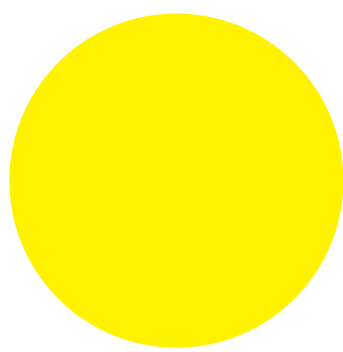


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Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian (2nd L) speaks at a joint press conference with Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif (1st R) in Islamabad, Pakistan on August 3, 2025.
● president.ir

Diplomacy in shadow of conflict US B-2 strike on Iran's nuclear sites and future of dialogue

By Kamran Yeganegi
Foreign policy analyst

O P I N I O N E X C L U S I V E

Amid a prolonged stalemate in US-Iran relations, the recent airstrike by American B-2 stealth bombers on nuclear facilities in Iran marks a deeply alarming escalation. The attack reportedly inflicted material damage and endangered the safety of nuclear infrastructure under international safeguards. Beyond its immediate military implications, this event signals a dangerous shift from strategic containment to direct confrontation. In such a volatile environment, a central question arises: Is there still space for diplomacy, or has the logic of force eclipsed all avenues for dialogue? From the perspective of international law, the US airstrike constitutes a flagrant violation of Article 2(4) of the United Nations Charter, which prohibits the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state. Iran, a signatory to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), has consistently declared that its nuclear program remains peaceful and under the close inspection of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). Striking facilities that operate under IAEA oversight lacks legal legitimacy and may well be categorized as an act of aggression under international law. Moreover, the potential risks to civilian populations and environmental harm raise additional concerns under international humanitarian law.

Politically, this attack reflects the exhaustion of Washington's "maximum pressure" policy, a paradigm that over the past two decades has caused substantial economic harm on Iranian civilians without achieving its stated goal of altering Iran's strategic posture. The shift from sanctions to direct military action is not a demonstration of resolve—it is a signal of conceptual failure. When coercive tools exhaust their political utility, the temptation to escalate militarily grows—but at a cost that may far exceed any anticipated gain. Regionally, the strike is a destabilizing shock to an already fragile Middle East. With proxy wars, deepening power rivalries, and widespread governance vacuums, the region now faces a heightened risk of proliferation, strategic miscalculation, and an arms race. The US action may also embolden hardliners, erode trust in international oversight mechanisms, and push other regional players toward reevaluating their security doctrines—developments that could unleash cascading instability far beyond Iran's borders.

Yet even amid this tense atmosphere, diplomacy must not be dismissed as naïve idealism. On the contrary, the current moment calls for diplomacy grounded in strategic realism. Iran has responded to the B-2 strike with restraint and resolve, opting to pursue its case through diplomatic and legal channels, including formal complaints to the United Nations Security Council, appeals to the International Court of Justice, and calls for independent inspections to assess damages. This posture underscores Tehran's commitment to international norms—even in the face of unlawful aggression.

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Army chief says missiles, drones primed as Israeli threats not over

International Desk

Iran's Army Chief Major General Amir Hatami said Iran's missile and drone capabilities remain strong and ready for operations, warning that Israel's threats should not be considered over. During a speech to the Army's Ground Force on Sunday, Hatami emphasized that the Iranian nation, through perseverance and resilience, defeated the enemy, but cautioned that a minimal threat should be treated with utmost seriousness. "We must not underestimate the enemy or consider its threat over," Hatami said, echoing Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei, who said, "We must treat even a one-percent threat as a hundred-percent threat." Hatami stated that despite sustaining some losses, including the killing of several command-

ers, distinguished scientists, and innocent civilians by the Israeli regime during its recent aggression against Iran, the Islamic Republic emerged victorious in this unequal confrontation, inflicted significant damage on the enemy, and thwarted its plots." He went on say that, "Just as we continued our strikes until the very moment a cease-fire was imposed on the enemy, we will resolutely continue our path in the defense industry, scientific and technological domains, and all other areas." "Today, all armed forces and the four branches of the Army are moving even faster toward the heights of science and technology and are more determined than ever to enhance combat capabilities and preparedness," he added. He concluded his speech by saying, "With our established

plans and strategies, the Army Ground Forces has been on a positive and growing trajectory in enhancing combat readiness, increasing mobility, and developing intelligence and operational capabilities." On June 13, the Israeli regime assaulted Iran by attacking several civilian, military, and nuclear facilities. During the early hours of the war, the regime managed to assassinate a number of Iran's military leaders and nuclear scientists. In response to the unprovoked act of aggression, Iran launched a flurry of drones and missiles towards the occupied territories, under the codename True Promise III. Iran succeeded in inflicting significant damage upon the Israeli settlements and military facilities. On June 22, the US Air Force and



Amir Hatami
● IRNA

Navy attacked three Iranian nuclear facilities. The following day, Iran's military forces launched more than 30 drones and missiles towards

Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar, the largest US military base in the region, in retaliation for the aggression and damaged various parts of the base.

On June 24, suffering heavy losses at the hands of Iran's Armed Forces, the Israeli regime and the US were forced to agree to a halt in hostilities.

Deputy FM: Iran in no rush to re-engage in US talks without guarantees



Saeed Khatibzadeh
● IRNA

International Desk

Iran said it is in no hurry to engage in fresh round of negotiations with the United States unless Tehran is given sufficient guarantees that the talks would yield results. In an interview with China's Phoenix Television, Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister Saeed Khatibzadeh said the US officials have sent many messages that they are ready to get back to the negotiation, but a recent aggression by Israel and the US against the Islamic Republic has changed many things. Khatibzadeh said that the aggression against Iran happened amidst nuclear talks between Tehran and Washington. Since April, Iran and the US have had held five rounds of negotiations to resolve a decades-old dispute over Tehran's nuclear program. The two sides had agreed to gather in Rome for the sixth round of the talks on June 15.

However, the US ally, Israel, launched an unprovoked aggression against Iran on June 13, killing nearly 1,100 Iranians – most of them civilians – in 12 days of strikes on the country. The US joined the aggression by targeting three Iranian nuclear sites. "If anything happens in the future, that will be an armed negotiation. Our fingers will be on the trigger, because the other side has shown that it is untrustworthy," Khatibzadeh said. Addressing the future of cooperation between Iran and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), he said that Tehran intends to continue its collaboration with the agency, and that in the coming weeks, the IAEA inspectors will return to Iran. Iran did not expel them but they left Tehran following Israel's aggression, he added. According to the official, Iran is committed to its responsibilities within the international community as it is a signatory to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) and the IAEA. On July 30, Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian put into effect a law passed by Parliament to suspend cooperation with the UN nuclear watchdog after the strikes by Israel and the US. Iran has accused the IAEA of siding with Western countries and providing a justification for Israel's air strikes.

Islamabad stresses lasting cooperation with Tehran to promote regional peace

International Desk

Pakistan's Defense Minister Khawaja Muhammad Asif said on Sunday that Islamabad seeks lasting cooperation with Tehran to promote peace and stability in the region. "The relations between Iran and Pakistan are very stable, and we are seeking lasting cooperation with the Islamic Republic to stabilize peace in the region," Asif told reporters after a meeting with his Iranian counterpart Brigadier General Aziz Nasirzadeh in Islamabad. "We have progressive vision to the expansion of military cooperation with Iran as well as commercial and economic exchanges," the Pakistani defense minister said. Asif said that Iran and Pakistan should encourage other regional countries to join the cooperation to establish peace in the region. "Stability in the region is inevitable for the development and



Pakistan's Defense Minister Khawaja Muhammad Asif (R) speaks to reporters after a meeting with his Iranian counterpart Brigadier General Aziz Nasirzadeh (L) in Islamabad on August 3, 2025.
● IRNA

prosperity of both nations — Iran and Pakistan — as well as for the other people of this region." The Iranian defense minister, for his part, said there are opportunities for collaboration in various areas, including cultural, historical, and religious ones, as well as the shared threats facing both countries. Nasirzadeh added that they also discussed developing defense cooperation and establishing security at the borders, noting that, "We

are confident that good things will happen in this regard." According to Pakistan's Defense Ministry, during their meeting, both sides discussed issues of mutual interest, including regional security, counterterrorism efforts, and ways to step up defense cooperation between the two neighboring countries. Nasirzadeh was accompanying Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian during a two-day visit to Pakistan.

Diplomacy in shadow ...

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The United States, if genuinely invested in global credibility and long-term stability, must understand that diplomacy cannot coexist with overt acts of war. Dialogue cannot be reestablished from a position of intimidation. True diplomacy requires mutual recognition, legal parity, and political will, not unilateral airstrikes. The historical record offers relevant lessons. From US-Vietnam rapprochement to the normalization of relations with Cuba and strategic engagement with China, enduring hostilities have often yielded to dialogue when leaders accepted the limits of force. There is no intrinsic law of geopolitics that mandates permanent enmity. Hostility between nations is not destiny; it is a choice—and it can be unchosen. The path forward requires more than rhetorical appeals. It demands innovation in diplomatic practice: Track II diplomacy, multilateral mediation, civil society dialogue, and a revitalized commitment to international institutions. Regional states and non-aligned countries can also play a constructive role in

de-escalating tensions and fostering back-channel communication. The longer such mechanisms are delayed, the greater the risk of spiraling miscalculation. Above all, this moment must be seen as a stress test for the post-Cold War international order. How the global community responds to the unlawful use of force by a permanent member of the UN Security Council will shape the credibility of international law for years to come. Will the rule of law prevail—or will power once again override legality? Iran has made its choice clear: to remain within the framework of international law, to pursue redress through legal means, and to exercise strategic patience. The burden now rests with the United States. Is Washington prepared to reconsider its trajectory? Is it willing to abandon a failing policy of militarized coercion in favor of a responsible return to diplomacy? The answers to these questions will not only determine the future of US-Iran relations—it may well define the next chapter of the global order itself.

Qalibaf at IPU in Geneva asserts Iran not begging security from anyone

International Desk

Iranian Parliament Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf said on Sunday that in his last month's speech at a meeting of the Inter-Parliamentary Union's (IPU) in Geneva, he attempted to "break the image of a weakened Iran" and emphasized that the Islamic Republic is not begging for its security from anyone. The only way the enemies have is to accept Iran's legal rights and avoid an imposed war or an imposed peace with the country, Qalibaf made the remarks during a parliamentary session in Tehran. Qalibaf said on Sunday that the Western media made great efforts to portray Iran as the loser of the recent conflict between Iran and Israel with the aim of forcing Iran to accept an "imposed peace after the imposed war." On June 13, Israel launched an

unprovoked aggression against Iran, triggering a 12-day war that killed nearly 1,100 people in the country. The United States also entered the war by bombing three Iranian nuclear sites in a grave violation of international law. In response, the Iranian Armed Forces targeted strategic sites across the occupied territories as well as the Al-Udeid air base in Qatar, the largest American military base in West Asia. On June 24, Iran, through its successful retaliatory operations against both the Israeli regime and the US, managed to impose a halt to the aggression. Iran's speaker said he tried to expose the atrocities that the criminal Zionist regime and its Western supporters are committing. The Parliament speaker also said he sought to "expound that the behavior of the [Israeli] regime is based on the 21st-century Nazism, which, together with rac-



Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf
● IRNA

ism, systematic genocide, and aggression against other countries' territorial integrity, poses a threat to global security." If the international community does not stand against Israel today, all countries will burn in the fire of the regime's fascist attitude, he added. In his address to the conference in Geneva on July 30, he held up the pictures of an Iranian infant, who was killed during the recent Israeli aggression against the country, and a starving Palestinian child in the Gaza Strip, as examples of the crimes of "the Nazis of the 21st century."

Iran, Pakistan deepen ties with 12 cooperation pacts in key sectors

Pezeshkian, Sharif close in on joint counterterrorism efforts

Economy Desk

High-ranking officials of Iran and Pakistan signed 12 cooperation agreements in the presence of the two countries' leaders in Islamabad, covering various scientific and technological, transportation and transit, economic and commercial, tourism, and agricultural fields. As part of the programs during President Masoud Pezeshkian's official visit to Pakistan, senior officials from both countries held a joint meeting on Sunday and subsequently signed 12 cooperation agreements aimed at facilitating and paving the way for the development of mutual cooperation across various sectors, IRNA reported.

At a joint press conference with Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, the Iranian president said that advancing the neighborhood policy is a fundamental principle in the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic.

Addressing the meeting, both leaders stressed cooperation on combating terrorism, with Pezeshkian saying, "Given the threats posed by terrorist groups in border areas, increased cooperation between the two countries to ensure border security and the peace and well-being of citizens in border cities of both

nations was emphasized."

The Pakistani prime minister stated that Iran and Pakistan "share a common objective in combating terrorism." Sharif, praising Iran's "courageous defense" against Israeli attacks in June which resulted in the deaths of military generals, elite scientists, and ordinary citizens, said, "We do not accept any terrorism in Iran. If someone falls victim to terrorism in Iran, it is as if this incident has occurred in our own country."

"Therefore, we must protect our shared hundreds-of-kilometers-long border and firmly confront any terrorist activity," he added.

The main areas covered by the signed agreements on Sunday include tourism, agriculture, judicial and legal cooperation, industry, science and technology, transportation and transit, cultural heritage, and commercial and economic cooperation.

These agreements will provide a framework for facilitating the exchange of knowledge, developing trade capacities, strengthening people-to-people interactions, and creating regional synergy between the two countries.

Pezeshkian's official visit was conducted at the invitation of Sharif. He is accompanied by the ministers of industry, mines and trade; foreign affairs; defense; roads and urban development; and the governor of Sistan and Baluchestan Province.

Meanwhile, during the Iranian delegation's visit to Islamabad, the secretary of the Supreme Council of Iran's Free Trade-Industrial and Special Economic Zones, who held talks with Pakistan's Minister for Commerce Jam Kamal Khan, elaborated on areas of mutual interest for developing bilateral relations. Reza Masrour added that offshore paddy cultivation and its conversion to rice in the Chabahar Free Zone (considering Iran's water crisis), granting multiple-entry visas to traders of both countries, establishing a joint free zone, and connecting the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) through Iran to Russia and Europe are among the topics that could lead to a leap in the two countries' economic relations.

Furthermore, at a meeting with officials from the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the delegation from the Iranian council invited Pakistani businessmen to utilize investment opportunities in Iran's free zones. The delegation explored mutual initiatives to deepen economic cooperation.



Also, Pakistan's deputy prime minister and foreign minister, emphasizing their country's commitment to supporting the Islamic Republic of Iran, stated that Pakistan stands alongside Iran to achieve the \$10 billion trade target. The foreign minister stressed that he held a very constructive meeting with the Iranian president and shared his

views on strengthening cooperation, especially in trade.

Energy ministry, industrial giant join hands to launch 3,000 MW solar project

Economy Desk

The Industrial Development and Renovation Organization of Iran (IDRO) and the Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Organization (SATBA) initiated joint cooperation to construct 3,000 megawatts of solar power plants within the industrial sector.

The roadmap for developing solar power plants in the industrial sector was outlined on Sunday during a meeting between Deputy Minister of Industry, Mine and Trade Farshad Moqimi and CEO of SATBA Mohsen Tarzatab, IRNA reported.

The goal of the collaboration is to remove obstacles and accelerate the implementation of renewable energy projects.

At the meeting, Moqimi, highlighting IDRO's key role as a driver and intermediary link between the government and the private sector, stated, "The organization, leveraging its extensive experience in managing national projects, will assume responsibility for guiding, consolidating, and facilitating solar projects in the industrial sector."

"The objective of this initiative is the optimal utilization of economies of scale, preventing the dispersion and uneconomical diversity of power plants, and ensuring stable electricity supply for the country's industries," he stated.



The chairman of IDRO's Board of Executives emphasized that, "IDRO, as a developmental and facilitating organization, is tasked with providing the necessary infrastructure for industries to benefit from clean energy. This will ensure a stable power supply while preventing losses caused by power outages."

Additionally, the two sides emphasized operationalizing previous agreements and strengthening cooperation between the Ministry of Energy and the Ministry of Industry, Mine and Trade, which is to enable the utilization of renewable power plant capacity in the shortest possible time.

The head of the Energy-Intensive Industries Power Plant Construction Project at Tavanir (Iran's Power Generation, Transmission, and Distribution Company) has recently reported increased interest from energy-intensive industries in building power plants and simultaneously urged greater movement by these industries towards developing renewable power plants.

"Preliminary permits have been issued for 19,357 megawatts (MW) of power plant capacity, of which approximately 6,000 MW will be connected to the national electricity grid by the end of the next Iranian year 1405 (March 20, 2027)," Mehdi Moqimzadeh stated last week.

The country has struggled with a persistent energy crisis in recent years. Since early May, power blackouts returned across the country after a brief respite following winter shortages.

President Masoud Pezeshkian in May granted all administrative departments a deadline - effective June 21 - to supply part of their required electricity from solar energy.

GSI: Only 2% of national mineral reserves explored

Mining to secure 300%-plus value-added return

Economy Desk

An official at the Geological Survey of Iran (GSI) stated that only 2% of the country's mineral reserves have been explored so far, and investment in the mining sector will yield a value-added return exceeding 300%.

Hossein Shariatmadar Tehrani, the director general of the office of the public relations, and international affairs at the GSI, emphasized that mining can make the country self-sufficient in other domains, ISNA reported.

"The value of Iran's natural and mineral reserves is \$27.3 billion. From the beginning of mining operations until now, only \$29 billion worth of identification and exploration has been carried out, covering about two percent of the reserves," he added.

Speaking in Kerman, Shariatmadar Tehrani stated, the southeastern province is "an outstanding and nationally significant province in terms of minerals."

"The preparation of basic geological information over an area exceeding 36,000 square kilometers in Rafsanjan, Jiroft, and Ravar counties will be carried out through outsourcing to the private sector," he added.

Shariatmadar, noting that all governments are moving towards a mining-oriented economy, added, "Iran has the world's fifth-largest mining economy. Mining can make us needless from other domains."

He further stated, "According to the Seventh Development Plan, we must have two million kilometers of aerial geophysical linear monitoring, which the Geological Survey of Iran will undertake."



Shariatmadar recalled the President Masoud Pezeshkian's emphasis on maximizing private sector utilization and high-level government supervision, stating, "By leveraging the scientific capacity of universities and capable companies that can assume the executive responsibilities of this important sector in the field of earth sciences, the operational execution of geological activities will increase severalfold compared to previous years."

The official said, "Since late last year, aerial geophysical data preparation over 9,000 kilometers in the Bahre Aseman area of Jiroft has been completed."

The organization operates in 15 regions across the country, with active geological centers, one of which is located in Kerman, he said.

Concluding his remarks, while emphasizing the necessity for Kerman Province to move towards establishing mineral processing industrial parks, he added, "This can yield a value-added return of 200 to 300 percent. Furthermore, multiple uses of mineral ores, including in medicine, are possible, and it can minimize the country's dependence on foreigners."

Private sector to build 'Gold City' at Imam Khomeini airport

Economy Desk

A private sector investor has signed a contract for constructing a "Gold City" at the Imam Khomeini International Airport, said the CEO of the airport on Sunday.

"Based on the contract executed with the private sector, Gold City will be constructed by the end of next Iranian year

(to begin on March 20, 2026)," ISNA quoted Saeed Chalandari as saying.

Chalandari said, "Given that construction costs are lower in the free zone and equipment import is easier in this area, the private sector executed a contract for constructing the building in this airport city."

The airport head stressed, "The gold trade guild, as well as gold exhibitions,

are planned to be located in this building. Raw gold will be imported to this center, transformed into various products including jewelry there, and then exported both domestically and internationally."

"Based on the executed contract, this building must be constructed and the company must commence its operations by the end of next year," he concluded.



E3 looks to US in talks with Iran: **Former envoy**

No demands 'beyond JCPOA' can be made by Europe



By Sadeq Dehqan
Staff writer

INTERVIEW

Nearly a month has passed since the imposed 12-day war ended, and Europe's troika has threatened to invoke the "snapback mechanism". It resulted in the most recent round of talks between Iran and the three European powers (Germany, France, and the UK) in Istanbul on July 25, 2024, with deputy foreign ministers attending.

The European troika announced that it stands ready to activate the snapback, but it offered Iran the option to extend the mechanism if Tehran meets certain conditions. The foreign ministries of the UK and Germany issued a joint statement on X (formerly Twitter), announcing: "The E3 is willing to reactivate the 'snapback'; However, we offered an extension if Iran complies with its legal obligations and specific criteria."

Previously, media outlets reported the European troika planned to call off sanctions temporarily if Iran agrees to resume talks with the US. According to the Financial Times, should Iran resumes negotiations with the US and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), these countries would draft a proposal to delay a looming UN deadline to reimpose international sanctions. The delay may end up taking months, but it is dependent on a Security Council resolution.

Israel's attacks on Iran's nuclear sites and targeted killings of scientists and commanders, backed by the US and Western allies during ongoing US-Iran talks, constitute a blatant breach of IAEA regulations, the UN charter, and the Geneva Conventions. Western powers, however, chose to stay mum on this issue and instead piled up on Iran, the victim of these illegal aggressions.

Iran Daily sat down with Ali Majedi, a seasoned diplomat and former Iranian ambassador to Germany, to delve into the rationale and objectives behind these talks.



Ali Majedi



US President Donald Trump's unilateral actions and sanctions have cast a large shadow over the world.
● JESS FRAMPTON/GZERO MEDIA



Currently, what is really pressuring Iran is the secondary US sanctions, which are as impactful as all UN and European sanctions combined. Under such sanctions, the activation of the snapback mechanism is less game-changing than the security narrative attached to it, which can be used to paint Iran as a threat to international security.

IRAN DAILY: Iran-Europe negotiations have resumed as of late. How do you see these talks playing out?

MAJEDI: Those who put stock in diplomacy and political solutions always welcome negotiations. Of course, every negotiation has two possible outcomes: agreement or no agreement. So, if the talks come through with results, it's a positive development; But if they fall through without any conclusion, it's not necessarily a negative — it's what you might call harmless.

Another key point in negotiations is that when both sides lay out their positions, neither may fully buy into the other's stance. But once they sit down and hash things out, they may find common ground in some areas. Therefore, I fully stand by the principle of negotiation. Usually, each party comes to the table with its maximum demands, which is a smart approach. Yet, to hammer out a deal, both sides must give ground to some extent, or else no agreement will be reached. Of course, sometimes parties have other motives — for example, one side may enter talks merely to clear their name from accusations of being unwilling

to negotiate, while the other might be laying down plans of their own simultaneously. But if both are genuinely keen on reaching an agreement, the odds of striking a deal improve. Before entering talks, parties also draw red lines, which must be heeded when predicting the outcome. These are the general principles behind negotiations. Regarding the Iran-Europe talks, what stands out to me is that European eyes are fixed on the US, and these talks are tied hand and foot to potential future negotiations between Iran and America.

What are the Europeans' maximum demands in these negotiations, in your opinion?

As I noted, Europe's gaze is on the US. Because America has declared that Iran has no right to enrich uranium, the Europeans bring the same issue to the forefront. They may make an agreement contingent on Iran also striking a deal with the US. But we must see whether Europe's own position gives them room to push such demands: Since they are part of the JCPOA, they actually cannot ask Iran to give up enrichment altogether — making such a de-

mand out of line. If Europeans are part of that deal, they can't go beyond the scope of the agreement. Under the JCPOA, Iran is allowed to enrich uranium up to 3.67%. They could argue that Iran has exceeded that level, but our response could be that they failed to actually lift the sanctions as promised. We stuck to our commitments for nearly a year, but they did not uphold theirs.

Europe was supposed to keep the JCPOA afloat through INSTEX, the special financial instrument launched in January 2019 by Germany, France, and the UK to get around dollar-based sanctions and facilitate trade with Iran. But in the end, it didn't live up to expectations. Initially, Europe wanted to collaborate with Iran but never really had the staying power or serious resolve to follow through. The dominance of the dollar and international economic structures also played a role. Back then, I was Iran's ambassador in Germany, and then-French finance minister publicly admitted that they had underestimated how weak the euro was against the dollar. In any case, Europe couldn't keep the ball rolling after the US left the JCPOA. They

could have created some special framework to fulfill their commitments, like China did by founding a bank to facilitate financial exchanges with Iran. That's not the focus now, but the bottom line is that Europe currently can't lay down demands outside the JCPOA framework.

So, logically, Europe should lift sanctions under the JCPOA framework, and Iran should reduce enrichment as agreed?

If the JCPOA is the yardstick for negotiations between Iran and Europe, that's how it should go: We must scale back enriched uranium above 3.67% — if such stock remains — and in return, sanctions must be lifted. However, the secondary US sanctions weigh heavily on Europe, making European companies think twice before stepping out of line with Washington. So, like it or not, the US gets pulled into the picture. Currently, what is really pressuring Iran is the secondary US sanctions, which are as impactful as all UN and European sanctions combined. Under such sanctions, the activation of the snapback mechanism is less game-changing than the

security narrative attached to it, which can be used to paint Iran as a threat to international security.

From a legal standpoint, the question for Europe is: Since Iran's nuclear facilities were attacked and you Europeans not only failed to condemn these attacks but, in some ways, played along, do you even have the legitimacy to make demands on Iran? The harsh reality is that the world today runs on power and force rather than justice or reason. Humanity's conscience has long been shut down. We are witnessing genocide and atrocities in Gaza and Palestine, with the so-called defenders of human rights in the West and Europe remaining tight-lipped while innocent people are killed daily. Despite all this, I believe we must keep the lines open and continue to negotiate, trying to win the other side over because dialogue is one of our key tools. Both Iran and Europe must return to their JCPOA commitments. Meanwhile, we must simultaneously negotiate with the US because lifting sanctions under the JCPOA alone won't ease pressure if secondary American sanctions remain.

So, you think talks with the US should be restarted in tandem?

Yes. The Iranian nuclear issue spans over 22–23 years, and almost all its details are clear to the world. It's not a new case. European and Western distrust of Iran's nuclear program has cost our country dearly. To dial back sanctions' impact, both international and American sanctions must be addressed simultaneously. That's why talks with both the US and Europe must move forward side by side.

Also, Iran should broaden the conversation with other countries like Russia and China, and draw on regional capacities as well. After the recent conflict, regional states have recognized how essential Iran's stability is to them. If Iran falls into conflict or instability, investment in neighboring countries suffers, and regional security deteriorates. Hence, regional players must roll up their sleeves, engage diplomatically, and contribute to resolving the problem. That is why Oman, Saudi Arabia, and

Qatar have all made some efforts to help peacefully resolve Iran's issues.

Aside from negotiations to lift sanctions, what other measures can Iran take?

Some internal shake-ups are needed at various levels. We must accept that power calls the shots in foreign policy. Thanks to our strong military capabilities, we wield part of that power and have leveraged it effectively — the world has acknowledged Iran's military strength. But alongside military power,

we must also think about the power of popular satisfaction, which depends largely on economic matters. The enemy wants to exploit public discontent by imposing economic hardship. Due to sanctions, we haven't been able to fully tap into our economic potential to improve the people's welfare. So, we must take a serious look at the economy and use the country's capacities to weather the storm of sanctions-induced pressures and focus on self-reliance to kick-start economic growth.



German Chancellor Friedrich Merz (L), French President Emmanuel Macron (C), and British Prime Minister Keir Starmer hold a joint press conference on the sidelines of the EU summit in Tirana, Albania, on May 16, 2025.
● LEON NEAL/POOL

Decade after landmark JCPOA deal Europe faces defining test in Iran

By Sahil V. Shah and
Nathalie Tocci

International affairs experts

OPINION

Europe's leaders met with their Iranian counterparts for nuclear talks in Istanbul on July 25. But with recent Israeli and US military strikes against the country jolting the Middle East into fresh uncertainty and undermining international law, the survival of one of the few diplomatic initiatives to ever successfully constrain a nuclear program without war is now under threat.

As the architect and guardian of the landmark 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), Europe faces a critical choice: Reassert its role as an honest broker of multilateral diplomacy aimed at nuclear non-proliferation, or follow Israel's US-backed military revisionism and sleepwalk into a confrontation that will only further fracture global security. The current moment carries great significance, as two weeks ago marked a decade since the 2015 deal — a breakthrough agreement that was built under European leadership and remains the most comprehensive non-proliferation accord ever negotiated.

The JCPOA proved that when approached with persistence, unity, and respect for international law, diplomacy can succeed. And if Western governments are serious about preventing Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons, this time around, they must offer more than coercion. They must offer a diplomatic solution that defuses short-term tensions and lays the groundwork for lasting stability.

And though we're in a period marked by the lowest levels of trust in relations between Iran and the West, this moment may paradoxically offer a unique yet narrow opening for such a deal. It is no secret that Israel's attack, eventually backed by the US, occurred just as indirect discussions between Washington and Tehran were reaching a new stage under Omani mediation. Unlike the JCPOA negotiations, no other nations — including European powers — were involved. Then, rather than give diplomacy a chance to deepen and expand, Israel took matters into its own hands right before negotiations were due to resume.

Though this clearly undermined Washington's diplomatic efforts, the US administration

ended up following Israel's military lead. Even several responses from Europe's leaders disappointingly signaled approval, invoking Israel's right to self-defense, calling it useful “dirty work” in a bid to “end” Iran's nuclear program.

But Europe cannot look away from history. Israel's decision follows a deeply troubling pattern of using ineffective military force to stall nuclear development regardless of international law or ongoing diplomacy. Israel's 1981 strike on Iraq's Osirak reactor, for example, didn't eliminate the country's nuclear ambitions. It spurred Saddam Hussein to double down in secret, ultimately drawing the region and the West into decades of instability and war.

The parallels with today are stark, with escalating sabotage, sanctions, and strikes likely to usher in a permanent “cat-and-mouse” game around Tehran's nuclear program that risks spiraling out of control. And alarmingly, the marked difference between now and then is that the UN Security Council's (UNSC) unanimous condemnation of Israel in 1981 hasn't been replicated in the wake of the recent bombings.

Military strikes on Iran's nuclear energy facilities under international safeguards, military sites, and residential areas, including efforts to assassinate officials, are illegal under the UN Charter and international law. The charter prohibits the use of force, except in cases of self-defense in light of an attack or with UNSC authorization.

These provisions were put in place for a reason — to ensure that diplomacy is the first resort, not preventive war. The

EU has always championed this approach. And abandoning it now, swayed by Israel's illusion of asserting itself as a regional hegemon, will only fuel further escalation and undermine the international norms that protect us all.

The international legal order is unraveling in real time. And if not reversed, it risks normalizing a world where power overrides principle and weakens the West's ability to credibly challenge other aggressors.

Meanwhile, European governments are busy brandishing the threat of triggering the JCPOA's “snapback” mechanism to reimpose UNSC sanctions on Iran — a grave and short-sighted mistake. This mechanism was embedded in a deal that's now effectively defunct, and one that never gave Iran a reciprocal right to challenge Western noncompliance.

Lest we forget, Iran upheld its end of the JCPOA for more than a year after the US unilaterally tore it up in 2018 and reimposed sweeping sanctions. And Tehran's later steps to reduce compliance were to build leverage after remaining partners — namely Europe — couldn't deliver any economic benefits, and the country's facilities and scientists were targeted by sabotage attacks and assassinations.

Europe's credibility as a diplomatic actor is on the line here. Today's snapback threats feel more performative than strategic — an exercise in legal brinkmanship, aimed at maintaining relevance and projecting leverage rather than actually advancing diplomacy. And wielding the mechanism now, after previously blocking Washington from misusing it, would

send a dangerous signal: that legal instruments are political weapons to be used selectively, and that agreements are binding only on one side.

Until very recently, the IAEA was still inspecting Tehran's nuclear program — a staggering 493 inspections in 2024, with the same pace continuing until the military strikes this year. However, the agency withdrew its inspectors shortly after Iran's parliament required all future access requests to be routed through its Supreme National Security Council.

The idea that Iran's nuclear program can be annihilated by force deserves closer scrutiny as well. While some physical infrastructure may take time to rebuild, the country's stockpile of 60 percent highly enriched uranium reportedly remains intact and accessible. And the lack of international oversight means we have no verifiable information on the material's status or location.

The net result of militarism here has been reduced visibility and trust — the predictable consequence of undermining international law. Now, without credible assurances against further military operations, Iran is unlikely to allow inspectors back in, or to participate seriously in any diplomatic process. Yet, unless the inspections resume, the world won't know the true status of its nuclear program — the baseline for any future agreement.

So, Europe has to urgently decide if it will continue following a coercive path or finally reclaim its diplomatic leadership. And if it chooses the path of diplomacy, its governments — particularly the UK, France, and Germany (the E3) — need

to champion a phased approach that stabilizes the current cease-fire by providing Iran with security guarantees during negotiations; reestablishes the UN's baseline knowledge of Iran's nuclear program; and buys time for more substantive negotiations on a long-term diplomatic package.

Such an approach could potentially surpass what was achieved 10 years ago, exchanging transparency and more long-term restrictions on Iran's nuclear stockpiles, capabilities, research and development, and manufacturing for deeper sanctions relief. It could also lay the groundwork for a regional enrichment consortium that Iran's nuclear program could directly feed into to build more interdependence under international oversight.

The road ahead is uphill — not least because of Washington's original violation of the 2015 deal and more recent military escalation. And while there's currently no great power consensus like there was a decade ago, it's important to remember that amid the transatlantic fracture caused by the Iraq war, there wasn't one in the early 2000s, when Europe first began its work, either.

With diplomatic relations hanging by a thread and the risk of war lingering, Europe's renewed role must be anchored in a rejection of militarism and animated by creative, practical solutions that all sides can accept. Only by summoning such courage, vision, and initiative can Europe claw back some of its lost credibility.

The full article first appeared on *POLITICO*.



European governments are busy brandishing the threat of triggering the JCPOA's “snapback” mechanism to reimpose UNSC sanctions on Iran — a grave and short-sighted mistake. This mechanism was embedded in a deal that's now effectively defunct, and one that never gave Iran a reciprocal right to challenge Western noncompliance. Having helped forge the Iran nuclear deal, the bloc must decide if it will once again take the diplomatic lead or be swayed by Israel's illusion of asserting itself as a regional hegemon.



Iranian wrestlers win four freestyle medals at U17 Worlds

Sports Desk

The penultimate day of the U17 Wrestling World Championships in Athens, Greece, saw Iranian boys collect four medals across five freestyle divisions.

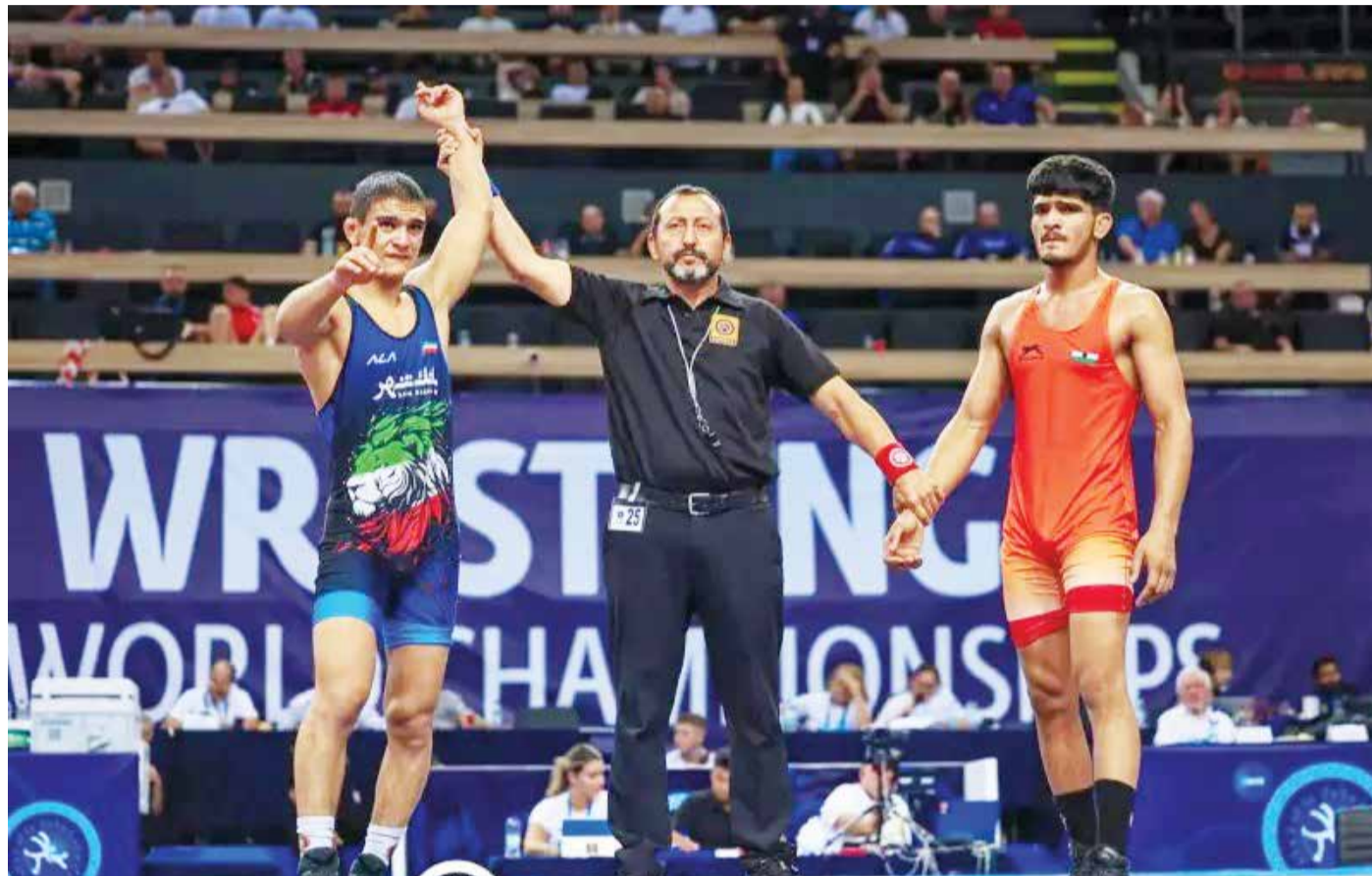
Mohammadreza Barari, meanwhile, finished his 55kg campaign empty-handed after a 4-0 loss to American Greyton Fredrick Burnett in the bronze-medal contest on Saturday, though he still contributed 10 points to Iran's bid for the team title.

Sina Boustani had a decent run in the 48kg event, beating opponents from Kyrgyzstan, Ukraine, and Japan, but was outclassed by American Ariah Mills in the final showpiece and settled for the silver.

Mills gave up an activity clock point in the first period and as Boustani was setting up a leg attack, the American hit a counter and scored the takedown to lead 2-1 at the break.

Boustani had his chance to score and reclaim the lead but Mills, who kept his distance, perhaps to have space to counter, got another takedown after a scramble. The American wrestler managed to score a go-behind and two turns to win 12-1 and get the first gold medal in freestyle for the United States.

Mohammadparsa Karami added a second silver to Iran's medal haul, courtesy of a final setback against Ukraine's Artur Kostyuk



Iranian Greco-Roman wrestler Morteza Hajmollamohammadi (L) has his hand raised as the 65kg bronze winner against Indian Gourav Punia at the U17 World Championships in Athens, Greece, on August 2, 2025.

● UWW

securing a superiority win (11-0) in the first period, to finish with a consolation bronze in the 110kg category.

Saturday's results came after Iran had lifted a fourth successive team trophy in the Greco-Roman competitions last week in the Greek capital.

Represented by nine wrestlers after Abolfazl Shiri (65kg) was denied an entry visa by the host country, Iran had only two finalists across 10 classes but still managed to pip Uzbekistan to the team title.

Amirsam Mohammadi won the 92kg gold, while Yazdan Delrouz settled for the 110kg silver, with Mohammadhossein Kazemi (71kg), Amirmohammad Hajivand (48kg), Abolfazl Zare' (60kg), and Amirreza Tahmasbpour (55kg) collecting four bronzes as Iran stood atop the table with 125 points.

Uzbekistan impressed with four gold medals but had to settle for a runner-up finish with 118 points.

Kazakhstan finished third with 113 points, with Kyrgyzstan and Azerbaijan – tied on 100 points – in fourth and fifth, respectively.

in the 80kg contests.

A European under-17 champion in June, Kostyuk was called passive and put on activity clock. He did not score in those 30 seconds but managed to get a takedown just before the break

and led 2-1.

Karami was put on the activity clock in the second period and as he failed to score, Kostyuk's lead swelled to 3-1. The Iranian had 25 seconds to score two points but Kpstiuk held on

to win a first gold medal for his country at the U17 Worlds in nine years.

In the 65kg division, Morteza Hajmollamohammadi bounced back from a last-four setback against American Arseni Kikini-

ou to beat Indian Gourav Punia for a bronze medal, rallying from behind with seconds left to win on criteria (8-8).

Amirhossein Naqdalipour, meanwhile, made a quick work of Georgian Murtaz Bagdavadze,

Esteghlal signs Albania international Asani

Sports Desk

Persian Gulf Pro League club Esteghlal signed Albanian international winger Jasir Asani on a year-and-a-half contract.

Joining as a free transfer from Gwangju FC, Asani, 30, enjoyed an impressive campaign with South Korean club last term, bagging 17 goals – including eight in the K League 1 – and three assists in 32 appearances for the K League 1 outfit across all competitions.

He also netted nine goals in 10 games to help Gwangju FC reach the last eight at the AFC Champions League Elite quarterfinals – before suffering a 7-0 humiliation against Al Hilal – and finish joint-second to Saudi Salem Al-Dawsari in the competition's leading marksmen chart – alongside Riyadh Mahrez and Brazilian Anderson Lopes.

Born in Skopje, North Macedonia, Asani left his birth country to join FK Partizani in the Albanian Superliga, where he

contributed 27 goals and 19 assists in 123 outings – either side of a loan spell at Swedish club AIK.

He also spent two seasons at Hungarian top-flight side Kisvárda FC, bagging 10 goals and 11 assists in 52 games, before signing for Gwangju FC in January 2023.

A former player of North Macedonia U19 and U21 teams, Asani made his senior international debut with Albania in March 2023 – a cameo appearance during a 1-0 loss at Poland in the Euro 2024 qualifiers – and went on to find the net on five occasions in 23 caps.

The left-footed Albanian is the sixth summer signing for the Tehran Blues, who finished ninth in the 16-team table of the Iranian league last season but managed to win the Hazfi Cup trophy in May and

secure a place in the AFC Champions League Two for the upcoming season, before bringing back Portuguese Ricardo Sa Pinto as the head coach last month.



● GETTY IMAGES

FIVB Boys' U19 World Championship: Iran beaten by Spain, misses out on bronze

Sports Desk

Iran had to settle for a fourth-place finish at the FIVB Boys' U19 World Championship, after a 3-2 loss (23-25, 25-23, 15-25, 25-21, 15-10) to Spain in Sunday's bronze-medal contest in Tashkent, Uzbekistan.

Spanish opposite César Irache Camacho stole the show with a remarkable 38 points, while outside-hitter Mario García Domínguez added 10 as Spain – runner-up in 2011 – celebrated a second victory over the two-time champion following a 3-2 triumph on the opening day of competition. Mohammad-Amin Rahimi chipped in 20 points for Iran, with fellow-outside hitter Amirmohammad Rafiei (16 points), opposite Amir Naderi (13), and middle-blocker Mohammad-Nima Bateni (10) also finishing in double figures.

Iran had a mixed campaign in the group stage earlier in the Uzbek capital, suffering two defeats in five outings in Pool C.

Adel Gholami's boys recovered from the first-day setback to beat Poland, which defeated Spain in the last four, in five sets and then walked away with comfortable straight-set wins against Egypt and Tunisia. A 3-1 loss to Italy on the final day of the group phase saw Iran finish third in the six-



Iranian opposite-spiker Amir Naderi (11) hits a spike during a 3-2 loss to Spain at the FIVB Boys' U19 World Championship in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, on August 3, 2025.

● FIVB

team group and land Belgium in the round of 16.

Iran overcame Belgium in four sets before defeating surprise package Finland – the only team with a perfect record in the group stage – 3-1 to set last-four date with

defending champion France in a repeat of the 2023 final in San Juan, Argentina.

However, Iran's bid for a first world under-19 title since 2017 ended in vain after France recovered from a first-set defeat to win 3-1 (14-25, 25-14, 25-22, 25-19) on Saturday.

United striker Hojlund available for £30m

BBC – Manchester United are prepared to sell striker Rasmus Hojlund for £30m.

The Denmark striker scored twice against Bournemouth in Chicago on Wednesday. Immediately after the game he sought out waiting journalists to say his intention was to remain at United despite their ongoing interest in signing RB Leipzig's Slovenia forward Benjamin Sesko.

However, the situation is not straightforward. Newcastle are also keen on Sesko but are yet to strike a deal with RB Leipzig for the 22-year-old.



● GETTY IMAGES

United are waiting to decide their next move and there have been reports the player would prefer a switch to Old Trafford. United sources are adamant they could do a

deal before selling players.

But it is accepted that there would have to be exits to ensure they remain compliant with the Premier League's profit and sustainability rules.

And, if Sesko arrived, Hojlund would be marginalised.

If Hojlund was sold for £30m, it would be a loss for United given the forward's 'book value' is £43m as he is two years into the five-year contract he signed.

United have spent almost £130m this summer on Bryan Mbeumo and Matheus Cunha.

Echoes of culture, nature in Deh Bala village of Yazd Province



Iranica Desk

Deh Bala village, located within the jurisdiction of Taft in Yazd Province, is renowned for its pristine natural environment, traditional architecture, rich cultural heritage, and hospitable residents. These qualities have made it one of the region's most favored tourist destinations, particularly during the summer months. Situated approximately 45 kilometers southwest of Yazd city and perched at an elevation exceeding 2,600 meters above sea level, Deh Bala enjoys a unique geographical position that results in a climate distinct from much of Yazd Province. The village experiences mild and pleasant weather during spring and summer, contrasted by cold, snowy winters, which collectively offer a notable four-season experience to visitors and inhabitants alike, Mehr News Agency wrote. During the warmer parts of the year, Deh Bala attracts thousands of tourists, mountaineers, and nature lovers, predominantly from the hotter and more arid cities within Yazd Province. The summer visitor influx causes the village's population to increase manifold, as local homes, eco-lodges, and private garden villas open their doors to those seeking respite from the heat.

Rich vegetation

The surrounding hills and lush valleys serve as thriving habitats for a wide variety of medicinal and edible plants. Species such as thyme, yarrow, violet, lavender, Persian hogweed, asafoetida, sainfoin, and countless other mountain herbs not only embellish the natural landscape but also hold importance in traditional medicine, perfumery, culinary arts, and handicrafts. In addition to the wild flora, orchards cultivating walnuts, almonds, apricots, apples, and damask roses contribute significantly to the livelihoods of local rural families. The traditional spring ritual of rosewater distillation, or Golabgiri, stands out as a vibrant cultural event that attracts numerous tourists each year, underscoring the village's cultural richness.

Historical and cultural heritage

Deh Bala's significance extends beyond its natural beauty to encompass a notable historical and cultural legacy. The village hosts several heritage sites, including the Grand Mosque, Hosseinieh (a space for religious gatherings), historic water mills, an ancient cemetery, verdant gardens, and longstanding springs such as Janbrazan and Tezerjan — each testifying to the village's antiquity and authenticity. Archaeological research suggests that human settlement

in the area dates back several centuries. Ancient qanats (underground aqueducts) and water mills reveal evidence of an advanced and sustainable civilization that once thrived here. Some of these structures, including the Grand Mosque and old mills, have been officially registered on Iran's National Heritage List, thereby receiving protection and conservation oversight.

Natural landscape

Deh Bala lies along one of the most renowned ascent routes to the summit of Shirkuh Peak. Its encompassing mountain heights, natural springs, and scenic valleys offer exceptional opportunities for mountaineering, ecotourism, and camping. Consequently, the village has become a central summer destination for climbing groups from across Iran.

Local culture and traditions

The people of Deh Bala possess a deeply rooted culture characterized by strong community bonds, religious devotion, and adherence to traditional practices. Religious ceremonies — especially during the lunar months of Muharram and Safar (marking the anniversary of the martyrdom of Imam Hussein (PBUH) and his companions — such as Nakhl-Gardani (the carrying of symbolic wooden structures), Ta'zieh (traditional religious plays), and ritual mourning gatherings are fervently observed.

Women play an integral role in maintaining and transmitting the village's cultural heritage. Their contributions span baking traditional breads, crafting sweets like Qottab and Baklava, producing handmade shoes known as Giveh, and distilling herbal extracts. The community speaks Persian with the local Taft dialect, through which numerous cultural concepts, poems, and proverbs have been preserved and passed down through generations.

Infrastructure, development challenges

Seasonal population increases place significant additional demands on the village's water supply, electricity, and public infrastructure. While there have been recent developments such as gas pipeline installations, road improvements, and the enhancement of tourism infrastructure, challenges persist — particularly in the provision of adequate healthcare services, public transportation, and waste management. Moreover, unregulated and unauthorized construction activities threaten to disrupt the village's traditional architectural fabric, necessitating carefully planned preservation efforts to safeguard its cultural heritage. The Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts, in collaboration with Yazd Province's Tourism Department, has undertaken several initiatives



to improve Deh Bala's infrastructure. These include the establishment of tourist camping facilities, installation of directional signage, upgrading access routes, and community training programs aimed at enhancing local tourism services.

Towards sustainable development

Deh Bala's distinctive geography, abundant natural resources, vibrant cultural traditions, and success in eco-tourism position it well to serve as a national exemplar for the sustainable development of mountain villages. Achieving

sustainable growth in the village requires intelligent investment in infrastructure, education on responsible tourism practices, conservation of natural habitats, and robust support for local artisanal and agricultural products. Official reports indicate that sustainable tourism development in Deh Bala has led to increased household incomes for rural families, environmental protection, and the strengthening of local cultural identity. This success story offers a valuable model for the sustainable advancement of other mountain communities throughout the country.



Tea and tradition in Iran's lush north

When most travelers think of Iran, images of ancient ruins, UNESCO heritage sites, deserts, and vibrant bazaars come to mind. But nestled in the lush northern provinces lies a hidden gem that few outsiders have experienced — Iran's tea plantations. With a deep-rooted culture and breathtaking green landscapes, the tea-growing regions of Iran offer a refreshing and authentic experience for adventurous travelers. Iran's tea production is centered in Gilan Province, located along the Caspian Sea in northern Iran. The region's humid climate, high rainfall, and fertile soil create ideal conditions for cultivating high-quality black tea, adventureiran.com wrote.

Lahijan

The picturesque city of Lahijan, Gilan Province, is known as the birthplace of Iranian tea cultivation. Introduced in the early 20th century, tea plantations here stretch across rolling hills and misty valleys, offering scenic views and tranquil vibes. So visit Iran's first tea factory, established by Kashef al-Saltaneh, the pioneer of Iranian tea and walk through the tea fields and interact with local farmers to understand the process of tea harvesting. You can also explore Lahijan's Tea Museum, where you can learn about the region's unique tea culture and history.

Best time to visit

The harvesting season is be-

tween April and October, with the first flush in spring offering the finest tea leaves. This is also the best time to witness the vibrant green fields and take part in local tea-picking traditions.

What makes Iranian tea unique?

Unlike heavily processed teas, Iranian tea is 100% natural, free of additives or artificial flavors. It's known for its: ● Rich aroma and smooth flavor ● Dark reddish color when brewed ● Slow, hand-crafted production methods that preserve quality Most Iranians drink their tea without sugar, instead placing a sugar cube or date in their mouth while sipping — a cultural experience worth trying.

Cultural experience

Tea is an inseparable part of Iranian hospitality. Whether you're in a mountain village or a bustling city, tea is always offered to guests as a sign of welcome and respect. Sitting down for a cup of tea becomes more than a drink — it's a moment of connection, storytelling, and tradition. If you're planning your next adventure in Iran, don't miss the serene and soul-refreshing experience of visiting its tea plantation regions. From sipping freshly brewed tea in the shade of a misty hillside to walking the same paths as local farmers, you'll gain a new appreciation for Iran's cultural and natural diversity.

Iran nominated for 2026 IBBY-Asahi Reading Promotion Award

Arts & Culture Desk

Iran's Children's Book Council nominated the Children Cultural Development Center as the country's official candidate for the 2026 IBBY-Asahi Reading Promotion Award. The announcement comes after a national review concluded the center's long-standing contribution deserves international recognition, IRNA reported. The council, which serves as Iran's IBBY national section, selected the center following a competitive process involving a jury of experts

including Fatemeh Chaykar, Roya Shahri, Neda Movahedipour, Jafar Tozande-Jani and Abdolhakim Bahar. The IBBY-Asahi award, sponsored by the Asahi Shimbun of Japan, is bestowed biennially to groups whose efforts deliver sustained impact in reading promotion for children and youth worldwide. Winners receive a diploma and US \$10,000 at the IBBY Congress. Iran previously won the prize in 2016, when its "Read with Me" program led by Zohreh Ghaeni was honored. The nominated center, known for

its expansive "Book in Circulation" scheme, brings books and educational games to remote villages and nomadic settlements in provinces such as South Khorasan, Lorestan and Khuzestan. Mobile sacks of reading materials are rotated weekly among schools and homes. Local teachers manage the collections, nurturing a love of reading deep within underserved communities. Zohreh Ghaeni, head of the Read with Me project and co-author of Iran's research on the history of children's literature, has commended the center's ability to "build trust" among rural families. The

center's methodical outreach and sustainable model underpin its qualifications for the award. It is the third time the organization has represented Iran for the Asahi award, after nominations in 2022 and again in 2024. No Iranian finalist has yet secured the final award since Read with Me's win in 2016. Preparations are under way to forward Iran's nomination dossier to the IBBY Executive Committee ahead of their selection meeting. A decision on the 2026 award is expected by mid-2026, likely coinciding with the next IBBY Congress.



Artists to honor Abbas Kiarostami with group show in Tehran

Arts & Culture Desk

A group exhibition featuring works by 161 Iranian visual artists from multiple generations will open at the Iranian Artists Forum in central Tehran to commemorate the late filmmaker and artist Abbas Kiarostami. Curated by Arash Raisian, the show, titled 'In Praise of Life', brings together a wide range of media including painting, sculpture, photography, installation, digital art, and video works, ISNA reported. The tribute coincides with the anniversary of Kiarostami's death in July 2016 and aims to celebrate what organizers described as his "life-affirming vision." Public viewing begins Fri-

day, August 8, and continues through Sunday, August 17, with daily visiting hours from 2 p.m. to 9 p.m. Kiarostami, who won the Palme d'Or at Cannes in 1997 for 'Taste of Cherry,' was widely regarded as one of Iran's most influential cultural figures. While best known internationally for his films, he was also an accomplished poet and visual artist whose minimalist approach left a lasting imprint on contemporary art in Iran and abroad. The exhibition title was inspired by Kiarostami's own philosophy, Raisian said, pointing to his "profound attention to the ordinary and the poetic." Works on display reflect that ethos, with many artists opting for subtle, con-



ceptual interpretations rather than direct references to the director's cinematic style. Iranian Artists Forum, a major cultural hub in Tehran, has previously hosted several tributes to Kiarostami, but organizers noted this year's event is the largest of its kind to date.

Two Iranian films to be screened at Italy's Della Lessinia festival

Arts & Culture Desk

Two Iranian films will be featured at the 31st Della Lessinia Film Festival, scheduled to run from August 22 to 31 in northern Italy. The festival, founded in 1995 in Verona province, originally focused on Italy's Lessinia mountains but later broadened its scope to include mountain cultures and traditions around the world, ILNA reported. This year's lineup includes 'Baraftoo,' translate into 'Within the Sun' a documentary by Sepideh Jamshidi, in the competition section, and 'The Plain Sings,' a short fiction film by Gita Feizi, in a special screening. The films shine a light on women's roles and rural resilience in Iran's mountainous west. 'Baraftoo,' co-produced by Ali and Sepideh Jamshidi, documents the lives of "hardworking women of



the Zagros," and was previously selected for the 56th Visions du Réel in Switzerland. Feizi's 'The Plain Sings,' written and directed by her and produced by Deyman Zandi, follows a young shepherd girl whose routine is disrupted by a wolf attack, forcing her to make a life-changing decision. The cast includes Darya Kakayi, Afshin Khedri, Sara Ahmadnejad, and Saman Saed Moucheshi. The film's interna-

tional distribution is handled by Daricheh Cinema. Both selections mark a growing presence of Iranian cinema on the international mountain film circuit, offering global audiences fresh insight into the country's rural narratives. The Della Lessinia Festival continues to draw attention for its focus on films that portray "life, history, and traditions" of mountain communities across continents.

Iranian leopard spotted beyond core reserve in conservation breakthrough

Social Desk

A Persian leopard was spotted and photographed last week in the Mo'ala heights of central Iran, Isfahan, signaling an expansion of the species' range beyond the Abbasabad Wildlife Refuge, local officials told state media on Sunday. The sighting, confirmed by Mohammadreza Halvani, director of the Abbasabad reserve, is being hailed as a milestone for the country's long-term conservation efforts, IRNA reported. Mo'ala, a community-managed buffer zone near Abbasabad in Isfahan Province, is one of several privately protected areas now showing signs of leopard activity. "It's a strong indication that our efforts are paying off," said Halvani. "What we're seeing now is the natural dispersal of male leopards in search of new territory." Roughly a decade ago, Abbasabad recorded its first confirmed leopard sighting in 40 years. Since then, under the backing of Iran's Department of Environment, the number of leopard observations has steadily risen to seven or eight per year. Some camera traps have captured mothers with cubs, a clear sign of successful breeding. According to Halvani, steady births over the past six years made it "predictable" that younger males would eventually move out. The latest image, taken by a local volunteer ranger in Mo'ala, likely shows one such individual establishing new ground.



Grassroots patrols have helped pave the way. Environmentalist Mohammad Akhavan, working with nearby communities in Nain County, has spent the past three years monitoring the area and ensuring safety for the wildlife. Halvani credited this "local commitment" for enabling secure conditions for the elusive predator. Abbasabad spans 400,000 hectares and is also a critical habitat for the endangered Asiatic cheetah. Both big cats remain on the IUCN Red List. Conservationists say expanding protected zones and formalizing local stewardship could ease human-wildlife conflict and build long-term population resilience.

Zoroastrians gather for annual pilgrimage at Pir-e Naraki shrine in Yazd

Arts & Culture Desk

Iran's Zoroastrian community launched its weeklong annual religious gathering on Sunday at the Pir-e Naraki shrine near Mehriz, in the central province of Yazd. Held each year on the Zoroastrian calendar day of Soroush Izad—this year falling on August 3—the event draws worshippers from across the country to the foothills of Mount Naraki, 20 kilometers northwest of Mehriz. The ceremony includes prayers, cultural events, and tributes to outstanding students, benefactors, and newlyweds. Pir-e Naraki is among the oldest Zoroastrian pilgrimage sites in Iran, nestled beside a spring in a low mountain range. Roughly 100 mud-brick rooms, known locally as kheylehs, have been constructed by the community to house pilgrims during the gathering. According to Zoroastrian belief, the site marks the mysterious disappearance of Nazbanou, a Yazdi noblewoman who was said to be



the bride of a Persian king and fled to Yazd after the Islamic conquest of Fars. Yazd is home to several significant Zoroastrian shrines, including Pir-e Sabz, Khatoun Banu, Seti Pir, Pir Herisht, and Pir-e Mehr Izad. These sacred sites remain central to the spiritual and cultural identity of Iran's Zoroastrians, whose roots trace back over 5,000 years. An estimated 6,000 Zoroastrians live in Yazd Province today. Mehriz County, where the Pir-e Naraki shrine is located, has a population of around 55,000 and lies 30 kilometers south of the provincial capital.