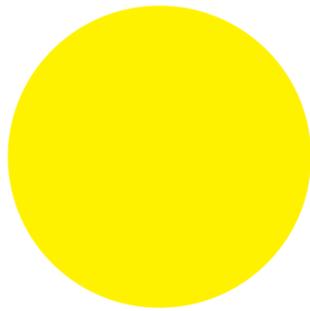


AFC Women's Asian Cup: Qanbari vows 'utmost effort' but tempers expectations for Iran



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# Iran Daily

Vol. 8059 • Tuesday, February 24, 2026 • Esfand 05, 1404 • Ramadan 06, 1447 • 100,000 rials • 8 pages

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Delegations hold a meeting of the 17th Iran-Azerbaijan Joint Commission for Economic Cooperation in Baku, Azerbaijan on February 23, 2026. [mrud.ir](http://mrud.ir)

'Token enrichment' aimed at scaling down Iran's nuclear gains

#### INTERVIEW EXCLUSIVE

A senior US official has said Iranian negotiators were informed during the Geneva talks that President Donald Trump's position is "zero enrichment" on Iranian soil. However, the unnamed official added that if Iran's proposal includes "small, token enrichment" and the Iranians provide precise documentation demonstrating that this level poses no threat, the United States would review it. Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi, however, told reporters on Friday that the American side did not ask Iran during the Geneva talks to agree to "zero enrichment," and he also rejected claims that Iran had proposed a temporary suspension of its enrichment program during those negotiations. Abbas Aslani, an international affairs expert, told Iran Daily that raising terms such as "token enrichment" is, in fact, largely a form of wordplay aimed at scaling down whatever nuclear concessions might potentially be granted to Iran by the United States.

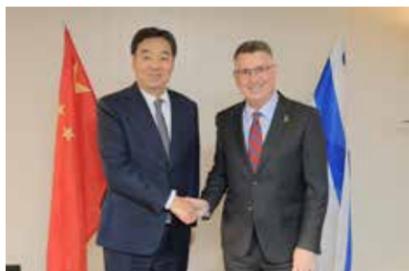


Abbas Aslani

**IRAN DAILY: From a technical and legal standpoint, how is the concept "token enrichment" defined, and could it be accepted or managed within Iran's nuclear policies?**

**ASLANI:** This concept has no clear definition or established status in the technical literature of the International Atomic Energy Agency or even in international law concerning treaties, including the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. It appears that such expressions are coined to downplay, belittle, or constrain Iran's nuclear achievements, as Tehran maintains that, based on its inherent rights, it is entitled to benefit from the nuclear fuel cycle. Naturally, the other side seeks to minimize this and portray it as insignificant. Iran has repeatedly stated that it will carry out the level of enrichment required to meet its needs. Tehran's position, both in the past and at present, seems clear. Labeling it as "symbolic" would not appear to be acceptable to Iran. However, enrichment would be pursued in line with the country's needs and within the framework of any agreement reached, while a reduction in enrichment levels—and, naturally, in the number of centrifuges or their scale—had already been anticipated.

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# Additional Protocol adoption tied to sanctions relief in potential US deal: *FM spokesperson*

## International Desk

Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baghaei said Tehran would only implement the Additional Protocol to the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Safeguards Agreement on a voluntary basis under a possible deal with the United States, provided that the Islamic Republic received concessions, including economic sanctions relief.

Speaking at a regular press briefing on Monday, Baghaei said Iran had prior experience with the protocol during the implementation of the 2015 nuclear deal and described it as a confidence-building measure.

"Adoption of the protocol has precedent in Iran and is considered a tool to provide greater assurance about the peaceful nature of Iran's nuclear program," he said. His remarks come after Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said in an interview with CBS that Iran was ready to fully cooperate with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) under safeguards rules and could also accept the Additional Protocol under certain conditions. He did

not elaborate on the required conditions. The Additional Protocol is a supplementary agreement to the IAEA's Comprehensive Safeguards Agreement that significantly expands the agency's inspection powers. Under the 2015 deal, known formally as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), Iran committed to temporarily implementing the protocol. After the United States withdrew from the accord in 2018 and reimposed sweeping unilateral sanctions, Iran gradually scaled back its commitments, including halting voluntary implementation of the protocol.

The last round of Iran-US negotiations began in early 2025 but stalled following an Israeli attack in June and the outbreak of a 12-day conflict, in which the United States also took part and bombed Iranian nuclear facilities. Since then, tensions have escalated, with an expanded US military presence in the region bringing the two sides close to renewed confrontation. However, diplomatic contacts between Tehran and Washington have resumed, with two rounds of talks held so far. Iran is expected to present its draft proposal

in the coming days, while the next round is scheduled for Thursday.

## No IAEA access without inspection protocol

During the press conference, Baghaei was also asked about IAEA inspections of Iran's bombed nuclear sites as a precondition to an agreement with Washington. Baghaei rejected the idea, saying cooperation with the IAEA in this regard is a separate matter. He argued that, for the first time, peaceful nuclear facilities of a country had been targeted by foreign military action, and no established mechanism exists for inspecting such sites.

"The agreement between Tehran and the agency to visit bombed facilities requires an understanding on a specific protocol. At present, we are not at this stage, although exchanges and contacts with the agency continue on a regular basis," he said.

Iran has refused to allow IAEA access to those facilities following the recent conflict, citing safety and security concerns. IAEA Director General Rafael Grossi has said in recent statements that no deal



Esmail Baghaei  
IRNA

would be reached if Iran does not allow verification of the damaged sites. Baghaei stressed that until a specific protocol is defined in this regard, Iran will not allow access to the damaged facilities.

Reports suggest that Grossi is set to participate in the Geneva talks set for Thursday, potentially to discuss technical details of a possible deal, including inspection of bombed sites.

## Army chief upbraids US invincibility boast as 'false and futile'

### International Desk

Top Iran's Army commander said on Monday that claims of US invincibility are "false and futile," warning that Washington would ultimately be defeated in any confrontation with Tehran.

Major General Amir Hatami, commander-in-chief of the Iranian Army, made the remarks at a graduation ceremony for PhD and master's students in Defense Management at the Army's Command & Staff University, according to Tasnim.

To support his argument, he pointed to the United States' protracted wars in Vietnam and Afghanistan, where it fought for two decades before ultimately withdrawing in disgrace, saying similar outcomes had unfolded in Iraq and other countries.

He stressed, however, that defeating an adversary requires a clear understanding of today's global realities as well as steadfastness and resilience among the Iranian people.

"In today's conditions, given the ongo-



Amir Hatami  
Tasnim

ing changes and developments, the responsibility of the Army is undoubtedly decisive," he said.

Hatami added that modern warfare has become far more complex, describing it as a hybrid conflict spanning political, economic, social, military, psychological and cognitive domains. He said that overcoming such threats depends on accurate awareness and understanding.

Iran's adversaries, he said, believe the country is currently in a position of weakness while they are strong, but said Iran's preparedness and resolve would prove them wrong.

Referring to the foreign-backed unrest in January that left many casual-

ties, Hatami accused Iran's enemies of attempting to stage a "quasi-coup" through miscalculation, but said the effort ultimately failed. Iran has explained that US-Israeli terrorists intervened in people's peaceful protests and caused fatalities.

Hatami warned that Tehran could face new forms of hostile plots in the future but pledged a "decisive and crushing response."

Hatami also said the enemy is pursuing a strategy of "strategic attrition" aimed at weakening Iran over time and exhausting its population, but argued that both the government and the public are aware of the broader plan and will counter it. He warned that undermining Iran's territorial integrity, as seen in some regional countries, is also part of hostile strategies, but vowed that the Iranian people would stand firm and prevent such plans from succeeding.

"We in the Army, with full awareness of our historic mission, will defend the independence, territorial integrity and the Islamic Republic of Iran to the last breath," he said.

## Deputy FM urges West to pursue diplomacy instead of sanctions in nuclear talks

### International Desk

Iran's deputy foreign minister said on Monday that sanctions and military pressure have failed to produce results against Tehran, calling on Western powers to "test respect and diplomacy" instead as nuclear negotiations with Washington gather momentum.

Kazem Gharibabadi, Iran's deputy foreign minister for legal and international affairs, made the remarks at a high-level session of the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) in Geneva, where he said years of pressure had proven ineffective.

"Sanctions and war have been tried in relation to Iran and have not worked. Now it is time to experience respect and diplomacy," he said. Iran and the United States have so far held two rounds of nuclear negotiations, with a third scheduled for Thursday in Geneva after Tehran submits its draft proposal. The renewed diplomatic push comes after months of stalled contacts following a 12-day conflict involving Israel and the United States, which disrupted earlier talks.

The latest efforts are unfolding amid a US military buildup in the region and repeated warnings from Washington that military action remains an option if diplomacy fails. Tehran has also warned that any aggression would face a firm response.

Gharibabadi stressed that while Iranians are not inclined to aggression, they are prepared to defend their country decisively.

"Iran and Iranians will stand with strength against any military or political plot targeting their homeland," he said.

He added that Iran's adversaries might be able to start a war but would not determine how it



Kazem Gharibabadi  
SNN

ends, warning that any conflict would not remain limited to the two sides but could engulf the wider region.

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian also recently reiterated in a post on X that Tehran is committed to regional peace and stability. He said the latest negotiations involved the exchange of practical proposals and yielded "encouraging signals," while stressing that Iran continues to closely monitor US actions and remains prepared for all scenarios.

Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi also said in an interview with CBS that there is still a strong chance of reaching a diplomatic solution based on a "win-win" framework.

"There is no need for any military buildup. Increasing military pressure cannot help and will not put us under pressure," he said. Meanwhile, Omani sources said Ali Larijani, secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council, is expected to travel to Muscat on Tuesday as part of ongoing diplomatic efforts, potentially with a focus on the security dimensions.

Oman continues to mediate between Tehran and Washington, hosting negotiations in Muscat and other diplomatic venues.

## 'Token enrichment' aimed ...

**In your view, could such a proposal help break the current deadlock over enrichment?**

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Proposals of this nature may stem from what could be described as the US side's maximalist approach. In any negotiation, there is inevitably give-and-take. If one party receives concessions, it must also grant concessions. However, since they have sought to apply maximum pressure while also putting forward maximum demands, they resort to such terminology. If this spirit governs other issues as well, it could act as an obstacle rather than a facilitator, as has been the case so far. Still, the American side faces pressure domestically from certain factions and lobbies, as well as externally from actors such as Israel. The use of such terms may therefore be aimed at easing the atmosphere and reducing those pressures. From that perspective, it may assist the American side itself to some extent—rather than the negotiation process or Iran. Otherwise, it offers no particular advantage to the Iranian side or to the talks.

**How do you assess the narrative gap between Iranian officials and US media reports regarding the content of the recent talks? Is it a matter of negotiation tactics, a battle of narratives, or genuine differences in interpretation?**

By occasionally leaking incomplete or even inaccurate information, the American side attempts to turn up the heat on Iran's negotiating team, either at the table or outside the negotiating room, and in effect cast a shadow over the quality of negotiations or the manner in which the Iranian team grants concessions. Previously, Western media consistently reported that the US position was zero enrichment and that enrichment would not be accepted at all. Now, however, it is being suggested that a certain level of enrichment might be acceptable. From a psychological standpoint, such positioning may be important for the Americans; first, to avoid coming under pressure for having granted excessive concessions to Iran; and second, because the Trump administration, even while engaging in diplomatic talks with Iran, appears intent on preserving the prestige of maximum pressure and avoiding being accused of backing down—even if it steps back from the idea of zero enrichment and accepts enrichment at some level. From the outset, it was conceivable that if an agreement were to be reached, enrichment levels or the scale of enrichment in Iran would be significantly reduced. This does not necessarily contradict that prospect.

**Araghchi has rejected any proposal for a temporary halt or suspension of en-**

**richment by Iran. What do you see as the source of such claims in Western media? Could this be part of psychological pressure or an effort to manage domestic and international expectations?** Beyond the political-level negotiations being pursued, there is a battle of narratives unfolding between the two sides. Moreover, in economic, security, and even military domains, threats, pressures, and measures are seen from the American side, while the Iranian side has sought to adopt countermeasures in response. Narratives can, in essence, lay the groundwork for certain policies or even shape emerging trends. The American proposal under the banner of zero enrichment has long been their genuine policy demand—not only during Trump's tenure but also under previous US presidents, who likewise sought to ensure that Iran would have no enrichment capability at all. However, they were unable to achieve that objective. At the current juncture, despite having effectively accepted the issue of enrichment in principle, their repeated references to it outside the negotiating room appear intended to create ambiguity and doubt, thereby exerting pressure on Iran to extract concessions in other areas. In effect, they seek to let uncertainty hang over the talks and use it as psychological leverage.

Mohammad Ali Rajabi  
Cartoonist

CARTOON



# Iran, Azerbaijan discuss rail, energy, Caspian oil cooperation

## 17th joint economic commission kicks off in Baku

### Economy Desk

Iran's Minister of Roads and Urban Development Farzaneh Sadegh Malvajerd met Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev in Baku on Monday to discuss new rail infrastructure, shared oil fields, transport cooperation, new border facilities and energy collaboration ahead of the 17th Iran-Azerbaijan Joint Commission on Economic Cooperation.

According to IRNA, Sadegh Malvajerd met Aliyev before the commission's meeting, emphasizing the importance of bilateral relations and outlining key priorities for economic cooperation, which the Azerbaijani president also underscored. Expanding transport cooperation, particularly strengthening regional connectivity and transit corridors, was among the main topics. The sides also discussed boosting energy cooperation, putting new border infrastructure into operation and constructing new rail links between the two countries.

They exchanged views on joint oil fields in the Caspian Sea and methods of extracting resources from them, as well as on ex-



Iran's Minister of Roads and Urban Development Farzaneh Sadegh Malvajerd (3rd L) meets Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev (3rd R) in Baku on February 23, 2026.   
● IRNA

panding bilateral and multilateral regional cooperation with neighboring countries in transport and energy sectors. The meeting stressed that the outcomes of discussions within the framework of the 17th joint economic commission should be finalized and that new agreements between the two countries should be drafted and signed.

During the talks, Aliyev thanked Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian for his message and welcomed the expansion of bilateral relations. "Projects implemented jointly by Iran and Azerbaijan will provide extensive opportunities for both countries and the region," he said.

Specialized and expert-level sessions of the commission began in Baku with the participation of specialists from both countries in transport, energy, oil and power. The meetings



are being held on Sunday and Monday, co-chaired by Sadegh Malvajerd and Azerbaijan's Deputy Prime Minister Shahin Mustafayev as heads of the two sides' commissions.

Amin Taraffo, head of the international affairs department at Iran's Ministry of Roads and Urban Development, said, "Development of transport cooperation, completion of border infrastructure and expansion of cultural interactions are among the most important axes of this assembly, and final agreements

will be signed in the form of a memorandum by the heads of the two countries' commissions."

"In this meeting, the two sides will negotiate on all areas of bilateral cooperation, and programs and capacities that should be realized and developed between the two countries by next year will be discussed and exchanged," he added.

"At the end of this assembly, the summary of negotiations and agreements reached in economic, cultural and other areas

of cooperation will be signed in the framework of a final memorandum by the heads of the joint commissions of the two countries," Taraffo said.

He noted that cooperation between Tehran and Baku has been expanding over the past year and a half.

"Border infrastructure between Iran and Azerbaijan, both in the rail and road sectors, is developing and transforming, and this trend can play an important role in facilitating trade exchanges," he said.

## Gov't moves closer to currency reform as CBI backs four-zero slash



### Economy Desk

The Central Bank of Iran (CBI) has approved a draft regulation to remove four zeros from the national currency, with implementation set to begin after final approval by the government.

According to the ILNA, the CBI's high council endorsed the draft executive bylaw for the plan, which must now be ratified by the cabinet before taking effect.

The draft sets out definitions and requirements for the preparation phase, including redesigning and testing systems, software and hardware by relevant institutions, holding training courses and introducing dual price labeling.

Under the proposal, authorities will publicly announce the start of the transition period at least four months in advance. During that phase, both currency units will circulate simultaneously. Guidelines and procedures for updating banking services and aligning figures for the two currency units will be drafted after cabinet approval of the bylaw.

## Aras Free Trade Zone emerging as industrial, export and tourism hub



### Economy Desk

Iran's Aras Free Trade Zone has seen the inauguration of 22 development, industrial, and tourism projects, approval of dozens of major investment plans, and signing of strategic memorandums of understanding over the past month, which signals the region's transition into a production, export, and tourism hub in the country's

northwest.

The zone's development strategy emphasizes infrastructure, industrialization, and the expansion of modern services.

According to ILNA, the past month was particularly dynamic for the Aras Free Zone Organization, ranging from the commissioning of multi-trillion-rial projects to the approval of 67 investment plans valued at 100 trillion rials (approximately \$62.5

million) by the zone's economic commission. The area is consolidating a new identity as a production-oriented, export-driven region underpinned by modern infrastructure.

The most significant milestone was the inauguration of 22 projects commissioned by President Masoud Pezeshkian, covering industrial units, service infrastructure, and tourism initiatives, which officials say will create substantial direct and indirect employment.

Industrial projects included the launch of a brake pad manufacturing company and a textile company, reflecting a focus on completing production chains and reducing import dependency. In tourism, the opening of a hotel expands the region's accommodation capacity.

Simultaneously, construction began on the widening and upgrading of the road to Silgerd village, highlighting attention to access infrastructure and connecting peripheral areas with Aras's economic core, a move expected to reduce logistics and

transportation costs.

Among the notable developments, the approval of 67 investment plans over the past 10 months could, if implemented, transform the region's production structure. This level of investment underscores Aras's shift from attracting small-scale capital to hosting large-scale, driving projects. Regional managers emphasize consolidating the zone's industrial and production-oriented position, aiming to make Aras a northwest industrial hub and a bridge connecting domestic production to regional markets.

Regulatory announcements on warehouse organization and enforcement discipline also indicate policymakers' efforts to improve transparency and efficiency in supply chains and trade.

### Cooperation with CIS

The zone's recent activities also included initiatives beyond physical development. Officials proposed "readiness to redefine Iran's economic cooperation

with CIS countries," reflecting a cross-border perspective that leverages Aras's strategic location near Armenia and access to the Eurasian market to enhance non-oil exports.

A memorandum of understanding for developing digital infrastructure and industrial marketing represents another step toward smartening services and facilitating producers' access to markets, which could boost enterprise productivity and reduce transaction costs.

In tourism, the launch of a credit card for visitors illustrates innovative financial tools to stimulate demand and increase tourist retention. Local festivals and cultural events further strengthen Aras's brand as a tourism destination, gradually solidifying its position among northwest Iran's destinations. Overall, Aras Free Zone is advancing on three parallel tracks: developing infrastructure and projects, deepening industrialization and attracting major investments, and enhancing tourism with innovative services.

## Five new coastal cities in development; Tis in Chabahar set for investment: Deputy min

### Economy Desk

Iran is prioritizing the development of five new coastal cities - Tis, Central Makoran, Makoran, Khalij-e Fars and Kushk - as part of a strategic plan to create economic and sea-based urban settlements, the country's Deputy Minister of Roads and Urban Development, Shahram Maleki, said on Monday. Tis city in Chabahar Port in the southeast has entered its development phase and is prepared to attract developers and investors.

According to IRNA, Maleki detailed the government's macro

approach to balanced territorial development, noting a special focus on planning new coastal and border cities in line with the country's updated spatial planning guidelines. He described the efforts as a strategic step toward achieving sustainable development, strengthening spatial convergence, and enhancing the resilience of new settlements.

"In the new approach, coastal and border cities have been defined as drivers of regional development, strengthening spatial security, economic prosperity, and increasing cross-border interactions, and their planning is

carried out based on upstream spatial planning documents and environmental, social, and economic considerations," Maleki said.

"The plan for the spatial structure of new coastal settlements for the four southern provinces, with the aim of creating an integrated, balanced, and coordinated development pattern along the coastal strip, is being prepared and has now reached the final stages for approval after expert review and inter-sectoral coordination."

"In this plan, issues such as optimal population distribution, link-

ing housing and activity, protecting natural resources and coasts, developing the sea-based economy, improving quality of life, and increasing resilience against natural hazards have been specially considered, and efforts have been made to shape new coastal cities as examples of smart and sustainable development," he added.

Maleki underlined that within the framework of developing new coastal settlements with an economic and sea-based approach, the new cities of Tis in Sistan and Baluchestan Province, Central Makoran, Makoran, Khalij-e Fars and Kushk in Hormozgan



Province are in the execution priority, and among these, the new city of Tis in Chabahar Port is ready to attract developers to serve as the country's first new coastal city hosting specialists and investors in the field of urban development.

## Non-oil transit at Bushehr Port jumps 385%: PMO



### Economy Desk

Non-oil transit and cabotage at Bushehr Port have recorded significant growth since the start of the current Iranian year on March 21, according to Iran's Ports and Maritime Organization (PMO).

The organization said non-oil transit through the port rose 385% year-on-year to 6,500 tons from the beginning of the year to date, the Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA) reported on Monday.

Non-oil cabotage at the port increased 100% over the same period to 1,700 tons, while oil cabotage totaled 120,000 tons, marking a 17% rise.

# Iran's cognitive misperceptions of China



By Mohammad Ali  
Ghanamizadeh Fallahi

Expert on international affairs

## OPINION EXCLUSIVE

In recent weeks, the People's Republic of China (PRC) has once again demonstrated that its Middle East policy is predicated not on ideological affinities or bloc-based loyalties, but on a rigorous calculus of interests, costs, and risks. The recent meeting between China's special envoy on the Middle East issue and Israeli officials — alongside parallel engagements with Palestinian counterparts — does not signify an abrupt strategic pivot or the selection of a specific faction. Rather, it represents a calculated effort to reconstruct communication channels, maintain the capacity for dialogue with all stakeholders, and prevent regional instability from spilling over into the critical economic and security infrastructure upon which China relies. In the Middle East theater, Beijing aims less for the political victory of a single party than for the mitigation of uncertainty — volatility that threatens to erode its trade flows, energy security, investment portfolios, and diplomatic credibility. Viewed through a data-driven lens, several salient points emerge:

**1. Level of representation:** The deployment of a special envoy, rather than a foreign minister or a high-ranking politburo member, allows Beijing to manage symbolic sensitivities while simultaneously engaging in technical and security-focused dialogue.

**2. Strategic timing:** These diplomatic maneuvers occur during a period when regional tensions — ranging from wars of attrition to maritime security risks and reciprocal threats — have once again cast a shadow over energy markets and transit corridors.

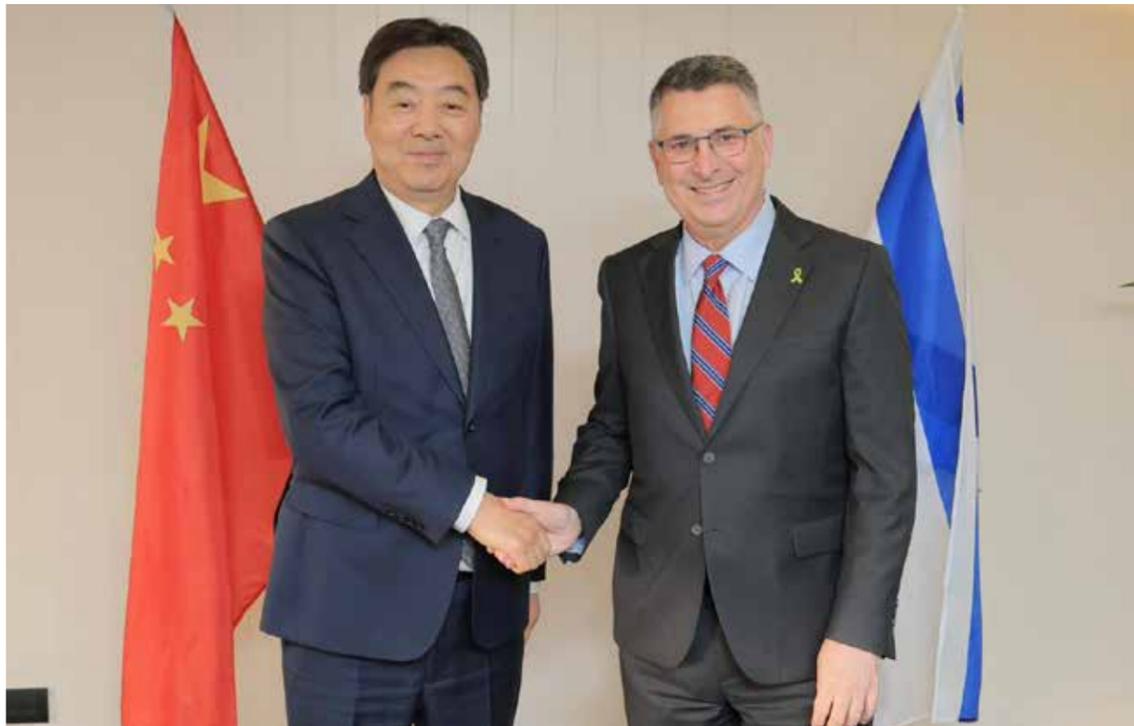
**3. Diplomatic lexicon:** China's diplomatic discourse relies heavily on concepts such as stability, dialogue, de-escalation, and mutual respect for interests. While seemingly neutral, these terms carry a distinct operational meaning: China seeks to avoid costly security commitments while retaining sufficient leverage to reduce crisis intensity through limited mediation or soft power when necessary.

### Logic of developmental state

This dynamic must be contextualized within China's political philosophy and governance logic. Contemporary China functions as a developmental, stability-seeking state that derives its domestic legitimacy largely from economic efficiency and the management of social order. In this model, foreign policy serves as a direct extension of developmental imperatives: energy security, supply chain resilience, access to various markets, infrastructure protection, and the mitigation of geopolitical risks. Consequently, Beijing seeks a network of flexible partnerships in the Middle East rather than rigid alliances. This network allows China to engage simultaneously with conflicting powers without being constrained by the binary, zero-sum logic of "friend versus foe". In essence, China seeks to extract economic utility from a volatile region without incurring direct security costs.

### Israel factor, regional balancing

For China, Israel is not merely a political actor but a nexus of technology, innovation, and economic capacity. While external pressures — specifically security sensitivities and constraints arising from Great Power Competition — limit the scope of cooperation, the structural attraction of Israel's knowledge-based economy remains undeniable. Furthermore, Beijing recognizes that any escalation between Iran and Israel, or the expansion of peripheral crises, directly impacts energy prices, maritime freedom of navigation, and the regional investment climate. Thus,



Chinese Special Envoy on the Middle East Issue Zhai Jun (L) meets with Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Sa'ar in Al-Quds (Jerusalem) on January 8, 2026.

from Beijing's perspective, maintaining an open channel with Israel is a component of risk management, paralleling its engagement with Iran and other regional actors.

### Implications for Iran-China relations

How do these maneuvers impact the Sino-Iranian relationship, and what perceptual errors does Iran entertain regarding China's political philosophy?

• **Short-term vs. medium-term impacts:** In the short term, these meetings serve primarily as signaling rather than a fundamental structural shift. China neither can nor desires to readily sacrifice its relationship with Iran; Tehran remains a vital energy supplier, a geo-economic node connecting East and West, and an influential actor in the security equations of the Persian Gulf and West Asia. Simultaneously, China wishes to avoid transferring the costs of sanctions, financial isolation, or proxy conflicts into its own economy. The probable trajectory is a continuation of ties, but with heightened sensitivity to risks and a stronger emphasis on de-escalatory behaviors.

However, in the medium term, a significant consequence may emerge: the erosion of Iran's exclusive strategic value to China. As Beijing diversifies its portfolio of reliable regional channels, Iran's

bargaining power in specific domains — such as energy contracts, investment terms, and sanctions evasion mechanics — may diminish. If Iran assumes that China is inevitably compelled to rely on it under all circumstances, it has failed to grasp China's logic of external balancing. China seeks autonomy and flexibility, not dependency; it aims to secure alternative pathways to minimize the costs associated with any potential shift in the status quo.

• **The great power variable:** In an environment defined by intensified Great Power Competition, where issues ranging from trade to technology and security are deeply intertwined, the "Iran file" may become a variable in China's broader negotiations with other global powers. This does not imply a direct transaction against Iran, but it suggests that Tehran should not view its relationship with Beijing as an immutable political guarantee. China typically avoids becoming hostage to a single foreign policy dossier. Wherever costs escalate, China employs diplomatic and economic instruments to reduce them, even if this necessitates a relative distancing from radical positions or a reduction in the visibility of certain collaborations. Yet, within this Chinese Realpolitik, a latent opportunity exists for Iran. An effective Sino-Israeli channel can facilitate



Chinese Special Envoy on the Middle East Issue Zhai Jun (L) meets with the Ambassador of Palestine to China Jawad Mohammed Qutish Awad in Beijing, China, on February 10, 2026.

CHINESE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

back-channel messaging and de-escalation during crises. In a region where a single miscalculation can trigger a chain reaction, neutral or semi-neutral communication conduits are invaluable. However, utilizing this asset requires a paradigm shift: Iran must transition its relationship with China from an expectation of absolute political patronage to one of risk management and project-based cooperation. Otherwise, any engagement between China and an adversary will be interpreted as betrayal, leading to the erosion of trust.

### Iran's misperceptions of China's political philosophy

Iran's strategic community often suffers from four specific perceptual errors regarding Chinese political philosophy:

**1. Conflating anti-hegemonism with ideological alliance:** Many in Iran assume that because China challenges certain US policies, it naturally stands in Iran's ideological camp. In reality, China pursues multipolarity to expand its own strategic maneuverability, not to form a fixed anti-Western axis with binding security commitments. China aims to alter the rules of the game to avoid living under a unipolar order, but it pursues this via economic pragmatism and balanced diplomacy, not rigid pacts.

**2. A revolutionary reading of the CCP:** The term "communist" is often associated in the Iranian mindset with an idealist, combative foreign policy. However, the CCP today acts primarily as a party of order and development. Even when invoking justice or international law in discourse, its decision-making is driven by the maintenance of conditions conducive to growth and stability. This utilitarianism allows China to address conflicting actors simultaneously: political morality is defined as collective stability and prosperity, not loyalty to a specific front.

**3. Misinterpreting "non-interference":** The principle of non-interference is sometimes misconstrued as definitive political support for nations under pressure. In Chinese logic, non-interference primarily denotes the avoidance of costly security entanglements and a preference for negotiated settlements. China may advocate for de-escalation at the UN Security Council, but it refrains from direct confrontation or offering defensive guarantees. Expecting China to act as a security ally contradicts its pragmatic philosophy.

**4. The morality trap:** There is a tendency to view China's normative diplomatic language (justice, fairness) as a reflection of its operational policy. In practice, China's foreign policy is a cost-benefit mechanism. China may support a cease-fire or a political solution, but it will simultaneously hedge its bets to protect its interests in any scenario. This dichotomy between rhetoric and practice is not necessarily hypocrisy, but the reflection of a state logic that views foreign policy solely as an instrument for domestic development.

### Toward a realistic partnership

If Iran seeks a more sustainable relationship with China, it must transition from a "patronage-centric" to a "partnership-centric" mindset. A partnership-centric approach involves defining specific projects, designing financial and legal mechanisms to mitigate sanctions risk, clarifying mutual expectations, and refraining from aggrandizing China's role in security equations. In this framework, China's engagement with Israel is not an existential threat but part of a consistent pattern of balancing.

Simultaneously, Iran must guard against allowing emotional or symbolic interpretations of Chinese behavior to create cognitive crises in its domestic and foreign policy. What erodes the relationship is not merely China's contact with others, but the exaggerated projection of the Sino-Iranian bond, followed by the



Beijing seeks a network of flexible partnerships in the Middle East rather than rigid alliances. This network allows China to engage simultaneously with conflicting powers without being constrained by the binary, zero-sum logic of "friend versus foe". In essence, China seeks to extract economic utility from a volatile region without incurring direct security costs.

inevitable disillusionment of reality. Ultimately, China's policy in the Middle East resembles a massive ship in a turbulent sea: it can neither outrun the waves

nor does it wish to fight them; instead, it attempts to traverse the turmoil by adjusting its angle, selecting the appropriate speed, and maintaining mul-

tipl potential courses. If Iran grasps this logic accurately, it can mitigate misunderstandings and define its position vis-à-vis China more realistically. In this

view, the improvement of the China-Israel channel is neither a sign of betrayal nor a promise of grand mediation; it is an indication that China intends to

be present in multiple rooms simultaneously to minimize the cost of surprise. Iran's art, therefore, lies not in expecting loyalty, but in constructing measurable

common interests and seeing China as it truly is: a pragmatic state that defines foreign policy through stability and development.

## How China's Ninth Bureau counters Mossad operations in Mideast



By Nadia Helmy

Visiting senior researcher at the Centre for Middle Eastern Studies

O P I N I O N

The Ninth Bureau (Bureau 9) of the Chinese Ministry of State Security (MSS) is a high-level intelligence agency focused on counter-espionage. Its role has grown in the Middle East, particularly in Iran and Egypt, to protect China's economic and strategic interests. The Chinese Bureau of State Security primarily counters Mossad operations by strengthening security coordination with Cairo and Tehran to secure China's Belt and Road Initiative projects and deploy Chinese defense technology within Egypt and Iran. This aims to reduce the effectiveness of Israeli infiltration of Chinese interests in both countries.

The Ninth Bureau (Bureau 9) is considered one of the most sensitive units within the Chinese Ministry of State Security. Its primary function is to monitor American intelligence and military activities, especially those targeting China and its allies and partners worldwide, particularly in areas of sensitive Chinese influence in the Middle East, such as Egypt and Iran, and to protect Chinese interests in Tel Aviv. Its primary role is to combat foreign espionage and monitor foreign intelligence activities targeting Chinese interests or its strategic partners. Here, the Ninth Bureau of the Chinese Ministry of State Security acts as a technical intelligence shield aimed at fortifying the Egyptian-Chinese partnership against Israeli espionage or sabotage attempts through the Israeli Mossad, with a particular focus on technical and cyber aspects.

The Chinese Ninth Bureau also works to curb Israeli Mossad operations inside Iran by providing close Chinese monitoring of Mossad infiltration into Iran, especially after the Israeli operations against Tehran and its sensitive facilities in 2005. Here, the Chinese Ninth Bureau seeks to support Iranian agencies by exchanging intelligence information and providing advanced technologies to protect defense and nuclear facilities and to prevent the collapse of their security systems that threaten Chinese interests. Following a similar Chinese strategy to counter Israeli intelligence espionage against Chinese interests in Tel Aviv, the Chinese Ninth Bureau works to protect China's technological and smart investments in Israel, such as the ports of Haifa and Tel Aviv, from Israeli or American counterintelligence penetrations, ensuring the confidentiality of sensitive Chinese technology.

In this context, the Ninth Bureau of the Chinese Ministry of State Security seeks to enhance China's strategic security in Egypt. The bureau focuses on protecting maritime routes, the Suez Canal, and Chinese logistics projects in Cairo, such as the Suez Canal Economic Zone and TEDA's projects, primarily by strengthening counter-espionage efforts against Israel in North African countries. Here, the Ninth Bureau specifically targets securing vital Chinese infrastructure through counterintelligence operations to limit any competing Israeli, American, or Western influence that could harm China's growing influence in the region.

This is the same point raised by the Israeli newspaper "Israel Hayom" in



THE ECONOMIST

a report published in 2025, citing Israeli security sources who expressed concern about joint meetings between high-ranking Egyptian and Chinese officials. These meetings reportedly addressed advanced Chinese arms deals for Egypt, including warships and advanced Chinese air defense systems. The Israeli newspaper, quoting Israeli military and security officials, expressed apprehension that the Egyptian army might diversify its arms sources, particularly from Beijing, as part of a new Egyptian military policy aimed at reducing its dependence on the United States, the traditional arms supplier to the Egyptian army. This reliance stems from US restrictions on certain military exports to Egypt, imposed to ensure Israel's qualitative military edge in the region.

Israeli intelligence, as expressed in publicly published reports in Tel Aviv, fears that Egyptian-Chinese talks and deals are not limited to the arms sector alone but also encompass other areas that deeply threaten Israeli national security. These include joint Egyptian-Chinese military training, most notably the "Eagles of Civilization" joint Egyptian-Chinese exercises and maneuvers from April to May 2025, technological cooperation in electronic warfare and surveillance systems, and the transfer of advanced Chinese military technolo-

gy to Egypt. Consequently, the Chinese Ninth Bureau is monitoring and countering Israeli Mossad operations in Cairo by strengthening security coordination with Egypt to secure Chinese "Belt and Road" projects in Egypt and providing a defense technology system to prevent Mossad intelligence penetrations in Cairo.

The Ninth Bureau of the Chinese Ministry of State Security plays a significant role in monitoring Israeli Mossad activities against Egypt. This role is highlighted in the following points, according to intelligence and analytical data for 2025 and 2026, through tracking Israeli intelligence infiltration of Egypt: The Ninth Bureau monitors Mossad attempts to infiltrate personnel or institutions cooperating with China in Egypt, especially given the recent increase in military and intelligence cooperation between Cairo and Beijing.

The Chinese Ninth Bureau also works on countering technical and cyber espionage of Chinese activities within Egyptian and Iranian territories: The Ninth Bureau contributes to providing the Egyptian side with closed Chinese technologies and systems that are "impenetrable" to Israeli or Western software. This is an approach that China has also begun implementing in other countries, such as Iran, to neutralize Mossad's technical capabilities. The Ninth Bureau



The headquarters of the Chinese Ministry of Public Security near Tiananmen Square, Beijing, are also officially listed as the Ministry of State Security (MSS) headquarters, but those are actually located at No. 100 Xiyuan, Haidian District, Beijing.

WIKIMEDIA



The Ninth Bureau of the MSS is waging a silent and comprehensive intelligence war to undermine Mossad operations, particularly in Iran, considering Israeli infiltration a threat to its strategic interests. The Ninth Bureau is working to uncover spy networks and thwart operations launched from neighboring Asian countries against Tehran, all within the framework of protecting Beijing's regional partnerships.

of Intelligence in China is currently focused on protecting Chinese military technology in Egypt, particularly given Egypt's acquisition of advanced Chinese air defense systems, such as the HQ-9B and J-10C fighter jets.

The Ninth Bureau is tasked with preventing Mossad from accessing the technical details of these weapons or attempting to disable them electronically. This explains Israel's growing concern regarding this intelligence cooperation between China and Egypt.

The Chinese Ninth Bureau is also working on intelligence sharing with Egypt. Reports indicate a significant shift in the level of coordination between the Chinese Ministry of State Security and the Egyptian General Intelligence Directorate in 2025-2026. Information is being exchanged regarding agent movements and suspicious activities that may aim to destabilize the region or harm shared interests. Here, the Ninth Bureau of the Chinese Ministry of State Security is actively monitoring what is known as "gray warfare" or "gray security" and the private intelligence companies that Mossad might use as cover for its activities in Africa and Egypt.

In this context, the Ninth Bureau of the Chinese Ministry of State Security is conducting extensive operations to counter Mossad's regional operations and infiltrations in Egypt and Iran. The Ninth Bureau of the MSS is waging a silent and comprehensive intelligence war to undermine Mossad operations, particularly in Iran, considering Israeli infiltration a threat to its strategic interests. The Ninth Bureau is working to uncover spy networks and thwart operations launched from neighboring Asian countries against Tehran, all within the framework of protecting Beijing's regional partnerships. The Chinese Ninth Bureau's role is focused on countering Mossad within the Middle East, specifically to protect China's strategic partners, such as Egypt and Iran. Here, the Chinese move, through its Ninth Bureau, aims to support Iran in confronting the deep Israeli penetrations revealed by the 2025 operations. These operations followed Israel's strikes and targeting of Iranian infrastructure and nuclear reactors due to the increasing Israeli penetration of Tehran. The Ninth Bureau, affiliated with the Chinese Ministry of State Security, monitors and analyzes the activities of the Israeli Mossad and dismantles Israeli spy networks that use neighboring countries as platforms to carry out operations inside Iran.

Beijing views the Mossad's success in penetrating Iran and its ally Egypt as a direct threat to China's direct interests. This compels China to intensify its efforts to counter Israeli intelligence, which it refers to in intelligence circles as "countering Pandora's box of risks". To this end, the Chinese Ninth Bureau is intensifying its security cooperation with both Egypt and Iran. The Bureau operates within a comprehensive Chinese strategy in Cairo and Tehran to enhance the intelligence security of Chinese partnerships in the Middle East, particularly in Egypt and Iran. In addition to the silent war China is waging against the Israeli Mossad, it aims to contain Israeli intelligence influence and ensure the stability of its economic and political partners in the region.

The full article first appeared on Modern Diplomacy.

## AFC Women's Asian Cup:

## Qanbari vows 'utmost effort' but tempers expectations for Iran

## Sports Desk

Iran captain Zahra Qanbari has pledged that her side will give their "utmost effort" at the upcoming AFC Women's Asian Cup, while cautioning against unrealistic expectations as Team Melli prepare to navigate a formidable group in Australia.

Making only their second appearance in the continental showpiece, Iran have been drawn in Group A alongside hosts Australia, South Korea, and the Philippines.

Team Melli will open their campaign against South Korea — runners-up in the previous edition — at Gold Coast Stadium on March 2. They will then face the hosts, who reached the semifinals of the 2023 FIFA Women's World Cup on home soil, at the same venue three days later.

Iran conclude the group stage against 2022 semifinalists the Philippines on March 8. The top two teams from each of the three groups, along with the two



Iran's women's national team players are pictured in a training session in Tehran, Iran, on February 22, 2026.

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best third-placed sides, will advance to the quarterfinals. With the tournament fast approaching, Qanbari offered a candid assessment of Iran's prospects during a final press

conference before the squad's departure from Tehran, reiterating the team's determination despite the odds. "We cannot expect this team to advance from the group stage,"

Qanbari said. "We face a very difficult task, having been drawn against extremely strong opponents. However, we will give our utmost effort and aim to achieve the best possible results."

Iran will be without prolific winger Negin Zandi in Australia after she sustained a ligament injury while on club duty with Bam Khatoon. Still, Qanbari expressed confidence in the squad's depth and unity.

"The national team is a blend of experienced players and promising young talents, and there is a very positive atmosphere within the squad," she said. "We have had good preparation and will strive to deliver strong performances."

The captain also underlined the importance of long-term development, framing the Asian Cup as both a competitive challenge and a valuable learning opportunity for emerging players.

"We must support these young players so they can achieve success in the future," she added. Head coach Marziyeh Jafari echoed her captain's measured outlook, acknowledging the challenges surrounding the team's preparation.

"When I accepted the national team role last May, few believed

I would take on the responsibility given our limited preparation time," said Jafari, who was appointed last April. "I carefully considered whether I could truly help the team under such conditions. With faith and hard work, we have moved forward."

Managing expectations ahead of a daunting group stage, Jafari emphasized Iran's underdog status.

"No one expected this team to qualify for the Asian Cup, and we cannot expect miracles in the finals," said the Asian Women's Coach of the Year.

Rather than focusing solely on immediate results, Jafari stressed the need for a long-term vision for the growth of women's football in Iran, confirming that plans are already in motion to build a sustainable future.

Iran secured their place in the finals in dramatic fashion last July, defeating Jordan 2-1 in a must-win Group A qualifier to top the standings on head-to-head criteria.

## Iranian Women's Basketball Super League:

## Sahar Academy, Esteghlal set up final showdown



IRIBF

## Sports Desk

Sahar Academy and Esteghlal will face off in the Iranian Women's Basketball Super League finals after sealing semifinal series victories on Sunday.

American center Alexis Poole delivered a dominant performance with a game-high 29 points, eight

rebounds, and five steals — posting an efficiency rating of 37 — to power Sahar to an 81-61 win over Palayesh Naft Abadan in Shahr-e Qods.

The result secured a 2-0 sweep for Sahar in the best-of-three series. Poole had also starred in Friday's 68-58 victory in the series opener, recording a double-double of 16

points and 10 rebounds to set the tone for her side's progression. Earlier on Sunday, Esteghlal completed its own semifinal sweep with a second consecutive win over Bahman Group.

After cruising to a commanding 72-50 triumph in Game 1, Esteghlal faced a far sterner test in the second fixture, eventually prevailing 70-63 in overtime.

The Tehran Blues dominated the opening two quarters to take a 38-24 lead into halftime. However, Bahman mounted a spirited comeback in the second half, tying the contest at 60-60 to force overtime.

Farzaneh Jamami's side held their nerve in the extra period to seal victory and book a place in the championship series in their top-flight debut season.

Farnaz Khodamardi led the scoring for Esteghlal with 29 points and an efficiency rating of 29. American duo Sabria Dean — the top scorer in Game 1 — and Chia Rael Whitsett also made key contributions in the decisive win.

## Persian Gulf Pro League:

## El Haddadi screamer sends Esteghlal top



Esteghlal midfielder Munir El Haddadi scores the winner during a 1-0 win against Mes Rafsanjan in the Persian Gulf Pro League in Rafsanjan, Iran, on February 22, 2026.

FFIRI

## Sports Desk

Moroccan midfielder Munir El Haddadi struck a stunning long-range effort to give Esteghlal a 1-0 victory over bottom-placed Mes Rafsanjan on Sunday, sending the Blues to the top of the Persian Gulf Pro League table.

The former Barcelona forward surged into the opposition half before unleashing a left-footed drive from 30 yards that beat Mes goalkeeper Payam Parsa in the 15th minute. It marked his fourth goal in 27 appearances across all competitions since joining the club last summer. Saied Saharkhizan believed he had doubled the visitors' advantage two minutes before halftime, but his effort was ruled out following a VAR review for offside in the buildup.

The narrow win was enough

to lift Esteghlal — with Voria Ghafouri serving as interim head coach following Ricardo Sá Pinto's dismissal on Saturday — to the summit of the 16-team standings on 38 points from 21 matches, two clear of Tractor.

Earlier in the day, Tractor were held to a 1-1 draw by Malavan at the Sirous Qayeqran Stadium.

Mohammad-Javad Mohammadi headed home Qaem Eslamikhah's set piece just before the hour mark to put Malavan ahead. However, fullback Danial Esmaeilfard restored parity with a composed left-footed finish in the 87th minute, ensuring Mohammad Rabiei avoided defeat in his first game in charge after replacing Dragana Skočić last week.

Elsewhere in the round, Foolad Khuzestan defeated Zob Ahan 2-1 at home on Saturday, courtesy of

substitute Arash Akbarzadeh's dramatic 97th-minute winner. The result extended Foolad's strong run to three wins and two draws in five matches since Hamid Motahari took over in mid-January.

Foolad climbed to ninth with 28 points, while Zob Ahan remained second from bottom on 19.

On Friday, Persepolis suffered a third consecutive league defeat, falling 2-1 at home to Khaybar to remain fifth on 35 points, as the visitors moved up to eighth with 29.

Chadormalou produced the shock of the round, coming from behind to thrash Golgozar, which led the table before Sunday's games, 5-1 at home. Fajr Sepasi edged Shams Azar 1-0 in Shiraz, while Irilco and Paykan shared the spoils in a 1-1 draw in Arak.

## Asian Cadet Fencing Championship:

## Iran finishes empty-handed after saber setback against Japan

## Sports Desk

Iran's campaign at the Asian Cadet Fencing Championship ended in disappointment as the country suffered an early exit in the boys' team saber event in Jakarta, Indonesia.

The Iranian trio of Hesam Moradi, Mohammad-Taha Abbaszadeh, and Kamyar Shahsavari began their campaign in the round of 16 against Japan. Despite a

spirited performance, they narrowly fell 45-42 in a closely contested bout.

With 16 teams competing in the saber team event, the defeat left Iran with a 10th-place overall finish.

The result compounded an already frustrating tournament for the Iranian delegation, whose fencers had also failed to secure a medal in the individual events preceding the team competition.



IRFNC

# Temporary world heritage dossier for Seymreh Valley completed

## Iranica Desk

The temporary nomination dossier for the global registration of the "Natural and Historical Landscape of Seymreh Valley," proposed as a mixed natural-cultural site, has been completed following preliminary research and with the cooperation of experts from various fields. The dossier has been submitted to Iran's Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts for review and completion of administrative procedures. According to Sharifi, the area represents one of the

world's most outstanding examples of the consequences of a major geomorphological event — the massive Kabir Kuh landslide — on the formation of natural landscapes, ecosystems, and patterns of human settlement, IRNA wrote. He noted that the proposed dossier was prepared in accordance with the criteria of the UNESCO World Heritage Convention. The Kabir Kuh landslide, recognized as the largest known landslide in the world, provides a unique illustration of active geological processes in the Zagros region.

Sharifi added that the continuity of human habitation, displacement, and cultural adaptation in the Seymreh and Kashkan valleys over a span of approximately 85,000 years represents an exceptional example of the enduring relationship between humans and nature within an inherently unstable landscape. Explaining the scope and components of this cultural and natural landscape, he said the Seymreh Valley and parts of the Kashkan Valley, the northern slopes of Kabir Kuh, the vast landslide mass, natural dam lakes, sedimen-

tary terraces, the eleven wetlands of Pol-e Dokhtar, and a series of prominent valleys and gorges together form a coherent system of natural and cultural phenomena whose outstanding universal value can be demonstrated in an integrated manner. He emphasized that submission of the dossier marks the first step toward the site's global registration. Following evaluation by the ministry and review by the National World Heritage Committee, and if approved, the site will be added to Iran's tentative list for future nomination to UNESCO.



IRNA

## Restoration work begins on Ivan-e Qadamgah in Arsanjan

### Iranica Desk

The Achaemenid-era monument known as Ivan-e Qadamgah in Arsanjan, a nationally registered heritage site in Fars Province, has suffered extensive damage over the years, caused by both natural factors and, more significantly, human activities. According to recent reports, preparations are underway for a new phase of restoration and conservation of the ancient structure, which is expected to commence in the near future.

Also known as Chashtgah, the site is among the numerous legacies of the Achaemenid Empire and is situated on the slopes of Mount Mehr near the village of Chasht-Khvar, approximately 25 kilometers from Arsanjan, IRNA reported. Carved from stone and displaying architectural features comparable to Achaemenid rock-cut tombs, the monument is thought to have served a rit-



ual purpose, or possibly functioned as a tomb or an ossuary. Nevertheless, its precise role continues to be debated and studied by archaeologists and historians. Despite being officially registered as a national monument of Iran, Ivan-e Qadamgah has long lacked sufficient protection and has never benefited from a comprehensive restoration program. Following a recent field inspection, the Director General of

the Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Organization of Fars Province announced that a formal restoration and conservation process for the historic site is planned to begin soon. Behnam Moridi described Ivan-e Qadamgah as one of the most important surviving examples from the Achaemenid era, emphasizing its particular significance in Fars Province due to its rock-cut design and historical value.



IRNA

He added that documentation, technical assessments, and executive planning for the restoration of the monument have been placed among the top priorities of the department's annual agenda. Emphasizing that safeguarding Chashtgah's ancient heritage is a serious national responsibility, Moridi said orders have been issued to secure dedicated funding and to launch specialized conservation studies,

which will be pursued with determination. According to him, cultural heritage plays a key role in sustainable development across different parts of the province, including Arsanjan. Proper restoration of Ivan-e Qadamgah could help strengthen tourism in eastern Fars, while tourism development based on preserving historical authenticity can protect cultural identity, create local employment, and unlock

regional potential. Moridi also pointed to the site's proximity to the World Heritage complex of Pasargadae, noting that this creates an opportunity to form a coherent historical tourism route that would increase visitor stays and contribute to the region's economic growth. Arsanjan is located approximately 130 kilometers east of Shiraz, the provincial capital. Ivan-e Qadamgah is carved into a rocky mountainside and consists of two stone porticoes. These two porticoes are connected by twin staircases, with the upper portico linked to the lower one through a series of steps. Above the upper portico, five large cavities have been carved into the rock, while a number of spherical hollows are distributed around the structure. In front of the monument lies a pool, which was historically fed by a spring flowing from the lower platform of the site.

## Reading Room

### Legacy of Nomadi Bartaia; bridging Persian and Georgian cultures

By Ehsan Houshmand  
Researcher in Ethnic Studies in Iran

Nomadi Bartaia, one of the renowned Iranologists of Georgia and the Caucasus region, passed away after several decades of scholarly activity that significantly advanced Iranian studies in the region. Over nearly six decades, Professor Bartaia played a key role in educating new generations of scholars and in highlighting the linguistic and cultural connections between Iran and Georgia through his teaching and research on Iranian studies and the Persian language. Nomadi Bartaia was born in 1944 in western Georgia. In the 1960s, he officially began his academic career in departments of Oriental Studies, focusing on the Persian language and the cultural and literary ties between Iran and Georgia. Over nearly six decades of research and teaching, he trained many students who later became prominent Iranologists. Bartaia held professorships in Oriental Studies and Iranian

Studies at Tbilisi State University and Kutaisi University, and he also studied at several universities in Iran. This combination of advanced academic education in Iran, fieldwork, documentary research, and library studies in Georgia enabled him to pursue Iranian studies with notable breadth and depth. In addition to teaching and research, he served as editor-in-chief of several publications, thereby contributing to the strengthening of cultural relations between Iran and Georgia in the public sphere. One of his notable works, Persian Vocabulary in the Georgian Language According to Yossef Grishashvili's "Urban Folk Culture", was published with the cooperation of the Cultural Office of the Iranian Embassy in Georgia. The historical and civilizational ties between Iran and Georgia constitute one of the most significant areas of Iranian studies. The presence of Iranian heritage from ancient to later periods — including inscriptions, stone carvings,



Nomadi Bartaia (L) and Ehsan Houshmand  
IRNA

manuscripts, buildings, palaces, fortresses, jewelry, and coins — clearly demonstrates these deep connections. The influence of Shahnameh-based names among Georgians, as well as the role of Georgian elites in Iran's military and administrative structures, particularly during the Safavid era, are also key subjects of scholarly research. Iranian mosques represent another enduring sign of shared Iranian-Georgian heritage. The influence of the Shahnameh on Georgian narratives and epics

— especially The Knight in the Panther's Skin, Georgia's most celebrated literary work — has attracted considerable scholarly attention. Notably, some of the earliest translations of the Shahnameh and other Persian literary works over the past eight centuries were carried out in Georgia, highlighting the resilience of cultural ties despite political fluctuations. The shared historical and cultural foundations between Iran and Georgia contributed to the growth of Iranian studies in Georgia over the past century.

However, in recent decades, Iran's institutional support for Iranian studies and the Persian language in the Caucasus has faced neglect. Over the last century, Iranian studies benefited from the work of major scholars such as Yuri Nikolaevich Marr, Ivane Javakhishvili, and Jamshid Giunashvili, alongside dedicated figures like Professor Nomadi Bartaia. In recent years, I had the opportunity to meet and converse with several distinguished Iranologists in Georgia, including the late Bartaia. In our discussions, he emphasized that cultural relations between Iran and Georgia date back to ancient times and were never fully severed, unlike political relations, which experienced interruptions. He noted that literary relations between the two countries began in the 12th century CE and continued despite historical disruptions, including the Russian occupation of Georgia. He also explained that many major Persian literary works—such as the Shahnameh, Vis and Ramin, the romances of Nezami Ganja-

vi, and Kalila and Demna—were translated into Georgian, although only some have survived due to historical events. Bartaia expressed optimism about contemporary cultural exchanges, noting that while Georgia once primarily translated Iranian literature, Iran has recently shown growing interest in Georgian culture. He cited the Persian translations of The Knight in the Panther's Skin as an example of this renewed engagement. Emphasizing his enduring affection for Iran, he stated that genuine understanding of Iranian culture requires firsthand experience and close interaction with its people. After a lifetime of dedication to Iranian studies, Nomadi Bartaia's name remains enduring. His legacy — reflected in the scholars he trained and the works he produced — continues to inspire those interested in Iranian culture and civilization, particularly in the Caucasus and Georgia.

This article was first published on ensafnews.com.

**ADVERTORIAL**

Afshin Hatami, CEO of Khuzestan Water and Wastewater Company:

# All ongoing and semi-finished water and wastewater projects in Khuzestan will be completed



construction of new treatment plants, and implementation of urban wastewater control schemes. Cooperation among the government, municipalities, and the private sector can accelerate the reform and development of water and wastewater infrastructure and improve the quality of life for the people of Khuzestan.

The appointment of Afshin Hatami as the new CEO of Khuzestan Water and Wastewater Company—an executive who advanced step by step from technical and expert positions within Ahvaz Water and Wastewater Company and now heads one of the province's most important service and infrastructure organizations—promises greater public satisfaction in the near future.

Hatami emphasized the importance of solidarity and consensus among provincial officials, particularly between Governor Dr. Mowali-Zadeh and Khuzestan's representatives in the Islamic Consultative Assembly, to remove existing obstacles in the water and wastewater sector.

Referring to drought conditions in both the country and the province, he outlined quantitative and qualitative water challenges as well as ecosystem changes. He noted that drought has led to reduced groundwater resources in some cities and quality deterioration in others.

**Khuzestan, as one of the first provinces in the country to experience drought in recent years, has faced numerous challenges in supplying drinking water. In this regard, Khuzestan Water and Wastewater Company has successfully mitigated the impacts of drought by implementing planned operational measures**



Groundwater levels in northern Khuzestan cities such as Izeh, Baghmalek, and Haftkel have significantly declined; in Izeh, well water levels dropped by up to 35 meters. Cities such as Hendijan, Khorramshahr, and Abadan have also faced serious supply problems due to reduced river flows—their sole water source—and increased salinity affecting water quality.

### Use of Treated Water for Non-Drinking Purposes

In a special interview with the newspaper "Iran," Hatami stated that one of the current challenges in Khuzestan is the use of treated drinking water for non-potable purposes, particularly irrigation of green spaces. He stressed

that municipalities must conduct studies and adopt methods for supplying raw water for non-drinking uses.

He added that the company is implementing network rehabilitation projects in priority cities to optimize consumption, reduce water loss, minimize operational risks in distribution networks, and improve both quantitative and qualitative performance. Water loss rates in many cities remain significant, largely due to aging infrastructure and expired service life. Over recent years, comprehensive studies of distribution networks in all provincial cities have been prepared and are now serving as

the basis for executive operations.

Khuzestan on the Path of Water Transformation: From Drought Control to Sustainable Rural Supply

### 24 villages in East Shoaibiyeh and Mianab benefit from sustainable drinking water

The CEO announced that 24 villages in East Shoaibiyeh and Mianab now have access to sustainable drinking water, with an investment of 1,500 billion rials aimed at alleviating rural water stress.

At the inauguration ceremony of the pumping station and transmission line at the Deilam

junction (East Shoaibiyeh), Hatami said the project included construction of 60 kilometers of transmission pipelines, rehabilitation of water supply facilities, installation of four electropumps, electrical panels, transformers, site development, and reservoir sealing.

With the launch of the first phase, more than 7,000 residents in 24 villages have gained access to safe and sustainable drinking water. Ten additional villages are planned under the second phase. The project was implemented in cooperation with the Karbala Headquarters and with the support of the local Member of Parliament.

In the presence of the Minister of Energy and the Governor of Khuzestan;

## Ending Arvand River pollution and new horizons in wastewater management

The current value of the project has been announced at 3 trillion tomans, with an initial capacity of 30,000 cubic meters per day, covering a population of approximately 177,000 people. The final capacity of Khorramshahr Wastewater Treatment Plant is projected at 48,000 cubic meters per day.

Hatami stated that the project began in 2015 but was halted for several years. Since the beginning of the 14th administration, it has been resumed and, after two years of follow-up by the Ministry of Energy and the National Water and Wastewater Engineering Company, is now in the testing and initial commissioning stage.

With the commissioning of this plant, the discharge of raw sewage into the Arvand River will be completely halted, and treated effluent can be utilized in agricultural and industrial sectors. Referring to provisions in the Seventh National Development Plan requiring industries to use non-conventional water sources, he urged provincial industries to utilize treatment plant outputs

to help achieve sustainable development and reduce water stress.

Further projects included the inauguration of water supply jihad projects in 41 villages of Haftkel County, implemented through coordination between the Water and Wastewater Company, Imam Hassan Mojtaba (AS) Headquarters, and the Hazrat Vali-e-Asr (AJ) Corps. Approximately 1,500 households, with a population exceeding 7,000 people, now benefit from sustainable drinking water.

More than 102 kilometers of steel and polyethylene transmission pipelines with diameters up to 20 inches were installed. With the drilling and equipping of wells and expansion of facilities, regional production capacity increased to around 10,000 cubic meters per day. The total value of these rural water supply projects exceeds 8,500 billion rials.

A storage reservoir and pumping station in Chamran City were also inaugurated at a cost of 800 billion rials, with a 6,000-cubic-

**Hatami stated that the project began in 2015 but was halted for several years. Since the beginning of the 14th administration, it has been resumed and, after two years of follow-up by the Ministry of Energy and the National Water and Wastewater Engineering Company, is now in the testing and initial commissioning stage**



meter capacity and 55,000-cubic-meter daily pumping capacity, serving more than 40,000 residents. Additionally, a water filtration project in Bandar Imam Khomeini was launched at a cost

of 450 billion rials, including eight filters with a capacity of 250 cubic meters per hour, significantly improving drinking water quality for 120,000 residents.

Hatami emphasized that these projects represent a major step toward improving service indicators, enhancing infrastructure resilience, and reducing water stress in

Shadegan County, Chamran City, and Bandar Imam Khomeini.

A 5,000-cubic-meter Bozi Martyrs Water Storage Reservoir in Shadegan was also inaugurated with an investment of 550 billion rials in the presence of Energy Minister Abbas Aliabadi. The project ensures sustainable drinking water for over 21,000 residents.

Hatami noted that the reservoir plays a strategic role in stabilizing distribution networks, improving water pressure, and managing consumption. He credited coordinated efforts and continuous follow-up by officials, including the local MP, for securing funding and completing the project.

He concluded by reaffirming the company's commitment to continuing effective cooperation and prioritizing water supply projects across other deprived areas of the province, aiming to achieve water equity, improve welfare indicators, and enhance rural quality of life.