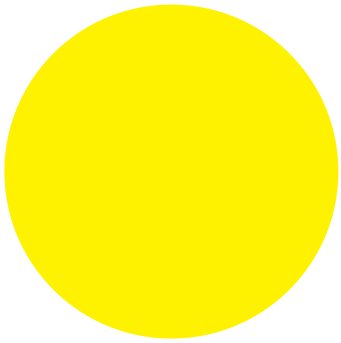




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How India and Iran are reviving civilizational ties

By Janvi Sonaiya
Senior Indian journalist

PERSPECTIVE
EXCLUSIVE

When India's Culture and Tourism Minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat sat down with his Iranian counterpart, Reza Salehi-Amiri, on the sidelines of the 26th UN Tourism General Assembly in Riyadh, the symbolism ran far deeper than polite diplomacy. This wasn't just another bilateral photo-op, it was the rekindling of one of Asia's oldest cultural partnerships, now being re-framed through the lens of tourism, soft power, and strategic connectivity. For centuries, India and Iran have been bound by history, poetry, architecture, and the gentle rhythm of civilizational exchange. The Persian influence on Indian art, language, and governance; from Mughal architecture to Urdu poetry; remains embedded in the subcontinent's cultural DNA. Conversely, India's spiritual traditions, culinary exchanges, and educational

interactions have long fascinated Iranian scholars and travelers. Now, in a post-pandemic world where tourism is increasingly seen as an instrument of diplomacy, both nations appear intent on transforming that shared legacy into a modern partnership. According to Iran's Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts, India has been designated as a "strategic tourism partner", a phrase that signals intent beyond cultural niceties. Tehran's tourism diversification plan, which seeks to attract 20 million foreign visitors annually by 2030 (up from around 5 million in 2023), recognizes India's vast outbound tourism market of over 27 million travelers per year as a critical growth source. Tourism isn't merely about nostalgia; it's about economics. Pre-pandemic, Indian tourists spent an estimated \$25 billion abroad annually (UNWTO data), a figure that's now rebounding. Even a fractional redirection of that flow toward Iran could help Tehran's economy diversify away from oil and sanctions dependence. For India, encouraging inbound Iranian travelers and cultural events could deepen peo-

ple-to-people ties and diversify its own visitor base beyond traditional Western markets. Both nations have reasons to act now. Iran's strategic position between the Middle East and Central Asia, and India's growing economic and cultural footprint, create a convergence of interests that tourism can humanize. While governments debate pipelines and ports, travelers bridge those divides more naturally. No discussion of India-Iran relations is complete without mentioning the Chabahar Port; a project that symbolizes connectivity, commerce, and confidence-building. Located in southeastern Iran on the Gulf of Oman, Chabahar is India's answer to Pakistan's Gwadar Port (operated by China). Through India's investment in developing two terminals, Shahid Beheshti and Shahid Kalantari, Chabahar serves as India's logistical lifeline to Afghanistan and Central Asia, bypassing Pakistani territory. In May 2024, India and Iran signed a 10-year agreement granting India operational rights for the Shahid Beheshti terminal, with India Ports

Global Limited (IPGL) committing an additional \$370 million in investment and credit. The port isn't just a trade corridor; it's a potential tourism and cultural gateway. Once passenger and cruise services are developed, Chabahar could facilitate spiritual and cultural circuits linking Indian pilgrims to Iran's historic cities like Mashhad, Shiraz, and Isfahan, and even onward to Central Asia. Tourism officials in both countries have quietly discussed incorporating Chabahar into broader heritage and maritime tourism routes connecting coastal Gujarat and Mumbai with Iran's ancient port cities. This kind of soft connectivity aligns perfectly with India's "Neighborhood First" and "Connect Central Asia" policies, while helping Iran tap into India's massive middle-class travel market. Iran's Minister Reza Salehi-Amiri put it aptly: "We must make this huge historical capital the basis for tourism development and cultural cooperation." Indeed, the shared civilizational narrative, poets like Rumi, emperors like Akbar, and cities like Hyderabad that still echo Persian aesthetics, offers a ready-

made brand for tourism diplomacy. The path ahead, however, demands pragmatism. Visa facilitation, direct air routes between major cities (Delhi-Tehran, Mumbai-Shiraz), and digital promotion campaigns will be crucial. Both countries can also leverage multilateral platforms like the UN World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) and BRICS+ to fund and market joint heritage circuits. If done right, tourism can become the cultural Chabahar, a people's corridor that reinforces what geopolitics alone cannot. It would embody the new grammar of diplomacy: where travelers, not just trade envoys, carry the weight of bilateral goodwill. With both nations facing the twin challenges of image-building and diversification, this cultural bridge offers a rare win-win. From the verses of Hafez that still echo in Delhi's Dargahs to the Sanskrit manuscripts preserved in Iran's Qom libraries, the story of India and Iran is one of mutual enrichment. Now, with the promise of tourism and the port of Chabahar, that story might find a modern sequel, written not in treaties, but in travel itineraries.

Iran open to negotiations with US; conditions not to change: *Leader's aide*

Tehran denies any talks with Washington despite Trump claim

International Desk

Head of Iran's Strategic Council on Foreign Relations Kamal Kharrazi said on Tuesday that Iran is ready to resume nuclear talks with the United States based on equal footing and mutual respect while insisting that Tehran will not budge on its positions. "They have to make the first move to show that they are ready to engage with us on the conditions that we put... it has to be based on equal footing and mutual respect," said Kamal Kharrazi, who is also an adviser to Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei. "The agenda would be prepared in advance to ensure the clarity of substance and the process of discussions." "Unfortunately, President (Donald) Trump does not believe in diplomatic engagement but rather prefers to use force to achieve his objectives," he added. Later on Tuesday, Trump claimed that Iran is "very much" signaling interest in striking a deal with the US over its nuclear program. "They'd like very much to make a deal with us, and they call us, and we'll end up probably doing that,

that's Iran," Trump said in a room filled with high-profile guests at a White House dinner honoring Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman.

"I am totally open to it, and we're talking to them, and we start a process." He added, "It would be a nice thing to have a deal with Iran," suggesting that Saudi support could facilitate negotiations.

Iran sharply rejected any notion of negotiations on Wednesday, directly contradicting Trump's claim that talks were underway. "There is no process of negotiation between Iran and the United States," Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baqaei told reporters in Tehran on Wednesday. Baqaei reiterated Iran's long-standing position that engaging with the US is illogical while Washington continues to prioritize military pressure over diplomacy.

No change in Iran's conditions

Kharrazi, indicated that Iran's conditions for a rapprochement with Washington have not changed since the US and Israel struck its nuclear facilities in June, adding that uranium en-



Head of Iran's Strategic Council on Foreign Relations Kamal Kharrazi (R) speaks during an interview with CNN's Fred Pleitgen in Tehran, Iran, on November 18, 2025.
© CNN

richment will continue because the country needs the fuel for its power plants and for medical purposes. Tehran's ballistic missile program, which he said is expanding, will also be off the negotiating table. "It is only the nuclear issue we will discuss with the United States," he said. The Trump administration and Iran were in the middle of talks to settle their dispute in June when Israel launched a surprise

attack on Iran, eventually drawing in Washington, which carried out strikes on three Iranian nuclear facilities, the first direct US attack inside Iran. Kharrazi said the "degree of enrichment," not enrichment itself, would be the focus of potential negotiations with the US.

Iran ready for any confrontation

Asked if he is concerned about

another military confrontation with the US or Israel, he said, "Everything is possible. But we are ready for that." Back in June, Washington had reportedly made a proposal for a nuclear deal under which the US would invest in Iran's civilian nuclear power program and join a consortium that would oversee the enrichment of low-level uranium inside Iran for an unspecified amount of

time. That potential consortium would be expected to include Middle Eastern nations and the UN's nuclear watchdog. At the time, Iranian officials repeatedly said they are open to the idea of an enrichment consortium but insisted Iran must be able to keep control of its own enrichment capabilities. Asked if there is room to reach an understanding with the US on Iran's nuclear program, including on a potential consortium, Kharrazi said, "I think so."

"If there would be genuine negotiations between Iran and the United States, there are ways and means (of) how to ensure that Iran can continue its enrichment and at the same time assure the others that it's not going to look for nuclear weapons."

Kharrazi also had a message for Trump.

"Start with a positive approach with Iran. If it will be positive, certainly it will be reciprocated. But for that, they (the US) have to refrain from any force against Iran," he said. "They have tried that and they now understand that it's not acceptable and it's not workable."

Grossi confirms IAEA inspectors return to Iran

International Desk

Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Rafael Grossi said on Wednesday that the agency's inspectors have returned to Iran to resume work at some Iranian nuclear sites.

Grossi said the inspectors have carried out inspections and design information verifications at many of the facilities unaffected by June's strikes by Israel and the United States.

"But more engagement is needed to restore full inspections, including at the affected sites, so that Iran fulfils its obligations under its NPT Agreement. I am in regular contact with Tehran and urge Iran to facilitate Agency access at its affected facilities and especially of its inventories of Low Enriched Uranium (LEU) and High Enriched Uranium (HEU), whose status needs urgently to be addressed," he said.

His remarks came as Europe's top three powers and the US have



Rafael Grossi
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launched a new campaign against Iran at the UN atomic agency.

The US, Britain, France and Germany have submitted a draft resolution

to this week's meeting of the IAEA's 35-nation Board of Governors demanding answers and access from Iran over its bombed nuclear sites and enriched

uranium stock. The draft, which is expected to be voted on by the board, stresses that it is "imperative" for Iran to comply with its obligations under the nuclear non-proliferation treaty.

It follows an IAEA report on Iran sent to member states last week.

The report claimed that Tehran has still not let inspectors into the nuclear sites Israel and the US bombed in June and that accounting for the uranium stock is "long overdue."

Iran's warning

Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister Kazem Gharibabadi on Sunday warned the European powers that if they get through their draft resolution, Iran would make a "fundamental revision" in its interactions with the agency and issues related to the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

Tensions between Iran and the UN nuclear watchdog have repeatedly flared in recent years, with relations being

further strained in the wake of a 12-day aggression in June that saw Israeli and US strikes on key Iranian nuclear facilities.

Iran suspended its cooperation with the IAEA after the 12-day aggression against Iran as per a law adopted by Parliament.

Tensions escalated as Iranian officials said the IAEA effectively provided cover for the strikes by declaring the country in violation of its non-proliferation obligations shortly before the bombardment and then failing to condemn the aggression.

Iran emphasizes that the basis of cooperation with the IAEA is the law passed by the Parliament and the requirements of the Safeguards Agreement. The Iranian Foreign Ministry has reiterated that Tehran remains a member of the NPT and the interaction with the agency will proceed solely within the legal framework of the safeguards and with the guidance of Iran's Supreme National Security Council.

Iran: UN Gaza resolution undermines fundamental rights of Palestinians

International Desk

Iran's Foreign Ministry in a statement on Tuesday censured a US-drafted resolution adopted by the UN Security Council that imposes a foreign guardianship mechanism on the Gaza Strip, warning it undermines the fundamental rights of the Palestinian people.

The Foreign Ministry said the resolution's drafters "consciously ignored" the central role of the United Nations and previous UN resolutions concerning Palestine.

Resolution 2803, passed on Monday, endorses the establishment of an "International Stabilization Force (ISF)" in Gaza under a 20-point plan devised by US President Donald Trump, who says

the plan is aimed at ending the Israeli regime's war of genocide on Gaza that began in October 2023.

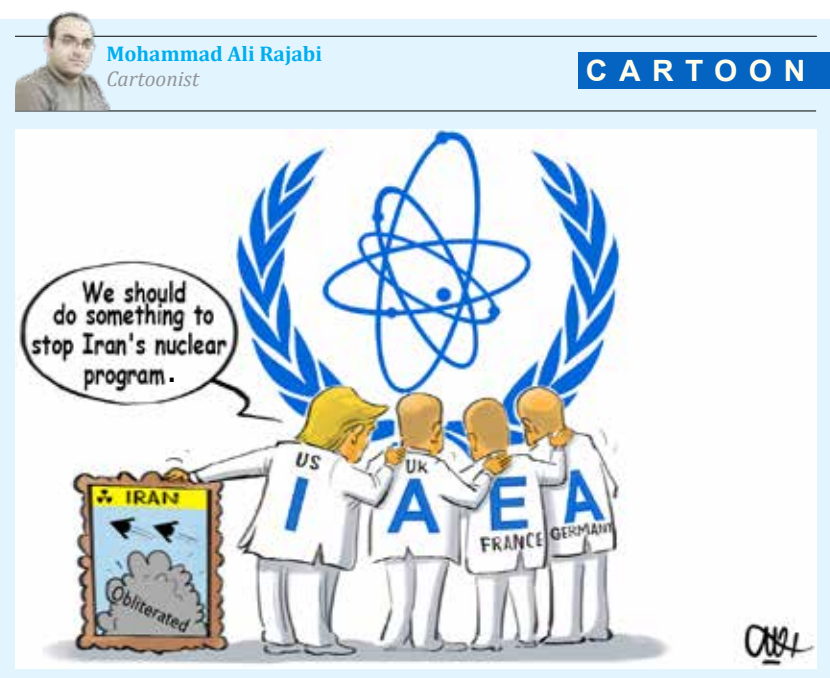
The ministry expressed "serious concern" about the resolution, reiterating Iran's support for any regional or international initiative aimed at ending the Israeli genocide and crimes in Gaza, facilitating humanitarian aid, and ensuring the complete withdrawal of occupying forces.

According to the statement, parts of the resolution effectively impose a "guardianship system" on Gaza, stripping "the Palestinian people of their fundamental rights, especially the right to self-determination and the establishment of an independent Palestinian state with Al-Quds as its capital."

The ministry underlined that any international forces deployed must operate strictly under full UN supervision, with responsibilities limited to monitoring the ceasefire and overseeing humanitarian aid delivery and distribution.

The statement also emphasized the responsibility of the international community, especially the guarantors of the ceasefire agreement, "to force Israel to end the occupation of Palestine and completely withdraw from the Gaza Strip", noting that no decision can and should distort this.

Hamas and Israel agreed last month to the US-brokered Gaza ceasefire, aimed at ending the latter's two-year-long genocidal war against Palestinians in the besieged territory.



Tehran, Beijing agree to draft housing, urban development roadmap



Economy Desk

Tehran and Beijing agreed to draft a roadmap and action plan on housing and urban development during a meeting between Iran's minister of roads and urban development and China's housing minister in latter's capital. The two sides expressed readiness to exchange knowledge and experience in construction, urban development and building resilience. Speaking with Ni Hong on the sidelines

Iran's Minister of Roads and Urban Development Farzaneh Sadegh Malvajerd (4th L), at the head of a delegation, meets China's Housing Minister Ni Hong in Beijing, China, on November 19, 2025.
● [mrud.ir](#)

of the second China-Europe Rail Connectivity Forum, Farzaneh Sadegh Malvajerd called for establishing new areas of cooperation in housing and construction and said regular bilateral meetings are essential for advancing joint progress, IRNA reported. Sadegh Malvajerd said China is a leading country in transport and housing infrastructure construction and reiterated Iran's readiness to draw on China's expertise in construction, urban development and structural reinforcement. She added that a memorandum of understanding on housing cooperation will be signed during the Iranian president's upcoming visit to China, describing the talks as the start of drafting a roadmap and cooperation framework for the housing and construction sectors.

She hailed social housing and rental housing as important areas of collaboration and said Iran will provide facilities to interested Chinese companies. The minister also stressed the importance of technology transfer and experience-sharing in social housing and industrialized construction. Sadegh Malvajerd said another area of cooperation is transferring technology to Iran for prefabricated housing construction. She noted that joint research between the two countries' housing and urban development institutions, issuing joint certifications, sustainable urban development, construction with a focus on renewable energy and water resources, and improving resilience against natural disasters and fires were also discussed with the Chinese minister.

Azerbaijan eyes Shahid Rajaei Port investment Iran, Russia set 5m ton Caspian cargo target: *Deputy minister*

Economy Desk

The Iranian deputy minister of roads and urban development announced on Wednesday that the Republic of Azerbaijan has expressed clear interest in investing in Iran's Shahid Rajaei Port in Hormozgan Province as preliminary negotiations are already underway. This is while Iran and Russia have set a joint target of moving five million tons of cargo annually through the Caspian Sea route.



"Azerbaijan is interested in investing in Shahid Rajaei Port, and we are fully prepared to facilitate this. This collaboration will undoubtedly increase transit volumes between our two countries," Saeed Rasouli, head of Iran's Ports and Maritime Organization, told reporters on the sidelines of the meeting of governors from Caspian Sea littoral states in Rasht, IRNA reported. "We have had discussions on this matter," he added. Rasouli said that during a recent visit to Azerbaijan, Iranian officials received detailed assessments of that country's port infrastructure, revealing mutual interest in expanding freight and tourism cooperation. "There is strong appetite on both sides to develop cargo and tourism links — an avenue that can significantly boost bilateral trade," he said.

Separately, Rasouli confirmed that Iran and Russia, under a transport cooperation roadmap signed last year by their respective ministers, have committed to handling five million tons of cargo annually via the Caspian Sea route by 2025. "Both nations must expand their loading, unloading, and storage capacities, and modernize their maritime fleets," he said, citing the comprehensive agreement covering maritime, rail, road, and air transport corridors. According to the official, Iran's northern ports currently possess a combined cargo handling capacity of 30 million tons annually, yet less than one-third of that capacity is utilized. "Without new investment, these northern ports sit underused," Rasouli noted. "We must optimize this existing asset — espe-

cially given the declining water levels in the Caspian Sea. We cannot afford to waste this infrastructure. The key is deeper connectivity with other Caspian nations to unlock this potential." The gathering in the northern city of Rasht in Gilan Province, attended by governors from all Caspian littoral provinces, was highlighted by Iran's Minister of Roads and Urban Development Farzaneh Sadegh Malvajerd as uniquely positioned to drive tangible outcomes. "This forum has a distinctive advantage over other international forums," the minister said. He said that the event stands out among international gatherings because "governors of the Caspian littoral provinces are present, and they can take operational steps based on the decisions made and play a role in expanding cooperation."

Seoul pledges long-term ties with Tehran at wastewater project launch



South Korea's Ambassador to Iran, Kim Jun-pyo, speaks at the inauguration of the first rural wastewater project in Sistan and Baluchestan, on November 19, 2025.
● [IRNA](#)

Economy Desk

South Korea's Ambassador to Iran, Kim Jun-pyo, said Seoul will continue its environmental and social cooperation with Iran as he spoke at the inauguration of the first rural wastewater project in Sistan and Baluchestan, held in the Kohak rural complex in Zahak County. Kim said the Kohak wastewater scheme is a successful example of effective and friendly cooperation between Iran and South Korea, IRNA reported. He stressed that his country will maintain its support for joint environmental and social initiatives, saying, "It is gratifying that the Korean government has been able to contribute to improving environmental conditions, increasing local resilience and enhancing public services." "We hope more joint projects in water, the environment and health will be implemented in the near future." Kim said South Korea attaches importance to its strategic partnership with Iran, especially in humanitarian and social sectors, and "welcomes new projects that help im-

prove the lives of people, particularly children and families." He added that Sistan and Baluchestan requires diverse forms of infrastructural support and said developing water and wastewater systems in underserved regions is "fundamental" to improving health and quality of life. Addressing the ceremony, Monika Oledzka Nilsson, UNICEF deputy representative in Iran, said the Kohak project is part of a successful collective effort capable of creating lasting change for children and families. She said joint cooperation among UNICEF, the Energy Ministry, the South Korean government and local authorities in water, sanitation and education projects reflects a shared commitment to improving living standards in less-developed areas, adding that the results clearly show a direct and positive impact on children's well-being. The Kohak rural wastewater project — serving a population of 10,000 in the Zahak area of Sistan — is the first rural wastewater initiative in the southeastern province carried out with the cooperation of UNICEF and the South Korean embassy.

Iran, Azerbaijan discuss satellite, cyber, data-transit cooperation Baku signals readiness for deeper ICT ties

Economy Desk

Iran's Minister of Information and Communications Technology (ICT), Sattar Hashemi, met Azerbaijan's Digital Development and Transport Minister Rashad Nabiyeu on the sidelines of the 2025 World Telecommunication Development Conference in Baku, where the two officials discussed satellite cooperation, spectrum coordination and expansion of re-

gional data-transit routes. According to IRNA, Hashemi said digital and infrastructure cooperation forms "an important part of the strategic interests of both countries," adding that closer technical alignment between Tehran and Baku could support convergence in space-based services and spectrum management. According to the minister, one of the main issues in bilateral

cooperation is "frequency procurement and signal management" in border areas, a field that has faced challenges for years. He noted that appointing a special representative to pursue the matter enabled both sides to finalize key agreements and open the way for broader regulatory cooperation. He expressed Iran's preparedness to expand cooperation in satellite technology, infrastruc-

ture development, data-transit corridors and cybersecurity. Establishing stable strategic data-transit routes along the North-South and East-West corridors would benefit both countries, he added, and Tehran welcomes further collaboration. Nabiyeu also welcomed work on a draft memorandum of understanding in the information and communications technology sector, saying, "This doc-



ument could be signed during a meeting of the presidents of the two countries." He also voiced Azerbaijan's readiness to work with Iran on Earth-observation satellites,

cybersecurity and joint space projects, adding that, "Purchasing satellite imagery and cooperating in space-based businesses are among Baku's areas of interest."

Araghchi: Calls on Iran for negotiation have been reinitiated

Diplomacy remains definitive modus for resolution

CONFERENCE

On Sunday, November 16, 2026, Abbas Araghchi, Iran's minister of foreign affairs, took part in a specialized panel of an international conference entitled "International Law Under Attack, Aggression, and Defense," hosted by Kazem Sajjadpour in Tehran. Earlier in the day, the foreign minister also delivered the opening speech of the conference, which was then followed by four panels comprised of Iranian officials and experts from within and without the country. A translation of the full text of Araghchi's panel discussion with Sajjadpour follows below.

SAJJADPOUR: In light of the American assault upon diplomacy, what trajectory does diplomacy now assume, and what is the prospect of resolving issues through diplomacy? Has diplomacy been entirely annihilated, or does it persist as one of the oldest institutions of human existence for the resolution of disputes?

ARAGHCHI: I am convinced that the recent military assault against Iran, which in reality constituted a kind of assault against diplomacy as well, and the first missile discharged by the United States and Israel essentially struck the table of negotiations between Iran and the United States. From one perspective, it created such a situation; yet from another, this very war revealed that no avenue exists except diplomacy. They attained none of their objectives; rather, they were defeated. If their objective consisted of annihilating Iran's nuclear program, this objective did not materialize. I have repeatedly stated: installations may be destroyed and obliterated, yet technology does not vanish through aerial bombardment, and more importantly, the resolute volition of nations does not vanish through aerial bombardment. Our installations were destroyed, yet our technology remains intact, and our determination has become even more adamant.

Now, the solicitation for negotiation has likewise been reinitiated, and this is natural because they did not attain what they intended regarding Iran's nuclear program through military assault, and this is precisely what we had repeatedly asserted: the Iranian nuclear issue possesses no military solution. They experimented with it and discerned that this solution is not valid. It is not the case that what one has failed to attain in war can be acquired through negotiation, nor can one impose one's demands. The first step in diplomacy and negotiation is that we accept that negotiation diverges from dictation and coercion. In negotiation, exchange and mutual interests are on the agenda. It is not the case that one side can attain whatever it desires. Negotiation and diplomacy must possess a rational and logical foundation and must be conducted with seriousness.

If such conditions for negotiation are furnished, the Islamic Republic of Iran has demonstrated that it is perpetually prepared for negotiation. We have never abandoned the negotiation table; it has invariably been our interlocutors who have betrayed the negotiation table. Even in the 2015 JCPOA agreement, the Islamic Republic of Iran negotiated in good faith, agreed with good faith, and implemented in good faith. Yet the United States, without any rationale, while Iran fully adhered to its commitments, withdrew from the agreement and betrayed diplomacy — betrayed an agree-

ment that was the product of diplomacy and which the entire world celebrated in 2015.

This time as well, this betrayal manifested in a worse form and through an assault against Iran. It was not Iran that absented itself from diplomacy; it was the United States and the Western countries that perpetually sought the imposition of their inclinations throughout the negotiation. In my estimation, diplomacy can still remain alive and remains the definitive modus for the resolution of disputes, yet one must adhere to its criteria, regulations, and principles.

In light of post-war conditions, how do you perceive the general prospect of Iran, Iran and the region, and Iran and the world?

Before addressing that, I wish to elucidate once more a point connected to the previous question. As I stated, the Islamic Republic of Iran is committed to peaceful resolution and the utilization of diplomacy and discourse for the resolution of issues, particularly in the region. In my previous statement, I mentioned two solutions: a solution grounded in coercion, aggression, and violence, and a solution grounded in discourse and diplomacy. The choice of the Islamic Republic of Iran is the second solution.

However, regarding the prospect, I perceive the prospect and future of the Islamic Republic of Iran, within the movement we have initiated in the region and at the international level, as exceedingly promising and affirmative. It is a reality that we succeeded in traversing an exceedingly arduous and intense war with success.

Our war constituted the defense against the assaults and aggression of the United States and the Zionist regime, with the collaboration of a large number of other countries that I do not wish to name, yet some of them confessed that they assisted both in defense and, occasionally, in the offensive actions of the forces of the Israeli regime. Their objectives in this



war were in no manner realized. Yet on the 12th day of the war, they conveyed a message that they desired an unconditional cease-fire. This occurred because they were unsuccessful in attaining all their objectives, and Iran succeeded on the first day of the war, within several hours, in preparing itself for defense and conducting a very robust defense of itself, and this defense assumed stronger dimensions each day. If war is repeated, we shall be capable of confronting it better and more powerfully than before, and this very reality constitutes a deterrent against war.

It is occasionally asserted that the skies of Iran were under the control of Israeli aircraft, yet the other side of the matter is not articulated — that the skies of Israel and the Zionist regime were under the control of Iranian missiles. In the final days, these missiles operated with such strength, authority, and precision that the regime possessed no avenue except an urgent solicitation for an unconditional cease-fire.

We passed this war successfully. Our nuclear technology, which they intended to annihilate, remains in its place. Installations and equipment, as I indicated, if destroyed, are reconstructed.

What is significant is the volition of the Iranian nation and the national cohesion that they intended to target, yet they failed to fracture it. The people of Iran, in the face of this assault, became stronger, more cohesive, and more supportive of the state and government.

Now, several months after the 12-day war, I affirm with confidence that from the perspective of defensive capability, we are incomparably stronger than prior to June 13. Our entire capability has been reconstructed. We derived numerous lessons from this war; we comprehended our weaknesses and the weaknesses of the enemy, just as we accurately discerned our strengths and the strengths of others. Now, if such a war is repeated, we shall be capable of confronting it better and more powerfully than before, and this very reality constitutes a deterrent against war.

The conception that engendered the 12-day war was an erroneous conception and calculation by our adversaries; they imagined that Iran lacked the preparedness to defend itself, yet, in practice, they observed that this conception was mistaken. Today, we are stronger than that time, and without doubt, this preparedness for war is the



Iran's Minister of Foreign Affairs Abbas Araghchi (R) participates in a specialized panel hosted by Kazem Sajjadpour, president of the Institute for Political and International Studies (IPIS), at an international conference entitled "International Law Under Attack, Aggression, and Defense," in Tehran on November 16, 2026.

● IRNA

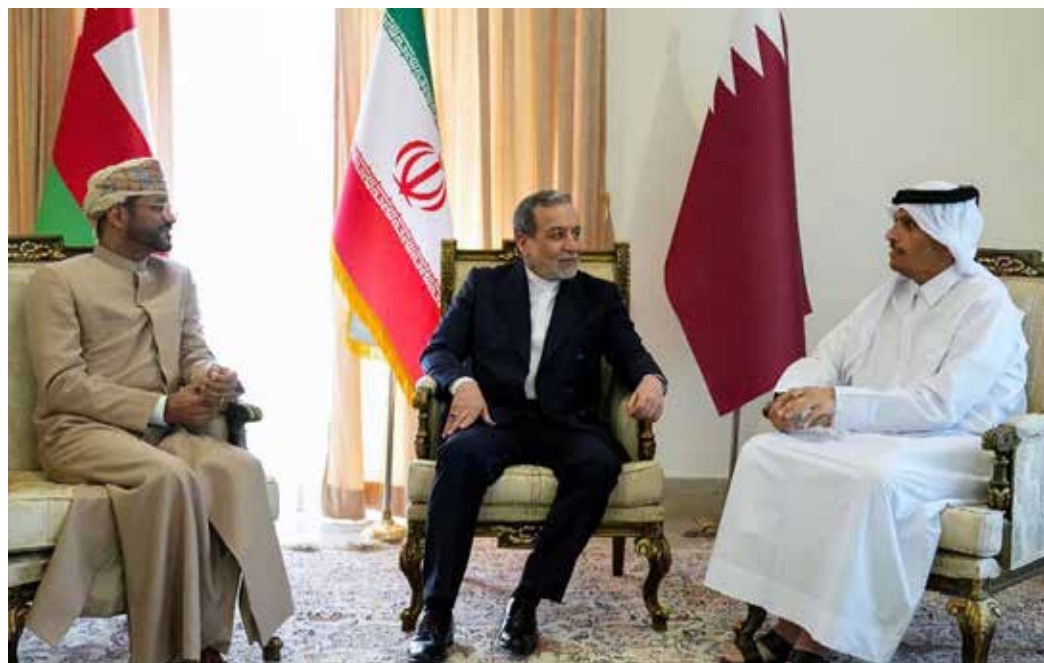


The conception that engendered the 12-day war was an erroneous conception and calculation by our adversaries; they imagined that Iran lacked the preparedness to defend itself, yet, in practice, they observed that this conception was mistaken. Today, we are stronger than that time, and without doubt, this preparedness for war is the most significant factor preventing the occurrence of another war.



Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi (C) meets with Qatar's Prime Minister Mohammed bin Abdulrahman al-Thani (R) and Oman's Foreign Minister Sayyid Badr al-Busaidi in Tehran, Iran, on May 18, 2025, before starting the fifth and last round of nuclear negotiations with the US.

● AFP



most significant factor preventing the occurrence of another war. If the failed experience of the past is repeated, the result will be nothing but the repetition of that same defeat.

Concurrently, we succeeded in reviving numerous capabilities of our own. On the other hand, for more than 40 years, the Islamic Republic of Iran has confronted sanctions and has opened its path through the sanctions. I do not assert that sanctions possess no cost or produce no difficulties; certainly, they possess cost and certainly they have produced numerous difficulties for us and for our people, yet nevertheless they have been unable to fracture our volition or limit our capabilities. All individuals who, at present, travel to Iran, in the meetings I have had, are astonished at how the Islamic Republic of Iran, after 40 years of American sanctions, has succeeded in continuing its trajectory of development and advancement. Economic difficulties exist, and I do not deny them. The government, with its entire being, is engaged in confronting these difficulties. We possess the capability to discover our path through these difficulties, and I think we have thus far achieved a successful trajectory.

The United States and others must understand that no avenue exists for resolving issues with the Islamic Republic of Iran except the avenue of diplomacy and except the utilization of the language of respect and dignity. If they address the Iranian people with the language of dignity and respect, they shall receive a response in the same language. In the 2013–2015 JCPOA negotiations, for example, we were addressed with respect, and we responded with respect; we entered into negotiations, and the negotiation was successful because the principles of negotiation were observed. But if they address the Iranian people in another language, the Iranian people shall respond in that same language. They experienced this in the 12-day war.

Politicians must recognize historical experiences and derive lessons from them, and utilize them for the future. We possess two experiences before us in the contemporary past: the experience of the 2015 negotiations that resulted in an agreement that the entire world celebrated as an achievement of diplomacy, and afterward the United States betrayed it; and the experience of the recent war in which the Iranian people responded with the same strength with which they were confronted and assaulted, and the other side observed its outcome. These two experiences now lie before us. Those who seek interaction with Iran must choose which experience they desire to consider as their criterion. We are prepared for both experiences.

The article first appeared in Persian on IRNA.

Deputy FM: What is West's apprehension now that Iran doesn't enrich uranium?

CONFERENCE

Kazem Gharibabadi, the Iranian vice president for Legal and International Affairs, delivered an address during the panel entitled "Jeopardization of the Non-Proliferation Regime: Prevailing Trends and Discourses" on the periphery of the conference "International Law Under Attack, Aggression, and Defense" in Tehran on November 16, 2025. This conference convened 350 international and domestic guests and was comprised of diplomatic delegations, professors, and analysts from France, Italy, Greece, Lebanon, Iraq, Ireland, Slovakia, the United Kingdom, Finland, Russia, and other nations within the region, who engaged in an examination of the legal dimensions of aggression and defense within the framework of international law through specialized panels. Gharibabadi, expounding upon Iran's legal perspective regarding the June military assaults by the Zionist regime and the United States upon Iran's peaceful nuclear facilities and scientists, stated: "Two aggressions have been done against Iran, one an aggression upon its territorial integrity and sovereignty, and the second an aggression against its nuclear installations. The latter action constitutes one of the most egregious exemplars of criminality, which can be addressed from a juridical standpoint." The translation of his address in full follows.

The non-proliferation regime is predicated principally upon the axiom of non-aggression against nuclear facilities. This is of paramount significance. The annals of the International Atomic Energy Agency contain no precedent for nuclear installations being subjected to assault. Certain facilities in other nations, admittedly, have been under the Agency's supervision and verification, yet the most consequential verifications executed have been those implemented in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Any assault upon nuclear facilities, irrespective of whether it constitutes sabotage, the application of coercive force, military operations, or even the assassination of nuclear scientists, all represent manifestations of threats to the nuclear activities of states and, within a broader context, a threat to international peace and security. All nuclear facilities in Iran that were assaulted by the Israeli regime, as well as by the United States of America, were under the stringent supervision of the International Atomic Energy Agency.

This morning, Dr. Eslami, the head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran, articulated that the country has executed extensive cooperation with the Agency and that comprehensive and expansive verifications of Iran's nuclear activities have been conducted. Consequently, a multitude of subjects, encompassing both enrichment and facilities, have been under the purview of the Agency's safeguards.

You are thoroughly cognizant that we possess numerous resolutions within the legal corpus that have been ratified in general conferences, whether in the Board of Governors or the General Assembly of the Agency. Certain of these were even ratified in the Security Council. All of these prohibit any assault upon nuclear facilities under the supervision of the International Atomic Energy Agency.

We even had a resolution at the Agency's General Conference concerning the non-use of coercive force. The Israeli assault on a reactor in Iraq resulted in the issuance of a specific resolution. The very occurrence of such an assault constitutes a threat to international peace and security. Within the United Nations, it is also stipulated that should such incidents recur, a report must be submitted to the Security Council. This is precisely the request proffered by the Islamic Republic of Iran. This resolution has not been abrogated and remains in full force; the aggression that transpired must be reported to the United Nations Security Council to prevent the repetition of such assaults by the Israeli regime. This is a matter that the International Atomic Energy Agency must pursue. The Israeli regime is a regime that is not a party to any of the non-proliferation agreements. The United States, a permanent

member of the Security Council, is, lamentably, itself engaged in the augmentation of its nuclear capacities, which is truly catastrophic. These two regimes that assaulted Iran — one possessing nuclear armaments illegitimately, the other escalating its nuclear capacity — are today observed pursuing the enhancement of their own nuclear capabilities and conducting new nuclear tests. These constitute threats to international peace and security.

But permit me to furnish some background intelligence: why was Syria assaulted? A reactor was present there — admittedly, we lack definitive intelligence and remain uncertain whether it was a nuclear reactor — however, subsequent revelations indicate a nuclear reactor did exist in Syria; they were unaware of this subject.

The Agency, nevertheless, had a resolution. The General Conference and likewise the UN Security Council had promulgated resolutions on this matter, yet why did we again witness incidents of this nature concerning Ukraine? This constitutes discrimination. They should have — and did — condemn any assault upon Ukrainian [nuclear] facilities, but what transpired concerning the assault upon Iran's nuclear facilities? They lapsed into absolute silence, regrettably. They did not condemn the assault against Iran and its nuclear facilities, and they even precluded the draft resolution Iran tabled, which was supported by several Agency members, from reaching fruition and ratification.

This is the mechanism that, lamentably, is arrayed before us: laws and regulations that preclude the execution of laws and obstruct the implementation of the very statutes they themselves have ratified. They did not permit the International Atomic Energy Agency and the Security Council to condemn these assaults; assaults that were executed against the territorial integrity of Iran and its nuclear installations.

This is "politics"; "politics" is the principal actor here, not laws. If you maintain amicable relations with them, then indeed,



you may proceed to execute this or that action and receive their endorsement and support. However, if you are to possess an independent polity, even if you maintain direct cooperation with them, you are considered the "villain" of their narrative, and this very fact becomes the rationale for them to assault you. Not only can they assault you, but they can also ratify a resolution against you to coerce you into cooperation. What manner of cooperation? We genuinely do not comprehend.

The assault on Iran's nuclear facilities pertained, in a practical sense, to Iran's enrichment activities. Moreover, there are facilities that had not been assaulted, and we maintained cooperation with the Agency and provided it access to these facilities that were not assaulted, even though only several months have passed since the war. However, the rationale for not permitting inspector access to the targeted locations is that we ourselves lack access; unexploded and inoperative ordnance remains present, and security considerations did not permit it. They executed the assault and now wish to ascertain the extent of the damage inflicted. This is not solely for the Agency's purposes. At this juncture, given that we are not conducting enrichment, what then constitutes their apprehension? They have now tabled a draft resolution in the Board of Gov-

nors, the phraseology of which includes, firstly, the suspension of uranium enrichment in Iran, secondly, that Iran refrain from re-engaging in reprocessing, and thirdly, that it engages in dialogues with the P5+1 in good faith. When they perceived an inability to advance via this avenue, they attempted to apply pressure through the illicit avenue of snapback.

Iran has continuously implemented the Additional Protocols over the preceding three years; Iran has implemented the Agency's modified Code 3.1; yet, they accord no consideration whatsoever to these facts. Why? Because engagement and dialogue hold no significance for them. They desire to utilize these international instruments and mechanisms to apply greater pressure upon Iran. If they genuinely sought engagement and cooperation, the path is a lucid one. We maintain cooperation with the Agency. Over the past five months, we have provided inspection access to all centers that were not targeted, and we have furnished them with principal and veracious intelligence regarding Iran's nuclear activities. You are aware, the Israeli regime has alleged that Iran pursues the fabrication of a nuclear bomb for three decades. Despite Iran being the target, Israel still proclaims that Iran seeks a nuclear bomb, and this is truly preposterous; they themselves possess warheads and atomic



Iran's Vice President for Legal and International Affairs Kazem Gharibabadi (2nd-L), sitting beside foreign guests, addresses the audience of the panel entitled "Jeopardization of the Non-Proliferation Regime: Prevailing Trends and Discourses" on the periphery of the conference "International Law Under Attack, Aggression, and Defense" in Tehran on November 16, 2025.

● IRNA



The director-general of the International Atomic Energy Agency did not even report to the Security Council. When we inquire of him about his responsibility to furnish a report to the Security Council regarding what transpired, and that he could have articulated this because he was conducting supervision, the director-general declares an inability to execute this function, and this is ludicrous. He has traveled to Ukraine repeatedly without any mandate from the Board of Governors, yet when it is necessary to come to Iran and talk about supervision, he remains silent.



International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Director General Rafael Mariano Grossi (R) and Minister of Energy of Ukraine Herman Galushchenko look at damaged transformers during their visit to a substation in the Kyiv region, Ukraine, on February 4, 2025.

● EPREM LUKATSKY/AP



armaments, have fomented chaos in the region, and have even stated that they, in fact, possess an arsenal of weapons of mass destruction, yet they continue to talk about their fantasy that Iran seeks to attain a nuclear bomb. This is the primary program and rationale they pursue.

Regarding the assault on Iran and its peaceful facilities, moral and legal dangers have existed. Malevolent conduct was perpetrated against Iran through the encouragement of illicit actions; this is the primary moral danger. Secondly, I refrain from employing the term "international community," but certain members of the international community, lamentably, encouraged these illicit actions. Thirdly, certain among them exacerbated tensions by abetting this illicit conduct. Fourthly, the culture of cooperation has diminished. When you are a member of the NPT, within the NPT context, you are penalized, and this is truly deleterious.

What we learn from the illicit conduct of assaulting Iran's nuclear facilities is that the Security Council failed; that is to say, it did not execute its duties. The Agency's Board of Governors did not execute its functions correctly. The United States, along with the European nations, also failed. The director-general of the Agency did not even report to the Security Council. When we inquire of him about his responsibility to furnish a report to the Security Council regarding what transpired, and that he could have articulated this because he was conducting supervision, the director-general declares an inability to execute this function, and this is ludicrous. He has traveled to Ukraine repeatedly without any mandate from the Board of Governors, yet when it is necessary to come to Iran and talk about supervision, he remains silent.

All of these entities fail in the execution of their duties. This is not solely concerning Iran today; in the future, other nations will be affected. Today, we observe nations in our region advancing towards the utilization of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes, and I remain unaware of what shall befall their nuclear facilities in the future, particularly given the menace posed by the Israeli regime, which cannot tolerate the peaceful utilization of nuclear energy in the region. This is a reality, and we have witnessed this in its conduct observed in Iraq, Syria, and Iran, and it may transpire in the region in the future, and this is a profound lesson we have internalized. The global community, the United Nations, and the UN Security Council must put an end to this savagery and these criminal acts perpetrated in the region by the Zionist regime and the United States.

The article first appeared in Persian on IRNA.

Riyadh 2025 Islamic Solidarity Games:

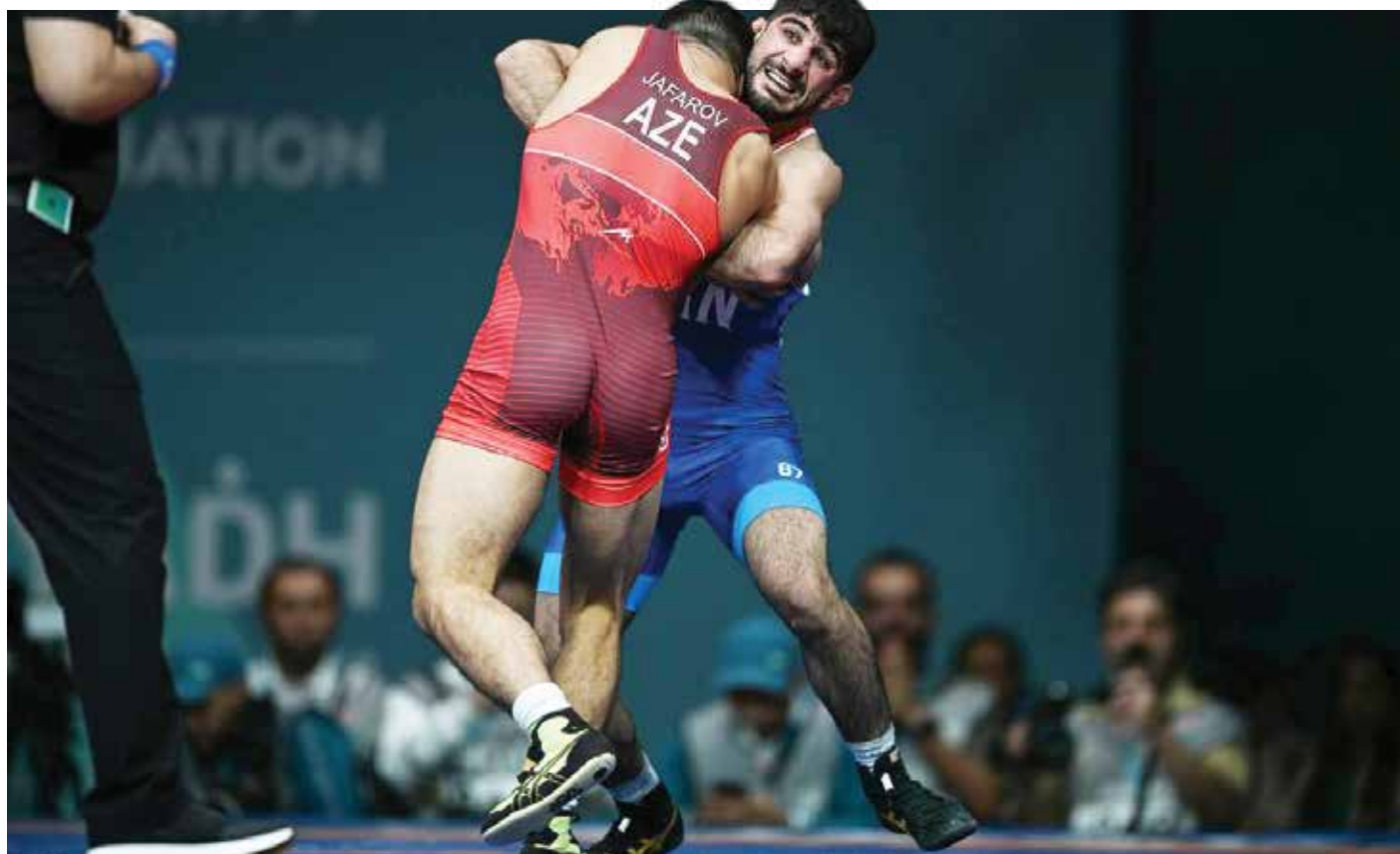
Esmaeili's last-gasp fightback propels Iran to double Greco-Roman golds

Sports Desk

Saeid Esmaeili and Gholamreza Farrokhi gave Iran a strong start in wrestling at the Islamic Solidarity Games in Riyadh, capturing gold in their respective Greco-Roman classes on Tuesday. Their final victories propelled Iran to 19 gold medals at the multi-sport event, though the country was still dealt a major blow in the two-horse race for the runner-up spot in the overall standings, as second-placed Uzbekistan enjoyed success in athletics and wrestling to open a six-gold lead with three days of action remaining. Amir Abdi and Ali Ahmadi-Vafa were also among Iran's wrestling medalists on Tuesday, claiming silver and bronze respectively, while Mohammadreza Tayyebi settled for silver in the men's shot put in athletics.

Esmaeili remains unbeaten

Esmaeili came within two seconds of suffering only the second defeat of his senior international career – and his first since June 2024 – but the 22-year-old sensation produced a trademark four-pointer to defeat Azerbaijan's Hasrat Jafarov 8-3 in a thrilling 67kg showdown. The two familiar foes met in the final at September's World Championships, with Esmaeili needing a flawless defense to secure a 3-1 victory. On Tuesday, however, Jafarov looked to be on his way to upsetting the reigning world and



Iranian wrestler Saeid Esmaeili (blue) performs a four-point throw against Hasrat Jafarov of Azerbaijan in the Greco-Roman 67kg final at the Islamic Solidarity Games in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, on November 18, 2025.

● IAWFIR

Farrokhi, who moved to 87kg for the U23 World Championships, won gold in Novi Sad without conceding a single point.

The Iranian still had a tough job securing a place in the final showpiece in Riyadh, as he needed a takedown in the final minute to edge world bronze medalist Asan Zhanyshov of Kyrgyzstan 7-6 in the semifinals. In the 77kg event, Abdi enjoyed an emphatic run to the final, defeating the two-time reigning world 72kg champion from Azerbaijan (9-0) and Uzbekistan's Abdullo Aliev – a world bronze medalist in September – 6-0 in the process.

In the final, however, the Iranian was second best against two-time Olympic medalist and two-time world champion Akzhol Makhmudov of Kyrgyzstan, who, trailing 1-0, performed a reverse-lift throw for five points before securing the fall in the second period.

Ahmadi-Vafa – a world junior and U23 gold medalist last year – bounced back from a technical-superiority loss to world silver medalist Alisher Ganiev in the semifinals to beat Azerbaijan's 2024 world champion Nihat Mammadli 3-2 for a consolation bronze in the 60kg division.

Olympic champion when he took a three-point lead by the end of the first period. Esmaeili erased the deficit after the break, though still down on criteria, and all seemed to be over for the Iranian as the clock ticked down, before he worked on a double-arm lock and then managed to throw Jafarov in danger from standing for four points. Azerbaijan challenged the call,

but there was no change in the result as Esmaeili emerged victorious to capture his third major gold of the calendar year after Asian and world titles. "We went straight into a training camp after the World Championships to prepare for the Games. The level of competition here was truly world-class, with the top five from the world event all participating, and I had to face world 63kg champion [Ayt-

jan Khalmakhanov of Uzbekistan] in the semifinals," Esmaeili said after his sensational victory. "I was in much better form when I faced Jafarov last time, as I came into this tournament still carrying some fatigue from that World Championships," added the Iranian. When asked about the high expectations for him to repeat his Olympic gold in L.A. 2028, Esmaeili said: "There are still

about two years and eight months until the Olympics, and I will work hard to retain my title in the Los Angeles Games and bring joy to all of my fellow Iranians." Later in the day, world 82kg champion Farrokhi made it seem a little easier as he defeated former world U20 champion Islam Yevloyev of Kazakhstan 6-0 to cap off a glorious two months in his career.

Qalenoeei lauds 'massive improvement' despite shootout setback against Uzbekistan

Sports Desk

Iran head coach Amir Qalenoeei shrugged off the shootout loss to Uzbekistan in the Al Ain International Cup final on Tuesday, praising his side's "massive improvement" over the two games during the latest international break. The two Central Asian rivals played to a goalless stalemate in their seventh meeting in two years before Uzbekistan, reduced to 10 men after Manchester City center-back Abdudokir Khusanov was sent off for denying Ali Alipour a clear goal-scoring opportunity with 20 minutes remaining, emerged victorious 4-3 on penalties.

Iranian goalkeeper Alireza Beiranvand saved Jamshid Iskanderov's attempt, but his teammates Mohammad-Mahdi Mohebbi and Milad Mohammadi then had their efforts kept out by Abduvohid Nematov, leaving Qalenoeei's men without a win against Uzbekistan since the 2023 CAFA Nations Cup final.

"I think we were not good enough until the mid-way point of the first, but after that – especially in the second period – we were in control of the game. Fortunately, taking last month's game against Tanzania into account, my



Iranian striker Ali Alipour (white) is fouled by Uzbekistan's Abdudokir Khusanov during the Al Ain International Cup final in Al Ain, UAE, on November 18, 2025.

● MILAD ESMAEILI/ISNA

team has now managed to keep three consecutive clean sheets," said Qalenoeei, whose team defeated Cape Verde on penalties last Thursday to book a final spot in the four-team tournament. "Wins or losses are not important in these kinds of matches, but it is our team's massive improvement at both ends of the pitch that truly matters, as we were solid in defense and managed to create many chances," added the Iranian.

"We achieved our objectives in this tournament, and I think anyone with a fair assessment would have to praise Iran's performance here." Qalenoeei also rued the absence of several key players in the Iranian squad, who missed the two games in Al Ain due to injury. "Just look at the difference Majid Hosseini made to our defensive structure after returning from a long spell out. Now, imagine how players like Sardar Azmoun, Mahdi Qa-

yedi, Ali Qolizadeh, and even Alireza Jahanbakhsh would have contributed to the team's strength and quality if they were available. "Unlike the game against Cape Verde, we were much quicker in attack and moved the ball faster today, which I'm really pleased with. However, to sustain this, we will need all of our injured players to recover and add to the team's caliber, as we are far from a finished article for the World Cup finals."

25th Summer Deaflympics: Ghaffari, Samiei team up for shooting bronze

Sports Desk

Iranian shooters Mahla Samiei and Bijan Ghaffari teamed up to claim an impressive bronze medal in the 10m air pistol mixed pair event at the Tokyo Summer Deaflympics on Wednesday. Having finished fourth in the qualifying round with 561.16 points, the Iranian duo defeated Ukraine's Sofiiia Olenych and Oleksandr Kolodil 17-9 in the third-place matchup. Indian pair Pranjali Prashant Dhumal and Abhinav Deshwal won the gold, thanks to 16-6 victory over Kao Ya-Ju and Hsu Ming-Jui of the Chinese Taipei in the final showdown.

Wednesday's medal marked a second bronze for Samiei in Tokyo, after the Iranian girl had tallied 215.5 points to finish behind India's Anuya Prasad, who set a new world record with 241.1 points, and Dhumal (236.8 points) in the women's division of the discipline on Tuesday. Iran has collected six bronze medals after five days of competition at the multi-sport event.

Ali Salahshour, Hossein Allahkarimi, and Masoud Rastegar secured a third-place finish in the men's judo team event, thanks to a 2-0 victory over Türkiye on Tuesday, having also finished with a bronze in their respective weight classes.



Iranian shooters Bijan Ghaffari (l.) and Mahla Samiei won a bronze medal in the 10m air pistol mixed pair event at the 25th Summer Deaflympics in Tokyo, Japan.

● MNA

Restoration revives Arak’s historic bazaar

Iranica Desk

The historic bazaar of Arak stands as the vibrant heart of a city that, since its foundation in the early Qajar period, was shaped with a precise urban plan and purposeful architecture. When Fath-Ali Shah Qajar laid the first stones of Sultanabad — the city’s original name — the bazaar was conceived as its first and most vital element. The Qajars believed that economic prosperity and population stability in the region would be impossible without a cohesive commercial artery, mehrnews.com wrote.

The core of the bazaar was built in the early 13th century AH, during Fath-Ali Shah’s reign, by order of Yousef Khan Gorji. In 1976, the Arak Bazaar was registered on Iran’s National Heritage List, a milestone that elevated it from a traditional marketplace to a site of architectural and cultural significance.

The bazaar’s layout is defined by two main axes: a north-south passage and an east-west route that intersect at the central crossroads, or Chaharsuq. Multiple entrances, connections to the city’s old streets, and the extension of shops along the main routes have allowed this complex to preserve both its traditional form and urban coherence.

According to assessments, the bazaar and its historical dependencies cover an area of about 14 hectares and include 30 caravanserais, making it one of the most notable examples of covered bazaars in Iran.

Hossein Mahmoudi, Head of the Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts Department of Markazi Province, told Mehr News Agency that the historic bazaar of Arak is currently on UNESCO’s Tentative List. He emphasized that all restoration

and reconstruction efforts must be carried out in full compliance with international standards and with respect for the site’s historical values.

He added that a four-party memorandum of understanding has been signed between the Cultural Heritage Department, Arak Municipality, the Charity and Endowment Organization, and the Bazaar’s Board of Trustees to coordinate and accelerate restoration efforts for this historic complex.



Mahmoudi noted that twelve workshops are currently active in restoring parts of the main bazaar route and caravanserais. The restoration work includes repointing brick joints, replacing damaged arches, cleaning deteriorated layers, applying traditional waterproofing to roofs, and paving the courtyards.

He further explained that since international experts are scheduled to visit and evaluate the site, all restoration projects must strictly follow scientific principles, global standards,

and conservation ethics.

Mayor of Arak’s historical fabric, Hossein Mansourizadeh, also stated that in the past, some restoration projects were carried out through partnerships, but a number of them were left unfinished due to funding shortages. He added that the municipality now directly oversees all restoration projects, with contractors selected by the city’s management, and the work is progressing continuously without interruption.

work at the Akbariyan Caravanserai has been completed, including scaffolding and the repair of damaged bricks inside the structure. He said that all deteriorated bricks in this caravanserai have been replaced, and new joint pointing is being carried out.

Referring to the tripartite agreement between the Municipality, the Cultural Heritage Department, and the Bazaar Guilds, he stated that according to established guidelines, 30 percent of the total restoration costs must

Adel Heidari, an infrastructure expert at the Cultural Heritage Department of Markazi Province, said that the restoration and reconstruction project of Arak’s historic bazaar will be fully completed in the next four months, with the majority of the arches, roofs, and caravanserais undergoing restoration.

Heidari noted that five active contractors are currently working within the bazaar, explaining that the ongoing projects involve the restoration, reconstruction,

mately 30 to 40 percent of the main bazaar restoration project has been completed. He emphasized that nearly all of the bazaar’s caravanserais and Timchehs (vaulted courtyards), with only a few exceptions, require full restoration and reconstruction, and that preservation efforts will continue according to a precise schedule.

Highlighting the importance of expertise in restoring historical monuments, Heidari stated that restoring this bazaar is by no means a simple task — it requires highly professional teams and trained contractors to ensure both the quality and durability of the restoration.

He explained that the bazaar is a complex composed of caravanserais, Timchehs, and passageways, and determining the final restoration cost requires detailed inspections inside each shop to identify damages and critical structural points. He continued that, given the age of the structure, continuous monitoring and thorough inspection of the interior spaces are essential, as there may be damages that have not yet been detected.

Heidari stressed that, from a restoration standpoint, cooperation with the Endowments Organization poses no issues, and project implementation is fully feasible; however, he expressed hope that the relevant institutions would provide the necessary financial support.

He concluded that the main goal is to preserve the authenticity and beauty of Arak’s historic bazaar — a goal that can only be achieved through unified management, the use of skilled experts, government funding, and the smart participation of private investors.

The historic bazaar of Arak is more than just an old building; it serves as the city’s collective memory, social identity, and a living part of its traditional economy.



● IRNA

be covered by the stakeholders. He added that the changes made in the bazaar are clearly visible to shopkeepers, tourists, and the general public. The Arak Bazaar remains active and vibrant, and merchants are fully informed about the restoration measures carried out by the city administration.

He further noted that all interventions outlined in the project priorities will be fully completed by mid March, and visual and video documentation of the projects is being prepared for presentation to the media.

and maintenance of the bazaar’s historic structures. At present, restoration work on the arches along the main bazaar route has begun from Imam Street and continues up to the central Chaharsuq (crossroads).

He added that part of the restoration activities focuses on repairing existing structures that can still be preserved, while another part involves the complete reconstruction of arches and roofs that, due to severe cracks, are no longer structurally sound.

He further stated that approxi-

West Azarbaijan Province welcoming tourists with history, nature

Iranica Desk

West Azarbaijan Province can rightly be called the “Rainbow of Tourism.” Its breathtaking blend of historical and natural attractions, combined with a remarkable diversity of ethnicities and religions, has turned the province into a vibrant symbol of freedom, dignity, and respect.

According to IRNA, the rich variety of ethnic groups and faiths in the region has given rise to unique historical and natural landmarks, as well as diverse customs and cultural traditions — each serving as a distinct ambassador of West Azarbaijan’s beauty and a magnet for visitors.

Here, mosques and churches stand side by side; the call to prayer from minarets harmonizes with the ringing of church bells. Local dialects, historical sites, diverse cuisines, unparalleled folklore and literature, and traditional dances reflecting unity and solidarity — all together tell the story of this land’s deep-rooted culture and history. Each aspect paints a vivid portrait of the province’s unmatched heritage, captivating visitors with its authenticity and charm.

The province of diverse ethnicities and religions boasts over 1,800 nationally regis-

tered sites and several UNESCO World Heritage sites, including the Saint Thaddeus Monastery in Chaldoran, Zor Zor Church in Maku, the Takht-e Soleyman Complex in Takab, Shah Abbasi Caravanserai in Khoy, and Lake Urmia National Park. Each of these landmarks is associated with different ethnic and religious groups and ranks among the most significant historical treasures of Iran.

Health tourism

Health tourism is a key sector in West Azarbaijan, and the province’s proximity to Iraq, Turkey,

and the Republic of Azerbaijan makes it a potential turning point for regional development. Every year, patients from neighboring countries travel to West Azarbaijan for medical treatment, benefiting not only from advanced healthcare services but also from the region’s natural therapeutic attractions, including its healing mineral waters.

The combination of skilled medical specialists, well-equipped healthcare facilities, and natural assets — springs, waterfalls, hydrotherapy and massage centers, and a mild climate — has made the province a preferred

destination for patients even from distant locations.

Religious tourism

Religious tourism represents a remarkable potential for West Azarbaijan, capable of driving development, generating long-term revenue, and creating stable employment for young people. Renowned as a “rainbow land” of cultures and faiths, the province showcases countless churches, mosques, shrines, Imamzadehs, and historic religious sites.

Among the most important and popular religious landmarks are the historic mosques and

Saint Thaddeus Monastery (Qara Kelisa) in northern West Azarbaijan Province. Considered one of the earliest Christian churches in the world, the monastery hosts thousands of tourists, pilgrims, and researchers annually during a religious ceremony.

Visitors attending the ceremony not only participate in tourism and pilgrimage but also act as ambassadors, conveying messages of peace, stability, and religious freedom to the world. The shrines of Imamzadehs Ebrahim and Mohammad in Urmia host countless devotees during Ashura and Tasu’a (the

martyrdom anniversary of Imam Hussein (PBUH), the third Imam of Shia Muslims, and his companions), and other religious occasions throughout the year. Takht-e Soleyman in Takab is another prominent example: every year, Zoroastrians from across Iran gather at the Azar Gushnash Fire Temple to perform religious ceremonies, sharing messages of justice and freedom globally. The tomb of Seyed Sadr al-Din in Chaldoran, a relic of the Safavid era, also continues to attract many visitors annually.

Eco-Lodges

Eco-lodges are another vital component of West Azarbaijan’s tourism offerings. Located in villages, they transport visitors back in time, connecting them with a simple, joyful, and vibrant lifestyle.

The province currently has 42 eco-lodges in Maku, Khoy, Salmas, Urmia, Naqadeh, Piranshahr, Sardasht, Mahabad, Takab, Shahin Dezh, Oshnavieh, and Bukan, welcoming both domestic and international tourists. Sardasht, with its pristine villages, Shalmash Waterfall, forests, and untouched nature, has the highest number, with 11 units. Following Sardasht, Takab has six, Urmia five, and the Maku Free Zone four units — all attracting tourists annually.



● Saint Thaddeus Monastery, Chaldoran
● iranroute.com



● Takht-e Soleyman Complex
● iraniantours.com

Iran targets 2m medical tourists, €6b revenue by 2028

Arts & Culture Desk

Iran's Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts, Reza Salehi-Amiri, announced on Wednesday the country plans to double its annual number of health tourists to two million and generate 6 billion euros in revenue by the end of its Seventh Development Plan (2028). Salehi-Amiri spoke to reporters in Tehran, outlining a comprehensive health-tourism system developed with the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Labor, the Social Security Organization, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and all relevant agencies, which will

be unveiled in the near future, IRNA reported.

"We are organizing to get past the current disunity," he said, pointing to efforts in Khuzestan and Khorasan provinces that have streamlined regional coordination.

Currently, Iran attracts some 1.02 million medical tourists per year, with some sources estimating closer to 1.2 million, bringing in around \$2 billion. Salehi-Amiri said the ministry's plan aims not only to boost visitor numbers but also to position Iran as a regional hub for health services.

"The goal is expansion to all countries in the region," Sale-



hi-Amiri added. He cited recent figures from Oman, where the Omani tourism ministry report-

edly paid \$100 million last year for Iranian health services. The minister stressed that Tehran

intends to deepen cross-border medical ties and integrate services across neighboring markets.

The ministry's strategy relies on leveraging Iran's skilled medical workforce, competitive treatment costs, and advanced hospital infrastructure.

Salehi-Amiri said the system will coordinate licensing, standards, and patient services across multiple agencies, a response to long-standing fragmentation that has slowed growth in the sector.

Salehi-Amiri recently visited Riyadh, meeting with tourism ministers from ten countries. The

trip underscored Iran's intention to market itself as a cost-efficient, high-quality alternative to regional competitors such as Turkey and the United Arab Emirates.

If targets are met, health tourism could become a major source of foreign exchange and an important driver of Iran's economic diplomacy.

The sector is already considered one of three pillars of the national tourism industry, alongside cultural and religious travel. However, implementing the planned institutional reforms and scaling inter-agency coordination remain crucial hurdles.

Iran presses cultural diplomacy at UNESCO's Samarkand gathering



Arts & Culture Desk

Iranian officials drove a packed diplomatic agenda in Samarkand as the 43rd UNESCO General Conference wrapped up, pushing cultural, scientific and educational initiatives that Tehran framed as part of a broader bid to "shape" global norms.

Seyed Mohammad Sadati Nejad, Director General for International Affairs on Environment and Sustainable Development, said the two-week session gave Iranian diplomats a platform to table new initiatives, revive older cultural files, and negotiate sensitive scientific-security proposals.

He added the conference allowed Iran to blend soft-power projection with targeted institutional engagement.

The event ran from October 30 to November 13, IRNA reported.

The Iranian delegation spotlighted a trio of files that officials had prepared for months. Delegates secured recognition for the Cyrus Cylinder, described by Tehran as an early expression of justice and "cultural tolerance", through a resolution co-sponsored with Tajikistan and Iraq.

Sadati Nejad said the text obliges UNESCO to weave its principles into education and human-rights programs and called the decision a rare moment when a historic artefact carried contemporary political weight, underscoring the "civilizational depth" Iran aims to leverage in multilateral fora.

Iran also secured endorsements for two major commemorations. UNESCO approved the 1150th anniversary of the death of Bayazid Bastami and the centenary of Allameh Tabatabaei's scholarly work in its 2026-2027 global observances, backed by regional partners from Armenia to Pakistan. Tehran further co-spon-

sored files on Rabe'eh Balkhi, Ayatollah Mohammad-Baqir Sadr, and the Turkic poet Baki, inserting itself into a wider cultural-heritage map across West and Central Asia.

A separate track centered on science diplomacy. Iran's science minister raised security threats facing academics, including the killing of Iranian researchers, urging delegates to consider "international mechanisms" to guard scientific activity. Sadati Nejad said the approach shifted Iran from a critic to an active contributor in shaping global norms.

The Samarkand meeting also brought a domestic win as UNESCO accepted Kashan into its Creative Cities Network as a "creative city of architecture," marking the first time architecture has been recognized as an independent field in the network.

He described the decision as a channel for urban diplomacy and a way to showcase the city's Iranian-Islamic design heritage to global audiences.

Sadati Nejad said Iran, nominated for multiple executive and scientific bodies, was elected with consensus by member states to four key committees, including the Legal Committee, the International Bioethics Committee (IBC), the International Committee on the Return of Cultural Property (ICPRCP) and the Committee on Social Transformation (MOST).

He added that the election reinforced Tehran's role in shaping legal, ethical, cultural and social-policy discussions internationally.

Sadati Nejad said that securing one of UNESCO's influential committee seats provides Iran a platform to translate conference outcomes into actionable programs and expand its engagement in science, culture, and education.

Where music meets Persian legends

INTERVIEW EXCLUSIVE

By Neda Sijani
Guest contributor

Tehran's Vahdat Hall hosted two charged evenings on November 18 and 19 as the Mithra Orchestra staged its 'Shahnameh Night', conducted by Mohammad-Reza Safavi and narrated by the distinguished actress and director Golab Adineh. The program drew a diverse crowd eager to watch an orchestra lean into both classical technique and Iran's deep literary heritage. Shakiba Khosravi led the ensemble as concertmaster, and Kaveh Kashiokooli oversaw production.

Founding an orchestra

Safavi recounts that the Mithra Orchestra was founded in 223 with the goal of broadening Iran's orchestral scene and bringing rarely performed works to the stage. Their first concert that autumn set the tone for a project that has remained deliberately wide-ranging ever since.

He explains that each performance from the start included one or two pieces by Iranian composers, a practice that grew into full concerts devoted to Iranian music. Composers entrusted the orchestra with their scores, a gesture Safavi sees as both encouragement and responsibility.

Strings binding 'Shahnameh Night'

For 'Shahnameh Night,' he anchored the orchestration around a string ensemble, describing the string group as the orchestra's spine even when the instrumentation shifts. The evening featured three works shaped by stories from the Shahnameh: 'Bi-

jan and Manijeh,' the celebrated piece by the late Hossein Dehlavi with text by Taha Afshin; 'Siavash Dance,' composed by Pouria Khadem; and 'Laughter of Gordafarid,' written by British playwright William Nicholson and set to music by Farhad Popal.

Adineh explains that Nicholson's piece was created with narration in mind, so her presence felt intrinsic to its dramatic logic. For Dehlavi's work, the team

Why music needs literature, literature needs music

Both artists stress that music and Persian literature meet a vital cultural need. Adineh sees these performances as a bridge, especially in a world of fleeting attention and screens, where young audiences rarely engage with epic texts. Musical storytelling, she says, brings classical poetry to life and should be pursued more boldly

Adineh's lifelong dialogue with music

Adineh, whose career in theater and cinema stretches back to the 1970s, approaches music from another angle. She has studied voice, Setar, Tombak and piano at various stages of her life, believing that any actor may find themselves one day required to sing or play. Even now, at seventy, she speaks of music as something inseparable from her daily rhythm.

Commercialized music culture

Adineh worries that today's music leans too heavily on commercial gain, a fast-food culture that dilutes both art and taste. Musicians chasing the market, she says, risk losing meaningful content. While modern audiences favor easily digestible tunes, this convenience may estrange future generations from authentic culture. Artists, she insists, can keep pace with the times without surrendering their craft or ideals.

Living canon

By the end of their conversation, both Adineh and Safavi returned to the theme that defined those nights at Vahdat Hall, the power of a shared artistic language. Their collaboration as conductor and narrator, orchestra and epic poetry, brought Iran's literary canon vividly to life, transforming it from relic to living tradition. On stage and set to music, it became immediate, accessible, and deeply moving. Safavi hopes the orchestra's winter performances will continue this work, while Adineh wishes audiences, especially younger ones, to follow the path from melody to text and discover how profoundly music can lead into the heart of Persian literature.



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sought permission from the composer's family to add a short narrative text, a request they warmly accepted. Khadem's piece stood alone without a narrator, forming a contrasting arc within the program.

Nicholson's message across oceans

Adineh notes that Nicholson, who enjoys global recognition for stage and screenwriting, recorded a personal message for the orchestra ahead of the premiere. In that video, he spoke of his emotional connection to the 'Shahnameh,' prompting her to reflect on how much more Iran must do if it intends to share its literary heritage with international audiences. To her, these moments show that cultural diplomacy through the arts still has a long path to travel.

with works by Ferdowsi, Nizami, and other masters.

Safavi adds that combining epic verse with orchestral performance opens doors for deeper study, connecting musicians, scholars, and audiences. Without this bridge, many masterpieces remain distant, admired but not truly felt.

Forging harmony from youth

Safavi echoes on building a young orchestra, many trained at home or abroad, bringing fresh approaches to harmony and orchestration. Ensemble discipline takes time, he admits, but trust, continuity, and shared standards forge a cohesive group. In two years, the orchestra has shown that unity matters far more than individual bravura.