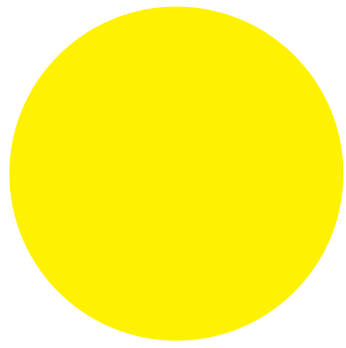


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### Lesson world should learn from Ukraine crisis

By Ali Khezrian  
Iranian lawmaker

#### OPINION EXCLUSIVE

The developments in the Ukraine-US standoff over the past three years send several crucial messages to the world. Firstly, the United States no longer speaks with one voice as a single, unified entity, as its policies shift with changes in administrations. This reality has hit home even for many in Iran when some naively believed that Donald Trump's election could tilt the playing field in Iran's favor. However, as events have shown, that assumption was wide of the mark. While Trump may change course when it suits his interests, he maintains a consistent policy in situations that do not benefit him. In the case of the Islamic Republic of Iran, he has adopted a unified, overarching strategy.

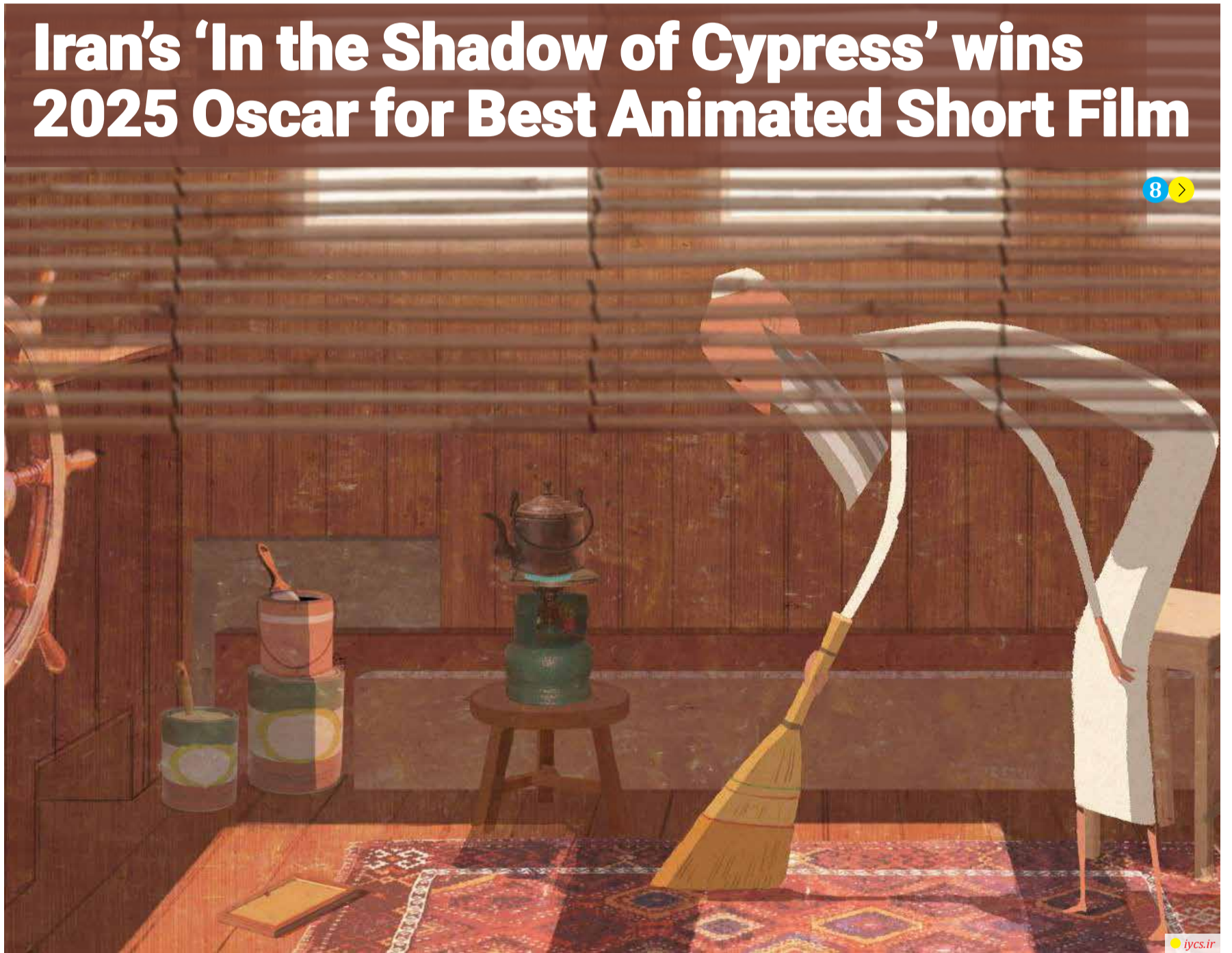
Regarding Ukraine, global public opinion witnessed that Trump did not act as expected when faced with a pro-Western country like Ukraine, which he should have supported. It is common knowledge that President Zelensky and Ukraine were provoked into a large-scale war by the US and the West, and thus, they should have received American support. However, at the critical moment when America was supposed to show solidarity, Trump casually stepped aside, making a deal with Russia and sidelining Ukraine. This sends a clear message to regional countries that relying on extra-regional powers for support in regional matters and pursuing their growth can lead to abandonment during crucial times.

Beyond this, there is an even more significant geopolitical shift taking shape—the growing rift between the US and its European allies. It seems that Europe will be the next loser after Ukraine. In numerous negotiations with Iran and other nations, Europeans often indicated their willingness to resolve issues, suggesting that if matters were settled with the US, they would cooperate in other areas. In practice, they portrayed themselves as followers of American foreign policy and international decisions. However, this subservience to American global policies is now facing a serious challenge, forcing Europeans to decide whether they will continue to blindly follow US approaches in other emerging issues.

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### Cracks appear in Pezeshkian's 'national consensus'

By Gholamreza Mansouri  
Political science expert

#### OPINION EXCLUSIVE

Abdolnaser Hemmati, Iran's minister of economy, was impeached by the parliament on Sunday after just six months in office. Observers believe that the impeachment was a political move rather than a technical one or one driven by national interests. Opposition lawmakers stated that the main reason for the impeachment was a sharp drop in the value of the national currency against the dollar, but experts blame the depreciation on US sanctions and restrictions on oil and natural gas exports. They believe that such an issue was out of the hands of the minister of economy. Meanwhile, the count from the impeachment vote has raised a new debate in the political arena, including one that hints at a betrayal of President Masoud Pezeshkian's motto of "national consensus and unity" by the opposition. At the beginning of his term in August, Pezeshkian

announced the start of a new era of cooperation between all political parties under the flag of Iran and the Islamic Republic. He invited all parties to introduce potential experts to join the government and help it, regardless of their political orientation. The opposition was also asked to come up with proposals to help run the country. Moreover, cabinet members were chosen from very various factions. That is why all Pezeshkian's picks were able to win confidence vote from the parliament without any obstacles.

However, soon after, the critics started attacking Pezeshkian's government. They first condemned the presence of Mohammad Javad Zarif as vice president for strategic affairs and vowed to take action against him, while knowing the importance of Zarif's presence in the government. The pressure became so high that he was just forced to resign at the suggestion of the judiciary chief on the very same day Hemmati was ousted. Second, the opposition supported anti-government protests, though small in size, in Tabriz and also in

front of the parliament in Tehran. They tried to rally the public against the same president who had shared power with them. Although Pezeshkian was eager to bridge the differences and utilize the capabilities of all political factions to restore Iran's position in the world, unfortunately, it was the political behavior of the opposition that prevented his goals to realize. In countries where political groupings are not clear and political parties do not act according to standards, experts believe that slogans like unity are ultimately doomed to failure just like one-sided love is.

Although it is still too soon to judge the failure or success of Pezeshkian's discourse at the moment, it seems that the president is going through a new chapter in his government's relationship with the opposition. The discourse of national unity is now visibly showing cracks due to the opposition's moves although the government seems to be determined to keep up it. However, if the opposition continues to throw wrenches, chances of success for the slogan become increasingly slim.



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# FM spox: Iran staving off confrontational approach to resolve nuclear disputes

## International Desk

Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesperson Esmail Baqaei said Iran has always been committed to diplomatic principles regarding its nuclear issue and has never had a confrontational approach toward resolving the dispute over the issue. "The Islamic Republic of Iran has always been committed to diplomatic principles regarding its nuclear issue, and we have never had a confrontational approach, because the nature of our nuclear activities is peaceful," Baqaei said during his weekly presser on Monday. "On the other hand, we see no justification for others to raise the issue of confrontation," he said, adding that naturally, the answer to confrontation will be confrontation. In 2015, Iran reached a nuclear deal with Britain, Germany, France, the United States, Russia and China, which is known

as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). The US quit the agreement in 2018, during Donald Trump's first term as US president, and Iran began moving away from its nuclear-related commitments under the deal. The US unilateral withdrawal from the agreement and re-imposition of sanctions removed under the deal left the future of the JCPOA in limbo. However, Iran has been trying to revive the JCPOA during the past years and have held several rounds of talks with the European parties to the deal, which their non-compliance to the agreement had a great impact on the implementation of the agreement. There have been speculations on new negotiations between Tehran and Washington on Iran's peaceful nuclear program in recent months, especially after Donald Trump's return to power in the United

States in January. However, Trump's language of threats and imposition of sanctions against Iran have made Iranian officials skeptical of negotiations with the US. Iranian officials say that negotiations under pressure are not meaningful. In response to a question about any discussion about Iran's nuclear issue between Russian and US presidents during their recent talks, Baqaei said that, "There may have been some discussion between the US and Russia regarding the Iranian nuclear issue as one of the international issues." He also responded to a question about whether the Russian foreign minister had raised the idea of mediation during his recent visit to Tehran, saying that, "I have already said that regarding these issues, given their importance, some parties may express their



Esmail Baqaei  
● IRNA

readiness to raise these issues in good faith. Therefore, from this perspective, it is natural for some countries to raise the issue of providing assistance if needed."

## Zarif resigns from VP post over 'pressure and slander'

### National Desk

Iran's Vice President for Strategic Affairs Mohammad Javad Zarif, who negotiated the landmark 2015 nuclear deal with world powers, has resigned from his post.

"Zarif's resignation letter was received by President Masoud Pezeshkian, who has not yet responded," the official IRNA reported, without giving further details.

In a Monday post on X, Zarif said he had "faced the most horrible insults, slander and threats against myself and my family, and I have gone through the most bitter period of my 40 years of service." He added, "To avoid further pressure on the government, the head of the Judiciary recommended that I resign and... I accepted immediately." Since he was tapped as vice-president, Zarif has been taking intense heat by a group of ultra-conservative lawmakers in Parliament who have argued that his appointment to a



Mohammad Javad Zarif  
● AP

sensitive post is illegal because at least one of his children holds US nationality. According to Iran's Constitution, individuals who hold foreign citizenship or whose immediate family members hold such citizenship cannot be assigned to sensitive posts in the Iranian government. Pezeshkian, who took office in July, named Zarif as his vice president for strategic affairs on August 1 but Zarif resigned after less than two weeks, before returning to the post later in the month.

Zarif was Iran's top diplomat between 2013 and 2021 in the government of moderate president Hassan Rouhani. He became known on the international stage during lengthy negotiations for the 2015 nuclear accord formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action. The deal was effectively torpedoed three years later when, during Donald Trump's first term as president, the United States pulled out of the deal and reimposed crippling sanctions on the Islamic republic.

## IAEA chief calls on Iran, US to begin talks to defuse nuclear tensions

### International Desk

The United Nations nuclear watchdog called on the US and Iran to begin talks, suggesting that US President Donald Trump holds the next move in trying to defuse tensions with the Islamic Republic over its nuclear activities.

"High-level engagement is indispensable to making real progress. My visit to Tehran last November, and meetings with President Masoud Pezeshkian and Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi indicate that there may be room for constructive compromises. I hope to see them again soon and pursue effective dialogue and tangible results," Grossi said.

At a press conference in Vienna on Monday after the IAEA Board of Governors meeting Grossi stressed the need for Iran to provide answers.

"What we need is real answers (from Iran). What we need is an engagement that is moving forward. We need to stop talking about process and start getting some answers as soon as possible," he said when asked what the agency expects from Iran.

Addressing broader diplomatic efforts, Grossi said, "An important statement by President Trump was when he said that he wants to have some form of a deal, some form of an agreement (with Iran)," Grossi said. "We need to engage as soon as possible, because time is passing."

The International Atomic Energy Agency is holding high level talks with the White House and would like to see a "more systemic" approach to Iran.

While Trump said last month he's open to a



Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Rafael Grossi reacts prior to the start of the quarterly Board of Governors meeting at the agency's headquarters in Vienna, Austria, on March 3, 2025.  
● ALEX HALADA/AFP

new Iran agreement, he's also pledged to reinvigorate sanctions aimed at choking off the country's oil exports. Tehran's government has rejected talks as long as the US maintains its maximum-pressure campaign against the Iranian economy.

On Monday, Grossi claimed that Iran has boosted its stockpile of near-weapons grade uranium by more than half over a span of three months. Tehran's growing stocks of 60 percent-enriched uranium make it "the only non-nuclear weapon state enriching to this level," Grossi told the IAEA's Board of Governors.

The IAEA chief claimed that the stockpile had grown from 182kg to 275kg in the previous quarter. He expressed "serious concern" at Iran's activities.

## Lesson world should ...

Will they wait until 30% of their territories are occupied, as happened in Ukraine, before waking up from their complacency? Or will they rethink their approach and carve out independent foreign policies?

This situation highlights the strategic foresight of Iran's Leader, who has consistently warned against putting faith in Western powers. Unlike certain pro-Western voices within Iran who clung to the idea that a sit-down with Trump would wipe away Iran's troubles, the Leader saw through this wishful thinking. Even President Zelensky, who had the West's full backing, has now been hung out to dry, how could Iran have expected a different fate? As it stands, Zelensky finds himself stranded, abandoned by

both the US and Europe—a sobering wake-up call for Iran.

This serves as a vital lesson for Iran, one that should be studied in Iranian universities, discussed in political science and international relations forums, and become the subject of numerous academic papers and dissertations. It could even be included in Iranian school textbooks as a historical lesson for Iranian children to understand the nature of dealing with such international powers that care about nothing beyond their own national interests and will trade you off when it suits their agenda.

As for Ukraine's future, with the shift in the US approach, the country should reconsider its actions. Ukraine has already created a war-torn environment with many refugees, de-

priving its citizens of a normal life. Ukraine should swiftly change course and seek peace, aiming to resolve its issues through negotiations with Russia itself, without relying on European or Western support. Ukraine should not invite extra-regional powers into its backyard, provoking Russia's reaction. If Ukraine continues down this path, it will only incite Russia against the powers that abandoned it when it needed them the most.

Zelensky now realizes that the West will not come to his aid. The only way forward is to resolve issues with the help of regional countries, without inviting extra-regional powers into the mix. Ukraine needs to learn from this experience and maintain its independence from extra-regional powers.

Mohammad Ali Rajabi  
Cartoonist



# Parliament ready to support development of private, public sectors: *Speaker*

## Economy Desk

Parliament Speaker Mohammad-Baqer Qalibaf emphasized the importance of synergy between the government and the private sector to address the country's economic challenges during a meeting with heads of Iran Chambers of Commerce, Iran Chamber of Cooperatives, and Iran Chamber of Guilds.

The meeting was aimed at discussing the country's economic and livelihood issues, with a focus on leveraging the private sector's potential. Qalibaf stated that the Parliament is prepared to support the development of the private and public sectors in the national economy, according to otaghonline.ir.

Qalibaf highlighted the necessity of implementing the provisions of the Seventh Development Plan (2024-28), which he said could guarantee solutions to the country's short- and long-term problems.

He stressed that the government must expedite its withdrawal from direct involvement in business activities and transfer economic affairs to the private sector. The government, he added, should focus solely on macro-level policymaking in this area.

The Parliament speaker also underscored the need for fundamental mechanisms to prevent increased living costs for workers and pensioners, ensuring that rising prices of essential goods and inflation do not further burden such groups.

Qalibaf called for regular meetings to coordinate efforts among these public institutions, particularly during critical periods such as the holy fasting month



From left to right, Qassem Nodeh-Farahani, head of the Iran Chamber of Guilds, Bahman Abdollahi, head of the Iran Chamber of Cooperatives, Parliament Speaker Mohammad-Baqer Qalibaf and Samad Hassanzadeh, head of the Iran Chamber of Commerce pose for a photo after discussing private sector issues in Tehran on March 3, 2025.

● otaghonline.ir

of Ramadan and the Nowruz holidays, to address the root causes of the country's economic challenges.

The meeting was attended by Samad Hassanzadeh, head of the Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines, and Agriculture; Qassem Nodeh-Farahani, head of the Iran Chamber of Guilds; and Bahman Abdollahi, head of the Iran Chamber of Cooperatives. They discussed key issues related to private sector activities, concerns, and government support.

## Ready to manage struggling production units

Speaking at the meeting, Hassanzadeh expressed the private sector's readiness to manage inactive production units, urging Parliament members and the government to actively identify economically viable units that have faltered due to poor management. He called for these units to be handed over to the private sector.

Referring to the approval of a government support package to compensate industries for losses caused by gas and electricity shortages, Hassanzadeh urged the government and Parliament to consider chambers of commerce as partners.

He suggested using their expertise to



assess damages suffered by production and industrial units and businesses due to energy imbalances.

Hassanzadeh also called for chambers of commerce, guilds, and cooperatives to have the opportunity to propose bills and plans, enhancing the role of economic actors in national decision-making.

He addressed the contentious issue of multilateralism in determining the minimum wage, describing the Supreme Labor Council's current mechanism as

outdated and in need of revision.

The chamber head proposed that representatives from chambers of commerce, guilds, and cooperatives be included in the council to strengthen multilateralism.

Hassanzadeh emphasized the need to revise the minimum wage model, suggesting that specific minimum wages be set for different occupational groups and adjusted as per regional economic conditions and living standards.

## Prepared to finance incomplete projects

Hassanzadeh also announced the private sector's readiness to participate in financing unfinished projects, offering to provide consultative support to parliament and government officials on practical solutions for funding such projects. He also expressed hope for amendments to the Iran Chamber of Commerce law, aiming to streamline and enhance the effectiveness of chambers of commerce across the country.

## Iranian MP urges economy reforms as ministers cannot 'perform miracles'

### Economy Desk

A member of Iran's Parliament stated that the focus should not be on the economy ministers but on changing the tools and conditions of the economy.

"It doesn't matter who the minister is; they can't perform miracles. The necessary economic conditions and tools must be fixed, and we cannot expect the government to remedy the economy in two or three days," Ahmad Bigdeli told ILNA. Bigdeli commented on the recent impeachment of the economy minister and the current state of the country, noting that the Parliament voted to oust the minister, effectively ending Abdolnaser Hemmati's tenure.

"I hope the president quickly proposes a candidate to avoid further uncertainty," the MP added. Regarding the country's economic outlook ahead of the Nowrouz (New Year) without an economy minister, he said, "I hope the economic team performs more effectively, and the absence of a minister does not impact the market. A caretaker has been appointed to handle the minister's duties and address people's concerns for the New Year."

### Warns of political pressure

A member of the Parliament's Economic Committee highlighted the financial outflow from the stock market following the impeachment of the economy minister, stating that turning impeachment into a tool for political pressure deprives the government of the opportunity to appoint competent individuals.

"No wise person would accept short-term responsibilities for the challenging role of economy minister," said Farid Mousavi in an interview with ILNA. He noted that despite the Leader's emphasis on avoiding excessive use of supervisory tools, the fastest impeachment in a government's history occurred recently.

Mousavi warned that the impeachment would lead to market instability, pointing out that approximately 1 trillion tomans exited the stock market in the first hour of trading on Monday.

"This heavy financial outflow means capital is leaving Iranian industries, 70% of which are production-based," he explained.

### Stabilizing currency rates

Another Parliament member suggested that the introduction of a new econ-



omy minister could lead to a reduction in currency rates.

"The dollar has a unique characteristic—it recognizes people. When it sees Abdolnaser Hemmati, it rises; when it sees someone else, it falls," said Abdolvahid Fayazi in an interview with ILNA.

Fayazi commented on the post-impeachment economic situation, stating that the Parliament exercised its legal right, and it is now the president's authority to appoint a caretaker. He acknowledged warnings that the impeachment could challenge market stability but noted that the Parliament proceeded with the vote.

"Those who pushed for the impeachment predicted that if Hemmati was impeached, the government would introduce a better candidate," Fayazi said.

Regarding currency fluctuations after the impeachment, he added, "This situation may persist until a new minister is appointed, but once a candidate is proposed, the exchange rate should decrease."

## New vessels to join Caspian Sea fleet to boost synergy: *PMO*

### Economy Desk

The deputy minister of roads and urban development highlighted the collaborative support of all Caspian Sea littoral states for the introduction of new vessels into the sea, stating that increasing the number and reducing the age of vessels in the Caspian Sea is now a priority.

On Monday, Saeid Rasouli who is also caretaker of the Ports and Maritime Organization (PMO) noted that the Caspian Sea's entry limitations, which are only possible through the Volga River route, often restrict the arrival of new vessels.

"Therefore, it has been decided to focus on cooperation and synergy to boost the number of vessels and lower their average age in the Caspian Sea," he added.

Rasouli emphasized that a significant issue facing the Caspian Sea is the declining water level and retreat of the sea. He mentioned that all countries in the region are concerned about this, with Iran facing fewer challenges compared to other nations dealing with more severe issues.

He added that it has been agreed to enhance cooperation in both maritime and environmental sectors, given that the retreating water poses risks to various aquatic species in the region. "A comprehensive plan will be developed to address this concerning trend collectively."

Rasouli further explained that each Caspian littoral state, including Iran through the PMO,



has conducted studies, noting that these studies will be shared to foster synergy and enable collective efforts, leveraging the expertise of specialists and professionals from the Caspian region to tackle this pressing issue.

He also pointed out that dredging ports in the Caspian Sea is a key focus in the maritime sector, and collaborative efforts will drive progress in this area.

"Another important topic discussed at the Caspian Sea littoral states' economic cooperation summit was the inclusion of private sector representatives from the Chamber of Commerce. They shared practical concerns about operating in the Caspian Sea, which significantly contributed to the idea of forming a Caspian Sea logistics consortium."

Rasouli noted that one of the issues raised was the lack of air cargo lines in the Caspian region. Economic stakeholders called for an increase in air cargo services to expedite the transportation of perishable goods like flowers and food products to markets.

Regarding digital corridors, Ra-

souli stated that while the concept is new, the world has long embraced such tools to enhance efficiency and productivity.

Traditional corridors in the region still rely on conventional processes, but there is a strong push to adopt technological solutions to accelerate development and ensure integrated efforts among Caspian littoral states.

He stressed the importance of digitizing processes to speed up operations, reduce paperwork, and increase transparency and accuracy in administrative procedures.

Rasouli highlighted that many transport documents in Iran are already issued digitally, and logistics agents operate through digital systems.

The official concluded by emphasizing the need for balanced and integrated efforts among all Caspian littoral states. If any country operates locally without coordination, it could lead to inefficiencies and disrupt the entire process. Therefore, all nations must work in harmony to ensure smooth and unified progress.

# End of war or expensive deal: What does Ukraine give and gain?

A double-edged sword in Zelenskyy's hands: Is he betraying Ukraine's ideals?

By Rasoul Salimi  
Political analyst

## ANALYSIS

As the war between Ukraine and Russia approaches its third year, speculation about an agreement between Ukraine and the United States to end this conflict has intensified. Over the past few days, international media have reported on a draft agreement that is reportedly taking shape under the pressure of the US President Donald Trump. This agreement, according to news sources, includes concessions such as granting the US access to Ukraine's mineral resources in exchange for security guarantees, eliciting varied reactions in Kyiv, Brussels, and Moscow.

New details have emerged regarding the agreement between Zelenskyy and Trump, indicating that Ukraine is content with the concessions made. What are these details, and what did Ukraine give and gain?

accept a cease-fire that would lead to the presence of international peacekeeping forces. The report adds that negotiations are underway at the level of foreign ministers from both countries, with Trump personally emphasizing the need to expedite the process. Experts suggest that this structure of the agreement reflects a shift in the US approach from extensive military support to a more pragmatic strategy prioritizing economic interests. It appears that the Trump administration is seeking to reduce US military expenditures in Ukraine while simultaneously ensuring ac-

phone call with senior officials in the Trump administration. This media outlet claims that the US threat to cut military and financial aid if Ukraine did not cooperate played a crucial role in changing Kyiv's stance. Politico also reported that Zelenskyy received assurances for continued limited support during a meeting with US congressional representatives in Washington, conditioned on Ukraine accepting a cease-fire. Political observers contend that US economic and military pressure has put Zelenskyy in a position with limited options. The reduction of European sup-



US President Donald Trump (R) and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy have a confrontational meeting in the Oval Office of the White House on February 28, 2025  
● DOUG MILS/THE NEW YORK TIMES



Ukrainian servicemen of 148th separate artillery brigade of the Air Assault Forces prepare a M777 howitzer to fire towards Russian positions at the frontline in Donetsk region on August 21, 2024  
● EVGENIY MALOLETKA/AP

### Latest details of Ukraine-US agreement

According to a report by The Washington Post, the draft agreement between Ukraine and the US consists of three main components: long-term security guarantees from Washington to protect Ukraine against Russian threats, granting access to Ukraine's strategic mines to American companies, and pressuring Kyiv to

cess to rare resources such as lithium and titanium, which are abundant in eastern Ukraine.

### How did Ukraine's perspective shift towards Trump's plan?

The answer to this question is significant, as Ukrainian media, such as Kyiv Post, reported that the Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy turned to accept negotiations following a tense

port, due to domestic economic issues in member countries and fatigue from the war, has made Ukraine increasingly reliant on decisions from Washington.

### What did Ukraine give and gain?

Ukrainska Pravda, a Ukrainian media outlet, reported that Ukraine would hand over control of some of its eastern mines to American companies for a

period of 20 years as part of this agreement. In return, the US has committed to providing advanced defense systems and ongoing military training to Ukraine without deploying forces directly. The New York Times also noted that the proposed cease-fire includes temporary border lines that would cede parts of occupied territories to Russia. Overall, this deal represents a double-edged sword for Ukraine. On one hand, security guarantees could prevent further Russian attacks; on the other hand, ceding resources and land means sacrificing a portion of the economic and territorial independence that Ukrainians have fought for.

### What are Ukrainian media criticizing about proposed US plan?

Zerkalo Nedeli, an analytical weekly published in Ukraine, described this plan in an article on February 24, 2025, as "a betrayal of Ukraine's ideals," stating that handing over the mines to the US would turn Ukraine into an "economic colony." The New Voice of Ukraine (NV) also reported on the same day that many Ukrainian politicians believe this agreement will ultimately favor Russia, as Moscow's military pressure would ease without any cost incurred. These criticisms, rooted in concerns over the loss of national sovereignty, specifically focus on the fear among Ukrainian

media that this agreement could weaken Zelenskyy in the eyes of the public and fuel domestic protest movements.

### To what extent will US exploit Ukraine's mines?

The scale of this exploitation reflects the US intention to transform Ukraine into a strategic economic partner, but the cost for Ukraine could be the loss of control over its natural wealth. Foreign Policy also reported that the US aims to exploit at least 30 percent of Ukraine's mineral resources, including lithium, cobalt, and nickel, with a global market value reaching hundreds of billions of dollars. These resources are vital for advanced technology industries and the production of electric batteries. Sputnik further claimed that this move is part of the US strategy to reduce reliance on China in the supply chain of mineral resources.

### EU's perspective on Ukraine-US agreement

The European Union finds itself in a tough spot. On one hand, ending the war would benefit Europe's economy, but on the other hand, weakening Ukraine could lead to increased Russian influence in the region. The Guardian has reported that the EU is concerned about this agreement, as undermining Ukraine's position against Russia could jeopardize the security of Eastern Europe. Le Monde also noted that Paris

and Berlin are calling for a more active role for NATO in any potential cease-fire and have criticized the unilateral approach of the United States.

### Will Ukraine agree to agreement?

The Economist predicted on February 25 that Ukraine is likely to accept this agreement with a 70 percent probability, as economic and military pressures have left it with little choice. However, Kommersant warned that if Zelenskyy signs this agreement, he could face severe internal resistance that might lead to his withdrawal from the political scene. Experts suggest that Ukraine's acceptance depends on various factors, including the level of public support and Russia's response. If Moscow rejects the cease-fire, the agreement would effectively become meaningless. Nonetheless, the Ukraine-US agreement is on the verge of being signed, yet many questions remain unanswered. Will this deal bring an end to the war, or will it turn Ukraine into a weaker player on the global stage? The answers to these questions will become clearer in the coming days, but what is certain is that this agreement will impact not only Ukraine's fate but also the balance of power in Europe and beyond.

The article first appeared in Persian on KhabarOnline news agency.

## Trump-Zelenskyy feud

# Is NATO on verge of collapse?

**OPINION** An unprecedented verbal clash between Donald Trump and Volodymyr Zelenskyy at the White House has brought to light deep rifts within the Western alliance and NATO, further strengthening the possibility of the coalition's collapse. In recent days, an unprecedented public altercation between the President of the United States Donald Trump and his Ukrainian counterpart, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, took place in the Oval Office of the White House, capturing global media attention. This confrontation, which unfolded in front of cameras, not only challenged Trump's policies but also highlighted deep divisions within the Western alliance and even the risk of NATO's collapse.



**Five key takeaways**

**1. The illusion of superiority:** Trump considers himself smarter than other leaders, even former US presidents. He has openly criticized not only Democrat presidents but also former Republican ones like George W. Bush.

**2. The law of the jungle:** For Trump, the primary criteria in foreign policy are "power" and "playing cards". He reminded Zelenskyy that without US military aid, Ukraine would stand no chance against Russia.

**3. Looking down on others:** Trump expected Zelenskyy to welcome him with humility and gratitude. Instead, Zelenskyy responded directly and firmly, which angered Trump.

**4. A desire for showmanship:** Unlike previous presidents, Trump raises sensitive issues in front of the media. He seeks to create a media wave to shape public opinion in his favor.

**5. Money-centric approach:** For Trump, international relations are evaluated solely based on financial gains and losses. He views the weapons

sent to Ukraine not as tools of political power but as a \$350 billion investment.

**Rifts in NATO, Europe**

Trump, who sought to humiliate Zelenskyy and blame him for US military aid, never imagined that Zelenskyy would stand up to him and leave the White House without signing any agreement.

The reaction of European leaders to this dispute was also noteworthy. Senior officials of the European Union supported Zelenskyy. Kaja Kallas, the EU's High Representative for Foreign Affairs, wrote on X, "Ukraine is Europe! We stand by Ukraine." Moreover, Ursula von der Leyen, president of the European Commission, tagged Zelenskyy directly in another X post, saying: "You are never alone."

However, there are also divisions within Europe. While leaders from Hungary and Italy supported Trump, Sweden's right-wing government stood by Zelenskyy. Giorgia Meloni, Italy's prime minister,

called for an urgent meeting between the US and European allies to discuss major challenges, particularly the Ukraine crisis.

**Lessons for America's admirers**

In the meantime, two important lessons have been drawn for admirers of the West and America to learn:

**1. Not giving in to pressure:** Standing up to leaders like Trump, who behave arrogantly and rudely, can yield better results.

**2. The high cost of US aid:** Countries dependent on Washington's financial and military aid often face humiliation and a loss of dignity.

**NATO on verge of collapse?**

This dispute not only revealed NATO's internal challenges but also highlighted horizontal and vertical rifts within the Western alliance. If Trump halts military aid to Ukraine and eases sanctions against Russia, the European Union will face its biggest



Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy (C) leaves the White House after meeting with US President Donald Trump (not seen in this picture) in Washington, D.C., on February 28, 2025.  
SAUL LOEB/AFP

crisis since World War II. With his "money-centric" approach, Trump overlooks democratic values and human rights. He views the world as a

business transaction based on financial gains and losses. This perspective may prevent NATO and the Western alliance from addressing future challenges,

ultimately bringing them closer to collapse.

The article first appeared in Persian on SNN.

## American Studies class with Professor Zelenskyy

**OPINION** When it comes to diplomatic meetings between heads of state, it is customary for even the smallest details of the ceremony to be meticulously planned and purposeful — from the attire and handshakes of the officials to even their manner of speaking and laughter. However, Donald Trump, much like how his return to the White House has profoundly transformed and redirected the course of US politics, seems to have many surprises up his sleeve when it comes to the etiquette of dialogue. This was evident in the bizarre and unusual events that unfolded during the Saturday evening meeting between the leaders of the United States and Ukraine. For Trump, Zelenskyy, the European Union, and even Russia, as well as the people who expected a routine diplomatic meeting, everything took an unexpected turn.



Staffers of the White House await the start of a joint press conference by the US and Ukraine presidents, which was later canceled as Donald Trump kicked out his Ukrainian counterpart following a heated meeting on February 28, 2025.  
SAUL LOEB/AFP

Before the aforementioned meeting at the White House, Donald Trump had promised his people the signing of a \$500 billion deal with Volodymyr Zelenskyy for the extraction of Ukraine's rare and valuable minerals. The stage was set accordingly for this scenario. It was planned that after the bilateral meeting, the leaders would sign the agreement and hold a press conference to map out how to confront Putin's forces in the future. However, the tables suddenly turned, and the encounter between the two, due to Trump's condescending and humiliating behavior toward his Ukrainian counterpart, escalated into a full-blown diplomatic scandal, all in front of cameras and the eyes of the world.

**Leader's foresight proven right**

"You don't have the cards right now with us."  
"You're gambling with World War Three."  
"You have to be thankful."  
"You're running low on soldiers. It would be a damn good thing. Then you tell us, 'I don't want to cease fire.'"  
"It'll be a tough deal to make because the attitudes have to

change."  
"You're not winning this"  
"If you didn't have our military equipment, this war would have been over in two weeks."  
These were just some of the taunts and insults hurled by Donald Trump and his deputy J.D. Vance at the unfortunate Ukrainian president during the meeting. The White House thus became a stage for Zelenskyy's complete humiliation, an event that has sparked numerous reactions, too many to recount here. However, this incident undoubtedly holds many lessons and warnings for us Iranians and the countries of the region, and it is worth reflecting on them.

The humiliation of Zelenskyy by Trump is a clear example of the West's instrumentalist approach toward dependent governments. This top-down behavior demonstrated that even the president of a Western close ally with blond-haired, blue-eyed people will have no standing if they do not fully comply with Washington's policies. The Leader of Iran's Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei, with his foresight, precisely three years

ago (March 1, 2022), at the onset of the war between Russia and Ukraine, pointed to this issue, stating: "The first lesson from the Ukraine affair is that the support of Western powers for countries and governments that are their puppets is a mirage; it is not real. All governments should know this. Those governments that rely on America and Europe should look at the situation in Ukraine today and Afghanistan yesterday." Today's developments prove the depth of this insight by the Leader.

**Lesson in understanding US**

The recent events also serve as a significant lesson for our country. While Donald Trump, by withdrawing from the JCPOA in May 2018, set Iran on an irreversible path in its dealings with the US, some, in a simplistic analysis, still advocate for negotiating with the unreliable US government. In contrast to this heavy-handed narrative, the explicit remarks of Iran's Leader on February 7, 2025, clarified the country's agenda. Ayatollah Khamenei stated: "No problem will be solved by negotiating with America. The

reason: experience." After yesterday's events, it seems no Iranian will count on negotiating with the Trump administration anymore. Mohammad-Ali Abtahi, a reformist political activist, wrote recently: "Trump behaved similarly with the King of Jordan and European leaders. Trump and Trump's America are not people to negotiate with. Now imagine if [Iran's President Masoud] Pezeshkian had been sitting across from him!"

**Death of Madman policy**

The altercation between Ukrainian and US officials at the White House shows that Trump's aggressive foreign policy has also failed so far. The weakness of this strategy was first exposed just a few days ago by Hamas leaders, who ignored Trump's threat to turn Gaza into "hell" if all Israeli prisoners were not released. Now, even a weak figure like Zelenskyy does not want to easily yield to Trump's demands. While Trump, by adopting the "Madman" approach and initiating threats and verbal attacks against Iran, sought to intimidate and persuade our officials to sit at the negotiating table and then

gain concessions from Tehran, recent events have further exposed Trump on the global stage and will challenge his strategy against the Islamic Republic. Friday's failure for Trump was no less than Zelenskyy's. The defeat of a president who seeks to project an image of constant victory negatively impacts the calculations of other parties involved with him in foreign policy matters and diminishes his bargaining power, which is based on coercion and fear.

**Clear message for Middle East**

Finally, the Trump-Zelenskyy dispute sends a clear message to the Middle East. Some regional countries, including Turkey and Saudi Arabia, have in recent years relied on the West to embark on adventures that have had significant consequences for the region. The Trump-Zelenskyy conflict sends a clear message to our region: security cannot be outsourced to foreign powers. Muslim countries must strive to establish a native and collective security regime.

The article first appeared in Persian on Quds Online.



During a campaign speech, Donald Trump holds up a mask of his face in Sarasota, Florida, on November 7, 2016.  
CHRIS O'MEARA/AP



The Leader of Iran's Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei, with his foresight, precisely three years ago (March 1, 2022), at the onset of the war between Russia and Ukraine, pointed to this issue, stating: "The first lesson from the Ukraine affair is that the support of Western powers for countries and governments that are their puppets is a mirage; it is not real. All governments should know this. Those governments that rely on America and Europe should look at the situation in Ukraine today and Afghanistan yesterday." Today's developments prove the depth of this insight by the Leader.

## UWW Ranking Series:

# Mirzazadeh dominates superheavyweight class, Ahmadi Vafa settles for bronze

## Sports Desk

The final day of the Muhamet Malo Ranking Series tournament in Tirana, Albania, saw Iran's Amin Mirzazadeh ease to the Greco-Roman 130kg gold medal, while Ali Ahmadi Vafa finished with a consolation bronze in the 60kg contests.

Making his first appearance since winning the superheavyweight bronze at last year's Paris Olympics, where he was only beaten by Cuban great Mijain Lopez, Mirzazadeh adopted the same gameplan throughout his four bouts to walk away with the ultimate prize in the Albanian capital.

The reigning world champion got the first passivity and scored by a turn from par terre before holding off the reverse position in the second period, winning his quarterfinal, semifinal, and final bouts by the same scoreline of 3-1. It was only in his first match against Estonian Heiki Nabi that Mirzazadeh took advantage on both par terre positions to win 4-0.

While the final showpiece against Turkish Hamza Bakir, who has all three age-group world titles under his belt, did not take a toll on Mirzazadeh, the Iranian will still have to see off domestic competition from young prodigy Fardin Hedayati and Ali-Akbar Yousefi to secure a place in September's



Iranian wrestler Amin Mirzazadeh (red) reacts after his victory over Turkey's Hamza Bakir in the Greco-Roman 130kg final at the Muhamet Malo Ranking Series tournament in Tirana, Albania, on March 2, 2025.  
● UWW

World Championships in Zagreb. A world junior and under-23 gold medalist over the past two years, Hedayati will be eager to have a shot at seniors' glory, having won double Ranking Series titles last season.

A world champion in 2021, Yousefi, meanwhile, made an emphatic return to international scene in February by claiming three superiority victories on his way to the gold medal at the Zagreb Open Ranking Series event.

Earlier on Sunday, reigning world U20 and U23 champion Ahmadi Vafa got off to losing start to his campaign, suffering a 12-6 defeat against former world bronze medalist Yu Shiotani of Japan. The Iranian still managed to re-

cover from the setback to hammer China's Ziyue Xi (11-2) and home-favorite Ergi Uku (10-0) before crushing Akyl Sulaimanov of Kyrgyzstan 12-3 for a joint-bronze alongside Chinese Haodong Tan.

Shiotani, meanwhile, did not concede a point following his first win, defeating Georgian Amiran Shavadze 9-0 in the final.

Sunday's results came after Iran had collected a gold and a bronze medal earlier in the Greco-Roman competitions.

An Olympic silver medalist last year, Alireza Mohmadi won the 87kg gold after Hungarian David Losonczi pulled out of the final showpiece with injury. The pinnacle of the Iranian's campaign, however, came in the last-eight round, where he outmuscled Semen Novikov 5-0, avenging the final loss to the Bulgarian in Paris. Mahdi Mohsennejad settled for a bronze medal in the 63kg class, beating Romanian Razvan Arnaut 3-1 in the third-place contest.

There was further glory for Iran in the freestyle event last week in Tirana, Ali Mo'meni (57kg), Rahman Amouzad (65kg), Kamran Qassempour (92kg), and Amirhossein Zare' (125kg) collected four gold medals, while Erfan Alizadeh settled for the 97kg silver and Younes Emami took the bronze in the 74kg class.

## AFC Champions League Two:

## Tractor looking to build on domestic form, home support against Al Taawoun

## Sports Desk

Persian Gulf Pro League club Tractor will be looking to take its domestic momentum into the continental campaign, when hosting Saudi side Al Taawoun in the first leg of their AFC Champions League Two quarterfinal in Tabriz today.

Tractor will step into the contest on the back of a goalless stalemate against Sepahan, though it was enough to keep Dragan Skocic's side

one point clear of the Isfahan-based outfit on top of the Iranian league table.

Al Taawoun, meanwhile, defeated Al Fateh 2-1 at home last time out but is stuck in mid-table in the Saudi top flight. Chasing a maiden Asian silverware, Tractor will expect a jam-packed crowd at the Yadegar-e Imam Stadium to push their side the extra mile as they seek a healthy advantage ahead of next week's return leg in Bahrain's Al Khaldiya in a 3-3

draw on home soil in the previous round second leg to advance 5-4 on aggregate. Al Taawoun had to work even harder to secure a quarterfinal spot, as its last-16 tie against Al Wakhrah SC of Qatar ended 4-4 on aggregate, before the Saudi club came out victorious 4-3 in the shootout.

Al Taawoun will draw confidence from their unbeaten away record in the competition this season, having won three and drawn once.

Amirhossein Hosseinzadeh will be the player to watch in Tractor colors, having scored a remarkable eight goals in six outings to sit atop the leading marksmen's chart of the competition alongside fellow-Iranian Sardar Azmoun, who plays for Emirati club Shabab Al Ahli. Croatian Skocic, however, will hope his backline puts in a more solid performance after Tractor had to hold off a late fightback from Bahrain's Al Khaldiya in a 3-3



● MOJTABA SALEH/AFC

## Asian Water Polo Championship:

## Iran undone by Kazakhstan, misses out on podium



## Sports Desk

Iran fell to shootout defeat against Kazakhstan in the third-place matchup at the 2025 Asian Water Polo Championship in Zhaoqing, China.

In a repeat of the bronze-medal contest in the 2022 edition, the two teams played to a 12-12 draw, before Kazakhstan came out victorious 4-2 in penalties.

This was a second shootout setback for Iran, after a 9-9 (4-1) defeat against the host in the semifinals had seen the country miss out on a place in July's World Aquatics Championships in Singapore.

Runner-up to China in the previous edition, Iran began its campaign in Zhaoqing with comfortable victories over South Korea (16-9), Chinese Taipei (37-5), and Uzbekistan (33-9) before losing 16-12 to Japan to finish second in Group B and progress to the quarterfinals. Iran then beat Singapore 14-7 to book a last-four place.

Japan, meanwhile, defeated China 14-11 in the final showpiece to lift a fourth trophy in five editions.

## Russian wrestling legend Saitiev dies at 49

REUTERS - Russian three-time Olympic freestyle wrestling champion Buvaisar Saitiev has died at the age of 49, Russian sports officials said on Sunday. Sports Minister Mikhail Degtyarev told TASS news agency that Saitiev's death was "premature and tragic," but provided no further details. Tass said only that he had died in Moscow.

Degtyarev described Saitiev as one of the most decorated freestyle wrestlers in history and praised his "inestimable" contribution to sport. Saitiev won Olympic gold in the 74 kg category in the 1996, 2004 and 2008 Games and was a six-time world and European champion. Saitiev, who retired in 2009, was awarded several civil honours in Russia and had served as a member of the State Duma lower house of parliament.



● UWW

# Discovering beauty of Derazno village in Golestan Province



● safarzon.com

## Iranica Desk

Derazno village, nestled in the Kordkuy of Golestan Province, is one of the most stunning areas in northern Iran. Its high elevation provides breathtaking views of the Golestan forests, making it a prime destination for nature enthusiasts and seasoned travelers alike. With its excellent climate, lush landscapes, and untouched forests, Derazno has earned a reputation as one of the most picturesque tourist spots in Golestan Province, guaranteeing lasting memories for visitors.

Located near the forest of the same name and the Jahan Nama forest, Derazno village is approximately 35 kilometers southeast of Kordkuy. The area lies near Derazno Peak, which rises to about 2,800 meters. Kordkuy itself is situated in western Golestan, bordered by Bandar Torkaman, Semnan, and the Gulf of Gorgan. As one of the highest villages in northern Iran, Derazno offers some of the most beautiful vistas of the Gulf of Gorgan. The surrounding mountainous regions are among the most pristine in Golestan, and the pastures of Derazno provide sweeping views of more than ten neighboring cities and villages.

Derazno village is situated in a cold region, making travel and daily life quite challenging for nearly half of the year. Currently, around 160 households reside in this area, spending only the first six months of the year in this beautiful highland. Unfortunately, in recent years, increased construction and soil erosion have led to significant damage to agricultural lands during heavy rainfall in the colder months.

Most houses in Derazno village have preserved a traditional structure that is well-suited to their environment. The local homes are constructed from adobe and wood, with some utilizing stones from the surrounding mountains. These houses remain cool in the summer and warm in spring and early autumn. Dense forests filled with fragrant wild and medicinal plants surround the village, while the nearby mountains are home to numerous springs and waterfalls.

On most days of the year, especially at sunrise and shortly thereafter, thick clouds envelop Derazno village. The expansive pastures around the village provide ideal grazing grounds for livestock from the local community and neighboring villages. However, due to overgrazing, access to these pastures for herders is currently permitted only with



● wikipedia.org

authorization from the Department of Environment. One of the notable features of the vegetation around Derazno village is the harmonious coexistence of forest and pasture. The dense forests of Derazno are adorned with thyme, nettle, chamomile, and shrubs such as medlar, barberry, wild plum, and wild apple and pear trees. At higher elevations, wildlife like wild boars and brown bears can also be spotted. Fortunately, in recent years, the Natural Resources and Watershed Management Organization has planted trees such as black pine, maple, ash, oak, and walnut in this area, significantly contributing to the restoration of the region's flora. Nonetheless, protecting the Derazno Forest and its natural resources remains essential. The most stunning views of the Caspian Sea and the surrounding plains can be enjoyed from this village. Derazno Peak, located adjacent to the village, rises to an impressive 2,800 meters above sea level.

Situated at an altitude of over 2,600 meters, Derazno village is accessible only via steep, winding mountainous roads. The high elevation and proximity to the mountains create a very cold climate, making travel along the village's dirt road impossible during the cold seasons.

No matter the time of year you visit Derazno village, there are seasonal activities that attract tourists.

### Paragliding and kite surfing

Due to the village's high elevation, paragliding enthusiasts are also drawn to this region. While the flying site in the Jahan Nama area is not accessible during winter, skilled kite surfers and paragliders can take advantage of favorable conditions for flying over the lush forests in spring and summer. The extensive pas-



● blitinja.com



● setavin.com

tures and meadows surrounding the village, along with the Derazno forest, provide a safe landing area for kite surfers.

### Nature walking and forest hiking

The winding local roads in the Derazno forests and surrounding parks offer untouched and picturesque environments for walking. If you have the appropriate equipment, consider planning a hiking trip to camp in the heart of this pristine nature. The meadows around Derazno village are lush and vibrant, often displaying the phenomenon of ocean clouds at certain times of the day. From these pastures, you



● blitinja.com

can enjoy breathtaking views of the Caspian Sea's plains, Golestan forests, and surrounding protected areas. Exploring the adobe houses of Derazno village and the wooden cabins on the hillsides is also a delightful experience.

### Imam Reza (PBUH) Forest Park

Imam Reza (PBUH) Forest Park lies along the road from Kordkuy to Derazno village, located in the "Palang Pa" area, through which a river of the same name flows. The park is covered with numerous trees, and diverse vegetation can be found throughout its various sections. It is approximately 25 kilometers from Imam Reza (AS) Forest Park to Derazno village. The park offers a variety of recreational facilities for the comfort of tourists and travelers, including accommodations, pavilions, a guesthouse, a restaurant, parking, and a children's playground. If you cannot find suitable accommodation in Derazno, you can stay in one of the suites at this forest park. Its close proximity to Derazno allows you to explore the attractions of both Kordkuy and Derazno during your visit.

### Jahan Nama Protected Area

The Jahan Nama Protected Area, located in the southernmost part of Golestan Province, is often referred to as the "Roof of Golestan" due to its high elevation. This area stands over 3,000 meters above sea level and provides breathtaking views of Kordkuy, Gorgan, and Bandar Torkaman. The entire mountainous region is adorned with abundant springs and dense forests. Among nature enthusiasts, the Jahan Nama Protected Area is one of the most popular forests in Golestan, attracting various groups of campers throughout the year. A diverse range of plants and animals can be found here. To visit this area and camp in its pristine locations, you'll need a knowledgeable guide, as well as suitable tools and

equipment. Venturing deep into this area without proper knowledge can pose risks for tourists.

### Historical attractions

Derazno village, nestled in pristine and picturesque natural surroundings, is situated in a historic area that was once part of Tabaristan. Consequently, in Kordkuy, you'll find not only stunning natural attractions but also a variety of historical buildings.

### Radakan Tower

Radakan Tower is situated in the southern part of Kordkuy, approximately 15 kilometers from Derazno village. This historic structure, also known as Mil Radakan, is located near a village of the same name. Mil Radakan rests atop a dirt and stone hill, and archaeologists compare its bricks and structure to the Gonbad-e Qabus Tower.

The entrance to Radakan Tower is located on its southern side, where remnants of a Kufic inscription can still be seen.

### Accommodation

Derazno village is a pristine retreat, situated far from urban chaos. While there are a few hotels and local accommodations nearby, the best option for staying in Derazno is to rent local houses. If you visit during the warm season, you can choose charming wooden cabins or adobe houses nestled on the slopes for your overnight stay, allowing you to truly enjoy the stunning morning views. In recent years, the influx of tourists has led to the establishment of eco-lodges in the village as well.

Imam Reza Forest Park features cabins and forest suites at reasonable prices, making it an attractive option for visitors. Additionally, luxurious villas and homes have been developed throughout the region, catering to those seeking upscale accommodations.

For nature enthusiasts, the village offers beautiful and secluded slopes that are perfect for camping. There is only one shop in the village that supplies essential food items and other necessities, so it's advisable to come well-prepared for camping.

### Best season to visit

Derazno is among the top travel destinations during the warm months. The delightful weather here provides a refreshing escape from the heat and pollution of large cities. However, by early autumn, the air begins to take on wintry colors and scents, making it increasingly challenging for residents to remain in the area.

# Iran's 'In the Shadow of Cypress' wins 2025 Oscar for Best Animated Short Film

## Arts & Culture Desk

Iranian short animated film 'In the Shadow of Cypress,' co-directed by Hossein Molyayemi and Shirin Sohani, won the 2025 Oscar for Best Animated Short Film at the 97th Academy Awards, held on March 2 at the Dolby Theatre in Hollywood.

The 20-minute animation secured the prestigious award against four other contenders, including the Belgian-French-Dutch short 'Beautiful Men,' Japan's 'Magic Candies,' the Dutch animation 'Wander to Wonder,' and France's 'Yuck!,' IRNA reported.

Produced by the Iranian Institute for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults, 'In the Shadow of Cypress' became the first Iranian animated or live-action short film to win an Oscar. It was only the second Iranian short film ever nominated, following 'Our Uniform' by Yeganeh Moghaddam, which vied for the same award at the 96th Academy Awards but did not win.

Overall, this marks Iran's third Oscar victory, following Asghar Farhadi's Best Foreign Language Film wins for 'A Separation' in 2011 and 'The Salesman' in 2016.

During their acceptance speech, Molyayemi and Sohani expressed deep gratitude, stating, "We dedicate our film and this spe-

cial award to all those who continue to fight their inner and outer battles heroically, and nobody knows about that."

Molyayemi added, "This is a miracle, and speaking before this expectant audience is overwhelming. But if we persevere and remain faithful, miracles do happen."

'In the Shadow of Cypress' employs geometric 2D animation to portray the relationship between a father and daughter as the father battles PTSD. According to the directors, the film serves as a tribute to veterans of the Iran-Iraq war, particularly those still grappling with PTSD. It explores the psychological and physical struggles of a sea captain and his daughter as they live in isolation at sea.

This historic Oscar win marks the first time Iranian filmmakers have claimed an Academy Award in this category. Initially, the directors were not expected to attend the ceremony, but they obtained a last-minute visa and arrived in Los Angeles just three hours before the event.

In a previous interview with Variety, Molyayemi and Sohani revealed that the film took six years to complete due to self-funding throughout development and production. They also cited longstanding sanctions as a significant challenge, stating that restrictions had intensified since President Donald



Trump's tenure. Prior to its Oscar victory, 'In the Shadow of Cypress' garnered major accolades at the LA Shorts International Film Festival, Lebu International Film Festival, and Tribeca Film Festival. It also earned multiple nominations at the Venice International Film Festival, Annie Awards, Annecy International Animation Film Festival, Melbourne International Film Festival, and Clermont-Ferrand International

Film Festival. Following the Oscar win, Iran's House of Cinema congratulated the filmmakers, stating, "It is a great joy and source of pride to see representatives of Iranian culture and art shine on the world stage and carry the Iranian flag at the 97th Academy Awards. With honor, we extend our congratulations to Hossein Molyayemi, Shirin Sohani, and the entire production team of 'In the Shadow of Cypress,' wishing

further success for Iranian cinema." The Iranian Documentary Filmmakers Association also praised the achievement, calling it "a great honor for Iranian cinema and a brilliant step toward global recognition of Iranian animation." The association extended its congratulations to the film's creators and the animation community, hoping this success would inspire new, innovative works.

The Iranian Film Directors Guild echoed the sentiment, noting, "The illustrious history of Iranian animation, which has quietly advanced since before the revolution, was missing an Oscar—until now. Thanks to the creativity and artistic vision of Shirin Sohani and Hossein Molyayemi, 'In the Shadow of Cypress' has filled that gap. The Iranian Film Directors Guild proudly celebrates this monumental achievement."

## UN tourism chief praises Iran's role in global tourism growth



### Arts & Culture Desk

United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) Secretary-General Zurab Pololikashvili has emphasized Iran's significant role in the global tourism sector and called for strengthened cooperation to advance sustainable tourism development. In a letter to Iran's Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts, Reza Salehi Amiri, Pololikashvili acknowledged Iran's position in the international tourism framework and underscored the importance of continued structural collaboration

between Tehran and the UNWTO, according to a statement from Iran's Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts on Monday. Pololikashvili praised the organization and participation in the 18th Tehran International Tourism and Related Industries Exhibition (TITE), held from February 11-14, describing it as a strategic platform for fostering global tourism exchanges, IRNA reported. He cited a report from UNWTO official Ian Wilko, who attended the event and recognized its role in bridging public and private sector cooperation in

tourism. The UNWTO chief also highlighted two key areas of future collaboration: The organization of an upcoming global urban tourism forum in Tehran and expanding Iran's engagement with the UNWTO's affiliate members to boost scientific, technical, and investment partnerships in the sector. Separately, D-8 Organization for Economic Cooperation Secretary-General Isia-ka Abdulqadir Imam also sent a letter to Salehi Amiri, emphasizing the need for sustained engagement in tourism and proposing a joint meeting between D-8 member states' deputy culture ministers and private sector representatives to outline a roadmap for joint tourism ventures. Pololikashvili reiterated the UNWTO's commitment to deepening engagement with Iran, leveraging shared capacities to promote sustainable tourism, enhance diplomatic tourism ties, and facilitate greater international cooperation.

## Iran calls for Afghanistan cooperation to combat drug trafficking

Iran's Deputy Interior Minister Ali Akbar Pour Jamshidian says Iran and Afghanistan should increase joint cooperation in the campaign against narcotics. Jamshidian made the remark in a meeting with an Afghan delegation headed by the Deputy Minister of Counter Narcotics, Lieutenant General Mullah Abdul Haq Akhund Hammar, in Tehran on Monday, Press TV reported. "The ban on the cultivation, purchase and sale of narcotics in Afghanistan was a very good action that can lead to greater outcomes with the formulation of a comprehensive strategy by the Afghan government," Jamshidian said. Afghan authorities banned all cultivation of opium poppy and all narcotics under strict laws in April 2022. Back in September, the United Nations' Office on Drugs and Crimes (UNODC) reported that Methamphetamine trafficking in and around Afghanistan has surged in recent years, despite the Taliban's pledge to contain the illicit drug trade. It added that Taliban's efforts to crack down on the drug trade in the country had little impact, both on the opium production and the burgeoning meth industry. Jamshidian noted that advancement, peace and development of the Iranian and Afghan gov-



ernments and nations are intertwined with each other. He added that close cooperation between police forces of Iran, Afghanistan and subsequently Pakistan would be an appropriate way to combat drug trafficking. The Iranian official said the anti-drug combat currently requires scientific work, emphasizing that the Islamic Republic's police, equipped with modern equipment and training, can transfer experience to the Afghan police. Elsewhere in his remarks, Jamshidian said Iran has been hosting Afghan refugees for years, adding, "The government and people of Iran and Afghanistan have close relations." He noted that approximately 4.5 million legal and some two million illegal Afghan migrants are

Iran's Deputy Interior Minister Ali Akbar Pour Jamshidian meets with an Afghan delegation headed by Deputy Minister of Counter Narcotics, Lieutenant General Mullah Abdul Haq Akhund Hammar, in Tehran, on March 3, 2025. ● IRNA

living in Iran, affirming Tehran's resolve to improve interaction with Kabul and solve bilateral issues. Akhund Hammar, for his part, said there has been no prohibition on the cultivation, purchase and sale of narcotics in Afghanistan over the past 45 years, but the issue has been largely addressed in recent years. He also thanked Iran for hosting the Afghan refugees over the past decades.