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Top security chief says IAEA allowed to have daily, monthly inspections



Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi (L) shakes hands with International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Director-General Rafael Grossi in Geneva, Switzerland on February 16, 2026.

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Deal could open door to US investment in Iran's energy sector



By Mahmoud Khaghani
Oil & energy expert

OPINION

US secondary sanctions target any investment, technology transfer or cooperation in Iran's energy sector. As a result, American and even non-American companies steer clear of any direct or indirect dealings with Iranian oil, gas and petrochemical projects, wary of hefty penalties that could come down hard on them. However, if Tehran and Washington were to mend ties under a comprehensive agreement, energy restrictions could gradually be

rolled back. Given that US companies are active in clean technologies, liquefied natural gas (LNG) and flare gas recovery, the ground could be laid for cooperation. LNG technology is highly advanced, and the leading equipment remains in the hands of companies such as Chevron, ExxonMobil and ConocoPhillips, along with several European firms. Access to comparable technology through the United States requires licenses from the Treasury and Commerce Departments, approvals that are currently out of reach for Iran.

During the administrations of Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani from

1989 to 1997 and Mohammad Khatami from 1997 to 2005, Iran maintained ties with multinational corporations, including American firms that even bought Iranian oil. Hess Corporation designed a refinery tailored to Iranian crude. Shell reached agreements with Iran in upstream and refining sectors. Investment projects were in place to convert natural gas into liquid fuels and LNG. Gradually, however, a faction that still wields influence in Iran's economy and politics moved to terminate contracts signed in shared fields with the United States, and even with China and Russia, including the Crescent deal. Later, after new oil contracts

were drawn up and signed with Total, those too were canceled. In effect, domestic opponents aligned with Donald Trump's 2018 withdrawal from the nuclear deal. When the 2015 nuclear agreement was sealed and European and Asian companies began moving in, the United States also signaled interest. Yet some groups pushed back and cast doubt on Iran's contract with Boeing by striking an anti-American tone. The upshot was that Washington questioned why it should release Iran's frozen funds if China and Russia were poised to clinch contracts instead.

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Grossi lauds 'in-depth technical discussions' with Araghchi ahead of US talks

Top security chief says IAEA allowed to have daily, monthly inspections

International Desk

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi and Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Rafael Grossi met in the Swiss city of Geneva Monday, with the head of the UN nuclear watchdog praising the talks as "in-depth technical discussions."

"Just completed in-depth technical discussions with Iran's Foreign Minister Araghchi in preparation for important negotiations scheduled for tomorrow in Geneva," Grossi wrote on his X account following the meeting. Araghchi, for his part, said they discussed certain technical issues related to Tehran's cooperation with the IAEA in the framework of safeguards cooperation and the Iranian Parliament's law regarding the issue.

Iran's technical viewpoints regarding its indirect negotiations with the United States were also discussed, he added.

The Monday meeting came as Iran and the United States are to hold a

second round of indirect talks on the Islamic Republic's peaceful nuclear program on Tuesday, with Oman continuing its intermediary role.

In a separate development, Secretary of Supreme National Security Council Ali Larijani said in an interview with Al Jazeera on Sunday that the IAEA is allowed to perform inspections on Iranian sites on a daily or monthly basis to make sure the Islamic Republic has never been after nuclear bombs. "To address this concern, a framework must be established, meaning the other side must also address our concern. We accepted the IAEA framework, and they come and can inspect monthly and daily; a bomb cannot be built in a backroom, but rather in a place with specific technology, and we accept the agency's oversight, there is no problem," Larijani said.

The top security chief also stressed that while Tehran pursues negotiations, it keeps deterrence in place in the face of any act of aggression against the country.

"Iran is not seeking war, but will not



Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi (R) and Director-General of the International Atomic Energy Agency Rafael Grossi meet and confer in the Swiss city of Geneva on February 16, 2026.

IRNA

surrender in the face of threats, and it relies on a combination of negotiations and deterrence," Larijani noted. He added that the Islamic Republic has increased its level of preparedness and is currently ready to engage in "fair" negotiations about its peaceful nuclear program to remove concerns without harming national security.

Underlining that Iran's missile program has not been raised in the recent negotiations, Larijani said the issue is part of the country's national security and defensive deterrence architecture and is not negotiable.

The latest talks resumed after a seven-month hiatus since June, when Israel attacked Iran during exchanges between Tehran and Washington.

The strikes resulted in the deaths of



more than 1,000 military personnel and civilians, including senior commanders of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps and nuclear scientists.

A few days after the Israeli aggression, which lasted 12 days, the United States bombed three Iranian nuclear sites.

FM asserts submission before threats 'not on the table'

Spox: Tehran attending US talks with 'result-oriented approach'

International Desk

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said on Monday that his trip to Geneva to hold indirect talks with the United States is aimed at reaching a just and equitable deal, while dismissing any pressure-driven concessions as well as threats against the Islamic Republic.

"I am in Geneva with real ideas to achieve a fair and equitable deal. What is not on the table: submission before threats," Araghchi wrote in a post on his X account after arrival in the Swiss city on Monday.

He also outlined other diplomatic agenda in Geneva, saying he will meet "Rafael Grossi (Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency) for deep technical discussions, as well as Badr Al-Busaid (Foreign Minister of Oman) ahead of diplomacy with (the) US on Tuesday."

Araghchi, at the head of a high-ranking diplomatic and specialized delegation, landed in Geneva on Sunday night. The Iranian delegation is scheduled to hold talks with



Esmail Baghaei
IRNA

the US on February 17 with the mediation of the Omani foreign minister. The first round of talks was held in Muscat last week, which was described by the two sides as a "good start." Iran's main demand during the Muscat talks was the effective and verifiable lifting of economic sanctions. Iranian officials have repeatedly emphasized that any agreement lacking tangible economic benefits would be meaningless in practice.

The negotiations are taking place as the US has resorted to a significant military buildup across West Asia, starting with sending its USS Abraham Lincoln aircraft carrier to the region.

Baqaei also said that Iran's problem is the

shifting positions and contradictory statements, not only from the negotiators, but also from other American officials.

"They are sending completely inconsistent signals and messages, none of which indicate seriousness," he said, adding that Iran is negotiating "in an atmosphere of full mistrust and skepticism" and cannot afford to ignore its past experiences "even for a single moment."

Pointing to the Iranian delegation participating in this round of negotiations, Baqaei said the talks naturally include technical as well as economic, political, and legal dimensions, but emphasized that the technical aspect plays an important role.

"In this round of negotiations, we will be present with a complete team — political, legal, economic and technical," Baghaei said. "All experts and representatives necessary to express views and make decisions on the various aspects of a potential understanding are in attendance."

IRGC Navy launches drills in Hormuz Strait amid US escalation

National Desk

The Naval forces of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) kicked off on Monday military drills under the name of "Smart Control of the Strait of Hormuz" in the strategic waterway as the US ramps up its illegal military presence in the West Asia region.

The combined, live, and targeted exercise is being conducted with the central role of the IRGC Navy and under the supervision, control, and field monitoring of IRGC Commander Major General Mohammad Pakpour.

The main objectives of the war game include assessing the operational readiness of the IRGC Navy's units, reviewing support plans and scenarios for reciprocal military action by the IRGC in the face of potential security and military threats in the Strait of Hormuz region, and making intelligent use of the geopolitical advantages of Iran in the Persian Gulf and the Sea of Oman.

The rapid, decisive, and comprehensive response of the IRGC's operational forces to anti-security plots in the maritime domain is at the core of the intelligence and operational drills of the units participating in the war game.

Iran is conducting naval exercises in the



TASnim

Strait of Hormuz as the administration of US President Donald Trump has deployed military forces to the region, including F-35 fighter jets, large fuel tankers, and additional naval assets, heightening concerns about possible new military action. At least 163 C-17 and C-5 cargo flights have traveled from bases in the United States and Japan to the Middle East via Europe, according to Drop Site News. US officials said on February 12 that the Pentagon was sending an additional aircraft carrier to the region, adding thousands more troops along with fighter aircraft and guided-missile destroyers.

Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces Major General Abdolrahim Mousavi warned the US president on Sunday against any confrontation with the Islamic Republic, saying such action would serve as a harsh lesson for Washington.

Deal could open ...

Under President Joe Biden, Iran held productive talks, and by early 2021 everything was set to sign off on reviving the tattered nuclear deal. But some inside Iran threw a wrench into the process. Then-president Hassan Rouhani had hoped the next Iranian government would see the agreement over the finish line, yet what is often described as the "hidden government" blocked it. The same faction is now trying to trip up President Masoud Pezeshkian's gov-

ernment to fail.

The ongoing talks between Iran and the United States are, in essence, a continuation of the negotiations to resuscitate the 2015 nuclear deal. Diplomacy and dialogue are meant to prevent mass bloodshed, destruction and conflict. In war, no one truly comes out as winner. Europe would bear the brunt of the fallout, as a conflict with Iran would trigger an oil price shock.

If the US is now eyeing war, it may have its sights set on Iran's oil and

gas reserves and its lithium deposits. The US is pursuing oil and gas and, more importantly, lithium resources. If it spends on war, it will seek to recoup the cost from Iran's oil, gas and lithium.

Negotiation and diplomacy are essential, but they should not pave the way for monopoly control by either the United States or the Eastern bloc.

This article first appeared in Persian on ILNA.



Mohammad Ali Rajabi
Cartoonist

CARTOON



Iran, Russia open economic meeting; final deals due Wednesday

Economy Desk

Iran and Russia opened their 19th Joint Economic Commission on Monday for three days of talks aimed at expanding cooperation in energy, trade, transport and technology, with final documents due to be signed on Wednesday.

Ali-Mohammad Mousavi, Iran's deputy oil minister for international affairs and commerce, said at the opening ceremony the two countries' cooperation was expanding in multiple sectors and that the three-day meeting would help turn agreements into projects and tangible results.

"Relations between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Russian Federation are based on mutual respect, common interests, and aligned perspectives on regional and international developments, and have followed a growing and constructive trend in recent years," Mousavi said, according to Shana. He added that the Oil Ministry, which is hosting the meeting, supported broader bilateral cooperation, balanced economic ties, private sector participation, removal of trade barriers and expansion of joint projects.

Trade hits \$4.7b

Addressing the opening ceremony, Khalimat Bodunova, Russian secretary of the joint commission, said trade and economic relations were rising, with bilateral trade reaching \$4.7 billion as per the latest data.

"The Russian delegation this year comprises government organizations and various companies," Bodunova said. "In this meeting, 17 expert committees are active, and in the first two



The 19th Joint Economic Commission of Iran and Russia opens in Tehran on February 16, 2026.

● ALI KHALI/SHANA

days, extensive actions and coordination must be carried out by experts from both countries." She also said a free trade agreement between Iran and the Eurasian Economic Union would play an important role in expanding trade by enabling exchanges of more than 2,000 categories of goods and services. According to ISNA, the session will cover issues including completion of the International North-South Transport Corridor, Russian gas transfers to Iran, and cooperation in space industries, nuclear energy, finance, banking, customs, agriculture, health, tourism, culture and technology.

Oil Minister Mohsen Paknejad, who chairs the Iranian delegation, has said priority projects and agreements in trade, energy, transport, finance, peaceful nuclear energy, health and other sectors would be reviewed during expert meetings on Monday and Tuesday, with final documents to be signed Wednesday.

On the sidelines of the opening ceremony, Mousavi told Shana that alongside the main commission document — a report and detailed text of about 190 articles — six additional agreements would also be signed by various agencies covering standards, health, agriculture and other sectors.

Focus on energy, agriculture, transit infrastructure

Mostafa Barzegar, director-gen-



eral for Europe, America and CIS countries at the Oil Ministry, said on the sidelines of the session that agriculture was one of the most important areas of cooperation and accounted for a significant share of trade. Barzegar said that agricultural and essential-goods trade between Iran and Russia had risen sharply this year from last year. He said major Russian companies had invested in seven Iranian oil fields and currently account for about 6% of Iran's oil production, a figure that could surge to 12% if investment increased.

In nuclear energy, the first

phase of the Bushehr Nuclear Power Plant built with Russian investment is operational, while phases two and three are under construction. A new memorandum between the two countries also envisages \$25 billion in investment to build small-scale nuclear power plants in the Sirik region of Iran, with progress to be reviewed during the commission.

Gas imports, INSC corridor, trade targets

Gas imports from Russia are another key topic. In the first phase, annual imports of 55 billion cubic meters are planned,

with the same volume to be added in a second phase. Talks are also underway on importing electricity from Russia via Azerbaijan.

According to ISNA, completion of the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSC) remains a priority. In the 162-km Rasht-Astara railway, considered the missing link, about 125 km of land has been acquired, with 40 km to be handed to Russia for construction.

Once connected to Azerbaijan, the route will have capacity to move about 15 million tons of cargo a year, boosting trade, particularly in agricultural

goods.

Annual trade between Iran and Russia is below the desired level given their strategic ties, with short- and medium-term targets aiming to raise it to \$20 billion.

A 20-year strategic partnership agreement and a Eurasian free trade deal are expected to help reduce tariffs and expand cooperation.

The 18th commission meeting, held in Moscow in May, approved 193 articles, more than 75% of which have been implemented or are underway, while some require legislative approval.

First floating solar farm to be set up in Khuzestan



Economy Desk

Iran plans to develop its first floating solar power plant at the Karkheh Dam in Khuzestan Province, a senior energy official said, as part of a broader scheme to add 171 megawatts (MW) of solar capacity in the southwestern region.

"Building a floating solar power plant in Karkheh Dam can, in addition to electricity production, play an effective role in reducing water evaporation from this dam," Alireza Parandeh Motlaq, deputy of technical and engineering

at the Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Organization (SATBA) said, as reported by IRIB News on Monday. Motlaq also said the construction of 171 MW of solar power energy, as well as the 2 MW floating farm, would be launched during a two-day visit by Energy Minister Abbas Aliabadi to the province on Tuesday. The projects are expected to cost about \$35 million. They are part of the government's initiative to install 7,000 MW solar power plants nationwide. Motlaq said that additional

facilities are also underway to support local grid stability. "A 3 MW farm and two plants of 9 MW each have also started in the province and will help enhance the daytime stability of the Khuzestan power grid," he said.

The expansion comes as President Masoud Pezeshkian's government aims to install 30,000 MW of renewable energy capacity over the next three years amid an expected power shortfall next year.

According to the Energy Ministry, Iran is projected to face a power deficit of 17,000 MW next year. The government has also urged industries to step up investment in solar power. Mohsen Tarztalab, head of SATBA and deputy energy minister, said on Friday that nearly 3,000 MW of renewables have been constructed under the Pezeshkian administration, with more than half developed through direct private sector investment and the remainder through participation of the National Development Fund.

Iran, Qatar agree to bolster veterinary cooperation for food security

Economy Desk

Iran and Qatar have agreed to establish reciprocal trade desks in Tehran and Doha to facilitate veterinary and agricultural cooperation, as Tehran seeks to expand its livestock exports to the Arab Persian Gulf state.

The understanding was reached during the 13th Qatar International Agricultural Exhibition (AgriteQ 2026), following a meeting between Iran's top veterinary official and senior Qatari counterparts, IRNA reported.

Heading an Iranian delegation, Alireza Rafieipour, head of the Iran Veterinary Organization (IVO) and deputy minister of agriculture, met with Qatari veterinary authorities at the Katara Cultural Village on the sidelines of the five-day expo, which runs from Feb. 12 to Feb. 16.

The discussions focused on expanding technical, health, and commercial cooperation regarding livestock and related products.

The Iranian side presented its production capabilities, highlighting exports including hatching and table eggs, honey, raw milk and dairy products,



poultry, red meat, and aquatic animals.

The delegation also detailed Iranian capacity to supply veterinary medicine, vaccines, biological materials, supplements, and micronutrients.

The head of Qatar's veterinary authority acknowledged Iran's technical expertise and production potential, calling for broader cooperation to meet a portion of Qatar's poultry and livestock needs.

He also expressed Doha's readiness to work with Tehran regarding the supply of veterinary inputs.

AgriteQ 2026, which focuses on food safety and sustainable agriculture, plays a strategic role in Qatar's National Food Security Strategy (2024-2030).

The photo shows the second day of the 13th Qatar International Agricultural Exhibition (AgriteQ), held at Katara Cultural Village.

● qna.org.qa

The event serves as a platform for addressing regional challenges such as water scarcity and climate change.

To follow up on the initial agreements, the two sides agreed to appoint special representatives in Tehran and Doha to monitor the implementation of the cooperation. The proposed "Qatar Desk" in Iran and the "Iran Desk" are intended to streamline technical and commercial interactions between the two countries.



By Annuntha Rangan
Senior research officer
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OPINION
EXCLUSIVE

When Iran experiences unrest, its impact does not remain confined within its borders; the repercussions are felt across Asia. The protests that began in late December 2025 with economic and guild-based demands were rapidly portrayed in international media as a sweeping crisis — even a sign of imminent collapse — largely due to the information vacuum created by a nationwide internet shutdown. The widespread circulation of unverified reports, recycled videos, and exaggerated casualty figures constructed an image of Iran that diverged significantly from realities on the ground. Once internet access was restored, it became clearer that a substantial gap existed between external narratives and domestic developments. The crisis did not remain purely internal. Following rhetorical escalation from the United States, it acquired geopolitical dimensions affecting countries such as India, China, and Pakistan. In this context, Indian experts have largely approached Iran's protests through the lens of mutual interests and strategic considerations. Unlike certain Western analyses that adopt a one-sided or interventionist framing, Indian analysts tend to emphasize regional stability, economic interdependence, and shared strategic projects — particularly the Chabahar Port and the International North-South Transport Corridor. Their assessments seek balance and relative neutrality, viewing Iran not merely as a site of crisis, but as a key component of Asia's broader strategic equilibrium.

On the late evening of December 28, 2025, all of a sudden, newspapers, news sites, and social media were filled with clips from Iran, breaking updates about Iran, and stories that seemed beyond imagination. I was also one of those who believed something huge was unfolding in Iran and that people had come out onto the streets to demand more than relief from a sliding economy.

However, I was soon proven wrong by the scale of misinformation circulating online. False reports, recycled videos, and fabricated demise posters spread rapidly across platforms, projecting an Iran that appeared to be collapsing in real time. The reality, at least initially, was more restrained. Citizens held peaceful protests that began with the bazaar community, shopkeepers, and merchants in Tehran's Grand Bazaar. University students soon joined, and demonstrations gradually spread to other major and small cities. But what stood out most in those early days was how quickly seven days of peaceful protest transformed into something far more politically charged. The slogans became sharper, more directly anti-government, and the protests took a completely different turn.

The flood of unverified reporting was not accidental. It was amplified by the fact that the internet was shut down nationwide. With communication restricted and official clarity limited, outsiders could not predict what was truly happening inside Iran. Yet videos and updates continued to circulate, often accompanied by claims of unimaginable numbers of protester deaths. It was difficult to verify anything, but it is also human nature to believe the loudest information available when there is no direct information from the affected parties. That is how the world perceived Iran's situation in those crucial early days. Fabricated reports from unverified sources became "legitimate" simply through repetition.

Only after Iran restored internet services was it possible to understand the situation with greater accuracy. Conversations with acquaintances present in Iran suggested that things were calmer than the external narrative had portrayed, particularly in Western media coverage. The gap between perception and reality was stark, and it highlighted

When Iran shakes, Asia feels it



FOREIGN POLICY

how information vacuums in closed or semi-closed environments can be filled by stories that serve political agendas more than they serve truth.

In the aftermath of this confusion, the crisis did not remain an internal Iranian issue for long. The United States of America, as it often does in moments of instability in West Asia, began to take advantage of the situation by framing it as a matter of urgent intervention and human rights concern. The irony of such positioning is difficult to ignore. Washington's record in Afghanistan, Libya, and Iraq has shown that its interventions frequently come with immense human cost, often measured in millions of lives disrupted or lost. Yet in moments like these, the language of rights and freedom becomes a familiar instrument, deployed not only to express concern but to justify pressure, sanctions, and coercive diplomacy.

Since the intervention and rhetorical escalation from the United States, the situation has shifted in character. What should have remained primarily an in-

ternal problem for Iran has increasingly been framed as an external confrontation, and in doing so, it has turned into a wider strategic threat for countries that maintain cordial or functional relationships with Tehran, including India, China, Pakistan, Russia, and others. The danger is not only the instability within Iran itself, but the way that instability becomes internationalized and weaponized through geopolitical competition. When it comes to India, New Delhi has historically maintained good relations with Tehran. Iran has been seen as a partner that was willing to supply oil at discounted rates, and beyond energy, Iran has long held strategic significance for India's connectivity ambitions. While the crisis in recent days has largely been framed as a confrontation between Iran and the United States, its consequences extend far beyond those two actors. India, despite appearing geographically distant, is among the most affected due to its long-standing strategic and economic engagement with Tehran. India has invested heavily in the devel-

opment of Chabahar port, and on May 13, 2024, a long-term agreement was signed between Indian Ports Global Limited and the Port and Maritime Organisation of Iran to operate the Shahid Beheshti terminal. This partnership was widely viewed as strategically significant for both countries, and for India, it represented something larger than a port project. Chabahar is closely linked to the International North-South Transport Corridor, a multimodal connectivity initiative that links India with Iran, Russia, and Europe. The corridor has already reduced transportation costs and distances, offering India more efficient access to Central Asia and Eurasia. Iran's stability is therefore directly linked to India's strategic and commercial interests.

Trade figures underline that this relationship has remained resilient even amid sanctions and financial constraints. In the financial year 2024–25, India's exports to Iran stood at approximately \$1.24 billion, while imports were valued at around \$0.44 billion. However, the current unrest has disrupted these arrangements. Operations at Chabahar have slowed, cargo movement along the corridor has been affected, and banking channels facilitating trade have come under renewed strain. Alternative mechanisms such as the rupee-rial arrangement face growing uncertainty, and Indian private sector entities have become increasingly risk-averse. For New Delhi, this represents a serious setback at a time when it is seeking to expand its economic and strategic footprint across Eurasia and Central Asia.

The crisis also worsens a growing trust deficit. Tehran increasingly perceives India as drifting closer to Washington, while New Delhi views Iran as unpredictable and strategically risky. At the same time, energy cooperation has been further constrained. Iran was once a major supplier of crude oil to India, but sanctions had already reduced imports



Since the intervention and rhetorical escalation from the United States, the situation has shifted in character. What should have remained primarily an internal problem for Iran has increasingly been framed as an external confrontation, and in doing so, it has turned into a wider strategic threat for countries that maintain cordial or functional relationships with Tehran, including India, China, Pakistan, Russia, and others. The danger is not only the instability within Iran itself, but the way that instability becomes internationalized and weaponized through geopolitical competition.



US President Donald Trump (r) answers a question from a reporter at the end of a news conference with Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu at Mar-a-Lago, Palm Beach, Florida, on December 29, 2025.

AP



well before the current unrest. The escalation effectively closes the door on any near-term revival of energy ties.

One of the most consequential yet understated outcomes of the crisis is China's expanding role in Iran. Beijing and Tehran are bound by a 25-year strategic partnership covering energy, infrastructure, and security cooperation. Unlike India and Western actors, China has demonstrated a willingness to absorb sanctions-related risks in pursuit of long-term strategic gains. As Iran becomes increasingly isolated, it is likely to lean more heavily on China for economic and diplomatic support. In the event of war or prolonged instability, this dependency will only deepen, marginalising India's influence and altering the balance of power in the region.

It is important, however, to understand the nature of China's posture in this unfolding crisis. Beijing's stand has been particularly striking for its restraint. Given China's history of involvement in West Asian affairs and its desire to expand its regional footprint, its limited response has disappointed some observers. Official statements from Chinese leaders have been cautious. Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning called on Iran's government and people to overcome difficulties and maintain stability, while Foreign Minister Wang Yi condemned American threats as a return to the law of the jungle and offered China as a constructive mediator. Beyond rhetoric, however, Beijing has taken no decisive action.

This restraint reflects China's broader strategic calculus. Beijing's economic and diplomatic investments in Gulf states far outweigh those in Iran. With relatively limited stakes and few viable tools to shape outcomes, a wait-and-see approach aligns with China's interests. The current crisis is largely beyond Beijing's control, and China's global partners appear to recognise this.

China's credibility as a responsible global actor has not been significantly damaged by its inaction. Analysts have noted that Beijing never positioned itself as Iran's security guarantor or as an anti-Western crusader. Instead, it seeks to function as an alternative partner within a global system from which it also derives enormous benefit. Its diplomacy aims to expand influence while managing rivalry, not to overturn the existing order outright.

Economically, Iran occupies a middling position in China's overseas portfolio. Projects such as the Qom-Yiwu rail freight corridor have symbolic importance but do not place Iran among Beijing's top development financing recipients. The two countries also maintain a security partnership that includes intelligence sharing, joint exercises, and coordination on counterterrorism. China has supplied Iran with various military and dual-use technologies in exchange

Officials attend a ceremony in 2019 to mark the first export convoy to India via Iran at Chabahar port. GETTY IMAGES



Iran's President Masoud Pezeshkian (l), along with other Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) leaders, signs documents covering a wide range of cooperative areas at an SCO summit in Tianjin, China. mfa.gov.ir

for discounted energy, infrastructure access, and diplomatic alignment.

The limits of this partnership were evident in June 2025, when US strikes targeted Iranian nuclear facilities. China's response was confined to diplomatic condemnation and calls for dialogue. No material support followed. This episode highlighted the fundamentally opportunistic nature of the relationship. China benefits from Iran's isolation but is unwilling to incur serious costs on its behalf.

Even a disruption in Iranian oil exports would be manageable for China, which has ample reserves and alternative suppliers. The loss of a consistently anti-American partner would be inconvenient but not catastrophic. The deeper concern for Beijing would be symbolic. While there are no signs of comparable unrest within China, its leaders are unlikely to take chances. Increased surveillance, tighter information controls,

and a heightened security presence would be the predictable response. Iran is not existential for China. Domestic stability is.

Now that the important covers are discussed, it is also crucial to understand how Pakistan is one of the most affected parties in this crisis. With Pakistan's disputed border with Afghanistan already tense and prone to frequent clashes, officials have warned that Pakistan cannot afford its border with Iran to become volatile as well. Although not all of this is due purely to the current protests, Pakistan's border trade with Iran has been disrupted in previous regional tensions, hurting border economies. Local communities rely on cross-border commerce, and closures or stricter controls disrupt livelihoods. Wider instability in West Asia, not limited to Iran alone, tends to raise global oil prices, which puts pressure on Pakistan's balance of payments and

inflation, especially given its reliance on imported energy.

At the same time, the crisis has revived questions about the US-Pakistan relationship, which has improved significantly in Trump's second term. With Trump continuing to threaten Iran with attacks, a key concern is whether the United States could seek access to Pakistan's airspace or military bases in the event of a strike. Such a demand would place Pakistan in a difficult position. Denying the request would risk annoying Trump and jeopardising the recent improvement in bilateral relations. Accepting it, however, would risk alienating Pakistan's Shia population and the Islamic world more broadly. Pakistan has around 20% Shia Muslims who sympathise with Tehran, and Iran is a Shia-majority state. There is a serious concern that a US attack on Iran, combined with pressure on Pakistan to facilitate such an attack, could foment unrest within Pakistan itself. Officials fear that any attack on Iran or a regime-change scenario could trigger widespread protests across Pakistan and create additional pressure along the Pakistan-Iran border due to a potential inflow of refugees.

Ultimately, Iran's unrest must be viewed within the broader West Asian context. Rising Iran-US tensions heighten Israel's security concerns, particularly regarding Iran-backed groups in the region and Iran's military capabilities. Persian Gulf states are watching cautiously, wary of being drawn into a wider confrontation while simultaneously fearing disruptions to energy markets and maritime security. The regional order remains fragile, shaped by unresolved conflicts and shifting alliances. A military conflict involving Iran would not remain confined within its borders. It would disrupt shipping lanes, destabilise oil markets, and force regional actors to recalibrate alliances, fundamentally reshaping West Asia's strategic landscape.

In this screengrab, people take to the streets of Kargil, Indian-administered Ladakh, on January 29, 2026, to show their solidarity with Leader of Iran's Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei, after the US president threatened him. ASR IRAN

China's credibility as a responsible global actor has not been significantly damaged by its inaction. Analysts have noted that Beijing never positioned itself as Iran's security guarantor or as an anti-Western crusader. Instead, it seeks to function as an alternative partner within a global system from which it also derives enormous benefit. Its diplomacy aims to expand influence while managing rivalry, not to overturn the existing order outright.



A border market is inaugurated in southeastern Iran with Pakistani Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif (not pictured) in attendance on May 18, 2023. president.ir

Iran to play Russia in volleyball friendlies in August

Sports Desk

The Iranian men's national volleyball team is set to visit Ufa in late August for a pair of friendlies against European powerhouse Russia, the Iranian Volleyball Federation announced on Sunday. The national governing body added that other teams could be invited by the Russian federation during the same period, potentially expanding the event into a friendly tournament. Widely regarded as one of the heavyweights in the history of the sport, Russia has been suspended by the International Volleyball Federation from participation in FIVB and CEV tournaments since February 2022, in the aftermath of the country's invasion of Ukraine. The visit will form part of Iran's preparations for the Asian Men's Volleyball Championship, which begins on September 4 in Fukuoka, Japan, where Iran will be chasing a fifth title in eight editions.

As if Iran needed extra moti-

vation to avenge its 2023 final defeat to Japan on home soil, an Olympic quota place will be at stake in Fukuoka, with the champion securing a berth in the men's volleyball tournament at the 2028 Los Angeles Games. Iran faces a hectic international calendar in the coming months, beginning with the preliminary round of the Volleyball Nations League (VNL).

Italian head coach Roberto Piazza's men will open their VNL campaign against Brazil in Brasilia on June 10, before taking on Bulgaria – finalist at last September's World Championships – Argentina and Belgium later in Week 1 at the Nilson Nelson Gymnasium.

Iran will then travel to Orléans, France, for the second week of action, starting with a daunting clash against the formidable host and reigning Olympic champion France on June 24, followed by matches against the United States, Japan and Cuba. The third and final week of the preliminaries will see Piazza's



FIVB

side face Ukraine in Belgrade on July 15, before further tests against Germany, Slovenia and

Türkiye.

The top eight teams in the 18-team standings will advance to

the quarterfinals as host. Iran will aim to build on a promising first year under Piazza by securing its first quarterfinal berth in four years at the prestigious annual tournament. After finishing in the bottom three in the previous two editions, Iran staged a late surge in the 2025 preliminaries to place eighth with six wins from 12 matches. However, Piazza's team ultimately missed out on the Finals, as China's host status secured it a quarterfinal spot despite finishing second from bottom. Momentum from several impressive VNL performances carried into the World Championship in the Philippines, where Iran advanced to the quarterfinals before suffering a 3-1 defeat to surprise package Czechia. Another encounter between Iran and Japan could be on the cards at the Aichi-Nagoya 2026 Asian Games, which will kick off on September 19, as Piazza's men aim for a fourth successive men's gold medal at the multi-sport event.

Iranian trio claims men's junior bronze at Sabre World Cup



IRNA

Sports Desk

The Iranian men's junior team claimed a prestigious bronze medal at the Sabre Coupe du Monde event in Dakar, Senegal, on Sunday. The trio of Taha Kargarpour, Parsa Poursalman and Hesam Moradi suffered a 45-39 defeat to top seed Egypt in the semifinals, but bounced back to overcome the host team 45-31 and secure the consolation bronze.

The third-place finish marked a second medal for Iran at the tournament, following Moradi's historic gold in the individual cadet event on Thursday.

The 16-year-old prodigy capped his landmark campaign with a 15-12 victory over Ecuador's Jose Daniel Valencia Olmedo in the final, clinching Iran's first-ever Sabre World Cup gold medal in the age category.

Moradi won four of his five bouts to finish fifth overall in the pool standings and advance to the round of 16, where he defeated Ishak Dali 15-4. A 15-11 victory over Kenya's Kinoti Kiara sent Moradi into the semifinals, before the Iranian edged Mexico's Nathan Mungia 15-13 to book his place in the final.

Tunis African Open 2026: Parhizgar wins gold as Iran bags three medals

Sports Desk

The Iranian men's judo team collected three medals – including one gold – at the latest African Open event in Tunis.

Elyas Parhizgar headlined Iran's medal haul in the Tunisian capital by claiming gold in the -81kg division on Sunday.

mar in the semifinals, Choopan rebounded to defeat Tajik opponent Mizrobozha Loiqov in the third-place bout.

Sunday's medals capped a solid run for Iranian judo in Tunis, after the country had captured three medals at the Junior and Cadet African Cup events over the previous two days.



Elyas Parhizgar (white), pictured at the 2025 Islamic Solidarity Games, won the men's -81kg title at the African Open event in Tunis.

isg-2025.com

2026 Karate One-Youth League: Iranians secure eight-medal haul in Fujairah

Sports Desk

Iranian karatekas collected eight medals – including two golds – to cap a solid campaign at the Karate One-Youth League event in Fujairah, UAE. Raha Babaei rounded off Iran's medal haul on Sunday with a bronze in the under-14 kumite -47kg class.

Babaei bounced back from a narrow 3-2 defeat to eventual gold medalist Marharyta Koliada of Ukraine in the fifth round, defeating Saudi Arabia's Slama Alrasheed 8-0 in the repechage to finish joint third alongside American Riana Dukhande.

Hasti Soltani also claimed bronze in the junior women's -59kg division, courtesy of an 8-2 victory over American Charlotte Singleton in the



Iran's Raha Babaei (R) poses on the podium with her U14 kumite -47kg bronze medal at the Karate One-Youth League event in Fujairah, UAE, on February 15, 2026.

IKF

third-place bout.

Ghazal Fat'h Cheshmeh and Abolfazl Arab Yaqoubi headlined Iran's campaign in Fujairah by winning gold in their respective categories.

Fat'h Cheshmeh secured a hard-fought 1-0 victory over Egypt's Noor Abdelaziz in the junior women's -48kg final on Friday, while Arab Yaqoubi defeated Spain's Rodrigo Garcia de Blas 3-2 in the cadet boys' -63kg final a day later.

Meanwhile, Arash Razani (junior boys' -76kg), Arash Alhaki (junior boys' individual kata), Mohsen Keikhaeikia (cadet boys' -52kg), and Setayesh Qaneifard (cadet girls' -54kg) added four bronze medals across four days of competition. The next stop of the Karate One-Youth League will be held in Harare, Zimbabwe, from March 26 to 29.

An Asian junior silver medalist in 2024, Parhizgar defeated Romania's Elemer Szocs in the semifinals before overcoming Muhammad Yusufzoda in the final – securing his second gold of the 2026 African Open series following his triumph in Casablanca last month.

Mohammadpouria Banaeian settled for silver in the +100kg class after suffering a defeat to Egypt's Hady Hussein in the final.

Amirabbas Choopan, meanwhile, claimed a bronze medal in the -90kg division. After falling to home favorite Abdelaziz Ben Am-

Banaeian had clinched the men's +100kg title with a victory over Egypt's Abdalla Abdalla in Friday's final, while Ali Nikseresht – who missed out on the podium on Sunday – finished runner-up in the men's -100kg category after losing to Belarus' Yauheni Morau.

Sobhan Hakimi also claimed silver at the cadet event.

Hakimi received a first-round bye in the -81kg class 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.

Gisum's ancient forests highlighted as key to tourism, heritage

Iranica Desk

In the village of Gisum, where the ancient Hyrcanian forests still maintain their rare connection with the sea, veteran natural resources scholar Mohammad Taher Nezami-Nav reminded residents of a simple but vital truth: forests are not a resource to be consumed today, but an investment for future generations. Pardel Amiri-Nejad, involved in the activities related to tourism sector, recounted a recent gathering in Gisum, where a man nearing 90 spoke not merely about trees and soil, but about heritage, memory, and responsibility for the future. The speaker, Nezami-Nav, is a senior professor of natural resources who earned his Ph.D. in soil science from the University of Nancy in 1970 and has spent more than 45 years teaching forestry, natural resources, and forest conservation at universities across Iran. In addition to his academic career, he held senior executive

and managerial positions in the country's natural resources sector, according to chtn.ir. What resonated most with the audience, however, was not his academic credentials but his childhood memories. Though not born in Gisum, he spent part of his early years in the village alongside its elders. From those formative days, he developed a curious spirit and a deep respect for the forest. He spoke of an elder named Cheraghali, a member of a generation that saw the forest as a trust. According to Nezami-Nav, elders in the past never entered the forest carelessly with sickles or axes; they used its resources sparingly and always with respect.

This early exposure to indigenous values and environmental stewardship shaped Nezami-Nav's life and career. He told villagers that his first research on forest conservation took place in the 1960s in Gilan Province, at a time when environmental protection was not yet widely recognized. Over



takhifan.com

the years, he became a university professor, trained generations of students, and played a pivotal role in managing Iran's natural resources. Yet his connection to Gisum and its ancient forests remained unbroken. Gisum Forest is far more than a recreational area. It is part of

the millennia-old Hyrcanian forests, showcasing a rich diversity of tree species and wildlife in northern Iran. Along Gilan's coastal strip, Gisum is one of the few remaining areas where the natural link between forest and sea has endured, while much of the coastal plain has been de-

graded in recent decades. This unique characteristic has made Gisum one of the region's most important tourism assets and a key driver of rural development. Nezami-Nav stressed that tourism development is meaningless without forest protection. "If the forest is damaged, neither

nature nor tourism will survive," he told villagers, emphasizing that local residents are the first guardians of this land. "If you protect it, no threat can destroy this heritage."

As Gisum seeks to establish itself as a distinctive global tourism destination, the need to integrate knowledge, experience, and public participation has never been greater. The gathering offered a lifetime of scientific and managerial insights, presented in simple language to the local community, with a clear message for residents and visitors alike: forests are the capital of future generations, not a legacy for today's consumption.

The most important lesson from the meeting may be this: if past generations entered the forest with reverence, today's generation must protect it with knowledge and responsibility — so that Gisum remains green and continues to stand as a natural showcase of tourism in Gilan and across Iran.



chtin.ir

Shahr-e Rey's cement museum seen as driver of urban tourism

Iranica Desk

The head of the Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Department of Shahr-e Rey, Tehran Province, has underscored the historical and industrial importance of the old cement factory of the city, describing the complex as one of the city's key urban tourism hubs and a suitable venue for cultural events and handicrafts exhibitions.

Mohsen Sa'adati said the facto-

ry, now operating as the National Museum of Cement Industry, plays a significant role in attracting visitors and hosting handicrafts exhibitions, and holds considerable potential for the development of urban tourism, chtn.ir wrote.

He added that, following coordination with the management of the museum and the factory complex, the necessary arrangements have been made to hold exhibitions at the site, along with

joint cooperation with the municipality. Sa'adati noted that, as a result of follow-ups by his department and coordination with site managers, an exhibition focusing on traditional stone carving is scheduled to be held at the complex next month under the supervision of the Cultural Heritage Department. He emphasized that, given its geographical location and existing industrial structures, the historic factory is regarded as one of the

region's major tourism assets and can play an effective role in introducing the history of Iran's industrial development. Sa'adati said the factory — with the National Museum of Cement Industry now operating on-site — is the first cement factory in Iran and the Middle East and one of the country's oldest centers of modern industry. The site was officially registered on the Iran National Heritage List on December 5, 2018.

Reading Room

History, identity, cultural survival in Iran

Iranica Desk

IBNA presents an interview with Reza Shabani, a prominent historian and enduring figure in the study of Iranian history, exploring his insights on Iran's culture and historical experience.

Conducted at Shahid Beheshti University, the conversation explores Shabani's intellectual formation, his understanding of Iran's historical experience, and his deep concern for preserving Iranian identity through historical awareness. Drawing on decades of scholarship and personal experience, Shabani presents a perspective in which history is not merely an academic discipline, but a vital means of safeguarding national dignity and cultural continuity.

Shabani's interest in history took shape in the early 1950s, when he left his village in the Taleqan region to continue his education in Tehran. These years coincided with a period of intense political and social upheaval, marked by the nationalization of Iran's oil industry and the leadership of Prime Minister Mohammad Mosaddeq. Experiencing this atmosphere of political open-



Reza Shabani

ness, foreign pressure, and ideological conflict firsthand, Shabani developed a strong sense of national consciousness. Studying history allowed him to understand the roots of Iran's resistance to external domination and to critically examine the consequences of foreign intervention, particularly by Russia in the north and Britain in the south.

According to Shabani, Iran's modern history cannot be understood without recognizing the sustained impact of colonial policies that repeatedly threatened the country's independence and territorial integrity. He points to the loss of regions such as the Caucasus, Central Asia, and Afghanistan as a result of Russian and British expansionist strategies in the nineteenth century. This historical reality, he argues, deeply affected Iran's political development while also

strengthening a collective awareness rooted in cultural resilience and attachment to the land.

Shabani situates this modern experience within a much longer historical continuum. He emphasizes that Iranians are among the earliest peoples to have simultaneously developed organized statehood, codified law, and ethical principles of governance. From the Median and Achaemenid periods onward, Iranian society emerged as a mature civilization possessing military strength, administrative order, and cultural sophistication. For Shabani, the Achaemenid era in particular represents a formative moment in world history, demonstrating ideals of justice, tolerance, and responsible rule that continue to resonate.

A defining feature of Iran's historical experience, in Shabani's view, has been its fundamentally defensive orientation. He argues that Iranian military campaigns were overwhelmingly conducted to protect borders and preserve national security rather than to pursue conquest for its own sake. Even the campaigns of Nader Shah Afshar, often cited as examples of imperial expansion,

are interpreted by Shabani as strategic responses to persistent threats against Iran's territorial integrity. Nader Shah's incursions into India, he notes, were not followed by permanent occupation but aimed at securing Iran's eastern frontiers and stabilizing the Iranian plateau.

Shabani also underscores the central role of Iranians in the formation and expansion of Islamic civilization. Following Iran's conversion to Islam, Iranian scholars, administrators, jurists, and mystics played a decisive role in shaping Islamic thought, science, and culture across vast regions — from Central Asia and South Asia to North Africa and parts of Europe. He stresses that much of what is today recognized as Islamic civilization emerged through the intellectual and cultural contributions of Iranians, particularly through theology, philosophy, historiography, and Persian-inflected Islamic mysticism. This synthesis of Iranian identity and Islamic faith, he argues, ensured the survival and continuity of Iran's civilization through centuries of political change. Equally important in Shabani's intellectual formation was



Inscription of Tomb of Darius I, Achaemenid Dynasty

IBNA

the role of family and lived culture. Although his parents were formally illiterate, they were deeply immersed in Iranian literary and historical traditions, having memorized large portions of classical Persian poetry. Works such as the Shahnameh were read aloud in the household, transforming the family environment into an informal school of cultural memory. Despite financial hardship, his parents provided unwavering moral and material support for his education, reinforcing his belief that Iranian identity is sustained not only through institutions, but through everyday cultural transmission within families and communities. For Shabani, being Iranian is not a matter of chance, but a meaningful privilege grounded in a long and continuous civilizational heritage. He maintains that studying history is both an intellectual and moral responsibility — essential for understanding the past, preserving national dignity in the present, and ensuring a conscious and informed future. Iran's enduring contributions to culture, science, and political thought, he concludes, must be protected and passed on through sustained historical research and a deep respect for the collective memory that has shaped Iranian society for millennia.

Pezeshkian urges skills-based learning during visit to smart school

Social Desk

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian visited a smart girls' high school in Shahriar County, west of Tehran, on Monday, highlighting the need to expand skills-based education in schools.

The institution has been designed around the "fourth-generation education" model, which emphasizes modern teaching methods and technology-driven learning. During the visit, Pezeshkian held direct discussions with teachers and students and stressed that, in addition to text-book-based instruction, schools must provide the necessary environment to develop students' individual and group skills, the president's official website reported. He stressed the need to establish skills-development workshops and expand the use of visual content to enable teachers and students to build deeper and more effective connections with educational content.

"Through skills development and the expansion of visual content-based learning,

we can present the practical applications of academic content to students," he said. He also underlined the importance of creating challenges and encouraging problem-solving in educational settings, adding that such approaches would help students practice teamwork, interaction, resilience, and creative thinking.

Pezeshkian said the ability to gather information, process data, and turn it into knowledge and practical products is another key requirement of fourth-generation education.

"Our goal is not to train one-dimensional students. They should form scientific and research groups and develop a sense of responsibility toward their surroundings and their country," he said.

During the visit, vice president for science and technology, Hossein Afshin, also outlined the features of the fourth-generation education model, saying it transfers valuable skills and patterns to students.

"In this approach, we move beyond rote memorization and focus on fostering students' creativity. The student becomes the

main axis of learning, while the teacher plays a facilitative role," he said.

He added that in fourth-generation education, schools and teachers aim to develop students' decision-making skills so they can identify their own educational paths in line with their talents and goals.

The fourth-generation education model moves beyond the simple transmission of knowledge and focuses on problem-solving, creativity, interactive learning, broad access to global resources, and personalized learning.

Facilities at the mentioned school, which serves as a pilot for this model, include a cognitive learning hall, a play terrace, a virtual space and advanced prototyping workshop, a science laboratory, a study hall, a content production studio, an IT and planning center, an artificial intelligence laboratory, an animation workshop, and a creativity and technology lab.

Advanced educational tools such as 3D printers, optical kits, augmented reality technology, and virtual reality headsets have also been introduced to create new



President Masoud Pezeshkian (R) visits a smart girls' high school in Shahriar County, west of Tehran, on February 16, 2026.

president.ir

learning environments for students and support the facilitative role of teachers. During the visit, a 3D-printed proto-

type bust of Pezeshkian, which was programmed, designed, and produced by students, was presented to the president.

4,000-year-old Elamite mounds unearthed in western Iran

Art & Culture Desk

Iranian cultural heritage officials have announced the discovery of four ancient mounds dating back around 4,000 years to the Middle Elamite period in the western province of Kermanshah, in what experts say could reshape the historical understanding of the region.

Saeed Boroushan, head of the Cultural Heritage Department in Sahneh county, said the sites mark the first confirmed evidence of the Middle Elamite period in the province and could represent a major historical breakthrough. He told ISNA that archaeological surveys of Kermanshah's ancient mounds began in 2003 under the supervision of researchers including Yaghoub Mohammadi Far and Abbas Motarjem. One of the surveyed sites was the Chogha Sabz mound in Sahneh.

About two years ago, a pottery fragment found in



IRNA

the area drew attention because it differed from previously discovered ceramics. A renewed survey of the Chogha Sabz mound later confirmed that the site was ancient and dated to the Middle Elamite period, roughly between 1500 and 1100 BC. "This was the first time a historical artifact from the Middle Elamite period had been discovered in Kermanshah, which could mark a transformation in the province's historical narrative," Boroushan said. Further investigations in

the surrounding area led to the identification of three additional mounds which yielded pottery evidence similar to that found at Chogha Sabz.

He noted that Elamite rulers were generally based in regions such as Susa and Anshan, leaving behind major monuments including the Chogha Zanbil. Until now, however, no clear archaeological evidence of their presence had been found in Kermanshah.

"These ancient mounds may represent an extension of the Kalmakareh

route, which also contains evidence of Elamite activity," he said.

The Elamite civilization emerged in southwestern parts of the Iranian plateau toward the end of the third millennium BC and later became geographically centered around Susa during the Achaemenid period. One of its most significant and well-preserved monuments is the Chogha Zanbil ziggurat near Susa in modern-day Khuzestan province.

Yet, some researchers who have observed this type of pottery during superficial visits to these same sites believe that these artifacts may not be Elamite, but rather date back to the Kassite period.

Morteza Geravand, an archaeologist, told IRNA that determining whether they belong to the Elamites or the Kassites definitively requires more extensive studies and scientific, stratigraphic archaeological excavations.

National tourism innovation award ceremony held in Chabahar

Social Desk

The "Iran National Tourism Award" with a focus on technology and innovation was held as part of the first Creative and Cultural Industries Festival in the Chabahar Free Zone, located in the country's southeasternmost region.

The national event, organized under the secretariat of the Iranian Cultural and Creative Industries Park, began on Saturday and concluded with a closing ceremony on Monday.

Focused on networking, technological collaboration, and strengthening the creative economy, the event served as a platform to promote national synergy in innovative tourism. Alongside the exhibition, specialized workshops were held on topics such as creative economy, cultural entrepreneurship, social dimensions of tourism, and new business models. The sessions drew wide participation and provided a forum for refining ideas, critically assessing projects, and analyzing emerging trends in the tourism sector.

Hassan Rahaei, secretary of the award ceremony, said the initiative was not merely a competition but a framework to identify, evaluate, and guide Iran's tourism innovation ecosystem. He noted that the sector now requires greater cohesion, standardization, and targeted support.

He added that the award's call for submissions, aimed at identifying genuine, technology-driven, and impactful innova-



tions in tourism, received strong nationwide interest. More than 120 entities—including startups, technology firms, and tourism operators—registered for the event.

Following an initial screening process, 48 participants advanced to the final judging stage, where they are set to be assessed based on a structured evaluation model. Rahaei said the results provide a realistic picture of innovation in Iran's tourism sector, highlighting both standout examples and existing defects.

He described one of the award's key achievements as drawing a clear distinction between "ideas" and "effective implementation."

He also stressed that the initiative could serve as a policy tool beyond the competition itself. The data and insights generated during the evaluation process, he said, could inform future decisions on supporting tourism technology companies, expanding digital infrastructure in destinations, strengthening cultural industries linked to tourism, and designing capacity-building programs.

Persian calligraphy on display at Kazakh University

Arts & Culture Desk

An exhibition and workshop on Persian calligraphy was held at the Iran Room of L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University in Kazakhstan, organized by the Iranian Cultural Center to promote cultural and artistic exchange.

In the first part of the program, a collection of Persian calligraphy works was displayed. The exhibition introduced participants to the aesthetic richness of Persian calligraphy while highlighting its deep connections with literature,

poetry, and Islamic thought.

Visitors toured the exhibition and raised questions about writing techniques, as well as the tools and materials used in traditional Persian calligraphy. The event continued with a practical workshop, where participants were guided step by step through the basic principles of Persian calligraphy. The session covered proper pen handling, the structure of letters, word composition, and proportional balance in script. Demonstrations were carried out on boards and paper, allowing attendees

to observe the techniques in practice. Several students took part in hands-on exercises, practicing the writing of simple Persian letters and words under direct supervision and guidance.

During the exhibition and workshop, organizers also presented an overview of the historical development of Persian calligraphy, its role in Iranian-Islamic civilization, and the legacy of prominent calligraphers in Iran's artistic heritage. Alongside the training session, a meeting was held between the acting head of the Iranian Cultural Center and the

dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences. The two sides discussed prospects for bilateral cooperation, exploring practical initiatives such as joint lectures, art exhibitions, support for students of Oriental studies, and academic exchanges. Iranian calligraphy master Hadi Ghaseemi delivered a lecture at the event and performed live demonstrations, showcasing various calligraphic styles. As a memento, he also created and presented personalized handwritten calligraphy pieces of each participant's name on traditional paper.



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