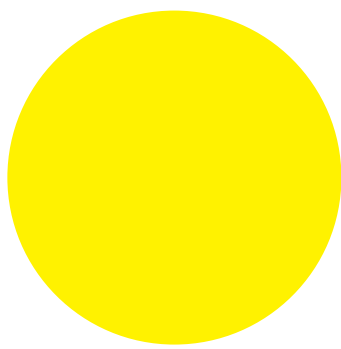


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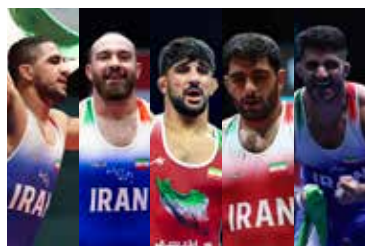


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Iranian diaspora in US caught between security, politics, collective responsibility



By Sharareh Abdolhosseinzadeh
Political sociology researcher

OPINION EXCLUSIVE

For more than four decades, the fraught relationship between Iran and the United States has not only shaped the foreign policy of both countries but has also directly played into the social and political lives of Iranian Americans. The Iranian diaspora in the US, one of the most highly educated and economically successful immigrant communities, has consistently occupied an in-between space. On one hand, they are an active part of the host society, and on the other, they were compelled to bear the symbolic and political costs of a geopolitical conflict in which they had no role. From a political-sociology standpoint, what is unfolding today is not just a "migration issue," but rather a clear case of the securitization of an ethno-national population amid geopolitical tensions.

Diaspora & security policy: from individuals to collective

Diaspora studies show that migrant communities often become, unintentionally, "security subjects" at critical junctures. When states or media tie a perceived threat to a national or ethnic identity, the boundary between individual and collective collapses, and individual accountability is replaced by collective suspicion. In the case of Iranian Americans, ongoing tensions between Washington and Tehran have prompted "being Iranian" to become, in certain political or media narratives, potentially associated with danger, distrust or questionable loyalty, even when individuals have lived legally in the US for years, paid taxes, worked in professional sectors, and maintained no institutional ties to Iran. What emerges is not rational policy-making but security labeling, a process in which individuals are judged not by their conduct but by an ascribed identity.

Distinct qualities of Iranian-American expats

The paradox deepens when attention is turned to the actual characteristics of Iranian diaspora. Sociological data indicates that Iranian-Americans entered the country largely through legal, academic or professional pathways; possess high levels of human capital in academia, medicine, engineering and technology; and rank among the strongest immigrant groups in terms of economic participation. A substantial part of this diaspora is not an "extension of the Iranian state" but rather a product of the divide between state and society in Iran, a point routinely overlooked in security policymaking.

State conflict, public cost

One key concept in political sociology is the transfer of conflict costs, meaning states clash at the international level, but the social, psychological and symbolic consequences are passed down to citizens or migrants associated with those states.

For Iranian Americans, such costs may surface in various forms, including heightened discriminatory scrutiny, restrictive visa and immigration procedures, psychological pressure rooted in social distrust, or the recurring need to "prove collective innocence." This dynamic runs counter to core liberal-democratic principles such as individual responsibility for wrongdoing and legal equality among citizens.

Diaspora as a quiet actor

Despite such pressures, the Iranian diaspora has often navigated the American public sphere cautiously or silently. Part of this reticence stems from previous experiences of political stigmatization; another part is rooted in uncertainty about the consequences of collective action. Yet, recent research suggests that under conditions of securitization, silence brings neither protection nor neutrality. Instead, the absence of intra-community narratives clears the way for stereotypical, politicized

storylines.

From this perspective, civic engagement within the diaspora, grounded not in ideological defense of any state but in the promotion of legality, social participation and democratic values, can help push back against the logic of "us versus them." Ultimately, the Iranian diaspora in the US sits at the intersection of foreign policy, internal security and social identity. Reducing this community to a "security problem" is not only analytically flawed, but from a political-sociology perspective, it reflects a failure to distinguish among states, ideologies and individuals. If the core principles of a democratic society are to be upheld, one simple, yet crucial, norm must be reaffirmed. No population should be judged in place of individuals, and no migrant should bear the cost of conflicts in which they played no part. The Iranian diaspora is not a security threat but a source of social and human capital, provided that politics is willing to draw a line between identity and danger.

Araghchi: Tehran-Baku disputes should be settled via dialogue

International Desk

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said on Monday that differences and misunderstandings between Iran and Azerbaijan need to be resolved through dialogue.

During a joint press conference with his Azeri counterpart, Jeyhun Bayramov, in Baku on Monday, Araghchi said Iran and Azerbaijan have agreed to continue consultations and exchange of visits in solving differences.

"We have many commonalities and shared interests in bilateral cooperation. There are also differences and misunderstandings that need to be resolved through dialogue," he said.

He added that the two countries managed to improve ties in the political field last year and expressed hope that Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev and foreign minister would visit Tehran.

He expressed confidence that Tehran and Baku would further boost mutual relations, warning that the two sides should not allow any other party to damage or steer this relationship in an undesirable direction.

The top Iranian diplomat reiterated Tehran's support for the 3+3 mechanism, a regional cooperation format involving the three Caucasus countries of Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia, and their three



Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi (L) and his Azeri counterpart, Jeyhun Bayramov, attend a joint press conference in Baku, Azerbaijan, on December 8, 2025.

● IRAN'S FOREIGN MINISTRY

neighbors of Iran, Russia, and Turkey. He said Iran "supports and welcomes" the peace process and the good path in ties between Azerbaijan and Armenia, throwing Tehran's weight behind Baku's proposal to host the next 3+3 meeting while the following one would be held in Yerevan.

"We believe that this is a good proposal which can strengthen the mechanism and make it more effective," the Iranian foreign minister emphasized.

He added that both Tehran and Baku have serious concerns about security in the region and believe that cooperation plays a key role in ensuring regional security.

"The important point is that regional security must be ensured by the countries of the region and any foreign interference from any side will undermine this security. This is something we agree upon, and on this basis, we continue our cooperation," Araghchi pointed out.

Pointing to the continuation of Israel's war in Gaza, he said Iran welcomes any move that would stop crimes and killings



against Palestinians, provide aid to them, and bring an end to the occupation of the Palestinian territory.

"At the same time, we believe that no plan should undermine the fundamental right of the Palestinian people to determine

their own destiny, nor should it affect or diminish their sovereignty over their future," the Iranian foreign minister emphasized.

Earlier on Monday, Araghchi met with Aliyev, who expressed his country's read-

iness to use all available capacities to strengthen relations with Iran.

The talks focused on key bilateral issues, including political cooperation, neighborly relations, and mechanisms for managing ties between the two countries.

Pezeshkian due in Kazakhstan on Wednesday

International Desk

Kazakhstan's presidential office on Monday confirmed a visit by Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian to Astana, the capital of Kazakhstan, on Wednesday and Thursday.

During the two-day visit, the Iranian president will hold talks with Kazakhstan's President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev to discuss enhancing cooperation in trade, economy, transport, logistics, and cultural and humanitarian fields.

On Sunday, Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesperson Esmail Baqaei in his weekly press conference



announced Pezeshkian's visit. After Kazakhstan, Pezeshkian will also travel to Turkmenistan,

Baqaei added. Details of the visit to Turkmenistan have yet to be released.

Second group of Iranian deportees from US en route home



International Desk

Iran on Sunday confirmed that 55 Iranian nationals have been deported from the United States, marking the second group repatriated in recent months under US immigration crackdown.

The director of Iran's Interests Section in Washington, Abolfazl Mehrabadi, said that around 50 Iranians left the US on Saturday. He told IRNA that the Iranians, who were held in

an Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) facility in Arizona, had departed for Tehran through Mesa Airport.

Mehrabadi said they were flown to Kuwait to be repatriated home.

American and Iranian officials announced in September that about 400 Iranians were expected to be returning from the US. The first flight, carrying 120 people, arrived in Qatar in late September before they were transferred to a Tehran-bound

flight.

A report published on Monday by Mizan news agency, quoted Iranian Foreign Ministry official Mojtaba Shasti Karimi acknowledging the deportation of 55 Iranians.

"These individuals announced their willingness for return following continuation of anti-immigration and discriminative policy against foreign nationals particularly Iranians by the United States," Karimi reportedly said.

According to Karimi, the individuals had in recent months completed "legal and administrative procedures" through Iran's Interests Section in Washington DC.

Based on the US claims, "the Iranians were repatriated because of legal reasons and breach of immigration regulations," Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Esmail Baqaei said on Sunday.

US President Donald Trump came into office promising the largest mass deportation in US history, targeting more than 10 million unauthorized migrants living in the United States.

Iranian attack shattered Israel's taboo of regional invincibility: Deputy FM



International Desk

Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister Kazem Gharibabadi said on Monday that Iran's missile attack against Israel in June has broken a taboo of the regime's invincibility which has existed in the region since 1960s wars.

Referring to the Six-Day War, or the 1967 Arab-Israeli war between Israel and a coalition of Arab states, Gharibabadi said no country managed to strike such a blow to the regime during the wars of the 1960s. Addressing a ceremony marking National Student Day in the Iranian northern city of Qazvin, the official said that Iranian missiles hit their targets and inflicted heavy damage on Israel's structures, IRNA reported.

On June 13, Israel launched an unpro-

voked war against Iran, assassinating many high-ranking military commanders, nuclear scientists, and ordinary civilians. More than a week later, the United States also entered the war by bombing three Iranian nuclear sites in a grave violation of the United Nations Charter, international law, and the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

In response, the Iranian Armed Forces targeted strategic sites across the occupied territories as well as the Al-Udeid air base in Qatar, the largest American military base in West Asia.

"The Zionist regime means Western countries, it means the United States, it means every weapon that the United States has and every defensive equipment that some European countries possess is at the disposal of this regime," Gharibabadi said.

Despite some Western countries' military support for the Israeli regime during the 12-day war in June, "Israel did not achieve its strategic objectives and suffered a major defeat," the Iranian diplomat stressed. Satellite images along with information from various sources "from inside the occupied territory of the Zionist regime," all indicated that the scale of the damage was "very, very extensive," the Iranian official said.



Mohammad Ali Rajabi
Cartoonist

CARTOON



VP urges coordinated support for SMEs to drive investment, exports

Economy Desk

Iran's First Vice President Mohammad Reza Aref stressed the need for coordinated action in government bodies to shore up small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), underscoring their key role in employment and export growth. "The government is ready to help resolve SMEs' issues by establishing a national working group on small and medium enterprises, given their vital role in employment and boosting exports," Aref said at the first national SME ranking conference held in Tehran on Monday, according to his website fvpresident.ir. The event, organized to introduce the country's top 100 SMEs from industrial parks and zones, became a platform for Aref to outline the government's commitment to addressing challenges facing the sector. He described investment as a national challenge

Iran's First Vice President Mohammad Reza Aref speaks at the first national SME ranking conference held in Tehran on December 8, 2025. ● fvpresident.ir

that becomes manageable when channeled through SMEs. "In small and medium enterprises, investment turns into a solvable issue, and with a knowledge-based approach common globally, these enterprises can achieve stronger performance in production," the top official added. Aref emphasized the benefit of linking Iranian SMEs to global industrial supply chains. "Connecting Iranian SMEs to international industrial chains can drive technological development, facilitate technical knowledge transfer, and improve product quality — these collaborations can lay the groundwork for transformation," he said. He further called on the



Ministry of Industries, Mining and Trade to prioritize key development indicators, including supply chain integration, investment in emerging

technologies, upgrading mining and industrial infrastructure, strengthening human capital, expanding smart systems, and restructuring organi-

zational frameworks. "We must take the role of SMEs in decision-making and policy formulation more seriously," Aref said, adding that the confer-

ence represented an innovative initiative in the "Year of Investment for Production" and should continue in the years ahead.

Minister calls for urgent banking overhaul as 150 projects roll out



Economy Minister Ali Madanizadeh speaks at a ceremony commemorating National Student Day (December 7) at Sharif University of Technology in Tehran on December 8, 2025. ● mefa.ir

Economy Desk

Iran's Economy Minister Ali Madanizadeh emphasized the urgent need to reform the banking system as a cornerstone of broader economic restructuring, revealing that more than 150 economic projects have been developed and launched since he assumed office in mid-June. Speaking on Monday, Madanizadeh said that shortly after taking office, his ministry assembled large teams of experts to review economic achievements and challenges over the past 12 years across key sectors including banking, budgeting, production, pensions, energy, and others. Many of the resulting analyses and proposals were already prepared but required conversion into actionable plans, he said, IRNA reported. "The outcome of this work has been the transformation of these studies into over 150 executable projects assigned to more than 20 deputy offices and specialized centers under the Ministry of Economy — a super-ministry in practice, not counting banks, insurance firms, and affiliated companies," he said. According to Madanizadeh, the projects have been clearly categorized by sector, ranging from reforming the banking system and capital markets to production growth initiatives, investment enhancement, privatization restructuring, reevaluation of free trade zones, and advancement of the digital economy. "If we neglect the digital economy, we will lose a golden opportunity," he added. Among these initiatives, six "mega-projects" have been singled out for immediate implementation under the minister's direct authority. "Not all economic issues fall solely under the Ministry of Economy," he noted. "Macroeconomic matters require consensus within the government's economic team, the cabinet, and sometimes coordination with other branches of power. But these six projects are ones for which I am personally accountable."

China's November crude imports from Iran hit four-month high



China's crude oil imports from Iran soared to their highest level in four months in November, Reuters reported on Monday, citing data from analytics firm Kpler. Kpler figures showed inflows of Iranian shipments increased by 233,000 barrels per day (bpd) from October to reach 1.35 million bpd in November, the highest since August. As per Reuters, China's overall crude oil imports in November climbed to 12.38 million bpd, the strongest level in 27 months. An analyst at energy consultancy Vortexa said the jump in volumes reflected lower prices for sanctioned Iranian and Russian crude, which boosted margins for the so-called "teapot" refineries and in turn fueled their demand for these barrels. Iran is reportedly offering Chi-

na, the world's biggest crude importer, generous discounts, a claim Iranian officials confirm but reject the idea that they are excessive. Imports of Iranian crude are never registered in China's customs data due to US sanctions on the Middle Eastern producer. According to media reports, Iran delivers oil to China through methods such as ship-to-ship transfers in waters near Malaysia and blending its crude with supplies from other countries to hide its origin.

Iran, Oman sign aviation pact to boost air travel, infrastructure

Economy Desk

Iran and Oman signed a cooperation agreement on Monday to expand collaboration in flight operations, airport services, passenger capacity, and aviation infrastructure, signaling a push to strengthen bilateral ties in the air transport sector. The memorandum of understanding was signed between Ramin Kashf-Azar, the acting head of Imam Khomeini International Airport City, and Nayef bin Ali al-Abri, the director general of Oman's Civil Aviation Authority in Tehran, IRNA reported. The meeting, held with the aim of developing aviation relations between the two countries, saw both sides emphasize joint efforts to enhance operational coordination, upgrade passenger handling capabilities, and reinforce aviation-related infrastructure. Kashf-Azar highlighted the potential of Imam Khomeini International Airport City to emerge as a regional hub and expressed readiness to engage in joint ventures, share technical expertise, and develop new flight routes. Abri welcomed the agreement, describing expanded air connectivity as a catalyst for boosting economic and tourism exchanges between Iran and Oman. He stressed the importance of sustained dialogue and joint cooperation.



Acting Head of Imam Khomeini International Airport City Ramin Kashf-Azar (L) and Director General of Oman's Civil Aviation Authority Nayef bin Ali al-Abri shake hands after signing a cooperation agreement in Tehran on December 8, 2025. ● IRNA

Both parties agreed to establish specialized working groups to assess practical areas of collaboration, aligning their efforts with long-term aviation strategies. Under the deal, Iran and Oman committed to sharing expertise, exploring commercial opportunities, and supporting the growth of the aviation sector. Cooperation will span operational processes, training and capacity building, digital innovation, and joint commercial ventures. The memorandum also lays the groundwork for specialized workshops, field visits, studies on airport city models, and the implementation of future joint projects.

Iran's Gilan, Russia's Ulyanovsk to launch first cargo ship, eye joint trade office

Economy Desk

The first cargo vessel carrying goods from Iran's Astara port to Russia's Ulyanovsk region will soon be loaded and dispatched, officials from both sides announced Monday, marking a concrete step toward expanding bilateral trade and transit cooperation between the two regions. The announcement came during a meeting in the northern Iranian city of Rasht between Alahyar Mesbahi, the deputy economic governor of Iran's Gilan Province, and Ruslan Gainetdinov, an advisor to the governor of Ulyanovsk, ISNA reported. According to Gainetdinov, the move follows completed transportation feasibility studies between Gilan and Ulyanovsk, leveraging ex-

isting logistical capacities. "This initiative can serve as a foundation for expanding trade exchanges and strengthening transit corridors between Iran and Russia," he said. Gainetdinov described Gilan as a "strategic gateway" for Russian imports and exports and expressed Ulyanovsk's readiness to cooperate across logistics, rail, and maritime transport sectors. He specified interest in Iranian exports such as petroleum products, methyl ethyl glycol, specialty resins, and construction materials. In a separate meeting with the Russian trade delegation, Mesbahi emphasized that establishing direct maritime and rail links between Gilan and Ulyanovsk would require additional joint sessions. He confirmed Iran's

readiness to form a joint governmental working group between the two provinces to advance coordination. Mesbahi also proposed the creation of a joint commercial office within the Gilan Chamber of Commerce to streamline cooperation. "We suggest establishing a joint Gilan-Ulyanovsk trade office at the provincial chamber of commerce to facilitate and follow up on collaborative initiatives," he said. He added that both regions aim to build shared value chains. "Gilan and Ulyanovsk are pursuing the creation of joint value chains — an initiative that can enhance both sides' presence in regional markets and solidify long-term economic collaboration," he said.

Asian trajectory of Iran

Capacities of SCO in redefinition of national security, economy



By Hajar Asghari
Researcher on
economic affairs

OPINION

The contemporary world, more than at any previous juncture, is exposed to geopolitical and geo-economic metamorphoses; metamorphoses that not only have confronted the traditional Western powers with extensive predicaments, but also have furnished unprecedented opportunities for the ascendance of novel initiatives in Asia and Eurasia. The gradual disintegration of the West-centric consensus, the structural fatigue of NATO, the crisis in the global economy, regional wars, and the emergence of medium and major Asian powers have situated the international constellation in a fluid condition.

In such circumstances, the countries that can utilize this fluidity in order to construct a new equilibrium, diversify their foreign relations, and elevate national resilience will attain a determinative position in the forthcoming decades. For Iran, which has endured four decades of pressure, threat, sanctions, and structural isolation, such a global transition constitutes a strategic opportunity for the redefinition of the trajectories through which its national interests are pursued. Within this very framework, the permanent membership of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) is not a mere diplomatic gesture; rather, it is one of the most consequential structural transformations in Iranian foreign policy during recent years. The SCO, contrary to superficial interpretations, is a multifunctional organization with a composite of security, economic, institutional, and identity-laden functions that, throughout the past two decades, has become one of the determinative actors in Asian equations.

This organization, at present with eight permanent members, encompasses an aggregate of 3.2 billion individuals (approximately 40 percent of the global population) and 34 million square kilometers of territory (approximately 22 percent of the world's landmass), and, according to the data of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the International Monetary Fund, it comprises approximately 25 to 30 percent of global GDP based on purchasing-power parity.

This organization is neither a military pact, nor a complete economic union, nor merely a dialogue-centered forum; rather, it is a composite mechanism that China and Russia, as two great powers of the world, have designed for the management of regional security, the development of geoeconomic cooperation, and the creation of shared standards in Central Asia and beyond.

For Iran, ingress into such an arena signifies connection to a multilayered network of security and economic collaborations that can transfer the country's position from Western-imposed isolation to the centrality of Asian interactions. Iran, throughout recent years, because of Western political and economic pressure, has been more in need than ever



Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian enters a hall for a session of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) Summit in Tianjin, China, on September 1, 2025.
● IRNA

of diversifying its pathways for securing security, trade, energy, and technology. The SCO furnishes this opportunity.

Iran, in its regional environment, is confronted by a constellation of intricate security threats. Chronic insecurity in Afghanistan, the re-emergence and eventual collapse of extremist groups, the activities of IS-Khorasan, narcotics and human trafficking, instability on the eastern borders, the rivalry of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates in the Persian Gulf, the military presence of the United States in the region, and the geopolitical transformations of the South Caucasus are all among the multifaceted threats whose management is arduous and costly for Iran. The SHANGHAI Cooperation Organization, from its inception, was established with the objective of confronting such threats.

The RATS (Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure) structure — whose office is located in Tashkent — thus far, according to the official report of the official website of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, has coordinated more than 40,000 registered counterterrorism operations, 5,000 arrests related to extremism, and the identification of more than 200 active groups in the region. The RATS structure, as the most

consequential regional center for combating terrorism, extremism, and separatism, now enables information sharing, the creation of security coordination, and the design of joint operations. These capacities are vital for Iran because, for the first time, Iranian national security can be managed in a networked and collectively cooperative form, not merely through an individual and reactive approach.

The augmentation of security predictability is one of the most momentous advantages of Iranian membership in the SCO. Intelligence cooperation with major Asian countries renders the security decision-making process in Iran more exact and reduces defense expenditures. These collaborations, especially in the Afghanistan–Central Asia axis, possess doubled significance because Iran, due to its geography, is compelled to manage the consequences of any insecurity in Afghanistan. Connection to the SCO extricates Iran from the position of “the sole responsible state” and transforms the responsibility of crisis management into a regional affair.

Alongside this security dimension, the SCO possesses an important function in soft balancing for Iran. Iran, because

of confrontation with the Maximum Pressure campaign of the United States and multilayered sanctions, has continually been exposed to Western attempts at geopolitical isolation. However, membership in the SCO enables Iran to fracture this isolation and connect to a network of major and medium Asian powers. Within this framework, any confrontation with Iran will possess repercussions for China and Russia — the two permanent members of the Security Council — as well. Such a condition naturally engenders a kind of informal deterrence and increases the cost of confrontation with Iran. This soft deterrence is not of the nature of a military alliance, yet it possesses a similar function in elevating Iran's negotiating weight.

In the economic domain, the SCO is perhaps the most consequential opportunity for Iran to neutralize sanctions. The SCO Interbank Consortium — which includes the China Development Bank, Russia's VEB, Kazakhstan's RSK, the National Bank of Tajikistan, and several other member banks — annually defines tens of billions of dollars of facility capacity for joint projects and furnishes the possibility of non-dollar settlements. Official data of the Shanghai Cooperation

Organization demonstrate that more than 70 percent of internal settlements of this consortium are conducted based on national currencies, and the trajectory of dollar elimination in regional exchanges is continuously increasing. This matter constitutes a vital capacity for Iran because banking and financial sanctions have been the backbone of the United States' sanctions against Iran. The banking and monetary collaborations of the SCO enable money transfers, joint investment, and project financing, and diminish Iran's dependence on Western financial mechanisms.

Alongside this, connection to Eurasian transit corridors confers new power upon Iran. The North–South Corridor, the China–Kazakhstan–Iran route, and several other pathways can transform Iran into a hub that connects Central Asia, the Caucasus, Russia, India, and the Persian Gulf. The China–Kazakhstan–Iran corridor alone, in 2023, according to China Customs data, transported more than 12 million tons of cargo, and its capacity has been estimated at 30 million tons. Such a position for the Iranian economy, in an era in which geoeconomics has superseded hard geopolitics, constitutes a golden opportunity. Revenues from transit, in addition to stability, possess high sanction-resilience and enable the country to extract maximum benefit from its geographic position.

In the energy domain as well, the SCO can generate new pathways for the export of gas, electricity, petroleum products, and participation in the energy value chain. The member states of the SCO possess approximately 21 percent of global gas reserves and 25 percent of coal reserves, and cooperation with them in the fields of new energies, the regional electricity grid, energy security, and novel technologies can diminish the dependence of the Iranian economy on raw-material exports and situate the country within a broader and more lucrative value chain.

One of the most momentous dimensions of Iranian membership in the SCO is the possibility of participation in regional institution-building and rule-making in the Asian order. The contemporary world is transitioning from a Western mono-rule order to a multi-rule order in which institutions, standards, and regional cooperation networks have acquired greater significance. Iran, through its presence in the SCO, now sits at the tables where decisions regarding the financial, commercial, digital, security, and energy standards of future Asia are made. This position constitutes a long-term asset for the country because the future of global power is inclined toward “rule-makers,” not “rule-takers.” The SCO, beyond its security and economic functions, also possesses a profound and strategic identity dimension; a dimension that has often been less examined, yet holds a determinative role in Iranian foreign-policy equations. Iran, throughout several past decades, especially after the Islamic Revolution, in the dominant Western narrative



The Shanghai Cooperation Organization's RATS structure — whose office is located in Tashkent — thus far, according to the official report of the official website of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, has coordinated more than 40,000 registered counterterrorism operations, 5,000 arrests related to extremism, and the identification of more than 200 active groups in the region. The RATS structure, as the most consequential regional center for combating terrorism, extremism, and separatism, now enables information sharing, the creation of security coordination, and the design of joint operations.



Targets are bombed during the Sahand-2025 joint anti-terrorism exercise, hosted by the Islamic Revolution's Guards Corps (IRGC) with the participation of members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) in Iran's East Azarbaijan Province. The exercise ran for five days from December 1, 2025.
● ISNA

and lexicon, has often been represented as an “isolated actor,” “unpredictable,” or “severed from international cooperation networks”. This image-construction, primarily the product of sanction policies, media operations, and structural attempts to constrain Iran at the margin of the international system, has not only diminished global perception of Iran but also has had direct consequences for the country’s economic, diplomatic, and even foreign-investment relations. With membership in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, this dominant narrative underwent a fissure and metamorphosis. The official presence of Iran in an institution whose members

include China, Russia, India, Pakistan, and a constellation of important Asian countries, transferred Iran from a position that, based on the Western narrative, was situated at “the margin,” to the center of a burgeoning Asian bloc. This bloc, which in total possesses more than \$500 billion of internal trade, and in which the volume of exchanges among some of its members (such as China and Central Asia) increases annually with double-digit growth, will play a determinative role in the future Asian order. This transfer is not merely symbolic; rather, it reflects the transformation of Iran’s perceptual position in the minds of regional and global actors. The SCO enabled Iran

to present itself as an active, responsible, and potential partner in major Asian security and economic projects. This identity metamorphosis possesses multilayered effects. First, the confidence of Asian and Eurasian investors in Iran increased because membership in the SCO is a signifier of relative stability, collaborative capability, and access to an expansive network of regional markets and infrastructures. Second, Iran’s diplomatic weight in regional and international dialogues was fortified because its presence alongside major Asian powers elevates Iran’s strategic position and enhances its negotiating capacity. Third, the perceptual

isolation of Iran — which the West had reproduced for years through media and public diplomacy — has been markedly reduced. Iran is now viewed within a framework that includes more than half of the global population and a significant portion of global production. In other words, Iran’s membership in the SCO, from an identity perspective, has engendered a kind of self-redefinition in a world in transition; a self-redefinition that has liberated Iran from a constrained, threat-centered, and isolated image and has situated it as a natural and credible actor in the new Asian order. This transformation, if actively managed, can leave a lasting im-

pact on all dimensions of Iranian national interests — from the economy and security to foreign policy and development. In sum, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, for Iran, is not merely a cooperation institution, but rather a new pathway for the pursuit of national interests in the domains of security, economy, politics, and identity. This organization renders Iran’s security networked, detaches the country’s economy from sanction-susceptible pathways, stabilizes Iran’s position in the future Asian order, and amplifies the country’s capacity for active agency in a multipolar world. If Iran can utilize these capacities with an active, coordinated, and

forward-looking approach, the SCO can become the backbone of Iran’s Asian strategy. This trajectory transfers Iran from a reactive condition to an active-agent condition, and relocates national interests from a narrow and constrained framework to a multidimensional, stable, and future-oriented framework. In a world in which the center of gravity of power is transferring toward Asia, Iranian presence in the SCO is not merely a tactical choice, but a strategic necessity for guaranteeing the security and prosperity of future generations.

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

Asianization, redefinition of Iran’s ‘Look to East’ strategy

By Sajjad Attazade
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OPINION

The structural transformation of the international system over the past two decades has gradually reshaped the material and normative foundations of power. The ongoing decentralization away from the West and the growing role of Asian actors in shaping the global economy, international governance norms, and technological networks are among the most visible signs of this shift. Consequently, the concept of the “East” is no longer merely a geographical direction; rather, it emerges as a civilizational and strategic domain endowed with new epistemic, economic, and institutional capacities. Within this context, Iran’s “Look to the East” policy can be understood as part of a broader process of strategic adaptation to the emerging Asian order — an order in which both the distribution of power and the distribution of meaning diverge from the Western-centric model, and diverse patterns of intra-Asian development and cooperation replace the exclusive centrality of the West. From a theoretical standpoint, Asianization signifies the gradual shift in the global system’s geopolitical and geoeconomic center of gravity toward Asia. This shift is not the result of a single political decision, but rather the outcome of three simultaneous historical trends: first, the saturation of growth capacities in the Western capitalist system and its resulting need for Asian markets and labor; second, the technological and infrastructural rise of emerging powers in the East; and third, the emergence of non-Western discourses on development, governance, and political legitimacy. As a result, Asia has transformed from an object of global politics into one of its principal sources of definition. In this setting, Iran — strategically situated between West Asia, Central Asia, and the Indian subcontinent — is compelled to recalibrate its role within a framework in which agency is increasingly centered in the East. Analytically, the Look to the East strategy may be viewed as Iran’s systematic response to three key constraints: structural



The photo shows the Azadi Tower, a symbol of Iran, situated in a map that highlights Russia and China, the two greatest world powers to Iran’s East.
● DOHA INSTITUTE

constraints in the international system arising from the concentration of power in the West; environmental constraints in West Asia driven by insecurity and regional rivalries; and institutional constraints rooted in the Western dominance of global economic structures. Iran’s response to these constraints has not taken the form of isolationism, but rather the expansion of diversified linkages with Asian actors. In this sense, the Look to the East policy reflects the logical continuation of the Islamic Republic’s doctrine of political independence, aimed at creating a form of intra-systemic balancing through deeper engagement with new centers of power. At the conceptual level, the Look to the East approach requires a redefinition of the very notion of the “East” within the broader process of Asianization. In this understanding, the East is not constructed as the “other” vis-à-vis the West, but as a network of economic, technological, and cultural relations grounded in the principles of coexistence and mutual independence. This reconceptualization elevates the Look to the East policy from a mere political orientation to a structural strategy. Within this framework, Iran’s objective is not merely to change its economic partners; rather, it seeks to reconstruct its position within the orbit of Asian power — an orbit in which economic cooperation with China, technological engagement with India, and security collaboration with Russia consti-

tute complementary components of a broader strategic logic. Historically, Iran’s orientation toward the East has precedents that go beyond contemporary developments. The tradition of eastern policy in Iran has rested upon two pillars: territorial continuity with Asian geopolitical structures and epistemic continuity with the East’s justice-centered discourse. These elements have taken different forms across various historical periods, from the 19th-century policy of “negative equilibrium” to the post-revolutionary doctrine of “neither East nor West”. Yet, their overall direction has consistently aimed at preserving autonomous decision-making in the face of global power monopolies. Accordingly, the current Look to the East orientation may be viewed as the logical extension of this historical tradition, now reproduced through contemporary Asian dynamics. From the perspective of international relations theory, Iran’s Asianization strategy can be interpreted through the lenses of structural neorealism and defensive realism. As global power balances shift, a rational actor seeking survival and stability turns toward coalition-building with aligned powers in neighboring regions. At the same time, this behavior involves constructivist dimensions: the Look to the East strategy is linked not only to the material logic of power balancing but also to the redefinition of Iran’s international identity. This identity is grounded in independence, justice, and resistance to

domination; values that resonate within emerging Asian discourses. In other words, Asianization for Iran is simultaneously a material strategy and a rearticulation of political identity at the international level. The continuation and deepening of Asianization require an understanding of the web of mutual interdependencies between Iran and other Asian powers. Iran positions itself in its eastern engagements not as a subordinate actor, but as an agent capable of generating regional meaning and order. This self-understand-

ing aligns with Asia’s multilateral logic; a logic that emphasizes relative autonomy and balanced distribution of benefits in contrast to Western hegemonic structures. Within this framework, Iran’s membership in institutions such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization or BRICS should be viewed not simply as diplomatic events, but as markers of Iran’s integration into the emerging Asian power network. The overall outcome of these trends is that the Look to the East policy, in the context of Asianization, constitutes part of the broader process of global order recalibration. Through this policy, the Islamic Republic of Iran seeks to consolidate its position as a status quo power within the evolving Asian order — an order founded on multi-centricity, coexistence, and the rejection of Western exclusivity. In this sense, the Look to the East approach is not a negation of the West, but a redefinition of Iran’s relationship with global power structures on the basis of its independent interests and identity. Thus, Asianization represents not merely a reaction to international crises, but a gradual transition in Iran’s foreign policy toward a higher level of strategic self-awareness; one in which the East becomes the central arena for the pursuit of independence and balance.

The article was first published by the Center for Political and International Studies

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The signage of the entrance to Iran’s Foreign Ministry reads, “Neither East nor West — Islamic Republic.” This harks back to a famous slogan during the country’s 1979 Islamic Revolution.
● ILNA

and lexicon, has often been represented as an “isolated actor,” “unpredictable,” or “severed from international cooperation networks”. This image-construction, primarily the product of sanction policies, media operations, and structural attempts to constrain Iran at the margin of the international system, has not only diminished global perception of Iran but also has had direct consequences for the country’s economic, diplomatic, and even foreign-investment relations. With membership in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, this dominant narrative underwent a fissure and metamorphosis. The official presence of Iran in an institution whose members

include China, Russia, India, Pakistan, and a constellation of important Asian countries, transferred Iran from a position that, based on the Western narrative, was situated at “the margin,” to the center of a burgeoning Asian bloc. This bloc, which in total possesses more than \$500 billion of internal trade, and in which the volume of exchanges among some of its members (such as China and Central Asia) increases annually with double-digit growth, will play a determinative role in the future Asian order. This transfer is not merely symbolic; rather, it reflects the transformation of Iran’s perceptual position in the minds of regional and global actors. The SCO enabled Iran

to present itself as an active, responsible, and potential partner in major Asian security and economic projects. This identity metamorphosis possesses multilayered effects. First, the confidence of Asian and Eurasian investors in Iran increased because membership in the SCO is a signifier of relative stability, collaborative capability, and access to an expansive network of regional markets and infrastructures. Second, Iran’s diplomatic weight in regional and international dialogues was fortified because its presence alongside major Asian powers elevates Iran’s strategic position and enhances its negotiating capacity. Third, the perceptual

isolation of Iran — which the West had reproduced for years through media and public diplomacy — has been markedly reduced. Iran is now viewed within a framework that includes more than half of the global population and a significant portion of global production. In other words, Iran’s membership in the SCO, from an identity perspective, has engendered a kind of self-redefinition in a world in transition; a self-redefinition that has liberated Iran from a constrained, threat-centered, and isolated image and has situated it as a natural and credible actor in the new Asian order. This transformation, if actively managed, can leave a lasting im-

pact on all dimensions of Iranian national interests — from the economy and security to foreign policy and development. In sum, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, for Iran, is not merely a cooperation institution, but rather a new pathway for the pursuit of national interests in the domains of security, economy, politics, and identity. This organization renders Iran’s security networked, detaches the country’s economy from sanction-susceptible pathways, stabilizes Iran’s position in the future Asian order, and amplifies the country’s capacity for active agency in a multipolar world. If Iran can utilize these capacities with an active, coordinated, and

forward-looking approach, the SCO can become the backbone of Iran’s Asian strategy. This trajectory transfers Iran from a reactive condition to an active-agent condition, and relocates national interests from a narrow and constrained framework to a multidimensional, stable, and future-oriented framework. In a world in which the center of gravity of power is transferring toward Asia, Iranian presence in the SCO is not merely a tactical choice, but a strategic necessity for guaranteeing the security and prosperity of future generations.

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

Asianization, redefinition of Iran’s ‘Look to East’ strategy

By Sajjad Attazade
Researcher at the
Center for Political and
Int’l Studies

OPINION

The structural transformation of the international system over the past two decades has gradually reshaped the material and normative foundations of power. The ongoing decentralization away from the West and the growing role of Asian actors in shaping the global economy, international governance norms, and technological networks are among the most visible signs of this shift. Consequently, the concept of the “East” is no longer merely a geographical direction; rather, it emerges as a civilizational and strategic domain endowed with new epistemic, economic, and institutional capacities. Within this context, Iran’s “Look to the East” policy can be understood as part of a broader process of strategic adaptation to the emerging Asian order — an order in which both the distribution of power and the distribution of meaning diverge from the Western-centric model, and diverse patterns of intra-Asian development and cooperation replace the exclusive centrality of the West. From a theoretical standpoint, Asianization signifies the gradual shift in the global system’s geopolitical and geoeconomic center of gravity toward Asia. This shift is not the result of a single political decision, but rather the outcome of three simultaneous historical trends: first, the saturation of growth capacities in the Western capitalist system and its resulting need for Asian markets and labor; second, the technological and infrastructural rise of emerging powers in the East; and third, the emergence of non-Western discourses on development, governance, and political legitimacy. As a result, Asia has transformed from an object of global politics into one of its principal sources of definition. In this setting, Iran — strategically situated between West Asia, Central Asia, and the Indian subcontinent — is compelled to recalibrate its role within a framework in which agency is increasingly centered in the East. Analytically, the Look to the East strategy may be viewed as Iran’s systematic response to three key constraints: structural



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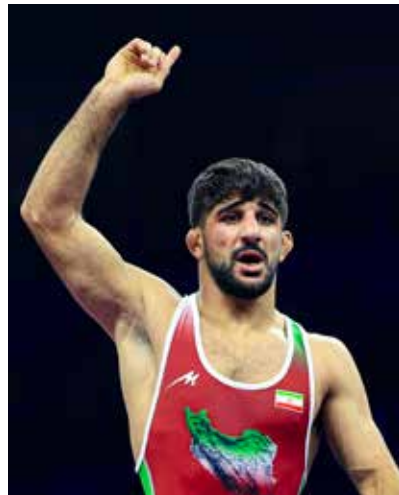
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Five Iranians shortlisted for 2025 Most Dominant Wrestler



L-R: Iranian wrestlers Rahman Amouzad, Amirhossein Zare', Saeid Esmaili, Mohammad-Hadi Saravi, and Gholamreza Farrokhi have been shortlisted by the UWW for the Most Dominant Wrestler in 2025.

Sports Desk

Five Iranians are among the nominees for the UWW Most Dominant Wrestler of 2025.

United World Wrestling has unveiled the 10-man shortlist for the year's most successful wrestlers across two divisions, with Rahman Amouzad and Amirhossein Zare' listed in freestyle, while Saeid Esmaili, Mohammad-Hadi Saravi, and Gholamreza Farrokhi are named in Greco-Roman.

A silver medalist at the Paris Olympics last year, Amouzad made amends for his final setback in the French capital against Kotaro Kiyooka by defeating the Japanese wrestler in emphatic fashion, securing a superiority victory in the first period of the 65kg showdown at September's World Championships in Zagreb

– Amouzad's second world title after his 2022 triumph. Ruthless Rahman then picked up where he had left off in Croatia, cruising to the final of November's Islamic Solidarity Games in Riyadh without conceding a single point, before demolishing Tajikistan's Abdulmazhid Kudiev (12-2) to claim his second major gold of the international season.

Zare', meanwhile, bounced back from his Olympic final heartbreak against his familiar Georgian foe Geno Petriashvili to reestablish his dominance in the superheavyweight division.

Chasing his third world 125kg gold in four years, Zare – a Ranking Series champion in February – overpowered Olympic bronze medalist Giorgi Meshvildishvili of Azerbaijan 5-0 in the final to cap-

ture the ultimate prize in Zagreb. He was also in a league of his own in Riyadh, capping his run with a 10-0 victory over Bahrain's Russian-born Shamil Sharipov in the final.

Joining the two Iranians in the five-man freestyle list are American duo Zahid Valencia and Kyle Snyder – world champions in the 86kg and 97kg classes, respectively – as well as Russian 61kg stand-out Zaur Uguev, who claimed the gold in Zagreb as a neutral athlete with an 11-2 win over Iran's Ahmad Mohammadnejad Javan in the final.

Meanwhile, reigning Olympic champions Esmaili and Saravi also received recognition for their continued success in 2025, while Farrokhi introduced himself as one of the brightest rising stars in Greco-Roman wrestling.

Esmaili began the international season with a gold-winning campaign at March's Asian Championships in Amman, and then marked his World Championships debut in style by edging Azerbaijan's Hasrat Jafarov 1-0 in the 67kg final.

The pair met again for gold in Riyadh two months later, where Esmaili came within two seconds of suffering only the second defeat of his senior international career – and his first since June 2024 – before producing a trademark four-pointer to defeat Jafarov 8-3 in a thrilling showdown.

Saravi proved to be the wrestler to beat in the 97kg division, securing his third Asian gold and second world title before rounding out the season with a comfortable title run at the Islamic Solidarity Games, courtesy of a

5-1 win over world bronze medalist Murad Ahmadiyev of Azerbaijan in the final.

Farrokhi, who won the 82kg gold at February's Ranking Series curtain-raiser, also enjoyed a dominant debut at the World Championships on his return to the Croatian capital, defeating Georgian Gela Bolkvadze 4-0 in the final.

He then moved up to the 87kg class for October's U23 World Championships in Novi Sad, Serbia, where the 22-year-old prodigy secured five superiority victories on his way to the gold medal, including a 10-0 demolition of Ukraine's Ivan Chmyr in the final. Farrokhi took his 2025 tally to four golds in Riyadh after beating Kazakhstan's Islam Yevloyev 6-0 in the 87kg final.

Armenia's Malkhas Amoyan was

also nominated in Greco-Roman after winning the European and world titles in the 77kg class, with Uzbekistan's Aytjan Khalmakhanov completing the list.

Khalmakhanov dominated the 63kg weight class in 2025, claiming the world senior and under-20 titles as well as the Asian gold, though he was clearly second-best against Esmaili when the two met at the Islamic Solidarity Games, suffering a 9-0 defeat in the semifinals before finishing with a consolation 67kg bronze.

The 2025 season was certainly one to remember for Iranian wrestling, as the country completed a historic clean sweep of the team titles at the World Championships, while also lifting the Greco-Roman trophies at the U17, U20, and U23 Worlds.

ISF U15 World School Volleyball Championship: Iranian girls defeat Chile to win Pool D



volleyballLir

Sports Desk

Iran continued its perfect run in the girls' competition of the ISF U15 World School Volleyball Championship in Shangluo, China, defeating Chile in straight sets in Pool D on Monday.

The Iranian girls prevailed 25-12 and 25-19 in the best-of-two-sets contest to top the group with four victories and 12 points, setting up a knockout clash with Brazil on Wednesday. Brazil overcame Uganda 1 in two sets later in the day to finish runner-up to Chinese Taipei in Pool C.

Iran began its campaign with successive 2-0 victories over India 1 and Uganda 2 on Saturday, before defeating Bulgaria by the same scoreline on Sunday.

India 1 overcame Chile 2-0 later on Monday to secure second place in Pool D. Elsewhere, Thailand beat Serbia in back-to-back sets to finish atop the Pool B standings with a clean sweep of three wins,

while China 2 also recorded a straight-sets victory against Quebec to claim the runner-up spot.

Chinese Taipei sealed the top position in Pool C thanks to a 2-0 win over India 2, while Bulgaria defeated Uganda 2 by the same score in Pool D.

Iranian boys through

Iran also enjoyed an emphatic group phase in the boys' event, seeing off Saudi Arabia in two sets to win Pool B with seven points and advance to the knockout stage.

Iran opened its title defense with a 2-0 win against Nigeria on Saturday and then edged China 2 on Sunday.

Nigeria also booked a knockout berth after defeating China 2 to finish second in the group with five points.

The eight-day tournament has brought together 30 teams from 17 nations. Launched in 1972, the ISF World School Volleyball Championship is the highest-level school volleyball event worldwide.

Iran coach Hosseini pleased with 'proper test' for female weightlifters in Riyadh

Sports Desk

Head coach Elham Hosseini said she "expected more" from the Iranian women's weightlifting team at the Islamic Solidarity Games in Riyadh, though she was pleased that the event provided "a proper test for the young squad to reach world-class level."

Represented by five weightlifters at the November event, Iran collected six medals across three women's divisions in Riyadh, with 16-year-old prodigy Mahsa Beheshti headlining the haul with a clean and jerk gold, as well as snatch and total bronzes in the -86kg class.

Reihaneh Karimi bagged the C&J and total bronze medals in the -69kg category, while Alma Hosseini settled for bronze in the -77kg snatch contest.

"We had five contestants in Riyadh, three of whom had participated in the Asian Youth Games in Bahrain in late October, which made it somewhat tougher for them as they did not have much time to recover," Hosseini told IRNA.

"The level of the ISG competition was similar to that of the Asian Championships, albeit without Chinese and North Korean weightlifters, though some top-notch



IRNA

participants from African countries like Nigeria and Egypt were present in Riyadh," added the 37-year-old coach, who made history by winning triple gold at the 2022 Asian Championships – the first senior international gold medals for Iranian women's weightlifting.

"There were also world and Olympic medalists taking part in the event, which was a privilege for our young weightlifters, who were able to compete at this level and succeeded in winning medals. Mahsa Beheshti delivered a sensational campaign despite being only 16."

"She had just participated in a tough competition in Bahrain but still managed to match her training records to win three medals. Mahsa's snatch and total

results were equal to those of the second-place finisher, but in this tournament, the athlete who achieves the result earlier wins the medal, and in the end, Uzbekistan took the silver in both the snatch and total."

"Alma, who had competed in the -69kg class in Bahrain, moved up to the -77kg category in Riyadh. Our main goal for her was simply to have a decent finish, and she ultimately succeeded in winning a bronze in the snatch."

"Reihaneh, having won medals in the senior class in recent years, was someone we hoped would secure the top prize in Riyadh. However, she was under a lot of stress. Had she overcome her anxiety, she could have achieved some excellent results."

"Riyadh was Sara Safa-

vardi's second international competition. She had competed for the first time in the Asian junior super-heavyweight category and performed relatively well at the senior level. However, we still expect higher numbers from our weightlifters. These competitions are a proper test for our athletes to raise their performance to world standards."

"Three years ago, junior weightlifters were added to the national team, and now they have reached a level where they can compete with seniors. However, we must separate the junior, youth, and senior categories. We need to maintain this medal-winning trend by building a strong foundation. Currently, we are in a situation where we are using juniors in the senior category, but we must work hard to preserve our talent across all these levels."

Regarding upcoming events, Hosseini said: "The national team training camp will get underway in late December. Our first competition will be the Asian Championships in April, followed by the World Junior Championships in Egypt in May. We will compete in four major tournaments before taking part in September's Asian Games."

Maragheh joins UNESCO's Global Network of Learning Cities

Iranica Desk

The ancient city of Maragheh in East Azarbaijan Province has officially been admitted to UNESCO's Global Network of Learning Cities (GNLC), the city's mayor announced. Shahram Morovati underscored the importance of effective urban management, emphasizing that Maragheh's accession to the UNESCO network represents both an international honor and a significant responsibility. "We believe that lifelong learning is the foundation of sustainable development, innovation, and strengthened social participation," he said. Morovati noted that the municipality will make full use of the network's opportunities to enhance the quality of life for residents. He recalled that Maragheh was recognized as a WHO Healthy City last year, and said the combination of these two global titles — Healthy City and Learning City — offers a promising outlook for the city's future development. This dual recognition, he added, reflects

the municipality's commitment to improving public health, raising awareness, and advancing the overall quality of life, according to chtn.ir. As part of its new global membership, Maragheh has placed several priorities on its agenda, including the development of local learning centers, the promotion of educational equity, the improvement of urban health, the expansion of social participation, and the creation of learning opportunities for people of all ages. The mayor also announced that a comprehensive program to implement the Learning City framework is already underway. Several elements are currently in progress, including the establishment of themed parks such as the Music Park, Sound Park, Education Park, Hydro Park, Sand Play Park, Adventure Park, and Animal Park — all designed to enhance civic education. With the Learning City certification, all urban spaces and infrastructure — including cultural centers, public parks, and pe-



● mianehnegar.ir

destrian pathways — may now serve as platforms for learning and community awareness. Morovati outlined three core strategies Maragheh has proposed to UNESCO: strengthening cross-sector collaboration among civil society, governmental bodies, and local organizations to promote lifelong learning; making use of the

city's cultural heritage and existing educational resources; and prioritizing health-oriented programs as part of the Learning City model. He further reported that a specialized Learning City Committee has been established, bringing together various municipal departments, government agencies, and NGOs to pursue these

strategies through an integrated, cross-sectoral approach. Stressing the importance of cooperation with UNESCO, the Iranian National Commission for UNESCO, and the UNESCO Office in Tehran, Morovati said such partnerships will support joint projects and enable Maragheh to draw on successful international experiences. He

added that Maragheh, having already demonstrated strong performance in implementing the Healthy City program, is prepared to play an active role in the global network. The official unveiling of Maragheh's membership certificate in the UNESCO Learning Cities Network will take place soon, in accordance with UNESCO protocols and with the participation of officials from various organizations. According to UNESCO, nine Iranian cities — Isfahan, Shiraz, Tehran, Mashhad, Bandar Khamir, Kermanshah, Hashtgerd, Rasht, and Kashan — were previously part of the network. With the admission of Maragheh, the number of Iranian member cities has now risen to ten. The UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities is an international initiative aimed at promoting lifelong learning, facilitating knowledge exchange among cities, enhancing urban quality of life, and supporting sustainable educational policies.

Export growth elevates Langerud's handicraft status



● iranhotelonline.com

Iranica Desk

Regular exports of artworks created by artisans from Langerud, located in Iran's northern Gilan Province, have significantly elevated its standing in the regional handicrafts sector, according to the head of Langerud's Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts Department. Rahman Hosseinzadeh stated that based on reports reflecting the performance of the city's skilled artisans — particularly those active in pottery and ceramics — the export of these products to international markets has experienced remarkable growth. He noted that the exquisite works produced by master artisans of the Anzali-Mahalleh neighborhood of Langerud, crafted through specialized expertise and several years of experience, are being exported regularly and in bulk to Iraq, Bahrain, Qatar, Lebanon, and the United Arab Emirates, chtn.ir wrote. He added that these high-quality products, distinguished by their artistic authenticity and strong local identity, have succeeded in securing a prominent position in target markets and have played a significant role in introducing Langerud's handicraft potential to a wider audience. Hosseinzadeh also emphasized that efforts are currently underway to explore and develop new export destinations, and with further support, the county's share of pottery and ceramic exports is expected to increase even more. Gilan Province, known for its rich cultural heritage, is widely recognized

as one of Iran's most vibrant centers of traditional handicrafts. The region's diverse natural landscape and deep-rooted artistic traditions have given rise to a variety of distinctive crafts, including pottery, woodcarving, mat weaving, traditional textile production, wickerwork, and decorative objects inspired by the province's lush environment and rural lifestyle. Many of these crafts, passed down through generations, reflect the creativity and cultural identity of local communities. The province's pottery and ceramics, in particular, hold a special place among Iranian handicrafts. Gilan's artisans utilize locally sourced clay and traditional firing techniques to produce items that blend functionality with aesthetic appeal. Their designs often incorporate motifs inspired by the Caspian Sea, rice paddies, forests, and local folklore. These unique artistic characteristics have helped Gilan's ceramic products gain recognition both nationally and internationally. In recent years, increasing global interest in sustainable, handmade, and culturally inspired products has created new opportunities for Gilan's handicraft sector. As demand for authentic, locally produced works grows, the province's artisans — especially those in hubs like Langerud — have expanded their presence in international markets. The consistent export of handcrafted items from Anzali-Mahalleh neighborhood is a strong example of this broader trend, illustrating how local craftsmanship can contribute directly to regional economic development.

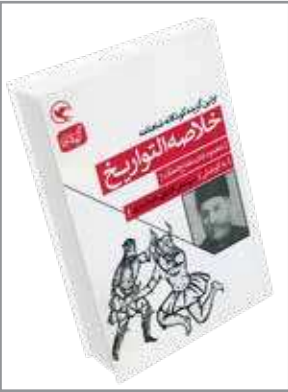
Exemplifying patriotism in Qajar-era history books for kids

Iranica Desk

Qajar-era textbooks not only carry historical value and educational significance but are still engaging and enjoyable to read. One of the earliest history textbooks for elementary schools was authored by Mahmud Meftah-ol-Molk, who, more than three decades earlier, had also produced one of the first examples of modern Persian children's literature. He sought to create a child-friendly, fluent, and captivating account of Iranian history using the Shahnameh. The book, titled *Khulasat-ol-Tavarikh* (literally meaning *A Summary of Histories*), is the first child-oriented selection of the Shahnameh, compiled by Seyyed Ali Kassefi Khansari, and has been published by Mohajer Publishing as part of the "Ganj-e Qajar" series. IBNA conducted an interview with Kassefi Khansari, about the history of children's historiography in Iran.

When did historiography for children and adolescents begin?

SEYYED ALI KASSEFI KHANSARI: Directly addressing children in history books became more common after the introduction of the printing press in Iran. The first notable example may be the book entitled *Nameh-ye Khosrovan* written by Jalal al-Din Mirza. However, it is debatable whether this book was intended for all children. Jalal al-Din Mirza was not a children's author and did not make extensive efforts to simplify language for young readers. Nonetheless, through illustrations and other devices, he produced a three-volume work for children. While important for its time, formal primary schooling and standardized textbooks were not yet established in Iran, which is why the book is considered the first true history textbook for children.



● IBNA

What was the purpose of writing history for children, and how long did this trend continue?

The motivations for creating history books for children during that period were varied. One primary reason was to provide educational materials for schools. Another was to promote patriotic, liberal, and expansionist ideals, which occupied the minds of many Iranians, especially intellectuals and educated elites, during the Qajar era and after the Constitutional Revolution. These nationalist approaches sometimes appeared in opposition to traditionalist or religious perspectives within certain historical texts.

How was the language of children's history books, and which efforts were

particularly successful?

Numerous history textbooks were written during the Qajar and post-Constitutional periods. Determining which were most successful requires further research. Meftah-ol-Molk's son, Musa, who inherited his father's title, also wrote history books for children. Other authors included Mohammad Ali Foroughi and his son, known as first and second Zoka-ol-Molk, and Abbas Eqbal Ashtiani, whose

and playful ways. While the diversity and formats of historical books have increased — including fantasy, reference works, and historical stories — high-quality and comprehensive historical books for children remain limited. Professionally authored histories of people, literature, art, and the world by Iranian authors are still relatively rare.

Which areas of history remain underexplored for children?

One long-standing concern of mine is the history of Muslims. Despite its critical importance, very little attention is given to the history of Muslims in textbooks or non-textbook publications for children. After the early Islamic centuries and the Arab conquest of Iran, textbooks rarely mention the fate of other Muslim communities or Islamic governments. Religious classes touch briefly on the prophets and the Twelve Imams of Shia Muslims, but children rarely learn about the diversity, spread, and development of Islam across 15 centuries. About nine years ago, I authored a five-volume series titled "I am a Muslim" with this goal in mind. Unfortunately, due to unprofessional, illogical, and unethical reasons, the books have not yet been published, and the publisher has not allowed their transfer to another publisher. While I regret the lack of publication, I remain hopeful. I believe that, whether before or after my death, this series will eventually be published by this or another publisher. Through these books, children — particularly those with a keen interest — will gain a deeper cultural, spiritual, and historical connection to Muslim communities across time and geography.



Iran, Turkey sign cinema cooperation pact to boost joint production

Arts & Culture Desk

Iran and Turkey formalized a broad cinema cooperation agreement during the International Cinema Cooperation Conference in Shiraz, held December 1-3 alongside the Fajr International Film Festival. Raed Faridzadeh, head of Cinema Organization of Iran, and Birol Güven, the General Director of Cinema of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of Turkey, signed the pact, IRNA reported. The agreement sets a framework for joint projects across multiple genres, including feature, documentary, short, and animated films, emphasizing shared historical and cultural themes. It allows films from both countries to be exchanged and

screened in targeted markets, aiming to broaden audiences and boost international reach. Filmmakers will gain mutual access to studios and shooting locations, easing logistical challenges and supporting the smooth execution of co-productions. The pact also encourages exchanges of filmmakers, technical crews, and specialists, while offering students and instructors opportunities for cross-border learning to strengthen professional and educational capacities. Regular film-weeks in Iran and Turkey are planned to introduce audiences to each other's cinema and reinforce cultural diplomacy. Officials described the initiative as "a strategic step" for deepening bilateral cultural and cinematic ties.

The Shiraz conference drew ministers, deputy ministers, senior cinema executives, and ambassadors from 23 countries, signaling regional interest in cross-border collaboration. The forum provided a platform to discuss joint production models, co-funding, and regulatory alignment to support festival participation and international distribution. Observers said the pact builds on years of informal collaboration between Iranian and Turkish filmmakers, ranging from co-produced shorts and documentaries to festival exchanges. Previous efforts were largely project-based; the new agreement establishes a formal structure with operational and strategic guidelines for sustained cooperation.



Head of Cinema Organization of Iran Raed Faridzadeh (R) and General Director of Cinema of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of Turkey Birol Güven, shake hands after signing a cinema cooperation agreement at the International Cinema Cooperation Conference in southwestern city of Shiraz, held December 1-3 alongside the Fajr International Film Festival.
● IRNA

Six Iranian films advance to India's Kerala festival

Arts & Culture Desk

Six films from Iran are among the line-up at this year's International Film Festival of Kerala (IFFK), which runs from December 12 to 19 in the southern Indian state's capital. The Iranian entries include 'Black Rabbit, White Rabbit' by Shahram Mokri, which competes in the festival's International Competition section. Also featured is 'It Was Just an Accident' by Jafar Panahi, presented under the festival's "popular films" strand, ISNA reported. In addition, retrospectives of four earlier Iranian



works have been selected under a special package for previous award-winners: 'About Elly' by Asghar Far-

hadi, 'The Dark Room' by Rouhollah Hejazi, 'Parviz' by Majid Barzegar and '10+4' by Mania Akbari.

The four films are among past recipients of the festival's Golden Crow Pheasant award. The 30th-edition IFFK boasts more than 200 films from nearly 70 countries, screened at 16 theaters across Thiruvananthapuram. Organized by the Kerala State Chalachitra Academy, the festival remains a key platform for world and Asian cinema. Attendance is expected to exceed 15,000 delegates this year, with an expanded schedule and several curated packages showcasing international and regional cinema.

Tehran, Yerevan hold 5th joint tourism cooperation meeting

Arts & Culture Desk

Iran's delegation is in Yerevan for the fifth meeting of the joint technical tourism committee with Armenia, taking place December 7-9, the Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Ministry announced. The team is led by Iran's Deputy Minister of Tourism and includes senior officials from East Azerbaijan province and the ministry's marketing and foreign tourism department. The three-day conference focuses on deepening bilateral ties and easing travel for visitors between the two neighbors. Agendas include expanding cultural and road-travel routes, streamlining border-crossing procedures and promoting joint tourism packages. Officials are also convening a round-table between Armenian tour

operators and Iranian private-sector representatives. Discussions cover medical tourism, heritage-site visits and coordinated marketing efforts. Additional meetings are scheduled with Armenia's health ministry, national tourism board, and economy ministry. The session continues the structured cooperation begun at the fourth committee meeting in Tehran during the 2022 Iran International Tourism Exhibition. Armenia has emerged as a key outbound destination for Iranian travelers, particularly in shopping, medical travel and cultural heritage. The current meeting follows broader bilateral agreements signed in August 2025 across tourism, culture, trade and infrastructure, showing Yerevan's growing role in Iran's regional tourism strategy.

Birth rate hits historic low in Iran as permanent singlehood surges seven-fold



Social Desk

Iran is facing a sharp demographic shift, according to new remarks by Marzieh Vahid-Dastjerdi, secretary of the National Population Headquarters. In an interview with Tasnim News Agency, she disclosed that the rate of permanent singleness (women reaching age 50 unmarried) has surged seven-fold, rising from 1.1 % in 1986 to 7.7 % in 2023. Births in 2024 reportedly dipped below one million for the first time, marking a low-water point in the

country's post-revolution demographic trajectory. Total fertility has fallen from an average of 6.8 births per woman in the mid-1980s to under 1.5 today. At the same time, registered marriages have dropped from roughly 800,000 annually between 2011 and 2013 to around 480,000 last year. Vahid-Dastjerdi pointed to shifting social norms. More people simply believe there is "no need to marry." Many now prioritize education, careers and financial stability. Where earlier couples wed despite unstable incomes or housing and often lived in extended family households, today

those patterns have largely disappeared. The data show that the average Iranian woman now gives birth to her first child at 27.5 years. In Tehran and other large cities the age is closer to 30. The lag between marriage and first birth has widened to an average of 4.5 years, while the interval between first and second child has stretched to about six years. These trends, she warned, are steering Iran toward a shrinking population of working-age adults, shrinking labor supply, and a bulging elderly cohort, amplifying long-term pressures on health, pension systems and social services. Unless the current trajectory changes, Iran may soon lose the narrow demographic window that once offered a youthful, economically active population, a window many analysts regard as critical for sustainable growth and innovation. "Attitudes and lifestyles have shifted," said Vahid-Dastjerdi. Without a reversal, the consequences could be profound.



Chakavak Orchestra to revive Pazouki legacy in Tehran

Arts & Culture Desk

Chakavak Orchestra will perform works by veteran composer Jahanbakhsh Pazouki on December 25 at Vahdat Hall in Tehran. Under conductor Reza Shayesteh the private ensemble will present, for the first time since the 1979 Islamic Revolution, several pieces by Pazouki.

Vocalists Vahid Nooraei and Mehrdad Peykarzadeh will join the orchestra on stage, ILNA reported. Shayesteh said the concert will mark the debut performance in Iran of "all the pieces" selected for the evening, drawn from the repertoire of Pazouki, one of the country's most influential songwriters and composers.

He added that Chakavak Orchestra remains "the only orchestra authorized to perform all his works in Iran". Formed roughly 27 years ago, Chakavak Orchestra has established a steady record in the Iranian music scene. Over the years it has helped launch the careers of numerous emerging vocal talents.