

President:
Security
achieved via
unified efforts
of government,
police, public



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Iran, US agree on 'guiding principles' to advance talks: Araghchi

Oman says Geneva meeting concluded with 'tangible progress'

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Leader's speech shifts
playing field toward
balanced bargaining

INTERVIEW EXCLUSIVE

As Iran's negotiating delegation was holding talks with the US team in Geneva on Tuesday, Iran's Leader Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei delivered a speech sharply criticizing Washington's stance, saying negotiations are meaningless if one side seeks to determine the outcome in advance. He also played down US military threats and underscored Iran's defensive capabilities. In another part of his remarks, Ayatollah Khamenei referred to recent unrest in Iran, describing it as part of a US plan to destabilize the country, and predicted that Washington's future moves against Iran would follow a similar pattern, but will fail.

Iran Daily interviewed Afifeh Abedi, an international relations expert, about the dimensions of these remarks and their impact on the Tehran-Washington standoff. She said the Leader, through this position, laid out the conceptual framework and red lines of negotiations with the United States and shifted the playing field from "pressure for concessions" to "balanced bargaining."

IRAN DAILY: What messages does the Leader's stance send to Western parties? In particular, how does this approach delineate Iran's framework and red lines in the negotiations?

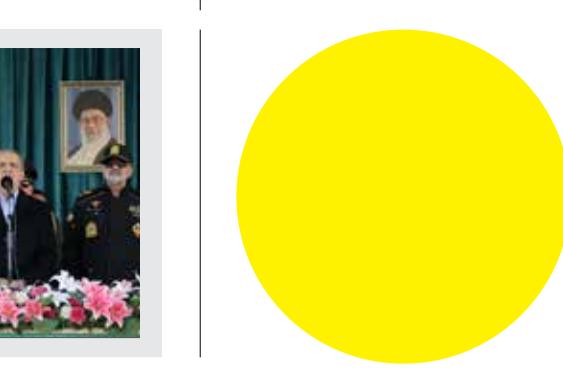
ABEDI: The recent positions articulated by the Leader were directed both at domestic public opinion and at the American side, including the US president. The emphasis on rejecting a "pre-written agreement" does not amount to rejecting negotiations per se; rather, it signals a refusal to accept an imposed framework. More precisely, opposition was not expressed toward negotiation as a diplomatic tool, but toward a "pre-engineered outcome."

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Iran drew nearly \$10b
in foreign investment
this year, official says

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Leader:
Weapons that can
sink US carriers
'more dangerous'
than warships

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Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei addresses people from East Azarbaijan Province in Tehran, Iran on February 17, 2026. [leader.ir](#)



Naval commander: IRGC
ready to close Strait of
Hormuz if ordered

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مزایده صادراتی بیلت آلیاژی ریخته گری مدادوم شرکت فولاد آلیاژی ایران

شماره مرجع مزایده: IASCO-EXPT-08 مورخ: ۱۴۰۴/۱۱/۲۹



شرکت فولاد آلیاژی ایران (IASCO) در نظر دارد نسبت به فروش بیلت آلیاژی صادراتی، از طریق مزایده عمومی اقدام نماید. خاطرنشان می‌سازد که عرضه در گرید منتخب و به شرح جزئیات ذیل انجام می‌پذیرد. از علاقمندان به شرکت در مزایده مزبور دعوت به عمل می‌آید که تا تاریخ ۱۴۰۴/۱۱/۲۹ برای دریافت اطلاعات مزایده و رامنایه‌های لازم با واحد صادرات به شماره تماس‌های ۰۲۱-۸۸۳۲۶۲۱ و ۰۲۱-۸۸۳۵-۳۱۲۲۶۷۵ و آدرس ایمیل Salesexp@iasco.net در ارتباط باشند. مهلت ارائه پیشنهاد قیمت مزایده یادشده حداکثر ساعت ۱۵:۰۰ روز سه شنبه مورخ ۱۴۰۴/۱۱/۲۹ می‌باشد.

Iran Alloy Steel Company
Tender Announcement for Export of CC-Alloy Steel Billet
Tender Ref. No.: IASCO-EXPT-08 Date: 18/02/2026

Please be informed that *Iran Alloy Steel Company (IASCO)* intends to launch a general Tender for the export of CC-Alloy Steel Billet under the following terms and conditions:

1. Product Specifications and Commercial terms:

Main Tender Grades & Quality	Acc. to attached specification No.
9403I	C07KU9403I4041A042

* Other Grades may also be considered By Customer Request with related premium price. (Please clearly specify the desired grade, analysis and etc).

• Size & Dimensions: (130*130) *12,000 mm.

• Quantity: 20.000 MT (±10%).

• Delivery Time: approximately 3 weeks after receipt of advance payment.

• Delivery Term: FOB Bandar Abbas.

Note: Other delivery ports including BIK, Parsian, and Chabahar may be considered upon buyer's request, subject to amended delivery time and mutual agreement. FCA Yazd may also be considered under the same conditions.

2. Tender General Conditions:

a. The offer must remain valid for at least **seven (7) Iranian working days** from the submission deadline.

b. Vague, conditional or incomplete offers will not be considered.

c. The buyer's company must be legally registered outside the Islamic Republic of Iran.

d. IASCO reserves the right to accept or reject any or all offers at its sole discretion.

e. All payments shall be deemed valid only upon the Seller's receipt of official bank confirmation.

f. Submission of offer implies full acceptance of all tender terms and conditions.

3. Offer Submission:

For instructions and further information, kindly contact the Export Department using the following details:

Tel: +9835-31222675 & +9821-88322621.

Email: Salesexp@iasco.net (For registration only, not to send any offer).

4. Closing Date:

Deadline for Offer Submission: Tuesday, February 24, 2026 - by 3:00 p.m. (Tehran Local Time)



Iran to play Nigeria,
Costa Rica in March
friendlies

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Afin village advances
toward global recognition

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Leader: Weapons that can sink US carriers 'more dangerous' than warships

The Leader of the Islamic Revolution responded to repeated US military threats against Iran, saying that the weapons that can sink the American carriers are "more dangerous" than the warships.

"The American president [Donald Trump] repeatedly says that their military is the strongest in the world. The strongest military in the world, however, can sometimes be struck so hard that it cannot even get back on its feet," Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei said on Tuesday while addressing thousands of people from East Azarbaijan Province, Press TV reported.

"They keep saying, 'We have sent an aircraft carrier toward Iran.' Fine—an aircraft carrier is certainly a dangerous piece of equipment. But more dangerous than the carrier is the weapon capable of sending it to the bottom of the sea," he added.

Trump's remarks that Washington has been unable to eliminate the Islamic Republic for the past 47 years is

quite an admission," Ayatollah Khamenei said.

"For 47 years, America has failed to destroy the Islamic Republic," he said, before addressing Trump and adding, "I say this: you will not be able to do so in the future either." The warning comes as US President Donald Trump has deployed military forces to the region, threatening to launch attacks on Iran.

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.

"In case we don't make a deal, we'll need it," Trump said on Friday, referring to USS Gerald R. Ford.

The military buildup comes as Iran and the US are holding indirect talks about the nuclear issue, months after the US-Israeli aggression on Iranian soil and attacks on peaceful nuclear facilities.

On Sunday, Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces Major General



Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei speaks in a meeting with people from East Azarbaijan Province in Tehran on February 17, 2026.

● khamenei.ir

Abdolrahim Mousavi warned Trump over his war rhetoric. "Trump should know that he would be entering a confrontation that gives harsh lessons, the outcome of which would ensure that he no longer bellows threats around the world," he said.

Elsewhere in his address, Ayatollah Khamenei referred to the ongoing indirect talks between Tehran and Washington.

"These remarks the US president makes—at times issuing threats, at times saying this must be done or that must not be done—show that they are seeking to dominate the Iranian nation," he said.

"They say, 'Let us negotiate over your nuclear energy,' and the outcome of the negotiation should be that you no longer possess this energy,"



he said, adding, "To predetermine the outcome before talks even begin is wrong and foolish."

"This is precisely the foolish approach being taken by

American presidents, certain senators, the current president, and others," he added.

Iran, US agree on 'guiding principles' to advance talks: Araghchi

Oman says Geneva meeting concluded with 'tangible progress'



Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi (2nd R) speaks on the phone as he reviews a text on the sidelines of the second round of the nuclear talks between Iran and the United States in the Swiss city of Geneva on February 17, 2026.

International Desk

Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said on Tuesday that Iran and the United States agreed on "a set of guiding principles" to move forward in the nuclear negotiations after the two sides wrapped up the second round in Geneva, Switzerland.

"Ultimately, we were able to reach broad agreement on a set of guiding principles, based on which we will move forward and begin working on the text of a potential agreement," Araghchi told Iranian state TV after indirect talks with the US delegation.

He described the second round as "more constructive" than the

previous one, which was held in Oman's capital Muscat on February 6.

"In this round, compared to the previous one, the discussions were completely serious and there was a more constructive atmosphere" the top diplomat said, adding that a third round had yet to be decided.

"It was agreed that both sides would work further on draft texts for a potential agreement, after which the drafts would be exchanged and a date for a third round would be set."

Araghchi also acknowledged that it would "take time to narrow" the gap between the positions of both sides, "but at least we now

have a set of guiding principles and a clearer path to move forward on."

Oman's Foreign Ministry in a statement said the talks concluded with "tangible progress," which paved the way for the continuation of dialogue in the near future.

The ongoing talks are aimed at resolving a decades-long dispute over Iran's nuclear program. The US, which has deployed aircraft carriers and warships to the region, has threatened Iran with military action if no deal is made. Iran has declared its conditions and vowed not to bow to excessive demands including the US push for zero uranium enrichment.

Iran has also said that it will hit back forcefully to any aggression.

Nuclear right irrevocable

After the conclusion of the second round, Araghchi spoke at a disarmament conference in Geneva where he reiterated that Iran's right to use nuclear energy was "non-negotiable" and "could not be arbitrarily suspended or reinterpreted."

He said under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), to which Iran is a signatory, the country was entitled to use nuclear energy for peaceful purposes.

"This inherent right... is not subject to political considerations," he said, adding that any attempt to suggest such a right is "revocable or optional" fundamentally contradicts both the text and the spirit of the treaty.

The new round of negotiations began 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.

Naval commander: IRGC ready to close Strait of Hormuz if ordered

National Desk

Commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps' Navy said on Tuesday that the force stood ready to shut the Strait of Hormuz whenever instructed amid simmering tensions between Tehran and Washington.

Navy Rear Admiral Alireza Tangsiri, who was overseeing the second day of a war game in the Strait of Hormuz, said that the decision to block the waterway rested with the country's top officials, Tasnim reported.

On Tuesday, the IRGC conducted the second day of its naval drills in the Strait of Hormuz, showcasing 24-hour "intelligence dominance" over the vital shipping route that links the Persian Gulf with the Sea of Oman.

The exercise, titled "Smart Control of the Strait of Hormuz," involved rapid reaction units practicing counter-strikes against potential threats.

According to Tangsiri, the IRGC maintained comprehensive surveillance at surface, aerial, and subsurface levels to ensure safe passage for the more than 80 vessels that transit the strait daily.

During the drill, traffic through the strait



A rocket is fired during the second day of IRGC Navy drills in the Strait of Hormuz on February 17, 2026.

● defapress.ir

was suspended for several hours on Tuesday.

He also described Iranian islands in the waterway as "impenetrable fortresses" and symbols of national honor.

The first phase of the maneuvers was conducted across Iranian islands in the Persian Gulf on Monday.

The drills come amid heightened regional tensions and repeated US threats to strike Iran if it does not accept nuclear demands, among others.

The United States has dispatched a large fleet of warships to regional waters near Iran, prompting authorities in Tehran to warn that even a single shot fired at the country would be met with a far-reaching and massive response targeting US bases in the region.

Mohammad Ali Rajabi
Cartoonist

CARTOON



Iran drew nearly \$10b in foreign investment this year, official says

Economy Desk

Iran has attracted close to \$10 billion in foreign investment in the current Persian calendar year that began on March 21, a senior official said on Tuesday, stressing that improving conditions for existing investors remains a priority.

Mehdi Heidari, head of the Organization for Investment, Economic and Technical Assistance (OIETAI) told the first "National Branding" scientific conference in Tehran that the OIETAI policy was focused on resolving issues for investors to build a positive experience and send a signal of confidence to the market.

Heidari, who also serves as deputy economy minister, described national brands as the determining factors in reducing investment risk and financial premium.

"While Iran benefits from strong human capital, it faces serious challenges in indicators such as economic stability, governance quality, transparency, legal credibility and infrastructure — challenges that directly hurt national brands," he said, according to IRNA.

At the same event, Saeed Sho-

jaei, deputy industry minister, said: "Security of property rights, fragmented laws, and concentration of production at lower levels of the value chain have prevented the formation of powerful Iranian brands at the regional and global levels."

More than 92% of the country's production is concentrated at the lower and middle levels of the value chain, and Iran's unwritten economic strategy for years has been earning foreign currency through raw material sales, he said.

Shojaei called the shift in industrial policy direction in the Seventh Development Plan a sign of realism.

The Iranian government has implemented a measure allowing foreign investors to bring capital into the country in the form of standard gold bullion.

Under a decision approved in October by the Foreign Investment Board, investors can import gold, then offer it on the Iran Mercantile Exchange or the Foreign Exchange and Gold Center.

The move is expected to preserve asset value while enabling investors to enter production and export-oriented sectors.



IRNA

According to a February 8 report by the Iran Center for Exchange of Currency and Gold

(ICE), the country attracted more than \$140 million in foreign investment through the import

and sale of standard gold bullion. The center's data showed for-

ign investors have imported and sold 488 kilograms of standard gold bullion since October.

Iran, Pakistan pledge to accelerate implementation of trade deals



Economy Desk

Iran and Pakistan are moving to operationalize joint agreements to boost bilateral trade, with officials expressing confidence they can reach a \$10 billion target within two years, following talks in Islamabad on Tuesday.

Iranian Agriculture Minister Gholamreza Nouri Qezeljeh told reporters after a joint meeting with Pakistani agriculture and commerce ministers in Islamabad, "Iran and Pakistan are serious about achieving a common goal in trade," emphasizing the implementation of joint agreements, especially in the agricultural sector.

He said the purpose of the visit to Pakistan is to follow up on agreements reached during President Masoud Pezeshki's visit to Islamabad (in August), and deals that both ministers had

Iranian Agriculture Minister Gholamreza Nouri Qezeljeh (2nd L), leading a delegation, attends a joint meeting with Pakistani agriculture and commerce ministers (not pictured) in Islamabad, Pakistan, on February 17, 2026. ■ IRNA

reached in Tehran in trade, agricultural products, research and academic cooperation in agriculture and related areas.

"In today's meeting, we also agreed to speed up projects aimed at developing the volume of trade exchanges between the two countries," Nouri Qezeljeh added.

He said technical and operational meetings continued throughout the day.

At the joint meeting on Tuesday, Pakistani Agriculture Minister Rana Tanveer Hussain said, "Pakistan and Iran share longstanding ties, and we will use these capacities to expand joint trade by leveraging mutual capabilities in the agricultural sector."

He added, "The process of advancing these relations will accelerate, and we are confident that with joint work and coordinated steps, we can reach a free trade agreement."

Tajikistan seeks Iran assistance in chemical industry

Economy Desk

Tajikistan expressed its interest in working with Iran in the chemical industry, to upgrade its plants, the country's Minister of Industry and New Technologies, Shirali Kabir, said following talks with his Iranian counterpart in Dushanbe on Tuesday.

"Tajikistan needs to modernize its chemical industry plants, a move that could provide a suitable basis for joint cooperation," Kabir told Iranian Minister of Industry, Mine and

Trade Mohammad Atabak, according to mimit.gov.ir.

He said the Tajik government was determined to expand economic relations with Iran.

Kabir noted that Tajikistan, which exports mainly cotton to Iran, could also export other products and benefit from Iran's market.

Meanwhile, Atabak said, said the Iranian government sought to boost trade with neighboring countries and that the nation had extensive capabilities in mining, mineral pro-

cessing, pharmaceutical industries, textiles among others.

"Iran, with high mineral reserves and expertise in industries including textiles and pharmaceuticals, is ready to develop interactions by accelerating the implementation of agreements," he added.

At the conclusion of the meeting, both sides emphasized the need to accelerate the implementation of agreements and remove administrative obstacles to realize joint cooperation.

Saffron export destinations top 70: Union leader

By Saeed Dehqan
Staff writer

INTERVIEW

The number of countries importing Iranian saffron has climbed to more than 70, posting a 40% rise in recent years, a union leader told Iran Daily.

"In the past, around 50 countries were importers of Iranian saffron, but now it has exceeded 70 countries, which indicates expansion of target markets and sustained demand for Iranian saffron," Gholamreza Miri, head of the Khorasan Razavi Saffron Exporters Union, said.

Khorasan Razavi province in northeast is the country's saffron production hub. Iran is the world's largest saffron producer and exporter and accounts for about 90% of global output.

Miri said saffron exports in the first half of the current Iranian year, which began on March 20, 2025, soared 75% year on year, without providing figures.

"This surge mainly occurred due to the emergence of new markets,"

he said.

However, export volumes fell in the second half due to a price shock in Iran during the harvest season which runs from early October to mid-December.

Miri said this year's harvest declined, leading to more than a doubling in the price per kilogram.

"The price increase caused a shock in global markets and some importers thought prices were inflated, as a result purchases decreased and exports fell in November, December and January," he said.

The union leader described the drop as "temporary" and said the market was adjusting to the new prices.

"Consumption of saffron has not declined and the global market still has high capacity to absorb the Iranian product," he said.

Miri expressed hope that with price stabilization and expansion of consumer markets, saffron exports would bounce back.

"Given the increase in the number of consuming countries, we expect the export trend to turn upward again, although it is not possible to accurately predict export volumes by the end of the year."

He noted that the global market effectively could not meet its needs without Iranian saffron.

Miri said that in the first 10 months of the year, 165 tons of saffron were exported, up about 10% from a year earlier. He forecast this year's production at around 400 tons.

Spain and Afghanistan also produce saffron, but Miri noted that their shares were not large enough to replace Iranian supply.

Afghanistan between 12 and 20 tons and Spain produces a maximum of 700 kilograms annually.

Referring to export challenges in some markets, he said India had imposed a 38% tariff on Iranian saffron, prompting Afghan traders to buy Iranian saffron and export it to India with far lower duties, profiting from the difference.

Nevertheless, he said the world market was so dependent on Iranian saffron that in the event of any problems, Iranian saffron would find its way to global markets through various routes.



Gholamreza Miri



Central Asia in Japan's focus

Toward new era of engagement?



By Muhammad Shamsuddin
Expert on international affairs

OPINION EXCLUSIVE

On 19–20 December last year, Tokyo hosted the first summit of the Central Asia + Japan Dialogue. The meeting was rich in substance and reflected a wide range of important regional and global issues. This article examines why this summit was significant in the context of the global agenda and whether it may influence the regional balance of power.

Int'l environment, Japan's role

The current international environment is marked by strong competition among major powers and ongoing changes in the global order. The center of global politics and the world economy is gradually shifting toward Asia, where the issue of global leadership in the 21st century is likely to be decided. Developments on the continent are unfolding against the background of growing rivalry between China on the one hand and the United States and its allies on the other.

Today, the Indo-Pacific has become a key priority of US foreign policy. Washington is seeking to renew existing partnerships, deepen alliances, and build new forms of cooperation in this region. At the same time, many of China's neighboring countries are increasingly concerned about the expansion of Chinese influence and are interested in limiting and balancing it. In these regional and global dynamics, Japan plays a central role.

With mediation from the United States, Japan and South Korea have moved toward normalization and closer bilateral relations with the US over the past few years. Although the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD), which includes Japan, the United States, India, and Australia, is currently less active than before, it still has the potential to serve as a coordination mechanism in the Indo-Pacific region. It is also important to recall the AUKUS format, which brings together Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States, and to which Japan may eventually be invited to participate.

Another important issue for Japan remains its unresolved territorial dispute with Russia over the southern Kuril Islands. This dispute dates back to the end of World War II and continues to prevent the signing of a peace treaty, while also limiting the development of broader bilateral relations. Japan's new prime minister, Sanae Takaichi, is among the political figures who seek to restore Japan's status as a "normal state". In practical terms, this means strengthening the country's ability to ensure its own security, pursue a more independent foreign policy, and defend its national interests more actively at both the regional and global levels. Shortly after taking office, she stated that Japan would be ready to intervene militarily if Taiwan's sovereignty were threatened. This statement triggered a strong reaction from Beijing, which referred to provisions of the UN Charter allowing "founding members of the United Nations to take military measures against militarist states of World War II," among which China included Japan.

Such statements from a Japanese prime minister are unprecedented and clearly demonstrate Tokyo's intention to defend its interests more firmly, with a particular focus on containing China. However, this approach is not limited to the Indo-Pacific region alone. Japan is gradually advancing a broader global strategy, in which Central Asia may play an important role as a strategic rear area.



Why Central Asia may be of interest to Tokyo

Central Asia may become a strategically important region for Japan for several reasons.

- **Geography and logistics:** The region is located in the very center of the Eurasian continent and borders both China and Russia. This geographic position makes Central Asia a key element in the development of Eurasian transport corridors, logistics routes, and trade flows. For example, China views Central Asia as strategically important for ensuring the security of trade in the event that southern maritime routes are blocked. The United States and European countries, in turn, are interested in promoting the diversification of transport links and enabling the region to access global markets while bypassing traditional northern routes. They aim to gain access to Central Asian resources, among other goals. Central Asian states themselves are actively seeking to use their transit potential and to develop alternative transport routes.

The region is also important for China in terms of developing its western territories. The Central Asian market can support industrial growth and job creation in China's border regions.

- **Resources:** Central Asia possesses significant reserves of natural resources, especially rare earth elements and other critical minerals. In the modern global economy, these resources are essential

for the development of high-technology industries. According to available estimates, Central Asia accounts for around 38.6% of global manganese ore reserves, 30% of chromium, 20% of lead, 12.6% of zinc, 8.7% of titanium, as well as large reserves of other materials. In total, 384 deposits of such minerals are located in the region.

The importance of these resources is increasing in light of China's efforts to introduce export controls. China currently accounts for about 60% of global extraction and more than 85% of global processing of these materials. Japan is particularly vulnerable in this regard as it depends heavily on imports of critical minerals from China, which supplies roughly 60% of Japan's needs.

This high level of dependence is pushing Japan to develop alternative supply chains. In July last year, within the QUAD framework, Australia, India, the United States, and Japan announced the launch of a Quadrilateral Critical Minerals Initiative. At the end of October, Washington and Tokyo also signed an agreement worth \$400 billion, which includes cooperation in the field of critical minerals.

- **Diplomacy and security:** Diplomatic support from Central Asian states is increasingly becoming an important political resource. For Russia, in the context of the ongoing war in Ukraine and its growing international isolation, any form of diplomatic backing is particularly valuable. At the 2023 Victory Day parade in Moscow, five out of seven foreign leaders

in attendance were from Central Asia. In the same year, regional capitals hosted major international events: Dushanbe held the CIS and Central Asia–Russia summits, while Bishkek hosted a CSTO summit, all attended by the Russian president.

China is also actively seeking diplomatic support from Central Asian countries. At the China–Central Asia summit held in June last year, President Xi Jinping promoted Beijing's concept of a "community with a shared future for mankind" as well as the Belt and Road Initiative, receiving support from regional leaders. China seeks backing from Central Asian states both in multilateral frameworks and through bilateral relations.

Japan is likewise working to secure diplomatic support from Central Asia. The Action Plan for the Central Asia + Japan Dialogue, adopted in 2006, states that Central Asian countries "expressed hope for the further strengthening of Japan's political role in the international community and confirmed their unanimous support for Japan's bid for permanent membership in the United Nations Security Council". This support is especially important for Tokyo today, given Beijing's position that Japan should not be granted a permanent seat on the Security Council. Central Asia also plays an important role in ensuring security across Central Eurasia, particularly for China and Russia. Both countries cooperate closely with Central Asian states through multilateral formats — primarily the CSTO and the



The illustration shows Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi in front of Tokyo and Mount Fuji.
• ALEKSANDR POTOLITSYN/TCA



Japan's new prime minister, Sanae Takaichi, is among the political figures who seek to restore Japan's status as a "normal state". In practical terms, this means strengthening the country's ability to ensure its own security, pursue a more independent foreign policy, and defend its national interests more actively at both the regional and global levels.



From left to right: Leaders of Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, Japan, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkmenistan pose for a group photo during the first Central Asia–Japan Dialogue Summit in Tokyo, Japan, on December 20, 2025.
• PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE OF JAPAN



 Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev (l) shakes hands with Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi during the first Central Asia-Japan Dialogue Summit in Tokyo, Japan, on December 20, 2025.

• EAST ASIA FORUM



 The main highway connecting the Tajikistani capital of Dushanbe with the Afghan border is being expanded with JICA's assistance. The project is aimed at improving connectivity with neighboring countries and is expected to boost economic activity.

• KUNO TAKESHI/JICA

SCO — as well as through bilateral mechanisms. Attacks on Chinese enterprises in late November and early December last year highlighted how closely China's security is linked to stability in Central Asia, as well as the broader global implications of instability in the region. Central Asian states themselves are interested in security cooperation. The aforementioned Action Plan notes Japan's readiness to contribute to stability in the region, particularly along the Tajik-Afghan border. In 2023, Japan introduced a new security assistance framework known as Official Security Assistance (OSA). Although Central Asian countries are not yet included in this program, expanding it to cover the region may become relevant in the future.

Japan's areas of comparative advantage (case of Tajikistan)

Japan's strategy in Central Asia initially focused on preventing excessive dependence of the region on its larger neighbors, while identifying areas where Japan could realistically compete. Geographic distance and the economic conditions of Central Asia — including a weak investment climate and low income levels — limited the development of strong trade and economic ties with Tokyo.

At the same time, the region faced numerous socio-economic and political challenges following the collapse of the Soviet Union, and required support for comprehensive development and long-term stability. Japan chose to focus on this area, where it could offer a competitive advantage. Tokyo began providing financial assistance, technical support, and expertise to Central Asian countries in areas such as combating transnational crime, healthcare, environmental protection and disaster prevention, water management, energy, trade and investment, transport and logistics, and poverty reduction.

To advance its regional objectives, Japan adopted the Silk Road Diplomacy strategy in 1997 and launched the Central Asia + Japan Dialogue in 2004. Japan has mainly implemented its regional policy through Official Development Assistance (ODA), administered by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA).

In Tajikistan, JICA's project portfolio over the first 30 years of its activities (1993-2023) included 49 projects with a total value exceeding \$427.4 million. Of this amount, \$97.2 million was allocated to technical assistance and \$330.2 million to grant aid.

One of JICA's key programs involves training Tajik civil servants in Japan to improve their professional qualifications. Each year, JICA provides 15 scholarships for Tajik officials to pursue master's or doctoral degrees, as well as training courses for around 100 participants. More than 2,500 specialists have already completed training in Japan and currently hold positions within the Tajik government.

JICA also implements projects in Tajikistan in areas such as infrastructure development, healthcare, cross-border cooperation, poverty reduction, and

agriculture. Its project portfolio includes the modernization of Dushanbe International Airport; improvements to road maintenance equipment in Sughd Region and eastern Khatlon Region; projects aimed at improving living standards in Tajik-Afghan border areas (jointly with UNDP); rural development projects in the Tajik-Afghan border zone of the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region; the Food Security Project for Vulnerable Farmers (2KR); and projects providing specialized medical equipment for the control of infectious diseases (EPI), implemented in two phases.

Summit outcomes: new Japanese approach?

Before drawing conclusions from the summit, it is important to consider the broader context. Today, Central Asian states are interested not only in receiving development assistance but also in attracting investment and advanced technologies across different sectors of their economies, as well as in building full-scale economic partnerships. Governments in the region are promoting initiatives in digitalization, artificial intelligence, green energy, infrastructure modernization, and transport connectivity.

Central Asian countries are also seeking to diversify their foreign relations and attract new sources of support. From this perspective, Japan — one of the world's leading innovative economies with significant financial and technological resources — is an attractive partner. It is within this framework that the first Central Asia + Japan summit should be understood.

Japan, for its part, is increasingly viewing Central Asia through a geopolitical and geo-economic lens. During the summit, Prime Minister Takaichi stated that the region has strategic importance and strong potential in geopolitics, economic security, and business cooperation.

Under the Tokyo Declaration adopted after the summit, Central Asian states ex-

pressed support for strengthening Japan's role in global affairs, for the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, and for reform of the UN Security Council, where Japan seeks permanent membership. Prime Minister Takaichi also announced Japan's intention to invest approximately \$20 billion over the next five years to support private-sector projects in Central Asia. She highlighted the development and diversification of rare earth supply chains, deeper cooperation in artificial intelligence, and the expansion of key transport corridors such as the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route.

Central Asian leaders also expressed interest in cooperation in priority areas. Kazakhstan's President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev emphasized his country's readiness to create favorable conditions for Japanese investors and identified nuclear energy, green energy, rare earth metals, logistics, and digital technologies as promising sectors. Supporting Japan's initiatives in artificial intelligence, he proposed hosting a regional platform at the Astana Hub technopark and the Alem.ai International Center. Overall, more than 60 bilateral documents worth over \$3.7 billion were signed during his visit.

Uzbekistan's President Shavkat Mirziyoyev called for expanding the presence of Japanese investors in the region. He proposed creating an investment fund for infrastructure and industrial development in Central Asia, as well as establishing a regional network of Japanese technoparks to support industrial cooperation and technology transfer. He also suggested creating a Central Asia-Japan digital hub for cooperation in artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, and digital solutions, and invited Japan to participate in major transport projects, including high-speed railways, highways, airports, and digital transport corridors. The leaders of Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan also expressed interest in cooperation in key areas, including energy, transport, the green economy, artificial

intelligence, and human capital development. As for the broader impact of the summit and Japan's attempt to shape a new regional agenda, it is too early to draw firm conclusions. Similar initiatives in Central Asia often do not lead to significant changes in the regional balance of power and remain largely declarative. Japan will also face strong competition from established regional actors. Whether Tokyo will be able to compete effectively remains an open question, and for now, cautious assessments appear more appropriate.

Overall, more than 150 documents involving both public and private sectors were signed following the summit. Moreover, the Tokyo Initiative CA+JAD (Central Asia + Japan Advanced Dialogue) was launched, and the Tokyo Declaration was adopted. In conclusion, several key points can be highlighted:

1. Against the background of global changes driven largely by China's rising power, Japan is reassessing its international role, with the containment of Chinese influence becoming a central concern for Tokyo.
2. Within this strategy, Central Asia — due to its geographic location, resource base, and growing diplomatic importance — may serve as a strategic rear area for Japan.
3. For Central Asian states, increased Japanese interest is also beneficial as it supports diversification of foreign relations and access to additional resources.
4. For more than 30 years, Japan has pursued a soft power approach in Central Asia, focusing on socio-economic and political development. Today, however, Tokyo appears to be moving toward a more active policy aimed at strengthening its geo-economic and geopolitical position in the region.
5. At the same time, it is still too early to speak of a full shift in Japan's regional policy. It remains to be seen whether current expectations of a "new era" of relations will translate into concrete results or remain largely rhetorical.

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Today, Central Asian states are interested not only in receiving development assistance but also in attracting investment and advanced technologies across different sectors of their economies, as well as in building full-scale economic partnerships. Governments in the region are promoting initiatives in digitalization, artificial intelligence, green energy, infrastructure modernization, and transport connectivity.



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The map shows the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route.
• TITR

Iran to play Nigeria, Costa Rica in March friendlies



IRNA

Sports Desk

Iran will face Nigeria and Costa Rica during the upcoming international break in March, Amir-Mahdi Alavi, spokesperson for the Iranian Football Federation, announced on Monday night.

The two matches, scheduled to be played in Amman, Jordan, form part of Iran's preparations for the 2026 World Cup, which will be co-hosted by the United States, Mexico and Canada from June 11.

Team Melli will play Nigeria on March 27 before meeting Costa Rica four days later, Alavi said.

The announcement follows months of difficulty for the federation in arranging high-profile friendlies for the national team. Neither Nigeria nor Costa Rica qualified for the World Cup in North America.

Nigeria finished runner-up to South Africa in its qualification group before losing on penalties to DR Congo in the second round of the playoffs last November.

The prospect of facing Athletico striker Ademola Lookman and Galatasaray forward Victor Osimhen, however, could provide a proper test for the Iranian backline.

Costa Rica finished third in its third-

round group in the CONCACAF region, failing to qualify for the finals for the first time since the 2010 tournament.

Iran has been drawn in a group with Belgium, Egypt and New Zealand. Under the expanded format, three teams from each group will advance to the round of 32.

With less than four months remaining until the tournament, Iran faces a series of challenges ahead of its opening match against New Zealand in Inglewood, California, on June 15, including concerns over potential visa issues for members of the squad and efforts to secure additional high-level friendlies.

Iran had been in advanced talks to face Spain in March or June, but Alavi said negotiations between the two sides had collapsed.

"The contract was on the verge of being finalized before they suddenly withdrew from negotiations," Alavi told state television. "Everything had been agreed, including the match time and venue, before they informed us they could not play the match."

"They told us they would be available during the September international break, although our intention was to arrange the match as part of our World Cup preparations."

Skocic walks out of Tractor job

Sports Desk

Croatian head coach Dragan Skocic has parted ways with Persian Gulf Pro League champions Tractor, the Iranian top-flight club announced on Tuesday.

The decision came on the morning of Tractor's final league-phase fixture in the AFC Champions League Elite against Al Gharafa in Qatar, sent shockwaves through the club's vast fanbase.

"Following the match against Al Sadd [on February 10], Dragan Skocic submitted a request to the club's management to ter-

minate his contract. Despite opposition from club officials, multiple meetings, and their insistence on continuing the cooperation, he remained firm in his decision," the club said in a statement.

"Ultimately, on Tuesday morning, the two sides signed a mutual agreement formally terminating his contract.

"Skocic leaves as the most decorated coach in the club's history, having won two major trophies and secured his place in Tractor's record books.

"Tractor Football Club extends its gratitude to Mr. Skocic for his efforts and wishes him

success in his future professional endeavors."

The club did not elaborate on the reasons behind the Croatian's departure.

Skocic guided Tractor to its maiden domestic league title last season and lifted the Super Cup in August, thanks to a 2-1 victory over Esteghlal in the season curtain-raiser.

Tractor is second in a tightly contested league table with 35 points from 20 matches, one point behind Golgohar with a game in hand, and level on points with Sepahan and Esteghlal.

The Tabriz-based side has

also impressed in the league stage of Asia's premier club competition, securing a place in the round of 16 with two matches to spare.

However, local media have reported tensions between Skocic and several senior players – notably club captain Shoja Khalilzadeh – following last week's 2-0 defeat to Al Sadd, which may have contributed to his decision to leave.

Former Zob Ahan and Mes Rafsanjan head coach Mohammad Rabiei has been reported as a leading candidate to replace Skocic.



AP

Iran judo chief confident of medal breakthrough after Tunis success

Sports Desk

Iran's men's judo team is on a trajectory to become a consistent medal contender for the country at major events – including the upcoming Asian Games – in the near future, Arash Miresmaeli, the chairman of the Iranian Judo Federation, insists.

His remarks follow an impressive medal haul by Iranian athletes at the recent Cadet and Junior African Cup tournaments, as well as the African Open event in Tunis.

The national team, which fielded five competitors across the cadet, junior, and senior categories in the Tunisian capital this week, returned with a total of six medals – including two golds – bolstering the federation's long-term strategy of investing in youth development.

Elyas Parhizgar headlined the three-medal haul in the African Open by claiming gold in the -81kg division on Sunday, after Mohammadpouria Banaeian had clinched the men's junior +100kg title.

"Our goal is to increase the ranking points of our judokas for Olympic qualification. Since the start of the new year, we have prioritized participation in ranking tournaments, including the African Open events in Morocco and Tunisia," Miresmaeli told the official



website of the national governing body. He highlighted that a strategic shift to nurture young talent, initiated several years ago, is now bearing fruit. "We began investing in cadets and juniors years ago, and that program is paying off. The national team now has a low average age but has reached a good level of maturity and experience. This was evident in both the Casablanca and Tunis African Open tournaments," he said. While the performance in Morocco was deemed "good and acceptable," Mires-

meli described the showing in Tunisia as "exceptional."

"It is a commendable achievement," he added.

Miresmaeli was particularly effusive in his praise for individual athletes. He singled out Parhizgar, who secured gold medals in both African Open events, stating the wins demonstrate the judoka has achieved significant self-confidence and maturity. Amirabbas Choopan – a bronze medalist in the -90kg division – was also commended

for an improved performance in Tunis, while 17-year-old Banaian, who also won a prestigious silver in the seniors' competition, received special mention for his high ranking and quality medals in recent events. "If he hadn't made a momentary lapse in the final in Tunis, he would have definitely taken gold," Miresmaeli noted.

Sobhan Hakimi, competing in the cadet category, secured a silver medal in the -81kg class. "We have invested in him, hoping he can shine for Iran at the Youth Olympics," the president said. He also described Ali Nikseresht – junior -100kg silver winner – as a key asset for the future, noting the judoka currently holds a world ranking of fifth.

Looking ahead, Miresmaeli outlined an ambitious roadmap centered on the Aichi-Nagoya 2026 Asian Games in September.

"Our goal is to integrate new and young talents into the national team and, with careful planning, head to the Asian Games. Although the task is difficult, we have our eyes on medals there," he stated.

The immediate focus, however, shifts to the Asian Championships – scheduled for the first time in the same year as the Asian Games – followed closely by the Asian U23 Championships. "Given the age profile of our judokas, we are

very hopeful of shining in that event," Miresmaeli said.

The federation's strategy also includes increased participation in Grand Slam and Grand Prix events. "We must step by step raise the preparedness and technical level of our judokas. By sending athletes to major events and holding joint training camps, we aim to provide them with bouts against high-quality opponents from around the world to help them reach full maturity," he explained.

Concluding his assessment, Miresmaeli expressed strong optimism for the future of the sport in Iran. "With God's grace, the planning, and the efforts made, judo is getting closer to securing a place in Iran's medal tally. The recent successes have injected new blood and energy into the sport. Our athletes have gained good self-confidence, and by participating in better and higher quality events, they will grow even more technically."

He reiterated that the long-term investment in youth is now delivering results. "The average age of the national team is low, and these judokas can certainly win medals for Iran for years to come. I hope that by continuing this path, we can fulfill our promise and firmly establish judo in Iran's medal-winning sports basket."

Afin village advances toward global recognition

Iranica Desk

South Khorasan Province, spanning the vast eastern reaches of Iran, benefits from rare natural and cultural assets derived from the coexistence of desert landscapes, mountain ranges, and fertile plains. As a result, the province is regarded as one of eastern Iran's most unspoiled and distinctive tourism destinations. Within the province, villages such as Afin — distinguished by traditional architecture, expansive seedless barberry orchards, and striking natural scenery — offer exceptional potential to attract both domestic and international visitors. The value of these assets becomes increasingly pronounced as such villages move toward nomination under the Best Tourism Villages program, IRNA wrote. In January of this year, Iran launched the process of nominating villages for the Best Tourism Villages program, initially reviewing more than 100 candidates nationwide. At the preliminary evaluation stage, 50 villages met the required criteria. Following field inspections and scoring assessments, 12 villages advanced to the final dossier-preparation phase, with the files of eight villages now ready for submission to



tishineh.com

the World Tourism Organization. The expanded list of Iran's selected villages under the program is expected to be reviewed during the 2026 vote. Among the shortlisted candidates is the historic and tourism-oriented village of Afin in South Khorasan Province, which — due to its distinctive cultural heritage and natural features — is considered well qualified for inclusion under the Best Tourism Villages program. Afin village, located in Zirkuh, covers an area of 450 hectares and is home to the world's largest seedless barberry orchard, making it one of South Khorasan's most prominent examples of rural and agricultural tourism. The process of nomination for Afin and other villages in South Khorasan is being pursued with an emphasis on revitalizing historic fabric, upgrading infrastructure, and expanding tourism services in accordance with international standards. Measures such as the development of eco-lodges, the launch of information platforms, and the promotion of cultural and natural assets have positioned Afin as a national model for rural tourism development. Afin's cultural identity — reflected in the meaning of its name in ancient Iranian lan-

guages as "water and life" — underscores the community's long-standing relationship with land and natural resources. This historical and cultural heritage, together with the village's natural landscapes and extensive barberry orchards, provides a solid foundation for introducing Afin as an international tourism destination. Given its existing capacities and the growing importance of the Best Tourism Villages program, Afin in South Khorasan Province is steadily moving toward becoming a successful model of sustainable tourism and agricultural development, with its nomination dossier ex-

pected to be completed in the near future in line with international standards.

In recent weeks, alongside the strengthening of national discourse on tourism development in the eastern regions of the country, Afin village has come into sharper focus among national planners. The visit of the advisor to the Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts, Parham Janfeshan, to the province, along with the holding of specialized meetings with tourism stakeholders, members of the Strategic Council for Afin's Best Tourism Villages nomination, and executive managers, indi-

cates that the village's dossier has entered a more serious and expert-driven phase on the path toward recognition. During this visit, Janfeshan emphasized the necessity of an expert-based approach and announced the dispatch of a specialized ministerial team to conduct on-site assessments of Afin's tourism infrastructure. He added that the process of nominating Afin under the Best Tourism Villages program is being pursued through the identification of infrastructural constraints and the formulation of an operational action plan. He further stressed that rural tourism development — even with minimal investment — can contribute to reverse migration trends and population stabilization in rural areas. This initiative can be regarded as an important step toward accurately identifying limitations, prioritizing interventions, and developing a coherent operational plan to complete the nomination dossier — an approach that, according to experts, is essential for moving from the stage of local advocacy to the level of national decision-making. At the same time, the Director General of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts Organization of South Khorasan Province addressed the damage

Teymarest acknowledged as major rock art site

Iranica Desk

Teymarest, located in Isfahan Province, is one of the largest rock art sites in the world, featuring an unparalleled collection of petroglyphs. With its exceptional cultural value, the region has the potential to become a unique open-air museum for international visitors and a significant source of tourism revenue. Majid Rasouli, a tourism guide, historian, and researcher of Teymarest's rock carvings, spoke about the tourism potential of the area. Rasouli, who also manages an eco-lodge in Gharqab village in Golpayegan, said that food tourism is one of Golpayegan's most important attractions, with many travelers visiting the city specifically to taste its famous kebab, according to chtn.ir. "However," he added, "the stron-

gest feedback we receive from our guests relates to visits to Gharqab village and the rock carvings of Teymarest." According to Rasouli, these visits are usually organized as one-day hiking and cycling tours, during which he personally accompanies tourists. The eco-lodge's proximity to attractions in Khansar and Khomein also allows visitors to experience a wider range of the region's natural and historical sites. Referring to the calm and pleasant atmosphere of Gharqab, Rasouli noted that the lodge operates in a peaceful rural setting and strives to provide the best possible services. "Fortunately, all the feedback we have received so far has been positive," he said. He described the offering of traditional food and the experience of rural life as the most important aspects of the lodge's activities. Guests often take part in

cooking and daily tasks, giving them firsthand exposure to the rhythms of village life. Commenting on the country's economic conditions, Rasouli said that rising inflation and recent events over the past year have almost entirely halted the arrival of foreign tourists. Most current visitors, he explained, belong to the middle and upper-middle economic classes and are interested in nature and history. He added that government support could significantly reduce the heavy costs of water, electricity, and gas, and that providing low-interest loans would lead to meaningful improvements in the sector. One of the region's most serious tourism challenges, according to Rasouli, is the shortage of staff. He noted that the Jaame Mosque of Golpayegan and the city's historic minaret are often closed due to a lack of per-

sonnel, leaving tourists locked out. "This issue delivers a major blow to the city's tourism," he said, stressing that keeping historical sites open is one of the most basic requirements of tourism and essential for visitor trust and satisfaction. Highlighting the global importance of Teymarest's rock carvings, Rasouli reiterated that Teymarest represents one of the world's largest rock art sites, with unique and irreplaceable motifs. "This region can become a distinctive open-air museum for international tourists and generate substantial foreign revenue," he said.

He also pointed to the absence of formal conservation programs as a major concern. "There is no official protection plan, and I personally monitor the rock carvings on a regular basis," he explained. While local communities have been



IRNA

supportive for years, Rasouli emphasized that greater promotion, public awareness, and institutional support are still urgently needed. Finally, he warned of threats

such as mining activities, natural erosion, and the lack of visitor awareness, noting that these factors could cause serious damage to this invaluable cultural heritage.

Sang-e Sefid village showcasing natural beauty, tourism potential

Iranica Desk

Sang-e Sefid, a picturesque village in Chardavol, Ilam Province, is attracting growing attention as a tourist destination thanks to its lush valleys, flowing rivers, and towering mountains. The village offers a unique combination of serenity and natural beauty, drawing both nature enthusiasts and cultural travelers alike. Situated at the entrance of Qir Canyon, Sang-e Sefid lies within a diverse landscape of foothills, plains, and mountains. Its northern boundary is framed by the Khorrameh and Vardalan mountains, while to the south it connects to the main road from Ilam to the Seymeh Bridge. Agricultural lands stretch to the east,



fararu.com

and the Chenreh River flows along its western edge, adding to the village's scenic charm.

At an elevation of approximately 980 meters above sea level, the village features gentle

slopes running from the northeast toward the southwest, channeling surface waters into the Chenreh River. Nearby, Mansouri Canyon offers visitors additional opportunities for exploration, hiking, and enjoying the striking natural scenery.

Speaking to ISNA, Omid Esmaeli, a technical expert at the Ilam Provincial Governorate, described Sang-e Sefid as one of Chardavol's most beautiful and unspoiled areas. He emphasized that the village's clear rivers, abundant vegetation, and unique natural features make it an ideal destination for those interested in historical sites and natural landscapes.

"The Chenreh River flowing through the village provides an excellent setting for relaxation and recreation," Esmaeli said. "Its banks are lined with local trees and plants, enhancing the area's beauty and freshness." He also highlighted Khorrameh Mountain southwest of the village, a popular spot for hiking thanks to its diverse flora and breathtaking vistas. Mansouri Canyon, with its high rock walls, pristine nature, and pleasant climate, continues to attract numerous visitors. Farzad Sharifi, Director General of Ilam Province's Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Organization, added that the gorge is notable for its natural rock formations, flowing streams, and native vegetation, creating a distinctive and visually striking landscape. He fur-

ther noted that Sang-e Sefid's fertile soils and abundant water resources sustain local agriculture, while livestock farming remains a key contributor to the community's economy. Sharifi also pointed out that spring and summer are the best times to visit Sang-e Sefid and Mansouri Canyon, when moderate temperatures and verdant scenery provide an ideal experience for tourists. "With its combination of pristine nature, clear rivers, and high mountains, this area stands out as one of Ilam Province's unique attractions," he said. "Protecting this natural heritage while promoting sustainable tourism can significantly contribute to both the economic and cultural development of the region."

President: Security achieved via unified efforts of government, police, public

Social Desk

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian said on Tuesday that the society must be managed with the least cost and damage, stressing that lasting security is achieved through the synergy of the government, law enforcement forces, and the public.

Speaking at a graduation ceremony for Iranian Police cadets, Pezeshkian said authorities must maintain order while minimizing harm to security forces and civilians. Underlining that societal management should be carried out with the least cost and damage, he said, "I believe we should govern the country with the least possible harm and incidents, and establish lasting peace and security in society."

Pezeshkian stressed that preventing unrest from escalating

into crisis should be a priority. "If there is dissatisfaction or a problem in society, we must not allow it to turn into a crisis. It must be prevented and treated," he said. "When an incident occurs, it must be managed with the minimum cost to the parties involved."

The president also called for equipping police and security forces with new technologies to manage incidents without injury to officers, adding that the government would support law enforcement forces. "We must not allow the health of our police forces to be put at risk," he said. "All our efforts must be that none of you, as far as possible, are harmed in any scene."

Pezeshkian said public security was essential and credited police forces as "the creators of security in Iran."

Late last month, economic hardships, caused and exac-



Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian (2nd R) delivers a speech at a graduation ceremony for Iranian Police cadets in the capital Tehran on February 17, 2026. president.ir

erbated by years of Western sanctions, triggered a wave of peaceful protests among merchants in Tehran and other cities. Authorities recognized the protesters' demands as legitimate, but the demonstrations were hijacked by rioters backed by American and Israeli leaders, who publicly called for vandalism and disorder.

Officials said that some of the mercenaries were armed, trained, and recruited by US and Israeli spy agencies to incite violence, damage public property, and kill civilians and members of security forces.



Mazandaran hosts over 3,000 artefacts; 800 officially registered

Art & Culture Desk

Director General of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts of Mazandaran Province, Hossein Izadi, told ILNA on Tuesday that there are over 3,000 protected artefacts in the northern province and 800 of them have been registered.

"Of these, 800 artefacts have been nationally registered, and the rest are in the process of registration or are historically valuable. These artefacts may be governmental, private, or quasi-governmental," Izadi added.

The official also pointed to the vastness of historical sites in the province as well as the shortage of funds and legal challenges of national registration.

"According to the law, regarding tangible historical sites and monuments, whether



sites, which incurs high costs, as one of the most significant problems.

"This issue must be institutionalized in the culture of heritage studies and among cultural heritage enthusiasts, otherwise we will face many problems," Izadi said.

"When a site is nationally registered, according to the law, it must either be bartered, acquired, or compensated for. However, since we do not have the budget to purchase the property, a right is created for the owner that is practically not fulfilled."

Izadi also touched on the emphasis of the Seventh Development Plan (SDP) on the tourism sector, saying, "Issues such as high-rise construction, mixed-use tourism complexes, ecotourism, and health tourism have been exempted from taxes and duties."

they are under the control of government agencies or in the possession of private individuals, all are obliged to preserve and maintain them," Izadi said.

"However, unfortunately, the budget for cultural heritage is insufficient, and with these funds, we can only maintain those among the 3,000 sites that have been nationally registered."

The director-general of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts of Mazandaran Province underscored the issue of boundaries and the re-evaluation of historical

power, how do you assess Iran's deterrent capacities and tools in the face of US military presence and threats in the region, and how might these factors affect the strategic calculations of the other side?

The Leader's consistent emphasis on the ineffectiveness of military threats has long formed part of the Islamic Republic's deterrence equation. Iran's deterrence architecture is multilayered, combining defensive capabilities, asymmetric capacities, and regional strategic depth.

The timing of these remarks—coinciding with the Geneva talks, which the opposing side had portrayed as a "final opportunity"—amounts to a renewed assertion of Iran's defensive readiness and strategic confidence. The message is clear: nego-

tiation under the shadow of threat does not hold.

Such resolve would naturally be expected to factor into the adversary's calculations regarding the potential gains of military escalation. Iran possesses diverse symmetrical and asymmetrical tools for defensive response to any aggression, and any military action against the country could impose broad and unpredictable costs on the United States and its allies. These considerations appear to have influenced Washington's posture and, at least for now, pushed back the war op-

How can the Leader's analysis of the recent unrest in Iran be examined within the framework of geopolitical rivalries

Muslim world's most exquisite handwritten Qur'an published in Iranian Nasta'liq script

Arts & Culture Desk

The head of the general department of public libraries of South Khorasan Province announced on Tuesday the publication of one of the most exquisite handwritten copies of Qur'an in the Islamic world, which is scripted in Iranian Nasta'liq and in the style of calligraphy master Othman Taha.

"This Qur'an, which is the result of over 10 years of calligraphy by the distinguished calligraphy master, Parviz Nikbin, after four years of editing and vocalization, successfully obtained the approval of Dar al-Quran al-Karim of the Islamic Republic of Iran and was able to be published as the first complete Nasta'liq Qur'an, which is considered the bride of Persian scripts," Ali Zohouri was quoted as saying by Mehr News Agency.

"This Qur'an had remained



for years without financial support and could not be published. However, with the explicit order and support of Governor-General Mohammad Reza Hashemi, we were able to reach an agreement with the esteemed CEO of Mehr Iran Bank for the allocation of printing costs. This endeavor was unique and unprecedented in its kind, as 22 billion Rials were secured from Tehran for the printing of a Qur'an."

Zohouri underlined that, "The publisher of this spiritual and artistic work is Chahar Deraft Publications, which has been very persistent and hard-working in this regard."

Leader's speech shifts ...

Iran has repeatedly stated that negotiations only carry weight when they are

grounded in mutual respect, a balance of interests, and reciprocal steps—not in imposed or unilateral results. In effect, this stance lays down the conceptual framework and red lines for talks with Washington and shifts the playing field from "pressure for concessions" to "balanced bargaining." Such a firm position also takes the decision-making space out of a climate shaped by psychological pressure and artificially manufactured security urgency. It signals that Tehran will not make decisions under American deadlines or media narratives portraying the moment as a "last chance."

As the Leader downplays US military

power, how do you assess Iran's deterrent capacities and tools in the face of US military presence and threats in the region, and how might these factors affect the strategic calculations of the other side?

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and maximum pressure strategies against Iran, and what implications does it have for domestic policy and national security?

The narrative of a "planned coup" and hybrid pressure is not presented merely as domestic political rhetoric. Statements by American and Israeli officials and sources have indicated that the United States and Israel played roles in organizing nationwide unrest, managing scenes of disorder, and planning subsequent scenarios. It should be recalled that during the June war, American and Israeli positions suggested they had expected airstrikes to feed into internal unrest and protests; however, that scenario did not materialize. In the January events as well, efforts were made to intensify unrest and shape

media narratives—including hasty remarks by Donald Trump such as the claim of the "fall of Mashhad"—in order to pave the way for complementary actions. The failure of that scenario cast doubt on the prospects of a swift military success. Accordingly, it is anticipated that a scenario synchronizing domestic unrest with military pressure or threats may remain on the agenda of certain actors. While such overt interference in Iran's internal affairs carries costs for both society and the state, the strategic culture of Iranian society—rooted in independence and resistance to foreign domination—has itself evolved into a factor that strengthens the country's social, political, and defensive resilience, and is likely to continue doing so.