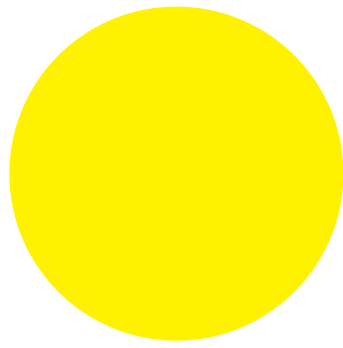


Tehran Symphony Orchestra opens 2026 season with cross-border classical showcase



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Vol. 8124 • Saturday, May 23, 2026 • Khordad 02, 1405 • Dhu al-Hijjah 06, 1447 • 100,000 rials • 8 pages



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Iranian Interior Minister Eskandar Momeni (2nd R) welcomes Pakistan's top military commander, Field Marshal Asim Munir, in Tehran on May 22, 2026. akharinkhabar.ir

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## US Senate anti-war vote signals early fractures in Republican strategic calculus

By Delaram Ahmadi Staff writer

INTERVIEW EXCLUSIVE

After seven failed attempts, the US Senate on May 19 finally passed a resolution to halt military action in Iran by a 50-47 vote. In this round, four Republicans aligned with President Donald Trump voted in favor. While the resolution stands little chance of becoming law, it points to growing opposition to a war launched by Trump despite the absence of an immediate threat to the United States, according to the country's own intelligence, and one that has carried economic consequences for American voters. Iran Daily spoke with Mehdi Paknia, a researcher of US foreign policy, who argues that the vote marks the beginning of a growing divide within the Republican Party, fueled by rising gas prices ahead of the 2026 elections and increasing public weariness with a long war.



Iran Daily spoke with Mehdi Paknia, a researcher of US foreign policy, who argues that the vote marks the beginning of a growing divide within the Republican Party, fueled by rising gas prices ahead of the 2026 elections and increasing public weariness with a long war.

IRAN DAILY: How should the alignment of several Republican senators

with Democrats be interpreted? Is this an exception, or does it signal a gradual shift in how part of the Republican Party views aggressive foreign policy? To what extent have the upcoming October elections influenced these lawmakers' decisions? PAKNIA: Republican senators siding with Democrats at this stage—especially after seven failed attempts—marks a turning point in the political management of this war. While, on the surface, 50 affirmative votes may appear marginal, the composition of that vote points to a widening rift. The presence of four Republicans—Rand Paul, Susan Collins, Lisa Murkowski, and notably Bill Cassidy—goes beyond individual dissent. The sudden shift by Louisiana Senator Bill Cassidy, which came immediately after losing the primary to a Trump-backed candidate, clearly points to the rising political costs of aligning with Trump's war policies. At the same time, the notable absence of several key Republican senators, including John Cornyn, Thom Tillis, and Tommy Tuberville, suggests growing hesitation within the party over continuing the war—even if it has not yet translated into open opposition. Taken together, this vote should not be seen as an exception but as the starting point of a gradual fracture in the

Republican Party's strategic calculus, driven by realities such as rising gasoline prices on the eve of the 2026 elections and public fatigue with a prolonged conflict.

Given that the House of Representatives remains under Republican control and a presidential veto appears likely, can this Senate move be expected to produce any tangible change in the White House's executive approach?

The resolution was introduced by Tim Kaine, a Democratic senator from Virginia. Its substance obliges Trump to withdraw US armed forces from any hostilities in or against Iran unless explicitly authorized through a declaration of war or a specific congressional mandate. This vote effectively represents an initial step in the Senate, and even if it were to pass both chambers, given the current balance of power, a presidential veto would be almost certain. However, as Democrats have emphasized, the significance of this move lies not in its binding force but in its psychological and political impact on the administration's conduct. The vote shows that the president no longer enjoys a political consensus in Congress to sustain the war. The Trump administration claims that

the early April ceasefire halted the 60-day clock under the War Powers Act and that continued operations do not require new authorization. However, the passage of this resolution effectively undercuts that argument. With this vote, the Senate has called into question the executive legitimacy of the White House—even if it has not legally constrained it. In effect, the Senate has introduced a form of soft political deterrence. The message coming out of this vote is clear: any continuation of the war now carries a high political cost, and its domestic legitimacy in the United States has been significantly weakened.

What impact will this Senate action have on the calculations of regional actors, particularly US allies in the Middle East?

The passage of this resolution sends a clear signal to regional actors that political will in Washington is wavering. For Trump's Middle Eastern allies, who have so far relied on the cohesion of Washington's power structure as a guarantee of sustained aggressive policies, this development sharply raises uncertainty regarding US security commitments. The key issue here is the clash between the Trump administration's legal claim and the Senate's approach. While the

White House argues—citing the early April ceasefire—that the War Powers Act clock has been suspended and that no congressional authorization is needed, the Senate's move to compel Trump to end the war directly pushes back against that claim. For regional allies, witnessing a 50-47 split—and recognizing that the highest legislative body in the United States is fundamentally divided over the continuation of the war—has significantly weakened the image of a unified strategic resolve in Washington. This situation effectively forces US allies to rethink their calculations before domestic variables in the United States—particularly the pressures of the 2026 elections and gasoline-driven inflation, a primary driver of internal opposition—reshape the trajectory of the war in unpredictable ways. They have now come to realize that their security can no longer rest solely on Trump's increasingly fragile military posture. As a result, this shift is paving the way for diversification of security options or even preemptive moves toward regional de-escalation pathways. For regional actors, it has become clear that relying on unconditional US backing—amid the erosion of the war's domestic legitimacy—is an increasingly risky and unsustainable strategy.

# Gov't ready to use all capacities to strengthen Armed Forces: *President*



Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian (r) meets with Army Chief Commander Major General Amir Hatami (c) in Tehran on May 21, 2026.

● PRESIDENT.IR

## National Desk

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian said that his administration will use "all available capacities" to strengthen the

country's Armed Forces amid threats of a renewed war on Iran by the United States and the Israeli regime.

Pezeshkian praised the bravery, sacrifice, and powerful perfor-

mance of Iran's Armed Forces — particularly the "proud Army" — in confronting the unprovoked war of aggression waged by a US-Israeli military coalition against the Islamic

Republic on February 28. He made the remarks in a meeting with Commander-in-Chief of the Iranian Army Major General Amir Hatami on Thursday. Emphasizing the importance of national unity and military readiness amid regional tensions, Pezeshkian also commended the Armed Forces for their "decisive, intelligent, and deterrent responses" to hostile actions by enemies. "The Armed Forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran, especially the faithful, popular, and revolutionary Army, demonstrated the country's defensive authority during the recent developments and threats through high operational readiness, intelligence

superiority, command cohesion, and effective combat capability, and did not allow the enemies to achieve their sinister objectives against the Iranian nation," he said.

Pezeshkian also described the role of the Army in ensuring national security, safeguarding the country's territorial integrity, and boosting defensive deterrence as "decisive and strategic."

The president stressed the necessity of continuously strengthening the country's defense capabilities and improving the combat readiness of the Armed Forces.

The government, he said, "stands alongside the Armed Forces with all its capacities and will support strategic programs aimed at enhancing defense power, logistical backing, modernization of equipment, strengthening operational infrastructure, and increasing the

country's deterrence capability." Pezeshkian further underscored the importance of coordination between executive bodies and the Armed Forces under the region's sensitive conditions.

"Today, national cohesion, defensive preparedness, and preserving the authority of the armed forces are the most important pillars supporting the country's security, stability, and calm in the face of enemy threats and hybrid warfare."

In the beginning of the meeting, General Hatami presented a report on the latest operational situation, defense measures, and missions of the Army in confronting enemy aggression and hostile movements.

Hatami also explained parts of the operations and responses carried out against aggressors during the recent war, emphasizing the full preparedness of various Army units across different fields.

## Pakistan's army chief in Tehran to mediate Iran-US talks

### Qatari negotiating team reportedly visits Iran

#### International Desk

Diplomatic efforts to narrow the gap between Tehran and Washington in a bid to end the US-Israeli war on Iran gained momentum on Friday as Pakistani and Qatari officials reportedly arrived in Iran to help the conclusion of a peace deal between the two countries. According to AFP, Pakistan Field Marshal Asim Munir departed Friday for an official visit to Tehran where he will have meetings with Iranian officials. Meanwhile, a Qatari negotiating team arrived in Tehran on Friday in coordination with the US to try to help secure a deal to end the war with Iran and resolve outstanding issues, a source with knowledge of the matter told Reuters on Friday. Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi also held another round of talks with Pakistan's Interior Minister Syed Mohsin Naqvi who has been in Tehran since several days ago to discuss proposals exchanged between Tehran and Washington two days after Iran received the latest US message.

#### 'Good signs' in talks

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio told reporters on Thursday there had been "some good signs" in the talks, but there could be no solution if Tehran enforced a tolling system in the Strait of Hormuz, which it effectively closed to most shipping after the war began on February 28.

"There's some good signs," Rubio said.

"I don't want to be overly optimistic ... So, let's see what happens over the next few days."

The war has wreaked havoc on the global economy, with the surge in oil prices stoking fears of rampant inflation. About a fifth of the world's oil and liquefied natural gas shipments travelled through the Strait of Hormuz before the war. Also on Thursday, US President Donald Trump claimed the US would eventually recover Iran's stockpile of highly enriched uranium. "We will get it. We don't need it, we don't want it. We'll probably destroy it after we get it, but we're not going to let them have it," Trump told reporters at the White House on Thursday.

The US president also railed against Tehran's intentions to charge fees on ships using the strait.

"We want it open, we want it free. We don't want tolls," he said. "It's an international waterway."

Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesperson Esmail Baqaei said the US could not force Iran into surrender through its threats, arguing that Washington's approach had made negotiations increasingly difficult.

#### 'Unconditional surrender of Iran'

Speaking in an interview with VICE published on YouTube on Thursday night, Baqaei said America's "deep-rooted arrogance" and insistence on the "unconditional surrender

of Iran" had complicated talks.

"The Americans suffer from a kind of inherent arrogance. If you are afflicted with such deep-rooted arrogance, you will not regard your negotiating counterpart as an equal partner deserving dialogue," he said.

"You cannot expect Iran to make concessions under pressure while its legitimate rights are ignored. You cannot force Iran into surrender," Baqaei added.

A shaky ceasefire is in place in the war that began with US-Israeli strikes on Iran on February 28, but there has been no major breakthrough, with a US blockade of Iranian ports and Tehran's effective closure of the Strait of Hormuz complicating negotiations.

Since the ceasefire 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.

Iran's 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.

Gharibabadi 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.

## 'Unjustified': Tehran raps US sanctions on envoy, Lebanese officials

#### International Desk

Iran's Foreign Ministry in a statement on Friday strongly condemned the United States for imposing sanctions on Lebanese citizens and officials, as well as the Iranian envoy to Beirut, calling them an "illegal and unjustified" act aimed at inciting sedition in Lebanon.

The statement came a day after the US Treasury Department designated nine individuals in Lebanon, including Iran's Ambassador Mohammad Reza Sheibani, claiming that they were enabling the resistance movement Hezbollah to "undermine Lebanon's sovereignty." The ministry denounced the sanctions against Sheibani as "another example of the US ruling administration's rebellion and disregard for the indisputable principles of international law and the UN Charter, especially the fundamental principle of respecting the national sovereignty of states."

It also strongly condemned the US sanctions on a number of Hezbollah representatives at the Lebanese parliament, officials from the Amal movement, and several Lebanese military and security officials.

"These despicable actions are aimed at weakening Lebanon's national sovereignty and inciting sedition in the Lebanese society. They are a sign of the continued complicity of the US ruling administration with the aggressor and occupying Zionist regime in continuing military aggression and committing heinous crimes against Lebanon," it added.

The ministry said that various Lebanese groups will defend their country's sovereignty



Mohammad Reza Sheibani  
● AFP

and territorial integrity by maintaining national unity and solidarity.

The Lebanese, it noted, will also prevent Israel from achieving its sinister goals by ending the Zionist regime's occupation and aggression. Meanwhile, the ministry expressed Iran's determination to strengthen its friendly and historical relations with Lebanon in various fields in line with the interests of both nations.

Despite a ceasefire announced on April 17 and extended until May 17, the Israeli military continues daily airstrikes in Lebanon and widespread demolition of homes in dozens of villages, echoing its years-long atrocities against Palestinians in the Gaza Strip.

Since March 2, Israeli attacks on Lebanon have killed more than 3,000 people and wounded about 9,400, according to the latest official figures.

Israel also occupies areas in southern Lebanon, including some it has held for decades and others since the 2023-2024 war, and has advanced about 10 kilometers inside the southern border during the current conflict.

## FM spox berates German reframe of US-Israeli aggression on Iran

#### International Desk

Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baqaei no Friday rebuked German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier for downplaying a recent aggression by the United States and Israel against Iran as merely an "unnecessary war," saying it was a "blatant" aggression against a sovereign state. Baqaei made the remarks in a post on X after the German president described the illegal joint military aggression by the US and Israel on Iran as a "truly avoidable, unnecessary war."

"The American-Israeli attack on Iran cannot be downplayed or reframed as merely an 'unnecessary war'. It was a flagrant violation of Article 2(4) of the UN Charter — a blatant act of aggression against a sovereign State," Baqaei said.

He added that the US-Israeli imposed war on Iran "could and should have been



Esmail Baqaei  
● IRNA

avoided."

"The UN Charter does not recognize any notion of a 'necessary war' that would grant States the right to use force against another sovereign nation based on the arbitrary & whimsical decisions of aggressors," he emphasized. He urged any nation that values the rule of law and the UN Charter to "unequivocally" condemn the US-Israeli act of aggression and to call for accountability.

The Iranian spokesperson also confirmed the German president's remarks regard-

ing the current escalation and instability in the West Asian region following the unilateral destruction by the Trump administration of the 2015 nuclear agreement, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). "It is true that the current crisis confronting our region and the world stems directly from the United States' unlawful and capricious withdrawal from the JCPOA in May 2018," Baqaei wrote. Steinmeier directly addressed the JCPOA, stating it would have been better if that agreement had been preserved, and emphasized, "If the 2015 agreement with Iran had been preserved, it would have been possible to prevent the consequences we are currently witnessing."

Steinmeier, who was personally involved in negotiating the JCPOA as foreign minister, bluntly called the war "a politically disastrous mistake" and a "politically fatal error."



Mohammad Ali Rajabi  
Cartoonist

#### CARTOON



# IRGC Navy ensures safe passage of 35 more vessels through Hormuz

The Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) has announced that it coordinated the transit of another 35 ships through the Strait of Hormuz in the past 24 hours.

"Over the past 24 hours, 35 ships, including oil tankers, container ships, and other commercial vessels, passed through the Strait of Hormuz, after obtaining permission, [and] with the coordination and security protection of the IRGC Navy," the IRGC's Navy said in a statement on Friday, Press TV reported. The passage came on top of 31 vessels — including oil tankers, container ships, and other commercial ships — that passed through the strait in the previous 24 hours, the IRGC Navy announced on Thursday.

The Iranian authority controlling the Strait of Hormuz in the Persian Gulf has defined the supervisory management zone of the waterway, announcing on Wednesday that movement through the strategic corridor requires coordination and a permit.

The zone is "the line connecting Mount Mubarak in Iran and southern Fujairah in the United Arab Emirates, on the eastern side of the strait, extending to the line connecting the end of

Qeshm Island in Iran and Umm Al Quwain in the United Arab Emirates, on the western side of the strait."

Iran shut down the Strait of Hormuz to its enemies and their allies following the US-Israeli aggression against the country on February 28.

According to a new Reuters report, the IRGC plays a central role in a new multi-layered transit system that gives preference to ships linked to allies such as China and Russia, while other vessels may require government-to-government arrangements or payments to pass.

The IRGC reviews an affiliation document supplied by a ship owner or operator and during the process they may want to physically inspect the ship, the news agency said.

"The affiliation check is to identify if the vessel has any connection to the US or Israel," a European shipping source told Reuters.

The IRGC requires ship owners to disclose details including the value of the ship's cargo, the flag, its origin and destination, the registered owner and manager, and nationalities of the crew, according to documents sent to shipping industry sources



A ship anchored in the Strait of Hormuz near Larak Island, Iran, May 16.  
● MAJID SAEEDI/GETTY IMAGES

es by Iran's Persian Gulf Strait Authority.

The vetting is carried out by Iranian state institutions including the Ports and Maritime Organization, the Ministry of Industry, Mine and Trade, the national shipping organization, and the security overseer of the Supreme National Security Council, according to the report. Ship owners' willingness to deal directly with Iran shows the degree to which the strait is under the Islamic Republic's control, Danny Citrinowicz, a former Israeli intelligence officer who specializes in Iran research and analysis, told Reuters.

"The straits will be blocked or opened up only by the approval of the Iranian government," said Citrinowicz. "Some will get through because of political alliances, others will have to pay, others will be turned back. This is the new norm."

Bilateral arrangements for passage include an additional step; countries contact Iran's foreign minister to request permission. The minister forwards these to



the Supreme National Security Council.

A decision is then made and communicated to the relevant bodies, including the IRGC which then provides the coordinates and instructions needed for safe passage.

Other countries have worked out different arrangements.

Among them is India, which imports about 90% of its oil needs and about 50% of its gas, much of which passes through Hormuz.

New Delhi uses its embassy in Tehran to liaise with Iranian authorities, including the IRGC and the Iranian Navy, which vets ships India wants to sail

out of the Persian Gulf, according to an Indian shipping ministry official cited by Reuters.

"The Indian navy also told us that if the Iranians ask you to stop, then you should stop. If they ask you to move, you should move," the report said, "And we've been following those instructions."

## First phase of Iran's largest solar plant goes online



Energy Minister Ali Abbas Aliabadi addresses the inauguration ceremony of the 130-megawatt phase of the Kaveh Methanol solar facility in Markazi Province, on May 22, 2026.  
● moe.gov.ir

consumption and expanding renewable capacity.

The Kaveh Methanol solar plant, executed by the private sector, was built in a high-potential area of Markazi Province in center of Iran and utilizes modern solar power technology to enable clean electricity generation on most days of the year.

Officials said that with completion of future phases, the facility could become Iran's largest solar power plant and play a significant role in diversifying the country's clean energy portfolio. The project has also created direct and indirect employment opportunities for local and specialized workers in the region, they added.

Markazi Province, with its favorable climate and high number of sunny days annually, is among Iran's most suitable regions for solar power development, and implementation of such projects could represent an important step toward sustainable energy development in the country.

According to SATBA officials overseeing private-sector execution of solar projects, joint efforts by the private sector and government will raise Iran's solar power capacity from 4,500 megawatts to more than 11,000 megawatts by autumn this year, accelerating clean energy production, ISNA reported.

The expansion comes as President Masoud Pezeshkian's government aims to install 30,000 MW of renewable energy capacity over the next three years amid an expected power shortfall next year.

and crack down on unauthorized cryptocurrency mining to manage grid stability. Around 7 million smart meters have been installed nationwide so far, with a target of exceeding 10 million by the end of the Iranian year (March 21, 2027), he said.

"These devices enable active management of electricity consumption by high-demand users and allow us to prevent excessive power use by these consumers to maintain grid stability," the ministry's website, moe.gov.ir, quoted Aliabadi as saying. Last week, Aliabadi said that the country currently had no deficit in electricity generation capacity but needed to reach a level this year that would allow it to manage peak demand, adding that the entire power system should be aligned with that objective.

"The most important policy of the new period at the Energy Ministry is to control consumption growth and move toward reducing energy use," he said on Monday.

According to the ministry, electricity demand was expected to rise "by more than 5% this year," after Iran's peak electricity consumption hovered around 79,000 megawatts last summer, as authorities focus on curbing rising

### Economy Desk

Energy Minister Ali Abbas Aliabadi announced on Friday the inauguration of the first phase of the country's largest solar power plant in Markazi Province, as the total national electricity generation capacity surpassed 100,000 megawatts.

The 130-megawatt phase of the Kaveh Methanol solar facility is now ready for connection to the national grid following completion of panel installation, power transmission infrastructure and technical testing, according to project officials cited by the Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Organization (SATBA), ILNA reported. The project aims to expand renewable energy sources, reduce dependence on fossil fuels and strengthen the stability of Iran's power grid.

Speaking at the opening ceremony, Aliabadi said Iran operates a diverse mix of power generation facilities, with hydropower plants forming a significant portion of capacity. Conditions at hydropower facilities have improved this year compared to last year, he added, without providing further details. Aliabadi also outlined plans to expand smart meter deployment

## US blockade fails to halt Iranian 1.4m bpd crude exports in April: IEA

Tehran ranked 2nd in OPEC oil output despite disruptions

### Economy Desk

The US naval blockade in the Strait of Hormuz has failed to halt Iranian oil flows, with the Islamic Republic continuing to export around 1.4 million barrels of crude per day in April despite mounting pressure on shipping routes, according to data cited in the International Energy Agency (IEA)'s monthly oil market report.

The IEA said in its latest report that, despite a partial decline in exports, Iranian oil production continued in April, with crude accumulation ongoing in both onshore and offshore storage facilities, eghtesademoaser.ir reported.

Iran's crude exports in April totaled 1.4 million barrels per day, down 410,000 barrels per day from the previous month, the report said. In terms of production, Iran became the second-largest producer in OPEC during the month. Despite US claims of a naval blockade, Iran produced 3.51 million barrels of oil per day in April, a decline of just 120,000 barrels per day from March. US officials had previously asserted that the maritime restrictions would paralyze Iran's oil industry within days and force the country to shut down its oil wells.

US President Donald Trump imposed the sea-based embargo on Iran's ports in mid-April, aiming to pressure Tehran into a peace agreement after a 40-day conflict that began in late February. The US pressure campaign is part of "Operation Economic Fury," targeting Iran's oil ex-



ports, financial networks and shipping routes to strain its economy.

Trump said at the time that Iran would only be able to sustain oil production and storage for another three days. US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent also warned that Iran could be forced to shut down oil wells within a week as storage nears capacity under intensified sanctions and maritime restrictions.

However, the latest shipping data complicates that narrative. While the naval blockade of Iranian ports since mid-April has reduced oil exports and led to a rapid buildup of crude both onshore and offshore, Iran is still moving oil even under the blockade, undercutting Washington's effort to choke off its energy lifeline and easing fears of an immediate global supply shock.

The IEA also said OPEC oil production in April, described in the report as the second month of the US-Israeli war against Iran, fell by 620,000 barrels per day to 20.18 million barrels per day. In March, the first month

of the conflict, OPEC production had already declined by 8.95 million barrels per day due to disruptions in the Strait of Hormuz and regional hostilities.

Overall, during the two-month period of the US-Iran conflict, total OPEC production fell by 9.57 million barrels per day. The 32% drop in OPEC output indicated that producers outside the Persian Gulf region were unable to offset the decline from the area, the report said.

According to the report, Kuwait recorded the largest production decline among OPEC members in April, falling by 620,000 barrels per day to 570,000 barrels per day. Saudi oil production declined by 270,000 barrels per day, while Iraq's output fell by 220,000 barrels per day. In contrast, UAE production rose by 340,000 barrels per day.

Iran was ranked the second-largest OPEC producer in April, with Saudi Arabia in first place at 6.98 million barrels per day and the UAE in third place at 2.45 million barrels per day.

# The man Iran doesn't know yet

## Story of one of quietest extraordinary journeys in sport



By Annunthra Rangan  
Senior research officer at  
Chennai Centre for China  
Studies

### PERSPECTIVE EXCLUSIVE

Iran has produced world-class athletes for decades, yet many of their stories have remained largely unseen outside the country.

There is a version of an athlete's story that the world prefers to tell. The prodigy identified early. The system that wraps itself around talent like scaffolding — coaches, funding, facilities, a clear road from promise to profession. The kind of story that feels inevitable in hindsight.

Moein Shafaghi's story is not that one.

He is 29 years old, from Talesh in Gilan province, a city far removed from the polished machinery of professional sport. He came to kabaddi through a single sentence from his brother, with no background in the game, no formal pathway into it, and no certainty that it would lead anywhere at all. Today, he is one of the most respected international players in the Pro Kabaddi League — a competition watched by millions across India, the country where the sport was born.

The distance between those two realities is what this story is about.

### The sport he gave everything to first

Before kabaddi, there was wrestling. Ten years of it. Not as a hobby or an after-school activity, but as a complete commitment — the kind that shapes a person down to their bones.

In Iran, wrestling is more than a sport. It is tied deeply to identity, history, and family pride. To dedicate yourself to it the way Moein did is to build your entire life around discipline and sacrifice. Early mornings. Endless training. Physical punishment. Mental exhaustion. Competition woven into everyday existence. He gave it everything he had.

What he received in return, through no fault of his own, was a road that eventually ended. Not because he failed the sport, but because the system around him failed to carry him further. In a smaller city without the infrastructure — something that talent alone cannot replace — opportunities eventually disappear. A young athlete can train with absolute dedication and still find himself staring at a ceiling with nowhere left to go.

Leaving wrestling broke him. He has admitted that openly, without trying to romanticize it. Athletes are often taught to project constant forward momentum, but Moein speaks honestly about the grief of walking away from the sport that defined him for a decade. And despite everything, he still says: "Wrestling will always remain deeply connected to the identity and culture of Iranian people. It is a sport that lives in our blood."

### A word from his brother

Kabaddi entered his life quietly. No dramatic discovery. No scout. No cinematic turning point. Just a word from his brother — a suggestion that pointed him toward something new.

He followed it. He arrived in ka-

baddi in his 20s with a wrestler's body, a decade of discipline, and absolutely no certainty that any of it would lead anywhere. No established pathway. No financial security. No network inside the sport. Only the physical and mental foundations wrestling had built inside him.

That stubbornness would become the most valuable thing he owned.

### The years nobody saw

What followed was not a breakthrough. It was survival. Years of unstable income. Financial struggle was so constant it stopped feeling temporary and simply became part of daily life. Injuries that stole time he could not afford to lose. A sport unfamiliar to many around him. Opposition from family members, including his father, who could not understand why he was leaving wrestling for something so uncertain.

Facing opposition from people you love carries its own kind of weight. It does not break you all at once. It builds quietly, in the hours when doubt becomes louder than belief. Moein questioned himself. He has spoken honestly about that too. There were moments where exhaustion felt more realistic than hope. Moments where belief looked dangerously close to delusion. Whether the sacrifices meant anything. Whether the road ahead actually existed. Still, he continued.

Not because it became easier. Nothing about Moein Shafaghi's journey has been easy. Even the smallest forms of progress had to be fought for. No momentum arrived naturally. Every step demanded persistence. Professional sport is exhausting in ways that performance alone can never fully explain. The audience sees those 40 minutes on the mat. They do not see the years of uncertainty, isolation, recovery, or quiet suffering that make those 40 minutes possible. Moein walked every metre of that road carrying pain, doubt, and the kind of humiliation professional sport rarely admits exists.

The body keeps score of everything a career demands, and Moein Shafaghi's body has been carrying that record for years. Wrestling left its marks first. A decade in that sport deposits itself into joints, bones, and accumulated damage long before anyone notices. Kabaddi added its own cost. More injuries. More recovery. More physical punishment. Broken teeth — the kind of damage most people associate with combat sports rather than a mat game — and yet here it is.

Then there is the wrist. Broken, and still unrepaired. Not healed. Unrepaired.



The distinction matters because this is not a story about recovery. It is about continuing despite damage that still exists. Match after match. Season after season. In a league that demands everything from a body already asking for rest. And yet he steps onto the mat anyway. The crowd does not see the wrist. They do not see the accumulated damage beneath the performance. They simply see a player competing with professionalism, composure, and complete commitment to his team. That is part of what makes him remarkable.

### The PKL did not discover him — he arrived

By the time Tamil Thalaivas selected him for Season 11 of the Pro Kabaddi League, Moein Shafaghi was not raw talent waiting to be developed. He was already fully formed through years of invisible labour and survival. The PKL did not discover him. He arrived.

The league was not a gift. It was the destination at the end of a road that, by every practical measure, should have gone nowhere. In his first season, he immediately established himself as the number one international player, scoring 113 points across 14 matches. Defenders hesitated around him. Raiders became cautious in his zone. His wrestling background gave him a physical and tactical fluency that few players possess naturally.

At six foot two in the under-84 category, he made an immediate physical impression. But the deeper difference was mental. The pressure of a stadium crowd meant little to someone who had already survived far harder conditions outside it.

His fellow Iranian, Amirhossein Bastami, helped him adjust to life in India during that first season —

the unfamiliar routines, the cultural distance, the emotional weight of being far from home. The support mattered. But the performance was his. He showed the league what he was capable of. Then he showed why he should never have been overlooked in the first place.

### The private arithmetic of distance

By the second season, the novelty of India had faded and what remained was simply the reality of distance. Loneliness settled differently then — not as shock, but as something constant. A quiet additional weight carried alongside competition, expectation and performance.

That is the private arithmetic of an athlete living far from home. You carry the pressure of performance alongside the emotional cost of absence. Family. Familiarity. Language. The small comforts that remind a person who they are outside sport.

Moein carried all of it quietly. For the love of kabaddi, he says: "In recent years, kabaddi has started creating its own place in Iran because of its excitement, intensity, and emotional connection with fans. More people are becoming interested in the sport, and I believe kabaddi has the potential to grow into something truly special in Iran."

### Representing more than himself

Iranian players have built something meaningful inside Indian kabaddi. Their wrestling foundations, discipline, and professionalism have earned genuine respect across the league.

Moein understands the responsibility that comes with that.

"When you play in another country, you represent your people too," he says. "You must represent your

country well both as an athlete and as a person."

That belief is visible in the way he carries himself. In India, the name Moein Shafaghi now means something. Not because recognition was handed to him, but because it was earned through performance, resilience and professionalism in one of the sport's most competitive environments. And he understands what Indian recognition means for an Iranian kabaddi player.

"India is the birthplace of kabaddi and the heart of the sport. To come here and earn respect in such a competitive environment is not easy at all. When Indian fans, players, and coaches appreciate Iranian athletes, it becomes a matter of great pride for us. It means all the hard work, sacrifices, and struggles were worth it. Respect earned in India carries a very special value for every kabaddi player."

Beyond the PKL, he represented the 2023 Asian Games, where Iran won silver in kabaddi after losing the final to India. He is currently in national camp once again, competing for selection and continuing to choose responsibility over comfort. And he believes kabaddi in Iran still has enormous room to grow.

"If kabaddi wants to grow strongly in Iran, the first thing it needs is a powerful and exciting league structure. A sport becomes truly alive when people are emotionally connected to it as fans and spectators. Media coverage and visibility are also extremely important. The more kabaddi is shown, discussed and promoted, the more young people will become interested in it."

### What he carries back with him

Back in Talesh, Moein works as a physical education teacher at a school.

He is, in the truest sense, someone who goes back.

He tries to give his students something the road taught him. Not shortcuts. Not guarantees. Only honesty. He can show them direction, but walking the path is their responsibility.

No path was shown to him. He built his own, step by stubborn step, through years when nothing was guaranteed and everything had to be earned.

What he offers his students is not shallow motivation. It is testimony. Proof of what survival, consistency, and belief can produce over time, even when there is no visible evidence that things will work out.

### The name he built

There is an athlete from Talesh who left the sport he loved, rebuilt himself inside a game unfamiliar to much of his country, travelled to a foreign land, survived loneliness and financial instability, and emerged with a name respected in the biggest kabaddi arenas in the world.

He did not have the ideal system. He did not have the right city, financial backing or carefully designed pathway into professional sport. He had a wrestler's body. A brother's support. Ten years of discipline with nowhere left to go. And a quiet refusal to stop.

There is still more road ahead, and he continues to walk it with the same stubbornness that brought him this far.

Iran produced Moein Shafaghi. It is time Iran knew him.

Moein Shafaghi (blue) of Tamil Thalaivas stretches to perfection, tagging a defender from Gujarat Giants during a high-intensity clash in India's Pro Kabaddi League.  
IRAN DAILY



In India, the name Moein Shafaghi now means something. Not because recognition was handed to him, but because it was earned through performance, resilience and professionalism in one of the sport's most competitive environments. And he understands what Indian recognition means for an Iranian kabaddi player.

Iranian star Moein Shafaghi (R) celebrates a standout performance for Tamil Thalaivas after being named the "Dream11 Gamechanger of the Match" in India's Pro Kabaddi League in 2024.  
IRAN DAILY



# The Parsis of India

## An opportunity for Iran's cultural diplomacy, soft power



By **Golnaz Saeedi**  
International affairs  
researcher

### OPINION

The Parsi community of India are descendants of a historic migration following the fall of the Sassanian Empire. They are not only bearers of a segment of Iran's cultural, religious, and civilisational memory but have also emerged as one of the most successful diasporic communities of Iranian origin in the Indian subcontinent. Despite centuries of geographical separation from their ancestral homeland, this community has maintained profound ties to the spiritual, linguistic, and ritual heritage of Iran.

In the current regional and international context, the Islamic Republic of Iran can leverage the cultural, economic, and social capital of the Parsis to devise a novel strategy for enhancing its soft power, cultural diplomacy, and the representation of Islamic-Iranian civilisation in South Asia. This article analyses the opportunities available to Iran by focusing on the Parsi community's cultural elements, civilisational symbols, and economic stature, with the aim of deepening transnational bonds and fostering purposeful engagement with this distinguished community.

The findings suggest that a discerning and non-instrumentalist revival of these ties could elevate the regional standing of Islamic Iran while advancing cultural, scientific, and economic objectives within the framework of public diplomacy.

#### A civilizational bond with Islamic Iran

The Parsis of India are descendants of a historic migration triggered by religious and social pressures following the collapse of the Sassanian Empire and the spread of Islam in Iran. Around the 8th century CE, they sought refuge in western India. According to the traditional narrative known as the Qissa-i Sanjan, a group of Zoroastrians from southern Iran crossed the Persian Gulf and settled in Sanjan, Gujarat, after securing asylum from a local ruler. In exchange for sanctuary, they pledged respect for local customs, thereby securing their right to reside.

Despite centuries of geographical separation, this migrant community has demonstrated remarkable fidelity to Iran's religious, linguistic, and cultural traditions, preserving a fragment of Iranian-Islamic civilisational memory in India. Though adhering to Zoroastrianism, the Parsis' cultural and linguistic elements remain vessels of Islamic-Iranian civilisational concepts. Notions such as Asha (truth/righteousness), "Good Thoughts, Good Words, Good Deeds," and reverence for nature, alongside the preservation of Sassanian architectural motifs and rituals, reflect the enduring spirit of Iranian culture. While Gujarati and English dominate daily use, the community's familiarity with Persian and Avestan vocabulary, and their employment of Avestan alphabet (din dabire) for religious texts,

underscores their linguistic ties to Iran. Terms like "Atashkadeh" (fire temple), "Namaz" (prayer), "Fravashi" (divine spirit), and "Ahura" remain vibrant in their cultural lexicon.

Ancient festivals such as Nowruz, Mehregan, Sadeh, and the Gahambars are meticulously observed. Rooted in Iran's spiritual calendar and cultural ethos, these rites, alongside Zoroastrian architectural symbols (e.g., fire temples) and traditional religious attire, constitute a living civilisational memory within India.

Historically, ties between Iranian Zoroastrians and the Parsis were sustained through clerical exchanges, textual transmission, and cultural synods. In the modern era, collaborative projects between Iranian and Parsi scholars, ranging from Avestan language preservation to sacred text restoration and documenting Zoroastrian traditions, highlight this bond's potential to reinforce the identity of Islamic-Iranian civilisation globally.

#### Strategic and cultural dimensions

The Islamic Republic of Iran could strategically engage the Parsi community as a transnational capital to bolster its soft power and cultural diplomacy in South Asia. As custodians of part of Iran's cultural heritage, the Parsis could play an important role in Persian language education, religious tourism, academic collaborations and shared cultural discourse. The Parsi community, is not only a part of ancient Iran, but could also play an important role in the region, in the framework of Dialogue of Civilisations of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Leveraging this civilisational potential is a strategic imperative for Iran's cultural, religious, and diplomatic institutions to recalibrate its global image and expand the sphere of influence of Islamic-Iranian civilisation.

#### Economic influence of the Parsi community in India

Despite their small population, the Parsis have played an important role in modern India's industrial, economic, and institutional development. From the 19th century onward, particularly under British colonialism, their modern education, expansive relations with co-



A Parsi man touches the figures carved into a wall of the Parsi fire temple in Mumbai, India.  
FRANCIS MASCARENHAS/REUTERS

lonial structures, and Zoroastrian work ethic positioned them at the forefront of entrepreneurship and economic modernisation.

Prominent families like the Tatas, Godrejs, Wadias, and Petits founded corporations, banks, shipping lines, educational institutions, and charities that remain pivotal to India's macroeconomic landscape. These families were not merely investors but moral and structural innovators in India's emergent capitalism.

#### Strategic opportunities for the Islamic Republic

From a strategic perspective, the Parsi community of India, as a key node of Iran's civilisational diaspora, offers valuable opportunities to advance the Islamic Republic's national interests in cultural, economic, and public diplomacy spheres. Given their social, economic, and cultural influence in India's civic structure, targeted and apolitical engagement with this capital can be pursued, some of which will be discussed here:

##### 1. Joint investment in knowledge-based industries and emerging techs

The Parsis of India are particularly active in advanced sectors such as information technology, clean energy, pharmaceuticals, and biotechnology, constituting a significant share of the country's entrepreneurial elite. The Islamic Republic of Iran can facilitate their

human and financial capital inflows by establishing frameworks in special economic zones, exclusive industrial zones and science and technology parks. Such platforms could foster bilateral collaboration, especially in technology exports and knowledge-based production, aligning with Iran's developmental priorities.

##### 2. Expansion of religious and medical tourism

Given the emotional and religious ties many Parsis maintain with Zoroastrian sites in Iran (e.g., in provinces of Yazd, Kerman, Fars, and Tehran), developing religious tourism infrastructure could attract this demographic. Additionally, Iran's high-capacity healthcare and medical services present a viable avenue to draw Parsi medical tourists.

##### 3. Educational and cultural institution-building collaborations

The Parsis' historical legacy in founding schools, academic centres, and cultural foundations in India provides a foundation for strategic educational exchanges with Iran. Potential initiatives include, establishing Persian language chairs in Indian universities, promoting Iranian Studies programs and co-producing multilingual content on shared heritage. These efforts would form part of a broader soft-power and elite engagement agenda between the two communities.



Despite centuries of geographical separation, this migrant community has demonstrated remarkable fidelity to Iran's religious, linguistic, and cultural traditions, preserving a fragment of Iranian-Islamic civilisational memory in India. Though adhering to Zoroastrianism, the Parsis' cultural and linguistic elements remain vessels of Islamic-Iranian civilisational concepts.

#### 4. Leveraging Iranian-origin brands in the global economy

Internationally recognised brands like Tata, Godrej, and other Parsi-founded enterprises hold untapped potential for collaboration in, national branding initiatives, export promotion of Iranian cultural goods (e.g., carpets, saffron, tea, handicrafts) and enhancing the global image of Iranian-Islamic heritage. Strengthening cultural ties with these institutions through economic diplomacy could provide Iran's cultural bodies with unparalleled opportunities to project soft power.

Engagement with the Parsi community of India requires a nuanced understanding of their cultural and social particularities. As a predominantly secular, politically independent group with a distinct historical identity, they are deeply sensitive to any political or ideological instrumentalisation of their heritage. Thus, the Islamic Republic of Iran's cultural policy must be grounded in mutual respect, soft-power approaches, and an emphasis on shared civilisational legacy.

A key opportunity lies in the Parsis' role as custodians dimensions of Iran's historical culture within modern Indian society. The persistence of Nowruz celebrations, Persian and Avestan linguistic elements, Sassanian architectural motifs, Zoroastrian symbols, and other cultural markers in Parsi life creates fertile ground for soft-power investments.

When approached strategically, the Parsi community can function as a transnational civilisational bridge for the Islamic Republic of Iran, advancing cultural, economic, and even political interests, provided the engagement is delicately balanced, non-political, and reciprocal. Harnessing this historical potential demands cultural policy making aligned with Iranian-Islamic civilisation, and strategic vision among Iran's cultural, diplomatic, and economic institutions.

#### Challenges and prerequisites for constructive engagement

Despite these opportunities, effective collaboration requires awareness of the Parsi community's unique realities:

- **Secular orientation:** Parsis are largely Western-educated and secular, treating Zoroastrian identity more as a cultural symbol than a doctrinal commitment.
- **Political neutrality:** They prioritise cultural autonomy and avoid entanglement with India's political factions and are neutral on international issues.
- **Demographic decline:** Their dwindling population raises existential concerns about generational continuity. Thus, Iran's outreach must be non-colonial in tone, culturally anchored rather than ideological, and explicitly reciprocal to avoid perceptions of appropriation. Over-politicisation or overt ideological framing risks triggering distrust and undermining the very ties Iran seeks to strengthen.

The full article was first published by the International Peace Studies Centre.



A girl participates in the Parsi navjote ceremony (rites of admission into the Zoroastrian faith) in Mumbai, India, in 2016.  
HEMIS/ALAMY

## Asian Taekwondo Championships:

# Salimi leaves it late as Iranians dominate men's competition with three golds

### Sports Desk

Iranians stole the show on the first two days of the men's kyorugi contests at the Asian Taekwondo Championships in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, collecting three gold medals and a silver across four weight classes.

Abolfazl Zandi picked up where he left off in his gold-winning campaign at last October's World Championships, defeating former world cadet champion Yang Hui-Chan of South Korea in successive rounds to win the top prize in the men's 58kg category on Friday. This was the second Asian medal of Zandi's career, following his bronze in the previous edition. A second men's gold for the country came in the -74kg event, where world bronze medalist Amir-Sina Bakhtiari, who was given a shot at glory through an Asian Taekwondo Union invitation, defeated China's Zhao Shan in two rounds of the final.

Friday's triumphs came after Arian Salimi had grabbed the +87kg gold in spectacular fashion on the preceding day in the Mongolian capital.

Having suffered a last-16 exit at last year's World Championships, Olympic champion Salimi was back to his ruthless form at the M-Bank Arena, marching into the final without conceding a single round in three bouts – including a semifinal victory over his familiar foe and reigning world champion Kang Sang-hyun of South Korea.

The 22-year-old sensation got off to a

slow start in the final against Uzbekistan's Marat Mavlonov, losing 7-7 on criteria in the first round, before bouncing back to win 6-3 in the second.

Mavlonov still thought he had done enough to bag the top prize when he took a 10-9 lead with three seconds left in a thrilling decisive round, but Salimi had other ideas, delivering a trademark three-point head kick in the final second to secure back-to-back Asian golds.

"This year's event also serves as the qualification pathway for [September's] Asian Games, which is why all leading taekwondo nations on the continent have come here with full-strength squads," Salimi said of the high level of competition in Ulaanbaatar.

"The South Korean and Uzbek opponents were particularly tough. The South Korean is a two-time consecutive world champion, and my opponent in the final has numerous titles from Asian competitions. We had a very intense match," added Salimi.

"This was only my second international tournament after the Paris Olympics, while the team entered the event off the back of difficult conditions amid the wartime circumstances in the country, so I still have room for improvement to reach the level I showed at the Olympics.

"My hometown training facilities were heavily damaged in the early days of the war and I had no place to train. I still managed to take part in the selection trials regardless, and thank God, in the end I achieved a good result for my dear



Iran's Arian Salimi poses with his men's +87kg gold medal at the Asian Taekwondo Championships in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, on May 21, 2026.



people and brought smiles to their lips under these tough circumstances." Earlier on Thursday, Yasin Valizadeh opened Iran's medal account with a silver in the -54kg weight class.

Valizadeh enjoyed an impressive run to the final on his senior debut at the Asian Championships, claiming three victories – including a straight-rounds win against Mahdi Razmian in an all-Iranian quar-

terfinal – before defeating Uzbekistan's Jakhongir Khudayberdiev in the last four. However, the Iranian fell in successive rounds against Jaafar Aldaoud – a second setback against the Jordanian following last year's semifinal loss at the Fujairah Open – adding to his 2022 Asian junior bronze.

Elsewhere, Thursday's results were one to forget for the Iranian women's squad as the two contestants in action finished empty-handed in their respective events. Masoumeh Ranjbar began her -46kg campaign with a 2-0 win against her South Korean opponent, but fell to prominent Chinese athlete Wang Shiyi – a world bronze medalist last year – in two rounds.

Teenage prodigy Wang Chieh-ling – a two-time world junior champion – defeated Thailand's Patcharakon Poolkerd in the final to secure Taiwan's first women's title at the event in a decade.

In the +73kg event, Iran's Baran Ahmadi had her run ended after two bouts, following a 2-0 defeat against Olympic silver medalist Svetlana Osipova of Uzbekistan, who went on to win the gold thanks to a final victory over South Korea's Song Da-bin.

Featuring 338 contestants from 31 countries, the 27th edition of the Asian Championships will run until Sunday.

The dreadful campaign for the Iranian women's squad continued on Friday with Mahla Momenzadeh and Baran Nemati crashing out in the -49kg and -73kg competitions, respectively.

## CAVA Women's Volleyball Championship:

# Iran off to flyer with Bangladesh rout

### Sports Desk

Iran got off to an emphatic start to its CAVA Women's Volleyball Championship title defense on Friday, hammering Bangladesh in straight sets (25-6, 25-9, 25-10) in Kathmandu, Nepal.

Iranian opposite Sepinood Dastbarjan was named Player of the Match following a standout display that excelled in every department of the game.

Iran will resume action against Sri Lanka in Pool B on Sunday, before facing Kazakhstan in its final group game the following day.

The host team, Nepal, is joined by India, Maldives and Kyrgyzstan in Pool A.

Iran celebrated a historic feat in last year's CAVA event in Tashkent, capturing its maiden international women's volleyball gold since the first national team was established in 1963, thanks to a straight-set victory over host Uzbekistan in the final.

This year's event is the first in a congested international calendar for Iranian women, who took



VOLLEYBALL.IR

part in a 20-day training camp at the FIVB facilities in Bangkok before the CAVA tournament amid the wartime circumstances in their home country.

Iran is also set to feature at the AVC Women's Nations Cup – starting June 6 in Candon, Philippines – where South Korean head coach Lee Do-hee's side has been drawn against defending champion Vietnam, Kazakh-

stan, Indonesia, Hong Kong, and Lebanon in Pool B.

The major showpiece for the Iranian women will come at September's Aichi-Nagoya Asian Games in Japan, where the country will make its first women's volleyball appearance at the multi-sport event since the 1974 edition on home soil.

## 2026 African Open Championships:

# Iranian para powerlifters grab four medals in Oran

### Sports Desk

Iranian para powerlifters Alireza Izadi and Mahdiyeh Mohammadian grabbed four medals between them at the latest regional Open Championships event of the season in Oran, Algeria.

Competing in the men's -59kg weight class, Izadi posted three successful efforts, with his final lift of 183kg securing the bronze medal for the Iranian.

Egypt's Mohamed Elmenyawy claimed the gold medal with a best lift of 209kg – one kilogram clear of Iraqi silver medalist Mustafa Radhi.

However, an overall tally of 542kg saw Izadi win the total gold medal, with Nigeria's Ibrahim Dauda (522kg) and Egypt's Mohamed Abdalla Elhout (512kg) settling for silver and bronze, respectively. In the women's -55kg competition, meanwhile, Mohammadian also registered three successful lifts (95-102-105) to finish with bronze – behind Egypt's Nawal Ramadan (123kg) and Nigeria's Esther Oyema (122kg).

Mohammadian then secured the total silver with 302kg, finishing behind Ramadan, who tallied 359kg, with Morocco's Meryem Hamouich fin-



Iran para powerlifter Mahdiyeh Mohammadian won two medals at the 2026 African Open Championships in Oran, Algeria.



ishing third on 177kg.

Featuring more than 150 contestants from 20 countries, the event marks the third regional championships in this year's four-event series, following the European Open Championships in Tbilisi, Georgia, and the Asia-Oceania Open Championships in Bangkok, Thailand, held over the past two months. The Pan American Championships are scheduled to take place later this year.

With the regional championships forming a mandatory part of the LA28 Paralympic qualification pathway, athletes will be aiming to secure valuable ranking points and set new continental benchmarks ahead of other major events in 2026, including the forthcoming Commonwealth Games in Glasgow, Great Britain.

## Iran misses Saber World Cup over Egyptian visa denial

### Sports Desk

Iranian fencers were ruled out of the Saber World Cup event, which began Friday in Cairo, Egypt, after being denied entry visas by the African country. The Iranian sabreurs had been

training under intense conditions for more than 45 days at the Christian Bauer training camp in Italy but will now return to Iran in the coming days. They are expected to continue their preparations in Tehran as they shift focus to upcoming

competitions – including September's Asian Games in Japan. This was the second Egyptian visa saga for Iranian athletes in less than a month.

Earlier in May, the Iranian weightlifting squad had to make a late arrival in Ismailia for the

World Junior Championships after a visa delay threatened to derail their men's title defense. The Iranian eight-man team still beat the odds to win the team crown with an impressive haul of six golds, seven silvers, and one bronze.



VARZESH3

# Qaleh Bala hosts Iran's second national ecotourism festival

## Iranica Desk

The Second National Ecotourism Festival was held in the tourist village of Qaleh Bala, located in the Beyarjomand district of Shahrud, Semnan Province. The event featured a variety of cultural programs, including local music performances, ethnic folk music, and traditional ceremonies, highlighting the cultural diversity and heritage of different regions of the country.

A number of tourism officials, members of parliament, provincial authorities, and those involved in the activities related to tourism attended the national gathering, according to chtn.ir. Qaleh Bala village, situated near Touran Biosphere Reserve and,

in recent years emerged as one of Iran's leading ecotourism destinations. The village is now being presented as Iran's primary candidate for recognition under the UNWTO's Best Tourism Villages initiative.

During the ceremony, speakers emphasized the village's exceptional natural, cultural, and social capacities, describing Qaleh Bala as being on the verge of an international breakthrough in rural tourism. Officials announced that the process of securing global registration for the village has entered its final stages.

Authorities attending the event described ecotourism development as one of the most important tools for economic growth, preservation of cultural identity,

and creation of sustainable employment opportunities in rural areas. They also stressed the importance of supporting local communities and strengthening tourism infrastructure.

The festival additionally showcased the diverse tourism potential of Semnan Province in areas such as nature tourism, rural tourism, handicrafts, and cultural tourism. Those involved in the ecotourism sector from across the country exchanged experiences and discussed the challenges and opportunities facing the sector.

The Second National Ecotourism Festival was held from May 19 to 21, 2026, with the aim of fostering dialogue between policymakers and operators of eco-lodges,



● chtn.ir

sharing successful experiences, examining tourism capacities, and strengthening cooperation among stakeholders in the field. Organizers said hosting the

national event in Qaleh Bala village not only further introduced the tourism capacities of eastern Semnan Province, but also marked an important

step toward the village's potential global recognition and the strengthening of Iran's position in rural and ecotourism on the international stage.

## Lesser-known monuments of Shiraz step into spotlight

### Iranica Desk

Coinciding with Cultural Heritage Week, several lesser-known monuments and mausoleums in Shiraz have once again drawn public attention. From the Haft-Tanan Garden Museum, which houses historical stone inscriptions, to the tombs of Abesh-Khatun and Sibawayh, each narrating a distinct chapter of the city's historical and intellectual identity, these sites collectively reveal that Shiraz's history extends far beyond its most famous landmarks within the old urban fabric.

Cultural Heritage Week (May 18-24) serves as an opportunity to look beyond well-known monuments and re-examine memorials that remain quietly embedded within the historic texture of Shiraz — each preserving a fragment of the city's collective memory, according to ISNA.

### Haft-Tanan Garden Museum

The Haft-Tanan Garden Museum, also known as the "Stone Museum," is more than a historical site; it represents a vital part of Shiraz's cultural memory. With origins predating the Zand era, the complex houses a grand structure that reached its peak during the reign of Karim Khan Zand. The narrative of seven anonymous mystics buried within the garden is tied to a unique tradition — ascetics who, even in death, avoided fame, leaving their graves unmarked and unnamed. Registered as a national heritage site in 1931 under number 4, the complex has since evolved into a museum of stone artifacts, bringing together valuable inscriptions and gravestones. Its veranda, adorned with Zand-era paintings, stands as a notable example of the artistic expression of that period.

### Bagh-e Nazar

At the heart of Shiraz's his-



Haft-Tanan Garden Museum  
● pegashekhavar.ir

toric district, on Zand Street, lies a structure that contains the tomb of Karim Khan Zand, founder of the Zand dynasty. Known as "Bagh-e Nazar" or the "Pars Museum," the building is a fine example of Iranian-European hybrid architecture in the form of a Koushik (pavilion-style mansion). Once far more extensive than its current boundaries, Bagh-e Nazar today remains adjacent to Arg-e Karim Khan and the Vakil complex, forming one of Shiraz's key historical nodes — a place that continues to bridge the city's urban fabric with its Zand-era heritage.



Bagh-e Nazar  
● saadatrent.com

The tomb of Abesh-Khatun, also known as "Rabat-e Abesh," is one of the most significant historical reminders of women's role in the governance of Fars. This three-story structure, registered as a national heritage site in January 1931 under number 76, serves as the resting place of Abesh-Khatun, the last ruler of the Atabegs of Fars in the 7th century AH. In addition to managing state affairs, Abesh-Khatun played a role in constructing schools, caravanserais, and pub-

lic-benefit buildings. Although parts of the intricate tilework have deteriorated over time, the mausoleum continues to reflect an essential layer of Shiraz's historical identity.

### Tomb of Sibawayh

In Shiraz's historic district and the Sang-e Siah neighborhood lies the tomb of Abu Bishr Amr ibn Uthman, known as Sibawayh — a scholar regarded as one of the greatest grammarians of the Islamic world, whose works hold a distinguished place in Arabic linguistics.

The current structure of Sibawayh's tomb was built in 1974 by the National Heritage Society. Its archway is decorated with mosaic tilework crafted by Khorasani artisans, while the surrounding space offers a tranquil setting for reflecting on the intellectual legacy of one of the most prominent figures in Iranian cultural history.

These memorials — from the stone inscriptions of Haft-Tanan Museum to the tombs of scientific and historical figures — form part of the interconnected cultural identity of Shiraz. Ultimately, Shiraz's history is not confined to a handful of celebrated monuments; rather, it is embedded in its alleys, mausoleums, and architectural remnants, each narrating a distinct layer of the city's cultural memory.

## Dashkasan Temple reveals Iran's artistic legacy

### Iranica Desk

In the heart of Zanjan Province, near the historic city of Soltaniyeh, stands the remarkable Dashkasan Temple, one of Iran's most striking examples of rock-cut architecture. Often referred to as the "Dragon Temple," Dashkasan is considered among the province's most important historical landmarks. Located about 15 kilometers southeast of Soltaniyeh, the site takes its name from a Turkish term meaning "stone cutter," reflecting its carved stone structure. Registered on Iran's National Heritage List, Dashkasan is regarded as a rare fusion of Iranian artistic traditions and East Asian decorative elements dating back to the Ilkhanid era.

Carved directly into the mountainside, the temple is surrounded by a dramatic natural landscape that enhances both its historical significance and tourism appeal. During the reign of Oljeitu (Sultan Mohammad Khodabandeh), the region gained major political and religious importance as a nearby Soltaniyeh flourished as the capital of the Ilkhanids. Dashkasan's distinctive features, particularly its monumental dragon reliefs, provide valuable insight into the cultural exchanges between Iran and East Asia during the Mongol period. Set among limestone mountains, the site reflects the essence of rock-cut architecture while offering a striking natural setting. Its proximity to Soltaniyeh, the grand Ilkhanid capital, underscores the historical and strategic importance of the complex during that era. The surrounding rocky terrain and moun-

tain scenery further enhance its appeal, creating a unique cultural and natural experience for visitors.

Researchers believe the complex may originally have been intended as a Buddhist-inspired temple, part of a larger ceremonial complex, or even an unfinished royal palace or sanctuary. Some historians attribute the dragon motifs to the presence of Chinese artists at the Ilkhanid court, whose

structure suggests that construction may have been halted abruptly. The main layout consists of a large central ivan flanked by two smaller side ivans. The defining masterpieces of the complex are the two massive dragon reliefs carved symmetrically into the walls of the main ivan. Featuring elongated serpentine bodies, open jaws with visible teeth, horns, and powerful claws, the dragons display a style strongly



● razebaghaa.ir

artistic influence shaped parts of the site's decorative program.

Archaeological studies date Dashkasan to the Ilkhanid period, particularly the reign of Oljeitu in the 14th century — a time marked by the flourishing of Persian art and architecture, exemplified by monumental structures such as the Soltaniyeh, Dome. Although the exact purpose of Dashkasan remains uncertain, scholars generally agree that the site reflects the broader cultural and artistic transformations that took place in Iran following the Mongol conquest. The most striking aspect of Dashkasan is its rock-cut design. Rather than being constructed with conventional building materials, the complex was carved directly into the mountainside. The unfinished nature of the

influenced by Chinese art. They are considered among the rarest examples of dragon imagery in both ancient and Islamic Iranian architecture.

Dashkasan stands as a vivid symbol of the cultural interactions between Iran and East Asia during the Ilkhanid period. The Mongol rulers maintained extensive political and cultural ties with China, resulting in the introduction of new artistic motifs and decorative styles into Iran. Dashkasan is a remarkable example of how foreign artistic influences, particularly Chinese visual traditions, were absorbed and adapted within Iranian architecture. The temple was carved primarily from the mountain's limestone using traditional stone-cutting techniques and metal carving tools. However, large portions of the com-

plex remain incomplete, reinforcing theories that construction was halted midway. Today, despite its registration as a national heritage site, Dashkasan faces natural erosion caused by wind, rain, and temperature fluctuations, making ongoing conservation and restoration efforts essential.

As one of Zanjan Province's major tourism attractions, Dashkasan is frequently visited alongside the UNESCO-listed Soltaniyeh Dome. Its dramatic rock-cut architecture and dragon carvings offer visitors a memorable experience that combines history, art, and nature.

Beyond its architectural significance, Dashkasan is valued as a rare example of Islamic-era rock-cut architecture and as a symbol of cultural fusion between Iran and East Asia. Historians regard the site as a living document of a transformative period in Iranian history, when indigenous traditions merged with imported artistic influences to create new artistic forms.

The mountainous landscape surrounding the temple also offers opportunities for hiking and nature tourism, broadening its appeal beyond history enthusiasts to nature lovers and adventure travelers. Tourism officials and cultural experts believe that promoting Dashkasan through cultural tours, digital media, and heritage programs could significantly contribute to the economic and cultural development of the Soltaniyeh region and Zanjan Province.

Experts emphasize that fully realizing Dashkasan's tourism potential will require improved visitor infrastructure, including better access roads, accommodation facilities, and informational services, while ensuring the long-term preservation of this unique heritage site for future generations.

# Tehran Symphony Orchestra opens 2026 season with cross-border classical showcase



## Arts & Culture Desk

The Tehran Symphony Orchestra opened its first official concert of 2026 titled 'From Beyond Borders' at Vahdat Hall in Tehran on May 21, under guest conductor Omid Mehrabi, performing a wide-ranging program of Ira-

nian and international classical works. The sold-out performance opened with Beethoven's 'Coriolan Overture,' setting a dramatic tone that moved between tension and resolve. It was followed by Mascagni's 'Intermezzo' from 'Cavalleria Rusticana,' before the orchestra shifted into the lyrical sweep of Smetana's 'The Moldau,' evoking flowing landscapes and national romanticism, according to IRNA. Tchaikovsky's 'Slav March' brought a martial intensity rooted in 19th-century Eu-

ropean orchestral tradition, while Borodin's 'Polovtsian Dances' added rhythmic color and choral-inspired momentum from the Russian repertoire. The ensemble also performed Fikret Amirov's 'Azerbaijan Caprice,' reflecting regional modernist orchestral writing. In a notable domestic highlight, the program concluded with Heshmat Sanjari's 'Dances of the Plectrum' from 'Iranian Paintings,' showing the orchestra's commitment to Iranian symphonic heritage alongside global canon works.

Audience response was strongly positive throughout, with repeated standing ovations between pieces. At one point, conductor Omid Mehrabi praised the ensemble's performance from the stage, urging the audience to match the musicians' intensity with equally strong applause. Founded in 1944, the Tehran Symphony Orchestra remains Iran's oldest symphonic ensemble and operates under the Roudaki Foundation, continuing its long-standing role in the country's classical music landscape.

Musicians perform during the Tehran Symphony Orchestra's first official concert of 2026 themed 'From Beyond Borders' under the direction of conductor Omid Mehrabi at Vahdat Hall in Tehran, Iran, on May 21, 2026. ● AA

# Iran urges overhaul of global development rankings

## Arts & Culture Desk

Senior Iranian policymakers and academics called for a sweeping revision of international development rankings during the 15th International Conference on Progress (ICP-2026) in Tehran on May 19-20, arguing that prevailing global indicators fail to reflect the political resilience, social cohesion and strategic independence of emerging nations. The two-day conference, held both in person and virtually under the theme "Convergence and Progress", brought together Iranian and foreign scholars, researchers and university professors to examine the social, political, cultural and economic dimensions of development in the Islamic world. Sadeq Vaez-Zadeh, head of the Supreme Council and Center

for the Islamic-Iranian Progress Model, said existing international classifications that divide states into categories such as "developed", "developing" or "advanced" were no longer sufficient to portray the realities of national progress. He said such rankings, despite criticism over methodological bias, continue to shape foreign trade, international investment, tourism and the global credibility of nations, making engagement with them strategically unavoidable. Referring to recent regional tensions, Vaez-Zadeh said several indicators demonstrating Iran's national convergence, defensive capability, political stability and relative economic resilience had become more visible under pressure.

He added that many internationally recognized measurements overlook these dimensions despite their growing significance in assessing state capacity and endurance. The Expediency Council member urged the Iranian government to establish a specialized inter-agency committee tasked with reviewing the country's standing in global indices and preparing scientific critiques and reform proposals for submission to international organizations through diplomatic channels. He further proposed that, if international institutions fail to adopt such revisions, emerging multi-lateral blocs including BRICS, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the Non-Aligned Movement and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation could jointly formu-

late alternative scientific frameworks for assessing national progress. Vaez-Zadeh also called on the United Nations Secretary-General to create a balanced international committee, preferably under the supervision of the UN General Assembly, to reassess indicators produced by bodies such as UNESCO, the UN Development Program and the Food and Agriculture Organization in light of new scientific and technological realities. Citing an earlier Iranian initiative in the early 2000s, he said Tehran had previously compiled national indicators in science, culture, education and technology and submitted them to the United Nations, which later incorporated parts of the data into its statistical yearbooks.



Head of the Supreme Council and Center for the Islamic-Iranian Progress Model Sadeq Vaez-Zadeh (L) and conference secretary Hadi Akbarzadeh attend the 15th International Conference on Progress (ICP-2026) in Tehran on May 20-21, 2026. ● IRAN DAILY

Conference secretary Hadi Akbarzadeh said the event focused on the interrelationship between convergence and progress across four principal spheres: Society, politics, culture and economics. He added that justice, spirituality and rationality had been identi-

fied as the three foundational pillars of the Islamic-Iranian model of progress and national unity. A total of 146 papers were submitted to the conference, of which 82 were accepted following peer review, including 61 oral presentations and 21 poster sessions.

# Tehran Virtual Book fair draws strong reader demand in digital push

## Arts & Culture Desk

Orders at the seventh Tehran Virtual Book Fair rose sharply mid-way through the nationwide cultural event, with more than 130,000 purchases registered and nearly 325,000 books sold by Thursday afternoon, deputy director of the Tehran International Book Fair Ebrahim Heydari said. Heydari, who also heads Iran Book and Literature House, said the online platform had recorded 130,245 orders since the fair opened on May 16, showing sustained public demand for books and growing engagement with Iran's expanding digital publishing market, IRNA reported. According to figures released on May 21, publishers had offered 473,942 printed and digital titles through the fair's online portal, while 86,642 distinct book titles had been sold by 2



p.m. local time on Thursday. Total sales reached 324,931 copies, including 290,570 printed books and 34,361 digital editions, showing the resilience of Iran's publishing sector despite mounting global shifts towards electronic consumption. Heydari said the figures highlighted continued enthusiasm among readers and broad participation by publishers in one of the country's largest cultural initiatives. Held under the slogan

A fleet of Iran Post delivery trucks lines up to distribute the surge of orders from the seventh Tehran Virtual Book Fair, which has recorded over 130,000 purchases and nearly 325,000 books sold since opening on May 16, 2026. ● IRNA

"Let's Read for Iran", the virtual fair runs until May 23 through the official platform of the Tehran International Book Fair, extending nationwide access to publishers, readers and literary institutions beyond the capital's conventional exhibition halls.

# 'War crime' of US-Israeli attack on Pasteur Institute demands retribution: FM spokesperson

## Social Desk

Tehran has condemned the deliberate targeting of the Pasteur Institute of Iran during the recent US-Israeli aggression, calling for those responsible for the attack on the country's iconic medical research center to be held accountable. In a post on X on Friday, Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baqaei pointed to a recent report published in The Lancet medical journal warning that the destruction inflicted on the Pasteur Institute threatens not only Iran's healthcare system but also regional health security, Press TV reported. Baqaei described the attack on the century-old scientific and public health institution as "a flagrant war crime," saying it constituted an assault on people's right to health, science and life. "The American-Israeli



US-Israeli airstrikes targeted the Pasteur Institute of Iran in Tehran in early April 2026. ● IRNA

deliberate attack on the Pasteur Institute of Iran was a flagrant war crime. The perpetrators must be held accountable," he wrote. Quoting The Lancet report, Baqaei noted that the institute had served as "a pillar of the country's public health system for more than a century," warning that its destruction poses "a real, immediate, and dangerous threat to public health." A group of international researchers and health experts, whose paper appeared in The Lancet

this week, also urged the global health community to support the restoration of the institute following the extensive damage caused by the strikes. The researchers warned that several critical laboratories, including facilities dedicated to genomic surveillance, rabies, HIV/AIDS, viral hepatitis and vector-borne diseases, had been completely destroyed, potentially undermining timely responses to future outbreaks. The Pasteur Institute

of Iran was bombed on April 1 and 2, with its headquarters and 13 source laboratories reportedly levelled during the US-Israeli attacks on the Islamic Republic. The aggression began on February 28 and ended under a Pakistan-brokered ceasefire on April 8. Founded in 1920 through cooperation between the Pasteur Institute of Paris and the Iranian government, the institute has played a pivotal role in combating infectious diseases and advancing vaccine production in Iran and across the region for more than a century. The Lancet paper stressed that the consequences of the attacks extend beyond Iran, warning that regional public health security is now at risk due to the damage inflicted on one of West Asia's most important medical and research institutions.