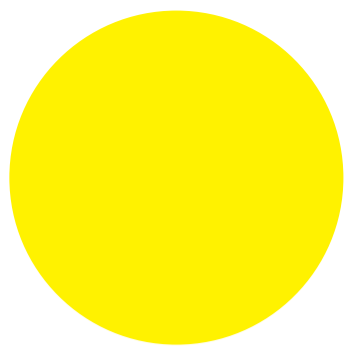


Petchem industry
nearing 100-m-ton
production capacity:

NPC

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Hezbollah's staying power remains unshaken

OPINION Despite relentless pressure, Hezbollah has stood its ground, proving that its influence is not fading anytime soon. Far from losing its grip, the movement has tightened its hold—not just militarily but as a deeply rooted political and social force. Its ability to bounce back from crises, rally support, and outmaneuver its adversaries has kept it a step ahead. While opponents have tried to chip away at its power through sanctions, military threats, and political isolation, Hezbollah has pushed back, adapting to every challenge. [See page 4 >](#)
EXCLUSIVE As tensions rise, one thing is clear—this movement is not backing down.



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Vehicles of members of Syria's new authority's security forces block a road in Sanamayn, in the southern province of Daraa, during clashes with opposition fighters on March 5, 2025.

● BAKR ALKASEM/AFP

Deep dive into roots of Alawite armed uprising in western Syria

By Navid Kamali
Foreign policy analyst

PERSPECTIVE
EXCLUSIVE

More than a decade into Syria's turmoil, the country's future remains up in the air. The fall of Bashar al-Assad and the rise of Ahmed al-Sharaa, the leader of Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham, as the interim president may have brought the Assad family's long rule—and with it, the Ba'ath Party's grip on power—to an end. However, as many had predicted, the shift in leadership has been far from a silver bullet for Syria's deep-rooted crises. Recent developments, particularly in western Syria, including Latakia and Tartus—strongholds of the Alawite minority—suggest that instability is still lurking around the corner. The emergence of resistance groups in these areas has thrown a new variable into Syria's power equations, with far-reaching strategic consequences for the country and beyond.

Against this backdrop, the role of the Alawite minority, which has long been intertwined with Syria's power structure, has taken on even greater significance. Given the involvement of regional and international players, these developments demand a thorough analysis to unpack their broader implications. Since Assad's downfall, Syria has effectively been carved up among various domestic and foreign factions, with the central government struggling to get a firm grip on the entire country. To get to the bottom of these ongoing shifts, one must delve into Syria's social, political, and historical fabric. The country has always been a mosaic of ethnic and religious communities—including Sunni Arabs, Alawites, Kurds, Druze, Christians, and Ismailis—each with its own history of coexistence and friction. The Alawite minority, whose fate has been closely tied to Syria's recent upheavals, has historically faced its fair share of challenges and restrictions. While recognized as a branch of Shi-

ism following rulings by clerics like Imam Musa Sadr in the 1970s, the community had endured systemic marginalization under Ottoman rule and earlier periods, being largely shut out of political and economic power. The collapse of the Ottoman Empire and Syria's transition to a French mandate opened new doors for minorities, including the Alawites. The French, aiming to weaken Sunni Arab nationalism, gave these groups a leg up by integrating them into the military and administrative sectors. Though driven by colonial interests, this policy laid the groundwork for the Alawites' eventual rise within Syria's power structure. The turning point came when the Assad family took the reins of power. Hafez al-Assad, himself an Alawite, seized control in a 1970 coup, cementing his rule by weaving an extensive network of loyalists across the military, security apparatus, and government. Under his leadership, Alawites gradually climbed the ranks of political, economic, and military

spheres. While this helped uplift the community, it also stoked resentment among other ethnic and religious groups, fueling a sense of exclusion. When Hafez al-Assad passed away in 2000, his son Bashar picked up where he left off, keeping power and wealth concentrated within the Alawite elite, particularly in Syria's coastal regions. This further widened the country's social and political divides. By the time Syria was engulfed in civil war in 2011, its sectarian cracks had already deepened. The Alawites, as Assad's staunchest supporters, found themselves in the crosshairs of various rebel and extremist factions. The mass killings of Alawites by terrorist groups forced many to flee their homes and seek refuge in safer areas, particularly around the capital. The war didn't just reshape Syria's demographic landscape—it also pushed some Alawites to reconsider their loyalty to Assad. Many began to question whether the government's rigid policies and failure to adapt to the times had only fueled violence,

instability, and widespread conflict. Now, with Assad out of the picture and Sharaa at the helm, the Alawite community faces an even greater existential threat. From the moment Damascus fell and Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham took over, deep-seated fears gripped the Alawites. The group's track record of violence and extremism—especially against religious minorities—has left many Alawites deeply uncertain about their future in their own homeland. In recent months, reports of human rights violations, discrimination, and targeted violence against Alawites have surfaced, further stoking tensions. In response, some within the community have begun banding together to form armed resistance groups, determined to fend off potential threats. At the same time, remnants of the former Syrian army still loyal to the Assad family have resurfaced, launching sporadic attacks on the new rulers using whatever weapons they can get their hands on. [Page 8 >](#)

Over 1,000 people, mostly civilians, killed in two days of Syria clashes

International Desk

More than 1,000 people, including 745 civilians, were killed in the two days of clashes between Syrian security forces and fighters loyal to the former government and ensuing revenge killings.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a UK-based monitor, said 745 civilians were killed mostly execution-style, while 125 Syrian security forces and 148 loyalists to the former government were killed. Death tolls from the two days of fighting have varied wildly, with some estimates putting the final death toll even higher.

Fighting began on Thursday after fighters loyal to the ousted president Bashar al-Assad government ambushed security forces of new rulers in Jableh, in the coastal Latakia Province.

The wide-ranging, coordinated assault was the biggest challenge to the country's new authorities so far, and came three months after opposition fighters led by Hayat Tahrir al-Sham militant group toppled the Syrian president.

To crush the rebellion, the new rulers called for re-enforcements, with thousands of fighters converging on Syria's coast from all over the country. Though fighters are nominally under the auspices of the new Syrian government, militias still persist, some of which have been implicated in past human rights abuses and are rela-



Syria's new authorities' forces are deployed in the town of Qadmus in Syria's Tartus governorate during clashes with opposition fighters on March 7, 2025. SANA

tively undisciplined.

'Expected challenges'

On Sunday, Syria's transitional president, Ahmad al-Sharaa, said the developments were within "expected challenges" and called for national unity.

"We have to preserve national unity and domestic peace, we can live together," he said in a video circulated by Arab media, speaking at a mosque in Damascus.

"Rest assured about Syria, this country has the characteristics for survival ... What is currently happening in Syria is within the expected challenges."

Videos showed the bodies of dozens of people in civilian clothes piled up in the town of Al-Mukhtariya, where more than 40 people were killed at one time, according to the Syrian Network for Human Rights. Other videos showed fighters wearing security uniforms executing people point blank, ordering men to bark like dogs and beat captives.

The Syrian coast is heavily populated by the minority

Islamic Alawite sect, from which the deposed Syrian president hailed, though most Alawites were not associated with the Assad government.

Revenge killings

Syria's new authorities promised Alawites that they would be safe under their rule and that there would be no revenge killings. Government security forces' killings of hundreds of mainly Alawite civilians this week, however, have sent waves of fear through the religious minority community.

A man from the town of Snobar, Latakia, detailed how gunmen killed at least 14 of his neighbors who were all from the Arris family, including the execution of a 75-year-old father and his three sons in front of the family's mother.

"After they killed the father and his boys, they asked the mother to take her gold off, or they would kill her," said the man who was close to the family but spoke under the condition of anonymity for his safety. Another resident of Latakia

said that power and water to the area had been cut off for the past day, and that they had been sheltering in their house, scared of the militants on the streets.

'Extremely disturbing'

The United Nations on Sunday said it was receiving "extremely disturbing" reports of entire families being killed in northwestern Syria and called for an immediate halt to the violence.

Iranian officials have warned that insecurity and instability in Syria will only benefit the Israeli regime and would cause terrorist and extremist groups taking advantage of the unstable situation.

Iran's Ambassador to Lebanon Mojtaba Amani said that the Israeli regime benefits from the disintegration of Syria.

Amani also warned that "organized massacre" against different Syrian groups is taking place in the Arab country, which is extremely dangerous and will have its impact in the region, especially Lebanon, in the future.

Iran says nuclear talks possible only if related concerns are to be addressed

International Desk

Iran's permanent mission to the United Nations said if the objective of negotiations with Iran is to address concerns about any potential militarization of Iran's nuclear program; such discussions may be subject to consideration.

"However, should the aim be the dismantlement of Iran's peaceful nuclear program to claim that what Obama (former US president) failed to achieve has now been accomplished, such negotiations will never take place," the mission said in a post on its X account on Sunday.

In recent months, the US President Donald Trump has repeatedly expressed his interest to reach an agreement with Iran on its nuclear program.

However, his language of threats and imposition of sanctions against Iran have made Iranian officials skeptical of negotiations with the US administration.

Trump last month restored his "maximum pressure" campaign on Iran which includes efforts to drive its oil exports down to zero.

Iranian officials have frequently said that negotiations under pressure are not meaningful.

On Saturday, Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei said the insistence of some bullying

powers on negotiations with Iran over its nuclear program is aimed at imposing their demands, stressing that the Islamic Republic will not accept their expectations.

"The insistence of some bullying governments on negotiations is not aimed at resolving issues, but rather [aims] to assert and impose their own expectations," he said.

"Definitely, the Islamic Republic will not accept their expectations," Ayatollah Khamenei added.

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 has 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.



Iran, Russia, China to hold joint naval drills today

International Desk

The navies of Iran, Russia and China will hold new military drills off the coast of Iran today in a bid to enhance naval cooperation.

The navies of the three countries will kick off joint drills, codenamed "Security Belt 2025", in the northern Indian Ocean with the aim of promoting security in the area and enhancing trilateral naval cooperation.

Vessels from the Iranian Navy and the Naval Force of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps will take part in the drills that mark the seventh edition of "Security Belt" exercises by Iran, Russia and China, the media office for Iran's military drills said in a report.

Azerbaijan, South Africa, Oman, Kazakhstan, Pakistan, Qatar, Iraq, the United Arab Emirates and Sri Lanka

will attend as observers.

China will deploy "a destroyer and a supply ship," China's Defense Ministry said on the WeChat social media network.

According to the Chinese Defense Ministry, "the aim is to strengthen military mutual trust and foster pragmatic cooperation among the naval forces of the participating countries."

The Iranian Army conducted drills in the same area in February to "strengthen defense capabilities against any threat."

The three countries have held similar exercises in the region in recent years. They have also been involved in joint efforts aimed at countering piracy and maritime terrorism, exchanging information in naval rescue and relief operations as well as sharing operational and tactical experience.



Mohammad Ali Rajabi
Cartoonist



Iran raps Canada's new sanctions as breach of international law

The Iranian Foreign Ministry strongly denounced the latest round of Canadian sanctions against the Islamic Republic, characterizing them as "deceitful" and "in violation of international law."

In a statement on Sunday, Assistant to Foreign Minister and Director General for the Americas Department at the Iranian Foreign Ministry, Issa Kameli, said the move is unlawful, illegitimate, and a violation of the human rights of the Iranian people, making the Canadian government internationally accountable, Press TV reported.

"The new sanctions imposed by Canada against Iran under the pretext of human rights are a political and deceitful move that contradicts the principles of the United Nations Charter and international laws governing free trade between countries," the statement read.

Canada announced on Friday fresh anti-Iran sanctions targeting seven individuals and entities over their alleged links to networks involved in the production of weapons, which Ottawa claims to have been sent to Russia for use in the Ukraine war.

The Canadian government also justified the sanctions by citing Iran's purported role in "gross human rights violations" and destabilizing activities.



Issa Kameli

The Canadian Foreign Ministry said the new sanctions align with measures taken by Canada's allies, including the United States, the United Kingdom, and the European Union.

Kameli pointed out that Canada itself is among the major violators of human rights, including through its complicity and deliberate participation in the genocide of the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip. He called upon Canada to take responsibility for its complicity in Israel's genocide and war crimes against the Palestinian people, as well as other human rights abuses. Responding to repeated accusations regarding Iran's alleged involvement in the Ukraine conflict,

the senior diplomat vehemently denied these claims and emphasized that "repeating a lie does not make it true."

He reiterated Iran's position of non-involvement in the ongoing Russia-Ukraine crisis, underscoring the country's opposition to war and advocating for diplomatic negotiations as the means to resolve disputes between warring parties. The diplomat further advised Canadian officials to focus on addressing their own domestic and international shortcomings, particularly the systemic policy of the colonial extermination of indigenous populations, rather than leveling baseless accusations against others.

Petchem industry nearing 100-m-ton production capacity: NPC



Ending waiver to buy Iranian electricity causing temporary challenges: Iraq

The end of the waiver to import electricity from neighboring Iran "presents temporary operational challenges," said Farhad Alaaeldin, foreign affairs adviser to Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani.

The administration of US President Donald Trump rescinded a waiver on Saturday that had allowed Iraq to pay Iran for electricity, as part of the businessman-turned-politician's "maximum pressure" campaign against Tehran, according to a State Department spokesperson.

The decision to let Iraq's waiver lapse upon its expiration "ensures we do not allow Iran any degree of economic or financial relief," the spokesperson said.

"The government is actively working on alternatives to sustain electricity supply and mitigate any potential disruptions," Alaaeldin told Reuters. "Strengthening energy security remains a national priority, and efforts to enhance domestic production, improve grid efficiency and invest in new technologies will continue at full pace."

Trump initially granted waivers to several buyers to meet consumer energy needs when he reimposed sanctions on Iran's energy exports in 2018, citing its nuclear program and what the US calls its meddling in the Middle East.

His administration and that of Joe Biden repeatedly renewed Iraq's waiver while urging Baghdad to reduce its dependence on Iranian electricity. The State Department spokesperson reiterated that call on Saturday.

"We urge the Iraqi government to eliminate its dependence on Iranian sources of energy as soon as possible," the spokesperson said.

The US has used the waiver review in part to increase pressure on Baghdad to allow Kurdish crude oil exports via Turkey, sources have told Reuters. The aim is to boost supply to the global market and keep prices in check, giving the US more room to pursue efforts to choke off Iranian oil exports. Iraq's negotiations with the semi-autonomous Kurdish region over the oil export resumption have been fraught so far.

In an interview on Friday, the US president claimed that he had sent a letter to Leader of Iran's Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei and proposed to negotiate with Iran on a new deal.

Iran denied receiving the letter, reiterating its position of not negotiating with Washington due to its untrustworthy and bullying nature.

"Some foreign governments and domineering figures insist on negotiations, while their goal is not to resolve issues but to exert control and impose their own agendas," Ayatollah Khamenei said on Saturday, dismissing the idea of negotiation with the US.

Economy Desk

The CEO of the National Petrochemical Company (NPC) announced that the petrochemical industry is on the verge of reaching an annual production capacity of 100 million tons. Hassan Abbaszadeh stated that required feedstock has been delivered to several petrochemical units, which are expected to become operational within the next few months, Shana reported.

The NPC head emphasized that developing the complex petrochemical industry is highly challenging without the use of modern management systems.

He noted that the petrochemical industry is a leader in adopting advanced systems. Abbaszadeh also emphasized the importance of management in the petrochemical industry's evaluations, noting that the sector is significantly influenced by political and international issues alongside domestic challenges.

The NPC head stressed that flexibility and preparedness of managers to adapt to environmental changes are crucial for navigating organizational challenges.

He called for greater attention to artificial intelligence in the petrochemical industry, urg-

ing companies to focus on the transformative potential of AI. Abbaszadeh also highlighted the importance of managers having a comprehensive understanding of the business landscape and ongoing developments.

He described human resources as the most valuable asset and urged company leaders to treat employees with respect and warmth, as their satisfaction is key to driving progress and further developing the petrochemical industry.

Need for sustainable development

Meanwhile, Afshar Bazayr, the

new CEO of Shastan Commercial Investment Company, said on Saturday that the petrochemical industry is currently one of the pillars of the country's economy, with sustainable development playing a critical role.

He defined sustainable development as designing a value chain to optimize production, reduce environmental impacts, increase profitability, and fulfill social responsibilities.

Bazayr emphasized the necessity of completing the value chain, diversifying the feedstock portfolio, updating technologies, and developing target markets in the petrochemical industry. He added that increasing invest-

ments in the sector is essential to achieving planned goals.

He pointed out Iran's opportunities and advantages for investment in the petrochemical industry, including rich hydrocarbon resources, skilled workforce, and access to open waters for exports.

Bazayr concluded by recommending greater focus on energy management, recycling, and circular economy practices in the petrochemical industry. He suggested that the NPC implement an integrated system across all industry processes to further enhance the improvement and excellence of the sector.

First air taxi takes flight in Iran to diversify transportation

Economy Desk

On Sunday, an air taxi service was launched on the Karaj-Qazvin route, marking a significant step in the development of fast and smart air transportation in the country.

The event was attended by aviation industry executives and representatives from the Civil Aviation Organization of Iran, ILNA reported.

The flight was conducted using a Piper aircraft owned by Atlas Air, supported by Hossein Pourfarzaneh, the deputy minister of roads and urban development who also heads the Civil Aviation Organization.

Air taxis are an air transportation system that uses small aircraft and commercial jets to transport passengers on short and medium routes. The service aims to reduce travel time, increase flexibility, and alleviate issues caused by road congestion and flight delays.

In many metropolitan areas, high-traffic regions, and locations with limited road infrastructure, air taxis can serve as a quick and efficient



alternative to traditional transportation methods.

Atlas Air with a fleet of 10 aircraft, capable of carrying between 2 and 35 passengers, is introducing an innovative approach to the country's aviation industry. The revival of air taxi services in recent years, with a focus on developing air transportation infrastructure, has had a notable impact in the world. With growing demand for rapid travel, air taxi services enable both personal and business trips with maxi-

mum speed and minimal formalities. Passengers can choose their desired routes without relying on fixed airline schedules, reaching their destinations in the shortest possible time. Key advantages of the system include significantly reduced travel time compared to ground and rail methods, flexibility in flight planning, reduced stress from delays and airport congestion, access to small and local airports, and improved connectivity to underserved areas.

Dehloran daily crude extraction up by 15,000 barrels

Economy Desk

The CEO of West Oil and Gas Production Company (WOGPC) announced a 15,000-barrel-per-day increase in oil production from the fields and wells in Dehloran, Ilam Province.

Mahmoud Nasiri stated that oil production in western Iran, which stood at 165,000 barrels per day six months ago, has now reached 180,000 barrels per day, IRNA reported.

The official, speaking to reporters on Sunday in Dehloran's Cheshmeh Khosh, described the increase as significant and noted that the oil and gas industry was once entirely dependent on foreign equipment and expertise but has now achieved self-sufficiency.

Nasiri added that out of 30 oil

fields in western Iran, 12 are developed, one is a gas field, and four are shared fields. Dehloran, he said, is one of the oil-rich counties in the province and the country, accounting for 98% of oil and gas production in western Iran.

Nasiri stated that the WOGPC covers the provinces of Ilam, Kermanshah, and Lorestan, employing 3,000 permanent, contractual, and temporary workers, with about 90% working in operational and production areas.

WOGPC is one of three subsidiaries of the Iranian Central Oil Fields Company (ICOFC) under the new structure of the National Iranian Oil Company. It officially began operations in 1999, producing, processing, and delivering oil and gas to consumption centers.



Hezbollah's staying power remains unshaken

Movement's adversaries miscalculate



The massive crowds that flooded the streets were not just a display of loyalty but living proof of Hezbollah's deep entrenchment in Lebanese society. Contrary to what many observers expected, the funeral was not a moment of weakness but one of consolidation. It demonstrated that Hezbollah's strength does not flow from its leaders to its base; Rather, it emerges organically from the base itself. The people do not follow Hezbollah passively; They are its foundation and the source of its power.



By **Mohammad Ali Senobari**
Director of New Vision

OPINION EXCLUSIVE

The funeral of Hezbollah's top-ranking martyrs Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah and Sayyed Hashem Safieddine was not merely a ceremony bidding farewell to great leaders; Rather, it was a resounding declaration of strength, unity, and resilience. This event sent shockwaves through both supporters and opponents alike. Those who viewed the funeral as a mere emotional event to boost Hezbollah's morale failed to grasp the deeper significance of this historic moment. It was not just about mourning; It was a message of defiance, strength, and unwavering commitment to resistance. The mass mobilization accompanying the funeral was not a reaction to tragedy but rather a declaration of continuity and defiance. It served as evidence of Hezbollah's resilience, not only as a military force but as a deeply rooted social and political entity. When analyzing this event, it becomes clear that Hezbollah's strength is not merely derived from its leadership, weapons, or battlefield victories but also from the organic relationship it has built with its people, its ability to adapt to shifting geopolitical realities, and its strategy and vision that extend beyond Lebanon's borders.

Beyond mourning: Testament to endurance, control

Traditionally, a funeral signifies closure. It represents an end, a

farewell, a moment of sorrow and reflection. However, the funeral of Hezbollah's leaders took place in an entirely different context. It was not about an ending but rather a reaffirmation of continuity and evolution.

The massive crowds that flooded the streets were not just a display of loyalty but living proof of Hezbollah's deep entrenchment in Lebanese society. Contrary to what many observers expected, the funeral was not a moment of weakness but one of consolidation. It demonstrated that Hezbollah's strength does not flow from its leaders to its base; Rather, it emerges organically from the base itself. The people do not follow Hezbollah passively; They are its foundation and the source of its power.

Many political movements throughout history have faced existential crises after the assassination or loss of their key leaders. Their ranks have crumbled, their ideologies wavered, and their followers dissipated. Hezbollah's adversaries had anticipated a similar trajectory, expecting the martyrdom of Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah to push the party into disarray. Instead, the funeral proved that Hezbollah's fundamental strength does not lie solely in individuals but in a well-structured institutional system of governance, military organization, and mass mobilization. The funeral was carried out with meticulous precision, without any breakdown in control despite the immense size of the crowd — which in itself was a powerful message. It debunked the notion that Hezbollah's authority over its base relies solely on its leadership. This event was not a fleet-



Mourners gather during a public funeral ceremony for late Hezbollah leaders Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah (shown on the left side of the gigantic poster) and Hashem Safieddine in Beirut, Lebanon, on February 23, 2025.
● THAIER AL-SUDANI/REUTERS

ing occurrence; Rather, it was an affirmation that the party's grip on its supporters remains firm, even under the most emotionally charged circumstances.

Redefining perceptions of power

One of the most striking aspects of this event was the sheer scale of participation. The funeral was not limited to Hezbollah's direct base; It became a national and even international phenomenon. Participants arrived from more than 80 countries, making it one of the most significant mobilizations in modern Arab history. This level of participation shattered many narratives that Hezbollah's adversaries had long sought to cultivate. First, it dispelled the notion that Hezbollah is an isolated entity, a sectarian force confined to Lebanon's Shia community. The presence of people from different sects, nationalities, and backgrounds demonstrated that Hezbollah's influence extends far beyond its traditional constituency. It is not merely a Lebanese or regional player but a global symbol of resistance. Second, the funeral undermined the persistent Western narrative that Hezbollah is losing its grip on popular support. In reality, such a vast and sustained turnout would have been impossible if Hezbollah's base were eroding. Instead, the event showcased a level of popular commitment that few political organizations — whether in Lebanon or across the region — could ever dream of achieving.

This public display also carried another significant implication: Hezbollah's adversaries are not merely contending with a mili-

tary force or a political faction, but also with a deeply entrenched socio-political entity backed by the loyalty of hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of people. No amount of military pressure, economic sanctions, or political isolation can simply dissolve a movement that enjoys such widespread legitimacy among its supporters.

Lessons about Hezbollah's organizational strength

The funeral was also a testament to Hezbollah's organizational discipline — a characteristic that has long set it apart from other armed and political movements in the region. Despite the intense emotional atmosphere, the event remained under strict control. Hundreds of thousands of people moved in an organized manner, there were no security breaches, and not a single gunshot was fired — an almost unprecedented feat for a gathering of this magnitude in the Arab world. This was not merely an example of crowd control; It was a reflection of Hezbollah's military, political, and social discipline.

This level of organization sends a direct message to Hezbollah's adversaries: Its internal cohesion remains intact. The Zionist entity, along with its Western backers, has long sought to weaken Hezbollah from within, hoping to foster internal divisions and sow discord. The funeral proved that these efforts have failed. Hezbollah remains a well-oiled machine, capable of managing not only its fighters on the battlefield but also its vast network of supporters in times of crisis.

Moreover, this discipline speaks

to Hezbollah's military capabilities. If it can organize an event of this magnitude with such precision, then it undoubtedly possesses the logistical and strategic capacities needed to sustain prolonged military engagements. This realization is crucial in understanding why Hezbollah remains an indomitable force despite continuous attacks from the occupying entity.

Strategic victory in face of assassination

Following the assassination of Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, there was a widespread belief — especially among Hezbollah's enemies — that this marked the beginning of the party's downfall. Some Western analysts prematurely concluded that Hezbollah had suffered an irreversible blow, one that would dismantle its leadership structure and plunge its operations into chaos.

However, the post-assassination phase and its aftermath proved the exact opposite. Rather than disintegrating, Hezbollah quickly reorganized, maintaining its political and military operations seamlessly. Within days, it restored its internal communication networks, adjusted its battlefield strategy, and continued its resistance efforts without interruption.

The fact that the occupying entity ultimately agreed to a cease-fire following these events is itself an admission of failure. Had Hezbollah truly been on the verge of collapse, as some speculated, the Zionist entity would have pressed forward to deliver a decisive blow. Instead, the enemy realized that Hezbollah remained intact — it was still capable of launching



Sheikh Naim Qassem (front-2nd L), who was later named Hezbollah's new leader, delivers an impassioned speech in Beirut, Lebanon, on September 22, 2024.
● COURTNEY BONNEAU/AFP



Supporters from Lebanon and beyond fill the Camille Chamoun Sports City stadium, where a part of the funeral of Hezbollah's assassinated leaders Nasrallah and Safieddine is held, on February 23, 2025.
● THAIER AL-SUDANI/REUTERS

counterattacks, still commanding its forces, and still operating with strategic precision.

This ability to swiftly recover from setbacks is a hallmark of Hezbollah's long-term resilience strategy. Unlike conventional state armies, which rely on hierarchical command structures that can be crippled by the loss of a leader, Hezbollah operates within a highly coordinated yet decentralized framework. The

party is designed to withstand the loss of individual figures because its strength lies in its ideological foundation, institutional framework, and deeply ingrained strategic adaptability.

Reshaping political equation in Lebanon

Beyond its immediate military and strategic implications, the funeral also had a significant impact on Lebanon's internal

political landscape. Hezbollah has long played a dual role — as a resistance movement against Zionist aggression and as a key political actor within the Lebanese state.

Following this event, Hezbollah subtly but decisively shifted the responsibility of addressing the five occupied points in southern Lebanon to the Lebanese government. By allowing the state to take the lead in dealing with

external mediators and handling the issue of occupation, Hezbollah reinforces the notion that it does not operate outside the Lebanese political framework but within it.

This move achieves two primary objectives. First, it forces the Lebanese state to acknowledge that the “people, army, and resistance” equation is the only viable framework for safeguarding national sovereignty. Second,

it signals to the international community that Hezbollah is not a rogue actor but a legitimate national force operating within Lebanon's broader political structure.

The funeral of Hezbollah's martyrs was not a moment of weakness but a testament to the movement's resilience, discipline, and strategic depth. It demonstrated that Hezbollah remains firmly in control, that

its base is as committed as ever, and that its adversaries have fundamentally miscalculated its staying power.

Far from marking the beginning of the end, this occasion signaled the start of a new chapter in the resistance — one in which Hezbollah, despite all efforts to weaken it, continues to evolve, adapt, and assert itself as an unyielding force in the struggle for liberation.

Nasrallah; martyr of normalization of relations

By Mohammad Reza Ghaemi Nik
Scholar

OPINION

1. It appears that the order to attack the Dahieh district of Beirut on September 27, 2024, was given by Netanyahu himself during his speech at the United Nations. In that speech, Netanyahu explicitly stated that the process of normalizing relations with regional countries, especially Saudi Arabia, had reached positive milestones until the October 7 Hamas attack pushed this normalization to the sidelines. In this context, Ismail Haniyeh, Seyyed Hassan Nasrallah, and other martyrs accompanying them were martyred in a conflict whose immediate outcome was the rejection of normalization between the Zionist regime and regional countries.

2. The idea of normalizing relations between the Zionist regime and Islamic or Arab countries, particularly in West Asia (the Middle East), has been one of the most important strategies of the regime in recent years. To understand the significance of this idea, one must consider the confrontations of said countries during the wars of 1948, 1967, and 1973 with the Zionist regime. These initial intense confrontations, through a process of attrition and compromise, eventually led to the 2008 war between Hezbollah and the Zionist regime. This process ultimately resulted in the adoption of normalization policies by some Islamic and Arab countries with the Zionist regime, as seen in the Camp David Accords of 1978 with Egypt, the 1983 agreement with Lebanon, the 1994 peace treaty with Jordan, the Abraham Accords of 2020 with the UAE and Bahrain, and even the laying of the groundwork for a similar agreement with Saudi Arabia before Operation Al-Aqsa Storm on October 7, 2023. Thus, over approximately half a century, we have witnessed a shift from military confrontation to the normalization of relations and friendly cooperation between the Zionist regime and some Arab and Islamic countries.

But on what basis does the project of normalization rest? More precisely, what process has occurred in the last two to three decades in the aforementioned Islamic countries of the region that has led them, both politically and socially, to move from military confrontation to the normalization of relations? If we consider the motivation behind the conflicts and wars prior to normalization by Islamic countries to be the incompatibility of the idea of political Zionism with Islam or even Arab nationalism, what fundamental process had taken place that had resolved this incompatibility for a while? What cognitive or fundamental idea had changed so that the hostile incompatibility between Jewish Zionism and Islam turned into the normalization of relations?

3. It seems that this shift and change in direction cannot be explained solely in terms of political relations as the fundamental transformation — from military and wartime confrontation to the normalization of relations based on friendly cooperation — requires a comprehensive explanation and public persuasion of Arab and Islamic societies, and thus, an explanation based on a grand social and political narrative. To understand this fundamental transformation, we must pay special attention to the foundations of the formation of Jewish Zionism in Israel.

According to the logic of divine religions, the most significant challenge faced by the prophets in fulfilling their assigned mission was in calling their people to the path of God. In other words, all the hardships and difficulties endured by the prophets arose when the issue of “calling” the general public to God and divine religions was at stake. As long as a prophet was personally inclined toward a religion, there was no significant problem, but all the troubles — from persecution to execution — occurred when the prophets called the general public to their religion. In this sense, it can be argued that these problems arose when the religion of each prophet became a political religion. However, political religions, each in their own time, made such calls in the language and wording of their era.

According to a hadith from Imam Hadi (AS), the miracles of Jesus, Moses, and the Prophet of Islam (peace be upon them) were all appropriate to the conditions of their time. However, considering the evolutionary process of religions, a new religion abrogates the previous one and is sent to perfect it. Therefore, given the role of Sharia in establishing social and political order in each religion, the issue revolves around the logic governing large-scale political and social relations that determine the overall happiness of humanity in each historical religious period. This is why the lives of followers of Judaism or Christianity among Muslims are

respected, as long as they do not engage in proselytizing, forming governments, or opposing Islamic Sharia within Islamic society; although they are invited to Islam. In other words, what happens in the rule of abrogation of religions is the abrogation of the laws of the previous religion due to the exhaustion of its historical capacity to create a comprehensive historical order for guiding humanity. Considering this evolutionary logic, the continuation of a religion in a period when its capacity has been exhausted and a new religion has been revealed, especially in terms of proselytizing and politics, is reprehensible because its proselytizing capacity has ended, and relying on proselytizing based on the logic of that religion means violating the rule of human evolution and disrupting the historical order that God has intended for humanity.

4. The capacity of Judaism and Christianity to call humanity to the truth, in terms of official history, began in the early 7th century AD, coinciding with the advent of Islam. However, according to the analysis of the famous German philosopher Leo Strauss regarding Spinoza's views, the solution of European thinkers to prevent the Islamization of Europeans was to find a way to revive the political and social capacity of Judaism and Christianity in the world known as the modern world. As we know, the modern world is secular, and the secular world has taken a neutral position toward divine religions. In this context, as Spinoza stated, if the Jews have not already weakened their religious foundations, he deeply believes that, given the fact that human affairs are changeable, they will once again regain their sovereignty in a favorable situation. Strauss considers this Spinozian point as a complete “substitution of a purely political solution for the miracle of redemption toward which men can contribute”. Strauss sees this moment as the birth of the idea of Jewish Zionism, in which a new possibility (unlike possibilities based on divine religions) is defined for reviving a this-worldly narrative of political Judaism. At



A group gather carrying the poster of the slain leader of Hezbollah Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah and chanting slogans following the confirmation of his death on September 27, 2024.
ANADOLU

this moment, a paradoxical event occurs. Judaism, relying on secular politics or the secular world, can revive its proselytizing capacity, and the idea of Jewish Zionism is formed.

The inherent contradiction of the idea of political Zionism immediately becomes the “Jewish Question” for 19th-century thinkers. Bruno Bauer, in his 1843 book *The Jewish Question*, reveals this contradiction in the relationship between Judaism and their refusal to submit to the modern secular state. Jews, due to their religious belief in the uniqueness of the Jewish race and its chosenness, cannot accept a secular state based on democracy. The Jewish Question was also “incompatible” with the idea of secular democracy. The Spinozian idea sought to unify Jews and Christians under liberal democracy, but Jews, not due to a conflict with the secular nature of the modern world but because of their belief in the chosenness of the Jewish people, could not submit to the idea of democracy, because, assuming unification, enduring suffering for Judaism would become meaningless, while the chosenness of the people of Israel [in the eyes of Jews] is certain and absolute. A unified, homeless Jew had nothing but himself to confront hostility and humiliation. The complete reali-

zation of social equality required the complete erasure of Jews in terms of their Jewishness. Unification [resulting from secularism] was the most disgraceful fate for a people who had gone from the house of bondage to the desert of Sinai and were simultaneously prevented from entering the land of the Palestinians.

According to Strauss's analysis, this Jewish stance was the most important factor in the complex situation of Jews in the first half of the 20th century, especially from 1933 to 1945 in Nazi Germany, which hindered the formation of a secular German state.

5. Europeans, to resolve this ontological contradiction of the Jewish people, sought to transfer this contradiction to Islamic societies. This transfer initially began through one of the most secular aspects of human life, namely land purchases, but quickly expanded. Since contradictory behavior in human life sooner or later leads to ontological violence, Jewish Zionism, in the Islamic world, which was fundamentally alien to secularism, quickly turned into a machine of violence.

In this regard, the most significant factor behind the violence of the past century by Israel should not be attributed to Judaism but to the inherent contradiction of the idea of Jewish Zionism, which has attempted, in an inherently contradictory combination, to revive the non-existent historical capacity of Judaism to call all humanity to the truth in the secular space of the modern world. However, after the relative establishment of this regime, which has always been accompanied by numerous acts of violence, the spread of secularism to Islamic countries could have reduced the level of violence. Therefore, in the past decade, the Zionist regime has tried to extend secularism and all its implications in the region, effectively carrying out its historical proselytizing through the call to secularism. It is no coincidence that most countries in the region that have accepted normalization have embraced secularism more than

other Islamic countries. In these countries, a significant boundary has been drawn between Islam and culture, politics, economy, science, and the like, and thus, by adopting a secular narrative of Islam, all conflicts are considered resolved there.

However, the most significant risk that the countries of the resistance axis cannot accept, and therefore will be in endless conflict with Israel and Jewish Zionism, is the conflict over the survival of Islam as a religion with a global proselytizing capacity, which abrogates this capacity in past religions. Apart from this view of Islam, which can be pursued in the idea of “political Islam,” conflict with Israel is not very reasonable. But it is through commitment to this political narrative of Islam that Islam can be the religion that calls all humanity to the truth and, of course, enters into serious conflict with Jewish Zionism.

Thus, it is only here that the boundary between truth and falsehood becomes clear, and truth and falsehood or good and evil are not forgotten under the process of secularism. If we consider the fundamental logic of divine religions to be adherence to inherent truth and inherent falsehood, from this perspective, this conflict is essentially a conflict over the death of truth or its revival and survival. Here, secular processes, which initially advocated the elimination of violence in religious conflicts, succumb to any form of ontological violence, and the clear result of ontological violence is only one action: assassination; the assassination of Seyyed Abbas Musawi, the assassination of Haj Qassem Soleimani, the assassination of Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, the assassination of Ismail Haniyeh, the assassination of Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah. All of them were heralds of calling humanity to peace and Islam and submission to divine truth, and they were victims of the secular logic of Jewish Zionism in Israel.

The article first appeared in Persian in *Vatan-e Emrooz*.



Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu adjusts his skull cap after speaking at a special session of the Knesset to approve and swear in a new cabinet, in Jerusalem on December 29, 2022.
AMIR COHEN/POOL

AFC Champions League Elite: Last eight on the horizon as Esteghlal visits Al Nassr

Sports Desk

A place in the AFC Champions League Elite quarter-finals will be up for grabs when Saudi heavyweight Al Nassr hosts Persian Gulf Pro League club Esteghlal in Riyadh today.

The tie is finely balanced after the two sides played to a goalless stalemate in the first leg in Tehran last week, and Esteghlal will be looking to build on the solid defensive performance, spearheaded by goalkeeper Seyyed Hossein Hosseini, when taking on the formidable, star-studded front-line of the home side at Al Awwal Park.

With Al Nassr dominating at the iconic Azadi Stadium, the Blues keeper pulled off a string of superb saves to keep Sadio Mane and Jhon Durán at bay, but the good news for the Saudi side and

Italian head coach Stefano Pioli is that Portuguese superstar Cristiano Ronaldo is available for selection again after missing the first leg with what was reported to be a fitness issue.

Ronaldo scored on return to Al Nassr lineup in a 2-2 draw against Al Shabab in the Saudi Pro League on Friday, taking his domestic tally to 18 goals, and will be chasing a seventh goal in sixth Asian outing this season.

History, however, is against Ronaldo as the Portuguese skipper has failed to find the back of the net in the previous three meetings with the Iranian clubs – including the league phase encounter with today's opponent last October – though his team will draw inspiration from a 12-game unbeaten run against Persian Gulf Pro League outfits.

Pioli will be without Portuguese midfielder Otavio and Spanish center-back Aymeric Laporte, as well as Saudi internationals Abdullah Al-Khaibari and Sultan Al-Ghannam, who are all ruled out of the contest with injury.

Esteghlal has been unbeaten in five games in the Asian Champions League, but Miodrag Bozovic's men will need to adopt a more attacking outlook if they are to reach the quarter-finals for the first time since the 2018 campaign, having bagged eight goals in nine games in the competition this season.

Esteghlal center-back Rouzbeh Cheshmi and midfielder Arash Rezavand will be facing a race against time to make it to the game after suffering minor injuries during a training session in Riyadh.



● AFC

FIBA West Asia Super League:

Tabiat beats Amman United for strong finish in first round



FIBA – Tabiat Basketball exemplified how important short-term memory could be in a quick tournament as the Iranian champion sent Amman United Club skidding 79-64 at the at the Nuhad Naufal Stadium on Saturday night to finish its first-round campaign in the FIBA West Asia Super League strongly. Coming off a tough 110-100 overtime loss to reigning champion Al Riyadi barely 24 hours ago, the wards of Iranian head coach Mehran Shahintab swiftly moved on and instead vented their frustrations toward the Jordanian crew on the way to netting a third victory in four outings in Group A – indeed a confidence booster for the second round on home soil in April.

Sina Vahedi starred for Tabiat, contributing with 28 points, 9 rebounds, and 9 assists. He also had 4 steals and a block, chalking up an efficiency of 37.

Ivan Buva came through with a double-double with 20 points and 13 rebounds, while Stedmon Lemon added 16 points as the trio showed how much they wanted to bounce back after losing to the Yellow Castle.

Lemon, who missed what could've been the game-winning jumper against Al Riyadi late in regulation, was responsible for kick-starting their third-quarter pullaway toward the W.

As Freddy Ibrahim cut the gap to three, Lemon responded with a jam, and that started a 9-0 run – capped by a Vahedi three-pointer – to push their lead to 12 points, 49-37, with under six minutes remaining.

Tabiat would follow up that solid third quarter with a strong fourth-quarter push, which inflated their lead to two decades' worth, 70-50, thanks to another outside shot courtesy of Vahedi with

3:55 left to play.

The defending Iran Basketball League champion drained a total of 10 threes, six of which came from Vahedi himself. His 9 assists, furthermore, nearly matched their foes' output (12).

"We had a short time from last night because we played a tough game ... maybe between these two games we only had maybe around 15 hours. I knew that my players are tired, but they made the decision to have a good game. And today, they managed to organize everything from offense to defense. I appreciate also that they shared the ball very well," Shahintab said after the game.

● Tabiat's Ivan Buva (25) goes up for a basket during a victory over Amman United Club at the FIBA West Asia Super League first round in Zouk Mosbeh, Lebanon, on March 8, 2025.
● FIBA

Iran edges out Afghanistan in futsal friendly

Sports Desk

Iran held off a second-half fightback by Afghanistan to win 4-3 at the friendly futsal tournament in Curitiba, Brazil. Hossein Tayyebi put Iran in front with three minutes into the contest, before Moslem Oladqobad doubled the lead for the Asian powerhouse two minutes later.

Abolfazl Afzali extended the lead for Iran in the 15th minute, only to see Akbar Kazemi reduce the deficit to two seconds later as it finished 3-1 in the first half.

Vahid Shamsaei's men again started on the front foot after the break and bagged a fourth goal through Mahdi Karimi in the early stages of the second period.

Afghan keeper Javad Safari produced some fine saves to deny Iran a fifth goal, while Afghanistan had a couple chances

on the counter-attacks. Kazemi again found the net for Afghanistan with a sublime lob, but was shown his marching orders after his foul denied Iran a clear goal opportunity. Afghanistan still managed to find a third goal when Iran's Ali Akrami was dispossessed by Hossein Mohammadi, who tackled the ball into the back of the net.

This was a third outing for Iran in Brazil, after a 5-2 loss to the host was followed by a 11-2 demolishing of Greenland on Friday.

Iran will have the chance to avenge the first-day defeat against the reigning world champion when the two sides square off in the final showpiece of the event today.



● FFIRI

Djokovic again stunned by a lucky loser at Indian Wells

REUTERS – Novak Djokovic was shocked by Botic van de Zandschulp 6-2 3-6 6-1 in the second round of Indian Wells on Saturday as the Serbian suffered an early exit at the hands of a tournament lucky loser for a second consecutive year. Djokovic fell to lucky loser Luca Nardi of Italy in the California desert last year and history repeated itself on Stadium One court a day after top seed Alexander Zverev also went out.

The twenty-four time Grand Slam champion got off to a horrid start, hitting 14 unforced errors and being broken twice in the opening set. He regrouped to race out to a 3-0 lead in the second, levelling the contest with a mighty forehand winner and pumping his fist in front of the packed, sun-soaked crowd.

But giant killer van de Zandschulp ran away with the decider, breaking Djokovic for a fourth time with a perfectly executed lob for a 3-1 lead and sealing the stunning upset

when Djokovic's shot went wide on match point.

"I started really well and then of course Novak came back," said van de Zandschulp, who secured a berth to the tournament upon the withdrawal of 47th ranked Facundo Diaz Acosta.

"In the end I was happy to get my level back."

Djokovic, 37, retired from his Australian Open semi-final against Zverev with a hamstring injury and

lost in the Qatar Open first round last month.

He said the leg injury was behind him coming into the tournament and did not look hampered by it in his match of Saturday, where he was accompanied by coach Andy Murray. "No excuses for a poor performance," Djokovic said.

"It doesn't feel great when you play this way on the court, but congratulations to my opponent.

"Just a bad day in the office."



● CLIVE BRUNSKILL/GETTY IMAGES

Iranica Desk

The migratory bird count, aligned with the global calendar, was conducted in Mazandaran Province this year. Following the assessment of migratory birds in the Miankaleh Wetland, a record-breaking number of birds was observed. This positive development is largely attributed to the increased rainfall experienced in the region.

This year's summer and autumn rains have significantly impacted the Miankaleh Wetland. These rains flooded parts of the previously dried areas, with some regions experiencing water levels gaining up to 30 centimeters. This transformation is particularly notable as it revitalized sections that had been dry for several years, offering a renewed habitat for various species.

Record number of species

According to the recent census, a remarkable 65 species of marine and shorebirds have arrived in the Miankaleh Wetland for wintering. This marks a new record in recent years and indicates a positive trend for the wetland's ecosystem.

Historically, before the extensive retreat of the Caspian Sea, the Miankaleh Wetland was a haven for migratory birds, hosting around one million annually. However, the ongoing retreat has significantly reduced their numbers in recent years, posing a challenge to the region's biodiversity.

Severe droughts had previously dried up the western part of the wetland, leading to concerns about its ecological health. However, this year's rains have revitalized these areas, creating the potential for a threefold increase in migratory bird presence. This resurgence offers hope for the restoration of the wetland's former glory.

Although the restored sections of the Miankaleh Wetland may face the possibility of drying out again in the summer, the rains of late summer and autumn this year have provided crucial water levels. These levels, ranging from five to 30 centimeters, have created an ideal environment for migratory birds, such as ducks and shorebirds, to winter in the area. The increased water expanse provides essential feeding and resting grounds for these birds.

International recognition

The registration of the Gulf of Gorgan in 1975, along with the Miankaleh Wetland, as the first international wetland site on the Ramsar Convention list, underscores the ecological importance of this region. This recognition highlights that this gulf and its surrounding areas constitute a valuable environmental ecosystem, worthy of protection and conservation efforts.

The Miankaleh Wetland plays a significant role in sustaining the Caspian Sea's ecological cycle. Furthermore, it directly impacts the livelihoods of local communities, with approximately 500,000 to 1 million people from the region affected by the health and vitality of the Gulf of Gorgan. The

Story of Miankaleh Wetland; from drought to revival



● MIZAN/MEHDI MOHEBBIPOUR

wetland's well-being is intrinsically linked to the socio-economic stability of the surrounding areas. The Miankaleh Wetland extends from the Miankaleh village in Behshahr to Ashuradeh in Golestan Province, encompassing a diverse range of habitats. This region, due to its suitable water expanse with rich food resources and aquatic life, serves as a crucial stopover for migratory birds.

Avian diversity and wildlife sanctuary

The wetland hosts over 40 species of migratory birds during winter and more than 100 species of native aquatic and shorebirds each year, contributing to its rich biodiversity. This wetland, with its wildlife sanctuary spanning approximately 22,000 hectares, supports a diverse array of plant life, including oleaster and wild pomegranate trees that provide food for several bird species. As a result of its diverse habitats and abundant resources, the Miankaleh Wetland has been able to host over 500 animal species. Its significant biodiversity has led to its designation as one of the biosphere reserves in the world by international environmental protection organizations, highlighting its global ecological importance.

A paradise for birds

The Miankaleh Wetland should rightfully be called a paradise for birds and birdwatching enthusiasts. Covering an area of 48,000 hectares, it is located in the eastern part of Mazandaran Province, adjacent to Golestan Province, and

annually hosts migratory birds. Every year, from mid-September to mid-winter, the wetlands and reservoirs of Mazandaran Province welcome various bird species from the colder regions of the Caspian Sea bordering countries. These birds journey to find warmer locations and abundant food resources, relying on the province's wetlands for sustenance and shelter.

Bird population increase

Kouros Rabiei, the head of the Wildlife Department at the Mazandaran Province's Department of Environmental, told IRNA that according to this year's census, 250,000 migratory birds wintered in the Miankaleh Wetland. This significant increase shows a threefold rise compared to the previous year, indicating the positive impact of recent conservation efforts and favorable environmental conditions. He noted that approximately 200,000 of the wintering birds in the Miankaleh Wetland were species of ducks and wild ducks, which were attracted to the wetland due to the good rainfall this year and the subsequent flooding of the western section of Miankaleh. Rabiei also mentioned that around 40,000 shorebirds were present in the Miankaleh Wetland this winter, further contributing to the wetland's avian diversity.

Revitalization of dried areas

Rabiei highlighted that the area of the wetland that had dried up over the past three years was revitalized by this year's rains, allow-

ing for a greater extent of the wetland to host these migratory birds. This revitalization is a testament to the resilience of the ecosystem and the importance of water availability for supporting wildlife. He explained that, in addition to the favorable rainfall this year, the issuance of hunting permits in neighboring provinces also played a role, as it indirectly facilitated the significant presence of migratory birds in the Miankaleh Wetland. He emphasized that migratory birds choose habitats for their wintering or summering based on the availability of security and adequate food, conditions that were indeed provided in Miankaleh this year.

Protected species

Rabiei stated that out of the 65 species of migratory birds that wintered in the Miankaleh Wetland, 16 species are considered protected, underscoring the need for continued conservation efforts. He noted that this year, 5,700 flamingos spent the winter in Miankaleh, compared to 5,600 last year, indicating a stable and healthy population of these iconic birds.

He continued that in previous decades, the Miankaleh Wetland alone hosted one million migratory birds; however, the retreat of the Caspian Sea and the increase in dry land in the Miankaleh Wetland significantly reduced these numbers. This year, however, there has been a remarkable resurgence in the presence of migratory birds in the wetland, signaling a positive shift in the ecosystem's health.

Endangered species

The official mentioned that approximately four percent of the migratory birds in the Miankaleh Wetland, equivalent to about 10,000 individuals, are classified as endangered. This alarming statistic highlights the critical importance of preserving the Miankaleh Wetland as an international habitat, ensuring the survival of these vulnerable species.

Mazandaran Province's natural beauty

Mazandaran Province itself is renowned for its lush landscapes, featuring dense forests, rolling hills,



and a stunning coastline along the Caspian Sea. The region's diverse climate, influenced by its proximity to the sea and the Alborz Mountains, creates a unique environment that supports a rich variety of flora and fauna.

This natural beauty not only attracts tourists but also provides critical habitats for numerous

species, including the migratory birds that flock to the wetlands each year. The province's commitment to preserving its natural heritage is essential for both ecological and economic sustainability.

Aquatic ecosystems

Hundreds of species of migratory birds, both native and non-native, migrate to the wetlands and water bodies of this province for the winter. The rich aquatic ecosystems of Mazandaran Province, benefiting from favorable conditions, provide a safe and expansive habitat each year for the birds that have landed there after covering long distances.

The wetlands and aquatic habitats of Mazandaran Province are among the most beautiful natural attractions of this region, drawing tourists and nature enthusiasts alike. With their significant ecological capacity, they not only enhance the province's tourism appeal but also serve as a pleasant refuge for migratory birds each winter, welcoming tens of thousands of birds.

The birds not only add charm to birdwatching in these aquatic habitats, but they also serve as narrators of the biodiversity of the water resources that rest alongside these habitats before continuing on their journey. Their presence is an indicator of the health and vitality of these ecosystems.

In addition to the international Miankaleh Wetland and the two wetlands of Fereydunkenar and Kiasar, Mazandaran Province has 915 water reservoirs covering approximately 18,000 hectares. These reservoirs make them some of the most suitable habitats for migratory birds, providing additional resources and refuge.

Most migratory birds spend the cold winter days in the Miankaleh Wetland of Behshahr, benefiting from its unique ecological conditions. The average rainfall in recent months in Mazandaran Province has been 422 millimeters, which represents an increase of about 21% compared to the long-term average of 334 millimeters and a 12% increase compared to the same period last year, further supporting the region's ecosystems.



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 ● Language Editor Mehdi Ebrahim

● Editorial Dept. Tel +98 21 84711411
 ● Address 208, Khorramshahr Ave., Tehran, Iran
 ● ICPI Publisher +98 21 88548892-5
 ● Advertising Dept. Tel/Email +98 21 88500601/irandaily@iranagahiha.com
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Dam levels reach critical lows Iran faces severe water crisis as reservoir supplies plummet

Social Desk

Iran is staring down the barrel of a severe water crisis as reservoirs across the country continue to dry up amid a staggering drop in rainfall, officials warn. With water reserves running dangerously low, experts say the country is teetering on the edge of an emergency that could wreak havoc on agriculture, industry, and daily life.

According to Isa Bozorgzadeh, spokesperson for Iran's water industry, rainfall in the current water year has nosedived 41% below the long-term average and 21% lower than last year's levels. The Ministry of Energy reports that precipitation from early October to mid-March has barely reached 93.8 millimeters, a dramatic shortfall from the 157.8 millimeter average.

"This drop in precipitation has had a direct impact on our reservoirs," Bozorgzadeh added. "Water inflow into dams has plummeted 33% compared to last year, while stored reserves have shrunk by 7% to 22.09 billion cubic meters." Tehran, home to over nine million people, is feeling the pinch. Images circulating on social media in recent weeks show alarmingly low water levels in the city's key reservoirs.

The National Water and Wastewater Engineering Company of Iran (Abfa) recently revealed that Tehran's water consumption has surged by 20%, reaching an unprecedented 48,000 liters per second due to seasonal demand spikes ahead of Nowruz and Ramadan.

"This year marks the lowest precipitation levels in the past 57 years," said Iran's Deputy Energy Minister for Water Affairs Mohammad Javanbakht.

The Lar, Lalyan, Mamlu, and Karaj dams, which are vital for Tehran's water supply, have been hit hard by a 47% decline in rainfall, leading to what officials call a "drastic reduction" in their reserves.

The figures paint a grim picture. In December, the Karaj Dam was 35% full, while the Lar Dam was at a mere 3% capacity. Fast forward three months, and these numbers have taken a nosedive: Karaj is now down to just 7% capacity, while Lar is teetering on the brink at 1%. The Lalyan and Mamlu dams are also struggling, holding only 12% of their potential storage.

"The situation at Karaj Dam is unprecedented in its entire history of operation," Javanbakht warned, adding that some of the remaining reserves are part of the "dead volume" that cannot be easily accessed for consumption.

Across Iran, other major reservoirs are also running on fumes. The Zayandehrud Dam, a crucial source of water for Isfahan Province, is operating at just 13% of its five-year average.

While authorities attribute the crisis to climate change and prolonged drought, experts argue that poor water management is fanning the flames. Firouz Qasemzadeh, another spokesman for Iran's water industry, confirmed that eight provinces have seen rainfall drop by more than 50%, warning that many key reservoirs have reached dangerously low levels.

As the summer months approach, officials are bracing for worsening water stress. If rainfall doesn't pick up, water rationing could be on the table. Experts are calling for urgent action, including better conservation practices, stricter consumption regulations, and smarter agricultural policies.

"This crisis has been years in the making, and unless we change our approach, it will only get worse," said a senior water industry official.

With Tehran's population growing by 2-2.5% annually and no new water sources in sight, authorities face an uphill battle to keep the taps running in the capital and beyond.



Tehran to host Picasso exhibition

Arts & Culture Desk

An exhibition featuring works from various periods of Pablo Picasso's career, including his renowned 'La Tauromaquia' (The Art of Bullfighting) series, will open on March 11 at the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art (TMOCA).

According to a statement from TMOCA, more than 60 works by the legendary Spanish artist will be displayed, spanning different phases of his artistic journey. Among them are 12 aquatint prints from the 'La Tauromaquia' series, alongside several of Picasso's most significant pieces, IRNA reported.

In addition to Picasso's works, the exhibition will feature pieces by Iranian artists whose styles or themes resonate with his artistic legacy.

The 'La Tauromaquia' collection consists of 26 aquatint prints, originally published as a portfolio in an edition of 261. The series is housed in major museums worldwide, including the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York.

Other notable Picasso works on display from TMOCA's collection include 'The Painter and His Model,' 'An Open Window on Rue Penhièvre,' 'Baboon and Young,' and multiple versions of 'Weeping Woman'.

The exhibition will also showcase works by renowned Iranian artists such as Bahram Dabiri, Bahman Mohassess, Jalil Ziapour, Mohsen Vaziri-Moghaddam, Mohammad Ali Shiva (Kako), Garnik Der Hacopian, Hannibal Alkhas, and Parvaneh Etemadi. Also, pieces by international artists including Georges Braque, Robert Delaunay, Fernand Léger, František Kupka, and Joan Miró will be on display. Visitors can attend the exhibition until May 21 except on Mondays.

Deep dive into ...

The emergence of these resistance forces has added another layer of complexity to Syria's already fragile power dynamics, raising the odds of fresh conflicts on the horizon.

Key battlegrounds in Alawites' armed resistance

Amid the unfolding crisis, the remarks of Iran's Leader Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei carry particular weight. He has repeatedly warned against policies that sow division and tear societies apart, emphasizing the importance of national unity and cohesion. Drawing on Syria's experience, Ayatollah Khamenei has stressed that neglecting these principles and disregarding minority rights could pave the way for serious crises and foreign intervention. In a stark warning, he once stated: "Some countries, if they make a grave mistake and push their devout young people out of the scene, will end up just like Syria." His words serve as a wake-up call to all nations—especially those with diverse ethnic and religious demographics—urging them to steer clear of divisive policies and

ensure that all groups have a stake in governance.

It is clear that the emergence of the Alawite resistance in Syria could trigger far-reaching strategic consequences. First and foremost, it could fan the flames of conflict and deepen instability. Should another full-blown civil war erupt, Syria would sink even deeper into chaos, with devastating repercussions for its people. Secondly, the resistance could shake up the balance of power in the region. If foreign powers throw their weight behind the various factions, Syria will once again turn into a battleground for regional and global rivalries, dragging the entire Middle East into a fresh wave of turmoil. This, in turn, could set off a domino effect of rising tensions and prolonged instability across the region.

Moreover, Israel is likely to exploit the situation to divert attention and clamp down on the Alawite population while consolidating its foothold in southern Syria and pushing for the fragmentation of Druze-majority areas. A renewed civil war would provide a golden opportunity for terrorist groups like ISIS and Al-Qaeda to stage

a comeback. These organizations will waste no time in capitalizing on the power vacuum, posing a grave threat to the security and stability of the entire region.

In this volatile climate, finding a way out of the Syrian crisis is more urgent than ever. Any viable solution must rest on a few fundamental principles. First, Syria's territorial integrity and national sovereignty must remain intact. Any attempt to carve up the country will only fuel further bloodshed and deepen the crisis. Second, the rights of all ethnic and religious groups must be safeguarded by the new rulers. Any form of discrimination or persecution will only set the stage for another cycle of violence. Third, foreign meddling—particularly Turkey and Israel's destabilizing interventions—must be kept in check. Any interference from these actors will only prolong the conflict and crush any hopes for long-term stability.

Fourth, efforts must be ramped up to prevent extremist and terrorist groups from regaining a foothold in Syria. If left unchecked, they will drag the country—and the wider region—into

another dark chapter of destruction. Lastly, a broad-based political process must be initiated, one that includes all Syrian factions, even Ba'ath Party loyalists, to ensure that no group feels sidelined from the country's political landscape. This process should pave the way for an inclusive government and the drafting of a new constitution that guarantees the rights of all Syrians, regardless of their ethnicity or faith.

Iran's role in shaping the trajectory of the developments is crucial. As a long-time ally of the Syrian people, Iran has made considerable sacrifices in its bid to uphold stability in the country. It is well-positioned to leverage its influence over various Syrian factions to push for a comprehensive political settlement. Furthermore, through collaboration with regional and international players, Iran can put its expertise and potential to use in the fight against terrorism and extremism in Syria.

It is worth reiterating that Ayatollah Khamenei has consistently underscored the need to preserve Syria's unity and territorial integrity while standing by its people. In a powerful

statement, he declared: "Those who have violated the land of the Syrian people will one day be forced to retreat by the strength of Syria's courageous youth. Without a doubt, this will happen."

As Syria enters a new chapter of its troubled history, it finds itself at a crossroads, facing an even more intricate web of challenges. The recent bloodshed targeting Alawites in the coastal regions has not only further complicated the power dynamics within the country but has also unmasked the true face of certain so-called human rights advocates.

In these circumstances, the Syrian people have a chance to take a hard look at who their true friends and foes really are. This crisis has laid bare the reality that those who, in recent months, have paid lip service to their so-called friendship with Syria see the country as nothing more than a means to advance their own interests. When it comes to securing their gains, they have shown no hesitation in fueling Syria's fragmentation or turning a blind eye to the bloodshed of its people.