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From Dimona to Tehran

Exposing nuclear double standards in Middle East

By Hoda Yousefi
Middle East affairs analyst

OPINION EXCLUSIVE

Tensions have surged recently as Israel's hostile rhetoric and direct military action against Iran have thrust the nuclear issue back into the global spotlight. Israeli leaders like Benjamin Netanyahu have justified their strikes by claiming that Iran is making significant advances toward a nuclear weapon. Yet US intelligence agencies and even the director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) have not backed Israel's claims of imminent Iranian nuclear weaponization.

This pattern exposes a familiar modus operandi: using Iran's transparent and peaceful nuclear program as a pretext for fabricated threats, thereby green-lighting aggressive acts while glossing over Israel's clandestine nuclear arsenal. This double standard, which subjects a Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) member to intense inspections while exempting a non-member from scrutiny, lies at the heart of structural discrimination in the non-proliferation regime.

Israel's nuke program has been shrouded in secrecy and deliberate ambiguity since its inception. Conceived by former Israeli prime minister David Ben-Gurion as a self-sufficient deterrent, the Dimona reactor was developed in absolute secrecy—a textbook case of systematic norm-breaking—backed by Western powers.

In 1957, France covertly supplied Israel with a nuclear reactor and an underground plutonium reprocessing plant—bypassing IAEA safeguards entirely. The construction of these facilities at the Negev Nuclear Research Center (near Dimona) between 1958-1960 was concealed even from Israel's main ally, the United States.

This clandestine supply chain exposed a shadow network of Western collusion in developing Israel's nuclear arsenal. In a secret 1959 agreement, Norway supplied 20 metric tons of heavy water to Israel through British channels. Britain independently provided strategic metals like lithium-6, a critical component for thermonuclear weapons. The US contributed long-range bomber guidance systems that enabled nuclear strike capabilities, while Germany later delivered Dolphin-class submarines capable of launching nuclear-armed cruise missiles—effectively completing Israel's nuclear triad.

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Pezeshkian: US obliteration of Iran's nuclear program 'an illusion'

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Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian (R) speaks during an exclusive interview with Al Jazeera aired on July 23, 2025.
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700,000 cubic meters supplied per month

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Pezeshkian: US obliteration of Iran's nuclear program 'an illusion'

International Desk

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian rejected as an "illusion" US president's claim of total obliteration of Iran's nuclear program, stressing that the Islamic Republic will continue the development of its peaceful nuclear industry "within the framework of international laws." In an exclusive interview with Al Jazeera aired on Wednesday, Pezeshkian said the claim made by Donald Trump "that our nuclear program is over is just an illusion," adding that the country's nuclear capabilities reside in the minds of its scientists and not in the facilities. Pezeshkian said Iran would continue its uranium enrichment program despite opposition from some Western countries, saying the development of its nuclear abilities would be car-

ried out "within the framework of international laws." "[US President Donald] Trump says that Iran should not have a nuclear weapon and we accept this because we reject nuclear weapons and this is our political, religious, humanitarian and strategic position," he said. "We believe in diplomacy, so any future negotiations must be according to a win-win logic, and we will not accept threats and dictates." Pezeshkian's comments echoed earlier remarks by Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi, who said in an interview with US broadcaster Fox News aired Monday that Tehran would never abandon its uranium enrichment program, but was open to a negotiated solution to solve a decades-long dispute over its nuclear program. Elsewhere in his remarks,

Pezeshkian said that his country is prepared for any fresh act of aggression by the Israeli regime, adding that he was not optimistic about a cease-fire announced by the US president to end the last month's aggression by the Israeli regime against Iran, in which the US intervened on Israel's behalf, launching strikes on Iran's nuclear facilities. "We are fully prepared for any new Israeli military move, and our armed forces are ready to strike deep inside Israel again," Pezeshkian told Al Jazeera. Iran was not relying on the cease-fire that ended the 12-day war to hold, he said. "We are not very optimistic about it," said Pezeshkian. "That is why we have prepared ourselves for any possible scenario and any potential response. Israel has harmed us, and we have also harmed it. It has dealt

us powerful blows, and we have struck it hard in its depths, but it is concealing its losses." He added that Israel's strikes had sought to "eliminate" Iran's hierarchy, "but it has completely failed to do so." Last month, Iran's Armed Forces fired hundreds of missiles toward the occupied territories in response to the regime's aggression against Iran on June 13, which claimed the lives of nearly 1,100 Iranians, including civilians, military figures and nuclear scientists. Iran's retaliatory attacks forced the regime to request a cease-fire only after 12 days.



Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian speaks during an exclusive interview with Al Jazeera aired on July 23, 2025.
● [president.ir](https://www.president.ir)



Tehran agrees to IAEA technical team's visit in coming weeks: Deputy FM

Gharibabadi asserts non-diversion of Iran's nuclear program based on UN reports



● [REUTERS](https://www.reuters.com)

International Desk

The Islamic Republic has agreed to allow a technical team from the UN nuclear watchdog to visit in the coming weeks to discuss "a new modality" on relations between the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and Tehran, Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister Kazem Gharibabadi said on Wednesday. "The delegation will come to Iran to discuss the modality, not to go to the (nuclear) sites," he told reporters during a visit to New York. "We are in contact with the International Atomic Energy Agency to discuss a new process regarding Iran-IAEA relations in the new circumstances. In this regard, we have actually agreed to accept an IAEA technical delegation to travel to Iran very soon, within the next two to three weeks, to discuss this process." Iran's President Masoud Pezeshkian gave a final approval to a law approved by the Parliament to suspend cooperation with the IAEA following its politically-motivated resolution which paved the way for US-Israeli

acts of aggression against the country last month. Gharibabadi also discussed with reporters his country's recourse against further financial punishment ahead of a critical meeting Friday with Britain, France and Germany in Istanbul. The three European countries have suggested triggering a so-called snapback provision in the 2015 nuclear agreement that would reimpose sanctions on Iran if there is no progress on a deal by August. Gharibabadi said Friday's meeting is very important but that its success will depend on how the Europeans approach Iran this time around. "We have always valued our meetings with the European countries. But there is an important issue: I think we have always told them that the policies of the European countries should be independent," he said. "They should not coordinate their positions with the Americans." He added, "If this is the case, why should we negotiate with the Europeans when we can negotiate with the Americans?" In a meeting with UN Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, Rosemary DiCarlo, in New York on Tuesday, he underscored the peaceful nature of the country's nuclear program, saying none of the reports published by the IAEA indicates any deviation in Tehran's nuclear activities. Pointing to regularly-issued reports

by the IAEA on the Islamic Republic's compliance with Iran's nuclear deal obligations, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), Gharibabadi said, "Not a single word about the diversion of Iran's nuclear program has been mentioned in any of these reports." Rejecting as baseless and repetitive the Israeli regime's claims over the past three decades regarding Iran's attempt to acquire nuclear weapons, Gharibabadi said, "The Islamic Republic of Iran, based on religious principles and decrees, has never sought weapons of mass destruction. These claims are leveled while the Zionist regime is not a member of any disarmament treaties for weapons of mass destruction and is equipped with all types of such weapons." The Iranian diplomat also rebuked the double standards of international institutions, including the United Nations, demanding that the world body play a more effective and impartial role in addressing the acts of aggression committed by the US and Israel against the Islamic Republic. The Israeli regime launched an aggression on Iran's military and civilian infrastructure on June 13 that killed nearly 1,100 people, including women and children, as well as a dozen top military brass. The US, which had been in talks with Tehran about its nuclear program since April, joined the war on June 22 by targeting several key nuclear sites.

Araghchi voices Iran's determination to repatriate illegal Afghans

International Desk

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said on Tuesday that Tehran is determined to repatriate Afghan volunteer refugees and illegal migrants to Afghanistan as Tehran has begun a plan to deport undocumented Afghan nationals. During a meeting with United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi in the capital, Iran's top diplomat highlighted Iran's five decades of hosting Afghan refugees and underscored the Iranian government's commitment to facilitate their voluntary return and to provide a dignified repatriation process for those residing without valid documents. Araghchi also called on the international community to fulfill its responsibilities and provide the required assistance in the matter. Grandi, for his part, expressed gratitude for Iran's long history of excellent cooperation with the UNHCR and its service to Afghan refugees. He expressed hope that, given the cooperation and coordination between the two neighboring countries, the return of Afghan nationals would proceed in a manner that upholds their rights and dignity. Iran began deporting Afghan refugees



Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi (r) talks with United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi at a meeting in Tehran, on July 22, 2025.
● [IRNA](https://www.irna.ir)

in late June. On Sunday, Malek Hosseini, who leads employment affairs at Iran's Ministry of Cooperatives, Labor, and Social Welfare, said that less than 700,000 Afghan refugees have left Iran as part of a program to deport the refugees. The official also said that less than 10% of the Afghan refugees, or nearly 434,000 people, have the legal documents to live and work in Iran. Economic experts have warned that any plan for the mass deportation of Afghans from Iran could seriously harm the country's labor market.



Mohammad Ali Rajabi
Cartoonist

Over 100 humanitarian groups warn of 'mass starvation' in Gaza

More than 100 aid and human rights groups have called on governments to take urgent action as Israel's forced "mass starvation" of Palestinians engulfs Gaza, including by demanding an immediate and permanent cease-fire and the lifting of all restrictions on humanitarian aid. In a statement signed and released on Wednesday by 109 organizations, including Mercy Corps, the Norwegian Refugee Council and Doctors Without Borders, the groups warned that deepening starvation of the population was spreading across the besieged enclave, Al Jazeera reported.

Tons of food, clean water, medical supplies and other items sit untouched just outside Gaza as humanitarian organizations are blocked from accessing or delivering them by Israel. Israel, which controls all supplies, food, medicine and fuel entering Gaza, has imposed a punishing blockade for months. As the Israel's siege starves the people of Gaza, aid workers are now joining the same food lines, risking being shot just to feed their families, the statement said. "With supplies now totally depleted, humanitarian organizations are

witnessing their own colleagues and partners waste away before their eyes," they said. The statement added that Israel's restrictions, delays, and fragmentation under its total siege have created chaos, starvation, and death. At least 111 deaths linked to famine and malnutrition have been recorded by hospitals in the Gaza Strip, according to the Ministry of Health. In recent weeks, more than 1,000 desperate people have been killed trying to reach food, mostly in mass shootings by Israeli soldiers posted near GHF distribution centers, according to the United Nations.



Veep places premium on housing supply as key gov’t priority

Economy Desk

Iran’s First Vice President Mohamad Reza Aref emphasized that providing the housing needs of the people, especially rural residents and vulnerable groups, is one of the government’s important priorities, stating, “A comprehensive plan for serious support will be formulated to complete and construct subsidized housing units.” Speaking at the 21st meeting of the Supreme Housing Council and noting that previous governments had good programs and commitments in the housing sector, Aref added that despite all efforts, approximately 140,000 applicants for subsidized housing units had been unable to receive their homes, IRNA reported. Referring to the commitment to build 970,000 subsidized housing units, he further stated that the country has encountered financing and execution obstacles over the years and decades in constructing these residential. “Therefore, a comprehensive plan for serious support to complete and build these units must be prepared and formu-

lated within the next month so that, through the facilities and authorities granted by the legislature, we can create momentum in this sector.” The vice president underscored that a significant portion of the income for certain segments of society is spent on rent. He stated that without government provision of facilities, purchasing housing would be virtually impossible for these groups, expressing hope that “by pursuing necessary measures in the housing sector for the lowest four deciles of society, we will take major steps.” He emphasized that the governments’ commitments to building subsidized housing, especially for vulnerable groups, are commitments of the system, “and we have no right to any delay in this regard.” Aref said, “Revitalizing the housing sector leads to economic prosperity and the activation of industry and job creation.” Noting that housing construction is one of the country’s important production sectors in line with this year’s slogan, he stated that meetings of the Supreme Housing Council must be held regularly so that more fundamental steps can



be taken for the housing of all citizens. Also in this meeting, the Ministry of Roads and Urban Development presented a report on the housing market, important measures of the rental management package, the performance of rental deposit loan payments, and the programs and challenges of subsidized housing. Subsequently, a report from the Central Bank of Iran on the performance of banking facilities in the housing

sector and the implementation of the law on jumpstarting housing production was presented. Furthermore, it was decided in this meeting that a committee composed of the Ministries of Economic Affairs and Finance, Roads and Urban Development, the Plan and Budget Organization, and the Central Bank will prepare and formulate a specific program within the next month to finance the completion of subsidized housing units.

Presidential envoy calls for value-added processing with neighbors

Backup dry ports planned as maritime expansion continues

Economy Desk

The president’s envoy for maritime development urged prioritizing value-added processing over raw material exports with neighboring countries. The special representative of the president for coordinating the implementation of General Maritime-Oriented Development and Makoran Policies stated, “We must utilize the capacity of neighboring countries to supply feedstock, process them domestically, and turn them into added value,” IRNA reported. At a meeting of the Planning and Development Council of Khorasan Razavi Province, Ali Abdolalizadeh stated that on the path of maritime-oriented development, while the primary focus has been on the Persian Gulf, the Oman Sea, and the Caspian Sea, establishing backup dry ports is also on the agenda. “The establishment of backup dry ports for Shahid Rajaei Port (in the south) began last year, and following the explosion incident (resulting in casualties in April), more focus has been placed on it. It is hoped that the transfer of cargo from Shahid Rajaei Port to the dry ports will commence soon.” The special representative of the president, emphasizing the creation of industrial infrastructure in border areas, stated that Khorasan Razavi has the capacity to become a “regional hub for peace and friendship.” “The economy is only one of the tools of peace; culture and civilization can also be complementary tools on this path,” he noted. Abdolalizadeh explained the difference between a dry port and a logistics village, stating, “In a dry port, ‘cargo’ is the main focus, while in a logistics village, ‘transportation’ is central.” He continued, “A dry port deals directly with goods and trade flow. It has the capacity to import raw materials without administrative formalities and also export final products without bureaucracy.” The official, referring to the Bandar Abbas-Sarakhs railway project, stated, “This project is nearing completion and is hoped to be finalized by the end of the current year or the first quarter of next year.” “Khorasan Razavi, especially Shahid

Motahari Station in Mashhad, has significant capacity and can become an effective transit hub for the entire region. This is because Central Asian countries and Afghanistan have the shortest route to access international waters through Iran and Chabahar Port,” Abdolalizadeh added. He further added, “Even if domestic investors are not found for the Sarakhs-Bandar Abbas railway line, the capacity of regional investors can be utilized.” The special representative of the president stated, “Sarakhs and Shahid Motahari Station can also become a security hub because economic interactions inherently create security. From this perspective, regional issues, such as the water issue and Iran’s water rights from Afghanistan, should also be resolved from an economic perspective, not a military one.”

10-million-ton capacity of dry port in Mashhad

The representative stated, “The capacity of Shahid Motahari Railway Station in Mashhad for exports and imports is up to 10 million tons, which is considered a highly promising capability.” Abdolalizadeh expressed hope that through cooperation with the railway and precise planning, the 10-million-ton transit volume at Shahid Motahari Station could be increased, and the North-South Corridor exports of our country could practically commence from this point. “The Shahid Motahari Dry Port and Logistics Village area in Mashhad, which holds a very special position within the country’s North-South Corridor complex, can be considered one of the most important points of this corridor. Fortunately, good equipment is ready and operational here, and significant activity is observed in the region,” he said. “Cargo is transferred from Sarakhs to Shahid Motahari Station in Mashhad and then to Shahid Rajaei Port within 72 hours. This transfer time is very acceptable and promising because special consideration can be given to this point in cargo transit planning. Action must be taken on this route as soon as possible,” Abdolalizadeh added.

Sea water transfer project operationalized for Isfahan refinery

700,000 cubic meters supplied per month

Economy Desk

The pilot operation phase for the first stage of the sea water transfer project to Isfahan Province commenced on Wednesday, as announced by the head of Isfahan Oil Refining Company. “With the operation of this project, approximately 700,000 cubic meters of the refinery’s monthly water requirement will be supplied through this source,” said CEO of Isfahan Oil Refining Company Gholamreza Baqeri-Dizaj. In an interview with SHANA detailing the sea water transfer project to the central province, Baqeri-Dizaj stated that this project is one of the most significant projects for Isfahan Refinery. It has been implemented and become operational with the goal of providing a stable water supply for the province’s major industries, especially during drought crises. He noted that due to Isfahan Province’s specific geographical location and recurring droughts, the issue of industrial water supply has been on the agenda for years. “The first phase of this project involves transferring water via a branch from the 339-kilometer Vasco pipeline to Isfahan, extending along northern and southern routes measuring 240 kilometers and 219 kilometers respectively. The northern route of this project delivers water to Isfahan Refinery. The pilot operation of this phase has now commenced at Isfahan Refinery, and it is planned that approximately 700,000 cubic meters of the refinery’s monthly water requirement will be supplied via this route.”

Major step towards stable water supply for industries

The CEO of Isfahan Oil Refining Company, emphasizing the continuity and sustainability



of production at the company, announced that Isfahan Refinery is the first industry in the province to utilize sea water. He stated, “With the operationalization of the sea water transfer plan, one of the biggest challenges for Isfahan’s industries, namely water shortage, will be resolved. The capacity exists to supply the water needs of the province’s industries through this means.” Baqeri-Dizaj, pointing out that the project’s execution was carried out in full compliance with environmental considerations, added, “For this project, which was established with the goal of ensuring water security for the province’s important and vital industries, pumping stations have also been successfully launched and are currently under pilot operation.” Regarding the second phase of the sea water transfer project to Isfahan Province, he said, “The second phase of this project involves the installation of approximately 400 kilometers of pipelines and the necessary equipment to supply water directly from the Oman Sea. The design stages for the second phase are complete, and its execution will commence subject to securing financial resources.” On July 9, the governor-general of Isfahan Province Mehdi Jamali-Nejad announced the first phase of the major project to transfer water from the Oman Sea to the province had been completed. The most significant advantage of the project is the cessation of water consumption by regional industries from the Zayandeh Rud River.

Exposing nuclear double ...

Israel, having refused to sign the NPT, has exempted itself from any legal obligations or international inspections, declaring a policy of “nuclear ambiguity”—neither confirming nor denying its weapon arsenal, on the assumption that the world will turn a blind eye until actual deployment occurs. Israel stands alone as the sole nuclear power without any officially recorded atomic tests—though this claim is heavily undermined by its documented collaboration in France’s 1960 nuclear test program. The regime’s secrecy was further shattered in 1986 when Mordechai Vanunu, a former technician at the Dimona facility, exposed the military dimensions of its nuclear program. His revelations confirmed the reactor’s 150-megawatt capacity and lent credibility to estimates of an arsenal holding between 90 to 200 warheads.

Iran’s nuclear transparency

In stark contrast to Israel’s opaque nuclear program, the Islamic Republic of Iran—as a committed NPT member state—has voluntarily accepted the most extensive and intrusive inspection regime in the history of the IAEA. Every aspect of Iran’s nuclear activities, from uranium extraction to enrichment at Natanz and Fordow facilities, remains under continuous IAEA monitoring through both on-site inspections and real-time surveillance systems. Iran has gone beyond its safeguards obligations, voluntarily implementing the Additional Protocol for years—a clear demonstration of its commitment to transparency. Yet, despite Iran’s unprecedented transparency, Tehran has faced a relentless, decades-long campaign of baseless accusations and psychological warfare. Recent reports by the IAEA director general—often shaped by political pressure from Zionist and Western lobbies—have conspicuously ignored Iran’s extensive cooperation while exaggerating minor technical issues. These manufactured concerns are then weaponized to justify politically motivated resolutions. As the head of Iran’s Atomic Energy Organization has emphasized, claims of Iranian noncompliance or the IAEA’s inability to verify activities are demonstrably false and directly contradict the agency’s own technical reports. This charade exposes the true objective: not genuine nonproliferation concerns, but laying the groundwork to refer Iran’s file back to the UN Security Council. The ultimate aim is to intensify pressure on a nation that insists on its inalienable right to peaceful nuclear technology—a right systematically denied while the world turns a blind eye to Israel’s clandestine nuclear arsenal.

Fear of an independent Muslim power

The West and Israel’s anxiety over Iran’s nuclear program goes beyond fear of weaponization. Their fundamental anxiety stems not from Iran potentially acquiring nukes—which Tehran has consistently rejected in its defence doctrine—but rather from an indigenous nuclear fuel cycle granting Iran a “nuclear breakout capability” and solidifying its position as an independent, self-reliant regional power that can no longer be coerced into retreat through economic pressure or military threats. This “strategic deterrent power” means the long-term consolidation of the Islamic Republic system and the end of Western-Zionist dreams of regime change. This is precisely the red line that the West is not willing to accept. In essence, the international community’s opposition does not stem from non-proliferation principles, but from geopolitical apprehension about a robust, independent power emerging in the Middle East. This approach represents a glaring case of discrimination and double standards, cloaked in the guise of security concerns. This hypocritical policy – which allows a non-NPT regime with a history of aggression to freely expand its nuclear arsenal while subjecting a compliant member to extreme pressure—severely undermines the credibility of the non-proliferation regime and the impartiality of international institutions, fueling global distrust.

Diplomatic path spells win-win for Europe, Tehran: *Expert*

INTERVIEW

The recent joint video conference between the foreign ministers of the three European countries (E3) and the EU's high representative for foreign affairs with Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi marks the latest significant development in relations between Iran and the European Union. According to media reports detailing this virtual meeting, the foreign ministers of France, Germany, and the UK, along with the European foreign policy chief, claimed that Iran has until late August this year to hammer out an agreement to prevent the activation of the snapback mechanism. They underscored their determination to reinstate UN sanctions if Tehran fails to make headway on the nuclear deal.

Iran's foreign minister, in turn, stressed that any new round of negotiations would only be possible if the other side was ready for a fair, balanced, and mutually beneficial nuclear agreement. He pointed out that if the European Union and the E3 countries wish to play a role, they must behave responsibly and break away from the outworn policy of threats and pressure, including threatening to trigger the snapback mechanism, which they lack any moral or legal basis for.

Based on analyses and speculation surrounding these discussions, it appears the European troika has carved out a two-month window for coming to terms on a diplomatic version. However, the extent to which they will adhere to their claim to achieve a diplomatic formula, and the regional and global repercussions of any failure to adhere, are questions that were put to Morteza Maki, an international relations and European affairs analyst.

The foreign ministers of the three European countries and the continent's foreign policy chief recently held talks with Iran's foreign minister and announced that an agreement on Iran's nuclear activities must be reached by September, less than two months from now. The question is: What objectives is Europe pursuing by escalating tensions with Tehran?

MAKI: In recent years, we have seen strained relations between Iran and Europe. Russia's attack on Ukraine, the Gaza war, and Iran's internal developments in 2022 were a series of events and developments that profoundly influenced Iran's relations with Europe, giving rise to very challenging ties. Even Europe, which always sought to play a mediating role in US-Iran nuclear issues and prevented the passage of resolutions against Iran at the UN Security Council twice during the first Trump administration, at this stage threw its weight behind the Israeli and American aggression against Iran. They even refused to issue a statement against the attack on Iranian nuclear facilities at the International Atomic Energy Agency. This showed that Europe has virtually sided with the US and Israel in their aggression and hostile policies against Iran.

The virtual meeting held between FM Araghchi and senior European diplomats, and the two-month window they proposed for resolving the dispute, indicates that they are concerned about escalating tensions with Iran and that Tehran's reaction could upend many equations and calculations. This two-month window could provide a breathing space for both Iran and Europe to come up with a middle ground solution for reaching an agreement on Iran's nuclear programs.

During this period, as numerous and contradictory reports circulated in political and media circles regarding the Islamic Republic of Iran's activities and nuclear program, a conversation with former US secretary of state Antony Blinken also came to light, in which he claimed that Iranians were willing to accept enrichment below one percent and reached a compromise with the Europeans, but the Israeli and subsequent American attack on Iran pushed this issue to the sidelines. If this is true (no one has yet confirmed or denied it), it shows that Iran has demonstrated maximum flexibility in reaching a deal.

The extension of time to prevent the automatic return of sanctions, known as "snapback," and the extension of UN Resolution 2231 are scenarios that have been mooted in recent days. We must make the most of these opportunities to prevent the ac-



From left, Poland's Prime Minister Donald Tusk, Germany's Chancellor Friedrich Merz, France's President Emmanuel Macron, and Britain's Prime Minister Keir Starmer talk to the press after their meeting in Tirana, Albania, on May 16, 2025.

● LEON NEAL/POOL



Europe and the US are now in a different situation compared to recent months, especially concerning the Ukraine war. Just as the US president finally accepted that Ukraine and Europe should play a role in reaching any practical agreement with Russia, it seems the Americans have given implicit approval regarding Iran-Europe negotiations, and the meeting of Iranian and European diplomats in Istanbul in the coming days has become fixed.



Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi (c) speaks to the media after his meeting with the E3 group of European ministers in Geneva, Switzerland, on June 20, 2025.

● SEDAT SUNA/GETTY IMAGES

tivation of the snapback as this activation will bring about political costs and destabilize conditions for Iran, the region, and the world.

We must hope for and help bring about an agreement between Iran and Europe within these two months. It appears that Donald Trump and the US have not so far taken a negative view of Europe's role in this regard. Europe and the US are now in a different situation compared to recent months, especially concerning the Ukraine war. Just as the US president finally accepted that Ukraine and Europe should

play a role in reaching any practical agreement with Russia, it seems the Americans have given implicit approval regarding Iran-Europe negotiations, and the meeting of Iranian and European diplomats in Istanbul in the coming days has become fixed.

It has now been announced that Europe has proposed extending Resolution 2231, which would mean refraining from automatically re-imposing sanctions. Will Iran accept this proposal, and if so, what concessions and consequences will it entail?

Currently, Iran is facing extremely difficult political, economic, security, and diplomatic conditions. Although it managed to inflict significant blows on the Zionist regime in the imposed 12-day war, it also suffered considerable damage. Any path opened for diplomacy should be welcomed, regardless of whether it leads to an agreement or not, and what scenarios exist in this regard; Diplomacy must be supported. The Islamic Republic of Iran is indeed striving to use every avenue for political opening and to prevent a political deadlock.

This issue is beneficial for both

Iran and Europe because if a political deadlock triggers the snapback, both Iran and the West will suffer very serious losses, and a situation of unpredictability and instability will emerge in the region. For example, the attacks carried out by the Zionist regime against Syria's territorial integrity in recent days, and the state of uncertainty and vacuum created in that country, show how much the absence of a diplomatic solution can be considered a major political, economic, and security earthquake for all countries in the region.

It seems that if the Europeans have agreed to set aside a two-month window to find a way to achieve a political agreement with Iran, it stems from issues on the field and insecurities existing in the region. All these factors could serve as motives for Europe to understand how threatening insecurity can be for those adjacent to the Middle East. Europe remembers the developments of 2015 and 2016 when a flood of migrants poured into European borders, confronting the continent with a difficult situation, and this could recur. If insecurity spreads in Syria and other countries in the region, its consequences will be far more widespread than the crisis of those years for Europe.

The Iranian foreign minister, in his discussion with the Europeans, made the start of negotiations contingent on the other side's readiness for a fair, balanced, and mutually beneficial agreement. In your



opinion, what characteristics should a fair agreement possess, considering our current situation?

No agreement should diminish Iran's deterrent power as Iran seeks nothing beyond the NPT, and Iran's missile capability serves the country's security against aggression. The 12-day war of aggression clearly demonstrated the importance of this missile capability in defending national security and territorial integrity. One of Iran's demands in any negotiation and agreement in this regard will be that this deterrent capability is not reduced.

On the other hand, the Islamic Republic of Iran aims to strip the US and the Zionist regime of the Iranophobia lever they have held onto in the region for decades, and which they attempted to use to securitize Iran's nuclear file at the regional level, portraying Tehran as a threat to its neighbors. The Israeli regime and the US justified actions and operations against Iran within the framework of this lever and Iranophobia, and the only way to neutralize this lever and scenario is through diplomacy. This diplomacy must lean on national cohesion, unity, and defensive and

military capabilities. These are essential for Iranian diplomats to sit with confidence at the negotiating table and work in synergy. Iran has shown maximum flexibility to allow the Europeans to verify Iran's nuclear activities. If the West is genuinely concerned about enrichment in Iran, their wishes will be fulfilled through such targeted proposals. However, if not, Iran will continue to resist their threats. Nevertheless, to prevent any conflict and tension, the door to diplomacy must be kept open. The "no war, no peace" situation has been very difficult for Iran and will make

governing the country challenging, and we must move past this stage. Iran-Europe relations and engagement in the next two months will be very sensitive and could bring about breakthroughs.

Can negotiations with Europe be seen as a bridge for negotiations with the US, or should these two be viewed separately?

Currently, and unfortunately, Iran has become a bridge for alignment and convergence between the US, Israel, and Europe. Even though the US and Europe have deep disagreements on political, economic, and security issues,

which have not reached this level in the past 80 years and relations have not been this challenging, they have found a kind of convergence on Iran. Iran-Europe talks can help Europe act with more caution or considerations regarding Iran in its alignment with the US and Israel. These talks can certainly contribute to alleviating tensions with the Americans as well.

The US concluded concerning Ukraine that they cannot resolve the war without Europe's cooperation. It appears that after the 12-day attacks on Iran, Washington has once again come to the

conclusion that Europeans, compared to other regional mediators like Arab countries, Oman, and Qatar, or China and Russia, can be more helpful in reaching a deal with Iran. Although the European troika and Iran currently have very strained relations and there is hostile rhetoric, against this pressure diplomacy, public and media diplomacy can certainly offer an opportunity for the Islamic Republic of Iran to emerge from these difficult political and economic conditions.

The interview first appeared in Persian on IRNA.

What West misunderstands about Iran

By Emad Khatami
Author, scholar

OPINION

When Iranian officials were preparing for the sixth round of negotiations with their US counterparts over the country's nuclear program, Israel launched a surprise military strike. Rather than condemning the attack, the United States and Europe stood by — or even applauded. The German Chancellor framed it as "the dirty work Israel is doing for all of us". This moment only reinforced what Iranian leaders have long believed: that the world demands their surrender — and leaves them alone, at constant risk of betrayal and invasion. Unless the West begins to understand Iranian history — and the mindset it has created among Iranian leaders — it will continue to misread Tehran's actions. What often looks like aggression or stubbornness from the outside is, in the minds of Iranian decision-makers, an act of defense grounded in deep national memory. For centuries, Iran has lived under the shadow of invasion, betrayal, and isolation. And every chapter of its modern history has only reinforced the same conclusion for its leaders: No matter who sits at Iran's end of the negotiating table — be it a reformist, a moderate, or a hardliner — Iran must rely only on itself. It's not a question of paranoia. It's a survival instinct. This sense of siege didn't begin in 2025 with the Israeli attacks, or even in 1980 with Saddam's invasion. Iran has been shaped by trauma stretching back over a thousand years: Alexander the Great's conquest of Persia in the 4th century BC, the Arab conquest in the 7th century, the Mongol invasions in the 13th century, and repeated Turkic and Central Asian assaults. In more recent centuries, it lost territory in the Russo-Persian wars and was occupied by Allied forces in both world wars, even though it had declared neutrality in both. Again and again, Iran has faced foreign troops on its soil. And each time, no one came to help. That deep historical scar tissue explains the decisions of Iranian leaders more than any speech ever could. It's why they see military self-reliance not as aggression, but as insurance. It's why they view diplomacy with suspicion, and why even moderates in Tehran are hesitant to trust Western intentions. In the contemporary era, there have been at least four major betrayals by the United States that continue to underscore Iran's fear of foreign duplicity. First, the 1953 coup against



A woman passes by an anti-American mural painted on the walls of the former US Embassy in Tehran, Iran, on August 16, 2023. ABEDIN TAHERKENAREH/EPA

prime minister Mohammad Mossadegh, backed by the CIA and MI6. Mossadegh was democratically elected and sought to engage with the United States as a counterbalance to British colonial influence. The US responded by orchestrating his overthrow, primarily to protect British oil interests. Second, after the 9/11 attacks, Iran secretly assisted the United States in its campaign against the Taliban — providing intelligence, cooperating with anti-Taliban forces, and supporting the post-war settlement in Afghanistan. Just weeks later, it was branded part of president George W. Bush's "Axis of Evil". The third betrayal involves the 2015 nuclear deal, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). Iran agreed to the strictest nuclear inspections regime in history. The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) confirmed its compliance 15 times between 2016 and 2018. Yet in 2018, President Donald Trump unilaterally withdrew

from the deal and reimposed crippling sanctions, more severe than those that existed before the agreement. Fourth, the most recent and perhaps most consequential betrayal came in June 2025. After five rounds of talks between Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi and US Special Envoy Steve Witkoff — mediated by Oman — a sixth round was scheduled. Both sides held firm positions but remained at the table. Iran sought recognition of its right to enrich uranium for peaceful purposes. The US ultimately demanded zero enrichment on Iranian soil. Despite the impasse, cautious progress was being made, based on comments from both sides after each round of talks. Then, on the morning of June 13, 2025 — just two days before the next round — Israeli forces launched an unprecedented assault on Iran, striking nuclear sites and killing civilians. Senior scientists and military commanders were among the casualties. These weren't symbolic

warning shots. They were hard, coordinated blows, timed to derail diplomacy. But Israel didn't act alone. While the initial Israeli attack was unilateral, American strikes soon followed. US stealth bombers dropped 30,000-pound bunker-buster bombs on Fordow and Natanz. Days earlier, President Trump called for Iran's "unconditional surrender". After the strikes, he publicly praised the operation, declared it a success, and warned that Iran "should make peace or face more attacks," adding that "there are many targets left" if Iran refused to relinquish key parts of its nuclear program. In Tehran, it's not irrational to believe that US diplomatic engagement was never intended to succeed. The negotiations had been real, but the intentions behind them now look suspect. For Iranian leaders, the lesson seemed unmistakable: The West may speak the language of dialogue, but it acts in the language of force and violence.

So, what should the West expect now? It doesn't matter who rules Iran. The leadership — regardless of name or face, whether wearing a crown, a turban, or a tie — shares a foundational belief: The West cannot be trusted to keep its word, honor its deals, or respect Iranian sovereignty. This mindset long predates the Islamic Republic. Both Reza Shah and his son Mohammad Reza Shah — who came to power with at least the tacit support of Western powers — remained deeply skeptical of foreign governments and consistently questioned their intentions. That posture didn't end with the 1979 revolution; It was only reinforced and has gained broader consensus across the political spectrum. This doesn't mean Iran is inflexible or incapable of negotiation. But its starting point is not trust, it's caution. That caution has only deepened over time, especially as the West repeatedly turns to what it calls "alternatives" to diplomacy. Each time that happens, those inside Iran who oppose negotiations gain the upper hand. This mindset may frustrate Western diplomats. But ignoring it leads to policies doomed to fail. If the West wants a different outcome with Iran, it must stop pretending it's engaging with a blank slate. History walks into every room before a single word is spoken. And for Iran, history keeps saying the same thing: You are alone, so act accordingly. Until that narrative is disrupted — not with air strikes, but with sustained, credible commitments — Iran's leaders will continue to do exactly what history taught them to do: resist.



For centuries, Iran has lived under the shadow of invasion, betrayal, and isolation. And every chapter of its modern history has only reinforced the same conclusion for its leaders: No matter who sits at Iran's end of the negotiating table — be it a reformist, a moderate, or a hardliner — Iran must rely only on itself. It's not a question of paranoia. It's a survival instinct.

The Iranian flag hangs from a building in Tehran following damage by Israeli air strikes on June 25, 2025. ABEDIN TAHERKENAREH/EPA

The article first appeared on Responsible Statecraft.

Iran set to reject Azerbaijan's bid for Ma'soumi: *Report*

Sports Desk

The Wrestling Federation of Iran is expected to reject a request to issue a letter of consent allowing superheavyweight prodigy Amirreza Ma'soumi to represent Azerbaijan at September's World Championships, ISNA reported on Wednesday.

Ma'soumi, 20, shared a photo of himself alongside his father and personal coach, Fardin Ma'soumi, in a training session with Azerbaijan's national team in Baku earlier in July – hinting at plans to continue his international career overseas.

The controversial photo was released just days after Alireza Dabir, the sport's governing body in Iran, had warned the freestyle 125kg wrestler against further absence in the Iranian training camp.

the Azerbaijan Wrestling Federation made an official approach for Ma'soumi on Tuesday, reportedly offering 300,000 Swiss francs for his services. However, ISNA wrote that Dabir has no intention of letting go of the Iranian wres-

ting's hottest assets and will inform the European country of his decision in an official letter next week.

Ma'soumi has been the dominant force of the superheavyweight class across different age groups in recent years, grabbing six world gold medals – including last year's junior and under-23 titles.

He was also part of the Iranian seniors' team in February's Ranking Series event in Zagreb and then represented the country at the Asian Championships in March, cruising to the 125kg gold on both occasions.

However, Ma'soumi, who fell short against compatriot Amirhossein Zare' in the Iranian Olympic trials last year, saw his hopes of a securing place in the world showpiece dashed after a second setback against the reigning world champion in May's International Takhti Cup final in Isfahan.

Dejected by some referring decisions in the 8-2 defeat, Ma'soumi visited Yerevan in June for talks with the Armenian wrestling officials, including national team head coach Abetnak Kurginyan,

about the prospect of representing the European country at international competitions.

Under the United World Wrestling rules, Ma'soumi would require a letter of consent from the Iranian federation before switching citizenship – a request that has been firmly rejected by Dabir.

"We've always granted approval for lower-ranked wrestlers [to represent other countries], but Ma'soumi is a top-notch asset for us, and already a favorite for world and Olympic golds. He has just been unlucky to have Zare' as a domestic opponent, though I believe the rivalry will push both wrestlers to new heights. I'm sure they are by far the world's top two in their weight class," Dabir said in interview in mid-July.

"Every wrestler must know his place. If Ma'soumi skips the next national camp, he will be axed from the under-23 squad as well. The national team interests come first. I like him like my own son, and I just hope he is given the right advice," added the former world and Olympic champion.



● UWW

Asian Roller Skating Championships:

Iran's Ahmadi wins speed slalom silver

Sports Desk

Taraneh Ahmadi got Iran off the mark at the Asian Roller Skating Championships in Jencheon, South Korea, by grabbing a silver medal in the women's inline freestyle speed slalom event.

Ahmadi suffered a setback against Chinese Taipei's Liu Chiao-hsi after three races and settled for a runner-up finish behind her familiar foe, who had also beaten the Iranian to the gold medal at the Asian Games 2023.

Romina Salek, who grabbed a precious gold medal at the Hero Battle Cup in Milan earlier in the month, was the other Iranian contestant in Wednesday's event but finished her campaign empty-handed after a defeat in the bronze-medal showdown.

Parinza Zakaria and Rei-



● IRNA

haneh Mostafaei competed in the women's junior competitions but failed to finish on the podium.

Meanwhile, Reza Lesani – also a gold medalist in Milan – bounced back from a semi-final setback to win a consolation bronze in the in the

men's speed slalom contests, thanks to a three-race victory over a Taipei opponent. Amir-Mohammad Savari, Roham Gharib, and Amirhossein Aslani also represented Iran in the men's event but failed to reach the closing stages of the competition.

FIBA U16 Asia Cup WABA qualifiers:

Iranian boys beat Jordan to advance to finals

Sports Desk

Iran secured a place at the 2025 FIBA U16 Asia Cup in Ulaanbaatar, thanks to a 96-88 victory over host Jordan at the West Asian qualifiers on Tuesday.

Bardia Khosravi had a double-double with 19 points and 11 rebounds and was named the most valuable player of the contest.

Alireza Rashidi and Yassin Morovvat chipped in 18 points apiece as Iran claimed a second victory in Group A of the qualifiers, following the 86-81 win against Syria on the preceding night.

Mohammad-Sadeq Pakgozar also finished in double figures for Iran, dropping 16 points.



● DANIAL AHMADI/IRIBF

Kareem Al-Khawaldeh led the scoring chart for the host nation with a game-high 21 points, followed by Michael

Sahlieh (16 points) and Faris Abusalem (11). Iranian boys, who had suffered a 84-70 loss to Lebanon in their open-

ing game in Amman, will conclude the West Asian qualifiers with a rematch against the Lebanese today.



● IRIHF

Asian Women's Youth Handball Championship:

Iran defeats Hong Kong, to play Chinese Taipei for fifth spot

Sports Desk

Iranian girls claimed a comfortable 32-15 win against Hong Kong on Wednesday to remain on course for a consolation fifth-place finish at the Asian Women's Youth Handball in Jinggangshan, China.

Diana Rezaei delivered a player-of-the-match performance as Iran secured a second victory at the competition, having beaten India 42-30 in the final game in Group B.

The win had seen Iran finish third in the group table behind reigning champion Japan and South Korea.

Iran began its campaign with a 40-27 loss to Japan on the opening day of the event, before falling short by the same scoreline against South Korea, which was beaten by Japan in the final showpiece of the previous edition in 2023.

Standing between Iran and the fifth spot – and a place at the 2026 IHF Youth World

Championship – in today's showdown at the Gymnasium of Jiangxi University of Software Professional Technology is Chinese Taipei, which came out victorious (29-24) against India earlier on Wednesday. This is the 11th edition of the flagship age-group continental event. South Korea is the most-decorated team of the competition with a remarkable eight titles, with Iran and Japan winning the previous two editions.

Neygenan; a neglected heritage village with unmatched historical architecture



Iranica Desk

Neygenan village is located 60 kilometers northeast of Boshruyeh, South Khorasan Province. It is considered one of the historic villages of Boshruyeh. In Iranian geographical literature, it is described as follows: “Neygenan is the name of one of the districts of Boshruyeh, consisting of 30 small villages, with a total population of about 1,320 people. The Neygenan district significantly differs from other districts in terms of population, area, and the number of villages, because the inhabitants of these villages have dispersed to other counties due to successive droughts.”

Village divisions

Today, Neygenan village is divided into two sections: “Paeen Deh” (Lower Village) and “Bala Deh” (Upper Village). The distinctive feature and point of difference is that, while the historic fabric of the Lower Deh remains intact, it is abandoned and uninhabited, chtn.ir wrote. Most of the residents of this village are engaged in agriculture and livestock farming. The main agricultural products include wheat, barley, saffron, and cotton, all cultivated through irrigation, chtn.ir wrote.

Architectural heritage

Seyyed Amir Soleimani-Rabati,

the head of the Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts Department of Boshruyeh, regarding the architecture of the old village fabric, stated, “The migration of residents to the western part of the historic fabric and the establishment of the new village have left the old fabric untouched and almost entirely preserved. The key characteristics of this fabric include its adobe and mud construction, the cohesive layout of the village, and the presence of public buildings such as the historic mosque and Husseinieh (religious hall), water reservoirs, caravanserais, luxurious houses, towers and fortifications, and residential structures.”

Historical patterns

Research studies on the historic fabric of Boshruyeh villages indicate that Neygenan’s architecture is based on patterns from the Safavid to Qajar periods. The residential houses, in addition to native features, also exhibit some non-native architectural characteristics. This is attributable to its strategic location along major Islamic-era trade routes, where the movement of caravan travelers and cultural exchanges influenced the economic life of the village, ultimately turning Neygenan into a thriving trading hub.

Pre-Islamic and Islamic Era influence

The historic fabric of Neygenan is unparalleled in South Khorasan Province in terms of cohesion and architectural style. The discovery of pre-Islamic pottery fragments suggests that settlement in this area predates Islam. Architectural studies associate the origin of the village with the Islamic Middle Ages, but its current cohesive structure was developed and solidified during the Safavid period. Its strategic positioning along key communication routes toward Mashhad, along with the presence of caravan facilities, has profoundly influenced the lives of its inhabitants. The style of buildings in the Paeen Deh reflects this strong economic foundation.

Unique Potential

From the perspective of fabric cohesion and architectural style, Neygenan is truly unique. The village is situated adjacent to the Trans-Iranian Railway. Its proximity to a salt desert and other natural potentials could facilitate its transformation into a significant cultural and economic hub.

Current challenges

The people of Neygenan have been renowned for their lit-

erary and cultural heritage for centuries. Currently, most of the residents are elderly, while the younger generation has migrated to other provinces. During special occasions such as the lunar month of Muharram (marking the anniversary of the martyrdom of Imam Hussein (PBUH) and his companions) and Nowruz (Iranian New Year), people return to the village collectively. However, the desire for modern construction in the new part of the village has led to the neglect and abandonment of the historic fabric.

Preservation

Although many other areas within the province with rich historical fabric, inhabited or abandoned, are affected by modern architectural interventions, Neygenan remains exceptional. This village resembles a living museum, possessing a unique ethnographic culture that could become an important academic research site. Neygenan is unparalleled within the province; however, sadly, it remains largely unknown and neglected. Despite its cultural and historical assets, it faces exposure to desert winds, and no meaningful progress can be made until the local community recognizes its true importance.



● ISNA

Tranquil beauty of Mal Agha village in Khuzestan Province

Mal Agha, or Malaga, is a picturesque village nestled approximately 20 kilometers from Qaleh Tal City, 32 kilometers northeast of Baghmalek, and about 170 kilometers from Ahvaz, in the eastern region of Khuzestan Province. Covering an area of 100 hectares, Mal Agha village is home to roughly 45 households. Situated at an elevation of around 1,000 meters above sea level, the village is perched on the slopes of the Zagros Mountains, offering stun-

ning vistas and a cool climate. Access to the village is convenient via an asphalted road, which winds through scenic landscapes of oak forests, rice paddies, and wheat fields. The Dez River flows through a nearby valley, providing irrigation for the region’s lush gardens of pomegranates, grapes, plane trees, wild pistachios, hawthorns, and surrounding oak forests. During spring, the village hosts a lively market where visitors can

enjoy fresh pomegranates, honey, pomegranate paste, and various dairy products. To accommodate tourists, 18 cabins with a capacity for 300 visitors have been developed, offering a peaceful retreat in this natural setting. One of the area’s notable natural attractions is Tang-e Tehi, a spectacular five-kilometer-long canyon situated three kilometers east of Mal Agha, beyond Do Ab, where two rivers converge. The canyon features several springs

and waterfalls, culminating in a stunning five-meter-high waterfall at the foot of the 3,600-meter-high Mangasht Mountain. This site is a popular destination for nature lovers and adventure seekers. Rich in history, Mal Agha contains archaeological sites such as stone inscriptions on large rocks and square stone tombs. These rock tombs, called “Bard-e Gouri” in Khuzestan Province, measure about 1.5 meters in width and

1.7 meters in height, serving as ancient graves that offer insight into the region’s historical heritage.

Baghmalek

Located nearby, Baghmalek is a significant city in Khuzestan Province, renowned for its combination of natural beauty and industrial development. Surrounded by mountains and lush greenery, Baghmalek is often regarded as a gateway for trav-

elers exploring the scenic landscapes of the Zagros region. The city boasts several parks, cultural sites, and local markets that showcase the rich traditions of the area. Economically, Baghmalek is notable for its agriculture, particularly date palms and citrus fruits, and for its proximity to oil and gas industries that contribute to the region’s economy. The city also acts as a hub for transportation and commerce, connecting rural villages like Mal Agha with larger urban centers. Visitors often use Baghmalek as a starting point for excursions into the stunning natural landscapes of the Zagros Mountains and nearby natural reserves. With its blend of natural, historical, and industrial attractions, Baghmalek continues to grow as a vital part of Khuzestan’s cultural and economic landscape, drawing both tourists and investors interested in exploring the diverse offerings of this vibrant region.



● wikipedia.org



● IRNA



● IRNA



Iran seeks to turn Alborz into tourism hub to boost economy



Iran's Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts, Reza Salehi Amiri (c), walks with officials during a visit to tourism and heritage sites in Alborz province, Iran, July 23, 2025.
● IRNA

Speaking during his one-day trip to Alborz on July 23, Salehi Amiri said the province, which sits just west of Tehran, “reflects all that Iran stands for – history, nature, culture and industry – in a dense and unique form.” His remarks came as Iran tries to ramp up tourism revenues amid biting Western sanctions, IRNA reported. Alborz, home to about 3 million people, bears Tehran’s demographic spillover and lies along strategic transport corridors connecting central Iran to the Caspian and western provinces. Salehi Amiri urged “massive national investment” to elevate the region’s tourism infrastructure to global standards, branding it a potential “gateway for international tour groups.” The minister noted that Alborz is

dubbed Iran’s “capital of ancient mounds” for its archaeological richness, with few parts of the province devoid of historical sites.

Scientific excavations are set to begin soon across ancient settlements, lasting roughly one year. “Specialized archaeology teams in collaboration with the Research Institute of Cultural Heritage will conduct excavations,” he said, adding that findings would be shared transparently with residents and local officials.

Plans include restoring historical spaces, building specialized museums, preserving rural heritage and creating public visitor routes.

Salehi Amiri called these steps vital to positioning Alborz as “a national brand and a future global destination.”

A five-star hotel in Karaj, Alborz’s capital, is slated for imminent opening with provincial support. Several other tourism projects are under construction. “This is a significant move to internationalize Alborz tourism,” he said, adding that smart planning and institution-

al backing are crucial.

Nationwide, Iran has over 2,700 active tourism projects. Last year, 7.3 million foreign tourists visited Iran. The government initially targeted 10 million arrivals in 2025 before regional conflicts disrupted projections. Tehran now eyes a medium-term goal of attracting 15 million foreign visitors, banking on private sector cooperation to “pick up the slack” amid economic constraints. “Tourism is not only an engine for national economic growth,” Salehi Amiri said, “it is a powerful tool of cultural diplomacy to reimagine Iran’s regional and global standing.”

Amid a severe economic crunch from what Iranian officials call “hybrid wars and external pressures,” he expressed regret over public hardships. But he assured citizens that the administration is “pulling out all the stops” to ensure security, economic stability, and basic goods supply.

“Alborz is no marginal province,” he said. “It is a civilizational center that must become Iran’s new tourism pole.”

Arts & Culture Desk

Iran’s Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts, Reza Salehi Amiri, on Wednesday called Alborz

province a “compressed mirror” of the country’s civilization, urging its transformation into a national tourism hub to help lift Iran’s economy and global image.

Iran readies 32 airports for Arbaeen pilgrimage flights



Social Desk

Iran’s Airports and Air Navigation Company said on Tuesday it had prepared 32 international airports to handle Arbaeen pilgrimage operations starting August 8.

The company’s managing director Mohammad Amirani told state media that a central Arbaeen taskforce was formed three months ago to coordinate airlines, security forces, airport police and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps aviation protection unit to ensure smooth travel for pilgrims heading to Iraq, IRNA reported.

“We expect a sharp rise in flights to Najaf and Baghdad from border airports including Ilam, Kermanshah, Ahvaz and

Abadan,” Amirani said, adding that infrastructure upgrades had been prioritized to “facilitate pilgrims’ movement.” Flights for Arbaeen, which marks the 40th day after Ashura and draws millions of Shia pilgrims annually, will operate from August 8 to August 17. All aviation, airport operations, and airspace control centers are on standby for the surge in passengers.

Amirani noted that Isfahan and Tabriz airports, damaged during recent Israeli airstrikes, were rebuilt and are now fully operational. The 12-day strikes targeted multiple Iranian cities, prompting emergency repairs to keep aviation services running.

He urged pilgrims to book tickets only through official channels and arrive early at airports to avoid delays, warning them against carrying prohibited items.

“Serving Arbaeen pilgrims is a great honor for us,” Amirani said. He described them as “special guests” deserving the highest standard of services at what he called “Zero Pole,” an expression referring to airports as the starting point of the pilgrimage journey.

Iran’s top-grossing animation ‘Woolina and the No Birds’ targets global market

Arts & Culture Desk

Iranian producer Mohammad Mehdi Mashkouri said on Wednesday that negotiations are underway to take the animated series ‘Woolina and the No Birds’ to international markets, following the domestic box office success of its feature film adaptation ‘Woolina and the No Birds’.

The three-dimensional series, directed by Hossein Safarzaghegan and produced by Mashkouri for the Owj Arts and Media Organization, builds on the its franchise, which first aired in two-dimensional format.

Its cinematic version, released in early 2024, grossed nearly 70 billion toman (around \$1.3 million), becoming the highest-grossing animation in Iranian cinema history. ‘Woolina and the No Birds’ has already been screened in Turkey, Russia, Armenia, Tajikistan, Iraq, and Lebanon.

The new series airs weekly on Iran’s Nahal TV channel every Thursday and Friday at 5 p.m. Mashkouri described its core mission as building a sustained relationship with children by creating an enduring Iranian hero through “repetition and continuity.” He argued that successful global brands thrive on consistent portray-

al of heroes across films and series, while Iranian children’s productions remain seasonal and fragmented.

“Childhood content is about persistence. That’s how heroes are created,” Mashkouri told IRNA in Tehran. He explained that the series continues the story world of ‘Woolina and the No Birds’, where the main characters, having achieved their goal of flying in the film, now use their flying tools to help others.

Each episode follows a standalone story designed around teamwork and problem-solving, avoiding the traditional good-versus-evil plotlines. “We emphasized cooperation and participation, using humor and child-friendly language,” Mashkouri noted.

Scripts were developed in consultation with child psychologists, family media experts, and children’s writers to ensure clarity and immediacy. “Children don’t have time for long analysis. Educational content must be simple and tangible.”

Mashkouri also highlighted the intensive pre-production phase, during which the team chose 52 core themes, writing a separate screenplay for each. At the end of each episode, characters receive medals for overcoming challenges, a device intended to keep



viewers engaged and pave the way for a planned second cinematic feature, already in early script development. On visual design, he acknowledged criticism over the absence of overt Iranian cultural elements, explaining that the fantasy nature of the characters necessitated a universal approach. “If the characters were human, we would have incorporated stronger Iranian symbols. But these are fantasy figures, aimed at international broadcast,” Mashkouri said.

Marketing efforts abroad began a year ago, with discussions ongoing in several countries, although Mashkouri declined to name them pending final agreements. “We are hopeful the series will join the network’s popular shows,” he said, adding that the animation has become one of Iran’s best-known children’s brands.

Saudi eyes closer anti-drug cooperation with Iran

Social Desk

Saudi Arabia is looking to step up cooperation with Iran in fighting drug trafficking, a senior Saudi official said on Wednesday in Tehran, signaling warming ties between the regional rivals.

Saeed Mohammed Al-Wadaei, head of the Counter-Narcotics Office at the Embassy of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in Tehran, said Riyadh wants to expand work with Iran on intelligence exchange, training, and operational strategies to combat what he called a “cross-border scourge.”

He was speaking during talks with officials at Iran’s Drug Control Headquarters, IRNA reported.

“We are witnessing considerable progress in relations,” Al-Wadaei said, noting that Saudi Arabia aims to bring these ties “to the fore” through joint anti-drug efforts. He described the cooperation as part of building “friendly relations between two brotherly countries.”

Al-Wadaei stressed that drug crime often cuts across borders and even continents, underlining the need for international coop-

eration to tackle trafficking networks. “Fifty percent of the drugs seized in Saudi Arabia result from cooperation with neighboring countries,” he said, highlighting existing joint operations with states along regional trafficking routes.

Saudi Arabia’s National Committee for Combating Drugs is finalizing a five-year strategy that includes international cooperation as a key pillar, according to Al-Wadaei.

He revealed that the strategy lays out “major operational objectives” alongside its primary goals,

with counter-trafficking collaboration among them.

He also voiced hope that an anti-drug clause embedded in past bilateral security agreements with Iran would be reactivated. “It would be a great pleasure to see this clause back in action,” he said.

Islam prohibits drug trafficking as a crime, Al-Wadaei noted, adding that both Tehran and Riyadh were working “with full force” to curb the problem. He said Saudi Arabia had reactivated its embassy’s counter-narcotics office in Tehran to further boost collaboration.

