

Iran to stage book fair online as digital reach expands amid scaled-back foreign presence



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Pezeshkian tells Iran stars to show 'strength, unity and dignity' at 2026 World Cup



President Masoud Pezeshkian (5th Left, 2nd Row) poses with a family photo with the Iranian football squad in Tehran on May 13, 2026. president.ir

Sports Desk

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian delivered a passionate send-off to the country's national football team before its departure for the 2026 FIFA World Cup, urging players to show "a powerful, ethical and hope-inspiring image of the Iranian nation" on football's biggest stage.

Speaking during a visit to Iran's national team training camp in Tehran, Pezeshkian met players, coaches and technical staff as preparations gear up for the tournament, which kicks off on June 11 in the United States and Mexico. "What the Iranian nation expects from its sons is to stand honorably and fight with all their might on the field of competition," Pezeshkian told the squad.

The president described the national team as the "representatives of the hope, determination, pride and unity of the Iranian nation" at the World Cup. "We hope you head into these competitions with strength, unity and an inspiring spirit, return with dignity and honor," he added.

During the visit, Pezeshkian was presented with Iran's No. 12 shirt in a symbolic gesture from the squad.

Iran, managed by Amir Ghalenoei, will compete in Group G alongside Belgium, Egypt and New Zealand.

All three of Iran's group-stage matches are scheduled to be played in the United States. Their opening fixture comes on June 15 against New Zealand at SoFi Stadium in Inglewood, California, just outside Los Angeles.

Time to benefit from war gains

EDITORIAL

Almost forty days into the war, one reality stands out. The United States, the world's leading military, political and economic power, backed by Israel and what is widely regarded as the Middle East's strongest air force, launched an all-out war on Iran in pursuit of clearly stated objectives.

The conflict began on Feb. 28 and quickly evolved into a broad, coordinated campaign against Iran. Several Arab states in the region aided the aggression by opening their airspace and territory to the attacking forces. In effect, Iran faced a multilayered assault. Yet despite the scale of the military pressure brought to bear, the key objective of the war remained unmet. Throughout the conflict, President Donald Trump repeatedly spoke about seizing Iran's stockpile of highly enriched uranium. One week after the war began, he told reporters aboard Air Force One that he believed the map of Iran would "probably not" look the same once the war ended. He also openly encouraged Iranians

to rise up against their government to bring about regime change. "When we are finished, take over your government," he said in an appeal directed at "the people of Iran."

Trump at times went even further, speaking candidly about Iran's oil resources. "My favorite thing is to take the oil in Iran," he said, while also expressing interest in occupying Kharg Island in the Persian Gulf, Iran's largest oil export terminal.

At the same time, he every now and then claimed that Iran's missile program, air force and navy had been destroyed. Those were among Trump's main wartime objectives and ambitions. Yet none of them materialized. Instead, the armed forces of a country that had faced decades of weapons sanctions mounted a response that surprised much of the world. Not only did Washington fail to attain its objectives, but according to available reports, 228 military assets in 15 US bases in the region were destroyed, with some suffering damage beyond repair. Moreover, the Strait of Hormuz, the

world's most critical energy chokepoint through which around 20% of global oil supplies pass, effectively fell under Iranian military control in the early days of the war with most shipping traffic halted.

The situation has become so embarrassing for Washington that reopening the conduit has itself turned into one of the war's primary objectives, despite the fact that the waterway had been fully open before the conflict began.

The war also triggered a wave of national solidarity inside Iran. Even many people who had longstanding disagreements with the Establishment, both at home and overseas, rallied around the defense of Iran once the homeland came under attack. More than 30 million people registered online in a system known as "Janfada," pledging to sacrifice their lives for the country.

These are major achievements that, in the eyes of many inside Iran, must be safeguarded. They have also drawn admiration from many around the world. From the standpoint of a neu-

tral observer, Iran stood for 40 days, resisted fiercely, defended itself and continued striking enemy targets all on its own.

But the war has also had costs for Iran. According to government spokeswoman Fatemeh Mohajerani, the war inflicted an estimated \$270 billion in damage on Iran's economy.

More than 120,000 residential and commercial units have either been destroyed or damaged. Iran's economic and energy infrastructure, including steel plants and petrochemical facilities, was bombed. The consequences are increasingly being felt in ordinary people's lives through rising inflation, unemployment and growing economic pressure.

The Iranian people resisted bravely under bombs and missiles and are now enduring the consequences of war with patience and dignity.

The gains achieved through that resistance must now be protected and, at the right moment, translated into tangible benefits for the public.

President Masoud Pezeshkian said Monday that Iran now faces three

possible paths: entering negotiations while preserving "authority and national interests," remaining in a state of "neither war nor peace," or continuing "the path of war."

At the same time, Pezeshkian revealed what he described as "rational preference" that the battlefield gains secured by Iran's armed forces should be "completed through diplomacy," and that "the rights of the Iranian nation be secured from a position of dignity and strength."

Wars begin with violence and bloodshed and leave a trail of death and destruction, but they usually end through diplomacy.

Iran does not come to the negotiating table empty-handed. If anything, some of the strongest cards may now be in Tehran's hands. Those cards could help secure the rights of the Iranian people, bring the cruel sanctions to an end and open the door to rebuilding the destruction of war through normalized trade and economic relations, allowing Iran to continue its path toward development and prosperity with renewed strength.