

Iran, Italy launch first joint children's painting contest to foster cultural exchange



Arts & Culture Desk

Iran's Institute for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults, in cooperation with the cultural attaché of the Iranian embassy in Italy, has issued a call for entries for the first joint Iran-Italy children's painting competition, aimed at deepening mutual understanding among Iranian and Italian children and adolescents of each other's cultures and traditions. The competition is open to children and teenagers aged six to 15 and will be held in three age categories, six to eight, nine to 12, and 13 to 15.

Participants are invited to submit artworks on a wide range of themes, including the customs and traditions of their own country, the natural and cultural beauty of their homeland, the two ancient civilizations of Iran and Italy in human history, an imaginary journey to Iran or Italy, national days, national flags and heroes of the two countries, as well as the preservation of cultural heritage. Paintings may be created using any tools, materials or techniques.

The deadline for submitting works to the inaugural Iran-Italy children's painting competition has been set for April 21, 2026. Five selected works in each of the three age groups will receive the jury's medal and certificate of honor, along with valuable Iranian toys. In addition, all works selected for exhibition will be awarded certificates of honor and gifts. The selected artworks will be displayed in separate exhibitions in Rome and Tehran, with participants from each country invited to attend special ceremonies.

Each participant is allowed to submit only one artwork, and all submitted paintings must be original and unpublished works by the participant. Entries that use copyrighted images, including characters from television programs, films, video games or books, will not be accepted.

Submitted works will not be returned, and all rights to the artworks will belong to the competition organizers. In some cases, the submitted paintings may be loaned for activities and events promoting children's art education and international cultural exchanges between Iran and Italy.

At closing ceremony of 43rd Book of the Year Award Pezeshkian stresses support for book industry to promote reading

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President Masoud Pezeshkian (3rd l) hands over an award to a winner during the 43rd Book of the Year Award ceremony in Tehran on February 8, 2026.

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system as stemming from distorted understanding of concepts and disregard for divine guidance as laid out in the Holy Quran.

Culture Minister Abbas Salehi, speaking at the same ceremony, said Iranians, through their books in various fields of knowledge, wrote and nurtured the golden history of Islamic civilization, adding that Iran's national identity is, in many ways, indebted to books. He said that even before the advent of Islam, Iran possessed a civilization rich in love for books and an interest in reading. "Through books, human beings grow and gain experience. Thanks to books, people find their way out of darkness and are guided toward light," he said.

Referring to the capacity of books to shape human understanding and belief, Pezeshkian noted that while individuals may adopt confrontational positions toward spoken words, the very nature of books encourages reflection and deep thinking, reducing resistance to accepting new concepts.

"This is because reading and studying give people the opportunity to verify and reassess," he added.

Pezeshkian went on to describe the main causes behind certain weaknesses and shortcomings in the country's management



past 45 years.

He also noted that when the Islamic Republic was established, women accounted for only eight percent of authors, a figure that rose to 29% by the fourth decade after the revolution and has now reached nearly 40%.

"We have moved closer to a form of gender justice in authorship, which is one of the achievements of the Islamic Revolution in the field of books," Salehi said.

Iran's Book of the Year Award is held annually in February, with prizes awarded to selected authors, translators and scholars. The award was first established in 1956 with the aim of encouraging contributors to knowledge and culture in Iran. Until 1978, the award was presented in fields including literature and literary studies, humanities, and social and educational sciences for children and adolescents. With the intensification of events

surrounding the Islamic Revolution, the award was suspended, before being revisited in 1983 at the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance. In 1984, regulations governing the selection of the Book of the Year were approved by then culture minister Mohammad Khatami. Since then, the Book of the Year Award ceremony has been held annually during the ten-day celebrations marking the anniversary of the Islamic Revolution.

Global powers in ...

Role of extra-regional powers

Recent United States statements and military signaling toward Iran should be understood less as a reversal of strategy

and more as a continuation of coercive deterrence within a narrower framework of crisis management. While Washington has issued warnings and demonstrated military readiness, these actions do not indicate a return to regime change as a central objective. Instead, they reflect an effort to reassert red lines and prevent escalation in an already volatile environment.

Structurally, the broader trend remains unchanged. United States troop levels in the Middle East peaked around 2011 during operations in Iraq and Afghanistan and have declined substantially since. Pentagon posture documents over the past decade consistently emphasize deterrence, freedom of navigation, and alliance reassurance, while avoiding commitments to large-scale ground operations. Even when threats are issued, they are calibrated to signal consequences rather than initiate transformative military campaigns. The current approach blends diplomatic pressure, military signaling, and economic leverage to manage crises rather than resolve them. Washington's priority is to prevent regional escalation that could disrupt

global energy markets, threaten maritime corridors, or force deeper US military involvement at a time when strategic focus is increasingly directed toward East Asia and Europe. Threats, in this context, function as instruments of containment rather than preludes to war.

This does not amount to disengagement. US naval deployments, air assets, and missile defense systems remain active in the region. However, their purpose is deterrence and reassurance, not political engineering. The lessons of the past two decades are evident. Military superiority alone has not produced durable political outcomes, and domestic appetite in the United States for open-ended Middle Eastern conflicts remains limited.

Diplomatic tools & deterrence

Diplomacy continues to play a central role, but its form has changed. The era of comprehensive peace processes has largely given way to continuous crisis diplomacy. According to assessments by the International Crisis Group, indirect talks, third party mediation, and deconfliction mechanisms have been instrumental in preventing escalation across several regional flashpoints in recent years. Multilateral frameworks remain relevant only when they are narrowly focused and operational rather than

declaratory. Regional security dialogues that concentrate on practical issues such as maritime safety, air-space coordination, and communication channels during crises have proven more effective than broader political initiatives. The objective today is not trust-building in a normative sense, but predictability. Deterrence functions when red lines are understood, even if they are not formally acknowledged.

Security & economic consequences
The Persian Gulf remains one of the most economically sensitive regions in the world. According to the International Energy Agency, roughly 20% of global oil consumption passes through the Strait of Hormuz. Even limited disruptions or heightened risk perceptions can trigger sharp price volatility. Historical data shows that periods of acute tension in the Persian Gulf have led to oil price increases of 10% to 20% within short time frames.

The implications extend beyond energy. The World Trade Organization has documented how instability in key maritime corridors increases shipping insurance costs, disrupts supply chains, and contributes to inflationary pressures globally. While regional actors possess significant military and logistical capacity, containment of crises depends less on capability than on political restraint

and clear communication. The most serious risk is not deliberate escalation, but miscalculation in an environment where signaling is often ambiguous.

Future scenarios

In the short to medium-term, the most plausible trajectory is the continuation of a contested status quo. This pattern has been evident since at least 2019, marked by periodic escalation followed by rapid de-escalation. Major regional and extra-regional actors appear determined to avoid full scale war, not because of reconciliation, but because the economic and political costs are widely understood.

At the same time, there is a gradual shift in the sources of power. Economic resilience, technological capability, and diplomatic leverage are increasingly central to strategic influence, alongside military strength. A fundamental transformation of the regional order would require either a major diplomatic realignment or a systemic shock such as a prolonged energy disruption or a large inter-state conflict. At present, available indicators suggest neither is imminent. The region is entering a prolonged phase of managed instability, where conflict remains persistent but is deliberately kept below the threshold of full-scale war.