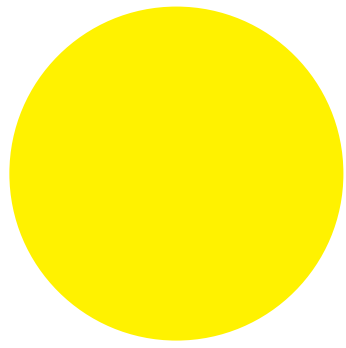


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Secret to Nowruz's endurance lies in respect for all humanity: Researcher

Nowruz belongs to whole world

By Sadeq Dehqan
Staff writer

INTERVIEW EXCLUSIVE



Nowruz, the festival marking the beginning of the Iranian New Year, stands as one of the oldest celebrations in Iranian history, with roots stretching back to ancient Iran and even prehistory. The origins of Nowruz lie in Greater Iran and the broader cultural sphere of the Iranian Plateau—an expanse that, during the Achaemenid Empire, encompassed vast parts of the Caucasus, Central Asia, Mesopotamia, Anatolia, as well as regions of present-day India, China, and even parts of Europe.

Given this extensive historical reach, it's no surprise that Nowruz is still celebrated across many of these nations and has even been enshrined as an official holiday in their national calendars.

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Breaking stereotypes, changing mindsets key to stronger ties:

Pakistani envoy to Iran

Ambassador Tipu calls for free trade agreement to help reach \$10bn target

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Pakistani Ambassador to Iran Muhammad Mudassir Tipu speaks to Iran Daily during an exclusive interview at the country's embassy in Tehran. **SAJJAD SAFARI/IRAN DAILY**



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Israel's offensive in Syria: Geopolitical ramifications, regional fallout of escalating crisis

By Hoda Yousefi
Middle East affairs analyst

ANALYSIS EXCLUSIVE

Between late December 2024 and March 2025, Israel's military strikes on southern Syria reached an unprecedented level of intensity and scope. The operations have not only reshaped the battlefield along Syria's borders and the Golan Heights but have also raised pressing questions about the future balance of power in the Middle East, Iran's role and resistance groups, and the prospects for stability in a post-Assad era. Citing "security imperatives" and the need to prevent advanced weapon transfers to Hezbollah and Iran-backed militias, Israel ramped up its aerial and naval strikes, wiping out 70% of Syria's military infrastructure in the south—including key bases in Quneitra and weapons stockpiles. These actions come as Syria's new

leadership, under Ahmad Al-Sharaa, attempts to carve out an image of moderation and pragmatism to gain international legitimacy. However, Israel's unilateral scrapping of the 1974 agreement and its seizure of 500 square kilometers of border territory have not only put vital water resources under its control but have also redrawn the region's security landscape in ways that may prove irreversible.

Military, geostrategic dimensions: From occupation to redefining borders

Israel's offensive in southern Syria goes far beyond a routine counterterrorism operation. Reports indicate that, deploying a mix of air and naval power, the Israeli military has taken out Syrian military bases as well as radar infrastructure and naval facilities. On March 3, 2025, a strike targeted a weapons site near the port of Tartus—aligning with Israel's claims about the presence of chemical arms. The attack followed a February 25 operation that struck Hezbollah po-

sitions in eastern Lebanon. On February 23, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu doubled down on his government's stance, declaring: "We will not allow southern Syria to become a new stronghold for jihadists... The complete demilitarization of this region is essential." The annulment of the 1974 agreement—previously overseen by UNDOF, which defined a 235-square-kilometer buffer zone—has given Israel free rein to take hold of Mount Hermon and other key border points. Beyond military considerations, this area carries strategic value due to its control over the Yarmouk River and the Golan watershed. In effect, by tightening its grip on these regions, Israel is securing both "border security" and "water control"—two pillars of its survival strategy. Meanwhile, Sharaa's insistence on adhering to the 1974 agreement and his stated reluctance to engage in conflict with Israel (as per his remarks on December 29, 2024) have done little to ease Israeli

concerns. From Israel's perspective, the lingering presence of the Resistance Axis (Iran and Hezbollah), coupled with reports such as the interception of arms shipments bound for Hezbollah on January 26, 2025, suggests that Syria remains a conduit for weapons transfers. Even Syria's January 17, 2025, crackdown on an alleged weapons smuggling attempt to Lebanon has failed to reassure Israeli decision-makers. On February 23, Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Katz made it clear: "We will hold on to our military outposts in the buffer zone indefinitely... There is no going back to the pre-October 7, 2023, reality."

Regional fallout, future scenarios: Fragile stability or escalation?

While these operations have eroded Syria's military capabilities, they have also ratcheted up tensions with regional players such as Turkey and Iran. On one hand, Iran's Leader, during a January 8, 2025, meeting with Iraq's prime minister, underlined the "need to bolster the

Popular Mobilization Forces" and opposed US presence in the region—signaling Tehran's ongoing efforts to prop up the Resistance Axis. On the other hand, Turkey—wary of Kurdish territorial gains in northern Syria—may seize the moment to expand its military footprint under the pretext of "counterterrorism," potentially setting the stage for direct friction with Israeli forces. Inside Syria, Israel's actions have deepened the legitimacy crisis facing Sharaa's government. While some rebel factions near the border (including remnants of the Free Syrian Army and Druze forces) view Israel favorably, the destruction of farmlands and civilian casualties (as documented in UN Security Council reports on February 12, 2025) have sparked public outrage. Sharaa, who had urged Iran to respect Syria's sovereignty on December 24, 2024, now finds himself caught between mounting domestic pressure to push back against Israel and the need to court international support.

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Araghchi: Iran ready for talks with Europe based on mutual respect, common interests

International Desk

Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said Iran is ready to talk with European countries based on mutual respect and common interests as the Islamic Republic's peaceful nuclear program has once again come under the spotlight following US President Donald Trump's return to the White House and his administration's signals to resume negotiations with Tehran. The Iranian foreign minister made the remarks in a phone conversation with his Dutch counterpart, Caspar Veldkamp on Saturday. Araghchi underlined that Iran's government pursues good diplomatic relations with other countries. The Dutch top diplomat, for his part, referred to the long history of relations between Tehran and Amsterdam and the importance of Iran's role in regional developments and emphasized the necessity of utilizing all diplomatic

capacities to resolve differences between the two countries. Veldkamp also pointed to the three Iranian islands in the Persian Gulf which are claimed by the UAE, saying that this is an issue between Iran and the UAE and the Netherlands supports the settlement of the issue based on international law. Last year, a statement issued at the end of a joint meeting of the heads of state of the European Union and the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) accused Iran of "occupation" of the triple Iranian islands of Greater Tunb, Lesser Tunb, and Abu Musa, and claimed that the islands belonged to the United Arab Emirates. Iran strongly condemned the statement with the Iranian foreign minister saying that the three islands have always belonged to Iran, and will forever remain as such. The three Persian Gulf islands have historically been part of



Abbas Araghchi

Caspar Veldkamp

and corroborated by countless historical, legal, and geographical documents in the country and other parts of the world. However, the UAE has repeatedly laid claim to the islands. Relations between Iran and the EU have damaged over many issues including Iran's nuclear

program. The government of President Masoud Pezeshkian has been trying to resolve the differences between the two sides through dialogue. Iran and three European powers – France, Germany and Britain – have held several rounds of talks on the is-

sue over the past year. The three European countries are party to the 2015 Iran nuclear agreement. Their failure to fulfill their obligations under the agreement after the US unilateral withdrawal from the deal left the future of the agreement in limbo.

Iran, India FM's call for strengthening collaborations

Iranian FM Seyed Abbas Araghchi, wrote on X on Saturday that, "Today, we celebrate 75 years of diplomatic relations between modern states of Iran & India." Araghchi added, "Of course, our shared history and cultural bonds go back centuries if not millennia, joining our nations at the hip. These ties have been paramount in paving the way for mutual growth & cooperation. Looking forward to further strengthening our partnership for the prosperity of our nations." Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, the Indian FM wrote in response, "Thank you FM @araghchi for your warm wishes on 75 years of diplomatic relations between India and Iran." Our deep-rooted ties are driven by historical linkages. Confident that our cooperation will continue to grow in times to come, he added.

Iran envoy voices concerns about rising Islamophobia in Western countries



Amir Saeid Iravani

International Desk

Iran's ambassador and permanent representative to the United Nations, Amir Saeid Iravani, raised concerns over the growing Islamophobia in several Western countries, particularly instances of violence, defamation, and the desecration of Islamic values, shrines, and the Holy Quran under the pretext of freedom of expression. Speaking at the High-Level Meeting to Commemorate the International Day to Combat Islamophobia on Friday, Iravani urged nations to criminalize and prohibit violence and hatred against religious symbols and

holy books through their national laws and to take collective action against Islamophobia. Reaffirming Iran's stance, Iravani emphasized the Islamic Republic's unwavering support for efforts to combat Islamophobia and religious extremism. "The Islamic Republic of Iran expresses its profound concern regarding the extensive network of anti-Muslim campaigns, which includes the utilization of media outlets and social media platforms," he said. Iravani warned that these campaigns have "detrimental effects" on Muslims worldwide, particularly for those under foreign occupation or in minority communities. He also referenced UN General Assembly Resolution 76/254, adopted three years ago, which he said reflects a shared global commitment to tackling Islamophobia. He noted that last year's resolution on "measures to combat Islamophobia" further reinforced the urgent need for legislative and policy actions to eliminate Islamophobia in all its forms. "The resolution underscores the

critical need for increased efforts to raise awareness and combat the spread of hate speech, which includes, inter alia, urging the implementation of all necessary measures, such as legislative and policy actions, to combat Islamophobia," he stated. United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres also expressed concern over "a disturbing rise in anti-Muslim bigotry," calling on governments to protect religious freedom and for online platforms to curb hate speech. Rights groups around the world and the UN have noted a rise in Islamophobia, anti-Arab bias and anti-Semitism since the start of Israel's 17-month war on Gaza. "We are witnessing a disturbing rise in anti-Muslim bigotry. From racial profiling and discriminatory policies that violate human rights and dignity, to outright violence against individuals and places of worship," the UN chief said in a video post on X. "This is part of a wider scourge of intolerance, extremist ideologies and attacks against religious groups and vulnerable populations."

Tehran says national oil exports cannot be deterred by sanctions

International Desk

Iran's government spokeswoman Fatemeh Mohajerani said Western sanctions cannot halt Iran's oil exports, as the country is determined to protect its share of the global energy market. "The country's oil exports cannot be stopped. We will not compromise on Iran's share in the world oil market," Mohajerani wrote in a post on X on Saturday. She said several ministries are leading a campaign to counter the sanctions, with the Oil Ministry taking center stage. Mohajerani characterized new US sanctions against Oil Minister Mohsen Paknejad as evidence of Washington's anxiety about Iran's successful efforts to circumvent previous restrictions. The US Treasury Department on Thursday issued new sanctions against Iran's oil minister, and some vessels that are part of a fleet involved in the Iranian crude oil exports. US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent said in a statement Thursday that the sanctions designated Paknejad and three entities engaged in the Iranian oil trade in China, and named three shipping vessels as blocked property for their use in the transactions. Paknejad "oversees the export of tens of billions of dollars' worth of Iranian oil and has allocated billions of dollars' worth of oil to Iran's armed forces for export," the Treasury claimed. The designated vessels include the Hong Kong-flagged Peace Hill and its owner



Hong Kong Heshun Transportation Trading Limited, the Iran-flagged Polaris 1, the Seychelles-registered Fallon Shipping Company Ltd, and the Liberia-registered Itaugua Services Inc. "Today's action advances President Trump's policy of maximum pressure" on the Iranian government, US State Department spokeswoman Tammy Bruce said in a statement. The new administration at the White House has escalated these measures since taking office in January, reinstating the so-called maximum pressure policy, a campaign of hybrid warfare targeting the Islamic Republic. Iran has exported its oil despite the severe sanctions imposed by the US to drive Iran oil exports to zero. The Director General of the Iranian Oil Terminals Company Abbas Assadrouz said on Saturday that all stages of receiving, storing, and exporting oil at Iran's Kharg Oil Terminal, through which 90 percent of Iran's oil is exported, are carried out in compliance with the most stringent international standards and under the supervision of advanced laboratories.

Israel's offensive in ...

From Israel's vantage point, the ideal scenario would see a moderate government in Damascus—one that distances itself from Iran while maintaining the capacity to counter groups like ISIS. However, the reality on the ground suggests that further weakening Syria could backfire, fueling the rise of jihadist factions like Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS). The group, which has recently ramped up its rhetoric against Israel, may well exploit public discontent to recruit more fighters. The growing internationalization of the crisis adds another layer of complexity. The US, by issuing "General License 2" (GL2) on January 6, 2025, has effectively eased sanctions in favor of Syria's transitional government while keeping an eye on Iran's role. Conversely, the Arab League and Turkey have accused Israel of "violating Syria's sovereignty." The tensions could soon spill over into the UN Security Council, where, on February 12, 2025, the US envoy blamed Iran for "destabilizing Syria"—a charge that Tehran

swiftly dismissed as "baseless."

Test for Middle East power dynamics

Israel's assault on Syria is not just another border skirmish; it reflects a deeper power struggle between the Resistance Axis and the Israel-US-Arab coalition. While Israel has, in the short term, succeeded in degrading Syria's and Hezbollah's military capabilities, its occupation of buffer zones raises the specter of friction with local populations and further international entanglement. At the same time, Israel's claims of Iran's withdrawal from Syria remain far from certain, given Tehran's entrenched presence in Iraq and Lebanon. By opting for "buffer zone control" over diplomatic engagement, Israel appears to be walking a tightrope—one that may not secure long-term stability. Ultimately, Syria's fate hinges on Sharaa's ability to form an inclusive government while the international community's response to Israel's territorial advances will play a decisive role in shaping the region's future.

Mohammad Ali Rajabi
Cartoonist



Pezeshkian underscores domestic potential for smart urban management

Economy Desk

President Masoud Pezeshkian stated that the necessary potential for smart urban management exists today, and Tehran must not be allowed to face further problems due to poor decision-making.

He emphasized that the resources, expertise, and skilled workforce are available, and these capacities should be utilized to transform Tehran into a modern and sustainable city.

Speaking at the meeting of the Planning and Development Council of Tehran Province on Saturday, Pezeshkian noted that while Tehran faces numerous threats, it also holds significant opportunities.

He highlighted the city's role as the nation's capital, home to major universities, experienced industrialists, and key governmental institutions, including the Parliament, government, and Judiciary.

The president stressed that with serious determination, the country could face fewer challenges, but current management issues in Tehran are unacceptable.

Pezeshkian pointed out the lack of educational facilities in some areas of Tehran, citing reports that indicate a need for 105 schools in the city of Shahr-e Qods, while only 35 are planned. This significant gap, he said, reflects a serious shortage of educational infrastructure, emphasizing that education is a fundamental need and must be prioritized, with new housing developments required to provide adequate educational spaces.

He warned against repurposing

these spaces and expecting educational problems to resolve themselves.

The president underscored the importance of adhering to urban development principles, noting that every city allocates space for education, health, and medical services in its development plans.

Repurposing these spaces, he said, would have irreversible consequences. He warned that the future of the country depends on the younger generation, and insufficient educational spaces today would lead to social repercussions tomorrow.

Empowering education via investment

Pezeshkian emphasized the need for investment in education, stating that many social problems could be resolved through education and creating a suitable environment for nurturing the next generation. If this path is followed correctly today, he said, there would be no need for late interventions in the future.

He called for community involvement in addressing educational shortages, urging residents, officials, and relevant institutions to come together and advocate for solutions. He noted that many factories and industries in Tehran have social responsibilities and can play a role in addressing these challenges.

The president expressed concern that 90% of the country's elites consider leaving Iran, attributing this to flaws in the educational system. He stressed the need to foster a sense of belonging to the country, culture, and society among students.

Pezeshkian highlighted the role of universities in solving the country's problems, noting that Tehran's major universities in economics, engineering, social sciences, and other fields can provide practical solutions.

He criticized the underutilization of academic expertise in addressing challenges, emphasizing that shortages and issues can be resolved with the help of experts. He rejected a directive approach to solving national problems, urging universities to take responsibility and step forward. He also called for greater coordination between scientific and executive institutions to address challenges.

On transportation, Pezeshkian emphasized the need to optimize infrastructure and improve inter-city coordination. He noted that Tehran's rail network connects to various parts of the country, and this capacity should be utilized effectively.

He stressed that creating a cohesive transportation network between Tehran and other cities is not a complex task and requires coordination between municipal and provincial management.

The president highlighted Tehran's economic and human resources, stating that the city has sufficient financial resources, skilled manpower, and extensive economic opportunities. He saw no reason for significant obstacles in addressing infrastructure issues in the capital.

Pezeshkian reiterated the importance of leveraging academic capacities, not just in Tehran but nationwide, to solve challenges in other cities as well.

He emphasized the need for collaboration among officials

and executive bodies to address transportation and other urban challenges.

Pezeshkian noted that Tehran occupies less than 1% of the country's area but houses over 20% of Iran's population. If resources and consumption are not managed properly, significant urban management issues will arise. He emphasized that the main issue is not relocating the capital but managing resources correctly. He warned that the imbalance between resources and consumption is a form of divine punishment, as resources have not been utilized properly and have often been overused.

The president called on elites and managers to address Tehran's crises, stating that all the country's experts, specialists, and senior managers are concentrated in Tehran. He emphasized that understanding the problems is not enough; planning and determination to implement solutions are essential.

Curbing migration to capital

Pezeshkian stressed the need to control migration to Tehran, as the city can no longer accommodate large-scale migration. Uncontrolled construction has led to the need for demolition orders, which could have been prevented. He reiterated that with the potential for smart city management, Tehran must not be allowed to face greater problems due to poor decisions. The resources, expertise, and skilled workforce are available and must be used to transform Tehran into a modern, sustainable city.

The president emphasized the importance of recognizing prob-



The meeting of the Planning and Development Council of Tehran Province convenes under the chairmanship of President Masoud Pezeshkian (c) with the presence of provincial officials at the Tehran Governor General's Office on March 15, 2025.

president.ir

lems and planning scientifically to solve them. He noted that the best managers, specialists, and resources are concentrated in Tehran, but other cities have not provided growth opportunities for elites nurtured by the country. He stressed that these elites and managers must solve their own problems before addressing national issues.

He emphasized the need for practical solutions to education and health issues, calling for cooperation among provincial governments, municipalities, and city councils. He stressed that if the future of the country's children is a priority, land for school construction must be allocated, and municipalities must play a key role in this process.

The president called for advocacy in education, urging education managers in each province to form advocacy teams and clearly state their needs. He emphasized that councils, the government, provincial administrations, and Parliament must work together to address these issues, ensur-

ing that education quality is not compromised by a lack of space and resources.

Pezeshkian addressed imbalances in water, energy, and gas, stating that solving these problems requires scientific solutions, national unity, and determination. He emphasized that once a path is chosen, there should be no hesitation in its implementation. The president highlighted the energy crisis, noting that imbalances in water, electricity, and gas are among the country's most pressing challenges. Reports indicate that power shortages have temporarily shut down some industrial units, and without precise management, gas cuts would have been necessary in some regions during winter. Recent shutdowns were primarily due to air pollution, but energy shortages also played a role.

In conclusion, Pezeshkian outlined the government's plan to increase the authority of governor generals, enabling them to address regional problems more effectively.

Iran, Turkey to establish joint border special zone: Minister



Roads and Urban Development Minister Farzaneh Sadeq-Malvajerd speaks during the inauguration of a 61-kilometer road and highway project in West Azarbaijan Province on March 15, 2025.

IRNA

Economy Desk

West Azarbaijan Province, with six active border crossings shared with three neighboring countries, holds a unique strategic position, and Iran is moving forward with plans to establish a joint border special zone with Turkey, said Roads and Urban Development Minister Farzaneh Sadeq-Malvajerd on Saturday.

Sadeq-Malvajerd made the remarks during the inauguration of a 61-kilometer road and highway project in West Azarbaijan Province. The project includes the 31-kilometer Khoy-Qotur-Razi route and 30 kilometers of road construction valued at 16.5 trillion rials.

She emphasized that the newly opened section is part of the East-West Corridor, a critical transit route connecting Iran

to international markets. Another segment of the corridor was inaugurated in East Azarbaijan Province three days earlier, extending toward the Tamarchin border. West Azarbaijan Province, located in northwestern Iran, shares borders with Turkey, Iraq, and Azerbaijan. Its strategic location makes it a vital hub for regional trade and transit. The province's six active border crossings facilitate the movement of goods, tourists, and travelers, contributing significantly to Iran's economy. The proposed joint border zone with Turkey aims to enhance cross-border trade and strengthen economic ties between the two nations.

The minister highlighted the broader impact of transit corridors, noting that they not only improve livelihoods in cit-

ies along the routes but also influence economic activity across the region and the country.

"The volume of goods, tourists, and passengers moving through these corridors leads to sustainable economic growth," Sadeq-Malvajerd said.

She added that Iran's unique geopolitical position and frequent sanctions make the development of transit routes crucial for building resilience against external pressures.

Sadeq-Malvajerd also addressed road safety ahead of the upcoming Nowruz (Persian New Year) travel season, urging drivers to exercise caution and enjoy their journeys responsibly. She pledged that the Ministry of Roads and Urban Development is fully prepared to enhance travel services and reduce accidents by addressing high-risk areas.

"Our goal is to reduce traffic fatalities and protect the lives of our citizens, especially the younger generation who will shape the future of this country," she said.

Steel production declines by 6.7% due to energy shortages: ISPA

Economy Desk

The Iranian Steel Producers Association (ISPA) released data showing a 6.7% decline in Iran's steel production over the first 11 months of the Persian calendar year 1403 (March 20, 2024 to February 18, 2025). The drop is attributed to imbalances in the industry, including severe electricity and gas shortages.

According to ISPA figures, the decline in steel production has intensified due to energy constraints, wrote IRNA.

The production drop, which stood at 4.8% in the first nine months of the year, rose to 5.5% by the 10-month mark and reached 6.7% in the latest 11-month report. Energy limitations have reduced the country's semi-finished steel production by approximately 2 million metric tons, valued at around \$1 billion. About 75% of this decline occurred in steel billet production, highlighting the disproportionate impact of electricity and gas shortages on small and

medium-sized private sector units.

Iran's steel industry, a key pillar of its economy, has faced some challenges in recent years. The sector, which contributes significantly to the country's non-oil exports, has been hit by international sanctions, fluctuating global demand, and domestic energy shortages.

Iran holds some of the world's largest iron ore reserves, but its steel production capacity has been constrained by outdated infrastructure and insufficient investment in modernization. Additionally, the government's focus on increasing self-sufficiency in steel production has often clashed with the realities of energy supply limitations, particularly in natural gas and electricity, which are critical for steel manufacturing. Severe gas restrictions have also hampered the production of newly operational direct-reduced iron (DRI) plants. While iron ore concentrate production has increased, pellet production has de-



IRNA

clined. After billets, rebar experienced the steepest drop in production within the steel supply chain, primarily due to a sharp downturn in the domestic market and reduced exports.

Steel exports decline by 13%

Export data for the first 11 months of the year shows a 13% decline in the value of Iran's steel chain exports, equivalent to \$892 million. This marks a significant increase from the \$792 million drop reported in the first nine months. Billets and slabs, Iran's primary steel export products, saw the largest volume declines at 17% and 29%,

respectively. On a positive note, exports of raw materials in the steel chain, including iron ore concentrate and pellets, have continued to grow. Sponge iron (and briquette) exports also rose by 14%, with most of the growth occurring in the first half of the year.

The decline in steel production and exports underscores some challenges facing Iran's industrial sector. As the government seeks to boost non-oil exports and reduce reliance on crude oil revenues, addressing energy shortages and modernizing infrastructure will be critical to reviving the steel industry and sustaining economic growth.

Breaking stereotypes, changing mindsets key to stronger ties: *Pakistani envoy to Iran*

Ambassador Tipu calls for free trade agreement to help reach \$10bn target

By Mostafa Shirmohamadi
Editor-in-chief

INTERVIEW

Pakistani Ambassador to Iran Muhammad Mudassar Tipu believes that sealing a free trade agreement (FTA) and tearing down long-standing barriers that have held back greater cooperation can help bring the two neighboring countries closer. As both neighbors are determined to boost annual trade to \$10 billion, Ambassador Tipu says an FTA could set the stage for a major economic upswing. Efforts to expand border infrastructure, keep

trade crossings open around the clock, and smooth out regulatory hurdles are already in the works to help trade surge.

However, the ambassador makes it clear that economic ties alone will not be enough. There is an urgent need to root out outdated perceptions that have stood in the way of people-to-people contact. He calls for a fresh approach, urging both nations to roll out cultural plans, promote academic exchanges, and use media and cinema to paint a more accurate image of each other. Whether through showing films, encouraging

tourism, or bringing business communities closer, he believes that "breaking down stereotypes" and "changing mindsets"—the way Iranians and Pakistanis see each other—are just as crucial as any trade agreement.

Read his full interview with Iran Daily for an in-depth look at his vision for a more connected future.



Pakistani Ambassador to Iran Muhammad Mudassar Tipu speaks to Iran Daily during an exclusive interview at the country's diplomatic mission in Tehran.

● SAJJAD SAFARI/IRAN DAILY



IRAN DAILY: Iran and Pakistan have set out to boost their annual trade volume to \$10 billion. What steps has the Pakistani government come up with to make this goal a reality? What obstacles stand in the way, and how does Pakistan plan to work through them?

TIPU: Well, thank you. It's always a great pleasure to meet you and speak to the Iranian media. I always love it because the more outreach I have, the more Iranian people will know what Pakistan's ambassador is doing in their country. First of all, I must tell you that I have a great regard for Iran's political institutions. I think that the Supreme Leader is one of the greatest leaders of our times, and the quality of governance in Iran is really remarkable. And I think President Pezeshkian's leadership is navigating Iran through very complex times. That is the strength of his personality, the way you know, in a very complex geopolitical environment leading the nation. This is truly remarkable.

You talked about trade. Trade, of course, is very, very important because the financial viability of both countries is critical. We have a 900-kilometer border. Honorable Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and honorable late president Raisi were profoundly wise to understand the potential of trade, and they agreed that trade should be elevated to \$10 billion. Now, it is about \$3 billion. Of course, it can be done. It's not difficult at all if you are looking at the size of the economies. Pakistan is 240 million plus, and Iran is 80 million plus. We already have a huge market of 330 million. Demography, geography, and culture really help us. So, I think setting the target was very critical.

Now, the whole government has a clear target in mind. What we are doing: I am a very strong

advocate of signing a free trade agreement with Iran. It's going to help both countries a lot in the years ahead. We are having negotiations. Signing a free trade agreement, of course, entails complex negotiations. We are part of those negotiations. So, once the FTA is signed, that can be a big step forward.

We are trying to open more border crossings. We are trying to increase the timings of opening the border because there is so much potential. We have even proposed that the border should be open 24-7, particularly at Zahedan, because it is the main trade artery between Pakistan and Iran.

We are trying to improve infrastructure between Quetta and Zahedan. Between Quetta and Zahedan, there is about a 500 to 700-kilometer area on which we want to develop the roads. We want to build more facilities there so that in the

years ahead, trade flow can be facilitated. We have established a business council. Pakistan has proposed its name. Iran is also going to propose its name. Once the business council is going to meet, it will have many private individuals and many key companies. They will identify the areas through which trade can be promoted.

Pakistan's exports to Iran have increased. We recently started export of chilled meat. This was about a year and a year and a half ago. And we were able to export about \$120 million.

This is very good. I also want corn to be exported to Iran. Pakistan produces world-class corn. Pakistan produces world-class leather products, cotton-related products, and textile products. So along with corn, we export quinoa, bananas, and mangoes to your country.

And we want more cooperation between the governments of

both countries. Wherever regulatory reforms are required, both countries should do them.

A very important element is improving infrastructure at the border: at Gabd, Mirjaveh, Tافتان, and other border points. We are trying to improve the infrastructure there. Iranian traders often come to me. I also meet regularly with Iranian government individuals and trading bodies. They also propose different things to promote trade. So that is what we are doing. These are the practical steps that we are taking to promote the trade. I want Iranian people and Pakistani people to be part of this process. There are stereotypes between Iran and Pakistan, and these stereotypes have been created by certain elements. We need to break down those stereotypes. We have excellent populations that are very educated and very dynamic. People-to-people contacts, contacts

between chambers, between governments, FTA improving border structure, and wherever concessions can be granted to each other's commodities, are very important elements.

The ground seems to be paved to reach this target, so what are the obstacles? Don't you see US sanctions on Iran as an obstacle?

You know, obviously, wherever we live, we will continue to face obstacles one way or the other. The more important thing is the solution-oriented mindset. If we have a solution-oriented mindset, we can always find a way out. I am not bothered about any particular international regime. The domestic strengths and the political commitment of both countries are very, very important. That is what we have. And I have been here for about a year and a half. I have seen a great deal of interest being created within the Iranian business community about Pakistan and vice versa. Pakistani businessmen are planning to visit Iran. The Islamabad Chamber is bringing its own delegation in a couple of weeks. I am going to speak to the Lahore Chamber of Commerce and Industries next month, where I am going to make a very strong case to promote the trade. These are some incremental steps that will lead to a very substantial outcome over the years.

The next question is about a sizzling issue, a pipeline that was supposed to deliver gas from Iran to Pakistan. The two countries signed an agreement in 2009. The pipeline was supposed to come online in five years, but Pakistan failed to meet its commitments mainly due to external pressure, including US sanctions. Last year, Pakistan started to lay part of that pipeline from the Iranian border to Gwadar. I'd like to know how far you have gone

and what you have done so far. First of all, let me tell you two things. This is not a sizzling issue. The most important thing for Pakistan and Iran is to look at history, the future, and the depth of the strategic relationship. This pipeline would entail some billion dollars, naturally.

Iran has already invested \$2 billion.

I would not say that Pakistan has failed. It was a complex phenomenon. Moving from signing the agreement to putting it into practice involved many challenges, but the good thing is that now we are interacting with the Iranian government, and we hope we'll be able to find a solution to this issue.

I'd like to know your solutions. At least you must have an idea about the main solution you're putting forward. How are you going to solve the problem? Have you started the construction?

The two governments are involved. We are trying to see how we can solve this matter. I cannot go into the specifics because, you know, it's a technical project, a financial project, and a whole host of things. It's going to be very complex. But I am giving you a broad view that we are both having very constructive discussions.

Pakistan is an energy-hungry nation and in dire need of gas. And Iran is very eager to start pumping gas into Pakistan. You know, the more the project is delayed, the more both countries will suffer losses.

The whole world is energy-hungry. It's not only Pakistan, and you know the geopolitical context of the whole world is being defined largely by energy issues. There are energy needs, and there are energy-producing countries. Of course, there is a sort of need-based relationship between both countries. I would not say that Pakistan, but every-



Iranians work on a section of a pipeline linking Iran and Pakistan near the Iranian port city of Chabahar on March 11, 2013.

● ATTA KENARE/AFP

body, is in dire need. Pakistan also has its own energy requirements. And, of course, Pakistan has many options. The most important thing for Iran and Pakistan is their political commitment and the strength of their bilateral ties. The point that I'm hammering on is that we have to look at our larger geostrategic objectives.

The IP pipeline is just one part of them. Let us be very, very clear on this count. As you have articulated this issue very respectfully, I would like you to take a much bigger view of the challenges that both countries are confronting. Our original situation, the commitment of our leadership, the commitment of the Supreme Leader and the Pakistani leadership, and the broad stakeholders of both countries, how do they want to pursue this relationship? That's what we must be cognizant of.

Last year, Iran and Pakistan exchanged cross-border fire. Actually, Iran carried out a drone and missile attack on several terrorist strongholds in Pakistan, and the Pakistani government retaliated by targeting a town in Iran's Sistan and Baluchestan province. I would like to know the reason behind this exchange of fire. What should be done by both countries to prevent such incidents from taking place in the future?

First and foremost, we have gone beyond that stage, and the kind of political resurrection we have done this is just incredible, and that shows the vitality of this relationship, and the political military intelligence leadership of both countries played a very vigorous role in dealing with that situation. I do not want to get into the specifics of that incident. I would not characterize that there were strongholds in Pakistan. I have my own view, but since my relationship with Iran is very, very important, Iran is a great country, I would not like to portray it in that context; I want to go beyond that, and I want to create more trust between the intelligence leaderships of both countries.

In the past couple of years, cooperation between both countries has been extremely good, but the nature of the challenge is profound. We are living in a very complex region, and some external elements and countries want to imperil our relationship, and terrorism has assumed a transnational character. We have to be very careful and very cognizant of that.

We also must educate our masses about the context in which these things happen. The best recipe is development. I'm a very strong proponent of development between Balochistan and Sistan and Baluchestan. These are great historic areas with affiliations at borders running back into centuries.

We need to focus on those areas and development at a wider strategic level. We have to have greater cooperation. We have hosted intelligence officers. We have our intelligence officers in Zahedan. You have your intelligence officers in Turbat. That mechanism is doing very well. I think what we need to do is to have a very good and timely exchange of information in a very objective manner.

Do you categorically reject that Pakistan hosts anti-Iran groups?

I don't think I need to answer this question. I think you know

it. I think even an Iranian child knows it. And I think this is an affront to my country to be very honest to have this question. I mean, Pakistan has repeated time and again, and look at Pakistan's actions. And as ambassador, I have unequivocally stated that, you know, territorial integrity and sovereignty of Iran is critical. Pakistan would not support any action that can impact the security of Iran. I'm unequivocally telling you that I condemn the terrorist forces, you know, which threaten Iran's stability, and Pakistan will take a very decisive and strong action against any entity.

Fuel prices in Iran are relatively low compared with other nations, and Iran is grappling with a major issue on a daily basis, that is, the smuggling of at least 20 million liters of fuel out of the country. Pakistani media last year reported that the illicit trade brought some \$1 billion worth of fuel into the country through smugglers, and they even pointed out that several government officials were involved. Iran is losing between \$5 billion to \$10 billion annually because of this illicit trade, which is not limited to Pakistan. Is the government of Pakistan determined to help stop the trade, or is Pakistan actually benefiting from it?

Let me ask you the question if I agree with your assumption, although whatever media has said I would have to cross check and verify it. I have spent many years in Pakistan's diplomatic service, and I have to be very, very careful with every information that I collect. And unless there are government sources...

I'm just citing Pakistani media. They cited an intelligence report published by government agencies.

Based on the media, I cannot make any speculations. This is very, very clear. I would like to look at hardcore facts and what is the official position of the government because the government, you know, has the institutional mechanisms to make a case.

If I go by the media, then I can point to many things that Iranian media have been saying with a complete degree of irresponsibility, and I don't want to get into that. But if I agree with your assumption, then I think the blame also lies with Iran. How do those things go from Iran to another country? But let's not get into that debate. My answer to this question will be that, you know, both governments should sit together, try to find the way how we can make things more formal and the menace of smuggling can be curbed. For that, both governments need more cooperation and more understanding, and given the complexity of the border, it is really a challenge.

But I would not like to comment on a media report. I am not sure if it was correct. I am not sure how the entire figures were collected because, in my experience, sometimes perceptions and realities are hugely different.

But it's common knowledge that fuel is smuggled out of Iran.

It may be smuggled. So many things happen all over the world. Even we hear that so many things happen in the

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If we have a solution-oriented mindset, we can always find a way out. I am not bothered about any particular international regime. The domestic strengths and the political commitment of both countries are very, very important.



Pakistani Ambassador to Iran Muhammad Mudassir Tipu poses for a photo after an exclusive interview with Iran Daily at the country's diplomatic mission in Tehran.

● SAJJAD SAFARI/IRAN DAILY



Iranian trucks are seen crossing the border into Pakistan at a checkpoint in southeastern Iran. ● IRNA

realm of nuclear technology. But I, as an ambassador, would only speak on issues where I have some very authentic information that cannot be challenged.

Don't you have any authentic information about this issue to share with us?

No, I told you. I said both governments need to sit, discuss, try to deal with this menace, and strengthen the border controls.

Let's move to the softer part of the interview, which is about tourism. Iran, as a great civilization, could be one of the world's top tourist destinations due to its historical places and monuments, but it mostly gets religious tourists from Pakistan: Shias who visit the shrines in Mashhad or Qom, or they just cross Iran to

reach Iraq. On the other hand, Pakistan's scenic landscapes could easily pull in more Iranian tourists. What can be done by both governments to increase tourism cooperation?

Change the mindset, change the stereotype, and educate the public.

What are the stereotypes regarding both nations?

If you read about Pakistan, there are so many negative stereotypes about terrorism. Terrorism is happening all over the world. There are wars in which tens and thousands of people have been killed. So, you know, episodic isolated incidents are transplanted on countries. This is not the right thing. We have to see what is the potential of Pakistan, what is the potential of Iran.

Iran is a very beautiful country, rich in history, culture, and traditions, and so is Pakistan. We need to have more films, exchanges between universities, sister city relationships, and relationships between the ports. More and more delegations should visit each other's countries. And we should give a constructive, positive and a beautiful view of each other's countries in the media.

That is going to inspire the people. We are culturally similar and have a very deep-rooted history.

What we need to change is the mindset. Even in Pakistan, people should change their mindset. They should know that Iran is a repository of history and rather than going to far-flung destinations they should visit this beautiful country. This will not only promote tourism and bring in more capital but also bring us culturally closer to each other.

What stereotypes do Pakistani people nurture in their minds about Iran?

They are all false. They think that traveling in Iran is very difficult, that maybe Iran is like some exclusive country. But traveling in Iran is not difficult. No. Iran is a remarkable country, so secure and so beautiful. These are the kinds of stereotypes that global media have placed in the minds of the people. We need to remove them.

Last but not least is cinema. I'm sure that you know Iran has gained fame in the world with its movies. Iranian cinema has already won two Academy Awards by director Asghar Farhadi, and just a couple of days ago, another Iranian director won an Oscar for a short movie. Pakistani cinema and TV series production is also booming and moving forward. Three years ago, this movie, Joyland, was shortlisted for the Academy Awards. That was great success for Pakistani cinema. So, what are the areas of cooperation between the two neighbors that are trying to disseminate a better image of their countries through culture and cinema?

I think our dramas can be played in Iran, and Iranian dramas can be played in Pakistan with translation. This is the first and foremost. This is very very important and exchange of culture troupes. I am trying to bring a well-known singer of Pakistan to Iran so that people in Iran know about Pakistan's culture.

I must admit that we have not done that much. Even as Pakistan's ambassador, I'm saying this is an area where we have not done that much, and we need to do a lot more, and perhaps we need to learn from the expertise of Iran. You have won two Oscars, this is incredible. It shows that your elegance and your contributions have been recognized, and we are fast chasing that idea. Actors can visit each other's countries. We need to have a broader cultural relationship to promote cinema and filming relations.



World Cup Asian qualifiers:

Iran names provisional 21-man squad for double header



FFIRI

Sports Desk

Iran head coach Amir Qalenoee announced a provisional 21-man squad for the two fixtures at the World Cup Asian qualifiers.

More players will be added to the list after today's games in the Persian Gulf Pro League, when Tractor plays Golgozar Sirjan in Tabriz and Esteghlal visits Zob Ahan.

Team Melli will face the United Arab Emirates at Tehran's Azadi Stadium on Thursday – the first day of the new Persian year – before hosting Uzbekistan on March 25.

Iran is top of the Group A table with 16 points – three clear of Uzbekistan and six above the UAE – with four games remaining, and with the top two winning direct qualification, Qalenoee's men could book their tickets for the 2026 finals in North America by the end of the upcoming international break.

Persepolis striker Ali Alipour has received a first international callup by Qalenoee after bagging 10 top-flight goals, including three in the last four outings, to sit atop the league's leading marksmen's chart.

Iralco's 20-year-old goalkeeper Mohammad Khalifeh, and Malavan center-back Danial Eiri, 21, are the surprise names in Qalenoee's list.

Despite a run of five wins in six matches – including a 4-1 rout of

Asian Cup champion Qatar – Team Melli and Qalenoee have been facing scrutiny from the Iranian fans and pundits due to a series of unconvincing and inconsistent performances throughout the campaign.

The criticism peaked in November, when Iran dominated the first half of the away games against North Korea and the Kyrgyz Republic but still had to survive a late fightback by the minnow oppositions to walk away with hard-fought 3-2 victories.

The following is Iran's 21-man squad for the games the UAE and Uzbekistan:

Goalkeepers: Payam Niazmand (Sepahan), Mohammad Khalifeh (Iralco)

Defenders: Milad Mohammadi (Persepolis), Omid Nourafkan (Malavan), Ali Ne'mati (Foolad Khuzestan), Danial Eiri (Malavan), Mohammadhossein Kan'anizadegan (Persepolis), Amin Hazbavi (Sepahan), Arya Yousefi (Sepahan)

Midfielders: Saeed Ezzatollahi (Shabab Al Ahli), Mohammad Qorbani (Al Wahda), Mohammad Karimi (Sepahan), Saman Qoddous (Ittihad Kalba), Mohammad-Javad Hosseinejad (Dinamo Makhachkala), Mohammad Mohebbi (FC Rostov), Mahdi Qayedi (Ittihad Kalba), Ali Qolizadeh (Lech Poznan), Alireza Jahanbakhsh (SC Heerenveen)

Strikers: Mahdi Taremi (Internazionale), Ali Alipour (Persepolis), Sardar Azmoun (Shabab Al Ahli).

Persian Gulf Pro League:

Alipour, Dursun on target to send Persepolis top

Sports Desk

Ali Alipour and Serdar Dursun scored in each half as Persepolis defeated Malavan 2-0 at the Persian Gulf Pro League in Tehran's Azadi Stadium on Friday.

The victory saw the Capital Reds, who are chasing an eighth top-flight crown in nine seasons, move atop the league table with 47 points – one point clear of Sepahan – though Tractor, which is third on 45 points with two games in hand, could overtake Persepolis with a home win against Golgozar Sirjan today. Sepahan was dealt a massive blow in its bid for a first league title in a decade after being held to a 1-1 stalemate at relegation-threatened Nassaji Mazandaran on Thursday – a fifth draw in six league outings for the Isfa-

han-based club.

Fresh from back-to-back league victories over city rival Esteghlal and Chadormalou, Persepolis started right on the front at the Azadi Stadium, taking a 16th-minute lead through Alipour, who headed home at the near post from a Soroush Rafiei's corner kick.

A third strike in four games saw Alipour sit atop the league's leading marksmen's chart with 10 goals and earn an international call-up for the upcoming double header against the UAE and Uzbekistan at the World Cup Asian qualifiers.

The visiting side delivered a much-improved and braver performance after the break, but Persepolis still managed to double the advantage midway through the second half, when

Dursun tapped in from close range, finishing off a sublime team move down the left flank – a third goal in five league appearances for the Turkish winter signing.

The defeat ended Malavan's three-game winning streak in the league, leaving the visitors sixth in the table with 30 points.

Meanwhile, Foolad Khuzestan defeated Iralco 2-0 in Ahvaz, courtesy of first-half goals from Sina Moridi and Mohammadreza Soleimani.

Foolad, which had its home game against Tractor postponed last week, is fourth in the table with 41 points, while Iralco is seventh with 28 points.

In the battle of two bottom-half strugglers, Mes Rafsanjan shared the spoils with Esteghlal Khuzestan in a goalless draw at home.

The result was still enough for Mes (23 points) to move three points clear of the relegation zone, with Es. Khuzestan in the 12th place with 25 points.

Elsewhere in the league today, Esteghlal will visit Zob Ahan at the Fooladshahr Stadium.

The Iranian top-flight sides will head into the Persian New Year break, before resuming action on March 29.



Persepolis strikers Ali Alipour (R) and Serdar Dursun celebrate a goal during a 2-0 victory over Malavan in the Persian Gulf Pro League at the Azadi Stadium, Tehran, Iran, on March 14, 2025.

MOJTABA SALEH/MIZAN



Karate 1 Premier League:

Iranians to vie for three medals on Day 3 in Hangzhou

Sports Desk

Three medals, including one gold, will be up for grabs for the Iranians when they resume action on Day 3 of the Karate 1 Premier League series in Hangzhou, China, today.

Representing the country in the female kumite -55kg contests, Fatemeh Sa'adati defeated opponents from Scotland, Chile, and Greece to progress to the quarterfinals as the pool winner, before beating Bulgarian Ivet Goranova 2-0 for a last-four spot on Friday.

A 5-2 victory over Luxembourg's Jennifer Warling saw the Iranian girl set a final date with Rina Kodo of Japan.

Fatemeh Sadeqi, a Series A goal medalist in Tbilisi in January, will be looking to finish her campaign with a consolation bronze in the female kata event, when taking on Japanese Saeko Azuma. Sadeqi claimed three wins in a row in the pool phase but fell to a 43.3-41.6 loss to Mo Sheung Grace Lau of Hong Kong.

Former world champion Bahman

Asgari also enjoyed an emphatic run to reach the men's kumite -75kg semifinals, only to suffer a last-gasp defeat against Enzo Berthon of France, and will face Croatian Ivan Martinac in the bronze-medal bout today.



Iranian girl Fatemeh Sa'adati (R) will face Rina Kodo of Japan in the female kumite -55kg final at the Karate 1 Premier League series in Hangzhou, China, today.

IKFIR

Architecture, economic impacts of Persian caravanserais



Zein-o-din Caravanserai, Mehriz, Yazd Province
● pinorest.com



Abbasi Caravanserai, Karaj, Alborz Province
● alibaba.ir

In the heart of Iran, where the ancient Silk Road once resonated with the footsteps of traders, stands a remarkable testament to the region's rich history: the caravanserais. These architectural marvels served not only as resting places but also as lively cultural centers, fostering commerce and connections. The story of the Persian caravanserai is a tapestry woven with threads of trade, hospitality, and cultural exchange.

Role of Silk Road

The Silk Road was a principal trade route connecting Asia and Europe, stretching from China to Turkey. Iran's strategic location along this route transformed it into a pivotal point for this vast exchange, welcoming diverse cultures and commerce and fostering connections that significantly shaped history. As merchants journeyed through Iran's sweeping deserts and verdant valleys, they found secure havens in caravanserais that guaranteed rest and respite, as destinationiran.com notes.

Caravanserais were vital rest stops along the Silk Road for weary travelers. They addressed challenges faced by traders, such as harsh climates and the threat of bandit attacks, by offering secure havens for rest and recovery. With fortified walls and storage facilities, this network of caravanserais ensured the safety of travelers and their valuable goods, boosting traders' confidence to transport larger quantities over greater distances. It was rare for a merchant or caravan to travel the entire trade route. Instead, caravans journeyed a specific segment, stopping to rest at caravanserais to trade or replenish supplies.

These establishments also enhanced trade efficiency by providing essential services like food, water, and animal maintenance, allowing merchants to regroup and reorganize their caravans. The logistics facilitated by caravanserais enabled the transfer and redistribution of goods, optimizing the flow of commerce between regions. As hubs for cultural exchange, caravanserais not only supported local economies but

also accelerated trade networks, connecting diverse civilizations and fostering economic growth along the Silk Road. A caravanserai was more than just a shelter or inn; it was a hub for businessmen from different countries to promote their products. In a time before expos, caravanserais served a similar role. To understand how caravanserais made trade easier, it is essential to first examine the features that aided people.

Architecture and trade in caravanserais

The tradition of caravanserais can be traced back to ancient Persia, flourishing during the Achaemenid Empire. Such structures grew popular during the Islamic Golden Age, becoming important hubs of commerce and cultural exchange. The Safavid and Qajar dynasties further contributed to the proliferation of caravanserais, leading to a flourishing construction boom, especially in regions bustling with trade activity. A key factor was the specific type of design in caravanserais that was replicated in many locations along the Silk Road.

Here is an in-depth analysis of caravanserai architecture and strategic features:

Livestock stable

Traders in the past relied on camels and horses to transport their goods. Caravanserais included dedicated spaces on the ground floor for stables to house livestock, allowing traders to feed their animals and provide them with necessary rest. Large open spaces in the courtyard often served as watering areas. Additionally, there were storerooms for hay and feed.

Courtyard

The courtyard served as a central hub for activity and interaction, often the most bustling part of the caravanserai. It was a place where people met, and small bazaars were set up for merchants to trade their goods. The scene was filled with an array of sights, sounds, and scents. The courtyard often contained a fountain or large well for water. Following the establishment of Islamic gov-

ernments, the courtyard was also used for congregational prayers.

Rooms

This area functioned as an inn for travelers needing rest and recovery. Rooms were typically built on the second level to provide a quiet environment for sleep. Some rooms featured small windows opening to the courtyard, allowing for light and air. There was also a small space in some rooms to build a fire for heat during winter.

Security

Given that most travelers carried gold and other valuable materials for trade and that caravanserais were often located outside of cities, security was paramount. Many caravanserais had fortified walls and outposts that housed soldiers or guards to protect the compound from bandits. Some caravanserais also had communication centers to send messengers (via horses or birds) to other cities.

Entrance

To minimize the risk of theft and prevent the entry of thieves, many caravanserais had only one entrance and exit, typically secured by large wooden or metal gates with guards. The gate needed to be wide and tall enough to accommodate heavily laden horses and camels.

Storage

Scattered throughout the ground floor were storage areas designed to hold a variety of items, including grains, food products, hay, and merchandise. Each storage unit was meticulously organized to ensure easy access and efficiency, highlighting the importance of proper inventory management in maintaining the quality of the stored goods.

Marketplace

The marketplace was the most vital part of any caravanserai, though its location could vary. In some caravanserais, it was situated in a corner where merchants could display their wares on tables or the ground. Other locations had a separate area attached to the caravanserai with designated stalls or

tables. Most travelers used the marketplace to sell their goods and purchase new products to sell at their next destination.

Cultural exchange and interaction

As stopping points for people from diverse regions, caravanserais were essential spaces for cultural exchange. Merchants shared not only goods but also stories and customs, fostering connections that transcended borders, especially in cities along the Silk Road. Culinary techniques, crafts, and artistic inspirations were exchanged, leading to a vibrant tapestry of shared culture. Poets, scholars, and artisans often gathered in these settings, infusing caravanserais with an atmosphere of creativity where new ideas blossomed through diverse cultural interactions.

Economic impact

The economic impact of caravanserais on Iran's trade landscape was profound. By serving as both markets and resting spots, they catalyzed local economies, enabling urban centers to thrive. Cities with caravanserais flourished as trade demands introduced new economic opportunities, and artisans and farmers expanded their production to meet travelers' needs. The success of caravanserais helped them endure difficult times by creating a complex network that supported local economies.

With the rise of modern transportation like trains and cars, the popularity of caravanserais declined sharply. Once bustling with travelers, many of these inns fell into neglect, becoming forgotten echoes of a vibrant history. However, the legacy of these caravanserais endures, embedded in the culture of Iran and other countries along the Silk Road.

Today, numerous caravanserais have been meticulously restored and now function as boutique hotels, art centers, or museums, attracting both local and international visitors. Around 54 caravanserais in Iran are inscribed as UNESCO World Heritage Sites. These renovations not only preserve their architectural charm but also breathe new life into local communities by boosting tourism.



Maranjab Caravanserai, Aran va Bidgol, Isfahan Province
● archilearn.net



Titi Caravanserai, Siahkal, Gilan Province
● iribnews.ir



Miyandasht Caravanserai, Shahrud, Semnan Province
● wikimedia.org

Iran's first woodcarving museum opened in Kermanshah



Arts & Culture Desk

Iran inaugurated its first woodcarving museum on Friday in a historic venue in western city of Kermanshah, to showcase the country's rich tradition of wood inlay and sculpture. The museum, housed in the historic Tekyeh Biglarbeigi monument, was officially opened in a ceremony attended by Kermanshah Governor Manouchehr Habibi, the province's cultural heritage director, the city's mayor, and several other officials, ILNA reported. Dariush Farmani, director of Kermanshah's Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts Organization, told reporters on the sidelines of the event that the museum's establishment had been in the works since 2021 when the nec-

essary permits were obtained from the Ministry of Cultural Heritage. However, due to a lack of suitable space for exhibition, the launch had been put on hold. "After extensive negotiations with cultural heritage authorities, we managed to secure a 200-square-meter space within Tekyeh Biglarbeigi for the museum," Farmani said. "Fortunately, today we have finally gotten it off the ground." As the country's first dedicated woodcarving museum, the facility showcases 200 intricately crafted wooden pieces, spanning both inlay work and sculpture. "Given the significance of Tekyeh Biglarbeigi as a historical landmark that attracts numerous tourists each year, we decided to set up the museum here," Farmani added, high-

lighting its appeal to Nowruz visitors. Meanwhile, Alireza Bavandpour, a Kermanshah-based woodcarving artist and representative of the World Wood Day Organization, emphasized the province's standing as a major hub for woodcarving and sculpture. "The museum will be open to visitors starting Saturday," Bavandpour confirmed. "Kermanshah holds a prominent position in the global woodcarving scene, and in line with this, we are set to host a cultural exchange event on June 10, bringing together 10 Chinese artists to commemorate World Handicrafts Day." He further noted that in recent years, Kermanshah has played host to several international events in the field of woodworking, solidifying its reputation as a center for the craft.

Iranian pediatric oncologist Ghalibafian honored as global leader in cancer care

Social Desk

Mitra Ghalibafian, a leading Iranian pediatric oncologist and head of radiation oncology at Mahak Hospital, was named one of the distinguished women leaders in the SIOP Almanac 2025, a global recognition for women in pediatric oncology. Ghalibafian, the founder of Iran's pediatric neuro-oncology program, has played a pivotal role in advancing cancer treatment for children, annually treating over 100 patients with brain tumors. Her selection by the International Society of Pediatric Oncology (SIOP) highlights her contributions to improving cancer care and reducing treatment disparities worldwide. With a career spanning over two decades, Ghalibafian has been instrumental in establishing specialized radiotherapy for children in Iran. Her collaborations with medical centers in Canada and other countries have facilitated access to cutting-edge treatments for Iranian children battling cancer. After earning her medical degree from Iran University of Medical Sciences, Ghalibafian pursued further studies in Austria, gaining expertise in pathology and biomedical engineering. She later returned to Iran, dedicating herself to healthcare in underserved regions and actively participating in the World Health Organization's polio eradication program. In 2006, she founded Iran's first dedicated pediatric radiotherapy center, offering advanced treatment options to over 200 young patients annually. Her groundbreaking work in neuro-oncology has significantly improved outcomes for children with brain tumors, reinforcing her impact on pediatric cancer care in resource-limited settings.



Secret to Nowruz's endurance...

One of the most thought-provoking aspects of Nowruz is its remarkable staying power. Despite the geopolitical reshuffling that has carved Greater Iran into numerous independent nations, this ancient festival continues to hold sway, honored across borders with traditions that remain strikingly similar. Recognizing its cultural significance, the United Nations General Assembly passed a resolution designating March 21 as "International Nowruz Day" under Article 49, linking it to the broader framework of a culture of peace. Today, Nowruz has been cemented as an international occasion. To explore the history, customs, and enduring legacy of Nowruz, Iran Daily reporter conducted an exclusive interview with Ardeshir Khorshidian, a Zoroastrian priest and scholar of ancient Iran. Below is the full interview.

IRAN DAILY: What sets Nowruz apart from similar festivals?

ARDESHIR KHORSHIDIAN: Nowruz is a springtime celebration, but what makes it unique is the incredible precision with which its timing has been calculated since ancient times. Given that Iranians were pioneers in wisdom and astronomy, their expertise played a crucial role in ensuring Nowruz was observed at a precise moment. In fact, Nowruz is likely the only festival in the world that takes place at an exact second. Each year, Iranians across the globe gather around their Haft Seen table at the very instant Nowruz begins, praying for global peace, harmony, and the well-being of all humanity. The calculations behind this moment date back to antiquity, ensuring that at the precise second Nowruz arrives, the Earth's axis aligns with the Sun, and day and night are exactly twelve hours long everywhere on the planet. What's truly remarkable is that thousands of years ago, Iranians managed to nail down this astronomical calculation with such accuracy.

Is Nowruz a religious occasion? Is it exclusively tied to Zoroastrianism?

There is much debate about when exactly Nowruz originated, as it traces back to pre-historic times. However, one important fact stands out: the birthday of Zoroaster, the prophet of Zoroastrianism, falls on March 26. Despite the fact that major Iranian empires—including the Medes, Achaemenids, and Parthians—were all Zoroastrian, none of them went so far as to declare Zoroaster's birthday as the start of Nowruz. Had they done so, the festival would have been reduced to a purely



religious event, limited to Zoroastrians. But as we see today, Nowruz transcends religion—it belongs to everyone.

This highlights yet again the spirit of unity among Iranians. Nowruz does not hinge on one's religious background; it is a celebration that brings people together, regardless of their faith. Throughout history, whenever Iran's identity, culture, or borders have been at stake, Iranians from all walks of life have stood shoulder to shoulder—as seen during the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988), when people of all ethnicities and backgrounds stepped up to defend their homeland with everything they had.

Given that thousands of years have passed, why has Nowruz stood the test of time? What, in fact, is the secret behind its longevity?

As I mentioned earlier, one key reason Nowruz has endured is that it has never been tied to any particular religious affiliation. This allows people of all faiths and beliefs to feel a sense of ownership over the tradition. Today, we see that diverse nations—regardless of religion, race, language, or ideology—come together to celebrate Nowruz, making it, in a sense, a festival for the entire world. Another crucial factor is Iran's well-documented mythical, heroic, and historical periods, which date back to the era of the Medes. A defining characteristic of Iran's various historical phases has been the culture of mutual respect

among different religious groups, ethnicities, and linguistic communities. This spirit of reverence and coexistence extends to Nowruz as well. That's why the festival has remained deeply ingrained in our cultural fabric—because all Iranians, along with the 18 nations that were once part of pre-Islamic Iran, have been profoundly mindful of its significance.

Could you elaborate on Nowruz customs, particularly the Haft Seen table, which is one of its most iconic symbols?

A long-standing tradition leading up to Nowruz is spring cleaning, which typically kicks off about ten days before the new year. The first five days are dedicated to tidying up the home, but the latter five are meant for cleansing the heart, soul, and mind. Another key element of the celebrations is the Haft Seen table, which is carefully set with seven symbolic items, all beginning with the Persian letter "S." Some of these include *sumac*, *samanu* (a sweet wheat pudding), and *senjed* (dried oleaster fruit). *Senjed*, for instance, represents wisdom, diligence, and perseverance. *Sib* (apples) and *sabze* (greens) symbolize solidarity and renewal. Meanwhile, *serkeh* (vinegar) serves as a reminder that life is a blend of both bitter and sweet experiences, teaching us to take life's hardships in stride. Another item found on the Haft Seen table is *sekkeh* (coins), which symbolizes stability and self-discipline—reminding people to remain steadfast in their character, much like a coin retains its value over time.



Notice of cancellation the tender No. 32/1403/Z

Hereby **Golgohar Mining & Industrial Co.** announces cancellation of Tender No. 32/1403/Z "140,000 metric tons of Iron Ore Concentrate (%Fe:66.50 ave) on basis of F.O.B at Rajaei Jetty Bandar Abbas - Iran" until further notice. Meanwhile the second tender renewal will be informed in newspaper and Golgohar website as www.geg.ir subsequently. Transactions Commission of Golgohar Mining & Industrial Co.

GOLGOHAR MINING & INDUSTRIAL CO.