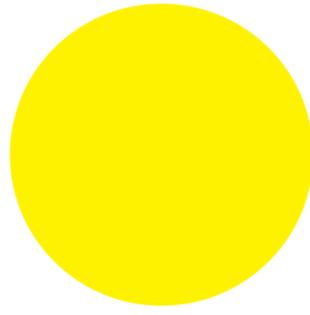


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Deal within reach if diplomacy takes priority, Iran FM says ahead of Geneva talks

Grossi: Necessary elements for deal on the table

International Desk

Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said a deal with the United States is attainable provided diplomacy is given priority, as Tehran and Washington gear up for a third round of negotiations in Geneva on Thursday.

In a post late Tuesday on X, Araghchi described the ongoing talks as a "historic opportunity" to secure an "unprecedented agreement" that would address mutual concerns and protect shared interests. He said the upcoming round would build on understandings reached previously, adding that Iran would return to the negotiating table determined to reach a fair and balanced deal "as quickly as possible."

The Iranian foreign minister also reiterated Tehran's long-standing position that the country would "under no circumstances" develop nuclear weapons, while stressing that Iranians would

never relinquish their right to peaceful nuclear technology. He added that Iran would defend its sovereignty with resolve but would pursue a peaceful solution to disputes through negotiations.

Full sincerity and good faith

Separately, Deputy Foreign Minister Majid Takht-Ravanchi told NPR in an earlier interview that Iran is ready to finalize an agreement swiftly and is prepared to take the necessary steps to make that happen.

"We will enter negotiations in Geneva with full sincerity and good faith, and we hope this goodwill and positive approach will be reciprocated by the American side," he said. The talks come amid heightened tensions, with the United States reinforcing its military presence in the region and warning it could turn to force if diplomacy fails. Takht-Ravanchi said Iran hopes such a scenario



Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi (2nd R) and Deputy Foreign Minister Majid Takht-Ravanchi (2nd L) confer on the sidelines of the second round of talks with the United States in Geneva, Switzerland on February 17, 2026.
● NourNews

can be avoided, cautioning that any conflict would be difficult to contain and would amount to "a real gamble." "A war may begin, but ending it will not be easy," he said. "The entire region

would suffer the consequences of any aggression against Iran." He urged that diplomacy remain the focus instead of military escalation, troop deployments or the dispatch of naval forces.

Iran's Parliament Speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf also stressed at a meeting on Wednesday that all options remain on the table in dealing with the United States, including both "dignified diplomacy" and what he described as a "regret-inducing defense" in case of confrontation.

"If you choose the path of diplomacy—one that respects Iran's dignity and mutual interests—we will be at the negotiating table," he said at the meeting. "But if you opt for war, the proud and united Iranian nation will once again bring you to disgrace."

Meanwhile, Rafael Mariano Grossi, Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency, said in an interview with RTVC Noticias that the crisis between Washington and Tehran can only be resolved through an agreement, warning that otherwise the use of force could be imposed.

Reports suggest Grossi will also attend Thursday's talks to ad-

dress technical aspects. He said the current uncertainty stems from the key fact that the agency has not been able to resume inspections of Iran's enriched uranium as it did before the 12-day war in June. "This is what creates uncertainty, and uncertainty can lead to dramatic decisions," he said.

In that context, Grossi called for intensified diplomatic efforts, noting that while the outcome is not guaranteed, the room for error narrows in the absence of technical verification.

He added that reaching an agreement to prevent further escalation and instability in the region remains possible, and that the necessary elements to achieve such a deal are already on the table. Iran's Parliament Speaker Mohammad Baqer Ghalibaf also stressed at a meeting on Wednesday that all options remain on the table in dealing with the United States, including both "dignified diplomacy" and what he described as a "regret-inducing defense" in case of confrontation.

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Foreign Ministry slams Trump's claims as 'big lie'

International Desk

Iran's Foreign Ministry has strongly pushed back against recent claims made by US President Donald Trump, rejecting his statements on Tehran's nuclear and missile program and the casualties during the January unrest as a "big lie."

In a post on X, Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baghaei called US officials "professional liars," accusing them of being skilled at creating the "illusion of truth." He warned that "no one should be fooled by these prominent untruths." Baghaei further charged that the US administration and its surrounding "war profiteers"—specifically pointing to Israel—are deliberately applying a propaganda tactic attributed to Nazi figure Joseph Goebbels that if you "repeat a lie often enough,



Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baghaei
● IRNA

it becomes the truth." He said they are repeating falsehoods to fuel a "sinister disinformation and misinformation campaign against the nation of Iran." Trump's comments came during his annual State of the Union address. He claimed that Iran possesses missiles capable of threatening Europe and US bases abroad, and is developing longer-range systems that could potentially target the United States.

He also asserted that Washington dismantled Iran's nuclear weapons program during the 12-day conflict in June, but alleged that Tehran has since resumed what he termed its "sinister nuclear ambitions." Referring to the ongoing negotiations between Tehran and Washington—with a third round set for Thursday—Trump stated that while Iran is seeking a deal, the US has yet to hear the "sacred words"

that Iran would never pursue nuclear weapons. This is while Tehran has consistently denied seeking nuclear arms or any other weapons of mass destruction, citing its religious doctrine and established policy.

While expressing a preference for a diplomatic resolution, Trump vowed he would never permit what he called "the world's largest state sponsor of terror" to obtain nuclear weapons.

In another part of his address, Trump alleged that the Islamic Republic had shot or executed at least 32,000 protesters during the January unrest. Iranian authorities have previously stated that the violence which interrupted peaceful protests was the work of foreign-backed terrorist elements, and have put the number of deaths at just around 3,000.

Prominent figures, activists say no to war on Iran

International Desk

A group of 353 Iranian researchers, political and civil society activists, and public figures from across a broad spectrum of political views have signed and released a statement titled "No to War and Aggression Against Iran," urging citizens to raise their voices against any military action targeting the country.

In the statement, the signatories described violence and war as "the greatest evils in politics," warning that armed conflict would bring devastating consequences for Iran and its people.

"War kills, destroys, plunges families into grief, wipes out infrastructure, spreads poverty, and sacrifices the innocent," the statement said. It added that conflict fuels further violence, deepens existing crises, weakens society's ability to address its challenges, and dims prospects for development, democracy, justice, and prosperity in Iran. The group accused Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and war hawks in Washington of seeking, through threats, sanctions, and warmongering, to destabilize and weaken Iran. Referring to the heavy loss of life in January as a result of foreign-backed element's involvement in peaceful protests, the statement said that no tragedy, regardless of its cause, justifies war; further suffering for compatriots, or destruction inflicted on the country.

"We, a group of concerned Iranians, despite the full diversity of our political positions, un-

equivocally and without hesitation oppose any aggression against Iran," the signatories declared. They argued that solutions—however difficult—must be pursued inside the country through constructive, development-oriented and reform-driven internal change.

The statement emphasized the need to "speak out loudly and clearly" against what it called the destructive path of war, adding that in the face of any aggression, they would stand firmly in defense of Iran. The group also called on fellow citizens, as well as individuals with influence and public standing, to amplify their opposition to war and external aggression.

Among the signatories are prominent political, academic and civil society figures, including former vice president Eshaq Jahangiri, former foreign minister Mohammad Javad Zarif, senior reformist figure Behzad Nabavi, intellectual Abdolkarim Soroush, former communications minister Mohammad Javad Azari Jahromi, academic Mohammad Fazeli, and sociologist Maqsood Ferasatkah, reflecting the wide range of political and intellectual currents represented in the initiative.

The statement comes as the United States has expanded its military presence in the region while engaging in negotiations with Iran, and has repeatedly warned that it could resort to military action if diplomacy fails.

Iranian officials have cautioned against any act of aggression, vowing a decisive response and warning that any conflict would likely spill over and destabilize the wider region.

Draft Ukraine resolution will not advance lasting peace, say UN envoy

International Desk

Iran's ambassador to the United Nations in New York said Tehran voted against a Western-backed resolution on the Ukraine crisis, arguing that the draft would not advance lasting peace and could instead deepen existing divisions. Speaking at the 23rd plenary meeting of the Eleventh Emergency Special Session of the UN General Assembly on Tuesday, Ali Bahreini said the resolution was introduced at an inappropriate time and without transparent prior consultations. He added that achieving a durable and long-term solution to the conflict requires addressing its root causes, including the provocative actions and decisions by certain states and the North Atlantic



Iran's national flag flutters in front of the United Nations Headquarters in New York.
● mfa.ir

Treaty Organization (NATO). He expressed regret that the resolution failed to tackle those fundamental issues. Bahreini also questioned the underlying objectives of the draft, saying there were concerns that its purpose was not to pro-

mote lasting peace in Ukraine but rather to serve political interests amid ongoing geopolitical rivalries.

He stressed that since the outset of the Ukraine crisis, Iran has maintained a clear, consistent and unchanged position, emphasizing the need for all UN member states to fully respect the principles enshrined in the UN Charter and international law. The Iranian envoy also firmly rejected what he described as baseless allegations regarding Tehran's support for one of the parties to the conflict, saying such accusations have been repeatedly denied and remain categorically rejected. Both Kiev and European countries have repeatedly accused Iran of supplying arms, including drones and missiles to Russia, a claim that Iranian authorities have firmly rejected. The resolution, backed by Western countries, was adopted with 107 votes in favor, 12 against and 51 abstentions on Tuesday.

Mohammad Ali Rajabi
Cartoonist

CARTOON



Mazandaran kicks off infrastructure projects with new major investment deals

Economy Desk

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian inaugurated several infrastructure and health projects in Mazandaran Province on Wednesday while signing investment deals worth more than 40 trillion tomans (\$242 million) aimed at developing the northern region.

Pezeshkian arrived in Sari on Wednesday for a two-day visit during which important development and service projects across the province are being inaugurated. The initiatives encompass a range of significant environmental, medical, infrastructure, and economic plans for Mazandaran.

Key highlights of the visit include the opening of two national projects in waste management and energy: the Eastern Mazandaran Waste Processing Plant and the Sari Waste-to-Energy Plant. Moreover, 21 health sector projects and a broader set of medical initiatives in the province were launched during a ceremony on Wednesday evening. The simultaneous commencement of major water and electricity projects in Mazandaran was also announced by presidential order.



Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian addresses investors and economic actors in Sari, northern province of Mazandaran, on February 25, 2026. [president.ir](#)

According to ISNA, the Sari Waste-to-Energy Plant, a flagship waste management project for the province, has the capacity to process 450 tons of waste per day and is expected to play a critical role in managing waste. Phases one and two of the project, under a contract signed in 2012, have now been fully completed. Key milestones achieved include the delivery of all imported equipment to the site, provision of vital infrastructure

including water, electricity, and access roads, significant progress in civil construction, ignition of furnaces one and two, and the commencement of waste reception after 13 years. With the plant now operational, long-standing waste management challenges in the provincial capital are expected to be significantly reduced, marking an effective step toward environmental protection and improved quality of urban services

in Mazandaran. Abdolreza Dadbod, deputy for coordination of urban affairs at the Mazandaran Governorate, said at the Wednesday evening ceremony, "The Eastern Mazandaran Province Waste Processing Plant uses the latest recycling methods and converts waste into usable materials for the agricultural sector. This plant, after being in construction for several decades, is the first complete waste management facility in the province, and three

counties will benefit from its services." During the visit, the president is also scheduled to hold meetings with investors, economic actors, and elites from the province's political, cultural, and social spheres. In a meeting with investors and economic actors in Mazandaran, Pezeshkian highlighted the province's regional connectivity potential. He stated that the transportation corridor stretching

from northern Iran toward Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Russia, and Azerbaijan constitutes an important economic artery.

He added that domestically, the development of rail corridors and public transportation, in cooperation with the Parliament and through attracting investors, is on the agenda to reduce transportation costs and facilitate economic activity.

Investment agreements signed

With the president and the governor of Mazandaran in attendance, eight major investment projects in the province were formally signed. The projects, representing a total investment of more than 40 trillion tomans (\$242 million), are expected to create employment for over 9,000 people and support the development of various industries, including agriculture, steel, tourism, and education. The signed initiatives span the sectors of agriculture, steel, tourism, wood and paper industries, and waste management, with the overarching goal of promoting economic development and generating sustainable employment in the province.

Iran revises oil-for-goods mechanism, eyes FX unification



Economy Desk

Agriculture Minister Gholamreza Nouri-Qezeljah said on Wednesday the government proposed a revised oil-for-goods mechanism under which importers of essential commodities would receive crude only after delivering shipments, tightening control over barter trade used to secure staple imports. Speaking after a cabinet meeting, Nouri-Qezeljah said the new barter formula was intended to secure steady imports of staple goods amid tighter external payment channels. Under the proposal, importers must first deliver the agreed cargo before being introduced to receive oil equivalent, reversing the previous sequence in which crude was allocated upfront, IRNA reported. The adjustment shifts performance risk onto the delivery stage and anchors crude entitlement to verified imports. In practice, it prioritizes physical supply of essential goods and reduces the likelihood of delays in procurement cycles. The oil leg remains centrally managed, while importers recover working capital through crude allocation after fulfillment. Nouri-Qezeljah added that a wheat subsidy package would be announced within days, as parallel policy steps gradually steer the currency market toward a single exchange rate. Under a new policy, 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. "If changes occur in prices, essential goods will also be covered. This was anticipated in advance, and for this reason, with the president's emphasis, necessary measures have been considered to manage potential differences and changes," he said. In separate remarks on Sunday, Nouri-Qezeljah said markets have seen no supply shortages since the launch of the major government economic program two months ago, rejecting earlier predictions of deficits. He said that despite heavy demand, work discipline had been maintained and visible satisfaction was now evident among lower-income groups.

Iran-Turkey trade hits \$13b as balance favors Ankara despite positive outlook

INTERVIEW EXCLUSIVE

Trade between Iran and Turkey reached about \$13 billion in the first 10 months of the current Iranian year, which began on March 21,



Jalal Ebrahimi

with the balance favoring Turkey by nearly \$3 billion, Jalal Ebrahimi, head of the Iran-Turkey Economy and Trade House, said in an interview with Iran Daily.

Ebrahimi said that despite challenges, the outlook for commercial ties between the two countries remains positive as trade grew 13% in the 10-month period. Iran's exports to Turkey totaled \$5.66 billion in the timespan, accounting for 12.5% of Tehran's total exports, he said. During the same period, Turkey's exports to Iran topped \$7.92 billion, meaning Turkey exported \$2.921 billion more to Iran than it received.

Regarding trade prospects through the end of the Iranian year on March 21, 2026, Ebrahimi said no significant change in trade figures is expected due to the approaching Nowruz holidays and regional conditions.

He added that 77% of Iran's exports to Turkey consist of commodities such as gas, fertilizer, aluminum, copper, rail and marine industry products, and steel products. Conversely, 72% of Turkey's exports to Iran comprise gold, food industry products, machinery, auto parts, and grains. "Excluding oil, condensates, and gas, the trade balance decisively favors Turkey because it holds a stronger

industrial position," Ebrahimi said. He explained that Turkey has modernized its factories using European technology and has increased both production and re-exports.

Turkey maintains its export flows even when facing domestic product shortages by sourcing goods from abroad, thereby retaining its customers, he said. "For example, when Iran halted tomato exports to control its domestic market, Turkish suppliers sourced tomatoes from other origins and captured Iran's regional markets."

Suitcase exports phenomenon

A portion of current exports is conducted through informal "suitcase trade" that is not registered in official statistics, Ebrahimi said.

"The phenomenon could be controlled by activating the capacity of free trade zones such as Maku and Aras (in northwestern Iran), but these opportunities have unfortunately not been sufficiently utilized."

Turkey's strategic view

Turkey has placed politics in the service of its economy, Ebrahimi said, recalling a statement by former Turkish foreign minister Ahmet Davutoglu, "Wherever there is a Turkish trader, we will open a consulate or trade representation there." As a result, Turkey maintains economic counselors in most countries worldwide, whereas Iran had such representations only in neighboring countries until recently. Ebrahimi pointed to a period of successful trade with Turkey during the tenure of an effective economic counselor at Iran's embassy in Ankara, when Iranian exports to Turkey rose to \$15 billion. He did not specify the exact period he



was referring to. However, trade data show that Iranian exports to Turkey have reached around \$15 billion at certain points, including in 2012 before the tightening of oil sanctions, and again in 2022 amid a surge in global energy prices.

"This demonstrates how crucial the presence and expertise of active trade counselors can be," he said.

Regarding significant capacities to increase exports to Turkey, Ebrahimi said that beyond petrochemical products, Iran could export processed industries and tree-based products such as dates and figs, which Turkey repackages and re-exports to Europe. Iran also has strong potential to export oil byproducts such as grease and industrial oils to Turkey.

"Turkey is currently facing a crisis in its textile industry, with more than 350,000 small and large units closing due to rising production costs and wages," Ebrahimi said.

Purchasing power has declined amid persistently high inflation in Turkey — official data show annual consumer price inflation running well into the double digits in recent years — although Ebrahimi did not cite a specific figure. "Nevertheless, Turkey has continued to perform successfully in tourism, with revenues projected to reach \$62 billion in 2026," he added.

Audit watchdog warns of rising gas flaring despite recovery drive

The Supreme Audit Court of Iran (SAC) has warned of surging gas flaring at the country's oil and gas fields, saying the wasteful practice was costing billions of dollars each year. The oversight body said in a report that, based on its estimates, more than 56 million cubic meters (mcm) per day of gas were burned off through flare stacks at oil and gas facilities during the first half of the current Persian year, from March 21 to September 22, 2025, Tasnim News Agency reported on Wednesday.

"The lost volumes amount to about \$6bn a year in value," the organization added.

The SAC, which is affiliated with parliament and tasked with ensuring the proper implementation of financial and budgetary laws and safeguarding public funds, urged the government to speed up measures to curb flaring.

The report comes after Oil Minister Mohsen Paknejad said on November 2 that his ministry had been able to collect 9.34 mcm per day of flare gas.

Under Iran's Seventh Development Plan (SDP), the Oil Ministry is required to save around 44 mcm daily by 2029.

Iran has rolled out a comprehensive program to put an end to flaring. In early November, the Oil Ministry signed 12 contracts with local companies to gather associated petroleum gas (APG) from nine oilfields run by the National Iranian South Oil Co. (NISOC), the country's largest crude producer.

The ministry described the initiative as the "largest flare gas recovery project in the country's history."

Under the plan, 32 flares will be extinguished over 18 months, saving 8.35 mcm of gas per day.

APG is a by-product generated during crude oil extraction, but in the absence of the necessary equipment it is burned via flare stacks. Flaring also occurs at gas fields due to a lack of infrastructure such as compressors or insufficient refining capacity.



IRNA

Why are Middle Eastern gov'ts lobbying against US attack on Iran?



By Galip Dalay
Senior consulting
fellow at Chatham
House

OPINION

Not long ago, most leaders in the Middle East were frustrated with the US for not taking a firmer stance towards Iran. Many regional elites were furious with the Obama administration for pursuing diplomacy with Tehran, adopting an accommodating stance, and prioritizing a nuclear deal, which culminated in the short-lived JCPOA.

The reason was clear: Iran was widely viewed as a major threat to regional stability.

Between 2003 and 2023, its influence had grown across the region. In the aftermath of the 2003 US invasion, Iraq came increasingly under Tehran's influence, alongside Iran's long-standing alliance with Syria (under the now deposed Assad regime), and its considerable clout in Lebanon wielded through Hezbollah. Conflict in Yemen saw Iran's influence in the country deepening through its alliance with the Ansarullah (Houthis). Iran, therefore, had created a powerful network of state and non-state allies across the region, commonly referred to as the "Axis of Resistance".

This Iran-centric network was previously a highly potent way for Tehran to capitalize on conflicts and instabilities and deepen its influence. Arab leaders feared this network: King Abdullah of Jordan portrayed it as an emerging "Shia Crescent," following the Iraq invasion.

Yet today, with a real prospect of US military action against Iran, regional states are pursuing energetic diplomacy to dissuade the US from attacking. Oman, Qatar, and Turkey have all ramped up their efforts to mediate. Saudi Arabia and Egypt have also advocated for de-escalation and diplomacy. What explains this striking reversal?

Switching threat perceptions

Iran's power and ambition across the region are diminished, and the prospect of an Iran-centric order has receded. For Middle Eastern leaders, the threats have changed: the greatest risks are now an expansionist and aggressive Israel, and the chaos of a potentially collapsed Iranian state.

The Axis of Resistance, once a powerful network, is increasingly transforming into a resistance without an axis. It has been severely damaged since Hamas's cross-border attacks of October 7, 2023, the war in Gaza, and a sequence of Israeli military campaigns.

Hezbollah has been degraded in Lebanon by relentless Israeli attacks. Assad has been toppled in Syria. The Iraqi Shia armed groups and Houthis in Yemen are under increasing pressure. Iran itself has been weakened by the damage to its network, the 12-day war with Israel, and the US strike on its nuclear facility. That, in turn, has diminished the Iranian threat to regional states.

Conversely, Israel's expansionism and unpredictability have grown,



Qatar's Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani (L) and Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani (R) talk to US President Donald Trump at the Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar on May 15, 2025.

● BRENDAN SMIALOWSKI/AFP

and increasingly alarm countries in its near neighbourhood.

Its September 2025 attack on Doha, in particular, indicated a willingness by Israel to breach commonly held understandings about regional security and the US security umbrella, amplifying the Persian Gulf's threat perception emanating from Israel.

The prevailing view across the region is that they have overestimated the Iranian threat and underestimated the Israeli one. The less the region's leaders perceive a threat from Iran, the more they will feel threatened by Israel and seek to counterbalance its power.

How to deal with Iran

The changing nature of regional states' threat perceptions informs their strategy towards Iran. Broadly speaking, there are three main policy approaches: regime change, containment, and policy-based pushback.

The US and Israel remain wedded to the first two approaches. There were indeed times when some regional states favoured elements of these approaches, too. As late as 2018, during Trump's first term, the US tried to midwife the still-born Middle East Strategic Alli-

ance (MESA), commonly known as the Arab NATO, composed of the six Persian Gulf states plus Egypt and Jordan as a bulwark against Iran.

But in the post-October 7 context, the regime change and containment policies hardly find any receptive ears amongst the Arab states.

Regime change, through a war, is viewed as highly dangerous. There is no organized, nation-wide, popular, and credible opposition in Iran, and the regime and state are so intertwined; any regime collapse raises the prospect of a state collapse — or a regime that metamorphizes into something even more militarized. The repercussions of a state collapse would far exceed what the Middle East has experienced as a result of conflict in Iraq, Syria, or Yemen, whether in the form of instability, migration, radicalism, the proliferation of armed groups, or regional spillover.

And Iran's demographic composition, with its sizeable ethnic minorities concentrated in specific areas of the country, heightens fears that the country could become internally fragmented.

Plus, it is widely believed among

regional leaders that an Iran knocked out of the equation will embolden Israel to attempt to reshape the region in its image — something that is an anathema to most regional states.

Trump's lack of clarity regarding the scale and aim of any military option further heightens regional fears about the implications of a potential military strike.

Containment of Iran was one of the central elements of US-backed regional initiatives, such as the Abraham Accords, which were premised on the idea of an order built on Arab-Israeli cooperation within a US-centric framework. This containment logic was probably more applicable to Israeli policy than to the Arab-Persian Gulf states. But Arab-Persian Gulf countries increasingly dismiss the strategy. In the Middle East, containment-based policies have seldom achieved the intended outcomes. They failed to contain and instead contributed to increased regional polarization and fragmentation.

Given the high cost and danger linked to the first two options, regional states have increasingly adopted the policy-based approach towards Iran. That means oppos-

ing and pushing back against certain Iranian policies, rather than seeking regime change or a broad containment. In the ongoing US-Iran dispute, Tehran's nuclear programme, ballistic missiles, and regional network and policy are the core elements.

Regional states oppose a US strike on Iran as a means to resolve these issues — but are concerned by them too. Opposition to Iran's network is a common policy position that unifies most regional countries. Similarly, these states do not want to see a nuclear Iran, although they do not believe this is likely to happen anytime soon.

Iran's opposition to regional diplomatic track

Conscious of regional concerns about the core elements of the US-Iranian negotiations, Tehran had a limited appetite for a diplomatic approach that involved not only the US and Iran but also regional states, as proposed by Turkey. Another possible reason for Iran's opposition to a broader diplomatic track is that, if diplomacy fails in a bilateral negotiation, Iran can blame the US's bad faith: whereas a wider format might see regional states assign part of the blame to Iranian intransigence.

Turkey's foreign minister also proposed a step-by-step negotiation process, in which the sides address one issue at a time rather than seeking a comprehensive package deal, to make negotiations and concessions easier for Iran to digest.

For the Iranian government, there is no good scenario. Each policy option is fraught with hazards. Despite this, regional leaders believe the US must give regional diplomacy a real chance. The alternative is a devastating war and another catastrophic cycle of conflict.

Such diplomacy is the least bad option. If it produces results, it would powerfully showcase regional ownership of regional crises. After decades of seeing its future shaped by external powers, the Middle East is in dire need of showing such ownership.

The article was first published by Chatham House.



Israel's September 2025 attack on Doha, in particular, indicated a willingness by Israel to breach commonly held understandings about regional security and the US security umbrella, amplifying the Persian Gulf's threat perception emanating from Israel. So, the prevailing view across the region is that they have overestimated the Iranian threat and underestimated the Israeli one.



Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (3rd-R) walks hand-in-hand with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan following their meeting in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, on February 3, 2026.

● MURAT CETINMUHURDAR/TURKISH PRESIDENT'S OFFICE

Any Iranian-American war may rapidly expand: *Expert*

INTERVIEW Amid the persistent tensions surrounding the indirect negotiations between Iran and the United States, and with the next round approaching in the coming days, it has become necessary to examine expert assessments regarding the prospects of reaching a deal, the extent of Iran's capacity to administer a war of wills, and the strategic challenges in the region.

Within this framework, the website of Al-Alam News Network conducted an interview with Dr. Rahim Kathir, an Arab university professor, researcher, and author on regional affairs, who presented an in-depth reading of the forthcoming round of negotiations and the foremost strategic and diplomatic challenges. Dr. Rahim Kathir holds a PhD in Arabic Language and Literature and a Master's degree in Middle Eastern Graduate Studies.

The following is the translated text of the interview with Dr. Kathir:

An upcoming round of indirect negotiations has been announced to take place in the coming days. Do you believe it constitutes the "last opportunity"?

KATHIR: To regard the negotiations as the "last opportunity" in a decisive or terminal sense is erroneous because this expression forms part of the manufacture of atmosphere at which Washington excels in the administration of conflict.

The current American administration, particularly within the method that emerged with Trump, has transformed media and propaganda into an autonomous theater of war and an instrument of psychological and political coercion no less consequential than aircraft carriers and sanctions.

The recurrent ultimatums and threats are not merely transient positions, but meticulously calculated messages intended to intimidate Iran, disseminate anxiety within the Iranian domestic sphere, and convey the notion that "there is no exit except surrender". Nevertheless, the probability of attaining a genuine settlement remains tenuous, not because Iran does not desire solutions, but because the chasm between the two parties is exceedingly vast: demands, conditions, and red lines that resist facile bridging.

This round may culminate in a mitigation of tension, crisis management, or limited understandings; however, its transformation into a comprehensive breakthrough appears remote so long as the American side approaches diplomacy as a component of coercive instrumentation rather than as a portal to equitable partnership.

With American officials expressing astonishment at Iran's failure to surrender, do you believe Iran has prevailed in the war of wills?

Iran has achieved manifest progress in the war of wills because the essence of this war resides in determining who compels the other to acquiesce to the logic of subordination.

Thus far, according to my reading, Iran is the victor at this level of the conflict. Diplomacy has triumphed because Tehran entered the negotiating trajectory without fear, without doubt or hesitation, and articulated its position with lucidity: what it seeks, what it rejects, and what it regards as non-negotiable conditions. This is not merely protocol participation, but a message of steadfastness: "We negotiate because we choose negotiation, not because we are compelled into it."

In my view, all manifestations of military spectacle — the fleets, the carriers, the aircraft, and the media pressure — have not produced the requisite shock, nor have they destabilized the resolve of the Islamic Republic, its leadership, or its public in the defense



Rahim Kathir

of dignity and sovereignty; this, in itself, constitutes a strategic achievement.

Do you consider it probable that the United States would launch a strike against Iran while it pursues the diplomatic path?

I do not exclude that possibility, not in order to facilitate a war scenario, but because American diplomacy is frequently utilized as a political veil for the administration of escalation. Negotiation may, in their calculus, transform into a mechanism for raising pretexts — namely, the preparation of the American domestic sphere and international public opinion for the proposition that Washington attempted the political path and the other party did

not respond, thereby rendering escalation or even a strike more marketable.

In my assessment, Iran maintains the elements of deterrence in readiness, meaning that it holds the political intellect in one hand and field preparedness in the other, since "fingers on the trigger are not a slogan, but a deterrent concept whose purpose is to prevent the adversary from believing that a strike would be without cost."

What constitutes the real source of danger today for the entire region? And how may it be repelled?

The source of danger lies in the projects administered by Washington and Tel Aviv to preserve the Middle East as an open arena for perpetual tension. Confronting

this danger requires three pillars:

- Regional unity and synergistic cohesion, that is, reducing the level of internal attrition and refraining from converting inter-state disagreements into breaches susceptible to external exploitation.
- Setting disagreements aside and addressing problems through dialogue, not in the sense of abolishing divergences, but by transforming them from a zero-sum conflict into negotiation and understandings that preclude explosion.
- Constructing a strategic immunity politically, economically, and in the media sphere, because a substantial portion of contemporary warfare is a war of narrative and propaganda, targeting the fractures in morale and the induction of fissures within societies. Genuine security commences

when the states of the region determine their priorities autonomously, not in accordance with an external agenda.

What scenario do you anticipate if the United States wages war against Iran?

In my view, any war would not be confined to Iranian geography, nor would it constitute a pristine operation as certain propagandas promote. The nature of the region and the interconnection of its dossiers render any major war susceptible to rapid expansion. The Iranian response would be forceful and intense, not as a spectacle, but within the logic of deterrence — namely, elevating the cost of aggression to a level that renders its continuation exceedingly difficult.

This signifies that the theater of war may broaden to encompass multiple flashpoints in the Middle East, and perhaps extend in its political and economic repercussions to a wider scope, reaching Asia through energy reverberations, maritime corridors, and markets. The most perilous element is not merely the magnitude of the flames, but the sequence of consequences: global economic disruption, security tensions across more than one arena, and an escalation of instability for which all will pay the price.

In conclusion, I must emphasize that the objective of Iranian deterrence is not war, but its prevention through rendering it an option neither marketable nor tolerable in its consequences.

The illustration shows Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian (L), US President Donald Trump (C), and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in front of a map of the Middle East.
● PALESTINE CHRONICLE



The current American administration, particularly within the method that emerged with Trump, has transformed media and propaganda into an autonomous theater of war and an instrument of psychological and political coercion no less consequential than aircraft carriers and sanctions. The recurrent ultimatums and threats are not merely transient positions, but meticulously calculated messages intended to intimidate Iran, disseminate anxiety within the Iranian domestic sphere, and convey the notion that "there is no exit except surrender".



US President Donald Trump dances during a rally in Fort Bragg, N.C., on June 10, 2025.
● EVELYN HOCKSTEIN/REUTERS

The interview was first published in Arabic by Al-Alam.

Football chief details team's preparations ahead of 2026 World Cup

Sports Desk

Mehdi Taj, President of the Football Federation Islamic Republic of Iran, has provided an update on the national football team's friendly matches ahead of the 2026 FIFA World Cup.

"We have scheduled two friendly matches against Nigeria and Costa Rica at the request of the head coach. One of these matches will be against an African team geographically close to Egypt. Although arranging these games has become very challenging recently, we will hold both matches in March in Jordan. We have also reached an agreement with the Jordanian Football Federation to invite the Jordan national team to Iran for a friendly match in the future," Taj said.

He added, "Two additional competitive matches are being prepared for June. The federation fully supports these plans, and we will not miss any FIFA international window,"

Fars News Agency reported. Regarding the status of US visas for World Cup participants, Taj explained, "The visa process is ongoing. One group traveled to Dubai on Monday, and another is set to depart on Thursday. Based on the head coach's recommendations, we may add a few more players, but ultimately, we will take only the selected players eligible to travel to the World Cup. Some Sepahan players will also travel to Dubai under suitable conditions."

Taj noted that a productive meeting was held with officials from IRIB, the Minister of Sports and Youth, Ahmad Donyamali, and other authorities. "In this session, we discussed media-related issues concerning the World Cup and made very good decisions that will help provide better and more professional coverage of the matches," he said.

On the departure of Antonio Mancione, the assistant to Iran head coach Amir Qalenoee, Taj emphasized,

"He submitted a letter to Nabi, the national team manager, who then referred it to us. Our position was not in favor of this separation. Given the current circumstances, the issues raised were unacceptable from our perspective, and we expect him to return to his duties. His return is possible."

Regarding Hossein Abdi, head coach of Iran's U17 national football team, who reportedly resigned due to an unsigned contract, Taj said, "I am not sure exactly what Abdi stated, but he came to meet me three days ago. My evaluation of him is very positive, and I believe he will return and continue his work in the best possible way."

Taj also addressed the under-23 and youth teams, noting, "We are working on new plans for the continuation of these teams. God willing, final decisions will be announced soon, along with the new structure for the under-23 and youth national teams."



● mehrnews.com

Iran paddle team eliminates Saudi Arabia in UAE event

Sports Desk

The Iran national paddle team, which traveled to the UAE to compete in the Dubai Ramadan Cup, secured a 2-1 victory over Saudi Arabia in their second match. According to Varzesh3, the Ramadan Cup paddle competition began on February 23 with the participation of the national teams of Iran, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco, and Bahrain.

Iran, placed in Group B alongside Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Morocco, defeated Saudi Arabia 2-1 on Wednesday, establishing themselves as one of the strong contenders to advance from the group. With this loss to Iran, Saudi Arabia has been eliminat-



● mehrnews.com

ed from the tournament. In another match, Morocco defeated Kuwait 2-1.

In Group A, the participating teams are the UAE, Egypt, Bah-

rain, and Lebanon. The Iran national paddle team is led by Dariush Saber, with Farshad Sefati serving as team supervisor.

Iranian heavyweight wrestler misses Albania ranking tournament

Sports Desk

Iran's heavyweight Greco-Roman wrestler will miss the Albania ranking tournament due to an injury.

According to ISNA, the second ranking competition of the United World Wrestling (UWW) in 2026 for Greco-Roman wrestling will be held from February 27 to 29 in Tirana, Albania, ISNA wrote.

Fardin Hedayati, Iran's 130kg Greco-Roman wrestler and the main rival of Amin Mirzazadeh for a spot on the national team, was initially scheduled to participate in the tournament. However, due to an injury sustained during training, he will not be able to travel with the



Fardin Hedayati
● varzesh3.com

Iranian wrestling team to the competition.

Hedayati had a successful 2025, winning gold medals at both the World U23 Championships and the Islamic Solidarity Games.

The Iranian wrestlers partici-

pating in the tournament are as follows: 63kg: Ali Hajivand, 72kg: Mohammadjavad Rezaei and Hojat Rezaei, 77kg: Amir Abdi and Alireza Abdoli, 82kg: Mohammadamin Hosseini, 87kg: Jamal Esmaeili, 97kg: Amirreza Moradian

Ski Federation president reflects on Winter Olympics

Sports Desk

The president of Iran's Ski Federation said the team achieved what it aimed for over the past two to three months at the Winter Olympics. "Although our 25-day training camp in Italy was canceled due to visa issues, our performance was better than the previous Olympics," he noted.

In an interview with IRNA regarding Mohammad Kiadarbansari's retirement from skiing and competitive sports following the Milan-Cortina 2026 Winter Olympics, Bahram Saveh-Shemshaki stated, "This was a personal decision. He dedicated years to skiing, participated in three Olympics, and decided to retire due to his age."

Speaking about his meeting with Thomas Bach, President of the In-

ternational Olympic Committee, on the sidelines of the 2026 Winter Olympics, he said, "During this meeting, we discussed the Olympics, winter sports, and women's participation in the Games. At these Olympics, we had a unified presence in both men's and women's competitions."

He emphasized the importance of participation, "Being part of the Games is significant because it shows respect for the Olympic spirit. The Olympics are not just about winning medals; the presence of countries enhances the event. Everyone who attends the Olympics is extraordinary, and that is truly valuable. We are the only federation responsible for winter sports."

When asked about hosting competitions, he said, "Next year, we are candidates to host the Asian

Junior Championships, and in September we will host the Grass Ski World Championships. These two events have been coordinated in advance with the international federation. Hosting depends on

regional security conditions — if the situation improves, we will host; if not, the events will be assigned to other countries."

Regarding the national ski team's performance at the Winter Olym-



● IRNA

pics, Saveh-Shemshaki explained, "As we predicted, we wanted the athletes to complete the courses themselves and ski with technical precision. The courses and competition quality were very challenging. These Games are for the best, but compared to the previous Olympics, we had no female participants in cross-country skiing before, and this time we secured a quota. Samaneh Beyrami performed exceptionally, overtaking 11 of her top-ranked competitors."

He added, "Our athletes competed according to their world rankings. Danial Saveh-Shemshaki delivered a technically better performance than before, although he started one second too early and received a penalty. Mohammad Kiadarbansari had been banned for doping

in the previous Olympics, and his last competitive result was at the 2018 Winter Olympics, but he completed both events successfully this time. In women's Alpine skiing, Sadaf Saveh-Shemshaki also finished her race compared to the previous Games. The President of the International Ski Federation commended her performance, took a photo with her, and expressed satisfaction."

Looking ahead, he said, "We will compete for medals at the 2029 Asian Games in Kazakhstan. Since Saudi Arabia could not meet hosting requirements, the Games were assigned to Kazakhstan. In the previous edition in Harbin, we performed poorly. We may not win medals in Kazakhstan either, but we will fight for them and also prepare for the 2030 Winter Olympics."

Esteghlal Kazerun maintains lead in Men's Handball Premier League

Sports Desk

The second phase of the 38th season of the Iran Men's Handball Premier League came to an end on Tuesday, as the remaining three matches of Week 16 were played in Kerman. According to ISNA, the opening

match saw Saipa Tehran take on Hepco Arak. Saipa, who have been enjoying a strong run of form in recent weeks, continued their impressive performances and secured a comfortable 30-24 victory. The result further underlined Saipa's credentials as one of the main title contenders

this season. With the loss, Hepco slipped to sixth place in the standings, dropping one position compared to the previous week. In the second match, league leaders Esteghlal Kazerun faced Sepahan Novin Isfahan. Sepahan Novin put in a commendable display against the table-toppers

and managed to take the lead at several stages of the match. Despite their strong showing, Esteghlal Kazerun ultimately imposed their dominance in a hard-fought encounter, claiming a 25-19 victory. The win earned them two additional points and allowed them to conclude the

centralized second phase of the league as the team at the top of the table.

The final match of the week featured Naft va Gaz Gachsaran against Sang Ahan Bafgh. Following last week's victory over Parvaz Havaniruz, Naft va Gaz once again faced a tough chal-

lenge. However, they managed to edge past their opponents with a narrow 28-26 win. As a result of the defeat, Bafgh remained on six points, while Naft va Gaz wrapped up their successful stint in Kerman with two consecutive victories before heading to Isfahan.

Aliabad village revives through nature-based tourism



● wikipedia.org

Iranica Desk

Nestled among the Arasbaran Forests, some 17 kilometers from Kaleybar, East Azarbaijan Province, lies Aliabad village — a small settlement with significant potential that has, in recent years, emerged as a noteworthy example of rural revitalization driven by nature-based tourism and locally rooted investment. For years, the village struggled with population decline and limited livelihood opportunities. According to the 2016 national census, Aliabad's population had fallen to 69 people across 31 households, a figure that reflected a long-term downward trend compared to previous decades. What has recently drawn the attention of rural development experts and tourism stakeholders, however, is not merely Aliabad's geographical location, but the gradual process of a "return to the village" and the emergence of reverse migration following targeted investment in accommodation infrastructure. Aliabad is situated within the Arasbaran Forests, an area recognized as Iran's second most significant natural heritage site and long valued by national and international institutions for its exceptional

biodiversity. The forests, with their diverse vegetation — including oak, maple, hawthorn, wild plum, ash, wild pear, and cornelian cherry — provide a natural foundation for the development of ecotourism.

The village's mountainous setting, proximity to numerous springs, and adjacency to dense forests and rich pastures have created a distinctive landscape that attracts nature enthusiasts, wildlife observers, and hiking tour participants during spring, summer, and even early autumn. One of Aliabad's most significant advantages is its short distance from Babak Castle, a formidable fortress with a history spanning some 1,200 years that still stands atop the region's rugged cliffs, bearing witness to a chapter of Iran's past. The castle's strategic location and sweeping views over surrounding valleys and highlands draw thousands of domestic and international visitors each year. This proximity has turned Aliabad into not only a destination for nature tourism, but also a stop along Arasbaran's historical and cultural tourism route. Many visitors choose to stay in the forest village after visiting the



castle, seeking a deeper experience of the region's ecosystem — an experience that extends beyond scenery to include interaction with residents, tasting local cuisine, and engaging with vernacular architecture. Aliabad's transformation accelerated when investment in tourism and accommodation began, relying primarily on local capital and motivation. The construction of prominent accommodation facilities, along with complementary projects in recent years, effectively ushered the village into a new phase of economic life. These investments, involving substantial financial resources, have not only generated direct and indirect employment but have

also encouraged some former residents to return and restore old houses as eco-lodges. This process can be described as a form of endogenous development — one shaped not by external intervention, but by local capacities and a strong sense of attachment to place. Rural development experts view Aliabad as an example of a model in which tourism acts as a driver of the local economy without undermining the area's cultural or environmental identity. Before the growth of tourism, Aliabad's economy relied mainly on agriculture and livestock farming. Wheat and barley cultivation, use of surrounding pastures, and the production of dairy and meat products formed

the backbone of household livelihoods. Nearby forests and rangelands also provided forest products such as cornelian cherries and natural honey. The annual cornelian cherry festival, now a major regional event, offers an opportunity to showcase local capacities to visitors. As tourist numbers have increased, some village homes have been converted into eco-lodges while preserving their traditional structure. This adaptive reuse has maintained architectural integrity, created supplementary income for households, and increased the participation of women in producing and selling local goods. Aliabad's architecture reflects climatic conditions, livelihood patterns, and

the area's topography. Older houses were built with stone, adobe, and wood — materials well suited to the environment and effective against mountain cold and moisture. Newer buildings, constructed with brick, cement, and steel, generally attempt to maintain visual harmony with the village fabric. Interior spaces often include areas for livestock, fodder storage, and even kilim and gabbeh weaving, illustrating the close link between livelihood and architecture.

Aliabad is not merely a natural destination; it embodies a living segment of Azarbaijani culture. Traditional wedding ceremonies, the telling of folk tales, and Azarbaijani songs, are still held on special occasions. The clothing of elderly women, particularly their distinctive headscarves, reflects continuity in regional dress traditions. Local cuisine — ranging from various soups such as cornelian cherry and fruit soup to stews, kebabs, meatballs, and rice pudding — forms an integral part of visitors' lived experience. The cold mountain climate favors hearty, warming foods, with wild forest fruits giving Aliabad's cooking its distinctive character.

In nearby summer pastures, Shahsevan nomads settle during the warm months, offering visitors a chance to experience nomadic life and learn about traditional production practices. Participation in dairy preparation, livestock herding, and local rituals blurs the line between observation and lived experience. Today, Aliabad stands at a crossroads of opportunity and responsibility. Increased tourist attention and investment can help solidify reverse migration and improve residents' quality of life, provided that principles of sustainable tourism and environmental protection are upheld. The Arasbaran Forests are a national asset, and any development must be guided by ecological considerations. Aliabad's experience demonstrates that when investment is grounded in a deep understanding of cultural and natural contexts, a balance can be achieved between economy, environment, and local identity. Once at risk of abandonment, the village has become a model of gradual revival — not merely the story of building a hotel, but of hope returning to stone houses in the heart of the Arasbaran forests.

Iranica Desk

The Director General of Markazi Province's Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Organization has announced the commencement of research excavations aimed at defining the legal boundaries and protection zones of Asirabad Hill in Saveh, know also as Asiaabad. Hossein Mahmoudi highlighted the historical and cultural importance of the site, noting that the hill, located near the sacred tomb of Imamzadeh Seyed Es'haq in the southeast of Saveh, is a nationally registered monument, added to Iran's National Heritage List in 1974. He emphasized that the site is now in urgent need of precise boundary delineation and protective regulations, according to chn.ir. "Determining the legal boundaries of historical sites is a fundamental le-

gal measure to prevent potential encroachments, ensure the optimal management of surrounding urban development, and safeguard the historical identity of regions," Mahmoudi explained. "As a first step, research excavations have begun to accurately identify the site's extent, examine its cultural layers, and document findings scientifically, providing the essential basis for proposing formal legal protection." Describing the features of the hill, Mahmoudi stated that Asirabad Hill comprises the remains of a Sassanian-era fortress with a square layout covering approximately 2.7 hectares. The massive structure, fortified with towers and walls, was built using adobe bricks, reflecting the architectural skill and defensive strategies of its time. Historical evidence indicates

Research begins to define legal boundaries of Asirabad Hill in Saveh



● yaldamedtour.com

that the complex continued to be used during the early Islamic centuries but was gradually abandoned during the medie-

val Islamic period. Regarding its present condition, Mahmoudi noted that the remaining structure rises roughly 12 me-

ters above the surrounding land, underscoring the fortress's former grandeur. However, the effects of natural erosion, the passage

of time, and some human interventions have made urgent preservation, consolidation, and legal protection essential. The research operations, led by experienced archaeologist Mohsen Karimi, are scheduled to continue until mid-March. The project involves detailed field studies, precise mapping, technical surveys, and comprehensive documentation, culminating in the preparation of a final proposal for the legal boundaries and protection zones of Asirabad Hill. Cultural heritage experts hope that this initiative will not only protect the historic site but also encourage sustainable tourism in the region. By raising awareness of Asirabad Hill's historical significance, authorities aim to integrate the site into educational programs and local tourism circuits, allowing both domestic and

international visitors to experience Iran's rich Sassanid heritage firsthand. The region surrounding Saveh has been inhabited for millennia and has played a pivotal role in Iranian history. Archaeological evidence suggests that this area was a strategic and cultural hub during the Sassanid period and continued to maintain significance through the early Islamic centuries. Sites such as Asirabad Hill offer a window into the defensive architecture, settlement patterns, and daily life of the region's ancient inhabitants, reflecting a continuous historical narrative that spans over 1,500 years. By preserving such monuments, authorities aim not only to safeguard architectural heritage but also to provide insight into the broader historical landscape of Markazi Province.

Visual arts, media bridge Qur'an to today's world

By **Sadeq Dehqan**
Staff writer

INTERVIEW

At the intersection of faith and creativity, the Arts and Media section of the 33rd International Holy Qur'an Fair brings the Qur'an to life through the universal language of art. Showcasing 170 works of visual art, live workshops, media campaigns, and urban art installations, including striking artistic billboards, this section seeks to



Ali Tan

bridge the timeless message of the Qur'an with the sensibilities of contemporary society.

The 33rd edition of Iran's largest Qur'anic event opened on February 20, coinciding with the start of the holy month of Ramadan, in the main prayer hall of Imam Khomeini Mosalla, Tehran, and will run for 15 days. With 11 exhibition sections and three commercial zones, spanning 70 subcategories across 14 thematic axes, the event is designed to cultivate a deeper connection between Quranic teachings and the rhythms of everyday life.

Set across 16,000 square meters, with 11,000 square meters of functional space, the exhibition hosts a diverse program that includes wholesome games for



children and teenagers, media productions and artistic creations, cultural and creative industries, applied research, new publications, Qur'anic product displays, modern educational programs, and emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence. Specially designed areas cater to families, scholars, and dedicated Qur'an practitioners, offering immersive experiences for all audiences.

This year, the exhibition carries the motto "Iran Under the Protection of the Qur'an." According to organizers, the slogan is more than a cultural tagline, it represents a civilizational and identity-oriented vision for Iranian society, positioning the Qur'an as a pillar of national cohesion and cultural strength. The exhibition explores a wide range of themes,

including: The Qur'an and the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), social optimism, national solidarity, the Islamic Revolution, ideal prayer and mosque, sustainable consumption, modesty and hijab, enjoining good while forbidding evil, (a collection of the sermons, letters and short sayings of Imam Ali (PBUH) and Sahifa Sajjadiya (hymns of Imam Sajjad (PBUH)), Mahdism, Ghadir, the lives of prophets and the infallible Imams, and contemporary sciences. Amid all this, the Arts and Media section focuses on visual arts, handicrafts, media productions, and urban artistic initiatives, striving to communicate the Qur'an's message through the creative and digital sphere. Ali Tan, director of the Arts and Media section, told Iran Daily, "Vi-

sual arts and media are the bridge linking the Qur'an to today's society. They deepen the public's bond with the Qur'an, which is why we ensured this section had a prominent place in the 33rd exhibition." He explained that the Arts and Media section comprises six subsections. The exhibition subsection showcases works by visual artists and craftspeople. "We've gathered 170 pieces from master artists, displayed gallery-style for public viewing."

The exhibition features 170 visual art pieces, including painting, calligraphy, calligraphic painting, miniature painting, illumination, floral-and-bird motifs, photography, sculpture, illustration, and caricature. Tan noted, "Visual arts comprise 50 to 60 disciplines; we've highlighted nine key foundational ones here."

All works are carefully curated and sourced from leading artists. "The pieces reflect both the spirit of Ramadan and the Qur'an, while also connecting to current events, such as recent gatherings, the 12-day conflict, resistance movements, and other significant occurrences from the previous exhibition until now," Tan added. Foreign artists are also represented, with their works featured in the International Section alongside the Arts and Media exhibits. The Workshop subsection hosts seven live workshops nightly, where artists in various visual and craft disciplines create in real time, allowing visitors to witness

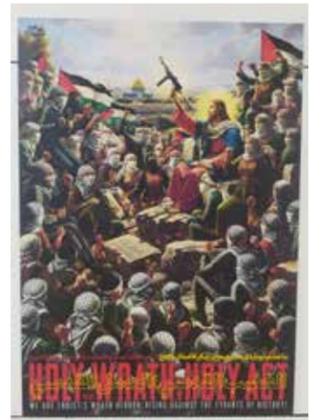


the artistic process up close.

A new initiative, the Urban Gallery, displays 30 works by artists throughout the city on billboards, including caricature, calligraphy, calligraphic painting, photography, and other visual forms.

Inside the exhibition, a special section titled "Martyrs' Memorial" presents paintings commemorating 12 Qur'an-focused martyrs of the 12-day war. Another section is devoted to themes of resistance and Gaza, featuring 25 works by Mohammad Kazem Hasanvand, head of the painting department at Tarbiat Modares University, an Australian Ph.D. graduate, and a prominent revolutionary artist whose acclaimed works spotlight resistance; these are exhibited in a dedicated space within the Arts and Media section.

Furthermore, the section runs a media campaign called "Iran Under the Protection of the Qur'an," which includes competitions and



media activities. Content production spans motion graphics, podcasts, films, photography, and other formats, distributed across multiple platforms.

Tan added, "We also have choral performances in the Arts and Media section. Each night, several pieces are performed, including a special anthem composed for the 33rd exhibition and occasion-specific hymns. These performances now take place in high-traffic urban spaces like subways, rather than inside the exhibition, so more people can experience them without the limitations of the indoor venue."

PERSPECTIVE

'Recidivism of Blood'

No curtain falls on hunger for power

Great theatrical adaptations rarely succeed by retelling a story; they endure by interrogating it. Mehdi Salahi's 'Recidivism of Blood,' a reinterpretation of 'Macbeth,' does not concern itself with whether Macbeth is evil, guilty, or tragic. Instead, it zeroes in on something far less comfortable: The unsettling proposition that Macbeth is not an aberration of history or literature, but a mirror of humanity's compulsive appetite for power.

This conceptual pivot is what makes Salahi's production noteworthy beyond the usual sphere of theatrical experimentation. By stripping away narrative ornamentation and leaning into physical theater, ensemble movement, and visual abstraction, the play effectively reframes Shakespeare's world not as medieval Scotland, but as an allegorical ecosystem of ambition. In this framing, blood is not merely the residue of murder; it becomes a cyclical condition, a stain humanity repeatedly steps into, washes off, and then returns to.

The original tragedy by William Shakespeare has often been staged as a morality tale about vaulting ambition.

Salahi's vision pushes further, implying that ambition is not the disease, it is the default setting. The disease lies in our inability to recognize its insatiability. Power, once tasted, recalibrates desire rather than satisfying it. The production's emphasis on repetition, choreographed movement, and collective embodiment of violence visually reinforces this thesis: tyranny is never a solitary act; it is a system perpetuated by participants who rarely perceive themselves as complicit.

Perhaps the most striking aspect of 'Recidivism of Blood' is its use of scale. With a large ensemble functioning almost as a kinetic organism rather than a collection of individuals, the production dissolves the myth of the lone tyrant. Macbeth ceases to be a singular villain and becomes a conduit, an avatar through which collective impulses toward domination are channeled. In this sense, the staging challenges one of the most persistent theatrical clichés: That tragedy is driven by extraordinary personalities. Salahi instead suggests that



tragedy is driven by ordinary instincts operating at extraordinary intensity. The minimalism of the set, offset by deliberate costume and makeup design, contributes to a neoclassical aesthetic that feels uncannily timeless. By eschewing heavy scenography, the production avoids tethering itself to any historical moment, allowing the thematic focus to remain squarely on psychological and philosoph-

ical terrain. The absence of decorative distraction compels audiences to confront the performers' bodies as the primary narrative medium. Movement, rhythm, and spatial composition replace dialogue as carriers of meaning, underscoring how power often operates beneath language rather than through it. This emphasis on physicality also reframes the roles of Lady Macbeth and King Dun-

can. Rather than functioning solely as characters within a plot, they emerge as symbolic nodes in a network of desire, legitimacy, and betrayal. Duncan becomes less a king than the embodiment of authority itself, a structural position that invites usurpation. Lady Macbeth, meanwhile, ceases to be the archetypal manipulative spouse and instead reads as the voice of internal rationalization, the whisper that converts ambition into necessity. What makes this reinterpretation resonate is its refusal to offer catharsis. Traditional productions of Macbeth often lean toward moral closure: Tyranny collapses, justice reasserts itself, and order returns. 'Recidivism of Blood' withholds that reassurance. Its aesthetic language implies that the cycle does not end with Macbeth's fall; it simply resets. Power vacuums invite new contenders, and the choreography of ambition begins again. In doing so, Salahi's work taps into a deeply modern anxiety, the suspicion that history does not progress morally so much

as it mutates structurally. The costumes may change, the rhetoric may evolve, and the technologies of control may become more sophisticated, but the underlying grammar of domination remains stubbornly intact. If anything, the production suggests that contemporary societies have become more adept at disguising their Macbeths, not eliminating them.

Ultimately, 'Recidivism of Blood' succeeds because it treats Shakespeare not as a sacred text but as a diagnostic instrument. It reads Macbeth not as a story about one man's downfall, but as an x-ray of humanity's recurring temptations. The result is less an adaptation than a philosophical reframing, one that asks whether the real tragedy is not Macbeth's rise and fall, but our persistent recognition of ourselves within it.

If theater is meant to disturb complacency rather than affirm comfort, then Salahi's production accomplishes precisely that. It leaves us with an unsettling afterthought: Perhaps the most frightening thing about Macbeth is not that he existed, but that he never stopped existing.

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