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Elite dialogue forum could enrich Iran-China mutual understanding

By Delaram Ahmadi
Staff writer

INTERVIEW



Iran-China relations have entered a new phase in recent years. The two countries signed a 25-year strategic cooperation agreement in 2021 aimed at elevating bilateral relations to the level of a "comprehensive strategic partnership" in economic, energy, technological, cultural, and security domains. In addition, through joint membership in organizations such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and BRICS, Tehran and Beijing, alongside other states, have formed a type of non-Western alignment. Such close cooperation has underscored the need for sustained dialogue at expert and elite levels.

The "Iran-China Dialogue Forum," now in its third round, represents the most important framework for elite-level engagement between research centers, think tanks, and specialists from both countries.

In this context, Iran Daily spoke with Hamed Vafaei, a China affairs analyst who attended the forum. Vafaei noted that such gatherings are highly effective in furthering mutual understanding, building trust, and strengthening the strategic relationship between the two countries, though deeper engagement and more detailed discussions will be required in subsequent stages.

IRAN DAILY: What role do such forums play in strengthening mutual political trust between the two countries, and how can this trust be sustained? How can these exchanges among scholars and think tanks be translated into executive decision-making?

VAFAEI: Iran and China have elevated their relations to the level of a comprehensive strategic partnership for more than a decade, yet it appears that the potential of bilateral ties goes well beyond the current framework. A review of existing cooperation structures suggests that there remains ample space for the formation of deeper strategic trust between the two sides.

To make use of this potential, various mechanisms are available. Achieving a genuine strategic relationship requires passing through three stages: mutual understanding, mutual trust, and finally a strategic partnership. These forums are highly effective across all three stages.

They provide Iranian and Chinese experts with the opportunity to engage in direct, unmediated dialogue, exchange views, and discuss the most important bilateral issues face to face.

One of the longstanding challenges in Iran-China relations has been the dominance of Western intermediaries in shaping mutual perceptions. For many years, Western sources served as a primary lens through which Iran understood China and vice versa. The establishment of such a forum — now in its third round — significantly helps do away with mediated narratives and pave the way for direct and independent dialogue.

Both Iran and China have a strong need for the continuation of these exchanges, and the fact that the forum has reached its third round reflects the shared interest of both sides in keeping the dialogue alive.

In the next phase, the key priority should be to deepen discussions and move toward more issue-specific engagement. The forum could be divided into more specialized sub-groups, creating greater opportunities for detailed and focused exchanges among Iranian and Chinese experts and think tanks.

There is a well-known Chinese proverb that says it is better to work deeply on a small issue than to work superficially on a large one.

The forum included think tanks affiliated with governance structures in both countries as well as independent and academic institutions, each of which exerts influence at different layers of policymaking. Therefore, the successful holding of such forums will undoubtedly contribute to a deeper mutual understanding between Iran and China.

At a time when the West is seeking to isolate Iran financially and technologically, what capacities do Iran-China technological cooperation offer to neutralize these pressures?

One of the most prominent issues currently on the Iran-China agenda is cooperation in science and technology. A review of China's top-level policy documents reveals a key concept known as "openness of science and technology to the outside world," which constitutes one of Beijing's foundational policies in engaging with developing countries, including Iran.

China possesses extensive capabilities in science and technology and, in some fields, has moved ahead of Western countries and even the United States. Many Western states are themselves seeking to tap into China's capacities in areas such as aerospace, artificial intelligence, semiconductors, rare earth minerals, and other advanced sectors, and are in constant consultation with Beijing.

Iran, too, should leverage China's capabilities by closely studying China's governance documents and policy principles, including the openness of science and technology, to make effective use of these opportunities.

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Qalibaf: Western intrigue fuels tensions in Horn of Africa, North Africa, West Asia 'Iran, Ethiopia aim to expand economic, cultural, political ties'

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Iranian Parliament Speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf (R) meets with Speaker of Ethiopia's House of Representatives Tadesse Chafo in Tehran on December 13, 2025.
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Qalibaf: Western intrigue fuels tensions in Horn of Africa, North Africa, West Asia

'Iran, Ethiopia aim to expand economic, cultural, political ties'

International Desk

Iran's Parliament Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf on Saturday called ongoing tensions in the Horn of Africa, North Africa, and West Asia the result of plots hatched by the West to create insecurity in independent and Muslim countries.

Qalibaf made the remarks in a meeting with Speaker of Ethiopia's House of Peoples' Representatives Tagesse Chafo in Tehran.

Qalibaf said that many developments are taking place on the eastern and western side of the Red Sea, which would have a direct impact on countries' security, urging the regional countries to jointly cooperate on security.

He underlined that countries with shared interests should stand together and cooperate.

"The root cause of insecurity in these regions, especially in Sudan, is the

Zionist regime backed by the United States, which is solely pursuing its own interests in Africa."

Qalibaf added that Sudan's split in 2011 was also one of the West's conspiracies, similar to what is happening in Gaza, Syria, and Yemen.

In a press conference after the meeting, Qalibaf said Iran and Ethiopia have enjoyed more than 70 years of political and economic relations, describing Ethiopia as one of Africa's most populous countries with close cultural and historical affinity to the Islamic world. Given the long-standing ties and the fact that both countries are now members of the BRICS group, there is a clear need to further strengthen relations, Qalibaf stated.

He said the visit by his Ethiopian counterpart is aimed at expanding cooperation in political, economic, and cultural fields, as well as opening new avenues for Iran's engagement with the Horn of Africa countries through maritime



Iran's Parliament Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf (r) greets Speaker of Ethiopia's House of Peoples' Representatives Tagesse Chafo in Tehran, Iran, on December 13, 2025.

● ICANA

routes.

The Iranian speaker noted that Tehran seeks to expand relations with the African countries while respecting their national sovereignty and territorial integrity, adding that there are significant opportunities for cooperation between Iran and Ethiopia in areas such as agriculture, knowledge-based industries, and energy.

For his part, Chafo said the relations between the two countries date back more than seven decades. He described his trip as the most significant visit at this level in decades.

Chafo described cooperation in parliamentary, political, and economic fields as important, saying the talks



had helped lay the foundation for expanding bilateral relations and utilizing existing capacities in both countries.

The Ethiopian official also held a separate meeting with Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi.

Tehran-Beijing ties built on choice, not compulsion: Deputy FM

International Desk

Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister Saeed Khatibzadeh stressed on Saturday that relations between Iran and China are based on choice, not compulsion, which necessitate the formation of a multi-layered and intertwined partnership.

Addressing a ceremony of the Third Forum of Iranian and Chinese Think Tanks in Tehran, Khatibzadeh said Iran and China, as two important pillars of the Global South, undoubtedly have an important path ahead to advance the shared interests, which will be pursued at an increased pace with greater convergence.

"The leaders of the two countries have demonstrated their determination to advance bilateral relations in a completely fragile and unstable environment — an environment made fragile as a result of actions that disrupt global and regional order and stability by hegemonic powers."

Khatibzadeh added that the presidents of the two countries have shown that their



Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister Saeed Khatibzadeh addresses a ceremony of the Third Forum of Iranian and Chinese Think Tanks in Tehran on December 13, 2025.

● MEHR

become even more evident, underscoring the need to adopt the right approaches and further strengthen mutual political trust.

"Within the framework of multilateralism — such as BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization — we should strengthen cooperation and help shape a bright future for the Global South," he said, while also stressing the importance of promoting cultural ties, noting that both Iran and China represent major global civilizations.

The Third Iran-China Dialogue Forum is being held by the Iranian Foreign Ministry's Institute for Political and International Studies (IPIS) on Saturday and Sunday. The event features specialized panels and workshops attended by Iranian and Chinese officials, researchers, and academics.

relations are not against relations with other countries, but rather are complementary to a new order. "Amid all these sanctions and pressures, there is one principle whose continuity we are certain of, and that principle is the friendship between Iran and China," Khatibzadeh said.

Chinese Ambassador to Tehran Cong Peiwu also addressed the ceremony, saying, relations between Iran and China have followed a healthy and stable course since their establishment more than five decades ago despite experiencing complex developments.

"Since the establishment of diplomatic relations, ties between China and Iran have undergone complex developments, yet they have consistently remained on a healthy and stable trajectory — one that has brought significant benefits to the peoples of both countries and has played an important role in promoting peace and stability in the region," he said.

Cong added that at a time when the international environment is increasingly marked by instability and the rise of unilateralism, the importance of strong Iran-China relations has

Gov't raises fuel prices for heavy users to curb consumption



Drivers refuel their vehicles at a gas station in Tehran, Iran, on December 13, 2025.

● ATTA KENARE/AFP

hicles were stationed nearby at times, but there were no long lines at the pumps or other visible problems.

Even at that new rate, Iranian gasoline prices remain among the lowest in the world.

The difference between the cost of production and delivering the fuel and the price at the pump is the subsidy paid by Iran's government. The Paris-based International Energy Agency (IEA) ranked Iran as paying the world's second-highest energy subsidy costs in 2022, behind only Russia. The IEA put Iran's oil subsidies at \$52 billion that year, with Iranian officials acknowledging tens of billions of dollars a year go toward artificially keeping energy prices low.

Critics say every single 10,000-rial increase in gasoline prices will lead to as much as a 5% increase in inflation. Currently, the nation is struggling with an annual inflation rate of some 40%. But cheap gas provides an opportunity for employment for the country. There are 25 million vehicles, including 3 million public and government-affiliated cars, as well as 6 million motorbikes in Iran. Reportedly, more than 8 million Iranians work as taxi drivers through online platforms, nearly 10% of the population.

"It is a start for amending the trend of fuel consumption," Oil Minister Mohsen Paknejad earlier told journalists.

Since taking office in July 2024, Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian has repeatedly called for increase in gasoline price.

National Desk

The Iranian government introduced a new pricing tier for the nationally subsidized gasoline on Saturday as part of an organized push to rein in rising fuel demand and smuggling. The price adjustment was implemented in the wee hours of Saturday, under which most vehicles except ambulances must purchase fuel at a higher rate of 50,000 rials per liter (4 US cents under the free-market rate), according to government spokesperson Fatemeh Mohajerani speaking on state TV.

The higher rate will target consumers requiring more than 160 liters per month.

Other drivers can still buy up to 60 liters at 15,000 rials per liter and an additional 100 liters at 30,000 rials per liter.

Mohajerani said the increase aims to control fuel consumption and combat smuggling.

This is the first price hike since 2019 when such a move sparked nationwide protests during which over 200 people were reportedly killed. At four gas stations in northern Tehran on Saturday morning, drivers seemed relaxed as they refueled in clear, cold weather. Single police ve-

Elite dialogue forum ...

Today, China has effectively become a massive battery to which many countries are connecting themselves, drawing energy and momentum from its strengths across various sectors. Given the substantial capacities and mutual willingness for friendly cooperation between Iran and China, the two countries cannot only push back against Western pressure but also develop bilateral and multilateral cooperation in science and technology, thereby breaking the monopoly long held by Western states. This approach also aligns with one of the core policies of the People's Republic of China.

How is Iran's role defined within China's Belt and Road Initiative, and what advantages does it bring to Iran's geopolitical position in the region?

Chinese policymakers are fully aware that

the initiatives they have proposed would be largely meaningless without Iran. China's four major initiatives, namely the Global Security Initiative, the Global Development Initiative, the Global Civilization Initiative, and the recently introduced Global Governance Initiative, all intersect geopolitically with Iran.

Chinese officials recognize that when discussing global development, it is impossible to overlook a country that possesses vast oil and gas resources, major economic potential, control over the Strait of Hormuz, access to the Persian Gulf and the Caspian Sea, and a critical geopolitical position.

In the security domain, China acknowledges Iran's central role in West Asia, its influence in neighboring countries, and its constructive contribution to regional stability. These factors cannot simply be set aside. In terms of civilization, China recognizes Iran as a global civilization. In Chinese text-

books and among the general public alike, the name "Persia" and Persian civilization are often more familiar than the modern name Iran.

Finally, in the realm of governance, the Islamic Republic has articulated its own critique of the existing global order, a perspective that overlaps significantly with China's views in several areas.

All of China's proposed initiatives therefore present Iran not only as a key participant but also as a country that stands to benefit substantially. This, however, requires a precise understanding of these initiatives and the formulation of complementary proposals aligned with Iran's national interests and development priorities. It is hoped that Iranian policymakers, with a clear grasp of China's positions and strategic frameworks, will be able to map out long-term plans that align Chinese initiatives with Iran's national interests.



Mohammad Ali Rajabi
Cartoonist

CARTOON



Iran-Kyrgyzstan chamber urges faster services exports to avoid market loss

By Sadeq Dehqan
Staff writer

INTERVIEW

Kazem Shirdel, head of the Iran-Kyrgyzstan Joint Chamber of Commerce, said in remarks to Iran Daily that the Islamic Republic needs to swiftly activate its technical and engineering services in Kyrgyzstan to avoid losing market share to rivals such as China and Turkey. Shirdel said Kyrgyzstan's construction and industrial sectors are expanding and require technical and engineering services, creating an opportunity for Iranian companies. Providing such services would also secure the supply of raw materials, specialists and after-sales services from Iran and help establish the production of Iranian goods in Kyrgyzstan, he said. However, he warned that delays in exporting engineering services could see the Kyrgyz market ceded to China, Turkey and other competitors, noting that Chinese machinery suppliers typically source their raw materials from China as well. "Activating technical and engineering services is therefore a vital opportunity," Shirdel said. He added that Iran has the potential to export construction materials, food products, detergents and medical goods to Kyrgyzstan. One of the main priorities, he said, is the export of technical and engineering services, a process that has already begun, with expectations that Iranian engineering associations will become active in the country and deliver tangible results.

Shirdel said expanding trade cooperation with Kyrgyzstan would open significant opportunities for exporting Iranian goods to other members of the Eurasian Economic Union and Central Asia under preferential tariffs. With both countries members of the Eurasian Economic Union, Iran can benefit from zero and 5% tariffs on agreed goods, he said. A full free trade agreement between Iran and the Eurasian Economic Union, in force since May 15, 2025, allows most goods traded between Iran and EAEU members to enter with zero tariffs. Despite its small population, Kyrgyzstan has a favorable economic position and is a member of the World Trade Organization, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and BRICS, Shirdel said. The status allows Iranian goods to be exported onward from Kyrgyzstan to neighboring countries such as Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, with goods cleared in Kyrgyzstan at zero tariff before re-export. Direct Iranian exports to Tajikistan face a 25% tariff, he said, while exports routed through Kyrgyzstan avoid this levy, facilitating access to Eurasian markets under preferential tariffs and free trade arrangements. Before the implementation of free tariffs, trade volumes with Kyrgyzstan were limited because the country represented a relatively small market for Iran, Shirdel said. However, a recent visit by an Iranian trade delegation to Kyrgyzstan is expected to yield positive results that will



become apparent next year. The trade and economic delegation, which visited Kyrgyzstan three weeks ago, included around 48 participants from Iran, among them the governor of Khorasan Razavi Province. Twelve members were government officials and the remainder from the private sector. Shirdel said the visit led to steps to facilitate bilateral trade and was followed by positive developments in commercial exchanges. He said such visits to Central Asia should continue and called for other border provinces, including East and West

Azərbaycan, to take part in trade cooperation with Armenia and Azerbaijan to ease Iran's commercial presence in those countries. Shirdel described zero tariffs as both an opportunity and a threat. While zero tariffs could drive a surge in exports, he said the measure would depend on Iranian companies modernizing their machinery and production processes to remain competitive. He added that sanctions and banking constraints have created challenges for Iran's trade. Foreign exchange commitments of 15-16% increase final costs, while banking sanctions add an

extra 1-1.5% to money transfer costs. By contrast, competitors such as Russia and Kazakhstan do not face such constraints, underscoring the need for solutions to ease such pressures, he said.

Iran's competitive advantages

Shirdel said Iran's competitive advantages — including cheap energy, affordable labor, low transport costs and short distances — help reduce the final cost of Iranian goods and can smooth entry into regional markets. However, failure to modernize machinery raises production costs and could turn

Iran into an importer even under zero-tariff regimes, as the government cannot restrict imports due to binding Eurasian commitments. Iran's exports to Kyrgyzstan totaled about 28,000 tons worth \$47 million in the first six months of the current year, which began on March 21, marking a 7.5% rise in value from the same period a year earlier, he said. Khorasan Razavi accounted for around 75% of export volume and 81% of export value in that period. Total Iranian exports to Kyrgyzstan last year amounted to about 409,000 tons valued at roughly \$243 million, Shirdel said.

Steel intermediates rise 5.4% in eight months as finished output slips: ISPA



Economy Desk

Iran's steel sector saw gains in upstream and intermediate segments in the first eight months of the current fiscal year — spanning March 21 to November 20 — even as finished product output suffered a decline, according to data from the Iranian Steel Producers Association (ISPA). Intermediate steel output climbed 5.4% year-on-year, even as total finished steel production fell 1.1%. The increase in intermediate output was underpinned by an 8.1% rise in sponge iron production and an 8.2% expansion in iron ore concentrate output. Pelletized iron ore production remained nearly un-

changed during the period, IRNA reported. Analysts noted that milder fall temperatures in the year compared with last year helped sustain production momentum by preventing the reimposition of gas curbs on steelmakers over the past two months. The sharpest decline among finished products was recorded in steel beams, with output falling 27.4%, mainly due to operational changes in production lines at Esfahan Steel Company. Flat steel products also saw reduced output, with industry sources citing weak domestic demand, unresolved export obstacles and continued imports as key constraints.

Iran, Armenia discuss boosting power imports, completing transmission line

Economy Desk

Iran and Armenia held talks on increasing electricity imports on a sustained basis during next summer, at the fifth meeting of the Joint Committee on the Operation of Power Networks of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Republic of Armenia, held in recent days in Yerevan, IRNA reported on Saturday. Officials from the two countries' power grid operators reviewed the record of ongoing cooperation in electricity exchanges and gas-for-power swaps, as well as joint operation of transmission lines and the development and modernization of telecommunications and metering infrastructure, stressing the need to maintain and deepen bilateral cooperation. The meeting also addressed plans to raise electricity imports on a stable basis in the summer of next year, update operational protocols and strengthen technical coordination, particularly under emergency conditions. Participants reviewed programs for supplying the gas required by power plants in return for generating and



delivering electricity to Iran in the coming year, with a focus on the summer peak demand period. The two sides agreed to utilize the maximum available operational capacity to supply electricity exports to Iran from gas exported to Armenia, in order to reinforce the stability of energy exchanges between the two countries next year. Obstacles to completing the third electricity transmission line between Iran and Armenia were also outlined, with both sides emphasizing the need to accelerate follow-up actions to finalize the project. The meeting underscored the strategic importance of

energy exchanges between the two neighbors and the need to enhance operational coordination in managing their power networks, aiming to improve technical alignment and joint planning to increase and optimize the use of existing capacities. Iran and Armenia maintain extensive cooperation in electricity exchanges and gas-for-power swaps. Electrical interconnection between the two countries has been in place since 1997 through two 230-kilovolt transmission lines, while a third 400-kilovolt line in Noravan, western Armenia, is currently under construction.

The Iran-Armenia gas pipeline is also a 140-kilometer pipeline that enables Iran to export natural gas to Armenia. The pipeline's Iranian section is 100 kilometers long, stretching from Tabriz to the Armenian border, playing a significant role in energy ties between the two countries. On November 21, 2024, the Armenian government approved an energy project to construct a new 400 kV power transmission line to Iran. The project is also intended to support the development of the North-South Energy Corridor, which aims to connect the power grids of Iran, Armenia, Georgia, and Russia.

Iran 2026 horizon

Strategic imperatives for a new world order



By Navid Kamali
Strategic affairs
analyst

OPINION EXCLUSIVE

The world stands on the threshold of 2026, not in a state of stasis, but in the midst of a historic and fundamental metamorphosis. If 2025 was, as described by many Western think tanks, the terminus of the classic liberal order, 2026 will be the year in which the contours of the new order and the geopolitical coordinates of the 21st century become distinct. The rapid developments initiated by Donald Trump's return to the White House and the shift in US policy-making have passed the initial shock phase via the imposed 12-day war between Iran and the Zionist regime and are now institutionalizing into new international procedures. For the Islamic Republic of Iran, as an anchor actor in West Asia situated at the heart of strategic intersections, a precise understanding of this transition is vital. In this context, the central question is this: in a world where multilateral institutions like the United Nations have been weakened, and the logic of transactionalism has replaced value-based commitments, how must our national interests be redefined and safeguarded? In this essay, by analyzing the trends of 2025 and looking toward the 2026 horizon, I argue that to successfully navigate this historic turning point, our nation requires a transition from reactivity to smart proactivity. This must be based on a precise recognition of the internal fissures within the West and the emerging opportunities in the East, ensuring the maximal protection and advancement of our national interests.

End of traditional diplomacy's era

A glance at Western think tanks reveals that most intellectuals view 2025 as a turning point in the collapse of decades-long diplomatic norms. The Trump administration in the United States, adopting an approach that could be termed "creative destruction" or, more pessimistically, a "mafia-style" approach, has targeted the structure of international institutions. Cutting UN funding, attacking the institutional independence of bodies like the Federal Reserve, and instrumentalizing trade tariffs were merely pieces of this puzzle. For Iranian policymakers, this shift carries a clear message: the era of relying on international law or traditional diplomatic procedures is over. We face a world where naked power and short-lived quid pro quo deals reign supreme, and securing national interests through the traditional diplomacy of the foreign ministry is no longer sufficient. While this environment appears unstable and perilous, it holds unparalleled opportunities for actors like Iran, who have learned to survive under the pressure of unjust sanctions. When the US evaluates its traditional allies through the logic of money, fissures emerge that creative Iranian diplomacy can penetrate.

West Asia; from fragile cease-fire to forced peace

One of the most critical vari-

ables of 2026 will be the security situation in West Asia. Field evidence and strategic analysis indicate that the Trump administration's approach in 2025 was a contradictory mix of maximum pressure and attempts at theatrical achievements. The cease-fire in Gaza, largely a product of the Zionist regime's military deadlock and the US president's need for an achievement to secure a Nobel Peace Prize, created a new atmosphere.

It is predicted that in 2026, Washington's pressure for an honorable exit of Netanyahu from power and the prevention of a reignited full-scale war will increase. This approach stems not from humanitarianism, but from the White House's desire to focus on competition with China and reduce military costs in the Middle East.

In the interim, our country, having weathered the experience of the imposed 12-day war with the Zionist regime, has solidified its position as the main backer of the Axis of Resistance. Iran has demonstrated that no sustainable security order can be formed without Tehran's presence and consent. 2026 is the time to diplomatically capitalize on field achievements; a time when deterrence power must be translated into sustainable political and economic interests.

Failure of tariff wars, Global South's pivot

In the realm of international political economy, 2025 held major lessons that must be applied by our country in 2026. Washington's tariff policies against emerging powers like India and Brazil, under the pretext of purchasing Russian oil or domestic issues, have yielded the opposite result, pushing these nations closer to China's economic orbit. This phenomenon represents a strategic victory for the "Look to the East" discourse and non-Western multilateralism that Iran has championed for years.

Economic analysts in reputable global think tanks estimate that while the US economy saw a bubble of growth in the short term due to protectionist policies and artificial intelligence, budget deficits and inflationary pressures will surface in 2026. Conversely, the convergence of the Global South within frameworks like BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) is accelerating.

For Iran, this means a golden op-



● BARBARA GIBSON/NEW STATESMAN

portunity to complete the North-South and East-West transit corridors. The trade isolation the West sought to impose on Iran is now shattering by America's own hand through the alienation of its allies.

Europe on precipice of nationalism

Developments in 2026 on the Green Continent are also of special significance for our diplomatic apparatus. Europe stands on the verge of sweeping political changes. Polls and political trends in the UK, France, and Germany indicate a surge in right-wing and nationalist movements, often labeled as populist. The potential collapse of the government in France and the rise of anti-migration and anti-Ukraine War parties in Germany signify a weakening of EU cohesion against external pressures.

A Europe embroiled in internal crises and political divergence will have less capacity to build consensus against Iran's nuclear or regional activities. Furthermore, given Trump's transactional approach and the likelihood of abandoning Ukraine, Europe will face a major security crisis on its eastern borders, shifting its security priorities. This transatlantic rift between Europe and the US, combined with Europe's internal disarray, provides greater breath-

ing room and maneuvering space for advancing Iran's national interests.

US midterm elections

Any outlook on 2026 is incomplete without considering US domestic developments. November 2026 marks the congressional midterm elections. US political history (with the exception of 2002) shows that the ruling party typically loses seats in midterms. If Democrats regain control of the House of Representatives, the Trump administration will face serious hurdles in advancing its agenda, reducing the risk of its quasi-authoritarianism. However, the more important point for our analysts is the state of the US economy at that time. If the stock market bubble bursts or the inflationary effects of tariffs become tangible for the American public, the Republican position will falter. This state of uncertainty in Washington means that any agreement or confrontation with this administration must be calibrated considering its limited political lifespan and internal challenges. Iran must not put all its eggs in the basket of either confrontation or engagement with a sitting administration; rather, we must envision diverse scenarios for the post-2026 era and the 2028 US elections.

Artificial intelligence, digital economy

While the US races at breakneck speed to dominate the realms of artificial intelligence (AI) and crypto-assets, the global digital divide is widening. 2026 will be the year when the real impacts of AI on productivity and indeed on social control become more apparent. Our country cannot remain indifferent to this technological transformation.

Trump's transactional strategy includes attempts to monopolize supply chains for critical materials (such as rare minerals) essential for high-tech industries. Iran, with its rich mineral resources and specialized human capital, has the potential to become a key node in the global supply chain, provided that tech diplomacy is activated in parallel to political diplomacy. Neglecting this domain in 2026 could result in irreversible strategic backwardness.

Strategic recommendations

Reviewing the above, it becomes clear that 2026 is not a year of tranquility, but a year of the consolidation of new patterns in the global order. The world ahead is one where ideological alliances would fade and get replaced by ad-hoc, interest-based coalitions. The United States, despite its military and economic power, is losing its soft power and ability to build global consensus due to isolationist and tension-inducing policies.

In this framework, the Islamic Republic of Iran requires a multi-faceted approach to preserve and elevate its national interests:

1. Smart reading of the adversary: It is essential to understand that the current US administration seeks deals and spectacles of success. This insight creates tools for our diplomatic apparatus to manage security threats with minimal cost. Utilizing regional levers to manage tension, without naive trust in Washington, must be on the agenda.

2. Diversifying strategic interactions: Diversification must accelerate. Now that Brazil, India, and other middle powers are disillusioned with US policies, it is the optimal time to strengthen BRICS ties and activate economic corridors. Iran's economy must be so interwoven with emerging economies that any unilateral sanction or pressure imposes a high cost on the global economy.

3. Endogenous resilience: The 2026 US midterms and the fragility of the Western economy demonstrate that relying on external variables to solve economic problems is a strategic error. The experience of 2025 proved that nations tying their economy and security to the fluctuations of the White House suffered the most damage.

In conclusion, our country must welcome 2026 with the self-confidence born of successfully weathering hard crises. We are no longer an isolated actor, but a power with whom rivals are forced to engage to restore stability to the region. The art of policy-making in the new year will be converting stability (this inevitable need of others) into tangible national interests; a year in which revolutionary rationality and agile diplomacy will guarantee the security and development of our beloved Iran.



In the realm of international political economy, 2025 held major lessons that must be applied by our country in 2026. Washington's tariff policies against emerging powers like India and Brazil, under the pretext of purchasing Russian oil or domestic issues, have yielded the opposite result, pushing these nations closer to China's economic orbit. This phenomenon represents a strategic victory for the "Look to the East" discourse and non-Western multilateralism that Iran has championed for years.



People rally in the iconic Enghelab Square of Tehran on June 24, 2025, to celebrate Iran's victory over the US and Israel, after the imposed 12-day war ended with the latter's unilateral request for a cease-fire.

● MOHAMMADHOSEIN
MOVAHEDINEJAD/TASNIM



Nuclear chessboard

Rising tests, expanding arsenals, eroding restraint


By Manoj Joshi
Journalist, columnist
OPINION

Perhaps the most alarming development amidst the swirl of wars and crises, be it Ukraine and Russia, Gaza and Israel, Iran and Israel, India and Pakistan, Thailand and Cambodia, Ethiopia and Eritrea, and Sudan, is the reinsertion of the nuclear weapon factor in global concerns. Since the launch of its attack on Ukraine, Russia has repeatedly brandished the nuclear threat to warn off the West. More recently, Russian President Vladimir Putin boasted of successful tests of a new nuclear-powered and nuclear-armed Burevestnik missile, as well as of a nuclear-weapon-armed Poseidon underwater drone. Shortly thereafter, United States President Donald Trump announced that his country had decided to renew testing of nuclear weapons, which is a decision that could end a moratorium that has lasted over 30 years. Days later, Putin said that if the US resumed testing, Russia, too, would follow suit. The US has observed a voluntary moratorium on nuclear testing since 1992, though it has maintained the ability to resume the tests. What Trump meant by this announcement remains ambiguous. Specialists say that four different types of activities could be on the table. The first is a straightforward explosive test, which would result in a seismic yield and can be easily detected by the global network of seismic stations. The second is a super-critical test in which a self-sustaining chain reaction is created, but may not yield a seismic result. A third is a subcritical test, which is conducted routinely, in which nuclear powers ensure the reliability of their arsenals through lasers and supercomputers, such as those the US has in its National Ignition Facility and China has at its Mianyang facility. The fourth is, of course, the testing of nuclear delivery systems. The United States has accused China and Russia of conducting “supercritical” hydronuclear tests, which it argues would violate the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) because such tests involve a self-sustaining fission chain reaction and therefore constitute nuclear explosions under the treaty’s defi-



● BARBARA GIBSON/NEW STATESMAN

nition. The CTBT has been signed by 187 states and ratified by 178, but it has not entered into force because several of the 44 Annex-II states required for entry into force — including India, Pakistan, and North Korea, none of which have signed the treaty — have not completed the necessary ratification procedures.

Expanding Chinese arsenal
Nevertheless, other issues are crowding the nuclear table. Since 2020, China allegedly has more than doubled its nuclear arsenal to around 600 warheads and is adding roughly 100 warheads each year. By the beginning of 2025, China had more or less completed 350 new Intercontinental Ballistic Missile (ICBM) silos in three large fields in the northern desert part of the country and three in the mountainous areas of the east. There are nearly as many silos as in the US. The Chinese have so far not acknowledged these changes, but they have spoken of the need for a “strategic counterbalance”.

Both allies, adversaries on edge
Another issue comprises nervous allies spooked by the Trump administration’s unclear alliance policy, with a president who may now be contemplating crossing the nuclear threshold. Among these could be counted countries such as South Korea, Japan, Poland, and Germany. Iran is recovering from the destruction of its nuclear facilities and is no doubt contemplating continuing its programme.

Ukraine’s plight is bound to focus minds. The country gave up its nuclear weapons in exchange for guarantees from the five declared nuclear-weapon powers. The guarantors agreed not to use military force or coercion against countries like Ukraine, Belarus, and Kazakhstan, which surrendered their nuclear weapons in 1994 following the dissolution of the erstwhile Soviet Union. Though the US and Russia have a total inventory of over 5,000 and a deployed inventory of 1,700 nuclear weapons each, they were essentially intended to be used against each other in the event of a nuclear war. However, the US is now confronting the growth of the Chinese arsenal and deliberating whether its own arsenal is expansive enough. Concurrently, it also has to worry about new Russian delivery systems. A Congressional Commission recommended in 2023 that the US expand its nuclear arsenal because of the Chinese buildup. As of now, both Russia and the United States continue to abide by the New START Treaty, which expires in February 2026. Given the recent dismal record of arms-control agreements, there is little hope that the treaty will be renewed. China, for its part, has made clear that it is not interested in arms-control negotiations as it seeks to catch up with the nuclear capabilities of Russia and the United States.

Islamabad’s command shake-up
Yet another development bears concerns for India. This is the

passage of the 27th constitutional amendment in Pakistan, which has given exclusive control of the Pakistani nuclear arsenal to Field Marshal Asim Munir. The Nuclear Command Authority (NCA) was created in 2000, headed by the prime minister, and comprised the three service chiefs and the chairman of the Chief of Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee (CJCS). Now, the office of the CJCS has been abolished. Asim Munir is not only the army chief but also, in his new role as Chief of Defence Forces (CDF), outranks the other service chiefs and will recommend the commander to lead Pakistan’s newly created National Strategic Command, which has replaced the NCA. In essence, this arrangement concentrates the authority over nuclear use in a single unelected leader. As is well known, Pakistani nuclear weapons are “India-centric”. Islamabad has adopted a “first use” doctrine which it says caters to “full spectrum deterrence” using strategic and tactical nuclear weapons for a range of contingencies — such as the loss of significant territory in a war with India, destruction of a large portion of its land or air forces, the strangulation of its economy, or the destabilisation of the Pakistani political system.

Golden Dome gamble
At Trump’s instance, the US is working on the Golden Dome missile defence project that would include space-based sensors and attack satellites. How-

ever, specialists argue that this could actually give a fillip to a new arms race. The threat of mutual destruction has held the nuclear peace since the beginning of the nuclear age. The effort to create a shield could negate this logic as adversaries will try to circumvent or defeat the new capabilities. This could involve new and more missiles, decoys, and delivery systems, such as underwater autonomous torpedoes, much like the Poseidon.

Arms control in crisis
Earlier this month, Trump said that he was “working on a plan to denuclearize” with China, Russia, and the US. This was a passing reference, and only a few details are known. The problem is that at this stage, arms control efforts have not just ground to a halt, but there has been a steady demise of treaties once signed between the US and Russia. Trump has been speaking of nuclear talks for quite some time. In 2020, he tried and failed to launch three-way talks involving China, Russia, and the US. Shortly after becoming president, he told the World Economic Forum that vast amounts of money were being spent on the destructive capabilities of nuclear weapons, and no one wanted to talk about it. “So we want to see if we can denuclearize, and I think that’s very possible.” Russia’s immediate response was that it wanted to resume arms control talks as soon as possible. Dmitry Peskov, the Kremlin spokesman, said that such negotiations were in the interests of the world and both countries, but he added that the ball was in America’s court. However, the Chinese have been quite categorical that they will not participate in any denuclearisation efforts. The Chinese spokeswoman Mao Ning said in response to a question following Trump’s denuclearisation claim that “China’s nuclear forces are not on the same scale as those of the US and Russia; it would be unfair, unreasonable, and impractical at this stage to require China to join nuclear arms control talks.” Clearly, in the current political climate, the prospects for arms talks are dim, while momentum appears to favour forces that are stoking a new arms race.

The article was first published by the Observer Research Foundation.

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Treaty name	Status 2025	Notes
INF Treaty	Dead	Both the US and Russia withdrew in 2019
CFE Treaty	Dead	Russia withdrew (Nov 2023). North Atlantic Treaty Organization suspended its obligations
Open Skies Treaty	Dead	Both the US and Russia withdrew in 2020-21
ABM Treaty	Dead	The US withdrew in 2002
New START	Suspended (by Russia)	Russia suspended in Feb 2023, not withdrawn. But the treaty expires in February 2026
CTBT	De-ratified (Russia)	Russia did so, citing the US’s lack of ratification
Vienna Document	Dead/Not functional	Russia stopped cooperation in March 2023

▲ Status of arms control agreements as of December 02, 2025
● MANOJ JOSHI/ORF



▲ The illustration published by the largest US defense contractor, Lockheed Martin, loosely imagines how Donald Trump’s boasted Golden Dome project will operate to shield the United States from missiles via satellites shooting lasers.
● CNN

Iran named Top Greco-Roman Team of 2025

Sports Desk

Iran was named the Top Greco-Roman Team of 2025 by United World Wrestling.

The recognition came after Iran completed a clean sweep of four world team titles across all age groups over the past 12 months. A prolific international season saw Iranian Greco-Roman wrestlers medal in 29 of the 40 possible weight categories, collecting 10 golds, six silvers, and 13 bronzes.

Iran won a single gold through Amirsam Mohammadi (92kg) at July's U17 World Championships in Athens, but one silver and four bronze medals helped the country claim its fourth successive team title with 125 points – seven clear of second-placed Uzbekistan.

The Iranian Greco-Roman team again managed only one gold at the U20 World Championships in August, with lightweight prodigy Payam Ahmadi claiming the top prize in the 55kg class. Two additional silver and bronze medals apiece saw the wrestling powerhouse lift a fourth consecutive team trophy in Samokov, Bulgaria. The pinnacle of Iran's inter-



Iranian Greco-Roman wrestler Mohammad-Hadi Saravi celebrates with his coach Hassan Hosseinzadeh after winning the 97kg gold at the World Championships in Zagreb, Croatia, on September 16, 2025.

● IAWFIR

national season came at September's Senior World Championships in Zagreb, where a remarkable haul of four golds, along with two silvers and two bronzes, led Iran to only its sec-

ond team title – and first since 2014 – in the history of the competition. Reigning Olympic gold medalists Saeid Esmaili (67kg) and Mohammad-Hadi Saravi (97kg), alongside

defending champion Amin Mirzazadeh and debutant Gholamreza Farrokhi (82kg), captured gold in their respective categories. Meanwhile, Ahmadi and Alireza Mohammadi settled for silver in the 55kg

and 87kg events, respectively.

Mohammad-Mahdi Keshtkar (63kg) and Danial Sohrabi (72kg) added two bronze medals as Hassan Rangraz's 10-man squad dominated the team standings

with a record-breaking 180 points – 91 clear of runners-up Azerbaijan.

At the U23 World Championships in October in Novi Sad, Serbia, Farrokhi once again struck gold after moving up to the 87kg class, joining Iman Mohammadi (72kg) and Fardin Hedayati (130kg) atop the podium to spearhead Iran's title-winning campaign.

Sajjad Abbaspour claimed silver in the 60kg category, while Ahmadreza Mohsennejad (67kg) and Abolfazl Mohammadi (82kg) secured bronze medals, as Iran topped the team standings with 143 points and lifted its fourth Greco-Roman trophy since the competition's introduction in 2017.

Iranian Greco-Roman wrestling continued its dominance at the Asian Championships and the Islamic Solidarity Games. After winning a sixth Asian title in seven editions – courtesy of five golds and three silvers – in March, Iran capped off the international season with an emphatic showing at the Islamic Solidarity Games in November, collecting four golds, one silver, and one bronze across six divisions in Riyadh.

Iranian Wrestling Premier League:

Yazdani makes emphatic comeback but Bank Shahr wins freestyle trophy



Hassan Yazdani is pictured after his victory over Mojtaba Goleji in the Iranian Freestyle Wrestling Premier League final in Tehran on December 12, 2025.

● IAWFIR

Sports Desk

Iranian wrestling sensation Hassan Yazdani made his long-awaited return to action in dominant fashion, but his Esteghlal Juybar team fell short in the final as Bank Shahr claimed the freestyle title at the Iranian Wrestling Premier League.

A star-studded showdown – featuring top Iranian and Russian wrestlers – at a jam-packed 7th Tir Indoor Hall in Tehran saw Bank Shahr prevail 4-1 to lift its second freestyle league trophy in three years.

All eyes were on Yazdani – winner of a national-record 10 world and Olympic medals – who made his first competitive appearance in 489 days after undergoing shoulder surgery following his 86kg final defeat at last year's Paris Olympics.

Moving up to the 97kg class in a bid to win an elusive second Olympic gold at Los Angeles 2028, Yazdani began the day with a superiority win (10-0) over former U20 world champion Abolfazl Babloo during his team's 7-3 semifinal victory over Khaybar in the morning session.

Then, with his team trailing 5-3, Yazdani defeated 2021 world bronze medalist Mojtaba Goleji 4-0 in the penultimate bout of the final to give Esteghlal a lifeline.

However, super-heavyweight prodigy Amirali Ma'soumi sealed the title for Bank Shahr in the 125kg decider after Amirreza Sahraei withdrew with an injury while trailing 7-0 in the first period.

Russian Akhmed Idrisov gave Esteghlal a winning start in the final by defeating 2022 world silver medalist Reza Atri 5-1 in the 57kg bout. Bank Shahr responded through former world champion Abasgadzhi Magomedov (61kg) and Abdulmazhid Kudiev (65kg), who beat Ali Qolizadegan by technical superiority (10-0) and Payman Nemati 6-4, respectively.

Mohammad Bakhshi leveled the scoreline with a 4-3 win over Ebrahim Elahi in an all-Iranian 70kg clash, but Russian great Zaurbek Sidakov – an Olympic champion and three-time world gold medalist holder – restored Bank Shahr's lead with a commanding 7-0 victory over Amirhossein Hosseini at 74kg.

Five-time world medalist Mohammad Nokhodi edged Mohammad Sheik Azami 4-3 at 79kg to extend Bank Shahr's advantage, before Russian two-time world junior champion Ibragim Kadiev narrowed the gap with a 5-4 win over Ezzatollah Akbari at 86kg.

A controversy-laden 92kg bout saw Bank Shahr's Mohammad-Mobin Azimi – the reigning U23 world champion – defeat senior world bronze medalist Amirhossein Firouzpour 5-3.

Firouzpour appeared to have scored a dramatic last-second single-leg takedown with two seconds remaining, but a successful video challenge awarded Azimi two additional points, leaving Bank Shahr on the brink of victory.

Asian Youth Para Games:

Iran wins goalball, table tennis golds on Day 4

Sports Desk

The fourth day of competition at the Asian Youth Para Games saw Iran collect two gold medals in goalball and table tennis in Dubai on Saturday.

The Iranian women's team defeated Thailand 6-2 to win the goalball gold, improving on their silver-medal finish at the 2021 edition in Manama.

Raheleh Bakhshi, Zahra Mousavi, Saba Dehqani, Paria Dehqani, Fahimeh Deldadeh, and Mahtab Zandiyeh represented Iran, which had beaten South Korea and Thailand twice apiece in the preliminary round.

In the boys' goalball competition, Iran defeated Thailand 15-7 to claim the bronze medal.

Elsewhere, Ali Rasti and Arsham Ramezani teamed up to win gold in the boys' doubles table tennis event. The Iranian duo produced a sensa-



● IRNA

tional comeback, rallying from two games down to defeat Chinese Taipei in the final.

Saturday's triumph brought Iran's table tennis medal tally in Dubai to three golds and six bronzes.

ISF U15 World School Volleyball Championship:

Iran rallies past Chinese Taipei to defend boys' title

Sports Desk

Iran successfully defended its boys' title at the ISF U15 World School Volleyball Championship, defeating Chinese Taipei 3-1 in the final in Shangluo, China.

The Iranian boys got off to a slow start in Friday's showdown, suffer-

ing a 25-15 loss in the opening set before bouncing back to win the next three sets 25-18, 25-22, and 25-17.

Iran opened its campaign with a 2-0 victory over Nigeria in a best-of-two-sets contest, followed by a 2-1 triumph over China 2, and then saw off Saudi Arabia in straight sets

last Monday to top Pool B with seven points and advance to the quarterfinals.

A straight-sets win (25-17, 25-15) against the host nation sent Iran into the semifinals, where Arash Sadeqiani's team came from behind to beat India 3-1 (20-25, 25-15, 25-13, 25-23) to secure a place in the final. Aydian Poozesh, Farham Baqeri, Shahdad Alizadeh, Radan Salehi, Mobin Alizadeh, Amirreza Faramarzi, Parsa Maqsoodi, Arouzhan Namazi, Yazdan Abdi, Arash Asharafi, Maziar Fallah, Yassin Asadizadeh, Akam Enbrahimnejad, and Sina Hazrati represented Iran in the boys' competition in Shangluo.

In the girls' competition, meanwhile, Iran secured four successive 2-0 victories over India 1, Uganda 2, Bulgaria, and Chile to top Pool D with 12 points, but relinquished a one-set lead in a 2-1 (26-28, 25-22, 15-13) quarterfinal defeat to Brazil.



● isfsports.org

Reviving Gilan’s heritage through eco-lodges



● jajiga.com



● kojaro.com

Iranica Desk

As luxury modern villas continue to reshape the green landscapes of Gilan Province’s villages — often replacing wooden houses, thatched roofs, and porches overlooking rice fields — eco-lodges have emerged as a lifeline for rural communities. They help preserve the province’s traditional architecture, authenticity, and cultural identity. Alongside these eco-lodges, the women of Gilan Province play a central role in keeping local culture alive, from preparing traditional dishes to weaving garments and scarves, basketry, and handicrafts. Many village men, once forced to migrate to cities in search of work, have also returned to their land, finding new livelihoods through the revival of these rural spaces, according to chtn.ir. Today, eco-lodges serve as one of the most important gateways to Gilan’s culture. For visitors, they are far more than overnight accommodations — they are immersive worlds filled with vibrant colors, local garments, old melodies, grandmotherly tales,

and the everyday rhythms of village life. Hosts, too, are more than property owners; they are storytellers and guardians of Gilan’s identity and heritage. Guests often describe the rare calm they rediscover here — a peace long lost in the noise of urban life. Mornings begin with the crow of a rooster, the aroma of steaming rice in copper pots, the bright clothing of Gilan’s women, and the calloused hands of men who still cherish their land and homes. Ahmad Pourmohammad, who runs an eco-lodge with his wife in one of Gilan’s lush villages, describes the lodge as a “small museum of authentic Gilan culture.” The traditional structure and old tools displayed in every corner, he said, represent fragments of the region’s identity. “As much as we can, we introduce visitors to our culture, traditions, dialects, and local cuisine,” he explained. “It’s always warmly received and gives guests a joyful, memorable experience.” He noted that eco-lodges have had a direct impact on rural development. “After these units were built, shops, bakeries,



● kojaro.com

restaurants, and service businesses increased in the villages. Eco-lodges have, in a sense, expanded people’s livelihoods — and even raised property values.” Yet he also pointed to bureaucratic challenges, “This place took three years to complete instead of one. Various craftsmen halted the work at different stages. The next phase of the lodge is fully designed and permitted, but a single expert’s objection has stalled it. We hope this issue is resolved soon.” Another lodge manager, Samareh Maleki, said she designed the surrounding grounds to preserve the natural forest environment. The building itself

is inspired by a historic merchant’s house displayed at the Rural Heritage Museum. She highlighted one of the lodge’s most striking features: a collection of wooden chests beneath the structure — replicas of those once made by skilled Tabrizi carpenters who traveled to Gilan in winter to craft sturdy, moisture-resistant chests that kept clothing fresh. Throughout the lodge, old tools such as farming implements, spinning wheels, stone mills, and cradles are displayed to showcase the hard work of past generations. Pointing to a worrying trend, Maleki said, “Many villagers continue to migrate to the city. But

eco-lodges have helped curb this movement by creating jobs, reviving local economies, and preserving traditional Gilan architecture. They provide employment for young people and women while giving visitors — Iranians and foreigners alike — a firsthand introduction to Gilan’s authenticity and hospitality.” She explained that the three-story lodge incorporates architectural elements rooted in regional history. The ground-floor windows are restored versions of old Rasht shopfronts; the second floor features a “Gholamgard,” a circular corridor once used by servants to deliver food discreetly to formal dining areas. Maleki also underscored the climatic wisdom of traditional Gilan architecture. Homes were designed to withstand the seasonal winds known as Gileh-va, with deep roof overhangs that cooled the house in summer and blocked cold winds in winter. Roofs were covered with rice stalks that provided insulation. Families spent summer evenings on the raised veranda, cooled naturally by the breeze long before air-conditioning existed. “This shows how intelligent and

environmentally efficient Gilan’s traditional architecture truly was,” she said. She noted that eco-lodges have transformed local attitudes. “Before they became common, many villagers were eager to sell their homes and move to the city. But when they saw tourists arriving in expensive cars and paying to spend even one night in these traditional houses, they realized the value of what they already had.” For Maleki and her husband, an eco-lodge is not just a source of income — it is a classroom for rediscovering the meaning of life. “We try to share a few key lessons with our guests,” she said. “First, not to take life so hard. Behind every challenge, there is always a God who sees and helps. Everyone may struggle, but what matters is standing up again and letting go of the past.” She concluded by emphasizing the central role of women, “A woman is powerful enough that if she shows even ten percent of her real confidence, she can be an exceptional leader. We must believe in ourselves and trust in God.”

Local cuisine reflects deep cultural roots in Boshruyeh

Iranica Desk

Food, culinary traditions, and related fields such as sweets and desserts are among the most essential cultural assets of any geographical region. This culinary sphere may be exclusive to a specific area or shared with neighboring communities, and today, local and traditional cuisine has become one of the key pillars of tourism. In a written note published by chtn.ir, Seyyed Amir Soleymani Robati, head of the Bashruyeh’s Department of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts, stated that the diversity of traditional dishes typically reflects the historical depth of a region’s culture. Therefore, when we encounter a wide range of foods and their derivatives in a historic city, the origins of this richness must be sought in centuries of cultural development. According to Soleymani, generations of people have con-



tributed to the cultural growth of Bashruyeh, South Khorasan Province. Over time — shaped by human experience, interaction with other regions, and cultural influences across fields such as art, economy, science, and architecture — local residents have applied their

utmost skill to their culinary practices. Throughout the centuries, they defined their food culture thoughtfully and creatively by considering seasonal eating patterns, balancing flavors through various condiments, using local desserts to achieve dietary



● ir-handicrafts.ir

moderation, and even integrating elements of traditional medicine into their cuisine. Ethnographic studies have identified more than 40 local dishes, over 10 native desserts, and more than 10 traditional sweets in Bashruyeh. Fortunately, with the recent growth

of tourism and renewed attention to local culture, many of these foods have returned to dining tables. Documenting their preparation methods has also helped prevent them from falling into obscurity. What stands out most — and even evokes astonishment — is

the remarkable culinary diversity of Bashruyeh in comparison to its population during the later Islamic period. Historical accounts indicate that in the Qajar era, the city had no more than 3,000 to 4,000 inhabitants. Given this modest population, Bashruyeh cannot be compared to major Islamic cities such as Yazd, Isfahan, or Kerman. Among the most important traditional dishes of Bashruyeh are various types of Eshkeneh (broth-based stews), Qormeh sabzi, Nokhod-Ab (chickpea broth), different kinds of Abgoosht (Persian meat-and-bean stew), Kachi, a variety of soups (Aash), and several types of local bread. What factors, then, enabled a small city located in a hot and arid region to gain distinction in scientific, architectural, artistic, and other fields during its peak from the Safavid to the Qajar periods? Soleymani concluded that the answer lies in the ingenuity and creativity of its people.



Tehran, Astana seal film cooperation deal

Arts & Culture Desk

Iran and Kazakhstan signed a bilateral agreement on film cooperation on December 11, during an official visit by Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian aimed at widening economic and cultural ties between the two countries. The memorandum of understanding, signed in the Kazakh capital by Iranian Culture and Islamic Guidance Minister Abbas Salehi and Minister of Culture and Information of Kazakhstan Aida Balayeva, was concluded on the sidelines of high-level talks attended by Pezeshkian and Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, IRNA reported.

The agreement sets out a framework for joint production of feature films, documentaries, short films and animation, with an emphasis on shared historical and cultural narratives. It also provides for the exchange of films in regional and international markets and removes procedural hur-

dles for the use of locations, studios and technical facilities in both countries. Officials involved in the talks described the deal as a practical step to move cultural cooperation from general exchanges to project-based collaboration, linking producers, film institutions and training bodies on both sides. The MoU also opens the door to academic and professional mobility, including exchanges of lecturers and students, joint training courses and the deployment of specialist crews on co-produced projects. Filmmakers from each country will receive reciprocal invitations to festivals and industry events, while joint Iran-Kazakhstan film weeks are planned to raise the profile of national cinema in both markets. The cinema agreement builds on a broader cultural cooperation program signed in June 2022, when Tehran and Astana concluded a set of bilateral memoranda during a presidential



Iranian Culture and Islamic Guidance Minister Abbas Salehi (L) and his Kazakh counterpart Aida Balayeva exchange a film cooperation agreement in Astana on December 13, 2026, during Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian's official visit.

● IRNA

summit, laying the groundwork for sustained exchanges in culture and the arts. The cinema accord forms part of a broader package of bilateral agreements signed during Pezeshkian's visit, spanning transport, trade facilitation, media and cultural cooperation, as Tehran and Astana look to lock in closer ties more than three decades after establishing diplomatic relations. By anchoring cooperation in concrete production and training mechanisms, the two governments aim to translate political goodwill into bankable projects, giving filmmakers access to new locations, audiences and financing structures.



Kazakhstan opens first-ever display of Persian manuscripts on Kazakh khanates



Arts & Culture Desk

Kazakhstan opened an exhibition on Friday displaying, for the first time, 27 rare Persian-language manuscripts on the Kazakh khanates, the semi-independent states ruled by local khans in 18th- and 19th-century Central Asia. The exhibition, titled 'History of the Great Steppe in Iranian Sources,' opened at the National Museum of the Republic of Kazakhstan in the Central Asian capital

Astana, IRNA reported, citing the Kazakh Ministry of Culture and Information. It centers on Persian archival materials that shed light on the political, social and economic life of the Kazakh khanates in the 18th and 19th centuries. According to the Kazakh ministry, the manuscripts, displayed publicly for the first time, trace key episodes in the evolution of territories that make up present-day Kazakhstan. The texts include official

correspondence, historical accounts and administrative records written in classical Persian, a diplomatic and scholarly language widely used across the region at the time. Several manuscripts focus on the internal socio-economic structure of the Kazakh khanates, while others document diplomatic contacts between Kazakh rulers, including Tauke Khan and Abulkhair Khan, and the royal courts of Iran. The records also provide contemporary accounts of political conditions in Turkestan, a historic cross-roads of trade and power in Central Asia. The documents go beyond court politics. Some manuscripts detail early surveys and exploitation of natural resources across the steppe, including coal, iron, copper, lead and turquoise, offer-

ing rare written evidence of mining activity and resource management in the region centuries ago. Kazakh officials described the exhibition as part of broader efforts to recover and reintroduce written sources on the Great Steppe preserved outside the country. The National Museum said the display underscores the role of Persian as a transregional language of governance and historiography, linking Iran and Central Asia through shared archival heritage. The manuscripts were selected for their historical scope and clarity and that the exhibition aims to make specialized archival material accessible to the general public for the first time, while also serving as a reference point for researchers of Central Asian and Iranian history.

Iran, India to form joint working group to boost cultural heritage cooperation

Arts & Culture Desk

Iran and India agreed to establish a joint working group to expand bilateral cooperation in cultural heritage, following a meeting between Ali Darabi, Iran's Deputy Minister for Cultural Heritage, and Vivek Agarwal, India's Deputy Minister of Culture, in New Delhi. The meeting, attended by Mohammad Fath'ali, Iran's ambassador to India, took place on the sidelines of the 20th session of UNESCO's Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, which is hosting global delegates in the Indian capital. Darabi and Agarwal reached consensus on forming a joint working group to coordinate practical cooperation, with a particular focus on restoration and protection of historic sites. Darabi described the initiative as a step toward "deep-

ening shared expertise and safeguarding our common heritage." Both sides outlined plans for specialized workshops to exchange technical knowledge in conservation. Discussions also covered reciprocal museum exhibitions, including a showcase of Iranian artefacts in India and Indian artefacts in Iran, aimed at broadening public access to each nation's heritage. Officials further agreed to explore joint nominations for inscription on UNESCO's World Heritage List. Darabi noted that the collaboration would underscore "shared civilizational bonds" and formalize recognition of historical and cultural connections between the two countries. The agreement builds on long-standing cultural ties. In previous exchanges, India's ambassador to Iran highlighted Persia as one of the world's oldest civilizations and advo-

cated for richer engagement through museum programs and cultural festivals reflecting millennia of shared history. The creation of the working group institutionalizes these efforts, providing a structured framework for curator training, joint conservation projects, and coordinated protection of intangible cultural elements. Iranian heritage authorities are seeking to convert diplomatic goodwill into concrete programs that strengthen technical expertise and public outreach. The New Delhi session has been significant for Iran's heritage diplomacy. During the meeting, Persian mirror-work, or Ayeneh-Kari, was inscribed on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. The traditional art involves decorating architectural surfaces with cut and shaped mirrors arranged in geometric or organic patterns to reflect light.

'Mould' wins top Asian talent prize at Baku festival

Arts & Culture Desk

Iranian short film 'Mould,' written and directed by Mohammadreza Nourmandipour, clinched the Best Film Award in the Asian Talents Competition at the 16th Baku International Film Festival in the Azerbaijani capital. The prize was announced on December 9 at the close of the festival, which ran from December 5 to 9 in Baku and drew submissions from more than 1,500 films worldwide, IRNA reported. 'Mould' was produced by Nourmandipour alongside Leila Haghani. The jury singled out the Iranian entry for what it described as its "precise storytelling" and restrained visual language, elevating it



above regional competitors in the Asian Talents section, a competitive strand dedicated to emerging filmmakers across the continent. Founded in 2004 by Azerbaijan's Young Filmmakers Centre, the Baku International Film Festival, previously known as START

International Short Film Festival, has steadily carved out a place on the regional circuit. Backed by Azerbaijan's Ministry of Culture and the Azerbaijan Film Agency, the event has increasingly positioned itself as a launchpad for films that later surface

at major global showcases, including Cannes, Venice and Berlin. Earlier this year, the film took the Best International Short Film Award at the 20th Shorts Mexico Film Festival in Mexico City. The film has also secured competition slots at Curtas Vila do Conde in Portugal, the Brussels Short Film Festival in Belgium, the ZOOM International Short Film Festival in Poland and the Fresno International Short Film Festival in the United States. The 15-minute drama centers on a father grappling with loss after the death of his wife and attempting to raise his young son "on his own terms," a narrative that unfolds through sparse dialogue and controlled performances.

Persian director Abbasi named jury member at two festivals in South Africa, India

Arts & Culture Desk

Tehran-based filmmaker Maysam Abbasi was appointed to serve on the juries of two international film festivals taking place



in South Africa and India, reinforcing Iranian cinema's footprint on the global stage. Abbasi, a writer, producer and director of theatre and film, will judge entries at the International Tourism Film Festival Africa in Johannesburg from June 2 to 5, 2026, and the Asian Talent International Film Festival in Ahmednagar, Maharashtra from December 18 to 20, the Mehr News Agency reported. At the South African event, now in its sixth edition, Abbasi will evaluate documentaries and tourism-themed films that spotlight travel narratives and cultural heritage. The Indian festival in

Ahmednagar, marking its fourth edition in October, brings together feature and short films from across Asia, offering emerging talents a showcase for innovative cinematic voices. "I see festivals as bridges," Abbasi said. "Cinema connects cultures and opens doors for creative exchange." His films and theatrical projects have previously drawn attention on the domestic festival circuit and at regional showcases. The International Tourism Film Festival Africa aims to elevate narratives that fuse travel content with cinematic craft, while the Asian Talent International Film Festival spotlights new voices in Asian filmmaking.