

Pezeshkian: Anti-Iran onslaught to be reciprocated with 'decisive' response



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EU's strategic miscalculation



By Rasoul Mousavi
Former Iranian ambassador to Finland, Estonia

OPINION EXCLUSIVE

On Thursday, at the close of a meeting of European Union foreign ministers, Kaja Kallas of Estonia, the European Union's foreign policy chief, outlined four issues in a brief two-minute interview, which included the designation of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) as a "terrorist organization" by EU member states, assistance aimed at improving conditions in Syria, support for efforts to establish peace in Gaza, and sanctions against both sides in the Sudan conflict. Kallas said EU foreign ministers had decided, with the aim of pressuring the Iranian government and supporting Iranian civil society, to place the IRGC on the terrorist list of member states.

In response to a journalist's question asking whether listing the IRGC amounted to EU support for a US military strike on Iran, Kallas said that declaring the force a terrorist organization meant its activities would fall under the criminal laws of member states, adding that the region did not need another war.

Placing the Guards on the EU's discredited terrorist list is not new and was first raised more than two years ago. At that time, I personally suggested to the late FM Hossein Amir-Abdollahian that if Europeans persisted with such rhetoric, Iran might assign responsibility for the security of European embassies in Tehran to the IRGC, so that Europeans would understand how their security in Tehran was ensured.

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Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi (L) and his Turkish counterpart Hakan Fidan hold a joint press conference in Istanbul, Turkey on January 30, 2026.

ANADOLU

Turkey's mediation bid driven by goodwill, necessity

INTERVIEW EXCLUSIVE



As tensions between Iran and the United States have reached a sensitive juncture, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has floated a proposal to host direct talks between the presidents of the two countries, in an effort to prevent the crisis from escalating and avert a military confrontation. Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi has also traveled to Istanbul and may convey Tehran's response to the proposal. Ankara has repeatedly stated its opposition to any form of foreign intervention in Iran. Speaking to

Iran Daily, Turkey affairs expert Firouz Dolatabadi said Turkey's effort is driven both by goodwill and necessity, but added that effective mediation is impossible, not only for Turkey, but for others as well, due to US overreach and its refusal to moderate its positions.

IRAN DAILY: What political and security considerations have prompted Ankara to step forward with such an initiative at this point?

DOLATABADI: Both goodwill and necessity are the two factors driving Turkey's inclination to engage in this process. Goodwill stems from the fact that the Turks do not have a clear assessment of the outcomes of the 12-day war [in June], and the wave of propaganda by the United States and Israel, along with

anti-Iran groups, has made them deeply apprehensive about the consequences of another conflict. The second factor is necessity, because Turkey, after suffering heavy setbacks in its foreign policy in Syria and Libya, and due to the lack of support from Arab and American countries as a result of the strongly Muslim Brotherhood-oriented tendencies of its leaders, finds itself in a dangerously isolated position. This proposal puts forward a softer image of Turkey at the regional and global levels, and Ankara believes it could create a new position for itself in the most strategic global issue — namely, Iran's disputes with the United States and Israel.

Turkey simultaneously maintains extensive relations with Iran, the United States, and NATO. Does this position enable Ankara to

play the role of an effective mediator? Can Turkey move beyond making a merely symbolic proposal?

An effective mediation role is almost impossible, both for Turkey and for others, because the United States is seeking to realize illegitimate demands that go far beyond the nuclear issue, and experience so far has shown that mediators' efforts have come to nothing. The United States expects mediators primarily to increase pressure on Iran to accept Washington's demands and to persuade Tehran to acquiesce to unjust conditions, rather than to broker an agreement. Otherwise, the United States and Trump would not have torn up the JCPOA [2015 nuclear deal] and withdrawn from an agreement that was more beneficial to them.

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Araghchi: Tehran ready for talks but not to accept 'dictation'

Turkish FM: Israel pushing US to attack Iran

International Desk

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said on Friday that the Islamic Republic is prepared to hold talks with the United States on equal footing but underlined that Tehran will not accept "dictation and imposition." Speaking during a joint press conference with his Turkish counterpart Hakan Fidan in Ankara, Araghchi said Iran is ready to enter negotiations if they are conducted from an equal position, based on mutual interests and mutual respect, however, he said that, "We will by no means accept dictation and imposition."

He said Iran welcomes "any initiative that leads to peace and stability in the region, reduces tensions, and neutralizes the sinister plots of Israel."

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 Lin-

coln to the West Asia waters. In his latest remarks, the US president said he has told Iran it has to do "two things" to avoid military action. "Number one, no nuclear. And number two, stop killing protesters."

"We have a lot of very big, very powerful ships sailing to Iran right now, and it would be great if we didn't have to use them."

Iran has rejected claims of killing protesters during recent riots in the country, saying that foreign-backed terrorists have been behind the killing of more than 3,000 people in Iran. Responding to questions about contacts with Washington, Araghchi said the US government has sought negotiations through various intermediaries. "Iran has no problem with negotiation," he said. "But negotiations cannot take shape under the shadow of threats. They must abandon threats and be ready for fair negotiations."

Asked whether he might meet a US official in the coming hours or days, Araghchi said, "No plan has yet been arranged for a meeting between us and the Americans."

 Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi speaks during a press conference in Istanbul, Turkey, on January 30, 2026. **ANADOLU AGENCY**

Ready for war

At the same time, Araghchi issued a stark warning over US threats. "We have said many times, and I repeat once again: Iran, just as it is ready for negotiations, is also ready for war," he said.

"We are even more prepared than before the 12-day war," said the minister, referring to the US-Israeli aggression on Iran in June. The attacks came as Tehran and Washington were holding indirect talks on the nuclear issue mediated by Oman.

He said any future conflict would be different, particularly if the United States were directly involved, and warned it could "expand beyond a bilateral war."

Araghchi also made clear that Iran's defensive capabilities are not up for discussion. "Iran's defensive capability and missiles will never be the subject



of any negotiation," he said.

Opposition to military action

Fidan reiterated Ankara's opposition to military action against Iran. "We have conveyed our opposition to a military intervention against Iran to our interlocutors at every opportunity," he said.

He said restarting talks between Tehran and Washington over Iran's nu-

clear program was "vital for reducing regional tensions."

The Turkish foreign minister said Israel was pushing the US to attack Iran, and urged Washington to "act with common sense and not allow this to happen."

He added that Iran's internal issues should be resolved peacefully by the Iranian people without foreign interference.

Pezeshkian: Anti-Iran onslaught to be reciprocated with 'decisive' response



Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan



Masoud Pezeshkian

International Desk

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian said Tehran will never welcome war, while simultaneously issues a stern warning that any aggression against the country or its people will be met with an "immediate and decisive" response. Pezeshkian made the remark in a phone conversation with President of the United Arab Emirates Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan on Friday amid heightened tensions between Iran and the United States. "Iran has not and will not welcome war in any way, and sees war as benefiting no party. However, regrettably, Western parties have, through their actions, shown that despite their claims, they have no practical commitment to diplomacy and the principles of international law," Pezeshkian said.

He added that Iran's approach is based on interaction and dialogue based on international law, mutual respect, and the avoidance of threats and force to resolve issues. However, the Iranian president

emphasized that any aggression against the country and the nation will be responded "immediately and decisively." Iran rejects threats and coercion and remains committed to dialogue, mutual respect and win-win diplomacy, Pezeshkian said, as Washington continues issuing military threats against Tehran. The phone call comes amid a sharp rise in threatening rhetoric from Washington. US President Donald Trump recently told reporters that "another beautiful armada" of warships was moving toward Iran. In subsequent remarks and online posts, Trump said the deployment was aimed at pressuring Tehran into negotiations, warning that failure to reach a deal would trigger a military strike "far worse" than the US attack on Iranian nuclear facilities in June 2015.

A US naval strike group has been in Middle Eastern waters since Monday, and Trump has warned it is "ready, willing and able" to hit Iran "if necessary."

The Emirati president said his

country is making diplomatic efforts to reduce tensions in the region.

He commended Iran's principled stance on pursuing diplomacy and dialogue to resolve issues and avoiding any war. Since Thursday, the Iranian president has contacted several leaders of the regional countries amid worsening tensions between Tehran and Washington.

Pezeshkian told Qatari Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani and Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Thursday that the US must cease provocative actions in the region if it is truly seeking genuine negotiations with Iran.

"If the American side is truly seeking genuine negotiations and diplomacy, it must cease such provocative and tension-provoking actions and demonstrate its commitment to the path of dialogue through actions," Pezeshkian said.

"We emphasize the path of interaction and diplomacy. However, we will not allow ourselves to be threatened or attacked during negotiations, as in past experiences," Pezeshkian said of the US-Israeli attacks, which took place in June ahead of a planned sixth round of talks.

The Emir of Qatar and the Pakistani prime minister emphasized their firm opposition to any actions against the security, sovereignty, and territorial integrity of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

'Irrational': Iran pillories EU for IRGC designation

International Desk

Iran strongly condemned the European Union for its "irrational and irresponsible" move to designate the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) as a terrorist organization, saying it reflects the depth of the bloc's hostility toward the Islamic Republic. The General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran said in a statement that the EU's decision has undoubtedly been taken in obedience to the "hegemonic and inhumane policies of the United States and the Israeli regime."

"It (EU's decision) reflects the depth of hostility and resentment of the leaders of the bloc toward the noble nation of Iran, the Armed Forces, the security and independence of the powerful country of the Islamic Republic of Iran."

The statement stressed that the action is in blatant violation of international law, the United Nations Charter.

The EU added the IRGC to its terrorist list in response to the forces' role in the Islamic Republic's response to recent riots in the country, which were triggered by protests over economic problems on December 28.

According to Iranian officials, more than 3,100 people, including security forces and ordinary people, have been killed in the protests.

The 27-nation bloc also adopted visa bans and asset freezes on 21 state entities and Iranian officials – including the interior minister, prosecutor general and regional IRGC commanders.

Iran's Foreign Ministry called the designation of the IRGC "illegal and polit-

ical," emphasizing that the IRGC is a formal, lawful institution that plays a crucial role in Iran's national defense and in combating terrorism.

It also described the EU's move as a "dangerous" and "unjustified" step that undermines multilateralism and the rule of law.

Iranian Parliament Speaker Mohammad-Baqer Qalibaf also slammed the designation. Qalibaf wrote in a post on the social media platform X that the IRGC is "one of the strongest and most effective anti-terrorism forces in the world."

Reacting to the EU's move, Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council Ali Larijani in a post on X said that under a resolution passed by Iran's Parliament, the armed forces of countries that have voted in favor of the EU's move are regarded as "terrorist" organization.

 Mohammad Ali Rajabi
Cartoonist

CARTOON



Iran to hold war games with China, Russia in Sea of Oman: Report

International Desk

Iran will reportedly hold a joint naval exercise with China and Russia in the Sea of Oman and the Indian Ocean in the coming days.

The joint military drill comes amid heightened tensions between Iran and the United States which has threatened Tehran with military action over its response to recent foreign-backed riots in the country. The Associated Press has also reported that Iran broadcast a warn-



ing to maritime traffic on Thursday, announcing plans for live-fire exercises in the Strait of Hormuz next week. The drills could disrupt traffic through the strategic waterway through which 20% of global oil

passes. The VHF radio notice sent by Tehran warned of "naval shooting" on Sunday and Monday. The message was initially detected by EOS Risk Group and later verified by AP.

Two Pakistani security officials, speaking on condition of anonymity as they weren't authorized to talk to journalists, also confirmed the warning had been sent. In recent years, the three countries have repeatedly held such military drills.

AEOI: Two 5,000-MW nuclear plants planned with capital market financing

Economy Desk

Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) chief Mohammad Eslami announced on Thursday that construction plans for two nuclear power plants, each with a capacity of about 5,000 megawatts, have begun and are currently in the implementation stage. Eslami said the initiative would strengthen the country's energy infrastructure while creating new long-term opportunities for capital market participation in national projects, as reported by IRIB. He added that plans were under way to finance nuclear power plant development projects through the capital market. Referring to the organization's capital market strategy, Eslami said

nuclear power plant development projects had been defined and formulated within completed planning frameworks, execution sites had been selected, and related corporate structures had been established. The newly created companies were designed to raise capital, he said. As projects gradually advance and conditions for attracting resources materialize, offering project shares in the capital market would be considered — an approach that could enable faster financing and more effective implementation of the plans, he added. In early November, the AEOI chief said construction of four power plants in Bushehr and four additional plants in other parts of the coun-



Satellite image shows the Bushehr Nuclear Power Plant, in Bushehr Province, Iran, on May 26, 2025.

REUTERS

try had been placed on the agenda with cooperation from the Russian government, with the Iranian government expected to later announce their specific locations. Iran's only operating nuclear power plant, built by Russia in the southern province of Bushehr, was first connected to the national electricity grid on September 3, 2011, and entered commercial operation in September 2013. The reactor has a net generating capacity of about 915 megawatts, or roughly 1,000 MW.



Iran oil supply disruptions unlikely despite US escalation: Kepler



Economy Desk

Oil prices have gained strongly over the last few days as tensions between the US and Iran escalated, but analysts at Kepler see little probability of supply disruptions from Iran, the key West Asian producer. On Thursday, Brent oil futures for March rose to \$68.75 a barrel, trading as high as

\$70.35 a barrel this session, its highest since late September. West Texas Intermediate crude futures rose 2.1% to \$64.52 a barrel having earlier topped \$65 a barrel also a four-month high. US President Donald Trump has increased pressure on Tehran over its nuclear program, "dismantling of Iran's nuclear program," not state change per se. However, the bank said pressure could instead focus on the

seizure of Iranian tankers outside the Persian Gulf.

According to the analysis, a disruption of the Strait of Hormuz remains a very remote scenario as seen in June. This is a red line Iran would not cross, not least because China, its oil customer, it wrote.

"We have been there before (June 2025). Oil price could continue to rise short-term, but it will be short lived (matter of couple of weeks in our view). Brent was very close to \$60/bbl in December before a series of events occurred," Kepler said.

"We would advise investors to tactically sell the oil&gas sector on any oil price strength from here."

31 cloud fertilization ops across Iran's watersheds since November

Economy Desk

Iran's Ministry of Energy announced that 31 cloud seeding operations have been carried out in the country's watersheds since the start of the current water year on November 22.

The operations began concurrently with the arrival of the first precipitation system into the country and continued across various water basins, utilizing both drones and aircraft, IRNA reported. A total of 16 operations were conducted using drones while 15 operations employed aircraft, according to the ministry's report. Drone-based operations included six missions in the Zayandeh-rud and Koohrang watersheds, eight missions in South Khorasan Province's watershed, and two missions in the watersheds



of Fars and Bushehr provinces. Aircraft operations comprised seven operational flights in the northwest watershed and Lake Urmia, three operational flights in the Central Alborz watershed covering Tehran, Qazvin and Alborz provinces, three operational flights in the northeast watershed encompassing Khorasan Razavi and North Khorasan provinces, and three operational flights in the southwest watershed including Isfahan, Chahar Mahal and Bakhtiari, and Khuzestan provinces. Persistent drought has created severe challenges for meeting Iran's water needs, further contributing to the 35% drop in dam inflows. According to Ministry of Energy, the cost of producing 1,000 cubic meters of water through cloud seeding ranges from \$15 to \$22.

Turkey's mediation bid ...

Turkish officials have emphasized their opposition to any foreign intervention in Iran.

[Page 1 >](#) To what extent can this stance by Ankara build trust in Tehran?

This has been a constant principle of Turkey's foreign policy from the past to the present, and Iran has full confidence and trust in Turkey on such matters.

What are Turkey's biggest constraints in trying to prevent further escalation between Iran and the United States?

The greatest constraint on Turkey's success lies in the excessive demands of the United States. Moreover, in the realm of foreign policy between Iran and the United States, there is no inherent tension. The reality is that tough and time-consuming negotiations are underway between Iran and the United States, while Washington refuses to moderate its unreasonable positions. Therefore, tension in the sense of developments spi-

raling into a major war between Iran and the United States has not been and is not being observed.

Also, Turkey certainly lacks the capacity to persuade the United States to moderate its positions. If it had such capacity, it would have tried to get Washington to adjust its stance toward Turkey itself. When Turkey intervened in Syria, it expected at least minimal US support, but that support did not materialize. The situation is the same today.

If talks were to take shape in the manner proposed by Turkey, how would you assess the chances of success of such a process?

Whether this process takes shape or not is not important. In either scenario, as long as the United States is unwilling to change its excessive positions and its foreign policy remains hostage to the racist current of the occupying regime of Israel, it will be the same story all over again, and there will be no hope

Envoy touts INSTC as optimal Eurasian trade route, urges deeper Russia economic ties

Economy Desk

The International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) represents the best, most cost-effective and shortest route for Eurasia, especially Russia, to access global markets, Iran's ambassador to Moscow said.

Kazem Jalali, referring to Iran's efforts to develop cargo transportation and particularly increase container capacity, stated the corridor reduces the 17,000-kilometer route from Mumbai, India to the Suez Canal and Stockholm to 7,000 kilometers, IRNA reported.

"The Russian gas transit project through Iran is another important bilateral cooperation plan between the two countries," he

said, emphasizing acceleration and preparation for implementation of the project.

Jalali noted Russia's nearly \$300 billion annual import volume from world countries and the substantial capacities available for Iran's private sector. He added that Iran and Russia's private sectors have experienced 100 years of communication disruption and lack mutual awareness of each other's capacities, with the cause of severed natural relations between the two nations being the October 17, 1917 Soviet revolution, which led to this communication gap and mutual unfamiliarity.

"We must understand Russia and its economic capacities better than before and set targets

accordingly," he said.

Jalali stated that Iran's Embassy is pursuing strengthened economic diplomacy in Russia, particularly facilitating Iranian private sector entry into Russia's petrochemical sector, and expressed the Embassy's readiness to assist, support and facilitate expanded cooperation between the government and private sectors of both countries in this field.

In the same meeting, Mehdi Heydari, deputy economy minister and head of Iran's Organization for Investment, Economic and Technical Assistance, said the groundwork for cooperation between Iran and Russia has been prepared in more than 200 petrochemical projects.

Call for dialogue to ease social polarization



By Hadi Khaniqi

University professor

INTERVIEW

Hadi Khaniqi, a distinguished professor of communications and media, believes that "dialogue" holds the key to resolving today's challenges in Iran and building a brighter future for the country. He believes that opportunities for dialogue emerged during wartime conditions, but unfortunately, this potential was not fully utilized, and with the escalation of various factors, we witnessed unfortunate events. The most dangerous aspect of these events is the tendency towards violence, the erosion of trust and grounds for dialogue, and the polarization of public opinion.

In recent days, protests that began approximately two weeks ago from Tehran's bazaar and gradually spread to various cities, have slowly shifted from livelihood-based protest atmospheres to political slogans, and have also adopted a violent approach in some areas. Perhaps we witnessed one of the most unprecedented violent processes last Thursday and Friday [January 8 and 9]. How can these events be analyzed, and what actions should be taken by elites, officials, and the people? In the current situation where society has a serious need for information and accurate analysis, to analytically examine this event, we conducted an interview with Hadi Khaniqi, a sociologist and professor of communications at Allameh Tabataba'i University.

Why did protests that initially were about livelihood issues gradually turn violent, and many parts of the country witnessed clashes? You have considered communication disorder as one of the problems of Iranian society. Does this same hypothesis have the ability to explain the recent situation as well? What do you believe is the origin of this problem?

KHANIQI: I thank IRNA for analyzing the dimensions and hidden angles of society and country's events at critical junctures. Every protest has various economic, social, and political roots, and even from a process-oriented perspective, one must pay attention to its cultural sources, and it is not unaffected by global and regional developments; what our country and society are facing today is a specific aspect of this general rule. In any case, a set of underlying and exacerbating factors, such as chronic structural pressures in the area of injustice and persistent and stable inequalities, poverty and its intensification, blockage or limitation, opportunities that arise for productive sectors of society, youth, women, and ethnic groups, have the potential to weaken the foundations of social order and create a fragile situation.

The decline of social capital, normative erosion, the lowering of institutional trust, and the dualization of shared values lead to the weakening of conflict resolution mechanisms like law and civil institutions, which reduces social capacities in society. In these conditions, any shock or tension can intensify this situation and lead to social, political, and economic action in response to a shortage or a decision. The country's economic situation, affected by sanctions and external threats and the loss or limitation of domestic opportunities, has formed a fragile central social condition, and it can be said that one manifestation of this is these very protests, which started from guild and economic protests and quickly acquired political dimensions and turned violent.

It cannot be said that this issue only started in the past few days; rather, it was traceable and preventable before this. At one point, we witnessed an effective and positive confrontation from policymaking institutions and executive

and governance institutions. Of course, we have not passed a long time from that period, i.e., late Khordad [late May/early June], when Israel, with the support of the US, attacked Iran and a 12-day war took shape.

Although a critical and fragile situation also emerged during that period, four important indicators were observable in that critical situation:

First indicator: We witnessed the resto-

and society or vice versa, or elites and various parts of the government or vice versa, do not understand or hear each other; while mechanisms for hearing them exist. The issue I mentioned in pre-crisis conditions has now manifested more prominently. On one hand, we are facing a protesting society, and on the other, the government has reasons for explaining the economic and livelihood situation, but dialogue cannot

symbolic state. Yes, we must both help in the formation of civil institutions and seek help from associations, parties, and organizations. The more organized a society is, the more it learns through this organization how to resolve protest; something that not only advanced societies but also developing societies have moved beyond.

We are not the first country to face these shortcomings, constraints, and



Burned buses stand at a depot in Tehran following unrest during protests in Iran on January 8–9, 2026, after demonstrations over economic issues led to damage to public property. **IRNA**

ration of trust and an increase in social capital in the face of the threat Iran was exposed to. All monitoring of developments in Iranian society before, during, and after the attack showed that trust in the government, the armed forces, and the defenders of the homeland, as well as society's trust in itself, had increased. Although this occurred temporarily following the threat, it had the potential to continue, but unfortunately, it was not attended to after the war.

Second indicator: The rise in society's resilience. This very society, which was facing poverty, dissatisfaction, and shortages, and where a significant portion of the middle class had fallen below the poverty line to join the lower classes, showed high resilience. In the face of shortages, we saw that no shops or gas stations became crowded, and family capacities were utilized to strengthen this solidarity. However, this too was not attended to after the war.

Third indicator: Iran's subversive opposition, which did not enjoy weight and credibility commensurate with the status of Iranian society and the developments that occurred in the country, became largely isolated due to its cooperation and alignment with Iran's enemies.

Fourth indicator: Relatively, the possibility for dialogue with different political tastes and viewpoints arose. I have said many times that the issue that can solve today's problem in Iran, bring benefits for Iran's tomorrow, and reveal shortcomings and mistakes is dialogue, and it is a difficult task. During the war conditions, this possibility also emerged, but this capacity was not utilized well. Consequently, underlying and exacerbating factors came into play, and these unfortunate events occurred, the most dangerous characteristic of which is the tendency towards violence, the erosion of grounds for trust and dialogue, and the polarization of public opinion.

Hence, a disruption and communicative imbalance arose in public opinion. That is, the parties, whether the government

take shape.

Considering that peaceful protests in recent days deviated from their path and turned violent, how do you define the role of media in this regard? I think the overall situation Iran is in, in terms of its economic, political, social status, its place in today's world, and the international situation, is a special one. My recommendation to the media, and my request, is that these issues be analyzed in the various languages of sociology, economics, politics, psychology, and even culture. The situation society is in, in my view, is that it is critical of its past situation and has accumulated protest.

These protests are the result of feelings of discrimination or lack of access to opportunities. Society feels it is losing its capabilities more and more every day in all fields, and there is no clear horizon ahead for its situation to improve. Consequently, society is in a state of everyday life or presentism.

The government's move in recognizing the protest and considering protest a right was, in my view, a positive step. This is because we are facing a protesting society. The level of dissatisfaction in our society is high, but being a protester does not mean the decay of society or its reaching bad points and violence. Protest can be a sign of society's vitality and can even be useful for the governance system, giving signals so that protests in economic and social policy are considered as data that act more importantly than a thermometer, like a warning device.

Unfortunately, in our society, these matters were not paid much attention to. By recognizing protest, the rules and mechanisms for reaching consensus to solve the problem should be provided so that the dissatisfied guild, the dissatisfied elite, or that dissatisfied young person or woman also knows that their counterpart, the official and sovereign institutions, understands their words, agrees with them, and also seeks their help in solving the problem.

This is not merely a temporary and

even crises, nor will we be the last. It can happen anywhere. We must know how protest can be transformed into stimuli for problem-solving. The concept of problem-solving does not mean ignoring the past; rather, we must also address correcting mistakes. In my opinion, had signs of change in policy-making, in the state broadcasting and media, and in the methods of administering the country appeared after the 12-day war, it would have shown that we have difficult conditions, but we can overcome these difficult conditions.

Despite the focus on nationalism and Iran's role in society, did you see any signs of meaningful change emerging?

We cannot say there were none, but did this happen in proportion to people's expectations and the opportunity and capacity created at that juncture? The message must be credible. You are from the media and know that sincerity, transparency, timely information dissemination, avoiding stigmatizing labels and the like, reviving shared empathy, reviving shared feeling, and so on must all come together. After all, belief stems from public opinion and the state of social capital. If it contains dissatisfaction, a lack of horizon, and hopelessness (which it does), it causes the credibility of the message to decrease.

We must be able to reach a collective agreement on this matter that Iran's situation is a difficult one, but this critical condition cannot be solved by anyone other than the people; a crisis cannot be solved by foreign intervention. In solving problems, different viewpoints must also be given space, and the arena should not be narrowed so much that an opposition is created and it is imagined as if our ideal condition lies only in the past.

Decorating a past unrealistically in the face of today's problems in Iran and using the media to turn a blind eye to oppression, tyranny, dependency, and lost opportunities is a product

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A brief window for rebuilding trust and dialogue emerged during recent wartime conditions, marked by heightened social cohesion, resilience, and a shared national focus. However, the failure to consolidate this moment allowed polarization to re-emerge, shrinking the space for dialogue and normalizing confrontational narratives.

of narrow-mindedness. Meanwhile, a desirable future horizon can be built by recognizing diversity and protest, but national construction happens with social cohesion, acceptance of the other, and strengthening non-violent legal capacities. If we restore protest to its proper place, give it a worthy response, facilitate dialogue, and accept our own mistakes, problems will lessen. The central signifier of Iranian society is justice, and justice includes accepting and correcting mistakes. One of the necessities of our society, which has also lost many opportunities, is recognizing change and reform. If change and reform are not recognized in time, they turn into accumulated anger.

So you believe the origin of the violence is this very weakness?

Yes, but this ground is not empty, and foreigners also ride on this violence. Therefore, in such conditions, I do not rule out foreign factors.

What results does the increase in violence have for society?

Security is what every developing society is missing, and development itself is the tool for charting the future; especially for Iranian society, where every citizen sees that it has all the capabilities for development, but their own situation is not good. A society that is hungry, has livelihood problems and feels humiliation, and whose future is not bright, sees that this situation is not worthy of it, and that there have been better situations both in its own past and in comparison with other countries.

I think we must contemplate this issue nationally, and in this national contemplation, there is no difference between reformist, principalist, nationalist, re-

ligious, and those who desire change. I see all of them. In the reform period, which entered the arena with the slogan of civil society and recognizing the other, inviting dialogue, and a sense of citizens' effectiveness, it leads to economic success. Because it can control many threats internally, regionally, and globally. So, by recognizing change, things can be done.

So you can build economic achievements from social and political phe-

nomena?
Yes, in any situation, by prioritizing solving people's problems, things can be done. If we hear each other's voices and facilitate dialogue, even in this damaged society where many young people are anguished, worried, and harmed, when we accept all this, instead of saying 'let come what may,' these damages, weaknesses, shortages, destructions, and the loss of human, material, and spiritual capital must be seen, and we must strive to get out

of this situation. What I understand is that by recognizing protest and difficult conditions, a clear horizon can be drawn for society, and we can move towards it.

Considering the current situation, what is the solution and what should be done?

When the answer to 'what should be done' becomes very difficult, we must think about 'what should not be done.' From a communication perspective, in

a dialogic space among elites, experts, civil institutions, and citizens, issues become clearer. The worst situation is the polarization of the public sphere and society. In a polarized space, everyone only seeks to gather evidence and documentation for their own interpretation and decision, rather than engaging in analysis.

As social psychologists say, a 'crowd mentality' forms where emotion, imitation, and suggestion are prominent, and a reduction in rationality and degradation of analytical faculties occur. In these conditions, no words are heard. Sometimes this phenomenon can be seen in cyberspace; there are two sides that lead to one side, like an echo chamber where only the reflection of one's own words is heard and the other's words are eliminated. Our society needs to speak and be heard. The more we move away from a bipolar atmosphere by creating dialogic arenas and intermediary institutions for two-sided and comprehensive reasoning, the better the media can also do their job.

What role do elites have in shaping a space for dialogue in this regard?

The ground for elites to speak must be prepared in society. In a bipolar space, 'words' are hard to hear. Some elites are disillusioned, and some see the future as so ambiguous that their words are not heard correctly and become costly for them. Providing arenas for dialogue and analytical, rational examination where they can articulate the share of every mistake and wrong approach is essential. In my opinion, it is better for elites to enter the arena and speak.

The interview first appeared in Persian on IRNA.



Residents stand amid charred ruins and rubble as smoke lingers over Rasht's bazaar following the January 8-9, 2026, riots in Iran.  IRNA

Understanding drivers of Iranian protests



By Mojtaba Lashkarbolouki
University professor

A N A L Y S I S

It is evident that the country's security, judicial, and law enforcement institutions will provide senior state officials with various reports on why the situation has escalated into protests. I recently had the opportunity to speak with several protesters (with those expressing dissent, not rioters or vandals). Some were first-time protesters, while others had protested before. Here is the essence of those conversations. Why do people protest? For five primary reasons.

1) A Lack of horizon

In the early 2010s, a former minister on a study trip to China (around 15 years ago) remarked that the Chinese citizens he saw lived in miserable conditions. Their standard of living and healthcare was incomparable to Iran's at the time. Yet, they were remarkably hopeful because they witnessed their government periodically demolishing old buildings block by block and constructing new ones to hand over. People lived in hardship but had a clear vision. They told themselves, 'Not this month, but next month; not this year, but next year; our turn will finally come.' The protesters I spoke with have no clear picture of the future. (This is a crisis of collective national lack of vision.) The current sensitive juncture has resulted in us perpetually navigating one crisis only to prepare for the next – a policy of makeshift, short-term solutions.

2) Lack of representation

A significant portion of the populace feels they lack any real or effective representative within the power structure. They do not know who effectively pursues their interests, concerns, and priorities within the establishment to see them through to a result.

3) Lack of channels

Globally, political parties, trade unions, and civil society organizations serve as arenas for consolidating opinions, dialogue, and negotiation between the people and the government. In Iran, we lack straightforward, result-oriented channels for conveying opinions. To simply say 'let the people voice their concerns' raises the question: precisely how, and to whom? Suppose someone is critical of internet filtering policies; where exactly should they turn? A critic without a channel becomes a protester.

4) Perception of parallel worlds

Protesters say that over the past decade, they consume less meat (according to statistics, red meat consumption has fallen to about one-third of levels ten years ago), travel less, and take more nerve pills, while respected officials speak of progress, growth, and development. It is as if we inhabit parallel worlds.

5) Choosing the 'lesser evil' over 'much better'

Over the years, the public has repeat-

edly been urged to choose the 'lesser evil' option to prevent matters from deteriorating drastically. However, there are those (outside the establishment) who promise a 'much better' alternative (whether true or false). Today's protesters are the same people who have grown weary of the 'lesser evil' and have pinned their hopes on the 'much better' option.

A Simplified formula:

Dissatisfaction (Reasons 1 & 5) + Despair (Reasons 2, 3 & 4) = Unrest and Unorganized Protests.

It is crucial to distinguish between unorganized protests and organized riots. Two Notable Observations from these Dialogues:

1) Moving beyond the four traditional authorities

There was a time in this land when four primary intellectual and political authorities existed: Marja' (sources of emulation) and clerics, parents, intellectuals, and prominent political figures. The group of protesters I encountered have

moved beyond all these. Perhaps we are entering a society without reference points. I do not know. I only know that traditional authorities have long been set aside by society, and this, alongside an atomized society lacking organization, becomes even more concerning. Why? Because even if the state wished to negotiate with the protesters, with whom precisely and how?

2) 50-year chasm

The heads of the three branches of government, the Chairman of the Expediency Discernment Council, and the Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council are all in their seventies and eighties. Meanwhile, a significant portion of the protesters have not yet completed their second decade of life. This 50-year age gap makes dialogue difficult. Interaction between senior managers belonging to the top 7% of the age pyramid (over 65) and the 93% of society under 65 is not straightforward. A strategic question:

These protesters (not the vandals) are the very people from the streets, the bazaars, schools, and offices. They are the nurses who sacrificed themselves during the COVID pandemic. They are the students and athletes who won gold medals for Iran in academic Olympiads and the Olympic Games. I believe that if called upon, these same protesters would stand shoulder to shoulder with military and law enforcement forces in defending this land's security against rioters, vandals, and mercenaries. But if the five reasons above persist, we may, through mere rhetoric, judicial and law enforcement action alone, and media restrictions, manage to dampen the visible flames. Yet, what does one do with the smoldering embers beneath the ashes?



People in Iran's northern city of Gorgan, Iran, rally on January 12, 2026, to condemn recent unrest on January 8-9, 2026.  IRNA

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A striking generational divide exists, with elderly government leaders facing protests led by young people. This age gap hinders dialogue and highlights the need to understand the protesters' underlying grievances, not just suppress their actions.

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of narrow-mindedness. Meanwhile, a desirable future horizon can be built by recognizing diversity and protest, but national construction happens with social cohesion, acceptance of the other, and strengthening non-violent legal capacities. If we restore protest to its proper place, give it a worthy response, facilitate dialogue, and accept our own mistakes, problems will lessen. The central signifier of Iranian society is justice, and justice includes accepting and correcting mistakes. One of the necessities of our society, which has also lost many opportunities, is recognizing change and reform. If change and reform are not recognized in time, they turn into accumulated anger.

So you believe the origin of the violence is this very weakness?

Yes, but this ground is not empty, and foreigners also ride on this violence. Therefore, in such conditions, I do not rule out foreign factors.

What results does the increase in violence have for society?

Security is what every developing society is missing, and development itself is the tool for charting the future; especially for Iranian society, where every citizen sees that it has all the capabilities for development, but their own situation is not good. A society that is hungry, has livelihood problems and feels humiliation, and whose future is not bright, sees that this situation is not worthy of it, and that there have been better situations both in its own past and in comparison with other countries.

I think we must contemplate this issue nationally, and in this national contemplation, there is no difference between reformist, principalist, nationalist, re-

ligious, and those who desire change. I see all of them. In the reform period, which entered the arena with the slogan of civil society and recognizing the other, inviting dialogue, and a sense of citizens' effectiveness, it leads to economic success. Because it can control many threats internally, regionally, and globally. So, by recognizing change, things can be done.

So you can build economic achievements from social and political phe-

nomena?
Yes, in any situation, by prioritizing solving people's problems, things can be done. If we hear each other's voices and facilitate dialogue, even in this damaged society where many young people are anguished, worried, and harmed, when we accept all this, instead of saying 'let come what may,' these damages, weaknesses, shortages, destructions, and the loss of human, material, and spiritual capital must be seen, and we must strive to get out

of this situation. What I understand is that by recognizing protest and difficult conditions, a clear horizon can be drawn for society, and we can move towards it.

Considering the current situation, what is the solution and what should be done?

When the answer to 'what should be done' becomes very difficult, we must think about 'what should not be done.' From a communication perspective, in

a dialogic space among elites, experts, civil institutions, and citizens, issues become clearer. The worst situation is the polarization of the public sphere and society. In a polarized space, everyone only seeks to gather evidence and documentation for their own interpretation and decision, rather than engaging in analysis.

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Iran beats Saudi Arabia to reach Futsal Asian Cup knockouts

Sports Desk

The Iranian national futsal team secured a 2-0 victory over Saudi Arabia on Friday, ensuring their progression to the knockout stage of the 2026 AFC Futsal Asian Cup. According to Mehr News Agency, the Group D clash took place at Jakarta's International Velodrome, with Iran's squad under head coach Vahid Shamsaei claiming both goals. Amirhossein Gholami opened the scoring with a

header from a corner delivered by Moslem Oladghobad, and was named the best player of the match. Later, Iran goalkeeper Bahram Mohammadi doubled the lead in the 35th minute with a precise long-range strike. Wearing their red away kit against the green-clad Saudis, Iran struggled to create clear-cut chances in the first half. Despite advancing toward the Saudi goal, Iranian players' short passes failed to produce mean-

ingful opportunities. Saudi Arabia, meanwhile, threatened Iran's goal twice with dangerous crosses but were unable to score. The second half, however, was dominated entirely by Iran. Shamsaei's team applied relentless pressure, eventually breaking through with the first goal midway through the half. In response, the Saudis, needing points to stay in contention, adopted a five-player "power play," leaving their goal unat-

tended at times. Although Iran faced five dangerous opportunities on their own goal during this period, Mohammadi's outstanding performance kept the score intact. Capitalizing on one such scenario, Mohammadi scored the second goal himself into the empty Saudi net. With two wins in the group stage, Iran advances to the knockout rounds. The team will face Afghanistan on Sunday for a chance to secure top spot in Group D.



varzesh3.com

Iran claims U17 bronze at Turkey Youth Table Tennis Contender



IRNA

Sports Desk

Iran's national table tennis team continued its campaign at the Youth Table Tennis Contender in Turkey, with the country claiming a bronze medal in the under-17 category. According to IRNA, Iranian players faced off against their international rivals throughout the competition. In the U17 boys' division, Arshia Lorestan secured a bronze medal, add-

ing to Iran's growing achievements in youth table tennis. In the same age group, Erfan Yazdanbakhsh and Avetsa Askarzadeh advanced from the group stage and won their Round of 16 matches, but were eliminated in the quarterfinals by host nation representatives, ending their progression in the tournament. In the girls' events, Vania Yavari advanced from the group stage to the knockout round, where

she faced the top seed and was ultimately defeated by her Indian opponent. Meanwhile, Sarina Jahanshahi and Zeinab Dura were unable to progress beyond the group stage. The Turkey Youth Table Tennis Contender is being held from January 28 to 31 in Cappadocia, Turkey. The Iranian delegation is coached by Hadi Sobhi, who oversees the country's representatives in this international youth competition.

Cramping Alcaraz beats Zverev in epic to reach final

A cramping Carlos Alcaraz had to draw on every physical and mental reserve to come back from the brink and beat Alexander Zverev to reach a first Australian Open final. Spain's Alcaraz came through 6-4 7-6 (7-5) 6-7 (3-7) 6-7 (4-7) 7-5 after an enthralling five hours and 27 minutes - but the scoreline barely hints at the drama that occurred in Melbourne, bbc.com wrote. Alcaraz had clinched the first two sets and was cruising

when, serving at 4-4 in the third, he suddenly pulled up and was left barely able to serve or move. The world number one took a medical timeout — leaving third seed Zverev irate — and looked a shadow of his former self as his German opponent forced a decider. Zverev went an early break up in the fifth set and served for the match at 5-4, before Alcaraz produced a scarcely believable comeback.

Buoyed by the crowd, Alcaraz broke to get the match back on serve and then capitalized on Zverev's nerves as the German served at 6-5 down to try to force a 10-point tie-break. Alcaraz fell to the floor in complete disbelief as Zverev missed a backhand and sent him into Sunday's showpiece. "I always say that you have to believe in yourself no matter what," Alcaraz said. "I couldn't be here right now without these guys [the crowd]. The way you pushed me back into the match on every point is crazy." Victory keeps alive the 22-year-old's bid to write more tennis history — should he win on Sunday, he will become the youngest man to complete the career Grand Slam. Only Novak Djokovic — and Alcaraz's own physical condition — now stand in the way of a fourth successive Grand Slam final between the Spaniard and Jannik Sinner.



GETTY IMAGES

Olympiacos' playoff qualification bears Taremi's signature

Sports Desk

Iranian striker Mehdi Taremi played a pivotal role in guiding Olympiacos to the knockout stage of the UEFA Champions League, earning widespread media praise while emphasizing his team's philosophy and focus on the present. According to varzesh3, in a historic night for Greek football, Taremi once again demonstrated why he is one of Olympiacos' key players this season. The Greek side's 2-1 victory over Ajax in Amsterdam not only secured the win but also marked Olympiacos' historic qualification to the Champions League playoffs under the new format — a success in which Taremi's impact was unmistakable.

Regarding Olympiacos' next

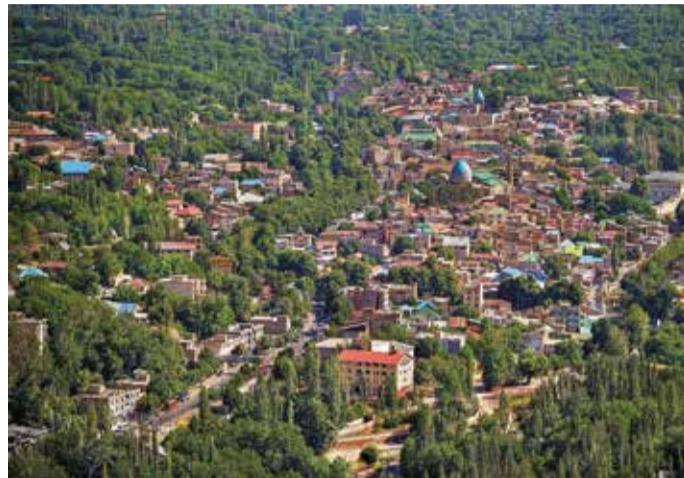
opponent and whether he preferred Leverkusen or Atalanta, Taremi said, "It doesn't matter who we face; both teams are very good. Now we celebrate, but from tomorrow our focus will be on AEK Athens." Taremi also highlighted the team's consistent philosophy, "Our philosophy doesn't change. We don't look to the future; we focus on the present." This statement demonstrates that despite their historic achievement, Taremi and his teammates remain grounded and competitive.

Ultimately, Olympiacos' qualification to the Champions League playoffs bears Taremi's signature — evident both in statistics and key moments of the games. The Iranian striker has established himself not only as one of the team's standout figures but also as one of the most influential players in this season's Champions League among Greek football representatives.



varzesh3.com

Trek through Damavand's legendary landscapes



wikipedia.org



eneshat.com



mrbilit.com

Iranica Desk

With its majestic peak, mountainous terrain, and wealth of historical and natural attractions, the city of Damavand in Tehran Province is considered one of Iran's premier tourist destinations.

As one of the most historic cities located on the slopes of the Alborz Mountains, its name is intricately linked to Iran's highest summit. The region, famed for its cool climate, stunning mountain scenery, and breathtaking vistas, is a popular destination for nature enthusiasts and mountaineers alike. This scenic city in Tehran Province has been designated a model tourism area, according to kojaro.com.

Lar Protected Area: It is a major tourist attraction bordering the mountains of Noor (Mazandaran Province) to the north, Mount Damavand to the east and northeast,

and Afjeh and Lavasan-e Bozorg to the south. Spanning approximately 73,500 hectares, it was designated a protected area in 1982.

Barf Waterfall: Located in the Lar Gorge east of Lar, this beautiful waterfall, is one of the area's pristine spots for leisure and recreation.

Slopes of Mount Damavand: Accessed via the Haraz Road, this area is one of Damavand's most popular destinations. After passing the Polur route entrance, travelers traverse the Lar Plain before being greeted by the magnificent view of the mighty Mount Damavand, a national symbol of resilience. The area's natural beauty and pleasant climate make it a top choice for weekend getaways. **Jangalak Waterfall:** Located seven kilometers east of Damavand, this 35-meter-high waterfall sits at an elevation of 2,320 meters.

Accessed via Roodbar Gorge east of the city, the surrounding area is known for its pleasant climate, enhanced by the presence of juniper and walnut trees.

Mosha Plain: Mosha is a village in the central district of Damavand with excellent weather, located six kilometers northwest of Damavand near Haraz Road. The Mosha Plain lies in the Mosha valley at an elevation of 2,250 meters, close to the Ab'ali Ski Resort. **Siah Sang Spring:** Located in Mosha village, the area surrounding Siah Sang Spring is rich in medicinal plants such as barberry, wild rose, poppy, yarrow, and borage. Unfortunately, the construction of the Mosha Tunnel and the diversion of water flows have recently muddied the spring and diminished the area's natural beauty.

A'la Spring: Situated in the northwestern heights of Damavand among east-west drainage valleys, it is one of the region's vital and significant springs. A'la Spring is known for its abundant, sweet water, which adds a unique charm to the surrounding landscape.

Tizab Spring: Located five kilometers north of Damavand in Dasht-e Mazar, this spring's water is brisk and astringent and is believed to have many therapeutic properties. Locally, it is used to treat skin and digestive ailments. Its name, meaning "Sharp Water," derives from its sharp and sour taste. Access requires proper mountaineering equipment, as visiting the site without appropriate gear can be dangerous.

Tar Lake: A freshwater lake located 30 kilometers east of Damavand at an elevation of 2,900 meters, Tar Lake has a maximum length of 3.1 kilometers and an average width of 400 meters.

Its water level varies seasonally. Once surrounded by thyme vegetation, the area now has sparse plant cover due to recent climatic issues. The lake is suitable for swimming, boating, and fishing.

Havir Lake: Considered a scenic spot in Damavand, this lake is located 500 meters from Tar Lake. It measures approximately 900 meters in length and about 150 meters in width, depending on the season. Both lakes are fed by springs originating from the Qarah Dagh, Siah Chal, and Shahneshin mountains to the north.

Rood Afshan Cave: A unique tourist attraction located at an elevation of 1,945 meters, the cave features a 20-meter-wide entrance and extends 29 meters in length. Its corridors are adorned with impressive stalactites and stalagmites. Formed during the Cretaceous period, the

cave holds significant geological value. The 800-meter trek to the cave entrance is challenging and requires mountaineering equipment, while exploration inside necessitates proper lighting. It is recommended for experienced hikers seeking adventurous trips.

Burnik Cave: This distinctive cave and landmark is located on the Damavand-Firuzkuh Road in Harandeh village. Reaching the cave requires a two-hour hike from the village. Burnik Cave maintains a consistently cool and pleasant temperature, making it a favored destination for professional cavers during the summer months.

Gerobar Waterfall: Located in the Ruhafza district of Damavand, this waterfall stands at a height of 20 meters. The surrounding area boasts diverse plant life, contributing to its pleasant and cool climate.

Jask offers rare glimpse into Iran's coastal heritage

Iranica Desk

Jask, located in eastern Hormozgan Province along the strategic Makran coastline, is a place where the sea is not only a source of livelihood but an integral part of the people's identity. From traditional fishing boats to the flight of fish-eating birds above the shoreline, this port presents a vivid image of the bond between humans and nature.

The beaches of Jask in eastern Hormozgan are considered among the most pristine and least-known tourist attractions in southern Iran — an area where traditional fishing, marine nature, and indigenous culture are closely intertwined, according to IRNA.

Jask's fishermen, men and women who have lived with the sea for generations, head out every morning in wooden boats and fishing vessels toward the turquoise waters of the sea. These boats, symbols of indigenous maritime knowledge, continue to play an important role in the local economy.

Alongside fishing activities, the coastline of Jask is home to a wide variety of seabirds and fish-eating birds that, with their spectacular dives to catch fish, add a unique charm to the region's natural landscape.

The presence of these birds has created significant potential for the development of nature-based tourism and birdwatching in eastern Hormozgan.

Sandy beaches, clear waters,



IRNA



wikipedia.org

coastal rock formations, and the region's distinctive tranquility have turned Jask into a promising destination for tourists.

Jask is located in southern Iran on the shores of the Sea of Oman, and this geographical position has a major impact on its climatic conditions. The region has a hot and humid climate and is influenced by desert and semi-desert air currents.

During summer, air temperatures rise above 41 degrees Celsius, and combined with high humidity, create heavy and oppressive conditions that make visiting the attractions of Jask difficult. In winter, however, conditions become somewhat milder, with temperatures dropping to around 14 degrees Celsius.

Given the coastal location of the port, sea breezes on some days reduce the intensity of heat and humidity. Nevertheless, extremely hot days and high humidity remain the dominant



michael-tour.ir

characteristics of Jask's climate. Jask is one of the six port counties of Hormozgan Province and, due to its position along the geographical curvature and its proximity to the Makran Sea and the Strait of Hormuz, has always held strategic importance. It is located approximately 300 kilometers east of Bandar Abbas. Jask is known as the "Pearl of the Sea of Oman" and a symbol of unity and brotherhood. Government authorities have emphasized that this port region and the Makran coast can develop into an economic and commercial hub and a center for trade and production — not only for Hormozgan and Sistan and Baluchestan provinces, but for the entire country.

With its unique position along the Sea of Oman, Jask encompasses a wide range of natural, historical, and cultural attractions. From beautiful and untouched beaches to historical sites and distinctive natural features, the attractions of Jask cater to a variety of tastes. The region is home to several active mud volcanoes, which present a striking and unique display of geological activity and are among the most attractive natural sights of Jask. The largest mud volcano in the area forms a cone rising 73 meters above the surrounding land and is considered one of the tallest mud volcanoes in Iran.

Many visitors travel to the region to experience a different side of nature, witness this remarkable phenomenon, and even benefit from the therapeutic properties of the mud. Around the world, mud volcanoes are recognized as natural centers for mud therapy, as the minerals found in their mud are believed to help alleviate muscle pain, skin conditions, and joint disorders. Another natural highlight and

attraction of Jask is the remarkable sandy rock formations located along the Minab-Jask route. This area creates a unique landscape that closely resembles the central deserts of Iran.

Saderman Cave, situated among the high and low Saderman mountain range at an elevation of approximately 2,000 meters above sea level, dates back to the Sassanid era and the early Islamic period. In the past, the site included five large caves and three smaller ones, but due to natural erosion and human impact, only one large cave with several columns remains today. The Gabric Protected Area is one of the natural treasures of Hormozgan Province, located in a village with the same name. Covering an area of 34,596 hectares, this region is considered one of Iran's most important marine habitats and has been listed as a protected area since 2001.

If you plan to visit this coastal city at the best time of year, mid-autumn to late winter is considered the most suitable period for traveling to Jask. During this time, temperatures are cool, ocean breezes are pleasant, and conditions are ideal for exploring the region's untouched nature. However, due to the influence of monsoon weather systems, occasional scattered and heavy rainfall may occur during winter. Summers in Jask, because of extreme heat and high humidity, are generally not suitable for travel.

Minister urges expansion of cultural infrastructure as participation rates lag

Arts & Culture Desk

Iran's Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance, Abbas Salehi, on Thursday warned of chronically low cultural consumption nationwide as he inaugurated a major cultural and artistic complex in the western border city of Sarpol-e Zahab, calling cultural infrastructure the "vital breathing space" of cities. Speaking at the opening ceremony of the Sarpol-e Zahab Cultural and Artistic Complex in Kermanshah Province, Salehi said official data from his ministry showed an unsatisfactory level of public engagement with cultural activities, despite Iran's deep-rooted civilizational and artistic heritage, IRNA reported.

Citing the 2023 Iranian Lifestyle

Survey, he said a large proportion of citizens do not visit museums, cinemas, theaters or concerts over the course of a year, while book reading levels remain weak.

"66% do not visit museums, galleries or historical sites, 67% do not go to the cinema, 86% do not attend theater performances and 82% do not go to music concerts," he said. Average weekly book reading stands at about 2.5 hours, with newspaper and magazine reading at 43 minutes.

"These figures reveal a paradox in a country whose semantic core is culture and art," Salehi said, adding that the main structural bottleneck was the shortage of accessible cultural facilities such as libraries, cinemas, galleries and performance halls.



Iran's Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance Abbas Salehi, speaks during the opening of a major cultural and artistic complex in the western border city of Sarpol-e Zahab, in Kermanshah Province, on January 29, 2026.

ISNA

Drawing a parallel with urban green spaces, he said the acceptance since the 1990s of parks as the "physical lungs" of cities should now be extended to cultural venues as the "breathing space of the soul" and a driver of social vitality. "This requires a two-way resolve: Officials must prioritize it and the public must demand it," he said. Salehi described Sarpol-e Zahab, a city of more than 90,000 people near the Iraqi border, as a region with a distinguished legacy in culture, art and the Iran-Iraq war, adding that the new complex and similar projects were a tangible response to long-standing infrastructure gaps, particularly in border and less-developed areas.

He said his personal attendance at the ceremony was intended to ensure the project's final delivery and the removal of remaining administrative hurdles, praising a decade of efforts by provincial



managers, engineers and workers. "This is not merely a construction project; it symbolizes a serious commitment to securing basic cultural infrastructure across the country," he said.

The 2,700-square-meter complex is among the most modern cultural facilities in Iran. It has a 450-seat capacity and is fully equipped with a conference hall, power and

lighting systems that meet national standards, providing a platform for cultural and artistic activities in western Kermanshah. At the ceremony, Kermanshah's director general for culture and Islamic guidance, Mozafar Teymouri, said the project's completion ahead of the anniversary of the Islamic Revolution showed the government's determination to

meet cultural demands. He said the complex could become a regional cultural hub and potentially serve pilgrims traveling to Iraq for the Arbaeen commemoration, provided sustained funding for events was secured. Arbaeen marks the end of the 40-day mourning period for Imam Hussein, a central figure in Shia Islam.



ISNA

Ammar film festival closes in Tehran, honors Behrouz Afkhami



IRNA

ABNA

Arts & Culture Desk

Iran's 16th Ammar Popular Film Festival closed on Thursday night in Tehran, awarding leading documentary and fiction works and paying tribute to veteran filmmaker Behrouz Afkhami at a ceremony marked by strong

political and cultural messaging. The closing event was held at Bahman Cinema in the Iranian capital on January 29, attended by filmmakers, jurors and families of those killed in past conflicts, ILNA reported. Afkhami, a prominent director and former lawmaker, was honored for his career and for his latest feature 'The Morning of The Execution,' which also received a festival citation. Hossein Shahrabi Farahani, a space scientist and the subject of the documentary 'Hope in Space,' said international cooperation was possible despite US sanctions. He said his team had signed a satellite-related contract with Russia, calling it "the riskiest government contract in Iran's space history," and added that sanctions had not altered his path. "If someone wants to work,

sanctions are just an excuse," he said, adding that a message broadcast from a satellite during the festival was that "the United States can do nothing". Shahrabi Farahani later received the People's Independence Award from the family of the late nuclear scientist Fereydoun Abbasi. Afkhami urged young filmmakers to focus on documentaries and docudramas, warning that cinema would become "increasingly artificial" with the spread of artificial intelligence. "For lasting cinema, one must think about documentary and low-budget filmmaking, which allows more production," he said. Among the festival's main awards, the top Lantern prize in the cultural war documentary section went to 'Everything, Forever' by Mohammad Hassan Yadevari. 'Not a Dream,' directed by

Amir Mazloumi and Mohammad Mehdi Ayoubi, won the Lantern in the Iranian Dream documentary category. In the historical and social documentary section, the Lantern was awarded to 'standing by the Thames' by Seyed Mostafa Mousavi-Tabar. In fiction, 'Chocolate VI' by Mehdi Mirqiasi won the Lantern for best feature film, while 'Tears of the Reedbed' by Mehdi Jafari received an honorable mention. Afkhami's 'The Morning of The Execution' was singled out for special recognition. Founded in 2010, the Ammar Popular Film Festival focuses on documentaries and narrative films centered on revolutionary, social and resistance themes. The 16th edition was held under the slogan "The civilizational battle of Islamic Iran against the barbaric West".

EU's strategic ...

Amir-Abdollahian listened carefully and responded in more measured terms that, if this were to happen, military attachés of European countries would also have to leave Tehran. Following that exchange, European positions receded from view for some time. The issue has now resurfaced, notably at a meeting where Iran was the first agenda item and Syria, with its particular history, the second.

European officials did not even take the trouble to study regional developments over the past three years to understand where the actual centers of terrorism have been and who has acted against it. In her interview, Kallas

stated openly that the purpose of listing the IRGC was to exert pressure on the Iranian government, thereby publicly acknowledging the political nature of the foreign ministers' decision. She presented no evidence of terrorist activity by the Guards, instead describing the move as a political tool to pressure Tehran and support civil society, while leaving its implementation to the criminal laws of member states. The EU today finds itself in its weakest political, security and military position. It has lost its moral capital through support for the war crimes of Benjamin Netanyahu, and its economic capital through backing the inconclusive war in Ukraine. Militarily, Europe

has never carried real weight without the United States, and its claims of military capability are now openly mocked by Donald Trump himself. The political nature of Europe's decision to list the Guards means that, just as the force is being placed on the list by a political decision, it could also be removed by another political decision in the future. However, Europe should recognize that designating the official defense force of a sovereign state sets a dangerous precedent in international law and international relations.

While it must be said with regret that recent US actions under Trump have severely undermined the credibility of international law, Europe, which

claims to uphold international rights and values, is engaging in a process whose consequences it does not fully grasp.

In seeking to bridge the transatlantic gap, Europe is widening its divide with Asia and Africa, failing to recognize that it is a neighbor to Asia and Africa through Islamic countries. Preoccupied with the Ukraine crisis to its east, Europe is losing sight of developments to its south.

The IRGC is Iran's official defense force and, over two centuries of Iranian history, represents the only force to have emerged from deep within Iranian society itself. It is fully self-sufficient and has no dependence on other countries

for its military needs. As such, the EU's declaration will have no impact on the Guards' operational or combat capabilities, except that it is likely to expose the Union to numerous legal challenges in the near future. Europe has taken this risk based on a flawed calculation that the current face-off between Iran and the United States will quickly end in Washington's favor, allowing Europe to cash in on its political alignment by seeking a reward from the United States. What Europe fails to see is that it has made a strategic error, and that regardless of how the current Iran-US confrontation ends, Europe will emerge as the strategic loser.