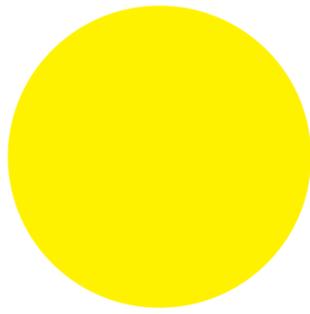


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# Iran Daily

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## Militant groups fuel historic Pakistan-Afghanistan clashes

**INTERVIEW EXCLUSIVE**



Clashes between Pakistan and Afghanistan have flared up in recent days, with Pakistani officials describing the situation as an

“open war.” The fighting, marked by air and ground assaults from both sides, has sharply escalated months of simmering border tensions. Islamabad accuses the Afghan Taliban of harboring and supporting militant groups such as Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), and has recently portrayed the Taliban as a tool in India’s hands. In response, the Taliban accuses Pakistan of military aggression, repeated violations of Afghanistan’s sovereignty and territorial integrity, and targeting civilians. In an interview with Iran Daily, Amin Rezaei-Nejad, an expert on subcontinent affairs, said the current clashes are rooted in longstanding border disputes but are now being driven by differing positions on Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan, as well as the absence of a stabilizing power in the subcontinent.

**IRAN DAILY: What are the historical and geopolitical roots of tensions between Afghanistan and Pakistan, and which factor is more decisive today?**

**REZAEI-NEJAD:** The main driver of this conflict goes back to the history of the two countries and the Durand Line, the border separating them, which Afghanistan has never recognized. Since the formation of Pakistan alongside Afghanistan, and because Kabul has never acknowledged this border, clashes have occurred between the two sides. Pakistan has consistently sought, through interference in Afghanistan and by weakening it, to keep the situation in a state where Kabul would never be able to revive its territorial claims. This is the most traditional and longstanding cause of the disputes.

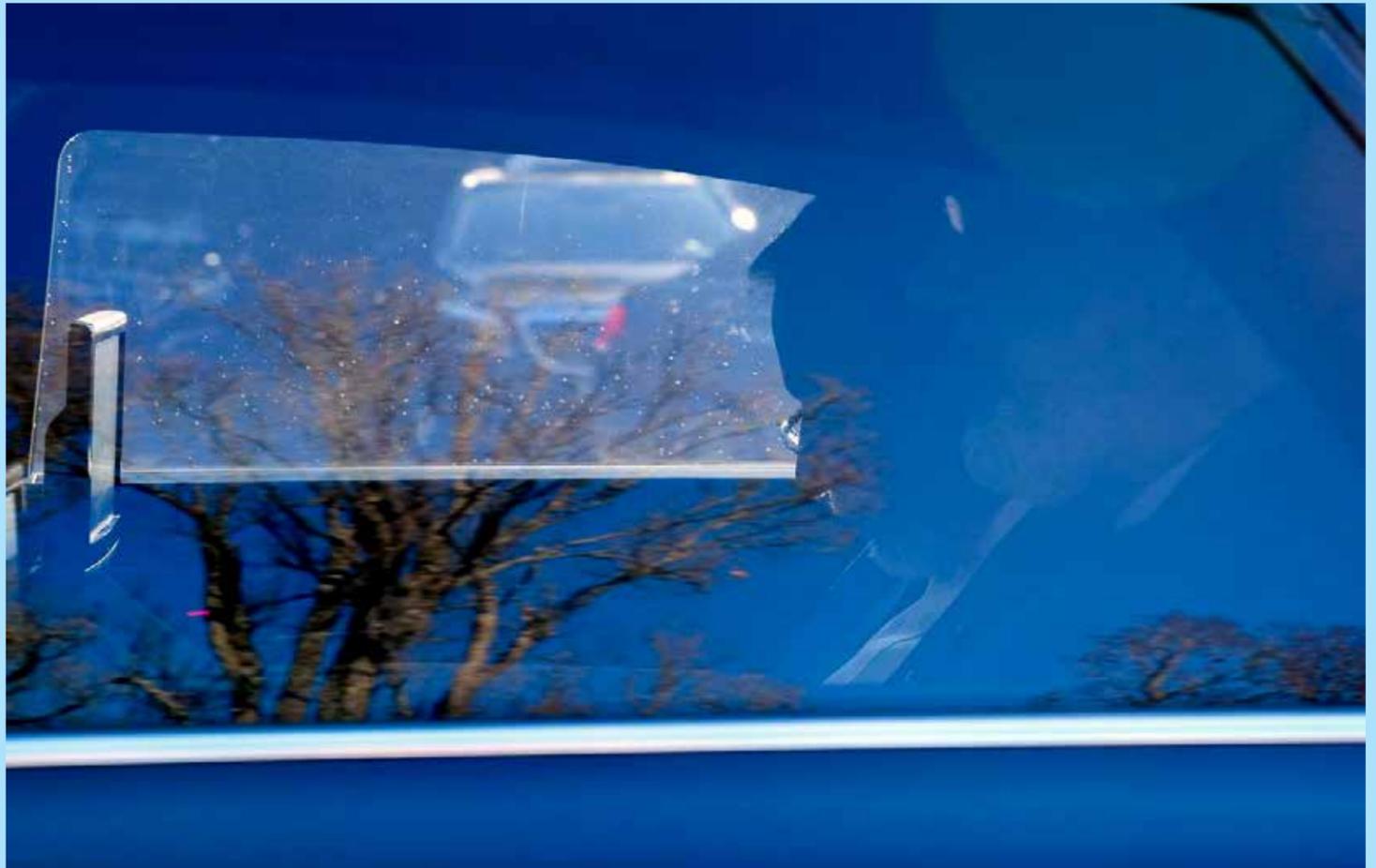
However, what has triggered the current round of hostilities is the disagreement between the two sides over Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan and their differing views of the group. Pakistan considers it entirely a terrorist organization, while Afghanistan sees it as one of the pressure groups that can be used as a leverage against Pakistan. As a result, both countries are now locked in a serious challenge over the TTP. This new phase effectively began with diplomatic rhetoric and has now evolved into an almost slow-moving war that has been ongoing for some time. At times it takes the form of diplomatic confrontation; at other times, border clashes and Pakistani airstrikes. This pattern has kept both sides in their current situation.

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## Araghchi touts ‘significant progress’ in Iran-US talks in Geneva

Technical teams to begin detailed expert reviews in Vienna

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The photo shows a silhouette of Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi (L) inside a car in Geneva, Switzerland on February 26, 2026. **IRANIAN FOREIGN MINISTRY**



Rereading United States' 2025 National Security Strategy, 2026 National Defense Strategy

### Strategy of terror production

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# Araghchi touts 'significant progress' in Iran-US talks in Geneva

## Technical teams to begin detailed expert reviews in Vienna



The photo shows Iranian diplomats during nuclear talks between Iran and the United States in Geneva, Switzerland, on February 26, 2026.  
● IRAN'S FOREIGN MINISTRY

### International Desk

Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi called the latest round of nuclear talks between Tehran and Washington in Geneva "the most intense so far", where "significant progress" was made in the negotiations.

"It concluded with the mutual understanding that we will continue to engage in a more detailed manner on matters

that are essential to any deal – including sanctions termination and nuclear-related steps," Araghchi said in a post on X on Friday.

The Iranian foreign minister also held a phone conversation with his Egyptian counterpart, during which Araghchi said that "success in this path requires seriousness and realism from the other side and avoidance of any miscalculation and excessive demands."

He said it was agreed that starting Monday, technical teams in Vienna at the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) would begin detailed technical reviews to organize certain technical issues within a defined framework, which would then be aligned with the political demands and considerations of both sides. Araghchi added that it was also decided that the next round of talks would take place in the near future, likely in less than a week.

A senior US official told Axios the talks were "positive" but did not immediately provide additional details.

Iran and the United States held their third round of negotiations in Geneva on Thursday to resolve a decades-old dispute over Iran's nuclear program. The Oman-mediated talks follow repeated threats from US President Donald Trump to strike Iran, and with the United States conducting its biggest military build-up in the region in decades.

### Excessive demands

Trump on February 19 gave Iran 15 days to reach a deal, and while Iran has insisted the discussions focus solely on its nuclear program, the US wants Tehran's missile program and its support for

resistance groups curtailed.

The Wall Street Journal reported on Thursday that Trump's negotiating team would demand that Iran dismantle its three main nuclear sites and hand over all its remaining enriched uranium to the United States.

Following the talks in Geneva on Thursday, Araghchi told state TV that the negotiations "made very good progress and entered into the elements of an agreement very seriously, both in the nuclear field and in the sanctions field." UN nuclear chief Rafael Grossi joined the negotiations, a source close to the talks told AFP.

Donald Trump said in his State of the Union address that Iran had "already developed missiles that can threaten Europe and our bases overseas, and they're working to build missiles that will soon reach the United States of America."

He also accused Iran of "pursuing sinister nuclear ambitions," though Tehran has always insisted its program is for civilian purposes.

### 'Big lies'

The Iranian Foreign Ministry called such claims "big lies." US Secretary of State Marco Rubio said

on Wednesday that Iran is "not enriching right now, but they're trying to get to the point where they ultimately can," adding that Tehran "refuses" to discuss its ballistic missile program and "that's a big problem."

Iran's President Masoud Pezeshkian insisted ahead of the talks that the Islamic Republic was not "at all" seeking a nuclear weapon.

US Vice President JD Vance told the Washington Post on Thursday there was "no chance" that a long-threatened strike on Iran would result "in a Middle Eastern war for years with no end in sight."

Parallel to the talks is a dramatic US military buildup in the region, with the USS Gerald R. Ford, the world's largest aircraft carrier, sent to the Mediterranean this week.

Washington currently has more than a dozen warships in the Middle East: one aircraft carrier – the USS Abraham Lincoln – nine destroyers and three other combat ships.

It is rare for there to be two US aircraft carriers in the region.

The maximum range of Iran's missiles is 2,000 kilometers (1,200 miles), according to what Tehran has publicly disclosed.

## Iran voices readiness to broker Afghanistan-Pakistan peace talks

### International Desk

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said on Friday Tehran is ready to facilitate dialogue between Iran's eastern neighbors, Afghanistan and Pakistan, as the two countries are engaged in a new conflict described by Islamabad as an "open war."

"In the blessed month of Ramadan, a month of self-restraint and strengthening solidarity in the Islamic World, it's fitting for Afghanistan and Pakistan to manage and resolve their existing differences within the framework of good neighborliness and through dialogue," Araghchi said in a post on X on Friday.



Taliban fighters look up while manning an armed pickup truck at the Afghan side of the Ghulam Khan crossing with Pakistan in Khost Province, Afghanistan, on February 27, 2026.  
● SAIFULLAH ZAHIR/AP

This comes as Pakistan's Defense Minister Khawaja Asif declared the neighbors are at "open war" following months of tension.

Asif said in an X post that Pakistan had hoped for peace in Afghanistan after the withdrawal of NATO forces in 2021 and expected the Taliban, which seized power in the country, to focus on the welfare of the Afghan people and regional stability.

Instead, he said that the Taliban had turned Afghanistan "into a colony of India," with which Pakistan has periodically engaged in wars, clashes and skirmishes since gaining independence from British colonial rule in 1947.

Pakistan bombed major cities in Afghanistan, including the capital Kabul, on Friday, after Afghan forces had attacked Pakistani border troops on Thursday night.

### Given the escalation of air and ground clashes, is there a risk that this crisis could spill over into a broader regional war?

The clashes are unlikely to widen; neither side seeks an expanded confrontation. Pakistan is facing very low economic growth, which limits its ability to organize heavy military operations once again. At the same time, it faces ongoing concerns along its eastern border with India, whose government has demonstrated a highly pragmatic approach to attacking Pakistan without hesitation. Therefore, Pakistan is not inclined toward broadening the conflict or turning it into a full-scale war.

### Iran shares borders and mutual interests with both countries. What measures can it take to prevent being harmed from these clashes?

The most significant step Iran can take is direct and unbiased mediation between the parties. Unfortunately, during previous mediation efforts, Iranian officials adopted positions that effectively pushed the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan into a corner and weakened its negotiating stance. As a result, the Islamic Emirate did not participate in the talks. It appears that a balanced approach toward both sides is required in order to move forward with a serious dialogue with both countries. Iran has the capacity to do so, both historically and in terms of shared interests, enabling it to engage with both Pakistan and Afghanistan and to broker agreements.

## Tehran raps continued UNSC silence on Zionist crimes as 'catastrophic'

### Israel launches new deadly aggression on Lebanon

### International Desk

Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesperson Esmaeil Baqaei on Friday strongly condemned the renewed aggression of the Israeli regime against Lebanon, calling for immediate action from the United Nations Security Council (UNSC).

Baqaei described the UNSC's continued silence and inaction toward the Israeli violations and crimes as "catastrophic," urging an immediate action from the council to fulfill its responsibilities in maintaining international peace and security. He also emphasized the direct responsibility of the United States and France, as guarantors of a ceasefire agreement between Israel and Lebanon, for the ongoing disastrous situation in Lebanon.

His remarks came after Israeli warplanes conducted at least 13 airstrikes on Lebanon's Bekaa Valley on Thursday, killing one person and wounding 29 others.

Lebanon's Ministry of Health said that a "16-year-old Syrian boy was killed" near Baalbek. The attacks targeted Shmestar, Boudai, Harbata as well as the Hermel and Nabi Chit mountains, according to the National News Agency (NNA). The air raids also left several shops damaged in the Baalbek Souk in Tall-et-al-Ajami. In October 2023, Israel initiated strikes against Lebanon, which intensified into a full-blown war by September 2024. This war has resulted in the killing of over 4,000 indi-



viduals and left around 17,000 others injured. Under the truce agreement, Israeli forces were expected to withdraw from southern Lebanon by January 2025. However, the withdrawal has been only partial, with a continued military presence at five border outposts.

Ceasefire breaches by Israel have resulted in the deaths and injuries of hundreds of Lebanese citizens.

In a report published by UNIFIL on December 12, 2025, more than 10,000 violations by Israeli armed forces have been documented since the ceasefire agreement, including air and ground aggressions that have breached Lebanese sovereignty.

Lebanon has filed a complaint with the UN about the repeated Israeli violations, urging the UN Security Council to push the regime to end its attacks and fully withdraw from the country.

## Militant groups fuel ...

Another factor behind these clashes, particularly their persistence, is the power vacuum that has emerged in the region. No order-maintaining power is currently present in Central Asia or the Indian subcontinent. At one time, the United States played that role; at another, the Soviet Union. These conflicts were manageable then. There is a power gap now which the Tehran summit has failed to fill. The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan effectively disregarded the summit and did not attend. Instead, it expanded relations with India, which further provoked Pakistan.

### A temporary ceasefire between the two sides was brokered in October 2025 with the mediation of Qatar and Turkey, but it did not hold. What were the main reasons for its failure?

Well, A mediator must be a country that has potential shared interests with both sides between whom it mediates. Neither Turkey nor Qatar possesses such capacity. They lack serious potential common interests with both parties that could be used as leverage to manage behavior and keep the ceasefire in place. That is the primary reason. Qatar's role was more functional when Afghanistan was under US occupation. Turkey has economic and at times security-related shared interests with Pakistan, but it does not have extensive ties with Afghanistan.

Moreover, other powers and more substantial actors should at least have participated in the mediation process, such

as Iran and India. Had other countries entered the process and a kind of consortium or regional conference been formed for mediation, it might have achieved some success. In its existing form, however, the ceasefire's instability was evident from the outset.

### Some Pakistani officials have accused the Taliban of becoming a tool in India's hands. How do you assess India's actual role in this conflict?

The statements made by Pakistani officials are largely propaganda. The claim that Afghanistan has become India's arm is somewhat far-fetched. However, whether India is dissatisfied with the situation—certainly not. Pakistan being preoccupied with its northern borders is entirely desirable from India's perspective.

Besides, Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan has now become a group that provides logistical and training services to Baloch separatist groups inside Pakistan, many of which were effectively shaped by the Indian security system known as RAW. Evidence for this claim lies in the similarities that have emerged between the behavior of separatist groups and the TTP, as well as certain statements made in Afghanistan indicating that connections have been established. From these two perspectives, India is benefiting. However, describing the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan as a mere instrument of India is an exaggeration and appears largely propagandistic.



Mohammad Ali Rajabi  
Cartoonist

### CARTOON



# WSA: Iran's steel output up 15% in January as global production falls

## Economy Desk

Global crude steel production fell in January 2026, while Iran's output grew by more than 15%, helping the country maintain its position as the world's 10th-largest steel producer, according to the World Steel Association (WSA).

The association reported that crude steel production across 69 countries reached 147.3 million tons in January, down 6.5% compared with the same month in 2025.

Iranian steelmakers produced 2.6 million tons of crude steel in January 2026, marking a 15.1% increase from January 2025, Mehr news agency reported.

China, the world's largest producer, saw output decline 13.9% to 75.3 million tons. India produced 15.1 million tons, up 10.5%, while the United States increased production by 3.3% to 7.1 million tons.

South Korea produced 5.6 million tons, a 5% rise, whereas

Japan's output fell 0.5% to 6.8 million tons and Brazil's production dropped 1.4% to 2.7 million tons. Germany recorded a 15% increase to 3.1 million tons, Russia's output decreased 7.4% to 5.5 million tons, and Turkey produced 3.4 million tons, up 5.8%.

The data show that while global steel production is trending downward, Iran's sustained growth has allowed it to retain its 10th-place ranking among the world's top steel producers.

Separately, the Iranian Steel Producers Association (ISPA) said in mid-February that exports from Iran's steel value chain rose sharply in the first 10 months of the current Iranian year, which began March 21. The association reported that export value of iron and steel chain products during the period that began March 21 surpassed \$6.5 billion — the total for the whole of last year — marking a 22% increase.



IRNA

## Iran-Afghanistan rail trade posts 17-fold yearly jump: RAI



IRNA

### Economy Desk

Rail freight exchanges between Iran and Afghanistan have increased 17-fold since the start of the current Iranian year on March 21, 2025, compared with the same period last year, a senior Iranian railway official said, citing latest transport data.

"Rail exchanges between Iran and Afghanistan from the beginning of this year through Tuesday (February 24) have increased 17 times com-

pared with last year," Shahriar Naqizadeh, director general for international commerce at the Railways of the Islamic Republic of Iran (RAI), told IRNA.

"In the Afghanistan sector, we achieved outstanding performance this year at the newly established Shamtigh rail border crossing, registering a 17-fold increase in rail exchanges with the country compared with last year," he said. According to the official, shipments sent via

the rail link exceeded 650,000 tons as of February 24 and are projected to surpass 750,000 tons by the end of the Iranian year on March 21, 2026.

"At least 150,000 tons of these shipments were transit cargo, meaning the consignments originated in other countries and were transported through Iran to Afghanistan," Naqizadeh said.

"Our target for next year is to move 2 million tons of cargo through the Shamtigh border, which is easily achievable," he added.

### Rail link opens export route eastward

Earlier, the chief executive of the Islamic Republic of Iran Railways said a new gateway for exports to Afghanistan had been opened, IRNA reported.

He said 70,000 tons of cargo were transported

to Afghanistan by rail in the 10th month of the current year, rising to more than 100,000 tons in the 11th month, with a forecast exceeding 1.5 million tons of rail cargo movement for next year. Exports transported via the railway include ceramic products from Yazd, steel shipments from various companies and transit of petroleum products from the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait and Russia to Afghanistan, according to the report. The new eastern corridor could help expand Iran's exports.

The railway chief also referred to petroleum product prices inside Afghanistan, saying the cost had been about \$1,400 per ton domestically, but rail transport reduced the price to \$935 per ton, demonstrating the impact of rail freight transportation.

## Minister opens West Asia's sole thermal paper plant, textile factories in Qazvin



ISNA

### Economy Desk

Iran's Minister of Industry, Mine and Trade Mohammad Atabak inaugurated paper, packaging, and textile yarn production factories in Qazvin on Thursday, including the largest and only active thermal paper producer in West Asia. The thermal paper production unit, with an annual capacity of 18,273 tons, is expected to create employment for 1,000 people di-

rectly and indirectly, ISNA reported.

The facility's main product is thermal paper used in point-of-sale (POS) devices, automated teller machines (ATMs), and retail cash registers, which was previously imported mainly from China and South Korea.

The paper and packaging industrial unit was established in Alborz Industrial City. According to the project's investors, once the factory reaches maximum

production capacity, it will be possible to prevent currency outflows equivalent to approximately 15 percent of the domestic market capacity for the product.

The machinery technology for the unit was supplied from China, and the foreign investors are among prominent producers in the paper and packaging industry. The inauguration of the facility aligns with policies of the Ministry of Industry, Mine and Trade to develop processing industries, reduce dependence on imports, and strengthen production chains in the northern Qazvin Province. Also on Thursday, a textile yarn production company with a nominal capacity of 11,850 tons per year and employment for 500 people began operations with the minister in attendance. A spinning company with a nominal capacity of 15,500 tons per year and employment for 400 people was also inaugurated by the minister and began operations.

## SCI reports annual inflation rise of 47.5% in 11 months

### Economy Desk

Iran's annual inflation rate continued an upward trend during the first 11 months of the current Iranian year starting March 21, rising from 33.2% at the beginning of the year to 47.5% as of February 19, according to data released by the Statistical Center of Iran (SCI), indicating an increase of 14.3 percentage points over the period.

Data published by the SCI and reported by ISNA

showed that annual inflation in the 11th month of the year (Jan. 21-Feb. 19) reached 47.5%, up 3.1 percentage points from the previous month.

During the 11th month, the highest annual inflation rate was recorded in the "bread and cereals" category at 90.2%, while the lowest rate was registered in the housing sector for residential rents at 34.7%.

Annual inflation refers to the percentage change in the average consumer price index

over the 12 months ending in the current month compared with the corresponding period a year earlier.

At the start of the Iranian year, covering March 21 to April 20, annual inflation was reported at 33.2%. In that first month, vegetables and legumes recorded the highest inflation rate at 59%, while oils and fats posted the lowest rate at 9.1%.

Separately, the Central Bank of Iran (CBI) said on Wednesday that consumer price

inflation, based on its own calculations, stood at 46.3% for the 12 months ending in the 11th month compared with the same period a year earlier.

According to IRNA, the consumer price index for goods and services in Iran's urban areas rose to 558.1 in the 11th month, increasing 8.4% from the previous month.

The index also increased by 62.2% compared with the same month a year earlier, the report said.



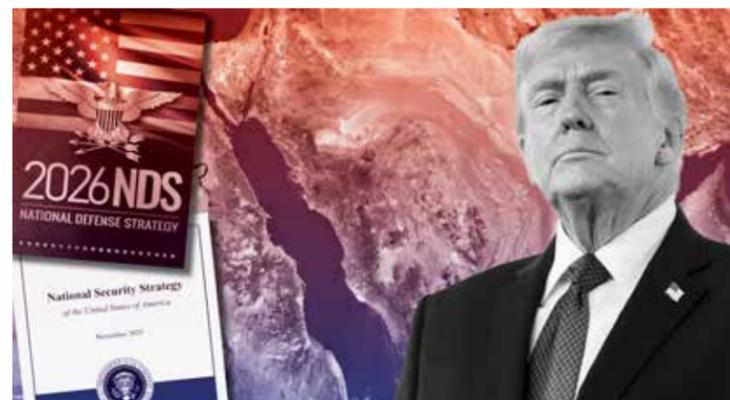
## Rereading United States' 2025 National Security Strategy, 2026 National Defense Strategy

# Strategy of terror production

**PANEL** "US and Its New Approach in the World" was the title of a specialized panel convened under the goal of "Rereading of the 2025 National Security Strategy and the 2026 National Defense Strategy of the United States," held at the premises of the Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA) with the participation of the Islamic World Peace Forum.

Strategic elucidation and analysis of the two aforementioned documents necessitate a perspective transcending a merely military text; for these documents not only reflect the American defensive doctrine, but also constitute a window to understanding profound transformations within the international order, this country's perception of threats, and its self-ascribed station within a world undergoing transition. The National Defense Strategy may be regarded as the nodal confluence of policy, power, technology, economy, and ideology; a text wherein past experiences, anxieties regarding the relative decline of American global power, and anticipatory projections of the future are represented in an interwoven configuration. In view of the significance and ramifications of these documents, particularly for the Islamic Republic of Iran, Messrs. Davoud Ameri, Seyed Jalal Dehghani Firouzabadi, Ali Fekri, and Hamidreza Dehghani Poudeh, as experts in the domain of politics and international relations, presented their perspectives and analyses in the presence of a coterie of intellectuals and elites.

What follows constitutes a translated account of the first part of the panel:



The illustration shows US President Donald Trump and the cover pages of the United States' 2025 National Security Strategy and 2026 National Defense Strategy.  
● GETTY IMAGES

The focal point of attention here concerns the orientation of these two documents — the 2025 National Security Strategy and the 2026 National Defense Strategy of the United States — toward the principal security issues of the United States within the arena of international relations. Kindly expound upon major world regions, such as the Western Hemisphere, Europe, the Middle East, Israel, the Far East, Russia, China, and others. Please also indicate the convergences and potential divergences between these two documents.



A man with an oversized Make America Great Again (MAGA) cap participates in a rally at Southern New Hampshire University Arena on February 10, 2020, to support US President Donald Trump.  
● DREW ANGERER/GETTY IMAGES



Davoud Ameri

**AMERI:** One addresses the general orientations of American national security, and the other is devoted specifically to defensive and military matters. We, who presently confront America directly — on one flank, with the possibility of a war and, on the other, with the atmosphere of negotiations — must attain an exacting comprehension of these two documents, scrutinize their context, and deliberate collectively regarding the strategies and measures that the Islamic Republic must adopt in response to American stratagems and its novel orientations.

If one adopts a macroscopic vantage, one may assert that what emerges from the 2025 American National Security Strategy indicates that, beyond the disseminated media version, latent and classified orientations also subsist, from whose diction certain inferences may be deduced. Nonetheless, we remain uninformed regarding the classified sections and perhaps may infer them from American conduct, particularly through the contradictions extant between the document and operational performance. Consequently, this document requires meticulous dissection.

A historical survey of American National Security Strategies reveals that Americans have consistently pursued two principal approaches, whether overtly or covertly. The first concerns soft dominion over the world's strategic resources and movements. With a decorous exterior, a liberal-democratic veneer, and an embellished image, Americans have endeavored to dominate global power resources and currents.

The second pertains to the globalization of American liberal democracy. The potent liberal-democratic current has persistently attempted to introduce American culture and values as the prevailing universal values, and American National Security Strategies have functioned as custodians and defenders of this orientation.

In the shadow of these two approaches, Americans have sought to fabricate an image of a utopia out of the US and to transform it into a universal aspiration across diverse regions of the globe. The phenomenon of migration has for years been interpreted within this very framework.

However, in recent years — particularly with the accession of the new American administration — alterations have become manifest. It appears that this administration, describable as modern and inclusive of trans-governmental actors, has introduced novel orientations, for American strategies have undergone modification. One factor was the collapse of

the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and the supposition of unrivaled American supremacy. The US endeavored, through a unipolar and unilateralist view, to designate itself the "global steward," yet this claim did not attain durable consolidation among scholars and policymakers worldwide.

Another factor was the gradual erosion of America's superior position subsequent to the Cold War and its incapacity to satisfy global expectations. Likewise, failure to perpetuate a unilateral model of global leadership and the proliferation of contradictions within American governance — between rhetoric and conduct, between idealized image and domestic realities — contributed to this reorientation.

Concomitantly, the emergence of new powers such as Russia and China challenged America's station.

It appears that in its new documents, the US has entered with a different orientation. The macro-objectives may be enumerated thus: first, the guarantee of survival and national security in all political, economic, military, and technological dimensions; second, reversion to efficacious global hegemony.

In the 2025 document, even the performance of former presidents undergoes critique and disparagement, and the present American condition is described as catastrophic; the authors present themselves as salvific agents of hegemonic



It appears that in its new documents, the US has entered with a different orientation. The macro-objectives may be enumerated thus: first, the guarantee of survival and national security in all political, economic, military, and technological dimensions; second, reversion to efficacious global hegemony. In the 2025 document, even the performance of former presidents undergoes critique and disparagement, and the present American condition is described as catastrophic; the authors present themselves as salvific agents of hegemonic restoration.

restoration.

Another orientation involves the containment of multilateralist tendencies that circumscribe American power. With the arrival of emergent powers and the formation of organizations such as BRICS, American unilateralism has encountered contestation. Therefore, one objective consists of the disruption or attenuation of multilateralist processes and the redefinition of American hegemony within a novel framework.

Within the 2025 document and the new Trump administration, two macro-strategies become discernible: first, an imperially inflected and explicit diction; second, a strategy of threat, terror production, and — if exigency dictates — recourse to war.



● HOMELAND SECURITY TODAY

Of course, efforts aim at the realization of objectives prior to war or without war; however, if necessary, the utilization of military power is deemed legitimate. This naked unilateralist diction seeks resolution of American predicaments through the fabrication of dread and deterrence — an atmosphere previously observed in certain regional transformations wherein mere engendering of fear yielded desired political outcomes absent extensive confrontation.

At present, America appears intent upon generating such an environment internationally. In Asia, across numerous global regions, and even in Europe, this American orientation becomes observable. We confront operational components: redefinition of

American national interests with an extraterritorial orientation; realization of peace through power or pacification grounded in authority; flexible realism in foreign policy; and management of balance of power commensurate with rival ascendancy. One prevailing orientation in these documents is movement toward containment and restriction of rival power globally.

Revitalization of the defense industry and reconstruction of domestic industries constitute serious orientations. Confrontation with migration as a domestic security issue, assurance of sustained access to supply chains, supremacy in energy, and alignment of countries with American interests through controlled — or even uncontrolled — coalitions are

also observable.

This document designates the Western Hemisphere as its primary priority and employs a proprietary language regarding it. Events in Venezuela and American conduct therein emanate from this perspective. Another point concerns the elimination or restriction of rival influence; that is, besides other goals, the US also seeks the eradication of any rival penetration within the Western Hemisphere.

In the second document (the defense document), it is again explicitly affirmed that this domain was acquired through military power. Thus, concealment recedes, and naked discourse oriented toward power attainment prevails.

In Asia, leadership from a position of power and management

of geopolitical and economic competition are emphasized. Regarding Europe, prior to publication of this document, I indicated in a report in March 2025 that Americans had effectively moved past a unified Europe and no longer regarded it as an autonomous actor in international interventions. This document does not recognize a unified and puissant Europe, yet encourages European states toward independence, effectively pursuing power division within Europe.

In light of these two documents — especially the second, which accentuates military and defensive orientation — military power is introduced as a legitimizing force. The National Defense Strategy endeavors, in fact, to confer legitimacy upon American military actions and to embellish them. For us in the Islamic Republic — an influential actor in global transformations and presently confronted simultaneously with negotiation and escalating American threat — precise comprehension proves indispensable. We must formulate our strategies vis-à-vis these orientations and deliberate upon them.

**Please explain the orientation, differences, and similarities of these documents, their perspective toward diverse global regions, including our own, and evaluate the actual performance of the current administration of the United States relative to these documents.**



Seyed Jalal Dehghani Firouzabadi

**DEGHANI FIROUZABADI:** The American National Strategy and its Defense Strategy are interrelated; the National Security Strategy presides over the National Defense Strategy. The latter possesses a more operational and military aspect and is implemented within the American bureaucratic structure.

In the Defense Strategy, the foremost objective is the restoration of America's position. Although official American diction seldom employs the term "hegemony," restoration of past greatness is posited within the framework of the "America First" slogan.

The document implicitly acknowledges the United States' fall from its prior station and asserts the necessity of revivification. It indicates that the liberal international order — from which America benefited — enabled others, particularly China, to utilize globalization and global commerce without incurring costs.

From the authors' vantage, certain American allies have engaged in gratuitous security dependence and must assume greater financial responsibility. The spirit of the document entails redefinition of America's role and position within the international system — that is, redefinition of national interests — alongside delegation of greater responsibility to allies and adoption of selective inter-



US President Donald Trump announces wide-ranging tariffs on several BRICS members and partner countries at a White House ceremony on the so-called "liberation day".  
● ANDREW LEYDEN/ZUMA PRESS WIRE

ventionism. This orientation does not constitute isolationism, but rather limited, efficacious, and selective globalism — intervention where vital American interests necessitate it. From a theoretical perspective, although pragmatism or moderated realism is invoked, in practice, numerous realist principles appear manifest: state-centrism, power-centrism — especially military power — and avoidance of war concomitant with maximal deterrence, particularly vis-à-vis China.

The slogan "peace through strength" and the hints of seeking absolute superiority articulated there indicate that the US must possess and preserve superiority across all domains of national power — military, economic, and technological. The concept of power balance appears within the deterrence framework as well. The Defense Strategy explicitly affirms that unilateral action has frequently benefited American national interests. Unlike the past, wherein unilateralism proved contentious, it is now explicitly defended as the optimal means of securing American security and interests.

Another dimension involves novel economic nationalism emphasizing three components: energy dominance, trade balance including through tariff war, and reinforcement of domestic industry with repatriation of production capacity. A salient distinction from prior documents is explicit repudiation of the liberal international order and practical transcendence of foundational principles of international law, such as national sovereignty, non-intervention, non-use of force, and inviolability of borders. Recent actions reinforce the perception that prior foundations of international relations encounter challenge.

These two documents may be regarded as a manifesto of the new Trump administration's orientation; in aggregate, no profound contradiction appears between them and the performance of the current US administration.

**Initially, some concluded superficially that our region had forfeited significance in American higher-order documents; however, this inference appears imprecise.**

**DEGHANI FIROUZABADI:** Although the document asserts that a country assigning priority to everything effectively possesses no priority, regarding the Middle East, four explicit objectives are enumerated: prevention of domination of regional energy resources

by a hostile state, guarantee of Israel's security, preservation of freedom of navigation including in the Red Sea and the Strait of Hormuz, and prevention of extensive regional instability.

Therefore, one cannot assert complete diminution of the Middle East's or Iran's significance; rather, the framework and modality of engagement have transformed. Even if the Middle East's position has declined in certain levels, in other dimensions, its importance has not diminished; indeed, for America, Iran has acquired heightened significance.

Some inferred diminution based upon quantitative content analysis — counting mentions of Iran — yet frequency of reference does not constitute a decisive metric of importance. As with China and Russia, Iran independently retains significance within the document.

I have even stated that Iran resides at the nucleus of the American National Security Strategy. In the National Defense Strategy as well, Iran is explicitly addressed; though characterized as weakened, it remains within the threat-construction framework. Consequently, one must not conclude that Iran has forfeited value within American security and defense prioritization. American practical conduct corroborates this assessment.

**Dr. Fekri, kindly continue, particularly regarding the United States' competition with China and the securitization of the economy, including tariffs as a security instrument.**

**FEKRI:** The American National



Ali Fekri

Security Strategy is prepared pursuant to an annual legal obligation. The Goldwater-Nichols Act of 1986 obligates publication. In 1986, proximate to the terminal years of the Soviet Union, the objective was the evaluation of international transformations within a specified temporal interval, the delineation of a desired world, and the specification of the trajectory toward it, so that all American institutions and even external actors comprehend America's direction. During the Cold War, emphasis centered on existential war with the Soviet Union. After its collapse, globalization and



This constitutes the US's desired world: restoration of primary economic centrality and recovery of lost or declining authority — namely, the MAGA project. For reentry into this domain, the American periphery must become entirely secure and unilateral. Since competition remains inevitable, it must be displaced elsewhere.

democracy promotion — concepts presently criticized — occupied the core.

After the September 11 attacks, concepts of preemptive action and counterterrorism entered the documents. At the time, it was frequently stressed that globalization has enemies that can threaten the United States' national security, thereby necessitating confrontation. During the Obama period, counterterrorism persisted, with augmented emphasis upon coalitions, diplomacy, and international cooperation.

Since circa 2010, the return to Asia and strategic competition with China entered the documents. In a global investment forum in China, the American treasury secretary and the Chinese commerce minister engaged in open disputation. The American official alleged that China's currency manipulation and intellectual property violations were hurting American domestic production; the Chinese minister attributed the issue to a weakened American production structure, adding that if the value of Yuan increases, another country will replace China. This indicated that structural competition was forming. Thereafter, strategic compe-

framework. America seeks to transform its periphery into a stable and exclusive pole of future economic power.

This constitutes the desired world: restoration of primary economic centrality and recovery of lost or declining authority — namely, the MAGA project. For reentry into this domain, the American periphery must become entirely secure and unilateral. Since competition remains inevitable, it must be displaced elsewhere.

Hence, pressure upon Iran, the Middle East, and Asia intensifies; tensions must be transferred elsewhere while the Western Hemisphere becomes homogeneous and exclusively American.

From the Chinese perspective, however, substantial credence is not accorded to the operationalization of this document as previous security documents likewise did not culminate in their intended outcomes, and states traversed episodic waves of pressure.

**Please elaborate on Trump's utilization of tariffs.**

**FEKRI:** I construe tariffs within the rubric of unilateral coercive measures. In one context, the US imposes sanctions; in another, tariffs; elsewhere, li-



People in Doral, Florida, react to the news of Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro's illegal capture in a US military action in Caracas on January 3, 2026.  
● GIORGIO VIERRA/AFP

tion with China assumed prominence. In Trump's first term, China and Russia were designated principal rivals, followed by Iran and North Korea. Regarding the 2025 document, the US has concluded that within the global economic contest of the past two decades, it has experienced relative decline — not absolute debility, but comparative deceleration vis-à-vis rivals whose growth velocity surpassed its. Projects such as "America First" were devised to reverse this trajectory through production repatriation and economic reconstruction.

In Trump's first term, one policy entailed insecurity generation around emergent powers: NATO eastward expansion, Middle Eastern transformations, Afghanistan developments, South China Sea tensions, extensive sanctions against Iran, and evolution from crippling sanctions to smart sanctions and maximum pressure. Yet this containment policy did not yield desired outcomes.

In the new document, America asserts that it must possess complete dominion over the Western Hemisphere and manage all contradictions therein. Issues such as the Panama Canal, developments in Venezuela, Greenland, and even Canada's and Mexico's relations with China and Europe become intelligible within this

censing requirements via the Department of Commerce. Each region encounters measures calibrated to its conditions. Concerning Iran, sanctions are deemed most efficacious. Regarding China and Europe — especially China — tariffs are emphasized because unilateral sanctions lack equivalent efficacy. Moreover, efforts also aim at augmenting energy costs and production factor costs for China so that Chinese commodities, owing to elevated production inputs, forfeit, for instance, 20% of competitive capacity relative to goods produced in the Western Hemisphere.

**Do they genuinely believe globalization has harmed America?**

**FEKRI:** Yes, they explicitly assert that countries such as China, Russia, India, and even smaller states exploited globalization's advantages and ascended while America receded within the power hierarchy. Hence, their solution is the reversal of this trajectory. Today, international institutions — whose norms Europeans originally constructed yet Americans defended — are questioned and progressively excised from the international arena.

The article first appeared in Persian on IRNA.

## UWW Ranking Series:

## Triumphant trio completes gold sweep in Tirana

## Sports Desk

The second UWW Ranking Series event of the season saw all three Iranian freestyle wrestlers claim gold medals in their respective weight classes at the Muhamet Malo tournament in Tirana, Albania.

Amirhossein Firouzpour capped off the gold sweep for the Iranian trio on Thursday with an emphatic 11-1 victory over former world silver medalist Miriani Maisuradze of Georgia in the 92kg final.

A bronze medalist at last year's World Championships, Firouzpour began the day with a 5-0 win over Kazakhstan's Azamat Dauletbekov – a three-time Asian champion and two-time world bronze medalist – before defeating India's Kumar Punit by technical superiority (12-1) to progress to the semifinals.

Another superiority victory (10-0), against Kamil Kurugliyev of Kazakhstan, sent Firouzpour into the final showpiece.

Earlier on Thursday, Mohammad Nokhodi, who had struggled with a knee injury last season,



Iran's Mohammad Nokhodi (red) has his hand raised as the winner against American Dean Hamiti in the freestyle 79kg final at the Muhamet Malo tournament in Tirana, Albania, on February 26, 2026.  
● KOSTADIN ANDONOV/UWW

appeared to have regained full fitness as he cruised to a 10-0 victory over American Dean

Hamiti in the 79kg final. The two-time world silver medalist executed three different

takedowns and turned Hamiti twice to rack up his points in the gold-medal bout.

Nokhodi also enjoyed a commanding run in Tirana, opening with a 12-2 win over Georgia's Tariel Gaphrindashvili before defeating former world cadet and junior champion Dzhabrail Gadzhiev of Azerbaijan (7-2) and India's Sagar Jaglan (10-0) to reach the final.

Younes Emami had opened Iran's account on Wednesday by claiming gold in the 74kg class with a 5-0 victory over Kyrgyzstan's Orozbek Toktomambetov in the final.

After securing the first point via the activity clock, the two-time world bronze medalist scored a takedown and a turn to build a 5-0 lead in the first period, then controlled the second to seal the win.

The day began with a 7-2 victory over American William Lewan. Emami followed that with a 7-5 win against Russian former world bronze medalist Inalbek Sheriev to advance to the semifinals.

He was awarded a semifinal victory over Magomedrasul Asluev after the Bahraini wrestler withdrew due to injury while leading 2-1.

With the tournament serving as another stage of Iran's selection process for major wrestling events in 2026, the three wrestlers strengthened their claims for places in the national squad for October's World Championships in Manama, Bahrain.

Elsewhere in Tirana, Russian great Abdurashid Sadulaev marked his return to the international stage with a gold-medal campaign in the 97kg division. A fifth showdown with his familiar rival Kyle Snyder was denied after the American lost to fellow Russian Mukhamed Khaniev in the quarterfinals. Instead, Sadulaev faced his young compatriot in the final.

Sadulaev was tested by Khaniev in the first period, but a powerful double-leg takedown gave him a 4-0 lead. Khaniev narrowed the gap to 4-2, yet a composed Sadulaev never allowed him to dictate the pace.

Keeping Khaniev at arm's length, Sadulaev added three counter takedowns while conceding two stepouts to secure a 10-4 victory and book his place at the European Championships.

## Iran names girls' roster for World Junior Taekwondo Championships



● taekwondo.ir

## Sports Desk

Iran has confirmed its girls' squad for the upcoming World Junior Taekwondo Championships, set to kick off on April 12 in Tashkent, Uzbekistan. The final selection trials were held on Wednesday at the Taekwondo House in Tehran, with official referees overseeing the contests under the supervision of the women's technical committee and coaching staff.

Hana Zarrinkamar will spearhead the Iranian squad in the Uzbek capital as she chases back-to-back world junior titles, having claimed the -68kg gold in 2024, when competing in the +68kg class.

Zarrinkamar will be joined by Bahar Tahmasbi (-42kg), Negar Mozaffari (-44kg), Zahra Mousavi (-46kg), Helia Ebrahimian (-49kg), Rozhan Heidari (-52kg), Dina Babarrahim (-55kg), Pinar Lotfizadeh (-59kg), Aynaz Mikaeili (-63kg), and Asal Goltapeh (-68kg).

Iran will be aiming to replicate its 2024 success in Chuncheon, South Korea, where the team secured four gold medals and one silver across 10 weight classes to claim a third girls' team title in 14 editions of the competition.

The team will be led by head coach Niloufar Safarian, assisted by Parvin Keshavarz, Fatemeh Kheiri, and Zahra Kongerani.

## FIVB Boys' U17 World Championship:

## Iran among 24-team field for revamped showpiece in Doha

## Sports Desk

Iran will be among the favorites at the 2026 FIVB Volleyball Boys' U17 World Championship when the revamped 24-team tournament gets underway in Doha, Qatar, on August 19.

The draw for the pool phase of the competition will take place on March 18.

The inaugural edition of the tournament – featuring 16 teams – was held in Sofia, Bulgaria, in August 2024. Iran suffered a narrow 3-2 defeat to Italy in the quarterfinals but bounced back with victories over Brazil (3-0) and Belgium (3-2) to secure a consolation fifth-place finish.

Italy will arrive in Doha as the

defending champion after defeating Argentina in a five-set thriller in the 2024 final. The Europeans will be joined by Spain, France, Poland, Czechia, Romania, Türkiye and Bulgaria, highlighting the depth of the continent's field following qualification through the CEV pathway.

Host nation Qatar qualifies automatically, while Pakistan, Iran, India, Japan and Chinese Taipei secured their spots through last year's Asian U16 Championship in Thailand, underscoring the continent's strong commitment to youth development.

Iran surrendered a two-set lead in the continental final in Thailand, eventually falling 3-2 to Pakistan.



● AVC

From South America, Argentina will compete alongside Brazil and Venezuela. Puerto Rico, Cuba, the United States and

Mexico complete the NORCECA contingent. Africa will be represented by Egypt, Tunisia and Algeria.

## Iranian Women's Volleyball Premier League:

## Playoffs set for first-leg thrillers in last eight



● volleyball.ir

The first round of the Women's Volleyball Premier League playoffs will be played today, with four crucial matches scheduled in Tehran, Tabriz, Karaj and Isfahan as the eight best teams from the regular season battle for places in the semifinals. The domestic top flight has reached its most decisive stage, where there is no margin for error. The quarterfinals will be contested in a best-of-three format, with the second legs set for March 3.

Saipa will host Malavan in Tehran. Saipa topped Group A with eight wins, two defeats and 24 points, and the defending champion enters the playoffs aiming to secure a third consecutive title. Malavan, in its debut top-flight season, qualified as the fourth team from Group B with four wins and 10 points, adding extra intrigue to the all-Tehran clash.

In Tabriz, Moqavemat Shahrdari Tabriz will face Shahin Bandar Ameri at Shahid Tavana Hall. Shahrdari finished second in Group A with eight wins and 24

points, while Shahin, enjoying its first Premier League campaign, claimed third place in Group B with six wins and 18 points, making this one of the most evenly matched ties.

Karaj's Enghelab Hall will see Shahr Arka Alborz, the Group B winner with nine wins and 27 points, take on San'at Mes Rafsanjan, which squeezed into the playoffs as the fourth-placed team from Group A. Meanwhile, in Isfahan, Foolad Mobarakeh Sepahan meets Majan Mazandaran in a high-profile encounter between two title contenders.

Foolad will step onto the court fresh from a historic CAVA Women's League title in Malé, Maldives, a fortnight ago – marking the country's first gold medal in women's international club competitions.

Majan, composed of Iran's under-18 national team players, enjoyed an impressive regular season under national team head coach Lee Do-hee, claiming eight wins from 10 matches to finish third in Group A.

# Specialized plans underway to protect trees at Chehel Sotoun Garden

## Iranica Desk

The director of the Chehel Sotoun Garden World Heritage Site in Isfahan said that problems including fungal pests, environmental damage, and the impact of air pollution on the garden's trees have been identified, and that specialized plans have been drawn up to control pests and improve their condition.

Speaking to IRNA, Mostafa Hadipour said the current condition of the garden's trees and green spaces not only directly affects the visual integrity of the Persian garden, but also has consequences for the wooden architectural decorations and parts of the palace itself. Addressing these issues, he added, is among the site's top priorities.

Hadipour stressed that all treatment and pest-control measures will be carried out only after the preparation of specialized plans and with the input of leading experts in the field. He noted that the plans must first be reviewed and approved by the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, then endorsed by the site's Strategic Council, the Technical Council of the Provincial Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Organization and the Technical Council of World Heritage Sites, before being formally communicated to the province and implemented under strict supervision.

He also said a specialized meeting to review the challenges and needs of the Chehel Sotoun World Heritage Site was held at the headquarters of Iran's World Heritage Sites, during which a comprehensive report on the current condition of the complex was presented.

The meeting addressed issues such as shortcomings in in-



shab.ir



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frastructure and facilities, the need for conservation work on parts of the architectural decorations, a shortage of specialized human resources, and the necessity of securing sustainable funding. It was agreed that a more expert-oriented approach should be adopted in allocating budgets to this World Heritage Site.

Describing Chehel Sotoun as not only a historic monument but also a valuable museum collection and a Persian garden, he said plans are under way to enhance the training of museum guides, update methods of communicating with visitors, and carry out urgent conservation works.

He added that further measures have been proposed to control humidity caused by the central pool, complete the restoration of columns and architectural decorations, and develop long-term interpretive and museum plans



iribnews.ir

to better organize visitor flow and improve the overall tourist experience.

Hadipour expressed hope that with the support of the Ministry of Cultural Heritage in staffing and operational budgeting, conditions for protection, restoration and management of

the site will improve in the near future.

Noting that Chehel Sotoun Garden, as a property inscribed on the World Heritage List, is under continuous monitoring by UNESCO, he said experts from the organization periodically assess its protective, conservation

and management status. As a result, safeguarding the site has become an even higher priority for Isfahan's provincial cultural heritage authorities.

According to IRNA, Iran has nine gardens inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List, registered in July 2011. Isfahan Province's share in this serial nomination includes Chehel Sotoun and the Fin Garden of Kashan. Other Persian gardens on the list include Pasargadae in Fars, Eram Garden in Shiraz, Abbasabad Garden in Behshahr, Shazdeh Mahan Garden in Kerman, Dowlatabad Garden in Yazd, Pahlavanpour Garden in Mehriz, and Akbariyeh Garden in Birjand.

The Chehel Sotoun Garden, covering an area of more than 67,000 square meters, represents only a small portion of the vast Jahan Nama Garden, whose history dates back to the pre-Safavid era.

During the reign of Shah Abbas I, a pavilion was built at the center of the garden, forming the original core of Chehel Sotoun Palace and comprising the central hall and four corner chambers. Significant transformations took place under Shah Abbas II, when the columned portico, the Mirror Hall, additional halls on the northern and southern sides of the columned portico, side porticos flanking the central hall, two pools on the eastern and western sides, and the wall paintings of the main hall were added to the structure.

The palace was officially designated in 1057 AH (Islamic calendar) for ceremonial purposes and for hosting monarchs and high-ranking officials of states contemporary with the Safavid dynasty. In 1118 AH, during the reign of Sultan Hossein, the palace suffered a major fire, after which the damaged sections were reconstructed and restored.

## Nir to become major health tourism destination

## Iranica Desk

The governor of Ardabil Province said that the establishment of health tourism village in Nir is a strategic step taken toward the development of health tourism in the country.

Masoud Emami-Yeganeh made the remarks during the signing ceremony of an agreement for the construction of the Nir health tourism village. He said that with the implementation of this project, Nir will be transformed into one of the country's major health tourism destinations and will play an effective role in boosting the regional economy, chtn.ir wrote.

Referring to the features of the project, he added that the tourism village will be developed by modeling modern hydrotherapy practices in Tajikistan, noting that this complex will be constructed for the first time at the national level.

He further pointed out that Nir, due to its rich natural resources, mild mountain climate, and proximity to major tourism hubs such as Sareyn and Ardabil, enjoys significant potential for the development of health-oriented tourism. The city is home to several mineral hot springs and natural attractions that have long attracted visitors seeking therapeutic and



otaghak.com

wellness services, making it a suitable location for the implementation of large-scale health tourism projects.

Recalling that Ardabil Province introduced five flagship tourism projects during the International Investment Conference held in November 2025, Emami-Yeganeh said the projects include two health tourism villages in Nir and Sareyn counties, two five-star hotels in Ardabil and Namin counties, and one large-scale tourism complex.

One of these projects is the health tourism village of Nir, for which a four-party memorandum of understanding has been signed with one of the country's

large and active tourism holding companies.

Pointing to Ardabil Province's extensive tourism plans, Emami-Yeganeh said that at present, 89 tourism projects in various sectors are under implementation across the province, with physical progress ranging between 60 and 70 percent.

Emphasizing that a major portion of these projects will become operational in the coming months, the Ardabil governor said efforts are being made to activate tourism capacities and bring Ardabil Province's unique opportunities to the stage of implementation and operation. Nir is located 35 kilometers

west of Ardabil, along the Ardabil-Sareyn transit road. The highlands of Mount Sabalan rise to the north and west of Nir, creating numerous peaks and valleys that give the region a distinctly mountainous character. This results in cold winters and relatively mild summers, which has led many tourists traveling on Ardabil-Sareyn tours to visit the city and explore its attractions.

With its wealth of ancient and historical sites, hot and cold mineral springs, natural landscapes, pleasant climate, and location on the lush foothills of Mount Sabalan, Nir holds a special place in attracting tourists.

Every year, it welcomes a large number of visitors from across the country. The presence of several hot springs along with its cool weather and green, inviting nature in spring and summer, all indicate the city's strong potential for tourism development.

In addition to Nir's growing health tourism sector, Ardabil Province as a whole continues to cement its reputation as a prime destination for both domestic and international tourists. The province boasts a diverse array of attractions, including the famed mineral springs of Sareyn, the scenic landscapes surrounding Mount

Sabalan, historic sites such as the Shrine of Sheikh Safi al-Din Complex, and vibrant local culture. With ongoing investment in infrastructure, luxury accommodations, and integrated tourism projects, Ardabil is positioning itself as a year-round tourism hub, where wellness, nature, and cultural heritage converge to offer visitors a unique and memorable experience. The development of Nir's health tourism village is expected to complement these attractions, creating a comprehensive tourism circuit that highlights the province's natural beauty, therapeutic resources, and rich historical legacy.



yjc.ir

# Tourism needs radical overhaul to steady growth: Minister

## Arts & Culture Desk

Iran's Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts, Reza Salehi-Amiri, said on Thursday in Tehran that the country's tourism sector requires structural re-engineering and a more predictable operating environment to ensure sustainable growth, citing fresh investment and employment data. Speaking at a meeting of the ministry's Strategic Council for International Affairs and Public Diplomacy, Salehi-Amiri said tourism, which is highly sensitive to external variables, cannot maintain stable expansion without a flexible, program-based governance framework extending from central policy to provincial and local execution, IRNA reported. He said a five-year transformation plan, running through March

2029, has been designed at national level and broken down into operational schemes for provinces and counties to align decision-making with implementation. The minister said 734 tourism projects are currently under way nationwide, backed by investment totaling 830 trillion rials, describing the figure as evidence of private-sector confidence in the industry's medium-term prospects. Financial support through the banking network, coordination with the central bank and the use of specialized funds are aimed at maintaining capital flows and bringing projects to completion, he added. Tourism accounts for roughly 6% of gross domestic product and nearly 10% of the country's daily economic turnover, according to the minister. About 1.6 million

people are employed across the tourism value chain. Safeguarding those jobs requires stronger demand, expanded target markets and a broader product mix, he said. Salehi-Amiri highlighted foreign currency earnings as a core advantage. Average spending by inbound visitors stands at significant levels, reaching several thousand dollars in certain markets. He pointed to health tourism as a growth segment, saying medical infrastructure has improved in recent years and can support higher-value arrivals alongside cultural, pilgrimage and eco-tourism. He set a medium-term objective of attracting 15 million visitors, arguing that institutional reform, targeted investment support and more effective cultural engagement abroad would be decisive in reaching that threshold.



● IRNA

## Italy's Sapienza Film Festival to host Iran's 'Sami'

### Arts & Culture Desk

Iranian film 'Sami,' directed by Habib Bavi Sajed, was selected for the main competition of the second edition of the Oriental Kaleidoscope - Sapienza Film Festival, with the event set to run in Rome from March 4 to 7. Held in the Italian capital under the banner "Everyday Life", the festival focuses on independent productions from the Mediterranean basin, the Middle East and across East and South-East Asia. The Rome-based showcase positions itself as a platform for films that rarely secure conventional distribution, giving space to character-driven narratives and low-budget cinema operating outside the mainstream circuit, IRNA reported.



● soughcinema.ir

'Sami' will compete against entries from Japan, Azerbaijan, Malaysia and China. It is the sole Iranian title in the running for the festival's top prize. The film has already built mo-

mentum on the international circuit. It won Best Screenplay at the 16th Kazan International Film Festival in Russia and was previously selected at the 16th Rome International Film Festival, as well as at the first Stockholm's Hope International Film Festival and Morocco's Nador International Film and Shared Memory Festival. The drama follows a man who, two decades after his wife's killing, refuses to accept her death, tracing the psychological toll of unresolved grief over time. The cast includes Saeed Nagravi, Mohammad Al Mehdi, Reza Nouri, Shaker Mousavi Nejad, Amineh Abiat, Mina Daghighaleh, Taqi Alboukhanfar, Ali Mahmoud Fallahieh and Shahrokh Sakhrivari.

## VP warns UN of ecological fallout from US military activity in Persian Gulf

### Social Desk

Iran's Vice President and head of the Department of Environment (DoE) Shina Ansari, wrote to Antonio Guterres warning that escalating US military activity in the Persian Gulf and the Sea of Oman risks causing severe and lasting environmental damage. In the letter, Ansari cited the growing militarization of the strategically sensitive Persian Gulf basin and cautioned that any military action in a region dense with oil, gas, petrochemical and maritime infrastructure could trigger widespread marine pollution, destroy coastal habitats and damage biodiversity, IRNA reported. She said the environmental consequences of armed activity in such a fragile ecosystem would not be

confined to a single territory or timeframe, recalling previous regional conflicts in which strikes on oil and industrial facilities led to extensive oil spills, toxic emissions, coral reef degradation and long-term health risks for coastal communities. Ansari grounded her warning in international environmental law, referring to Principle 21 of the 1972 Stockholm Declaration and Principle 2 of the 1992 Rio Declaration, which hold states responsible for ensuring activities under their jurisdiction do not cause transboundary environmental harm. She also cited Article 55 of the 1977 Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions, which mandates protection of the natural environment against widespread, long-term and se-

vere damage during armed conflict, and the 1976 ENMOD Convention prohibiting hostile environmental modification with severe or lasting effects. Calling the Persian Gulf and the Sea of Oman a "sensitive and fragile ecosystem", she urged the UN Secretary-General to use his authority under Articles 99 and 34 of the UN Charter to prioritize environmental risks arising from heightened military activity in the region. Ansari also requested that relevant UN specialized agencies conduct an assessment of potential environmental threats and advance preventive mechanisms, stressing the need for full compliance with international environmental obligations to avert irreversible ecological harm affecting future generations.

## Iran launches 10-year reform of school educational system

### Social Desk

Education Minister Alireza Kazemi said on Friday that Iran will overhaul its student pastoral and character education framework to align it with the needs of a new generation, unveiling a 10-year reform plan with annual operational targets. Speaking at a ceremony in Tehran, Kazemi said existing structures were no longer fit for purpose as pupils grow up in a vastly different social and technological environment from previous generations, IRNA reported. He said the ministry would redesign methods, content and organizational structures within schools' pastoral departments to address students' intellectual, cultural and social needs in what he described

as a rapidly evolving digital era. Schools must move beyond purely academic instruction and place structured character development alongside formal teaching, he added. Kazemi confirmed that new approaches would incorporate digital tools and online platforms into pastoral activities under defined educational frameworks, signaling a shift towards regulated use of technology in student development rather than blanket restriction. The most concrete measure outlined at the event was a decade-long program for what officials termed a "modernized pastoral system". Deputy Minister for Cultural and Pastoral Affairs Sadegh Hosseinzadeh Maleki said the plan sets a 10-year horizon with

annual implementation phases, designed to raise the quality of non-academic education and increase structured student participation in school and community life. The program will be rolled out through teachers, counsellors and school administrators nationwide. Officials did not provide budget figures but described the reform as a systemic redesign rather than a pilot initiative. Iran's pastoral education units, embedded in schools after the 1979 revolution, operate alongside the formal curriculum and focus on social skills, identity formation and civic engagement. The new blueprint seeks to recalibrate that model for a generation shaped by social media, digital communication and shifting cultural norms.

### PHOTO OF THE DAY

The funeral of Abdolmajid Arfaei, the distinguished linguist of ancient Iranian languages who is known as the Persian translator of the Cyrus Cylinder, is held on February 27, 2026, at the Center for the Great Islamic Encyclopedia in Tehran, before his body was sent to Iran's southwestern city of Shiraz for burial at Hafezieh. ● ISNA

