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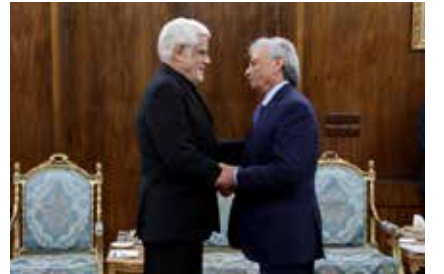
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Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian shakes hands with Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan after a joint press conference in Yerevan, Armenia on August 19, 2025.  
● president.ir

### Iran's strategic position casts shadow over Trump Route

By Afifeh Abedi  
International, Caucasus affairs expert

OPINION  
EXCLUSIVE

The South Caucasus, due to its unique geography, natural resources, and proximity to three major players—Iran, Russia, and Turkey—holds outstanding geopolitical significance. This importance extends far beyond the region itself, directly shaping the way relations between actors are formed, whether through conflict or peace. Much of the historical disputes, as well as the countless plans for energy corridors and transit routes, can be traced back to the fact that the Caucasus lies at a crossroads linking Europe, Russia, Turkey, Iran, and Central Asia. For this reason, Iran has never lost sight of the South Caucasus. Yet in practice, it has not been able to fully

cash in on the potential benefits of the region. Several factors explain this shortfall. Efforts to align with Russia's policies and interests have sometimes curtailed Iran's room for independent maneuver. At other times, the involvement of extra-regional players with far greater financial and political clout has succeeded in luring regional states into their orbit. Meanwhile, Iran has been weighed down by sanctions, distracted by a host of foreign policy challenges, and largely absorbed by its security priorities in West Asia—all of which have diluted its influence in the Caucasus. Still, Iran has at least managed to keep the South Caucasus from becoming a direct source of threats to its national security. The greater concern, however, is that Tehran has failed to make the most of the region's opportunities, while its rivals have often turned even slight chances into big gains. [Page 2 >](#)



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## Pezeshkian in Yerevan

# President: Tehran's concerns over new route should be addressed

## Armenia reassures Iran about border control



Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian (5th L), flanked by members of his entourage, holds talks with Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan (5th R) during a visit to Yerevan, Armenia on August 19, 2025.  
● [president.ir](#)

exclave will be under Armenian control. Pezeshkian, who was on a two-day visit to Armenia, in a post on X said Iran believes that Armenia's sovereignty and territorial integrity should be preserved and emphasized the continuation of sincere relations between the two countries. A planned corridor linking Azerbaijan with its exclave Nakhchivan, which is part a recent peace deal signed earlier this month in Washington between Armenia and Azerbaijan, has

caused security concerns for Iran as the United States has been granted exclusive rights to develop the corridor, which is known as the Zangezur corridor. Iran has 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. In a joint press conference with Pashinyan, Pezeshkian said Iran believes that problems of the Caucasus region should be resolved by the regional states, stressing that resorting to trans-regional forces complicates the situation in the region. "Roads passing through Armenia will be under the exclusive jurisdiction of Armenia, and security will be provided by Armenia, not by any third coun-

try," Pashinyan added at the meeting with Pezeshkian. He underlined that the corridor would open new economic perspectives between the two countries and may offer a railway path from Iran to the Black Sea coast through Armenia. Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi, who is accompanying Pezeshkian in his regional tour that will also take him to Belarus, said that the Armenian side has assured that it will not allow Iran be threatened from its territory. During the visit, the two countries also signed 10 memoranda of understanding on cooperation aimed at enhancing the countries' relations. The documents were signed by high-ranking officials of the two countries following the private

meeting between Pezeshkian and Pashinyan. The MoUs address diplomacy, economy, mines and industries, road and urban development, healthcare, environment, education, culture, social interaction, and tourism. Pezeshkian told Pashinyan that Iran is ready to expedite the finalization of a long-term strategic cooperation program between the two nations. The president also stated that the relations and cooperation between Iran and Armenia are developing in all areas, emphasizing the necessity of increasing interactions and consultations between the officials of the two countries to remove obstacles and problems in achieving the goals and implementing the mutual agreements.

### International Desk

President Masoud Pezeshkian said on Tuesday that Iran's concerns about the presence of transregional forces near the

common border with Armenia should be "completely" addressed after Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan reassured him that a planned corridor linking Azerbaijan with its

## Putin, Zelensky ready for face-to-face peace talks

### International Desk

Russian and Ukrainian presidents have agreed to hold face-to-face peace summit after leaders of the United States, Ukraine and several European countries held a meeting in Washington to put an end to more than three years of war between the two neighboring countries. According to three sources familiar with the issue, Russian President Vladimir Putin has proposed holding the peace summit with Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky in Moscow during a phone call with his American counterpart Donald Trump. The discussion between and Putin came during high-stakes talks between Trump, Zelensky and several European leaders. "Putin mentioned Moscow" during their call on Monday, one of the sources told AFP, adding that Zelensky had said "no" in response. A diplomatic source close to the discussions said that European leaders had told Trump that Putin's proposal "did not seem like a good idea." After the summit in the White House on Monday that included the Ger-

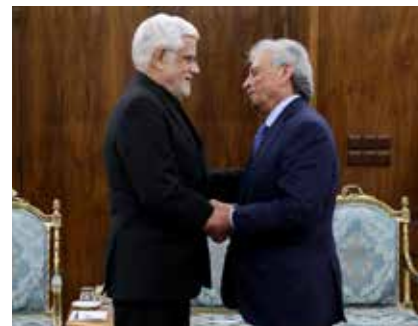
man, French, Finnish, Italian and UK leaders, Trump said a next step to stopping the fighting now its fourth year would be a face-to-face meeting between Putin and Zelensky. The Ukrainian leader has said repeatedly in recent weeks that he is prepared to sit down with Putin to end the war, which has cost tens of thousands of lives and displaced millions. "I confirmed - and all European leaders supported me - that we are ready for a bilateral meeting with Putin," Zelensky said Monday. Putin also told Trump during the call that he was open to the "idea" of direct talks with Ukraine, Kremlin aide Yuri Ushakov said. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said Tuesday that any meeting between the Russian and Ukrainian presidents would have to be prepared "very thoroughly." Switzerland, meanwhile, had said earlier that it would grant Putin immunity if he came to the country for talks on peace in Ukraine, despite the International Criminal Court's arrest warrant. Trump met with Putin last week in the northern US state of Alaska, end-

ing a years-long Western policy of isolating Putin. Zelensky has come under increasing pressure to cede territory to end the grinding war, as Russia makes a series of advances. Ahead of the White House meeting, Trump had pushed Ukraine to give up Crimea and abandon its goal of joining NATO - both key demands made by Putin. But Zelensky stressed he had been able to present a clearer picture of the battlelines to Trump, who he met in a one-on-one in the Oval Office. "This was the best of our meetings," Zelensky said, according to a statement put out by his office. "I was able to show many things, even on the map, to all American colleagues regarding the situation on the battlefield." Rather than concessions from Ukraine, the summit focused on arranging security guarantees in the event of a peace deal, French President Emmanuel Macron told reporters afterwards. Trump said the guarantees "would be provided by the various European Countries (in) coordination with the United States of America."

## Veep calls for Muslim unity to fight off Israel

### National Desk

Iran's First Vice President Mohammad Reza Aref on Tuesday emphasized the necessity of unity among Islamic countries to confront Israel's crimes against Palestinians. Aref made the remarks in a meeting with Pakistan's Minister of National Food Security and Research Rana Tanveer Hussain in Tehran. The Iranian official said that the Israeli regime is committing brutal crimes against Palestinians in the Gaza Strip and the Islamic Republic seeks unity and cohesion among influential Muslim countries to confront the regime. "We must not allow the oppressed people of Gaza to face such brutality from the usurping Zionist regime in their own land," Aref said. Israel's strikes on the Gaza Strip have claimed the lives of more than 62,000 Palestinians since October 2023. The first vice president also underlined that the strategy of Iran is based on strengthening bilateral relations with major neighboring and regional countries and is fully prepared to expand and deepen interactions in all fields and to utilize each other's capacities. Aref also welcomed the formation of the joint agricultural committee between Iran and Pakistan.



Iran's First Vice President Mohammad Reza Aref (L) shakes hands with Pakistan's Minister of National Food Security and Research Rana Tanveer Hussain in a meeting in Tehran on August 19, 2025.  
● [IRNA](#)

On Monday, Iran and Pakistan agreed to more than double the value of their annual agricultural trade amid efforts by the two neighbors to bolster their political and economic cooperation. "We are ready to cooperate bilaterally and regionally in advanced technologies, especially artificial intelligence and other advanced technologies. The joint commission for economic cooperation should also become more active than before, and the agreed strategies should be implemented so that we witness a major development in relations," Aref said.



**Mohammad Ali Rajabi**  
Cartoonist

## Iran's strategic position ...

Iran's main strategy for managing disputes and promoting regional stability has been to adopt a "balanced policy." Given the current landscape, this approach is not without logic, since strategic alliances in the South Caucasus are themselves riddled with weaknesses and contradictions. Even when Iran has sought closer ties with Armenia, the internal divisions within Yerevan have limited results, with today's dynamics being part of those very contradictions. It is in this context that projects such as the Zangezur Corridor and the so-called Trump Route have come to the fore. In such ventures, geographical proximity often outweighs both investment volumes and the might of outside sponsors. That is why the

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Zangezur Corridor is seen as costlier than the Trump Route, though the two can be complementary rather than mutually exclusive. For Iran, the bigger concern lies not in the routes themselves, but in their potential military and security repercussions for the region. Yet Iran holds a strategic position that can overshadow even the Zangezur Corridor or the Trump Route. Neighboring four geostrategic zones, enjoying access to open waters, and lying on the natural East-West and North-South axes, Tehran has diverse opportunities within reach. Moreover, rival roads are still a long way from becoming fully operational, given the need for stable financing, security guarantees, and resolu-

tion of border issues. Their success depends heavily on risk management and political continuity. This time gap could open the door for Iran to push forward its own routes and projects, involving both Armenia and Azerbaijan—initiatives that are not only feasible but also actionable. In the end, one key point must be underscored: Iran has already experienced "neighboring the United States" through Washington's military presence in Afghanistan and Iraq. So, while America's growing footprint in the South Caucasus is undoubtedly a serious challenge, it is by no means an unfamiliar one. This prior experience could give Tehran added depth and direction in shaping its future policy in the region.





# Tehran, Yerevan agree on transport links, set \$3b trade target

Economy Desk

Iran and Armenia agreed on Tuesday to expand transit corridors and upgrade transport infrastructure while setting a \$3 billion target for bilateral trade, signaling a stronger partnership in regional connectivity and economic cooperation.

Iran's Minister of Roads and Urban Development and Armenia's Minister of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure, in a joint meeting, emphasized the development of transport infrastructure, strengthening transport and infrastructure cooperation, and resolving transit-related disputes.

During her official visit to Armenia, Farzaneh Sadeq Malvajerd, in talks with Davit Khudatyan, highlighted the importance of transit corridors such as North-South and the Persian Gulf-Black Sea, calling for the enhancement of road, rail, and logistics infrastructure in Armenia to facilitate regional goods transfer, ILNA reported.

The Iranian minister also invited her Armenian counterpart to visit Iran at the earliest opportunity to review the coun-

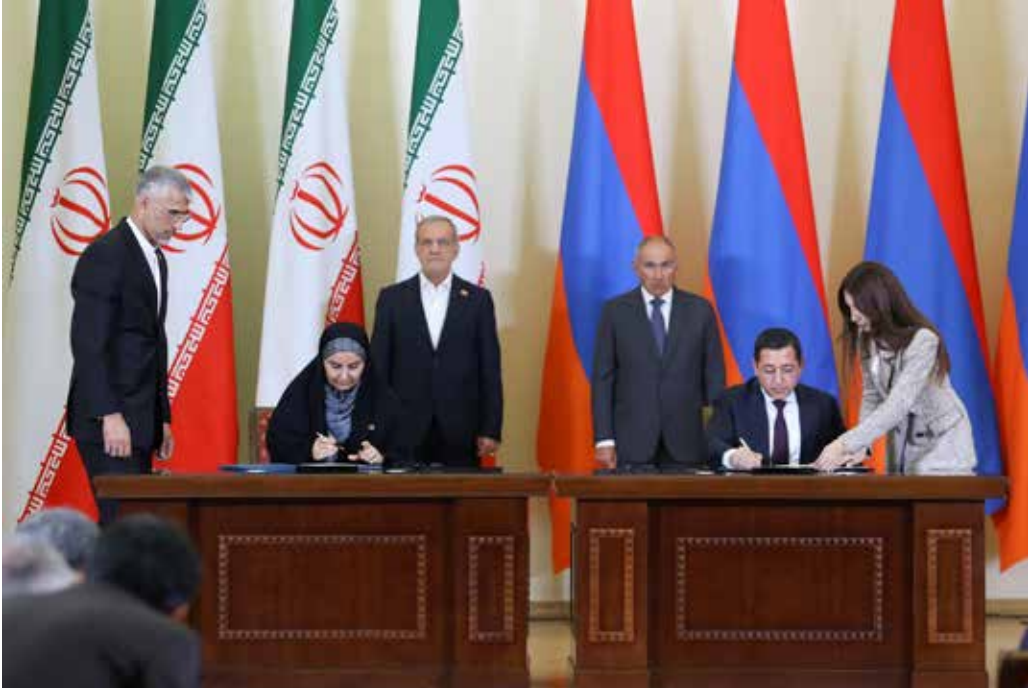


Iran's Minister of Roads and Urban Development Farzaneh Sadeq Malvajerd (L) and Armenia's Minister of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure Davit Khudatyan, sign an MoU in Yerevan, witnessed by President Masoud Pezeshkian and Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, on August 19, 2025. [president.ir](#)

try's transport and logistics capacities. Sadeq Malvajerd pointed to a roughly \$330 imbalance in transit tolls between the two countries and called for a revision of the practice.

### Jolfa-Yerevan-Georgia railway

Stressing the need to preserve the territorial integrity of states, the Iranian minister underlined that the creation of new transport routes must avoid geopolitical alterations. She described the reopening of the Jolfa-Yerevan-Georgia railway as a crucial step toward facilitating regional transit. Khudatyan, for his part, expressed full satisfaction with the quality and speed of the North-South corridor project carried out by an Iranian company, stating that Yerevan



preferred to assign subsequent phases of the project to the same contractors.

### Air transport, Trade growth

In the field of air transport, the two sides also noted the operation of 20 weekly flights between the two countries and underscored the need to

increase flights and sign an aircraft leasing agreement to expand cooperation. Meanwhile, Iran's Minister of Industry, Mine, and Trade, Mohammad Atabak, met with Armenia's Minister of Economy in Yerevan. In the meeting, Atabak underscored the need to expand economic and trade cooperation and

stressed raising trade volume to \$3 billion. A joint working group composed of deputies from both sides was proposed by Atabak and Gevorg Papoyan to accelerate agreements and facilitate exchanges in order to achieve the \$3 billion trade target in the fields of industry and commerce.

## IEA: Iran's oil output registered upswing of 200,000 bpd in July



Economy Desk

The International Energy Agency (IEA) reported an increase of around 200,000 barrels per day in Iran's crude oil production in July. According to Shana, the IEA's latest Short-Term Energy Outlook shows that Iran's oil output reached 3.27 million barrels per day in July, compared with 3.08 million barrels per day in June, marking a 190,000-barrel increase.

The report stated that the total oil production by the 12 members of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) stood at 28.21 million barrels per day in July, down by 210,000 barrels from the previous month. OPEC's June output had reached 28.42 million barrels per day.

Speaking to reporters on the sidelines of a cabinet meeting on July 15, Oil Minister Mohsen Paknejad said, "I will not comment on figures for oil production and exports, but the trend of crude oil output and exports continues as before, and the situation in this sector is favorable and without problems."

Hamid Bovard, CEO of the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC), told a press briefing in May that despite challenges, production increased by 150,000 barrels last year. He added that plans have been made to raise output by another 250,000 barrels this year (began on March 20, 2025).

Meanwhile, according to data published in the 60th edition of OPEC's Statistical Bulletin, Iran recorded the world's highest growth in crude oil production in 2024, with a 13 percent increase.

Daily crude oil output rose by 374,000 barrels, climbing from 2.884 million barrels in 2023 to 3.257 million barrels in 2024.

## NIORDC stops diesel imports after consumption control plans



Economy Desk

The National Iranian Oil Refining and Distribution Company (NIORDC) announced that with the implementation of consumption management

policies, the country's diesel imports have dropped to zero. According to NIORDC, in the first five months of the year, despite extensive overhauls at oil refineries, Iran's diesel production increased by an

average of 3 million liters per day compared with the previous year, Mehr reported. With the enforcement of consumption management measures and efforts to combat smuggling, diesel consumption in non-power plant sectors declined by about 5 million liters per day year-on-year, eliminating the need for diesel imports.

In addition, average daily deliveries of liquid fuel to power plants during the first five months of the year (began on March 20, 2025) rose by 27 percent compared to the same period last year. Gas supplies to the national grid's thermal power plants remained nearly unchanged from a year earlier. Through such measures, the Oil Ministry and NIORDC have

succeeded in boosting liquid fuel reserves by 60 percent compared with last year in preparation for winter, ensuring that gas shortfalls can be compensated by liquid fuel. Mohammad Sadegh Azimifar, CEO of NIORDC, said in July that daily diesel consumption this year had dropped by 5 million liters compared with the same period last year.

Citing the latest fuel consumption statistics, he noted that diesel consumption in non-power plant sectors had significantly declined. Average daily diesel use in these sectors from the beginning of the year to the end of July stood at about 81 million liters, down from 86 million liters in the same period last year. As a result of reduced consumption

and increased refinery output, he added, diesel stockpiles are in good condition, with reserves for power plants now 72 percent higher than a year earlier. However, speaking at a press conference in May, Azimifar said, "Diesel consumption in power plants has increased by 188 percent this year." He noted, "Despite adding 8 million liters to diesel production, I do not see a clear outlook. Electricity and gas imbalances need to be resolved before we can comment on oil and gas exports. Our goal is to achieve the production target of 129 million liters of gasoline per day set under the Seventh Development Plan by the end of this administration, and we will meet that target."

## Agriculture sector grows 5.6%, tops economy: Minister

Economy Desk

Iran's Agriculture Minister Gholamreza Nouri Ghezleji announced a 5.6 percent growth in the agricultural sector during last Iranian calendar year (began on March 20, 2024), saying the sector, despite climatic challenges and economic constraints, secured the highest growth rate among all sectors and added one percent to its share in the national economy. Speaking on Tuesday at the 40th session of the Food Security Coordination Headquarters, Nouri Ghezleji said agriculture had risen from a negative 2.4 percent growth rate to positive 3.2 percent and was the only sector to exceed the 5.5 percent growth target of the Seventh Develop-

ment Plan, achieving 5.6 percent, IRNA reported.

The minister credited this achievement to the efforts of producers and agricultural associations. Detailing the performance, he said output had increased in several areas, including a 27 percent rise in sturgeon farming, 12 percent in cage farming, 5 percent in raw milk, 2 percent in red meat, and 2 percent in eggs.

Nouri Ghezleji added that agricultural exports had also grown by 32 percent, while the trade deficit in the sector improved from minus \$11 billion to minus \$8 billion.

### Agricultural exports up 10%

The minister noted that in the

first four months of the year, while the country's overall exports declined by 14 percent, agricultural exports rose by 10 percent, reflecting the effort and resilience of producers, importers, and exporters in the sector.

### 1.2m tons of animal feed offered on platform

The agriculture minister also reported that more than 1.2 million tons of animal feed have been offered on the "Bazargah" platform.

Referring to fisheries, he added that structural measures have been taken in the field, and aquaculture has achieved the growth target set in the Seventh Development Plan.





# Pezeshkian never says he inherited wreck: *Experts*

**DEBATE** In the latest segment of IRNA's *Talaaghi* (translation from Persian: Intersection) program, experts looked back at the first year of the Iranian president's term in office. It was on July 28, 2024, that Pezeshkian's presidential decree was signed off on by the Leader of the Revolution, followed shortly by the inauguration ceremony. From then on, Pezeshkian and the government as a whole have plunged into a turbulent period marked by an unprecedented flurry of events, challenges, and crises. Mere hours after the swearing-in, a high-profile guest of the ceremony, Ismail Haniyeh, Hamas' political leader, fell victim to an assassination attempt in Tehran. Following this, developments have picked up speed, leading us now into a post-war situation with Israel. A wide array of issues looms large — from the water crisis and glaring shortcomings in the energy sector to foreign policy hurdles, such as the fate of the "snapback mechanism". Regarding the government's performance over the past year and upcoming challenges, IRNA's *Talaaghi* program hosted two distinguished political analysts, Mohammad Atrianfar and Ahmad Shirzad. Below is the first part of their roundtable discussion, which has been translated and edited for conciseness:



Mohammad Atrianfar (R), journalist and reformist politician, and Ahmad Shirzad (L), former Iranian lawmaker, debate the one-year track record of President Masoud Pezeshkian (not pictured) on August 5, 2025.

Over this past year, foreign policy crises have clearly taken center stage during Mr. Pezeshkian's term. This period saw the Zionist regime's aggression on the country and the imposed 12-day war. We're here to discuss the events that unfolded during this time and the Iranian government's handling of them.

**ATRIANFAR:** When it comes to assessing the government's capacity and performance, I'll lay out some broad points first and then we drill down into more details. One major mistake that the media, society, and even our political and social elites keep falling into when passing judgment at the highest levels is their habit of tying someone's hands to past promises. They focus on what candidates have pledged, while overlooking the glaring gaps that often crop up between lofty slogans and the realities on the ground. This misconception trips up the public, causing them to miss the mark significantly. This type of judgment sets us up for an error that typically means the actor or official ends up defeated because their performance inevitably falls short of their lofty ideals — which puts them in the spotlight for being inefficient.

I'd argue that perhaps Mr. Pezeshkian is the only Iranian presidential figure who, from day one, did not make grand promises, instead raising his hands to say, "I am fully bound by the approved long-term political, executive, and social plan of the Islamic Establishment."

With all this said, we can now stick to the broad agenda of this debate, even though we know that society expects us to get into the details because a government is about execution, performance, and economy. It is a government that responds to the public's social and economic concerns. But we are not in a position — at least I am not — to be the ones to pass ultimate judgment. I believe Dr. Shirzad, given his academic stature, may avoid getting bogged down in such



Look at Mr. Pezeshkian's competitors in the election — all wore labels, justified or not, and society judged them accordingly. Fortunately, the labels on Mr. Pezeshkian were minimal. When he came out and said, "I don't want to quarrel," and moved ahead with unity, that allowed him to pull off what he did. Had it been someone else, it wouldn't have been possible to act this way.

details as well; The task of analyzing performance falls to the engineers involved in implementation — those who can back up their claims with hard data.

**Thank you. Mr. Shirzad, considering the key points Mr. Atrianfar touched on, how do you size up Pezeshkian's government? For instance, he proposed unity to tackle problems. What is your assessment of this administration?**

**SHIRZAD:** Masoud Pezeshkian is a unique figure, one whose like we seldom come across. We must pay attention to how, at this juncture, someone who has served multiple terms as a widely respected and efficient representative in his city stepped up to become president. Mr. Pezeshkian does not have the

backing of a powerful organization, and I think both he and society acknowledge this. Imagine someone who is secretary-general of a party or has gathered a core group of longtime allies around them — that's not him. He has been a lone player, deeply rooted in religious commitment based on the Qur'an and Nahj al-Balagha, and he is a man of integrity.

Looking at his background, he's never played up to power; Speaking the truth has been paramount for him — an outstanding ethical trait. Lacking an organizational base can sometimes bring efficiency, which is a characteristic specific to the Islamic Republic. We're not talking globally — this trait could cause problems in certain contexts. This is

talked about a lot these days, especially on social media, where people ask why the president sometimes signs something only to later backtrack on it. That's a clear sign that there isn't a strong organization standing behind him — otherwise, he would have checked in with others to find if there's any sensitivity.

At the same time, I think the particular role Mr. Pezeshkian has carved out in the current political climate is something no one else could have done. The problem in our country is that people tend to be boxed into their historical labels. Mr. Atrianfar himself has labels attached to him, whether he knows them or not, that make people overlook the details of his unique character; Similarly, I, Shirzad, carry certain labels, and these labels



The reformist Iranian presidential candidate Masoud Pezeshkian (R) greets his rival, Saeed Jalili, a hardline former nuclear negotiator, at the conclusion of a debate at a TV studio in Tehran, Iran, on June 1, 2024.



cause plenty of issues. In this environment, many others, if they had stepped forward, couldn't have carried out their duties properly.

Look at Mr. Pezeshkian's competitors in the election — all wore labels, justified or not, and society judged them accordingly. Fortunately, the labels on Mr. Pezeshkian were minimal. When he came out and said, "I don't want to quarrel," and moved ahead with unity, that allowed him to pull off what he did. Had it been someone else, it wouldn't have been possible to act this way.

One hugely positive move by Mr. Pezeshkian, which I hope continues and that the government has followed, is that he has steered clear of criticizing the past nonstop. This is crucial. People are fed up with officials coming in and tearing down their predecessors. Society is very sensitive to this; It finds such behavior unappealing and unacceptable. Our country's leaders, including the Leader of the Islamic Revolution, seem to disapprove of it. It's genuinely unpleasant for the public, and Mr. Pezeshkian has respected this norm.

This stands in sharp contrast to previous governments, where the refrain — rightly or wrongly — was that "we inherited a wreck, and here's what we've done." Even if true, such remarks do not sit well with the public. People judge the government as a whole; They don't accept compartmentalized blame.

In the election campaign, Mr. Pezeshkian did not say what he would or would not do but rather called out the challenges we face. He continues to highlight existing shortages and problems honestly. When I hear him say "we have done this work," the "we" here includes all those involved in this establishment, myself included. This kind of language is very important — it shows he does not seek to pass the buck or distance himself while condemning others. This approach earns him better listening and greater trust from the people.

These are unique qualities that I believe should be emphasized.

**In any case, this government came forward and took on responsibility. Now, a year has rolled by since they accepted this responsibility, and during this year, we've witnessed a storm brewing in foreign policy as well as a whirlwind of internal political rivalries and other struggles amid these tempests. How has the situation shaped up from your perspective? To be more direct, some critics of Mr. Pezeshkian say that during the campaign, it was said that if his rival won, inflation would skyrocket, war would break out, and many bad scenarios would come to pass — all of which have happened now. What is your assessment?**

**ATRIANFAR:** When it comes to an electoral candidate and the slogans they put out there, some things are said that wouldn't be fair to pin on the candidate themselves. Likewise, incorrect things were said about the rival candidate as well. As mentioned and as Dr. Shirzad also pointed out, I too stand by the fact that Masoud Pezeshkian is simply Masoud Pezeshkian, and nothing else. This character, aside from refraining from condemning the previous government, first distanced himself from unethical behavior in slogans and actions, and second, as Mr. Shirzad brought up in a very important statement, when he even wants to criticize and lay out the shortages, he merely includes his contribution to the effort and uses the word "we". This "we" means a broad group of statesmen who have participated, interfered, and taken responsibility; who have been elected and selected, and so on.

Mr. Pezeshkian never said, "When I come in, inflation will be controlled." Firstly, in the analytical foundations, no matter where you go, two plus two equals four; Logarithms have only one solution everywhere. Wherever you go, this is how it is. Some laws are independent of rational assumptions, and reasoning has



Then-Iranian lawmaker Masoud Pezeshkian (front 2nd-L) poses for a photo with his fellow MPs after being elected as the first deputy speaker, in the Parliament in Tehran, Iran, on May 31, 2016.  
● ABDOLVAHEH MIRZAZADEH/ISNA



Mr. Pezeshkian had a remarkable talent that really should be recognized: He brought down the temperature and cooled off society, bringing it closer to equilibrium. People's nerves were calmer, and that's very important. Sure, our nerves were frayed by the external enemy, but concurrently, we didn't have an added nerve-racking tension here — and that is very significant.

no say here. Can anyone claim they really have the power to interfere in those rules, whether they are Pezeshkian or not Pezeshkian, Qalibaf or not, Jalili or any of the esteemed presidential candidates? Physics runs its own course. Official numbers do their own work. To say "If this happens, inflation will go up" is simply not true.

The role of a statesman in this arena is more like that of an operator who must correctly piece together the data; If he does, he may have a slight influence on the outcome and offer a closer solution, but if he slips up, the situation worsens. For this reason, I specifically reject the assertion you pointed out, and no one can lay that claim at Mr. Pezeshkian's door. Mr. Pezeshkian has acted within the established frameworks, and the situation is exactly as it should be. Anyone else in his shoes would have faced the same scenario. We accept that when people come in, their direct impact is quite limited. If today, Mr. Jalili were in place of Mr. Pezeshkian, the notion that "war would break out during his term but not under Pezeshkian" is a slogan no one — especially among those who, loosely speaking, are supporters of Pezeshkian under the reformist banner in our society — has thrown out. Especially when a decision-maker understands that issues like war, foreign policy, safeguarding national independence, and dialogue with foreign countries ultimately fall under the Leader's domain more than the government's in Iran. The Leader himself has referred to it officially and unofficially that as the leader of the country and its political system, he is responsible

for defending Iran's territorial integrity, securing the nation's independence, and marshaling the forces and must have the necessary tools at hand.

**Mr. Shirzad, from your perspective — and given that both of you come from camps with a positive outlook on the government's performance — if you were to explain to the audience what successes the government has had amid the internal and external storms of the past year, and why you give it a passing grade, what would you say?**

**SHIRZAD:** Naturally, we wouldn't give any government a perfect score.

**Not a perfect score, but I said a positive one.**

**SHIRZAD:** We give them an acceptable score. In fact, it's hard to get a good score from us. Look at balanced and developed societies — they usually run at a lower temperature, metaphorically, not because nothing happens. Single incidents do break out here and there, like a small burst of energy passing through, yet society as a whole does not flip out. Most developed societies maintain this calm state.

Mr. Pezeshkian had a remarkable talent which really should be recognized: He brought down the temperature and cooled off society, bringing it closer to equilibrium. People's nerves were calmer, and that's very important. Sure, our nerves were frayed by the external enemy, but concurrently, we didn't have an added nerve-racking tension here — and that is very significant. Certainly, Iranian society especially

demonstrated its maturity during the 12-day war, showing that now is not the time to get on each other's nerves. Look at the level of political faction tension before and after Mr. Pezeshkian's government. It hasn't disappeared, though; The fact that even now some people use very harsh rhetoric on both sides is true. We truly need to dial down these harsh statements, take the edge off these discourses, and try to speak in a way that wins over the other side, bringing them closer to what we want — not to leave them stuck in their position.

**Is that something the government, in your view, has done?**

**SHIRZAD:** Yes, Mr. Pezeshkian has done that. Regarding unity, he showed that he never threw out empty slogans or lied; Perhaps the only topic he really zeroed in on during the election was precisely unity. With his unique manner, he asked people not to fight. He genuinely followed through on this and was successful.

Probably the clearest proof was in the early months when he tried to bring on board different figures and factions in the cabinet. When you try to do this, you face pushback — both sides complain about certain appointments — but he succeeded anyway. In securing the parliament's vote of confidence and bringing the lawmakers on side, he was successful, and overall, if we want to sum up, he managed to bring down the social temperature.

I should mention the fact that Iranian society is more dynamic and developing than some of our friends and pessimistic critics think. When I often meet young people at university, many of them impassioned protesters, I tell them not to think what I say is in promotion of Pezeshkian or Khatami or Ahmadinejad. That's not the point. You can hold the toughest views against, say, Khatami's government — it's fine — but look at how much our society has really grown and developed over these 30 or 40 years.

If you compare our technological level, it's not that drastically different. Yes, many problems remain and many roads untraveled, but overall, our progress is better than pessimists imagine. Therefore, if a president can keep the atmosphere calm, Iranian society can take off dramatically and pull off extraordinary achievements in a short time. That's hugely significant.

So, we shouldn't expect a president to bring inflation down overnight from 50% to 30%. It's very tough. Mr. Atrianfar explained that these things have fundamental rules. But if you can set the tone for a balanced, calm, and pleasant atmosphere as much as possible, society will do its part — and no enemy will be able to mess with that.

The full interview first appeared in Persian on IRNA.



The elderly gather to play chess in a park in Iran during the imposed 12-day war of Israel against the country, on June 20, 2025.  
● SAEED NIKPOUR/MEHR



## Wrestling U20 World Championships:

## Setback in Samokov as Iran falls short of gold in four divisions



Iranian Abolfazl Mohammadnejad (blue) concedes a two-point turn against Kazakhstan Yedige Kassimbek in the freestyle 125kg final at the Wrestling U20 World Championships in Sofia, Bulgaria, on August 18, 2025.

● AMIRREZA ALIASGARI/UWW

## Sports Desk

Iran got off to an under-par start at the Wrestling U20 World Championships in Samokov, Bulgaria, as the country failed to win a freestyle gold medal across four weight classes on Monday.

There was, however, some consolation for the Iranian squad – three-time freestyle champion over the past four editions – after Abolfazl Mohammadnejad settled for a silver medal in the 125kg contests, while Ebrahim Elahi finished with a bronze in the 70kg category.

Mohammadnejad enjoyed an impressive start to his superheavyweight campaign, outmuscling Ukrainian Ivan Myroshnychenko (7-0) and French wrestler Levan Lagvilava (11-4), before edging Azerbaijan's Yusif Dursunov on criteria (1-1) to set a final date with Yedige Kassimbek of Kazakhstan.

Having suffered three losses in as many previous meetings with the Kazakh wrestler, Mohammadnejad thought he may have a chance to change that record when he went up 1-0 in the final after Kassimbek

failed to score on the activity clock. The second period, however, was all about Kassimbek as he got a take-down and then turned the Iranian, wrapping Mohammadnejad's legs around his head, for two points to win 4-1.

Elahi, meanwhile, bounced back from a last-four criteria defeat (2-2) against American Peter John Duke to beat France's Abdoullah Nakaev 6-4 and share the third podium with Nurlan Aghazada of Azerbaijan, while Duke went on to defeat Moldovan Alexandr Gaidarli 7-5 in the final.

Elsewhere, Erfan Alizadeh – an Asian U20 champion in July – crashed out in the round of 16 following a 7-5 loss to Nikolaos Karavanos of Greece in the 97kg class.

Mohammad-Mahdi Mamivand also finished his 74kg empty-handed – courtesy of a 9-8 setback against Italian Raul Caso in the last 16.

The freestyle competitions will be followed by the women's wrestling event in Samokov, before the Iranian Greco-Roman squad begins its bid for a fourth successive team title at the U20 Worlds on Friday.

## Insipid Persepolis held by Fajr in Iranian top-flight opener

## Sports Desk

Head coach Vahid Hashemian received a reality check in his debut on the Persepolis bench after the Tehran Reds labored to a 1-1 home stalemate against Fajr Sepasi in their Persian Gulf Pro League opener at the Shahr-e Qods Stadium on Monday. Star striker Ali Alipour found the bottom corner with a side-footed effort from outside the box deep into stoppage time to cancel out Hossein Shahabi's 13th-minute strike for the newly-promoted visitors. Persepolis, which was without three summer signings in goalkeeper Payam Niazmand, Ivorian fullback Serge Aurier, and Congolese winger Thievy Bifouma for different reasons, dominated the possession throughout the game but still struggled with creating clear-cut chances and even felt lucky not to be pun-

ished on a couple of counter-attacks before Alipour's last-gasp equalizer. Hashemian will be desperate to see the new additions available and his team improves on Monday's drab performance when the Reds travel to Isfahan to take on Sepahan in the 'Iranian Clasic' next week. Elsewhere on Monday, Iran under-20 international Kasra Taheri scored a bizarre goal in the 20th minute – when Zob Ahan goalkeeper Parsa Jafari's pass ricocheted off his foot and found the back of net – as Paykan celebrated a 1-0 away victory in Isfahan on its return to the Iranian top flight. Paykan will host Esteghlal Khuzestan next, with Zob Ahan visiting Esteghlal. Golgozar Sirjan also got off to a winning start in the new season, beating Iralco 1-0 at home, thanks to Majid Eidi's sublime volley from the edge

of the box 15 minutes into the game. Next for Golgozar is an away game at Fajr Sepasi, with Iralco facing Kheybar Khorramabad in Arak. Kheybar pulled off a sensational fightback to beat Mes Rafsanjan 3-2 at home on Monday. Alireza Naqizadeh and a Hossein Pourhamidi's own goal gave Mes a two-goal lead inside 18 minutes, but Ehsan Hosseini pulled one back for the home side from close range midway through the first half, before Esmaei Babaei drew Kheybar level right before the break. Former Mes midfielder Ali Shojaei headed home eight minutes after the break against his former club to secure maximum points for head coach Seyyed Mahdi Rahmati in his first game in charge of Kheybar. Next for Mes is a massive home game against defending champion Tractor on Tuesday.



Persepolis midfielder Marko Bakić (88) goes up for a header against Fajr Sepasi striker Shervin Bozorg during a 1-1 draw at the Persian Gulf Pro League at the Shahr-e Qods Stadium, Tehran, Iran, on August 18, 2025.

● FATEMEH SHAMS/FFIRI

## Asian Shooting Championships:

## Iran wins air pistol team gold in men's youth contests

## Sports Desk

Iranian boys Mohammadreza Ahmadi, Amirhossein Gohari, and Mohammad-Mahdi Choo-bin teamed up for a youth team gold medal at the Asian Shooting Championships in Shymkent, Kazakhstan, on Monday.

The Iranian trio scored 1721 points to beat India (1716pts) and South Korea (1699) to the ultimate prize in the men's 10m air pistol contests. There was further joy for Ahmadi, who bagged the individual bronze in the same class thanks to a 217-point performance in the final, with Indian duo Girish Gupta (241.3) and Dev Pratap (238.6) grabbing the gold and silver medals respectively.

On Tuesday, Iranian girls Pari-mah Amiri, Donya Arshadnia, and Tara Abbaszadeh won a



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youth silver medal in Shymkent, scoring 1676 points for a runner-up finish behind India (1701) in the women's 10m air pistol event, with the host team taking the bronze with

1658 points. Iran had won a couple of bronzes in the men's 10m air pistol team event earlier in the competitions. Amir Joharikhou, Vahid

Golkhandan, and former Olympic champion Javad Forouqi scored 1733 points for a third-place finish in the team final, while Joharikhou also bagged a bronze in the individual competitions. Three-time world bronze medalist Hanieh Rostamian, meanwhile, missed out on the podium in the women's 10m air pistol final on Tuesday. The Iranian scored 199.9 points to finish fourth, standing behind Chinese gold medalist Ma Qianke (243.2pts), South Korean Olympic champion Yang Ji-in (241.6), and Indian shooter Manu Bhaker (219.7), who won double bronze medals at the Paris Olympics last year.

The 16th edition of the Asian Championships will continue across three age classes at the Shymkent Shooting Plaza until August 30.

## Alcaraz wins Cincinnati Open after ailing Sinner retires in final

**REUTERS** – Carlos Alcaraz won the Cincinnati Open after top seed Jannik Sinner retired as he was feeling unwell on Monday, raising concerns about the Italian's fitness just days before he is due to begin the defence of his U.S. Open title.

The Spanish second seed snapped the world number one's 26-match winning streak on hardcourts when his ailing rival signalled he could no longer continue while trailing 5-0 in the first set of the final. Sinner had been bidding to become the first man since Roger Federer in 2015 to win back-to-back Cincinnati titles but he looked uncomfortable early on in the

sweltering conditions. He called it quits after 23 minutes of play. Monday's clash had been expected to be a dress-rehearsal ahead of a potential final showdown between the world's two best players at the US Open, with the duo having faced off in the title match at the last two majors.

Alcaraz came from two sets down and saved three championship points to triumph at Roland Garros, while Sinner emerged victorious at Wimbledon.

Monday's result extended Alcaraz's head-to-head record over Sinner to 9-5, including a 6-2 edge on hardcourts.



Jannik Sinner (1) is consoled by Carlos Alcaraz after retiring from the Cincinnati Open final in Cincinnati, OH, US, on Aug. 18, 2025.

● IMAGN IMAGES



# Women artisans revive, sustain Morvar weaving tradition in Malayer

## Iranica Desk

The hard work of women artisans in handicrafts reflects their extraordinary commitment, creativity, and perseverance in both preserving and developing traditional arts. As true guardians of cultural and artistic heritage, they continue their work despite social and economic challenges, playing a vital role in ensuring that handicrafts remain alive and relevant.

Many women artisans, by learning crafts such as carpet weaving, pottery, embroidery, and wood carving from previous generations, have safeguarded these arts and passed them on to future generations, preventing these traditions from fading into oblivion. By blending traditional designs with contemporary styles, these women create unique works that are simultaneously authentic and harmonized with modern tastes, IRNA wrote.

Countless women, alongside their family responsibilities, devote themselves to handicrafts with love, patience, and artistry. In rural and underprivileged areas, these arts are more than a passion — they represent an essential source of livelihood. Women's efforts not only contribute to the welfare and prosperity of their families but also promote local economic development.

For Iranian women, art is deeply intertwined with their essence; by creating, they not only produce art but also impart love, cultural memory, and identity. This heritage is faithfully passed down from mothers and grandmothers to future generations. Preserving and reviving these crafts means passing on an authentic and noble legacy that strengthens cultural connections across time. The hands of Iranian women are filled with artistry, and their lives are interwoven with sacrifice. Each handicraft made by these skilled women is more than an object — it tells a story. A Persian carpet woven by a woman carries years of patience within its knots; a pottery piece from Lalehjin of Hamedan Province preserves the warmth of the artist's touch; the ornate work of carving, kilim weaving, and mat weaving carries an infinite love. These women create invaluable masterpieces with the fewest resources. Yet, they need to be seen, recognized, and supported so that their art continues to thrive. Handicrafts are not simply handmade products; they embody spirit, memory, and the very soul of culture. The art of Morvar weaving (Morvar Bafi) in Malayer, a



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city in Hamedan Province, is one of the handicrafts with great potential to serve as a lifeline for the local economy. Through the establishment of small workshops, this craft can generate new income for families and help reduce unemployment in rural communities. Morvar weaving holds a prominent position among the handicraft branches of the region. Alongside the renowned wood-carved furniture industry, it plays an important role in both the local and national markets. Although some view this art as male-dominated, many women and girls in Malayer actively engage in basket and Morvar weaving, establishing workshops of their own and becoming successful entrepreneurs. Davijan village, in particular, is recognized as the National Village of Morvar Weaving in Iran. In December 2021, and in an effort to revive handicrafts and traditional arts, Morvar weaving was officially registered on Iran's Handicraft List. Today, the collective work of nearly

2,000 artisans across 20 large workshops and 150 smaller home-based units produces more than seven million Morvar items annually. This large-scale production has placed Malayer at the forefront of Morvar weaving in the country. Every art form is accompanied by hardship before it flourishes. Yet the creativity, innovation, and determination of Iranian women allow them to overcome barriers and transform difficulties into opportunities for growth. Just as the women of Malayer have risen above every challenge, today many talented girls and women pursue Morvar and basket weaving, producing a diverse range of designs and innovations. Since many women are actively involved in the art of Morvar weaving, which is expanding daily, IRNA conducted an interview with Zahra Nazari, an artist and entrepreneur from Solta-nieh village in Malayer.

**How did you enter this profession, and who encouraged you?**

**NAZARI:** I believe that art is innate in every woman, but choosing which specific path to follow requires great passion. I personally became acquainted with Morvar weaving by chance. A friend introduced me to a workshop, and through that opportunity, I began working and learning. I have been practicing this art for over 12 years. At the beginning, I had just gotten married, and working long hours was challenging. But over time, I became deeply attached to this craft and decided to pursue it seriously. As I continued, I realized that Morvar weaving matched my character perfectly, and with passion and determination, I kept going. After gaining two years of experience in a workshop, I established a small one of my own. One of my main goals was to employ women who were seeking work and facing difficulties.

**Can you explain what Morvar is and describe the methods used for its cultivation?**  
Morvar cuttings, belong-

ing to the willow family, have existed for centuries in Malayer, often grown beside vineyards. Farmers traditionally used them to produce everyday household items, particularly baskets for carrying grapes and fruits, which were once very common. The primary origin of Morvar cuttings in Iran is Malayer. Thanks to its favorable climate, the region provides excellent conditions for cultivation. While many assume Morvar is native to Iran's north, in fact, there are generally two types: the orchard Morvar, which often grows wild near orchards, and the cultivated kind that is systematically bred on agricultural land.

**When is the Morvar harvested?**

The best time for harvesting Morvar cuttings is late autumn. Farmers cut and dry them, after which they are ready for use by artisans. For weaving, the cuttings are purchased and then roasted for about 12 hours, followed by a resting period of 24 hours in large cauldrons to absorb

water while cooling to room temperature. It is important that the cuttings are not exposed to open air too soon, as this causes them to dry out and become brittle. Once properly prepared, these cuttings are transformed into a range of items, including baskets, buckets, bread holders, dowries for brides, and special newborn baby sets. The market for these products remains strong both within Iran and abroad.

**Could you please describe how you have created job opportunities and developed your workshop?**

At present, more than 10 women are directly employed in my workshop, while around 20 women who cannot attend in person work from their homes. We provide them with the raw materials, and they complete the assigned work and deliver the finished products back to us. Altogether, nearly 30 women have found employment through this modest workshop. My hope is that,

with the support of authorities, I will one day be able to expand it further. Such an expansion would allow dozens — even hundreds — of women and girls from Malayer and surrounding areas to join, enabling us to reach larger and more competitive markets while also boosting exports.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, we faced severe challenges. The market slowed down considerably, sales dropped, and we suffered heavy financial losses. However, conditions are now improving, and I am optimistic about the future. My greatest strengths have been reliance on God and the invaluable support of my mentors.

I must especially appreciate the cooperation of Malayer's Department of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts, which provided significant support. If such support continues to increase, we can create more employment opportunities for women, ease the livelihood struggles of families in these difficult economic times, and contribute in a small but meaningful way to the nation's foreign exchange earnings.

**What is your advice to women interested in the art of Morvar weaving?**

Morvar weaving is a distinctive art that calls for both creativity and great patience. Although the income from this craft may be modest, the real driving force behind it is love and passion. Without those, it is difficult to persevere.

The time it takes to learn Morvar weaving depends greatly on each person's talent and aptitude. In general, however, the basic skills can be mastered in as little as five to fourteen days. From there, success is tied to perseverance, patience, and resilience. The challenges are many, but each can be overcome step by step through dedication and hard work.

The story of Morvar weaving in Malayer illustrates more than the revival of a traditional Iranian art — it is also a story of women's strength, sacrifice, and innovation. With limited resources, they create timeless masterpieces that are at once functional, beautiful, and deeply cultural. Each item tells not only the tale of its artisan but also embodies the continuity of Iran's artistic spirit through generations.

Supporting these women means more than preserving handicrafts; it means protecting living heritage, empowering communities, and investing in cultural identity. Their art is not just woven into baskets or carpets — it is woven into the very fabric of life.



# Iran, Armenia ink cinema cooperation deal

## Arts & Culture Desk

Iran and Armenia signed a comprehensive cinema cooperation agreement on Tuesday during Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian's official visit to Yerevan, marking a fresh push to strengthen cultural ties between the neighboring nations. The memorandum aims to bolster film industry collaboration between the two countries through joint productions, technical exchanges and commercial distribution networks, IRNA reported. Raed Faridzadeh, head of Cinema Organization of Iran, and David Banuchyan, his Armenian counterpart, signed the deal in the presence of Pezeshkian and Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan at a ceremony in the Armenian capital. The agreement encompasses several key areas including mutual film screen-

ings and commercial distribution, reciprocal invitations to cinema festivals, and facilitated participation of filmmakers and industry professionals in bilateral projects. Both nations committed to promoting joint productions spanning feature films, documentaries, shorts and animations focusing on their shared history, culture and traditions. The pact also covers technical knowledge exchange and student-teacher programs in cinema education. Under the terms, filmmakers will gain easier access to shooting locations and studio facilities in both countries. The deal includes provisions for joint film weeks, copyright protection for cinematic works, and establishment of an Iranian Young Cinema Association office in Yerevan. Industry insiders view the agreement as a "significant step" towards expand-



Cinema Organization of Iran's Head Raed Faridzadeh (L) and Armenian counterpart David Banuchyan hold a signed cinema cooperation agreement during a ceremony in Yerevan, August 19, 2025.

● ARMANPRESS

ing Iran's regional cinema partnerships. Armenia's film sector, though smaller than Iran's established industry, has shown growing international recognition in recent years. The signing formed part of a broader diplomatic push during Pezeshkian's visit, which saw multiple bilateral agreements inked between the two nations. Armenia's and Iran's foreign ministries also signed a memorandum on political consultations for 2025-2027. Previous cooperation between the countries had been limited to a Statement of Mutual Understanding between Armenia's National Cinema Center and



Iran's Farabi Cinema Foundation, making table upgrade in bilateral film industry relations.

## Iranian photographer Bayat triumphs at Golden Shot in Sharjah



## Arts & Culture Desk

Iranian photographer Bahram Bayat won two accolades at the Golden Shot Photography Awards 2025 held in Sharjah, United Arab Emirates. Bayat clinched first place in the Fine Art Single Image category and received an Honorable Mention in the Urban Life Single Image category, IRNA re-

ported. The Golden Shot Photography Awards, renowned for recognizing exceptional talent across various photographic genres, attracted entries from around the globe. Bayat's winning images were selected from thousands of submissions, highlighting his distinctive artistic vision. Bayat, based in Zanjan, Iran,



is celebrated for his compelling documentary and fine art photography. His work has been showcased in numerous exhibitions internationally and domestically, reflecting his dedication to visual storytelling. In addition to his photographic pursuits, Bayat contributes to the arts through teaching and collaborations with esteemed cultural publications.

## Armenian State Symphony to perform at Persepolis

## Arts & Culture Desk

Armenian State Symphony will perform at Persepolis in southern Iran on September 22, in the presence of senior officials from both Iran and Armenia, Deputy Culture Minister Hojatollah Ayoubi said. He also revealed plans to streamline access for pilgrims travelling to the Armenian Church (Qara Kelisa) in north-western Iran. In the run-up to the concert, Ayoubi outlined how the Armenian ensemble's centenary celebration will "light up" Persepolis, symbolizing goodwill and cultural harmony. He explained that the concert forms part of deeper co-operation across tourism, culture and heritage sectors between the two countries. The performance marks a striking cultural milestone in Tehran-Yerevan relations. It follows recent agreements to ease vehicle-based pil-



grimage travel to Qara Kelisa, where "roughly 4,000" Armenian pilgrims visited Iran this year. Ayoubi said the Armenian Minister of Education, Science, Culture and Sports is expected in Iran soon, as both countries advance collaboration in heritage promotion and tourism infrastructure. Ayoubi described the visit of Iran's President Masoud Pezeshkian to Armenia as a "welcome step", saying it helped remove significant tourism barriers. "This journey is extremely timely," he said, adding the government delegation in-

cludes several senior cultural and tourism figures. He added that key cultural and tourism documents were reviewed during the visit to pave the way for smoother travel and enhanced cultural exchange. The minister said that vehicle access will be simplified especially for pilgrims to Qara Kelisa near Khoy, a route used annually by Armenian worshippers. "We intend to provide special measures," he noted, referencing the recent 4,000-strong arrival of pilgrims, and emphasizing the importance of safe, easy travel.

## 'Black Rabbit, White Rabbit' to compete at 30th Busan Int'l Film Festival

## Arts & Culture Desk

Iranian filmmaker Shahram Mokri's latest feature, 'Black Rabbit, White Rabbit,' will have its world premiere in the Vision section of the 30th Busan International Film Festival (BIFF), which runs from October 3 to 12, in Busan, South Korea. The film marks Mokri's return to the festival, following the screening of his short film Ando-C at the 14th BIFF. 'Black Rabbit, White Rabbit' is a co-production between Tajikistan and the United Arab Emirates, and features performances in Persian, Tajik, and Russian. The narrative follows a woman who, after a car accident, begins to perceive her surroundings in increasingly surreal ways, blurring the lines between reality and illusion. The film's international distribution is managed by DreamLab Films, led by Nasrin Mirshab. The Vision section at BIFF is renowned for showcasing innovative works by emerging and established Asian filmmakers. This year's lineup includes films from countries such as Japan, India, Indonesia, and Kazakh-



stan, reflecting the festival's commitment to presenting diverse cinematic voices. Mokri's previous works, including 'Fish & Cat' and 'Careless Crime,' have garnered international acclaim for their inventive storytelling and cinematic techniques.

## Iran pressed to avert demographic decline with stronger social policies

## Social Desk

Interior Minister Eskandar Momeni on Tuesday warned that Iran's population could shrink to under 40mn within decades if present trends continue, urging officials and civil groups to take swift action to avert what he called a "major" threat to the nation's future. The minister said low birth rates and changing lifestyles had left the country in a precarious demographic position, IRNA reported. He argued that social issues should be tackled with "social" rather than security-driven approaches and pressed for stronger grassroots involvement to strengthen cohesion. Officials say the government must throw its weight behind family support measures and economic relief to encourage higher birth rates. Momeni insisted that the state's role should be to "clear obstacles" and create space for civic organizations rather than subsume them. The warning comes as Iran faces other



pressing social challenges. Rapid ageing means that by mid-century almost one in three Iranians will be over 60. At the same time, drought and water scarcity are driving people from rural areas into already strained cities, a trend that risks leaving swathes of villages abandoned. Economic pressures remain at the forefront. Inflation, youth unemployment and the rising cost of housing and education weigh heavily on households, while many young couples delay or avoid having children.