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Leader of Iran's Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei addresses a ceremony to remember the Iranians who lost their lives more than 40 days after Israel waged a 12-day imposed war on the country in downtown Tehran on July 29, 2025.

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Trump's flight from reality

PERSPECTIVE

The outlook for talks—or whatever guise can be given to diplomacy between Iran and the United States—appears more opaque than ever. Although US President Donald Trump's Middle East envoy, Steve Witkoff, speaks of returning to the negotiating table, Trump remains obstinately resistant—and visibly upset—about accepting the "realities" emphatically stated by Iran's Foreign Minister Seyyed Araghchi. A week after interview with Fox News, Trump's critical reactions continue to reverberate. The US president on Monday issued threatening rhetoric aimed at Iran, warning that if uranium enrichment resumes, US would strike back by bombing Iran's nuclear sites once more. These remarks drew a swift response

from Araghchi who tweeted that any further aggression would be met with a "more decisive" response—one that "will be IMPOSSIBLE to cover up." "They were interviewed on a recent show and the foreign minister saying things he shouldn't be talking about," Trump said, responding to Araghchi Fox News appearance. But what did Araghchi say that made it so unacceptable to Trump? Araghchi underscored Iran's inalienable right—enshrined in international treaties, accepted legal norms, and plain common sense—to pursue uranium enrichment. He made it clear Iran could not give up its enrichment program as it represented not only a scientific milestone but also a matter of national pride.

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West's claims over nuclear program, human rights mere excuses: *Leader*



National Desk

Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei called Western claims over Iran's nuclear program and human rights mere pretexts, saying their real concern is Iran's growing power in different fields.



Leader of Iran's Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei speaks during a ceremony in Tehran on July 29, 2025, to commemorate the victims of last month's Israeli's aggression against Iran. [khamenei.ir](#)

Ayatollah Khamenei made the remarks on Tuesday during a ceremony to mark the 40th day since the martyrdom of those killed in the last month Israel's aggression against Iran. "Nuclear program, enrichment, human rights are all excuses ... What they are after is your religion and knowledge," he said. "Our nation, by divine grace, will never abandon its religion or its knowledge," he said. "We will take great strides in strengthening our faith and deepening our scientific advancement." The Leader said that the recent 12-day aggression against Iran

revealed the strength and determination of the Iranian nation, and showed the world the unmatched firmness of the Islamic Republic's foundation. Ayatollah Khamenei added that the war served as an occasion for the Islamic Republic to display its willpower and capabilities, stressing that the root cause of enmity toward Iran lies in the nation's "faith, knowledge, and unity." "They are against this widespread faith of [our] people, their unity under the banner of Islam and the Qur'an, and they are against your knowledge."

The Leader's remarks come in the wake of Israel's June 13 aggression targeting senior Iranian officials and nuclear scientists in an act of terrorism that killed scores of civilians as well. Days later, the United States escalated the war by bombing three civilian nuclear facilities in Iran. In a powerful response, Iranian Armed Forces launched retaliatory strikes on strategic Israeli targets across the occupied territories and also hit the Al-Udeid air base in Qatar, the largest American military outpost in West Asia.

Speaker calls Israel's actions in Gaza reminiscent of Nazi crimes

International Desk

Iranian Parliament Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf on Tuesday described Israel's actions in Gaza as reminder of Nazi crimes during the World War II, warning that every moment of delay in confronting Israel is tantamount to complicity in the crimes of the "Nazis of the 21st century." Speaking at the meeting titled "Commitment to International Law and the UN Charter for Ensuring International Peace and Security" in Geneva, Qalibaf said the catastrophe unfolding in Gaza today marks one of the darkest moments in human history. The meeting was held on the sidelines of the 6th World Conference of Speakers of Parliament in Geneva, at the initiative of Iran and with the participation of representatives from many countries. Qalibaf said the "apartheid regime of Israel", backed by global powers, is carrying out deliberate crimes against civilians, particularly children. "What we are witnessing is not a war; it is an organized genocide that demeans humanity. This is the emergence of the Nazis of the 21st century," he stated.



Iranian Parliament Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf speaks in a meeting on Gaza in Geneva, Switzerland, on July 29, 2025. [icana.ir](#)

The speaker stressed that UN reports prove these crimes are not accidental but part of a plan to ethnically cleanse Palestinians. He warned that despite international laws, the world's silence on what is happening in Gaza has effectively legitimized it. "Gaza today is not merely a regional crisis; it is a test of the world's conscience. If the Nazis of our time are not stopped there, the flames of this tragedy will spread across the globe," Qalibaf cautioned. Since October 2023, the Israeli

regime has launched a devastating war on the Gaza Strip, which has claimed the lives of more than 59,000 Palestinians in the besieged territory. The regime has also resorted to a starvation policy in recent months to force the Palestinian resistance groups to surrender. The starvation and famine in Gaza have claimed the lives of more than 130 people, mostly children. Israel's policy of starving Gaza civilians has drawn condemnations by the countries across the world.

Iran vows stronger response if attacked again by US, Israel

International Desk

Iran's foreign minister warned on Monday that it would respond to the United States and Israel in a "more decisive manner" should they attack Iran again. The comments appeared to be in response to remarks by US President Donald Trump, who had threatened earlier in the day to "wipe out" the Islamic republic's nuclear program if it resumed atomic activities following a round of US strikes last month.

"If aggression is repeated, we will not hesitate to react in a more decisive manner and in a way that will be IMPOSSIBLE to cover up," Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said in a post on X. "If there are concerns about the possible diversion of our nuclear program into non-peaceful purposes, the 'military option' proved incapable – but a negotiated solution may work," he added. It remains unclear how much damage was caused by the US strikes on Tehran's nuclear facilities, which came after Israel launched a surprise bombing campaign which claimed the lives of nearly 1,100 Iranians. Major General Abdolrahim Mousavi, Chief of Staff of Iran's Armed Forces, in a phone conversation with Tajikistan's Minister of Defense Emomali Abdur Rahim Sobirzoda on Tuesday said Iran places absolutely "no trust" in the promises of the US and the Israeli regime and stands "fully prepared" to decisively confront any renewed aggression. He said the enemy's outrageous actions proved that despite 12 days of brutal attacks violating all international norms, the US and Israel "did not achieve their goals and received heavy blows, which is why they called for a ceasefire to save the Zionist regime."



Abbas Araghchi [IRNA](#)

Israel's attacks had derailed US-Iran nuclear negotiations that began in April. During a ceremony commemorating those killed in the last month aggression by the Israeli regime on Tuesday, the Iranian foreign minister said that there is no plan for new negotiations for now. Over the course of the 12-day war, Iran responded with missile attacks on Israeli targets in the occupied territories, as well as one on a nearby US base in Qatar. During a visit to Scotland on Monday, Trump maintained the previous strikes on Iran "wiped out their nuclear possibilities". "They can start again. If they do, we'll wipe it out faster than you can wave your finger at it," he added. Before the war broke out, the United States and Iran were divided over uranium enrichment – with Tehran describing it as a "non-negotiable" right, and Washington calling it a "red line". Tehran, which has consistently denied pursuing a bomb, has said it is open to discussing the rate and level of enrichment, but not the right to enrichment itself. In his post, Araghchi said: "No one in their right mind would abandon the fruits of tremendous investment in homegrown and peaceful technology" just because of foreign bullying.

Iran warns against attempts to disintegrate Syria



Amir Saeid Iravani [IRNA](#)

International Desk

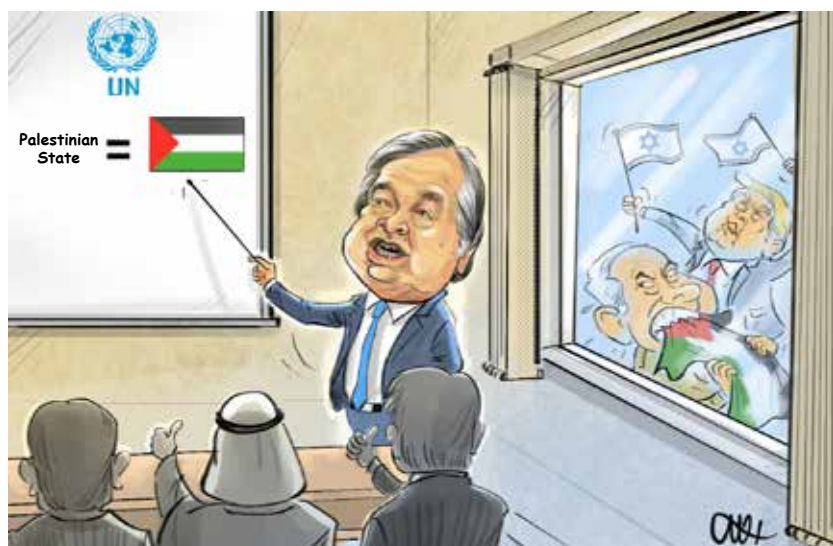
Iranian UN ambassador Amir Saeid Iravani on Monday underlined Iran's "unwavering commitment" to the sovereignty, unity, and territorial integrity of Syria, warning against any attempt to disintegrate the Arab country. "We strongly oppose any attempt

— whether direct or indirect — to undermine Syria's national sovereignty or to fragment its territory. In this regard, we warn against Israel's dangerous and destabilizing agenda aimed at detaching Syria's southern provinces from the authority of the central government", the Iranian diplomat said during an address to a UN Security Council session to discuss the

situation in Syria. Iravani said such illegal actions constitute a clear violation of international law, the UN Charter and the Security Council resolution, and threaten regional stability. He also referred to a recent outbreak of violence in Syria's Sweida Province, which resulted in the loss of hundreds of civilian lives and damage to critical infrastructure. "We express our support for the interim government's efforts to restore stability and urge a prompt, transparent investigation conducted in full accordance with the rule of law". Clashes in Druze-majority Sweida Province, which began on July 13 and ended with a cease-fire a week later, initially involved Druze fighters and Bedouin tribes, who have been fighting for decades. Later, government forces joined the fighting on the side of the Bedouin armed groups. The clashes killed more than 250 people and displaced 128,571 others, according to the UN's International Organization for Migration.



Mohammad Ali Rajabi
Cartoonist



Iran moving from industrial dependence to national industry: Veep

Economy Desk

Iranian first vice president stated that the country is transitioning from dependency to national industry and is pursuing a strategy of self-reliance in all industrial fields. Speaking at a ceremony commemorating National Skills Week on Tuesday, Mohammad Reza Aref emphasized that the country is transitioning from dependency to national industry, underscoring the pursuit of “a strategy to achieve self-sufficiency in all industrial fields and meet the country’s needs,” IRNA reported. The vice president stressed that, of course, close ties must be maintained with global scientific, technological, and academic centers and institutions along this path. Aref stated, “today, in technological advancements, the share of Iranian scientists

is greater than their proportion relative to the population,” adding that the necessities of the human resource development chain impose the strengthening of this link upon the country. He asserted that Iran must hold a superior position in advanced technologies, particularly emerging ones, within the region. Aref noted that specialists and university graduates cannot lead this path, as progress in this field rests with technologists. Globally, he pointed out, the share of scientists is less than that of technologists and is incomparable. The vice president added that Iran must move “at high speed in the competitive arena of technological advancements alongside world countries.” This raises the question, he posed, of whether this path can be traversed relying solely on university researchers and theoretical graduates, to which the answer is negative.

Consequently, he stated, the pursuit is for collaboration between the scientific and technological sectors. Aref declared that Iran must have no lag behind any advanced country in emerging and prominent technologies. He stated that highly motivated youths mean technologists should lead the way, and given that “we are in the era of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, the role of technologists is more specific than that of scientists.” Aref stated that science must keep pace with technology and moderate its behavior; otherwise, it could exhibit harsh and inhuman behavior.



Tabriz-Baku flights resume, boosting ‘trade and economic diplomacy’



Economy Desk

Flights between Tabriz and Baku, and vice versa, resumed on Tuesday following a several-year interruption, with “the development of trade, tourism,

and economic diplomacy” cited as key objectives for reinstating the route. The resumption follows President Masoud Pezeshkian’s official visit to the Republic of Azerbaijan in April and recent diplomatic efforts by the governor

general of East Azarbaijan Province. At the inaugural ceremony for the Baku route held at Tabriz Shahid Madani International Airport, Governor General of East Azarbaijan Bahram Sarmast said that advancing trade, tourism, and economic diplomacy are primary goals of reestablishing the air link, IRNA reported. Provincial officials attended the ceremony, presenting flowers to passengers aboard the first flight. Sarmast emphasized the flight’s restoration stems from Pezeshkian’s diplomatic engagement and underscores East Azarbaijan’s strategic importance in relations with Baku. He noted that the resumption of Tabriz-Baku flights is happening after an interruption of several years, explaining

that establishing these flights is one of the outcomes of the president’s visit to the Republic of Azerbaijan and signifies the importance and position of the northwestern province in relations with Baku. Expressing hope for an increase in flights on this route, the governor general of East Azarbaijan stated, “The province has been one of the country’s important industrial and commercial hubs, and the long-standing history of the Chamber of Commerce in Tabriz, the existence of 70 industrial towns and zones, and 4,800 industrial and production units signify the province’s substantial share in the national economy.” “East Azarbaijan, due to its location at the crossroads of northwestern provinces and its capabilities in tourism,

health tourism, non-oil exports, technical and engineering services, and agricultural and horticultural products, holds a central position in economic relations and exchanges with the Republic of Azerbaijan,” Sarmast said. He said that developing transportation and transit, completing important road projects and border bridges with the Republic of Azerbaijan, visa cancellation, and developing air transport cooperation are among this province’s strategies for connecting with Baku. The Director General of East Azerbaijan Airports, Ramin Azari, also stated at the ceremony that currently, 18 flight routes are active at Tabriz airport. He added, “direct and scheduled flights are also established from this airport with four foreign countries.”

MP: Committee agenda targets water crisis with Persian Gulf transfer, conservation

Economy Desk

A member of the Iranian Parliament’s Development Committee announced that plans for water transfer from the Persian Gulf and promoting water conservation culture were prioritized during a Tuesday meeting with the energy minister to address the water crisis in Tehran and Fars provinces. Speaking to ICANA, Mohammad Reza Rezaei Kouchi said, “A meeting was held with the Energy Minister Abbas Aliabadi on Tuesday to examine the water crisis situation in the capital and also to secure drinking water for Fars Province.” Regarding the meeting’s outcomes, he said that the session had two main parts. The first part was dedicated to Tehran’s water crisis, which has led to a severe shortage of drinking water due to poor advance planning. This situation, he noted, was predictable given population growth and rainfall patterns, yet proper planning had not been undertaken. Rezaei Kouchi further stated that while the Energy Ministry is attempting to resolve Tehran’s problem by transferring water from dams in adjacent counties, this is not a fundamental solution. He emphasized the necessity of changing water consumption habits and establishing sustainable water transfer to Tehran, including from the Caspian Sea, as priorities. Unprecedented efforts are underway to resolve the water crisis in Tehran and the region through the transfer of water from the Taleqan Dam. The core concept of the project, launched in January, 2023, is to increase the water intake capacity from the

Taleqan Dam and transfer it to Tehran via the existing route (Ziyaran to Bilaqan). According to the project managers, the project has the capacity to transfer 6.5 cubic meters of water per second. Combined with the 5 cubic meter capacity of the old water conveyance line, it will enable the annual transfer of 300 million cubic meters (mcm) of water to Alborz and Tehran provinces. The parliamentarian also stressed that Tehran’s per capita water consumption is significantly higher than the global average and that efforts in promoting conservation culture have been weak. **Only rescue for arid provinces** The Development Committee member continued that the second topic was the transfer of water from the Persian Gulf to Fars Province in south of Iran. He warned that unless solutions are devised for this province immediately, a crisis similar to Tehran’s would soon occur in Fars. The private sector has invested in the sea water transfer project to Fars, but faces obstacles such as the Energy Ministry’s lack of commitment to guaranteed water purchase. Rezaei Kouchi clarified that agreements were reached during the meeting to support the contractor through guaranteed water purchase, banking facilities, and advance water purchase by large industrial units. He asserted that transferring water from the Persian Gulf is the only way to save Fars, as groundwater aquifers are in poor condition and excessive extraction has caused land subsidence. Highlighting the necessity of changing the national water consumption pattern, Rezaei Kouchi noted that approximately 90%



of Iran’s water is consumed in the agricultural sector with inadequate efficiency. He emphasized the need to reform cultivation patterns and recognize water as a national value. He referenced other water transfer projects in the country, stating, “Projects for transferring water from the Sea of Oman to Sistan and Baluchestan, the Persian Gulf to Kerman, and from Yazd to Isfahan are underway.” “However, government cooperation and utilizing the National Development Fund’s capacity are essential for developing these projects,” he said. The parliament member projected that water transfer to Fars would take at least four years. Furthermore, he mentioned that the plan to transfer water from the southern sea to Isfahan Province has already been implemented, but due to high transfer costs, it is currently only for industrial use. He added that gradually, with government support, financial resource allocation, and utilizing other national capacities, Persian Gulf water could also be delivered to Isfahan for drinking purposes.

Trump’s flight from ...

In fact Iran cannot relinquish its enrichment program, since under Article III of the IAEA Statute and Article IV of the NPT, the right to peaceful nuclear energy—including prospecting, mining, enrichment, and reactor operation—is a “inalienable right” guaranteed to all signatories. Iran’s enrichment cannot be abandoned because the program transcends individuals or governments—it is a national endeavor. The program, built independently from foreign assistance and largely through trial and error with significant sacrifice, and loss of young, elite talent, cannot be abandoned without defying logic and national dignity. Acknowledging these rational and lawful arguments appears to be one of the most difficult admissions in modern political history—a difficulty that pushed Trump to launch an attack against Iran’s nuclear infrastructure. Araghchi’s second major point in that Fox News interview addressed Iran’s adherence to the NPT. He said the country would never go to 90% enrichment and would be committed to staying below 5% for civilian power reactor fuel, and only enrich up to 20% for a TRR research reactor. We do enrich uranium for our own needs, he pointed out. This reaffirms a central tenet of Iran’s nuclear doctrine and underscores its public promise to remain strictly non-military—a point emphasized in IAEA Director-General Rafael Grossi’s latest report, which reiterated the absence of any credible evidence of diversion, though the report provided Israel with a justification to attack Iran. If two decades of honest cooperation with the IAEA could not dispel doubts about Iran’s peaceful intentions, the most telling test should come after the assault on Iran. If Iran had aimed to build a bomb, what better time than the post-attack period to

claim justification? Yet Iran remains a party to the NPT and continues to observe its obligations. The upcoming visit of an IAEA deputy to Iran signals Iran’s continued compliance, a reality Trump seems reluctant to acknowledge, since Iran’s compliance contradicts the justifications offered by the US and Israel for their aggression. Thus, Trump lashes out, resorting to crude rhetoric. Araghchi also signaled openness to dialogue, saying Iran was open to dialogue “though not directly at this stage.” But he stressed that if the goal was a “win-win outcome”, he would be ready to engage. Yet Trump appears to have ignored that part of the message. He seems bent on viewing negotiations as extortion, not opportunity—and recoils from acknowledging hard truths. Trump’s refusal to face reality likely stems from the bitter truth about the ineffectiveness of military aggression. As Araghchi reiterated, the illegal bombing of Iran’s nuclear sites reaffirmed that no military solution exists. If doubts linger about the peaceful nature of Iran’s program, the military action did nothing to prove otherwise—whereas a negotiated solution might still succeed. At its core, Trump’s rhetoric is an implicit admission of failure. His claim that Iran is “still enriching” tacitly acknowledges Iran’s enduring capability—proving that the two-day mission by US bombers to target Iranian nuclear sites was effectively for nothing. Nuclear knowledge cannot be destroyed—the centrifuges, facilities, and even scientists may be targeted, but the expertise remains. The sooner Trump embraces this reality, the closer he would return to its campaign of “Make America great again.” Likewise, recognition of Iran’s nuclear program as a permanent capability—not to be reversed by force—could shift the negotiation landscape and pave the way for a rational deal.

US exits UNESCO as Gaza starves

Controlling narratives to hide Israeli crimes



In this illustration, US President Donald Trump holds an American flag with a UNESCO building in the background.

● INVEZZ



By Hassan Shokouhi Nasab
Int'l affairs expert

PERSPECTIVE

The United States officially pulled out of UNESCO, the UN's cultural and educational agency, just a few days ago. This marks the third time America has walked away from the international body, disregarding its global commitments.

Observers see this move not as a one-off stunt but as part of Washington's long-standing policy to undermine global institutions it helped set up but swiftly gives the cold shoulder to whenever these organizations act against the political interests or demands of its strategic ally, the Israeli occupation regime.

In justifying this exit, the US has accused UNESCO of "anti-Israel bias," "Chinese influence," and promoting "divisive social and cultural causes". The reality is that UNESCO, by emphasizing cultural justice, protecting the heritage of occupied peoples, and defending the historical rights of Palestinians, has repeatedly stood in the way of Israel's cultural appropriation and historical falsification — fueling the wrath of the White House. Accordingly, America's departure lays bare that when it comes to the rights of oppressed peoples, the interests of Tel Aviv and its lobbyists take precedence over all US principles and international obligations.

This move has sparked widespread reactions. Israel, as usual, jumped on the opportunity to praise the decision, while international bodies, governments, and independent experts have slammed it as a sign of America's moral isolation. UNESCO, expressing deep regret, reaffirmed its commitment to defending culture, education, peace, and global heritage. What has become crystal clear is not merely the withdrawal of a country but a coordinated effort by dominant powers to discredit institutions that still echo the voices of the oppressed.

Cost of dodging global obligations

This is not the first time the US has bailed out of international bodies that do not guarantee its exclusive interests. In 2018, the Trump administration pulled out of the UN Human Rights Council, alleging its "biased stance" against Israel — a council which, despite its flaws, was one of the few that thoroughly documented and condemned repeated Palestinian rights violations by the occupation regime.

Similarly, in 2020, America dropped out of the World Health Organization (WHO), citing its mishandling of the COVID-19 crisis — an act that not only sparked sharp criticism from health experts but also weakened Washington's global leadership in public health.

Leaving the Paris Climate Agreement provides another example of America's denial of global commitments in vital areas of survival and the environment. The recent UNESCO exit fits squarely into this pattern — a trajectory aimed at dismantling multilateral mechanisms that prioritize global concerns over the narrow political interests of the US and its allies.

Economically, America's withdrawal means losing direct in-

fluence over budget allocations, projects, and operational priorities within UNESCO. Previously, US financial contributions made up around 22% of UNESCO's total funding. With these funds cut off, not only does US leverage take a hit, but this vacuum gets filled by countries like China and Russia, which now have a stronger say in shaping global standards in education, culture, and digital governance. Over time, this shift will chip away at the commercial, scientific, and cultural standing of American institutions, limiting US access to UNESCO frameworks on world heritage listings, AI education, digital rights, and media ethics. Politically and diplomatically, this decision delivers a symbolic and practical blow to America's image as a champion of democracy, culture, and human rights. The UNESCO exit sends a clear message: The US is only committed to international cooperation when its own interests and those of Israel are ensured. Many diplomats believe such actions further isolate the US in multilateral relations while opening the door for developing countries and strategic rivals to lay out a new world order. Moreover, European countries and traditional US allies have voiced concerns over

this repeated rule-breaking as the cohesion of international institutions depends on predictable and responsible behavior by major powers.

Functionally, American academic, research, cultural, and artistic institutions will be hit hard by the federal government's decision. Numerous joint UNESCO projects in education, world heritage, social sciences, media literacy, endangered language preservation, and artificial intelligence now face suspension or cancellation. US universities and organizations will no longer be able to plug directly into long-term scientific and cultural UNESCO programs — dealing a heavy blow not only to scientific exchange but also to soft power diplomacy.

Symbolically, this exit carries profound meaning. UNESCO stands as a beacon of cultural peace, education for coexistence, and dialogue among civilizations. To walk away from it — especially amid global human tragedies like genocide in Gaza, famine, and cultural-informational warfare — is to turn one's back completely on the human-centered principles governing global interaction. This decision, echoing the deadly silence of other international institutions toward the killing and starvation of Pales-



A child recovers books from the rubble of a building hit in Israeli strikes the previous night in Jabalia, in the northern Gaza Strip, on January 16, 2025.

● OMAR AL-QATTAA/AFP

tinians, further undermines the credibility of global structures and intensifies the fundamental question: Is the current international order truly a tool of justice or merely an instrument of power?

US, Israel at heart of humanitarian catastrophe

While the Israeli regime, with the overt and unconditional backing of the US, is pursuing a policy of gradual genocide and systematic starvation of Gaza's population, Trump's decision to once again bail out of UNESCO carries weight far beyond mere politics; It is a deliberate cut-off from the last global institutions defending humanity and giving a voice to the world's oppressed.

UNESCO could have been the narrator of cultural, educational, and human crimes in Gaza — from bombing schools and universities to damaging historical heritage and denying education to future Palestinian generations. But America's exit shuts down the final channel that legitimizes Palestinian cultural rights.

At the same time as this decision, hunger-related casualties in Gaza have soared to unprecedented levels. According to the latest WHO report, at least 21 children under five have died from malnutrition since the start of 2025. In the 24 hours leading up to July 24, 15 more Palestinians, including several young children, succumbed to famine. Official malnutrition deaths have exceeded 100, with over 90,000 women and children suffering from severe dietary deficiencies. Healthcare facilities, besieged and constantly attacked, are unable to keep up with treatment needs. International aid organizations, including Doctors Without Borders and Oxfam, have described this crisis as a man-made, total disaster.

Under these conditions, the US exit from UNESCO is far from a mere political or cultural spat; It's a partnership in silencing the global soft resistance. When the body charged with protecting education, culture, and human rights worldwide — an institution the US itself helped set up — is cast aside by Washington, it means no formal mechanism should stand in the way of crimes like starving a nation, erasing national heritage, or withholding education from Palestinian children. This decision, alongside the silence of other bodies, sends a stark warning about the collapse of the global collective conscience.

If this trend carries on and the international community remains mute toward crimes like the deliberate famine and cultural erasure of Gaza's people, not only will institutions such as UNESCO become practically irrelevant, but the entire international legal and humanitarian order will face the threat of total collapse.

Today, America's UNESCO exit is not just a political statement; It's a global declaration that power writes off the truth. The first victim? A child clutching a schoolbook with an empty stomach — a book no longer printed, seen, or defended by any institution.

The article first appeared in Persian on Mehr news agency.



To walk away from UNESCO — especially amid global human tragedies like genocide in Gaza, famine, and cultural-informational warfare — is to turn one's back completely on the human-centered principles governing global interaction. This decision, echoing the deadly silence of other international institutions toward the killing and starvation of Palestinians, further undermines the credibility of global structures and intensifies the fundamental question: Is the current international order truly a tool of justice or merely an instrument of power?

Why UN not declaring famine in Gaza?



Yazan, a malnourished two-year-old Palestinian boy, sits with his brothers at their family's damaged home in the Shati refugee camp, west of Gaza City, on July 23, 2025.
● OMAR AL-QATTAA/AFP

By Moncef Khane
Former United Nations official
OPINION

On July 9, 2024, no fewer than 11 experts mandated by the United Nations Human Rights Council issued a mayday call about famine in Gaza. “We declare that Israel’s intentional and targeted starvation campaign against the Palestinian people is a form of genocidal violence and has resulted in famine across all of Gaza. We call upon the international community to prioritise the delivery of humanitarian aid by land by any means necessary, end Israel’s siege, and establish a cease-fire,” their statement read. Among the experts were Michael Fakhri, special rapporteur on the right to food, Pedro Arrojo-Agudo, special rapporteur on the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation, and Francesca Albanese, special rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967. In their opinion, the death of children from starvation despite attempts to provide them with medical treatment in central

Gaza left no room for equivocation. While “famine” is generally understood as an acute lack of nutrition that would lead to starvation and death of a group of people or an entire population, there is no universally accepted definition of the concept in international law. However, in 2004, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) developed the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC), a five-stage quantitative humanitarian scale to map the food insecurity of a population. The aim of this evaluation instrument is to spur collective action when food insecurity is identified and prevent such situations from reaching Level 5 on the IPC scale when famine is confirmed and declared. It has been used by FAO, the World Food Programme (WFP), and their partners as a scientific, data-driven tool for the past 20 years. The IPC quantifiable criteria for declaring famine are gruesomely straightforward: 20 percent or more of households in an area face extreme food shortages with a limited ability to cope; acute malnutrition in children exceeds 30 percent; and the

death rate exceeds two people per 10,000 per day. When these three benchmarks are met, “famine” needs to be declared. Although it does not trigger legal or treaty obligations, it is nevertheless an important political signal to compel an international humanitarian action. If the aforementioned experts could conclude, in unison and over a year ago, that famine was present in the besieged Gaza Strip, it is hard to understand why the competent UN entities and executive heads have not yet reached the conclusion that Level 5 has been reached by July of this year, after over four months of a medieval siege. In the era of real-time information transmitted to smartphones the world over, the reality of fatal levels of food insecurity is glaring and unconscionable. Images of emaciated bodies reminiscent of those taken in Nazi concentration camps tell the macabre tale of the reality in Gaza, blockaded by the uncompromising Israeli occupation forces. And yet, even against the backdrop of UN agency for Palestinian refugees (UNRWA) warnings issued on July 20 that one million children in Gaza are facing the risk of starvation, “famine” is

not yet declared. On the surface, the explanation for not declaring “famine” in Gaza is that the necessary data used under the IPC scheme is not available. This may well be the case since Israel prevents access to the Gaza Strip to journalists and some humanitarian workers. IPC analysts, therefore, do not have primary data collection capabilities, which they have for the other 30 or so situations they monitor. But when the physical evidence is plain to see, when some reliable data is available, humanitarian considerations ought to override technical requirements. However, in today’s UN system culture, transfixed by a US administration gone amok against it, political considerations override the sense of duty and professional imperatives. Those at the helm know what is right (or one hopes so) — and what could be fatal to their persona and careers. The US government’s ad hominem attacks against and sanctions imposed on Chief Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC) Karim Khan and UN Special Rapporteur Francesca Albanese are a vivid reminder that those jobs are not without risks. In the case of Albanese,

“In today’s UN system culture, transfixed by a US administration gone amok against it, political considerations override the sense of duty and professional imperatives. Those at the helm know what is right (or one hopes so) — and what could be fatal to their persona and careers. But now that the US Congress has passed an unprecedented bill defunding the UN system, not doing what is right to shield the concerned UN organisations from Washington’s retaliatory wrath is no longer an acceptable cop-out, if it ever was.

her mandate is not even a “job” as she is carrying it out pro bono, which makes her steadfastness and courage all the more exemplary. Admittedly, UN executive heads such as Secretary-General Antonio Guterres have more complex calculations to contend with, punitive actions by some powers on the organisation they lead being the principal one. As the saying goes, “money talks,” and the US is the single largest contributor to the UN system. But now that the US Congress has passed an unprecedented bill defunding the UN system, not doing what is right to shield the concerned UN organisations from Washington’s retaliatory wrath is no longer an acceptable cop-out, if it ever was. It is important here to remember that the Statute of the ICC provides that starvation of civilians constitutes a war crime when committed in international armed conflicts. The full siege of Gaza since March 2, which is resulting in the starvation of civilians, first and foremost infants and children, falls squarely within the purview of Article 8 of the Statute, all the more so as it is the result of a deliberate and declaratory policy denying humanitarian assistance for months. In this man-made famine, Palestinians are starving to death amid the deafening silence of the world, while tonnes of food are going to waste on the Egyptian side of the border while awaiting permission to enter Gaza. Israeli troops and foreign mercenaries hired by the Gaza Humanitarian Foundation have killed more than 900 Palestinians seeking aid at so-called humanitarian distribution sites. Some 90,000 children and women are in need of urgent treatment for malnutrition, according to the WFP; 19 people died of starvation in a single day on July 20, the Gaza Ministry of Health reported. And worse is yet to come. Michael Fakhri, Pedro Arrojo-Agudo, and Francesca Albanese said it a year ago — it is high time for the UN to officially declare that “famine” is in Gaza.



Palestinians gather to receive food distributed by a charity organization in Gaza City in July 2025.
● ANADOLU

The article first appeared on Al Jazeera.

AFC Women's Asia Cup: Iran to face Australia, South Korea, Philippines in group phase

Sports Desk

Iran was drawn against Australia, South Korea, and the Philippines in Group A of the 2026 AFC Women's Asia Cup – starting March 1 in Australia.

The draw for the 21st edition of the flagship continental event took place at the Sydney Town Hall on Tuesday, where 12 teams were split into three groups.

Marzieh Jafari's girls will begin their campaign against South Korea on March 2, before taking on their formidable hosts in Gold Coast three days later.

The final round of the group phase will

see Iran face the Philippines on March 8.

The top two in each group will be joined by the two best third-place teams in the quarterfinals.

Iranian girls secured a second appearance in the finals in dramatic fashion earlier in July, defeating Jordan 2-1 in a must-win final game in Group A of the qualifiers to beat the host to the top spot of the table on head-to-head criteria.

Elsewhere in the draw, North Korea, China, Uzbekistan, and Bangladesh were drawn in Group B, with Japan, Vietnam, India, and the Chinese Taipei completing the lineup in Group C.



● FFIRI

No surprises as Iran names squad for Volleyball World Championship

Sports Desk

There were no surprise additions to the squad as Iran head coach Roberto Piazza named a provisional 25-man list for the upcoming Volleyball World Championship – starting September 12 in the Philippines.

All players will have to report for a first training session in Tehran ahead of the world event next Tuesday.

The World Championship will be a second major event for Iran under the Italian head coach following the recently-finished preliminary round of the Volleyball Nations League.

The majority of the list were part of the team when Iran won six in 12 outings to finish eighth in the 18-team table earlier in July and missed out on a spot in the VNL Finals.

In fact, an eighth-place finish would have been enough for Iran to progress, had China – second from bottom in the preliminary table – not automatically qualified as the host of the Finals, which start with the quarterfinals in Ningbo on Thursday.

Opposite-spiker Ali Hajipour, who missed all three weeks

of action in the VNL preliminaries, has been named in the squad, while former Iranian captain and opposite-spiker Milad Ebadipour is yet to receive a call-up by the Italian coach.

Iran will make an eighth appearance at the flagship international event of the sport, with its best result coming in the 2014 edition, when Team Melli finished sixth in Poland. Iran will begin its Pool A campaign at the World Championship against Egypt on September 14, before facing another African test in Tunisia two days later.

The final round of the group fixtures will see Iran take on the host at the SM Mall of Asia Arena in Pasey on September 18.

The top two in each of the eight groups will progress to the round of 16.

Despite failing to secure a first VNL last-eight spot since 2022, Piazza's team definitely did enough to win over Iranian fans again with some brilliant performances and results in the preliminary phase – following a dire run of results over the past couple of years that saw Team Melli finish in the bottom three of the VNL table on two occasions

and miss out on a berth for Paris Olympics last summer.

Star opposite Amin Esmailnejad and outside-hitter Morteza Sharifi will headline the Iranian squad in the World Championship, having enjoyed a prolific campaign in the VNL preliminaries.

Esmailnejad chipped in 158 points to stand 13th in the top scorers' chart, while Sharifi contributed with a remarkable 18 aces for a joint-third place in the best servers' table.

The following is the Iranian 25-man squad for the FIVB World Championship:

Setters: Javad Karimi, Arshia Behnejad, Ali Ramezani, Omran Kookjeili

Middle blockers: Mohammad Valizadeh, Mahdi Jelveh, Issa Naseri, Matin Ahmadi, Armin Qelichniazi, Yousef Kazemi

Outside hitters: Morteza Sharifi, Amirhossein Efsandiar, Ehsan Daneshdoost, Amir Aftab-Azari, Pouria Hosseinkhanzadeh, Amirhossein Sadati, Alireza Abdolhamidi, Ali Haqqarast

Outside hitters: Amin Esmailnejad, Bardia Sa'adat, Ali Hajipour, Pouya Ariakhah
Liberos: Mohammadreza Hazratpour, Arman Salehi, Mehran Tavana.

Asian Junior Wushu Championships:

Iranians steal the show with seven sanda golds

Sports Desk

Iranian boys and girls continued their prolific run at the Asian Junior Wushu Championships in Jiangyin, China, by collecting 10 medals, including a remarkable seven sanda golds, on the penultimate day of the competitions.

Ehsan Gohari (45kg) and Reza Khankeshi (56kg), Amirhesam Mohammadi (60kg), Ali Rezaei (65kg), and Amirreza Karimi (80kg) bagged five gold medals in the men's event, while Amirmahdi Shiridel settled for a silver in the 75kg after a setback against his Chinese opponent in the final showpiece.

Yekta Adibi (52kg) and Rezvan Mouchani (60kg), meanwhile, walked away with the ultimate prize of their respective classes in the women's competitions. There was further glory for the country in the taolu contests on Tuesday.



● iranwushufed.ir

Saba Ramian tallied 9.226 points to grab the gold in the girls' cadet nandao form – a second medal for the Iranian girl after a first-day bronze – while Ramtin Siahmoshtei settled for the bronze of the same form in the boys con-

tests, taking his personal tally to three medals in Jiangyin. Iranian boys Mohammad-Parsa Madadi and Younes Khodaei, meanwhile, teamed up to win a silver medal in the duilian competition.

Iran edges Russia in pre-Asia Cup friendly

Sports Desk

Iran's national basketball team walked away with a hard-fought 70-67 victory over Russia in a warmup game in Moscow on Monday.

The match was part of Iran's final training camp ahead of the FIBA Asia Cup – starting starting August 5 in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. Sina Vahedi led the way for Iran with 20 points, and two assists, registering an efficiency rating of 18.

The two teams will go head-to-head in a rematch in the Russian capital today. Iran played three matches in a friendly tournament in Beirut before heading to Russia.

Team Melli suffered a 60-59 defeat against Egypt and then fell to a 105-89 setback against Lebanon, but defeated Jordan 70-61 in its final outing in Beirut on Friday.

Iran will begin its bid for a fourth Asian title with a game against

Guam in Group B on the opening day of the flagship continental event, before taking on Japan two days later – in a repeat of a group encounter between the two teams in the 2022 edition, which Iran won 88-76. The final round of the group fixtures will see Greek head coach Sotirios Manolopoulos's men play Syria on Aug. 9.

The winners of the four groups in Jeddah will be handed direct qualification for the quarterfinals, with the second and third teams heading into a playoff round for a place in the last eight.

Australia will enter the flagship continental event as the defending champion after beating Lebanon in the 2022 final.



● FIVB



● IRIBF

Escape urban life, embrace untamed beauty in Aghuzhal Highland



IRNA

Iranica Desk

Mazandaran Province, the jewel of tourism in Iran, always captivates hearts with its abundant attractions, but its lush summer highlands offer an indescribable experience of delightful weather and pristine nature. Aghuzhal Highland is one of these heavenly destinations, where the cool breeze seems to promise deep tranquility. If you are looking to escape the city's hustle and find absolute silence, Aghuzhal Highland in western part of Mazandaran Province, with its dreamy coolness and dirt paths leading you to the heart of the mountains and the depths of the Dohezar forests, is an ideal place for you — a place where only the sound of nature accompanies your steps. This heavenly region is perfect for lovers of long walks and mountaineering; from dense forests to mountain climbing trails, every step in Aghuzhal Highland offers a fresh experience of untouched natural beauty, IRNA wrote. To reach this lost paradise, after passing through Tonekabon and the Dohezar forests, follow the Dehestan sign and entrust yourself to the mountain dirt road; in Aghuzhal, where cars have no place, the road turns into a walking trail leading you to the heart of its pristine nature. If it is your first time going to Aghuzhal, we suggest planning your trip with experienced guides, as this area is a professional nature travel route in Iran.

What to bring with us?

To enjoy the trip to the summer highland area of Aghuzhal, like any other trip, there are some essentials that tourists must have with them. These include personal items, identification card, necessary medications, towel, spoon and fork, a mat for sitting and resting, suitable hiking shoes, backpack for carrying gear, trash bags for preserving environmental cleanliness, sleeping bag for night rest, flashlight for nighttime illu-

mination, windbreaker for protection against wind and rain, warm clothes for cool nights, and a cup for drinking liquids. These items help ensure a more comfortable and enjoyable journey.

Flora and fauna

The forests in Aghuzhal are a treasure of towering, centuries-old trees. These forests are covered with beech, plane, Hyrcanian, and maple trees that together create a stunning and lush landscape. The unique humidity, appropriate elevation, and fertile soil provide ideal conditions for the growth and development of diverse, long-lived plants. Interestingly, the ferns in these forests date back to prehistoric times and are relics of ancient eras. The village houses here are mostly made of beech wood, reflecting the deep bond between the people and nature. The running rivers and streams among the villages add a special freshness and vitality to the area.

Unique biodiversity

Along the forest paths, the pleasant sounds of birds herald a rich and diverse ecosystem. Various animal species coexist in this region, from birds and reptiles to mammals, amphibians, and fish. The biodiversity of Aghuzhal makes it an environmentally valuable area. Among the mammals in this region are deer, wild sheep, wolves, wildcats, foxes, and wild boars. The plains and meadows of Aghuzhal are also home to wild horses, whose beauty and grandeur add a special charm to the area. Besides mammals, Aghuzhal is a habitat for various bird species. These include pheasants, partridges, golden eagles, and white-headed ducks, each playing an important role in maintaining the ecological balance of the region.

Milash Waterfall

On your trip to Aghuzhal Highland, besides enjoying the beauty of the forests in this area, do not miss the opportunity to visit the quiet and lush tourist attractions

of Mazandaran Province, especially Milash Waterfall. This waterfall, located in a village with the same name, is known as the tallest waterfall in northern Iran. With a height of 25 meters, it is situated deep in the Dohezar forest, about one kilometer west of the village. Milash Waterfall, with its breathtaking views and pristine surrounding nature, is an ideal place for rest and rejuvenation. The pool at the base of Milash Waterfall is no deeper than 70 centimeters and is covered with small and large stones. These features make Milash Waterfall a safe and suitable spot for family recreation and swimming for tourists. The soothing sound of the waterfall and the cool water offer visitors a sense of calm and freshness.

To access Milash Waterfall, you must first drive to Milash village in your private vehicle. After arriving in the village, about 20 to 30 minutes of walking along suitable and green paths will take you to the waterfall. This walk through nature is an opportunity to enjoy the forest's beauty and breathe fresh and clean air. Upon reaching the waterfall, you can rest beside it, enjoy the unique views, and create memorable moments with your friends and family.

Daryasar Plain

One of the attractions near this highland is Daryasar Plain, which is located not far away. In spring, Daryasar Plain turns into a colorful tableau; its vast lands are covered with white chamomile flowers, creating a delightful view. This plain is located in the Dohezar hills region, south of Tonekabon, and with its pleasant weather and stunning natural scenery, provides an excellent opportunity for walking and photography.

Nousha village

Another lesser-known but amazing attraction near Aghuzhal is Nousha village. This village, 50 kilometers from Tonekabon, has become a hidden paradise due to its special geographical location.

Access to Nousha is possible only by horse or on foot, adding to the village's charm and offering tourists a different travel experience. The best time to visit this village is from May to September when nature is at its peak beauty, allowing visitors to enjoy natural landscapes and rural life. Traveling to Aghuzhal and visiting Nousha village is an opportunity to experience nature's wonders and spend unforgettable moments in the heart of the mountains and green plains. These two places, with their unique beauty, can offer a different and peaceful experience to every traveler. Indeed, this trip is not only a chance to see natural landscapes but also an opportunity to connect with local culture and simple rural life.

Travel time

The best time to travel to Aghuzhal is summer. During this season, the weather is cool and pleasant, without humidity, providing travelers with a delightful experience of nature. Given the natural beauty and stunning views of the area, summer is suitable for hiking and exploring the plains and forests. Also, in this season, you can enjoy various activities such as camping and nature photography. Although summer is the best time to visit Aghuzhal, you can also visit the area and its surroundings in early spring. At this time, nature gradually blooms, and flowers and plants begin to grow. However, before traveling to higher elevations, plains, and highlands, be sure to check the weather conditions. On rainy days, forest hiking may be very difficult and risky. One important point to consider is that higher elevations usually have lower temperatures than the forests and lower paths. Therefore, without knowing the weather conditions, especially in spring, it is best to avoid going to the highlands. With proper planning and awareness of weather conditions, you can have a memorable and safe trip to Aghuzhal and enjoy its natural beauty.





Tehran handicrafts fair becomes turning point in Iran's cultural event history

Arts & Culture Desk

Iran's 37th National Handicrafts Exhibition, hailed as a watershed moment in the country's art and cultural scene, generated nearly \$18.8 million in direct sales and led to a \$50 million international agreement, according to the Ministry of Cultural Heritage. The fair was held in Tehran from November 13 to 16, 2024, drawing tens of thousands of visitors and over a thousand participants from across the country. In a policy meeting held Tuesday to plan the upcoming edition, Deputy Minister of Handicrafts Maryam Jalali described last year's event as a "structural and content transformation." The session, attended by Cultural Heritage Minister Reza Salehi Amiri and senior officials, was held at the ministry's Nowruz Hall. Jalali said the 2024 fair had become more than a venue for craft sales, it served as a national stage to project Iran's "cultural power" and engage in global dialogue.

The ministry reported that 1,038 artists and organizers participated in the event, which brought in an estimated 80,000 visitors. Through prior negotiations, officials secured a 50% discount on booth rental fees and provided free accommodation for 259 artisans from economically disadvantaged regions. In addition to the 1 trillion rials (\$18.8 million) in declared artist sales, the event also resulted in 1.5 trillion rials (\$28.3 million) in domestic contracts signed with public institutions. The most notable outcome was a \$50 million memorandum of understanding with a visiting commercial delegation from the region — a deal officials say highlights the potential of Iran's crafts sector in economic diplomacy. "We saw a real shift," Jalali said. "This was not just an exhibition, it was a platform to grow our creative economy and raise the global profile of Iranian craftsmanship." She added that the 38th edition would aim to build on last year's success through national brand development and stronger cultural exports.



● IRNA

Official calls Khorramabad world heritage status a triumph of cultural identity



● MEHR

Arts & Culture Desk

Iran's Deputy Tourism Minister Ali Darabi said that the UNESCO World Heritage inscription of Khorramabad's prehistoric valleys and sites "was a cultural will amid a security storm." He added the recognition, achieved during a period of conflict, "goes beyond an administrative achievement, reflecting the deep identity conviction and strong bond Iranians have with their historical heritage."

Darabi made these remarks at a ceremony honoring those involved in securing the World Heritage listing, highlighting the achievement as a powerful symbol of national unity and dedication to preserving Iran's rich Iranian-Islamic cultural legacy. The ceremony also marked the announcement of a major national festival planned for August 26 in Khorramabad. Atta Hassanpour, Director General of Lorestan's Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts Department, described the event as "a message of national resolve" to showcase the province's historical significance and enhance social spirit. Iran's Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts has accelerated its efforts to promote heritage protection. Currently, Iran holds 29 World Heritage dossiers covering 114 sites and elements, a testament

to the country's vast civilizational richness. Darabi emphasized that the registration process has transformed from a specialist endeavor into a widespread public demand and a national priority. "Heritage now penetrates the cultural conscience of society," he said. In related developments, military forces will withdraw gradually from the historic Falak-ol-Aflak Castle in the coming months, opening the door for restoration and tourism development, Hassanpour announced. Former Deputy Minister Mohammad Hassan Talebian described the World Heritage listings as strategic tools for institutional cohesion and cultural diplomacy. Heritage expert Rasoul Vatandoust added that such recognitions provide "an unparalleled opportunity to redefine Iran's image internationally—as a rooted, civilization-building culture."

Zagros forests gain UN protection following Iran's proposal

Arts & Culture Desk

The United Nations' Asia-Pacific disaster management arm (APDIM) formally adopted forest fire prevention in Iran's Zagros range as a regional priority, following a proposal by Iran, according to documents released at the 81st annual session of ES-CAP in Bangkok on July 26. The move marks a "significant step" in safeguarding one of the Middle East's largest and most vulnerable forest ecosystems, long threatened by intensifying wildfires, IRNA reported. The Plan and Budget Organization of Iran, the national focal point for APDIM, played a central role in getting the initiative off the ground and is now pushing forward with bilateral cooperation projects, in coordination with Iran's Forests, Range and Watershed Management Organization. The adopted programs aim to boost regional preparedness and capacity to tackle large-scale forest blazes, APDIM officials said. The Iranian proposal also urges an expansion of APDIM's scope to address pest outbreaks and forest diseases—issues Tehran wants brought to the table at the center's upcoming Governing Council meeting. Iran's delegation emphasized that "trans-boundary environmental challenges require collective action," adding that broader APDIM engagement could lead to more effective international responses to forest degradation. The project builds on Tehran's earlier collaboration with APDIM on combating cross-border dust storms. Iranian officials expressed hope that deeper ties with the UN body and related institutions will lead to more "tangible improvements" in disaster management across the region.



Uzbek archaeologists push to re-date Samarkand's origins to 3,000 years

Lawmakers in Samarkand region submitted new archaeological findings to national authorities that could officially push the city's age back to 3,000 years, according to a statement published by state news agency UzA on Tuesday. The regional kengash (council) of people's deputies took up the matter at its July 23 session, following fresh excavations and expert assessments. The findings stem from a multi-year archaeological effort to revisit the city's origins using modern tools and interdisciplinary methods. Samarkand's officially recognized age has shifted over time—from 1,500 to 2,000, then to 2,500 years, and most recently to 2,750 in the

early 2000s. Now, scientists argue that the city's roots may stretch back even further, citing evidence uncovered at nearby Kuktepa and Afrasiab. "This hypothesis rests on robust data," said Muminhon Saidov, director of the Samarkand Archaeological Institute. He noted that Kuktepa, a site located about 25 kilometers from present-day Samarkand, may have hosted a large urban center in the early first millennium BC. Archaeologists, including M. Iso-middinov, Claude Rapin and M. Khasanov, point to a ruler's residence and a temple complex unearthed there—features they say match descriptions in the ancient Zoroastrian text, the Avesta. They

believe the urban nucleus later shifted to Afrasiab by the 7th or 6th century BC. Excavations carried out earlier this year uncovered a 22-meter section of a defensive wall near the former Amir Timur Ark in Kuksaray Square. Made of sun-dried bricks and built directly on a natural loess base, the wall dates from the 7th to 6th century BC and helps piece together the city's fortification layout. Dig sites within the Afrasiab citadel revealed layers of habitation stretching from the 7th-6th centuries BC to the 12th century. Lower strata produced pottery shards, animal remains and organic samples—some buried more than seven meters deep—belonging to

what is believed to be a complex defensive system. Botanical and zoological materials from the digs were dispatched to laboratories in France, Germany and Japan. Final analyses are still underway. However, preliminary reviews submitted to Uzbekistan's Academy of Sciences and the Agency for Cultural Heritage's Scientific Council have drawn positive responses. The research has been guided by a public council on history and archaeology formed this year at the governor's initiative. The group includes historians, scientists and cultural figures working under the region's administration. If validated by national authorities, the proposed re-dating would mark



a turning point in understanding Samarkand's place in Central Asian history—pushing its story further back into antiquity.