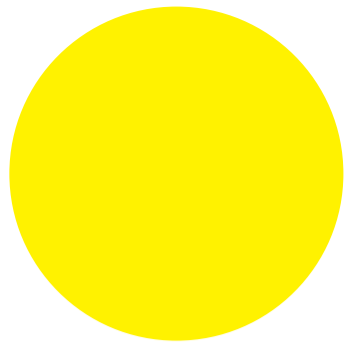


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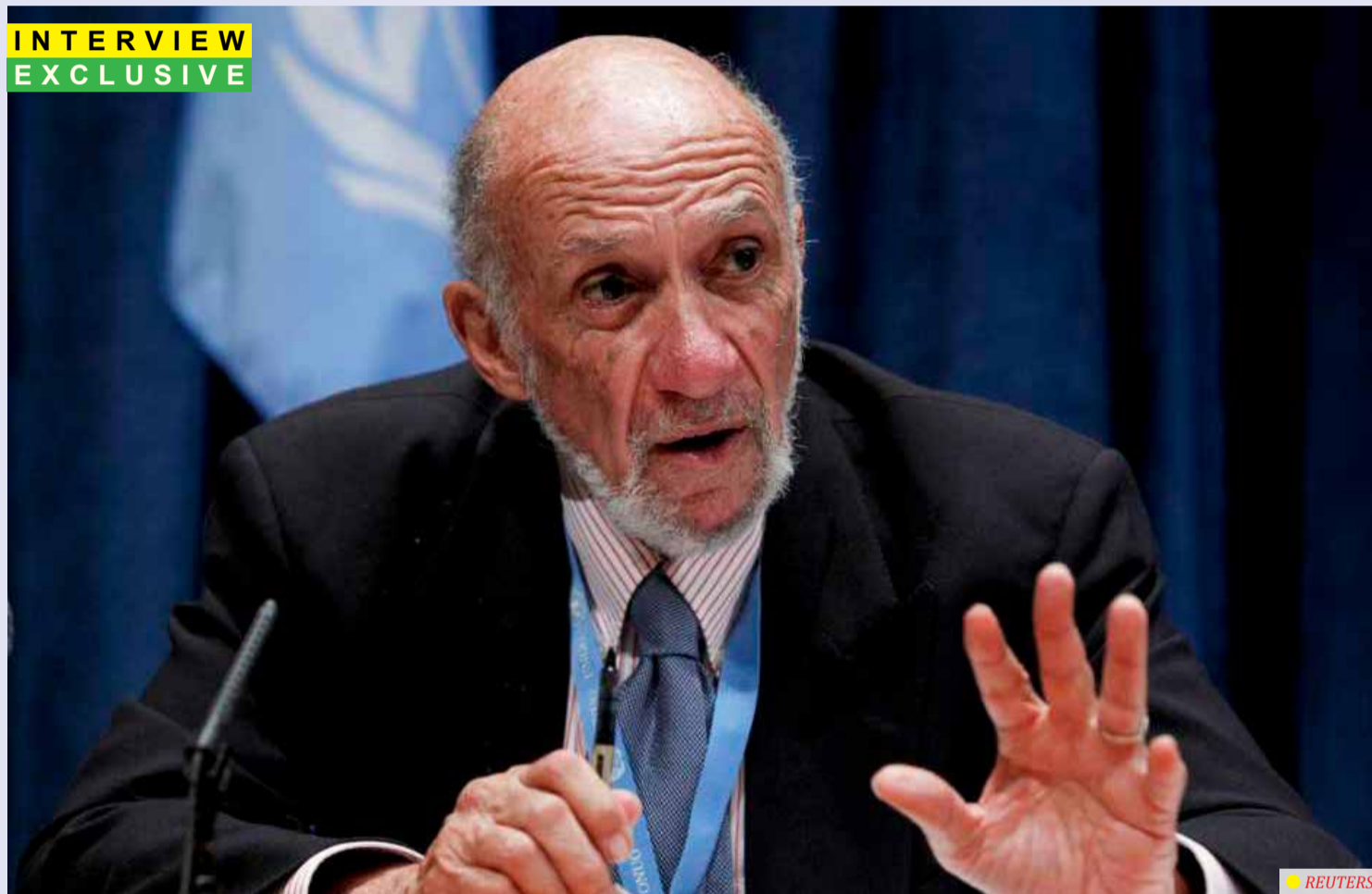
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Hormuz crisis & fragility of Europe's economy



By Abed Akbari
International relations expert

OPINION
EXCLUSIVE

A crisis in the Strait of Hormuz—and, more importantly, the potential persistence of a blockade of this vital passage under current geopolitical conditions—places Europe's economy up against one of the most serious energy shocks in recent decades. The Strait of Hormuz carries roughly 20 to 21 million barrels of crude oil and condensates per day, a figure that accounts for nearly one-fifth of global oil consumption. In addition, close to 20% to 25% of global LNG trade passes through this route. For the European Union, which is still working through the reconstruction of its energy security architecture after the Ukraine crisis, a prolonged closure of the strait would not merely mean a temporary spike in energy prices; it could turn into a structural challenge to its industrial model and economic stability. Responses from Brussels and European governments may appear logical on the surface, but when faced with a "persistent blockade" scenario, they reveal the structural constraints of Europe's economy more than they offer solutions. Europe's first response is to diversify its

sources of energy imports. Following the Ukraine war, the European Union reduced the share of Russian gas in its imports from around 40% in 2021 to less than 15% in 2024, shifting toward LNG imports. However, in a Hormuz blockade scenario, this very strategy runs into a geographical contradiction. Qatar, the world's third-largest LNG exporter with around 77 million tons of annual exports, supplies a significant portion of liquefied gas to the European market, and all of its exports pass through the Strait of Hormuz. If the blockade persists, a substantial share of this supply would effectively be wiped out of the market. Even if Europe manages to offset part of this shortfall through imports from the United States—where LNG export capacity is estimated at around 90 to 100 million tons in 2025—liquefaction infrastructure constraints and long-term contracts would still stand in the way of rapidly redirecting these volumes to Europe. As a result, Europe would be forced to compete with Asian consumers such as China, South Korea, and Japan for limited spot market cargoes—a competition that, as seen in 2022, can drive up gas prices in Europe to over €300 per megawatt-hour. In this sense, diversification in practice would amount to shifting dependence from a single geographic source to a highly expensive and volatile global market. Europe's second response is to draw on

strategic energy reserves. Under International Energy Agency requirements, member countries must hold reserves equivalent to at least 90 days of oil imports, and many European countries have maintained this level. However, in the event of a sustained Hormuz blockade, the effectiveness of these reserves would quickly be used up. The European Union's daily oil consumption is estimated at around 10 to 11 million barrels per day. Even assuming a partial release of reserves, such a move would only cushion short-term price shocks and would prove largely insufficient in the face of a disruption lasting several months or longer. Moreover, replenishing depleted reserves at a time when global oil prices could rise above \$120 or even \$150 per barrel would place heavy pressure on European government budgets. As such, the use of strategic reserves amounts less to a solution than to buying time at a significant cost. At the macroeconomic policy level, Europe's response also runs up against serious constraints. Energy price increases stemming from supply disruptions are a classic case of cost-push inflation. Estimates by the European Central Bank indicate that every 10% increase in energy prices can add roughly 0.4% to 0.6% age points to eurozone inflation. In such conditions, the central bank's main tool—raising interest rates to curb inflation—

has limited effectiveness, as the source of inflation lies on the supply side rather than demand. By contrast, higher interest rates increase the cost of industrial investment and can intensify the ongoing trend of deindustrialization that has already begun in Europe. At the same time, governments are compelled to roll out energy subsidies to contain social pressures. The experience of 2022 and 2023 showed that European countries collectively spent more than €700 billion to shield consumers and industries from rising energy prices. Repeating such interventions in the event of a Hormuz blockade would push public debt in many of Europe's largest economies—including Italy, where debt exceeds 140% of GDP—to even more unsustainable levels. Even Europe's long-term strategy—the transition to renewable energy—comes up against contradictions in the context of an energy crisis. The European Union has set a target of raising the share of renewables in final energy consumption to around 42.5% by 2030. However, the development of wind and solar infrastructure requires massive industrial investment and complex supply chains. The production of steel, aluminum, and the industrial equipment needed for these projects is heavily dependent on cheap energy, while energy-intensive sectors such

as steel and chemicals in Europe have already seen output declines in recent years due to rising gas prices. As a result, the green transition under crisis conditions would not accelerate; rather, it could end up becoming a highly costly process that ultimately leads to the relocation of part of Europe's industrial capacity to regions with cheaper energy. Finally, Europe's security and diplomatic responses are also held back by structural limitations. Efforts to establish naval missions to protect shipping lanes in the Persian Gulf have been attempted before, but the European Union lacks an integrated military structure and independent large-scale operational capability. In practice, the security of maritime routes remains dependent on the presence of the United States, leaving Europe with limited tools to ensure the free flow of energy in the region. Taken together, a prolonged blockade of the Strait of Hormuz is a scenario that shows many of Europe's policy tools are designed to manage short-term shocks, not a sustained crisis at one of the world's most critical energy chokepoints. The continuation of such a situation would not only push energy prices higher but also deepen the structural fragility of Europe's economy, exacerbating the continent's industrial, financial, and social challenges in the years ahead.

Qalibaf says Iran will not negotiate under 'shadow of threats'

Tehran poised to reveal 'new cards' on battlefield

International Desk

No decision has been made so far for the second round of talks between Iran and the United States in Pakistan as Iran underlines that it will not negotiate under the shadow of threats.

Despite the US claims in recent days that Tehran has accepted to take part in the second round of talks, Iranian Parliament Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf said that Iran will not accept negotiations with Washington under the shadow of threats. In a post on his X handle early on Tuesday, Qalibaf denounced US President Donald Trump for acting on a delusion.

His remarks came in response to continued US ceasefire violations of the ceasefire deal reached two weeks ago, including a naval blockade and an attack on an Iranian merchant vessel in the Sea of Oman on Sunday.

"Trump, by imposing a blockade and violating the ceasefire, wants – in his own delusion – to turn the negotiating table into a table of surrender or to justify renewed warmongering," the top lawmaker and lead negotiator said.

Qalibaf made it clear that pressure tactics will not yield results at the negotiating ta-

ble.

"We do not accept negotiations under the shadow of threats," he said. "Over the past two weeks, we have prepared ourselves to reveal new cards on the battlefield."

US ceasefire violations

The remarks came as the next round of talks between Tehran and Washington were shrouded in uncertainty following renewed American aggression at sea, after the US Navy violated the ceasefire by targeting an Iranian merchant vessel in the Sea of Oman.

The Iranian military described the incident as a breach of maritime conduct and reiterated that its response posture remains active, while stressing confidence in national capabilities.

Earlier on Monday, President Masoud Pezeshkian rejected US threats as pressure tactics, saying Iran will not submit to coercion, even as Washington continued to float military and diplomatic ultimatums.

According to reports in US media, the American delegation was scheduled to fly to Islamabad on Tuesday for the next round of talks with the Iranian delega-

tion.

"We're offering a very fair and reasonable deal, and I hope they take it because, if they don't, the United States is going to knock out every single power plant, and every single bridge, in Iran," Trump wrote on his social media pages.

Trump's threats

The US president reiterated its threats against Iran on Tuesday, saying that the US military has used the ceasefire period to restock on equipment and is ready to resume attacks against Iran if he orders them.

"We're loaded up," Trump told CNBC. "We have so much ammo, so much of everything. ... We've used this to restock, and they probably have done a little bit of restocking."

"We're ready to go. The military is raring to go."

He added that he does not want to extend the ceasefire, which is due to expire on Wednesday.

"We don't have that much time," he said. "Iran can get themselves on very good footing if they make a deal," he said, claiming that Iranian officials have "no choice" but to negotiate.



Security personnel stand guard at a checkpoint near the Serena Hotel at the Red Zone area in Islamabad on April 21, 2026, amid heightened security measures ahead of anticipated US-Iran peace talks.

AFP

The war of aggression by the US and Israel was launched on February 28 with the assassination of the Leader of the Islamic Revolution, Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei, top military commanders, and ordinary civilians, including nearly 170 schoolchildren in southern Iran's Minab city.

After 40 days of aggression, the US agreed

to Iran's ten-point proposal, which paved the way for talks between Iran and the US under Pakistani mediation in Islamabad. The 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.

Iranian oil tanker enters national waters in disregard of US blockade



IRNA

International Desk

The Iranian oil tanker Sili City entered Iran's territorial waters on Monday night after crossing the Arabian Sea, with operational support from Iran's Navy, the Army announced.

"Despite multiple warnings and threats from the naval group of the US Army, the Iranian tanker crossed the Arabian Sea under full security and with operational support from the Iranian Navy, entered Iranian territorial waters last night," the

Public Relations of Iran's Army said in a statement on Tuesday.

It added that the tanker has been anchored for several hours at one of the southern ports of Iran.

The development comes as the US has imposed a so-called "blockade" on Iranian ports since last week in breach of the two-week ceasefire which began on April 8.

On Monday, the US military seized an Iranian container ship in the waters of the Sea of Oman. The US military deployed its forces onto the ship's deck and dis-

abled its navigation systems.

According to Iran's military, the Armed Forces were ready to deal decisively with the American aggressor forces.

However, due to the presence of several family members of the ship's crew — whose lives and safety were at constant risk — they faced certain limitations.

The military added that as soon as the safety of the families and crew of the vessel was assured, Iran's powerful armed forces would take the necessary action against the terrorist US Army.

The US Department of Defense also said on Tuesday US forces have boarded an oil tanker previously sanctioned for carrying Iranian crude oil in Asia.

In a social media post, the Pentagon said the US forces "conducted a right-of-visit maritime interdiction" and boarded the M/T Tifani "without incident."

Ship-tracking data showed the Tifani was carrying oil in the Indian Ocean on Tuesday between Sri Lanka and Indonesia. The Pentagon described the Tifani as "stateless" despite it being a Botswana-flagged vessel. The announcement did not say precisely where or what time Tuesday the ship was boarded.

Armed Forces not to allow Trump to skew battlefield realities: Top military command

International Desk

Iran's highest operational command unit said the Islamic Republic's Armed Forces enjoy the upper hand in the face of the adversaries, and, therefore, do not let US President Donald Trump misrepresent the conditions governing the battlefield. Major General Ali Abdollahi, commander of Khatam al-Anbiya Central Headquarters, which is responsible for coordinating operations between the country's Army and the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC), made the remarks in a statement on Tuesday, Press TV reported.

"Holding the upper hand, the Armed Forces do not allow the lying and delusional president of the United States to exploit the situation or fabricate false narratives about conditions on the ground, particularly regarding the management and control of the Strait of Hormuz, during periods of silence in military confrontation," he said.

The remarks came after successive claims made by Trump concerning the state of affairs in the strategic waterway following his announcement of a short-term ceasefire.

The claims saw Trump take to his Truth Social platform, alleging that Iran had "agreed to never close the Strait of Hor-



Ali Abdollahi

muz 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." Trump additionally said that ceasefire negotiations "should go very quickly in that most of the points are already negotiated."

Iranian officials have, however, categorically dismissed all such claims. The Islamic Republic even moved swiftly to close the chokehold to all traffic after Trump announced continuation of the blockade. Tehran has also refused to rejoin negotiations with Washington as long as the latter would not abandon its pressure tactics.

The commander, meanwhile, asserted that the Armed Forces "will duly respond to any breach of commitments" on the part of the adversaries.



Mohammad Ali Rajabi
Cartoonist

CARTOON



First Announcement

N.I.S.O.C
NATIONAL IRANIAN SOUTH OILFIELDS COMPANY
AHVAZ-IRAN

TENDER NO.: 08-21-0440029

The National Iranian South Oil Company (NISOC) is seeking to procure the specified goods listed in the table below through a Qualitative Evaluation Call for conducting a public tender via the Government Electronic Procurement System (SETAD). All stages of the tender process including the receipt of tender documents, submission of bidders' proposals, and the opening of bid envelopes, shall be carried out exclusively through the Government Electronic Procurement System (SETAD) portal at www.setadiran.ir. Bidders who have not previously registered must complete the registration process on the aforementioned portal and obtain an Electronic Signature certificate to participate in the tender.

| Items | Material Description | Quantity |
|-------|--|----------|
| 1 | CASING (USED AS TUBING), API GRADE L-80, "VAM", "N.VAM", THREAD, RANGE 3, (MAX LENGTH: 40.5 FT), AS PER API 5CT / ISO11960, PSL: 2, MARKING: COLD DIE STAMPED IN ACCORDANCE SIZE (OD), WEIGHT (PPF), AS SPECIFIED. NOTE: LEVEL OF INSPECTION: 1 (L.O.:1) "OCP/MPS DOCUMENTS ARE ESSENTIAL TO REVIEW & CONFIRM" "ITP DOCUMENTS IS ESSENTIAL FOR TECHNICAL EVALUATION" 4-1/2 IN., 13.5 PPF, DRIFT: 3.795 IN. | 30,000LE |

Vendors who intend to participate in aforesaid tenders are requested to send their "Intention To Participate" letter via fax to the following number along with their resume according to Qualitative Assessment Form no. 1, available at: www.setadiran.ir, not later than 14 days after the second announcement, otherwise, their requests for participation in the tender will be disregarded.

The applicants should have relevant background in supplying the required goods and capability to provide and submit a bid bond of 99,398/19 EURO or 159,217,603,680 RIAL, in favor of NISOC.

FOREIGN PURCHASING DEPARTMENT

Bldg. No. 104, Material Procurement Management Complex,
Kouy-e-Fadaelan Islam (New Site), Ahvaz, Iran
Tel. No.: 061 34 12 4644 Fax No.: 061 34 45 74 37

PUBLIC RELATIONS

2157482

www.shana.ir
 www.nisoc.ir
 <http://lets.mporg.ir>
 www.setadiran.ir

Parliamentary panel approves bill to tighten control over Hormuz

Economy Desk

A 12-article bill aimed at consolidating Iran's sovereignty over the Strait of Hormuz was approved by the National Security and Foreign Policy Committee of Iran's Parliament, committee member Vahid Ahmadi told ISNA. The committee has submitted its report on the legislation to Parliament's presidium for review and potential approval during a public session. The timing of the plenary debate will be determined after the presidium reaches a decision. "Several bills regarding the Strait of Hormuz had been drafted in Parliament, which

were referred to the National Security and Foreign Policy Committee," Ahmadi said. "Ultimately, the bill 'Consolidate Iran's Sovereignty in the Strait of Hormuz' was approved in the committee and referred to the presidium for review and approval in the public session."

Ahmadi outlined key provisions of the proposed legislation, stating that it envisions establishing a new legal regime for the strategic waterway. Under the framework, the Islamic Republic of Iran could collect fees in exchange for providing services related to environmental protection and security matters in the Strait of Hormuz.

The bill also includes measures for designating shipping lanes, regulating types of vessels permitted to transit, and imposing restrictions on ships belonging to hostile countries or entities affiliated with them, Ahmadi added. The legislative push comes against a backdrop of heightened regional tensions. Following initial US and Israeli air strikes in February, Iran effectively closed the Strait of Hormuz, a critical chokepoint through which approximately one-fifth of global oil supplies transit. Since February 28, the country has prohibited vessels from hostile states from passing through the strategic waterway.



VP pushes for rapid reconstruction, economic relief after war damage



Iran's First Vice President Mohammad Reza Aref (l) holds talks with Minister of Economic Affairs and Finance Ali Madanizadeh in Tehran on April 21, 2026.
● fvpresident.ir

ty, fuel and energy quality control, enhancing safety in sensitive industries, and combating fraud.

Aref emphasized that compliance with standards and safety protocols during the reconstruction process was the government's "red line," adding that sustainable reconstruction would not be possible without precise oversight. He also underscored government support for cooperation among the Standards Organization, the Department of Environment, and the private sector.

In a meeting with Minister of Economic Affairs and Finance Ali Madanizadeh, officials presented a report on measures taken in tax, customs, and banking sectors. These included postponement of certain customs guarantees, tax support for small and medium-sized enterprises, accelerated insurance payments for residential damage, and the initiation of damage assessments for large industries.

"Economic pressure on people and businesses must be minimized," Aref said, stressing the necessity of maintaining the country's economic stability.

Economy Desk

Iran's First Vice President Mohammad Reza Aref on Tuesday called for enhanced coordination among state agencies to accelerate reconstruction of war-damaged assets.

In separate meetings with the ministers of science and economy and the heads of the Department of Environment and National Standards Organization, he also urged efforts to reduce economic pressure on citizens while receiving reports on damages from the recent conflict.

According to IRNA, Aref announced during a meeting with Science Minister Hossein Simaie that 32 scientific centers and universities nationwide had been damaged in the US-Israeli war that began February 28, with Sharif University of Technology, Isfahan University of Technology, and Shahid Be-

heshti University sustaining the most severe losses.

The first vice president made the remarks as part of ongoing government sessions to coordinate recovery efforts.

Aref stressed the necessity of rapidly reviving Iran's scientific infrastructure.

During a meeting with the head of the Department of Environment, officials presented a report on environmental damage resulting from the destruction of certain industries, buildings, and areas under the organization's management, as well as harm caused by oil tank explosions. The organization's programs in air pollution monitoring, hazardous waste management, and biodiversity conservation were also outlined.

In a separate session with the head of the National Standards Organization, a report detailed the body's actions regarding supervision of basic goods quali-

Iran Air resumes domestic flights after 50-day wartime hiatus

Imam Khomeini Airport set to restore Muscat, Turkey routes

Economy Desk

Iran Air, the flag carrier of the Islamic Republic of Iran, announced Tuesday that its domestic flights would resume on Wednesday after a 50-day suspension, with the first service operating between Tehran and Mashhad.

The inaugural flight is scheduled to depart this morning from Mehrabad Airport in Tehran to Mashhad, with a return flight set for noon from Mashhad to Mehrabad, according to Mehr news agency. Iran Air stated that its domestic flight schedule would be gradually restored.

Mohammad Amirani, CEO of Iran Airports and Air Navigation Company (IAC), said planning was underway to resume flights from Imam Khomeini International Airport to Muscat and Turkey, while the Mashhad-Muscat route was also under consideration pending review and approval of conditions. All flights and airport operations would remain subject to national conditions and safety considerations, he added.

"Following a meeting with air defense officials, the top priority at present is ensuring safety conditions for reopening airports to enable their gradual return to operational cycles," Amirani told Tasnim news agency.

Amirani noted that Mehrabad Airport had declared readiness for a limited number of flights and that the national air traffic control center was fully prepared to provide services. He added that Kerman and Yazd airports had become operational from Wednesday based on issued NOTAMS, while the



reopening of other airports remained on the agenda, contingent upon necessary permits from the Civil Aviation Organization. On Saturday, Iran reopened the eastern section of its airspace for international overflights following a security and safety review, after a closure imposed during the Israeli-American aggression that began on February 28. Tehran's Imam Khomeini International Airport and Mehrabad Airport, as well as six other airports, have also resumed operations.

Russia to lift Iran flight ban

In a related development, Russia's Federal Air Transport Agency (Rosaviatsia) announced Monday that airlines would again be permitted to fly to Iran and sell tickets to and from the United Arab Emirates.

"Transit flights and direct flights to airports within Iran can now resume, provided that all guidelines from Iranian aviation authorities are carefully observed," Rosaviatsia said in a statement Monday, according to ISNA.

Russia had suspended flights to

the occupied Palestinian territories and Iran following the US-Israeli aggression against Iran in late February. Rosaviatsia had previously stated that Iranian airspace would remain closed until May 15 and had asked Russian airlines to halt ticket sales to the UAE until further notice.

The agency did not explain its policy shift on Monday, stating only that the decision to resume flights and ticket sales was made in coordination with Russian transport authorities and the Foreign Ministry. Following temporary ceasefire agreements in the Iran-Lebanon conflicts, Rosaviatsia announced Thursday that daily flights to and from the occupied Palestinian territories would be permitted at least until May 15.

Also on Monday, Qatari aviation authorities announced they would allow foreign airlines to land at their main airport near Doha.

According to a report by The Moscow Times, Rosaviatsia has asked Russian travelers to use alternative routes when flying to Persian Gulf countries such as Qatar.



AUCTION SJSCO. D140502

Sirjan Jahan Steel Company is pleased to announce the sale and export of 25,000 tons **DIRECT REDUCED IRON (DRI)**, with the option to increase the contract quantity by up to 20% on basis of FAS at the Buyer's warehouse in Bandar Abbas, IRAN (Other ports are negotiable) according to INCOTERMS 2020. Interested applicants are hereby invited to obtain

the tender documents by visiting the official website of Sirjan Jahan Steel Company at sjSCO.ir, through the Sales and customer portal, Tender and Foreign Tender section.

All documentation will be provided electronically.

All bids on conformity to tender instruction should be submitted no later than **Monday, April 27, 2026.**

For more information, please contact us at:

Tel: +2186084642



AUCTION SJSCO. B140502

Sirjan Jahan Steel Company is pleased to announce the sale and export of 10,000 tons **STEEL BILLET** (Size 150 x 150 mm), with the possibility of increasing the contract amount to 30,000 tons on basis of FOB Bandar Abbas according to INCOTERMS 2020. Interested applicants are hereby invited to obtain the tender documents by visiting

the official website of Sirjan Jahan Steel Company at sjSCO.ir, through the Sales and customer portal, Tender and Foreign Tender section.

All documentation will be provided electronically.

All bids on conformity to tender instruction should be submitted no later than **Monday, April 27, 2026.**

For more information, please contact us at:

Tel: +2186084642

Richard Falk: Trump diplomacy mockery of int'l law, morality



By Asgar Ghahremanpour
Editor-in-chief

INTERVIEW

Richard Anderson Falk, a prominent American jurist and one of the most influential figures in contemporary international law, was born on November 13, 1930, in New York. He taught at Princeton University for more than three decades before retiring as a professor of International Law. Falk began his academic studies in economics at the Wharton School, later earning his law degree from Yale University and a doctorate in law from Harvard University — an academic trajectory that consolidated his standing as a major theorist of world order.



His early intellectual formation was influenced by thinkers such as Karl Marx, Herbert Marcuse, and C. Wright Mills; an influence reflected in his critical approach to power, capitalism, militarism, and structures of global domination. Falk has consistently sought to bridge scholarly inquiry and moral commitment, employing international law as an instrument to restrain war and injustice. He is the author and editor of dozens of books on international law and the United Nations.

In 2008, the United Nations Human Rights Council appointed him Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the occupied Palestinian territories. Falk has been a steadfast critic of military interventionism and an advocate for strengthening global accountability, international justice, and a transition toward a more humane world order. Richard Falk is currently 96 years old and, over the past decades, has devoted considerable effort to the prevention of war.

In this interview, Falk, relying on the Geneva Conventions and the Rome Statute, regards the targeting of Iran's civilian infrastructure, including schools, hospitals, and universities, as a clear instance of war crimes and, if sustained, as potentially constituting crimes against humanity. Within this framework, the supporting role of the United States is also discussed as a form of complicity in the commission of legal violations. Furthermore, with reference to the rulings of international bodies, Falk assesses Israel's conduct as potentially meeting the elements of genocide, while highlighting the structural ineffectiveness of the UN Security Council and the International Criminal Court (ICC). Finally, he considers aggression against Iran and the targeting of civilians as a direct violation of Article 2(4) of the UN Charter and contrary to the fundamental principles of international law.

From the perspective of international law and the Geneva Conventions, how do you assess Israel's targeting of civilian infrastructure, including elementary schools, universities, and hospitals — facilities that enjoy special protection under international humanitarian law? Specifically, how do such actions constitute war crimes under the Rome Statute?

Israel has ignored international law since its inception in 1948, including



A room in Gandhi Hospital in Tehran, Iran, is damaged and subsequently evacuated as a result of US-Israeli air strikes on March 1, 2026.
● ABEDIN TAHERKENAREH/EPA

the legal obligations of an Occupying Power in the Palestinian Territories of Gaza, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem. Such an assessment has been validated by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in its Advisory Opinion of July 19, 2024, regarding the "Legal Consequences Arising from the Policies and Practices of Israel in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, including East Jerusalem". This authoritative rendering of international law, in a highly professional manner, called for Israel to withdraw from these Palestinian territories, occupied since 1967, within one year, a judicial determination overwhelmingly endorsed by the UN General Assembly.

Several years before the attack on Israeli border villages from Gaza on October 7, 2023, Israel was widely regarded as guilty of the distinct crime as specified in the 1973 Apartheid Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid, considered binding on all states. This legal assessment was made in a series of independent studies and reports under the auspices of the UN and leading human rights organizations, including Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch.

As a leading scholar of international law, how do you view the systematic nature of Israel's attacks on civilian infrastructure? Do these actions, particularly the targeting of schools and universities where children and young people were present, meet the legal definition of crimes against humanity?

It is a fundamental norm of international law that the targeting of civilian infrastructure is not only unlawful — it is a war crime that, if sustained, is also a crime against humanity. Israel has repeatedly targeted schools, hospitals, and heritage sites, resulting in severe physical damage but also in many deaths and injuries. In the case of Gaza, this unacceptable pattern of war crimes has been aggravated by the blockage of humanitarian aid causing widespread disease, starvation, and malnutrition. There is little doubt that any objective international criminal court would find these combat tactics to constitute crimes against humanity.

The United States continues to provide military and political support to Israel. From the standpoint of international law, to what extent is the US complicit in the commission of war crimes and crimes against humanity? Under the principle of "universal jurisdiction"

and the doctrine of command responsibility, can American officials be held legally accountable for their support of actions that violate international law?

International law is somewhat vague about the degree to which crimes of a perpetrator also produce criminality for governments that act in complicity by the supply of weapons, munitions, funds, and intelligence. The Genocide Convention (1948) and the Apartheid Convention (1973) both impose an obligation on parties to the convention to take steps to prevent such crimes and to punish perpetrators, and seem susceptible to being interpreted as extending accountability to governments and individuals that knowingly lend support, even by way of incitement to commit such crimes.

The Gaza Tribunal, the UK Gaza Tribunal, and Canadian Inquiry into Canadian Responsibility all acted on the legal premise that complicity was a crime for which those guilty should be held accountable.

You have previously characterized certain actions by Israel as "genocide". Based on the rulings of the International Court of Justice and the definition of genocide in the 1948 Genocide Convention, do you believe the scale and nature of Israeli attacks on Gaza — including the destruction of civilian infrastructure, the siege, and the prevention of basic necessities — legally satisfy the elements of the crime of genocide?

I have no doubt that the behavior of Israel in response to the October 7, 2023, assumed a genocidal character in Gaza (as well as later in the West Bank and South Lebanon) and that it would produce judicial findings that Israel was guilty of violating the Genocide Convention. The Gaza Tribunal, at its public session and in its prior Sarajevo Declaration, both occurring in 2024, responded to expert witnesses and survivor testimony with a clear understanding that Israel's actions as well as those of the complicit Western states constituted genocide. The ICJ is proceeding from its 2025 Decision on Interim Measures that the evidence before supported an inference of "plausible genocide," but a final judgment will be rendered within the months ahead to give an authoritative reasoned response on the central question of genocide.

What is your assessment of the role and performance of international judicial bodies — particularly the International Criminal Court and the ICJ — in addressing Israel's violations of international law? In light of the ICC's arrest

warrants for Israeli officials, why has the international community failed to enforce these rulings, and what steps are needed to ensure accountability?

The ICC is a weaker institution than the ICJ due to it resting on the Rome Statute that provides a treaty framework for its operations. In addition to Israel, important countries, including the US, China, Russia, and India, have refused to become parties to the treaty and regard its issuance on November 21, 2024, of arrest warrants for Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and former Minister of Defense Yoav Gallant as without a proper legal foundation. Also, the ICC proceeds only against individuals and was formally established outside the UN system.

Nevertheless, the ICC proceeded in a highly professional manner and came to legal conclusions that enjoy the approval of most international law experts. Sadly, there is no way of enforcing its judgments without voluntary compliance or independent UN action. So far, the political will to implement the arrest warrants is lacking.

You have served as a UN Special Rapporteur. From your experience, why has the United Nations system, particularly the Security Council, been unable to effectively uphold international law regarding Israel's actions? What structural or political obstacles within the UN prevent meaningful action against powerful states and their allies?

There are two main reasons why international law has not been effectively implemented in relation to Israel. First, Israel enjoys the support of the liberal democracies of the West to the extent that the political will to enforce international law even in relation to genocide is not present.

Secondly, the UN Security Council is the only political organ with enforcement authority, and its behavior is subject to a veto, which was cast on milder cease-fire resolutions, and was not presented for action to the Security Council in anticipation of a veto.

Regarding the future of negotiations: the current cease-fire in Gaza has been announced, but many fear it is fragile and temporary. In your view, what are the prospects for these negotiations? Under what conditions can a cease-fire be transformed into a sustainable and just peace? Do you believe that the current diplomatic efforts in Islamabad and elsewhere have the capacity to produce a legally binding and enforceable outcome?

The Trump diplomacy leading to a cease-fire and setting forth a plan for the future of Gaza is a mockery of international law and morality. It rewards Israel for committing genocide, while punishing Palestine by inflicting a diplomatic process that denies its right of self-determination. The fact that the UN Security Council endorsed this outcome unanimously (although China and Russia abstained) in SC Resolution 2803 and that it was applauded by the UN Secretary General for doing so are shameful acts of submission to geopolitical pressures exerted by the US on behalf of Israel.

Finally, from the perspective of international law, what are the rights of the Iranian people and other nations in the region to defend themselves against aggression? If Israel violates the cease-fire and renews its attacks, what legal recourses and defensive measures do regional states have under international law, particularly under Article 51 of the UN Charter concerning the inherent right to self-defense?

These are complex questions that deserve detailed responses that are not possible in this format. Briefly, Iran is the victim of an unprovoked aggression prohibited by Article 2(4) of the UN Charter, making Iran entitled to act within the full scope of the right of self-defense as set forth in Article 51.

Israel has repeatedly violated the cease-fire to which it agreed upon, and has not been called to account. Palestine as a widely recognized state entity is entitled to act in self-defense, although it lacks the capabilities to do so. Other actors would be entitled to help defend Palestine in the spirit of collective self-defense but none have chosen to do so, except in an indirect way by South Africa through its ICJ initiative to allege Israeli violations of the Genocide Convention.



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Mourners dig graves on March 3, 2026, for the burial of over 160 children brutally killed in an air strike by Israel and the US on a primary school in Minab, Iran.
● UPI

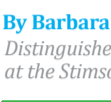
Beneath the Strait

Iran could threaten

Persian Gulf data centers, undersea cables



By Masha Kotkin
Former energy advisor
at US Department of
State



By Barbara Slavin
Distinguished fellow
at the Stimson Center

OPINION

The United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and other Persian Gulf countries view investment in artificial intelligence (AI) and IT services as a path to creating a highly skilled workforce and diversifying from oil and gas extraction.

Before the outbreak of the US and Israeli war on Iran, these states were attracting investment from and business partnerships with a variety of US tech firms, providing responsive digital services and nurturing national tech champions, such as Humain, G42, and QAI. However, profitably scaling these investments requires physical security for infrastructure and a means of delivering AI and other digital services to customers outside the region via undersea fiber optic cables.

The conflict with Iran has exposed tech infrastructure to new acute threats, with Iranian drones striking data centers in Bahrain and the UAE, Iran threatening to sever undersea cables and mine the Strait of Hormuz in response to potential troop landings, and other retaliation against US tech firms operating in the Middle East in response to the assassinations of Iranian officials.

War risks have already halted work on new undersea cables in the Persian Gulf, mirroring the situation in the Red Sea where the prospect of Houthi attacks has delayed all undersea cable construction since 2024. In March 2024, an Ansarullah (Houthi) missile strike on a commercial ship in the Red Sea resulted in a damaged ship that dragged its anchor and inadvertently severed three subsea cables. After months of delays, likely due to the need to navigate geopolitical risks and sensitivities onshore in Yemen, UAE-based E-marine eventually fixed the cables. According to the industry-run International Cable Protection Committee (ICPC), out of around 200 instances of cable damage each year, only about one percent was intentional. The ICPC attributed nearly three-quarters



● ISTOCK

of cable cuts to fishing equipment and ship anchors. But the same equipment that causes accidents could also be used to inflict deliberate damage by diminished-but-determined Houthi or Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps naval forces.

Persian Gulf investment, hydrocarbon diversification

Cables create the physical path for Persian Gulf data centers and internet users to communicate beyond the region. Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and on a smaller scale, other Persian Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries need cables to deliver AI and digital services to customers both locally and further afield. Like investments in commercial air hubs, investing in data centers and advanced AI chips can raise the quality of life in the GCC but will almost certainly need to reach customers beyond the region, particularly in Africa and Asia, to sustain large-scale profitability. Economic diversification plans of Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and on a smaller scale, Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait, and Oman, aim to create national AI and tech champions with global reach. Growing their customer base beyond the region requires data connectivity. Significant subsea cable connectivity already exists regionally, but cable routes are subject to the same physical concentration and geopolitical exposure around the Suez Ca-

nal, Bab al-Mandeb, and Strait of Hormuz as other forms of commerce.

To sustain the development of its data center capability, national telecom champions in Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Qatar have joined international consortia building cables at sea and on land. Saudi Arabia's stc Group, majority-owned by the Saudi Public Investment Fund (PIF), is investing \$800 million in SilkLink, a 4,500 km (2,796 mi) fiber optic cable network, submarine cable landing stations, and several data centers in Syria. Qatar's Ooredoo aims to build Fibre in the Persian Gulf (FIG), a \$500 million cable corridor originating in the Persian Gulf of Oman, passing through the Strait of Hormuz, overland through Iraq, Turkey, and France. An Emirati Iraqi consortium called WorldLink is funding a \$700 million hybrid fiber optic cable project to run a cable from the UAE to Iraq's Al Faw Peninsula, then across Iraq to Turkey. Meta is leading a consortium made up of India's Bharti Telecom, Saudi Center3, China Mobile International (CMI), South Africa's MTN Global Connect, France's Orange, Telecom Egypt, UK's Vodaphone. WIOCC, which is co-owned by 14 African telecommunication operators, is building Persian Gulf2Africa (2Africa), which is projected to bring high-speed internet to three billion people.

Finding alternate routes

Plans to build cable systems, which utilize both subsea and terrestrial infrastructure traversing multiple countries, shift geopolitical risk from the waters of the Red Sea to risks on the ground in Iraq, Syria, Jordan, and/or Israel. Terrestrial cable networks move data across multiple international borders, which also bring a myriad of legal and regulatory requirements including landing fees, law enforcement, and national security access requirements, as well as digital sovereignty laws in each country. Historically, companies minimized the cost and time of meeting those requirements by maximizing the use of subsea cables to move data. Terres-

trial cables also bring higher construction costs (compared to laying cables at sea), a need to obtain rights of way, and added maintenance risks from human activity.

Low earth orbit (LEO) satellite internet services like Starlink provide a 100–200 megabit per second download, which works well for individual consumers and companies. LEO services provide a compelling backup option for individual households or offices but cannot match the aggregate data rates of undersea cables or scale to meet the telecom needs of an entire city for four million residents of Dubai, or the needs of one of the region's 283 data centers. Fiber optic cables can carry magnitudes more data at lower latency. For example, the 2Africa cable was designed to carry up to 21 Terabits (i.e. roughly equivalent to over one million LEO connections) on each of its 16 fiber optic pairs.

Emerging Risks

Military conflict between Israel and the United States and Iran has effectively halted cable projects in the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea. The Houthis recently joined the fight, thus far limiting attacks to Israel. The Houthis earn landing fees from data cables and wish to maintain access to telecommunications in Yemen, but this does not mean that cables do not risk becoming collateral damage or being targeted under future escalation in this evolving conflict. Repairing subsea cable damage requires specialized repair ships to remain stationary. Only 63 cable repair ships operate worldwide, with two to four repair ships in the Middle East. To repair damaged subsea cables,

these ships need to obtain access rights in territorial waters. Once granted, the process of dispatching the ship, repairing, and reburying the cable takes at least 40 days and costs between \$1 and \$3 million. Significant delays to repair damaged cables in the Red Sea in 2024 and 2025 point to a significantly longer timeline to repair damage.

The economic future of countries bordering the Persian Gulf remains uncertain. Iran has responded to attacks on its energy infrastructure, a data center and steel mill, by Israel and the United States by targeting similar facilities across the GCC. Rystad Energy estimates that repairs of energy infrastructure alone will likely cost around \$26 billion. Iran has issued multiple threats against US tech companies operating in the GCC, categorizing their assets as "enemy technology infrastructure". Expanding that definition to include subsea fiber optic cables does not seem farfetched. Cable damage in the region will not just cause internet outages in the Persian Gulf, but economic problems in Arab, European, African, and Asian countries connected by those cables.

Protracted conflict with Iran raises the risk that combatants target cables and other internet infrastructure in the region. Sustained geopolitical risks may incentivize more investment and refocus the private sector on terrestrial projects offering overland alternatives to Persian Gulf and Red Sea choke points. Development of these cable systems will support economic diversification of Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Qatar, and others in the Persian Gulf, and bring much-needed transit revenue to Iraq and Syria. Protracted conflict with Iran may also incentivize tech companies and investors from outside the Persian Gulf to explore cable networks bypassing the region altogether, like the Meta Waterworth cable system transverse the Indian Ocean linking South Africa, Asia, and North America. Shared vulnerability of communications infrastructure and the potential for outside investors to reallocate resources elsewhere add incentives for governments in the region to de-escalate to preserve their economic diversification plans.

The article was first published by the Stimson Center.



● INTERNATIONAL TELECOMMUNICATIONS UNION



Protracted conflict with Iran raises the risk that combatants target cables and other internet infrastructure in the region. Sustained geopolitical risks may incentivize more investment and refocus the private sector on terrestrial projects offering overland alternatives to Persian Gulf and Red Sea choke points.



✓ The anchor of the Rubymar cargo ship, which sunk after it was attacked by Yemen's Ansarullah (Houthi) forces in the Red Sea in March 2024, likely severed three subsea cables.
● GETTY IMAGES

Controversy erupts as Iranian trio named for Asian club competitions

Sports Desk

The Iranian Football Federation's decision to name three clubs as the country's Asian club representatives for next season has frustrated title rivals in the Persian Gulf Pro League. Esteghlal, Sepahan, and Tractor were selected as continental competitors after the League Organization of the national governing body announced on Saturday that the remaining eight rounds of the domestic top flight – postponed since February 28, when the United States and Israel initiated a military campaign against Iran – will be staged after “the conclusion of the national team's games at the FIFA World Cup (June 11–July 19).” With the Asian Football Confederation setting May 31 as the deadline for confirming the 2026/27 continental club lineup, the Iranian federation, according to the League Organization's Saturday announcement, was left with no choice but to put forward the league's

current top three for the two tournaments. Sitting atop the table with 41 points from 22 games, Esteghlal has been given a place in the West zone's 12-team table of the AFC Champions League Elite, while Tractor – second on 39 points – will have the chance to secure a spot through the preliminary playoffs. Third-placed Sepahan, trailing Tractor on goal difference, will be Iran's representative in the AFC Champions League Two. “The result must be decided on the pitch,” Golgozar head coach Mahdi Tartar, whose team is fourth in the table with 36 points from 23 matches, said on Monday. “We played away to Tractor one day before the start of the war and lost. That's fine – football has its wins and losses. But what matters is that the result is determined on the field and the standings are decided through football,” added the Iranian coach. Tartar, whose Golgozar side remains within striking distance

of the top three, continued: “We are fourth in the table and still a title contender. We managed to beat the league leaders and also had decent results against Persepolis and Sepahan.” Persepolis CEO Peyman Haddadi, meanwhile, described the decision as “unfair,” insisting that “the league continue and that Iran's representatives be selected based on a full footballing process and on actual matches.” “We have also put forward transparent and fair proposals to ensure that, if it becomes impossible to complete the league, Iranian clubs in Asian competitions are chosen according to a just and equitable solution,” added the Tehran Reds' official. A seven-time champion over the past nine seasons, Persepolis sits sixth in the table – seven points off the top – but recent league history favors the Reds as the capital heavyweight has relied on late surges in the closing stages to secure multiple title-winning campaigns over the past decade.



The photo shows Tractor (red) and Esteghlal in action during a goalless draw in the Persian Gulf Pro League in Tabriz, Iran, on January 18, 2026.
● MAJID JARRAHI/IRNA

Gitipasand crowned national futsal champion with seventh title



Gitipasand players pose with the trophy after winning the Iranian Futsal Super League in Shazand, Iran, on April 20, 2026.
● VARZESH3

Iran to compete in double IJF Grand Slam events in May

Sports Desk

A three-man Iranian squad will take part in two upcoming IJF Grand Slam tournaments in Dushanbe and Astana, the Iranian Judo Federation confirmed. The third Grand Slam event of the international judo season will kick off in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, on May 1, followed by a three-day competition in Astana, Kazakhstan, from May 8 to 10.

A gold medalist at the Casablanca African Open in January, Elyas Parhizgar will compete in the -81kg weight class across both tournaments. Amirabbas Choopan – bronze medalist at February's Tunis African Open – will vie for glory in the -90kg division. Iranian prodigy Mohammad-Pouria Banaeian, who claimed an impressive junior

gold medal in the Tunisian capital, will look to build on that success when competing in the +100kg contests. The two tournaments will serve as a significant part of Iran's preparation for the Aichi-Nagoya 2026 Asian Games in September, after the country missed out on April's Asian Championships in Ordos City, China, as a result of the military conflict with the United States and Israel.



Iranian judoka Elyas Parhizgar (white), pictured in last November's Islamic Solidarity Games in Riyadh, will compete in the men's -81kg event in May's IJF Grand Slam events in Dushanbe and Astana.
● IRIJF

Sports Desk

Gitipasand Isfahan secured a commanding away victory against Palayesh Naft Shazand to defend its crown and clinch a record-extending seventh title in the Iranian Futsal Super League. The 28th edition of the domestic top flight concluded on Monday, with Gitipasand emerging as the most decorated club in Iranian futsal history. The top prize was decided in Shazand, where the defending champions delivered a flawless 4-0 performance to finish the campaign with 65 points – one point clear of their long-time rivals, Mes Sungun. With both giants in contention for the title heading into the final round, and Palayesh Naft Shazand and Beheshtisazi Gorgan fighting to avoid relegation at the bottom of the table, the stakes could not have been higher. Gitipasand rose

to the occasion, securing a third consecutive championship and a fourth title in the last five seasons under head coach Mohammad Keshavarz. Goals from Mahdi Asadshir, Ali Khalilvand, and Mohammad-Javad Safari, along with an own goal by Erfan Mohammadpour, sealed the victory in Shazand. Iranian international pivot Saeid Ahmadabasi finished as the champions' top scorer with 21 goals. Mes Sungun, despite thrashing Shahr-dari Saveh 6-2, settled for second place with 64 points – their third straight season as runners-up. At the other end of the table, Beheshtisazi and Javad al-Aemeh Shahr-e Kord were relegated to the first division after just one season in the top flight. Goharzamin Sirjan, who finished third for the third consecutive year, defeated Gorgan 4-1 to confirm their rivals' fate.

Elsewhere on the final day, Arshia Shahr-e Qods edged Foolad Hormozgan 1-0, Palayesh Naft Isfahan sent Javad al-Aemeh down with a 4-0 thrashing, and San'ich Saveh played out an eight-goal 4-4 draw with Pardis Qazvin. Despite a 50-day league stoppage due to the country's military conflict with the United States and Israel, the hiatus appeared to have little effect on attacking quality, with several high-scoring and entertaining encounters. Goharzamin superstar Hossein Tayyebi claimed the league's Golden Boot with 28 goals. With this triumph, Gitipasand extends its record as Iran's most successful futsal club, now boasting seven championships and eight runner-up finishes. The title-winning campaign secures Gitipasand's place as Iran's sole representative in the AFC Futsal Club Championship next season.

Naderi declares Iran as 'beach soccer favorites' at Asian Beach Games

Sports Desk

Iran's beach soccer head coach Ali Naderi has declared his side the leading contender for gold at the Asian Beach Games, vowing that the team will give its all to bring glory to the country. The sixth edition of the multi-sport event kicks off with the opening ceremony in Sanya, China, today, with the beach soccer contests getting underway on Thursday. Drawn in Group B alongside the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, and Thailand, Iran will begin its campaign against the UAE at the Sanya Bay Yuhai Club Venue on the opening day of the beach soccer event. Speaking after a dominant 11-1 friendly victory over Palestine on Tuesday, Naderi expressed confidence in his squad's readiness despite a 50-day interruption in training. “We are gradually improving through our training sessions and have reached relative readiness,” Naderi said. “Despite the 50-day halt in training, we have had good sessions during these 11 days here in Sanya.” “The overall condition of the team



● IRNA

is good, and we have what it takes to win the gold – to repeat the title and raise our country's flag,” added Naderi, who led Iran to a third-place finish at the 2024 World Cup in the UAE. Naderi acknowledged the growing strength of several regional rivals, noting that beach soccer has its own unique dynamics. “Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Oman are in very good shape and have made long-term investments in the sport,” he said. The coach also pointed out that Japan is not participating in this edition. Nevertheless, he emphasized that the teams that have traveled to

Sanya have arrived well-prepared, with solid logistics and training camps behind them. “Regardless of the obstacles we have faced, we remain the favorites for the top prize, and we will face our opponents with every effort to achieve success,” Naderi concluded. The beach soccer competition in Sanya features seven teams, with China, Oman, and Palestine completing the lineup in Group A. Iran will face Thailand on Friday before concluding the group fixtures against Saudi Arabia the following day. The top two from each group will advance to the semifinals.

Qaleh Bala village makes third bid for UNWTO list

Iranica Desk

The historic village of Qaleh Bala, located 21 kilometers from the town of Beyarjomand in eastern Shahroud, Semnan Province, is recognized as one of Iran's most significant natural and cultural tourism destinations thanks to its terraced architecture, valuable historical fabric, and proximity to the protected Turan region.

The village has been nominated twice before for world heritage listing but was rejected each time due to weak documentation and deficiencies in its dossier. Now, for the third and final time, the village has been nominated for inclusion in the "Best Tourism Villages" list of the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), with all deficiencies addressed, targeted planning in place, and support from various sectors, according to IRNA.

The head of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts Department of Shahroud stated that registering Qaleh Bala on the UNWTO's global list plays an important role in boosting tourism and the economy of Semnan Province, and that every effort is being made to achieve this goal.

Seyyed Sadegh Razavian added that the global registration of Qaleh Bala is a cross-sectoral matter requiring collective support. Accordingly, he expressed hope that various executive bodies would cooperate more than ever by fulfilling their duties.

He explained that the village is moving toward global registration by holding 20 events in various social, cultural, educational, and community spirit fields, documenting the customs and traditions of the residents, and focusing on visual beautification grounded in historical identity, natural assets, and environmental features. According to reports, the evaluation of dossiers for villages



nominated for global registration and the announcement of results will take until early autumn 2026.

Razavian added that the village's historical fabric and terraced structure, women's participation in rural activities such as handicrafts, the village's geographical position as the gateway to the Turan Biosphere Reserve — the only breeding ground of the Asiatic cheetah in the world — collective participation in wildlife protection, and the tradition of offering fodder as a religious vow for feeding wildlife are among the reasons for Qaleh Bala's nomination.

An artistic and meaningful monument has been installed as a

comprehensive symbol of the identity, nature, and distinctive architecture of Qaleh Bala. The aim is to highlight the unique capacities of this tourist village as it pursues global registration.

Razavian explained that the metal structure of the monument is an intelligent combination of key elements, including the *Podoces pleskei* known as Zagh-e Boor, an endemic species to the region, and the Asiatic cheetah, as symbols of the area's rich biodiversity.

He reminded that the Asiatic cheetah is an endangered species and a symbol of valuable wildlife in the Khar Turan Biosphere Reserve and Qaleh Bala. The design and installation of the village monument, drawing on this asset, not only significantly increases visual appeal and creates a landmark for tourists but also sends a clear message to the world about

the determination of residents and officials to protect and introduce the natural and cultural heritage of this region.

Razavian stated that the installation of the monument is very important for public awareness and preparing the necessary infrastructure for the global registration process of the village. Referring to the installation of wooden signage for facades in the tourist village, he added that wooden directional signs were designed and installed to improve the village's visual identity.

He added that these signs were installed along the routes to eco-lodges, natural attractions, and scenic spots in the village, and will aid the global registration process by enhancing the quality of the landscape, infrastructure, and visitor experience.

Regarding the installation of alley name signs featuring

the Zagh-e Boor, and the Asiatic cheetah, he said that the construction and installation of new alley name signs were carried out with the aim of environmental identity-building and promoting a culture of nature conservation.

According to Razavian, featuring these two valuable species on the village signs reflects the attention and commitment of Qaleh Bala's residents to protecting wildlife and the local ecosystem. The village, known as a "wildlife-friendly village," has always strived through active participation to safeguard nature and the unique species of Turan National Park.

He noted that the installation of alley name signs, as part of the global registration process, enhances the village's visual beauty and serves as a reminder of the importance of peaceful coexistence between humans and nature.

Razavian emphasized that keeping ancient traditions alive and showcasing the region's local culture plays an important role in earning points for the global registration of Qaleh Bala. The women of the village adorn the thirsty earth in the hope of rain during this traditional ceremony.

Referring to efforts to keep culture alive in the heart of the desert, he said that a children's library was established in 2025 in Qaleh Bala with the participation of culture-loving residents, active women, children, and adolescents. This cultural initiative aligns with the planning for the village's global registration and sustainable tourism development. The role of mothers and women in preparing cultural programs, as well as children's performances and recitations, showcased a manifestation of social sustainability and cultural solidarity within the local community.

Razavian stated that the launch of the children's library is an important step in raising the cultural and educational level of the village's children and plays a key role in the path toward sustainable tourism development and global registration. The social participation of residents, especially women and children, can be a valuable asset for preserving cultural heritage and introducing the village's tourism capacities.

He also mentioned the revival of silk weaving and the opening of a handicrafts house in one of the village's historic homes as other efforts and groundwork for the global registration of Qaleh Bala and the development of sustainable tourism.

Referring to efforts to restore historical buildings in the village, Razavian noted that the Qaleh Bala watermill, which for years was part of the village's historical identity and traditional architecture, has been restored as part of the effort to protect this valuable regional heritage.

Major museum expansion wraps up in West Azarbaijan Province

Iranica Desk

The Director General of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts Organization of West Azarbaijan Province has announced the completion of the Urmia Archaeological Museum, described as the second richest museum in the country.

Speaking to IRNA, Morteza Safari added that the Urmia Archaeological Museum is among the priority projects of the province's cultural heritage, tourism, and handicrafts sector.

He continued that the museum currently covers an area of 600 square meters, which will expand to approximately 1,800 square meters upon completion of the project.

Safari added that with the implementation of this plan, the development space of the Urmia Archaeological Museum will reach 2,000 square meters, and the necessary space for displaying museum artifacts will be provided.

He stated that the museum's development plan is being carried out following expert studies, ensuring that the new floor added to the old building imposes no



load on it, with all safety principles and required standards being taken into account.

Safari noted that the museum was originally built in 1967 (1346 Persian calendar), and no serious development project had been carried out for it since then. Moreover, only 10 percent or even less of the existing space was available for displaying artifacts.

He added that the museum houses a large number of artifacts, which prompted the initiation of a new development

plan to expand the museum and create adequate space to display them, allowing the public to visit and become familiar with these historical objects.

Safari said that the completion of this complex will enable the display of many more historical artifacts that, due to space constraints in previous years, had been kept in storage and could not be exhibited. QR codes have also been defined for the museum's artifacts. He reminded that the devel-



opment project of the Urmia Archaeological Museum is one of the largest cultural heritage, tourism, and handicrafts projects in West Azarbaijan, which includes not only the expansion but also the reinforcement of the old museum building.

The Urmia Archaeological Museum, with 57 years of history, is considered one of the richest museums in the country, connecting visitors to the lifestyle of ancient peoples from the early Neolithic period and the

first human settlements in the Middle East.

The museum holds 25,000 historical and cultural artifacts, including a variety of stone, pottery, and metal objects from the early Neolithic to the late Qajar period, as well as a collection of stone tools dating back to the 7th millennium BCE, discovered from the ancient hill of Ahranjan in Salmas and Jalbar Hill in Naqadeh, which are on public display.

Part of the museum hall is dedicated to Islamic-era artifacts from the early Islamic centu-

ries to the Qajar period, including various glazed pottery and Seljuk-era brass vessels, Ilkhanid golden ceramics and tiles, glazed pottery vessels from the 12th century CE, along with coins from early Islam to the Qajar period displayed in other sections. Three-thousand-year-old glazed bricks, silver coins, and Sassanid glass vessels are among other unique features of the historical museum of Urmia. Three large stone inscriptions from the Urartian period, written in Urartian cuneiform, are among the museum's unparalleled artifacts.

Rare manuscripts from the Ilkhanid to Qajar periods, along with works by famous calligraphers of the Islamic world such as Ahmad Neyrizi and Naini, form another part of this rich national treasure.

Given the high number of historical artifacts, this cultural site is the second richest museum in the country.

Bone and stone tools, glazed tiles, and bricks from Qalaichi Hill are among other unique artifacts from the early Islamic to Qajar periods housed in this museum.

Pezeshkian calls for return to Sa'adi's profound thought in face of anti-civilizational forces

Arts & Culture Desk

President Masoud Pezeshkian called for a return to the ethical and humanist thought of classical Persian poet Sa'adi in a message marking Sa'adi Commemoration Day on April 21, with Culture and Islamic Guidance Minister Abbas Salehi issuing a parallel tribute highlighting unity and compassion. Pezeshkian cast Sa'adi as a cornerstone of Iran's Iranian-Islamic civilization, urging renewed engagement with his "profound" ideas and refined literary voice. He said the Shiraz-born poet sought to revive a humane, ethical society grounded in justice, social responsibility, and coexistence, adding that reliance on such a legacy has enabled Iran to endure and play a lasting role in human history. "Today, in the face of anti-civilizational forces, we must turn to Sa'adi's profound thought," the President said, emphasizing the continued relevance of his teachings

in navigating contemporary challenges and strengthening national cohesion. He described Sa'adi as among the architects of Iran's cultural and civil revival after the Mongol invasions, crediting his prose and poetry with laying enduring foundations for Persian literature and moral discourse. In a separate message, Salehi said commemorating Sa'adi shows a "living Iranian soul" rooted in compassion, wisdom, and dialogue. He pointed to the poet's renowned verse that "human beings are members of a whole" as a timeless moral charter transcending borders and identities. Salehi added that Iranian culture has long advanced peace and coexistence, noting that recent developments have once again underscored national solidarity alongside dignified resilience, reflecting the enduring spirit of the Iranian people.

PHOTOS OF THE DAY



Iran's Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance, Abbas Salehi, visits the Iran Cultural & Press Institute on April 21, 2026, where he reviews recent publications and discusses media initiatives with institute officials. ● SAJAD SAFARI/ IRAN DAILY

US-Israeli strikes erase two Iranian libraries, damage 62 more



Arts & Culture Desk

Iran Public Libraries Foundation announced that 64 libraries across the country sustained damage during American and Israeli military strikes, with two completely razed. Azadeh Nazarboland, secretary-general of Iran Public Libraries Foundation, said on Tuesday that the border regiment library in Dehloran, Ilam Province, and the Seyyed al-Shohada library at the Hosseiniyeh in Zanjan were 100% destroyed, IRNA reported. Reconstruction of the Zanjan facility, a 1,000-square-metre collection housing over 35,000 volumes, is under way through local efforts. Other damaged libraries have returned to service after repairs, Nazarboland added during a visit to North Khorasan Province. The foundation now runs 4,298 urban and rural service points, including 514 mobile units. Mobile library vehicles have ramped up from 60 to 72, bolstering cultural access in under-served areas. Another 800 libraries operate in rural regions.

ADVERTORIAL

'The Heart of Iran': HEGTA's national social initiative brings hope back to children's hearts

Following the tragic events of the recent imposed war against Iran and the martyrdom of a number of fellow citizens, including children and adolescents from the Shajareh Tayyebeh School in Minab, Social Security Tourism Holding (HEGTA), in collaboration with the country's artistic community, has launched the national initiative 'The Heart of Iran' with the goal of strengthening joy, hope, and creativity among affected children and families. Alireza Tabesh, CEO of HEGTA, said, "in these days when so many hearts are grieving, with the participation and cooperation of organizations such as the House of Cinema, the House of Theater, Iran Music House, the Stationary Manufacturers Union Society of Iran, and the Peyk-e Tahrir group, we consider it our duty to create a new atmosphere of hope, solidarity, and creation for children. Art is the common language of all Iranians, and by partnering with a range of the country's cultural and artistic institutions, we aim to help increase people's resilience and build a brighter future for the next generation."

'The Heart of Iran' program

The CEO of HEGTA stated, "under this initiative, a series of programs have been planned, centered around children's drawing under the slogan 'We build the future with colors', completing a puzzle of the 'Map of Iran' focusing on images of historical and natural heritage alongside the names of various cities of our country, as well as designing artistic performances and helping to organize them nationwide with the assistance of civil associations and institutions." He emphasized, "these programs will be carried out across the extensive network of HEGTA's hotels, trains, and tourism centers, as well as in schools, cultural centers, and public events, in coordination and collaboration with relevant authorities throughout Iran."

Tabesh said, "the goal of this initiative is not merely to hold a cultural event; rather, we want to create a collective experience, one in which children learn that hope can be kept alive through colors, art, empathy, and resilience."

First of its kind in Tehran

According to the CEO of HEGTA Tourism Holding, the first evening of the program was held at the Homa Hotel in Tehran, with the presence and participation of a number of reputable cultural institutions, including the House of Cinema, the House of Theater, Iran Music House, the Stationary Manufacturers Union Society of Iran, and the Peyk-e Tahrir group. During this program, artists, children, and families affected by the recent war came together to experience an evening full of empathy, art, and hope. Tabesh, referring to the content of the program, said, "for this event, a series of theatrical, puppet, and musical performances, along with joyful cultural activities, were prepared for children to create unique and hopeful moments for them."

It is worth noting that the execution of this program was overseen by the Headquarters for Cooperation of the House of Cinema (under the responsibility of Anahid Abad), and it is planned to continue in accommodation and cultural centers. He added, "in a special segment of this program, a large puzzle featuring the 'Map of Iran' and images of the natural and historical heritage of the country's cities (a work by Ava Peyk-e Tahrir; Majid Akbari) was completed and installed at the Homa Hotel, with the participation of children and artists, in memory of the martyred children of the Shajareh Tayyebeh School in Minab, as a symbol of solidarity, resilience, and the reconnection of Iran's little hearts." Tabesh added, "the children wel-



comed this event with great enthusiasm and spent more than five hours alongside artists, performances, and puppets, sharing intimate, joyful, and memorable moments." This program included puppet theater, traditional Kheimah Shab-Bazi (a traditional Persian puppet show), stand-up comedy, and music. Three puppet shows were performed by the Puppeteers' Association of Iran and artists from the Children and Adolescent Section of the House of Theater, and the Kheimah Shab-Bazi segment was staged by the Iran Puppet Museum House under the direction of Setareh Eskandari. Following that, the Dey Band music group and the Azerbaijani group of Vahid Asadollahi created a unique atmosphere for the attendees by performing cheerful pieces. Additionally, a number of artists and cultural figures present at the event spoke with affected children and families by presenting them with flowers. The children, with great excitement, took souvenir photos with the artists and puppets, experiencing moments

full of connection, joy, and hope, an evening that reached its peak of solidarity with a collective singing of the anthem 'Ey Iran.' It is worth mentioning that Hossein Pakdel, Alireza Shojanoori, Atefeh Razavi, Hadi Hejazifar, Alireza Kamali, Alireza Hosseini, Shabnam Moghaddami, Gelareh Abbasi, Shakib Shajareh, Ali Osivand, Ali Nikraftar, Mohammad Foghani, Farzin Mohaddes, Mona Zandi, Vahid Aghapour, Ali Roueintan, Mohammad Loghmanian, Ruhollah Hejazi, Sajjad Afsharian, Anahid Abad, Maryam Hajirvand, Mohammad Fereshtehnejad, Nazanin Solhjoo, Kazem Hajir Azad, Alireza Najafzadeh, Homayoun As'adian (Managing Director of the House of Cinema), Hamidreza Nourbakhsh (Managing Director of Iran Music House), and Alireza Gilvari (Managing Director of the House of Theater) were present at this event.

Exhibition of children's works at national, international levels

The CEO of HEGTA noted, "regarding the children's drawings, the created works will be presented, after profes-

sional judging, in national and international exhibitions, as well as in the form of cultural products." Tabesh concluded by emphasizing the continuity of this path, "HEGTA stands with the people and for the people; our mission, alongside engaging in the tourism sector, is to build a brighter future for the children of Iran, and the 'Del Iran' initiative will continue until this goal is achieved."

Mobile cinema at Homa Hotel

Referring to the lived experience of affected families in hotels during war conditions and efforts to increase family resilience, Tabesh noted, "in this regard, during Nowruz this year, in cooperation with the Iranian Youth Cinema Society and with the participation of some of the country's art luminaries, fifteen feature films were screened over two weeks in the form of a 'Mobile Cinema' for families affected by the third imposed war, in one of the halls of the Homa Hotel in Tehran, and this initiative was well received by the families affected by the imposed war."