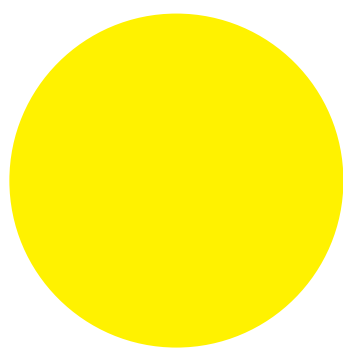


## Iran excoriates Zelensky for Davos drivel

*Araghchi: World has had enough of 'confused clowns'*

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Iranian Roads and Urban Development Minister Farzaneh Sadeq Malvajer (3rd L) is welcomed by Governor General Mansour Bijar (2nd L) during a visit to Sistan and Baluchestan Province, southeastern Iran on January 22, 2026.

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## Failed Mossad operation aims to cause chaos in Iran

Israeli efforts to incite Trump continue

By Afifeh Abedi  
International relations expert

**OPINION  
EXCLUSIVE**

Following a fragile cease-fire in the 12-day conflict, it was predictable that the United States and Israel would move the war to Iran's streets. Concurrently with intensified economic sanctions targeting ordinary Iranians, American and Israeli media outlets were churning out daily reports and analyses portraying widespread public discontent. These reports were further fueled by climate-related water shortages, painting a picture of Iranian society on the brink of explosion. Behind the scenes, Mossad and the CIA were reportedly recruiting terrorists, outlaws, and opponents of the Islamic Republic to stir up an armed conflict.

Much of what transpired in January was a pre-planned scenario designed for January and February. However, Iran was not caught off guard. It must be emphasized that the hybrid war waged against the Islamic Republic is one of the most complex subversion projects in international politics, encompassing vast intelligence, security, economic, social, and even psychological dimensions – a comprehensive analysis of which would fill hundreds of pages.

However, after navigating the recent crisis, two short-term steps that represent the initial next moves by the US and Israel against Iran can be described as follows: persuading Donald Trump to take further action against Iran and launching a campaign to tarnish the Islamic Republic's image internationally.

1. Wooing Trump for aggressive action: After Iran's decisive response to US and Israeli aggression in June, which involved

precise targeting of Israeli military and intelligence centers in occupied Palestinian territories, Tel Aviv has largely accepted that any unilateral attack on Iran could trigger a far more regret-inducing response. As seen during the 12-day conflict, Israel couldn't hold its own without US and European support, and any new conflict will require significant external backing for survival. Consequently, during the recent crisis, Israel admitted Mossad's involvement in the killings of Iranians in the streets while publicly stating it would not intervene in an attack on Iran.

However, Israel's efforts to play mind games with Trump to incite the US president against Iran continue. Trump, meanwhile, has fallen for the Israeli trap. Regardless of the Jeffrey Epstein case, which can be seen as a Mossad file against Trump, Benjamin Netanyahu has used various psychological tactics and exploited Trump's personality traits to push the

US president into a direct and reputational confrontation against Iran.

One of Trump's characteristics is that he views all global equations as win-or-lose scenarios and is unwilling to accept any form of defeat. During the 12-day conflict, Trump was talked into an illegal and highly dangerous attack on Iran's nuclear facilities, after which he trumpeted a victory on social media. However, the recent crisis, which has once again put Trump in Netanyahu's trap, has yielded no major gains. Consequently, Israel's game of goading him into an unpredictable and aggressive action against Iran continues, as evidenced by recent claims about Iran's alleged plot to assassinate Trump.

The NewsNation journalist's question to Trump about the possibility of Iranian assassination was not accidental and it is clear that Israeli propaganda is behind it to continue inciting Trump against Iran.

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# Pezeshkian: Enemies seek to expand insecurity in Muslim countries

Erdogan says Iran's security of 'extraordinary importance' to Turkey

## International Desk

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian said enemies are working to spread terrorism and insecurity in the region by engineering internal crises in Muslim countries, pointing to "direct" US-Israeli role in Iran riots.

"The plan of the enemies of the Islamic Ummah is to expand and sustain war, terrorism, and insecurity in the region by creating internal crises in Islamic countries," Pezeshkian told his Turkish counterpart, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, during a telephone conversation late Thursday.

Enemies, he maintained, "do not want Muslim nations to live in peace, security and stability."

He said the recent riots in Iran had clear external dimensions and pointed to the "direct role" of the United States and the Israeli regime.

He said protests by some merchants and trade groups, sparked by economic problems caused by "unjust pressures and sanctions," had initially been peaceful and were being managed toward res-

olution.

"However, groups of trained terrorists, with unprecedented actions such as setting fire to mosques and public and government centers, destroying rescue equipment, and killing civilians as well as security and law enforcement forces, sought to advance their destructive goals with the direct support of the United States and the Zionist regime," Pezeshkian said.

Erdogan, for his part, offered condolences over the deaths of a large number of Iranian civilians and security personnel during the recent unrest.

He said peace, stability and security in Iran were of "extraordinary importance" to Turkey and stressed that Ankara had consistently voiced this position in all arenas and forums.

Pezeshkian thanked the Turkish government and people for their "firm, principled and brotherly" support for the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan also said that Ankara opposes any military action against Iran, stressing that Iran should resolve its internal problems



Recep Tayyip Erdogan

on its own. He was referring to the US president's military threats against Iran over protests in the country.

## Causes behind riots

In a message addressed to the Iranian people on Thursday, Pezeshkian said he has tasked several groups with "carefully examining the causes behind the recent events" in order to identify and eliminate "the roots of violence."



Masoud Pezeshkian

He said the government and the establishment consider themselves responsible for all those harmed in the events and would work, "as far as possible," to compensate damages with the help of the Iranian people.

The Iranian president said the recent unrest and insecurity was "a vengeful response by the enemies of the Iranian nation" following their defeat in the 12-day war in June.

He said hostile forces had turned "the legitimate and civil protests of the people" into "a bloody and violent arena," resulting in the deaths of nearly 3,000 citizens and injuries to thousands more.

"The same evil hands that, in the 12-day war, shed the blood of more than a thousand women, men, youths, children, scientists and commanders of this land, today emerged from another sleeve," he said.

## Iran: EU parliament's resolution against Iran based on unfounded claims

Iran's Foreign Ministry strongly condemned a "meddlesome and irresponsible" resolution issued by the European Parliament on recent foreign-backed terrorist attacks in the country, saying it was based on unfounded and incorrect claims.

In a resolution adopted on Thursday, members of the European Parliament expressed what they described as "full solidarity" with Iranians while also calling for the designation of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) as a terrorist organization.

The Iranian Foreign Ministry in a statement on Friday said that the European Parliament absolutely "lacks moral standing on human rights issues due to its members' support for cruel sanctions against Iran and complicity with the Israeli regime's aggression against the Islamic Republic in June, which was a flagrant violation of the human rights of the Iranian people," Press TV re-



IRNA

ported.

According to the ministry, the silence of the European Parliament and its leaders regarding the Israeli regime's genocidal war in occupied Palestine and their disregard for the crimes committed on the streets of Iran are "two sides of the same coin."

It said the drafters of the EU Parliament's resolution based their work on US-Israeli "lies," ignoring solid evidence, including images, audio files, and field reports, that Israeli-linked terrorists drove peaceful gatherings to violence. They repeated a series of stereotypical accusations against Iranian

security forces and legal institutions in a completely biased manner, the ministry noted.

It said the European Parliament issued a resolution that not only disseminates falsehoods and distorts clear realities but also blatantly violates some of the most important principles of the United Nations Charter and the fundamental rules of international law.

It noted that Iran is duty-bound to safeguard security, public order, and national sovereignty against any terrorist act and foreign threat and interference.

"Any unlawful or interventionist decision or

stance concerning the Armed Forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the guardians of the country's security will be met with Iran's reciprocal action, and the responsibility for its consequences shall lie with those who instigate it," the ministry warned. Late last month, widespread economic hardship compounded by years of Western sanctions sparked peaceful protests by merchants across Tehran and other cities.

Iranian authorities initially acknowledged the legitimacy of some demands, but officials said demonstrations were hijacked by US- and Israeli-backed rioters aiming to incite violence and disorder.

Iran's Foundation of Martyrs and Veterans Affairs later reported that 3,117 people died during the unrest, including 2,427 civilians and security personnel, noting that many innocents were killed by organized terrorist elements.

## Iran excoriates Zelensky for Davos drivel

Araghchi: World has had enough of 'confused clowns'

## International Desk

Iran's foreign minister on Friday launched a furious tirade against the Ukrainian president who has called for toppling Iran's ruling establishment over response to the recent foreign-backed riots in the country, saying, "The world has had enough of Confused Clowns."

Volodymyr Zelensky, whose country has been fighting a full-scale war with Russia for almost four years, said in a speech at the World Economic Forum on Thursday that if Iran's leadership was able to remain in power, it was a "clear signal to every bully."

Zelensky appeared to cite Europe's response to the recent protests in Iran as another example of its inaction over developments across the world.

"The world has not helped enough the Iranian people, it has stood aside," he said.



Abbas Araghchi  
TASNIM

Zelensky also pointed to Europe's inability to counter Russia over its military campaign in his country, saying that the US could seize shadow fleet tankers and oil while Europe could not, noting that oil funds the war against Ukraine. "If [Russian President Vladimir] Putin has no money, there's no war for Europe," Zelenskyy said.

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi in a post on X said the Ukrainian leader had been "rinsing American and European taxpayers to fill the pockets of his corrupt generals."

"The world has had enough of Confused Clowns, Mr Zelensky," he said, in apparent reference to the Ukrainian leader's previous career as a comedian and comic actor.

"Unlike your foreign-backed and mercenary-infested military, we Iranians know how to defend ourselves and have no need to beg foreigners for help," he added.

Iranian authorities said over 3,000 people had been killed in the latest protests, which were orchestrated by the United States and Israel.

## 'Absurd': Tehran refutes Trump's allegations about assassination attempt



Fatemeh Mohajerani  
IRNA

## International Desk

Iran on Friday dismissed "unfounded" allegations by the US president

about Tehran's alleged attempt to assassinate him as part of a broader psychological and propaganda campaign against Tehran.

US President Donald Trump on Tuesday issued a warning that Iran would be wiped "off the face of this earth" if Tehran ever succeeded in assassinating him.

Government spokeswoman Fatemeh Mohajerani said in an interview with IRNA that Iran has a clear and long-standing policy of firmly opposing terrorism in all its forms.

"It is completely absurd that a country that has suffered the most from

terrorism and paid heavy costs in fighting it becomes the target of such baseless allegations," the official said.

Mahajerani said that the official position of the Iranian government has always been and will remain the rejection of violence and terror in all its forms.

She described the move as "a futile attempt" to divert attention from international realities, noting that the accusations lack legal and logical credibility, and are merely designed for deflection and influencing public opinion.



Mohammad Ali Rajabi  
Cartoonist

## CARTOON





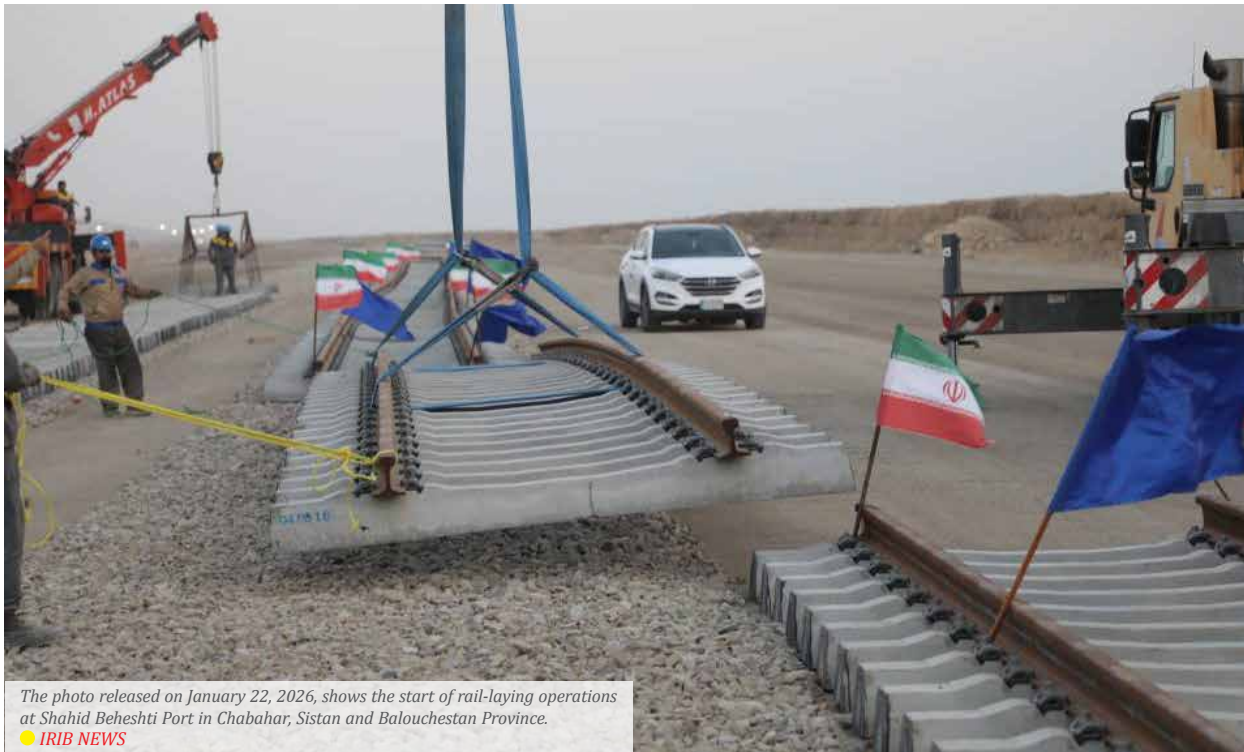
# 14 infrastructure plans launched at Chabahar Port as INSTC advances

## Economy Desk

Iran on Thursday inaugurated and launched construction of 14 infrastructure and equipment projects at the strategic port of Chabahar in southeast Iran, as the government pushes ahead with rail connectivity and port development aimed at boosting trade and economic growth.

Speaking at the inauguration ceremony, Roads and Urban Development Minister Farzaneh Sadeq Malvajerd said the completion of the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC), linking Chabahar to Zahedan and connecting Zahedan to Iran's national and international rail networks, represented more than a domestic achievement, IRNA reported. "The major development that will be realized through the rail connection and completion of the north-south rail corridor — meaning the connection of Chabahar to Zahedan and Zahedan to the national and international rail networks — is not merely a domestic event, but a sign of trust in the Islamic Republic of Iran, which is evident in all our visits to neighboring and surrounding countries," Sadeq Malvajerd said.

She described the rail project linking Chabahar to the national rail network as vital,



The photo released on January 22, 2026, shows the start of rail-laying operations at Shahid Beheshti Port in Chabahar, Sistan and Balouchestan Province.

IRIB NEWS

saying completion of the corridor would meet long-standing public demands while delivering major infrastructure gains and economic growth for the port.

Sadeq Malvajerd added that the project was strategically significant and ultimately converged on Chabahar Port, where long-standing commitments had now materialized.

"This is a highly strategic project that ultimately leads to Chabahar Port, where

promises and commitments made in past years have now been fulfilled," she said.

Referring to government efforts to develop transport and housing infrastructure, the minister said, "More than 14 projects in the fields of infrastructure, equipment and maritime safety at Chabahar Port have been completed, which represents significant developments."

Sadeq Malvajerd also noted a more than 110% increase in the unloading of essential

goods at the port.

In a related development, 304 residential units under Iran's national housing movement were delivered in Chabahar. Each unit covers 140 square meters and was built, benefiting around 1,200 local residents.

On Thursday, Sadeq Malvajerd also ordered the start of rail-laying operations at Shahid Beheshti Port in Chabahar, funded by the Ports and Maritime Organization. According to IRNA,

the initial phase includes 24 kilometers of substructure and 11 kilometers of track installation.

The rail project aims to connect the Makoran coastline to Iran's national rail grid and the International North-South Transport Corridor. Its objectives include accelerating the export of essential, containerized, and petroleum goods, increasing vessel intake capacity, and enhancing the port's operational efficiency.



Ali Madanizadeh

## Minister: Forex income funds to be opened in stock market 'in coming days'

### Economy Desk

Iran's Economy Minister Ali Madanizadeh announced the imminent launch of three foreign exchange income funds in the stock market that will offer investors returns in hard currency.

"These three forex funds, which function similarly to fixed-income funds, will become operational in the capital market in the coming days," Madanizadeh said in an interview with IRNA.

"Their structure mirrors that of fixed-income funds, but they generate returns in foreign currency, and their implementation has been finalized."

He added that regulatory approvals have already been granted to the three funds and that they are expected to begin operations within days, though detailed information will be provided by the Securities and Exchange Organization. According to the minister, the funds will collect foreign currency from the public — including banknotes and transferable foreign exchange — and distribute forex-denominated returns to unitholders. "All citizens will be able to invest in these funds," he said.

## Iran-Africa trade jumps 23% with Algeria's role as key partner



IRNA

### Economy Desk

Iran's trade with the African continent grew by 23% in the first eight months of the current Iranian year, which began on March 21, driven by a more than fivefold increase in commerce with Algeria, according to Saeed Zare Haqiqi, head of Iran's Commercial Office in Algiers.

"According to official statistics, Iran's trade volume with Africa during the first eight months of this year rose by 23%, with exports increasing from \$470 million to \$850 million," Zare Haqiqi said in an interview with IRNA. He added that imports from the continent declined, falling from \$72 million to \$45 million over the same period. He highlighted Algeria's growing role, noting that bilateral trade surged from around \$2 mil-

lion to \$11 million in the same timeframe. "This figure reflects a fivefold increase in trade between Iran and Algeria," he said. Zare Haqiqi described Africa as a major strategic destination for Iran's private sector, calling it a "significant economic opportunity," with Algeria holding a "key position" within the region. "Algeria is a secure country with a strategic location near Europe," he said. "Its foreign exchange earnings have risen from around \$50 billion to over \$300 billion in recent years, and the country now maintains a trade surplus of \$20-30 billion, creating substantial opportunities for economic cooperation."

He emphasized that sustainable economic collaboration must be based on mutual benefit. "Sustainable trade between Iran and Algeria will only materialize

when our economic relations are bilateral and grounded in shared interests," he said. "In this context, barter arrangements and diverse financing mechanisms are also viable options."

Zare Haqiqi also underscored the role of trade exhibitions in market development. "Specialized trade fairs are among the most important tools for expanding markets," he said. "Our plan involves regularly organizing reputable exhibitions at fixed intervals, targeted invitations to economic actors, and operational support for traders to ensure tangible outcomes." He stressed the importance of logistics, financing, facilitating cross-border payments, and maintaining newly established markets as critical pillars for advancing trade ties.

## SATBA: Clean energy capacity exceeds 3,700 MW

### Economy Desk

Iran's installed renewable energy capacity has surpassed 3,700 megawatts, though approximately 870 megawatts of that total have not yet been officially recognized due to lengthy administrative and grid-connection procedures, according to Mohsen Tarzatab, head of the Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Organization (SATBA).

"Currently, about 3,400 megawatts out of the 3,700 megawatts of installed renewable capacity are being injected into the national power grid," Mehr news agency quoted Tarzatab as saying on Thursday.

The deputy minister of energy attributed the discrepancy to time-consuming protocols within the Ministry of Energy and grid management processes. A meeting has been held with officials from the power grid management and the electricity sector of the Ministry of Energy to accelerate these procedures, he said.

Tarzatab added that the country aims to reach 5,200 megawatts of renewable capacity by the end of the current Iranian year (March 20, 2026). "However, we are working to achieve a significantly higher figure by February 20," he said. Masoud Pezeshkian's government aims to install

30,000 MW of non-fossil capacity over the next three years amid an expected power shortfall next year. According to the Energy Ministry, the country is expected to face a power shortfall of between 17,000 and 20,000 megawatts next year.

The government has also urged manufacturers to step up investment in solar power. About 60% of the total electricity used by industrial subscribers during the past month was outsourced from distribution companies and regional power firms, according to Iran's Power Generation, Transmission, and Distribution Company (Tavanir).



MEHR



## Purposive, not reactive

## Japan's museum diplomacy in Egypt



By Seohee Park  
Professor of int'l relations  
at Victoria University of  
Wellington

## O P I N I O N

When the Grand Egyptian Museum (GEM) officially opened in Giza, Egypt, on November 1, 2025, few observers noticed what the numbers revealed. The Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) financed over 80% of the museum's 84-billion-yen (\$1-billion) construction budget.

Directional signage across its halls appeared in Arabic, English, and Japanese. The choice of languages, especially Japanese, was an act of geopolitical inscription. Why did JICA invest in GEM? What kind of interests does Tokyo have in the Egyptian museum? Japan's approach to museum diplomacy has reconceptualised the very meaning of "influence" itself. Rather than competing directly with other Asian powers through military bases, trade corridors, and security partnerships, Japan is moving into the realm of cultural memory and so-called civilisational stewardship. Japan's investment in the GEM represents a deliberate way of embedding long-term influence not through debt-laden infrastructure mega-projects, but through the shaping of how societies understand their own pasts and futures.

For decades, Japan's Official Development Assistance (ODA) has been synonymous with technical excellence and disaster resilience. Nonetheless, Egypt was not an obvious arena for Tokyo's strategic outreach. Japan's ODA policy has changed significantly since its postwar origins, shifting from mainly commercial interests towards more strategic geopolitical deployment. The choice of Egypt is something more calculated: a recognition that influence in the 21st century is increasingly contested through control over how societies understand their pasts and imagine their futures. Where some powers build ports and highways, Japan is learning to build meaning itself.

The symbolic significance is difficult to overstate. As the world's largest archaeological museum, the GEM houses over 50,000 artefacts, many displayed for the first time. By funding the conservation labs, restoration work, and the centrepiece recovery of the Khufu "solar boat," Japan has successfully positioned itself as a "custodian" of global heritage. This support matters precisely because heritage stewardship cannot be easily reversed. Once a country plays a role in curating how a civilisation presents its identity, the role becomes structurally embedded in how that nation imagines itself as it can determine which artefacts are displayed, how they are contextualised, and which narratives are amplified. Tokyo Governor Yuriko Koike's attendance at the opening ceremony is another strategic intention.

A Cairo University graduate who experienced the 1973 October War (Yom Kippur War) brought something technical bureaucrats cannot: she embodied the relational depth that Japan sought to communicate. When senior political figures invest their symbolic capital in cultural diplomacy, they signal that the partnership extends beyond transactional exchange. Her participation in a broader diplomatic tour across the Arab region in October, emphasising health, education, and environmental cooperation, intertwines the GEM into a larger picture of institutional ties that transcend any single project.

Japan's cultural ODA footprint extends well beyond Egypt. JICA's involvement in restoring heritage sites in Kathmandu Valley after the 2015 Gorkha Earth-



quake, including the reconstruction of the Degu Taleju Temple in Patan Durbar Square, follows an identical logic. By dispatching heritage conservation experts to work alongside Nepal's own institutions, Japan builds physical infrastructure, local technical capacity, and institutional memory all together. The symbolic reopening of the temple in April 2025 positioned Japan as a partner committed to both technical excellence and cultural continuity. What emerges from these examples is a reconfigured understanding of geo-economic power.

Twentieth-century hegemony was projected through military bases, resource concessions, and strategic enclaves. In contrast, 21st-century influence increasingly flows through what we might call the infrastructure of meaning: museums, archives, conservation expertise, and cultural landscapes. Cultural ODA carries distinct advantages. It does not generate the debt anxieties associated with major connectivity megaprojects, nor does it trigger the

geopolitical sensitivities of military partnerships. More crucially, its returns accumulate slowly but durably, in trust, institutional alignment, and narrative credibility.

For Egypt, whose influence in the Middle East has slowly declined, Japan's support addresses an immediate crisis: revitalising a tourism economy devastated by years of political uncertainty and collapsing visitor numbers. The GEM's opening promises both economic recovery and restored national prestige. For policymakers across the Indo-Pacific, however, the strategic lesson cuts deeper. The competition for influence is no longer confined to maritime chokepoints, semiconductor supply chains, or development finance. It is equally contested through the stewardship of collective memory. This approach matters because how a nation understands its past shapes how it imagines its geopolitical future. Countries that help curate that understanding acquire leverage that operates below the threshold of traditional

diplomacy — influence that persists across electoral cycles and regime transitions, that cannot be easily audited or contested because it appears cultural rather than political.

Japan's engagement in Egypt and Nepal reveals a shift in what "infrastructure" means in geoeconomic competition. By investing in institutions that preserve identity and heritage, Japan is constructing an influence that outlasts any single loan agreement or connectivity corridor. The GEM thus marks both a milestone for Egypt's cultural sector and a reminder of Japan's influence itself — extending its reach into the world's museums, heritage sites, and symbolic spaces where national identity is perpetually remade. Tokyo's strategy is driven not by external pressure, as Calder once said, but by deliberate strategic choice. It is a new geography of geo-economic power in the 21st century.

The article first appeared on E-International Relations.



Abe Toshiko (7th-L), Japan's minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, visits the Grand Egyptian Museum along with her accompanying delegation on May 10, 2025.  
● [egy monuments.gov.eg](http://egy monuments.gov.eg)



Rather than competing directly with other Asian powers through military bases, trade corridors, and security partnerships, Japan is moving into the realm of cultural memory and so-called civilisational stewardship. Japan's investment in the GEM represents a deliberate way of embedding long-term influence not through debt-laden infrastructure mega-projects, but through the shaping of how societies understand their own pasts and futures.



Heavy machinery is being used to move the wooden "solar boat" of Khufu to its new permanent display home in the Grand Egyptian Museum in Giza, Egypt.  
● EGYPTIAN MINISTRY OF TOURISM AND ANTIQUITY



# Grand Egyptian Museum, transformations of the sacred in collective imagination



By Samir El-Sayed

Managing Editor of Al-Ahram

## OPINION

The celebration marking the opening of the Grand Egyptian Museum was not a fleeting cultural event, but a collective ritual that reconfigured the relationship between Egyptians and their symbolic heritage.

Across both physical and digital spaces, feelings of joy and pride in ancient civilization merged with a latent desire for self-reclamation. The museum moment thus transcended the celebration of artifacts; it became a summoning of collective memory as symbolic energy — what Pierre Bourdieu would call symbolic capital — through which the community seeks to reconstruct its identity in an age of profound transformation.

Here, the collective ritual functions as a social mechanism for producing meaning and repairing the community. The Egyptian who once participated in the popular mawlid surrounding the shrine of a saint or a religious symbol now performs a comparable ritual through the screen: a digital collective rite in which images, comments, and digital symbols are shared. Through this participation, individuals assume their roles within a communal scene that reproduces a sense of belonging — albeit in forms that vary according to class, cultural background, and generational experience.

In the digital public sphere, large segments of Egyptian society did not merely transfer their rituals onto screens; they invented a new ritual form that goes beyond representation and participation to assume a symbolic function in rebuilding identity and collective memory. Ritual here is not simple communication or social performance, but a form of “symbolic-psychological healing,” through which the community restores its equilibrium by engaging with its historical symbols. This engagement reorders shared meanings, repairs the image of the national self, and grants individuals a sense of cohesion in the face of accelerating social change following periods of anxiety and instability.

Within this context, the Grand Egyptian Museum emerges as a form of civic sacred space — a “civil temple” whose authority derives from the historical value of the symbol and the national consensus surrounding it. It is governed by a logic of reverence for human achievement, beauty, history, and national identity. The sacred here is not religious in the theological sense, but a shared civilizational symbol in which collective memory is embodied and around which the community gathers in a unifying celebratory act. In traditional popular festivals, symbols were produced within limited spatial settings and under religious or local authority. In the “networked mawlid,” however, the symbol is liberated from vertical authority and becomes horizontally shared among individuals. Each user can now participate in producing meaning through images, words, or digital performance. The medium no longer merely transmits the ritual; it becomes the ritual itself — an embodiment of an era in which media and symbols intertwine and technology turns into a new ritual arena.

At a deeper psychological level, this celebration reveals a profound activation of the “collective unconscious”. Foundational symbols — Horus, Isis, Osiris, the Nile, the pyramid — return not as inherited icons along a linear historical continuum, but as archetypal forms summoned from the reservoir of collective unconsciousness whenever the community faces identity anxiety or sweeping social transformation. When the image of the self is shaken, symbols are recalled to stabilize meaning and restore psychological balance. Humanity does not forget the



Tourists stand under the statue of Pharaoh Ramses II at the Grand Egyptian Museum in Giza, Egypt.  
● AP

primal images of security that shaped its earliest understanding of existence.

Ancient Egyptian civilization was among the most adept at crafting symbols and transforming them into rituals, myths, and arts that formed the nucleus of collective consciousness across the ages. Isis embodies the archetype of the Great Mother — the protective figure of fertility, compassion, loyalty, and creative feminine power that bestows life and guards it from annihilation. Her resonance endures in representations of motherhood, sanctity, womanhood, and the homeland itself. Osiris represents the primordial image of death and rebirth: the belief in renewal and in cosmic justice triumphing over chaos and evil. This idea recurs in modern rituals, from popular festivals to national celebrations that mark renewal after crisis.

Ra and Horus embody the concept of the ruler-symbol who guarantees cosmic order and justice (Ma'at), not merely authority but balance as a moral and universal principle deeply rooted in the Egyptian imagination. Hathor symbolizes cosmic femininity, beauty, music, and joy — an archetype from which emerged the Egyptian reverence for the Nile, nature, and the impulse to celebrate even in the darkest moments. Horus, in his struggle against Seth, becomes the mythic model of the Egyptian hero: the savior, the just leader, the son who restores order after turmoil.

These archetypal images formed the deep symbolic structure of Egyptian identity and persisted through historical transformations in renewed forms. In Coptic Christianity, they appeared in the figures of Mary, resurrection, and divine justice;

in popular Islam, in saints, miracles, and mawlid; and in the modern era, in symbols of renaissance, heroism, and the motherland. This is not doctrinal continuity but symbolic continuity rooted in a shared cultural structure: the Egyptian belief in life, justice, fertility, joy, and perpetual renewal.

From this perspective, the dynamics of symbolism in Egypt can be understood as a continuous process of reproducing and renewing cultural meaning. Through social practices — collective narratives, rituals, and artistic expression — the community reinterprets its spiritual and cognitive content in ways that reinforce identity cohesion amid historical and social change. In the Egyptian collective consciousness, symbols do not vanish; they undergo continual reinterpretation that enables them to fulfill their essential function: mediating between popular memory and official history, between the sacred and the everyday, and between the individual and the collective.

Thus, the Egyptian symbolic field remains a living space for the reproduction of meaning. Each generation reinterprets inherited symbols according to its own historical and social conditions, while the emotional and symbolic charge embedded in these icons serves as the deepest psychological-social bond linking contemporary Egyptians to the accumulated layers of their civilizational experience. It is a continuous mechanism for preserving cultural memory and renewing its legitimacy over time.

What unfolds in the digital sphere is a form of “psycho-cultural transformation” of the symbol. Rather than remaining confined to ancient texts and myths, the

symbol is reactivated in contemporary consciousness through collective performance of identity in digital media — through images and celebrations that animate the symbol within living consciousness and anchor it in the present. This transformation, not without tension or conflict, constitutes a central mechanism in the evolution of the civic symbolic system as a network of symbols derived from citizenship and shared history, ensuring continuity and vitality within the modern imagination.

In digital space, Egyptians do not celebrate the past as it was; they reproduce it in accordance with the needs of the present, seeking to alleviate the tensions generated by the overlap of multiple identity layers — Pharaonic, Coptic, and Arab-Islamic — in an effort toward symbolic reconciliation. This reconciliation is not complete, but it unfolds within collective memory as a process of symbolic negotiation, renewed whenever the national self-image is shaken.

Through this process, Egyptian consciousness works toward a “symbolic reconciliation” among its layered historical identities — a form of cultural healing that fuses past and present to generate renewed emotional unity. Ancient symbols are not revived as static nostalgia, but as symbolic energy enabling Egyptians to confront rapid change without losing a sense of stability. The networked ritual thus becomes a means of collective psychological equilibrium, an act of compensation and liberation at once.

Seen in this light, the moment exceeds the notion of a superficial “digital ritual” producing virtual belonging. It signals the emergence of a new civic symbolic order:

a network of symbols, rituals, and shared meanings derived from citizenship, participation, and collective history. This order reproduces the sacred in a civic form, detached from theological or closed ideological references when these operate as dogmatic authority rather than living cultural structures.

This new symbolic system is not grounded in theology, but in a new civic sacred. Its texts are national narratives; its rituals are visits and digital participation; its sacred spaces are museums and archaeological sites. Its function is to create social cohesion within a pluralistic society through a shared symbolic language that allows diverse groups to express belonging without contradicting their personal beliefs. In this sense, the civic symbolic system neutralizes symbolic conflict by offering a relatively “neutral” symbol around which the majority can gather, creating a safe symbolic space for collective identification.

Within this new order, historical and religious symbols are culturally and psychologically integrated into a single digital space. The shift from verticality to horizontality reflects a contemporary Egyptian inclination toward democratizing symbols and relocating the sacred within everyday experience. Yet the success of this symbolic system remains contingent upon its capacity to represent a genuine collective will that transcends internal divisions.

Accordingly, the opening of the Grand Egyptian Museum emerges as a complex event: a national project with political and economic dimensions, and simultaneously a symbolic practice generating a shared emotional state. Egyptians performed a collective ritual of identity enactment, in which identity shifts from a fixed essence or proclaimed discourse into a symbolic act performed and reproduced — through images more than words — within a contested cultural and national space. It is an attempt to produce a new civic sacred, grounded in pride, spectacle, and the celebration of civilization as both memory and aspiration.

The transformation from the “popular mawlid” to the “networked mawlid” is not a rupture with heritage, but a parallel extension into a new medium. Collective celebration — whether in traditional festivals or on digital platforms — remains a psycho-cultural moment in which Egyptians rediscover themselves within the community, and the community within itself. In this way, Egypt converses with itself across time, performing its symbolic existence much as one performs prayer, song, or public joy: an act of survival.

Through this collective performance, Egypt translates itself into a permanently present symbolic act. Participation becomes a language of collective existence, and digital space a stage for reenacting and renewing memory in new forms. Meaning is regenerated through image, celebration, and symbol, continually renewing the collective sense of belonging. The opening of the Grand Egyptian Museum, then, was not merely an event in cultural memory, but a civilizational birth in the deepest sense of the word: a collective ritual linking past and present and granting the community a sense of continuity amid transformation. Through it, Egyptians reproduce themselves not as passive inheritors of the past, but as active symbolic agents. It is a celebration of a memory that renews itself, an identity that is performed more than proclaimed, and a sacredness that migrates from temples and processions to screens — affirming that Egyptians, in every era and through every medium, do not abandon their rituals, but reshape them to express their enduring capacity to transform history into feeling, feeling into ritual, and ritual into a living identity that does not fade.



An image created by drones depicting a ceremonial chariot belonging to the famed pharaoh, Tutankhamun, lights up the sky above the Grand Egyptian Museum during the opening ceremony in Giza, Egypt, on November 1, 2025.  
● EGYPT TELEGRAPH

The article first appeared on Ahram Online.



# Persian Gulf Pro League: Tractor ends goal drought with Mes rout

## Sports Desk

Tractor ended a three-game scoring drought in the Persian Gulf Pro League by hammering Mes Rafsanjan 4-1 at home on Thursday.

The defending champion, which had last found the net in a 2-1 win against Paykan on December 14, took the lead through league top scorer Amirhossein Hosseinzadeh. He netted his ninth goal of the campaign with a composed finish 13 minutes into the game at an empty Yadegar-e Imam Stadium.

Dragan Skocic's men had to wait until the 56th minute for a second goal. Hosseinzadeh's close-range effort struck the post but bounced off Mes goalkeeper Nima Mirzazad and into the net.

Ahmadreza Zenderuh had a chance to reduce the deficit for the visitors 10 minutes later, only to be denied from the penalty spot by Iranian international keeper Alireza Beiranvand.

Tractor fullback Danial Esmailifard extended the lead in the 76th minute, and Croatian striker Domagoj Drozdek added a fourth six minutes from full-time. Farnam Arab pulled one back for Mojtaba Jabari's Mes in the 88th minute, but it proved too little, too late. The victory lifted Tractor to second in the table with 29 points ahead of Friday's

fixtures, while Mes remained rock-bottom with 11.

Elsewhere, former Esteghlal and Persepolis players impressed on their debuts for new clubs as Malavan and Foolad Khuzestan shared the points in a thrilling 2-2 draw at the Sirous Qayeqran Stadium.

Ehsan Mahrouqi gave Foolad the lead six minutes after the break, slotting home on the rebound after ex-Esteghlal fullback Ramin Rezaeian's effort was saved by Malavan keeper Farzad Tayyebipour.

An own goal from Argentine striker Gustavo Blanco drew Malavan level in the 73rd minute. The home side was then reduced to 10 men following a VAR-upheld straight red card for Amirreza Afsordeh in the 87th minute.

Malavan still managed to take the lead two minutes later. Substitute Mojtaba Fakhrian, who joined on loan from Persepolis earlier in the month, rounded off a well-worked counter-attack with a sublime curling strike from the edge of the box.

Just when Malavan appeared to be on course for a hard-fought victory, Mohammad Qoreishi headed home Rezaeian's corner-kick in the fifth minute of stoppage time, allowing Foolad to salvage a point in Hamid Motahari's



Tractor players celebrate a goal during a 4-1 victory over Mes Rafsanjan in the Persian Gulf Pro League at the Yadegar-e Imam Stadium, Tabriz, Iran, on January 22, 2026.  
● MASOUD VAEZ/TASNIM

first game as head coach. In other action, Khaybar and Irzalco also played to a 2-2 draw in Khorramabad.

Amirhossein Farsi and Mehrdad Qanbari put Khaybar ahead twice, only to see their goals canceled out by goals

from the visitors' Rahman Jafari and Sasan Hosseini, with the second equalizer coming in the 91st minute.



## Iranian outside-hitter Hosseinkhanzadeh joins Qatar's Al Arabi

### Sports Desk

Iranian international outside-hitter Poriya Hosseinkhanzadeh has signed for Qatar's Al Arabi.

"Look who's here, Poriya Hosseinkhanzadeh; welcome!" wrote the reigning Qatari Volleyball League (QVL) champion, ending weeks of speculation about the future of the Iranian volleyball star, who joins from Italian SuperLega heavyweight Lube Civitanova. A former player of Foolad Sirjan and Shahdab Yazd in the

Iranian top flight, the 21-year-old will be looking for a fresh start after receiving limited playing time over the past year and a half at Lube.

Hosseinkhanzadeh joined Lube last summer with high hopes, planning to develop at one of Europe's top clubs. However, despite promises from the management and technical staff for more opportunities, he primarily served as a bench player and was unable to meet expectations.

Initially, rumors linked him

to Russia's Super League and Dynamo Ural, with preliminary agreements reportedly reached. However, the transfer ultimately fell through, costing him the opportunity to continue his career in one of top European leagues.

While Al Arabi is a prominent team in Qatar, the quality of competition is not comparable to Italy's Serie A or even Iran's Super League. The transfer represents a choice focused more on maintaining match rhythm and securing regular playing time rather

than professional advancement at the highest level.

A world U21 champion with Iran in 2023, Hosseinkhanzadeh was a key player for the senior squad in last year's Volleyball Nations League and the FIVB World Championship, where Iran reached the quarterfinals before falling to the Czechia.

Al Arabi, who beat Al Sadd in straight sets on Thursday, sits second in the QVL table with nine wins and 27 points from 11 games – trailing Al Wakrah by a single point.

## WTT Youth Contender 2026: Faraji finishes joint-third in U19 singles for second trophy in Doha

### Sports Desk

Iranian table tennis wonderkid Benyamin Faraji secured a second trophy at the latest WTT Youth Contender event, finishing joint-third in the U19 boys' singles category in Doha.

The young Iranian relinquished a two-game lead to suffer a 3-2 setback (8-11, 9-11, 11-9, 15-13, 11-9) against Lin Ching-Ting of Chinese Taipei in Thursday's semifinals, adding the third-place prize to the under-17 title he had won at the Lusail Sports Arena on Tuesday. Lin still had to settle for a runner-up finish following a 3-1 loss to South Korea's Lee Seungsoo in the final, with Chinese Taipei player Hung Che-Yen taking the other third-place prize. Given a first-round bye, Faraji began his campaign with a 3-2 win against



India's Punit Biswas and then defeated South Korean Ma Yeongmin by the same scoreline – a repeat of their under-17 semifinal clash earlier in Doha. A straight-game victory (11-6, 11-9, 11-5) over Slovakia's Samuel Arpas sent Faraji into the semifinals. Iran's Arshia Lorestani and Mohammad Habibi also competed in the un-

der-19 event in Doha, but their campaigns ended in the round of 16. Lorestani defeated Vietnam's Li Ki Ho 3-2 but was undone in straight games by India's Priyanuj Bhattacharyya, while Habibi overcame the host's Yousif Abdulla in five games before suffering a 3-1 defeat against Hung.

## Iran coach Shamsaei confirms final squad for Futsal Asian Cup

### Sports Desk

Head coach Vahid Shamsaei has unveiled Iran's final 14-man squad for the upcoming AFC Futsal Asian Cup, which kicks off on Tuesday in Jakarta, Indonesia.

Iran opens its bid for a record-extending 14th title against Malaysia in Group D on Wednesday. Shamsaei's team will then face Saudi Arabia on Friday before closing the group stage against Afghanistan – coached by Iranian Majid Mortezaei – two days later at the Jakarta International Velodrome.

This will be the third meeting between Iran and Afghanistan at a major tournament in less than two years. Iran won 3-1 at the 2024 Asian Cup but drew 2-2 at the Islamic Solidarity Games last November in Riyadh.

The top two teams from each group advance to the quarterfinals. Nine players from the current roster were part of the squad that lifted the Asian trophy in Thailand two years ago, courtesy of a 4-1 victory over the host in the final. Meanwhile, Mahdi Rostamiha, Mahdi Mahdikhani, Amirhossein Gholami, and Hossein Sabzi will make their debuts

at the flagship continental event. Despite a hampered preparation that saw two friendlies called off in recent weeks, Shamsaei's men will be looking to build on their commanding ISG campaign in Riyadh, where they defeated African powerhouse Morocco 5-0 in the final. The following is Iran's 14-man squad for the 2026 AFC Futsal Asian Cup:

Goalkeepers: Baqer Mohammadi, Mahdi Rostamiha

Sweepers: Mohammad-Hossein Derakhshani, Amirhossein Gholami, Hossein Sabzi

Right wingers: Masoud Yousef, Moslem Oladqobad, Mahdi Karimi

Left wingers: Salar Aqapour, Ali Khalilvand, Mahdi Mahdikhani

Pivots: Hossein Tayyebi, Saeid Ahmadabbasi, Behrouz Azimi.



● MOJTABA JANBAKHSH/FFIRI



# Discover Siraf Port with sunsets, history, living culture

Iranica Desk

Nestled at the foot of rocky mountains and beside the crystal-blue waters of the Persian Gulf lies a quiet yet storied city — the ancient port of Siraf (Bandra-e Siraf) in Bushehr Province. Its name is intertwined with the grandeur of maritime trade, culture, and civilization, as well as with secrets buried deep within its soil and sea. Siraf is not only a relic of Iran's glorious past but also a living mirror reflecting the life of southern communities and their eternal bond with the sea.

Siraf is among the oldest ports in Iran. Its prosperity dates back to the Sassanid era, when major trade routes between East and West passed through this port. With the advent of the Islamic period, Siraf reached the height of its prosperity, becoming one of the most important commercial centers of the Persian Gulf and the Islamic world during the 9th and 10th centuries CE, according to chn.ir.

At that time, goods such as silk from China, spices from India, ivory from Africa, fabrics from Yemen, and pearls from the waters of the Persian Gulf were exported worldwide through the port of Siraf. This harbor served as a gateway between East and West, where merchants from India, China, Africa, and beyond gathered, and large caravans set out from here toward the heartland cities of Iran.

In those days, Siraf was a thriving and populous city. Historians have written about its multi-story houses, bustling bazaars, vast warehouses, and magnificent mosques. It is said that at its peak, the city's population exceeded 300,000 — an astonishing figure for a port city over a millennium ago. But this splendor did not last



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ABDOLREZA SHEYBANI/hormoz.ir

forever. In the 10th century CE, a devastating earthquake destroyed much of the port. Many neighborhoods sank beneath the ground and sea, and Siraf never regained its former prosperity. Yet the ruins and remaining structures still stand today as silent witnesses to the city's once-great civilization.

The sunsets of Siraf are among the most breathtaking along the Persian Gulf — moments when the sun slowly sinks into the horizon and shades of orange and purple paint a dreamlike

image upon the sea's surface. In this ancient port, traditional wooden dhows (Lenj) can still be seen, crafted by hand through generations. Local seafarers continue to set sail in the same age-old fashion, their lives still deeply tied to the rhythms of the sea. Fishing, diving, and maritime trade remain inseparable parts of everyday life in Siraf. Along the surrounding shores, the clear waters of the Persian Gulf are home to coral reefs, colorful fish, sea turtles, and occasionally playful dolphins — a



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sight that leaves visitors with unforgettable memories. Siraf is not only blessed with natural beauty but also holds within its heart a precious treasure of historical and cultural heritage. Among the most remarkable historical attractions of this ancient port are the following:

Ancient cemetery: Located in the Lir Valley, this site features a collection of hand-carved rock tombs chiseled into the mountainside. Varying in shape and size, these graves still hold many

mysteries yet to be uncovered.

Grand Mosque: One of the oldest mosques in Iran, dating back to the early Islamic centuries. With its simple, unadorned architecture, the mosque reflects the faith and artistry of the people of that era.

Terraced houses and stone alleys: Built along the mountain slopes and stretching toward the cliffs overlooking the sea, these tiered homes and narrow stone pathways represent a brilliant example of how humans have adapted their architecture to

the harsh climatic conditions of southern Iran. Historic wells, cisterns, and rock-cut chambers: These structures showcase the advanced engineering knowledge of ancient Iranians in water management and construction within arid and mountainous landscapes.

In addition to these monuments, remnants of old customs offices, jetties, watchtowers, and sections of the city's stone walls can still be seen in various parts of the port.

Despite its quiet and peaceful atmosphere, the spirit of life still flows through the city. The warm and hospitable people of the region, speaking in their charming southern accent and preserving their authentic culture, are the true heirs of a great civilization. Visitors to Siraf can experience a unique blend of history, nature, and local culture — from exploring ancient monuments and diving in crystal-clear waters to savoring fresh seafood.

Siraf is a destination for those seeking tranquility by the sea and stories from the past. Every step on its soil is a journey through time: from the grandeur of the Sassanids to the prosperity of the Islamic era, from the silence of the medieval centuries to the life of today.

Siraf can rightly be called the "Silent Pearl of the Persian Gulf." Though parts of it lie hidden beneath soil and water, its memory and spirit remain alive. This historic port is a reminder of the brilliance of Iranian seafaring and their enduring role in connecting civilizations.

Visiting Siraf is not merely seeing a tourist destination; it is an experience of touching history — a history that still lives and flows in the sound of the waves, the dust of the mountains, and the eyes of the southern people.

## Fahraj village in Yazd Province breathes life into history



MAJID JARRAHI/IRNA



yazdatlas.com



IRNA



yazdatlas.com

Iranica Desk

Fahraj village is the oldest testimony of life in the heart of the desert, yet its name has not yet appeared on the World Heritage list — a village whose recognition is not only the wish of the people of Yazd Province but also the desire of all lovers of Iran's cultural heritage.

Maliheh Fakhari, a journalist, wrote: Fahraj, a village with an ancient and deeply rooted history dating back to pre-Islamic times, is one of the earliest human settlements on the Iranian central plateau — a place where humans-built homes from desert soil, learned serenity from the wind, and faith from the sun, according to chn.ir.

The narrow, winding alleys of Fahraj still carry the scent of life: the aroma of oven-baked bread, the fragrance of rain-soaked earth, the calm of tranquility. The houses are built with those same ancient materials, and the walls are still repaired by the hands of the people, not by machines. It is this very bond between the people and the architecture that has kept Fahraj alive. Here, the past and the present walk side by side—quietly, yet with majesty.

In the heart of the village stands the Fahraj Grand Mosque, a structure that, according to many researchers, is the oldest standing mosque in Iran. It has no tiles, no gold, no flashy stucco work—but in its simplicity, a

spirit of grandeur flows. The mud-brick columns and semi-circular arches of the mosque seem to tell the story of the first Iranian Muslims, who, in the heart of this desert, built a place of worship from clay and earth.

The Fahraj Grand Mosque is not just a historical building; it is a symbol of the beginning of Islamic history in Iran. Next to the mosque, the historic castle, water reservoirs, covered passageways (Sabats), and desert houses form a harmonious ensemble of traditional life — a complex that, despite the passage of centuries, has preserved its structure.

One of Fahraj's most valuable features, which sets it apart from other historic villages, is

its accessibility for all visitors. In recent years, through the collaboration of the local community and Yazd's Cultural Heritage Organization, accessible pathways, safe entrances, and facilities have been provided so that everyone can enjoy the beauty of Fahraj — even those with mobility limitations.

This accessibility, alongside the authenticity of its historic fabric, has made Fahraj an outstanding example of humane and sustainable tourism. Today, Fahraj is not merely a tourist destination; it is a model of "living within heritage"—a place where people still reside in their mud-brick homes while hosting visitors from around the world.

In 2025, out of nine Iranian villages presented to the World Tourism Organization, only three succeeded in gaining global recognition: Soheili from Qeshm, Shafi'abad from Kerman, and Kandolous from Mazandaran.

Despite its abundant historical, cultural, and social potential, Fahraj was left off this list. Yet it cannot be considered a forgotten village; its heritage values remain alive, awaiting another opportunity to enter the global stage.

Experts believe that the absence of certain tourism infrastructures and the need to complete technical documentation were the main obstacles to Fahraj's inclusion on the World Heritage

list during this period. Nevertheless, Fahraj's unparalleled potential continues to place it among the most deserving candidates for future consideration.

In Fahraj, the people still play the central role. Women work in small weaving and bread-making workshops, men keep the qanats alive, and young people have launched local tourism tours. They understand that if cultural heritage is to endure, it must flow through daily life.

If registered, this village could serve as an educational model for other desert regions of Iran — a paradigm of how humans can adapt to nature, use resources wisely, and preserve cultural authenticity alongside sustainable development.





# Fadjr Int'l Theater Festival, launchpad for new talent, legacy for Iranian dramatic arts

**Mr. Astaneh, having served as secretary of the festival for four terms, how significant do you consider this festival from a theatrical perspective?**

The Fadjr International Theater Festival is the nation's largest theatrical event and, in a sense, serves as the identity card of Iranian theater. Therefore, it holds immense importance for the theater community. Many of our nation's leading and prominent figures in theater are individuals who have emerged, been recognized, and introduced through this festival over the years. A wealth of brilliant talents have been discovered within this festival, and they are now among the best in the country. The festival has been seen both nationally and, in many editions, globally, and this visibility is essential for the vitality of Iranian theater. Each year, the festival has striven to endure amidst shifting social, political, and other conditions, because theater is an inextricable part of human societies. The theater community insists on the continuation of theater throughout the year, under all circumstances, and I hope that the life of this festival and Iranian theater, as long as there are theater artists in Iran, will always endure, remain vibrant, and flourish.

**What is the festival's standing in the region and on the international stage?**

In recent years, certain issues have somewhat tarnished our international connections. However, for many years prior, the bond between Iranian theater and the Fadjr International Theater Festival with major theater festivals and companies in other countries has positioned the festival as one of the most established and recognized festivals in Asia, the entire region, and even parts of Europe.

The festival enjoys considerable international recognition, with prominent figures from the world of theater – from the East, including countries with rich theatrical traditions like China, Japan, Korea, Singapore, and India – and from the West, such as Germany, France, England, and the Netherlands – participating in it. For example, major companies like the German "Theater Ensemble," one of the world's largest, have dispatched their directors to the festival. The positive experiences and testimonials shared by these international guests serve as testament to the fact that the festival is among the most serious and influential theatrical events.

**How do you assess this year's festival?** This year's festival, naturally, is being held with limitations due to the pre-

By Sadeq Dehqan  
Staff writer

## INTERVIEW

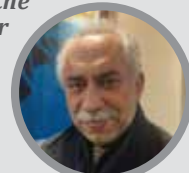
*The 44th Fadjr International Theater Festival, a cornerstone of Iranian cultural life and the nation's most prominent theatrical event, is currently captivating audiences in Tehran. Recognized by experts for its vital role in connecting artists, audiences, and the broader cultural sphere, this year's festival marks a significant milestone: For the first time, the opening ceremony was held in the historic city of Kerman.*

*From January 12 to 17, Kerman hosted five distinct sections of the festival, radio drama, stage and street theater, and a compelling exhibition of photography and posters. The festival's vibrant energy then shifted to Tehran on January 22, continuing its run until February 1.*

*Throughout its storied history, the Fadjr International Theater Festival has served as both a launchpad for*

*emerging talent and a vital forum for the nation's leading theatrical figures. Many celebrated names in Iranian theater have risen to prominence through this very festival, its evolution consistently reflecting the shifting currents of the nation's social and political landscape. Our conversation centers on Hossein Mosafer Astaneh, Senior Advisor to the Secretary of the 44th Fadjr International Theater Festival, a seasoned and influential voice in Iranian theater. Having served as secretary for four terms, Mr. Astaneh brings a wealth of experience and an unparalleled insider's view of the festival's triumphs, challenges, and enduring legacy.*

*In this discussion, we explore the festival's past and present, a celebration that Astaneh himself views not merely as an artistic endeavor, but as an "act of devotion" by Iran's theater community, dedicated to preserving the vibrant spirit of Iranian theater.*



Hossein Mosafer Astaneh



vailing socio-political conditions, but it is being held nonetheless; because, as I mentioned earlier, the life of theater must continue under all circumstances. This year, there may certainly be limitations in the number of venues and performances, particularly in the international section, but this does not diminish the significance of holding the festival itself. Regardless of its size or scope, and with however many theaters in Tehran and a portion of theaters in other provinces

(like Kerman) are utilized, there is a fervent desire to hold it. Ultimately, judging will take place in the various sections, and the top groups will be selected.

**Some people believe the festival is a government festival and does not represent the Iranian theater community. What is your view on this?**

The organizers of the festival are no different from the Iranian theater community. Sometimes, people assume that

purely government officials are running the festival, when in reality, from the secretary to the managers of various sections, they are selected from within the Iranian theater community, and the government only provides budgetary support. Those from the theater community who take on the responsibility of running the festival are essentially putting their own year-long programs and performances on hold to support the works that have been produced

throughout the year and have earned the right to be showcased at the festival. Therefore, in my opinion, the festival organizers perform an act of devotion for the Iranian theater community. I myself, during the four terms I served as Secretary, had to put my personal theatrical work aside and dedicate months of time and energy to organizing the festival. For this reason, taking on the responsibility of running the festival is not particularly appealing to those who undertake it.

**How do you assess holding a portion of the festival for the first time in the province of Kerman and extending the festival to other regions of the country?**

All those involved in the festival believe that the Fadjr International Theater Festival is not the theater festival of Tehran, nor does it belong solely to the capital; rather, it is a national theater festival. In past years, there has consistently been criticism as to why the festival should be held only in Tehran each year, allowing only the people of the capital to benefit from the works. Of course, there may be shortcomings and deficiencies in various parts of the country for hosting the festival, but we believe that any city or province that can provide the minimum requirements for hosting even a portion of the festival should do so, and the festival should travel to different regions of the country so that both the people and the artists of those areas can benefit from its cultural bounty.

**How do you assess dedicating a part of this year's festival to theatrical works by people with disabilities?**

Nationally, an independent festival is held annually under the title 'Festival of Theater for People with Disabilities.' Staging theatrical works for these dear individuals not only aids their therapeutic process but is also highly effective in elevating their psychological and emotional well-being and increasing their self-confidence. Participants, by attending this festival, are, in a sense, also undergoing psychological therapy, and the festival plays a vital role in fostering joy and vitality for people with disabilities. This festival is held annually independently throughout the provinces, and its selected participants gain access to the national festival. This year, the final stage of this festival coincides with the Fadjr International Theater Festival and has been incorporated into it. This development results in greater visibility for theater by people with disabilities and further increases attention to this field.

## Failed Mossad operation ...

Israel and Europe are jointly carrying out a project to provoke Trump against Iran, with different objectives. Europeans are keen to drag Trump into a devastating war with Iran so that the US will be diverted from the issue of Greenland's annexation. Europeans are well aware that the next war between the US and Iran will cost Washington dearly and Trump will be forced to back down from his claims about Greenland.

2. Marring Iran's image: Following a failure to pull off a coup in January 2026, American and Israeli propaganda has taken the issue of Iranian unrest to human rights organizations. Few in the world remain unaware that the killings of Iranians in the streets of Tehran were a joint Mossad-CIA scenario designed to ruin the relationship between the government and the people of Iran. The "fatality creation" project, as one component of the hybrid

war against the Islamic Republic, has a long history. This project should be analyzed under a "cognitive-perceptual operation"; an operation whose goal is not only to tarnish the international image but also to disrupt internal decision-making systems, erode social capital, and create a rift in the government-people relationship through the production of threatening perceptions. One strategic advantage of this pattern for domestic opponents and their Western-Israeli supporters is that even in the event of tactical failure, the project leaves at least a form of "percep-

tual residue" in the minds of the audience. This residue acts as a pre-assumption in later stages and provides the necessary ground for activating and facilitating further projects against the Islamic Republic. From the perspective of cognitive warfare, each narrative operation has a cumulative effect and is defined in a continuous chain. In this regard, after the terrorist events of January 2026, Israeli-affiliated media outlets, selectively citing figures from the identification number on the body bag of one of the victims, began to claim "thousands of ca-

sualties" in these events. However, a constant principle exists in the fatality creation project: the higher the numbers announced, the more successful the project appears to public opinion. In other words, statistical exaggeration is not a media mistake, but part of the deliberate plan of this campaign; a plan that even in some informal documents and confessions of its masterminds, refers to targeting a much higher death toll. Statistics in this project serve two simultaneous functions: first, to reignite unrest and continue the cycle of unrest

and casualties; and second, to convey success and "return on investment" to American and Israeli supporters of this campaign, who assess public opinion and social destabilization as a measurable project. The criminals who have killed more than 70,000 people in the Gaza Strip and for whom the people of Gaza have become meaningless numbers whose slaughter continues, are certainly not well-wishers of the Iranian people and will not be. For them, the more victims Iran suffers, the more successful their fatality creation project will be.