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The photo published by local media shows Iranian-built and overhauled Sahand stealth destroyer (up) and domestically-developed Kordestan forward base ship in the southern port city of Bandar Abbas on November 29, 2025.

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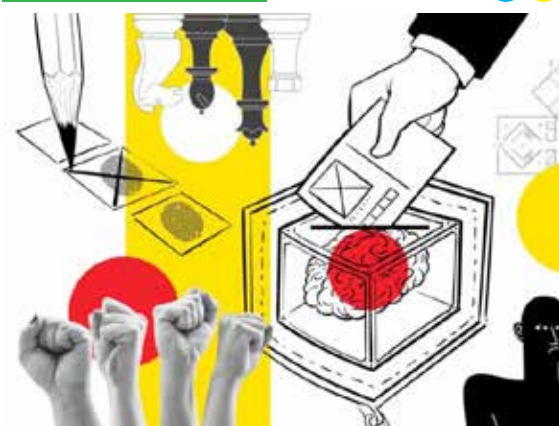
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Europe, regional states trying to ease Iran-US tensions

By Delaram Ahmadi
Staff writer

INTERVIEW
EXCLUSIVE



In the aftermath of the 12-day war, Iran's contacts with the United States over the nuclear issue dropped to a minimum. Yet following tensions between Iran and the International Atomic Energy

Agency, fresh diplomatic efforts have emerged both from Europe and regional states, aimed at getting talks back on track. Saudi Arabia has expressed readiness to facilitate dialogue between Tehran and Washington, European governments, whose role had dwindled to near zero after the activation of the snapback mechanism, have resumed their outreach, and in the latest development, Turkey's foreign minister is heading to Iran with the nucle-

ar file on his agenda.

But the United States and Iran remain firmly dug in, showing little willingness to compromise. In an interview with Iran Daily, Omid Khazani, an international affairs analyst, said European and regional states are deeply concerned about the damaging fallout of heightened Iran-US tensions and are focusing their efforts on resolving the issue, though, he noted that Arab states had a better chance of playing a meaningful role.

IRAN DAILY: After the snapback mechanism strained Iran-Europe relations, how significant was Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi's recent phone call with European Commission Vice-President Kaja Kallas, following his trip to Paris and meeting with her French counterpart? Can these talks be viewed as part of an effort by both sides to dial down tensions? **KHAZANI:** If you look at the Western bloc as a whole, their interests do not necessarily overlap regarding Iran. They do share one overarching objective that is preventing any

new country from joining the global nuclear club. But in terms of managing this issue, their interests diverge.

Europe has never pushed ties with Iran to the low level we see today. This is partly because Europe has adjusted its policies to stay aligned with the US.

But if the situation turns from worse to the worst, leading to another war that spirals from short-term strategic strikes into a full-scale conflict, the damage to Europe would be far greater than to the United States. Any long-term instability inside Iran would mean instability in the Caucasus, West Asia, and the strategically vital Persian Gulf, through which one-fifth to one-quarter of the world's daily oil exports pass.

A sweeping conflict would create millions of refugees heading toward Europe, trigger deep security crises, and most importantly, endanger global energy stability. All of this weighs heavily on the minds of European policymakers. They do not want their ties with Iran to collapse to absolute zero. Europe wants to rebalance its relationship with Iran, partly to position itself as a medi-

ator and partly to escape the current nuclear ambiguity.

After the 12-day war, Iran did not leave the NPT, but it entered what is commonly referred to as the "nuclear ambiguity" phase. Europe sees this nuclear ambiguity as a high-risk situation and does not want to live with that uncertainty.

That's why, after the snapback, which fueled anger inside Iran, Europe has been trying to re-engage and, if possible, help shape a new structure for negotiations. But how much political weight Europe actually carries under Trump, who is self-absorbed and dismissive of European leaders, is another matter.

Can European states act as a bridge between Iran and the United States, or are they merely pursuing their own interests?

These two ideas are not mutually exclusive. If Europe wants to act as a mediator, it will naturally pursue its own interests. Europe does not want the current no-deal scenario or nuclear ambiguity to snowball into a massive, uncontrolled war.

The risks are too high, so naturally, Europe wants to be a bridge because its interests demand a resolution to this prolonged crisis. But whether Europe holds this position in Iran's eyes is another question. After Trump's withdrawal from the JCPOA in 2018, Europeans tried hard to preserve some of Iran's economic benefits, creating the INSTEX mechanism. But due to US secondary sanctions, they achieved nothing. As a result, Iran no longer takes them seriously. The snapback mechanism further damaged Europe's image; had they delayed its activation, they might have retained more leverage.

Still, Europe does not want to be sidelined. They want to stay in the game for their own interests, but in reality, neither Iran nor even the United States gives them much weight. In Trump's view, the political clout of Persian Gulf states, even a small country like Qatar or figures like Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, is far greater than that of some European governments, even the EU as a whole.

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Destroyer, floating base join Navy

Iran ready to deliver 'decisive response' to threats anywhere: *Army chief*



Chief Commander of Iran's Army (C), Major General Amir Hatami, speaks during a ceremony marking the joining of the destroyer Sahand and the Kordestan floating base to the Navy's fleet in Bandar Abbas on November 29, 2025.
● IRNA

National Desk

A destroyer and a new floating base joined Iran's Navy's fleet in a ceremony on Saturday to strengthen the Navy's combat capability and enhance Iran's access to international waters. The Iranian-built stealth destroyer, Sahand, was first launched in December

2018. It is equipped with a helicopter deck, torpedo launchers, anti-aircraft and anti-ship guns, surface-to-surface and surface-to-air missiles, and electronic-warfare systems. It sank last year in the shallow Persian Gulf waters after being briefly repositioned. During the ceremony, the Kordestan floating base was added to the Navy. It

can provide rescue and relief, accommodate the heaviest helicopters, and support three destroyers on a three-year, around-the-world mission without needing to dock for fuel.

Chief Commander of Iran's Army Major General Amir Hatami said that the Sahand destroyer, was overhauled in a very short time thanks to efforts of the Navy's specialists.

"Today, with more up-to-date equipment, weapons, and capabilities, it is ready to carry out missions in the Navy."

Pointing to the Kordestan floating base, he said that it can carry out important operations in support of naval combat units and other military forces.

Referring to the enemies' rhetoric against Iran, saying that Iran is fully prepared to deliver a crushing response to any threat against its national interests.

Major General Amir Hatami added that "our defensive strategy is based on active defense and smart deterrence."

"This means that we will not wait for the enemy to attack, and we have the necessary readiness for any decisive and crushing response at any point where our national interests require," he added.

Paying tribute to the Navy's sacrifices during the Iran-Iraq War, he said Iran's power remains a stabilizing force for the nation and the wider region.

"Today, one cannot draw a distinction between the security of the region and the security of countries," he said.

Hatami added that nearly five decades of experience since the 1979 Revolution have demonstrated Iran's "constructive and irreplaceable role" in regional security, noting that developments over the past two years have made clear "which countries are the disruptors of regional security," leaving "no doubt for any fair observer."

On June 13, Israel launched an unprovoked war against Iran, assassinating many high-ranking military commanders, nuclear scientists, and ordinary

civilians.

More than a week later, the United States also entered the war by bombing three Iranian nuclear sites in a grave violation of the United Nations Charter, international law, and the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

In response, the Iranian Armed Forces targeted strategic sites across the occupied territories as well as the al-Udeid air base in Qatar, the largest American military base in West Asia. On June 24, Iran, through its successful retaliatory operations against both the Israeli regime and the US, managed to impose a halt to the illegal assault.

Iran's top commanders have warned that any new act of aggression against the country will be met with an even harsher response.

Chief of Staff of the Iranian Armed Forces Major General Abdolrahim Mousavi said on Thursday that the country's strategic naval forces are prepared to give a "firm and regret-inducing" response to any possible act of aggression by enemies.

Araghchi, top EU diplomat discuss Iran nuclear issue, West Asia

International Desk

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi in a phone conversation with European Union foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas discussed a range of issues including Iran's nuclear program – the main source of tensions between Tehran and European powers in recent months.

According to Iran's Foreign Ministry, Araghchi and Kallas emphasized the importance of continuing contacts and consultations between Tehran and the European parties regarding Iran's nuclear program.

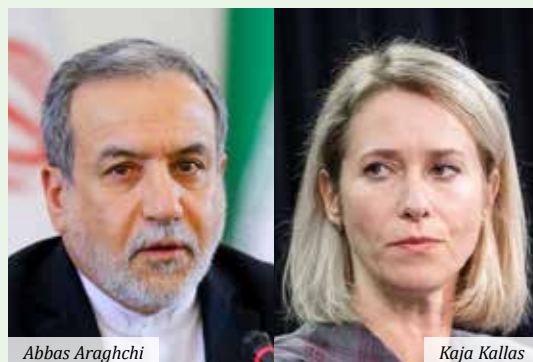
Iran's nuclear program has been a source of contention with Western countries for more than two decades. While Iran insists that its nuclear activities are entirely peaceful and aimed at civilian purposes such as energy production and medical research, Western powers – particularly the United

States, the United Kingdom, France, and Germany – have long expressed concern that Tehran could be seeking the capability to develop nuclear weapons.

Tensions have increased in recent months especially after the three European parties to the 2015 Iran nuclear deal – Germany, France and Britain – activated the so-called snapback mechanism embedded in the nuclear agreement on August 28, which led to the reimposition of international sanctions against Iran.

They accused Iran of not honoring its obligations under the nuclear deal from which the US unilaterally withdrew in 2018 and the European parties to the deal failed to fulfil their commitments.

Tehran has repeatedly said it was the United States and its European allies who undermined the 2015 nuclear deal by failing to honor their commitments



Abbas Araghchi

Kaja Kallas

not Iran.

Despite their illegal move to trigger the snapback mechanism, the European powers have repeatedly called for the resolution of the issue through diplomacy.

Germany: 'We welcome negotiations' with Iran

Germany's envoy to the United Nations Ricklef Beutin in an interview with Al Arabiya said that Europe is ready to continue negotiations with Iran.

"We have been in contact with the Iranians for years. We have never seen sufficient measures from Iran during this time, and Iran has violated all of its commitments," he claimed.

"For that reason, after repeated warnings, we activated the snapback mechanism. But this is not the end of diplomacy. That is why we remain ready to negotiate with Iran."

"We welcome negotiations. The Iranians must change their position; there is no disagreement on this."

Turkish foreign minister Fidan to visit Iran for high-level talks



Hakan Fidan

International Desk

Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan is scheduled to visit Iran today for a series of meetings aimed at cementing ties and addressing key regional issues, Turkish Foreign Ministry sources said on Saturday.

The sources added that talks would focus on "enhancing the institutional structure of bilateral relations" under the High-Level Cooperation Council, which was established in 2014.

Fidan will also review preparations for the ninth meeting of the council. The discussions will revolve around

fostering cooperation on security and counterterrorism, as well as accelerating infrastructure projects for border trade centers.

The Turkish foreign minister is also expected to call for increased joint efforts to achieve the target of \$30 billion in bilateral trade and emphasize the importance of maintaining dialogue between the two countries to promote regional stability, according to the sources.

He will reiterate Turkey's support for a peaceful resolution to Iran's nuclear program and underline that Israel's aggressive policies continue to obstruct stability in the region, the sources noted.

During the meeting with Iranian officials, Fidan will also stress the importance of Syria's stability for the broader region, discuss the UN Security Council's recent resolution on Gaza, the preservation of the current ceasefire between Israel and the Palestinian resistance group Hamas, as well as the reconstruction efforts in Gaza.

Russia-Ukraine war, developments in the South Caucasus as well as recent tensions between Pakistan and Afghanistan will also be on the agenda.

Europe, regional states ...

Turkish media report that Turkey's foreign minister is travelling to Iran to discuss a range of issues, including the nuclear file. How do you interpret this visit? Could Turkey be trying to mediate between Iran and the West, or is it mainly pursuing its own regional interests?

Turkey is a NATO member, a member of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, a close US ally, and at the same time an important neighbor of Iran with strong bilateral ties, not to mention its good personal relations with President Trump. Naturally, Turkey wants to play a role in this long-running international saga over Iran's nuclear program. Its interests demand that a second Iran-Israel war be avoided. Turkey

would be among the countries most affected by such a conflict. It has a fragile economy, and any major energy disruption would hit it hard. So, Turkey's interests lie firmly in resolving this crisis and ensuring political stability in West Asia. Beyond that, any country that contributes to resolving the issue stands to gain political weight. Turkey is no exception.

Under current conditions, how do you assess the role of European and regional states in shaping the trajectory of potential Iran-US negotiations? Are mediators capable of bringing the two sides closer?

All regional states have their own interests at stake. These include achieving greater stability in West Asia, which sustains a multi-trillion-dollar regional

economic ecosystem.

The opposite scenario, namely instability, would be disastrous leading probably to an energy crisis, security breakdowns, refugee flows. So, all these states want Iran's nuclear ambiguity to end and a deal to be reached, because no deal means the looming risk of war. Therefore, everyone is trying, in pursuit of their own interests first, and as international actors seeking political relevance second, to mediate.

But in my view, Arab states such as Saudi Arabia and Qatar have a far better chance of mediating at this stage, particularly under President Trump, who harbors deep mistrust toward Europeans. Under these circumstances, regional Arab states are far more likely to succeed as mediators.

Mohammad Ali Rajabi
Cartoonist

CARTOON



Hormozgan opens cold plasma clinics to combat diabetic amputations

Economy Desk

Iran inaugurated its 10th and 11th specialized clinics using cold plasma technology for chronic wound treatment on Saturday, marking a significant expansion of a domestically developed medical innovation aimed at preventing limb amputations among diabetic patients. The new clinics — launched at Khalij-e Fars (Persian Gulf) and Payambar-e Azam (PBUH) hospitals in Bandar Abbas — were officially opened in the presence of Mohammad Eslami, the head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI), and Hormozgan Governor General Mohammad Ashuri Taziani.

“The cold plasma technology has a broad spectrum of applications across agriculture, industry, environmental protection, and, impor-

tantly, healthcare,” Eslami said at the ceremony.

“This unique technology is the rightful heritage of the Iranian people, and they must benefit from its impacts across all aspects of life.”

Eslami emphasized that the clinical phase of cold plasma therapy for chronic wounds has been successfully completed.

“The equipment is fully Iranian-made, continuously localized, and steadily upgraded based on scientific research by our university experts,” he said. “The third generation of this device was developed within the past two years at the AEOI.”

He added that the technology effectively eliminates pain and suffering for diabetic patients, significantly reduces the risk of amputation, and spares them the

financial and emotional burdens associated with chronic wounds.

“With this modern, minimally invasive approach, patients are saying goodbye to pain, hardship, and high treatment costs,” Eslami noted.

According to health officials, chronic wounds — particularly among Iran’s large diabetic population — often lead to amputation without advanced intervention.

The new clinics in Hormozgan, a province with high diabetes prevalence, aim to address this urgent public health challenge using cutting-edge, homegrown technology.

The launch marks the latest step in Iran’s push to deploy cold plasma therapy nationwide, reinforcing its strategy of leveraging nuclear and plasma sciences for civilian and humanitarian purposes.



AEOI chief Mohammad Eslami speaks at the inauguration ceremony of the specialized clinics using cold plasma technology for chronic wound treatment at Payambar-e Azam (PBUH) hospital in Bandar Abbas, Hormozgan, on November 29, 2025.

● SHABESTAN NEWS

TPO pushing for balanced trade with Iraq via joint agri-value chains



Economy Desk

A senior official with the Trade Promotion Organization (TPO) announced on Saturday that the Islamic Republic is seeking to rebalance its trade relationship with Iraq by moving beyond a largely one-way export model toward joint agricultural production, shared value chains, and more balanced commerce.

Speaking at the first joint conference on Khuzestan’s agricultural capabilities — from production to exports — Abdolamir Rabi-havi, the director general of the TPO’s West Asia Bureau, described Iraq as the country’s top non-oil export destination and “first strategic partner,” ISNA reported.

While Iranian exports to Iraq have grown dramatically — from a few hundred million dollars in the early 2000s to around \$12 billion last year — the trade flow remains heavily tilted in Iran’s favor, Rabi-havi noted. He said both governments now aim to gradually narrow the gap.

“Iraq is Iran’s most important non-oil export partner and ‘first strategic partner,’” Rabi-havi said. “Giv-

en our 1,500-kilometer shared border, adjacency between five Iranian and seven Iraqi provinces, and 12 official border crossings, the geographic and logistical framework already exists for a win-win trade model.”

He emphasized that the path to a durable partnership lies in shifting Iraq’s role from a passive consumer to an active co-producer. “The sustainable solution is to build joint value-added chains and increase targeted imports from Iraq,” he said.

Rabi-havi pointed to Iraq’s significant agricultural potential — fertile land, abundant groundwater resources, and the capacity for self-sufficiency or even export — as a foundation for correcting the trade imbalance. In the first seven months of the current Iranian year (which began March 21, 2025), Iran exported approximately \$2.6 billion in agricultural goods, nearly one-third of which went to Iraq.

Dates offer a strategic example, he said, adding, “Iraq produces hundreds of thousands of tons of dates annually but exports much of it unprocessed

and without added value.”

He highlighted opportunities for Iranian companies, particularly in Khuzestan, to collaborate on processing, packaging, and international marketing.

Rabi-havi welcomed the existence of Iraq’s specialized date company under its Ministry of Agriculture as “a suitable point of connection for joint procurement, collection, and professional export operations.”

He added that Iran has already exported more than 200 types of agricultural products to Iraq — many of which are suitable for repackaging, further processing, and re-export to third markets such as Syria, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, and other countries via Mediterranean routes.

“This model can lead to joint branding and mutual value creation,” he said.

At the core of Iran’s updated economic approach, Rabi-havi said, is “joint investment and production in Iraq.” By establishing agro-processing and complementary industrial units on Iraqi soil, both countries could jointly access new markets.

He also invited Iraqi investors to explore opportuni-

ties in Khuzestan’s protein sector — especially in fish and poultry farming — describing the province as a prime location with free-trade-zone advantages that could host partnerships with neighboring Iraqi provinces.

Rabi-havi stressed that a lasting trade relationship requires reciprocity. “As long as Iran is only an exporter and Iraq only an importer, the relationship will remain vulnerable to volatility,” he said. “If Iran’s exports to Iraq stand at around \$12 billion, imports from Iraq must gradually rise toward a comparable level.”

He concluded that targeted cooperation in agriculture, agro-industry, and complementary investments in Iraq would help stabilize trade and reduce risk for economic actors on both sides.

Iran’s push for deeper economic integration comes as bilateral trade faces headwinds. Data shows that trade between the two countries totaled approximately \$3.57 billion in the first five months of this Iranian year, an 18% decline compared to the same period last year, driven largely by an 18% drop in Iranian exports to Iraq.

The downturn reflects a confluence of factors, including new Iraqi trade policies, domestic energy and infrastructure constraints in Iran, and external pressures on Iranian exports. Given Iraq’s critical importance as a market for Iran’s consumer goods, metals, petrochemicals, and agricultural products, officials say a strategic reassessment of trade policies and a more proactive approach are essential to prevent losing market share to regional and extra-regional competitors.

Iran, Azerbaijan, Russia sign cooperation deal to solidify INSTC

Economy Desk

Iran, Azerbaijan, and Russia signed a long-term cooperation agreement aimed at revitalizing the western route of the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC), the Islamic Republic of Iran Railways said on Friday.

The deal was finalized on the sidelines of the 83rd meeting of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) Transport Council meeting in Baku, which brought together chief executives and delegations from 15 member states, IRNA reported.

The memorandum of understanding among the national railway operators of the three countries focuses on establishing fixed freight pricing, setting competitive unified tariffs, and expanding logistics services along the western leg of the INSTC — an alternative trade artery linking Russia, the Caucasus, and the Persian Gulf.

By signing the agreement, the three nations reaffirmed their commitment to sustainable and mutually beneficial bilateral and multilateral cooperation, with the shared goal of transforming the western route into an active regional transit corridor.

The move comes as part of broader efforts to enhance connectivity and trade efficiency across Eurasia amid shifting



Railway officials from Iran, Azerbaijan, and Russia pose during the signing of a memorandum of understanding to strengthen cooperation on the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) at the CIS Transport Council meeting in Baku, November 28, 2025.

● IRNA

global supply chain dynamics.

Stretching over 6,000 kilometers from India’s Mumbai port to Russia’s St. Petersburg via Iran and Azerbaijan, the corridor offers a direct, multimodal connection between the Persian Gulf, the Caspian Sea, and Eurasian markets.

By shortening transit distances and cutting shipping times by up to 40 percent compared with traditional routes through the Suez Canal, it allows goods to move faster and at lower cost, boosting Iran’s competitiveness as a transit hub.

Iran, Afghanistan launch monthly rail transit of 7K tons of diesel

Economy Desk

Iran has begun monthly rail shipments of 7,000 tons of diesel from Imam Khomeini Port to Afghanistan, marking a new phase in rail-based fuel transit to the landlocked neighbor, a senior railway official said Saturday.

Gholamhossein Valadi, director general of Iran’s Southern Railways, confirmed the launch in a media briefing, stating that the first consignment has already been loaded at the Imam Khomeini Port rail terminal onto specialized tank wagons, Mehr news agency reported.

“The first cargo of diesel has been loaded at the Imam Khomeini Port rail station and will travel via tank wagons along the country’s southern rail corridor to the Shamtigh border crossing, before entering Afghanistan and continuing to Rozanak station near the city of Herat,” Valdi said.

He noted that the transit route spans



approximately 2,148 kilometers and offers significant time and cost savings compared to road transport. “This rail corridor brings considerable logistical efficiency and creates new capacity for fuel exports and transit,” he added.

According to Valdi, the Southern Railways is fully prepared to carry out the 7,000-ton monthly diesel transit operation on a sustained basis to meet Afghanistan’s fuel and commercial needs.

Experience of proportional elections in Iraq, Japan

Two countries, one reality

How proportional formulae configure political power



By Asgar
Ghahremanpour
Editor-in-chief

ANALYSIS

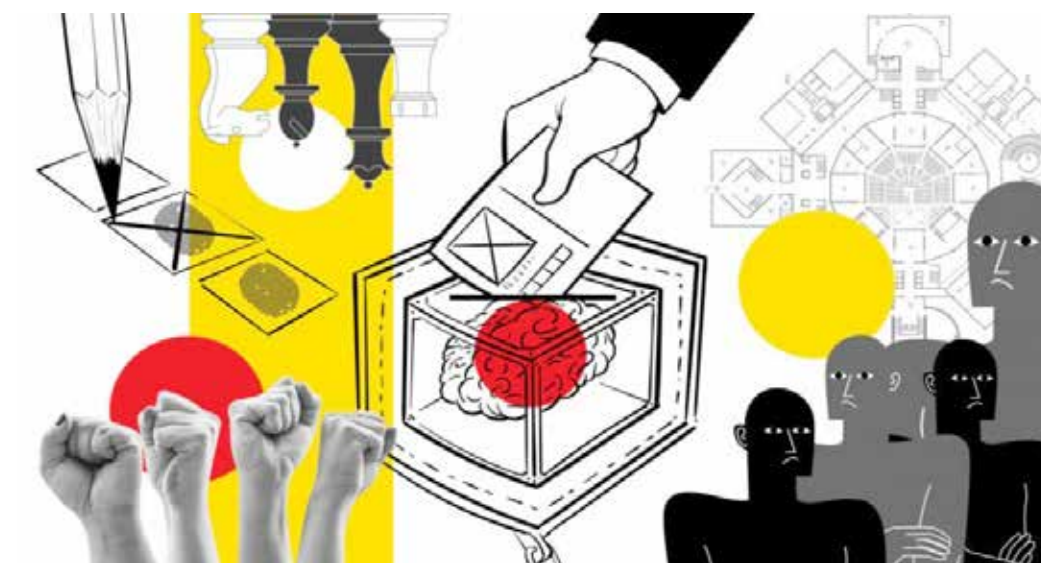
Elections have always constituted one of the most consequential junctures in the political life of every polity, a moment during which citizens can articulate their judgment regarding who ought to function as decision-makers. However, when the matter concerns proportional representation, the subject becomes somewhat more intricate, and many individuals may remain unaware of how this species of election operates and what advantages and disadvantages attend it. In this exposition, we endeavor to examine, in a simple and intelligible manner, the experience of two dissimilar countries, namely Iraq and Japan, and to demonstrate what role proportional elections can perform in representation and political oversight. Initially, we must elucidate what proportional elections are.

In the most elementary definition, in a proportional system, the number of seats that each party or political list acquires is approximately commensurate with the percentage of votes that they obtain in the election. In other words, if a party secures 30 percent of the votes, it is expected to possess approximately 30 percent of the parliamentary seats. This system is designed to engender greater equilibrium and more precise representation of political groups and minorities, in contrast with majoritarian systems in which only the winning candidate within each electoral district can enter parliament, and the votes of those who cast ballots for others are, in effect, disregarded.

1. What is proportional representation?

In traditional simple-majority systems (First-Past-the-Post), such as district-based elections, only the candidate who obtains the highest number of votes within a district becomes the victor, and other votes within that district are consequently wasted. This signifies that a party with a high percentage of votes nationwide may obtain a small number of seats since it has not acquired a majority within any district. Conversely, proportional representation endeavors to allocate seats relative to the overall percentage of votes to parties or lists. For instance, if a party obtains 30 percent of the votes nationwide, approximately 30 percent of the seats are accorded to it. This system generally ensures that smaller parties and marginalized groups can also possess representation in the legislature and that the voices of minorities are heard. Various methods exist for implementing proportional representation, including:

- **Closed/open list:** in the closed list, the party designates who receives the seat; in the open list, voters can exert direct influence upon the ranking of candidates.
- **Seat-allocation formulae:** such as Sainte-Laguë or D'Hondt, which convert vote percentages into seats.



THE DAILY STAR

2. Experience of Iraq: proportional representation, its challenges

Iraq's parliamentary elections were held in November 2025 and distributed 329 seats in the Council of Representatives. The elections utilized a modified form of proportional representation known as the Sainte-Laguë formula.

- Iraq has 18 provinces (Halabja is still calculated under the province of Sulaymaniyah). Each province is considered one electoral district.
- Iraq's modified Sainte-Laguë formula possessed one significant alteration: the first divisor was 1.7 instead of 1.0. This signifies that, to determine how many seats each party receives from the total seats of an electoral district, the total votes of each party are initially divided by 1.7, not 1 — which is used in the standard Sainte-Laguë formula. This ostensibly minute technical alteration, in practice, facilitates the efforts of large parties and reduces the prospects of small and independent parties.

Quotas

- **Women:** at least 25 percent of the seats in the Iraqi parliament are allocated to women.
- **Minorities:** 9 seats are allocated to religious and ethnic minorities such as Christians, Yazidis, Mandaeans, and Feyli Kurds.

Constraints, administrative issues

The Iraqi elections were conducted amid serious challenges:

- **Disenfranchisement of overseas voters:** no voting was conducted in embassies and consulates, and this active and politically engaged segment of the Iraqi diaspora was excluded.
- **Restriction of competitors:** approximately 850 candidates, nearly 10 percent of all registrants, were barred from competition.
- **Return of closed lists:** this alteration reduced the prospects of independent candidates and augmented the power of traditional parties.

Impact on participation, competition

- Despite the presence of around 31 coalitions, 38 parties, and 70 independent lists, power effectively remained in the possession of several major blocs.
- Shia, Sunni, and Kurdish parties, through internal mechanisms and

quota structures, possessed substantial control over the elections. In Iraq, the experience of proportional elections in recent years has been complex and, to some extent, contentious. The Iraqi parliamentary elections on November 11, 2025, were intended to constitute the country's sixth national election since 2005. These elections are conducted under the supervision of the Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC) and aim to engender equilibrium and inclusivity among various parties. However, recent alterations have considerably undermined this objective. The 2025 elections occurred amid declining public trust since years of political manipulation and elite dominance have corrupted a process that was supposed to be democratic. Many consider the recent elections the most inequitable elections since 2005 because decisions were made that strengthened powerful and established parties and weakened independent and reformist competitors. The elections in Iraq were conducted proportionally and through the modified Sainte-Laguë method. As stated earlier, in this method, each province functions as an electoral district, and the number of seats is determined by the total votes divided by the number of seats in that province. The modification implemented in the 2025 elections was that the first divisor, instead of being 1.0, was considered 1.7. This alteration, small yet extreme-

ly consequential, ensured that the initial seat-winners within each district were largely selected from among large and established lists, and the prospects of small parties and independent candidates were diminished. Thus, although the system ostensibly remained proportional, the reality is that power became concentrated within traditional and potent political groups. Furthermore, overseas voters could not participate and were required to return to Iraq in order to cast their votes. This decision effectively disenfranchised a large segment of the politically active diaspora and reduced the representation of ethnic groups such as the Kurds since the Kurdish community abroad generally votes intensely for Kurdish parties. In other words, a significant portion of the electorate was excluded. In this election, approximately 850 candidates, nearly 10 percent of all applicants, were barred from competition. Reasons such as criminal records, accountability issues, and administrative irregularities were cited. This wave of disqualifications produced widespread controversy, as many influential and well-known candidates, including individuals who had served multiple parliamentary terms, were removed. This situation has caused citizens to doubt the fairness of the electoral process. From a political perspective, Iraq still operates under the system of muhasasa, meaning that power is



In traditional simple-majority systems (First-Past-the-Post), such as district-based elections, only the candidate who obtains the highest number of votes within a district becomes the victor, and other votes within that district are consequently wasted. This signifies that a party with a high percentage of votes nationwide may obtain a small number of seats since it has not acquired a majority within any district. Conversely, proportional representation endeavors to allocate seats relative to the overall percentage of votes to parties or lists. For instance, if a party obtains 30 percent of the votes nationwide, approximately 30 percent of the seats are accorded to it.

allocated according to ethno-sectarian lines: the prime minister is Shia, the speaker of parliament is Sunni, and the president is Kurdish. Within such a framework, the 2025 elections were tumultuous and highly competitive, with candidates contending for 329 seats. The large number of candidates and parties ostensibly reflects political plurality, but in reality, power remains concentrated within a few established blocs whose structural advantages permit them to exercise superior influence.

Among the Shia blocs, Muqtada Sadr's movement decided to boycott the elections. In the early elections of 2021, this movement obtained 73 seats, but after failing to form a national majority government, it withdrew its representatives from parliament. The boycott reduced voter participation and shifted the electoral landscape to the advantage of other Shia parties under the banner of the Coordination Framework. This bloc includes most principal Shia parties, and key individuals, such as Hadi al-Ameri, continue to play significant roles within it. In the Sunni landscape, Iraq's political environment is also undergoing transformation. The Taqadum Party, which previously held Sunni leadership, has lost part of its standing after the removal of the former parliamentary speaker, yet it still retains considerable power. Other parties and coalitions, such as the Sovereignty Alliance and the Azm Movement, endeavored to attract Sunni voters. Sunni voter participation has increased in several provinces, signifying a partial revival of electoral motivation.

Among the Kurds, nearly one year after the 2024 parliamentary elections of the Kurdistan Region, Kurdish parties entered the national elections without possessing a regional government. Internal disagreements prevented the formation of a coalition, and Kurdish political power in Iraq is significantly fragmented. The Patriotic Union of Kurdistan has been weakened due to leadership disputes, and several senior figures have joined the Kurdistan Democratic Party. Meanwhile, there is heightened attention toward Baghdad to secure greater influence in federal decision-making.

Given this experience, one can assert that the proportional system in Iraq was designed to engender precise representation and inclusivity, yet reforms and alterations in calculation methods, disqualification of candidates, and voting restrictions have caused this system, in practice, to strengthen established parties and reduce the prospects of independents and minority groups. This demonstrates that although the system appears democratic and proportional, political reality can be entirely different.

3. Experience of Japan: combination of district-based, proportional systems

Japan possesses a distinct system known as the Two-Part Voting System or the Mixed Electoral System, with 465 seats in the House of Representatives, out of which:



People sit behind fences watching a campaign rally unfold in Iraq on November 4, 2025, seven days before the parliamentary elections are held.
MORTEZA AHMADI AL-HASHEM/MEHR

- 289 seats are elected from single-seat constituencies.
- 176 seats are allocated through proportional representation within 11 regional blocs.

Voting procedure

Voters in Japan possess two votes:

- **District candidate:** for selecting the representative of their district.
- **Party:** for proportional representation, which allocates seats to parties according to their percentage of votes.

Merit of Mixed System

- Candidates defeated in single-seat constituencies can enter the legislature through party votes in the proportional component.
- “Wasted” votes in the single-seat constituencies can still exert influence in the proportional tier.
- Politicians can adopt diverse campaigning strategies to attract votes both in local constituencies and in the proportional tier.

Practical example

Imagine that candidate A becomes victorious in their district,

Feature	Japan	Iraq
Type of proportional representation	Mixed System (district-based + proportional)	Modified Sainte-Laguë
Lists	Closed and open (candidates within party lists are rankable)	Closed List
Quota seats for women	None (but some parties present balanced lists)	25% of seats reserved
Quota seats for minorities	None (but the division of regional blocs functions similarly)	9 seats reserved
Voting from outside the country	Limited, depending on local law	None

IRAN DAILY

but candidate B loses by a narrow margin. In the proportional system, if the party of candidate B acquires a sufficient percentage of votes, B can enter the legislature through a proportional seat. In this manner, representation and fairness toward voters increase. Thus, the Japanese experience exemplifies a hybrid approach that seeks to integrate broad representation with political stability. The crucial point is that candidates who are defeated in the single-seat constituencies can enter the legislature through the proportional list. Consequently, “wasted” votes in the single-seat constituencies are still reflected to some extent,

and greater representation from the perspective of voters is created. For example, if two candidates compete in a single-seat district and the defeated candidate is close to the victor; they possess a chance to obtain a proportional seat. This feature allows a significant portion of voters to feel that their opinion has not been disregarded and preserves motivation for electoral participation. Another merit of Japan’s system is that it can maintain a degree of balance between small and large parties because, in the proportional component, seats are allocated according to each party’s percentage of votes. This stands in contrast

with the single-seat method, in which only one candidate becomes victorious, and other votes are effectively unseen. Japan’s Mixed System grants candidates and parties diverse avenues for entering the legislature and prevents the dissipation of votes. The experiences of Iraq and Japan reveal that although the term “proportional representation” may be utilized in both countries, operational design and political conditions exert a substantial influence upon the final outcome. In Iraq, reforms and restrictions caused the proportional system to become an instrument for entrenching established blocs

rather than strengthening representation, whereas in Japan, the combination of single-seat and proportional components endeavors to secure both authentic representation and political stability.

Conclusion

Ultimately, proportional elections constitute an instrument for reflecting the people’s votes into parliamentary seats. However, without transparent laws, independent oversight, and the possibility of participation for all social strata, this instrument can produce the opposite result and concentrate power in the hands of a limited group. Therefore, understanding the mechanisms of proportional elections, including seat calculation, quotas for women and minorities, and methods of vote distribution, possesses great significance. Citizens, through awareness of these mechanisms, can make superior decisions and protect their civic rights. In the end, both experiences demonstrate that proportional elections are, in theory, a powerful instrument for equitable

representation, but in practice, legal design, reforms, and political conditions can alter their effect to the advantage of particular groups. Civic education, electoral transparency, and independent oversight constitute the keys to transforming the proportional system from a theoretical mechanism into an authentic instrument for reflecting the public will. For every society that values democracy, public awareness regarding electoral methods, understanding limitations and advantages, and the capacity for questioning constitute the most important steps for guaranteeing justice and genuine participation in politics. By examining Iraq and Japan, one can discern that the electoral system not only structures political power but also serves as a criterion for assessing the health of democracy and the degree of public participation. Although countries differ, the common lesson is unequivocal: without public awareness, even the most sophisticated electoral systems cannot ensure that the authentic representatives of the people are chosen.

Proportional elections a courageous step along an arduous trajectory



By Hojatollah Ayoubi

Head of int'l affairs at Iran's Ministry of Cultural Heritage

OPINION

The implementation of city council elections in Tehran on the basis of a proportional system is courageous and facilitative. Yet its success is contingent upon the resolution of several technical and legal issues, the guarantee of financial transparency, and the genuineness of parties and political coalitions. Negligent attention to these subtleties may divert this experiment toward outcomes such as inefficacy or corruption.

Issue of determining threshold

Mere proportionality in elections is insufficient for genuine partitocracy. Global experience indicates that the absence of a “threshold,” or the establishment of a very low threshold, will engender the proliferation of fictitious parties and electoral lists that have no social base. Therefore, it must be determined what percentage of the votes constitutes the condition for a party or list to enter the stage of seat allocation; for instance, there’s the reasonable span of 3 to 8 percent, but it must be determined through simulation, the study of global experiences, and the political circumstances of the country. This threshold delineates the boundary between parties with authentic constituencies and the emergence of ephemeral coalitions.

Allocation of remaining seats

After tabulation, a portion of the votes invariably remains as a fraction of a single seat. For distributing this fraction among lists, numerous methods exist, such as “D’Hondt” or “Sainte-Laguë,” which will produce divergent consequences for representation and political equilibrium. Hence, the precise method and the accepted mathematical formula must be



ISTOCK

determined and inscribed in the bylaws, so that ambiguity, disagreement, and impairment of public trust are forestalled.

Presence of independent candidates

The combination of party lists with independent candidates introduces a new veil of complexity. In many proportional representation systems, competition is predominantly list-based, and the entry of independents renders the calculations for seat allocation arduous and “unprecedented”. A lucid mechanism is required for determining the manner of calculating the share of independents, the relation of individual vote totals with lists, and the hierarchy of priority in allocating seats, so that no technical disputations arise after the announcement of results.

Genuineness of parties, necessity of financial transparency

It is vital that coalitions and parties possess genuineness

and a real social base. The formation of coalitions a few days prior to elections, which are organized solely for financial or media-related purposes, does not contribute to genuine partitocracy and also disarranges the landscape of electoral expenditures. To avert this circumstance, rules of financial transparency and specific restrictions must be established. The following mechanisms may be employed:

- **Mandatory establishment of an electoral account:** Every party, coalition, or candidate shall be obliged to open an electoral account before the elections and to conduct all receipts and expenditures exclusively through that account, which shall be accessible to the Ministry of Interior and the supervisory authority.
- **Restriction of monetary contributions:** A defined ceiling shall be established for financial contributions by natural persons. Monetary contributions outside the banking network

shall be prohibited.

- **Prohibition of legal and corporate contributions:** Private companies, legal entities, and enterprises shall be barred from providing direct payments to parties or coalitions.
- **Perpetual transparency:** Periodic reports of resources and expenditures must be published publicly, and the possibility of independent auditing must be provided.
- **Rational support for small parties:** To reinforce genuine partitocracy, reasonable educational or media resources must be provided for parties with a minimal social base, so that competition does not devolve into financial bargaining.
- **A robust and competent supervisory body:** The establishment or reinforcement of an independent and capable institution for supervising electoral financing and imposing deterrent fines is necessary. The implementation of the proportional representation system in city council elections

can accelerate partitocracy and fortify political institutions. Yet correct advancement is conditional upon the adoption of preliminary technical and legal decisions and the institution of transparent financial rules. It is proposed that the Ministry of Interior (1) determine and, through simulation, announce a rational threshold, (2) publish the formula for allocating remaining seats beforehand, (3) elucidate the mechanism for the presence of independents, and (4) implement the regulations of financial transparency and the independent supervisory authority before the commencement of elections. If these guarantees are instituted, the experience of proportional elections can be transformed into a positive and enduring evolution within the party system. I wish the success of this trial in realizing sustainable popular sovereignty.

The article first appeared in the Persian-language Iran Newspaper.



Mere proportionality in elections is insufficient for genuine partitocracy. Global experience indicates that the absence of a “threshold,” or the establishment of a very low threshold, will engender the proliferation of fictitious parties and electoral lists that have no social base.

FIFA Futsal Women's World Cup: Iran undone by Italy, misses out on quarterfinals



Iranian players are pictured during a Group D defeat against Italy at the FIFA Futsal Women's World Cup in Pasig, Philippines, on November 29, 2025.
● FIFA

Sports Desk

Iran's bid for a last-eight spot at the inaugural FIFA Futsal Women's World Cup came to an end following a 3-1 defeat against Italy in Pasig, Philippines, on Saturday.

The setback saw Shahrzad Mozafar's side finish third in Group D with three points, while Brazil and Italy progressed to the knockout phase with nine and six points, respectively.

Needing a victory to advance to the quarterfinals, Iran almost took the lead in the opening minute after a well-worked buildup from a corner saw Nasimeh Gholami set up Mahtab Banaei, whose shot beat Italy keeper Ana Sestari but drifted just wide of the left post.

Italy responded seconds later, with Sara Boutimah drilling a low shot from just above the arc, forcing keeper Farzaneh Tavassoli into a save, before the European side began to pin Iran in its own half with a high press.

Iran, however, managed to break the deadlock in the 10th minute.

Tavassoli launched the ball from her own half and Fereshteh Khosravi's dummy run inside the box blocked Sestari's line of sight, allowing the ball to sneak through and roll over the line.

Italy came charging forward, with Tavassoli tipping away Gaby Vanelli's effort in the 14th minute, before the Iran captain survived a scare in the 18th when Renata Adamatti's shot took a slight deflection off her fingertips and struck the right post. Adamatti then spotted Tavassoli off her line with a minute remaining in the half but failed to guide her lob from her own half into the unguarded net.

Italy almost drew level two minutes after the restart, Adamatti sidestepping Maral Torkaman at the top of the arc only to miss the left post with her effort, before Tavassoli's timely block denied Vanelli a clear shot on goal.

The end-to-end action continued,

with Iran nearly doubling its lead in the 26th minute when Sara Shirbeigi saw her attempt blocked by a charging Sestari. Moments later, Italy's Adrieli Berte failed to convert Vanelli's low cross as it flashed across the goalmouth.

The European side eventually turned the tables just before the half-hour mark, Berte lifting Adamatti's pass over Tavassoli with a composed lob. Italy kept the momentum and took the lead seconds later from another fast break, with Bruna Borges tapping in Erika Ferrara's pass.

Iran attempted to claw back into the game by switching to a power play, but the strategy backfired. Vanelli punished a loose pass in the 35th minute, sending a long-range effort into the empty net.

Iran had opened its campaign with a 4-1 loss to Brazil before bouncing back to beat Panama 6-2 on Wednesday, keeping its hopes alive heading into the final group match.

Iran's taekwondo girls keen to shine at World U21 Ch'ships as in Riyadh

Sports Desk

Iranian girls will look to build on their impressive run at the Islamic Solidarity Games a fortnight ago when the World Taekwondo Under 21 Championships kicks off in Nairobi, Kenya, on Wednesday.

Just two weeks after a dire World Championships in Wuxi, where Iran finished empty-handed across eight women's categories, head coach Mahrouz Saei took a team of low-profile but promising young talents to the multi-sport event in Riyadh – a gamble that paid off for the under-fire coach. Iran collected five medals in six weight classes in the Saudi capital, and now three of them will vie for glory at the inaugural Under-21 event in Nairobi. Sayna Karimi enters the -46kg draw fresh off a stunning ISG campaign. In only her second senior international outing, the 19-year-old Iranian defeated Turkey's reigning world champion Emine Gögebakan and went on to capture the gold without conceding a single round. Rozhan Goodarzi (-51kg) and Hasti Mohammadi (-57kg) will be looking to take inspiration from their promising performances in Riyadh, where the two teenage prodigies settled for bronze in their weight categories. Meanwhile, Saghar Moradi will fancy her chances in the -57kg division, having already won a world silver and two Asian golds in the junior ranks, while Sara Soufi is aiming for a solid international breakthrough in the -73kg event.

Still, Mobina Nematzadeh remains the Iranian woman to watch when she gets her -53kg campaign underway in the Kenyan capital. A world junior champion in 2022, Nematzadeh stole the headlines when she won a precious -49kg bronze medal on her senior debut at last year's Paris Olympics. The 20-year-old was a hopeful at the World Championships last month, only to see her bid for glory come to an end in the round of 16 against even-

tual champion Merve Dinçel of Türkiye. Nematzadeh will be desperate to bounce back from the Wuxi setback as she has already set her sights on another Olympic success at LA 2028.

Zandi eyeing third gold

In the men's competition, Abolfazl Zandi will spearhead the eight-man Iranian squad, aiming to add the Under-21 -58kg crown to the senior world gold he won in Wuxi, as well as his world junior title from 2022.

Joining Zandi on the Iranian team is Mahdi Razmian (-54kg), who enters the tournament as the reigning world and Asian junior champion, but suffered a second-round exit in Wuxi. Matin Rezaei will compete in the -68kg class, boasting the 2022 world and Asian titles in the junior ranks, plus a bronze medal at last year's senior Asian Championships.

World junior champion Amirmohammad Ashrafi (+87kg) and former world cadet gold medalist Radin Zeinali (-74kg) will also be among the favorites in their respective categories. Amirabbas Rahnama (-63kg), Amirreza Gholami (-80kg), and Mohammad Alizadeh (-87kg) complete the Iranian men's lineup in Nairobi.



Iran's Sayna Karimi (L), pictured at the Islamic Solidarity Games, will compete in the women's -46kg class at the World Taekwondo Under 21 Championships in Nairobi, Kenya.
● SNN

6th International Fajr Cup: Hasanpour strikes superheavyweight gold as Iran claims team title

Sports Desk

Iranian weightlifters Reza Hasanpour and Ariya Paydar completed a one-two finish in the +110kg class on the final day of the International Fajr Cup in Tehran, as the host nation lifted the team trophy.

Former world junior silver medalist Hasanpour dominated the super-heavyweight event, tallying 190kg in the snatch and a best clean & jerk of 235kg for a total of 425kg on Friday. He finished 55 kilograms clear of compatriot Paydar, who registered 165kg-205kg-370kg. Afghanistan's Fazal Karim Turkmen took the bronze with 130-175-305.

Earlier in the day, Abolfazl Zare – a winner of three world junior medals in May – had to settle for silver in the 110kg event despite lifting 208kg to top the clean & jerk standings. His 171-208-379 performance saw him finish behind Turkmenistan's Davranbek Hasanbayev, who secured the gold with a 185kg snatch and a 202kg clean & jerk. Tajikistan's Akbarjon Ghafurov claimed the bronze with 125-155-280.

Meanwhile, in the 94kg event, Uzbekistan's Mukhammadkodir Toshtemirov won the gold with 170-200-370. The Iranian duo of Ali Aalipour (161-196-357) and Hamidreza Zarei (149-195-346) finished second and third, respectively.



Iranian weightlifter Reza Hasanpour is seen in action in the +110kg class at the 6th International Fajr Cup in Tehran, Iran, on November 28, 2025.
● MIZAN

Friday's medals came after Iran collected double golds through Hafez Qashqaei and Iliya Salehipour on the opening day of the event. Competing in the men's 65kg division, Qashqaei – the 2019 world clean & jerk silver medalist – lifted 122kg in the snatch and secured a best clean & jerk of 160kg to take the total gold with 282kg.

Meanwhile, Salehipour, coming off a triple-medal run at the Islamic Soli-

darity Games earlier this month, posted 155kg in the snatch and 192kg in the clean & jerk for a 344kg total to win a closely contested 88kg event. Iran finished atop the team standings with 620.8 points, followed by Turkmenistan (486) and Uzbekistan (386). Weightlifters from Iran, Iraq, Sri Lanka, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, and Saudi Arabia competed at the sixth edition of the tournament in Tehran.

Asian Youth Chess Championships: Iranians grab double gold in standard event

Sports Desk

Kiasha Mahboobi and Barad Ahmadi claimed two golds as Iran finished with an impressive six medals at the standard competition of the Asian Youth Chess Championships in Bangkok, Thailand. A rapid gold medalist earlier in the competition, Mahboobi tallied seven points from nine rounds to win the boys' under-eight title, edging India's Amudhan Tamizh on superior tie-break. Mahboobi's compatriot Mahdiyar Janbarari settled for bronze with six points, helping Iran top the team standings in the age group.

Ahmadi drew his final match with China's Fuyan Shen to secure the boys' under-14 title with six points.

Ayhan Rahbar (boys' U12), Mahdis Asadi-

kalam (girls' U8), and Asma Hassanpour (girls' U10) added three bronze medals to Iran's haul.

Iran finished fourth in the overall team table while placing runner-up in the girls' under-18 event.



Sarein battles fluctuating tourism, rapid development

Iranica Desk

Sarein, a city in Ardabil Province long recognized as a major tourist destination, now finds itself caught between seasonal surges in visitors and relentless construction — most of it aimed at seasonal accommodations.

Akbar Mohammadi, a tourism entrepreneur and investor in Sarein, told Mehr News Agency that the city currently hosts over 230 active lodging facilities, including hotels, hotel-apartments, guesthouses, and suites — a capacity far exceeding the city's size and actual demand during peak travel periods. Despite this abundance, many of these units are only occupied during specific times of the year, remaining empty for months at a stretch.

Regarding the city's hydrotherapy complexes, Mohammadi explained that they are the main driver of Sarein's tourism industry. "The city has several active complexes, and many visitors come solely for these facilities. Yet even their popularity is highly seasonal: summers and holidays are extremely busy, while autumn and winter see much lower attendance," he noted.

The tourism expert emphasized the imbalance in visitor flow, "During summer, Nowruz (Iranian New Year) holidays, and special holidays, the city's population multiplies several times over. But in the second half of the year, a large portion of accommodations remain vacant. This severe fluctuation undermines the sustainability of Sarein's tourism development."

He added that despite the city already having more than 230 lodging centers, local tourism authorities and urban planners continue to propose further ex-



● takhfiyan.com

tions in subterranean layers could damage them."

Mohammadi noted that the risks extend beyond geology. "More construction means more population, wastewater, water consumption, and waste. If infrastructure doesn't develop alongside this growth, the environmental pressure around the spa complexes will increase, lowering the quality of the tourist experience as well."

He added, "For a city like Sarein, the springs are the most valuable asset. If construction takes place without proper geological assessment and respect for the springs' protected zones, it could cause irreparable damage. Today, more than ever, building regulations in sensitive areas must be strictly enforced. Sarein needs development, but it must be a type of development that preserves the sanctity of its springs. If these resources are

pansion, with new construction projects underway. "A significant part of the current capacity stays empty for most of the year," he stressed.

Mohammadi also raised concerns about pressure to expand the city's boundaries. "There are ongoing discussions about allocating more land for construction. If this process continues without careful study or consideration of actual tourist demand, it could cause serious economic and environmental consequences," he warned.

On the need for a revised development approach, he said, "Tourism growth is not just about building more hotels. Authorities must focus on managing demand, distributing travel throughout the year, developing off-season activities, and improving service quality. Without this shift, Sarein risks facing an oversupply of accommodations and wasted investment."

Regarding the potential impact of uncontrolled construction on Sarein's hydrotherapy complexes, Mohammadi explained

that the city sits atop sensitive geothermal structures. "Any deep drilling, unplanned construction, or increased load near the springs could disrupt the balance of underground water pressures. This is a serious concern," he said.

"If urban expansion continues without study," he continued, "the springs' discharge may decrease, water courses may shift, or even water quality could be affected. Some springs rely on extremely delicate and stable flows, and even minor disrup-

harmed, not only will the thermal spa industry suffer, but the city's entire tourism sector will be negatively affected."

Beyond the challenges of fluctuating tourism and rapid development, Sarein and Ardabil Province remain among Iran's most attractive destinations for nature and culture-oriented travel. Sarein's cool summer climate, fresh mountain air, and mild breezes draw thousands of visitors each year, particularly from warmer provinces seeking relief from seasonal heat. Nestled on the slopes of Mount Sabalan, the city benefits from a unique geothermal landscape where thermal springs, mineral-rich waters, and green valleys form the heart of its tourism identity.

Ardabil Province itself offers a remarkably diverse range of natural attractions. Mount Sabalan — the dormant volcanic peak towering over the region — is one of the most iconic natural landmarks in Iran, attracting climbers, hikers, and photographers. The alpine meadows around Sabalan, known for their wildflowers and natural lakes, have become a popular route for eco-tourism and summer trekking. The Shorabil Lake in the provincial capital of Ardabil, with its walking paths and recreational facilities, is another major draw for visitors.

The province's climate plays a significant role in shaping its tourism appeal. Summers are pleasantly cool, springs are lush and green, and winters — though cold and snowy — attract travelers interested in winter landscapes and seasonal festivities. This climatic diversity offers opportunities for year-round tourism if properly managed.

Wood, thread tell story of Baraghan's puppet acrobat

Iranica Desk

In Baraghan, a village in Iran's Alborz Province where thousand-year-old walnut trees cast long shadows over homes and memories, it is more than just a picturesque landscape of orchards. Behind its stone walls and along its quiet alleys flows a story that few may have considered — a story of wood, thread, calloused hands, and the ambitious dreams of humans. This is the story of the Barghan puppet acrobat (Arusak-e Bandbaz), a wooden figure that comes to life with the movement of a small ladder. In Baraghan, simply asking about the puppet acrobat brings smiles to the faces of many elders. Tahmasb Mansourian, nearly 75 years old, recalls: "In our time, toys were scarce. This puppet was enough to make the world beautiful for us. With a piece of wood and a thread, we were entertained and our imaginations soared."

The puppet acrobat is a wooden figure that begins its acrobatic movement along a small ladder once its strings are pulled. Its body is limp yet astonishingly agile, leaping up and down a wooden rope between two tiny columns, as if it has no weight. But this puppet represents more than a child's toy; it embodies the skills, courage, and lives of people raised among



● chn.ir

walnut and mulberry trees, chn.ir wrote.

Baraghan, according to the elders, is a village where trees have long outgrown the people. Towering walnut trees with massive trunks have provided shade and sustenance for generations. These ancient trees offer more than fruit and cover; they quietly shape the skills and memories of the village's inhabitants, each branch telling a story of local life.

During walnut harvest season, village men climbed the tall, straight trees with confident steps. Scaling these trees required not only strength, but also agility, balance, focus, and courage. When children play

with the puppet acrobat, they follow in the footsteps of past generations, practicing these very skills, keeping alive the story of human effort and daring. Elders say the puppet acrobat is a miniature reflection of the men who once climbed the trees. As a child pulls the puppet's strings, it's as if they are experiencing the skill and courage of these men firsthand. This puppet is a miniature narrative of human perseverance and a living expression of the abilities and intelligence of generations who lived in Baraghan.

Crafting a puppet acrobat is far from simple. Though the tools seem modest, breathing life into the wood requires patience



● farsnews.ir

and knowledge passed down through generations.

Upon entering a small workshop, one immediately notices small and large pieces of wood. The scent of freshly cut timber carries the weight of history, as if each piece holds its own story. The craftsman, first draws the puppet's pattern on a thin board, two to three millimeters thick. With a fine saw, like a skilled surgeon, he carefully frees each body part from the wood.

In the past, this work was done with a chisel, meaning each piece was carved rather than cut — a process that could take hours. The pieces are then sanded to ensure no sharp edges

harm a child's hand. Tiny holes are drilled with a hand tool, forming the joints that allow the puppet to move.

Next comes the ladder: two narrow sticks, about 25 centimeters long, connected by a small crosspiece resembling a rung. The puppet's miniature stage is ready. Finally, silk threads, like invisible veins, connect all the components. When the ladder is moved, the puppet begins its acrobatics. The first time it leaps with agility, one cannot help but smile. The wood has truly come to life.

Today, the puppet acrobat is no longer a common companion in Barghan children's hands. While some may grow up with

smartphones and online games, others remain committed to preserving this silent heritage. Iranian culture is multi-ethnic and multi-narrative; every village, every family, completes the national puzzle. Traditional puppets are more than toys — they are storytellers, narrating art, aesthetics, lifestyle, and worldviews.

In Baraghan, the puppet acrobat has long served as an informal teacher of balance, courage, and capability. Every pull of its string trains a child to overcome heights and trust in their own abilities.

Local residents and experts suggest simple yet effective ways to preserve this intangible heritage: teaching adolescents how to make the puppets, producing them in small batches for eco-tourism centers and local markets, holding small festivals, making documentaries, promoting them online and through local media, and establishing permanent exhibits in museums and tourism centers.

Preserving intangible heritage is not about keeping an object — it is about maintaining the mindset, perspective, and skills shaped by generations. The Barghan puppet acrobat offers a miniature view of the village's worldview, demonstrating how life, skill, and creativity flow through the simplest of games.



Cultural exchange ‘cannot be fenced in’ as Shiraz hosts 15-nation film forum: *Iran’s cinema chief*

Arts & Culture Desk

Head of Cinema Organization of Iran (COI) Raed Faridzadeh said on Saturday that cultural exchange “cannot be fenced in” and that attempts to disrupt artistic engagement amount to ignoring the “depth” of Iran’s long-standing cultural identity. Speaking to domestic media in Shiraz on November 29, he defended the Fajr International Film Festival’s restored independence, the arrival of prominent foreign filmmakers, and the need for a structural policy to bring foreign films back into Iranian theatres, IRNA reported.

“Art always finds its way,” he said, even when political currents try to block dialogue. The remarks come as Tehran seeks to reposition itself as a regional film center at a moment when cultural diplomacy in the Middle East is shifting. Officials hope the festival’s move to Shiraz, coupled with this year’s high-level attendance, will shore up Iran’s influence in a competitive landscape. The government also views the event as proof that the country’s cinematic appeal endures despite geopolitical friction and market constraints.

Faridzadeh said the idea for a regional summit of film authorities dates back more than a decade. Ministers, deputy ministers, cultural envoys and heads of national film bodies from 15 countries began arriving on Saturday ahead of a closed-door session and a ministerial meeting. He said the goal is to “deepen” co-operation, draw up timelines for joint productions and revive partnerships that had stalled.

Shiraz, now the permanent host of the international festival after its separation from the domestic Fajr event, has pulled in more than 200 foreign guests, according to the provincial culture office. About half had arrived by November 29. Workshops in filmmaking, photography and other crafts are underway. France’s ambassador attended earlier in the week, and visiting delegates toured the festival market, short-film pavilion and an exhibition on the 12-day war. Pakistan has taken a prominent role this year. Its culture minister, Aurangzeb Khan Kichi, is due in Shiraz on November 30, leading a team whose films ‘Umro Ayyar,’ ‘Taxali Gate’ and ‘Actor in Law’ screen for the

first time in the festival. Iranian officials see the participation as an opening for stronger bilateral cultural ties after several quiet years. The Pakistani roster includes directors, producers and actors seeking distribution and training opportunities.

The festival’s jury president, Turkish auteur Nuri Bilge Ceylan, issued a forthright statement after criticism of his attendance. He said boycotts risk depriving audiences rather than governments and described Iranian film students as possessing “an extraordinary spark”.

Ceylan said accepting invitations to festivals should not be mistaken for political endorsement but seen as a way to cross borders “created by political regimes”.

Faridzadeh echoed this point, noting that efforts to frame cultural participation as political support “misread” the role of cinema.

Faridzadeh also repeated his call for a structured regime to regulate foreign film screenings in Iran. He said several studies, including research led by senior adviser Hosseini, had outlined a regulatory pathway to allow regular circulation of quality



Raed Faridzadeh

international films. The presence of foreign filmmakers in Shiraz, he said, should be a “wake-up call” for institutions to push through the overdue reforms.

He toured the festival’s various sections on Friday, saying the event’s components “fit together” and that Shiraz had

proven itself a capable host. This year’s theme, centered on the poetic strain of Iranian cinema, is meant to underline what he called a “distinct aesthetic spirit” that runs through Iranian filmmaking.

Officials expect the summit’s technical and ministerial meetings to map out timelines for

co-financing schemes, talent exchanges and regional training programmes.

Faridzadeh said Iran’s status as a “cinematic parent” stems from shared cultural roots with its neighbors and from an industry that has sustained global standing despite sanctions and budget pressures.

‘Alone Together’ wins Best Int’l Short at US Anthem Festival

Arts & Culture Desk

The Iranian short film ‘Alone Together,’ written and directed by Omid Mirzaei, produced by Saeed Khani, won the Best International Short Film award at the 15th Anthem Film Festival in the United States.

The win signals a rising appreciation for Iranian cinema that boldly tackles civil-rights themes. ‘Alone Together’ joins a growing wave of socially conscious works making inroads abroad and rubbing shoulders with global festival staples, ILNA reported.

The film unfolds on a frigid



id winter night aboard a long-distance coach halted at a roadside checkpoint. Suspicion falls on a lone

boy passenger. That momentary moment becomes a quiet capsule of fear, empathy and moral unease.

In the cast are Alireza Sanifar, Parham Gholamlou, Mohammad Movahednia, Saba Amiri and Mohammad Rashidi. International sales and festival submissions are handled by Solmaz Etemad.

The Anthem Film Festival is known for spotlighting works that explore autonomy, civil liberties, personal freedoms and the struggle against coercion. ‘Alone Together’ fits squarely within that mission with its sharp, atmospheric narrative.

‘Dialogue of Creativity’ showcases works of Iraqi, Iranian women artisans

Arts & Culture Desk

A joint Iraqi–Iranian handicrafts exhibition ‘Dialogue of Creativity’ went on display in Baghdad, aiming to deepen cultural and artistic ties between the two neighboring nations.

The exhibition went beyond a simple display of traditional crafts. It created a tangible forum for cross-cultural exchange and long-term collaboration between Iranian and Iraqi women artisans.

In a region where soft power often complements formal diplomacy, grassroots cultural initiatives like this serve as strategic instruments to reinforce bilateral goodwill, ILNA reported.

Over 100 female artisans from both countries presented a wide range of traditional works, including embroidered garments,

calligraphy, woven textiles, home décor, sculptures, paintings, handmade handbags, shoes, and other regional crafts.

One Iranian exhibitor with two decades of experience showcased hand-stitched tablecloths, blankets, and children’s clothing, noting strong demand for her handcrafted sandals and bags.

First-time Iraqi participant Hawraa al-Daikan called the exhibition a “valuable platform” for women to present and market their work, particularly given prohibitive booth costs at major fairs.

Iran’s Cultural Attaché in Baghdad, Sheikh Gholamreza Abazari, who attended the event and toured the exhibits described the initiative as laying the foundation for “broader future collaborations,” underlining that joint exhi-



bitions can facilitate both cultural and economic cooperation.

In addition to immediate displays, organizers announced the formation of women-led craft collectives in Iraq, comprising over 100 skilled artisans active in weaving, ceramics, metal engraving, marquetry, jewelry, glasswork, painting, regional clothing, embroidery, leatherwork, and natural soap and candle making.

The program aims to empower women, foster peer learning, and open stable markets for their handcrafted goods.

Iran presses to block down-listing of peregrine falcon at CITES CoP20



Social Desk

A delegation from Iran has lobbied vigorously during the 20th meeting of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) in Samarkand, Uzbekistan, held from November 24 to December 5, to prevent moving the coastal peregrine falcon *Falco peregrinus* from Appendix I to Appendix II.

According to delegates from the Iranian Department of Environment and

Iran’s Foreign Ministry, they engaged in wide-ranging diplomatic efforts with countries including China, Russia, the EU, Armenia, Kenya and New Zealand, IRNA reported.

In effect, Iran argues that relaxing the falcon’s status would “normalize trade” in the species, a move that could undercut decades of conservation gains. The delegation submitted detailed scientific documentation to underpin its appeal.

The push comes at a moment of

heightened stakes for global biodiversity. CITES CoP20 is reviewing 51 proposals to amend species listings, alongside a broader agenda of trade-regulation and ecosystem-safeguarding measures. Parties to the treaty, 185 in total, are considering changes affecting more than 250 species.

Iran’s stand underscores its commitment to safeguarding vulnerable wildlife. The peregrine falcon once suffered dramatic population declines mid-20th century due to pesticides

such as DDT; only after its ban and concerted breeding and conservation efforts did populations begin to recover. Conservationists argue that a downgrading now could erase those gains.

Negotiations at CoP20, the first to be held in Central Asia, have been described as complex and highly political. Feelings within the Iranian camp are decisive: National authorities view the species as emblematic of biodiversity resilience, not a commodity for trade.