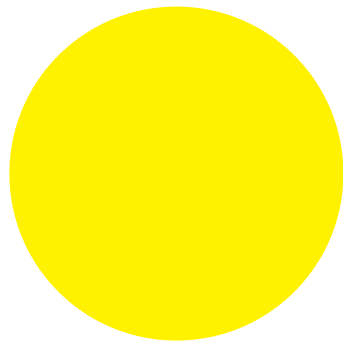


Semnan hosts first Silk Road tourism conference

Historic corridor hailed as gateway to Semnan's int'l tourism future, official says

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# Iran Daily

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Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian addresses a ceremony to mark the national Nurse's Day in Tehran, Iran on October 29, 2025.  
president.ir

## JCPOA remains alive with waned enforcement capacity

INTERVIEW  
EXCLUSIVE



Iran has formally notified the UN Security Council that Resolution 2231, the legal backbone of the 2015 nuclear deal between Iran and the six world powers, has expired.

Yet, Iran's foreign minister on Tuesday insisted that while Resolution 2231 had run its course, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) itself is still alive. Abbas Araghchi argues that none of the five remaining parties – except the US – has officially withdrawn, and that Iran has only suspended its obligations rather than walked away from the accord, as certain articles continue to serve its interest, including the right to enrichment.

This raises a fundamental question: how can the JCPOA still be deemed alive

when the resolution that endorsed it has lapsed? And do the remaining signatories share Tehran's reading of the situation?

In an interview with Iran Daily, international affairs analyst Abed Akbari explains that the JCPOA and Resolution 2231 are legally distinct instruments. As a political agreement, he says, the JCPOA can survive independently of the Security Council's endorsement, even though the loss of a binding international framework makes its implementation far more fragile.

IRAN DAILY: From the standpoint of international law, how can Resolution 2231 expire while the JCPOA is still considered valid?

AKBARI: From a legal perspective, we need to draw a line between two separate domains. First is the "Security Council resolution", a decision adopted under the UN Charter, endowed with binding force and backed by international enforcement mechanisms. Second is the "multilateral

political accord" – the JCPOA itself – an expression of the will of states that carries contractual and political weight but does not necessarily amount to a legally binding treaty under the Vienna Convention, nor does it automatically inherit all the binding effects of the council's decision. When a resolution expires, it simply means its own text or enforcement provisions set a time limit; once that period lapses, the council's enforcement powers are no longer operative. But that does not automatically erase the JCPOA text. The agreement among the parties remains in place until they jointly decide to terminate, revoke, or halt its implementation. So, while the expiration of the resolution ends the "UNSC-backed guarantees", it does not by itself nullify the "contractual or political undertakings" of the JCPOA. In practice, this creates a hybrid situation: international enforcement tools such as UNSC-mandated sanctions or monitoring mechanisms cease to function, but the JCPOA's technical core and substantive provisions, agreed upon by all parties, can

still endure as a contractual norm, a set of technical standards, and a legal-political point of reference guiding the conduct of the signatories. In short, the council's umbrella collapses, but the deal itself may linger on, although in a weakened and contestable form.

With the snapback mechanism triggered and UN sanctions reinstated, alongside Iran's formal notice of Resolution 2231's expiry, do the remaining parties still regard the JCPOA as alive or as a dead deal?

Politically speaking, the interpretations are divergent, even contradictory, so there's no unified collective status of the deal. From a legal and practical standpoint, Western and European actors have invoked the resolution's provisions and their reading of the snapback clause to justify reinstating certain sanctions and pressure. They argue that violations or threats to international peace can warrant the reimposition of restrictions.

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# President: Enemy aims to shatter national unity key to braving challenges



## National Desk

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian said on Wednesday that the Islamic Republic can overcome the country's hardships through national unity and solidarity, which the enemy is seeking to destroy. "The enemy's wish is that we fail to complete our reforms and overcome our problems. But with your help, and through unity and solidarity, we will overcome all challenges," Pezeshkian said while addressing a ceremony marking "Nurse's Day" in Tehran. "We will not surrender and through unity and solidarity we will overcome prob-



Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian addresses a ceremony marking "Nurse's Day" in Tehran, on October 29, 2025.

● [president.ir](#)

lems." Referring to recent aggression by the Israeli regime against Iran in June, Pezeshkian said, "The Zionist enemy imagined that when it attacked Iran with bombs and missiles, the people would take to the streets and Iran would break apart, but the people gave a response that was unimaginable for them."

He stressed that even Iranians who had not been treated properly in the country, stood by Iran during the 12-day aggression.

Back in June, Israel launched aggression against Iran, triggering a 12-day war that killed over 1000 people, including military commanders, nuclear scientists, and civilians.

The United States also entered the war by bombing three Iranian nuclear sites in a grave violation of international law. However, the problems in the country,

mostly economic ones, are partly due to the illegal sanctions imposed by Western countries during the past decades over Iran's nuclear program.

The economic restrictions even worsened this month following the activation of the so-called snapback mechanism which reinstated international sanctions that had been lifted under the 2015 Iran nuclear agreement.

Despite their failure to fulfil their commitments under the deal, the European parties to the agreement triggered the so-called "snapback" process on the pretext of Iran's non-compliance with its obligations, leading to the re-imposition of the UN sanctions.

Iranian officials have called their move "null and void" and are trying to counter the sanctions by strengthening economic relations with friendly and neighboring countries.

## Israeli slaughter machine steamrolling through Gaza

100-plus Palestinians killed in 12 hours in fresh violation of truce deal

### International Desk

Israeli forces killed more than 100 Palestinians, including 46 children, in a blatant violation of a US-brokered cease-fire between the occupying regime and Hamas resistance group. In about 12 hours from Tuesday to Wednesday, Israeli attacks on Gaza killed at least 104 Palestinians and wounded 253 others, according to Gaza's Ministry of Health.

"These documented crimes add to the long list of ongoing violations against our people," the Palestinian Civil Defense in Gaza said in a statement, demanding an "immediate and comprehensive cease-fire" across the Strip.

One of the attacks hit a tent housing displaced people in Deir el-Balah, in central Gaza, according to medical sources. Other attacks targeted the northern and southern parts of the Palestinian territory.

The strikes — the deadliest since the cease-fire took effect on October 8 — marked the most serious challenge to the tenuous truce to date.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said he had ordered the military to conduct "powerful strikes" over Gaza after



Bodies are transferred to a hospital in the Gaza Strip after at least seven Palestinians were killed in a barrage of Israeli attacks on October 28, 2025.

● [AP](#)

accusing Hamas of violating the cease-fire when the group handed over body parts that Israel said were the partial remains of a hostage recovered earlier in the war.

Netanyahu called the return of these body parts a "clear violation" of the cease-fire agreement, which requires Hamas to return the remaining captives in Gaza as soon as possible.

Hamas has said it is struggling to locate the bodies amid the vast destruction in Gaza, while Israel has accused the group of purposely delaying their return. The US president defended Israel's actions on Wednesday, citing groundless reports that a

37-year-old Israeli soldier had been killed in southern Gaza.

"As I understand it, they took out an Israeli soldier," Trump told reporters on board Air Force One as he travelled from Japan to South Korea, saying he heard the soldier was apparently killed by sniper fire. "So the Israelis hit back and they should hit back. When that happens, they should hit back," he added, calling Israel's attacks "retribution" for the soldier's death. Hamas has denied responsibility for the alleged attack on Israeli forces in Rafah, southern Gaza, and said in a statement that it remained committed to the cease-fire deal.

## Japan touts Iran's 'constructive role' in securing West Asia stability



● [IRNA](#)

### International Desk

Japan's Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi underscored "Iran's constructive role" in securing stability in the West Asia region, which he said is of great importance for the international community, including Japan.

Motegi made the remarks in a post on his X account in response to a congratulatory message by his Iranian counterpart, Abbasa Araghchi, on his appointment as Japan's new foreign minister. "Japan intends to carry on with its diplomatic efforts for establishing peace and stability in the Middle East region," he said.

Referring to relations between the two countries, he said, "Multilayered and constructive dialogues between Japan and Iran, based on the long-standing

and friendly relations of the two countries, are always going on."

He also expressed hope for holding a meeting with Iranian foreign minister, saying, "I sincerely hope to work with you to further build up the long-standing and friendly ties between Japan and Iran, which were founded by the efforts of our predecessors."

On October 21, Araghchi in a post on X congratulated Motegi on his appointment, expressing hope that during Motegi's tenure, political, economic, and cultural interactions between Tehran and Tokyo would flourish in an atmosphere of mutual trust and understanding.

Japan has been one of the main buyers of Iranian crude oil but it has stopped Iranian oil imports under pressure from the United States.

## India seeks US sanctions waiver extension for Iran's Chabahar Port



● [IRNA](#)

### International Desk

India is working to secure an extension of the US sanctions waiver for Iran's Chabahar Port — a vital link in its connectivity network with Afghanistan, Central Asia, and Eastern Russia, sources said. Sources have told the Economic Times that New Delhi is engaged in active discussions to ensure continuity of the

waiver, which is under consideration in Washington.

The Chabahar Port serves as India's strategic gateway to Afghanistan for economic cooperation and humanitarian aid, including medical supplies and ambulances sent earlier this month. The Taliban officials in Afghanistan has also expressed interest in utilizing the port for its external trade.

In May 2024, Iran and India signed a 10-year contract for operation and equipment of the southern Iranian port city of Chabahar as part of plans to further boost their bilateral trade and economic relations.

India has already provided equipment worth \$25 million, shipped food supplies through the port. Under that deal, India pledged \$120 million in investment and offered an additional \$250 million credit

line for infrastructure upgrades.

The United States had previously extended the sanctions waiver until October 28, after initially setting a revocation deadline of September 29.

The waiver had allowed India to develop the Shahid Beheshti terminal at Chabahar, seen as a key gateway to Afghanistan and Central Asia. With its withdrawal, entities involved in the project may now face penalties.

Regional countries, including Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Tajikistan, are also keen to use Chabahar. Russia, through Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, is exploring the port for trade access to India and the wider Asian region.

Last month, Tehran hosted the first India-Iran-Uzbekistan trilateral meeting to promote greater utilization of Chabahar and related transport corridors.



Mohammad Ali Rajabi  
Cartoonist

### CARTOON





# Rasht-Astara railway to break shackles of sanctions on Iran, Russia, says Indian media

## Economy Desk

A railroad project under construction in northwestern Iran, that is part of an international corridor, is a blow to Western leverage, a weekly Indian English-language news magazine wrote on Wednesday.

India Today said the €1.6-billion Rasht-Astara railway, being built under a 20-year Russia-Iran partnership, would reshape global trade routes by bypassing Western-controlled chokepoints.

The project is a clear message that “isolation is obsolete and the world is no longer unipolar,” the publication added. According to the media outlet, the railway – described as the missing link in the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) – could revolutionize trade and help Iran and Russia circumvent Western sanctions as US pressure intensifies.

The 7,200-kilometer corridor is designed to cut trade costs by 30% and reduce shipping time from 37 days to 19, almost half that of the Suez Canal route.

The report called the project “more than just steel and concrete,” portraying it as a symbol of defiance by two of the world’s most heavily sanctioned economies.

The venture, described by the Indian magazine as “confrontation by construc-

tion,” is primarily financed by Moscow and built by Russian engineers under a 20-year Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Treaty signed in January 2025.

Once complete, the corridor will handle up to 20 million tons of cargo annually — including oil, gas, steel, food, and machinery — through routes “completely untouched by Western naval power.” Unlike maritime chokepoints such as the Suez Canal or the Strait of Malacca, the report noted, “this land bridge cannot be blockaded by American fleets or frozen by European banks.”

“Beijing’s Belt and Road Initiative overlap perfectly with the INSTC, creating a seamless trade network from the South China Sea to the Baltic,” the report added. “Together with platforms like BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization,” the report said, “this emerging bloc is quietly rejecting Western sanctions as illegitimate.”

Even Afghanistan, freshly recognized by Moscow in 2024, could become a crucial junction, extending the corridor into Central and South Asia whilst bypassing Pakistan entirely, it said.

Meanwhile, India’s rival corridor, IMEC, remains largely on the drawing board. The INSTC, by contrast, is already operational, with trains moving and contracts signed.



IRNA

## Gov’t spox calls FATF delisting process ‘time-intensive’



## Economy Desk

Iranian government spokeswoman Fatemeh Mohajerani said on Wednesday that the Islamic Republic had long known the process of removing Tehran from the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) blacklist would be gradual and not immediate, a week after the global watchdog decided to keep the country on the list, IRNA reported.

Her remarks came as the move sparked debate among policymakers and commentators inside the country.

Without referring to specific reactions, Mohajerani said the government recognizes Parliament’s oversight role but stressed the

need for caution regarding any actions that could, in her words, “cause public anxiety or disrupt the meaningful social cohesion of Iranians in line with their national identity.”

“When we approved the exit from the CFT and Palermo conventions, we already knew that the process of leaving the blacklist would be time-intensive and would not occur quickly,” she told reporters on the sidelines of a cabinet meeting in Tehran.

She said the Central Bank of Iran (CBI) had submitted a detailed report on the issue, adding that the economy minister was ready to provide a full explanation to the media.

Despite Iran’s approval of the

Palermo Convention in May and its official accession to the International Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism (CFT) on October 21, the country remained on the FATF blacklist, prompting reactions from economic and legal experts. Hadi Khani, head of Iran’s FATF delegation, said on Friday that the global watchdog had not shut the door on Iran. “The country’s case with FATF is now on a proper technical and legal track and will be pursued vigorously until the expected results are achieved,” he said.

“Approval of the Palermo and CFT conventions does not equate to leaving the blacklist,” Khani added. “Rather, Iran’s engagement to resolve long-standing FATF challenges has only just begun and is expanding day by day.” Iran attended the FATF’s three-day plenary meeting in Paris last week for the first time in six years, as it seeks to be removed from the global financial blacklist.

The FATF continues to list Iran, alongside North Korea and

Myanmar, as a “high-risk jurisdiction subject to a call for action,” citing what it describes as “significant deficiencies” in Iran’s anti-money laundering and counter-terrorist financing (AML/CFT) framework.

While the FATF acknowledged the country’s re-engagement with it to address deficiencies in its AML/CFT regime, it claimed that the country has failed to address the majority of the action plan it laid out to counter such “illicit” activities since 2016.

The statement by the task force said, “Iran will remain on the FATF High Risk Jurisdictions Subject to a Call for Action statement until the full Action Plan has been completed. As the FATF previously stated, should Iran ratify and implement the Palermo and Terrorist Financing Conventions, in line with the FATF standards.” Iran’s efforts to exit the FATF blacklist began roughly a year ago, after 14 of the past 18 years during which the country’s economy and trade — even with allied nations — were affected by FATF restrictions.

## Gold tops Iran’s imports at \$1.2b, non-oil exports up 3%

## Economy Desk

Gold bullion has become Iran’s top import in the first seven months of the current Persian calendar year that began on March 21, with 20 tons valued at \$1.2 billion entering the country, head of Iran’s Customs Administration (IRICA) Faroud Asgari said.

Speaking on a televised program, Asgari said gold was the leading import item during the period, followed by 6.6 million tons of corn feed worth \$1.9 billion, ISNA reported. Imports of edible oil increased by 154%, strengthening the country’s strategic reserves, while rice imports reached



IRNA

970,000 tons — up 91% compared with the same period last year.

“A total of 2.1 million tons of barley for livestock and poultry was also imported, showing a 91% rise,” he said.

On the export side, Asgari, who also serves as a deputy economy minister, noted that Iran’s non-oil exports reached \$32 billion in the seven-month period, up more than

3% by volume compared to last year.

The country exported around 92 million tons of goods, with key items including natural gas, liquefied propane and butane, iron ingots, iron concentrate, and petrochemical products.

Imports totaled over 22 million tons worth more than \$34 billion, marking a 16.7% decline in value from the same period a year earlier, he added.

## JCPOA remains alive ...

On the other hand, Iran, joined at times by Russia and China, maintains that once the resolution’s timeframe expired, those UNSC-based mechanisms became void, making any attempt to revive them illegitimate or at least disputable.

As a result, we now see three camps:

(a) Some participants still treat the JCPOA as a living technical and political framework, using it as a reference point in talks or practical arrangements.

(b) Others interpret the resolution’s expiry as a weakening of its legal backbone, viewing the JCPOA as a deal under strain and constraint.

(c) A third group, including international organizations and neutral states, occupies a middle or ambiguous ground, guided largely by political calculus and national interests.

The JCPOA’s “life status” is no longer an

undisputed international fact. Some still hold on to it as a technical benchmark; others write it off as obsolete or enforce its demise through parallel measures, such as sanctions. This divergence itself has become the greatest obstacle to the deal’s full and effective revival.

**Can Iran’s stance, that the JCPOA lives on despite the resolution’s expiry, be read as a signal of diplomatic intent? How viable is this path?**

Iran’s statement should be understood both as a legal-political position and a diplomatic signal. Strategically, it conveys a dual message: on one hand, Tehran affirms a degree of continued commitment to the JCPOA’s technical framework, showing it hasn’t shut the door on negotiations; on the other, it reasserts sovereign rights, especially over enrichment, as a domestic and international bargaining chip.

This can indeed be interpreted as a willingness to keep the diplomatic track open. But its success depends on several external variables: First, the West’s readiness to offer tangible economic benefits and credible guarantees. Second, the resolution, or at least management, of non-nuclear issues such as missiles and regional policies, which many Western states see as preconditions. Third, the level of mutual trust and the robustness of verification mechanisms Iran seeks. And fourth, domestic or geopolitical pressures that might stiffen or soften Iran’s resolve.

Without real economic incentives and credible assurances, a mere legal or diplomatic declaration won’t bring the JCPOA back to life in practice. But if the process is coupled with solid guarantees, economic packages, and verification tools, diplomacy could find a way back in, though success would neither be swift nor

guaranteed, and would require complex, multi-party trade-offs.

**Given the latest developments, can the JCPOA still serve as a framework for a renewed agreement, or does any future deal need to be drafted from scratch?**

A realistic assessment requires a hybrid approach. The 2015 JCPOA offered a solid set of technical and institutional solutions, such as caps on nuclear activity, IAEA verification regimes, and joint decision-making mechanisms, that still provide a valuable “technical bank” for negotiators. Reusing this framework as a starting point is often more efficient than reinventing the wheel, as it saves time and preserves measurable benchmarks. However, today’s realities, including new political alignments, lessons from past breaches, and questions over sunset clauses and

enforcement, demand serious structural updates.

Any revival effort must therefore include new annexes or modifications: stronger verification and access provisions, clearer definitions of what happens when resolutions expire, robust economic and banking guarantees to make sanctions relief effective, and, if necessary, coordinated arrangements addressing extra-JCPOA issues.

The pragmatic way forward is neither to resurrect the 2015 deal unchanged nor to tear it up and start anew. The best course is to retain the JCPOA’s technical foundation while retrofitting it with structural reforms that patch its flaws. This approach combines a familiar, defensible baseline with the flexibility to adapt to current realities and may well be the only viable path that is both technically sound and politically negotiable.



# Iraq 2025 parliamentary elections

## How votes are won, what results could mean for Iraq’s fragile stability

By Renad Mansour  
Scholar, director of Iraq Initiative at Chatham House

ANALYSIS

Iraq’s parliamentary elections are set to take place on November 11, 2025. Yet despite the streets being adorned with campaign posters, there is little buzz in the air. Many Iraqis are expected to stay at home, having grown disillusioned with the ability of elections to deliver change in the two decades of democracy since the US-led regime change. There is already a broad consensus on the likely results of the election. Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani’s electoral list is widely seen as the frontrunner, with the ruling coalition of Shia parties under the Shia Coordination Framework expected to retain power through a consensus government that includes the major Kurdish and Sunni blocs.

However, Sudani himself is seen as unlikely to remain prime minister even if his list wins the most votes: This will instead be decided in the complex post-election government formation talks between parties. After every previous vote, the election winner has not gone on to become prime minister. Yet, despite these foreseeable outcomes, the elections remain intensely contested. The major blocs are pouring vast funds into their campaigns. As former prime minister Haider al-Abadi admits, the election “will not depend primarily on popularity; It will depend on spending money, it will depend on buying votes.” Indeed, the election is less a referendum on government performance than an opportunity for deeply entrenched party elites to recalibrate power among themselves. The seats won at the polls will serve as bargaining chips, which elites deploy alongside other levers of power — including violence and street mobilization — as parties vie for senior government positions. The outcome of this bargaining could test Iraq’s stability. The country is entering the election from a rare moment of calm, which rests on a fragile elite pact that has traded reform for order. If the process proceeds smoothly, it will reaffirm Iraq’s managed stability through another cycle of competition within the system. But if rival factions perceive an imbalance or attempt to disrupt long-standing arrangements, even momentary instability could shake Iraq’s fragile equilibrium.

How does democracy work in Iraq?

Iraq’s constitution, which was ratified by referendum in 2005, established the country as a parliamentary democracy with the Council of Representatives as its elected legislature. Every four years, registered citizens across all 19 provinces of Iraq (including those within the Kurdistan Region) are meant to vote for 329 members of the Council of Representatives. Theoretically, the Council of Representatives then nominates the president, a largely ceremonial position, who then nominates a



People drive their vehicles past electoral billboards on a street in Baghdad, Iraq, on October 14, 2025, ahead of parliamentary elections on November 11. ● AHMAD AL-RUBAYE/AFP

prime minister from the “largest bloc” within parliament. However, the largest bloc is not necessarily the bloc that won the most seats in the election, but rather the largest coalition, and the process of government formation involves protracted negotiations and bargaining between parties. While the system does not explicitly divide power by ethnicity or religious sect on paper, in practice, it remains deeply shaped by the ethno-sectarian order that was institutionalized after 2003. Politics has become tethered to identity. Shias primarily vote for Shia parties, Sunnis for Sunni ones, and Kurds for their respective Kurdish groups. Under an informal agreement in place since 2005, the prime minister has been a Shia, the president a Kurd, and the parliamentary speaker a Sunni Arab.

Who is contesting Iraq elections?

Twenty years ago, the first election featured only a few grand coalitions. The United Iraqi Alliance (UIA) represented all major Shia groups and was endorsed by Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani. The Kurdistan Alliance united the dominant Kurdish parties, and Tawafuq represented the few Sunni Arabs who did not boycott the vote. There was also the Iraq list, a secular coalition led by Ayad Allawi. Today, those once-unified blocs have fractured into a constellation of competing electoral lists. The 2025 elections feature 31 alliances, 38 political parties, and 75 independent candidates. From the United Iraqi Alliance (UIA) now emerge a host of competing Shia factions. These include Prime Minister Sudani’s Reconstruction and Development Coalition, the State of Law, led by former prime minister Nouri al-Maliki, as well as Qais al-Khazali’s al-Sadiqoun, Hadi al-Ameri’s Badr, and Ammar al-Hakim’s National State Forces Alliance. To varying degrees, some of these groups have historical and political links with Iran. These parties make up the ruling Shia Coordination Framework (SCF), an umbrella bloc of Shia parties that initially supported Sudani as prime minister. They are

contesting the elections as separate electoral lists but are expected to unite again after the election in a bid to form the largest bloc in parliament. The SCF is opposed by the influential Shia cleric Muqtada Sadr, whose movement is boycotting these elections. The Kurds, once united under the Kurdistan Alliance, now contest elections through separate banners: the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), and a range of smaller Kurdish movements. Tawafuq and the Iraq List, too, have fractured, giving rise to a variety of Sunni-led parties, including Mohammed al-Halbousi’s Taqaddum, Khamis al-Khanjar’s al-Siyada, and Muthanna al-Samarrai’s Azm Alliance.

defend them against external threats. More recently, Iraq’s protest movements — which called for an end to the ethno-sectarian system — have given rise to mobilization that uses the language of civic reform. However, in 2025, amid declining turnout, the defining feature of this election will be politicians using their positions and finances to gain votes. Those who do turn out at the polls are less likely to be ordinary citizens casting a free ballot, but rather those who are bound to the system in one way or another. Politicians are spending vast amounts this time around in what an expert at a Chatham House roundtable dubbed “the billionaires’ election”. Elections

Bloc	Electoral List	Leader
Shia-led	Reconstruction and Development Coalition	Mohammed Shia al-Sudani (Current PM)
	State of Law Coalition	Nouri al-Maliki
	National State Forces Alliance	Ammar al-Hakim
	Badr Organization	Hadi al-Ameri
	al-Sadiqoun Bloc	Qais al-Khazali
	Ibshir Ya Iraq Alliance	Humam Hamoudi
	Tasnim Alliance	Asaad al-Eidani
Sunni-led	Hoquq Movement	Hussain Moanis
	Taqaddum Party	Mohammed al-Halbousi
	al-Siyada Party	Khamis al-Khanjar
	Azm Alliance	Muthanna al-Samarrai
Kurdish-led	Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP)	Masoud Barzani
	Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK)	Bafel Talabani
	New Generation Movement	Shaswer Abdelwahid
Other	Ishraqat Kanoon	Hayder al-Mutairi
	al-Badeel	Adnan al-Zurfi

Major electoral lists competing in Iraq’s 2025 parliamentary elections ● CHATHAM HOUSE

How votes are won in Iraq: mobilizing the few Although Iraqis are theoretically free to vote for who they want, in practice, many of those who still vote do so based on patronage networks, financial or material incentives, and dependence. Elections are therefore seen by many Iraqis as an exercise in clientelism and corruption. Historically, Iraqi politicians evoked identity politics and ethno-sectarian loyalties to rally their bases, persuading voters that only one of their own can safeguard their interests or

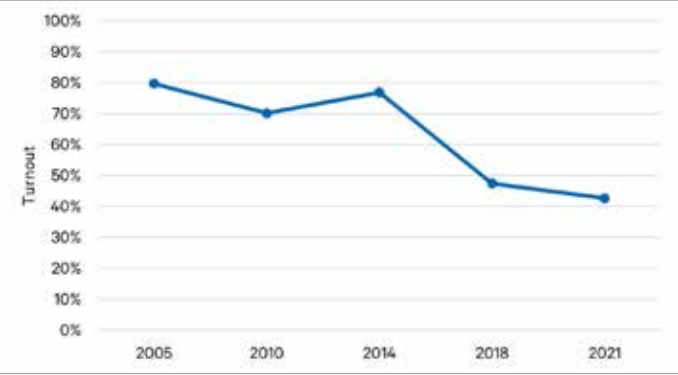
have become high-stakes investments for the elite: Strong results translate into greater leverage during post-election bargaining, where influence and access to state resources are negotiated. Recent US-imposed restrictions on Iraq’s banking sector mean many rich Iraqis are directing their capital into domestic ventures, including politics. This election has therefore become another lucrative investment opportunity. To secure votes, the incumbent prime minister often wields his executive authority and the



Sudani himself is seen as unlikely to remain prime minister even if his list wins the most votes: This will instead be decided in the complex post-election government formation talks between parties. After every previous vote, the election winner has not gone on to become prime minister. Yet, despite these foreseeable outcomes, the elections remain intensely contested. The major blocs are pouring vast funds into their campaigns.

power to dispense public sector employment. During Sudani’s three years in office, the government’s payroll has swollen dramatically, with around one million new job positions announced. Ahead of the election, Sudani issued nearly 9,000 “thank-you” letters that can aid in future promotions to state employees. The timing, however, drew sharp criticism. President Abdul Latif Rashid warned that the move breached the government’s recent pledge to safeguard electoral transparency. Then, there are the men and women in uniform — employees of the Ministry of Defense, the Ministry of Interior, and the various groups that make up the Popular Mobilisation Forces (PMF) and the Peshmerga. They cast their ballots early, on special voting days arranged just for them. Their turnout is tightly managed. Commanders keep watch. Their votes are more easily channeled toward the political parties that have given them their position and that command them. Beyond the military barracks lies another circle of voters: the clients woven into Iraq’s vast party networks. Families have learned to navigate the political seasons, understanding when loyalty is expected and when rewards are due. Parties also deploy service delivery as an electoral tool in areas where they hope to gain support. For example, Taqaddum candidate Raad al-Dulaimi launched a campaign to extend drinking water networks to underserved and Sunni communities north of Baghdad. Such initiatives, while addressing genuine infrastructure gaps, underscore how political actors increasingly take on the role of the state, delivering services to secure loyalty at the ballot box. There are also more overtly transactional ways that votes are purchased. Iraq’s thriving trade in votes has evolved for the 2025 election. A black market for biometric voter cards has emerged, with investigations revealing that cards are being bought and sold for around \$100 each. Voters typically receive half the payment upfront and the remainder on election day, in exchange for either casting a prearranged vote or abstaining altogether. Iraq’s political class is also turning to social media. Candidates and parties are said to pay influencers to post favourably about them, promote campaign narratives, or discredit rivals. Influencers told us that the going rates in this election are significantly higher than in previous years; A single post from a widely followed account

Turnout in Iraq’s previous parliamentary elections ● INTERNATIONAL IDEA/IFES







↑ Iraqi Prime Minister-designate Mohammed Shia al-Sudani (3rd-L) attends a parliament session to elect a new speaker in 2024.  
● EPA



↑ Supporters of Iraqi cleric Muqtada Sadr (not pictured) storm the parliament located in Baghdad's high-security Green Zone on July 27, 2022, to protest a rival bloc's nomination for prime minister.  
● AHMAD AL-RUBAYE/AFP

can now fetch several thousand US dollars.

Why turnout in Iraq is low

Since the high turnout of almost 80 per cent in December 2005, turnout has steadily fallen in Iraq. This reflects widespread scepticism that voting can change who governs or how they govern.

Official turnout figures in Iraq often overstate the level of public engagement. This is because the percentage is calculated based on the number of voters relative to registered voters, or those who have updated their electoral registration, and not the entire voting-age population, many of whom choose not to register. In 2025, out of roughly 30 million eligible voters, only about 21 million registered, meaning that official turnout rates exclude a third of the electorate from the calculation. For the many Iraqis who stand outside the networks of power described above, the political system feels neither representative nor responsive. After two decades of elections and promises of reform, daily life for most Iraqis remains defined by hardship and neglect. On the most basic measures of governance, the state consistently falls short. Iraq, despite its vast oil wealth, continues to rank among the poorest performers in service delivery.

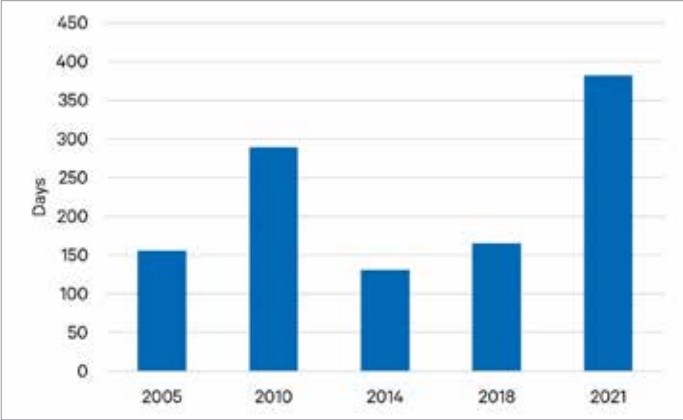
Sadr's boycott campaign will also contribute to low turnout. His movement won the largest number of seats — 73 out of 329 — in the 2021 election, only to withdraw dramatically from parliament after failing to form a "majority government" in August 2022.

Sadr has warned his followers against running on other lists and even dismissed 31 members of his organization for supporting other candidates. His position has frustrated many of his closest advisors, who argue that his organization remains one of the few with a powerful and disciplined electoral machine capable of mobilizing large numbers of voters. But Sadr is seeking to publicly position himself outside of the political order, allowing him to claim moral distance from an election in which so few Iraqis are expected to take part.

How Iraq's gov't formation works

On paper, Iraq's constitution outlines a clear timetable for forming a government after the election. In practice, each step becomes an opportunity for political blocs to extract concessions, exchange offices, and

reinforce the elite pact that underpins the system itself. Since 2005, the period from voting to the formation of a government has averaged around 224 days. Cabinet posts and senior positions are allocated according to an informal "points system," calibrated to the number of seats each party secures. The negotiations begin almost



↑ Duration of government formation in Iraq, by election year  
● CHATHAM HOUSE

immediately after the Federal Supreme Court (FSC) ratifies the election results, following the resolution of polling disputes. Within 15 days of ratification, the caretaker president must call the newly elected parliament to convene. The first parliamentary session, chaired by the oldest member, is meant to elect a speaker and two deputies by an absolute majority. However, in practice, this moment often becomes the first arena of political negotiation. Parties delay the vote and keep the session "open" for months, as happened in 2022, while they negotiate over positions and alliances.

Once a speaker is finally chosen, attention shifts to the presidency, which requires a two-thirds parliamentary vote. Here, too, political manoeuvring is intense. Since 2022, a two-thirds quorum is required for the presidential vote, effectively forcing consensus and enabling a one-third minority to block progress.

When the president is eventually elected, he has 15 days to nominate a prime minister from the "largest bloc". This itself is a source of contention. In a landmark 2010 ruling, the FSC interpreted "largest bloc" to mean one formed after elections rather than the list that won the most seats. This allowed Nouri al-Maliki's coalition to outmanoeuvre Ayad Allawi's winning alliance. That precedent, reaffirmed in 2019, institutionalized post-election bargaining as a defining feature of government formation.

Once nominated, the prime minister-designate has 30 days to present a cabinet and government programme to parliament for a vote of confidence. This stage is also dominated by negotiation. Prospective ministries are divided among the main factions, each claiming key portfolios in proportion to their parliamentary weight.

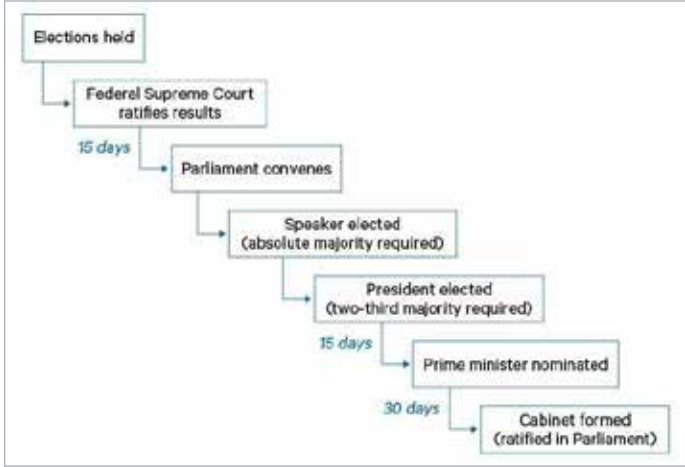
At every stage, these negotiations are not done in the parliament, but in the backrooms of power. The real decision-makers, the heads of the ruling blocs, treat electoral results as bargaining chips in negotiations over ministerial positions and almost 1,000 other senior government posts, known as "special grades". These positions offer access to vast state resources, patronage networks, and the machinery of influence. Yet, seats are only one bargain-

sion into the Green Zone amid their failure to form a government, leaving some 30 people dead. During that government formation process, the homes of politicians, including Halbousi and then-prime minister Mustafa Kadhim, were attacked. Tit-for-tat assassinations, common during election season, remain a standard feature of how the system operates.

The fragmentation in Iraq's elections is therefore less about ideological division than strategy. Each faction competes separately, seeking to measure its electoral weight and amass bargaining chips for the post-election negotiations. Once the seats have been traded for positions, these groups inevitably reconverge within their traditional ruling blocs, reassembling the same order of power in a slightly altered form. And so, the cycle endures: the same elite, reshuffled and rebranded, returns to power under the familiar guise of democratic renewal.

Encouraging participation, accountability

Iraq's post-2003 electoral system was designed to prevent the return of dictatorship. Elections were meant to serve as a periodic rebalancing mechanism, a way to recalibrate political representation every four years and to allow rival parties to contest power peacefully within an agreed constitutional framework. Competition was meant to pro-



↑ The stages of the government formation process in Iraq  
● CONSTITUTION OF THE REPUBLIC OF IRAQ

ing chip in Iraq's post-election contest for power. Elites have also mobilized supporters in the streets and even used targeted violence to preserve their influence. For example, PMF followers occupied Baghdad's Green Zone after their affiliated parties performed poorly in the 2021 elections. Less than a year later, in August 2022, the Sadrists mounted their own incur-

duce pluralism, while inclusion across ethno-sectarian lines was intended to sustain stability. The promise to the public was that, through elections, Iraqis could hold leaders to account and preserve the hard-won gains of democracy. Yet, two decades on, that system has hardened into something different. Rather than preventing authoritarianism, it is con-

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The fragmentation in Iraq's elections is less about ideological division than strategy. Each faction competes separately, seeking to measure its electoral weight and amass bargaining chips for the post-election negotiations. The very institutions designed to uphold democratic checks, transparency, and the rule of law have been captured or politicized by the same elite.

solidating a competitive political order in which elections persist, but democracy and accountability are being eroded. The very institutions designed to uphold democratic checks, transparency, and the rule of law have been captured or politicized by the same elite. Other ways of holding the elite accountable, such as protests, have been systematically weakened through co-optation, intimidation, and violence.

In the near term, no overhaul of Iraq's self-sustaining political system is likely. The SCF is expected to continue steering government formation, maintaining its central role in determining the prime minister and executive portfolios. The Sadrist movement will likely keep "one foot in and one foot out" of the system, influential enough to shape outcomes but distant enough to claim opposition. Meanwhile, the major Kurdish and Sunni parties will seek to regain ground lost during the last government formation process and secure a larger share of power.

Rebuilding trust, therefore, requires addressing Iraq's democratic deficit at its core and then restoring the connection between elections and accountability. Beyond this, Iraq needs electoral rules that make votes truly count: clearer seat allocation mechanisms, transparent candidate vetting, enforcement of rules around campaign finance and political parties, and an electoral commission insulated from political capture. Equally important is strengthening parliament's oversight capacity, enabling committees to genuinely scrutinize budgets, monitor ministries, and question senior officials without partisan obstruction.

Such steps require political will from the elite that has so far been absent. Cultivating the political will necessary for change will require a networked approach that connects civil society with reform-minded actors inside the system to generate meaningful pressure.

Without structural reform, Iraq's elections will remain arenas of elite competition rather than vehicles for citizen accountability. They will continue to offer the appearance of democratic choice without its substance. Only through genuine reform can Iraq's democracy begin to deliver what it once promised: not just the reshuffling of power, but the restoration of trust.

The full article first appeared on Chatham House.



# World Taekwondo Championships: Zandi grabs gold, ends Iran's decade-long drought

## Sports Desk

Abolfazl Zandi ended Iran's 10-year wait for a gold medal at the World Taekwondo Championships, capturing the top prize in the men's -58kg weight class in Wuxi, China, on Wednesday. A world junior champion in 2022, Zandi defeated 2023 silver medalist Georgii Gurtsiev of Belarus, who competed as a neutral athlete, in straight rounds (7-3, 12-8) to add a second medal to Iran's haul in Wuxi. Mahdi Hajimousaei had settled for silver in the men's -63kg category after a punch to his neck forced him to withdraw midway through the final against Tunisia's Mohamed Khalil Jendoubi on Saturday. Farzan Ashourzadeh, Masoud Haji-Zavvareh, and Mahdi Khodabakhshi had been the last Iranians to strike gold in the world showpiece, when Iran claimed the men's team title in 2015. The final victory rounded off an emphatic run for Zandi, who did not concede a single round

across five bouts en route to the final. The young Iranian began his campaign with a dominant 12-0, 14-2 victory over Morocco's Achraf El Mbarki before pulling off an upset (4-2, 5-5) against former world and Olympic champion Vito Dell'Aquila to reach the round of 16. Zandi then overpowered Spain's Jesús Fraile (14-1, 7-2) and followed it with a dominant last-eight win (15-2, 14-1) against Ukraine's Maksym Manenkov. He then secured his place in the final with a hard-fought 6-5, 12-9 victory over the host nation's Huang Kefen. Elsewhere on the penultimate day of the competition, Kowsar Asaseh became the sixth Iranian female contestant to finish empty-handed in Wuxi. Asaseh came out on top in back-to-back rounds (12-0, 8-2) against Cypriot Antreana Achilleos but suffered a 2-1 setback (2-0, 5-7, 5-5) against China's Chen Ximin in the -62kg event. It has been a disappointing campaign for Iranian women at the World Championships, as former

world medalist Mahla Momenzadeh (-49kg) also had her campaign after two bouts, while Saeideh Nasiri (-46kg), Olympic silver medalist Nahid Kiani (-57kg), Melika Mirhosseini (-73kg) all failed to go beyond last 16 in their respective classes. Nastaran Valizadeh, meanwhile, fell to a first-round exit in the -67kg division.

## Mobina to rescue?

Olympic bronze medalist Mobina Nematzadeh will look to end Iranian women's dreadful run when she gets her -53kg campaign underway today. Given a bye in the first round, the 20-year-old sensation will make her debut at the event against Dominican Republic's Nahomy Victor or Lebanon's Mariella Bou Habib, with the winner likely to face Turkey's Merve Dinçel – a -49kg gold medalist in 2023 – in the round of 16. Amir-Sina Bakhtiari will be the other Iranian in action on the final day, facing Colombia's Damián Gil in his opening bout in the men's -74kg contests.



Iran's Abolfazl Zandi (blue) is seen in action against Italian Vito Dell'Aquila in the men's -58kg event at the World Taekwondo Championships in Wuxi, China, on October 29, 2025.  
● WORLD TAEKWONDO

## Asian Youth Games:

# 'Envisioned for years': Iranian girls win historic handball gold



Iranian girls' handball team and coaching staff pose for a photo after securing the gold medal at the Asian Youth Games in Manama, Bahrain, on October 28, 2025.  
● IRIHF

against Satoya Kobayashi of Japan. Arman Elahi suffered a final loss on criteria (4-4) to Uzbekistan's Ulugbek Rashidov and settled for the 51kg silver, with Seyyed Taha Hashemi bagging a consolation bronze in the 60kg class – courtesy of a 9-3 win against Yokub Ibronov of Tajikistan. There were more medals for Iran in the girls' competitions on Tuesday as weightlifter Hasti Seddiqi took the clean & jerk bronze in the 63kg category, while Fatemeh Rastegar clinched a first-ever women's boxing medal for the country despite a last-four setback in the +80kg division. Meanwhile, the Iran demolished Uzbekistan 14-23 before the boys' futsal final. Sadra Choopani and Mohammad-Javad Norouzi each scored a hat-trick with Hosseinreza Yousefi finding the net twice. Amirhossein Mostasharnejad, Abolfazl Zamani, Saeid Fakhrani, Mohammadhossein Gharibi, Mohammad Karami, and Amirhossein Dahipour were also on the scoresheet for the Iranian under-17 side. Standing between Iran and the gold medal in today's final showpiece is Afghanistan, which defeated Thailand 9-1 in the other semifinal.

stand on the podium as the champions of Asia," added the head coach. The Iranian team began its campaign with an impressive 30-25 win against China and went on to beat Uzbekistan 27-24. The team then came out victorious against another Asian powerhouse in Kazakhstan (27-23) before the emphatic 32-16 victory over Thailand.

## Wrestling glory

Elsewhere in the Games on Tuesday, it was business as usual for Iranian wrestling as the country collected four medals, including double golds, on the first day of the boys' freestyle event. Parsa Tahmasbi defeated Adilet Tolobekovich Mukanbetov 6-2 in the final to capture the gold medal in the 45kg weight class, while Amirmohammad Zarrinkam walked away with the ultimate prize in the 71kg event, thanks to an 11-0 superiority win

## Sports Desk

Iranian girls made history on Tuesday by securing the handball gold at the 3rd Asian Youth Games in Bahrain. A commanding 43-26 win against India saw Khadijeh Qane's team clinch the top spot in the seven-team round-robin tournament with one game to spare, sealing a maiden continental gold for Iranian women's handball across all age groups. The Iranian young guns opened a 23-13 lead by halftime and never looked back, celebrating a fifth successive victory at Umm Al-Hassam Hall to sit atop the table with 10 points ahead of today's dead rubber against Hong Kong. Aseman Badvi spearheaded the victory with a game-high 12 goals. Hasti Arianfar posted a perfect shot conversion for her seven goals, while Reihaneh Hos-

seini contributed with six. Sana Fotouhi, Sarina Rostami, Parisan Ahmadi Khosravi, Zahra Afshari, Fatemeh Olfatnia, Hasti Sheikhalizadeh, Fatemeh Behzadi Moqaddam, Melika Safikhani, Tina Khoshnejad, Arezou Talei, Negar Babasafari, Dina Derakhshanmehr, and Dina Rezaei were the other members of the Iranian history-making squad in the Games. "Thank God for this magnificent achievement. Congratulations to all the Iranian people and the sports community, especially the entire handball family," Qane' said after the game. "We had little time to prepare for the tournament, but the players' enthusiasm made this happen. I am incredibly happy for the Iranian handball girls. This is a success I have envisioned for years. I was always confident that these girls would one day

# Al Bataeh's poor run leaves Majidi on the brink: Report

## Sports Desk

Al Bataeh head coach Farhad Majidi could be the next manager to be shown the exit door by his club in the UAE Pro League after a disappointing start to the new season, according to a report from Dubai-based newspaper Al Bayan. The 49-year-old Iranian took charge of struggling Al Bataeh midway through last season and guided the club to safety in the Emirati top flight, recording five wins and four draws from 14 games to finish 11 points clear of the relegation zone. However, Majidi's side has endured a woeful run of results this season and currently sits third from bottom in the 14-team table on three points, just two above the relegation zone. Al Bataeh was also knocked out by Shabab Al Ahli in the shootout in the UAE President's Cup last 16 on Saturday. "The wave of coach dismissals in the league continues," headlined the Al Bayan report. "Three head coaches have already been axed by their clubs. The first dismissal involved Hussein Ammouta, the Moroccan head coach of Al Jazira. The second was Ivaylo Petev, the Bulgarian boss of bottom club Baniyas, and now, a third head coach has been shown the exit door: None other than Bruno Pereira, the Portuguese coach of Dibba SCC," wrote the newspaper. "The number is expected to grow even further. Sharjah's Serbian coach Milos Milojevic is likely to be the fourth, with the shadow of dismissal looming over his head following his team's 5-0 home defeat against Iran's Tractor last time out in the AFC Champions League Elite. "Farhad Majidi, the head coach of Al Bataeh, is the fifth manager to come under pressure due to poor results. Al Bataeh currently sits in 12th place in the league table with just one win from its first six matches, with the only victory coming in the second round of matches against Khor Fakkan," Al Bayan wrote of the Iranian coach, whose team is on a five-game losing run. Next up for Majidi and his team is an away game against six-placed Al Jazira in the league on Saturday.



● alбатаehfc.ae



# Tracing trade routes, civilizations in western Iran



### Iranica Desk

The ancient site of Homan, located in Darreh Shahr, Ilam Province, holds within it secrets from the Greeks, Assyrians, and Medes. Habibollah Mahmoudian told ISNA that the Homan archaeological site, situated on the western bank of the Seymareh River, contains remains of an ancient city known as Homan. The site covers an area of about two square kilometers, showing evidence of extensive construction activities. He noted that in recent years, large-scale agricultural operations in the area have caused many of the mounds and ancient structures to be leveled and turned into farmland. However, remnants of walls and rooms with arched ceilings made of stone and gypsum can still be seen in some parts, especially in the valleys overlooking the Seymareh River and its tributaries in the Darreh Shahr region, according to ISNA.

The archaeologist explained that the site lies about four kilometers from the city of Darreh Shahr and appears to have once served as a loading area and important trade center near the bridge. Mahmoudian said the existence of communication routes and proximity to the river probably made the area one of the main transportation hubs in ancient times. Referring to archaeological findings, he mentioned that decorated and glazed pottery from later historical periods has been discovered at the site. However, this does not rule out the possibility of an earlier origin. Among the artifacts are turquoise-glazed pottery fragments whose style and manufacturing techniques suggest a much older date. Citing local witnesses, he added that until a few years ago, the remains of buildings at the Homan site were still visible, but they have now been completely destroyed. These destructions are



a serious warning for the cultural heritage of the region and require immediate attention from responsible authorities. He referred to historical theories about the area and said that, according to the French archaeologist Jacques de Morgan, the ruins

of the ancient city of Darreh Shahr and Madaktu might lie beneath this site. Evidence also suggests that opposite Madaktu, on the left bank of the Seymareh River, there was an Assyrian city called Dur Andazi, which may correspond to the area now known as Homan.

The archaeologist concluded that precise excavation and documentation of this site could open new horizons in understanding the ancient civilizations of western Iran and further highlight the importance of Darreh Shahr in the region's archaeological map. In addition to Homan, the broader Ilam Province is rich in archaeological and historical heritage, reflecting its position as a crossroads of ancient civilizations. The region's varied topography, including rivers, valleys, and mountainous terrain, contributed to the development of settlements from prehistoric times through the Medes, Achaemenids, and beyond. Numerous sites across Ilam reveal evidence of early human habitation, including rock carvings, ancient cemeteries, and remnants of fortified cities, illustrating the long-standing cultural and strategic significance of the area. Darreh Shahr itself has long been considered a hub of ancient civilization, with evidence

suggesting that it was a center of trade and administration in various historical periods. The presence of bridges, caravan routes, and river crossings in the region indicates that it played a vital role in connecting western Iran to Mesopotamia and the broader Near East. Archaeological findings, such as pottery, tools, and architectural remains, highlight the sophistication of local communities and their interactions with neighboring cultures. Preservation of these sites remains a pressing challenge. Modern urban development and agricultural expansion continue to threaten the integrity of ancient ruins, underscoring the need for systematic excavations and protective measures. Properly studied and conserved, the archaeological sites of Homan and Darreh Shahr can provide invaluable insights into the region's rich past and strengthen Ilam's profile as a key area for Iranian and Near Eastern archaeology.

## Fresh excavations begin at key historical sites of Qazvin Province

### Iranica Desk

The head of the Archaeology Department at the Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts Organization of Qazvin Province has announced the launch of a new season of scientific excavations across the region's historical sites. Mohammadreza Asgari stated that fresh archaeological work will soon commence at Ebrahimabad Hill in Abyek and Kondor Hill in Takestan, while several other sites have already undergone exploration. According to him, the excavation at Ebrahimabad Hill — a significant prehistoric settlement site — has received official authorization from the Research Institute of Cultural Heritage and is

set to begin shortly under the supervision of Fazeli from the University of Tehran. This marks the second season of work at the site, following the first phase also directed by Dr. Fazeli. Outlining the scientific objectives of the project, Asgari explained that researchers aim to study the evolution of early village life and architecture in the 6th millennium BCE, trace the development of agriculture on the Iranian Plateau through archaeobotanical and archaeozoological studies, and examine the ritual and belief systems of Neolithic and Chalcolithic communities, ISNA wrote. He further noted that the upcoming excavation at Kondor Hill in Takestan is primarily administrative, focusing on defin-

ing the site's official boundaries and protection zones. Once these limits are determined, the team will proceed with detailed stratigraphic excavations as part of the second season of work. Asgari also pointed to ongoing excavations at Qestin Lar Hill, currently being led by Kambiz Kabiri, as part of the broader efforts to prepare the site for potential inclusion on the UNESCO World Heritage List. Reviewing the progress of archaeological projects conducted this year, he highlighted that the sixth season of excavations at Qal'eh Kord Cave has been completed under the joint supervision of Vahdati-Nasab and Milad Hashemi. The main focus of this campaign was the identification and study of Paleolithic sites in

the area. He said that discoveries from previous excavation seasons at Qal'eh Kord have revealed evidence of Neanderthal presence, dated to approximately 400,000–450,000 years ago. Research conducted last year suggested that the hominins at the site had already evolved beyond the Neanderthal stage, while recent work has explored even older cultural layers. Samples collected during these excavations are now being analyzed in laboratories to refine their chronological context. The official went on to mention the excavation of the Shakin Mine, explaining that the project's primary goal was to collect samples for laboratory analysis. The Shakin Mine, he noted, has

been continuously utilized from prehistoric times up to the present day, making it a unique site for understanding long-term patterns of resource exploitation. He also referred to the Meshkin Hill excavation, another key project undertaken this year. The work at this site has spanned two seasons — the first conducted as a training program for archaeology students from the University of Tehran, and the second focused on defining the site's boundaries and protection zones. Additionally, Asgari reported that excavations were carried out at the Lotfali Khan site, located within the residential area of Avaj. The objective of this project was to determine the extent and

boundaries of the archaeological area. During the course of excavation, archaeologists uncovered Bronze Age cultural layers dating back to the pre-Islamic era — a discovery regarded as one of the most significant findings of the current archaeological season. Discussing the next stages of work, Asgari explained, "After completing the field studies and preparing the preliminary reports, the documents will be submitted to the Ministry of Cultural Heritage for final approval. Once approved, the site boundaries and protection zones will be officially ratified. All excavations conducted this year have completed their fieldwork phases and were supervised by designated research teams."







## Semnan hosts first Silk Road tourism conference

# Historic corridor hailed as gateway to Semnan's int'l tourism future, official says



### Arts & Culture Desk

Iran's central city of Semnan hosted its first International Tourism Conference on the Silk Road, launching a drive to position itself as a key destination on the ancient trade route and a hub for international cultural exchange. The forum at Semnan University gathered senior Iranian tourism officials, including Ali-Asghar Shalbafian, head of the Investment and Economic Affairs Center at the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts, Tourism and Handicrafts; Masoud Shojaei,

Ali-Asghar Shalbafian, head of the Investment and Economic Affairs Center at the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts speaks during first International Tourism Conference on the Silk Road held at Semnan University on October 29, 2025. [semnan.ac.ir](http://semnan.ac.ir)

director-general of International Tourism Marketing and Development; and Atousa Momeni, director of UNESCO's Regional Center for Intangible Heritage Studies in West and Central Asia. The conference, titled 'Opportunities and Prospects, Silk Road Tourism in Semnan,' marks the city's bid to represent Iran within the International Union of Tourism Cities (IUTC), a 40-member network linking historic Silk Road destinations, half of them in China. "This is a unique opportunity," Shalbafian told participants. "The Silk Road can be the brand and axis of Semnan's tourism identity." Shojaei highlighted Semnan's natural and cultural diversity, "from desert to mountain", and its proximity to the Asiatic cheetah's habitat as key draws for international visitors. He said the ministry will create a Net-

work of Iranian Silk Road Cities to strengthen regional cooperation and global visibility. "Countries around the world are using tourism to shape their image," he said. "Visualization helps tourism soar." UNESCO's Momeni called the Silk Road "a highway of the cultural biosphere," describing it as a living bridge among civilizations. She urged community-based initiatives and good conservation practices to keep the route's legacy alive. Stretching about 600 kilometers, Semnan contains the longest continuous section of the Silk Road in Iran and the country's densest concentration of caravanserais and nationally registered heritage sites, several under review for UNESCO listing. Officials say the city aims to develop a coherent tourism brand linking its historical, ecological, and cultural resources.

## Iranian-born maestro Rahbari returns to lead Russia's Mariinsky Symphony

### Arts & Culture Desk

Celebrated Iranian-born conductor Ali Rahbari will once again take the baton at Russia's storied Mariinsky Symphony Orchestra from November 1, the Mariinsky Theatre said, marking the start of his fifth artistic season as the venue's permanent guest conductor. Now in his 70s, Rahbari remains one of the few Middle Eastern maestros to hold a long-term post with a major Russian orchestra. His return underscores the Mariinsky's commitment to keeping its stage open to international talent despite political headwinds, while for Rahbari, it extends a collaboration that began in

2021 under artistic director Valery Gergiev, IRNA reported. During his two-week residency in St. Petersburg, Rahbari will lead two major programmes. On November 8, he will conduct Beethoven's Symphony No. 4 and Mahler's Symphony No. 4, while the November 15 concert, billed as 'Spanish Night,' will feature works by Chabrier, Lalo, Ravel and Rimsky-Korsakov. He will be joined by acclaimed Russian soloists Maxim Fedotov on violin and soprano Anastasia Kalagina, both regulars on the Mariinsky stage. Rahbari, born in Tehran in 1948 and trained in Vienna, has conducted over 120 orchestras world-



wide, including the Berlin Philharmonic, the Czech Philharmonic and the Brussels Radio and Television Philharmonic. He was first invited to the Mariinsky in 2021 to conduct works by Shostakovich and Rimsky-Korsakov, and was soon after appointed its first permanent guest conductor. Beyond the podium, Rah-

bari has used his Mariinsky tenure to introduce several Iranian artists to international audiences, including violinist Amin Ghaffari and opera singer Reza Fekri. Critics in Russia describe his interpretation as "deeply lyrical yet sharply disciplined," a blend that has become a hallmark of his performances in St. Petersburg.

## Iran proposes naming BRICS Literary Award after national poets

### Arts & Culture Desk

Iran has proposed that the annual BRICS Literary Award be named after a national poet from each member country, an initiative unveiled during the 2025 shortlist announcement in Jakarta. The suggestion came from Hamid Nazarkhah Alisaraei, poet, writer and Iran's national coordinator for the BRICS Literary Network. The move underscores Tehran's aim to link literature with "cultural diplomacy" and strengthen Iran's presence in international literary circles. For Iran, the prize could honor classical figures such as Hafez, Sa'adi or Rumi, reinforcing Persian cultural heritage while fostering cross-border dialogue, IRNA reported.

"The BRICS Literary Award is the first international prize focused on cultural, human and indigenous values, independent of politics," Alisaraei told delegates. "We propose that each year the award bear the name of a national poet from a member country." He added that translating shortlisted works into all official BRICS languages would "widen dialogue" among the bloc's writers. This year's shortlist features ten authors from BRICS members and partner nations, including Mansour Alimoradi for Iran, alongside nominees from Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, the UAE, Ethiopia, Indonesia and Egypt. Iran's other entrants for the first edition were Reza Amirkhani and Majid Gheisari, showing the country's

strong literary footprint. The final winner will be announced on November 27 in Khabarovsk, Russia. Founded in November 2024 at Moscow's inaugural Forum of Traditional Values, the BRICS Literary Award honors works reflecting the spiritual and cultural identity of member nations. Each country may nominate up to three writers, with shortlisted works translated to support cross-cultural readership. Russian Union of Writers co-chair Vadim Terekhin said the award provides "a forum for mutual understanding and cultural empathy" among contemporary authors. "It strengthens connections and deepens respect for each nation's literary heritage," he added.

## Croatian Drago Štambuk's trilingual poetry unites cultures



### Arts & Culture Desk

The gallery of Saless Publications, one of Iran's most respected publishing houses, hosted a literary gathering for the launch of 'Damavand / Wounded by Flowers,' a trilingual collec-

tion of poems by Croatian poet and ambassador Drago Štambuk. The volume, translated into Persian by Ebtehaj Navaei, Mahmood Dehaghi, and Mohammad Javadi, gathers selections from three of Štambuk's earlier works published in Iran, alongside an exclusive bilingual interview with the author. Opening the event, Peyman Sarmasti, the host, called the gathering "a meeting of words, art, and thought in peaceful harmony," describing Štambuk as "a poet and philosopher who transcends worlds and reminds us that beauty in language brings hearts closer than distance can separate."

Writer Hossein Khatibi, who co-edited the selection with Siavash Soufinejad, said the launch symbolized "a journey of words that connects continents and civilizations," calling the collection "a map of the soul in motion." He highlighted Štambuk's dual life as a poet and diplomat whose travels reveal "the essence of humanity through love, languages, and culture." Mahmood Dehaghi, university professor and one of the translators, praised the poet's fusion of mythic imagery with rhythmic musicality, describing his work as "a blend of classical and modernist sensibil-

ities marked by deep compassion for humankind." Štambuk, he noted, "sees the world as a blurred mirror, impenetrable yet full of reflected truths that only poetry can reveal." Štambuk and Khatibi read poems in Croatian, English, and Persian, including 'Damavand,' '1918,' 'Wrist,' 'Nordwind,' 'Black Wave,' and 'Zefir,' before an audience of about 150 poetry enthusiasts. The event drew nearly 20 ambassadors, Masoud Habibi, Deputy Minister of Culture and Student Affairs at the Iranian Ministry of Health, and renowned writer-director Masoud Foorutan, among other public figures and journalists.

## Iranian 'Tadji' to compete at Ireland Foyle Film Festival

### Arts & Culture Desk

The Iranian short film 'Tadji,' written and directed by Mehdi Borjian, was selected for competition at the 38th edition of the Foyle Film Festival in Derry/Londonderry in Ireland, slated for November 19 to 30. The festival, which boasts accreditation from the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (Oscar) and the British Academy of Film and Television Arts (BAFTA), offers short-film winners a direct route to both awards, ISNA reported. 'Tadji' portrays the ordeal of a factory worker named Tadji, described as "strong-willed"

and grappling with a critical decision amid personal hardship. The ensemble cast features Fatemeh Neyshabouri, Morteza Khanjani, Shamila Tabesh, Fatemeh Hasani, Rouhieh Mahmoudi, Faezeh Vafaei, Elaheh Mochani, Ali Bagheri, and Ahad Shamloo, with veteran actor Gholamreza Ramezani in a guest appearance and child actor Jani-ar Eskandarian. Borjian said the story is rooted in real-life labor tensions and seeks to capture the "unyielding resolve" of a woman caught between survival and dignity. Festival organizers emphasize that the film sched-



ule will include screenings across the festival's Light in Motion short-film competition, Northern Ireland's only Oscar- and BAFTA-qualifying competition. Festival director Bernie McLaughlin described the selection as a "vital bridge" between Iranian independent cinema and global recognition.