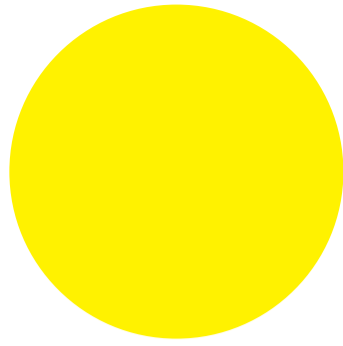


Alamut Castle reopens to visitors as UNESCO bid enters final stage



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The top military brass pay tribute to the late founder of the Islamic Republic, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, at his mausoleum in southern Tehran on National Army Day on April 18, 2026. IRIB NEWS

Iran, Lebanon ceasefires interlinked with mutual impact

By Mohammad Irani
Lebanon affairs expert

OPINION EXCLUSIVE

Since the outset of the US and Israeli offensive against Iran, and the entry of Lebanon's Islamic Resistance—Hezbollah—in support of the Islamic Republic's positions, along with its clashes with the Israeli regime, the Iran and southern Lebanon files have become intertwined.

It was therefore only natural that any decision concerning Iran would also affect Lebanon.

The temporary ceasefire that took shape in Iran, coupled with Tehran's emphasis on halting hostilities in Lebanon under the proposed ten-point provisions, led to a similar situation being established in Lebanon shortly thereafter. In effect, the Iran-US ceasefire can be seen as the primary foundation, with the southern Lebanon issue functioning as a subsidiary track—effectively part of that broader arrangement.

However, the United States initially pushed back, attempting through multiple statements and releases to carve out the southern Lebanon issue from the Iran negotiation file. The convening of a meeting between Lebanese officials and the Israeli regime in Washington—through which the ceasefire was announced—thus appears to have followed a prearranged path designed to avoid tying the ceasefire directly to the Iran-US agreement. Both Washington and the Israeli regime appear reluctant to place these developments within the framework of an Iran-

US ceasefire. As such, the scenario that unfolded in Washington can be seen as a form of cover aimed at playing down Iran's role in this context. Nevertheless, most analysts believe that the underlying basis of this ceasefire lies in the Iran-US understanding.

Alongside this, another key factor was the resistance of Hezbollah fighters and the people of southern Lebanon. Over roughly 40 days following the escalation in the south, they played a decisive role. The Israeli regime had moved in with full ground and air capabilities, occupying significant

parts of southern Lebanon. It was this resistance that ultimately led to the formation of the temporary ceasefire agreement. However, there is little expectation that Israel will remain committed to such agreements. Past patterns suggest that once agreements are reached, they are often walked back as soon as conditions shift. Accordingly, both resistance forces in the south and the Lebanese population—drawing on extensive experience in dealing with Israel—are well aware that the ceasefire should not be overly relied upon.

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Leader commends Army for courageous defense against aggressors

Pezeshkian touts Army as symbol of national dignity, independence

National Desk

Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Mojtaba Khamenei hailed the country's Army for courageously defending the nation in the recent imposed war, just as it did in previous imposed wars. In a message on Sunday marking Army Day, Ayatollah Khamenei said the Islamic Republic of Iran's Army has been "courageously defending the land, water, and the flag to which it belongs" in the face of the US-Israeli war of aggression. "With its strong divine and popular support, and in dense and solid ranks, shoulder to shoulder with other warriors of the armed forces, it has confronted two armies at the forefront of disbelief and arrogance, making their weakness and humiliation evident

in the eyes of the world," read the message issued on the occasion of Iran Army. The message, issued on the day named in honor of the Army by the late founder of the Islamic Republic, Imam Khomeini, congratulated all army personnel, their families, and the Iranian nation. A group of top commanders of Iran's Army visited the mausoleum of the late founder of the Islamic Republic Imam Khomeini to renew allegiance to the ideals of Imam Khomeini. Ayatollah Mojtaba Khamenei also described the victory of the Islamic Revolution as a turning point in the Army's history, marking the end of an era of weakness that had been imposed by enemies and internal traitors. He stressed that the Army's progress must be pursued

with doubled effort and that necessary measures for its advancement will be issued in the near future. During the recent 40-day war of aggression imposed by the US-Israeli coalition, the Iranian Armed Forces defended the country with all their might, carrying out numerous successful retaliatory operations against enemy installations across the region. President Masoud Pezeshkian also in a message described the Army as a symbol of national dignity, power, and independence, and emphasized the unparalleled role of the Army in safeguarding the country's security and peace. Pezeshkian referred to the Army's role in protecting the country's territorial integrity and tranquility in the society and stressed the importance of discipline, expertise, and



Ayatollah Seyyed Mojtaba Khamenei

revolutionary spirit in advancing the missions of the force. He also pointed to the coun-

try's critical situation and existing threats facing the country and emphasized the

synergy and readiness of the armed forces in defending the country.

Iran will shelve limited opening of Hormuz if US disrupts shipping: SNSC

Naval blockade constitutes 'violation of ceasefire'

International Desk

Iran's Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) said the Islamic Republic will prevent the conditional and limited opening of the Strait of Hormuz if the United States tries to disrupt shipping or impose measures such as a naval blockade.

"Should the enemy attempt to disrupt shipping or impose measures such as a naval blockade, the Islamic Republic of Iran will consider that a violation of the ceasefire and will prevent the conditional and limited opening of the Strait of Hormuz," the SNSC said in a statement on Saturday. The statement was issued regarding the state of play in negotiations with the United States, mediated by Pakistan, to end the ongoing war, which has temporarily been halted after a ceasefire was announced on April 8. The ceasefire will lapse on Wednesday. A first round of talks in Islamabad failed to produce an agreement, with Iranian officials blaming the US side for putting forward excessive demands and shifting its position at the negotiating table.

US military logistics

Noting that most US military logistics in the Persian Gulf pass through the Strait of Hormuz, which Iran considers a threat to its national security and regional stability, the SNSC said Iran will continue to maintain oversight



Tankers are anchored in the Strait of Hormuz near Qeshm Island, Iran, on April 18, 2026. © ASGHAR BESHARATI/AP

and control of all traffic through the waterway until the war permanently comes to an end. The SNSC noted that Iran had conditionally reopened the Strait of Hormuz to commercial shipping on Friday after the US and the Israeli regime accepted to cease hostilities on all fronts, including a halt to Israeli attacks on Lebanon, which was a key Iranian precondition for accepting the temporary ceasefire.

US naval blockade

However, it said that Iran views a continued US naval blockade as a violation of the ceasefire and will not allow conditional and restricted passage through the Strait of Hormuz if the blockade remains in place. The statement said that Iran's decision to reopen the Strait in a limited way, which was announced by Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi on Friday, also came after the US submitted new proposals for a peace deal through a Pakistani delegation, led by Army

chief Field Marshal Asim Munir, which traveled to Tehran earlier this week. The spokesperson for the Khatam al-Anbiya Central Headquarters Ebrahim Zolfaghari also said on Saturday that Iran, in line with previous agreements and with good faith during negotiations, had agreed to a managed passage of a limited number of oil tankers and commercial ships through the Strait of Hormuz. However, he said the Americans, with their track record of repeated breaches of faith, continue to engage in banditry and piracy under the guise of a so-called blockade that the US has imposed on the Strait of Hormuz to force Iran to reopen the waterway. "For this reason, control of the Strait of Hormuz has returned to its previous state, and this strategic strait is under the intense management and control of the armed forces," the spokesperson stated. On Friday, Abbas Araghchi announced the reopening of the strait following the implementation of a ceasefire between Israel and Lebanon. Reacting to the announcement, US President Donald Trump took to his Truth Social platform, alleging that Iran had "agreed to never close the Strait of Hormuz again." He also claimed that the United States' "naval blockade will remain in full force and effect as it pertains to Iran, only, until such time as our transaction with Iran is 100% complete."

FM spox: Enriched uranium not to be transferred 'anywhere'

International Desk

Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman said the country's stockpile of enriched uranium would not be transferred "anywhere," dismissing an earlier claim by US President Donald Trump that Tehran had agreed to hand it over to Washington. Esmail Baqaei in an interview with Iran's state TV on Friday said that the transfer of Iran's enriched uranium to the US has never been raised in negotiations in Pakistan.

Baqaei's remarks came after the US president claimed in a post on social media that the US would receive Iran's enriched uranium.

"The U.S.A. will get all Nuclear 'Dust,' created by our great B2 Bombers," Trump claimed.

On Friday, Pakistan hosted negotiations between Iran and the US to put an end to a US-Israeli aggression against Iran. However, the negotiations in Islamabad failed to produce an agreement due to the American delegation's excessive demands.

The talks followed a Pakistan-brokered ceasefire agreement which temporarily ended the aggression which began on February 28.

Baqaei said recent talks in Pakistan centered on solving the ongoing conflict and



Esmail Baqaei
IRNA

not on recovering Iran's uranium. "The previous negotiations focused on the nuclear issue, but now the negotiations are focused on ending the war, and naturally, the range of topics discussed has become wider and more diverse," he said.

He also rejected the idea of the suspension of uranium enrichment by Iran, describing it a media campaign to influence the negotiations.

Iran possessed around 400 kilograms of highly enriched uranium before the US-Israeli strikes on Iran's nuclear facilities in June, and the fate of the stockpile has been a central focus of discussions since then.

Before the strikes, Iran had enriched uranium to 60 percent, exceeding the 3.67% limit set under the now-defunct 2015 nuclear agreement with the United States and other countries.

Iran, Lebanon ceasefires ...

A highly cautious approach is therefore required.

Indeed, Shiite leaders, including Sheikh Naim Qassem, have stressed that residents of southern Lebanon should refrain, for now, from returning to their villages and homes, given the risk that Israel could again breach the agreement and resume attacks. Reports also indicate that the ceasefire has already been intermittently violated. It is important to note, however, that since the Iran and Lebanon files are closely intertwined, disruptions in one track can directly affect the other. As

long as Iran-US negotiations continue to move forward, the Lebanon ceasefire can play a positive role and potentially yield favorable outcomes, with similar conditions taking shape in southern Lebanon. For instance, the reopening of the Strait of Hormuz is a result of the ceasefire taking hold in southern Lebanon—something that had been a key demand of Iran.

At present, Israel is under pressure from the United States and appears unlikely to take steps that would derail the progress of ongoing tracks. While a ceasefire holds on the Iran front and negotiations continue, any Israeli devi-

ation could provide Iran with leverage to reengage in actions that would once again increase pressure on Israel. Specifically, pressure could be reapplied via the Strait of Hormuz by disrupting maritime traffic, or Iran could signal a potential withdrawal from negotiations. Whether acknowledged or not, the Islamic Resistance in southern Lebanon is aligned with Iran in this conflict, and it is unlikely that Iran would abandon its regional ally under difficult circumstances. Conversely, if the Iran negotiations fail to reach a conclusion, the Lebanon ceasefire would inevitably be affected as well.



Mohammad Ali Rajabi
Cartoonist

CARTOON



Iran's eastern airspace, six airports reopened after security review

Airlines prepare to resume flights



● IRNA

Economy Desk

Iran has reopened parts of its airspace and six airports following a security and safety review, aviation authorities said, after a closure imposed during the Israeli-American aggression began on February 28.

The Civil Aviation Organization said in a statement

that, with approval from relevant authorities and after security and safety assessments by its national civil-military coordination committee (CMC), parts of the country's airspace and several airports were reopened as of 7 a.m. on Saturday in line with a Notice to Airmen (NOTAM).

According to the statement, air routes in the

eastern section of Iran's airspace have been reopened for international overflights.

Separately, Maqsood Asadi Samani, secretary of the Association of Iranian Airlines, said six airports — Imam Khomeini, Mehrabad, Mashhad, Birjand, Gorgan and Zahedan — have resumed operations.

He added that airlines are

preparing to restart both domestic and international flights, noting that, as per standard procedures, carriers must obtain the necessary permits from the Civil Aviation Organization before operating flights.

The aviation authority also said flight operations at airports across the country will gradually resume from Saturday, depending on

technical and operational readiness in both military and civilian sectors to provide passenger services.

According to Iranian media reports, seven Iranian airports were targeted during the 40-day military conflict, with attacks focusing more on tourism, passenger and cargo infrastructure than on military facilities.

Gov't plans high-tech overhaul for war-scarred industries



● TASNIM

Economy Desk

Iran's government intends to use new technology and production lines to rebuild industrial units damaged during the 40-day US-Israeli aggression, with environmental considerations involved in the relocation of some facilities, the economy minister said.

According to a report by Tasnim, Economy Minister Ali Madanizadeh outlined the reconstruction strategy, stating, "In

the renovation program for damaged industrial units, new technology or production lines will be used instead of previous technologies, and even new site allocations for damaged industries have been considered based on environmental considerations."

Madanizadeh added that support measures are already underway for other manufacturing and industrial units facing demand shortfalls or disruptions in their

production chains. "Supportive decisions by the government for other production and industrial units that have faced demand or production chain problems are being implemented," he said.

Describing the current phase as a period of economic renewal, the minister noted, "The post-war period is a period of economic renovation, and support packages, such as the recent one for workshops with fewer than 50 employees, have been considered." The US and Israel launched their aggression against the country on February 28, with civilian targets and infrastructure among the primary sites struck.

While no official statistics have yet been released on the extent of damage to industrial facilities, attacks on the petrochemical and steel sectors ranked among the most prominent targets of the campaign.

Tehran, Ankara agree to expand agricultural, border ties after SCO meet

Economy Desk

The Iranian agriculture minister said on Saturday that Iran and Turkey have agreed to deepen agricultural and border cooperation, driven by a notable surge in bilateral farm trade over the past year.

According to a report by IRNA, Gholamreza Nouri-Qezeljah detailed his recent trip to Turkey and his attendance at the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) agriculture ministers' meeting in Kyrgyzstan. He said he held extensive meetings with his Turkish counterpart and senior Turkish officials, adding that "the significant increase in agricultural exchanges over the past year is the reason both sides agreed to continue and expand joint cooperation."

Nouri-Qezeljah also addressed his participation in the SCO gathering, emphasizing that discussions focused on food security and the strategic role of member states, which collectively represent more than 40 percent of the global population.

During his diplomatic engagements, the minister met with



Gholamreza Nouri-Qezeljah
● IRNA

representatives from 10 to 12 participating countries and organizations. He noted that a unified position emerged regarding recent geopolitical developments, stating that "condemnation of recent US and Israeli actions against Iran was a common stance" among the attendees.

The US-Israeli aggression, among the primary sites struck, targeted civilian and infrastructure positions.

On the regional front, Nouri-Qezeljah held consultations with the provincial governors of Turkey's Agri and Iğdir regions. Both sides emphasized the need to facilitate border traffic, strengthen local border markets, and advance efforts to establish a joint free trade zone. He added that the Iranian president has given special attention to this area of bilateral cooperation.

Indian ships warned off Hormuz as Iran tightens grip amid US blockade



The UK Maritime Trade Operations (UKMTO) reported that the incident occurred around 20 nautical miles northeast of Oman.
● UKMTO

Economy Desk

Two Indian-flagged ships were warned to stay away from the Strait of Hormuz after being fired upon by Iranian gunboats, sources told The Indian Express on Saturday, as Iran reasserted military control over the strategic waterway following a US-imposed maritime blockade.

Iranian state media and international reports provided accounts of the incident. Tasnim news agency reported that an Indian tanker was fired upon with warning shots to return after ignoring alerts from Iranian forces. TankerTrackers, an online service that tracks ships and tankers, reported that two vessels retreated and turned back from the Strait of Hormuz.

In an unconfirmed report, TankerTrackers stated that following a warning from the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Navy, two Indian-flagged vessels carrying Iraqi oil were forced to retreat and return to the western side of the Strait of Hormuz. According to Tasnim, shooting also occurred during the incident. One of the vessels is a Very Large Crude Carrier (VLCC) flying the Indian flag and carrying 2 million barrels of Iraqi oil.

According to The Indian Express, tensions in the strategically vital Strait of Hormuz escalated sharply on Saturday after Iran reportedly opened fire on two merchant vessels attempting to transit the waterway, following its decision not to reopen the critical oil route. Two Indian vessels also have had to reverse course in the Strait of Hormuz following the gunfire, a vessel-tracker said.

The new strike comes a day after US President Donald Trump announced the continued, full-force naval blockade of the Strait of Hormuz.

Iran's Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) said on Saturday the Islamic Republic will maintain control of all traffic through the strategic Strait of Hormuz until a negotiated end to the US-Israeli-imposed war is achieved.

New Delhi on Saturday summoned the Iranian envoy after the two Indian-flagged ships were fired at. Iran said it had reimposed military control over the strait after the US blocked its ports, effectively tightening its grip over a passage through which nearly a fifth of global oil consumption flows.

The US, through the United States Central Command, confirmed enforcing a complete maritime blockade on ships entering or exiting Iranian ports and coastal areas.

"US Central Command has initiated a full maritime interdiction effort targeting Iranian coastal operations. Vessels attempting to enter or exit Iranian-controlled ports will be subject to inspection and possible denial of passage," CENTCOM said in a statement.

Following the move, at least 23 vessels reportedly reversed course, highlighting the immediate disruption to commercial shipping.

Another Indian oil tanker crosses Hormuz

Another report by the Times of India said that an Indian crude oil tanker crossed the Strait of Hormuz on Saturday, even as tensions around the waterway remained high. Maritime traffic data showed that Dosh Garima passed through the strait, becoming the 10th Indian vessel to cross Hormuz since the war between Iran and the United States began, and the second since the ceasefire that began last Wednesday.

According to the data, the tanker started its journey from Ras Laffan port in Qatar and is now in the Gulf of Oman after crossing the Strait of Hormuz. Meanwhile, an AFP report said at least eight oil and gas tankers crossed Hormuz on Saturday.



By Sajad Abedi
Political analyst

OPINION EXCLUSIVE

The diplomatic landscape of the Middle East and Southwest Asia underwent a seismic shift in April 2026 as Islamabad emerged as the unlikely yet pivotal stage for negotiations between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the United States. Following 40 days of unprecedented military aggression by US and Israeli forces against Iranian soil — a conflict that began in late February and saw the martyrdom of Iran's previous leadership — the transition to the "Islamabad Track" represents a critical juncture. This analysis explores the dynamics, obstacles, and future trajectory of these high-stakes negotiations.

Context: from kinetic war to diplomatic maneuvering

The negotiations in Islamabad, mediated by Pakistan's civil-military leadership, came on the heels of a two-week cease-fire initiated on April 8, 2026. The conflict, which triggered massive Iranian retaliatory strikes against US regional bases and a near-total blockade of the Strait of Hormuz, forced Washington to the table. For Iran, under the new leadership of Ayatollah Seyyed Mojtaba Khamenei, the talks are not viewed as a retreat but as a "consolidation of gains". The presence of heavyweights like Iranian Parliament Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf and Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi in Islamabad signals that Tehran is negotiating from a position of perceived military parity, rather than submission.

Actors and atmosphere

The composition of the delegations reveals the gravity of the encounter. On the American side, Vice President JD Vance, accompanied by influential figures such as Jared Kushner and Steve Witkoff, represents a Trump administration that is simultaneously aggressive and transactional. Iran, conversely, has fielded a "war cabinet" of diplomats and technocrats, including Ali Baqeri Kani and Central Bank Governor Abdolnasser Hemmati. The first round of talks in mid-April ended without a definitive agreement after 20 hours of intensive discussion. While the US reportedly accepted Iran's "10-point

Future of Iran-US negotiations on Islamabad's ground



A high-level Iranian delegation, led by Parliament Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf (c), arrives in Islamabad, Pakistan, to participate in the talks with the United States, on April 11, 2026.
● XINHUA

framework" as a baseline, the transition from generalities to technical specifics has proven arduous. The Iranian side has characterized the US stance as "maximalist," while Washington remains hesitant to provide the ironclad guarantees Tehran demands.

Strategic stumbling blocks

Four primary issues define the impasse on Islamabad's ground: **1. Sovereignty and the Strait of Hormuz:** Iran's insistence on maintaining absolute military control over the Strait of Hormuz is a non-negotiable point for Tehran but a strategic nightmare for Washington. The blockade demonstrated Iran's ability to choke global energy markets, and Tehran seeks formal recognition of this leverage. **2. Sanctions and Compensation:** Unlike previous rounds of diplomacy (such as the 2015 JCPOA), Iran is now demanding not just the removal of all primary and secondary sanctions, but also financial compensation for the damage inflicted during the 40-day war of aggression.

3. The Nuclear Question: Despite the conflict, Iran maintains its right to a peaceful nuclear program including advanced enrichment. The US reluctance to acknowledge this "inalienable right" remains a fundamental friction point. **4. The Regional Front:** The situation in Lebanon remains a "litmus test" for the talks. Iran's precondition for the talks included a cessation of Israeli attacks on Beirut and southern Lebanon. The ambiguity regarding the inclusion of Hezbollah in the cease-fire has already strained the Islamabad process.

Pakistan as strategic bridge

The choice of Islamabad as a venue is significant. Pakistan, led by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Army Chief General Asim Munir, has leveraged its unique position as a neighbor to Iran and a long-term partner of the US. By hosting these talks, Pakistan aims to prevent a total regional conflagration that would inevitably destabilize its own borders. However, the me-

diation is fragile; if the talks collapse, Pakistan faces the risk of being caught in the crossfire of a renewed "war of the cities" or a maritime blockade.

Future scenarios: three paths forward

As the two-week cease-fire nears its expiration, three scenarios emerge for the future of the Islamabad negotiations:

- **Scenario 1: Managed De-escalation.** The two sides agree to a "long-term truce" rather than a final peace treaty. This would involve a partial lifting of sanctions in exchange for the reopening of the Strait of Hormuz, moving the technical discussions to a neutral European ground like Geneva or Ankara.
- **Scenario 2: Diplomatic Collapse and Escalation.** If the US maintains its maximalist demands and refuses the compensation clause, the Iranian delegation — which has already threatened to leave the table — may return to Tehran. This would likely lead to a resumption of ki-

netic operations, with Iran utilizing its "active defense" strategy across the region.

Scenario 3: The "Islamabad Protocol"

A surprise breakthrough mediated by regional powers (including Turkey and Saudi Arabia) where a new security architecture for the Persian Gulf is established, acknowledging Iran's regional influence in exchange for a permanent end to US-Israeli strikes.

The "ground of Islamabad" has provided a temporary sanctuary for diplomacy in a region otherwise engulfed in flames. However, the future of these negotiations depends less on the skill of the mediators and more on the willingness of the Trump administration to accept the new geopolitical realities of a post-February 2026 Middle East. For Iran, the goal remains clear: a permanent end to aggression and the full restoration of its economic and sovereign rights. Without these, the Islamabad talks may be remembered not as a bridge to peace, but as the final "calm before the storm".



For Iran, under the new leadership of Ayatollah Seyyed Mojtaba Khamenei, the talks are not viewed as a retreat but as a "consolidation of gains". The presence of heavyweights like Iranian Parliament Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf and Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi in Islamabad signals that Tehran is negotiating from a position of perceived military parity, rather than submission.

Hezbollah's significant role in Ramadan War



By Allah-Karam Moshtaghi
Former Iranian diplomat in Beirut

OPINION

Lebanon's Hezbollah has played a pivotal role in recent regional developments and strengthened the Axis of Resistance in the Ramadan War. Looking back, we can divide Hezbollah's political and military conduct into four chronological phases.

The first phase spans from the beginning of Operation Al-Aqsa Flood in September–October 2023 until prior to the Zionist regime's ground invasion of Lebanon in September–October 2024. The second phase began shortly thereafter, concurrent with the pager incident and the martyrdom of several senior political and military commanders

of Hezbollah, including Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, and continued until November–December 2024, coinciding with the cease-fire and the fall of Bashar al-Assad's government in Syria. The third phase encompasses the period from the fall of the Syrian government until February 2026, and the fourth phase commenced with the military aggression of the United States and the Zionist regime against Iran.

Miscalculation regarding collapse of "unity of fronts" strategy

The US and Zionist regime's assessment was that Iran-backed groups in the region had been severely weakened and lacked even the capacity for self-defense, let alone the ability to assist Iran. Furthermore, given Iran's unwillingness to request assistance from its allies during the 12-Day

War, the perception emerged that the "Unity of Fronts" strategy had collapsed. On the other hand, they believed that Hezbollah, due to internal challenges and logistical constraints, lacked the capacity to enter the battlefield and open a new front — even if it possessed the will to do so.

Developments during the second and third phases created conditions under which Hezbollah's assistance to Iran or the opening of a new front against the Zionist regime from Lebanon appeared impossible. During this same period, Hezbollah repeatedly announced that it was focused on



The illustration shows supporters of Hezbollah waving the group's flag and holding pictures of its slain leader Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah.
● ABOLITION MEDIA



reconstructing damaged areas, resettling the displaced, and politically organizing its internal situation. Moreover, it did not demonstrate any direct military response to Zionist regime attacks during this time — a fact that reinforced the perception that Hezbollah would not engage in future confrontations.

Wisdom of Shia movement in Lebanon and its challenges

The strategic wisdom of the Shia movement in Lebanon enabled Hezbollah to pursue military operations. In this regard, the proposal to suspend Lebanese parliamentary elections for one year — initially put forward by France and Saudi Arabia — was transformed, through the wisdom of Nabih Berri, into a two-year suspension. This decision freed Hezbollah from focusing on electoral competition and internal matters, allowing it to redirect its energy toward other domains.

The suspension of elections also alleviated Hezbollah's concerns regarding the participation of southern displaced persons in voting as Lebanon's law requires citizens to vote in their place of birth. On the other hand, Hezbollah endeavored

to avoid internal political confrontations and even adopted a conciliatory approach in the face of hostile media and political actions by certain factions. Furthermore, domestic opponents have not yet reached a level of audacity that would enable them to undertake military or security actions against this group.

As a result, Hezbollah is currently concentrating its capabilities and capacities in two domains: social and military-security. In the social sphere, managing the displaced — particularly following the loss of Syria's geographical support — has become one of its serious challenges.

Additionally, the high number of martyrs and wounded among supporters of the Resistance has exerted significant pressure on this movement. Approximately 1,500 Lebanese citizens who are supporters of the Resistance have been martyred in Lebanon over a 40-day period recently, with over 4,000 wounded, and millions displaced alongside them. Considering that approximately 60 percent of Lebanon's population supports the Resistance, with Shias constituting 30 percent of this base, social pressure remains extremely high.

Despite these conditions, Hezbollah

continued to conduct military operations in Lebanon — operations that, within a geography under constant surveillance and attacks by the Zionist regime, have been exceedingly difficult, yet were being carried out daily, extensively, and with special initiatives.

A significant portion of Lebanese society views this war not as a sign of weakness but as an indication of Hezbollah's resurgence and demonstration of power; despite certain attacks and damages, public perception of this group has not turned negative.

Lebanon's political condition favor Hezbollah

If we examine Lebanon's government through the framework of its army, presidency, and prime ministership, it cannot be said that the dominant approach is anti-Hezbollah. Although some factions seek to constrain this group, conditions do not permit practical action against it.

Anti-Hezbollah actions are primarily undertaken by factions such as the Lebanese Forces band led by Samir Geagea and certain ministers; these actions are often framed as national initiatives since, otherwise, they would not dare to implement them as a di-



Lebanon's President Joseph Aoun (R) meets with Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri to address the Israeli escalation along the Blue Line, at the presidential palace in Baabda on March 23, 2026.
● L'ORIENT-LE JOUR

rect confrontation with Hezbollah.

Hezbollah is currently part of the Lebanese governmental structure. Together with the Amal Movement, it holds five ministerial portfolios in the government and maintains influence within the army and security apparatuses. Therefore, the Lebanese government cannot be considered absolutely anti-Hezbollah.

Regarding the presidency as well, given the moderate and rational approach of Joseph Aoun, Hezbollah is not regarded as an enemy. Indeed, in certain instances, the hardline positions of the likes of

Youssef Raji are moderated. Furthermore, reports indicate that the Prime Minister has, in some cases, sought to avoid provocative actions by Raji against Hezbollah.

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



The proposal to suspend Lebanese parliamentary elections for one year — initially put forward by France and Saudi Arabia — was transformed, through the wisdom of Nabih Berri, into a two-year suspension. This decision freed Hezbollah from focusing on electoral competition and internal matters, allowing it to redirect its energy toward the military domain.

Collapse is real

Lebanon cease-fire marks a historic strategic defeat



By Ramzy Baroud
Author, journalist

OPINION

A cease-fire in Lebanon was announced on Thursday by US President Donald Trump, but its reality tells a very different story. The cease-fire was not the product of American diplomacy, nor Israeli strategic calculation. It was imposed — largely as a result of sustained Iranian pressure.

Washington, Tel Aviv, and their allies — including some within Lebanon itself — will continue to deny this reality. Acknowledging Iran's role would mean admitting that a historic precedent has been set: for the first time, forces opposing the United States and Israel have succeeded in imposing conditions on both.

This is not a minor development. It is a strategic rupture. But it is not the only fundamental shift now underway: Israel's very approach to war and diplomacy is itself changing.

After failing to secure victory through overwhelming violence, Israel is increasingly relying on coercive diplomacy to impose political outcomes.

Over the past two to three decades, this Israeli strategy has become unmistakably clear: achieving through diplomacy what it has failed to impose on the battlefield.

'Diplomacy' as war

Israeli "diplomacy" does not conform to the conventional meaning of the term. It is not negotiation between equals, nor a genuine pursuit of peace. Rather, it is diplomacy fused with violence: assassinations, sieges, blockades, political coercion, and the systematic manipulation of internal divisions within opposing societies. It is diplomacy as an extension of war by other means.

Likewise, Israel's conception of the "battlefield" is fundamentally different. The deliberate targeting of civilians and civilian infrastructure is not incidental, nor merely "collateral damage";



From left: Israeli Ambassador to the US Yechiel Leiter, US Secretary of State Marco Rubio, US Ambassador to Lebanon Michel Rubio, and Lebanese Ambassador to the US Nada Hamadeh Moawad pose for a photo before engaging in cease-fire talks in Washington, on April 14, 2026.
● SHMULIK ALMANY/ISRAELI EMBASSY IN WASHINGTON

it is central to the strategy itself. Nowhere is this clearer than in Gaza. Following the ongoing genocide, vast swathes of Gaza have been reduced to rubble, with estimates indicating that around 90 percent of the whole of Gaza has been destroyed. According to the Gaza Ministry of Health, women and children consistently account for roughly 70 percent of all of Gaza's casualties.

This is not collateral damage. It is the deliberate destruction of a civilian population, an act of genocide that is designed to force mass displacement and remake the political and demographic reality in Israel's favor.

The same logic extends beyond Gaza. It shapes Israel's wars in Lebanon against Hezbollah and its broader confrontation with Iran. The United States, Israel's principal ally, has historically operated within a similar paradigm. From Vietnam to Iraq, civilian populations, infrastructure, and even the environment itself have borne the brunt of American warfare.

A faltering model

It is often argued that Israel turned to "diplomacy" following its forced withdrawal from southern Lebanon in 2000 under resistance pressure. While this moment was pivotal, it was not

the beginning. Earlier precedents exist. The First Intifada (1987–1993) demonstrated that a sustained popular uprising could not be crushed through brute force alone. Despite Israel's extensive repression, the revolt endured.

It was in this context that the Oslo Accords emerged — not as a genuine peace process, but as a strategic lifeline. Through Oslo, Israel achieved politically what it could not impose militarily: the pacification of the uprising, the institutionalization of Palestinian political fragmentation, and the transformation of the Palestinian Authority into a mechanism for internal control.

Meanwhile, settlement expansion accelerated, and Israel reaped the global legitimacy of appearing as a "peace-seeking" entity.

Yet the last two decades have exposed the limits of this model. From Lebanon in 2006 to repeated wars on Gaza (2008–09, 2012, 2014, 2021, and the ongoing genocide since 2023), Israel has failed to secure decisive strategic victories. Its ongoing confrontations with Hezbollah and Iran further underscore this failure.

Not only has Israel been unable to achieve its stated military objectives, but it has also failed to translate overwhelming fire-

power — even genocide — into lasting political gains.

Some interpret this as a shift toward perpetual war under Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. But this reading is incomplete.

power — even genocide — into lasting political gains. Some interpret this as a shift toward perpetual war under Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. But this reading is incomplete.

Perpetual war?

Netanyahu understands that these wars cannot be sustained indefinitely. Yet ending them without victory would carry even greater consequences: the collapse of Israel's deterrence doctrine and, potentially, the unraveling of its broader project of regional dominance.

This dilemma strikes at the heart of Zionist ideology, particularly Ze'ev Jabotinsky's concept of the "Iron Wall" — the belief that overwhelming, unrelenting force would eventually compel indigenous resistance to surrender.

Today, that premise is being tested — and found wanting. Netanyahu has repeatedly framed

current wars as existential, comparable in significance to 1948 — the war that resulted in the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians during the Nakba and the establishment of Israel.

Indeed, the parallels are unmistakable: mass displacement, civilian terror, systematic destruction, and unwavering Western backing — once from Britain, now from the United States.

But there is a critical difference: The 1948 war led to the creation of Israel; the current wars are about its survival as an exclusivist settler colonial project.

And herein lies the paradox: the longer these wars continue, the more they expose Israel's inability to secure decisive outcomes. Yet ending them without victory risks a historic defeat — not only for Netanyahu, but for the ideological foundations of the Israel itself.

Israeli society appears to recognize the stakes. Polls throughout 2024 and 2025 have shown overwhelming support among Israeli Jews for continued military campaigns in Gaza and confrontations with Iran and Lebanon.

Public discourse frames this support in terms of "security" and "deterrence". But the underlying reality is deeper: a collective recognition that the long-standing project of military supremacy is faltering.

Having failed to subdue Gaza despite the genocide, Israel is now attempting to achieve through diplomatic maneuvering what it could not secure through war. Proposals for international oversight, stabilization forces, and externally imposed governance structures are all variations of this approach.

But these efforts are unlikely to succeed.

Gaza is no longer isolated. The regional dimension of the conflict has expanded, linking Lebanon, Iran, and other actors into a broader, interconnected front.

Balance is shifting

In Lebanon, Israel has been repeatedly forced toward cease-fire

arrangements not out of choice, but because it failed to defeat Hezbollah or break the will of the Lebanese people.

This dynamic extends to Iran. Following the joint aggression on Iran starting February 28, both the United States and Israel were compelled to accept de-escalation frameworks after failing to achieve rapid or decisive outcomes.

The expectation that Iran could be quickly destabilized — replicating the models of Iraq or Libya — proved illusory. Instead, the confrontation revealed the limits of military escalation and forced a return to negotiations.

This is the essence of Israel's current predicament.

Diplomacy, in this model, is not an alternative to war — it is a pause within it. A temporary tool used to regroup before the next phase of confrontation.

But in Israel's case, this aggressive "diplomacy" is increasingly becoming the only available tool, precisely because its military strategy has failed to deliver victory.

Lebanon was meant to be the exception — a theater where Israel could isolate and defeat Hezbollah. Instead, it became further evidence of strategic failure.

Efforts to separate the fronts — Gaza, Lebanon, Yemen, Iran — have collapsed. Iran has explicitly linked its diplomatic engagement to developments on other fronts, forcing Israel into a broader strategic entanglement it cannot control. This marks a profound shift.

The foundational pillars of Israeli strategy — overwhelming force, fragmentation of adversaries, narrative control, and political engineering — are no longer functioning as they once did.

Yet Netanyahu continues to project victory, declaring success at regular intervals, invoking deterrence, and framing ongoing wars as strategic achievements.

But these narratives ring hollow.

The article first appeared on The Palestine Chronicle.

World Taekwondo Junior Championships: Iran collects seven medals, finishes men's runner-up

Sports Desk

Iranian men's and women's teams concluded their campaign at the World Taekwondo Junior Championships in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, with seven medals, including four golds.

A haul of three golds saw the country claim the runner-up spot in the men's event with 397 points – seven behind host Uzbekistan, which bagged two golds and two silvers, plus one bronze, to become only the third nation, following South Korea and Iran, to lift the men's trophy across 15 editions of the global showpiece.

Russia stood third – courtesy of two golds and a silver – with South Korea and Thailand in the following spots.

In the women's competition, Iran – champion in the previous edition – had to settle for a fourth-place finish behind China,

Croatia, and South Korea.

Three Iranians were in action on the final day of the event at the Martial Arts Sports Complex in Tashkent's Olympic City, finishing empty-handed after last-eight setbacks in their respective categories.

Ali Razmian was knocked out by Kazakhstan's Adilet Sheri in the men's -51kg category, while Rozhan Heidari (-52kg) and Aynaz Mikaeili (-63kg) fell to Spain's Itziar Garcia Godoy and Uzbekistan's Mo Uktamjonova, respectively, in the women's contests on Friday.

Parsa Houshyar secured Iran's third men's gold when he defeated France's Nolhan Rosemond in the -63kg final on the penultimate day of the tournament.

Rosemond led the first round but conceded five Gam-jeoms (penalty points), handing the round to his opponent. Houshyar appeared on course to win the sec-

ond round, only for Rosemond to deliver a stunning late body kick and take it 4-3. But Houshyar was not to be denied, claiming the decisive third round 9-6 to seal gold.

Benyamin Soltanian dominated the men's -73kg event without dropping a single round, capping off with a final victory over South Korea's Seung Min Ahn.

Mohammad-Erfan Khodaei also enjoyed an emphatic campaign in the men's division, defeating Poland's Antoni Sokolowski in the -55kg final – the Iranian's sixth straight-round win of the competition.

Hana Zarrinkamar, meanwhile, headlined the Iranian women's medal hunt in Tashkent by grabbing gold in the +68kg class, thanks to a final victory over Czechia's Alice Bínová, which saw the Iranian girl secure back-to-back titles at the



Parsa Houshyar (L) offers a military salute to the Iranian flag following his victory in the men's -63kg final at the World Taekwondo Junior Championships in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, on April 16, 2026.
● IRAN TAEKWONDO FEDERATION

World Junior Championships. Pinar Lotfizadeh (-59kg), Bahar Tahmasbi (-42kg), and Helia Ebrahimian (-49kg) added three women's bronzes to Iran's medal count.

Despite failing to repeat the historic double team title-winning success of 2024, the Iranian

boys and girls will have every reason to be pleased by the final outcome in Tashkent after they were forced to go through exhausting circumstances amid the country's military conflict with the United States and Israel.

The Iranian delegation had to

travel by road for 27 hours to cross the Turkmenistan border, followed by connecting flights to the Uzbek capital in order to attend the championships.

The six-day contests featured 986 competitors from 115 countries.

Iran learns pool fate in AVC Women's Volleyball Cup



● GEORGE WOOD/GETTY IMAGES

Sports Desk

The Iranian national team has been drawn against defending champion Vietnam, Kazakhstan, Indonesia, Hong Kong, and Lebanon in Pool B of the upcoming AVC Women's Volleyball Cup, which begins June 6 in Candon, Philippines.

The draw for the seventh edition of the annual tournament, formerly known as the AVC Women's Challenge Cup, took place in Manila on Friday, with 12 teams split into two groups.

Pool A will feature the host Philippines, Chinese Taipei, South Korea, Kyrgyzstan, Australia, and Uzbekistan.

The event marks Iran's third participation in the tournament, following last year's sixth-place finish in Hanoi, Vietnam, and a fifth-place finish in the 2023 edition in Gresik, Indonesia.

"The AVC Women's Cup continues to establish itself as a premier competition, showcasing the highest level of women's volleyball in Asia. With the strong lineup of teams this year, we are confident that the tournament will deliver exciting matches and further elevate the sport across the region," AVC President Ramon Suzara said during the drawing ceremony.

The preliminary round will feature 30 matches across June 6-9 and June 11-12, with teams competing in a round-robin format within their respective pools. A rest day is scheduled for June 10.

The top teams from each pool will advance to the knockout stage, beginning June 13, which includes the semifinals and classification matches. The tournament will culminate on June 14 with finals for all ranking positions, including the gold medal match.

The participating teams include host Philippines, defending champion Vietnam, and top-ranked teams based on the latest world rankings: Kazakhstan, Chinese Taipei, South Korea, Iran, and Kyrgyzstan booked their places in the showpiece via the latest FIVB World Rankings.

Additional representatives from AVC zones complete the lineup, including Uzbekistan (CAVA), Hong Kong (EAVA), Australia (OZVA), Indonesia (SAVA), and Lebanon (WAVA).

Iran will play in a couple of rematches from last year's edition, which saw the team beat Indonesia in a five-set thriller in the pool phase before falling in four sets in the classification match. South Korean head coach Lee Do-hee's side also faced Kazakhstan in Hanoi, suffering a 3-1 loss.

Iran will look to build on a decent run of results under Lee last year, which included a historic title at the CAVA Women's Volleyball Championship – a maiden international gold since the first Iranian national team was established in 1963 – as well as a bronze medal at the Islamic Solidarity Games in November.

World Snooker Championship: Vafaei to open Crucible campaign against Chinese Si

Sports Desk

Iran's Hossein Vafaei will face 15th seed Si Jiahui of China in the opening round of the Halo World Snooker Championship in Sheffield, England, on Wednesday.

The main draw of the prestigious tournament, which began at the iconic Crucible Theatre on Saturday, features 16 top-seeded players and 16 qualifiers.

Vafaei booked his place at the event after back-to-back victories in the qualifiers last week. Entering the competition in the third qualifying round, he defeated Poland's Michał Szubarczyk 10-2 before overcoming China's Gao Yang 10-4 on Tuesday.

The Iranian will resume the match against Si in a best-of-19-frames format on Thursday, with the winner taking on world number one and 2019 champion Judd Trump or his fellow Englishman Gary Wilson on Saturday.

Seven-time champion Ronnie O'Sul-



● GEORGE WOOD/GETTY IMAGES

ivan will open his campaign against Chinese debutant He Guoqiang on Tuesday. The Englishman, whose most recent world title triumph came in 2022, is making his 34th consecutive appearance at the World Championship.

The 50-year-old has not won a ranking title this season but made the sport's highest-ever professional break with a 153 at the World Open in March.

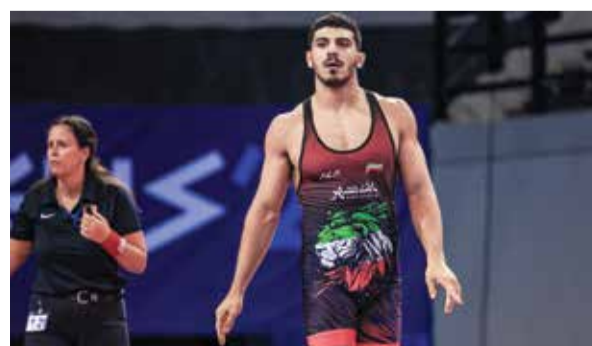
English third seed Kyren Wilson – the 2024 champion – will face his teenage compatriot Stan Moody on Monday.

Iranian wrestlers scoop five medals in Champions tourney

Sports Desk

Iranian wrestlers grabbed five medals on the opening day of the Champions international tournament in Antalya, Turkey.

Reigning world cadet champion Amirsam Mohammadi spearheaded the country's medal hunt on Friday by claiming the top prize in the Greco-Roman 97kg weight class. There was further glory for Iran in the Greco-Roman division as Mohammadreza Gholami settled for silver in the 67kg class, while Alireza Amiri (55kg) and former world under-17



Iranian Greco-Roman wrestler Amirsam Mohammadi, pictured in last year's U17 World Championships, won the 97kg gold medal at the Champions international tournament in Antalya, Türkiye.
● IUWW

gold medalist Amir-Mahdi Saeidi-Nava (77kg) added a pair of bronze medals.

Mohammad-Javad Aboutalebi (67kg), Iliya Ilkhani (67kg), and Mohammad Moradi (77kg)

missed out on the podium in the Greco-Roman contests.

Danial Tavakkoli was the only Iranian freestyle medalist on Friday, taking a consolation bronze in the 97kg category, while Erfan Siri (57kg), Sajjad Pirdayeh (70kg), and 79kg competitors Mohammad-Mahdi Mami-vand and Sobhan Esmi all finished empty-handed in their respective events.

The three-day tournament features under-20 wrestlers from global powerhouses of the sport, including Iran, Russia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Türkiye, Kyrgyzstan, and Georgia.

Officials urge protection of cultural treasures on World Heritage Day

Iranica Desk

Coinciding with April 18, International Day for Monuments and Sites known also as World Heritage Day, the Directors General of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts of three provinces — Khuzestan, South Khorasan, and Gilan — in separate messages commemorating this day, emphasized the importance of safeguarding cultural heritage as the “living memory of nations” and called for the cooperation of the public, specialists, and researchers to protect valuable historical sites.

According to chtn.ir, Mohammad Jorvand, Director General of the Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts Organization of Khuzestan Province, described World Heritage Day, as a valuable opportunity to highlight the importance of protecting cultural heritage as the living memory of nations. Referring to Khuzestan’s ancient background and the province’s rare collection of monuments, historical sites, and civilizational remains, he said, “These precious treasures form an important part of Iran’s cultural identity. Every historical site — from ancient ruins and historic cities to valuable structures from various eras — tells a clear story of this land’s civilizational richness.”

Jorvand stated that the need to protect this heritage is felt more strongly today than ever before, adding, “The recent war and the attacks by America and Israel have shown that historical monuments are not merely collections of stone and clay but symbols of a nation’s identity, resilience, and endurance. The threats directed at cultural infrastructure and buildings in recent years once again underscore the importance of syn-



Ivan-e Karkheh, Khuzestan Province
● mrbilit.com



Sarayan Caravanserai, South Khorasan Province
● kojaro.com

ergy in safeguarding cultural heritage.”

He described the protection of cultural heritage as a national and public responsibility, noting that this duty does not rest solely on one institution but requires the participation of researchers, specialists, cultural activists, and the public.

Jorvand further emphasized, “The Khuzestan Cultural Heritage Organization, with the support of experts and heritage enthusiasts, is seriously pursuing the protection, restoration, and promotion of the province’s historical monuments.”

He concluded by inviting all enthusiasts, researchers, and activists in this field to contribute with empathy and cooperation to preserving these enduring assets for future generations.

Seyyed Ahmad Barabadi, Director General of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts Organization of South Khorasan Province, also issued a message commemorating this day, stressing the need for firm and timely protection of cultural heritage against threats. He described cultural heritage as an irreplaceable treasure and the living memory of human civilization — one that connects our



Mirza Kuchak Khan's House, Gilan Province
● mizboon.com

roots to the past and will serve as a guiding light for the future. Referring to this year’s ICOMOS (International Council on Monuments and Sites) theme — Emergency Response for Living Heritage in contexts of Conflicts and Disasters — he called for intelligent and decisive action against any threat to these ancient relics. Expressing regret over the damage inflicted upon historical buildings and sites in recent attacks, he described these events as “a bitter and clear testimony” that heritage destruction is not only a cultural loss but also the erasure of a part of humanity’s shared memory.

Barabadi emphasized Iran’s

even greater responsibility to protect these valuable historical trusts, stating that the region’s tense conditions necessitate preventive approaches and emergency response in protecting our heritage.

He further declared the South Khorasan Province’s Cultural Heritage Organization’s commitment to protecting, restoring, and promoting the province’s valuable monuments, which he said belong to both present and future generations. He considered their protection a national, human, and global duty, the realization of which is impossible without synergy, empathy, and active participa-

tion from all those concerned with the culture and civilization of dear Iran.

Barabadi called upon all fellow citizens, especially the youth and the future-building generation, to pay deeper attention to these peerless treasures so that, through cooperation and solidarity, we may safeguard our heritage from potential enemy threats and pass on a rich legacy to future generations.

Yousef Salmankhah, Director General of the Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts Organization of Gilan Province, also referred to this year’s theme of ICOMOS for World Heritage Day and described living heritage as encompassing all dimensions of cultural heritage, including tangible, intangible, and natural heritage.

Salmankhah called this day a valuable opportunity to promote the discourse of heritage protection and the importance of institutionalizing a culture of peace and heritage-love among Iranians. Emphasizing the power of Iran’s national identity, he said, “The theme reminds us more than ever of the simultaneous importance of vitality and protection, and that dear Iran is not merely a static geography but the embodiment

of ‘living heritage’ — a heritage that finds meaning in the connection between ancient monuments and the ongoing life of the people. In this context, the vast province of Gilan, with its rare wealth of heritage — from prehistoric caves to ancient sites and magnificent buildings — has a significant share in this national capital.”

He further explained emergency response as the next component of this year’s slogan, describing it as an inseparable part of the risk management cycle, stating, “Emergency response is not an isolated intervention but a systemic cycle of actions with a long-term vision that seeks to protect humanity’s living heritage in crisis situations.”

Salmankhah noted that safeguarding cultural heritage requires public participation, for every citizen must themselves be a ‘heritage guardian,’ and raising public awareness is the first and strongest bulwark against destruction and oblivion.

Referring to the recent developments of the American-Israeli war and the damage inflicted upon 140 historical buildings and sites across the country, he emphasized the need to enhance the resilience, strength, and safety of historical monuments, as well as the government’s efforts in preventive measures and intelligent recovery management against threats.

Salmankhah, inviting all elites, those involved in the cultural heritage sector and the people of Iran, especially his fellow Gilani citizens, stated, “Our heritage is our identity, and it is necessary to take steps with a new perspective and redoubled effort to introduce and protect these unparalleled treasures, and to strive in their preservation.”

Khantakhti Bas-Relief draws visitors to northwestern Iran

Iranica Desk

A historical rock inscription has been discovered carved into the solid heart of Pir-e Chavush Mountain, located near the city of Salmas and close to the village of Khantakhti in northwestern province of West Azarbaijan. The very existence of the Khantakhti stone inscription stands as a powerful testament to the authenticity, deep-rooted history, and cultural identity of this region of the country.

Carved during the Sassanid era, the inscription vividly depicts historical events and the conquests achieved by Iranians at that time. Recognized as a national heritage site, the Khantakhti inscription offers visitors a fascinating glimpse into one of the country’s most authentic historical attractions. It symbolizes the glory and pride of ancient Persia, as the engravings clearly represent a victory over Roman domination.

Access to the inscription has been made easy by the construction of a staircase built directly along the path, allowing tourists to view the carving up close and fully enjoy its im-



mense historical significance. According to detailed research, the Khantakhti inscription in Salmas dates back to the Sassanid period and the third century CE, making it approximately 1,800 years old. Numerous renowned archaeologists — including Carpenter, Flinders, Coste, de Morgan, Lehmann, and Walter Hintz — have studied and introduced these remarkable rock reliefs to the academic world.

The Romans repeatedly attacked this region over the centuries. During one such invasion, Emperor Julianus launched a direct assault on Salmas and brought the city under temporary Roman control. Those who, in their writings, referred to Salmas as “Gilia Kamus,” meaning “land of whole grains,” were among those who had occupied it. However, in one of the most significant battles of the era,



● wikipedia.org

Ardashir I and his successor Shapur I of the Sassanid Empire decisively defeated the Roman armies and succeeded in conquering Armenia. The invaluable stone carving of Khantakhti in Salmas is believed to have been created precisely to commemorate this hard-won victory.

The bas-relief famously depicts the Roman Emperor Valerian kneeling in submission before Shapur I. It also shows the local

Armenian ruler offering gifts to Ardashir and Shapur as a sign of allegiance.

Excavations carried out in Salmas link the city’s origins all the way back to the Medes era. During Achaemenid times, Salmas was known as Zarund. After the fall of the Arsacid (Parthian) king Khosrow, and due to its strategic position between the rival powers of Iran and Rome, the region eventually came under Sassanid control.

The Khantakhti inscription measures approximately two meters in width and between 2.5 to 3.5 meters in length. These precious carvings are located about two meters above ground level, and their beauty, precision, and intricacy capture the attention of every viewer who sees them. The engraving depicts both foot soldiers and horsemen, all wearing what appear to be crowns. Their clothing closely resembles that which was typical of the reign of Ardashir, the founder of the Sassanid dynasty.

It is widely believed that the horseman on the left is Ardashir I, and the one on the right is Shapur I — both powerful kings who achieved magnificent victories over the Romans during their respective reigns.

This bas-relief belongs to the third century CE and the royal period of the Sassanid dynasty. Present-day Salmas was, during the Parthian era, a buffer zone between Iran and the Roman Empire, later becoming a major site of military conflict between the two superpowers of the time: the Sassanid Persian Empire and the Roman Empire.

Tehran, Moscow urge UNESCO action after strikes damage heritage sites



Arts & Culture Desk

Ahmad Pakatchi and Rinat Alyautdinov, Iran and Russia's permanent representatives to UNESCO, said in a joint emergency letter that missile strikes by the United States and Israel hit civilian infrastructure and cultural sites in Tehran, causing serious damage and breaching international law.

The letter, addressed to UNESCO Director-General Audrey Azoulay and shared by Iran's permanent mission, said the area around the St. Nicholas Orthodox Cathedral was struck during the early hours of April 1, IRNA reported.

The landmark, designed by Russian architect Nikolai Markov and listed on Iran's National Heritage register, sustained severe structural damage. The diplomats said the blasts shattered windows and destroyed doors at the cathedral, while a neighboring facility operating as a Russian nursing home suffered extensive damage, including a partial roof collapse. The incident coincided with the Christian observance of Great Lent

and the approach of Easter, heightening the site's religious significance. Pakatchi and Alyautdinov said targeting areas adjacent to cultural landmarks and humanitarian civilian infrastructure constituted a "clear violation" of international humanitarian law, citing the 1954 Hague Convention. They condemned the strikes and warned they risk undermining cultural identity and long-term regional stability.

The two envoys called on UNESCO to issue a formal condemnation and to step up international efforts to prevent further damage to cultural property.

Iran's Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts said about 140 historical sites nationwide have been damaged or destroyed in the attacks, with financial losses estimated at roughly 75 trillion rials (about \$48.6 million).

UNESCO had earlier warned of risks to heritage sites, including damage reported at the Golestan Palace, and said it continues to share geographical coordinates of protected sites with parties to minimize harm.

Parliamentarians push to enshrine Strait of Hormuz national day

Social Desk

Iranian lawmakers have tabled proposals to designate a "National Day of the Strait of Hormuz" in the official calendar, senior Parliament figures told ISNA.

Alireza Salimi, a member of the Parliament's presiding board, said a group of legislators had drafted a bill to formalize the commemoration, with two routes under consideration: endorsement by the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution or, failing that, passage through Parliament.

Salimi said two dates were under review, February 28, marking what officials describe as the start of Iran's defensive campaign in the "third imposed war", and the date of parliamentary approval of legislation affirming Iran's sovereignty over the Strait of Hormuz. He signaled a preference for February 28, citing its symbolic weight.



Separately, lawmaker Esmail Hosseini, speaking on April 18, said a fast-tracked, double-urgency bill had been submitted to Parliament.

He linked the initiative to historical milestones, including March 20, 1951, when Iran nationalized its oil industry, casting it as part of a broader struggle to assert control over national resources.

Hosseini said the proposed designation would show Iran's role in managing and safeguarding the strategic waterway in line with international conventions, arguing that such stewardship has been pivotal to the country's political and economic resilience.

Alamut Castle reopens to visitors as UNESCO bid enters final stage

Arts & Culture Desk

Alamut Castle in Iran's northwestern Qazvin Province reopened to visitors on April 18 after an 18-month closure, provincial heritage chief Maryam Mahdavi said, marking a return timed with International Day for Monuments and Sites as the landmark nears a final decision on its UNESCO World Heritage bid.

Mahdavi, acting head of cultural heritage in Qazvin Province, said the high-profile site had undergone extensive ground preparation and conservation works before welcoming tourists again, IRNA reported.

The reopening comes as Iran pushes to secure global listing for the mountain citadel, a process officials say is in its closing phase.

In July 2025, Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Reza Salehi-Amiri said international evaluators were expected to conduct a final inspection in early autumn, describing a potential inscription as a "turning point" for regional tourism.

Perched on a rugged ridge about 200 kilometers northwest of Tehran, the site, long known as the "Eagle's Nest", rose to prominence in 1090, serving for over a century as the intellectual and strategic



hub. Authorities are concurrently moving to scale up accommodation capacity and court private investment, aiming to leverage a prospective listing into sustained visitor inflows and broader economic spillovers across the province.

Iranian cinema shows signs of rebound amid wartime disruption

Arts & Culture Desk

Iranian cinemas grossed about 120 billion rials, roughly \$78,500, and drew more than 130,000 cumulative admissions between March 16 and April 18, according to the Cinema Management and Screening System SAMFA on Saturday, as the sector struggles to regain momentum after wartime disruption and a brief ceasefire period.

Since cinemas reopened on March 16, four new domestic releases have anchored ticket sales. 'Midnight' by Mohammad Hossein Mahdavian led the market with 43,500 ad-

missions and 36 billion rials in revenue. It was followed by 'Gambler' with 10,000 viewers, 'Paradise for Criminals' with 5,800, and 'Line of Rescue' with 5,000.

A broader slate of comedies, animation and war-themed films added to the circuit from April 10, pushing combined attendance to 66,000 viewers and revenues to 58.24 billion rials, about \$38,100.

'Cloture' emerged as the top performer in this group with around 25,000 tickets sold, while smaller titles such as 'James Bond Island Adventure' and 'Cloture' posted uneven results across the market.

Overall box office revenue across all releases has reached nearly 120 billion rials, about \$78,500, during a period marked by wartime conditions and a two-week ceasefire, according to SAMFA data.

Industry figures have voiced concern over the fragile recovery, arguing that sustained audience growth will depend on stronger commercial releases. Film producer Ali Sartipi said cinemas required structural support and more attractive content rather than low-budget productions, adding that box office momentum could not be restored through what he described as forced output.

Int'l Red Cross body unlocks emergency funding for Iran relief operations

Social Desk

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies has approved emergency Disaster Relief Emergency Funds and launched an international appeal to bolster relief operations led by the Iranian Red Crescent, the organization said on Saturday.

The move underpins expanded humanitarian coordination in Iran as the IFRC moves to reinforce field capacity and emergency readiness across the country. Initial support includes the delivery of 200 specialized first aid kits to Iranian Red Crescent teams, aimed at improving response speed and the quality of frontline medical assistance during emergencies, IRNA reported.

Further shipments are planned, including advanced search and rescue equipment such as combi tools, concrete breakers, harnesses, safety helmets and pneumatic sets. The IFRC said the equipment is



intended to enhance precision, operational safety and efficiency in rescue missions in disaster-hit areas.

Humanitarian supplies including blankets, carpets and other emergency shelter materials are also being prepared to support displaced people and improve temporary accommodation conditions.