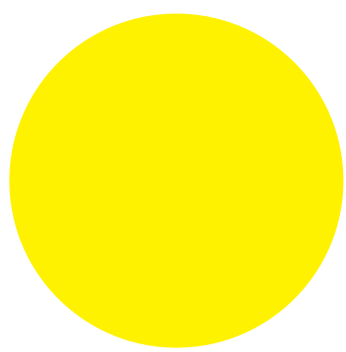


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President Masoud Pezeshkian (4th R) addresses a meeting attended by Oil Minister Mohsen Paknejad (5th R) and his deputies in Tehran, Iran on May 20, 2026.

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Strait of Hormuz; legal aspects of the new arrangements in light of aggression, fundamental change of circumstances



By Kazem Gharibabadi
Iran's deputy foreign minister for legal, international affairs

OPINION EXCLUSIVE

For a long period, maritime navigation through the Strait of Hormuz did not proceed on the basis of exercising an asserted right, but rather within the framework of an interaction founded upon comity and mutual good faith. Over years, the Islamic Republic of Iran, as the coastal State, facilitated the passage of vessels through a continuous and peaceful practice. However, this practice was never to be understood as an acceptance of a binding legal obligation or as a relinquishment of the coastal State's sovereignty and sovereign rights over its own waterway. Nevertheless, today, due to a fundamental change of circumstances and the substantial transformation of security, the continuation of such unilateral comity is no longer possible, and the adoption of appropriate measures based on respect for the sovereign rights of the coastal State has become an inevitable necessity. Indeed, the Strait of Hormuz has long been regarded as a sensitive and strategic waterway—a status that has now been redefined in light of the repeated acts of aggression by the Zionist regime, the United States, and certain neighboring States in the region. Some neighboring States, by placing their territory at the disposal of aggressors for commission of acts of aggression against the Islamic Republic of Iran, have become complicit in such aggression. This conduct itself constitutes an act of aggression as defined by General Assembly Resolution 3314 (XXIX) and, consequently, those States have assumed the heavy burden of responsibility for this act,

which is a manifest violation of the Charter of the United Nations and the peremptory norm of "prohibition of aggression". As a result of this aggression and these hostile acts, the security and safety of the region, and in particular of the Strait of Hormuz, have suffered severe and widespread harm. It must not be forgotten that the aggressor and its regional military bases were supplied and equipped, inter alia, through that same strait. Therefore, preventing the recurrence of such internationally wrongful acts is an undeniable imperative. In the wake of the intensification of such acts, the circumstances have fundamentally changed, giving rise to a new and irreversible situation. In this situation, the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran, as the coastal State, finds itself compelled to adopt practical and proportionate measures to manage the developments that have expanded into the maritime zones. These measures are taken with a view to preventing further risks from being imposed on vessels and seafarers in the Persian Gulf, the Strait of Hormuz, and the Gulf of Oman.

Fundamental change of circumstances

Since the commencement of acts of aggression against the Islamic Republic of Iran, the security environment of the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz has undergone significant transformations and has thereby become subject to a fundamental change of circumstances. In the current situation, the underlying circumstances governing the legal regime of the Strait, namely the existence of a minimum level of regional stability and security necessary to guarantee safe passage, have been severely undermined as a result of repeated threats and actions that violate Article 2 (4) of the Charter of the United Nations. One of the most significant factors that has

disrupted the prior order is the persistent disregard for a peremptory norm of international law: the norm that prohibits any act of aggression. In addition to this, despite repeated violations of international law, the United Nations Security Council, as the primary body responsible for the maintenance of international peace and security, has remained practically incapable of condemning the aggressor and has consequently failed to discharge its primary responsibility to ensure international peace and security and to restore stability to the region. Accordingly, under the international law of the sea, the regime of passage through straits used for international navigation cannot be applied in a security vacuum. The coastal State's obligation to facilitate passage is conditional upon the existence of circumstances in which the safety of navigation and maritime public order have not been seriously disrupted. In a situation where persistent military threats pose real dangers and transform the operational environment, the adoption of necessary measures based on the doctrine of fundamental change of circumstances is unavoidable. On this basis, the set of current measures and practices must be regarded as an adjustment of rights and obligations to adapt to the circumstances, in light of the fundamental change of circumstances, measures undertaken with the aim of establishing a balance between the security requirements of the coastal State and the continued safe passage of international navigation.

Sovereignty over territorial sea

Under the international law of the sea, the sovereignty of coastal States over their territorial sea, including over that part which lies within an international strait, and the exercise of rights and jurisdiction derived from such sovereignty,

constitutes a fundamental and well-established principle. Consequently, the arrangements for managing passage through the Strait of Hormuz are governed within the framework of the domestic laws of Iran and Oman, as well as customary and treaty-based rules and principles, including the 1958 Geneva Conventions, the relevant provisions of the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, the principles of the Charter of the United Nations, and international judicial precedents (including the judgments of the International Court of Justice in the Corfu Channel and Oil Platforms cases). Within this framework, one essential principle is of particular importance: no right under international law, including the right of passage, may be exercised in such a way as to result in a threat, military aggression, or violation of the security of the coastal State. Accordingly, mere reliance on classical concepts is insufficient to address the exigencies of the current unprecedented situation and does not adequately meet the requirements of security and sovereignty.

This situation is also premised upon the peremptory norm prohibiting the threat or use of force, as embodied in Article 2(4) of the Charter of the United Nations and recognized in international judicial precedents and the judgments of the International Court of Justice as an intransgressible rule. In the case concerning Military and Paramilitary Activities in and against Nicaragua (Nicaragua v. United States of America), the findings of the International Court of Justice clearly indicate that any foreign military presence or action that endangers the security or sovereignty of another State, even indirectly, is contrary to that principle. Furthermore, Article 2 of the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea affirms the sovereignty of the coastal State over its territorial sea, seabed, and subsoil, and grants no

authorization for the stationing of foreign forces. Article 30 of the same Convention confirms the right to require any military ship that fails to comply with the laws and regulations of the coastal State to leave the territorial sea immediately. Moreover, the San Remo Manual on International Law Applicable to Armed Conflicts at Sea emphasizes the right of coastal States to restrict foreign military presence in order to preserve the neutrality of regional States and the security of the waterway.

While preventing the reproduction of aggressive and interventionist patterns that have led to instability and insecurity, this approach establishes a balance between the freedom of navigation and the security rights of the coastal State as affirmed in established international judicial practice.

Historic sovereignty over Strait of Hormuz

In formulating the arrangements for managing passage through the Strait of Hormuz, it is essential to emphasize the historic sovereignty of Iran and Oman over this waterway. This finding has been affirmed by various arbitral tribunals. Accordingly, the longstanding historic sovereignty of Iran over the Strait of Hormuz, which existed for centuries prior to the Convention and has been continuously exercised, remains valid. In the case of Qatar v. Bahrain, the International Court of Justice, upon examining historic rights in the Persian Gulf, took the view that the continuous exercise of sovereignty and historical activities by coastal States constitutes a valid basis for the recognition of a "historic title" over maritime areas. Given the similar geographic and historical situation of the Strait of Hormuz, this judicial precedent directly confirms the historic sovereignty of Iran and Oman over the strait.

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IRGC warns repeat of aggression spurs war 'far beyond region'

Trump's 'big hit' rant to be met with Iran's 'many more surprises'

International Desk

The Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) warned on Wednesday that the war with Iran would spread far beyond the region if the United States and Israel resume their aggression against Iran after the US president threatened to strike again unless a deal is reached.

A ceasefire on April 8 brought a halt to the conflict, which has roiled the global economy, but with Washington and Tehran seemingly reluctant to resume the fighting a war of words has taken its place. US President Donald Trump has repeatedly threatened Tehran with renewed military action, while Iranian officials have hit back with their own warnings of devastating action.

Nevertheless, despite sporadic outbursts of violence, the two countries have continued to take part in diplomatic exchanges, mediated by Pakistan, aimed at bringing a formal end to the war.

"If the aggression against Iran is repeated, the promised regional war will this time spread far beyond the



Israelis look at an impacted site following missile attack from Iran in Bnei Brak, Palestinians' occupied territories on June 16, 2025.

REUTERS

region, and our devastating blows will crush you," the IRGC said in a statement.

"The American-Zionist enemy... must know that despite the offensive carried out against us using the full capabilities of the world's two most expensive armies, we have not deployed the full power of the Islamic revolution," the IRGC added.

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi also warned earlier on Wednesday

that any return to war with Iran would bring "many more surprises."

'US seeking to restart war'

Iran's Parliament Speaker and chief negotiator Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf on Wednesday said the US was seeking to restart the war and hoping the Islamic republic would surrender. "The enemy's movements, both overt and clandestine, show that despite econom-

ic and political pressure, it has not abandoned its military objectives and is seeking to start a new war," Qalibaf said in an audio message on his official website.

He said Iran's military forces have utilized the ceasefire to strengthen their capabilities, warning the enemies that the armed forces are in such a readiness that will certainly make them regret any renewed aggression against

Iran. On Tuesday, Trump claimed that the US retained the upper hand and that Iran was desperate for peace.

"I hope we don't have to do the war, but we may have to give them another big hit. I'm not sure yet." He has previously made similar claims without a deal being concluded. The US president is himself under pressure, with rising energy costs beginning to bite at home.

While the ceasefire brought a halt to the fighting, it has not reopened the vital Strait of Hormuz, through which a fifth of the world's oil and liquefied natural gas usually pass.

The future of the waterway is a key sticking point in negotiations, but without a deal fears are growing for the global economy as pre-war stockpiles of oil are used up.

Rising fuel prices have caused widespread pain, with protests erupting even in Kenya, which like many African countries is dependent on imports from the Persian Gulf and where the public transport system has ground to a halt.

Leader extols Iranian resistance against 'two global terrorist forces'



Ayatollah Seyyed Mojtaba Khamenei
IRNA

National Desk

Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Mojtaba Khamenei said on Wednesday that the Iranian nation is currently resisting "two global terrorist armies," urging the country's officials to redouble their efforts to resolve the nation's problems. Ayatollah Khamenei made the remarks on the second anniversary of the death of former president Ebrahim Raeisi who died in a helicopter crash in April 2024. "Now, we stand before the epic-making feats of the Iranian nation in their unique and historical resistance against the two global terrorist armies," Ayatollah Khamenei said, in an apparent reference to the United States and Israel. He underlined that this matter bears heavier burden on the officials from the leadership and heads of the branches of government down to all levels of management to address people's problems.

The blessing of Iran's national unity, the Leader said, now demands that officials redouble their ef-

orts to resolve the public's economic concerns, make direct and on-the-ground appearances, and define a serious role for the Iranian people in the country's progress toward a bright future.

The message comes as Iran continues to face heightened threats from the United States and Israel, following their unprovoked strikes in late February and ongoing threats of renewed aggression.

The message, released by the Leader's office on Wednesday, also paid tribute to the martyrs of the April flight - at their head president Raeisi - saying they are "a reminder of the martyrdom of a multitude of servant-martyrs in the Islamic Republic of Iran".

In the 2024 helicopter crash, Mohammad Ali Ale-Hashem, the Leader's representative in East Azarbaijan Province, and Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, Iran's foreign minister, were also killed alongside Raeisi when their helicopter went down in mountainous terrain in northwestern province of East Azarbaijan.

Pakistani minister in Tehran as US-Iran talks hover in stalemate



Mohsin Naqvi
IRNA

International Desk

Pakistan's interior minister headed to Iran on Wednesday for the second time this week amid an impasse between Tehran and Washington over a proposal to end the war, Iranian state

media reported.

"Mohsin Naqvi travelled to Tehran to meet officials from the Islamic Republic," Iran's official IRNA news agency reported, citing diplomatic sources in Islamabad.

Pakistan has been mediating between Iran and the United States, with Naqvi previously in Tehran on Saturday to "facilitate" the process between Tehran and Washington, according to Iranian media.

Since a ceasefire between Iran and the US took hold on April 8, Tehran and Washington have held a single round of talks which failed to culminate in a deal.

However, the two sides have been exchanging proposals to resolve disagreements and end the war in the

region.

The Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman said on Monday that the US has sent a set of "revised" points and considerations to Iran through mediator Pakistan despite publicly rejecting Tehran's 14-point peace proposal.

"After Iran sent its 14-point plan, the US side conveyed its considerations. We also presented our considerations in return. Although the American side publicly announced that this plan was rejected, we received from the Pakistani mediator a set of revised points and considerations from their point of view," Esmail Baqaei said during his weekly press conference.

Deputy Foreign Minister Kazem Gharibabadi said on Tuesday that Tehran's latest peace proposal to the

US involves ending hostilities on all fronts including Lebanon, the exit of US forces from areas close to Iran, and reparations for destruction caused by the US-Israeli war.

He added that Tehran also sought the lifting of sanctions, the release of frozen funds and an end to the US marine blockade on the country.

Vance boasts of 'a lot of progress' in talks

US Vice President JD Vance also said on Tuesday the US and Iran have made a lot of progress in their talks and neither side wants to see a resumption of the military campaign.

"We think that we've made a lot of progress. We think the Iranians want to make a deal," Vance told reporters

at a White House briefing.

Vance said he had just spoken to US President Donald Trump, who stressed that the core issue for the US is that Iran can never have a nuclear weapon. If that happens, Vance said, countries around the Persian Gulf would then want their own weapon, then other countries across the world would as well.

On Tuesday, Trump offered a deadline of several days for resuming strikes if a deal is not agreed. He had claimed a day earlier that Persian Gulf Arab leaders asked him to hold off on an attack at the 11th hour.

"I'm saying two or three days, maybe Friday, Saturday, Sunday, something, maybe early next week, a limited period of time," he said.

FM spox blasts CENTCOM's 'shameless distortion' on Minab massacre



The Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman rejected as totally "baseless" the US Central Command (CENTCOM)'s narrative regarding the missile strike on Minab's Shajareh Tayyebeh school, saying the US is attempting to shun accountability for the massacre of more than 170 students and teachers.

In a post on his X account early Wednesday, Esmail Baqaei said that the "claim by US Central Command (CENTCOM) that the targeted #Shajareh_Tayyebeh Elementary School in #Minab was locat-

ed within a 'missile launch facility' is a baseless fabrication and an appalling lie."

On the very first day of the unprovoked war of aggression by a US-Israeli military coalition on February 28, US Tomahawk missiles struck Shajareh Tayyebeh Girls' Elementary School in Minab, in southern Iran, killing at least 175 people, most of them schoolgirls, Press TV reported.

Baqaei's remarks came after Adm. Brad Cooper, the CENTCOM commander, claimed during a House committee hearing that the school was located near an active Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) cruise missile base.

"This shameless distortion is a clear attempt to obscure the severe reality of the 28 February missile attacks, which resulted in the tragic slaughtering of over 170 school children and their teachers," Baqaei stressed.

"Targeting an active educational institu-

tion during school hours constitutes a grave violation of international humanitarian law and is a clear war crime. The civilian nature of the site cannot be obscured by technical misrepresentations." "The military commanders and United States authorities responsible for ordering and executing this catastrophic assault must be held fully accountable under international law," the Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman emphasized.

Multiple independent investigations, including visual analyses by CBC News and satellite imagery from Planet Labs, revealed a pattern of precision-guided munitions striking the school. Former Pentagon expert Wes Bryant concluded the attack was "absolutely deliberately targeted." President Donald Trump had claimed without evidence that, "That was done by Iran, because they're very inaccurate with their munitions."

Mohammad Ali Rajabi
Cartoonist

CARTOON



Pezeshkian urges nationwide curb on fuel waste to boost public welfare

Economy Desk

President Masoud Pezeshkian said on Wednesday the government's top priority is supporting household livelihoods and directing national resources toward productive and essential sectors of the economy, adding that Iran cannot allocate resources to importing fuel for "non-essential consumption."

In remarks during a meeting with senior officials of the oil ministry, Pezeshkian stressed the need to present a realistic assessment of the country's conditions to the public, saying citizens must be informed that Iran faces limitations in gasoline supply and certain energy carriers, and that overcoming these constraints requires public cooperation and changes in consumption patterns, according to IRNA.

"The government cannot allocate the country's resources to importing fuel for non-essential consumption," he said.

Pezeshkian said continued unnecessary consumption and widespread use of single-occupancy vehicles, particularly under external pressure and damage to parts of the country's energy infrastructure, amounts to waste of national resources.

The president called for expanding public transportation use and reducing fuel consumption, saying savings should be redirected away from gasoline imports toward improving living standards, strengthening social support systems, and financing food subsidy programs for low-income groups.

The remarks came during a detailed review session with the oil minister, deputy ministers and senior managers of Oil Ministry, where officials presented updates on oil production, exports, gas and petrochemical operations, and the status of energy infrastructure.

The oil minister also provided an assessment of the sector's performance during a 40-day US-Israeli war that began in late February, as well as efforts to maintain production stability, repair damaged facilities, and restore

output capacity.

The country is facing growing external economic and maritime pressure, including US restrictions targeting its shipping and oil trade through a naval blockade imposed since mid-April. The move, part of what Washington has described as "Operation Economic Fury," is aimed at pressuring Tehran into a peace agreement following the aggression. Officials further outlined technical reconstruction work on damaged units and the management of conditions following restrictions and the US maritime blockade in the Strait of Hormuz targeting Iranian ports, alongside updates on crude output, exports and gas network performance.

Pezeshkian praised the energy sector's response during the crisis, saying it prevented disruptions to production, transmission and fuel supply. In separate directives, he instructed the Oil Ministry to prioritize gas allocation to productive, high-value-added sectors in order to reduce waste and generate additional



President Masoud Pezeshkian (R) holds talks with senior officials of the Oil Ministry in Tehran on May 20, 2026.
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national revenue, and to develop a provincial allocation system based on real regional de-

mand to ensure stable energy supply for strategic sectors.

Iran-designated route enables 6m barrels of crude to exit Persian Gulf



Supertankers carrying 6 million barrels Middle East crude exit Strait of Hormuz via Iran transit route.
© REUTERS

of two Chinese tankers on Wednesday, the data showed. Kpler data showed the tanker is heading to Ulsan, where the country's largest refiner SK Energy is located, to discharge its cargo on June 9, according to Reuters.

South Korean Foreign Minister Cho Hyun first disclosed the development during a parliamentary session, saying, "At this very moment, a South Korean tanker is exiting the Strait of Hormuz under coordination with the Iranian side," the Korea Herald reported.

Cho added that consultations with the Iranian authorities had been completed and that the vessel had "begun sailing yesterday and is passing through very cautiously." He also mentioned "2 million barrels," apparently referring to the volume of crude oil aboard the tanker, the Korea Herald reported.

South Korea's Foreign Ministry later confirmed that "one South Korean tanker has passed through the Strait of Hormuz and is continuing its voyage," suggesting the vessel had exited the high-risk waters around the strait and entered a safer maritime zone. Around 10 South Korean crew members were aboard the tanker that completed the transit, the ministry said in a message to reporters.

An official at South Korea's Foreign Ministry, requesting anonymity, told reporters the vessel's movement was taking place "in coordination with relevant countries, including Iran, to ensure the vessel's safety."

According to the ministry official, the Iranian

government informed the South Korean Embassy in Tehran on Monday night that one South Korean vessel would be allowed to transit the strategic waterway.

"The government plans to additionally request that all South Korean vessels be allowed to transit freely through the Strait of Hormuz," the official said.

The ministry said one of 26 South Korean vessels currently in or near the Strait of Hormuz began sailing Tuesday morning from waters near Qatar. Officials said the vessel used the same route previously taken by ships that managed to leave the strait after the outbreak of the conflict.

The development comes some 88 days after the outbreak of the West Asia conflict, during which commercial shipping through the Strait of Hormuz has faced severe disruption amid heightened regional tensions and security concerns.

Before the war began, shipping traffic through the strait averaged 125 to 140 daily passages, and 20,000 seafarers remain stranded inside the Persian Gulf on board hundreds of ships. Shipping traffic has averaged 10 vessels going into and out of the strait in recent days and has included cargo vessels and other ships such as chemical and liquefied petroleum tankers, with crude oil tankers still representing a small proportion of the total volume, according to Reuters analysis based on ship tracking data.

Around 10 ships crossed the strait in the past 24 hours and included small cargo ships and a chemical tanker crossing into the Persian Gulf, according to data from Kpler and satellite analysis from data analytics specialists SynMax.

Iran crude trades above \$109 as US blockade lingers in Hormuz

Economy Desk

The price of Iranian oil in global markets rose to as high as \$109.53 per barrel, according to the latest data published by OilPrice and cited by Tasnim news agency on Wednesday.

Tasnim reported that prices for Iranian crude grades increased by \$2.04 on Tuesday, based on the latest available data from the energy pricing website.

Iranian Light crude for delivery to Northwest Europe was priced at \$108.28 per barrel, while Iranian Heavy and Foroza Blend traded at \$106.38 and \$106.63 per barrel, respectively, in the region.

In the Mediterranean market, Iranian Light crude was priced at \$107.63 per barrel, while Iranian Heavy stood at \$105.48 and Foroza Blend at \$105.73 per barrel.

The highest recorded price for Iranian crude was at Egypt's Sidi Kerir port, where Iranian Light crude reached \$109.53 per barrel. Iranian Heavy crude was priced at \$107.38 per barrel and Foroza Blend at \$107.63 per barrel in the same market.

Oil prices continued to hov-



er around triple-digit levels as the prolonged standoff between the United States and Iran kept traders on edge. Brent crude remained above \$110 per barrel on Wednesday as investors anticipated an extended period of tension in the Middle East, after rising sharply from last month's low of \$86.

Market analysts said there was a possibility that tensions between Washington and Tehran could persist throughout the year. US President Donald Trump said on Sunday that the United States would strike Iran to push Tehran toward an agreement. The two sides agreed to a ceasefire on April 8 after a 40-day US-Israeli aggression against Iran.

However, Trump said a day earlier that countries including Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates had asked Washington to delay any attack while negotiations between the two sides were continuing.

Strait of Hormuz; legal ...

Both the 1958 Geneva Convention on the Territorial Sea and the Contiguous Zone and the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea recognize the full sovereignty of the coastal State over its territorial sea and preserve the historic rights of coastal States in gulfs and semi-enclosed waterways. Therefore, in light of the continuous and historic exercise of sovereignty by Iran and Oman over the Strait of Hormuz over many centuries, this strait possesses a historic title.

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Hierarchy of applicable rules
In this regard, the rules governing this matter must be examined at three distinct but inter-related levels, given that each level possesses a higher rank and a more fundamental character, and rules at lower levels cannot be interpreted or applied in conflict with the principles of higher levels.

The first level relates to the fundamental principles of international law, including peremptory norms (*ius cogens*), that is the prohibition of aggression, and those enshrined in the United Nations Charter including prohibition of threat or use of force (Article 2(4)) and the inherent right of self-defence (Article 51). These principles

stand at the apex of the hierarchy of international legal norms and establish the framework and limitations for all other rules.

The second level refers to international humanitarian law (the law of armed conflict), which governs conduct in armed hostilities and determines which conducts are permissible and which are prohibited in situations of armed conflict. This level of rules complements in hierarchical manner; the fundamental principles of the first level.

At the third level, the law of the sea applies as a specialized body of law. The rules governing the regimes of passage through international straits, the rights of coastal States over their territorial sea, and other provisions of the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea cannot be applied in a vacuum or by disregarding the higher levels. In other words, the law of the sea must not be analyzed separately from the "root causes" that have shaped the current situation (including aggression, continuous military threats, and the inability of the Security Council to maintain peace), nor separately from the fundamental principles of international law; otherwise, this branch of law would become a tool for justifying aggression and disregarding the sovereign rights of coastal States.

With respect to the third level, it must be noted that the Islamic Republic of Iran has not acceded to the 1958 Convention on the Territorial Sea and the Contiguous Zone, nor to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). Therefore, Iran is not bound by their provisions, except insofar as they have become part of customary international law.

The regime of "transit passage" set forth in the 1982 Convention does not meet the established criteria of customary international law. The conclusions of the International Law Commission's 2018 work on the identification of customary international law contain key elements generally considered for determining whether a practice has become customary. Two of these conclusions are particularly relevant: first, under Conclusion 5, "State practice consists of conduct of the State, whether in the exercise of its executive, legislative, judicial or other functions". Second, Conclusion 15 provides that "Where a State has objected to a rule of customary international law while that rule was in the process of formation, the rule is not opposable to the State concerned for so long as it maintains its objection".

Through its continuous and persistent objection to the regime of "transit passage" provided

for in Articles 37 to 44 of the 1982 Convention, Iran has not recognized these rules as binding under customary international law. In this regard, Iran's consistent legislative and diplomatic practice since 1982 has established its position as a persistent objector to the binding nature of these rules and has challenged the *opinio juris* necessary for the formation of a customary norm.

The first notable document registered in the United Nations Treaty Series is Iran's interpretative declaration made at the time of signing the Convention, in which it explicitly stated that certain provisions, including the regime of "transit passage" in Part III (Articles 37 to 44), do not represent established customary international law. Iran's Maritime Law of 1963 (1342), its 2012 (1391) amendment, and Iran's Law on Maritime Zones of the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman of 1993 (1372) are further evidence of this practice. The latter law makes no reference to transit passage and thus does not recognize that regime; rather, it establishes specific regulatory provisions for the strait, including the requirement to obtain prior authorization for the passage of warships, submarines, and vessels carrying dangerous or environmentally harmful substances.

Consequently, the applicable legal framework for passage through the Strait of Hormuz, in the absence of a binding treaty obligation and in the absence of a customary rule of "transit passage", is the customary right of "innocent passage" through straits used for international navigation, as recognized by the International Court of Justice in the Corfu Channel case (1949). Within this framework, the coastal State has the right to regulate passage, collect fees for maritime services, require prior notification or authorization for the passage of warships, and adopt necessary measures for the protection of its security. The measures taken by the Islamic Republic of Iran are consistent with this customary framework.

Accordingly, any legal analysis of the situation in the Strait of Hormuz that proceeds directly to the specific provisions of the law of the sea without first examining peremptory norms, the fundamental principles of the Charter, and international humanitarian law is not only incomplete but also misleading. The law of the sea does not operate in a vacuum and cannot be used as a shield to justify aggression, extra-regional military presence, or the disregard of the historic and contemporary sovereign rights of coastal States.

Trump's cult of personality an impediment to diplomacy

INTERVIEW

The daily, nay hourly, fluctuations in the approach of Donald Trump, the president of the United States, toward Iran, toward war, and toward the process of negotiations have saturated these concepts and processes, more than ever before, with an aura of ambiguity and befuddlement. Trump, during this juncture and according to the testimony of numerous analysts, politicians, and even officials from allied nations, finds himself ensnared within a maelstrom of prior erroneous decisions and future — not that favorable — probabilities; and although he himself alleges that he experiences no pressure upon his determinations, the realities on the ground recount something divergent from this conviction and claim of his.

The American president, in order to contend with this narrative, endeavors, through the projection of the challenge toward Iran, to flee from the reality latent therein; yet this flight will not prove feasible even with the recommencement of hostilities against Iran, for the reason that he desires Tehran's submission, whereas Tehran has exceedingly robust foundations in the refusal of any submission before exorbitant demands.

For the purpose of examining and analyzing the dimensions of the American president's personality and approach, an interview has been conducted with Jalal Sadatian, an international relations analyst and former Iranian diplomat, the translation of which you will read below.

Jalal Sadatian



The president of the United States both speaks of the possibility of an agreement with Iran and describes Iran's stances and proposals as devoid of sincerity; to what extent can this behavioral contradiction be evaluated as a component of a strategy of psychological pressure and negotiation from a superior position?

SADATIAN: Donald Trump, as a businessman, believes that he can implement and obtain results, within this matter of negotiation with Iran, through the same methodologies he employs in commercial transactions. Furthermore, the utilization of these methodologies can, on certain occasions, also exert an influence upon the energy issue. In fact, on one occasion, through these statements, he was able to control energy prices; however, they subsequently resumed an ascending trajectory.

At present, the proposition of these utterances serves the same purpose of gaining control over energy prices because one of the serious pressures exerted upon him, both within the United States and upon other areas, such as Asia and Europe, is the energy issue. This subject not only affects diesel and gasoline but also, consequently, other commodities, including agricultural materials; and it is even said that agricultural products have encountered price increases. Therefore, he imagines that, through these methodologies, he can influence prices; although, as a rule, these influences have been exceedingly limited.

Another point is that he possesses a particular procedure and personal characteristic, which we denominate a "cult of personality," and he, from a personality standpoint, cannot accept defeat. Ultimately, a type of defeat has materialized for him; a defeat to which not only we, as the Islamic Republic, but also numerous analysts and political and international activists attest in their interviews and commentaries. Even some retired figures who have held responsibilities at various levels across the world have made this claim. This matter imposes pressure upon him because he has achieved none of his intended objectives. Furthermore, insinuations are raised suggesting that he, due to being caught in the Epstein case, has been placed under pressure by the Zionist lobby and by Netanyahu personally, and has been provoked by him.

Trump has a personality wherein he accords to himself a certain haughtiness, superiority, and grandeur, and he perpetually desires to demonstrate that



he is the leader of the greatest power in the world and that he makes the best decisions. To satisfy this psychological and emotional need, he occasionally performs theatrical behaviors; for instance, on a single night, beginning at 3:00 A.M., he published 18 tweets. Or he announces a decision but does not act upon it; just as he has withdrawn from many international collaborations, due to the same slogan of "America First" that he propounds.

He, from a personality and psychological perspective, is not particularly harmonious with the domestic structures of his own country, either. He may convene meetings and ostensibly hear the opinions of others; however, ultimately, he makes most decisions himself and does not pay much heed to others. This is one of his characteristics. He likes to say, "I controlled it, I did this."

Some believe that in repeatedly mentioning the subject

of negotiations, the principal objective of the United States is not the attainment of an agreement but rather the propulsion of Iran toward submission. To what extent do the behavioral and political evidences of the American government confirm this analysis?

Some have comprehended Trump and act in accordance with his temperament; however, Iran has resisted and persevered and has remained adherent to its principles and frameworks. Iran states, "If you say something, say it with logic and reasoning, not merely from a position of force. If reasoning exists, readiness for response exists as well."

Trump says that Iran must not possess enrichment capability, whereas Iran argues, on the basis of the NPT, that it possesses the right to enrichment for its own consumptive purposes, like other countries. He says that Iran has conducted enrichment outside of conventional norms,

such as at 60 percent. ^{NYT} Iran responds that it performed this action in reaction to the American withdrawal from the JCPOA and the non-adherence of the Europeans. Iran further states that it exercised patience and executed its obligations for a period, but the opposing party did not fulfill its obligations; therefore, this action has been a reciprocal reaction. At the same time, Iran has announced that it is prepared to resolve this matter and that monitoring will remain in place. So, Iran speaks with reasoning, but, since Trump does not possess a clear argumentative framework, he mostly tries to force his will.

You have referred to the domestic and international pressures confronting the American president, but he himself does not hold such a belief, and his personality does not permit its acceptance. Therefore, this question arises: how will the future unfold? Will domestic and foreign pres-



Trump says that Iran has conducted enrichment outside of conventional norms, such as at 60 percent. Iran responds that it performed this action in reaction to the American withdrawal from the JCPOA and the non-adherence of the Europeans. Iran further states that it exercised patience and executed its obligations for a period, but the opposing party did not fulfill its obligations; therefore, this action has been a reciprocal reaction. At the same time, Iran has announced that it is prepared to resolve this matter and that monitoring will remain in place.

ures overcome Trump, or will his personality dominate the processes? In simpler language, will military confrontation continue?

The short and explicit response is that the probability of military confrontation is increasing. We must be capable of correctly explicating our stances. It is necessary to hold press conferences and to employ credible figures possessing international connections for the explanation of Iran's stances. It is true that the minister of Foreign Affairs is regularly in communication with his counterparts; however, this alone is insufficient. In the face of the media pressure and the media capability of the United States, which perpetually constructs narratives, we sometimes lag behind. We must persuade the world's public opinion and influential individuals, including the Arab lobby in America or influential figures in Europe.

For example, look at how the prime minister of Spain takes a stance, and, in certain circles, the people openly appreciate his stances. This type of action can be effective in moderating Trump's utterances. On the other hand, sometimes European countries announce that this war is not theirs, but sometimes they also announce that, due to American pressure, they will dispatch a naval vessel. Instead of merely reacting, we must preemptively explain our stances and exploit the capacity of former presidents, former ministers of foreign affairs, and internationally recognized figures for the explanation of Iran's stances. Unfortunately, we still have weaknesses in the domain of narrative construction, media, and public diplomacy.

At present, it is insufficient merely to say that we are in the right. It is true that pressures have been exerted upon the world's public opinion to pay attention to Iran's stances; however, explanation is also necessary. All capacities must be employed, and a unified narrative must be presented. Furthermore, it is necessary to articulate Iran's stances and proposals transparently for public opinion. Numerous analysts and journalists do not know precisely what proposals Iran has presented and what responses it has received. This signifies that we have lagged in narrative construction.

Will the behavioral oscillations and the continuous alteration of stances by the American president, from threat and escalation to the declaration of readiness for agreement or cease-fire,



NGOs, social movements, unions and left-wing parties hold a massive demonstration under the slogan "No to war" in Valencia, Spain, on March 21, 2026, during the US-Israeli war on Iran.

fundamentally permit decision-making, negotiation, and agreement?

The reality is that not many indications of rationality are observed. Was Iran not negotiating with the United States during the 12-day war? Then why did the United States attack Fordow, Isfahan, and Natanz? While technical negotiations were supposed to continue, why were the attacks carried out? Does war not possess rules and frameworks?

What logic and framework do attacks on educational centers, medical facilities, residential places, and historical monuments follow? It is natural that these actions engender mistrust. Iran endeavors, through diplomacy and regional consultations, including Mr. Araghchi's travels to Pakistan, to moderate these contradictory behaviors. Trump, even within the United States, has repeatedly circumvented Congress. At present, as

well, he endeavors to preserve his war powers without regard for legal restrictions. Although the Democrats seek to restrict these powers, they have not yet succeeded. Therefore, even if a certain rationality exists within the domestic structure of the United States, the behavior of American presidents and their disregard for rules and commitments have created mistrust. There exists no definitive guarantee

that, if a promise is made, it will certainly be fulfilled. No such guarantee exists, neither at the international level nor within the United States. Nevertheless, if the objective is the avoidance of war and the preservation of achievements, there is no recourse except to continue the path of diplomacy and to arrive at a type of agreement; an agreement wherein concessions are granted and concessions are received, so

that the country's infrastructure, the lives of the people, and further damages may be protected. At present, the "neither war nor peace" situation has disrupted the lives of many inside Iran; due, for instance, to internet problems and the damages inflicted upon professions dependent upon international communications. For this reason, efforts are underway by various officials, including the government, the Supreme Na-

tional Security Council, Mr. Qalibaf, and Mr. Araghchi, to return the people's living conditions to a normal state as quickly as possible, while preserving achievements. It is true that the opposing party is not particularly trustworthy; however, ultimately, there exists no other way except to move along this same path of diplomacy.

The full interview first appeared in Persian on IRNA.

Iran isn't 'flailing'

It's executing a coercive risk strategy



By Kelly A. Grieco
Senior fellow at the
Stimson Center

OPINION

Iran's strategy of drone and missile strikes is neither random nor desperate; rather, it is a coherent strategy designed to steadily increase the political and economic costs of continued US and Israeli military operations. Iran's goal is not merely to put an end to the current fighting but to inflict sufficient pain to ensure the United States and Israel do not repeat this again. Understanding the logic behind Iran's actions is essential in coming to realistic assessments about the course of the conflict and preventing dangerous miscalculations.

In his briefing on the morning of March 10, Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth dismissed Iran's alleged week of strikes across the Persian Gulf as the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps "flailing recklessly". It is a reassuring framing. It is also wrong — and dangerously so. Understanding what Tehran is actually doing matters enormously for what comes next.

Iran's campaign does not look like desperation. It looks like Thomas Schelling. In his classic study of military coercion, Schelling defined risk strategy as the deliberate manipulation of shared danger. This approach exploits the "danger somebody may inadvertently go over the brink, dragging the other with him".

This is precisely what Tehran is attempting. By widening the conflict and raising economic and political costs of continued fighting, Iran aims to create pressure on Persian Gulf governments, global markets, and ultimately Washington, compelling it to halt the campaign. The first 10 days of fighting, examined carefully, reveal not reckless lashing out but a coherent and escalating coercive logic.

Tehran's campaign reflects an updated deterrence calculus. After the April 2024 Damascus strike killed senior IRGC officers, Iran telegraphed its retaliatory attack on Israel in advance, signaling restraint. But that caution was not rewarded. Washington and Tel Aviv struck again — and again. Tehran has since concluded that restraint, unreciprocated, does not deter. Only costs that are impossible to ignore achieve that effect.

Consider the target selection. According to the Institute of National Security Studies, Tehran



The illustration depicts US President Donald Trump as stuck in a figurative "escalation trap" within Iran's flag.
● ALLIE CARL/AXIOS

has launched more than 750 missiles and 2,000 drones toward the region. Only about 180 targeted Israel — the state that directly struck Iranian territory. The UAE alone absorbed over 1,400 drones, 260 ballistic missiles, and eight cruise missiles. That disparity is not simply an accident of geography. It is a strategic choice.

The campaign also followed a deliberate progression. Early strikes concentrated on military installations hosting US forces, including Al Dhafra Air Base in the UAE, Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar, Camp Arifjan in Kuwait, and the US Fifth Fleet headquarters in Bahrain. Rather than striking those bases indiscrimi-

nately, those attacks repeatedly targeted missile-defense radars and communications nodes. Within days, the campaign expanded to civilian infrastructure, including airports, ports, hotels, and data centers used by the US military and its partners. A drone strike on a logistics unit at Kuwait's Port Shuaiba killed six American soldiers, suggesting Iranian intelligence had tracked US forces miles from the main base. By midweek, energy infrastructure had entered the target set. Strikes on Saudi Arabia's Ras Tanura refinery, fuel storage facilities at Fujairah in the UAE, and Qatar's Ras Laffan LNG complex — the world's largest — sent European gas fu-

tures up 76% in a single week. Oil crossed \$110 per barrel. Each target category serves a distinct coercive purpose. Attacks on military installations raise risks to US personnel. Strikes on airports and ports signal to Persian Gulf governments that hosting US forces carries direct economic consequences. Disruptions to LNG and oil infrastructure send a warning far beyond the Middle East that the costs of this war will not remain local.

The Persian Gulf states are a particularly well-chosen pressure point not because they are combatants, but precisely because they are not. In the weeks before the conflict, Persian Gulf



The photo leaked on March 29, 2026, shows a damaged American E-3 Sentry plane, an airborne warning and control system (AWACS), after a strike on Saudi Arabia's Prince Sultan Air Base during the US-Israeli war on Iran.
● NBC NEWS



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leaders urgently warned Washington against attacking Iran, stressing their territory must not be used for offensive operations. Yet they now find themselves entrapped in a war they neither chose nor supported. Their economies face simultaneous downturns in hydrocarbon, shipping, tourism, and aviation revenues. Their militaries are expending interceptors at a rapid rate. Persian Gulf leaders have publicly called for de-escalation. That is exactly what Iran is counting on.

Some analysts argue that Iran's strikes are backfiring, pushing Persian Gulf states closer to Washington rather than pressuring it. There is something to this. Persian Gulf anger at Tehran is real. But the asymmetry of interests limits how far that logic runs. Iran is fighting for regime survival. For the Persian Gulf states, this war is not existential. However furious Persian Gulf leaders may be, they have powerful incentives to avoid further escalation. Their economies, their reputations, their carefully constructed images of stability are all at risk. That calculus favors pressure toward de-escalation, not wider war, which is precisely Iran's bet.

Tehran also still holds cards it has yet to play. Saudi Arabia's Abqaiq oil processing facility remains vulnerable. Expanded attacks on desalination plants could threaten drinking water for tens of millions. And Iran is now signaling readiness to escalate dramatically. It has reportedly laid roughly a dozen mines in the Strait of Hormuz in recent days. Iran possesses thousands of mines to make a sustained closure of the Strait a genuine possibility. That would confront Washington with a terrible dilemma: Attempt to reopen it under withering drone and missile fire, at significant cost to American ships or personnel, or accept a prolonged closure of the waterway — one that could take weeks or months to reverse. The mines laid so far look less like the opening of that campaign than a demonstration that Tehran retains the option — and is prepared to use it.

None of this means Iran's strategy will succeed. Escalation, once begun, follows its own logic. But dismissing Tehran's campaign as reckless flailing badly misreads the situation — and risks badly miscalculating what comes next.

The article first appeared on the Stimson Center.

Iran aiming to reclaim superheavyweight territory, weightlifting chief Anoushiravani says

Sports Desk

must build on the latest success at the Asian Weightlifting Championships to reassume dominance in the superheavyweight class for the years to come, Sajjad Anoushiravani, the chairman of the Iranian Weightlifting Federation, insists.

Young Iranian Alireza Yousefi marked his return to the global stage in style by setting a new world record of to win the Asian clean & jerk gold in the men's +110kg event in Gandhinagar, India, on Sunday.

Following last year's weight class adjustments, new standard records were set by the International Weightlifting Federation, including 260kg for the clean & jerk in the men's superheavyweight division. Yousefi exceeded the mark by one kilogram with his final lift in Gandhinagar. Making his first international appearance in 18 months after recovering from knee surgery, the 22-year-old prodigy added the snatch bronze and total silver to his haul as the Iranian depleted two-man squad finished fifth in the overall medals table – which also featured the

women's competition – with two golds as well as one silver and one bronze apiece.

Two-time world junior champion Alireza Nasiri had to recover from three failed snatch attempts in his 110kg campaign on Saturday to bag the clean & jerk gold.

Speaking to ISNA upon the team's return, Anoushiravani said the primary goal in India was to assess Yousefi's condition after a year and a half away from major competition. "Thank God, he performed exceptionally well and set the world record in the superheavyweight category," the federation chief said. "He has a chance to compete in the Asian Games and Olympic qualifiers, and he is still young."

Anoushiravani, however, acknowledged that Yousefi still has room for improvement in the snatch. "The technical staff of the national team must address the issue, and Alireza is fully aware of it," he added, while also praising Dr. Reza Shirvani, head of the federation's medical committee, for orchestrating Yousefi's powerful comeback from knee surgery.

Yousefi – also a winner of two



Iran's Alireza Yousefi makes a lift during the men's +110kg event at the Asian Weightlifting Championships in Gandhinagar, India, on May 17, 2026.
● PTI

world junior titles – made his senior international debut at the 2024 World Championships in impressive fashion, stunning fellow Iranian Alireza Davoudi and Armenian Olympic silver medalist Varazdat Lalayan to claim the C&J gold with a then-continental record lift of 262kg, before winning bronze in the total with 456kg.

Iran dominated the superheavy-

weight division for the best part of the early years of the century, with legendary Hossein Rezazadeh and Behdad Salimi – the head coach of the national team – sharing three Olympic golds and dozens of world medals between them.

However, Iran was dethroned by Georgian Lasha Talakhadze, who made the class his own territory for more than a decade, col-

lecting triple Olympic titles and seven successive world crowns.

Anoushiravani was adamant about Iran's long-term ambitions in the weight division. "Sooner or later, we must reclaim the superheavyweight titles both in Asia and the world. That is our plan," stressed the Iranian, who has an Olympic and world silver in the category under his belt. "God willing, this

will happen at the Asian Games and also at the World Championships in China."

Regarding 21-year-old Nasiri, who recently moved up from the junior national team, Anoushiravani noted that the young lifter was dispatched to gain experience in a more professional setting ahead of the Asian Games. "Nasiri is one of the talents we have invested heavily in over the past few years," he said. "He started with a heavy weight in the snatch, and the technical staff wanted to see how he would handle intense competition. Now his weaknesses have been identified, and we will address them."

He concluded that overall, both lifters' performances were decent given the heavy opening weights they faced. "We have several weight categories where we are capable of breaking world records," Anoushiravani said. "This will happen in the near future." He added that both athletes would return far stronger for September's Aichi-Nagoya Asian Games and the World Championships in Ningbo, China, in October, with a clear goal of qualifying for the Olympics.

Iran set to dispatch 27 athletes to Youth Olympics

Sports Desk

Iran is set to be represented by 27 male and female athletes at the upcoming Dakar Summer Youth Olympics, Hamid Azizi, the country's chef de mission at the multi-sport event, has confirmed.

The fourth edition of the Games, set to be staged in Africa for the first time, will resume after an eight-year hiatus with the opening ceremony in the Senegalese capital's Dakar Arena on October 31, with young athletes from across the globe vying for glory in 25 sporting events over 13 days of action.

The Iranian delegation in Dakar will be named after seven-year-old schoolboy Makan Nassiri, whose remains were never identified after the U.S. airstrikes on the Shajareh Tayyebah Elementary School in Minab, southern Iran, on February 28.

Azizi said that the Iranian contingent's lineup is all but finalized with five months remaining until the Games. "We will continue trying to add quotas if withdrawals occur in other countries, but no quotas will be deducted," he told local media.

The 27 qualified athletes span both team and individual events. The breakdown includes two taekwondo athletes (one boy in the +73kg category and one girl in the -63kg class), one cyclist competing in both the individual time trial and road race, and four beach wrestlers across the 60kg, 70kg, 80kg, and 90kg weight classes. Track and field will see one boy in the 2,000m steeplechase, while badminton has secured two boys' quotas. Boxing contributes one girl in the 57kg division, and table tennis, triathlon, and swim-



Photo taken on May 17, 2026, shows an external view of Dakar Arena, which will host badminton and futsal event during the Dakar 2026 Youth Olympic Games, in Diamniadio, Senegal.
● XIE JIANFEI/XINHUA

ming each send one boy – the latter in the 200m event. Wushu is represented by one athlete in the taolu discipline, beach volleyball by a boys' pair, and women's futsal by a full squad of 10 players.

Azizi noted that Iran's quota situation has been finalized in coordination with the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and relevant international bodies. While the overall environment regarding training camps and finances is favorable, he remained cautious about medal predictions. "It is difficult to predict medals in youth age groups because we know our own athletes' conditions but not those of other countries," he said.

Reflecting on Iran's Youth Olympic history, Azizi recalled a steady upward trajectory: at Singapore 2010, Iran secured two gold, two silver, and one bronze medal; at Nanjing 2014, the tally improved to three gold and three bronze; and at Buenos Aires 2018, the delegation achieved its best performance to date with seven gold, three silver, and four bronze medals.

"Iran's best performance

was in Argentina. Iranian sports have made good progress since then," he said, citing a strong showing at last year's Asian Youth Games in Manama, where the country bagged an impressive 76 medals, including 22 golds.

Azizi expressed high hopes for wrestling as "always the first hope" of the delegation, along with table tennis prodigy Benyamin Faraji, who has excelled at the senior level, and taekwondo, where recent federation stability has boosted confidence. "We are not without expectations in any sport, and we hope our athletes will surprise everyone," he stated.

However, he acknowledged that the African hosting context has reduced the number of sports and participants compared to previous editions. "Senegal does not have a weightlifting federation, so that sport was removed from the program, even though Iran has always been a medalist in weightlifting at the Youth Olympics," Azizi explained. "Overall, the opportunity to win medals in Dakar is lower than in Argentina."

Asian Taekwondo Championships: Iran suffers team setbacks in poomsae

Sports Desk

Iranians suffered further setbacks in the poomsae competition on Day 2 of the Asian Taekwondo Championships in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, finishing empty-handed in the mixed pair events on Wednesday.

Given a bye in the first round, Yassin Zandi and Marjan Salahshouri crashed out in the mixed pair under-30 quarterfinals after scoring 8.62 points against the Filipino duo's 8.70.

Zandi had fallen to Muhammad Riza of Indonesia in the round of 16 of the men's individual event on the opening day, while the women's competition was one to forget for two-time world silver medalist Salahshouri, who de-

feated Hong Kong's Tsz Ki Liu in her opener but was undone by South Korea's Jooyeong Lee.

Meanwhile, Yassin Akbari and Yasaman Limouchi teamed up to progress from the freestyle mixed pair preliminaries, but eventually settled for a fifth-place finish after an 8.20-point performance in the final showdown.

Akbari had also made it to the men's individual final on Tuesday, finishing sixth, which proved enough for him to secure qualification for the Aichi-Nagoya 2026 Asian Games in September.

Limouchi represented the country in the women's freestyle event, finishing ninth in the preliminaries with 7.40 points to miss out on the

final showdown.

The Asian Championships will continue with the opening day of the kyorugi contests at the M Bank Arena today.

Yassin Valizadeh will get the country's men's team title defense underway in the -54kg division, while reigning Olympic champion Arjan Salimi will look to make up for a below-par World Championships campaign last year – where he suffered a round-of-16 exit – by defending his continental title in the +87kg class.

In the women's event, Masoumeh Ranjbar will compete in the -46kg class, while Fatemeh Ahmadi will be part of the +73kg draw.

Two-time world silver medalist Marjan Salahshouri was part of the Iranian poomsae mixed pair at the Asian Taekwondo Championships in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia.
● TAEKWONDO.IR



Akbari returns to lead Paykan volleyball team

Sports Desk

Peyman Akbari has once again taken over as head coach of the Paykan men's volleyball team, succeeding Mohammadreza Tondravan ahead



● volleyball.ir

of the upcoming Iranian Super League season.

The most decorated team in the history of the Asian Club Championship with eight titles, Paykan confirmed Akbari's appointment as

part of its long-term vision to restore its glory days in Iran's top-flight volleyball.

The former Iranian international outside hitter and team captain returns to a club where he previously achieved legendary status both on the court and on the bench.

Akbari is no stranger to success with Paykan. During his previous stints with the club – as both player and coach – he secured two Iranian Super League championships, multiple run-

ner-up finishes, two Asian Club Championships titles, as well as third- and fourth-place finishes at the FIVB Club World Championship. He also brings experience from serving on Iran's national team coaching staff in recent years.

Akbari was also in charge when the Iranian national team completed a clean sweep of six victories – including a 3-1 win against Türkiye in the final – to claim the men's gold medal at the Islamic Solidarity Games in Riyadh last November.



Bronze finial, Lorestan, 8th–7th centuries BCE.
● ISNA

Hermitage museum preserves priceless treasures of ancient Iran



Gilt silver vessel, 6th century CE
● ISNA



Gold griffin with inlaid decoration, 4th century BCE.
● ISNA

Iranica Desk

Iran's historical heritage has long occupied a prominent place in the world's leading museums, from the Louvre Museum in France to the British Museum and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in the United States. Yet Russia's Hermitage Museum also holds an extensive and remarkable collection reflecting the depth of Iranian culture and history. On the occasion of International Museum Day, observed annually on May 18 around the world, attention turns to some of the museum's most significant Iranian artifacts — treasures that have received comparatively little international attention. The Hermitage, one of the world's most visited museums, houses more than 2.5 million historical and artistic objects, with Iranian works forming a substantial part of its collection. Many of these pieces arrived in Russia through commercial and cultural agreements forged during the wars between Iran and Russia in the Qajar era.

According to Ancient Iranian Heritage by Mohammad Ali Alavi Kia, numerous objects also left Iran during the reign of Fat'h-Ali Shah, including manuscripts from the library of Sheikh Safi al-Din in Azarbaijan, which were seized under Russian occupation. Among the oldest Iranian objects in the Hermitage are 55 painted Elamite ceramic vessels dating back to the late 4th and 3rd millennia BCE — approximately 5,000 to 6,000 years ago. These artifacts were donated to the museum in the early 20th century by the French archaeological mission excavating in Iran. The collection also includes Lorestan bronzes from the 13th to 8th centuries BCE, featuring bracelets, pins, bronze figurines, and pottery. Several Iron Age vessels of the Hasanlu type and a red-glazed ceramic piece from Amlash, donated by renowned scholar Arthur Upham Pope, are also preserved there.

Achaemenid splendor

The Hermitage's Achaemenid collection, dating from the 6th to

4th centuries BCE, includes a fragment of the Persepolis reliefs depicting the head of an "Immortal" guard from the royal army. The piece was presented to the museum by the Iranian government in 1935 during an international exhibition of Iranian art. Other notable works from the period include a golden cup with lion-shaped handles, gold jewelry, necklaces adorned with semi-precious stones, plaques depicting a winged figure believed by some scholars to symbolize Ahura Mazda, and various animal sculptures. The museum's Achaemenid seal collection features a cylinder seal from the late 5th century BCE portraying the victory of a Persian king over Egypt, along with agate and carnelian seals executed in a Greco-Persian style.

Parthian collection

The Parthian era at the Hermitage is represented primarily through discoveries from the ancient city of Nisa, located in present-day Turkmenistan and once home to one of the earliest Parthian royal palaces. Excavations conducted between 1947 and 1963 uncov-

ered a wealth of material later donated to the museum by the Turkmen government.

Among the most important pieces are four ivory rhytons from the 2nd century BCE and decorative clay plaques from the palace complex. The museum also preserves more than 2,600 administrative documents linked to Parthian royal stores — records considered crucial to understanding the economy and history of the Parthian Empire. In 1996, the Hermitage acquired a rare Parthian metalwork masterpiece: a gilded silver plate bearing the image of a mountain goat and a lengthy Parthian inscription indicating that the object belonged to Narseh, son of Artabanus and Sasanian viceroy of the Caucasus in the mid-3rd century CE.

Largest collection of Sassanid silverware

The Hermitage possesses the world's largest collection of Iranian and Central Asian silver vessels from the 3rd to 9th centuries CE. Many of these artifacts were discovered in treasure hoards and accidental finds near Russia's Kama

and Ob river regions.

The collection includes three gold vessels and more than 35 Sassanid silver plates, the most famous of which depict royal hunting scenes. Some scholars believe several of the pieces date to the late Sassanid era and even into the 8th century. The museum also houses more than 1,200 Sassanid seals, including an amethyst seal belonging to Queen Deng, wife of Yazdegerd II, as well as seals engraved with lengthy Middle Persian inscriptions.

Rare treasury of coins

With more than 3,000 specimens, the Hermitage's Parthian coin collection ranks among the finest in the world. It includes rare coins minted under Mithridates II and pieces issued by lesser-known branches of the Parthian dynasty in Sistan. The museum's Sassanid coin collection exceeds 6,000 pieces and is considered one of the richest globally. Among its highlights are rare coins of Hormizd II and Khosrow I and II, alongside imitation coins struck in Central Asia.

Beyond historical Iran, the Hermitage also preserves a vast collection of Iranian-influenced art and culture from Central Asia, ranging from Bactrian and Khwarazmian vessels to Sogdian artifacts, murals, clay sculptures, and Buddhist works.

Sogdian art occupies a particularly important place in the museum. Murals, wooden and clay statues, and artifacts excavated from Panjakent — a major city in present-day Tajikistan — form some of the collection's most celebrated holdings. Several paintings depict scenes from the Panchatantra, the Mahabharata, and epic tales of Rostam. Many of these artifacts have been restored by Hermitage specialists, with some later returned to museums and academic institutions in Tajikistan after conservation work.

Today, the Iranian collection at the Hermitage stands not only as one of the most important repositories of ancient Iranian art outside Iran, but also as a foundational resource for scholarly research into pre-Islamic Iranian art and metalwork.

4,800-year-old Anubanini Relief seeks recognition in Kermanshah

Iranica Desk

Thanks to its four-season climate, towering mountains, fertile plains, abundant rivers and springs, and strategic location along the ancient route connecting the Iranian plateau to Mesopotamia, the western Iranian province of Kermanshah has long been a focal point for civilizations, empires, and rulers throughout history. The province is home to nearly 5,000 identified historical sites, making it one of Iran's three richest provinces in terms of archaeological heritage. Yet despite this wealth of antiquities, only a handful of landmarks — including the UNESCO-listed Bisotun Inscription, Taq-e Bostan, the Temple of Anahita, Biglarbeigi Tekyeh, and Moaven al-Molk Tekyeh — have received national and international recognition, according to ISNA. Historians and cultural heritage experts say that nearly 99 per-

cent of Kermanshah's historical treasures remain largely unknown, despite many possessing cultural value equal to or even greater than the province's most famous monuments. As Iran marks Cultural Heritage Week (May 18–24), renewed attention is being drawn to one such neglected site: the Anubanini Inscription in Sarpol-e Zahab, which some historians consider one of the oldest inscriptions in both Iran and the Middle East. The ancient relief and inscription were first documented in 1836 by British orientalist Henry Rawlinson near the Alvand River on Mount Patir, north of Sarpol-e Zahab — a city regarded by some scholars as one of the world's oldest urban settlements. Archaeologists estimate the inscription to be around 4,800 years old, making it the oldest known rock relief inscription in Iran. It was commissioned by Anubanini, king of the Lul-



iraniraniha.ca

lubi people, who ruled parts of western Iran during the third millennium BCE, before the rise of the Medes. The Lullubi inhabited mountainous regions stretching from present-day Iraqi Kurdistan to western Iran, including modern-day Kermanshah, Kurdistan, Ilam, and parts of West

Azarbaijan Province. Historical records indicate that they traded with the Babylonians and were twice defeated by Akkadian rulers. The rock relief, carved 16 meters above ground level, depicts King Anubanini standing triumphantly over a captive. In one hand he holds a weapon, while the other carries a bow. Opposite him stands the goddess Ishtar, presenting him with the ring of power. Behind Ishtar, two kneeling prisoners await punishment, while six additional captives appear in the lower register of the relief. The accompanying inscription introduces both the king and the monument while invoking curses upon anyone who might damage the relief in the future. It calls upon deities including Ishtar, Shamash, Anu, Antum, and Sin to punish violators and extinguish their lineage. Experts believe the Anubanini relief later inspired other royal inscriptions, including

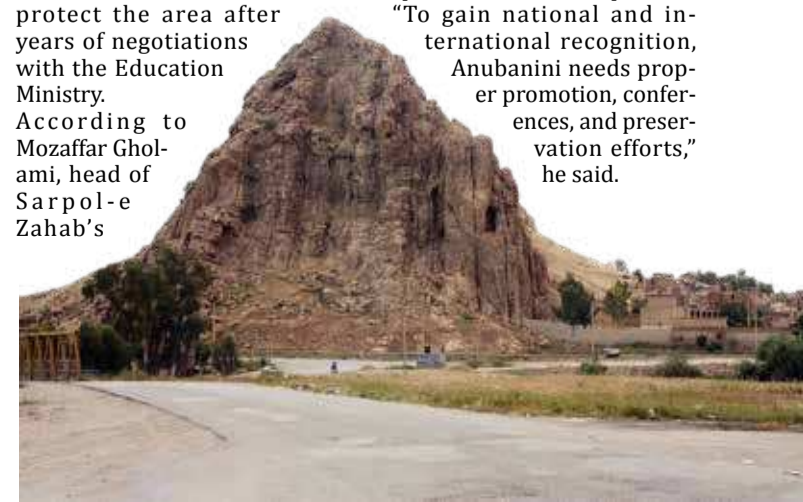
the famed Bisotun Inscription commissioned centuries later by Achaemenid King Darius the Great.

Despite its historical significance, the monument remained largely unknown for decades — partly because it was enclosed within the courtyard of a girls' school in Sarpol-e Zahab, limiting public access and visibility. Ironically, the devastating 7.3-magnitude earthquake that struck Sarpol-e Zahab in 2017 helped bring the monument back into public view. The school surrounding the site was destroyed in the quake, eventually allowing cultural heritage authorities to reclaim and protect the area after years of negotiations with the Education Ministry. According to Mozaffar Gholami, head of Sarpol-e Zahab's

Cultural Heritage Office, the Anubanini Inscription has the potential to become one of Kermanshah's premier historical attractions alongside Bisotun and Taq-e Bostan — provided it receives sufficient funding and promotion.

"Anubanini spent years trapped inside a school courtyard and never had the opportunity to be properly introduced to the public," Gholami said. "Now that the site has been freed, provincial authorities are expected to pay greater attention to it." He added that the monument has suffered extensive damage over its nearly 5,000-year history, including erosion and the impacts of the Iran-Iraq War.

"To gain national and international recognition, Anubanini needs proper promotion, conferences, and preservation efforts," he said.



Demographic alarm grows as marriages, births fall, aging pressure mounts in Iran

Social Desk

Iran is grappling with a deepening demographic slowdown as official figures show a sharp decline in marriages and births alongside rising aging pressures, prompting senior officials to warn that current trends could reshape the country's social and economic outlook for decades. Health ministry data show births fell by 87,661 in the 2023-2024 period, dropping to 892,268 in 2024, while marriages declined by 38,708 to 431,664 over the same period. The birth-to-death ratio slipped from 2.14 to 1.98, signaling a narrowing population growth buffer as Iran's fertility rate dropped to about

1.34-1.35, well below replacement level. "Marriage is the first link in the chain of population decline," said Deputy Health Minister Alireza Raeisi, noting that economic instability, rising living costs and job insecurity are delaying family formation. "When marriage is postponed, fertility inevitably follows a downward path." Officials also pointed to structural pressures in healthcare and aging. Around 10 percent of Iran's population now accounts for roughly 40 percent of hospital bed occupancy, reflecting what experts describe as a rapidly aging patient base and increasing strain on medical resources.



Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance Abbas Salehi warned that demographic imbalance could carry broader national consequences. "If Iran loses its population capital, its economic and security capacity will be significantly weakened," he said, adding that within three decades, around one-third of the population could be elderly if current fertility trends persist.

The minister noted that while economic factors matter, cultural shifts are also playing a key role. "We are facing a deeper cultural challenge," he said, citing global examples where high-income countries such as Germany, Japan, and South Korea are also experiencing fertility declines. In a separate message, Iran's Leader Seyyed Mojtaba Khomeini also linked population growth to the country's future trajectory, saying the continuation of Iran's national "strength and influence" is closely tied to demographic capacity. He described population policy as a strategic priority, warning that declining fertility could limit long-term national development

and emphasizing the role of encouraging childbirth in shaping what he called a "promising future" for the country. Health officials said nearly 12 million people are currently of marriage age, yet delays in family formation remain widespread. They also reported that fertility has fallen from around 6.5 in the 1980s to near 1.3 today, describing it as a "structural transition" that is difficult to reverse. Population experts estimate that under current conditions Iran's elderly population could rise to 31-32 percent by 2051, with projections ranging from 93 million to just over 100 million depending on fertility recovery scenarios.

Isfahan draws UNESCO restoration mission after damage to historic landmarks

Arts & Culture Desk

Iran's Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts said the restoration of Isfahan's historic monuments has been placed at the top of the government's agenda, as UNESCO prepares to send experts to assess and assist recovery efforts following recent damage to the UNESCO-listed city. Reza Salehi-Amiri, speaking during a visit to the Safavid-era Chehel Sotoun Palace, said coordination with international bodies, including UNESCO, ICESCO and the United Nations cultural system, had intensified in recent weeks, CHTN reported. He said the UNESCO secretary-general had agreed to dispatch specialists to Iran "at the earliest opportunity." "Isfahan is not just a city of buildings and structures; it is the identity and memory of Iran," Salehi-Amiri said. "It shines like a sun across this land." He stressed that restoration work on damaged heritage sites would begin after technical assessments and approval by expert councils, adding that the government had prioritized accelerated reconstruction in coordination with local author-



ities and the private sector. Salehi-Amiri said a new high-level restoration committee had been established in Isfahan following a cooperation agreement between the municipality and the provincial heritage office, aimed at speeding up decision-making on preservation projects. "We are determined to restore these monuments so that both Iranian citizens and international visitors can once again experience them," he said. During the visit, officials also unveiled a cooperation framework for heritage management and reviewed damage assessments at several historic structures in the city's UNESCO-listed cultural core, including parts of Naqsh-e Jahan Square. The minister also highlighted Isfahan's expanding role beyond cultural heritage, unveiling plans to position the city as a regional hub for health tourism.

He inaugurated a five-star hotel within the Isfahan Health City complex, describing it as part of a broader investment exceeding 200 trillion rials in modern medical infrastructure. "In the future, Isfahan will stand not only as a cultural capital but also as a global destination for health tourism," he said, citing plans to attract up to six billion dollars in annual revenue from the sector. The minister also introduced a symbolic revival of traditional polo, or Chogan, in Naqsh-e Jahan Square as part of efforts to promote Iran's intangible heritage to international audiences. Salehi-Amiri, whose three-day visit includes heritage site inspections and participation in cultural events, said Isfahan remains "a living museum of Iranian civilization" and pledged continued government support for its restoration and global cultural profile.

Short film 'Warden' from Iran sweeps two awards at Portugal festival

Arts & Culture Desk

Iranian short film 'Warden' clinched the Best Short Film and Best International Short Film awards at the 13th Leiria International Short Film Festival in Portugal, marking the first time the production has secured a double win at the European event. Written and directed by Sabah Mohammadi, the film was produced by the Iranian Youth Cinema Society's Kurdistan office alongside Mohammadi, ILNA reported.

The annual festival, hosted by the Leiria Film Fest Cultural Association, ran from May 5 to 10 at Miguel Franco Theatre in Leiria. 'Warden' follows the manager of a girls' dormitory whose routine night shift spirals into confrontation after a student returns late, turning an ordinary corridor into a charged emotional crossroads. The cast includes Yasaman Nasiri, Tara Qobadi, Atefeh Azmodeh, Fardin Qaderi and Elham Banihashem. International distribution is handled by Madakto Pictures.



First nat'l museum charter approved in Iran to unify cultural governance

Arts & Culture Desk

Iran approved its first comprehensive national museum charter, a senior heritage official said, setting out a unified governance framework for the country's 830 museums and formally defining the role of museums within the national cultural system. Ali Darabi, deputy minister for cultural heritage, told IRNA that the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution had endorsed the "National Museum Charter" after months of consultations with specialists, museum executives and academics, alongside reviews of international and domestic practices. He described the document as a "strategic roadmap" for the future



of Iran's museum sector. Darabi said the Islamic Republic had, for the first time, established a high-level policy document clarifying the functions of museums and outlining the responsibilities of the state and other institutions in supporting and developing the sector. Under the charter, 20 state bodies have been assigned defined responsibilities through

what officials described as an "institutional mapping" mechanism. The entities are required to coordinate with the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts on museum policy, development and oversight. Darabi said one of the charter's central pillars was the establishment of "integrated museum governance", bringing state-run museums,

collections affiliated with the armed forces, banks, public institutions and private-sector museums under a common policy and regulatory structure for the first time. He said the framework did not entail state ownership or interference in institutional holdings, but instead aimed to introduce shared standards, coherent supervision and coordinated management to curb overlap and fragmentation across the sector. The charter is expected to strengthen museums' contribution to cultural capital, national identity, public education and tourism development, while consolidating their standing within Iran's broader cultural landscape.

Iran seeks bigger share of \$350m toy market

Arts & Culture Desk

Iran's toy market is valued at \$300 million to \$350 million, but domestic producers account for only about \$100 million of that total, Secretary of the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution Abdolhossein Khosropanah said in Tehran, as officials moved to bolster local manufacturing and curb imports. Speaking at the 62nd meeting of the Toy Supervisory Council, Khosropanah said, "The global games and toys industry is worth around \$130 billion," adding that Iran must move toward a more coordinated governance model focused on regulation rather than traditional oversight, Mehr News Agency reported. He outlined priorities including investment security, market development, and support for creative industries. Industry representatives and officials also reviewed the implementation of

Iran's national toy document, a policy framework designed to align industrial production with cultural and educational goals. The plan aims to unify fragmented data systems and improve coordination between state bodies and private manufacturers. Hamed Alamati, head of the Institute for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults (IIDCYA), said Iran plans to launch comprehensive scientific surveys on production and consumption trends. "In previous years, available figures were largely estimated," he said, adding that nationwide exhibitions are being expanded, including in rural provinces, to stimulate local markets. Leila Babaei, a senior cultural affairs official, emphasized the need for unified data collection and inter-agency participation, noting that only one ministry has so far formally appointed a representative to the national

framework. Industry voices raised concerns over informal imports and weak enforcement. It is estimated that 60 to 70 percent of imported toys enter the country outside formal regulatory channels, prompting calls for tighter customs oversight and tariff enforcement. Despite challenges, officials reported progress in production capacity, with more than 600 manufacturing units active and over 40 million toys produced in the current year. Exports reached \$40 million across 25 countries in the year ended March 20, 2025, though officials acknowledged recent fluctuations in trade performance. Khosropanah said the council must focus on "problem-solving governance," not structural expansion, as Iran seeks to reposition toys not only as consumer goods but as instruments of cultural identity and child development.