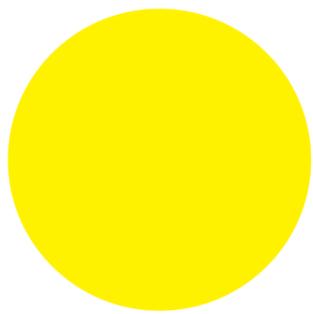


Tehran demands evidence as Trump claims 32,000 riot deaths

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President Masoud Pezeshkian (back row, 4th R) poses for a group photo with Iranian Paralympics medalists during a ceremony in Tehran, Iran on February 21, 2026. president.ir

A president of contradictions who seeks peace through war

EDITORIAL

A massive military buildup in the Middle East has pushed the United States to the brink of a full-scale war with Iran. The stated aim is to force Iran to dismantle its nuclear program, a demand Tehran has so far refused, arguing that as a signatory to the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) it is entitled to enrich uranium.

A report by The Wall Street Journal suggests President Donald Trump may opt for an initial limited strike on Iran, targeting several military

and government sites to strong-arm Iran into yielding to the kind of deal he has in mind.

First, such a course has already been tried and failed. During Israeli strikes on Iran in June, the US bombed three Iranian nuclear facilities. Since then, Trump has repeatedly bragged that "Operation Midnight Hammer" took out Iran's nuclear program entirely. Eight months have passed since that attack, yet the deal the US sought has not been clinched.

Why, then, would the United States double down on a path that has al-

ready been tested unless it harbors goals beyond dismantling Iran's nuclear program, namely unilateral action without a UN mandate to topple a sovereign state in breach of international law?

Moreover, if Trump maintains that Iran's nuclear program has been destroyed, what justification remains for another attack to coerce Tehran into giving up a program he claims no longer exists?

Trump has once again shown that a second-term US president, especially a Republican with far-right inclinations, can prove highly dan-

gerous on the international stage. Since 2016 and throughout his 2024 campaign, Trump has trumpeted a pledge to end "endless wars." Yet he has now sent the largest US military deployment to the Middle East since 2003, gearing up for another conflict, a useless war over an issue that could readily be settled through diplomacy. As Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi has said, a deal between Tehran and Washington is within reach if both sides show a measure of "creativity and flexibility."

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Israeli onslaught claims 12 lives, injures dozens across Lebanon

Iran rebukes regime's massacre, ceasefire breaches

International Desk

Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman in a statement on Saturday condemned Israel's new deadly attacks on Lebanon, calling for immediate action by the United Nations to stop the regime's aggression against the Arab country.

According to Lebanon's Health Ministry, the Friday's attacks in eastern and southern Lebanon killed 12 people and injured at least 25 others.

The ministry said 10 people lost their lives after a series of attacks on the Bekaa Valley in eastern Lebanon on Friday evening.

A Hezbollah official said on Saturday that eight members of the group were among the victims.

The Israeli forces also launched an attack on the Ain al-Hilweh Palestinian refugee camp in Saida in the south, killing two people and wounding several others.

The refugee camp was the target of an Israeli attack last November, during which 13 people, including 11 children, were killed.

Lebanese President Joseph Aoun on Saturday condemned the attacks, which took place days after the government announced that the army will start implementing the second phase of its plan to disarm Hezbollah in southern Lebanon.

He called the attacks "a blatant act of aggression aimed at thwarting diplomatic efforts" by the United States and other nations to establish stability.

Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baqaei condemned the attacks as blatant violations of Lebanon's national sovereignty and territorial integrity, as well as the November 2024 ceasefire agreement. He emphasized the direct responsibility of the ceasefire guarantors, the US and France, for the crimes committed by the regime.



A heavily-damaged building is pictured in the village of Ali al-Nahri in the center of Lebanon's eastern Bekaa Valley region on February 21, 2026, following Israeli strikes. ● AFP

Baqaei also stressed the necessity of immediate action by the UN and its Security Council to fulfill their legal responsibilities to stop the Israeli military aggression.

Israel has kept up regular strikes on Lebanon despite a November 2024 ceasefire that sought to halt more than a year of hostilities with Hezbollah. In a report published by UNIFIL on December 12, 2025, more than 10,000 violations by Israeli armed forces have been documented since the ceasefire agreement, including air and ground aggressions that have breached Lebanese sovereignty. According to Lebanon's Health Ministry, from October 8, 2023, until the ceasefire, the Israeli regime killed 4,000 Lebanese



citizens, and wounded at least 17,000 others, most of them women and children.

Lebanon has filed a complaint with the UN about the repeated Israeli violations, urging the UN

Security Council to push Israel to end its attacks and fully withdraw from the country.

Tehran demands evidence as Trump claims 32,000 riot deaths

International Desk

Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi rejected US president's claim that 32,000 civilians were killed during the recent riots across the country, demanding evidence for his claim.

"Fulfilling our pledge of full transparency towards our own people, Iran's Government has already published a comprehensive list of all 3117 victims of recent terrorist operation, including about 200 officers. If anyone disputes accuracy of our data, please share any evidence," the Iranian foreign minister said in a post on X.

Araghchi's comments came hours after US President Donald Trump told reporters that 32,000 people were killed during the protests. He did not offer a source for the death toll.



"32,000 people were killed over a relatively short period of time," Trump told reporters, saying, "I feel very badly for the people of Iran."

Iran's Foundation of Martyrs and Veterans Affairs announced in a statement on January 21 that a total of 3,117 people had lost their lives during the protests, adding that 2,427 of those killed were innocent civilians and security personnel. Protests began on December 28,

with merchants in Tehran's central bazaar closing shops to protest the collapse of Iran's currency. But they turned violent after foreign-backed rioters hijacked the legitimate protests.

Iranian officials have linked the riots and terrorist acts to the US and the Israeli regime.

The US and Israel's Mossad have admitted their involvement on the ground, with former US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo tweeting, "Happy New Year to every Iranian in the streets. Also, to every Mossad agent walking beside them." In a Persian-language social media post, Mossad encouraged rioters to "Go out together into the streets. The time has come," adding that Mossad agents are with the rioters "not only from a distance and verbally. We are with [them] in the field."

President reaffirms Iran will not cave in to bullying

International Desk

President Masoud Pezeshkian on Saturday reiterated that the Islamic Republic will not give in to bullying and the troubles the enemies have created for the country.

Addressing a group of Iranian Paralympics medalists in Tehran, Pezeshkian praised the disabled athletes who managed to win medals during the latest Paralympics Games, which were held in France's capital in 2024.

"You did not give in to problems, we either. Despite all the problems they have caused and the wounds they have inflicted upon the body of our society, will not give in to the problems and the bullying," the Iranian president said.

He was referring to the sanctions and restrictions that the country's enemies have imposed on Iran and their support for the recent riots that led to the death of thousands of Iranians in January.

The Iranian president underlined that the government will do its utmost to overcome all the shortages and hardships through unity.

More than 3,000 Iranians were killed during the last month's riots which were



Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian addresses a group of Iranian Paralympics medalists in Tehran on February 21, 2026. ● IRNA

triggered by protests over economic problems.

Sanctions imposed on Iran by Western countries during the past decades have led to the devaluation of Iran's currency, which have worsened economic woes in Iran.

Navy commander calls for increased naval collaboration at MILAN 2026 drill

Iranian Navy Commander Rear Admiral Shahram Irani called for the enhancement of bilateral and multilateral naval collaboration during a sequence of high-level discussions at the MILAN 2026 international naval exercise in India.

Rear Admiral Irani conducted individual meetings with Admiral Htein Win, the Commander of Myanmar's Navy, Admiral Aleksandr Alekseyevich Moiseyev, the Commander of the Russian Navy, and Lieutenant General Mohammad Bin Abdulrahman Bin Hamed Al-Gharibi, the Chief of Staff of the Royal Saudi Naval Forces, to explore methods for enhancing collaboration in the maritime sector, Press TV reported.

During the meetings, senior commanders highlighted the strategic importance of oceans in economic growth and sustainable security, stressing the necessity to enhance professional interactions among



navies, share training teams, conduct collaborative exercises, and leverage each other's technical and operational capabilities. Topics such as fighting piracy, safeguarding maritime communication routes, maritime search and rescue operations, and managing maritime crises were also key points of discussion.

Elaborating on Iran's stance on promoting collective security and regional collaboration, the Iranian



Iranian Navy Commander Rear Admiral Shahram Irani (L) meets with his Russian counterpart Admiral Aleksandr Alekseyevich Moiseyev on the sidelines of the MILAN 2026 international naval exercise in Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh, India, on February 21, 2026. ● IRNA

Navy commander characterized multinational drills as an effective means for fostering trust, improving operational coordination, and sharing experiences between nations.

Exercise MILAN 2026 is the 13th edition of the Indian Navy's biennial multilateral maritime drill, conducted in Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh.

This year's event aligns with the International Fleet Review (IFR) and the IONS Conclave, featuring participation from over 72 nations and involving more than 60 warships.



Mohammad Ali Rajabi
Cartoonist

CARTOON



Pezeshkian gov't posts 7% export growth, 37.1% import drop

Economy Desk

Trade data covering the first 18 months of President Masoud Pezeshkian's administration show exports rose 7% while imports fell 37.1% compared with the same period in the previous administration, according to a report by IRNA.

The report said imports declined from \$94.7 billion to \$93.4 billion as part of policies aimed at managing imports to support domestic production. Exports reached \$85.6 billion during the period, marking what it described as significant growth from the comparable earlier timeframe.

Expanding non-oil exports is a key government strategy, pursued through increasing production and investment in mining and mineral industries. Last year, exports of 23 million tons of mineral and processed steel-chain products were affected by imbalances that prevented completion of the value chain and eliminated the potential for a \$4 billion increase in exports. The total value of metal products produced and sold domestically exceeds \$35 billion, resulting in \$14 billion in non-oil exports

and reducing reliance on imports of raw materials for other industries.

Trade statistics for the first 10 months of the current Iranian year, which began on March 21, show the trade balance improved from a \$10 billion deficit to a \$4 billion deficit, while transit performance improved from minus 15% to minus 4%.

Non-oil exports reached 130 million tons worth \$45 billion, compared with 128 million tons valued at \$48 billion in the same period a year earlier, indicating a 1.33% increase in export volume.

By destination, the largest share of Iranian exports went to China at more than \$10.918 billion, accounting for 24.25%, followed by Iraq with \$7.917 billion (17.59%), United Arab Emirates with \$6.448 billion (14.32%), Turkey with \$5.66 billion (12.57%) and Afghanistan with \$2.088 billion (4.64%).

Imports during the same 10-month period fell 15.5% to \$49 billion from \$57.1 billion a year earlier, a decline the report attributed to policies supporting domestic production and prioritizing imports of cheaper essential and intermediate goods.



Among suppliers, the United Arab Emirates accounted for more than 30% of total imports at about \$14 billion, followed by China at \$13.439 billion (27.37%), Turkey at \$7.921 billion (16.13%), India at \$1.547 billion (3.15%) and Germany at \$1.436 billion (2.92%).

Iran's exports to Russia forecasted at \$1.4b as trade expands, chamber says



By Sadeq Dehqan
Staff writer

INTERVIEW

Iran's exports to Russia are projected to reach about \$1.4 billion this year, up from \$267 million in 2019 and more than \$1 billion last year, Kambiz Mirkarimi, a board member of the Iran-Russia Joint Chamber of Commerce, told Iran Daily. Iran and Russia have set a medium-term target of \$30 billion in bilateral trade, which he said is fully achievable within five years if transport and banking infrastructure is completed.

The three-day joint commission on economic and trade cooperation between the two countries concluded on Wednesday with the signing of a cooperation document and four memorandums of understanding, he said.

The 19th Joint Commission was co-chaired by Iran's Oil Minister Mohsen Paknejad and Russia's

Energy Minister Sergei Tsivilov. Many past understandings, with obstacles removed, have entered the implementation phase.

The Iran-Russia economic commission has been held for years, alternating annually between the two countries, Mirkarimi said. Before 2018, many agreements had limited impact, but ties later jumped and cooperation expanded. From 2019, Iran's exports surged, rising 61% that year from about \$267 million and exceeding \$1 billion last year. Exports are forecast to reach roughly \$1.4 billion this year.

Despite the growth, Iran's exports remain small compared with Russia's \$300 billion market, leaving significant room for expansion, he said, adding that infrastructure for continued growth is now in place.

On logistics, he said the North-South corridor linking Iran, Azerbaijan and Russia is highly important, with major investments made, roads and highways built and customs posts expanded. Shipping capacity on the Caspian Sea has increased to 120,000 tons this year and is expected to reach 150,000 tons

soon. A 7,500-ton vessel was recently added to the fleet and two more will be added by the end of 2026. Transit plays a crucial role in relations because the corridor is a major global route, he said.

According to the board member of the joint chamber, in rail, only completion of the Rasht-Astara segment remains for the entire rail route between Iran and Russia to be connected. Most land acquisition for the project has been completed and remaining stages are under way.

In finance, he said banking relations between the two countries are established and they have activated a financial mechanism as an alternative to SWIFT, though multiple exchange-rate regulations had limited full use of these capacities. With exchange-rate issues between the two countries now unified, exporters have no incentive to operate outside the banking network, which he said will boost trade. An Iranian bank in Russia purchases rubles and pays the rial equivalent in Iran, with obligations settled through a domestic system, creating a positive outlook for expanding ties.



The 19th Joint Commission on Economic and Trade Cooperation is co-chaired by Iran's Oil Minister Mohsen Paknejad and Russia's Energy Minister Sergei Tsivilov in Tehran on February 18, 2026.

IRNA

Russian companies have entered investment projects and serious negotiations are under way in the energy sector, including a proposal to transfer Russian gas through Iran to East Asia, which he said has gained importance following the halt of Russian gas exports to Europe. He said Iran's geographic position as an east-west and north-south crossroads should be used to develop energy and transport infrastructure. Chambers of commerce play an important role in exchanging trade delegations, organizing conferences and exhibitions and helping companies market products, he said, adding that knowledge of each other's markets must increase. With tariff reductions, standards and health regulations become more important, requiring increased activity by veterinary, plant quarantine and health authorities.

Imports from Russia have not grown as much as exports, moving bilateral trade toward balance, he said. According to Russian statistics, total trade is about \$5 billion, though he said Iranian figures differ. Based on Iranian data, exports are currently about \$1.4 billion and imports are around the same level, bringing trade close to equilibrium, whereas previously Iran's exports were only one-third or one-quarter of imports from Russia. Official trade volume stands at about \$3 billion, though he said the real figure is likely higher.

Minister hails gov't economic reform, reports no supply shortages



Gholamreza Nouri-Qezeljah
IRNA

Economy Desk

Iran's Agriculture Minister Gholamreza Nouri-Qezeljah said on Saturday that m+arkets have seen no supply shortages since the launch of a major government economic program two months ago, rejecting earlier predictions of deficits.

"There has not been a single day of shortages since the start of the government's major economic plan," he said, adding that the program had been implemented successfully and market needs had been met, IRNA reported. He said that despite heavy demand, work discipline had been maintained and visible satisfaction was now evident among lower-income groups.

The recent economic reforms represent the strongest support for producers, he said, adding that farmers will now be able to sell their products at fair prices and that price suppression or restrictive administered pricing would end.

Under a new policy approved by the government's economic team, all foreign currency transactions are now centralized in a single trading hall with

a negotiated rate closely aligned with market prices. The policy shifts foreign currency allocation from the beginning of the supply chain to direct subsidy transfers at the consumer end.

Nouri-Qezeljah said connecting Iran's production sector to global markets requires higher quality, adding that the future will be defined by competition and that research, education and extension sectors must mobilize fully because producers can only achieve profitability in the new environment through productivity gains.

President Masoud Pezeshkian has announced formation of a specialized government team operating under Articles 127 and 138 of the Constitution to monitor implementation, resolve obstacles and adjust the program as needed. The group includes the ministers of agriculture, industry, mines and trade, economy and welfare, the vice president of the Plan and Budget Organization, the Central Bank governor, the justice minister and other relevant officials. The team reviews data daily, identifies problems and issues corrective decisions.

Geneva negotiations shape future trajectory of American, Israeli policy



By **Rahman Ghahremanpour**
International affairs analyst

OPINION

At present, both the trajectory of diplomacy and the trajectory of military confrontation are advancing concomitantly. This signifies that, on the one hand, Iran and certain regional states are endeavoring to ensure that the diplomatic process attains fruition and to preclude the eruption of military hostilities; on the other hand, with respect to the option of military confrontation, the United States has arrived at the conclusion that Iran's prospective response would likely be more expansive and more vehement than what was witnessed during the 12-day war. Accordingly, the Pentagon is augmenting its military capabilities in the Middle East in order to maintain preparedness for diverse contingencies. Although it appears that the probability of military confrontation remains more pronounced, the prospect of diplomacy has not been extinguished and may be reinforced in the forthcoming weeks. Nevertheless, given the formidable impediments subsisting between the two parties, excessive optimism would be unwarranted, and a posture of prudence is requisite.

It appears that Netanyahu's visit to America, beyond the declared objectives he himself articulated — including opposition to a prospective agreement with Iran or efforts to circumscribe the scope of diplomacy — also encompassed a more consequential and less conspicuous objective, namely military and intelligence coordination with the United States in the event of military action against Iran. Moreover, the composition of the individuals who accompanied the prime minister of Israel on this visit consisted predominantly of intelligence and military figures, and the visit transpired subsequent to the joint military exercise conducted by the United States and Israel in the Gulf of Aqaba; a drill characterized as preparation for responding to Iran's potential and retaliatory measures in the event of an American attack on that country. Accordingly, although superficially it appeared that Netanyahu's principal objective was to forestall the formation of an agreement, the probability of reaching an agreement persisted; therefore, additional objectives must also be contemplated. It appears that this less-publicized or deliberately attenuated objective was, in actuality, the final coordination between the two parties regarding the manner of responding to Iranian measures or even the scenario of a prospective attack on Iran. Analogous visits were also observable prior to the 12-day war. Donald Trump did not explicitly repudiate such a scenario; rather, he declared that at present, he prefers to grant diplomacy an opportunity. This is precisely the same lexicon that had been heard from him in April 2025, at

a juncture when, simultaneously, the United States and Israel were engaging in clandestine coordination for military action against Iran.

It is accurate that divergences of opinion exist within the Republican Party regarding the manner of addressing Iran; however, the salient point is that to the extent the prospect of attaining an agreement becomes more attenuated, the number and gravitas of the agreement's proponents — both within the Republican Party and within Trump's electoral constituency, namely the "MAGA" current — will diminish commensurately. In other words, this matter is contingent and dependent upon the conduct of both parties, namely Iran and the United States. The further the two states recede from an agreement, and the more the probability of attaining it declines, the greater Netanyahu's latitude for maneuver in exploiting the fissure between Tehran and Washington becomes. Conversely, the greater the likelihood of an agreement, the more intensified Tel Aviv's exertions will become in order to disrupt it or, at minimum, to incorporate its preferred stipulations into the text of the agreement.

On this basis, and in continuation of the preceding point, it appears that under present conditions, both the diplomatic trajectory and the trajectory of military confrontation are simultaneously active, and Israel is pursuing both in tandem; this actor, on the one hand, endeavors to ensure that no agreement materializes, yet if it reaches the conclusion that preventing an agreement is infeasible, it will then strive to embed its preferred conditions within that framework. Concurrently, Israel is collaborating with the United States to realize the scenario of military action against Iran and to design deterrent measures in response to Tehran's potential reaction.

The reality is that Trump's decision is exceedingly consequential and determinative. This decision could metamorphose into



a serious threat to America's standing and to Trump's personal position in the international arena. If he proves incapable of actualizing his threats against Iran, or if, in the event of military action, he fails to attain his desired outcome, his credibility at the global level will be impaired. On the other hand, some in America, particularly Trump's adherents, believe that even if he consents merely to a symbolic action or ultimately refrains from action, his credibility will nonetheless diminish because he has articulated a statement that he has not implemented; whereas one of the principal components of Trump's political image has been that whatever he articulates, he executes. From this perspective, Trump occupies a predicament of considerable difficulty, and perhaps for this reason, a final decision has not yet been adopted, and he continues to endeavor, within the framework of diplomacy accompanied by pressure, to oscillate between the two options of diplomacy and military con-

frontation. Naturally, his preference is to attain his objectives at minimal cost, namely through a diplomatic agreement.

However, the issue is that Trump's desired agreement, from the vantage point of the Islamic Republic, is construed as a species of strategic capitulation, and for this reason, Tehran is unlikely to acquiesce. Simultaneously, as reference was made to the menacing dimension of this decision, some also contend that such action could constitute a golden opportunity for Trump; an opportunity to demonstrate his resolve to his adversaries at the international level, including countries such as Cuba, North Korea, and even Mexico, and to convey the message that he is determined to enfeeble his rivals and to increase the cost of defiance for them. It suffices to note that Trump, concomitantly with exerting pressure upon Iran, has adopted a stringent approach toward Cuba and, in the context of combating drug cartels, has directed pressure toward Mexico. Therefore, from the standpoint



To the extent the prospect of attaining an agreement becomes more attenuated, the number and gravitas of the agreement's proponents — both within the Republican Party and within Trump's electoral constituency, namely the "MAGA" current — will diminish commensurately. In other words, this matter is contingent and dependent upon the conduct of both parties, namely Iran and the United States. The further the two states recede from an agreement, and the more the probability of attaining it declines, the greater Netanyahu's latitude for maneuver in exploiting the fissure between Tehran and Washington becomes.

The illustration puts the picture of US President Donald Trump inside the geographical map of Iran.
● GAGE SKIDMORE/
GEOPOLITICAL DESK

of the principle of opportunity-centric calculation, this situation could be attractive and even seductive for Trump. He may compute that if he succeeds in attaining his objective in confrontation with Iran, the pathway for his subsequent actions in the Middle East will become more facilitative.

Regarding the impact of this matter upon the midterm congressional elections, it must be noted that electoral campaigns have not yet commenced in earnest. Nevertheless, current polling indicates that Trump does not occupy a particularly favorable position. Consequently, contrary to certain analyses that attribute military action necessarily to the reinforcement of his position, it may be asserted that Trump likely approaches the matter from the vantage point of opportunity-centric calculation and computes that confrontation with Iran, if successful, could contribute to consolidating his electoral base and attracting a portion of undecided voters in the midterm elections, thereby improving his standing relative to the present condition. With respect to the deployment of American military forces in the region, as previously indicated, the behavioral framework and policy of Trump is predicated upon "coercive diplomacy" or the exertion of pressure; a concept that, in its traditional signification, bears partial resemblance to "gunboat diplomacy," although it also possesses notable distinctions. Accordingly, Trump seeks both to preserve the pathway of negotiation and, simultaneously, to fortify America's military posture in the region. His recent statement that fear can compel Iran to reach an agreement is indicative of the mentality prevailing within his team; namely, that through the deployment of the American fleet in the region and the augmentation of deterrence levels, Iran might be impelled toward



This image, provided February 19, 2026, by the Iranian military and dated February 17, 2025, shows navy ships conducting operations during a joint drill by Iranian and Russian forces in the Indian Ocean.
● MASOUD NAZARI MEHRABI/IRANIAN ARMY

acceptance of an agreement; therefore, Trump simultaneously contemplates both dimensions of the matter: both the prospective opportunities inherent in such an approach and the threats emanating from it. What is determinative is his personal and his team's perception and calculation of these threats and opportunities. Outside the United States, including in Iran, there may exist the perception that such action could lead to the attenuation of Trump's position in the midterm elections. However, the crucial consideration is the calculation of Trump's team, particularly under circumstances in which he already does not occupy a favorable position in polling related to the midterms. In such an environment, the possibility exists that he will assume risk and undertake action in order to alter the situation. This analysis stands in contraposition to the classical and prevalent view that asserts that military intervention on the eve of midterm elections is detrimental to the incumbent president. Nonetheless, it must be observed that in the majority of cases, incumbent presidents in midterm elections encounter a reduction in their party's seats, and instances contrary to this rule have constituted exceptions.



● BRETT DEERING/GETTY IMAGES

Therefore, it may be argued that Trump is already confronted with a challenging electoral outlook and may pursue such measures not from a position of superiority, but as an instrument for reversing the situation and ameliorating his standing; meaning that, because he does not occupy a favorable position, he may regard such actions as a means of consolidating his electoral base and mobilizing his supporters in the midterm

elections. The report recently disseminated by Reuters and The New York Times can be analyzed within this very framework. The New York Times has alleged that the Pentagon is preparing for a multi-week conflict with Iran, and Reuters, employing different terminology, has corroborated this assessment. If one seeks to comprehend the prospective logic of this American action, it appears that Washington has

taken seriously Iran's threat to regionalize the war and, consequently, is fortifying its military deployments in the region in order to prevent the expansion of the conflict's scope and the infliction of damage upon its allies. From this perspective, the augmentation of America's military presence, rather than necessarily signifying a definitive decision to initiate war, may be construed as an effort to contain the scenario of war expansion.



Some in America, particularly Trump's adherents, believe that even if he consents merely to a symbolic action or ultimately refrains from action, his credibility will nonetheless diminish because he has articulated a statement that he has not implemented.

In this context, Tehran's reaction possesses determinative significance. It remains necessary to await developments and ascertain whether Iran will gravitate toward an approach that elevates the defense to an expansive and maximalist level and utilizes all its capacities to strike the United States and its allies, or whether it will endeavor to avert movement toward an apocalyptic and survival-centric war. This constitutes the pivotal ambiguity that appears to subsist both in Tehran and in Washington. In Washington, certain currents maintain that the trajectory of conflict should be directed toward regime change in Iran; conversely, within Iran, perspectives also exist asserting that expanding the scope of war and increasing the cost for the United States will preclude subsequent actions by Washington. This strategic ambiguity is an exceedingly significant matter, and the augmentation of the American fleet's presence in the region may likewise constitute an effort to manage this very uncertainty and to maintain preparedness for diverse scenarios.

The article first appeared in the Persian-language newspaper Etemad.

US will likely exhibit greater pliancy regarding nuclear issue



By Ali Bigdeli
Expert on American affairs

OPINION

I harbor the hope that the negotiations between Iran and the United States soon reach a decisive juncture, and that, to the fullest extent feasible, the prevailing tensions — particularly the security, and military tensions emanating from the United States — decrease. Trump has articulated the doctrine of "peace through strength" and continues to follow that very paradigm. During the preceding round of negotiations, of which five stages were convened, and at a moment when arrangements had been effectuated for the convening of the sixth round, they initiated a military assault; their rationale and allegation were that Iran had engaged in procrastination. The policies and international, and even regional, conditions are at present scarcely advantageous to Iran, and determinations must be calibrated in conformity with prevailing circumstances. They imposed sanctions upon our armed forces, including the Islamic Revolution's Guards Corps, declined to extend an invitation to Iran for the Munich Security Conference, and, in effect, the United States has transmuted pressure upon Iran into an international demand so that a global consensus against Iran may crystallize. Under the current circumstances, it is in our interest to embark upon a new trajectory and to possess an alternative for every conceivable contingency; however, if our political adversary acquires augmented latitude and we remain seated as mere spectators, time will elapse and culminate in detriment to us.



● ALHURRA

It is probable that during Mr. Larjani's visit to Oman and Qatar, certain matters were exchanged between Iran and the United States. Concurrently, I maintain that we possess only a limited temporal margin. The international system has

undergone transformation, and numerous alterations remain in progress. Modifications must likewise be instituted within Iran's foreign policy, and action must be undertaken in consonance with prevailing conditions and developments. Although the

decision in this regard is difficult, our inaction engenders complications. The United States will likely demonstrate greater flexibility regarding the nuclear issue. Of course, pursuant to the regulations of the International Atomic



● Oman's Foreign Minister Sayyid Badr bin Hamad Al Busaidi (R) meets with US Special Envoy Steve Witkoff (C) and President Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner ahead of the indirect US-Iran talks, in Geneva, Switzerland, on February 17, 2026.
● OMAN'S MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS



Under the current circumstances, it is in our interest to embark upon a new trajectory and to possess an alternative for every conceivable contingency; however, if our political adversary acquires augmented latitude and we remain seated as mere spectators, time will elapse and culminate in detriment to us.

Energy Agency, all countries retain the right to enrich below 4%. I propose that within the course of negotiations we preserve, on the basis of the JCPOA in 2015, enrichment at 3.67% and permit the Agency to dispatch its inspectors to Iran. In the President Pezeshkian's speech on February 11, he likewise declared that "we are honest with our own people and are not seeking nuclear weapons and are prepared for any verification." We are at a moment of decision; if we do not resolve the nuclear issue, time will be forfeited. In my estimation, we should permit the Agency's inspectors to enter Iran. This measure may constitute a form of preemption; otherwise, conditions will become severe. Developments indicate that if in any round of negotiations, we fail to approximate a final outcome, the probability of intensified tensions increases. Neither the United States desires war nor does Iran; that is to say, neither party exhibits an inclination toward warfare. The countries of the region are likewise sensitive to this matter, yet in light of the threat articulated by Trump, the probability of descent into tension and conflict remains conceivable. The prospect of sustaining simultaneous military confrontation with Israel and the United States does not even admit conceptual accommodation. Civil unrest, domestic dissatisfaction, subsistence conditions, and the instability of the international system have collectively engendered an atmosphere of general precariousness; nevertheless, endeavors must be undertaken, to the greatest extent feasible, to diminish the existing tensions.

The article first appeared in Persian on ISNA.

acceptance of an agreement; therefore, Trump simultaneously contemplates both dimensions of the matter: both the prospective opportunities inherent in such an approach and the threats emanating from it. What is determinative is his personal and his team's perception and calculation of these threats and opportunities. Outside the United States, including in Iran, there may exist the perception that such action could lead to the attenuation of Trump's position in the midterm elections. However, the crucial consideration is the calculation of Trump's team, particularly under circumstances in which he already does not occupy a favorable position in polling related to the midterms. In such an environment, the possibility exists that he will assume risk and undertake action in order to alter the situation. This analysis stands in contraposition to the classical and prevalent view that asserts that military intervention on the eve of midterm elections is detrimental to the incumbent president. Nonetheless, it must be observed that in the majority of cases, incumbent presidents in midterm elections encounter a reduction in their party's seats, and instances contrary to this rule have constituted exceptions.



● BRETT DEERING/GETTY IMAGES

Therefore, it may be argued that Trump is already confronted with a challenging electoral outlook and may pursue such measures not from a position of superiority, but as an instrument for reversing the situation and ameliorating his standing; meaning that, because he does not occupy a favorable position, he may regard such actions as a means of consolidating his electoral base and mobilizing his supporters in the midterm

elections. The report recently disseminated by Reuters and The New York Times can be analyzed within this very framework. The New York Times has alleged that the Pentagon is preparing for a multi-week conflict with Iran, and Reuters, employing different terminology, has corroborated this assessment. If one seeks to comprehend the prospective logic of this American action, it appears that Washington has

taken seriously Iran's threat to regionalize the war and, consequently, is fortifying its military deployments in the region in order to prevent the expansion of the conflict's scope and the infliction of damage upon its allies. From this perspective, the augmentation of America's military presence, rather than necessarily signifying a definitive decision to initiate war, may be construed as an effort to contain the scenario of war expansion.



Some in America, particularly Trump's adherents, believe that even if he consents merely to a symbolic action or ultimately refrains from action, his credibility will nonetheless diminish because he has articulated a statement that he has not implemented.

In this context, Tehran's reaction possesses determinative significance. It remains necessary to await developments and ascertain whether Iran will gravitate toward an approach that elevates the defense to an expansive and maximalist level and utilizes all its capacities to strike the United States and its allies, or whether it will endeavor to avert movement toward an apocalyptic and survival-centric war. This constitutes the pivotal ambiguity that appears to subsist both in Tehran and in Washington. In Washington, certain currents maintain that the trajectory of conflict should be directed toward regime change in Iran; conversely, within Iran, perspectives also exist asserting that expanding the scope of war and increasing the cost for the United States will preclude subsequent actions by Washington. This strategic ambiguity is an exceedingly significant matter, and the augmentation of the American fleet's presence in the region may likewise constitute an effort to manage this very uncertainty and to maintain preparedness for diverse scenarios.

The article first appeared in the Persian-language newspaper Etemad.

US will likely exhibit greater pliancy regarding nuclear issue



By Ali Bigdeli
Expert on American affairs

OPINION

I harbor the hope that the negotiations between Iran and the United States soon reach a decisive juncture, and that, to the fullest extent feasible, the prevailing tensions — particularly the security, and military tensions emanating from the United States — decrease. Trump has articulated the doctrine of "peace through strength" and continues to follow that very paradigm. During the preceding round of negotiations, of which five stages were convened, and at a moment when arrangements had been effectuated for the convening of the sixth round, they initiated a military assault; their rationale and allegation were that Iran had engaged in procrastination. The policies and international, and even regional, conditions are at present scarcely advantageous to Iran, and determinations must be calibrated in conformity with prevailing circumstances. They imposed sanctions upon our armed forces, including the Islamic Revolution's Guards Corps, declined to extend an invitation to Iran for the Munich Security Conference, and, in effect, the United States has transmuted pressure upon Iran into an international demand so that a global consensus against Iran may crystallize. Under the current circumstances, it is in our interest to embark upon a new trajectory and to possess an alternative for every conceivable contingency; however, if our political adversary acquires augmented latitude and we remain seated as mere spectators, time will elapse and culminate in detriment to us.



● ALHURRA

It is probable that during Mr. Larjani's visit to Oman and Qatar, certain matters were exchanged between Iran and the United States. Concurrently, I maintain that we possess only a limited temporal margin. The international system has

undergone transformation, and numerous alterations remain in progress. Modifications must likewise be instituted within Iran's foreign policy, and action must be undertaken in consonance with prevailing conditions and developments. Although the

decision in this regard is difficult, our inaction engenders complications. The United States will likely demonstrate greater flexibility regarding the nuclear issue. Of course, pursuant to the regulations of the International Atomic



● Oman's Foreign Minister Sayyid Badr bin Hamad Al Busaidi (R) meets with US Special Envoy Steve Witkoff (C) and President Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner ahead of the indirect US-Iran talks, in Geneva, Switzerland, on February 17, 2026.
● OMAN'S MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS



Under the current circumstances, it is in our interest to embark upon a new trajectory and to possess an alternative for every conceivable contingency; however, if our political adversary acquires augmented latitude and we remain seated as mere spectators, time will elapse and culminate in detriment to us.

Energy Agency, all countries retain the right to enrich below 4%. I propose that within the course of negotiations we preserve, on the basis of the JCPOA in 2015, enrichment at 3.67% and permit the Agency to dispatch its inspectors to Iran. In the President Pezeshkian's speech on February 11, he likewise declared that "we are honest with our own people and are not seeking nuclear weapons and are prepared for any verification." We are at a moment of decision; if we do not resolve the nuclear issue, time will be forfeited. In my estimation, we should permit the Agency's inspectors to enter Iran. This measure may constitute a form of preemption; otherwise, conditions will become severe. Developments indicate that if in any round of negotiations, we fail to approximate a final outcome, the probability of intensified tensions increases. Neither the United States desires war nor does Iran; that is to say, neither party exhibits an inclination toward warfare. The countries of the region are likewise sensitive to this matter, yet in light of the threat articulated by Trump, the probability of descent into tension and conflict remains conceivable. The prospect of sustaining simultaneous military confrontation with Israel and the United States does not even admit conceptual accommodation. Civil unrest, domestic dissatisfaction, subsistence conditions, and the instability of the international system have collectively engendered an atmosphere of general precariousness; nevertheless, endeavors must be undertaken, to the greatest extent feasible, to diminish the existing tensions.

The article first appeared in Persian on ISNA.

Sports Desk

Ricardo Sa Pinto has been dismissed as the head coach of Persian Gulf Pro League side Esteghlal, the Tehran-based club confirmed late on Friday.

The decision follows the team's elimination from the AFC Champions League Two in the round of 16 on Tuesday. Esteghlal conceded two late goals to lose 3-2 against Jordan's Al Hussein in Amman, crashing out 4-2 on aggregate in Asia's second-tier club competition. "Esteghlal wishes to express its gratitude to Mr. Ricardo Sa Pinto, the former head coach of the senior football team, for his efforts, and hereby announces that the collaboration has come to an end," a club statement read.

"At the outset of his tenure, the club provided its full backing by meeting his technical and operational requests and assembling the squad in line with the head coach's vision.

"However, the results achieved throughout the season did not align with Esteghlal's stature. The team's elimination from the Asian competition – one of the season's primary objectives – led to dissat-

Sa Pinto sacked as Esteghlal head coach

isfaction among supporters and the club management. With no clear prospect for improvement evident in the remainder of the domestic campaign," the statement added, also citing "certain unconventional communication

challenges on the part of the coaching staff" as a contributing factor to his dismissal. "Esteghlal Club wishes Mr. Sa Pinto to success in his future endeavors and reaffirms its commitment to advancing the team with full

force and determination, striving to meet the aspirations of its loyal supporters. The process of appointing a new head coach will be announced in due course." Sa Pinto began his second spell in charge ahead of the current sea-

son, having previously guided the Blues to a third-place league finish and the Hazfi Cup final in the 2022/23 season, where they lost to archrival Persepolis. Esteghlal has recorded 13 wins and eight defeats in 31 matches

across all competitions this season and currently sits third in the Persian Gulf Pro League with 35 points from 20 games – one point behind leader Golgozar Sirjan, which has played two matches more, and level on points with second-placed Tractor.

Esteghlal remains in contention for a second successive Hazfi Cup title and is set to meet Khaybar Khorramabad in the quarterfinals. The lowest point of Esteghlal's inconsistent run under Sa Pinto came in the Group A opener of the Champions League Two last September, when the Blues suffered a humiliating 7-1 defeat to the UAE's Al Wasl in Dubai.

The Capital Blues travel to face bottom-placed Mes Rafsanjan today, a match that will also mark a reunion with former coach Mojtaba Jabbari, who led the club to domestic cup success last season. Several names have already emerged in Iranian media as potential successors to the Portuguese. Former player Sohrab Bakhtiarizadeh, who impressed during two short spells as caretaker coach last season, is reportedly the frontrunner to take charge for the remainder of the campaign.

● AHMAD MOEINI JAM/IRNA

Ebadipour 'not expecting' call-up from Iran coach Piazza

Sports Desk

Iranian outside hitter Milad Ebadipour says he is "not expecting" a call-up from national team head coach Roberto Piazza ahead of a busy 2026 international calendar.

The 32-year-old, a two-time Asian Games gold medalist and double Asian champion with Team Melli, last represented Iran under then-caretaker coach Peyman Akbari during the preliminary round of the 2024 Volleyball Nations League (VNL), where Iran finished second from bottom in the 16-team standings and failed to reach the Finals.

Speaking to Varzesh3, Ebadipour – who plays for KS Norwid Czestochowa in Poland's PlusLiga – said he recently met Piazza during the Italian coach's visit to Poland. However, he stressed that their brief conversation "had nothing to do with a possible return to the Iranian team" and instead focused on changes Piazza is considering within his national team coaching staff.

"I don't really expect Piazza to call me up," said Ebadipour, who made his senior international



● FIVB

debut in 2014.

"I think Piazza wants to continue with the same squad from 2025. The issue of confidence comes into play – he wouldn't want it to be perceived that he doesn't trust his current team, nor would he want to appear to be turning back to more experienced players. That's why I believe he will stick with the same group from last year."

Despite his doubts over a recall, Ebadipour reaffirmed his commitment to the national side. "I have always been, and will always be, a soldier of the

national team. Whenever I am needed, I will be at the service of the team," he said.

Piazza, who was appointed to the role in January last year, guided Iran to an eighth-place finish in the VNL preliminary round with six wins from 12 matches. However, the team narrowly missed out on the Finals after China advanced to the quarterfinals as host nation despite finishing second from bottom.

Momentum from several encouraging VNL performances carried into September's World

Championship in the Philippines, where Iran reached the quarterfinals before falling 3-1 to surprise package Czechia.

Iran will look to build on a promising first year under Piazza by securing its first VNL quarterfinal berth in four years when it opens its campaign against South American powerhouse Brazil on June 10.

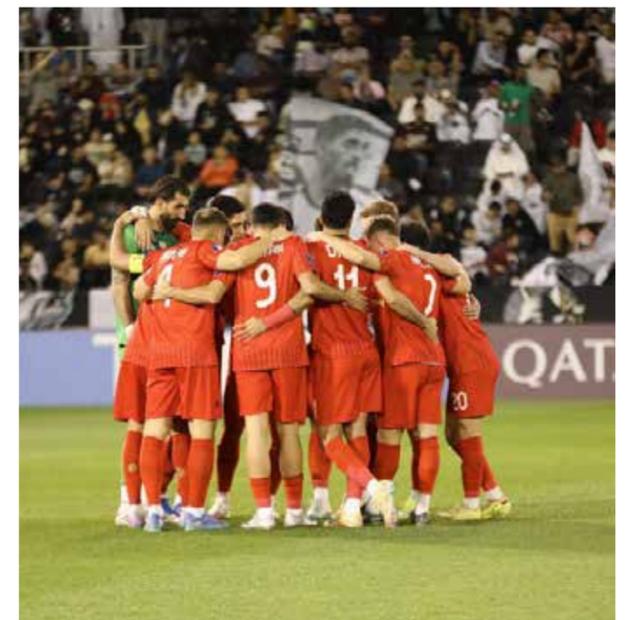
A congested international schedule will also see Iran compete at the Asian Men's Volleyball Championship, which begins on September 4 in Fukuoka, Japan. Iran will be targeting a fifth title in eight editions.

Beyond continental glory, additional incentive awaits in Fukuoka: The tournament winner will secure an Olympic quota place for the men's volleyball competition at the 2028 Los Angeles Games — added motivation after Iran's defeat to Japan in the 2023 final on home soil.

Another potential showdown between Iran and Japan could follow at the Aichi-Nagoya 2026 Asian Games, which begin on September 19, where Piazza's side will be chasing a fourth consecutive men's gold medal.

AFC Champions League Elite:

Tractor to host Shabab Al Ahli in neutral venue



● AFC

Sports Desk

Persian Gulf Pro League champion Tractor will have to stage its AFC Champions League Elite last-16 home leg against the UAE's Shabab Al Ahli at a neutral venue, the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) has confirmed.

The two sides will meet at Dubai's Rashid Stadium on March 2, before facing off in the return leg seven days later. The venue for the second leg has yet to be finalized by the Iranian club in coordination with the continental governing body.

The knockout tie will mark a repeat of the teams' opening league-phase encounter, which ended in a 1-1 draw in Dubai last October. Iranian clubs Tractor, Sepahan and Esteghlal have been barred from playing their matches on home soil in the AFC's two club competitions following last month's protests in the country, as well as escalating regional tensions between Iran and the United States in recent weeks.

Tractor suffered a 2-0 defeat to Al Sadd in Doha on February 10 in a fixture designated as its Matchday 7 home game. However, the Tabriz-based side closed out the league phase with a 2-0 win over Al Gharafa in Al Rayyan last Tuesday to secure third place in the 12-team West Zone standings with 17 points – five behind leader Al Hilal and level on points with second-placed Al Ahli Saudi, trailing only on goal difference.

Shabab Al Ahli, meanwhile, fell to a 4-3 defeat against Al Ahli in Jeddah on Monday but still advanced to the knockout stage as the sixth-placed side with 11 points.

Domestically, Tractor sits second in the Persian Gulf Pro League with 35 points – one behind leader Golgozar, which has played two games more. The club resumes league action with a trip to Malavan FC today.

Newly appointed head coach Mohammad Rabiei is set to make his debut on the Tractor bench after replacing Croatian Dragan Skocic, who parted ways with the club on the eve of the Al Gharafa fixture.

Iranian Women's Basketball Super League:

Sahar Academy, Esteghlal seize early advantage in semifinals

Sports Desk

Sahar Academy and Esteghlal moved a step closer to the final of the Iranian Women's Basketball Super League after winning their opening semifinal games on Friday.

American center Alexis Poole recorded a double-double of 16 points and 10 rebounds, along with four steals, for an efficiency rating of 22 as Sahar secured a 68-58 victory over Naft Abadan in the first game

of the best-of-three series.

Esteghlal, meanwhile, cruised past Bahman Group with a commanding 72-50 win. Sabria Dean led the charge with 20 points, four rebounds and four assists, finishing with a game-high efficiency rating of 23.

The second round of the semifinals is scheduled for today, with Naft Abadan and Bahman aiming to level their respective series and force a decisive third game.



● IRIBF

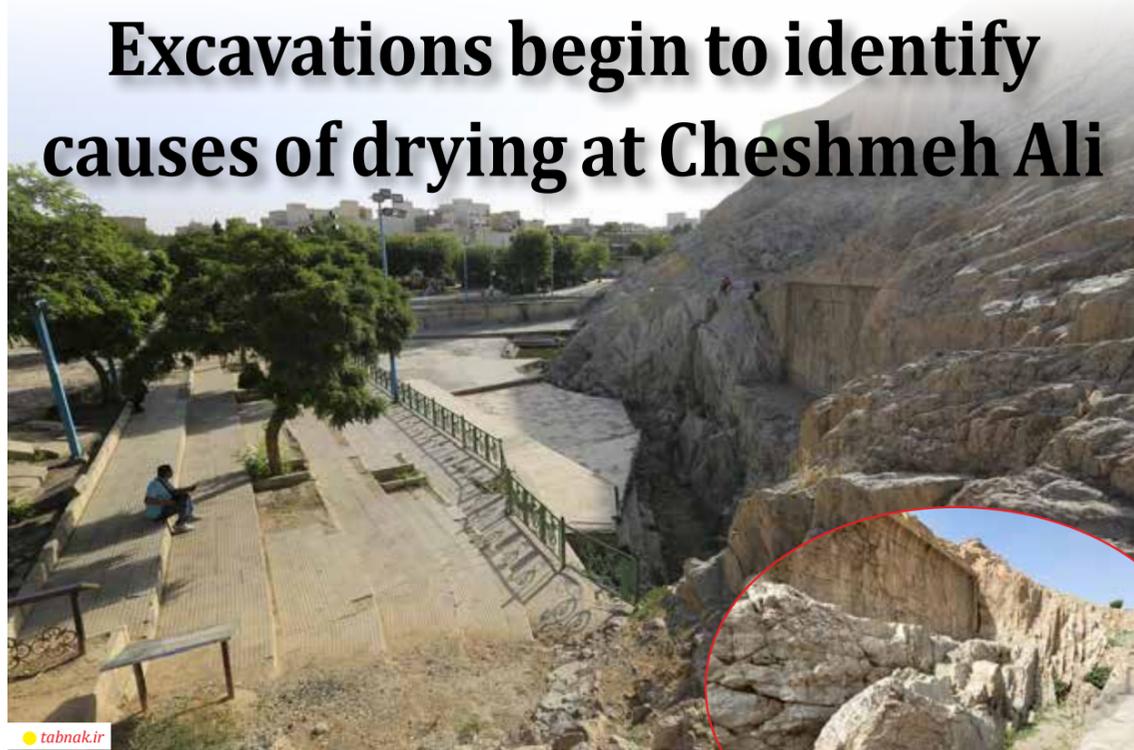
Iranica Desk

The head of the Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts Department of Shahr-e Rey, Tehran Province, announced the start of excavation operations aimed at identifying the water source and assessing the condition of the waterbed of Cheshmeh Ali, in order to determine the factors behind the drying up of this historic site and to propose restoration solutions.

According to ISNA, Mohsen Sa'adati stated that, as part of efforts to identify the water source and catchment area of Cheshmeh Ali, excavation work in the vicinity of the spring has begun by the Tehran Metro Company under an order from the Shahr-e Rey Prosecutor's Office, ISNA wrote.

In addition to examining the condition of the waterbed, these excavations are intended to identify the spring's water source and catchment basin, determine the factors contributing to its drying up, and present practical, operational solutions for its revival.

He added that the drying of Cheshmeh Ali's waterbed in Shahr-e Rey, as one of the city's most significant cultural heritage concerns, has consistently remained on the agenda until a positive outcome is achieved. Necessary follow-ups will continue in cooperation with relevant agencies to ensure that the conditions required for restoring this valuable historical site are put in place. "Cheshmeh Ali," located on the slopes



Excavations begin to identify causes of drying at Cheshmeh Ali

of Bibi Shahrbanu Mountain on the outskirts of Shahr-e Rey, is one of the region's most important natural and historical landmarks. Over millennia, it has played a vital role in water supply, daily life, and the formation of early set-

tlements in this part of the Central Iranian Plateau. Archaeological studies indicate that habitation and use of this spring date back to the Neolithic period, with some research estimating the age of civilization in its surrounding

human populations and has had a significant influence on the formation of past communities.

In recent decades, the spring's water flow — once known for its relatively consistent discharge — has declined noticeably. The first signs of a substantial decrease emerged in the early 2010s, and in 2017 the water flow was temporarily cut off. Although some return of water was observed afterward, for approximately the past three years the spring's bed has been completely dry. This situation is regarded by experts and cultural heritage activists as both an environmental and cultural crisis.

Experts identify two main factors behind the spring's complete drying: the alteration and blockage of natural water channels as a result of construction projects and metro excavations, and the decline in groundwater levels caused by drought and excessive extraction of water resources.

Some analyses point to the tunneling of Tehran Metro Line 6 and the construction of its stations as having affected the spring's water discharge, although some officials involved in development projects consider reduced rainfall to be the primary cause.

Alongside these debates, local residents and those involved in the cultural affairs have repeatedly warned about the abandonment of the spring's bed and the threats posed by urban development to its survival and potential restoration.

Anbaran kilim weaving draws national support, global attention

Iranica Desk

Kilim weaving in the city of Anbaran boasts a long history and strong economic vitality, with many local families engaged in the craft. Seasonal and permanent handicrafts exhibitions have become a major attraction for tourists and travelers from across Ardabil Province and beyond.

As the nimble hands of Anbaran's weavers scatter colors across looms and knot wefts into evocative patterns, the city seems infused with the scent of amber and incense. Each kilim revives layers of memory and imagination, reflecting a rich cultural heritage passed down through generations, according to IRNA.

During a recent visit to Anbaran's permanent handicrafts exhibition — designated Iran's national kilim city — Seyyed Reza Salehi-Amiri, Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts, praised local women for producing works worthy of global markets. He said the pieces on display represent a striking example of internationally appealing art created by women of the region.

Earlier, Maryam Jalali, deputy minister for handicrafts, said during a visit to Anbaran's exhibition in Namin that the dossier for Anbaran's global registration as a craft city has been completed. She stressed that further growth of the craft depends on completing the production-to-sales chain.

Jalali said Anbaran, as a national handicrafts city, is not merely a producer of kilims but a generator of culture and art for Iran. She added that global recognition would significantly enhance the craft's visibility and mar-

ket reach, noting that while Anbaran is strong in production, it must also strengthen sales and marketing.

Also visiting the exhibition, Ahad Biouteh, a member of the Cultural Commission of the Parliament, said women kilim weavers in Anbaran play a vital role in shaping Iran's cultural identity and deserve greater support. He noted that the city lies in Iran's northwestern border region and emphasized the importance of backing local artisans.

Biouteh said Ardabil's economy is fundamentally rooted in tourism and handicrafts, adding that low wages and weak marketing remain key challenges. He called for targeted government-led initiatives to organize the handicrafts market, stressing that producers should not be burdened with sales concerns. He urged the relevant ministry to introduce incentive packages for handicrafts and tourism investment in Anbaran to support regional development.



● khazarnama.ir

Meanwhile, Jalil Jabbari, director general of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and



Handicrafts Organization of Ardabil Province, announced plans to revive Anbaran's handicrafts building and establish a secretariat for the national kilim city. He said artisans in Anbaran and Namin require stronger support and that efforts are underway to facilitate their activities.

Jabbari added that the directorate will use all available opportunities to improve working conditions for artisans and has

the authenticity of Anbaran handwoven rugs.

Experts say Anbaran kilims rank among Ardabil Province's most distinctive handwoven products, known for their reliance on local traditions, authentic materials and unique designs. Made from high-quality wool sourced from local sheep and dyed with natural pigments such as madder, walnut husk and , the kilims are valued for their durability, softness and colorfastness. Produced using a flat-weaving technique with dense warp and weft, Anbaran handwoven rugs are renowned for their strength and long lifespan in everyday use. The combination of natural materials, tight weaving and geometric, mentally composed patterns has made them among the region's most authentic and distinctive handwoven textiles.

With the anticipated global registration of Anbaran as a national kilim city, the town is expected to attract international attention, accelerating development in handicrafts and urban growth while strengthening its place in the cultural history and identity of the region.

Chabahar emerges as premier tourism destination

Iranica Desk

The deputy governor of Sistan and Baluchestan Province and governor of Chabahar said the region's rare diversity of natural attractions, the pristine Makoran Coast, and its rich local culture have turned Chabahar into one of the standout tourism destinations in the country's southeast. Alireza Noora noted that beyond its economic and commercial significance, Chabahar enjoys valuable cultural and social capacities that can play a major role in the development of the travel industry.

He added that the hospitality, honesty, and solidarity of Chabahar's people represent a major social asset, making travel to the county a distinctive and memorable experience for both domestic and international visitors, according to chn.ir. Emphasizing the region's ecotourism potential, Noora said the scenic Makoran coastline, miniature mountains, wetlands, unique natural landscapes, and the mild climate during the colder seasons have positioned Chabahar as a year-round destination.

He stressed that expanding accommodation facilities, improving access roads, and promoting indigenous capacities at national and international levels are among the measures that could increase Chabahar's share of Iran's travel

industry.

According to Noora, tourism growth not only creates sustainable employment but also strengthens the local economy, supports handicrafts, and helps better introduce the region's authentic culture, paving the way for balanced development across the county.

He further noted that the historic Tis village, located within the Chabahar Free Zone, hosts 33 natural, historical, and sightseeing attractions and welcomes domestic and foreign tourists, particularly during the NOWRUZ (Iranian New Year) holidays.

He also highlighted that the Makoran coastline stretching from Chabahar to Gwatar and Konarak is among the country's richest natural and human landscapes for marine, natural, and cultural tourism. Owing to its unique geomorphology, biodiversity, coral reefs, fisheries, diving potential, and striking coastal scenery, the area has long attracted researchers and tourists alike.

Noora concluded that key initiatives undertaken include organizing high-traffic tourist sites, supporting eco-lodges, developing service infrastructure along attraction routes, establishing handicrafts exhibitions, promoting local artists, issuing permits for new tourism projects, and cooperating with the private sector to build tourism piers.



● destinationiran.com

Iran plans 1,000 heritage sites, markets for expanded Nowruz festivities

Persian New Year to rebuild social morale, widen public participation: Minister

Arts & Culture Desk

Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts Reza Salehi-Amiri said on Saturday that the upcoming Nowruz, which begins on March 20, 2026, will serve as a platform to rebuild social morale and widen public participation, outlining a nationwide program of cultural events and expanded heritage access at a meeting of senior cultural officials in Tehran. Speaking at the Ministry's Cultural Council session held at the Fajr Hall of the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts, the minister cast the Persian New Year as a "national and civic project" designed to strengthen social capital through coordinated public celebrations, artistic programming and community-led initiatives, IRNA reported. The ministry will activate 1,000 designated Nowruz sites across the country, alongside 1,000

handicrafts markets, in what officials described as the largest organized seasonal rollout of its kind. Ceremonies marking the exact turn of the year will be staged at selected heritage venues, each operating under capped visitor quotas to manage crowd flow and protect historic fabric.

A summit of tourism ministers from Nowruz-celebrating countries is scheduled to convene in Tehran during the holiday period, adding an international dimension to the domestic program. National-level performances will include concerts by the Iranian National Orchestra and a dedicated Nowruz symphony, while provincial theater troupes and street carnivals are set to animate urban centers and regional capitals.

Programs are also planned at Tehran's landmark palace complexes, including Niavaran Palace Complex and Golestan Palace, where curated exhibitions



Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts Reza Salehi-Amiri (c) speaks during a Cultural Council session in Tehran, Iran on February 21, 2026.

● YJC

and formal ceremonies will accompany public celebrations. Deputy minister Ali Darabi said governors would oversee implementation at provincial level, with the central government acting as coordinator. Municipal authorities have been tasked with preparing public squares, parks and pedestrian zones for high visitor volumes, while national travel service headquarters will operate throughout the holiday to streamline logistics and safety arrangements.

Officials said the overlap of Nowruz with the holy month of Ramadan in 2026 would be addressed through tailored cultural programming intended to accommodate both observanc-



es without disrupting travel and public events.

Nowruz, inscribed by UNESCO as an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity and observed

across parts of West, Central and South Asia, remains Iran's busiest travel season. Authorities expect millions to take to the roads and visit histori-

cal sites during the two-week break, making crowd management and heritage protection central to this year's operational blueprint.

Minister urges Iran to seize gaming potential amid global boom

Arts & Culture Desk

Iran's Culture and Islamic Guidance Minister Abbas Salehi warned that failure to mount coordinated support for the domestic video games sector would amount to "burning" a national advantage, as he addressed the closing ceremony of the 11th Iran Video Games Festival at Tehran's Vahdat Hall. Salehi said video games, with 3.4 billion players worldwide and \$183 billion in revenue in 2023, have become one of the most powerful media industries globally. Iran, he added, remains competitive in human capital despite losing part of its early lead. More than 29 million people in Iran are active gamers, according to the National Foundation for Computer Games, with the average player age rising to 29

from 16 in 2010. In the United States the average stands at 35, underscoring the medium's shift into a multi-generational market, ISNA reported. He described gaming as an integrated cultural ecosystem spanning animation, narrative design and advanced technologies including virtual reality, arguing that piecemeal policies would not suffice. A comprehensive support package, aligning public and private investment from production to market access, is needed to prevent further erosion of capacity.

Festival secretary Reza Ahmadi said 164 titles were submitted this year despite internet disruptions and logistical constraints. Of those, 130 qualified for review and 75 reached the main competition stage. He called the event a pro-

fessional platform rather than a mere contest. Veteran developer Mohammad-Mehdi Behfarad, chief executive of Medrick Game Studio, said Iran entered game development roughly in step with the global wave nearly two decades ago but failed to sustain momentum.

Neighboring countries with shorter track records now target annual sales of around \$750 million, he said, attributing Iran's lag to late-stage policy recognition and limited structural backing.

He said total annual support from all public funds combined does not match the price of a luxury car in Tehran, arguing that without meaningful capital injection and media visibility, studios cannot scale or compete internationally.

Vienna forum brings Iranian, European scholars together to revisit shared civilizational heritage

Arts & Culture Desk

Iranian and European Iranologists gathered in the Austrian capital for a two-day international conference on Iranian-Islamic civilization, held in person and online, as scholars from both sides set out to reassess its historical foundations, intellectual architecture and cultural reach, organizers said.

The conference, titled 'Iranian-Islamic Civilization: Identity, Components and Historical Glory', brought together academics in history, philosophy, literature and cultural studies to examine the formation and evolution of a civilizational model shaped by the encounter between Islam and Iran's pre-Islamic heritage, IRNA reported.

The opening session also marked the launch of the first Iranology Book Prize, named after the late Austrian Iranologist Bert Fragner. The award was presented to Sibylle Wentker of the Austrian Academy of Sciences for her translation and critical edition of five volumes of 'Tarikh-e Vassaf', a key chronicle of Iran during the late

thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries under Mongol Ilkhanid rule. The work is regarded as a principal source for the political and social history of that period. In her remarks, Wentker described the prize as a professional honor and outlined the historiographical value of 'Tarikh-e Vassaf', written by Vassaf al-Hazra of Shiraz, noting its detailed account of events spanning the late 1200s and early 1300s and its synthesis of political narrative with social observation.

Another highlight was the formal unveiling in Vienna of the German-language volume Austrian Iranologists, published by Unidialog Verlag with contributions from Iranian cultural institutions based in the city. The book documents the role of Austrian scholars in advancing Iranian studies and traces a century of academic engagement between the two countries.

Speakers addressed a broad spectrum of themes, from the philosophical and administrative legacies of pre-Islamic Iran to the development of Persian literature and mysticism across a cultur-



al zone stretching from Anatolia to the Indian subcontinent. One panel examined the portrayal of women in the 'Shahnameh' (Book of Kings) classifying female figures from political actors to warrior heroines and arguing that Ferdowsi's moral framework rests on human merit rather than gender. The second day, held online, featured 15 papers across two panels dedicated to intellectual history, economic structures and the transmission of scientific knowledge. Presentations revisited the Academy of Gondishapur's role in transferring medical learning into the early Islamic era and analyzed Iran's fiscal institutions from the pre-modern period to the twentieth century.

A president of contradictions ...

Influenced by Israel's hawkish Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Trump has laid down maximalist demands, including curbs on Iran's missile range, conditions that Tehran argues would compromise its security and defense. Even if Trump were pursuing regime change, he would be contradicting his own promises on the campaign trail. In a November 2024 interview, he said, "We can't get totally involved in

all that. We can't run ourselves, let's face it."

Since returning to the White House in January 2025, Trump has ordered several military strikes, though limited ones, against countries such as Yemen, Nigeria and Venezuela, moves that run counter to his promise to wind down US military engagements.

Now, with such a massive deployment to the Middle East, he has put the entire region and, by extension, the glob-

al economy at risk.

Iran's Leader has warned that any attack would trigger a regional war. Ali-reza Tangsiri, commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps' Navy, has said his forces stand ready to close the Strait of Hormuz – a waterway through which some 20% of the world's oil passes – on orders from higher authorities.

It is striking that a president who casts himself as a messenger of peace and

covets the Nobel Peace Prize would at the same time contemplate a war against Iran, the fallout of which is impossible to predict.

The notion of "peace through strength" appears to really hit the spot for the paradox-filled president but he totally misses that it is basically a synonym for bloodshed and violence or at best, it is just a euphemism for war.

If the flames of such a conflict spill over beyond Iran and engulf the wid-

er Middle East, particularly if energy flows are disrupted, experts warn oil prices could skyrocket above \$150 a barrel. That seems to be the last thing Trump would want.

With US midterm congressional elections looming in November and the prospect of impeachment if Republicans lose ground, Trump would do well to think twice about striking Iran and several times over about his pledge to end endless wars.