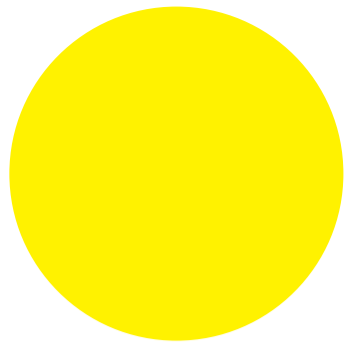


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Scourge of war ravaging classrooms, massacring students



Young pupils light candles during a vigil held in front of the United Nations Office in Tehran on March 15, 2026 in memory of 168 students and staff killed by a US air raid on an elementary school in Minab, southern Iran on February 28, 2026.

IRNA



By Kamran Yeganegi

Political affairs expert

OPINION EXCLUSIVE

February 28 was the day when, in the city of Minab, the sound of the school bell was drowned out by the sound of explosions. A place that should have been a space for learning, hope, and the future suddenly turned into a scene of grief and loss. On that tragic day, an elementary school that served as a sanctuary for education and the nurturing of the next generation was attacked, and 168 people,

most of them pupils, lost their lives. Available evidence indicates that the attack was carried out by the US military. If these reports are confirmed by international investigative bodies, the world would face one of the most shocking violations of humanitarian principles in wartime. The tragedy is not just a local disaster; it is a deep wound on the conscience of humanity and raises a fundamental question before the international community: how can war penetrate the very heart of a classroom?

Across cultures and civilizations, the school represents the future. In classrooms, children do not merely learn to read and write; they shape their

dreams for tomorrow and the future of their societies. When such a place becomes the target of military violence, it is not only a building that is attacked—the future of a society itself is under assault. The death of schoolchildren in Minab is not only the loss of innocent lives; it is the extinguishing of hundreds of dreams and aspirations that might have contributed to a brighter future for their country.

From the perspective of international law, children and educational institutions enjoy special protection during armed conflicts. The Geneva Conventions and their additional protocols clearly emphasize the principle of distinction between military and civilian

targets. Under this principle, parties to a conflict are obligated to distinguish between military objectives and civilian objects and to refrain from attacking facilities such as schools, hospitals, and residential areas.

Moreover, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, along with numerous United Nations resolutions, stresses the necessity of protecting children during times of war. Schools are classified as civilian infrastructure under international humanitarian law, and attacking them can constitute a serious violation of international law and potentially a war crime.

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Pezeshkian condemns European approach on US-Israeli aggression

Iran has not requested ceasefire, nor resumption of talks: **FM**

International Desk

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian criticized the "destructive approach" of some European countries regarding the US-Israeli aggression, urging them to adhere to the rule of international law.

The remarks came during a phone conversation with French President Emmanuel Macron on Sunday, as tensions continue to rise following a recent exchange of attacks between Iran on the one side and the US and Israel on the other, president. ir reported.

Pezeshkian attributed the root causes of insecurity and

instability in the region to the hostile actions of Israel, including the ongoing bloodshed in Gaza and Lebanon, as well as two wars with US involvement against Iran.

Macron, in the phone call, called for an end to the conflict and a de-escalation of tensions. He later tweeted that he had called for an immediate halt to Iran's attacks on regional countries. Pezeshkian explained that recent attacks on Iranian islands, Kharg and Abu Musa, are examples of strikes carried out against Iran using the territory of some Persian Gulf countries.

He stated that allowing the US to utilize territory and facilities



Emanuel Macron

Masoud Pezeshkian

ties for "brutal attacks" against Iran is in violation of international law and the principle of good neighborliness.

"The Iranian people, government, and armed forces have never sought tension or conflict," Pezeshkian said, "but there is no doubt that we will confront aggressors and decisively defend our territorial integrity and na-

tional security with popular support and reliance on our national capabilities."

Strait of Hormuz not closed

Macron also tweeted that he had called for the swift restoration of freedom of navigation in the Strait of Hormuz.

Iran's Foreign Minister Ab-

bas Araghchi had earlier asserted in an interview with CBS that Iran has not closed the Strait of Hormuz, but ships are avoiding the area due to insecurity caused by US aggression.

He added that Iranian military forces have previously allowed groups of ships from various non-hostile countries to pass safely.

Nevertheless, France, following a US request for assistance in countering Iran in the Strait, has announced it will not deploy warships to the area.

This request has been met with lukewarm responses from other nations. Japan stated that deploying warships to the Strait of Hormuz faces significant obstacles. China only indicated it would play a constructive role in de-escalating tensions and restoring peace as a "friendly neighbor" to Middle Eastern countries. South Korea stated it is reviewing the US request for ship deployment and will consider the matter. The UK has said

it is examining "all options" for reopening the Strait of Hormuz, while Italy has emphasized diplomatic efforts to reduce military tensions.

In his interview, Araghchi also stressed that Iran has not requested a ceasefire, nor has it sought negotiations.

"We are ready to defend ourselves as long as necessary. We have been doing so, and we will continue to do so until President Trump realizes that this is an illegal and unwinnable war."

He later reiterated in a tweet that Iranian armed forces will continue to fire until the US president realizes that the war is wrong and "must never be repeated."

IRGC launches for first time strategic Sejil ballistic missiles at Israel

Regional centers working with USS Gerald Ford deemed 'legitimate target'

International Desk

The Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) launched Sejil missiles at the Israeli-occupied territories for first time since the outbreak of the US-Israeli war of aggression on February 28.

The IRGC's maiden launch of the advanced missiles was carried out during the 54th wave of retaliatory strikes against the illegal regime as part of Operation True Promise 4.

In a statement, the IRGC's Public Relations Office said the fresh wave of strikes included the launch of super heavy Khorramshahr missiles equipped with a two-ton warhead, along with Khaybar-shekan (Khaybar-buster), Qadr, and Emad missiles.

It noted that for the first time in Operation True Promise 4, the strategic and solid-fuel missile Sejil was fired against the centers of management and decision-making that influence the Israeli regime's air-based operations.

The IRGC also said in another statement that its naval forces simultaneous-



The photo shows the aftermath of Iranian missiles fired at Rishon LeZion, south of Tel Aviv, on March 15, 2026 in retaliatory strikes against the occupied territories amid the ongoing US-Israeli aggression on Iran.

ly targeted four airbases belonging to the terrorist US forces in the region, including Al Dhafra Air Base in the UAE.

In this large-scale operation, the IRGC struck command and control centers, flight control towers, as well as support and equipment warehouses at the US bases, using various precision guided ballistic and cruise missiles equipped with new warheads, and different types of suicide drones, the statement read.

Meanwhile, the spokesperson for the Khatam al-Anbia Central Headquarters is a subdivision of the General Staff of the Iranian Armed Forces that is tasked with the layout and arrangement of operations involving various Iranian military units.

The US and the Israeli regime launched a large-scale unprovoked military campaign against Iran following the assassination of Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khomeini, along with several senior military commanders and civilians on February 28.

The attacks have involved extensive aerial strikes on both military and civilian locations across Iran, causing significant casualties and widespread damage to infrastructure.

In response, the Iranian Armed Forces have carried out retaliatory operations, targeting American and Israeli positions in the occupied territories and at regional bases with waves of missiles and drones.

ences for the American aircraft carrier are deemed to be the legitimate targets of strikes by the Iranian Armed Forces.

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Iran warns regional countries of assisting US to appease it

International Desk

Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baqaei said on Monday that no regional country should allow its territory or facilities to be used by aggressors against Iran to "appease them", adding that documentation of attacks from neighboring countries is underway.

Addressing his weekly press conference, Baqaei said that Tehran had warned regional countries not to put their territory at the disposal of aggressors against Iran for months and they all assured Iran that such a thing would not happen.

But, "What we have witnessed is the constant use of these countries' facilities by the United States. We have told all these countries that we have no problems with them and will have relations with them forever, but we have been subjected to aggression, and it is our inherent right to defend ourselves. We only target American assets in these countries," Baqaei said.

The Iranian official added that the regional countries know that under the international law, no country is authorized to allow an aggressor country to use its territory for aggression

against other countries.

In response to a question about some Muslim countries' double standards toward the aggression against Iran, especially over a recent UN Security Council resolution against Iran, Baqaei said the resolution passed with the support of Muslim countries is not "defensible".

"History will judge the consequences of any support for law-breaking and aggression against countries, Baqaei said, stressing that the people of Iran will not forget these days.

Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi, who joined the press conference at the Foreign Ministry, underlined that Iran has not requested for a ceasefire amid its "honorable resistance" against the aggression.

"When we say we don't want a ceasefire, it's not because we're seeking war, but because this war must end in a way that our enemies never consider repeating these attacks. I think they've already learned a good lesson with whom they are fighting - a nation that doesn't hesitate to defend itself and is prepared to continue the war as far as necessary."

Araghchi said that the country's enemies are



Esmail Baqaei

seeking an "unconditional surrender" of Iran in their new aggression - the goal that they failed to achieve during their June aggression.

The US and Israeli armed forces have launched an aggression against Iran since February 28, claiming the lives of more than 1,000 people in Iran, including the Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khomeini and several other high-ranking officials.

Iranian armed forces have decisively retaliated against the strikes by launching barrages of missile and drones against the Israeli-occupied territories as well as US bases in regional countries from which it launches attacks on Iran.

Scourge of war ...

History's painful experiences demonstrate that in many

wars, children become the first victims of violence. From the wars of the twentieth century to contemporary conflicts, schools, hospitals, and civilian infrastructure have repeatedly been damaged or destroyed. Each time such a tragedy occurs, a fundamental question confronts the international community: have the rules of international humanitarian law remained merely words on paper?

The massacre in Minab must be viewed from this perspective. In a world where inter-

national laws and institutions were created to reduce human suffering during war, the occurrence of such a disaster reveals a deep gap between proclaimed principles and the realities on the battlefield. If the international community cannot safeguard the most basic rights of children—the right to life and the right to education in safety—then the foundation of many norms of international law will face serious challenges.

At the same time, the human dimension of this tragedy must not be forgotten. Each of those 165 students had a story, a family, and a future. Note-

books left unfinished, chairs left empty, and classrooms that will no longer echo with laughter and conversation remind us of a painful truth: war does not only alter borders and political calculations; it transforms the lives of innocent people forever. The reality is clear. Killing schoolchildren can never be a source of pride for any military force. Even in the harshest circumstances of war, humanitarian principles and international legal norms must be respected. If schools—the places that should be the safest for children—become battlefields,

then the very concept of human security is called into question.

Today, Minab is no longer just the name of a city. It has become a symbol of a larger question: can the world truly protect children from the violence of war? If the international community remains silent in the face of such tragedies, it will not only endanger human lives but also undermine the credibility of the international legal order itself. Perhaps the most important question after this tragedy is this: if the world cannot protect children in a classroom, what can it protect?

Mohammad Ali Rajabi
Cartoonist



US-Israeli aggression harms environmental sites in 11 provinces

Iranica Desk

During the US-Zionist war against Iran, the infrastructure, buildings, and protective facilities of this organization were damaged in 11 provinces of the country, said the deputy head of the Department of Environment for natural environment and biodiversity, Hamid Zohrabi.

He noted that the environment and natural areas have become victims of the Zionist regime's war-monger activities against Iran, IRNA reported. Zohrabi added that, in addition to damage to some environmental infrastructure and facilities, the attacks on fuel-storage centers also caused severe air pollution in the capital. He reported that, during the 12-day conflict, approximately 8,500 hectares of protected areas

— including forests and rangelands — were affected by fires, a large share of which occurred in the Zagros region. Emphasizing the continuity of the Department of Environment's conservation mission, he stated, "Despite the damages incurred, our organization's commitment to protecting biodiversity and natural areas remains strong." He further said, "We

strive to prevent any disruption in the protection of natural areas through greater cohesion and cooperation with environmentalists, nature-lovers, and civil-society organizations." Fortunately, he noted, despite the prevailing conditions, there has been no interruption in the protection of various regions of the country, and pathways for misuse by violators

have been blocked. According to Article 55 of the Additional Protocol to the Geneva Convention, the severe destruction of natural environments is prohibited. The serious air pollution in Tehran following the attacks on fuel-storage centers can be considered an example of environmental manipulation for military purposes — an act also contradictory to the 1976 ENMOD



● IRNA

Convention (Convention on the Prohibition of Military or Hostile Use of Environmental Modification Techniques). During his visit to North

Khorasan Province, Zohrabi also inspected several sites under the management of the Department of Environment.

Iran to seek compensation for heritage damage

The damage inflicted on Iran's buildings and cultural-heritage sites by the recent American-Zionist attacks must be assessed by official judicial experts and pursued for compensation through international legal mechanisms — especially via the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and UNESCO, the distinguished cultural-heritage figure said. Fae'q Towhidi emphasized the need for legal follow-up within the framework of international obligations and treaties. He noted that the destruction or damage of historic and cultural monuments during armed conflict is prohibited under international law. According to the conventions on cultural-heritage protection, such attacks violate international obligations and can be classified as war crimes, and in some cases, crimes against humanity.

Based on these commitments, governments are obliged to prevent harm to cultural and historic heritage even in wartime. Consequently, where monuments have been damaged, a precise damage-assessment must be carried out and legal mechanisms for claiming reparations activated, according to chtn.ir. Towhidi also highlighted preventive measures for museum collections. He said that, in line with national and international protocols, Iran has taken the protection of museum artifacts in critical and wartime conditions seriously, implementing the necessary arrangements for their safe preservation. Earlier, Iranian archaeologist Habib Emadi issued a grave warning about the potential destruction of Iran's historic monuments amid ongoing military conflicts and missile strikes.



● IRNA

Emadi stressed that any assault on cultural heritage is not merely an attack on a nation's assets but an affront to humanity's collective memory and shared capital. He called on the global archaeological community to adopt a clear, responsible stance against such acts. Emadi underscored the funda-

mental role of cultural heritage in shaping national identity, stating: "Cultural heritage is a cornerstone of national identity, cultural creativity, and collective self-confidence. Damage to historical sites during wartime is not only an irreparable loss for a country but a profound blow

to the world's shared heritage." Referencing Iran's illustrious civilization, he added, "Iran's ancient and rich civilization has contributed unparalleled masterpieces to global art, culture, and philosophy. Therefore, archaeologists everywhere have a duty to react decisively to any threats against ancient sites and to condemn such actions through official statements." Emadi also pointed out Iran's historic influence on global culture, "Persian art and culture, because of their unique characteristics and the region's geopolitical position, have always exerted a deep influence on the contemporary world. For any researcher or heritage enthusiast, witnessing — or even imagining — damage to sites like the Golestan Palace or other monuments affected by the recent conflict is deeply painful."

Emadi emphasized the responsibility of international organizations, adding: "Global bodies, particularly UNESCO, must play a more active and effective role in enforcing protective laws and monitoring compliance with conventions and protocols related to the safeguarding of cultural heritage during crises and wars." Referring to the damage sustained near several nationally and globally registered historical sites during recent US-Israeli strikes, he said, "The vast spiritual and cultural capital derived from Iran's unique civilization requires serious and comprehensive attention. Cultural heritage is the result of the thought and labor of generations who lived on this land; passing it on to future generations is a responsibility that rests on the shoulders of all members of society."

Qanbari U-turns on Australian asylum to rejoin Iranian teammates

Sports Desk

Zahra Qanbari, the captain of the Iranian women's national football team, reversed her decision to obtain asylum in Australia and rejoined her teammates on the way back to their home country.

This was the latest twist in a weeks-long media saga swirling around Team Melli during its AFC Women's Asia Cup campaign in Gold Coast, Australia.

It all began when an IRIB TV host urged the Iranian authorities to treat the players "as wartime traitors" after they refused to sing the national anthem before their opening group game against South Korea.

The team soon became the center stage of a propaganda warfare amid the country's military conflict with the United States and Israel, which was initiated by airstrikes on Tehran on February 28.

Persian social-media accounts and London-based broadcaster Iran International claimed the players would not be safe upon returning to the country.

The rumor was then amplified by several English-language media outlets, with U.S. President Donald Trump calling on Australian authorities to grant asylum to the Iranian players, only days after American missiles struck an elementary school in Minab, southern Iran, killing over 170 students. While the players sang the na-



● Zahra Qanbari (No. 9) leads the Iranian team onto the pitch ahead of a game against the Philippines at the AFC Women's Asia Cup in Gold Coast, Australia, on March 8, 2026. ● AFC

tional anthem and performed military salutes before their next two matches against Australia and the Philippines, Iranian officials denied all the allegations, with Sports Minister Ahmad Donyamali insisting the players would be "welcomed to their homeland with open arms." However, five players, including Qanbari, decided to part ways with the squad and seek asylum in Australia after three successive defeats saw Iran crash out in the group stage, with Australia's Home Affairs Ministry approving their requests.

The group of five was then followed by teammate Mohaddeseh Zolfi and coaching staff member

Zahra Solatan, though the two, plus Zahra Sarbali and Mona Hamoudi, were quick to change their decision and left Gold Coast to join the rest of the squad in Malaysia ahead of a long trip back home.

Qanbari became the fifth member of the team to have a change of mind and left for Kuala Lumpur late on Sunday, but Atefeh Ramezani and Fatemeh Pasandeh stayed in Australia.

What started as a sporting event participation evolved into a politically charged episode, exposing how global tensions spill onto the playing field, with media narratives shaping public perception far beyond the match results.

Iran to play Nigeria, Costa Rica in friendlies, Taj confirms

Sports Desk

The Iranian men's national team will face Nigeria and Costa Rica in a friendly double-header during the upcoming FIFA international break, Mahdi Taj, chairman of the Iranian Football Federation, confirmed on Sunday.

The four-team event in Antalya, Türkiye, also featuring Jordan, will be part of Iran's preparation for the 2026 FIFA World Cup, which will be co-hosted by the United States, Mexico, and Canada in June and July.

Team Melli will take on Nigeria on March 27, before facing Costa Rica four days later.

The tournament was initially scheduled to take place in Amman, Jordan, but it was moved to Türkiye due to an ongoing military conflict between Iran and a U.S.-Israeli coalition.

The United States and Israel initiated a military campaign against Iran on February 28, assassinating the Leader of the Islamic Revolution, Seyyed Ali Khamenei, and several top Iranian military commanders on the first day of the airstrikes in Tehran.

Iran has been retaliating with widespread missile and drone attacks against Israel and U.S. bases in the region.

With all domestic and international flights cancelled in the country due to the conflict,



● VARZESH3

the national team players will likely have to undertake a challenging land journey to Antalya for their two games.

"We have obstacles in traveling to Türkiye that we are working to overcome to ensure the team plays the two games and does not fall behind in its preparation for the World Cup," Taj said.

Iran is scheduled to kick off its World Cup campaign against New Zealand at SoFi Stadium in Los Angeles, California, on June 16, before facing Belgium at the same venue five days later.

The final round of Group G fixtures will see Iran take on Egypt in Seattle, Washington, on June 26.

However, questions remain re-

garding Team Melli's participation at the global showpiece, after U.S. President Donald Trump said last week that it would not be appropriate for the Iranian players to visit his country "for their own life and safety."

The Iranian federation and team head coach Amir Qaleneoei quickly responded to Trump's comments through social media posts on Thursday, insisting that "no one has the authority to exclude Iran from the World Cup."

"If any country is to be expelled, it should be the one that merely carries the title of 'the host' but fails to guarantee the safety and security of the participating teams," the statement added.

Free trade zones record double-digit export growth

Economy Desk

Exports from Iran's free trade zones grew by 14%, according to the Supreme Council of Free Zones during the first eleven months of the current Persian calendar year of 1404 (started March 21, 2025). The council reported that exports from these zones reached \$1.322 billion, marking a 14% increase compared with the same period last year. According to IRNA, economic indicators for the country's free trade and industrial zones over the first eleven months of 1404 show a marked rise in both domestic and foreign investment, higher production value, and a continuing upward trend in exports — all of which point to expanding economic activity within these areas. Domestic investment attracted in the free zones over this period reached 8.479 billion rials (around \$33,270), representing a 125% increase compared with the same period last year. Realized domestic investment amounted to 1.869 billion rials (around \$1,270), registering 36% growth.

Foreign investment also showed notable progress. Attracted foreign investment totaled \$1.025 billion — an impressive 531% increase compared with the first eleven months of the previous calendar year. Realized foreign investment reached \$533 million, up 268% year-on-year. Exports from the free zones stood at \$1.322 billion dollars in the same eleven-month period, a 14% improvement from last year.

The total value of production in these zones surpassed 4.269 billion rials (around \$8,430), a 28% rise over the same period a year earlier, indicating significant progress toward production targets. The continued growth of investment — especially foreign investment — together with higher production and exports underscores the strengthening role of the free zones in the national economy and in promoting sustainable development. These results were achieved despite the challenges posed by the imposed 12-Day War, unrest in December, ongoing



● IRNA

sanctions, activation of the "snapback" mechanism, and continued external pressure aimed at maintaining the threat of conflict. More recently, the US and the Israeli regime launched joint military aggression on Iran on February 28. The US-Israeli military aggression against Iran has driven international energy and commodity prices to new highs. Iran is responding to the aggression by attacking US military assets in oil-rich countries of the Persian Gulf. Iran has also blocked the Strait of Hormuz to oil and gas tankers affiliated with

the aggressor regimes and targeted some of the tankers that ignored warnings from the Iranian forces. The disruption of tanker traffic in the strategic waterway, lying between the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman, has triggered a major surge in energy prices, disrupting the global economy. Yet, import data show that between February 28 (when the US-Israeli aggression started) and March 13, a total of 161,601 tons of basic goods entered the free trade-industrial zones of Iran's Qeshm, Arvand, Aras, Maku, Anzali, Chabahar, and Mazandaran.

Animal product output exceeds domestic needs

Economy Desk

The deputy minister of Agriculture and head of Iran's Veterinary Organization stated that by the end of the current Persian calendar month (started February 20), over one million tons of raw animal products, including chicken, red meat, and eggs, will be produced and supplied, much beyond the country's domestic demand.

Alireza Rafiei-Pour added Iran currently has a surplus of 20–30% in egg and milk production compared to domestic consumption, with these excess products being stored in cold storage facilities. Furthermore, he explained that imports are limited, with only 5–10% of the country's red meat needs (approximately 100,000 to 150,000 tons) being met through imports, which are currently available in cold storage. He emphasized that there are no concerns regarding the supply of protein-based foods, even in a wartime scenario, and that strategic food reserves are in a favorable condition. Rafiei-Pour assured the public that there is no cause for concern in the supply of meat, chicken, eggs, honey, milk, and dairy products. Providing statistics on an-



● IRNA

imal slaughter under the organization's supervision since February 18th, he reported that over 600,000 head of small ruminants and approximately 73,000 head of large livestock have been slaughtered with veterinary health oversight. Moreover, 86 million chickens have been processed in the country's slaughterhouses and made available to consumers. Rafiei-Pour added that a special intensified health supervision plan has been implemented from February 18th to April 2nd, covering the special periods of Ramadan and Nowruz. "During this time, veterinary staff are present in production, storage, and distribution centers until late at night, in addition to their daily monitoring, to ensure product safety," he said. The deputy minister noted

Iran's significant progress over 47 years of sanctions and war, highlighting that in the production of chicken, eggs, honey, and milk, the country ranks among the top 1 to 10 countries globally. "We export between 3 to 4 million tons annually in this sector, and this food security is a source of pride about which our dear citizens can have complete peace of mind." Hamidreza Rastegar, head of Tehran Guilds' Union, also stressed the adequate supply of essential goods, stating that the relevant ministries promptly act to supply any depleted item. In a television interview, he added that there are no shortages of essential goods and urged the public to maintain normal purchasing habits and avoid panic buying.

Minister urges provinces to 'step up' cultural efforts for Nowruz to foster national unity

Arts & Culture Desk

Iran's Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Reza Salehi-Amiri urged provinces to roll out Nowruz (Persian New Year) programs that tap into local artistic and cultural assets to ease social stress, raise public satisfaction and reinforce national unity, a message delivered against the backdrop of the United States and Israel's military strike on Iran that began on February 28. Speaking to senior officials, including Deputy Tourism Minister Anoushirvan Mohseni-Bandpey, Salehi-Amiri outlined a strategic framework that positions the Persian New Year as a catalyst for social resilience.

"Nowruz can become a social container that absorbs psychological pressure and rebuilds our social capital," the minister said, emphasizing that the holiday's rituals should be leveraged to "step up" community well-being. The minister highlighted the need for provinces to lean on their unique cultural and artistic capacities, from traditional calligraphy and miniature painting to folk music ensembles, ceramic workshops and performing-arts festivals, to create inclusive public spaces. "When citizens take part in cultural, ritual and civic activities, they generate an inner sense of satisfaction that translates into collective contentment," Sale-

hi-Amiri explained. He stressed that tourism, when properly managed, can serve as a tool for "shaping the social landscape" and "fostering hope and calm." Provinces are therefore called upon to design and roll out Nowruz events that reflect local heritage while honoring the "First Martyrs' Nowruz" of the nation's revered heroes. The minister urged officials to "bring forward" programs that blend artistic performances with commemorative ceremonies in city squares and public parks, thereby "draining" negative emotions and "strengthening" social empathy. Salehi-Amiri also stressed the centrality of the concept of



Iran's Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Reza Salehi-Amiri (3rd l) speaks during a meeting in Tehran on March 15, 2026. ● ISNA

"Iran" as a unifying identity. "Iran must be the core theme of all cultural and social initiatives during Nowruz; it is the common thread that binds every Iranian together," he said.

By focusing on this shared identity, the minister believes the country can "tighten" national unity and "boost" social solidarity. The remarks came as Iran grapples with the fallout from the joint US-Israeli offensive that began on February 28, an event that has heightened public anxiety and underscored the importance of domestic stability. In this context, the minister thanked the members of the travel-services task force for their dedication, noting that the ultimate goal is to "harness tourism, cultural and social capacities to raise public satisfaction, reinforce social hope and upgrade the nation's social capital."



Lights back on Iranian cinemas

Arts & Culture Desk

Iranian cinemas across the nation are gradually reopening, a move hailed as a symbol of national resilience and a commitment to maintaining normalcy despite heightened regional tensions. Bahman Sabz, an organization affiliated with the Culture and Islamic Guidance Ministry, has activated almost 60 cinemas in 40 cities since March 13, launching a campaign called "Cinema Stands with Iran," IRNA reported. Hadi Esmaeili, the managing

director of Bahman Sabz, emphasized the importance of cinemas as "cultural and media hubs" that can serve a purpose beyond entertainment. "Cinema is a vital point in every city," Esmaeili said. "Our cinema operators are standing alongside the people, just as they did during the 12-day conflict [in June]." Bahman Sabz cinemas previously launched the "Cinema in Solidarity with Iran" campaign during the recent conflict and are planning special programs for the month of Ramadan under the "Cinema Stands with Iran" initiative.

Esmaeili stressed the historical role of cinema in Iranian society, noting its influence during the Islamic Revolution and the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988). He expressed hope that new films will soon be added to the screening schedule, encouraging consistent attendance. The Iranian Film Distribution Guild has indicated that new releases will be introduced in the coming days. Meanwhile, Tasvir-e Shahr Institute, a prominent film organization, announced the reopening of five of its cinema,

Bagh-e Ketab, Mellat, Raga, Razi, and Tamasha, starting on March 15. Director General Maryam Pirkari described the move as "a national effort to inject vitality and enthusiasm into society" and a demonstration of the Iranian people's spirit in the face of adversity. Films screened will be pre-war titles, excluding comedies. "Reopening cinemas, alongside other everyday activities, is a clear sign of resistance and high morale," Pirkari stated. "It plays a vital role in invigorating the community."