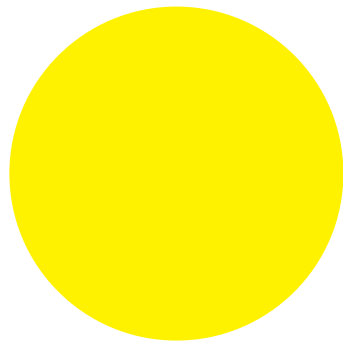


Russian Orthodox Patriarch praises Leader's message, backs closer religious ties

8 >



Iran urges vigilance against Israeli false-flag plots after Egypt drone attack

2 >

Qalibaf: US will pay price for attacks on civilians

Iran pounds US military base in Kuwait in retaliation

2 >



People gather at the site of a residential building destroyed in a US airstrike on Iran's southern island of Qeshm on July 30, 2026.

TASNIM



Tehran, Yerevan seek to boost regional trade through transport links

3 >



Evolution, not revolution

Why China isn't pushing its cleantech advantage in Hormuz crisis

4 >



U17 Wrestling World Championships: Iran's Greco-Roman title streak snapped by Russia

6 >

China leads development of beneficial AI, helps shape fairer global governance



By Cong Peiwu
Chinese ambassador to Iran

OPINION EXCLUSIVE

A new wave of artificial intelligence is sweeping across the globe, fundamentally reshaping the way people live and work while transforming models of social governance. At the 2026 World Artificial Intelligence Conference and the High-Level Meeting on Global AI Governance, President Xi Jinping laid out China's vision for AI development and global governance in a comprehensive manner, advancing four key proposals: upholding openness and win-win cooperation, strengthening risk awareness, promoting inclusiveness and universality, and calling for collaboration and solidarity. These proposals chart the course for global AI governance. Through concrete action, China is demonstrating the responsibility of a major power while offering a Chinese approach to the inclusive develop-

ment of artificial intelligence.

Development for people & benefit of humanity

Faced with questions of our time such as, "When machines begin to think, how should humans coexist with them?", President Xi Jinping stressed that all countries should adhere to a human-centered approach and a positive, beneficial orientation, and join hands to build a fair and rational global governance system for artificial intelligence. This vision is firmly rooted in China's own practice. In recent years, China has actively advanced the "AI+" initiative. The scale of the country's core intelligent economy has surpassed one trillion yuan, while a wide range of smart devices has entered households and contributed to public well-being. "Made in China Smart" has become another hallmark of Chinese modernization.

In smart healthcare, for example, artificial intelligence has made its way from research laboratories to primary

healthcare clinics, emerging as a powerful assistant in safeguarding public health. Specialized AI disease agents developed by the country's leading hospitals are gradually being rolled out to county- and township-level medical institutions nationwide, raising the standard of diagnosis and treatment at the grassroots level. In smart education, intelligent classroom feedback systems automatically collect multidimensional classroom data, assist teachers with analysis, and offer recommendations to improve teaching methods, thereby effectively enhancing educational quality. In agriculture, embedded AI decision-making systems provide around-the-clock monitoring and intelligent control across the entire production chain—from breeding and cultivation to processing—injecting strong scientific and technological momentum into rural revitalization. These examples vividly demonstrate the principle that the benefits of AI development should be shared by the people.

Upholding innovation while ensuring AI remains safe & controllable

China has emerged as one of the world's leading forces in artificial intelligence. It ranks first globally in AI patent applications, accounting for 60% of the world's total. The country is at the forefront of fields such as deep learning, computer vision and natural language processing, while its overall computing capacity ranks second worldwide. In the digital sphere, China has achieved breakthroughs in a number of core technologies, and emerging industries—including indigenous operating systems, humanoid robots, smart homes and intelligent terminals—are expanding rapidly. The 15th Five-Year Plan has mapped out the roadmap for AI development, emphasizing the combination of an efficient market and an effective government, while promoting in a coordinated manner the upgrading of traditional industries, the strengthening of emerging sectors and the strategic

development of industries of the future.

For instance, AI-powered intelligent manufacturing is boosting industrial productivity, while smart networked systems are optimizing urban traffic management.

China places equal emphasis on development and security. It continues to improve its laws and regulations, policy frameworks, application standards and ethical guidelines to ensure that artificial intelligence remains safe, reliable and controllable.

President Xi Jinping stressed the need to pay close attention to the inherent and derivative risks posed by AI, accelerate the development of regulatory frameworks, technical oversight, risk warning mechanisms and emergency response systems, reinforce safety red lines, prevent abuse and misuse, and ensure that AI always remains under human control.

At the same time, China opposes the over-expansion of the concept of national security.

Page 3 >

Qalibaf: US will pay price for attacks on civilians

Iran pounds US military base in Kuwait in retaliation



People inspect the site of a residential building destroyed in a US airstrike on Iran's southern island of Qeshm on July 30, 2026.

● TASNIM

Minab and Lamerd."

He was referring to the US deadly airstrikes on a school in Iran's southern city of Minab as well its attack on a sports hall in the city of Lamerd on the first day of the US-Israeli aggression against Iran on February 28.

Iran's top parliamentarian added that the United States had grown accustomed to making up for "the slaps it receives on the battlefield by shedding the blood of innocent people."

Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baqaei also reacted to the deadly airstrike in Qeshm, saying that the US airstrike was "a crime reminiscent of Daesh terrorist atrocities". Baqaei added that "these crimes, which evoke the terrorist acts of Daesh and are committed under the slogan of 'peace through strength' with the aim of punishing a nation for insisting on its rights, dignity, and independence, will never produce authority or legitimacy."

International Desk

Iran's Parliament Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf strongly condemned the United States for launching a deadly airstrike on residential homes in Iran's southern island of Qeshm in the Persian Gulf, warning that the US will pay the price for its actions.

The United States attacked a working-class residential neighborhood in the Chah Tangu area of Qeshm Island

in the early hours of Thursday, killing three members of a family.

Two other children from the family, aged seven and nine, were pulled alive from the debris shortly after the attack. The farther, identified as Qeisar Jafari, was a taxi driver.

Qalibaf in a post on X said that the US commits a new crime every day, stressing that the "terrorist attack on civilian residential homes on Qeshm Island is a continuation of the crime in

"With every explosion, every crime, every sanction, every threat, and every child you kill, you only make Iranians more determined and united in defending their homeland," the spokesman stressed.

Two student dormitories in the southwestern Iranian city of Ahvaz were also damaged in US airstrikes, while a sports hall in Fars Province was struck in separate attacks, according to Iranian officials.

Iran's retaliation

Iran's Armed Forces launched attacks on the US military bases in region in response to the US new attacks on Iran.

The Iranian Army said in a statement that it targeted key facilities at US-run Ahmad al-Jaber Air Base in Kuwait, as newly analyzed satellite imagery also points to fresh damage at another US-operated base in the Persian Gulf state.

According to the statement, loitering drones targeted aircraft shelters, satellite communications systems and equipment storage facilities at Ahmad al-Jaber Air Base. It described the installation as a major hub for US air and surveillance operations and a vi-

tal center for the logistical support of American forces.

The retaliation comes as the US has been targeting southern Iranian provinces since earlier in July after violating the terms of the Islamabad Memorandum of Understanding.

Tehran has responded with repeated missile and drone attacks targeting US-operated military facilities across the region.

The Army condemned the US strike on civilian homes in Qeshm, calling it "a clear violation of humanitarian principles and another example of the enemy's war crimes."

It added that "crimes, sanctions and threats will only make Iran more united and cohesive in its sacred defense." The United States has perpetrated numerous violations against Iranian territory since April 7, when US President Donald Trump announced a unilateral ceasefire in the latest bout of wholesale American-Israeli aggression targeting the Islamic Republic.

The violations continued even after Washington and Tehran signed a Pakistan-mediated memorandum of understanding last month, whose first clause had clearly mandated cessation of aggression on all fronts.

Hamas says disarmament hinges on Israel's withdrawal from Gaza

International Desk

The Palestinian resistance group Hamas said on Friday that the implementation of the second phase of the Gaza peace deal is dependent on Israel's full implementation of its first phase, including the withdrawal of its troops after the US president said his "Board of Peace" had reached an agreement for the complete disarmament of Hamas and other armed groups.

The announcement followed months of faltering efforts to keep the ceasefire agreement reached last year in the Egyptian resort of Sharm el-Sheikh on track and it was not immediately clear how strongly either Hamas or Israel stood behind it.

"The occupation's commitment to halting the killing is the fundamental prerequisite for proceeding with implementing and establishing a timeline for what has been agreed upon," Hamas said.

The group also named as necessary conditions the



● REUTERS

entry of an administrative committee – the National Committee for the Administration of Gaza, – the deployment of an international stabilization force and the disbanding of Israeli-backed militias.

The issue of Hamas's disarmament has been one of the key sticking points in the advancement of the ceasefire deal that has been in place between Israel and the group in Gaza since October.

Despite the ceasefire, daily violence has continued in Gaza, with Israeli strikes targeting Palestinians.

"An agreement has been reached regarding the issue of weapons... Furthermore,

an agreement has been reached on a gradual withdrawal of (Israeli forces)" from the strip, a Hamas official said.

The official added that the Islamist movement now expects the mediators and US President Donald Trump's Board of Peace to ensure that Israel complies with the terms of the deal.

Ghazi Hamad, a member of the group's negotiating team, said the movement was making "concessions for the sake of our people in the Gaza Strip, to save them from killing and displacement".

"The National Committee for Administration of Gaza (NCAG) shall manage and

execute the cataloguing and storage of weapons in accordance with the agreed timetable," the senior official said.

"The agreement contains a clear provision stating that Israel must commit to and implement its obligations. If Israel does not implement the agreement, neither will we," Hamad added.

Earlier this month, Hamas announced the dissolution of its body that governed Gaza for nearly two decades, clearing the way for the NCAG to implement civilian rule in the territory of more than two million people. The move marked a significant political shift by Hamas.

Israel launched a genocidal war on the Gaza Strip on October 7, 2023 after Hamas fighters launched attacks on the regime's positions in the occupied territories.

Israel has killed at least 73,341 Palestinians and injured 174,086 others since the beginning of the genocide, destroying around 90 percent of the territory's civilian infrastructure.

Iran urges vigilance against Israeli false-flag plots after Egypt drone attack

International Desk

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi affirmed that Egypt is an important friend and partner in the region whose security is of utmost importance to the Islamic Republic, while calling on all parties to remain vigilant against Israeli plots and false-flag operations designed to undermine regional peace.

In a message posted on X on Thursday, Araghchi responded to Western media reports attempting to link an unclaimed drone attack on Egypt's Damietta Port to Iran.

"Egypt is an important friend and partner in the region, and its security is of utmost importance to us," the foreign minister stated.

"We must all be vigilant against Israeli plots and false-flag operations designed to undermine regional peace. The threat is clear, mutual, and fearful of Muslim solidarity."

The remarks came after Egyptian authorities reported a drone strike on Wednesday that caused an explosion and fire involving two ships at Damietta Port on the Mediterranean coast, including a US-linked gas-storage tanker. No country or group has claimed responsibility for the incident, and no casualties were reported. The fire was quickly brought under control.

Certain Western outlets, including the Wall Street Journal, have sought to frame the unclaimed attack as part of a so-called "Iran war," in what Tehran views as a transparent effort to fabricate pretexts and sow



Water jets are fired at a US-owned gas storage tanker after a drone strike at Egypt's Damietta port on July 29, 2026.

● REUTERS

discord among regional nations.

Iran has consistently rejected any involvement in actions targeting friendly countries. It has a long record of exposing the Israel's history of false-flag operations aimed at fracturing Muslim unity and expanding its aggressive agenda.

Iran's Foreign Ministry also condemned the strikes and warned of "dangerous consequences".

US President Donald Trump told reporters on Wednesday that he had been briefed on what happened in Damietta and implied that Iran or resistance groups were responsible.

"It's a little more of the same. But it's going to be straightening out," he said.

IRGC strikes two violating tankers in Strait of Hormuz

International Desk

Iran's Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) said on Friday that it had struck two "violating" oil tankers attempting to pass through the strategic Strait of Hormuz under the "air escort" of the US military.

The IRGC said the "non-compliant oil tankers... were struck and brought to a halt, while four other oil tankers quickly changed course and returned to their previous positions".

"In the early hours of today, two violating oil tankers, believing they could pass through our undeclared route under the aerial escort of the child-killing US army, ignored our warnings and proceeded along an unsafe and illegal route. They were struck and brought to a halt," the

statement said.

"Four other violating oil tankers immediately changed course and returned to their previous location," it added.

Referring to a statement issued by the US Central Command (CENTCOM) claiming that vessels continued to transit the strait with the support of US military forces, the IRGC said it had warned shipping companies and insurers the previous night not to rely on "false" US claims.

"The IRGC Navy once again warns that the illegal interference and orders issued by the child-killing US army to vessels in the region will not go unanswered," the statement added.

The latest incident comes a day after the IRGC declared that the Strait of Hormuz would remain closed as

long as US threats and interference in the region continue.

On Thursday, the IRGC said two oil tankers attempting to transit the Strait had turned back after one caught fire.

Washington has violated the Islamabad Memorandum of Understanding, which recognizes Iran's sovereignty over the Strait of Hormuz and grants it responsibility for regulating maritime traffic through the strategic waterway.

The US has attempted to undermine that arrangement by creating an unauthorized maritime corridor near Omani waters, prompting Tehran to reimpose restrictions on vessels linked to aggressor states.

Iran says all navigation through the Strait must be conducted under Iranian arrangements.



Mohammad Ali Rajabi
Cartoonist

CARTOON



Tehran, Yerevan seek to boost regional trade through transport links

Economy Desk

Iran and Armenia discussed expanding cross-border road transport cooperation as the two neighbors seek to strengthen regional trade and transport connectivity.

The discussions took place during a meeting between Armenia's deputy minister of territorial administration and infrastructure and the head of Iran's Road Maintenance and Transportation Organization, where the two sides exchanged views on ways to expand bilateral cooperation in international road transport as part of efforts to advance transport diplomacy and regional trade, according to IRNA.

The meeting, attended by representatives from Iran's Foreign Ministry, the Ministry of Roads and Urban Development, and the Road Maintenance and Transportation Organization, underscored both sides' commitment

to strengthening transit infrastructure and removing existing obstacles.

Reza Akbari, head of Iran's Road Maintenance and Transportation Organization, said that following a transport meeting held in Armenia last month and subsequent ministerial-level negotiations, the two sides have prepared a draft comprehensive memorandum of understanding. "The draft focuses on developing infrastructure, removing obstacles to cross-border traffic, reducing or eliminating road tolls, and increasing the capacity to accommodate transit fleets in the two countries," he said.

Akbari, who also serves as Iran's deputy roads minister, said that, given the strong potential for Iran's trade with neighboring countries, "the establishment of parallel transport corridors in the region and the full activation of the Iran-Armenia-Georgia corridor could significantly increase

trade flows and play a decisive role in the regional supply chain." Armenian Deputy Minister of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure Kristine Ghalechyan welcomed broader economic and transport cooperation with Iran and said infrastructure projects were making progress. "Transit infrastructure development is on the right track, and these measures will help reduce problems facing drivers, facilitate the movement of transit fleets and improve border logistics," she said.

Referring to previous technical meetings between senior officials from the two countries, she said another expert-level meeting would be held in the near future to examine proposals included in the draft memorandum of understanding and practical measures for expanding bilateral cooperation, with the outcome of the talks to be communicated through diplomatic channels.



ISNA

Iran's gas exports to Turkey rise 34% in H1 2026: Eurostat



IRNA

Economy Desk

Iran's natural gas exports to Turkey rose 34% in the first half of 2026 up from a year earlier, according to data released by the European Union's statistical office.

Eurostat data, cited by Tasnim news agency, showed Iran exported 4.53 billion cubic meters (bcm) of natural gas to Turkey in the first six months of 2026, up from 3.38 bcm a year earlier, even as the country came under

US-Israeli attacks beginning in late February.

Israeli air strikes in March damaged several gas-processing facilities along the coast of Bushehr Province. Oil Minister Mohsen Paknejad said in June that Iran had restored about 30 million cubic meters of gas-processing capacity lost during the 40-day war.

The country has remained on a war footing since a US-Israeli coalition launched attacks on Iran in late February, particularly tar-

geting civilians and infrastructure during the 40-day conflict. After a pause of several weeks, attacks on Iran's infrastructure resumed on July 11.

Iran's high-pressure natural gas transmission network measured about 41,000 kilometers as of May 2025, making it the world's fourth-largest by network length and the largest in the Middle East.

According to the latest Statistical Review of World Energy published by the Energy Institute last

week, Iran exported 15.4 bcm of natural gas via pipeline in 2025.

The figures, cited by Tasnim, showed Iran exported about 15 bcm of pipeline gas in 2024.

Iran, which holds the world's second-largest natural gas reserves after Russia at around 34 trillion cubic meters, exported 7.4 bcm of gas to Turkey and 7.5 bcm to Iraq in 2025, its two largest export markets. The country also exported 0.5 bcm of natural gas to the former Soviet republics during the year.

Tehran opens furniture export exhibition as industry targets overseas markets

Economy Desk

Iran opened its 35th International Specialized Export Exhibition of the Furniture Industry on Thursday, with about 100 domestic companies exhibiting products, technologies and innovations in the furniture and interior decoration sectors.

The four-day exhibition, held at the Tehran Permanent International Fairgrounds, was inaugurated in the presence of officials from the Ministry of Industry, Mine and Trade, trade unions, industry associations, manufacturers, exporters and other representatives of Iran's furniture industry, according to IRNA.

Hossein Norouzi, head of the exhibition's organizing committee, said Iran's furniture industry has reached a stage where it can meet domestic demand while expanding its presence in regional and international



IRNA

markets.

"This exhibition provides a valuable opportunity to present those capabilities to business partners and target markets," he said. Norouzi said participation by about 100 manufacturing and specialized companies reflected the industry's dynamism and production capacity.

"The exhibition is not merely a venue for displaying products, but also a platform

for expanding business cooperation, exchanging expertise, building professional networks and promoting exports," he said. Side events would include specialized seminars, initiatives to strengthen cooperation between industry and universities, and presentations on new technologies, according to him.

"One of our main goals is to create opportunities for meaningful interaction among manufacturers, designers, academics, investors and exporters so that Iran's furniture industry can strengthen its position in global markets through innovation, quality and design," he said.

"We hope the exhibition will help stimulate business activity, create new economic opportunities, pave the way for commercial agreements, expand exports and further showcase the capabilities of Iran's furniture industry," he added.

Customs chiefs sign Iran-Azerbaijan cooperation deal on trade, transit

Economy Desk

Iran and Azerbaijan signed a memorandum of understanding on Thursday to expand customs cooperation and agreed on new measures aimed at facilitating bilateral trade and transit.

The agreement was signed at the northwestern Bileh Savar border crossing by the heads of the two countries' customs administrations, who also discussed obstacles to trade and transit and approved new measures to remove bottlenecks and accelerate the movement of commercial and transit goods, IRNA reported.

Foroud Asgari, head of the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration, said inadequate infrastructure remained one of the main obstacles to expanding trade and transit between the two countries.

"The completion of bridges under construction at the Astara and Nakhchivan border crossings by the Republic of Azerbaijan will strengthen infrastructure, boost trade and facilitate the movement of trucks," he said. Asgari, who serves as Iran's deputy economy minister, said President Masoud Pezeshkian had shown particular interest in expanding trade with Azerbaijan and had repeatedly stressed the importance of strengthening economic ties between the two countries.

"The main obstacle to expanding trade between the two neighbors is border congestion and barriers to



IRNA

Foroud Asgari, head of the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (2nd R), and Shahin Baghirov (2nd L), chairman of Azerbaijan's State Customs Committee, sign a memorandum of understanding at the Bileh Savar border crossing in Ardabil Province, Iran, on July 30, 2026.

IRNA

the smooth movement of trucks," he said, emphasizing the need for closer cooperation to resolve the issue.

Shahin Baghirov, chairman of Azerbaijan's State Customs Committee, said trade between Iran and Azerbaijan was important and that both sides shared a positive outlook.

"Holding these meetings is very important and will have a highly positive impact on resolving problems and removing obstacles," he said.

Baghirov also welcomed the establishment of a 24-hour online communication channel with his Iranian counterpart to enable the immediate resolution of customs-related issues. The two customs chiefs signed the customs cooperation memorandum at the end of the meeting to facilitate and speed up customs procedures for commercial goods and transit cargo.

China leads development ...

Advancing global governance through Chinese proposal

Page 1 >

As a responsible major country, China is committed to serving as a provider of international public goods. Since President Xi Jinping put forward the "Global AI Governance Initiative," China has taken a series of practical steps to follow through on its implementation. These include releasing the Inclusive AI Capacity-Building Action Plan and the "AI+" International Cooperation Initiative, while facilitating the establishment in Shanghai of the World AI Cooperation Organization, which is open to all countries and focuses on helping Global South nations strengthen their innovation, application and governance capacities.

At this year's World Artificial Intelligence Conference, President Xi Jinping announced that over the next five years China will provide 5,000 AI training opportunities for developing countries, establish international AI application cooperation centers for ASEAN, the Arab League, the African Union, the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and BRICS countries, and implement the "Mazu" intelligent meteorological early warning initiative in 30 countries.

These concrete measures fully reflect China's open and cooperative spirit, its global vision and international outlook, while presenting Chinese wisdom and solutions to the international community.

President Xi Jinping noted that the development of artificial intelligence should not be a solo performance by any single country, but rather a symphony of global cooperation. The Iranian people are hardworking, talented and rich in intellectual resources, with enormous potential for AI development.

Looking ahead, China stands ready to join hands with countries around the world, including Iran, to address common challenges and share opportunities. China will continue contributing its wisdom and strength to advance the building of a community with a shared future for mankind, and to ensure that artificial intelligence becomes a powerful force for the progress of human civilization.

Evolution, not revolution

Why China isn't pushing its cleantech advantage in Hormuz crisis

By David M. Hart
Senior fellow for
Climate and Energy
at CFR

OPINION

Earlier this year, the closure of the Strait of Hormuz triggered a perverse optimism in some quarters of the climate movement. The movement's archenemy, US President Donald Trump, had, in one fell swoop, accomplished its dream of raising the price of oil. Yet, the most surprising outcome of the Strait of Hormuz crisis to date is that the price has not risen nearly as much as many analysts expected. The biggest reason is that China cut its fossil fuel imports massively in the months since the closure. But that answer begs another question: Why would China, the global champion of clean energy technology, do that? Why wouldn't it maximize the pain felt by fossil fuel consumers worldwide, thereby boosting the sales of solar panels, batteries, and electric vehicles — the "new three" export industries that President Xi Jinping has lauded — even if it had to pay more for its own imports in the short run? Many political analysts have proposed answers to those

questions. China values stability generally. China wants to be seen as the adult in the room in global politics. China might want to do the Trump administration a favor in the hope of a reciprocal benefit in the future. China might even prefer continued Republican control of the US government. All these speculations need to be seen in the light of a cold, hard economic fact: China exports more than cleantech. A lot more. In 2025, China exported about \$220 billion worth of solar panels, electric vehicles, batteries, and wind turbines. That sounds like a lot, and it is. But it's only 6 percent of the \$3.77 trillion that China exported overall. China is the leading trade partner of more than 120 countries. Every additional dollar that those countries spend on imported oil and liquefied natural gas (LNG) because of the Strait of Hormuz crisis isn't being spent on Chinese electronics, textiles, metals, and chemicals — all of which bring in hundreds of billions of dollars more than the "new three". Moreover, the rising price of oil is slowing global economic growth and could trigger an economic crisis if it gets too high, with knock-on effects for Chinese exports. The International Mon-



etary Fund's most recent economic outlook, which assumed that the Strait of Hormuz would reopen in mid-July, forecasted global growth of only three percent in 2026, shrinking to two percent if the strait remained closed amid sustained hostilities. The slowdown would be steepest in emerging markets.

China is in desperate need of export revenues. Its economy has slowed considerably and it seems unable to boost domestic demand. Exports account for virtually all its economic growth. China is also saving money on its remaining imports of oil and LNG. In the long run, the crisis is likely to accelerate the adoption of

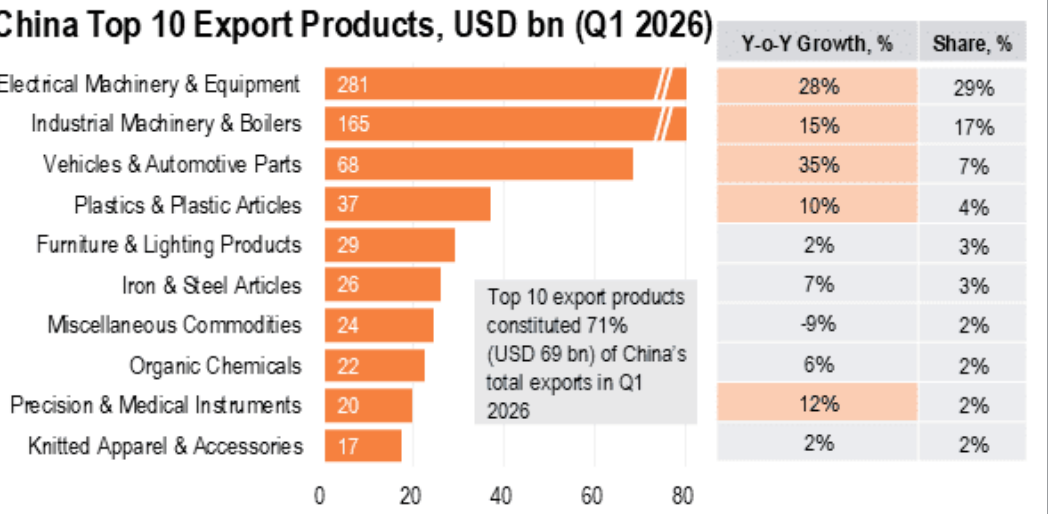
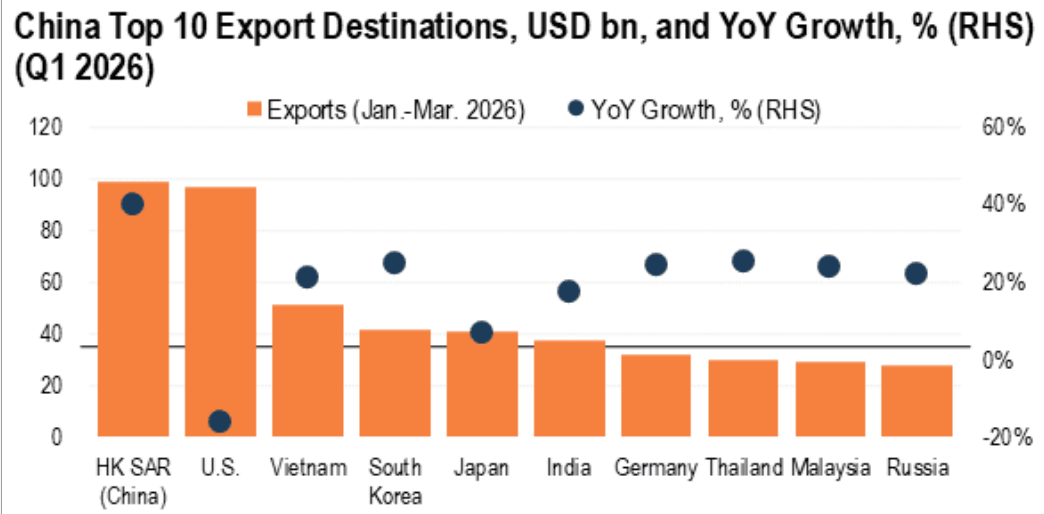
Employees work on solar panels destined for export at a Chinese factory in Lianyungang, in Jiangsu Province, on January 4, 2024. AFP

cleantech, much of it imported from China. Using electricity generated by renewables and stored in batteries to power electric cars will relieve many countries that rely on petroleum imports today of a major economic risk that has proven, through the Strait of Hormuz crisis, to be all too real. This package of technologies is also getting increasingly affordable even as its performance improves. These countries may not be happy about their growing dependence on China, but even if cleantech imports were cut off, the immediate consequences would be far less severe than if their current energy systems are starved of fuel. The idea that Trump may inadvertently accelerate the transition to clean energy isn't crazy. But the transition will be an evolution, not a revolution.

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

A cargo ship unloads imported crude oil at the Qingdao Port crude oil terminal in Qingdao, China, on January 22, 2026. CFOTO

Why wouldn't China, the global champion of clean energy technology, maximize the pain felt by fossil fuel consumers worldwide, thereby boosting the sales of solar panels, batteries, and electric vehicles — the "new three" export industries that President Xi Jinping has lauded — even if it had to pay more for its own imports in the short run?



Why Burnham should back Britain's new clean energy system

No more North Sea drilling

By Chris Aylett
Research fellow at Chatham House

By Ellie Macmillan-Fox
Project manager in the Environment and Society Centre

OPINION

Andy Burnham arrived in 10 Downing Street earlier amid speculation about a possible change in energy policy. Specifically, whether he will support expanded North Sea oil and gas production, by greenlighting new drilling, reforming the windfall tax, and potentially rolling back Labour's 2024 manifesto pledge not to issue new exploration licences. Labour's stance on North Sea oil and gas has become a lightning rod for criticism of its broader climate and energy policy, as the cross-party consensus on tackling climate change has broken down. The Conservatives would scrap the 2050 net zero emissions target, claiming that it is making energy more expensive and driving deindustrialization. Kemi Badenoch has positioned the Tories as champions of the UK's oil and gas industry, calling her party's recent victory in the Aberdeen South by-election a "referendum on oil and gas". The Labour government has also come under not-so-friendly fire from trade unions and former prime minister Tony Blair. In a scathing article on the direction of the Labour Party, Blair called for the government to slow emissions reductions and extract "what is left" of North Sea fossil fuels. Pressure has even come from the White House. Amid rumours that Burnham would approve new drilling, US President Donald Trump posted on Truth Social that it was "a big day for the country" and that the people of Aberdeen were "dancing in the streets". Sources close to Burnham, however, were quick to emphasize that no decision had been made and that he was expected to uphold the manifesto pledge. The topic was also noticeably absent from his first speech.

Reality of North Sea oil and gas

At a recent Chatham House event, the executive director of the International Energy Agency, Dr Fatih Birol, questioned why the UK debate is so focused on the North Sea, noting that its remaining reserves afford no protection against high and volatile prices. The answer is that North Sea oil and gas has been politically weaponized, leading to a distorted impression of the role it can be expected to play in Britain's economic future. This is due not to net zero, but to hard geological realities. After decades of exploitation, production on the UK Continental Shelf peaked in 1999 and has been in gradual decline since. According to the government regulator, as much as 93 per cent of the oil and gas it is likely to produce



has already been extracted. Most of what remains is already earmarked for extraction from existing fields. New drilling, the focus of so much political and media attention, might yield 74 million tonnes of oil and 381 TWh of gas according to the regulator — around half a year of UK consumption. This translates into a continued long-term decline in tax receipts and jobs, even if fluctuating oil and gas prices — and new North Sea projects — provide temporary, modest boosts.

In a keynote speech at a conference on January 20, 2026, Greater Manchester Mayor Andy Burnham talked of a new green energy cluster in the south-west of Greater Manchester including the world's largest liquid air energy storage plant, under construction by Highview Power in Carrington. trafford.gov.uk

Annual oil and gas revenues to the Exchequer are expected to fall to £0.3 billion by 2030–31, down from £4.4 billion when Labour took office in 2024, and £9.1 billion when the Conservatives took office in 2010. New licences will not significantly alter this basic trajectory. Employment in the sector has been declining for years, long before Labour took office. The number of jobs fell by a third between 2014 and 2023, despite hundreds of new licences being issued in this period. The diminishing gains from North Sea oil and gas also flow to a shrinking subset of companies, and ever fewer workers concentrated in a single region of the UK. By contrast, the construction of a new energy system based on renewables and electrification represents an enormous growth opportunity

The Brent oilfield, operated by Shell, lies off the north-east coast of Scotland in the North Sea, midway between the Shetland Islands and Norway. [MARTIN LANGER/ALAMY](#)

with the potential to distribute benefits across the country. This new energy system is a natural fit for Burnham's flagship mission to decentralize political and economic power in the UK. A "Manchesterism" for energy, if you will.

Decentralization
Energy systems based on lots of renewables tend to be less centralized than those based on fossil fuels. Weather is one driver of this. It is sensible to situate solar farms in the sunny southern counties of the UK, whereas wind farms are usually found in the blustery north of England and Scotland

— and in the North Sea. Efficiency is another driver. Battery storage — which is an essential partner to variable renewable generation and plays an increasingly vital role in the UK's system — tends to be built close to major sources of demand, like cities. This reduces the losses that occur as electricity is transmitted and limits the need to build new grid infrastructure, in turn reducing costs for consumers. The tendency towards decentralization of the UK's renewables-based system means that much of the tax take from the energy system, such as business rates paid to local authorities, is spread across the country. The flexible and modular nature of renewable energy technology also lends itself to a range of ownership models — which means the benefits can flow directly to citizens and communities.

Jobs
According to the Confederation of British Industry (CBI), the UK's net zero economy directly supported around 308,000 jobs in 2025, with another 520,000 jobs in the supply chain, and a further 234,000 in the wider economy. These jobs — including renewable installation and maintenance, manufacturing, engineering, construction and professional services — are broadly distributed across the UK. Many more jobs are set to be created in the next phase of the UK's energy transition. While the UK has made impressive progress on the supply side — deploying renewables — much less progress has been made on the demand side, above all electrifying heating and transport. Doing so will require large numbers of skilled workers to install and maintain essential technologies, such as heat pumps and electric vehicle chargers, and build out and manage the supporting network, as ever more energy is consumed in the form of electricity. Retrofitting Britain's housing stock, to ensure it is fit for cold winters and hot summers alike, represents another growing source of employment.

Cost of a U-turn
Andy Burnham faces no shortage of tough decisions. The direction of Britain's energy policy is not one of them. Rolling back pledges on North Sea oil and gas would be of limited material benefit to the UK. But such a symbolic policy shift would undermine the stable foundations on which the UK is building a new energy economy — which is delivering broad-based growth — and damage the UK's reputation as a country that takes its international climate commitments seriously. Instead, the new prime minister should capitalize on the opportunities of the energy transition to fulfil his mission of distributing power and prosperity across the country.

The article was first published by Chatham House.



At a recent Chatham House event, the executive director of the International Energy Agency, Dr Fatih Birol, questioned why the UK debate is so focused on the North Sea, noting that its remaining reserves afford no protection against high and volatile prices. The answer is that North Sea oil and gas has been politically weaponized, leading to a distorted impression of the role it can be expected to play in Britain's economic future. This is due not to net zero, but to hard geological realities.



U17 Wrestling World Championships:

Iran's Greco-Roman title streak snapped by Russia

Sports Desk

The Greco-Roman competition at the UWW U17 World Championships proved one to forget for Iranian wrestling as the country missed out on a fifth successive team title in Baku.

A haul of two golds and two bronzes saw Iran finish third in the team standings with 96 points. Russia, which was eligible for team points for the first time since the 2021 edition, claimed the title with 127 points, while host Azerbaijan finished runner-up with 107 points despite failing to win a single gold medal across the 10 weight classes.

Iran might have enjoyed a better finish had it not been for the bizarre manner in which Armin Esmaeili exited the 45kg competition.

The U17 Asian champion began his campaign with a 9-1 superiority victory over Türkiye's Kerem Derman before defeating Kazakhstan's Nurislam Pakhitzhan 6-4 later in Tuesday's morning session to advance to the semi-finals.

However, Esmaeili was disqualified after failing to report for his semifinal bout against Azerbaijan's Ali Javadli in what Iranian head coach Mohsen Sourian said was the result of a sudden change to the evening-session schedule.

Amirreza Tahmasbpour still provided Iran with some relief on the final day by claiming gold in the 60kg division thanks to an 8-6 victory over Tajikistan's

Makhdi Barotov in a dramatic final.

At one stage, Barotov appeared destined to win Tajikistan's first-ever Greco-Roman world title across all age groups. Tahmasbpour scored a takedown and two trap-arm turns to build a 6-0 lead inside the opening minute, but the bout was turned on its head before the break. Barotov countered an attempted duck-under to force Tahmasbpour backward for two points. Moments later, he secured double underhooks and launched the Iranian with a throw. The officials initially awarded four points to Tahmasbpour, but a successful challenge overturned the decision and awarded the points to Barotov instead, putting the Tajik ahead 6-6 on criteria.

Tahmasbpour, however, sensed that Barotov was tiring and began repeatedly snapping him down. After one of those snaps, he spun behind his opponent for the decisive takedown to seal an 8-6 victory, adding the world title to the 55kg bronze medal he won in Athens last year.

Iran collected another medal on the final day as Amirreza Mehri claimed bronze in the 92kg division.

Mehri suffered a disappointing start to his campaign with a 6-2 defeat to Ukraine's Hlib Yevsieiev but bounced back to defeat American William Etu and Azerbaijan's Zohrab Safarov 4-3 in the repechage before beating Uzbekistan's Mirjalol Shovkatov by the same scoreline in the

bronze-medal match.

Alireza Rezaei had opened Iran's account on Tuesday by winning gold in the 80kg category.

Rezaei enjoyed a comfortable run to the final, outscoring his opponents 26-1 across four bouts, but had to dig deep against Azerbaijan's Isfahan Hasanov, rallying from behind to edge the home favorite 2-1.

Ali-Akbar Akou, meanwhile, recovered from a 5-4 quarterfinal defeat to Ukraine's Tymofii Prykhodko by beating Georgia's Saba Takidze 7-3 before edging Russia's Fedor Sukharev 1-1 on criteria to secure bronze in the 110kg division.

"The team's result and performance were weaker than in previous years because there is a continuous generational change at this age level and you don't get to work with the same group of wrestlers for several years," Iranian head coach Sourian said.

He added that his squad had only five seven-day training camps under his supervision before the tournament and missed several warm-up events, including April's Victory Cup in Antalya, because of the wartime conditions in Iran.

Sourian also acknowledged that his wrestlers were below their best physically but insisted the federation's long-term development strategy deliberately avoids placing excessive physical demands on teenage athletes.

"Yes, they weren't in ideal physical condition and looked drained toward the end of their bouts,"



Iran's Amirreza Tahmasbpour (red) scores a takedown against Tajikistan's Makhdi Barotov during the Greco-Roman 60kg final at the U17 Wrestling World Championships in Baku, Azerbaijan, on July 29, 2026.
● AMIRREZA ALIASGARI/UWW

he said. "But we have always believed we should not put too much pressure on young wrestlers. During my years in charge of this age group, our ultimate goal has always been to develop wrestlers for the junior and senior national teams, not simply chase results at any cost." The coach noted that all 10 members of Iran's current junior national team had previously competed under him at U17 level,

while senior national team members Payam Ahmadi and Ali Ahmadvafa also emerged through the same development pathway. Sourian also accepted full responsibility for Esmaeili's disqualification, apologizing "to him, his family and his personal coach."

Despite missing out on the team title, Sourian rejected suggestions that Iran's overall cam-

paign should be viewed as a failure.

"Taking everything into account, the result was not bad," he said. "Azerbaijan didn't win any gold medals, while we and Russia each won two. Expectations are naturally very high because we had won the title four years in a row, but people also have to consider the circumstances we had to deal with in the buildup to the event."

33-member Iranian squad named for WT President's Cup in Lahore

Sports Desk

Iran will dispatch a 33-member squad to compete at the upcoming World Taekwondo President's Cup – Asia, which will kick off on August 18 in Lahore, Pakistan.

The G3-ranked event will feature 323 athletes from across the continent and offers valuable ranking points on the road to Olympic qualification, with gold medalists earning 30 points in the World Taekwondo rankings.

Iran's delegation will feature 18 male and 15 female athletes.

Paris Olympic gold medalist Arian Salimi and reigning world and Asian champion Abolfazl Zandi spearhead a star-studded men's roster.

Mahdi Razmian, Yasin Valizadeh, Amir Mohammad Nasirahmadi, Ali Asghar Moradian, Mahdi Hajmoussaei, Amirabbas Rahnama, Danial Bozorgi, Martin Rezaei, Amirsina Bakhtiari, Radin Zeinali, Reza Kalhor, Amirreza Sadeghian, Mehran Barkhordari, Amirreza Gholami, Mohammad Hossein Yazdani, and Ali Najafi have also been called up by head coach Payam Khanlarkhani.

Among the notable selections are Bozorgi and Kalhor, who return to international competition after serving three-year suspensions. Their inclusion is expected to



Abolfazl Zandi (blue), seen in action at last year's World Taekwondo Championships, will be part of Iran's men's squad at the World Taekwondo President's Cup in Lahore, Pakistan.
● WORLD TAEKWONDO

strengthen the national team, particularly in the men's under-68kg division.

In the women's competition, Olympic silver medalist and Asian champion Nahid Kiani will be Iran's leading contender, while reigning two-time world junior champion Hana Zarrinkamar will look to build on her senior breakthrough at the Chuncheon Korea Open in July, where she claimed gold in the +73kg category.

Yalda Valinejad, Hasti Moham-madi, and Fatemeh Ahmadi, who were part of the Iranian team that won bronze at the World Cup Team Championships a fortnight ago, have also been named in the

squad. Saina Karimi, Masoumeh Ranjbar, Mahla Momenzadeh, Maryam Malekoutikhah, Anahita Ramezani, Nastaran Valizadeh, Fereshteh Fathi, Saghar Moradi, Elham Haghighi, and Sara Soufi complete the lineup.

Meanwhile, Iran will once again have no representative in the women's under-53kg division, marking the second consecutive international event after the Korea Open in which the weight class has been left vacant.

The registration deadline for the President's Cup has not yet passed, meaning changes to Iran's squad remain possible before the competition begins.

FIE World Rankings:

Iran up to 27th in men's saber despite dismal World Championships

Sports Desk

Iran's men's saber team climbed one place to 27th in the latest FIE World Rankings.

The rankings were released by the international fencing governing body on Friday, a day after the conclusion of the World Championships in Hong Kong, where Iran endured a disappointing campaign across the individual and team saber events.

A 45-35 defeat to Japan saw the Iranian quartet of Ali Pakdaman, Mohammad Fotouhi, Nima Zahedi, and Taha Kargarpour suffer a first-round exit in the men's team saber competition on Thursday.

Pakdaman was Iran's best performer at the global showpiece, reaching the last 16 of the men's individual event.

The former Asian champion claimed five successive victories to advance from the preliminary rounds. He then defeated Matteo Neri – a member of Italy's team that won gold at the previous World Championships – 15-13, before overcoming American William Morrill by the same scoreline. His run ended with a 15-6 defeat to Egypt's Mohamed Amer.

Fotouhi, Zahedi, and Kargarpour also progressed from the preliminary phase but failed to advance beyond the round of 64. Zahedi was beaten 15-13 by Uzbekistan's Sardor Abdulkarimbekov in his second knockout bout, while Kargarpour defeated Ukraine's Oleksiy Statsenko 15-13 before losing 15-11 to Russia's Kamil Ibragimov. Fotouhi suffered a 15-10 defeat to Saudi Arabia's Adel Almutairi in the opening knockout round. Pakdaman remained the highest-ranked Iranian in the men's individual saber rankings, retaining 41st place. He is followed by Kargarpour (111th), Za-

hed (115th), and Fotouhi (174th).

France climbed to the top of the men's team rankings after winning the world title on Thursday, followed by runner-up South Korea, bronze medalist Romania, Hungary, and the United States.

France's Sébastien Patrice retained the No. 1 spot in the men's individual rankings despite exiting in the last 16 in Hong Kong.

South Korea's Do Gyeong-dong and Oh Sanguk complete the top three, while France's Maxime Pisanfetti and Russian world champion Kamil Ibragimov round out the top five.



● FIE



Sistan’s ancient flavors preserve living culinary heritage

Iranica Desk

The foods and local dishes of Sistan and Baluchestan Province, with a history as long as that of the land itself, are not merely expressions of the creativity and artistry of its people; they are also a vivid reflection of their ingenious adaptation to a harsh natural environment. Amid the 120-day winds and the relentless heat of the plains, the women of Sistan have, with limited resources and by relying on locally available products such as wheat, barley, dates and animal products, created a colorful table filled with enduring flavors. This culinary tradition is deeply rooted in the region’s agricultural and pastoral culture, according to chtn.ir.

This heritage — ranging from traditional Abgoosht (meat-and-legume stews) and local soups to distinctive breads such as Nan-e Rostam — is not simply a means of satisfying hunger. Rather, it is an inseparable part of Sistan’s historical identity, Nowruz traditions, and ceremonies of celebration and mourning.

“Sistan Yellow Kashk,” regarded as the “gold of this land,” is a remarkable example of the ingenious processing of milk in a hot, dry climate. It continues to be produced using traditional methods and is sold in both domestic and international markets.

The head of the South-East Regional Museum, referring to the diversity of foods in the northern parts of Sistan and Baluchestan Province, stated that in the Sistan region, owing to its several-thousand-year history of animal husbandry and agriculture, the predominant cuisine has developed around meat. Sistani cattle, once recognized as a distinct breed and formerly raised in abundance thanks to the presence of Hamun Lake and its extensive reed beds, together with sheep, local poultry and fish, have formed the main pillars of the local people’s diet.

Mohammad Ali Ebrahimi continued, “Fish has also held a special place in the Sistani diet because of the abundance of water in the Helmand River and the Hamun wetlands, and a wide variety of dishes are prepared using it.”

He explained that these livestock and aquatic animals were not only the main sources of protein but also played a fundamental role in the economy and culture of the region. Among the most notable dishes of the area is Sistani Abgoosht, prepared with either mutton or local chicken. In addition to being a complete and nutritious meal, it is traditionally believed to have medicinal properties for colds and physical weakness, which is why it is par-

ticularly popular during the colder months. He added that Sistan Yellow Kashk, made from Doogh (a yoghurt-based beverage), cracked wheat and distinctive local spices, is one of the region’s characteristic condiments and appetizers. He then turned to the art of breadmaking in Sistan, explaining that local breads are made using wheat and barley and that their variety is remarkable. Their traditional bread is a prominent example of this craft: approximately one meter in diameter, it is baked in clay ovens. This bread, prepared collectively by the skilled and creative women of Sistan, has considerable nutritional value.



He added that baking this bread was not merely a daily activity but also a social ritual during which women of the region would gather together. While baking bread, they exchanged experiences and helped preserve their oral heritage. Its thin, crisp texture, combined with its good shelf life, has made it a staple food and a constant accompaniment to local dishes.

He noted that other breads, such as Saji bread and thicker oven-baked breads, are also common in Sistan, each used according to the type of food being served and local preferences.

He also referred to the region’s traditional sweets and snacks, adding that various sweets and sweet breads are made from wheat flour in Sistan. These foods are prepared especially for various religious, ritual and social occasions, including the birth of a baby, wedding ceremonies and annual celebrations, each accompanied by its own particular customs.

Referring to date-based sweets found throughout the province, he stated that date sweets also constitute an important part of this heritage. Made by combining dates with flour and other natural ingredients, they have long been popular in the region. He said that in the past, prepar-

ing these sweets was reserved for particular occasions, and the skilled women of Sistan would decorate them according to their own tastes and serve them to guests. This diversity of sweets reflects the creativity and ingenuity of the people of Sistan in using local products such as dates and wheat to create enduring flavors that have become embedded in the historical memory of the land.

“Thus, Sistan’s local foods do more than meet nutritional needs; they also carry stories, beliefs and ethnic identity. Today, they constitute a living heritage worthy of preservation and introduction to the world.”

An expert from the Foundation

for Iranian Studies, emphasizing the prominent role of traditional foods in the identity of Sistan and Baluchestan Province, stated that Sistan and Baluchestan, Iran’s largest province, possesses a history spanning several thousand years and a great civilization whose traces can be seen throughout the land.

Abbas Nourzaei continued, “One of the most prominent manifestations of this ancient civilization is its local and traditional cuisine. Looking at this long history, we find that various peoples and communities have been dispersed from the north to the south of the province — from the Sistan region, including Zabol and Hirmand, to the Sarhad region centered around Zahedan, Khash and Mirjaveh, and further south to Makoran, with its breathtaking coastline along the Makoran Sea. Each of these areas has its own climate, natural environment and ecosystem. This geographical and ethnic diversity has provided the foundation for classifying the province’s local foods according to ingredients that are closely adapted to the climatic and natural conditions of each region.”

Nourzaei said that this diversity has meant that the province’s local foods are not only a reflection of the people’s tastes but also reflect the history and way of life of

each ethnic group. He went on to emphasize the importance of historical research in understanding the origins of these foods, saying, “To trace the earliest distinctive foods of the Sistan region, one must turn to Shahr-e Sukhteh (the Burnt City) in the Zargaran Plain of Sistan. This archaeological site, which has been inscribed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, has yielded a treasure trove of ancient food remains and plant seeds during various excavation seasons. The cultivation of grains and plants such as wheat, barley, coriander and grapes in this area demonstrates the advanced state of agriculture at the time.”

He stated that, in terms of poultry, remains of ducks and other waterfowl have been discovered, while clear evidence has been found of the breeding and domestication of cattle, buffalo, camels and sheep.

These findings indicate that the inhabitants of the region between approximately 5,500 and 7,000 years ago were not only engaged in agriculture and animal husbandry but also made use of a diverse range of ingredients to prepare local foods and traditional dishes.

He added that these discoveries have made Shahr-e Sukhteh one of the world’s richest sources for the study of the history of ancient food and nutrition. Examination of the surviving remains indicates that the diet of the people of that period was highly diverse and relied heavily on locally produced agricultural and animal products.

Nourzaei added that another astonishing achievement of these excavations has been the ability to reconstruct recipes for dishes prepared thousands of years ago in this land. These include a type of dolma made with grape leaves and duck meat, as well as a dish resembling Abgoosht, prepared from a combination of fish, Doogh and wheat or rice. These two examples, carefully documented and recorded by researchers of traditional foods, demonstrate the continuity of culinary traditions in the region.

He explained that the importance of these discoveries lies in the fact that they represent some of the oldest documented examples of combined culinary practices on the Iranian Plateau. Recording and preserving these ancient recipes is a valuable step towards safeguarding the country’s intangible culinary heritage and demonstrates that culinary creativity and knowledge in Sistan and Baluchestan have roots extending back 5,000 years. Many of the province’s modern dishes are descendants of these ancient traditions.

Choram Castle seeks rescue from neglect

Iranica Desk

Rising 12 meters above the surrounding landscape, the historic Choram Castle in Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad Province, with its thick defensive walls and mysterious underground tunnels, stands as a symbol of the authority of local rulers during the Qajar era. Today, however, this valuable historical relic urgently needs attention to save it from further deterioration and neglect.

According to chtn.ir, Choram village, in Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad Province, is more than a destination of pristine natural beauty; it is also heir to an ancient civilization. The historic Choram Castle, regarded as an architectural and cultural landmark of the area, embodies part of this heritage. The valuable structure, which was inscribed on Iran’s National Heritage List, stands atop a hill known as Telgerd, meaning “round hill,” and tells part of the turbulent history of southern Iran.

Historians and archaeologists believe that human settlement in the area dates back to around 4,000 BCE and the Elamite civilization. Although the existing structure was built on the orders of Abdullah Khan during the Qajar period, the continuity of human settlement across the area highlights the strategic importance of Choram as a fertile plain surrounded by the rugged mountains of the Zagros. Local rulers from the Abdullah Khan family, including Parviz Khan and Hadi Khan, built the castle atop a 12-meter-high hill not only to assert their control over the surrounding plains but also to oversee the security of the area.

The castle’s architecture offers a distinctive example of the combination of defense and residential life in Iran’s past. Walls measuring 90 to 100 centimeters thick, along with specialized architectural techniques used to decorate the rooms, demonstrate the skill of the architects of the period.



One of the most remarkable features of the structure is an underground passage approximately three kilometers long. Restoration experts say the tunnel was used during emergencies and military attacks either as an escape route or as a secure means of accessing water and food supplies. The presence of an old bathhouse featuring traditional Iranian architectural elements at the entrance to the castle also confirms that the site served not only a military purpose but also as the residence of an affluent family.

Significant parts of the historic structure have suffered serious damage over time, including from natural disasters such as earthquakes. Today, not only has the inscription at the castle entrance become illegible due to severe erosion, but the need to restore and revive the structure to attract domestic and international tourists is also more urgent than ever.

Visitors traveling to the national heritage site, located 153 kilometers from Yasuj and 29 kilometers from Dehdasht, pass through a route that becomes a lush and scenic landscape in spring. However, the lack of rail infrastructure and the need to improve visitor amenities around the castle remain challenges that require comprehensive provincial planning.

Transforming the castle into an open-air museum and restoring its damaged sections could not only help preserve the region’s history but also serve as a catalyst for economic development and sustainable tourism in Choram.

Historic Choram Castle is more than a mud-brick structure; it is part of the historical identity of Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad. Preserving it for future generations is an undeniable responsibility for government authorities, who must ensure that proper restoration and promotion save this cultural gem from the threat of oblivion.





Russian Orthodox Patriarch praises Leader's message, backs closer religious ties

Arts & Culture Desk

Patriarch Kirill, head of the Russian Orthodox Church, hailed as "valuable" a message from Iran's Leader, Ayatollah Seyyed Mojtaba Khamenei, after receiving it from Iranian Ambassador to Moscow Kazem Jalali during a meeting at his residence. Jalali delivered the message and thanked Patriarch Kirill for sending separate messages offering condolences over the martyrdom of former leader Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei and congratulations following the election of his successor IRNA reported on Friday. Ayatollah Khamenei was assassinated at the age of 86 in an airstrike on February 28, the first day of the US-Israeli war on Iran, along with a number of senior military commanders. His son, Mojtaba, was wounded in the attack and was elected as Iran's third Leader by the Assembly of Experts on March 8. A delegation from the Russian Orthodox Church attended Ayatollah Khamenei's funeral in Tehran in early July. Patriarch Kirill said members of the delegation had reported receiving a warm welcome from both Iranian of-

ficials and ordinary citizens. "This reflects the closeness between Iran and Russia, as well as the closeness between the followers of Islam and Christianity," Patriarch Kirill said. Expressing deep sorrow over the suffering and killings in different parts of the world, including the Iranian nation's confrontation with their enemies, the Patriarch said he prayed for peace and security in the region and especially for the well-being of the Iranian people, "who are standing firm and resisting." The cleric commended dialogue between the Russian Orthodox Church and Iran's Islamic denominations, as well as the work of the two countries' joint commission, and called for the talks to continue. "Russian Christians today enjoy good relations with Iran's Islamic community... The Russian Orthodox Church and Iran's Muslims share close and common positions on various issues, including moral values, the role of religion in everyday life, family relations and family issues," he said. The top clergyman also stressed the importance of bolstering religious, academic and scientific cooperation



Iranian Ambassador in Russia Kazem Jalali (2nd R) gives a book to Patriarch Kirill (2nd L), head of the Russian Orthodox Church, during a visit in Moscow on July 31, 2026.
● ORTHODOX TIMES

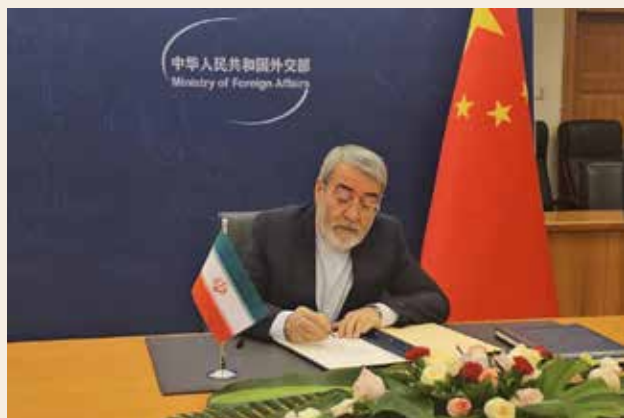
between Iran and Russia. "In light of the close relations between our two countries, there is a good opportunity to exchange views on bilateral ties," he added. Jalali express gratitude to the Russian government, people and the Russian Orthodox Church for expressing sympathy with Iran following the "criminal aggression" by the United States and Israel and the assassination of the former leader. "They believed that by assassinating our leader and military commanders they would take over our country. But it can be said that Iran experienced a rebirth after these events, and that reality was reflected in the magnificent farewell and funeral ceremonies for the martyred leader," the envoy said. He added that Iran was "standing up to" aggression in line with its moral, humanitarian and Islamic principles. Elsewhere in his remarks, Jalali said



the 12 rounds of dialogue between Islam and Orthodox Christianity had produced constructive results and announced Tehran's readiness to host the 13th round of the talks. At the end of the meeting, the ambassador presented Patriarch Kirill with

the Persian translation of "Freedom and the Sense of Responsibility," a book originally published in Russian by the Patriarch and translated and published by the Centre for Interfaith Dialogue of Iran's Islamic Culture and Relations Organization.

Iran joins founding members of global AI cooperation body launched by China



The photo published by ISNA on July 31, 2026 shows Iran's Ambassador to China Abdolreza Rahmani Fazli signing a document in Beijing that makes the country a founding member of an international AI organization launched by China.
● ISNA

Social Desk

Iran has become a founding member of the newly established World Artificial Intelligence Cooperation Organization (WAICO) after signing its founding charter, with Tehran saying it aims to play an active role in promoting international cooperation on AI. Iran's Ambassador to China Abdolreza Rahmani Fazli inked the founding document on behalf of the Iranian government, formally placing Iran among the founding members of the organization, ISNA reported on Friday. After signing the charter, Rahmani Fazli met Chinese Assistant Foreign Minister Liu Bin and stressed the importance of multilateral cooperation in shaping the future of advanced technologies. "Iran is ready to play an active role in the scientific,

research and practical development of AI, as well as in creating international mechanisms for the fair use of this technology," the envoy said. He added that by joining the international initiative as a founding member, Iran was pressing ahead with its approach of constructive engagement in emerging technologies and using the potential of AI to promote sustainable development and social progress. The World Artificial Intelligence Cooperation Organization (WAICO) was set up on July 16 at the initiative of China on the sidelines of the 2026 World Artificial Intelligence Conference in Shanghai. Under its founding charter, the WAICO is an independent intergovernmental organization headquartered in Shanghai that aims to promote international cooperation in AI, strengthen global

governance of the technology and ensure its healthy, safe and fair development. Iran established the Headquarters for the Development of AI Technology and Applications in May last year to coordinate policymaking and expand the use of AI in the country. Earlier this week, Emadeddin Fatemizadeh, head of the headquarters' secretariat, said Iran's ranking for AI adoption had improved from 93rd at the end of 2024 to 76th in 2026. Fatemizadeh said Iran ranked within the world's top 20 in AI research, but the technology's penetration across government institutions remains below expectations. "Iran's position in AI research is between 12th and 18th, but we do not have a satisfactory situation in the operational use of this technology across government bodies," he said. He added that expanding the operational use of AI would require cooperation between government agencies, knowledge-based companies and end users.

Ancient Gate of Parseh to become museum site with Italian assistance



● IRNA

Arts & Culture Desk

Iranian and Italian experts are coming together to restore the ancient Tol-e Ajori archaeological site near Persepolis and convert it into a museum site that will open the remains of what archaeologists believe was the gateway to the ancient city of Parseh to visitors, local cultural heritage officials said, IRNA reported on Friday. Tol-e Ajori, located about 3 km west of the UNESCO-listed Persepolis complex in Iran's southern Fars province, contains the remains of a monumental Achaemenid gateway regarded by archaeologists as the entrance to the ancient city of Parseh, one of the ceremonial capitals of the Achaemenid Empire. Known from archaeological and historical evidence as the Gate of Cyrus or the Gate of Parseh, the structure is believed to have been built before the Persepolis terrace and to have served as the main entrance to the city. Archaeologists believe it was probably constructed during the reign of Cyrus because its design incorporates Babylonian

art and architectural elements. According to historical findings, the structure measured at least 33 by 33 meters and was built using thousands of glazed bricks. Alireza Askari Chaverdi, an archaeologist at the University of Shiraz, said Tol-e Ajori occupied a special place in the cultural project "From the Gate of Parseh to the Gate of All Nations" because it served as the entrance to the civilization of Parseh and linked the Achaemenid Empire with Mesopotamia. Chaverdi said archaeological excavations at the site had been completed and restoration plans had been sent to Italian counterparts for final approval. He said that once the restoration plans were finalized, work would get under way on a protective structure around the site and on tourist access routes. "The project will be carried out in three phases covering structural calculations, design and construction," Chaverdi said, adding that technical specialists from Iran, particularly the Fars Province Construction En-

gineering Organization, would also take part to help convert the site into a museum as quickly as possible. The Fars Department of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts is working with the provincial Construction Engineering Organization to turn Tol-e Ajori into a museum site accessible to visitors, according to IRNA. Farzad Zarei, acting head of public relations at the Fars Department of Cultural Heritage, said on Thursday that the engineering organization would cooperate in the design and construction of the Tol-e Ajori museum site. Speaking after a group of engineers visited the site, Zarei said the cooperation would draw on the province's technical expertise in structural engineering, tourism planning and lighting design. He added that the joint effort would create infrastructure to support sustainable tourism development in Fars province while paving the way for better protection and presentation of the region's archaeological heritage.