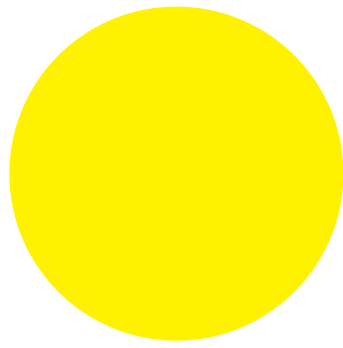


AFC Asian Cup
Saudi Arabia 2027:
Iran drawn
against Syria,
Kyrgyzstan, China
in group stage



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Iran Daily

Vol. 8114 • Monday, May 11, 2026 • Ordibehesht 21, 1405 • Dhu al-Qadah 23, 1447 • 100,000 rials • 8 pages



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UAE pursues breakaway strategy in rivalry with Saudi Arabia

**I N T E R V I E W
E X C L U S I V E**

The United Arab Emirates, which has become entangled in the United States and Israel's war against Iran, appears to be drawing ever closer to Israel while simultaneously distancing itself from Arab states. Evidence of this can be seen in the expansion of Abu Dhabi's defense and security cooperation with Israel, alongside its withdrawal from OPEC and OAPEC. These developments could reshape regional equations and influence the policies of Persian Gulf countries, including Saudi Arabia and Iran.



Parham Pourramezan

In an interview with Iran Daily, political science researcher Parham Pourramezan said the UAE has adopted a strategy of separation in its competition with Saudi Arabia for leadership of the Arab world and is seeking to outmaneuver Riyadh by elevating its own geopolitical standing. According to him, the alliance with Israel is unfolding along the same lines and is also aimed at securing a backer capable of sustaining the UAE's economic development agenda in the post-war era.

IRAN DAILY: Could this UAE-Israel convergence evolve into a sustainable strategic partnership? Under the current tense regional conditions, to what extent would this approach benefit the UAE, and what costs could it carry?

POURRAMEZAN: Cooperation between the UAE and Israel in the economic, defense, and security spheres has, in fact, been underway covertly for many years. This is not a new phenomenon at all. What appears new is simply that these ties have now been brought into the open. For years, the two sides have been engaged in various forms of cooperation behind the scenes.

What is now pushing their ties from ordinary relations toward a strategic partnership is, above all, the deepening of economic cooperation, followed by increasingly extensive security and defense collaboration.

There is little doubt that, particularly in the near future, more will be heard about the deepening of relations between the UAE and Israel. The reason lies in the ongoing rivalry between the UAE and Saudi Arabia over leadership of the Arab world. Abu Dhabi has now adopted a strategy of separation, seeking to distinguish itself from the broader West Asian region by enhancing its geopolitical standing — first to gain an advantage over Saudi Arabia and then to use Israel as an ally and backer capable of helping sustain the economic development policies it has pursued in recent years, policies that were disrupted during the war.

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President Masoud Pezeshkian (L) attends a meeting with a group of government officials in Tehran, Iran on May 10, 2026. president.ir



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Iran's top military brass vows crushing response to 'enemy's mistake'



National Desk

Iran's top military command assured Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Mojtaba Khamenei that the country's Armed Forces are fully prepared to confront any "strategic mistake" or aggression by the "American-Zionist enemy." According to a Sunday statement by the General Staff of

the Iranian Armed Forces, Major General Ali Abdollahi, commander of the Khatam al-Anbiba Central Headquarters, met with Ayatollah Khamenei and presented a report on the readiness of Iran's Armed Forces, including the Army, the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC), law enforcement and border forces, the Defense Ministry, and Basij volunteer forces.

Abdollahi said "all fighters of Islam" possess high readiness in terms of morale, defensive and offensive preparedness, strategic plans, and the equipment and weaponry required to confront hostile actions by the "American-Zionist enemies." He warned that if the enemies commit any "strategic mistake, aggression, or invasion," Iranian forces would respond "swiftly,

intensely, and powerfully." During the meeting, Ayatollah Khamenei praised the country's military and issued new directives for continuing action and confronting enemies decisively following the 40-day US-Israeli war against the country.

The unprovoked US-Israeli war on February 28 touched off days of bombing of Iran's military and civilian infrastructure, intended to bring down the Islamic Republic.

Meanwhile, spokesperson for the Iranian Armed Forces, Brigadier General Abolfazl Shekarchi, said on Sunday that the country's Armed Forces have the upper hand in the region, despite US acts of aggression and mischief.

"Despite the United States' provocations, thankfully the initiative remains in the hands of the Armed Forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran, and the combat capabilities of Iran's fighters are at a very high level," Shekarchi said.

He also warned certain regional countries about the adverse consequences of siding with the "fascist" US military.

Warning to regional countries

"Any country which takes action against Iran will face a decisive response from our country's Armed Forces," the general pointed out.

The remarks were also echoed by the commander of the IRGC Aerospace Force.

Brigadier General Majid Mousavi said the force's missiles and drones have been locked onto enemy targets and are awaiting the order to fire. "The (IRGC) Aerospace Force's missiles and drones have been locked onto American targets in the region and the vessels of the aggressor enemy," Mousavi said in a message released on Saturday night.

Despite a ceasefire in place since April 8, the US military has repeatedly violated the agreement. In the latest of such violations, the US struck two Iranian oil tankers near the port of Jask and the Strait of Hormuz, and carried out assaults on several coastal areas overlooking the strategic waterway on May 7-8, which were met with a powerful re-

sponse from Iran. Moreover, Army spokesman Brigadier General Mohammad Akraminia warned that countries complying with US sanctions against Iran will "certainly face problems" in passing through the Strait of Hormuz.

Iran shut down the Strait of Hormuz to enemies and their allies following the launch of the US-Israeli aggression.

It began exercising far stricter controls last month after US President Donald Trump announced an illegal blockade of Iranian vessels and ports in violation of the terms of a Pakistan-brokered ceasefire.

Akraminia said the Americans tried to break Iran's control on the Strait of Hormuz by escorting destroyers and ships, but they encountered the Iranian Armed Forces, whose strong resistance led Trump to abandon his military campaign to reopen the waterway. Akraminia also warned that other surprising options await the enemy if it makes a new miscalculation and attacks Iran again.

Pezeshkian: Talks meant to uphold national rights, not surrender

Tehran replies to US proposal on ending aggression



Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian (4th) attends a meeting of the task force for reconstruction of structures damaged during the US-Israeli aggression against Iran in Tehran on May 10, 2026. president.ir

International Desk

President Masoud Pezeshkian said on Sunday that any negotiations are aimed at securing the nation's rights and firmly defending national interests, stressing that dialogue does not mean surrender or retreat.

Speaking during a meeting of the task force for reconstruction of structures damaged during the US-Israeli aggression against Iran, Pezeshkian said the Iranian nation "will never bow before the enemy."

"If there is any talk of dialogue or negotiation, it does not mean surrender or backing down, but rather the goal is to secure the rights of the Iranian nation and powerfully defend national interests," he said.

His remarks came as regional efforts are underway to end the ongoing tensions in the region, which have been caused by a US-Israeli aggression against Iran on February 28.

On April 11-12, Iran and the United States held the first round of negotiations brokered by Pakistan, days after Islamabad mediated a ceasefire to halt the aggression on Iran. However, it failed to produce an agreement due to the US excessive demands.

Efforts to bring back the sides to the negotiating table also failed after Iran refused to take part in the second round due to the US violation of the ceasefire.

However, the two countries have been

exchanging proposals through mediator Pakistan to find a way out of the crisis which has also disrupted global economy.

Reply to US proposal

IRNA reported on Sunday that Iran submitted its official reply to the latest US proposal for reaching a deal that allows a permanent end to the US-Israeli war of aggression against the country.

The news agency said the response insists that current negotiations between Iran and the US should solely focus on efforts to end the war, and other issues, including disputes surrounding Iran's nuclear program, should be discussed at later stages of the talks.

The Iranian Foreign Ministry announced earlier this week that the country would submit its final response to the US proposal after carrying out deliberations and thorough examinations.

The US proposal had come in response to a 14-article plan submitted by Iran to allow a complete halt to the US-Israeli war of aggression. Iran's semi-official ISNA news agency said in a Sunday report that the latest Iranian reply is focused on efforts to end the aggression and to guarantee the security of shipping activities in the Persian Gulf.

A key sticking point in the current negotiations between Iran and the US

is the restoration of shipping through the Strait of Hormuz, a key waterway in the Persian Gulf, which has come under Iranian control since the early days of the aggression.

Iran has indicated it is ready to reopen the Strait if the aggression ends permanently and the US lifts its illegal sanctions and blockade on the country.

US President Donald Trump declared a ceasefire with Iran on April 8, following 40 days of the unprovoked aggression. However, he later ordered the continuation of an illegal blockade of Iranian vessels and ports in violation of the ceasefire's terms.

'Comprehensive agreement'

Qatar's Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani held talks with US Secretary of State Marco Rubio on regional developments and efforts to end the ongoing war, according to a Qatari government statement.

During the meeting in Miami, Sheikh Mohammed called on all parties to pay attention to mediation efforts and address "the root causes of the crisis through peaceful means," the statement said.

Qatar is seeking a "comprehensive agreement" for lasting peace in the region, it added.

Hours after his meeting with the US secretary of state, the Qatari prime minister also held a phone conversation with Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi.

The two sides discussed "the latest regional developments and ongoing diplomatic processes," but did not provide further details, according to IRNA.

Deliberate threats to civilians 'indefensible, inhumane': ICRC

International Desk

President of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) Mirjana Spoljaric Egger said intentional threats against civilians are devastating for entire populations, emphasizing that "endless wars" should not be normalized.

"Any deliberate threats against civilians – in rhetoric and in action – are indefensible, inhumane and devastating for entire populations. We cannot normalize endless war. We need to bring humanity back into the conversation on conflict," Spoljaric said in an exclusive interview with IRNA published on Sunday. Spoljaric visited Iran less than two weeks ago to discuss humanitarian consequences of a recent aggression by the US and Israel against Iran.

During her visit, she visited some of the residential and civilian areas damaged in the US-Israeli attacks in the capital, Tehran.

In response to a question about the ICRC's position about the US's attack on a school in southern Iran on the first day of the war, which led to the killing of more than 120 children, Spoljaric stressed that the loss of civilian lives, especially children, is deeply tragic.



Mirjana Spoljaric Egger, ICRC President, speaking at a press conference. [irna](http://irna.ir)

"Schools and universities must remain sanctuaries for learning. All parties must respect and ensure respect for the protection granted to schools under international humanitarian law," she said.

Referring to US threats of targeting Iran's infrastructure, the ICRC's president said international humanitarian law sets limits on how wars are fought. "I have already said that any deliberate threats against civilians – in rhetoric and in action – are indefensible, inhumane and devastating for entire populations. We cannot normalize endless wars. We need to bring humanity back into the conversation on conflict. Civilians and the infrastructure they rely on to survive need to be protected," she said.



Mohammad Ali Rajabi
Cartoonist

CARTOON



TPO: Exports to Africa jump 25% as continental trade expands

Economy Desk

Iran is conducting trade with 39 African countries, with the value of each ton of Iranian exports to the continent rising by 25%, a senior Trade Promotion Organization (TPO) official said, according to IRNA. Amir Roshanbakhsh, deputy head for the development of international businesses at the Trade Promotion Organization of Iran, provided details on the country's trade trends with Africa. "At present, Iran's trade exchanges with 39 countries across the African continent are ongoing, and export and import processes with these countries are underway," he said.

Roshanbakhsh said the value of each ton of Iranian exports to Africa had risen from \$442 to \$554. "The value of each ton of exported goods to the African continent was \$442, which has increased by 25% to \$554, meaning the value of Iran's exported goods to this continent has increased," he said. He added that the value of imports from Africa had declined by 11%, indicating that Iran was importing lower value-added goods while exporting products with higher added value. Roshanbakhsh said Iran's trade activity in North Africa remained relatively limited despite what he described as strong potential for expanding commerce in

the region. "If we divide the African continent into regions, our trade activities in North Africa have been relatively limited, despite the good capacity and potential these countries offer for our trade," he said. He added that Iran's trade ties with West Africa were stronger, with an active trade center operating in the region and efforts underway to increase exchanges between merchants. Roshanbakhsh also emphasized the development of emerging opportunities in Africa, saying trade relations with East African countries such as Tanzania had existed for years and continued to this day.



IRNA

IKIA says foreign airlines in talks to resume Iran routes



IRNA

Economy Desk

Foreign airlines are in talks to resume flights to Iran and have announced their readiness to return to the market, the chief executive of Tehran's Imam Khomeini International Airport (IKIA) City told ILNA. Ramin Kashef-Azar said foreign carriers were negotiating a return to Iranian routes as conditions stabilized following the conflict. The country's airspace gradually reopened after a ceasefire was reached between Washington and Tehran on April 8, halting a 40-

day conflict launched by the US-Israeli coalition in late February. "International flights are operating according to schedule. Domestic airlines are maintaining their international flight programs and flight conditions at this airport are normal," Kashef-Azar said. "For foreign airlines, Iran is an attractive market, and with every day they lose access to Iranian routes they incur losses. They do not want to lose this market, and multiple rounds of negotiations have so far taken place on returning to Iranian routes as conditions

stabilize," he said. He said domestic carriers were continuing to meet market demand until foreign airlines resumed operations. "Domestic airlines are continuing to meet existing market demand, and with longer operating hours, the number of flights at Imam Khomeini Airport is also increasing," he said. Kashef-Azar said Iran Air was currently operating Hajj flights without the participation of Saudi airlines and had encountered no problems. He added that foreign airlines had also moved to remove parked aircraft from Imam Khomeini airport during the period of conflict. Kashef-Azar said development projects at Imam Khomeini airport were continuing without interruption. "Development is our right, and during this period no project was halted or left unfinished," he said.

IRCS pharmaceutical firms suffer \$83m wartime damage

Mohammad Reza Shanesaz
IRCS

Economy Desk

Two pharmaceutical and medical equipment companies affiliated with the

Iranian Red Crescent Society (IRCS) suffered an estimated \$83.3 million (1.5 trillion tomans) in damages during the US-Israeli war against Iran, the head of the organization's medical procurement body told ISNA. Mohammad Reza Shanesaz, head of the Iranian Red Crescent Society's Medical Procurement Organization, said nearly 40-day war damaged the pharmaceutical and medical equipment companies. He said laboratories, production halls and other

sections of the companies were damaged, forcing the Medical Procurement Organization out of production for two days. However, Shanesaz said employees, most of them women, quickly resumed operations. "Without any fear, they immediately got to work, removed the obstacles that had halted production, and the company's production resumed," he said. He added that both companies had also come under attack during the earlier 12-day Israeli-imposed war in June.

Shanesaz said preliminary estimates put the damage to the two companies at around 1.5 trillion tomans, though he said the figure would "certainly increase." He also said eight containers carrying materials needed for the production of hemodialysis filters had been seized aboard the vessel Tosca. He said obtaining the materials had been difficult and time-consuming, and that their seizure would complicate the production of medical equipment for dialysis patients until the cargo was released.

IRISL ranks 17th among world's top container shipping lines

Economy Desk

The Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Lines (IRISL) ranked 17th among the world's top container shipping companies in the latest Alphaliner rankings, according to Tasnim news agency. Swiss-based Mediterranean Shipping Company (MSC) retained its position as the world's largest container shipping company with a capacity of 7.319 million TEU. Denmark's Maersk and France's

CMA CGM ranked second and third, with capacities of 4.661 million TEU and 4.289 million TEU, respectively. China's COSCO Group ranked fourth with a capacity of 3.597 million TEU. Germany's Hapag-Lloyd, Singapore-based Ocean Network Express (ONE) and Taiwan's Evergreen Marine ranked fifth through seventh, respectively. South Korea's Hyundai Merchant Marine (HMM) ranked eighth with a capacity of 1.03 million TEU, while Taiwan's

Yang Ming Marine Transport ranked ninth with a capacity of 741,908 TEU. IRISL ranked 17th globally with a container shipping capacity of 142,180 TEU. IRISL, Iran's state shipping carrier, has operated under multiple rounds of US sanctions in recent years targeting Iran's shipping and logistics sectors. Washington reimposed sanctions on IRISL and dozens of affiliated entities and vessels in 2018 and expanded measures in subsequent years.



The company has also faced operational pressure amid heightened tensions in regional shipping routes following the recent US naval blockade on Iranian ports and shipping activity linked to the Strait of Hormuz.

UAE pursues breakaway ...

In summary, these ties are likely to grow stronger in the medium term and could eventually develop into a stable and strategic partnership in the long run. However, this does not necessarily mean the outcome will benefit the UAE. The Palestinian cause remains a central issue in the Arab world and is not something that can simply be brushed aside. The growing rapprochement between Arab states — particularly the UAE — and Israel effectively amounts to a direct abandonment of that cause, and it will undoubtedly carry consequences. Moreover, given the nature of the confrontation that unfolded between Iran and the UAE, it has become evident that the UAE could, because of its provocations against Iran, face setbacks that push it years backward. Abu Dhabi is also likely to recognize that its foreign policy must ultimately place reliable

neighbors — including the Arab Persian Gulf states and Iran — at the center of its strategic calculations, rather than shaping its policies primarily around the interests of the United States and Israel.

Before the recent escalation, many believed Saudi Arabia was moving toward normalizing ties with Israel and joining the Abraham Accords. In light of the war and the growing tensions between Riyadh and Abu Dhabi, can Saudi Arabia still be expected to move toward an agreement with Israel?

Prior to the war, there were many concrete indicators suggesting that Saudi Arabia could eventually join the Abraham Accords. However, considering Iran's role in the region and its emergence as an undeniable regional — if not extra-regional — power, it can now be argued that the approach of both re-

gional and international actors toward Iran is likely to change.

This shift could push many countries, including neighboring states such as Saudi Arabia, to reconsider and potentially recalibrate their foreign policies and alliance structures. One of the most significant aspects of this process would involve redefining Riyadh's relationship with the United States and, subsequently, with Israel.

As for whether Saudi Arabia will join the accords in the short, medium, or long term, it is still too early to say with certainty. Much will depend on the final outcome of the war.

If positive negotiations emerge between Iran and the United States, Saudi Arabia could remain in a state of uncertainty regarding the Abraham Accords, or at least continue to weigh its options cautiously. However, if no agreement is reached between Washington and Teh-

ran and the military costs of instability in the region continue to rise, there is a possibility that Saudi Arabia could, under a form of compulsion — partly voluntary and partly imposed by circumstances — become directly involved in the confrontation and eventually join the Abraham Accords. In this regard, the outcome of the war will be highly consequential.

Could the widening rift between the UAE and several key Arab actors, including Abu Dhabi's withdrawal from frameworks such as OPEC and OAPEC, create new diplomatic, economic, or security opportunities for Iran in the post-war period?

After the war, Iran's regional role has changed in a fundamental way. From a realistic standpoint, Iran has entered a new phase of power, having demonstrated both a degree of deterrence ca-

pability and its broader strength in both offensive and defensive arenas.

The UAE's withdrawal from OPEC and Arab alliances, as well as its confrontational posture toward Iran, could create several opportunities for Tehran, including strengthening Iran's regional standing. Now, Iran could use this opportunity to enhance its leverage — both through control over the Iranian islands and through its oil leverage and the strategic importance of the Strait of Hormuz. This could allow Tehran to emerge as a more influential and powerful regional actor.

That said, a more precise assessment will require additional time, as the full consequences of the war have not yet become entirely clear and the situation remains, so to speak, in a gray zone. More time is needed before more definitive and accurate analyses can be offered.

What will happen when Trump meets Xi?

OPINION

US President Donald Trump will travel to Beijing for meetings with President Xi Jinping on May 14–15, 2026. Brookings experts weigh in below on how Trump and Xi's interaction will impact their areas of expertise and how the summit's success will be measured.



JARED BARTMAN/THE ECONOMIST

Low expectations amid fears of escalation



By Jonathan Czin
Chair in foreign policy studies

Outside observers should have low expectations for the upcoming summit between Trump and Xi. While the relationship has stabilized since the two leaders met last November, it remains fragile — defined more by an absence of friction than any affirmative agenda or deep dialogue on the substantial differences that bedevil the relationship. Many Chinese analysts expect a US snap back to a more competitive China policy, either after the midterms or after Trump steps down in 2029. Beijing seems focused on using this interregnum to en-

hance its position vis-à-vis the United States. Likewise, many in the Trump administration and on Capitol Hill favor a return to sustained strategic competition. The summit's diplomacy has only reinforced the deeper drivers diminishing the likelihood of substantive gains. The reported meager bureaucratic preparations for this meeting limit the prospects for progress. Counterintuitively, by signaling early and loudly a desire for multiple presidential encounters this year, the Trump administration may have reduced Beijing's incentive to offer any major concessions. Chinese officials believe they will extract more value from concessions later,

calculating that Trump — the self-identified consummate dealmaker — will want to tout any agreement as a major breakthrough ahead of the midterm elections. However, there are risks ahead that could make this meeting a high-water mark of Sino-US amity rather than a precursor to additional agreements. Most notably, the administration is trying to reconstruct its tariff regime after the Supreme Court ruled in February that many of the previous tariffs were unlawful. Beijing could argue that restoring tariff levels back to where they were violates the tenuous "cease-fire" in the trade war, opening up the possibility of a renewed cycle of escalation.

Prolonging uneasy calm in US-China relations



By Ryan Hass
Director of John L. Thornton China Center

A key lesson from 2025 for Trump and Xi was that they both could harm the other, but not without inviting painful retaliation. As a result, both leaders agreed to a trade war truce when they met on the margins of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation meeting in Busan last October. Trump appears focused on preserving this truce and using the time to build insulation against dependence on China for key inputs such as rare earths. This focus likely will guide his visit

to Beijing. In this sense, the summit can be understood more for what it aims to avoid (e.g., a breakdown in the relationship) than what it seeks to achieve. To be clear, there will be outcomes from Trump's visit. Both leaders will likely announce Chinese purchases of American products, such as Boeing airplanes and agricultural goods. They also likely will announce a bilateral "Board of Trade" to identify non-sensitive sectors for purchase commitments and limited tariff adjustments. Spaces to watch will include any announcement of major Chinese invest-

ments into the United States and any potential shift to long-standing American declaratory policy on Taiwan. So long as the visit proceeds smoothly and Trump concludes he was treated respectfully, then the uneasy calm in the bilateral relationship will endure. If, on the other hand, Trump leaves feeling disrespected or trifled with, then he could have a change of heart. Trump may also be sensitive to being perceived as upstaged, particularly if Beijing rolls out the red carpet for Russian President Vladimir Putin immediately after his departure from Beijing.

End of estrangement



By Susan A. Thornton
Senior fellow at Yale's Paul Tsai China Center

For Americans, the most significant result from Trump's upcoming visit to Beijing will be that it happened. Mistrust between the US and Chinese governments has skyrocketed since COVID-19. Communication between the two across the Pacific has been dramatically truncated. Joe Biden was the first US president since US-China relations were established

not to visit China. Congressional visits have similarly fallen off. This estrangement coincides with both elevated bilateral tensions and with sudden and dramatic changes in the global power structure, norms, and institutions. Presidential-level communication is currently the only guardrail in US-China relations; we need this channel to stop miscalculation from leading to conflict. It is less than ideal, of course, that this meeting will happen against the backdrop of the war with Iran, but US policy contin-

ually allows the urgent to crowd out the important. Trump seems determined not to let that happen in this case. He deserves credit for already increasing communication with Xi in the first year of his second term; the Chinese leadership has also shown flexibility and willingness to keep this channel open. The two have stated that they may meet as many as a record four times this year. These meetings are our best hope for preventing miscalculation and should be welcomed as such. Ongoing estrangement is too dangerous.

Uncertainty surrounds Taiwan



By Richard C. Bush
Nonresident senior fellow

I have no idea how the Xi-Trump summit will affect Taiwan and its relationship with the United States. China watchers understand that China's policymaking occurs in a black box. Currently, the United States has no formal process. For outside observers of the Trump administration looking for intensive summit preparations regarding Taiwan or any other issue, they are not readily apparent. I hope that US officials are consulting with their Taiwan counterparts,

but I do not know whether they are. Nor do I know how the two presidents will discuss Taiwan at the summit. That is, will they do so with other officials present or talk one-to-one with interpreters (no notetakers)? Whatever the case, will senior US officials have an opportunity in advance to brief Trump on how not to concede too much on Taiwan? It is possible that Taiwan may get crowded out by other important issues: tariffs, export controls, Russia-Ukraine, and especially the war in Iran. But the Chinese are signaling that Taiwan cannot be avoid-

ed. So, Xi may seek changes in US declaratory policy, including on Taiwan's legal status. He may ask Trump to impose constraints on American arms sales to Taiwan and then enforce them. The simple fact is that Beijing could ameliorate many of its purported complaints about Taiwan's cross-strait policy by talking to officials of the government in Taipei and doing so without conditions. But it has not done so for 10 years. As far as US-Taiwan relations are concerned, in the immortal words of Carter administration official Burt Lance, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it."



US President Donald Trump (R) meets with China's leader Xi Jinping (2nd-L) in Busan, South Korea, in October 2025.
HAIYUN JIANG/THE NEW YORK TIMES

It's time for US, China to talk about AI



By Kyle Chan
Fellow

The United States and China are the world's two artificial intelligence (AI) superpowers. Virtually all of the most advanced and widely used AI models are developed by these two countries. As AI systems rapidly become more powerful, so too do the risks they create. Anthropic's newest model, Mythos, has raised new concerns about AI-enhanced cyberattack capabilities. Researchers are sounding the alarm that AI tools could help less sophisticated actors devel-

op novel bioweapons. The proliferation of AI agents, capable of operating autonomously for hours at a time, raises questions around unintended actions and loss of control over these systems. And yet, the United States and China hardly talk about AI, at least at the official level. Both nations see AI as a key strategic technology, and their relationship in this domain is characterized by a low degree of trust and a high degree of competition. But this could change, given suggestions that Trump and Xi may finally discuss AI at their upcoming summit in Beijing. The United States and

China will almost certainly continue to compete fiercely in AI. But ideally, both leaders can also take steps toward working together in areas of shared interest. Trump and Xi can begin by opening official communication channels on AI risks, developing nonbinding safety guidelines, and sharing limited information about AI misuse or safety incidents. Both countries will be wary of agreeing to anything that could tie their own hands. But restarting official dialogue between the United States and China on AI is a crucial first step toward addressing an increasingly high-stakes issue.

A blind spot in US AI policy



By Yingyi Ma

Nonresident senior fellow

An opening chapter of an AI cold war is emerging. This week, the White House accused China of “industrial-scale” theft of American AI models, while Beijing reportedly moved to prevent Meta from acquiring Manus — a Chinese-founded AI startup now based in Singapore.

The deeper contest is not over who copies whose model, but over the talent capable of building the next generation of frontier AI. And on that dimension, the Trump summit offers little relief.

DeepSeek and Manus were not built by talent poached or stolen

from American institutions. Their founders and core teams were trained entirely within China. Beijing’s decision to block the Manus acquisition is instructive because it reveals what matters most to China: keeping its frontier AI talent at home. The White House, by contrast, remains focused on distillation and chip controls — symptoms of a competition but not the root of it.

From an American perspective, success should be measured by whether the summit prompts any honest reckoning with the US talent crisis: why the United States is producing less technical talent domestically, why its AI pipeline depends so heavily on immigration, and why that pipeline is now drying up.

Trump has lost leverage on fentanyl



By Vanda Felbab-Brown

Senior fellow

Fentanyl and synthetic opioid precursors remain a significant issue in US-China relations, but the Trump administration has weakened its leverage. By October 2025, China had outsmarted the United States in its fentanyl diplomacy, absorbing Trump’s early-2025 tariffs while retaliating with counter-tariffs, export controls on critical minerals, and boycotts of sensitive imports like soybeans. Subsequent diplomatic rounds led China to give the Trump administration the same deliverables it had already given to the Biden administration in late 2024 — the scheduling of nitazenes and several fentanyl precursors.

The US-China counternarcotics working group is working, but US officials tell me that cooperation hasn’t been as robust as it was in late 2024. At a March 2026 UN meeting on narcotic drugs, the US-China exchanges were acrimonious: the US delegation complained of China not doing enough to stop fentanyl precursors, while China accused Washington of “unilateral bullying”.

Indeed, the Trump administration deprived itself of the kind of multilateral counternarcotics pressure that China has been responsive to by letting the Biden-era Global Coalition to Address Synthetic Drug Threats wither on the vine. Moreover, the Trump administration’s preferred tool of diplomacy — tariffs — was gutted by the February

2026 US Supreme Court decision against its use of the International Emergency Economic Powers Act. The Stop Chinese Fentanyl Act (H.R.747), a new US bill seeking to impose visa bans and other sanctions on Chinese officials and other actors if China doesn’t cooperate against synthetic drug flows, has been stuck in the Senate.

In March 2026, the United States began charging Chinese precursor smugglers with material support for terrorism, following the designation of Mexican cartels as foreign terrorist organizations. This is an irritant for China, but a minor one. A much bigger irritation would be keeping China on the list of major illicit drug suppliers that the US government will release in September.

Oil, coal, and power politics



By Scott M. Moore

Nonresident senior fellow

The Iran conflict’s climate and energy dimension will hang over the Trump-Xi summit in two ways. On the one hand, the disruption to energy markets has substantially increased the cost of Chinese energy imports and will almost certainly result in increased coal combustion. Xi will be anxious to ensure that these disruptions are min-

imized, particularly if the conflict is still ongoing by the time the summit begins.

On the other hand, the conflict has vindicated China’s approach to energy security. China has pursued an “all-of-the-above” strategy for developing fossil and non-fossil energy and electrifying its energy system, which allows for power from multiple sources to be optimally integrated and, increasingly, stored. Its long-term investment in boosting oil and gas

supplies from overland rather than seaborne sources, most notably Russia, likewise looks sound. China is, thus far, less exposed to energy supply disruption and price volatility than it would be otherwise. Success should be measured to the extent that China agrees to purchase US energy, as opposed to continued purchases from Iran, Russia, and other US adversaries.

The full article first appeared on Brookings.



Chinese President Xi Jinping (front-R) shakes hands with DeepSeek founder Liang Wenfeng on February 17, 2026. © CCTV

Implications of China’s blocking ban on US sanctions

PERSPECTIVE

On April 24, the United States Department of the Treasury added five Chinese refineries to its sanctions list. In response, on May 2, the Chinese Ministry of Commerce (MOFCOM), through an official communiqué, stated that, for the purpose of safeguarding national sovereignty, security, and developmental interests, the American sanctions against said enterprises “will not be recognized, executed, or complied with”. This unprecedented move rests upon a foundation of mechanisms designed, since 2021, by the MOFCOM under the framework of the regulation, titled “Rules on Counteracting Unjustified Extraterritorial Application of Foreign Legislation and Other Measures,” a decree that bans Chinese firms from adhering to foreign sanctions. Continuing along this trajectory, on April 13, 2026, the State Council of China, in its capacity as the supreme executive authority within the nation, issued a statute denominated the “People’s Republic of China Regulations on Countering Improper Extraterritorial Jurisdiction by Foreign States”. This regulation establishes a comprehensive, multi-agency framework for counteracting extraterritorial jurisdiction, according to which any entity, whether Chinese or even foreign, that abstains from transacting with a sanctioned Chinese company due to Washington’s directives, may be litigated against in Chinese courts. In effect, this regulation has expanded the role of the Chinese

Ministry of Justice in obstructing American sanctions. Concerning the rationale for China’s current decision to counteract American extraterritorial sanctions, one may mention two causal factors pertaining to the necessity of action and one enabling foundation pertaining to the feasibility of implementation. The first cause resides in the following: unlike prior sanction episodes, which predominantly targeted smaller, privately-owned Chinese refineries denominated “teapots,” this time saw the Hengli petro-refinery, which, according to certain estimations, constitutes China’s third-largest refinery, being placed upon the United States Department of the Treasury’s

sanctions list; a development that became intolerable for Beijing. The second cause relates to the pattern of intensifying restrictions by the Trump administration against the unfettered activities of Chinese corporations, including pressure upon Panama to expel Chinese companies from critical terminals of the Panama Canal; a trajectory that has impelled China toward the conclusion that, to contain this, stronger mechanisms must be deployed against American cross-border interventions. The enabling foundation, too, signifies that the Chinese governing apparatus has evaluated the execution of such an action as feasible and low-cost at the present juncture. Given that this

policy situates Chinese enterprises between the acceptance of penalties from China or from the United States, Beijing has likely calculated that, domestically, no serious harm will come to Chinese firms. According to Kyle Chan, a researcher at the Brookings Institution, “This is about Beijing finally feeling comfortable enough to push back against what they’ve long seen as extraterritorial reach by the US over their own firms & banks.” So, Beijing places the burden of choice upon Washington whether to enforce and intensify the sanctions or not. Accordingly, if the United States desires to sanction a major Chinese bank due to its collaboration with Hengli, the matter will no longer be confined merely



The fact that this Chinese action, which perhaps would not have been possible a decade ago, has been rendered feasible must be understood in conjunction with two processes: the economic decoupling between the United States and China and, more generally, the fragmentation of the international economy; processes that have been shaped by the intensifying rivalry of great powers.

to Iranian petroleum but will instead transform into a direct financial confrontation between the two largest global economies. Notwithstanding that China does not exclude this possibility, its risk assessment has not been of a magnitude to preclude action in blocking the sanctions. The fact that this Chinese action, which perhaps would not have been possible a decade ago, has been rendered feasible must be understood in conjunction with two processes: the economic decoupling between the United States and China and, more generally, the fragmentation of the international economy; processes that have been shaped by the intensifying rivalry of great powers. Of course, China’s recent action may itself become a pivotal juncture in their deepening.

The aforementioned processes, together with China’s recent action, significantly lay the groundwork for weakening and constraining of the extraterritorial effects of American sanctions. Within this framework, a novel opportunity emerges for the Islamic Republic of Iran to gradually distance itself from the so-called “sanctions-circumvention” paradigm and to move toward a form of formalization in its economic interactions with China; an approach that, while preserving confidentiality considerations, can manifest itself, particularly, through the revival of the formal payment structure in bilateral relations.



Hengli Petrochemical Dalian Refinery, China © XINHUA

The article was first published by the Abrar Moaser Tehran International Research Institute.

AFC Asian Cup Saudi Arabia 2027:

Iran drawn against Syria, Kyrgyzstan, China in group stage

Sports Desk

Iran has been drawn against Syria, Kyrgyzstan, and China in Group C of the 2027 AFC Asian Cup, which will be hosted by Saudi Arabia from January 7 next year.

The draw for the 19th edition of the flagship continental tournament was held at the historic Salwa Palace in Riyadh on Saturday, where 24 teams were split into six groups.

Three-time champion Iran – a semifinalist in the previous two editions – will kick off its bid for a first Asian title since 1976 against China at Riyadh's Kingdom Arena on January 7, before facing Kyrgyzstan at Al Shabab Stadium four days later.

The final round of group fixtures will see Iran take on Syria at King Fahd Sports City Stadium on January 18. Iran and China last met in the group stage of the 2019 event in the United Arab Emirates, with Iran claiming

an emphatic 3-0 victory.

Iran has emerged victorious in all seven of its previous meetings with Kyrgyzstan, though the Central Asian team provided tricky tests for Iran in the World Cup qualifiers two years ago. Amir Qalenoee's side labored to a 1-0 home win in Isfahan and then had to hold off a second-half comeback to win 3-2 in the reverse fixture in Bishkek.

Iran's game against Syria will be a repeat of the last-16 clash in the 2023 edition, which Qalenoee's men won in a penalty shootout.

When asked after the draw whether the Asian powerhouse would end its decades-long wait for the elusive crown in Saudi Arabia, Qalenoee said: "It's unfortunate that we haven't been champions for a long time. It's hard to make predictions in football. I think we truly deserved to win the title in the previous tournament, but bad luck went against us.



The photo shows Iran's Mohammad Mohebi (21) and Syria's Fahd Youssef jumping for a header during a last-16 game at the 2023 AFC Asian Cup in Doha, Qatar, on January 31, 2024. AFP

"Our team is in good condition; we are one of the teams that qualified earliest for the World Cup, and we hope to perform well there and then get ready for the Asian Cup. "After the World Cup, we are going to have a generational

change, and I hope we can be a worthy representative of the people of Iran.

"Football has improved across Asia, and the teams have become much closer in level. Even though we have four seedings, the competi-

tion in Asian football has become very tight," the Iranian head coach added.

In other groups, host nation Saudi Arabia, seeking to lift the coveted trophy for the fourth time, will face 1980 winner Kuwait, Oman, and

Palestine in Group A. Saudi Arabia will kick off against Palestine at the 72,000-seater King Fahd Sports City Stadium in Riyadh.

Group B will see Uzbekistan, Bahrain, North Korea, and Jordan vying for a place in

the round of 16.

Australia – champion in 2015 – leads Group D, which also features Tajikistan, 2007 winner Iraq, and Singapore.

Aiming to deny two-time winner South Korea progression from Group E are the United Arab Emirates, Vietnam, and either Lebanon or Yemen, who will meet in June to decide the final qualifier for the continental showpiece.

Record four-time winner Japan leads Group F, with two-time defending champion Qatar, Thailand, and Indonesia also seeking to advance to the knockout stage.

The top two sides from each group and the four best third-placed teams will advance to the round of 16, which will be played between January 22 and 25. The quarterfinals are scheduled for January 28 and 29, with the semifinals on February 1 and 2.

The final will be played on February 5 at King Fahd Sports City Stadium.

AVC Asian U18 Beach Volleyball Championships:

Iranian teams crash out in quarterfinals



● AVC

Sports Desk

The two Iranian pairs missed out on last-four spots at the AVC Asian U18 Beach Volleyball Championships after suffering defeats against their Kazakhstani and Qatari opponents in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, on Saturday. Iranian Team A – featuring Amirreza Jamshidi and Amin Vakili – which had topped Pool C with maximum points, began the day with a straight-set victory (21-16, 21-11) over Kazakhstan's Ilya Pavlov and Vladislav Shelekhov to progress to the quarterfinals. However, they later surrendered a one-set lead to lose 2-1 (18-21, 21-11, 15-10) to the other Kazakhstani duo in the tournament, Orazali Sagynysh and Agabek Alikhan, at Tashkent's Olympic Village – a repeat

of the setback the Iranian team suffered when the two sides met in the CAVA U18 Championship final in the Uzbek capital last week.

Despite failing to secure a semifinal spot, the Iranian team will still have a chance to book a place at the upcoming U18 World Championships in through a classification playoff clash against Japan's Rikuho Kashiwaki and Sota Sugiura.

Meanwhile, Iran's Sina Al-e Yassin and Vahab Ownaq – bronze medalists at the CAVA event – also got off to a winning start on Saturday, beating Hong Kong's Chung Siu Wing and Lee Yat Hei 2-1 (21-13, 19-21, 15-9) in the round of 16, before falling in back-to-back sets to Qatar's Moussa Alkheer and Mubarak Musa.

Ex-world silver winner Tajik replaces Aflaki as Iran's taekwondo coach

Sports Desk

Ali Tajik has been appointed as the head coach of the Iranian men's national taekwondo team.

A world silver medalist in 2005, Tajik takes over from Majid Aflaki, under whom Tajik worked as the number two in the coaching staff.

A former coach of the Oman men's team for seven years, Tajik will be tasked with steering Iran's campaign at the upcoming Asian Championships – which will kick off in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, on May 19 – followed by the Aichi-Nagoya Asian Games in September.

The appointment ends speculation over the future of the Iranian job after Aflaki refused to attend the team's training camp in recent weeks over a

reported falling out with the national governing body.

Aflaki had been in charge of the national team since 2023 and spearheaded Iranian men's glorious campaigns on the global and continental stage over the past three years.

The former coach led Iran to its first team title in eight years at the Asian Championships in 2024 in Da Nang, Vietnam, but the highlight of his tenure came at the Paris Olympics later that year, where both Iranian male contestants won medals.

Arian Salimi ended Iran's wait for a first Olympic taekwondo gold since Hadi Saei's 2008 triumph by beating Britain's Caden Cunningham in the +80kg final, while Mehran Barkhordari settled for silver in the 80kg class after a final



● taekwondo.ir

defeat against Firas Katoussi of Tunisia.

At last October's World Championships in Wuxi, China, Aflaki's squad collected three medals through Abol-

fazl Zandi (gold), Mahdi Haji-Mousaei (silver), and Amir-sina Bakhtiari (bronze) to finish as runners-up behind South Korea in the men's team standings.

Shabanpour withdraws from final against Israeli player at ITF event

Sports Desk

Iran's Hana Shabanpour pulled out of the ITF World Tennis Tour Juniors tournament in Istanbul after getting an Israeli opponent in the girls' doubles final.

The Iranian teamed up with Turkish player Samiye Idil Ozkeresteci to beat the second-seeded pair of Stefania Kadzova and Sofia Vasiltsova in straight sets (6-4, 6-3) to progress to the final of the Ted Nazmi Bari Cup – an ITF J60 tournament.

However, once the final opponents were confirmed to be Russia's Eva Sultanova and Is-

rael's Margarita Aktuganova, Shabanpour withdrew from the championship match.

The decision came in solidarity with the 168 victims – including 120 schoolchildren – who were killed by a U.S.-Israeli airstrike on the Shajareh Tayyeb Elementary School in Minab, southern Iran, on February 28, as well as other victims of the recent hostilities on Iranian soil.

Shabanpour had made it to the singles quarterfinals earlier in the tournament but was undone by Turkish top seed Melis Yildirim in straight sets (7-6(3), 7-6(6)).



● X

Tourism train to highlight rosewater tradition in Kashan

Iranica Desk

A special tourism train dedicated to the rosewater distillation season is set to be launched to Kashan, with the aim of strengthening Isfahan Province's position as "Iran's Desert Tourism Capital," the deputy head of tourism at Isfahan Province's Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Organization said. Davoud Abian said the first tourism train for Kashan's traditional rosewater distillation ceremony has been planned and will be operated as part of efforts to realize the provincial tourism slogan, "Isfahan, the Desert Tourism Capital of Iran." He added that the initiative is intended to promote rail-based tourism, introduce the cultural and ritual capacities of the province, and facilitate easier

travel for tourists, according to chn.ir. Referring to the growing popularity of experience-based tourism, Abian said the Kashan rosewater tourism train provides a valuable opportunity to showcase the unique attractions of Iran's desert regions as well as the province's traditional ceremonies. He noted that the program could play an important role in boosting domestic tourism, enhancing travel experiences, and increasing the average length of stay for visitors.

Abian further stated that passengers on this tourism train will enjoy a safe and attractive rail journey, during which they will visit the traditional rosewater distillation ceremonies held in Kashan and Qamsar. He added that tourists will also become familiar with the

cultural, historical, and handicraft capacities of the region.

Emphasizing the importance of inter-agency cooperation in tourism development, he said the project has been implemented in coordination with the Isfahan Railway Organization, travel agencies, and municipal management bodies. He added that efforts are underway to operate this route on a regular basis and to develop it into a set of diverse tourism packages.

He noted that the first departure of the tourism train will take place in the coming days. He stressed that the development of rail tourism is one of the key priorities in the province's tourism planning and expressed hope that such initiatives would further consolidate Isfahan's position as "Iran's Desert Tourism Capital."



hamshahronline.ir

Markazi Province struggles to save centuries-old qanats

Iranica Desk

Ancient qanats — Iran's centuries-old underground water channels and one of the country's greatest engineering achievements — are facing an escalating crisis as over-extraction of groundwater, recurring droughts, and the spread of deep wells push many of them toward extinction.

For centuries, qanats sustained life in Iran's arid and semi-arid regions by transporting water from underground aquifers to farms and settlements. They played a central role in the development of rural communities, agriculture, and sustainable water management across the country, according to ISNA. However, experts warn that decades of uncontrolled drilling of legal and illegal deep wells, falling groundwater levels, climate-driven droughts, and changing water consumption patterns have severely weakened this historic system. Many qanats have already dried up, while others now operate only seasonally.

The crisis is particularly evident in Iran's Markazi Province, historically one of the country's major qanat regions. Once home to around 3,600 active qanats, the province now has only 2,388 remaining, according to Ali Arabi, head of the Qanat Department of Markazi Province's Agricultural Jihad Organization and a member of Iran's National Qanat Technical Committee.

ply have disappeared due to neglect, structural collapse, blocked shafts, flooding, and most importantly, declining groundwater reserves.

He noted that the rapid expansion of deep wells over recent decades has significantly lowered underground water tables, depriving qanats of the natural pressure and balance required for water flow.

Arabi said, adding that this has already occurred in many parts of Markazi Province.

He pointed to areas around Arak — including Motabad, Malekabad, and Ebrahimabad — where numerous wells drilled to supply urban drinking water have led to the destruction of many historic qanats.

Despite the decline, approximately 14 percent of agricultural land in Markazi Province is still irrigated through qanats. Arabi described the system as one of the most sustainable and low-cost methods of water extraction in Iran's dry climate because, unlike deep wells, qanats operate within the natural recharge capacity of aquifers. He added that Iranian communities had relied on this indigenous technology for centuries to sustain agriculture in harsh environments without depleting groundwater reserves.

Among the hardest-hit systems is the Kheirabad Qanat, which once delivered around 60 liters of water per second and irrigated large areas of farmland, but has now nearly dried up due

to nearby well drilling in its recharge zone.

Arabi also highlighted the globally registered Ebrahimabad Qanat, a 12-kilometer-long system regarded as one of Iran's most significant examples of historic hydraulic engineering.

Although national and provincial budgets are allocated annually for qanat restoration, Arabi said the high costs of dredging, repairs, and rehabilitation have made recovery efforts difficult, especially in areas where deep wells remain active nearby.

Experts warn that the disappearance of qanats represents more than the loss of traditional water channels. The decline threatens rural livelihoods, increases dependence on groundwater extraction, accelerates land subsidence, and undermines Iran's long-term water security.

According to Arabi, many villages in Iran were originally established around qanat systems, meaning their collapse could intensify rural migration, reduce agricultural production, and contribute to the abandon-

ment of rural settlements.

He also warned that continued reliance on deep wells risks further groundwater depletion and irreversible damage to aquifers, potentially worsening future water shortages for both agriculture and drinking supplies.

Beyond their environmental and economic importance, qanats are also considered part of Iran's historical and cultural heritage — a symbol of indigenous knowledge and sustainable water management developed over centuries.

As droughts and declining rainfall continue to place mounting pressure on Iran's water resources, experts say protecting and restoring qanats, alongside stricter groundwater management, has become increasingly urgent.

The gradual disappearance of active qanats in Markazi Province is not merely an agricultural issue, but a broader sign of growing stress on Iran's groundwater resources and the weakening of the country's traditional water management systems.



kojaro.com

Speaking to ISNA, Arabi said many qanats that once served as the primary source of irrigation and rural water sup-

ply have disappeared due to neglect, structural collapse, blocked shafts, flooding, and most importantly, declining groundwater reserves. He noted that the rapid expansion of deep wells over recent decades has significantly lowered underground water tables, depriving qanats of the natural pressure and balance required for water flow.

Coordinated tourism development needed in Khorasan Razavi

Iranica Desk

Khorasan Razavi Province, home to the holy city of Mashhad and the shrine of Imam Reza (PBUH), one of the most important pilgrimage destinations in the Muslim world, receives millions of pilgrims annually. Alongside pilgrimage tourism centered in Mashhad, provincial officials are increasingly seeking to promote lesser-known destinations across Khorasan Razavi in order to expand tourism opportunities and distribute travel more evenly throughout the province.

The deputy head of tourism at Khorasan Razavi's Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Organization has said that domestic travel trends within the province are increasingly shifting toward lesser-known destinations, while emphasizing the urgent need for stronger tourism promotion, coordinated planning, and improved content production. Speaking to ISNA, Mohammad

Rokni said the largest share of intra-provincial travel in Khorasan Razavi is currently directed toward the cities of Dargaz, Quchan, Gonabad, Torbat-e Jam, and Khaf. He noted, however, that some regions, including the historic Torshiz area, still lack organized tours and structured travel programs.

Rokni stressed the importance of increasing advocacy efforts and strengthening cooperation among tourism stakeholders in order to achieve broader development goals. He added that producing high-quality content and providing comprehensive introductions to tourist attractions are essential, particularly given the accommodation capacity and handicraft potential across the province's cities and counties.

He noted that demands and initiatives from those active in the tourism sector in some cities remain limited and insufficient. Emphasizing the need for practical action rather than passive discussion, Rokni said cultural figures and tourism profession-

als in different sectors should actively pursue their demands in order to create meaningful and lasting change. "If we simply sit and do nothing, nothing will happen," he said.

Rokni also underlined the importance of adopting an integrated and province-wide approach to tourism development.

"If we want to create a strong tourism flow in Khorasan Razavi Province, we cannot focus only on our own city, because tourism is a chain that must move forward in coordination," he said.

He suggested that tourists visiting one destination should also be introduced to nearby regions and attractions, adding that such interactions and cooperation between cities could help create a more cohesive and sustainable tourism network throughout the province.

Referring to the accommodation infrastructure and handicraft capacities that already exist in many counties, Rokni

said the current priority should be making better use of existing opportunities and unlocking untapped potential rather than waiting for entirely new resources.

"We need to work much more seriously on content production," he said.

Rokni stated that attracting tourists requires effective and professional promotional content, adding that some cities currently lack even basic monolingual or bilingual materials that could help travel agencies and tour operators introduce those destinations to visitors.

He stressed the need for high-quality content related to pilgrimage tourism, nature tourism, cultural tourism, handicrafts, and other tourism sectors, expressing hope that stronger cooperation and collective efforts would lead to greater tourism growth across the province.

Rokni also pointed to the lack of suitable digital content for online promotion and regional



Dargaz
chn.ir

marketing, saying many destinations in the province still do not have adequate materials to present themselves effectively on social media platforms.

"We do not have content that we can properly present in virtual spaces," he said.

He concluded by emphasizing the importance of continued content production, stronger

advocacy efforts, investment attraction, and securing financial support and facilities for the tourism sector. Rokni expressed hope that, through collective determination and coordinated action, tourism across Khorasan Razavi Province would experience broader growth and long-term prosperity.

Mashhad enters race for OIC City of Tourism for 2030

Arts & Culture Desk

Iran has nominated the northeastern pilgrimage metropolis of Mashhad as its candidate for the Organization of Islamic Cooperation's 2030 "City of Tourism" title, Deputy Tourism Minister Anoushirvan Mohseni-Bandpey said, positioning the holy city to expand its international cultural footprint across the Muslim world. The nomination, approved after technical assessments by the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts, places Mashhad among prospective contenders expected to compete for one of the Islamic world's highest-profile tourism distinctions, according to IRNA. The final selection process will move

forward at an expert-level review session in Tashkent in May before tourism ministers from OIC member states convene in Doha later this year to announce the winning city. Home to the shrine of Imam Reza (PBUH), Mashhad stands as one of the region's largest religious tourism hubs, drawing millions of pilgrims and travelers annually from across West Asia, Central Asia, the Persian Gulf, and the wider Islamic world. Iranian tourism authorities say the city's extensive hospitality infrastructure, expanding urban transit network, and growing health tourism sector strengthened its candidacy. Officials view the nomination as a strategic opening to deepen cultural diplomacy, showcase Iran's historical

and religious heritage, and channel fresh investment into tourism facilities in the country's east. Iran previously secured the title in 2018 with the northwestern city of Tabriz, which hosted dozens of international cultural gatherings and tourism events under the "Tabriz 2018" initiative. The program remains one of Tehran's most prominent experiences in multilateral Islamic tourism cooperation. The OIC tourism designation, formerly known as the "Capital of Islamic Tourism," has in recent years spotlighted cities such as Konya, Medina, Bukhara, Cairo, Dakar, and Lahore, featuring the initiative's growing international visibility across the Muslim world.



Iran maps out post-war tourism surge with hotels, airlines push

Arts & Culture Desk

Iran is preparing a broad post-war expansion of its tourism industry through new infrastructure, hotel capacity, airline development and international promotional campaigns, Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Minister Reza Salehi-Amiri said on Sunday. Speaking at the ministry's seasonal conference in Tehran, Salehi-Amiri said authorities were drafting multiple support packages for tourism operators as the country seeks to position the sector for a "post-war leap" after months of regional turbulence and security pressures, according to IRNA. "The tourism industry must be prepared for a major jump in the post-war period," he said, adding that plans were underway to expand accommodation networks, strengthen aviation services, boost cultural content production and roll out international advertising initiatives aimed at reviving inbound travel. The minister said the support measures were being coordinated with parliament, the Economy Ministry, the Plan and Budget Organization and other state bodies, with details expected to be unveiled soon. Iran's tourism authorities are seeking



to capitalize on renewed regional attention toward the country's historical and cultural assets after what officials described as heightened international solidarity over damage inflicted on heritage sites during recent conflict. Salehi-Amiri said 149 historical sites across 20 provinces sustained damage during the US-Israeli strikes against Iran which began February 28, prompting domestic and international campaigns in support of protecting Iran's ancient cultural legacy. He said global reactions had underscored the significance of Iranian civilization and the need to preserve its heritage. Despite wartime disruption, the minister portrayed the recent period as a test of national resilience that reinforced social cohesion and public engagement. He pointed to large public gatherings during memorial ceremonies for those killed in the conflict as evidence

Iran's Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Minister Reza Salehi-Amiri speaks at a ministry's seasonal conference in Tehran on May 10, 2026. ● CHTN

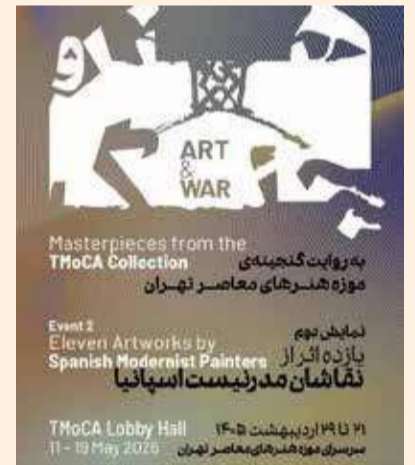
of what he called a strengthened collective identity. The government is now attempting to channel that atmosphere into economic recovery sectors including tourism, one of Iran's most employment-intensive industries. Salehi-Amiri said preserving public confidence and improving governance efficiency would remain essential in the reconstruction phase, citing transportation, housing, energy and public services as priorities alongside cultural development. Iran, home to UNESCO-listed landmarks stretching from Persepolis to Isfahan, has increasingly promoted cultural diplomacy and regional tourism cooperation as part of efforts to widen its international tourism footprint.

TMoCA to unveil Picasso-led Spanish modernist showcase in 'Art & War' series

Arts & Culture Desk

Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art (TMoCA) will open a new chapter of its 'Art & War' program on May 11, featuring 11 works by leading Spanish modernist painters including Pablo Picasso, Antoni Tàpies, Robert Motherwell and Juan Gris, as the capital's premier museum expands its internationally focused examination of war's imprint on modern art. The exhibition, titled 'Eleven Artworks by Spanish Modernist Painters,' runs from May 11 to May 19 at the museum's main hall and draws exclusively from TMoCA's celebrated collection, one of the most significant repositories of Western modern art outside Europe and North America. The showcase revisits how conflict, political turbulence and social upheaval reverberated through

20th-century Spanish art, bringing together works associated with Cubism, abstraction and postwar modernism. Museum organizers said the exhibition seeks to deepen public engagement with the visual language artists employed to confront war, displacement and historical rupture. The event follows the opening phase of TMoCA's broader 'Art & War' initiative, which previously highlighted works by major international pop art figures including Roy Lichtenstein, Robert Indiana and James Rosenquist from May 3 to 10. That exhibition explored art's "reflective" and "resistant" role during periods of global conflict and drew attention to the museum's expanding international cultural outreach. By turning the spotlight onto Spanish modernism, the latest installment widens the historical and geograph-



ical scope of the series while reinforcing Tehran's role as a regional platform for cross-cultural artistic dialogue.

Tehran, Mexico City forge cultural bridge with Cyrus-inspired plaque

Arts & Culture Desk

Iran and Mexico marked a rare cultural milestone in the central Mexican city of Abasolo, birthplace of independence leader Miguel Hidalgo, where diplomats, lawmakers and academics unveiled a commemorative plaque inspired by the ancient Cyrus Cylinder, highlighting shared ideals of sovereignty, justice and cultural identity. Held on May 8 at Abasolo's historical museum on the anniversary of Miguel Hidalgo's birth, the event drew nearly 300 political, diplomatic and cultural figures, including members of Mexico's Senate and federal Congress, local Guanajuato officials, representatives of the ruling Morena party and Cuba's deputy ambassador to Mexico, IRNA reported. The plaque, presented as a symbol of civilizational dialogue between Iran and Mex-

ico, carries part of a message attributed to Cyrus the Great on freedom and human dignity. "Human beings are free to live and work in any land, provided that they do not violate the rights of others," the inscription reads. Participants described the ceremony as a "historic" step toward deepening cultural ties between two nations shaped by strong traditions of independence and national dignity. Addressing the gathering, Iran's Ambassador to Mexico Abolfazl Pasandideh drew parallels between Mexico's independence movement and Iran's 1979 Islamic Revolution, saying both nations share historical memories of resisting foreign domination and safeguarding national identity. He also highlighted the role of religious leadership in transformative moments of history, comparing Hidalgo, the Catholic priest who became a sym-



bol of Mexican independence, with Imam Khomeini, founder of the Islamic Republic. The ambassador said today's world needs stronger dialogue among nations, mutual respect and cultural cooperation, adding that Iran and Mexico, as two ancient civilizations, can help advance peace and understanding across regions. The ceremony was repeatedly met with applause, with attendees calling it one of Guanajuato's most distinctive recent cultural initiatives

Iran's Ambassador to Mexico Abolfazl Pasandideh (L) shakes hands with Job Eduardo Gallardo Santellano, Municipal President of Abasolo, Guanajuato, during a ceremony in Abasolo, Guanajuato, on May 8, 2026, to unveil a commemorative plaque inspired by the Cyrus Cylinder, symbolizing a new cultural bridge between the two nations. ● IRNA

linking Iran's name with concepts of freedom, dignity and intercultural dialogue in the hometown of Mexico's independence hero.