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Envoys from Afghanistan's neighboring countries and Russia, including Iran's Mohammad Reza Bahrani (c), pose for a group photo during a gathering in Tehran, Iran to discuss developments in Afghanistan on December 14, 2025.

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# Tehran meeting offers chance to ease Afghanistan tensions

By Delaram Ahmadi  
Staff writer

INTERVIEW



Seeking solutions for Afghanistan has been one of the top priorities of neighboring states and even Western governments over at least the

past two decades. Security, terrorism, migration, narcotics, and the economy have formed the backbone of regional meetings, policy exchanges, and cooperative initiatives. Yet sharp disagreements persist among regional players, Afghanistan's neighbors, and Western countries over the nature of governance in Afghanistan and how to engage with the current authorities in Kabul. These divergences, coupled with a prevailing security-centric approach,

have made it difficult to arrive at a workable framework for addressing Afghanistan-related challenges. The latest gathering of Afghanistan's neighboring countries was held on Sunday in Tehran, hosted by Iran and attended by special envoys from Pakistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, China, and Russia, though notably without Afghan representatives. The talks have resumed after a two-year hiatus, at a time when, in addition to long-standing challenges, rising tensions between Afghanistan and Pakistan have triggered fresh concerns. The key question is whether this renewed dialogue format can deliver tangible results or whether it will, like previous platforms, fizzle out without outcomes.

In an interview with Iran Daily, Afghan affairs analyst Abdol-Mohammad Taheri said the Tehran meeting could help resolve not only existing tensions but also Iran's own problems with Afghanistan, provided that the Taliban seize the opportunity with

strategic foresight.

IRAN DAILY: What explains the revival of talks on Afghanistan after this hiatus? Is the Tehran meeting a reaction to recent developments in Afghanistan-Pakistan relations, or part of a longer-term regional strategy?

TAHERI: Afghanistan constitutes one piece of a broader puzzle that inevitably shapes today's world. It has long been argued that the more Afghanistan and its people are neglected, the more the surrounding environment—first the region and eventually more distant countries—will bear the costs, until, in line with the “butterfly effect,” the entire world is affected. Although Afghanistan may at first glance appear to be a small country, a kind of geopolitical bottleneck with hundreds of ethnic groups and cultures, it cannot be ignored.

The reactivation of this mechanism reflects growing sensitivities across the world. There is now a shared realization that Afghanistan cannot simply be left to

its own devices. Abandoning Afghanistan would amount to creating a safe haven for dangerous groups, beyond any form of international oversight.

Against the backdrop of disputes between Pakistan and India, tensions between Pakistan and Afghanistan, pressures exerted on Iran by US imperialism and Israel, and broader upheavals across the Middle East—particularly West Asia—countries with shared borders, cultures, languages, and ideological affinities have had little choice but to step up engagement with Afghanistan through any mechanism that serves their national interests. Closer engagement with Afghanistan's center of gravity ultimately benefits all, because abandoning the country would once again turn it into a sanctuary for opposition groups, terrorists, and entrenched conflicts that have plagued the region for decades.

Over the past two decades, addressing Afghanistan's problems has been a core item on the agenda of neighbor-

ing and Western countries alike, leading to numerous meetings in various formats. Why have so many initiatives failed to yield tangible results?

Afghanistan's conditions have always been exceptional. Over the past half-century, power has changed hands repeatedly among groups with vastly different ideologies—from leftist movements to the Parcham and Khalq parties, factions aligned with Moscow or Washington, the Soviet military intervention, and later the post-9/11 era. As a result, Afghanistan has consistently served as a bargaining chip rather than enjoying sustained stability.

Looking solely at the past 30 years, Afghanistan has changed hands four, five, or even six times. Any assessment must begin with this reality. The lack of concrete outcomes stems largely from Afghanistan's perpetually extraordinary circumstances. It cannot be evaluated in the same way as other countries and then judged accordingly.

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# Iran rejects 'transregional solutions' for stability in Afghanistan

## International Desk

Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said on Sunday that "transregional solutions" could not lead to stability in Afghanistan, as the country hosted a Meeting of the Special Representatives of Afghanistan's Neighboring Countries Plus Russia in Tehran.

Araghchi told envoys from Pakistan, Uzbekistan, China, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Russia that "regional solutions" would have greater capacity to bring about sustainable development and security in Afghanistan. Referring to nearly two decades of NATO's presence in Afghanistan, the top Iranian diplomat said that developments in the region over the past few years had shown that external

approaches would neither lead to stability nor guarantee sustainable development.

"Today, more than ever, we need a coordinated framework and regional cooperation on Afghanistan, and regional cooperation is the foundation for stability and prosperity in Afghanistan," he said.

The Iranian minister said Afghanistan had immense capacities in the economic, human, transit, and natural areas and its geographical position put it at the center of the transportation networks of Central Asia, West Asia, and South Asia.

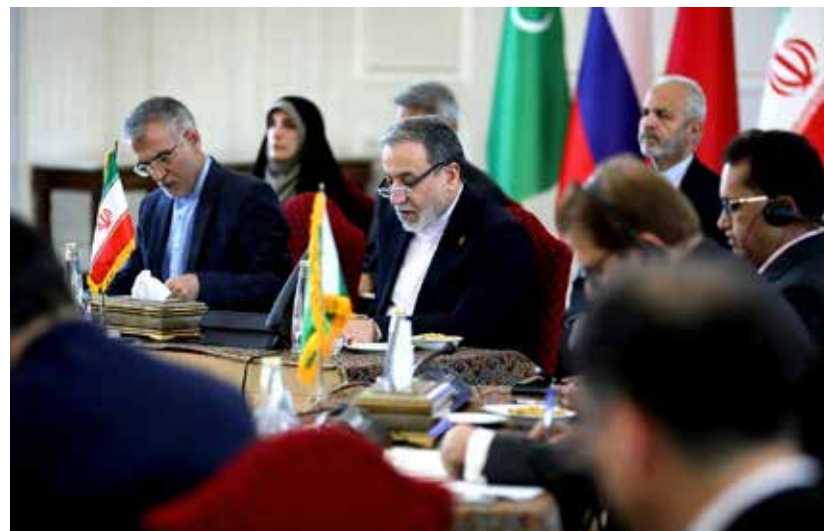
"Therefore, Afghanistan's stability and development are not only a humanitarian necessity but also a strategic imperative for the entire region," he added.



Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi (2nd L) speaks at the Meeting of the Special Representatives of Afghanistan's Neighboring Countries Plus Russia in Tehran on December 14, 2025.

● MIZAN

Araghchi noted that the experience of past decades clearly showed that security, development, and prosperity in Afghanistan were directly tied up with the interests of all neighboring countries, saying that Iran had always emphasized the comprehensive integration of Afghanistan into the region. He also called for setting up a sustainable framework for regional cooperation on Afghanistan, that he said would be beneficial for both the country and the entire region.



## FM spox rejects US claims about seized Venezuelan tanker

'US action is a true example of piracy and armed robbery at sea'

### International Desk

Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman on Sunday rejected as "baseless" the US claim that a seized Venezuelan tanker in the Caribbean is used to transfer oil for the Islamic Republic.

US President Donald Trump announced Wednesday that the US had detained an oil tanker off the coast of Venezuela. The tanker was seized for allegedly being used to transport sanctioned oil from Venezuela and Iran, according to Attorney General Pam Bondi. White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt on Thursday said the Department of Justice requested and was approved for a warrant to seize the vessel.

Spokesman Ismaeil Baqaei said the United States always "invents pretexts" for its illegal actions at the international level, adding that the US action against the Venezuelan oil tanker has no basis or legitima-



Ismaeil Baqaei  
● IRNA

cy in international law and is merely an "institutionalized bullying" at the international level. "The fact that you refer to domestic laws to commit an international crime does not in any way legitimize that action. The US action is a true example of piracy and armed robbery at sea."

He warned about the consequences of such measures, saying that if such violations become normal, all countries and the entire international community will suffer. The Iranian official called on the inter-

national community to condemn the US action. Moreover, the spokesman rejected claims about Iran's interference in Venezuela's affairs as "utterly irrelevant."

He also highlighted the US's long history of carrying out coups and changing national governments in Latin America.

As an independent and sovereign nation, Venezuela has the right to decide on its foreign relations and engage with the states that act toward it in accordance with mutual respect and reciprocal interests,

Baqaei emphasized.

"The party that must be held accountable is the one that insists on violating the right of the Venezuelan people to self-determination and seeks to impose its views on the independent countries of the Western Hemisphere and Latin America."

The United States has stepped up coercive pressure on Venezuela by deploying military forces to the Caribbean under the pretext of an "anti-drug trafficking" operation.

Since September, US forces have carried out a series of deadly attacks on alleged drug boats, leaving more than 80 people dead.

Venezuelan authorities warn that the campaign is a thinly veiled act of aggression aimed at destabilizing the government, warning that Washington's real objective is "regime change" and the eventual seizure of the country's vast oil resources.

## Judiciary faults US sacking of Iranian professor over support for Palestine

### International Desk

Iran's Judiciary rebuked on Sunday the dismissal of an Iranian professor at Arkansas University over support for the Islamic Republic and Palestine as yet another clear example of the violation of human rights by the US government.

"The firing of this Iranian professor from the university for defending the oppressed people of Palestine is another disgrace for United States in violating human rights," said Nasser Seraj, the deputy for the Iranian Judiciary's International Affairs and secretary of the Human Rights Headquarters.

"The removal and dismissal of Iranian professors and those who oppose the crimes of the genocidal and child-killing Zionist regime in Western universities shows that what is promoted in the West under the guise of freedom of expression and academic space is more just a show and anti-human rights cover rather than reality."

Seraj underlined that, "Such examples in the West show that freedom of expression and democracy are nothing but all talks, and anything that contradicts their demands, even at the scientific or civic level, is met with restrictions and expulsion."

The University of Arkansas fired Shirin Saeidi from her position as director of the Middle Eastern Studies department over her social media posts in solidarity with Iran and Palestine.

Speaking to The New York Post newspaper on Friday, a spokesman for the University of Arkansas announced Saeidi's suspension, adding, however, that she still retains her position as a political sci-



Shirin Saeidi

ence professor at the school.

The measure, which raises serious concerns about academic free speech, came after the university came under pressure from anti-Iran figures and the Zionist lobby.

In several X posts in November, the professor praised Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei and offered prayers for his safety.

She also hailed Ayatollah Khamenei as "the leader who kept Iran intact during the Israeli attack," referring to the illegal US-backed aggression against the country in June.

In separate posts on X, she condemned Israel as a "terrorist" and a "genocidal" regime.

Mike Huckabee, the US ambassador to the Israeli regime, has attacked Saeidi for her pro-Palestine stance, claiming the professor "would probably be better suited to being given a one-way ticket to Tehran."

In March, an Iranian scholar at Yale Law School was fired for her outspoken criticism of Israel's genocidal war on the besieged Gaza Strip.

Helyeh Doutaghi condemned the move as a normalization of "fascistic governance" at top universities in the US.

## Tehran condemns 'violent attack' on Sydney Jewish festival

### International Desk

The Iranian Foreign Ministry on Sunday censured a "violent attack" in Sydney that targeted a Jewish celebration and claimed at least 11 lives as well as injuring more than two dozen others.

"We condemn the violent attack in Sydney, Australia. Terror and killing of human beings, wherever committed, is rejected and condemned," Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baqaei said on X.

Two gunmen shot and killed 11 people and wounded 29 others at Sydney's Bondi Beach on Sunday in a "terrorist" attack on a gathering for the Jewish festival of Hanukkah. Emergency responders rushed at least 29 people to local hospitals from the beach, one of the biggest



tourist attractions in Australia's largest city, said New South Wales police. One of the alleged shooters was killed, and the second was in a critical condition, they added.

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese hailed ordinary citizens who tackled and disarmed one of the gunmen as "heroes."

Police declared the shooting a "terrorist incident" and said they had found suspected "improvised ex-



Emergency workers transport a person on a stretcher after a shooting at Bondi Beach in Sydney, Australia, on Dec. 14, 2025.

● MARK BAKER/AP

plosive devices" in a vehicle near the beach that was linked to the deceased suspect.

"An attack on Jewish Australians is an attack on every Australian," Albanese said.

The shooting took place during an annual "Hanukkah by the Sea" event at Bondi Beach which police said was attended by over a thousand people.

As gunfire erupted, crowds fled in fear from the beach in eastern Sydney, which draws huge numbers of surfers, swimmers and tourists, especially at weekends.



Mohammad Ali Rajabi  
Cartoonist

### CARTOON





# RAI signs investment deals to boost freight capacity, private-sector role

Economy Desk

Iran's state railway company signed two memoranda of understanding and three investment and operational contracts on Sunday aimed at expanding rail freight capacity, upgrading logistics infrastructure, modernizing its rolling stock, and strengthening private-sector participation in the sector.

The agreements were finalized during a signing ceremony held at the headquarters of the Islamic Republic of Iran Railways (RAI) in Tehran, where senior transport officials and private investors gathered to mark a renewed push toward rail-based transit and logistics development, IRIB reported.

Noorollah Biranvand, the deputy for capital provision and transport economics at RAI, said the state railway company had inked "two memoranda of understanding and three strategic contracts with active private-sector companies," including the purchase of 200 freight locomotives as part of its ongoing development agenda to reinforce the role of rail in the country's freight movement.

According to RAI, the implementation of the deals aligns with national objectives that prioritize rail transport, increase the railway's share in domestic freight, reduce fuel consumption and air pollution, lower road accident rates, expand international

rail transit, and bolster domestic manufacturing.

Minister of Roads and Urban Development Farzaneh Sadeq Malvajerd, speaking at the same event during the signing of the private-sector investment memorandum for the Aprin Dry Port and rail fleet, emphasized the urgency of "completing missing links in the country's rail corridors." The minister identified locomotive shortages as "one of the industry's serious challenges" and reiterated the government's full support for private investment in the rail sector.

"Investing in rail opens a path to transformative development that can reshape the country's transport future," Sadeq Malvajerd said, adding, "The future of the rail industry is brighter than ever, and the government's policy is to act as an enabler and provide effective support for private-sector presence — a shift already yielding visible results."

She criticized the marginal role of the private sector in rail development in past years and stated, "The government of President Masoud Pezeshkian, by changing its approach to the rail sector, has placed practical and targeted support for investors at the top of its agenda."

Following the minister's remarks, RAI CEO Mohsen Zakeri outlined the company's development-focused strategy, noting that Iran's total transit volume, including both



Iran's Minister of Roads and Urban Development Farzaneh Sadeq Malvajerd (c) speaks at the headquarters of the RAI in Tehran, where two memoranda of understanding and three investment and operational contracts were signed on December 14, 2025.

● [mrud.ir](#)

road and rail, has reached approximately 20 million metric tons.

He announced new incentives for investors and cargo owners in the rail sector, saying, "Fresh attractiveness measures have been introduced to enable the sector to play a more prominent role in the country's transit chain."

Tehran hosting int'l transport, logistics exhibition

The rail developments coincided with the opening of the 9th International Exhibition of Transport, Logistics and Related Industries in Tehran on Sunday, which the road minister also attended.

At the exhibition, she highlighted technological advancement as a central theme, "One of the most significant developments we are witnessing at this exhibition is the advancement of new technologies and smart solutions."

She added that Iran is pursuing "national and international transport cooperation



based on economic diplomacy and investment attraction," and stressed, "Transport — and the discourse around it — is a pillar of economic diplomacy, particularly in our engagement with neighboring countries, and is of great importance to us."

According to IRNA, the exhibition's core focus is on building an integrated transport and logistics chain centered on efficiency, digitalization, and enhanced private-sector involvement. The themes were

selected in line with Iran's strategic needs, national infrastructure development policies, and the imperative to elevate Iran's role in international transit corridors.

The event is addressing critical challenges such as aging rolling stock, insufficient logistics infrastructure, lack of investment, legal obstacles, and the need for digitalization of processes, aiming to present operational solutions through closer public-private sector cooperation.

## Kazakh wheat surplus, Iran's flour milling opening new trade pathways: Chamber



● [Kazakhstan government website](#)

Economy Desk

The head of Iran's Chamber of Commerce announced on Sunday that Iran's private sector sees significant opportunities to boost value-added exports and transit trade with Kazakhstan, including through the purchase and processing of surplus Kazakh wheat and the use of Iran's transit corridors.

Speaking at a meeting of the Iran Chamber's board of representatives, Samad Hasanzadeh said

Kazakhstan produces more than 20 million metric tons of wheat annually, of which around 13 million tons is surplus.

"Senior Kazakh officials are interested in exporting their surplus wheat to Iran or, via Iran, to other countries," he said, IRNA reported.

Hasanzadeh said Iran has very large capacities in flour milling, adding that if several Iranian flour mills cooperate to purchase Kazakhstan's surplus wheat and export flour to third countries,

this could generate substantial added value.

Outcomes of Iran trade delegation's Kazakhstan visit

Hasanzadeh said the recent visit by an Iranian trade delegation to Kazakhstan resulted in the signing of nine cooperation documents between the private sectors of the two countries, covering mining as well as broader trade and economic cooperation between business communities.

He added that a separate agreement was signed on the transit transportation of Kazakh cargo toward Southeast Asia and Africa through Iran's corridor.

Operational proposals by Iran Chamber

The Iran Chamber chief also outlined several operational proposals presented during meetings with Kazakhstan's trade minister, customs chief, and other senior government and private sector officials.

The proposals included the formation of a joint Iran-Kazakhstan operational working group to immediately define priority trade items aimed at utilizing the Eurasian free trade agreement, the launch of a Kazakhstan-Iran green transit corridor with customs discounts, the establishment of a joint Iran-Kazakhstan logistics terminal at Iran's southern ports, the creation of a joint industrial park in free trade zones to export to Eurasian markets, and the formation of a joint consortium to process Kazakh mineral resources in Iran for export with added value to third countries.

On December 11, Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian visited Astana, heading a high-ranking delegation, during which 14 memoranda of understanding were signed. Pezeshkian and his Kazakh counterpart, Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, described the event as a significant step in expanding bilateral ties.

## China-Europe rail deals bring 42nd Chinese freight train into Iran: Official



● [IRNA](#)

Economy Desk

Rail agreements involving six countries along the China-Europe route have resulted in the arrival of the 42nd freight train from China into Iran, with one additional train — from Russia — entering the country on Sunday, a senior official at Iran's state railway said, highlighting growing rail transit flows through the country.

Shahriar Naqizadeh, director general for foreign trade at the Islamic Republic of Iran Railways (RAI), told IRNA that rail agreements with six countries on the China-Europe corridor — China, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Iran, Turkey and Turkmenistan — "have led to the result that today the 42nd train from China entered our country."

Last month, representatives from Iran, China, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Turkey signed an agreement in Istanbul to expand rail transit along the southern branch of a key transport corridor, a move that positions Iran as a "golden gateway" for container trains traveling from China to Europe.

Under the six-party deal, the countries along the route committed to setting unified and competitive tariffs, speeding up train transit times, reducing ancillary and customs costs, and providing the necessary infrastructure to enable a sharp increase in container train traffic through the corridor's southern branch, which passes through Iran.

Naqizadeh said that on Sunday, two freight trains from China and Russia were entering Iran simultaneously, calling it "a very important development."

He said the continued arrival of containerized and transit freight trains from Russia to Iran's southern ports, as well as to Afghanistan via the Shamtigh border, marked significant progress for the rail sector.

He also pointed to the resumption of the Islamabad-Tehran-Istanbul rail line after several years of suspension, adding that it is set to become operational from early January. He said coordination is underway for the entry of a second Chinese freight train bound for Europe via Iran, noting that previously such a train had entered Iran only once, in March 2025.

Responding to questions about the emergence of alternative corridors around Iran, Naqizadeh said Iran's rail route has unique advantages, including its shorter distance and fully overland nature.

"Unlike the so-called Middle Corridor, it does not cross the Caspian Sea and does not require multimodal transport," he said.

He added that Iran's route is also attractive in terms of tariffs, saying the country has provided time-bound transit commitments to cargo owners. "We have given guarantees on transit timing so that goods entering Iran can be moved out and delivered as quickly as possible," Naqizadeh said.

## Tehran meeting offers ...

Why did the Taliban not attend the Tehran meeting, and what political message does their absence convey?

Page 1 >

In different periods—both under the Taliban and under non-Taliban governments—two main approaches toward Iran have existed: one rooted in Persian-speaking constituencies and another driven by Pashtunism. During the Taliban's first period in power, there was no positive approach toward Iran. This shifted under Hamid Karzai's presidency, when relations with Tehran were strong despite US pressure to distance Kabul from Iran. In Karzai's first term, relatively capable administrators prioritized national interests and viewed closer ties with Tehran as more beneficial than alignment with other countries that offered little political regard.

Even governments that emerged from ostensibly democratic processes failed to maintain a consistent ap-

proach toward Iran. During Karzai's second term, intensified US pressure weakened ties, a trend that deepened under Ashraf Ghani, whose administration engaged Iran through a rigid Pashtunist lens. This resulted in fragile and often abnormal relations in multiple dimensions. Pashtunism dominated governance, and relations with Persian-speaking communities were historically strained.

These internal divisions persist today. In the Taliban's second period in power, attitudes toward Iran remain fragmented. Some factions, such as the Haqqani network, are deeply skeptical, while others in the Taliban believe pragmatic engagement with Iran can help secure their interests. Participation—or non-participation—in political dialogues reflects these internal divergences. At no point, under democratic governments or Taliban rule, has there been a fully unified view of Iran within Afghanistan's power structures. Consequent-

ly, attendance and outcomes in such talks are directly shaped by these enduring inconsistencies.

Given the fragility of the ceasefire between Afghanistan and Pakistan and the failure of the Doha and Istanbul talks, what capacity does the Tehran meeting have to reduce tensions? Can Iran act as a mediator?

Despite repeated efforts by Afghan actors to avoid closer alignment with Iran, a persistent perception remains that—given extensive cultural ties, shared borders, and deep social, economic, and political linkages—Iran, as a major regional power, is better positioned than others to help address Afghanistan's challenges. Historically, whenever Afghanistan turned to Iran, Tehran proved capable of offering meaningful assistance. What distinguishes the Tehran meeting is that, unlike similar gatherings elsewhere, it is not held under the shadow of imperial power. In venues

such as Qatar, Saudi Arabia, or Pakistan, US influence often sets the tone of negotiations. Tehran, by contrast, provides a platform free from such dominance. As a result, the meeting can function not only as a mediation channel between Afghanistan and Pakistan but also as a means of easing tensions between Iran and Afghanistan themselves.

For the Taliban to sustain their rule, they must analyze surrounding dynamics with depth and clarity. The movement has long been plagued by uncertainty, with a large portion of its outlook shaped by rigid traditional norms disconnected from today's world. Unless this worldview evolves, the Taliban will struggle to recognize not only Iran's potential but also the capacities of other neighboring countries. Nonetheless, there is little doubt that Iran can play an effective role in addressing Afghanistan's problems as well as resolving its own disputes with Kabul.



# Energy diplomacy in a geopolitical dilemma

## Role of oil, gas in Iran's regional, int'l relations



A worker observes his surroundings at the Persian Gulf Gas Refinery in Khuzestan Province, southwestern Iran, on April 26, 2023.  
● ALI MOAREF/IRNA



An Iranian petrochemical company displays its various home-grown parts at the first Iranian Knowledge-Based Production exhibition, held in Shiraz, Fars Province, from June 21 to 24, 2022.  
● IRAN PRESS



By Masoud Dashti Derakhshan  
Expert in oil, energy

### OPINION EXCLUSIVE

For more than a century, energy resources have shaped the political identity, economic trajectory, and foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran. With some of the world's largest proven oil and natural gas reserves, Iran occupies a decisive position in global energy markets. Yet, international actors have often sought to restrict Iran's ability to fully leverage this strategic advantage through geopolitical tensions and sanctions. Despite these challenges, Iran has transformed energy into both a tool of constructive engagement and a source of resilience. This article examines the role of oil and gas in Iran's regional and international relations, highlighting the

country's capabilities, strategies, and opportunities.

Iran's hydrocarbon wealth — second globally in natural gas reserves and among the top four in oil — provides unparalleled potential for influence. These resources have enabled:

- sustainable economic partnerships with Asian and European states,
- attraction of foreign investment in energy infrastructure,
- active participation in OPEC and other international institutions,
- and domestic stability through revenues supporting social programs, subsidies, and infrastructure.

Energy has evolved from a mere commodity into a diplomatic instrument. By managing production levels, joining pipeline projects, and negotiating bilateral and multilateral agreements, Iran has sought to expand cooperation and build strategic alliances. Energy diplomacy thus reflects Iran's

broader foreign policy objectives: safeguarding independence, consolidating regional influence, and resisting coercive policies.

### Sanctions as test of creativity, self-reliance

Unilateral sanctions imposed by the United States and its allies have constrained Iran's export capacity and revenues. Yet these measures have also spurred innovations, such as:

- development of indigenous technologies to reduce reliance on external suppliers,
- strengthened partnerships with China, a reliable buyer and investor in infrastructure,
- and expanded cooperation with Russia and Venezuela to challenge Western dominance in energy markets.

While reliance on a limited set of partners presents short-term challenges, this strategy has safeguarded Iran's independence and ensured continuity in complex in-

ternational conditions.

The Persian Gulf — home to the Strait of Hormuz, a vital artery of global oil trade — underscores Iran's strategic leverage. Iran's role in the region is defined by:

- commitment to energy security alongside deterrence capabilities,
- gas export initiatives to Pakistan and Persian Gulf States,
- expansion of electricity and gas networks to foster regional integration,
- and active participation in OPEC to balance competition with cooperation.

Despite external interference, Iran continues to promote economic cooperation as the foundation for regional stability. Iran has pursued long-term resilience through:

- development of South Pars, one of the world's largest gas fields,
- expansion of petrochemical industries to diversify beyond crude oil exports,
- and establishment of energy

corridors linking Central Asia, the Caucasus, and South Asia. Projects such as the Iran-Armenia pipeline and the proposed Iran-Iraq-Syria corridor reinforce Iran's role as a secure transit hub, enhancing both national development and regional stability.

### Future of Iran's energy diplomacy

Global energy systems are undergoing transformation, yet oil and gas will remain central for decades. Iran's vast reserves and strategic geography position it to play a decisive role in shaping the future energy order. Greater integration into global markets — if artificial barriers are removed — would not only advance Iran's national interests but also contribute to international stability. Iran's energy diplomacy rests on three pillars:

- self-reliance in production and technology,
- partnerships with reliable allies

to counter external pressures, • and leveraging domestic capacities to maximize resilience and influence.

By pursuing this path, Iran can transform its energy wealth into a foundation for sustainable development, strategic authority, and equitable global cooperation.

Iran's energy resources are both a divine gift and a strategic asset. Through resilient diplomacy, the Islamic Republic has demonstrated its ability to convert these resources into instruments of national strength and international engagement. Despite sanctions and external pressures, Iran's determination to turn challenges into opportunities has ensured continuity and progress. Looking ahead, Iran's energy diplomacy will remain a cornerstone of its foreign policy — defending national rights while contributing to a fairer and more sustainable global energy system.

## Iranian oil industry exhibits considerable resilience: Senior expert

### Global petroleum sensitivity to geopolitical developments been reduced

### INTERVIEW

*Amid unprecedented tensions and the imposed 12-day aggression by the Zionist regime and the United States against Iran, numerous observers anticipated that the global oil market would once again confront a price shock. Contrary to such predictions, the market continued its trajectory with relative tranquility, failing to record any significant volatility. Perhaps the most salient inquiry pertains to why events of this nature, which ordinarily precipitate price turbulence, proved ineffectual on this occasion.*

*In this context, one must not disregard the marked augmentation in the resilience of Iran's petroleum sector. Over recent years, the modalities of sales, transportation methodologies, and commercial networks have evolved into a diversified and flexible architecture such that the severity of sanctions no longer possesses the erstwhile efficacy. The nation's production and export capacities have incrementally attained a magnitude capable of substantially countervailing external pressures and imparting greater stability to regional and global markets. Nevertheless, the current exigencies and challenges confronting Iran's oil industry, exacerbated by the United States' endeavor to reduce Iranian oil sales to zero under the policy known as maximum pressure, must not be overlooked.*

*To elucidate these interrogatives and explore the underpinnings of the energy markets' responses, an interview was conducted with Fereydoun Barkeshli, an eminent expert in the petroleum industry and former general manager for the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) in OPEC, the text of which is translated below:*

Fereydoun Barkeshli



It was anticipated that any military conflict in the Persian Gulf, even of short duration, would induce shocks in the oil and gas markets; however, this did not transpire during the imposed 12-day war. Despite direct conflict involving Iran and limited regional assaults, why did this imposed 12-day war fail to exert a discernible effect on global oil or gas prices?

**BARKESHLI:** It is accurate that throughout past decades, every geopolitical upheaval in the Middle East and Persian Gulf has influenced the global oil market and pricing proportionate to the magnitude and significance of the unrest. The correlation between geopoliti-

cal developments and the oil market commenced in 1971 during the Yom Kippur War and, subsequently, the oil embargo imposed by certain oil-exporting countries against several major oil-importing nations. Indeed, since that juncture, the connection between Middle Eastern developments and the global oil market has entered political petroleum discourse. Earlier, in the early 1950s, events such as the nationalization of Iran's oil and the initial oil embargo on the country caused the global oil price on the London exchange to increase — though only to 6.5 cents per barrel, which, though non-negligible by the standards of that era, did not constitute a shock.

During the imposed 12-day intrusion by Israel and America into Iranian airspace, the global oil price only experienced a transitory increase of around two dollars and several cents, followed by a decline. The rationale for this phenomenon pertains to multiple factors. Consider the Ukraine conflict. On the eve of Russia's attack on Ukraine, i.e., February and March 2022, Brent North Sea crude was trading at around \$97.15 per barrel. The market endured several weeks of turbulence and concluded 2022 at \$85 per barrel. On October 7, 2023, with the onset of the bloody Gaza war, Brent stood at \$83.35 per barrel. Again, there were several tenuous days accompanied by

diverse analyses, succeeded by a downward trend in global oil prices. At the initiation of the Israeli air strikes against the Islamic Republic, global oil prices rose by 7%, yet by October 2025, they barely sustained \$70 per barrel. In essence, it can be asserted that the global oil market has lost sensitivity to geopolitical developments. Indeed, the geopolitical significance has relinquished a considerable portion of its influence. In other words, geopolitical events have been assimilated and embedded in the current global oil market pricing. Consequently, even today's prices owe their endurance to the succession of crises and developments in the Middle East.





Many experts attribute the substantial reduction in geopolitical impact on price trends to American self-sufficiency. To what extent do you concur with this interpretation?

Overall, I identify three influential factors, the foremost being the one you mentioned: the United States' self-sufficiency in domestic oil supply and subsequently its emergence as the largest producer and exporter of petroleum. In the 1950s, amid the struggle of the nationalization of the Iranian oil industry and the consequent embargo on Iranian oil exports by Britain, the US was self-sufficient. The removal of 650,000 barrels per day of Iranian crude and products did not exert a notable market impact.

In the 1970s, during the Arab oil embargo, the US transitioned from a major producer to a major oil importer. Until the mid-2000s, America remained a significant oil importer. However, with the advent of shale oil, the US transformed into a principal exporter of oil and petroleum products. Shale emerged rather abruptly on the international oil scene.

The rapid expansion of shale surprised many market participants. Hydraulic fracturing of shale rock commenced relatively quietly and gradually advanced. Shale-producing entities were primarily small to medium-sized and often family-run companies operating in shale-rich regions. No prominent, renowned corporations were initially active in shale production. These companies were highly vulnerable and generally commenced operations with loans from local banks. Accordingly, shale producers were price-sensitive relative to global oil rates. The average break-even cost per barrel of shale oil was approximately \$60. Therefore, producers sought to sell their crude at WTI prices exceeding \$60 per barrel.

Given global oil price volatility, smaller shale producers gradually lost competitiveness, giving rise to the entrance of major oil companies into shale operations. Advanced technologies and extensive investments have ushered shale crude production into new economic phases. The current crude oil production in the United States stands at 13.8 million barrels per day, approximately only 1.6 million of which entails conventional crude. The reentry of the United States among the major oil producers has profoundly impacted its international ambitions and policies. After 70 years, the US evolved into a major petroleum exporter.

The first oil shock in the early 1970s confronted the US and the world with the most severe oil crisis. In the early 1950s, with Iran's oil nationalization movement and the subsequent embargo, 650,000 barrels per day of Iranian crude were excised from global markets. Global oil prices rose by as much as 22% in 1953 and the first half of 1954, constituting a considerable shock. Nevertheless, prior to the embargo by Britain and the US, substantial stockpiling had occurred, enabling endurance of the removal of Iranian oil. Of note, in the 1950s, the United States was among the major exporters of oil and petroleum products.

In 2015, Barack Obama promulgated legislation lifting the US oil export ban after several decades. America rapidly became a net petroleum exporter. In the first half of 2025, the US exported 4.7 million barrels per day of crude oil and 6.6 million barrels per day of petroleum products. Concurrently, the United States remains an oil importer as well.

Could it be stated that America's disregard for the Inter-

national Energy Agency and environmental conventions commenced at this aforementioned period?

Yes, indeed. With Donald Trump's first electoral victory in 2016, the pace of shale oil production in the United States accelerated. Trump monetized the Strategic Petroleum Reserves, which since 1975 had been established by the International Energy Agency to ensure readiness for emergencies and potential sanctions from producers. He utilized them commercially to augment supply and depress prices. This act conveyed the first posture of a nation independent of imports to the global audience. His action provoked condemnation. Henry Kissinger, architect of the Strategic Petroleum Reserves, criticized Trump's decision as erroneous. However, this was merely the inception of American disregard for a series of international commitments, facilitated by its attainment of self-sufficiency through shale oil and gas. Today, most market analysts recognize the cessation of shale oil growth. Nonetheless, the persistent inquiry remains: should an analogous shale phenomenon emerge anew, how will OPEC member states and their allies contend with it?

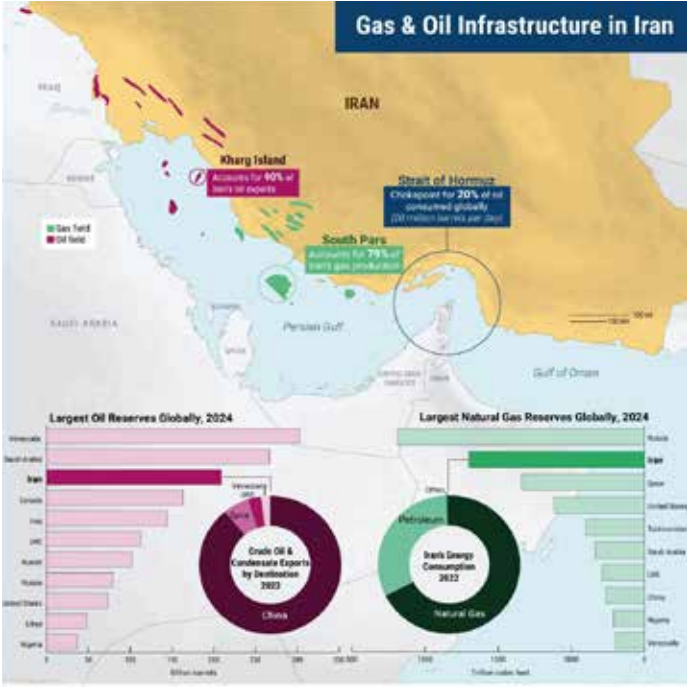
And the second phenomenon that has overshadowed the geopolitical influences on oil?

The advent of the phenomenon known as the "Paris Climate Change Convention," colloquially referred to as COP, whose 30th convocation recently transpired in Brazil. COP, forged initially in 1995 with a political orientation adverse to fossil fuels, crystallized in 2015 within the Paris Accord as a potent anti-oil movement exerting profound deleterious ramifications on investment trajectories and petroleum consumption.

Trump's America, in the very year 2025, extricated itself from this treaty. The American withdrawal destabilized the foundational pillars of the climate change accord and ameliorated the prospects for oil and gas production and consumption. One might contemplate extolling Trump's initiative in this regard. Indeed, a robust tie was forged between the International Energy Agency in Paris and the Paris Climate Accord. This tie has engendered a statist, quasi-dictatorial hegemony of metrics, whose scope has expanded within myriad multinational corporations, institutions, and centers engaged in statistical estimation and the generation of data analytics.

America, having metamorphosed into a significant oil exporter, harbors an unfavorable disposition towards fossil fuel denunciatory entities. In truth, today, OPEC and its allied nations regard Trump as a savior confronting the anti-oil onslaught emanating from Europe. OPEC member states traditionally align with the Republican Party of the United States, whose principal bases comprise the oil, gas, and

industrial manufacturing sectors. The lobbying apparatus of principal OPEC constituents, exemplified by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates in Washington, is entrenched within Republican circles. Saudi Arabia and the UAE wield considerable influence within American oil enterprises. Conversely, Iranian-supporting lobbies in America are ideologically aligned with the Democratic Party. In effect, Iran's lobbying endeavors within the current echelons of American power and policymaking remain impotent. America epitomizes the "country of lobbies"; without connection and influence, effectuating progress is infeasible.



● AL JAZEERA

Now that COP30 in Brazil has concluded, the world and the global oil market must adjudicate how, concomitant with the closure of the honeymoon epoch for renewable energies and the green political movements advocating them, OPEC and the oil market will architect their configurations. The third subject pertains to the economic conditions of the United States and the world. The indebtedness of global governments will exceed \$111 trillion by year-end. The United States government, with \$38 trillion, leads the world's debtors. China's debt stands at \$18.7 trillion, and Japan's at \$8.9 trillion. European governments, India, and other industrial nations have accrued historical and unprecedented debts, collectively expending far beyond their national capacities. In other words, the global economy is presently in a precarious state. Topics such as geopolitical developments are not within the purview of macroeconomic principles and infrastructures. When the macroeconomic groundwork of the global economy is unfavorable, the milieu is ill-prepared for supra-structural dynamics and interactions. Consequently, geopolitical developments have attenuated efficacy. The phenomenon of Trump and the "Trump economy" will not terminate with his presi-

dent tenure conclusion in 2028; one might assert that Trumpism is merely nascent. Certain analysts contend that the oil market has transcended the "Iran-centric risk". Do you concur with this sentiment? Manifestly, every producer, commensurate with its production capacity, possesses a voice and power to exert influence. I recall that at prior OPEC assemblies, the then-minister of Kuwait brusquely questioned the legitimacy of a country with sub-half-million barrel production possessing the right to speak vis-à-vis a nation with a daily output of 5 million barrels. This is an old story, but I mention it to underscore that the productive capacity of a country buttresses its power and standing. Iran is no exception. It is paramount to note that Iran is a founding member of OPEC, conferring certain privileges and credence to the Islamic Republic. Put differently, Iran-centrism was not a risk, provided one subscribes to the idea of petroleum Iranophobia. Iran and Saudi Arabia have, for decades, constituted the two principal members of OPEC and the global oil market. No resolutions within OPEC or global oil markets transpired without concordance between these two nations. The rationale exceeded mere political considerations; it was also in the national interests of both. Other states articulated their interests within the framework of these two countries' interests and orientations. Hence, from this perspective, the assertion that the Iran-centric risk has abated may be valid. Concurrently, the essence and nature of threats have evolved. From one vantage, the primary bipolar actors in the oil market are presently Saudi Arabia and Russia. From another, I posit that in the medium term, they shall be Saudi Arabia and the UAE; and in the long term, Saudi Arabia and Iraq. The truth is that Iran's status in the global oil market remains in-

determinate. Universal acknowledgment exists regarding Iran's criticality and its paramount position as an investment locus in oil, gas, and corridor infrastructure. Nonetheless, presently, discourses revolve around ancillary issues such as shadow tankers, sanction circumvention, or the aggregation of crude oil upon the waters, given existing sanctions.

May it be posited that Iran has entered an economic habituation phase vis-à-vis sanctions, thereby amplifying its resilience?

My response is negative; at a minimum, I assert that sanctions have not become habituated for Iran's petroleum sector. Indeed, oil is so internationalized that it resists sanction imposition. Iran's oil industry remains international. What has transpired is that the operational cost of internationalization has escalated compared to normal conditions. Consequently, financing constraints have emerged for the oil industry, and requisite expenditure for maintenance and development has not been met. The Iranian oil industry is in urgent need of investment. Compared to other economic and industrial sectors in the country, Iran's petroleum industry exhibits its pronounced resilience. Iranian oil has been sanctioned by America since the summer of 1979. It was severely afflicted during the Iraqi-imposed war and constituted the primary target of adversaries. Mismanagement, as well as injudicious policies and political outlooks, inflicted significant damage upon the oil sector; however, the oil industry perhaps uniquely engendered a structurally resilient economy.

What severely pressures Iran's oil industry concerning sanctions is the restriction on financial and banking operations. At first glance, all issues seem attributable to sanctions, but the fundamental problem is Iran's non-membership in the Financial Action Task Force (FATF). Since the early 1990s, membership in this financial regime has become, more or less, obligatory for conducting banking and financial operations. Iran, even absent sanctions, cannot access its financial resources without FATF membership. Of course, obstacles multiply for a sanctioned country. Without membership in the Financial Action Task Force, performing banking operations in other international currencies is also unfeasible. Some smaller banks and monetary institutions devise mechanisms to maintain transactions, albeit with elevated costs and attendant risk.

The sole pragmatic means to circumvent the FATF stranglehold is barter trade, the challenges of which are well-recognized. Though in a foreseeable temporal continuum, Global South countries may establish their own FATF group, this does not imply that transactions and banking operations will be facilitated without acceptance of FATF standards.

The reality is that scant opportunity remains for Iran and the global petroleum industry. The Middle East demands peace and tranquility. Under conditions of tension, development is absent or proceeds sluggishly. Iran has effectively forfeited the 20th century in oil. Should the next two-decade span also elapse, the dossier of oil in economic history will irrevocably close. The National Iranian Oil Company is a trillion-dollar entity. Its stewardship must conform to the standards of a colossal national enterprise with the longest tenure in the Middle East.

The full interview first appeared in Persian on IRNA.

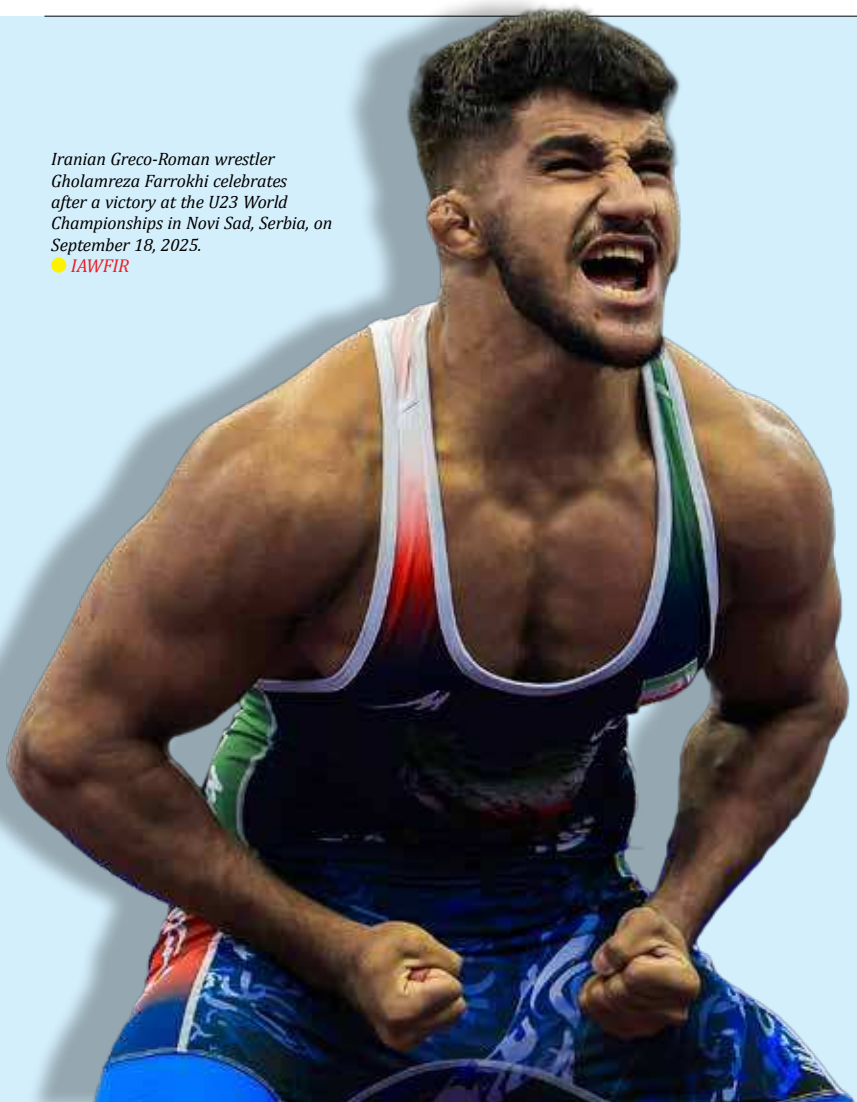


An oilfield crew, contracted by the Railroad Commission of Texas (RRC), works a service rig during a state-funded oil well plugging operation in Midland, Texas, US, on September 25, 2025. ● ELI HARTMAN/BLOOMBERG



Iranian Greco-Roman wrestler Gholamreza Farrokhi celebrates after a victory at the U23 World Championships in Novi Sad, Serbia, on September 18, 2025.

● IAWFIR



# Iran's Farrokhi named Greco-Roman Breakout Performer of the Year

## Sports Desk

United World Wrestling named Iran's Gholamreza Farrokhi the Greco-Roman Breakout Performer of the Year. Farrokhi enjoyed an emphatic international season in 2025 by capturing four gold medals at major tournaments, including the top prize on his Senior World Championships debut in September. "When opportunity knocked, Farrokhi wasn't just there to answer it, he was there to kick the door off its hinges. The 23-year-old wrecking ball stepped into Iran's senior lineup for the first time in his career and tore through anyone in front of him," the UWW wrote on Instagram of the young sensation, who racked up a perfect 17-0 record, including 11 technical superiority wins, across his international appearances. Farrokhi made his senior international breakthrough at February's Ranking Series event in Zagreb, where he claimed

three commanding victories before defeating 2024 world silver medalist Erik Szilvassy of Hungary, 6-2, in the 82kg final.

The Iranian picked up where he had left off on his return to the Croatian capital in September, accumulating a total of 37 points across four bouts while conceding only one en route to the world title. Moving up to the 87kg category for the U23 Worlds in October, Farrokhi was in a league of his own in Novi Sad, Serbia, sweeping aside all five of his opponents by technical superiority – including Ukraine's Ivan Chmyr in the final – to claim the ultimate prize.

The Iranian capped off the season with yet another gold-winning campaign at the Islamic Solidarity Games in November, defeating Kazakhstan's Islam Yevloyev, 6-0, in the final.

Farrokhi could receive further recognition from the sport's international governing body, as he has been named

to the five-man shortlist for the Most Dominant Wrestler of 2025. He faces stiff competition from fellow Iranian world champions Saeid Esmaeili and Mohammad-Hadi Saravi, as well as Armenia's Malkhas Amoyan and Uzbekistan's Aytjan Khalmakhanov.

His prize was the latest testament to a memorable international season for Iran, which was named Top Greco-Roman Team of 2025 after completing a clean sweep of four world team titles across every age group.

A prolific 12 months saw Iranian Greco-Roman wrestlers medal in 29 of the 40 possible weight categories, collecting 10 golds, six silvers, and 13 bronzes.

The pinnacle of Iran's run came at the Senior Worlds, where a remarkable haul of four gold medals, along with two silvers and two bronzes, led the country to only its second team title – and first since 2014 – in the history of the competition.

## Asian Youth Para Games:

# Iran collects 262 medals, finishes runner-up to Uzbekistan

## Sports Desk

Iran bagged 262 medals, including 76 golds, to finish runner-up in the overall standings at the Asian Youth Para Games in Dubai, UAE. Represented by 194 athletes across 11 disciplines, the Iranian delegation – dubbed 'The Children of Iran, Ambassadors of Victory' – also collected 96 silvers and 88 bronzes, marking its highest-ever medal haul across five editions of the multi-sport event. Uzbekistan topped the table with 99 gold, 57 silver, and 88 bronze medals, while Ja-

pan, Thailand, and Indonesia rounded out the top five. Amir-Mohammad Haqiqatshenas brought the curtain down on a prolific campaign for Iran on Saturday, defeating his Thai opponent in the final to claim gold in the men's -70kg taekwondo category.

The Iranian women's team also finished on a high note in goalball, prevailing 6-2 over Thailand to secure gold, while the country settled for bronze in the men's competition. Meanwhile, Ali Rasti and Arsham Ramezani teamed up to win gold in the boys' doubles table tennis event, bringing

Iran's tally in the sport to three golds and six bronzes. The Iranian duo produced a sensational comeback, rallying from two games down, to defeat Chinese Taipei in the final.

Para swimming and para athletics proved Iran's most successful disciplines in Dubai, yielding 104 and 82 medals, respectively.

Iran had also finished runner-up in the first three editions of the Asian Youth Para Games – Tokyo 2009, Kuala Lumpur 2013, and Dubai 2017 – before claiming the top spot in Manama 2021 with 144 medals.



The Iranian delegation is pictured at the opening ceremony of the 5th Asian Youth Para Games in Dubai, UAE, on December 10, 2025.

● ALI SHARIFZADEH/IRNA

## FIBA World Cup Asian qualifiers:

# Iran to play home double-header at neutral venues

## Sports Desk

Iranian national basketball team will have to play its next two home games at the 2027 FIBA World Cup Asian qualifiers at neutral venues, the Iranian Basketball Federation announced.

Iran will face Jordan on February 27, before taking on Syria on March 2 in first-round Group C of the qualifiers.

"Despite all efforts by the Iranian Basketball Federation and continuous international follow-ups, Iran's hosting rights for its home games in the second window of the 2027 FIBA Basketball World Cup qualifiers have ultimately been moved to a third country," the IIRBF said in a statement on Saturday, citing an official FIBA announcement.

"The Central Board of the sport's international governing body, at its latest meeting, endorsed the decision by the FIBA Executive Committee to hold Iran's home games outside the country until further notice. FIBA stated that the safety and security situation in Iran and Israel remains under review, adding that it is prepared to return hosting rights to their respective territories once suitable circumstances are met," the statement added.

The venue for the two matches has yet to be determined by the Iranian federation.

Iran got off to a flying start in its qualification campaign, defeating Iraq in back-to-back games in Zouk



● FIBA

Mikael, Lebanon, in late November. Iranian players drained a remarkable 19 three-pointers – the third-highest tally ever recorded by a team in a single game in the history of the Asian qualifiers – to secure a 94-68 victory in their group opener. Sotirios Manolopoulos's side then prevailed 86-71 in the second outing to sit second behind Jordan in the table, level on four points.

The top three teams from each of

the four groups will advance to the second round of the qualifiers. The 12 qualified teams will be split into two groups and will face the three teams advancing from the corresponding group twice – Group A will be paired with Group C, and Group B with Group D.

The top three teams from each second-round group, along with the best fourth-placed team, will qualify for the 2027 World Cup in Qatar.

# Iranian basketball great Haddadi joins Esteghlal

## Sports Desk

Former Iranian international center Hamed Haddadi has joined Esteghlal in the Iranian Basketball Premier League. The 40-year-old's contract will run until the end of the ongoing top-flight season. Esteghlal dominated the first half of the season, completing

a clean sweep of 10 victories – including an 80-70 away win against second-placed Tabiat in their most recent outing – to sit atop the table with 20 points. Widely regarded as the greatest Iranian basketball player of all time, Haddadi – a former NBA player with the Memphis Grizzlies and Phoenix Suns – returned to the Iranian league with

Palayesh Naft Abadan in January 2024 after four years with China's Sichuan Blue Whales. A three-time FIBA Asia Cup champion with Iran and a four-time MVP in the competition, the 7-foot-2 center retired from international duty following the country's final outing at the previous FIBA World Cup against Lebanon in September 2023.



● IRNA



# Golestan to host 17th Handicrafts Expo alongside Tribal Culture Festival

Iranica Desk

The 17th National Handicrafts Exhibition of Golestan Province will be held concurrently with the 17th International Festival of Tribal Culture, featuring works by artists from across Iran as well as neighboring countries, displayed over an area of 3,600 square meters, said Maryam Haji-Ebrahimi, deputy head of the Golestan Province's Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Organization. She pointed to the diversity and wide-ranging participation of nationally and internationally recognized handicraft cities and villages, noting that four globally registered cities and villages — Lalejin, Shiraz, Meybod, and Qasemabad village — will take part in the event, showcasing their internationally recognized capacities through the presentation of high-quality works. In addition, nine nationally



cdn.asriran.com

registered cities and villages, including Gonbad-e Kavus, Aliabad-e Katul, Khor, Fashtakeh

village, and Bafroiye, will present their prominent traditional crafts, playing a key role

in introducing local identity and strengthening the handicrafts economy, according to chn.ir.

Referring to the exhibition's innovative and supportive sections, Haji-Ebrahimi said a knowledge-based handicrafts pavilion has been set up, focusing on products developed through modern technologies and the practical application of knowledge in the handicrafts sector. She further noted that a pavilion dedicated to home-based business supporters has been established to assist home-based handicraft producers and connect them to target markets. Meanwhile, the veterans' section provides an opportunity for experienced artists from Golestan Province and other parts of the country to present their valuable works and authentic techniques to the public. Highlighting the broad provincial participation, she said that 27 provinces have been finalized for participation in this year's exhibition, with 66 artists

attending from other provinces. In addition, 205 artists from Golestan Province are presenting their works at the event. She added that a total of 164 handicrafts pavilions have been set up at the exhibition, while foreign artisans from Central Asian countries are also in attendance, introducing their traditional handicrafts. Haji-Ebrahimi stressed that the main objective of holding the exhibition is to provide a suitable platform for introducing the handicrafts of Golestan and other provinces, expanding interprovincial and international cooperation, and enhancing artists' skills, enabling them not only to sell their works but also to gain practical knowledge and experience. The 17th International Festival of Tribal Culture of Iran will be held from December 16 to 19 at the province's permanent exhibition venue.

## Iran's art of mirrorwork reaches new milestone at Golestan Palace

Iranica Desk

Global registration of the art of mirrorwork in Iranian architecture known as Ayeneh-Kari is a source of pride for Iran's cultural heritage, said the director of the Golestan Palace World Heritage Site. Afarin Emami added that the restoration and conservation of the mirrorwork masterpieces at Golestan Palace have reached a new milestone — one that ensures the continued brilliance and splendor of this art form in Iranian architecture, according to chn.ir. She noted that coinciding with the inscription of "the art of mirrorwork in Iranian architecture" on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, the organization and restoration of the mirrorwork in the entrance hall of the Mirror Hall at Golestan Palace have been completed. Emami continued that this measure represents a significant step in the protection and restoration of the extensive mirror decorations of this site, adding that the opportunity created by the temporary closure of museums and their gradual reopening was used in the best possible way. Referring to the importance of the mirrorwork at Golestan Palace, Emami emphasized that

the extensive and unique mirror decorations of the building — created between 1874 and 1882 by the renowned Iranian artist Sani ol-Molk — are among the most radiant and magnificent works in the history of Iran's architecture. She added that, within the framework of plans for the reopening of the main halls of the palace, including the entrance hall, the Mirror Hall, and the Salam Museum Hall in the coming days, special attention was paid to these decorations.



wikipedia.org

edge and expertise of master craftsmen and restorers, as well as systematic conservation management. Alongside conservation and restoration efforts in all other decorative elements of the complex, the extensive mirrorwork decorations have been recognized as a focal point of artistic creativity and aesthetic sensibility, contributing to the continuity of the palace's vibrant and living architecture. The official pointed out that over the past years, a total of nine large-scale conservation and restoration projects have been implemented exclusively on mirrorwork surfaces in an extensive and integrated manner within the complex.

## Humans settle, expand knowledge in Neolithic Iran

Iranica Desk

For millions of years, humans lived according to a common pattern of hunting and gathering, and the shift in lifestyle was not a sudden decision but a process spanning thousands of years. Around 12,000 years ago, this process culminated in the Neolithic period, or the beginning of settled village life, which many scholars consider the most important event in human history. Mohammad Hossein Azizi Kharanqi, an archaeologist, told chn.ir that one of the most fundamental chapters in human evolution shows that "humans did not leave the caves by a sudden decision." He explained that the most important feature of the Neolithic era was domestication. Humans gradually abandoned full-scale hunting and began integrating species that could be domesticated into their lives. The oldest evidence of goat and sheep domestication in Iran dates back approximately 10,000 years and has been identified at sites such as Ganj Dareh in Kermanshah, chn.ir wrote. He added that during the same period, humans domesticated wheat and barley — the foundations of human subsistence even today — for the first time. Archaeological studies show that the earliest evidence of wheat domestication in Iran, around 11,000 years ago, was found at the Chogha Golan site in Ilam. Azizi emphasized the importance of pottery technology in the history of civilization, stating that pottery was humanity's first technological product. Before this, humans were mere consumers of nature; but by firing clay to produce durable vessels, they made a fundamental leap. The oldest examples of pottery in Iran have been discovered in Kermanshah, Ilam, and later in Khuzestan, and even after 9,000 years, they



Chogha Golan  
IRNA



Ganj Dareh  
razebaghhaa.ir

retain the same strength and durability. He stressed that cooking food in clay vessels allowed humans to extract more calories and nutrients, which in turn influenced cognitive development, improved nutrition, and contributed to the formation of complex biological and mental structures. The archaeologist pointed to mental transformations during the Neolithic, noting that settled life, regular sleep, cooked food, and increased caloric intake fostered the growth of the abstract mind. Humans began to think not only about the tangible world but also about abstract concepts, leading to a flourishing of art. The production of various pottery forms and decorations enabled ideas and beliefs to be transmitted between communities, expanding artistic expression. He also noted changes in environmental practices and human perceptions of death during the Neolithic. Burials increasingly took place inside homes. Children were buried in clay vessels, while adults were generally interred lying down, facing the sun, under

the floor. Many scholars believe this practice signified a lasting connection to ancestors and strengthened people's attachment to their environment and settlements. Azizi continued, stating that ancient humans were already familiar with fire and used it for warmth, defense, and cooking; but in the Neolithic, fire was harnessed industrially for the first time. The controlled use of fire in simple kilns for pottery production marked the beginning of human awareness of fire's technical potential — knowledge that later enabled metal smelting and subsequent industrial revolutions. He added that with sedentary life came the construction of houses, the establishment of farms, the domestication of animals, and the emergence of the concept of ownership. Many epidemics also began during this period. For this reason, some researchers argue that although the Neolithic was the greatest transformation in history, it may also have been the most difficult and burdensome change for humanity — a shift that separated humans from millions of years of freedom.





# Iran brings literary catalog to Istanbul, over 250 titles on display

## Arts & Culture Desk

Iran Book and Literature House is showcasing more than 250 titles at the 42nd Istanbul International Book Fair, which opened on December 13, at the TÜYAP Exhibition Centre in Istanbul and runs through December 21, according to the institute. The presence underscores Tehran's bid to scale up rights trading and cultural exports as regional publishing hubs jostle for shelf space and deal flow, with Istanbul positioning itself as Turkey's dominant marketplace for international exchange despite a proliferation of smaller fairs elsewhere. Iran's stand in the international section features classical and contemporary literature, poetry, Iranology, children and young adult books, art and illustration, culture and civilization, alongside a curated set of translations. The program also puts forward Iran's book-publishing platform, a literary agency and illustration representation, aiming to

"open doors" to co-publishing, rights swaps and bilateral partnerships. Running from December 13 to 16, the fair's international segment is designed as a four-day rights corridor, bringing together publishers and cultural institutions from multiple markets for targeted meetings, catalogue pitching and market briefings. Organizers have framed it as a pivot for professional exchange at a time when supply chains in publishing are re-routing and regional demand indicators remain resilient. Iran Book and Literature House said its agenda includes presenting Iran's publishing capacities, promoting the national grant scheme, spotlighting Iranian illustration, and holding talks with Turkish publishers and cultural managers to advance rights transfers and joint projects. Partial quotes such as "rights exchange" and "capacity-building" featured prominently in meeting schedules circulated at the venue.

The 2025 edition introduces, for the first time, an illustration wall, a dedicated showcase that has drawn sustained footfall from illustrators and editors scouting visual talent for children's and art lists. The addition shows a broader shift towards visual storytelling and cross-format licensing within the industry. The fair hosts publishers and institutions from 14 countries and is backed by a dense calendar of cultural programming, including panels, workshops and book launches, reinforcing its status as Turkey's flagship publishing event. Organizers report more than 1,015 participants and about 510,000 visitors this year, figures that cement Istanbul's lead over regional fairs held in Bursa, the Black Sea region, Izmir and Ankara. With roughly 13,914 square meters of exhibition space, the Istanbul International Book Fair remains the country's largest platform for cultural interaction and publishing commerce.



## Minister calls for unity amid diversity at Cinema Verite Festival draws over 8,000 viewers in first four days in Tehran



## Arts & Culture Desk

Iran's Culture and Islamic Guidance Minister Abbas Salehi opened the 19th Cinema Verite (Haqiqat Cinema) international documentary film festival in Tehran, calling on filmmakers to embrace plural views within a shared national framework, as the six-day event runs from December 10 to 16 at the Melat Cineplex. The remarks set the tone for a festival entering what organizers described as a phase of "maturity", amid rising public interest and a generational shift in Iran's documentary sector, IRNA reported. Attendance has climbed sharply early in the run, signaling stronger domestic demand for non-fiction cinema, while official messaging underscores tighter

expectations around social responsibility and national cohesion in a politically charged year. In a written message, Salehi said differing perspectives "find meaning" within a red line called Iran, urging documentarians to tackle reality with courage and precision while bearing a heightened social duty. Documentary cinema, he wrote, becomes influential when it confronts facts directly, exposes overlooked angles and invites deeper dialogue on Iranian society and global issues such as injustice. Referring to recent national trauma, he said truthful visual records would be vital for an accurate historical narrative in the years ahead. Raed Faridzadeh, head of the Cinema Organization of Iran, said the festival's continuity had taken on added importance for a country rich in historical experience, climatic diversity and cultural achievement. "Truth," he wrote, does not sit in "lifeless propositions" or fleeting images but emerges in the encounter between seeing and understanding, offering a sense of calm beyond words. He said the resilience of Iranians during the recent imposed war had given the event renewed meaning. Festival secretary Mohammad Hami-

di-Moghaddam framed the 19th edition as the start of a "new journey", pointing to rapid change in documentary filmmaking driven by a younger generation producing faster and at lower cost, often outside established templates. That shift, he said, was already reshaping equations in Iran and globally and would be visible across this year's program. He cited growth across most sections, broader thematic range, stronger provincial participation, and higher visibility for women filmmakers and students. The Iran section includes works on a 12-day national resistance narrative, alongside continued focus on Gaza and Palestine. Workshops emphasize scientific approaches and new technologies, while a documentary photography segment aims to deepen ties between still and moving images. Public response has been brisk. By the end of December 14, organizers said cumulative attendance had reached 8,820, surpassing 8,000 within four days at the Melat Cineplex. The early surge, compared with previous years, points to expanding audiences for Iranian documentary cinema. The festival concludes on December 16, with the closing ceremony scheduled at Tehran's Vahdat Hall.

## Transnational short 'Rekindle' wins Audacity Award at France's Tous Courts

## Arts & Culture Desk

A co-production of Iran, the Netherlands and Russia, 'Rekindle' (Didar), directed by Ata Mojabi, won the Audacity Award at the 43rd Tous Courts International Short Film Festival in Aix-en-Provence, France, the Iranian Students' Film Society said. Tous Courts, backed by the French National Centre of Cinema and the Moving Image, has long positioned itself as a bellwether for experimentation rather than box-office heft, IRNA reported. Screened in competition in the affluent Provençal city, 'Rekindle' drew jury praise for its "audacity" in storytelling and a pursuit of "pure catharsis", according to the festival's statement. The film operates in a neo-noir register, favoring compressed tension and pared-back dialogue over exposition, a stylistic wager that paid off with the jury's top distinction for boldness. Founded in 1982, Tous Courts has built its reputation by platforming shorts that push cinematic language, often serving as a launchpad for directors who later scale up to features. The festival's CNC support lends institutional heft, while its programming ethos prizes risk-taking, a mix that continues to attract global submissions. 'Rekindle' is produced by Mehdi



Radinkhah, Tom Palmen and Mojabi. Shot entirely in the Russian city of Kazan and performed in Russian, the film brings together artists from Iran, Russia and the United States, reflecting a transnational production model that spreads cost and creative input across borders. The project was developed during the FILM7DAYS international filmmaking camp in Kazan, where it previously secured the event's top prize, building early momentum on the festival circuit. Since then, it has screened at Grenzland in Germany, Portobello in Britain and the ISFA Academy celebration, tightening its distribution funnel ahead of wider festival rollout. Now completed and ready for sales, 'Rekindle' is being handled internationally by Eastwood, as its producers seek to convert critical recognition into sustained festival bookings.

## Iran's musical 'King Lear' takes Tunis stage

## Arts & Culture Desk

An Iranian musical adaptation of William Shakespeare's 'King Lear' was performed in November at the Tunis City Opera House as part of Tunisia's Journées Théâtrales de Carthage, a flagship Arab and African theater festival, Iran's Mehr News Agency reported. The appearance at Carthage, widely regarded as a bellwether for experimental and cross-cultural theater in the region, underscores Tehran's push to project contemporary performing arts beyond its borders, leveraging festival platforms to recast classical Western texts through Persian musical and visual idioms. Directed by Erika Abdolrazaghi and produced by Ali Oji, the production followed a domes-



tic run at Tehran's Theater City complex and the landmark Vahdat Hall before travelling to North Africa. Staged as a "musical retelling", it fused choral singing, stylized movement and a modernist set to reframe Shakespeare's tragedy for a non-Western audience. Tunisian media described the performance as a "fresh" and "impactful" reworking, high-

lighting its use of music and dance to sharpen the emotional arc of Lear's descent and the moral rupture at the heart of the play. The Tunis Opera House, a cornerstone venue in the capital's cultural district, hosted the performances under the festival's international program. The cast brought together established Iranian stage and screen figures, including Ah-

mad Saatchian, Reza Yazdani, Abdolrazaghi herself, Narges Mohammadi and Milad Rahimi Abkenar, alongside Borzhin Abdolrazaghi, Soroush Karimi-Nejad, Noushin Etemad, Touraj Saminipour, Ali Jadidi, Amour Zarkarian, Ali Khayam and Farshteh Sari. Their ensemble approach leaned on physical theater and vocal composition rather than linear dialogue, compressing Shakespeare's sprawling narrative into a tightly paced stage score. Founded in 1983, Journées Théâtrales de Carthage has evolved into a high-profile marketplace for Arab and African theater, often serving as a launchpad for productions seeking wider circulation across Mediterranean and Francophone circuits.

## Jordan human rights event picks Iran-Lebanon documentary 'Ategh'eh'

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The joint Iran-Lebanon short documentary 'Ategh'eh', directed by Masoud Dehnnavi and produced by the Revayat-e-Fath Cultural Foundation, was selected for the 16th Karama Human Rights Film Festival in Jordan, Iran Online reported on December 14. The competitive ENTRET-ODOS festival spotlights short films addressing human rights and civic issues, providing an international platform for socially conscious cinema. 'Ategh'eh' has previously featured at the 40th Tehran Short Film Festival, the 18th Cinema Verite

Documentary Festival, the 16th Slovenian Migrant Film Festival, and the 12th ARKIPEL Documentary and Experimental Film Festival in Jakarta. The film won the Best Short Documentary Award at Italy's 26th Lucania Film Festival and secured the Best Film accolade in the Farasat section at the 100-second International Film Festival. The documentary chronicles the life of a civilian woman named Ategh'eh in the Lebanese border town of Aita al-Shaab. Amid phosphorous and artillery bombardments that forced residents to flee, she remained in her home, sup-

porting and uplifting local volunteer forces. "She stayed to give morale and help," the festival synopsis notes, highlighting her courage amid conflict. By focusing on Ategh'eh's personal endurance against the backdrop of war, the documentary embodies a nuanced perspective on civilian courage often absent in mainstream reportage. Its acclaim across Europe and Asia reflects both the cinematic quality and the resonance of its human rights message. The Karama Human Rights Film Festival will run from December 5 to 15 in Amman, featuring entries from around the world.