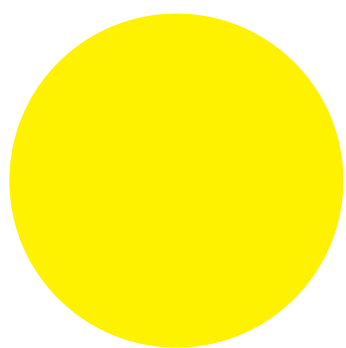


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President Masoud Pezeshkian gives a flower to a reporter as a token of appreciation during a surprise visit to the Islamic Republic News Agency's head office to mark the National Journalist's Day in Tehran, Iran on August 9, 2025. ● president.ir



Legendary Persian miniature master Mahmoud Farshchian dies at 95

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Iran's Palermo approval heralding economic stability, diplomacy clout

P E R S P E C T I V E

Iran's accession to the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, long tied up in political wrangling, has now opened new doors for the country's economy — a breakthrough greeted with a green light from the financial markets. Hopes are running high that with the approval of the final bill for Iran's membership in the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) — namely the "CFT" — fresh opportunities will come through for economic players. The Palermo Convention, as it is widely known, had been caught in the crossfire of Iran's political and legal disputes for years. At one point, the system opted to put it on ice in the Expediency Council, leaving it to gather dust for years. But in the current climate, on grounds of national interest, this deadlock has been broken, and the Palermo approval has formally moved to the implementation stage. The decision to join the Palermo Convention has acted not only as a legal milestone but also as a powerful signal to domestic and international markets. Financial markets reacted swiftly, with the dollar and Tether rates falling. On the global stage, the FATF, after six years, has once again extended an invitation to Iran for in-person talks.

Stability signal to domestic markets

Palermo's approval came at a time when Iran's financial markets were grappling with chronic volatility, high inflationary expectations, and deep investor mistrust. The decision effectively sent out a "stability signal" to economic stakeholders, with its psychological impact immediately visible in currency trading, the stock exchange, and even the gold market. The drop in dollar and Tether rates in the days following the approval was not merely the result of short-term shifts in supply and demand; analysts believe it signaled a reduction in negative expectations among traders.

Azerbaijan-Armenia peace deal

Ignoring Iran's role could turn accord into new battleground

By Afifeh Abedi
International affairs analyst

OPINION EXCLUSIVE

Armenia and the Republic of Azerbaijan signed a peace agreement on Friday evening, local time, in a ceremony at the White House attended by US President Donald Trump. The accord aims to strengthen bilateral economic ties after decades of conflict and to move toward full normalization of relations. During the signing ceremony, Trump announced both sides' commitment to "stop all fighting forever." Yet the history of the South Caucasus has shown that the ethnic, religious, and territorial disputes in this region run so deep that even a comprehensive, detailed political agreement is unlikely to settle them entirely on its own. Even international agreements backed by major powers—without mutual trust and effective monitoring mechanisms—run the risk of collapse or a return to cycles of tension. From this perspective, proclaiming a permanent end to hostilities between Azerbaijan and Armenia appears more as a display of political and diplomatic optimism than a reflection of an enduring reality, and will still need to stand the

test of practical implementation. US mediation and oversight of the agreement's implementation have added a new layer of geopolitical competition to the South Caucasus. Part of Washington's role goes beyond sole diplomacy, tying directly into safeguarding the interests of multinational corporations and the potential deployment of US-linked military assets in the region. Such developments are naturally alarming for Russia—which views the Caucasus as part of its traditional sphere of influence—and could tip the balance of power in the region. However, with Moscow's resources and focus constrained by the war in Ukraine, much of the responsibility for countering these shifts in regional balance has effectively fallen on Iran. This situation presents Tehran with a complex and multi-layered challenge, requiring shrewd diplomacy, tactical flexibility, and a careful balancing of relations with both Eastern and Western power blocs. Consistent with its foreign policy tradition, Iran prefers to see Russia's influence in the Caucasus maintained and to prevent any expansion of Western—particularly direct US military—presence, which could undermine Iran's geopolitical and economic interests.

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Pezeshkian: Iranian media dashed aggressors' hopes for destabilizing country

National Desk

President Masoud Pezeshkian on Saturday commended efforts made by the Iranian media during Israel's 12-day aggression against the country, saying that the journalists dashed the hopes of aggressors for sowing discord in Iran. Pezeshkian made the remarks during a visit to the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) on the occasion of the National Journalist's Day in Iran, which falls on August 8. Pezeshkian said Israel's goal in the imposed war against Iran was to create chaos in the country and foment unrest for the Islamic Establishment, "but it is not the case that by killing me and others like me, they will achieve their goals."

The Israeli onslaught on Iran, which began on June 13, claimed the lives of nearly 1,100 Iranians including ordinary people, nuclear scientists and top military commanders.

While standing in front of an IRIB building, which was targeted by the Israeli regime during its aggression, Pezeshkian expressed hope that the journalists would help the

country to achieve unity and cohesion despite differences. He said that the Israelis attacked the IRIB building because of its influence and effectiveness. According to the international rules, no one has the right to attack media centers in any war, and the regime showed that it does not adhere to any international frameworks, the Iranian president said.

He referred to the unity emerging in the country following Israel's strikes, saying, "Even those who we did not expect, and those who we had imprisoned whether rightly or wrongly, all stood firmly by Iran."

Pezeshkian also paid a visit to the Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA).

He pointed to the "very important role" of the media in maintaining unity and cohesion in the country, saying that "during the recent 12-day war, it became clear how much the unity and cohesion in the country and society can generate strength, faith, and a love for life in the face of enemy's aggression."

The president also congratulated the reporters on the National Journalist's Day.



Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian speaks during a visit to Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) on the occasion of the National Journalist's Day in Tehran on August 9, 2025.

● president.ir

Tehran welcomes Baku-Yerevan peace deal; warns of 'foreign intervention'



US President Donald Trump (c) joins hands with Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev (l) and Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan during a signing ceremony in the White House in Washington, DC on August 8, 2025.

● ANDREW HARNIK/AFP

International Desk

Iran's Foreign Ministry in a statement on Saturday welcomed the Armenia-Azerbaijan peace deal but warned against any foreign intervention as the US-brokered agreement grants Washington development rights to a strategic transit route across the Caucasus region.

On Friday, Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev signed the US-mediated peace deal at the White House.

The accord includes the creation of a transit corridor through Armenia to connect Azerbaijan to its exclave of Nakhchivan – a longstanding demand of Baku.

The United States will have development rights to the corridor – dubbed the "Trump Route for International Peace

and Prosperity" (TRIPP) – in the strategic, resource-rich region.

Zangezur corridor

Iran has long opposed the corridor – often referred to as Zangezur – fearing it would cut the Islamic Republic off from the Caucasus.

In a statement, Iran's Foreign Ministry welcomed "the finalization of the text of the peace agreement by the two countries" but expressed "concern over the negative consequences of any foreign intervention in any way and form, especially in the vicinity of common borders."

The statement added that such a move would "disrupt the security and lasting stability of the region."

Christian-majority Armenia and Muslim-majority Azerbaijan have feuded for

decades over their border and the status of ethnic enclaves within each other's territories.

The nations went to war twice over the disputed Karabakh region, which Azerbaijan recaptured from Armenian forces in a lightning 2023 offensive, sparking the exodus of more than 100,000 ethnic Armenians.

Armenia and Azerbaijan have committed to a lasting peace after decades of conflict, US President Donald Trump said.

Nobel prize for Trump

Pashinyan and Aliyev said Trump's mediation should earn him a Nobel Peace Prize – an award the US leader has long been craving.

The two former Soviet republics "are committing to stop all fighting forever, open up commerce, travel and diplomatic relations and respect each other's sovereignty and territorial integrity," Trump said at a White House signing event on Friday. The two leaders would have a "great relationship," Trump said.

"But if there's conflict... they're going to call me and we're going to get it straightened out," he said.

The Azerbaijan and Armenian leaders shook hands under the satisfied gaze of Trump before all three signed a document the White House called a "joint declaration."

Aliyev hailed the "historic signature" between two "countries which were at war for more than three decades."

"We are today establishing peace in the Caucasus," he said.

US-Azerbaijan military cooperation

Aliyev also thanked Trump for lifting restrictions on US military cooperation with Azerbaijan, which was announced on Friday.

Pashinyan said the "initialing of (the) peace agreement will pave the way to end decades of conflict between our countries and open a new era."

The Armenian leader said the "breakthrough" would not have been possible without "peacemaker" Trump.

"Today, we can say that peace has been achieved," Pashinyan told a news conference after signing the deal. The foreign ministry in Turkey, a longtime supporter of Azerbaijan, hailed the "progress achieved towards establishing a lasting peace."

UK Foreign Secretary David Lammy congratulated the two countries "on the bold steps taken in Washington."

European Union chiefs said it would pave the way to "lasting, sustainable peace for both countries and across the entire region."

Iran nabs 20 suspects accused of spying for Israel's Mossad

National Desk

Iran has arrested 20 people accused of collaborating with Israel's Mossad spy agency in recent months in the capital Tehran and some other provinces, the Judiciary said on Saturday, warning that they will face no leniency.

"The Judiciary will show no leniency toward spies and agents of the Zionist regime, and with firm rulings, will make them all learn their lesson," Judiciary spokesperson Asghar Jahangiri told reporters in Tehran on Saturday.

Jahangiri said interrogators are working on the cases of the suspected spies, a number of whom had been captured before Israel's aggression against Iran on June 13.

He added that charges against some of the suspects arrested had been dropped and they were released. He did not give a number.

He said full details would be made public once investigations were complete.

On Wednesday, Iran executed Rouzbeh Vadi, who was convicted of spying for Israel and passing on information on another nuclear scientist killed in Israel's airstrikes on Iran.



● MIZAN

The Iranian Judiciary has tightened up on the spies and elements of enemies after the regime launched an unprovoked war against the country. Nearly 1,100 Iranians, including senior military commanders, nuclear scientists and ordinary citizens were killed in the Israeli attacks.

Ignoring Iran's role ...

From the provisions outlined in the agreement, the so-called "Trump Corridor" appears to mirror the "Zangezur" project—a transit and energy route that could redraw the map of the region's geopolitics. The viability of such a project will hinge heavily on regional political and security stability, as well as on the extent of overlapping interests among the main players, especially Iran.

If the Azerbaijan-Armenia peace agreement evolves into a stable, enforceable framework and the project's design allows Iran to benefit economically and in terms of connectivity, its chances of being implemented would rise significantly. But if mistrust and insecurity persist, and Iran's role is sidelined or diminished, the plan could face serious roadblocks and may even serve as a stage for heightened geopolitical rivalry.

Speculation has also surfaced about the corridor being used to supply part of Europe's gas needs. Europe—seeking in recent years to reduce its reliance on Russian gas—would welcome any alter-

native energy route, including the Zangezur Corridor. From a geo-energy perspective, such a plan poses a direct threat to Russia's position in the European energy market and could cut into Moscow's revenues and economic leverage. However, the history of transatlantic economic relations has shown that US dominance over an energy project does not necessarily guarantee European interests; Washington could well provide Europe's energy security at higher costs and within a framework of deeper political dependency.

For Iran, this corridor presents a highly complex equation. On one hand, it could limit some of its transit routes and strategic access to the Caucasus and Europe. On the other, it might become a complementary economic and transit channel for Iranian projects. This is likely why Tehran's cautious approach has been to postpone any final decision on the corridor's fate until its operational conditions become clearer, focusing for now on expanding bilateral economic and transit projects with both Azerbaijan and Armenia.

Mohammad Ali Rajabi
Cartoonist



TCI launches nationwide fiber optic project for 27m subscribers

Economy Desk

Managing Director of Telecommunication Company of Iran (TCI) Mohammad Jafarpour said the fixed-line operator's large-scale project to shift from copper cable to fiber optic technology had been launched for 27 million subscribers. Speaking at a press conference on Saturday, Jafarpour said that with the implementation of the country's largest Information and Communication Technology (ICT) project, the entire copper network will be dismantled and replaced with a fiber optic network within the next five years, as reported by ISNA. Jafarpour addressed the company's new approach to the major copper-to-fiber optic transition, saying that the project will involve "converting copper

cable connections to fiber optics for 27 million subscribers, with a focus on using domestically-produced equipment." According to the official, the execution of the project is expected to create around 10,000 new jobs across various sectors. He further stated that a significant share of modem equipment will be domestically produced, which will help keep the communications and IT industry alive in the field of manufacturing and foster entrepreneurship. In the implementation phase, numerous private contractors are already working with the company. "The 'CloudMa' platform was unveiled at last year's Telecom Exhibition, and now a large volume of services has been moved to CloudMa. Today, the TCI is providing cloud comput-

ing services to many organizations," Jafarpour said. Regarding the fiber optic rollout, he noted that the company's policy and target are to expand fiber optic infrastructure in provincial capitals. Jafarpour explained that the demand for fiber optics is currently stronger in provincial centers and densely populated areas. The fiber optic design for all 31 provinces has been completed, and in several provinces, the shift from copper to fiber optics has already taken place. In subsequent phases, the transition will be carried out in high-population counties. He expressed hope that by the end of the Iranian year 1404 (began on March 20, 2025), the nationwide copper-to-fiber optic transition would begin.



Iran to launch national GPU farm for AI training by late September

Economy Desk

Iran's vice president for Science, Technology and Knowledge-Based Economy said the country's national GPU farm for artificial intelligence will be operational by late September, despite minor delays. Hossein Afshin told reporters on Saturday that the necessary equipment for AI infrastructure had been procured and efforts were under way to bring all GPUs online by late September, ISNA reported. "There may be a slight delay due to the country's circumstances, but the AI infrastructure — including the AI platform and AI assistant — is being pursued with determination and strength," Afshin said, noting "very positive developments" over the past year.

Iran's global/regional ranking in AI Citing scientific output, Afshin said Iran's ranking in the Nature index had improved from 33rd to 30th globally, thanks to professors, PhD students and postdoctoral researchers. He stressed that the focus was on quality over quantity of publications. Iran's regional ranking currently fluctuates between 14th and 17th, sometimes ahead of or behind Tur-



● Hossein Afshin/ISNA

key and Saudi Arabia. Afshin said the government was aiming for a "scientific leap" within one to two years. "We have no concern over this because our focus is on quality. With the activities underway at the Science Foundation, we hope to achieve a scientific leap in the next one to two years similar to that of the past decade," he said. Afshin also announced free AI training programs for around 2 million students that began in early summer. The initiative, he

said, aims to strengthen domestic human resources, with recorded courses to be made widely available by year-end. He added that quantum courses would be offered from early late September in 12 universities across 16 fields. "Education must come first, and when human resources feel they can receive all necessary training domestically and flourish, an environment will be created for them to remain in the country," Afshin said.

Solar power output surges 71% in four months: SATBA

Economy Desk

The head of Iran's Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Organization (SATBA) announced that in the first four months of the Iranian calendar year (began on March 20, 2025), electricity generation from solar power plants increased by 71 percent compared to the same period last year. On Saturday, Mohsen Tarzatab said that solar power generation rose from 357 million kilowatt-hours to 610 million kilowatt-hours — marking a 71 percent increase, IRNA reported. Regarding wind power production, he noted that generation from wind farms also grew, rising from 413 million kilowatt-hours to 432 million kilowatt-hours. The deputy energy minister stated that the country's renewable energy capacity has now reached 1,868 megawatts, compared to 1,232 megawatts at the end of the first four months of last year. "Over the past year alone, 636 megawatts of new renewable capacity have come online, increasing the share of renewables in the national electricity mix to 1.9 percent," he said. Speaking about the organization's ongoing plans, Tarzatab said that in the first phase, the construction of 7,000 megawatts of renewable power plants, mostly solar, has been planned and finalized. SATBA's full focus, he stressed, "is on achieving this goal and helping reduce the electricity supply-demand imbalance



● IRNA

in the country." Emphasizing that the share of renewable energy in the national power generation mix will exceed 5 percent by the end of this year, he added that Iran has now become a major hub for renewable energy development, undergoing what he described as a "major revolution" in the sector — the results of which will gradually become evident in the coming weeks.

Iran's Palermo approval ...

The banking sector and industries dependent on foreign trade, such as petrochemicals and steel, stand to see the biggest gains. The reason is clear: with Palermo's passage, hopes have risen for improved banking ties and lower transaction risk. In recent years, many foreign banks and financial institutions, even when primary sanctions had been lifted, refused to work with Iran because it remained on the FATF blacklist. Palermo's approval marks a step towards removing that roadblock. While other bills, like the Counter-Terrorism Financing Convention (CFT), still need to be passed, the shift has already sent the message to international institutions that Iran's credit risk is easing. Foreign investors, when assessing proj-

ects in Iran, focus on two key factors: political-economic stability and the secure transfer of funds. With Palermo's approval, hopes for improvement on both counts have grown. Iranian banks can also seize this moment to kick off talks for connecting to regional financial messaging systems or even parts of SWIFT — a path that was effectively blocked without these conventions in place.

Message to global stage, FATF invitation

One of Palermo's most significant outcomes is Iran's re-entry into dialogue with international bodies. After years on the FATF blacklist and under severe banking restrictions, the group has, according to Economy Minister Ali Madanizadeh, extended an official in-

itation to Iran — for the first time in six years — to start face-to-face negotiations. This invitation is a clear sign of shifting international attitudes toward Iran and recognition of the country's reform efforts. As a global standard-setter for financial transparency, the FATF assesses practical measures taken by countries, and such invitations are generally extended only to those that have already set out on the path of reform. Palermo's approval has also sent a strong political message to Iran's partner countries and trading allies: a commitment to fighting financial crimes and money laundering, and readiness to align with international financial transparency rules. The message could carry real weight in upcoming talks to improve banking and trade relations.

CFT outlook, Palermo's path

While Palermo's passage was a major step, it does not complete the FATF engagement process. The CFT still awaits approval, and without it, Iran's cooperation with the FATF will remain unfinished. The Palermo experience has shown that, with decisions grounded in national interest and today's realities, political and legal barriers can be cleared, paving the way for international engagement. Once the CFT is approved, Iran could move its FATF cooperation into a new phase and break down many of the remaining banking and financial barriers. In the current climate, passing the CFT is expected to replicate Palermo's psychological and economic effects — perhaps even more strongly — since a

major share of foreign banks and partners' concerns relate specifically to counter-terrorism financing. The FATF's invitation after six years, the boost in hopes for improved banking relations, and Iran's strengthened hand in economic talks are just part of the event's positive fallout. The road ahead — with CFT approval and the completion of international cooperation — could solidify and expand Palermo's gains. The Islamic Republic of Iran is serious about managing financial risks and economic security, and is employing both legal and political tools to meet that goal. This combination of measures, at both domestic and international levels, is painting a new picture of Iran as a responsible player in the global financial system.

Syria ticking time bomb

Tel Aviv out to weaken regional states



By Sadeq Dehqan
Staff writer

INTERVIEW

The situation in southern Syria is such that at any moment, the fighting could flare up again, turning Syria into a bloody battlefield once more — this time among the Druze, Sunni Bedouin tribes, the Syrian regime, and their respective backers, potentially fanning the flames of unrest nationwide. To get to the bottom of the current tensions in Syria and the impact of various players on the country's internal scene and future decisions towards its neighbors, we sat down for an interview with Mohammad Irani, Iran's former ambassador to Jordan and a specialist in Syrian affairs. The text of the interview follows:

IRAN DAILY: As our first question, how do you see the situation in Syria after last month's bloody clashes ended?

IRANI: Things have cooled down to some extent compared to the events in Sweida that drew in Israeli military intervention, but in my view, there are several reasons why the fighting in these areas is bound to break out again. That's why the current situation in Syria — especially in Sweida — is nothing but a ticking time bomb.

First, demographics: Part of Sweida's population is made up of Sunni Arab tribes, who are ethnically and religiously distinct from the Druze. These tribes even live in certain neighborhoods of the city, meaning that the potential for conflict in Sweida is still in play. Second, the armed conflict between the Druze and the Sharaa's forces has seriously eroded Syrian sovereignty, prompting the ruling regime, with backing from Turkey and some Arab countries like Saudi Arabia and even Qatar, to dig in their heels and resist any move for Sweida to secede. So, it won't be easy for the province to break away from Syria.

Right now, Sweida is basically the scene of a tug-of-war between the Zionist regime and Turkey. In other words, we're seeing Druze and Arab tribal factions fighting proxy battles on behalf of Israel and Turkey. Turkey is the main provider of security and the primary supporter of the Sharaa regime in Damascus. The neighboring Arab countries may not be all for Turkish influence in Syria, but when it comes to Syria's territorial integrity, they generally side with Turkey.

What objectives is the Zionist regime pursuing in Syria by supporting the Druze, and are they likely to succeed?

There's no doubt the Israeli regime is dead set on undermining the strength of the countries around it. In this regard, even carving up part of Syria suits its agenda. However, I don't think the Americans will allow the country to be chopped up at this stage. At the moment, both the Druze in the south and the Kurds in the north have close ties with Israel, while most Alawites mostly live along the coast.

One thing that keeps the pot boiling in Syria is Israel's fundamental security doctrine: 'No neighbor is a friend, and every neighbor is a potential threat.' This mindset dictates that Israel's neighbors should always look over their shoulders, living in fear of the next Israeli military strike.

The Zionist regime, for its own perceived security, has consistently tried to turn border provinces of neighboring states into demilitarized areas — by hook or by crook, whether through treaties or by waging war. Look



at Egypt: Israel invaded, occupied the Sinai Peninsula twice, and succeeded in imposing demilitarization on that region. The same goes for Lebanon, where Israel has tried to neutralize military threats by occupying parts of the country. Just recently, we saw a similar effort in Sweida province in Syria. The Israeli regime's main aim right now is to transform Sweida into an autonomous province without an army or heavy weaponry.

Amidst this, there's speculation about Israel launching a so-called "David's Corridor" by occupying parts of southern Syria. How plausible is this?

There's talk about Israel looking to set up the so-called "David's Corridor" stretching from the Jordanian border to the Iraqi border and further east. I firmly believe that if Israel could pull off this plan, it wouldn't hesitate for a second as it fits right in with its much-vaunted "Nile to Euphrates" vision. But for now, the US is busy at its al-Tanf base on the Jordanian border, trying to snuff out the threats of local groups to Israel. So, I think, at least for now, the David's Corridor plan is still a long shot for Israel.

How do you assess Ahmad al-Sharaa's changes in approach since coming to power in Syria?

Ahmad al-Sharaa, once known as Abu Mohammed al-Jolani, has changed tack after coming to power, choosing a strategy that helps him hang on to the reins of authority. He's even gone so far as to open the door to US occupation in parts of Syria, and you can see that in the approaches and positions he's been taking. As things stand, the part of Syria under Sharaa's rule might as well

be a pawn for the United States in the region. Of course, Turkey may have had a hand in shaping this situation, helping Sharaa firm up his grip on Damascus.

Will the Israeli regime still respond to internal events in Syria and the build-up in military strength there? And will Sharaa attempt to join the Abraham Accords to gain Israel's approval?

In my view, given Israel's security approach towards the region and its neighbors, the Israelis won't let up on thwarting any chance for Syria to rebuild its military. For Israel, strong neighbors are always something to be reckoned with, so it will keep trying to chip away at its neighbors' power, hitting back at any military movement in Damascus.

With things going as they are, it looks like Israel is gradually painting Syria into a corner — leaving it powerless to assert military sovereignty over its borders, especially the ones adjoining

the Golan Heights.

Given Sharaa's current predicament, I don't think he would bat an eye at recognizing Israel, and as he's said before, if Israel were to pull out of occupied Syrian lands, he'd immediately recognize them.

That said, I doubt Israel will ever actually step back from the parts of Syria it has occupied, but it's definitely within the realm of possibility that Ahmad al-Sharaa will gradually show more flexibility towards Israel, and under US and even Turkish pressure, move towards cutting a deal and signing a peace agreement with Israel.

What is your assessment of Turkey's influence in Syria after Sharaa's rise? It seems the role of other actors has started to overshadow Turkey.

Although Syria is currently a battleground for both Turkey and the Zionist regime, I think the Turks, given the political blows they've suffered in Syria — particularly from Israel's occupation

of Syrian territory and the ongoing Israeli threats after the recent events in Sweida — aren't interested in crossing swords with Israel in Syria. As a result, they've pretty much left the field open to the Israelis.

Turkey does keep raising objections about Israel's activities in Syria with the Americans, but so far, these complaints have gotten nowhere. There are also significant differences between Turkey and some Arab states over Syria's issues, al-Sharaa's rule, and control of Damascus. Political costs for Turkey in Syria are only likely to mount. As Turkey's influence continues to wane, the US may well only allow Turkey to take on minor economic projects in Syria, leaving Turkish presence largely symbolic.

That means Turkey will be forced to roll back its post-Assad gains, focusing what little influence it retains on northern Syria and the Kurdish areas — though many variables still could come into play there.



Mohammad Irani



Syria's self-proclaimed President Ahmad al-Sharaa (L) and Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu (R) **MINTPRESS NEWS**



One thing that keeps the pot boiling in Syria is Israel's fundamental security doctrine: 'No neighbor is a friend, and every neighbor is a potential threat.' This mindset dictates that Israel's neighbors should always look over their shoulders, living in fear of the next Israeli military strike.



Syrian Internal Security Forces officers escort a Druze prisoner and prevent him from being attacked by Bedouins, at an Internal Security Forces checkpoint working to prevent Bedouin fighters from advancing towards Sweida, following renewed fighting between Bedouin and Druze in Sweida, Syria, on July 19, 2025. **KHALIL ASHAWI/REUTERS**



Are Iran-Egypt relations on cusp of 'seismic shift'?


By Elfadil Ibrahim
Columnist
O P I N I O N

In the heart of old Cairo two months ago, one of the Middle East's longest-running rifts was being publicly laid to rest. Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi, flanked by Egyptian officials, walked through Cairo's historic Khan el-Khalili bazaar, prayed at the Al-Hussein Mosque, and dined with former Egyptian foreign ministers at the storied Naguib Mahfouz restaurant. Araghchi was unequivocal when he posted during his trip that Egyptian-Iranian relations had "entered a new phase". This visit was more than routine diplomacy, but a signal of a potentially seismic shift between two Middle Eastern powers, drawn together by the pull of shared crises. The rupture began in 1979, when Iran's revolutionary leaders severed diplomatic relations after Egyptian president Anwar Sadat signed the Camp David Accords with Israel — a betrayal in Tehran's eyes. The schism deepened when Cairo granted asylum to the deposed Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, who had just been overthrown by a popular revolution that birthed a new Islamic Republic under the leadership of Ayatollah Khomeini. The Shah died and was buried in Egypt in 1980. During the Iran-Iraq War (1980–1988), Egypt's material support for Saddam Hussein's regime cemented Tehran's view of Cairo as an antagonist. For decades thereafter, diplomatic relations remained frozen, with only intermittent and largely fruitless attempts at dialogue. Against this backdrop of accumulated grievances, Tehran's recent renaming of "Khalid al-Islambouli Street" is a particularly significant gesture. The street had honored the chief suspect in Sadat's 1981 assassination, whom Iran hailed as a "martyr" after his court-mandated execution by firing squad. The new name, "Hassan Nasrallah Street," instead pays tribute to Hezbollah's slain leader, killed by Israeli air strikes in 2024, rectifying a decades-old insult to Egypt. This renaming represents a strategic concession, resolving what Araghchi called the "final hurdle" to normalization weeks earlier. Cairo's swift public embrace of the move, with Foreign Ministry spokesperson Ambassador Tamim Khallaf calling it a "positive step" that "helps put matters back on the right track," demonstrated Egypt's willingness to turn the page. During marathon meetings with President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi and Foreign Minister Badr Abdelatty in June, Araghchi asserted that "trust between Cairo and Tehran has never been this high." The tangible outcome of the meetings was an agreement to establish regular political consultations at the sub-ministerial level — a structured channel absent since 1979. Crucially, Abdelatty carefully framed the visit as a pragmatic necessity, not as unconditional alignment. "There is a mutual desire to develop our relations, taking into account the concerns and perspectives of each side," Egypt's chief diplomat said. This nascent détente is less about newfound affection than

cold-eyed calculation amid emerging and converging crises. First, Houthi attacks on Red Sea shipping, launched in solidarity with Palestinians in Gaza, struck Egypt's economic jugular. Billions of dollars in Suez Canal revenues evaporated as shipping rerouted around Africa. While Araghchi publicly downplayed direct control over the Houthis, insisting that Yemen "makes its own decisions," Cairo desperately needs Tehran's leverage to restore maritime security. Abdelatty's blunt emphasis on "protecting freedom of navigation in the Red Sea" during a March phone call with Araghchi underscores this vital priority. While Yemen's Houthis maintain operational independence from Tehran, Iranian support for the group is well-documented, and statements from Egyptian leadership calculate that Iran could exert significant influence on the Houthis. For Iran, reeling from Israeli and US strikes on its nuclear and military infrastructure in June, normalization with Egypt — the Arab world's cultural heart and an important US ally — helps establish its regional legitimacy and expands its diplomatic options. Larger regional dynamics are increasingly conducive to Iranian-Egyptian normalization. China's 2023 brokering of Saudi-Iranian rapprochement removed a critical veto. With Riyadh restoring ties with Tehran, Cairo gained freedom to engage Iran without fear of alienating its vital Persian Gulf financiers. This new diplomatic freedom is being accelerated by the brutal reality of Sudan's civil war. The conflict has pushed the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) to revive a dormant alliance with Iran in a desperate search for military support. Since Egypt is also a key backer of the SAF, Cairo and Tehran now share a mutual ally in a war raging on Egypt's southern doorstep, creating an unexpected arena of common interest. These regional realignments, coupled with shared economic pain — Egypt's debt crisis and Iran's crippling sanctions — make tangible cooperation on trade, and religious tourism (primarily for Iranians to visit Shiite sites in Egypt) suddenly



viable. Additionally, Israel's 12-day assault on Iran further intensified cooperation between Cairo and Tehran. The offensive created parallel crises for both: For Iran, Israeli strikes — conducted with US assistance — against its defense and nuclear infrastructure violated its territory and derailed nuclear diplomacy. Concurrently, Egypt suffered collateral damage to its energy security when Israeli-operated gas fields, supplying 15–20% of its needs, were shuttered. This forced emergency measures and sparked blackout fears, revealing a shared vulnerability exploited by the conflict. The attacks also amplified Egypt's mediating role while drawing Iran and Egypt closer. Sisi's late-night call with Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian, just hours before US strikes on Iranian nuclear sites — in which Sisi condemned Israeli "escalation" — highlighted Cairo's unique positioning. Egypt's foreign minister has since embarked on a diplomatic blitz, coordinating with Oman, which has mediated US-Iran talks, US Special Envoy for Middle East Affairs Steve Witkoff, and Rafael Grossi, director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), in hopes of reviving nuclear negotiations. Despite the momentum, full dip-

lomatic trust remains constrained by structural divides. Egypt's pro-Western orientation — anchored in US military aid and its 46-year-old treaty with Israel — clashes with Tehran's revolutionary ethos. Hostility toward the US ("the Great Satan" as the Islamic Republic's founders called it) has remained a core, albeit flexible pillar of Iranian foreign policy. For Cairo, its relationship with Israel is non-negotiable, for reasons both strategic and existential. Israel is not only a critical energy supplier, but also an indispensable counterpart in Gaza cease-fire talks aimed at ending the brutal war raging on Egypt's Sinai border. Iran's anti-Western posture, meanwhile, has been hardened by a series of Israeli escalations: direct strikes killing senior military and scientific figures, and explicit threats to assassinate Iran's Leader Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei. Significantly, Iran's support for Hamas — the Resistance group Israel has been fighting in Gaza for nearly two years — isn't merely a complication; It's a structural barrier. Egypt, in addition to being a key mediator in the Gaza conflict, is also a significant stakeholder with sensitive national security interests on the line. Its primary objectives are to secure a cease-fire, establish a governing au-

thority in a post-war Gaza, and, crucially, prevent a mass influx of Palestinian refugees into the Sinai Peninsula. However, Cairo's goals clash head-on with Iran's public declarations in support of the Resistance group. For Egypt, Hamas is not a partner but a dangerous security threat. Cairo views the group as a hostile offshoot of its primary domestic arch-nemesis, the Muslim Brotherhood, and has long accused it of fueling the brutal Islamist insurgency in the Sinai Peninsula. This deep-seated animosity is irreconcilable with Tehran's position. After Hamas's October 7 attacks on Israel, Iran's late president Ebrahim Raisi hailed the attacks as a "victorious operation" that "made the Islamic Ummah happy". In a recent interview with Fox News, Iran's Foreign Minister called Hamas "freedom fighters... fighting for a just cause". This praise is not just political; It was backed by operational links managed by figures like the recently assassinated Revolutionary Guard commander Saeed Izadi, who reportedly oversaw military coordination with Hamas. While reports indicate Iran did not participate in the October 7th attack, its praise for Hamas is backed by decades of material support that built the group's military strength. Iran's support for Hamas, and its fundamental hostility towards Israel, which itself is a necessary albeit frustrating partner for Egypt, will continue to complicate the burgeoning relationship. The Cairo-Tehran rapprochement, therefore, is not a grand strategic embrace but rather a marriage of convenience. Its trajectory leans toward deeper engagement because mutual necessity — securing waterways, averting an all-out regional war, surviving economically — now outweighs the costs of avoidance. It looks probable that the two nations will soon upgrade their current low-level missions to full embassies, that economic ties will continue to grow, and that diplomatic channels will remain active on flashpoints like the Red Sea crisis and US-Iran nuclear talks. However, this relationship will remain inherently transactional, constrained by their competing national interests.

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi (2nd-R) meets with former Egyptian foreign ministers Nabil Fahmy, Amr Moussa, and Mohamed Orabi in Cairo, Egypt, on June 2, 2025.
● IRNA

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Egypt's President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi (R) welcomes his Iranian counterpart, Masoud Pezeshkian, during the D-8 summit in Cairo, Egypt, on December 19, 2024.
● president.ir



The full article first appeared on Responsible Statecraft.

FIBA Asia Cup:

Iran close strong to stun Japan in Group B thriller

FIBA – Iran finished with a furious flourish, holding Japan scoreless in the final three minutes to claim a 78-70 victory in a tense FIBA Asia Cup 2025 Group B clash on Friday at the King Abdullah Sports City. Mohammad Amini powered the win with 24 points, 8 rebounds, 3 steals and 2 blocks, wreaking havoc at both ends in the decisive fourth quarter. Sina Vahedi provided the perimeter spark, drilling four triples on his way to 22 points, including the go-ahead basket that triggered Iran's closing run. Japan had looked poised to take the game before the momentum turned sharply. Joshua Hawkinson posted a massive double-double of 20 points and 17 rebounds, while Keisei Tominaga lit up the scoreboard with 22 points and five triples (all in the first half) before fouling out late. Iran came out with energy, disrupting Japan's rhythm early with tight pressure and

quick rotations. Forcing five turnovers in the opening seven minutes, Team Melli built an 11-5 lead and held the edge 16-13 after a Vahedi buzzer-beater from deep. Japan found their footing in the second quarter, leaning on Tominaga's hot hand. A flurry of long-range hits from Tominaga, Hawkinson and Akira Jacobs spurred a 10-1 run for a 31-24 lead. Iran struck back before halftime, with Amini's drives and Vahedi's steady scoring pulling them level at 34-all by the break. The third quarter was a tug-of-war, neither side leading by more than six. Japan briefly surged ahead through free throws from Hawkinson and a big three from Yudai Baba, but Amini's fearless attacks inside and Kazemi's hustle plays kept Iran locked in. Jacobs' late free throws were answered by another Amini drive, tying it again at 58 heading into the final ten minutes. Early in the fourth, Amini's

transition layup and Vahedi's aggressive penetration gave Iran a 63-60 edge, but Baba's and-one finish swung momentum back to Japan at 68-65. The Akatsuki Japan looked in control after an 8-2 run, yet Iran refused to fade, eventually tying the game again at 70 thanks to a Matin Aghajpour triple with about three minutes to go. Jacobs' emphatic block on Amini afterwards only delayed the inevitable. Vahedi buried a triple to push Iran ahead 73-70, then drew charge on Tominaga for his final foul. Mobin Sheikhli followed with another three, and Amini's steal-and-slam punctuated an 8-0 closing burst. Japan could not score again after Tominaga's floater at the 3:58 mark. The win moves Iran to 2-0, firmly in the mix to top Group B, while Japan drop to 1-1 ahead of their next assignment against Guam. Iran will face Syria with momentum on their side.



Iranian guard Sina Vahedi (3) goes up for a basket during a 78-70 victory over Japan at the FIBA Asia Cup in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, on August 8, 2025. ● FIBA

Chengdu 2025 World Games:

Iranians win karate, wushu golds on Day 3



Iran's Sara Bahmanyar (1) and Shahin Banitalebi are pictured with their gold medal at the World Games in Chengdu, China, on August 8, 2025. ● theworldgames2025.com

Sports Desk

The third day of action at the 2025 World Games saw Iranians bag a couple of gold medals in the karate and wushu events in Chengdu, China. Sara Bahmanyar overcame some high-profile karatekas – including reigning world champion Moldir Zhangbyrbay of Kazakhstan in the final – to walk away with the ultimate prize in the women's kumite -50kg event. Former world bronze medalist Bahmanyar began her campaign with a 4:0 victory over back-to-back European champion Ema Sgardelli of Croatia and then came out on top against Canada's Yamina Lahyanssa (5:4) and Italian world silver medalist Erminia Peretto (11:3) to finish atop Pool A and progress to the semifinals.

The Iranian girl defeated two-time African gold medalist Cylia Ouikene 4:3 for a place in the final showpiece, and was then awarded the win against Zhangbyrbay by hantei (judges' decision) after it finished 0:0. Later on Friday, Shahin Banitalebi added a second gold to Iran's medal haul, thanks to an impressive run in the men's taolu. Representing the country in the men's nanquan/nangun event, Banitalebi scored 9.710 points to stand third in nanquan table, before a 9.756-point performance in nangun saw the Iranian beat Brunei's Mohammad Adi Salihin, who tallied 19.456 points in total, to the combined gold, while Liu Chang-min of the Chinese Taipei settled for the bronze with 19.430 points. Iranian girl Helia Asadian was also in action at the wushu

competitions on Friday but was unlucky to finish her campaign empty-handed in a closely-contested nanquan/nandao showdown. Asadian scored 19.343 points to finish fifth, with Malaysian Cheon Min Tan (19.479), Uzbekistan's Darya Latisheva (19.433), and Ong Cassandra (19.386) of Singapore grabbing the medals. The 12th edition of the World Games, featuring 34 sports and 60 disciplines that are not contested at the Olympic Games, will continue in Chengdu until next Sunday.

Iranian boxers settle for four Asian U19 bronzes

Sports Desk

Four members of the Iranian under-19 squad had to settle for a bronze medal on the first day of the U22 & U19 Asian Boxing Championships in Bangkok, Thailand. Meanwhile, Ali Chehreqani defeated opponents from Turkmenistan and the United Arab Emirates before outmuscling the host's boxer in emphatic fashion to progress to the men's 60kg final and will fight for the ultimate prize today. Mahdi Rouzbehani beat Saudi and Sri Lankan boxers but fell short against his Filipino opponent in the semifinals to finish joint-third in the men's 50kg event. Ashkan Hashemi was beaten by Indian Mausam Suhag in the 65kg semifinals to finish his 65kg campaign with a bronze medal, with Mohammad-Saleh Mesbahi suffering a controversial last-four

setback against the Uzbek boxer – a world champion last year – in the 70kg event. A fourth bronze medal for the country came in the men's +90kg class as Abbas Garshasbi also fell short against his Uzbek opponent in the last-four bout. Amirreza Soltani (-55kg) and Arvin

Shahbabaei (90kg) finished empty-handed after first-round defeats in their respective weight classes. More than 390 boxers will represent 26 countries across different men's and women's weight categories and age-groups in the Thai capital for 13 days.



● ISNA

Man United sign RB Leipzig striker Sesko for £73.7m

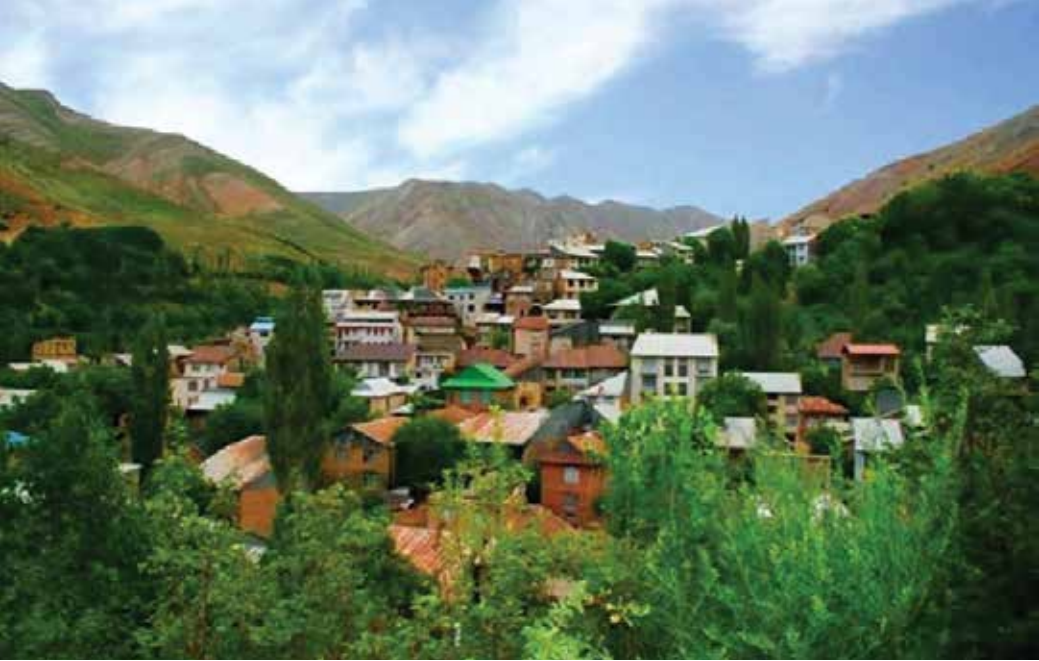
BBC – Manchester United have completed the signing of RB Leipzig striker Benjamin Sesko in a move worth £73.7m. The deal for the Slovenia international, who has joined on a five-year contract, includes a guaranteed payment of £66.3m, with the remainder in add-ons. He is United's third major signing in attack following the arrivals of Matheus Cunha for £62.5m and Bryan Mbeumo for £65m with £6m in add-ons. Sesko, 22, was also a target for Newcastle United but has chosen to join Ruben Amorim's side. United finished 15th in the Premier League last season, while the Magpies were fifth and qualified for the Champions League in a campaign in which they also won the EFL Cup. "The history of Manchester United is obviously very special but what really excites me is the future," said Sesko. "When we discussed the project, it was clear that everything is in place for this team to continue to grow and compete for the biggest trophies again soon. "From the moment that I arrived, I could feel



● MANCHESTER UNITED

the positive energy and family environment that the club has created. It is clearly the perfect place to reach my maximum level and fulfil all of my ambitions. "I cannot wait to start learning from Ruben and connecting with my team-mates to achieve the success that we all know we are capable of together."

Rudbar-e Qasran; a jewel in Tehran’s northern slopes



Iranica Desk

Rudbar-e Qasran district in northern Tehran is a region with a rich historical and natural heritage that has played diverse and significant roles in the economic, industrial, and tourism sectors of the capital from ancient times up to the present day. The name Rudbar, which means riverbank, reflects its distinctive location alongside permanent rivers that traverse the area. Historically, Rudbar-e Qasran was vitally important for supplying fuel to trains and supporting the rail transport industry, owing to its strategic geographical position and abundant natural resources. With the establishment of the Trans-Iranian Railway, particularly during the 1940s and 1950s, the demand for coal as a primary locomotive fuel surged. Among the most important sources of this fuel were the coal mines of Rudbar-e Qasran. This area, rich with numerous mines including the notable Shemshak coal mine, served as one of the principal centers for sup-

plying fuel to locomotives during that era, chtn.ir wrote. Coal transport from these mines to various parts of the country relied on specially engineered routes. These routes were carefully designed using precise technical calculations and utilized specialized wagons and freight paths tailored to the terrain and logistical demands. The existence of numerous tunnels and bridges — several of which remain standing in parts of the region today — attests to the strategic significance of Rudbar-e Qasran during the first Pahlavi period. Over time, however, especially from the late 1950s through the 1960s, the advent of newer generations of locomotives powered by alternative fuels such as diesel and electricity drastically reduced the demand for coal. Consequently, Rudbar-e Qasran’s traditional role in coal supply diminished, and many of its mines gradually ceased operation. By the 1990s, remnants of mining activity were still observable,



● kojaro.com

but over time, the traces of this once vital industry slowly vanished from the landscape. In contemporary times, Rudbar-e Qasran is renowned more for its pristine natural environment, abundant tourist attractions, and rich cultural heritage than for its historical coal mines. Nestled on the northern slopes of the central Alborz Mountains, this region boasts diverse vegetation, roaring rivers, and a

mild climate, establishing it as a favored destination for nature tourism and mountaineering enthusiasts alike. The villages scattered throughout the region, including Ahar, Shemshak, Dizin, Ruteh, and Shemiranat, are known for their traditional architectural fabric, historic old houses, an array of hiking trails, and the warm hospitality of the local residents. These villages attract thousands

of domestic and international visitors each year and are notable not only for their natural beauty but also their historical significance. A prime example is the Shemiranat Palace, constructed during the reign of Naser al-Din Shah Qajar, which, together with nearby hiking trails weaving through forests and mountains, has become a central hub for mountaineers. Beyond its physical and natural attributes, Rudbar-e

Qasran holds deep cultural significance. The continuity of multi-generational families rooted in the region and the ongoing transmission of local culture, customs, and indigenous arts have transformed Rudbar-e Qasran from merely a recreational site into a vital space for exploring and appreciating a part of Tehran’s cultural identity. Moreover, the region’s potential in environmental education, sustainable tourism, and the preservation of natural resources deserves special recognition. An area with such a storied history, remarkable nature, and cultural importance demands intelligent and thoughtful management. Visitors to Rudbar-e Qasran should approach their experience with an awareness and respect for its natural and historical values. The protection of the environment, strict avoidance of littering, and adherence to responsible nature tourism principles are essential responsibilities shared by both tourists and local authorities. In recent decades, the rap-

id population growth and northward urban expansion of Tehran have posed threats to parts of Rudbar-e Qasran due to unchecked construction activities. This phenomenon serves as a stark warning regarding the potential loss of the area’s invaluable natural resources and historic character. Thus, safeguarding Rudbar-e Qasran necessitates meticulous planning and the implementation of stringent regulations aimed at preserving its ecological integrity and historical fabric. Rudbar-e Qasran’s significance extends beyond its former industrial role as a vital supplier of locomotive fuel; today, it stands as one of the natural gems surrounding Tehran, holding a cherished place in the hearts of mountain climbers and forest lovers. From the villages of Ahar and Ruteh to Shemshak, every corner of this region tells a story — a story that begins with coal and locomotives and concludes with the serene embrace of forests and the gentle sounds of birdsong.

Natural wonders surrounding Harzevil Cypress in Gilan Province

Iranica Desk

One of the tourist attractions of Iran is the so old cypress, one of which is the Harzevil cypress. They estimate the age of this tree to be 1000 to 3000 years. This magnificent cypress tree has long been popular among the people of this village. Nasir Khusraw’s logbook mentions the name of this cypress tree, which indicates the tree’s great age. It is said that the age of this tree is between 1000 and 3000 years. Harzevil Cypress is a tall tree with a height of about 30 meters. Also, the trunk diameter of this valuable Iranian treasure is about four meters. You should know that this cypress is called Harzevil since

it is located in the village of the same name. According to the people of Harzevil, this is a sacred ancient cypress tree. It was registered as a national natural heritage, visitiran.ir wrote. Harzevil village is located in the city of Manjil, Gilan Province. This village is situated on the outskirts of Manjil. The closest major tourist town to this village is Rasht, which offers many accommodations ranging from multi-star hotels to private villas. The best time to visit this village is in spring and late summer. Usually, the climate in villages and towns of northern Iran is sultry during the summer. Therefore, if you want to travel to this village in the best months, it is

suggested you go in June. Manjil itself is known for its distinctive windy climate, which has made it an important site for wind turbines that add an attractive scene to the city. The area around Manjil, including Harzevil, has a rich history and natural beauty, marked by features such as the Sefid Rud Dam. Notably, Manjil was affected by the devastating 1990 earthquake that struck northern Iran, causing major damage and shaping the region’s modern history. Visitors to Manjil can enjoy unique local products, such as olives from the nearby town of Rudbar, and take in scenic views and cultural experiences representative of northern Iran.



● visitiran.ir



Legendary Persian miniature master Mahmoud Farshchian dies at 95

Arts & Culture Desk

Mahmoud Farshchian, the celebrated Iranian painter credited with modernizing Persian miniature while preserving its spiritual core, died on Saturday morning in the United States at the age of 95, the Iranian Academy of Arts confirmed.

He was born in Isfahan in Jan. 24, 1930 and began his education and artistic training in the 1940s. Farshchian held his first exhibition in 1945 and traveled to Europe in 1953. In 1953, he also became the director and professor of the Fine Arts Faculty. Over the decades, he designed the gilded shrines of Imam Reza and Imam Hussein in the 2000s and 2010s. He created iconic paintings such as “The Guarantor of the Gazelle” (*Zamen-e Ahoo*) in 2006, “The Evening of Ashura” in 1976, “The Ghadir Khumm” in 1989, and contributed illustrations for Ferdowsi’s ‘Shahnameh’ in 1974.

Farshchian also produced notable works like the ‘The Fifth Day of Creation’ painting in 1973 and designed the ‘Flag of Justice’ in 2010.

His richly detailed works, which blend classical miniature techniques with contemporary aesthetics, are displayed in major museums worldwide and adorn religious shrines in Iran. Over more than seven decades, he developed a signature style that brought a centuries-old art form into the modern age while keeping it firmly rooted in Iranian culture and Shia tradition.

Iranian officials and art institutions offered swift condolences. First Vice President Mohammad Reza Aref wrote, “The works of Master Farshchian were not only a manifestation of visual beauty, but also a translation of wisdom, mysticism, and the Iranian-Islamic spirit. Future generations of Iranian art will be inspired by his precious legacy.”

He called Farshchian “a cosmopolitan who loved Iran and its people,” praising his kindness and humility as qualities that “will forever remain in memories.”

Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Reza Salehi Amiri described Farshchian as “a borderless ambassador of culture and the mirror-bearer of the sky of Iranian art,” whose brush for seven decades painted the soul of the nation. With works such as “The Evening of Ashura,” “The Guarantor of the Gazelle” and ‘Shams and Rumi,’ Farshchian built a firm bridge between ancient heritage and contemporary art. “His memory will remain a guiding light for Iranian culture and art,” he added.

Majid Shah-Hosseini, head of the Academy of Arts, hailed his ability to carry Persian miniature “beyond the borders of tradition to new horizons” through works “infused with Islamic mysticism.”

Culture minister Abbas Salehi praised him as “the architect of a union between history and spirituality” whose works were “living narratives of faith, love and national identity.”

Former Minister of Culture Mohammad Mehdi Esmaili noted the coincidence of his passing with the Shia observance of Arbäeen, saying it was “fitting that the creator of ‘The Evening of Ashura’ should depart in these days of mourning.”

Art institutions also joined the chorus of grief. The House of Cinema called him “irreplaceable,” while Ali Maqavasaz, head of the Revayat-e Fat’h Cultural Foundation, said Farshchian’s paintings had become “part of the collective memory of Shia Muslims worldwide.”

Farshchian’s artistic journey began in his teenage years when his father, a carpet merchant, introduced him to the atelier of master painter Mirza Agha Emami. He later studied at the Isfahan School of Fine Arts under Isa Bahadori before moving to Europe, where he spent years studying Western masters in museums, often, as he recalled, “the first to enter and the last to leave.”

His synthesis of Eastern and Western techniques gave Persian miniature new dynamism. Colors swirled, figures seemed to move, and compositions carried a dra-

matic tension absent from earlier static forms. His subjects ranged from Qur’anic stories to epic poetry, with recurring themes of divine love, sacrifice and redemption. By the 1970s, Farshchian’s reputation extended far beyond Iran. His works entered collections in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the British Museum and the Hermitage. In Iran, his designs for the shrines in Mashhad and Karbala became touchstones of contemporary religious art. In 2001, the government opened the Farshchian Museum in Tehran’s Sa’dabad Cultural Complex, housing more than 70 of his works.

Farshchian remained active well into his nineties, producing large-scale works and mentoring younger artists. His meticulous brushwork, layered symbolism and luminous palettes made his paintings instantly recognizable. Admirers say he restored Persian miniature’s relevance, freeing it from dependence on literary illustration and asserting it as a stand-alone art form. In keeping with his last wishes, Farshchian’s body will be flown from the United States to Dubai and then to Iran for funeral rites. A memorial will be held in Tehran before burial beside the 17th-century poet Saeb Tabrizi in Isfahan, the city where his artistic journey began.

His earlier will had specified burial at the shrine of Imam Reza in Mashhad, but his representative said he had later expressed a preference for “the soil of the motherland” and proximity to Saeb’s tomb. Dates for the ceremonies have not yet been announced, pending the arrival of his remains.

Farshchian leaves behind a body of work that continues to inspire artists and art lovers alike. From “The Evening of Ashura” to “The Guarantor of the Gazelle” each can-



Mahmoud Farshchian



vas remains a testament to his belief that painting could be both a vessel of beauty and a vehicle for the sacred.

As the House of Cinema put it in its tribute, “His art will forever illuminate the path of future generations.”

Archaeologists launch sixth dig at Qaleh Kurd Cave, Iran’s oldest human settlement

Arts & Culture Desk

Archaeologists have returned to Qaleh Kurd Cave near Avaj in Qazvin Province to begin the sixth season of excavations at what is recognized as Iran’s oldest known human settlement.

In this latest campaign, led by Hamed Vahdati Nasab and Milad Hashemi Sarvandi from Tarbiat Modares University, researchers aim to dig deeper into the cave’s Pleistocene layers, ISNA reported. The research, backed by Iran’s Research Institute of Cultural Heritage and Tourism and the Qazvin provincial heritage office, seeks to uncover further evidence of early hominin activity in the region.

Qaleh Kurd Cave, perched in the Hesar-Valiasr district of Avaj in Qazvin, stands out for its Middle Pleistocene deposits containing human remains and stone tools.

Past seasons yielded a deciduous Neanderthal-age tooth estimated at approximately 180,000 years old, as well as cultural layers dating



back around 455,000 years, making the site central to understanding early human habitation in the Iranian Central Plateau.

Archaeologists hope that continued excavation will turn up further lithic artifacts and hominin remains, potentially pushing back the timeline of early human presence even

further.

Vahdati Nasab said the team is prepared to “dig down to lower layers,” signaling a push into previously unexplored depths. The team is also coordinating with local authorities to plan for eventual public access and tourism once the scientific work wraps up.

Tehran confirms continued presence at Paris’s Cité Internationale

Arts & Culture Desk

Aidin Mahdizadeh, Iran’s Director-General of Visual Arts at the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, said on Saturday that Iranian artists remain part of the Cité Internationale des Arts in Paris and that Iran is actively working to restore full access there following setbacks during the COVID-19 era.

Iran has not given up on its artists’ presence at the Cité. As Mahdizadeh put it, the interruption was not deliberate but rooted in a slew of complications — from the pandemic to opaque directives, delayed cost estimates, strained Franco-Iran relations, and a procedural vacuum during previous administrations, IRNA wrote.

Negotiations launched in 2017–18 stalled when COVID struck. By 2022, Iran had formally accepted a revised residency protocol, yet “no letter exists terminating our cooperation,” he stressed. A brief, unofficial note suggesting suspension arrived at Iran’s Paris embassy earlier this year, “but it never reached us formally,” he said, highlighting that this bypassed standard diplomatic channels and denied Iran a chance to reply. Meanwhile, the ministry has budgeted for the



program and awaits formal payment terms from the French side.

Mahdizadeh outlined that a cross-institution task force—comprising the Visual Arts Directorate, the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Islamic Culture and Relations Organization—has been meeting, including with Iran’s cultural attaché in France, to iron out the ambiguities on funding, processes, and dispatching artists. The coordination, he noted, must be “collective and national,” not driven by a single body.

Mahdizadeh said, “Iranian artists have not been removed from the Cité.” Instead, their re-engagement is very much underway.