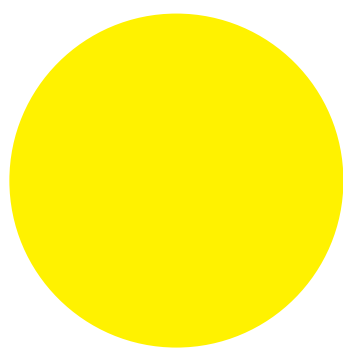


At closing ceremony of 43rd Book of the Year Award

Pezeshkian stresses support for book industry to promote reading

8 >



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Global powers in Middle East: a strategy of containment, not war

Emphasizing US role & its crisis-management approach



By Janvi Sonaiya
Journalist

OPINION EXCLUSIVE

In a geopolitical analysis, the most consequential shift in the Middle East's security environment is the steady erosion of clear deterrence thresholds. For much of the late twentieth century, regional stability rested on a limited number of predictable fault lines and relatively rigid state behavior. That architecture has weakened. Today, the region operates in a condition of persistent low intensity confrontation, where coercion is continuous but escalation is carefully managed.

Data from the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project indicates that while the frequency of direct interstate wars has declined, incidents involving non-state actors, militias, and proxy forces have increased steadily since the mid-2010s. This reflects a strategic preference among regional powers to operate below the threshold of full-scale war. Security calculations are now shaped less by ideology and more by cost benefit analysis, domestic political constraints, and reputational signaling. Alignments are therefore fluid rather than fixed. States cooperate on specific interests such as intelligence sharing, energy logistics, and maritime security while remaining adversaries on other fronts. This is not bloc formation in the classical sense. It is a form of tactical convergence designed to reduce vulnerability rather than resolve conflict.

Page 8 >

The result is a fragile equilibrium that depends heavily on restraint and constant recalibration.

Araghchi: Diplomacy sole way to resolve ambiguities about Iran's nuclear program

2 >



Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi (2nd L) takes part in the National Congress on the Islamic Republic's Foreign Policy in Tehran on February 8, 2026.

● MIZAN



Petropars: Farzad B joint gas field enters operational phase after long hiatus

3 >



Iran's chief rabbi: Iranian Jews have never felt like outsiders

Religious coexistence in Iran; rare, enduring experience in West Asia

4 >



AFC Futsal Asian Cup: 'Toughest of the lot': Shamsaei relishes hard-fought 14th title

6 >



Iran's hot springs fuel wellness tourism across diverse regions

7 >



Araghchi: Diplomacy sole way to resolve ambiguities about Iran's nuclear program

International Desk

Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said Tehran is ready to resolve ambiguities about its peaceful nuclear program, noting that diplomacy is the only way to do as other paths have not yielded results.

He made the remarks at the National Congress on the Islamic Republic's Foreign Policy in Tehran on Sunday, two days after Iran and the United States held indirect nuclear talks in Oman following weeks of escalating tensions caused by the US war rhetoric against Iran.

"We are a man of diplomacy, we are also a man of war; not in the sense that we seek war, but ... we are ready to fight so that no one dares to fight us," he said. Currently, he added, the foremost principle of Iran's foreign policy is dignity, which means preserving independence, negating domination and defending the country's sovereignty.

Araghchi further emphasized that Iran's response depends on the tone adopted by others toward the country, saying diplomacy will be met with the same language, as it is the case with the use of force and the language of respect.

He expressed Tehran's readiness to resolve ambiguities about its peaceful nuclear program, noting that diplomacy is the only way to do as other paths have not yielded results. "They (the enemies) bombed our facilities, but they failed to achieve the result they wanted. Knowledge cannot be destroyed by bombing; technology cannot be destroyed. There is technology and there is knowledge, so there is no choice but to negotiate," he said.

Additionally, in his remarks, the top diplomat stressed that Iran's official right to the peaceful nuclear energy program exists and that the country wants its right to be respected. "I believe the secret of the Is-



Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi speaks during the National Congress on the Islamic Republic's Foreign Policy in Tehran on February 8, 2026.
● MIZAN

lamic Republic of Iran's power lies in its ability to stand against bullying, domination and pressures from others," Araghchi said.

"They fear our atomic bomb, while we are not pursuing an atomic bomb. Our atomic bomb is the power to say no to the great powers. The secret of the Islamic Republic's power is to say no to the powers."

Meanwhile, the foreign minister referred to the illegal US-Israeli aggression against Iran that killed at least 1,064 people between June 13 and 27, 2025.

He said the war would have remained a stain in Iranian history if the nation had not resisted the enemies.

"The indomitability of the Iranian people had to be proven,



and this was proven in the 12-day war. Those who ... tweeted "unconditional surrender" on

the third day of the war... sent a message of "unconditional ceasefire" on the 12th day.

Why? Because we were not afraid of war and resisted," he pointed out.

President: Iran's nuclear logic rooted in rights enshrined in NPT



Masoud Pezeshkian
● president.ir

President Masoud Pezeshkian hailed the new round of indirect nuclear talks between Iran and the United States as a "step forward," emphasizing that Tehran's rationale concerning the issue is based on the rights enshrined in the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

"The Iran-US talks, which were held in light of requests from friendly governments in the region, were a step forward. Dialogue has always been our strategy for a peaceful resolution. Our logic in the nuclear issue centers on the rights enshrined in the NPT," Pezeshkian wrote in a

post published on the social media platform X on Sunday, Press TV reported. He added that the Iranian nation has always responded to the language of respect reciprocally, yet it never endures the language of force.

A new round of Iran-US nuclear negotiations, mediated by Oman, ended in the Omani capital on Friday after several hours of indirect talks. The discussions, which kicked off in the morning, were facilitated by Omani Foreign Minister Badr bin Hamad Al Busaidi. The negotiating delegations of Iran and the US exchanged a range of viewpoints, considerations, and approaches through the top Omani diplomat.

Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi has described

the talks as a good start overall, saying that Iran's positions were clearly conveyed and its concerns were transferred to the US negotiators.

On the nuclear front, Iran insists on its legal right to enrich uranium on its own soil, describing the issue as a red line in the talks. From Tehran's perspective, any potential technical measures can only be considered within a framework that recognizes this right, and any preconditions beyond it would be seen as a sign of bad faith by the other side.

Iran had held five rounds of talks on a replacement for the 2015 nuclear deal prior to the US-Israeli airstrikes on the country and its nuclear facilities in mid-June.

Iran's top general says country has no intention of initiating a regional war



Chief of Staff of the Iranian Armed Forces Major General Abdolrahim Mousavi addresses a group of Iranian commanders and servicemen of the Army's Air Force and Air Defense Force during a ceremony in Tehran, Iran, on February 8, 2026.
● IRNA

National Desk

The Chief of Staff of the Iranian Armed Forces Major General Abdolrahim Mousavi said on Sunday that Iran has no intention of starting a regional war but is fully prepared to deliver a decisive response to any act of aggression. "While we are prepared, we have no intention of starting a war in the region," Major General Abdolrahim Mousavi said on Sunday, addressing a group of Iranian commanders and servicemen of the Army's Air Force and Air Defense Force during a ceremony on the occasion of the Iranian Air Force Day. "Although the targets of a regional war would be the aggressors, it would nonetheless set back the region's progress and development for years, and the United States and the Zionist regime, as the warmongers, will be held responsible for its repercussions," he said. He underlined that Iran enjoys both the prowess and necessary preparations for a long-term war with the United States. It yet welcomes logical openings for negotiations without unreasonable preconditions,

the general stated.

General Mousavi said the Iranian nation has witnessed US atrocities, treacheries, deceptions, bullying, greed, domination-seeking, and inhumane desire for swallowing Iran over the past 47 years.

"All these have made this generation more serious, determined, capable, and resolute in standing up against this wicked enemy," he noted.

Earlier, the top commander warned of Iran's devastating response to hostile actions, stressing that any attempt to impose war on the country would end in certain failure.

He noted in a message issued on Saturday that the Iranian Air Force is currently at the highest level of preparedness and, in full coordination with other branches of the Armed Forces, is ready to confront any form of threat or aggression with a firm and forceful response.

The general also stated that Iran would never initiate a war, but stressed that it would not hesitate for a moment to decisively defend its national security, vital interests, and territorial integrity.

Former FM: Negotiations with US on right track

International Desk

Ali Akbar Salehi, the former Iranian foreign minister and the Head of the Iranology Foundation, said on Sunday that new round of negotiations between Iran and the United States are proceeding "on the right track".

"If certain international actors who are up to mischief are controlled, I feel that this time the right path is being gone down. The remarks by US President Donald Trump have been positive so far. To what extent



Ali Akbar Salehi
● MIZAN

he can be relied upon, however, is a separate matter," Salehi told IRNA on the sidelines of the National Congress on the Islamic Republic's

Foreign Policy in Tehran. The Iranian official also emphasized the necessity of domestic unity in foreign policy as the country has "enough en-

emies abroad".

Referring to the Iranian foreign minister's positive assessments of the first round of nuclear negotiations with the US, which were held in Oman on Friday, "I think if no particular incident comes up and we stand together within the country, this domestic unity will lead to an increase in power and provide strong support for our negotiator."

Iran and the US have launched new round of negotiations in Oman to resolve tensions over Iran's nuclear program.



Mohammad Ali Rajabi
Cartoonist

CARTOON



Petropars: Farzad B joint gas field enters operational phase after long hiatus

Economy Desk

Iran's Petropars Group announced on Sunday that after years of delay in the development of one of Iran's most important joint gas fields, Farzad B entered the operational phase with the preparation and loading of the first jacket for the wellhead platform.

The Farzad B gas field is one of Iran's most important yet challenging joint fields in the Persian Gulf and due to its proximity to Saudi Arabia and long delays in decision-making and implementation, the field has always been cited as an example of lost opportunities in the development of joint fields.

Hamidreza Saqafi, CEO of Petropars Group, said the construction of the offshore structure began in November 2024 at the Khorramshahr yard of the Iranian Offshore Engineering and Construction Company, and was completed and ready for loading within 15 months. Saqafi attributed the progress to round-the-clock efforts, continuous planning, close cooperation, and synergy with the Oil and Gas Company, and hailed such efforts as a step towards national interests. The CEO of Petropars Group stressed that the Farzad B gas field, after long delays, has entered the implementation phase with an operational approach based on domestic capabilities.

"The importance of Farzad B is not limited to a single construction or marine



project; rather, the development of this field can play a direct role in increasing the country's gas production capacity, reducing energy imbalance, and preventing uneven extraction from a shared field," he said.

"Accordingly, the successful implementation of this phase is considered a deci-

sive step towards paving the way for the full development of the field." Mehdi Saeedi Boroujeni, the project manager for the development of the

Farzad B field, also underlined that, given the completion of construction, the start of loading the offshore structure requires a full ebb tide and the beginning of a flood tide.

"It is essential that the time of the full ebb on the day of operations be in the early hours of the day, and the rate of increase in water level should be gentle, so that in case of any disruption, there is sufficient time for corrective actions," Saeedi Boroujeni said.

"It is expected that the loading operation will be carried out at the beginning of next week, followed by mooring and movement towards the installation site." Farzad B, which is known as Arabiyah in Saudi Arabia, lies 85 kilometers to the east of the Iranian port city of Bushehr and holds 23 trillion cubic feet (over 650 billion cubic meters) of natural gas.

Saudi Arabia has been pumping gas from its side of the field since 2016, when a Canadian-led consortium brought output to 1.2 billion cubic feet (nearly 34 million cubic meters) per day.

However, development on the Iranian side of the field had been stalled since 2014, when a consortium of three Indian state-owned companies abandoned the project because of foreign sanctions on Iran.

Iran then decided to use the services of domestic companies for a project that could play a major role in meeting the country's rising energy demand.

Chabahar-Zahedan railway to see transport of 8m tons of cargo, 2m passengers



Khatibi added that the 158-kilometer Zahedan-Khash route was inaugurated in 2022, and currently, the completion of the remaining 477 kilometers is on the agenda.

"The major achievement is the laying of 353 kilometers of track on this route over the past year, of which 200 kilometers have been completed in the last 4 months, despite all issues and problems," he said.

"With the good support of the Ministry of Roads and Urban Development and the Planning and Budget Organization, we succeeded in achieving unprecedented records in railway construction on this route." Khatibi underlined that the main goal of the project is to connect the oceanic port of Shahid Beheshti in Chabahar to an annual capacity of 8 million tons, as well as its very good hinterland, to the railway network.

"This project is not merely a provincial or national project, but in addition to transforming the east of the country in terms of traffic and the movement of goods and passengers, as well as tourist aspects, it is also considered by eastern neighboring countries, Indians, and CIS countries so that they can also utilize this capacity."

Economy Desk

The deputy of the construction and development of railways, ports, and airports of Iran's Construction and Development of Transportation Infrastructures Company reported on Sunday that with the completion of the Chabahar-Zahedan railway line by the year 2041, Iran is predicted to witness the annual transportation of 2 million passengers and 8 million tons of cargo through the strategic

railway line.

Abbas Khatibi said the completion of the Chabahar-Zahedan railway line is 635 kilometers long and has 89% physical progress, and all efforts are focused on the completion of track laying operations on the route by the end of the calendar year (March 20).

"More than 34 trillion rials have been invested and spent on this project to date, which, of course, its current value is more than 100 trillion rials," he said.

Iran pistachio exports hit \$730m by late December



Economy Desk

The director general of the office of cold-climate fruits and dried fruits of the horticulture affairs department of the Agriculture Ministry said 100,000 tons of pistachios, valued at 730 million dollars, were exported to 67 countries worldwide, including 18 European Union countries, by the end of December.

Dariush Salempour stressed that according to official statistics provided by Iran Customs, in the first nine months of the calendar year (started March 21, 2025), nearly 100,000 tons of pistachios (in-shell pistachios, pistachio kernels, green pistachio kernels, and other related products) were

exported to target countries, with the largest volume of exports going to Turkey, India, the United Arab Emirates, the Russian Federation, Kyrgyzstan, Iraq, Kazakhstan, Pakistan, and China.

"Last year, an unprecedented performance in pistachio production, processing, and export was recorded in the country, with over 175,000 tons of pistachios valued at 1.7 billion dollars being exported," he added.

Salempour estimated the production of fresh and dried pistachios in the country in 2025-2026 to be close to 300,000 tons, saying, "Iran ranks first in the world in terms of cultivated area, with over 600,000 hectares of pistachio orchards."

Private sector enters gas demand management with goal of 35% savings

A new data-driven model for managing natural gas consumption, centered on so-called energy service companies, has entered the implementation phase following the signing of 22 operational contracts between the National Iranian Gas Company and private-sector firms. The initiative aims to optimize consumption, reduce energy waste and cut end-use gas consumption by 25% to 35%, SHANA reported.

Official figures show that about 22% of the country's produced energy is lost at the final consumption stage. As a result, energy policy has shifted

from expanding production to managing demand. Under targets set in the country's Seventh Development Plan, the equivalent of 200 million cubic meters of gas per day must be recovered through efficiency measures by the end of the program. Against this backdrop, leveraging private-sector capacity for gas demand management has become a key priority of the 14th administration.

According to SHANA, two types of contracts have been defined for the program. Under the first model, an energy service company acts as a gas retailer,

taking responsibility for distribution and consumption management within a defined area. Under the second, companies focus solely on consumption optimization and generate revenue from energy savings certificates.

Estimates indicate that full implementation of the contracts could reduce end-use gas consumption by 25% to 35%. Beyond easing the country's energy imbalance, the measure is expected to channel gas resources more effectively to productive and energy-intensive industries, lower household utility bills, improve network effi-

ciency, enhance equipment quality and reduce environmental pollution.

Experts say the model could open new investment opportunities for the private sector and offer a replicable framework for sustainable energy management. Continuous monitoring, data collection and trend analysis are expected to help identify high-consumption points, optimize equipment scheduling and design economic incentives for consumers to change behavior.

Officials argue that the initiative is not merely a technical solution but a



comprehensive tool for advancing the country's economic, environmental and social objectives in energy management.

Iran's chief rabbi: Iranian Jews have never felt like outsiders

Religious coexistence in Iran; rare, enduring experience in West Asia



By Sadeq Dehqan
Staff writer

INTERVIEW

The presence of Jews in Iran is not confined to a contemporary religious minority. It is a deeply rooted narrative of shared life and history in the Iranian land. According to Younes Hamami Lalehzar, chief rabbi of Iran's Jewish community, this history "dates back more than 2,700 years and even predates the formation of a unified Iranian nation." From the settlement of the earliest Jewish communities in the western Iranian plateau to their gradual spread across central cities, traces of this long-standing presence are embedded in Iran's cultural geography. As he puts it, "today it is hard to find a city in Iran that does not bear some sign of the historical presence of Jews."

He says the history of Jews in Iran has been shaped far more by coexistence and friendship than by exclusion or erasure. Pointing to the role of Cyrus the Great in freeing Jews from Babylonian captivity, he stresses that "Jews have always regarded themselves as indebted to Iranians, especially Cyrus the Great," a perspective that, in his view, has secured a special place for Iran and Iranians in Jewish historical memory.

Referring to the continuation of this coexistence after the advent of Islam, the chief rabbi highlights shared religious and ethical principles between Judaism and Islam as the backbone of a lasting bond between Iranian Jews and Muslims. That bond, he says, has surfaced repeatedly during critical historical moments, from the Islamic Revolution and the Iran-Iraq war to recent years. Comparing the situation of Jews in Iran with that in parts of the region, he notes: "While pressure in many Middle Eastern countries forced Jewish communities to leave their homelands, Iran's Jewish community remained after the 1979 Islamic Revolution and continued its life."

In the following interview, Iran Daily speaks with Rabbi Lalehzar, a physician, to present a clear and grounded picture of Jewish life and long-standing coexistence in Iran.

IRAN DAILY: Could you explain the historical background of the Jewish presence in Iran and the current situation of the Jewish community in the country?

LALEHZAR: The presence of Jews in Iran goes back a very long way, spanning roughly 2,700 years, even before Iran took shape as a unified entity through the union of the Persians and the Medes. As recorded in the Hebrew Bible, in the Second Book of Kings, Chapter 17, when the Assyrian king attacked the Holy Land and seized its northern part, the inhabitants of that region were taken captive and resettled in the cities of Media, which correspond to western parts of present-day Iran. Nearly 200 years later, following the invasion by Nebuchadnezzar, the Chaldean or Babylonian king, the remaining Jews were also taken into captivity and transferred to Babylon, today's Iraq. With the campaigns of Cyrus the Great and later Darius I, and the final defeat of the Chaldeans, the Jews came under Iranian rule, administration and imperial authority. Initially, Jews settled in western regions such as Ilam and Khuzestan, then moved to Hamadan and gradually spread to central regions including Isfahan, Yazd, Damavand and other parts of Iran. This spread was such that today there are very few cities in Iran without some trace of Jewish

presence, such as a synagogue or a Jewish cemetery.

Throughout history, there have been ups and downs, but overall, given the well-known hospitality of Iranians and mutual adaptability, along with similar traits within the Jewish community, a notable degree of coexistence and solidarity has prevailed between the two. Jews, in particular, see themselves as indebted to Iranians, especially Cyrus the Great, who effectively rescued them from Babylonian captivity and granted them the freedom either to return to the Holy Land or to remain freely in Iran and continue practicing their faith.

For this reason, Cyrus the Great and, by extension, the land of Iran and its people have held a special status among Jews. After the advent of Islam and the conversion of the majority of Iranians to Islam, the bond between Jews and Muslims grew stronger due to many shared beliefs, including faith in one God, belief in the afterlife, the Day of Judgment and a promised savior, as well as significant similarities in religious law, such as prayer, fasting, animal slaughter, rules of halal and non-halal food, purity and impurity, and shared moral principles. A clear illustration of this coexistence can be seen by comparing Iran with other countries in the Middle East. In many of those countries, revolutions that were

largely nationalist in nature led to the expulsion of Jews and forced them to leave their homelands. In Iran, however, despite the 1979 Islamic Revolution, which was explicitly religious and led by a Muslim jurist, the Jewish community remained. This is rooted in shared perspectives and common ground that, at various stages before the revolution, during the revolution, after it, throughout the [1980s Iraqi] imposed war, the reconstruction period [under president Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani in the 1990s] and even during the recent 12-day war, consistently fostered solidarity and cooperation between Jews and the wider Iranian society.

How would you briefly describe Jewish life within Iranian society?

Iranian Jews are among the oldest and most historically rooted Jewish communities in the world. After the Holy Land, Iran is home to the tombs of several Jewish prophets, including the Tomb of the Prophet Daniel in Susa, the Tomb of Esther and Mordechai in Hamadan, and the shrine of the Prophet Habakkuk in Tuyserkan. Renowned scholars have also lived in this land, figures who are held in high regard by Jews around the world.

Although the Jewish population declined in the post-revolution era and during the Iran-Iraq war, the Jewish community in Iran

has remained dynamic, with a strong sense of solidarity and mutual support. In many parts of the world, Jews are often viewed through the prism of Zionism, but in Iran, following the approach articulated by Imam Khomeini at the outset of the revolution, a clear distinction was drawn between Judaism as a divine religion and Zionism as a political movement. This distinction has always existed, although in the past two years, particularly in the wake of the Gaza war, it has become more visible globally, with Jewish opposition to the actions of the Zionist regime [of Israel] gaining wider attention.

What does the daily life of a Jewish individual in Iran look like?

The daily life of an Iranian Jew closely resembles that of other Iranians. People pursue education, employment and everyday activities like any other citizen. In Tehran, for instance, there are four schools dedicated to the Jewish community, two for boys and two for girls, covering levels from primary school through to high school. Their curricula follow the national education system, with the addition of religious instruction specific to the



Younes Hamami Lalehzar



Younes Hamami Lalehzar (c), chief rabbi of Iran's Jewish community, attends an interfaith meeting of leaders of Iranian religious minorities in Qom, Iran on February 5, 2026.
● IRNA



In many parts of the world, Jews are often viewed through the prism of Zionism, but in Iran, following the approach articulated by Imam Khomeini at the outset of the revolution, a clear distinction was drawn between Judaism as a divine religion and Zionism as a political movement.

Jewish community. Many Jews, whether students or professionals, work in a wide range of occupations, just like other Iranians, and under the Constitution they enjoy full freedom to perform their religious rites. Access to synagogues is unrestricted. These conditions have given rise to a blended identity shaped by Jewish culture rooted in the Torah and Iranian culture and ethics, forming a distinct Iranian-Jewish identity.

This prevailing sense of solidarity has enabled Iranian Jews to take pride in who they are: Jews who are also Iranian, living alongside their compatriots and deeply attached to their homeland and birthplace.

How does the Jewish community in Iran view the future? Have existing challenges encouraged emigration?

As a minority, the Jewish community is naturally influenced by the broader society. Apart from the early days of the revolution, when there was extensive propaganda about pressure on religious minorities, and the years of the imposed war, when the country faced severe conditions, Jewish emigration declined afterward and settled into a relatively stable pattern. In fact, in recent years, the rate of emigration among Jews has been lower than that of many other segments of society.

That said, economic difficulties have affected the Jewish community, like other groups in Iran, creating livelihood and employment challenges. However, the inclination toward emigration has not shown a significant upward trend and has remained largely stable in recent years.

In professional and social terms, how are Jews accepted in Iranian society, and what fields do they mainly work in?

Culturally, economically, academically and socially, Jews are active members of Iranian society, no different from other citizens, and they do not carry a separate or exclusive role. In the past, prominent Jewish figures have been active in cultural fields, particularly music, as well as in economics, trade, academia and scientific work.



Iranian Jews perform religious rituals at a synagogue in Tehran, Iran on November 30, 2023.
● WANA



Iranian Jews rally to protest Israeli crimes against Palestinians in the Gaza Strip in city of Kermanshah, western Iran on October 30, 2023.
● IRNA

One point that may warrant criticism is that Jews are less visible in the media or are spoken about less frequently. At times, contrary to the views expressed by Imam Khomeini and the Leader (Ayatollah Khamenei), even occasions such as the Jewish New Year or the birth and passing of Prophet Moses are not reflected in national media, an issue that could receive greater attention.

How does the broader society view Jews? Despite being a minority, is there any sense of separation or alienation?

Jews, Muslims and other religious minorities in Iran live alongside one another with mutual respect and do not feel alienated, because they consider Iran to be their own country. As mentioned earlier, there are many shared values, and the spirit of hospitality and adaptability among Iranians, whether Jewish or Muslim, has played a key role in this coexistence.

Whether in the past, when neighbors knew one another well and supported each other, or in today's more urbanized life where social ties may be looser, this sense of solidarity continues in workplaces and social settings. This model of coexistence shows that despite differences in belief, shared human, ethical and civic values far outweigh divisions. From a monotheistic perspective, all human beings are creations of God, and just as no parent wishes to see discord among their children, God does not approve of injustice or conflict among His servants. This religious and human outlook can serve as a model for better coexistence worldwide, as reflected in the Torah's teaching to "love your neighbor as yourself."

Could you explain the difference between Judaism and Zionism, and why some people conflate the two?

Judaism is a monotheistic and

divine religion with a history of more than 3,300 years, dating back to the time of Prophet Moses. Zionism, by contrast, is a political party and movement that emerged in the late 19th century within the context of nationalism. Zionism has exploited certain religious ideals of Judaism. According to Jewish religious beliefs, a return to the Holy Land and the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem (Al-Quds) can only take place with the emergence of the promised savior. Zionism, however, removed these beliefs from their religious framework and pursued actions devoid of justice and human dignity, actions that were not endorsed by many Jews from the outset. Over time, as Zionist objectives became clearer, Jewish opposition to the movement grew. Today, there are even Christian and Muslim Zionists, but because Zionism emerged from within a Jewish context and misused its ideals, Jewish op-

position to it has been more pronounced. Over the past two years, particularly following the Gaza war, this distinction and opposition have become more visible, with Jewish communities in countries such as the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom staging protests against the actions of the Zionist regime. In Iran, this opposition has also taken shape through gatherings and statements. Therefore, religious Jews have consistently emphasized that just as ISIS does not represent Islam, Zionism does not represent Judaism. Even ISIS claims to act in the name of religion, while Zionists make no such claim.

Is the kind of antisemitism seen in Europe, particularly around the Holocaust, present in Muslim societies and especially in Iran?

What is known as antisemitism has its roots in European and

Christian history and has never existed as an organized current in Islamic countries, particularly in Iran. There may be isolated disagreements, but no systematic anti-Jewish movement has been observed in Iran.

Today, Iranian Jews are fully free to practice their religious rituals. Synagogues operate without the presence of special security forces, whereas in many European countries, due to security concerns, entry to synagogues requires passing through protective checkpoints. This contrast underscores the genuine coexistence and solidarity between Muslims and Jews in Iran, a coexistence that stands in sharp contrast to the actions of the Zionist regime in the occupied territories, where the rights of other residents are ignored and repression and killing are used as tools of control.

How do you assess the roots of

tension between Muslims and Zionists in the occupied territories?

The main root of these tensions lies in the denial of the rights of others and of minorities, whether from a religious, human or human rights perspective. All residents of a land have the right to life, freedom and basic rights. When these rights are repeatedly violated, tension and conflict become inevitable.

The iron-fist pressure exercised by the Zionist regime cannot go on indefinitely. What ultimately ensures the survival of human society is the observance of justice and fairness, a principle also embedded in the belief in the promised savior, meaning the establishment of a divine and just order in which oppression and injustice are eliminated and people live peacefully alongside one another. One can only hope that such conditions will be realized sooner rather than later.

Ezra Yaghoub Synagogue

A striking, spiritual landmark of Tehran

PERSPECTIVE

The Ezra Yaghoub Synagogue is among the oldest and most prominent religious centers of Tehran's Jewish community. More than a place of worship, it stands as a historical marker of the long-standing Jewish presence in Iran. Located in Tehran's historic Oudlajan neighborhood, it is one of the capital's oldest and largest surviving synagogues. Its main structure was built in 1894 during the reign of Qajar king Naser al-Din Shah, a period when much of Tehran's Jewish population lived in traditional quarters such as Oudlajan and needed a dedicated space for worship and communal life. The synagogue is named after Ezra Yaghoub, a well-known Jewish merchant who stipulated in his will that his wealth be used to build a house of worship. Yaghoub

was among the first prominent Iranian traders to establish commercial ties with Manchester in England. After his death at the age of 40, his wife allocated a substantial part of his estate to charitable causes, including the construction of this synagogue. Architecturally, the building blends local design with Jewish religious elements typical of the Qajar era. It sits within a relatively large compound and includes two main prayer and gathering halls: a larger southern hall with a capacity of more than 200 people and a smaller one that can accommodate around 150. The overall design is modest but rooted in traditional aesthetics, preserved through successive restoration efforts. The synagogue has undergone several renovations and, in 2004, was officially registered as a national heritage site by Iran's Cultural Heritage Orga-

nization, in recognition of its architectural features and historical value.

Historical role, social function

Historically, the Ezra Yaghoub Synagogue served purposes that went well beyond religious worship. In the decades before World War II, it became a hub for Jewish migrants arriving in Tehran from cities such as Bukhara and Samarkand via Afghanistan and Iranian city of Mashhad, many of whom later planned onward migration. During World War II, Polish Jewish refugees also stayed there temporarily and received assistance from the local Jewish community. From the 1960s onward, as Jewish residents gradually moved from Oudlajan to northern Tehran and later abroad, particularly after the 1979 Islamic Revolution, the synagogue's active congregation declined.

Today, religious services are held mainly on special occasions and on Shabbat, the weekly holy day. The synagogue is no longer used for daily worship but remains an important historical and religious site and a gathering place for the Jewish community on specific dates. Public visits are generally possible only by prior arrangement, usually through cultural associations or guided tours, and access is not broadly open to the general public or non-Jews.

History, social standing of Jews in Iran

The presence of Jews in Iran dates back more than 2,700 years. In the sixth century BCE, following the Babylonian exile, many Jews settled across the Achaemenid Empire, including in what is now Iran, where they were welcomed by Cyrus the Great. Over centuries, Iranian Jews have maintained close interaction with other ethnic and religious groups and have become an integral part of Iran's social

fabric. They speak Persian, share Iranian cultural norms, identify strongly as Iranian, and have long taken part in the country's economic, cultural, and social life.

Jewish rituals, practices in Iran

Like Jewish communities elsewhere, Jews in Iran observe a range of religious practices at both communal and family levels.

Worship in synagogues: Synagogues serve as venues for Friday prayers, daily services, religious study, and communal observances. On holy days such as Shabbat and major festivals including Passover, Yom Kippur, and Sukkot, special services are held.

Study, education: Alongside worship, Torah reading, Talmudic studies, and Hebrew rituals form a core part of religious life. These activities usually take place in religious schools, study rooms, and educational sections, with children actively involved.

Family ceremonies: Life-cycle events such as Hebrew naming ceremonies, Bar and Bat Mitzvahs marking religious maturity, weddings, and memorial services continue to be observed. However, the community's smaller size today means some ceremonies are held on a more modest scale.

Heritage that has endured

For those interested in historic architecture or the history of Iran's religious minorities, the Ezra Yaghoub Synagogue offers a compelling visit. Beyond its architectural and cultural value, it stands as a symbol of the Jewish community's continuous 2,700-year presence in Iranian history. It reflects religious and cultural coexistence, active participation in urban life, and the effort to preserve religious identity alongside peaceful coexistence with followers of other faiths. Despite challenges and a



● TEHRANICA

shrinking population, Iran's Jewish community has managed to safeguard its religious and cultural identity, operate within existing legal frame-

works, and keep its traditions and rituals alive to this day.

This article first appeared on Shaya News in Persian.



AFC Futsal Asian Cup:

'Toughest of the lot': Shamsaei relishes hard-fought 14th title

Sports Desk

Head coach Vahid Shamsaei was full of praise for his players after Iran defeated hosts Indonesia 5-4 in a shootout to lift the AFC Futsal Asian Cup trophy in Jakarta on Saturday. The Asian powerhouse had to withstand a euphoric home crowd at the Indonesia Arena and come from behind on three occasions, with the match finishing 5-5 after extra time, before Hossein Sabzi's composed finish with the final spot-kick secured a record-extending 14th title at the flagship continental event. "From a technical point of view, all my players delivered today. I never wish such pressure on anyone, but the important thing is the trophy is now in our hands," said Shamsaei, who won the competition eight times as a player and was also in charge when Iran was crowned Asian champion two years ago. "I've lifted many trophies throughout my career, but this one was definitely the toughest of the lot," added the 50-year-old, who went on to hail first-time finalists Indonesia for pulling off "the biggest development that I've seen in futsal." Prolific pivot Hossein Tayyebi

gave Iran a third-minute lead, slicing his shot from inside the semi-circle beyond a diving Ahmad Habiebie for his sixth goal of the competition. The contest, however, turned on its head inside three minutes as Reza Gunawan pounced on a rebound and poked his shot past Iranian goalkeeper Baqer Mohammadi in the seventh minute, before Israr Megantara added two in quick succession to send Indonesian fans roaring. Mahdi Karimi reduced the deficit in the 18th minute when Salar Aqapour, from a free-kick on the edge of the circle, rolled the ball to him, with the winger side-footing his shot past the Indonesian wall and into the back of the net. Saied Ahmadabbasi, who went on to pick up the tournament's Most Valuable Player award, drew Iran level four minutes into the second half, only for Indonesia to restore the lead seconds later through Samuel Eko. Aqapour and Mohammadhossein Derakhshani both struck the woodwork before Karimi finished off a well-worked power play for Iran's second equalizer in the 38th minute, forcing the match into extra time. Iran looked destined for only a



Iran captain Hossein Tayyebi (10) holds aloft the AFC Futsal Asian Cup trophy after a shootout victory over Indonesia in the final in Jakarta, Indonesia, on February 7, 2026.
● AFC

fourth defeat in Asian Cup history when Israr bagged his third of the afternoon with less than two minutes remaining, but Ahmadabbasi struck again moments later to ensure the final would be decided by a shootout. Indonesia's Muhammad Nizar saved Iran's opening spot-kick from Masoud Yousef, before Iran's second-choice goalkeeper Mahdi Rostami denied Dewa Riz-

ki's fourth attempt for the hosts. Israr then went from hero to villain after sending Indonesia's final effort wide, allowing Sabzi to step up and clinch the title. "It's very difficult in this situation to say if I'm happy or unhappy," said Shamsaei. "A lot of incidents have happened recently in my country. I believe futsal is a sport that brings everyone together.

"Since I started as a player, it was always about being of service to my country. That was my mentality – to show my best performance for my country. I believe everything I did was for my people. "When I became a coach, my mentality stayed the same. The team and I were under a lot of pressure. I want to thank the federation, all the players and

the team manager – hand in hand, we made our people back home happy." Meanwhile, Shamsaei's opposite number on the Indonesian bench, Hector Souto, was proud of his team despite missing out on the title on home soil. "I'm super proud of my players for doing an amazing job and for working so hard," said Souto. "No one would have believed that we would make the final, with chances to win in 40 minutes, in extra time or on penalties," said the Spaniard. "The tournament went well for us and we were mentally super strong – probably the strongest team in the tournament – and we made it difficult for Iran, but we also made many mistakes. "The team needs to build on their game in many areas, but today we talk about how good they were, their amazing performance and how we pushed Iran to the limit. "We must remain humble because there are stronger teams in Asia like Iran and Japan with very good players, and we cannot yet match their speed. "Sometimes you succeed and sometimes you don't, but today we came really close, so we should be really proud."

Asian Indoor Athletics Championships:
Zarei wins women's 400m silver as Iran bags three medals on Day 2

Iran's Zahra Zarei (l.) poses with her women's 400m silver medal alongside Uzbek gold medalist Hukmova Jonbibi (c) and China's bronze medalist Zuo Siyu at the Asian Indoor Athletics Championships in Tianjin, China, on February 7, 2026.
● SUN FANYUE/XINHUA

Sports Desk

The second day of the Asian Indoor Athletics Championships saw Iran collect three medals — including a women's 400m silver through Zahra Zarei — in Tianjin, China, on Saturday. Zarei clocked a personal-best 54.18 seconds in the final to finish behind Uzbekistan's

Hukmova Jonbibi, who crossed the line in 53.61 seconds, with China's Zuo Siyu settling for bronze in 54.62 seconds. Elsewhere, Arash Sayyari claimed bronze in the men's 400m final. The Iranian, who was only handed a place in the final after a Chinese sprinter was forced out through injury, also registered a career-best

47.59 seconds, finishing behind Qatar's Bassem Hemeida (47.27 seconds) and China's Chiyu Zheng (47.34 seconds). Iran's second bronze medal of the day came in the men's 3000m, where Hossein Nouri clocked 8:12.09. Japan's Kazuya Shiojiri (7:53.87) and Kyrgyzstan's Nursultan Keneshbekov (7:55.06) took gold and silver, respectively.

Zagreb Open Ranking Series:

Oskou dominates 77kg class to remain on course for major events

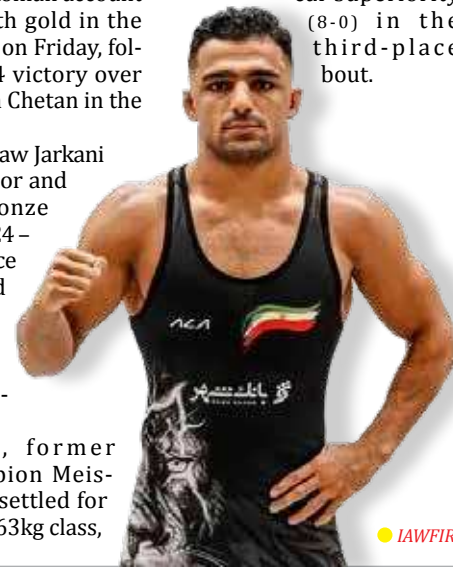
Sports Desk

Iranian wrestler Ali Oskou capped his 77kg campaign at the Zagreb Open with an emphatic gold medal, taking Iran's tally to three in the Greco-Roman competitions at the Ranking Series season opener. A world under-23 bronze medallist last October, Oskou defeated Hungary's Zoltan Levai by technical superiority (9-1) in Saturday's final at Arena Zagreb. The Iranian began his run with a commanding 7-0 victory over American Kamal Bey before dispatching Egypt's Yehia Abdelkader 10-0 to reach the quarter-finals. A 5-2 win against Hungary's Robert Fritch sent Oskou

into the semifinals, where he again overpowered Georgia's Temuri Orjonikidze by superiority (10-1). With the tournament also serving as the second phase of Iran's team selection process, Oskou – who claimed gold at the national championships last December – will hope his dominant showing in the Croatian capital convinces head coach Hassan Rangraz to hand him a place at either the Asian or World Championships later this year. In contrast, Amirmahdi Saeidi Nava endured a disappointing outing in the 77kg class, suffering a first-round 7-2 defeat to home favorite Antonio Kamenjasevic. Ahoura Bouveiri also exited early in the category, losing

3-1 to Bulgaria's Stoyan Kubatov in the qualification round. Erfan Jarkani had opened Iran's Greco-Roman account in Zagreb with gold in the 63kg division on Friday, following an 8-4 victory over India's Chetan Chetan in the final. The triumph saw Jarkani – a world junior and under-23 bronze medalist in 2024 – secure his place in Iran's squad for April's Asian Championships in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. Meanwhile, former world champion Meisam Dalkhani settled for bronze in the 63kg class,

rebounding from a 14-5 semifinal loss to Chetan by defeating Kazakhstan's Dastan Zarlykhanov by technical superiority (8-0) in the third-place bout.



● IAWFIR

CAVA Women's League:

Sepahan into last four after clean sweep of group wins

Sports Desk

Iran's Foolad Mobarakeh Sepahan continued their perfect start to the CAVA Women's League with a comfortable straight-sets victory (25-11, 25-11, 25-11) over Uzbekistan's Humo VC in Malé, Maldives, on Saturday. The win over the runner-up at the 2024 CAVA Women's Volleyball Club Championship saw Sepahan

finish top of the Pool B standings and advance to the semifinals. Sepahan had opened their campaign with a 3-1 victory (25-14, 23-25, 25-14, 25-12) against home favorite Hurraa Community Club at the Social Center Indoor Hall on Thursday, powered by a game-high 19 points from Iranian international outside hitter Fatemeh Khalili. Khalili again topped the scoring, with additional



● ASMA DAFEIAN/volleyball.ir

contributions from Elaheh Poursaleh, Masoumeh Qadami and middle blocker Zahra Karimi, as Sepahan went on to secure a 3-0 win (25-14, 25-15, 25-18) over

Nepal Police Club later on Saturday. Organized by the Central Asian Volleyball Association (CAVA), the tournament features seven clubs from across Central and South Asia and serves as a qualification pathway to the upcoming AVC Women's Champions League, with the champions earning a place at April's showpiece event in Goyang, South Korea.

Historic tea garden in Fuman to undergo major development

Iranica Desk

During a ceremony held concurrently with the Ten-Day Dawn celebrations, marking the anniversary of the victory of the Islamic Revolution, the groundbreaking for the development and revitalization of the first tea garden in western Gilan Province was held in Fuman. The project, which aims to establish a boutique hotel and a specialized tea museum, was attended by Ali Darabi, Deputy Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts, along with

a number of provincial and local officials, chtn.ir wrote. This historic tea garden, dating back to the mid-18th century, is set to be transformed under this national tourism project into a hub for introducing the history, culture, and art of tea production in Iran. Speaking at the ceremony, Darabi highlighted Gilan Province's unique potential for attracting tourists, stating that the implementation of this project represents a strategic and significant step toward the development of sustainable tourism, the strengthening

of the national brand of Iranian tea, and the stimulation of economic growth in western Gilan. He added that reviving this valuable heritage will not only preserve the identity of Iranian tea but will also create employment opportunities and promote local development. The development plan includes the construction of a three-story building, part of which will be dedicated to a boutique hotel with a capacity of 40 guests, while the remaining sections will house a specialized tea museum and a live tea-making

workshop. The museum will showcase historical tea-farming tools, related documents and images, as well as the tea production process from plantation to cup. This initiative, being carried out through the efforts of the Gilan Province's Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Organization in cooperation with private-sector investors, is considered a milestone in the development of tourism infrastructure in Fuman and in introducing the region's lesser-known capacities.



● chtn.ir

Turkish consul highlights tourism potential of West Azarbaijan



Maku
● IRNA

Iranica Desk

Regional tourism attractions in West Azarbaijan Province continue to draw significant attention from Turkish travelers, with cities such as Maku and Khoy, Lake Urmia, and several UNESCO-listed sites ranking among the most visited destinations, Turkey's Consul General in Urmia said. Muslim Aygun noted that Turkey itself is home to more than 20 World Heritage sites and stressed that, given the substantial tourism capacities on both sides, expanding cooperation with Iran holds particular importance, according to chtn.ir.

Addressing cross-border travel trends, Aygun pointed to the steady flow of Iranian tourists to Turkey through the Bazargan, Sero, and Razi border crossings in West Azarbaijan Province. He said the Razi crossing accounts for the highest volume of tourist traffic, prompting ongoing efforts to expand and reinforce road infrastructure at the site. He also referred to the reconstruction project at the Bazargan border crossing, explaining that road infrastructure development there has been underway for the past five years and is expected to come into operation in the

near future. Aygun expressed hope that similar infrastructure projects at the Sero border crossing would advance more rapidly. Stressing the need to remove existing barriers to tourism cooperation between the two countries, the Turkish consul general said the head of tourism agencies in Turkey's Van Province had raised concerns in a letter over prolonged road infrastructure projects on the Iranian side. He added that such delays have negatively affected traveler satisfaction. Aygun further highlighted existing direct flights from Urmia to Isfahan, Shiraz, Tabriz, Mash-

had, and Istanbul, calling for the launch of a direct air route between Urmia and Ankara. He emphasized that increasing the number of air connections should be prioritized to support tourism growth. Turning to cultural cooperation, he also underscored the importance of handicrafts in West Azarbaijan Province, noting that Turkey likewise produces high-quality handicraft products. He said organizing joint handicrafts exhibitions between the border provinces of Iran and Turkey could play an effective role in strengthening cultural and economic relations.

Iran's hot springs fuel wellness tourism across diverse regions

Iranica Desk

Hot springs are among Iran's most popular tourist attractions, scattered from Dehloran in the west to Sarein in the northwest, and from Geno in the south to Morteza Ali in the east. Rich in minerals, these springs play a vital role in promoting wellness tourism, drawing visitors and boosting local economies. The ideal season to visit a hot spring depends largely on its location. In warmer regions, autumn and winter are recommended, while in colder areas, spring and summer are best, according to IRNA.

Sarein

Sarein is home to one of Iran's most famous hot springs. Each year, the city attracts a large number of. Each year, the city attracts a large number of domestic and international tourists. Visitors come not only for the therapeutic benefits of the hot springs but also to enjoy the region's stunning natural scenery. The hot spring complexes in Sarein are thoughtfully designed with multiple

sections that are easily accessible for men, women, and children. Facilities include accommodations, restaurants, dry and steam saunas, jacuzzis, Turkish spa baths, massage services, and hydrotherapy areas. The mineral-rich waters contain compounds such as carbonate and bicarbonate anions, chlorides, sulfates, and cations including calcium, magnesium, sodium, and potassium. While these minerals give the water a slightly acidic taste, the springs remain completely clear and colorless. Sarein's appeal goes beyond its hot springs. In addition to the thermal waters, the city also features two cold pools with carbonated water that is safe to drink. Within a 30-kilometer radius of Ardabil, numerous other renowned springs can be found, each celebrated for its unique therapeutic properties. Together, these natural attractions make the region one of the most popular destinations in Ardabil Province.

Baliran

Located about 25 kilometers south of Amol in Mazandaran Province, Baliran Hot Spring is set amid lush forests and natural scenery. Recognized as the country's second-best tourist desti-



Baliran Hot Spring
● IRNA

nation in the early 2000s, this site offers relief from joint and muscle pain, improves blood circulation, treats skin disorders, reduces stress, and boosts immunity. Visitors with heart conditions should consult a doctor before using the waters. Baliran enjoys a temperate, humid climate influenced by the Caspian Sea, though seasonal variations occur. The spring is accessible via main roads from Amol, with Tehran approximately 205 kilometers away.

Dehloran

Among Ilam Province's most unique natural attractions, Dehloran Hot Springs are renowned as a therapeutic center in western Iran. Registered as a national natural monument in 1976, the springs reach temperatures of around 50°C and include both hygienic thermal



Morteza Ali Hot Spring
● rokna.net

pools and mud therapy baths. Located three kilometers northeast of Dehloran at the foot of Siyah Mountain near the Bat Cave, the sulfur-rich waters are believed to treat rheumatism, allergies, abscesses, deep wounds, joint and bone pain, and general fatigue. Visitors can also explore the nearby Bat Cave. Due to the high sulfur content, those with heart conditions are advised to avoid the water.



Geno Hot Spring
● alibaba.ir

Surrounding facilities and mud pools make the site attractive for tourists beyond its therapeutic value.

Geno

Geno Hot Spring, located 35 kilometers northeast of Bandar Abbas in Hormozgan Province, is a major tourist attraction known for its mineral-rich waters and scenic surroundings. Situated at the foot of the Geno Mountains, the spring maintains

an average temperature of 41°C and contains chlorosulfate, chloride, sodium, and sulfur minerals. These minerals offer relief from skin issues, joint pain, and rheumatic conditions. In winter, the warm waters produce a striking steam cloud above the pools. Autumn and winter are the best times to visit. The site features cycling tracks, horse trails, electric mini trains for children and adults, and garden-lined walkways, making it ideal for a memorable stay.

Ayoub

Set on a hill approximately 300 meters above the Gifan Valley near Bojnord, North Khorasan Province, Ayoub Hot Spring is famed for its sulfur-rich waters, which help alleviate skin conditions and muscular and joint pain. The spring is polygonal in shape, with surrounding fences for vis-

itor safety. The village also features a shrine believed to be associated with the Prophet Ayoub. Spring is the best season to visit, when the surrounding nature is lush, though the site is accessible year-round. The water temperature is around 47°C, and a nearby cold spring feeds into the pool, creating a balanced and pleasant swimming temperature.

Morteza Ali

Located in the eastern part of Tabas, South Khorasan Province, at the southern slopes of a mountain, Morteza Ali Hot Spring consists of several main and secondary springs. They differ in temperature: Qanbar Spring is cold, Morteza Ali Spring is warm, and Jafari Spring merges the two. Interestingly, the waters remain separate, creating noticeable temperature variations within the same river, allowing visitors to experience warm water with one foot and cold water with the other. The site is best visited in autumn or spring. Its mineral-rich waters are believed to have therapeutic properties, while small fish provide a natural foot massage by eating dead skin cells. Visitors should bring water-friendly shoes and extra clothing, as deeper parts of the spring may fully submerge them.



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

Arts & Culture Desk

The closing ceremony of Iran's 43rd Book of the Year Award was held on Sunday morning at Tehran's Vahdat Hall, attended by President Masoud Pezeshkian and Culture Minister Abbas Salehi, with selected works honored. Addressing the event, Pezeshkian said the government's approach to promoting books and reading is based on providing maximum support to all stakeholders active in this field, President.ir reported. "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

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. ● president.ir

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. "When Islam arrived in this land, Iranians, through writing and books, played a key role in flourishing Islamic civilization," he added. According to Salehi, since the victory of the Islamic Revolution in 1979, more than 1.5 million book titles have been published in first editions and reprints. He described this quantitative contribution to authorship and publishing as one of the achievements of the Islamic Revolution over the



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.