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Iran's foreign policy should go beyond survivalism



By Hossein Salimi

Professor of international relations

#### OPINION

In the history of Iran's foreign relations, following the emergence of modern diplomacy, the country's foreign policy was initially shaped around survival. From almost the era of the Iran-Russia wars onward, external policies were crafted primarily to preserve the state's existence. Over time, that approach shifted toward a strategy of development and later toward expansionism. Yet today, Iran's foreign policy appears to have once again reverted to a phase defined solely by survival.

The shift toward a survival-centered doctrine stems from a serious theoretical fallacy in how foreign policy is understood by key actors in the field. A review of the prevailing discourse in Iran's foreign policy suggests that the theoretical framework guiding decision-makers and principal actors rests on four main pillars that lie at the heart of this misreading.

**1. Classical realism:** A view of foreign policy that reduces security exclusively to its military dimension, subordinating all other considerations to a particular understanding of security — one attainable only through military power.

**2. Marxism:** A perspective that portrays the world as a realm of domination, holding that the capitalist system is controlled by specific capitalists, particularly Jewish ones, who in turn use states as instruments of control.

**3. The duality of good and evil:** An outlook rooted in Manichaean culture, depicting the world as an arena of an endless struggle between good and evil, not grounded in monotheism, but in a perpetual conflict between opposing moral forces.

**4. Dependency theory:** A theory asserting that the more extensive a country's ties with the global capitalist system, the less development it will achieve, thereby emphasizing inward-looking policies and self-sufficiency.

The convergence of these four elements has made it difficult for the country to grasp the realities of today's international system. Some [Page 8 >](#) of the pillars underpinning this framework have outlived their historical relevance, while others are internally inconsistent. The very concept of security, for instance, has undergone a profound transformation. It is no longer defined solely by military capabilities or nuclear energy.

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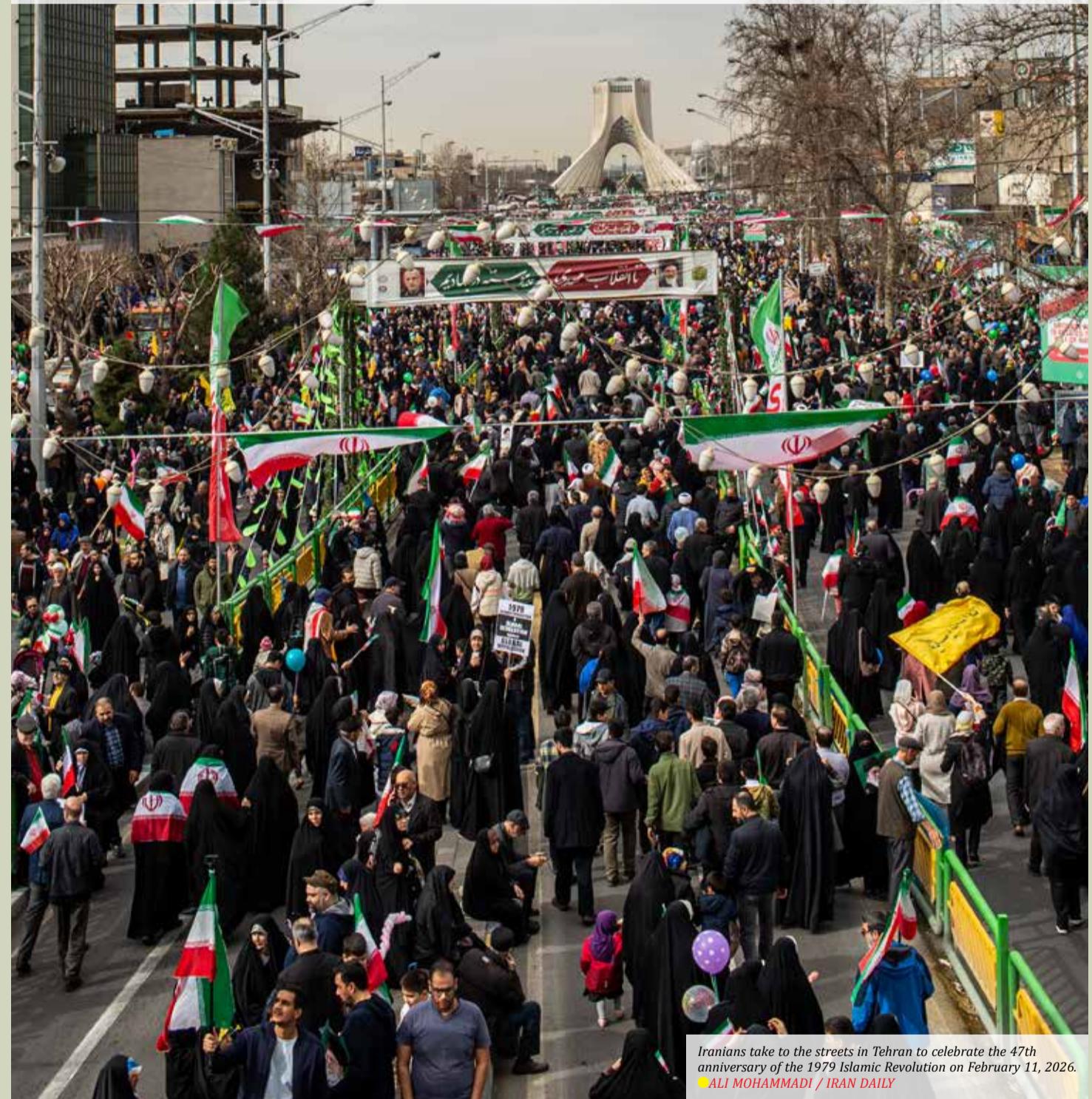
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## Everyone For The Homeland

# Iran marks 47th anniv. of Islamic Revolution with mass rallies

**Pezeshkian: Tehran ready for 'any verification' but not to accept excessive demands**



## Everyone For The Homeland

Iran marks 47th anniv. of  
Islamic Revolution with mass rallies**Pezeshkian:** Tehran ready for 'any verification' but not to accept excessive demands

## National Desk

Iranians took to the streets across the country to mark the 47th anniversary of the Islamic Revolution weeks after nationwide protests over economic problems turned violent in the wake of support from foreign countries including the country's arch foe the United States.

Huge crowds poured into Tehran's main squares and into public spaces across roughly 1,400 cities and towns, braving chilly temperatures, rain and snow in a display of national unity amid provocations and threats by the US and Israel in recent weeks.

In Tehran, participants gathered from 9:30 a.m. local time and proceeded toward the iconic Azadi Square where President Masoud Pezeshkian addressed the massive crowd.

They chanted slogans in unison condemning decades of crimes by the United States against the Iranian nation, as well as the Israeli regime's atrocities.

They also carried photos of the martyrs of the eight-year Iraqi war on Iran, the 12-day US and Israeli war in June, and the recent foreign-backed riots, as well as other martyrs who lost their lives in the line of duty.

On Monday, Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei called on the Iranian nation to demonstrate its will and steadfastness on the anniversary of the Islamic Revolution, saying such unity would frustrate the enemy.

**January's protests**

The large-scale turnout follows riots on January 8 and 9, when protests initially sparked by economic grievances on January 8 and 9 and turned into unruly scenes of mayhem and destruction. Armed groups infiltrated the demonstrations, leading to damage to shops, government buildings and public facilities, as well as casualties among civilians and security forces.

Iranian authorities confirmed that



Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian addresses a ceremony marking the 47th anniversary of the Islamic Revolution in Tehran on February 11, 2026. [president.ir](http://president.ir)

American and Israeli spy agencies were directly involved, providing funding, training, and media support to the perpetrators. According to a statement last month by Iran's Foundation of Martyrs and Veterans Affairs, a total of 3,117 people lost their lives during the riots, including 2,427 innocent civilians and security personnel. Addressing the ceremony in Tehran, Pezeshkian pointed to the deadly incidents during the recent protests, saying that events of January 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> caused great sorrow in the hearts of Iranians. "We are ashamed before the people, and we are obligated to assist all those who were harmed in these incidents", Pezeshkian said.

**Ready to listen to people**

He underlined that the government



is ready to listen to the people's demands, "We consider ourselves the servants of the people; we do not seek confrontation with the people. But the enemy is trying to deepen society's wounds. We must be aware that this is not in our interest."

Referring to ongoing nuclear negotiations between Iran and the US, he denied Iran was seeking nuclear weapons and said the country was ready for "any verification." However, he said the Islamic Republic would "not yield to excessive demands" on its nuclear program.

Pezeshkian said the "high wall of mistrust" created by the US and Europe "does not allow these talks to reach a conclusion", adding that Iran will not bow to the excessive demands of the West and will not back down in the face of any aggression.

## Larijani cautions US to be watchful of Israel's 'destructive role' in talks



## International Desk

Iran's top security official warned on Tuesday that the United States should be vigilant about the destructive role of the Israelis as the regime's prime minister met the US President Donald Trump amid nuclear talks between Tehran and Washington.

"Netanyahu is now on his way to the United States. Americans must think wisely and not allow him, through posturing, to imply before his flight that 'I want to go and teach Americans the framework of the nuclear negotiations,'" Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) Ali Larijani said in a post on X. "They [Americans] must remain alert to the destructive role of the Zionists," Larijani said while visiting

Oman on Tuesday.

His comments were parts of his interview with the Oman National Network. Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi also warned about the Israel's efforts to derail new nuclear negotiations between Iran and the US. In an interview with Russia Today on Tuesday, Araghchi renewed Iran's warning about the Israeli regime's desire to drag the US into another war against the Islamic Republic. Araghchi described Netanyahu as a "warmonger" who "doesn't like" peace or diplomacy. "In the past two years, he has attacked seven countries in our region," the foreign minister said, noting that the last target was Qatar, "an ally to the US, a friend to the US and the West." Netanyahu "has no solution in his mind but

parture, the Israeli prime minister said he would present "Israel's vision" for the negotiations, saying that the issue of Iran will be the central focus of his talks with the US president.

**Visit to Qatar**

Larijani, on his way back home, also visited another Persian Gulf Arab country, Qatar, where he held talks with Qatar's Emir Tamim bin Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani. The pair discussed "developments in the region, efforts to reduce escalation and enhance regional security," according to a statement by Qatar's Foreign Ministry. The emir's office had announced earlier on Wednesday that Sheikh Tamim discussed regional de-escalation on a call with Trump. Sheikh Tamim and Trump focused on "the current situation in the region and international efforts aimed at de-escalation and strengthening regional security and peace," the statement said.

The leaders also discussed "supporting diplomatic efforts aimed at resolving crises through dialogue and peaceful means," it add

## Top security official underscores Iran's missile power as non-negotiable



## International Desk

Iran's Secretary of Defense Council Ali Shamkhani reiterated on Wednesday that the country's missile capabilities are non-negotiable as Tehran and Washington have launched a new round of negotiations to resolve a dispute over Iran's nuclear program.

He said that Iran's missile capabilities are its red line and are not a subject to be negotiated.

Shamkhani made the remarks on the sidelines of a ceremony marking the 47<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Islamic Revolution in Tehran.

Iran and the US held their first round of the new talks in Oman on Friday. On Sunday, Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi, who is leading the Iranian team in the negotiations, said Tehran's missile program had never been part of the talks' agenda.

Washington has long sought to extend talks on Iran's nuclear capabilities to cover its missile program as well. Iran has said it is prepared to discuss curbs on its nuclear program in return for the lifting of sanctions, but has repeatedly ruled out linking the issue to other questions including missiles.

Meanwhile, Iran's Foreign Ministry's spokesman Esmail Baqaei in an interview with PBS network said that Iran is ready to talk about the level of enrichment of the uranium.

"We have said many times that we would be ready to talk about the level of enrichment, about the stockpile," PBS quoted Baqaei as saying. "But the important thing is that our right, which is recognized under an international treaty, should be respected."



Mohammad Ali Rajabi  
Cartoonist

## CARTOON



## Iran to recognize Taliban gov't in Afghanistan soon, envoy says

Iran will soon recognize the Taliban government, known as the Islamic Emirate, in Afghanistan, the acting head of the Iranian embassy in Kabul said.

"There is no obstacle to recognizing the Islamic Emirate in Afghanistan and Tehran will soon do so," Alireza Bikdeli told Afghan media outlet TOLOnews, IRNA reported on

Wednesday. Bikdeli said Iran and Afghanistan had multidimensional bonds ahead of them and that, at an "appropriate time," Tehran would announce the legal decision of recognition to strengthen those bonds. "At an appropriate time, we will use this legal decision and, to strengthen our ties, we will have our own initia-

tive regarding recognition that all of you will admire," he said. In August 2021, after the downfall of the Afghan government, the Taliban declared their rule under the name "Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan". The development followed the withdrawal of US and NATO forces, the rapid fall of cities and taking control of

Kabul on August 15, 2021. Then-president Ashraf Ghani left the country and the Taliban fully assumed the government. Russia is the only country to have formally recognized the Taliban government, although several others have maintained contacts or relations without granting official recognition.

# 1,376 production units, 100k subsidized housing units launched

## Economy Desk

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian issued an order on Tuesday, inaugurating more than 1,300 new and revived industrial and production units and 100,000 subsidized housing units (urban and rural) across the country. During the online commissioning ceremony coinciding with the 47th anniversary of the victory of the 1979 Islamic Revolution, Pezeshkian gave a go-ahead to the operation of 868 new industrial units and 508 renovated production units in industrial towns, IRNA reported.

In his speech at the inauguration of the projects, Minister of Industry, Mines, and Trade Mohammad Atabak underlined that some 1,325 large, medium, and small production units have been put into operation in the last 18 months in the Pezeshkian administration, resulting in the direct employment of more than 80,000 people.

Referring to the National Program for the Development of Industrial Clusters, he called it a major step toward streamlining licensing, guiding investment, reducing duplication, and increasing regional coordination and demand.

This initiative transforms industrial value chains from an isolated model to a networked, cluster-based approach, he explained, emphasizing that each small or medium enterprise is part of a broader production, innovation, and market ecosystem.



The minister stressed the current administration's commitment to linking small and medium enterprises (SMEs) with large industries and knowledge-based companies, leveraging support institutions, and enhancing regional industrial clusters.

Atabak praised Pezeshkian's backing of industry, noting that the government and private sector act as partners in development.

"Small and medium-sized enterprises are at the heart of Iran's industrial future, strengthening resilience, preventing production

disruptions, and supporting sustainable employment in towns and villages," the minister said. He affirmed that the government views SMEs not as peripheral, but as vital engines of the country's industrial growth.

During another online ceremony on Tuesday, the projects and measures undertaken by the Ministry of Roads and Urban Development under the incumbent administration were also reviewed, among which were a 66,000-hectare expansion of residential capacity in full compliance with environmental consid-

erations, a 110 percent increase in land preparation for housing projects, a record 1,150 kilometers of highway construction, a 28% growth in container operations at ports, and the revival of rail routes through transport diplomacy.

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian (R) and Minister of Industry, Mines, and Trade Mohammad Atabak participate in an online commissioning ceremony on February 10, 2026, coinciding with the 47th anniversary of the victory of the Islamic Revolution.

● president.ir

## Future satellite launchers to carry heavier payloads: ISA

Iran's Space Agency (ISA) revealed new progress on the country's heavy-lift satellite launchers Qaem 120, upgraded Simorgh, and Qoqnos, adding that the vehicles are being developed to place heavier payloads into low Earth orbit.

Speaking to Tasnim about the status of indigenous launchers and planned native launches, Hassan Salarieh, head of the Iran Space Agency, stated that this Persian calendar year (started March 21, 2025) has seen launches by the Qased, Simorgh, and Zuljanah satellite carriers, with most of these launches aimed at "technology development".

Turning to launcher development, Salarieh said several parallel tracks are underway in advancing solid-fuel satellite carriers.

He stated that after the development of the Qaem 100, the Qaem 105 project from the same family is now being pursued in cooperation with the Islamic Revolutionary Guards



Corps Aerospace Force.

He also said development of the Qaem 120 launcher is planned, noting it can carry heavier payloads to low Earth orbit compared with the earlier Qaem 100 version and has the potential to reach a 36,000-kilometer orbit in an elongated elliptical trajectory, or GTO.

According to Salarieh, multiple related proj-

ects have been defined, with suborbital and test launches expected soon.

Regarding existing launchers, he said the first test last year of an upgraded Simorgh launcher, aimed at delivering payloads toward a 36,000-kilometer orbit through elliptical injection, was successful, and additional launches are planned to stabilize its performance. He added that development of the Qoqnos satellite launcher is another key effort, stating it is also designed to carry heavier payloads in low Earth orbit.

On broader orbital ambitions, Salarieh said Iran's strategy for reaching geostationary orbit involves combining powerful launchers with "orbital transfer blocks."

He explained that in this approach, the launcher places the satellite and transfer block into parking orbit or low altitude, after which the transfer block moves the payload to a higher orbit.

## Minister brushes off rumors on oil sales ban, tanker seizures



## Economy Desk

Iran's oil minister dismissed on Wednesday the recent rumors about the potential repercussions of longstanding Western embargo on the country's petroleum industry, saying there is no problem concerning the sales of national oil and its export.

Mohsen Paknejad added that his colleagues have devised methods and solutions appropriate to the current restrictions, and through such solutions, no problem will arise.

On the sidelines of a rally marking the 47th anniversary of the victory of Iran's Islamic Revolution, he said Iranians have always shown that they stand by the ideals of the Islamic Revolution, adding that the rally's message is, in fact, a declaration that encroachment upon Iran's soil is no more than a dream or illusion for them.

On Tuesday, it was rumored that the Trump administration

officials had discussed whether to seize tankers involved in transporting Iranian oil but had held off over concerns about Tehran's near-certain retaliation and the impact on global oil markets, according to the Wall Street Journal.

The US has seized several ships that have carried Iranian oil as part of its two-month-old blockade of sanctioned tankers serving Venezuela. The tankers, which make up the so-called shadow fleet, help transport oil from numerous sanctioned countries to China and other buyers.

"Considering that we have been under sanctions from the beginning of the Islamic Revolution and numerous obstacles were placed in our way, we have fully learned the methods of bypassing sanctions," Mousa Ahmadi said in an interview with ISNA.

Iran's Oil Minister Mohsen Paknejad tours the South Pars gas field.

● POGC

other sanctioned ships from loading oil in Iran faces many obstacles, some of the officials said.

Iran is likely to respond to a stepped-up US crackdown by seizing tankers carrying oil from US allies in the region or even by mining the Strait of Hormuz, the narrow exit from the Persian Gulf through which as much as 25% of the world's petroleum supply passes. Either move is likely to drive up oil prices sharply, risking a political firestorm for the White House. While those retaliations have not taken place either, oil benchmarks, as expected, were rising Wednesday after the Trump administration officials said the US is considering seizing additional tankers involved in transporting Iranian oil.

Brent crude futures were up 1.5% to \$69.8 a barrel early Wednesday, while West Texas Intermediate futures rallied 1.6% to \$65.

Earlier, the head of the energy committee of Iran's Parliament emphasized that even if all American ships are stationed in the Persian Gulf, the path of Iran's oil exports will not be halted.

"Iran's deputy minister of energy announced that 148 renewable power plant projects with a total capacity of 750 megawatts are ready for inauguration during the current week. Mohsen Tarzalab said that once the projects become operational, the country's renewable power plant capacity will exceed 4,200 megawatts. "Of the total projects ready for inauguration, 56 projects with a capacity of 395.845 megawatts have been implemented by the private sector, and another 92 projects with a capacity of 354.200 megawatts will be put into operation through investment by the National Development Fund," he noted.

## Construction of Iran's largest solar power plant begins in Hamedan



● RAZIEH HAJLUI/ASR-E HAMEDAN

## Economy Desk

Executive operations for the construction of Iran's largest solar power plant, with a capacity of 500 megawatts, began on Tuesday in the central province of Hamedan.

According to IRNA, based on the plans made, the operation of the major energy sector project will take place in August 2027. At the ceremony, the governor of Hamedan said that the province, in recent years, alongside the increase in production and industrial activities, has faced growth in electricity consumption, and this issue has further increased the necessity of investment in the energy produc-

tion sector. Hamid Mollanouri Shamsi maintained that permits for more than 3,000 megawatts of solar power plants in the province have been issued.

"At present, more than 70 megawatts of such capacity are under construction, and the projects are gradually entering the production circuit," he said, adding that this trend promises a bright future for the sustainable supply of energy in the province.

So far, around 6,200 hectares of the province's natural resources lands have been allocated for the construction of solar power plants. Two days earlier, on Sunday,

Iran's deputy minister of energy announced that 148 renewable power plant projects with a total capacity of 750 megawatts are ready for inauguration during the current week.

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# Iranian children, digital isolation in shadow of socio-cultural crisis



By Mohammad Mehdi  
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## O P I N I O N

Children have a right to play, not in digital isolation, but in alleys and squares that smell of life and culture. Recognizing and reviving this right is a responsibility for all of us: Governments in policymaking, families in upbringing, media in storytelling, and civil society in advocacy.

Play is the essence of childhood and the foundation for a child's individual and social development. In Iranian social history, street games were not just a form of recreation, but deep cultural platforms for transmitting values, identities, and social skills. Alleys and squares served as informal schools for children, places where principles of cooperation, fair competition, friendship, justice, and even responsibility were ingrained through group games. However, over the past two decades, this cultural heritage has been on the brink of collapse. Urban transformations, social insecurities, the dominance of apartment living, and the rise of digital games have detached children from their natural and social environments. Instead of experiencing the street and traditional games, they are immersed in a virtual world, a world that, while exciting and technologically advanced, is intensely individualistic, consumerist, and isolating.

From a child rights perspective, this situation is not merely a shift in lifestyle; it represents a socio-cultural crisis. Children are being deprived of a fundamental right, the right to play as a cultural and social right. This text aims to analyze the dimensions of this crisis with a legal-analytical approach and demonstrate how the loss of street games is a legal, cultural, social, and even political issue.

### Playing as human right

The Convention on the Rights of the Child, in Article 31, clearly states that governments recognize the right of the child to rest and recreation, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate for the child's age, and to participate freely in cultural and artistic life. This article shows that play is not only a tool for recreation but also a human and cultural right. Play fosters physical growth, creativity, strengthens social interactions, and even serves as practice for democratic participation in society.

### Games as intangible cultural heritage

Children's games in every society are part of the intangible cultural heritage. In Iran, games like seven stones game, dodgeball, hopscotch, tag, hide and seek, five stones game (Jacks) carry shared values, local languages, children's rhymes, and unwritten social rules. Eliminating these games means erasing a part of the community's cultural memory.

### Social transformations, emergence of socio-cultural crisis

Urban growth and building density have transformed streets from spaces for children's play into congested and dangerous thoroughfares. Children can no longer freely play in the alleys because their physical safety is not guaranteed against vehicles or social harms.

Increased parental concerns about social threats (from street violence to moral hazards) have led them to restrict children's presence in public spaces. The result is that children are confined within the four walls of their homes and behind screens. Digital games have replaced street



Two children play video games on handheld devices while sitting on a sofa in an undated photograph. 

games. These games are often individualistic and based on economic algorithms that reproduce consumerism. Unlike traditional games, which fostered interaction, cooperation, and direct environmental experience, digital games tend to lead to individual isolation and prolonged sedentary behavior. With the elimination of safe public spaces and the reduction of opportunities for traditional games, children are deprived of the right explicitly stated in Article 31 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Governments are obligated to provide conditions for the realization of this right, but in practice, Iranian urban and cultural policies have paid less attention to this important matter. The right to play must be guaranteed for all children, regardless of socioeconomic status, gender, or place of residence. However, children in marginalized or disadvantaged areas are far more deprived of public spaces than affluent children. This reproduces a form of cultural inequality. Children not only play, but in games, they rediscover their cultural identity. Eliminating traditional games causes children to lose their connection with the collective cultural heritage and become vulnerable to a "rootless digital globalism."

### Social, psychological consequences

Digital games reduce real-life interactions and limit children to virtual relationships. The result is that social skills

such as empathy, conflict resolution, and cooperation are weakened.

Global research shows that a reduction in physical and group games is associated with increased depression, anxiety, and attention deficits in children. A child who doesn't run and shout in the streets is a child who is missing out on a crucial part of their psychological development. With the elimination of traditional games, future generations will forget a part of their shared cultural memory. This not only undermines children's identities but also severs the ties between generations.

To address this crisis, a multi-faceted approach must be adopted:

#### • Re-envisioning Urban Spaces for Children:

Creating safe streets for play, local parks with traditional designs, and free open spaces for children.

#### • Registering and Reviving Traditional Games as Intangible Cultural Heritage:

The National Heritage Organization can register indigenous games and revive them through schools and media.

#### • Promoting Culture-Digital Games:

Designing native computer games based on Iranian values and traditions, so that children can connect with their cultural identity even in the digital space.

#### • Educating Parents and Educators:

Raising awareness about the importance of group games and the need to strike a balance between digital and real-world play.

● **Cultural Equity:** Allocating resources to disadvantaged areas to create free and safe play spaces, so that all children can benefit from their right.

#### ● **Role of Media and Civil Society:**

Media can create new narratives about street games and their cultural importance, and civil society organizations can launch campaigns to bring play back to the streets.

The socio-cultural crisis of children in Iran, the loss of street games and their replacement with digital isolation, is not just a shift in lifestyle, but a legal, cultural, and social challenge. Children are being deprived of a fundamental right, the right to play and cultural participation, and this deprivation has profound psychological, social, and identity-related consequences.

The future of children is the future of Iran. If we do not re-create play spaces and cultural heritage today, tomorrow we will face a generation disconnected from their cultural memory and trapped in individual isolation. Children have a right to play—not in digital isolation, but in alleys and squares that smell of life and culture. Recognizing and reviving this right is a responsibility for all of us: governments in policymaking, families in upbringing, media in storytelling, and civil society in advocacy. Only then can we build a future generation that thrives in a rich and humane cultural-social ecosystem, rather than living in isolation.



The decline of street games in Iran reflects a broader socio-cultural and legal crisis, as children are increasingly confined to digital isolation and deprived of their right to play under Article 31 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.



Traditional children's games are a vital part of Iran's intangible cultural heritage, fostering social skills, shared values, and cultural identity, now at risk due to the loss of safe public play spaces.



Children play on swings and seesaws at a public playground, in this undated photograph. 

# Virtual space as living environment, need for digital life literacy



By Ali Saberi  
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## O P I N I O N

With the expansion of knowledge and technology in social life, the virtual sphere has taken on a new meaning and status. It is no longer peripheral; it has moved directly into the lived environment of human beings. A space with such a broad and diverse range of services, capabilities, and modes of interaction, and one that enables people to live on a virtual platform, naturally demands to be understood and learned. To exist meaningfully in the digital world, people must consciously define a way of life for it.

From this perspective, the essential competencies required for living well online can be described as digital life literacy. We have to acknowledge that when knowledge and technology evolve, when a space called the virtual world comes into being, human lifestyles must evolve alongside that transformation.

Contemporary individuals, in order to live with technology and engage effectively in digital life, need a specific set of capacities and know-how. They need a framework for virtual living that allows them to manage their digital lives

responsibly and intelligently: A blend of knowledge, awareness, ethics, critical understanding, and social insight that can guide today's connected human within the digital ecosystem. Digital life literacy, then, is the sum total of what we need to learn in order to live properly in the virtual space. But before learning how to live digitally, we must first define and understand the virtual space itself, accurately and deeply. This means moving beyond a purely instrumental view of the digital world toward a human-centered lens. The virtual space is not merely a technological upgrade; it is a life-shaping environment. It has the power to influence thought patterns, behavior, emotions, ethics, identity, and personality, and to reshape society and the world at large. Something with such reach and impact must be read carefully and understood correctly.

When we talk about digital life literacy, and when we extend it to encompass social life as a whole and recognize it as a core necessity of modern living, we are essentially accepting that as capabilities and services scale up, lifestyles must follow suit. When progress happens, lifestyles must be recalibrated accordingly.

Developing a lifestyle that aligns with transformation and progress means cultivating a literacy that keeps human beings in step with change. Technology



People gather around a table, each absorbed in their smartphones, illustrating the growing ubiquity of mobile device use in daily social settings.  IRNA

alone should not advance; the way we live with technology must advance as well.

This is precisely why the virtual space, as a product of technological progress, requires structured understanding and deliberate learning. It calls for an educational framework, digital life literacy,

that allows a culture of living with technology to take shape in parallel with technological growth.

Ultimately, the purpose of digital life literacy is to articulate the need for a form of applied, ethics-driven knowledge, one that ensures the virtual space transforms human life in constructive

ways. The goal is for technology to support and serve us, rather than harm us; to help build a digital world that is healthy, humane, and genuinely enriching.

The article was first published in Persian in Etemad newspaper.

# When memorization replaces meaningful learning



By Babak Kazemi  
Public policy researcher

## O P I N I O N

The education system is the backbone of any society's development. A country's system of education not only plays a decisive role in its scientific and economic advancement, but also shapes the cultural, social, and moral identity of future generations.

In Iran, the education system has unfortunately been grappling with a wide range of challenges for years, largely as a result of misguided or flawed policy-making by ineffective administrators. These challenges stem from weak policy design, short-term and ad hoc decision-making, and the poor execution of reform agendas, all of which have inflicted serious quantitative and qualitative damage. That said, the government under President Masoud Pezeshkian, and given his stated commitment to education and educational equity, a critical window of opportunity has opened up to undertake a fundamental reassessment and steer the education system toward a brighter future.

The first and most fundamental problem in Iran's education system is its heavy reliance on rote memorization. While the rest of the world is pivoting toward cultivating critical thinking, creativity, and entrepreneurship, our system remains locked into memory-based learning. Iranian students are overwhelmingly bombarded with large volumes of theoretical information that rarely translate into real-world utility. This approach not only drags down educational productivity, but also severs the link between what students learn and the actual needs of society. Educational inequality is another major fault line in this landscape.

The stark disparity in educational resources across different regions, particularly between urban and rural schools,

has meant that many students in underprivileged areas are effectively shut out of quality, standards-based education. Public schools are struggling with inadequate facilities, non-specialist teachers, and weak infrastructure, while private schools, backed by hefty tuition fees, offer resources on par with international standards. This educational gap not only calls the very notion of equity into question, but also shapes, and often limits, students' academic and career trajectories.

At the same time, teachers' livelihoods and professional standing within Iran's education system remain deeply unsatisfactory. Teachers, as the cornerstone of education and human development, have long been burdened by economic hardship. The partial and ineffective rollout of the teacher ranking system, insufficient salary increases, and the absence of robust professional development programs have all chipped away at teacher motivation and classroom quality. In many developed countries, teachers rank among well-paid professionals with high social status; in Iran, by contrast, financial pressures have pushed many teachers to take on second and even third jobs, a reality that directly undermines the quality of instruction.

Another critical challenge is the weak alignment between the education system and labor market needs. While many countries reverse-engineer their education policies based on economic and industrial demand, Iran's system continues to privilege purely academic tracks, leaving technical, vocational, and entrepreneurial skills on the sidelines. As a result, many school and university graduates enter the job market without the competencies employers are looking for, ultimately fueling higher unemployment rates.

Addressing these challenges requires a deep, systemic overhaul of national education policy. The first step is to shift gears from a memorization-driven model to a skills-based framework. Curricula must be redesigned to strengthen

students' critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving capabilities. Leveraging modern educational technologies, updating teaching methodologies, and trimming down excessive and low-value content are among the measures that can significantly boost learning outcomes.

Closing the educational equity gap also demands targeted government intervention. Channeling more resources toward schools in disadvantaged areas, upgrading public schools with modern facilities, recruiting qualified teachers nationwide, and leveling the playing field in access to educational opportunities can all help narrow socioeconomic divides within the system. Elevating the status of teachers and improving their living conditions must likewise be treated as top-tier priorities.

The fair and rigorous implementation of the teacher ranking system, meaningful increases in salaries and benefits, continuous training programs to enhance instructional quality, and policies aimed at rebuilding teacher motivation are all steps that can restore this profession's

standing within the education system. Ultimately, Iran's education system must be brought into sync with the country's economic and industrial realities. Expanding technical and vocational education, scaling up skills-based and entrepreneurial tracks, and forging closer ties between schools and the labor market can produce graduates who are job-ready and socially adaptive.

Iran's education system is at a critical crossroads. Without bold and evidence-based reforms, the gap between education and societal needs will only widen. The Iranian administration now has a rare chance to roll out precise, science-driven policies that can fundamentally transform the education system and put it on a path toward sustainable development. Reforming education is not merely an urgent demand—it is a vital necessity for Iran's future, one that we hope will be realized with the strong backing of the president.

The article was first published in Persian on Etemad newspaper.

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Iran's education system remains trapped in rote memorization, failing to equip students with critical thinking and practical skills needed for real-world challenges.



Schoolchildren attend a class at a primary school in an undated photograph.

IRNA



# AFC Champions League Elite: Tractor coach Skocic rues 'individual errors' in Al Sadd defeat



Al Sadd striker Roberto Firmino (R) is challenged by Tractor's Aleksandar Sedlar during an AFC Champions League Elite game in Doha, Qatar, on February 10, 2026. 

## Sports Desk

Tractor head coach Dragan Skocic lamented "individual errors" after his side suffered their first defeat in the AFC Champions League Elite, falling 2-0 to Qatar's Al Sadd in Doha on Tuesday.

Rafa Mújica broke the deadlock on the hour mark after Akram Afif nodded Pedro Miguel's cross into the path of the Spanish striker, who controlled superbly before slotting past Tractor goalkeeper Alireza Beiranvand.

Roberto Firmino sealed the victory in the 89th minute, finishing off a well-worked counterattack with a composed close-range effort.

The defeat – Tractor's first in seven matches – leaves the Iranian champions third in the 12-team West Zone standings with 14 points, five behind Saudi heavyweights Al Hilal and level

with second-placed Al Ahli. "Our team played a difficult match, as expected, against a strong opponent with a selection of outstanding players," said Skocic, whose side has already secured a place in the last 16 of Asia's premier club competition.

"We lost due to some individual errors in defensive coverage, and we will work on learning from this match to come back stronger," the Croatian added.

Tractor will look to finish the league phase on a positive note when they travel to face Al Gharafa next week at Thani bin Jassim Stadium in Al Rayyan.

Al Gharafa, who suffered a 7-0 thrashing at Al Ittihad later on Tuesday, sit 10th with six points – two behind eighth-placed Al Sadd – and must beat Tractor to keep alive their slim hopes of reaching the knockout stage.

Meanwhile, Al Sadd head coach Roberto Mancini said his side could draw inspiration from Tuesday's victory as they push for a place in the round of 16. "The match was difficult, and we delivered a good performance, especially in the second half, where we created many chances, scored two goals, and secured three important points," said Mancini.

"We faced an opponent that had not lost a single match in the competition this season, so it was very important for us to defeat Tractor. We still have hope of qualifying, and we will hold on to it.

"I am happy with the victory and grateful for the support of the Al Sadd fans. I hope they continue supporting the team strongly in the upcoming matches," the Italian added.

Asian champions in 2011, Al Sadd will target another three points in their final league-stage clash against Al Ittihad in Doha on Tuesday.

## Sepahan wins historic CAVA Women's League title

### Sports Desk

Iran's Foolad Mobarakeh Sepahan made history on Tuesday by capturing the CAVA Women's League title in Malé, Maldives, defeating Kazakhstan's Turan VC in straight sets (25-22, 25-20, 25-20) in the final.

The triumph marked the first gold medal for an Iranian club in women's volleyball competitions.

Sepahan's historic success also secured the team a berth at April's AVC Women's Championships in Goyang, South Korea.

The Iranian side opened its

campaign with a 3-1 victory (25-14, 23-25, 25-14, 25-12) over hosts Huraa Community Club, before easing past Nepal Police Club and Uzbekistan's Humo VC in straight sets to advance to the semifinals as the top team in Pool B. Bolstered by several national team players, including setter Shabnam Alikhani and outside hitter Masoumeh Qadami, Sepahan continued its dominant run with a commanding 3-0 win (25-12, 25-9, 25-16) against Sri Lanka's Hirdaramani Sports Club in the semifinals.

The latest success in the CAVA competition – which featured

seven clubs from across Central and South Asia – brings Iranian women's volleyball's medal haul to four in as many months.

Iran defeated Uzbekistan 3-0 to clinch the CAVA Women's Volleyball Championship title last October, securing the national team's first gold medal since its establishment in 1963. The team then claimed bronze at the Islamic Solidarity Games in November.

The country also celebrated gold at the Asian Youth Games in Bahrain in October, where Iran's under-18 side came from behind to defeat Indonesia in a dramatic five-set final.



AVC

## AFC Champions League Two: Wasteful Esteghlal facing knockout exit after Al Hussein setback

### Sports Desk

Persian Gulf Pro League side Esteghlal suffered a major setback in its quest for AFC Champions League Two glory, falling to a 1-0 defeat against Jordan's Al Hussein in the first leg of their last-16 tie at Dubai's Al Maktoum Stadium on Tuesday.

Jordan international Sisa struck late at the neutral venue to hand Al Hussein – who had been under sustained pressure for much of the contest – a slender advantage ahead of next week's return leg in Amman.

The Tehran Blues dominated the opening half and created a string of chances. Saeid Saharkhizan came close in the eighth minute, ghosting into the box but failing to control Alireza Kooshki's cross. Al Hussein goalkeeper Yazeed Abulaila was kept busy throughout the first

half, tipping away a curling effort from Munir El Haddadi before producing fine saves to deny Kooshki from a free-kick and Abolfazl Zamani from close range. Esteghlal's clearest opportunity arrived just before halftime when Zamani threaded a pass through to Jasir Asani. With only Abulaila to beat, the Albanian international dragged his right-footed effort wide. Asani sought redemption early in the second half, cutting in from the right and firing into the side netting. Minutes later, he thought he had broken the deadlock, only for his strike to be ruled out following a VAR review that detected an offside earlier in the move.

Misfortune struck again in the 63rd minute when Esteghlal had a second goal disallowed. Rustamjon Ashurmatov's glancing header from Kooshki's free-kick was ruled mar-



Esteghlal midfielder Munir El Haddadi (L) is seen in action against Al Hussein in the AFC Champions League Two last-16 in Dubai, UAE, on February 10, 2026. 

ginally offside.

Esteghlal's profligacy in front of goal ultimately proved costly. Al Hussein gradually grew into the match, with Mahmoud Kharouba and Aref Haitham forcing Habib Far Abbasi into action for the first time.

The breakthrough came in the 78th minute when Esteghlal failed to deal with a corner. The clearance fell to Sisa some 30 yards from goal, and the Jordanian unleashed a superb swerving strike that beat a stunned Abbasi to secure a vital away victory.

## Khatoon crowned Iran Women's Pro League champion

### Sports Desk

Bam Khatoon sealed a record-extending 12th Iran Women's Pro League title with a commanding 3-0 home victory over Sepahan on Tuesday.

The latest triumph proved the toughest for Marziyeh Jafari's side, whose remarkable 1,527-day unbeaten league run was ended by Malavan last week, leaving Khatoon needing at least a point in the final round to secure the crown.

Mona Hamoudi struck twice, while Iranian international Sara Didar also found the net, as Khatoon rose to the occasion to finish top of the standings with 49 points from 16 wins in 18 matches. Out of respect for those who lost their lives during January's unrest in the country, Khatoon players opted against holding a title celebration and promptly left the podium after receiving their medals and the trophy.

Golgohar finished runners-up with 47 points despite a 4-2 away win over Istatis Karan Fars in Shiraz. The defeat left the hosts second from bottom in the 10-team table with seven points, joining Yasam Kurdestan in relegation. Jafari, the reigning AFC Women's Coach of the Year, will now turn her attention to international duty as Team Melli faces a daunting challenge at the upcoming AFC Women's Asian Cup, which kicks off on March 1, with Iran drawn in Group

A alongside hosts Australia, 2022 runners-up South Korea, and the Philippines, semifinalists in the previous edition.

Elsewhere on the final day of the domestic top flight, Ava Tehran secured its top-flight status with a 2-1 home win over Malavan to finish eighth on 11 points. Persepolis defeated Yasam 4-0 away to claim seventh place in their debut Kowsar League season, while third-placed Ista Alborz beat Palayesh Gaz Ilam 3-1 at home.



Khatoon captain Atefeh Ramezanizadeh holds the Iran Women's Pro League trophy after a 3-0 victory over Sepahan in Bam, Iran, on February 10, 2026. 

# Marnan Bridge; silent chronicle of Isfahan's living past



kojaro.com

## Iranica Desk

Marnan Bridge stands among the understated yet historically rich attractions of Isfahan, resting quietly within the flow of centuries on the bed of the Zayandeh Rud River. Over long ages, it has borne witness to movement, daily life, and the enduring connection between the two sides of the city. With its graceful architecture and authentic character, this historic structure remains a valuable reminder of the grandeur of Isfahan's bygone eras. Located in the western part of the city, far from the crowds and commotion of major tourist routes, Marnan Bridge offers visitors a distinctive opportunity to uncover the lesser-seen and more intimate beauty of Isfahan.

The bridge is situated in western Isfahan, spanning the Zayandeh Rud River. It lies along Khayyam Street, on the axis connecting it to Vahid Street, and is geographically close to Sa'di Park and Vahid Park, according to kojaro.com. From an architectural standpoint, Marnan Bridge shares notable similarities with Isfahan's renowned Si-o-Se Pol (Thirty-Three-Arch Bridge) and Khaju Bridge. Nevertheless, due to its more modest scale and its location in a quieter, less frequented area, it has remained

largely overlooked by many tourists. Measuring approximately 160 meters in length, the bridge is supported by solid foundations of stone and brick. The design of its arches and spans reflects careful engineering, allowing it to endure the pressure of river currents and seasonal flooding while maintaining its structural integrity over many years. Today, Marnan Bridge features 17 active spans, although historical records indicate that it once had a greater number, some of which were gradually blocked over time. The smaller arches positioned between the larger ones serve primarily decorative purposes, adding visual rhythm to the structure. The width of the spans varies along the bridge, with the central section distinguished by wider arches that emphasize both balance and strength in its overall design.

When the Zayandeh Rud flows at full capacity, the passage of water beneath Marnan Bridge is accompanied by a powerful, resonant sound — one that is simultaneously forceful and calming, creating a uniquely soothing atmosphere. During periods when the riverbed is dry, the bridge remains a welcoming space for pedestrians and cyclists. Visitors can stroll or ride across it while enjoying the

elegant nighttime lighting, the surrounding green parks, and the unforgettable view of the sun setting over the western horizon, as seen from the bridge's elevated vantage point.

## History

The historic Marnan Bridge of Isfahan has long been recognized as an important communication route and a notable architectural landmark. Positioned in the westernmost part of the city, it played a vital role in linking the northern and southern banks of the Zayandeh Rud River. Through this connection, the bridge facilitated movement between the fertile villages north of the river and the settlements established along its southern shore, making it a key transportation artery in western Isfahan for generations. Despite its significance, precise details regarding the exact date of construction and the identity of the original builders remain uncertain. Some historians believe that, similar to Shahrestan Bridge, the earliest foundations of Marnan Bridge date back to the Sassanid era and that the structure underwent restoration and reconstruction during the Safavid period. Others attribute its construction entirely to the Safavid era, suggesting that an Armenian

merchant of Isfahan, known as Sarafraz, financed its building or major renovation. Throughout its long history, the bridge has suffered damage caused by natural events and has been repaired on multiple occasions. Even so, these interventions have not diminished its authenticity, and the bridge has retained the essential architectural character and appearance associated with the Safavid period. The original name of the historic Marnan Bridge was "Marbin," a term derived from "Mehrbin" and rooted in Avestan culture. During the Sassanid period, linguistic changes in Middle Persian gradually transformed the word Mehrbin into Marbin. Over time, the name Marnan emerged as the modern form and became associated with both the bridge and its surrounding area, remaining in common use to this day. Alternative interpretations of the name's origin also exist. Some scholars believe it refers to the winding, serpentine course of the Zayandeh Rud in this section, while others connect it to the presence of a village named Marnan near the Jolfa district. Marnan Bridge is also known by the name Sarafraz Bridge.

## Nearby attractions

Nazhvan Forest Park is one of the largest and most verdant natural

areas in Isfahan, stretching along the banks of the Zayandeh Rud and playing a crucial role in improving the city's air quality. Its dense vegetation, towering old trees, and tranquil environment have earned Nazhvan the reputation of being the "lungs of Isfahan," offering residents and visitors a refreshing escape from urban life. Nazhvan, with its diverse sections and wide range of attractions, ranks among the most popular destinations in Isfahan. Facilities such as the Isfahan Aquarium, Reptile Garden, Butterfly Garden Museum, Bird Garden, Shell Museum, and chairlift represent only a portion of its recreational and educational offerings. Well-designed walking paths, ample resting areas, and convenient access have made Nazhvan a favored destination for families, nature enthusiasts, and tourists seeking both leisure and learning.

The

Isfahan National Museum of Art is housed in a historic building dating back to the late Qajar period and was inaugurated in conjunction with the 43rd anniversary of the victory of the Islamic Revolution. Today, it is regarded as one of the city's leading museums. With a collection of more than 300 historical artifacts, the museum traces the artistic evolution of the people of Isfahan from prehistoric

times to the modern era. Spanning over one thousand square meters, the museum occupies two floors and includes six exhibition halls.

Throughout its galleries, visitors encounter remarkable works such as 50,000-year-old stone tools, ancient jewelry and pottery, swords attributed to Shah Abbas Safavid, Qajar-era lacquer pieces, pen cases, masterful calligraphy, textile arts, metalwork, enamelwork, and paintings by well-known contemporary artists.

Vank Cathedral is among the most significant historical and religious landmarks of Isfahan, located in the historic Jolfa district. Constructed during the reign of Shah Abbas Safavid by Armenian immigrants, the cathedral has held an essential role not only as a place of worship but also as a center of cultural, historical, and social life for the Armenian community.

The architecture of Vank Cathedral presents a striking fusion of Iranian and Armenian artistic traditions, clearly visible in its frescoes, domes, and interior decorations. The inclusion of a museum, a library, and Iran's first printing house within the complex has further elevated its cultural importance. Today, Vank Cathedral stands as a lasting symbol of religious coexistence and cultural harmony in the history of Iran.

## Kul-e Farah site brings ancient history to life in SW Iran

### Iranica Desk

Kul-e Farah Gorge, located in Khuzestan Province northeast of the city of Izeh, is one of Iran's most distinctive archaeological and tourist sites. This historic gorge is home to Elamite rock reliefs intricately carved into massive cliffs, vividly portraying the life, rituals, and beliefs of people who lived thousands of years ago.

Beyond its historical and cultural significance, Kul-e Farah is also a major natural and cultural tourism destination, offering visitors a rare opportunity to experience art, history, and scenic landscapes simultaneously, according to IRNA.

The gorge lies approximately seven kilometers northeast of Izeh and is easily accessible via paved roads and dirt tracks. Izeh, the nearest city, provides accommodation, restaurants, and a range of tourism services. Clearly marked tourist signs guide visitors from within the city, and the route is accessible to passenger vehicles.

This favorable geographical location has turned Kul-e Farah into an ideal combination of cul-



wikipedia.org

tural tourism and nature exploration. Along the way, travelers encounter mountainous scenery, green plains, and seasonal rivers that enhance the overall travel experience.

The rock reliefs of Kul-e Farah date back to the Elamite civilization, which flourished in southwestern Iran around the third millennium BCE. The carvings depict scenes of daily life, religious ceremonies, festivals, sacrifices, and sacred rituals.

These engravings are not only artistically and aesthetically significant but also provide valuable insights into the social structure, religious beliefs, and rituals of ancient societies. Some researchers have de-

scribed the site as an "open-air stone museum," where visitors can observe thousands of years of culture, art, and history without spatial limitations.

Kul-e Farah holds not only national but also international importance, playing a key role in understanding ancient Iranian history and civilization. The site reflects the artistic skill, architectural knowledge, and cultural sophistication of the Elamites, who managed to record complex social and religious scenes on stone surfaces.

One of the site's most remarkable features is the unique integration of historical remains with natural landscapes. Nestled within the Zagros Mountains, the

site offers a peaceful, clean, and pleasant environment. Visitors can walk through it, enjoy the rocky vistas and surrounding valleys, and gain a multidimensional experience that combines history and nature.

This diversity makes Kul-e Farah appealing to a wide range of visitors — from history and culture enthusiasts to nature lovers and hiking fans. The surrounding mountain trails also provide opportunities for light trekking and nature walks.

A visit to the gorge can be combined with other nearby historical and natural attractions, including the Miangan Wetland, which is ideal for ecotourism, birdwatching, and photography;

thusiasts can capture striking images of the fusion between historical monuments and natural scenery, and students and researchers of history, archaeology, and anthropology can benefit from the site as a living open-air classroom.

A two-day itinerary is recommended to fully explore Kul-e Farah and its surroundings. Kul-e Farah is officially listed among Iran's National Heritage Sites, underscoring its historical, cultural, and tourism significance. Preserving this site for future generations is crucial, and responsible tourism plays an essential role in its protection.

As a comprehensive and exceptional tourist destination, Kul-e Farah Gorge offers an unforgettable experience by blending history, art, and nature. Visitors can explore millennia-old Elamite rock carvings, enjoy tranquil natural scenery, gain educational and cultural insights, and plan a meaningful journey. This site is not only a national attraction but also a cultural heritage site of global value — one that deserves to be experienced by travelers from around the world.

# Afghan ensemble calls to 'fade borders through music' at Tehran's Fajr festival

## Arts & Culture Desk

The head of the Afghan ensemble "Salam Afghanistan", said that his group seeks to "fade borders through music" as it performed at Tehran's Rudaki Hall during the 41st Fajr International Music Festival. The Kabul-rooted ensemble took to the stage on the evening of February 10 as part of Iran's flagship annual music event, a state-backed fixture that has long served as a barometer of the country's cultural climate. For Afghan musicians, whose domestic space has narrowed sharply in recent years, the Tehran platform carries added weight, ILNA reported.

Hamid Sael, who has appeared at several previous editions of the Fajr festival, described the event as a source of hope for professional musicians. Its continuity, he said, signals that the musical sphere remains alive, offering performing groups a rare opening to present new work before large audienc-

es.

The 41st edition of the Fajr International Music Festival officially opened on February 9, and will run until February 15. He stressed the deep historical and literary ties binding Iranian and Afghan music. Shared poetic heritage underpins much of the repertoire on both sides of the border, with contemporary Iranian and Afghan verse circulating widely in compositions in both countries. Salam Afghanistan works closely with Iranian collaborators, setting poetry to music through joint composition and ensemble performance. Its output spans anthems and popular songs as well as traditional pieces. While vocal traditions and poetic structures overlap, instrumental practice can diverge. Sael pointed to the Rabab/Rubab (lute-like musical instrument of Central Asian origin), often cited as a shared instrument, noting that in Iran and Afghanistan it shares little beyond its name. The instrument differs in shape and playing technique, and



The Afghan ensemble 'Salam Afghanistan' performs at Tehran's Rudaki Hall on February 10, 2026, during the 41st Fajr International Music Festival.

● IRNA

certain notes are rendered differently in performance. Afghan instrumentation also reflects affinities with the Indian classical tradition in some regions. The Tehran concert featured indigenous and folk music drawn from several Afghan provinces, alongside pieces dedicated to the western city of Herat, long regarded as a cultural bridge between the two nations. The program was designed to foreground musical continuities while acknowledging regional distinctiveness. Sael also alluded to the acute pressures facing musicians inside Afghanistan. Music, he said, has been declared forbidden under the current authorities, with public performance and even the audible presence of instruments effectively banned.



Yet he rejected the notion that Afghan musical heritage has vanished. Rather, he argued, it has been suppressed by recent decrees and destruction. Music, he said, is intrinsic to both societies and cannot be excised without

hollowing out the social fabric. Beyond entertainment, it functions as a vehicle for cultural transmission and collective memory. In that sense, cross-border collaboration becomes more than artistic exchange; it is an assertion of continuity.

## VP says government welcomes criticism from film community

### Arts & Culture Desk

Iran's First Vice President Mohammad Reza Aref, visiting the 44th Fajr National Film Festival in Tehran on Tuesday, dismissed what he described as attempts to portray a rift between the government and artists, saying the administration "openly welcomes" criticism from the country's film community and that no estrangement exists between the two sides.

Speaking to reporters at the Mellat Cineplex, the main venue of the annual state-backed festival, Aref said this year's edition had drawn strong public attendance despite what he called negative messaging following unrest in January, IRNA reported. He added that the quality of entries had improved compared with previous years and that many films



adopted youth-oriented and socially critical approaches.

"The artist is the mirror of society," Aref said, urging officials to raise their tolerance threshold and framing cinema as a space for dialogue and the exchange of ideas. At the same time, he said filmmakers, given their influence on younger generations, should remain attentive to social realities. During his tour, Aref met festival organizers and se-

nior officials from the Cinema Organization of Iran and attended a screening of 'Mola,' directed by Abbas Lajevardi. In a closed-door session, officials briefed him on audience turnout, production standards and structural challenges facing the industry. Aref called for a more strategic approach to the economics of culture, stressing the need to bolster infrastructure and draft a clear governmental roadmap for the film sector.

## Iran's foreign policy ...

Human security and a country's position within global value chains have emerged as key instruments in building sustainable security. Yet the prevailing theoretical framework in Iran leaves out these concepts, effectively depriving the country of the opportunity to draw on such resources.

This framework also shapes Iran's posture in international negotiations. An exclusive focus on certain issues without considering how to integrate into global value chains or forge regional alliances aimed at sustainable security cannot ensure genuine national security. In today's world, security takes shape in countries that are embedded in global value chains,

not merely through missile arsenals or military strength. At various historical junctures, this fallacy has exerted a decisive influence. Whenever Iran's foreign policy has been confined to survival alone, the country has been pushed toward periods of decline or deep crisis. The current situation suggests that once again the focus of foreign policy has been narrowed to mere preservation. The result has been a widening gap between Iran and the realities of the international system, transforming the country into a passive actor that waits on the decisions of others and merely falls back on reactive measures. A proper understanding of foreign policy and the safeguarding of na-

tional security therefore require a theoretical framework capable of enhancing statesmen's ability to comprehend global dynamics and engage intelligently with the international system. Without revisiting and revising this framework, an accurate reading of global realities and the design of an effective foreign policy will remain out of reach. In other words, preserving national security today demands recognition that foreign policy is not simply about survival. It requires active and intelligent engagement with global structures, participation in value chains, and regional cooperation — capacities that the current theoretical framework in Iran does not fully possess.

## US, Iranian religious leaders, academics issue joint call for peace amid rising global conflicts

### Social Desk

A group of prominent religious leaders, scholars and faith-based peace advocates from the United States and Iran issued a joint statement opposing war and urging governments to take "concrete steps towards reconciliation" before further catastrophes unfold.

The signatories include Ayatollah Mostafa Mohaghegh Damad, dean of the Department of Islamic Studies at the Academy of Sciences of Iran; Professor Gholamreza Aavani, member of the Iranian Academy of Sciences; Dr. Reza Davari Ardakani, distinguished emeritus professor of philosophy at the University of Tehran; most reverend John C. Wester, Catholic Archbishop of Santa Fe; Bishop Vashti Murphy McKenzie, president and general secretary of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA; Rabbi Amy Eilberg, peace and justice activist; and Professor Jim Wallis of Georgetown University.

In their joint declaration, titled 'A Time for Peace,' the leaders say the world is "ensnared in armed conflicts that engender despair, anxiety, and the unending slaughter of innocents," and call for urgent action to prevent the spread of war. Below is the full text of the statement:

Today the human family is ensnared in armed conflicts that engender despair, anxiety, and the unending slaughter of innocents.

We are a group of religious leaders from the United States and Iran. With profound sympathy for all victims of war and oppression, we together implore our governmental leaders and those of other countries to take concrete steps towards reconciliation before even greater catastrophes befall us.

Now is the time for religious leaders everywhere to take meaningful,

constructive steps toward lasting peace and to extinguish the flames of enmity and hatred. Mutual trust must be forged between nations and faith communities, grounded in our sacred texts that call us to extend good will even in the hardest circumstances.

Genuine peace means more than the cessation of hostilities. It entails cooperation across differences to address injustice, poverty and hunger, environmental degradation, and threats to public health.

To realize true peace which blesses all parties to conflict, religious leaders must call those wielding political power to oppose all aggression and tyranny, to acknowledge the rights of others, and to uphold universal human rights. Religious leaders with moral authority, sustained by their communities, must courageously stand for human dignity and nonviolent means of resolving conflicts.

The Golden Rule - do unto others as you would have them do unto you - is a cornerstone of our shared heritage and comes from God speaking directly to Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad.

If action to transform violent conflicts is not taken now, the horrors of war and devastation will spread and engulf thousands, if not millions, of innocent lives. We cannot allow that to happen.

We stand ready to partner with governments, other faith communities, and civil society organizations to prepare the ground for genuine peace and cooperation, allowing hope to overcome cynicism and despair. And we pray that such a concerted effort, across national and communal borders, will bear fruit, so that our children and grandchildren can share an increasingly interdependent world in which all inhabitants flourish in lasting peace and security.