

Activities at Shahid Rajaei Port revert to normal after huge blast

Safety measures need to be enhanced at Iran's key commercial port



By Abdolkarim Hashemi Nakhli-Ebrahimi
Iranian MP representing Hormozgan Province

OPINION EXCLUSIVE

The precise cause of the explosion at Shahid Rajaei Port in Bandar Abbas, Hormozgan Province, has yet to be pinned down, and it seems likely that negligence played a part in the deadly incident. However, what is crystal clear—and what has been caught on camera—is that a minor fire, triggered by the explosion of flammable materials, broke out and quickly spread to a nearby fuel tank, which then set off the main blast. This fuel tank was a single unit with no adjacent tanks, but the blast, which was felt like an earthquake in surrounding areas, ripped through machinery, equipment, and imported and exported goods stored nearby, making it tough to put out the fire.

As reported in the media, the human and financial toll from the main explosion has been substantial, though it is still too early to put a figure on the full extent of the damage. Shahid Rajaei Port is Iran's largest commercial port and serves as the beating heart of the nation's trade. Between 80% and 90% of southern transit operations go through this port, which also handles more than 70% of the country's container traffic and over half of all imports and exports.

Despite the recent incident, operations at Shahid Rajaei Port have carried on, as the export and import docks are set apart from the site of the accident. Thanks to the quick on-the-ground efforts of local and national authorities, the port has bounced back to full operation in no time, ensuring uninterrupted trade and transit.

From the early hours after the incident, a host of provincial and national organizations—including the Basij volunteer force, naval units of both the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps and the Army, the Red Crescent, city fire departments, the port's own emergency teams, and rescue squads from neighboring provinces—rushed in to help bring the fire under control and assist the injured. The medical university, provincial security council, and governor were on the ground from the outset, and both the minister of interior and the minister of roads made their way to the scene without delay. Special thanks are also due to President Masoud Pezeshkian, who showed up in the province, visited the patients at their bedsides, boosted the morale of both medical staff and victims, and issued orders to speed up relief efforts, get to the bottom of the incident, and make up for the losses. Now that the fire has been put out and the situation brought under control, reconstruction efforts must get underway without delay, and the root cause of the accident must be tracked down to prevent such disasters from happening again. Given Shahid Rajaei Port's critical role in national trade and transit, it is crucial for the authorities to step up efforts to equip the port with state-of-the-art firefighting and rescue facilities. The layout of machinery and adherence to passive defense principles at the port must also be reviewed so that, should a similar incident crop up, the risk of further casualties and damage can be kept in check.

Unfortunately, the current emergency response capabilities at the site are outdated, making it urgent to address these shortcomings without delay. In the aftermath of this accident, all safety, security, technical, and port authorities—especially the Ports and Maritime Organization, the Ministry of Roads and Urban Development, the Interior Ministry, and security forces—must look into every aspect of the incident thoroughly, and those found to have fallen short or been involved in the accident should be brought to justice.

Pezeshkian's visit to Baku sends strong message to extra-regional players

Corridors key to lasting relationship

INTERVIEW EXCLUSIVE



Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian (L) talks with his Azerbaijani counterpart Ilham Aliyev in the balcony of Azerbaijan's Zugulba Presidential Palace in Baku on April 28, 2025. president.ir

By Reza Edalatipour
Staff writer

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian, on his first visit to the South Caucasus since taking office, set off for Baku to draw a line under the turbulent years between Iran and Azerbaijan. Hamed Hekmatara, a geopolitics and diplomacy researcher at the University of Tehran, told Iran Daily in an interview that the trip sent a clear signal regarding Tehran-Baku cooperation across political, economic, and security arenas.

Iran Daily: Pezeshkian's trip took place at a sensitive juncture in Iran-Azerbaijan relations, especially following border tensions involving Armenia. How will this visit impact political ties between the two neighbors?

HEKMATARA: In a bid to redefine regional relations and cool down geopolitical tensions in the Caucasus, Pezeshkian's visit to Azerbaijan and his candid talks with the country's political and economic officials conveyed a clear message from Tehran: Iran seeks a stable region free from foreign interference, grounded in mutual respect for national sovereignty.

He managed to lay out the Islamic Republic's principled stance effectively, asserting that the territorial integrity of all regional countries must be respected, and no country should set its sights on the territories of others or interfere in the domestic affairs of its neighbors. This approach, particularly amid rising tensions over developments in the South Caucasus, sends an important message to Baku and Yerevan.

Within this framework, resolving remaining misunderstandings and security concerns between Tehran and Baku could open the door to a new chapter in bilateral relations. Boosting political and economic ties will not only strengthen bilateral relations but also help pave the way for regional stability, cultural bonds, and accelerated joint development. The Caucasus today more than ever calls for geopolitical wisdom and an end to zero-sum games.

How might this visit feed into stronger cooperation on the North-South corridor and ease Iran's connection to Europe via Azerbaijan?

The land route of the North-South corridor runs through Azerbaijan, which acts as a link between Iran and Russia. Past disputes had thrown a wrench in cross-border traffic, especially customs and transit operations. This visit could smooth over previous disputes and kick-start trade between the two countries and others along the corridor.

As trade picks up steam, Iran and Azerbaijan will inevitably step up cooperation to develop the corridor and streamline commerce. Such sustained collaboration in transport and trade will bring the two sides closer, helping to clear the air on past, present, and future disputes. Basically, international corridors represent a new form of regionalism and can shore up intergovernmental ties, fostering peace, stability, and economic prosperity.

How can Azerbaijan's participation in the North-South and East-West corridors be seen as a guarantee for

sustainable regional economic and transport ties?

The Azerbaijan Republic sits at a crossroads between Iran and Russia, and also between the Caspian Sea and Turkey. Alongside Iran, it holds the key to the intersection of the North-South and East-West corridors. Some extra-regional actors have tried to undermine Iran by developing rival corridors through Azerbaijan, aiming to cut Iran out and sow discord between the two nations.

However, Azerbaijan's cooperation with Iran to route the East-West corridor through Iranian soil rather than southern Armenia can settle geopolitical disputes and thwart extra-regional attempts to damage Iran's regional ties. Similarly, Iran can lean more heavily on the land and rail routes through Azerbaijan for the North-South corridor instead of relying on maritime routes via the Caspian Sea to get to Russia.

Both countries, despite some extra-regional efforts, have come to terms that circumventing each other's geography in developing international corridors would also involve bypassing each other's geography in yet another international corridor. Therefore, their mutual interests call for paying close attention to each other's views on corridor development.

In light of Israeli efforts to deepen ties with Azerbaijan, what security message does Pezeshkian's visit send?

Pezeshkian's warm reception by President Ilham Aliyev, the smiles exchanged during his speeches and the recitation of verses by the great Iranian poet Shahrar, blew apart the heavy

costs—both material and psychological—that the Israeli regime has poured into the region to drive a wedge between Iran and its neighbors.

Despite shared cultural, religious, and historical ties, this regime has long sought to isolate Iran from neighbors ranging from Azerbaijan and Turkey to Saudi Arabia and the UAE. Iran's continued engagement can turn the tables quickly, transforming regional security threats into unparalleled and unshakable opportunities.

Can it be said that this visit, following agreements aimed at expanding economic and political cooperation, has strengthened Iran's role in the South Caucasus?

When Azerbaijani officials and people, who highly value cultural ties, sense firsthand the warmth and solidarity expressed by Iran's president, the Israeli regime's efforts against Iran hit a dead end mentally.

Therefore, given the rich cultural commonalities, cultural diplomacy toward neighboring countries should be ramped up across all levels—from top officials to ministries, organizations, and media outlets like national TV. In this way, such efforts, at a fraction of the cost compared to Iran's rivals, any sabotage of Iran-Azerbaijan relations will be rendered ineffective at any level given the historical ties between the two countries.

Consequently, the two culturally aligned nations will no longer need to plan and waste resources managing the fallout of such influence, but instead will focus their time and energy on strengthening their unbreakable historical ties to build a prosperous and resilient region.

Activities at Shahid Rajaei Port revert to normal after huge blast

Blaze 'contained', clean-up under way

National Desk

Authorities said on Tuesday that Shahid Rajaei Port in southern Iran, rocked by a massive explosion on Saturday, has resumed its activities after firefighters managed to fully contain a fire caused by the blast. Despite the serious damage to the Bandar Abbas desalination and power plants, vital facilities have been restored in the shortest possible time, according to the authorities at the country's main port. Head of Iran's Ports and Maritime Organization Saeed Rasouli on Tuesday announced the docking of 35 ships carrying various types of cargo at the port. The customs at the port also announced that it has resumed its activities since Sunday. Officials said on Tuesday that firefighters have brought un-

der control a blaze at the Iran's main port, following a deadly explosion blamed on negligence.

At least 70 people have been killed and more than 1,000 others suffered injuries in the blast and ensuing fire, which was heard dozens of kilometers away and caused extensive damage.

Red Crescent official Mokhtar Salahshour said on Monday that the fire had been "contained" and a clean-up was under way.

State television aired live footage on Tuesday showing thick smoke rising from stacked containers.

Iran's ILNA news agency quoted Hossein Zafari, spokesman for the country's crisis management organization, as saying the situation had improved significantly since Monday. However, "the operation and



Iranian Red Crescent rescuers work following an explosion at the Shahid Rajaei Port in Bandar Abbas, Iran, April 27, 2025.
● IRANIAN RED CRESCENT SOCIETY

complete extinguishing process may take around 15 to 20 days," the agency reported.

An investigation is under way to determine the main cause behind the incident.

The port's customs office said the blast may have started in a depot storing hazardous and chemical materials.

Interior Minister Eskandar Momeni said there were "shortcomings, including noncompliance with safety precautions and negligence."

The port of Shahid Rajaei lies near the major coastal city of Bandar Abbas on the Strait of Hormuz, a waterway through which one-fifth of global oil output passes.



Iran floats meeting with E3 before US talks in Rome: Report



International Desk

Iran reportedly proposed meeting the European parties to the 2015 nuclear deal, known as E3, as Tehran and Washington have engaged in new negotiations to resolve a decades-long dispute over Iran's nuclear program.

Two E3 diplomats and a Western diplomat have told Reuters that Iran had communicated after last Saturday's talks with the US a proposal to meet possibly

in Rome on Friday.

Should that not be possible, the Iranians also suggested discussions in Tehran before that date, the diplomats said.

The European and Western diplomats said the E3, France, Britain and Germany, were assessing whether it was in their interest to meet Iran now or wait to see how talks with Washington developed, but ruled out a meeting in Tehran. An Iranian official confirmed the proposal, but said the E3

had not responded so far.

"It is important to remain on the same page with all parties to the 2015 deal. Therefore, meeting the E3 countries this week ahead of the next round of talks with Americans would be useful," Reuters quoted the Iranian official as saying. Since April 12, Iran and the US have held three rounds of talks in Oman and Italy to settle a standoff on Iran's nuclear program.

Sidelineing Europe in talks

In response to a question about whether the exclusion of European countries from the negotiations was Iran's or the US's decision, Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baqaei said on Monday, "Neither, it was their own choice."

The three European countries had key roles in the conclusion of the 2015 nuclear deal from which the US withdrew in 2018 and reimposed sanctions against Iran. A move that left

the future of the agreement in limbo specially after the three European countries failed to fulfill their commitments envisaged in the nuclear agreement which is known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). Despite their inability to fulfill their commitments under the JCPOA, Iran has called for cooperation on different areas including the nuclear issue.

Ready for talks

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said on Thursday he was ready to travel to Europe for talks, although he suggested that the ball was in Europe's court.

"Last September in New York, I offered dialogue when I met E3 FMs and indeed any other European counterpart. Instead of confrontation, I put forward cooperation not only on the nuclear issue, but in each and every other area of mutual interest & concern. They unfortunately

chose the hard way," Araghchi said in a post on X.

"I once again propose diplomacy. After my recent consultations in Moscow & Beijing, I am ready to take the first step with visits to Paris, Berlin & London. I was ready to do it before Iran commenced its indirect dialogue with the US, but the E3 opted out," he added.

The Iranian foreign minister said that ball is now in the E3's court, adding that they have an opportunity to do away with the grip of Special Interest groups and forge a different path.

Since September, Tehran and the three European powers have met several times to discuss their ties and the nuclear issue.

The most recent meeting in March was held at the technical level, looking at the parameters of a future deal to secure a rollback of Iran's nuclear program in return for the lifting of sanctions.

France's threats

Despite Iran's goodwill, France on Monday warned that it will not think twice about reimposing United Nations sanctions on Iran if negotiations with the US do not succeed.

"It goes without saying that when the Iranian nuclear deal expires in a few weeks, if European security interests are not guaranteed, we will not hesitate for a single second to reapply all the sanctions that were lifted 10 years ago," French Foreign Minister Jean-Noel Barrot said.

The 2015 nuclear deal with Iran expires in October and the E3 has the power to initiate its mechanism for reimposing sanctions, called snapback, at the Security Council.

According to diplomats, the E3 countries are now looking to trigger the snapback mechanism by August, rather than June, if no substantial deal can be found by then. The opportunity expires on October 18.

Iran opens 'trillion dollar' market to US: Bloomberg

As countries around the world try to bargain with US President Donald Trump over tariffs, Iran is pitching its economy to the United States as an investment opportunity amid talks between the two countries over Iran's nuclear program.

With talks showing signs of progress, top Iranian officials are for the first time in decades overtly promoting their economy to the White House.

Tehran's top diplomat, Abbas Araghchi, wrote in a Washington Post op-ed last week that a new nuclear deal could give US companies access to what he claims is a "trillion-dollar" economic opening in country of around 90 million people and with some of the world's biggest oil and gas reserves.

Transforming the US-Iran relationship from one of hostility

to one of economic cooperation has the potential to help resolve a conflict that's kept Middle East security fragile for decades. Araghchi said his country's nuclear program itself could become a target for US investment, representing "tens of billions of dollars in potential contracts."

"The Iranian market alone is big enough to revitalize the struggling nuclear industry in the US," he said in separate remarks on X last week.

A US State Department spokesperson, in a response to a query from Bloomberg, said Trump is clear Iran cannot have an atomic weapon. The spokesperson added it is not in US national interests to negotiate issues such as these publicly.

"We do not confirm or deny details of ongoing negotiations,"

said a spokesperson for the White House's National Security Council.

Trump has previously spoken of Iran's economic potential. And earlier this year, Bloomberg reported that he asked Russian President Vladimir Putin — an ally of Iran — to help broker talks with Tehran.

"I want Iran to prosper," Trump said this month. "I don't want to do anything that will hurt anyone, but Iran can't have nuclear weapons. We don't want to take away their industry or their land."

Leader of Iran's Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei has also said he sees no reason why American investors shouldn't spend their money in the Islamic Republic, according to President Masoud Pezeshkian.

Tehran rebukes deadly US attacks on Yemen as 'war crime'

Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baqaei strongly condemned deadly strikes by the United States on areas in Yemen, including a detention center designated for African migrants.

Nearly 70 inmates were killed and more than 50 others wounded, most of them critically, in an US airstrike that targeted one of the detention centers designated for African migrants in Sa'ada Province on Monday, Press TV reported.

In a statement on Monday, Baqaei said the continued US military attacks on civilian targets, key infrastructures and homes of people in various parts of Yemen, which have killed hundreds of innocent people, are amount to a "war crime". He lashed out at the United Nations and human rights bodies for remaining silent and indifferent to the US attacks in clear breach of law and repeated violation of Yemen's national sovereignty and territorial integrity.

The Iranian spokesperson added that the Israeli regime continues its genocidal war in Palestine and its acts of aggression against Lebanon.



Yemenis check the rubble of a building hit in US strikes in the country's northern province of Sa'ada on April 29, 2025.
● AFP

Baqaei said the US military aggression against Yemen is in line with the Israeli regime's wicked plan to "destroy and weaken Muslim countries and to spread insecurity the entire West Asia region."

He emphasized that all Muslim countries bear a historical responsibility to take effective strategies to stop the killing of the Muslim people of Yemen and to prevent the continuation of genocide in Gaza and the West Bank.

Iran, Niger sign cooperation document at joint economic meet



Iran's Minister of Industry, Mines, and Trade Mohammad Atabak (R) and Niger's Oil Minister Sahabi Umarou sign a collaboration document during the third meeting of the Iran-Niger Joint Economic Cooperation Commission in Tehran on April 29, 2025.

Economy Desk

Iranian and Nigerien ministers signed a collaboration document in the fields of mining, energy, industry, and technology transfer during the third meeting of the Iran-Niger Joint Economic Cooperation Commission, held on the sidelines of the 7th Iran Expo 2025. The session took place during Expo 2025 with the participation of Mohammad Atabak, Iran's minister of industry, mines, and trade; Mohammad Ali Dehqan Dehnavi, head of Iran's Trade Promotion Organization (TPO); and Sahabi Umarou, Niger's oil minister, as reported by Mehr.

"After a 13-year hiatus," the two sides have successfully reactivated "the Iran-Niger Joint Cooperation Commission," Atabak said at the outset of the meeting, expressing hope that "the level of economic relations between the two coun-

tries will advance through this joint collaboration document." Highlighting the low volume of trade between Iran and Niger, he added, "The Trade Promotion Organization of Iran is responsible for pursuing and implementing these trade agreements. We expect Niger to designate a specific organization or authority to oversee the continuation and enhancement of cooperation, as well as the follow-up on provisions within the joint document."

New chapter in ties

During the meeting, Dehqan Dehnavi stated, "Extensive negotiations were conducted over the past two days between experts, during which the various clauses of the Iran-Niger joint collaboration document were reviewed and discussed. It was agreed in these sessions that bilateral relations should continue across multiple dimensions."

Referring to the preparation of the joint document on mining, energy, industry, and technology transfer, he noted, "A joint working group will oversee matters related to the Iran-Niger collaboration document through specialized technical teams."

The deputy minister of Industry, Mine, and Trade emphasized, "The signing of this document marks the beginning of a new chapter in Iran-Niger economic and trade relations. Further collaboration agreements will be prepared by experts for the next commission session."

Meanwhile, Niger's oil minister underscored the need to identify and promote market capabilities and trade opportunities between the two nations, stating, "Current trade relations remain below the desired level, and elevating them requires concerted efforts from both countries."

IOPTC voices readiness to transfer crude oil, swap with neighbors

Economy Desk

Iranian Oil Pipeline and Telecommunication Company (IOPTC) announced its readiness to transfer crude oil and conduct swap operations with neighboring countries. "The company is prepared to facilitate the transfer of crude oil and swap operations to neighboring countries, provided there is a declared need and the necessary conditions are met," IOPTC Chief Ali Ahmadipour was reported as saying by IRNA on Tuesday. Speaking on the sidelines of the second day of the Iran Expo 2025, Ahmadipour said, "We are capable of transferring crude oil and conducting swaps to countries such as Iraq, Afghanistan, and other neighboring states. However, the relevant



missions must be officially assigned to the company." The IOPTC chief added, "Last year, the company broke its transfer record, moving 144 billion liters of crude oil and petroleum products across the country." Ahmadipour further noted, "Our daily operations include transferring 190 million liters of petroleum products and 200 million liters of crude oil."

Iran-Iraq chambers say \$20b exports to Iraq on agenda

Economy Desk

Yahya Ale Eshaq, head of the Iran-Iraq Joint Chamber of Commerce, revealed plans to expand exports to the neighboring Arab country to \$20 billion. "Plans are in place to raise exports to Iraq to at least \$20 billion within the next year or two," Ale Eshaq said. "Khuzestan has significant potential and capabilities and can serve as a driving force in developing Iran-Iraq relations." In an interview with ISNA regarding Khuzestan Province's capacities and the development of its trade relations, Ale Eshaq stated, "This year, we have exported \$12 billion officially and \$14 billion unofficially to Iraq." The head of the chamber emphasized, "We are prepared to operate in various sectors, including technical and engineering services, small and large-scale trade, among other areas." Ale Eshaq noted, "Iran-Iraq relations



are strategic and not overly dependent on ministerial changes. The deter-

mination of both countries is focused on expanding exports."

Tehran enters Cuba's sugarcane industry renovation



Economy Desk

Deputy minister of industry, mines and trade announced that Iran's Industrial Development and Renovation Organization (IDRO) has entered discussions with Cuba to modernize and reconstruct the Latin American country's sugarcane industries, calling the move a fundamental shift in developing Tehran-Havana economic ties. Farshad Moqimi met on Tuesday with the head of Cuba's Chamber of Commerce and an accompanying delegation during

a joint session focused on modernizing and renovating Cuba's sugarcane industries, IRNA reported.

"The project to modernize and reconstruct Cuba's sugarcane industries could provide a strong foundation for future cooperation between the two countries," Moqimi stated in the meeting.

Highlighting that "one of the best technical and executive teams has been assigned to this project," he added, "There are no technical challenges in this sector." The head of IDRO emphasized that "securing financial resources is the most critical issue for implementing this project," noting that "once this matter is resolved, the technical team will be dispatched to Cuba for further assessments."

During the meeting, President of the Cuban Chamber of Commerce Antonio Luis Carricarte Corona stated, "Sugarcane and its industry are integral to Cuba's identity and culture," adding that, "Cuba's public and private sectors will fully collaborate in executing this project."

Under the proposed plan, two Cuban sugarcane factories will be modernized and reconstructed as a pilot initiative.

Iran, Romania hash out boost in trade to \$1 billion

Economy Desk

The vice president of Iran's Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines, and Agriculture stated that Iran-Romania trade "does not align with the two nations' potential," and called for formulating a five-year plan to increase bilateral exchanges to \$1 billion during a meeting with his Romanian counterpart.

Qadir Qiyafeh, during a meeting with Aurelian Gogulescu, vice president of Romania's Chamber of Commerce, described the two nations' economies as "complementary" but noted that trade figures in recent years have remained modest.

"Latest statistics show Iran-Romania trade reached \$348 million, a figure far too low given our combined \$700 billion GDP," IRNA quoted Qiyafeh as saying.

Highlighting the composition of bilateral trade, he added, "In our exchanges, we exported petrochemicals, construction materials, etc., and imported auto parts, corn, and

wheat from Romania. However, the potential for expanding trade extends far beyond these sectors."

He identified transportation issues and tariff disparities as key challenges, stating, "Romania produces high-quality agricultural goods and cars, and holds advantages in oil and gas equipment. The Port of Constanța also shortens the Indian Ocean-Black Sea corridor, enhancing logistical efficiency."

Emphasizing Iran's strengths, he noted, "Oil, gas, and ferrous/non-ferrous metals are key areas for collaboration. Despite sanctions over 46 years, Iran has advanced in production and cutting-edge technologies like nanotechnology — ranked fifth globally — and pharmaceuticals. We remain keen to cooperate with Romania. Implementing bilateral agreements and forming joint banking committees would also be beneficial."

The vice president of Iran's chamber stressed that "active participation of Iranian and Romanian business-

es in each other's exhibitions will strengthen ties," reiterating the need for a "five-year plan to achieve \$1 billion in bilateral trade."

"Under Iranian law, companies engaged in international trade must join the Chamber. We have 34 provincial chambers, 39 joint chambers with other nations, and 300 associations across sectors, comprising over 110,000 small, medium, and large enterprises — a vast platform for collaboration," he further explained. According to Gogulescu, "The trade between the two sides exceeded \$400 million in 2016, but declined in subsequent years due to various factors. Chambers can revive this by encouraging traders to participate in each other's exhibitions."

Gogulescu also recalled, "The Romanian Chamber delegation's 2016 visit to Tehran and a 2000 MoU with Iran's Chamber," adding, "Beyond these, our determination to deepen ties is pivotal. Like Iran, Romania's Chamber integrates all provincial chambers under its umbrella."

Iranian Army's drone revolution takes center stage

PERSPECTIVE

Throughout the 2010s, the Iranian Army set out to ramp up its drone warfare capabilities — a move that has now given rise to a full-blown drone revolution within its ranks. The sheer number of these unmanned aerial vehicles on display at the outset of the Army Day parade drove home just how vital they have become.

What stood out more than ever during the April 18 parade in Tehran was the coordinated drone fly-past of the Islamic Republic of Iran Army. In previous years, each branch would showcase its drones separately as part of its own mobile units. This year, however, the drones were brought together in a unified display, underscoring their growing significance within the Army.

Against this backdrop, it's worth taking stock of the status and role of pilotless planes across the Army's various branches. The formation of a drone unit within the Air Defense Force and the simultaneous display of numerous UAVs in the mid-2010s marked the beginning of the Army's drone revolution. During this period, drones with a wide range of missions were brought into service, and their mass deployment made waves in the media.

In the following years, other Army branches jumped on the bandwagon, each moving to expand its drone warfare organization as needed. The Air Force, in particular, stepped up its game due to operational demands, even rolling out the strategic Kaman-22 drone and later setting up a dedicated drone academy to train specialized personnel.

With the establishment of drone commands in all four branches, the Army's drone warfare capabilities picked up speed. There was now a need to showcase this growing power and pave the way for large-scale drone procurement.

In January 2021, the Army's four branches came together for their first joint drone drill, showing off the latest research and operational achievements in Iran's central desert. This exercise opened the door for new drone equipment to make its way into the Army.

Just four months later, on May 17, 2021, a contract was signed between the Army and the Ministry of Defense for the production and delivery of 1,000 drones — a clear sign of the Army's all-out push to build up its drone fleet for modern warfare.

That year, Army drones took part in several exercises, carrying out missions such as the Arash suicide drone's destruction of a target after flying more than 1,300 kilometers, the pinpoint strike by the Qaem bomb dropped from the Air Force's Kaman-12 drone at a range of 15 to 20 kilometers, and the targeting of small floating objects by the Simorgh drone (a naval version of the Shahed-129) using precision-guided bombs.

On April 18, 2022, for the first



Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian (standing-R) and commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Aerospace Force Amir Ali Hajizadeh (standing-L) observe Iran's new Shahed 136-B drone during Tehran's military parade commemorating the anniversary of the war with Saddam Hussein's Iraq, in Tehran on September 21, 2024.

● ATTA KENARE/AFP

time, more than 50 drones of various types were put on display at the Army Day parade. Among them were several drones, such as Omid and Ababil-5, that were seen for the first time.

The operational status of the strategic Kaman-22 drone was also announced around this time, though it had first been spotted in March 2021.

In those same days, 200 combat, reconnaissance, and suicide drones were handed over to the Army's four branches in a ceremony attended by the minister of defense and Army's chief commander Major General Abdolrahim Mousavi. This delivery, the first batch under the 1,000-drone contract, included a new suicide drone named Amin.

Perhaps the most striking milestone in the Army's drone revolution came with the unveiling of

the strategic Drone Base 313 in May 2022. This underground facility, with its dedicated corridors and taxiways for various drones, brought together models such as Arash, Omid, Mohajer-6, Ababil-5, Kaman-12, Kaman-22, Fotros, and Karrar, all armed with new indigenous munitions-from Balaban and Qaem bombs to Azarakhsh and Shafaq-2 missiles, as well as Heidar-1 and -2 cruise missiles.

It was the first time news of drones being armed with cruise missiles in Iran hit the headlines, and the details of Drone Base 313 sparked widespread coverage in international media and among analysts.

In July 2022, drones made their way onto the Navy's vessels, and the first drone-carrying flotilla was officially commissioned. This flotilla, comprising sever-

al surface and subsurface vessels equipped with a range of drones, carries out various operations depending on the drones' flight range. The group includes the Lavan (Hengam-class) and Delvar logistics ships, the Hendijan support ship, the Jamaran warship as the flotilla's command center, and two submarines — Tareq (Kilo-class) and Fateh.

In December 2023, the Army, in cooperation with the Ministry of Defense, managed to equip the Karrar jet drone with Majid air-to-air missiles as part of Project Rasool. Previously, the Karrar had been armed with Azarakhsh air-to-air missiles in its role as an interceptor drone, but the Majid missile, with its 8-kilometer range and enhanced capabilities, gave the Army an edge in aerial interception, especially against other drones.

The outbreak of regional and international conflicts has shown that drones are far more powerful than previously imagined, capable of single-handedly turning the tide of any battle. Notably, the war in Ukraine brought to the fore the role of small drones and FPVs, which even air defense systems have struggled to counter. This highlighted the need to focus on small drones, especially in ground warfare. Recognizing this, the Army's Ground Force entered the fray, and for the first time last year, made extensive use of these drones during its Eqtedar exercise.

All things considered, it appears that over the past decade, the Iranian Army has pulled off a major transformation in its drone capabilities — and all signs point to this upward trajectory gathering steam in the years ahead.



Iranian specialized forces operate domestically-engineered micro air vehicles during the Great Prophet 19 military exercise by the IRGC Ground Forces on February 18, 2025.

● TASNIM



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Iran's power under the waves



The photo shows Iran's homegrown Fateh (Conqueror) submarine sailing in the Persian Gulf waters. **TASNIM**

PERSPECTIVE

The Armed Forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran have bolstered their deterrence capabilities and stood firm against diverse threats by designing and manufacturing a wide range of naval equipment. Top of Form "Iran manufactures its own submarines, including the Fateh-class and the smaller Ghadir-class, which are optimized for the shallow waters of the Persian Gulf." This statement, aired on an Indian television program, shed light on Iran's rise to the ranks of a regional military power beneath the waves. Up until the early 1990s, Iran's Army had no submarines at its disposal, having only bought a handful of Kilo-class subs. Interestingly, even the country that built such submarines refused to carry out repairs and overhauls for Iran. The move forced Iran's hand: not only did it pick up the know-how for overhauling and maintaining submarines, but it also gradually got the hang of designing and building them from scratch.

Ghadir-class; major leap toward homegrown submarines

The Ghadir submarine joined the ranks of the Iranian Navy in 2006. Recognized as a medium or midget submarine, it was made by the Marine Industries Organization of the Ministry of Defense, and a significant number have since been brought into service. Over the years, newer ver-

sions of the Ghadir have been kitted out with more advanced systems, so much so that the current model boasts sophisticated detection equipment and is capable of firing anti-ship cruise missiles. With a length of 29 meters and a displacement of 115 tons, the Ghadir can hunker down on the seabed, making it invisible to radar systems. At the front, two long-range torpedo tubes with a 533mm diameter have been fitted, allowing for the launch of both torpedoes and anti-ship cruise missiles. On top of that, the Ghadir's strengths include rapid troop transport, tracking enemy surface and subsurface vessels, target identification, special forces deployment, and respectable underwater endurance.

Fateh; Iran's hidden weapon

Iranian experts later set their sights on designing the Fateh submarine, which was officially handed over to the Navy in 2018. Weighing in at 527 tons on the surface and 593 tons submerged, the Fateh is classed as a semi-heavy submarine and outshines the Ghadir in terms of operational specs. It can dive down to 200 meters under normal conditions, with a maximum depth of 250 meters, and is able to carry out missions for up to 35 days. Measuring 43.5 meters in length and 4.5 meters in width, the Fateh is outfitted with four 533mm torpedo tubes and can also take on board eight naval mines. The construction of the

Fateh called for over 412,000 parts and the localization of 76 advanced technologies. This massive undertaking clocked up more than 4.2 million man-hours, with a network of 48 design centers, 120 industrial sites, 80 knowledge-based firms, 57 universities, and 195 research centers pitching in across the country. The Fateh features 12 types of sonar, both active and passive, scanning its surroundings, and an ESM system to ward off enemy threats. It can fire off underwater missiles and man-portable surface-to-air missiles at designated targets, and, if the need arises, ferry commandos to operational zones.

Iranian submarines use cutting-edge tech

Commander of the Iranian Navy Rear Admiral Shahraram Irani, has said that new submarines are currently under construction and will soon be rolled out. Meanwhile, the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps is already equipped with unmanned submarines boasting unique capabilities. Should the IRGC get its hands on advanced manned submarines, its dominance in the Persian Gulf would, without a doubt, go up a notch. Many experts believe Iranian submarines have strong export potential and could break into global markets, as they have taken advantage of some of the world's most advanced technologies.

The article first appeared in Persian on Fars news agency.



Head of the Iranian Defense Ministry's Marine Industries Organization Rear Admiral Amir Rastegari inspects the indigenous Fateh submarine in southern Iran on February 18, 2019. **MEHR**

Perfumed death Saddam dropped on Iranian civilians

PERSPECTIVE

Imagine this: You're not on a battlefield, not behind trenches, but sitting in your own town, enjoying the fresh air and going about your daily life, when suddenly the sound of bombing and people's screams takes over your entire being. They say when people are afraid, they should take deep breaths to calm down. You try to inhale deeply, but then you find out that the very breath that, moments ago, was life-giving has now turned deadly. Now, you feel the horror of the bombing weighing down on your chest, and the grief of losing your life and loved ones clouds your vision... This is the story of all those who, because of Saddam's chemical bombings, struggled to breathe — some were defending Iran behind the frontlines, while others were innocent women and children in their homes.

of Agent Orange on Vietnamese hiding in forests. Eventually, the UN banned these weapons, but Saddam, indifferent to this, broke the agreement and used them extensively against Iran, making Iraq the record holder for chemical weapons use after the World Wars.

The first recorded Iraqi chemical attack on Iran was on January 13, 1981, when our fighters in western Ilam were targeted. This led to the Ba'athist army stepping up these attacks, later taking down civilians as well.

Sardasht; WMD's third target

What makes chemical weapons deadlier is their long-term effects — even if people don't die immediately, injuries can pass down physical and genetic disorders for generations. Years ago, credible Iranian media reported that around 10% of the veterans of the Holy Defense era (Iran-Iraq

Halabja.

Fruits that smelled like death

The UN later confirmed that Saddam's regime dropped over 1,800 tons of mustard gas, 140 tons of nerve agent Tabun, and 600 tons of Sarin gas on Iranian soldiers in the western and southern fronts. The enemy used blister agents, nerve gases, choking agents, mustard gas, blood agents, and more. One eerie detail? Many of these bombs had strange, deceptively pleasant scents — like apples and other fruits — tricking civilians into inhaling more before realizing the danger. Mustard gas, for example, has a mild smell, sometimes like radish or fresh apples. It causes severe skin and respiratory burns, leading to blindness, cancer, and death. Tabun gas, the world's deadliest, can shut down the nervous system within two hours.



Victims of Iraq's brutal use of mustard gas bombs on the city of Sardasht, West Azerbaijan, Iran, on June 28, 1987, are being moved by a helicopter to receive urgent care. **navideshahed.com**



Victims of Iraq's brutal use of mustard gas bombs on the city of Sardasht, West Azerbaijan, Iran, on June 28, 1987, are gathered in a makeshift treatment facility. Many of the victims were women and children. **navideshahed.com**

On April 26, 1985, the UN issued its statement against Saddam's chemical bombings in Iran — a massive humanitarian tragedy that even violated the rules of war. Years later, we look into who was behind this horrific event and which countries sided with Saddam.

When were these weapons first used?

If you look back at historical records, the first chemical attacks date back to around 400 BC, during the Peloponnesian Wars, where substances like tar, oil, fire, and arsenic were used. But modern chemical bombs trace back to World Wars I and II — so much so that Nazi Germany, using 124,000 tons of chemical agents, killed one million Europeans. Later, the Americans dropped around 75 million liters

(war) are chemical attack victims. Iran has roughly 70,000 chemical warfare survivors, with over 10,000 later martyred.

According to the UN, Saddam used chemical attacks over 350 times against Iran. This Ba'athist dictator, who knew no rules of war, spared no one — not even residential areas. One of his most infamous crimes was the chemical bombing of Sardasht in West Azerbaijan, a town of 12,000 that ended up with 2,000 wounded in the first moments. Later reports confirmed around 8,000 were poisoned, with many martyred. Hard to believe, but Sardasht is considered the third city in the world to be hit by Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) after Japan's Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Saddam was so ruthless that he even used these weapons against his own Kurdish citizens, like in

Trading in war, death

Many believe Iran only fought the Ba'ath regime during the eight-year Holy Defense — but in reality, many countries backed Saddam, arming him to the teeth. Countries that were permanent UN Security Council members. European nations put their arms factories to work for Saddam's crimes.

The Germans took the lead in selling chemical weapons to the Ba'athists, followed by the US, France, the Netherlands, Britain, and the USSR — all supplying these deadly bombs, profiting from Saddam's atrocities against Iranians. Countries that claimed to stand for peace at the UN, yet made money off war.

The article first appeared in Persian on Mehr news agency.

Taremi racing against time to save Inter future

Sports Desk

When Iranian striker Mahdi Taremi left Porto as a free agent to join Inter Milan last July, his signing was widely regarded as a bargain for the Serie A giant.

Taremi had spent four glorious seasons with the Portuguese heavyweight, helping the Dragons lift seven domestic trophies – including a league and cup double in the 2021/22 campaign – while he bagged 91 strikes in 182 appearances to become the club's third all-time top scorer.

With Marcus Thuram granted an extended vacation ahead of the campaign – due to involvement in Euro 2024 – the Iranian talisman capitalized on the Frenchman's absence by delivering impressive performances during preseason friendlies, which led to many tipping him for a No. 9 role alongside Lautaro Martinez in the starting XI.

Nine months on, however, Taremi already appears to be fighting for his future in the Nerazzurri colors.

Taremi's contribution for Inter has been limited to just three goals – including two penalties – in 37 games across all competitions, with his last strike coming from the spot against Lecce in Serie A on January 26.

The Iranian had an evening to forget during the 3-0 defeat against city rival Milan in the Coppa Italia semifinal last



week and was taken off early in the second half, while he was an unused sub in the 1-0 loss to AS Roma in the league on Sunday.

Italian pundits and media have been quick to cast doubt on whether Taremi is the right fit for Inter, and the club's recent dip in form has only fueled the

somewhat harsh criticism.

"The expectations were high of Taremi for what he had done in the Portuguese league, but he is yet to make

an impact [for Inter]," Alessandro Matri, former Milan and Juventus striker and now a commentator for SportMediaSet, said of the Iranian after the Milan derby.

"I think he is clumsy in his movements. I'm sorry to say that, but you can really see that he hasn't fit in," added Matri.

Italian journalist Davide Stoppini, writing for La Gazzetta dello Sport last Thursday, slammed Inter boss Simone Inzaghi's decision to give Taremi a starting role against Milan.

"If they still had a chance to change the ending of the story, Taremi and [Albanian midfielder Kristjan] Asllani definitely blew it last night," Stoppini wrote.

"Inzaghi can only hope that from here until the end of the season, for an inexplicable reason, Taremi changes face. But in reality, his fate is sealed: It will be goodbye in the summer, provided he finds admirers around Europe, who will take on a salary of €3 million net per season (until 2027).

"Taremi is the latest example of a certain type of business that Inter will no longer do in the market: 33 years old in July, a player who is not there in the present but who cannot be relied upon in the future either."

The writing is already on the wall for Taremi, who has at most seven games – should Inter reach the European final – to save his Nerazzurri career, starting with the Champions League last-four clash at Barcelona tonight.



Western Asia Youth Chess Championship: Iran bags double golds in standard event

Sports Desk

Iran's Niousha Mohammadi and Kiasha Mahboubi walked away with a couple of gold medals in the standard competitions of the Western Asia Youth Chess Championship in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, on Monday.

Aihan Rahbar, meanwhile, stood runner-up to

Kazakhstan's Alimzhan Zhaunbay in the boys' under-12 contests – the Iranian's second silver medal in Dushanbe after his second-place finish behind compatriot Ramtin Kakavand in the blitz event. Mohammadi collected 6.5 points to beat FIDE master Veronika Shubenkova to the top spot in the girls' under-18 category on a

superior tiebreak 2 (number of wins) after nine rounds of play.

Mahboubi notched up his second medal in the competitions – following his blitz silver – when he finished atop the boys' under-eight standings with 7.5 points.

Earlier in Dushanbe, Mohammad-Hossein Darvishi had added a blitz gold

to Iran's haul, thanks to a 7.5-point tally in the boys' under-16 category, while Saina Kowsari (under-12) and Taraneh Taqizadeh (under-14) had settled for a couple of blitz bronzes in their respective girls' divisions.

Taqizadeh had also won a silver in the rapid contests, while Kakavand picked up a bronze medal.

Iran confirms squad for Women's Futsal Asia Cup

Sports Desk

Iran head coach Forouzan Soleimani unveiled the 14-woman squad for the upcoming AFC Futsal Asia Cup, which will resume after a seven-year hiatus in China next Tuesday.

Prolific Fereshteh Karimi, who was named the Most Valuable Player of the tournament in the previous two editions in 2015 and 2018, and goalkeeper Farzaneh Tavassoli will headline the Iranian squad, also featuring Tahereh Mahdipour, Mahdieh Mahmoudinia, Fatemeh Rahmati, Sara Shirbeigi, Fereshteh Khosravi, Elham Anafcheh, Zahra Kiani, Nasimeh Sadat Gholami, Nastaran Moqimi, Mahtab Banaei, Fatemeh Hosseini, and Maral Torkaman – the MVP and top scorer in February's CAFA championship.

Bidding for a third successive crown in the flagship continental event, Iran will get its campaign underway against the Philip-

pinos in Group B on Tuesday. Team Melli will then take on Hong Kong on May 9, before squaring off against Vietnam at the Hohhot Sports Center two days later.

Iran defeated Japan 1-0 for the title in the inaugural edition in Malaysia in 2015 and repeated the success three years later in Thailand, thanks to a 5-2 victory over the same opponent in the final.

The 2020 edition in Kuwait was canceled by the continental governing body of the sport due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Elsewhere in the 12-team event, the host country is drawn against Uzbekistan, the Chinese Taipei, and Australia in Group A, with Japan, two-time bronze winner Thailand, Indonesia, and Bahrain completing the lineup of Group C.



Cavaliers thrash Miami to win play-off series 4-0

BBC – The Cleveland Cavaliers beat the Miami Heat 138-83 to secure a 4-0 first-round play-off series win and book their place in the NBA Eastern Conference semi-finals.

Donovan Mitchell scored 22 points for the visiting Cavaliers, who were also helped by DeAndre Hunter adding 19 points, Ty Jerome scoring 18 points and Evan Mobley contributing 17 points as they won by the fourth-largest winning margin in an NBA play-off game.

"We came out here with a goal in mind, to keep our foot on their throat and on their neck and continue to play 48 minutes of basketball," Mitchell told TNT television.

The 55-point margin was Miami's biggest play-off defeat and overtook the previous record of 37 points which had been set in the third game of the best-of-seven series.

In San Francisco, the Golden State Warriors took a 3-1 lead in the Western Conference



● SAM NAVARRO/IMAGN IMAGES

first-round play-off series against the Houston Rockets with a 109-106 home win. Jimmy Butler was back for the Warriors after missing game three with a pelvic injury and scored 14 of his 27 points in the fourth quarter, while team-mate Brandin Podziemski made six three-pointers in his 26 points. The Warriors had trailed by

seven points at half-time before going on an 18-1 run at the start of the third quarter, but the score was tied at 104 with one minute 20 seconds left of the contest.

Fred VanVleet scored 24 of his 25 points from three-point distance for the Rockets but missed a long-range shot in the final second that would have tied the game.

Adventure-seeking travelers on Hengam Island's shores

Iranica Desk

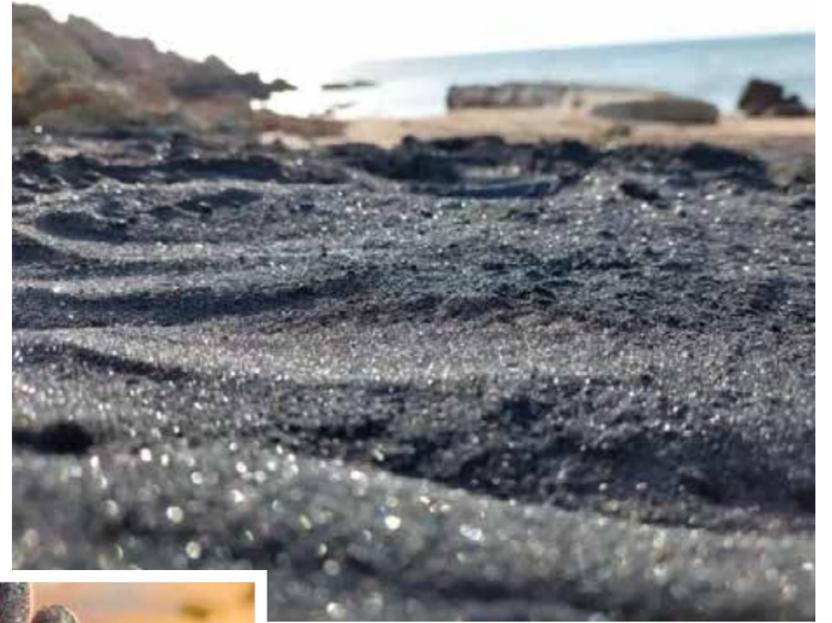
For many years, traveling to southern Iran and its beautiful, unique beaches has been part of the plans for numerous tourists. This region of the country is always a welcoming host to nature lovers. The Persian Gulf is home to many islands, with Qeshm Island being one of its most stunning. Silver Beach is considered one of the main attractions of Qeshm.

Silver Beach is among the famous beaches in southern Iran and a highlight in Hormozgan Province, located in the northwestern part of Hengam Island. The beauty of this beach captivates everyone who visits, with its black and silver sands. Walking on the soft, shimmering sands of Hengam Island while watching the beautiful waves of the azure Persian Gulf invokes a sense of childhood dreams.

Natural attractions remain valuable and appealing only as long as they remain untouched. Every nature lover and tourist should take this matter seriously to avoid destroying the divine gifts of the country out of selfishness or negligence. Unfortunately, the removal of sand from this beach by tourists has put the area at risk of permanent destruction.

To prevent further damage to this natural wonder, tourists are currently prohibited from accessing Silver Beach or disembarking there. Instead, travelers can only view the beach from a distance while aboard their boats or ships.

To reach Hengam Island, one must travel from Bandar Abbas to Qeshm. The distance from Shahid Zakeri Port in Qeshm to Shibderaz Jetty is approximately 56 kilometers, taking about 50 minutes. At the jetty,



tickets can be purchased for travel to Hengam Island via boats and vessels. If the sea is calm, sightseeing boats head toward Hengam Island, located just two kilometers south of Qeshm. This sea journey takes around 10 minutes.

The Silver Beach of Qeshm is one of the country's unique natural landscapes and perhaps the most beautiful beach in Iran, known for its glowing sands. The stunning Silver Beach of Hengam Island is visually striking both during the day and at night. When the waves reach the shore and collide with the luminous particles, their brightness multiplies several times, and this shimmer lasts for a few seconds.

The shine of the sands on Silver Beach is due to shiny mineral grains that sparkle under sunlight, reflecting light. Additionally, crushed plankton and seashells contribute to the beach's luminescence. Phytoplankton are tiny living organisms

that thrive in ocean and sea waters. Their chlorophyll gives the water a green hue, and when the sea becomes turbulent, these organisms emit blue light. This phenomenon occurs mainly during midday in autumn, although the luminescence shines even brighter at night. Walking on the sands of Silver Beach at night, with a flashlight in hand, creates a memorable experience, as the glowing particles of the sand shine beautifully in the light.

Best time to visit

The south of Iran, especially the Persian Gulf islands, experiences very hot and humid weather in the summer, leading to fewer tourists during this time. The best seasons to visit Hengam Island are autumn and early spring. Winter may not provide opportunities for travel to the islands due to turbulent seas, so it's essential to check the weather conditions carefully before planning your trip.



● alibaba.ir

Necessary equipment

For many, a trip to Hengam Island is a day trip that requires minimal special equipment. It is important to bring a camera, lightweight clothing, comfortable shoes, sunglasses, and a sun hat. Some travelers may wish to camp on the island to enjoy the breathtaking night sky and beaches filled with glowing phytoplankton. In this case,

they should bring camping gear such as a tent, sleeping bag, cooking supplies, and a flashlight.

Where to stay

There are no hotels on Hengam Island; however, several eco-lodges offer reasonable amenities for travelers. Renting a suite in the new village of Hengam is another accommodation option. Camping is possible on

Hengam Island, and you can set up tents in various parts of the island. It's advisable to inform the local police station about your camping location so they can check in on the area during nighttime patrols.

Watching dolphins

To see the lovable dolphins, venture out to Hengam Island early in the morning. Dolphins often breach the water during the cool early hours. Boating, watching the Persian Gulf fish approach the boat, and observing birds of prey dive to catch fish at the water's surface will provide thrilling experiences.

Local market

The local market of Hengam is one of the most fascinating local markets in the country, constructed with materials that reflect the island's traditional customs. Women in traditional clothing can be seen preparing various dishes, with the delicious

sambosas from this market being particularly famous.

In the local market, the island's residents sell many shell-based handicrafts, such as earrings, necklaces, and bracelets. If you intend to buy special spices for cooking shrimp and fish, this market is the best place to visit.

Henna body art is another local specialty available in the market. Engaging in conversation with vendors dressed in their vibrant traditional attire adds to the unique charm of the experience.

Shipwrecked Portuguese vessel

The Portuguese arrived at Hengam Island during the Safavid era and occupied it for a time. Today, only remnants of the shipwrecked Portuguese vessel can be found around the island. This historical site is located near a part of Hengam Island known as the natural aquarium.

Mystique, history of Haruniyeh Dome near Mashhad

The Haruniyeh Dome is located in Tus, approximately 25km northwest of Mashhad in the Khorasan Razavi Province. It is one of the few remaining structures from ancient Tus and is situated near the tomb of Abolqasem Ferdowsi, the renowned epic poet of Persian culture. This dome is recognized as the oldest surviving monument in Tus and

is believed to serve either as a tomb or a Khanqah (a gathering place for Sufis). Dating back to the 14th century, the dome is attributed to Imam Mohammad Ghazali, a Shafi'i Sunni Muslim scholar and polymath, with this association stemming from a dark stone near the structure that is inscribed in his memory.

Built in an Azeri architectural

style, the exact function of Haruniyeh Dome remains uncertain, despite ongoing research. It was registered as a national heritage site on June 6, 1931, but after the Islamic Revolution, it was reclassified as the tomb of Ghazali, visitiran.ir wrote.

Numerous tales surround the purpose of this building. One story suggests that it was used

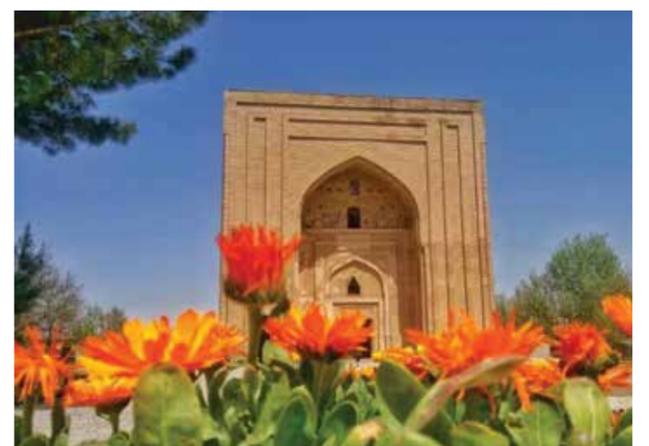
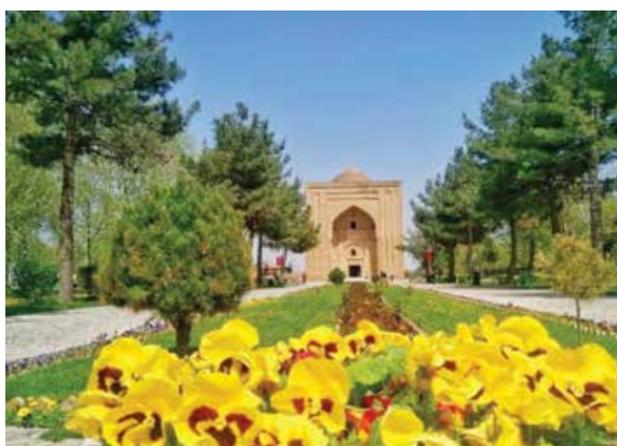
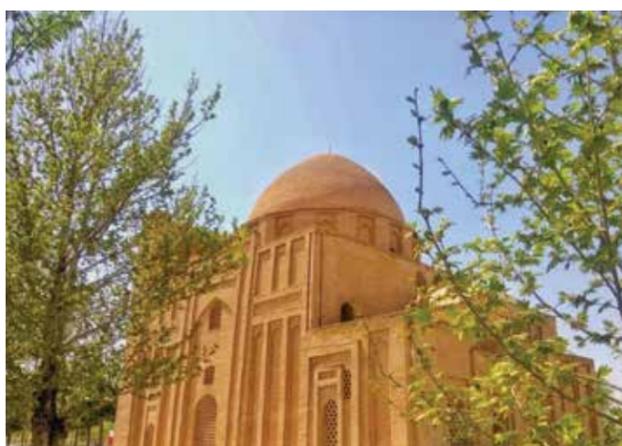
by Harun Al-Rashid, the Abbasid Caliph, to imprison opponents. Others speculate that it may have served as a fire temple. The mystery of its function has even led to the creation of various religious narratives. There are also legends about the sound of Naqareh (drums) being played on the roof of the building.

Architecturally, the dome features

a technique known as Panjereye Koor or Kur Dar, which translates to "blind window" or "blind door." This technique enhances the tall walls of the structure and creates harmony with the hemispheric shape of the dome. The entrance height is notably tall, partially covering the dome, while the back of the building is shorter, producing a unique visual per-

spective for visitors.

Inside, the dome mirrors the ethereal quality common to Persian domes, with magical sunlight streaming in through the windows set against a brick backdrop. Currently, the interior functions as a semi-museum. Its proximity to Ferdowsi's tomb makes Haruniyeh Dome a site rich in tourism potential.



● reiseniran.de

Ancient Sasanian tombstone inscription found in southern Iran

Arts & Culture Desk

A tombstone carved in Middle Persian, or Pahlavi script, has been unearthed in Iran's southern province of Fars, an independent researcher told ISNA. The inscription, dating back to the late Sasanian Empire, was discovered in a small cave near the city of Abadeh, said historian and linguist Abolhassan Atabaki. Working under the guidance of archaeologist Arash Nemiranian and with the help of local tour guide Babak Parsajam, Atabaki identified what he called a "hidden" relic. "It had been deliberately tucked away from sight," he said, referring to the

stone's concealed location and difficult access. Initial field analysis suggests the site was overlooked for centuries. The tombstone contains a command for the construction of a Dakhmak—a rock-cut burial site used during Zoroastrian funerary practices. Such tombs, typically made of stacked stones, are rarely found with inscriptions. According to Atabaki, the find changes that. "Until now, we hadn't identified a stone burial with an inscription," he noted. The artifact is believed to predate other known Pahlavi inscriptions in the region, including those at Kalat-e Bahman and the Gabr Fortress. It was written in Pahlavi Book script, a formal writing

style used in late antiquity. The slab is now under review by Fars province's cultural heritage department for possible registration as a national monument. A full reading of the text is expected to appear in an upcoming academic journal. "This is more than just a stone," Parsajam said. "It reshapes the historic identity of Abadeh." The Abadeh region, known as the northern gateway to Fars, has been inhabited since the first millennium BCE. Historically, it served as a key stop for caravans moving between Iran's northern and southern regions. Experts believe the new find offers fresh insight into local burial customs



and script usage during the twilight of the Sasanian era, which ended with the Arab conquest of Persia in the 7th century CE.

Iran touts safety, hospitality as it targets 15mn tourists by 2029



Arts & Culture Desk

Tour operators can help reshape the world's perception of Iran by showing its "beauty, safe-

ty and hospitality," a senior tourism official said on Tuesday, urging stronger global ties through cultural travel. Speaking at a business-to-business (B2B) tourism event at the International Tour Operators Forum in Tehran, Deputy Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts, Anoushirvan Mohseni Bandpey, called on international tour operators to present a "true and real" image of Iran, IRNA reported.

The gathering came as Iran continues its post-pandemic push to revive the tourism sector and meet its ambitious target of attracting 15 million foreign tourists annually by 2029. "Tourism is a tool for peace," Mohseni Bandpey said. "It brings nations together, encouraging mutual understanding and direct connection." According to official figures, Iran welcomed 7.4 million foreign visitors in 2023. The deputy minister said the country is aiming to more than double that figure within four years, backed by nearly 2,500 tourism infrastructure projects — including the construction of 500 hotels. Iran boasts some of the richest cultural and natural offerings in the region. With 54 sites on the UNESCO World Heritage list — 28 tangible and

26 intangible — it ranks among the world's top 10 countries in terms of tourism assets. Mohseni Bandpey also pointed to improving logistics. Over 30 international airlines operate in the country, and around 3,000 eco-lodges have opened in picturesque villages and remote regions. "Creative tourism" is at the heart of Iran's strategy, he said, emphasizing the human desire to connect. He expressed hope that meetings like Tuesday's would "lead to bilateral agreements" between countries and tour professionals. The official opened the event by extending sympathy to the families of those killed in a recent incident at Bandar Imam in Hormozgan Province and offered warm greetings to visitors who had "traveled to magnificent Iran."

Iranian photographer returns as official lensman for French Avignon Festival

Iranian photographer Vahid Amanpour was named the official photographer for the 79th edition of the Festival d'Avignon (Avignon Festival) in France, organizers confirmed Tuesday. The annual festival — one of the most performing arts gatherings in Europe — runs from July 5 to 26 in southern France. Now in his third consecutive year in the role, Amanpour is expected to capture some of the most intimate and striking moments of the event, Mehr News Agency reported. Based in France, Amanpour works with the Opéra National de Paris and is affiliated with the Hans Lucas photography agency. His images have gained wide recognition across the

European performing arts scene. In 2023, he received a top award at the 17th edition of Serbia's Theater Photography Festival, a nod to his "deep visual storytelling." "It's a great honor," Amanpour said in a brief statement, calling the assignment both "demanding" and "deeply rewarding." Founded in 1947, the Festival d'Avignon is a hallmark of avant-garde theater and draws thousands of visitors and artists from around the world each summer. It is known for blending classical repertoire with bold contemporary works, often performed in historic venues like the Palais des Papes.



Ali Rahbari's 'Persian Concerto' set for encore in St. Petersburg



Arts & Culture Desk

Iranian composer and conductor Ali Rahbari will take the podium once again in Russia this June, as his Persian Concerto returns to the Mariinsky Opera House in St. Petersburg. The 36-minute composition, which blends Persian classical motifs with Western symphonic structure, was first performed at the historic venue on March 21. The debut received what organizers called an "outstanding" reception, prompting a second performance now scheduled for June 19, IRNA reported. The work features two Iranian tar soloists, Aydin Ollianasab and Mahsa Kharratian, accompanied by the Mariinsky Symphony Orchestra. The piece is divided into three movements — Kereshmeh, Raqs-e-Looti, and Sarmast — and draws on traditional Persian modes and

rhythms. The final section takes inspiration from Camel Bell, a well-known piece by the late master Abolhasan Saba. Rahbari, who has led major orchestras across Europe and Asia, is a permanent conductor at the Mariinsky Opera. The upcoming concert will mark his 22nd performance in that role. Tickets, as with many of his previous appearances, have nearly sold out weeks in advance. In a statement, the composer described the concerto as a "dialogue between East and West," highlighting the role of the tar — a traditional Persian string instrument — in bridging cultural soundscapes. The Mariinsky Theatre, founded in 1783, is one of Russia's most institutions. In St. Petersburg's crowded classical music scene, where dozens of concerts take place nightly, Rahbari's programs continue to stand out.



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