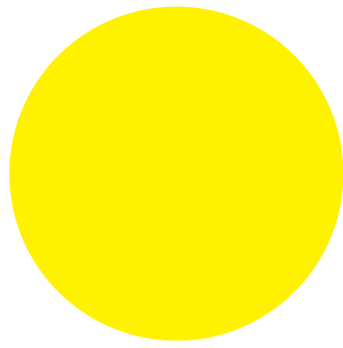


**Pezeshkian urges joint effort to fight terrorism in calls with Modi, Sharif**

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## Massive blast hits key port in southern Iran

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Thick, black smoke rises as rescuers arrive near the source of an explosion at the Shahid Rajaei port dock southwest of Bandar Abbas in the Iranian province of Hormozgan on April 26, 2025.   
● IRNA

**Iran-US talks grow 'more serious' as both sides resolute for deal: Iranian FM**  
US official calls meeting 'positive, productive'

International Desk

Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said on Saturday Iran-US talks over Tehran's nuclear program had become "more serious" with both sides demonstrating willpower to strike deal despite "serious disputes" emerging in the expert-level negotiations. Iran and the United States held a third round of talks in the Oma-

ni capital Muscat where negotiators discussed what Araghchi described as "more detailed and more technical" issues regarding the Iranian nuclear work. The talks, which began April 12, saw experts led by chief negotiators Araghchi and his US counterpart Steve Witkoff exchanging messages via Omani intermediaries during latest round.   
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Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi (back row-1st R) is seen discussing with his accompanying delegation ahead of indirect nuclear talks with the United States in the Omani capital of Muscat on April 26, 2025.   
● ISNA

### Iran can help build bridges between India, Pakistan

By Mashallah Shakeri  
Iran's former ambassador to Pakistan

OPINION EXCLUSIVE

The tragic incident that took place on April 22 in Indian-administered Kashmir's Pahalgam was deeply unfortunate. The attack left 26 people dead, including foreigners and Indian nationals. Regardless of ethnicity, nationality, or gender, this

incident is a tragic event that is condemned. Questions remain regarding the motive of the perpetrators behind the attack and whether any governments were involved. On the ground, however, tensions have been spiraling between India and Pakistan, as New Delhi blames the attack on Islamabad. It is important to note that the current situation is not related to the longstanding conflict between the two sides. Three wars have taken place between these two countries, which have many on-

going disputes, including border conflicts. Actions taken by both nations in the disputed Kashmir region are regularly challenged by the opposing side. Therefore, the potential for escalating tensions between these two nations has always existed, and the incident in Pahalgam has sparked a fury that has been bottled up, leading to heated rhetoric and harsh words exchanged. Considering the region is already not in a normal situation, it is hoped that these tensions will subside.   
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### 'National Carpet Center' revived in Iran's Industry Ministry

Hand-woven Persian rugs victim of political rivalries

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### Caring Cities in a Divided World

By Jordi Vaquer, Secretary General of Metropolis, the World Association of Major Metropolises



Since 1985 Metropolis, the World Association of Major Metropolises, has been for the large cities of the World a space to meet and exchange their experiences in improving the quality of big city life. Our organization, which counts on the active participation of Mashhad and other Iranian cities, is a microcosm of international relations, but also a space that brings hope for a divided, violent, unequal and ecologically devastated planet, a world where national governments struggle to address global crises and, instead, often add to the global disfunction. However agitated international and domestic political affairs may be, city governments cannot afford to lose sight of the medium term, and even long term. When a large city plans the expansion of its sewage system, its future water supply, or the construction of a metro system, the next news cycle, or even the next election, are almost irrelevant timeframes. Even ten years are a short period of time in the making of a city: for serious planning of the main systems that sustain it, a full generation, 25 years, is probably the minimum relevant scale. Thus, in a world of immediacy and of frequent crises, city administrations are forced to think long term and to engage in foresight, plan future scenarios and anticipate future events. Unsurprisingly, therefore, cities are also some of the most creative and innovative political players. The big cities of the World are often pioneering ideas that, years later, become established in the political mainstream. Climate Change is the most obvious example, a topic where national governments have failed terribly, while local governments take the initiative and act. Local administrations are tireless innovators, often learning and sharing with international counterparts. For example, in the crucial first weeks of the COVID-19 emergency large cities used intensively their international connections to learn from their peers. From refugee and migrant inclusion to the challenges of demographic transitions, from the use of data and artificial intelligence to food security, emergency preparedness or water scarcity, cities innovate and move forward global agendas, while remaining close to citizens and their needs. One concept that has entered international urban debates with force is that of Caring Cities. The pandemic shed light on the essential role played by caregivers, both paid professionals and unpaid, usually women in the family context. We all have needed, need, and will need care in our lives, but the immense benefits to individuals and societies of care work (for children, sick or disabled people, dependent aged people, and even for fully functional adults) are often taken for granted, undervalued and unrecognized, and most care work is badly paid or not paid at all. In all regions of the world, the overwhelming majority of care work is done by women. Some Latin American cities, such as Bogotá, Mexico City or Montevideo, acted with a new level of ambition to support caregivers and transform care into a central element of how cities are planned. By organizing social services and mobility to support caregivers, and creating direct support that allows them to improve their wellbeing, complete their education and enter the job market, cities allow hundreds of thousands of caregivers, mostly women, to recover time for themselves, to achieve economic autonomy, and to participate fully in the live of their family, their community and their city. The examples from Latin America have inspired cities from West Africa to Turkey, from Southern Europe to Korea, who are building their own versions of caring cities. In a world of geopolitical confrontation, environmental degradation, extreme inequality and media controversy, it is my privilege as Secretary General of Metropolis to see cities show a different, much needed leadership, caring for the people and for the planet. Pragmatic urban collaboration is not impeded by the global fault lines that crisscross our planet and, instead, I witness every day in my job the potential of city-to-city sharing and learning to deliver solutions. The World's leaders should take note.



# Massive blast hits key port in southern Iran



## National Desk

A massive explosion and fire at Iran's largest commercial port in southern country has killed at least five people and injured more than 500 others. Social media videos showed black billowing smoke after the blast at

the Shahid Rajaei port in Hormozgan Province. Others showed glass blown out of buildings kilometers away from the epicenter of the explosion. State media footage showed the injured crowding into at least one hospital, with ambulances arriving as medics rushed one person by on a stretcher.

The blast shattered windows within a radius of several kilometers and was heard in Qeshm, an island 26 kilometers south of the port. At least 516 have been injured in the blast at the port just outside of Bandar Abbas, a major facility for container shipments for Iran that handles



People transport an injured man along a devastated boulevard following an explosion at the Shahid Rajaei port dock southwest of Bandar Abbas in the Iranian province of Hormozgan on April 26, 2025.

● IRNA

some 80 million tons of goods a year. Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian expressed sympathy for the victims of the deadly blast, adding he had "issued an order to investigate the situation and the causes", dispatching Interior Minister Eskandar Momeni to the area to look into the incident.

The Interior Ministry said it launched an investigation into the incident.

Although the cause of the blast was not immediately clear, the customs office at the port said in a statement carried by state TV that it probably resulted from a fire that broke out at the hazmat and chemical materials storage depot.

Hossein Zafari, a spokesperson for Iran's crisis management organization, appeared to blame the explosion on poor storage of chemicals in containers at Shahid Rajaei.

"The cause of the explosion was the chemicals inside the containers," he told Iran's ILNA news agency.

"Previously, the Director General of Crisis Management had given warnings to this port during their visits and had pointed out the possibility of danger," Zafari said.

An Iranian government spokesperson, however, said that although chemicals had likely caused the blast, it was not yet possible to determine the exact reason.

Oil facilities were not affected by the blast on Saturday, authorities said. The National Iranian Petroleum Refining and Distribution Company said in a statement that it had "no connection to refineries, fuel tanks, distribution complexes and oil pipelines." Shahid Rajaei, more than 1,000 kilometers south of the capital Tehran, is the most advanced container port in Iran.

The rare explosion came several months after one of Iran's deadliest work accidents in years. The coal mine blast in September, caused by a gas leak, killed more than 50 people in Tabas in Iran's east.

## Pezeshkian urges joint effort to fight terrorism in calls with Modi, Sharif



Narendra Modi

Masoud Pezeshkian

Shehbaz Sharif

## International Desk

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian on Saturday called for regional cooperation to root out terrorism as he spoke with Indian and Pakistani leaders following a deadly attack by gunmen in Indian-run Kashmir. India blamed Pakistan for the April 22 attack on tourists in Pahalgam which left 26 civilians dead. However, Islamabad has denied involvement and expressed readiness for a neutral probe into the incident. Speaking with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Pezeshkian "strongly" condemned the "inhumane" act of terror, IRNA reported. "Such bitter incidents double the

shared responsibility of all regional countries... to help eradicate the roots of terrorism," he told Modi on the phone.

He urged New Delhi to continue to follow in the footsteps of its prominent national figures such as Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru, "who were the messengers of peace."

Modi, for his part, echoed Pezeshkian's calls for a collective approach to the fight against terrorism, saying regional countries needed "unity and all-out cooperation" to address the issue.

The Iranian president also phoned Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif to highlight the need for

"greater cooperation" among regional nations to "combat the sinister phenomenon of terrorism" and "destroy the financial and military infrastructure of terrorist groups."

"Such terrorist acts... lead to new conflicts and tensions among regional countries," he warned. Sharif described Pakistan a victim of terrorism and said Islamabad was open to cooperate for a "comprehensive and transparent inquiry" into the recent incident.

Pezeshkian invited both leaders to visit Iran. The two also offered their condolences over a deadly explosion that ripped through a key port in the southern Iranian city of Bandar Abbas on Saturday.

## World bids farewell to Pope Francis



Italian cardinal Giovanni Battista Re (3rd R) officiates the mass in front of the coffin of late Pope Francis, during the funeral ceremony at St Peter's Square at the Vatican on April 26, 2025.

● TIZIANA FABI/AFP

Presidents, royalty and simple mourners bade farewell to Pope Francis on Saturday at a solemn funeral ceremony, where a cardinal appealed for the pontiff's legacy of caring for migrants, the downtrodden and the environment to be kept alive.

The Argentine pope, who reigned for 12 years, died at the age of 88 on Monday after suffering a stroke, Reuters reported.

"Rich in human warmth and deeply sensitive to today's challenges, Pope Francis truly shared the anxieties, sufferings and hopes of this time," said Italian Cardinal Giovanni Battista Re, who presided over the funeral Mass. In spiritual language, the 91-year-old Re gave a simple message: there was no going back. The first pontiff from Latin America had been "attentive to the signs of the times and what the Holy Spirit was awakening in the Church," he said.

Applause rang out as Francis' coffin, in-laid with a large cross, was brought out of the basilica and into the sun-filled square by 14 white-gloved pallbearers at the start of the Mass.

The Vatican estimated more than 250,000 people attended the ceremony, cramming the square and the roads around.

The crowds clapped loudly again at the end of the service when the ushers picked up the casket and tilted it slightly so more people could see.

Aerial views of the Vatican showed a patchwork of colors - black from the dark garb of the world's leaders, red from the vestments of some 250 cardinals, the purple worn by some of the 400 bishops and the white worn by 4,000 attending priests.

After the funeral, as the great bells of St. Peter's pealed in mourning, the coffin was placed on an open-topped popemobile and driven through the heart of Rome to St. Mary Major Basilica.

Francis, who shunned much of the pomp and privilege of the papacy, had asked to be buried there rather than in St. Peter's -- the first time a pope had been laid to rest outside the Vatican in more than a century.

The burial itself was conducted in private.

Iran's Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance Seyyed Abbas Salehi also attended the funeral ceremony in Rome. Francis' death ushered in a meticulously planned period of transition, marked by ancient ritual, pomp and mourning. Over the past three days, around 250,000 people filed past his open coffin, laid out before the altar of the cavernous basilica.

Francis, the first non-European pope for almost 13 centuries, battled to reshape the Church, siding with the poor and marginalized, while challenging wealthy nations to help migrants and reverse climate change.

## Iran-US talks grow ...

"The atmosphere was quite serious," Araghchi told Iranian TV after the meeting, adding that the two sides moved away from broader topics.

"This does not mean our differences have been resolved. There are still disagreements on both major issues and on the details," he pointed out. The top diplomat added that the delegations would go back to their capitals for "further review" of the issues raised in order to "narrow down differences" and would reconvene probably next Saturday in a venue to be determined later.

## Cautious optimism

He expressed "extremely cautious optimism" about progress in the talks as there were issues over which "general understandings" needed to be achieved before any

discussion on their details. Araghchi said he was "satisfied" with the pace and course of the negotiations though there were "some very serious disagreements" on certain issues which "would defiantly take time" to be resolved.

"I believe that there is willpower in the opposing side. We definitely have willpower, but whether an agreement can be reached is uncertain. I am optimistic, but very cautious."

The Iranian negotiating team for this round included economic experts and specialists from the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran are expected to join the talks next week, according to Araghchi.

The Iranian minister reiterated that the talks had so far focused on nuclear-related matters and "no other issues" had been touched on in the

course of the meetings.

Iran has time and again said that its defense capabilities including its ballistic missile program is not up for negotiations.

"Our topic is solely nuclear which means trust-building over Iran's nuclear program in return for the lifting of sanctions," he said.

A senior US administration official hailed the talks with Iran as "positive and productive," and said the two sides had agreed to meet again soon in Europe.

"This latest round of direct and indirect discussions lasted over four hours. There is still much to do, but further progress was made on getting to a deal," the official said on condition of anonymity.

"We agreed to meet again soon, in Europe, and we thank our Omani partners for facilitating these talks."

# Early production in three western Iranian oil fields fetches \$200m: *Official*

## Economy Desk

An official with Petroleum Engineering and Development Company (PEDEC), which is a subsidiary of the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC), said last year's output of three oil fields in the country's west had generated 200 million dollars in revenue after successfully meeting their annual production commitments and exceeding the planned ceiling.

"Based on the approved plan and budget of the Joint Management Committee (JMC), the contractor was obligated to achieve a certain amount of cumulative crude oil production from these fields within the 12-month period of the year 2024," said Majid Najarian, executive director of the development program of Cheshmehkosh, Dalpari and Paydar-e-Shargh oil fields.

"With the continuous efforts of the operational teams and the effective cooperation of all project factors, this goal was achieved ahead of schedule at the end of the eleventh month

of 2024 (December 2024)," he added. "In the twelfth month, the production amount exceeded the contractual obligations and nearly 3 million barrels more than the determined commitments were recorded."

Najarian underlined that the stated amount of surplus production had generated over \$200 million in revenue for the project through the sale of oil beyond annual commitments, which would have a significant impact on improving the project's economics.

"In 2025, achieving a production record exceeding contractual commitments is also on the agenda, and we hope that with this trend, while compensating for some of the temporary reductions in the initial years, we will bring the cumulative production of the project at the end of the 10-year period to a level beyond the mandated target," he said.

"Given the upward trend in production and planning, it is predicted that this project will achieve beyond the defined

goals within its contract prospect."

The development plan for the Cheshmehkosh oil field is in the Dehloran region, Ilam Province. The Dalpari and Paydar-e-Shargh oil fields are also located 30 kilometers from the central processing unit of the Cheshmehkosh oil field.

Iran's petroleum industry is over a century old, but its four-decade achievements have proven outstanding. Iran's recoverable liquid hydrocarbon reserves amounted to 88 billion barrels before the 1979 Islamic Revolution, which has increased to 340 billion boe thanks to cutting-edge technology.

Iran has proven its achievements in the crude oil, gas, petrochemical, refining, and distribution sectors. Some breakthroughs include the operation of the massive South Pars gas field, the giant Yadavaran oil field, and the Bandar Abbas Gas Condensate Refinery. Furthermore, 65 oil and gas fields have been discovered



since the 1979 Islamic Revolution, bringing recoverable oil and condensate reserves to 160 billion barrels and recoverable natural gas reserves to 33 tcm. Eight-fold gas production is

also an achievement in the E&P sector in the aftermath of the Islamic Revolution.

South Pars is one of the largest gas reserves in the world, with the massive Azadegan and Ya-

davaran oil fields being among the key exploration achievements following the Islamic Revolution. The rate of success in exploration in Iran has reached 100%.

SHANA

## Electric utility urges public to join '25-Degree Campaign' to save energy

### Economy Desk

Iran's state electricity company Tavanir called on its entire subscribers across the country to join the "25-Degree Campaign" and economize on their electricity consumption.

Tavanir made the call in a statement on Saturday as household power consumption tends to register a hike in looming hot days ahead of summer.

"We inform all compatriots that due to the noticeable increase in air temperature in most parts of the country, an 8% growth in electricity consumption compared to the same period last year, and a 45% decrease in the water reserves of hydroelectric power plants due to the noticeable decrease in rainfall in the country, we ask all compatriots to help ensure stable electricity supply for all subscribers by joining Tavanir Company's 25-Degree Campaign and optimizing electricity consumption, which involves setting the temperature of cooling devices to 25 degrees and using the low speed of evaporative coolers," the statement read.

Top Iranian officials placed a premium last winter on the importance of public participation in optimizing energy consumption and called for nationwide involvement in the "2 Degrees Less" campaign.

Following the invitation by President Masoud Pezeshkian and Oil Minister Mohsen Paknejad, various officials issued statements urging citizens to join the initiative aimed at reducing energy consumption and ensuring adequate winter fuel supplies.

The president criticized inefficient energy consumption in industries, offices, and homes, stressing that the government, producers, and citizens must work together to revise policies and adopt more efficient energy consumption patterns.

Pezeshkian pointed out that electricity and gas consumption in Iran is currently three times the global average. "This is while we lack sufficient gas and electricity to meet industrial needs," he said. Pezeshkian added that inefficient energy use in industries, offices, and households must be addressed.

### Renewable electricity boasts high appeal: Minister

In a related development, Iran's Energy Minister Abbas Aliabadi said the appeal of renewable electricity is high as its buying and selling are done on the energy exchange.

"Based on the law, buying and selling is done on the energy exchange, and as you know, the price of electricity on the energy exchange is highly attractive," Aliabadi said. The minister said the ongoing discussion is about future contracts, especially the issue of renewables, stressing that solar panels and wind power plants no longer need fuel. Responding to a question about the reluctance to build rooftop power plants due to the low price of selling surplus electricity, Aliabadi added, "Building solar power plants is permitted everywhere, including on house roofs and in yards, even if it is a joint venture, and we are moving towards renewable electricity generation being independent of selling to the government, with everyone producing and consuming for themselves."

According to a study by Iran's Parliament Research Center, the gap between electricity supply and demand has surged to around 12,000 megawatts in recent years, exacerbated by growing consumption and a series of hurdles including failure to increase power production capacity due to a lack of funds and shortages of fuel supply for thermal power plants.

## 'National Carpet Center' revived in Iran's Industry Ministry

Hand-woven Persian rugs victim of political rivalries

### Economy Desk

Iran's deputy minister of industry, mines and trade announced the revival of the "National Carpet Center" following reforms implemented by the current government in the structure of the carpet sector in the ministry.

Davoud Mousavi described the provision of liquidity as one of the challenges and concerns in the carpet sector and stated, "For this reason, interactions and meetings are being held with operating banks to resolve some of the liquidity problems of carpet producers."

Mousavi said the rising cost of items related to carpet production, including dyes and silk, is a challenge for an artist who wants to start their activity from a small workshop, and if the mentioned measures are taken, these problems will also be resolved.

Emphasizing the capacity to export Iranian hand-woven carpets to countries around the world, the deputy minister said Iran is known for carpets, and in the issue of carpets, the Islamic Republic has been and is a top global brand as well as an international brand.



"Those involved in the Iranian carpet industry know that, considering past approaches, there were even problems within the administrative structure of carpets. However, with the establishment of the current government, the structure of the carpet sector was reformed, and the 'National Carpet Center' was revived within the Ministry of Industry, Mines and Trade due to its importance," Mousavi said.

He stated that Iran used to have over one billion dollars in carpet exports, but the figure had significantly decreased.

"As far as commerce is concerned, one of the important issues ahead is resolving the challenges in this area so that we can take effective

steps regarding the development of the carpet industry's commerce, similar to other items. This requires coordination among all those responsible for exports, including customs, the Central Bank, and relevant ministries, and coordination in this regard is currently underway," Mousavi added.

Yahya Ale Eshaq, a senior advisor to the Ministry of Industry, Mines, and Trade, said Iranian hand-woven carpets fell victim to political rivalries.

"The most important event that caused a disaster in Iran's carpet industry was that in recent decades and in the years after the [1949] Revolution, the carpet industry in Iran became contaminated with internal

political rivalries, and a political group in the country, believing that the carpet industry with this level of revenue generation is controlled by a specific political faction that the aforementioned group disagrees with, rose up against hand-woven carpets," Ale Eshaq said.

"In fact, this group targeted the country's carpet industry with the aim of incapacitating the opposing political faction, and since they also held power, they created obstacles in the way of carpet exports by enacting laws or exerted influence on its pricing so that the industry would lose its economic justification, and generally struck at the root of Iran's carpet industry with a political approach."

Ale Eshaq underlined that the decrease in demand for Iranian carpets inside and outside of Iran caused many master weavers to emigrate to India, Pakistan, Malaysia, Indonesia, and China, and these countries gradually took over the global markets that were held by Iranian carpets.

He called hand-woven carpets from India, Pakistan, Malaysia, Indonesia and China as the main rivals of Iranian ones.

## Iran can help ...

Pakistan has strongly denied any involvement in the attack. However, in the wake of the incident, India has suspended the Indus Waters Treaty in place between the two sides since 1960. This particular incident, although tragic, is not unique to India and Pakistan. Similar events have occurred in other countries as well. Therefore, emotional reactions are better to be kept in check, and issues that both countries are committed to, such as the

water flow from the Indus River to Pakistan, should not be held hostage by this incident.

The reason is that a large number of people on the other side of the border depend on the water that flows from India for their livelihoods—whether it be for agriculture, drinking water, or other water-related needs that extend to southern Pakistan. Such actions could set a poor example for the international community. If a country ignores a previous com-

mitment that directly affects the rights of another, it could lead to a negative precedent. I strongly believe that an impartial investigation should be conducted.

Iran has always been at the forefront of promoting understanding and peace in the region, and has a long-standing history of doing so. Iran would be very pleased to contribute to fostering a sense of understanding between the two countries. Both nations are friends of Iran, and the historical and cultur-

al ties between the people of Iran and these countries are of great importance. By leveraging this credibility, Iran can hopefully help build bridges and create a peaceful understanding between Pakistan and India.

Countries able to ease disputes can make a significant difference in the international arena. As far as is known, Iran's stance has always been balanced toward Pakistan and India. Both countries are important trade and economic partners

of Iran, and in some cases, even political allies with it. Pakistan has always respected Iran's position, and similarly, India has done the same. In many international forums, India has extended assistance to Iran. If the need arises today, Iran is ready to step in, and will proudly use its diplomatic leverage to support both countries. Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi on Friday called on both India and Pakistan to exercise restraint, saying Iran stood ready to help ease tensions.

## Middle East in 2025

## Regional reactions to US-Iran talks

## International Desk

In the spring of 2025, with Donald Trump's return to the White House, the Middle East has once again taken center stage in global geopolitics. Ongoing negotiations between Tehran and Washington — mediated by Oman in Muscat and Rome — have sparked speculation about a potential security-economic deal. Unlike Trump's first term, marked by the US withdrawal from the JCPOA and "maximum pressure" policy, his second-term pragmatism — aimed at countering China, managing energy crises, and reducing military costs — has opened up space for dialogue with Iran.

However, in a region where every diplomatic shift has multi-layered consequences, how are neighboring countries reacting to these talks? From Baghdad to Baku, Kabul to Doha, states are weighing up the opportunities and threats of a potential deal. Below is an analysis of regional perspectives:

Iraq, caught between Tehran and Washington, is keeping a close eye on the talks. A deal lifting sanctions could boost Iranian energy, electricity, and consumer goods exports to Iraq, aiding Baghdad's fragile economy. However, Trump's "America First" policy may scale back US military presence, creating a power vacuum that could favor Iran or draw in rivals like Turkey.

The Taliban-led Afghanistan, isolated globally, cautiously follows the talks. Sanctions relief could allow Iran to serve as Afghanistan's transit gateway via Chabahar Port and the North-South Corridor. However, ISIS-K



The illustration shows the US President Donald Trump (c), his advisor Massad Boulos (l), and a number of regional leaders.  
● THE ARAB WEEKLY

threats and lack of US-Taliban engagement hold back progress. Pakistan sees both promise and risk. A revived Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline could cut down its reliance on expensive fuels, but closer Iran-US ties may upset Islamabad's traditional balancing act with Washington, especially vis-à-vis India. Security concerns in Balochistan further complicate matters. Baku views a stronger Iran as a

threat to its Zangezur Corridor ambitions. With Russia's influence waning post-Ukraine war, Iran may step up as a mediator in Armenia-Azerbaijan tensions, unsettling Baku.

Yerevan welcomes a potential deal, hoping for enhanced trade and reduced isolation via Iranian transit routes. However, it must juggle relations with Russia, which may look unfavorably on Tehran's Western outreach.

Ankara watches the talks closely. Reduced tensions could bring about energy and transit cooperation, but a stronger Iran complicates Turkish ambitions in Syria, Iraq, and the Caucasus. Ashgabat eyes economic benefits, such as revived gas exports via Iran to Europe, while staying out of geopolitical rivalries.

Riyadh is worried that a stronger Iran may upset the Persian Gulf balance in favor of Iran but may team

up with Tehran on OPEC policies. The UAE seeks trade opportunities but sticks with its ties with the West. Qatar and Oman could mediate economically and diplomatically. Bahrain, being close to Saudi Arabia and the US, views the talks as a threat to its national security. Tel Aviv sees Iran as an existential threat and may lobby Washington to limit any deal while ramping up military cooperation with the Persian Gulf states.

The 2025 Tehran-Washington talks represent a potential turning point for the Middle East. Success hinges on Iran's ability to balance regional rivalries while engaging globally. Neighboring states must decide whether to embrace diplomacy or push back — a choice that will shape the region's future.

The article is a summary of an op-ed published on Sad Online.

## Seven reasons why it's absurd to bomb Iran



Iran's new drone aircraft carrier Shahid Bagheri is seen in the Persian Gulf.  
● SEPAH NEWS



By Ted Snider  
Columnist

## ANALYSIS

"There are two ways Iran can be handled," US President Donald Trump has said, "militarily, or you make a deal." National Security Adviser Mike Waltz advocated for the military solution; Director of National Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard and Vice President JD Vance advocated for diplomacy. Trump has opted for diplomacy. But all options are still on the table, and if the diplomatic path fails, Trump says "the other will solve the problem."

But there are several reasons why all options should not be on the table and why bombing Iran to prevent it from acquiring a nuclear bomb would be absurd. Here are seven of them.

Most importantly, and the only one that really needs to be said, is that Iran is not pursuing a nuclear bomb. In 2003, Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei, the Leader of Iran, issued a fatwa, an official religious ruling, that declared nuclear weapons to be forbidden by Islam. The 2025 Annual Threat Assessment, which "reflects the collective insights of the Intelligence Community," clearly states that US intelligence "continue[s] to assess Iran is not building a

nuclear weapon and that [Ayatollah] Khamenei has not reauthorized the nuclear weapons program he suspended in 2003." That assessment maintains the 2022 US Department of Defense Nuclear Posture Review that concludes that "Iran does not today possess a nuclear weapon, and we currently believe it is not pursuing one." The most absurd reason for bombing Iran to prevent them from pursuing a nuclear bomb is that the US knows Iran is not pursuing a nuclear bomb. Since Iran is not pursuing a nuclear weapons program, the second reason why it is absurd to bomb Iran is that it has every legal right to its civilian nuclear program. As a signatory to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, Iran has "the inalienable right to a civilian program that uses "nuclear energy for peaceful purposes". The US does not believe Iran has an illegal nuclear weapons program, and it would be absurd to bomb them for having a legal civilian nuclear program.

Thirdly, Iran has already demonstrated that a military solution is not necessary for the Trump administration to achieve its goal of ensuring that Iran does not enrich uranium to weapon-grade levels. America's concerns, well-founded or not, can be satisfied by establishing ver-



The most absurd reason for bombing Iran to prevent them from pursuing a nuclear bomb is that the US knows Iran is not pursuing a nuclear bomb.

Since Iran is not pursuing a nuclear weapons program, the second reason why it is absurd to bomb Iran is that it has every legal right to its civilian nuclear program. As a signatory to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, Iran has "the inalienable right to a civilian program that uses "nuclear energy for peaceful purposes".

ifiable limits on Iran's levels of enrichment. Iran demonstrated its willingness to comply with this non-military solution when it agreed to those verifiable limitations in the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Program of Action (JCPOA) nuclear agreement. Eleven consecutive International Atomic Energy Agency reports verified that Iran was completely and consistently in compliance with the commitments made under that agreement. A military solution to America's concerns about Iran's civilian nuclear program is absurd because the US has historical evidence that the non-military solution works.

The military solution is not only absurd because it is unnecessary, it is even more absurd because it risks, not only war with Iran but a wider, regional war. The US has begun moving military equipment into the region, including aircraft carriers, bombers, and air defense systems. While presented as preparation for the possibility of intensified war with the Ansarullah (Houthis), US officials have privately said "that the weaponry was also part of the planning" for a potential "conflict with Iran". Even just that "buildup of American weaponry," according to a new intelligence assessment provided by Tulsi Gabbard, "could potentially spark a wider conflict with Iran that the United States did not want". Iran has stated that US

military action against its civilian nuclear program will elicit a military response from Iran against US bases in the region. Iran's Parliamentary Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf said, "If they threaten Islamic Iran, then, like powder kegs, America's allies in the region and US bases will be made unsafe." A military solution risks a war with Iran and, potentially, even a wider, regional war.

The fifth reason is that for all the risk of war with Iran and, perhaps, even a wider regional war, the assessed benefit is not worth it. In a striking line that has received little attention, The New York Times reported that the goal of military plans to bomb Iran's civilian nuclear sites being discussed by the US and Israel "was to set back Tehran's ability to develop a nuclear weapon by a year or more". Absurd is an understatement for risking war with Iran, and even a wider Middle East war, to set Iran's nuclear program — a nuclear program the US knows Iran does not have — to set the program back by only a year.

All of this calculation of costs and benefits and risks of war is absurd because we know that the diplomatic path can work. We know it can work because it did 10 years ago with the successful solution of the JCPOA nuclear agreement. There is reason to hope that, a decade later, it can work again. In the first round of



Leader of Iran's Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei (c) tours an exhibition showcasing Iran's latest peaceful achievements in the nuclear industry. The exhibition was held in the Imam Khomeini Hussainiyah in Tehran, Iran, on June 11, 2023.  
● khamenei.ir

talks in Oman on April 12, Iran insisted that future direct talks would be contingent on the success of the current indirect talks. The first round in Oman successfully led to a second round in Rome, and the second round has

now led to a third round because the second round was constructive.

And, finally, talk of a military solution by the nation that claims leadership of a world order based on international law

is absurd because a pre-emptive strike on Iran without Security Council approval would be a violation of international law.

Diplomacy has a real chance of defusing the long and volatile standoff between the US and

Iran. Threats of war are not only unnecessary, they contribute only to making diplomacy more difficult.

The article first appeared on *Antiwar.com*.

## Trump's theatrics of peace, machinery of war



By Peter Rodgers  
Scholar

OPINION

The Middle East has once again become a zone of turmoil, and with Donald Trump's return to the political arena, a chaotic and contradictory foreign policy has emerged. On one hand, he claims to be brokering a cease-fire in Gaza and is attempting to revive the Abraham Accords, aiming to bring Israel and Saudi Arabia closer. On the other hand, his threats of military action against Iran and intensified bombings in Yemen have pushed the region to the brink of war.

This contradictory approach is not only incoherent but resembles a sinking ship — one that is frightening even its allies, including Arab states and Israel. Is this policy merely a spectacle designed to gain global recognition or is it a sign of deeper strategic confusion?

Trump outwardly presents himself as working toward a Gaza cease-fire, but this move seems more like a bid for global attention than a genuine step toward peace. Simultaneously, he is push-

ing to revive the Abraham Accords, which were forged during his first term between Israel and several Arab countries like the UAE and Bahrain. His current goal is to bring Saudi Arabia into the fold, but the plan faces serious obstacles. As a key regional actor, Saudi Arabia is unlikely to sign on without guarantees of regional stability and progress on the Palestinian issue. Ongoing border tensions and long-standing distrust make these efforts precarious. The cease-fire in Gaza, while attractive in rhetoric, is undermined by Trump's other aggressive moves, leaving it with minimal chance of success. Ignoring the Palestinian perspective and relying on political pressure only deepens the divide. Ultimately, these policies seem more like tools of political posturing than genuine paths to peace.

Trump's aggressive stance toward Iran and Yemen paints a chaotic picture. By repeatedly threatening military action against Iran and continuing his "maximum pressure" strategy, he not only provokes Tehran but also unnerves his allies. The intensification of air strikes on (Ansarullah) Houthi positions in Yemen, sup-

posedly aimed at curbing Iranian influence, has left even supporters like Saudi Arabia and the UAE vulnerable to the consequences of regional instability.

Israel, too — fearing retaliation from Iran and its regional allies — watches with growing unease. This strategy, rooted in power projection rather than prudence, has brought with it waves of unrest and uncontrollable tension. Traditional US allies in the region, such as Jordan and Egypt, find themselves bewildered, unsure how to balance loyalty to Washington with the protection of their national interests. Iran, in response, continues to expand its military capabilities, intensifying the cycle of confrontation. Meanwhile, in Yemen, the relentless targeting of civilians has dealt a severe blow to the moral credibility of this policy and has deepened the humanitarian crisis. Rather than showcasing strength, this aggressive foreign policy has bred fear and distrust, even among friends, and pushed the region closer to catastrophe. This stark duality in Trump's policy may stem from his deep-seated ambition for global prestige — perhaps even the hope that

peacemaking theatrics and diplomatic performances could earn him the Nobel Peace Prize. On one hand, through initiatives like the Abraham Accords, he has tried to present himself as a peacemaker, highlighting the normalization of ties between Arab states and Israel as a historic breakthrough. On the other hand, he leans heavily on aggressive policies and displays of military might, aiming to project strength and send a clear message to rivals and potential adversaries. These two seemingly contradictory approaches — a theatrical display of peacemaking and a practical embrace of war — may appear to be part of a complex strategy. But in practice, this contradiction has proven fragile and unstable, producing results opposite to what was intended. The idea of achieving peace through war is fundamentally flawed as war rarely resolves the roots of conflict. Instead, it sows destruction, rage, and mistrust, laying the groundwork for new cycles of violence. Lasting peace demands diplomacy, inclusive dialogue, and structural justice, while war tends to eliminate those opportunities. Using force to impose peace inspires resis-

tance and revenge among those defeated or harmed. America's military interventions in the Middle East, and Trump's renewed belligerence, have fueled extremism, worsened humanitarian crises, and squandered resources that could have been used for reconstruction and trust-building. This is a mistake Trump made during his first term — and now appears to be repeating with even greater urgency.

Trump's new Middle East strategy, launched with claims of a Gaza cease-fire and a revival of the Abraham Accords, has in practice become a wreck. With threats against Iran and bombings in Yemen, he has alarmed even his allies. While he may seek a Nobel Peace Prize through diplomatic posturing, his warmongering approach mocks that very goal. The Arabs and Israelis who were expected to benefit from his policy now find themselves adrift in a worsening crisis he helped engineer. This contradiction not only undermines his credibility but has also pushed the region further into instability.

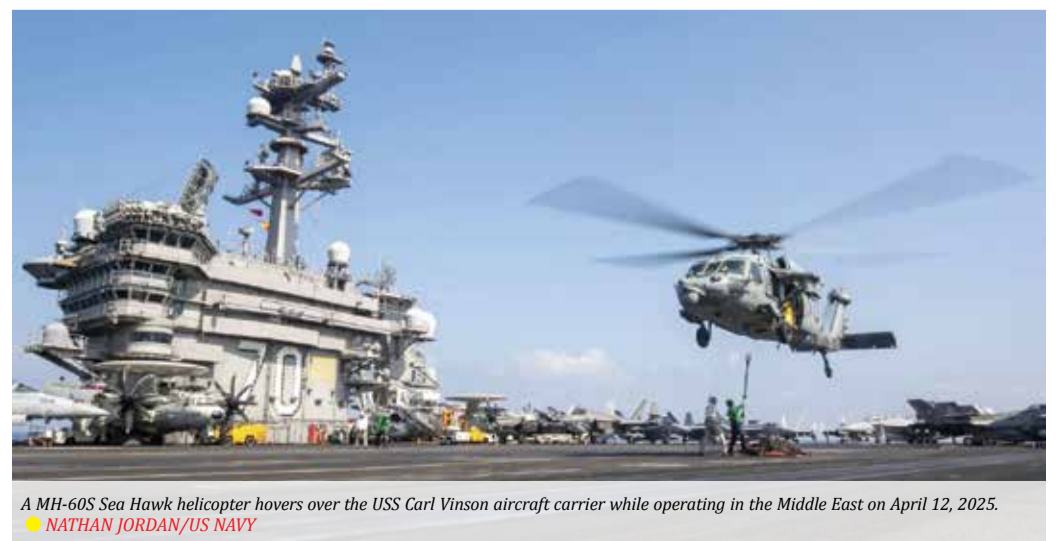
The article first appeared on *Eurasia Review*.

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The idea of achieving peace through war is fundamentally flawed as war rarely resolves the roots of conflict. Instead, it sows destruction, rage, and mistrust, laying the groundwork for new cycles of violence. Lasting peace demands diplomacy, inclusive dialogue, and structural justice, while war tends to eliminate those opportunities. Using force to impose peace inspires resistance and revenge among those defeated or harmed.



● PAUL SPELLA/THE ATLANTIC



A MH-60S Sea Hawk helicopter hovers over the USS Carl Vinson aircraft carrier while operating in the Middle East on April 12, 2025.  
● NATHAN JORDAN/US NAVY

## Persian Gulf Pro League: Last-gasp winner sends Tractor five points clear

### Sports Desk

Tractor closed in on a maiden Persian Gulf Pro League trophy after a 2-1 away win against Foolad Khuzestan in a rescheduled fixture from matchday 22 on Friday. Mahdi Hashemnejad bagged the winner in the 24th minute of stoppage time to help Tractor open a five-point gap over second-placed Sepahan on top of the table with three games remaining. Croatian striker Domagoj Drozdek put the visitors in front in the 46th minute, slotting home Mahdi Torabi's delicate flick-on from inside the box for his seventh goal in Tractor colors since joining the club in January. Things went from bad to worse for the home side in the 81st minute, when, following a VAR review, Malian center-back Moussa Coulibaly received his marching orders for a high boot in the opposition box. A chaotic second half saw the game paused multiple times, resulting in 24 minutes of added time, and Foolad kept chasing an equalizer despite playing with 10 men. The brave performance paid off

in the 16th minute of stoppage time, after Tractor defender Aref Aqassi was deemed by the VAR to have handled the ball inside his own box. Teenage substitute Abolfazl Zadeh-Attar showed nerves of steel to step up for the spot-kick, and despite having his effort saved by Alireza Beiranvand, managed to level the scoreline on the rebound. Just when the game looked destined for a stalemate – much to Sepahan's delight – Hashemnejad intercepted a Sina Asadbeigi's back pass before his composed finish found the bottom corner to send the Tractor bench into frenzy. Friday's result meant third-placed Persepolis, trailing Tractor by 10 points, will miss out on the Iranian top-flight crown for only the second time in nine seasons. Tractor will play away to Shams Azar on Friday, and can secure the coveted title at home against Nassaji Mazandaran on May 8, before visiting Esteghlal Khuzestan on the final day a week later. Sepahan, meanwhile, will play at home against Golgozar Sirjan and Esteghlal, either side of a trip to bottom-side Havadar.



Tractor players celebrate a goal during a 2-1 victory over Foolad Khuzestan in the Persian Gulf Pro League at the Foolad Arena, Ahvaz, Iran, on April 25, 2025.

## WTT Youth Contender 2025: Iranian table tennis prodigies crowned in Sarajevo

### Sports Desk

Iran's Benyamin Faraji and Nikan Shirvani walked away with a couple of winner's trophies in the latest WTT Youth Contender event in Sarajevo. Faraji, who won a historic under-15 bronze at the World Championships last year, beat opponents from Czechia, Italy, Croatia, and Slovakia before defeating Slovenian Miha Podobnik 3-1 (11-7, 10-12, 11-2, 11-5) in the boys' singles U19 final. This was Faraji's third Youth Contender title of the season, after he won the trophy in January's event in Tunis, followed by a runner-up finish in Cappadocia, Turkey, in February. Elsewhere in the boys' competitions, Shirvani came out on top in the under-11 age class, thanks to a 3-0 win (11-7, 13-11, 11-9) against



Moldavan Nicolae Bucur. Shirvani had come from behind to edge out Saleh Allam of Egypt in a five-game thriller (11-13, 11-7, 11-7, 9-11, 11-2) at the Sport Hall ILIJAŠ for a place in the final.

Iran's Nikan Shirvani won the boys' singles U11 trophy at the WTT Youth Contender 2025 event in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina. **FARSNEWS**

## Iranian Basketball Super League: Shahrdari Gorgan beats Kaleh in Game 4 to head into Finals

### Sports Desk

Shahrdari Gorgan secured a place in the Iranian Basketball Super League Finals thanks to a 95-86 victory over Kaleh Mazandaran at home on Friday. American point-guard Glenn Cosey stole the show for Shahrdari, registering a double-double with 25 points and 11 rebounds, as the home side won the best-of-five series 3-1 to head into the Finals for a fifth successive season. Shahrdari fell to an 82-76 loss in Game 1, but bounced back to rout Kaleh 122-68 in its own backyard in Amol, before taking a 2-1 series lead with an 89-83 home victory in Game 3 on Wednesday. Shahrdari had finished fourth in



the regular season with 13 wins in 20 outings, while Kaleh had won 17 games to stand atop the 11-team table. **IRIBF**



Magic forward Franz Wagner dunks against the Celtics during Game 3 of the first round in the NBA play-offs in Orlando, FL, US, on April 25, 2025. **MIKE WATTERS/IMAGN IMAGES**

## Magic survive to hit back against Celtics in NBA play-offs

BBC – The Orlando Magic survived a Boston Celtics fightback to halve the deficit in their play-off series against the NBA champions. Boston levelled things up with two minutes 31 seconds remaining but consecutive scores by Franz Wagner secured a 95-93 home win on Friday. Magic now trail 2-1 in the first round of the Eastern Conference play-offs. The best-of-seven series continues in Orlando today. Boston led for most of the way before they rallied from a 12-point deficit in the fourth quarter to make it 91-91.

Wagner then scored on consecutive drives over Kristaps Porzingis to finish with 32 points – his team's highest scorer. Jayson Tatum returned for the Celtics after missing game two with a sore right wrist and scored 21 points in the first half before finishing with a game-high 36. LeBron James continued his return to full fitness with a game-high 38 points but was unable to prevent the Los Angeles Lakers losing 116-104 at the Minnesota Timberwolves. Jaden McDaniels scored 30 points and Anthony Edwards 29 as the

Timberwolves finished strongly to take a 2-1 lead in the Western Conference first round. The hosts went on a 13-1 run over the final four minutes 37 seconds after the score was tied by the Lakers' Luka Dončić, who registered 17 points despite playing with a stomach illness. James had 13-for-21 shooting, including three three-pointers in a four-possession span during the fourth quarter. "He was shooting it from Yucatan," said Edwards. "He was shooting it crazy." Lakers coach JJ Redick added:

"He's moving better. It seems like he's getting healthier by the day." Minnesota are again at home on Sunday, as are the Milwaukee Bucks after winning 117-101 over the visiting Indiana Pacers in the Eastern Conference. Indiana led by 12 early in the third quarter but Giannis Antetokounmpo and Gary Trent Jr each scored 37 points as the Bucks fought back to cut their series deficit to 2-1. Trent Jr started in place of Taurean Prince and restricted Pacers guard Tyrese Haliburton to 14 points while tying a franchise play-off record with nine three-pointers.

# Archaeologists examine excavated artifacts from historical Shiraz

## Iranica Desk

A faculty member of the University of Art in Shiraz, who oversees the archaeological team at the Shah Cheragh Metro Station, believes that the first archaeological excavation of the historical fabric of Shiraz, initiated for scientific investigations related to the development of the urban railway, represents a golden opportunity for archaeological research, alongside its practical applications.

Meysam Nikzad stated that, until now, purposeful archaeological excavations have not been conducted in the historical fabric of Shiraz, resulting in limited information regarding the historical sequence and archaeological layers within this metropolis.

He added that, considering this rare opportunity, the archaeological team stationed at the site comprises a mix of researchers and specialists, leveraging the research capabilities of the faculty members from the University of Art, particularly in architecture and restoration, to analyze the findings of the excavation, IRNA wrote. Nikzad continued by noting that this project began in April of this year as part of a trilateral agreement between the University of Art in Shiraz, the Transportation and Traffic Department of Shiraz Municipality, and the Research Institute of Cultural Heritage, with the Fars Cultural Heritage Department supervising the operations.



He mentioned that the excavation's depth has reached nearly two meters; however, the layers unearthed remain disordered and chaotic due to being intermixed with contemporary waste, such as plastic fragments and other modern refuse. Nikzad added that currently, excavations are under-

way in four trenches, where remnants of residential architecture from the Second Pahlavi era have been uncovered. These remains are part of a residential unit designed with a central courtyard, which, in the excavated trenches, have revealed a kitchen, storage area, courtyard, and sections of the living space.

The head of the archaeological team explained that the materials used in this building included brick and clay mortar, with some areas coated in gypsum or lime mortar. These materials continued to be utilized during the 1960s and 1970s, alongside alterations and additions such as cementing the courtyard

floor, before the site was demolished and leveled for the construction of a parking area. He noted that among the movable findings, there are simple and glazed pottery fragments that date back to the later Islamic period. The Chancellor of the University of Art in Shiraz emphasized the university's

role in relation to industry and society. He stated that last year, agreements were established between the Transportation and Traffic Department of Shiraz Municipality, the Research Institute of Cultural Heritage, and the University of Art in Shiraz, designating the university as a research arm for the municipality and

the research institute concerning the Shiraz metro project.

Sattar Khaledian expressed that what was paramount in this context, and what all parties underscored, was the need for the preservation and respect for historical and cultural heritage.

He added that the University of Art in Shiraz remains committed to upholding scientific, professional, and research ethics. Following the acquisition of the necessary permits from the Research Institute of Cultural Heritage, the faculty members have conducted their excavations in accordance with international standards, ensuring the provision of adequate space for precise and specialized reporting and visits by journalists and media representatives to inform the esteemed citizens of Shiraz and fellow countrymen.

He mentioned that the faculty members of this institution have previously engaged in archaeological excavations at historic sites, including Poshtchi Hill, the Abou Nasr Palace, and Persepolis, thereby shedding valuable light on the history of this city and province.

Khaledian noted that the trust the people of Shiraz place in the University of Art, along with citizens' requests for the university's continued involvement in archaeological, historical, and cultural studies, has underscored the pressing necessity of this project.

● MEHR

## Elegance of Gelich; an ancient art form of Semnan Province

In the rich tapestry of Iran's cultural heritage, Gelich Bafi stands out as a significant traditional craft, particularly in the Semnan province. This ancient art form reflects the creativity and craftsmanship of local artisans who have passed down techniques through generations. Gelich, resembling Kilim rugs, showcases

unique patterns and vibrant colors that enhance the beauty of any space. It not only serves aesthetic purposes but also plays a practical role in daily life, making it a cherished part of Iranian culture. One of the applied handicrafts of Semnan is Gelich Bafi. Like many other handwoven crafts of Iran, Gelich is very ancient, and

since it resembles Kilim, it is locally named Gelich. The warps of Gelich are made from cotton yarn, while colorful wool yarns are used for the wefts, *visitiran.ir* wrote. The tools used to create Gelich are similar to those of textile machinery, but the final product resembles Kilim. Because Gelich is often produced using

machinery, the production rate is higher, making it more financially efficient. The method of weaving Gelich is akin to that of making fabrics; however, spun cotton yarns with a high level of twist are utilized as warps. Colorful wool yarns are threaded as wefts, creating beautiful geometric motifs in various colors. Gelich can be made

in sizes suitable for prayer rugs, ground cloths, and doormats. Gelich is versatile and can be used to create various items such as Sar Hamoumi — a bag for bath tools used in public bathrooms — Ayeneh Kiseh, meaning "mirror bag," which is a small sachet for makeup accessories or sewing supplies; Asb Sari, a large piece

of Gelich placed on horses during weddings to enhance the dowry's appearance; Kaj Sari, a sachet that historically held utensils but is now filled with fibers for cushions; and Korsi Sari, the cover of a Korsi (a low table with a heater underneath) that beautifies the setting. Gelich features many famous patterns and key centers for producing the beau-

tiful handwoven products include the northern cities and villages of Semnan.

To preserve Gelich, it is essential to protect it from moths, humidity, flames, direct sunlight, chemical bleachers, and sharp objects. Cleaning Gelich is simple, requiring only soap and lukewarm water to maintain its beauty and longevity.



● delgarm.com



● wikisemnan.com



● chtn.ir

# Iran calls for 'redefining relations' with Uzbekistan based on shared heritage



Iran's Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts Reza Salehi Amiri (right) meets with Umid Shadiev, Uzbekistan's Deputy Minister of Environment and Head of the State Tourism Committee, in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, April 25, 2025.  
● IRNA

**Arts & Culture Desk**  
Iran and Uzbekistan agreed to step up cooperation in tourism and cultural exchanges, officials said on Friday,

highlighting their shared "deep roots" and calling for a "strategic" upgrade of ties.  
Reza Salehi Amiri, Iran's Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handi-

crafts, met with Umid Shadiev, Uzbekistan Deputy Minister of Environment and Head of the State Tourism Committee, in Tashkent, IRNA reported. Speaking during the talks, Salehi Amiri stressed that relations between the two nations should be "redefined" on the basis of common heritage, rather than "conventional diplomacy." He warned that Uzbekistan's share of Iranian outbound travel remains "tiny," blaming "mutual negligence" in promoting each other's tangible and intangible treasures. Recalling his trips to Samarkand and Bukhara, Salehi Amiri said Iranians feel a "sense of closeness" to Uzbekistan's architecture and culture. He

called for cultural tourism that would not only offer new experiences but also revive "civilizational memory." To drive cooperation forward, Salehi Amiri proposed three main steps: signing a comprehensive agreement, promoting both countries' tourism assets through media and influencers, and holding joint exhibitions in cities like Tehran, Samarkand, Bukhara, Isfahan, and Shiraz. Salehi Amiri also mentioned preliminary agreements with Uzbek officials to hold a joint handicrafts festival and announced Iran's readiness to host a bilateral tourism investment summit. "The groundwork for doubling tourist exchanges is ready," he said, urging both sides to "take the relationship to a strategic level." Shadiev welcomed Iran's outreach, calling for a "new chapter" in ties through a strategic document in tourism. He described Iran's International Tourism Exhibition as a "unique event" and expressed regret at miss-

ing the latest edition due to scheduling conflicts. However, he pledged a stronger Uzbek presence at future events. Shadiev, who had previously visited Iran, said he felt he had "recovered part of his own identity" during the trip, noting the "deep, authentic" cultural connections between the two nations. He also proposed academic partnerships between Uzbekistan's Silk Road University and Iran's Research Institute of Cultural Heritage. Toward the end of the meeting, Salehi Amiri invited a high-level Uzbek delegation to attend the Tehran tourism fair and called for joint exhibitions in historical Iranian cities. He underscored Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian's "political will" to deepen ties with Central Asia, particularly Uzbekistan, saying, "It is now up to us to turn this strategic will into cultural and tourism policymaking and pave the way for civilizational synergy."

## Iran showcases culture at Eurasia Int'l Book Fair as Russia opens film academy

**Arts & Culture Desk**

Russia unveiled the Eurasian Academy of Cinematographic Arts, while Iran drew strong attention with a major cultural presence at the Eurasia International Book Fair in Kazakhstan, IRNA reported.

In a video address, President Vladimir Putin called the academy's creation a "very important" step to strengthen cultural ties, aiming to build an "open platform" for creative collaboration across the region.

Plans include student exchanges, workshops, and joint film projects to "lay a foundation for greater mutual trust."

The opening ceremony in Moscow drew artists and officials from Russia and 22 other countries. Russian Culture Minister Olga Lyubimova and Nikita Mikhalkov, head of the Russian Filmmakers' Union, both spoke at the event. Mikhalkov said the academy should serve as a "hub for sharing cinematic knowledge and experience."

The academy unveiled its official symbol, the "Diamond Butterfly," a sculpture blending traditional and modern elements meant to represent "flight and transformation" in cinema.

The idea for the Eurasian Film Academy first surfaced at a BRICS culture ministers' meeting in St. Petersburg. Built with the support of the Filmmakers' Union, the Russian Culture Foundation, and the Foreign Ministry, the academy will promote films that reflect family and traditional values.



The first Eurasian Film Award ceremony will be held on December 5 in Moscow.

Meanwhile, Iran showcased over 100 premium titles at the Eurasia Book Fair in Astana, ranging from literature and art to Iranian studies and Persian language learning. Many works were translated into Kazakh and Russian to reach a broader audience.

Iran's booth also featured Mojtaba Sajjad, head of Iran's Jungle Publishing Institute, and master calligrapher Hamid Niroumand.

Niroumand presented a new handwritten collection of Omar Khayyam's quatrains, drawing crowds in a country where the Persian poet remains widely admired.

The book fair, running through April 27, hosts more than 70 publishers from 15 countries, including Turkey, China, Portugal, Mongolia, Venezuela, and Spain.

## Tehran, Ankara eye deeper tourism, cultural ties

**Arts & Culture Desk**

Iran and Turkey pledged to boost tourism and cultural cooperation on the sidelines of the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) tourism summit in Erzurum, Turkish officials said on Friday.

Anoushirvan Mohseni Bandpey, Iran's Deputy Minister of Tourism, called for "practical steps" to expand tourist exchanges and showcase attractions in both countries.

He also invited the Mayor of Erzurum to attend an upcoming global urban tourism summit in Iran, expressing hope that fresh talks would "lead to stronger ties."

The meeting, hosted by the Governor and Mayor of Erzurum, underlined the push for deeper collaboration. Both sides agreed to draw up plans to ease travel and boost joint cultural and economic projects "in the near future."

The push comes against the backdrop of lopsided travel flows between the two neighbors. Last year, more than 3.5 million Iranians visited Turkey, while only around 580,000 Turks traveled to Iran, said Reza Salehi Amiri, Iran's Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts.

"This meaningful gap needs a rethink," Salehi Amiri said. He stressed the importance of achieving "strategic balance" in tourism under a broader cultural diplomacy drive.

Iran and Turkey share deep cultural roots, a factor that officials believe could help pave the way for stronger cooperation in heritage preservation, handicrafts, and joint cultural programming.

Salehi Amiri announced plans to hold two major cultural events — one in Tehran and one in a Turkish city — later this year, which has been dubbed the "Year of Shared Culture" by both countries.

"Every tourist becomes a cultural ambassador," he said,



underlining the role of tourism in promoting Iran's image abroad.

As a founding member of ECO and the host of its permanent secretariat in Tehran, Iran sees itself as a key player in revitalizing the regional bloc.

Salehi Amiri said Iran would press for stronger bilateral and multilateral ties at the summit, aiming to "activate shared tourism capacities" among ECO members.

Efforts are underway to secure an agreement that would have ECO countries officially recognize each other as "primary tourist destinations" in national programs. In a region marked by political strains, officials see tourism and culture as a springboard for greater economic, social, and cultural convergence.



## Iranian filmmaker Maryam Bahrololoomi to judge at Turkish festival

**Arts & Culture Desk**

Iranian director and producer Maryam Bahrololoomi was named a jury member for the 8th International Women Filmmakers Festival in Turkey. Bahrololoomi, an acclaimed filmmaker with a string of internation-

al honors under her belt, will join jurors from Germany, France, and Turkey to evaluate feature films in the event running from May 5 to May 10, 2025, in the coastal city of Izmir, Mehr News Agency reported. Launched in 2015 by the Turkish Women Directors Association, the festival highlights cinema, shorts,

animation, and documentaries crafted by women. It has grown into one of Asia's key platforms for showcasing women's voices in film. Bahrololoomi, a member of the Iranian Directors Guild and the Film Producers Association of Iran, has "consistently" received recognition for her work and served as a juror

at numerous international festivals. The International Women Filmmakers Festival, known locally as Kadın Yönetmenler Festivali, has built a reputation for putting women's storytelling "front and center" in an industry often dominated by men.