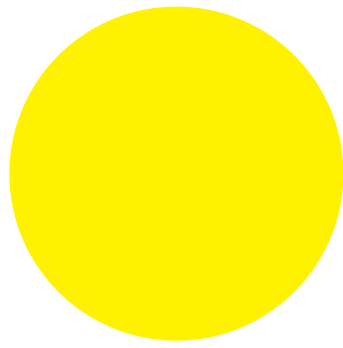


Exhibition
diplomacy key
to postwar
tourism
recovery



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Parliament Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf (c) addresses a meeting with members of the Iranian Chamber of Commerce in Tehran, Iran on June 17, 2026.

ICANA

Shared interests key to sustaining Iran-US understanding

INTERVIEW
EXCLUSIVE

Iran and the United States are set to sign an understanding on Friday that will not only bring the war to an end but also pave the way for a broader agreement within the following 60 days. Still, the sustainability of any deal remains in doubt. In an interview



Reza Ghoobeshavi

with Iran Daily, political analyst Reza Ghoobeshavi said the definition of shared interests will be the main guarantee of the durability of such an agreement—a missing element that ultimately contributed to the collapse of the previous accord known as the JCPOA.

IRAN DAILY: Why have the details of the Iran-US understanding not been officially released? Does the confidentiality surrounding the agreement reflect operational and security necessities, or does it point to unresolved ambiguities and disagreements between the parties?

GHOUBESHAVI: The exact reason remains unclear. However, according to Iranian officials, an understanding was reached with the American side that both parties would refrain from publishing the text before the agreement is signed next Friday in Switzerland, as some technical details still need to be finalized.

No documented information has yet emerged confirming that the agreement contains "confidential" sections. On the contrary, Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi has promised that the full text will be released after it is signed. Araghchi has also noted that the current text is not lengthy and consists of only two pages, unlike the JCPOA, the 2015 nuclear agreement, whose text ran to several pages and was considerably more detailed.

Given that some provisions of the understanding have not yet been made public, can differences in interpretation among Iran, the United States, and Israel regarding their commitments be expected? What risks would such discrepancies pose to the durability of the agreement?

There will certainly be differences in how Iran, the United States, and even Israel interpret both their own obligations and those of the other parties. While these divergent interpretations are natural, the situation becomes problematic if those differences evolve into serious gaps or major disputes. Such a development could undermine the agreement, gradually weaken it, and ultimately lead to its collapse.

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Russia, China back US-Iran peace memorandum US bound to ensure proper implementation of MoU: *Araghchi*

International Desk

Russian and Chinese foreign ministers said on Wednesday that their countries fully support a memorandum of understanding (MoU) recently reached between Iran and the United States to end the aggression against Iran.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and Chinese top diplomat Wang Yi made the remarks in separate phone calls with their Iranian counterpart Abbas Araghchi.

Lavrov said that Moscow supports the Iran-US agreement which is scheduled to be signed in Switzerland on Friday, however he insisted that the Israeli regime must also comply.

"The Russian minister expressed support for the understandings reached through effective mediation by Pakistan and Qatar to de-escalate tensions in the region. The im-

portance of compliance by all parties involved in the armed conflict, including Israel, was emphasized," the Russian Foreign Ministry said in a read-out of the call.

Araghchi, for his part, stressed the responsibility of the US to ensure the proper implementation of the agreement, stressing that among the provisions is the complete cessation of attacks against Lebanon.

Back in March, Israel began to launch attacks on Lebanon after Lebanon's resistance movement Hezbollah launched military operations against Israel 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.

Lavrov and Araghchi also underlined the importance of international backing for the agreement, including support

from the United Nations Security Council.

They stressed the need for continued diplomatic cooperation among regional countries aimed at strengthening peace and stability.

Chinese foreign minister also welcomed the deal and commended the resilience of the Iranian government and nation in the face of pressures and coercive policies, and at the same time praised Iran's "responsible and diplomatic approach" in resolving issues and advancing dialogue.

Wang Yi, while emphasizing the need for the precise and full implementation of the provisions of the memorandum, also declared China's readiness to cooperate in facilitating its implementation.

The Iranian foreign minister expressed hope that Iran and China would be able to take advantage of the opportunities



Sergei Lavrov



Abbas Araghchi



Wang Yi

presented by the deal to develop their bilateral relations, particularly in the areas of energy and economy.

Tehran and Washington announced the agreement on Monday after a marathon of negotiations mediated by Pakistan, which will be followed by 60-day negotiations on Iran's nuclear issue and sanctions imposed on the Islamic Republic. Iran's top negotiator Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf and US Vice President JD Vance will attend the formal signing of the agreement in Switzerland on Friday. On February 28, the US and the Israeli regime began their

latest round of unprovoked aggression against Iran. After their failure to achieve their goals in the war, Washington accepted a ceasefire agreement proposed by Pakistan and engaged in talks with Tehran to end the war.

Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister Majid Takht-Ravanchi said on Tuesday that the second phase of the two-stage process will begin immediately after the signing of the memorandum on Friday.

Takht-Ravanchi noted that the MoU addresses war reparations, the release of Iran's frozen assets, end to US blockade

on Iranian ports and an end to hostilities across the region, including Israel's war on Lebanon.

Announcing the agreement in a post on social media on the early hours of Monday, US President Donald Trump said the Strait of Hormuz, a major shipping route for global oil and gas supplies that Iran has effectively shut down for months, would open on Friday, and that he had ordered the end of the US blockade of Iranian ports.

The memorandum of understanding also includes a \$300 billion fund to help rebuild Iran.

Israel continues southern Lebanon strikes despite Iran-US deal

International Desk

Israeli forces on Wednesday carried out airstrikes on several areas in south Lebanon, state media reported, despite a peace agreement between Iran and the United States, that includes halt to regime's attacks on Lebanon.

Lebanon's National News Agency (NNA) said Israeli warplanes launched raids targeting the Nabatieh al-Fawqa area and the eastern outskirts of neighboring town Kfar Tebnit.

The Israelis also launched a drone strike on the town of Ansariyah in the Zahrani area, NNA reported.

While violence has declined in Lebanon since a US-Iran agreement was announced on Monday, Israeli strikes on the south have killed at least five people since then, according to NNA.

The reduction in violence has allowed some south Lebanon residents to return



The photo shows buildings destroyed in Israel's strikes on southern Lebanon on June 17, 2026.

● AFP

and inspect their towns and villages, but the Lebanese army has urged locals to delay their return, citing "the risk of Israeli violations and attacks." Iran's military threatened on Tuesday to respond to Israel after strikes in southern Lebanon killed several people. "If the child-killing army of the Zionist regime does not put an end to its acts of aggression in southern Lebanon, it should await a harsh response from the powerful Armed Forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran," said the

Iranian military's central command Khatam al-Anbiya. It added that Israel had violated the ceasefire in Lebanon "84 times" since the deal was announced on Monday.

Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi also said on Tuesday that an end to the conflict would be incomplete "without the withdrawal of Israeli forces from the territories it occupied in this war."

"Any military attack by the Zionist regime on Lebanon from now on and the con-

tinued occupation of Lebanese territories from now on will be considered a violation of the memorandum of understanding in our view," he said.

But Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on Monday that the regime's forces would remain in Lebanon "for as long as necessary."

Israeli attacks on Lebanon began in early March after Lebanon's resistance group Hezbollah launched military operations against the regime in response to the regime's aggression against Iran.

The war has claimed at least 3,800 lives since March 2, according to the latest figures released by Lebanon's Health Ministry.

Iranian space program gaining fresh momentum: *Minister*

Iran's space industry is pressing forward with renewed momentum, as the minister of information and communications technology announces the underway plans for the imminent launch of the "Pars 2" satellite and deployment of the "Shahid Soleimani" constellation by year-end.

Speaking on Wednesday at a meeting with experts and managers of the Iranian Space Research Institute, including Hassan Salarieh, head of the Iranian Space Agency (ISA), Sattar Hashemi praised the achievements of the space sector under the current administration, attributing progress to the efforts of specialists and experts in the field, Press TV reported. "The approach of the Ministry of Communications and the fourteenth administration toward the space industry is a strategic one, and this field has extensive capacities for the development of smart agriculture, water resource management, land management, and improving the quality of data-driven governance in the country," Hashemi stressed. The minister also highlighted the resilience of Iran's space infrastructure during wartime conditions, describing continued operations as a significant achievement.

"The continuation of the country's space activities under difficult conditions is the result of the commitment, expertise, and round-the-clock efforts of colleagues in this field," Hashemi added.

Referring to ongoing projects, he added that "the necessary planning is underway to place the 'Pars 2' satellite into orbit."



● MEHR

Pars-2 is an advanced, domestically-developed highly-accurate and imaging satellite manufactured by ISA with the primary mission of Earth observation, remote sensing, and environmental monitoring.

Hashemi further stressed the importance of strengthening international and technological cooperation while rebuilding and restructuring the sector after recent challenges caused by the US-Israeli war of aggression against Iran.

In his remarks, Salarieh, the ISA's chief, reaffirmed that space projects are continuing at high speed and rejected claims that the industry had been disrupted by war time conditions. "The projects in the space industry are being carried out at high speed. The damage inflicted during the Ramadan War does not mean that our space industry has stopped; the country's space industry is still operating," he stressed.

Salarieh further emphasized the distributed nature of Iran's space infrastructure, explaining that the system is not centralized in a way that would allow it to be halted by targeting a single site.

Iranian tankers exit US blockade zone ahead of peace talks

International Desk

The first tankers carrying Iranian oil exited a US blockade in the Strait of Hormuz, a tracking website said on Wednesday, two days before the signing of an agreement between Tehran and Washington. The talks on a final settlement are set to begin Friday at Switzerland's Bürgenstock mountain resort, as news that the Hormuz Strait will reopen sent world oil prices tumbling.

The TankerTrackers website, which monitors oil shipments and storage, marked Iran's "first crude oil exports in two months," citing digital tracking data corroborated by satellite imagery.

"At least two National Iranian Tanker Company (NITC) VLCC supertankers named DIONA (9569695) and HERO2 (9362073) have exited the US Navy blockade perimeter carrying a combined total of 3.8 million barrels of Iranian crude oil between them," TankerTrackers said on



X, later adding that a third tanker had exited.

Negotiations over a final deal are to start immediately after the Swiss signing ceremony and continue during a 60-day window, leading to decisions on the fate of Iran's nuclear program and a plan for the lifting of international economic sanctions.

The United States will allow Iran to immediately begin selling oil and fuel under the deal to end the war, the Wall Street Journal (WSJ) reported on Tuesday, citing unnamed people familiar with the agreement.

A waiver of sanctions on oil sales will take effect immediately after the signing, the WSJ added, also covering services such as banking, transportation and insurance.

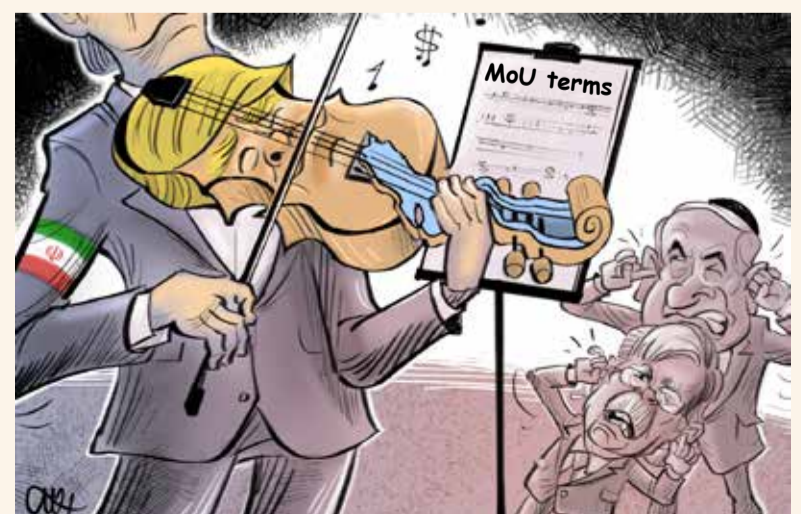
Iranian officials on Tuesday announced that the naval blockade have been removed.

Senior member of the Parliament's National Security and Foreign Policy Committee Alaeddin Boroujerdi said that several Iranian ships have already broken through the US naval blockade which has been in place since April 13.

The US imposed the blockade on Iranian ports after Iran closed the strategic Strait of Hormuz in response to the US-Israeli aggression against Iran on February 28. The closure of the waterway caused the surge in energy prices across the world. Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Majid Takht-Ravanchi also said on Tuesday that the two-month US naval blockade on Iranian ports have been lifted.

Mohammad Ali Rajabi
Cartoonist

CARTOON



Qalibaf urges shift from military to economic front to ease public woes

Infrastructure reform required for China partnership



Parliament Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf chairs a meeting with the Iran Chamber of Commerce and senior economic officials in Tehran on June 17, 2026.

● ICANA

of Commerce," which was attended by representatives of business associations, members of the chamber's economic commission and senior economic officials, emphasized the importance of the gathering.

Ahead of Qalibaf's upcoming visit to China, private sector participants at the meeting presented more than 30 proposals for developing economic, trade and investment ties between Iran and China. "What matters is that we officials, in whatever position we hold, come to understand that it is the people who drive the economy, culture, politics and all arenas of the country forward," Qalibaf said. "The people are the main axis of the country's progress, and the people of Iran are a valuable and irreplaceable asset." Referring to his new role in relations with China, he said, "When we look at the record of economic relations and joint cooperation with China, we see that in many areas we have not been able to achieve desirable results. So, we must

honestly ask where the problem lies and who is going to solve these problems?" Qalibaf stressed the need to reform economic and financial infrastructure to enhance relations with China.

"Without doubt, on this path we need to establish a financial system and design and implement deep, precise and extensive mechanisms in logistics, transportation, technology and infrastructure, and we must be able to connect with our partners, especially China, in a shared ecosystem, from education to the market and supply chains."

"Achieving this goal requires that the two countries be connected in various economic dimensions," he said.

Qalibaf also addressed sanctions against Iran during past decades, saying, "I am not among those managers who say sanctions are a scrap of paper."

"We experienced 12% growth in the industrial sector in the early 2000s, and we also see today's situation."

"But if lifting sanctions means surrendering, we will never do such a thing – the Iranian nation and all the country's officials have shown they would give their lives but are not ones to surrender," he said.

"I came here today to say that we must all take over the front line that was in

the hands of the combatants, stand firm, pull the people out from under economic pressure, and build the country with strength," Qalibaf added.

The country is grappling with persistently high inflation, with the Central Bank of Iran reporting that the annual inflation rate rose to 53.9% in the 12 months ending in the second month of the current Iranian year, compared with the same period a year earlier.

China and Iran 'true' partners

Qalibaf said Iran needs "blocs" and added, "I say clearly – these blocs must definitely take shape, and in a way, they have already taken shape."

"Whatever bloc takes shape, there will be two certain countries in it – without doubt, China and Iran."

Qalibaf went on to say that, "I will move forward on this path with strength – in all its dimensions, in technology, in the economy, and in politics. We must pursue these matters with dignity, but without tension, and with logic."

Iran's Parliament speaker added, "Certainly, China is unique for us. It is we who must make China believe – and it will believe – that we are not merely a customer or a trade counterpart, but that we truly are a full partner with China."

Economy Desk

Iran's Parliament speaker underlined on Wednesday that the country should shift its focus from the military arena to the economy, calling for the mobilization of domestic capabilities to ease pressure on the public and improve living standards. Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf, who also serves as Iran's special representative

for China affairs, made the remarks at a policy meeting with the Iran Chamber of Commerce, where he said, "Today, we must take over the front line from the young men standing by the missile launchers, stand firm, and bring prosperity to the people."

Qalibaf, speaking at the "consultative meeting of the special representative for China affairs with the Iran Chamber

CBI urges stronger banking ties with Moscow, more INSTC financing

'Iran-Russia payment link phase 3 due in two months'

Economy Desk

The governor of the Central Bank of Iran (CBI) called on Wednesday for expanded banking cooperation with Russia, urging greater financing capacity for bilateral trade and a stronger role for a Russian bank in supporting a key international transport corridor.

Abdolnasser Hemmati, during a visit to Russia's Mir Business Bank, called for broader banking cooperation, increased financing capacity for bilateral trade and a stronger role for the bank in supporting the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC).

According to IRNA, Hemmati arrived in Moscow on Tuesday for talks with Russian officials aimed at expanding monetary and banking cooperation between the two countries. He said upon arrival that the third phase of a bilateral monetary and banking agreement linking Iran's SHETAB and Russia's Mir payment networks would become operational within the next two months.

During his visit to Mir Business Bank on Wednesday, Hemmati said the Russian bank had made significant progress in recent years and that measures taken by the institution could help complete supply chains and provide additional services to businesses in both countries. He said development of the North-South Corridor should be pursued more vigorously. He said plans were underway



Central Bank of Iran Governor Abdolnasser Hemmati (2nd R) meets with officials of Russia's Mir Business Bank during a visit to the bank in Moscow, June 17, 2026.

● IRNA

to expand capacity in Iran's northern regions, increase maritime transportation and place greater focus on sourcing goods through Russia.

"The Iranian government's policy is to expand bilateral trade, and the banking network will strongly support this path," the CBI chief said. "The volume of trade between the two countries has much greater growth potential, and strengthening financial and banking infrastructure can help achieve that goal," he added.

"We expect Russian banks to expand cooperation in opening letters of credit (LCs) for Iranian parties so that medium-term financing and the import of goods needed by the country can be facilitated. At the same time, efforts will continue to expand Iranian exports to the Russian market," he added.

Russia and Iran's trade turnover rose 16.2% year-on-year to \$4.8 billion in 2024, according to Russian officials, who say bilateral trade remains below

its potential.

The monetary agreement between Iran and Russia became operational in January 2025, enabling the two countries to use their national currencies — the rial and the ruble — as the basis for trade settlement at agreed exchange rates in the commercial foreign exchange market.

Russia's Mir card network was connected to Iran's SHETAB banking network in November 2024. The first and second phases of the SHETAB Mir payment system have already been completed. Hemmati said on Tuesday that the third phase of the Iran-Russia monetary and banking agreement, involving the integration of the SHETAB and Mir banking networks, would be implemented within a maximum of two months.

Hemmati told reporters in Moscow that the necessary steps for the third phase were currently underway. With the completion of the third phase, Iranian travelers in Russia will be able to use their domestic bank cards to make purchases, he said.

Minister highlights Iran's economic deterrence to counter sanctions

Economy Desk

Iran has reached a level of economic and industrial capability where sanctions can no longer affect its economy as they once did, said the minister of industry, mine and trade.

Mohammad Atabak, speaking at a ministry meeting also attended by Vice President for Strategic and Parliamentary Affairs Mohsen Esmaeili, described Iran's current position as strong and influential.

He said that national unity, coordinated leadership, and broad public participation have enabled the country to withstand external pressure while maintaining economic and industrial activity, Press TV reported.

"The country has reached a stage of deterrence and capability where sanctions can no longer affect economic activity in the same way they did in the past," Atabak stated.

He also credited the public and security forces for helping preserve stability and national strength

during challenging periods. The minister announced the establishment of a central headquarters for production, trade, and market regulation during the US-Israeli aggression. Despite restrictions and operational difficulties during the aggression, manufacturers continued production and maintained supply chains for essential goods, he noted.

A sharp rise in demand was managed through centralized coordination, cooperation with the private sector, additional production shifts, the removal of unnecessary procedures, and the direct distribution of raw materials, Atabak explained. As a result, he said, essential goods remained available throughout the war and were not removed from store shelves or markets.

Atabak noted that the industrial sector sustained the heaviest losses during the war, with more than 3,300 industrial units coming under attack.

However, reconstruction

efforts began immediately, and some facilities, including Mobarakeh Steel's number 8 furnace, have already resumed operations, he added.

He expressed hope that additional proposals submitted by the ministry would be approved swiftly to help sustain production and strengthen the national economy.

As the industrial sector demonstrates resilience, with reconstruction underway for over 3,300 damaged production units, the diplomatic front is simultaneously pressing forward to consolidate the country's position.

The latest US-Israeli aggression against Iran began on February 28 and continued until April 7, prompting Iranian retaliatory operations. Following a ceasefire on April 8, ensuing negotiations mediated by Pakistan eventually resulted in the MOU, with further intensive talks expected over the next 60 days to reach a comprehensive agreement.

Shared interests key ...

One way to prevent such an outcome is for Iran and the United States to move toward reducing their differences, defining shared interests, and normalizing relations so that these factors can serve as safeguards for the agreement. Unfortunately, that did not happen with the JCPOA, and the absence of such foundations ultimately contributed to its demise.

Iran's deputy foreign minister has said that if Israel violates its commitments, a mechanism outlined in the memorandum of understanding will be activated, though no details have been disclosed. What scenarios or models can be envisaged for such a mechanism? Could it be purely political and diplomatic, or might it also involve security and field-related dimensions?

Israel was not directly present in the Iran-US negotiations, although it was informed of certain aspects of the agreement. Based on reports published in Western and Israeli media, the entire text was not coordinated with Israel. Moreover, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and other ministers were reportedly caught off guard by both the announcement of the agreement and certain provisions, including the inclusion of Lebanon.

Some ministers have criticized both the agreement and the US administration, explicitly declaring that they do not consider themselves bound by its provisions. Israeli officials continue to insist on maintaining freedom of action in Lebanon.

This raises a highly important question: how can the United States prevent Israeli attacks in Lebanon? Will it rely solely on personal pressure and threats from Pres-

ident Trump toward Netanyahu, as has been witnessed on multiple occasions, including during discussions over a Gaza ceasefire? Or will Washington step up its pressure, potentially extending it to public threats as well?

Given the complexity of US-Israeli relations, it is difficult to predict the mechanism. It is certainly political in nature, but its exact form is not easily foreseeable. It could involve a US commitment to compel Israel to withdraw under specific conditions, including Hezbollah's commitment to maintaining a ceasefire.

Nevertheless, the Israeli occupation of parts of Lebanon and continued Israeli attacks there appear to remain among the issues most likely to threaten the agreement.

What information is available regarding the financing mechanism, governance

structure, and allocation of resources for the reported \$300 billion investment fund to be established with the participation of Arab countries in the region? What objectives is the fund expected to pursue, and what benefits would it offer participating parties?

Almost none has been published. What is known so far is that the United States is not expected to contribute financially to the fund. Persian Gulf Arab countries will most likely provide the bulk of its resources. It is also reasonable to assume that a portion of Iran's frozen or blocked assets abroad could be allocated to the fund.

The fund appears to be designed as an alternative to discussions surrounding war reparations and Iran's post-war reconstruction, thereby addressing Iranian concerns through a different framework. Persian Gulf Arab states are also likely to

welcome the initiative, as they have been seeking stronger economic ties with Iran and the creation of shared economic interests with Tehran in order to establish broader areas of cooperation.

Iranian officials, for their part, would hope that the fund not only attracts substantial investment but also enables Persian Gulf Arab countries to use their influence in Washington to help facilitate the lifting of US sanctions on Iran. Without sanctions relief, the fund would have little practical ability to operate.

In this sense, the fund and its proposed \$300 billion capital base could serve as a form of guarantee for sanctions relief. Should sanctions be reimposed or intensified, the Arab countries financing the fund would also suffer losses, or their investments could effectively be held hostage alongside Iran's restricted assets.

Consequences of recent election in Armenia

By Motahare Heydari
Expert on Caucasus affairs

OPINION

The victory of Armenia's Civil Contract (KP) Party, which is led by incumbent Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, in the recent parliamentary election occurred notwithstanding compounded pressures and alleged Russian interference. It enables the Armenian government to continue reducing dependence upon Moscow and strengthening ties with the West with a measure of public support. Nevertheless, the failure to attain a two-thirds majority of parliamentary seats has created constraints upon fundamental reforms, such as constitutional amendments. This victory signifies the continuation of Armenia's current orientation toward greater autonomy in the diplomatic sphere and furnishes a robust foundation for advancing a diversification policy.

Armenia's trajectory toward Europe should be analyzed as a synthesis of strategic realism and the bitter lessons derived from security experiences. Following Russia's inability to provide effective support during the Karabakh crises, Armenia suspended its practical participation in the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), procured its required military equipment from France and India, and expanded cooperation with the European Union. The convening of the important European Political Community summit in Yerevan and the passing of legislation associated with the frameworks for cooperation reinforced this orientation, and the recent election validated it as the conscious choice of many citizens. It is said that this process constitutes a serious endeavor in Yerevan to diversify foreign relations and attain more durable security and development.



Armenia's distancing from Russia carries dual consequences, the meticulous examination of which is indispensable on an evidentiary basis. From a security perspective, the diminution of Moscow's traditional guarantees creates short-term risks, particularly in the face of pressures from Azerbaijan or Turkey. However, Armenia is strengthening its resilience and autonomy through the acquisition of diverse defensive equipment and European monitoring missions. From an economic standpoint, prior dependence was vulnerable and imposed constraints; however, investments by the European Union, new transit corridors, and partner diversification appear to have contributed to sustaining economic growth and providing opportunities for sustainable development, although transitional challenges and potential pressures from Moscow

remain. The reorientation of Armenia's foreign policy toward the West constitutes a long-term strategic choice rooted in the 2018 Velvet Revolution and accelerated by post-war realities following the war in Ukraine and Russia's weakening position. Pashinyan's recent victory consolidated this policy; however, reason dictates that it should not be regarded as entirely irreversible because it remains contingent upon progress in peace efforts with Azerbaijan and the management of associated risks. This transformation appears to be a response to geopolitical developments and an endeavor to establish a more equilibrated framework of international relations. The recent election can largely be seen as having weakened Armenia's relationship with Russia. Despite the campaign of opposition forces aligned with Moscow,

Pashinyan's victory demonstrated that Russian influence is diminishing and that Armenia is advancing toward a more autonomous foreign policy. The approximately 30% parliamentary presence of parties aligned with Russia underscores that this distancing must proceed with utmost caution, diplomatic rationality, and the prioritization of national interests in order to preserve stability. Among the factors behind the victory of the Civil Contract party, one may cite the relative management of economic difficulties, the presentation of the election as a choice between peace and adventurism, the absence of a strong opposition alternative, and support for external diversification. These factors are connected with dissatisfaction regarding prolonged dependence upon Russia and a preference for pragmatic approaches to securi-



Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan waves his hat at an event while his party members applaud.
● SOCIAL MEDIA

ty and progress. Through their votes, citizens endorsed a path that prioritizes the mitigation of the risks associated with excessive dependence. Closer relations with the European Union may generate opportunities such as increased foreign investment, access to advanced markets, institutional reforms, the strengthening of the rule of law, and energy corridors that support long-term development. However, threats such as Russian economic pressures, regional tensions, and the difficulties of transitioning from Eurasian structures persist. The meticulous and gradual management of this equilibrium is crucial for maximizing advantages and minimizing risks. Armenia's reduced dependence upon Russia may steer the balance of power in the South Caucasus toward greater plurality and diversification. The diminution of Moscow's influence has expanded the space available for the European Union, the United States, India, and new forms of engagement, and may contribute to more durable peace. Although the danger of a security vacuum exists in the short term, evidence indicates that this path, notwithstanding its challenges, may constitute an appropriate choice for strengthening Armenia's sustainable security, economic development, and for shifting the balance in favor of greater independence.

The article was first published in Persian by the Strategic Council on Foreign Relations.



António Costa, the president of the European Council, speaks during a session of the European Political Community summit, held in Yerevan, Armenia, on May 4, 2026.
● HETQ



The recent election can largely be seen as having weakened Armenia's relationship with Russia. Despite the campaign of opposition forces aligned with Moscow, Pashinyan's victory demonstrated that Russian influence is diminishing and that Armenia is advancing toward a more autonomous foreign policy. The approximately 30% parliamentary presence of parties aligned with Russia underscores that this distancing must proceed with utmost caution, diplomatic rationality, and the prioritization of national interests in order to preserve stability.



Armenia's election, peace in South Caucasus



By Maximilian Hess
Associate fellow at the
International Institute
for Strategic Studies

OPINION

On June 7, 2026, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan won re-election to a third term in Armenia's parliamentary elections. Pashinyan's Civil Contract party secured 64 of 105 seats in the legislature, giving him a mandate to push on with two major foreign policy shifts. Firstly, Pashinyan seeks to finalise a peace deal with Azerbaijan and to normalise ties with Turkey, a process combined with abandoning nationalist claims to the Karabakh territory after Azerbaijan regained full control of this region in 2023. Secondly, Pashinyan has vowed to seek further integration with the European Union, despite major economic pressure from Russia, with which Yerevan is formally in a customs union as well as a mutual-defence treaty organisation — the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) and Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), respectively.

Pashinyan's electoral success is remarkable. An erstwhile journalist, carried to power on the back of an anti-corruption protest movement in 2018, his re-election despite military defeat and the loss of control over Karabakh — a highly emotive issue in Armenia — is a near unprecedented feat. He was first re-elected in 2021, just seven months after Azerbaijani forces retook more than two-thirds of Armenian-held territory in and around the region. The second time was less than three years after Azerbaijani forces retook all of it, displacing 100,000–120,000 ethnic Armenians. Moreover, Pashinyan's victories have come despite him lacking the military credentials and historic role in leading operations in the First Nagorno-Karabakh War of 1988–94, or the Russia-linked wealth of his leading



JESS FRAMPTON/GZERO MEDIA

electoral rivals.

How did he do it?

Pashinyan's electoral success is all the more remarkable given his break with historical claims to Karabakh. In an April speech, he called future claims to the territory a "geopolitical trap" and vowed to put Armenia on the "course of creative and peaceful history" — alluding to the draft peace agreement initialled with Azerbaijan last year and talks with Turkey that saw Ankara lift decades-old trade restrictions this May. A key part of Pashinyan's success has been his pursuit of multilateral engagement. The draft peace agreement with Azerbaijan was belatedly supported by United States President Donald Trump's second

administration, which seized on the effort to rename the most controversial aspect — a trade corridor via southern Armenia linking Azerbaijan and its exclave of Nakhchivan as well as Turkey by rail — the Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity (TRIPP), instead of the "Zangezur Corridor" previously insisted upon by Azerbaijan, a name many saw as carrying an inherent irredentist threat. Furthermore, Pashinyan argued that his electoral rivals had not benefited Armenia during their time in power before 2018, and that new opposition parties, whose leaders had deep ties to Moscow, would not do so in the future. After all, Moscow ignored Armenia's 2022 request for assistance under

the CSTO treaty when Azerbaijani forces were moving into de jure Armenian territory in the same region through which the TRIPP corridor will run. He also tied his campaign to Armenia's European aspirations, pledging to prepare the country for EU candidacy status if re-elected. Russia's ability to exert pressure also fell dramatically since it dedicated resources to its war against Ukraine — a remarkable turnaround given the Kremlin's lynchpin role in ending the 2020 Second Nagorno-Karabakh War. Finally, the increased confidence in the power of Azerbaijan's regime, led by Ilham Aliyev, following its military victories, has reduced the need for Baku to seek further successes against Armenia, which has much less well-funded and equipped armed forces.

The latter puts the economic success Armenia has seen in the last four years — to become the fastest-growing economy on the continent since 2022, with growth at 7.2% of GDP last

The path to sustainable peace

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However, Pashinyan now faces his greatest challenge yet: finalising the peace agreement with Azerbaijan, while standing up to pressure from Russia over his government's Western aspirations, given Russia's status as its lead trade partner. Combined with EU pressure to crack down on sanctions evasion linked to Russia, Pashinyan's government will need even more explicit backing, and potentially aid, from Europe to weather the decreased support for its agenda from the Armenian public that is likely to result.

year according to the IMF — at risk, given Russia's status as its lead trade partner. Combined with EU pressure to crack down on sanctions evasion linked to Russia, Pashinyan's government will need even more explicit backing, and potentially aid, from Europe to weather the decreased support for its agenda from the Armenian public that is likely to result.

Finalising peace with Azerbaijan remains a formidable challenge given Azerbaijan's insistence that Armenia amend its constitution — to remove an indirect reference to Nagorno-Karabakh — as part of the process. While Pashinyan has said he plans to pursue such a vote, Civil Contract is short of the two-thirds majority in the legislature required to do so. The two parliamentary opposition parties — vehicles for the Russian-linked businessman Samvel Karapetyan and for former Armenian president Robert Kocharyan, who was also the first "president" of the ethnic Armenian state in Karabakh — are unlikely to entertain such proposals.

Further progress will depend on wider support that builds on the landmark visit by European leaders to Yerevan ahead of the election. Investigations by local and foreign journalists helped mitigate Russian influence campaigns, but since the election, Russia has further intensified economic pressure by expanding its trade controls. Delicate diplomacy and considerable help will be required to complete the journey.

The article was first published by the International Institute for Strategic Studies.



Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan (front) speaks to the press as vote counting continued across the country in Yerevan, Armenia, on June 8, 2026.
OZGE ELIF KIZIL/AA

Yazdani vs. Azarpira to headline Iran's freestyle trials for World Championships

Sports Desk

All eyes will be on a highly anticipated 97kg showdown when Hassan Yazdani and Amirali Azarpira face off in a best-of-three series for a place in Iran's freestyle squad for October's Wrestling World Championships in Astana.

With seven wrestlers having already secured their spots for the Kazakh capital, the remaining three places in the 74kg, 92kg and 97kg divisions will be decided at the national team trials, held on the sidelines of the International Takhti Cup in Kerman. Despite their combined international success, both Yazdani and Azarpira will enter the trials looking to bounce back from disappointing outings in their most recent major competitions. Sidelined for 18 months by a shoulder injury he sustained in his 86kg final defeat at the Paris 2024 Olympics, Yazdani - winner of a national-record 10 world and Olympic medals - marked his return to the mat with two emphatic victories on the final day

of the Iranian Wrestling Premier League last December.

However, the decorated Iranian received a harsh reality check at the Zagreb Open Ranking Series event in February, raising doubts over his pursuit of an elusive second Olympic gold medal at Los Angeles 2028.

Yazdani appeared to be back to his best in the Croatian capital, cruising to three technical-superiority victories in the morning session to reach the final. He looked in control early in the title bout, taking a 2-1 lead into the break against Stephen Buchanan, only for the American to storm back with a dominant second-period display and secure a shock 13-3 victory. The defeat marked the first technical-superiority loss of Yazdani's illustrious career.

Azarpira, meanwhile, enjoyed an impressive 2025 campaign, adding a world silver medal to his Paris Olympic bronze before claiming gold at the Islamic Sol-

idarity Games. However, April's Asian Championships proved one to forget for the 24-year-old, who settled for silver after a 4-0 defeat to Japan's Arash Yoshida in the final.

With Russian great Abdurashid Sadulaev, American world champion Kyle Snyder and Bahrain's Olympic gold medalist Akhmed

Tazhudinov all expected to feature in a star-studded 97kg field, whoever emerges victorious from Friday's trials will be looking to launch a statement campaign in Astana ahead of the Olympic Games two years from now.

The other two divisions being contested in the Iranian trials

also boast plenty of international pedigree, with all four wrestlers having won medals across various age groups and senior-level events in recent years.

In the 74kg division, Younes Emami and Amirmohammad Yazdani, who share eight senior world and Asian medals between them, will square off in a rematch of last year's trial at the Ulaanbaatar Open. Emami came out on top on that occasion to secure a place at the World Championships, though he ultimately fell short of the podium in Zagreb after losing the bronze-medal match.

Amirmohammad Yazdani also endured a disappointing Asian Championships campaign by Iranian standards, finishing with bronze after a quarter-final defeat to eventual champion Yoshinosuke Aoyagi of Japan.

The 92kg category, meanwhile, has developed into one of the country's most compelling domestic rivalries, featuring Amirhossein

Firouzpour and Mohammad-Mobin Azimi.

A winner of five age-group world titles since 2019, Firouzpour defeated Azimi to earn a place at the 2025 World Championships, where he marked his debut at the global showpiece with a bronze medal.

Azimi responded in impressive fashion, capturing the world under-23 title later that year before claiming gold medals at both the Zagreb Open and the Asian Championships during the 2026 season.

The winners of Friday's deciders will join reigning world champions Rahman Amouzad (65kg) and Amirhossein Zare' (125kg), alongside Milad Valizadeh (57kg), Ahmad Mohammadnejad Javan (61kg), Sina Khalili (70kg), Mohammad Nokhodi (79kg) and two-time world champion Kamran Qasempour (86kg) in Iran's 10-man squad for the World Championships. The defeated wrestlers, meanwhile, will have an opportunity to represent the country at the Aichi-Nagoya Asian Games in September.



Freestyle wrestlers Hassan Yazdani (l) and Amirali Azarpira will go head-to-head for Iran's 97kg spot at October's World Championships.

● IAWFIR

Iran missed 'golden opportunity' against New Zealand, Jalali says

By Sadeq Dehqan
Staff writer

INTERVIEW

Iran squandered "a golden opportunity" to boost its chances of reaching the knockout stage of the 2026 FIFA World Cup after settling for a 2-2 draw against New Zealand, according to football expert and former coach Majid Jalali.

"The most important priority in the remaining group-stage matches against Belgium and Egypt should be avoiding goals and strengthening our defensive structure," Jalali told Iran Daily.

The veteran analyst praised the efforts of the Iranian players in their opening group-stage fixture, noting the difficult circumstances under which the team entered the tournament.

"If we want to be fair, we have to acknowledge that the players went into this match under tremendous pressure," he said.

"They had a difficult journey to get there, lacked a proper preparation camp and did not play enough quality friendly matches. Despite all that, they delivered a respectable performance and deserve appreciation. The conditions facing our national team were not comparable to those of many of the other teams in the tournament." Nevertheless, Jalali believes Iran should have secured all three points against New Zealand.

"Looking at New Zealand, I felt that even under these circumstances we had the ability to beat them," he said. "Iranian football has the necessary quality, provided that better decisions are made based on available data and analysis and that the team approaches the match with a different mindset."

Jalali questioned the starting lineup selected by the coaching staff, arguing that Iran should have adopted a more aggressive approach from the outset.

"Although four substitutions were made during the match, I believe the starting lineup could have been stronger and allowed us to put more pressure on the opponent from the beginning," he said. "We needed more technically gifted and creative players on the field. Players such as Mahdi Qayedi and other attack-minded footballers could have offered greater creativity and helped us take the initiative."

"It is a pity because we missed a very good opportunity to collect a full three points and significantly improve our chances



Iran's Mohammad Mohebbi scores their second goal past New Zealand's Max Crocombe during a FIFA World Cup match in Los Angeles Stadium, Inglewood, California, US on June 15, 2026.

● REUTERS

of progressing," the former Football Federation technical director said. "Some of the coaching staff's assumptions were understandable because New Zealand was a relatively unfamiliar opponent and there was limited information available. But if we were aiming to qualify from this group, this was clearly the match we needed to win."

Jalali also highlighted weaknesses in Iran's midfield balance, arguing that the team lacked sufficient defensive protection in front of the back line. "To win matches like this, you first need to make sure you do not concede," he said. "In midfield, only Saeid Ezzatollahi provided the defensive resilience required for such a

game, and that was not enough. We needed at least one more ball-winning midfielder alongside him. Players such as Roozbeh Cheshmi, Amirmohammad Razzaqinia or even Ehsan Hajisafi could have helped strengthen the middle of the pitch."

According to Jalali, Iran's defensive shortcomings were exposed whenever possession was lost.

"We already knew that the team had defensive issues," he said. "When the midfield is unable to win duels and intercept passes, those problems become even more obvious. Every time

contribute more defensively. In the remaining games, the main objective must be not conceding goals."

Jalali also commented on the inclusion of less-established players such as Shahriar Moghanlou and Arya Yousefi in the starting lineup.

"These players have not often been used in the starting eleven before, but there are always factors inside training camps that outsiders do not see," he said. "The coaching staff undoubtedly has more information than anyone else and understands the reasons behind those decisions."

Assessing the performances of Iran's key players, Jalali said midfielder Saman Qoddous fell short of expectations, while Ezzatollahi and striker Mahdi Taremi delivered relatively solid displays.

Despite his concerns, Jalali insisted Iran's hopes of advancing remain alive.

"We missed a golden opportunity against New Zealand, but football always leaves room for hope," he said. "We have players capable of improving the team's defensive stability if they are used properly. Against Belgium and Egypt, the most important thing is not conceding."

He added that the value of the point earned against New Zealand was limited given the strength of the remaining opposition.

"If we had earned this point against Belgium or Egypt, it would have been considered a very good result and our chances of qualification would have increased significantly," Jalali said. "The situation is different now because both Belgium and Egypt are capable of beating New Zealand. That makes it crucial for us to pick up points from the remaining two matches. Even two draws could potentially keep Iran in contention to advance as one of the best third-placed teams."

Iran eyes multiple taekwondo golds at Asian Games: Saei

Sports Desk

Iran will be targeting "not just one, but multiple gold medals" in taekwondo at the Aichi-Nagoya Asian Games in September, according to Iranian Taekwondo Federation president Hadi Saei.

The country's men's and women's national teams began preparations in Tehran on Tuesday, with Iran seeking its first taekwondo gold medals at the continental showpiece since the 2018 Asian Games in Jakarta, where Mirhashem Hosseini and Saeid Rajabi topped the podium in their respective men's weight classes.

"The Asian Games are our foremost target moving forward. It is an event of tremendous importance not only for us, but for the entire sporting community in the country," Saei said during the opening session of the men's training camp.

"The Ministry of Sport and the National Olympic Committee are counting heavily on taekwondo medals - particularly gold medals - and we share those expectations. We must win gold at these Games. In fact, our expectation is not just one gold medal, but multiple gold medals."

Saei, Iran's most decorated Olympian with two gold medals and one bronze, also reflected on the country's performance at the previous Asian Games.

"At the previous edition, we had three athletes reach the finals and felt we deserved to win gold medals. Unfortunately, a series of incidents and what we believed was flawed refereeing by the host nation prevented us from achieving that goal," he said.

Iran won three silver and two bronze medals in the men's competition at Hangzhou 2022, while the women's team collected two bronze medals in the kyorugi events and saw Marjan Salahshouri finish third

in the women's poomsae competition.

"Taekwondo medals will have a significant impact on Iran's position in the overall medal standings at the Asian Games," Saei said.

"In addition to South Korea, our main rivals include Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and several other countries competing with Iran in the medal table. That is why taekwondo gold medals carry added importance. Success in this sport could play a decisive role in improving Iran's final ranking at the Games."

With Payam Khanlarkhani at the helm as head coach, the Iranian men's squad features Olympic champion Arian Salimi and Olympic silver medalist Mehran Barkhordari, who won gold and silver respectively at the Paris Olympics, alongside reigning world and Asian champion Abolfazl Zandi.

The training camp also includes Mahdi Hajimousaei and Amirina Bakhtiari, who captured Asian titles last month, as well as Asian silver medalist Yassin Valizadeh, Asian bronze medalist Amirreza Sadeqian, Mohammadhossein Yazdani, Amirabbas Rahnama and Ali Najafi.

While Zandi (-58kg), Hajimousaei (-68kg) and Salimi (+80kg) have already secured their places at the Asian Games, the men's -80kg berth remains up for grabs in a four-way contest in the coming days.

Olympic silver medalist Nahid Kiani, fresh from winning Asian gold in May, headlines the Iranian women's squad, which also includes Asian bronze medalist Yalda Valinejad, Rozhan Goudarzi, Saina Karimi, Hasti Mohammadi, Saghar Moradi, Fereshteh Fathi, Baran Nemat, Fatemeh Amadi and reigning two-time world junior champion Hana Zarrinkamar. Iran's women's selection trials for the Asian Games will take place on Saturday.

Mashhad stone carving art in need of revival

Iranica Desk

A handicrafts expert says reviving the art of stone carving is not only a cultural responsibility toward citizens, but also an opportunity to introduce it at national and international levels. Speaking to ISNA, Maryam Momtazian said the traditional stone carving art in Iran's Khorasan Razavi Province has significantly faded in recent years and is close to being forgotten, adding that Mashhad has the potential to offer a unique and lasting souvenir of this kind.

She noted that the connection between younger generations and stone carving has become very limited and, in some cases, completely lost. "If greater attention is given to this indigenous art and if creative industries support it, it could first establish a sustainable link between handicraft enthusiasts and practitioners, and ultimately help strengthen the economic cycle of the sector," she said.



Momtazian added that, to help address the issue and strengthen stone carving in the handicrafts market, innovative products could be developed using Mashhad serpentine stone, which is not only durable but also has distinctive and even therapeutic properties. She said she has ideas in the field of creative industries that could produce positive outcomes.

She emphasized that the goal of these proposals is to revive this valuable art and reconnect younger generations with modern applications of stone carving. In this regard, she said she has held numerous discussions with institutions such as the municipality, the city council, and other relevant bodies, and is actively pursuing the implementation of



● mashhadrokhshar.ir

the plan. The artist stressed that handicrafts today require more attention and support from responsible institutions than ever before. She noted that such support — especially in creative industries related to handicrafts — has been emphasized by experts and officials, including managers of science and technology parks,

but still needs to be strengthened. She added that despite difficult economic conditions, it is still possible through effort, innovation, and proper planning to both improve the livelihoods of industry practitioners and contribute to broader economic development and job creation.

Referring to cities such as Isfahan, she said experience shows how

a local art can become a cultural identity and tourist attraction. She noted that live demonstrations of artistic production can create meaningful cultural engagement while also increasing sales opportunities. She added that Mashhad once had a stone carving bazaar, but this heritage has disappeared, and today even many local children are unaware of it.

Momtazian identified resistance to innovation and the need to prove practical value as key challenges for creative ideas in handicrafts. She said acceptance of new ideas requires not only originality but also a clear understanding of their function and benefits.

She concluded that in the fields of handicrafts, tourism, and cultural heritage, promotional and media support plays a crucial role. However, she said such support is currently insufficient and needs to be strengthened. Despite existing challenges, she remains optimistic about the future of the project and believes it has investment potential.

Ancient mound near Dastena under archaeological study

Iranica Desk

A field trial excavation program is being carried out at an ancient mound site northeast of Dastena, Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari Province, to determine the extent of the archaeological remains and propose a protective buffer zone, with financial support from the Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Department of Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari Province, said the head of the archaeological survey team.

Mohsen Heydari said the excavation is being conducted under an official permit from the Research Institute of Cultural Heritage and Tourism and with the approval of the Archaeology Research Center. He is leading the project as a faculty member of the Archaeology Department at Shahid Chamran University of Ahvaz, chtn.ir wrote.

He explained that the archaeological site is located 35 kilometers from Shahrekord, 550 meters northeast of Dastena, and east of the Bibi Hajer shrine and Dastena Cemetery. The site lies on the southern slopes of a high series of hills known as Mount Bibi Hajer, which stretches from east to west.

Heydari noted that the site has suffered irreversible damage in recent years, with parts of its central area being leveled and

excavated. He added that, due to a project to expand the road connecting Dastena to Shalamzar and the possibility of further destruction of parts of the site, defining the archaeological boundaries and protective zone was prioritized.

"Without detailed archaeological studies and a clear understanding of the extent of the remains, there is a risk of irreparable damage to archaeological deposits and cultural remains," he said. According to the archaeologist, the main objective of the field program is to accurately identify the site's boundaries and propose a protective buffer zone, creating a legal safeguard to prevent preventing further destruction of the surviving archaeological remains, particularly from human activities.

Heydari added that small 1-by-1.5-meter test trenches are being excavated within the surrounding area to identify the spread of cultural and archaeological deposits. The work aims to clarify the extent of the remains and provide a basis for protecting the site.

The site, registered as "Imamzadeh Bibi Hajer and the adjacent mound," dates back to the Middle Islamic period particularly the Ilkhanid era and was listed as a national heritage site in 2005 under registration No. 12410.



● chtn.ir

Sisakht becomes growing ecotourism destination

Sisakht, a city in Iran's Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad Province and often described as the jewel of the Zagros Mountains, has long been known among nature lovers and travelers as the "Land of Snow and Sunshine." This enchanting city, combining the soothing cold of the snow-covered peaks of Mount Dena with life-giving springs, has created a unique paradise that bears no resemblance to routine travel experiences.

This is a place on Earth where snow, sunlight, and rock embrace each other to create a symphony of life. Sisakht, known as the "Land of Snow and Water," with its extraordinary wealth of thousands of plant species and roaring springs, is not only a tourist destination but a living miracle of nature that captivates every visitor with its grandeur.

What distinguishes this region from other parts of Iran is its exceptional vegetation cover, with more than a thousand plant and medicinal species. This remarkable biodiversity has the slopes of Mount Dena and the surrounding areas of Sisakht into a natural pharmacy and a collection of some of the world's rarest plants, whose fragrant aroma fills the hiking trails.

Lake Kuhgol, with an area of about half a hectare and a depth of 15 meters, is considered the poetic highlight of this natural landscape. This clear mountain lake, located at high elevations in the Zagros range, shines like a turquoise gem and reflects the sky in its waters.

Located in the heart of the Dena Protected Area, Kuhgol serves as a rich habitat for wildlife including ducks, mallards, cranes, storks, and many other native bird species. The sight of these birds flying over the lake and through wild vegetation creates remarkable scenes for photographers and nature enthusiasts.

After a 30-minute hike through wildflowers and the scent of thousands of medicinal plants,



● Kuhgol Lake ● karnaval.ir

visitors reach one of the most breathtaking natural attractions in the Zagros Mountains. This hiking route itself is considered a recreational and ecotourism attraction.

Mishi Spring, complementing the beauty of Kuhgol, presents another scene of wonder in the "Land of Snow and Water." Flowing along a long, relatively steep valley, it creates a striking landscape among the rocky terrain.

A stream of clear water, resem-



● Mishi Spring ● IRNA

bling strands of pearls, runs through the valley and carries life-giving water downstream. The sound of flowing water forms the natural music of this landscape.

Beyond supplying drinking water to Sisakht, the spring serves as a vital source for irrigating extensive orchards of apples, grapes, and walnuts in the region, producing high-quality agricultural products that are

known both nationally and internationally.

The Director General of the province's Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Organization described Kuhgol and Mishi Spring as among the most popular and strategic attractions of the province during spring and summer.

He added that the region's diverse natural beauty, including towering mountains, dense forests, flowing springs, and rich plant diversity, has turned

it into one of the key tourism destinations in the country.

He noted that pleasant, clean air and easy access due to proximity to the tourist city of Sisakht have significantly increased the appeal of the area for both domestic and international visitors.

He also highlighted the availability of standard seating areas, sanitary facilities, food shops, cafés, and restaurants

in the recreational zones to ensure visitor comfort.

Tourists, he said, can also stay in eco-lodges and licensed guesthouses in Sisakht and surrounding areas for a safe and comfortable experience.

In addition, a vibrant handicraft and local souvenir market operates in the Mishi Spring recreational area, where visitors can purchase rare medicinal plants and organic local products.

To reach this natural paradise, travelers first arrive in Yasuj, the capital of Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad Province, and then travel approximately 35 kilometers northwest to reach Sisakht. From there, a further five-kilometer journey leads to the magical Kuhgol region.

With additional attractions such as the mysterious Deh Sheikh Cave, the ancient stepped village of Kareyak, and the scenic city of Sisakht, the city welcomes more than 40,000 domestic and international tourists annually. This strong tourism flow highlights its potential to become an international tourism hub.

Given the growing interest from global travelers, this hidden paradise is open to nature lovers worldwide. Visitors are invited to travel to Sisakht and experience firsthand the splendor of its thousand plant species and the flowing waters of Dena, creating lasting memories in their travel journals.

Exhibition diplomacy key to postwar tourism recovery



Iranian officials and representatives attend a meeting of the Foreign Exhibitions Policy Council at the Tourism Ministry in Tehran on June 17, 2026 to discuss a roadmap for rebuilding the country's tourism sector through exhibition diplomacy.
 ● CHTN

Arts & Culture Desk

Exhibition diplomacy will play a central role in rebuilding Iran's tourism sector after wartime damage, Deputy Tourism Minister Anoushirvan Mohseni Bandpey said on Wednesday at a meeting of the country's Foreign Exhibitions Policy Council in Tehran. The high-level gathering, held at the Tourism Ministry's deputy office and attended by senior government officials, tourism associations, business chamber rep-

resentatives and free-zone authorities, focused on selecting priority international exhibitions, appointing organizers and defining Iran's global tourism marketing roadmap, CHTN reported. Iran's cultural heritage authorities said that recent strikes by the United States and Israel which began February 28 have damaged 149 historical sites. Mohseni Bandpey described peace, stability and national cohesion as the foundations of tourism recovery, saying the industry must unite

to overcome the impact of wartime losses and restore momentum. "Today, more than ever, we need solidarity across the tourism sector to compensate for the damages and consequences imposed during the war," he said. Deputy minister said 64 tourism facilities and establishments, along with 149 museum, historical and civilizational sites, sustained damage during the conflict. Despite the setbacks, he stressed that international marketing efforts would continue.

"Our plans to introduce Iran's tourism potential to global audiences will not stop," he said, adding that overseas exhibitions remain among the most effective platforms for promotion, market development and tourism diplomacy. With reconstruction costs and economic pressures limiting available resources, the deputy minister said Iran would pursue a more targeted and strategic presence at major tourism fairs abroad. He identified neighboring and border countries as the primary focus of the country's tourism diplomacy and called for greater involvement from free zones, provincial authorities, the Iran Chamber of Commerce and professional tourism organizations. He also proposed leveraging the capacities of border provinces by assigning some exhibitions in neighboring countries to adjacent Iranian provinces for implementation and coordination.

Council members and industry representatives reviewed priority markets and support mechanisms for the private sector, while examining several planning scenarios for participation in foreign tourism exhibitions. Participants emphasized the importance of strengthening Iran's presence in neighboring countries, the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), health tourism markets and key European destinations.

Iran-UAE film enters post-production ahead of festival circuit



Arts & Culture Desk

Iranian-UAE short film 'Hide and Doubt' has moved into post-production after completing principal photography in Tehran, marking the latest joint cinematic venture between the two countries, according to the project's media office.

Written and directed by Mohammad Zolfaghari and Sepehr Vali and produced by Amir Khatibi, the film is now undergoing editing and technical post-production work as its producers prepare it for submission to domestic and international film festivals, PANA reported.

The project is backed by KIMIA ARTS COMPANY, a Dubai-based international arts organization active in cinema, theatre and contemporary arts. The company has positioned cross-border cultural engagement and artistic collaboration between Iran, the wider region and the international arena at the heart of its activities.

With cameras now switched off, the production team has turned its focus to refining the film's final cut and advancing distribution plans for the festival circuit. The cast features Mahrokh Rafizadeh, Pardis Shirvani and Hana Ahmadi.

Iran to receive first of 20 Russian rescue helicopters by March 2027

Social Desk

Iran has moved forward with a major overhaul of its aerial rescue fleet after the Iranian Red Crescent Society signed an agreement in Moscow on Wednesday to purchase 20 helicopters from Russia, with the first four aircraft scheduled for delivery before March 2027, according to Iranian Red Crescent Society (IRCS) Chief Pirhossein Kolivand. Kolivand and Nikolay Kolesov, director general of Russian Helicopters, signed the memorandum at the Russian state-owned company's headquarters as Tehran presses ahead with efforts to strengthen emergency response capabilities across the country, IRNA reported. "Today we signed an agreement for the direct purchase of 20 helicopters from Russia to reinforce Iran's logistics network and air rescue fleet," Kolivand said. He described the deal as an unprecedented step in the history of the Red Crescent Society, adding that a finalized contract for the first four helicopters



would allow their delivery before the Iranian New Year of 1406, which begins in March 2027. The acquisition advances a broader Iran-Russia cooperation plan first outlined in early 2025. Russian and international reports previously estimated the overall program at around \$500 million, including aircraft procurement, spare parts, pilot and technician training, and support services. Kolivand said the helicopters would be equipped with modern technology and night-vision systems, enabling round-the-clock operations. The aircraft will also support medical evacuation missions, emergency relief efforts, and firefighting operations. The new fleet is expect-

ed to significantly expand Iran's ability to respond to natural disasters, wildfires, and emergencies in mountainous and remote regions, marking one of the largest upgrades to the country's airborne rescue capabilities in recent years. Iran's Ambassador to Russia Kazem Jalali and Parliament budget committee chairman Gholamreza Tajardoost attended the signing ceremony.

Tehran unveils three SCO initiatives, calls for wartime protection of universities

Social Desk

Iranian Science, Research and Technology Minister Hossein Simaei Sarraf on Wednesday proposed three major initiatives to expand academic, research and technological cooperation among members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), while urging stronger international protection for universities and scientists during conflicts. Speaking at the SCO University Presidents Forum and the 10th Meeting of SCO Ministers of Education and Science in Minsk on June 17, Simaei Sarraf said scientific cooperation should move beyond declarations and evolve into practical, problem-oriented programs capable of addressing shared regional challenges, IRNA reported. The minister also condemned attacks on universities and scientists, describing academic and cultural institutions as a red line in times of conflict. "Universities should be safe havens for thought, dialogue and hope, not victims of confrontation," he said, calling on the global



scientific community and international organizations to take a clearer and more responsible stance in safeguarding universities, researchers and scientific centers. "Security for universities is security for humanity's future," he added, warning that silence in the face of attacks on academic institutions could encourage further violence against science and civilization. Turning to Iran's proposals, Simaei Sarraf announced a Shanghai Talent and Researcher Exchange Program, under which Iran is prepared to offer 100 annual scholarships for master's and doctoral students as well as 10 postdoctoral research op-

portunities at its leading universities. The program would focus on joint research addressing real-world challenges across the region. He also proposed the creation of a Shanghai Network of Innovative and Technological Universities, linking leading universities and science and technology parks to accelerate commercialization of research and strengthen university-industry cooperation. Iran expressed readiness to host the network's secretariat. As a third initiative, the minister called for the establishment of joint research consortia in three strategic fields: Intelligent natural resource manage-

ment, particularly water resources, artificial intelligence, and advanced pharmaceutical technologies. The minister said the true value of science lies in improving people's lives and solving societal problems, stressing that agreements and policy documents become meaningful only when translated into action in classrooms, laboratories and research centers. "Universities are not merely educational institutions," he said. "They must serve as standard-bearers of rationality, entrepreneurship, hope and international scientific cooperation." The SCO education and science ministers' meeting continues in Minsk through Thursday, focusing on expanding multilateral cooperation in education, research and technology across the region.

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