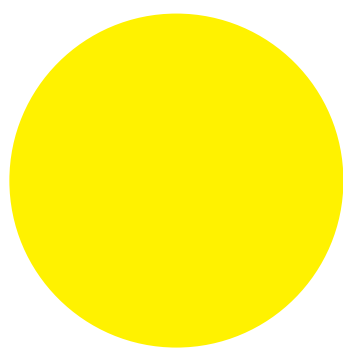




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Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi (R) and his Turkish counterpart Hakan Fidan attend a joint press conference in Tehran on November 30, 2025.

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Regional integration of Iran & Turkey: The path to cooperation in a complex Middle East



By Asgar Ghahremanpour
Editor-in-chief

OPINION

In the complex and rapidly transforming landscape of the Middle East, the relationship between Iran and Turkey has reached a stage that can be described as a "transition toward functional integration," a phase in which shared security, economic, and geopolitical interests provide stronger incentives for closer ties than ever before, despite enduring structural and historical rivalries. Integration theory suggests that regional states move toward sustained cooperation when practical interactions increase the costs of confrontation and make the benefits of collaboration tangible and measurable. The current position of Iran and Tur-

key exemplifies this scenario: situated between competition and cooperation, where the weight of cooperative factors is rising, potentially generating positive spillover effects in other domains. Amid ongoing security threats along the shared borders of Syria and Iraq, and a geopolitically unsettled South Caucasus following the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War, both countries perceive regional developments not as a series of isolated crises but as a "threat linkage." Turkey is particularly concerned about the role of Kurdish groups in northern Syria, while Iran emphasizes the preservation of Syria's central governance and territorial integrity. Though these objectives appear distinct, at the broader level of regional security, they overlap: neither Tehran nor Ankara seeks Syria's fragmentation, nor do they wish for external actors to alter the regional

balance of power through new spheres of influence. This security alignment, a fundamental basis for integration in neofunctionalism theory, has rendered security dialogues an indispensable and continuous feature of bilateral relations. Beyond security concerns, the economic dimension plays a critical role in enabling integration. The targeted trade volume of \$30 billion is not merely a media talking point but a cornerstone for developing mutual interdependence—a type of interconnection that European Union experience demonstrates can ultimately reduce the costs of political tension and enhance institutional cooperation. Iran serves as a primary route for Turkey's access to affordable and reliable energy, while Turkey provides Iran with a crucial gateway to European and Mediterranean markets. Developing transit proj-

ects, including the reinforcement of the East-West corridor, expansion of rail capacity, and establishment of border trade hubs, exemplify the "functional spillover" effect, whereby cooperation in one sector (e.g., infrastructure) inevitably leads to cooperation in others. Expanding joint infrastructure reaches a point where any political tension incurs immediate and tangible economic costs—precisely the condition in which integration begins. Another factor influencing Iran-Turkey integration is the evolving power structure in the region. Following the Gaza conflict, widespread humanitarian crises, and unprecedented external interventions, both countries face direct and indirect pressures. Iran must manage tensions with Israel and the United States while simultaneously seeking to build new regional networks of cooperation. Turkey, similarly, strives to re-

store its regional standing and mitigate Western pressure while taking a more active role in the Palestinian issue and Gaza reconstruction. These shared pressures have created a need for Tehran and Ankara to establish a stable "diplomatic contact point," capable of reducing regional tensions and enhancing the influence of both states. Nevertheless, Iran-Turkey integration faces significant obstacles that any realistic analysis must acknowledge. Geopolitical competition in the South Caucasus retains the potential for serious tensions. Turkey maintains strategic ties with Azerbaijan, whereas Iran aims to stabilize international borders and prevent abrupt geopolitical shifts. In Syria, while shared threats have incentivized cooperation, the ultimate objectives of the two countries differ in some respects.

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Turkey FM: Iran-West row should be resolved within int'l law framework

Tehran a reliable energy supplier for Ankara: Araghchi

National Desk

Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan said on Sunday that Ankara believes that differences between Iran and the West over Tehran's nuclear program should be resolved within the framework of international law and through dialogue.

"Turkey has always stood by Iran and will continue to stand by Iran. We believe that these differences should be resolved within the framework of international law and through dialogue. Iran should also be integrated into the international community on economic and other issues," Fidan said, while addressing a joint press conference with his Iranian counterpart, Abbas Araghchi, in Tehran.

The Turkish foreign minister also pointed to the sanctions the West has imposed on Iran over the past decades, saying that the "unjust sanctions" must be lifted and Turkey will do its utmost to help the removal of sanctions imposed on Iran over its nuclear program. Fidan said they also discussed developments in the region, especially Israel's acts of aggression against the regional

countries, continuation of the ceasefire in Gaza and the cessation of attacks in the occupied West Bank and al-Quds.

"We believe that the international community must fulfill its responsibilities regarding the issues of Syria and the expansion of Israeli aggression in the region," he added.

Iran's foreign minister, for his part, said Tehran and Ankara have common concerns about the regional issues.

"The issue of Palestine and the need for joint cooperation to stop the killing of the oppressed people of Gaza were among the most important topics of today's talks. The repeated violations of the ceasefire in Gaza and the recent attacks by the Zionist regime on Lebanon and Syria show that this regime is pursuing larger plans to destabilize the region," Araghchi said.

He also referred to the developments in Syria and Israel's attacks on the Arab country, saying, "The most important threat to the security and stability of Syria comes from the Zionist regime and its occupation. It is the duty of the regional countries to stand against the aggression and expansionism of the Zionist regime, including in Syria and

Lebanon."

The two diplomats also discussed the economic relations between the two countries.

Araghchi said that Iran is one of the most reliable energy suppliers for Turkey, adding that Iran has announced its readiness to extend a long-standing gas contract with Turkey and develop co-operation in the field of electricity.

Iran currently supplies Turkey with about 10 billion cubic meters of natural gas annually under a contract signed in 2001. The 25-year agreement is set to expire in mid 2026.

Turkey has requested increased supplies due to rising energy demand in both household consumption and the manufacturing sector.

In July 2022, Iran and Turkey agreed to begin negotiations on a new gas export deal.

He also expressed the need to remove obstacles facing trade and investment between the two neighboring countries.

Establishment of joint free zones and the activation of a new border crossing as well as the connection of the railways of the two countries were also



Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi (R) and his Turkish counterpart Hakan Fidan take part in a press conference in Tehran on November 30, 2025.

● IRNA

discussed during the meeting.

Araghchi added that the two sides agreed to hold the meetings of the High-Level Cooperation Council and the Joint Economic Commission to specifically address the issues.

Iran-Saudi talks

Also on Sunday, the Iranian foreign

minister hosted Saudi Arabia's Deputy Foreign Minister for Political Affairs, Saud bin Mohammed Al-Sati, in Tehran.

During the meeting, both sides discussed bilateral ties and regional issues including developments in Syria, Palestinian territories and Lebanon.

Pezeshkian urges 'serious' global action against Israeli aggression on Palestinians

International Desk

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian once again called for serious and effective international steps to end the Israeli aggression and violations against the people of Palestine.

He made the remarks in a letter to the United Nations on the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

"This day recalls eight decades of the occupation of Palestinian lands by the usurping Israeli regime, the continuous pain and suffering of the Palestinian people, and the persistence of oppression and injustice inflicted upon that oppressed nation," Pezeshkian said.

He stressed that the international community needs to confront the Israeli regime for its open violations of international law.

He added that ending

the organized occupation of Palestinian lands and the right of return of Palestinian refugees are the only sustainable solution to the Palestinian issue.

The Iranian president further called Israel the most serious threat to world peace and security, saying Iran continues to offer its absolute support to Palestinians to achieve their objectives. He also highlighted the failures of international organizations to protect Palestinians, calling on the global community to uphold the rights and self-determination of the Palestinian people.

Palestine 'deepest wound in human conscience': FM spox

The Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman also reiterated the country's unwavering support for Palestinians, describing their plight as "the deepest wound



in human conscience."

In a post on X, Esmail Baqaei emphasized that Palestine remained "the most universal cause for justice and solidarity," highlighting the ongoing struggles faced by Palestinians under the "occupying apartheid regime." Baqaei was referring to the regime's decades-old practice of exercising a deadly and extremist racist agenda against Palestinians, which has claimed the lives of hundreds of thousands of them, including as part of the ongoing war



Palestinians walk through the destruction left by the Israeli air and ground offensive in the Gaza City on November 29, 2025.

● AP

of genocide in the Gaza Strip, and displacement of millions of others among them.

The genocide, which began in October 2023, alone has killed more than 70,000 Palestinians, mostly women and children, and reduced the biggest part of the coastal sliver into rubble.

Trump's declaration of Venezuelan airspace closure 'reckless, arbitrary': Iran



● AFP

Iran condemned the US president's announcement of the closure of Venezuela's airspace, calling it a "blatant breach" of international law and the principles governing civil aviation, Press TV reported.

In a statement on Saturday, Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baqaei underscored that Washington's so-called declaration was part of a long pattern of hostile actions against Venezuela's sovereignty, describing the move as arbitrary, reckless, and devoid of legal legitimacy.

He warned that such self-described directives from the White House represented an unprecedented threat to international flight safety, potentially destabilizing global aviation norms and endangering peace and security far beyond South America.

The statement echoed concerns raised across diplomatic and aviation circles, as experts noted that no country had the authority to unilaterally close another one's airspace under global civil aviation law.

Earlier, US President Donald Trump used his social media platform, Truth Social, to issue an informal warning, claiming that airlines and pilots were to treat Venezuela's airspace as "entirely closed."

Venezuela dismissed the warnings as politically motivated and aimed at isolating the country rather than ensuring safety.

It swiftly revoked the licenses of six international airlines that had suspended operations, denouncing them for aligning with US pressure and contributing to "state terrorism."

Last week too, Venezuela's civil aviation authority had openly condemned foreign carriers for siding with US-backed destabilization attempts and bowing to "unilateral terror directives" instead of complying with international law.

Washington has deployed the USS Harry S. Truman strike group to the Atlantic in previous months amid rising attempts to militarize Washington's anti-narcotics claims. Since September, Washington has conducted lethal maritime strikes under the pretext of countering narcotics, killing more than 80 people in Central and South American waters.

Baqaei emphasized that international aviation safety could not be subordinated to geopolitics or used as leverage, adding that such moves only amplified Venezuela's moral authority in defending legal order, peace, and stability.

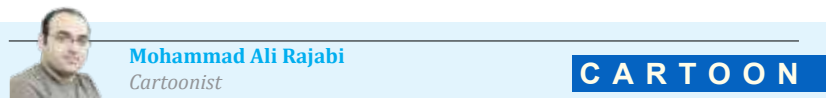
Regional integration of ...

The presence of external actors such as the United States, Russia, and NATO further limits the potential for full strategic integration.

The key point, however, is that these rivalries have not reached a level that halts functional cooperation; both countries have worked to manage competition while sustaining collaboration. In integration theory, this pattern is referred to as "integration amid competition," a situation observed in many global regions and one that can lead to relative stability.

Despite these limitations, the recent visit of the Turkish foreign minister to Iran signals a clear willingness by both states to prioritize cooperation as a more logical and cost-effective path than confrontation. Increased coordination on issues such as Syria, Gaza, the South Caucasus, and even the Russia-Ukraine crisis indicates that Tehran and Ankara are moving toward the establishment of a "structured dialogue framework," which, if institutionalized, could lay the foundations for sustained regional integration. Overall, the current outlook sug-

gests that Iran and Turkey are not yet on the path to a full strategic alliance but are engaged in a rational, gradual process of functional integration, driven by security imperatives, economic opportunities, and the need for effective regional crisis management. If these cooperative mechanisms become institutionalized and evolve into stable and organized arrangements, the bilateral relationship is likely to enter a more stable, lower-tension phase in the coming years, transitioning from costly competition to mutually beneficial partnership.



VP calls for major investment to drive national digital economy

‘Iran is on the verge of a digital leap’

Economy Desk

Iran’s First Vice President Mohammad Reza Aref on Sunday said the government will push major investments and regulatory reforms to accelerate the country’s digital transformation, calling the Information and Communications Technology (ICT) sector one of the safest and most profitable destinations for capital in Iran. Addressing an ICT investment forum in Tehran, Aref outlined the administration’s plans to expand digital infrastructure and attract domestic and foreign investment. Speaking at the National Conference on Investment Opportunities in the Communications and ICT Sector in Tehran, Aref said the current administration is prioritizing the expansion of digital infrastructure, training in modern ICT skills, support for knowledge-based companies and the attraction of domestic and foreign capital. “We are on the verge of a digital leap that allows us to build the future together, and the future of Iran’s economy is digital,” he said. “Today, I state clearly that information and commu-

nications technology is one of the safest, most profitable and most strategic areas for investment in Iran. The government is ready to remove obstacles, amend laws and support projects in this field.” Aref said the Seventh Development Plan (SDP), framed as a reform-oriented program targeting 8% economic growth, requires “extremely heavy” investment. Production, he noted, “is not limited to hardware,” and Iran must pursue “a scientific leap in both hardware and software, especially in emerging technologies.” He added that Iran could meet both domestic and regional needs through a private-sector-centered push in ICT. Aref cited Iran’s rank of 70 in global innovation indices and rank 46 in innovation output, arguing that despite structural gaps, the country’s scientific and human-capital potential remains strong. He also stressed that Iran still faces a “meaningful gap” with global ICT standards and said digital infrastructure “is not yet aligned with national and regional needs,” even as neighboring countries express interest in

cooperating with Iran in this field. Aref went on to say that, “Today, we face challenges in attracting investment that must be resolved, and reducing investment barriers is the government’s top strategy. Conditions for domestic and foreign investment have been prepared, and we must provide transparent, investor-oriented and well-designed regulations to enable capital inflow.” He acknowledged Iran’s lag in Artificial Intelligence (AI), noting that the current government established a high-level AI Development Secretariat and a cybersecurity structure within its first months in office. “We made a good start and must make up for the delays,” he said. Regional countries, he added, share similar AI development strategies, and the issue was highlighted in the recent Shanghai Cooperation



Organization summit. “ICT is a foundation of economic transformation and modern governance,” Aref said, adding that the government of President Masoud Pezeshkian and the ICT Ministry are pursuing nationwide fiber-optic expansion and fifth-generation net-

work rollout. Progress in high-tech sectors, he said, must rely on domestic capabilities, supplemented by external assistance when necessary. Aref underlined that other nations have already made significant investments in AI and ICT

and that Iran must prepare to attract capital for such sectors, which he said offer high returns for investors. The ICT sector, he noted, can drive transformation across energy, manufacturing, agriculture, healthcare, public services and smart-city development.



Trade volume up in eight months despite lower overall value: IRICA

Economy Desk

Iran’s foreign trade reached more than 131 million tons worth upwards of \$76 billion in the first eight months of the current Iranian year, which began on March 21, according to data from the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA). Total trade volume — the sum of exports and imports — rose 1.53% in weight compared with the same period last year, but the total value fell 9.38%, the data showed, IRNA reported. Exports amounted to 105.231 mil-

lion tons valued at \$36.997 billion, marking a 1.17% increase in weight and a 3.48% decline in value year-on-year. Imports reached 25.823 million tons worth \$39.540 billion, reflecting a 3% increase in weight and a 14.29% drop in value from the previous year. IRNA reported that part of the rise in export volumes this year appears linked to energy shortages in industrial and mining sectors, which left production capacity underutilized and pushed producers toward exporting further raw materials such as iron concentrate and pellets.

Iran continues to face nationwide energy shortages, with recurring power disruptions putting sustained pressure on the country’s electricity grid. According to recent figures from the Iranian Steel Producers Association (ISPA), exports of raw materials in the steel supply chain continue to surge. Exports of iron ore concentrate alone grew 82% compared with the first seven months of last year — a trend that has raised concerns among steelmakers, who warn that the outflow of the key input could strain domestic supply.

Iran’s caviar exports surge as production ramps up: Union chief

By Sadeq Dehqan
Staff writer

INTERVIEW



Iran’s caviar industry is experiencing robust growth, with domestic production reaching over 25,000 kilograms in the year 2024–2025 and exports rising sharply, driven by strong global demand for high-quality sturgeon roe — particularly the premium Beluga variety, valued at \$700 to \$1,000 per kilogram on international markets. Ali Akbar Khodaei, the secretary-general of Aquatics’ Production and Trade Union of Iran, provided updated figures in an interview with Iran Daily, highlighting the acceleration of

output and expansion of export momentum. “Caviar production will exceed 8,000 kilograms by the end of this year (March 20, 2026),” Khodaei said. “Caviar exports generated \$2 million in revenue in the first six months of the current Iranian year (which began March 21, 2025).” He noted that while caviar accounts for a smaller volume compared to other fisheries products, its dollar value per unit far surpasses them. “In the first half of this year, Iran exported 3,500 kilograms of caviar,” he said. The figures reflect a clear upward trajectory. In the full year ending March 20, 2025, Iran exported 7,100 kilograms of caviar worth \$4.2 million — up from 4,800 kilograms valued at \$3.188 million two years earlier, marking an approximate 60% increase in export volume over that period.

“Caviar exports in the first six months of this year rose notably from 2,800 kilograms to 3,500 kilograms compared to the same period last year,” Khodaei added.

Drive behind rising exports

Khodaei attributed the growth to expanded sturgeon farming across multiple provinces and maturing investment cycles in caviar production. “Sturgeons are long-cycle species — it takes about 10 years for a fish to reach caviar-producing age,” he explained. “Investment in sturgeon aquaculture has accelerated in recent years, and production is now rising exponentially.” He illustrated the trend with an example, saying, “If 20% of a sturgeon cohort reaches maturity this year, 40% will do so next year, and 60% the year

after. This means production — and consequently exports — is continuously increasing.” Given that seafood exports typically peak in the second half of the Iranian year, Khodaei forecast that annual caviar shipments will exceed 8,000 kilograms by March 2026.

Iran’s position in global market

Despite its premium product, Iran holds a modest share of the global market. “China is currently the world’s largest caviar producer and exporter,” Khodaei said. “Iran, despite possessing what is widely regarded as the world’s finest caviar — with high global demand — does not yet hold a large share of international trade.” He noted that China commands roughly 30% of the global caviar market, followed by Eastern European, European, and even US



producers. “Iran ranks 14th globally in overall caviar production and market share,” Khodaei acknowledged. “However, when it comes to Beluga caviar — the exclusive variety from the Caspian Sea and considered the best in the world — Iran holds second place globally, behind only

Russia.” He added that Iran entered the farmed sturgeon sector with a multi-year delay compared to global competitors but is steadily reclaiming its historic position. “We are gradually finding our place, and our share of the global market will continue to grow in the coming years.”

Seven fruits of Mohammed bin Salman's trip to US



By Amin Parto
Expert on Middle
Eastern affairs

OPINION

Mohammed bin Salman, the crown prince of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, undertook a remarkably clamorous trip to the United States. What, then, was the yield of this trip for the Middle East? These are the most consequential items that appear evident:

1. Attainment of a defensive and security cooperation with the United States commensurate with that of Qatar: When Qatar, subsequent to the Israeli aerial assault, requested a security guarantee from the United States — whereby an attack against Qatar would be construed as tantamount to an attack upon American interests — Saudi Arabia likewise conceived the notion of presenting an analogous request to the United States. In what respect, precisely, is Saudi Arabia inferior to Qatar? Especially under circumstances in which, unlike Qatar, it has not granted asylum to Hamas or the Muslim Brotherhood, has not supported groups such as Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (at a time when it was designated terrorist), and does not maintain clandestinely amicable relations with Iran?

2. Agreement concerning rare elements: The United States finds itself under severe pressure from China owing to its dependency on rare mineral elements. China possesses an almost monopolistic dominion over these minerals, which are acutely indispensable for American industries, particularly its military sector. Now, Saudi Arabia, according to certain assessments, may be capable of assisting the United States in the procurement of some of these elements. The Jabal Sayid reserves — containing more than 550,000 tons of heavy elements and 355,000 tons of light elements, potentially constituting the fourth-largest deposit in the world — represent one of Saudi Arabia's principal hopes for exporting rare raw materials to the United States. During Mohammed bin Salman's trip, agreements were concluded with the United States to construct joint production facilities with MP Materials Corporation, enabling the commencement of



US President Donald Trump (L) and Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia Mohammed bin Salman arrive at the US-Saudi Investment Forum in Washington, D.C., the US, on November 19, 2025.
● BRENDAN SMIALOWSKI/AFP



The Jabal Sayid copper operation is located 350 kilometers north-east of Jeddah in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The first shipment of copper concentrate occurred in December 2015, and the mine commenced commercial production in July 2016.
● mininglifeonline.net

production and processing of these elements. Nevertheless, challenges such as water scarcity in Saudi Arabia and the necessity for foreign specialists to initiate the production process persist.

3. The F-35: By purchasing 48 aircraft, Saudi Arabia shall become the second operator of the F-35 in the Middle East after Israel. This occurs despite the negative response four years earlier to the United Arab Emirates' request to acquire the aircraft, and despite the continued improbability that Turkey — due to Israel's

opposition — will be able to procure it. The Saudi version of the F-35 will certainly be considerably inferior to the Israeli version in its software and hardware (including radar evasion) and will not constitute a threat to Israel. Nevertheless, Saudi Arabia does not harbor hostility toward Israel, and the threats it perceives originate elsewhere. It must, however, be stated that the paramount consequence of Saudi Arabia's acquisition of the F-35 is a drastic diminution in the likelihood of expanded Chinese arms purchases, particularly concerning long-range

air-defense systems or combat aircraft.

4. Other armaments: Saudi Arabia obtained additional procurements, including 300 Abrams tanks of the latest variant, intended to replace the antiquated M-60 tanks and the Abrams tanks it has possessed for two decades. The Saudi Abrams fleet has also endured the protracted Yemeni war. Saudi Arabia will likewise acquire 60 F-15EX aircraft. These fighters are replacements for the Saudi offensive F-15 fleet, which has also endured the prolonged war in Yemen.

5. Refusal to be extorted by Trump regarding the Abraham Accords: Trump exerted considerable insistence that Saudi Arabia join the Abraham Accords and formally recognize Israel. The Saudi red line, however, was singular: Israel must consent to the establishment of an independent Palestinian state in whatever form it may materialize. Yet this very issue is Israel's red line: Netanyahu explicitly declared that, for Israel, the non-establishment of an independent Palestinian state is far more significant than relations with Saudi Arabia. Israel can wait indefinitely for relations with Saudi Arabia, yet it remains eternally opposed to the formation of an independent Palestinian state. Trump attempted to persuade bin Salman to recede from this position, but the Saudi crown prince did not and refused to retreat, a matter that profoundly displeased Trump. Saudi Arabia's demand is unambiguous: Israel must consent to a defined and temporally structured path toward the creation of an independent Palestinian state and must record and register its commitment in an international document.

6. Mediation regarding the Iranian issue: Although contradictory statements and extensive denials persist concerning the transmission of a letter from the Iranian president to the United States by bin Salman, it is not implausible to imagine that Saudi Arabia seeks to undertake such a role. While other channels of negotiation and mediation between Iran and the United States (Oman, Qatar, and Iraq) have reached an impasse, a new channel could be Saudi Arabia.

7. Obtaining authorization for acquiring hardware required for the development of artificial intelligence: The United States has granted Saudi Arabia (and likewise the United Arab Emirates) authorization to purchase up to 35,000 Nvidia Blackwell chips for use in artificial intelligence systems. This purchase, of course, constitutes an initial step toward a much grander contract for the acquisition of an additional 600,000 chips required for artificial-intelligence systems.

The article was first published in Persian by the Center for Middle East Strategic Studies.



The Jabal Sayid reserves — containing more than 550,000 tons of heavy elements and 355,000 tons of light elements, potentially constituting the fourth-largest deposit in the world — represent one of Saudi Arabia's principal hopes for exporting rare raw materials to the United States. During Mohammed bin Salman's trip, agreements were concluded with the United States to construct joint production facilities with MP Materials Corporation, enabling the commencement of production and processing of these elements. Nevertheless, challenges such as water scarcity in Saudi Arabia and the necessity for foreign specialists to initiate the production process persist.

Future of Middle East

A triangle with a trembling base



By Mohammad Hosseini
Former ambassador
of Iran to Saudi
Arabia

OPINION

Mohammed bin Salman's recent trip to Washington can be explicated within the framework of a new chapter in United States-Saudi relations. From the perspective of international relations theory, the American approach toward Saudi Arabia may be theoretically articulated through the lens of Offshore Balancing, and

the Saudi approach toward the United States may be similarly articulated through the lens of a Hedging policy. The grand strategy of the United States in international politics is the preservation and perpetuation of hegemony through the prevention of the emergence of regional hegemons, and the operational method of this strategy is perpetual balancing within subsystems and geographical zones. This balancing is sometimes direct and sometimes indirect, enacted from afar and through America's allies. For the hegemonic power, the identity of the aspir-

ing actor is irrelevant; any actor that nurtures hegemonic ambitions at the regional level or proceeds along that trajectory must necessarily be balanced through the reinforcement of its rival, and its hegemony must be obstructed — even if that actor is Israel, the closest American ally and the beneficiary of powerful Jewish lobbies within the United States. That was why the United States, in the 1973 Arab-Israeli war, prevented the final blow of Israel against Egypt, and Moshe Dayan, Israel's Minister of War, declared that on the verge of the final blow



From left to right: Former US president Barack Obama, current US President Donald Trump, Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, and former US president George W. Bush
● ELISE SWAIN/THE INTERCEPT

to Egypt and the occupation of Cairo, Kissinger imposed a peace on Israel that was to the benefit of the Arabs. The logic of American conduct in 1973 was unambiguous: Israel must be secure; Israel must triumph in regional conflicts; yet Israel is not permitted to become the hegemon of the Middle East — just as Britain, Germany, and France were not permitted such a status in Europe from the American vantage point, and still are not, and must, within an asymmetrical distribution of power, balance one another, as must other regions as well. From the perspective of American strategists, after October 7, 2023, and especially following the imposed 12-day war, the balance of power in the Middle East has shifted to the advantage of Israel; however, the desirable American model for the Middle East is a structure of equilibrated power among Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Israel. In this triangle, Israel fulfills the role of the triangle's base — meaning that in security and military dimensions, it possesses superiority relative to Saudi Arabia and Turkey, yet this superiority must not metamorphose into hegemony. Therefore, the United States seeks to reinforce Saudi Arabia's position in the Middle East in order to:

1. forestall Israeli hegemony in the region,
2. align the Arab world with the United States through the principal Arab state, Saudi Arabia,
3. exploit Saudi financial capacity and investment power



The photo shows a general view of the hall during the Organization of Islamic Cooperation - Arab League Extraordinary Summit in Doha, Qatar, on September 15, 2025, where the Arab leaders condemned an earlier Israeli air strike on the Qatari capital.

to fortify the American economy,

4. preserve and regulate energy security in the Persian Gulf,
5. secure Saudi political and financial cooperation in the Gaza peace plan and in the implementation of that initiative within Gaza itself,
6. strengthen the Abraham Accords (the plan for the normalization of Arab-Israeli relations) by incorporating Saudi Arabia,
7. safeguard and preserve the exogenous regional order in the Persian Gulf,
8. acquire Saudi cooperation in a potential war with Iran or in the containment of Iran,
9. enlist Saudi Arabia in shaping the future regional order in conjunction with Israel and Turkey,
10. and lay the foundations of

Trump's three-pillar doctrine in the form of a triangle composed of Israel, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia's motivations for deepening relations with the United States, and particularly with Trump himself, are comprehensible within the framework of hedging, insulation, or strategic indemnification.

1. Despite its diversification of relations with major powers since 2010, Saudi Arabia still regards the United States as the principal guarantor of its survival,
2. Saudi Arabia views Israeli hegemonic aspirations as an existential threat to Arab states in the long term,
3. Saudi Arabia considers an American war against Iran a threat to regional stability and

does not necessarily view regime change in Iran as beneficial to the long-term interests of Arab states; rather, it prefers a weakened and contained (and predictable) Islamic Republic to its collapse. On this basis, Saudi Arabia, through clandestine diplomacy, seeks to prevent an Israeli war against Iran,

4. The Israeli assault on Qatar constitutes an alarm bell for Arab states, including Saudi Arabia; the experience of Hosni Mubarak — abandoned by the White House — and the American inaction regarding the attack on Aramco stand before Saudi rulers as cautionary precedents; thus, the Saudis seek durable security guarantees from the United States,
5. The acquisition of advanced

military equipment — the F-35 aircraft — and the strengthening of Saudi Arabia's nuclear program in exchange for a 600-billion-dollar investment and the promise of its increase to one trillion dollars constituted Mohammed bin Salman's agenda during this trip,

6. Saudi Arabia also seeks an appropriate positioning for itself within the future regional order and the nascent global order,
7. The strengthening of Saudi-American relations enhances Saudi Arabia's bargaining power vis-à-vis its regional allies and rivals such as Turkey, Iran, Israel, and Qatar,
8. Likewise, the strengthening of relations with the United States enhances Saudi bargaining power vis-à-vis other great powers such as China, Russia, and Europe,
9. The Saudis consider the condition of neither-war-nor-peace between Iran and Israel temporary, and by delineating various scenarios, they deem their survival under any such scenario contingent upon the reinforcement of political and security ties with the United States,
10. And finally, Saudi Arabia also desires a role in the three-pillar order of Trump, in partnership with Israel, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia — a configuration whose base is uncertain and fragile, and whose existence may be annihilated or consolidated by the outcome of the Iranian-Israeli conflict (the potential forthcoming war).

The article was published in Persian by Iranian Diplomacy.



The grand strategy of the United States in international politics is the preservation and perpetuation of hegemony through the prevention of the emergence of regional hegemons. Any actor that nurtures hegemonic ambitions at the regional level or proceeds along that trajectory must necessarily be balanced through the reinforcement of its rival, and its hegemony must be obstructed — even if that actor is Israel, the closest American ally.

Sale of F-35 to Saudi Arabia From promise to reality



By Jalal Sadatian
Expert on international Affairs

OPINION

The crown prince of Saudi Arabia's trip to Washington and its media spectacle were less the product of a strategic accord than the consequence of a half-concluded transaction. That Mohammed bin Salman succeeded in appearing in the White House constituted a symbolic achievement for him, yet from a strategic perspective, this journey remains enveloped in ambiguity. This very ambiguity has caused the dossier of the F-35 sale to Saudi Arabia to enter a more complex phase. Contrary to what certain media outlets insinuate, this encounter not only resulted in no definitive agreement, but numerous reports concerning tension and discord during the negotiations preceding the meeting between bin Salman and Trump have been disseminated. This reveals that Washington still exercises considerable caution in granting security assurances and in determining the fate of the F-35 sale to Riyadh. Even the elevation of Saudi Arabia's security partnership, including the conferral of the status of Major Non-NATO Ally, is now obscure. Approximately 20 states currently possess this designation, yet the actual utilization of its advantages has always been accompanied by

constraints. Saudi Arabia has not yet succeeded in signing a mutual defense treaty similar to that of Qatar with the United States because Washington deems such a level of commitment justifiable only if it constitutes a component of a complete political-security package that includes normalization with the Israeli regime. The totality of these realities demonstrates that the matter of the F-35 sale is not a purely military dossier, but a segment of a regional engineering process that Washington strives to advance. The United States desires to employ the F-35 sale as a lever of coercive influence for normalization, yet Saudi Arabia accepts this concession only if it receives formal, Senate-ratified security guarantees.

Saudi Arabia's effort to attain mutual defense treaty

Tel Aviv perceives this transaction not as a military purchase but as an instrument of political coercion. The principal condition of the Israeli regime is that the sale of the F-35 to Saudi Arabia becomes acceptable only when the process of normalizing relations with Riyadh becomes operational. From the perspective of the Israeli regime, the Qualitative Military Edge (QME) constitutes an absolute red line. For any access by an Arab state to a fifth-generation fighter, without its inclusion in a shared political-security framework, is construed as



Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman of Saudi Arabia (L) and US President Donald Trump watch a military flyover as the former arrives at the White House in Washington, D.C., the US, on November 18, 2025.

a threat. Certain officials in Tel Aviv have even proposed that the potential Saudi F-35s should not be stationed in the western region of the Arab country since an F-35 can reach the air boundaries of the Israeli regime in a matter of minutes. This manifests the profound level of security anxiety among the officials of this regime. In tandem with these apprehensions, the issue of the potential transfer of F-35 technology to China or Russia has also been raised. This concern may render Washington's decision-making process more convoluted. The events in Gaza and the pressure of Arab public opinion have caused Saudi Arabia to render normalization conditional upon tangible steps toward the establishment of a Palestinian state. This signifies that the Israeli regime can no longer introduce Saudi Arabia into the Abraham Accords through merely symbolic concessions.

American diplomats contend that the principal demand of the Saudis is a mutual defense treaty. Yet its realization is possible only when a complete package emerges, one that includes normalization and trilateral security coordination among the United States, the Israeli regime, and Saudi Arabia.

Transformation of regional security structure

For Saudi Arabia, the purchase of the F-35 is not merely a defensive transaction. This aircraft symbolizes Riyadh's entry into the narrow circle of clients of the American fifth-generation fleet and, in a sense, constitutes a seal of validation of strategic proximity to Washington. However, since the transaction has not been finalized, and even its timetable remains undefined, Saudi Arabia does not know when it may derive benefit from these promises. According to the

published analyses, the F-35 sale is the commencement of a prolonged and obscure process that may require years — and possibly never — before culminating in actual delivery. If the F-35 is delivered to Saudi Arabia, a new phase of the armament competition in the Persian Gulf will arise, in such a manner that other states either pursue analogous acquisitions or seek technology of equivalent grade from their partners. This process may transform the security structure of the region. In the cabinet of the Israeli regime, moreover, no consensus exists: certain individuals consider this transaction a direct threat, whereas others declare that if it becomes part of a broader security-political package, it may form an element of the desired order of the Israeli regime. The Israeli regime accepts the sale of the aircraft only if normalization with Riyadh occurs, and Saudi Arabia accepts normalization only if it receives formal security guarantees. This reciprocal conditionality has removed the transaction from the realm of a simple military purchase and has converted it into one of the most delicate geopolitical dossiers of the region. Whether this transaction ultimately proceeds or remains suspended for years depends on developments in United States-Israeli relations, the future of the Gaza war, and Saudi Arabia's capacity to obtain genuine concessions from Washington. Yet what is unequivocal is that without a comprehensive political package, none of the parties will consent to the final signature of this accord.

The article was first published in Persian by the Strategic Council on Foreign Relations.



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Women's Handball World Championship: Iran falls to Hungary in second group game

Sports Desk

Iran fell to a second straight defeat at the IHF Women's Handball World Championship in Germany and the Netherlands, suffering a 47-13 loss against European powerhouse Hungary in the Dutch city of 's-Hertogenbosch on Saturday.

The defeat left Iran at the bottom of the Group B table, while Hungary maintained a perfect record to remain at the top, holding a superior goal difference to Switzerland.

Hungary will now face Switzerland in the final round of the group stage in a direct battle for first place and the chance to carry full points into the main round. Iran will face Senegal to fight for the group's final main round spot, with the losing side moving on to the President's Cup.

From the very start, the disparity between the two teams was obvious. Hungary got off to a blis-

tering start, building an early 4-0 lead, while Iran had to battle hard to find its way to the goal. Iran's first goal came in the fifth minute, the second in the sixth, and then a long scoreless drought followed. In the next 14 minutes, Iran scored only twice, while Hungary kept piling on goals and was already up 18-4 by the 20th minute. In those opening 20 minutes alone, Hungary coach Vladimir Golovin had already rotated his entire squad, and 12 of them had scored. Many of the goals came from fast transitions.

The Hungarians were backed by a strong performance from goalkeeper Kinga Janurik. Whenever Iran did manage to break through late in the half, it was mostly thanks to Haniyeh Karimi. The team also missed their left back, Nastaran Koudzari, who was injured in the opening minutes. For the second match in a row at Germany/Netherlands 2025, the inexperienced Iranian side fin-

ished the first half with just seven goals, while Hungary was already closing in on the 30-goal mark.

The same pace continued in the second half, though Iran showed more confidence compared to its first match against Switzerland, where they managed to score only twice after the break. This time, they scored four goals within the opening 12 minutes. Iran kept fighting, but Hungary did not slow the tempo.

By the 50th minute, Hungary had already reached the 40-goal mark and finished with 47. The result marks Iran's largest losing margin at the World Championship. The previous record was a 45-22 defeat to Germany in 2023.

For Iran, Aseman Badvi and Karimi led the scoring with three goals each. On the Hungarian side, where all players featured, Gréta Márton scored nine, and both Kinga Janurik and Anna Bukovszky finished with save percentages above 50%.



● IHF

Qayedí at the double as Al Nasr advances to UAE League Cup semifinals



● khabarvarzeshi.com

Sports Desk

Iranian winger Mahdi Qayedí scored twice to help Al Nasr defeat Shabab Al Ahli 3-2 in the second leg of the UAE's ADIB Cup quarterfinals on Saturday, with his side ultimately prevailing 3-2 in a penalty shootout at Al Maktoum Stadium.

The victory came after the first leg had ended in a 2-1 defeat for Al Nasr. Al Nasr took the lead in the 13th minute when Qayedí broke free inside the box and finished coolly past goalkeeper Hassan Hamza Al Mazmi.

Shabab Al Ahli equalized 12

minutes later through Mateus Dias Lima, who won the ball from Salem Al Shargi before converting calmly for his fifth goal in ten ADIB Cup appearances.

Qayedí struck again against his former club just before halftime, lifting the ball over the onrushing goalkeeper to restore Al Nasr's lead and swing the momentum back in his team's favor.

Abdoulaye Toure extended Al Nasr's advantage with a composed finish from inside the area in the 61st minute.

Yuri Cesar set up a tense finish by reducing the deficit in the

82nd minute, which sent the tie directly to a penalty shootout. Al Nasr held its nerve from the spot to seal its place in the semifinals against Al Ain.

Al Nasr head coach Slavisa Jokanović was full of praise for the Iranian international after the match, saying: "Mahdi made a powerful return and delivered an exceptional performance. Having just recovered from an injury, he proved he remains a high-quality and impactful player."

Al Ain hammered Sharjah 4-1 later in the day to advance to the last four with a commanding 7-2 victory on aggregate.

Esmailnejad joins Akkus Belediyespor in Turkish volleyball league

Sports Desk

Iranian opposite spiker Amin Esmailnejad has joined Turkish Efeler Ligi side Akkus Belediyespor.

The Iranian made his debut for the club in a straight-sets defeat to Halkbank on Saturday, contributing three points. The loss marked Akkus Belediyespor's sixth in seven outings, leaving them second from bottom in the 14-team league.

Esmailnejad was a key player for Iran in June's Volleyball Nations League (VNL), finishing as the 17th-highest scorer with 158 points. His efforts helped Iran finish eighth in the 18-team preliminary round, though the team narrowly missed qualification for the VNL Finals.

The prolific spiker missed September's World Championship in the Philippines due to an untimely ankle injury sustained just before the tournament. Without him, Iran reached the quarterfinals, where they were defeated 3-1 by Czechia.

Iranians shine in Turkey

Meanwhile, other Iranian players delivered impressive performances in the Turkish league's seventh round on Saturday. National team captain Mor-teza Sharifi scored 20 points, including three aces, to lead Istanbul BSK to a 3-0 (25-21, 25-20, 27-25) home victory over Spor Toto. The win keeps Istanbul second in the table with six wins.

Ali Fazli earned a man-of-the-match award, contributing 21 points in Istanbul Basaksehir's straight-sets win (32-30, 25-11, 25-22) against Gaziantep Gencilik.

Despite a 15-point performance from the in-form Bardia Sa'adat, Alanya Belediyespor fell to a 3-1 defeat against league leaders Ziraat Bankasi.



● FIVB



● IRNA

ITTF World Youth Championships:

Injury struggle costs Faraji in quarterfinals

Sports Desk

A pre-match injury setback proved costly for Benyamin Faraji at the ITTF World Youth Championships in Cluj-Napoca, Romania, as the Iranian table tennis prodigy suffered a quarterfinal defeat to China's Li Hechen on Saturday. Faraji, who won a historic under-15 bronze medal in last year's edition, sustained a knee

injury just before his last-eight showdown in the boys' singles U19 category.

To secure the ranking points for the round—which would have been forfeited with a withdrawal—the Iranian technical staff made the difficult decision for him to compete.

Clearly hampered by limited mobility and pain, Faraji fell to a 4-0 defeat (11-2, 11-9, 11-5, 11-6)

against his formidable Chinese opponent.

Faraji's campaign had begun promisingly on Thursday with a 4-3 victory (10-12, 13-11, 6-11, 11-3, 6-11, 12-10, 11-4) against Brazil's Leonardo Iizuka. He followed this with a remarkable comeback in the round of 16, overcoming American Nandan Nares in seven games (12-10, 9-11, 6-11, 1-11, 11-7, 12-10, 11-7).

Follow colors of autumn through Chalus Road



Chalus Road
● rasekhoon.net



Valasht Lake
● reiseniran.de



Pol-e Khab
● yjc.ir

Iranica Desk

A short drive from Tehran is all it takes for travelers to break away from the noise and intensity of the capital. For many seeking a quick escape from daily routine, the Chalus Road remains one of the most popular and accessible destinations. As travelers leave Tehran behind, a growing sense of freedom and calm guides them toward a refreshing experience in the heart of northern Iran. Approaching the northern stretches of the route, noticeable shifts in weather mark the transition from Tehran's lingering warmth to the crisp air of autumn. Cooler winds, the scent of damp earth, and the gradual drop in temperature signal the arrival of the season's charm. In the mountainous regions, this refreshing change brings renewed energy to those heading north, according to IRNA. Throughout the journey, the winding path of the Chalus Road is accompanied by breathtaking natural scenery. Lush for-

ests, towering peaks, and flowing rivers paint a serene and captivating picture, encouraging travelers to pause, enjoy the landscape, and capture memorable photographs. Each curve of the road reveals new vistas, heightening the excitement and anticipation of reaching a scenic autumn destination.

Pol-e Khab

The village of Pol-e Khab becomes one of the region's most enchanting attractions during autumn. As the season unfolds, a vibrant palette of yellow, orange, and red sweeps through the trees, creating striking scenery. The cool air invites visitors to enjoy leisurely walks and explore the natural surroundings. The Chalus River, flowing beside the village, adds to its appeal with its soothing sound and peaceful ambiance. Visitors often picnic by the river or in the surrounding forests, making the most of the area's tranquility. Autumn is also harvest season in Pol-e Khab. Local farmers offer fresh produce such as apples

and walnuts, while nearby cafés and restaurants serve seasonal dishes and warm drinks for travelers. For photography enthusiasts, the village provides exceptional opportunities to capture the vivid colors and natural beauty of the season.

Asara

Asara, a lush and scenic town in Alborz Province, has emerged as a popular tourist stop along the Chalus Road. Easily accessible from Tehran, the town offers a peaceful retreat with its forests, towering mountains, and pleasant weather. Among Asara's prominent attractions is the Haft Cheshmeh Waterfall, surrounded by verdant nature and cascading pools. Nearby stands the towering 90-meter Adran Waterfall — one of Iran's tallest — providing a dramatic backdrop for nature lovers and photographers. The historic Salsal Castle, dating back to pre-Islamic times, welcomes visitors at the entrance of Asara and hints at the region's deep heritage.

Asara is also a favored destination for mountaineers. The 4,000-meter-high Kohar Peak is a well-known challenge that requires proper equipment and physical readiness. Hikers can rest at shelters along the route and enjoy sweeping views of snow-covered summits.

Valasht Lake

Valasht Lake stands among northern Iran's most picturesque natural attractions, accessible via the Chalus Road. After exiting the town of Chalus toward Tehran and driving 23 kilometers past the Kojur Bridge, visitors reach a small paved road leading west. Passing through pine forests and the village of Sanar, a 5-kilometer dirt road finally leads to the southern edge of the lake. In autumn, Valasht Lake transforms into a breathtaking scene. Surrounding trees glow in warm shades of yellow and orange, their colors reflected on the still surface of the water. Fallen leaves and crisp, cool air enhance the magical atmo-

sphere, offering visitors a refreshing and serene experience. Hiking, cycling, and boating are popular activities during this season, and with fewer tourists around, travelers can enjoy the peace and quiet of nature in near solitude.

Arangeh village

Located at kilometer 21 on the Chalus Road, Arangeh village is another autumn highlight. Its terraced orchards and stone houses showcase traditional mountain architecture, while the winding access road reveals dramatic views of the Alborz ranges. In autumn, Arangeh becomes a living canvas of color. Apple and walnut orchards brighten in shades of red and yellow, and the scent of ripe fruit fills the air. Springs and small waterfalls flowing from the mountains add to the village's charm, creating a soothing atmosphere for residents and visitors alike. The hospitality of Arangeh's locals, along with their rich cultural traditions and handicrafts,

enriches the experience. Visitors can purchase local goods, learn about village customs, and enjoy meaningful interactions that deepen their connection to the region.

A perfect seasonal escape

In autumn, the Chalus Road offers an ideal one-day getaway from Tehran. Its colorful twists and turns, combined with scenic landscapes and convenient amenities, make the journey both enjoyable and rejuvenating. With proper planning and attention to weather and travel conditions, visitors can fully appreciate the beauty of this classic route. Ultimately, a trip along the Chalus Road is not just a visual experience — it is a chance to recharge and reconnect with nature. For anyone seeking a pleasant and refreshing escape, this beautiful road remains an inviting choice. Travelers are encouraged to check weather conditions and bring the necessary gear to ensure a safe and enjoyable journey

History meets nature in Hezar Darb Castle of Ilam Province

Iranica Desk

An archaeology graduate specializing in prehistoric studies has described the Hezar Darb Castle in Darrehshahr of Ilam Province as one of the region's prominent tourist attractions, combining history and nature in a single landscape. The structure, built with stone and gypsum in a rectangular plan, dates back to the Sassanid period. In an interview with ISNA, Habibollah Mahmoudian said the main façade of the monument features arched vaults, noting that its architectural characteristics suggest a probable military function. He explained that the building's primary layout is rectangular, with long corridors extending in four directions. These corridors connect to interior rooms through multiple doorways. The multi-story complex includes a basement, ground floor, and upper level, all constructed based on its foundational plan. According to Mahmoudian, the thickness of the walls and the lack of open windows in corridors and rooms resulted in dark interior spaces. Ventilation and lighting were provided through nearly one-meter-wide openings in the ceilings and



● wikipedia.org

passageways. The structure's materials consist of carved stones and river pebbles bound with fired gypsum mortar. He added that foundation remains can be traced on all four sides of the fortress. The walls measure approximately 1.8 meters in thickness and are constructed from pebbles and gypsum. He noted that the northern wall, overlooking a cliff, was built about four meters lower than the fortress's main wall. Remains of another structure with similar materials can also be seen on the northern slope below the fortress, though its original purpose remains unknown. Pottery fragments found

around the site are mostly buff-colored, some with slips, and generally well-fired. Their decorations include rope-pattern reliefs and incised designs. The most distinctive pottery type is "Nishguni" ware from the Sassanid era, further confirming the fortress's historical dating through its architectural style and construction materials. Situated in a region with a rich cultural past, Hezar Darb Castle also reflects the broader history of Ilam Province, an area long inhabited since prehistoric times and home to significant Elamite, Parthian, and Sassanid settlements that shaped its enduring historical landscape.

Golamzadeh House in South Khorasan registered on National Heritage List

Iranica Desk

The Gholamzadeh House in South Khorasan Province has been officially added to Iran's National Heritage List, according to Ali Shariatimnesh, deputy director of the provincial Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts Organization. He noted that the monument is located in the town of Eresk in Boshruyeh, with its architectural origins dating back to the Safavid era, chntn.ir wrote. Shariatimnesh explained that the house features traditional and local architectural elements, including a central courtyard, an ivan, an entrance corridor, and several rooms arranged around the yard. He added that the Gholamzadeh House belongs to the category of two-ivan residential structures. "Despite later physical alterations, the building retains its Safavid authenticity, which is clearly visible in its layout and design," he said. The rectangular plan of the structure is aligned along a north-south axis. South Khorasan Province, located in eastern Iran, is a region with deep historical roots stretching back thousands of years. Archaeological findings in cities such as Birjand, Ferdows, and Boshruyeh reveal traces of



● chntn.ir

ancient settlements that flourished along desert routes connecting central Iran to the eastern territories. Throughout history, South Khorasan served as a significant link on the Silk Road and other caravan paths. These routes enabled the movement of goods, scholars, and travelers, turning the region into a cultural intersection where Persian, Central Asian, and even Indian influences merged. Many of the area's traditional caravanserais, fortifications, and adobe-built villag-

es still reflect this prosperous trading past. South Khorasan is also notable for its long-standing architectural heritage. Its historic houses, windcatchers, water reservoirs, and mud-brick fortresses illustrate a unique adaptation to the harsh desert climate. The registration of the Gholamzadeh House adds to the province's growing list of preserved heritage sites, highlighting ongoing efforts to protect the cultural landscape of this historic region.



Fajr festival defies cultural sanctions, hosts Turkish director Ceylan despite pressure

Arts & Culture Desk

Attempts to push foreign filmmakers into boycotting Iran's 43rd Fajr International Film Festival have failed to derail the event, with jury member Mehdi Karampour rejecting the idea that culture can be drawn into political sanctions. Kermpour said artistic works must be preserved for future generations, documenting "what is happening here and now." Despite these pressures, celebrated Turkish filmmaker Nuri Bilge Ceylan arrived in Shiraz to lead the international jury. Rouhollah Hosseini, festival secretary, said that threats and social media campaigns tried to block Ceylan, but the event went ahead on schedule, less than three months after Hosseini's August appointment. Karampour described the festival as a platform to showcase Iran's cinema beyond political narratives. "Not having something gives us nothing. Preserving and speaking out is essential," he said, emphasizing

ing that cinema carries a cultural mission that surpasses politics. The festival, revived after a four-year hiatus in its international section, has been relocated to Shiraz to emphasize the city's literary and cultural heritage. Hosseini said this move strengthens the festival's cultural authenticity while shielding it from political frictions often present in Tehran. Organizers reported participation from 37 countries, with screenings, masterclasses, and panels designed to reconnect Iran's filmmakers with the global circuit. Hosseini and Karampour both underlined the strategic focus on "poetic cinema," linking contemporary filmmaking to Persian literary and philosophical traditions. Jury members include young actors and veteran filmmakers, with Ceylan's approach described as "poetic and rigorous," complemented by leading cinematographers and composers. Karampour highlighted that



such platforms are crucial for sustaining cultural continuity, particularly in the absence of

a systematic national cultural policy. The festival continues through

December 3, aiming to preserve Iran's cinematic heritage, foster dialogue, and

maintain its global presence amid growing international pressures.

Actor-cum-director Payman Maadi joins jury at Marrakech film festival



Arts & Culture Desk

Payman Maadi, the Iranian actor and filmmaker celebrated for his role in 'A Separation,' was named a member of the jury at the 22nd Marrakech International Film Festival, which officially opened on Friday. The panel is chaired by South Korean director Bong Joon Ho.

Maadi's appointment goes beyond national representation. It signals the festival's intent to bring diverse perspectives to the evaluation of a competitive selection of 14 first and second films from around the world, a slate crafted to spotlight emerging cinematic talent, ISNA reported. He joins an eight-member panel alongside Brazilian-Algerian filmmaker Karim Ainouz, Moroccan director Hakim Belabbes, French Palme d'Or winner Julia Ducournau, American actress Jenna Ortega, Canadian director Celine Song, and Anglo-Argentine actress Anya Taylor-Joy. Their combined experience spans directing, screenwriting, and acting across multiple continents. The festival, running until December 6, opened at Marrakech's Congress Palace with the screening of Dead Man Wire by American director Gus Van Sant.

Tanzanite awards Iranian animation 'The Legend of Sepehr'

Arts & Culture Desk

Iran's feature-length animated film 'The Legend of Sepehr' took the main award at the fourth Tanzanite International Animation Festival in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, after a week of screenings and competition. The film, directed by Emad Mehrabi and Mehrdad Mehrabi and produced by Mehdi Jafari Jozani, beat entries from China, the United States, Russia, France and Germany to claim the top prize in the feature-length category, IRNA reported. Festival director Emilien Hirwa described Tanzanite as "a launching pad" for animators worldwide, offering a platform to exchange ideas and build cross-border networks. This year, the organizers received hundreds of submissions from more

than 60 countries. The UK, Italy and Iran contributed the largest number of entries selected for the competition. The award trophy for 'The Legend of Sepehr' was handed to Iran's cultural attaché in Tanzania on behalf of the creators. He praised the filmmakers' achievement and noted it as a testament to Iran's recent progress in animation, which has gained recognition across multiple international festivals. Following the ceremony, an English-subtitled screening of 'The Legend of Sepehr' was presented as a special feature for Tanzanian audiences, reinforcing cultural exchange between the two countries. The organizers expressed hope that collaboration between Iranian and Tanzanian animators could yield further creative proj-



ects and strengthen ties within the global animation community.

Iraq's Duhok International Film Festival to host 'The Blue Bicycle'



Arts & Culture Desk

Iranian short film 'The Blue Bicycle,' directed by Siavash Saedpanah and produced by Saeid Nejati for the Eshragh Film Club, was selected for the Kurdish-language competition of

the 12th Duhok International Film Festival, organizers in the northern Iraqi city of Duhok said on Sunday. The festival, established in memory of Kurdish filmmaker Yilmaz Güney, winner of the Palme d'Or at Cannes in 1982, is among the most closely watched cultural fixtures in the Middle East for works centred on Kurdish life and language. The 12th edition runs from December 9 to December 16, in the mountainous, border-hugging city of Duhok. 'The Blue Bicycle' tracks a soft-spoken teacher in a remote highland

village, as he prepares to leave the place he has long called home after a profound loss. In the hush of farewells and unspoken grief, an abandoned blue bicycle passes from hand to hand, binding strangers without a word — a quiet thread through lives on the verge of parting. The film will vie against entries from filmmakers across the Kurdistan Region, Iran and neighboring countries in the Kurdish section. Cast members include Armin Azizi, Ardeshtir Ahmadi, Matin Veisi, Omran Moradi, Azad Karimian, and Delaram Ahmadi.

Iran's Hakim Sabzevari University, Iraq's Qurtuba University forge academic, research pact

Social Desk

Iran's Hakim Sabzevari University signed a co-operation accord with Al-Qurtuba University of Iraq aimed at broadening ties in academia, research and technology. The agreement, unveiled at Sabzevari's campus in northeast Iran, paves the way for faculty and student exchanges, joint training programs, collaborative research projects, and the

staging of scientific and technological exhibitions. In a modest but pointed nod to the future, the pact also triggered two specialist workshops, focused on drug-delivery nanocarriers and stem-cell applications in regenerative medicine, delivered by Sabzevari's Basic Sciences faculty and reportedly met with strong interest by Qurtuba participants. Sabzevari counts 9,000 students across 33 aca-

demic departments and 139 majors from undergraduate through PhD levels. Qurtuba, with roughly 14 faculties spanning engineering, medicine, dentistry, pharmacy, basic sciences and humanities, brings considerable breadth to the partnership, a union of complementary strengths that could ease resource constraints and broaden research horizons for both institutions.