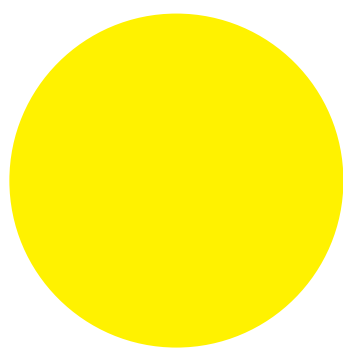


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A staff member removes the Iranian flag from the stage after a group picture with foreign ministers and representatives of United States, Iran, China, Russia, Britain, Germany, France and the European Union during the Iran nuclear talks in Vienna, Austria on July 14, 2015.
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Art of hedging: Turkey's global strategy



By Asgar Ghahremanpour
Editor-in-chief

OPINION

Turkey, the heir to the Ottoman Empire and NATO's eastern bastion, has in recent years played a role on the international stage that has left many observers perplexed, and at times astonished. On one hand, it purchases Russian S-400 air-defense systems and shakes hands with the Kremlin's president; on the other, it supplies its own domestically-produced drones to NATO allies in Eastern Europe. Ankara is simultaneously on the verge of joining a defense pact with Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, without ever uttering a word about leaving

NATO. This "apparent contradiction" is, in fact, a sophisticated and calculated manifestation of an advanced hedging strategy whose goal is to transform Turkey from a "follower ally" into an autonomous and influential "Central power."

Main pillar: NATO as insurance, not prison

Turkey has no intention of leaving NATO. Membership in the alliance provides its primary security insurance and access to advanced technology. However, Ankara regards NATO not as an inevitable destiny, but as a strategic choice that must be leveraged according to its own national interests. The purchase of the S-400 from Russia was not merely a military decision; it was a clear geopolitical message: "Turkey is autonomous in choosing

its security partners." This bold move, while angering Washington, gave Ankara unprecedented bargaining leverage within NATO and demonstrated that it can manage the cost of defying Washington's directives.

Alternative branches: networking in east & south

To reduce its dependence on the West, Turkey is actively weaving a network of alternative relationships.

- Russia: This relationship is a classic case of "cooperative rivalry." The two countries are competitors in Syria and the Caucasus, yet partners in energy (the Turk Stream pipeline), tourism, and even military affairs (despite differences over Ukraine). This interdependence increases both sides' room for maneuver.

- China: Participation in the Belt and Road Initiative, attracting Chinese investment, and even considering the purchase of Chinese defense systems open another option alongside Western technology.

- The New Middle East: The improvement of relations with Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Egypt after a decade of tensions reflects Ankara's economic and security realism. Should a defense pact with Riyadh and Islamabad materialize, it would create a security pole independent of NATO, with Turkey as one of its pillars.

- Emerging Organizations: Expressions of interest in joining BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization show that Ankara does not see the future international order as confined to the West.

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Iran, US at it again

Nuclear talks to restart soon
amid heightened tensions: *Report*

International Desk

Iran and the United States are likely to recommence nuclear negotiations in the coming days, semi-official news agency ISNA reported on Monday, as tensions are running high in West Asia amid a US military buildup in the Persian Gulf. ISNA said the negotiating delegations would be led by Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi and US Special Envoy for the Middle East Steve Witkoff. Turkey is expected to host the talks, the agency added, after Araghchi traveled to the neighboring country on Friday at the invitation of Turkish officials who have offered to mediate between Tehran and Washington. Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan is also expected to take part in the talks, ISNA said. Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baqaei said earlier in

the day that Tehran was "reviewing and deciding" on the details of a diplomatic process including "a manner and a framework" for the upcoming talks. Foreign Minister Araghchi also said on Monday that Iran was ready for dialogue provided it took place on an "equal footing, respect and mutual interests," but maintained that "diplomacy is not compatible with intimidation and threats." He expressed hope to "see the results of diplomacy soon." US President Donald Trump claimed on Saturday that Tehran was "seriously talking" with Washington. "We could make a negotiated deal that would be satisfactory, with no nuclear weapons," Trump told reporters aboard Air Force One. Trump has threatened military action against Iran and ordered the dispatch of an aircraft carrier



Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi (L) talks to Hassan Khomeini, the grandson of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, as he pays tribute to the late founder of the Islamic Republic in his mausoleum in southern Tehran on February 2, 2026.
● IRNA

group to the Middle East following nationwide deadly rioting last month, which the Iranian government says has been orchestrated from overseas. Iran's Leader Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei warned on Sunday that any US aggression would set off a "regional war." Washington has said any deal with Iran must include a ban on uranium enrichment, the removal of already enriched uranium, limits on long-range missiles and a rollback of support for regional resistance groups, conditions that Tehran has rejected.

*FM spox:* Anti-Iran regional adventurism to have 'contagious' repercussions

International Desk

The Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman warned on Monday that the regional countries must be aware of the consequences of any threats and acts of adventurism against the Islamic Republic. Esmail Baqaei raised the alarm at his weekly press conference in Tehran, following American media reports claiming that Saudi Defense Minister Prince Khalid bin Salman (KBS) had said in a private briefing in Washington that if President Donald Trump did not follow through on his threats against Iran, the move would "embolden" the Islamic Republic. "We have also seen these media reports. Iran and Saudi Arabia are two Muslim countries, and we have had a positive view of our brothers in the region. We believe that the countries of the region are well aware that any insecurity in the region and any threat against Iran will have contagious effects and consequences,"



Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baqaei speaks at a weekly press briefing in Tehran on February 2, 2026.
● IRNA

Baqaei said. "The reason for the efforts of the regional countries in a collective action to prevent escalation of tension is precisely this consensus regarding the dangers inherent in any adventurous action against Iran." Stressing that the positions of countries cannot be evaluated solely based on a media report, the spokesman said, "We are in close contact with Saudi Arabia; in just the past few days, both our ambassador in Saudi Arabia and through the Saudi embassy in Tehran, discussions have taken place between our friends in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Sau-

di officials." Pointing to the existing contacts and interactions between Iran and the regional countries, especially Saudi Arabia, Baqaei said, "At the same time, I emphasize that we invite all countries in the region to seriously and carefully consider the regional situation and not allow parties who in no way wish for the good and welfare of the region to exploit the issues raised." The Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman also spoke about the formation of a common understanding among the regional countries with regard to the breakout of new conflicts.

"What we are observing is the formation of a common understanding among the countries in the region regarding a threat that concerns the entire region. The countries in the region have clearly understood that any escalation of tension against the Islamic Republic of Iran will have consequences beyond Iran's geographical borders," Baqaei said. "This is the nature and characteristic of any tension, that its effects will be contagious. For this reason, the countries in the region are striving to prevent the escalation of tension and contribute to strengthening peace and security in the West Asia region," he added. Tensions between Iran and the United States have hit a new high since the latter brought in what it calls a large "armada" of warships and destroyers to the Persian Gulf region in support of deadly riots prompted by national currency depreciation across Iran.

Senior official denies plan to transfer Iranian enriched uranium abroad

International Desk

A senior Iranian security official on Monday dismissed reports that highly enriched uranium could be shipped out of the country after Russia said it was ready to store Iran's stockpiles as a possible option to ease tensions. "Iranian officials have no intention of transferring enriched nuclear materials to any country," Ali Bagheri, deputy secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council (SNSC), said, according to Fars news agency. Bagheri added that any potential talks between Iran and the United States over the country's nuclear program would "not revolve around such an issue at all." The remarks came hours after Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Russia had long ago offered its services to process or store Iran's enriched uranium. Asked whether Russia was discussing with Iran and the United States the possibility of taking Iranian enriched uranium, Peskov said, "This topic has been on the agenda for a long time." He said Moscow was trying to de-escalate tensions around Iran "to the best of its ability" and remained in contact with all interested parties, Reuters reported. SNSC secretary Ali Larijani met Presi-



Iranian technicians work inside a uranium conversion facility outside Isfahan, Iran.
● GETTY IMAGES

dent Vladimir Putin in Moscow on Friday during a visit that coincided with rising tensions between Iran and the United States, amid media speculation that the issue of enriched material was on the agenda. Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baqaei told reporters on Monday that such speculation had been raised before. "Iran's enriched nuclear material is one of the issues that naturally would be determined in a negotiation," Baqaei said.

Art of hedging ...

Tools of implementation:
blending hard and soft power

Page 1 > Turkey's hedging is not merely diplomatic. The country employs assertive military power to achieve its goals. Military operations in Syria, Iraq, and Libya, along with decisive military support for Azerbaijan, send a clear message: Turkey is not reluctant to use force to protect its interests and is actively defining its own sphere of security influence. Alongside this, soft power based on Ottoman heritage, media diplomacy (the TRT World network), and the promotion of its model of "democratic conservatism" enhances its appeal in parts of the developing world.

Strategic risks: playing on both sides

This ambitious strategy is not without

dangers:

1. Distrust: Turkey risks being seen by the West as "unreliable" and by Russia and the East as a "mercenary ally."
2. Overstretch: Simultaneous involvement in multiple theatres (the Eastern Mediterranean, Syria, the Caucasus) could exhaust the country's economic and military resources.
3. Economic Fragility: High inflation and dependence on foreign investment constitute a critical vulnerability that could overshadow all diplomatic maneuvering.

Central power in the making

Turkey's hedging strategy is an ambitious gamble to redefine its identity and international standing. Erdogan and Turkey's foreign-policy architects

are not seeking a complete break with the West, nor are they willing to accept unquestioning subordination to it. By creating multiple, reciprocal dependencies, they aim to raise the cost for any hostile action against Turkey and carve out space for independent action. The future of this strategy depends on two key factors: domestic economic stability and Ankara's diplomatic skill in managing the inevitable tensions of this multi-faceted game. If successful, Turkey could become a model for middle powers with grand ambitions. If it fails, it may find itself caught in limbo—without a steadfast ally. In any case, Turkey offers the world a practical lesson: in an age of geopolitical turmoil, smart hedging can be a weapon for survival and relevance.



Mohammad Ali Rajabi
Cartoonist

CARTOON



Construction of Iran's first private town gets underway

Economy Desk

Iran's Ministry of Roads and Urban Development has approved the feasibility study and site selection for the construction of Central Makran New Town in Hormozgan Province, which will be developed as the country's first privately built new town, a senior official said on Monday.

Gholamreza Kazemian, Deputy Roads and Urban Development Minister, made the announcement at the conclusion of a meeting of Iran's Supreme Council of Urban Planning and Architecture on Monday. He said the town will be built along the Oman Sea Coasts of Hormozgan and will rely entirely on domestic private-sector investment.

According to Kazemian, the project has a 20-year development horizon and will be implemented gradually. He explained that given that this marks Iran's first experience with a privately developed new town, the plan has undergone heightened technical and institutional scrutiny. Construction will proceed in phases and will be closely aligned with the pace of job creation and population growth, with land allocation tied directly to demonstrated demand, he added.

A consortium of Iranian companies is participating in the project, with investors committing their own capital to finance and implement the development, Kazemian said.

Also speaking at the meeting, Minister of Roads and Urban Development Farzaneh Sadegh stressed that relevant authorities are expected to facilitate the project, while ensuring that environmental considerations and the livelihoods of local communities are fully taken into account during implementation.

Central Makran New Town is envisioned as an advanced port-based economic hub and one of Iran's main commercial and transit gateways. It is expected to function as a major tourism destination and a multifunctional center along the Makran coast.

The city is also projected to meet housing demand, generate diverse employment opportunities, and attract skilled professionals, positioning it as a key regional center for innovative activities and startup development.

With plans to make extensive use of renewable energy and green infrastructure, Central Makran is expected to serve as a model for coastal ecosystem protection and environmentally



An aerial view of Chabahar Port along the Makran coast
IRNA

friendly urban development. By the 2046 horizon year, the city is expected to emerge as a leading example of next-generation, smart cities in Iran, driven by domestic and

foreign investment and anchored in private-sector participation.

The city is also expected to foster a dynamic cultural identity by hosting national and international events

and expanding public spaces, while simultaneously strengthening trade networks, scientific cooperation, and regional and international transit corridors.

Pezeshkian pledges to remove barriers to international commerce



president.ir

Economy Desk

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian said improving trade relations, supporting merchants, producers, and exporters, and removing structural barriers are key priorities of his government's foreign policy agenda.

Speaking at a meeting with the Coordination Council of his deputies on Monday, he said the administration is focused on strengthening economic engagement with other countries while

creating a more supportive environment for domestic and international trade.

Turning to domestic priorities, the president stressed that government decision-making will be centered on the people, their livelihoods, and improving overall quality of life. He underscored the administration's determination to combat rent-seeking, corruption, and illegal practices as part of broader efforts to create the conditions necessary for sustainable economic improvement.

Pezeshkian added that removing cumbersome laws and regulations is another core component of the government's reform agenda, aimed at improving performance efficiency and the quality of public services. He also said his government is committed to downsizing the public sector through the transfer of state-owned companies and certain activities to the private sector wherever possible, while maintaining regulatory oversight by public institutions.

From globalization to energy mercantilism

Weaponization of maritime chokepoints & return to 'age of insecurity'



By Reza Mokhtar
Senior energy researcher

OPINION EXCLUSIVE

The world is shifting away from a liberal order built on free trade—the era of Adam Smith—toward one marked by intense geoeconomic rivalries and fragile supply chains. Drawing on recent real-world events, such as the war in Ukraine, tensions in the Red Sea, and seizures of commercial vessels, energy security is no longer a shared global good but has become a tool in hybrid warfare. The focus here is on the vulnerability of key maritime chokepoints and why nations are increasingly turning to strategic stockpiling and overland alternatives.

End of history & return of insecurity

The post-Cold War idea that economic interdependence would prevent major wars has lost its shine. The global liberal order is fading, not because it is failing everyone, but because its continued existence has ended up boosting rising powers more than it serves its original architects—the United States and Europe. We are now in a time when trade

routes are not reliably safe anymore. Moving goods often requires military escorts, payoffs, or bilateral security deals. In this environment, supply chains for goods and energy are being reshaped not by comparative advantage but by relative security.

Wars at sea: breaking down recent events

Field reports make it clear that conflict has spilled from land into the oceans. Seas will matter even more in the years ahead—not just because shipping remains the cheapest way to move things, but because controlling oceans and straits is essential to dominating global energy flows. This shift shows up in several key areas.

First, in the Black Sea and Mediterranean through targeting commercial fleets. Second, in the Indian Ocean through cargo seizures. Third, in energy geopolitics, infrastructure and corridor vulnerabilities, as Ukrainian drones have carried out strikes on Russian oil refineries and Yemen's Ansar Allah forces effectively partially closed Israel's Eilat port and made the Red Sea unsafe.

Survival strategies, stockpiling & alternative corridors

In this era of energy mercantilism, countries are pursuing two main ap-

proaches. First, strategic stockpiling, such as China's filling of its strategic petroleum reserves and building up of grain stocks.

Second, developing overland corridors, such as the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC), the Belt and Road Initiative and rail routes through China, Central Asia, and Iran.

Fate of 'glass house' economies

In the end, smaller Persian Gulf states with highly exposed economies—sometimes called "aquarium economies"—look especially fragile in future conflicts. Their weakness is not just reliance on sea routes and the Strait of Hormuz; it is their dependence on imported security arrangements.

Potential regional adversaries like Israel have strong capabilities for air strikes. In a full-scale war, these gleaming but shallow economies could collapse structurally under sustained air and naval pressure. By contrast, nations like Iran and Russia, with abundant energy resources and robust overland connections, stand to show greater resilience if they manage supply chains and self-sufficiency well. Over the next decade, energy security will be measured not by market prices but by assured physical access.

Economic council approves major oil, power projects to boost energy output

Economy Desk

Iran's Economic Council approved several large-scale projects in the oil and power sectors aimed at increasing production capacity and strengthening the country's energy supply.

At a meeting held on Monday and chaired by First Vice President Mohammad Reza Aref, the council en-

dorsed the general framework of a plan to raise oil output and offset declines in gas production, the vice-president's website reported.

The plan includes the implementation of pressure-boosting operations at the shared South Pars gas field, the development of the Sepehr and Jofeir oil fields, and accelerated production from the Azadegan

oil field.

The project involves an estimated investment of \$17 billion and is expected to generate revenues of up to \$520 billion, according to the website.

The council also approved a separate project aimed at real-time monitoring and smart management of the integrated petroleum products supply chain, with an investment of

€420 million, plus \$48 million funded from domestic resources of the National Iranian Oil Refining and Distribution Company.

The initiative aims to establish intelligent, integrated oversight of petroleum product production, transportation, and storage between 2026 and 2029.

In the power sector, the council approved optimization and perfor-

mance-upgrade projects for the Dez and Shahid Abbaspour dams and power plants in Khuzestan Province. Based on the approvals, generation capacity at the Dez power plant will increase from 520 megawatts to 720 megawatts, while capacity at each unit of the Shahid Abbaspour power plant will rise from 180 megawatts to 250 megawatts.



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Designation of a nation's military force unprecedented in international law

Iran should file lawsuit against EU decision on IRGC: *Expert*

INTERVIEW

As relations between Tehran and key European Union member states have come under strain in recent months amid political and security tensions, EU foreign ministers have raised the prospect of placing the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) on the bloc's terrorist list—marking a new step in the escalation of political pressure on Iran. While the move may carry limited practical effects, it sends significant political and legal signals that merit a closer examination in the broader context of Iran-EU relations.

The decision has raised serious questions about its grounding in international law, the EU's legal authority to take such action, and the potential consequences for the future of ties between Iran and Europe, particularly as Tehran has already warned that the abuse of legal and security mechanisms would shut down the path of dialogue and diplomacy.

Mohsen Abdollahi, a professor of international law, argues that the EU's decision to label the IRGC as terrorist is without precedent: first, because terrorism is defined as an anti-state crime; second, because such a move violates the principle of state sovereignty under international law; and third, because it constitutes a breach of the principle of non-intervention.



From the EU's perspective, does the Council of Foreign Ministers have the legal authority to designate an official organization that is part of the sovereign structure of a UN member state as terrorist, or does such a move require a prior judicial ruling by a European court?

ABDOLLAHI: Under EU law, this issue has not been explicitly segregated. In other words, when EU regulations or practices concerning the designation of terrorist entities were formulated, no distinction was drawn between listing a sovereign state organization and listing a non-state entity. Put differently, there was no prior provision addressing whether a country's armed forces could or could not be listed as a terrorist group. As a result, the listing of sovereign institutions has been treated as subject to the same rules governing the designation of individuals and organizations deemed terrorist under EU law. EU law generally—indeed, consistently—requires that the listing of an individual, organization, or group be based on a prior decision or investigation by a competent authority at either the national or EU level, such as the European Court of Human Rights, the Court of Justice of the European Union, or other EU bodies. By this, I mean that the authority in question may be judicial or political. For example, if one EU member state has identified an individual, an organization, or even, in our discussion, the IRGC, as a terrorist entity, that determination can pave the way and lay the groundwork for action by EU institutions, including the European Parliament and

Mohsen Abdollahi



the Council of Europe. In the case of the IRGC, as you know, such an opening unfortunately emerged in 2022 following the attack on a synagogue in Düsseldorf, Germany. In that case, the IRGC was accused of involvement in the attack. We believe that this allegation was unfounded and that there was no evidence whatsoever to suggest that the IRGC would have been involved in such an attack. Nonetheless, the initial condition—namely, a preliminary decision by an authority, whether judicial or administrative, regarding alleged terrorist activity—was, regrettably, met. Subsequently, as you are aware, in connection with that case, the European Parliament adopted resolutions in January 2023, then again in April 2024, and most recently in January 2026, calling for the IRGC to be designated as a terrorist organization. From the standpoint of EU law, it therefore appears that the procedural and formal steps required to list the IRGC as a terrorist entity have been followed. That said, all these steps remain open to legal challenge, but in brief, this is the trajectory that has been taken. We can then examine whether this issue has any precedent in international law and, finally, address the possibility of revision. But let me stress at this point that for the EU to designate an entity or an individual as a terrorist organization, there must have been a prior effective conviction related to terrorist activities in one

of the EU member states. Unfortunately, such a precedent was created in the Düsseldorf synagogue case. In any event, both the Islamic Republic of Iran and the IRGC maintain that the allegation was baseless, and in fact they did not—and rightly so—participate in those proceedings. Still, that episode provided the legal footing that was later used to move toward designating the IRGC as terrorist.

To what extent is this action compatible with the fundamental principles of international law, particularly state and sovereign immunity, the principle of non-intervention, and the principle of the sovereign equality of states?

Under international law, a country's armed forces form an integral part of the state itself. A state enjoys immunity in international law and is, in principle, regarded as inviolable. Moreover, the armed forces fall squarely within acts of sovereignty that are immune from the jurisdiction of courts. Why do I underscore this point? Because in the American and European reading of terrorism—and indeed in the interpretation generally accepted worldwide—terrorism is understood as an anti-state crime. The underlying assumption is that non-state actors and individuals carry out terrorist acts with the aim of undermining states, not that states themselves engage in terrorism against other states. It is self-evident that if a state were to carry out terrorist acts against another state, those actions could rise to the level of

an armed attack. International law also recognizes that terrorist acts may, in certain circumstances, constitute an armed attack. Therefore, from a legal standpoint, it is fundamentally untenable to characterize part of a country's armed forces as a terrorist force or terrorist organization, because doing so runs counter to the very essence and definition of terrorism. This is precisely why, when you examine global counterterrorism law, you find a consistent refusal to accept the notion of "state terrorism." Terrorism is, by definition, an anti-state crime. It is not a crime committed by the state; rather, the state is typically the victim of such crimes. Designating part of a country's armed forces as terrorist is truly unprecedented in international law. We all recall that during President Trump's first term, the United States designated the Quds Force of the IRGC as a terrorist organization. If you look closely at the White House statement issued at the time, even the Trump administration explicitly acknowledged that this move was unprecedented in international law—there had been no prior instance of a state placing a lawful component of another state's armed forces on its terrorist list. The White House itself conceded that the action was without precedent and, notably, limited it to the Quds Force. It was after that decision that a broader trend—or campaign, one might say—took shape, unfortunately fueled in part by some Iranians living abroad, pushing for the IRGC as a whole to be designated as a terrorist organization in countries such as

Members of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps take part in a military parade in Mashhad, Iran on September 21, 2024.

QUDS ONLINE

Australia or within the European Union. As I have said, this move is unprecedented: first, because terrorism is an anti-state crime; second, because it violates the principle of state sovereignty under international law; third, because it breaches the principle of non-intervention; and fourth, because it contravenes the United Nations Charter. Under the UN Charter, states are sovereign equals, and no state is entitled to subject even the core components of another state's sovereignty—including its armed forces—to its own jurisdiction or restrictive measures. For these reasons, this action is considered unprecedented and in violation of international law.

Given previous legal practice, including cases involving sanctioned groups and individuals, what implications does the absence of a final court ruling have for the potential annulment of this decision before the Court of Justice of the European Union?

This decision, like nearly all EU decisions, is an act of the European Union itself. If the IRGC as a whole has been covered by this designation, it could be said that the EU has gone a step further than the United States. That in itself is striking—how European states have managed to outpace even the Trump administration in breaching international law, given that despite all its disregard for international norms, the Trump administration confined its designation to

the Quds Force alone. That said, under the rule-of-law framework governing the EU, every decision is subject to judicial review. To the best of my recollection, this decision may be challenged within two months of notification by the IRGC itself or by one of its affiliated entities capable of representing it before EU institutions. However, there is a condition: the entity bringing the challenge must demonstrate that it has been adversely affected by the decision. For instance, the IRGC's Khatam al-Anbiya Construction Headquarters, which is a purely economic entity, might be a suitable candidate to challenge the measure. Despite the deeply unfavorable political climate surrounding Iran, I would recommend pursuing such an appeal. Even though the Iranian government regards this action as contrary to international law, it should make every effort to have it overturned. In the past, the EU has shown that its judicial bodies, on balance, have a respectable track record of reviewing and at times striking down politically motivated decisions. It may therefore be possible to challenge this decision before the Court of Justice of the European Union, which has jurisdiction over appeals against decisions of the EU and the Council. The legal grounds for such a challenge can be grouped into four categories. First, it could be argued that the authority to adopt this decision was lacking or that a fundamental procedural rule was violated—for example, that the IRGC was not afforded an adequate opportunity to present a legal defense. Second, it could be demonstrated that core EU rules or treaties to which the EU is a party were breached. This decision is clearly at odds with the UN Charter, while EU decisions are not supposed to conflict with the Charter, given that all EU member states are UN members and, under Article 103 of the



Under the rule-of-law framework governing the EU, every decision is subject to judicial review. Even though the Iranian government regards this action as contrary to international law, it should make every effort to have it overturned.



Charter, obligations arising from it take precedence over other international commitments. Third, it could be shown that the decision amounted to an abuse of power, driven more by political motives than by sound legal reasoning. And fourth, the applicant could challenge the factual basis of the listing and show that the underlying facts were based on misinterpretation or unfounded allegations. It appears that this decision is certainly open to challenge and that there are substantial legal grounds for contesting it. In my view, both the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the IRGC should make use of the minimum legal avenues available within the EU itself to oppose this decision.

From the perspective of the international responsibility of states, could such an action provide a basis for Iran to bring a claim or seek compensation before international

bodies, or are there serious legal obstacles in this path? As for the possibility of raising the matter before international bodies such as the International Court of Justice, it must be noted that these institutions do not enjoy compulsory jurisdiction. In each case, the basis of their jurisdiction must be carefully examined. With respect to the EU, such a basis is virtually nonexistent, as it is difficult to identify a treaty to which both the bloc and Iran are parties and that would allow the issue to be brought before the Court. Regarding individual member states—particularly Germany, which provided the initial foundation for this decision—it would need to be assessed whether there exists a treaty between Iran and that country recognizing the ICJ as a dispute-settlement mechanism. Nonetheless, this decision can certainly be raised within United Nations bodies such as the Security Council and the General

Assembly, and it is advisable to pursue that avenue as well, given the serious legal consequences and ramifications of the move. **If such a resolution were to be implemented, what concrete legal effects would it have on diplomatic relations, official missions, and institutional interactions between Iran and EU member states?** Imagine, in a hypothetical scenario, that Iran's armed forces, including the IRGC, were to become engaged with the armed forces of an EU member state. Under classical international law, international humanitarian law would apply in such a situation. But once a state labels part of another state's armed forces as terrorist, complex questions arise about the applicability of humanitarian law. For instance, if in a limited confrontation in the Persian Gulf, members of a French naval vessel were captured by Iranian forces, could

Troopers of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps stand guard as the IRGC takes delivery of 100 high-speed boats in Bandar Abbas, Iran on May 28, 2020. **IRNA**

the state that has designated the IRGC as terrorist reasonably expect its personnel to be treated as prisoners of war? As you know, when an entity is designated as terrorist, one of the legal consequences is that its members are deprived of prisoner-of-war status if captured. These are just some examples of the serious and complex legal issues that the designation of the IRGC as terrorist could create—not only for the IRGC itself but also for European states. In other words, the consequences of this decision will not remain on paper, and the likelihood of significant legal complications—even for European governments—is very high.

The interview first appeared on IRNA in Persian.

Diplomatic deal still within reach



By Rahman Ghahremanpour
International affairs analyst

OPINION

The US military buildup in the Persian Gulf serves both diplomacy and the possibility of confrontation with Iran. Under President Donald Trump's coercive diplomacy framework, these two approaches do not clash with each other; rather, they go hand in hand. As seen during Israel's 12-day war against Iran in June, Trump typically starts by calling for talks and a diplomatic deal, and if such an agreement falls through, he then turns to military action. From this perspective, the current US naval presence can be read as having both purposes. That said, as a global power, the United States would need to secure at least a minimum level of justification in public opinion before launching any military action. In the case of Venezuela, the justification Washington pursued was alleged cocaine trafficking by the government of president Nicolas Maduro to the United States, the resulting threat to US security, and the deaths of American youth due to drug



The illustration shows Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi (front) and US special envoy to the Middle East Steve Witkoff. **IRNA**

overdoses. In the case of Iran, it appears that Trump is seeking to follow a similar playbook:

first putting a diplomatic offer on the table and laying out conditions that are unlikely to be accepted by Iran, then telling the international community that Iran refused the deal and that military action has therefore become necessary. However, this does not mean that the diplomatic path has been completely shut down. A

diplomatic agreement remains possible, even though it would be extremely difficult. Achieving it would require, first and foremost, a shift in US policy and positions, followed by changes on the Iranian side. Several regional countries, including Turkey, have made efforts to open diplomatic channels between Tehran and

Washington. Unfortunately, regional states lack the leverage needed to influence White House policies in any meaningful way. At the same time, West Asian countries do not have a strong regional organization such as the European Union or ASEAN that carries significant weight in the global economy and politics. For this reason, I

view these regional diplomatic efforts with caution. Past experience, including the first Persian Gulf War, the invasion of Iraq, and strikes on nuclear facilities in Iran and Syria, as well as the overthrow of the government of Syrian president Bashar al-Assad, has shown that regional organizations in the Middle East unfortunately lack effectiveness and initiative, and are unable to alter Washington's policies. At present, Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed, the ruler of the United Arab Emirates, wields more influence in the United States than any other regional leader. This influence can be seen in his role in helping pave the way for peace between Azerbaijan and Armenia, as well as in the fact that, for the first time, trilateral talks between the United States, Russia and Ukraine were held in Abu Dhabi two weeks ago. At the next level, Saudi Arabia also appears to enjoy considerable clout in Washington for now. Therefore, if regional diplomacy is to gain traction, much will depend on the real decisions taken by Riyadh and Abu Dhabi regarding the current situation.

The article first appeared in Persian on IRNA.

AFC Futsal Asian Cup:

Iran sees off Afghanistan to set quarterfinal date with Uzbekistan



Iranian players react after a goal during a 5-2 victory over Afghanistan at the AFC Futsal Asian Cup in Jakarta, Indonesia, on February 1, 2026.

● AFC

Sports Desk

Iran survived a late scare from Afghanistan to secure a 5-2 victory and clinch top spot in Group D of the AFC Futsal Asian Cup in Jakarta, Indonesia.

A clean sweep of three group wins means the defending champions will continue their bid for a record-extending 14th title at the flagship continental event against Group C runners-up Uzbekistan in today's quarterfinal clash at the Jakarta International Velodrome.

The game will mark the third encounter between the two sides in two years. Vahid Shamsaei's men came out on top in a shootout after a 3-3 draw in the semifinals of the previous Asian Cup in Thailand, before winning 4-2 – again in the semifinals – at last November's Islamic Solidarity Games in Riyadh.

In a rematch of the 2-2 draw in

the Saudi capital, Iran took the lead in the 13th minute when Afghanistan goalkeeper Javad Safari parried Amirhossein Gholami's shot into the path of the onrushing Behrouz Azimi, who made no mistake from close range as Iran went into halftime leading 1-0.

Afghanistan pushed desperately for an equalizer after the break, leaving gaps at the back which Iran exploited in the 29th minute, breaking away from an Afghanistan corner as Gholami picked out prolific pivot Hossein Tayyebi to knock the ball home.

Iran extended its advantage a minute later when a Video Support review adjudged Safari to have fouled Tayyebi inside the semi-circle, with the Iranian captain converting from the spot for his third goal of the competition.

Afghanistan was also awarded a penalty in the 32nd minute, with Reza Hosseinpour reducing the deficit on the re-

bound after his spot kick was saved by Iranian goalkeeper Baqer Mohammadi.

Safari's deflected strike from distance a minute later set up a tense finale as Afghanistan threw bodies forward in search of an equalizer, only to be caught out once again on the counter, with Masoud Yousef (36th minute) and Mahdi Karimi (40th) settling the contest.

"We had some problems with timing and with the court," Shamsaei said after the game, adding, "Both teams have technical players so it was difficult to move the ball given the conditions." "Uzbekistan are one of the best teams in Asia and in the history of the tournament, they have always been part of the last four. It is unfortunate that two of the bigger names have to face each other and one of them will have to leave, but this is part of life and part of the game,"

added the Iranian head coach, whose team began the tournament with a 4-1 win against Malaysia, before defeating Saudi Arabia 2-0 in their second group outing. Earlier on the final day of the group phase, Japan pulled off a second-half fightback to edge four-time runner-up Uzbekistan 2-1 and finish top of Group C, setting up a highly anticipated quarterfinal clash with Afghanistan today.

The other last-eight match will see Group A winner Indonesia take on Group B runner-up Vietnam.

A victory against Uzbekistan would send Shamsaei's men into Thursday's semifinals against either Thailand or Iraq.

Thailand – beaten by Iran in the 2024 final – also enjoyed a perfect run in Group B, while Iraq finished second in Group A after ending level on seven points with the host team.

Zagreb Open Ranking Series:

Yazdani aiming for statement return to international action

Sports Desk

All eyes will be on Hassan Yazdani when the Iranian freestyle wrestling superstar makes his first international appearance since the 2024 Paris Olympics at the opening Ranking Series event of the season, which begins Wednesday in Zagreb, Croatia. Sidelined by a shoulder injury following his setback in the 86kg final in Paris, Yazdani – winner of a national-record 10 world and Olympic medals – marked his return to wrestling mat with two emphatic victories in the Olympic 97kg category on the final day of the Iranian Wrestling

Premier League last December.

With his sights set on an elusive second Olympic gold at Los Angeles 2028, Yazdani will be looking to lay down a marker against the top 97kg contenders, including compatriot Amirali Azarpira, Russian great Abdurashid Sadulaev, American world champion Kyle Snyder, and Bahraini Olympic gold medalist Akhmed Tazhudinov, with a strong showing in the Croatian capital.

With the Zagreb Open serving as a key stage in the national team selection process ahead of this year's major events – including September's World

Championships in Manama – participation in the tournament comes as a relief for Iranian freestyle head coach Pejman Dorostkar and his Greco-Roman counterpart Hassan Rangraz, after their squads were granted late Croatian visas on Sunday amid recent internet restrictions in Iran. Joining Yazdani in the Iranian freestyle squad are Milad Valizadeh, Ali Yahyapour (57kg), Reza Mo'meni (61kg), Peyman Ne'mati (65kg), Sina Khalili, Ebrahim Elahi (70kg), Ali-Akbar Fazli (74kg), Adel Panahian, Sobhan Esmi (79kg), Ali Savadkouhi, Abolfazl Shamsipour (86kg), Abolfazl Rahmani, Mohammad-Mobin Azimi (92kg), and

Morteza Janmohammadzadeh (130kg).

The Greco-Roman competition will get underway on Friday at Arena Zagreb. Pouya Dadmarz, Mohammad Hosseinvand Panahi (55kg), Sajjad Abbaspour, Pouya Nasserpour (60kg), Erfan Jarkani, Meysam Dalkhani (63kg), Ahmadreza Mohsennejad, Mohammad Kamali (67kg), Mohammad-Javad Rezaei (72kg), Ahoura Boveiri, Amirmahdi Saeidinava, Ali Oskou (77kg), Abolfazl Mohammadi, Mohammadreza Mokhtari (82kg), Nasser Alizadeh, and Mohammad-Hadi Seydi (97kg) will represent Iran across eight weight divisions.



● FARSHAD BANDANI/IAWFIR

Fujairah Open International Taekwondo Championships: Ne'matzadeh strikes gold as Iranian girls bag seven medals

Sports Desk

Mobina Ne'matzadeh captured the -53kg gold



Iran's Mobina Ne'matzadeh (R) won the women's -53kg gold medal at the 13th Fujairah Open International Taekwondo Championships.

● WORLD TAEKWONDO

to spearhead Iran's seven-medal haul in the women's competition at the Fujairah Open In-

ternational Taekwondo Championships in the United Arab Emirates. With the tournament serving as a World Taekwondo G2 event and contributing valuable Olympic qualification ranking points, Sunday's triumph at Sheikh Zayed Sport City boosted Ne'matzadeh's chances in her bid for a berth at the Los Angeles 2028 Games, following her bronze-medal finish at Paris 2024.

Elsewhere in the women's competition, teenage sensation Saina Karimi (-46kg) – who claimed an impressive gold at last November's Islamic Solidarity Games in Riyadh

– along with Kowsar Asaseh (-62kg) and Fate-meh Ahmadi (+73kg), settled for silver medals in their respective weight classes.

Saina Alipour (-46kg), Maryam Malakoutikhah (-49kg), and Islamic Solidarity Games bronze medalist Melika Mirhosseini (-73kg), meanwhile, finished their campaigns with three consolation bronze medals. A total of 1,709 athletes – including 206 senior female competitors – from 66 countries took part across senior, junior, cadet, and children's divisions at the 13th edition of the prestigious tournament.

Taremi converts last-gasp spot-kick as Olympiacos rescues point at AEK

Sports Desk

In a dramatic finish to one of Greek football's biggest rivalries on Sunday night, Iranian striker Mahdi Taremi scored from the spot deep into stoppage time to help Olympiacos salvage a 1-1 draw away at AEK Athens, keeping pace with the home side and PAOK in the Super League title race. The derby at the Allwyn Arena in Nea Filadelfia seemed destined to be won by AEK after Barnabás Varga headed the hosts into the lead in the 59th minute. The Hungarian striker rose well from a Razvan Marin corner to direct the ball past Olympiacos goalkeeper Konstantinos Tzolakis, giving AEK what looked like a crucial advantage.

AEK continued to push for a second goal and even struck the crossbar, before

Olympiacos was awarded a controversial penalty by the VAR in the 16th minute of added time.

Taremi stepped up to take the spot kick and calmly converted, securing a share of the points for the visitors.

The last-gasp equalizer took Taremi's tally to 15 goals and four assists in 25 appearanc-

es across all competitions since the Iranian striker joined the club from Internazionale last summer.

The draw left AEK top of the Greek Super League standings with 45 points, one clear of PAOK and two above third-placed Olympiacos, with both chasers holding a game in hand.



Olympiacos striker Mahdi Taremi (2nd L) celebrates his equalizer with teammates during a 1-1 draw against AEK Athens in Nea Filadelfia, Greece, on February 1, 2026.

● GEORGIA PANAGOPOULOU/APE-MPA

World’s first Rafugari museum to open in Babolsar

Iranica Desk

The Director General of the Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Organization of Mazandaran Province announced that a license has been issued for the establishment of the world’s first Rafugari (traditional mending) museum in Babolsar. The museum is scheduled to open in May 2026, coinciding with Cultural Heritage Week.

Hossein Izadi said the Babolsar Rafugari Museum has been established with the aim of safeguarding the authentic and ancient art of Rafugari, highlighting its place within Iran’s handicrafts, and transferring the knowledge and experience of master craftsmen to future generations. He noted that the museum will showcase tools, works, traditional techniques, and the historical evolution of this tra-

ditional art, according to IRNA. He added that the launch of the museum will not only play an important role in preserving and promoting traditional arts, but can also develop into a center for education, research, and cultural tourism in the province, attracting art and cultural heritage enthusiasts from across the country.

Describing the creation of the world’s first specialized Rafugari museum as a valuable step toward protecting intangible cultural heritage and reviving traditional arts, Izadi said Rafugari is an integral part of Iranian cultural identity. He emphasized that the museum can further enhance Mazandaran’s cultural standing at both national and international levels.

Izadi also stated that the issuance of the museum’s operating license aligns with efforts to support specialized and thematic museums,

adding that, in terms of content and function, the museum has the potential to become one of the country’s most distinctive and prominent museums.

Hamidreza Akbari, founder and director of the Babolsar Rafugari Museum, underscored the importance of establishing the museum, noting that Rafugari is not merely a technical skill but a component of Iranian cultural identity, indigenous knowledge, and lifestyle that has received less attention in recent years.

He added that the establishment of the world’s first specialized Rafugari museum is an effort to document, record, and pass on the experiences of master craftsmen to future generations, expressing hope that the museum will become a hub for education, research, and the attraction of cultural tourists.



● 3sot-carpet.com

Comprehensive revitalization planned for historic Kerman Bazaar



● chtn.ir

Iranica Desk

Kerman’s historic bazaar is poised for a comprehensive revitalization, with initiatives focused on organizing its historical and cultural axis to enhance urban tourism, preserve the city’s rich heritage, and strengthen the local economy, the Director General of the province’s Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Organization said during a field visit.

Seyyed Moayed Mohsenzadeh, while assessing the current conditions and physical state of this valuable complex, emphasized that the historic Kerman Bazaar, as one of the oldest and most prominent historical and cultural axes of the city, plays an irreplaceable role in shaping urban identity, fostering

social vitality, and supporting economic prosperity. He noted that revitalizing the bazaar is an essential step toward achieving sustainable tourism development, according to chtn.ir.

Referring to the objectives of the field visit, Mohsenzadeh explained that it was conducted to carefully evaluate existing conditions, identify challenges, damages, and specific needs, and assess service provision, urban landscape quality, and the utilization of historical and cultural assets. The insights gathered, he added, will form the basis for drafting and implementing a comprehensive, phased plan aimed at improving the historical and cultural axis of the Kerman Bazaar.

Highlighting the importance of

coordination among relevant authorities, Mohsenzadeh stated that successfully organizing the historic bazaar requires synergy among responsible institutions, urban management bodies, trade guilds, and shopkeepers. He stressed that achieving these goals will not be possible without active social participation and the collaboration of all stakeholders, while simultaneously preserving historical authenticity, safeguarding architectural and cultural values, and enhancing the overall environment of the bazaar.

Mohsenzadeh also underscored the bazaar’s role in shaping tourists’ experiences, describing it as one of the city’s most significant tourist destinations. He noted that a well-planned revitalization could improve

visitor experiences, increase the length of tourist stays, and strengthen Kerman’s image at both national and international levels. Such initiatives, he emphasized, will not only promote tourism but also foster economic growth, support local businesses, and revive the cultural and social functions of the bazaar.

He affirmed that the Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Organization, taking a participatory and forward-looking approach, is committed to revitalizing the Kerman Bazaar so that this historic complex — considered the beating heart of the city — can play an even more effective role in sustainable tourism development and in improving the quality of life for the city’s residents.

Reading Room

Enduring value of book in digital age



By Amirreza Asnafi
Associate Professor of Information and Knowledge Studies

At a time when the world is moving at an unprecedented pace through technological, informational, and communicational transformations, reflection on the foundational values of human culture appears more essential than ever — particularly as our attitude toward books, this civilization-shaping phenomenon, is increasingly being challenged. Recently, I read an article by a respected academic asserting that encouraging traditional reading is equivalent to promoting backwardness. As a librarian, an educator in this field, and someone who trains young librarians in this country, this claim prompted serious reflection. First, it remains unclear what is meant by “traditional books” or “traditional reading.” A book is fundamentally a medium of information; it is neither traditional nor modern. At most, one can distinguish between its physical and electronic formats. In no library anywhere in the world is the physical

book — or the act of reading it — described as “traditional,” not even in societies that pioneered electronic book technologies. The notion of “traditional books” or “traditional reading” is a claim that is not only scientifically and culturally inaccurate, but also potentially harmful. Such framing can foster misconceptions within society and weaken the standing of books, reading, and the circulation of ideas. Books are neither symbols of backwardness nor relics of a pre-industrial era; rather, they have served as the axis of intellectual transformation, the foundation of civilizations, and the source of major innovations throughout history — and they continue to do so today.

Inviting people to read is an invitation to think, to understand deeply, to analyze, and to reflect — qualities that are more vital in the digital age than ever before. Technology may accelerate our movement, but it is thought that gives that movement direction. If reading books is labeled as backwardness, then we must also accept that human civilization itself — science, philosophy, law, civil liberties, academic achievements, and even contemporary technologies — has

been built upon this so-called “backwardness.” Books carry civilization and preserve collective memory. History clearly demonstrates that no society has progressed without the transmission of written knowledge. The book was the first medium that allowed thought to move beyond geographical boundaries and across generations. If we speak of tradition, we must recognize that tradition signifies continuity in historical wisdom, not intellectual rigidity. In fact, reading is a means of overcoming stagnation and entering the domain of active human thought.

All major scientific and intellectual revolutions have emerged from books. Galileo, Kant, Avicenna, Farabi, Descartes, Newton, Marx, Darwin, Russell, Popper, Habermas, Hannah Arendt, Morteza Motahhari, Allameh Tabatabaee, and hundreds of other thinkers transformed the modern world through their books — not through social media posts. This observation does not imply rejecting or ignoring new media; rather, it underscores the fundamental distinction between technological bias and human-centered thinking.



● ibna.ir

Technological transformations are both valuable and necessary. However, a common error in the digital age is technological obsession and the illusion of knowledge created by immersion in technology — the belief that technological tools can replace thinking itself. Such a misconception can intensify information gaps and lead to a burdensome form of ignorance. Reading books, whether in print or digital form, remains a gradual and profound process that fosters structured and meaningful understanding.

Information consumption on social media is largely superficial, fragmented, and emotionally driven. While technology can increase the speed of information transmission, it cannot guarantee the quality of comprehension. For this reason, UNESCO, the International Federation of Library Associations, and even global forums focused on artificial intelligence continue to recognize reading literacy and deep reading as essential skills for the twenty-first century. Reading books is, ultimately, an exercise in thinking. From

the perspective of cognitive science, sustained reading enhances concentration, strengthens memory, deepens conceptual analysis, and improves problem-solving abilities. Such depth of understanding cannot be achieved through hurried and fragmented information consumption. In a world where information is fluid, rapid, and often shallow, a call for deep reading is, above all, a defense of intellectual independence.

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Iran pledges funding discipline as Fajr Int'l Theater Festival closes in Tehran



Artists, officials and guests gather on stage during the closing ceremony of the 44th Fajr International Theater Festival in the Iranian capital Tehran on February 1, 2026 with festival insignia and national flags displayed behind them as the audience looks on.

● AMIN JALALI/IRNA

Arts & Culture Desk

Iran's Culture and Islamic Guidance Minister Abbas Salehi said the gov-

ernment had honored its financial commitments to theater groups despite tight resources, as the 44th Fajr International Theater

Festival wrapped up on Sunday in Tehran, signaling a cautious effort to sustain the country's cultural economy under fiscal strain, he

said. Salehi said theater had "moved alongside society through every phase of Iran's history" and described the festival, held under the slogan "Solidarity with Hope", as part of a broader push to keep cultural production alive amid economic constraints, dolat.ir reported.

"Our resources are not high, nor even average," Salehi said. "Yet this year we ensured that all payments promised to theater groups were settled in full, on schedule, and with a slight increase on earlier commitments."

He added that the ministry had sought to remain "faithful to its undertakings in both substance and timing".

The annual festival, a flagship state-backed cultural event, is closely watched by Iran's artistic community as a barometer of public funding and policy priorities. Salehi said the ministry had operated "within existing capacity", un-

derscoring budget discipline while attempting to shield performing arts from deeper cutbacks.

He said the closing ceremony effectively marked the starting point for preparations for the 45th edition, framing continuity as a policy goal. "Theater has always accompanied life and will continue to do so," he said.

Salehi also addressed institutional reforms, saying spending on a permanent secretariat for the Fajr festivals had been aimed at establishing a stable, long-term administrative base rather than a one-year structure. "The level of expenditure reflects a permanent and sustainable secretariat," he said, noting the absence of such an entity in previous years.

On music and broader festival policy, Salehi said authorities were seeking a calibrated approach. "We do not want festivals to be defined by excessive cheerfulness, nor to drift away from the natural course of music," he said, adding that cul-

tural events should reflect prevailing national conditions without creating a "heavy and restrictive atmosphere" for artists and audiences.

He described the target as a "balanced, acceptable middle ground". The ceremony, attended by senior cultural officials, artists and provincial representatives, formally closed the 10-day event, which featured stage and street performances in Tehran and several regional centers, including Kerman. Festival secretary Vahid Fakhri Mousavi described the event as "the new year moment of Iranian theater", saying the festival's only expectation was "to continue, to remain, and to keep the stage alive".

The Fajr International Theater Festival is part of a broader cluster of cultural events held annually to mark the anniversary of Iran's 1979 Islamic revolution, carrying both artistic and policy significance for a sector operating under prolonged economic pressure.

Iran registers ownership of 16 wetlands as government steps up conservation drive

Social Desk

Iran has issued state ownership deeds for 16 nationally significant wetlands, Vice President and Head of the Department of Environment (DoE) Shina Ansari said on Monday in Tehran, marking a legal push to shore up protection of fragile ecosystems under mounting climatic and structural pressure. Speaking at a World Wetlands Day ceremony attended by First Vice President Mohammad Reza Aref, Ansari said official documentation had been completed for wetlands including Hoz-e Soltan, Quri Gol, Salehiyeh, Parishan and Arjan, Alagol and Ajigol, and Baram Alwan, with title deeds registered in the name

of the Islamic Republic of Iran, IRNA reported. She credited inter-agency coordination, notably with the State Organization for Registration of Deeds and Properties, for accelerating the process. "Iran is the birthplace of global wetland conservation, yet our wetlands are under severe stress," Ansari said, citing constrained resources, engineering-led approaches and neglect of ecological water needs. She described wetlands as among the country's most contested environmental challenges. Ansari said the government had launched corrective measures, with the National Wetland Management Coordination Headquarters meeting regularly and following up decisions

"with seriousness". Ensuring environmental water rights, restoring degraded sites and documenting indigenous and traditional knowledge form the backbone of the strategy, which she called "an investment in the future". Local communities, she said, had historically preserved wetlands even during prolonged droughts by relying on native knowledge, prompting the department to blend traditional practices with modern management. Tehran is also pursuing cross-sectoral reforms to overhaul decision-making structures and enforce an integrated approach to river basin governance, with provincial committees chaired by governors convening on a continuous



basis. Over the past year, Iran secured Ramsar Site status for the Gandoman wetland and introduced three "wetland cities" internationally. Ansari said Iran had also retained the regional Ramsar Convention Centre, which supports 15 countries, after plans to relocate it to an Arab state were reversed, extending its presence in Iran for another three years.

Roughly 36% of Iran's dam reservoir capacity still held despite dry conditions

Social Desk

Iran's dam reservoirs are operating at just 36% of capacity, with 64% left empty, as water inflows decline and storage levels fall sharply in the current water year that began on September 23. From the start of the water year to February 1, total inflows to dams nationwide reached 7.34 billion cubic meters, down 4% from 7.64 billion cubic meters over the same period last year. Total outflows also dropped markedly, falling 26% year on year, reflecting tighter water management amid shrinking reserves, IRNA reported. The figures underline mounting stress on Iran's water system, already strained by prolonged drought, uneven rainfall and structurally high demand from agriculture and large urban centers. Lower inflows and reduced releases have translated into a sharp erosion of stored water, raising concerns ahead of the peak irrigation and summer consumption seasons. The total volume of water currently held in dam reservoirs stands at 18.77 billion cubic meters, a 16% decline from 22.34 billion cubic meters recorded a year earlier. Despite the cut in outflows, storage levels have continued to slide, highlighting the limited buffering capacity of existing infrastructure under persistently weak hydrological conditions.

Conditions are particularly acute at several strategically important dams. At least 16 major reservoirs report filling rates below 20%, including the Amir Kabir, Lar, Latian-Mamloo, Zayandeh Rud, Doosti, Torogh, 15 Khorad, Boukan, Sefid Rud, Tahm, Tangouyeh Sirjan, Voshmgir, Golestan, Boostan, Rudbal Darab, Chah Nimeh-ha, Saveh and Kamal Saleh dams. Many of these facilities supply water to densely populated provinces or agriculturally intensive basins, amplifying the economic and social risks associated with depleted storage. Rainfall has offered only limited relief. Cumulative precipitation across the country reached 108.7 millimeters during the same period. This remains below the long-term average of 111.6 millimeters, though it is significantly higher than the 56.9 millimeters recorded in the comparable stretch of the previous water year. Even so, rainfall was unevenly distributed, with five provinces registering zero precipitation, underscoring persistent regional imbalances. The data point to a water year marked by constrained inflows, cautious releases and declining reserves, reinforcing warnings from Iranian water authorities about the need for sustained demand management, especially in farming, and heightened vigilance in major urban and industrial hubs as the year progresses.

'Guardians of the Sun' caught between childhood, adolescence

By Neda Almasian Tehrani
Member of Iranian Society of Film Critics and Writers (ISFCW)

OPINION

The animated feature 'Guardians of the Sun', directed by Emad Rahmani and Mehrdad Mehrabi, stumbles less because of technical shortcomings or production constraints than because it falls victim to a fundamental confusion about its intended audience. The film opened the 44th edition of the Fajr Film Festival on January 31. The film appears to be made for children and teenagers, yet in practice it neither aligns with their mental world nor employs a language, humor, or narrative structure calibrated to that age group. The result is a work suspended awkwardly between childishness and a veneer of adulthood, ultimately satisfying neither. 'Guardians of the Sun' tells the story of a teenage boy named Bahram who, together with his friend Jano, embarks on a perilous journey to find the legendary sword of Khashayar. The sword is said to possess the power to alter destiny, and various forces are competing to seize it. Along this quest, Bahram and Jano en-

counter obstacles, enemies, and situations meant to transform them from ordinary adolescents into responsible heroes. Yet this heroic arc rests less on dramatic logic than on hurried, and at times unjustified, plot progression. One of the film's most serious flaws is its use of certain expressions and verbal jokes that, while they may add a layer of humor, are clearly inappropriate for the target audience of children and teenagers. These jokes do not grow organically out of the situations, nor do they serve the narrative. They feel more like attempts to amuse adults who may not even be the film's primary viewers. This tonal duality prevents the film from forging a sustained connection with its audience. 'Guardians of the Sun' presents an image of adolescence that bears little resemblance to today's Iranian youth and instead recalls dated, fossilized clichés. The characters' concerns, reactions, and even their manner of speaking seem to belong to decades past. The film makes no real effort to grasp the lived world of contemporary children and teenagers, with its more complex relationships, different sense of humor, and sharper critical outlook. This gap makes it difficult for younger viewers to see themselves

reflected in Bahram or Jano. The screenplay is crowded with plot threads that are introduced but never properly resolved. Subplots, secondary characters, and even certain dramatic motivations are left underdeveloped and abandoned midway. The film is constantly pushing forward, but this movement resembles a cursory passing through stations rather than a heroic journey grounded in narrative logic. The lack of focus on a coherent storyline causes the narrative to lose cohesion, with haste replacing suspense. Rahmani and Mehrabi, who have previously worked mainly in short animation and commissioned or television projects, face a serious challenge here in handling feature-length storytelling. Their background in short-form work is plainly visible: The structure is more episodic than cinematic. The film lacks clear peaks and valleys, and turning points arrive one after another without sufficient buildup. Visually, the film remains within the average standards of Iranian animation. The problem, however, is that the imagery does not serve the story. The design of spaces and characters does little to deepen the film's world and



functions largely as a neutral backdrop. When the narrative falters, the visuals cannot step in to save it. 'Guardians of the Sun' is, above all, an example of a project that urgently needed serious reconsideration at the screenplay stage and a clearer understanding of its audience. It is neither childlike enough to appeal to today's children nor mature enough to fully engage teenagers. Abandoned plotlines, an uneven tone, and distance from the contemporary world of its viewers turn this animation into a confused work. More than a failed experiment, 'Guardians of the Sun' serves as a warning about the necessity of taking audience awareness seriously in animation for children and young people.

The article first appeared on IRNA in Persian.