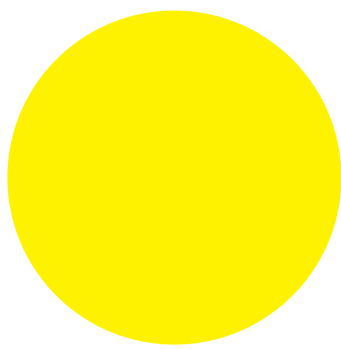


Iran, Iraq sign four cooperation deals, including rail link MoU

Pezeshkian says stronger ties require swift implementation of accords

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Global peace threatened by American unilateralism



By Amir Dabiri Mehr
Political researcher

O P I N I O N
E X C L U S I V E

The two wars waged by the United States and Israel against Iran — one lasting 12 days and the other 40 days — can be examined on two distinct levels. The first level is the narrative promoted by mainstream American media and the various arms of the Zionist media empire. According to this version, the conflicts stemmed from escalating tensions between Washington and Tel Aviv on the one hand and Tehran on the other, particularly over nuclear issues. This narrative claims that the confrontation will continue until Iran capitulates and the dispute is resolved in favor of the US and Israel. However, following the admirable resistance of Iran's Armed Forces and the Islamic Republic's assertion of sovereignty over the Strait of Hormuz, the nature of the dispute has shifted. It has now become clear to everyone that the American-Zionist narrative of the recent war was highly unrealistic and fabricated. The second level views the recent war as a confrontation of wills within the international system. The naïve assumption held by the US and Israel was that a joint military assault would achieve the following: overthrow Iran's political system, destroy its peaceful nuclear facilities, neutralize its missile capabilities, and render pro-Iran forces in Iraq, Lebanon, and Yemen passive. In reality, none of these four American-Zionist objectives were realized. Instead, Iran created a new problem for the United States by closing the Strait of Hormuz, redirected global criticism toward Washington over the resulting energy crisis, and forced the US to expend enormous efforts over several months to reopen the strait — efforts that have so far failed. Oil prices have reached their highest levels in recent years as a result. In other words, despite spending more than \$80 billion — funded by American taxpayers — the United States has been unable to impose its will on Iran. Based on the same flawed analysis, President Trump has requested an additional \$95 billion to try once again to force his defeated will upon Iran. Given past experiences and current realities on the ground, this attempt is doomed to failure.

A crucial point is that the indifference and silence of countries around the world toward American warmongering in the Persian Gulf would only be understandable if the first narrative were true. In that case, nations might refrain from commenting or opposing the US due to their own political and economic considerations. However, nearly five months after the start of the war against Iran, it has become evident to all experts and analysts that the first narrative primarily serves to justify Washington's warmongering. It is the second narrative that aligns with existing realities. Consequently, the likelihood of future American warmongering in other regions of the world to impose its unilateral will is now a serious possibility, and the interests of other countries are potentially at risk. International peace and security have therefore been placed in jeopardy by the United States, and governments face a fateful choice.

If American policies and actions are condemned and met with clear and covert reactions and protests, there can be hope for international peace and security in the future. However, if other countries remain silent and passive in the face of America's aggressive and warmongering policies, a precedent will be established whereby international peace and security become subordinate to American will and interests rather than the national interests of other nations. To put it more plainly: whenever the United States has a conflict of interest with any country, it will resort to military solutions and attempt to achieve its objectives through military unilateralism. Such a pattern will benefit no nation.

Araghchi: Iran's diplomacy met with military action, not dialogue

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Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi (R) addresses SCO Council of Foreign Ministers meeting in Cholpon-Ata, Kyrgyzstan on July 24, 2026.
● IRANIAN FOREIGN MINISTRY



Celebrities, concerts, and football

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Araghchi: Iran's diplomacy met wit military action, not dialogue

International Desk

Iran's foreign minister said on Friday that Iran came under attack while it had chosen diplomacy to resolve disputes with the United States, noting that, "Response to diplomacy came not through negotiations but through military action."

Addressing a meeting of foreign ministers of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) in Cholpon-Ata, Kyrgyzstan, Abbas Araghchi said Iran had once again become the target of overt military aggression by the United States and Israel. He said attacks that began in June 2025 were followed by a renewed wave of aggression between February and April 2026.

Referring to the assassination of Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei, a deadly attack on a school in the southern city of Minab as well as a deadly strike on a stadium in Lamerd, Araghchi said attacks on schools, hospitals, civilian infrastructure and peaceful nuclear facilities under International Atomic Energy Agency supervision, if left unanswered by the international community, would "leave no country immune from similar acts."

"Most concerning of all" was that the at-

tacks occurred while Iran had opted for diplomacy and dialogue and negotiations aimed at settling differences were underway, Araghchi said.

He stressed that the response to diplomacy came not through negotiations but through military action, adding that such conduct weakens trust in diplomacy, calls into question the credibility of peaceful mechanisms for resolving disputes and carries a dangerous message for the future of international relations.

Those attacks triggered Operation True Promise 4, during which Iranian Armed Forces struck US and Israeli military assets across the region. The defensive operation began immediately after the February 28 attacks and was followed by Iran's imposition of restrictions on the Strait of Hormuz.

Attempts to moralize crime

"Perhaps the most painful development after the commission of such crimes is the attempt to normalize them. Contemporary experience has shown that crime, if met with silence, ambiguity or indifference by the international community, will not only fail to stop but will become a model for repetition," Araghchi said.

Addressing the meeting, the Iranian top diplomat called on the SCO to take a firm stand against unilateralism and defend the principles of international law, saying the bloc should become a leading voice for multilateralism and respect for state sovereignty.

"The world is facing unprecedented challenges, including the expansion of unchecked unilateralism, the erosion of the fundamental principles of the United Nations Charter, the unlawful use of force, the imposition of unilateral and excessive sanctions, and the instrumentalization of economic and financial mechanisms to exert political pressure," he said.

Under such circumstances, the responsibility of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, as one of the world's most important transregional institutions encompassing a significant share of the global population, economy, energy resources and strategic capabilities, has become more important than ever, he added.

US violating its commitments

Araghchi also said that the attacks against Iran represented not merely a threat to one country's national security but a challenge to the legal principles underpinning



Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi addresses SCO Council of Foreign Ministers meeting in Cholpon-Ata, Kyrgyzstan on July 24, 2026.
● IRANIAN FOREIGN MINISTRY

the international order.

He said Iran exercised its inherent right to self-defense under Article 51 of the UN Charter while maintaining that the country has never initiated a war and remains committed to dialogue, diplomacy, good-neighborliness and regional cooperation.

Just few weeks after inking the Islamabad Memorandum to end the war on June 17, the US "has once again demonstrated that it does not abide by its commitments," noted the minister.

"The blatant violation of the provisions of this memorandum, attacks on transportation infrastructure, drinking water facilities, fishing boats, local commercial vessels, meteorological centers and other civilian infrastructure constitute clear

violations of international law and international humanitarian law and a vivid example of the continued policy of resorting to force and disregard for international obligations," he added.

Reiterating Iran's determination to defend its sovereignty, Araghchi emphasized that "any participation, cooperation or assistance in committing aggression against Iran will entail international responsibility for the parties concerned."

During the SCO meeting, 25 documents were signed by the foreign ministers of the member states.

The Iranian foreign minister also held separate talks with his counterparts from China, Russia, Pakistan, Belarus, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan on bilateral ties and developments in the Middle East region.

Armed Forces pummel US bases in Bahrain, Jordan, Kuwait

'Stay out of a radius of 500 meters from American bases'

International Desk

Iran's military said on Friday it carried out drone strikes against several American military facilities and bases in Bahrain, Jordan and Kuwait in retaliation for the latest US attacks against the Islamic Republic.

Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC), meanwhile, said that they targeted a data center in Bahrain belonging to Amazon, according to state media.

"This morning, the fuel tanks, large equipment warehouses and silos, and the barracks of the US terrorist forces at the Isa Air Base in Bahrain were targeted by Arash kamikaze drones," the Army said in a statement.

An explosion and the sounding of warning sirens were heard in Bahrain on Friday, though it was not immediately clear if the two events were linked.

There was no confirmation from the US of any targeting of its facilities or personnel.

The Iranian Army also said drone attacks against Jordan, targeting "aircraft hangars, aviation maintenance hangars and a barracks" at al-Azraq



● TASNIM

base.

In a separate statement, the Iranian Army said it had launched drones at US equipment warehouses in Camp Udairi and the site of American military personnel in Camp Doha and Camp Arifjan in Kuwait.

The IRGC also said they had targeted the Ali Al Salem Air Base in Kuwait, destroying an ammunition depot and inflicted casualties among US personnel.

The force also said attacks on equipment storage silos at Camp Udairi in Kuwait and a US Fifth Fleet watchtower in Bahrain.

The IRGC also warned citizens in countries where hosting US bases to stay away from American forces.

"We warn the general public in countries where American soldiers are stationed to immediately stay out of a radius of 500 meters from the places where American soldiers are hiding, in order to be safe," the IRGC said in a statement carried by state TV.

The attacks by Iran's Armed Forces were in response to the US military actions against Iran, which claimed the lives of at least four Iranians.

The governor's office of Khuzestan Province reported that four citizens were martyred and five others injured in a fresh US missile attack targeting areas on the outskirts of the city of Ahvaz early Friday.

According to Iran's Health Ministry, at least 55 Iranians have been killed and 629 others have been wounded in the new US aggression against Iran.

The US military said on Friday morning its forces launched another night of strikes against Iranian military targets.

US Central Command said that the strikes began at 6:45 pm Eastern Time (22:45 GMT) on Thursday, marking the 13th consecutive night of operations aimed at holding Tehran "accountable."

Iran demands GCC clarify stance after US 'serving side by side' claim

The Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman called on the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) to clarify its position on US allegations about its member states' participation in the aggression against Iran.

Esmail Baqaei made the remarks after commander of US Central Command Admiral Brad Cooper called Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Qatar and Bahrain, as well as Jordan as "the most prominent countries that have been most helpful and served side by side" in the aggression, Press TV reported.

Publishing footage showing Cooper's remarks, Baqaei said, "If this claim by the American official is not true, the mentioned governments should officially and transparently reject it."

The spokesman stressed the Islamic Republic's "inherent and legitimate" right of self-defense as well as its right to attack hostile targets in countries used as launch pads for anti-Iran offensives.

"In such circumstances, when the Islamic Republic of Iran, within the framework of its inherent and legitimate right of self-defense, targets bases as well as military and logistic assets of the US on the territory of these countries, raising the question, 'Why has Iran done this?' is irrelevant," he said. Baqaei emphasized that the main source of insecurity and conflict in the region is the US-Israeli aggression against Iran.

"Any participation in this aggression, in-



● Esmail Baqaei
● IRNA

cluding by providing a platform for military operations, is considered a manifestation of an aggressive act and a violation of the principle of good-neighborliness and Article 2 (4) of the United Nations Charter, based on the UN General Assembly Resolution 3314 on the definition of aggression." The spokesman stressed that, "The Islamic Republic of Iran's self-defense is carried out in order to restore security and stability for the entire region."

The US military has conducted new waves of deadly strikes on Iran and reinstated a blockade of Iranian ports in flagrant violation of a war-termination deal.

In response, Iran's Armed Forces have launched heavy reprisal attacks against strategic American targets across the region, declaring the Strait of Hormuz closed "until further notice" and at least until "the end of US interference in the region."

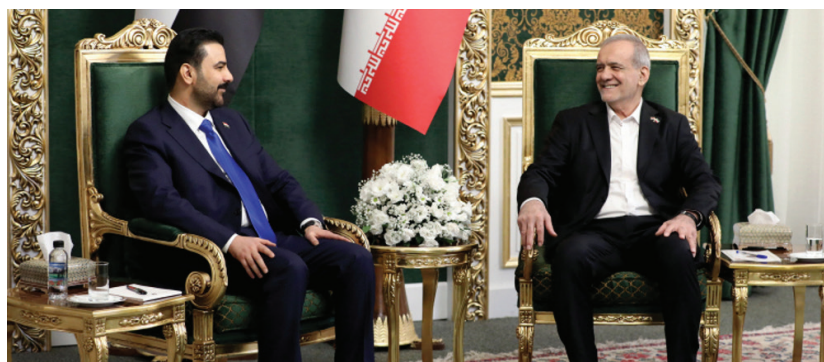
Tehran, Baghdad reject US ceasefire proposal conveyed by Iraqi PM

International Desk

Iranian and Iraqi officials rejected a media report claiming the Iraqi Prime Minister Ali al-Zaidi had delivered a US ceasefire proposal to Tehran, dismissing the report as "completely misleading" and "entirely unfounded."

An Iranian official dismissed as "completely misleading" the New York Times report about a 10-day US ceasefire proposal presented by Iraq's prime minister, stressing that the Islamic Republic has always been committed to diplomacy.

The New York Times claimed in a report on Thursday that Tehran rejected a ceasefire proposal from US President Donald Trump that was allegedly presented by al-Zaidi during his trip to Iran. On Friday, the Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA) quoted an informed Iranian official as saying that the NYT report is "completely diversionary and



● Iran's President Masoud Pezeshkian (R) meets with Iraqi Prime Minister Ali al-Zaidi in Tehran, Iran, on July 23, 2026.
● president.ir

misleading."

"The problem of escalating conflict in the region stems solely from America's breach of its agreements and the violation of the commitments outlined in the Memorandum of Understanding dated

June 18," the official said.

"Unlike the United States, which has used diplomacy as a tool for psychological-media games, and whose internal disputes among different factions within the US ruling establishment and the

influence of the Zionist regime in its policymaking have created a kind of chaos in its decisions, Iran has always attached genuine importance to diplomacy."

Al-Zaidi's visit came one week after he met Trump at the White House.

During his trip to Tehran, al-Zaidi met President Masoud Pezeshkian, Iran's top negotiator in the talks with US and Speaker of the Iranian Parliament Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf, and the country's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi as well as Judiciary chief Gholamhossein Mohseni-Ejei.

Araghchi also said Iran has no shortage of intermediaries to exchange messages with the US, stressing that the main obstacle to any progress is the United States' "irrational, excessive, and hegemonic" approach.

Araghchi dismissed speculation that Baghdad was carrying a US message to Iran.

"It is natural for the Iraqi prime minister to share his assessments and views from his trip with us," Araghchi said.

"At present, we have no problem with mediators for exchanging messages with the United States. There are enough parties capable of playing that role, and there is no real obstacle to message exchanges."

Iraq also on Friday reacted to the New York Times report, calling it "completely baseless."

In a statement carried by the Iraqi News Agency (INA), the Iraqi prime minister's media office said the "claims" in the New York Times report were "completely baseless and had no connection to reality."

It urged media outlets "to verify information, rely on official sources and refrain from circulating unsubstantiated reports or claims attributed to anonymous sources."

Iran, Iraq sign four cooperation deals, including rail link MoU

Pezeshkian says stronger ties require swift implementation of accords

Economy Desk

Senior Iranian and Iraqi officials signed four cooperation agreements and memorandums of understanding on Thursday during Iraqi Prime Minister Ali Falih al-Zaidi's official visit to Tehran, as the two countries sought to deepen bilateral ties.

The documents, signed in the presence of Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian and al-Zaidi, included an agreement on cross-border road freight transport, a memorandum of understanding to build the Khosravi-Khannaqin-Baghdad railway, a Tehran-Baghdad sister-city agreement, and an MoU on public administration, training and human resources.

At a joint meeting of the two countries' senior delegations, Pezeshkian called for a comprehensive strategic cooperation plan between Iran and Iraq, saying broader ties depended on the swift implementation of existing agreements, expanded economic and infrastructure cooperation, and stronger security coordination, according to the Iranian presidency's website, president.ir.

"The security of Iran and Iraq is intertwined, and the shared determination of

the two countries is to turn agreements into practical achievements for both nations," Pezeshkian said.

He also called for joint mechanisms between the two countries to become more active through regular meetings of bilateral commissions and faster implementation of signed agreements.

"All agreements must move into the implementation phase as quickly as possible through sustained follow-up by the responsible institutions, and the relevant ministers should accelerate the process of expanding cooperation by proposing practical solutions," he said.

Pezeshkian described the proposed comprehensive strategic cooperation plan as a roadmap for long-term bilateral relations. He said expanding rail and road transport networks was among Iran's priorities.

Iran has begun expanding transport infrastructure with its neighbors, he said, adding that his country is interested in Iraq joining this network to build a unified transit system. The initiative aims to deepen cooperation in transit, investment, regional markets, and port development, Pezeshkian added.

Al-Zaidi said Iran held a spe-



Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian (r, c) and Iraqi Prime Minister Ali Falih al-Zaidi (l, c) oversee a ceremony in which the two neighbors sign four cooperation agreements and MoUs in Tehran, Iran on July 23, 2026. president.ir

cial place in Iraq's foreign policy and described expanding bilateral cooperation as a strategic necessity.

"Today, all of Iraq's economic ministers are accompanying this visit to discuss and reach agreements on everything that serves the common interests of our two countries," he said.

He also expressed Baghdad's interest in expanding cooper-

ation with Iran in the fields of the economy, science, higher education, healthcare and other areas of mutual interest.

According to IRNA, transportation experts view the memorandum on the Khosravi-Khannaqin railway not merely as an agreement to build a new rail line, but as a step toward completing one of West Asia's key transport

corridors by linking Iran's railway network to Iraq, opening new prospects for trade, international freight transport and passenger travel between the two countries.

The agreement comes as construction of the Kerman-shah-Khosravi railway in Iran continues at an accelerated pace, while talks on launching the Iraqi section in

Diyala Province have entered a new phase, raising hopes for one of the two countries' longest-standing joint infrastructure projects.

The project was first proposed in the 1970s to connect Iran's railway network with Khannaqin and Baghdad, but was never implemented because conditions were not suitable for simultaneous construction on both sides of

the border. Following Iran's 1979 Islamic Revolution, the eight-year Iran-Iraq war, damage to infrastructure and years of instability in Iraq delayed the project for an extended period. Although it returned to the agenda after bilateral relations improved, the lack of conditions for parallel implementation on both sides of the border continued to prevent its execution.

In a separate meeting on Thursday, Pezeshkian and al-Zaidi said accelerating the full implementation of bilateral agreements would be an important step toward strengthening relations and advancing mutual interests. The two sides also stressed the need to activate joint capacities in political, economic, trade, transit, energy and regional cooperation.

As the two countries seek to expand economic cooperation, Economy Minister Ali Madanizadeh said on Thursday Iran exported about \$12 billion worth of goods to Iraq, while imports from Iraq totaled less than \$1 billion.

"Most of our trade is concentrated in energy exports, namely natural gas and electricity, and we are seeking to make the trade balance somewhat more even," he said.

Initial phase of Iran's first geothermal power plant comes online



Economy Desk

Iran has connected the first 5 megawatts (MW) of its Meshgin Shahr geothermal power plant in Ardabil Province to the national electricity grid, Energy Minister Abbas Aliabadi said on Thursday, marking the first phase of the country's first geothermal power project.

The pilot project, built with an investment of 10 million euros, has been developed over a geothermal reservoir with an estimated generation capacity of about 250 MW, Aliabadi said, according to IRNA.

"The implementation of this project has enabled the country to acquire the expertise needed to explore, de-

sign, construct and operate geothermal resources," he said.

Aliabadi said several wells, each about 3,000 meters deep, had been drilled to explore and develop the geothermal resource, with a combined generation capacity of 30 MW.

"Five megawatts of that capacity have been brought online in the first phase," he said.

He said the project was intended to expand the use of geothermal energy as a clean and sustainable power source while supporting economic development in the region by attracting tourism. "In the next stages of the project, we will seek to expand the capacity of the

Meshgin Shahr power plant and its existing wells, then develop the entire explored reservoir in the region and build geothermal power plants in other parts of the country," Aliabadi said.

He said the project's objectives included expanding the use of geothermal renewable energy for electricity generation, acquiring technology and expertise in geothermal resource development, localizing technical knowledge for the sustainable operation of geothermal reservoirs, and reducing dependence on fossil fuels.

The geothermal power plant is under construction about 25 kilometers (16 miles) south of the city of Meshgin Shahr.

1,200 idle mines revived as investment push picks up

Economy Desk

Industry Ministry spokesperson Ezzatollah Zarei said 1,200 idle mines has been reactivated and measures introduced to accelerate investment in the mining sector as the country pursues a 13.5% growth target under the Seventh Development Plan (SDP). Zarei told IRNA that the government had delegated some decision-making powers to provincial authorities, shortened administrative procedures and introduced investment packages to encourage greater private sector participation in mining.

Under Iran's development plan, the mining sector is expected to achieve 13.5% growth by the end of the plan period, Zarei said, adding that the government had launched a series of

measures, including reactivating idle mines, developing infrastructure and facilitating investment procedures to meet that goal.

As part of such efforts, 1,200 idle mines have resumed operations, he said. The government has also transferred some authority over mining zones, idle mines and mining license transfers to provincial governments to speed up decision-making. Zarei said the ministry had also prepared 95 investment packages for mining projects to be offered to investors across the country.

"Some mines may not be economically attractive on their own, so we are seeking to encourage investment in them by offering the necessary support and incentives," he said.

On foreign investment, Zarei

said overseas investors were active in parts of Iran's mining sector, although investment levels did not match the country's resource potential.

He said Chinese investors had participated in projects involving building stone, gypsum and copper, while investors from Central Asian countries, including Kazakhstan, were also involved in some mining activities.

According to Zarei, the limited level of foreign investment in Iran's mining sector reflects the country's broader economic and international conditions.

The country is the 15th-largest mineral-rich country globally, and Iranian officials call mining the backbone of industrial development and say it should replace oil as the primary revenue generator.



Celebrities, concerts, and football

What transformation did American culture make in FIFA World Cup?


By Sadeq Dehqan
Staff writer
INTERVIEW

With the conclusion of the 2026 World Cup, the dossier of the first 48-team edition of this competition has likewise been closed; a tournament that, in addition to technical matters, from the perspective of organizational modality, executive management, and economic approach, constitutes one of the more distinctive editions in men's World Cup history.

In this World Cup edition, the United States, as the principal host, endeavored, by reliance upon its expansive infrastructures, technologies, and economic capacities, to present an image of its managerial capability and power in hosting the globe's biggest football event. Nevertheless, alongside this ostentatious exhibition, pronounced marks of American culture were conspicuously observable in the conduct of the matches; from the extensive presence of cinema and music celebrities and performative programs added to the contests, to the emphasis upon revenue generation, television broadcasting rights, unprecedented ticket prices, and the transformation of the World Cup into an event transcending a merely athletic competition. However, this edition of the tournament was not limited solely to executive and entertainment dimensions. Simultaneously, certain decisions and controversies, particularly in the method of engagement with the Iranian national team, raised questions concerning the degree of the organizers' adherence to the principle of neutrality and the separation of sport from politics. From the logistical difficulties and restrictions imposed upon the Iranian delegation, to the criticisms made by experts and diverse media vis-à-vis unfair treatment of certain teams, it demonstrated that the organization of a global event, in addition to executive capacity, necessitates the observance of justice and uniform treatment of all participants. Iran Daily, in the ensuing exclusive interview with Masoud Moeini, a football expert and veteran and a former member of the technical committee of the Football Federation of the Islamic Republic of Iran, has endeavored, while evaluating the performance of FIFA and the United States in hosting the 2026 World Cup, to address the various dimensions of this event, including the quality of infrastructures, the influence of American culture upon the atmosphere of the matches, the commercialization of football, the controversies pertaining to the Iranian national team, the future outlook of the world's paramount football event, and other related subjects. The full text of this interview follows:



Dancers perform during a ceremony for the FIFA World Cup 2026 Group D match between USA and Paraguay.
● GETTY IMAGES

IRAN DAILY: With the conclusion of the 2026 World Cup, we intend to adopt a comprehensive view of this event from executive, technical, and social perspectives. Initially, please articulate your general assessment of the level of organization of the matches in the United States.

MOEINI: As you have indicated, this subject must be examined from diverse perspectives. In the domain of infrastructures, namely the stadiums, team accommodations, and additional facilities, the organization of the matches transpired at an almost unparalleled level. One might contend that, in terms of hardware amenities, few prior World Cup editions have exhibited such opulence, magnitude, and facilities. It must be acknowledged that the United States, as one of the hosts, exploited all its material capacities for the most splendid possible organization of this event. Another point that should not be neglected is the augmentation of the number of teams from 32 to 48. FIFA, with this decision, furnished a golden opportunity for a greater number of teams, particularly in Asia and Africa,

Masoud Moeini



to experience participation in the World Cup. These teams, although unable in this edition to deliver a brilliant performance, nevertheless acquired an experience that will constitute a valuable asset for their footballing future. It is natural that the populations of these nations, likewise, experience satisfaction and delight from their national team's presence in the world's paramount football event. Alongside these points, one must also reference the fact that the American rulers and the incumbent Republican Party, by exploiting the colossal financial resources of this country, endeavored to display an image of their superiority and capability. Unfortunately, however, when this supremacism transgresses the boundaries of sport and political matters encroach upon the arena of competition, not only does this image become distorted, but it also engenders serious anxieties in global public opinion. Notwithstand-

ing these controversies, it must be conceded that the organization of the matches, from a technical and executive standpoint, was acceptable.

Many analysts maintain that the United States adopted an unprofessional behavior toward the Iranian national team and imposed difficulties and non-football-related issues upon this team. What is your evaluation of this matter?

Permit me to speak candidly; I have been present in football for more than four decades and have traveled to various countries with diverse teams, yet I have never before witnessed such treatment of a sports team. In this edition, the Iranian national team encountered difficulties unprecedented in prior editions. For example, in previous World Cups, teams were typically stationed in proximity to the match venues to afford sufficient opportunity for rest and recovery; however, in this edition, the Iranian team was compelled to traverse lengthy distances by bus or airplane and arrive at the stadium merely hours before the match.



Permit me to speak candidly; I have been present in football for more than four decades and have traveled to various countries with diverse teams, yet I have never before witnessed such treatment of a sports team. In this edition, the Iranian national team encountered difficulties unprecedented in prior editions. For example, in previous World Cups, teams were typically stationed in proximity to the match venues to afford sufficient opportunity for rest and recovery; however, in this edition, the Iranian team was compelled to traverse lengthy distances by bus or airplane and arrive at the stadium merely hours before the match.

This procedure was criticized not only by Iranians but also by numerous international commentators and experts as one of the major deficiencies of this edition. It was expected that the host would treat all 48 teams uniformly; unfortunately, however, that did not occur, and this treatment cast a heavy shadow upon the sporting reputation of this event.

One of the salient characteristics of this edition was the predominance of American entertainment culture over the atmosphere of the matches. The extensive presence of celebrities, performative programs during halftime, and even a 25-minute concert and program during the halftime of the final match, generated the impression that the World Cup had been converted into a commercial spectacle. In your opinion, did this approach contribute to the matches' appeal, or did it impair the authenticity of football?

If we examine Qatar's experience in the previous World Cup, we observe that that country, likewise, with the expenditure of millions of dollars, employed celebrities and renowned figures to introduce itself to the world. This behavior is rooted in a natural reality; every nation that hosts such a colossal event tries to exploit this opportunity to display its capabilities and advancements. The World Cup is the world's largest football festival, and approximately two billion individuals watched the final match. It is therefore natural that the host nation wishes to present the most favorable possible image of itself. Of course, a distinction must be made between legitimate exploitation of this opportunity and excess in commercialization. There's a supremacist attitude among certain American officials, who strive to present their country as the world's greatest power. Although it is not necessarily congruent with the dispositions of ordinary American citizens, politicians exploit such an event to convey the same message in practice. Concerning the final match, although the halftime programs, including the concert performances by singers, extended to 25 minutes, in my opinion, these programs do not per se disrupt the footballing process because the final is always an exceptional match, and special programs are customarily arranged for it.



Iranian players arrive for the World Cup soccer tournament in Tijuana, Mexico, on June 7, 2026, while all of their games were scheduled to take place in the United States.
● GREGORY BULL/AP

From a technical perspective, how do you evaluate the final match? Many experts maintain that Spain smartly neutralized Argentina and was deserving of the championship.

The final match is a contest in which no team is willing to suffer defeat. For this reason, both teams, above all, endeavor not to concede a goal and then devise their strategy for victory. An interesting point about this edition was the low risk-taking propensity of teams in the first half because any goal conceded in the first half compels the team in the second half to assume greater risk and alter its playing style. Regarding the final, however, Spain demonstrated itself to be an extremely powerful, technically proficient team with exceedingly high tactical intelligence. Messi's role in Argentina's preceding matches, as a coordinator and creative manager, was highly pronounced, and the other players exhibited substantial dependence upon him. Spain, with meticulous planning, neutralized this strength. Throughout the match, wherever Messi was present, at least three Spanish players encircled him and prevented him from receiving the ball. Statistics, likewise, corroborate this point, and Argentina did not manage a single shot on target throughout the 90 minutes of regulation time. Spain, with this strategy, effectively removed Messi from the flow of the game in both halves and succeeded in scoring during extra time; a goal that proved exceedingly difficult for Argentina to compensate. In my opinion, Argentina's weakest performance in this entire World Cup occurred precisely in the final match.

The scheduling of certain matches around noon, including at 11:30 AM, generated numerous questions among audiences. On what basis was this decision made, and to what extent did it affect the quality of the matches?

This decision was adopted by FIFA. FIFA's primary objective was the maximization of revenue from the sale of television broadcasting rights. Given the considerable time difference between the United States and other continents, including approximately a 10-hour difference with Iran, FIFA endeavored to schedule matches at hours when the maximum number of viewers in Asia, Africa, and Europe could watch them live. Although this timing was not ideal for the players, the teams were informed of the match timing at least one week in advance and possessed sufficient opportunity to adapt to the conditions. Fortunately, the temperature inside the stadiums was controlled, and the principal challenge remained the players' adaptation to their biological clocks, the management of which was the responsibility of the technical staffs.

The exceedingly high ticket prices in this edition, especially in the final match, and likewise the emptiness of certain seats, engendered the concern that football has become a sport for the rich and that World Cup attendance has become inaccessible to the general public. What is your opinion? Stadiums possess various sections with disparate prices. Ticket prices in the World Cup commenced at approximately \$100 to \$500 and extended to exceedingly high figures, and as you indicated, it was reported in the news that tickets were sold for prices around \$81,000. I myself witnessed at the Australian Open tennis tournament that tickets for certain matches, particularly the match in which Rafael Nadal participated, were sold for as much as \$15,000. On the other hand, certain spectators, likewise, procure their tickets from the black market and are willing to pay extraordinarily large sums. Nevertheless, it should not be forgotten that, among the more than 80,000 spectators present at the final, the number of those capable of paying such costs is limited. The vacant seats,

US actor and producer Tom Cruise delivers a speech on an elevated platform ahead of the 2026 World Cup football tournament final match between Spain and Argentina at the New York/New Jersey Stadium in East Rutherford on July 19, 2026.

● ODD ANDERSEN/AFP



Concerning offside, however, I believe that excessively meticulous scrutiny, even for a fingertip or a body part that has no effect on the flow of play, not only does not appear fair but also diminishes football's appeal. In the past, referees were advised that if they were doubtful about an offside, they should allow play to continue, to render football more fluid and high-scoring. Today, however, we witness that a legitimate goal is occasionally disallowed merely due to a few centimeters of offside in the upper body.

This official illustration shows how Iran's Mehdi Taremi (white) was found marginally ahead of Belgium's Alexis Saelemaekers by the VAR system when the ball was played in.

● ODD ANDERSEN/AFP



likewise, were predominantly situated in the more remote sections of the stadium, and certain individuals, due to the high costs, abstained from attending the stadium.

In principle, football should remain a popular sport, and FIFA should adopt measures to enable lower-income groups, likewise, to benefit from these events. However, FIFA's priority is revenue generation, and the augmentation of the number of teams to 48 constitutes one of its strategies for attracting new audiences and increasing substantial revenues.

The "Cooling Break" intervals, or hydration breaks, were implemented during the World Cup matches. What effect did these intervals have upon the flow of the games?

FIFA, prior to the commencement of the matches, announced that, due to intense heat, 3-minute breaks would be scheduled around the 25th minute of the first half and the 65th minute of the second half. Although this duration is brief, it may disrupt the momentum of a team that has dominated the flow of the game, removing it from the peak of its attacks, and conversely, may afford the opposing team an opportunity to alter the rhythm of the game and regain composure. FIFA typically tests such schemes initially in junior categories and, upon success, extends them to higher-level competitions. Given global warming, which is perceptible today in many parts of the world, including Europe and even Tehran, the implementation of this program in the American heat appeared necessary. Of course, FIFA should carefully

examine the feedback from this idea in future tournaments and implement necessary modifications if required.

The video assistant referee (VAR) system played a highly pronounced role in this edition and even altered certain results. Has this technology contributed to justice, or has it diminished football's excitement? What is your opinion, particularly concerning offside calls of a few centimeters that resulted in the disallowance of certain goals?

The VAR system typically intervenes in critical situations such as penalties, offsides, and on-field confrontations. For instance, I myself witnessed a scene where the referee initially did not award a penalty, but upon review of images from various angles, VAR demonstrated that a foul had occurred, and the referee correctly amended his decision. This demonstrates that VAR can play an effective role in the realization of justice. Concerning offside, however, I believe that excessively meticulous scrutiny, even for a fingertip or a body part that has no effect on the flow of play, not only does not appear fair but also diminishes football's appeal. In the past, referees were advised that if they were doubtful about an offside, they should allow play to continue, to render football more fluid and high-scoring. Today, however, we witness that a legitimate goal is occasionally disallowed merely due to a few centimeters of offside in the upper body. In my opinion, the principal criterion for offside determination should be the feet because the player's balance

and movement are grounded upon the feet, and other body parts do not play a determinative role in this matter. Furthermore, just as the complete crossing of the ball over the goal line serves as the criterion for goal-line decisions, a specific margin of tolerance could be established for offside as well, to prevent excessive strictness and preserve the beauty and excitement of football. Of course, these are my personal perspectives, and I hope that FIFA will, in the future, undertake a serious reconsideration of the offside regulations. Nevertheless, VAR, despite all its controversies, is an efficient instrument for the establishment of justice and must be properly managed.

Concerning Mehdi Taremi's disallowed goal, if the criterion for offside determination were the position of the feet, in your opinion would that goal have been accepted? Without doubt, yes. In that scene, Taremi's foot was not in an offside position, but his upper body was a few centimeters ahead of the opposing

defender, and this very fact caused the goal's disallowance, whereas, in my opinion, this cannot constitute a logical justification for disallowing the goal. If the criterion were the position of the feet or even the head, which typically plays a direct role in the scoring of goals, this goal would have been readily accepted. I hope that overly strict regulations will gradually yield to more logical regulations, so that we may witness more fluid, more appealing, and more exciting football, and that this sport does not distance itself from its inherent appeal.



Sports Desk

Iranian national teams learned their opponents for the upcoming Aichi-Nagoya Asian Games after the draw ceremony for several team sports was held on Thursday.

The 20th edition of the continental multi-sport event will open at Paloma Mizuho Stadium in Nagoya, Japan, on September 19.

In the men's volleyball tournament, which will feature 16 teams, Iran will begin its bid for a fourth successive gold medal in Pool B against Indonesia, Thailand, and Kyrgyzstan from September 27.

With the men's competition kicking off only two weeks after the conclusion of the Asian Championship – where the continent's lone berth at the Los Angeles 2028 Olympics will also be at stake – Iran and fellow Asian powerhouse Japan may opt to field second-string squads for the Games.

Tough football fate

New Iran U23 head coach Hossein Abdi will face a daunting task in his debut campaign after his team was drawn in a tough Group B alongside China, North Korea, and the United Arab Emirates.

China will look to build on its impressive runner-up finish at the U23 Asian Cup in January, while North

Iranian teams discover Asian Games opponents



VARZESH3

Korea will also fancy its chances as a traditional heavyweight in Asian age-group football.

The UAE may attract less attention than China or North Korea, but its significant progress in academy development and talent identification programs in recent years cannot be overlooked, and it could well emerge as one of the teams capable of upsetting the balance in the group.

The runner-up in the group could face overwhelming

favorite Japan in the first knockout round.

The 16-team men's football tournament will get underway on September 14.

A difficult group stage also awaits Iran's men's handball team.

Also under a new head coach, Croatian Nenad Kljaić, Iran has been pitted against reigning Asian champion Bahrain, Kuwait – bronze medalist at January's Asian Championship – record nine-time continental champion South Korea,

and Kazakhstan in Group B. The handball tournament will begin on September 20, with Qatar, Japan, China, and Hong Kong making up Group A.

Kabaddi hopefuls

Iran's men's and women's teams will be among the favorites, alongside India and Chinese Taipei, in the kabaddi competition, having collected three medals between them over the past two editions, including a clean sweep of the men's

and women's gold medals in 2018.

Beaten by India in the 2022 final, Iran is in Group B of the men's tournament alongside Nepal, Thailand, Pakistan, and Malaysia. India, Japan, Chinese Taipei, South Korea, and Bangladesh are in Group A.

Iran's women's team, which was unfortunate to miss out on the podium at Hangzhou 2022 after losing to Nepal in the bronze-medal match, has been drawn against Japan, Bangladesh, and India

in Group A, with Sri Lanka, Thailand, Chinese Taipei, and Nepal in Group B.

The kabaddi competition will begin on September 21. In the men's water polo tournament, Iran will open its campaign in Group B against 2022 silver medalist China, Singapore, and South Korea from September 26 at Nippon Gaishi Hall.

Iran won bronze – its first medal since claiming gold on home soil in 1974 – in 2018, but lost to Kazakhstan in a shootout in the

bronze-medal match at Hangzhou 2022.

Kazakhstan, Japan, Thailand, and Hong Kong make up the other group in the eight-team competition.

Named "Angels of Minab" in memory of the 168 victims, including 120 schoolchildren, killed in a U.S.-Israeli airstrike on Shajareh Tayyeb Elementary School in Minab, southern Iran, on February 28, the Iranian delegation will comprise 214 male and 94 female athletes competing across 36 sports at this year's Asian Games.

Reigning world karate champion Atousa Golshanejad and men's national kabaddi captain Fazel Atarachi have been named Iran's flag bearers for the opening ceremony.

At Hangzhou 2022, Iran fielded 289 athletes and finished seventh in the medal standings with 13 gold, 21 silver, and 20 bronze medals—its lowest placing in the past five editions of the Games.

Iran's most successful Asian Games campaign came in Tehran in 1974, where it won a record 81 medals, including an all-time high of 36 golds, to finish second behind Japan in the overall standings.

In more recent editions, Iran's best performance came at Guangzhou 2010, where it finished fourth with a haul of 20 gold, 15 silver, and 24 bronze medals.

Asian Men's Junior Handball Championship:

Iran beaten by Bahrain, misses out on world spot

Sports Desk

Iran suffered a 31-24 defeat to Bahrain in the quarterfinals of the Asian Men's Junior Handball Championship in Chuzhou, China.

Failing to reach the last four also meant Keyvan Sadeqi's men missed out on a continental berth at the 2027 IHF Men's Junior (U21) World Champion-

ship in North Macedonia. Ahmed Eid led Bahrain – winner of two bronze medals in the previous three editions – with eight goals, while Ali Abbas added seven. Amirhossein Karami was Iran's top scorer with seven goals, followed by Omid Enayatijoo with four.

The defeat came as a bitter blow for the Iranian

team, which had produced impressive performances to advance from a daunting Group B featuring two-time defending champion Japan, 2024 runner-up South Korea, five-time champion Kuwait, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, and India. Iran got off to a flying start by defeating Kuwait 29-27 before suffering a narrow 29-28 defeat to

South Korea and sharing the spoils with the UAE in a 25-25 draw.

Iran then returned to winning ways with a 26-25 victory over Qatar but suffered another heartbreaking defeat, losing 28-27 to Japan, before concluding the group stage with a commanding 63-14 victory over India on Tuesday.

Iran will now look to em-

ulate its fifth-place finish from the 2024 edition, beginning with a 5th-8th classification match against the loser of the quarterfinal between South Korea and Chinese Taipei later on Friday at Chuzhou International Handball Hall.

In the other quarterfinal on Friday, Group B winner the UAE defeated China 37-28 to advance.



IRIHF

ISSF World Cup 2026 Hangzhou:

Rostamian wins bronze in 10m air pistol

Sports Desk

Iranian shooter Hanieh Rostamian won the bronze medal in the women's 10m air pistol event at the latest ISSF World Cup stop of the 2026 season in Hangzhou, China, on Friday.

The Iranian Olympian shot 579-25x to finish eighth in qualification in the morning session before scoring 221.0 points in the final later in the day, securing the fourth World Cup medal of her career.

China's Yao Qianxun produced a composed performance under immense pressure to claim the title, edging India's Sainyam by the narrowest of margins in one of the closest finals of the season.

The home favorite and the Indian rising star were level after the first two stages of the final, both posting 101.6 points to set the stage for a thrilling battle for gold. The pair remained neck and neck throughout the elimination stages before Yao found just enough with her closing shots to finish on 243.6, edging Sainyam by 0.2 points.

Zeinab Toumari and Samieh Yasi were the other Iranians in the event but missed out on the eight-shooter final after scoring 574 and 566 points, respectively, in qualification.

MMA



Asian Hockey5s Championship:

Iran defeats Iraq, Saudi Arabia to progress to knockouts

Sports Desk

Iran's U18 men's team secured its place in the knockout stage of the Asian Youth Hockey5s Championship in Muscat, Oman, after defeating Iraq and Saudi Arabia on Friday.

Iran produced another impressive display in the return leg of the

group stage, opening the day with a 4-1 victory over Iraq.

Mahdi Golestan, who was named Player of the Match, was on target alongside Mohammad Pouya, Kamyar Mohammadnejad, and Amirhossein Rajabi.

In its second match of the day, Iran delivered a dominant attacking

performance to thrash Saudi Arabia 7-0. Pouya was named Player of the Match after another standout display, while Parsa Rajabi and Ashkan Zolfagharkhanian each scored twice. Mohammad Taha Abbasi, Pouya, and Golestan also found the net.

The victories saw Iran finish comfortably atop

the Men's Challenger bracket and book a place in the knockout stage, where it will face the fourth-placed team from the Elite bracket on Saturday for a place in the semifinals.

The championship also serves as the qualifying tournament for the FIH Hockey5s World Cup later this year.

Iran had made a flying start to the tournament in Muscat on Monday, securing back-to-back victories over Iraq and Saudi Arabia.

Competing in its first international tournament, Iran opened its Men's Challenger campaign with a 5-0 victory over Iraq before hammering Saudi Arabia 9-0 to underline its title ambitions.



AHHF

UNESCO committee approves Hegmataneh conservation report

Iranica Desk

The conservation report submitted by Iran's Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts on the UNESCO-listed Hegmataneh archaeological site in Hamedan Province has been reviewed and approved by members of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee during its 48th session, currently underway in Busan, South Korea. The committee assessed the measures taken to protect, conserve, manage, and continuously monitor the World Heritage property. It welcomed Iran's efforts to safeguard the Hegmataneh site and emphasized the importance of maintaining the current conservation and management approach. Under the committee's decision, Iran is required to continue implementing its



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conservation, management, and monitoring programs for the historic site and submit an updated report on the latest measures and progress to the UNESCO World Heritage Centre by the end of 2027. The committee's approval of the conservation report

reflects its confidence in the management and protection of Hegmataneh, one of the oldest centers of civilization in Iran and the world. It also indicates that the conservation policies implemented by the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts are in line

with the requirements of the World Heritage Convention and international conservation standards. Hegmataneh, one of the most significant cradles of Iranian civilization, was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List during the 46th session of the

World Heritage Committee. The continuation of specialized monitoring and conservation programs is expected to ensure the preservation of the site's Outstanding Universal Value for future generations. Iranian archaeologists have recently discovered

an Achaemenid column base, remains of water management systems, and architectural structures from the Qajar and early Pahlavi periods during excavations at Hegmataneh. Yaqub Mohammadifar, professor of archaeology at Bu-Ali Sina University and director of the 25th season of excavations at the Hegmataneh World Heritage Site, said that a series of geophysical studies and mapping operations were carried out alongside the latest archaeological excavations to identify buried structures and complete research data on the historic site. Referring to the discoveries made during the first two weeks of the current excavation season, Mohammadifar said that the findings so far include an Achaemenid column base, water con-

veyance structures dating back to the Middle Islamic period, and architectural remains from the Qajar period and the early Pahlavi era. Archaeological research has shown that Hegmataneh preserves the remains of one of the oldest urban settlements on the Iranian Plateau. Excavations have uncovered extensive mud-brick architectural complexes, a planned urban layout, residential quarters, workshops, and sophisticated water management systems, providing valuable evidence of the site's continuous development over thousands of years. These discoveries have made Hegmataneh one of Iran's most important archaeological sites for understanding the evolution of early urban life and state formation in ancient Iran.

Safavid-era cistern reveals hidden layers of Isfahan's history

Iranica Desk

The director-general of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts Organization of Isfahan Province has announced the discovery of a historic cistern during excavation work on Apadana Street and the suspension of construction activities to allow for documentation and further studies. Amir Karamzadeh said that during excavation work carried out by the Isfahan Water and Wastewater Company on First Apadana Street, experts encountered a historical area. Following the presence of archaeologists and preliminary examinations, it was determined that the re-

main of an old cistern dating back to the Safavid era were located at the site. After the identification of the historic structure, experts were dispatched to the location, and excavation work in the area where the remains were found was halted to allow for more detailed investigations, documentation, and specialized studies of the historic structure. Karamzadeh noted that the location of the discovery makes it particularly significant, explaining that the cistern is situated about seven meters below the current street level of Apadana Street. He added that one of the main issues at this stage is assessing the preservation

conditions of the structure and determining how it should be managed, given its location on one of Isfahan's main and heavily trafficked thoroughfares. He said the historic structure is located in the central section of Apadana Street and, considering the urban development around it, necessary assessments will be carried out in cooperation with relevant authorities, including Isfahan Municipality, after the completion of initial documentation to determine the best approach for its protection and management. Karamzadeh added that expert studies on the exact date and architectural characteristics of the cistern are still underway.

At present, the main priority is completing field studies and documenting the structure, after which decisions will be made regarding conservation measures and the appropriate approach to this historic discovery. He further noted that the discovery of historical remains during urban development projects highlights the need for closer coordination between executive bodies and cultural heritage authorities, ensuring that development plans can proceed while safeguarding the historical layers of Isfahan. Karamzadeh emphasized that many modern streets in Isfahan have been built over layers of the city's historical landscape, and



chtn.ir

the discovery of this Safavid-era cistern once again underlines the importance of archaeological

studies before carrying out construction activities in historically significant areas.

Threads of heritage weave through Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad's handicrafts



Kilim-weaving
ilna.ir



Gachmeh
chtn.ir



Siah Chador
chtn.ir

Iranica Desk

Handicrafts in Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad Province, as an inseparable part of the region's economy and cultural identity, play a significant role in preserving indigenous heritage and promoting sustainable development in nomadic areas. Among the province's most notable crafts are kilim, Gachmeh, and black tents, each representing centuries-old traditions and the creativity of local communities. In the past, handicrafts were not only a major source of livelihood for the people of Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad but were also deeply intertwined with the everyday life of nomadic and rural communities.

These unique handwoven products form an essential part of the province's cultural heritage, carrying stories of past generations through their patterns, colors, and designs. This report introduces three of the province's most distinctive handicrafts — arts that represent only a small part of the remarkable skills of the Lor-speaking men and women of Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad and reflect the deep roots of an ancient and authentic culture. Almas Ghobadi, deputy head of handicrafts at the province's Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Organization, said these woven arts embody the region's turbulent history and

that protecting them is a historical responsibility.

Kilim

Today, kilim is the most widespread and widely used handwoven product produced across the province. These valuable textiles are generally woven double-sided and in various practical sizes. Studies show that most looms used for kilim weaving are vertical metal looms, while the raw materials vary depending on the intended use of the final product. The colors and patterns used in Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad kilims are entirely traditional, authentic, and based on geometric motifs. Today, raised kilims are also woven across the

province, featuring exceptional beauty and delicacy. These embossed textiles depict themes ranging from Islamic architecture to diverse military, social, and historical scenes with remarkable skill. Another type of raised kilim reflects contemporary culture through a creative combination of tradition and modernity.

Gachmeh

Gachmeh is another distinguished craft, combining elements of kilim and carpet weaving, in which motifs appear in raised and knotted forms. Considered one of the signature handicrafts of the province, this exceptional product was once at risk of disappearing but has

been revived through the efforts of artisans and cultural heritage enthusiasts. One of the technical features of Gachmeh weaving is that it does not use traditional weft threads; instead, the same materials used in kilim weaving are employed with special precision. After the warp is prepared, carpet-weaving techniques are applied to the borders and patterns, creating fully raised designs. Nomadic communities in Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad use colorful Gachmeh pieces as floor coverings and for decorating the interiors of tents and homes. Today, this unique craft is regarded as one of the province's most beautiful and valuable woven products.

Siah Chador

Among the Lor people's traditional arts, the black tent (Siah Chador) stands out as one of the most remarkable and practical handicrafts of the region. This traditional nomadic shelter has unique ecological and engineering features and has preserved its original design and structure over generations. Serving as a secure and intimate home for nomadic families in the heart of nature, the black tent is carefully woven from goat hair. Its roof contains tiny openings that allow air to circulate during hot summer months, keeping the interior cool and comfortable. The remarkable feature of this structure appears with the arrival of rain: when exposed to moisture, the goat hair fibers expand, automatically closing the openings and preventing rain, snow, and hail from entering the living space. Today, these traditional crafts continue to serve as symbols of the cultural identity of Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad Province, while also offering opportunities for sustainable livelihoods and the preservation of indigenous knowledge.



Tehran, Seoul agree on heritage, tourism cooperation roadmap

Arts & Culture Desk

Iran and South Korea agreed on Friday to expand cooperation in cultural heritage, tourism, handicrafts and creative industries during talks between their culture ministers on the sidelines of the 48th session of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee. Meeting South Korean Culture, Sports and Tourism Minister Chae Hwi-young in Seoul, Iranian Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Reza Salehi-Amiri proposed a comprehensive roadmap covering cultural exchanges, smart tourism, digital museums, heritage conservation, creative industries and joint exhibitions, CHTN reported. The two sides also agreed to pursue reciprocal tourism and

handicrafts exhibitions, expand people-to-people exchanges and encourage cooperation among artists, scholars and content creators. "Our civilizations share deep historical roots, and those commonalities can serve as the foundation for lasting cooperation," Salehi-Amiri said. "Culture is the strongest bridge between nations." The meeting coincided with Iran's campaign to have the Alamut Castle and Associated Fortresses inscribed as the country's 30th UNESCO World Heritage site when the committee reviews the nomination. Salehi-Amiri said the inscription would strengthen international recognition of Iran's cultural legacy while supporting heritage preservation and inbound tourism.



Iranian Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Minister Reza Salehi-Amiri (L) and South Korean Culture, Sports and Tourism Minister Chae Hwi-young shake hands during their meeting in Seoul on July 24, 2026, in this photo released by the South Korean culture ministry. ● YONHAP

South Korea, which has built globally recognized creative industries spanning film, television, music and digital content,

offers valuable experience that Iran hopes to draw upon, the minister said, inviting Seoul to deepen cooperation in creative industries, artificial intelligence, digital archives, museum technologies and sports tourism. The two ministers also discussed drafting a comprehensive memorandum of understanding and agreed to maintain follow-up consultations. Salehi-Amiri invited his South Korean counterpart to visit Tehran and participate in future cultural and tourism events. As part of his visit, Salehi-Amiri also held talks at the Korea National University of Heritage (KNUH), where he proposed establishing a joint academic working group and launching faculty and student exchanges focused on archaeology, monument restoration, World Her-

itage management, intangible cultural heritage and advanced conservation technologies. "Iran and South Korea can become a model for academic cooperation in cultural heritage across Asia," he said, calling for closer collaboration in training specialists and transferring conservation expertise. Deputy Cultural Heritage Minister Ali Darabi said South Korea's postwar experience in restoring historical monuments could provide valuable expertise for Iran's restoration programs after 149 historical sites were damaged during recent US and Israeli military attacks. He also proposed joint research on digital heritage, underwater archaeology, artificial intelligence and museum cooperation. Korea National University of Heritage President Kang Kyung-hwan welcomed the proposals, describing Iran as home to "one of humanity's oldest and richest civilizations" and saying expanded exchanges of academics and researchers could "open a new chapter" in scientific and cultural cooperation between the two countries.

Iran proposes action plan to expand BRICS health cooperation

Social Desk

Iran proposed a three-point roadmap to strengthen health cooperation among BRICS nations at the 16th BRICS Health Ministers' Meeting in Chandigarh, India, as senior Health Ministry officials called for joint action on emergency preparedness, pharmaceutical innovation, and regulatory cooperation, according to Iran's Health Ministry. Presenting Iran's official statement, Deputy Health Minister and senior adviser Ali Ja'farian said health is "a fundamental human right" and a cornerstone of sustainable development, urging BRICS members to translate political commitments into practical cooperation, IRNA reported. Reflecting on Iran's healthcare response during the recent conflict, Ja'farian said the country's medical system continued operating despite heavy pressure on hospitals, healthcare workers, and medicine supply chains. "Essential health services in Iran never stopped. This is the true meaning of resilience," he said, noting that doctors in Tehran successfully carried out 15 complex liver transplants during the 40-day crisis in March. He stressed that vulnerable patients "cannot wait for conflicts to end," pointing to Iran's expansion of mental health services through the national 190 counseling hotline and the growth of the country's Seraj mental and social health network to more than 120 centers providing free psychological and social support. Ja'farian urged BRICS to prioritize joint early warning systems, emergency response networks, antimicrobial resistance, and en-



Iran's Deputy Health Minister Ali Ja'farian attends the 16th BRICS Health Ministers' Meeting in Chandigarh, India, where he presented Iran's proposal for expanding health cooperation among BRICS nations. ● IRNA

vironmental health threats while respecting national sovereignty. He also called for shifting pharmaceutical cooperation from one-way technology transfer toward joint research, local manufacturing, and more resilient supply chains. "Iran is ready to expand cooperation in tuberculosis research, new vaccines, and advanced diagnostics," he said, while backing the creation of a BRICS expert working group on traditional, complementary, and integrative medicine. Highlighting digital transformation, Ja'farian said artificial intelligence should be deployed "fairly and intelligently" across health systems. He proposed that, before the next ministerial meeting, every BRICS health cooperation mechanism deliver "at least one joint pilot project, one operational protocol, and one measurable outcome" to turn solidarity into tangible results. On the meeting's second day, Iran's delegation also secured consensus for a proposal to include psychosocial support during crises, particularly for children and adolescents, in the draft BRICS declaration, underscoring the bloc's growing focus on mental health cooperation.

When the breath of donali fell silent

A farewell to Balochestan's musical voice

By Alireza Sepahvand
Journalist

OPINION EXCLUSIVE

Shir Mohammad Espandar was not merely a musician, he was the donali (a pair of fipple flutes) itself. With the final breath of this great master, one of the most authentic and singular voices of Iran's regional music also fell silent. For nearly a century, he narrated the culture and identity of Balochestan not through words, but through the sound of his instrument, proving that two slender reed pipes can sometimes proclaim the identity of a land more powerfully than any podium or media platform.

In the history of Iranian music, few artists have become so inseparably intertwined with a single instrument that one seems incomplete without the other. Just as the tanbur (a long-necked fretted lute) is forever associated with Seyyed Khalil Alinejad, the dotar with Haj Ghorban Soleimani, and the sorna with Shahmirza Moradi in Iran's musical memory, the donali will forever be identified with the name of Shir Mohammad Espandar. He was not merely a performer of this instrument, he was its greatest narrator and interpreter. At first glance, the donali appears to be a simple instrument, two slender reed pipes placed side by side. Yet behind this apparent simplicity lies one of the most demanding performance techniques among wind instruments. The musician must simultaneously control two independent streams of sound: shaping the melody with one pipe while sustaining a continuous drone with the other. Such mastery is nearly impossible without complete command of circular breathing and precise control of the diaphragm, tongue, and mouth muscles. The slightest disruption in airflow upsets the instrument's sonic balance. Yet for decades, Espandar performed this extraordinarily difficult technique with such ease and naturalness that its complexity remained invisible to his audience.

The secret of his enduring legacy, however, was not confined to his extraordinary technical skill. Espandar breathed life into



the donali. In his performances, musical phrases, motifs, modes, and figures were never mere repetitions of local melodies. Through subtle variations in dynamics, note duration, melodic ornamentation, and an intelligent interplay between silence and sound, he transformed them into a deeply personal and distinctive musical language. Every performance became a fresh retelling of Balochi music, a story that was never repeated in quite the same way. One could hear Balochestan in the sound of his instrument: the scorching winds of the desert, the slow movement of caravans, the exuberance of indigenous ceremonies, and the pulse of a people who have preserved their history and culture through music for centuries. In Espandar's hands, the donali was not simply an instrument, it became the voice of a land that expressed its identity through melody.

Shir Mohammad Espandar was among the rare artists who, without relying on extensive publicity or media support, introduced the music of Balochestan to audiences far beyond Iran's borders. Wherever he performed, before he ever introduced himself, it was the voice of the donali that introduced the cultural identity of Iran to listeners. For years, without ever holding an official title, he served as a cultural ambassador, a responsibility that even cultural institutions have at

times failed to fulfill.

Yet Espandar's story is the familiar, bittersweet fate of many masters of Iran's regional music: artists who receive little recognition during their lifetime, only to be hailed as "national treasures" after they are gone. For years, we have spoken of preserving the music of Iran's ethnic communities, yet we have done far too little to preserve the lives and livelihoods of those who carry this heritage. Even today, many masters of indigenous music live in the country's most remote regions with the barest of means, their reward amounting to little more than a handful of plaques of appreciation and, ultimately, messages of condolence.

Such neglect is not merely an injustice toward an individual artist; it is a disregard for a vital part of Iran's cultural memory. Regional music is not a book that can simply be reprinted. Much of this heritage resides in the minds, memories, lived experiences, and performance practices of its masters. With the passing of each one, a portion of this priceless legacy disappears forever.

Now that Espandar is no longer among us, perhaps the time has come to rethink our approach to the music of Iran's diverse ethnic cultures. This art should not be remembered only during festivals or special occasions. If we truly value Iran's cultural diversity, we must first invest in those who safeguard it, from educating a new generation of performers and documenting traditional performance practices to ensuring the livelihoods of master musicians and establishing specialized research centers dedicated to regional music.

Espandar has departed, but the breath of his donali will continue to resonate in Iran's musical memory. It was a voice that spoke not through the grandeur of orchestras, but through the breath of a man from Balochestan who narrated the identity of an entire land. Perhaps today, more than ever before, we must acknowledge that cultural heritage is preserved not first in museums or archives, but in the hearts and souls of living artists. And if we fail to value them while they are still with us, a part of our history and identity will fall silent with their passing.