

Navy chief: Presence of extra-regional fleets in West Asia 'unjustified'
Iran, Russia to hold naval drill in Sea of Oman today

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Joint drill with Russia highlights Iran's transnational deterrence

INTERVIEW EXCLUSIVE

The navies of Iran and Russia are set to hold a joint exercise on Thursday in the Sea of Oman and the northern Indian Ocean. The drill comes as the United States has significantly stepped up its military presence in the region, deployed a second aircraft carrier, and, according to some US officials, is preparing for a possible confrontation with Iran if negotiations—whose second round was held on Tuesday—collapse. A few days earlier, the Islamic Revolution Guard Corps (IRGC) had also conducted drills in the Strait of Hormuz. Ebrahim Pourvahedi, a security studies expert, told Iran Daily that Russia's presence alongside Iran in the exercise could be interpreted not only as defensive convergence but also as evidence of Iran's transnational deterrence and its evolution into a deterrence network against the expansionism of NATO and the United States.

IRAN DAILY: With Russia's participation in this joint exercise, what strategic messages does the move send to the United States and its regional allies? Can it be seen as a sign of emerging defense convergence between Tehran and Moscow and part of efforts to strengthen active deterrence against US pressure?

POURVAHEDI: Holding a joint exercise between Iran and Russia stands as a clear symbol of the end of the project of Iran's "political isolation," a goal for which the US foreign policy establishment has invested heavily for years. The strategic message to Washington is that the era of a "hierarchy of power," in which the United States unilaterally decided on the security of international waters, has come to an end.

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Iranian Oil Minister Mohsen Paknejad (R) shakes hands with Russian Minister of Energy Sergey Tsivilyov after signing several cooperation documents in Tehran, Iran, on February 18, 2026.
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President calls for further regional cooperation to prevent foreign intervention

International Desk

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian on Wednesday called for further cooperation among regional countries to prevent intervention by extra-regional actors.

"The countries of the region must expand their relations in such a way that there is no need for intervention by extra-regional actors to decide on matters concerning this region" President Pezeshkian said during a meeting with Russian Energy Minister Sergey Tsivilyov in Tehran.

The Iranian president described the level of relations between Tehran and Moscow as expanding and expressed his satisfaction with the acceleration of bilateral interactions.

President Pezeshkian, who

signed the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Treaty between Iran and Russia last year, underlined that his administration is determined to implement the agreement.

He said that the implementation of the agreement is being pursued in all fields including transportation, energy, oil and gas, agriculture and food products, defense and security cooperation.

The president stressed that he was personally following up on the progress of the agreement on a weekly basis, and has tasked different ministers to pursue the implementation of the agreements.

Back in January 2025, Iran and Russia signed the 20-year Comprehensive Strategic Partnership deal, marking a significant step towards strengthening



Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian (R) talks with Russian Energy Minister Sergey Tsivilyov (L) during a meeting in Tehran on February 18, 2026. president.ir

their bilateral ties. The treaty aims to expand economic, diplomatic and military cooperation between Moscow and Tehran and will likely act as a counterbalance to illegal Western sanctions.

It provides the legal framework for long-term development of cooperation in areas ranging from defense, energy, finance, and transportation to industries, agriculture, science, culture, and technology.

Iran and Russia, both under US sanctions, have deepened their relations in various fields in recent years.



Navy chief: Presence of extra-regional fleets in West Asia 'unjustified'

Iran, Russia to hold naval drill in Sea of Oman today

International Desk

Navy Commander Rear Admiral Shahram Irani warned that the presence of extra-regional fleets in West Asia is "unjustified", stressing that the Iranian nation will confront them with a great strength in case of any aggressive move.

Admiral Irani, commander of the Navy of the Iranian Army, told reporters in India on Wednesday that "the Islamic Republic of Iran has been facing threats, ranting and ravaging, propaganda, and the presence of extra-regional fleets in West Asia for 47 years."

"If extra-regional fleets believe they have come with power, they should know that the Iranian people will confront them with even greater power," in case of any act of aggression, Admiral Irani emphasized.

He traveled to India to participate in three events – namely the IONS (Indian Ocean Naval Symposium), the Milan 2026 Naval Exercise, and the International Fleet Review (IFR).

He also stressed that "the faith of the people and missiles of Iran's deterrent weapons are the ones that stand against the enemy."

The United States has significantly increased its naval presence in West Asia, deploying the aircraft carrier



Shahram Irani

USS Abraham Lincoln and multiple accompanying warships, destroyers, and air assets to the wider Middle East as tensions with Iran escalate. US officials said on Friday that the Pentagon was sending an additional aircraft carrier to the region, adding thousands more troops along with fighter aircraft and guided-missile destroyers.

Tehran has viewed the move as a direct threat, with Iranian officials warning of strong retaliation if US forces act against Iranian interests. The Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei said on Tuesday that 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 Khamenei said. "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.

On Thursday, Iran and Russia will conduct naval maneuvers in the Sea of Oman amid simmering tensions between Tehran and Washington.

"The joint naval exercise of the Islamic Republic of Iran and Russia will take place tomorrow (Thursday) in the Sea of Oman and in the northern Indian Ocean," ISNA reported, citing drill spokesman, Rear Admiral Hassan Maghsoudloo.

"The aim is to strengthen maritime security and to deepen relations between the navies of the two countries," he said.

The drills come two days after the IRGC conducted a two-day naval drill 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.

Tehran summons German envoy over Berlin's anti-Iranian measures

The Foreign Ministry summoned Germany's ambassador to Tehran over the recent adversarial stances and measures that have been adopted by German authorities versus the Islamic Republic. Axel Dittmann was summoned by Alireza Yousefi, director-general for Western Europe at the ministry, on Tuesday, and formally notified of the Islamic Republic's strong protest, Press TV reported.

The ministry identified the reason behind the summoning as "anti-Iranian actions in Germany and destructive positions taken by German officials against the Islamic Republic in violation of the international law."

During the meeting, Yousefi condemned the stances and activities "particularly the hosting and support of violent and terrorist elements and groups" that are hostile towards Tehran.

He emphasized that such positions and measures contradicted the fundamental principles of the international law and the United Nations Charter, and entailed international responsibility for Berlin. The German ambassador undertook to convey Tehran's protest to relevant German authorities.

German authorities have been adopting increasingly inimical positions concerning the Islamic Republic simultaneously with underway escalation in the United States' rhetorical and military escalation



targeting Tehran.

Dittmann had also been summoned to the ministry in late January after German Chancellor Friedrich Merz claimed that the Iranian government's "days are numbered." His remarks came as Donald Trump had markedly escalated his verbal threats and ordered significant military buildup around Iran following the Islamic Republic's response to a foreign-backed riots last month. Germany has also played host to gatherings and activism by anti-Iranian groupings and outfits, including monarchists seeking the return of Iran's former Washington-backed tyrannical Pahlavi regime. Most recently, it hosted the Munich Security Conference, which excluded Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi, while providing ample opportunity for those attacking the Islamic Republic.

Over 80 UN member states condemn Israel's de facto annexation of West Bank

More than 80 United Nations member states condemned Israel's plan to expand control over the occupied West Bank and claim large tracts of Palestinian territory as Israeli "state property". "We strongly condemn unilateral Israeli decisions and measures aimed at expanding Israel's unlawful presence in the West Bank," Palestinian Ambassador to the UN Riyad Mansour said on Tuesday, speaking on behalf of the coalition of 85 member states and several international organizations, Al Jazeera reported.

"Such decisions are contrary to Israel's obligations under international law and must be immediately reversed. We underline in this regard our strong opposition to any form of annexation," Mansour said.

"We reiterate our rejection of all measures aimed at altering the demograph-



A Palestinian woman with children walks near members of Israeli police during an Israeli raid in Qalandya, in the Israeli-occupied West Bank. REUTERS

jeopardize the prospect of reaching a peace agreement ending the conflict," he added.

The Comprehensive Plan to End the Gaza Conflict is a November agreement between Israel and Hamas to end the genocidal war.

Signatories to the joint statement on Tuesday include Australia, Canada, China, France, Pakistan, Russia, South Korea, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, the European Union, the League of Arab States and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

Mohammad Ali Rajabi
Cartoonist

CARTOON



Tehran, Moscow sign cooperation document, MoUs at 19th joint economic commission

Paknejad: Past agreements with Moscow now moving into implementation

Economy Desk

A cooperation document and four memorandums of understanding were signed between Iran and Russia on Wednesday during the 19th session of their Joint Commission on Economic Cooperation, co-chaired by Iran's Oil Minister Mohsen Paknejad and Russia's Energy Minister Sergei Tsivilov.

On the final day, a memorandum of understanding on an executive cooperation program for 2026-2028 between Iran's National Standards Organization and Russia's Federal Agency for Technical Regulation and Metrology was signed by Farzaneh Ansari, Iran's vice president and head of the standards body, and Anton Pavlovich Shalaev, head of the Russian agency, IRNA reported.

Another MoU between Russia's Federal Accreditation Service and Iran's National Accreditation Center was signed by Mehdi Alipour, head of the Iranian center, and Dmitry Valeryevich Volvach, head of the Russian service.

Parvaneh Rezaei, Iran's deputy labor minister, and Mikhail Yuryevich Ivanov, head of Russia's Federal Service for Labor and Employment, also signed an MoU on cooperation in employment development and labor inspection.

A final memorandum between Art Khimia Joint Stock Company and the Petroleum Industry Research Institute was signed by Azim Kalantari Asl, head of the institute, and Andrey Vladimirovich Shpak, chief executive of the company.

Iran's oil minister noted in a live interview with IRIB that the 19th Joint Commission on Economic and Trade Cooperation between the two countries concluded after three days of intensive negotiations, and "with obstacles removed, many past understandings have entered the implementation phase." At a joint press conference with his Russian counterpart, he added, "What was ultimately agreed upon at the meeting was a collective resolve to move from dialogue to concrete implementation."

During the three days of this commission's session, specialized working groups held detailed and intensive negotiations in various fields, according to Paknejad.

"Obstacles to a significant portion of past understandings were removed through expert negotiations and have now entered the implementation phase. The secretariat of the joint commission in both countries will be responsible for following up on implementation of the agreed provisions," he said. With the activation of implementation mechanisms and the removal of existing obstacles, it is expected that economic and energy cooperation between Iran and Russia will develop at a faster pace, and the two countries will be able to benefit from existing capacities to expand cooperation, he added.

Main areas of negotiations

According to Paknejad, important discussions were held in the energy sec-

tor, particularly in the development of oil and gas fields and gas trade, the main focus of which was gas imports from Russia which is seriously on the agenda.

"In the transportation sector, the Rasht-Astara railway project was reviewed as one of the important joint plans, and existing obstacles were largely removed." The Russian side also committed to starting operational work on the project in early April 2026, he added.

Progress on Bushehr nuclear plant phases

"On the peaceful use of nuclear energy, particularly the development of phases two and three of the Bushehr Nuclear Power Plant, it was agreed that implementation of the projects should be pursued at a faster pace," Paknejad said. "We also reached agreements on the field of grain supply, livestock feed, and agricultural products, which can play an important role in meeting the country's needs," he added.

Also at the joint press conference with Russian minister, Paknejad said, "There is good cooperation in the oil and gas sector between the two countries, and we are examining the assignment of one of the country's important fields to Russian companies."

He reiterated that discussions on Russian gas exports to Iran have been concluded, with only one or two clauses remaining that he hoped would be fi-



Iran's Oil Minister Mohsen Paknejad (R) and Russia's Energy Minister Sergei Tsivilov attend a joint press conference on the sidelines of the 19th Joint Commission on Economic and Trade Cooperation in Tehran on February 18, 2026.

● SHANA

nalized and signed soon. Addressing Iran's need for gas imports, Paknejad said production capacity has increased under the current administration, and that a production record was set on Tuesday at South Pars, but the imbalance remains significant enough that Iran still needs to import gas from Russia.

"As the trend of increasing the country's gas production capacity continues under President Masoud Pezeshkian's government, a record of 730 million cubic meters of daily gas extraction from the joint South Pars field was registered yesterday (Tuesday)," he said.

This amount is the highest figure recorded in the history of operation of this joint field, he added.

Thirteen-fold project success in 11 months

Tsivilov said at the press conference, "In the past 11 months, projects have been 13 times more successful than the previous year." "We are seriously cooperating with the Iranian government and have many projects in various locations; including blocks 2 and 3 of the Bushehr nuclear power plant that are currently under construction," Tsivilov said. "Besides blocks 2 and 3 of the Bushehr nuclear power plant, we are examining new plant units. A working group has been formed in this regard that is to provide us with a summary of its discussions within three months, and this will be very impactful in the development of peaceful nuclear energy," he concluded.

Minister inaugurates projects, unveils new development plans in Khuzestan



Economy Desk

Iran's Energy Minister Abbas Aliabadi marked the operational phase of a series of major water and electricity projects during a two-day visit to southwestern Khuzestan Province and announced the launch of several other strategic infrastructure projects.

The projects ranged from drinking water supply, transmission network development, water resource management, facility optimization, and electricity infrastructure strengthening and were either commissioned or had construction started with the minister's participation.

The Ghadir water supply and transmission capacity expansion project was inaugurated on Wednesday. According to Khuzestan Governor Mohammadreza Mavalizadeh, the project took about 10 months to complete and the increased capacity will help ease drinking water and agricultural shortages in several areas, ISNA reported.

Also, at a ceremony marking

the expansion, Aliabadi said, "We are on the verge of upstream development of the Bakhtiari Dam. With the plan now approved, a \$1.2 billion investment is set to flow into the region, creating a substantial boost in the region."

He added that the country has 12,000 MW of hydropower capacity, which, when combined with its solar resources, will significantly improve the energy situation," IRNA reported.

Also on Wednesday, seven electricity distribution projects by the Khuzestan Power Distribution Company were collectively commissioned in Shush County, aimed at developing energy supply infrastructure and improving services in urban and rural areas of the province.

On Tuesday, the first day of the minister's provincial visit, 39 projects by the Khuzestan Regional Power Company were inaugurated. In addition, the Bahmanshir River dam and navigation lock were commissioned.

According to ISNA, the Bah-

manshir River dam and navigation lock project, besides preventing salt and fresh water interference, also functions as a movable bridge with rotational joints to facilitate land and river transportation.

The main objective of the project is to prevent Persian Gulf saltwater intrusion into the Karun and Bahmanshir rivers and to stabilize the region's hydraulic conditions. Besides its protective role, the structure is expected to increase agricultural resilience and strengthen the local ecosystem.

Speaking at Tuesday's inauguration ceremony for the Bahmanshir River dam and navigation lock in Khorramshahr, Mavalizadeh said, "This infrastructure project is a precursor to completing two other dams in Mard and Choybdeh, and with the commissioning of these projects, fresh and high-quality water will be available to the people of the region."

He also announced the launch of three other important projects.

"Dredging of the Arvand is one of the vital projects for the province," he said.

"Also, the construction of the Shalamcheh-Basra railway is a complementary factor for transforming this region into a hub of growth and an economic driver of the province," the governor said.

Iran, India discuss tech cooperation to form regional digital hub

Economy Desk

Iran's Communications and Information Technology Minister Sattar Hashemi said technological cooperation between Iran and India could lead to the formation of a regional digital power hub, during an official visit to India and a meeting on Wednesday with India's Minister of Electronics and Information Technology Jitin Prasad.

"Today, India is one of the main global software hubs that has been able to create and export significant capacities in information technology, artificial intelligence, and cybersecurity to the world," IRNA quoted Hashemi as saying.

"Iran, with its strong human force and scientific infrastructure, has also taken important steps in developing new technologies, and technological cooperation between Iran and India, given the historical background and current capacities of the two countries, can lead to the formation of a digital power hub in the region," he added.

Hashemi identified expanding private-sector engagement between the two countries as a top priority, adding that Iran is keen to "start operational cooperation in areas such as developing native Large Language Models (LLMs), creating joint AI platforms in the agriculture sector, and establishing innovation centers to apply artificial intelligence across various fields."

The minister also stressed the importance of securing critical data infrastructure



Iran's Communications and Information Technology Minister Sattar Hashemi (L) meets India's Minister of Electronics and Information Technology Jitin Prasad in New Delhi on February 18, 2026.

● IRNA

in the coming years and announced Iran's readiness to exchange experience on cyber threats, countering emerging malware, and strengthening financial infrastructure security. He described India's capacity to train specialized human resources as an important opportunity.

Hashemi also proposed creating a joint fund to support Iranian and Indian startups, holding joint technology events, talent-exchange programs, allocating special zones in the technology parks of both countries, and facilitating issuance of "tech visas" for IT specialists as practical paths to expand cooperation. Prasad said at the meeting, "India is ready to share its experiences in the fields of artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, and training specialized human resources with Iran and to begin operational cooperation on joint technology projects."

"Creating joint innovation centers and specialist ex-

change programs can accelerate technology development in both countries and help strengthen digital infrastructure and improve data security," he added.

According to the report, Hashemi traveled to New Delhi as part of a technology diplomacy program and to attend the global "AI Impact 2026" summit, aiming to present Iran's capabilities in artificial intelligence and pursue bilateral and multilateral cooperation in this field.

The India AI Impact Summit 2026, attended by more than 110 countries, 30 international organizations, and 45 ministerial-level delegations, is being held from Feb. 16 to 20, at the Bharat Mandapam convention center in New Delhi.

a set of procedural norms; it is a repository of collective memory. To distort the name of the Persian Gulf is to distort the textual fabric of global civilization. The legal protection of names is therefore part of the moral duty of the international community to preserve historical truth. The ethics of naming draw from several overlapping legal principles:

- The principle of good faith (*bona fides*), requiring honest interpretation of estab-

lished facts;

- The doctrine of legitimate expectation, which protects consistent usage in international relations;
- The principle of cultural heritage preservation, embodied in UNESCO's conventions.

Together, these principles establish that altering a name with entrenched historical and legal foundations constitutes a breach of international comity. It intro-

duces instability into the semantic order of law, much like arbitrary redrawing of borders introduces instability into the territorial order. Therefore, defending the name "Persian Gulf" is not an act of nationalism, but an act of epistemic justice, a defense of the truth embedded in international legal memory.

The name Persian Gulf is not a relic of the past but a living legal institution. It exists in treaties, judgments, UN resolutions,

and collective consciousness. Like the course of a river, its trajectory cannot be redirected by political slogans. The Persian Gulf Act provides an opportunity for the United States and the international community to reaffirm a simple yet profound principle: that law must speak the language of truth. In an age where historical narratives are weaponized, affirming factual nomenclature becomes a defense of international order itself. As such, the

Persian Gulf stands not merely as a geographical entity, but as a testament to the endurance of law over politics, truth over ideology, and continuity over revisionism. In the lexicon of international law, certain names, like certain rights, are inalienable. In reaffirming the Persian Gulf, the international community is not reviving a relic of history but preserving the rule of law against revisionism — a small yet vital act of truth in an age of disinformation.

UAE's claims over Persian Gulf's three islands

Historical sovereignty, colonial interventions, and int'l law perspectives

By Mohammad Mehdi Seyed Nasser
Researcher at SBU's Center for Medical Ethics and Law Studies

OPINION EXCLUSIVE

The repeated assertions by the United Arab Emirates (UAE) during joint Arab meetings with China, Russia, and the European Union reveal multiple dimensions of a meticulously crafted strategy by the sheikhdoms of the southern Persian Gulf. Part of this strategy aims to exploit tensions between Iran and the West to garner support for unfounded claims over the Iranian islands, while another component seeks backing for Abu Dhabi's positions in exchange for economic incentives extended to actors such as China, Russia, and Europe. Some experts suggest that, in the next phase, the UAE may turn to international bodies, including the United Nations Security Council and the International Court of Justice.

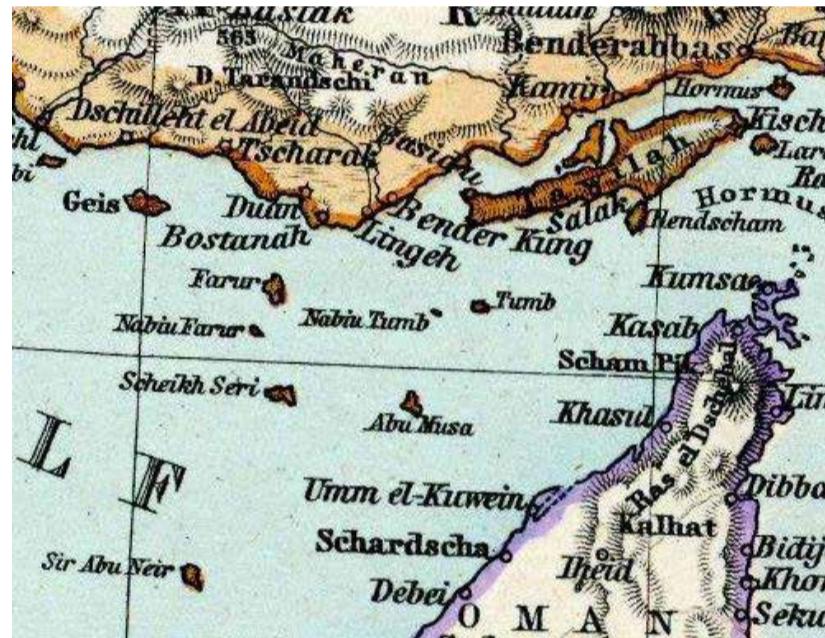
Accordingly, scrutinizing and responding to the UAE's claims is of undeniable and critical importance. Following the occupation of the three islands by the United Kingdom, London attempted to negate Iran's historical sovereignty over the islands, citing legal principles such as the "prior occupation" rule to justify its own control. The UK also asserted that it had occupied ungoverned islands.

Among the approximately 130 recognized islands in the Persian Gulf, Abu Musa is the southernmost Iranian island. Covering nearly 12 square kilometers in the warm waters of the Persian Gulf, Abu Musa has also been referred to as Bu Musa, Bu Mouf, Gap-e Sabz, and Baba Musa. Historical documents and maps denote the island as Bu Mouf or Bu Musa, where "Bum" means place and "Sa" can mean green or a type of herb, collectively translating to "the green land".

According to the 2016 national census, the island's population is 4,213. Economically, Abu Musa's impact has historically been limited due to insufficient freshwater and arable land, while its abundant fish and pearl resources have sustained local livelihoods.

Greater Tunb Island, with an area of approximately 11 square kilometers in the southeastern Persian Gulf, has sparse vegetation and a hot, humid climate. Historically, it has been referred to as Tunb, Tel Mar, Tunb Mar, Tunb Gap (by local sailors), and Tunb, meaning "hill". The island is inhabited, with a 2016 population of 690.

Lesser Tunb, spanning 2-2.5 square kilometers, lies southwest of Greater Tunb, sharing a similarly warm, humid climate with poor vegetation, lacking potable water, and therefore largely uninhabited. Given the strategic, political, and economic significance of the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz, the location of these islands cannot be ignored. Among the numerous islands in the Persian Gulf, Abu Musa, Greater Tunb, and Lesser Tunb hold critical geostrategic importance for safeguarding maritime security and freedom of navigation in the Strait



The photo shows a fragment of Adolf Stieler's Handatlas (1891) where the three Islands of Abu Musa, the Greater Tunb, and the Lesser Tunb are colored orange to indicate they were part of the Iranian territory.

• WIKIMEDIA

of Hormuz. Due to the shallow waters throughout the Strait, large vessels must navigate through limited channels adjacent to these islands, underscoring their military and strategic value. Iran exercises sovereignty over strategically located islands, such as Hormuz, Larak, Hengam, Qeshm, Greater Tunb, and Abu Musa, which together form a defensive arc in the Strait of Hormuz. Territorial disputes concerning islands stem primarily from historical developments and geographical considerations, including effective control and proximity.

International courts, particularly the International Court of Justice (ICJ), have repeatedly examined historical evidence.

Determining initial possession is essential for establishing sovereignty, followed by evaluating whether subsequent developments interrupted or maintained effective control. Any interruption in sovereignty — under international law, understood as the temporary emergence of *terra nullius* — requires the explicit or implicit consent of the sovereign state. Colonial occupation cannot unilaterally sever this relationship as no state may acquire territory by force. The occupier's humanitarian obligation is

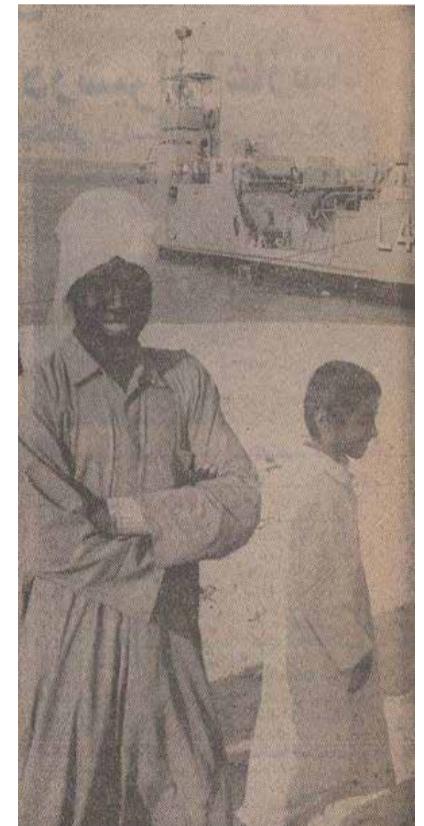
limited to administering the territory for the benefit of the original sovereign, without annexing it.

Historical evidence unequivocally confirms Iran's longstanding sovereignty over the three islands, refuting claims of *terra nullius*. Consequently, the UAE cannot rely on historical precedent to substantiate its claims. To make this observation, two key questions have to be answered: first, whether Iran's legal relationship with the islands was ever interrupted; and second, whether the British occupation was sufficient to establish effective control and disrupt Iran's sovereignty without objection.

The British presence in the Persian Gulf, particularly during the Qajar era, never resulted in the recognition of British sovereignty over the islands, and multiple protests by Iran are documented. From 1948 to 1971, British control did not sever Iran's effective sovereignty. Even assuming a hypothetical lapse during British occupation, the short duration and lack of overt acts negate any claim of effective control sufficient to transfer sovereignty under international law. Iran has consistently maintained its ownership

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The British presence in the Persian Gulf, particularly during the Qajar era, never resulted in the recognition of British sovereignty over the islands, and multiple protests by Iran are documented. From 1948 to 1971, British control did not sever Iran's effective sovereignty. Even assuming a hypothetical lapse during British occupation, the short duration and lack of overt acts negate any claim of effective control sufficient to transfer sovereignty under international law. Iran has consistently maintained its ownership and control, reinforcing its continuous sovereignty.



Residents of Abu Musa are happy to see their island liberated by the Iranian Navy and united with the motherland once more in 1971.

• WIKIMEDIA

and control, reinforcing its continuous sovereignty.

The legal avenues for the UAE's claims are thus effectively closed under international law, leaving only historical narrative as a potential source of dispute. Specifically, the question of the origins of the Persian Gulf's Al-Qawasim tribe remains pivotal. If the Qawasim were Iranian, sovereignty over the islands is clear; if they were local Arab sheikhs, historical gaps could be argued; and if neither, British intervention would have created ambiguous conditions, leaving the islands under *de facto* *terra nullius* until 1971.

Comparative case law, including the Chagos Advisory Opinion, Pedra Branca arbitration, Nicaragua v. Colombia, and the Spratly Islands arbitration, reinforces that sovereignty claims require clear historical and legal continuity, consent, and effective administration. Notably, in the Chagos case, the UK could not retain islands for itself during decolonization, and in Pedra Branca, effective exercise of sovereignty required compliance with historical preconditions.

Therefore, any future dispute over the three islands before an international tribunal must meticulously reconstruct historical phases: from initial discovery and administration by Iran, through the Qawasim period, British presence, post-1948 British occupation, the 1971 Iranian reoccupation and Memorandum of Understanding, and the 1992 UAE assertions. Each phase is interdependent and essential to establish continuity of sovereignty. All in all, the UAE's assumption as successor to the Trucial States under decolonization lacks sufficient legal grounding.



People of Tehran celebrate the liberation of Abu Musa, the Greater Tunb, and the Lesser Tunb by the Iranian Navy in 1971 from British occupation.

• WIKIMEDIA

AFC Champions League Elite: Tractor's Hosseinzadeh pleased with strong league-stage finish



Tractor striker Amirhossein Hosseinzadeh (99) reacts after scoring during a 2-0 victory over Al Gharafa in the AFC Champions League Elite in Al Rayyan, Qatar, on February 17, 2026.

APC

Sports Desk

Tractor FC striker Amirhossein Hosseinzadeh praised his side's "outstanding performance" after a 2-0 away victory over Al Gharafa on Tuesday, as the Persian Gulf Pro League champion wrapped up the league stage of the AFC Champions League Elite on a high note. The result marked Tractor's fifth win in eight matches, lifting the Iranian side to third place in the West Zone's 12-team standings with 17 points – five behind leaders Al Hilal and level with Al Ahli Saudi.

Mahdi Hashemnejad broke the deadlock on the hour at Thani bin Jassim Stadium, sweeping home the rebound after goalkeeper Khalifa Ababacar parried Regi Lushkja's initial effort. Hosseinzadeh sealed the victory with 10 minutes remaining,

latching onto a cutback from Masoud Zaerkazemayn. The forward skipped past a challenge from Aron Gunnarsson before firing into the top corner to put the result beyond doubt.

"First of all, I have to say thanks to Dragan Skocic, our previous head coach who brought really bright days to the club and helped us reach our dreams," Hosseinzadeh said of the Croatian manager, who parted ways with the club on the eve of the match.

"We played a very good game and our performance was outstanding. We showed the best version of ourselves and I'm also very happy with my goal. "We qualified with the best result possible, which is third, and now we turn our attention back to domestic matches before switching focus to the knockout stage."

The third-place finish sets up a round-of-16 clash with the United Arab Emirates' Shabab Al Ahli – a repeat of the sides' opening league-phase encounter, which ended in a 1-1 draw in Dubai last October.

Shabab Al Ahli suffered a 4-3 defeat to Al Ahli Saudi in a seven-goal thriller in Jeddah on Monday but still secured sixth place with 11 points to advance to the knockout rounds.

The Emirati side will host the first leg of the tie on March 2-3, with the return fixture scheduled for the following week. Elsewhere in the last 16, Qatar's Al Sadd will take on Saudi heavyweights Al Hilal, with the first leg in Doha, while Al Duhail face Al Ahli Saudi in another Qatar-Saudi Arabia matchup. The UAE's Al Wahda will meet Saudi Pro League champion Al Ittihad.

Teenage Esmali emerges as Iran's new wrestling prodigy

Sports Desk

Amirhossein Esmali has become the latest teenage wrestler to capture national attention after achieving a rare double success in both freestyle and Greco-Roman superheavyweight categories at the Iranian Cadet Championships

within the span of seven days. The 16-year-old from East Azerbaijan Province claimed silver in the Greco-Roman 110kg division earlier this month, falling 3-1 to Aliakbar Akou in the final. He responded in emphatic fashion in freestyle, securing the national title with a 6-1 victory over Pouyan Esmaeilzadeh



Iranian wrestler Amirhossein Esmali has his hand raised as the winner in the 110kg final at the National U17 Freestyle Championships in Kerman, Iran, on February 13, 2026.

IAWF

last Friday.

The achievement has marked Esmali as one of Iran's most promising young talents.

Such a feat is uncommon in Iranian wrestling, where athletes typically specialize in one discipline. Excelling at national level in both freestyle and Greco-Roman underscores Esmali's versatility and technical maturity at a young age.

His rise comes amid a broader upswing in wrestling in East Azerbaijan, a province that has experienced notable progress over the past year. The emergence of new talents such as Esmali has fueled optimism about the region's future contribution to Iran's storied wrestling tradition.

Following his performances, Esmali has earned call-ups to the training camps of both the national under-17 freestyle and Greco-Roman teams. However, after clinching the freestyle national title – and with major continental and world championships on the horizon – he is expected to focus on freestyle as he pursues a place on Iran's squad for the upcoming Asian and World Championships.

AFC Champions League Two: Esteghlal coach Sa Pinto on the brink after last-16 exit



Sports Desk

Esteghlal's Portuguese head coach, Ricardo Sa Pinto, is facing an uncertain future after his side was dramatically eliminated from the AFC Champions League Two by Jordan's Al Hussein.

The Jordanian Pro League champions mounted a late comeback at the Amman International Stadium, securing a 3-2 victory on the night and a 4-2 aggregate win to book their place in the quarterfinals of Asia's second-tier club competition.

Needing to overturn a one-goal deficit from the first leg, Esteghlal began brightly, applying early pressure. Saed Al Rosan was forced to clear a dangerous cross from Saleh Hardani, and their aggressive start paid off in the fourth minute when they were awarded a penalty.

Pedro Henrique brought down Mohammadhossein Eslami inside the box, and after a VAR review, Jasir Asani stepped up to convert the spot-kick and give the visitors the lead.

Al Hussein struggled to break down a resolute Esteghlal defense in the first half but came close in the 38th minute when Mahmoud Al Mardi drilled a shot into the side-netting from a tight angle.

The home side's pressure finally told two minutes later. Ali Hajabi rose highest to power home a header from Al Mardi's corner, leveling the night and putting Al Hussein ahead on aggregate heading into the interval.

Esteghlal hit back just four minutes after the restart. Asani grabbed his second of

the game, pouncing on a loose ball and curling a precise effort past goalkeeper Yazeed Abulaila to restore his team's advantage on the night.

The Iranian side pushed for a third goal that would have swung the tie back in their favor. In the 61st minute, Eslami's teasing cross from a set-piece found Rouzbeh Cheshmi, but his effort was straight at Abulaila.

The introduction of substitutes Obieda Al Namarnah and Yousef Abu Al Jazar proved decisive for Al Hussein. With 14 minutes remaining, Esteghlal's goalkeeper spilled a cross from Yousef Abu Jaboloush, and Abu Al Jazar reacted quickest to turn in Aref Al Haj's miscued shot.

Despite a late surge from Esteghlal, their hopes were extinguished in the fifth minute of added time when Obieda Al Namarnah scored a third for the hosts to seal the comeback and a place in the last eight.

The defeat has ignited intense speculation in the Iranian media regarding Sa Pinto's future. With the team struggling for consistency this season, several names, including former coaches Javad Nekounam and Sohrab Bakhtiarizadeh, have already been touted as potential replacements.

Esteghlal will still have all to play on the domestic front, sitting third in the Persian Gulf Pro League table with 35 points from 20 games – one point behind leaders Golgohar Sirjan with a game in hand and trailing Tractor on goal difference.

The Capital Blues are also in contention with a second successive Iranian Hazfi Cup trophy and will face Khaybar in the quarterfinals.

Iranian Women's Volleyball Premier League:

Malavan seals playoff spot as Majan stuns Saipa

Sports Desk

The latest round of fixtures at the Iranian Women's Volleyball Premier League delivered high drama on Tuesday, with key results shaping the playoff race across the two groups of the regular season. In Group B, Malavan Tehran clinched a playoff berth after edging Mehregan Shiraz 3-2 in a five-set thriller at Tehran's Volleyball House. After dropping the opening two sets, Malavan mounted an impressive comeback, winning 25-15, 25-21 and 15-8 to secure its fourth victory of

the campaign and confirm qualification as the group's fourth-placed side.

Elsewhere in Group A, Majan Mazandaran produced the standout result of the matchday by sweeping group leader and defending champion Saipa in straight sets (25-18, 25-15, 25-21). The victory marked Majan's seventh win of the season and lifted the team to 20 points, tightening the race at the top of the table. Naft Omidiyeh defeated Mes Rafsanjan 3-1 to keep their playoff hopes alive, with the final qualifying spot now set to be decided in the last round of the



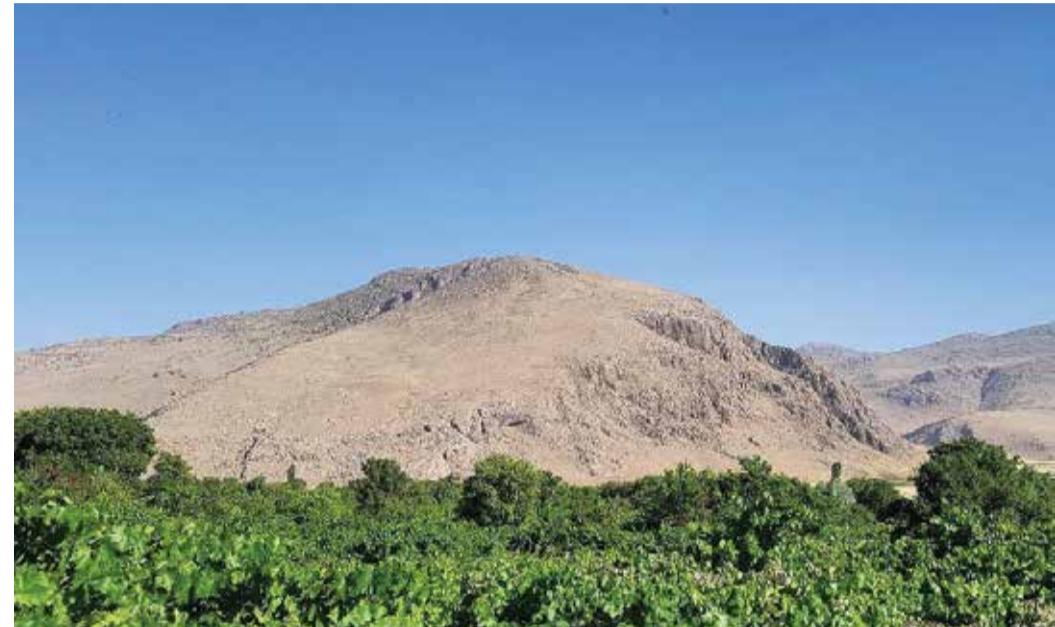
league stage.

Meanwhile, Shahr Arka Alborz maintained top spot in Group B after a dominant straight-sets victory over Shahin Bandar Ameri.

Two matches were awarded as forfeits after team withdrawals, further impacting the standings heading into the decisive final week.

volleyball.ir

Kandoleh village preserves culture, nature in heart of Dinavar



Iranica Desk

Nestled in the lush mountains of Dinavar, a village awakens the senses with the scent of ripe grapes, the sounds of the Hawrami language, and the vibrant colors of Kurdish clothing. Kandoleh is a place where history, culture, tradition, and nature come together, offering visitors an experience that is not only beautiful to see but unforgettable to feel. Milad Ataei, a journalist from Kermanshah Province, wrote, "Traveling to Kandoleh is not a journey across geography — it is a journey into a feeling." That feeling begins on the winding mountain roads of Dinavar and takes root at the first glimpse of mud-brick houses and expansive vineyards, gradually settling into the soul. Here, time

moves differently; the rush of city life feels distant. Everything unfolds with patience, just like the grape clusters that ripen slowly and sweetly under the September sun, according to chtn.ir.

Kandoleh, designated as a tourism-focused village in Kermanshah, is more than a destination — it is a living story, a narrative of human coexistence with nature and culture. Its historically registered structures, with narrow alleys and mud-brick homes, testify to centuries of life and continuity. But Kandoleh is not bound to the past. Today, it thrives. The presence of four eco-lodges allows visitors not only to see the village but to live it. Staying in these homes means waking to the smell of freshly baked bread, sipping tea on a veranda

overlooking the mountains, and listening to life flow quietly and naturally.

Many recognize Kandoleh for its grapes. Vineyards, spreading like a green carpet across the slopes, produce some of the finest grapes in the region. Here, grapes are more than an agricultural product — they are part of the village's identity. Every year, the Kandoleh Grape Festival is held, blending taste, color, and music. During these days, the village comes alive, filled with laughter, local melodies, and the energy of its people, transforming Kandoleh into a living stage of culture.

What truly distinguishes Kandoleh, however, is its unique cultural spirit. The villagers speak Hawrami Kurdish, a language that itself is a valuable

and ancient heritage. This cultural identity is reflected in their clothing as well. Women wear traditional Kurdish garments made of vibrant, eye-catching fabrics, moving like living flowers through the village streets. These colors are not just beautiful — they proclaim identity. Their clothing is more than attire; it tells a story of a living culture proudly preserved. Ceremonies also hold a special place in Kandoleh. The village's Ta'zieh — a traditional theatrical ritual registered as a national cultural heritage — is one of its most significant cultural expressions. In Kandoleh, Ta'zieh is more than a performance; it is an emotional and spiritual experience in which villagers participate wholeheartedly. The ritual connects generations and

remains an inseparable part of local life. The landscape — mountains, vineyards, and a sky full of stars at night — remains pristine. Here, nature is untouched, and the authentic silence can still be heard. Perhaps Kandoleh's lasting charm lies in this perfect combination: history, culture, tradition, and nature. Tourists visiting Kandoleh are not mere observers; they become part of the story. They wake to the crow of a rooster, stroll through village streets, converse with locals, and watch sunsets among the vineyards. Kandoleh invites visitors to pause — to see, listen, and feel. Here, there is no need to rush. Every moment offers a chance to discover beauty — in the smiles of its people, the colors of its clothing, the taste of its grapes, and the quiet of its mountains.

In an era when many tourist destinations have lost their identity amid the rush of development, Kandoleh has preserved its authenticity. The village shows that development, when guided by respect for culture and nature, can become not a threat but an opportunity for continuity. Kandoleh is not just a village; it is an experience. An experience that lingers in the heart long after the journey ends. Perhaps in the taste of a grape cluster, the sound of a Hawrami word, or the sight of a woman in colorful clothing walking along a stone alley — this is Kandoleh's secret: a place where travel becomes memory.

Excavations show prehistoric occupation of Sarcham Hill

Iranica Desk

Preliminary studies indicate that Sarcham Hill in Holeyhan, Ilam Province, was inhabited from prehistoric times through the historic era, including the Bronze Age. Habibollah Mahmoudian, a prehistoric archaeology graduate, told ISNA that Sarcham Hill is located 700 meters northeast of Sarcham village in Holeyhan District. The Holeyhan-Piazabad asphalt road runs along the northern edge of the hill. He explained that the Zardalan area, part of Holeyhan, encompasses Piazabad village as its center and lies at the far end of Ilam Province. The site sits at an elevation of 952 meters above sea level, with the permanent Sey-

mareh River flowing to its east and southeast.

Mahmoudian noted that Zardalan comprises two distinct climatic zones: the northern highlands rise above 2,500 meters and have a temperate mountainous climate, while the low-lying southern areas along the Seymareh River, where the hill is located, experience mild and warm winters.

The archaeologist added that Sarcham Hill lies east of the Towhid Town-Piazabad road, within agricultural lands. Seasonal river erosion from the "Pol-e Jamshid" stream has exposed much of the archaeological layers at a depth of five meters.

Local livelihoods are based on agriculture and animal husbandry, with both irrigated and dryland crops

cultivated in the region. Mahmoudian emphasized that erosion by Pol-e Jamshid has revealed the main archaeological layers, which contain stone and pottery artifacts, blades, tools, and bone remains. The pottery, largely handmade, includes both simple and decorated types. The density of pottery and stone blades underlines the hill's significance.

During field surveys in Zardalan, a total of 26 pottery fragments and 14 stone tools and blades were recovered and studied. The pottery interiors are brown and red clay, often decorated with parallel lines and bands.

Surface finds, including stone tools and blades on the valley heights of Pol-e Jamshid, suggest that the site belongs to prehistoric periods.



Water inflow revives Kani Barazan Wetland

Iranica Desk

With the inflow of seven million cubic meters of surface runoff through channels and drainage systems leading to Kani Barazan Wetland, this international wetland has been revitalized and is now hosting 20,000 birds, according to the head of the Department of Environmental Protection of Mahabad in West Azerbaijan Province.

Announcing the development, Farouq Soleymani said that following the renewed restoration of Kani Barazan Wetland, thousands of aquatic and semi-aquatic birds have entered the area for the purposes of overwintering, resting, and feeding, according to chtn.ir. He added that the presence of both native and migratory birds in Kani Barazan Wetland during the current season demonstrates that the wetland is in a favorable condition in terms of food availability and the level of security required for wildlife.



Referring to the arrival of aquatic and semi-aquatic birds in the wetland, he noted that a wide range of species are currently present in this international habitat, including greylag geese, teals, coots, mallards, ruddy shelducks, and sandpipers. Soleymani emphasized that given the favorable conditions of Kani Barazan International Wetland during this season and the continued inflow of surface waters into the wetland

body, it is expected that in early spring the area will host thousands of birds, including endangered species such as the white-headed duck, for nesting and breeding.

Referring to the protective measures in place for the birds of Kani Barazan Wetland, he stated that environmental rangers are currently stationed at the birdwatching site on a round-the-clock basis and are actively safeguarding the wetland.

Minister: Comprehensive free zone tourism plan signed, targeting €6b health revenue



Reza Salehi-Amiri
IRNA

Arts & Culture Desk

Iran's Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Minister Reza Salehi-Amiri announced on Wednesday the finalization of a comprehensive plan in the form of a memorandum of understanding for the development of tourism capacities across the country's free zones.

"My colleagues met with the heads of free zones this week for joint cooperation. Yesterday, in a meeting with [Reza] Masrour, the head of free zones, we agreed to develop tourism infrastructure, create attractions, and provide necessary incentives to guide people to islands and free zones. We also signed a comprehensive program in the form

of a memorandum of understanding for the development of tourism capacities in free zones," Salehi-Amiri said.

"Free zones are one of the hubs that, if we pay attention to them, some people who travel to neighboring countries will be inclined to change their travel to free zones like Kish. The more we invest in free zones, the more tourism revenues within the country will be strengthened."

The minister also underlined the Islamic Republic's plan to draw two million health tourists in the next two years.

"Based on the Seventh Development Plan, our commitment until 2028 is to attract two million health tourists and generate 6 billion euros in revenue, and this plan will definitely be operational-

ized," Salehi-Amiri said. "Currently, Kish Island has 50 active hotels and 50 hotels under construction, and this city is one of our tourism hubs. Other free zones like Qeshm also possess such capacities," he added. Salehi-Amiri enumerated the merits of health tourism in Iran, saying, "First, we are one of the few countries in the region that has a very high specialized capacity of doctors and specialists. The second point is that there are more than 800 hospitals, treatment centers, and advanced equipment in the country, and the third point is affordability. The average costs in Iran are one-fifth of the region and one-tenth of Europe, and patients receive the same services for one-fifth of the cost in Iran."

Tehran, Riyadh underscore continued cooperation in Hajj pilgrimage

Arts & Culture Desk

Alireza Rashidian, the head of Iran's Hajj and Pilgrimage Organization, met on Tuesday with the Saudi Arabian ambassador to Tehran, discussing the progress of joint cooperation between the two countries in the field of Hajj and Umrah pilgrimage, and emphasizing the expansion of ties to provide appropriate services to pilgrims.

In a meeting with Abdullah bin Saud al-Anzi, Rashidian — as reported by IRNA — appreciated the cooperation of the Saudi side in providing services to Iranian pilgrims and underscored their continuation in the upcoming Hajj in the next Iranian calendar year.

Pointing to the 1405 Hajj agreement, he stated, "The precise implementation of executive and cultural programs within the framework of the understandings reached can pave the way for improving the quality of services and increasing pilgrim satisfaction."

Rashidian also underscored the necessity of accelerating executive processes, timely coordination, and continuous technical interactions between the two



Alireza Rashidian (r), the head of Iran's Hajj and Pilgrimage Organization, meets with Saudi Arabian Ambassador to Tehran, Abdullah bin Saud al-Anzi, on February 17, 2026.
IRNA

countries, adding, "Cohesive and planned cooperation plays an important role in facilitating pilgrimage affairs during the Hajj season."

The Saudi ambassador, for his part, praised Iranian pilgrims as among the most disciplined and law-abiding pilgrims, considering them a role model in adhering to rules and regulations.

Both sides expressed hope that with the continuation of such talks, joint cooperation in the field of Hajj and pilgrimage will be further strengthened.

The development comes as some Muslim and Arab countries declared Wednesday as

the first day of the holy fasting month of Ramadan. The countries such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait, the UAE, Yemen, Palestine and Lebanon declared Wednesday as the first day of Ramadan, while other countries such as Iran, Oman, Jordan, Syria and Egypt announced that Thursday is the start of the holy fasting month.

Iran among top 10 countries with highest obesity rate: Deputy minister

Social Desk

The deputy health minister raised the alarm on Wednesday that Iran is among the top 10 countries with the highest prevalence of obesity across the world, stressing, "In our country, one out of every three students suffers from obesity and overweight, which is a serious warning for the future health of the country."

Alireza Raeisi was reported by IRNA as saying that the issue of obesity should not be reduced merely to weight loss and fitness, adding that obesity or overweight signal changes in the body, ultimately leading to an imbalance in the consumption of macronutrients and micronutrients.

"The consumption of unhealthy foods in Iran is very high and increasing. Statistics show that the rate of obesity in the country has had a sharp upward trend from 2022 to 2024."

The deputy minister took to the task some incorrect beliefs and traditions, such as "chubby children are more lovable," saying, "This wrong attitude of parents leads to childhood obesity, and later,



as the individual ages, no one can be held accountable for its complications and consequences."

Stressing that obesity and overweight in the adolescent age group is very concerning in the country, Raeisi said,

"One of the main reasons for this trend is the sharp decrease in physical activity, especially among children and adolescents, because most of these individuals spend many hours of the day in virtual spaces without the slightest physical movement, which in recent years has replaced playing computer games.

This, along with the lack of necessary physical activity, has had and continues to have irreversible consequences for individuals (now and in middle age)."

Pointing to weight loss as one of the complications of many diseases such as uncontrolled diabetes, hyperthyroidism, and even cancer, he stressed that in such cases, the amount of weight loss itself is not important, but rather the speed of the individual's weight changes is important, and if this weight change (decrease or increase) happens in a short period, it can be dangerous.

Joint drill with ...

The experience of US engagement with other international actors has shown that Washington only backs down when confronted with "hard power" and "balanced coalitions."

Therefore, Russia's presence alongside Iran can be interpreted not only as defense convergence but also as a sign of Iran's transnational "deterrence" and its transformation into a deterrence network against NATO and US expansionism. The exercise signals to the American side that the cost of any miscalculation in the region would mean confrontation with a united front of Eastern powers, not Iran alone. The clear message is that Iran has shifted from being an easy military target to becoming a hub of regional defense convergence against the West's destabilizing adventurism.

Should Moscow's participation in this

exercise be assessed within the framework of routine cooperation, or does it carry broader strategic dimensions under current conditions, particularly in light of regional geopolitical developments and the war in Ukraine?

Viewing this exercise as a routine event would amount to ignoring the realities of the international arena. Today, the international community is witnessing the formation of a global "resistance front" against US hegemony, with the Ukraine war and tensions in West Asia representing two fronts of the same confrontation. Cooperation between Tehran and Moscow at this juncture is entirely strategic, as both countries are under the most severe unlawful pressure from Washington. Russia has come to understand that its security vis-à-vis NATO is intertwined with Iran's security in the Persian Gulf and the Sea of Oman. Accordingly,

the drill carries a message beyond military cooperation and stands as a symbol of the political will of the two powers to reshape the unipolar order and challenge US maritime dominance in international waters.

Given other recent drills by the IRGC in the Strait of Hormuz, what impact will these moves have on US security calculations and those of regional actors?

US decision-makers are highly pragmatic and clearly understand the language of "cost-benefit." When asymmetric drills by the IRGC in the Strait of Hormuz—which target the vulnerabilities of America's classical fleet—are combined with oceanic maneuvers by Iran and Russia, commanders at United States Central Command realize that their aircraft carriers in the region are not instruments of power but rather "large and vulnerable targets." This situation makes

the "security dilemma" unsolvable for the United States. For regional countries, the message is equally clear: Washington is unable to safeguard even its own hegemony, let alone guarantee the security of its partners. As a result, this display of battlefield leverage will push US regional allies to rethink their calculations and steer clear of destabilizing policies. Ultimately, the outcome of Iran-Russia military convergence offers a tangible model of regional collective security that could, in the future, draw in new members from among regional states.

This exercise comes shortly after the second round of Iran-US talks in Geneva. Does this timing point to a form of synergy between diplomacy and hard power in Iran's approach?

This is certainly the case. Historical ex-

perience and behavioral studies of the United States show that Washington grants no concessions at the negotiating table unless compelled to do so on the "ground." Holding this exercise alongside the Geneva talks constitutes precisely the leverage Iran's diplomats require. The move reminds the US team that its "options on the table," particularly military threats, have lost their edge, and that Iran is negotiating from a position of strength, relying on indigenous capabilities. In fact, the exercise provides a concrete backing for diplomacy, ensuring that the other side understands that if the diplomatic path is blocked, it will face a powerful Iran at sea and on land that does not fear confrontation. It appears that Iran's preemptive initiatives in the maritime domain will, in the future, catch the United States off guard with many surprises.