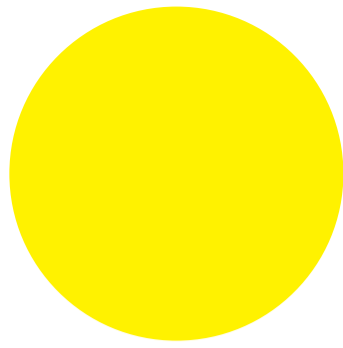


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How Netanyahu using war to buy time?

By Qasem Moheb-Ali
Middle East affairs expert

OPINION
EXCLUSIVE

At the outset of the Gaza war, Israel laid out three goals: to destroy Hamas, to free captives, and to set up a new administration in Gaza — one that excluded Palestinians. This alternative governance was envisioned either under direct Israeli control or via an Arab or international consortium. However, a recent decision by Israel's security cabinet marks a dramatic shift: it now envisions the full occupation of Gaza for an indefinite period. This move strongly suggests that Israel is gearing up to dig in and hold onto the territory long-term, while deferring any final decision on Gaza's future until later talks — whether they follow US President Donald Trump's Gaza takeover plan, forcibly displace Palestinians, or settle on some shared administrative model with the participation of Arab countries.

Despite its overwhelming military campaign, Israel has so far failed to wipe out Hamas. The war's main consequence has been the large-scale destruction of Gaza and the killing of civilians — with little to show for it strategically.

So, why does Israel continue this war despite opposition at home and abroad?

For Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, the Gaza war has thrown him a lifeline. As long as the conflict drags on, his grip on power remains intact. Moreover, the involvement of regional actors like Lebanon's Hezbollah and Yemen has handed Netanyahu a pretext: he portrays himself as Israel's savior, claiming that its national security is hinged on his leadership and policies. Another stroke of political fortune for Netanyahu came with the return of Donald Trump and the hardliners to the US political scene. This shift has opened the door for Netanyahu to act with fewer constraints. While US Democrats traditionally stood by Israel — it is a fixed policy of Washington to back Tel Aviv — they were critical of Netanyahu's policies and showed greater openness toward centrist factions within Israeli politics.

Trump, by contrast, has thrown his full weight behind Netanyahu and has shown no reservations about his aggressive policies. This alignment has emboldened Israel's far-right factions to press ahead with expansionist ambitions, and the war in Gaza is used as cover for a broader push to annex the West Bank fully. It's nearly impossible to separate out the roles of Israel and the United States.

Pakistan, India exchange fire amid mounting fears of wider military standoff

International Desk

Indian and Pakistani soldiers exchanged heavy volleys of shells and gunfire across their frontier in Kashmir overnight, killing at least five civilians in a growing military standoff that erupted following an attack on tourists in the India-controlled portion of the disputed region.

In Pakistan, an unusually intense night of artillery exchanges left at least four civilians dead and

wounded 12 others in areas near the Line of Control (LoC) that divides Kashmir, local police official Adeel Ahmad said. People in border towns said the firing continued well into Friday morning.

In India, military officials said Pakistani troops barged their posts overnight with artillery, mortars and gunfire at multiple locations in Indian-controlled Kashmir. They said Indian soldiers responded, triggering fierce exchanges until early dawn.

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A person inspects his damaged shop following overnight shelling from Pakistan at Gingal village in Uri district, Indian controlled Kashmir on May 9, 2025.

AP

Leo XIV elected as new pope

Pontiff laments 'technology, money, success, power or pleasure' valued over religion



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Caspian Sea oil exploration resumes after three-decade hiatus

Iran targets 600m cubic meters of in-place crude

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Trust-building key to Iran-Europe relations

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Salehi: Tehran Int'l Book Fair platform for expanding cultural diplomacy

Saudi Arabia invited as guest of honor next year

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Iran dismisses secret nuclear site report as 'absurd'

Araghchi: Such claim by Israeli PM attempts to torpedo Iran-US talks

International Desk

Iran's UN mission in a statement on Friday rejected a media report about an alleged secret nuclear site in the country's Semnan Province, calling the "absurd" report an attempt by the terrorist cult Mujahedin Khalq Organization (MKO) to be recognized by the world.

The American news channel, Fox News, on Thursday claimed that it has exclusively obtained satellite imagery revealing what an Iranian opposition group says is a previously undisclosed Iranian nuclear weapons facility.

According to the claims by the MKO, intelligence gathered from sources inside the country points to a sprawling compound covering nearly 2,500 acres in Iran's northern province of Semnan.

"The modus operandi of the terrorist cult known as the MKO demonstrates that it—in a desperate pursuit of recognition—furnishes fabricated reports, disguised as so-called intelligence findings, to Western intelligence services, including those of the United States," Iran's UN mission said in a statement on X.

"However, once such agencies come to discern the utter unreliability of the absurd reports churned out by the MKO terrorist cult, it then seeks out its next clientele among Western media outlets, aiming to exploit those platforms in order to ride the tide of media momentum."

The Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi also reacted to the Fox News report, saying that the reports are supplied by the MKO on Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's or-

der in a bid to sabotage ongoing nuclear talks between Tehran and Washington.

In a X post on Friday, Araghchi said Netanyahu is using "Saddam's Iranian henchmen" under his policy of dictating what President Donald Trump must do with regard to the Islamic Republic in a desperate attempt to sabotage Iran's talks with the US.

"Like clockwork, more Very Scary Satellite Images are being circulated as Iran-US indirect nuclear talks are set to resume," he said.

"With his credibility in tatters and exposed as a saboteur, Netanyahu—under his 'Determining What @realdonaldtrump Can & Cannot Do' policy—is turning to both old and new sock puppets. This time, he is using Saddam's Iranian henchmen. They may come cheap, but

hiring a literal cult only conveys utter desperation."

Iran and the US have already held three rounds of indirect talks, mediated by Oman, on Tehran's nuclear program and the removal of US sanctions.

Back on April 23, Araghchi had warned against "clear" attempts by the Israeli regime and certain groups to spoil diplomacy amid indirect negotiations with the US over Tehran's civilian nuclear program.

The fourth round of Tehran-Washington negotiations had initially been scheduled for May 3 in the Italian capital, but was postponed due to what Iran described as "technical and logistical" reasons.

Both sides have so far described their talks as generally productive, including the last round, which was billed as a "constructive" process.



The photo, published by Fox News on May 8, 2025, shows a facility that is claimed to be a secret nuclear site in Iran's Semnan Province.

FOX NEWS

'Reinforcement of ties': Iran FM to visit Saudi Arabia, Qatar today



Abbas Araghchi
AFP

International Desk

Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman Esameil Baqaei said the country's top diplomat is scheduled to visit Saudi Arabia and Qatar today. Baqaei made the announcement on Friday, saying Araghchi's planned

trips are in line with the Islamic Republic's "principled policy of continuous reinforcement of relations with its neighbors."

"The foreign minister (Abbas Araghchi) will travel to Riyadh on Saturday to meet and hold talks with high-ranking Saudi officials," Baghaei said, adding that the Iranian foreign minister will also head to Doha on Saturday evening to participate in the Iran-Arab World Dialogue Summit. The visit to Saudi Arabia and Qatar comes as the US President Donald Trump is scheduled to tour the Persian Gulf region.

Trump will visit Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates from May 13 to 16 on his first major Mid-

dle East trip of his second term. In Riyadh, he is expected to meet leaders of the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council, a source close to the Saudi government said earlier this month.

The visit follows three rounds of US-Iran negotiations over Tehran's nuclear program and the removal of US sanctions on Iran.

According to American news website Axios, the fourth round of negotiations is expected to take place in the Omani capital of Muscat on Sunday.

The meeting had initially been scheduled for May 3, but it was postponed due to "logistical and technical reasons."

Pakistan, India exchange ...



Kashmiri Muslims arrive to attend Friday prayers at a damaged mosque following Indian strikes in Muzaffarabad, the capital of Pakistan-administered Kashmir, on May 9, 2025.

SAJJAD QAYYUM/AFP

Two people were killed and four others injured in Uri and Poonch sectors, police said, taking the civilian death toll in Indian-controlled Kashmir to 18 since Wednesday. Pakistan said Indian mortar and artillery fire has killed 17 civilians in Pakistan-administered Kashmir in the same period. Indian authorities have evacuated tens of thousands of civilians from villages near the volatile frontier. Thousands of people slept in shelters for a second consecutive night.

On Thursday, Pakistan's army said it shot down 28 Indian drones, while New Delhi accused Islamabad of launching raids with "drones and missiles," and claimed it destroyed an air defense system in La-

hore. Tensions between the nuclear-armed rivals have soared since an attack on a popular tourist site in India-controlled Kashmir left 26 civilians dead, mostly Hindu Indian tourists, on April 22. New Delhi has blamed Pakistan for backing the attack, an accusation Islamabad rejects.

On Wednesday, India conducted airstrikes on several sites in Pakistani territory it described as militant-related, killing 31 civilians according to Pakistani officials. Pakistan said it shot down five Indian fighter jets.

The Indian army said Friday that Pakistan fired about 300-400 drones overnight in violation of Indian airspace to

target military installations in nearly three dozen sites along the western borders. India brought down a number of the drones using "kinetic and non-kinetic means," Wing Commander Vyomika Singh of the Indian air force told a news conference.

Tehran calls for restraint

Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi visited India on Thursday following a Monday visit to Pakistan, during which he called on both sides to exercise restraint.

In his meeting with India's Minister of External Affairs Subrahmanyam Jaishankar on Thursday, Araghchi highlighted the importance of stability and security in the South Asian region for Iran and the world. He expressed hope that recent tensions in the area will be resolved through foresight and responsible determination by the involved parties.

Iran's top diplomat also held a phone call with Pakistani Foreign Minister Muhammad Ishaq Dar on Thursday. Araghchi emphasized the importance of both parties' efforts to prevent further escalation and reduce tensions.

The countries have fought two of their three full-scale wars over Kashmir, a disputed territory that both claim in full but administer separate portions of since gaining independence from British rule in 1947.

Iran will 'open gates of hell' if attacked by US or Israel: IRGC chief



Mohammad Salami
TASNIM

International Desk

Commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Major General Mohammad Salami issued a stark warning to Israel and the United States on Thursday, saying that Iran would "open the gates of hell" if attacked by the US or Israel.

"These are serious warnings to the Zionist and American authorities... If you make the slightest mistake, we will open the gates of hell for you," Salami said in a video carried by Iran's Tasnim news agency.

"A principle in our defense doctrine is that from any point where our enemy acts against our interests and goals, we will target and hit that point and any other point where our enemy's interests lie," Salami said.

"Therefore, we declare that any point in any territory that becomes the origin of an invasion will be the target of an invasion for us, meaning that the origin will

become a target," he added.

General Salami made the threat amid tensions and a series of confrontational statements between Iranian, Israeli, and American officials, set against the backdrop of nuclear talks between Iran and Washington.

Salami warned the US and Israel of dire consequences if any of them initiates an attack. He accused Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of trying to drag the US into an "unending war" and emphasized that Iran is ready to fight on all levels while still prioritizing diplomacy.

On Thursday, Israel's Defense Minister Israel Katz threatened Iran with "Gaza-like" action amid an escalation with Yemen which hit Ben Gurion Airport near Tel Aviv with a hypersonic missile on Sunday. Israel accuses Iran of providing Yemeni armed forces with military assistance. Iranian officials have denied any involvement in the recent missile attack by Yemen's Armed Forces.

US President Donald Trump has also threatened Iran with military attack if no agreement is reached between the two countries in the ongoing talks between the two countries on Tehran's nuclear program.

The US and Iran have held three rounds of negotiations since April 12. A planned fourth round, originally scheduled for May 3, was postponed due to "logistical reasons," according to mediator Oman.



Mohammad Ali Rajabi
Cartoonist



Iran Oil Show:

Minister announces accelerated investment in upstream petroleum sector

16 contracts, MoUs inked with knowledge-based firms

Economy Desk

Iran's 29th International Oil, Gas, Refining, and Petrochemical Exhibition officially opened on Thursday at the Tehran Permanent Fairgrounds, attended by Oil Minister Mohsen Paknejad.

The four-day event hosted 2,200 domestic and foreign companies, including 150 international firms from 14 countries.

This year's key theme, "Investment in the Oil Industry: A Guarantee for Economic Growth and Development," reflects the sector's strategic priorities. The exhibition focuses on showcasing investment opportunities, cutting-edge technologies, domestic capabilities, and engagement with foreign investors.

On the sidelines of the event's second day, the oil minister stated, "Under new measures, the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) is mandated to finalize investor proposals for upstream projects within 3-4 months."

"In response to past criticisms over lengthy collaboration processes in upstream projects, and in line with the Leader's emphasis on streamlining procedures, we have significantly reduced these timelines through strategic planning," Paknejad added.

Meanwhile, President Masoud Pezeshkian, while touring the

exhibition, urged participating companies to prioritize "foreign currency generation through efficiency and productivity."

The president called on firms to submit proposals for boosting production and exports, which the Oil Ministry and government will review.

The country's oil and gas industry has faced significant challenges in recent years, including international sanctions, geopolitical competition, and aging infrastructure. The exhibition serves as a bridge between industry, academia, and the private sector, playing a vital role in advancing Iran's energy sector. The event hosted companies from China, Russia, Spain, Italy, the UK, Switzerland, South Korea, Turkey, India, the UAE, Canada, France, Germany, and Brazil, facilitating knowledge exchange, commercial partnerships, and showcasing Iran's industrial achievements.

Focus on innovation, domestic capacity

With the world's second-largest gas reserves and fourth-largest oil reserves, Iran requires infrastructure modernization and technological upgrades. This year's exhibition featured events centered on knowledge-based firms, startups, universities, and tech parks, alongside workshops, technical

seminars, and unveilings of domestically produced equipment. Over four days, specialized conferences, training workshops, and book launches highlighted investment opportunities in oil and gas fields, exploration projects, and optimization initiatives. Press briefings with senior oil industry executives and media panels further enriched the event.

Oil output target set

The NIOC head announced on Friday that, "Based on planned programs, the country's oil production will increase to 250,000 barrels per day this year."

During a press conference on the second day of the exhibition, Hamid Bovard said, "Oil production rose to 150,000 barrels per day at the start of the current administration. Plans have been made to increase this figure to 250,000 barrels per day this year, though achieving this target requires specific conditions to be met."

Key contracts

On Friday, National Iranian South Oil Company (NISOC) signed 10 supply contracts worth over \$24 million with domestic manufacturers and knowledge-based firms. The agreements cover drilling mud oxy-polymer, turbine spare parts, suspension materials, flanges, construction machinery,



drilling cement, and over 10,000 steel pipes.

NISOC chief Ebrahim Piramoon emphasized that such deals aim to "strengthen domestic production, localize technology, reduce foreign dependency, and enhance supply chain resilience."

First-hand contracts reach \$500m

Hossein Afshin, vice president for Science, Technology, and Knowledge-Based Economy of Iran commented on the volume of contracts signed with executive bodies, noting that the approved value of first-hand contracts — pioneering agreements aimed at

fostering domestic technology innovation, knowledge-based partnerships, and sanctions-resilient solutions — has reached \$300m to date.

With today's signings, Afshin said, the total will rise to \$500m, underscoring efforts to scale up homegrown expertise and reduce reliance on foreign technologies amid economic pressures.

Omid Shakeri, deputy oil minister for engineering, research and technology, stressed "maximizing legal and technological capacities to advance the industry," adding that leveraging first-hand contracts aligns with the ministry's tech-driven strategy.

Iran-China coal-to-gas MoU

Moreover, Iran's Research Institute of Petroleum Industry and China's Keyon Company signed a cooperation MoU to develop coal-to-natural gas conversion technology. Signed on the exhibition's opening day, the agreement addresses Iran's gas supply shortages and explores alternative fuels. Hamid Ganji, the head of the Gas Research Institute, emphasized Iran's "significant coal reserves" and Keyon's expertise in synthesis gas and hydrogen production, stating, "This collaboration aims to localize technical know-how and achieve industrial-scale utilization of this technology."

Caspian Sea oil exploration resumes after three-decade hiatus

Iran targets 600m cubic meters of in-place crude



ALI AHMADYAND/SHANA

Economy Desk

Iranian Oil Minister Mohsen Paknejad ordered on Friday the restart of exploratory drilling operations in the shallow waters of the Caspian Sea in north of the country.

The drilling rig of North Drilling Company was deployed at the Rudсар structure in Block 18 of the Caspian Sea at a water depth of 70 meters, Tasnim reported.

The official restart of exploratory

drilling was announced by Paknejad during the 29th International Oil, Gas, Refining, and Petrochemical Exhibition. The minister said, "If exploration operations in the Caspian Sea yield desired results, approximately 600 million cubic meters of crude oil in-place will be realized."

"For nearly 28 years, drilling activities in the shallow waters of the Caspian Sea — the southernmost part of the sea — had been largely halted. After 28 years, operations will commence at the Rudсар hydrocarbon structure, located 15 to 16 kilometers offshore, at depths of 70 to 75 meters," he added. The minister emphasized, "Drilling will extend approximately 5 kilometers below the seabed. The success of this exploration will determine whether this hydrocarbon structure can be classified as a reservoir or field."

Paknejad said the move requires extensive calculations to be conducted by the National Iranian Oil Company. "Initial estimates based on seismic and geological studies suggest approximately 600 million cubic meters of crude oil in-place and 2 TCF of gas producibility. However, these figures will be confirmed after the completion of studies, which will take one year," he added.

The exploratory drilling will reach a final depth of 5,077 meters to evaluate the reservoir potential of the Rudсар structure.

The last shallow-water well in the Caspian Sea was drilled in 1997. Drilling in the deep-water section of the Caspian Sea had also been suspended since 2014. The Oil Ministry plans to resume activities in this section following repairs to the Iran-Amirkabir semi-floating platform.

Iran, India sign two memos on customs, pharmaceuticals

Economy Desk

Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi and Minister of External Affairs of India Subrahmanyam Jaishankar signed two memoranda of understanding at the end of the 20th Iran-India Joint Commission Meeting at Hyderabad House in New Delhi on Thursday.

The agreements include a memorandum of understanding on customs cooperation and another on regulations related to pharmaceutical products. They also signed the minutes of the joint commission meeting, IRNA reported. Araghchi underscored that Iran-India economic relations remain



Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi (l) and Minister of External Affairs of India Subrahmanyam Jaishankar sign memoranda of understanding in New Delhi on May 8, 2025.

IRNA

below expectations, stating that bilateral trade has fallen short of projected levels. He said that sanctions pose significant hurdles to expanding economic collaboration and expressed hope for addressing such issues in the future.

Leading a diplomatic delegation, the Iranian foreign minister arrived in New Delhi on Wednesday to engage in discussions with senior Indian officials on matters of mutual interest, as well as regional and international developments.

How Netanyahu using ...

For many American hardliners, Israeli matters more than some US states.

Page 1 > The US, at the same time, holds the veto power in the UN Security Council, which is the only body whose resolutions are binding and enforceable. While the UN secretary-general may speak out strongly, or the International Court of Justice may condemn Israeli actions, these judgments only mat-

ter if they are taken up by the Security Council. And there, a single US veto is enough to shut things down, even if European states fall in line behind the condemnation, or countries like Spain and some Arab nations speak up in favor of Palestinian statehood, their influence is greatly watered down when the great powers are lined up behind Israel.

Israel has also latched onto the idea

that criticism of its actions is tantamount to opposing Middle Eastern stability — or even American power itself. It portrays its military operations as being carried out on behalf of these very powers. As long as this narrative holds sway, global public opinion or symbolic gestures from smaller states will have little real impact on Israeli policy.

As a result, unless the big powers

change course, the UN will remain toothless when it comes to holding Israel accountable. Given this blanket of protection from major powers and the Security Council's inaction, Israel has felt free to shrug off international law. For any real change to occur, a ceasefire must be reached in Gaza, even if the current conditions are not ideal. Ending the war would pull the rug out from under Netanyahu and strip

him of the narrative that has kept him afloat. If that happens, it could open the door to real diplomatic momentum.

Until then, the odds of Palestinian advocates or supporters getting a meaningful plan off the ground remain slim. As long as the war rages on, Netanyahu and his allies will continue to cash in on chaos, using it as both a shield and a stepping stone.



AIDA AMER/AXIOS

Trust-building key to Iran-Europe relations

Exploring structural, behavioral obstacles to dialogue

By Kamran Yeganegi
Foreign policy expert

**OPINION
EXCLUSIVE**

Amid the shifting tides of the international order, and as West Asia transforms into a dynamic arena of renewed geopolitical competition, whispers of revived negotiations between Iran and the European Troika — France, Germany, and the United Kingdom — have begun to surface once more. However, the atmosphere surrounding these diplomatic overtures is not one of enthusiasm, but rather of caution, skepticism, and strategic recalibration. Dialogue for the American side, it seems, is no longer merely a vehicle for mutual understanding, but increasingly a battleground for redefining power and posture.

The current climate is not the result of a singular rupture, but rather the consequence of a gradual erosion of trust shaped by missed opportunities, broken promises, and unreciprocated goodwill. The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) once stood as a symbol of constructive engagement — a rare in-

stance in which diplomacy triumphed over confrontation. Yet, the unilateral withdrawal of the United States and the subsequent failure of Europe to uphold its own commitments have left the foundations of that agreement fractured and the capital of trust significantly depleted.

At the structural level, Europe's long-standing challenge in demonstrating strategic autonomy from the United States has been starkly evident. Despite occasional rhetorical divergence, the European Troika's actions have remained closely aligned with Washington's maximalist approach, particularly regarding sanctions and conditionality.

For Tehran, it is deeds, not declarations, that carry weight. And to date, European behavior has yet to reflect a meaningful commitment to redressing the damage caused by the breakdown of prior agreements.

On the behavioral front, a persistent underestimation of the complexity and nuance of Iran's domestic and regional landscape continues to impede progress. Overly abstract analyses, a tendency to rely on outdated

narratives, and an insistence on narrowly defined frameworks have collectively eroded Europe's credibility as an impartial interlocutor. Rather than leveraging its diplomatic heritage to build bridges, Europe has at times resorted to reactive policies shaped more by internal political considerations than by a genuine interest in resolution.

Iran, meanwhile, has responded to this shifting landscape with strategic pragmatism — diversifying its foreign policy, deepening ties with Eastern powers, and reinforcing regional partnerships. The message to Europe is clear: the era of Western exclusivity in Iran's foreign relations is over. Iran remains open to dialogue, but not from a position of weakness, nor within frameworks that reduce diplomacy to an instrument of pressure.

If Europe is sincere in its desire to reclaim relevance in the Iranian equation, it must confront a pivotal challenge: the reconstruction of trust. This cannot be achieved through symbolic gestures alone but requires concrete actions, a genuine acknowledgment of mutual interests, and a departure

from the deceitfulness of the past.

At this sensitive juncture, the future of diplomacy between Iran and Europe depends on a return to fundamental diplomatic principles — honesty, mutual respect, balance, and rationality. In a world increasingly disillusioned with unilateralism, effective diplomacy is defined by its

capacity to accommodate diversity, recognize legitimate interests, and prioritize understanding over escalation.

Europe must now decide: remain a peripheral observer offering polite political gestures, or re-engage as a serious actor — fortified by courage, sincerity, and a renewed diplomatic vision.

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For Tehran, it is deeds, not declarations, that carry weight. And to date, European behavior has yet to reflect a meaningful commitment to redressing the damage caused by the breakdown of prior agreements.



New deal demands US-Iran pragmatism

Europe unable to act independently

INTERVIEW *The negotiation train between Iran and the US has hit the brakes at the fourth station, a pause some interpret as the talks' end, while others see it as an inevitable part of challenging dialogues. This halt stems from numerous internal factors within the US and influential external variables. To dig into these issues and the outlook of the talks, IRNA conducted an interview with Heidarali Masoudi, an international relations professor and expert on US affairs.*



Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi (R) and Steve Witkoff, US special envoy for Middle East affairs
● MEHR



Heidarali Masoudi

IRNA: The postponement of the fourth round of Iran-US talks is the most important topic in relations between the two countries today. What factors could be the reasons for this delay?

MASOUDI: Currently, three reasons are brought up for the postponement: logistical issues, substantive issues in the talks, and changes in Trump's national security team. If logistical issues mean the initial coordination and preparations by the Oman government for the talks, then logically, all these matters should have been taken into account before the parties announced their agreement for the next round, unless an unpredictable event occurred that made holding the talks impossible. Since no such unexpected logistical event has happened, logistical issues cannot be the reason for the postponement. The second reason is substantive issues in the talks, which are occasionally mentioned in the news. If substantive issues mean disagreement between the negotiating parties, we should remember that naturally, negotiation only makes sense when there is disagreement because the basic premise of negotiation is the existence of differences.

This holds true unless, for example, preconditions are set for the talks to continue negotiations. However, given the approach so far from both the Iranian and American sides, it seems unlikely that such preconditions exist at this stage. Therefore, this factor also cannot be decisive for the delay. The third reason, which appears to be the main cause, is changes in the US national security team. Since one of the most important figures in Trump's national security team, Michael Waltz, was dismissed, one of Trump's key foreign policy files — the Iran talks — has been temporarily put on ice until the national security team's situation stabilizes. Currently, the post is temporarily held by Secretary of State Rubio, so it remains to be seen who will be appointed as the future US national security advisor.

Can changes in Trump's foreign policy team and cabinet be seen as positive or negative signals toward the negotiations?

To assess whether such changes

are positive or negative signals, it should first be noted that Waltz's dismissal is a product of the Trump administration's lack of major foreign policy achievements in its first 100 days. Trump entered office with illusions or fanciful hopes of ending international wars and conflicts, not just in 100 days but from day one. However, these illusions ran up against hard realities, and his administration failed to deliver on issues like the Gaza war, the Russia-Ukraine conflict, and even Iran's nuclear issue.

It seems the main cause for Waltz's firing is less about his hardline positions or the so-called "signal-gate," and more about the wide gap between Trump's illusions about international affairs and their complex, multi-layered realities. Trump is trying to patch up these failures by sacrificing aides like Waltz. Whether this benefits or harms Iran depends entirely on the replacement — the new national security advisor. So, we must wait and see who will take this role.

Are contradictory statements and behaviors by US officials part of a specific strategy or tactic, or are they signs of confusion?

The overall US strategy toward Iran over the past four decades has been containment, alongside selective engagement. This strategy is concretely seen in coercive diplomacy toward Iran — i.e., using both threats and incentives to push back Iran on

contentious issues such as the nuclear program. Thus, containment with selective engagement is the fundamental US strategy toward Iran, and coercive diplomacy is Washington's practical tactic within that framework. Trump, naturally, is unfamiliar with these concepts and tactics and views foreign policy mainly through a transactional, simplified lens. In practice, he runs into the complexities and obstacles of reality, and this simplistic view has caused confusion and mixed signals in his and his advisors' positions toward Iran. While opposition to Iran's nuclear weapons may be a generally accepted policy to be stated, how to achieve this goal continues to face serious complexities and disagreements within Trump's foreign and national security teams and in dealings with Iran and other international actors.

Do these events mean the end of negotiations, and what should Iran's main approach be toward recent developments?

Not necessarily. It is likely that in the coming days, talks mediated by Oman will get underway again. However, some points and recommendations can be made. First, Iran unfortunately lacks tools to influence internal US negotiation processes and therefore must play it cool and wait for Trump's national security team to stabilize. Second, a relatively favorable scenario for Iran would be the

appointment of someone like Steve Witkoff as national security advisor, who would also take the lead in Iran talks. Although the US national security bureaucracy significantly shapes policy toward Iran, having a loyal figure close to Trump like Witkoff could tone down the influence of anti-Iran actors such as the Israeli lobby or the Foundation for Defense of Democracies.

Third, one of Iran's most necessary actions now is to continue positive and cooperative engagement with other key international players affecting the nuclear issue, including Europe, the IAEA, and, of course, Russia and China. Russia and China seem to have adopted a "watch-and-approve" stance toward Iran-US diplomacy, and Iran's interaction with them should be adjusted accordingly. However, Europe, although feeling sidelined from the nuclear equation, has yet to carve out an independent role from the US, as shown by the postponement of meetings between Iranian and European diplomats following the announcement of the talks' delay.

During Iran-US talks, actors like Europe and the IAEA have sometimes played disruptive roles. What strategy should be adopted in this regard?

Although Europe has its own concerns about Iran, especially on missile and drone issues, it tries to use Iran as a bargaining chip in dealing with Trump. Regarding the IAEA, while it

can play a vital role in verifying Iran's commitments in any future deal, one reason for the recent excessive and exaggerated activism by Director Rafael Grossi may be personal ambitions for advancing his international standing. With Guterres' term ending, Grossi is reportedly a candidate for the next UN secretary-general.

Currently, Israel is the most destructive actor. As Iran-US talks continue with hope and a clear prospect of an agreement emerges, Israel's disruptive role will step up at three levels — Washington, the region, and inside Iran. Iran cannot practically counteract Israel's destructive actions and its lobby in Washington but can team up with regional players to prevent Arab countries from backing away from diplomacy and Iran-US talks.

Domestically, all military, security, and political officials must carefully identify potential security, political, economic, and infrastructure gaps vulnerable to Israeli infiltration or sabotage and design and implement measures to plug up these vulnerabilities.

Besides people, places, and facilities involved in Iran's nuclear, missile, and drone programs and the supply chain for military industry parts — always potential Israeli targets — critical infrastructure such as water and electricity supply, especially with the approaching hot season and existing challenges, must be properly guarded and protected.

How do you assess the outlook of negotiations given today's conditions?

I believe that Iran and the US will pick up talks again after a short pause. However, reaching a new nuclear agreement requires both sides to reach creative technical and diplomatic solutions; the US to drop simplistic and unrealistic proposals; Iran to adopt active diplomacy with all key nuclear issue players, control Israel's destructive role in the region and inside Iran, and continue trust-building and relations with regional actors close to the US, especially Saudi Arabia. Trump's upcoming trip to Saudi Arabia could well help push forward Iran-US negotiations.

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It seems the main cause for Waltz's firing is less about his hardline positions or the so-called "signal-gate," and more about the wide gap between Trump's illusions about international affairs and their complex, multi-layered realities. Trump is trying to patch up these failures by sacrificing aides like Waltz. Whether this benefits or harms Iran depends entirely on the replacement.



US special envoy for Middle East affairs Steve Witkoff (L), Secretary of State Marco Rubio (2nd-L), and former national security advisor Michael Waltz (3rd-L) meet with the Russian delegation (not pictured) at Diriyah Palace in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, on February 18, 2025.
● EVELYN HOCKSTEIN/POOL

The article first appeared in Persian on IRNA.

FIFA Beach Soccer World Cup: Iran crashes out after last-eight heartbreak

Sports Desk

Iran was knocked out of the FIFA Beach Soccer World Cup after a last-eight 4-3 defeat against Belarus in Victoria, Seychelles, on Thursday. Having finished third in its last two appearances in the competition, the Asian champion took the lead through Mohammad Ma'soumi less than a minute before the first interval but Belarusian talisman Ihar Bryshtsel leveled the scoreline with a penalty midway through the second period at the Paradise Arena. Bryshtsel and Yahor Hardzetski scored two quick-fire goals in the early stages of the third period before Anatoliy Ryabko headed home to give Belarus a commanding lead with seven minutes remaining. Ma'soumi pulled one back for Iran and Movahed Mohammadpour cut the deficit to one with 37 seconds left on the clock but the late fight-back proved too little, too late as Belarus held on to avenge the 6-1 loss to Iran in the third-place contest in Dubai last year.

Belarus will take on Senegal for a place in the final showpiece today. Mamour Diagne scored with two seconds left in extra time as Senegal came from behind to stun last year's finalist Italy 4-3 on later on Thursday. Six-time champion Brazil, meanwhile, continued its title defense with an emphatic 6-0 victory over Spain. Rodrigo delivered yet another man-of-the-match performance with a couple of goals in the first period as the Seleção set a last-four date with Portugal. Having beaten Iran to the top spot in Group B, Portugal had a Jordan hat-trick and a last-gasp Miguel Pintado bicycle kick to thank for beating Japan 7-6 in a thrilling quarterfinal to remain on course for a third World Cup trophy.

Iranian skipper Mohammadali Mokhtari (L) makes a bicycle-kick effort during a 4-3 defeat against Belarus at the Beach Soccer World Cup quarterfinals in Victoria, Seychelles, on May 8, 2025. **TULLIO PUGLIA/FIFA**



AFC Women's Futsal Asian Cup: Iran beat Hong Kong to progress



AFC – Defending champions Iran secured their place in the quarter-finals after defeating Hong Kong, China 3-1 in their AFC Women's Futsal Asian Cup Group B tie in Hohhot, China, on Friday. The win took Iran to six points – level with Vietnam who also qualified – with the two to meet on Sunday to decide the group winners. Having opened their campaign with a hard-fought 1-0 win over the Philippines, Iran took time to find their rhythm, with Fatemeh Hosseini testing Hong Kong, China goalkeeper Ng Cheuk Wai in the fifth minute.

Iran's pressure came to fruition in the 10th minute after Fereshteh Karimi's effort rattled the left post with the rebound falling kindly for Elham Anafjeh to tap the ball home. Hong Kong, China, however, maintained their feisty demeanour to level the tie two minutes later after Nastaran Moghimi turned Tsang Lai Mae Halasan's effort into her own net. A 5-3 defeat to Vietnam in their opener meant Hong Kong, China needed the points to salvage their campaign but their efforts of the first half were undone by a costly mistake in the 26th minute.

A poor pass from Kung Yuet Charis to Chan Wing Sze was caught out by Mahtab Banaei, who powered her way through to fire past Ng. Iran piled on the pressure and put the game beyond Hong Kong, China's reach in the 37th minute after Maral Torkaman laid the ball for Anafjeh to drill a low shot into the bottom right corner to claim her second goal of the evening.

Iranian players celebrate a goal during a 3-1 win against Hong Kong, China at AFC Women's Futsal Asian Cup in Hohhot, China, on May 9, 2025. **AFC**

Persian Gulf Pro League: Persepolis remains in ACL Elite contention; Nassaji relegated

Sports Desk

Oston Urunov scored a stoppage-time winner as Persepolis came from behind to beat Khaybar 2-1 in Khorramabad in the Persian Gulf Pro League on Thursday, keeping its hopes alive of booking a place in the AFC Champions League Elite next season. Nassaji Mazandaran, meanwhile, will have to start next campaign in the second-tier league after a 3-3 stalemate against newly-crowned champion Tractor secured a bottom-two finish for the northern Iranian side. Two points behind second-place Sepahan before the penultimate round of fixtures, Persepolis was stunned in the 25th minute when a Farid Amiri's flick-on header went past Algerian goalkeeper Alexis Guendouz, who was replaced by Amirreza Rafiei at halftime due to a muscle injury. Turkish head coach Ismail Kartal made several changes to the starting XI in the second half and it paid off as Farshad Ahmadzadeh headed home the equalizer in the 65th minute before teeing up

fellow-substitute Urunov for the last-gasp winner. The hard-fought victory saw the Tehran Reds move level on 57 points with Sepahan, which was held to a 1-1 draw at bottom-club Havadar. Kaveh Rezaei found the net for the visitors with 18 minutes from normal time to cancel out Karim Eslami's first-half strike. Sepahan still sits above Persepolis in the table – thanks to a superior head-to-head record – before welcoming Esteghlal on the final day, with the Reds, who will face relegated Havadar at home on Thursday, hoping for a favor from their archrivals to seal a spot in the Asian elite clubs' competition. Elsewhere, Amirhossein Samdaliri and Kevin Yamga were on the scoresheet as Nassaji rallied from behind twice to salvage a point in Tabriz, but it proved to be just a consolation for the visiting side. The result also means Tractor will miss out on the 70-point mark, though Dragan Skocic's side could still match the record 68-point tally – set by Esteghlal in 2022 and Persepolis last season

– with an away win against Esteghlal Khuzestan on the final day. Mes Rafsanjan, meanwhile, is guaranteed a place in the Iranian top flight next season despite suffering a 2-1 loss at Zob Ahan. Mahmaoud Qaed-Rahmati and Morteza Tabrizi scored for the home before Mohammad Akbari cut the deficit to one late in the first half. Mes is third from bottom in the 16-team table with 27 points – five clear of the safety zone before the dead-rubber at home against Khaybar on Thursday. Mohammadreza Soleimani bagged a brace inside seven minutes after the break to cancel out Shahin Tavakkoli's ninth-minute own goal and help Foolad beat Esteghlal Khuzestan in the Ahvaz derby. Esteghlal shared the spoils with Chadormalou in a goalless game at Tehran's Azadi Stadium, while Iralco and Malavan played to a 1-1 draw in Arak. Fifth-placed Golgozar Sirjan continued its impressive campaign with a 1-0 home victory over Shams Azar, courtesy of Ousmane Ndong's first-half goal.



Persepolis winger Oston Urunov (70) celebrates with teammates after scoring the winner in a 2-1 victory over Khaybar in the Persian Gulf Pro League in Khorramabad, Iran, on May 8, 2025. **VARZESH3.COM**

Asian Canoe Sprint Championships: Iranians collect double silver medals

Sports Desk

Iranians won three medals, including a couple of silvers, on Day 2 of the

Asian Canoe Sprint Championships in Nanchang, China. Representing the country in the men's K1 1000m event, Ali Aqamir-

zaei clocked 3:49.947 minutes in the final to settle for a runner-up finish behind the host's Zhang Dong – a gold medalist at the Asian Games on

home soil two years ago. Mohammad-Nabi Mirzaei also finished his men's C1 1000m campaign with a silver medal after finishing the final race in 4:19.026 minutes. In the women's competitions, Tania Kargarpour took the bronze in the K1 1000m event with 4:29.992 minutes

in the final. Meanwhile, the Iranian quadruple of Aqamirzaei, Kargarpour, Elnaz Shafieian, and Payman Qavidel missed out on the podium in the mixed K4 1000m event, clocking 1:35.729 minutes to finish fourth behind China, Japan, and Kazakhstan.

Kuhrang's natural scenery, cultural heritage in perfect harmony

Iranica Desk

Kuhrang is a vibrant city celebrated for its stunning, verdant landscapes and natural beauty. If you were to compile a list of Iran's most impressive tourist destinations, Kuhrang would undoubtedly be near the top. Its majestic scenery captivates every visitor, often inspiring different nicknames — some call it Iran's

white paradise, while others refer to it as Iran's roof. During winter, Kuhrang transforms into Iran's snowy capital, offering perfect conditions for winter sports and snow-driven adventures. If you're unfamiliar with Kuhrang's location or unsure of its attractions, you've come to the right place — this guide will introduce you to everything this remarkable city has to offer.

As one of the oldest settlements in Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari Province, Kuhrang is approximately 130 kilometers from Shahrekord and about a seven-hour drive from Iran's capital, Tehran. Covering an area of 3,684 square kilometers, the city is home to roughly 41,000 residents. It borders Isfahan and Lorestan provinces to the north, Ardal to the south, Farsan to the east, and Khu-

zestan Province to the west. The local inhabitants are primarily of Lori and Bakhtiari ethnicity, speaking the distinct Luri Bakhtiari dialect.

Thanks to towering mountains like Zardkuh, Kuhrang enjoys a climate characterized by cool, moderate summers and rainy, cold winters. Notably, after Bandar Anzali, Kuhrang ranks as Iran's second-highest rainfall area,

with an average annual precipitation of around 1,400mm. The region boasts an array of natural sights and attractions — from bubbling springs and freshwater sources to mountain peaks that serve as sanctuaries for rushing rivers. The sprawling poppy fields, spectacular waterfalls, and lush grasslands draw millions of visitors every year, making Kuhrang a true haven for nature lovers.



Kuhrang Spring

● hamsafarshim.ir

Kuhrang is renowned for its numerous springs, each with its own unique visual appeal. The most notable among them is the Kuhrang Spring, which originates high in the Zardkuh mountain range. After winding through rugged terrain, it flows into the Zayandeh River. This spring not only brings life, greenery, and freshness to its surroundings but also serves as a cultural hub — hosting traditional tribal ceremonies that enrich the region's heritage. Visiting Kuhrang Spring offers travelers a chance to witness nature's boundless beauty and experience the rich culture of the local communities.

Sadly, due to decreased rainfall and climate shifts across Iran, the Kuhrang Spring has dried up in recent years. Nonetheless, the surrounding area remains scenically stunning, with many other natural spots compensating for the spring's absence.

Qeysari Protected Area

When visiting Kuhrang, a trip to the Qeysari Protected Area is highly recommended. Covering approximately 10,000 hectares, this region is one of the most popular tourist destinations in Kuhrang. Its cold, dry climate supports a diverse range of flora and fauna, divided into two sections by the Shahrar River.

This protected zone acts as a sanctuary for many animal species — such as leopards, foxes, bears, and various snakes — and hosts an abundance of birdlife, including sparrowhawks, golden eagles, and partridges. Exploring this rich habitat offers wildlife enthusiasts an exciting and immersive experience.



● mrbit.com



Chama Ice Cave

● pinorest.com

One of the most extraordinary natural attractions in Kuhrang is the Chama Ice Cave, located about 25 kilometers from Chelgard, near the village of Sheikh Ali Khan. The cave's mesmerizing formations include snow masses, stalactites, and layers of ice — some reaching heights of 50 meters. Remarkably, ice persists in this cave year-round, ensuring that visitors can marvel at massive ice formations even during the summer months.

Beyond its stunning appearance, the Chama Ice Cave is also Iran's largest source of freshwater. The melting ice and snow inside feed Iran's coldest and purest spring, which, after merging with the Kuhrang Dam, supplies drinking water throughout the region.



Dimeh Spring

● visitiran.ir

Another must-see in Kuhrang, especially during the cooler seasons, is Dimeh Spring. Located in the village of Dimeh, approximately 10 kilometers from Chelgard, this spring is celebrated not just for its natural beauty but also for its medicinal properties. Its waters are believed to have curative effects, making it a popular destination for health seekers and nature lovers alike. The spring is surrounded by pristine natural scenery, including majestic oak trees that create a peaceful, lush environment. Modern facilities — such as pavilions and shops — are available nearby, making visits comfortable and convenient for travelers.

Fritillaria Plain

The Fritillaria Plain stands out as one of Kuhrang's most breathtaking natural attractions, destined to delight visitors from around the world. During the two to three weeks when the plain is ablaze with colorful fritillaria flowers, Kuhrang attracts the highest number of tourists each year.

Almost everyone, from anywhere, journeys to this dreamy landscape to experience the awe-inspiring beauty of this natural wonder firsthand. The extent of the Fritillaria Plain in Kuhrang is approximately 3,400 hectares. If witnessing the vast expanse of blooming fritillaria is your goal, May — the peak month for this display — is the ideal time to visit.



● [IRNA](https://irna.com)

Bardeh Castle

A visit to Kuhrang becomes even more enriching if you dedicate some time to exploring Bardeh Castle. This historic gem, dating back to the Qajar era, is located in a village of the same name, approximately 40 kilometers from Shahr-e-Kord.

The architecture of the castle features four towers, a central courtyard, stables, a bathhouse, and a square layout, all designed and constructed under the supervision of Esmail Torkan.

Within Bardeh Castle, you can observe two distinct sections: the inner and outer parts, each offering its own visual appeal. The inner section comprises a basement and a ground floor, with sitting rooms on the northern and southern sides. The outer side of the castle includes stables, and above that, the luxurious section of the castle is built with a completely separate pathway.



● wikimedia.org

At each of the four corners of the structure stand round towers — the western towers served as living quarters, while the eastern ones provided defensive shelter. The main gate, situated at the center of the western side, divides the castle into northern and southern halves. The construction materials are a blend of brick, stone, and mudbrick, reflecting the architectural style of the period.



Sar Aqa Seyyed Village

● visitiran.ir

Another must-visit destination in Kuhrang is Sar Aqa Seyyed village, renowned as a genuine tourist attraction in its own right. Nestled amidst the lush Zagros Mountains, this village is often called the "Masuleh of Zagros" because of its terraced housing architecture.

Historical evidence indicates that, like other cave-dwelling villages carved into the mountains, Sar Aqa Seyyed dates back to the Paleolithic Era — a period when humans sought refuge deep within the mountains for shelter.

The village's name is also linked to the shrine of Imamzadeh Aqa Eisa, who, according to tradition, has been residing there for around 600 years, along with his family and relatives. Some locals suggest that the name "Aqa Seyyed" originates from Imamzadeh Seyyed, located in the southern part of the village, with villagers' homes built on elevated sites overlooking the shrine.

The authentic traditional clothing, unique customs and traditions, rural way of life, and numerous natural attractions have made Sar Aqa Seyyed a popular destination for international tourists. Interestingly, despite its many attractions, the village has maintained its traditional rural lifestyle — largely due to limitations such as the lack of modern amenities like gas. Visiting Sar Aqa Seyyed during the summer or spring offers a memorable encounter with the area's nomadic tribes, allowing travelers to experience their rich cultural hospitality firsthand.



● [IRNA](https://irna.com)

Bazoft River

Rivers and springs are integral to Kuhrang's identity. Among these, the Bazoft River is famously originating from the high peaks of Monar and Zardkuh. Its proximity to some of the most pristine and lush forests creates some of the most stunning scenery in the region's natural landscape.

Interestingly, the Bazoft River is a significant tributary of the Karun River and maintains water flow almost year-round. Its lengthy course winds through the Zagros oak forests, shaping a vital ecosystem for the area's flora and fauna.

Salehi: Tehran Int'l Book Fair platform for expanding cultural diplomacy

Saudi Arabia invited as guest of honor next year

Arts & Culture Desk

Iran's Minister of Culture, Abbas Salehi, highlighted the role of the 36th Tehran International Book Fair as a platform for cultural diplomacy and the promotion of reading. During his visit to the international section of the fair on May 8, Salehi engaged with publishers and cultural representatives from various countries, exploring the latest trends in publishing and cultural exchanges, IRNA reported. In his remarks, Salehi underlined the importance of the fair in fostering closer cultural ties. He pointed to Iraq's prominent participation as a guest of honor this year, emphasizing the deep historical, religious, and cultural connections between the two na-

tions. "Iraq's presence is a milestone in our bilateral relations, offering a valuable opportunity for cooperation in publishing, translation, and cultural exchange," he said. Salehi also visited the Russian, Omani, Turkish, Yemeni, and other international booths, where he discussed mutual cultural interests and the potential for joint projects. Particularly, he commended Russia's ongoing engagement, praising their active role in the fair over the years. "Russia's participation fosters increased cultural dialogue, with both countries showcasing contemporary works in translation," he noted. The minister's visit to Oman was equally significant, where he reaffirmed the longstanding cultural ties between Iran and Oman.

"Our book fair is a key avenue to strengthen this bond," he said. The fair also witnessed discussions on the growing presence of African countries, with Kenya positioned as a gateway to East Africa's cultural sector. Salehi expressed interest in translating African literature into Persian, emphasizing the role of books in building bridges across continents. Also, the Russian Book Union is hosting over 80 cultural events in conjunction with the fair, marking its tenth consecutive participation. "This year, we are presenting 550 titles and organizing diverse activities to foster deeper ties between Russian and Iranian writers, publishers, and translators," said Arezoo Ashtijoo, a representative of the Russian Book Union.

These events span across Tehran and several other Iranian cities, aiming to promote the Russian language and culture. In a related development, the head of the Tehran International Book Fair, Mohammad Javadi, met with the Saudi Ambassador to Iran, Abdullah bin Saud Al-Anzi, on May 8. Javadi extended an invitation for Saudi Arabia to be the guest of honor at next year's fair, a move aimed at strengthening cultural relations between the two nations. During the meeting, both sides agreed on the importance of focusing on shared cultural aspects, noting that literature could be a powerful tool in fostering mutual understanding. "Cultural ties are strengthening between our countries, and we hope to build on this momentum in future fairs," Javadi added.



Iran's Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance Abbas Salehi (c) speaks with visitors and media representatives during a tour of the 36th Tehran International Book Fair, on May 8, 2025. ● TIBF

The 36th Tehran International Book Fair runs from May 7 to 17, 2025, under the theme "Read for Iran," providing a digital platform for non-attendees to purchase books online.

Int'l 100-Second Film Festival shaping future of Iranian cinema, cultural equity



Arts & Culture Desk

The 14th International 100-Second Film Festival, running from May 6 to 9, plays a key role in promoting cultural justice, particularly by supporting filmmakers from underrepresented areas, says Habib Ilbeigi, CEO of the Shahr Cinema Institute. Ilbeigi highlighted how the festival

provides an opportunity for creativity to flourish, especially with the accessibility of smartphones that enable filmmakers to produce high-quality short films. "In the past, such access was not possible," he remarked, emphasizing that the 100-second films, while not requiring heavy budgets, allow for powerful ideas and innovative concepts to come forward,

inn.ir reported. "Unlike the common misconception that short films are always low-budget, the cost can vary significantly based on production resources," Ilbeigi added. He also pointed out that while these films might not achieve the technical polish of feature-length films, it is the ideas and concepts that matter most. The festival, according to Ilbeigi, serves as an excellent venue for discovering emerging talents. With many students and young enthusiasts across the country, such festivals give filmmakers the chance to be recognized and introduced to the broader cinema community. "Many successful filmmakers who were discovered

at these festivals are now continuing their work in Iranian cinema," he said. Ilbeigi also touched upon the ongoing challenges in supporting young filmmakers after their initial success. "Holding festivals is just the beginning," he said. "Continuous support is crucial for their professional development." Emphasizing the importance of guiding filmmakers after they complete their first film, Ilbeigi stated that these individuals should not be left to navigate the industry on their own. "They need support in areas like technical skills and training," he added. "It is vital that after their first film, they continue to receive attention and resources to help them grow."

Drawing from his experience at the Farabi Cinema Foundation in 2017, Ilbeigi recalled how he advocated for the identification and support of emerging filmmakers. "These filmmakers should be offered scholarships to enhance their technical abilities and gain more experience in areas like screenwriting and co-production," he noted. Ilbeigi stressed the need for film festivals to go beyond simply showcasing films. "Festivals should act as platforms for identifying and selecting new talent. Producers and investors need to attend these events to find the best works for future projects," he said. He also pointed to a gap in the

current festival system, where many festivals only focus on awards ceremonies. "To ensure filmmakers continue to grow, they must receive ongoing support and training after their festival appearances," he added. Ilbeigi concluded by underlining the importance of talent-scouting events, where producers and investors should actively participate to identify new talent. He further reflected on the role of the Cinema Organization of Iran in promoting Iranian films at international festivals. While the direct involvement of the organization may have diminished in recent years, it still provides critical support, particularly in terms of distribution and international marketing.

Leo XIV elected as new pope

Pontiff laments 'technology, money, success, power or pleasure' valued over religion

Cardinal Robert Prevost has taken the name Leo XIV. The Chicago-born missionary who spent his career ministering in Peru and took over the Vatican's powerful office of bishops was elected the first pope from the United States in the 2,000-year history of the Catholic Church.

In his first words as Pope Francis' successor, uttered from the loggia of St. Peter's Basilica, Leo, 69, said, "Peace be with you," and emphasized a message of peace, dialogue and missionary evangelization. He wore the traditional red cape of the papacy — a cape that Francis had eschewed on his election in 2013. He spoke to the crowd in Italian and Spanish, but not English, AP reported.

During the Italian language section of his homily, Pope Leo XIV has lamented that there are many



Newly elected Pope Leo XIV, Cardinal Robert Prevost of the United States appears on the balcony of St. Peter's Basilica, at the Vatican, May 8, 2025. ● REUTERS

places where "technology, money, success, power or pleasure" are valued over Christian faith, which he warned, in many places, was "considered absurd, meant for the weak and unintelligent." The new pope said "believers are mocked, opposed, despised or at best tolerated and pitied." He said that often the figure of Jesus is "reduced only to a kind of charismatic leader or superman," and warned that this was not just among non-believers, but even among the baptised, who he said ended up living their lives in "defacto atheism". Pope Leo XIV's formal inaugura-



tion Mass to mark his appointment will take place in St. Peter's Square on Sunday May 18, the Vatican said in a statement on

Friday. The new pope, elected on Thursday, will hold his first general audience on May 21.



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