

# Pezeshkian warns social polarization poses serious challenge to country



Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian (C) speaks during the 68th session of the Council for the Development of Qur'anic Culture in Tehran, Iran, on February 24, 2026. [president.ir](#)

## Social Desk

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian warned on Tuesday that deepening social polariza-

tion poses a serious challenge to the country, urging officials to prioritize economic relief, social justice and public trust. Speaking at the 68th session

of the Council for the Development of Qur'anic Culture in Tehran, Pezeshkian said the government's central focus remained improving household

livelihoods and easing pressure on families, adding that division and unfulfilled promises risk eroding social capital at a time of economic strain, [president.ir](#) reported.

His remarks come as policymakers grapple with persistent cost-of-living pressures and uneven service delivery, issues that have fed public dissatisfaction in recent years. By linking social cohesion directly to economic management and administrative conduct, the president signaled that restoring confidence hinges less on rhetoric and more on tangible improvements in governance and welfare outcomes. Pezeshkian criticized what he described as superficial engage-

ment with religious principles, arguing that ethical standards such as honesty, fairness and support for vulnerable groups must be embedded in day-to-day decision-making, budgeting and service provision. Failure to align policy with declared values, he said, widens the gap between public expectations and institutional performance.

He cautioned against making unrealistic pledges, saying that overpromising and underdelivering fuels disillusionment and weakens trust. "Hope is essential, but it must rest on honesty and realism," he said, stressing that senior officials bear primary responsibility for truthful communication.

Addressing recent incidents involving attacks on religious sites and public property, the president condemned acts of violence while acknowledging that some grievances stem from perceptions of discrimination and shortcomings in administrative

performance. Proper implementation of justice and equitable access to services would curb many such tensions, he said.

Pezeshkian added that mosques and community institutions should play a more active role in identifying and assisting households facing hardship, describing them as hubs of social solidarity rather than solely places of worship. The government would support initiatives that mobilize local capacity to address poverty and vulnerability, he said.

He also called for modern educational approaches to engage younger generations, saying ethical instruction must be accompanied by practical role models in public life.

"We did not assume office to command people, but to solve their problems," he said, adding that national solidarity and administrative competence were prerequisites for overcoming economic and social pressures.

## Fajr Visual Arts Festival rolls out 170 events across 31 provinces

Water theme anchors festival to Iran's civilizational roots, minister says

### Arts & Culture Desk

Iran's Culture and Islamic Guidance Minister Abbas Salehi said on Tuesday that this year's Fajr Visual Arts Festival will center on water as a civilizational pillar of Iran, as the 18th edition opens today, in Shushtar, Khuzestan Province, with a nationwide program spanning all 31 provinces.

Salehi said visual arts carry a defined social mandate and must address tangible human concerns, IRNA reported.

Selecting water as the festival's central motif signals what he described as an artistic response to a national priority. In Iranian and Islamic tradition, he noted, water occupies a sacred and communal place, reflected in religious texts, folklore and ritual forms that have evolved over centuries.

This year's program places particular emphasis on public participation. Workshops dedicated to reconstructing traditional cultural symbols linked to water will run alongside exhibitions and urban interventions, under-



scoring the festival's shift towards community-based production. Organizers say the approach seeks to bridge professional art circles and local audiences, embedding contemporary practice in inherited forms.

Running under the banner 'My Homeland/Iran: Visualizing Water', the festival's water-focused strand is conceived as a long-term cultural initiative aimed at promoting responsible consumption and resource management. The symbolic opening on February 25 marks the start of a broader sequence of events planned over the coming months. The festival runs through March 3.

Saideh Arian, secretary of the 'My Homeland' section, said 31 provinces are staging

more than 170 artistic events as part of the festival. Each province is hosting five educational workshops led by artist-mentors, a showcase of workshop outcomes and ancillary visual arts programs linked to water culture.

The section has already commenced activities in 13 provinces, including Ardabil, Kerman (including South Kerman), Kermanshah, North Khorasan, Lorestan, Semnan, Hamedan, Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad, Markazi, Yazd, Zanjan and Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari.

Arian said eight indigenous rain-invoking doll traditions are being revived through large-scale ritual figures, among them Katra Gisheh in Gilan, Buke Baraneh in Kermanshah, Kurdistan and Ilam.

## Sepandarmazgan, ancient ode to women and the soil

### Arts & Culture Desk

Long before heart-shaped candy boxes and red roses took over store windows, ancient Iranians were tipping their hats to women, life, and the living earth itself. On the fifth day of the month of Esfand, which falls around February 24, they marked Esfandegan, also known as Sepandarmazgan, a centuries-old festival that scholars have described as a celebration of "women and life." In historical texts, it was even called the "women's feast."

Today, the holiday barely registers on the public radar. But cultural historians say it deserves a second look, not as a nostalgic relic, but as a living thread that ties together nature, spirituality and the enduring status of women in Iranian culture.

The name "Esfand" traces back to "Spenta Armaiti" in the ancient Zoroastrian scriptures. In that cosmology, Spenta Armaiti was a divine feminine figure, a guardian of the earth, a symbol of patience and devotion. In the spiritual realm, she embodied humility and wisdom; in the material world, she protected the soil, fertility and greenery. Earth wasn't just dirt underfoot. It was mother, steady, generous and life-giving.

The 11th-century scholar Biruni, in his book 'Athar al-Baqiya,' referred to the festival as the 'Feast of Women' and used another intriguing name: "Mozd-giran." Some modern analysts interpret that term as symbolically tied to women's rights, lit-

erally suggesting the "taking of wages," or receiving one's due. In that reading, Esfandegan wasn't just a feel-good holiday; it hinted at recognition of women's natural rights, the right to choose a spouse, a profession, a path in life.

That's a bold claim, and historians debate how far to take it. But what's clear is that women were front and center in the ritual life of the day. Historical accounts describe women dressing in their finest clothes, gathering in prayer and celebration, and holding bouquets of flowers. Some sources suggest the festival also honored unmarried young women, underscoring their place in communal life.

At home, the vibe was warm and unmistakably affectionate. Men gave gifts to their wives. Kindness flowed a little more freely than usual. If it sounds vaguely like Valentine's Day, cultural experts are quick to pump the brakes. They argue that Esfandegan and Valentine's differ in origin, philosophy and ritual. One grew out of ancient Iranian cosmology and reverence for the earth; the other from Western Christian tradition and medieval romance.

Still, most scholars see no need for a cultural tug-of-war. Every tradition that carries a human message of love and respect has its place, they say. The real issue isn't competition, it's amnesia. In recent decades, Valentine's Day has gained popularity among Iranian youth, while Esfandegan has large-



ly gathered dust. Cultural observers often point to a lack of sustained policy support and public programming around indigenous festivals. When homegrown traditions aren't actively introduced to new generations, they can quietly fade into the background.

That's why some experts are calling for a cultural reboot. Instead of pushing back against imported holidays, they suggest shining a brighter spotlight on Iranian celebrations such as Mehregan, the feast of friendship and covenant, and Esfandegan, the day of women and the earth. Not as museum pieces, but as meaningful touchstones that speak to contemporary concerns.

Those concerns are hardly abstract. Women today make up more than half of Iran's population. They are students, scientists, entrepreneurs, industrial workers and public servants, in addition to their foundational roles within families. Analysts argue that paying serious, structured attention to women's challenges and rights isn't just a social ob-

ligation, it's an investment in public health and social balance.

Even the culinary traditions of Esfandegan echo its themes of abundance and renewal. Historical sources mention a special soup known as "Ash-e Esfandi," sometimes called "Haft-daneh" or "seven seeds," made from a mix of grains and legumes, a symbolic nod to fertility and the promise of spring.

Because Esfandegan falls on the eve of Nowruz, the Persian New Year, it also carries the electric hum of seasonal rebirth. Nature is about to turn the page. Green shoots are poised to break through the soil. In that liminal moment between winter and spring, ancient Iranians chose to honor both the earth beneath their feet and the women at the heart of their homes. In a world that often moves too fast to look back, Esfandegan offers a reminder: sometimes the way forward begins by dusting off what we've forgotten.

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