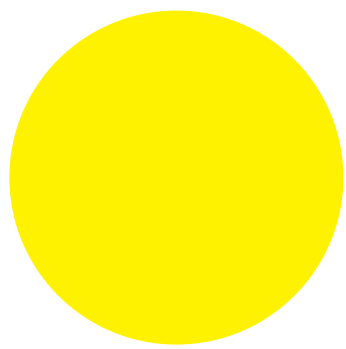


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Israel fears journalists lifting lid on Gaza's reality

By Emad Abshenas
Middle East affairs analyst

OPINION
EXCLUSIVE

On Monday, in its latest act of brutality, the Israeli occupation army carried out a targeted attack on a press tent outside the main gate of the Al-Shifa Hospital in Gaza City, killing several journalists on the spot. The targeted killing of journalists in the Gaza Strip is nothing new. In its drive to block coverage of the truth, expose the scale of its crimes, and silence the voice of reality, the regime has so far killed 238 journalists in the Palestinian enclave. In recent years, Israel has stopped at nothing when it comes to crimes against the Palestinian people. In this latest war alone, it has committed atrocities in various parts of Gaza that, under international law and norms, are entirely unacceptable. These crimes are unfolding while international bodies turn a blind eye and remain silent. This silence has only emboldened Israel to press ahead with the massacre of Palestinians, effectively giving it a free hand to commit more atrocities. Thanks to Washington's protective umbrella, Israel feels no qualms about launching direct attacks on journalists. In doing so, the United States becomes, in effect, an accomplice in these crimes. What drives Israel's fear of journalists—and its willingness to commit war crimes against them—is the fact that reporters on the ground in Gaza are putting out images and reports of starvation and the appalling humanitarian conditions there. Determined to prevent such reporting and scare off the press, Israel repeatedly resorts to these attacks to sow fear among journalists. Monday's assault on the press tent, in which several reporters were killed, was Israel's way of sending a chilling message: even if such crimes are committed in broad daylight and before the eyes of the entire world, no international authority is capable of stopping it.

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Pezeshkian inaugurates 425 MW solar power plants in four provinces

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Iranian Energy Minister Abbas Aliabadi (2nd R) speaks to President Masoud Pezeshkian (2nd L) during a ceremony to remotely launch several solar farms nationwide in Tehran, Iran on August 12, 2025.

president.ir

'Trump Route' no threat to strong Iran: Expert

US pursues political goal in South Caucasus

INTERVIEW
EXCLUSIVE

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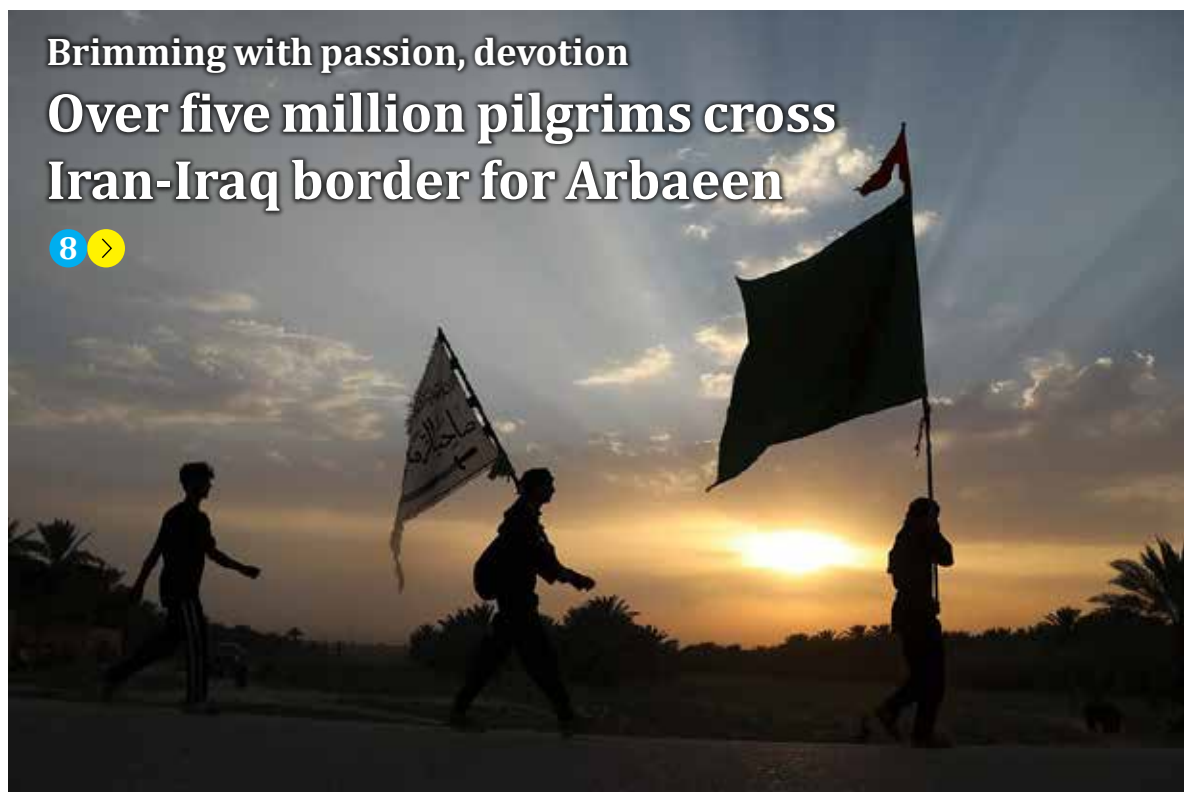


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Araghchi warns against disruption in transportation in Caucasus region

International Desk

Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said on Tuesday Tehran welcomes a recent peace agreement reached between its two northern neighbors – Armenia and Azerbaijan – which involves the implementation of a transportation corridor project, but warned against any disruption in Iran's access to transportation corridors.

"These routes must not lead to geopolitical changes in the region or disrupt Iran's access to other transportation corridors," the Iranian foreign minister told his Armenian counterpart Armenian Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan in a phone conversation.

Araghchi reiterated that any decision or measure must fully respect national sovereignty and territorial integrity of states.

Referring to some sensitivities related to the issue, the top Iranian diplomat pointed out that observing the considerations related to the stability and security of the region and surrounding countries is a must for any plan or agreement in this field.

Armenia and Azerbaijan on

Friday 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.

Under the deal, 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.

Iran has for long opposed the idea, saying it would change the geopolitical order of the Southern Caucasus and would restrict Iran's ability to use transport networks in the region.

During the phone call, Mirzoyan acknowledged the principled position of Iran in respecting Armenia's national sovereignty and territorial integrity, as well as its attention to geopolitical sensitivities and regional peace and stability.

He assured Araghchi that Yerevan would consider regional peace, stability, and mutual Iran-Armenia interests when making decisions about transit routes.

On Monday, Iranian President



Masoud Pezeshkian told Armenia's Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan that there is a need

for vigilance on any foreign military or security intervention in the Caucasus region.

Pezeshkian emphasized the preservation of Armenia's sovereignty and a lack of interfer-

ence by military or security forces within the framework of the project.

Top gen. vows 'more decisive response' to any act of aggression

International Desk

Chief of Staff of Iran's Armed Forces Major General Abdolrahim Mousavi said on Tuesday that the country's Armed Forces are ready to deliver a "more decisive response" to another act of aggression by the United States and the Israeli regime.

Given a history of breaking promises by the US and Israel, Iran's Armed Forces are prepared to deliver a more decisive response to another act of aggression by them, Mousavi told visiting Chief of the South African National Defense Force, General Rudzani Maphwanya, in Tehran.

A cease-fire on June 24 proposed by the US ended a 12-day aggression by Israel and the US against Iran after Iran's Armed Forces "crushing" missile strikes targeted Israel's positions in the occupied territories as well as the US largest military site in the Middle East in Qatar.

Major General Mousavi also referred to the Israel's genocidal war in the Gaza Strip and hailed South Africa's move to file a complaint against the regime in the International Court of Justice (ICJ). Maphwanya said Iran has always supported the freedom-seeking struggles of the people of South Africa against apartheid, which has created a historical bond between the two nations.

The South African official also held a separate meeting with Iran's Army commander Major General Amir Hatami, during which they commended their countries' common goal of fighting the global arrogance and aggressive colonial approaches.

The Iranian commander noted that the two sides were similar-



ly bound by anti-colonial, anti-arrogance, and justice-driven principles, hailing that the African nation had been accorded a "prioritized" position in the Islamic Republic's foreign policy approach.

"The Islamic Republic and South Africa have always supported each other and oppressed nations," Hatami declared, underscoring that the shared mission had to last until restoration of an international order "based on justice and human dignity."

The commander described South Africa's "firm stance" in condemning the Israeli regime's and the United States joint atrocities against Palestinians as both "courageous and commendable."

As a case in point regarding Pretoria's fight against the regime's aggression, he cited and praised Pretoria's decision to challenge the Zionist regime at the ICJ over its ongoing genocide in the Gaza Strip.

The move, he said, would "go down in history."



Chief of Staff of Iran's Armed Forces Major General Abdolrahim Mousavi (R) talks with Chief of the South African National Defense Force, General Rudzani Maphwanya (L) during a meeting in Tehran on August 12, 2025.

IRNA

Recalling Israel's unprovoked war on Iran in June, the commander denounced Tel Aviv and Washington for violating international law through the aggression.

He, however, underlined that the duo's all-out campaign to damage the country ended in humiliation, with Iranian missile counter-strikes forcing Tel Aviv to seek a ceasefire and Washington to refrain from resuming its attacks.

The commander further stressed that the political alignment between Tehran and Pretoria had lent South Africa "a special position" in Iran's strategic outreach to Africa, expressing hope to translate shared capabilities, especially in the military sphere, into concrete joint projects.

Veep: Direct nuclear talks with US possible under 'suitable conditions'

International Desk

Iran could hold direct nuclear talks with the United States if conditions are suitable, First Vice President Mohammadreza Aref said on Tuesday.

"Iran is ready for negotiations under equal conditions in order to safeguard its interests ... The Islamic Republic's stance is in the direction that people want and, should there be suitable conditions, we are even ready for direct talks," Aref said.

A sixth round of talks between Tehran and Washington was suspended following Israeli and US strikes on Iranian nuclear facilities in June.

Previous rounds of negotiations, which started in April, were indirect, mediated by Oman. Washington claims uranium enrichment in Iran constitutes a pathway to developing nuclear weapons and should be dropped.

Iran has repeatedly said that its nuclear program is peaceful and has announced its readiness for trust-building measures to resolve a decades-long tension over Iran's nuclear program.

Aref said that Iran has repeatedly announced that it is ready to build trust but



Mohammadreza Aref

the US has turned a blind eye. He said Washington has a habit of dictating its own demands in the negotiations but the Iranian nation has not accepted (such negotiations) and will not allow the government to negotiate under such conditions.

"We will negotiate with dignity and will not give up (uranium) enrichment, and the idea of zero enrichment is a big joke," he said.

On Sunday, Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian also made a statement in favor of resuming negotiations with the US regardless of current levels of distrust.

"You don't want to talk? Well then, what do you want to do? Do you want to go to war? ... Going to talks does not mean we intend to surrender," he said, adding that such issues should not be "approached emotionally".

Israel fears journalists ...

With the visible political and military backing of the United States, many countries

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and international bodies are too afraid to confront Washington and therefore avoid condemning Israel's atrocities. Israel has taken full advantage of this climate, committing acts of barbarity that would make even history's worst criminals pale in comparison.

By directly targeting journalists, Israel seeks to intimidate others into abandoning their mission of conveying the plight of Gaza's people to the world. Yet journalists in Gaza have shown, through courage and self-sacrifice, that they fear neither death nor danger and will carry on with their professional and moral duty.

The work of these reporters is already having an impact internationally. Their coverage has stirred public opinion in many countries—especially those backing Israel,

including European states and even the United States—against the regime's atrocities. Widespread protests are now unfolding in these nations, condemning both their governments and their silence.

Sustained reporting on Gaza's reality, coupled with growing public outrage, could force pro-Israel politicians and leaders to rethink their positions and back away from their passive stance on these crimes.

History offers a parallel: during the Vietnam War, the US government initially tried to stamp out voices opposing the conflict. But in the end, the American people and the anti-war movement succeeded in driving pro-war leaders out of the political arena. In Gaza's case too, the continued efforts of journalists could turn the tide, prompting citizens in Western countries to keep up their protests and ultimately pushing governments to change course.

Pezeshkian inaugurates 425 MW solar power plants in four provinces

Economy Desk

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian officially launched via video conference on Tuesday 130 megawatts of solar power capacity and initiated the construction of an additional 295 megawatts across four provinces. The new solar capacity includes 20 megawatts in Khorasan Razavi Province, 50 megawatts in Markazi Province, and 60 megawatts in Bushehr Province. The president's directive also kick-started the construction of a 200-megawatt solar power plant in Bushehr and a 95-megawatt facility in Tehran.

Appreciating provincial officials and contributors, particularly the Energy Ministry, for their dedication to advancing clean and renewable energy initiatives, Pezeshkian underscored the significance of the plan in addressing energy shortages and stressed the need for accelerating the ongoing projects to ease public concerns in the sector.

Speaking during the inauguration ceremonies, Energy Minister Abbas Aliabadi reported that since the beginning of the current administration, as many as 117 projects in the water and electricity sectors have been launched thanks to the technical savvy of domestic engineers. Aliabadi added that an additional 21 projects encompassing both renewable and thermal power plants are expected to become operational by September. The energy minister also announced that plans are underway to inaugurate 389 projects in the water and electricity sectors by the end of the year, which is projected for March 2026.

President honors martyred scientists of Israeli aggression

In another development on Tuesday,

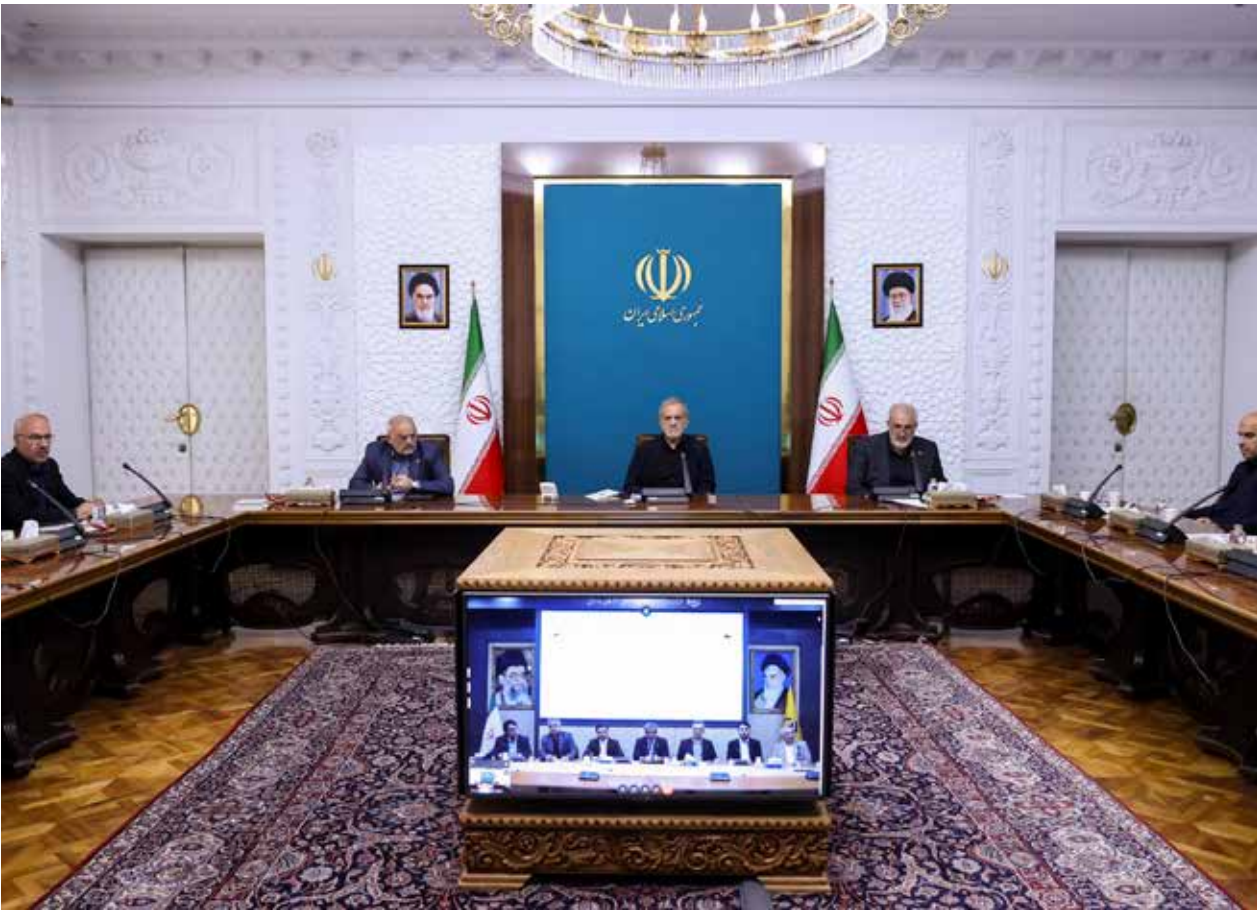
Pezeshkian paid tribute to the Iranian scientists and scholars assassinated by the Israeli regime in the 12-day imposed war, asserting that their only ambition was to elevate Iran to the heights of knowledge and progress.

Addressing the memorial for martyred scientists of Faculty of Nuclear Engineering at Shahid Beheshti University in Tehran, the president reviled the self-proclaimed advocates of democracy, human rights, and peace, declaring their claims to be utter farce. Pezeshkian underlined that those honored at the memorial dedicated their lives to serving the Iranian people and safeguarding the nation from cowardly acts of aggression, ultimately falling victim to the Tel Aviv regime's actions. "These individuals had no sins other than their knowledge and their determination to equip their country with advanced technologies," he said.

The president also commemorated the memory of the country's martyrs in science and technology, expressing hope that the youth would carry on their legacy with strength and strive for the nation's independence and freedom.

He further took to task the aggressive actions of the Israeli regime, which are supported fully by the United States and European countries. Pezeshkian rebuked the Israeli actions in Gaza as shameful, saying, "The Israelis are aggressors who enjoy full support from the United States. They have the platform, money, force, and power, and today, in addition to widespread killings, they block access to water, medicine, bread, and food, leaving people trapped in hunger. This behavior is disgraceful."

On June 13, Israel launched a blatant and unprovoked act of aggression against Iran, assassinating many



high-ranking military commanders, nuclear scientists, and killing hundreds of civilians. 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-Undead air base in Qatar, the largest American military base in West Asia.

On June 24, Iran, through its successful retaliatory operations, managed to impose a halt to the illegal aggression, which was perpetrated against the backdrop of the Israeli regime's long-time onslaught on Palestinians in the besieged Gaza Strip. Since October 7, 2023, the Gaza genocide has left 61,499 dead and 153,575 injured, most of them children and women. Over 11,000 people are also missing,

in addition to hundreds of thousands of displaced persons and a famine that has claimed more than 210 lives.

Iran, Kenya target \$1b trade boost at joint economic meeting in Nairobi



Economy Desk

Iranian Minister of Agriculture Gholamreza Nouri Qezeljah announced on Tuesday that Iran and Kenya had

launched their seventh joint Economic Committee meeting in the capital Nairobi to deepen economic ties, with both sides setting a target to boost annual trade to \$1.0 billion from the cur-

rent \$150 million. The two-day meeting, co-chaired by Iran's agriculture minister and Kenya's prime and foreign minister, hosted more than 100 representatives from government ministries and the private sector of the two countries. Nouri Qezeljah underscored Kenya's strategic location in East Africa and its economic potential, saying Iran is ready to share expertise in greenhouse cultivation and water-efficient farming, as well as its experience in producing and exporting crops such as pistachios, saffron and dates. The minister said Iran sees Kenya as a

gateway to regional markets and plans to expand cooperation beyond trade to include strategic and technical partnerships. "The official trade volume between Iran and Kenya currently exceeds \$150 million, and this figure is expected to increase to \$1 billion in the near future," Nouri Qezeljah said, stressing that such interactions will pave the way for upgrading economic and cultural relations between the two countries. The two sides also hashed out creating a joint committee to follow up on agreements, holding joint exhibitions, enhancing banking cooperation, and facilitating private-sector participation. Kenya's prime and foreign minister, for his part, noted that Kenyan tea exports have grown from over 3,000 tons in 2003 to more than 13,000 tons in 2024.

He said Nairobi aims to remove remaining export restrictions to Iran and agreed with Tehran to form a joint body to address trade barriers within 60 days, particularly in the tea sector. "We encourage Kenyan traders and businesspeople to benefit from the rare capacities and capabilities that exist in Iran. The joint commission for cooperation between the two countries can be an important factor in strengthening convergence and developing bilateral cooperation," Kenya's prime and foreign minister said. The committee is expected to sign multiple cooperation documents covering agriculture, health care, cultural exchanges, construction, and overseas farming projects, with officials from both countries saying the outcome will lay the groundwork for a significant expansion of bilateral and regional engagement.

Iran, Turkmenistan agree on construction of new railway lines at Sarakhs

Economy Desk

The representatives of Iran and Turkmenistan agreed on Tuesday to construct two new railway lines at the Sarakhs border crossing to reduce cargo backlog and enhance rail trade between the two neighboring countries. The agreement was reached during a bilateral meeting in Turkmenistan's Turkmenbashi Port on the sidelines of the United Nations' Third Conference on

Landlocked Developing Countries. Jabbarali Zakeri, the head of the Islamic Republic of Iran Railways, said after meeting the Turkmen railway minister that the plan includes adding one standard-gauge line and one broad-gauge line between the Sarakhs stations on each side of the border. Zakeri, who is also deputy minister of transport and urban development, stressed that expanding

the number of exchange tracks is vital for strengthening rail links between the two neighbors. The official said expert-level meetings between the two rail administrations will be held to advance implementation, with the talks having addressed the backlog of export freight at Sarakhs. Zakeri said Turkmenistan's railway will add 200 to 300 Uzbek freight wagons to the joint transport fleet to help increase inter-

national cargo capacity and speed up rail trade along the route. The Sarakhs crossing is a key gateway for cargo flows between Iran, Central Asia and beyond, forming part of the International North-South Transit Corridor (INSTC) and other regional rail networks. The planned infrastructure expansion is expected to boost both bilateral trade and multimodal transit operations through the corridor.



'Trump Route' no threat to strong Iran: *Expert*

US pursues political goal in South Caucasus



By Sadeq Dehqan
Staff writer

INTERVIEW

Some experts believe that this agreement between the two former Soviet republics of Azerbaijan and Armenia deals a geopolitical blow to Russia by cutting down its influence in the Caucasus and boosting that of the United States.

The officials say this transit route basically carves out a special zone that allows Azerbaijan full access to its exclave Nakhchivan while simultaneously respecting Armenian sovereignty. Moreover, the agreement lays the groundwork for a 99-year exclusive cooperation between Armenia and the US for developing the route. Iran Daily sat down with Bahram Amir-Ahmadian, an expert in international relations and Central Asian and Caucasus affairs, to break down the ins and outs of this peace deal and its implications, as you'll see below:

IRAN DAILY: After years of talks, initially mediated by Russia, the two countries of Azerbaijan and Armenia finally reached a peace deal with US mediation. How do you size up this agreement?

AMIR-AHMADIAN: The cease-fire agreement, signed with Russia's mediation in November 2020, emphasized cooperation between the two nations. According to clause 6, Azerbaijan was supposed to provide a corridor under Russian supervision to the Armenians living inside Nagorno-Karabakh and Azerbaijan to maintain their connection with Armenia as the Armenians there had been under siege for a long time. Clause 9 of that agreement stated that Armenia must guarantee safe transportation links between the western regions of Azerbaijan and the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic, with transport control carried out by Russian border services. During Soviet times, since these regions were all part of one country, they were connected by an old rail and road network. But after the USSR collapsed, new independent republics emerged, and war broke out between Armenia and Azerbaijan, breaking those connections. In the meantime, Iran stepped in and patched things up by allowing transit through its territory, enabling vehicles from southern Nakhchivan to cross into Iran and reach Azerbaijan along the Aras River.

After the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and subsequent military tensions, Iran and Russia worked hard to smooth things over and restore calm to the region, but ultimately Azerbaijan and Armenia hammered out a deal with US mediation.

Does this new corridor make economic sense for investors?

The Americans plan to collaborate with Armenia to invest along this 43-kilometer corridor as a consortium. But consider this: Because of the corridor's short length, it's unlikely to generate significant revenue as transit income tends to depend on the length of the route. When a corridor is short, it may not even cover maintenance costs. Even major corridors like Iran's North-South or East-West routes have faced skepticism about their ability to turn a profit or cover upkeep expenses. Usually, such corridors are seen as tools for boosting a country's strategic standing rather than pure money-making ventures. From my perspective, the Americans aren't in it for the money but rather want to beef up their presence and influence in the region.

On the other hand, Turkey and

Ilham Aliyev and Nikol Pashinyan, the leaders of Azerbaijan and Armenia, respectively, last Friday, August 8, 2024, signed a peace agreement at the White House brokered by US President Donald Trump. According to American officials, this deal could put an end to nearly four decades of conflict and political tension between the two countries.

One of the key provisions of this agreement is the establishment of a transit corridor, called the "Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity (TRIPP)," which replaces Russia's plan to control the Zangezur corridor (as mentioned in clause 9 of the November 10, 2020, cease-fire agreement).



Bahram Amir-Ahmadian



US President Donald Trump, flanked by Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev (L), and Armenia's Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, poses for photographs during the signing ceremony of the new peace agreement at the White House, US, on August 8, 2025.

● NATHAN HOWARD/EPA



The Americans plan to collaborate with Armenia to invest along this 43-kilometer corridor as a consortium. But consider this: Because of the corridor's short length, it's unlikely to generate significant revenue as transit income tends to depend on the length of the route. When a corridor is short, it may not even cover maintenance costs.



The map shows the prospective Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity (TRIPP) within Armenian borders.

● THE ECONOMIST

Azerbaijan want this corridor to serve as an alternative route to their existing corridor linking Turkey to the Black Sea, Georgia, Azerbaijan, and the Caspian Sea. The Trump Route, compared to that, simply doesn't stack up economically because the access routes leading into it haven't been developed. Plus, Turkey's main industrial and export hubs lie around the Black Sea and Marmara regions. In reality, Turkey and Azerbaijan have other motivations — they want to weave the Turkic world together through this corridor since Armenia has cut off their direct connection.

This US-backed corridor near Iran's borders has sparked some concerns inside Iran. What's your take?

Sometimes we hear in the media claims that this corridor paves the way for NATO's presence along our borders and might pose a threat. But that's far from the truth. We already share a 532-kilometer border with Turkey, a NATO member. In fact, we are already neighbors with NATO. Also, Armenia's government has signed off on US presence within its sovereignty, so we can't exactly push back unless this partnership directly threatens our national security. If that were to happen, then we would have to step up and take action.

Do you think this corridor, running parallel to our border and potentially restricting our links with other parts of the Caucasus and Europe, amounts to a threat? I don't see this corridor as a threat or a constraint. Yes, it runs parallel to the western and eastern borders of northern Iran and sits along our

route to farther regions. But we can still enter Armenia through its border and access those highland areas because Armenia has no interest in cutting off ties with Iran. Armenia is the decision-maker here. Even without this corridor, Armenia could have closed its borders to Iran if it wanted as it controls its own territory — just like we can close our borders to any country as we see fit.

Armenia has always enjoyed a long-standing and cordial relationship with Iran, and it's out of the question that they would cut ties. The very lifeblood and economic artery of Armenia during the war with Azerbaijan hinged on its connection to Iran. Back in 2003, when I attended an international conference in Armenia, the then-speaker of their parliament mentioned that the "bridge of friendship" built over the Aras River by Iran provided critical support to their economy in sensitive times and helped Armenia get out of various tight spots. Of course, Iran's assistance wasn't limited to Armenia alone; When Azerbaijan faced blockades in accessing Nakhchivan, Iran stepped in and established a communication route on its soil between these two parts, thereby coming through for our neighbor.

Do you think Iran could have played a more active mediating role in striking a peace agreement between Armenia and Azerbaijan? Did we hesitate in making an impact?

During the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict and the ensuing disputes, our involvement was limited because both countries are our neighbors, and we wanted them to iron out

their issues themselves. Of course, the influence of other countries in our political dealings — particularly with Azerbaijan — has at times thrown a wrench into deepening cooperation between us, and occasionally their behavior hasn't been particularly friendly toward Iran. That said, as a neighbor, we have made it our duty over the past 30 years to keep the connection open between Nakhchivan and Azerbaijan's mainland, and to meet their needs for food and fuel. However, sometimes Baku hasn't reciprocated our goodwill and has even taken steps that affected our relations. For instance, we canceled visa issuance for Azerbaijani citizens visiting Iran, but they didn't follow suit. Nevertheless, we have always tried to maintain

friendly relations with the Republic of Azerbaijan.

Considering the peace agreement between Armenia and Azerbaijan brokered by the US, what should Iran do to ensure it faces no harm or threats from this deal?

Iran will keep its ties with both neighboring countries, Armenia and Azerbaijan, intact and continue its cooperation. Moreover, as I mentioned earlier, there is no threat looming over us. Iran is a very strong country; We have no worries regarding threats and possess the ability to flex our muscles and defend our borders. For example, in 2020, when tensions and clashes erupted in the region, we deployed military forces along the entire Aras River and our shared borders.



US covets mineral resources, strategic position of southern Armenia

INTERVIEW

The recent agreement between Armenia and Azerbaijan to open up transit routes in the South Caucasus has once again shone a spotlight on Iran's geopolitical sensitivities in the region. The issue of creating or restoring routes that could cut out or diminish Iran's role in regional transit is, for Tehran, not just an economic matter but a national security concern. Iran's short yet strategic border with Armenia, which serves as the country's only land gateway to Europe and a lifeline against geopolitical pressures, has always been front and center of Iran's foreign policy calculations.

Tehran has repeatedly stressed that holding on to this border is part of a "red line" for Iran's national security, warning that any geopolitical shifts affecting this corridor will meet a strong reaction. From Iran's perspective, this border is vital not only for trade and international relations but also symbolically represents historical ties and a balancing factor against power dynamics in the South Caucasus.

Iran's policy toward developments in the South Caucasus rests on key principles: respecting countries' territorial integrity, opposing any changes to international borders, and keeping at bay foreign powers' influence in the region's affairs. Following this policy, Tehran has taken a firm and cautionary stance against any plan that would set up a "corridor," "passage," or similar route that would sever or limit Iran's land connection to Armenia. Iran is determined to hold its ground through active diplomacy and regional cooperation, both to protect its economic interests in transit corridors and to prevent any arrangements that would tip the geopolitical balance against it.

To delve into this issue, Ali Saghayian, former Iranian ambassador to Armenia and a Caucasus analyst, provided his expert views in the interview below:



Ali Saghayian

We witnessed an agreement at the White House regarding the not-so-new issue of a transit corridor in southern Armenia. What is your overall assessment of this agreement?

SAGHAYIAN: Let me get straight to what the main issue is first, then touch on the recent meeting in Washington at the White House between the leaders of Baku and Yerevan. After the Soviet Union's collapse, Azerbaijan and Armenia emerged as independent republics recognized by Iran. Some Soviet-era issues, such as Nagorno-Karabakh, initially didn't stir up tensions between the Armenian and Muslim Azerbaijani inhabitants there. However, for specific reasons, conflicts erupted, pushing Armenia to step in to support the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh, deploying troops to protect them. This escalated into a series of conflicts between the two countries, punctuated by brief wars and ceasefire negotiations mediated by Iran, Russia, France, and the US, under the Minsk Group framework. This process continued into president Sargsyan's tenure, when eight more regions came under Armenian and Nagorno-Karabakh control. After 2020, which you mentioned, with the rise of Armenian Prime Minister Pashinyan, whom I consider a Western-leaning government leader coming to power via a color revolution, the situation changed. Although earlier attempts at such a revolution had failed, he ultimately won popular support and high election votes. Pashinyan adopted a Western-oriented approach and aimed to break away from the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. He mapped out plans to return territories previously absorbed into Nagorno-Karabakh and publicly announced them. I must add that Iran's stance was crucial at this stage. At the highest level, the Commander-In-Chief of the Armed Forces Seyyed Ali Khamenei declared that "Nagorno-Karabakh is the soil of the Republic of Azerbaijan," a position that played a key role in the peaceful return of those areas without bloodshed. This happened during a short 24-hour clash, after which Armenian forces withdrew, and Ilham Aliyev thanked Iran and its leadership personally. The November 9, 2020, agreement did not mention a "corridor" but referred to "links" between Lachin in Armenia and Nakhchivan on the other end. I should remind that



since Azerbaijan's independence, Iran has supported Nakhchivan from the outset. Even during the period when Heydar Aliyev, Ilham Aliyev's father, was in exile in Nakhchivan and the region was under siege, Iran stepped up to supply food, fuel, and essential goods via Jolfa. Heydar Aliyev himself has repeatedly acknowledged this. To me, the "corridor" issue is a subject that the US and other external forces are keen to push forward. They have their eyes on the area's mineral resources, energy reserves, and strategic military significance. As Brzezinski said, whoever controls this region will hold the reins of the entire South Caucasus.

Do you mean the Syunik region?

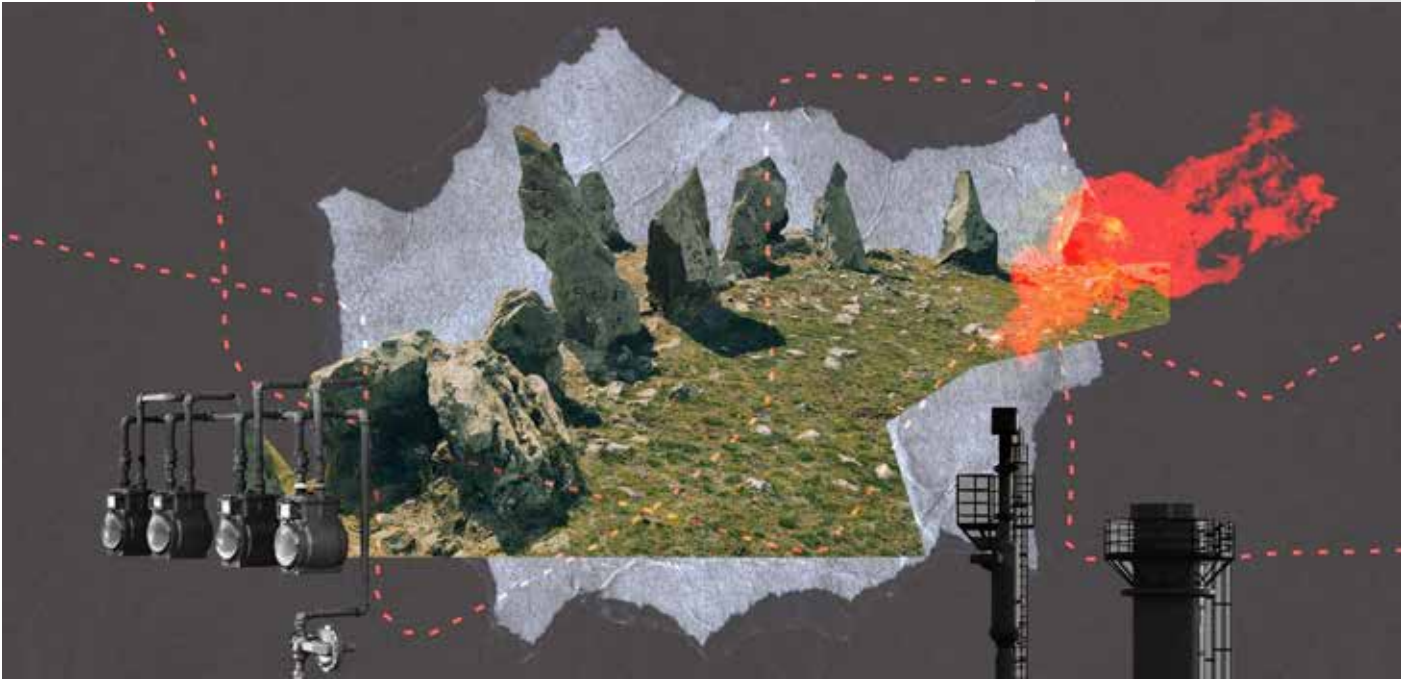
Yes, because this area has untouched mineral resources, gas, oil, and abundant water, which doubles its importance. The waters from the Syunik mountains supply much of Baku's water resources, so capturing this region could jeopardize Azerbaijan's capital security. Regarding the recent meeting, which I dub "Trump the Gambler's publicity stunt," as Martyr Soleimani used to call him, the main goal was to score a win for himself. This agreement has only been initialed but not signed yet; Baku's main condition for Yerevan is constitutional reform through a referendum to remove the Nagorno-Karabakh clause from Armenia's constitution. So, this is just a stepping stone, and peace talks on border delimitation are still far from ty-

ing up loose ends. Even during Armenian control of Nagorno-Karabakh, with Ayatollah Hashemi's approval, Iran carried out the Khoda-Afarin Dam reconstruction with Iranian engineers and supervision by Nagorno-Karabakh forces. After disputes, we also laid the groundwork for the Aras bypass road from Aghband to Kalaleh, enabling free passage for Azerbaijani trucks and troops to Nakhchivan without any fees or conditions. Iran even offered to open up a railway route, and the Iranian section is currently being ramped up. In my view, the so-called peace agreement must be examined carefully. The Russian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova's stance also re-

flects reservations. Although Iran's Foreign Ministry welcomed the initialing and supports any peace negotiations to resolve the dispute, as I and other officials like Dr. Velayati have stated, Iran will under no circumstances allow foreign troops to set foot in this region. Moscow feels similarly threatened — arguably even more so — considering its ongoing nearly three-year war, which Trump has taken advantage of to make headway for himself. I hope the sound of guns will die down, though I see some worrying moves from Azerbaijan's side that warrant attention. At the start of this conflict in the Petrosyan era and the first war, then-Iranian president the late Ayatollah Hashemi Rafsanjani offered to play host to ne-

gotiations. Iran also pushed for cease-fires and peace during the second war. Even outside the Minsk Group framework, Iranian officials have been going back and forth between Baku and Yerevan to mediate. Although sometimes this presence fell off due to other foreign policy priorities like JCPOA talks, the border's security and military issues remain a top concern for Iran. In line with this, the Leader of Iran's Revolution has sent a clear message to Erdogan, Putin, and Pashinyan: Changing borders is a red line for the Islamic Republic of Iran. This message has been well received by the parties involved.

The full interview first appeared in Persian on IRNA.



US President Donald Trump (R) and his Azerbaijani counterpart, Ilham Aliyev, sign a Memorandum of Understanding to prepare the Charter on Strategic Partnership between the two countries, in Washington on August 8, 2025.
● caliber.az



This agreement has only been initialed but not signed yet; Baku's main condition for Yerevan is constitutional reform through a referendum to remove the Nagorno-Karabakh clause from Armenia's constitution. So, this is just a stepping stone, and peace talks on border delimitation are still far from tying up loose ends.

Iran U21 gearing up for title defense at volleyball world meet

Sports Desk

Iran will once again be among the favorites at the FIVB Men's U21 World Championship when the global showpiece gets underway on August 21 in the Chinese city of Jiangmen.

A two-time champion over the past three editions, Iran will begin its title defense against Kazakhstan in Pool B on the opening day of the competition.

A second outing for Iran will come against Puerto Rico on Aug. 22, followed by games against South Korea – in a repeat of last year's Asian under-20 final, which Iran won in straight sets – Canada, and Poland.

The top four in each of the four six-team groups will progress to the round of 16.

Iranian head coach Mohammad Mo'menimogaddam will be looking to build on a 20-game unbeaten run at the helm, during which the country claimed back-to-back Asian under-20 titles either side of the world U21 crown in 2023 – thanks to a 3-2 victory over Italy in the final showdown in Manama.

Mo'menimogaddam said the primary goal for him and his coaching staff has been to develop a decent generation of young play-



ers for the senior national team, while chasing a second successive world title in Jiangmen.

"The team is highly motivated and eager to deliver a performance worthy of the Iranian volleyball's stature," the head

coach told reporters during a final training session in Tehran on Monday.

"The team will definitely go after glory in Jiangmen, although this year's tournament will be exceptionally tough as it is the

post-Olympic year and many countries are undergoing comprehensive changes in their youth setup," added the Iranian coach.

Pouria Ariakhah will be the player to watch in the Iranian squad after

the prolific opposite delivered an MVP display during the title-winning run at the Asian U20 meet in Indonesia last summer and was part of the national team in the Volleyball Nations League preliminaries in June and July.



Iranian under-21 players are seen in a training session in Tehran, Iran, on August 11, 2025.

● AMIRHOSSEIN KHAIRKHAH/
volleyball.ir

Young setter Emran Kookjili, along with middle-blockers Taha Behboudinia and Armin Qelichniazi, were also among the individual award winners at the Asian event and are expected to play integral roles for the Iranian team in Jiangmen again.

Joining the quadruple in the visit to China are Emad Kakavand (setter), Ali Mombeini (opposite), Morteza Tabatabaei (libero), Shayan Mehrabi (middle blocker), Matin Hosseini (outside hitter), Morteza Narimani (outside hitter), Arian Mahmoudinejad (outside hitter), and Mohammad-Mani Alikhani (outside hitter).

Elsewhere in the competition, the host nation will be joined by Egypt, the United States, Thailand, Morocco, and Turkey in Pool A, with four-time champion Brazil, Bulgaria, Czechia, Colombia, Japan, and Cuba completing the lineup in Pool C.

Italy, Argentina, Tunisia, France, Ukraine, and Indonesia will lock horns for a last-16 spot in Pool D.

Iranian Super Cup:

Tractor leaves it late against Esteghlal to win curtain raiser



Tractor players pose with the Iranian Super Cup trophy after beating Esteghlal 2-1 at the Naqsh-e Jahan Stadium, Isfahan, Iran, on August 11, 2025.

● TASNIM

Sports Desk

Persian Gulf Pro League champion Tractor came from behind to beat Esteghlal 2-1 in stoppage time and lift a maiden Iranian Super Cup trophy at Isfahan's Naqsh-e Jahan Stadium on Monday.

Tomislav Štrkalj came off the bench midway through the second half to net the winner in the first minute of added time. The Croatian striker burst past Esteghlal center-back Armin Sohrabian on Mahdi Hashemnejad's delicate through ball before finding the bottom corner with a composed finish.

Rouzbeh Cheshmi put the Hazfi Cup champion, which has Portuguese head coach Ricardo Sa Pinto back on the bench for the new season, ahead 12 minutes into the game, heading home Ramin Rezaeian's set

piece past young Tractor goalkeeper Adib Zarei.

There was little to separate the two sides for the remainder of the first half, before Tractor desperately pushed for an equalizer after the break.

Serbian center-back Aleksandar Sedlar and Croatian midfielder Igor Postonjski came close to drawing Tractor level, only to be denied by the Blues' new Spanish keeper Antonio Adán.

Tractor's domination eventually paid off with four minutes remaining, as Esteghlal fullback Saman Fallah was deemed by a VAR review to have handled the ball in the box.

Amirhossein Hosseinzadeh, the leading marksman in the Iranian top flight last season, sent Adán the wrong way from the spot, before Štrkalj's strike turned the contest on its head

within five minutes.

The two sides will meet again in Tabriz next Tuesday in the opening round of fixtures in the Persian Gulf Pro League season.

Tractor head coach Dragan Skocic will hope Monday's triumph serves as a morale booster ahead of a tough campaign – including the AFC Champions League Elite – despite parting ways with two integral players from last season's title-winning squad in center-back Aref Aqasi and midfielder Ricardo Alves, while international keeper Alireza Beiranvand will be sidelined for four months due to suspension.

Sa Pinto, meanwhile, will be desperate to see new signings make an instant impact as the Blues will be looking to improve on the ninth-place finish last term.

Asian Men's U-17 Handball Championship:

Iran to play Uzbekistan in group opener

Sports Desk

Iranian handball team will square off against Uzbekistan in their Group D opener at the AHF Asian U-17 Championship in Amman, Jordan, on September 15.

The first edition of the competition was to kick off on July 1, but had to be rescheduled by the Asian Handball Federation due to regional conflict and flight

suspension.

A second outing for Iran will come against Maldives on Sept. 16, followed by a game against Asian handball powerhouse South Korea two days later.

The two top teams in each of the four preliminary groups will progress to the second-round group phase to battle for a last-four spot. The two finalists will qualify for the inaugural IHF Men's

U-17 Handball World Championship – starting October 27 in Morocco.

Elsewhere in Amman, Kuwait, Bahrain and Hong Kong will lock horns in Group A, with Group B featuring Saudi Arabia, China, and Qatar.

The host country will be joined by the Chinese Taipei, India, and Syria in fighting for a top-two finish in Group D.



● IRNA

Arbaeen pilgrimage linking faith, culture, economic development



● ana.ir



● fararu.com

Iranica Desk

With the arrival of Arbaeen, which marks forty days after Ashura — the martyrdom anniversary of Imam Hussein (PBUH), the third Imam of Shia Muslims — attention once again turns to a ritual that has evolved beyond a purely religious event. As the largest annual gathering in the world, Arbaeen pilgrimage, also known as Arbaeen walk, unfolds new dimensions encompassing soft power, religious tourism, the unity of the Islamic world, and socio-economic opportunities for scholars and policymakers to analyze. What truly sets Arbaeen walk, apart is not only the immense number of pilgrims but also their rich cultural, national, and geographical diversity. From Iran and Iraq, extending to Pakistan, Afghanistan, India, Lebanon, Bahrain, Yemen, and even countries across Europe, this monumental gathering unveils a vast and underappreciated potential within international religious tourism. Despite Iran's abundant reli-

gious heritage sites — ranging from Mashhad and Qom to Rey and Shahcheragh — the contribution of religious tourism to the nation's gross domestic product remains minimal. Arbaeen pilgrimage stands out as the singular international religious event that places Iran at the epicenter of the Muslim world's attention, offering a golden opportunity to foster and develop this often overlooked sector, chn.ir wrote. Unofficial reports estimate that over 3.5 million Iranians participated in last year's Arbaeen pilgrimage. This massive movement, if managed strategically, has the potential to act as a significant catalyst for the local economies of border provinces, facilitating the advancement of tourism infrastructure and associated services. Beyond economic dimensions, this religious event serves as a powerful platform to express the solidarity of Shia Muslims and the broader Muslim community. The presence of Iranians along the pilgrimage route symbolizes not only profound faith and devotion but also

functions as an instrument of public and cultural diplomacy for Iran within the region — diplomacy that unfolds not within governmental halls but along the dust-laden paths connecting Najaf to Karbala. Given this significance, it is imperative that responsible organizations — such as the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Secretariat of the High Council of Free Zones — adopt a vision that transcends the provision of mere welfare services. Instead, they should leverage this occasion to enhance and project Iran's international reputation among Muslim nations. Nevertheless, despite these substantial capacities, Arbaeen pilgrimage faces critical challenges linked to structural deficiencies in transportation, accommodation, healthcare, and security infrastructure. Border crossings like Qasr-e Shirin, Mehran, Shalamchah, and Chazabeh endure overwhelming pressure annually, operating well beyond their intended capacity due

to the influx of pilgrims. Furthermore, the lack of efficient rail networks and integrated multi-modal transport systems shifts a disproportionate load onto roads and public transportation. Simultaneously, considerable investment potential remains untapped in border regions for establishing pilgrim lodges, service centers, clinics, and cultural facilities. Activating these opportunities will require robust incentives from the government alongside active participation from the private sector. A key driver of transformation in Arbaeen tourism is the serious integration of digital technologies. Utilizing systems for pilgrim registration and tracking, navigation applications, medical service delivery, nutrition management, and information dissemination can markedly improve the safety and fluidity of pilgrims' journeys. Likewise, establishing reliable financial infrastructure capable of facilitating Iranian pilgrims' payments in both foreign and local currencies within Iraq represents a

significant challenge — one that the Central Bank and fintech companies must collaboratively address. Arbaeen pilgrimage transcends the boundaries of a mere religious ritual; it is a multifaceted cultural, social, and economic phenomenon that has emerged as one of the largest human gatherings worldwide. The annual congregation of millions of pilgrims from Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and other Islamic countries along the Najaf-Karbala walking route provides immense potential to foster religious tourism, which in turn can play a pivotal role in sustainable development, cultural diplomacy, and the solidarity of Muslim nations. This religious gathering acts as a decisive green light for re-examining and reformulating the country's tourism policies. It offers an unprecedented opportunity to showcase Iranian hospitality, ritual arts, the local economy, service capabilities, and the logistical strengths of border areas. Although current infrastructure remains inade-

quate to meet growing demand, a comprehensive strategic plan coupled with effective collaboration between public and private sectors can transform this occasion into a cornerstone for the expansion of religious tourism and regional integration. Arbaeen walk represents a golden opportunity not only to advance economic growth and religious tourism but also to strengthen cultural unity within the Islamic world and redefine Iran's soft power in the region. Fully capitalizing on this potential demands a perspective that extends beyond conventional, service-oriented approaches. This requires focused attention not only within religious and cultural domains but also at the highest levels of national and regional policymaking. If this pivotal moment is recognized and embraced wisely, Arbaeen walk can evolve from a deeply spiritual ritual into a globally recognized brand in religious tourism — a distinguished brand that interweaves Iran's identity with spirituality, hospitality, and civilization.

Historical context, architectural design of Jajarmi Hosseinieh in Bojnord

Iranica Desk

Jajarmi Hosseinieh is a late Qajar historical building located in the city of Bojnord, North Khorasan Province. According to an inscription found in 1907 CE, the builder of this monument was Gholamreza Banna Yazdi. A Hosseinieh is a

Shia Islamic congregation hall dedicated to hosting religious ceremonies, especially those commemorating the martyrdom of Imam Hussein (PBUH) and his companions. The owner of this Hosseinieh initially lived there and later dedicated it as a charitable endowment. The historical building was registered on

Iran's National Heritage List in 2004. The monument covers an area of 600 square meters and has a square plan, considered an example of traditional architecture featuring a central courtyard, to which all doors and windows open. The building is constructed with two stories on

the east and west sides, with its entrance connected to the central courtyard through an octagonal space. Two staircases located in the northeast and southwest corners lead to the upper floor rooms. The stairs are symmetrically placed on the east and west sides, each consisting of

10 steps, 30 centimeters wide, 20 centimeters high, and 130 centimeters long. Jajarmi Hosseinieh is characterized by two-story construction on the east and west sides, where three types of simple crescent and pointed arches are used in the arcs. The ground floor has an older

history than the upper floor and was originally used as a residential area. The upper floor, which does not structurally conform to the lower one, is where religious ceremonies are held. Various roofing types, including flat and vaulted roofs, are used throughout the building.



● kojara.com



Brimming with passion, devotion

Over five million pilgrims cross Iran-Iraq border for Arbaeen

Social Desk

More than 5.4 million Iranian pilgrims have crossed the country's borders en route to the Arbaeen religious procession in Iraq since July 26, police and government officials reported on Tuesday.

According to Colonel Ahmad Karami-Asad, head of the traffic police, the number of pilgrims moving through six official border crossings has steadily increased amid efforts to streamline the flow and enhance safety, inn.ir reported.

Arbaeen, a major Shia Muslim event commemorating the 40th day after the martyrdom of Imam Hussein (PBUH), draws millions annually to the holy city of Karbala in Iraq.

The massive movement marks one of the largest annual religious gatherings worldwide, with Iranian authorities closely monitoring border traffic and road safety. Despite the surge in crossings, fatal accidents linked to the pilgrimage have dropped compared to

last year, though officials emphasize ongoing risks, particularly during nighttime hours.

Colonel Karami-Asad said that from July 26 through the morning of August 12, 125 deaths and 2,917 injuries related to traffic accidents were recorded across five border provinces. "More than 90 percent" of these incidents stemmed from driver errors such as inattention, loss of vehicle control, sudden lane changes, and improper overtaking. Still, this represents a reduction compared to the previous year's figures.

According to official statistics, a total of 3.4 million pilgrims have exited Iran, while about 2 million have returned as of August 12. Nearly 44% of the departing pilgrims crossed through the Mehran border, with others using Shalamcheh, Khosravi, Chazabeh, Tamarchin, and Bashmaq checkpoints.

Traffic flow patterns have shifted recently, with the share of exits via Mehran and Shalamcheh declining in favor of Khosravi, Chazabeh, and air travel routes.

Authorities expect daily returnee numbers to reach 350,000 to 400,000 by week's end, highlighting the peak of the homebound wave.

The total vehicle movements over the 17-day period amounted to 58 million, slightly down from last year. Bus traffic fell by 13 percent, while private cars and light trucks increased by about 5 percent. Vehicle congestion at border crossings has eased in the last two days; about 13,000 vehicles cleared the Mehran crossing and 4,000 vehicles exited Khosravi in the past 24 hours.

Also, Iranian Interior Minister Eskandar Momeni visited the Khosravi border on Tuesday to oversee operations and meet officials. He confirmed that more than half a million pilgrims have passed through Khosravi this season, twice the volume recorded last year. "Thanks to close coordination with Iraqi authorities and the implementation of the Sajjad system, traffic flow has become smoother and delays minimized," Momeni said.

He also emphasized that all six official



border crossings are fully secured by police, military, and border forces, with no major security incidents reported. Momeni praised the efforts of minis-

tries, municipalities, volunteer groups, and local communities for their support in ensuring pilgrims travel with safety and dignity.

Aghelizadeh joins jury of South Korea's DMZ documentary festival



Arts & Culture Desk

Iranian writer and filmmaker Pouya Aghelizadeh, also a member of the International Federation of Film Critics (FIPRESCI), will serve as a jury member at the 17th DMZ International Documentary Film Festival, taking place September 11-17, in Goyang and Paju, Gyeonggi Province, South Korea.

The festival, held near the Korean Demilitarized Zone, promotes themes of "peace, life and communi-

cation" through documentary storytelling, Mehr News Agency reported. Aghelizadeh's inclusion signals growing international recognition of Iranian voices in global documentary discourse. Festival organizers, showcasing a slate of global entries, have tapped Aghelizadeh for his critical perspective and creative background that includes award-winning works like 'PlayBack,' 'Room of Light,' 'Room No. 4,' and 'Nest'.

These films have earned honors for best film, experimental experience, best actress, cinematography, and student film, and secured the Independent Festival of America's honorary award.

Festival sources confirm that Aghelizadeh is currently writing the feature screenplay and a series titled 'Tenth Symphony'. He will bring both his creative insight and critical acumen to bear when deliberating the international competition.

Iranian filmmaker Ahmad Zaeri named goodwill ambassador at London festival



Arts & Culture Desk

Iranian filmmaker Ahmad Zaeri was named goodwill ambassador for humanitarian narratives at London's Earl's Court International Film Festival.

The 10-year-old festival has tapped Zaeri to champion international storytelling projects, support emerging filmmakers and strengthen cinema's role in social awareness campaigns, Mehr News Agency reported.

Zaeri's film 'Saad's Olive Tree' tells the story of a Syrian child who lost his sight from a mortar shell while playing with friends, according to the festival website. The movie follows the child's self-imposed isolation and his mother's efforts to draw him back into the world with help from neighbors in their war-torn town.

Festival director and founder Caroline Todrich-Richardson praised Zaeri's ability to transform human suffering into "deep and compassionate narratives" that align with the festival's mission. She called his appointment to the ambassador program "an honor."

The acclaimed Iranian director has previously won awards at multiple

international festivals for films including "Saad's Olive Tree" and "War Citizen." His work has been recognized at festivals in the Netherlands, Russia, England, Iran and the United States.

Zaeri's humanitarian focus centers on children caught up in conflicts and crises. His appointment comes as the Earl's Court festival prepares for its 11th edition, running November 14-21 in London.

The festival has carved out a niche showcasing films that tackle social issues and human rights themes. Organizers said Zaeri's new role will help expand their international reach and mentor young filmmakers working on similar projects.

Zaeri joins a roster of cultural ambassadors working to promote cross-cultural understanding through film. The Earl's Court festival has made humanitarian storytelling a cornerstone of its programming since launching in 2015.

Iran's Oscar selection committee returns to House of Cinema after several years

Arts & Culture Desk

Iran has reestablished its official Oscar selection committee under the House of Cinema, the country's main film industry guild, marking a significant shift after years of oversight by the Farabi Cinema Foundation.

The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences set October 1, 2024, as the deadline for countries to submit films for the Best International Feature Film category at the upcoming Academy Awards, inn.ir reported.

The move restores control to the House of Cinema, which now holds the majority of seats on the committee responsible

for choosing Iran's official Oscar submission. The committee includes representatives from both the House of Cinema and government sectors.

This decision follows years of controversy surrounding the film selection process, which in the past sparked calls for a more transparent and artist-driven approach. The House of Cinema had formally petitioned in 2018 for the selection committee to be returned to an independent guild-based body, emphasizing that Oscar submission responsibilities should rest with a jury comprised solely of filmmakers and cinema professionals, free from government officials. Under Academy rules, eligible films must

have been publicly screened in their home country for at least seven consecutive days between October 1, 2024, and September 30, 2025.

The new committee's formation and mandate signal a renewed commitment to aligning Iran's Oscar submissions with international standards and to giving artists a greater voice in the selection process.

In recent years, the Farabi Foundation, a government-backed institution, had been the official body handling the Oscar submission, but this shift back to the House of Cinema marks a notable recalibration of authority within Iran's film industry.

