

Iran finds common purpose
and of f the fie ldatWorldCup
Knockoutroundthe re f ortaking,
butEgyptpre se ntstoughte st

INTERVIEW
EXCLUSIVE

8 >



Iran Daily

Vol. 8148 • Tuesday, June 23, 2026 • Tir 02, 1405 • Muharram 08, 1448 • 100,000 rials • 8 pages

irandaily.ir | newspaper.irandaily.ir | IranDailyWeb

Pezeshkian: Iran will not bow to excessive demands in negotiations

Pre side nt due in Pakistan today for one -day visit

2 >



'Encouraging progress':

Iran, US wrap first round of Switzerland talks

2 >



Iran crude exports reach 36 million barrels since June 15

NIOC shipment equals nearly half of Iran's monthly oil exports

3 >



From oud to 'taroud'

An Iranian instrument makes a comeback, tradition and survival

INTERVIEW
EXCLUSIVE

4 >



Living traditions of Muharram in northern Iran

7 >

FIFA World Cup:

'Written in history': Iran coach Qalenoee hails hard-fought point against Belgium



6 >

Iran's goalkeeper #01 Alireza Beiranvand makes a save during the 2026 World Cup Group G football match between Belgium and Iran at the Los Angeles Stadium in Inglewood on June 21, 2026.

AFP

France seeks to claim Europe's place in Iran talks

By De Iaram Ahmadi
Staff writer

INTERVIEW
EXCLUSIVE

French Foreign Minister Jean-Noël Barrot has said Paris will not endorse the lifting of UN sanctions under a potential Iran-US agreement unless it is satisfied with the terms of the final deal.



Abed Akbari

Iran negotiations also address Iran's ballistic missile program and support for regional militant groups. In an in-

terview with international affairs analyst Abed Akbari, Iran Daily examined the roots and implications of France's position. He believes Paris is seeking to bring Europe back to the center of the negotiating equation. At the same time, while France possesses important levers to influence the process, the United States ultimately retains a strong capacity to bring its European allies into line if the political will exists.

IRAN DAILY: How should the French foreign minister's remarks be interpreted? Is Paris acting in coordination with Washington as an external pressure point, or is it trying to incorporate its own interests and demands into the final agreement?

AKBARI: Paris' position should not be viewed solely through the lens of coordi-

nation with Washington, although strategic alignment across the Atlantic remains a reality. France has traditionally sought to play an independent role in the Iranian nuclear file and has been reluctant to present itself as merely following the US lead. Even during the negotiations that culminated in the 2015 nuclear deal, Paris consistently adopted some of the toughest positions among European countries.

Under the current circumstances, part of France's stance can be seen as an effort to maintain pressure on Iran and strengthen the West's bargaining position. Another part, however, stems from Europe's own concerns. European governments increasingly feel that their role has been sidelined in recent diplomatic developments, particularly if direct understandings emerge between Tehran and Wash-

ington. In that sense, France and some of its European partners are trying to signal that achieving a durable and comprehensive agreement without Europe's active involvement would be difficult. In other words, beyond serving as an "external pressure" actor, Paris is also seeking to bring Europe back to the center of the negotiating equation.

To what extent can France and other European countries influence the outcome of a final agreement? Do tools such as UN mechanisms and international sanctions provide the means to gain bargaining power?

Europe's influence lies less in defining the overall framework of an agreement and more in shaping its details and implementation mechanisms. The reality is that if Iran and the United States reach a

strategic-level understanding, European countries are unlikely to be able to block it. However, they still retain significant leverage.

First, the three European parties to the nuclear deal continue to play a role in the legal mechanisms associated with Iran's nuclear file. Second, a substantial portion of non-US sanctions, as well as financial and banking restrictions, falls within Europe's sphere of authority. Third, should the issue be brought before the UN Security Council, the positions of European powers could affect the final shape of the legal and international arrangements.

Europe therefore cannot dictate the overall direction of a deal, but it can raise the political and legal costs of certain decisions and influence how any agreement is ultimately implemented.

Page 2 >



'Encouraging progress': Iran, US wrap first round of Switzerland talks



Iran's delegation including Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi (C) and Parliament Speaker Mohammed Baqer Qalibaf (right) arrive for a quadrilateral meeting between the United States, Iran, Pakistan and Qatar at the Burgenstock luxury hotel complex near Lake Lucerne, Switzerland, on June 21, 2026.
● AFP

also been agreed to prevent fighting from erupting again, they said. Lebanon was pitched into the conflict as Hezbollah resistance group attacked Israel over the war on Tehran, prompting Israel's brutal strikes on Lebanon.

Building on Islamabad MoU

Sunday's meeting followed an interim deal digitally signed last week between the presidents of Iran and the US and stretched into the early hours of Monday. The memorandum, which contains 14 clauses, calls on the US to cease hostilities on all fronts — including in Lebanon, suspend oil and petrochemical sanctions, release Iran's frozen assets, and lift the naval blockade on Iranian ports. "The discussions were held in a positive and constructive atmosphere and yielded encouraging progress," Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif wrote on X, adding that the first round of talks had "concluded successfully." Esmail Baghaei, spokesman for Iran's negotiating team and also the Foreign Ministry spokesperson, said Iran had achieved "favorable progress" in the first

round of talks over the issuance of waivers for oil and petroleum product exports. The talks involved "an exchange of important messages," specifically regarding clauses 10 and 11 of the 14-point memorandum reached between the two countries, he said.

Sanctions 'waived', frozen assets 'released'

Baqaei said in a televised interview that the clauses address "two critical issues" that are issuance of waivers for the export of Iranian oil and derivatives and the US commitment to unfreeze Iranian funds.

The Iranian official added that under clause 13 of the memorandum, negotiations toward a final agreement cannot proceed to the next stage until those steps are completed.

Iran's oil and petrochemical sector has been under US sanctions since 2018, when Washington reimposed measures aimed at driving Iranian crude exports to zero. The campaign, part of a broader "maximum pressure" policy, has fallen short of fully halting shipments, though it has significantly reduced Tehran's oil revenues.

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi, who is also a member of the Iranian negotiating team, in a post on social media said Tehran has secured waivers for oil and petrochemical exports, the release of some frozen assets and the launch of a reconstruction and development plan for Iran.

"Oil and Petrochem exports are waived, blockade lifted, some frozen assets released, and major reconstruction & development plan launched for Iran. 1st real test: Lebanon deconfliction cell," he wrote.

The US Treasury said Monday it is temporarily lifting sanctions on Iran to allow the Islamic Republic to produce, sell and deliver crude oil and related products through August 21.

"All transactions" that were previously prohibited involving the production, sale, and transport of Iranian-origin crude oil "are authorized through 12:01 am eastern daylight time, August 21, 2026," according to a license published by the Treasury Department, which administers US economic sanctions.

The Iranian delegation is led by Parliament Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf while the US Vice President JD Vance is heading the American delegation in the negotiations.

Vance declared Monday that a "very good foundation" had been laid for negotiations towards a final deal with Iran.

Tehran has agreed for inspectors from the UN's nuclear watchdog to return to the country, Vance claimed, a year after Iran suspended some cooperation and blocked inspectors from key nuclear sites bombed by the US and Israel in 2025's 12-day war.

Baqaei said that "a very brief discussion took place regarding the nuclear issue, but there was no discussion of details" and that nuclear talks had not begun.

International Desk

Iran and the United States made "progress" at the first round of Switzerland talks aimed at reaching a final peace deal, with the Iranian side saying it achieved "favorable progress" on some important issues.

Mediators Pakistan and Qatar said the negotiators reached agreement on a "roadmap towards reaching a final deal within 60 days" on sanctions imposed on Iran as well as the country's nuclear program, with technical talks to continue for the rest of the week at the Swiss resort of

Burgenstock.

"Encouraging progress has been made including the creation of a mechanism for further technical talks," they said, detailing a contact channel set up to "avoid incidents and miscommunication" at the Strait of Hormuz, a vital global oil supply route.

Tehran had effectively closed the waterway in retaliation against the joint attacks by Israel and the United States on February 28 that touched off the war in the Middle East.

A "de-confliction cell", between the parties and the Lebanese authorities has

Pezeshkian: Iran will not bow to excessive demands in negotiations

President due in Pakistan today for one-day visit

International Desk

President Masoud Pezeshkian reiterated on Monday that Tehran will not yield to "excessive demands" or any attempt to disregard the rights of the Iranian people during the ongoing negotiations between Iran and the United States to end war.

Speaking at a ceremony marking National Guilds Day, Pezeshkian said the talks are being conducted with dignity and strength and within the framework determined by the Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Mojtaba Khamenei.

He also emphasized the strategic role played by guilds and trade unions in preserving national stability and maintaining services to the people throughout the recent imposed war by the US and the Israeli regime.

Pezeshkian also referred to the Israel's war on Lebanon, hailing the recent ceasefire in Lebanon as a significant

diplomatic victory for the Iranian negotiating team in the talks with the US.

"The fact that today, as a result of the resistance of our negotiating team, the other side has been compelled to back down on the issue of Lebanon and has ceased the killing and slaughter of the oppressed people of that country is no small achievement," Pezeshkian said. Iran has insisted on a halt to Israel's attacks in Lebanon as a precondition for the resumption of negotiations.

On Sunday, Tehran and Washington began new round of negotiations to how implement a Memorandum of Understanding reached between the two countries in Pakistan last week.

Islamabad has played a significant role in establishing a ceasefire between the two countries after the US-Israeli aggression against Iran in February. IRNA said on Monday that President Pezeshkian will travel to Pakistan on Tuesday for on a one-day visit to hold consultations and exchange views with



Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian speaks during a ceremony marking National Guilds Day in Tehran on June 22, 2026.
● president.ir

top Pakistani officials.

Expressing appreciation to Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif for "his mediation between Iran and the United States" is among the objectives of the visit, said Habibollah Abbasi, director of public relations at the president's office.

Qatari PM lauds Islamabad MoU for 'stopping the war'

International Desk

Qatari Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al Thani said on Monday that with a memorandum of understanding (MoU) signed between Iran and the United States in Pakistan, "We have reached a state of stopping the war."

The Qatari foreign minister made the remarks in an interview with Al Jazeera.

He said that the preliminary agreement between Washington and Tehran "took great effort with our partners in Pakistan and regional and international support to create suitable conditions for negotiations." The Qatari official, whose country played a role in mediating between Iran and the US, said the aim of the MoU is to stop the war and lay the foundation for further talks.

"Other issues being discussed between Washington and Tehran include Iran's nuclear file, the status of the Strait of Hormuz and regional security", he added.

Qatar's foreign minister said the initial agreement establishes an institutional framework for the ongoing negotiating process.

Iranian and American presidents separate-



Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al Thani
● AFP

ly signed the MoU on Wednesday to end a recent aggression by the United States and Israel against Iran. The agreement between Iran and the US was finalized on Sunday, following months of intensive negotiations mediated by Pakistan, with support from other regional countries.

Under the agreement, the war and all military operations, including in Lebanon, have ended immediately, and the US naval blockade against Iran has been lifted.

The MoU also provides for the reopening of the Strait of Hormuz to commercial shipping. The two sides have now engaged in 60-day negotiations to address outstanding issues, including the lifting of all sanctions against Iran and Iran's nuclear program.

France seeks to ...

Could France's insistence on including Iran's missile program and regional policies in the agreement further complicate efforts to reach a comprehensive deal?

Yes, without question. One of the key reasons behind the relative success of the 2015 nuclear agreement was that negotiations remained confined to the nuclear issue. The broader the scope of negotiations becomes, the greater the number of variables and stakeholders involved, reducing the likelihood of reaching an agreement.

For years, France has argued that any lasting agreement should also encompass missile-related and regional dimensions. From Iran's perspective, however, these issues fall outside the scope of nuclear negotiations and are closely tied to deterrence capabilities and national security considerations. As a result, introducing such files into the talks could deepen existing divisions and make the path to an agreement lon-

ger and more complex.

At the same time, it is important to note that raising these demands does not necessarily mean they will be met. In many international negotiations, parties put forward their maximum demands at the outset, while the final agreement typically emerges from the balance of power and the genuine priorities of the sides involved.

Given the United States' central role in these negotiations, to what extent can Washington bring its European allies behind its preferred framework? Are there serious differences between the US and Europe over the scope and conditions of a potential agreement?

The United States remains the decisive player in this file and, if the political will exists in Washington, it has considerable capacity to bring its European allies on board. Both the experience of the 2015 nuclear deal and the reimposition of sanctions after the US withdrawal demonstrated that, despite political objections, Europe has limited ability in

practice to push back against Washington's strategic decisions.

That does not mean, however, that there are no differences. Europe generally takes a broader security view of its surrounding environment, placing greater emphasis on issues such as the missile program, regional security, migration, and stability in the Middle East. The United States, by contrast, may at times be willing to prioritize the nuclear issue and temporarily set aside some secondary demands in pursuit of a quicker agreement.

The differences between the United States and Europe therefore relate more to the scope and level of ambition of a potential deal than to the principle of reaching one. If Washington concludes that a more limited but workable agreement serves its interests, it will likely be able to rally most of its European allies behind that approach. Even so, Paris will continue trying to ensure that Europe's security concerns are reflected in the final text to the greatest extent possible.



Mohammad Ali Rajabi
Cartoonist

CARTOON



Iran crude exports reach 36m barrels since June 15

NIOC: Shipments equal nearly half of Iran's monthly oil exports

Economy Desk

Iran has exported 36 million barrels of crude oil since June 15, a tanker tracking firm said on Sunday, as shipments accelerated following the easing of US maritime restrictions.

In a post on X, TankerTrackers.com said there was "roughly an equal amount still afloat in Iran." Since the announcement of the US-Iran agreement on June 15, "Iranian-linked tankers and cargo ships have become noticeably more active globally," advocacy and monitoring group United Against Nuclear Iran (UANI) has said.

TankerTrackers.com said on Friday that Iran had exported nearly 18 million barrels of crude over the five days after the United States lifted its naval blockade of the country's southern ports and coastal waters. It estimated the value of those shipments at about \$1.44 billion. The exports mark a sharp recovery after Iran's crude shipments were largely suspended from mid-April to mid-June because of the naval blockade. The US Navy formally ended the blockade of Iranian ports and coastal areas on Thursday, June 18, following a directive from President Donald Trump.

Before the blockade was lifted, Iran had accumulated more than

60 million barrels of crude oil in floating storage off its southern coast, according to estimates by shipping intelligence companies. Iran and the United States on Sunday launched the first round of negotiations over the war, launched by a US-Israeli coalition against Iran in late February. The talks follow a memorandum of understanding signed separately by President Donald Trump and his Iranian counterpart, Masoud Pezeshkian, extending the US-Iran ceasefire by 60 days and establishing a framework for future negotiations on Tehran's nuclear program and other key issues.

Iran has been under US sanctions over its nuclear program for years. Under one provision of the memorandum, Washington granted Tehran a sanctions waiver on the second day of the 60-day negotiation period.

Commenting on the easing of maritime restrictions on oil exports, National Iranian Oil Company CEO Hamid Bovard said on Sunday that, "In the first stage, Iranian vessels crossed the previously restricted boundary and headed toward their designated destinations."

Bovard did not provide shipment figures but said that, "Over the past few days, crude oil shipments equivalent to nearly half of the country's monthly exports



SHANA

have been sent abroad, and with the full implementation of the memorandum of understanding, oil exports will continue in full." Bovard also said energy-sector negotiations had focused on investment and the removal

of oil-related sanctions. He added that Iran had proposed amendments to the US side and expressed hope that conditions would allow those proposals to be implemented.

In an article published in the

state-owned "Iran" newspaper, Oil Minister Mohsen Paknejad said on Sunday that Iran's oil industry would offer the "biggest scene of investment opportunities for the global economy" if an agreement with the United

States is reached.

Paknejad said that if Western parties benefiting from the agreement remained committed to its spirit, Iran's oil industry would serve as the testing ground for its implementation.

Reshadat P4 offshore platform installed in Persian Gulf, boosting output capacity

Economy Desk

Iran installed one of its largest offshore oil processing platforms in the Persian Gulf on Monday, state media reported, in a move that will add 35,000 barrels per day to the country's crude production capacity.

The 6,200-ton P4 platform at the Reshadat Oil Field was successfully placed in the waters by domestic engineers and manufacturers using a complex float-over method, according to SHANA. The installation was carried out without foreign assistance.

The project had faced delays due to sanctions but gained momentum under the current administra-



SHANA

tion, which took office in August 2021, Shana reported.

Iran has been under Western sanctions for decades over its nuclear program, with the oil and energy sectors hit the hardest. The platform will also enable the injection of 80,000 barrels per day of

water to maintain reservoir pressure and accelerate development of the field, located about 90 kilometers off Lavan Island in the Persian Gulf.

The Reshadat Oil Field, operated by the Iranian Offshore Oil Company, has been in production since 1969.

VP says stable policies could unlock \$150b in domestic, expatriate capital

Economy Desk

Vice President Mohammadreza Aref said on Monday that stabilizing laws and decision-making could activate at least \$150 billion in potential domestic capital and funds from Iranian investors inside and outside the country, Mehr News Agency reported.

Aref, speaking at a meeting with capital market participants, emphasized the need for consistent economic policies and warned against arbitrary approaches.

He said that economic, development and technology programs must be tailored to the country's new circumstances.

Aref pointed to the private sector as the key driver of economic development, saying the government should play a facilitating role.

"There is at least \$150 billion in capital within the country and also among Iranians abroad that can be utilized for economic development."



fypresident.ir

"The private sector must be the center of economic development, and the government should act as a facilitator," he said, adding that alignment between the private sector and the establishment was necessary.

He also called for greater consid-

eration of views from economic, social and political elites on various issues.

"Investors are interested in investing in the country, but this requires stability in laws, stability in decision-making, and avoidance of arbitrary behavior," Aref said.

Iran, Iraqi Kurdistan officials discuss border trade facilitation at Kermanshah crossing



Economy Desk

Iranian and Iraqi Kurdistan officials met at the Sheikh Saleh border crossing in western Kermanshah Province on Monday to discuss ways to organize cross-border trade, facilitate goods entry and explore possible exports of agricultural products, IRNA reported.

The meeting was attended by the governor of Salas-e Babajani county, the special assistant at Iraqi affairs, the director of the Sheikh Saleh border

customs and customs officials from Iraq's Kurdistan region.

Head of the Sheikh Saleh Border Customs Mehdi Ramezani stressed the need to streamline border procedures. During the meeting, Iraqi officials raised requests regarding passenger procedures and conditions for exporting agricultural products, including fruit and vegetables.

It was agreed that feasibility studies and necessary arrangements would be examined at future technical and executive meetings.

The two sides also emphasized the need to ensure security for economic operators, traders and drivers at the border, and agreed to hold regular joint meetings to follow up on foreign trade issues and strengthen border capacities.

The Sheikh Saleh border market, one of Iran's official border markets, began operations in 1996. Salas-e Babajani county shares 40 kilometers of border with Iraq, and trade activities are conducted through the Sheikh Saleh customs and border market.

From oud to 'taroud'

An Iranian instrument maker on innovation, tradition and survival



By Alireza Sepahvand

Freelance journalist

INTERVIEW EXCLUSIVE

possibilities.

Among contemporary Iranian luthiers (skilled craftspeople who builds and repairs stringed instruments), Masoud Maleki has focused much of his work on the oud — a fretless, pear-shaped lute that is one of the most influential string instruments in the Middle East and a historical ancestor of the European lute. Alongside his work as an oud maker, Maleki has developed an experimental instrument called the “taroud,” a hybrid design that combines elements of the Persian tar, one of Iran’s most important plucked string instruments, with the tonal character of the oud.

Drawing on years of practical experience, Maleki views instrument making as a gradual process shaped by experimentation, listening and close interaction with musicians. In this conversation, he reflects on the principles of oud construction, the evolution of the taroud, the role of technology in modern lutherie, and the economic realities confronting Iranian instrument makers in an era of inflation, market uncertainty and changing cultural conditions.

Masoud Maleki, an Iranian oud maker and designer of the experimental instrument known as the “taroud,” believes that new musical instruments can endure only when they complement established traditions rather than attempt to replace them. In this exclusive interview with Iran Daily, he discusses the craft of oud making, the development of his hybrid instrument, and the economic challenges facing instrument makers in Iran today.

Instrument making occupies a unique position at the intersection of craftsmanship, acoustics, musical knowledge and cultural heritage. In Iran, where traditional music is deeply rooted in centuries of artistic practice, instrument makers play a vital role in preserving established forms while also exploring new



Masoud Maleki works on making an instrument in his workshop.

● HOSSEIN NAQIZADEH/IRAN DAILY

to that of the Persian tar. The end result was an instrument with the tonal character of the oud but the fingering approach of the tar, offering a practical low-register alternative for tar players. The taroud is, in fact, designed for tar players.

How did the instrument evolve through testing and feedback?

The taroud has been produced in several versions and tuning systems, including eight-, ten- and eleven-string models. Throughout its development, the focus has been on achieving a stable, resonant and delightful bass register while eliminating some of the technical challenges associated with the fretless nature of the oud.

When designing a new instrument, do you think first about tone color or playability?

Both are important and are usually addressed simultaneously.

How do you evaluate the acoustic quality of an instrument?

Many advanced workshops in Turkey use specialized equipment to measure the acoustic properties of wood and finished instruments. In Iran, oud making and oud playing are still relatively young compared to some neighboring countries, so there is considerable room for further research and development.

Do modern technologies such as acoustic analysis software play a role in your work?

I learned oud making largely through studying and reverse-engineering the work of respected master builders, combined with practical experience. Nevertheless, I maintain contact with leading instrument makers and continue learning from new techniques and developments.

What are the most common mistakes made by young oud makers?

One major problem for many novice oud makers is their lack of experience as performers. Building a fine instrument requires years of experimentation, patience and learning, much like becoming a skilled musician. Some people expect quick recognition or financial success without going

Masoud Maleki, an Iranian oud maker, poses for a photo with an oud in his workshop.

● HOSSEIN NAQIZADEH/IRAN DAILY



Iranian traditional instruments have evolved over centuries and have become part of people’s auditory memory. Taroud, for example, complements existing instruments by allowing the player to achieve a lower and more stable sound, rather than attempting to replace any other instrument.

IRAN DAILY: What led you from performing music to instrument making and designing new instruments?

MALEKI: My older brother became involved in both instrument making and kamancheh performance during his teenage years. His interest gradually inspired other members of our family to enter the fields of music and instrument making, and that was how I became involved in this profession.

In oud making, what most determines the quality of the instrument’s sound: the wood, the bowl design, the soundboard, or something else?

The sound quality of an oud depends on many factors working together. These include the accuracy of the mold dimensions, the quality of the materials — especially the soundboard — the strings

used, and ultimately the knowledge and experience accumulated by the maker over time.

What criteria do you use when selecting wood for an oud, and which species do you prefer?

Whenever possible, I prioritize locally available woods. Walnut is my first choice, followed by maple. Today, however, a variety of high-quality imported woods are also available and can be used when appropriate.

How do you balance structural strength with the freedom of the strings to vibrate in order to produce a richer sound?

The thickness of the bowl and soundboard, as well as the bridges at the end of the soundboard, play a crucial role.

For example, if the bowl is made from a dense and rigid wood, it can be carved more. In contrast, the soundboard may be made from a wood with different characteristics to achieve better tonal quality.

Do you follow traditional models, or are you more interested in new designs?

I enjoy working with a variety of oud traditions, including Iraqi, Syrian, Egyptian and Turkish models. However, many instrument makers choose to specialize in a single design approach.

How did the idea for the “Taroud” first emerge?

The taroud is essentially a fretted oud inspired by the Turkish lavta. I installed frets on the neck using a system similar



The photo shows various types of woods used in making ouds in a workshop in Iran.

● HOSSEIN NAQIZADEH/IRAN DAILY



through that process.

Why do some newly invented instruments survive while others disappear?

Iranian traditional instruments have evolved over centuries and have become part of people's auditory memory. Taroud, for example, complements existing instruments by allowing the player to achieve a lower and more stable sound, rather than attempting to replace any other instrument.

How did you combine the characteristics of the tar and the oud in the taroud?

One challenge of the oud is its large body and fretless fingerboard, which can make playing more demanding. In the taroud, the body is smaller and

the neck is longer. The addition of frets simplifies performance, while the instrument also avoids issues associated with the animal-skin soundboard used in the traditional Persian tar.

Do you have plans to document your knowledge through books, blueprints or educational programs?

More or less, I continue to study wood structures, tonal characteristics and more precise tools and techniques. However, instrument making is a vast field, and there is always more to learn.

If you could design an entirely new instrument today, what gap in Iranian instruments would you try to address?

Just as the synthetic-frame daf was able to resolve some of the issues of

the leather-headed daf, in my opinion, the use of skin (membrane) on important Iranian instruments such as the tar and kamancheh still poses certain challenges, and it would be good to think of a solution for it.

What is the biggest financial challenge facing instrument makers in Iran today?

Market instability, rapid inflation and uncertainty surrounding the broader music environment make professional instrument making increasingly difficult.

Can instrument making alone provide a sustainable livelihood?

Some makers who are able to sell high-end or export-quality instruments can earn a comfortable living. However,

many people working in the arts continue to face significant financial pressures.

How have rising material costs affected the industry?

The dramatic increase in the price of wood, tools and other materials has placed enormous pressure on instrument makers. Combined with a sluggish market, these rising costs have significantly affected production and sales.

How do you assess the current market for handmade Iranian instruments?

Most of my work is focused on the domestic market. However, the Persian Gulf region was once a very favorable destination for Iranian-made ouds. Recent regional developments have

weakened that market, and its future remains uncertain.

What measures could improve the situation for Iranian instrument makers? Professional exhibitions in Iran and abroad, insurance support, improved international communication and stronger infrastructure would all contribute to a healthier environment for instrument makers.

Have you ever had to sell an instrument for less than its true value despite months of work?

Yes. During periods of economic hardship and market stagnation, I have sometimes had no choice but to sell special instruments below their actual value. It is a difficult reality for any craftsman, but it is one of the challenges of working in today's market.

A maqam that defied a war

INTERVIEW

Master oud player Rahim AlHaj joined EC Erb to discuss his lifelong journey of using music as a bridge across cultures and conflicts. From his Grammy-nominated collaboration, "Ancient Sounds," with Amjad Ali Khan to his latest album "One Sky" with Sourena Sefati, AlHaj reflects on how music expresses shared humanity, connects people beyond borders, and keeps stories of compassion and resilience alive.

Our paths have crossed again through the years. We've got so many mutual connections.

ALHAJ: You know, that's one of the great things about music, really. It just connects people from around the world. And actually, I would say it all the time that music has the most channels to connect people. It's an incredible way of connecting people. I mean, you're talking about cinema maybe, but music is always available in our life, in our home, in our car, in our ear — you're always there.

Tell me a bit about meeting Amjad Ali Khan and recording the Grammy-nominated album "Ancient Sounds".

Twenty-six years ago, when I arrived in the United States, in New Mexico, Amjad Ali Khan, the famous Sarod player, was told, "There's an Iraqi musician who just arrived two or three months ago, but he doesn't speak English." And he said, "Wow, can I meet him? Can I see him?" Then they called me and I came in. I didn't speak English. We recorded the record — that was in 2000 — and when I heard it, I said, whoa, that's such beautiful music.

One of your last recordings is "One Sky" with Sourena Sefati. How did this collaboration come about?

You remember when Bush said there is an "Axis of Evil"? I said to myself, hmm, that's interesting. How about bringing musicians from North Korea, from Iraq, and from Iran, and composing music to show our humanity? We are human beings — we are not the Axis of Evil. No, we are like anybody else on this planet. And I called the group Axis of Evil, the band. We recorded the record, and Smithsonian took it. They said, "Hey Rahim, Axis of Evil is a difficult title. Would it be possible to change the name?" I said, "No, it's perfect." Eventually, I agreed, and we did the record. It's about recognizing our humanity and how music has the power and capacity to unite us, not divide us. That's such a beautiful feeling. In fact, I remember composing a piece when I was 16, during the Iraq-Iran War. I specifically chose an Iranian maqam called dasht to protest the war. It was like saying, "No — they are not our enemy." They're human beings like us. Politicians do whatever they want. And after all these years — 40 years later — an Iranian musician is playing that same piece. Isn't that wonderful? That piece, by the way, got me in trouble with the Iraqi government because we were at war with Iran, and they said, "How dare you compose music in an Iranian mode, not an Iraqi one?"

As we've been talking about music



From left to right: Palestinian-American percussionist Issa Malluf, Iraqi oud master/composer Rahim AlHaj and Iranian santur virtuoso Sourena Sefati
● HOSSEIN NAQIZADEH/
IRAN DAILY

and how it forms those connections, one thing that always feels strong for me is that I love sitting and listening to music in the comfort of my home, but there's something else that just happens when you're there to experience it live. I feel like we, as the audience, really become part of it, and something can grow inside of us with live performance.

I always say it's a new birth because you are not the same person for that one hour. When you are on stage, you are a new person, new notes. You have to express them in the way that you feel in the moment. Even if it's written and you've played it zillions of times, every performance is about that moment of presence. You can express yourself in that moment to the live audience. You can see them, you can hear them, you can feel their reaction and connect with them — and that's what lifts the musician up. You feel alive. There's nothing like it.

Another recording of yours I wanted to touch on was "Little Earth". You reached out and collaborated with a wonderful array of musicians, and one that really caught my ear was the piece "The Searching". You recorded it with the late great accordion player Guy Klucsevsek, who's been such a favorite of ours at KGNU. I got the impression that he'd never played a maqam before, and yet he fell into the music — even finding that unlikely quarter tone on the accordion. Yeah, it's really incredible. Guy did a phenomenal job on this piece, and I think he's the only accordion player

who managed to play the quarter tone on the accordion. Literally, there's no one else in the world who could do that — it's almost impossible.

We were recording in Santa Fe, and he put me in tears. I remember thinking, how did he capture what I wanted to say? How did he know exactly what I needed in this piece? That's "The Searching". It's about when you fall in love and sometimes go separate ways for whatever reason. You have that curiosity about your lost love — where did they go? Did they marry? Have kids? One day, at the airport, he sees a woman with her son, and she recognizes him. It's too late, but that's her, his love. He had been searching for her, and that's what the piece is about.

Your last album is entitled "One Sky" and it wraps up with that piece "Dancing Planet". I just love the beautiful music and the imagery. This piece makes me wonder — is the planet itself dancing, or are you inviting all the inhabitants to the dance?

Thank you very much. That's exactly it. I remember my mom used to sing in this rhythm, an Irish rhythm, and I always wondered — how did Irish rhythms come to Iraq? We'd been occupied by Britain at that time, in my mom's era. She used this rhythm to make up songs and keep us quiet. So, I took that rhythm and used it to honor the planet — when people live in harmony, peace, love, and compassion. It's an invitation for everyone to come and celebrate the earth through dance.

You moved to the United States after leaving Iraq. What did you learn from that experience that you might share with us?

I've been here 26 years, and I learned that there's nothing bigger than a big heart for humanity. I learned that it doesn't matter who you are, what color you carry, or what language you speak — there's something inside you that you can't get rid of: you are a human being. I remember vividly my first concert when I was about to collect my ticket to go back to Syria. I thought, I can't live here — no one knows the oud, no one knows Rahim AlHaj. Then a little boy and his father came to the green room. The boy was in tears. I said, in bad English, "You don't like my music, do you?" And he said, "No, I loved it, but I need your signature."

At that moment I thought, if this little boy understood what I was trying to express — the struggles of children and women in times of war — then maybe I could make a difference here. And I did. Here I am, still working, and I will never stop until I expire.

I've learned that yes, it takes time, but the reward is the love and appreciation from people. We don't need more than that, really. Especially in these times, which are so difficult and divided, we need our voices to be heard, to tell our stories and our humanity. Everyone has a story to tell — small or big, happy or sad — and not everyone gets to share it. So, how about we share our stories and learn from them? That's my understanding of music and art in general.

The full interview first appeared on KGNU.



I remember composing a piece when I was 16, during the Iraq-Iran War. I specifically chose an Iranian maqam called dasht to protest the war. It was like saying, "No — they are not our enemy." They're human beings like us. Politicians do whatever they want. And after all these years — 40 years later — an Iranian musician is playing that same piece. Isn't that wonderful?

FIFA World Cup:

'Written in history': Iran coach Qalenoeei hails hard-fought point against Belgium

Sports Desk

Iran head coach Amir Qalenoeei was full of praise for his players after Team Melli produced a resilient performance to hold Belgium to a goalless stalemate at the FIFA World Cup in Los Angeles on Sunday.

The result took both sides' tally to two points in Group G, keeping Iran well in contention for a maiden knockout-stage spot at the global showpiece ahead of Friday's game against Egypt. The African side came from behind to beat New Zealand 3-1 later on Sunday to move atop the group standings with four points.

Alireza Beiranvand delivered a goalkeeping masterclass to spearhead a solid display by Iran, who lined up with an unprecedented five-man backline. The pinnacle of his man-of-the-match performance came in the 58th minute, when he pulled off a heroic save to keep out Maxim de Cuyper's close-range effort, which is already being tipped as one of the saves of the tournament.

Iranian center-back Shoja Khalilzadeh, who was on the receiving end of severe criticism after a shaky performance in the 2-2 draw against New Zealand, also deserves credit for his composed display, which was reflected in the Opta statistics after the game. Despite dominating possession throughout the match, Belgium was fortunate not to fall behind in the 25th minute after Iranian striker Mahdi Taremi converted an inventive, well-worked set



Iranian goalkeeper Alireza Beiranvand saves a close-range effort from Belgium's Maxim de Cuyper (5) during a Group G match at the FIFA World Cup in Los Angeles, California, US, on June 21, 2026. ● REUTERS

piece, only for VAR to rule that he had been in an offside position before finding the net.

The Belgians also had Thibaut Courtois to thank for keeping them level, as the Real Madrid goalkeeper denied Hossein Kan'anizadegan and Taremi in either half.

The pivotal moment of the contest at SoFi Stadium came in the 66th minute, when Belgian defender Nathan Ngoy was sent off for denying Taremi a clear goalscoring opportunity. Iran enjoyed more possession thereafter and found the courage to push forward, with Qalenoeei making a couple of attacking substitutions

in pursuit of what would have been a dramatic victory.

The game still finished goalless as Iran avoided defeat in back-to-back World Cup matches for the first time in the history of the tournament, while the European Red Devils – ranked 10th in the FIFA rankings – were left frustrated by another draw.

'Great achievement'

Qalenoeei believes Iran's unbeaten start will be talked about for years to come, having arrived at the tournament after a politically charged build-up that was hampered by extraordinary circumstances.

Iran's World Cup participation was in doubt because of the country's war with co-hosts United States, while the team had several pre-tournament friendlies cancelled by prospective opponents.

"I want to go back six months," the Iranian said after the game. "We were in war conditions for six months; we didn't have our league operating."

"Many teams cancelled the games they would play against us. We came to the World Cup in the worst conditions possible."

Iranian players have continued to face disruption at the World Cup. They are based in Mexico and, for

their games on U.S. soil, must fly in a day before each match and leave on the same day because of visa restrictions.

A win against Egypt would see Iran reach the knockout stage, while even a draw could be enough to progress as one of the best third-placed teams. However, Qalenoeei says his players have already achieved something remarkable given the circumstances.

"The players who came to this World Cup in this condition need to be congratulated," he added.

"We had the opportunity to win [against Belgium], but I think this is a great achievement."

"We have played two World Cup matches under these conditions – we had less than 16 hours to train before the game."

"This will be written in the history of our football and future generations will talk about what we have achieved."

Qalenoeei was also grateful to "all the Iranians, with different attitudes regarding politics, who supported us and gave us energy." The Iranian head coach, however, was disappointed by the limited impact of his substitutions after Belgium went down to 10 men, although he acknowledged that Iran was "lucky not to lose" against such strong opposition.

"I don't think any team in the world could have coped with such conditions and played like this – the conditions have been extremely hard for us," he said.

"Our players are really giving everything; they are playing with their hearts," added Qalenoeei,

who also reserved special praise for Beiranvand for keeping Iran in the contest.

"Tomorrow we need to focus on the game with Egypt. Egypt are a very strong team and have very good players. Our first and foremost aim is to reach the next round," said the manager.

Beiranvand, meanwhile, said the result was down to the teamwork shown by the entire squad and coaching staff.

"The game was very tough. After all, the Belgian team is one of the best in the world. They put incredible pressure on us, especially in the first half."

"After the red card, Belgium sat back a bit more. They were looking to intercept a pass from us and capitalize on our mistakes through counterattacks. We could have won the game if we had been more focused, but hats off to all the players who played today. They played with their hearts."

Iranian midfielder Alireza Jahanbakhsh, who earned his 100th international cap after coming on as a halftime substitute, also paid tribute to the team's "spirit" and "amazing performance."

He said the team would draw upon the experience of narrowly missing out on progression at the last World Cup, when they were eliminated following a 1-0 defeat to the United States.

"Last World Cup, we tried to do our best, but at the very last minute, we couldn't do it," he said.

"But now I think the most important thing is that we recover well and make sure we are ready for the next game."

Yazdani embraces new weight challenge ahead of Wrestling Worlds

Sports Desk

Iranian wrestling sensation Hassan Yazdani says he is prepared to test himself against the world's best at 97kg after securing his place on the freestyle national team for October's World Championships in Astana, acknowledging that the transition to a new weight class has been one of the toughest challenges of his decorated career.

The 31-year-old defeated reigning world silver medalist Amirali Azarpira in back-to-back bouts at Iran's national team trials on Friday, winning 4-2 and 5-3, and is now set to chase a fourth gold medal at the global showpiece.

Yazdani moved up two divisions after recovering from an 18-month shoulder injury – which he suffered during his 86kg final setback at the Paris Olympics – last December, entering a new chapter of his career.

October's event will mark Yazdani's return to Wrestling Worlds for the first time since the 2023 final loss to his familiar American foe David Taylor. Despite his success at the trials, Yazdani admitted he is still adapting to the physical demands of his new division. He said improvements in his



Freestyle wrestler Hassan Yazdani (red) is seen in action against Amirali Azarpira during the Iranian national team trials in Kerman, Iran, on June 19, 2026. ● ADIB MOHMADI/IWFIR

conditioning have helped his transition, although he believes there is still significant work to be done before he reaches peak form.

The former Olympic champion estimated that he was operating at "around 70 percent" of his ideal form during Friday's double header, expressing confidence that he will be considerably better prepared by the time the World Championships begin.

The 97kg division is expected to feature a star-studded cast in Astana, with Ameri-

can Kyle Snyder defending his title, while former world and Olympic champion Abdurashid Sadulaev will also be in the mix if he earns a place on the Russian team. Reigning Olympic champion Akhmed Tazhudinov of Bahrain and Japanese world bronze medalist Arash Yoshida, who defeated Azarpira for the Asian title in April, will also fancy their chances in Astana. Georgian Olympic silver medalist Givi Matcharashvili and former world 92kg champion Rizabek Aitmukhan of Kazakh-

stan will also pose a threat to Yazdani, who, rather than viewing the increased competition as a deterrent, welcomed the opportunity to measure himself against the sport's top names.

"I hope I can perform well in this weight class too," Yazdani told the official website of United World Wrestling. "There will be great champions at the event, and I hope I get the chance to wrestle them, test myself and deliver my best performance at the World Championships."

The decision to move up in weight was made last year with an eye on long-term success, which is an elusive second Olympic gold in LA 2028. Yazdani said he wanted to make the switch early enough to address weaknesses, gain experience and fully adapt to the division before the next Olympic cycle reaches its peak.

He acknowledged that changing weight classes becomes "increasingly difficult with age," especially after turning 30, but insisted he had carefully considered the challenges awaiting him at 97kg.

"There are definitely challenges in this weight class, and I have thought about all of them," he said. "I hope I can deliver my best performance and achieve an excellent result."

Beach Wrestling World Series:

Iran sweeps four medals to win team title

● IAWFIR

Sports Desk

Iran completed a clean sweep of the medals – including two golds – across the four weight classes to claim the team title at the third Beach Wrestling World Series event of the season in Batumi, Georgia.

Ali-Akbar Zaroudi capped a five-win campaign in the 70kg class with a 2-0 victory over Ukraine's Oleksii Boruta in the final.

The other gold medal for Iran came in the +90kg division, where Seyyed Amirreza Sahraei Mahalli defeated Ukraine's Vazha Dauri 3-0 in the final.

Iran's Ali-Mohammad Gholami, meanwhile, had to settle for silver in the 80kg class after suffering a 2-1 defeat against host wrestler Luka Chkhitunidze in the title bout.

Amirhossein Kavousi also fell short in his final, losing 3-2 to Azerbaijan's Ahrif Ashirov in the 90kg showdown.

The results saw Iran top the team standings with 90 points, finishing 20 clear of second-placed Georgia, which added three bronze medals to Chkhitunidze's gold.

Azerbaijan finished third on 55 points, courtesy of one gold and one bronze medal.

Living traditions of Muharram in northern Iran



● defapress.ir



● IRNA



● chn.ir

Iranica Desk

In many parts of Gilan, Mazandaran, and Golestan provinces in northern Iran, Muharram, marking the anniversary of the martyrdom of Imam Hussein (PBUH) and his companions, is not merely a religious observance; it is an integral part of the social calendar of villages. Families who may have few opportunities to gather throughout the year come together again during Muharram. Migrants return to their hometowns, and village neighborhoods come back to life. In these regions, Ashura rituals are still based on collective participation. Each household takes on a role: some prepare the Takyeh (local mourning hall), others cook ritual foods, some help set up ceremonial standards, and others take responsibility for organizing the mourning gatherings. It is this broad participation that has allowed many Muharram tradi-

tions in northern Iran to continue uninterrupted across generations, according to chn.ir.

If the Husseiniyeh is considered the central symbol of Muharram in central Iran, and the Madhif in parts of the south, then the Takyeh is undoubtedly the most important architectural and cultural element of Ashura practice in northern Iran. In many villages of Gilan and Mazandaran provinces, Takyehs are among the oldest public buildings. These spaces are not limited to mourning ceremonies; throughout the year, they serve as venues for community gatherings, social discussions, and various local rituals.

Many traditional Takyehs in the north are built of wood, a material suited to the region's humid climate. Gabled roofs, open verandas, wooden columns, and spacious courtyards distinguish these structures from religious spaces in other parts of Iran. During Muharram, the Takyeh becomes the

beating heart of the village.

One of the most striking images of Muharram in northern Iran is the procession of ceremonial standards (Alam) through rural paths. In the early days of Muharram, the ritual of Alam-Bandi (standard decoration) is held in many areas. People decorate the standards with black and green cloths, preparing them for participation in mourning ceremonies.

In northern Ashura culture, the Alam is not only a religious symbol but also an emblem of neighborhood and village identity. Each community has its own standard, and residents feel a collective responsibility for its preservation and upkeep.

In many parts of Iran, Ta'zieh (religious passion play) has gradually moved away from everyday life. However, in northern regions, there are still villages where Ta'zieh remains an inseparable part of Muharram traditions. Village squares, Takyeh courtyards,

or open spaces beside mosques are transformed into performance stages, where crowds gather for hours to watch the reenactment of the events of Karbala.

A key feature of Ta'zieh in northern Iran is its deep connection with local communities. Performers are often selected from among villagers, and many roles are passed down through generations within families. In some areas, children are introduced to Ta'zieh from an early age, helping preserve this ritual art form. For cultural tourists, attending a Ta'zieh performance in a northern village offers a rare opportunity to witness the continuity of a tradition with few parallels elsewhere in the world.

One of the lesser-known aspects of northern Iran's Ashura heritage is the recitation of elegies (Nowheh) in local languages and dialects. In many parts of Gilan, these lamentations are interwoven with the Gilaki language. In Mazandaran,

local poetry is recited alongside conventional elegies, while in parts of Golestan, regional dialects are also present in mourning rituals.

In northern Iran, offerings (Nazri) are not only religious acts but also part of the region's culinary culture. Many foods prepared during Muharram are rooted in local cuisine. The use of local ingredients, traditional cooking methods, and widespread community participation give this aspect of the rituals a distinctive identity.

For visitors, these offerings provide an opportunity to engage with the culinary culture of the region — where spirituality and hospitality come together. Although villages are the primary guardians of northern Ashura traditions, cities in the region also play an important role in sustaining this heritage, hosting large-scale mourning ceremonies during Muharram.

Northern Iran is unique in that

many of its Ashura rituals take place in proximity to the ancient Hyrcanian forests — millions of years old. During Muharram, processions moving along rural paths through tall trees, mist, and humidity create a distinctive atmosphere of mourning.

Many visitors are unaware of the dozens of local Muharram traditions that exist in this region, some of which date back several centuries and are still practiced in their original form. Introducing these cultural assets could open new horizons for cultural and anthropological tourism in northern Iran.

Muharram in northern Iran thus holds significant potential for the development of cultural and heritage tourism. However, utilizing this potential requires preserving the authenticity of the rituals, as their true value lies in their organic nature and deep connection with the everyday lives of the people.

Reading Room

Ashura; timeless narrative of justice, sacrifice, human values

By Mohsen Alviri
Professor of Baqir al-Olum
University

The event of Ashura, the martyrdom of Imam Hussein (PBUH) and his companions in Karbala, is among the few occurrences in human history whose influence has not diminished after more than fourteen centuries. On the contrary, its presence and impact across cultural, social, political, artistic, and spiritual spheres have continued to expand over time.

Thousands of books, articles, lectures, and academic studies have been dedicated to Ashura, with each generation attempting to understand this profound event from a particular perspective.

Some researchers have examined Ashura through a historical lens, seeking to reconstruct the events that took place in the year 61 AH. Others have analyzed the social conditions that shaped the movement from a sociological viewpoint. Many have explored it through psychological, cultural, educational, ethical, or political approaches. All of these perspectives are valuable and necessary, but a fundamental question remains: Can the full potential of Ashura be understood within these frameworks alone, or are there broader horizons for studying this historic movement?

Many scholars argue that Ashura possesses such depth and breadth that it cannot be viewed merely as a historical episode. From this perspective, two new approaches can be proposed: Examining Ashura at a civilizational level and studying its mythological dimensions. In the humanities, there is a distinction between "perspective" and "level of analysis." Perspective refers to the lens through which a phenomenon is studied — whether historical, sociological, psychological, or cultural.

The level of analysis, however, concerns the scale at which a subject is examined. A phenomenon may be studied at an individual, family, social, national, regional, global, or civilizational level.

Many studies of Ashura have remained focused on the level of the event itself — examining it as a historical incident that took place at a specific time and location. Within this framework, key questions revolve around what happened, who participated, what circumstances led to the event, and what consequences followed. This approach is essential, but it may not be sufficient.

A civilizational perspective refers to the broadest and most complex level of human relations. Civilization is not merely a collection of political or economic structures; rather, it includes a network of values, ideals, lifestyles, cultural patterns,



systems of meaning, and visions for the future.

A civilizational approach studies a phenomenon in relation to both distant history and future generations. At this level, the question is not only what impact an event had in its own era, but also what capacities it contains to shape humanity's historical path.

From this viewpoint, Ashura is not limited to the year 61 AH. Over centuries, it has inspired movements for freedom, justice, cultural transformation, and spiritual renewal. In this sense, Ashura can be described as having a "civilizational character" — containing capacities usually associated with civilizations themselves.

One of the most remarkable aspects of Ashura is the way it appears to concentrate major themes of human history within a single event: the struggle between truth and falsehood,

justice and oppression, freedom and tyranny, loyalty and betrayal, and moral conviction and personal interest.

On one side, Imam Hussein (PBUH) and his companions represent the highest human ideals; on the other, the opposing force symbolizes moral decline and human degradation. From this perspective, Ashura is not merely the story of a battle, but a condensed reflection of humanity's ongoing struggle between good and evil.

Alongside the civilizational level of analysis, another perspective can be considered: what may be called the "mythological dimension" of Ashura. In everyday language, the word "myth" is sometimes understood as a fictional story. However, in modern mythology studies, myths have a much broader meaning. They are narratives that represent humanity's deepest values, hopes, fears, aspirations, and

experiences through symbols and characters.

Therefore, describing the mythological dimension of Ashura does not mean treating it as a legend or fiction. Ashura is a historical reality, and its historical nature must be emphasized. At the same time, the greatness of its figures and the depth of its values have given it many qualities associated with the great myths of humanity.

Human beings have always needed meaning, identity, and role models. Myths respond to these needs by providing symbols and narratives that help societies understand themselves. As traditional myths declined in modern societies, new forms of symbolic heroes emerged — from fictional characters in cinema to influential cultural and political figures.

Myths often develop around heroes: individuals who move beyond ordinary limitations and represent values greater than personal interests. Ashura presents a powerful collection of such figures. The level of sacrifice, devotion, loyalty, and commitment to truth demonstrated by them has made Ashura one of the richest sources of human ideals.

Meanwhile, one of the most important roles of myths is their influence on art. Many of the world's greatest literary and artistic works have been inspired by mythological narratives.

A mythological understanding of

Ashura can also open new horizons for artistic creation. Literature, poetry, cinema, theater, painting, music, and performing arts can draw upon its themes and create new interpretations of Ashura's meanings.

Many significant artistic works related to Ashura have emerged from precisely this approach — works that go beyond historical description to explore the deeper human and spiritual dimensions of the event.

From a mythological perspective, rituals are not merely repeated actions; they are ways of recreating meaning and reconnecting individuals with fundamental values. Ashura-related mourning ceremonies and traditions, when understood in this context, become more than reminders of a historical tragedy. They become spaces where values such as sacrifice, resistance, loyalty, and dignity are renewed.

In this view, religious gatherings and mourning assemblies are not only places of grief, but also arenas for experiencing and reaffirming these ideals. Ashura holds a unique capacity in this regard. Within the culture shaped around Imam Hussein's (PBUH) legacy, death is not viewed as the end of existence but as a passage toward a higher form of life. This understanding has allowed Ashura's legacy to inspire generations of seekers of justice, sacrifice, and freedom throughout history.

This article was originally published by IBNA.

Iran finds common purpose on and off the field at World Cup

Knockout round there for taking, but Egypt presents tough test



Belgium's Thomas Meunier (L) heads the ball past Iran's Mohammad Mohebbi during the World Cup Group G soccer match between Belgium and Iran in Inglewood, near Los Angeles on June 21, 2026. ● AP

By Sadeq Dehqan
Staff writer

INTERVIEW

Iran's national soccer team remains in contention for a place in the knockout stage of the 2026 FIFA World Cup after opening Group Stage play with back-to-back draws against New Zealand and Belgium. The team's performances under head coach Amir Ghalenoei, the unusual circumstances surrounding its preparation for the tournament, player readiness, and the outlook for the decisive match against Egypt have all become key talking points among soccer analysts. Beyond the tactical discussions, the remarkable support from Iranian fans in the stadiums and the strong sense of unity within the squad have stood out during the tournament, fueling optimism about Iran's chances of advancing beyond the group stage. To discuss these issues, we spoke with Bijan Zolfagharnasab, a veteran soccer analyst and former Iranian international who was part of



Iran's 1976 AFC Asian Cup-winning team and represented the country at the 1976 Montreal Olympics. Holding a doctorate in physical education and sports science, Zolfagharnasab has also coached Iran's senior and U-23 national teams. In this interview, he evaluates Iran's first two World Cup performances, identifies the team's strengths and weaknesses, assesses its chances of qualification, discusses the importance of player unity and fan support, and outlines what Iranian soccer must do after the tournament.

IRAN DAILY: What is your assessment of Iran's match against Belgium and the team's performances in its first two World Cup games?

ZOLFAGHARNASAB: In my view, holding Belgium to a scoreless draw was a positive result. Although Iran spent long stretches defending, the team played a disciplined, intelligent, and well-organized game. We also turned in a respectable performance against New Zealand in our opener.

From what I have seen in the assessments of European analysts and experts, they share a similar view. Despite the difficult circumstances Iran faced in preparing for and traveling to the World Cup, our team has shown solid organization, strong defensive structure, and even promising attacking play. The players, particularly in the second match, were on the same page and consistently covered for one another across the field.

So far, the results have not been disappointing. Had we arrived at the tournament venue earlier and avoided some of the logistical challenges surrounding travel and visas, we might have picked up even better results and been sitting in a stronger position in the group standings.

That said, the players, coaching staff, Football Federation, and Ministry of Sport and Youth deserve tremendous credit. At a time when both the country and our soccer program were dealing with various challenges, they managed to pull everything together and get the team to the tournament.

Especially against Belgium, Iran delivered a result-oriented performance while executing a well-thought-out game plan. It was a display worthy of recognition.

Where do you see the national team's biggest strengths and weaknesses?

One of our biggest weaknesses has been the lack of quality warm-up matches. Had the team entered the tournament after playing more friendlies against stronger opponents, I have no doubt we would have collected better results by now.

Even so, every player, member of the

coaching staff, federation official, and Ministry of Sport and Youth representative deserves praise. The team has put in respectable performances and has represented Iranian soccer with pride. Iran entered this tournament far from ideal conditions, yet the players have left everything on the field.

As for our strengths, the most important one is the unity and togetherness within the squad. That has strengthened our belief in the team's chances of success. The players have rallied around a shared objective and are leaving everything on the field to make the Iranian people proud. You can see that spirit throughout the team, from the coaching staff to the

players and even the supporters. Everyone is pulling in the same direction for Iran's name and pride. That mentality extends to the bench as well. Even players who have not seen action are fully invested, constantly lifting up their teammates and providing encouragement. That collective spirit is one of the national team's most valuable assets.

Based on the results and performances so far, how likely is Iran to advance from the group stage?

We have completed our first two group-stage matches and remain firmly in the race with two points. Now we must prepare ourselves mentally and physically for the final match against Egypt.

I believe our players are gradually finding their rhythm, both physically and mentally. We should be capable of producing a more cohesive and attack-minded performance in the next match and earning the result needed to move on.

However, there is one condition: the team cannot become complacent or take Egypt lightly. The players must step onto the field with full focus, maximum determination, and the hunger to compete for every ball.

Before the tournament, there were predictions that some spectators and groups opposed to the Islamic Republic might create distractions for the national team. Instead, fans have been overwhelmingly supportive in both matches. What is your view?

Contrary to many of the predictions and off-field noise, Iranian fans have backed the national team wholeheartedly in

both matches, both through their presence and their support in the stands.

They demonstrated that Iranians around the world, regardless of their personal views or beliefs, carry Iran in their hearts. Whenever their country needs support, whether in sports or any other arena, they put differences aside and stand behind Iran and the national team. The unity and solidarity we are witnessing inside the stadiums, and even across society more broadly, along with the excitement generated among the public, are among soccer's greatest achievements.

That is why I believe the Football Federation and, at a higher level, the Ministry of Sport and Youth must do everything possible to continue developing the sport. The growth of soccer infrastructure. The foundation begins with standard playing fields and adequate facilities throughout the country.

Alongside improving pitches and equipment, we must also make better use of the resources already available. I know of soccer facilities that have fallen into disrepair and can no longer be used effectively for youth development. That is deeply unfortunate and highlights the need for better management of existing infrastructure.

I can confidently say that if we create the right environment for soccer to grow, given the tremendous talent of Iranian youth and the nation's passion for the game, we can consistently compete for major honors in Asia and make our presence felt on the world stage.

We can bring pride and joy to Iranian soccer fans both at home and abroad.

That is why I believe that once the national team returns from the World Cup, preparations for future Asian competitions must begin immediately. With a younger, more energetic squad and the invaluable experience gained from this tournament, Iran can set its sights on reclaiming the summit of Asian soccer.

TENDER NO.: 08-38-0440045

First Announcement

The National Iranian South Oil Company (NISOC) is seeking to procure the specified goods listed in the table below through a Qualitative Evaluation Call for conducting a public tender via the Government Electronic Procurement System (SETAD). All stages of the tender process including the receipt of tender documents, submission of bidders' proposals, and the opening of bid envelopes, shall be carried out

NATIONAL IRANIAN SOUTH OILFIELDS COMPANY
AHVAZ-IRAN
exclusively through the Government Electronic Procurement System (SETAD) portal at www.setadiran.ir. Bidders who have not previously registered must complete the registration process on the aforementioned portal and obtain an Electronic Signature certificate to participate in the tender.

Item	Material Description	Quantity
1	ROCK BITS, JET TYPE, LESS NOZZLES WITH API REGULAR TOOL JOINT PIN CONNECTION I.A.D.C. CODES: 1.1.1 OR 1.1.4 OR 1.1.5 ARE ACCEPTED IN EVALUATION MARKING: ALL SPECIFICATION OF BIT SUCH AS: TYPE, SIZE, MANUFACTURER, SERIAL, THREAD, ISO & IADC IN ACCORDANCE WITH API SPEC 7-1/ISO 10424- SHOULD BE DIE STAMPED ON THE TOP OF THE BIT LOCATION: DRILLING MOVEABLE MCAPP: DR/03/87/003 34 IN. X 7-5/8 IN.	8NO
2	ROCK BITS, JET TYPE, WITHOUT CENTER JET, LESS WITH API REGULAR TOOLJOINT PIN CONNECTION LEVEL OF INSPECTION: 2 (L.O.I.: 2) "QCP/MPS DOCUMENTS ARE ESSENTIAL TO REVIEW & CONF" "ITP DOCUMENTS IS ESSENTIAL FOR TECHNICAL EVALUAT MARKING: ALL SPECIFICATION OF BIT SUCH AS: TYPE, SIZE, MANUFACTURER, SERIAL, THREAD, ISO & IADC IN ACCORDANCE WITH API SPEC 7-1/ISO 10424- SHOULD BE DIE STAMPED ON THE TOP OF THE BIT LOCATION: DRILLING MOVEABLE MCAPP: DR/03/85/003, 80/001, 81/001, 80/006 8-1/2 IN. X 4-1/2 IN. 26 IN., I.A.D.C. 1.1.4	60NO
3	ROCK BITS, JET TYPE, WITHOUT CENTER JET, LESS WITH API REGULAR TOOLJOINT PIN CONNECTION LEVEL OF INSPECTION: 2 (L.O.I.: 2) "QCP/MPS DOCUMENTS ARE ESSENTIAL TO REVIEW & CONF" "ITP DOCUMENTS IS ESSENTIAL FOR TECHNICAL EVALUAT MARKING: ALL SPECIFICATION OF BIT SUCH AS: TYPE, SIZE, MANUFACTURER, SERIAL, THREAD, ISO & IADC IN ACCORDANCE WITH API SPEC 7-1/ISO 10424- SHOULD BE DIE STAMPED ON THE TOP OF THE BIT LOCATION: DRILLING MOVEABLE MCAPP: DR/03/85/004, 84/005, 79/001, 09/76/020, 78/0 17-1/2 IN., I.A.D.C. 1.1.1	85NO
4, 5, 6	NOZZLES FOR DRILLING BITS COMPLETE WITH O-RING & RETAINING RINGS NOZZLES FOR DRILLING BITS ONE SET CONSISTS OF 3 NUMBERS CONNECTION SIZE AS SPECIFIED LOCATION: DRILLING MOVEABLE FOR SIZE 26 TO 34 INCH	48ST
7, 8, 9	NOZZLES FOR DRILLING BITS COMPLETE WITH O-RING & RETAINING RINGS NOZZLES FOR DRILLING BITS ONE SET CONSISTS OF 3 NUMBERS CONNECTION SIZE AS SPECIFIED LOCATION: DRILLING MOVEABLE FOR SIZE 14-3/4 TO 26 INCH	149ST

Vendors who intend to participate in aforesaid tenders are requested to send their "Intention to Participate" letter via fax to the following number along with their resume according to Qualitative Assessment Form no. 1, available at: www.setadiran.ir, not later than 14 days after the second announcement, otherwise, their requests for participation in the tender will be disregarded. The applicants should have relevant background in supplying the required goods and capability to provide and submit a bid bond of 31,974/87 EURO or 54,508,560,000 RIAL, in favor of NISOC.

THE ONLY ACCEPTABLE DELIVERY TERM IS CFR, BANDAR IMAM KHOMEINI, IRAN. PAYMENT TERM IS C.A.D. INCLUDING AN ADVANCE PAYMENT. SUBSEQUENT TO NISOC'S MATERIAL APPROVAL.

PUBLIC RELATIONS
FOREIGN PURCHASING DEPARTMENT

Bldg. No. 104, Material Procurement Management Complex,
Kouy-e-Fadaeian Islam (New Site), Ahvaz, Iran
Tel. No: 061 34 12 4844 Fax No: 061 34 45 74 37

PUBLIC RELATIONS

www.shana.ir | www.nisoc.ir | http://lets.mporg.ir | www.setadiran.ir

2210648