

Pezeshkian accentuates blue economy as key to tackle water stress

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Deal within reach if US drops excessive demands



By Ebrahim Rezaei

Spokesman of Iranian Parliament's National Security & Foreign Policy Committee

O P I N I O N
E X C L U S I V E

So far, two rounds of talks have been held between Iran and the United States over the Islamic Republic's nuclear program. As stated by the Iranian negotiating team, the process has been moving along smoothly and is being viewed as positive and forward-leaning. The matters raised in the second round are set to be looked into by the National Security and Foreign Policy Committee during a session, with a number of Iranian negotiators in attendance. The committee will certainly keep tabs on the negotiations and maintain oversight throughout the process. Efforts in the committee will focus on ensuring that the talks stay in line with the principles and framework set by the Islamic Republic and that they serve the interests of both the state and its people.

From what can be seen, the general atmosphere of the talks has so far been constructive. The American negotiators have acted respectfully and have not taken a high-handed approach. Therefore, it seems that if things keep going in the same vein and the Americans do not press excessive demands, and if the talks stay centered on Iran's nuclear issue alone—while sanctions get lifted and Iran's uranium enrichment program is acknowledged—then reaching an agreement is certainly within the realm of possibility.

In his second term, US President Donald Trump appears to have stuck to his guns from his first presidency. However, he may now have come to the realization that the so-called "maximum pressure" and "smart sanctions" campaign has failed to bear fruit, and that negotiating with Iran is the only viable path forward.

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Iran, Russia, China bolstering alliance in West-dominated world

I N T E R V I E W
E X C L U S I V E

Iran, Russia, and China have over the past years been expanding their cooperation in various fields from economy to military and security. The three countries are strongly critical of what they see as unilateral policies pursued by the West, especially the United States. This common view has further aligned Iran, Russia, and China, with all advocating for a new world order in which multilateralism speaks first. Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi recently said his country, Russia, and China can take significant steps to promote international peace and security.

Jafar Ghanadbashi, an Iranian expert in West Asia issues, believes that Tehran, Moscow, and Beijing are capable of working towards what the foreign minister has said, as their policies are aligned, and that the trio have already boosted cooperation among themselves, which offers them great help to achieve higher goals at the international arena. The following is the full interview of Iran Daily with Ghanadbashi.

In fact, Iran, Russia, and China need to expand their cooperation both on a strategic and non-strategic level. In the economic arena, Iran, Russia, and China are looking to leverage each other's strengths, especially at a time when they, particularly China, are in a sort of economic war with the West led by the US.

In terms of economics, Iran, Russia, and China are cooperating in areas such as energy, development projects, maritime routes, as well as using ports and transit corridors. That cooperation needs to be developed further as Iran, China, and Russia are emerging as three major powers in a multipolar world that is taking shape.

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Pope Francis stands up at the end of a prayer vigil on the occasion of the Jubilee of Divine Mercy at St Peter's square in Vatican on April 2, 2016.
● VINCENTO PINTO/AFP

Sanctions removal as Iran's main demand in every negotiation: *FM spox*

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Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baqaei speaks during his weekly press conference in Tehran on April 21, 2025.
● IRNA



Iran's nuclear trajectory, US strategy

High-stakes geopolitical game

O P I N I O N
E X C L U S I V E

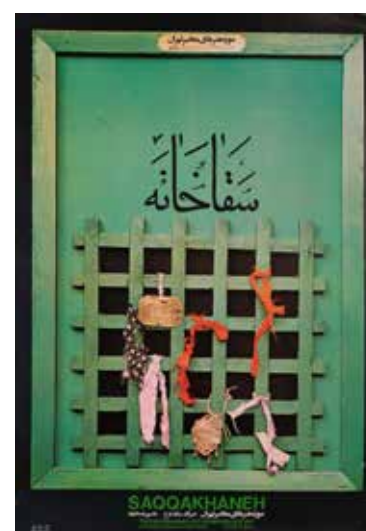
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Vafaei lets 'animal come out' to roar past Hawkins and progress

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Legacy of Ghobad Shiva

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Sanctions removal as Iran's main demand in every negotiation: *FM* spox

Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baqaei said the termination of "unlawful and cruel" sanctions is the fundamental demand of the Islamic Republic in every negotiation. Baqaei was speaking at his weekly press conference on Monday following two rounds of indirect talks between Iran and the United States on the nuclear issue, Press TV reported. "All sanctions imposed on the Islamic Republic of Iran are unjustifiable, unlawful and cruel. Therefore, we do not distinguish between the sanctions which have been imposed on us under different pretexts and titles," he said. He added that Iran pursues the removal of these sanctions in every negotiation as its fundamental demand just in a way that leads to tangible and completely effective outcomes.

He noted that Iran should be able to carry out its economic, trade and banking activities, stressing the need for necessary guarantees that the previous negative experience would not be repeated any more. Baqaei reiterated that Iran must be assured that its indirect talks with the US would lead to enduring specific outcomes and that the opposite sides would seriously fulfill their commitments. Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi and Steve Witkoff, the US president's special envoy for West Asia affairs, led two rounds of indirect talks about Iran's nuclear program and the termination of US sanctions in the Omani capital of Muscat and the Italian capital, Rome, on April 12 and 19, respectively. The high-level talks mediated by Omani Foreign Minister

Badr bin Hamad Al Busaidi. Speaking at the end of the second round of talks on Saturday, Araghchi said Tehran and Washington had reached a "better understanding" on certain principles and goals. Iran and the US agreed to open expert-level technical discussions in Oman on April 23. A third round of high-level indirect negotiations between Araghchi and Witkoff would kick off in Oman on April 26 to evaluate the results of the expert meetings and see how close they will be to an agreement. The Iranian spokesperson hailed Oman's professional role as the host and mediation of the talks between Tehran and Washington. He said Oman had proposed that the second round of the negotiations should be held "in a place other than



Muscat", adding that the three parties agreed on the venue.

He also commended the Italian government for its positive cooperation.

Pontiff passes away at 88

Pezeshkian: Pope Francis will remain in hearts of all awakened consciences and freedom-seekers

International Desk

Pope Francis, the first Latin American leader of the Roman Catholic Church, passed away, the Vatican said on Monday.

He was 88, and had suffered a serious bout of double pneumonia this year, but his death came as a shock after he had been driven around St. Peter's Square in an open-air pope-mobile to greet cheering crowds on Easter Sunday.

"Dear brothers and sisters, it is with profound sadness I must announce the death of our Holy Father Francis," Cardinal Kevin Farrell announced on the Vatican's TV channel.

"At 7:35 (0535 GMT) this morning the Bishop of Rome, Francis, returned to the house of the Father."

A spokesman said his body might be moved to St. Peter's Basilica as early as Wednesday morning to allow the faithful to pay their respects. No date has been set for the funeral.

Tributes for Francis poured in from around the world, with many leaders praising his humility and care for the poor.

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian offered his condolences over the death of Pope Francis and praised his condemnation of "genocide" by Israel in Gaza.

"With sorrow, I offer my condolences on the passing of Pope Francis, the leader and spiritual guide of the world's Catholics," Pezeshkian said in a statement posted on his official website.

The president of Iran said the pon-



tiff's name and memory would remain "in the hearts of all awakened consciences and freedom-seekers" for his humanitarian stances, including the "condemnation of the genocide committed by the Israeli regime in Gaza."

Earlier on Monday, Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi and the Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baqaei also offered condolences to all Christians around the world.

Francis had on Sunday made his first prolonged public appearance since being discharged from hospital on March 23 after a 38-day stay for pneumonia.

In an Easter Sunday message read aloud by an aide as the pope looked on from the main balcony of St. Peter's Basilica, the pontiff had reiterated his call for an immediate cease-fire in Gaza.

World leaders paid tribute to the pope, praised his efforts to reform the worldwide church and offered condolences to the world's 1.4 billion Catholics.

Jorge Mario Bergoglio was elected pope on March 13, 2013, surprising many Church watchers who had seen the Argentine cleric, known for his concern for the poor, as an outsider.

He sought to project simplicity into the grand role and never took possession of the ornate papal apartments in the Apostolic Palace used by his predecessors, saying he preferred to live in a community setting for his "psychological health."

He initiated changes within the Vatican, emphasizing transparency, accountability and financial reform, and appointed more women to senior posts in its hierarchy. However, Francis was also viewed as a haphazard leader, often blindsiding Vatican officials with his off-the-cuff comments.

He struggled to get a grip on the Church's crisis over sexual abuse by clerics and he inherited a Church torn by infighting in the Vatican bureaucracy, and was elected with a clear mandate to restore order.

Iran FM to visit China today for consultations on nuclear talks

International Desk

Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi will visit China on Tuesday, the Foreign Ministry said, ahead of a third round of nuclear talks between Tehran and Washington due on Saturday in Oman.

The visit to China comes after a trip to Russia last week, where he discussed the latest developments in talks between Tehran and Washington over Iran's nuclear program. After the visit to Russia, Araghchi told state TV that Tehran always closely consults with its friends, Russia and China, over the nuclear issue.

"It is natural that we will consult and brief China over the latest developments in Iran-US indirect talks," Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baqaei said, adding that Beijing can play a constructive role in this process.

China was a signatory to the 2015 Iran nuclear deal, formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).



The landmark accord was also signed by four other permanent UN Security Council members - Britain, France, Russia, and the United States - along with Germany and the European Union.

Those countries were party to the agreement and so "consultations must continue with them," Baqaei said.

A third round of US-Iranian talks, mediated by Oman and involving Araghchi and Trump's Middle East envoy Steve Witkoff, are due to take place in the capital Muscat on Saturday.

Iranian official warns of continuous inclusion on FATF blacklist

National Desk

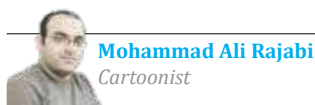
Iranian Deputy Finance Minister Hadi Khani warned of the consequences of the continuous inclusion of the country on the blacklist of the global money laundering watchdog FATF.

He said that removal of Iran from the FATF blacklist would take away the tool of US hostile measures against the Islamic Republic. Khani said that Iran's economic partners - China, the UAE, and Turkey - are set to undergo FATF supervision for their measures vis-à-vis the

economic activities of individuals whose countries are on the FATF blacklist and reside on their soil.

"As a result, we are witnessing an intensification of supervisory measures by our most important trading partners against us, which is an example of the US abusing our inclusion on the blacklist to pressure Iran," he said.

Iran's Expediency Council has begun re-examining the anti-money laundering and terrorism financing conventions adopted by the global financial crime watchdog FATF.



Mohammad Ali Rajabi
Cartoonist

Deal within reach ...

As is well understood, every negotiation rests on a set of agreed principles and a basic framework. Both parties must get on the same page regarding this structure before they can drill down into the details. This framework forms the very first step toward any potential agreement.

From the standpoint of the Islamic Republic, the overarching framework in the ongoing negotiations is that the talks must zero in solely on nuclear matters. Iran seeks recognition from the US of its right to

enrich uranium, as well as the removal of sanctions. Naturally, the opposing side has laid out its own framework, which includes the expectation that Iran will not pursue nuclear weapon capabilities. The assessment of these positions will set the preliminary structure of the negotiations, and discussions will follow through within this agreed scope.

If the talks stick to the issues outlined in this framework, then a deal is indeed possible. The Islamic Republic is prepared to put forward a

process that lays to rest concerns about potential nuclear weapons development. In turn, the US must take steps to roll back the cruel economic sanctions imposed in recent years, including those targeting oil, finance, transport, insurance, and more.

However, should the Americans try to slip in topics beyond the nuclear issue—such as missile-related matters—it is only natural that the Islamic Republic will refuse to engage on anything outside the agreed nuclear parameters.



Iran's nuclear trajectory, US strategy

High-stakes geopolitical game



By Mohammad Khatibi
Guest contributor

O P I N I O N
E X C L U S I V E

The geopolitical landscape surrounding Iran's peaceful nuclear program has been marked by persistent tension, largely driven by Washington's evolving policies and the shifting dynamics of the Middle East. Since President Donald Trump's withdrawal from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in 2018, Iran's nuclear trajectory has become increasingly reactive — shaped by the United States' "maximum pressure" campaign, an initiative aimed at economically isolating Tehran and coercing compliance through stringent sanctions.

While the US left the JCPOA, Iran never formally abandoned the agreement. Instead, Tehran sought diplomatic engagement with key players such as the European Union, Russia, and China, exploring alternative avenues to salvage the deal in Washington's absence. These efforts, however, failed to provide the necessary economic relief, rendering adherence to the agreement an increasingly diminished priority for Iran.

Iran responded to sustained economic pressure by gradually increasing its uranium enrichment activities. Nuclear experts have claimed that Iran has reached purity levels capable of facilitating the development of multiple warheads, should Tehran choose to pursue such a path. Nevertheless, the recent US-Iran escalation does not necessarily indicate an imminent shift toward nuclear armament by Tehran. Iranian leaders have repeatedly emphasized strategic, religious, and geopolitical considerations that deter them from developing nuclear weapons.

A key pillar of Iran's official stance is the fatwa issued by the Leader of Iran's Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei, which prohibits weapons of mass destruction. Tehran has also reiterated its commitment to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), positioning itself as a state committed to nuclear transparency despite persistent Western skepticism.

In recent months, Washington has escalated its military presence in the Middle East, deploying additional assets to signal a heightened willingness to exert force against Tehran. While the US officially maintains that diplomacy remains its preferred approach, its actions — including prolonged sanctions, targeted strikes on Iran's regional allies, and intensified aggressive rhetoric — reflect a broader strategy rooted in coercion rather than engagement.

Iran's deterrence strategy continues to be shaped by its alliances with key regional actors. From Hezbollah in Lebanon and Ansarullah (the Houthis) in Yemen to Iraq's Popular Mobilization Forces, Iran's network of partners forms a critical buffer against Western pressure. While Washington perceives these relationships as a destabilizing force, Tehran regards them as an essential component of its national security doctrine. The ongoing Israeli war on Gaza has further recalibrated Iran's regional stance. Tehran views this as a pivotal moment — one that has hardened its adversaries while reinforcing its commitment to the Axis of Resistance. Iranian leaders have openly signaled their resolve to maintain support for Palestin-

ian factions and other allied forces, despite mounting military and economic challenges. Washington's growing reliance on military deployments — including recent bomber rotations — indicates an unwillingness to veer from force-driven policies. President Trump's explicit threats against Iran, particularly regarding operations originating in Yemen, have raised concerns about the likelihood of further regional escalation.

Iran's red lines remain non-negotiable: indigenous uranium enrichment will not be forfeited, support for regional allies will persist, and missile capabilities remain off the table in diplomatic discussions. These firm positions suggest that Tehran will not bow to Western pressure, nor will it make concessions for temporary sanctions relief. Ultimately, Washington faces a critical choice: whether to persist with its coercive strategy — which has historically failed to deter Iran — or pivot toward a more pragmatic approach that acknowledges regional complexities. Without meaningful diplomatic recalibration, tensions are likely to endure, deepening instability in the Middle East and fueling an unpredictable geopolitical future.

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Italy's Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani (front-L) meets with Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi (front-R) at the Italian Foreign Ministry in Rome before nuclear talks, on April 19, 2025.
● ITALIAN FOREIGN MINISTRY

Understanding reached, deal not yet

OPINION

In heavy air and under cloudy skies, Rome — the city of legendary empires — once again became the stage for a new chapter of diplomatic confrontation. The negotiations between Iran and the US, which for months had been stuck in twists and turns of silence and tension, have now found a glimmer of new life in the Italian capital. Though faint, this glimmer has fixed eyes on the future. After months of deadlock and silence, Rome has now turned into a crossroads of hopes and doubts — where Abbas Araghchi, Iran's foreign minister, and Steve Witkoff, the senior US representative, outlined new lines of dialogue in two rounds of intense, indirect talks.

New path in diplomacy

After concluding the second round of four-hour talks, Abbas Araghchi faced reporters with a calm yet cautious expression and stated: "The atmosphere of the negotiations was constructive and forward-moving. We reached a better understanding on a set of principles and objectives." He announced that a new phase would begin: Starting Wednesday, Iranian and American technical experts will kick off their specialized discussions to delve into the details of the agreement and outline a practical framework moving forward. According to Araghchi, after the expert-level talks, he and Witkoff will meet again in Oman on

Saturday to review the results and decide on the next steps. Yet, amid this optimistic news, Araghchi made a key statement that revealed the true essence of the situation: "There is neither reason for excessive optimism nor for excessive pessimism. We are still proceeding cautiously. I hope that next week, we will be in a better position — in a position to judge whether reaching an agreement is possible."

Why Rome, why Oman?

The choice of Rome and then Oman as negotiation venues is more than a geographical decision — it carries political messages. Rome, the heart of Europe, far from the media frenzy of the US or regional tensions, is the ideal place for talks requiring high sensitivity and subtlety. Oman, with its history of successful mediation — particularly in previous nuclear talks between Iran and the US — has once again been chosen as a neutral and trustworthy ground for entering the technical phase. Analysts say this shift shows that both sides are looking to build a secure space, allowing them to focus on negotiations without media pressure or political provocations.

From principles to implementation

An understanding on "principles and objectives" is a promising starting point, but entering the real details will be a serious test. Issues such as uranium enrichment levels and capacity, Iran's nuclear research and develop-



The illustration shows Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi (R) and the US special envoy in the Middle East Steve Witkoff. ● AL ARABIYA ENGLISH

ment programs, verification mechanisms for commitments, the timeline and stages of sanctions relief, and guarantees for implementation — all these dossiers will be opened in the expert meetings in Oman.

External, internal pressures

The political and international backdrop of these talks is far from simple. In Washington, the US administration is under heavy pressure from Congress and regional allies, especially Israel. Any agreement must convince domestic critics that US interests are not at risk. In Tehran, the bitter memory of America's withdrawal from the JCPOA in 2018 looms large. This time, Iran is seeking stronger, more tangible guarantees — ones that will prevent a repeat of that bitter scenario.

Cautious global welcome

On the international stage, the return to diplomacy has been met with cautious optimism. The European Union has officially welcomed the resumption of talks, emphasizing that any agreement must ensure Iran's sustained return to nuclear commitments and meaningful sanctions relief. China and Russia, which have grown closer to Iran in recent months, are also invested in the talks' success, as regional stability benefits their economic and geopolitical projects. Meanwhile, Israel has strongly warned against any revival of the nuclear deal, threatening unilateral action if necessary — a shadow that could still loom over the negotiations.

Economic, social consequences of deal

Even a temporary or phased deal could have an immediate impact on Iran's economy. Unfreezing assets, facilitating oil exports, easing banking restrictions, and reducing transaction

costs could provide short-term relief to the country's exhausted economy. On the other hand, Iranian society, long burdened by sanctions, is closely monitoring the talks. Even a clear sign of reduced tensions could shift the social atmosphere and restore hope for the future among the younger generation.

From Rome to Oman; from hope to reality

This time, Iranian and American negotiators may understand better than ever that no agreement will come about without difficult compromises. As diplomatic history shows, real agreements are born somewhere between maximalist demands and non-negotiable red lines. If, in Oman, experts can narrow technical differences, and if Araghchi and Witkoff can demonstrate the political will to continue the process in the third round, then hope for keeping the talks alive may be more than just a dream.

Hazy but open horizon

The world's eyes are fixed on Rome and Oman. A potential agreement, if achieved, will undoubtedly face a tough road ahead. But the fact that diplomacy has once again taken the place of threats and sanctions is itself a sign of the force that could guide a crisis-weary world toward some measure of calm. Until next Saturday and the third round of talks in Oman, all eyes remain on the Middle East — hoping that this time, diplomacy might prevail over the clamor of war and crisis.



This time, Iranian and American negotiators may understand better than ever that no agreement will come about without difficult compromises. As diplomatic history shows, real agreements are born somewhere between maximalist demands and non-negotiable red lines.

These days, Rome and Oman are not just hosting nuclear negotiations; they are witnessing a human effort to restore hope to a world that, more than ever, needs peace and dialogue. Amid breaking news, conflicting analyses, and endless waiting, we remain watchful — waiting for the moment when, perhaps this time, the diplomats' silence will give way to the smile of agreement.

The article first appeared in the Persian-language newspaper Haft-e Sobh.

Much hinges on Iran-US talks

By Abbas Nasir
Former editor of Dawn

OPINION

Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi and US presidential envoy Steve Witkoff met at the negotiating table in Rome yesterday to take forward "positive" talks on Tehran's nuclear programme initiated last week in, and mediated by, Oman. However, there is little clarity on what the process will deliver, although the two sides have reportedly agreed to task experts to discuss a framework for a potential deal in Oman next week.

With Donald Trump at the helm in the US, policies, particularly foreign policy, may appear chaotic but are generally formulated to uphold the interests of apartheid Israel, as big donors to American politicians' election campaigns — presidential candidates or Congressional — demand and get their pound of flesh.

This was evident in the fate of the Gaza cease-fire, which went into effect to coincide with Trump's inauguration at his insistence because he was keen to be seen as a peacemaker-president, despite Israeli reticence. The US envoy's arm-twisting worked. But only for a while. A lot of lobbying takes place behind closed doors — away from the public eye — as must have happened in this case, too. The result: Israel unilaterally violated the terms of the cease-fire agreement and changed goalposts, before resuming its geno-

cidal military campaign in Gaza. Credible third-party statistics say most Israeli air strikes post-cessate-fire have targeted women and children. Rescue workers have also been attacked; in one incident alone, 15 of them were ambushed and killed by the occupation forces.

A cover-up attempt failed because one of the murdered ambulance workers' mobile phone recorded the whole incident. It exposed Israel's lie that the ambulances were moving suspiciously, without lights or beacons. The video was found in the phone buried in a shallow grave with the paramedic.

Of course, no outrage was expressed by any democratic Western Persian government. Such is Israel and its backers' influence that from the US to the UK to Germany in the EU, the right to

protest — one of the most fundamental human rights — is being trampled upon in the name of 'antisemitism'.

The tragedy of the Holocaust is too recent a crime against humanity to be forgotten, and nobody can support bias of any kind; but it is far too convenient and wrong to label any criticism of the occupation and the denial of Palestinians' rights and their mass murder by Israel as 'antisemitic.' It is not.

Against this backdrop, why is America negotiating with Iran to get it to move away from enriching uranium to 90pc or more (weapons-grade) from the current 60pc and not going for the military option? From the US perspective, many of Iran's oil-rich Persian Gulf neighbours are very nervous about the outbreak of any hostilities spilling over

onto their soil. So, while Israel has publicly advocated for a 'Libya-like' dismantling of Iran's nuclear capability, the US position isn't that unambiguously maximalist. Witkoff has gone on record to say that a reduction in enrichment to a level that is for civilian use only will be acceptable. Obviously, under pressure from Israel, officials in Washington started backtracking on his statement, without really spelling out exactly what is acceptable. Although officially it wasn't said to be linked to the Iran-US talks, the timing of the visit last week to Tehran by Saudi Defence Minister Prince Khalid bin Salman, a former fighter pilot, and his chief of general staff could not have been coincidental. Considerable bonhomie was on display and significantly the visitor was granted an audience by the Leader of Iran's Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei.

The visit seemed aimed at underlining the Saudi position to Tehran that Riyadh disapproves of any US-Israeli military action against Iran since Iran and Saudi Arabia's relations are now back on track after a China-mediated normalisation process. It was clear from a media leak originating in Israel that the apartheid entity wishes to attack and degrade Iran's military capability. The leak said Trump vetoed an Israeli plan for a joint attack on Iran's nuclear facilities.

The plan proposed American air cover as Israeli "commandos" landed on the ground, penetrated fortified facilities deep underground, and destroyed them.

Even a US president totally beholden to the apartheid entity saw the dangers of such an escalation and preferred talks.

While he owes much to Israel, as is clear from huge arms shipments to it and the expulsion of even permanent American residents for merely protesting against the Gaza genocide, he also has commercial ties with the Saudis and wants to keep them and other Persian Gulf states onside. Moreover, Trump sees himself as bathed in glory as a peacemaker by expanding the Abraham Accords to Saudi Arabia.

Iran has made clear that it is willing to agree to any "reasonable" demands, i.e., it may be amenable to reducing its enrichment to verifiable civilian use thresholds but would not be prepared to "dismantle" its programme. Crippling sanctions may have brought Iran to the negotiating table, but its red lines remain. Many analysts say Iran is prepared to accept what was agreed to in the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action agreement during the Obama administration — a deal that Trump annulled in 2018 despite IAEA certification that Iran was adhering to its commitments. This was done under Israeli pressure.

A lot has changed since in the region, especially with the consolidation of Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's role. The de facto Saudi leader may not have been assertive then as he needed American support to cement himself at the helm. But, observers say, he seems to have come of age now.

The Persian Gulf leaders' disdain



● NEW ARAB



While Trump owes much to Israel, as is clear from huge arms shipments to it and the expulsion of even permanent American residents for merely protesting against the Gaza genocide, he also has commercial ties with the Saudis and wants to keep them and other Persian Gulf states onside.

for what they see as religiously inspired militancy in the Muslim world, particularly in Gaza, may keep them from doing anything concrete to stop the genocide, but even they would see the perils of endorsing an attack on Iran as they may themselves get sucked into the conflict.

Let's see if the talks break down and things move towards Israel's position or sanity prevails and a peaceful path is negotiated out of what could be a bloody scenario and regional conflagration.

The article first appeared on Pakistan's English-language newspaper Dawn.

World Snooker Championship:

Vafaei lets 'animal come out' to roar past Hawkins and progress

Sports Desk

Iran's Hossein Vafaei progressed to the last-16 round at the World Snooker Championship thanks to a hard-fought 10-9 victory over Englishman Barry Hawkins in Sheffield's Crucible Theatre. The Iranian will face three-time world champion Mark Williams in the next round on Friday after the Welshman orchestrated a 10-8 victory over Wu Yize of China. Vafaei had never been ahead in the entire first-round contest at the Crucible Theatre until the final frame. The former world amateur champion trailed throughout his match against Hawkins but grew stronger as the contest went on and enjoyed runs of 104, 107 and 110 as he repeatedly drew level. The Iranian world No. 24 had to come from behind on six occasions, including four

times by a couple of frames to stun the 11th seed.

Already known as a feisty character on and off the baize, Vafaei shocked the Crucible crowd with a large outburst during the deciding frame. He potted a red ball to reach a break of 50, and with the frame yet to be secured, the 30-year-old produced an unexpected "come on" roar. The former Shoot Out champion still held his nerve together to make a 73 break and qualify for the last 16 of the competition for only the second time in his career. "In the moment during the deciding frame, my mind went negative," Vafaei, who compiled four century breaks, told the World Snooker Tour. "I had to change something around. I needed to give something a go and let the animal come out again. It was a trick to my mind. "I was under lots of pressure.



Iran's Hossein Vafaei celebrates his victory over Englishman Barry Hawkins at the World Snooker Championships in Sheffield, Britain, on April 20, 2025.

● WORLD SNOOKER

All the way, I was down. What can I do? I'm always under pressure. I couldn't handle it at the end.

"I had to show some emotion or I'm not human. I had to show to the fans that we feel the pressure. People want to see this.

"Beating the world number 11 in the Crucible with four centuries is the best performance I have had. The numbers don't lie.

"I could easily have given up and not continued. I kept believing in myself that the game was there."

Vafaei is a character who divides opinion, but he surely adds a different element to the action in Sheffield.



Central Asian Youth Table Tennis Championships:

Boys crowned as Iran completes title double



Sports Desk

The Iranian boys' under-19 team defeated Kyrgyzstan 3-0 to walk away with the winner's trophy at the Central Asian Youth Table Tennis Championships in Almaty, Kazakhstan.

The triumph meant Iran made a clean sweep of double team titles in



Iran's under-19 team and coaching staff pose with their medals and the winner's trophy at the Central Asian Youth Table Tennis Championships in Almaty, Kazakhstan, on April 20, 2025.

● IRTTF

Almaty, after the country's female team also beat Kyrgyzstan in emphatic fashion to lift the silverware. Benyamin Faraji put the Iranian quadruple in front with a 3-0 (11-3, 11-6, 13-11) win against Islam Ibragimov, before Amir-Abbas Hodaei and Mohammad Habibi also came out victorious against Abai Kasymov and Nuradil Tologonov, respectively, in straight games to secure a second victory in three outings for Iran at the four-team event.

The Iranian boys began their campaign with a 3-2 loss to Uzbekistan but went out to beat the host with the same scoreline.

Kazakhstan defeated Uzbekistan 3-2 on the final day as three teams finished on five points, though Iran stood on top of the table to qualify for June's Asian Youth Table Tennis Championships in Tashkent.

Earlier on Sunday, Setayesh Iloukhani, Vania Yavari, and Efat Ranjbar all came out on top in straight games against their Kyrgyz opponents to steer Iran to a third victory in as many matches in the girls contests.

Iranian girls came from behind twice to beat the host 3-2 in their opener and then eased to a 3-0 win against Uzbekistan.

Mahdavi agrees one-year extension to Shahdab contract

Sports Desk

Mahdi Mahdavi will stay on as Shahdab Yazd head coach for next season, the Iranian top-flight volleyball club announced on Sunday.

Former Iranian international setter Mahdavi took over from Rahman Mohammadi-Rad, to whom he worked as a number two, on Shahdab bench in February following a disappointing run of results in the Iranian Premier League regular season. The 41-year-old went on to turn Shahdab's fortune around, steering his side to the domestic league playoffs. Having stood third in the regular season table, Shahdab overcame Paykan and Chadormalou in the knockout phase to reach the Finals but eventually settled for a runner-up finish after a 2-1 defeat against familiar foe Foolad Sirjan in a thrilling best-of-three series earlier in April. Mahdavi's men came from be-

hind to win the first game 3-1 (24-26, 26-24, 25-21, 25-17) but Foolad bounced back to come out victorious 3-2 and 3-1 in the next two outings and defend its title.

This was Shahdab's third defeat against Foolad in a major final over the past 12 months, following setbacks in the league last year and the AVC Asian Club Championship showdown in September.



● RASOUL SHIRDEL/volleyball.ir

Curry leads Warriors to play-off win at Rockets

BBC – Stephen Curry scored a game-high 31 points as the Golden State Warriors began their NBA play-off campaign with a 95-85 win at the Houston Rockets.

The seventh-seeded Warriors made it successive wins in Houston, with Curry also adding six rebounds and three assists.

Jimmy Butler chipped in with a further 25 points, seven rebounds and six assists to hand Golden State a 1-0 series lead – with Game 2 scheduled for Thursday.

"Steph was incredible. He was incredible," Warriors coach Steve Kerr said.

"With that type of pressure on him from [Amen] Thompson and others, he just made some amazing plays and, obviously, carried us offensively along with Jimmy."

The Rockets, seeded second in the play-offs, endured a disappointing end to the regular season with three successive defeats and have lost back-to-back games at home.

Ime Udoka's side are featuring in the play-offs for the first time since 2019-20, when they lost against the Los Angeles Lakers in the semi-finals.



● AP

"I wouldn't say the moment, I would say the physicality at times, going after guys, and just play-off basketball," Udoka said when asked if a lack of experience cost his side.

"It's not really about the moment. Going into the lane, trying to shoot over too many and not finding your outlets is a

big thing and a big key for us all year." Elsewhere, the Cleveland Cavaliers sealed a 121-100 win against the Miami Heat in the Eastern Conference play-offs.

Donovan Mitchell scored 30 points with Ty Jerome adding 28 points and Darius Garland scoring 27.

Revitalize spirit, find relief in Towbiroun Valley

Iranica Desk

Dezful, situated in the north-eastern part of Khuzestan Province, is approximately 155 kilometers from Ahvaz, the provincial capital. This city boasts a wide array of natural and historical attractions, making it home to some of the most significant tourist spots in Khuzestan Province. Despite the province experiencing a hot climate from mid-spring to mid-autumn, Dezful offers cool retreats that allow visitors to escape the heat. One such oasis is Towbiroun Valley, an extraordinary natural wonder located just 20 kilometers north of the city in the Sardasht region, near an area known as Tangeh Sara.

Towbiroun Valley is renowned for its stunning scenery and is a must-visit for nature lovers and adventure seekers alike. The name Towbiroun is derived from the local Dezfuli dialect, where “Tow” refers to fever and heat, and “Biroun” means to cut off. Therefore, “Towbiroun” can be interpreted as “a place that removes heat from the body and soul.” Historically, people would travel to Towbiroun Valley seeking relief from pain and illness, believing in the healing properties of its waters. Upon arriving at the valley, you’ll be struck by its breathtaking beauty. It is characterized by towering rocky walls that soar up to 100 meters high, creating a narrow, shaded

path where you can wander along a cool sandy floor. The experience of walking through this enchanting landscape, surrounded by the protective embrace of these towering cliffs, is unlike any other. As you explore, you’ll be captivated by the unusual and delightful rock formations, lush vineyards, and wild fig trees. The valley is further enhanced by abundant springs, picturesque waterfalls, and gentle trickles of water, which together create a landscape that is both extraordinary and indescribable.

Nature’s masterpiece

Over thousands of years, nature has sculpted this legendary valley, where mist, sun, and the cosmos have played a vital role in its creation. The structure of Towbiroun Valley is primarily composed of sedimentary rocks shaped by water erosion from prolonged rainfall and runoff from the surrounding mountains. During dry periods, the valley serves as a drainage channel, collecting underground water, which flows visibly along its walls and floor. This environment supports a diverse range of wildlife, including various fish, snakes, and lizards.

Recreational activities

Jeep and off-road riding: For thrill-seekers, Towbiroun Valley is the perfect spot for exciting jeep rides. Just be sure to preserve the beauty of this natural haven while enjoying the adventure. **Walking:** Strolling through the valley, with its cool sands and clear waters, provides a relaxing experience. Take your time to enjoy the tranquility that this unique environment offers. **Photography and scenic viewing:** The dreamlike landscapes evoke a special sense of peace. Don’t forget your camera — capturing these



mesmerizing views will bring lasting joy. **Camping:** Towbiroun Valley is an ideal location for nature tours and overnight stays. If you love camping and group outings, this valley allows for unforgettable nights under the stars, enveloped in its serene darkness. Remember to respect the natural surroundings and leave no trace.

When to visit

Though Dezful is known for its hot climate, Towbiroun Valley remains one of the best places to retreat into nature, even during the height of summer. The optimal time to visit is from May to late summer. Notably, even when temperatures rise above 40 degrees Celsius in Dezful, a cool breeze sweeps through the valley, often reduc-

ing the temperature to a pleasant 25 degrees or less. For those considering an overnight camping experience, Towbiroun Valley is an exceptional choice. Setting up a tent here allows you to enjoy an exciting night in this magical place. As you immerse yourself in the beauty of Towbiroun, please keep in mind the importance of preserving its pristine nature.

Leveraging technology, handicrafts to enrich cultural heritage tourism



Iranica Desk

During the recent visit of Deputy President for Science and Technology Hossein Afshin to Khuzestan Province, an excellent opportunity arose to discuss and emphasize the necessity of linking technology, cultural heritage, and tourism — a subject that has the potential to create a fundamental transformation in this industry at both provincial and national levels.

In this meeting, the importance of utilizing modern technologies to transform the tourism industry was underscored. Afshin announced an agreement with the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts aimed at developing technological tourism in Khuzestan Province. He noted that the intended development model, while generating wealth, also prioritizes environmental protection, economic diversity, and the preserva-

tion of cultural heritage. One of the key topics emphasized during this session was the vital role of technology in transforming the tourism industry and in restoring historical artifacts. Contrary to common misconceptions, tourism is not merely limited to booking accommodations and tickets; rather, technology can serve as a powerful tool for storytelling, preservation, and the creative presentation of cultural heritage. Furthermore, the discussion addressed the potentials of handicrafts and the challenges faced in marketing and sustaining them. Afshin emphasized the role of creative industries as a bridge between innovation and heritage. By combining creativity with modern technologies, it is possible to pave the way for international markets for Iranian products. Handicraft houses also have a crucial role to play in this journey; these centers, akin to growth centers for knowledge-based companies, can provide platforms for the flourishing of artistic businesses and handicrafts. Despite these significant potentials, Khuzestan Province faces serious challenges in leveraging knowledge-based infrastructure. Infrastructural weak-

nesses have hindered the province’s Science and Technology Park, which, despite its vast local capacities, suffers from minimal facilities. Meanwhile, the innovation and creativity embedded in Iran’s cultural heritage and handicrafts are supported by a rich knowledge base and historical resources, which can enhance the country’s standing in the international arena. The application of technology in these areas can be remarkably diverse, ranging from manufacturing technologies in handicrafts to the use of artificial intelligence for restoring artifacts, digitizing historical heritage, employing blockchain for registering artifacts, and designing specialized interactive museums according to global standards. In this context, joint cooperation between the Presidential Department for Science and the Ministry of Cultural Heritage can establish a foundation for the emergence of major technolog-

ical players in related fields, opening a new path in the discourse surrounding development based on identity and cultural economy. Achieving this goal will transform Khuzestan Province into a model for sustainable development founded on heritage and innovation within the country.



Kapu weaving
● diyarmo.com



Iran's female director Sadegh Asadi to judge at int'l animation festival in France

Arts & Culture Desk

Shiva Sadegh Asadi, an Iranian animator and director, has been appointed as a judge for the official competition of short films at the 49th edition of the Annecy International Animation Festival, set to take place from June 8 to 14, in France. Sadegh Asadi will be part of an illustrious panel, which includes Academy Award-win-

ning filmmaker Andrew Ruhemann from the UK and renowned American animator, writer, and director Chris Sanders, a two-time Academy Award nominee, IRNA reported. Together, they will evaluate and select the best animated short films from this year's official competition. Sadegh Asadi's body of work, known for its profound exploration of human emotions and

inner worlds, has garnered attention at some of the most prestigious film and animation festivals worldwide. She has previously directed animated shorts such as 'Kitten,' 'Grandfather,' and 'Crab' for the Institute for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults (IIDCYA). Also, her upcoming project, 'The Patternless Garment,' is currently in production under the same

institute's banner. Sadegh Asadi's other notable works include 'Yal o Koopal,' 'Spot,' and 'Aquatic,' which have been featured and awarded at international festivals such as Annecy, Animafest Zagreb, Hiroshima in Japan, and the DOK Leipzig in Germany. An accomplished painter as well as an animator, Sadegh Asadi holds a Master's degree in Animation Directing from



the University of Art in Tehran. Her creative focus spans themes of dreams, dark fan-

tasies, femininity, and family dynamics, both in her artwork and her films.

Iran grapples with aging population as growth rate slips to 0.6%



Social Desk

Iran's population is aging at an accelerating pace, with its growth rate slipping to just 0.6%, according to

Marzieh Vahid Dastjerdi, Secretary of the National Population Headquarters. Speaking at a joint session with the Ministry of Education on Monday, Dastjerdi warned that the country is "moving rapidly toward population decline and aging," IRNA reported. Dastjerdi emphasized that the education system plays a central role in shaping future generations and has a key part to play in advancing the nation's pro-natalist policies. "Fortunately, strong steps have already been taken within the Ministry of Education in line with the Youthful Population Law," she said.

Iran currently has a youthful demographic under its wing—more than 24 million boys and girls between the ages of 1 and 20 are enrolled across kindergartens and high schools nationwide. "This is a golden window for nurturing growth and development," Dastjerdi noted. She stressed that if educators help get the message across about the importance of family and population policies, the long-term impact could be substantial. Dastjerdi stressed the urgency of the demographic challenge. "While the global population is still rising, two-thirds of the world now live in

countries with fertility rates below replacement level," she said. In Iran, approximately 10.4% of the population is over the age of 60, and demographic projections show a steady downward trend. With fertility and birth rates falling, concerns are mounting over the socio-economic strains an aging society might bring. To counteract the declining birth rate, Dastjerdi pointed to several key strategies under consideration, including expanding childcare facilities, offering longer parental leave, and introducing more flexible work arrangements for women. "Support-

ive policies must catch up with the challenges at hand," she said. Education Minister Alireza Kazemi, also present at the meeting, stressed the importance of future-oriented planning. "Alongside cultural and promotional efforts, we must remove the roadblocks to childbearing and support young families with real incentives," he said. Among the proposed measures are marriage facilitation programs and financial incentives for childbearing—initiatives that officials hope will turn the tide before the country's demographic clock runs out.

Legacy of Ghobad Shiva

Artist who gave voice to Iranian graphic design

By Saeideh Ehsani Rad
Staff writer

EXCLUSIVE

Ghobad Shiva, born on January 24, 1941, in Hamedan, Iran, is widely regarded as one of the most influential figures in Iranian graphic design. With a career spanning decades, Shiva is celebrated not just for his artistic excellence but for championing a uniquely Iranian voice in the global design landscape. Known as the first to truly introduce "Iranian Graphic Design" to the world, his legacy continues to resonate in the work of his students and admirers.

A childhood rooted in art

Shiva's artistic inclinations emerged early. His father was a lover of poetry and mysticism and a skilled tar player. His older brother worked at the American hospital

in Hamedan and would bring home Christmas cards from his American colleagues. These cards, with their illustrations and festive designs, sparked young Ghobad's fascination with visual art. By high school, he was already creating paper crafts and drawing designs inspired by those cards—one of which impressed his teacher and marked the beginning of his journey in visual communication. He graduated with a degree in painting from the University of Tehran in 1966, studying under renowned artists such as Ali Mohammad Heydarian, Mahmoud Javadipour, Hooshang Seyhoun, and Mohsen Vaziri-Moghaddam. Later, he pursued a master's degree in graphic design at Pratt Institute in New York, which he completed in 1980. There, he studied with leading figures in design such as Milton Glaser, Herb Lubalin, and Ivan Chermayeff, sharpening his skills and broadening his perspective.

Defining Iranian graphic design

When Shiva began his professional career, the prevailing influences in Iranian graphic design were largely foreign—especially Polish. However, Shiva envisioned a uniquely Iranian graphic language. His groundbreaking use of Persian calligraphy—particularly Nasta'liq and Shekasteh scripts—in modern graphic compositions began with the poster for the Fifth Shiraz Arts Festival. The design drew immediate international attention and was even included in museum collections across the US and Europe. Despite facing resistance at home

from some within the art community, Shiva remained committed to this vision. His exhibitions abroad, especially in the US, played a significant role in introducing Iranian graphic aesthetics to the world. During one show at Pratt Institute, he enhanced the viewer's understanding by displaying slides from the book 'Persia, Bridge of Turquoise' by Roloff Beny, linking his posters to architectural and cultural motifs from Iran. The exhibition gained so much traction that NASA representatives visited and recorded his voice to include in a capsule of Earth's cultural artifacts, intended for extraterrestrial listeners.

Innovation, teaching

Upon returning to Iran, Shiva became a professor at IRIB University, where he mentored generations of designers. He also established some of the most influential design studios in the country. His graphic design atelier, associated with Tamassha magazine and later Soroush publishing, was one of the largest and most respected studios in Iran, rivaled only by Franklin Publishing. Shiva was a founding member of the Iranian Graphic Designers Society and designed its logo—a hand poised in mid-creation—a lasting emblem of the profession. Alongside his colleagues like Morteza Momayez and Aydin Aghdashloo, Shiva helped usher in the modern era of Iranian graphic design, transforming everything from book covers to movie posters. His works bridged traditional Persian visual culture with contemporary design principles, creating a new, localized aesthetic that was both

globally relevant and deeply rooted in heritage.

A living archive

During a recent Nowruz visit in spring 2025, Iran's Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance, Abbas Salehi, paid tribute to Shiva, who now battles Alzheimer's and lives away from the public eye. The visit was a moment of reflection on his contributions and the importance of preserving his legacy. Niknam Hosseini-Pour, head of the ministry's public relations department, recalled earlier meetings with Shiva, including one during the COVID-19 pandemic when they arranged for the transfer of Shiva's works, tools, and personal design desk to Iran's National Library and Archives. These artifacts are now preserved as part of Iran's cultural heritage, although only a fraction has been publicly exhibited. Many believe a dedicated national graphic design museum is long overdue.

Teacher's legacy

As a teacher, Shiva was generous with his knowledge. According to his wife, he never kept his insights to himself. He trained countless students—many of whom are now leaders in the field. Shiva's intellectual and emotional investment in his students is perhaps his most lasting legacy. Though he lost his only son, Farshid, in recent years, the minister referred to his artworks and students as his "spiritual children," carrying his legacy forward both in Iran and abroad.

Designer's philosophy

Shiva's colleague, graphic designer



Ebrahim Haghighi, emphasized that Shiva belonged to a generation of artists who approached each project with deep care and thought. In an era when the design process was more time-consuming and labor-intensive, Shiva would spend days sketching, testing ideas, and fine-tuning every element—never rushing a piece until it was fully realized. One of his most iconic posters was for a theater production by Ali Rafiei about Amir Kabir, photographed by Bahman Jalali. It's now considered a masterpiece in Iranian graphic history. His work, Haghighi noted, transcended tools. Whether created with pencil, brush, or computer, the essence of Shiva's designs lay in the thought and creativity behind them. A good student, he said, learns from the mind of the artist, not just the medium.

Artistic language, national identity

Designer Hossein Norouzi described Shiva's approach as deeply nationalistic but also academically informed. Shiva fused elements of classical Persian

art—miniature painting, reliefs, and ceramics—with contemporary Western design techniques. His posters often reflect the intricate compositions and color palettes of traditional Persian art, reinterpreted through his unique visual language. He was especially known for his masterful integration of Persian script into modern design—transforming letters into expressive, fluid forms. Norouzi emphasized that Shiva's work is not merely a reassembly of old motifs, but an original synthesis of cultural memory and modernity. His art invites viewers to a visual poetry steeped in Iranian identity yet rendered through global design principles.

A legend etched in design

From the bustling streets of Tehran to the halls of Western museums, Ghobad Shiva's influence is undeniable. In 2007, the Encyclopedia Britannica featured him as a leading graphic designer from Asia, highlighting his poster celebrating Sa'adi. The Alliance Graphique Internationale (AGI) has recognized him as one of the top 12 graphic designers in the world.

