

Miankaleh caught in crossfire of industry, livestock



Construction vehicles stand waiting on the Hoseynabad pastures in the Miankaleh peninsula, Mazandaran Province, Iran.

● IRNA

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The outcry from environmental and wildlife advocates reached the ears of the current Iranian government, prompting President Pezeshkian to call off the petrochemical project in the Miankaleh peninsula. No one was more pleased by the suspension of the construction of a petrochemical plant there than the local herders, who set their sights on the green pastures of Hoseynabad, hoping to hold on to their modest assets and put food on the table.

PERSPECTIVE

The Miankaleh peninsula, situated in the extreme south-eastern part of the Caspian Sea in Iran's Mazandaran Province to the north, has gone through a turbulent history, ranging from choking wildfires to dust storms that have made their way into the reserve. However, nothing has sent shockwaves through Miankaleh more than the anxiety over the construction of a petrochemical plant and the separation of 90 hectares of pristine land and pastures in Hoseynabad. Industrial wastewater, polluting gases, and fuel pipelines from the petrochemical industry pose a serious threat to this natural treasure, and any encroachment by polluting industries chips away at its ecological value and raises the specter of being struck off the UNESCO list.

The Miankaleh petrochemical project, also known as Mazandaran (Miankaleh) Petrochemical, has run into controversy since day one. Despite its bumpy ride, the project quietly picked up steam again in recent weeks, only to be brought to a halt by a government red card.

Miankaleh Lagoon is the 36th registered wetland in the world, and the construction of polluting industries on its fringes rings alarm bells about the risk of its removal from the UNESCO list. The outcry from environmental

and wildlife advocates reached the ears of the current Iranian government, prompting President Pezeshkian to call off the petrochemical project. No one was more pleased by the suspension of the Mazandaran Petrochemical construction than the local herders, who set their sights on the green pastures of Hoseynabad, hoping to hold on to their modest assets and put food on the table.

Environmental activist Hor Mansouri, while commending the government for pulling the plug on the Miankaleh project, stated: “The government, by considering the law, national interests, and the legitimate demands of the people, took a hard look at the Miankaleh petrochemical issue from scientific, legal, environmental, and social angles.” He added: “The government’s decisive move to put the brakes on this project is a clear sign of national resolve to safeguard natural resources, uphold the law, and stand up to environmental violations and threats. Today, it can be said that the government stands shoulder to shoulder with the people, environmental activists, and Miankaleh’s vulnerable nature. This move is a major step towards looking out for the rights of future generations and preserving Miankaleh’s unique ecosystem.”

Just as the process of transferring national lands is complicated, re-

claiming them is even more tangled and hinges on a court ruling. While land reclamation is not impossible, everyone should keep in mind not to muddy the waters and assume the government has carte blanche in such matters; if such absolute authority is handed over to the government, it will inevitably spill over into cases of land transfers one day.

Behzad Angouraj, a natural resources expert, explained that national lands are public property under the control of the Islamic governance, meaning they do not belong to the state per se, and the president’s order cannot be enforced without a court ruling. He added that if one looks back on the Rouhani government’s 2020 decision to address the needs of downstream petrochemical industries, it becomes clear that both attracting investment and capital flight can be read into the various permits, approvals, and even objections. According to Article 44 and the Law on Facilitating Investment, as well as other regulations, he continued, the development of the private sector is mandated, but social activists believe there is a disconnect with current laws, especially regarding bank loans and land allocation, which they see as a form of rent-seeking. Angouraj noted: “With the government’s current management, it cannot say for sure whether the land allocated to the Hosey-

nabad project is national pasture or non-national, nor can it confirm whether there are any disputes. It must be understood that a suspension order — whether from the judiciary or the president — does not mean the project executor is incapable of carrying out the plan.”

“The Miankaleh lands fall within the Miankaleh biosphere reserve zone, and any development in this area must stick to strict environmental guidelines and relevant laws.”

Reclaiming national lands no walk in park

Angouraj believes the issue of reclaiming lands allocated to this project is highly contentious and intriguing as the same authority that signed off on the project is now backtracking.

“The credibility of approvals and objections from a key organization responsible for environmental protection should not be called into question in this way as the process of reclaiming allocated lands is anything but straightforward, and the government should not be looked to for land reclamation.”

According to Shana, Hassan Abbaszadeh, the CEO of the National Petrochemical Company, stated on May 2 that the implementation of the Miankaleh petrochemical project was contingent from the outset on securing environmental permits. He explained, “It was planned that,

pending approval and issuance of the necessary permits, the development of the methanol chain and its downstream industries using natural gas would be put on the agenda. However, the project failed to secure the required environmental permits from day one, and no authorization was granted as time went on.”

Furthermore, Mehdi Younesi Rostami, governor of Mazandaran Province, also clarified that the legal suspension of Miankaleh Petrochemical’s activities was put into effect by a Cabinet decision on April 23, 2025, and all activities have been deemed illegal and shut down as of that date.

Younesi Rostami added that given the revocation of the establishment license for the so-called Miankaleh Petrochemical by the Ministry of Industry, Mining, and Trade, as well as the failure to obtain required environmental permits from the Iranian Department of Environment, all activities related to this project have been illegal and called off as of the aforementioned date.

“As the government’s top representative in the province, I stress that from now on, any action or operation under the Miankaleh Petrochemical project lacks legal standing, and any violations will be dealt with strictly according to the law.” Younesi Rostami reminded that the Mazandaran Governor’s Office insists on the need to stick to sustainable development principles, protect public rights, and look after the province’s natural resources and environment. Any industrial investment is subject to strict compliance with technical, environmental, and legal standards.

The Miankaleh Petrochemical project has become a hot potato, drawing widespread criticism. On June 24, 2023, reports emerged of fencing and resumed construction on the site, even though, according to Article 38 of the Sixth Development Plan, even minor activities such as fencing count as the start of project implementation and fly in the face of environmental regulations. This prompted opposition from the Department of Environment, and based on the latest correspondence from the judiciary, even the disputed land must be returned.

The article first appeared in Persian on Mehr news agency.



Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian
● TASNIM



Sheep walk past fences in the middle of the construction equipment in the Miankaleh peninsula, Mazandaran Province, Iran.
● ROKNA