

Pezeshkian prioritizes social health, commissions universities to draft national reform plan

Social Desk

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian on Sunday declared social and cultural health a higher-order responsibility than routine political management, urging universities in Tehran to draft a scientific, actionable framework to address emerging social challenges.

Speaking on February 15 at the closing ceremony of the 16th Farabi International Award, Pezeshkian said the country faced weaknesses in what he termed "social medicine", citing gaps in diagnosis, policy design and execution, president.ir reported.

He called for transparent debate, institutional self-criticism and data-driven remedies, stressing that effective governance must connect knowledge, technical skill and implementation capacity.

He said recent incidents that resulted in

casualties among civilians and security forces were unacceptable and reflected shortcomings across multiple layers of administration.

Rather than focusing solely on individual errors, he urged managers to scrutinize their own oversight mechanisms and correct systemic flaws.

"Our responsibility in social and cultural health today is heavier than purely political duties," he said, adding that societal perceptions had been bruised and required careful, expert-led repair.

The president tasked academics, students and intellectual leaders with identifying root causes of social harm and drafting preventive protocols.

He said universities should operate as policy laboratories, gathering evidence, consulting widely and delivering executable guidance to government.

Science Minister Hossein Simaei-Sarraf

said the administration had formally mandated the higher education sector to examine the recent events and submit solutions, describing the move as institutional trust in scientific capacity rather than reliance on internal executive reporting.

The recalibration signals a shift towards structured social governance at a time when demographic pressures and economic constraints are tightening policy bandwidth. By embedding academia in the decision-making loop, the government aims to bolster social capital and pre-empt further shocks through anticipatory regulation rather than reactive management. At the ceremony, the president presented awards to leading scholars, academic associations and journals in the humanities and Islamic studies, reinforcing the administration's emphasis on indigenous intellectual capital as a pillar of long-term social resilience.



Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian speaks at the closing ceremony of the 16th Farabi International Award in Tehran on February 15, 2026.
● president.ir

Air pollution tops Iran's environmental agenda as government moves to unblock clean-air law

Social Desk

Iran's vice president and head of the Department of Environment (DoE) of Iran said on Sunday that air pollution remains the country's most acute environmental challenge, citing years of regulatory inertia despite an existing legal framework, as the government steps up fleet renewal, electrification and energy reforms.

Speaking at a two-day air pollution management conference hosted by the national meteorological body in Tehran, Shina Ansari said chronic non-compliance with the Clean Air Law has kept pollution entrenched in major cities, particularly the capital, even as public demand for cleaner air has intensified.

Air pollution has shadowed Tehran for more than six decades, Ansari said, arguing that episodic emergency measures during winter inversions have displaced sustained policy execution. The Clean Air Law, enacted in 2017, assigns oversight to the environment department and implementation duties to more than 20 agencies, yet key obligations, from scrapping ageing



Iran's Vice President and head of the Department of Environment Shina Ansari speaks during the air pollution management conference in Tehran, Iran, February 15, 2025.
● IRNA

vehicles to expanding public transport and enforcing technical inspections, have lagged. The government has prioritized enforcement over palliative curbs. Since last year, more than 500,000 worn-out vehicles have been retired nationwide, compared with about 200,000 over the previous eight years combined, Ansari said. Accelerating the program matters beyond air quality: Faster scrappage eases energy imbalances and trims fuel demand, a fiscal pressure point for a sanctions-hit economy. Alongside electric buses and taxis, Tehran has begun replacing 20,000 obsolete

motorcycles with electric models, financed through fuel-saving certificates. The scheme, a national first, faces operational bottlenecks but is proceeding, the vice president said. On stationary sources, targeted fuel switching has delivered quick gains. In the industrial city of Arak, allocating low-sulphur fuel oil to the Shazand power plant cut unhealthy days linked to sulphur dioxide to five last year from 27 the year before. The government is now supplying 420 million liters of low-sulphur fuel oil to four power plants embedded in residential areas during pollution spikes, while piloting desulphur-

ization technology with domestic firms. Renewable capacity has surged to roughly 4,000 megawatts from about 1,200 MW at the start of last year, led primarily by solar installations, marking a significant shift in the country's generation mix. At the same time, gas flaring has been reduced by more than 10 million cubic meters as the Oil Ministry tightens controls and curbs waste in energy-producing provinces such as Khuzestan and Bushehr. Yet Ansari warned that congestion economics are biting. Tehran's population ranks around 25th globally while its land area sits near 120th, an imbalance that magnifies pollution, water stress and subsidence. Despite a decades-old ban on industrial siting within 120km of the capital, dozens of industrial zones have proliferated closer in, crowding out ecological capacity.

Parl. passes €5 air levy on foreign tourists in next year budget

Arts & Culture Desk

Iran's Parliament on Sunday approved a €5 levy on every foreign tourist entering the country by air, incorporating the charge into the draft budget for the next Iranian year (March 2026–March 2027).

Lawmakers voted 196 in favor, 15 against and seven abstained out of 230 members present during the morning sitting on February 15. The measure was added as a new clause under the revenue provisions of the national budget bill.

Under the approved text, airlines will collect the €5 fee indirectly by adding it to ticket prices for inbound international

passengers. The amount will be calculated at the prevailing market exchange rate. The legal basis for the levy references Clause 3 of Note 10 of the current year's budget law and the Seventh Five-Year Development Plan (2023–2027). Mohsen Zanganeh, who tabled the proposal, told the chamber that many countries impose comparable charges on foreign visitors, often embedded in ticketing or airport fees. A similar €5 surcharge had been envisaged in the current year's budget but was not implemented amid a downturn in travel flows. Reinstating the measure in the next year bill would secure a dedicated revenue

stream for tourism development, he said, adding that the Civil Aviation Organization would collect the funds through contractual arrangements with carriers.

Opposing the clause, Valiollah Bayati argued that the overarching thrust of the budget should be to attract tourists rather than deter them with additional costs.

Supporting the measure, Gholamreza Shariati said Iran faced acute shortcomings in tourism infrastructure, particularly in transport, and that even a modest, indirectly applied €5 charge could be channeled into upgrading facilities and services.

Veteran Iranian screen actor Enayat Bakhshi dies at 80

Arts & Culture Desk

Veteran Iranian stage and screen actor Enayat Bakhshi died early on Sunday, February 15, in Tehran after a prolonged illness. He was 80.

Bakhshi had been hospitalized for nearly two months and was treated for multiple health complications, including infection. He had also been admitted earlier this year, ISNA reported.

Born in April 1945, Bakhshi built a six-decade career spanning theater, cinema and television, carving out a durable presence in more than 170 productions. With his gravelly voice and imposing features, he was frequently cast in antagonist roles, a niche he once said left actors "overlooked and unrecognized" despite their craft.

He began his film career in 1970 with 'Mr. Naive' directed by Dariush Mehrjui, a landmark of Iran's New Wave cinema.

He went on to work with leading auteurs including Ali Hatami and Amir Naderi, consolidating his reputation as a dependable character actor able to anchor complex supporting roles.

His film credits include 'The Deer,' 'Tangir' and 'Killing Mad Dogs,' works that

helped define successive phases of



post-revolutionary Iranian cinema. On television, he reached mass audiences in historical and religious epics such as 'Imam Ali' and 'Sarbedaran,' staples of state broadcasting that shaped the medium's golden era. Bakhshi remained active into his final years. His latest film, 'Key Role,' premiered at the Fajr Film Festival last year and is still on release. He received an honorary diploma for best supporting actor for the role, underscoring his enduring box-office draw at a time when Iran's domestic industry is grappling with tighter budgets and a shrinking theatrical market. In separate statements, the heads of Cinema Organization of Iran and state broadcaster hailed Bakhshi as a pillar of the country's performing arts, praising his professional discipline and lasting imprint on the nation's visual memory.

Iran's photographer wins gold at Xposure 2026 in UAE

Arts & Culture Desk

Iranian photographer Amir Minabian won the gold medal at the 2026 Xposure International Photography Festival in the United Arab Emirates, the Hormozgan Department of Culture and Islamic Guidance said on Sunday.

Held annually in the United Arab Emirates, the festival draws leading professional photographers, documentary-makers and visual artists, whose works are vetted by international juries across documentary, environmental, portrait, industrial and conceptual categories, IRNA reported.

His winning photograph, crafted in a documentary-art idiom and anchored in a nuanced reading of human and environmental themes, stood out among hundreds of submissions from across the globe. The jury awarded it the festival's gold medal, the highest distinction of the event. Over nearly three decades, he has collected top honors at national cultural fixtures and international festivals, earn-



ing two global gold medals from competitions hosted in the United States, the United Kingdom, Sweden, Brazil, Argentina, Tajikistan, Germany, Thailand, Greece, Wales and the United Arab Emirates. Beyond his exhibition record, Minabian has spent a decade lecturing in photography at university level. He is a full member of the Iranian Photographers Association, the Hormozgan branch of the Iranian Youth Cinema Society, the Hormozgan Visual Arts Association, the Iranian Cultural Heritage Photographers Association and the International Federation of Photographic Art (FIAP).