Archaeology gathering. The exhibition includes stunning representations of treasured mosques and Islamic structures, as well as significant historical landmarks such as Persepolis and contemporary architectural marvels like Azadi Tower. The 'Iran, the Sacred Land' exhibition, which debuted on February 5, showcased 80 of Masihi's works, highlighting scenes of Iran's civilization, art, and ancient artifacts. A description at the entrance of the exhibit read, "Here is a visual narrative of a story called 'Memo-



ries of the Sacred Land,' an almost mythical tale of the narrator's journey to various corners of this land, accompanied by an elderly man who teaches him the language of stones, bricks, and shadows." Masihi explained that the exhibition featured only a small selection from a larger collection of 800 photographs. "Each time, new facets of Iran will be revealed," he said. The next exhibition, 'Iran, I Think



of You,' is tentatively scheduled to take place at the Sa'dabad Cultural and Historical Complex.

Exhibition of 9th Int'l Fajr Handicrafts Festival extended

Arts & Culture Desk

The exhibition of the 9th International Fajr Handicrafts Festival, known as Sarv-e Simin, will be extended until February 28, in response to high demand from artists, researchers, and enthusiasts of traditional arts. Visitors will have the opportunity to explore a wide array of masterpieces by both Iranian and international artisans, offering a rare glimpse into the vibrant world of traditional craftsmanship, ISNA reported. The festival, which kicked off on February 20 at Sa'dabad Cultural-Historical Complex, has attracted significant participation from across the globe. A total of 8,173 artworks were submitted to the festival, with 7,974 pieces coming from 4,378 Iranian artists, and 198 works submitted by artists from 20 countries, including Tajikistan, Afghanistan, France, Thailand, the UK, India, Uzbekistan, and Ka-



zakhstan. Among the international submissions, Tajikistan was the leading contributor, while Iranian artists from Isfahan and Shiraz submitted the highest number of pieces. The festival aims to celebrate and recognize outstanding works in the field of handicrafts and traditional arts, with an emphasis on both preserving heritage and fostering innovation. The event's closing ceremony, took place, February 24 at Milad Tower in Tehran. Available data compiled

by the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts, Iran's annual handicraft exports currently stand at about \$250 million, with an additional \$250 million in informal "suitcase" exports. However, the global market for handicrafts is valued at \$770 billion, underscoring a significant opportunity for growth. Currently, a selection of 13 cities and three villages in Iran have been registered by the World Council of Handicrafts as "world cities of handicrafts."

Iran, Turkey discuss expanding library and cultural cooperation

Arts & Culture Desk

Turkey's Ambassador to Iran, Hicabi Kirlangic, met with Masoud Moinipour, the Head of the Library, Museum and Document Center of Iranian Parliament, to discuss the enhancement of cultural and library relations between the two countries. The meeting, aimed at exploring ways to expand cultural and library cooperation, allowed both sides to exchange views on

shared areas of potential collaboration. Among the proposals put forward were initiatives such as book exchanges, restoration of manuscripts, digitization of works, and organizing joint training programs, Mehr News Agency reported on February 24. In addition, Moinipour presented a collection of books and materials related to Turkey as a gift to the Turkish ambassador, further symbolizing the strengthening

ties between the two nations. Both sides agreed that the meeting presented a valuable opportunity to boost cultural relations between Iran and Turkey. Moinipour stressed the importance of cultural collaboration between the two nations and introduced the rich resources available at the Iranian Parliament Library. He emphasized the need to increase academic and library exchanges, advocating for deeper scientific cooperation.

The library director also proposed organizing special programs under the umbrella of the shared "Cultural Year" between Iran and Turkey, such as joint exhibitions, book and historical document exchanges, and collaboration in manuscript restoration projects. Moinipour drew attention to joint research in Iranian and Ottoman studies and expressed his support for furthering academic and cultural engagement.

