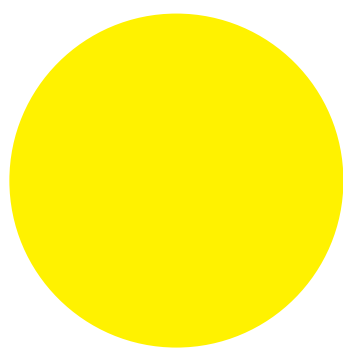


Global opera star takes 'Shahnameh' to Iranian stage
From Europe's
grand opera houses to Shiraz,
Reza Fekri comes home

INTERVIEW
EXCLUSIVE

8 >



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| IranDailyWeb

Gov't pursues diplomacy to ease tensions with West despite intrigues: *Spox*

2 >

President calls for science-based agriculture reforms amid water stress

3 >



Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian addresses a national conference on food security followed by a ceremony to honor top farmers in Tehran on January 27, 2026.

● president.ir

Tehran, Baku must safeguard relations against foreign plots

INTERVIEW
EXCLUSIVE



Mohsen Pak-Ayeen

Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Sa'ar has recently accused Iran of exhibiting "violent" treatment of protesters and warning about similar behavior

toward other nations. The remarks were made on Monday in Baku in the wake of the recent unrest in Iran which escalated to violence with foreign involvement. Tehran responded by characterizing the statements as an attempt to undermine relations between Iran and Azerbaijan, calling for Baku's vigilance in this regard. Shortly thereafter, Israeli media reported the thwarting of an attack on Israel's embassy in Azerbaijan. Mohsen Pak-Ayeen, an expert on Azerbaijani affairs, told Iran Daily that Israel's presence in Baku is an attempt to shake off international isolation and that the Azerbaijani government is open to criticism for facilitating such an opportunity. He also stressed the need for Tehran and Baku to strive to maintain their friendly relations.

IRAN DAILY: How do you assess Israeli foreign minister's statements during his meeting with Azerbaijani officials? Does the delivery of these statements in Baku indicate specific strategic goals on the part of the Israeli regime?

PAK-AYEEN: Israel is attempting to break out of its isolation, particularly as [Prime Minister Benjamin] Netanyahu cannot travel to various countries due to the potential for arrest on charges brought by the International Criminal Court in The Hague. Consequently, the Israeli Foreign Minister is often dispatched to several countries to achieve this end. A primary objective of this minister's tour is to exploit the opportunity to articulate unsound positions, advance baseless claims, and meddle in Iran's internal affairs. The statements are a clear case of interference in Iran's internal affairs and are inconsistent with any international norms. The hand of the Israel and the US, particularly the government of [US President Donald] Trump, in directing terrorist groups in Iran to create unrest and chaos is well-documented. American and Israeli officials have both acknowledged this on at least ten occasions over the past two weeks, explicitly stating that Mossad and CIA operatives are among the Iranian terrorists, guiding them.

Page 2 >



Persian Gulf at core of Iran's strategic development plans: Minister

3 >



Iranian wrestlers miss Ivan Yarygin Cup over Russian visa denial

6 >



Mideast in 'transition phase': Balance of terror instead of balance of power

INTERVIEW
EXCLUSIVE

4 >



Tabriz pushes forward with heritage restoration

7 >



Malaysia to host Iranian Film Festival to boost cultural ties

8 >



Gov't pursues diplomacy to ease tensions with West despite intrigues: *SpoX*

International Desk

The Iranian government spokeswoman said on Tuesday that the administration is striving to resolve tensions with Western countries through diplomacy despite their "belligerent approaches." "In a situation where approaches (toward Iran) are belligerent, the government is trying to resolve issues through diplomacy, in line with safeguarding national interests and promoting regional stability, and within the framework of international peace," Fatemeh Mohajerani said during her weekly presser.

"Of course, this does not mean that other options have been taken off the table by the government and the Establishment."

Mohajerani told reporters that Iran is in a hybrid and multilayered war and is in a state of full readiness to respond to any threat.

Tensions have worsened between Iran and the United States over the

past weeks after US President Donald Trump threatened to attack Iran over its response to the recent foreign-backed riots across the country. The US has also dispatched a strike group led by the USS Abraham Lincoln to the West Asia waters.

"We have a big armada next to Iran. Bigger than Venezuela," Trump told the Axios news site, weeks after US military action resulted in the capture of the Latin American nation's president, Nicolas Maduro.

But he added, "They want to make a deal. I know so. They called on numerous occasions. They want to talk."

In a subsequent briefing with reporters, a US official said, "With regard to Iran, we are open for business. If they want to contact us, and they know what the terms are, then we're going to have the conversation."

Earlier this month, US special envoy Steve Witkoff said any deal would have to include a ban on uranium enrichment in Iran, the removal of



Iranian government spokeswoman Fatemeh Mohajerani listens to reporters during her weekly presser in Tehran on January 27, 2026.

● IRNA

already-enriched uranium, a cap on Tehran's stockpile of long-range missiles and a rollback of the Islamic Republic's support for resistance groups in the region.

Tehran has expressed willingness to negotiate with the US but has rejected those terms outright.

In recent days, Iranian officials have repeatedly warned of a decisive response to any miscalculation.

Yemen's Ansarullah resistance movement has also warned the US and Israel that they will resume their drone and missile strikes in the Red Sea against Israeli-affiliated vessels and ships bound for the Israeli-occupied territories in reprisal for any adventurism in the region.

The secretary general of the Lebanese



Hezbollah resistance movement also warned the US and Israel that a fresh round of strikes on Iran would have serious consequences for the entire region, as Tehran will respond forcefully

and decisively to any act of aggression. "A new war on Iran could set the entire region ablaze this time," Sheikh Naim Qassem said in a televised speech on Monday.

Araghchi: Recent riots organized to drag US into another war with Iran



The photo shows stores burned during recent protests over economic problems in Rasht, Iran.

● IRNA

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said recent protests were derailed into violent riots and organized terrorist actions to provoke a new war by the United States against Iran.

Speaking by phone with his Sri Lankan counterpart, Vijitha Herath, on Monday, Araghchi discussed and exchanged views on the latest state of bilateral relations, as well as regional and international developments, Press TV reported.

Iran's top diplomat said that peaceful protests by Iranians on January 8-9 were diverted into violent acts and terrorist operations, stressing the organized and terrorist nature of these actions, whose objective was to draw the US into another

war against the Islamic Republic. Araghchi also appreciated the Sri Lankan government's support for Iran in the face of an anti-Tehran human rights resolution, describing it as a sign of Sri Lanka's independent, balanced, and friendly approach toward Tehran.

Herath, for his part, referring to the pattern of US behavior toward independent countries, emphasized that Sri Lanka, as a friendly country, will remain committed to continuing and strengthening its relations with Iran despite certain foreign interventions.

The two sides also stressed the necessity of joint efforts to enhance relations between the two countries. They agreed to continue and expand

bilateral cooperation in various fields, particularly in the economic and commercial sectors, and to maintain ongoing consultations and close coordination in international organizations and forums.

Foreign-instigated riots in Iran escalated on January 8 and continued for several days, following peaceful protests in Iranian bazaars and markets where traders called for government action to halt the devaluation of the Iranian rial.

The violence, encouraged openly by the Israeli regime and US President Donald Trump, resulted in extensive damage to public and private property, with widespread destruction of shops, government institutions, public service facilities, and the killing of thousands of civilians, including women and children, as well as security forces.

Iranian authorities have confirmed that US and Israeli spy agencies were directly involved, and provided funding, training, and media support to rioters and armed terrorists acting on the streets.

Iran summons Italy envoy over EU proposal for IRGC designation



● IRNA

International Desk

Iran's Foreign Ministry summoned Italy's Ambassador to Tehran Paola Amadei on Tuesday after the country announced its plan to propose to the European Union to designate the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) as a "terrorist" entity.

The Foreign Ministry's Director General for Western Europe Affairs Alireza Yousefi lodged a strong protest against "irresponsible positions" by Italy's foreign minis-

ter, stressing the IRGC's legal status as an official branch of the Iranian Armed Forces.

He warned about the consequences of the move and called on Rome to change its "ill-considered approach" toward Iran.

The Italian ambassador said she would promptly convey Iran's position to her government.

The summon came a day after Italian Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani urged the European Union to proscribe the

IRGC as a "terrorist organization" in the wake of recent riots across Iran. Tajani claimed that the "losses suffered by the civilian population during the protests demand a clear response."

"I will propose, in coordination with the other partners [in the European Union], the inclusion of the Revolutionary Guards on the list of terrorist organizations," he said.

He also called for the EU to levy individual sanctions against those responsible.

Tehran, Baku must ...

When a regime resorts to such tactics, it is natural for its positions adopted in Baku to be unfounded, illogical, and unprincipled, and no country in the world will accept such positions. Therefore, I believe these positions should not be given any credence. At the same time, caution must be exercised to prevent Israel's presence in Baku from damaging relations between Iran and Azerbaijan, and to protect Iran's relations with Azerbaijan. The Azerbaijani government should also be called out for facilitating Israel's emergence from isolation at a time when it is widely reviled across the globe and for allowing it to make such statements against its friendly neighbor, Iran.

How do you analyze Azerbaijan's stance regarding recent developments in Iran? Is Baku merely monitoring development plans or does it have a pre-determined plan in this regard?

The official position of the Republic of Azerbaijan, which was also voiced by Pres-

ident Ilham Aliyev just two days ago, is the expression of concern over these events and hope for stability, security, and peace to return to Iran. That was the official stance of the government in Baku.

It has been reported that an attack on Israel's embassy in Azerbaijan has been foiled shortly after Sa'ar's statements. Can this event be assessed as a project aimed at advancing the policy of Iranophobia in Baku?

These claims by the Israeli regime are an attempt to project victimhood and have been made repeatedly in the past. It should be remembered that Israel is a regime that launches attacks on Qatar to target figures like Hamas leaders. Therefore, this regime is hardly in a position to discuss these matters. Moreover, Israel's embassy in Azerbaijan is located on the upper floors of the Hyatt hotel and is adjacent to the Japanese embassy, making it virtually impossible for a terrorist or sabotage operation to take place there. Also, the Hyatt hotel is also fully under the se-

curity coverage of the Azerbaijani government. Therefore, the claims made by the Israeli regime, although it has not directly accused Iran in this matter, are a move to play the victim and to extricate itself from the pressure it faces globally.

What measures can Iran take to preserve and strengthen its positive relations with Azerbaijan and prevent their exploitation and destruction by hostile countries?

I believe that the more positively Iran and Azerbaijan's relations progress, the more they can neutralize the plots of the Israeli regime to undermine these relations. Therefore, the active diplomacy that currently exists between the two countries, the exchange of various delegations, and the holding of joint economic commissions should continue with strength and should not be affected by trips like these, which are undertaken with the aim of Israel's emergence from isolation. Both Iran and the Republic of Azerbaijan must look after their good relations.



Mohammad Ali Rajabi
Cartoonist

CARTOON



President calls for science-based agriculture reforms amid water stress

Economy Desk

President Masoud Pezeshkian on Tuesday urged Iranian farmers and officials to adopt expert-driven planning to confront severe water shortages and climate change impacts, while announcing structural reforms aimed at eliminating rent-seeking practices that have long distorted agricultural markets. Speaking at the 39th national ceremony honoring exemplary farmers, Pezeshkian stated that climate change and declining water resources represent serious national challenges. "We must accept that groundwater resources are declining and rainfall has decreased. Through consultation and utilizing elite capacities, solutions can be found for these conditions," he said, IRNA reported. Iran, with its predominantly semi-arid and arid climate, faces water stress and crisis, and the supply of drinking water has now become one of the biggest challenges in many provinces, and cities. The president warned against non-expert investments in agriculture and emphasized long-term viability. "Non-expert investments in the agricultural sector must be avoided. Investment should not be conducted

in a way that the entire capital is lost within a few years' horizon. A correct and forward-looking perspective in this field is decisive." While praising farmers who have achieved productivity gains, quality improvements, cost reduction and efficiency increases, Pezeshkian noted the country's potential remains underutilized. He added that strengthening accountability mechanisms within government agencies — particularly in dealings with farmers — is essential. "The administrative and ministerial system must provide knowledge, education and capabilities broadly to farmers. Farmers are among society's hardest-working strata and deserve precise, expert responses." Pezeshkian stressed that management cannot function through decrees alone. "Management is not possible merely by issuing orders. The decision-making system must transparently specify how much water exists, how it is distributed, and what crops should be cultivated." He cited field-level problems regarding water resources and land-use conversion, noting authorities are reforming processes through effective university collaboration. "We are amending this course by estab-

lishing effective communication with universities and utilizing the country's scientific capacities. Decisions must be based on science, expertise and actual needs." The president declared that grounds for discrimination, rent-seeking and injustice must be eliminated. He attributed past institutional failures — including efforts by the General Inspection Organization and Supreme Audit Court of Iran — to entrenched corruption networks. "Public dissatisfaction has largely stemmed from rent-seeking, bribery, smuggling and hoarding," he said. "Through fundamental structural reforms, appropriate grounds for these violations will no longer remain. When rent-based currency allocation is removed, hoarding and smuggling possibilities will practically disappear and the trend of irrational price increases will stop." Under a new policy approved by the government's economic team, all foreign currency trans-



actions are now centralized in a single trading hall with a negotiated rate closely aligned with market prices. The policy shifts foreign currency allocation from the beginning of the supply chain to direct subsidy transfers at the consumer end. Pezeshkian announced formation of a specialized government team operating under Articles

127 and 138 of the Constitution to monitor implementation, resolve obstacles and adjust the program as needed. The group comprises the ministers of agriculture, industry, mines and trade, economy and welfare, the vice president of the Plan and Budget Organization, the Central Bank governor, the justice minister and other relevant officials.

The team reviews data daily, identifies existing problems and issues necessary corrective decisions. He emphasized that process owners — including active participants in agriculture, livestock breeding and other guilds — must attend these meetings to present their issues and receive immediate decisions on-site.

Persian Gulf at core of Iran's strategic development plans: Minister



Economy Desk

The Persian Gulf serves as the focal point of Iran's major economic and strategic planning efforts, requiring intelligent management grounded in sustainable development, environmental protection and optimal utilization of natural resources, Roads and Urban Development Minister Farzaneh Sadeq Malvajerd said Tuesday at the inauguration of the 6th International Conference on the Persian Gulf Oceanography. "The Persian Gulf is the axis of concentration for many of the country's macroeconomic and strategic plans. Intelligent management of this water body requires a forward-looking perspective toward sustainable development, environmental protection and optimal utilization of natural resources," IRNA quoted Sadeq as saying. She noted Iran's distinguished position due to extensive access to free waters and strategic maritime corridors, stating this advantage has created unique opportunities for economic development, strengthening regional and international com-

munications and advancing economic diplomacy. "Intelligent management of Persian Gulf waters requires long-term decision-making based on scientific data, joint modeling and convergence among science, technology and policy-making," the minister added. Emphasizing the water body's importance at national, regional and international levels, Sadeq stated, "Persian Gulf is a shared, sensitive and strategic subject in the region, and data exchange, joint modeling and comparative analyses can pave the way for collective decision-making and strengthen scientific diplomacy." She described international Persian Gulf conferences as golden opportunities for knowledge sharing between domestic and foreign researchers. "The Persian Gulf holds a strategic position in connecting geography, economy and security. These events enable exchange of successful experiences in water body management and provide practical solutions for sustainable utilization of marine resources," she said. Sadeq Malvajerd expressed

hope that the conference's outcomes would lead to enhancement of indigenous knowledge, strengthening of international cooperation, sustainable utilization of marine resources and elevation of the Persian Gulf's historical and scientific standing. "Maritime transportation is the main artery of the country's trade and security. Maritime safety, reduction of incidents, increased port productivity and sustainable development of coastal cities are only possible through precise planning and utilization of data and scientific analyses," she said. The minister emphasized that marine meteorology plays a highly key role in intelligent management of the country's water bodies. Accurate marine meteorological data is not only effective in reducing natural hazards and increasing maritime safety, but also plays a vital role in protecting sensitive ecosystems, enhancing resilience of coastal communities and managing consequences of climate change, she said. Foreign Ministry spokesperson Esmail Baqaei, also speaking at the conference, emphasized the necessity of sustainable development in the Persian Gulf region. He stated that development planning must simultaneously address economic, environmental and cultural heritage dimensions, "because Persian Gulf is an invaluable asset for comprehensive regional development." Baqaei added that the Persian Gulf represents both a security and economic priority for Iran and an inseparable part of national identity. "These two aspects complement each other, and intelligent policymaking must seek synergy among these dimensions."

ADVERTORIAL

Member of the Parliament's Industries and Mines Commission stated; Mobarakeh Steel's positive performance in innovation and technology localization



The representative of the people of Khaf and Roshtkhar and member of the Parliament's Industries and Mines Commission said: Mobarakeh Steel has performed well in the field of localization, redesigning, and engineering of downstream, complementary, and parts manufacturing industries, and in creating new capacities in this area, moving towards greater innovation and creativity by trusting human resources. Amir Tavakoli Roudi, regarding the performance of Mobarakeh Steel Company in the recent year, said: Mobarakeh Steel, as a successful complex in the steel supply chain sector, has tried to perform its mission well considering both global and domestic conditions. Pointing to the problems caused by energy imbalance for the Mobarakeh Steel complex, he said: Our country's steel complexes have suffered greatly from energy imbalance, and the loss of profit related to this problem amounts to several hundred trillion Tomans. One of Mobarakeh Steel's valuable measures in recent years has been helping to reduce imbalances through the establishment of power plants and supplying 600 megawatts of its required electricity through these plants. Also, this company has participated in the water transfer project from the sea to the Central Plateau of Iran, and currently, a part of this water has reached the Mobarakeh Steel complex. The member of the Parliament's Industries and Mines Commission continued: Given the existing conditions, we will also witness an imbalance in the supply of raw materials and feedstock for

steel industries in the near future. Mobarakeh Steel has made predictions in this regard to resolve this problem, and the Mining Division of this company has started good measures in the field of exploration, which we can also consider as one of the positive points in Mobarakeh Steel's performance record in the recent period. Tavakoli Roudi also explained regarding the activities of Mobarakeh Steel Company in the field of Green Steel: The general view in the world is to reduce the use of fossil fuels in steel production and replace it with Green Steel. Mobarakeh Steel Company has taken good steps in this path and has achieved results in this regard. The representative of the people of Khaf and Roshtkhar in the Parliament, emphasizing the importance and necessity of localization, self-reliance, and innovation in steel industries, added: During the visit we had to the latest steel industries exhibition, we became acquainted with the achievements of Mobarakeh Steel Company in the field of technology localization, and it must be admitted that Mobarakeh Steel has performed well in the field of localization, redesigning, and engineering of downstream, complementary, and parts manufacturing industries, and creating new capacities in this area. Tavakoli Roudi noted in the end: One of the requirements of our country's industries today, especially steel industries, is trusting the capacity of human resources based on rationality, collective wisdom, innovation, and creativity, and Mobarakeh Steel's record in the direction of creating self-belief and trust in domestic human resources has also been bright.

Mideast in 'transition phase': Balance of terror instead of balance of power



By Asgar Ghahremanpour
Editor-in-chief

INTERVIEW EXCLUSIVE

This interview with Professor Mehran Kamrava, a distinguished scholar of Middle East studies, was conducted following the region's dramatic developments. The core of this interview is to examine the question of whether the Middle East, after the events of October 2023 and the Iran-Israel conflict, has entered a "new order" or is merely experiencing a more violent phase of chronic instability. Dr. Kamrava, emphasizing that the region is in a "transition phase" with uncertain outcomes, analyzes the prevailing balance of terror, the renewed marginalization of the Palestinian issue, and the consequences of US policies. He also specifically points to the opportunities and threats facing Iranian diplomacy, including the potential shift in the Persian Gulf's security equations and the necessity of revising its negotiation approach. This interview provides a profound analysis of the complex power dynamics in one of the most sensitive contemporary junctures in the Middle East.

Mr. Dr. Kamrava, greetings and respect, First of all, thank you for accepting Iran Daily's invitation for an interview regarding the new outlook and developments in the Middle East. Given your expertise and valuable written works in regional studies, many of which have been translated into Persian and are taught in Iranian universities, the questions in this dialogue are focused on this field.

IRAN DAILY: The first question relates to the region's structural developments following the events of October 2023. Some experts consider these developments a sign of the formation of a "new regional order," while others believe the region has entered a more violent phase of "chronic instability." In your opinion, has the Middle East entered a new order, and if the answer is positive, what are the most important features of this order?

KAMRAVA: Currently, it must be acknowledged that with the military defeat of the Axis of Resistance, the previous balance of power and political equations between Iran, the United States, Israel, and the countries of the Persian Gulf have been transformed. We are in a "transition phase" where its end point is still unknown. The policies during Mr. Trump's presidency disrupted all previous calculations and equations, and the final shape of the regional order is still ambiguous. The question is, are we moving toward multipolarity in the region? For example, for the first time, we see countries like Saudi Arabia and Qatar expressing serious concern about the possibility of a US military attack on Iran and striving and lobbying to prevent it. Also, for

the first time, Iran has practically used its missile capability and warned regional countries that in the event of a US attack, American targets and bases on their soil may be targeted. Therefore, we are not yet aware of the final form of this order.

Another point worth mentioning is the issue of the United Arab Emirates. This country, after withdrawing from Yemen and even disengaging from Socotra Island, where it had significant influence, is at a historical juncture. Currently, nationalism in this country has taken on a military form. This government might exploit the current situation—with the perception that the Iranian government has been weakened due to the 12-day war or internal developments—to take action against the three Iranian islands. Overall, we are in a phase where the region's security, military, and diplomatic structures are completely transforming. Although last year such plans by the UAE seemed far-fetched, today, in the event of another US and Israeli attack on Iran, there is a possibility of this country exploiting the situation to change the security structure of the Persian Gulf. Therefore, I emphasize that we are in a transition phase with uncertain outcomes.



Mehran Kamrava

The limited 12-day war between Iran and Israel is considered an almost unprecedented experience in re-defining the rules of regional deterrence. In your opinion, will this event make future conflicts in the Middle East more controllable, or conversely, has it made the situation more dangerous and complex? What we witness in the region today is the rule of a "balance of terror," not a balance of power. All actors fear each other: Iran fears another Israeli attack, Israel fears another Iranian missile retaliation, and the Arabs fear Iranian targeting of American bases. This situation has inherently made conditions more complex and dangerous. To exit this situation, this balance of terror needs to transform into a balance of power with new definitions and perceptions. Overall, it seems the current situation has become somewhat more dangerous and complex.



The Palestinian issue had been marginalized in regional politics in recent years, but recent developments have once again placed it at the center of attention. Has Palestine once again become the axis of regional politics, or are regional states still trying to contain and manage it?

Although the Palestinian issue has been raised again, it is not in the way one might think. Living conditions in Palestine have become more difficult, and the possibility of establishing a functional Palestinian government in the occupied territories has moved further from reality. If establishing such a government was difficult before October 2023, it now seems almost impossible. While the name of Palestine is once again on the lips of the international community, in practice and objective conditions, achieving the freedom of Palestine, which was already problematic, has unfortunately become considerably more difficult.

The Middle East is witnessing intense rivalries among regional powers such as Iran, Turkey, Israel, and Saudi Arabia. In your opinion, is the region moving toward a fragile balance among these powers, or is the risk of sliding toward broader wars still high?

As long as there is ideological enmity between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Zionist regime,

the possibility of rivalry and even war persists. Today, even in Turkey, discourse about the possibility of conflict with Israel is raised. Although it does not seem that Israel intends to attack a NATO member, the intensity of this rivalry in the mindset of Turkish officials is such that they envision the possibility of war. Therefore, in answer to your question, yes, the risk of sliding toward broader wars remains high.

The new US National Security Strategy document in 2025 indicates changes in Washington's approach toward the Middle East. In your opinion, what changes has this document created in America's perspective, and what is its consequence for the region?

We should not focus solely on this document. This document, more than representing a macro and stable approach in US foreign policy, reflects the views of Mr. Donald Trump and his circle. After his presidential term ends, priorities may change again. However, it cannot be denied that due to having powerful allies like Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Qatar, which have deep relations with the US, Washington sees no necessity for direct and extensive intervention in the region.

Considering recent developments in Venezuela and also the beginning of the new year

with Trump's warmongering positions, what is your assessment of Trump's foreign policy in 2026? Given the domestic protests in Iran and the government's managerial approach toward them, will anything specific happen in his policy toward Iran before the end of the Trump administration? Or can the US midterm elections hinder interventionist policies? Current US foreign policy is highly personal and influenced by Mr. Trump's style of "warlike diplomacy" and bullying. He deals with countries like Greenland, Iran, and Venezuela with the claim that Latin America is the United States' "backyard." It seems Trump is primarily seeking short-term military conflicts that he can quickly win and dominate news headlines.

In your opinion, what is the greatest strategic threat to the Middle East in the next decade, and why?

Regional instability is rooted in several key factors: environmental crises (especially water scarcity, which Iran is also grappling with), secessionist movements in some countries including Iran, and the weakening of central governments which calls into question their ability to govern the country effectively.

If you were to analyze the Middle East ten years from now, what would you consider the most important shaping factor, and why?

It seems the answer to this question is encompassed within the factors mentioned in the previous question.

Please briefly share your view on the impact of recent protests in Iran on the future of Iran-US negotiations. Considering recent rumors, is this discourse merely part of Trump's negotiation style, or is there a real possibility for dialogue?

In my opinion, the United States, especially since the beginning of the new round of Mr. Trump's presidency, has a strong desire for negotiation. This desire is not necessarily for resolving the crisis but is largely influenced by Trump's own personality and ambitions. In my view, this was an exceptional opportunity for Iran to obtain concessions from the US if it had been willing to negotiate from the outset. The desire for negotiation exists from the American side, but it seems Iran either lacks the necessary resolve or, due to ideological reasons, is unwilling/unable to negotiate with the US. While almost all countries, from the European Union to the Persian Gulf states and even Zelenskyy, have learned how to engage with Trump, unfortunately, the Islamic Republic has not developed this capability within itself. In my opinion, the possibility of negotiation is still high. Iran often announces readiness for negotiation when domestic protests occur. If the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or the Supreme National Security Council have the necessary resolve and permission, the current conditions could even be a suitable opportunity for negotiation.



The photo shows part of a world map on a globe, focusing on the Middle East region.



Current US foreign policy is highly personal and influenced by Mr. Trump's style of "warlike diplomacy" and bullying. He deals with countries like Greenland, Iran, and Venezuela with the claim that Latin America is the United States' "backyard." It seems Trump is primarily seeking short-term military conflicts that he can quickly win and dominate news headlines.



Smoke and flames erupt from an Israeli airstrike in Gaza City on July 21, 2025.

AP



Global security continued to unravel in 2025

Crucial tests are coming in 2026

By Marion Messmer
Director of International Security Programme

By Katja Bego
Research fellow at International Security Programme

OPINION

2025 has not been a banner year for the international security order. A ceasefire in Gaza's brutal war was achieved – though Israel and Hamas each accuse the other of violating the truce. Elsewhere, from Ukraine to Sudan, ongoing conflicts seem only more intractable. And the threat of further violence looms from Venezuela to the India-Pakistan border. In response to this growing instability, governments are spending on defence at levels not seen since the Cold War. Meanwhile international aid spending has been slashed by many Western countries – worsening conditions in conflict affected countries and degrading early warning systems. 2025 accelerated numerous developments in insecurity but four particular trends stand out.

Nuclear showdowns and nuclear power

Nuclear arms control continued to unravel over 2025. Expanding nuclear and conventional missile tests by major powers created serious escalation concerns. Meanwhile, China's arsenal continued to expand, on a trajectory that could see it have at least as many ICBMs as either Russia or the USA by the end of the decade. At the same time, a series of extraordinary events undermined a fragile strategic balance. February's Munich Security Conference speech by US Vice President JD Vance indicated the new Trump administration's declining commitment to European defence and raised questions about the credibility of NATO's article 5 mutual defence guarantee – a critical question in light of previous Russian nuclear threats relating to Ukraine. A 4-day crisis in May between India and Pakistan saw two nuclear-armed states in open conflict, alarming observers for its potential to escalate. Tensions remained high, particularly following terror attacks in Islamabad and New Delhi.

In June, US-Israel strikes on Iran's nuclear facilities were followed by the suspension of some IAEA inspections in the country, rendering the status of Iran's nuclear programme unclear, and deepening security concerns in the Middle East. That may have contributed to Saudi Arabia's decision to sign a mutual defence agreement with nuclear-armed Pakistan in September. In October, Russia claimed to have tested a nuclear-powered cruise missile. The same month, the US and Russia broached the possibility of renewing nuclear weapons testing, threatening to collapse a 30-year moratorium that has underpinned strategic stability. Later that month President Trump endorsed South Korea's pursuit of nuclear-powered submarines, which caused North Ko-

rea to warn of a 'nuclear domino' effect, raising fears of regional nuclear proliferation. 2026 will quickly provide a critical inflection point for nuclear arms control: New START, the last arms-control agreement between the US and Russia (owners of the largest nuclear weapon stockpiles) will expire in February 2026. Failure to agree even a symbolic extension could drive an uncontrolled expansion of US and Russian nuclear arsenals – fuelling proliferation elsewhere.

Hybrid warfare intensifies

Hybrid attacks in Europe have increased significantly since the Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine began. 2023 and 2024 saw an increase in damage to undersea infrastructure in the Baltic and North Seas. But 2025 has been characterized by an increase in drone disruption: at airports, and at other important strategic locations like military bases. Drones, crewed aircraft, and even balloons have repeatedly violated European states' sovereign airspace along the border with Russia and Belarus, creating serious disruption. Most states do not have sufficient defensive anti-drone systems in place. The air defence systems that exist are built to counter missile or aircraft threats and are therefore not cost-effective in countering drones. This means that adversaries have been able to cause significant disruption to air travel almost unhindered. The increase in drone incidents, air space violations and physical sabotage is likely to have a big impact on European actions in 2026. European publics find them disconcerting and favour more action to protect them. However, European governments have been struggling to define a comprehensive strategy to respond to such attacks, given their disparate nature and the difficulty of attributing them. There is a chance that a country might shoot down a Russian aircraft in 2026 – Poland's foreign minister warned his country may do so during a meeting at the UN in September. Such an act could be the forceful gesture Russia needs to persuade it to cease attacks – or it could risk an unprecedented escalation.



Weaponized interdependence

Though certainly not new, 2025 was the year countries increasingly showcased their willingness to exploit economic linkages and supply-chain vulnerabilities as instruments of coercion and geopolitical leverage. China weaponized its hold over global rare earth supplies and processing capabilities by restricting exports – critical to almost all high-end manufacturing, including many weapon systems. In September, Beijing imposed a temporary export ban on drone components, vital for Ukraine's war effort. In October, another ban, on low-end Nexperia chip exports, threatened to ground the European car industry to a halt. The US also looked to use its economic might, exploiting allies' overwhelming reliance on the US security umbrella, technology and market access as leverage to extract favourable trade and tariff concessions. Countries that have long relied on openness and interconnectedness in global supply chains find themselves increasingly vulnerable in

this new era of geoeconomics. Many are now investing in developing their own sovereign capabilities and reducing their reliance on others – efforts which are set to become their own source of friction and tension in 2026.

Space security and the return of 'Star Wars'

The US decision to stop sharing intelligence and satellite imagery with Ukraine in March 2025 provided a harsh wakeup call for many European NATO members – who also rely on the US for many space capabilities. Germany has just published its first space security strategy, drawing on lessons from Russian attacks on Ukrainian space communication systems. The Finnish armed forces significantly invested in their satellites over 2025. And space security was a significant focus in the UK's Security and Defence Review. In November, President Macron announced €4.2 billion of funding for weapons to support European interests in space.

Article 2nd half

And space is becoming a more

A Trident II D5 missile capable of carrying a nuclear warhead is test-launched from a US ballistic missile submarine in 2018.
● REUTERS



Countries that have long relied on openness and interconnectedness in global supply chains find themselves increasingly vulnerable in this new era of geoeconomics. Many are now investing in developing their own sovereign capabilities and reducing their reliance on others – efforts which are set to become their own source of friction and tension in 2026.

Ukrainian soldiers prepare a drone at the frontline near Bakhmut in Donetsk region on March 26, 2024.
● AP



active and militarized domain beyond Europe. India is investing significantly in its military space capabilities as part of its modernization efforts, amid concerns about Chinese superiority. Brazil had been expanding its capacity through a partnership with the US – though deteriorating relations with the Trump administration mean Rio is likely to invest more in independent capabilities. In May, President Trump announced his Golden Dome plan – a resurrected Reagan-era missile defence project to defend the US from ICBM attack – which threatens to accelerate the militarization of space. The year was also marked by growing hostile Russian activity in space. In September the US accused Russia of launching a satellite that was likely a space weapon. In October, the head of UK space command warned of Russian jamming attacks on UK space assets. In 2026, space will continue to become more commercialized, more militarized and more congested. Yet no meaningful plans exist to update space governance treaties in 2026.

2026: intensifying threats

Events in 2026 like the imminent expiry of New START in February and the Review Conference of the Non-Proliferation Treaty in April will provide important indications of to what extent the international community can rally around common interests such as preventing nuclear proliferation, or whether national interests will prevail. If enough states can agree to put new guardrails in place, the international order might be somewhat buttressed. But, even after a year as concerning as 2025, states still might not yet feel security threats acutely enough to find common cause.

The article first appeared on London-based think tank Chatham House.

Iranian wrestlers miss Ivan Yarygin Cup over Russian visa denial



Iranian freestyle wrestlers are pictured during a training session in Tehran, Iran, on January 24, 2026.

● IAWFIR

Sports Desk

Iran's freestyle wrestling team has been forced to withdraw from the Ivan Yarygin Cup, which begins today in Krasnoyarsk, Russia, after being denied the entry visa by the host country.

Iran was to dispatch 13 wrestlers to the international tournament – named after late Soviet wrestling great, who won two Olympic gold medals and a world title during his illustrious career in the 1970s.

The visa denial deals another blow to Iranian wrestling as the country's freestyle and Greco-Roman squads also face uncertainty for the opening Ranking Series event of the season, the Zagreb Open, which starts on February 4. Croatia has yet to issue visas for the Iranian delegation, reportedly due to an internet shutdown within Iran.

The Iranian government restricted

internet services on January 8 for security reasons amid recent domestic unrest.

While the United World Wrestling (UWW) unveiled an entry list for the Zagreb Open on Monday that did not include Iranian names, Saied Yousefi, head of international public relations for the Iranian Wrestling Federation, remains optimistic the issue can be resolved before the tournament begins.

Yousefi explained that the omission from the list was a precautionary financial step. "If our wrestlers' names were entered into the UWW registration system, we would have had to pay approximately €220 per wrestler per day for hotel costs," he said.

He noted that upon the system's closure, names are automatically forwarded for hotel reservations. If the team were then unable to travel, the federation would be liable for signif-

icant, non-refundable expenses.

"To prevent this, in coordination with United World Wrestling, it was decided that the names would be registered only when the conditions for our wrestlers' participation are finalized. There is no problem in this regard," Yousefi added.

The national wrestling federation stated on Monday that, through relevant authorities including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Iranian Embassy in Croatia, and UWW, it is actively pursuing the visa issuance process.

Both the Russian and Croatian tournaments were slated to be key stages in the selection process for Iran's national teams ahead of major upcoming events, including April's Asian Championships in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, as well as the World Championships in Manama and the Aichi-Nagoya 2026 Asian Games in September.

World Team Table Tennis Championships Finals:

Iranian teams learn opponents in milestone event in London

Sports Desk

Iranian men's and women's teams learned their group opponents at the ITTF World Team Table Tennis Championships Finals, which will kick off in London on April 28.

The draw for the prestigious tournament took place on Monday at The Shard in London, setting the stage for a historic celebration of 100 years of World Championships.

The Iranian men's team was drawn alongside Austria, Malaysia, and Togo in Group 13 of the B1 stage, while the women's squad was given Thailand, Serbia, and Benin tests in B1 Group 8.

The 2026 edition marks an unprecedented milestone as the Word Championships returns to its birthplace. The Championships will feature 64 men's

and 64 women's teams competing across 13 days at two iconic London venues.

Competition will unfold across three stages: Stage 1B features group stages determining qualification pathways, followed by Stage 1A seeding matches for the top-ranked teams, before Stage 2 delivers knockout rounds showcasing the world's finest teams in pursuit of global supremacy.

"From London to London, we have come full circle," ITTF President Petra Sörling said during Monday's draw ceremony. "England has hosted the World Championships on seven occasions, but returning to where it all began makes this centenary edition truly special. This event is already historic, but I am confident it will also be unforgettable." In the men's competition, reigning champion China was drawn alongside

host nation England, five-time winner Sweden, and Korea Republic in Group 1. Winner of the last 11 editions, China will face stiff competition in what promises to be a highly competitive group.

France, silver medalist at the last edition, will face Japan, Germany and Chinese Taipei in Group 2 as it bids to lift the Swaythling Cup for the first time.

In the women's draw, England was pitted against Japan, Germany and France in Group 2. China, a 23-time Corbillon Cup winner, headlines Group 1 where it will meet Korea Republic, Chinese Taipei and five-time champion Romania. The top eight seeds in each competition will contest Stage 1A at OVO Arena Wembley on May 2-3, with all teams progressing to Stage 2. Their group performances will determine their



Neda Shahsavari will headline the Iranian women's team at the ITTF World Team Table Tennis Championships Finals in London.

● ERFAN KHOSHKOU/ISNA

seedings for the knockout rounds. Stage 1B takes place at the Copper Box Arena from April 28 to May 1, where 56

teams in each competition will battle for the remaining 24 places in the main draw.

Ahmadkohani called up for national camp as doping ban nears end



● volleyball.ir

Sports Desk

Iranian gymnast Mahdi Ahmadkohani has been called up to the national team training camp as his two-year suspension for an anti-doping whereabouts violation nears its conclusion.

The 28-year-old, a two-time rings silver medalist in the 2023 FIG World Cup series, received a 24-month ban from the International Testing Agency (ITA). The sanction, which expires on February 21, was imposed after he accrued three whereabouts failures within a 12-month period. Considered a key prospect for an Olympic quota in Paris 2024, Ahmadkohani had

earned a place in the rings final at the World Cup event in Cottbus, Germany, in February 2024 before being withdrawn due to the FIG anti-doping rules.

Reflecting on the incident at the time, Ahmadkohani stated, "Unfortunately, I had not entered the necessary information on the anti-doping website regarding my residence and training location, which led to my suspension."

His return to the national camp renews hopes among Iranian fans for an Olympic berth at Los Angeles 2028. Mahdi Olfati secured Iran's first-ever Olympic quota in artistic gymnastics for the Paris Games and finished seventh in the men's vault final.

Sepahan to represent Iran at CAVA Women's Champions League

Sports Desk

The Iranian Volleyball Federation announced on Tuesday that Sepahan will represent the country at the upcoming CAVA Women's Champions League, which kicks off next Wednesday in Malé, Maldives. The tournament winner, featuring clubs from the Central Asian

Volleyball Association (CAVA), will secure a berth in the AVC Women's Champions League in Goyang, South Korea, in late April.

In a statement, the national governing body explained the decision: "In light of the importance of the CAVA Women's Champions League and in line with the strategic goals for developing Iranian



● ISNA

women's volleyball – culminating in participation in the Women's Volleyball Nations League by 2028 – the federation has acted to ensure Iran's representation."

The move followed the withdrawal of the reigning Iranian league champion, Saipa. "Consequently, the federation issued an official invitation to clubs, calling for declarations of interest. Following necessary evaluations and negotiations, it was decided that Foolad Mubarakkeh Sepahan will represent Iran," the statement continued.

"This selection aligns with the strategic objective of providing increased, targeted support and investment for the nation's women's volleyball program. The Sepahan team will feature a roster of young, national team-caliber players, and their participation is intended as a crucial developmental step to gain invaluable experience for upcoming major events."

On the domestic front, Sepahan secured a straight-set victory over Mehregan Shiraz in the Iranian Women's Volleyball Premier League on Saturday. The result placed them second in Group B, tied on seven wins and 21 points with group leader Shahr Arka, and clinched a playoff berth.

Tabriz pushes forward with heritage restoration



Tabriz Grand Bazaar
● alibaba.ir

Iranica Desk

Recent heavy rainfall has not caused significant damage or destruction to the historical monuments of East Azarbaijan Province, according to the Deputy Head of the Province's Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Organization, Vahid Navadad. He stated that no credible reports of such damage have been received so far. Despite budget constraints, Navadad confirmed that archaeological excavations, restoration projects, and research programs are actively ongoing in Tabriz and other parts of the province. He highlighted the recent completion of an emergency excavation at a mosque within the historical fabric of Tabriz's Grand Bazaar, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Plans are also in place to resume excavation work at the historical Rab'-e Rashidi complex in Tabriz, according to ISNA. Furthermore, studies on the preservation and restoration of Tabriz's historical zones have been completed and are now awaiting funding allocation to proceed. Navadad announced that a portion of new projects will commence before Nowruz (the Iranian New Year, beginning March 21), including initiatives related to the Tabriz Regional Museum and emergency restoration of historical buildings. He emphasized the continuous activity of restoration workshops, noting that a significant number

operate with private sector participation throughout the year. Particularly in the Tabriz Grand Bazaar, restoration efforts are carried out directly by property owners under the technical supervision of the Tabriz Bazaar's World Heritage Site and the provincial Cultural Heritage Organization. This model extends to several nationally-registered historical buildings with private ownership in Tabriz and other provincial cities, where defined operational plans are being implemented through owner collaboration. Navadad pointed to a positive shift in recent years regarding Tabriz's historical fabric. "A favorable trend in investment and economic activity within historical fabrics and buildings has emerged and even intensified in recent years," he stated. This has increased the interest of investors and local residents in reviving and utilizing historical buildings, contributing not only to cultural heritage preservation but also to the economic vitality of these areas. This growing interest has led to a significant rise in collaborative projects, with many owners of historical houses and buildings directly seeking to undertake restoration and revival projects. Navadad added that the provincial Cultural Heritage Organization supports these projects to the best of its ability, both technically and through financial and credit assistance.

Visit Teben Beach as gateway to history, tranquility

Iranica Desk

Teben Beach is located in the southwest of Hormozgan Province, within Parsian. Just seven kilometers away lies the historic and culturally rich town of Kushk-e Nar. Kushk-e Nar, anciently known as "Qasr-e Kenar," once served as the seat of power for the Al-Harm tribe. Traces of this history remain evident in the local language, culture, and way of life of its people. The residents speak Persian with the local Kushk-e Nar (Lari) dialect and are known for their characteristic southern Iranian hospitality, warmly welcoming travelers. Before the Islamic Revolution, Teben Beach was a commercial port with a customs office. Today, its function has shifted, and it has been transformed into a fishing harbor. Its pier shelters fishing boats and Lenjes (traditional wooden vessels), with the daily lives of the fishermen lending the place a vibrant, authentic atmosphere — a sight that is both captivating and tangible for visitors. Just about 100 meters west of Teben Beach lies the sandy Badu Beach. Together, Teben and Badu present two distinct yet complementary faces of the region's natural landscape. These two beaches are separated by a hill approximately 50 meters high.



● MEHR

Atop this hill stands a historic water reservoir dating back to the period of Portuguese presence and occupation. It stands as a silent testament to the influence of extra-regional powers in centuries past. Teben Beach and its surroundings offer a rare blend of sea, mountains, valleys, and history — a significant potential for developing sustainable tourism in the south of the country. It is a destination still untouched by the crowds of mass tourism and can offer nature lovers, and those seeking tranquility and authenticity, a unique and memorable experience. The city and district of Kushk-e Nar in Parsian represent the westernmost

point of Hormozgan Province, neighboring South Pars and bordering Bushehr Province. Parsian itself, with a population of over 50,000, is located 450 kilometers from the provincial capital and lies at the westernmost edge of Hormozgan. The media event "Iran Jan" is currently underway in Hormozgan Province from January 24 to January 30. These special programs, organized under the slogan "Hormozgan: Land of Sea-Based Opportunities," focus on presenting the province's diverse capacities, capabilities, and strengths in various fields through more extensive and artistic expression.

Intangible embrace of winter in Yazd

Iranica Desk

While much of Iran lies blanketed in white under winter's icy grip, the beating heart of the central desert tells a different story. Yazd, the world's first city of adobe, is more than just a destination these days — it is a sanctuary; a place where the ingenious architecture of our ancestors has subdued the winter, entrusting the sun's warmth within its earthen walls. Yet what secret lies woven into the very fabric of Yazd that makes it the most compelling narrative for tourism amid the cold? Journalist Maliheh Fakhari observed that a journey to Yazd in February bears little resemblance to ordinary travel; it is an encounter with "living history." Walking through the harmoniously narrow alleys of historic quarters like Fahadan, one is first captivated by the brilliance of architects who, centuries ago and without modern tools, instilled the concept of "climatic comfort" into every brick of this city. During this season, Yazd stands as a showcase of cultural heritage, where windcatchers — though resting from the hot summer winds — still command the skyline with majestic presence. One of the most intriguing and scientifically noteworthy features to appreciate in this season is the phenomenon of "thermal inertia" in Yazd's

traditional architecture. Native materials such as adobe and clay, with their high thermal capacity, absorb the gentle warmth of sunny desert days and slowly release it into interior spaces during the cold nights. This is the very essence of "sustainable heritage" that the modern world seeks. A visitor staying in an eco-lodge nestled within Yazd's historic core this month is not simply booking a room — they are immersing themselves in a thousand-year-old feat of bioclimatic design. The Sabats — covered passageways — of Yazd also take on a distinct and captivating role in winter. These elegant structures, renowned for providing shade in summer, help retain the earth's warmth during colder days, forming cozy corridors for pedestrians. Here, cultural heritage is seamlessly interwoven with everyday life. The sound of a bicycle passing beneath a Sabat, or the aroma of freshly baked Taftoon bread drifting through the damp alleyways, forms part of an "intangible heritage" that is vividly revived in February. Moreover, Yazd in this season serves as a living exhibition of the handicraft artistry of its people, who weave genuine warmth and care into textiles such as Termeh and Darai. Handicrafts thrive during the long winter nights, and sitting beside traditional looms in snug workshops within the old city is itself an act of experiential tourism.

These evenings often coincide with heartfelt gatherings in homes built around central courtyards and turquoise pools, offering a chance to redefine "culinary tourism." Dishes like Ash-e Shooli and Yazdi coffee are more than mere sustenance — they are emblems of this land's historical identity, bringing warmth and community to visitors amid the desert's penetrating chill. Yazd's inscription as a UNESCO World Heritage Site has placed upon us a profound duty to protect this "living fabric." The city must not lose its identity under the weight of mass tourism. Tourism development in this season ought to shift toward responsible tourism — that is, appreciating the grandeur of heritage without damaging its delicate form. This city demands continual reinterpretation so that new generations may learn how to harmonize with nature and, even within the harsh desert, sustain a civilization that has persevered for millennia. In the end, during February, Yazd is less a point on a map and more a sensation — a feeling of security within the shelter of towering earthen walls, and a sense of serenity in a city untouched by hurry. For those who cherish heritage, Yazd in this season stands as the finest invitation to return to oneself and behold a splendor that time has failed to tarnish.



● IRNA



Malaysia to host Iranian Film Festival to boost cultural ties

Arts & Culture Desk

The fourth Iranian Film Festival in Malaysia, slated to run February 6-8, aims to deepen cultural and artistic relations between Iran and Malaysia, according to Habib Reza Arzani, Cultural Attaché of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Malaysia.

Arzani announced the festival's details at a press conference attended by Malaysian media outlets on January 27, Ana News Agency reported.



Iran's Cultural Attaché in Malaysia Habib Reza Arzani speaks at the press conference in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, on January 27, 2026.

● ANA

The festival, which will showcase Iranian cinema across Sabah, Johor, and two locations in Kuala Lumpur, has evolved into a vital platform for cultural dialogue, Arzani stated, highlighting cinema's universal language in fostering mutual understanding.

He extended gratitude to key stakeholders, notably the Malaysian National Film Development Corporation (FINAS) and the GSC cinema chain, for their patronage.

A joint Iranian-Malaysian scientific-cinematic committee will be established during the festival to strengthen professional and academic collaborations in the film sector and facilitate future joint initiatives.

Arzani underscored Iran's prominent

position in international cinema, noting its focus on humanism, ethics, family values, and social justice.

He highlighted the work of acclaimed director Majid Majidi, whose films such as 'Children of Heaven,' 'The Color of Paradise,' 'Rain' and 'The Song of Sparrows' exemplify value-driven and humanistic cinema, conveying universal themes of kindness, hope, and respect for human dignity.

A specialized workshop led by Majidi will provide a valuable opportunity for Malaysian filmmakers, students, and enthusiasts to engage directly with his professional insights.

Arzani cited the global success of 'Children of Heaven,' the first Iranian film nominated for an Academy Award, as

a testament to Iranian cinema's potential and Majidi's global standing, describing him as a cultural ambassador for human and spiritual values.

The festival will feature films including 'Ahmad,' directed by Amir Abbas Rabbie; 'The Willow Tree,' directed by Majid Majidi; 'Dreamland,' directed by Mohsen Enayati; 'Guardian of the Field,' directed by Mohammad Reza Kherdmandan; 'The West Sky,' directed by Mohammad Asgari; and 'Tear of the Reedbed,' directed by Mehdi Jafari. Arzani expressed hope that the festival will foster expanded collaboration between Iran and Malaysia in cinema, encompassing co-productions, artist exchanges, workshops, and cultural market development.

Global opera star takes 'Shahnameh' to Iranian stage

From Europe's grand opera houses to Shiraz, Reza Fekri comes home

By Alireza Sepahvand
Journalist

INTERVIEW EXCLUSIVE

Renowned Iranian tenor Reza Fekri, a celebrated soloist with the Croatian National Opera and a frequent guest at the prestigious Mariinsky Opera of Saint Petersburg, will present Ebrahim Bazrafkan's opera, 'Kherad,' with the Fars Symphony Orchestra in Shiraz on January 10 and 11. Based on Ferdowsi's epic 'Shahnameh,' 'Kherad' tells the story of Rostam and Sohrab, with Fekri taking on the role of Sohrab. This performance represents a landmark event for Shiraz, marking the first fully-staged opera featuring professional acting, makeup, set and costume design, a full orchestra, choir, and soloists. We recently had the opportunity to interview Fekri, and the conversation follows.

Born in Tehran, Fekri is a leading figure in Iranian opera, consistently performing on the international stage as a permanent tenor with the Croatian National Opera and a guest soloist at the Mariinsky Opera.

He completed his undergraduate and graduate studies in opera singing at the Academy of Music, University of Zagreb.

Fekri has collaborated with renowned opera houses and orchestras worldwide, including the Mariinsky Opera in Saint Petersburg, the Croatian National Opera in Zagreb, Helikon Opera in Moscow, the Opera and Symphony Orchestra of the Zagreb Academy of Music, the Zagreb Philharmonic Orchestra, the National Radio and Television Symphony Orchestra of Croatia, the Khmelnytsky Philharmonic Orchestra (Ukraine), the Montenegro Symphony Orchestra, the Antalya State Symphony Orchestra, and the Tehran Symphony Orchestra, among others.

He has worked with distinguished conductors such as Ali Rahbari, Valery Gergiev, Hervé Niquet, Pier Giorgio Morandi, Tomislav Fačini, and Valery Kiryanov.

Fekri has released one solo album and has several albums in production with the prestigious German label Naxos.

In the current season, he will perform the role of Count Almaviva in Gioachino Rossini's 'The Barber of Seville' at the Croatian National Opera, a role regarded as one of the most challenging and important for a tenor. Performing this role represents a significant achievement in both European and international opera circles.

Performing with the Mariinsky Opera is considered a milestone for many singers. How did this experience differ from your other international performances, and how did it influence your professional path?
Performing with an institution such as the Mariinsky Opera is not merely another engagement; it means entering a centuries-old tradition of the highest operatic standards. At the Mariinsky, musical precision, professional discipline, and a profound approach to both text and drama are taken extremely seriously. What distinguished this experience for me was the intensity of focus on detail and the deep sense of responsibility each performer carries toward the entire work. It significantly shaped my artistic perspective and raised the standards I set for myself as a professional opera singer.

Collaborating with major European orchestras, such as Croatian orchestras, what challenges and standards does this environment impose on an opera singer that may be less present elsewhere?

Working with large European orchestras requires complete preparation and artistic flexibility. Rehearsal time is limited, and singers are expected to arrive fully ready. One of the main challenges is achieving precise musical alignment with the conductor and orchestra within a short timeframe. In such settings, nothing is left to chance; every aspect of the performance is the result of years of training and professional experience.

Having performed at the highest levels of the operatic world, how do you assess the current position of opera in Iran, and what potential do you see in it?
Opera in Iran today is less a fully established system and more a collection of significant yet scattered talents. There are gifted young singers, knowledgeable composers, and a serious audience, but what is often missing is a consistent and structured framework. The greatest potential of Iranian opera lies in combining the country's rich cultural heritage with international academic training, which could eventually lead to the formation of a distinctive operatic identity.

What motivated your return to Iran for a few weeks with an operatic performance? Do you see this presence merely as a performance or as part of a broader cultural responsibility?
For me, this return is not simply about a short-term performance. Performing opera in Iran is part of a cultural responsibility I feel toward the country I come from. Establishing a direct connection with Iranian audiences and sharing the experience I have gained abroad is an essential part of my artistic mission.

How did your collaboration with Pars Orchestra of Shiraz begin, and what qualities of this ensemble attracted your attention?

This collaboration emerged through dialogue and a shared artistic understanding. What stood out to me in Pars Orchestra of Shiraz was the musicians' motivation, seriousness, and commitment to presenting a professional artistic project despite challenging circumstances. That dedication was a decisive factor for me.

The work you are performing in Iran is an Iranian opera based on the Shahnameh. What is its place within the operatic repertoire, and what should audiences pay attention to while listening to it?



● IRNA

The work to be performed in Shiraz is The Opera of Wisdom (Kherad), an Iranian opera based on the Shahnameh and the story of Rostam and Sohrab. It holds a special place in the operatic landscape as a serious attempt to unite the universal language of opera with one of the most profound narratives in Persian literature. Audiences may focus on how the dramatic storytelling unfolds through music, how the concept of wisdom is conveyed, and how elements of classical opera are combined with the epic spirit of the Shahnameh. This opera demonstrates that opera can speak through our own cultural language and is not confined solely to Western repertoire.

Do you perceive differences between Iranian audiences and European audiences in their response to opera performances? How does this affect your performance?

Yes, there are noticeable differences. Iranian audiences tend to respond in a more emotional and immediate way, while European audiences often react through a long-established listening tradition and historical familiarity with opera. For me, this contrast is inspiring and encourages a heightened sensitivity to the atmosphere and the audience during each performance.

Based on your experience in the world's major opera houses, what limitations and opportunities does opera performance in Iran face today?

The limitations are largely structural and infrastructural. How-

ever, there is also a significant opportunity: a curious and eager audience. This enthusiasm can serve as a powerful driving force for the development of more serious and sustainable operatic projects in the future.

In your opinion, what infrastructures and changes are essential for nurturing a new generation of opera singers in Iran?

Structured education, access to specialized teachers, regular performance opportunities, and meaningful connections with the international operatic scene are essential. Without these elements, it becomes extremely difficult for young talents to pursue a professional path.

Why do you think Tehran Symphony Orchestra has not yet utilized your capacity for operatic repertoire performances?

I prefer to approach this matter constructively. Artistic collaborations require time, planning, and alignment of artistic visions. I remain hopeful that, under the right professional circumstances, such collaborations can take shape in the future.

Finally, what message or advice would you give to young Iranians interested in opera and classical music?

Patience, perseverance, and proper training are the three essential elements of this path. Opera is a long and demanding journey, but if pursued with passion and awareness, it can become a deeply meaningful and lasting artistic experience.

Iranian diaspora literature on display in Tehran



Arts & Culture Desk

The Institute for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults (Kanoon) is holding an exhibition of works by Iranian authors and illustrators based abroad, featuring 300 titles published in multiple languages.

The exhibition, titled 'Tak-Khal' (Champ), is being held at Kanoon's central library through February 19, Mehr News Agency reported.

The showcase underscores the growing international presence and impact of Iranian literary talent, providing a valuable platform for diaspora authors to connect with audiences within Iran.

The exhibition's name is derived from 'Tak-Khal,' a book by Payam Ebrahimi, which has been translated into seven languages and serves as a symbol of Iranian cultural influence on the global stage.

Kanoon recently issued a call inviting Iranian creators residing overseas to donate or loan books published abroad. The initiative garnered a substantial response, with writers, illustrators, and publishers submitting a diverse range of works.

The exhibition aims to highlight the breadth of Iranian literary production beyond national borders, fostering cross-cultural understanding and appreciation.

Concurrent with the exhibition, Kanoon plans to host specialized workshops and related programs, with schedules to be announced shortly.