

Iran, E3 to re-engage in high-stakes talks in 'coming week': *Report*

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Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian (L) and Energy Minister Abbas Aliabadi (C) attend a meeting on tackling the country's water crisis in Tehran, on July 20, 2025. [president.ir](http://president.ir)

### Sidelining ethnic minorities will fan flames of war in Syria

By Javad Salehi  
Regional affairs analyst

#### OPINION EXCLUSIVE

The situation in Syria, shaped by multiple variables and a turbulent history, cannot be understood through a single lens. Ethnic complexity, identity struggles, and regional and international forces have woven a dense web—making every event here a launching point for a chain reaction.

To properly address Syria's current state, it must be viewed within a broader structural context. The downfall of Bashar al-Assad's government sowed the seeds of today's societal fractures. In effect, its collapse opened a Pandora's box of long-simmering ethnic and religious grievances. In the present climate, the Sunni and Salafi fundamentalist factions—long opposed to Assad—have seized the moment to exact historical retribution on other groups, including Alawites and Druze.

Meanwhile, the existing political leadership in Syria lacks genuine decision-making power, as power was effectively handed to it by external forces. Though formally recognized and even supported by some nations, the current government has been unable to stabilize the country.

Ahmad al-Sharaa's government lacks legitimacy. It has failed to unify Syria's diverse people under a single governing canopy or to secure the rights of its various communities. As a result, different ethnic and religious groups now find themselves in limbo. The Kurds, for instance, are caught in a precarious state, uncertain about their future under Sharaa's rule, and buying time as they calculate their relationship with Damascus.

The Druze share that fate, constantly anxious about their place in Syrian society. Tribal and sectarian lines continue to fracture too—rivalries and competing demands tearing communities apart. Even traditionally dominant Alawite regions, once central to Assad's rule, are now gripped by fear over their future, as threats against them have steadily escalated. Sharaa ascended to power backed by foreign patrons and underpinned by an informal regional and global consensus. Though he campaigned on national sovereignty, he has consistently acted late to emerging crises. Even if his intentions were to resolve issues, his government has shown itself so ineffective that it has emerged from the start unable to handle multiple conflicts. From his first days in office, clashes involving armed factions erupted across Syria, and more recently a major crisis broke out in Suwayda Province. The root of these crises lies in Sharaa's flawed approach: rather than tackle Syria's complex, deep-seated internal problems through inclusion of all ethnicities, tribes, and religious groups, he has leaned heavily on external powers—Israel, Turkey, the US, and Europe—to solve them. That approach has left him outmaneuvered and incapable of resolving Syria's internal issues. [Page 2 >](#)

As long as this one-track strategy defines Sharaa's governance, such flare-ups will continue.



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# Iran, E3 to re-engage in high-stakes talks in 'coming week': *Report*

## International Desk

Iran and three European powers – Britain, France and Germany – are reportedly planning to hold fresh talks on Tehran's nuclear program in the coming days.

The European troika, known as the E3, "are in contact with Iran to schedule further talks for the coming week," a German diplomatic source said, following tensions between the sides over Europe's decision to trigger the so-called snapback mechanism.

The mechanism allows for the return of anti-Iran sanctions suspended under the 2015 nuclear deal from which the US withdrew in 2018 and the European parties failed to fulfill their commitments.

Iran's Tasnim news agency also reported that Tehran had agreed to hold talks with the three European countries, citing an unnamed source.

Consultations are ongoing regarding a date and location for the talks, the report said, falling short of specifying the exact time and venue of the high-stakes negotiations.

Iran's Foreign Ministry has yet to comment on the reports.

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi held a call Friday with his British, French and German counterparts and

European Union foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas.

During the call, the Europeans warned that if Iran did not return to talks soon, they would activate the mechanism. Araghchi told his European counterparts that they have no grounds for reactivating UN sanctions.

"If EU/E3 want to have a role, they should act responsibly and put aside the worn-out policies of threat and pressure, including the 'snap-back' for which they (have) absolutely no moral (or) legal grounds," Araghchi said on X.

Iran and the United States held five rounds of nuclear negotiations through Omani mediators before Israel launched its 12-day aggression against Iran on June 13. US President Donald Trump's decision to join Israel in striking Iranian nuclear facilities effectively ended the talks which were set to resume on June 15. The aggression against Iran claimed the lives of more than 1,000 Iranians, most of them civilians.

Despite the aggression, both Tehran and Washington have signaled willingness to return to the table, though Tehran has said it will not give up its right to enrich uranium – a demand by the US for signing an agreement with Iran. "Iran must never be allowed to ac-



quire a nuclear weapon. That is why Germany, France and the United Kingdom are continuing to work intensively in the E3 format to find a sustainable and verifiable diplomatic solution to the Iranian nuclear program," the German source said.

"If no solution is reached over the summer, snapback remains an option for the E3," the German source said. Iran has on numerous occasions dismissed reports that claim it is pursuing nuclear weapons.

Iran's foreign minister said in an interview with China's CGTN that Tehran should see the US "genuine will" for resumption of nuclear talks, which ran into a snag following the US-Israeli aggression against Iran last month. "If we are still not convinced, it is be-

cause we should see the other side's genuine will — a will to reach a win-win solution," Araghchi said.

"Our nuclear program is solely for peaceful purposes, and we are certain about this. We have no problem with sharing this with others; however, this can only be achieved through negotiation," he said.

Araghchi asserted that Iran proved the peaceful nature of its nuclear program by signing an agreement with world powers in 2015, which was praised by the world as a "major diplomatic achievement."

But suddenly, Washington decided to pull out from the deal in a "regrettable decision," Araghchi said, adding that "everything we are witnessing today stems from that withdrawal."

## Leader's aide, Putin meet on regional issues, nuclear program



## International Desk

Russian President Vladimir Putin held a meeting with Ali Larijani, top adviser to Iran's Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei on situation in Middle East and Iranian nuclear program, among other issues. Larijani "conveyed assessments of the escalating situation in the Middle East and around the Iranian nuclear program," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said of the unannounced meeting.

Putin expressed Russia's "well-known positions on how to stabilize the situation in the region and on the political settlement of the Iranian nuclear program," he added.

No further details were immediately available about the surprise visit by Larijani to Moscow. Iran and Russia enjoy a close diplomatic and political relationship.

## Army superseded air defense systems damaged in Israeli onslaught: *Iran commander*

## National Desk

Iran said on Sunday it had replaced its air defense systems damaged during Israel's 12-day aggression last month.

Iran's Army Operations Chief Rear Admiral Mahmoud Mousavi said Israel sought to destroy Iran's defense capabilities, and some of the country's defense systems were damaged in the aggression.

"Some of our air defenses were damaged, this is not something we can hide, but our colleagues have used domestic resources and replaced them with pre-arranged systems that were stored in suitable locations in order to keep the airspace secure," Mousavi said.

Iran's air defense network includes systems like the domestically built Bavar-373 and Khordad-15, designed to counter missiles and aircraft. Iran also installed Russia's S-300 air defense systems in 2016.

Mousavi said Iran's radar and air defense systems were among the first targets of Israel in its 12-day assault, but the Air Defense Force personnel remained at their stations around the



clock and confronted the enemy. Mousavi also noted that by using the existing air defense systems and the new replacements, the Iranian forces managed to cover the country's skies, and thus the enemy failed to achieve its objectives.

He further said that Israel did not enter the war alone and that the United States and NATO helped it.

"The capacity of the Iranian Armed Forces is beyond what the illegitimate Zionist regime can counter. However, the supporters of this usurping regime have been aiding it for months by gathering intelligence, and we consider the US complicit in the Zionist

regime's crimes," he pointed out. On June 13, Israel launched an unprovoked aggression against Iran, killing more than 1,000 people, including military commanders, nuclear scientists, and ordinary civilians.

More than a week later, the US also entered the war by bombing three Iranian nuclear sites in a grave violation of international law.

In response, the Iranian Armed Forces targeted strategic sites across the occupied territories as well as the al-Udeid air base in Qatar, the largest American military base in West Asia. Iranian fire killed at least 28 people in Israel.

## Tehran urges UNSC to register 12-day war report as official document

## International Desk

Iran's permanent mission to the United Nations sent a report to the Security Council detailing crimes committed by the Israeli regime during its last month aggression against Iran and demanded the registration of the report as an official document.

In separate letters addressed to UN Secretary-General António Guterres and the current rotating President of the Security Council, Asim Iftikhar Ahmad, the mission presented a comprehensive account of violations, particularly those targeting women and children, during the 12-day military aggression in June.

The report was also sent to the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, as well as the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). Referring to the loss of lives and widespread destruction of civilian infrastructure, the letter underscores the collective responsibility of the Security Council and the international community to hold those responsible for the blatant aggression. According to the report attached to the letter, 1,100 civilians — including 132 women and 45 children — were killed in the Israeli attacks, which began in the early hours of June 13.



The report noted that the strikes were carried out with deliberate targeting of civilian and vital infrastructure — including hospitals, media outlets, and peaceful nuclear facilities — with substantial military, intelligence, and political support from the United States and several Western countries.

It includes names and biographical details of some victims, including 30 schoolchildren, families who lost all their members, and casualties from strikes on Hakim Children's Hospital, kindergartens, public parks, Evin Prison, and ambulances.

The mission condemned the aggression as grave violations of the UN Charter, international law, the Geneva Conventions, and international human rights standards. It called on the Security Council to address the structural impunity of the Israeli regime and its allies, urging decisive action against those responsible.

## Sidelining ethnic minorities ...

As a former terrorist leader, Sharaa has systematically sidelined rival groups, consolidating his power. Today, most factions that once opposed him have been stripped from the power structure. He believes the best way to stabilize Syria is by leaning on foreign forces. He is seeking ties with Israel and European nations under Turkey's mediation. Moreover, he is pushing to align Syria closer to Persian Gulf Cooperation Council states like Qatar and Saudi Arabia.

Sharaa is trying to entrench his rule through supranational powers. As long as that remains his paradigm, internal order will be neglected. Without broad public support—derived from genuine political inclusion, a constitutional consensus, and representation—his

grip on Syria will only weaken as his incompetence compounds.

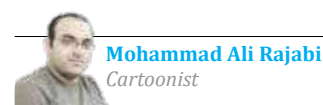
Inevitably, Sharaa's closeness to foreign powers such as Israel, which historically have acted against Syria's national interest, will stir more domestic discontent and cast him as a traitor. That will further destabilize his standing in Syria.

Sharaa may gain some traction internationally—for networking, lifting sanctions, or shaping public perception—but ironically this foreign-facing strategy will intensify Syria's internal unrest, especially while various ethnic and doctrinal groups remain caught in uncertainty, fear, and hostility toward Damascus.

Lastly, Iran's position vis-à-vis the Sharaa regime should not be overlooked. Given Sharaa's ideological

leanings—shaped during his time leading terrorist groups—no optimistic relations with Iran should be expected.

He appears intent on tying many of his own shortcomings and failures to an external actor to deflect blame, and sees Iran as the prime scapegoat. Given that he lacks the political capital or capability to amplify the Syria-Israel conflict, and is in no position to frame another foreign adversary within the Western or European context, the Islamic Republic would become the lowest-hanging fruit. It would therefore not be surprising if, in the coming months, Mr. Sharaa increasingly shifts the blame for Syria's domestic crises onto Iran, ramps up hostile rhetoric, and even forges alliances that align with efforts to contain Tehran.



Mohammad Ali Rajabi  
Cartoonist





# Iran launches exports of superb bovine embryos to Africa, Central Asia

Economy Desk

Two export agreements for sending Iranian high-yield cattle embryos to African and Central Asian countries were finalized, said the CEO of a company affiliated with the Academic Center for Education, Culture and Research (ACECR).  
Announcing the news, Mohammad Mehdi Naderi added that, "Negotiations with other countries are also underway," IRNA reported.  
Naderi pointed to the launch of the country's largest center for producing high-yield cattle embryos via the IVF (in vitro fertilization) method, stating, "The production capacity of this new unit is 10,000 embryos per year, and for the first time in Iran, the export of superior cattle embryos to various countries has commenced."  
"This center is equipped using cutting-edge global technologies and in accordance with the latest international standards," he added.



20-fold rise in calf production  
Naderi elaborated on the advantages of IVF technology for breeding high-yield cattle, saying, "Under normal circumstances, only one calf per year can be obtained from each elite cow. However, using this technology enables the production of up to 20 calves from a single elite cow per year."  
"We perform weekly egg collection from outstanding domestic cows as well as top imported breeds from Germany, Denmark, Italy, and France," he continued.  
"These eggs are fertilized in the laboratory and develop into embryos within seven days. The seven-day-old embryos are frozen and then im-

planted into the uteruses of ordinary cows, thus enabling the propagation of superior genetics within the country's livestock herds."  
The company's CEO pointed to the interest from various countries in the advanced technology, stating, "At international exhibitions, including Iran Expo, we have received requests from neighboring countries such as Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as African countries like Kenya, Tanzania, and Côte d'Ivoire. Companies from Russia, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan have also expressed readiness to purchase elite Iranian embryos."  
"Currently, two export agreements with African and Central Asian countries have reached the implementation stage, and negotiations with

other countries continue. Despite some interruptions due to regional war conditions, we are pursuing export development and initiating limited-capacity joint collaborations," Naderi said.

Three-year plan for livestock industry

Naderi addressed the country's need to develop modern technologies in the livestock industry, stating, "A three-year program has been formulated to transform livestock farms and enhance superior genetics within the country's herds."  
Emphasizing the importance of governmental and banking support, he said, "Livestock farmers, due to a shortage of working capital, require

low-cost facilities and financial support. In this regard, negotiations have been held with Bank Keshavarzi of Iran and the Fund for Supporting the Development of the Livestock Industry, and memoranda of understanding have been signed."  
The official also discussed the role of IVF technology in increasing productivity and developing dual-purpose breeds, saying, "These breeds, in addition to producing quality milk, have a high capacity for meat production, and developing these breeds is part of the country's upstream programs. With the necessary support, self-sufficiency in meat production and reduced dependence on imports can be achieved in a short period."

## Tehran-Ankara and Tehran-Herat trains set to roll in coming months

Rail services to Tajikistan's Merv, Dushanbe now operational



Economy Desk

The head of the Islamic Republic of Iran Railways announced plans to launch a Tehran-Ankara train within the next two months and a Tehran-Herat train in the coming month.

Speaking on Sunday at a ceremony for investment in the passenger rail fleet, attended by the Minister of Roads and Urban Development, Jabar Ali Zakeri referenced the recent launch of the Tehran-Van train after a five-year hiatus, adding that the launch of trains for travel to the cities of Merv and Dushanbe in Tajikistan has also begun, IRNA reported.  
Zakeri expressed hope that the new rail services would foster stronger ties between nations.

The deputy minister of roads and urban development also highlighted the development of tourist trains, noting that Iran's railway system has historical significance and that tourism-oriented rail activities could generate substantial revenue and appeal.

He emphasized that while the freight sector aims to achieve projected capacity, enhancing the economic viability of passenger rail remains critical. However, he identified the primary challenge as the "mismatch between rail infrastructure and fleet development."

Zakeri stressed, "Annually, 150 to 300 kilometers are added to the national rail network, yet government funding for fleet expansion remains inadequate."

He underlined that the "policy of maximizing private sector participation and investment requires foundational government support."

The CEO further noted that under existing approvals, "300 passenger wagons will join the network this year with state support."

Regarding prior private investments, he stated, "100 freight wagons (of 600 planned) have been integrated into the rail network. For passenger wagons, a contract with a Chinese partner has been finalized, with financial and technical issues resolved."

Zakeri expressed optimism about "adding 40 to 50 wagons monthly to the rail network."

Rail transport expansion

Addressing the ceremony, Minister of Roads and Urban Development Farzaneh Sadeq Malvajerd emphasized that, "Rail transport expansion is a top priority in joint economic commissions with neighboring countries," adding that efforts focus on "ensuring uninterrupted rail connectivity despite internal bottlenecks and border challenges."

The minister underscored that, "Improving the freight volume-to-capacity ratio will significantly advance Iran's development," citing the country's "regional advantage in cost-effectiveness, safety, and logistical ease."

Referring to passenger rail shortcomings, Sadeq Malvajerd acknowledged that the country is "far from achieving the target of 500 locomotives and 900 passenger wagons, necessitating private-sector involvement."

She concluded that, "Unwarranted interference in private-sector activities must be avoided."

## Government tax revenues surge by 52%



Economy Desk

In the past Iranian calendar year (began on March 20, 2024), the Iranian government's total tax revenues reached 1,229,000 billion tomans (approximately \$14.13 billion), representing a 51.7% growth compared to the previous year.  
Official reports from the country's statistical authorities indicate that total government tax revenues amounted to 1,229,000 billion tomans during the 12 months of 1403, ISNA reported.  
This is while total tax revenues

in the 12 months of 1402 (began on March 20, 2023) were 810,782.4 billion tomans (approximately \$9.32 billion), indicating that the government's tax revenues last year grew by 51.7% compared to the year before.

Mohammad Hadi Sobhaniyan, the head of the Iranian National Tax Administration (INTA), announced, "The tax-to-GDP ratio increased from 5.7 percent in 1400 (2021-22) to 8.3 percent last year, and tax's share in the public resources of the budget has risen from below 30 percent to about 50 percent."

## Iran Fisheries Organization forecasts over \$574m investment this year

Economy Desk

A senior official from Iran's Fisheries Organization forecasted investment volumes exceeding \$574.7 million in the current year.  
The deputy for planning and resource management of Iran's Fisheries Organization Eisa Golshahi said, "Fisheries and aquaculture represent an unparalleled capacity for poverty alleviation, deprivation reduction, and wealth creation," adding that investments in the current year (began on March 20, 2025) are projected to surpass \$574.7 million, IRNA

reported.  
Golshahi highlighted fisheries' role in the marine-based economy and its capacities, noting, "There remains a significant gap between the current capacity of fisheries/aquaculture and its potential for development."  
Emphasizing fisheries and aquaculture as interdisciplinary fields requiring cross-sectoral collaboration to realize their potential, Golshahi asserted, "This sector holds unique capabilities for poverty eradication, deprivation reduction, and wealth generation, with substantial investments made in

recent years."  
He cited the shift toward marine-based development and production of marine fish/shrimp as impactful recent measures, saying, "Last year saw \$402.3 million in investments, predominantly from private sources. This year, investments are expected to exceed \$574.7 million."  
Golshahi identified shrimp and marine fish farming as primary coastal activities, noting successful cooperation in this domain – particularly the implementation of the first marine fish value chain in free trade zones.



"Technology transfer and resource utilization progress faster in free zones. However, enhanced collaboration

is essential to amend existing laws/regulations and remove legal impediments," he stressed.



# Israel scheming to bring 'irreparable damage' to region: *Former envoy*

## INTERVIEW

Following the latest Israeli strikes on Syrian territory, regional tensions in West Asia have once again ratcheted up. These attacks, carried out under the cloak of support from certain Western powers and the silence of international bodies, amount to a blatant violation of Syria's national sovereignty and signal the ongoing expansionist agenda of Tel Aviv. In recent days, government facilities and public infrastructure in Syria have been hit, sparking reactions from several regional countries. Some analysts argue these moves could pave the way for new geopolitical shifts in the region. The ongoing escalation, especially given Syria's fragile security situation and the complex interplay of local and international actors, may well force a rethink of existing alliances and balances. While some states have called for a joint response, observers are expected to keep a close eye on developments in the coming weeks.

Hossein Noushabadi, regional affairs analyst and former Iranian ambassador to Oman, shed light on the matter in the following interview:



Hossein Noushabadi

**The Islamic Republic of Iran has always warned of Israel's expansionist and belligerent policies, maintaining that these ambitions will not stop at Palestine, Lebanon, or Iran. What is Israel driving at with its attacks on Syria at this juncture?**

**NOUSHABADI:** The regime's expansionist and aggressive nature knows no bounds. Its strikes on Syria are, quite simply, a violation of that country's sovereignty and a blatant breach of the UN Charter and international law. From the outset, Iran has stated that it will stand alongside the Syrian people, unequivocally supporting their national sovereignty and territorial integrity. What we witnessed recently is the targeting of government sites, public locations, and an ongoing occupation of parts of Syria, which is condemned in and of itself. It's clear to everyone that this occupying and aggressive regime poses the gravest threat to peace, stability, and security in the region.

This regime, backed up by US military and political aid, as well as support from Western countries such as Germany, France, and the UK, has put international peace and security on thin ice through unprecedented and ruthless means. What's now unfolding in Syria is the direct consequence of global bodies turning a blind eye to this regime's genocide, warmongering, and drive for domination. These criminal acts have not only heaped misery on the people of Syria, but their destructive impact has rippled across the entire region. Our expectation is that all regional countries, at this critical juncture, step up to the plate and fulfil their shared obligations to maintain peace, security, and stability. By mobilizing regional and international capabilities through entities like the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and the Arab Inter-Parliamentary Union and by bringing pressure to bear on the United Nations and other global bodies, they should stand against the occupation regime's warmongering, expansionism, and divisive tactics. The aim must be to stop West Asia from suffering irreparable damage due to American-Israeli scheming. Today, it is plain to see that the Israeli regime, by sowing discord and animosity, seeks to pit ethnic and religious groups against each other, both inside Syria and throughout the broader region. The objective is to fan the flames of insecurity and violence. It is therefore vital for all regional states to stand up for Syria's national sovereignty and territorial integrity, shield minority rights, and push back against any move toward the country's disintegration. The rogue and unrestrained Israeli regime recognizes only the language of force. That's why all nations in the region must join forces to bring an end to these reckless aggressions and root out this fabricated regime. The regime's racial discrimination, aggression, and genocidal policies



Security members carry belongings as they leave the damaged Syrian Defense Ministry building hit by several Israeli air strikes, in Damascus, Syria, on July 16, 2025. ● GHAITH ALSAYED/AP

can only be eliminated through collective unity, and this cancer must be cut out as soon as possible, before it spills over to other nations.

**Controversy flared in early July 2025 over a billboard in Tel Aviv featuring the leaders of eight Arab states and proclaiming a revival of the Abraham Accords. It seemed that Ahmed al-Sharaa and Syria would turn out to be at the top of this list, but the latest Israeli incursion may have thrown a wrench into these plans. What's your take?**

Given Israel's brazen violation of Syria's territorial integrity, it seems unlikely this pact or alliance will come together as envisioned. Regional states have wised up as their recent remarks show they are not falling for these divisive ploys. Presently, a

group with questionable legitimacy has seized power in Syria, but the key issue is not about the Syrian government itself, but safeguarding that country's national sovereignty and territorial integrity.

We have always stated our support for the Syrian people. These efforts to set peoples of the region at each other's throats — whether under the guise of counterterrorism or with the aim of fomenting divisions among different ethnic and religious communities — are all part and parcel of the aforementioned joint American-Israeli scheme. Any state that signs up for this agenda will eventually find itself caught in the crossfire. Many countries that previously held their tongue now speak more reasonably as they realize that if Israeli expan-

sionism and aggression are not checked, it won't be long before others are also dragged in. Recent comments by Turkey's President — calling, for the first time, for an end to Israeli attacks on Yemen, Lebanon, Syria, and Iran — reflect a growing sense of alarm, possibly setting the stage to put the brakes on Israel's belligerent, expansionist policies. It appears unlikely that Israel's current projects will bear fruit given recent developments.

**With the fall of Bashar Assad's government, Syria's internal situation has entered a new chapter, drawing in certain regional countries with their own agendas. How are the recent Israeli attacks likely to play out for these countries' presence?**

Those who

cheered on the collapse of Assad's government now see that not only did security and stability fail to take hold in Syria and the region, but the situation has actually gone from bad to worse. Violent extremism — especially directed at religious minorities such as the Alawites — lays bare this reality. Far from benefiting Syria or the region, these developments have only emboldened Israel to target Syria's infrastructure and vital resources by trampling on international law. The regime shows no sign of letting up, and regional countries will come away empty-handed from this warmongering. The time has come for these states to take stock of their policies if they wish to save the region and their own populations.

*The interview first appeared in Persian on IRNA.*



Multiple Israeli air strikes hit the Ministry of Defense building at Umayyad Square in Damascus, Syria, on July 16, 2025. ● SALWAN GEORGES/ THE WASHINGTON POST

Today, it is plain to see that the Israeli regime, by sowing discord and animosity, seeks to pit ethnic and religious groups against each other, both inside Syria and throughout the broader region. The objective is to fan the flames of insecurity and violence. It is therefore vital for all regional states to stand up for Syria's national sovereignty and territorial integrity, shield minority rights, and push back against any move toward the country's disintegration.



# Battle in Sweida

## Where Israel, Turkey clash over Syria's trade routes

 By Malek al-Khoury  
Journalist  
**OPINION**

With the fall of former Syrian president Bashar al-Assad and the ascent of Ahmad al-Sharaa (Abu Muhammad al-Jolani) to power in Damascus — with backing from Turkey — Syria has shifted from an integral part of the Axis of Resistance to contested terrain between rival regional projects. Two competing visions have emerged: Turkey's Development Road, a proposed transport corridor connecting Basra to Turkey and onward to Europe; and Israel's Peace Line, which aims to link the Persian Gulf to the Mediterranean via Jordan and the occupied port of Haifa.

### Regional battle for Syria's southern gateway

These infrastructure corridors are not mere economic initiatives; They are the battlegrounds of a new regional order. Sweida, long viewed as peripheral, has become a strategic flashpoint in this war of logistics. This Druze-majority province has become a potential gateway to a regional war over trade and transportation corridors. These plans extend into neighboring Lebanon, too. The strategic weight of Sweida stems from its location at the nexus of these rival projects. The province could serve as a vital artery for Ankara's overland ambitions or as a chokepoint threatening Tel Aviv's efforts to bypass Turkish and Iranian territories. Thus, the vital southern Syrian governorate of Sweida suddenly finds itself on the frontline — not due to a dispute over a localized conflict, but because it is a strategic key in the railway battle where roads become borders and pipelines turn into fronts. Meanwhile, Sweida's Druze religious leadership issued a strongly worded statement rejecting the use of their region as a bridge for foreign projects that ignore their sovereignty or existence. The statement declared, "Those betting on the violation of Sweida will lose. The mountain's fate will be decided in the mountain itself." The elders emphasized Sweida's geography as a crossroads and demanded the opening of land corridors with Jordan and with areas held by the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) in the north.

### Old-new Katz project

In November 2018, then-transport minister and current Israeli Defense Minister Israel Katz unveiled at an international transport conference in Oman the Railway of Peace project, aiming to connect Persian Gulf countries to Israel via Jordan, as part of a strategic plan to boost economic integration and link West Asian markets to Israeli Mediterranean ports. Katz — who arrived less than two weeks after Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's surprise meeting with the late Sultan Qaboos in Muscat — presented the project as a massive infrastructure undertaking involving railway lines linking the port of Haifa in northern Israel to Persian Gulf cities via the Jordanian capital Amman, with the



● THE CRADLE

possibility of connecting Palestinians to Haifa port to facilitate trade exchange. Katz said during the conference: "This project is not just a bridge for transport, but a bridge for peace and economy among the region's peoples. We aim to create faster, cheaper, and safer transportation, opening new horizons for economic and political cooperation." He added: "The Railway of Peace will allow avoiding security risks at the Strait of Hormuz and Bab al-Mandab and open vital alternatives for shipping goods between the Persian Gulf and Europe." The project stands out as an important alternative, allowing Persian Gulf states to bypass security threats at the Strait of Hormuz and Bab al-Mandab, providing a safer and cheaper land route for goods transport, with significant economic benefits for all participating countries, including Jordan, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, other Persian Gulf states, and potentially Iraq and Syria. The project also plans to establish modern logistics centers, such as the cargo zone in Irbid, Jordan, to boost the local economy. Katz highlighted the project's importance for Palestinians, saying, "By connecting Palestinians to Haifa port, we give them a chance to participate in global trade, which will bring them economic and social benefits."

The inclusion of Jordan and the occupied Palestine was floated as economic sweeteners. But the true aim was regional hegemony through infrastructure. While Katz's statements were laced with euphemisms about peace and development, the underlying logic was clear: Use transport infrastructure to normalize Israel's regional role while locking out Iranian and Turkish competitors. Despite most Arab states involved lacking official diplomatic relations with Israel, the project received clear American support, with then US envoy Jason Greenblatt considering it part of Washington's efforts to push the Deal of the Century for regional peace.

### Goeconomics as political warfare

Alongside the Turkish-Israeli competition over railway corridors through southern Syria, Saudi Arabia's ambitious project NEOM — along with the infrastructure system linked to the UAE's Al-Ain 2030 — emerges as a third actor reshaping the geopolitical game. The project aims to transform northwestern Saudi Arabia into a global economic and logistical hub, including railway lines and transport networks extending from the heart of the Arabian Peninsula to the Red Sea, inevitably repositioning regional trade routes. This shift directly ties into Tel Aviv's plans to build a railway

line stretching from Eilat (adjacent to NEOM) to Aqaba, then to southern Syria, and onward to Beirut or Tripoli. This functions as a land-based extension of NEOM — and a strategic complement to Riyadh's ambition to bypass chokepoints like the Strait of Hormuz by linking the Persian Gulf to the Mediterranean. Here, Sweida becomes an indispensable strategic node that could serve as the gateway crossing from Syria's occupied Golan to Kurdish-controlled areas in Syria and Iraq. The Israeli media and officials have at times referred to this as the route of David's Corridor — a corridor that reimagines Israel's role in the region through infrastructural dominance, fusing settler colonialism with logistics. In other words, NEOM's rise as a maritime-land axis enhances the geopolitical value of the Aqaba-Sweida line, pushing the occupation state to be more stringent. For Tel Aviv, any Turkish expansion southward is an existential threat to these designs. For Ankara, securing Sweida is essential to asserting influence over the Levant's southern flank.

### Sweida becomes battlefield

Before setting his sights on Sweida, Sharaa's rise was marked by brutal campaigns in the coastal region, including massacres of Alawite communities that cleared space for Turkish-backed dominance. With those opera-

tions complete, attention turned south toward the Druze stronghold. In the post-Assad vacuum, Sharaa chose Sweida as the base for consolidating power and advancing Turkey's project — with the aim of securing Syria's southern border crossings, creating strategic depth, and extending influence toward Lebanon and Jordan. Turkey backed this trajectory through direct and indirect agreements with Syrian factions aligned with it, particularly Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), which now plays a central role in administering areas from Idlib to the eastern Hama countryside, where the desert meets the roads leading south toward Sweida. Ankara's ambitions have also expanded toward Lebanon — especially the northern city of Tripoli and its surroundings — where it has built social, political, and economic influence through networks of institutions, associations, and newly naturalized citizens. The port of Tripoli, which Turkey hopes to transform into an alternative to Beirut's port, is envisioned as a key station along the regional transit route. Sharaa based part of this conviction on secret understandings made in the Azerbaijani capital, Baku, involving Syrian and Israeli figures under unofficial Turkish auspices. These understandings were interpreted as implicit approval for his southward expansion, in exchange for guarantees against the return of Iranian influence and Turkish commitments not to threaten Israeli security. But this ambition triggered an Israeli red line. Netanyahu warned of the emergence of a "new southern Lebanon" in Syria. Katz declared, "The Druze are our brothers, and we will not leave them alone facing this expansion," signalling readiness to intervene. Soon after, Israeli warplanes targeted Damascus and Sharaa-aligned units advancing south. Ankara, meanwhile, has publicly reasserted its own red lines. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan stated after a cabinet meeting on July 17: "We did not agree to the division of Syria yesterday, nor today, and we will categorically not agree tomorrow. Those who descend from the well, holding on to the rope

of Israel, will sooner or later realize what a serious mistake they have made." In reality, there is no open confrontation between Turkey and Israel, but a tacit division of spoils, with each pursuing its own corridor ambitions while managing the conflict through proxies and backchannels.

### Vegetable truck incident

The security explosion in Sweida did not arise from an explicit political decision but was triggered by a seemingly minor incident: A dispute over the cargo of a vegetable truck at a checkpoint. Intelligence information later revealed that this incident was the spark igniting a wide clash involving local Druze groups, Sharaa's HTS-led factions, and remnants of armed groups unofficially reintegrated on the ground with indirect Turkish support.

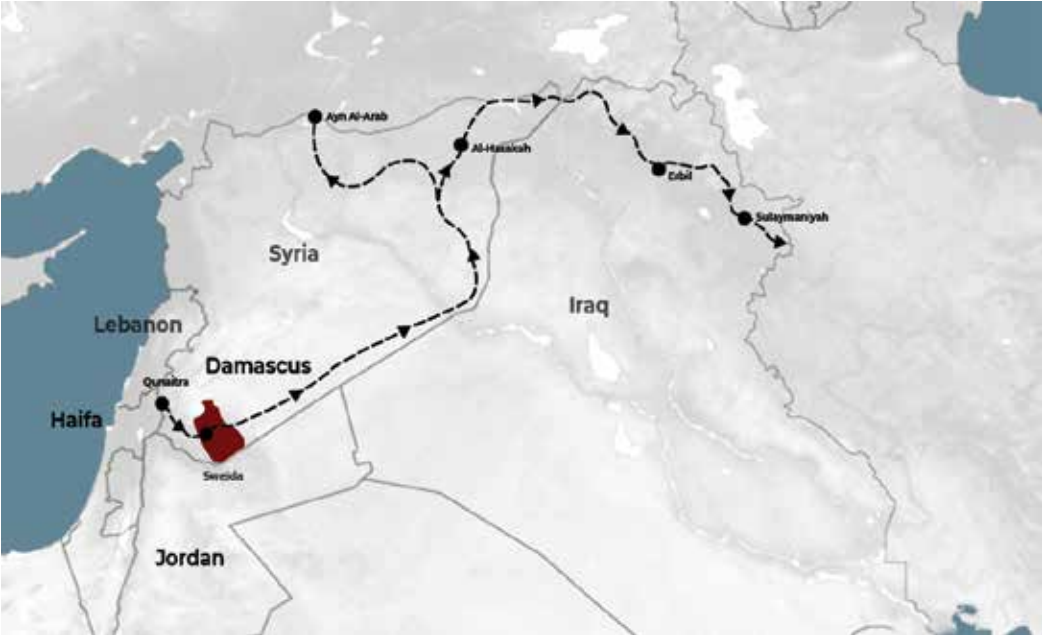
The incident quickly escalated into an open battle involving Israeli reconnaissance drones, local armored units, and armed groups bearing conflicting flags — some close to Ankara, others linked to extremist organizations recently reactivated. Within a week, over 700 were dead.

### Washington watches, regulates, but won't decide

The US was not absent from the scene. Washington expressed its welcome to Sharaa's assumption of power on multiple occasions, seeing him as an internationally acceptable figure compared to the previous government. However, it did not grant him a free mandate to move southward. US envoy to Syria, Tom Barrack, clearly stated that Washington supports Syria's territorial unity but simultaneously warned against unilateral actions that could threaten regional stability. In truth, Washington's role has grown, but as an observer rather than an active player. This passivity has created room for regional powers like Turkey and Israel to draw new influence maps across a devastated Syrian geography. Washington appeared keen to regulate the pace but was unwilling to make a decisive decision. It seeks to avoid direct confrontation with Turkey or Israel, but is also not ready to allow unchecked Turkish expansion.

### War of projects

The battle for Sweida is not really about sectarianism or governance. It is a war between two infrastructural visions: one Turkish, one Israeli. Each project aims to dictate the routes of trade, energy, and influence in post-Assad Syria. Sharaa, despite his roots in Al-Qaeda and ISIS, has become a placeholder for Turkish interests. But without genuine alliances or internal legitimacy, he faces the full weight of Israeli hostility. The Battle of Sweida is the first real test for the post-Assad era. Its outcome will shape not only Syria's future borders, but the entire transport and power map of the region. It will also determine whether the new Syria will follow Turkey's Development Road or Israel's so-called Peace Line.



● The map depicts David's Corridor, a planned project aiming to connect Israel to Kurdish-controlled areas in Syria and Iraq. ● THE CRADLE

The article first appeared on The Cradle.



## AFC Women's Asia Cup qualifiers:

# 'Beyond expectations': Jafari hails Iran's resolve in sensational progress

## Sports Desk

Head coach Marziyeh Jafari was full of praise for her players after Iran defeated Jordan 2-1 in the final game in Group A of the AFC Women's Asia Cup qualifiers to advance to next March's finals in Australia.

Knowing that anything but a victory would have ended their bid for qualification, the Iranian girls rose to the occasion on Saturday, recovering from a shock defeat against Lebanon to beat the in-form host in Amman and leapfrog Jordan on top of the group table on the head-to-head criteria.

Chances were few and far in the first half at the King Abdullah II Stadium, with both sides being denied by the woodwork once, before Sara Didar gave Iran the lead two minutes into the second half.

A tame headed clearance by Jordan was redirected into the box by Afsaneh Chatre-noor, with Negin Zandi nodding the ball down for Didar to slot the ball past goalkeeper Sherin Al Shalabe. On a perfect record prior to the game, Jordan desperately pushed for an equalizer but was punished on the counter with nine minutes



Iran's Sara Didar (20) celebrates with teammates after scoring in a 2-1 win against Jordan at the AFC Women's Asia Cup qualifiers in Amman, Jordan, on July 19, 2025.

● AFC

left on the clock, when Zandi surged from the halfway line before doubling Iran's lead with a composed finish.

It still turned out to be nail-biting closing stages

for the Iranian girls, after Fatemeh Ameneh's header lobbed Iranian goalkeeper Raha Yazdani to find the back of her own net in the 88th minute.

Yazdani produced a heroic

save a minute later to deny Jordanian skipper Maysa Jbarah from the edge of the six-yard box, as Iran held on to become the final team to punch the ticket for the 12-team finals.

"I am really happy that we were able to make the hearts of the Iranian people happy. Qualifying for the AFC Asian Cup was not easy," Jafari said after the game.

"We entered the compe-

tition with difficult conditions, intensive camps, logistical restrictions and a lot of psychological pressure, but my players fought with all their might and performed beyond expect-

tations," added the Iranian, who was only appointed to the job in April.

"The players not only showed high technical quality, but also showed that they are mentally strong and motivated at the level of a great team. This team deserves to be seen."

Despite a sensational qualification, Jafari still believes much more work needs to be done to ensure Iran will improve on the 2022 group exit when making a second appearance at the flagship continental event.

"This qualification is not the end of the road; it is the beginning of a new chapter. We must have a more detailed plan to have a strong presence in the final stage.

"This team has the capacity to be seen, grow, and compete with Asian powers. I hope the support continues so that we can be a worthy representative of Iranian women's football in Asia."

Iran will be joined by host Australia and defending champion China, as well as Japan, South Korea, India, Bangladesh, Chinese Taipei, Vietnam, Uzbekistan, the Philippines and three-time champion North Korea in the 21st edition of the Women's Asia Cup.



Iranian outside-hitter Morteza Sharifi (16) goes up for a spike against France at the Volleyball Nations League in Gdansk, Poland, on July 19, 2025.

● FIVB

## Volleyball Nations League:

## Iran undone by Olympic champion, misses out on Finals spot

## Sports Desk

Iran's bid for a first progress to the Volleyball Nations League Finals since 2022 came to an end after a straight-set defeat (26-24, 25-16, 26-24) against back-to-back Olympic gold medalist France in their penultimate preliminary game in Gdansk, Poland, on Saturday.

The result saw the defending champion secure a top-seven finish in the 18-team table and a place in the quarterfinals – starting July 30 in Ningbo, China.

French Opposite Théo Faure scored 20 points for the third time in as many matches in the third week of action, with outside-hitter Trévor Clévenot

chipping in 14, including two blocks, and two aces. Yacine Louati also finished in double figures for the European powerhouse, contributing 11 points.

Morteza Sharifi led the Iranian offense with 16 points, while fellow outside-hitter Amirhossein Esfandiari tallied 11, with nine kills and two blocks. "The result is part of the game but not the most important thing for us now," Italian head coach Roberto Piazza, who was appointed to the Iranian job in January, said after the game, adding: "We have to grow up every day."

"What I liked about today was that we played a normal game against the two-time Olympic champion. The [Iranian] players showed that they have

the confidence to play in top level of volleyball," added the Italian.

The decisive point of the contest perhaps came in the closing stages of the first set, when Iran, leading by 24-22, conceded four points in succession to lose the set.

"I think we gave it our all on the court once again, especially in the first and third sets," Piazza said.

"In the second set, we lost some confidence because when you're leading in a set but then let it slip away for whatever reason, the mental setback can stick with you for a while. But what I keep telling my players is that every new set is a new life. The previous set has to be forgotten quickly because each one is a fresh challenge."

## Asian Men's U16 Volleyball Championship:

## Iran beaten by Pakistan in five-set final

## Sports Desk

Iran relinquished a two-set lead to suffer a 3-2 (22-25, 21-25, 30-28, 25-21, 15-11) loss to Pakistan in final showpiece of the Asian Men's U16 Volleyball Championship in Nakhon Pathom, Thailand.

Muhammad Junaid chipped in a game-high 28 points for Pakistan, with Faizan Ullah finishing on 22. Azhvan Namazi, meanwhile, contributed 22 points for Iran, while three teammates – Amirreza Far-amarzi (13), Yasin Asadizadeh (13), and Radan Salehi (11) – also finished in double figures.

This was Iran's second defeat against Pakistan in the tournament, following a 3-1 setback in the second group phase.

There was, however, some consolation for the Iranian players in the awarding ceremony as outside-hitter Namazi, middle-blocker Maziyar Fallah, and setter Aidin Pouzesh picked up individual awards and were named in the team of the tournament.

While questioning the real age of some Pakistani players, Iran head coach Arash Sadeqiani was still full of praise for his boys, who "had been away from their families for

50 days, and only arrived in Thailand 15 hours before their opening game."

"There were other challenges like jet lag and tough weather conditions, but the team deserves credit for pushing through all of them," added Sadeqiani, who vowed a much-improved performance by his team at next year's FIVB U17 World Championship in Doha, Qatar.

Iran and Pakistan will be joined by the other two semifinalists India and Japan in representing the continent in the world showpiece.



Iranian players are pictured on the podium with their silver medals at the Asian Men's U16 Volleyball Championship in Nakhon Pathom, Thailand, on July 19, 2025.

● MOHAMMAD-JAVAD AMINI/volleyball.ir



# Bewitching Shidvar Island protecting nature, promoting sustainable tourism

Iranica Desk

There are numerous islands in Hormozgan Province, including Lavan, Hendurabi, Larak, Abu Musa, Kish, and Qeshm, which are well-known for their tourism and recreational opportunities within the Middle East. However, among these, there is a small island covering an area of just one square kilometer called Shidvar, or Marou, renowned for its pristine condition and being an ideal destination for a one-day excursion.

This untouched island is situated approximately 1.5 kilometers from Lavan Island and is part of the Shibkuh district of Bandar Lengeh. Visits are permitted only in groups and require prior approval from the local Department of Environment, IRNA wrote.

Since the island has no air or rail connections, reaching it involves traveling by road from Bandar Abbas, heading roughly 358 kilometers west towards Bandar-e Moqam. From there, visitors can take a boat to Marou Island.

Fauna

The island is a protected wildlife refuge, home to various species including hawksbill turtles that lay eggs there, along with seabirds such as terns. Because bird nesting occurs in May and June, it is highly recommended to plan visits during this period. To observe turtle nesting, you can take an early morning boat trip to



explore the beaches. Dolphins and sharks are also frequently seen around the island. Furthermore, the island hosts several venomous snakes, notably rattlesnakes, which have led locals to refer to the island as Maran or Marou (Mar means snake

in Persian). Safety precautions are advised when exploring the area.

**Flora**

Marou Island is inhabited by a variety of salt-tolerant plants that are resistant to drought, some reaching heights of up to



one meter. Portions of the rocks and cliffs are also covered with moss and green algae, which, during cooler months, adorn the beaches with a lush appearance. As temperatures increase, these algae change color and dry out. A significant portion of the is-

land is covered by the Shidvar Wetland, which has been registered as one of Iran's Ramsar international wetlands. The island remains uninhabited and features sandy beaches approximately 200 meters long. Walking along the shoreline,

climbing small hills, and observing the unique flora and fauna are among the most attractive aspects of ecotourism on the island.

Activities such as diving, swimming, and walking are especially enjoyable in pleasant weather and away from noise pollution, offering visitors a tranquil experience. Additionally, fishermen operating around the island often sell fresh fish, which can be grilled in nature over a campfire, adding to the outdoor experience. Another highlight of Marou Island is the lighthouse, which visitors can ascend to enjoy panoramic sea views and watch the sunset.

Important recommendations:

- Avoid approaching nesting sites during bird migration periods.
- Turtles lay their eggs exclusively on this island. Your presence near nesting sites can cause stress to the animals and may prevent them from returning in future seasons.
- Refrain from collecting soil from the island.
- Minimize your environmental impact by limiting your presence, as there are no facilities for extended stays.
- Do not leave litter behind, including plastic bags and other waste.
- For leisure, it is best to visit from mid-fall to late winter. Since turtles lay their eggs in May, access to the island is restricted during that period.

# A journey through historic Deyr-e Gachin Caravanserai near Qom



Qom is one of Iran's oldest and most historically significant cities, renowned for its religious, cultural, and architectural heritage. As a center of spiritual learning and pilgrimage, Qom has preserved numerous ancient structures and sites that reflect its rich history spanning over millennia. Its proximity to historic trade routes and spiritual centers has contributed to its importance as a hub of cultural exchange and development throughout the ages.

Deyr-e Gachin Caravanserai is situated eighty kilometers northeast of Qom. Renowned as the mother of Iranian caravanserais, this ancient monument was built along the Silk Road and the historic route connecting Rey to Qom. Today, it lies within the boundaries of Kavir National Park. The caravanserai has been officially registered on Iran's National Heritage List.



The construction of Deyr-e Gachin dates back to the Sassanid era, with repairs carried out during the Seljuk, Safavid, and Qajar periods. Historical texts indicate that it has also been known by other names, including Ardeshir and Deyr-e Kaj. Among these, the name Ardeshir suggests a possible connection

to Ardeshir I, the Sassanid king. Nearby, other historical structures such as the Rock Castle of Mohammadabad Kaj and Qaleh Goli can be found in the vicinity of Deyr-e Gachin. The caravanserai is a Chahartaq — a square structure supported by four arches — covering an area of approximately 12,000



hectares. It comprises various sections, including gateways, four rectangular towers, two half-towers flanking the main gate, a 300-square-meter mosque, two minarets, a stone mill, a bathhouse, two vestibules, a prayer hall, over forty rooms, staircases leading to the roof, and two wells. Outside the main complex, addi-

tional structures are present on its western side, such as a rectangular fire temple, a fortress, a brick kiln, two water reservoirs, and a graveyard. When considering the entire spread of the site, including these external features, its total area extends to about 19,000 hectares. The complex is enclosed by a wall exceeding

five meters in height, one meter in width, and eighty meters in length. Sections of the wall feature crenellations, and it is constructed of bricks arranged in a cross pattern. The bricks, characteristic of the Sassanid period, exhibit exquisite details and were also used during the Seljuk era for restoration.

Within the caravanserai, a vestibule leads beyond the first gateway to the Miansara (central hall). This area houses a mosque, bathhouse, mill, and other sections. Surrounding this core are thirty-six single-story rooms, each with a single door. Those located above the Miansara level are equipped with ivans — open, vaulted or arched spaces projecting from the walls.

On the northeast side, an alcove features an octagonal-shaped Miansara. Additionally, there are rooms with three doors each opening to the outside.



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## Tehran to host exhibition on modernist women artists



Arts & Culture Desk

The Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art will open a major exhibition on July 23 spotlighting modernist Iranian women artists, featuring 121 works by 65 pioneers including Monir Farmanfarmaian, Iran Darrudi, and Behjat Sadr. Running through September 22, 'In Women's Words' draws exclusively from the museum's permanent collection, IRNA reported. According to museum director Reza Dabirinejad, the show is the most comprehensive survey of women's contributions to modern Iranian art ever mounted by the institution. The exhibition had originally been slated to follow last year's blockbuster Picasso retrospective but was postponed due to the outbreak of regional conflict. With the easing of tensions, Dabirinejad said the museum felt it was the right moment to "recenter the narrative" and highlight voices long underrepresented in Iran's official art history. "The story of Iranian modernism is incomplete without women," said Toka Maleki, one of the curators. "Their perspectives shaped abstraction, portraiture, and new media in ways that demand deeper critical attention." The show is divided into several thematic sections—from early abstract experiments to nature studies and social realism—featuring works in painting, sculpture, photography, and video art. Alongside household names like Parvaneh Ettemadi and Fereydoon Lashai, previously unseen pieces by lesser-known artists are also on display, some of them exhibited for the first time since entering the museum's vaults. The exhibition also kicks off a two-month cultural program that includes scholarly panels, film screenings, and the release of a bilingual exhibition catalogue. The museum plans to launch a digital platform to make the show accessible to a global audience. "Institutional history has often overlooked women," said Afsaneh Kamran, another curator and university lecturer. "We're not setting up a gendered binary. We're filling in critical gaps." According to Dabirinejad, the museum holds 270 works by women modernists in its archives. "This exhibition isn't just about inclusion," he said. "It's about recognition—and recalibrating how we archive and tell stories." The show's significance goes beyond its gallery walls. In a symbolic gesture, Maleki was appointed honorary director of the museum for the duration of the exhibition—the first time a woman has held any directorial role at the institution since its founding in 1977. Fourteen satellite exhibitions will also be staged in collaboration with twelve Tehran galleries over the coming weeks.

# Pezeshkian calls for localized, expert-led efforts to tackle water crisis

Social Desk

President Masoud Pezeshkian on Sunday urged the development of comprehensive, science-driven solutions to address the country's worsening water shortages, stressing that "regional and root-level" strategies are key to long-term stability. Speaking at a high-level meeting with university leaders and cabinet ministers in Tehran, Pezeshkian said Iran must "strike a balance between water supply and consumption" to ensure sustainable development. The gathering, held at the presidential office, brought together key officials from the ministries of energy, agriculture, and science, as well as top scholars from major universities. Iran, which is reeling from its hottest summer on record and widespread drought, is confronting a decades-long water crisis worsened by aging infrastructure, and climate change. Calls for drastic cuts in consumption have already sparked frustration in some provinces, as dam reserves in Tehran hit a century-low. Pezeshkian warned that piecemeal fixes won't solve the issue. "This isn't a short-term project," he said. "It's a continuous process that demands engineering, education, legal enforcement, and constant monitoring." He called for specialized joint task forces between universities and govern-



Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian (L) attends a meeting on tackling the country's water crisis in Tehran, on July 20, 2025.  
● president.ir

ment bodies to draft tailored solutions for each region, based on local geography and needs. The president said the country's strategy must go beyond "top-down" directives. Localized task forces should be launched in every province under the supervision of governors and academic institutions to produce actionable plans. "One-size-fits-all policies won't hold water anymore," he said. According to a detailed report presented at the meeting, Iran's crisis stems from multiple overlapping factors: Rampant water waste in agriculture, unauthorized groundwater use, outdated distribution networks, and lack of data-driven planning. Pezeshkian also pressed for transparency and public engagement. He stressed the need for "broad awareness" among policymakers and the public alike, suggesting a mix of government and academic reports be made publicly accessible. "People need to understand what's at stake," he said, citing the vital role of state media and schools in shaping a conservation culture. As daily consumption in some households continues to exceed 200 liters—well above the national standard of



130—authorities have warned of steep fines and possible shut-offs. Energy Minister Abbas Aliabadi said that pressure drops in several neighborhoods were necessary. "There's no way around it—we simply don't have the water," he said in a televised interview, apologizing to citizens while urging them to cooperate. Aliabadi promised continued outreach through regional water agencies, advising citizens to monitor usage and reach out for guidance. Repeat violators of rationing rules, he warned, would face "heavy financial penalties" followed by disconnection if the overuse persists. The government is also under pres-

sure to modernize water systems and fix distribution losses, which remain high due to decades-old pipelines and obsolete cooling systems. Pezeshkian challenged Iranian universities to rise to the occasion. "Like the third- and fourth-generation universities abroad, our institutions must move beyond theory and deliver real solutions," he said. The crisis has exposed structural gaps in governance, from inter-agency conflicts to politically motivated decisions made without scientific backing. Officials now face the urgent task of putting research to work and turning policy into practice before the situation spirals further.

## ISO renames Arabic transliteration standard to 'Perso-Arabic'



Arts & Culture Desk

The International Organization for Standardization (ISO) has officially renamed its Arabic transliteration standard to include Persian, following an Iranian-led campaign to recognize the Persian script's distinct identity. The name change of ISO 233 to "Transliteration of Perso-Arabic characters into Latin characters" was approved earlier this month with 16 votes in favor and none against, according to the National Library and Archives of Iran (NLAI). The move marks a major step in Iran's years-long diplomatic and academic effort to cement the linguistic independence of Persian script in international documentation, IRNA reported.

The ISO 233 standard governs the transliteration of Perso-Arabic characters into Latin script and is widely used in the fields of information science, cataloging, and archiving. It provides a consistent method for converting Persian and Arabic letters into Latin equivalents to ensure accurate indexing and retrieval of multilingual data across global systems. For decades, ISO 233 was officially titled "Arabic characters," even though it encompassed Persian as well. Iranian representatives—backed by the Persian Language and Literature Academy and Iran's National Standards Organization—argued that the structural differences between the two scripts warranted formal recognition. "For the first

time, Persian is no longer subsumed under Arabic in this context," an NLAI official involved in the discussions said. The revised title, 'Information and documentation - Transliteration of Perso-Arabic characters into Latin characters,' reflects what Iranian experts say is a long-overdue correction. The change is expected to lay the groundwork for further standard-setting initiatives focused exclusively on Persian. The shift also underscores Iran's growing presence in international technical bodies. The local Secretariat of ISO's Technical Committee 46 in Tehran played a pivotal role—coordinating documentation, mobilizing votes, and maintaining pressure throughout the process. Officials described the result as "strategic," highlighting Iran's capacity to influence global norms through sustained engagement and specialized diplomacy. The NLAI praised the outcome as a win for both linguistic diversity and national prestige, noting that standard-setting is not merely technical but deeply symbolic.

## Iranian short film 'Dandelions Girl' selected for Greece's drama festival



Arts & Culture Desk

Iranian short film 'Dandelions Girl,' written and directed by Azadeh Masihzadeh, will compete in the children and youth section of the 48th Drama International Short Film Festival in Greece, ILNA reported. The Oscar-qualifying event, scheduled for September 8–14 in the northern Greek city of Drama, received 3,714 submissions this year. Only 151 films made the final cut across all sections, including 15 in the KIDDO 2025 competition where 'Dandelions Girl' will screen. The festival is one of Europe's most established platforms for short films. Produced by Razieh Gholami, 'Dandelions Girl' tells the story of a young girl who breaks into the world of football despite setbacks. Through a symbolic lens, it explores the clash between truth and deception and celebrates the resilience and honesty of the younger generation. "She throws the balance off just by standing her ground," the synopsis reads. Tara Soroush, Beniam Afrangheh, and Abdollah Bahadori star in the film. International distribution is handled by AtoZinema, led by Masihzadeh.