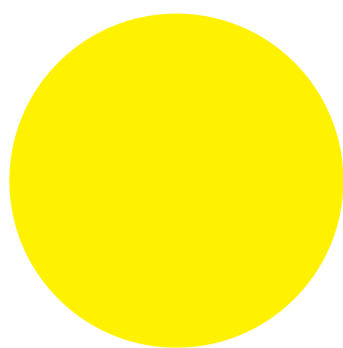


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Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian (c) and other participants stand for the country's national anthem at the opening of the Tehran Dialogue Forum in Tehran on May 18, 2025.

president.ir

Tehran, Manama set out to mend ties: Former diplomat

'Zero-tension strategy' key to regional development

I N T E R V I E W



As Iran doubles down on its neighborhood policy, questions arise over whether this recalibrated approach can pave the way for lasting regional stability. In a climate marked by shifting

alliances and external meddling, Tehran is walking a diplomatic tightrope, seeking to mend fences with Persian Gulf Arab neighbors while keeping broader strategic interests in play. Former ambassador Nosratollah Tajik sheds light on what is at stake as Iran tries to iron out long-standing differences, win over skeptical partners, and ward off pressure that threatens to throw its foreign policy off balance. Do not miss Iran Daily's deep dive into this critical moment in regional diplomacy.

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Piazza at the helm as Iran embarks on 'new project'

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Access route to Zingan Cave demanding restoration, recognition

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Tehran Int'l Book Fair closes with over 1.4m books sold

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Content of nuclear talks reflects US stance on Iran



By Mansour Haghighatpour
Iran's foreign policy expert

OPINION
EXCLUSIVE

Amid the ongoing nuclear negotiations between Tehran and Washington, US President Donald Trump has over the past several days made remarks that have drawn sharp criticism from senior Iranian officials who believe the United States' stance is contradictory and incoherent. Trump often fails to strike the right balance and does not project the gravitas expected from the leader of a global superpower. He makes frivolous and self-contradictory comments, sometimes even walking back his previous positions. Trump often speaks to play to the gallery, targeting the press and media with his remarks, while the actual message and subsequent actions often diverge sharply. These often-contradictory stances also show that deep divisions exist within the US political landscape, spanning Republican factions, Democrats, the Senate, the House of Representatives, and other institutions — each taking a different line. It is regrettable that a unified voice is not heard from within the US, whereas Iranian officials have consistently stood their ground and delivered a clear message, "We are not seeking nuclear weapons."

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President: Iran will never abandon own peaceful nuclear program

International Desk

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian said Tehran will never retreat from its peaceful nuclear program, no matter the pressure or threats it faces, dismissing US President Donald Trump's inflammatory rhetoric.

Pezeshkian made the remarks in an address to the sixth edition of the Tehran Dialogue Forum in the Iranian capital on Sunday.

He was responding to Trump's recent statement that the United States must ensure Iran does not obtain nuclear weapons while threatening to launch attacks targeting Iran's nuclear program. The president emphasized that as a member of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), Iran has the right to use peaceful nuclear technology and conduct nuclear research for various purposes, including health, agriculture, industry, and other vital sectors.

"The continued claims by others that Iran is pursuing nuclear weapons are nothing but a repetition of baseless and warmongering allegations," he stated. Pezeshkian also responded to Trump's branding of Iran as a regional threat

during his recent trip to West Asia. "Are we the ones bombing homes and killing scientists, scholars, and innocent people? Are we threatening the world with weapons, or are they, who have come to our region with threats?" he asked.

"Did we assassinate Ismail Haniyeh in Iran? Do we support such killings? It is the criminals who accuse others of destabilizing the world. This is the death of ethics in politics — and it is their doing."

Sowing discord in region

Foreign powers, according to the president, are deliberately sowing discord among regional states to justify their interference and looting.

"We've lived alongside our neighbors for thousands of years, but they try to divide us. They send weapons so that we fight among ourselves, and then come to the region under the pretext of peace to plunder our resources," Pezeshkian said.

Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi, who also addressed the conference, said the ongoing crisis in the Gaza Strip proves that the fate of the region should

not be tied to the decisions made at the think tanks of extra-regional powers.

"For the first time in decades, a historic opportunity has arisen for the initiative in regional developments to be in the hands of the countries of the region themselves, instead of external actors," he added.

"Our nations can open a new path for development, peace, and cooperation by reclaiming the right to self-determination and designing a future based on their collective will; a future that is shaped not in the think tanks of extra-regional powers but in regional capitals and based on local needs, values, and realities."

The top Iranian diplomat underlined that peace and security in the West Asian region are not possible without a "candid, deep, and comprehensive" review of the Palestinian issue.

Relations with Europe

He also referred to Iran's relations with Europe, saying that Tehran is ready to rebuild trust with European powers.

"Iran is ready, should it observe genuine will and an independent approach from the European parties to begin a new



Masoud Pezeshkian
president.ir

chapter in its relations with Europe," Araghchi said.

On Friday, senior Iranian diplomats met with counterparts from Britain, France and Germany for talks on the status of US-Iran nuclear negotiations.

European governments have recently threatened to trigger the "snapback" mechanism under the 2015 deal, which would reinstate UN sanctions in response to Iranian non-compliance – an

option that expires in October.

Following the US withdrawal from the Iran nuclear deal in 2018, relations between Iran and Europe began to deteriorate due to the Europe's failure to fulfill its commitments under the agreement. Iran's foreign minister in an article published by French weekly Le Point said the snapback mechanism was designed as a last-resort dispute tool and now is wielded as diplomatic leverage.

Araghchi rejects Witkoff's remarks as completely far from realities

'Uranium enrichment will continue in Iran'



Abbas Araghchi
MEHR

International Desk

The Iranian foreign minister on Sunday reacted to remarks by the US chief negotiator in nuclear talks with Iran about uranium enrichment, saying that they are completely far from the realities of negotiations.

"I think they are completely far from the realities of negotiations and enrichment will continue in Iran," Abbas Araghchi said.

"If they are interested in ensuring that nuclear weapons are not produced (by Iran), we are fully prepared, but if they have unrealistic demands, they will

not achieve any results," Iran's top diplomat added.

US special envoy to the Middle East Steve Witkoff said on Sunday that the Trump administration's "red line" in nuclear talks with Iran is that Iran cannot maintain any ability to enrich uranium.

"We have one very, very clear red line, and that is enrichment. We cannot allow even 1% of an enrichment capability," Witkoff told ABC's "This Week." "Everything begins... with a deal that does not include enrichment... because enrichment enables weaponization, and we will not allow a bomb to get here," he added.

Earlier this year, Witkoff had indicated that the US would accept Iran maintaining a limited enrichment capability, but the Trump administration has since hardened its public stance.

"We've delivered a proposal to the Iranians that we think addresses some of this without disrespecting

them," Witkoff said. "We want to get to a solution here, and we think that we will be able to."

Witkoff says negotiators will likely be meeting this week in Europe for another round of talks. "We hope that it will lead to some real positivity." Since April 12, Iran and the US have held four rounds of talks on Iran's nuclear program, with US President Donald Trump threatening Iran with military attack if no agreement is reached.

Negotiations have gotten into the expert level – meaning the two sides are trying to see if they can reach any agreement on the details of any possible deal. But one major sticking point remains Iran's enrichment of uranium, which Tehran insists it must be allowed to do and the Trump administration insists the Islamic Republic must give up.

Iranian officials have repeatedly announced Iran's non-negotiable position on uranium enrichment.

Barzani commends growing Tehran-Erbil ties under Pezeshkian



Nechirvan Barzani
IRNA

International Desk

President of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq Nechirvan Barzani said on Sunday that relations between Tehran and Erbil is constantly expanding under the administration of Iran's President Masoud Pezeshkian.

Addressing the sixth edition of Tehran Dialogue Forum (TDF) in Iran's capital, Barzani said relations between the two sides, especially in the field of economy, have seen significant progress after a visit by Pezeshkian to the Kurdistan Region in last September.

He described an expert-level meeting which is scheduled to be held in the northwestern Iranian city of Sanandaj in the near future as one of the main achievements of the Pezeshkian's trip.

Barzani said the Iranian president really believes that the countries of the region should further cooperate and help each other.

"We are witnessing expansion of Iran's relations, especially with the Kurdistan Region, after he (Pezeshkian) came to power as the president of the Islamic Republic of Iran," Barzani said.

He also said that his territory will not become a "source of threat" to neighboring Iran, stressing that great steps have been taken to secure the common borders.

"One of our key principles is not to allow the Kurdistan Region to become a base for threatening our neighbors, especially the Islamic Republic of Iran," he said.

Iran, Azerbaijan hold Aras-2025 joint military drill

International Desk

Iran and Azerbaijan launched a new joint military drill to boost border security and confront potential threats.

The "Aras-2025" exercise, running through May 21, involves Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) and Azerbaijani troops, IRNA reported.

The drill was being held in areas of Karabakh previously disputed with Armenia before Azerbaijan regained control in September 2023.

"This drill is a key step in boosting border security and confronting potential threats," said Brigadier General Vali Madani of the IRGC's Ground Force.

Last month, Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian made a visit to Baku, where he met his Azerbaijani counterpart Ilham Aliyev.

"Iran will make efforts to ensure that its relations with Azerbaijan are strategic across all spheres," Pezeshkian said at the time.

Tehran has been strongly opposed to the so-called Zangezur corridor linking Azerbaijan to

Turkey which would run along Iran's border with Armenia.

In November, special units of the IRGC's Ground Force and the elite divisions of the Azerbaijani Armed Forces launched a large-scale joint military exercise to enhance security cooperation and strengthen counter-terrorism efforts between the two nations.

The four-day drill, codenamed "Aras Joint Exercise," was held in the high-terrain regions of Aslan Duz County in Iran's northwestern province of Ardabil.

Israel launches 'extensive ground operations' in Gaza

The Israeli army announced "extensive ground operations" Sunday as part of its newly expanded campaign in the Gaza Strip, where rescuers reported dozens killed in a wave of Israeli strikes.

The announcement came just hours after Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu signaled Israel was open to striking a deal with Hamas that involved "ending the fighting" in the besieged Palestinian territory, AFP reported.

The military said that over the past day, troops had "begun extensive ground operations throughout the northern and southern Gaza Strip".

Israel claims its ramped-up campaign is aimed at freeing hostages and defeating Hamas, but as the early stages of the operation got underway Saturday, Israel and the group were entering indirect talks in Qatar aimed at hammering out a deal.

On the ground, civil defense spokesman

Mahmud Bassal told AFP that at least 50 people had been killed Sunday "as a result of ongoing Israeli air strikes since the early hours".

He said 22 people were killed and at least 100 others wounded in a predawn attack on tents sheltering displaced Palestinians in Al-Mawasi, in the southern Gaza Strip.

"All my family members are gone. There is no one left," said a distraught Warda al-Shaer standing amid the wreckage.



Mohammad Ali Rajabi
Cartoonist



IRISL defies sanctions, shipped 27m tons of goods last year

Economy Desk

Head of the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Lines (IRISL) announced that the company transported 27 million tons of goods during the last Iranian calendar year – 1403 (began on March 20, 2024), despite operating at the forefront of efforts to counter international sanctions.

Speaking at a press conference on Sunday hosted by the Tehran Stock Exchange, Mohammad Reza Modarres Khiabani said, "The company's vessels have a cargo capacity of 5 million dead-weight tons (DWT)."

"The shipping industry is at the forefront of confronting sanctions," he added.

Noting that the IRISL entered the capital market in 2008, the IRISL head highlighted that its primary shareholders are pension funds.

Stressing that the company operates not only in maritime transport but also in rail and road sectors, he said, "The non-maritime divisions of the shipping company are not necessarily tasked with supporting the maritime sector."

Emphasizing the company's regional and global standing, Khiabani added, "Our shipping company ranks first in the region and 18th globally in cargo transportation. Our fleet is active

in both the Caspian Sea and southern ports, and we also engage in logistical, operational, and support services."

The CEO further noted that 70% of the country's mariners are trained through the company's educational institute. "Except for 24 emergency personnel, all our employees are Iranian," he said, adding, "The number of foreign staff has declined since 2019, when there were 670 foreign workers. Today, nearly all personnel are Iranian."

Chabahar to become new shipping hub

Khiabani also revealed plans to expand operations in Chabahar, stating, "We aim to establish Chabahar as one of our key hubs." He underscored the port's strategic significance, saying, "Chabahar will play a vital role for Iran in the coming years. We are committed to its development, as it aligns with our social responsibility to advance the Makoran region."

Highlighting the company's international presence, he added, "Our offices in Europe, Russia, China, and India position us to play a pivotal role in the North-South Transport Corridor. However, its full development requires collaboration with governmental bodies. We remain a key stakeholder in this initiative."



The CEO also addressed operations in the Caspian region, saying, "We manage Russia's Astrakhan Port, which faced sanctions in recent years. Despite this, it remains one of Russia's most active Caspian ports."

Earlier, during a ceremony marking the 17th anniversary of the company's listing on the Tehran Stock Exchange, Khiabani said, "The IRISL, as the largest shipping fleet in the West Asia region, achieved a profit growth of over

90 percent in the year 1403 compared to the previous year, reaching 19 trillion Tomans (approximately \$228.9 million USD) in the year 1403 from 10 trillion Tomans (approximately \$120.5 million USD) in the year 1402.

Chamber head urges CFT ratification to facilitate FATF delisting



Economy Desk

Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture called on the Expediency Council to prioritize approval of the CFT bill, describing the approval as a critical step toward securing Iran's removal from the FATF blacklist.

Samad Hassanzadeh, the head of the chamber, welcomed the approval of Iran's recent accession to the United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime (Palermo Convention), stating, "We expect the Expediency Council to prioritize approving the CFT bill as well, so that the groundwork can be laid for Iran's complete removal from the FATF blacklist."

On Wednesday, the Expediency Council conditionally approved Iran's

accession to the Palermo Convention following three general council sessions and five joint commission meetings.

Speaking at the opening session of the Chamber's Representatives Council on Sunday, Hassanzadeh said, "After the Expediency Council revisited the process of joining FATF-related conventions, renewed hopes emerged among economic stakeholders and the broader private sector community for reducing transaction risks and enhancing transparency in the country's banking and financial systems."

"Accession to the Palermo Convention is a prudent measure to mitigate transaction risks and improve the transparency of Iran's banking and financial framework. This marks a critical step toward removing Iran from the FATF blacklist," he emphasized. Hassanzadeh added that "full cooperation with the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), even amid sanctions, will yield significant achievements in facilitating commercial re-

lations and reducing transaction costs."

"We expect the Expediency Council to place the approval of CFT on its agenda to secure Iran's full exit from the FATF blacklist," he concluded.

Iran's accession to these two conventions remains the sole obstacle to the country's membership in the FATF. Resolving the issue would enable Iran to soon exit the FATF's "blacklist," which outlines recommendations for combating financial crimes, including terrorism financing and money laundering.

With one bill now approved, the council's decision on the second bill (CFT) must be finalized to remove remaining barriers to Iran's FATF membership.

Since 2009, when Iran began preliminary steps to join FATF, its economy has endured 16 turbulent years. Even at the height of oil and banking sanctions due to non-membership, Iran incurred significant costs in financial, banking, and trade transactions.

Greater efforts called to boost Iran's global halal market standing

Economy Desk

Head of the Alborz Province Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines, and Agriculture called for intensified efforts to elevate Iran's current standing in the global halal products market.

During a press conference at the inaugural National Halal Industry Conference held at the Tehran International Exhibition, Parham Rezaei highlighted Iran's significant potential in the halal sector, adding, "Despite the country's extensive infrastructure in food and pharmaceutical industries, our share of this global market remains below one-tenth of one percent," as reported by ISNA.

Halal refers to products and practices permissible under the Islamic law, particularly regarding food and drink prepared in accordance with religious guidelines. "Iran's position in the global halal products market must far exceed its current state," he emphasized.

"Over the past 1.5 years, the development of the halal industry has been seriously pursued by the Alborz Chamber of Commerce, with numerous expert meetings held alongside the National Standards Organization, the Halal Research Center, and other relevant bodies. This initiative, supported by the Alborz Province House of Industry, Mining, and Trade, as well as the Iran Chamber of Commerce and the National House of Industry, Mining, and Trade, has now entered its implementation phase," he said.

"The first specialized conference will

take place on May 21, coinciding with World Standards Week, alongside the Agrifood Grand Exhibition."

According to Rezaei, the event will serve "as a platform for synergy among economic stakeholders and a roadmap for Iran's export opportunities in halal products."

He underscored Alborz Province's strategic advantages, including 4,000 industrial and production units, over 160 national food industry brands, and a 65% share of Iran's pharmaceutical sector, positioning it as a prime candidate to lead halal exports.

The Alborz Chamber chief also reported, "Over 30,000 containers of vegetables and perishables were exported from the province last year, bolstered by its geographical proximity to the capital."

Criticizing current global halal export leaders, Rezaei remarked, "It is regrettable that non-Muslim nations dominate halal exports, while we, despite our immense potential, remain marginalized. A key goal of this conference is not only to highlight the issue's importance but to draft a clear, strategic roadmap for Iran's strong entry into the global market."

He expressed confidence that "with sustained efforts, hosting international halal product expos at the Expo level and establishing Iran as a regional leader in this industry are achievable goals. The Alborz Chamber stands ready to collaborate fully with the private sector and government."

Meanwhile, Ebrahim Ebrahimi, the di-



rector-general of the legal and parliamentary affairs office at Iran's National Standards Organization, addressed the halal industry's global financial scale during the press conference, saying, "In 2022, the industry's global turnover reached \$6 trillion, with projections of \$8 trillion by 2025. Yet Iran's share remains minimal, at less than 1%."

Stressing the need for harmonized standards, he added, "While halal standards are rooted in jurisprudential principles, they must be designed for acceptance across all nations, particularly Islamic countries."

"The top five halal export leaders are non-Muslim nations, while the largest importers are Muslim-majority countries," Ebrahimi further noted.

Also, Arman Khaleqi, the secretary-general of Iran's Chamber of Industry, Mine and Trade, described halal certification as a "premium standard" that fosters public perception of halal goods and services as higher quality.

"By addressing sanctions-related challenges, we can aspire to thrive in halal exports. This is a vast market whose opportunities we continually overlook," he concluded.

Content of nuclear

Iran, they reiterate, is prepared to provide full guarantees to the international community and allow oversight, on the condition that its right to enrichment is recognized, a reasonable level. Iran should maintain 20% enrichment, which is essential for producing medical isotopes for over a million patients and for research reactors in Tehran. The country has invested billions of dollars to reach this point,

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weathering tough sanctions and making heavy sacrifices. This is not the time to roll back what has been achieved just because Trump wants. Iran cannot sit around waiting for others to supply its medical isotopes, and cannot put its research activities on hold just to see if someone eventually gives it what its people need. The Islamic Republic's stance is both logical and justified. This position is consistent across

the board — from the Leader to the negotiating team and the general public. But as for the US, its disjointed statements are a sign of internal pressure and discord. The Trump administration is attempting both to settle internal scores and to silence Israeli criticism of a possible deal with Iran. Iran is pursuing diplomacy with Europe as well. On Friday, Iranian officials met in Turkey with political officials of the UK, France,

and Germany, which are the European partners of the 2015 Iran nuclear deal from which Trump withdrew in 2018. The discussions in Turkey covered Tehran-Washington nuclear talks. Now, while it is necessary for Iran to mend ties with Europe and clear up any lingering doubts—there are doubts regarding the Ukraine war, which Iran needs to clarify for Europe—there is little chance that Europe can leave an impact on the Iran-

US talks or a possible deal. The reason is clear as the Americans have essentially rendered Europe powerless, and Europe has drifted toward a fault line in its relationship with the US. Due to Trump's erratic conduct, Europe appears to be pulling away from Washington and might increasingly tilt toward the East and China in the future. Although Europe lacks the resolve to directly counter US policy, its role may still serve as a stabiliz-

ing factor in the ongoing diplomatic efforts. Yet, what truly matters is the content of the negotiations taking place between US and Iranian representatives. Tehran will wait to see what's actually put on the table — that's what will ultimately reflect Washington's final stance. The US should also remember that it owes Iran, as it reneged on its obligations while Tehran had fulfilled its own.

Tehran, Manama set out to mend ties: *Former diplomat* **'Zero-tension strategy'** key to regional development

INTERVIEW Like most countries, Iran's foreign policy rests on a three-pronged approach: its neighbors, the region, and the wider world. Tehran has been striving to strike a balance among these three pillars, aiming to push forward both its short- and long-term interests. The interplay and mutual influence among these elements make it essential to draw the line on priorities and red lines. Shedding light on the policies shaping these dynamics and their reciprocal effects, Nosratollah Tajik, former Iranian ambassador to Jordan and regional affairs expert, provided his insights in the following interview.

IRNA: Over the past year, the Iranian Foreign Ministry has made the neighborhood policy and engagement with Arab states of the Persian Gulf a top priority. How do you assess this approach? Has it managed to build trust and dial down tensions in the region?

TAJIK: Every country's foreign policy is built on three pillars: neighborhood, regional, and global strategies. These three layers feed into each other, with each exerting influence and responding in turn. In Iran's case, the global and regional dimensions have traditionally carried more weight, which has inevitably rubbed off on its neighborhood policy. In fact, you can't break down Iran's neighborhood diplomacy without considering its regional and international relations.

Each of these levels is indispensable and cannot stand in for the others. They each operate in their own sphere and carry their own weight. To think that a neighborhood policy could take the place of a regional one, or that regional ties could substitute for global engagement, is simply misguided. They are interdependent and must move forward in tandem. Only a well-crafted strategy that brings together these three levels into a balanced triangle can roll out an effective, dynamic foreign policy that maximizes national interests.

We must recognize the unique role of neighborhood policy and how it can play out in practice, especially since each level has its own theoretical underpinnings. If we lose sight of this, then when a government, for example, puts regional policy front and center, questions would arise about the fate of global relations. You can't swap out smooth international relations for a solely regional approach, nor can you slot in neighborhood policy as a replacement. Moreover, it's not enough for a government to talk up such priorities; It needs both theoretical and practical foundations, with all sectors pulling in the same direction rather than canceling each other out.

Iran has 15 neighbors, each with diverse economic, political, social, and cultural characteristics. Our current focus is on the Persian Gulf, a region of immense geostrategic value due to its energy resources and centrality to global industry. The Persian Gulf's importance is self-evident. The current Iranian administration has made a push to bring down surrounding tensions — a wise move. If Iran can hammer out a zero-tension strategy with its southern Arab neighbors



Nosratollah Tajik

along the Persian Gulf, the region stands to reap the rewards of greater development. But this isn't something that can fall into place just because one or even all countries wish it. It requires a string of prerequisites, groundwork, and political will — or at the very least, harmony. If any country plays out of tune, that harmo-

ny will not materialize, and the region won't get off the ground in terms of development and modernization. While some countries have made headway in these areas, security remains the bedrock of progress, and not all have achieved it. Regional transformations are also shaped by broader Middle Eastern developments.

The Pezeshkian administration's focus on neighbors is a positive step, but it coincides with upheavals in the Middle East, especially in Palestine, the Occupied Territories, the West Bank, Gaza, Syria, and Lebanon. These tensions have set the stage for

perceptions — among both neighbors and outside powers — that Iran, having lost some of its external deterrence, is now in a weaker position. This has opened the door for Iran to draw closer to its southern Persian Gulf neighbors. Yet, it's still early days; the Middle East remains volatile and unpredictable. It's not as simple as a figure like Trump dropping in, making waves, and expecting all his ideas to take root. We all remember his first term, when he visited Saudi Arabia and joined in the sword dance. Many believed his proposals would come to fruition, but the events of October

2023 showed the region heading in a different direction.

In my view, Iran's neighborhood policy is still in its infancy. The groundwork is being laid out, and preliminary agreements have been struck. Trust-building measures between Iran and the southern Persian Gulf states are getting off the ground, though the foundation isn't yet solid and could still be knocked off course by other developments. Still, it seems that the parties involved have the will to see this through. Whether all issues are within their control remains to be seen. It will take time.

Iran's relationships with regional states are far from uniform. With some, like Oman, there's a strategic partnership and deep friendship; with others, relations are chilly. What should Iran do to step up its game and bring more countries on board?

There are many reasons for the unevenness in Iran's ties with its neighbors. The southern Persian Gulf states have widely varying histories of political, social, and economic interaction with Iran. Some, like Oman, have deep-rooted ties, while others are newer on the scene, having only emerged as nation-states since the 1970s. In short, Iran's relationships with these countries run the gamut. Yet, they are all part of a collective mechanism — the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), a six-nation bloc established after Iran's



After delivering a keynote speech, Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi (walking) greets the top-ranking guests attending the fourth round of the Arab-Iranian Dialogue Conference held in Doha, Qatar, on May 12, 2025.

● MASHREGH NEWS



You can't swap out smooth international relations for a solely regional approach, nor can you slot in neighborhood policy as a replacement. If we lose sight of this, then when a government, for example, puts regional policy front and center, questions would arise about the fate of global relations. Moreover, it's not enough for a government to talk up such priorities; It needs both theoretical and practical foundations, with all sectors pulling in the same direction rather than canceling each other out.



Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi (front-L) is welcomed by an unidentified Omani official (front-C) upon his arrival at Muscat, Oman, on May 11, 2025, for negotiations with US Mideast envoy Steve Witkoff (not pictured).

● IRANIAN FOREIGN MINISTRY

Islamic Revolution. The GCC often bands together to present a united front against Iran. When it comes to improving or expanding these ties, two theoretical models are usually put forward: collective cooperation or bilateral relations. So far, collective cooperation between Iran and its southern neighbors hasn't taken off, despite numerous proposals. Instead, most ties have been handled one-on-one, which, while somewhat successful, hasn't led to any real breakthroughs. On paper, there may be plenty of protocols and agreements, but in practice, there's been little tangible progress. This is partly due to the foreign policy inclinations of these states and the structure of the GCC, where Saudi Arabia calls the shots as the "big brother" to the other five. Thus, neither through collective nor bilateral means have we managed to forge stable, flourishing relations that could set the stage for balanced regional political, social, and economic ties. Unfortunately, neither bilateral relations nor joint summits between the northern and southern shores of the Persian Gulf have yielded a dominant discourse or a model based on complementary economic advantages. This gap has given rise to mutual suspicion. Some of this stems from Iran's regional and global policies, and some from the southern states. To date, I haven't seen any study that weighs up each side's role in this lack of progress. Iran can certainly make a difference by fine-tuning its policies, and the southern Arab states can also play a key role. The most decisive factor, however, is the involvement of external powers. Unfortunately, their approach is rarely constructive; Instead, they tend to stir up trouble and drive wedges between countries. Take Trump's recent visits to Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the UAE: Beyond his inflammatory rhetoric, he sought to pit these countries against each other and talked up one side at the expense of the other. This is hardly a recipe for regional cooperation. Given our historical baggage, we still face unresolved issues, but we have no choice but to move past this and shift gears toward constructive engagement between the northern and southern Persian Gulf.

Bahrain is one regional country where Iran currently has no embassy. What do you see as the main challenge in restoring ties, especially given recent contacts? Are the two sides on a path to fully resume relations?

Bahrain's situation among the six southern neighbors is truly unique and complex. Part of this is due to historical, territorial, and geographic ties, and another part is rooted in cultural, religious, and past connections. Bahrain is the only country in the region ruled by a Sunni minority over a Shia majority. This is a legacy of the close ties that once bound Iran and Bahrain. Thus, managing this relationship requires a different approach. With most countries, the golden rule is good neighborliness, but with Bahrain, we need to go above and beyond. Finding the right formula for our foreign policy — especially our neighborhood strategy — is crucial. This will spill over into our regional and international



The map shows the geographical locations of the members of the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).
● STRATFOR

standing, provided we take into account both sides' sensitivities and concerns. For example, co-operation should raise the bar for the political and social rights of Bahrain's Shia majority, allowing Bahrainis to sort out majority-minority issues internally, while Iran keeps out of their domestic affairs and maintains a balanced, dignified relationship with both the government and the people. The relationship should be such that it doesn't cast a shadow over Iran's ties with Bahrain or other countries. Given the recent meetings and contacts — some of which got underway during the previous Iranian administration and carried over into the current administration — it appears both sides are on track to rebuild ties and move past previous difficulties. The aim is to put in place a stable, practical relationship free from third-party interference. Domestic conditions in Iran and the regional environment, which has been somewhat imposed on Iran, also play a role. God willing, we'll see where this leads.

What benefits would Iran stand to gain by getting back on track with all its neighbors?

The first benefit of normalized

relations is a safer environment for Iran. Every country seeks not only internal security but also secure borders and, beyond that, the political and psychological security that flows from stable, dignified ties with neighbors. Good neighborliness and thriving relations can go a long way toward ensuring these layers of security, making the country less vulnerable to threats from, or through, its neighbors. This is the bare minimum. To move beyond that, we must recognize that each neighbor has unique economic, social, and cultural advantages. When people can move freely and cross borders without obstacles, such human exchanges pave the way for new models of cooperation — especially in trade and economics, but also in culture. These forms of cooperation will, in turn, spill over into the political sphere. As a result, such relations take a load off the country's foreign policy; When ties with neighbors are routine, calm, and constructive, the foreign policy team no longer needs to get bogged down in every minor issue, allowing it to focus on bigger challenges. The benefits of good neighborly relations should not be underestimated; they can have a profoundly positive impact across

the political, social, economic, cultural, and even human levels.

Donald Trump, the US president, made the rounds in Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the UAE, with Iran and the nuclear deal high on the agenda. What message do you think the Iranian foreign minister's visits to these countries ahead of Trump's trip sent, and what were these countries expecting from Trump in talks about Iran?

I've already touched on Trump's trip in earlier answers. We live in a region that is underdeveloped, or at best, just starting out on the path to development. All of us here are classified as developing countries. The southern neighbors see a strong Iran as a potential hegemon, and thus are keen to keep Iran in check. Regional developments have mostly played out to Iran's detriment, creating what they see as an opportunity to redefine relations with the Arab world. In my view, much of the foreign minister's recent travel was a result of Iran's policy in this period. Unlike during the JCPOA era, when outreach to the southern Persian Gulf states was limited — partly because they unrealistically wanted a direct seat at

the negotiating table, which Iran opposed — we also dropped the ball tactically by not keeping them in the loop. Naturally, they sourced their information elsewhere and mounted opposition to the JCPOA, working to undermine it. However, in this new era, Iran has rolled out a more effective strategy to inform them. Recent consultations with China, Russia, Europe, and Arab states fit into this approach, and were less about Trump's trip per se. Trump's visit was not just political; his main goals were economic, aimed at drumming up investment. In reality, his trip was more about opening up markets for American goods and services. Meanwhile, the region's countries are flush with cash — both because of Iran's absence from the oil market and their own ambitions to break into global markets in energy, goods, new technology, AI, and digital industries. These are the opportunities Trump is zeroing in on: tapping into their financial resources and sealing deals for engineering services to give the US economy a shot in the arm.

The article first appeared in Persian on IRNA.



US President Donald Trump (C) takes a group photo with the leaders of the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states and the group's secretary general at a summit held in the Saudi capital, Riyadh, on May 14, 2025.
● gcc-sg.org

Unfortunately, the approach of external powers is rarely constructive in the region; Instead, they tend to stir up trouble and drive wedges between countries. Take Trump's recent visits to Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the UAE: Beyond his inflammatory rhetoric, he sought to pit these countries against each other and talked up one side at the expense of the other. This is hardly a recipe for regional cooperation.

Piazza at the helm as Iran embarks on 'new project'

Sports Desk

Italian head coach Roberto Piazza took charge of the Iranian national volleyball team's training camp on Saturday ahead of the two major international events.

Having endured a dire run of results over the past two years, Iran will be looking for a fresh start under Piazza at the upcoming Volleyball Nations League in June, before heading to the Philippines for the Men's World Championship in September.

"I'm so excited and thrilled to finally be here. I want to start a new project with Iran and work hard toward our ultimate goal of qualifying for the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics," Piazza said upon arrival in Tehran on Thursday alongside his fellow-Italian number two Tomaso Totolo.

Piazza, 57, signed a two-year contract with the Iranian Volleyball Federation in January, with the option of a two-year extension.

The Iranian team's preparation began under assistant coach Mohammadreza Tondraevan in Tehran in late March, but the Italian could only join up with his players after seeing out the remainder of his club duty with Powervolley Milano in the Italian top flight.

The former Dutch national team boss named Iran's provisional 30-man squad for the VNL campaign last week, before the list is reduced to 14 players for the first week of action – starting June 11 in Rio de Janeiro.

Opposite-spiker Amin Esmailnejad, who had a prolific campaign with Skra Belchatow in the Polish PlusLiga, will again be the man to watch in the rejuvenated Iranian squad, while outside-hitter Pouria Hosseinkhanzadeh and setter Javad Karimi are also expected to play a pivotal role for the team af-



ter impressive seasons with Lube in the Italian Serie A and Brazil's Minas Tênis Clube, respectively. Iran will begin its VNL campaign with formidable tests against volleyball powerhouses Brazil and USA, followed by games against Slovenia – VNL semifinalist in June – and Ukraine. Iran will visit Belgrade, Serbia, for Week 2 of the preliminaries, starting with an encounter against the host on June 25.

Piazza's side will then play Argentina and Germany before the Italian reunites with his former team, the Netherlands, in the Serbian capital on June 29. The third and the final week of the preliminary phase in Gdańsk, Poland, will see Iran square off against European powerhouses Poland (July 16) and France (July 19), who met in the Olympic final last year, either side of an all-Asian battle against China.

Iran will hope to be in contention for a place in the VNL Finals when going head-to-head with Bulgaria in their final Week 3 game on July 20. The top eight teams of the preliminary-round table will progress to the VNL Finals – starting with the quarterfinals on July 30 in the Chinese city of Ningbo.

Some easier contests are on the cards for Piazza's men at the World Championship group

stage, where Iran is pitted against the Philippines as well as African teams Egypt and Tunisia in Pool A.

Iran will take on reigning African champion Egypt in their opening game on September 14, and then faces Tunisia two days later.

The Asian powerhouse will conclude the group fixtures against the host on September 18, with the top two in the pool table advancing to the round of 16.



Iranian national team players and coaching staff are pictured during a training session in Tehran, Iran, on May 17, 2025.

● MASOUD AKBARI/volleyball.ir

AFC Women's Futsal Asian Cup:

Head coach Soleimani dedicates World Cup spot to 'Iranian women'



Sports Desk

Iranian girls may have fallen short of retaining the title at the AFC Women's Futsal Asian Cup but the two-time champion still left China with a something to cheer about, as the third-place finish secured a spot for the country at the Women's World Cup in November.

Maral Torkaman – the top scorer in China with six goals – netted twice either side of a Nataran Moqimi's strike to help Iran defeat the host 3-1 in Hohhot on Saturday and join Japan and Thailand in booking a ticket for the inaugural world showpiece in the Philippines.

Iran head coach Forouzan Solei-

mani hailed the achievement as something that is built on the collective efforts of the women's futsal community back home.

"This World Cup qualification is a credit to all of futsal women in Iran and is invaluable for them," she said. "It is a huge community full of girls and women who love the sport, all across the country and in provinces far away from the cities. They play with passion and love."

"They support us every day and give us strength, and we do what we do for them."

The 55-year-old added that Iran's status as a traditional powerhouse in the continent can be attributed to establishing women's futsal earlier than

most other countries in Asia, starting around 20 years ago, which has since flourished into a network of around 100 teams across three divisions.

"All 32 provinces have their own leagues, and each team is led by experienced female coaches," she added.

Soleimani also paid tribute to her charges for bouncing back from the disappointment of the 3-2 loss to Japan in the semi-finals and looked ahead to a decent World Cup debut come November.

"Our aim was to defend our title, so we were mentally down after the last-four defeat," she said. "What we did was to talk to them and motivate them, in-

cluding the mental aspect."

"We knew how China would play and we asked our players to play powerfully and with high pressure; the match was very hard, but we were more experienced and created more opportunities, which led to our victory."

"Our players compete regularly in domestic leagues and we also have frequent training camps, so this is also what we will continue to do to prepare for the World Cup."



Iran's Nastaran Moqimi (11) celebrates her goal with teammates during a 3-1 victory over China at the AFC Women's Futsal Asian Cup in Hohhot, China, on May 17, 2025.

● FFIRI

Fakhrian, Kazemian join Persepolis

Sports Desk

Mojtaba Fakhrian and Mohammad-Amin Kazemian, two of the finest players in the newly-finished Persian Gulf Pro League season, signed for Persepolis, the Tehran Reds announced on Saturday.

Fakhrian, 22, is widely regarded as one of the young prospect in the Iranian top flight after bagging four goals in 23 league appearances

for Shams Azar – including the winner in the shock 1-0 victory over Tractor in December, as well as the spectacular bicycle strike during the 3-2 home win against his new employers in March. Kazemian also had an impressive campaign with Iralco, as the 28-year-old winger scored nine goals, and provided his teammates with three assists in 28 games to help the club finish eighth in the table.

Persepolis had also signed Congolese wide forward Thievy Bifouma, who registered five goals and assists apiece for Esteghlal Khuzestan, last week.

The new recruitments are part of what promises to be a summer of shakeup in the Persepolis squad under Turkish head coach Ismail Kartal, after his team failed to reach the knockout phase of the AFC Champions League Elite and was beaten by Sepahan in the

Hazfi Cup last 16, while finishing third in the league table with 60 points – eight adrift of champion Tractor.

This was a worst league position in 10 seasons for the Reds, who dominated the Iranian club football for nearly a decade with seven top-flight titles – including domestic doubles on two occasions – while reaching the final showpiece of the Asian elite clubs' competition twice.



● fc-persepolis.com

Access route to Zingan Cave demanding restoration, recognition



alibaba.ir

Iranica Desk

The Director General of Ilam Province’s Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts Organization said that the access route to Zingan Cave, Iran’s only open cave and one of the most beautiful tourist attractions in the province, requires renovation and funding. Farzad Sharifi, in an interview with ISNA, said, “This cave, with its narrow tunnels, stunning blue stalactites, and cool climate, is an excellent destination for nature lovers and tourists.” He also highlighted that this natural site has been registered on Iran’s National Heritage List. He noted that the cave is located in the Salehabad

district of Mahran. While Mahran experiences high temperatures during summer, the air inside the open cave remains very cool, and the humidity helps to forget the outside heat. However, the access road to Iran’s most beautiful open cave needs improvement. Sharifi mentioned that the cave is located 52km southeast of Ilam. Its access road is straightforward but requires repair and renovation, and funding must be allocated for these improvements. He added that many people associate caves with darkness, but Zingan Cave is not enclosed or dark. Instead, it is a natural gorge, an open space at both ends, and does not resemble



the typical caves we are familiar with. This cave is renowned for its pleasant, rather cold

weather — hence, it is also called Behesht Cave, meaning “Heaven.” Many eco-tourists believe that

what appears to be a cave is, in fact, a gorge, due to its open ends and natural formation.

Despite Salehabad and the wider Mehran district having warm, dry weather, the interior of the cave is very damp, fostering the growth of plants and vegetables typical of humid, rainy habitats. High water levels, along with vestibules and numerous icicles, have created a sort of natural forest in the middle of the plain, where ferns, algae, and lichens thrive. Interestingly, the temperature difference between outside and inside the cave exceeds 20 degrees Celsius, making it most suitable to visit during spring and summer. Passing through Zingan Cave, or the gorge, offers a highly adventurous experience. The estimated length of the passage is about six

kilometers. Throughout the journey, water flows along the pathway, requiring visitors to wade through it at times. Certain sections narrow significantly, adding to the challenge and excitement of the trek. Along the route, visitors can see two waterfalls, which must also be crossed. To reach this remarkable yet lesser-known site, located ten kilometers from Salehabad, travelers should head west from Ilam for about fifty kilometers. From Salehabad village to the cave entrance, there is a five-kilometer dirt road. After about forty minutes of travel, visitors will arrive at the cave’s entrance.

Discovering Negel village, its iconic Holy Qur’an

Iranica Desk

Negel is a village located 65km from Sanandaj, situated between Sanandaj and Marivan in Kurdistan Province. It lies in a valley, from the south of which the Shoshtar River passes through. Negel shares borders with Hasanali Mountain to the north, Pol Charmo Mountain to the southeast, Ghezakan to the south, Kani Charmo Valley and Kurah Mianeh to the northwest, and Kachul Valley to the southwest, with Rasani Valley restricting it to the northeast. The residents of Negel speak Kurdish in the Sorani dialect.

Historical context

Negel has a rich history intertwined with the broader history of Kurdistan Province. Historically, this region has been a cradle of Kurdish culture and resistance, with its communities maintaining their language, traditions, and nomadic pastoralist lifestyle over centuries. The village’s strategic location in the fertile valley made it an important point for trade and local exchanges. Local legends and archaeological findings suggest that the area has been inhabited since ancient times, with some structures and artifacts pointing to a history that predates the Islamic era. The community’s resilience and cultural preservation have shaped Negel into a symbol of Kurdish identity and heritage in Kurdistan.

Negel Qur’an

Negel Qur’an is a large Holy Qur’an

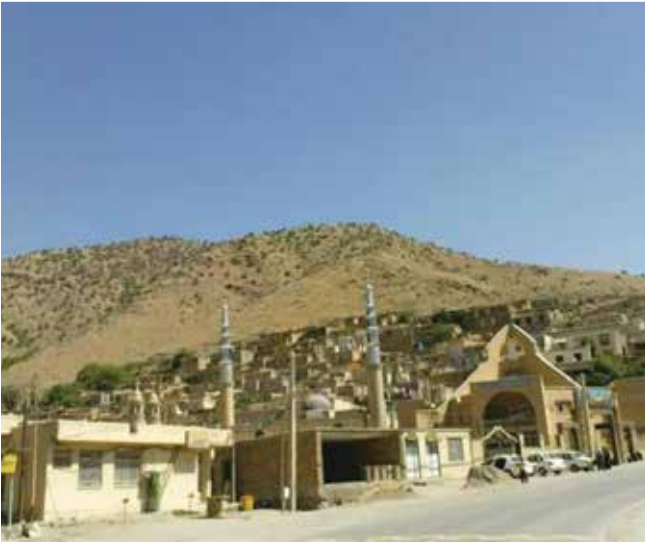
written in Kufic script on thick, brown paper, commonly known as “deer skin” because of its texture. The residents attribute the creation of this Holy Qur’an, dating back to the 4th century AH (10th century CE), to Othman ibn Affan, the third Rashidun caliph. Currently, it is preserved in the central mosque of the village. The story is quite captivating! Legend has it that once, while grazing sheep in the region, a shepherd was captivated by a beautiful flower. When he uprooted it, a hole revealed a box inside. Unable to extract the box alone, he sought help from locals. They found inside the box a gigantic Holy Qur’an, which was considered a divine blessing. In gratitude, the villagers established a mosque originally named Nogol (a new flower or blossom), which over time evolved into the name Negel.

Negel Museum

Built in 2013 by the Cultural Heritage Organization of Kurdistan Province, Negel Museum includes two sections: the Holy Qur’an Sector and an Anthropology Museum featuring artifacts from the past 50 to 200 years. The museum’s collection, provided by local residents, includes jewelry, agricultural tools, and traditional household items, offering insight into the area’s cultural and livelihood history. Today, the museum is housed within the main yard of the central mosque, serving as a testament to the village’s rich heritage.



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Tehran Int'l Book Fair closes with over 1.4m books sold

Arts & Culture Desk

The 36th Tehran International Book Fair wrapped up Saturday evening, drawing more than six million visitors over its 11-day run. Final figures released at the closing press event showed total sales reached just over \$8 million, from both in-person and online platforms. More than 1.4 million books were sold during the fair, which opened on May 7 under the slogan "Let's Read for Iran."

This year's edition saw a marked shift toward online sales, which jumped 38% from last year and edged out physical sales for the first time, IRNA reported.

The spokesperson for the fair Ebrahim Heidari described this as a "notable shift" in reader behavior. Publishers covering health, nutrition, psychology, and sports sciences made a strong showing. According to organizers, their presence was "more visible than ever." The rise in titles on healthy living and wellness points to a growing interest among Iranians in knowledge-based lifestyle choices. One of the most visited booths belonged to Hatami Publishing, which focuses on mental health, nutrition, and sports science. The publisher drew large crowds with its university and general-interest offerings — especially with over 90 versions of mandala therapy books aimed at

stress reduction. The method is seen as "one of the best" in its field. SAMT Publishing, known for academic titles, saw strong demand for textbooks on psychology, education, and physical education. A standout was its widely sought-after volume on the "fundamentals of sport science." Roshd Publishing, a long-established name in health education, also reported a sharp rise in visitors. With books aimed at teachers, parents, and teens, Roshd helped push forward community knowledge on wellness. The increased turnout at health-focused booths reflects what one publisher called a "clear move" toward public engagement with topics tied to physical and mental well-being.



Iran's 'The Lovely Sky' awarded at Brazil's Animatiba

Arts & Culture Desk

"The Lovely Sky," an animated short by Iranian director Amir Mehran, has bagged the top jury prize at the fourth edition of Brazil's Animatiba festival. The 14-minute drama, produced by the Institute for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults in Iran, draws on the trauma of war through a poignant, minimalist lens. It took the jury's breath away, Mehr News agency reported. The closing ceremony, held on May

14, 2025, drew a lively crowd of animation fans from across the globe. The festival's official trailer, which opened with an image of Iran's map, hinted at the international flavour of this year's entries. Held in Curitiba from May 8 to 14, the biennial has quickly made a name for itself as a hub for bold storytelling and innovative animation. This year's lineup featured works from five continents. It has also been screened in the 63rd Zlin Film Festival in the Czech city of Zlin, the 19th World Festival



of Animated Film Varna in Bulgaria, the 16th Bueu International Short Film Festival in Spain, and the 39th International Festival of animation cinema, comics, and games in Italy.

Iran's Pouya Saraei, Azerbaijani Alim Qasimov team up in cross-cultural music project

Arts & Culture Desk

Iranian composer and Santur (hammered dulcimer) virtuoso Pouya Saraei announced the release of his latest musical project, a collaboration with celebrated Azerbaijani vocalist Alim Qasimov. The piece, titled 'Mastam,' showcases a fusion of Persian classical music and Azerbaijani mugham traditions, Mehr News Agency reported. Saraei, a professor at Tehran University of Art and a prominent figure in Iranian music, composed and arranged the piece, also performing on the Santur. Qasimov, known for his emotive vocal improvisations and recipient of the International Music Council-UNESCO Music Prize in 1999, lends his voice to the project. 'Mastam' features contributions from a diverse group of musicians from Iran, Turkey, Azerbaijan, and Europe. Saraei's recent endeavors include a collaboration with British-Iranian singer Sami Yusuf, performing mystical compositions with an ensemble of international



musicians. He also participated as a solo performer in a three-night performance of Howard Shore's 'The Lord of the Rings' score in Istanbul. 'Mastam' is now available on major streaming platforms, offering listeners a rich tapestry of cross-cultural musical expression.

Iranian theater troupe to stage in St. Petersburg



A scene from Iranian theatrical play 'Hiss', directed by Esmail Shafiee
● theater.ir

Arts & Culture Desk

An Iranian theater group is set to perform at one of Russia's most esteemed cultural gatherings. Led by Esmail Shafiee, a director and faculty member at the University of Arts in Tehran, the international troupe Chaika will perform their multilingual production 'Hiss' at the 31st KukArt International Festival of Puppet and Synthesis Theater in St. Petersburg, INA reported. The production brings together talent from Iran, Azerbaijan and Russia. Mina Emami and Nasim Fakhri-Moghadam from Iran join forces with Shoghi Huseynov of Azerbaijan and six local actors from St. Petersburg.

'Hiss' has already turned heads on the global circuit. The play has bagged two top prizes at earlier festivals—Best Duet Acting for Mina Emami and Farzaneh Meydani, and Best Directing for Shafiee. This is not the troupe's first time in the spotlight at KukArt. Last year, their experimental piece 'Mozart, Salieri, Macbeth and Others' earned them the festival's Best Experimental Performance Award. Behind the scenes, Shafiee is supported by Mohammadreza Rahgozar as assistant director, Afsaneh Gholizadeh in makeup design, and Golnaz Golshan on costume design. KukArt runs from June 22 to 30 in St. Petersburg.

Notice of tender for export sale No. Z/1404/04
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Analysis%		
%Fe Ave	66.50	
%FeO	Min 24	Max 28
%P Max	0.05	
%S Max	1.1	
%SiO2 Max	3.0	
%Al2O3 Max	0.7	
%CaO Max	0.9	
%MgO Max	2.5	
%Moisture Max	5.0	
Size ave	80%<0.48 mm	

GOLGOHAR MINING & INDUSTRIAL CO.

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Analysis %		
%Fe	65.00	Min
%FeO	1.0	Ave
%P	0.05	Max
%S	0.01	Max
%SiO2	3.5	Max
%Al2O3	0.7	Max
%CaO	0.9	Max
%MgO	2.5	Max
CCS (kg/p)	Ave 250	
8-16 mm%	Min 90	
-6 mm%	Ave 5	
A.1%	Max 3.8	
T.1%	Min 95	
Prosity%	19-24	
Reducibility%	Min 90	

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