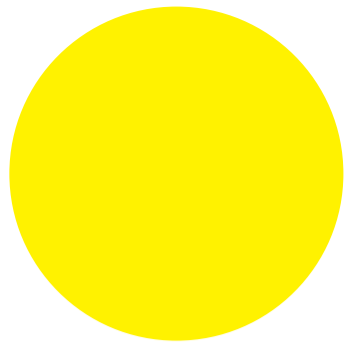


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## Iran says US failed to win its trust in Islamabad talks

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### Pakistan's mediation How Islamabad brought Washington, Tehran to table

By Syed Ali Abbas  
Pakistani researcher at Center for International Strategic Studies

#### OPINION EXCLUSIVE

As delegations from the United States and Iran convened in Islamabad on April 11 for direct negotiations facilitated by Pakistan, the international community witnessed a development that few had anticipated. Pakistan, which brokered a ceasefire between the two warring parties on April 7, had emerged as the principal intermediary in one of the most consequential diplomatic efforts in history. That both Washington and Tehran accepted Pakistan in this role, at a moment of acute military conflict and deep mutual hostility, reflects a convergence of factors that deserve serious attention. Understanding how Pakistan curved out this position requires a study of the relationships it has cultivated, the diplomatic stance it has maintained, and the structural conditions that made it the only actor simultaneously trusted by both sides.

#### Foundation of Pakistan's credibility

Pakistan's ability to mediate between the United States and Iran rests fundamentally on the character of its bilateral relationships with both sides. These relationships reflect decades of sustained engagement that have established a degree of mutual confidence not easily replicated by other potential intermediaries. Pakistan's relationship with the United States has undergone a significant transformation in recent years. High-level diplomatic and military engagement, including direct contacts between Pakistan's senior leadership and the Trump administration, established a channel of communication that proved essential when Washington required a credible intermediary to engage Tehran. Pakistan's conduct during its bilateral conflict with India in May 2025, specifically its demonstrated preference for de-escalation and its public acknowledgment of American diplomatic efforts in bringing that crisis to a close, consolidated its standing in Washington

considerably. The personal rapport developed between Pakistan's leadership and President Trump during this period created a foundation of trust that became directly relevant to the mediation effort months later. Pakistan's relationship with Iran operates on an entirely different but equally substantive basis. The two countries share a long border and a history of bilateral engagement that predates the contemporary state system in its cultural and civilizational dimensions. Iran was among the first countries to recognize Pakistan's independence, and that foundational gesture has shaped the quality of the bilateral relationship ever since. Pakistan and Iran have maintained constructive diplomatic ties across periods of considerable regional turbulence, and Islamabad has consistently approached Tehran as a neighboring state deserving of respect and engagement.

Beyond its historical foundations, Pakistan's engagement with Iran also rests on a concrete institutional dimension. As the country that represents Iran's diplomatic interests in Washington, Pakistan possessed a practical channel that no other potential mediator had access to. When the conflict erupted on February 28, Pakistan was able to activate this channel, engaging across multiple capitals within days and putting forward a concrete ceasefire framework that included an immediate halt to hostilities, a two-week negotiation window, and confidence-building measures.

Pakistan's position in the current conflict has been firmly rooted in international law and the principles of state sovereignty, calling consistently for a negotiated resolution and the protection of civilian populations. This stance reflects a broader and longstanding feature of Pakistani foreign policy, that when Muslim states are drawn into conflict with one another or with external powers, Pakistan's role is not to take sides but to work actively toward peace and stability.

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## Fortress of Iran emerging after test of direct confrontation

By Sajad Abedi  
Political analyst

#### OPINION EXCLUSIVE

As of April 2026, the Islamic Republic of Iran stands at perhaps the most critical juncture since its inception in 1979. Following the unprecedented military aggression initiated in February 2026 and the subsequent martyrdom of Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei, the nation has undergone a rapid and profound transition. The appointment of Ayatollah Seyed Mojtaba Khamenei as the new Supreme Leader on March 8 marked the beginning of a

new chapter. Today, the discourse surrounding a "strategic ceasefire" with Western powers is not merely about silencing guns; it is about defining the survival and evolution of the Iranian state in a post-conflict world.

#### Strategy over sentiment for Tehran

A ceasefire in the current context is viewed through the lens of "strategic patience 2". Unlike previous diplomatic efforts, the 2026 negotiations—largely facilitated by regional intermediaries like Pakistan and Oman—are driven by a "Realpolitik" necessity. The Iranian establishment recognizes that while the military has

demonstrated significant deterrent capabilities (notably in the Persian Gulf and against advanced aerial platforms), the domestic infrastructure and the national economy require a period of "active reconstruction". Therefore, any ceasefire is seen not as a concession, but as a tactical maneuver to consolidate the new leadership's authority and provide much-needed relief to the civilian population without compromising on core ideological red lines, such as the missile program and regional influence.

#### Domestic consolidation

The future of the Islamic Republic is now inextricably linked to the vision of its third Leader. The transition in March 2026 was remarkably swift,

signaling a high level of consensus within the establishment.

We are likely to see a shift toward a more "technocratic security state". This model prioritizes:

1. Institutional cohesion: eliminating factional infighting to present a unified front to the West.
2. Economic resilience: moving beyond "resistance economy" to a "sovereign integration" model, focusing on deepening ties with the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and BRICS.
3. Ideological continuity: maintaining the Axis of Resistance while perhaps adopting more sophisticated, less overt methods of regional power projection.

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# Iran says US failed to win its trust in Islamabad talks

**FM spox:** There are conflicting views on 2-3 key points

## International Desk

Iran and the United States ended Pakistan-brokered negotiations on Sunday without an agreement with the Iranian chief negotiator saying that Washington failed to win Tehran's trust during the Islamabad talks.

Iranian Parliament Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf in a post on X after the negotiations said that before the talks, he had emphasized that Iran has the necessary good-faith and will, but the country has no trust in the opposite side due to the experience of the two US-Israeli-imposed wars.

"My colleagues raised forward-looking initiatives, but the opposite side ultimately failed to win the trust of the Iranian delegation in this round of negotiations," he added.

"The US has realized our logic and principles, and now it has time to decide whether it can gain our trust or not?" Qalibaf said.

The top legislator also noted that Iran pursues powerful diplomacy, alongside military force, for upholding the rights of the Iranian people.

Tehran, he emphasized, will spare no effort to consolidate

the achievements of Iran's 40-day national defense.

The talks followed a Pakistan-brokered ceasefire agreement which temporarily ended an unprovoked aggression by the US and the Israeli regime against Iran, which began on February 28. The 14-day ceasefire expires on April 22.

Strikes by the US and Israel have targeted Iran's military sites, medical centers, schools, universities and many other civilian structures.

The aggression has claimed the lives of more than 3,700 people in Iran and inflicted severe damage to the country's infrastructure. Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei as well as many military officials have been martyred in the attacks.

During the war, Iranian armed forces also unleashed 100 waves of successful retaliatory strikes against sensitive and strategic American and Israeli targets throughout the region.

## Closure of Strait of Hormuz

They also blocked the Strait of Hormuz to oil and gas tankers affiliated with the adversaries and those cooperating with them in an attempt to maintain



Iran's Parliament Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf (c) is welcomed by Pakistan's Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar (R) as he arrives in Islamabad to attend the negotiations between Iran and the US on April 11, 2026.

● IRNA

security at the strategic waterway.

Iran's grip on the Strait of Hormuz has largely cut off the Persian Gulf and its oil and gas exports from the global economy, sending energy prices soaring. US President Donald Trump said on Sunday that the US Navy would immediately start blockading the Strait of Hormuz and would also interdict every vessel in international waters that had paid a toll to Iran.

The US president further said in his Truth Social post that Washington remains "locked and loaded" and its military will "finish up" Iran at the "appropriate moment".

## Matters of difference

Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baqaei, who accompanied the Iranian delegation in Islamabad, said the two sides reached a consensus on some issues, but they held different views regarding 2-3 important matters.



"Finally, the talks did not reach an agreement," he noted.

The discussions took place following the 40-day imposed war on Iran in an atmosphere of distrust and suspicion, he emphasized, adding, "Therefore, it was not expected that the talks would reach a consensus."

Baqaei added that the talks covered some new issues with their own complexities, such as the Strait of Hormuz.

The US top negotiator, Vice President JD Vance, in a very short

news conference, said Iranians had failed to agree to the US terms. And he added, "We leave here with a very simple proposal - a method of understanding. This is our final and best proposal. We will see if the Iranians will accept it."

"We need to see an affirmative commitment that they will not seek a nuclear weapon, and they will not seek the tools that would enable them to quickly achieve a nuclear weapon," Vance said after the 21-hour-

long talks.

Halting Iran's nuclear capabilities had been a "core goal" that wasn't reached.

Iran has long denied seeking nuclear weapons but has insisted on its right to a civilian nuclear program. Pakistani Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar said his country will try to facilitate a new dialogue between Iran and the US in the coming days.

"It is imperative that the parties continue to uphold their commitment to cease fire," Dar said.

## Pakistan's mediation ...

This principled position has been a consistent feature of Pakistan's regional and international conduct. This consistency gave Islamabad the credibility with leadership in Tehran, which considered Pakistani position as that of a trusted neighbour with a genuine and demonstrated commitment to peaceful resolution.

## Regional dimension

Pakistan's position is equally significant within the broader regional diplomatic landscape, and the way in which it mobilized that position for the mediation effort. Pakistan's longstanding partnership with Saudi Arabia, and its substantive engagement with Persian Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states more broadly, gave it direct access to the perspectives of the Arab states most immediately affected by the conflict. Its ability to convene the foreign ministers of Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Turkey in Islamabad in late March for coordinated consultations aimed at building momentum toward de-escalation. This multilateral dimension of Pakistan's diplomatic effort was essential in creating the political conditions within which a ceasefire could become viable.

Moreover, Pakistan's partnership with China introduced a further importance to the mediation effort. Direct consultations between Pakistani and Chinese senior officials during the crisis ensured that Beijing's longstanding relationship with

Iran and its considerable interest in regional stability was coordinated. Pakistan's capacity to serve simultaneously as a trusted partner of Washington and a credible interlocutor with Beijing, at a moment of intensifying competition, reflects a distinctive feature of its foreign policy positioning that carries real value in the present international environment.

What made this external outreach effective, however, was the structural coherence with which Pakistan conducted its diplomacy internally. The civilian leadership maintained the formal diplomatic channel while Pakistan's military leadership sustained lines of communication with figures in Tehran whose institutional positioning required a different mode of engagement. This dual-track approach ensured that the mediation effort did not stall at any single point of contact and that both parties could engage without being seen to make premature concessions. It is this coherence, civilian and military working in concert toward a single diplomatic objective, thus, achieving significant results.

## Significance for Pakistan's international standing

Pakistan's facilitation of the United States-Iran ceasefire and its hosting of the Islamabad negotiations carry implications that extend beyond the immediate context of the current conflict. They demonstrate that Pakistan's geographic position, at the intersection of South Asia, the Middle East, and Cen-

tral Asia, combined with the breadth and depth of its bilateral relationships, constitutes a diplomatic asset of significant value. They establish Pakistan as a state capable of exercising constructive influence in matters of regional and global consequence at the highest level of international diplomacy. Sustaining this role will require consistency of conduct and continued investment in professional diplomatic capacity. The credibility that Pakistan has established through this mediation effort is the product of years of sustained engagement. It will be preserved and extended through the same means, and it will be tested by the manner in which Pakistan manages the considerable complexities that the Islamabad negotiations will inevitably present in future. The Islamabad talks, while yet to produce immediate results, reflect precisely the kind of patience and persistence needed in diplomacy. Pakistan remains hopeful that the dialogue will continue and ultimately arrive at a conclusive resolution.

What is clear at this stage is that Pakistan has demonstrated, under demanding conditions, the relationships, the diplomatic acumen, and the coherence necessary to serve as a consequential actor in international affairs. The international community's recognition of that fact, reflected in the presence of American and Iranian delegations in Islamabad this week, is itself a significant marker of how Pakistan's role in the global order is evolving.

## Tehran refutes CENTCOM's claims of Hormuz passage

'US destroyers only a few minutes away from complete destruction'

## International Desk

Spokesman of the Khatam Al-Anbiya Central Headquarters Ebrahim Zolqadr refuted CENTCOM's claims that American vessels have crossed the Strait of Hormuz, stressing that permission of passage of any vessel through the strait lies in the hands of the Iranian Armed Forces. Iran shut the strait down to adversaries and their allies after the United States and the Israeli regime launched their latest wave of unprovoked aggression towards the Islamic Republic. Each year, the waterway hosts 20 percent of the world's liquefied natural gas (LNG) transit and 25 percent of seaborne oil trade.

Closing it sent shockwaves throughout global energy markets, including in the United States, where gas prices skyrocketed and prompted nationwide resentment at the ruling administration. The Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC)'s Navy on Saturday warned military vessels of a "firm response" to their potential attempts at passing through the Strait of Hormuz. "Permission to transit, in accordance with specific regulations, is granted exclusively to non-military vessels," it noted.

The Navy categorically rejected reports claiming passage of American vessels through the strait, and reiterated that any such attempt would be met with "a decisive and forceful response."

An investigation by Press TV has found that the US military's attempt to sail two destroyers through the strait ended as a failed propaganda stunt timed to coincide with talks in Islamabad.

The investigation, based on information provided by highly placed military-security sources, revealed that the US Navy destroyers came within minutes of complete destruction after attempting a high-risk passage through the strait in a failed propaganda operation aimed at influencing Iran-US talks in the Pakistani capital.

The destroyers attempted to transit the strategic waterway but were intercepted and forced to retreat by Iranian naval forces. The destroyers were only a few minutes away from complete destruction after Iranian cruise missiles locked onto the vessel and attack drones were deployed. They had attempted to use electronic warfare tactics, including turning off its position reporting system, in a bid to deceive the IRGC naval forces.



Mohammad Ali Rajabi  
Cartoonist

## CARTOON



# President weighs gov't agencies wartime performance, stresses resilience

**Economy Desk**

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian evaluated the performance of key government agencies in energy, resource supply, infrastructure and food security during field visits, issuing necessary orders while emphasizing the strengthening of national resilience and the sustainability of public services. According to IRNA, as part of ongoing monitoring and field visits, Pezeshkian visited the Plan and Budget Organization (PBO) and three strategic ministries - Oil, Energy, and Agriculture - to closely follow activities, challenges and measures taken during the country's special conditions. The visits aimed to accurately assess the performance of executive agencies during the current sensitive period, particularly following recent attacks by the United States and Israel that began on February 28, and their effects on infrastructure and national resources. During a meeting with the head

and senior PBO managers, the president examined topics including financing support projects in wartime conditions, compensating for damages incurred, and the optimal management of public resources. At the Oil Ministry, Pezeshkian received a comprehensive report on the extent of damages inflicted on the country's oil and gas resources and facilities following the recent attacks. The president then visited the Energy Ministry, where after receiving specialized reports, he commended the ministry's effective measures in managing water and electricity crises during the wartime period. Referring to the destruction of part of the sector's infrastructure due to enemy attacks, Pezeshkian emphasized, "Rapid reconstruction and preventing widespread disruption in public services demonstrates the technical capacity and dedication and resolve of the Energy Ministry." During his visit to the Agriculture

Ministry, Pezeshkian appreciated the ministry's efforts in managing the supply chain, production and distribution of basic goods. Based on reports presented, no shortages or unavailability of basic items needed by the population have been observed during the crisis period, and the distribution system has operated with stability and efficiency. **Rebuilding vital industries, resuming production** In a meeting with the president, Minister of Industry, Mine and Trade Mohammad Atabak, outlining his ministry's 40-day measures during the US-Israeli imposed war, emphasized the priority of rebuilding the country's vital industries and returning to the production cycle. He also announced the facilitation of raw material imports for factories and economic enterprises during the imposed war, and recalled, "With coordination from the Trade Promotion Organization and Islamic Republic Customs,



Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian (R) holds talks with Oil Minister Mohsen Paknejad at the ministry in Tehran on April 12, 2026. SHANA

clearance was expedited so production could continue without interruption." He mentioned the allocation of new resource headings for rebuilding damaged industries and

clarified, "It has been decided that based on priority, urgent and necessary measures will be taken for production and industrial factories." The deputy minister of industry,

mine and trade for commercial affairs said on Sunday, "According to coordination that has been made, raw materials for food industry packaging will enter the country within the next few days."

## Iran to restore 80% of damaged refining capacity in two months: Deputy min.



**Economy Desk**

Iran expects to restore nearly all damaged refining and distribution facilities to 70-80% of their pre-attack capacity within one to two months, a senior oil official said, as authorities work to recover from strikes on energy infrastructure. Deputy Oil Minister Mohammad Sadeq Azimifar told Iran's Student News Network (SNN) that repair work had begun at most sites, adding that part of the Lavan refinery is expected to resume operations within about 10 days,

with other units coming back online gradually. Azimifar, who also serves as managing director of Iran's Oil Refining and Distribution Company, said reconstruction work has started at nearly all oil refining facilities damaged during the US-Israeli military conflict, with efforts underway to restore transfer and storage infrastructure. "For example, at the Shahr-e Rey oil depot (in Tehran Province), nearly 2,000 workers are engaged in restoring transfer and storage facilities," he said. He added that at most

Iran's Deputy Oil Minister Mohammad Sadeq Azimifar speaks to SNN at a damaged refinery on Lavan Island on April 12, 2026. SNN

damaged refining and distribution facilities, Iran can return to 70-80% of pre-war capacity within one to two months, and in a medium- to long-term phase, can reach 100% of pre-attack capacity.

**Refining industry hit across entire supply chain** "The refining industry

has been targeted by enemies from the beginning of the war (on February 28). Our entire chain in refineries, transmission lines, oil depots and aircraft refueling facilities were attacked, and during the war, our facilities across the country were repeatedly targeted," Azimifar said. "One of the facilities that was attacked after the ceasefire (on Wednesday) was the Lavan refinery complex. A restoration program was urgently developed in several phases so that despite the damage to the refinery facilities, we could bring it back into production as quickly as possible," he added. "Various teams have now been deployed for debris removal and replacement of damaged equipment. Within about 10 days, we will commission part of the refinery, and other sections of the refinery will be brought into production in a phased manner," Azimifar said.

## Pezeshkian tells Putin deal possible if US respects int'l law



**International Desk**

President Masoud Pezeshkian told Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin on Sunday that clinching an agreement was not out of reach if the United States adhered to international legal frameworks. In a phone call, Pezeshkian said the "biggest obstacle" to achieving a fair deal in Iran-US negotiations mediated by Pakistan was the presence of "double standards and the hegemonic approach of the American side." The call came hours after Tehran and Washington failed to reach an agreement to permanently end the war launched jointly by the United States and Israel against Iran on February 28. Pezeshkian said Iran remained fully prepared to

reach a "balanced and fair agreement that ensures lasting peace and security in the region." While describing Persian Gulf Arab countries as "Iran's brothers", he criticized them for allowing the United States to use military bases and facilities on their territory to carry out attacks against Iran. "Iran is ready to engage and cooperate with its neighbors to achieve endogenous regional peace and security without the presence and interference of extra-regional countries," he added. The president also praised Russia's support and principled stance in defending Iran's national sovereignty and territorial integrity, particularly its "responsible decision" to oppose an anti-Iran resolution at the United Na-

tions Security Council last week, which he described as a valuable step in preventing further escalation. Putin, for his part, stressed Russia's backing for diplomatic efforts to resolve the crisis politically and said Moscow was ready to use its capacities to help find a political and diplomatic solution, while keeping up contacts and consultations. He censured Western positions and double standards and called for respect for Iran's national sovereignty and territorial integrity. Putin also underlined what he described as Iran's legitimate positions, including compensation for damages caused by the military attacks and the need for long-term security guarantees to prevent any repeat of aggression.

## Civil aviation faces \$187.5m war losses after US-Israeli attacks

**Economy Desk**

Seven Iranian airports were targeted during the 40-day US-Israeli military conflict that began on February 28, with attacks focusing more on tourism, passenger and cargo infrastructure than on military facilities, according to Iranian media reports. Based on estimates and a report published in The Wall Street Journal, Mehrabad Airport in Tehran, as well as airports in Tabriz, Kashan, Urmia, Khorramabad, and the Bahram and Azmayesh facilities in Tehran, were repeatedly targeted by air strikes and bombings during the conflict. The attacks damaged infrastructure including runways, air traffic control towers and hangars, while dozens of Iranian passenger aircraft used for tourism and travel were either com-

pletely destroyed or removed from flight operations due to shrapnel hits and collateral damage. Iran's Civil Aviation Organization is still compiling assessments of damages to airports and aircraft stationed at them. However, based on some published reports, the number of passenger aircraft damaged or destroyed during the war is estimated to exceed that of military aircraft. While unofficial reports indicate the complete destruction of about 20 passenger aircraft in the country and damage to another 40 passenger planes - which constitute important infrastructure for the country's tourism industry. Based on ILNA's inquiries, Mahan Air has so far sustained the most damage from the destruction of passenger aircraft, and fol-

lowing this airline, which provided services to hundreds of domestic and international passenger routes, Iran Air and Zagros Airlines are also on the list of those most affected by the imposed Ramadan war against Iran. Inquiries by ILNA from some aviation industry activists and the country's airline offices revealed that the largest wave of attacks has been directed at Iranian passenger aircraft. Maqsood Asadi Samani, secretary of Iran's Airlines Association, told ILNA, "The damages incurred include opportunity costs for airlines given that we were in the Nowruz holidays (begin on March 20), as well as damages to aircraft and subsequently damages that have been inflicted on the country's airports." He stated that estimates of opportunity

cost losses for travel companies that had planned to transport Nowruz passengers exceed 700 billion tomans (\$4.375 million) per day, and even if we do not account for the Nowruz travel situation, the damages inflicted on the country's airline offices in total during the 40 days of imposed war against Iran amount to about 30 trillion tomans (\$187.5 million). He stated that the figure only includes the opportunity costs for airlines from losing Nowruz passengers and missing flights, otherwise, when accounting for damages inflicted on the chain of service companies to airlines such as handling companies and aircraft repair and maintenance providers, the amount of damage inflicted on the air infrastructure of the country's tourism industry from these companies' opportunity



costs is much higher than this figure. "140 aircraft had been prepared for passenger transport during Nowruz, with each aircraft on average capable of conducting 6 flights per day, and each flight transporting 120 passengers," Samani announced. "The loss of this capacity, considering ticket prices, caused significant losses to airlines and the tourism services supply chain in ticket sales and more."



# Why US allies in Asia chasing nuclear energy, eyeing nuclear weapons

By Joshua Kurlantzick  
Senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations

## OPINION

As the Iran war's economic ripple effects widen, countries across Asia are scrambling for both short-term solutions to the energy crisis and longer-term structural changes that will better ensure energy security. Most of the region, with a few minor exceptions, is extremely dependent on crude oil and liquified natural gas (LNG) from the Persian Gulf. Countries such as Bangladesh and the Philippines are already desperate. The Philippines has declared a national emergency, while Bangladesh has imposed severe fuel rationing amid fears it could become the first Asian state to run out of fuel.

Even more developed countries, like Japan and South Korea, are being affected by the energy crisis. Although Japan has significant strategic reserves, and both countries can temporarily switch to coal or purchase some LNG on the expensive spot market, leaders in Tokyo and Seoul are well aware that the situation could worsen quickly if US President Donald Trump escalates by acting on his bellicose Easter comments. The crisis is now speeding up a debate within Japan and South Korea about expanding the use of nuclear power. There has also been renewed pressure to secure the rights to enrich a higher percentage of uranium from other states, in South Korea, for its nuclear plants. The Trump administration's devotion of massive military resources to the Middle East — which has even diverted parts of the high-altitude missile interceptor system promised to South Korea — and its seeming indifference to Washington's Asian allies has also sparked serious consideration in Tokyo and Seoul about whether the two Northeast Asian powers need their own nuclear weapons.

Even the possibility that South Korea could enrich a greater percentage of its own uranium would have massive geopolitical ramifications in the region. And if Japan and South Korea were to move toward becoming nuclear-armed states, the geopolitical shock — and danger — would be immeasurable.

South Korea is already one of the world's largest producers of nuclear energy and is expanding its civilian nuclear capacity. Japan's leadership, meanwhile, has made nuclear energy central to its policy agenda, despite lingering public concern from the 2011 Fukushima disaster. The Iran war has only accelerated Tokyo's plans to reopen nuclear plants and build new ones.

South Korea's 1974 nuclear deal with the United States, the so-called 123 Agreement, prohibited it from enriching its own uranium and required it to import enriched fuel instead. Late last year, Washington and Seoul agreed to a change that allows South Korea to enrich uranium up to 20 percent for civilian purposes. (This is far below weapons-grade levels of enrichment.) The possibility of higher enrichment in South Korea has already led to severe warnings from the nuclear-armed North and from China. North Korea's state news agency warned that South Korean domestic uranium enrichment, backed by the United States, was "laying a spring-



Workers sit in front of a nuclear power plant central control room for the Tokyo Electric Power Company Kashiwazaki-Kariwa on January 21, 2026.  
AFP

board for its development into the "quasi-nuclear weapons state". Beijing, too, has cautioned Seoul that even domestic enrichment for civilian nuclear energy could have consequences. China has not declared what these might be, but they could range from intense economic coercion — China is South Korea's largest trading partner — to more aggressive Chinese military escalation, particularly in waters near South Korea. For its part, Japan already possesses the capacity and right to enrich its own uranium. Without declaring it, Japan has what is called nuclear latency — the ability to rapidly develop nuclear weapons without actually crossing the threshold of building them.

As Daniel Sneider, non-resident fellow at the Korea Economic Institute (KEI), recently wrote in a column, Japan "has a stockpile of forty-five tons of weapons-grade plutonium (eight tons of it held in Japan), the capability to enrich uranium, ballistic-missile technologies developed under its satellite-launch programs, and advanced fighter aircraft with nuclear delivery potential. A report published on the International Nuclear Information System | International Atomic Energy Agency website observed that Japan's latency hedges against regional threats while simultaneously functioning as diplomatic leverage against the United States should the Trump administration withdraw its security guarantees."

Many South Koreans want the same capabilities as Japan as they no longer trust the US nuclear umbrella. Leaders in both countries have not only pushed for greater nuclear power but

also increasingly raised the possibility of obtaining nuclear weapons.

Roughly 76 percent of South Koreans want to have an "indigenous nuclear weapons capability," according to an April 2025 poll by the respected Asan Institute for Policy Studies — the highest figure Asan has recorded. In the same poll, less than half the respondents believed the United States would use nuclear weapons to defend South Korea if North Korea struck it with nukes. Former South Korean president Yoon Suk-yeol already set a precedent in 2023 by suggesting that South Korea could need nuclear weapons to defend itself.

With nuclear latency, either country could assemble weapons relatively quickly. Experts expect that this could take just a few months for Japan, but South Korea would likely take longer. If South Korea were to attempt to achieve the kind of nuclear latency Japan possesses, it could theoretically make Seoul a regional pariah, lead to economic sanctions, or prompt the United States to formally withdraw its security guarantees, multiple experts on proliferation told me in interviews. And they suggest that the Asan poll should be taken with a grain of salt. Public sentiment in South Korea for indigenous nuclear weapons capacity softens significantly if people polled believe that the shift would end the country's alliance with the United States.

Still, Trump has, at times, suggested he might not stand in the way of allies in Northeast Asia obtaining nuclear weapons, and he seems far from concerned about regional proliferation. If Trump maintains this posture as

South Korea pursues nuclear latency, Seoul would be less of a pariah and unlikely to face sanctions — though it would not reduce any geopolitical risk. Indeed, given that Beijing has offered dire warnings just about Seoul gaining greater enrichment capabilities, it is hard to determine how severely and quickly China could escalate a response if South Korea were to obtain nuclear latency.

As for Japan, moving closer to obtaining nuclear weapons would cause potentially even greater blowback from China, at a time when the two powers already face deteriorating relations. Chinese rhetoric on Japan's Taiwan position hints at how Beijing might respond to Tokyo openly considering getting nuclear weapons. One Chinese state news outlet already called for Beijing to consider nuclear strikes on Japan just because Japan's prime minister suggested that the country could become involved in a conflict over Taiwan.

Yet Washington's ambivalence toward non-proliferation in Asia and uncertainty about US commitment to allies — a sentiment clearly felt in Europe, too, as France and the United Kingdom explore expanding their own nuclear umbrellas — could lead both Japan and South Korea to follow a path toward nuclear energy and, possibly, nuclear weapons. Former lieutenant general Noboru Yamaguchi, a senior government advisor in Japan, told KEI's Sneider: "It is impossible to prove extended [US nuclear] deterrence is valid... Deterrence is about how we feel. It was questionable during the Cold War. Now, I don't believe in any kind of deterrence."

Indeed, Japanese Prime Minister Takaichi Sanae, who just led her party to a massive electoral victory, has left open the possibility that Tokyo will abandon its commitment to not obtaining nuclear weapons. As the Carnegie Endowment's Shizuka Kuramitsu notes, the prime minister has committed to "making 'important policy shifts,' including amending the Japanese Constitution. The election result may have also boosted her confidence to revisit the three non-nuclear principles."

With Washington focused on the Middle East, the world desperate for energy, and Asian allies unsure of the future, the possibility of multiple nuclear-armed states in Northeast Asia looks dangerously plausible.



The Iran war's energy fallout is speeding up a debate in Japan and South Korea about expanding nuclear power capabilities, while the Trump administration's recent shift away from Asian allies has sparked dialogue about whether the two Northeast Asian powers should develop their own nuclear weapons.



South Korean President Lee Jae Myung (C) speaks during a news conference to mark the first anniversary of former president Yoon Suk Yeol's brief imposition of martial law, at the Blue House in Seoul on December 3, 2025.  
CHUNG SUNG-JUN/GETTY IMAGES

The article was first published by the Council on Foreign Relations.

# Asian Wrestling Championships: Valizadeh ends 57kg curse as Iran bags three freestyle medals

## Sports Desk

Milad Valizadeh headlined Iran's medal hunt on the penultimate day of the Asian Wrestling Championships by claiming the freestyle 57kg gold in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, on Saturday.

A silver medalist at the competition last year, Valizadeh defeated Mongolia's Munkh Erdene Batkhuyag 14-3 to grab the first gold medal for the country in this weight class since Reza Atri's triumph in 2019.

Batkhuyag suffered an apparent rib injury while scoring a stepout midway through the first period, which cut Valizadeh's lead to 4-3. After the restart, Valizadeh shot in for a takedown, at which point Batkhuyag seemed to have stopped fighting.

But Valizadeh didn't, and flipped the lifeless Batkhuyag back and forth until he piled up enough points for a superiority



victory that ended the match at 1:47.

To be fair, the referee never blew the whistle, and Valizadeh was

under no obligation to stop. And after the initial boos, the crowd



Milad Valizadeh celebrates with the Iranian flag after winning the freestyle 57kg gold medal at the Asian Wrestling Championships in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, on April 11, 2026.

● KEYVAN GHAREHDAGHI/UWW

actually applauded when he celebrated his victory with a gymnastics backflip.

There were further medals for the Iranians on Saturday, as Amir-Ali Azarpira settled for silver in the 97kg class after being stunned by Japan's Arash Yoshida in the final.

In a battle of world medalists, Yoshida outlasted Olympic bronze winner Azarpira, notching a second-period takedown for the key score in a 4-0 victory.

Yoshida's victory secured a second gold for Japan on Saturday, following Keyvan Gharehdaghi's 79kg crown – both won by wrestlers born and raised in Japan with Iranian fathers.

Neither wrestler could make inroads early on, as Yoshida received an activity point for the lone score of the first period.

In the second period, Azarpira launched an attack, but Yoshida sprawled and started to work his way behind. When Azarpira tried to get to his feet, Yoshida deftly lunged for an ankle and sent the Iranian to the mat for a takedown and a 3-0 lead. A penalty for hands to the face accounted for Yoshida's final point.

At last year's World Championships in Zagreb, Yoshida took a bronze medal after losing in the semifinals to American great Kyle Snyder, who then beat Azarpira for the gold.

Sina Khalili, meanwhile, took home his second straight 70kg bronze with a one-sided 11-0 win over Shakhzodbek Yarashev of Uzbekistan, which included a 4-point takedown in the second period, as Iran collected three medals across five weight classes. Elsewhere, Peyman Ne'mati suffered a first-round exit in the 65kg division following a 6-4 setback against the host's Rustamzhan Kakharov.

Mahdi Yousefi, who stepped into the 79kg competition as the defending champion, finished empty-handed in Bishkek, falling to a 5-2 defeat against Olympic champion Razambek Jamalov of Uzbekistan in the quarterfinals.

## AFC Champions League Elite: Tractor to face uphill test in last 16

### Sports Desk

Persian Gulf Pro League champion Tractor FC will face a daunting task when it resumes AFC Champions League Elite action against Emirati club Shabab Al Ahli in Jeddah on Tuesday.

The last-16 game at the Prince Abdullah Al Faisal Sports City will end weeks of speculation and uncertainty swirling around the Iranian top-flight side's future in the continent's elite club competition.

In late March, Iran's Sports Ministry prohibited the country's national and club teams from visiting "hostile countries, where the security of Iranian athletes cannot be guaranteed," amid a regional military conflict between Iran and a U.S.-Israeli coalition.

However, Tractor was later given the green light to travel to Jeddah after a two-week ceasefire went into effect in the early hours of last Wednesday.

Tractor has still endured a hampered preparation ahead



● AFC

of the knockout-stage clash. The Iranian side left the country by road on Saturday, having trained for two days in Iran with just 13 players, as the team's foreign recruits – along with Iranian internationals Amirhossein Hosseinzadeh and Shoja Khalilzadeh – were not present in Iran. The team arrived in Turkey on Saturday night before flying to Jeddah on Sunday.

Ultimately, Tractor is set to hold a light, low-intensity

training session today to prepare for Tuesday's match. While Tractor has been out of action for over 40 days, Shabab Al Ahli, in contrast, has played several competitive matches during this period and is fully match-fit for the game, which will be a rematch of the 1-1 draw on the opening day of the league phase last September in Dubai.

Tractor has also lacked proper group training sessions, and the absence of foreign

players from those sessions has made head coach Mohammad Rabiei's job even harder.

However, the good news for the Iranian coach was that integral foreigners Regi Lushkja, Aleksandar Sedlar, Tibor Halilović, Odildzhon Khamrobekov, Tomislav Štrkalj, and Swedish goalkeeper Marko Johansson joined the Tractor camp in Turkey on Saturday and will be available to feature on Tuesday.

Tractor won five and lost one of eight games in the West zone's league stage, finishing third in the 12-team table with 17 points, while the Emirati champion stood sixth with 11 points.

Elsewhere in the rescheduled last-16 round, in a Saudi-Qatari double-header, Riyadh-based heavyweight Al Hilal will take on Al Sadd on Monday, with Al Ahli Saudi and Al Duhail squaring off earlier in the day.

Saudi Pro League champion Al Ittihad and the UAE's Al Wahda go head-to-head on Tuesday.

## Iranian top flight unlikely to resume, volleyball chief says

### Sports Desk

The Iranian Volleyball Premier League is unlikely to resume, Milad Taqavi, the chairman of the country's Volleyball Federation, announced on Sunday.

All domestic top-flight fixtures in the regular season have been halted following the U.S.-Israeli aggression on Iran on February 8. Although the federation had recently announced that matches would resume on April 4 in a centralized format, the ongoing circumstances have made it impossible to proceed, the head of the sport's national governing body said.

"Clubs have announced that they cannot continue their training sessions, and the situation remains unclear," Taqavi told ISNA. "As a result, I doubt the league



● VARZESH

will continue." When asked whether the champion would be declared based on the current standings, Taqavi responded: "We need to make decisions regarding the champion as well as relegation and promotion. Once the situation improves, we will try to hold a consultation meeting and make a decision on the mat-

ter." Defending champion Foolad Sirjan tops the league table with 16 wins from 18 games, followed by Shahdab Yazd and Paykan, who have won 15 and 13 games, respectively. Sepahan, Chadormalou, Shahr-dari Urmia, San'atgaran Omid, and Mehregan Noor complete the top eight in the 13-team table.

## Iran eyeing strong performance at Asian Gymnastics Championships

### Sports Desk

Iran's men's artistic gymnastics head coach, Reza Kheirkhah, has emphasized the importance of a strong performance at the AGU Asian Championships in June.

The 13th edition of the competition, which will kick off in Zunyi, China, on June 18, will also serve as a qualification path for the Aichi-Nagoya 2026 Asian Games in September.

"Previously, all countries could participate in the

Asian Games without restrictions. However, a decision by the Asian Gymnastics Union now means only the top 10 teams on the continent will earn berths for the showpiece event in China," Kheirkhah told IRNA.

"The squad's first two training camps were held before the Persian New Year holidays (late March). The first camp lasted 14

days and featured 17 gymnasts, offering high-quality training.

"A selection round was then held, and several athletes were cut. The second camp took place in Japan – a change that has doubled the importance of precise planning and preparation for the event in China," Kheirkhah explained.

Referring to the country's recent difficult circumstances, Kheirkhah explained, "Due to the



● OCA

wartime conditions, many gyms were closed for a

while, and athletes were away from training for

about one to two months. That is why we decided to invite 14 gymnasts to the new camp in Gonbad, where the focus will be on regaining fitness rather than holding a selection round."

He continued, "Under such conditions, you cannot expect a selection performance from an athlete who has been away from training for some time. We will try to hold a selection round at the next camp and finalize the squad for the China competition. We

also plan to reduce the number of athletes to improve training quality and individual attention."

The latest national team camp began on Saturday, with Mahdi Ahmad Kohani, Mahdi Olfati, Mohammadreza Khosronejad, Abolfazl Nikkha, Ali-Asghar Asadi, Ali Asadi, Amirmohammad Qorbani, Siavash Siah, Arman Khodaei, Hooman Jafari, Amirmohammad Rahmani, Amirabbas Mojahed, and Mohammadreza Hamidi taking part in training.

# A 2,000-year-old art form shines again on glass canvases in Iran

## Iranica Desk

The art of painting on glass, one of the world's most distinguished and ancient artistic traditions, boasts a history in Iran's cities of Shiraz and Tehran that stretches back more than two thousand years.

Reverse glass painting has a long and rich history. This art form, often executed in two dimensions with vibrant, luminous colors, has been popular within the folk and ethnic cultures of many countries around the world, according to IRNA.

The origins of such painting in Europe date back to the third century BCE. The oldest discovered example comes from southern Italy: a glass vessel featuring an engraved gold leaf placed between two colorless glass bowls. These objects, known as gold glass, have surviving examples housed in the British Museum. The production of glass objects, along with enameling and gilding on them, reached its zenith during the 11th and 12th centuries CE. During this period, thin painted metal sheets were affixed to the back of glass, with one of the most beautiful examples from the 13th century found in the "Chapel of St. Stephen" within St. Minster's Church in England.

Stained glass used to dec-

orate churches became widespread in Europe from roughly the 9th and 10th centuries CE. It was produced by first painting flat glass pieces with molten colored glass and then heating them to fix the designs. The finest example of this technique is from the 12th century at Chartres Cathedral in France. This type of painting, which involves no subsequent heating of the glass objects, is also known as "cold painting." Precise details about how this art form entered Iran are not available. However, it is probable that the art



arrived through merchants from Venice, Italy — which for centuries was a global hub for glassmaking and related decoration. This European art was soon imbued with a distinctly local character thanks to the creativity of Iranian artists.

The earliest reverse glass paintings in Iran were beautiful gol-o-morgh (flower and bird) pieces, which were used in the stucco work of ceilings and walls in aristocratic homes, a tradition dating back to the Zandieh period (1751-1794). The finest examples of reverse glass painting from the Zand era were created by the renowned Shirazi painter Agha Sadegh. He was a student of Ali Ashraf, a famous painter of the 12th century AH (18th century CE). Gradually, reverse glass and mirror painting with gol-o-morgh themes became more wide-

spread. Over time, depictions of young women in European attire, as well as landscapes, were added to these paintings. These changes occurred under the influence of the growing popularity of European-style prints in Iran and subsequent Iranian im-



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itations of them, which had found favor with the general public.

With the beginning of Fath-Ali Shah's reign in the first half of the 13th century AH (early 19th century CE), the style of portraiture and figure painting became prevalent among court painters. Many examples of this style are preserved in the painting collection of the Golestan Palace. At present, the art of reverse glass painting is common in most countries around the world, and notable 20th-century painters have worked in this field, although the art has never regained the popularity it

enjoyed in years past.

The art of painting on glass, which from ancient times played a role in decorating orsi (traditional sash) windows, mirror work, and the stained glass of Iran's historic buildings, has experienced a resurgence in recent years among young artists, adopting a new style and approach. This art form, a fusion of color, light, and transparency, has successfully carved out a place for itself within Iran's contemporary decorative arts.

Painting on glass in the history of Iranian art is rooted in Persian aesthetic sensibilities and its interaction with

Islamic arts. In the past, this art was mainly used in the design of painted glassware and decorative vessels. Today, however, by utilizing new industrial paints and modern techniques, it is finding new life in decorative panels, interior design, and mixed media art.

In this art form, the artist first outlines the design on the glass surface using a resistant outline paste. Then, special oil-based or water-based paints are used to fill in the spaces between the lines. The transparency of glass allows light passing through the colors to create a unique combination of radiance and

shadow — an effect that cannot be achieved on any other type of painting canvas.

Art experts believe that the lack of formal training and specialized workshops in art centers is the biggest challenge facing the growth of this field in Iran. Many artists learn this craft either on their own as self-taught practitioners or through informal workshops. Nevertheless, the market for glass art pieces has seen a growing trend in recent years, thanks to the expansion of online stores selling art supplies. This has helped boost the production of both works for home decoration and for exhibition.

The dynamism and the interplay of color and light in glass painting have made it one of the most promising fields within Iran's decorative arts. With increasing public interest in educational workshops and the presence of Iranian works in international visual arts competitions, it is expected that this discipline will soon be recognized as a part of the country's contemporary handicrafts industry.

The art of painting on glass serves as a bridge between traditional art and the contemporary spirit — an art that shines from within light and places color upon the very transparency of life itself.

## Major restoration project underway for Zamankhan Bridge

### Iranica Desk

The restoration of the historic Zamankhan Bridge in Saman, located in Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari Province, has officially commenced, announced the head of the provincial Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts Organization.

Heydar Sadeghi, the Director General of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts of Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari Province, stated that the project was officially handed over to a contractor during a ceremony attended by provincial and local officials. The attendees included representatives from the Regional Water Company and the Saman Municipality, and the ceremony was held with the full support of the Saman governor, chtn.ir wrote.

He further emphasized that the restoration efforts are part of broader cultural heritage, tourism, and handicrafts programs, all of which are aimed at preserving and protecting historic monuments for future generations. He noted that the bridge had suffered significant damage in recent years due to hydraulic issues and the strong, relentless currents of the water flowing beneath it. These natural forces caused some

of the surrounding stones to collapse, which in turn resulted in considerable structural damage to this valuable historical edifice.

Over the past two years, comprehensive studies and a detailed restoration plan for the Zamankhan Bridge were developed in close collaboration with the University of Isfahan. Following thorough expert reviews and technical assessments, the plan was officially ap-



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proved by both the provincial technical council and the technical council of the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts. Once approved, the plan was formally communicated and put into action. The contractor selection process was carried out through a public tender, and the necessary funds were provided from

the social responsibilities budget of the Ministry of Oil. Sadeghi confirmed that the restoration project is expected to be completed within a six-month timeframe. He expressed his sincere hope that the restoration of the historic Zamankhan Bridge in Saman would be successfully finished on schedule, thanks to the active participation of the private sector and the rigorous oversight provided by all relevant executive

bodies. Located in the Shahrekord region, the Zamankhan Bridge is one of the historic bridges built over the Zayandeh Rud River during the Safavid era. The bridge measures 30 meters in length and features two spans of unequal length — a unique and remarkable architectural characteristic that distin-

guishes it from other bridges of its time. The bridge rests on three sturdy stone piers and is situated in a pleasant, mild climate, surrounded by stunning natural scenery that includes lush orchards filled with various trees, local rice paddies, and the clear, flowing, pristine waters of the Zayandeh Rud, all of which create an unforgettable and picturesque environment.

The Zamankhan Bridge is recognized as one of the most important historical monuments in Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari Province, and it currently attracts a large number of tourists who come to admire its historical significance and natural beauty. The bridge was originally built by the Safavids to help people cross the Zayandeh Rud River safely and prevent them from drowning. Today, however, it serves primarily as a historical and tourist attraction. The fame of this bridge has grown so significantly in recent years that during peak travel seasons, one can see many tourists visiting Zamankhan for sightseeing and recreation. It may be of interest to know that the Zamankhan Bridge is considered a national heritage site. The bridge has been officially registered on Iran's National Heritage List. Furthermore, after the famous Si-o-Se-Pol and Khaju bridges in Isfahan, it is regarded as the most significant Safavid-era bridge ever built over the Zayandeh Rud River.



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## New chapter for Shiraz's bazaars

### Iranica Desk

The Director General of the Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Organization of Fars province has announced the beginning of a new phase of executive operations in the historic bazaars of Shiraz.

Behzad Moridi added that for him, bazaar takes priority over many other matters, because it represents the meeting point of life, lawful livelihood, and the living identity of the city, according to ISNA.

Moridi went on to detail the specific situation of the Ordu Bazaar, noting that approximately one-third of the restoration work in this key area had been delayed. He explained that many people had been asking what the fate of the remaining section would be. Fortunately, with the preparation of financial resources and the resolution of administrative obstacles, precise planning has now been carried out to finalize this

project.

The Ordu Bazaar dates back to the Qajar era and is located in Shiraz, between Saray-e Moshir Bazaar and the three-way intersection of Ruhollah Street. This historical structure has been registered as one of Iran's national heritage sites.

In further remarks, Moridi addressed the concerns of representatives from the Bazaar-e No of Shiraz. He stated that the main focus of the project in the bazaar is the renovation and restoration of public and shared spaces, including roofs and passageways. Bazaar-e No, which is one of the tourist attractions of Shiraz, is located in the northernmost row of the Vakil Bazaar and extends all the way to the Isfahan Gate.

Moridi emphasized the importance of utilizing the expertise of previously experienced contractors, ensuring that with their full knowledge of the historical fabric, the executive operations can begin without interruption.

# 'Minab Eyes' installation unveiled in Tehran to honor schoolchildren

## Arts & Culture Desk

The visual installation 'Minab Eyes' was unveiled in Tehran's Tajrish Square to honor schoolchildren from the Shajareh Tayebah school in Minab, Hormozgan Province, in a public art project reported by IRNA on Sunday and commissioned by the Tehran Beautification Organization. The installation, developed in cooperation with the Soureh Omid art and media institute and created by artist Reza Golpayegani, trans-

forms a busy urban space into a commemorative site through large-scale depictions of children's eyes intended to prompt reflection among passersby. The students being commemorated were killed on February 28 in Minab, southern Iran, in an incident that drew local mourning and public remembrance. Organizers said the project seeks to preserve their memory in the urban fabric and highlight themes of innocence and loss through contemporary visual lan-

guage. Golpayegani said the focus on the eye as "the window of the soul" was intended to convey "silent emotion" and human vulnerability, particularly that of children. "The aim is not only artistic expression but collective remembrance," he said. Installed in one of Tehran's busiest northern squares, the work invites pedestrians to pause amid daily movement and engage with the imagery, which features enlarged, close-up portraits of children's eyes.



## Iran turns to villages, cultural ties as post-crisis social unity deepens

### Social Desk

Iran's Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Reza Salehi-Amiri said Sunday that recent national challenges had ultimately strengthened social unity, as authorities move to channel that unity into a cultural and community-driven recovery focused on villages, handicrafts and local tourism, according to IRNA. Speaking at a meeting with state-affiliated foundations, banks and economic bodies in Tehran, Salehi-Amiri described the recent crisis as a defining national moment that ultimately consolidated unity across society, according to IRNA. The war, he said, carried layered social, economic and security dimensions but culminated in a "dignified" outcome shaped by public resilience and coordinated governance. He framed the period as a test of collective resolve, saying at-

tempts to trigger instability and widen social divides were neutralized by broad-based participation and a shared sense of purpose. The result, he added, was a reaffirmation of social solidarity that now underpins the country's cultural and developmental trajectory. Officials are now channeling that unity into a culturally driven recovery, with villages positioned at the heart of both identity and sustainability. Salehi-Amiri said rural communities serve as living repositories of tradition and social continuity, warning that unchecked migration to cities risks weakening cultural foundations. A notable shift during the recent Nowruz holidays saw millions gravitate toward rural destinations, signaling renewed public interest in local heritage and community-centered travel. Authorities say this trend could help reshape tourism patterns while reinforcing social bonds formed

during the wartime period. Handicrafts were highlighted as a bridge between economy and culture, with more than 530,000 people employed in the sector. Salehi-Amiri described it as a family-based, "homegrown" industry capable of preserving identity while fostering inclusion, particularly among women in rural areas. Despite wartime pressures, officials said essential services and supply chains remained stable, allowing daily life to continue and social rhythms to endure. The revival of tens of thousands of small workshops during the conflict was cited as evidence of grassroots resilience and community-driven recovery. Deputy Tourism Minister Anoushirvan Mohseni Bandpey said eco-lodges had played a role beyond tourism, supporting decentralized living and acting as a form of "passive defense" by sustaining rural presence during the crisis.

## Iran confirms 3,375 dead in war, including children, foreign nationals

### 857 schools damaged in war as student death toll mounts

### Social Desk

Iran's Legal Medicine Organization has identified 3,375 people killed in the recent "Ramadan War," its chief said Sunday, while lawmakers reported widespread damage to schools and mounting student casualties following attacks blamed on US and Israeli forces. Abbas Masjedi, head of the state forensic body, said the victims were identified using "scientific" methods through April 10, including 2,875 men and 496 women. The organization is the sole official authority for such figures, he said, ISNA reported. Masjedi said children were among the dead, including seven infants under one-year-old, 255 aged between one and 12, and 121 aged 13 to 18. Most victims fell in the 19-40 age bracket, followed by those aged 41-60.

A smaller share was over 61. He said most victims were Iranian nationals, though some held citizenship from Afghanistan, Syria, Turkey, Pakistan, China, Iraq and Lebanon. The highest tolls were recorded in Tehran, Hormozgan and Isfahan provinces. From the outset of the attacks, the organization mobilized nationwide, running autopsy halls at full capacity and deploying round-the-clock, multi-layered shifts to process remains. Identification relied on DNA profiling, tissue sampling and cross-matching with relatives, with strict protocols to prevent "any error," Masjedi said. Separately, Mohammad Molavi, deputy head of parliament's education commission, said 857 schools were damaged during what he called the "third imposed

war," describing the strikes as a "clear violation" of educational rights. Molavi said 277 students were killed, including 157 boys and 113 girls, along with young children. He added that 344 teachers and 67 education staff also died in the attacks. He pointed to a strike on a primary school in Minab as evidence of "war crimes," and said 154 academic sites, including laboratories, libraries and dormitories, were hit. Such attacks contravene international law, he said, citing provisions of the Rome Statute. It is said that service delivery continued throughout the conflict, with authorities streamlining coordination among medical, municipal and military institutions to ensure swift identification and handover of victims to families.

## Fortress of Iran ...

### Axis of Resistance post-ceasefire

A ceasefire between Iran and the US/Zionist regime will have immediate ripples across the Levant and the Arabian Peninsula. Critics argue that a ceasefire might signal a retreat; however, specialized analysis suggests the opposite. Tehran is likely to use the diplomatic lull to formalize its presence in Iraq and Yemen. By shifting from "hot conflict" to "hybrid influence," Iran aims to transform its non-state allies into legitimate political and military pillars within their respective states, mirroring the Hezbollah model in Lebanon.

### US-Iran dynamic beyond truce

For the United States, a ceasefire in mid-2026 is a tool for damage control. With global oil prices volatile and the risk of a broader war looming, Washington is seeking an "exit with honor." However, the future of the Islamic Republic will be defined by its ability to

resist the "decoupling" strategy—the Western attempt to isolate Iran from global financial systems even during peace. The Iranian leadership is now acutely aware that "paper guarantees" (like the JCPOA) are insufficient. Future negotiations will likely demand "irreversible sanctions relief" and "security guarantees" that involve third-party guarantors, specifically China and Russia, to ensure that the US cannot unilaterally pivot back to a "maximum pressure" campaign.

### Challenges: internal pulse

While the leadership transition has been smooth at the top, the future stability of the Islamic Republic depends on its ability to address the "social contract." The post-war reconstruction phase must provide tangible economic benefits to the youth and middle class. If the 2026 ceasefire leads to a period of economic growth and reduced social restrictions, the new leadership will find a path to-

ward long-term stability. If, however, the ceasefire is used only for military re-armament at the expense of social welfare, the internal pressure could become a significant variable. The Islamic Republic of Iran in 2026 is no longer the state it was in the previous decade. It has emerged from a direct military confrontation with its leadership intact and its regional architecture tested. The future of the Islamic Republic is shifting toward a "fortress Iran"—a state that is diplomatically engaged but militarily and economically autonomous. The ceasefire of 2026 is the gateway to this new reality. Whether it leads to a "grand bargain" or remains a "cold peace," Iran has proven that its system is capable of surviving extreme shocks. The coming years will reveal if the Islamic Republic can translate this military and political resilience into a sustainable model of 21st-century governance that balances revolutionary ideals with the pragmatic needs of a global power.

## Street theater honors Spain's stance as Iran marks Islamic Revolution Art Week

### Arts & Culture Desk

Nine street performances took to major squares across the Iranian capital on Saturday as part of Islamic Revolution Art Week, organizers said, dedicating the productions to the Spanish government and people for declaring recent military actions against Iran "illegal." The coordinated shows, staged by the Soureh Art Center under the Islamic Ideology Dissemination Organization, unfolded in nine locations across Tehran on the third day of the April 9-16 observance, drawing crowds amid ongoing public gatherings. Parallel performances were also held in Mashhad, Lahijan, and



Varamin, IRNA reported. Works including 'We Are Iran' in Tajrish Square and 'Arash' from the 'Mosht o Meydan' series in Punak Square dramatized themes of unity, resistance, and national identity. Other productions such as 'Bell of Heaven' and 'The Path' were staged along Enghelab Street, while 'Rostam' and 'Flag' brought epic and patriotic narratives to southern districts of the capital.

The dedication reflects appreciation for Spain's "principled" position and its condemnation of silence in the face of what it described as an unjust war. The performances, mounted in open urban spaces, aim to bring revolutionary art directly to the public and reinforce cultural cohesion during a sensitive period. The weeklong observance commemorates Morteza Avini, a pioneering Iranian documentary filmmaker and theorist of Islamic cinema born on September 13, 1947, who was martyred on April 9, 1993, in Fakkeh after a landmine explosion. His legacy continues to shape the intellectual foundations of revolutionary art in Iran.