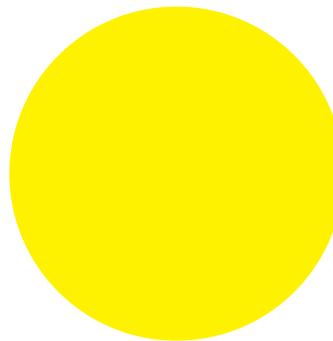


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# Iran Daily

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## Deputy FM says deal within reach if US 'sincere' about talks

Zero enrichment not on agenda anymore: *Takht-Ravanchi*

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Strategic containment still tops economic gains in Washington's calculus

### INTERVIEW EXCLUSIVE



On the eve of a new round of talks between Iran and the United States, Hamid Qanbari, deputy foreign minister for diplomacy, has said that shared interests in oil and gas, joint fields, mining investments and even aircraft purchases have been built into the negotiating framework. He added that in the previous 2015 agreement, namely Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), the US did not reap economic benefits, and stressed that for any future deal to endure, it was necessary for Washington to also benefit from sectors with high and fast returns. At the same time, Majid Takht-Ravanchi, Iran's deputy foreign minister for political affairs, told the BBC that the issue of zero enrichment was no longer under discussion and, as far as Iran was concerned, it was not on the negotiating table. Such remarks may point to a degree of flexibility by the parties to move past the current stalemate. Yet whether they will ultimately lead to a lasting agreement remains uncertain. Abdollah Razavi, an international affairs analyst, told Iran Daily that creating economic incentives for the United States does not guarantee Washington's long-term commitment, as geopolitical considerations still take precedence over economic logic.

IRAN DAILY: Could the creation of tangible economic benefits for the US increase its motivation to show greater flexibility and remain committed to a potential agreement?

RAZAVI: Creating economic incentives for the United States appears, on the surface, to be an attempt at "locking in interests." However, the core problem in the US power structure is not a lack of interests, but the dominance of geopolitical and ideological considerations over economic logic.

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

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Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian (2nd R) gives a certificate of honor to a winner of the Farabi International Award during a ceremony in Tehran on February 15, 2026.



Global justice in 21st century  
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### INTERVIEW EXCLUSIVE

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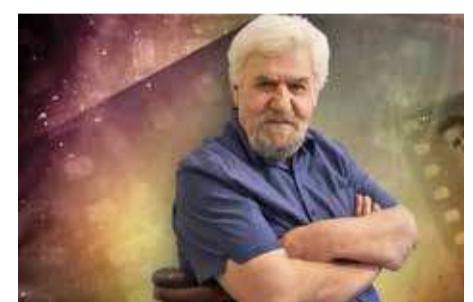
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# Deputy FM says deal within reach if US 'sincere' about talks

Zero enrichment not on agenda anymore: *Takht-Ravanchi*



The photo grab shows Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister Majid Takht-Ravanchi, who speaks during an interview with the BBC in Tehran.

## International Desk

Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister Majid Takht-Ravanchi said that US sincerity in the ongoing nuclear talks would help clinch a deal. "If they are sincere, I'm sure we will be on the road to an agreement," Takht-Ravanchi told the BBC in an interview aired on Sunday ahead of the

second round of negotiations between Iran and the US, which are scheduled to be held in Geneva on Tuesday. The senior diplomat stressed that the ball was in the US court to prove that it wanted to do a deal. The first round of the talks was held in Oman on February 6, which was described as positive by both sides. Takht-Ravanchi pointed to Tehran's

offer to dilute its 60%-enriched uranium as evidence of its willingness to compromise.

"We are ready to discuss this and other issues related to our program if they are ready to talk about sanctions," he said.

As to whether Iran would agree to ship its stockpile of more than 400kg of highly enriched uranium out of Iran, as it did in the 2015 nuclear deal, Takht-Ravanchi said "it is too early to say what will happen in the course of negotiations."

Russia, which accepted 11,000kg of uranium enriched to a low level as part of the 2015 multilateral accord that Trump pulled out of three years later, has offered to accept this material again.

### Maximalist demands

One of Iran's main demands has been that talks should focus only on the nuclear file, and Takht-Ravanchi said: "Our understanding is that they have come to the conclusion that if you want to have a deal you have to focus on the nuclear issue."

Tehran views Washington's maximalist demands for zero enrichment as

an obstacle to any deal and regards that as a red line and a violation of its rights under the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

"Zero enrichment is not an issue anymore and as far as Iran is concerned, it is not on the table anymore," Takht-Ravanchi said. This contradicts comments made by the US President Donald Trump to reporters as recently as Friday that "we don't want any enrichment."

The US has also called for talks on Iran's missile program, which Tehran says is non-negotiable.

"When we were attacked by Israelis and Americans [in June], our missiles came to our rescue so how can we accept depriving ourselves of our defensive capabilities," Takht-Ravanchi said.

The senior diplomat, who is playing a key role in the current talks as he did in the negotiations more than a decade ago, also expressed concern about the American president's conflicting messages.

"We are hearing that they are interested in negotiations," he said. "They have said it publicly; they have said it in private conversations through

Oman that they are interested to have these matters resolved peacefully."

But in his latest remarks, Trump focused again on regime change, musing: "It seems that would be the best thing that would happen."

"We are not hearing that in the private messages," Takht-Ravanchi observed, referring to the notes being passed through Oman's Foreign Minister Sayyid Badr bin Hamad Al-Busaidi.

### US military buildup

Takht-Ravanchi also questioned the US military buildup in the region, warning another war would be "traumatic, bad for everybody... everybody will suffer, particularly those who have initiated this aggression."

He added; "If we feel this is an existential threat, we will respond accordingly."

As to whether Iran would regard an American campaign as a battle for survival, he replied: "It is not wise to even think about such a very dangerous scenario because the whole region will be in a mess."

Iran has repeatedly made it clear that US military bases in the region would be regarded as legitimate targets.

## Tehran denounces Pelosi's call for US to exact 'pain' on ordinary Iranians

Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baqaei sharply criticized comments by former US House speaker Nancy Pelosi calling for intensified economic pressure on Iran.

In remarks posted on X on Saturday, Baqaei wrote, "Nancy Pelosi calls on the US administration to 'cripple' Iran's economy so ordinary Iranians—even in rural areas—'feel the pain.'"

"Deliberately inflicting pain & suffering on civilians for political leverage is the textbook definition of terrorism," he added, noting, "Only an evil & arrogant mindset can feel entitled to prescribe policies built on civilians' suffering in another country."

"Legally speaking, this is further



evidence of a deliberate & systematic US policy of exacting pain and cruelty on populations it disfavors. Such conduct amounts to 'crime against humanity.' Pelosi had made the remarks while speaking at the Munich Security Conference on Friday. She identified further hardened American economic coercion towards Iran as a means of bringing

about "regime fall" in the Islamic Republic.

Iranian officials have long denounced US sanctions as collective punishment targeting civilians.

Last month, US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent acknowledged the impact of sanctions during remarks at the World Economic Forum in Davos.

In November 2018, former US secretary of state Mike Pompeo also spoke about sanctions after Washington withdrew from a 2015 nuclear agreement with Iran and other countries and reinstated sanctions.

Iranian officials must listen to the US "if they want their people to eat," he said at the time.

## Strategic containment still ...

The experience of the JCPOA showed that even when major European and Asian companies entered the Iranian market, Washington withdrew from the deal without paying a decisive economic cost. This suggests that in the hierarchy of decision-making in Washington, "strategic containment of Iran" takes priority over "economic gain." Therefore, even if specific economic benefits are defined for American actors, there is no guarantee that at critical political moments these interests will outweigh security considerations, pressure from regional lobbies, or partisan rivalries.

Could including such economic issues ultimately pave the way for a comprehensive, durable and reliable agreement that leads to the effective and full lifting of sanctions on Iran, or will structural constraints in US policy continue to stand in the way?

Broad economic arrangements could, in theory, lead to a more sustainable deal. In the US case, however, the main obstacle is not the absence of economic design, but the multilayered sanctions structure and the instrumental use of the dollar and the global financial system. For Washington, sanctions are not merely a pressure tool; they are part of its financial and political

architecture in the international system. For this reason, the "full and effective lifting of sanctions" is likely to face pushback from institutional actors, as sanctions provide a permanent source of leverage. Even if the sitting administration has the political will, Congress, security agencies and lobbying networks can prevent a deal from being fully institutionalized. As a result, the likelihood that a comprehensive agreement will lead to the durable and irreversible removal of sanctions remains limited within the current framework of US policy.

If an agreement is reached and sanctions are lifted, would American companies and economic actors realistically be able to benefit from these areas, or would political and legal barriers remain the main obstacle?

Even in the event of a deal, meaningful participation by American companies would be held back by deep political and legal constraints. US primary sanctions, which prohibit American citizens and firms from engaging with Iran, are largely rooted in congressional legislation, and their removal would require a complex and politically costly process. In addition, the risk of sanctions' reimposition would discourage long-term investment. The period after the JCPOA showed that even

non-US firms pulled back out of fear of secondary penalties. Structural barriers are therefore such that even if an agreement is reached, US economic engagement would remain fragile, limited and dependent on the country's domestic political climate.

**How should Takht-Ravanchi's remarks be interpreted? Do they primarily reflect the Islamic Republic's red lines and principled positions, or do they signal a more realistic understanding by the US of Iran's nuclear program?**

Takht-Ravanchi's statement that "zero enrichment" is off the table should primarily be seen as the consolidation of a sovereign red line. The position is a response to a years-long US strategy aimed at steering negotiations toward the maximum restriction of Iran's technical capabilities. From an analytical standpoint, it does not signal a change in Washington's approach, but rather reflects the reality that the maximum pressure policy has failed to roll back Iran's nuclear program to zero. In other words, the remarks mirror the assessment that the balance of technical and political power has shifted, and the United States is now compelled to confront the reality of Iran's existing capacity rather than expect a complete rollback.

## Top general warns Iran to give 'lesson' to Trump if war breaks out

### International Desk

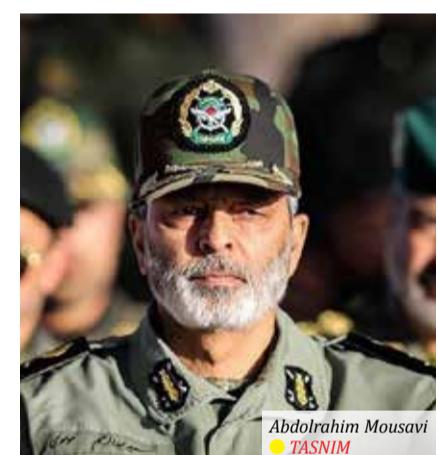
Chief of Staff of the Iranian Armed Forces Major General Abdolrahim Mousavi warned on Sunday that any military aggression against the country would be a "lesson" for US President Donald Trump. Mousavi made the remarks in reaction to Trump's rhetoric about possible strikes on Iran if no deal is reached during nuclear talks between Tehran and Washington.

The general said remarks of the US president, who claims to lead a superpower, were not befitting of a person in such a capacity, ISNA reported.

"If Trump truly intends to wage war, why is he speaking of negotiations?" Mousavi asked.

"Trump should know that he is walking into a battle, the outcome of which will prevent him from saber-rattling in the world ever again."

On February 6, Iran and the US held a



Abdolrahim Mousavi  
TASNIM

fresh round of negotiations to resolve a longstanding dispute over Iran's nuclear program. A second meeting is due for Tuesday in Geneva, Switzerland.

The US has deployed several aircraft carriers and warships to the Persian Gulf to force Iran into making big concessions for a deal.

Iranian officials have reiterated that they will not give in to excessive demands but are ready to strike a fair deal with the US.

Iran's military officials have also warned that the country is fully prepared to decisively respond to any hostile action.

Mohammad Ali Rajabi  
Cartoonist

### CARTOON



# 16th cold plasma clinic opened as AEOI eyes medical tech expansion

## Economy Desk

Iran's 16th cold plasma-based wound treatment clinic opened Sunday in Firuzabad, Fars Province, in the presence of the vice president and head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI).

According to IRNA, wound treatment at Hazrat-e Qaem Hospital uses modern scientific methods and international equipment based on cold plasma technology. Devices used at the clinic feature the latest global technologies and were supplied and installed in cooperation with the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran.

Mohammad Eslami, the AEOI chief, said 1.5 million people across the country benefit from radiopharmaceutical services. Eslami also inaugurated a cold plasma wound treatment clinic at Shohaday-e Khalij-e Fars Hospital in Bushehr on Saturday

morning, and another cold plasma clinic became operational in Bandar Ganaveh.

Speaking to reporters at the ceremony, he said, "Today the 14th and 15th cold plasma wound treatment centers in Bushehr Province are being inaugurated, which is an important step in developing novel medical services in the country," Mehr news agency reported.

Referring to the development of new technologies in chronic wound treatment, the vice president said the AEOI is active in the medical field across several areas using advanced technologies, and one area pursued with greater momentum over the past two years has been the use of plasma technology in treatment.

"In this framework, two areas have been activated in particular. First, cancer treatment, which with successful results is undergoing clinical stages and



*Head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran Mohammad Eslami cites the Qur'an ahead of inaugurating the 16th cold plasma-based wound treatment clinic in Firuzabad, Fars Province, on February 15, 2026.*

● [aeoi.org.ir](http://aeoi.org.ir)

will soon expand nationwide with cooperation of the Ministry of Health, and Medical Education," he said.

"The second area is chronic wound treatment. Many families face the problem of chronic wounds, especially diabetic foot ulcers, and fortunately with development of this technology, effective and promising results have been achieved."

With the expansion of facilities and capacity, authorities are seeking to turn the clinics into regional specialized hubs providing services to other areas as well, he added.

Referring to capacities in radiation therapy and radiopharmaceuticals, Eslami said, "This field



is among novel treatment methods in the world and advanced countries have also made extensive investment in it."

## Agricultural exports hit \$8b, minister says



imports of essential goods and agricultural items.

"So far, \$16 billion worth of goods have been imported to meet the country's essential needs, which has played an important role in market regulation and supplying public necessities," Nouri-Qezeljeh said.

"Currently, 85 percent of the country's food security by weight is supplied through domestic production and only 15 percent depends on imports. In terms of economic value as well, 80 percent of the country's food needs rely on domestic production and 20 percent is supplied through imports," he added.

Referring to earlier methods of securing agricultural inputs, the minister said, "In certain periods, the import of inputs was carried out through channels such as sailors, personal currency transfers and barter, but now a legal framework for broader use of the barter method has been provided."

"Despite this capacity being available to individuals, full utilization has not occurred and it is necessary to identify and remove its executive obstacles," he added.

## Economy Desk

Iran's Agriculture Minister Gholamreza Nouri-Qezeljeh said Sunday that agricultural exports reached \$8 billion as he reported a significant growth in the export of the country's agricultural products.

"Exports in this sector were \$5 billion last year, (which began on March 21, 2024). The \$3 billion growth in ex-

ports indicates new momentum in target markets and strengthening of trade diplomacy in the agricultural sector," Nouri-Qezeljeh was quoted by Mehr news agency as saying on the sidelines of a meeting with provincial governors and agricultural officials from northern provinces in Sari.

The minister also stressed that a major portion of the country's food security has been secured via the

## Petchem chief urges refineries shift away from fuel focus



## Economy Desk

Iranian Deputy Oil Minister Hassan Abbaszadeh on Sunday called on refineries to shift away from a focus on gasoline and diesel production.

"Globally about 70% of output is allocated to fuel products, while petrochemicals account for almost 45%, but in Iran refineries have remained primarily focused on fuel products," Abbaszadeh said at a ceremony to sign agreements related to energy conservation projects in Tehran, according to ISNA.

The official, who also serves as the head of the National Iranian Petrochemical Co., said a government policy to cut natural gas to petrochemical plants during the cold season to ensure gas flow to households had inflicted "economic losses" to the sector.

He called for measures to be taken including "cooperation and synergy among different sectors" to provide "better feedstock access" for the petrochemical industry.

Abbaszadeh described feedstock shortfall as "one of the biggest challenges" the petrochemical sector was facing.

"Optimizing energy consumption is the simplest and most cost-effective solution for providing a stable supply of gas and feedstock for the industry," he said.

The official warned that petrochemical targets set in the country's Seventh Development Plan (SDP) running until 2029 would be unattainable unless consumption patterns were reformed. As an example, Abbaszadeh pointed to gas-fired power plants that waste such a "valuable resource" to generate electricity with "productivity below 30%." Under the SDP, the annual production capacity, which reached the milestone of 100 million tons earlier this month,

must climb to 131 million tons in the next three years.

"Although the country possesses vast energy resources, full use of production capacity is not possible," Abbaszadeh said.

He cited inefficient consumption of resources and methods of using and distributing energy resources, including natural gas, as key reasons.

More than 20% of Iran's installed petrochemical capacity remain idle due to feedstock scarcity.

Abbaszadeh also told reporters separately that gas restrictions had been lifted since Friday, allowing petrochemical companies to use gas within defined capacity limits.

"About 98% of petrochemical production and supply capacity has returned to operation or is close to returning," he said.

He further said that exports of petrochemicals rose around 2% year-on-year, without giving a figure.

Meanwhile, Ali Rabani, NIPC energy consumption optimization manager, said at the same ceremony that the National Energy Optimization Campaign was continuing strongly, with about 300,000 families having joined so far.

"In the field of energy consumption optimization, effective measures are being implemented. Registered energy consumption amounted to 1.7 billion cubic meters, and through coordination of headquarters and operational teams a target has been set to achieve 200 million cubic meters of energy savings this year," Rabani said.

## Two major ports set to be built on Makran Coast

## Economy Desk

The head of Hormozgan's Ports and Maritime Department said plans are underway to build two new major ports along the Makran coast and in the western part of the southern province.

"After completion of design and site-selection phases, two international ports in the Makran region and Bandar Lengeh will be added to Iran's 15 major ports," Tasnim news agency quoted Hossein Abbasnejad as saying.

"The new Lengeh port has been designed in its first phase with an area of 300 hectares, expandable to 1,500 hectares, and will be capable of receiving 50,000-

ton vessels," Abbasnejad said.

"The Makran port has been designed with 1,100 hectares of backland so that it will be able to receive mega-size vessels," he added. "Although port construction is a time-consuming and long-term process, after completion of the siting phases we hope to soon see the start of executive operations for these national projects."

Outlining the latest status of port infrastructure development in southern Iran and the country's largest coastal province, Abbasnejad said the project to connect 2,700 hectares of new land to the Shahid Rajaee Port area, which is underway via a strategic bridge, will

become operational in the first half of next year (starting March 21).

"With this achieved, the land area of this port will rise to 5,100 hectares and the logistics and backland capacities of the country's largest commercial port will double," he said.

"Shahid Rajaee Port cur-

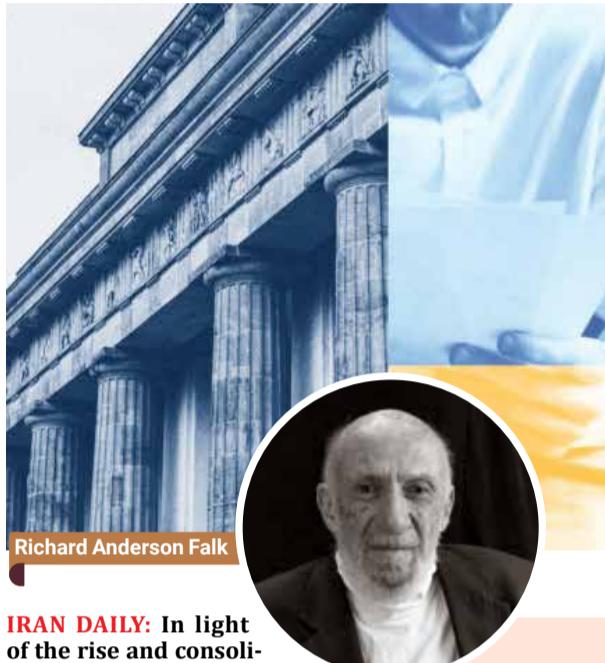
rently handles the highest level of maritime traffic among all ports in the country, and all this traffic is conducted under precise supervision of the Vessel Traffic Service control section while observing the highest safety standards of Iran's Ports and Maritime Organization."



● [IRNA](http://IRNA)

## Global justice in 21st century

# Geopolitical obstacles to int'l law enforcement



Richard Anderson Falk

**IRAN DAILY:** In light of the rise and consolidation of far-right and nationalist movements — such as the Trump phenomenon in the United States and similar trends in Europe and elsewhere — how do you assess the current status of international law within the emerging global order? Would you say that international law is increasingly retreating in the face of power politics?

**FALK:** International law is definitely being marginalized in contemporary international relations by the rise of ultra-nationalist political leaders and authoritarian governments. This negative trend is making a severe impact on political consciousness as a result of the adoption and revival of an imperial foreign policy by the US under Trump, although the pragmatic use or neglect of international law in the management of global security preceded Trump and can be traced back to 1945 when the winners of World War II became self-anointed as the architects of "a new world order," a role most prominently associated with the design and establishment of the United Nations.

It is notable that the UN Charter designated the Security Council as the only political organ of the new Organization that was provided with the legal authority to reach obligatory decisions binding on sovereign states. Most significantly, it refused to allow international law or ensure democratic representation of the non-West to control outcomes in the Security Council in the face of opposition of even one of the five winners of World War II, which were given permanent representation, while other member states were selected on a term basis.

The role of international law was curtailed by acceding these five winners in 1945 not only permanent SC membership but more significantly a right of veto. This meant that if a breach of international law was to be dealt with even by a majority vote of 14-1, it would still fail, and have no legal effect if the lone dissenting vote was one the P5, which not only crippled the role of the SC in relation to geopolitical rivalry, as during the Cold War, but was highly undemocratic if evaluated from demographic perspectives.

This absence of democracy was also present in the internal makeup of the P5 giving the US, France, and the UK great power status in the form of SC permanent membership and the veto, and excluding such Global South great powers as India, Indonesia, Nigeria, and Brazil, creating an everlasting Western dominance in the SC, including a right of each P5 member to block any effort to reform the SC because all amendments of the Charter were nullified unless it had the support of all five. The net result of the Security Council's

extensive role has been to subordinate the UN to the P5, ensuring that the management of global security — including war prevention and genocide intervention — reflects geopolitical primacy rather than the universal rule of law. In this dynamic, strategic interests of the powerful trump the regulative principles that should possess universal applicability and govern the strong and weak alike.



CHAINANALYSIS

### appears to be taking shape?

It is a fiction embraced by naïve legalists to suppose that international law ever controlled the management of global security or inhibited the strategic priorities of dominant states. There were eras of greater peacefulness when Great Powers acted prudently with respect to militarization and conflict resolution. The idea of a rule-governed international order applied

Whether this discouraging character of international relations will change in light of the Gaza genocide, aggressive uses of force, extreme violations of human rights, and ecological instability is impossible to predict, although it seems unlikely in the present atmosphere. The antics of Trump's narcissistic geopolitics are generating a tidal wave of anxiety about the human future, as well as bearing witness to the



This AI illustration shows a large silhouette of a man towering over a session of the United Nations Security Council.

It is a mistake to think that the whole enterprise of international law is failing. International law works effectively in any substantive setting in which there exists a mutual interest in its applicability. The routines of international life, including most commerce and trade relations, air and maritime safety, communications, tourism, and diplomatic representation, are complied with because the logic of reciprocity is operative. This is not true in domains of behavior such as armed conflict, in which differentials of hard power determine political outcomes and uphold strategic interests and reflect the ambitions of the powerful.

In these latter contexts, international law has long been marginalized by design, leaving the management of global security to the discretion of the geopolitical actors for any given issue involving the implementation of international law, as the disappointing UN response to the recent Gaza genocide illustrated.

**Do you believe that the era in which international law functioned as a normative framework capable of restraining state power is coming to an end? If so, what kind of alternative global order**

selectively and within the limits set by those domains of international life where reciprocity prevailed, and differentials in power and wealth were minimized, as in international trade and investment compared to the colonial era.

The experience with nuclear weapons is illustrative of this pattern of marginalizing international law despite the risks of leaving the use of this apocalyptic weaponry of mass destruction entirely under the control of the most dangerous geopolitical actors. Rather than favoring denuclearization and disarmament, the same five winners in 1945 continued to leave this weaponry essentially unregulated, except to the extent of seeking maximum control over the spread of the weapons to other states. The result has been costly arms races, dangerous crises, abetted by a scheme of deterrence plus nonproliferation, with a resulting nuclear hegemony. If ever there was a basis for universal rule governance, it was with respect to nuclear weaponry, but it could not overcome the ideology of "political realism" that dominated the thinking of foreign policy elites of the major states and was systematically opposed to accepting any arrangements that restricted their hard power capabilities.

devastating consequences of unchecked lawlessness. We can only hope that civil society activism and more responsible political leadership will emerge to create a more viable international legal order than was framed in 1945.

**Based on your experience as the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, to what extent does this case illustrate the gap between the principles of international law and the political will of powerful states? What are the broader implications of this gap for the credibility of the international system?**

There is no doubt that this gap between law and politics exists in relation to the management of global security, including war prevention, conflict resolution, genocide, apartheid, and ecocide. This should not confuse us about the reliance on compliance with international law by all sovereign states, including those most powerful, whether labeled as Great Powers or in the UN context as the five permanent members of the Security Council or P5. As suggested in my prior responses, where the logic of reciprocity applies to the behavior



By Asgar Ghahremanpour  
Editor-in-chief

### INTERVIEW

on November 13, 1930, in New York. He taught at Princeton University for more than three decades until he retired as a professor of International Law. Falk began his academic studies in economics at the Wharton School, later earning his law degree from Yale University and a doctorate in law from Harvard University — an academic trajectory that consolidated his standing as a major theorist of world order. His early intellectual formation was influenced by thinkers such as Karl Marx, Herbert Marcuse, and C. Wright Mills; an influence reflected in his critical approach to power, capitalism, militarism, and structures of global domination. Falk has consistently sought to bridge scholarly inquiry and moral commitment, employing international law as an instrument to restrain war and injustice. He is the author and editor of dozens of books on international law and the United Nations. In 2008, the United Nations Human Rights Council appointed him Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the occupied Palestinian territories. Falk has been a steadfast critic of military interventionism and an advocate for strengthening global accountability, international justice, and a transition toward a more humane world order. Richard Falk is currently 96 years old, and, over the past decades, has devoted considerable effort to the prevention of war. In our conversation, I sought to explore the relationship between politics and international law, as well as the state of global justice in light of the rise of far-right movements across much of the world, particularly in the United States.

of sovereign states, international law provides a stable and convenient basis for the myriad of interactions that make routine international interactions trustworthy.

For the agenda of global security and strategic ambition, the design of the UN itself recognized the lack of political will to close the gap between international law and its dependence for implementation on political will and capabilities, epitomized by the right of veto conferred upon the winners of World War II, arguably the most dangerous political actors in the world at the time.

At present, despite the widespread disappointment and tension arising from this gap, there is still the absence of political will among the leading geopolitical actors (the US, Russia, and China) to close the gap. From a legal perspective, this gap is insulated from remedy by each of the P5 possessing an unrestricted right to veto any proposed amendment of the UN Charter. The most that can be realistically envisioned in the near future is more prudent or responsible behavior by these dominant geopolitical actors and by secondary geopolitical actors of limited geographic scope to restrict their lawlessness to the security agendas of regional geopolitical configurations of power, although US imperial geopolitics and Russian and Chinese spheres of influence geopolitics ensures that the harmful gap between what international law requires and what international politics determines will continue to cause immeasurable harm, especially to vulnerable peoples and nations, or states that have resources coveted by geopolitical actors.

**Some argue that international law has always been subordinate to politics rather than an independent constraint upon it. From your perspective, is the relationship between politics and international law inherently conflictual, or is there still room for a constructive and mutually reinforcing relationship?**

To avoid confusion and repetition, please consider the relevance of my responses to earlier questions. In sum, with respect to all aspects of global security, international law, in practice and design, has long been subordinated to politics, but only for regional and global political actors, and then only since the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, when Europe gave birth to a self-serving format for an international normative order that legitimated coercion in the course of colonizing projects in the Global South.

A deficient version of symbolic international law enforcement occurs at the conclusion of major wars ending in victory for one side. As in the aftermath of World War II, the winners prosecuted the war crimes alleged to be committed by surviving German and Japanese individuals at Nuremberg and Tokyo, which critics persuasively derided as justice of the "victors".

As also suggested in previous responses, where reciprocal benefits result from compliance, international law has long provided a reliable framework guiding the behavior of individuals, corporations, and financial institutions, and governments in many international interactions — although even here, there are important subtle encroachments by the rich and powerful on the rights of the poor that escape from the discipline of a legal order administered on the basis of equality of all.



Muhammad and Abdel, Gazan children who lost a limb when the UNRWA school they were sheltering in was hit by an Israeli air strike in Nuseirat in 2024, talk to each other. **UNRWA**

Reporters photograph a display for "Midnight Hammer," the name of the American operation to bomb Iran's nuclear sites, during a news conference on June 22, 2025. **ALEX BRANDON/AP**



**At a time when powerful states increasingly disregard or actively undermine multilateral institutions such as the United Nations, the International Criminal Court, and the global human rights regime, how do you envision the future of multilateralism?**

There is little doubt that this is a bad time for internationalism, given global trends toward ultra-nationalism and xenophobia, which tend to devalue cooperative multilateralism. These trends are accentuated by the intense US hostility to internationalism given Trump's diplomacy on behalf of the United States, which continues to be the most influential world state — although in danger of losing this status due to China's continuing rising star. Early in 2026, the US government, by executive order, withdrew and stopped funding for no less than 66 international institutional arrangements, 31 of which were within the UN System.

The global scope of ecological challenges, as well as the complexities of digital age communications, global migration flow, and vulnerabilities to disease epidemics, makes it likely that a new cycle of functional pressures will, in the years ahead, restore and even expand dependence upon multilateralism. This seems probable, although the signature reality of the present global setting is radical uncertainty, or put differently, the unknowability of the future.

**Can global civil society, academics, and human rights institutions play a meaningful role in restoring the legitimacy and effectiveness of international law, or are such efforts structurally constrained by the current global power configuration?**

In line with the unknowability of the future, an initial response is to underscore unknowability, together with an awareness that there are many historical examples of surprising happenings in international life that were not anticipated by relevant experts or public opinion. Among notable recent examples is the victory of Vietnamese nationalism in opposing the militarily superior US intervention in the Vietnam War. Other important examples are the collapse of the Soviet Union, the peaceful transition of the apartheid regime in South Africa into a multiethnic constitutional democracy, and the Arab Spring attacking dictatorial rule in several Arab majority countries at least briefly.

In light of this defining feature of unknowability, it is appropriate to struggle for a desirable future. This suggests that

Kidnapped Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro (in handcuffs) and his wife, Cilia Flores, arrive at the Wall Street Heliport in Manhattan under heavy escort on January 5, 2026. **AA**

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I believe Iran, among contemporary states, has suffered more acutely and over a longer period than any other sovereign state or member of the United Nations from the shortcomings of international law. It has endured diplomatic pushbacks, overt and covert violations of its territorial sovereignty designed to destabilize and replace its structure of governance, double standards with respect to nuclear programs, and recent acts of aggression and repeated threats designed to undermine Iran's security and deny the country and its people their inalienable right of self-determination. These grievances were brilliantly articulated by Iran's current foreign minister at the Al Jazeera Forum held in Doha, Qatar, on February 7–9, 2026.

civil society activism is worth supporting as strongly as possible in the hope of both restoring and enhancing the role of legitimacy, and with it, the effectiveness of international law in relation to global security and human rights priorities. Of course, resistance from current geopolitical configurations, statism, and predatory capitalism is to be expected, and current prospects for a successful transformation of irresponsible patterns of geopolitics seem poor, but this may change over time in unpredictable ways. The struggle for law and justice is imperative, even without any assurance that it will be successful in the short term, but neither is it doomed to failure.

**What advice would you offer to the new generation of international lawyers and policymakers seeking to defend and advance international law in a world moving toward unilateralism, authoritarianism, and weakened global governance?**

My first advice would be directed at teachers and commentators on law and global politics to adopt a paradigm of international law pedagogy that emphasizes the importance of justice-driven law in relation to global security, human rights, and ecological policy agendas. My second piece of advice would be to urge all students of international relations and law to be required to study international law within a framework that is less vocational and more humanistic, as integral to engaged citizenship in democratic societies. This educational commitment needs to be supplemented by societal beliefs that such moral literacy is expected to be present in all phases of the professionalism of law, lawyers, and judges, as well as of foreign policy advisors.

This reorientation of pedagogy would also necessitate a prior critique of prevailing versions of "political realism" that continue to dominate foreign policy decision-making, especially in the governments and "think tanks" of geopolitical actors in a manner that would downgrade the historic agency of militarism. This would include studying the record of defeat of the militarily superior side in most anti-colonial wars since 1945. The link between international law and international legitimacy would also be stressed to make the key point that if international law is not implemented by governments and intergovernmental institutions, it still legitimates civil society secondary enforcement capabilities in the form of solidarity

initiatives and informal pressures by protests and boycotts, mounted to promote national and international sanctions.

**In your analysis of the shortcomings of international law, you highlighted its ineffectiveness in restraining major powers and the geopolitical dominance of the P5. Iran, as a country that over the past four decades has consistently faced confrontation with this power structure — from unilateral extraterritorial sanctions to the assassination of its military commanders on the territory of a third country — has experienced blatant violations of fundamental principles of international law. Yet none of these actions have elicited an effective response from international bodies, and at times they have even been accompanied by tacit legitimacy. In light of Iran's lived experience in this regard, do you see Iran as a confirmation of the thesis that "international law functions as an instrument of power," or rather as a sign of the legitimacy crisis in the current order, which could pave the way for a transition toward a more just system? And particularly considering your role as the UN Special Rapporteur on Palestine, what structural similarities or differences do you perceive between the international system's handling of the Palestinian issue and its handling of Iran?**

I believe Iran, among contemporary states, has suffered more acutely and over a longer period than any other sovereign state or member of the United Nations from the shortcomings of international law. It has endured diplomatic pushbacks, overt and covert violations of its territorial sovereignty designed to destabilize and replace its structure of governance, double standards with respect to nuclear programs, and recent acts of aggression and repeated threats designed to undermine Iran's security and deny the country and its people their inalienable right of self-determination. These grievances were brilliantly articulated by Iran's current foreign minister at the Al Jazeera Forum held in Doha, Qatar, on February 7–9, 2026.

Iran is above all a victim of Islamophobic geopolitics that intensified after the end of the Cold War and the 2001 terrorist attack attributed to Al Qaeda. US foreign policy toward Iran is also distorted by counter-revolutionary pressures of Iranian exile communities and by Israeli lobbying and donor leverage. It is these largely "invisible" realities that have shaped US policies toward Iran ever since 1979.

In the current dangerous atmosphere, the short-term fate of Iran and the Middle East is also unfortunately subject to the irresponsible and unpredictable impulses of the American president, Donald Trump. This dominant political leader is capable of making dramatic, disruptive moves, often in cooperation with Israel and Saudi Arabia, and occasionally making abrupt changes in policy, sometimes of a stabilizing nature. Above all, Iran is long overdue to be a recipient of international justice, a first step of which is an international show of support for its sovereign rights, which includes the termination of prolonged sanctions that have inflicted hardship on the Iranian population and given rise to the recent internal crisis of manipulated protest.



## UWW Ranking Series:

# Ahmadi, Hedayati to spearhead Iran's Greco-Roman squad in Tirana

## Sports Desk

Payam Ahmadi and Fardin Hedayati will headline Iran's Greco-Roman campaign when the upcoming Muhamet Malo tournament gets underway in Tirana, Albania, on February 25.

Iran head coach Hassan Rangraz has named a 13-man roster for the second Ranking Series event of the international season. The tournament will also form part 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.

Ahmadi is set to compete in the 55kg division on the back of a standout season last year, which saw the 20-year-old prodigy claim the world junior title before securing a silver medal on his Senior World Championships debut in September, underlining his rapid rise through the ranks.



Hedayati, meanwhile, will take to the mat in the 130kg class following a gold-laden 2025 campaign. The heavyweight topped the podium at the

Asian Championships, the Islamic Solidarity Games and, most notably, the U23 World Championships. He will be looking to lay down a marker in his pursuit of a

superheavyweight berth in Manama, where reigning world champion Amin Mirzazadeh remains the man to beat. Elsewhere, two-time world

U20 champion Alireza Abdevali and Islamic Solidarity Games silver medalist Amir Abdi are among the leading contenders in the 77kg category.

will enter the 74kg division as he bids for a third world podium finish in Manama. Emami narrowly missed out on a medal at last year's World Championships in Zagreb, losing to Slovakia's Tajmuraz Salkazanov in the bronze-medal bout.

He will be joined by Mohammad Nokhodi, a five-time world medalist, including two silvers. Nokhodi is set to compete at 79kg in his first international outing since claiming bronze in Zagreb last September.

In the 92kg division, Amirhossein Firouzpour will look to build on a strong 2025 season. The two-time U23 world champion captured Asian gold in Amman before earning bronze on his senior world championship debut. He is expected to face stiff opposition from reigning world silver medalist Amanula Gadzhimagomedov, who is entered as a neutral athlete and is widely regarded as one of the favorites for the title.

## 2026 Karate One-Youth League:

## Iranians win three cadet medals on Day 2

## Sports Desk

Iranian athletes claimed three cadet medals on the second day of the 2026 Karate One-Youth League event in Fujairah, United Arab Emirates, highlighted by a gold medal performance from Abolfazl Arab Yaqoubi in the kumite competition.

Competing in the male -63kg category, Arab Yaqoubi edged Spain's Rodrigo Garcia de Blas 3-2 in one of Saturday's closest finals. With the lead changing hands during the bout, the Iranian secured victory with a decisive late

attack to seal the title. In the girls' -54kg division, Setayesh Qaneifard rebounded from a narrow 1-0 defeat to Uzbekistan's Sarvinoz Lapasova to earn a consolation bronze. She capped her campaign in emphatic fashion, defeating France's Amina Delorme 9-0.

Iran's second bronze in cadet kumite came in the -52kg class through Mohsen Keikhaeikia. After suffering a 4-0 loss to Kazakhstan's Nurassyl Nurseit in the second round, Keikhaeikia mounted a strong comeback in the repechage. He recorded wins over

opponents from Greece, Saudi Arabia and Egypt, before sealing a 5-0 victory against Belgium's Adam Ghazouani to secure third place. Saturday's success followed an impressive run for Iran in the junior ranks, where the team collected one gold and two bronze medals.

Ghazal Fat'hi Cheshmeh led the charge on Friday, capturing gold in the female kumite -48kg division with a hard-fought 1-0 win over Egypt's Noor Abdelaziz in the final. Arash Razani secured bronze after bouncing back from a third-round 2-0 loss to Uzb

bekistan's Asilbek Kobilov. Razani advanced through the repechage with victories over opponents from Armenia and Türkiye, before defeating Italy's Nicola Esposito 4-0 in the bronze-medal bout. In the men's individual kata, Arash Alhaki progressed with wins against competitors 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 victory over Germany's Haruaki Kuniyasu to clinch bronze.



Iran's Abolfazl Arab Yaqoubi (2nd L) poses with his gold medal on the podium in the cadet -63kg category at the Karate One-Youth League event in Fujairah, UAE, on February 14, 2026.

IWKF

## Persian Gulf Pro League:

## Golgohar beats Persepolis to go top, adds to Reds misery



## Sports Desk

Golgohar Sirjan climbed to the top of the Persian Gulf Pro League table with a commanding 3-1 home victory over Persepolis, piling further pressure on Reds head coach Osmar Loss Vieira.

All four goals came from long range in an entertaining contest in Sirjan. Pouya Pourali and Pouria Latififar struck superb volleys from outside the box to hand the hosts a two-goal advantage. Persepolis responded deep into first-half stoppage time when Uzbek international Igor Sergeev unleashed a powerful effort to reduce the deficit.

Latififar restored Golgohar's two-goal cushion seven minutes after the restart, netting his second of the afternoon to seal a significant win. The result lifts Golgohar to 36 points, one clear of nearest challengers Tractor, Esteghlal and Sepahan, whose fixtures were postponed due to commitments in Asian competitions. For Persepolis, it marked a

fourth defeat in six matches, leaving the Tehran side fifth on 34 points and under mounting scrutiny as the title race intensifies.

Elsewhere, a 90th-minute strike from Aref Qazal secured a 1-0 home victory for Khaybar Khorramabad against Malavan. The win moved head coach Mahdi Rahmati's side up to ninth on 26 points, two adrift of seventh-placed Malavan.

At the foot of the table, Mes Rafsanjan boosted its survival hopes with a 2-0 away win over 10-man Paykan in Tehran.

Reza Jabireh opened the scoring just two minutes into the match, before Paykan winger Farid Amiri was shown a red card four minutes later. Saman Nariman-Jahan doubled the lead six minutes after the interval against his former club, helping Mes - still bottom with 15 points - claim only its third win in 21 league outings. Paykan remains 13th on 22 points, three clear of the relegation zone.

## Iranian judoka Hakimi bags silver in Cadet African Cup

## Sports Desk

Iranian judoka Sobhan Hakimi claimed a silver medal at the Cadet African Cup in Tunis, delivering a strong performance in the men's -81kg division. Hakimi received a first-round bye before defeating home favorite Mohamed



Amin Abidi to book his place in the final. He ultimately fell short against world No. 3 Aly Elramly of Egypt, settling for second place on the podium. The result followed a productive outing for Iran at the Junior African Cup in the Tunisian capital on Friday, where the team

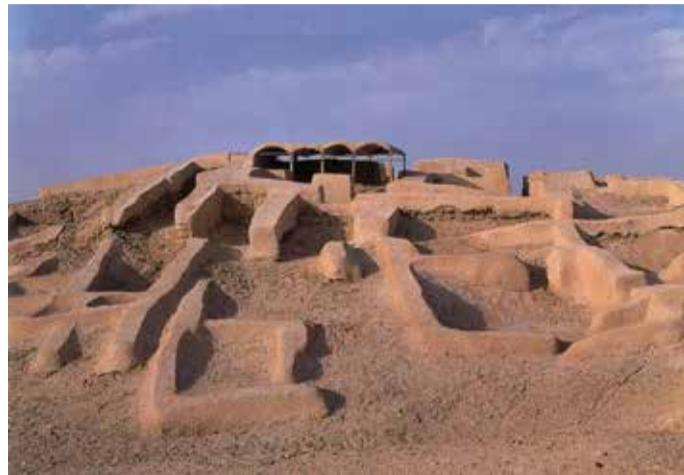
secured one gold and one silver medal. Mohammadjouhari clinched the men's +100kg title with a victory over Egypt's Abdalla Abdalla in the final. Banaeian opened his campaign with a win against Serbia's Petar Novakovic and then overcame Tunisia's Adem Kouki in the semifinals to advance to the gold-medal bout. Compatriot Ali Nikseresht finished runner-up in the men's -100kg category after losing to Belarus' Yauheni Morau in the final. After receiving a bye in the opening round, Nikseresht defeated Tunisia's Adem Landolsi to top Pool A and move into the semifinals, where he beat American Caedmon Haddad before eventually taking silver.

Golgohar players are pictured after a goal during a 3-1 victory over Persepolis in the Persian Gulf Pro League in Sirjan, Iran, on February 14, 2026.

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# Shahr-e Sukhteh; ancient capital of peace, innovation



● destinationiran.com

## Iranica Desk

Across the ancient world, cities are often remembered for their wars, conquests, and empires. Yet some civilizations followed a different path — one shaped not by violence, but by cooperation, creativity, and long-term stability. Archaeological discoveries in southeastern Iran point to such a society, one that flourished thousands of years ago through innovation, social organization, and sustained peace. At the heart of this story lies Shahr-e Sukhteh (Burned City), a city whose silent ruins conceal a remarkably advanced urban culture. Far from being a simple relic of the past, it offers fresh insight into how early societies could thrive through knowledge, planning, and equality — challenging long-held assumptions about the foundations of civilization itself. Iran's 17th site inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List is far more than a remnant of distant antiquity. Archaeological evidence shows it was home to a highly advanced, peaceful, and innovative society that, some 5,000 years ago, practiced principles comparable to modern urban planning, advanced medicine, and social equality. Spread across 270 hectares, the site today lies in profound

silence. Yet beneath the soil is a city that defies conventional narratives of the ancient world. In a recent interview with chtn.ir, Mobarakeh Mollahshahi, an archaeologist at the Shahr-e Sukhteh World Heritage Site, said that the settlement deserves to be known as the "ancient capital of peace." She noted that despite more than 50 years of systematic excavation, archaeologists have not discovered a single spear, sword, shield, or defensive structure — elements considered standard in cities of the same era. "This is in sharp contrast to civilizations in Mesopotamia or Egypt, where fortification walls and arsenals were integral to urban life," she said. According to Mollahshahi, this enduring peace — maintained for at least 800 years of dense urban occupation — created exceptional conditions for growth. Freed from the threat of invasion, the city's inhabitants were able to devote their energies to science, industry, and the arts. At the Shahr-e Sukhteh Archaeological Museum, each display case reveals a groundbreaking discovery. Vida Kazempour, head of the museum's research department, highlighted several of the most remarkable finds. Among them is what scholars

describe as the world's earliest cinema: a painted ceramic bowl depicting an ibex in five sequential frames. When rotated, the images show the animal leaping toward a tree and climbing it, demonstrating an advanced understanding of motion and visual continuity rather than simple ornamentation. Equally significant are wooden combs decorated with intricate geometric inlays. These artifacts have reshaped assumptions about the origins of marquetry art, once believed to have originated in ancient China. Evidence now suggests the technique emerged a millennium earlier in the workshops of Shahr-e Sukhteh. Clay tablets uncovered at the site further attest to the city's sophistication. Kazempour explained that these tablets functioned as commercial contracts, complete with designated spaces for official or mercantile cylinder seals. The discovery of standardized rulers with millimetric precision points to a unified system of measurement. The city's international connections during the Bronze Age have also drawn attention. Archaeologists discovered the complete skeleton of a macaque monkey buried with ceremonial rites similar to those reserved for high-status humans. Native

to the Indus Valley — in present-day Pakistan — the animal's presence indicates commercial or diplomatic ties with that civilization as early as 2800 BCE. Shahr-e Sukhteh's social structure remains one of its most debated features. Mollahshahi said the identification of ten distinct burial practices suggests a complex and stratified society. Particularly striking are subterranean chamber graves — pits with side rooms — most of which belonged to women. "These graves, associated with the affluent and possibly the ruling class, contain women buried with exquisite jewelry, painted vessels, and fine textiles," she explained. At the same time, large-scale bead-making and textile workshops found in the city's industrial districts appear to have been managed by women. Combined with the absence of weapons, the evidence raises the possibility that Shahr-e Sukhteh functioned as a matriarchal society in which women played a central role in managing the economy and trade. The city was also a pioneer in medical science. Archaeologists have identified the world's earliest known brain surgery at the site: the skull of a 13-year-old girl shows clear evidence of trepanation, and analysis indi-

cates she survived for at least six months after the operation.

Urban infrastructure at Shahr-e Sukhteh was equally advanced.

Another archaeologist at the site noted that it was one of the earliest cities in the Middle East known to have a covered sewage collection and disposal system. Clay pipes carried wastewater from homes into main channels and out of the city, while the cemetery was located entirely outside residential areas — reflecting a sophisticated understanding of public health.

Describing the city's layout, archaeologist Abulfazl Mirzandeh said Shahr-e Sukhteh did not develop haphazardly. Instead, it followed a pre-designed plan that included a central residential area with orderly mudbrick houses, an eastern industrial zone with pottery, metalworking, and stone-carving workshops, a northwestern district for jewelry production, and a vast cemetery set at a defined distance. This functional zoning predates modern urban planning concepts by thousands of years.

Despite decades of research, only a fraction of the city has been explored. Archaeologists estimate that just two percent of the site — around three hectares — has been excavated after 50

years and 30 excavation seasons. The remaining 98 percent, including streets, homes, squares, and archives, remains untouched beneath the soil.

At the current pace, a complete scientific excavation would take between 300 and 400 years. Yet nearly every excavation season has produced a landmark discovery, from the world's first artificial eye — made of bitumen and gold and implanted in the skull of a young woman — to the earliest known backgammon board.

Today, Shahr-e Sukhteh stands as more than a historical monument. It offers a living model of how a society can reach remarkable scientific, artistic, and social heights through sustained peace. The site demonstrates that 5,000 years ago, inhabitants of the Iranian Plateau not only rivaled their great contemporaries, but in many fields — from urban governance to women's rights — surpassed them.

Preserving this unique heritage from the region's fierce 120-day winds, illegal excavations, and chronic underfunding will require a strong national commitment. Shahr-e Sukhteh belongs not only to Iran, but to all humanity, with each new discovery adding a vital piece to the puzzle of human history.

## Historic Safavid bathhouse in Asadabad awaits new life

### Iranica Desk

The historic Golestan Bathhouse of Asadabad, located in the heart of the old urban fabric of Asadabad, Hamedan Province, is one of the region's notable heritage structures and a fine example of Safavid-era bathhouse architecture. Featuring a domed structure, the building is also known locally as the Khan Bathhouse, Niloofar Bathhouse, and the Old Bazaar Bathhouse.

The historic bathhouse has been closed for more than 30 years due to its age and severe deterioration. Restoration work has been carried out intermittently over the years with limited funding, leaving the project unfinished. For more than three decades, heritage enthusiasts have eagerly awaited the reopening of the site, hoping to revisit a tangible piece of the region's past, according to ISNA.

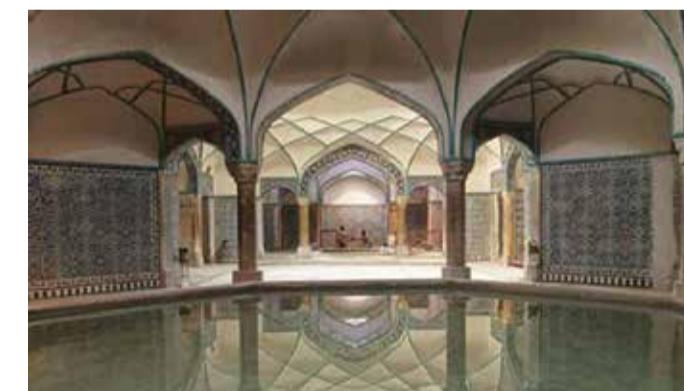
No inscription or historical document has been found to precisely date the bathhouse, but based on the age of the city's water reservoir and Grand Mosque,



experts believe its foundations date back to the Safavid period. Questions remain as to whether the doors of this historic structure will finally reopen after more than 30 years of closure and restoration.

Asadabad Governor Soleiman Nazaridoust said the city welcomes private-sector investors interested in establishing a traditional restaurant or handicrafts market within the bathhouse. He added that the governor's office is fully prepared to cooperate in issuing the necessary permits

for tourism-related projects. Nazaridoust noted that Golestan Bathhouse has undergone slow, piecemeal restoration for decades, keeping it closed despite strong public demand for its reopening. He expressed hope that, with the attraction of an investor, the site could be opened to visitors by mid-March. Head of the Asadabad Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Organization, Kamran Akbari-Shayegan, said the building has been temporarily put into use and, since last week, has been operating as a "Qur'an Café" under a joint initiative by



route and was registered on Iran's National Heritage List in 2001. Since restoration efforts began in 2009, around 80 percent of the work has been completed, with the remaining 20 percent to be finalized through cooperation between the Cultural Heritage Department and the municipality.

Akbari-Shayegan said the building has been temporarily put into use and, since last week, has been operating as a "Qur'an Café" under a joint initiative by

the municipality and the office of the Friday prayer leader. He stressed, however, that the bathhouse requires a permanent and appropriate new function.

The bathhouse — owned by the municipality and restored by the city's Cultural Heritage Department — is well suited for conversion into a traditional restaurant, marketplace, bathhouse museum, or another related cultural use through private-sector involvement.

Restoration measures already carried out include structural

lightening and vault stabilization, replacement of worn bricks, interior repairs, installation of lighting, improvements to the sewage disposal system, and restoration of the entrance.

Shayegan emphasized that historic monuments are key drivers of tourism development, expressing hope that an appropriate change of use for the bathhouse will significantly boost tourism in Asadabad.

Architecturally, the bathhouse consists of several interconnected sections, including the entrance forecourt, vestibule, changing hall, and water reservoir. Visitors entered via a 1.55-meter-wide staircase leading to a hexagonal domed space with a diameter of 2.67 meters, which opened into an octagonal changing hall featuring six arched platforms for changing clothes. A narrow corridor then led to the hot chamber, composed of three domed sections, with the hot-water reservoir located on the western side of the central space.

# 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.

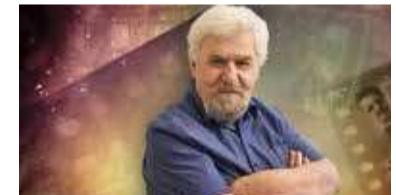
Born in April 1945, Bakhshi built a six-decade career spanning theater, cinema and television, carving out a durable presence in more than 170 productions. With his gravelly voice and imposing features, he was frequently cast in antagonist roles, a niche he once said left actors "overlooked and unrecognized"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



● IRNA

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).