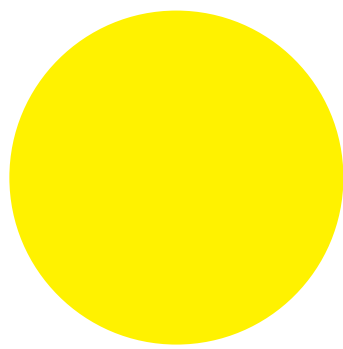


44th Fajr Film Festival  
Human portrait of  
Gen. Soleimani's formative  
years in 'Migration'

INTERVIEW  
EXCLUSIVE

8 >



# Iran Daily

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## China says Iran-US dispute should be resolved through dialogue

Switzerland: Oman to host US-Iran talks in Geneva next week

2 >



### Pezeshkian asserts no nation benefits from war 'Iran to fast-track corridor projects; connectivity will guarantee regional security'

2 >

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian walks to the podium to address an international conference on investment opportunities in rail and road construction in Tehran on February 14, 2026.  
● [president.ir](http://president.ir)



Seven agreements  
signed to advance  
national rail,  
road corridor  
infrastructure

3 >



Why Qatar is betting  
on diplomacy with  
Iran

OPINION 4 >



Sangan Mosque  
preserves faith,  
heritage in  
Khorasan Razavi

7 >

Azmoun eyes long-awaited return  
with World Cup in sight

6 >



## Tehran-Washington talks focus on containing crisis

INTERVIEW  
EXCLUSIVE



Kamran Yeganegi

Negotiations between Tehran and Washington are expected to continue on Tuesday in Geneva amid mounting pressure and military threats from Washington and persistent mistrust and caution on the Iranian side. These circumstances have made it difficult to forecast the future of the talks. Kamran Yeganegi, an international affairs analyst, told Iran Daily that the current negotiations are focused on managing the conflict rather than complete resolution of differences, and could either lead to a limited

understanding or trigger a new deadlock.

IRAN DAILY: How would you evaluate the course of negotiations up to this point? how do you see the outlook and what factors could lead to progress or a stalemate?

YEGANEHI: The current course of talks should be analyzed within the framework of "conflict management" rather than the "final settlement of disputes." Historical experience in Iran-US relations has shown that whenever both sides conclude that the cost of continued tension outweighs the cost of negotiations, a window for dialogue tends to open up, even a limited one. A similar juncture appears to have been reached. So far, signs of willingness to sustain dialogue can be observed, yet this willingness has not been elevated to

the level of a "strategic decision for sustainable compromise." What is currently seen is largely an effort to contain the crisis and prevent escalation. This is not a minor achievement though, but it remains far from a comprehensive agreement. The outlook ahead depends on several decisive factors: First, the degree of realism on the American side in accepting Iran's rights and red lines of Iran. Second, defining phased and verifiable objectives instead of putting forward maximalist demands; And third, the ability of both sides to manage third-party actors and the media environment, which could derail any potential agreement even before it takes shape. If the negotiations move forward based on balanced and simultaneous steps, a limited but effective understanding may be within reach.

However, if military pressure and demands beyond the core issues are imposed on the negotiating table, the risk of entering a new cycle of mistrust and stalemate will increase.

What objectives did Ali Larijani pursue in his visit to Oman and Qatar as Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council? Do these moves complement the efforts of the Foreign Ministry and the negotiating team, or do they point to a parallel channel designed to advance specific security and regional agendas?

In complex security and strategic cases, diplomacy is not defined solely within the framework of the Foreign Ministry. Wise governance requires that foreign policy and national security considerations move in a coordinated orbit.

Page 2 >

Fajr festival brings AI to the fore  
as judges fault pop music standards

8 >





## Putin urges deeper Russia-Iran strategic partnership

### International Desk

Russian President Vladimir Putin on Saturday called for the “persistent” strengthening of a comprehensive strategic partnership between Moscow and Tehran in a message to his Iranian counterpart Masoud Pezeshkian to congratulate on the 47<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1979 Islamic Revolution. In his message, Putin said relations between the two countries were characterized by “a friendly nature and good neighborliness” as he wished “prosperity and well-being” to the Iranian people, IRNA reported.

“Russia supports Iran’s efforts to safeguard its sovereign rights and legitimate interests and to ensure the country’s security in the current complex international conditions,” he added, in an apparent reference to rising tensions between Iran and the United States, which have seen a massive US naval buildup in the Persian Gulf to threaten the Islamic Republic with military action if a deal is not reached over its nuclear program. Putin and Pezeshkian signed a 20-year comprehensive strategic partnership treaty in Moscow on January 17, 2025 which came into force in early October. Under the treaty, the two countries are committed to assisting one another in countering common security threats and to engaging in intelligence sharing. The agreement also specifies that if one party faces aggression, the other will refrain from aiding the aggressor.

# Pezeshkian asserts no nation benefits from war

‘Iran to fast-track corridor projects; connectivity will guarantee regional security’

### International Desk

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian praised efforts by West Asian leaders to strengthen peace and stability in the strategic region, saying that no nation benefits from war. Pezeshkian made the remarks during the International Conference on Investment and Financing Opportunities of Rail and Road Corridors, which was held in Tehran on Saturday.

Pezeshkian’s remarks came as regional countries including Turkey, Iraq, Oman, Qatar and Egypt did their utmost to ease tensions recently deteriorated between Tehran and Washington over Iran’s nuclear program. Efforts by the leaders of the regional countries have reportedly led to the resumption of talks between Iran and the United States and have already reduced the risk of a military confrontation in the region. During the conference, the president said development of communication routes would guarantee progress for all regional countries and create a suitable platform for peace and security for future generations.

He said that Iran is firmly committed to accelerating the implementation of vital transport infrastructure projects, stressing

that connectivity will guarantee the security of all regional countries.

“In the Islamic Republic, we are determined to implement projects related to the country’s roads and vital arteries with power, speed, precision, and high quality,” Pezeshkian said.

During the event, attended by Minister of Roads and Urban Development Farzaneh Sadegh Malvajer, seven memoranda of understanding and agreements were signed between the Construction and Development of Transportation Infrastructures Company of Iran and domestic and foreign investors to expand rail and road corridor infrastructure.

Ambassadors from the Republic of Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Iraq, Belarus, Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan, the United Arab Emirates, Russia, Armenia, Qatar, and Burkina Faso, as well as the UN representative in Iran, attended the event.

Pezeshkian underlined the broader significance of transport links, saying, “The communication roads and routes that connect us are the path of development and peace, and with the opening of these roads, the security of all of us will be ensured, the economies of countries will develop, and we will build a region full of peace, tranquility,



Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian speaks during the International Conference on Investment and Financing Opportunities of Rail and Road Corridors in Tehran on February 14, 2026.

and friendship.”

He added that Iran shares deep historical and cultural ties with neighboring countries.

“We are friends, brothers, and relatives with the Republic of Azerbaijan, Iraq, Kurdistan, and so forth,” he said.

“We have a several-thousand-year history

of cooperation and friendship with Turkey, Afghanistan, and Turkmenistan; therefore, we will revive our connections and believe that our routes of connection are the path of peace, development of science and knowledge, and capability. With the opening of roads, we can guarantee security and the economy.”

## China says Iran-US dispute should be resolved through dialogue

Switzerland: Oman to host US-Iran talks in Geneva next week

### International Desk

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said the current situation surrounding Iran has affected the entire West Asia region, stressing that disputes between Tehran and Washington should be resolved through mediation and dialogue.

Addressing the 62<sup>nd</sup> Munich Security Conference on Saturday, the Chinese top diplomat said, “The United States must exercise ‘caution’ in its engagements with Iran. This situation directly impacts peace in the Middle East.” “Instead of creating new conflicts, the parties should act with caution,” Wang said.

Since February 6, Iran and the US have launched a new round of negotiations to resolve a dispute over Iran’s nuclear program.

The US, which has sent a number of aircraft carriers and warships to the region, has threatened Iran with new military attacks if Iran does not make



Wang Yi

a deal.

Iran has announced its conditions and has underlined that it will not bow to excessive demands in the negotiations which were held in Oman’s capital. Iran has also said that it will give decisive response to any aggression.

Switzerland said on Saturday that Oman would host new round talks in Geneva next week. “Switzerland stands ready at all times to offer its good offices to facilitate dialogue between the United States and Iran, a foreign ministry spokesman told AFP.

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov also said on Saturday that Moscow along with others, including China, is working to ensure a suitable political environment for negotiations between Iran and the United States.

On the sidelines of the Munich Security Conference, the US Secretary of State Marco Rubio discussed the outlook for negotiations with Iran with Bloomberg, saying that President Donald Trump “would always prefer to end problems with a deal.”

Addressing the Munich conference, Rubio however repeated claims that Iran’s nuclear program has military objectives, stressing that the US actions in June against Iranian nuclear facilities had contained what he described as a “growing threat.” The US president, who has repeatedly said he prefers a deal with Iran, claimed on Friday that regime change in Iran is “the best thing that could happen.”

## Araghchi calls Munich Conference a ‘circus’

### International Desk

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi on Saturday branded the Munich conference a “circus” and the European Union an “aimless” bloc over the pair’s lack of understating about Iran.

“Sad to see the usually serious Munich Security Conference turned into the ‘Munich Circus’ when it comes to Iran,” Araghchi wrote on X, arguing that the annual gathering in Germany had declined as it preferred “substance” over “performance.” He accused Germany of “wholly surrendering its regional policy to Israel.” The top diplomat took a swipe at the EU, calling it a “confused ‘entity that had ‘lost all geopolitical weight’ in the West Asia region.”

Araghchi said the EU and the three European powers – Germany, France and Britain or E3 – which were parties to the tattered 2015 Iran nuclear deal, had become “paralysis and irrelevance” as they had been sidelined in the ongoing talks between the Islamic Republic and the United States to hammer out a new agreement.

“Instead, our friends in the region are far more effective and helpful than an empty-handed and peripheral E3,” he said in a clear reference to mediation efforts by several regional nations including Oman, Qatar and Egypt to help progress fresh Iran-US talks that began on February 6 in



Abbas Araghchi

the Omani capital Muscat.

Earlier on Friday, the Iranian foreign minister in a phone conversation with Cypriot Minister of Foreign Affairs Constantinos Kombos, whose country holds the rotating presidency of the EU, said the bloc is needed to make a serious revision in its “unconstructive” approaches toward Tehran.

Araghchi criticized the EU’s inappropriate approaches towards Iran, particularly the recent offensive move by the Council of the European Union in blacklisting the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) as “terrorist organizations” and the union’s unwarranted interference in Iran’s internal affairs.

On January 30, the European Union added the IRGC to its terrorist list in response to Iran’s measures against rioters who violently wreaked havoc across the country on the invitation of a monarchist and the public incitement of US and Israeli leaders in late December.

## Tehran-Washington talks ...

Larjani’s visit should be understood in this context. When negotiations with multilayered dimensions are underway, it is natural for security and regional coordination to be pursued in parallel.

These moves do not represent a parallel channel competing with the Foreign Ministry, but rather one complementing it. The Foreign Ministry follows up on the text and framework of any agreement, while security institutions are responsible for assessing strategic consequences, executive guarantees, and preventing miscalculations. At a time when the other side is coupling negotiations with military pressure, it is natural for Iran to reinforce its diplomacy with the backing of national security.

**Considering the contradictory statements by Donald Trump, what do you think are his overall objectives and strategy toward Iran? How can the apparent contradiction between negotiations, increased military pressure, and rhetoric such as regime change be interpreted within a coherent strategy?** Trump’s foreign policy has relied less on “consistency in tone” and more on “effectiveness in outcomes.” For this reason, what may initially appear contradictory can, in many cases, be components of a single pattern: combining negotiation with pressure to enhance bargain-

ing power. Within this framework, his overall strategy toward Iran appears to rest on three simultaneous pillars.

First, diplomacy under pressure. Inviting to negotiations while increasing military pressure is, in Trump’s logic, a form of “leverage-building”. In this view, negotiation is not a substitute for pressure but its continuation through political tools. Second, managing domestic audiences and regional allies. He seeks to demonstrate simultaneously that he is pursuing an agreement while remaining “tough” on Iran and not setting aside instruments of power. This dual approach effectively enables him to frame any outcome as a success at home.

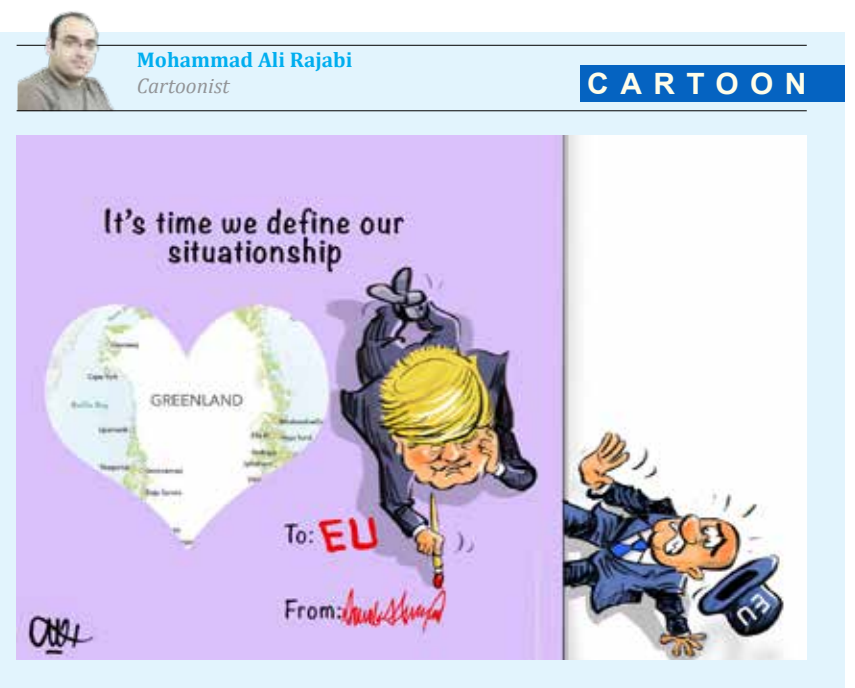
Third, psychological warfare and increasing uncertainty. Raising issues such as regime change, even without a clear operational plan behind them, aims to heighten concern and doubt on the opposing side and to shape the media environment in Washington’s favor. However, this approach is inherently risky, as the simultaneous use of threats and dialogue can increase the likelihood of misperception, miscalculation, and unintended incidents. If the real objective is to reach a sustainable agreement, the American side will ultimately have to move beyond symbolic messaging and demonstrative pressure and enter the logic of “balanced and verifiable action,” the only path through

which diplomacy can shift from fragility to reliability.

**Trump has announced the deployment of a new carrier strike group to the region and stressed the need to create fear, while some US officials say the military is preparing for a several-week conflict with Iran if ordered. How do these moves affect diplomacy, and how should Iran respond?**

Such positions and actions are in practice an attempt to strengthen leverage at the negotiating table. Although this approach may be designed to extract concessions, it intensifies the climate of mistrust and increases the risk of miscalculation. These developments make the negotiating environment more sensitive while also adding urgency to diplomatic prudence.

The prudent management of this situation for Iran can be summarized along three axes. First, maintaining smart and decisive deterrence without resorting to provocative behavior; second, sustaining active diplomacy with an emphasis on balanced and verifiable measures; and third, strengthening national cohesion and making clear that negotiations are conducted from a position of dignity and to safeguard national interests, not out of weakness. Strength combined with restraint represents the most effective response to pressure.





# Seven agreements signed to advance national rail, road corridor infrastructure

## Economy Desk

Seven memoranda of understanding, documents and agreements for developing rail and road corridor infrastructure were signed Saturday between Iran's Construction and Development of Transportation Infrastructures Company (CDTIC) and domestic and foreign investors in the presence of President Masoud Pezeshkian.

The signings took place during the International Conference on Investment and Financing Opportunities of Rail and Road Corridors (Corridor 2026), which was also attended by Roads and Urban Development Minister Farzaneh Sadegh Malvajerdi as well as domestic and foreign industry participants, IRNA reported.

Documents covering the handover of 125 kilometers of acquired land along the Rasht-Astara route and client requirements for the Rasht-Astara railway were signed between the CDTIC and Russian firm Caspian Services.

"To enhance international cooperation and attract private sector investment, 53 memoranda of understanding spanning more than 4,400 kilometers in the highway and rail sectors have been prepared between the company and domestic and international investors and fi-

nancial providers, and today six important memoranda and a document from this collection are being signed in the presence of the president," Houshang Bazvand, managing director of the CDTIC, said at the conference.

"Two documents from this collection relate to Russia's Caspian Services and are dedicated to constructing the strategic Rasht-Astara railway; a project that, upon completion, will close the missing link of the International North-South Corridor and significantly increase transit capacity along this route," Bazvand added.

## Major build plan, high-speed targets

Also, Yuri Kuzmin, representative of Russian company Caspian Services, said Saturday during the conference, "In current global conditions and the new geopolitical order, the North-South Corridor has gained increased strategic importance, and implementation of this corridor is being directly pursued by the leaders of Iran and Russia."

Stressing that the western branch of the corridor is currently under construction, passing through the Republic of Azerbaijan and Iran, Kuzmin said, "In this regard, the railways of Iran, Azerbaijan and Russia are pursuing seamless transport technology. However, removing

bottlenecks and upgrading sections of the route is necessary." Kuzmin also praised the Rasht-Astara rail project as a unique and complex undertaking being executed in difficult natural conditions in a densely populated area.

"Construction of new stations, grade-separated intersections and bridges is planned within this project framework, and maximum speed for passenger wagons will reach 140 km per hour and for freight and container wagons 120 km per hour," he said.

"To finance the project, the Russian Federation approved an export loan, and implementation of the intergovernmental agreement between the two countries began in May."

## Private investment milestone

During subsequent sessions of the conference, a preliminary memorandum of understanding for construction and operation of the Zahedan-Yunesi railway and completion and operation of the Zahedan-Chabahar railway was signed between Pars Railway Development Company and Construction and Development of Transportation Infrastructures Company.

Bazvand said regarding this agreement, "Given the importance of completing the eastern



Houshang Bazvand (R), managing director of Iran's Construction and Development of Transportation Infrastructures Company (CDTIC), and Yuri Kuzmin, representative of Russia's Caspian Services, exchange signed documents on the sidelines of the Corridor 2026 conference in Tehran, Feb. 14, 2026.

● president.ir

rail corridor and progress on the Chabahar-Zahedan railway project, this memorandum is being concluded for the first time in rail infrastructure development with private sector participation and represents a turning point in attracting non-governmental investment in the rail sector."

The final contract for the Qom-Salafchegan-Rahjerd freeway was then signed between

the construction company and Qom-Salafchegan-Rahjerd Freeway Construction Company.

A preliminary memorandum for construction and operation of the Ardakan-Yazd-Mehriz freeway was subsequently signed between the construction company, with participation of the National Land and Housing Organization of Iran, and the municipalities cooperation organization of Yazd Province.

Finally, a preliminary memorandum covering 16 rail and road projects across four provinces was signed between the CDTIC and Turkish company Veo.

The conference drew ambassadors from Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Iraq, Belarus, Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan, the United Arab Emirates, Russia, Armenia, Qatar, Burkina Faso and the United Nations representative in Iran.

## Steel chain exports register 38% surge in 10 months: ISPA



● IRNA

## Economy Desk

Exports from Iran's steel value chain rose sharply in the first 10 months of the current Iranian year (began on March 21), with iron and steel ship-

ments increasing 27% and total steel chain export volume climbing 38%, the Iranian Steel Producers Association (ISPA) said, according to IRNA.

The association reported that export value of iron and steel chain products during the period that began March 21 surpassed \$6.5 billion — the total for the whole of last year — marking a 22% increase.

Exports of upstream raw materials continued their upward trend, with shipments of iron ore concentrate and pellets totaling 20 million tons. Volumes of concentrate and pellets

rose 68% and 28% respectively compared with the same period last year.

By contrast, exports of long steel products fell 10% year-on-year in the 10-month period. Among them, I-beams posted the steepest decline, dropping 33%, while rebar exports decreased 17%, according to ISPA. Flat steel products moved in the opposite direction, recording a 195% surge in export volume compared with the same period last year. The value of steel sheet exports rose 132% to about \$563 million during the period.

## Iran-Russia economic ties enter 'new phase' with Caspian ship delivery: Envoy

## Economy Desk

A 7,200-ton cargo ship named "Sahel-e Khazar" (Caspian Beach) was officially delivered to Iran's shipping fleet Friday at the Lotus Special Economic Zone in Russia's Astrakhan Province, with Iranian Ambassador to Russia Kazem Jalali describing the event as a practical manifestation of Tehran-Moscow relations entering "a new phase of economic cooperation."

According to ISNA, the vessel was built by Lotus Shipbuilding Company and will operationally join the fleet of Caspian Shipping Company.

Technical documents for the ship were signed in the presence of officials from both countries, and the two sides agreed to continue technical and engineering cooperation in future projects.

The ceremony was held within the framework of ongoing maritime and commercial cooperation between Iran and Russia and concluded as one of the joint industrial projects between the

two countries in the maritime transport sector.

At the ceremony, Modarres Khiabani, CEO of the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Lines, highlighted the importance of developing maritime transport corridors.

According to Khiabani, the capacity of the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Lines' fleet in the Caspian Sea has increased from 95,000 tons to 120,000 tons in recent years. With the addition of the "Sahel-e Khazar" vessel and two more ships to be built by Iranian shipbuilding companies by the end of 2026, the maritime transport capacity of Iran's Caspian fleet is expected to reach 150,000 tons.

The head of the Shipping organization, emphasizing the importance of the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC), described increased maritime transport capacity as a prerequisite for developing this strategic route and announced that the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Lines, as the



world's 17th largest container shipping company, is striving to enhance its role in strengthening economic relations between the two countries.



Iranian Ambassador to Russia Kazem Jalali addresses the delivery ceremony of the cargo ship, "Sahel-e Khazar" (Caspian Beach), to Iran's shipping fleet at the Lotus Special Economic Zone in Russia's Astrakhan Province on February 13, 2026.

● ISNA

## TPO: Non-oil exports top \$41.24b in first nine months, up 1% by weight

## Economy Desk

Iran's total non-oil exports reached 118,901 million tons, valued at \$41.243 billion, during the first nine months of the current Iranian year, which began March 21, registering a 1 percent increase in weight compared with the same period last year, the Trade Promotion Organization (TPO) announced, according to IRNA.

The average price per ton of exported goods during the period stood at \$347. Analysis of export destinations indicates stabilization of Iranian goods in major regional and Asian markets, clearly reflected in the country's top five export markets.

China ranked first with \$10.212 billion in purchases, representing a 25 percent share, followed by Iraq with \$7.395 billion (18%), the UAE with \$5.816 billion (14%), Turkey with \$5.005 billion (12%) and Afghanistan with \$1.877 billion (5%). These five countries collectively accounted for 74 percent of Iran's total exports, highlighting strong commercial ties and high potential for expanding economic cooperation in the region.

The export commodity mix shows that petrochemical, mining and metal industry chains continue to form the main pillar of the country's non-oil exports. Key items during the period included methanol, petroleum bitumen, liquefied butane, iron and non-alloy steel ingots, various urea types, other petroleum gases and liquefied hydrocarbon gases, iron ore and its concentrate, polyethylene grade, containers, hot-rolled iron and steel bars, and worked aluminum.

"This commodity composition indicates the continuation of Iran's relative advantages in the energy, mining and metal industries, with high capacity to develop exports of higher value-added products in these



● IRNA

sectors," the report said.

During the same nine-month period, Iran's imports reached 29.325 million tons valued at \$44.151 billion. The average price per ton of imported goods was recorded at \$1,506.

The top five import sources were the UAE, China, Turkey, India and Germany, collectively accounting for 80 percent of total imports. In addition, Russia, the Netherlands, Hong Kong, Oman and Switzerland ranked among the top ten import trade partners.

Major import items included gold, animal corn, sunflower seed oil, smartphones, rice, soybeans, separate parts for automobile production, barley (excluding seed), common wheat, soybean meal, photovoltaic cells (solar panels) and palm oil.

The report noted that the main focus of imports has been on securing essential goods, livestock and agricultural inputs, production raw materials, and certain capital- and technology-oriented items, aimed at supporting domestic production, strengthening the value chain and maintaining food security.

Iran's foreign trade statistics for the nine-month period reflect continued trade dynamism, stabilization of export target markets, deepening of regional cooperation and the effective role of leading industries in driving non-oil exports.



# Why Qatar is betting on diplomacy with Iran



By Sultan Al-Khulaifi  
Senior researcher at  
Center for Conflict and  
Humanitarian Studies

## OPINION

The confrontation between the United States and Iran has entered a more volatile phase, marked by direct military strikes, heightened rhetoric, and the steady erosion of long-standing restraints. From attacks on Iranian nuclear facilities to Tehran's calibrated retaliation across the region, the risk of escalation has become tangible rather than theoretical. For Persian Gulf states, whose security and economic stability are directly exposed to any US-Iran conflict, the implications are immediate. It is within this environment that Qatar's diplomacy between Washington and Tehran should be understood: not as neutrality for its own sake, but as a calculated effort to contain risks that escalation would only magnify.

Periods of heightened tension between the United States and Iran have long carried consequences well beyond Washington and Tehran. Following a wave of riots inside Iran that, according to varying estimates, resulted in the deaths of several thousand people, rhetoric between Tehran and Washington has hardened markedly. This included President Trump's threat to intervene on behalf of the protesters, a development that further heightened the urgency of diplomacy in the Persian Gulf. The Persian Gulf's geography, concentrated energy infrastructure, and interlinked security environment mean that even limited confrontation risks rapid regional spillover. Against this backdrop, Qatar's approach toward Washington and Tehran has consistently prioritised de-escalation, mediation, and the maintenance of political channels at moments when such channels appeared increasingly fragile. Qatar has emerged as an effective and credible mediator at moments of acute tension between the United States and Iran, offering practical avenues that have helped prevent crises from escalating further. Drawing on its sustained relations with Tehran and its strategic partnership with Washington, Doha has maintained discreet and trusted channels that allow both sides to communicate when direct engagement becomes politically constrained. This positioning has enabled Qatar to facilitate de-escalatory outcomes that have saved face for both parties, reinforcing its role as a mediator that creates political space for restraint rather than confrontation.

This role was most visibly demonstrated in September 2023, when Qatar helped facilitate a prisoner exchange between Iran and the United States, alongside the release of frozen Iranian funds for humanitarian purposes. The process required months of indirect negotiations, careful sequencing, and political reassurance on both sides. While the agreement did not signal a broader rapprochement, it underscored an important point: even amid deep hostility, diplomacy remains possible when credible mediators are available.

For Doha, such mediation is not an end in itself. It reflects a broader conviction that the Iranian nuclear issue, and US-Iran tensions more generally, cannot be sustainably managed through coercion alone. Qatar has consistently aligned itself with the view that dialogue rather than military action offers the only viable path toward containing



Iran's President Masoud Pezeshkian (L) walks with Qatar's Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani during a welcome ceremony at the presidential palace in Tehran, Iran, on February 19, 2025.  
● [president.ir](https://www.president.ir)

risks and preventing escalation. This position does not imply indifference to Iranian regional behaviour or to proliferation concerns; rather, it reflects an assessment of costs, uncertainty, and unintended consequences for regional security. As such, even in the aftermath of Iran's calibrated missile strike on the Al Udeid airbase in Qatar — a Qatari military facility hosting US forces — launched in June 2025 in response to US attacks on Iranian nuclear facilities, Doha moved swiftly to engage both sides and contain the crisis. Through urgent outreach and established communication channels, Qatar contributed to broader efforts that helped support a fragile cease-fire that has broadly held since, underscoring both its capacity to be effective in mediation and the trust placed in Qatari diplomacy.

A military confrontation aimed at overthrowing the Iranian regime would almost certainly generate effects that extend far beyond Iran's borders. Internally, such a scenario risks producing state collapse, fragmentation of authority, and the re-politicisation of ethnic and sectarian identities within a large and highly complex society. Externally, the spillover effects could include large-scale refugee movements toward neighbouring states, including across the Persian Gulf, as well as severe disruptions to maritime security and energy markets. Taken together, these outcomes would pose immediate

challenges to Persian Gulf states whose own stability is closely tied to regional calm.

Recent developments in the region have already altered the strategic balance. Since the October 7 attacks and the subsequent regional confrontations, Iran's network of allied non-state actors has come under sustained pressure. Several elements of the "Axis of Resistance" have been weakened militarily and politically, reducing Tehran's ability to project influence in certain theatres. At the same time, the US attacks on Iran in June 2025 have dispelled any remaining misconceptions about Washington's willingness to strike Iran directly and degrade its nuclear enrichment capacity.

From a Persian Gulf perspective, however, further escalation offers diminishing returns. Weakening Iranian regional influence does not automatically translate into regional stability, particularly if pursued through strategies that risk state collapse. For Persian Gulf states, the priority is not the dramatic remaking of Iran's political system, but the avoidance of chaos that would be costly, unpredictable, and difficult to contain. This assessment is not limited to Doha. In recent years, Qatar's position has increasingly converged with those of Saudi Arabia and Oman, both of which have invested in reducing tensions with Tehran through dialogue and confidence-building

measures. Their efforts to communicate the risks of military escalation to the Trump administration reflected a broader regional mood, one that favours containment and engagement over confrontation. This convergence is notable given the political differences that have historically separated Persian Gulf capitals.

Qatar's mediation efforts offer a pathway that helps prevent regional chaos at a moment when escalation increasingly offers diminishing returns. By keeping channels open, facilitating limited agreements, and discouraging maximalist strategies, Doha seeks to reduce the likelihood of miscalculation. Such efforts rarely produce dramatic breakthroughs, and they are often invisible by design. Yet their absence would likely make escalation more probable, not less.

In an increasingly polarised regional environment, the value of de-escalation is easily overlooked. It lacks the clarity of deterrence and the euphoria of military action. Still, as Qatar's engagement between Washington and Tehran illustrates, diplomacy, however incremental and imperfect, remains one of the few tools capable of preventing crises from spiralling into wider conflict. In a region where the costs of war are shared far beyond the battlefield, that contribution should not be dismissed lightly.

The article first appeared on Al Jazeera.



Interceptor missiles are fired after Iran's Armed Forces targeted the American Al Udeid base in a calibrated missile attack in response to the US bombing of Iran's nuclear facilities, as seen from Doha, Qatar, on June 23, 2025.  
● [STRINGER](https://www.stringer.com)



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# Good neighborliness policy in effect

## Why is Larijani's trip to Muscat, Doha significant?

### OPINION

The scheduled trip of the secretary to Iran's Supreme National Security Council to Oman and Qatar, at a juncture fraught with regional vicissitudes, conveys an unequivocal message regarding the enduring primacy of the neighborhood policy for Tehran: namely, to circumscribe the escalated tensions fomented by the United States and the Israeli regime, and to underscore that the resolution of West Asian security problems must transpire through endogenous regional mechanisms.

On Tuesday, February 10, the Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council departed for Oman and then Qatar in a prearranged trip intended to reiterate and elucidate the policy of good neighborliness of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Concurrent with the ascent of the aircraft conveying Ali Larijani, a torrent of conjecture concerning the objectives and minutiae of these visits commenced — an unsurprising phenomenon given the prevailing national and regional circumstances.

General Sultan bin Mohammed Al Nu'amani, minister of the royal office of Oman, received the secretary at Muscat Airport, after which Larijani was hosted by Haitham bin Tariq, sultan of Oman. The 3-hour cordial meeting witnessed both parties accentuating the paramount bilateral commonality: the imperative of safeguarding regional security.

The most headline-generating encounter was the dialogue between the Iranian secretary and Badr bin Hamad Al Busaidi, Omani foreign minister; disseminated images intensified speculation regarding the transmission of written messages from the senior authorities of the two states. Subsequent to the meeting, Larijani declared that diverse economic deliberations — including investment and the resolution of mutual issues — had been conducted with Omani officials, and that the Sultan had articulated lucid and supportive positions concerning the augmentation of Iran-Omani economic cooperation. In consonance with antecedent diplomatic itineraries of Iranian officials, Larijani also met Mohammed Abdulsalam, spokesperson of Ansarullah (Houthis) of Yemen, and thereafter attended the National Day ceremony of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Muscat.

Describing the aggregate of his visit and consultations with Omani authorities as "fruitful and auspicious," the secretary, in an interview with Al-Alam television network, stated that his trip to Muscat occurred within the framework of historically robust Iran-Oman relations and encompassed discourse on Iran's expectations for the amplification of commercial relations and developmental cooperation, as well as consultations regarding regional and international issues.

On Wednesday morning, February 11, Larijani, escorted by General Al Nu'amani, departed Muscat for Doha, the second destination of his tour. In the Qatari capital, he was received by officials and subsequently conferred with Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, emir of Qatar, and thereafter with Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani, prime minister and foreign minister of Qatar.

### Conjectures surrounding Larijani's presence in Muscat, Doha

"Regional war" is a succinct yet momentous catchphrase employed by



numerous regional and international analysts to denote any military confrontation between Iran and the United States — implying that tensions initiated by the United States through the deployment of warships to the Persian Gulf and the Sea of Oman would not culminate in a circumscribed military engagement. For Iran, any conflagration instigated by Washington would constitute authorization to target American bases at any locus within the region, thereby precipitating comprehensive military turbulence across West Asia.

This alarm, resonant and admonitory for regional capitals, catalyzed endeavors to attenuate and arrest the escalation from the earliest days of intensification. Among regional actors, Oman, Qatar, and Turkey manifested the most conspicuous diplomatic exertion. The commencement of a new round of Iran-United States negotiations in Muscat, attended by Abbas Araghchi, Iran's foreign minister, and Steve Witkoff, special envoy of the US president, may be construed as one immediate corollary of these regional initiatives.

Nevertheless, regional relations in their totality — transcending merely the question of engagement with the United States — necessitate manifold exchanges at diverse levels. The predominant axis of such consultations, notwithstanding the discourse on negotiations, still revolves around regional relations and bilateral cooperation: precisely the objective pursued by the secretary through his presence in Oman and Qatar.

On Monday, Esmail Baqaei, spokesperson of Iran's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, clarified that the visit had been prearranged and constituted a continuation

of prior travels and consultations by the secretary, who had previously visited Russia, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Iraq to meet counterparts. These dialogues align with the principled policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran to fortify relations with neighboring states. The policy of good neighborliness and the consolidation of regional cooperation constitute cardinal pillars of Iran's foreign policy; thus, the visit in question must be evaluated within this paradigm. Across the waters of the Persian Gulf, both the sultan of Oman and the emir of Qatar reiterated the same principle. Oman's official news agency announced that the two sides emphasized the salience of resolving divergences through peaceful modalities to establish peace and security regionally and globally. The Amiri Diwan of Qatar likewise declared that the emir discussed regional conditions and endeavors to mitigate tension with the Iranian secretary.

### Tehran's security message to regional capitals, Washington

The significance of nuclear negotiations with the United States must not eclipse other foreign policy priorities of the Islamic Republic of Iran, particularly coordination with neighboring states. This axiom constitutes the principal objective of the secretary's trip to Doha and Muscat, especially as Benjamin Netanyahu hastens to the United States to destabilize the tenuous security equilibrium of the Middle East and to impel Donald Trump toward a renewed regional conflagration. For Netanyahu, any diplomatic accord — even one consonant with American interests — is unacceptable as it imperils his political survival within the Israeli regime. Consequently, he will exploit American scandals

and fabricate scenarios about Iran's move toward nuclear weapons to persuade Trump.

Trump's prior acquiescence to Netanyahu in June of this year has compelled Tehran to reiterate admonitions to the United States while augmenting preparedness for any war scenario. From Muscat, Larijani conveyed to the White House that Netanyahu is en route to America and that Americans must deliberate sagaciously and not permit him, prior to departure, to insinuate that "I want to go and teach the Americans the framework of nuclear negotiations"; They must remain vigilant regarding the pernicious role of Zionists.

Baqaei likewise affirmed that Iran's negotiating party is the United States, and it is incumbent upon that country to decide whether to act independently of pressures detrimental to the region and even to its own interests. As far as Iran is concerned, prior experiences — particularly the June episode, characterized as profoundly negative — are meticulously considered. In light of these experiences, Iran remains resolute in securing national interests through diplomacy.

Another dimension of the secretary's visit to the two regional capitals is the invalidation of certain speculative claims propagated by some media outlets and analysts concurrent with the announcement of the new negotiation round. Istanbul and Ankara had been advanced by predominantly Western outlets as potential venues for Iran-United States negotiations, despite Tehran's abstention from any decision regarding location or procedural modalities. The confirmation of Muscat as the venue and the bilateral nature of the talks, mediated by the Omani foreign minister, prompted assertions that the Islamic Republic had marginalized regional states. The secretary's presence in Oman and Qatar, together with the Foreign Ministry spokesperson's clarifications, refutes this allegation.

Baqaei, while expressing gratitude for the goodwill and good offices of all regional and neighboring countries, stated that no arrangement existed to convene the meeting outside Oman. Moreover, all regional states that facilitated the process had offered to host, and Iran remains in communication with all regional friends and neighbors.

The secretary's presence in two pivotal regional states, at a time when the Israeli regime and certain American officials contend that Iran's regional presence should constitute an axis of Tehran-Washington negotiations, is significant because the logic of the Islamic Republic maintains that regional issues — across every domain and category — must be resolved and negotiated within the region and among its states.

It appears that one of the paramount objectives of this visit is the attainment of a framework for regional dialogue capable of generating a rational solution to extant challenges among neighboring countries. Tehran is not merely prepared but eager to deliberate upon all reasonable concerns of its neighbors; however, it is equally determined to share this eagerness with regional states rather than extra-regional powers.

The article first appeared in Persian on IRNA.



Secretary to Iran's Supreme National Security Council Ali Larijani (front-left) shakes hands with Omani Minister of the Royal Office General Sultan bin Mohammed Al Nu'amani on February 11, 2026, before departing Muscat for Doha, Qatar's capital and the second destination of his tour.

● IRNA



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Qatari and Iranian officials await Secretary to Iran's Supreme National Security Council Ali Larijani (not pictured) to disembark the aircraft after landing in Doha, Qatar, on February 11, 2026.

● X





# Azmoun eyes long-awaited return with World Cup in sight

## Sports Desk

Iranian international Sardar Azmoun is set to make his long-awaited return from injury this week when his Shabab Al Ahli side travel to face Al Ahli Saudi FC in a crunch AFC Champions League Elite fixture on Monday.

After more than 130 days on the sidelines, the prolific striker has fully recovered from ankle surgery — Azmoun's second injury setback of the season after he missed the early stages of the campaign with a knee problem, limiting his contribution to just one goal in three appearances across all competitions. Azmoun was last in action during a 1-0 victory over Al Ittihad Club in the Asian elite club competition last September, and Portuguese head coach Paulo Sousa will hope the Irani-

an's return against another Saudi opponent can help Shabab Al Ahli secure a place in the knockout stage.

The Emirati champions sit sixth in the West Zone's 12-team table with 11 points — three clear of Qatari sides Al Duhail SC and Al Sadd SC, who occupy seventh and eighth — and a draw would be enough to send Shabab Al Ahli through to the last 16.

Azmoun's return would also provide a major boost for national team head coach Amir Qalenoee.

With the World Cup finals less than four months away, Qalenoee appears to have settled much of his squad for the tournament in North America, and the frontline partnership between Azmoun and Mahdi Taremi is expected to lead the line as Team Melli target a first-ever knockout-stage appearance at

the seventh attempt on football's biggest stage. While Taremi has been enjoying a strong season in the Greek

Super League with Olympiacos, Azmoun's trajectory has been far more turbulent. The 29-year-old will be eager to rediscover his sharpness ahead of March's international window. The coming month could prove decisive. With five crucial club fixtures before the March friendlies, Azmoun has an opportunity to rebuild match fitness and firmly stake his claim for a national team recall.

Azmoun, who has scored an impressive 57 goals in 91 caps, last featured for Team Melli in

a home draw against Uzbekistan in World Cup qualifiers 11 months ago. The former AS Roma

and FC Zenit Saint Petersburg striker recently made a cameo appearance for Shabab Al Ahli's under-23 side against Sharjah, delivering a promising display. He was also available for selection against Al Hilal last week, though Sousa ultimately left him out of the squad.

For Azmoun, the objective is clear: regain form, reclaim his place in the starting XI for club and country, and look ahead to what could be the third World Cup campaign of his career.



● shababalahli.ae



Younes Emami (red) will compete in the freestyle 74kg contest at the Muhamet Malo Ranking Series event in Tirana. ● IAWFIR

## Iran to send freestyle trio to Muhamet Malo tournament

### Sports Desk

Iran will be represented by three wrestlers in the freestyle competition at the upcoming Muhamet Malo tournament, which is set to begin on February 25 in Tirana, the Iranian Wrestling Federation confirmed on Friday.

The second Ranking Series event of the international season will also serve as the next stage of Iran's selection process for major events in 2026, including the World Championships in Manama and the Aichi-Nagoya 2026 Asian Games later in the summer.

Two-time world bronze medalist Younes Emami will compete in the 74kg division in the Albanian capital as he targets a third

world medal in Manama. Emami narrowly missed the podium at last year's World Championships in Zagreb, falling to Slovakia's Tajmuraz Salkazanov in the bronze-medal bout.

Joining Emami in Tirana will be Mohammad Nokhodi, a five-time world medalist, including two silver medals. Nokhodi will contest the 79kg category, marking his first international appearance since claiming bronze in Zagreb last September.

In the 92kg division, Amirhossein Firouzpour will aim to build on an impressive 2025 campaign. The two-time world U23 champion secured Asian gold in Amman last year before earning a bronze medal on his senior World Championships debut. However, he is

likely to face stiff competition from reigning world silver medalist Amanula Gadzhimagomedov, who is entered as a neutral athlete and is considered a strong contender for the title.

Iranian Olympic bronze medalist Amirali Azarpira, who won world silver and Islamic Solidarity Games gold last year, was initially listed in the 97kg entries for the Muhamet Malo event. The Iranian coaching staff, however, opted to reserve him for the Asian Championships in April.

Two-time world silver medalist Amirmohammad Yazdani (74kg) and reigning world U23 champion Mohammad-Mobin Azimi (92kg) have also secured places in Iran's squad for the Asian Championships in Bishkek.

## Tunis Junior African Cup:

## Banaeian claims gold as Iran bags two medals on Day 1

### Sports Desk

Iranian judokas secured two medals — including a gold in the men's +100kg division — on the opening day of the Tunis Junior African Cup in Tunis on Friday.

Mohammadpouria Banaeian clinched the superheavyweight title with a victory over Egypt's Abdalla Abdalla in the final.

The Iranian began his campaign with a win against Serbia's Petar Novakovic, before defeating home favorite Adem Kouki in the semifinals to book his place in the gold-medal bout.

Compatriot Ali Nikseresht had to settle for silver in the men's

-100kg category after falling to Belarus' Yauheni Morau in the final.

After receiving a first-round bye, Nikseresht opened his campaign with a victory

over Tunisia's Adem Landolsi to top Pool A and advance to the semifinals, where he overcame American Caedmon Haddad.

The silver medal marked a significant

improvement for Nikseresht compared to his outing at last month's African Open Casablanca, where he exited in the second round of the pool stage.

Banaeian and Nikseresht will have another opportunity to add to their medal haul when they compete in the senior event later in Tunis. They will be joined by Elyas Parhizgar and Amirabbas Choopan, while Sobhan Hakimi is set to feature in the cadet competition.

The one-day junior event brought together 125 competitors from 19 countries across various men's and women's weight divisions.



Iranian judokas Mohammadpouria Banaeian (R) and Ali Nikseresht won gold and silver, respectively, on Day 1 of the Tunis Junior African Cup. ● IRIJF

## 2026 Karate One-Youth League:

## Iranians impress with three medals in Fujairah

### Sports Desk

Iran's rising karate talents claimed three medals, including one gold, on the second day of action at the opening Karate One Youth League event of the season in Fujairah.

Ghazal Fathi Cheshmeh led the charge on Friday, capturing gold in the junior female kumite -48kg division. She edged past Egypt's Noor Abdelaziz 1-0 in a tightly contested final, with a single clean score proving decisive. In the junior male -76kg category, Arash Razani bounced back from a third-round 2-0 defeat to Uzbekistan's Asilbek Kobilov. Razani progressed through



Iran's Ghazal Fat'hi Cheshmeh (2nd L) poses with her junior kumite -48kg gold medal at the Karate One-Youth League event in Fujairah, UAE, on February 13, 2026. ● IKF

the repechage rounds with victories over opponents from Armenia and Türkiye before sealing a 4-0 win against Italy's Nicola Esposito to secure a bronze medal.

Compatriots Amirsam Zeinali and Amirreza

Kaki also competed in the same division but were eliminated in the pool phase.

Iran's second bronze came in the men's individual kata competition through Arash Alhaki. Alhaki advanced with victories over compet-

itors from Egypt, Italy, Hong Kong, Portugal, and Saudi Arabia before falling 4-1 to Japan's Takamasa Yatoji. He concluded his campaign with a 3-2 triumph against Germany's Haruaki Kuniyasu to clinch bronze.



Iranica Desk

Khorasan Razavi Province, located in northeastern Iran, has long been one of the country's most important centers of civilization, culture, and spirituality. For centuries, this region stood at the crossroads of major trade routes, welcoming caravans, scholars, and travelers, and in doing so, it played a vital role in shaping Iran's historical and cultural identity. Within this ancient landscape lies the city of Khaf and its surrounding settlements, including Sangan—an area marked by both the harsh realities of nature and the enduring achievements of human creativity.

At the heart of Sangan's historic urban fabric stands the Sangan Grand Mosque, a monument that embodies the deep connection between faith, architecture, and collective memory in eastern Iran. More than a place of worship, the mosque represents centuries of architectural knowledge, spiritual devotion, and communal life. Its survival through earthquakes, environmental challenges, and historical transformations highlights not only the technical mastery of its builders but also the cultural and religious importance it has held for generations of the people of Khorasan.

The Sangan Grand Mosque is not merely a refuge for worshippers, but a mirror reflecting the Iranian spirit — a building whose every brick and arch speaks of an ancient era, of a faith intertwined with art, and of architects who sought the secret of endurance in order, balance, and brickwork.

For centuries, the sounds of passing caravans, desert winds, and repeated calls to prayer have passed through its lofty ivans. Yet each morning, as sunlight falls on its brick piers, the mosque seems renewed — its long endurance not a sign of decay, but proof of life. It is this resilience that has once again drawn researchers and cultural heritage enthusiasts to Sangan, prompting them to retell the story of its survival.

Referring to the background and cultural value of the Sangan Grand Mosque, a restoration and conservation expert described the historic structure as a reflection of the continuity of Iranian thought and art—one that has withstood nature, earthquakes, and neglect for centuries. Alireza Yavari, a specialist in the restoration of historic buildings, in a recent interview with ISNA said that the Sangan Grand Mosque is a living document of the development of architectural



thought in eastern Iran — an example of the knowledge of engineers and architects who created structures that have successfully endured the test of time and repeated earthquakes. Explaining the mosque's historical importance, Yavari noted that every historic building represents a collective memory — a narrative of how people lived in their own time. "Just as Persepolis reflects the grandeur of ancient dynasties and the mau-

soleum of Ferdowsi safeguards the Persian language, the Sangan Grand Mosque narrates the endurance of faith, taste, and wisdom among the people of Khorasan," he said. The mosque dates back to the Khwarazmian period and is more than 7.5 centuries old. Despite all subsequent changes and events, it continues to beat like a living heart within the old urban fabric of the city. Yavari added that Khaf and its

surrounding areas have historically been exposed to severe earthquakes. According to tectonic studies and the book The History of Earthquakes in Iran, the region has experienced numerous major seismic events. He noted that the most significant of these was the earthquake of 737 AH, centered on the historic city of Jizd between Roshtkhar and Salameh. That quake devastated large parts of eastern Khorasan, yet the San-

gan Grand Mosque remained standing despite its proximity to the epicenter. "This durability was no coincidence," he said. "It was the result of the knowledge and experience of architects who understood the principles of weight, symmetry, and structural strength in brick construction." The expert pointed out that the mosque's two-ivan layout is a defining feature of Khorasani architecture, a design that later evolved in many Iranian mosques. The Sangan Grand Mosque is located in an old neighborhood known as "Kucheh Ab" (Water Alley). In the past, natural qanat water flows passed through this neighborhood, and the mosque's location was deliberately chosen due to easy access to water. Since mosques served not only as places of worship but also, at times, as communal shelters, proximity to water and solid ground was of great importance. The mosque's courtyard is rectangular, measuring approximately 14.6 meters in length and 11.5 meters in width. The main ivan, or qibla ivan, has an opening 4.33 meters wide and rises to a height of about eight meters. The proportions of the space are carefully calculated. The architects adjusted the dimensions

of arches and vaults with an understanding of the sun's path and sound reflection. The result is a space in which both light and sound acquire a sacred quality: sunlight traces the lines of brickwork, while the call to prayer resonates across the courtyard — as though the builders intended to suspend time and place in a moment of devotion.

Yavari noted that the mosque was registered on Iran's National Heritage List on October 12, 1998. "National registration is the first step in protecting cultural heritage," he said, "but the continued life of a monument depends on public participation and a genuine connection between heritage authorities, academics, and citizens."

Fortunately, he added, the people of Sangan treat the mosque with care and awareness. Whenever issues of restoration, cleaning, or preventing damage arise, local residents take the initiative. "This sense of belonging is something many large cities lack," he said.

One of the mosque's most striking features is its decorative brickwork. All parts of the structure — from piers to niches and ivans — were once adorned with carved and patterned bricks. Despite the erosion of time, traces of that brilliance remain.

He added that during various restoration phases, changes were made to the arrangement of the bricks. In later periods, some decorative elements were removed from their original positions and relocated elsewhere. Even fragments of brick inscriptions attributed to the Sangan Dome Mosque — another Seljuk-era monument — were gradually incorporated into the arches of the qibla ivan.

While acknowledging that this phenomenon poses challenges to historical authenticity, Yavari interpreted it as a sign of temporal continuity among generations of Iranian restorers. "This unintended layering shows how our heritage, like a living language, is constantly being reinterpreted," he said.

Turning to the aesthetics of the mosque's brickwork, Yavari pointed to the striking variety of geometric motifs used in its design — diamonds, semicircles, leaves, and abstract floral patterns that, from a distance, create an image resembling delicate brick lace.

Compared to the more ornate monuments of western Iran, he said, the mosque displays a minimalist yet deeply spiritual character. The restrained use of color — mainly in brick and turquoise tones — reflects the mystical outlook of Khorasani architects.

# Tabas Salt Lake gains national natural heritage status

Iranica Desk

Tabas Salt Lake has been officially registered on Iran's National Natural Heritage List, according to an announcement by a natural heritage registration expert from the Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Organization of South Khorasan Province.

Zahra Rezaei Malakouti said the proposal for registering Tabas Salt Lake was reviewed and approved during a session of the National Heritage Registration Council, held at the Registration Office of the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts.

Following this approval, the lake was officially inscribed on the list of nationally protected natural sites, chntn. ir wrote. She explained that the seasonal lake is located south of the city of Tabas, near the village of Fahalonj, on the edge of the Salt Desert. Malakouti added that both major and minor rivers originating from the elevated areas surrounding Tabas Basin channel annual rainfall runoff into the basin, forming a striking seasonal lake that retains water for several months each year. She noted that due to the high salt concentration of the seasonal rivers

and intense evaporation in this desert region, the water contains large amounts of mineral compounds. These minerals, combined with salt, lead to the formation of sodium chloride, commonly known as table salt. The expert emphasized that this rare and scenic area holds exceptional significance among the province's natural sites. Its considerable tourism potential and strong capacity to attract visitors were cited as compelling reasons for its documentation, protection, and designation as a nationally recognized natural heritage site.







# Fajr festival brings AI to the fore as judges fault pop music standards

## Arts & Culture Desk

The secretary of the 41st Fajr International Music Festival said at the closing ceremony in Tehran on Friday that the event had prioritized Iranian classical and regional traditions, children's music and the responsible use of artificial intelligence, while judges warned of deep structural weaknesses in the country's pop sector. Arash Amini told the audience at Vahdat Hall that this year's edition, held from February 9 to 15, was conceived as a barometer of Iran's music scene rather than a mere run of concerts, ISNA reported. He said organizers placed Iranian dastgahi music, the country's clas-

sical modal system built around canonical melodic frameworks known as dastgahs, and regional genres at the core of the program, expanding the presence of folk ensembles to offset the incomplete staging of the 17th Regional Music Festival. Amini said a dedicated children and youth strand was mounted in collaboration with the Art Bureau, drawing strong attendance from school pupils. Performances foregrounded traditional instruments such as the Setar, Santur (hammered dulcimer) and Kamancheh (an Iranian spiked fiddle), with repertoire aligned to Iranian modal systems, in a bid to anchor younger audiences in national musical heritage. He added that works were as-

essed across 12 competitive categories, with the Barbad Award presented in fields including Iranian classical, pop and children's music to bolster professional standards. In a notable departure, the closing ceremony featured a segment on artificial intelligence, reflecting its growing use in arrangement, composition and lyric writing. Amini said the aim was to alert musicians to the technology's rapid advance and promote informed, ethical deployment in creative practice. A pop compilation album titled '41 Works', featuring 41 singers performing songs themed on Iran, was unveiled during the ceremony. Four veteran regional musi-

cians from Chababhar, Golestan, Kermanshah and Lorestan were also honored for lifetime achievement. In a statement read out at the event, the Barbad Award jury said the breadth of genres offered a realistic snapshot of Iranian music, combining artistic promise with serious structural challenges. While praising the resilience of dastgahi and fusion forms, the panel criticized much of the pop output for weak composition, poor vocal training and the absence of coherent educational and regulatory frameworks. The jury expressed particular concern over children's productions, citing a lack of policy, planning and targeted support, and de-



Secretary of the 41st Fajr International Music Festival Arash Amini speaks during the closing ceremony at Vahdat Hall in Tehran on February 14, 2026. IRNA

clined to grant any award in the lyrics category, saying none of the submissions met acceptable literary standards.

## 44th Fajr Film Festival

# Human portrait of Gen. Soleimani's formative years in 'Migration'



By Sadeq Dehqan  
Staff writer

## INTERVIEW

*The feature film 'Migration,' directed by Mohammad Esfandiari and produced by Mehdi Motahar, stood out as one of the more unconventional entries at the 44th Fajr Film Festival. Taking a fresh narrative angle, the film explores the childhood and adolescence of Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani. As the festival's sole literary adaptation this year, it won the Crystal Simorgh for Makeup (Soudabeh Khosravi) and Costume Design (Majid Leilaji), and received an Honorary Diploma for Best Adapted Screenplay. Departing from the conventional, hero-centric biopic template, Migration adopts a grounded, humanistic lens to chart the psychological and moral architecture of a future commander, from early curiosities and hardships to his first encounters with personal and social responsibility. By foregrounding the familial and socio-cultural milieu that shaped general Soleimani, the film offers a rarely depicted portrait of his path toward maturity, making it particularly resonant for audiences drawn to historical cinema and biographical storytelling. On this occasion, we spoke with Mehdi Motahar, the film's producer and co-writer, about the project's genesis, its adaptive strategy, and the production challenges behind the camera.*



Mehdi Motahar

worked in documentary filmmaking and became relatively recognized in that arena, then transitioned into short fiction and eventually feature narratives. The story of the Resistance Front, the life of General Qassem Soleimani, and the martyrs who sacrificed their lives for Iran have long preoccupied me. I had previously directed several key documentaries about Soleimani, including '72 Hours,' which chronicles the final three days of his life. After a substantial body of documentaries had been produced and much had been said in that format, we decided to pursue the subject through dramatic storytelling. We collaborated with the "Maktab-e Haj Qassem" (School of General Qassem Soleimani) foundation, which is committed to distancing Soleimani's image from mythologized exaggeration and instead presenting a precise, authentic portrayal. For more than six years following his martyrdom, they had refrained from greenlighting any fictional dramatization, focusing instead on oral histories, memoirs, and documentaries. Notable publications included 'I Wasn't Afraid of Anything,' based on Soleimani's own handwritten memoirs, and 'The Rain Has Set In' by Ahmad Yousefzadeh. Through our discussions, we realized that "The Rain Has Set In" had strong cinematic potential. Initially, however, the foundation was resistant to a narrative feature. Under the pretext of producing a promotional trailer for the book, we secured a commission, but with the same budget, we produced a short film titled 'At Thirteen,' depicting Soleimani's childhood and adolescence. The short was screened at the Tehran International Short Film Festival and the International Resistance Film Festival, and its reception ultimately persuaded the commissioning body to back a feature-length project in the same vein. In effect, that short opened the door for adapting the book into a full-scale feature.

**You collaborated with Mohammad Esfandiari, a first-time feature director. Given his debut status, how confident were you about the project's success?**  
In documentaries, shorts, and previous features, I've consistently pre-



ISNA

ferred working with first-time directors. They tend to bring compressed energy and bold conceptual instincts to the table. Their relative inexperience can be offset by surrounding them with seasoned department heads, particularly in makeup, production design, and the assistant directing team. I had previously collaborated with Mr. Esfandiari on 'At Thirteen,' so there was already creative synergy. We also made a strategic decision to channel the budget into production value, set construction, makeup, costume design, and technical departments, rather than into marquee actors. That investment paid off, as evidenced by our Crystal Simorgh wins in Makeup and Costume Design. Regarding the screenplay, we remained faithful to the source material. Although we were not initially shortlisted in the screenplay category, the festival secretariat chose to recognize us with an Honorary Diploma, both to encourage adaptation and because we were the only adapted work in the competition.

**Why did you choose to focus on Soleimani's childhood and adolescence? What made that period cinematically compelling?**  
Had we chosen to dramatize the final chapter of the general's life, there were undoubtedly filmmakers better positioned to mount a large-scale war epic. Such productions require considerable resources, and with a debut director, our team represented a risk for the commissioning body.

Instead, we gravitated toward a chapter of his life that few had attempted to depict, his formative years, which he himself repeatedly emphasized as pivotal. This period, shaped by rural life, tribal migration, and the central role of family, was instrumental in forging his character. For me, entering a hero's narrative at the point of formation is far more dramatically sound than starting at the apex of their heroism. It allows audiences to witness the gradual accretion of values and convictions.

**What elements from his early life contributed to the making of a great commander?**  
Childhood is foundational to character formation. One must examine the family structure in which a figure was raised, the hardships

endured, the friendships formed, the economic conditions navigated. A person acquainted with hardship can better empathize with the suffering of others. From an early age, general Qassem Soleimani was in a state of striving and discovery. As the title 'Migration' suggests, he was perpetually in motion, migrating for livelihood, for deeper understanding, and ultimately for transformation. The concept of migration in the film operates on both literal and philosophical planes. He moved from village to city to work and repay his father's debts; later, he returned to uplift his village; then he migrated to defend his country, and eventually to confront Daesh terrorist group and the United States. Nearly every chapter of his life is marked by a form of exodus, physical, moral, or ideological.

**How did you ensure the character remained believable and avoid hagiographic exaggeration?**  
That principle was embedded both in the narrative structure and in the ethos of the School of General Qassem Soleimani foundation. We foregrounded the realist dimensions of his personality in the screenplay. The source text, 'The Rain Has Set In,' did not portray an invulnerable hero, and we maintained that tonal register. Our objective was to demonstrate that if General Soleimani rose to such prominence, he emerged from an entirely ordinary family with

modest economic means. The underlying message is one of accessibility and hope, that anyone, even from the most remote corners of Iran, can ascend to positions of responsibility and serve their people.

**As the film's producer, how did you approach location scouting and the reconstruction of his birthplace and migratory lifestyle?**  
Much of Soleimani's childhood and adolescence unfolded in rural settings shaped by seasonal migration. The film spans roughly 15 to 16 years of his early life, requiring us to reconstruct multiple timeframes across the 1960s and 1970s. The most significant challenge was recreating his birthplace, Qanat-e Malek, which no longer retains its original architectural markers. After extensive research and consultations with eyewitnesses, we scouted for approximately one to one and a half months across regions near Tehran, Isfahan, and northern Lorestan. Eventually, we identified the village of Hiv, near Savojbolagh, whose texture resembled that of Qanat-e Malek. However, the original structures were absent. Consequently, over a two-month period, we built extensive sets and effectively constructed an entire cinematic village, functioning much like a dedicated backlot. In essence, we erected a bespoke film village from the ground up to authentically stage that chapter of his life.

**IRAN DAILY: Could you elaborate on the production trajectory of Migration? As one of your screenplays, it received the Honorary Diploma for Best Adapted Screenplay at the 44th Fajr Film Festival. What drew you to this subject?**  
MOTAHAR: I studied political science and hold a Ph.D. in history, so employing media as a vehicle to articulate the concerns that emerged from years of academic research felt like a natural progression. I initially



### Notice of tender for export sale No. Z/1404/28

**Golgohar Mining and Industrial Company**

Hereby Golgohar Mining & Industrial Co. announces selling and export 70.000 metric tons of Iron Ore Concentrate (%Fe:68 ave) on basis of F.O.B at Rajaei Jetty Bandar Abbas - Iran. Interested bidders should find tender documents at Golgohar website: [www.geg.ir](http://www.geg.ir). All bids on conformity to tender instructions must be submitted no later than 09:00 A.M. on 24. Feb.2026 to Golgohar complex in sirjan (50 km in shiraz road). Bidders are invited to the transactions commission department of the seller with an introduction letter of interested buyer and personal identification of the representative. Tender results shall be announced at 09:00 A.M. on 24.Feb.2026 at the office of the Seller.

**GOLGOHAR MINING & INDUSTRIAL CO.**

Analysis %	
%Fe Ave	68.00
%FeO	Min 24 Max 28
%P Max	0.035
%S Ave	0.5
%SiO2 Max	2.2
%Al2O3 Max	0.6
%CaO Max	0.7
%MgO Max	2.2
%Moisture Max	7.0
Blaine (cm2/gr) Ave	1100
Size ave	80%<0.15 mm