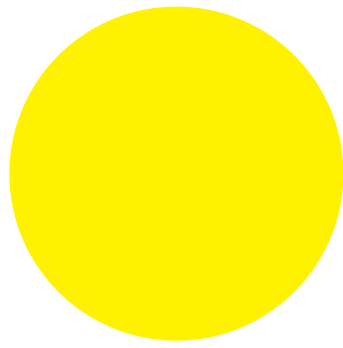


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Smoke rises from the site of an Israeli airstrike that targeted the southern Lebanese village of Kfar Tibnit on June 13, 2026.

AFP



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### Iran marks first anniversary of 12-day war, hails national unity against Israel

National Desk

President Masoud Pezeshkian praised the resilience of Iran's "patient" nation on the first anniversary of last year's 12-day war with Israel, saying the country's steadfastness had dashed the enemy's "pipe dreams."

In a message marking the anniversary of the conflict, Pezeshkian said Israel launched its attack based on "entirely mistaken calculations and an obvious delusion", believing that by assassinating senior military commanders, targeting leading nuclear scientists and carrying out brutal attacks on infrastructure and residential areas, it could bend the will of the Iranian people.

"But what unfolded was the epic of a nation's resistance, which, through faith, the wise guidance of the martyred Leader and the readiness of self-sacrificing armed forces, frustrated the enemy's pipe dreams," he said.

The president said Iranians stood as "one clenched fist and one beating heart" against Israel throughout the war and that their "comprehensive defense and sacred unity" thwarted the enemy's plots and ultimately forced it to accept a ceasefire.

Pezeshkian also repeated a statement by Supreme Leader Ayatollah Seyyed Mojtaba Khamenei that "preserving national cohesion, strengthening defense capabilities and maintaining public vigilance" were the most vital requirements for overcoming future challenges.

Parliament Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf said in a separate message that, following the example of those killed during the 12-day war, Iranians would stand firm to the last drop of blood for the country's ultimate victory.

The 12-day war began with an Israeli attack on Iran on June 13 last year, but was met with a firm response from the Islamic Republic that led the enemy to seek a ceasefire.

### 2026 geopolitical earthquake; Iranian crisis as a catalyst for multipolarity

By Josef Kraus  
Professor at Masaryk University  
& Mohammad Hossein Vahedi  
Political philosophy scholar

OPINION  
EXCLUSIVE

The security crisis that engulfed the Middle East in the early months of 2026 is far more than a local flashpoint; it signals a fundamental shift in the international order. From an analytical perspective, it is imperative to look beneath the surface of conventional narratives regarding nuclear proliferation or regional containment. What we have witnessed was not merely an isolated act of aggression, but a calculated "geopolitical realignment," designed primarily to counter the growing global dominance of the People's Republic of China.

A core hypothesis emerging from the Iranian academic community, strongly aligned with the school of political realism, characterizes this conflict as a "proxy strike against Beijing." In early 2026, facing domestic polarization and the rela-

tive decline of its global hegemony, the United States executed a high-risk maneuver. The objective went beyond regime change in Tehran; it was an attempt to seize the "energy jugular" of the Chinese economy. The Persian Gulf remains a vital artery for Beijing. Had Washington achieved a swift victory and installed a compliant government in Tehran, it would have placed its hand directly on the valve of China's energy security. However, this attempt to capture global supply chains was built on a complete miscalculation of Iran's institutional stability and national resilience. The defining moment that rewrote the rules of the game was the closure of the Strait of Hormuz. Iran's ability to effectively—and surprisingly easily—block this maritime chokepoint exposed the deep fragility of the modern "just-in-time" delivery economy. The geopolitical consequences of this blockade, which disrupted not only oil markets but also vital flows of helium, ammonia, and chemical fertilizers, were more catastrophic than any sanctions regime in recent decades. We have entered an era of "economic realignment"

in which Tehran has transformed from a passive target of Western restrictions into an active "sanctioning power." It has been proven that this physical blockade is a far more devastating tool of statecraft than the financial exclusions of the SWIFT system. For Europe, this conflict served as a painful awakening. The transatlantic bond was pushed to the brink of collapse, as it became clear that the objectives of the US and Israel in the region were in direct conflict with European economic survival. The European Union, long immersed in the inertia of American hegemony, was effectively forced toward strategic autonomy by the intensity of Iran's military response. There emerged an understanding that "borrowed security" from Washington is unreliable and carries the potential to be sacrificed for the narrow geopolitical goals of the White House. Europe—a continent lacking significant energy resources, particularly in its western regions—has historically been dependent on US energy and support. Yet, unexpectedly, the continent finds itself in a state of "strategic solitude." Europe

is currently struggling to secure supplies on two fronts: Ukraine and Iran. While the nature of these political conflicts differs, the US has suddenly left Europe to fend for itself. Washington's unilateralist policies will ultimately drive the continent toward self-reliance and a pivot toward China. Europe's pivot to China could have profound consequences for US foreign policy. As previously noted, the US launched the assault on Iran primarily to strike at China's oil supply and hegemony. Ostensibly, the US claimed the operation was to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons, yet the reality possessed multiple dimensions. We cannot ignore Iran's geopolitical capacity. Iran shares deeply intertwined relations with China across various domains. Just as Iran's vast geopolitical and geoeconomic capacity turned it into the "bridge to victory" during the Second World War, it has now become the central arena for the competition between China and the US for future global hegemony—a reality underscored even as Donald Trump projects the American flag over the Iranian map on his social media platforms.

# Iran, US signal optimism as peace deal draws closer

## International Desk

Iran is cautiously pursuing a possible peace agreement with the United States as both sides expressed optimism about the chances of concluding the deal in the coming days.

While Pakistan's prime minister, whose country has mediated the agreement, said on Saturday that Tehran and Washington could finalize the deal within as little as 24 hours, Iran's Foreign Ministry's spokesman Esmail Baqaei underlined that the expected memorandum would not be signed on Sunday.

"We have to wait and see about the exact time of signing; although it will not be tomorrow," Baqaei said during a press conference in Hamedan on Saturday.

"We are responsible for pursuing this diplomatic process with skepticism; because the experience of a year and a half of negotiations with the American side, along with their breaches of commitment and atrocities during previous talks, necessitates that we take every step with caution and extreme prudence," the Iranian official said.

He added that the memorandum focuses on the ending of the war on all fronts and it has been decided that there will be no discussion on the Iranian nuclear issue at this



Iranian Parliament Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf (L) meets Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif in Islamabad, Pakistan, on April 11, 2026.  
● IRNA

inside Iran as the only viable option.

In the second phase, negotiations would also focus on removal of the US's sanctions, the official added. Araghchi noted that Lebanon has never been excluded from Iran's strategic considerations.

According to the official, a definitive conclusion of the war must feature the Israeli regime's withdrawal from the areas it has occupied in Lebanon.

## Removal of US blockade, reconstruction plan

The foreign minister said the first clause of the proposed agreement concerns the lifting of the illegal naval blockade imposed by the US against Iran.

He said the potential agreement would additionally include an economic reconstruction plan to address war-related damages.

Iran and the United States have engaged in weeks of indirect negotiations seeking to bring an end to the war sparked by US-Israeli strikes on Iran on February 28.

stage.

Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif in a post on X said, "We are closer to a peace deal than ever before." "With finalization likely expected in the next 24 hours, Pakistan is preparing for the electronic signing of the peace deal immediately after, followed by technical level talks next week."

Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi in a televised interview on Friday outlined the structure of the potential memorandum of understanding.

Diplomatic efforts are now in their final stages and are based on a 14-point mem-

orandum of understanding that has been discussed in the media, Araghchi said.

## Two-phase negotiation framework

According to Araghchi, the process is divided into two stages, namely realization of an initial memorandum of understanding between Iran and the US, and a second phase that is expected to feature negotiations leading to a potential final agreement. He added that Iran's frozen assets would be released upon signing of the agreement, adding that the signing process might take place in a digital format in a day

or two.

The second phase is expected to last around 60 days but might be extended if both sides were satisfied with progress, Araghchi noted.

## Nuclear issue, sanctions left for 2<sup>nd</sup> phase

The foreign minister underlined that sensitive topics, including the nuclear issue featuring uranium enrichment and highly-enriched uranium, have been postponed to the second stage. He also stated that Iran's position on the highly-enriched materials is that it should exclusively be diluted

## Ayatollah Khamenei grants clemency to 139 death row prisoners



Ayatollah Seyyed Mojtaba Khamenei  
● IRNA

## National Desk

The spokesperson for the Iranian Judiciary Ali Asghar Jahangir said on Saturday that Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Mojtaba Khamenei has agreed to commute the sentences of 139 prisoners on death row.

The pardon was granted at the request of the country's Judiciary Chief Gholam Hossein Mohseni-Ejei. Jahangir said that Ayatollah Khamenei granted the amnesty on the basis of Islamic compassion, stressing that the decision comes whilst many countries refuse to grant clemency during wars and crises.

He emphasized that Iranian prisoners convicted of undermining national security and involvement in foreign-backed January riots and acts of sabotage were excluded from the amnesty list.

Article 110 of the Constitution grants the Leader the right to pardon or reduce the sentences of convicts upon a recommendation from the head of the Judiciary.

The clemency, however, does not apply to certain types of convicts, including those who have been sentenced for their role in the armed struggle against the country, armed or organized drug trafficking, armed robbery, arms smuggling, abduction, bribery, and embezzlement.

Back in June 5, the Leader had also pardoned or commuted the sentences of more than 2,000 convicts.

The clemency applies to inmates convicted by general and revolutionary courts, military tribunals, and government penal institutions. Such pardons are routinely announced on major religious and national occasions.

## Martyred Leader's funeral slated for July 4; burial on July 9

### National Desk

Funeral for martyred Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei will begin in Tehran on July 4 and conclude with his burial in the northeastern holy city of Mashhad on July 9, according to the office responsible for preserving and publishing the works of Ayatollah Khamenei. According to a statement issued by the office, farewell ceremonies for the martyred Leader will be held at Tehran's Imam Khomeini Mosalla on July 4 and 5.

A funeral procession in Tehran is scheduled for July 6, while another procession will take place in the holy city of Qom on July 7.

The final funeral ceremony will be held in the holy city of Mashhad on July 9. The statement said the martyred Leader will be laid to rest at the holy shrine of Imam Reza (AS).

The organizers invited "all noble and dear people, the free people of the world, followers of the school of Islam, and those interested in Iran" to attend the ceremonies and bid farewell to the martyred Leader.

Ayatollah Khamenei was assassinated by the US and Israeli militaries at his residence in Tehran on February 28, when they launched a bloody war of aggression against Iran that also saw the assassination of several top military commanders.

Days later, Iran's Assembly of Experts, a body of 88 clerics, elected Ayatollah Seyyed Mojtaba Khamenei, 56 years old, as the third Leader of the Islamic Revolution.

Ayatollah Seyyed Mojtaba Khamenei is the son of Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei.



Martyred Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei

## Israel ratchets up assaults on southern Lebanon, orders evacuations

### International Desk

Israel carried out new air strikes in the south of Lebanon on Saturday after ordering people to leave about 20 locations including the city of Nabatieh as part of its military campaign against Hezbollah resistance movement.

Lebanon's state-run National News Agency (NNA) said Israeli airstrikes hit several areas covered by the warning, including the villages of Riham and Sujud, located not far from Nabatieh, and other areas not mentioned in the evacuation notice. It said an Israeli strike killed a local official in Riham, lo-



cated in the southern region of Jezzine.

The Israeli army warned residents in 24 locations, both in and around Nabatieh and nearer to the coast, to "evacuate your homes immediately and move to the north of the Zahrani River", around 45 kilometers from

the southern border with Israel.

Last month it declared all areas south of the river "combat zones", and has been heavily striking the area. Fighters from the Hezbollah resistance movement also on Saturday struck and destroyed technical devices

belonging to Israeli forces with two kamikaze drones on the outskirts of the Jal al-Dei military post in Nabatieh. Hezbollah fighters also destroyed an Israeli Merkava tank in the southeastern outskirts of the town of Yahmour al-Shaqif. The conflict between Israel and Hezbollah began in March after the Lebanese group launched military operations against the Israeli regime in response to the regime's aggression against Iran.

The war has claimed at least 3,700 lives since March 2, according to the latest figures released by Lebanon's Health Ministry.



Mohammad Ali Rajabi  
Cartoonist

## CARTOON



# Minister urges BRICS action to safeguard global food security

## Economy Desk

Iran's agriculture minister said on Saturday that global food security must not be undermined by unilateral measures and disruptions to supply chains, calling on BRICS members to play a more effective role against emerging food security challenges.

"Any action that limits countries' access to food, agricultural inputs, transportation, financial services and international trade will challenge global efforts to combat hunger and achieve sustainable development," Gholamreza Nouri Qezeljah told the closing session of a BRICS agriculture ministers' meeting in the central Indian city of Indore.

The two-day conference began on Friday in Indore as part of a five-day gathering held under India's presidency of BRICS, which comprises 11 major emerging economies – Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Indonesia –

representing over 40% of the global population.

Nouri said BRICS, as one of the most important players in the global economy, has the capacity to play a more effective role in the face of emerging food security challenges.

The minister noted that merchandise trade among BRICS members had surged to about \$1.17 trillion in 2024, up from \$84 billion in 2003. "The expansion of BRICS membership has created new and rare capacities for developing economic cooperation, investment and trade among member countries," he said. "BRICS member countries now hold a significant share of the global economy, trade and agricultural production, and this capacity can become the driving engine of international cooperation in the fields of agriculture and food security."

## Iran backs BRICS grain exchange

Nouri Qezeljah voiced Iran's support for the ini-

tiative to establish a "BRICS Grain Exchange" and to expand agricultural trade using member countries' national currencies.

"A BRICS grain exchange can increase transparency in agricultural markets," he said, adding that the mechanism would improve price discovery, reduce transaction costs and lower supply chain risks. Using national exchanges as operators and settling transactions in national currencies could reduce dependence on intermediary currencies and strengthen members' economic resilience, he said.

## Iran's 2025 farm output tops 135m tons

The minister said Iran produced more than 135 million tons of agricultural products in 2025. Despite persistent drought, the effects of climate change and natural constraints, he said, more than 4.3 million agricultural operators are active in Iran. "About 76% of agricultural operators in the country have less than five hectares of land, which



Agriculture Minister Gholamreza Nouri Qezeljah addresses the closing session of a BRICS agriculture ministers' meeting in the central Indian city of Indore, on June 13, 2026.

IRNA

doubles the importance of supporting smallholder farmers and facilitating their access to quality and affordable inputs."

Iran's agricultural trade with BRICS members exceeded \$8 billion in 2025, he said. "About 30% of Iran's agricultural exports

went to BRICS member countries in 2025, and these countries also accounted for about 50% of Iran's agricultural imports," he added.

Nouri Qezeljah also outlined Iran's capacities in agricultural production, genetic resources, modern

technologies and regional cooperation, and said Tehran supports the "BRICS Agricultural Inputs, Genetic Resources and Information Network (BRICS AGRIN)" initiative, calling it an important step toward improving food security among member states.

## First multimodal LPG shipment departs for Afghanistan, Pakistan



## Economy Desk

Iran has successfully carried out its first liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) export operation using multimodal transport to destinations in Afghanistan and Pakistan, a senior port official said on Saturday.

The operation through the southern port of Khorramshahr in Khuzestan Province marks a step in expanding export routes, according to Ali Asgari, director general of the Khorramshahr Port and Maritime Organization.

"This is an important step in developing export routes and strengthening the position of Khorramshahr Port in the country's logistics network," Asgari was quoted as saying by the Mehr news agency.

"The implementation of this operation has further demonstrated Khorramshahr Port's capabilities in supporting supply chains and developing regional trade, and has paved the way for more effective use of multimodal transport capabilities."

"Using the multimodal transport model, while increasing efficiency and facilitating cargo movement, helps develop export markets and strengthen trade ties with neighboring countries."

Asgari also pointed to the southern port's role in the country's trade corridors, adding, "The development of multimodal transport and increasing the share of rail cargo movement are among the key goals of the country's development plans, and Khorramshahr port has taken effective steps in this direction."

"Relying on its existing capacities and developing cooperation with economic actors, Khorramshahr Port seeks to increase its share of the regional export and transit market," he said. "This success can pave the way for similar projects in the future." No further details on shipment volumes or timelines were provided.

Iran does not currently export LNG, despite holding some of the world's largest natural gas reserves. Its flagship Iran LNG project in the southern port of Asaluyeh has been delayed for years after international sanctions prompted the withdrawal of foreign partners and technology. Iranian officials said in 2024 that the project was about 53% complete and that they aimed to first commission a smaller LNG facility with a capacity of about 1.5 million metric tons per year, targeting 2026, while acknowledging that the timetable depends on multiple technical and financial factors.

## NIPC touts postwar restoration of 38% of petchem capacity

## Economy Desk

About 38% of petrochemical production capacity that was knocked out or disrupted during a 40-day US-Israeli war of aggression is currently restored, a deputy oil minister said, adding that polymer and plastics markets have now stabilized.

In an interview with SHANA, Hassan Abbaszadeh, managing director of the National Iranian Petrochemical Company, said six workers were killed during the hostilities.

"Part of the damage during the war was related to gas refineries, which affected part of the petrochemical industry's feedstock, including natural gas and gas condensates," Abbaszadeh said.

"Some petrochemical ancillary facilities were directly hit, and power plants responsible for supplying electricity and steam to petrochemical complexes were targeted. Unfortunately, part of the power and steam generation capacity was affected," he added.

"Also, some petrochemical production units were directly struck and taken out of production," Abbaszadeh said. Air strikes over several days hit facil-



SHANA

ities in Mahshahr, in the southwestern province of Khuzestan, and in Asaluyeh, in the southern province of Bushehr, damaging installations at multiple companies in April. The Tabriz and Marvdasht (Shiraz) petrochemical plants were also hit, Iranian state media and company statements confirmed at the time

The NIPC has not yet issued an estimate of the damage, but the export ban points to a sector hit hard by the attacks.

Domestic needs, industries come first Following the attacks, recovery committees were activated immediately to bring petrochemical plants back online

using all available power and steam sources, Abbaszadeh said. "Priority was given to meeting the needs of the people and downstream industries," he added.

"Fortunately, thanks to these efforts, about 38% of the capacity that was lost or affected has so far returned to production."

Abbaszadeh said a two-month short-term recovery plan has been defined, with its first phase running through June 20. "We hope that in subsequent phases, more companies will gradually return to production."

Iran imposed temporary export restrictions on some petrochemical products after an April 8 ceasefire to secure domestic supply, Abbaszadeh said. Export permits have since been restored for products with surplus and full warehouses, he added, though bans remain for items still facing supply constraints.

Abbaszadeh said two major petrochemical complexes returned to production this week alone. "This trend will continue, and other companies will gradually resume operations, which will result in greater market stability."

## Service exports triple to \$3b as TPO calls for e-commerce reform

## Economy Desk

A senior Iranian trade official said on Saturday that the country's service exports had tripled to around \$3 billion from \$1.2 billion following the removal of foreign currency repatriation requirements, adding that cross-border e-commerce and market intelligence are essential for creative and knowledge-based industries.

Amir Roshan, deputy for international business promotion at the Trade Promotion Organization of Iran (TPO), said the surge underscores how cutting red tape unlocks export capacity, IRNA reported.

"This leap shows that whenever government restrictions on trade are reduced and processes are facilitated,

the market responds positively and export capacities become activated," Roshan told a gathering on cultural and creative industries' international market entry.

He noted that TPO places special emphasis on non-oil service exports, including creative industries, knowledge-based goods, artistic products, computer services, tourism, engineering, and technical services, "where the share of goods is smaller and the role of services is more prominent."

A persistent challenge, Roshan said, is weak knowledge of target markets. "Our trade in many cases remains traditional and relies mostly on individual experience, while professional trade worldwide is based on market studies."

"Producers in fields such as computer games, fashion and clothing, handicrafts, artistic goods, and other creative sectors must properly study the target market before entering foreign markets," he added. "Many export failures happen because the product is not aligned with the taste, culture, and needs of the destination market."

Roshan also played down the complexity of services exports compared to goods. "In goods exports, there are issues like standards, quarantine, customs formalities, quotas, and numerous regulations, but in services exports many of these barriers do not exist, making the path easier."

## Cross-border e-commerce

Roshan described cross-border e-com-

merce as a key priority for TPO, capable of solving traditional export problems for small businesses and individual producers.

"If an Iranian producer offers a product such as saffron, handicrafts, toys, or other goods on a digital platform in the target country, and a foreign consumer buys it on a small scale, this process can be considered personal online sales and small-scale trade, not bulk goods exports," he said.

He added that a draft regulation on cross-border e-commerce has been revised and submitted to the government for approval. "If approved, we can hope that the path for small-scale exports and the sale of Iranian products in target markets through digital platforms will be facilitated."

# Harrowing details from bloody day of Lamerd

## City's governor elucidates dimensions of US attack on noncombatant citizens

By Bita Mir-Azimi  
Staff writer

### INTERVIEW

On February 28, 2026, merely seven hours after the terroristic assault by the United States and the Zionist regime upon the Shajareh Tayyebah School in Minab, the county of Lamerd, situated in the southern reaches of Iran's Fars Province, became the theater for one of the most unprecedented, yet simultaneously one of the most sparsely narrated, war crimes of those days; an assault whose significance derives not exclusively from the number of casualties, but rather from the character of the weaponry employed and the methodology of operational execution.

During this onslaught, a sports complex, adjacent residential zones, and proximate civilian spaces, including an area near an elementary school, sustained impacts from projectiles which, according to disseminated reports and analyses, were of the advanced PrSM (Precision Strike Missile) type; munitions that, instead of concentrating upon point-specific destruction, are engineered for the infliction of maximal human carnage across an extensive swath through detonation at low altitude and the dissemination of a colossal quantity of tungsten fragmentation. Based upon published assessments, each of these missiles possesses the capacity to discharge in excess of 180,000 tungsten pellets or fragments, and the four PrSM projectiles launched toward Lamerd dispersed, in aggregate, approximately 720,000 fragments above a small sector of the city within a temporal span of less than one minute.

The consequence of this assault was the martyrdom and wounding of dozens of noncombatant citizens, including children, adolescents, and female athletes; individuals who possessed no military role whatsoever. What turns the Lamerd incident into a distinctive occurrence within the annals of warfare is not solely the humanistic dimension of the catastrophe, but rather the deployment of an advanced weapons system exhibiting a singular operational pattern within an entirely civilian environment. This renders the assault a thought-provoking example for the examination of juridical, humanistic, and military dimensions of warfare, which doubly amplifies the necessity for its reexamination and inscription within the nation's historical memory.

The Lamerd incident has exceptional importance for this reason: that it transcends a conventional military attack and constitutes an instance of the employment of an advanced weapons system with a pattern of extensive devastation within an entirely civilian space. For this cause, this event represents not merely a fragment of wartime memory, but also a matter amenable to scrutiny from the



The photo shows a damaged sports hall in Lamerd, southern Iran, that was attacked by the US and Israel on February 28, 2026, while a women's volleyball team was using the facility.

● MOHAMMAD SAFARI/JAMARAN

perspective of international humanitarian law, military studies, and the humanistic consequences of warfare.

The governor of Lamerd County, during an exclusive interview with the Persian-language Iran Newspaper, elucidated the dimensions of the terroristic and criminal American assault upon Iran.

Ali Alizadeh noted that this grievous incident transpired on the initial day of the commencement of hostilities and in continuation of attacks perpetrated by the United States and the Zionist regime against Iran.

"According to published reports and analyses, a type of munition was utilized in this assault whose characteristics diverged from conventional methodologies of destruction. In typical attacks, a missile, subsequent to impact with the ground or a structure, induces direct structural demolition and the creation of debris; however, during this incident, the detonations transpired at an elevation above ground level, and a vast volume of fragmentation was dispersed

radially throughout the surrounding environment."

According to experts, Alizadeh relayed, each of these missiles contained thousands of pellets and metallic pieces

in the form of fragmentation which, subsequent to detonation at altitude, affected an extensive area. For this reason, the damages were not exclusively limited to buildings and infrastructure; rather, individuals who were present upon public thoroughfares, within residential courtyards, inside automobiles, or even within houses were exposed to direct impact from the fragments.

#### All of the victims were ordinary citizens

All of the victims were ordinary citizens, Alizadeh emphasized. Some were present within the courtyards of their own homes, some were upon their daily routes of travel, and a group was within public and athletic

venues.

"In one sports complex, students were engaged in activities when, after hearing the sound of the initial detonation, they exited the hall to ascertain the cause of the incident and, subsequently, were exposed to later explosions. Fortunately, a portion of the existent structures prevented the occurrence of greater damages; however, overall, an extremely grievous event unfolded."

Concerning the state of emergency response following the occurrence of the assault, the governor also maintained that given that this incident transpired on the surprise war's inaugural day, the necessary preparedness for confronting such an expansive volume of wounded and martyred individuals did not exist within the county. The initial destination for the wounded was the county hospital, and the medical personnel, under difficult and unprecedented conditions, confronted a high volume of injured persons. Many of the wounded were transferred to medical centers with severe in-



According to published reports and analyses, a type of munition was utilized in this assault whose characteristics diverged from conventional methods of destruction. During this incident, the detonations transpired at an elevation above ground level, and a vast volume of fragmentation was dispersed radially throughout the surrounding residential environment. As a result, all of the victims were ordinary citizens.

juries resulting from fragment impacts, and, unfortunately, a number of them, despite the administration of therapeutic and surgical interventions, were martyred due to the severity of their injuries.

In response to the question of why the dimensions of this incident have received less media attention during the preceding months, he stated: "The matter was not entirely neglected; however, during that period, certain other events that had more extensive international reverberations were prioritized for media coverage and for juridical and diplomatic pursuits. It was natural that the diplomatic apparatus and responsible institutions, for the purpose of raising the matter in international fora, would concentrate upon dossiers possessing a greater capacity to attract global public attention. Consequently, the Lamerd incident was, to some extent, eclipsed by other events."

#### Legal and diplomatic prosecution of the assault upon noncombatants

Now that some time has passed and numerous pieces of documentation, reports, and evidence have become available, the governor of Lamerd emphasized the necessity for juridical pursuit of this dossier. He further added that the groundwork has been established for a more serious pursuit of the matter.

"The objective is to employ juridical and international capacities for the substantiation of the incident's dimensions and for the pursuit of matters pertaining to human rights violations. In this same vein, delegations from international institutions, including representatives associated with humanitarian and juridical domains, have visited the region and conducted field investigations."

Alizadeh continued that Iran's Judiciary has also established legal dossiers for all of the martyrs and injured veterans of this incident. What is of importance in this dossier is "the civilian character of the region and of the incident's victims". All of the martyrs and wounded were ordinary citizens and individuals from various levels of society, including educators, students, corporate employees, bazaar merchants, housewives, athletes, and other citizens who were performing their everyday activities and had no military role or engagement whatsoever. The governor of Lamerd, in conclusion, emphasized that the principal expectation and demand of the region's populace is that the responsible institutions within the judicial and diplomatic domains continue the prosecution of this dossier with seriousness, so that the dimensions of the incident may be precisely raised in international fora, and the rights of the injured parties, as well as the families of the martyrs and injured veterans, may be fully secured.



The photo shows the extent of destruction caused by the shrapnel of a US-Israeli missile strike that detonated in the air of Lamerd city, southern Iran, on February 28, 2026, killing at least 21 people, including 4 children, and injuring more than 100 people.

● MOHAMMAD SAFARI/JAMARAN

The article first appeared in Persian in Iran Newspaper.

# 118 Lamerd citizens become victims of American missile test: *Hospital chief*



A young girl who was injured by the American-Israeli missile strike on the city of Lamerd, southern Iran, sits on the blood-stained floors of the Haj Mahmoud Haj Heydar Hospital on February 28, 2026.  
● IRNA

The chief of Lamerd Hospital, lauding the presence and solidarity of the people, pointed out that the quantity of fragments that had descended upon the bodies of innocent people in that county was so considerable that 21 individuals, including five children, were martyred.

"All martyred children were surely loved by their parents, but one of them was, in medical terminology, a 'golden baby' — that is, an infant whom, after 10 to 15 years of infertility treatment, God had bestowed as a gift upon its parents, and unfortunately, this child was martyred in this incident as well."

Doctor Sajjadi also spoke of the solidarity among the medical staff in managing the crisis of this atrocity. When a large number of wounded individuals in critical condition are transferred to the hospital, the simultaneous treatment of them is exceedingly difficult, but, "thank God," through the solidarity of the medical and nursing staff, "we rendered the entire hospital stable" in fewer than four hours. "Even nurses who had retired came to the hospital in order to assist the medical team," Doctor Sajjadi added.

The director of Lamerd Hospital concluded by saying that even though the fragments and lead materials utilized in these missiles may not have been toxic, the intensity and speed of the fragments that were released prior to impact with the ground were so elevated that, "if you take a turn about the city, you will observe bullets and fragments that have pierced the body of the city".

"All existent evidence demonstrates that," Doctor Sajjadi stressed, "on February 28, a terrorist atrocity transpired in this county, for which the global community must demand accountability and provide a response. God was with the people of Lamerd; if these missiles had struck the city in the morning, the number of martyrs would assuredly have reached more than 300 because the point of impact for one of the missiles was adjacent to an elementary school."



All martyred children were surely loved by their parents, but one of them was, in medical terminology, a "golden baby" — that is, an infant whom, after 10 to 15 years of infertility treatment, God had bestowed as a gift upon its parents, and unfortunately, this child was martyred in this incident as well.

By Mohadesse Jafari  
Staff writer

## INTERVIEW

More than 100 days have elapsed since the commencement of the wicked Zionist-American assaults upon Iran. With each passing day, new dimensions of American atrocities inflicted upon the life and body of our motherland during this imposed war are still unveiled. On the first day of the war — specifically on February 28, at approximately 16:00 to 17:00 local time, shortly after the bombardment of the Shajareh Tayyebah Elementary School in Minab — the Americans tested, for the first time, a novel prohibited weapon of mass destruction of their own construction upon the heads of a small town's populace. This military catastrophe transpired in four points within Lamerd County, southern Iran, namely: a sports hall, two residential zones, and a hall adjacent to the Dabestaneh School. Lamerd is a small city in the southern part of Fars Province which, according to foreign media outlets, turned within a few seconds into a laboratory for one of the most lethal methodologies of mass extermination. This missile barrage occurred not above a military installation, nor upon a battlefield; rather, it transpired above houses wherein people resided. According to the chief of Lamerd Hospital, each of these missiles carried 180,000 fragments composed of tungsten shot. Four missiles — that is, 720,000 metallic projectiles — descended upon a small expanse of a city with a population of approximately 30,000 inhabitants. In effect, on that day, 24 projectiles rained down upon every man and woman, irrespective of their age; a military experiment for

which the citizens of Lamerd became victims on that ominous day.

Doctor Mohammad Javad Sajjadi, director of Haj Mahmoud Haj Heydar Hospital in Lamerd County, recounts to Iran Newspaper the day when the emergency department of this hospital became inundated with the blood of innocent and civilian people:



Mohammad Javad Sajjadi

"It was around half past four in the afternoon when the sound of successive explosions shattered the serene atmosphere of this county. Upon hearing the first missile sound, I promptly rushed to the hospital. In fewer than five minutes, simultaneously, more than 70 injured individuals, bloodied due to the impact of multiple fragments upon their bodies, were transferred to the emergency department. The condition of certain patients was critical, and they possessed an urgent necessity for surgical intervention; for this reason, we were compelled to rapidly separate the martyrs from the wounded." Doctor Sajjadi said that not even 30 minutes had passed subsequent to hearing the four explosions when the count of wounded individuals transferred to the hospital reached 110. The fragments, which had lodged themselves in the knees, feet, shins, and flanks of the people, caused "the severance of vital arteries, spinal paralysis,

and blindness among numerous wounded individuals".

"On that very first day of the war, the people of Lamerd County received their portion of the aid that was supposed to arrive from the president of the United States of America to the Iranian people."

He recounts that with each passing hour, the number of wounded individuals and martyrs rose, and ultimately, the count of persons transferred to the hospital reached 118. Approximately 65 of the wounded sustained superficial injuries and received outpatient treatment; however, the circumstances for the remainder were not favorable.

"That same night, 32 wounded individuals required immediate surgery, and our surgeons

remained within operating rooms until 02:30. We were even obliged to return six of the wounded to the operating room on the morning of the subsequent day. Five wounded individuals from that terrorist atrocity were also transferred to the city of Shiraz due to the severity of their injuries and the necessity for super-specialized interventions."

During those hours, the emergency department of Lamerd Hospital no longer emitted the odor of disinfectants; the scent of blood had pervaded every room, to such an extent that the populace undertook action to facilitate the more comfortable movement of physicians and nurses, and they mopped the stone pavements of the emergency department.



The overloaded staff of the Haj Mahmoud Haj Heydar Hospital tend to the wounds of a boy who was injured by the US-Israeli missile strike on the city of Lamerd, southern Iran, on February 28, 2026.  
● IRNA



## FIVB Men's Volleyball Nations League:

Iran eases past  
Argentina,  
opens account in  
preliminaries

Iranian players celebrate a point during a 3-0 win against Argentina at the Volleyball Nations League in Brasilia, Brazil, on June 12, 2026.

● VOLLEYBALL WORLD

## Sports Desk

Iran defeated Argentina in straight sets (25-23, 25-19, 25-23) on Friday to get off the mark in Week 1 of the FIVB Men's Volleyball Nations League in Brasilia, Brazil.

Opposite spiker Ali Hajipour topped the scoring for Iran with 22 points, including three aces, while outside hitter Pouria Hosseinkhanzadeh added 19. Middle blocker Mohammad Valizadeh also made a valuable contribution with eight points.

Outside hitter Fausto Díaz was Argentina's top scorer with 12

points, while opposite Germán Alfredo Gómez (11 points) and Luciano Vicentin (10) also finished in double figures.

The victory, Iran's first in three matches, lifted Roberto Piazza's side to 13th in the 18-team preliminary standings. Argentina, meanwhile, sits second from bottom after suffering its second defeat in as many matches.

"The players showed they could perform better than they had in the previous two matches," Iran head coach Roberto Piazza said after the game, while acknowledging there was still room for improvement.

Iran began its preliminary-round campaign with a 3-1 defeat (25-21, 23-25, 25-15, 25-23) to South American powerhouse Brazil on Wednesday before a below-par performance saw Piazza's side fall in straight sets (25-23, 25-19, 25-21) to Bulgaria the following day at the Nilson Nelson Gymnasium. Asked what contributed to his team's improvement from the previous two games, the Italian said: "Nothing special happened. We simply talked a little because the players need to believe that they are truly strong. But you can only be strong when you play together and perform as a team."

"It was not a perfect performance, but we accepted certain mistakes. Yesterday and the day before, there were moments when we were genuinely ridiculous because we made errors that should never have happened, and that is not acceptable. Volleyball is part of life, and making mistakes is also part of life." Commenting on the performance of Iranian setter Arshia Behnejad, Piazza said: "Arshia was excellent today. He was excellent yesterday, and he was excellent two days ago as well. There is no problem — he just needs to keep going."

"Tomorrow we will rest, and on Sunday we have a tough opponent and a difficult match against Belgium. It will be a challenging game."

Belgium also heads into the final day of Week 1 action with a 1-2 record, having beaten Bulgaria 3-1 in its opener before suffering back-to-back defeats to Brazil and Serbia, both in four sets.

Iran will travel to Orléans, France, for the second week of competition, beginning with a daunting test against the host nation and reigning Olympic champion France at the CO'Met Arena on June 24. That will be followed

by matches against the United States (June 25), Japan (June 26) and Cuba (June 28).

The third and final week of the preliminary phase will see Iran — chasing its first VNL Finals appearance in four years — face Ukraine in Belgrade on July 15, followed by matches against Germany (July 16), Slovenia (July 17) and Türkiye (July 19).

The top eight teams in the 18-team standings will advance to the VNL Finals, which begin in Ningbo Beilun, China, on July 29. China has already secured a place in the quarterfinals as the host nation.

## FISU World University Championship Combat Sports:

## Greco-Roman glory as Iran completes men's title double

## Sports Desk

Iranian wrestlers dominated the Greco-Roman competition with nine medals, including five golds, as the country completed a men's team title double at the FISU World University Championship Combat Sports in Brasilia, Brazil. Morteza Alghosi capped Iran's Greco-Roman campaign in style on Friday, defeating Russian wrestler Aleksandr Melekhov — competing as a neutral athlete — in the 130kg final to claim the gold medal.

Amirreza Dehbozorgi opened Iran's gold account on the final day by beating Daniel Tebloev — also competing as a neutral athlete — in the 60kg final, before Mohammad Kamali outmuscled Türkiye's Servet Angi to take gold in the 67kg division. Mohammad Naghousi suffered defeat to Moldova's Alexandru Solovei in the 77kg final and had to settle for silver.

Friday's results came after Mahdi Kamali had secured gold in the 55kg category a day earlier, thanks to back-to-back victories

over French and Brazilian opponents in a three-man Nordic-format bracket, while Hojjat Rezaei finished atop the podium in the 72kg division.

Reza Bahmani, meanwhile, settled for silver in the 63kg class after losing to Russian wrestler Ruslan Mamedov in the final, while Reza Azarshab (82kg) and Shayan Habibzareh (97kg) added two bronze medals to Iran's haul. A remarkable tally of 10 medals, including seven golds, in as many weight classes had already helped Iran dominate the freestyle com-

petition earlier in the Brazilian capital.

Mahdi Veisi (57kg), Mahdi Rahimi (61kg), Mohammadreza Hosseini (65kg), Mohammad Bakhshi (70kg), Adel Panahian (79kg), Mohammad-Javad Salehi (92kg), and Erfan Alizadeh (97kg) were the gold medalists for Iran in the freestyle event.

Mohammad-Hossein Norouzian (86kg) and Morteza Janmohammadzadeh (125kg) claimed silver medals in their respective categories, while Mahdi Abbaspour took bronze in the 74kg division.



● FISU

## IWBF Wheelchair Basketball World Championships:

Iran drawn against  
Canada, Germany, Morocco in group phase

Iran's men's team has been drawn alongside host Canada, Germany and Morocco in Group D of the upcoming IWBF Wheelchair Basketball World Championships, which will begin on September 9 in Ottawa, Ontario.

The draw for the tournament, which will serve as the first qualification event for the Los Angeles 2028 Paralympic Games, saw the 16 participating teams divided into four groups following the conclusion of the IWBF Men's Repechage in Suphan Buri, Thailand, where Iran, Poland, the Netherlands and Brazil secured the remaining berths for the world championships.

Defending champion USA has been drawn in Group A alongside Italy, Brazil and the Netherlands, while two-time champion Australia will face Great Britain, Türkiye and Argentina in Group B. Spain, Japan, Poland and Colombia

make up Group C.

Iran completed a clean sweep of three victories in Suphan Buri. The Iranian side opened its campaign with an emphatic 77-24 victory over Senegal before defeating Brazil 75-63 the following day at the Suphan Buri Indoor Stadium. An 81-59 win over Poland then saw Iran finish atop the Group B standings. Under the tournament

format, the top team in each group was scheduled to face the bottom-placed team from the opposite group, while the runners-up were to meet the third-placed team from the other pool. The winners of the four crossover matches would qualify for the World Championships. However, Iran was awarded direct qualification after Venezuela's late withdrawal from the tournament left Group A without a fourth-placed team.

Iran achieved its best result in three appearances at the world championships in the previous edition in Dubai, claiming the bronze medal with a 72-54 victory over the Netherlands in the third-place playoff.

The 14th edition of the World Championships, held every four years, will bring together 336 athletes from 28 teams — including 12 women's teams — from around the world in Ottawa.



● IWBF

Iranian gymnastics team heads to  
China for Asian Championships

## Sports Desk

Iran's five-man squad departed for China on Friday ahead of the AGU Asian Artistic Gymnastics Championships, which will begin on Thursday in the Chinese city of Zunyi.

Mahdi Olfati — winner of a historic Asian vault gold medal last year — will headline the Iranian roster at the competition, which also serves as a qualification pathway for September's Aichi-Nagoya Asian Games in Japan.

A men's vault finalist at the Paris 2024 Olympics, Olfati will be joined by Mahdi Ahmadkohani, Hooman Jafari, Amirabbas Mojahed and Mohammadreza Hamidi.

Hamidi was a late addition to the squad after Mohammad Khosrownejad sustained a ligament injury ear-

lier this month and was ruled out of the continental event.

Ahmadkohani, meanwhile, will be looking to make a strong return to international competition after serving a 24-month suspension imposed by the International Testing Agency (ITA). The ban, which expired on February 21, was handed down after the Iranian gymnast — a two-time rings silver medalist in the 2023 FIG World Cup series — accrued three whereabouts failures within a 12-month period. Ahmadkohani has denied any wrongdoing, insisting that he "had not entered the necessary information on the anti-doping website regarding my residence and training location, which led to my suspension."

The Iranian team will be coached by Reza Kheirkhah at the Asian Championships.



● gymnastic.ir

# Bushehr, land of sunlight, color, living beauty



## Iranica Desk

Bushehr is a place where the sun rises each morning from the heart of the blue waters, breaking the spell of the night and beginning a daily celebration of light and color. For travelers seeking a destination where they can experience the rhythm of nature up close, Bushehr offers a landscape in which every corner tells a story of vivid colors and timeless beauty. This coastal province seems to take on a new appearance with every passing hour. From sunrise to sunset, the shoreline reveals a constantly changing scene. In the early morning, the sea takes on a soft turquoise shade, as if the sky has melted into the water. At midday, beneath the direct southern sun, the Persian Gulf turns deep blue and sapphire, while near sunset it glows with shades of copper and gold. The transformation of colors is not only a result of changing light.

The seabed along Bushehr's coast is itself a natural display of contrasts. In some areas, living corals add warm tones to the water; elsewhere, white sandy shores make the sea appear clearer and brighter. Where dark rocks and cliffs rise from the waves, the colors shift toward emerald green and deeper shades of blue.

In the heart of Bushehr's historic district, light does more than illuminate — it interacts with architecture. When sunlight passes through the colored glass of traditional Orsi windows and old wooden doors, the interiors of historic houses become stages of moving light and shadow. Ruby reds, turquoise blues and amber yellows dance across plaster walls and handmade carpets, creating an atmosphere of rare beauty. This is where the deep connection between Bushehr's traditional architecture and the generosity of the southern sun becomes most visible.

A short distance from the port city, the plains of Bushehr reveal another side of the province's natural charm. Its lush palm groves stretch across the landscape like a green belt. The strong trunks of the palms, standing among their long leaves, symbolize endurance against the region's heat and humidity. Yet the magic of Bushehr's colors extends far beyond its coastline and palm forests.

Jashak Salt Dome, one of Iran's remarkable geological attractions, is a landscape shaped by crystal and light. When the intense southern sunlight strikes its transparent formations and massive salt structures, the mountain becomes a natural gallery of shimmering white, pink and mineral hues, leaving visitors fascinated.

At Bushehr's fish market, colors reach another level. The astonishing variety of fish creates a scene that no painter could fully capture.



● chtn.ir

These colors are also a reflection of the flavors that come alive in Bushehr's traditional cuisine.

During the colder months, Bushehr's farmlands become fields of color and taste. The

bright red of locally grown tomatoes, the rich red of sweet watermelons, the green of peppers and the cheerful shades of seasonal crops transform the province into a winter garden whose produce is valued throughout Iran.

And no account of Bushehr's summer would be complete without mentioning the traditional Sharbat Khanehs (traditional syrup houses) of the historic district. During the hot afternoons, when humidity fills the air, escaping to the cool interiors of old houses and enjoying a glass of fresh lemon syrup or a colorful herbal syrup offers a simple but memorable experience.

The clear colors of these syrups, shining in glass cups, reflect the same sunlight that brightens this ever-awake land throughout the day. Bushehr — a land of light, color and beauty — continues to welcome visitors to its endless celebration of nature, culture and tradition.

## Se-Kuhe Castle stands tall in Sistan's historic landscape

### Iranica Desk

Sistan and Baluchestan Province is one of Iran's most valuable provinces, a region holding important historical treasures within its heart. Shahr-e Sukhteh (Burnt City), Dahaneh-ye Gholaman, Arg-e Jalaliabad, and many other sites form just a part of the province's remarkable attractions.

In the Sistan region, less than 50 kilometers from the city of Zabol, lies the historic Se-Kuhe Castle (Qaleh-e Seh Kuhe), a fortress with a long and storied past filled with local legends. This castle is considered the second tallest structure in the Sistan plain and has been registered on Iran's National Heritage List.

The castle is regarded as one of the must-see attractions of Zabol and after Khwajeh Mountain, stands as the second tallest structure across the vast Sistan plain. The castle was built on a rectangular and elevated plot of land covering approximately 3,700 square meters and features two entrance pathways, one on the eastern side and one on the western side. The western entrance has become impassable and has suffered extensive damage, while the eastern entrance has a steep downward slope.

Se-Kuhe Castle was officially registered as a national heritage site of Iran on February 1, 2003.

The castle is located in the Shib Ab district, within Se-Kuhe village, in the city of Zabol. This historic fortress is bordered to the northeast by semicircular plains, to the south by Delasa village, to the west by the farmlands of Lutak village, and to the northwest by Sam Castle.

Se-Kuhe emerged as a result of water receding from the Zabol



● kojaro.com



plain and is situated along the route from Zabol toward Zahedan, lying along a sloped path.

Due to its location along the course of the Helmand River, Se-Kuhe became completely submerged at one point. Later, as the river changed its course, the land gradually emerged from the water, appearing as three elevated mounds, or three mountains, rising from the dry Sistan plain. In this way, Se-Kuhe first

surfaced as three islands, and then, as the plain's floodwaters receded, its entire area eventually became dry land.

Many experts believe that the architectural characteristics of this region date back to the Afsharid period. The peak of political and military activity at Se-Kuhe Castle, however, occurred during the reign of Naser al-Din Shah Qajar. During that time, the castle played a significant deterrent role against the colonial ambitions of

the British government and their efforts to separate parts of Iran, and it also assumed an effective role in the campaigns against Herat. Sardar Ali Khan Sarbandi was the first person to pledge allegiance to Iran's central government and raised the Iranian flag atop Se-Kuhe Castle in 1852 CE. This historic castle, whose history reaches back to the Qajar era, was the last residential fortress where the region's ruling governor of the time took up residence.

Se-Kuhe Castle stands as a symbol of Sistan's architectural style and is considered one of the final buildings constructed in this particular manner.

The castle is among the sites in Sistan where, during the struggles between Iran and Britain, the Iranian flag was hoisted. For several years, the fortress witnessed the peak of military and political conflicts between Great Britain and Iran during the reign of Naser al-Din Shah Qajar, and it played a role in the recapture of parts of the country during that war.

Adjacent to the main Se-Kuhe Castle in Zabol, a small citadel sits atop the third mound, covering an area of 2,000 square meters. This small citadel is only 20 meters away from the main castle, a distance so short that many historians have proposed the theory that the citadel and the castle were originally one single structure. Traces of habitation at this citadel are clearly visible, though it remains unknown exactly who lived there and during what period.

According to local elders in the village, coins were once minted within this castle. Additionally, a well existed on the southern side of the fortress, into which bodies were thrown during times of war. The well was reportedly so deep that when villagers dropped a stone into it, no sound could be heard. Today, only a hollow remains at that spot. In any case, this castle represents a chapter of Sistan's history in which many political and social events unfolded, and it is tied to several centuries of the region's recent past.

The architecture of Se-Kuhe Castle follows the traditional style of Sistan. Two types of arched

vaults, known as Taq-e Ahang, are found in this castle.

The construction of houses in the Se-Kuhe district, like other settlements in Iran, initially involved laying the walls, then marking the porches and doors, and finally roofing the homes. The method for constructing roofs in the Sistan region involves starting from one side and building the roof up to less than halfway across, while simultaneously doing the same from the opposite side. When the roof bases meet above the room's walls, several more rows are added from each side to complete the roof. The roofs of houses in the Sistan plain are generally built in a domed shape, following the Yazdi style.

The castle consists of three sections:

**Northern citadel:** This section of the castle served as the resting place for the ruler and his companions. The northern citadel has a polygonal exterior with a domed surface and high vaults, and it occupies a significantly smaller area compared to the southern citadel. The northern citadel is also referred to as Malek Sar or Falak Sar.

**Central courtyard citadel:** This section of the castle is filled with both small and large rooms, which provided resting and sleeping quarters for the servants, the ruler's personal guard soldiers, and his companions. This area lies between the northern and southern citadels.

**Southern citadel:** This section of the castle belonged exclusively to the ruling governor of the time. Resembling a compact palace, it featured a narrow, tall porch, a small courtyard, and a number of rooms on the northern side of the courtyard.

# Tehran, Moscow expand tourism diplomacy with new travel initiative



CHTN

## Arts & Culture Desk

Iran and Russia moved to deepen tourism diplomacy and public engagement during talks in Moscow, agreeing to expand cultural cooperation, facilitate travel and strengthen tourism exchanges as part of a broader effort to turn their long-standing civilizational ties into practical partnerships, Iranian officials said. Meeting on the sidelines of the sixth International Tourism Forum in Moscow, Hojjatollah Ayoubi, head of the Center for International Affairs and Diplomacy at Iran's Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts, and Russian Deputy Culture Minister Andrey Malyshev discussed measures to remove barriers to travel, promote joint tourism initiatives and broad-

en cultural cooperation between the two countries, IRNA reported. The forum opened on June 10 and will run through June 14 at VDNH in Moscow. The talks followed the signing of a 2026-2028 tourism cooperation roadmap by Tehran and Moscow on June 11, a plan aimed at improving air connectivity, facilitating payments, implementing existing agreements and boosting visitor flows between the two countries. Ayoubi said tourism and cultural diplomacy had become among the most effective tools for bringing nations closer together and opening new avenues of cooperation. He described Iran and Russia as countries with deep historical and cultural roots that can draw on their shared civilizational assets to

foster stronger people-to-people ties. "Cultural and tourism cooperation can help build trust, strengthen regional convergence and create new horizons for collaboration," he said. The two sides agreed to pursue closer cooperation in tourism marketing, destination promotion and the use of modern digital tools to showcase attractions in both countries. They also discussed measures to simplify travel procedures and encourage greater engagement between tourism operators. Ayoubi said Iran was well positioned to attract a larger share of Russia's outbound tourism market, citing the country's rich cultural heritage, diverse historical and natural attractions, hospitality traditions and growing health tourism sector.

## KotorArt festival taps Iranian tenor Reza Fekri for opening gala

### Arts & Culture Desk

Iranian tenor Reza Fekri, a member of the Croatian National Theatre Opera in Zagreb, will perform as a featured soloist at the opening concert of the 2026 KotorArt International Festival on July 13 in Kotor, Montenegro, placing an Iranian artist at the forefront of one of Southeast Europe's leading classical music events. The opening gala, titled "Trajanje" ("Duration"), will take place at 9:30 p.m. local time in the historic square facing St. Tryphon's Cathedral, a landmark venue in the UNESCO-listed Adriatic town. The program will feature "Triptihon," a major work by renowned Croatian composer Ivan Brkanović. Fekri will appear alongside Croatian soprano Mihaela Kristina Molinarić and bass-baritone Krešimir

Stražanac. The performance will bring together the Bokelj Symphony Orchestra and the Academic Choir Ivan Goran Kovačić under the baton of Croatian conductor and composer Mladen Tarbuk. Widely regarded as one of the Balkans' premier classical music gatherings, KotorArt has built an international reputation for attracting leading performers and ensembles from across Europe and beyond. Fekri's appearance marks another milestone in a career that has steadily expanded across Europe's classical music scene. In addition to his ongoing work with the Croatian National Theatre Opera, he has maintained artistic collaborations with Russia's Mariinsky Theatre and has regularly taken part in projects led by acclaimed Iranian conductor and composer Ali Rahbari.

His professional portfolio also includes performances with Moscow's Helikon Opera, the Tehran Symphony Orchestra and the Fars Symphony Orchestra, as well as appearances in opera, symphonic and oratorio productions across Europe. Among his recent engagements were a performance of Gioachino Rossini's "Stabat Mater" in Varaždin, Croatia, with the Varaždin Chamber Orchestra under Anđelko Igrec, and appearances as tenor soloist in Mozart's "Requiem" during the project "A Challenge for Mozart," conducted by Tarbuk in Zagreb and Požega. The KotorArt opening concert extends the successful artistic partnership between Fekri and Tarbuk while bringing an Iranian voice to the opening night of one of the region's most prominent cultural events.

## 'Dream Land' rolls out across Turkish cinemas after festival success

### Arts & Culture Desk

Iranian animated feature 'Dream Land' began its theatrical run across 28 cities in Turkey on Friday, June 12, marking a major international release for the award-winning production, according to the film's producers. Directed by Mohsen Enayati and produced by Mostafa Hassanabadi, 'Dream Land' is a joint project of the Soureh Animation Center, Mahwa Animation Center, Tehran Municipality's Cultural Department, and Ayandeh Negar Studio. The film recently captured the Best Animated Feature award at an international children's film festival in India, adding momentum to its overseas rollout. The coming-of-age adventure follows Arat, a teenager driven by dreams of heroism. As he journeys with friends toward a mythical dream city, he

uncovers unexpected truths that reshape his understanding of the world and himself. Turkish distributor MC Film has launched the film in cinemas across Ankara, Istanbul, Antalya, Bursa, Gaziantep, Kayseri, Konya, Erzurum, Van and more than a dozen other cities, giving the Iranian production one of its broadest regional releases to date. The release comes as Iranian animation continues to expand its international footprint through festival appearances and commercial screenings. 'Dream Land' was recently selected for the main competition of the 11th Kinolub International Film Festival for Children and Youth in Poland, where it will compete alongside entries from around the world later this month. Veteran dubbing director Amirhoshang Zand oversaw the film's voice cast, which includes Mir-taher Mazloumi, the late Manouchehr



Valizadeh, Manouchehr Zendedel, Negin Kianfar, Ardeshtir Monazzam, Leila Kouhsar, Arezoo Afri, and Arsalan Joolaei. International distribution is handled by the Soureh International Center.

## Iran's biodiversity shapes cultural mosaic of a civilization

### Social Desk

Iran's extraordinary biodiversity has helped forge one of the world's richest cultural landscapes, the head of the National Committee for Cultural and Natural Heritage at Iran's National Commission for UNESCO said during a visit to the Pardisan National Museum of Natural History in Tehran, according to the Department of Environment (DOE). Ahmad Mohit Tabatabaei said Iran's cultural diversity has emerged from the country's vast ecological variety, creating a shared heritage rooted in the natural environment. "The two fundamental assets of any civilization are cultural heritage and natural heritage," he said. "Together they shape the identity of a nation. Without one, the other loses much of its meaning." DOE reported. He described natural heritage as

nature's interaction with human communities over centuries, a process that has given rise to traditions, literature, customs and distinct ways of life. Mount Damavand, he said, is not merely a natural landmark but a powerful symbol embedded in Persian mythology, poetry and collective memory. Likewise, the ancient Hyrcanian forests have influenced the music, traditions and cultural identity of communities along the Caspian coast. Mohit Tabatabaei said modern museums have evolved beyond collections of artifacts and now serve as bridges between the past and the future. "The future belongs to nations that understand their past," he said, stressing that such understanding must encompass both cultural and natural heritage. He noted that national parks and protected areas increasingly function as "ecomuseums," preserving

living ecosystems while showcasing natural history in its original setting. Golestan National Park, Iran's oldest national park, stands as "a living museum" where visitors can experience wildlife and natural history firsthand, he added. Calling children, cultural heritage and natural heritage the three pillars of the future, Mohit Tabatabaei urged greater investment in education and public outreach. Museums, he said, act as mirrors reflecting Iran's natural and cultural identity and can inspire stronger stewardship of these national treasures. He also highlighted the establishment of the Pardisan Biodiversity Museum during the years of the Iraqi-Imposed War (1980-1988), describing it as evidence of a forward-looking vision that safeguarded Iran's natural legacy even in the most challenging circumstances.

## Nearly three centuries on, Magtymguly Pyragy still unites the region

### Arts & Culture Desk

Iranian scholars, diplomats and cultural figures gathered at Kharazmi University on Thursday to commemorate the 293rd birth anniversary of Magtymguly Pyragy, the celebrated Iranian-Turkmen poet and mystic, marking his enduring role in fostering cultural dialogue and regional understanding. The ceremony, attended by ambassadors from Turkmenistan and Tajikistan, officials from the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), academics and researchers, featured traditional music performances and cultural rituals that reflected the rich heritage associated with the renowned 18th-century literary figure. Ali Rahbar, secretary of the event and director of the Turkmen Cultural House Institute, described the gathering as an opportunity to honor "one of the great cultural luminaries of Iran and the region,"



saying that cultural icons serve as powerful symbols of identity and can help strengthen cultural diplomacy among nations. "Magtymguly lived in a turbulent era, yet his thoughts carried messages of peace, friendship, spirituality and wisdom," Rahbar said. "Today, he remains a shared civilizational figure linking Iran, Turkmenistan and neighboring countries." Mohammad Javad Haghshenas, cultural adviser to Iran's minister of cultural heritage, said Pyragy's legacy transcended linguistic and geographic boundaries through its

emphasis on ethics, justice, human dignity and social solidarity. "Commemorating Magtymguly is not merely remembering a poet," Haghshenas said. "It is a tribute to a valuable part of Iran's cultural heritage and to the contribution of Turkmen culture to the country's historical richness." ECO Cultural Institute President Mohammad Hasan of Pakistan called Pyragy "a shared cultural figure among the peoples of the region," while Tajik Ambassador Nizomiddin Zahedi said the poet's works had become a cultural bridge connecting Iran, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and other regional nations. Turkmen Ambassador Ilyas Gayypov said the poet's legacy had evolved into a key pillar of cultural cooperation between Turkmenistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran, adding that his enduring messages of patriotism, humanity, unity and peace continue to resonate nearly three centuries later.