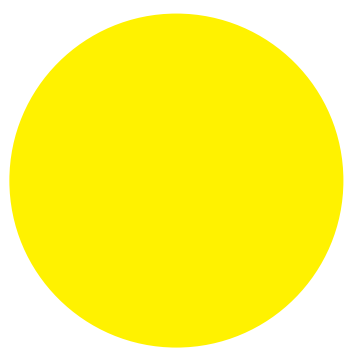


New fishing record set in international waters: **IFO chief**

Iran exports \$451m aquatics in seven months

3 >



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In a letter to UN chief:

## Iran, Russia, China reaffirm end of UN Resolution 2231

2 >

### UN chief's report unlikely to satisfy Iran

By Delaram Ahmadi  
Staff writer

**INTERVIEW  
EXCLUSIVE**

Tensions between Iran, the IAEA and the UN Security Council remain among Tehran's most consequential foreign-policy files. Recently, Russia's envoy to international organizations in Vienna, Mikhail Ulyanov, held talks with IAEA Director General Rafael Grossi about Iran. The UN nuclear agency continues to demand access to facilities damaged during the 12-day war in June as well as to Iran's stockpile of 60% enriched uranium. Iran, citing post-war security concerns, insists on a new cooperation framework, one that had been reflected in the "Cairo understanding" but was voided after the activation of snapback. Meanwhile, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres is set to brief the Security Council on the status of Resolution 2231, which underpinned the 2015 nuclear deal (JCPOA). Iran argues that the resolution has expired and that its nuclear file should be taken off the UN's agenda, while Western states insist that the September activation of the snapback clause has restored all pre-JCPOA sanctions.



China and Russia, alongside Iran, have again written to the UN and the Security Council, stressing that the resolution has lapsed. With Western pressure mounting, can reliance on China, Russia and international mechanisms realistically shield Iran? International affairs analyst Gholamreza Haddad has told Iran Daily that such mechanisms predominantly serve the interests of major powers, and that Iran should instead work to reduce the "threat perception" surrounding it.

**IRAN DAILY:** After the invalidation of the Cairo understanding, can Russia realistically mediate a new monitoring mechanism between Iran and the IAEA, or is the trajectory still pointing toward escalating confrontation? **HADDAD:** Such expectations are unrealistic. Given Russia's diminished diplomatic weight, largely due to the Ukraine war and wide-ranging international sanctions, Moscow no longer enjoys the leverage it once had. Also, based on the Islamic Republic's publicly declared policies and considering the heavy costs it has already borne, a new mechanism is unlikely to take shape. The IAEA's demands include maximum monitoring and full clarification regarding Iran's stockpile of highly enriched uranium and Iran has openly rejected such conditions in the current climate. Therefore, the path appears to be moving toward ratcheting up confrontation rather than easing it.

**How might China and Russia's positions influence the content or orientation of the UN secretary-general's report which is due in December 13?**

From the perspective of the international political-economic order, the world is moving toward divergence. The post-WWII cooperation-based order, shaped by the United States' hegemonic will and enabling globalization and institutionalized cooperation, is undergoing a major shift toward more zero-sum dynamics and competition over relative gains. The resurgence of tariff-driven policies, protectionism and a neo-capitalist approach in US foreign policymaking are key signs of this turn away from cooperative regimes. Under these evolving conditions, cooperation frameworks survive only when they do not clash with the interests of major powers, especially the hegemon.

As a result, the credibility and effectiveness of cooperative regimes have declined. The UN, perhaps the most expansive cooperative regime in an anarchic international environment, is facing the consequences of this trend. International organizations, the operational arms of such regimes, are fully aware of this erosion, which makes their role increasingly difficult. The secretary-general himself appears acutely aware of this reality. He sees that the hegemon which once bankrolled, strengthened and institutionalized these mechanisms, has been steadily pulling out of many institutions, from the WHO and UNESCO to the Human Rights Council and environmental accords, and may even reconsider participation in security alliances such as NATO.

Page 2 >

## Leader hails 'very exalted' status of women in Islam, slams Western culture

8 >



Leader of Iran's Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei walks on the stage to address a group of women and girls from across the country in Tehran on December 3, 2025.  
● [khamenei.ir](http://khamenei.ir)



### Dynamics of sectarian conflict in post-Assad Syria

Will civil war occur?

**OPINION**

4 >



### Head coach Mozaffar urges new vision for Iranian women's futsal

6 >



### Restoration of Shahzadeh Mahan Garden's gate begins in Kerman

7 >



### Official comptroller: Israel fails to protect vital facilities from Iranian missiles during war

2 >



### Curtains down on 43rd Fajr International Film Festival in Shiraz

8 >



# In a letter to UN chief: Iran, Russia, China reaffirm end of UN Resolution 2231

## International Desk

Iran, China, and Russia in a joint letter to the UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres reiterated the termination of Security Council Resolution 2231 concerning the Iranian nuclear program, saying that the top body's adherence to the resolution's expiration date would "contribute to strengthening its authority."

"In accordance with operative paragraph 8 of Resolution 2231, all its provisions are terminated after 18 October 2025," said the letter, penned by the trio's diplomatic missions to the United Nations.

The date, therefore, "marks the end of the Security Council's consideration of the Iranian nuclear issue," the note added.

The letter comes as Guterres is expected to present a report to the UN Security Council (UNSC) on the implementation

of the resolution, which endorsed the 2015 nuclear deal between Iran and world powers, known as the JCPOA. Slovenia's UN Ambassador Samuel Zbogar, who chairs the UNSC, said on Monday that the 15-member body would receive the report this month and a meeting would likely be called afterward.

Resolution 2231 mandated suspension of nuclear-related sanctions against Iran after it was unanimously ratified in 2015. The United States unilaterally walked out of the JCPOA in 2018 and re-imposed and reinforced its sanctions and forced the European parties to the deal – France, Germany and Britain (E3) – to abide by them. On August 28, the European trio instigated the so-called snapback mechanism – officially called the Dispute Resolution Mechanism (DRM) – under the nuclear agreement, which led to reimposition of international sanctions on Iran.

The joint letter reminded that the three European nations had no legal right to have the sanctions restored due to their own non-commitment to the historic accord.

"The E3, having themselves ceased to perform their commitments under both the JCPOA and Resolution 2231 and also failing to exhaust the procedures of the DRM, lacks the standing to invoke its provisions."

The letter was referring to the unilateral withdrawal of the US from the agreement and the European trio's suspending their trade with Iran despite their commitments under the deal.

Iran, China, and Russia noted that the Security Council's adherence to the resolution's expiration date "contributes to strengthening the authority of the Council and the credibility of multilateral diplomacy."



## Iran slams unilateral sanctions as 'crimes against humanity'

Detrimental effects of sanctions target lives, health of ordinary citizens: *Envoy*

Iran's representative at the Assembly of States Parties (ASP) to the International Criminal Court (ICC) denounced unilateral sanctions imposed on countries as "crimes against humanity."

Abbas Bagherpour, head of the Iranian delegation and Director General of International Legal Affairs at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, made the remark in The Hague on Tuesday, urging the international community to address their adverse impact on human lives, particularly on patients and vulnerable groups.

Bagherpour said the detrimental effects of unilateral coercive measures, directly targeting the lives and health of ordinary citizens, fall within the jurisdiction of international criminal law, according to Press TV.

The envoy also underlined Iran's commitment to confronting impunity and prosecuting serious crimes by mentioning the approval of a bill on international crimes and its submission to the Iranian Parliament.

The legislation aims to establish a specialized framework for prosecuting genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes, and military aggression, demonstrating Iran's willingness to



Director General of International Legal Affairs at Iran's Foreign Ministry, Abbas Bagherpour, speaks during a session of the Assembly of States Parties to the International Criminal Court (ICC) in the Hague, Netherlands, on December 2, 2025.

● IRNA

cooperate internationally. Bagherpour expressed concern about the impact of unilateralism and the normalization of genocide and war crimes on the pursuit of justice, saying that it placed the ICC under a serious test for future generations.

He also condemned the situation in Palestine, describing the ongoing Israeli actions there as an "open policy of genocide" that had deeply affected the conscience of humanity.

Referring to Israeli-US military aggression against Iran in June, the envoy said that the attacks deliberately targeted civilians, including women and children, as well as scientists, journalists, and civilian infrastructure such as hospitals and energy facilities, among them nuclear sites.

Bagherpour reiterated the need to pursue individual criminal responsibility for those who ordered, planned, or executed the attacks.

## Official comptroller: Israel fails to protect vital facilities from Iranian missiles during war

### International Desk

Israel's official comptroller on Tuesday accused the military of failing to protect vital facilities and institutes from Iranian missiles launched to retaliate the regime's aggression in June.

Several critical Israeli sites were struck by Iranian ballistic missiles during the war, including the Haifa Bazan oil refinery, which suffered damage to pipelines and transmission lines, and various important laboratories at Rehovot's Weizmann University among others.

The missile attacks were in response to Israel's unprovoked war, during which dozens of high-ranking Iranian military commanders and nuclear scientists, as well as hundreds of ordinary civilians were killed.

According to comptroller Matanyahu Englman, the issue of physical defenses was first flagged in 2011 by a division of the Defense Ministry and his office in a detailed report in 2020 had highlighted the structures' vulnerabilities. However, he said all efforts to date on the issue had been ignored.

The physical defenses are distinct from Israeli air defenses such as the Iron Dome, David's Sling, the Arrow, and the Iron Beam. Those batteries are designed to prevent an aerial threat from crossing into Israeli airspace or getting anywhere near a variety of Israeli installations or residen-



A damaged building is seen at the campus of the Weizmann Institute of Science following an Iranian missile strike in Rehovot, occupied territories, on June 19, 2025.

● REUTERS

tial areas.

In contrast, the comptroller took various authorities to task for not providing specific physical defenses to specific critical infrastructure installations in the event that a missile breaks through the air defenses and strikes that installation.

Israeli air defenses were not hermetic, and Hamas, Hezbollah, Ansarullah, and Iran all succeeded in harming different critical sites at points in the war, sites which had no physical defenses, Englman said.

During the June aggression, Iran demonstrated the precision and effectiveness of its ballistic and hypersonic missile capabilities, striking multiple critical Israeli sites that had long been considered secure.

## UN chief's report...

Given these dynamics, Guterres understands that as long as these institutions operate within the interests of powerful states, they survive.

Expecting him to take a position on Iran's nuclear file and the snapback dispute that openly contradicts the positions of the United States, the EU and the broader Western bloc and aligns instead with China and Russia is extremely unlikely. His stance is therefore not expected to satisfy Tehran.

**How can Iran leverage the divisions among permanent Security Council members, especially between Western powers and Russia and China, to reinforce its diplomatic position and mitigate international pressure?**

Historical experience shows that the Islamic Republic has rarely benefited

from such divisions. There is little reason to believe this long-standing pattern will suddenly reverse.

Moreover, the current Security Council structure largely aligns with Russian and Chinese interests. No decision contrary to their key interests can be taken due to the veto. In fact, it is the United States whose long-term position is weakened by a Security Council system that constrains major-power behavior more than it enables collective action.

Russia and China also understand that pushing the US into a position where the Security Council no longer serves its interests — limiting its positive influence while retaining strong negative constraints — could hasten the collapse of an order in which Moscow and Beijing themselves hold substantial influence. Expecting a serious confrontation between Russia and China and the US and Europe over Iran is therefore unlikely.

**If Western efforts to pressure Iran through Resolution 2231 and snapback ultimately fail, what legal or institutional alternatives could they turn to sustain pressure?**

Iran is already under Chapter VII, Article 41. It would be relatively straightforward to piece together IAEA reports, document Iran's actions, such as missile activities, the expansion of enrichment capacity, or support for regional resistance groups, and to justify a referral from Article 41 to Article 42.

Such a shift could pave the way for the formation of a coalition against Iran. Expecting legal or institutional mechanisms to block such a move would be a mistake. What can truly alter this trajectory is reducing the threat perception surrounding Iran by demonstrating fundamental changes in its operational intentions. If such shifts do not occur, international legal mechanisms will likely work against Iran.



Mohammad Ali Rajabi  
Cartoonist

CARTOON





# New fishing record set in international waters: *IFO chief*

## Iran exports \$451m aquatics in seven months

### Economy desk

The head of Iran's Fisheries Organization (IFO) said the country's fishermen had set a new record in fishing across transboundary waters, with some Iranian vessels catching up to 160 tons — a figure that was previously between 100 and 130 tons. Hamzeh Rostampour made the announcement while speaking at Tehran Permanent International Fairgrounds on the sidelines of the 9th Iran International Fisheries In-

dustry Exhibition (IFEX) on Wednesday. Rostampour said that \$451 million worth of aquatics was exported from the country in the first seven months of the current Iranian calendar year (started March 21, 2025). Stressing that sea-based development in the fisheries sector, as one of the pillars of food security and job creation, holds a strategic position, Rostampour said the IFO had thus far generated employment opportunities for 285,000 job-seeking people directly and for one million

others indirectly. The official also announced a 20 to 30 percent growth in production compared to the current year's forecasts and the export of \$400 million worth of various fishery and aquatic products in the first half of the year. Pointing to the export of over \$400 million worth of fishery products since the beginning of the year, Rostampour stated that about 80% of it consisted of shrimp, with European and neighboring countries as its destination.

The IFO chief also emphasized the importance of supplying the domestic market and reducing the price of aquatic products for consumers, saying, "Warm-water fish have high protein content, and their consumption plays an important role in people's health." Rostampour added that, "By reducing production costs and increasing productivity, the price of fishery products in the domestic market can be lowered so that people can benefit from healthy and high-quality food."



## Energy minister says virtual, physical imports of water on agenda

### Economy Desk

Iran's Energy Minister Abbas Aliabadi announced on Wednesday that the imports of water have been put on the agenda, saying, "Water imports, both virtual and physical, from neighboring countries are on the agenda." Speaking on the sidelines of the 21st Iran International Water and Wastewater Exhibition, Aliabadi said there is an exaggeration in the media

regarding water wastage in the network, and figures such as 35% water loss do not exist. The energy minister added that appropriate measures have been taken for leak detection, and there a significant reduction in water wastage, especially in the country's metropolises in recent years. "We are also seeking to secure Iran's water rights from neighboring countries; we must prevent water outflow to the seas," Aliabadi said. "Ne-



Iran's Energy Minister Abbas Aliabadi speaks at the 21st Iran International Water and Wastewater Exhibition in Tehran on December 3, 2025. ● ISNA

gotiations are underway with neighbors to supply surplus water, but in the current situation, the entire region is facing drought." Speaking at the opening ceremony of the exhibition, the head of the organizing committee for the Energy Min-

istry's water and electricity industry exhibitions said 150 domestic companies and four foreign companies from Italy, Germany, and China are participating in the 21st Iran International Water and Wastewater Exhibition. "Integrated water resource

management, drought and climate change resilience, consumption optimization, reduction of water waste, development of wastewater collection and treatment networks, wastewater recycling, improvement of drinking water quality, and utilization of new technologies in monitoring and smart management of networks are among the main priorities of this year's exhibition," Gholamhossein Moqimi said.

Referring to the intensification of drought conditions in the country, Moqimi said, "Given the current requirements in the water sector, this exhibition is twice as important as previous periods. The Ministry of Energy and the organizing committee have tried to make this period as coherent and productive as possible, and participants have been invited to present their latest scientific and technological achievements." The 21st Iran International Water and Wastewater Exhibition will be held from Wednesday (December 3), to Saturday (December 6), from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. at Tehran Permanent International Fairgrounds.

## China ramps up Iranian oil intake after getting new import quota

China's independent oil refiners are boosting their intake of Iranian crude from onshore tanks and ships idling at sea after Beijing issued a fresh round of import quotas late last month, as reported by Bloomberg.

Several processors based in Shandong Province have been taking crude from bonded storage at ports and refineries this week, according to people familiar with the matter, asking to not be identified discussing sensitive information. A lot of the oil had been bought prior to the new quota allocation, they said.

China's private refiners, known as teapots, dominate the nation's purchases of crude from Iran and Russia, which are cheaper than other grades, but had to scale back buying during the fourth quarter due to exhausted allocations and the fallout from sanctions. Beijing runs a quota system under which it controls the amount of oil that non state-owned refiners can import. Still, overall demand from teapots is likely to remain muted through year-end, in part due to weak processing margins, according to Vortexa Ltd. That means "sanctioned crude is likely to keep accumulating on water," said Emma Li, lead China market analyst for Vortexa.

Chinese authorities typically provide guidance on the overall annual quota, but don't usually give details on the tranches issued throughout the year that make up the actual total figure. For the latest allocation, about 20 teapots got between seven-to-eight million tons, according to analysts.

Two supertankers carrying Iranian oil that had been idling off China, discharged their cargoes this week at separate Chinese ports, according to ship-tracking data compiled by Bloomberg. One of the vessels, Panama-flagged Ill Gap — transporting about 2 million barrels — unload-



● Reuters

ed at Rizhao.

The vessel's Mumbai-based manager Eversail Ship Services OPC PVT, and owner Crystal Blue Sky Inc. that's in the Marshall Islands, did not respond to emails for comment. It's not been sanctioned by any Western governments.

Iranian crude held on tankers at sea climbed to more than 54 million barrels this week, the highest in about two and a half years, according to data from Kpler. China is the biggest consumer of oil from the OPEC producer, which is subject to sanctions. Exports recently rose to the fastest clip in years.

Given the very limited pool of buyers, Iranian oil needs to be cheap. Some cargoes of Iran Light were offered at a discount of around \$8-to-\$9 a barrel to ICE Brent this week, compared with about \$4 in August, according to traders. Widening sanctions on Russia are also leading to cheaper barrels.

Many Chinese refiners burned through their allocations faster than usual this year due to stricter tax regimes on alternative feedstock such as fuel oil. Since 2024, they've received full-year quotas upfront to aid planning, but that system often leaves them running short well before year-end.

### Economy desk

The deputy head of planning and economy in the Ministry of Agriculture raised the alarm on Wednesday that the erosion of two billion tons of Iranian soil is regarded as a "silent threat" to the national food security and reducing production costs and increasing productivity are the economic strategies of the ministry for soil conservation.

"Soil; this silent yet vital asset, today more than ever, requires protection, study, and intelligent management. World Soil Day is an opportunity to review the status of this non-renewable resource, which is not only the foundation of food security but also a pillar of sustainable development in the world and in



● ISNA

## Deputy minister warns soil erosion poses 'silent threat' to food security

Iran," Akbar Fathi said.

"In Iran, the soil situation also requires urgent attention and more precise policymaking. Estimates indicate that our country experiences between 1.5 to 2 billion tons of soil erosion annually; a figure that is very high compared to the global average (about five tons per hectare) and in some regions, even 20

to 30 tons per hectare has been reported. This is while the formation of one centimeter of fertile soil takes, on average, more than 700 years."

Stressing that soil is regarded as the food security of future generations, Fathi said, "Although the challenges are serious, there is also a clear and achievable

path. Countries that have implemented long-term soil conservation programs over the past three decades have been able to experience up to a 50% reduction in erosion and a 30% increase in productivity. Iran, with its scientific, academic, and technological capacities, is also capable of managing a significant portion of the current crisis in less than a decade."

The deputy head of planning and economy in the Ministry of Agriculture said the future of Iran's food security is directly dependent on the decisions that are taken regarding soil.

"Soil protection is not a choice, but a strategic necessity for the country's economic, environmental, and social survival," Fathi added.

### AUCTION SJSCO. D140405

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Interested applicants are hereby invited to obtain the tender documents by visiting the official website of Sirjan Jahan Steel Company at [sjSCO.ir](http://sjSCO.ir), through the Sales and customer portal, Tender and Foreign Tender section.

All documentation will be provided electronically.

All bids on conformity to tender instruction should be submitted no later than **Monday, December 15, 2025.**

For more information, please contact us at:  
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# Dynamics of sectarian conflict in post-Assad Syria

## Will civil war occur?



By **Mohammad-Reza Babaei**  
Researcher on Middle Eastern affairs

### OPINION

The Levant region has, for centuries, been transformed into an epicenter of sectarian disputes. Although this region experienced a brief interval of stability and social cohesion during certain junctures of history, in most political crossroads, sectarian tensions were effectively reproduced and assumed novel configurations. The origins of these tensions and religious confrontations consist of an ensemble of interwoven factors and elements. Therefore, in order to comprehend the essence of these disputes, apprehending the entanglements of demography and geopolitics is deemed indispensable. The geopolitical position of the Levant has, since antiquity, transformed this region into a fulcrum of ideologies and doctrines in which sects and denominations encounter one another at a singular point of convergence. As indicated, this blessing or affliction is predominantly a consequence of the geopolitical position of the Levant. The absence of a central authority in this region was experienced for centuries, and scarcely did any political power succeed in consolidating and stabilizing its authority over this realm. The geographical configuration of the Levant territory — encompassing impassable mountains, desert expanses, and flat plains in a single continuum — constituted one of the catalytic elements in the formation of quasi-anarchies and centrifugal polities.

This condition and geopolitical capacity prepared the political and social groundwork for the expansion of the influence of myriad religious sects in the political sphere of this region. Among these religious sects, the role of the Druze and the Alawites is particularly accentuated throughout the historical evolution of Syria. Although the origin and cradle of the Nusayri doctrine (attributed to Muhammad ibn Nusayr, whose adherents were later designated as Alawites) was in Kufa, and the Druze doctrine emerged in Cairo during the era of al-Mustansir Billah of the Fatimid dynasty, the geopolitics of the Levant served as an impregnable bastion safeguarding them against political adversaries and guaranteeing their survival.

### Incomplete transfiguration of Syrian nation-state

During the First World War, the Hijaz became the point of departure for a major Arab uprising against the Ottomans. This uprising was executed with the support of the Allied forces and under the leadership of Sharif Hussein and his sons. The primary objective of this armed uprising, at first instance, was the establishment of an independent Arab emirate; however, due to the conflict of interests between France and Britain concerning the future of the region in the post-World War I era, this objective was reduced to the formation of the so-called Greater Syria (the present-day Syria and Lebanon), and eventually Faisal bin Hussein governed this territory for a brief period.

The French, who were far from content with the Sykes-Picot Agreement with Britain, ultimately attacked Syria and placed this country under their protectorate

for more than two decades. The presence of France in the Levant region during the 1920s to 1940s influenced the form and demographic structure of Syria and its impact on the future political system of this country.

During this period, each religious group, in order to attain greater political and socio-cultural autonomy, inclined toward one of the regional or international actors. The Christians of the Levant had, since the 18th century, been regarded as one of France's natural allies in this region. In addition to them, a segment of the Sunni social elites of Syria considered the period of French mandate over their country as a set of lessons for practicing democracy and civil governance. Shukri al-Quwatli stood at the apex of these elites, and after the independence of Syria, he became the first president of this country. The proximity of Sunni elites to the French was largely oriented toward preserving the territorial integrity of Syria and creating a political balance against the Alawites and the Druze.

The relationship between the Alawites of the Syrian coast and France was de facto. On one hand, the Alawites were discontent with the French due to the cession of the Alawite-inhabited region of Iskenderun to Turkey in 1939, for this action transformed the demographic balance of Syria to the detriment of this religious minority. On the other hand, the absorption of numerous Alawite youth into the local army under French supervision propelled them from the margins of Syrian society toward its center and generated a positive impact on their economic status. The prominent presence of the Alawite minority in the local army during the mandate period assisted them in preserving their role and standing in Syrian military institutions after the French departure and ultimately enabled them to seize power for more than five decades through a military coup.

The situation regarding the Druze is somewhat different. The relationship between this religious minority and the French is almost irreconcilable. These hostilities date back to the mid-18th century, when religious wars erupted between the Druze community and the Maronite Christians. Ultimately, Paris's diplomatic initiatives resolved the conditions to the advantage of the Christians. This development caused the Druze during World War I and even thereafter to incline more toward Britain and its traditional ally in the region, Jordan. It is noteworthy

that in 1925, the Druze, under the leadership of Sultan Pasha al-At-rash, initiated a major uprising against the French, and the flames of this uprising spread to other regions of Syria.

The relations shaped by religious inclinations and tendencies, and the reduction of nationalism to sub-national orientations in which the role of regional and international actors was more or less evident, constituted the principal cause of the failure of nation-state building in Syria and brought this country to the condition that we witness today.

### Syria from independence to post-Ba'ath transition

The independence of Syria never culminated in national cohesion; on the contrary, sectarian disputes in each period were reproduced in new forms and repeatedly propelled Syria toward civil war. However, after Hafez al-Assad's rise to power, the authoritarianism imposed upon society by the military preserved these sectarian disputes like embers beneath ashes for years. It should not remain unmentioned that the wars between Arabs and Israel, on one hand, and the civil war in Lebanon, on the other, exerted a significant influence in silencing these tensions.

The era of Hafez al-Assad provided a suitable substratum for religious minorities, including the Alawites and the Druze. The ascent of an Alawite president created an opportunity for many Alawites to obtain a greater share of power distribution compared with the past. This principle was equally applicable to the Druze. Before Hafez al-Assad's rise to power, the Druze community was consistently suspected of collaboration and alignment with Israel and Jordan. However, during Assad's era, they too acquired a larger share of power relative to the past.

The event known as the Arab Spring, which began in the final days of 2010 in Tunisia, soon affected Syria. The popular protests in Syria, which began on March 18, 2011, within five months transformed into one of the bloodiest civil wars in the contemporary history of the region. This civil war, whose objective was the overthrow of Assad's government, propelled Syria into a new phase of sectarian disputes.

Merely one year into this war, the discourse of transnational jihadism replaced the dominant secular nationalist discourse; the cause of this development was the rise and influence of Salafi groups and the



▲ Demonstrators gather at the al-Azhari Square in Latakia, Syria, on November 25, 2025.  
● AFP



The relations shaped by religious inclinations and tendencies, and the reduction of nationalism to sub-national orientations in which the role of regional and international actors was more or less evident, constituted the principal cause of the failure of nation-state building in Syria and brought this country to the condition that we witness today.

gradual diminution of the role of moderate and secular armed groups. The empowerment of Islamist groups — and foremost among them the group known as the Islamic State (Daesh or ISIS) — rendered the international community more cautious than before regarding any political transition in the region. This was due to the prevailing security concern that a power vacuum might create the groundwork for the rise and emergence of fundamentalist groups.

The entry of the counter-terrorism coalition led by the United States and the military intervention of Russia gradually shifted the balance to the advantage of the central government, and this transformation compelled several factions and groups with radical Islamist antecedents to undergo a transfiguration. A transfiguration through which more pragmatic and simultaneously more pluralistic interpretations of political Islam were presented in order to exhibit a semblance of alignment with the international community. Some maintain that these ideological shifts constitute a political tactic for interacting with actors in the international political arena primarily.

The Russian military attack against Ukraine on February 24, 2022, and the October 7, 2023, incident in Gaza were two major developments that played crucial roles in the revision of the policies of the United States and the West toward the Middle East. Although the Syrian government had effectively lost a considerable portion of its economic capacities and political power during the Syrian civil war, it nevertheless endeavored to gradually regain its international standing and initiate new relations with the Arab states of the region and Turkey.

In Idlib as well, Abu Mohammad al-Jolani (Ahmad al-Sharaa), through the so-called Salvation Government, administered the territories under his control in northwestern Syria and established the institutions that a government requires in these areas. The period from March 2020 to November 27, 2024, constituted an opportunity for Ahmad al-Sharaa to demonstrate his model and style of governance to the international community and to instill in them the impression that he was capable of playing a constructive role during the transition era.

Although abundant doubts and skepticism regarding al-Sharaa's intentions persisted in Washington, the war in Ukraine and the October 7 incident compelled the United States and the West to

endeavor to weaken the Axis of Resistance and challenge Russia's hegemony in the region. The Israeli military attack against Hezbollah in Lebanon ultimately prepared the prelude for the resumption of military operations by the armed opposition and ultimately the downfall of Assad. Nearly one year has passed since the collapse of Assad's government, but this country continues to traverse part of its turbulent transition, and recent developments have demonstrated that Syria remains considerably distant from desirable governance. The transition era not only failed to ameliorate the political condition of this country but also reproduced a new wave of sectarian violence that continues to claim victims. The interim cabinet ruling Syria is, in truth, a rushed response or expedient solution intended to weaken the Iranian and Russian axis. Although the intensification of sectarian disputes may in the not-too-distant future ignite the flames of a new civil war or impair the international image of the new rulers of Damascus and ultimately overthrow them, American decision-makers still lack a defined outlook regarding post-transition Syria.

The Damascus government, in practice, does not control the eastern and northeastern regions of the country, which contain more than two-thirds of Syria's oil and gas. The central government's dominance and influence in the south are challenged by the Druze, local armed groups, and Israeli military forces. In the Syrian coast as well, Alawite protests against the Damascus government and intermittent armed clashes by militant cells against state forces persist.

The issue of minorities constitutes a strategic asset for Israel and the United States against Ahmad al-Sharaa and will play a pivotal role in future bilateral and multilateral negotiations. However, at present, the issue of minorities functions more as an instrument of pressure against Damascus, compelling it to acquiesce to maximalist demands; for the occurrence of a new civil war in Syria and the intensification of political-security vacuums in this country may challenge the policy of disarming Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hashd al-Shaabi in Iraq — pursued by Israel and the United States — and transform Syria once again into a substratum for the influence of the Axis of Resistance.

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



▲ Bedouin fighters deploy at Mazraa village, on the outskirts of Suwayda city, Syria, as smoke rises from the clashes between the Bedouin clans and Druze militias on July 18, 2025.  
● GHAIETH ALSAYED/AP



# Price of reintegrating Syria?

## Become Israel, America's slave

By Rania Hammad and Tawfiq Al-Ghussein  
Researchers on political affairs

OPINION

The visit of Ahmad al-Sharaa, Syria's de facto leader, to the White House earlier last month is being framed as Syria's return to international legitimacy. In reality, it means something profoundly different: the reshaping of a shattered state into a system of managed dependency — and the process is being overseen by the very powers that helped destroy it. What Washington calls “rehabilitation” uses humanitarian language to mask external control. The key sector where that control is exercised is the energy sector. The limits of Syria's permitted recovery are already clear in the language of Western policy institutes, donor coordination platforms, and Persian Gulf-Western investment forums: low-risk sectors such as logistics, agriculture, and labor-intensive manufacturing are allowed to revive, while strategic sectors — energy, major infrastructure, telecommunications, and defense — remain locked behind political conditions tied to sanctions relief and regional alignment. Energy is the decisive lever in this system: by regulating Syria's access to its own oil and gas fields, refining capacity, electricity generation, and pipeline routes, external actors are setting the parameters for Syrian sovereignty. This means that Syria's diplomatic “normalization,” presented as a step towards stability, is actually designed to entrench dependency rather than overcome it. This is evidenced in Syria's emerging post-war architecture. These dynamics are not speculative. Since 2022, the Brussels Syria Conferences, IMF technical workshops, and analyses from the Atlantic Council, Carnegie, and the European Institute of Peace have openly stated that sanctions relief affecting the energy sector will depend on Syrian compliance with Western regional priorities. Under these conditions, aid ceases to serve reconstruction, instead becoming a technology of political supervision. In this sense, Western consultancies, Persian Gulf sovereign wealth vehicles, and donor agencies function less as partners than as custodians of Syrian recovery. And most importantly, “normalization” is, in practice, the monetization of sovereignty because access to energy revenues is now contingent upon political obedience. Al-Sharaa's political posture mirrors this regional recalibration. As early as 2020, during the acceleration of Arab normalization under the Abraham Accords, Syrian and Lebanese outlets quoted him telling his cadres that “the world is changing.” He went on to say: “Arab states are normalizing relations with Israel. We must read these realities carefully.” His refusal to criticize the Accords and his silence during Israel's genocidal assault on Gaza in 2023–2025 — and during Israel's consolidation of its control over the Syrian Golan Heights

indicate the acceptance of a regional structure built around Israeli military primacy and Persian Gulf-Israeli energy integration. His attempt to recast himself as a statesman in a 2021 PBS Frontline interview — declaring that “we are not a threat to the West...we want to build a balanced relationship with all countries that respect our identity” — fits neatly within this trajectory. The language of “balance” signals an understanding that Syrian political legitimacy now depends on adopting frameworks designed outside Syria, particularly those governing the energy sector. Sovereignty is performed, but increasingly displaced to foreign centers of power.

**Sidestepping Palestine**

This alignment extends to his policies towards Palestinian movements in Syria. In a 2022 internal address, he insisted that “we will not allow external groups to drag Syria into wars that serve other agendas.” While couched in the language of sovereignty, the formulation conforms to Western and Persian Gulf expectations that Palestinian factions in Damascus be restricted, especially those linked to Iran or Hezbollah, and thus capable of influencing regional energy and security arrangements. Yet this is not a break from Syrian history. Under Hafez al-Assad, rhetorical solidarity with Palestine existed alongside interventions that weakened the Palestinian movement, from Tal al-Zaatar to the War of the Camps. As Rashid Khalidi and Patrick Seale both observed, Palestinian factions were treated as both assets and liabilities, to be shaped according to Syrian state strategy. Al-Sharaa's stance reproduces this pattern within a landscape now dominated by external powers. His rise unfolded as Israel intensified its dismantling of Syria's military and industrial infrastructure in late 2024. As Gaza endured genocidal destruction, Israel expanded operations across Syria, striking air-defense systems, command centers, power stations, fuel depots, and the fragile national electricity grid. These strikes prevented any reconstitution of deterrence and reinforced Israeli control over Jabal al-Sheikh and the wider Golan Heights. Al-Sharaa's silence signalled acceptance of a regional alignment in which Syrian strategic and energy sovereignty is effectively suspended under the pretext of “security”. For Washington, al-Sharaa offers an anti-Iran axis without direct American intervention. Sanctions relief — especially those governing oil-export waivers and regional electricity transfers — is granted selectively. Israel's actions reveal the scale of external interference. Beyond occupying Jabal al-Sheikh and the sustained air campaign targeting Syrian energy and transportation infrastructure, Israel's intelligence networks have exploited grievances in Suwayda, amplifying Druze separatism to weaken the state. These operations are part of a coherent



A general view of Rmailan oil field is pictured in northeastern Syria, near the border with Turkey, on January 8, 2025.

strategy of keeping Syria militarily incapacitated and economically vulnerable. The objective is to limit Syria's ability to challenge Israeli dominance.

### Israel is the master of the house

This strategy is guided by Israel's doctrine of “calibrated containment,” which treats permanent Syrian fragmentation as a security objective. Israeli operations across Syria and Lebanon, including restrictions on Hezbollah's mobility, help preserve a system of managed instability in the country. The suppression of Palestinian political forces in Damascus fits the same logic, preventing any alternative political pole from emerging that could disrupt the regional energy architecture now being built. Arab regimes reopening their embassies in Damascus present their engagement as a sign of solidarity, yet their calculations are fundamentally transactional. Reintegration under US oversight stabilizes their own regimes and embeds Syria within a regional system governed by Western control over energy flows, transit routes, and infrastructure investment. Turkey has entrenched a parallel form of dependency. Its shift from direct intervention to structural integration has transformed northern Syria into an extension of its border economy, where Turkish currency, contractors, and energy distributors dominate. This is

framed as “stabilization,” but it institutionalizes long-term dependence on Ankara. The Persian Gulf monarchies have become Syria's principal financiers. Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Qatar deploy reconstruction capital through corporate vehicles tied to their national energy strategies. Their funding is not aid but leverage, conditioning liquidity on political conformity. These arrangements fold Syria into a Persian Gulf-Israeli energy framework that privileges external interests over national renewal. Russia and Iran, though critical to preventing state collapse, now find their influence shrinking. Moscow remains militarily present but strategically diminished; Tehran's networks have been disrupted by al-Sharaa's restructuring. Their foothold is tolerated only insofar as it does not challenge the architecture shaped by Western, Persian Gulf, and Israeli priorities. And amid all of this, Israel remains the uncontested regional hegemon. As Israel launches periodic strikes across the region with total impunity, it is sending a message to the people of the region: we are the masters of the house. For Syrians, the implications are profound. A state that once claimed centrality in the Arab liberation project risks becoming the conduit through which the Palestinian presence is erased on its own soil. If pressure on the remaining Palestin-

ian factions continues, al-Sharaa faces a historic choice: revive a meaningful liberation project or preside over Syria's absorption into a regional order built on foreign control and energy dependency. This is not rehabilitation: it is annexation through consent. As Gaza burns and Lebanon falters, the same powers that invoke security to justify genocide invoke stability to legitimize Syria's subordination. The vocabulary shifts, but the logic doesn't. Yet Syria's predicament is not solely the result of foreign manipulation. Dependency took root in decades of authoritarian governance, economic mismanagement, and the suppression of dissent. External powers merely exploited vulnerabilities already embedded. True independence begins with self-critique as much as it does with resistance. It demands institutions capable of withstanding external pressure, particularly in the energy sector, where sovereignty is most easily compromised. Sovereignty cannot be reclaimed by aligning with stronger states or through orchestrated defiance. It begins with knocking down the political foundations that allow dependency to take hold. Tell me who your friends are, and I will tell you who you are.

The full article first appeared on Mondoweiss.



Debris lies on the ground at the scene of an Israeli strike on a military facility in Syria's southern Hama governorate, on April 3, 2025.



The limits of Syria's permitted recovery are already clear in the language of Western policy institutes, donor coordination platforms, and Persian Gulf-Western investment forums: low-risk sectors such as logistics, agriculture, and labor-intensive manufacturing are allowed to revive, while strategic sectors — energy, major infrastructure, telecommunications, and defense — remain locked behind political conditions tied to sanctions relief and regional alignment. This means that Syria's diplomatic “normalization,” presented as a step towards stability, is actually designed to entrench dependency rather than overcome it. This is evidenced in Syria's emerging post-war architecture.



# Head coach Mozaffar urges new vision for Iranian women's futsal

## Sports Desk

Iran head coach Shahrzad Mozaffar has called for the country's women's futsal to "surpass Asian standards" and adopt an international vision after her team suffered a group-stage exit at the inaugural World Cup in the Philippines.

Iran was beaten by Brazil (4-1) and Italy (3-1), either side of a 6-2 win against Panama, to finish third in Group D last week and miss out on a place in the quarterfinals.

Mozaffar said she was still pleased that her players showed fighting spirit against two global powerhouses, despite the team's limited preparation for the event. "The players performed beyond expectations. They gave their all, fought fiercely, and showed that Iranian women's futsal has immense potential," Mozaffar told the official website of the Iranian Football Federation.

"Brazil is an exceptional team, boasting the best generation of futsal players in the world right now. Their level of coordination and individual quality is extraordinary. As the tournament progressed and we observed Brazil's results against other teams, it became even more evident what kind of team we played against and how brilliant our performance was.

"The significant point about Italy is that at least half of its players are of Brazilian origin. Therefore, it is completely natural for their playing style and quality to resemble Brazil's. The reality is



● FIFA

that we played against the first- and second-best versions of Brazil, which is a major challenge for any team."

"We lost control of the game for a few minutes in the second half against Italy, and that's precisely when we gave away the result, despite all statistics – including possession and chances created – being even at fulltime.

"I think international experience made the difference between

the two sides. Italy has played against the world's top-tier teams for years and has high tactical maturity, which plays a pivotal role in such situations."

Mozaffar replaced former coach Forouzan Soleimani after a mediocre campaign at May's Asian Cup, where the two-time champion finished third – a result that eventually placed Iran in a tougher World Cup group compared to Asian finalists Ja-

pan and Thailand.

"We would have definitely advanced to the knockout phase if we had been placed in another group. Nevertheless, this great experience of playing against two global heavyweights is a valuable asset for us – one that we can build on for the future," she added.

"Our first training camp began in early July, and we had only about four and a half months to prepare

for the tournament – and even that preparation was hampered for various reasons.

"The team was not in good mental form after the Asian Cup, so our primary goal was to rebuild the players' confidence and then address major tactical issues," said Mozaffar, who guided Iran to the Asian title in 2018 during her previous spell in charge of the national team.

"We had to completely change

the team's defensive structure. The team used to play zonal defense, which is not effective at World Cup level, as modern futsal relies heavily on individual marking.

"Implementing the new defensive system requires high physical intensity and years of practice, but the players executed it remarkably well in such a short time.

"We had four months to bring the players to peak readiness in defense, attack, mentality, and physicality. Our effort was to reach a world standard in all aspects within this short period, and I think the progress was completely tangible. We built a squad that stood toe-to-toe with the world's best, from a team that had struggled against the Philippines and China and lost to Japan in the Asian Cup."

Mozaffar believes a shift in vision is essential for the future of women's futsal in Iran if the country hopes to achieve global success.

"Now that the World Cup has been initiated, we must change our outlook and move beyond continental standards, measuring ourselves against the world's top teams. We need consistent exposure at the highest levels of world futsal, along with top-tier preparation and training camps. "For the next World Cup, precise planning must start today. We need to build a new generation, inject fresh blood, and implement structured programs. That's how a last-four finish – and even stepping onto the podium – will become achievable."

## Russian great Sadulaev set to join Iranian FS Premier League: Report

### Sports Desk

Russian wrestling sensation Abdurashid Sadulaev is in advanced talks to join Bank Shahr in the Iran Freestyle Premier League, according to the sports news website Varzesh3. Should the deal be finalized, the 29-year-old will represent Bank Shahr in the 97kg weight class in the league semifinals against Khaybar Khorramabad.

Nicknamed "The Russian Tank," six-time world champion Sadulaev won Olympic gold medals at Rio 2016 and Tokyo 2020, but missed the chance to pursue a third title in Paris last year.

He was barred from competing in the European Olympic qualifiers after United World Wrestling (UWW) found new information regarding his support for the Russia-Ukraine war, deeming him ineligible to represent the International Olympic Committee (IOC) as an individual neutral athlete.

With Bank Shahr and Esteghlal Juybar dominating the preliminary phase of this season's Iranian league, a third meeting between the two star-studded clubs is on the cards in the final – where Iranian fans could be treated to a highly anticipated showdown between Sadulaev and Iran's 10-time world and Olympic medalist Hassan Yazdani.

Yazdani, who has been sidelined with a lengthy shoulder injury since his 86kg final defeat at last year's Paris Olympics, joined Esteghlal in early November but was not part of the 10-man roster when his team suffered a 7-3 loss to Bank Shahr in Group B last Friday.

Esteghlal had edged Bank Shahr 5-5 (42-41) in the reverse fixture earlier in the season. Sadulaev was also ruled out of September's World Championships in Zagreb after Croatia denied him an entry visa – the third major event he missed following Paris 2024 and April's European Championships.

The last time Sadulaev faced an Iranian opponent, he staged a dramatic comeback with four seconds remaining to defeat two-time world champion Kamran Qasempour 5-3 in the semifinals en route to the 92kg gold at the 2024 World Championships in Tirana, Albania.

● UWW

## Iran suffers second defeat against Uzbekistan in friendly double-header



● FIFA

### Sports Desk

The Iranian women's national football team fell to a second defeat against Uzbekistan in four days, losing 1-0 in a friendly match in Tashkent on Tuesday. Marziyeh Jafari's side had previously suffered a 2-0 loss to the Central Asian side on Saturday. The matches were part of both teams' preparation for next year's AFC Women's Asia Cup, which begins on March 1 in Australia. Iran will face Australia, South Korea, and the Philippines in a tough Group A.

"These two games gave us the chance to see more players in real match conditions. Some of the girls really impressed me and made me reconsider certain positions. The players have reached

a good level of confidence, which is a major boost for the team because we can't afford to rely on a limited group of players," Jafari said after Tuesday's defeat. Iran had to play both games without star players Zahra Qanbari, Negin Zandi, and first-choice goalkeeper Zahra Khajavi – all absent from the trip to the Uzbek capital for various reasons.

"I would have appreciated having a few more players available so we had more options for arranging the lineup, but even with this group, we put in a decent performance – especially in the second game, which we dominated throughout the 90 minutes. I'm sure with a bit more coordination among the players and an established striker up front, we definitely could have won the match," added the Asian women's

coach of the year.

"These games helped clarify the selection pathway for the squad heading to Australia. I've now seen almost every player in competitive action, and if I need to make changes to the lineup in the future, I have a much clearer and more detailed understanding of each individual."

Iran, which was knocked out in the group stage on its Asian Cup debut in 2022, will begin its campaign in Australia against South Korea – runner-up to China in the previous edition – in Gold Coast on March 2. Team Melli will then face the formidable host nation – a 2023 World Cup semifinalist – on March 5, before concluding the group phase against the Philippines, a 2022 Asian Cup semifinalist, three days later.



# Restoration of Shahzadeh Mahan Garden’s gate begins in Kerman



● IRNA

Iranica Desk

The head of Kerman’s Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts Organization has announced the commencement of restoration work on the entrance gate of the Shahzadeh Mahan Garden, a UNESCO-recognized site. Morteza Nikrou stated that the restoration planning began following photogrammetric surveys and mapping, aimed at updating existing plans and identifying damages more accurately, alongside geotechnical studies, according to IRNA. He explained that this phase of the project includes restoring and repairing the brick floor-

ing on the gate’s roof, reducing structural load, removing deteriorated bricks, leveling surfaces, and implementing traditional brickwork techniques. Nikrou emphasized that preserving and restoring historical structures in Kerman, especially valuable sites such as the Shahzadeh Mahan Garden, is a national duty and a cultural mission upon which the province’s tourism future depends. He added that this precious heritage not only narrates the identity and history of Kerman’s people but also serves as a global asset contributing to sustainable tourism development. He further noted that, with a responsible approach, the involve-

ment of specialists, participation of local communities, and co-operation of relevant organizations, they aim to maintain these enduring monuments for future generations, ensuring they remain vibrant, usable, and a cornerstone for advancing Kerman’s cultural tourism while safeguarding its historical legacy. A wonderland of greenery and gushing springs amidst arid lands and rugged mountains, the Shahzadeh Mahan Garden is one of Iran’s national monuments and a UNESCO World Heritage site. The garden spans 5.5 hectares in a rectangular layout, with an entrance and gate at the lower end and a two-storey residen-

tial structure at the upper end. The central axis is lined with cascading water fountains, exemplifying the dexterous use of natural land features — a hallmark of Persian garden design. Built in 1850 during the Qajar era and expanded in 1870, the garden features terraced pools and a main residential building. The two-storey structure’s upper floor served as living quarters and a reception area for guests, while smaller rooms are arranged along the garden’s sides. The garden contains a variety of pine, cedar, elm, buttonwood, and fruit trees, nurtured by fertile soil, an underground water canal, and favorable climate conditions.

## Jahanian Mansion of Esfahak registered on National Heritage List

Iranica Desk

The historic Jahanian Hawz-khaneh Mansion, located in the historic core of Esfahak village in Tabas, South Khorasan Province, has been officially registered on Iran’s National Heritage List. Ali Shariatimanesh, Deputy Director of the provincial Organization of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts, stated that Esfahak village possesses a unique form of rural architecture with significant historical value. The diversity of architectural styles, combined with the use of local materials adapted to the rocky terrain, has made the remaining structures historically valuable and in need of preservation, according to chtn.ir. He explained that the mansion, dating back to the Qajar era, once belonged to one of the region’s prominent families. Its architectural layout follows the traditional Chahar-Sofeh plan, and key elements include a Hashti (entrance vestibule), Hawzkhaneh (water chamber), windcatcher, ivan, and

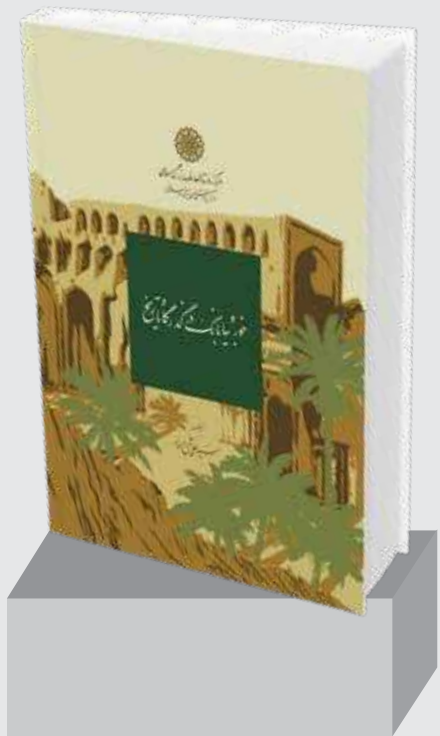
kitchen, chtn.ir wrote. Shariatimanesh emphasized the importance of safeguarding these structures to maintain the historical and cultural integrity of the village, which continues to attract attention for its authentic architecture and traditional lifestyle. Located in the western part of South Khorasan Province, Esfahak village reflects traditional mudbrick construction, vaulted ceilings, interconnected courtyards, and adaptive designs suited to the local terrain and climate. It gained international recognition when it was registered as one of the World’s Best Tourism Villages, highlighting its value as a living example of Iranian rural heritage. The village survived major earthquakes in the past, including the catastrophic 1978 Tabas earthquake, and many historic mudbrick structures remain intact. Local residents have maintained traditional practices, including architecture, handicrafts, and community-based preservation, making it a model of sustainable cultural tourism in Iran.



● chtn.ir

### Introduction to the book:

## Khur and Biabanak in the Passage of History Uncovering heritage of Iran’s desert region



The book Khur and Biabanak in the Passage of History, authored by Seyyed Ali Aledavoud and published in 2024 by the Center for the Great Islamic Encyclopedia, presents an extensive study of one of Iran’s historically significant yet often overlooked regions. In his foreword, Kazem Mousavi Bojnourdi, head of the Center, wrote, “Every corner of Iran holds untold stories of history, culture, and art. Together, these stories have shaped the nation’s cultural identity over a long and eventful history, leaving a legacy for future generations. It is our responsibility to learn more about this valuable culture and civilization and to emphasize the significance of each part accordingly. In this context, there is hope that the neglect and potential destruction of lesser-known areas can be prevented as much as possible. Among

Iran’s remarkable points, the desert region of Khur and Biabanak stands out — a land whose surprising secrets captivate any visitor. Throughout history, this region has produced great figures and holds a unique place in Iranian culture and civilization. Seyyed Ali Aledavoud, who has devoted at least half a century to exploring Iranian literature, culture, and history through his writings, now presents the results of his extensive research on the history and culture of his ancestral homeland for scholars and interested readers alike.” In the preface to his book, Aledavoud explained, “The study of cities and regions of Iran, from ancient periods and when the country encompassed wider territories, has always attracted the attention of authors and researchers of various eras. Valuable historical records from cities such as

Neyshabur, Sistan, Qom, and other regions reflect the dedication of their learned writers to their native lands. The extensive and useful information contained in these works is not only important for understanding those cities, but also provides insights into the general history of Iran and the lives of scholars, poets, and writers who emerged from these places.” Aledavoud continued, “My birthplace — Khur and Biabanak — is a desert region that has remained largely unknown. Situated almost in the center of Iran, at the edge of the central desert, it is remote and isolated. Historical anecdotes illustrate its obscurity: when Mohammad Shah Qajar requested precise information about the poet Yaghma Jandaqi’s hometown, Yaghma described it in various ways, yet the Shah could not grasp its exact location. Finally,

Yaghma added that if Iran were compared to a reclining lion, its head would be in Jolfa, its tail in Chahbahar, and Khur and Biabanak would lie at its center.” Due to its remoteness and desert surroundings, Khur and Biabanak is rarely mentioned in classical texts. However, 3rd- and 4th-century geographers noted that the road from Isfahan to Neyshabur passed through three villages — Biyazeh, Garmeh, and Ardib — collectively called “Seh Deh” (Three Villages), with a population of about a thousand. The geographer Al-Muqaddasi, who likely passed through the area, described its prosperity and abundance, particularly in Garmeh. Over the centuries, travel routes shifted, and Jandaq became the main north-south passage, surpassing other villages in prominence. Until the late Qajar period, local figures and

scholars identified themselves as Jandaqis. Today, however, the region has emerged from isolation: the road from Khur to Tabas has opened, and the caravan route from Jandaq to Semnan has been paved. Hundreds of cars and buses now pass daily, boosting local economic activity but reducing the previous tranquility of the area. The book is structured into multiple sections, and its appendices include four scholarly treatises. Aledavoud noted that this work is not exhaustive, and he hopes that younger researchers and enthusiasts of the region will conduct broader field studies to produce a more comprehensive account. He encourages further research to cover topics not fully addressed in this volume and to provide a deeper understanding of this desert region’s history, culture, and heritage.





# Leader hails 'very exalted' status of women in Islam, slams Western culture

## Arts & Culture Desk

Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei, Leader of the Islamic Revolution, told thousands of Iranian women on Wednesday that Islam grants them a "very high and exalted status" with equal rights to men in social, political, and spiritual life, denouncing what he described as the "corrupt Western culture." Speaking in Tehran, he cited Lady Fatima (PBUH), daughter of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), as a model for Iranian women, Khamenei.ir reported.

Fatima, he said, embodied the highest virtues across all arenas: Spiritual devotion, humility, selflessness, resilience, political insight, household management, and raising children.

"The Iranian woman, thank God, takes guidance from such a sun and moves in accordance with her



Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei addresses a group of women and girls from across Iran in Tehran on December 3, 2025.  
● khamenei.ir

goals," he said.

Khamenei emphasized that men and women have "equal roles in the life and history of humanity" and equal opportunities for spiritual advancement.

"In social activities, business, politics, governmental positions, and spiritual conduct, the path to women's advancement is open," he added.

The Leader sharply criticized Western culture, arguing it undermines family and women's dignity. He said Islam's regulations on gender interaction, dress, and modesty safeguard women and control "dangerous sexual de-



sires," while Western societies largely ignore these issues.

He described men and women as "two balanced elements" whose complementarity is essential for societal management, human continuity, and civilizational progress.

Highlighting women's rights in Islam, Khamenei cited justice in family and social conduct, security, dignity, equal wages, insurance for working women, and specific leave provisions.

He called family formation a cen-

tral role for women, contrasting it with the neglect of family in Western capitalist culture, which he said treats women as objects and fosters social harms including fatherless children, gangs, and sexual immorality.

Khamenei asserted that the Islamic Republic disproves Western claims that restrictions such as the hijab limit women's progress.

He praised Iranian women's unprecedented achievements in science, sports, research, politics, health, and social support, saying the country has never seen such a concentration of learned and active women.

He cautioned domestic media against repeating Western views, urging coverage that emphasizes Islam's "deep and effective" perspective, which he said would attract women globally.

"The Islamic Republic has enabled the advancement of women in all major fields while preserving their dignity and identity," Khamenei concluded, contrasting this with what he described as Western "enslavement disguised as freedom."

## Curtains down on 43rd Fajr International Film Festival in Shiraz

### Arts & Culture Desk

The 43rd Fajr International Film Festival wrapped up in Shiraz on Tuesday, celebrating cinematic excellence from across the globe and honoring filmmakers, photographers, and artists for their contributions to culture, resistance, and poetic cinema.

The closing ceremony at the Pardis Honar Shahr-e-Aftab complex drew senior officials from Iran's Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, provincial authorities, international guests, and artists from dozens of countries, IRNA reported.

Festival director Rouhollah Hosseini set aside statistics on guests and films to highlight the emotive power of cinema. "Numbers matter less than the feeling you carry after watching a film. Today, I feel a deep sense of joy," he said, recalling the generosity of Shiraz's residents and the unifying impact of the festival's screenings.

Veteran war photographer Alfred Yaghoubzadeh was honored during the ceremony, receiving recognition for his contributions, while writer Reza Amirkhani was wished a swift recovery after a period of illness.

The festival's competitive awards spotlighted diverse cinematic achieve-



ments. In the photography and video category, Ali Tousali received a diploma of honor for his 60-second film, while Sobhan Farajvan earned the Best Photo Simorgh award.

Palestinian producer by Rashid Masharawi's film 'From Ground Zero' won the diploma of honor in the Broken Olive section, while 'All that Is Left of You,' a multinational production spanning Germany, Cyprus, Palestine, Jordan, Greece, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia, took the Best Film award.

Masharawi, speaking via video, said the accolade "encourages Gaza's resi-

dents to create films and believe cinema can save them."

Veteran filmmaker Reza Mirkarimi was recognized for his enduring contributions to Iranian cinema.

Mirkarimi noted the festival's independence and its successful staging outside Tehran, describing it as a "non-political cultural circle connecting Iranian cinema to the world."

Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance, Abbas Salehi, stressed the festival's role in promoting dialogue and reflecting collective human experiences. He referenced the recent conflict

in Gaza, highlighting cinema's capacity to convey resilience and solidarity.

"Art cannot remain silent in such times," Salehi said, urging continued international collaboration and joint productions.

Awards in the Future Frame section honored 'Riverstone,' directed by Lalith Rathnayake, from Sri Lanka with the Jury's Special Crystal Simorgh, while Best Film prizes were shared between Tunisia's 'Round 13' and 'Two Faces of Autumn,' a co-production between Iran, Australia, and Canada.

Director Ronak Taher thanked Shiraz's residents for their hospitality.

In the Eastern Vista section, Behnough Sadeghi won the Best Artistic Achievement for 'Calm Man' from Iran, dedicating her award to her mother.

Egypt's 'The Settlement' received the Jury's Special Crystal Simorgh, and Russia's 'Where the White Cranes Dance' claimed Best Film.

Raed Fereidazadeh, head of Cinema Organization of Iran, underscored cinema's role as a bridge for understanding and praised the festival's successful staging in Shiraz after a brief hiatus.

The International competition recognized 'Lessons Learned' from Hungary as Best Film, 'March to May' from the Czech Republic for Best Direction, 'Look at Me' from Russia for Best Screenplay, Ahmed Malek for Best Artistic Contribution in 'My Father's Scent,' and Japan's 'River Returns' with the Jury's Special Prize.

## Iranian cinematographer joins jury for Turkey's Amed Film Festival

### Arts & Culture Desk

Iranian filmmaker and cinematographer Touraj Aslani was appointed as a jury member in the Long Film section of the 3rd Amed International Film Festival, to be held in Diyarbakır, Turkey, from December 7 to 14.

Aslani takes the post after serving on the jury at the Fifth Rojava Film Festival held recently in Qamishli, Syria, Mehr News Agency reported.

The full Long Film jury comprises Ahu Öztürk, Aziz Çapkurt, Silan Özgün Özçelik, Leyla Toprak and Touraj Aslani.



The Amed festival was launched in 2012 by the Middle East Cinema Academy as a platform for independent and Kurdish filmmakers whose works often challenge mainstream cinematic powers. The event aims to spotlight female emancipation, ecological awareness, cultural diversity and themes of resistance and freedom.

After its second edition in 2016 the festival had lain dormant for eight years, owing to the fraught cultural climate in the region. Under renewed support from Diyarbakır municipality the festival will resume this winter with short Kurdish films, Kurdish documentaries and Kurdish feature films on the screen. Selected projects will receive production grants from the Sinebîr Project Fund.

## Peregrine falcon stays on CITES' top protection list after Iran blocks bid to ease curbs

### Social Desk

Iran said that delegates at the CITES summit in Samarkand rejected a joint US-Canadian proposal that would have downgraded the peregrine falcon from Annex I to Annex II, a move that could have opened the door to legal trade in the prized raptor.

The 20th meeting of the Convention on International Trade

in Endangered Species, hosted by Uzbekistan from November 24 to December 5, voted down the motion after Iran rallied support from Russia, several African states and European members, according to the country's CITES scientific authority, Asghar Mobaraki, IRNA reported.

Mobaraki told IRNA that Washington and Ottawa had drafted the proposal with firm backing

from "Arab countries, and even China".

Approval, he said, would have "seriously threatened" the future of the falcon at a time when Iran is already grappling with organized smuggling. Keeping the bird in Annex I maintains the strictest ban on commercial trade.

He said sustained lobbying on the sidelines of the summit was

crucial. Backed by the head of Iran's environment department and a full technical team, Tehran sought to drum up negative votes in what he described as an "unmatched" diplomatic push.

The delegation argued that easing restrictions would incentivize illicit trapping across West and Central Asia, where prices for trained falcons can surge on the black market.

Mobaraki warned that the matter may resurface at the next CITES COP in four years and urged stronger field enforcement at home to clamp down on trafficking networks.

He said authorities must tighten checks and improve habitat protection if Iran is to fend off renewed attempts to loosen global safeguards.

Separately, the summit agreed

to list the marsh frog *Pelophylax ridibundus* in Annex II, following concern over shrinking wetlands, climate-driven habitat stress and unregulated harvesting.

Mobaraki noted that the species had not previously appeared in any CITES annex. Three related species in the same genus were also cleared for inclusion in Annex II in a bid to head off further population declines.