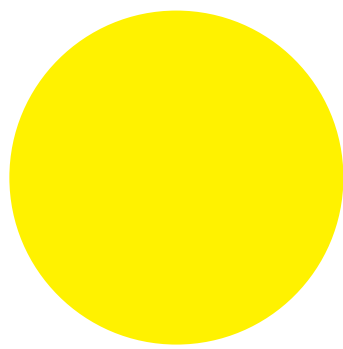


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Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian (L) presents the draft budget bill to the next fiscal year to Parliament Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf during a visit to the legislature in Tehran on December 23, 2025. khabaronline.ir

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A Palestinian man carries the body of his 5-month-old brother, Ahmed Al-Nader, who was killed the previous day along with other family members in an Israeli shelling on a school-turned-shelter in the Tuffah neighborhood of Gaza City on December 20, 2025. AFP



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US Venezuela policy, a Monroe Doctrine redux with China, Russia in focus

By Delaram Ahmadi
Staff writer

INTERVIEW



Jahanbakhsh Izadi

Tensions between the United States and Venezuela have dramatically escalated. Besides sweeping sanctions, US President Donald Trump has ordered a complete blockade of oil tankers related to Venezuela and has largely expanded the presence of the US Navy and Coast Guard in the Caribbean. Those actions are allegedly linked with the fight against drug trafficking and allegations of "narco-terrorism." While a direct military confrontation is not currently underway, the risk of escalation remains, with regional and global actors seeking diplomatic solutions. The key question is what motives are at play. Jahanbakhsh Izadi, an expert on South America affairs, told Iran Daily that US actions were rooted in the same Monroe Doctrine, now aimed at eliminating the influence of rivals such as China and Russia from South America, with the drug issue highlighted to serve that broader objective.

IRAN DAILY: How can the tense relationship between the United States and Venezuela be analyzed within the broader framework of Washington's policies toward Latin America?

IZADI: When all US activities and policies toward Venezuela are taken together—along with potential future cases in Latin America—it becomes clear that this policy is a continuation of the Monroe Doctrine of 1823. The underlying assumption in Washington is that the Western Hemisphere constitutes its backyard, and that the entry of other actors—particularly international rivals—into the region poses specific threats to US interests. From this perspective, the measures taken over the past month or two are anchored in that doctrine, but with notable differences from the past. Originally, the Monroe Doctrine had two pillars: first, that European powers should not interfere in the affairs of the Western Hemisphere or South America; and second, that the United States would refrain from interfering in European affairs. Today, European involvement is no longer seen as problematic. The focus has instead shifted toward China, especially given its extensive economic, technological, and energy ties with Latin American countries, as well as Russia, which to some extent is viewed as a potentially disruptive actor with a limited military footprint in the region. Accordingly, these activities are interpreted within that framework, regardless of the pretext used.

How do you assess the role of oil in the American overall policy toward Venezuela? Is the United States seeking control over Venezuela's oil resources?

Undoubtedly, energy in general—and oil in particular—continues to play a role in US policy as long as fossil fuels remain dominant and energy equations retain their global significance. Moreover, some of these dynamics are driven by US energy companies and resources that help shape such policies, and these factors cannot be ignored. Yet, following the shale oil and shale gas boom in the United States, America's own energy calculus has changed. The United States appears less concerned with meeting its own energy needs than with managing global energy flows.

Take the Persian Gulf as an example: most of its oil is destined for Asian countries such as South Korea, Japan, India, and China. Within the framework of global capitalism, the United States seeks to preserve its dominance and leverage over key energy hubs—both sources of production and international corridors—to pursue its political and strategic objectives through energy as a tool.

To what extent are allegations of "narco-terrorism" and the linking of sanctions to the fight against drug trafficking political, and to what extent are they grounded in reality?

To claim that narco-terrorism has no significance in the region would be inaccurate. However, the notion that this issue is what has genuinely driven US involvement in the current crisis does not appear convincing. According to some estimates, perhaps around 15% of drugs entering the US may be linked to Venezuela, 80% come from other sources.

As such, the focus on Venezuela as a primary hub for drug inflows into the United States appears to be a pretext. This issue has been highlighted largely to rally public opinion in support of US policies or of Trump himself. Broadly speaking, US strategy toward Latin America often involves playing up such themes, either by creating them or, where they do exist, by blowing them out of proportion.

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Russia defends Iran's inalienable right to maintain nuclear program

'Unrealistic': Moscow warns against expanding talks beyond nuclear file

International Desk

Russia's permanent representative to international organizations in Vienna underscored on Tuesday Iran's legitimate right to maintain its national nuclear program, warning that any attempt to broaden talks with Tehran beyond its nuclear program would render negotiations "unrealistic." In a post on the social media platform X, Mikhail Ulyanov wrote that the Islamic Republic, as a signatory to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), is entitled to maintain a nuclear program as long as it is exclusively for peaceful purposes. Ulyanov made the statement in response to former US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's claim that Washington would not allow Iran to revive its nuclear activities, saying such comments ignore Iran's rights under international law. "Apparently, the former Secretary of State does not know that under the NPT Iran has the inalienable right to

maintain national nuclear program provided that it serves exclusively peaceful purposes," Ulyanov wrote on X. In a separate post, Ulyanov also reacted to remarks by Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baqaei, who said Iran's defense capabilities are purely deterrent and non-negotiable, and Tehran would not negotiate over regional or missile-related issues. "The defensive capabilities of the Islamic Republic of Iran are designed to deter aggressors from thinking of attacking Iran and are by no means up for negotiation," he said at his weekly press conference on Monday. Stressing that Iran has developed its missile program to defend its integrity, Baqaei slammed the "blatant hypocrisy and double standards" vis-à-vis Iran's missile program, which is meant to portray it as a "threat," while lethal weapons and even weapons of mass destruction are being funneled into the Israeli-occupied territories to be used in the regime's genocidal war

in the Gaza Strip. Endorsing Baqaei's position, the Russian diplomat said negotiations should be strictly limited to nuclear matters, warning that expanding talks to include regional security or missile capabilities would make the entire process unrealistic. "Right. The talks should be devoted to nuclear issues only. Any attempt to extend the negotiations to regional security and missiles will make the whole exercise unrealistic. It would be like an attempt to hit three birds with one stone," Ulyanov added on X. Iran has repeatedly maintained that its nuclear program is peaceful and that its defense and missile capabilities are solely intended for deterrence. On June 13, Israel launched an unprovoked war against Iran, a day after the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) claimed that Tehran had failed to comply with its commitments to international nuclear safeguards, paving the way for the 12-day war, which



assassinated many high-ranking military commanders, nuclear scientists, and ordinary civilians. More than a week later, the United

States also entered the war by bombing three Iranian nuclear sites in a grave violation of the United Nations Charter, international law, and the NPT.

US Democrats urge 'maximum pressure' on Israel over Gaza truce breaches



Palestinian mourners stand next to the bodies of members of the al-Nader family, who were killed in an Israeli bombing of a school-turned-shelter in the Tuffah neighborhood of Gaza City on December 20, 2025.
● AFP

Dozens of US House Democrats have urged the White House to exert "maximum diplomatic pressure" on the Israeli regime to halt its near-daily violations of a ceasefire agreement in the Gaza Strip, citing continued civilian casualties, destruction of property, and restrictions on humanitarian aid. In a letter sent to President Donald Trump on Monday, as reported by Press TV, 47 Democratic lawmakers said the regime's actions since the ceasefire took effect on October 10

have undermined the fragile agreement and risked renewed large-scale conflagration. The letter was led by Reps. Mark Pocan of Wisconsin and Madeleine Dean of Pennsylvania. The lawmakers referenced figures released by Gaza's Government Media Office, which has denounced Israeli forces for committing 875 ceasefire violations since that date. According to the office, those violations have resulted in the deaths of at least 411 Palestinians and injuries to 1,112 others.

The overall Palestinian death toll in Gaza since October 7, 2023, when the regime launched a war of genocide on Gaza, has reached at least 70,937, with more than 171,000 wounded, women and children forming the majority of the casualties. International experts have warned that actual figures might be significantly higher. In their letter, the Democrats cited the regime's "continued bombardment against civilians, destruction of property, and insufficient delivery of humanitarian aid," calling on the administration to ensure full compliance with the ceasefire framework. "It's imperative" that Washington hold Tel Aviv "accountable for its actions," the lawmakers wrote. The media office said the documented Israeli violations had included 265 incidents of direct gunfire at civilians, 49 military incursions into residential areas, and 421 shelling attacks. It also reported widespread destruc-

tion of civilian structures, including homes, neighborhoods, gardens, and small agricultural plots. The American lawmakers highlighted reports that more than 1,500 buildings had been destroyed since the ceasefire began, many of which reportedly did not appear damaged before being demolished. They also raised concerns about humanitarian access, noting that the ceasefire agreement calls for 600 aid trucks per day to enter Gaza. According to the media office, however, only 17,819 aid trucks have entered the territory out of the 42,800 agreed upon, an average of 244 trucks per day, or about 41 percent of the required volume. Fuel deliveries have been even more limited. The office said only 394 fuel trucks had entered Gaza out of the 3,650 stipulated under the agreement. It warned that the shortage had left hospitals, bakeries, and water and sewage facilities "almost completely out of service." The Democrats said insufficient aid deliveries had left around 1.6 million Palestinians in the coastal sliver in critical conditions. The letter cited specific incidents, including a November 29 Israeli drone strike that killed two brothers aged

eight and 10 after they allegedly crossed into an Israel-controlled area of Gaza. The Israeli military described the children as "suspects," a characterization the lawmakers criticized for failing to acknowledge they were minors. The lawmakers also referenced the regime's broader conduct in Gaza, noting that mass starvation had been cited in ongoing legal proceedings at international courts. Over the past 24 hours, five Palestinians have been reported killed, including four previously unrecorded victims and one newly confirmed fatality, along with three injuries. Since the ceasefire agreement on October 11, 2025, a total of 406 fatalities and 1,118 injuries have been recorded, and 653 bodies have been recovered. The number of Palestinians killed in the Gaza Strip since the start of Israeli genocidal war in October 2023 has reached 70,942, the majority of whom are women and children, according to medical sources. Local health authorities reported that the total number of injuries has risen to 171,195, with many victims still trapped under rubble, and emergency and rescue teams unable to reach them.

US Venezuela policy ...

Given the absence of direct conflict, how serious is the risk of escalation to the level of military confrontation?

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Considering that Trump's social base, or the MAGA movement, does not welcome war, Washington is likely to pursue its objectives through threats or what is often described as peace through strength. Accordingly, the US approach has been to apply pressure through sanctions and blockades. The aim is to prevent war from breaking out. Still, there are no absolute guarantees. Should a perceived necessity arise, all these factors could fall into line. Therefore, if Maduro can be compelled to step aside through dialogue, diplomacy, pressure, sanctions, and exchange of messages, that option would likely be preferred over any military conflict. Otherwise, if the Monroe Doctrine truly underpins

this approach, war may ultimately prove unavoidable. It should also be noted that not all aspects are fully known; for instance, whether the United States is pursuing outright regime change, or merely the removal of Maduro while tolerating his successors and engaging them in negotiations and political compromise.

What role can regional and global actors play in finding a diplomatic solution to this crisis, and where might Iran fit into this equation?

It is unlikely that international rivals of the United States can prevent Washington's approach toward Venezuela or similar cases. They lack both the tools and motivation to do so. The region remains firmly under US dominance, leaving little room for meaningful assistance to the Venezuelan government. Consequently, neither Russia nor China can do much

in practical terms, and the same applies even more so to Iran. As for international institutions and global public opinion, they are also unlikely to play a key role. International institutions are effectively paralyzed, a reality that was evident during the Ukraine crisis and the 12-day war, as power dynamics prevail. Public opinion can also be managed through narrative-building, such as the emphasis on drugs and trafficking. The key point to bear in mind is that countries like Venezuela will never hold the same importance for the United States as Argentina or Brazil. Venezuela occupies a relatively low position both in the international system and in US foreign policy priorities. As such, these developments should be viewed as a temporary, short-lived, and relatively low-cost crisis rather than a major, enduring confrontation.



Mohammad Ali Rajabi
Cartoonist

CARTOON



Budget bill presented to Parliament

President calls for unity, expert approach to overcome challenges

Economy Desk

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian on Monday presented the government's budget bill for the next fiscal year, starting on March 21, 2026, to the presiding board of Parliament during an appearance at the legislature in Tehran. Speaking at an open session of the Iranian parliament, Pezeshkian addressed a range of economic, currency and livelihood issues and stressed the need for cooperation, solidarity, mutual assistance and national unity, his official website reported. "The government seriously draws on the views of experts and specialists in various fields, including water, the environment, social issues, management and foreign policy, because overcoming the crises ahead will not be possible without scientific input and the presence of committed professionals," he said. Government programs, Pezeshkian said, are aligned with financial capacity, expert resources, and available facilities. He welcomed practical participation

from anyone offering alternative solutions, emphasizing that reform demands collective national engagement. Addressing lawmakers, the president said, "My request is that we trust the country's elites, academics and those who genuinely care about the country, and address problems through expert work under their management." "Even if we face challenges at the implementation stage, experts will be able to offer corrective solutions. But if decision-making is handed to those lacking sufficient knowledge and expertise, the outcome will be what we are witnessing today," he said. The budget bill is drafted at a time when Iran is facing unjust Western sanctions over its nuclear programs, targeting the oil and energy sectors and affecting humanitarian costs, including medicine and healthcare. The country is also grappling with energy shortages and environmental challenges such as drought, and air pollution. The draft budget for the coming year is the first to be prepared

under a new framework, under which Parliament will no longer review and approve budgetary provisions, but will instead examine tables containing figures and numbers, ISNA wrote. Under the legal process, the bill will be referred to relevant parliamentary committees and the joint budget committee for detailed review after its formal submission. Parliament Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf said, "Under Parliament's internal regulations, the general outlines of the draft budget for next year will be placed on the agenda of next Sunday's session, which will be attended by the president to defend the bill." Finance Minister Ali Madanizadeh said on Saturday that the draft budget for the next fiscal year has been structured to achieve a near-zero deficit,



imposing no pressure on the Central Bank (CBI), and helping control inflation. He emphasized that the government is not using the capital market to cover budget shortfalls.

He had also said in November that the government has seen no decline in oil revenues and will proceed with its budget planning as scheduled, adding, "Oil income will be included in

the budget according to the usual plan." Iran does not release detailed figures on crude exports due to US sanctions, which it says require confidentiality.

Tehran focuses on nuclear cooperation with Russia, plans multiple power plants

Economy Desk

Iran is focusing on nuclear cooperation with Russia, particularly in the construction of nuclear power plants, Behrouz Kamalvandi, deputy head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI), said on Monday. "In the past, we had nuclear cooperation with China, but currently there is no specific engagement with them because our focus is now on cooperation with Russia, especially as we aim to develop our own nuclear power plants," Kamalvandi told ILNA. He added that Iran's relationship with Russia in nuclear technology is extensive, particularly in the power sector. "In addition to the existing plant [in Bushehr] that has been operating for 11 years, we have two other power plants under construction, which have made acceptable progress," he said. The Bushehr Nuclear Power Plant (BNPP), located in south Iran on the Persian Gulf coast, has generated more than 72 billion kilowatt-hours of elec-



tricity since it was launched more than 11 years ago. Kamalvandi also noted that beyond these three plants, Iran plans to build both large-scale and small modular reactors with Russian cooperation. He said cooperation with Russia extends to other areas, such as radiopharmaceutical production. According to Kamalvandi, Iran is building a 300-megawatt plant in Darkhovin, using domestically built equipment. "Building a power plant requires equipment including steam generators, boilers, vessels and turbines, all of which

can now be produced domestically," Kamalvandi said. He highlighted Iran's ability to manufacture plant components domestically and carry out maintenance, expressing hope for a bright future for its nuclear power plants. The Darkhovin Nuclear Power Plant (also known as Esteghlal Nuclear Power Plant or Karoon) is a planned nuclear power plant located in Khuzestan province,

First geothermal power plant in northwest to join grid soon: TPPH

Economy Desk

Iran's first geothermal power plant, located 25 kilometers south of Meshginshahr in Ardabil Province, is set to be connected to the national grid "soon" following the activation and completion of operations to revive its first geothermal well, according to an official at the Thermal Power Plants Holding Company (TPPH). The project, described as a pilot, is being developed on a geothermal reservoir with a potential capacity of around 250 megawatts. Installation and commissioning of the plant are over 95% complete, IRNA reported. According to Behnam Khaefinejad, project spokesperson at the TPPH, about \$5 million have been invested in constructing the plant, including drilling and cleaning wells. "To explore and extract the geothermal resources, several wells have been drilled to depths of about 3,000 meters, with a production capacity of 30 megawatts,



of which five megawatts will soon be brought online in the first phase," he said. The project has enabled Iran to gain expertise in exploration, design, implementation, and operation of geothermal resources, Khaefinejad said, highlighting plans to develop geothermal energy as a clean and sustainable power source. Future phases aim to expand the Meshginshahr plant's capacity, develop existing wells, extend the reservoir, and establish additional geothermal power plants

across the country, he said. The initiative also seeks to promote renewable geothermal energy, localize technical know-how for sustainable exploitation of geothermal reservoirs, and reduce reliance on fossil fuels, he added. Unlike conventional steam power plants that generate electricity using heat from fossil fuels such as gas or diesel, geothermal plants use the natural heat from underground reservoirs to produce steam for turbines, Khaefinejad explained.

Iran cuts rail export costs to Uzbekistan by 20% using domestic wagons

Economy Desk



Iran has exported goods to Uzbekistan for the first time using Iranian rail wagons, a move that has cut rail transport costs to the Central Asian country by at least 20%, a rail official said on Monday. Mostafa Nassiri Varag, director general of Khorasan Railways, told IRNA that the first shipment using Iranian wagons was dispatched last week from the Sarakhs rail route in Iran's northeastern Razavi Khorasan Province, transiting Turkmenistan before entering the Uzbek city of Bukhara.

The move marks the implementation of a trilateral railway agreement between Iran, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan on transporting and exporting goods with Iranian wagons. "Previously, goods were exported to Turkmenistan using Iranian wagons. Now, with the launch of rail shipments from Sarakhs to Bukhara in Uzbekistan, Iranian wagons have also begun operating in that country," he said, adding that the move signals lower-cost exports to Central Asian countries. Nassiri Varag said Iranian exports had previously been transported

using rail fleets from Central Asian countries and Russia, a practice that increased transport costs for Iranian traders. According to him, more than 7,000 foreign wagons were used across Khorasan Railways, particularly at the Sarakhs border rail station and Shahid Motahhari rail station, during the first nine months of the current Persian calendar year (starting on March 21), representing a 26% decline compared with the same period last year. "However, in this period, rail exports from Razavi Khorasan grew by nearly 60%, showing that, despite reduced

loading by foreign fleets, the exports continued successfully with the use of more cost-effective Iranian wagons," he said. The Sarakhs rail and road customs terminal, located in the far northeastern region of Iran in Razavi Khorasan Province, 185 kilometers northeast of Mashhad and bordering Turkmenistan, is considered one of Iran's key gateways for foreign trade and transit, particularly with Central Asian countries. The Shahid Motahhari railway station is located 50 kilometers south of Mashhad, in the Razaviyeh district, along the Mashhad-Fariman road.

Inside '5,000-day war' on Iran

By Nargol Aran

Tehran-based columnist

OPINION

I come back to the clip of Hamideh in a long fuchsia coat passing the Qur'an over her daughter's head for the first day of school. It is September 2023. Her seven-year-old kisses the Book and walks beneath it.

Almost two years later, in the early hours of June 13, 2025, Hamideh's building was hit as Israel hunted down Iran's military-scientific establishment. Sixty lives were taken in that one blast, including Hamideh's two daughters and husband.

We sit in a small room at her sister's house. The power is out, but the afternoon sun slants in, casting a lattice of light and shadow. Hamideh wears a black dress and a long black shawl. The warmth in her brown eyes that I'd seen in all her photos has gone cold. "I had the most beautiful family," she says, squeezing her eyes shut. Tears come in quick jets. Our weeping leaves a damp hush that settles us. She sits upright, touches my hand, and begins to speak again.

Hamideh and Alireza met as undergrads in engineering school in Isfahan. They married four years later in 2010.

"I loved you from the very first day," he confessed. He was a teacher's son, she a shopkeeper's daughter. Classmates went abroad, but Alireza, who was born in the aftermath of the Imposed War — the war between Iraq and Iran from 1980 to 1988 — believed in staying to build the nation that had endured eight years of onslaught. Defense work carried prestige and honor. He began as a contractor with Parchin, the company known for its role in Iran's missile program, and later took on a full-time position.

On Thursday, June 12, 2025, Hamideh cooked Alireza's favorite meal: pilaf with braised shank. Ayma and Hida took turns doing Hamideh's hair after lunch as they filled their backpacks. Ayma was more boisterous, while Hida walked with an air of mystery. They had a routine of placing mats on the carpet in the living room and sleeping as "mother and girls". But that night, they asked to sleep "father and girls". She kissed them goodnight and went into the bedroom at 1 a.m. At 3:30, she was awakened "with a shrieking red light." She knew it was Israel.

"And then I was falling," she says, gasping for air. She landed on the



A weeping woman carries her bleeding baby following the surprise Israeli strikes on residential neighborhoods in Keshavarz Boulevard, downtown Tehran, Iran, on June 15, 2025.

AMIR KHOLOUSI/WANA

mattress with the frame of the bed protecting most of her body except her neck — there, she felt intense stabbing. "My mind was racing between the fear of paralysis and what had happened to Alireza and the kids."

She heard sirens. A hand came to her through the crack in the wall. "My name is Omid," a man told her. The name means hope. "I will help you get out." She begged him not to leave.

The rescuer stayed and passed her a bottle of water. "It soothed but also awakened me. I was ready to jump out of my life," she says.

She was in a black haze — and then she was in an ambulance. She was fully awake in the hospital. But no one knew who else had survived. "I prayed to see them alive, and if that wasn't meant for us, to have God grant me patience."

By nightfall, she was told Alireza's body was found next to the girls. She was in the hospital with a treatable spinal injury, but they were gone, their flesh in pieces. Hamideh doesn't think she can rewrite the aftermath; it feels like it has been written. For months, they had arranged to be away that week but abruptly postponed their plans at the last minute. She was supposed to be the one who slept with the girls in the living room. Then, suddenly, a great terror uprooted their lives, and she was on her own.

What does she think this force is? I ask.

Israel is targeting our societies by hitting our backbone, she explains.

That night, commanders, scientists, and engineers were killed alongside their families and neighbors. They were targeted in their homes, not on a battlefield. The world is enabling Israel to murder our elders in their work and our children in their sleep, or as they fetch food and water. "What I saw people suffer in Gaza, which I couldn't bear to look at (may I be forgiven), is now mine," Hamideh says softly. Does she have any clue how one survives? "I know I was granted the minimum I prayed for. I was given patience," she answers.

In the garden of martyrs

I am at Rasoul Mosque, high on a hill. It is the "chehelom" — the 40th day of mourning — for Sardar Gholam Ali Rashid, one of our armed forces' most senior commanders, and his son, a young seminary student. Both were murdered by Israel in air strikes on June 13. In the mosque courtyard, photos of Ayma, Hida, and the other children surround the pool, scented with sweet tube-rose.

I climb to the women's gallery and lean on the rail, watching the men gather directly under the dome. Sardar Rashid stares back at me from a banner that hangs beneath a blue-tile frieze, the color of his eyes, inscribed with Aya 5 of Sura al-Jumu'ah: "The example of those who were entrusted with observing the Torah but failed to do so, is that of a donkey carrying books."

A nuclear-armed US outpost on the Eastern Mediterranean is usurping Judaism to annihilate

our societies. The crimes it commits, like the "state" itself, know no boundaries. The order that preached "Human Rights" to us and that also enables Israel meant its right to commit genocide and crucify those willing to defy it. I look downstairs. A veteran of the Imposed War, the war when Sardar Rashid first entered battle, removes his prosthetic leg and settles on the blue-and-white flatweave mat with diamond lattice. Children play tag behind me. A woman hands down laminated Qur'an pages rimmed with orange flowers. By each of us reading one, we contribute to the whole. Sadeq Ahangaran steps to the podium. He is a war elegist, carrying the snowy mantle of old age. He once went to our soldiers on the front, which is now the city, where victims have no age limit. "Our beloved is gone. Our tulip is in the Garden of Martyrs," he recites in an embered voice, the flickers of a fire settling.

A soft response begins to gather around him. We answer in a half-voice — a chorus shadowing him while hitting our chests in rhythm. The silence between the thuds is the terror we now own. Our protectors have been taken. Tears burn my face and spot the green of my shawl. Ahangaran leaves an intentional pause, and the cadenced blows of "sineh-zani" — our collective expressions of grief — rise as the percussion of vibrating bodies breaks the quiet. The Martyr's promise — to save — echoes up to the dome.

A river of names

It is August. We are still in a

"cease-fire."

"We cease; Israel fires," the martyred Refaat Alareer said.

I'm at the office of Agahiyeh Nō magazine to meet 43-year-old journalist Sergei Barseghian. For the past few years, I've read him tear apart the "absolutely bonkers" opposition being tailored for Iran by the US and Israel, "to bring democracy if they succeed in destroying us".

He woke to the sound of explosions on June 13. "I wanted it to be the construction next door, but I knew what it was," he says, running his hands over his silver quiff before saying, "Israel."

What did he feel most of all? "It had already been clear in Gaza and Lebanon, but still, rage that they could commit such atrocities so openly," he said. A political editor for Khabaronline, he went straight to his phone and laptop with his team. Neighbors and extended family were wiped out as entire apartment blocks like Hamideh's were brought down: "a river of names..."

The target set — armed forces, defense industry, and later, broadcasting — was "to force capitulation by making it impossible to respond," Barseghian says.

On the third and 12th days, Israel slaughtered nearly 100 people, first at a busy intersection and then at a prison.

But Barseghian had no intention of leaving the city. "I wasn't afraid of death."

He says Israel functions as a concentrated Western power, backed by diplomatic cover and missile defenses; for the attack on Iran alone, it received an IAEA endorsement and a quarter of America's THAAD interceptors. The German foreign minister who defended attacks on hospitals in Gaza is presiding over the UNGA. "They gave up everything they had made for Israel," Barseghian says.

However, he adds, unlike the past two Iranian dynasties that faced colonial Europe, the Islamic Republic of Iran has proven capable of defending its borders, despite claims that it would prove little more than a paper tiger that could be taken out with one swift blow. Barseghian recalls watching Iranian air defenses from the rooftop as a child when Iraq, also backed by the United States, bombed Tehran. But he adds that as destruction intensifies, so does the distortion of language.

In Gaza, they said, "Hamas is under hospitals." That, Barseghian argues, was how the bombings were normalized. In Iran, the euphemism

“

Israel is targeting our societies by hitting our backbone, she explains.

That night, commanders, scientists, and engineers were killed alongside their families and neighbors. They were targeted in their homes, not on a battlefield.

The world is enabling Israel to murder our elders in their work and our children in their sleep, or as they fetch food and water. "What I saw people suffer in Gaza, which I couldn't bear to look at (may I be forgiven), is now mine," Hamideh says softly.



People help casualties on the floor following the Israeli strikes on Tehran, Iran, on June 15, 2025.

AMIR KHOLOUSI/WANA



Relatives mourn over the flag-draped coffin of Mahan Setareh, a member of the paramilitary Basij force who was killed in Israeli attacks, during his funeral ceremony in Tehran, Iran, on June 26, 2025.

VAHID SALEMI/AP

shifts: “regime commanders,” “regime airspace” — as if our commanders and skies were not us. The aim, he thinks, is to make a population numb to its own defense while legitimizing war crimes. But Iranians didn’t fall for it. Barseghian emphasizes that Iran has never accepted Israel as legitimate, “even during the Shah’s time when Israel worked with SAVAK,” the Shah’s notorious secret police.

The wholeness Israel seeks to break
Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are from this region and have lived together since their beginnings. People can’t be forced to accept an exclusively Jewish “state,” as is clear to Barseghian. He himself is an Iranian Christian, born in Tehran to Armenian parents from Isfahan. This longstanding coexistence undercuts Israel’s claim of a European “right” to Palestine — the whole-

ness itself is what Israel seeks to break. “Look at Iraq, then Syria,” he says. “Now, they come after us.” Does he believe our nation can hold? I ask him. So long as Iran has defenders, he responds, this country will continue to baffle its adversaries — and Israel will keep exposing itself. The June Onslaught, to him, was proof. The commanders were loved by the nation for safeguarding our territorial integrity. But

when they were taken, the continuity plan held; Iran did not fold, but forced Israel to retreat and seek a cease-fire. The martyrs were honored because they held the nation intact. In July, Armita Rezaiejad — whose father was gunned down by Mossad in front of her eyes when she was five — asked an audience of journalists, “How can you call it a 12-day war when my father was killed over 5,000 days ago?”

We stand after one campaign in a longer war to subdue this region and “take out the head of the octopus” — Israel’s description of Iran — cast as the nerve center of resistance. Our elders foresaw the expansion of Israel and warned and prepared us. For daring to oppose it, our backs have been broken, our children turned to mangled flesh before our eyes. Still, our survival feels miraculous. “Sardar Rashid loved Aya 47 of Surah al-Hajj,” his wife recalls in

a sermon weeks after June 13, referring to a verse of the Holy Qur’an. In it, God promises justice, but “a day with your Lord is indeed like a thousand years by your counting.” He had conviction that it would come, she explains, but not according to a timeline we determine, and the only way to endure as a people was to bear witness.

The article first appeared on Mondoweiss.

Extrajudicial killings from Barack Obama to Donald Trump

By Medea Benjamin
Co-founder of peace group CODEPINK
OPINION

In May 2013, as president Barack Obama delivered a major foreign-policy speech in Washington, I managed to slip inside. As he was winding up, I stood and interrupted, condemning his use of lethal drone strikes in Yemen, Pakistan, and Somalia. “How can you, a constitutional lawyer, authorize the extrajudicial killing of people — including a 16-year-old American boy in Yemen, Abdulrahman al-Awlaki — without charge, without trial, without even an explanation?” As security dragged me out, Obama responded, “The voice of that woman is worth paying attention to.” Perhaps my questions touched a chord in his conscience, but the drone attacks did not stop. Just before that incident, I had returned from Yemen, where a small delegation of us met with Abdulrahman’s grandfather, Nasser al-Awlaki — a dignified man with a PhD from an American university, someone who genuinely believed in the values this country claims to represent. He looked at us, grief etched into his face, and asked, “How can a nation that speaks of law and justice kill an American child without apology, without even a justification?” Under Obama, drone strikes killed thousands of people. Entire communities lived under the constant terror of buzzing drones — never knowing whether a flash in the sky meant death for them, their children, or the neighbors who ran to help. We heard these horrors firsthand in 2012, when CODEPINK traveled to Pakistan to meet with victims’ families. A tribal leader from Waziristan described attending a peaceful jirga — a gathering of elders — when a US missile obliterated the meeting. Dozens were instantly killed. As survivors rushed to help the wounded, a second missile struck. Forty-two people died, including elders and local officials. No one in Washington was held accountable. Not one person. Faced with mounting outrage, Obama eventually scaled back the drone program — not because the killings were illegal, immoral, or strategically disastrous, but because the political cost was rising. The truth is that Obama’s drone war normalized the idea that the United States can kill whoever



The illustration shows US President Donald Trump (L) and his predecessor, Barack Obama, over the picture of a drone.
● LEX VILLENA/THE REASON

er it wants, wherever it wants, without due process or oversight. That normalization is the bridge to where we are today. The Trump administration is now carrying out extrajudicial assassinations at sea, including “double taps”. With the latest December 15 strikes, 95 people have been blown to bits in the bombing of 25 boats. Meanwhile, the administration is refusing to release the memo that supposedly explains the legal basis for these killings or to release the

video showing the September bombing that killed two shipwrecked sailors who survived an initial strike. But let’s be clear: the actions of the Trump administration are not an aberration — they are the logical sequel to Obama’s drone killings. If Obama could kill a 16-year-old American boy without accountability, why wouldn’t Trump believe he has the same power to snuff out the lives of civilians with no due process? One of the victims of Trump’s maritime strikes was Alejandro Carranza Medina, a Colombian

fisherman killed on September 15 when a US missile tore apart his vessel. His family has filed a complaint with the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. The family says he was working — fishing, not fighting — when the US government ended his life. And even in cases where drugs are on board, let’s say the obvious: Smuggling narcotics does not turn the open sea into a battlefield, and it does not strip civilians of their right to due process simply because the Trump administration says so. The US

cannot declare people “enemy fighters” to disguise what are, in reality, unlawful killings. Civil liberties groups are suing the government to secure the release of the Office of Legal Counsel opinion and other documents related to these strikes on civilian boats in international waters. The public deserves to see this information. The American people also deserve to see the full video of the September “double tap” that killed two survivors desperately clinging to their overturned boat, as a bipartisan group of lawmakers is demanding. We deserve transparency, accountability, and answers — the same things we demanded under Obama and never received. For more than 20 years, human rights advocates have warned that unchecked drone warfare would shred the boundaries between war and peace, between combatants and civilians, between military force and basic law enforcement. Trump’s maritime killings are the predictable collapse of a system the Obama administration cemented into place: killing people far from any battlefield, without legal authority, without congressional approval, and without the slightest regard for human rights. Once an administration insists that due process in the use of lethal force is optional, every future president inherits a blank check for murder.

The article first appeared on Antiwar.com.



A Yemeni boy walks past a mural depicting a US drone in Sana’a, Yemen, on December 13, 2013. The writing on the wall reads, “Why did you kill my family?”
● MOHAMMED HUWAIS/GETTY IMAGES.

Under Obama, drone strikes killed thousands of people. Entire communities lived under the constant terror of buzzing drones — never knowing whether a flash in the sky meant death for them, their children, or the neighbors who ran to help. Faced with mounting outrage, Obama eventually scaled back the drone program — not because the killings were illegal, immoral, or strategically disastrous, but because the political cost was rising. The truth is that Obama’s drone war normalized the idea that the United States can kill whoever it wants, wherever it wants, without due process or oversight.

Esmaeili crowned Most Dominant Greco-Roman Wrestler of 2025



Iranian Greco-Roman wrestler Saeid Esmaeili (blue) lifts Uzbekistan's Aytjan Khalmakhanov during his 67kg gold-winning campaign at the Islamic Solidarity Games in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, on November 18, 2025. ● IAWFIR

Sports Desk

Iran's Saeid Esmaeili was named the Most Dominant Greco-Roman Wrestler of the Year by United World Wrestling (UWW). The 22-year-old sensation fended off competition from fellow Iranian world champions Mohammad-Hadi Saravi, and Gholamreza Farrokhi, as well as Armenia's Malkhas Amoyan and Uzbekistan's Aytjan Khalmakhanov to claim the prestigious prize. A gold medalist at last year's Paris Olympics, the 67kg wrestler earned the recognition following an emphatic 12-month run in which he posted an 11-0 record across three major tournaments, claiming seven technical-fall victories in the process. Eight of his wins came without conceding a single point, including two 9-0 triumphs over Khalmakhanov — the 63kg gold medalist at September's World Championships — and Serbia's former world champion Sebastian Nadj. Ranked world number one in his weight class, Esmaeili began the international season with a gold-winning campaign at March's Asian Championships in Amman.

He then marked his World Championships debut in style by edging Azerbaijan's Hasrat Jafarov 2-1 in the final. The pair met again for gold at the Islamic Solidarity Games in Riyadh two months later, where Esmaeili came within two seconds of suffering only the second defeat of his senior international career — and his first since June 2024 — before producing a trademark four-point move to defeat Jafarov 8-3 in a thrilling showdown. Esmaeili's honor marked the third award for Iranian Greco-Roman wrestling at the season-ending UWW Awards. Farrokhi claimed the Breakout Performer of the Year prize after racking up a perfect 17-0 record, including 11 technical-superiority wins, across his international appearances. He made his senior international breakthrough at February's Ranking Series event in Zagreb, where he secured three commanding victories before defeating 2024 world silver medalist Erik Szilvássy of Hungary, 6-2, in the 82kg final. The Iranian picked up where he left off upon returning to the Croatian capital in September, accumulating 37

points across four bouts while conceding just one en route to the world title. Moving up to the 87kg category for the U23 World Championships in October, Farrokhi was in a league of his own in Novi Sad, Serbia, sweeping aside all five opponents by technical superiority — including Ukraine's Ivan Chmyr in the final — to claim the title. He capped off the season with yet another gold-winning campaign at the Islamic Solidarity Games, defeating Kazakhstan's Islam Yevloyev 6-0 in the final. Meanwhile, Iran was named the Top Greco-Roman Team of 2025. A prolific year saw the country complete a clean sweep of four world team titles across all age groups, with Iranian wrestlers medaling in 29 of the 40 possible weight categories, collecting 10 golds, six silvers, and 13 bronzes. The pinnacle of Iran's international 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 the nation to only its second team title — and first since 2014 — in the history of the competition.

AFC Champions League Elite: Skocic challenges Tractor to aim higher after last-gasp winner secures knockout spot

Sports Desk

Persian Gulf Pro League champion Tractor may have secured progression to the AFC Champions League Elite last 16 with two matches to spare in the league phase, but head coach Dragan Skocic is demanding that his side aims for more in the competition. Prolific striker Amirhossein Hosseinzadeh netted a stoppage-time winner as Tractor came from behind to beat Qatar's Al Duhail 2-1 at home on Monday, moving up to second in the West Zone's 12-team table with 14 points — four adrift of Saudi heavyweight Al Hilal, which defeated host Sharjah FC 1-0 to maintain its perfect run in Asia's elite club competition.

The visitors broke the deadlock against the run of play in the 35th minute after Mohammad Naderi tripped Edmilson Junior in the box, with Benjamin Bourigeaud sending Tractor goalkeeper Alireza Beiranvand the wrong way from the spot. Tractor's equalizer came six minutes into the second half as Tibor Halilovic's curling free-kick struck the upright, before captain Shoja Khalilzadeh calmly side-footed home the rebound. Just when it looked as though the match would end in a stalemate, Hosseinzadeh dribbled past a couple of Al Duhail players before his deflected effort from distance lobbed Argentine goalkeeper Bau-

tista Burke, sending the home crowd at Tabriz's Yadegar-e Imam Stadium into a frenzy. "I am very happy with today's game; we played very well," Skocic said after his team secured its fourth win in six Asian matches. "We gave the penalty away too easily in the first half, but otherwise we produced a good performance. "We created more scoring opportunities. We pressed the opponents well and closed them down with discipline. I like this way of playing, and today we played a little more with our minds. "We have a long season ahead of us. Our achievement has been satisfying, but we are looking to the future. No one in the lock-

er room is satisfied with merely advancing from the first stage, but what has been done is respectable," added the Croatian. Hosseinzadeh, meanwhile, praised the Tractor supporters "who came to the stadium to support their team despite the cold weather in Tabriz." "We conceded too cheaply, but we had chances to equalize in the first half. At halftime, we vowed to win this match, and that's what we managed to do in the end," added the 25-year-old Iranian international, who took his tally to 10 goals and five assists in 21 appearances across all competitions this season. Hosseinzadeh, who was the leading marksman in the Iranian top flight last sea-



Tractor striker Amirhossein Hosseinzadeh (2nd L) celebrates with teammates after scoring the winner in a 2-1 victory over Al Duhail in the AFC Champions League at the Yadegar-e Imam Stadium, Tabriz, Iran, on December 22, 2025. ● IAWFIR

son, credited Skocic with helping him deliver "the best version of me over the past two years." "I am really pleased with my form for both club and

country. I would love to be part of the Iranian squad at the World Cup, though the final decision rests with the national team's coaching staff," he said.

Tractor will be back at the home venue to face Al Sadd on February 10, before playing away to another Qatari opposition in Al Gharafa seven days later.

Iran names roster for AFC U23 Asian Cup



Sports Desk

Iran head coach Omid Ravankhah has named a 23-man squad for the upcoming AFC U23 Asian Cup, which kicks off on January 6 in Saudi Arabia. Iran has been drawn alongside Uzbekistan, South Korea, and Lebanon in Group C of the competition's seventh edition. Iran will face China in a friendly during a seven-day training camp in Dubai — starting Sunday — before departing for Riyadh for its opening match against 2020 champion South Korea at Al Shabab Club Stadium on January 7. Ravankhah's men will then take on Uzbekistan —

champion in 2018 and runners-up in the previous two editions — at the Prince Faisal bin Fahd Sports City Stadium on January 10, before wrapping up the group stage against Lebanon at the same venue three days later. The top two teams from each of the four groups will advance to the quarterfinals, with the final to be staged at Jeddah's Prince Abdullah Al Faisal Sports City Stadium on January 24. Iran will return to the U23 Asian Cup finals for the first time since 2022 after finishing top of its qualification group — which also featured hosts the UAE, Hong Kong, and Guam — in

September. Iran defeated Hong Kong (4-0) and Guam (6-0) before completing a perfect qualification campaign with a 3-2 victory over the UAE. Ravankhah's team took part in the four-team Manas Cup in Kyrgyzstan in November, suffering back-to-back defeat against Russia (2-0) and the host (2-1), before beating Bahrain 1-0. The following is Iran's full squad for the 2026 AFC U23 Asian Cup:

Goalkeepers: Mohammad Khalifeh (Iralco), Amir-Mahdi Maqsoodi (Sepahan), Pouria Rafiei (Sepahan)
Defenders: Mohammad-Mahdi Zare' (Akhamat Grozny), Danial Eiri (Malavan

FC), Farzin Mo'amelegari (Shams Azar), Masoud Mohebbi (Khaybar FC), Bahram Goudarzi (Iralco), Arshia Vossouqifard (Fajr Sepasi), Seyyed Mahdi Mahdavi (Iralco), Erfan Jamshidi (Paykan)
Midfielders: Pouria Latififar (Golgozar Sirjan), Mahdi Goudarzi (Khaybar FC), Abbas Habibi (Malavan FC), Mahdi Ja'fari (Malavan FC), Amir-Mohammad Razaqinia (Esteghlal), Amir-Reza Sheikhirad (Nassaji Mazandaran), Mohammad-Javad Hosseinnejad (Dynamo Makhachkala), Yadegar Rostami (Fajr Sepasi), Mohammad-Hossein Sadeqi (Persepolis), Hamidreza Zarouni (Khaybar FC)
Strikers: Mohammad Asgari (Sepahan), Reza Ghandipour (Al Wahda).

Immerse in Lahijan; enchanting bride of Gilan Province



Sheytan Kuh
● gashstour.ir



Iran's National Tea Museum
● visitiran.ir



Sustain Wetland
● eneshat.com

Iranica Desk

The city of Lahijan, located in eastern part of Gilan Province, has long been known as the “Bride of Gilan” for its distinctive urban architecture and wide streets nestled between mountains and forests. It borders the Caspian Sea to the north, the Alborz Mountains to the south, Langarud to the east, and Astaneh Ashrafiyeh to the west. Its numerous cafés have earned it the nickname “the city that never sleeps.” Continuous rains, persistent mist, and the unparalleled green landscapes of rice paddies and tea gardens give Lahijan a unique identity compared to other cities in Gilan. It is not only the tea capital of Iran but also an exceptional destination for tourists, thanks to its natural, historical, cultural, and religious attractions. Historically, Lahijan served as the capital of the Kia dynasty in Gilan Province and played an important role in the economy, culture, and politics of northern Iran during the Safavid and Qajar eras. It is also the birthplace of many scholars, poets, and thinkers. Lahijan always has a new story to tell — from tea plantations and the hills of Sheytan Kuh to its lively nightlife and bustling markets, IRNA wrote.

Sheytan Kuh

Sheytan Kuh is a lush and iconic hill at the heart of Lahijan, extending along the Alborz Mountains. Its many steps lead visitors to the “Green Roof,” which offers stunning 360-degree panoramic views

of the city, tea plantations, and dense forests. Visitors climb nearly 300 steps beside an artificial waterfall to reach the northern ridge, where the summit and cable car station are located. Those unable to ascend can drive from the south to the cable car station at the Green Roof. More than a tourist attraction, Sheytan Kuh is a place for social interaction and family walks, symbolizing Lahijan’s natural identity. At the foot of the lush hill covered with boxwood trees, there is a large pool covering 17 hectares and about four meters deep. Traditionally, it served as a water reservoir to irrigate rice fields and was fed by streams flowing from the mountain. At the center of the pool lies a beautiful island (formerly called Mian Poshteh), connected to the southern edge by a long concrete bridge. The pool’s perimeter is nearly two kilometers, bordered by a beautiful boulevard. It is one of Lahijan’s major scenic and recreational spots, popular for morning walks and exercise as well as evening gatherings. Many artists, from painters to musicians, perform here during busy times.

Iran’s National Tea Museum

The most significant event in modern Lahijan’s history was the cultivation of tea bushes by Kashf al-Saltaneh (Mohammad Mirza Chaykar) about 115 years ago, which transformed the agricultural economy of the city and Gilan Province. Kashf al-Saltaneh’s tomb, now the Iran’s National Tea Museum, and the treasures of Iranian tea history

are notable monuments in the city. The museum is registered as a national heritage site and acquaints visitors with tea, its history, and its development. Located at the tomb of Prince Mohammad (Kashf al-Saltaneh), the father of Iranian tea, the museum is the country’s only specialized tea museum. Situated on Kashf al-Saltaneh Street in Lahijan, the building commemorates the pioneer who popularized tea cultivation in Iran and houses invaluable historical artifacts, including tea-pots and cups from different eras, documents on tea cultivation, and vintage photos of Kashf al-Saltaneh and traditional tea production methods. The museum represents northern Iran’s agricultural and economic identity and shows how a product shaped local culture and lifestyle. Visiting it is a journey through history and a tribute to the efforts that changed the region’s economy and people’s lives. As a cultural attraction, it connects generations and highlights tea’s importance in the social and economic life of Gilan and Iran. Haj Mohammad Mirza Kashf al-Saltaneh was more than a government official; he transformed northern Iran’s agricultural and economic landscape. Educated abroad and a statesman during the Qajar era, he realized Gilan Province’s economy needed a strategic, sustainable crop. Despite British restrictions on tea seed exports, he cleverly smuggled seeds into Iran and established tea cultivation in Lahijan and northern areas. This revo-

lutionized the region’s economy and employment and made Iranian tea a vital part of daily life and culture. Kashf al-Saltaneh was also a thinker and writer who masterfully promoted tea and its cultivation. His tomb, Iran’s National Tea Museum, symbolizes progressive thought and respect for labor and self-sufficiency. Known as the father of Iranian tea, his name is forever intertwined with Lahijan’s history and greenery. The Lahijan Flower and Ornamental Plants Garden, covering 54 hectares, is another legacy of Kashf al-Saltaneh. It is a lush paradise in this tourist-friendly city. The garden is enhanced by various ancient trees such as camphor and bamboo. Located beside the Lahijan cable car, it offers enchanting views. However, many visitors to Gilan Province remain unaware of its beauty.

Lahijan Cable Car

Lahijan Cable Car is one of the city’s most modern and popular tourist attractions. It carries visitors from Sheytan Kuh’s slopes to Lahijan’s Green Roof, offering breathtaking panoramic views of the city, tea plantations, dense forests, and the Alborz Mountains — a must-see experience in northern Iran. The cable car represents the smart integration of modern technology with Gilan Province’s pristine nature. Travelers enjoy a smooth, memorable ride in safe, comfortable cabins over hills and tree-covered valleys. At intermediate and final sta-

tions, amenities like food stalls, photo spots, and walking paths create enjoyable moments, making the cable car a favorite family destination. More than recreation, the cable car is a key driver for tourism and the local economy. By generating direct and indirect jobs and showcasing a modern, attractive image of Lahijan to domestic and international visitors, it plays a crucial role in sustainable regional development.

Sustain Wetland

Sustain Wetland is a scenic area near Sustain village, about five kilometers southeast of Lahijan and 49 kilometers southeast of Rasht. To the north, it borders Bijarkun village; to the south and west, it is surrounded by dense Lahijan rice paddies; to the east lie Kateshal village and moorlands. It takes roughly 13 minutes to reach the wetland from Lahijan via the closest route and about 58 minutes from Rasht. Unfortunately, Sustain Wetland lacks recreational facilities and camping areas. Boating is not permitted. Visitors can enjoy watching water lilies, migratory birds, and fishing, though these activities are seasonal. For instance, in summer, lower water levels reduce fish populations, so fishing should be limited to protect them. Dense forests, mainly poplars, surround the wetland. Other trees, including hornbeam and willow, are

also present.

Hajiabad Wetland

Located west of Lahijan at the city’s entrance from Rasht, Hajiabad Wetland was once overlooked but has recently gained attention. Thanks to Lahijan’s municipality’s efforts in enhancing the area and adding a cycling track and several cafés, it now attracts tourists, locals, and people from nearby towns. Covering around 17 hectares, this land-water complex is significant for tourism because of its native plants and birds. Fed by rainfall, the wetland hosts various fish species.

Sukhteh Kuh

Sukhteh Kuh is a pristine mountainous and forested area on Lahijan’s outskirts. Known for its dense Hyrcanian forests, clear springs, and fresh, cool air, it is a hidden gem for nature lovers and hikers. With panoramic Alborz Mountains views and forests filled with beech and maple trees, Sukhteh Kuh is a lost paradise for photographers and those seeking tranquility. The area offers walking and hiking trails, perfect for spending a full day immersed in northern Iran’s untouched nature. Beyond tourism, Sukhteh Kuh is a valuable ecosystem with unique plants and animals. It is deeply rooted in Lahijan’s local culture and forms part of the community’s collective memory, requiring protection and care for future generations.

Iranica Desk

Dyeing is a process in which textile products such as fibers, yarns, fabrics, or clothes are immersed in a mixture of pigments and chemical substances, during which the pigments become almost permanently attached to the materials. The art of dyeing has been practiced in Iran for hundreds of years. The Pazyrik carpet, discovered in Siberia and attributed to the Achaemenid dynasty, was made using yellow, red, blue, and green dyes — evidence of the ancient roots of dyeing in Iran. The Safavid dynasty is particularly known for the remarkable advancement of dyeing and carpet weaving during the Islamic era. Some of the common colors used at that time included crimson red, blue, green, pale yellow, and orange. Interestingly, the pigments used during the Safavid period are quite similar to those employed today. Natural dyes fall into two main categories: plant-based and animal-based. However, most modern dyes are synthetic and, compared to natural ones, lack the same distinctive brilliance and charm. Among Iran’s major dyeing centers, Qom stands out as one of the most important. In addition to its carpet production, tra-

Tracing heritage of dyeing in Qom

ditional dyeing has long been one of Qom’s oldest crafts and remains popular even today. Thanks to the efforts of the Cultural Heritage Organization of Qom, this traditional dyeing technique has been nationally registered as part of Iran’s cultural heritage. Using their creativity, dyers can mix pigments to create hues that differ subtly from one another. For instance, by blending violet and red, a bright magenta is produced; adding rich yellow pigments to this mixture transforms it into a persimmon orange. The dyeing process itself involves several stages. First, wool or silk is soaked in warm water for about two hours to prepare the fibers for dye absorption. The material is then washed in water at 30-35°C with detergents,

rinsed thoroughly, and dried. In the next step, various types of alum — green, white, or black — are added to nearly boiling water. Alum, a sulfate compound, enhances pigment absorption and improves colorfastness. The amount of alum used and the duration of this step depend largely on the desired color. Next, the dyeing pot is heated to around 100°C. The yarns and chosen pigments are combined and boiled together for about an hour, with the mixture stirred every five minutes using a wooden spatula. Once the boiling stage is complete, the pot is allowed to cool gradually. Finally, the dyed yarns are spread out and dried in sunlight, completing the traditional dyeing process.



Tehran, Dushanbe map reciprocal museum exhibitions in Shiraz

Arts & Culture Desk

Iran and Tajikistan agreed to stage reciprocal museum exhibitions, including a showcase of Tajik historical heritage in the southern Iranian city of Shiraz, as the two countries move to scale up cultural diplomacy anchored in shared Persianate history. Zarifi Alisher Najmiddin, First Deputy Director of the National Museum of Tajikistan, made the proposal on Tuesday during talks in Shiraz with Behzad Moridi, director general of cultural heritage, tourism and handicrafts for Iran's Fars Province, IRNA reported. The Tajik official said deeper museum cooperation could sharpen regional and international recognition of the two nations' common cultural legacy. Under the plan, a curated exhibition of selected artifacts from the Jondishapur Museum of Trade History will be mounted at the National Museum of Tajikistan to coincide with the international Nowruz celebrations. A second phase will bring an exhibition

of historical and artistic works from the National Museum of Tajikistan to a museum or cultural venue in Shiraz. Moridi welcomed the proposal, describing museum and cultural exchanges as a core pillar for consolidating bilateral ties. He said Zarifi's visit marked a practical step toward durable, goal-oriented cooperation between Iranian and Tajik cultural institutions. Fars province, home to Shiraz and widely regarded as a cradle of Iranian civilization, is prepared to broaden museum collaboration with Tajikistan, Moridi said. He cited the province's dense concentration of museums, archaeological sites and listed monuments as a platform for joint international exhibitions and long-term partnerships. The cooperation agenda under discussion spans conservation and restoration of historical artifacts and sites, joint scientific research, professional training and capacity building, and systematic cataloging and documentation



Zarifi Alisher Najmiddin (R), first deputy director of the National Museum of Tajikistan, reads a Tajik text to Behzad Moridi, director general of cultural heritage, tourism and handicrafts for Iran's Fars Province, during a meeting in Shiraz, Fars Province, on December 23, 2025.
● IRNA

of collections. The two sides also exchanged technical experience in museology and reviewed mechanisms to streamline bilateral engagement in cultural heritage management. Shiraz has emerged in recent months as an active node in Iran's cultural and economic outreach. Since the last Nowruz, the city has hosted multiple high-level gatherings involving leaders from countries within the broader Persian cultural sphere. It also served as the venue for the 17th session of the Iran-Tajikistan Joint Economic Commission, underscoring its growing role in Iran's external engagement.



Iran, Kazakhstan frame shared heritage as bridge for cultural dialogue



Kazakhstan's Ambassador to Iran, Ontalap Onalbayev (L), speaks during the Iran-Kazakhstan cultural night at the Niavaran Cultural and Historical Complex in Tehran on December 22, 2025.
● ISNA

Iran's minister of cultural heritage, tourism and handicrafts said that shared heritage can serve as a platform for dialogue and cultural peace, as Tehran hosted a joint Iran-Kazakhstan cultural evening at the Niavaran cultural and historical complex. Speaking at the gathering in Tehran on December 22, Reza Salehi-Amiri, Iran's Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts, described ancient rituals, scientific figures and long-standing traditions across the region as assets that transcend modern borders and bind societies together. He said the responsibility

of governments was to understand these legacies more deeply and present them credibly on the global stage. The event marked the first installment of a new series titled 'Shared Heritage, Everlasting Ties', launched by the ministry as part of its cultural diplomacy agenda. The initiative is designed to use heritage, tourism and the creative industries as low-cost, high-impact instruments of engagement at a time when formal political channels across Eurasia face persistent constraints. Salehi-Amiri pointed to Yalda, the ancient winter solstice celebration observed across Iran and Central Asia, as one of the region's most enduring shared traditions, carrying a message of continuity and

social cohesion. He also cited previous high-profile cultural programming, including the Armenian Philharmonic's performance at Persepolis, as evidence that culture operates as a transnational language with durable soft-power returns. Kazakhstan's Ambassador to Iran Ontalap Onalbayev, told the audience that expanding relations with Iran remained a key priority of Astana's foreign policy. He said historical exchanges along the Silk Road had positioned both countries as connective corridors between East and West, facilitating trade, scholarship and literature over centuries. Onalbayev described Iran as a significant political and economic partner in the Middle East and the wider Islamic world, adding that recent high-level exchanges and the signing of several cultural memoranda had created operational momentum for cooperation in areas such as archives, cinema and cultural exchanges. A focal point of the evening was the

joint submission by Iran and Kazakhstan of a UNESCO commemorative dossier on the philosopher Al-Farabi, which Salehi-Amiri described as a template for future multilateral heritage projects, similar to the earlier multinational registration of Nowruz. He confirmed that Tehran will host a global Nowruz celebration and a meeting of tourism ministers in March 2027. Held alongside exhibitions of books, photographs and traditional crafts, including a Kazakh nomadic yurt, the Niavaran event drew diplomats, lawmakers and cultural figures. Iranian and Kazakh musicians performed traditional repertoires, underscoring the organizers' emphasis on tangible cultural expression rather than formal declarations. Iranian officials said the 'Shared Heritage, Everlasting Ties' program would continue on a rotating country basis, positioning culture as a practical channel for sustained regional engagement rather than a symbolic add-on.

'Mitosis' picked for competition at Russia's Echo BRICS Film Festival

Arts & Culture Desk



Iranian short film 'Mitosis', directed by Raha Haji Zeinal, was selected to compete at the ninth Echo BRICS Film Festival, scheduled to run from December 23 to 27, in Moscow. The annual, in-person festival is set to screen entries from a broad slate of countries, including Poland, Britain, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Iran, underscoring the event's widening geographic footprint on the Eurasian cultural circuit. Echo BRICS is regarded as one of Russia's established international film platforms, awarding prizes across feature, documentary and short formats, as well as acting, screenwriting and directing categories, according to ILNA. 'Mitosis' was written by Ali Safari and produced by Anahita Mogouei alongside Soran Karimi. Iranian actors Mehdi Abouhamzeh and Farid Zangi lead the cast. The short centers on moments of rapid decision-making and their lasting consequences, a narrative approach that has helped the film gain traction on the global festival calendar. The film previously received an honorable mention for best film at the World Culture Festival in Karachi, Pakistan, an event that has scaled up quickly into the country's largest cultural showcase. More than 1,000 artists from 140 countries took part in the Karachi festival's second edition, which combined film screenings with theater, photography and visual arts programming. Beyond South Asia, 'Mitosis' has screened in Europe and Latin America, including at the Norwich Film Festival in eastern England and Colombia's Palooza Film Festival.

Iran, Uzbekistan float joint Avicenna film in push for cultural diplomacy

Arts & Culture Desk

Iran's Academy of Arts and Uzbekistan's Embassy in Tehran agreed to explore a joint feature film on the life of Avicenna and to expand exchanges of historical records, opening a new phase of bilateral cultural diplomacy aimed at safeguarding shared heritage, Iranian state news agency IRNA reported. At a meeting in Tehran, Majid Shah-Hosseini, president of the Academy of Arts of the Islamic Republic of Iran, and Fariddin Nasriyev, Uzbekistan's ambassador, framed culture and the arts as a practical entry point for deeper cooperation between two civilizations with intertwined histories.

Shah-Hosseini proposed co-producing a film on Avicenna, known as Ibn Sina, arguing that joint stewardship of cultural icons can counter historical distortion and elevate authentic narratives. Shah-Hosseini said Uzbekistan's recent opening of a major Center of Islamic Civilization in Tashkent underscored the momentum for hands-on collaboration. He described the academy as the country's top arts planning body, with specialist groups spanning art research, traditional and visual arts such as architecture and miniature painting, and modern disciplines including cinema and theater. Those capacities, he said, position the academy to translate cultural intent into

executable projects. He also expressed hope that Akmal Nuriddinov, head of Uzbekistan's Academy of Arts, would visit Iran next month with a delegation to finalize groundwork for a five-year operational plan now being drafted as a memorandum of cooperation. Proposed deliverables include exchanging digital copies of reference art books, staging reciprocal cultural weeks in Tehran and Tashkent, and coordinating preservation of shared cultural assets. Shah-Hosseini criticized what he called flawed Western cinematic portrayals of Avicenna, citing the 2013 film 'The Physician,' and said neglect by rightful heirs invites misrepresentation by others. He emphasized that

honoring civilizational figures requires sustained institutional action rather than symbolic gestures.

Nasriyev welcomed the academy's hospitality and pointed to the recent expansion of Iran-Uzbekistan civil ties. He said Tashkent favors broader engagement between the two academies and supports hosting Iranian delegations in Uzbekistan. Noting the depth of overlapping historical sources, he said Uzbek specialists are prepared, subject to Iranian consent, to review relevant archives in Iran and transfer materials to Uzbek libraries or the Tashkent civilization center. On Avicenna, Nasriyev proposed

a co-produced film with location shooting split between Bukhara, the philosopher's birthplace, and Hamedan, his burial site. A shared creative lens, he said, could deliver a credible, high-standard production. He also invited Iranian officials to mark Avicenna's commemoration with a symbolic appearance at his statue in Tehran. Abdolrahim Firouzabadi, director for the academy's presidential office and international relations, said parallel talks with Uzbekistan's Academy of Arts have advanced ideas ranging from book exchanges and a Central Asian art section at the academy library to cooperation in miniature painting education and joint study of Timurid-era works.