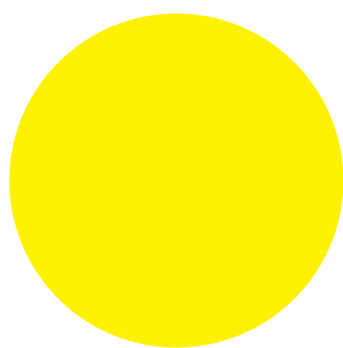


Talk with veteran performer
Abolfazl Mirza-Ahmadi

**Ta'ziyeh is more than
religious play;
it is mother of Iran's
performing arts**

INTERVIEW
EXCLUSIVE

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Iran's Industry, Mining and Trade Minister Mohammad Atabak (2nd R) and Pakistan's Commerce Minister Jam Kamal Khan (C) attend the 10th Joint Economic Commission meeting in Islamabad, Pakistan, on August 4, 2026.
● IRNA

India walks tightrope between Iran ties, US strategic interests

By Janvi Sonaiya
Indian Journalist

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

India's latest intervention at the United Nations Security Council reflects the diplomatic balance New Delhi is trying to maintain as the US-Iran conflict enters another dangerous phase: defending its own economic and strategic interests while keeping open diplomatic space with Tehran.

India has significant strategic ties with the United States, including growing defense and economic cooperation. At the same time, Iran remains an important country in India's regional strategic calculus. New Delhi has historically maintained ties with Tehran despite US sanctions and has invested in connectivity projects such as the Chabahar port, which provides India with an important route to Afghanistan and Central Asia that bypasses Pakistan.

The crisis has therefore placed India in a delicate position.

Speaking at a Security Council open debate on the Middle East, India's Permanent Representative to the UN, Ambassador Parvathaneni Harish, described the renewed escalation in West Asia as "deeply concerning" and called for an immediate de-escalation of tensions.

But India's most pointed remarks were directed at the deteriorating security situation in the Strait of Hormuz, where attacks on commercial vessels have put the safety of Indian seafarers and the country's energy supply chains at growing risk. The Strait of Hormuz is a critical choke point for India, handling roughly 60% to 65% of the country's crude oil imports and a massive share of its Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) supplies. India relies on foreign oil to meet 85% of its total domestic demand.

Harish expressed concern over the attacks on vessels including GFS Galaxy, MT Al Bahiyah, and MT Mombasa, noting that several Indian citizens were injured, some seriously, and that one Indian national lost his life while another remains missing. He emphasized that the security of commercial shipping and civilian infrastructure must be protected, and called for the restoration of safe navigation and commerce.

The statement is significant because it comes at a moment when the political and military situation around Hormuz is becoming increasingly complicated. A ceasefire or pause in hostilities between Washington and Tehran had briefly raised hopes that the world's most important energy choke-point could return to normal. Instead, attacks resumed, shipping remained severely disrupted and competing proposals emerged over how the Strait should be managed.

Iran in their national interest, said that the security crisis cannot be separated from the broader military conflict and has sought greater control over maritime transit arrangements. Oman, meanwhile, has proposed a regional framework for managing navigation, while the United States has insisted on a return to free navigation through what it considers an international waterway. The disagreement has added a new diplomatic dimension to an already dangerous military confrontation. For India, the issue is not an abstract question of maritime law. It is directly connected to the safety of its citizens, the country's energy security and the stability of its economy.

India's trade and energy supply chains are deeply linked to West Asia. The region accounts for a substantial share of India's crude oil imports, while the Persian Gulf is also home to around 10 million Indians. Bilateral trade with the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council countries is around \$180 billion annually, cumulative foreign direct investment exceeds \$31 billion and remittances from the GCC are more than \$52 billion.

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Iran not currently engaged in talks with US, FM spox says

Efforts underway for Tehran-Washington diplomatic solution: **Qatar**

International Desk

Iran's Foreign Ministry said negotiations with Oman is about the Strait of Hormuz and there are currently no talks with the United States while Qatar said efforts are underway for a diplomatic solution between Tehran and Washington. "We are not currently negotiating with the United States. Our negotiations are with Oman to secure passage through the Strait of Hormuz," said ministry spokesman Esmail Baqaei during a weekly press briefing on Monday. Baqaei described the talks with Oman as "constructive", saying they were aimed at reaching an agreement on a new route. He added that no significant change in the status of the strategic waterway should be expected as long as, US military actions and a naval blockade continue. "As long as US hostile actions continue, a naval blockade against Iran remains in place, US military aggression against Iran and its interests persists, and the United States continues to violate its commitments, there will naturally be no significant change in the situation in the Strait of Hormuz," he said. "The Strait was not closed because of disagreements between Iran and Oman. It has faced disruption since last March due to the military aggression of the United States and the Zionist regime," he added.

Talks on reopening Strait of Hormuz

US Treasury Secretary Scott Bes-



Esmail Baqaei
IRNA

sent claimed on Tuesday that a deal with Iran could be reached on Tuesday or Wednesday to reopen the Strait of Hormuz.

"We are in talks with the Iranians, and I think there is a chance we may have a deal today or tomorrow to open the strait and move towards a more normalized position in this conflict," Bessent said in an interview with CNBC.

Iran closed the Strait of Hormuz to hostile states and their allies in response to the US-Israeli aggression in February and then began asserting more control in retaliation for the US sustaining an illegal naval blockade of Iranian ports and vessels despite a standing ceasefire mediated by Pakistan.

Remarks by the American official came after US President Donald Trump announced on Saturday that he had agreed to cancel a

planned attack on Iran, claiming that Tehran and other regional countries had requested a pause after "the perimeters of a deal" had been reached.

The reported plans emerged amid continued tensions following Iran's resistance to US pressure tactics and military aggression, with Iranian officials repeatedly warning that any new attack by Washington or Tel Aviv would trigger a strong response.

During a phone conversation on Saturday, Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi told his Saudi counterpart Faisal bin Farhan that Tehran remained prepared to defend its sovereignty, territorial integrity and national security.

"Any hostile action by the US or Israel, or participation or cooperation by regional countries in such actions, would be met with a deci-

sive and proportionate response from Iran's powerful armed forces," Araghchi said.

Responding to a question about efforts to bring the US back into compliance with the Pakistan-mediated Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) and the status of indirect message exchanges, Baqaei said Iran had never been the first party to violate any understanding. "The ball has been in the US court for quite some time," he said, adding that Washington announced on July 7 that it would no longer honor all of its commitments under the agreement.

Diplomatic efforts underway

Qatar said on Tuesday that efforts for a diplomatic solution between the United States and Iran were ongoing but that there were no direct talks between the sides planned.

"We can confirm that the efforts are still ongoing with all parties," Foreign Ministry spokesman Majed Al-Ansari told reporters at a regular briefing.

He said that negotiations were focused on "a short-term resolution that would help us reignite the talks and go back to the mediation efforts in its totality".

"Our focus right now is on lowering escalation, reopening the strait, and reopening the door for diplomacy between the parties" Al-Ansari said.

"We are hopeful that if we can get a resumption of the talks anytime soon, we'll be able to push forward towards a major deal," he added.

Pezeshkian denies resignation rumors; says he will stand firm

Leader's office rejects 'false' remarks attributed to Ayatollah Khamenei

National Desk

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian said he would not resign and would stand firm, rejecting recent speculation about his future and accusing unnamed figures of trying to drive a wedge between the country's leadership. In a televised interview with the public scheduled to air on Tuesday evening, Pezeshkian pushed back against rumors that he planned to step down from the presidency. "If I wanted to resign, I would officially announce that I had resigned. I will not resign. I will stand firm," he added.

Pezeshkian said those spreading the claims were seeking to create divisions, adding that "the Leader says one thing and they say something else." Mehdi Tabatabaei, deputy for communications and information at Pezeshkian's office, in a post on X also dismissed the rumors as "baseless and an outright lie."

The comments came after Mohammad-Baqer Kharrazi, a cleric whose sister is married to the Leader's brother, claimed that Pezeshkian had threatened to resign "28 times" but stopped after being warned that his next resignation would be accepted by the Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Mojtaba Khamenei.



Masoud Pezeshkian
president.ir

Public Relations Office of the Leader reacted to the rumors on Tuesday, saying that remarks attributed to the Leader circulating on social media in recent days were false and accused those spreading them of fueling public division.

The statement added that Ayatollah Khamenei had repeatedly stressed the need to preserve national unity and respect officials committed to serving the Islamic Republic, particularly the government.

It said content that runs counter to the Leader's recommendations serves the objectives of ill-wishers of the Iranian nation. The statement rejected as "false and contrary to reality" a social media post in which an individual makes a claim about the reaction of the Leader to a letter of president Pezeshkian.

The Leader's office underlined that the only official sources for Leader's remarks are his websites, saying that any material published outside of the websites "lacks authenticity and validity".

Iran called off strikes on Ukraine after Kiev admitted mistake: **Senior general**



Mohsen Rezaei
WANA

International Desk

Mohsen Rezaei, advisor to the Leader of the Islamic Revolution, said that Iran prepared to strike three locations inside Ukraine in response

to an attack on an Iranian ship, but suspended the operation after Kiev claimed the incident was a mistake. "We were ready to attack three areas in Ukraine," Rezaei said in a televised interview on Monday, referring to the Ukrainian strike on an Iranian vessel. "But after they claimed it was a mistake, we halted our response to examine their claim. Even if it was a mistake, it still requires compensation."

The remarks came after an Iranian merchant ship Anna, which was carrying a cargo of iron from the Russian port of Astrakhan to Iran's Bandar Anzali in the Caspian Sea, came

under a Ukrainian attack on July 25. The attack killed one Iranian sailor and injured several others.

Foreign Ministry Spokesman Esmail Baqaei said on Monday that evidence and statements made by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky indicate that the attack in Russian waters was deliberate, despite assurances from the European country's officials that the incident was unintentional.

Ukrainian officials have described the incident as accidental in direct contacts with Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi and in messages sent to Tehran, he said. "However, the ev-

idence and indications are very clear, including explicit statements by the president of Ukraine, indicating that the attack was deliberate," he added. Araghchi in a phone conversation with his Ukrainian counterpart Andrii Sybiha said that Kiev should compensate Tehran for the damage caused by the attack.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Rezaei said the United States was defeated midway in what he called US President Donald "Trump's third war" against Iran, as Iranian forces disrupted American plans, forced the relocation of US command centers, and inflicted heavy casualties, add-

ing another major failure to Washington's record of setbacks.

Rezaei characterized the recent American aggression as Trump's third war against Iran, coming after earlier 12-day and 40-day conflicts. He added that the US is planning for a fourth phase of war against Iran. First, they have plans to create unrest inside the country and then they are trying to involve other countries in the war. He referred to Ukraine's attack on the Iranian ship and Saudi Arabia's participation in the bombing of Iraq as examples of US's attempts to expand the war in the region.

India walks tightrope ...

Any prolonged disruption to the Strait of Hormuz therefore carries consequences far beyond the immediate conflict.

The waterway is a critical artery for global energy markets. Before the war, it handled roughly one-fifth of global oil and LNG shipments. With shipping through the Strait severely reduced, the disruption has already raised concerns about energy prices, freight costs and the reliability of supply chains. The United Nations has warned that a return to full-scale hostilities could have "catastrophic consequences" for the global economy and has repeatedly called for the restoration of freedom of navigation. For India, every additional day of disruption increases the economic risks.

Higher oil prices would widen India's import bill, increase demand for dollars and put pressure on the rupee. More expensive energy could also feed into inflation and raise transportation and production costs. But India's vulnerability goes beyond oil prices. A prolonged crisis around Hormuz could affect shipping insurance, freight rates and the availability of vessels. It could also disrupt the movement of other commodities, including LNG and petrochemicals. For an economy as dependent on imported energy as India's, the difference between a temporary disruption and a prolonged crisis could be substantial.

India also has little interest in a wider regional war that could destabilize the Persian Gulf, threaten the safety of millions of Indian workers

and push energy prices sharply higher.

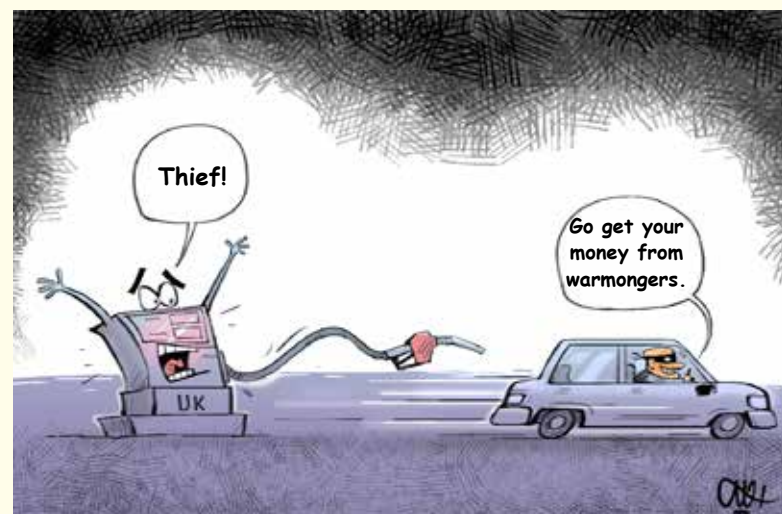
India's position is therefore not simply about choosing between Washington and Tehran. It is about protecting a set of interests that sometimes overlap with both sides and sometimes do not.

For India, the stakes are therefore no longer limited to the price of oil. They extend to the safety of nearly 10 million Indians in the Persian Gulf, the security of vital trade routes, the stability of its energy supplies and its ability to maintain strategic relationships with countries on opposing sides of the conflict. New Delhi is drawing a red line around the safety of its citizens and the freedom of commercial navigation, while keeping another door open: the door to diplomacy.



Mohammad Ali Rajabi
Cartoonist

CARTOON



Iran, Pakistan advance toward \$10b trade target at economic talks

Neighbors to discuss finalizing free trade deal at joint commission



Pakistan's Commerce Minister Jam Kamal Khan (l) speaks at the 10th Joint Economic Commission meeting in Islamabad, Pakistan, as Iran's Industry, Mining and Trade Minister Mohammad Atabak (c) looks on, on Aug. 4, 2026.
● IRNA

five ministers, to discuss trade, industry and commerce issues and follow up on previous agreements. He said the joint commission would review agreements and plans approved in earlier meetings to assess progress and address possible obstacles. In a bilateral meeting with Jam Kamal Khan, Atabak called for follow-up on permits for the transfer and maritime transportation of goods, exemptions from storage fees and the removal of customs and administrative hurdles affecting the clearance and movement of cargo. "Removing these obstacles will facilitate transit routes through Pakistani ports and strengthen the role of Karachi, Qasim and Gwadar ports in regional trade," Atabak said. Atabak said expanding economic ties was essential for both countries, adding that their shared border, geographic position and diverse economic capacities made closer relations a necessity.

He said extending trade facilities to all land, air and sea routes, concluding a free trade agreement, establishing direct financial and banking links and reducing administrative restrictions could allow Iran and Pakistan to reach the \$10 billion trade target within one year. He also called the implementation of guidelines for transit of goods from Pakistani ports to Iran an important step in strengthening Pakistan's regional transit role and boosting regional trade. Iran's southern ports remain under a US naval blockade imposed by President Donald Trump in mid-April, aimed at pressuring Tehran into an agreement after a 40-day US-Israeli war that began in late February. After a pause of several weeks following the signing of an MoU, strikes on Iran's infrastructure resumed in mid-July, and the naval blockade was also reinstated. Iran has been seeking to diversify logistics routes to counter growing restrictions on trade corridors, redirecting cargo operations to northern ports as well as ports in Pakistan, India and Oman after activity at the United Arab Emirates' Jebel Ali port was disrupted during wartime conditions. Pakistan's Commerce Minister

Jam Kamal Khan said after meeting Atabak that Islamabad was working to overcome all obstacles to economic cooperation and accelerate progress toward the roadmap for increasing bilateral trade to \$10 billion. Pakistan's Commerce Ministry also said on Monday that the two countries would take new steps to strengthen cooperation and advance a free trade agreement during Atabak's visit. The talks are focused on 19 key areas, including finalizing the Iran-Pakistan free trade agreement, establishing a barter trade mechanism, reviewing existing agreements, addressing transit barriers and facilitating the movement of Iranian containers through Pakistani ports. The agenda also includes developing border infrastructure at the Rimdan-Gabd border crossing, improving road transport, connecting Pakistan's Gwadar port with Iran's Rimdan border through maritime links, and developing a rail corridor linking the ports of Chabahar and Gwadar. Other issues include expanding joint industrial production, particularly in textiles, resolving banking and financial problems faced by traders, easing business visa procedures and activating joint border markets.

Economy Desk

Iran and Pakistan opened their 10th Joint Economic Commission meeting on Tuesday in Islamabad as the two neighbors seek to boost bilateral trade to \$10 billion from around \$3 billion. Iran's Industry, Mining and Trade Minister Mohammad Atabak said the meeting aims to advance a roadmap agreed by the presi-

dents of the two countries to expand economic and trade cooperation, according to IRNA. "Fortunately, economic cooperation between the two countries is growing, and given the shared capacities and border cooperation, we expect the 10th meeting of the Iran-Pakistan Joint Economic Commission to facilitate border exchanges, increase trade in goods and help achieve the

targets outlined in the roadmap," Atabak said. The meeting was opened in Islamabad with the participation of a high-level Iranian delegation led by Atabak and Pakistan's Commerce Minister Jam Kamal Khan. Atabak said his agenda during the three-day visit featured meetings with senior Pakistani officials, including the prime minister and

Iran restores 60 mcm/day of South Pars gas output lost in war, governor says



Economy Desk

Iran has restored 60 million cubic meters per day of natural gas production lost after damage to South Pars facilities during the US-Israeli war, and efforts are continuing to recover the remaining capacity, the governor of Bushehr Province said on Monday. Speaking at a meeting with Interior Minister Eskandar Momeni in Tehran, Arsalan Zare said rapid reconstruction of damaged oil, gas and petrochemical facilities remained one of the southern province's top priorities because continued operations were essential for employment, the country's energy supply and the economy, ISNA reported. He said reconstruction work was being carried out by Iranian engineers,

specialists and technical personnel. 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 the lost gas-processing capacity. Executive Vice President Mohammad Jafar Qaempanah also said last month that the attacks had taken about 230 million cubic meters of Iran's gas production capacity offline and that 100 million cubic meters was expected to be restored within the next few months. The loss is significant compared with Iran's daily gas production of about 650 million cubic meters and has added to the country's existing gas imbalance.

Iran has remained on a war footing since a US-Israeli coalition launched attacks on Iran on Feb. 28. The country holds the world's second-largest natural gas reserves. South Pars, which Iran shares with Qatar, is the world's largest natural gas field. **Phase 11 output to hit full capacity in two months** The first production block of South Pars Phase 11 is expected to reach its nameplate production capacity within the next two months, marking a new stage in the development of the strategic project, according to the project's executive. Keivan Tariqati, head of the South Pars Phase 11 development project, told Shana that 11 wells had already entered pro-

duction and that drilling, completion and tie-in work on the remaining wells was progressing as planned. "Based on the current plan, with the completion of drilling operations and the commissioning of the wells under development, the first block of Phase 11 is expected to reach its nameplate capacity of more than 28 million cubic meters of raw gas per day, equivalent to 1 billion cubic feet per day, within the next two months. The project will then enter the production stabilization stage." The project, being developed by Pars Oil and Gas Company on behalf of the National Iranian Oil Company, is valued at nearly \$4 billion. Its ultimate goal is to achieve sustainable production of 2 billion cubic feet per day of raw gas from the strategic section of the shared field. Under the Phase 11 development plan, the project includes the construction and installation of offshore facilities at two border locations and the drilling of 27 wells. As additional wells gradually come on stream, the project is expected to increase Iran's production capacity from the shared South Pars field and help reduce the country's gas imbalance.

Space cooperation deal to expand satellite applications in NW



Economy Desk

Iran Space Research Institute and the Maku Free Zone Organization have signed a cooperation agreement to expand the use of space technologies, commercialize advanced technologies and strengthen scientific, research and industrial cooperation in northwestern Iran. Under the agreement, the two sides will cooperate on using satellite systems for smart regional management and natural resource monitoring. They will also strengthen scientific and research infrastructure through the institute's laboratory capabilities, facilitate technology transfer between industry, universities and research centers, and support investment in and commercialization of advanced technologies. The agreement is aimed at creating closer links between scientific institutions, industry and investors in advanced technologies and expanding the role of space technologies in regional development and the knowledge-based economy in the Maku Free

Zone, according to IRNA. The deal was signed at a ceremony attended by the parliamentary affairs deputy of Iran's Ministry of Information and Communications Technology, the chairman and members of the board of directors of the Maku Free Zone Organization, and several lawmakers representing the region. Moharram Shameli, head of the Institute of Space Propulsion, represented acting chief Nader Makari at the ceremony. Makari said the agreement would help leverage the Maku Free Zone's capabilities for applied space projects and facilitate the transfer of research-based technologies into practical use. The two sides will also work to develop cooperation between industry, universities and research institutions to transfer technology and train specialized personnel. The agreement is intended to create conditions for wider use of space technologies in smart management, sustainable development and increasing value-added activities in the Maku Free Zone and northwestern Iran.

Expansion of war Washington's new strategy vis-à-vis Tehran

Saudi Arabia's entry into conflict watershed moment



By Rahman Ghahramanpour
Strategic affairs analyst

OPINION

The assault upon the Iranian vessel, perpetrated by Ukraine, and the recent strikes against Iraq are signs of an expanding conflict between Iran and the United States, and appear to herald the opening of additional fronts against Iran with the objective of intensifying pressure upon Tehran. In actuality, the United States and Israel endeavor to open novel paths and methods for exerting pressure upon Iran. It is said that during a meeting between Benjamin Netanyahu, the prime minister of the Israeli regime, and Donald Trump, the president of the United States, at the White House, this very subject — namely, innovative methods for applying pressure upon Iran — was deliberated; nevertheless, its particulars have not yet leaked to the outside.

Apparently, the Americans, in response to Iran's strategy of expanding the war's geography, are reciprocally attempting to broaden the war's geography as well. Indications thereof comprise, on the one hand, Ukraine's attack upon the Iranian maritime asset and, on the other, the joint American-Saudi strikes against the Popular Mobilization Forces' headquarters in Iraq.

In my estimation, this constitutes a watershed moment within this confrontation. Heretofore, the Americans and regional states, at minimum, exercised caution regarding direct entry into engagement with the Axis of Resistance, endeavoring either to have Israel execute such operations or to conduct clandestine activities; however, the recent assaults by the United States and Saudi Arabia against Popular Mobilization Forces' installations, resulting in the martyrdom of several of its members, appear to indicate a novel approach in confronting Iran on the part of the United States.

The American and Saudi strikes against the Popular Mobilization Forces are consequential from multiple perspectives. First, Saudi Arabia has explicitly acknowledged its participation in these attacks — a matter of considerable importance. Previously, Saudi Arabia attempted to refrain from adopting an explicit and transparent posture regarding this issue and, so to speak, to proceed with prudence; yet its commission of this act conveys the message that it stands prepared to attack the Axis of Resistance in other locations as well, should necessity arise, which shall likely manifest in subsequent confrontations within Yemen.

On the other hand, the message is that any point from which unmanned aerial vehicles are dispatched toward Saudi Arabia shall be targeted by that kingdom. Another message, likewise salient, is the collaboration between Saudi Arabia and the United States. We know that after



Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (R) walks alongside Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, on February 27, 2024.
● AFP

Trump declared his intention to conduct the operation for "liberating" vessels in the Strait of Hormuz, Saudi Arabia and Qatar refrained from cooperating with the United States, asserting that such action might precipitate an exacerbation of the regional crisis. Consequently, when Saudi Arabia undertakes joint military action with the United States against the Popular Mobilization Forces, this may bear the significance and implication that it no longer harbors its previous concerns and, in effect, wishes to communicate to Iran its readiness for escalation and its potential entry into direct confrontation with Iran should this trajectory persist.

Concerning the rationale for Ukraine's assault upon the Iranian vessel, numerous explanations have been advanced. In truth, from the outset, Ukraine had adopted a notably harsh stance vis-à-vis Iran, contending that Iran had supplied Shahed unmanned aerial vehicles to Russia and that Russia was employing them to attack Ukraine.

Nevertheless, the reasons for executing this action at this particular juncture and selecting this moment in time may be multiple. One possibility goes back to the fact that Volodymyr Zelenskyy, the president of Ukraine, has announced a 40-day campaign of severe pressure against Russia, designed to compel Vladimir Putin, the president of Russia, to accept peace. Previously, we witnessed Ukraine's attacks upon Russian refineries, to the extent that Russia was compelled to solicit gasoline purchases from Kazakhstan. Therefore, one might

plausibly construe this incident within that same framework — namely, the application of augmented pressure upon Russia to accede to peace.

Another consideration, which one might mention with some caution, is that this action may have been undertaken with American knowledge or, at minimum, without American opposition. The implication thereof could be that the United States is transmitting to Iran the message that, should the war expand, America too can exert pressure upon Iran through Ukraine, Saudi Arabia, and its other allies. Over the past month, we have observed a trend wherein certain individuals within the

United States asserted that Mr. Trump could not single-handedly manage Iran and that a coalition must be formed; murmurs of this sentiment were also heard. It might be asserted that Ukraine's action constitutes one of those measures to which the Americans previously showed little enthusiasm but now demonstrate a propensity.

We are aware that Mr. Zelenskyy repeatedly informed Trump of his capacity to assist the United States in intercepting Iranian drones, yet America displayed negligible inclination toward such assistance. In any event, Ukraine's action against Iran and Saudi Arabia's action against the Popular Mobilization Forces indicate that, perhaps within the White House, concerning those fresh measures, there exists a conviction that Trump, through collaboration with certain allies, can expand the geographic scope of the war against Iran.

For the present, it appears that both Iran and the United States have arrived at the conclusion that both trajectories — namely, diplomacy and conflict — should be pursued simultaneously. Within this arena, both parties endeavor to deploy their full capabilities to compel the opposing side to yield concessions.

Hence, the recent statement by Mr. Trump, wherein he declared, "It's our turn to hit them," aptly demonstrates that even within the White House, the belief persists that the diplomatic path must continue in parallel with the military course of action. This circumstance raises the probability of the current confrontation becoming protracted.

The article first appeared in Persian on IRNA.



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Mourners carry a coffin draped with a cloth bearing the emblem of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) during a funeral for PMF fighters killed in air strikes on Najaf, Iraq, on July 30, 2026.
● HADI MIZBAN/AP

Money that bought war is on blockchain


By Thomas S. Karat
Political analyst
OPINION

Four days before Donald Trump took the oath a second time, a company controlled by the intelligence chief of a foreign monarchy wired the president-elect's family its first installment. The date was January 16, 2025. The buyer was Aryam Investment 1, a vehicle backed by Sheikh Tahnoon bin Zayed Al Nahyan, national security adviser of the United Arab Emirates and brother of its ruler, a man his own country's press calls the spy sheikh. The purchase was 49 percent of World Liberty Financial, the Trump family's cryptocurrency firm, for \$500 million. Eric Trump signed it. Of the first tranche, \$187 million went directly to entitles the president owns. It was the first time a foreign government official had bought a major stake in the company of an incoming American president, and it was done in the open, on paper, before the man had even been sworn in. What that money bought is the subject of this account. It did not buy a dinner, though there was a dinner. It bought the machinery of the American national-security state, piece by piece, and the transactions can be traced with the precision of a bank statement because for once, the participants did not trouble to hide them. Begin with the chips. For years, the export of the most advanced American semiconductors to the UAE had been restricted, on the assessment of American intelligence that the technology could reach the Chinese military through Emirati firms with documented ties to Huawei. Chief among those firms was G42, chaired by the same Sheikh Tahnoon. The restrictions were not arbitrary. They were the considered judgment of the people whose job is to keep the most powerful computing hardware on earth out of the hands of adversaries. Months after Tahnoon's money reached the Trump family, the administration reversed the controls and cleared the sale of hundreds of thousands of advanced AI chips to the UAE, a fifth of them reserved for Tahnoon's G42. A former senior export-control official, asked to justify the reversal on its merits, told the Wall Street Journal that it was impossible to defend on national-security or economic grounds. There was, he said, only one explanation for it. The UAE paid for it. Then the stablecoin. In March 2025 World Liberty issued USD1, a token pegged to the dollar, the kind of instrument whose issuer earns the interest on the reserves behind it. Five weeks later, a firm chaired by Tahnoon called MGX used \$2 billion of USD1 to finance an investment in Binance, the largest crypto exchange in the world. The transaction floated a five-week-old Trump-family token into the top tier of the global market and placed the president's family on the interest of a two-billion-dollar sum. The announcement was made from a stage in Dubai by Zach Witkoff, co-founder of World Liberty and son of Steve Witkoff, the president's special envoy to the Middle East. It's only the beginning,

the younger Witkoff said. Then the pardon. The founder of Binance, Changpeng Zhao, had pleaded guilty in 2023 to running an exchange that the government said moved money for terrorists and cybercriminals; then-treasury secretary said Binance had let funds flow to terrorists, cybercriminals, and child abusers. His company had helped launch USD1. The sheikh whose fund floated USD1 was his patron. In October 2025, Trump pardoned him. Asked on television how he answered the appearance of pay for play, the president said of the man whose exchange underwrites his family's fortune that he did not know who he was. He knew, he added, only that the sentence had been four months, and that he had heard it was a witch hunt. Foreign state money in; export licenses, regulatory surrender, and a pardon out. The circuit is complete, and every wire in it is visible. This is not the corruption of the past, which required a hidden account and a middleman and a plausible story. This is corruption conducted as commerce, itemized, timestamped, and posted to a public ledger, on the apparent calculation that a transaction carried out in full view cannot be called a conspiracy. The meme coin was the retail version of the same machine. In January 2025, the president launched a token bearing his own name and his own face — the face from Butler, fist raised, blood on the ear, the words Fight, Fight, Fight beneath it. In May, the top 220 holders were invited to dine with him; they had spent, on average, \$1.8 million each. Access to the sitting commander-in-chief was auctioned to whoever would pay, and a great many of those who paid were his own supporters, the ones who read the raised fist as a covenant. Of roughly 1.48 million wallets, 988,905 ended up underwater, down a combined \$3.81 billion. From the same instrument the president reported income of \$636 million. The faithful were the exit liquidity. The face that nearly took a bullet was the bait. None of this would deserve the name of a story if the money stopped at enrichment. It does not stop there. The same Persian Gulf capital that bought the coin and the chips runs, along a second channel, straight into the wars. Consider the president's son-in-



The illustration shows the National Security Adviser of the United Arab Emirates Sheikh Tahnoon bin Zayed Al Nahyan (above) as well as US President Donald Trump (below), his Middle East envoy Steve Witkoff (R), and his AI and Crypto Czar David Sacks.
● MARK HARRIS/THE NEW YORK TIMES

law. Jared Kushner left the first Trump White House and, one day later, incorporated an investment firm; six months after that, he took \$2 billion from the sovereign wealth fund of Saudi Arabia, whose own screening panel had recommended rejecting the deal, citing the firm's inexperience and its excessive fees, only to be overruled by the crown prince. By 2026, that firm, Affinity Partners, held some \$6.16 billion, of which 99 percent came from foreign nationals — the sovereign funds of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Qatar. And through Trump's second term, the man taking that money was simultaneously one of the chief American negotiators across the Middle East, at the same tables as Steve Witkoff, in the same rooms where the region's wars are set-

tled or prolonged. When the president ordered the American attack on Iran, he explained the decision as the product of counsel. He struck, he said, after listening to what Steve and Jared and others were telling him. Steve is Witkoff, whose son runs the coin the Emiratis floated with two billion dollars. Jared is Kushner, 99 percent of whose fortune is foreign sovereign money, whose largest backer is a Saudi crown prince whose government, the House Judiciary Committee noted in a letter to Kushner, had been pushing Trump to continue the war. You cannot both be a diplomat and a financial pawn of the Saudi monarchy at the same time, the committee's ranking member wrote to him. You cannot faithfully represent the United States

US Vice President JD Vance (L) waits, alongside Special Envoy for Peace Missions Steve Witkoff (C), and Donald Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner, to meet with Pakistan's prime minister for high-level talks aimed at advancing a deal to end the Iran war.
● NATHAN HOWARD/GETTY IMAGES

with billions of dollars in Saudi and Emirati cash burning a hole in every pocket of every suit you own. This is the part the crypto ledger cannot show but the pattern makes plain. The men who counseled a war sat, at the very moment they counseled it, atop billions of dollars belonging to the Persian Gulf monarchies that wanted the war fought. The advice and the money arrived through the same men. No intercept is required to see it; the disclosures are public, the letters are filed, the president named his advisers himself. Set beside this the machinery built to prevent exactly this, and watch it fail. When Congress passed the GENIUS Act in July 2025 to regulate stablecoins, it barred members of Congress and their families from profiting off them, and declined to extend the same bar to the president and his family. The exemption was not missed. It was written. The Trump Organization offers a voluntary pledge against dealings with foreign governments, while permitting dealings with foreign companies — a wall that dissolves the instant a sovereign wealth fund is the buyer, which is to say always. The regulator of the president's stable-coin answers to the president, who has placed the relevant agencies under his direct control by executive order. The largest holder of his meme coin, a crypto financier under SEC fraud charges, put \$75 million into World Liberty and watched the case against him paused within three weeks and settled a year later for a fraction, with no admission of guilt. Every safeguard that might have caught the transaction was either exempted, evaded, or owned. The Governor of California's office counts nearly \$2 billion in victim restitution erased by this president's pardons. Congress is investigating whether the clemency was for sale. But investigations presume a hidden thing to uncover, and here there is nothing hidden. The dinner was advertised. The stable-coin deal was announced from a stage. The chip reversal was published in the Federal Register. The pardon was signed in daylight. The war counsel was described by the president on camera. The genius of the operation, if that is the word, is that it dispenses with the cover-up and in dispensing with it, strips the law of the thing it was built to find. What is being sold is not merely access, and not merely the enrichment of one family, though it is both. What is being sold is the direction of American power — its export controls, its prosecutorial discretion, its clemency, and, at the end of the chain, its decisions about which countries to bomb. The buyers are foreign monarchies with wars they want fought and technologies they want acquired. The price is posted. The receipts are on a public blockchain and in the files of congressional committees. The president has told the country, of the men whose money moved through every link of it, that he does not know who they are. The country has been given every fact it would need. What it does with them is the only part of this that remains, for now, unwritten.



It was the first time a foreign government official had bought a major stake in the company of an incoming American president, and it was done in the open, on paper, before the man had even been sworn in. What that money bought is the subject of this account. It did not buy a dinner, though there was a dinner. It bought the machinery of the American national-security state, piece by piece, and the transactions can be traced with the precision of a bank statement because for once, the participants did not trouble to hide them.



The article first appeared on antiwar.com.

U17 Wrestling World Championships: Iran denied freestyle team crown by narrowest margins



Iran's Benyamin Ashofteh (red) is seen in action against Azerbaijan's Ibrahim Hasanov in the freestyle 51kg final at the U17 Wrestling World Championships in Baku, Azerbaijan, on August 2, 2026.
● IAWFIR

Sports Desk

Iran missed out on its first freestyle team title at the U17 Wrestling World Championships in three years after being pipped by Russia in the title race in Baku, Azerbaijan. A haul of three golds, one silver, and two bronze medals across the 10 weight classes saw Iran finish with 145 points – just one behind Russia, which claimed one more bronze medal than the Iranians. India finished third with 123 points, courtesy of one gold, one silver, and four bronze medals, while Team USA, the two-time defending champion, endured a disappointing campaign, collecting just two silver medals to place seventh with 68 points. Iran held a narrow 110-106 lead over Russia after three of the five weight classes on the final day. With one gold-medal bout and one bronze-medal bout remaining for each team, Iran needed to win both matches or see Russia lose one to secure the title, but neither scenario unfolded. Iran's Reza Shamsipour won gold at 71kg, while Russia's Mokhammad Baisultanov claimed bronze, extending Iran's lead to 135-121 heading into the final weight class. It all came down to the final bout of the tournament at 92kg. After Reza Isazadeh lost his bronze-medal match 3-2 to India's Saksham Fnu, Iran remained on 145 points. All Abdurazak Shabanov needed to do was defeat American Salah Tsarni in the gold-medal bout to clinch the team title for Russia, and he did just that with a 9-4 victory, as Russia – eligible for team points for the first time since the 2021 edition – completed a clean sweep of the Greco-Roman and freestyle team crowns. Iran also celebrated a gold medal at 51kg earlier on Sunday, where Benyamin Ashofteh

defeated host wrestler Ibrahim Hasanov 5-1 in the final. Hasanov opened the scoring after Ashofteh failed to score during the activity period, but the Iranian moved ahead on criteria at 1-1 in the second period after Hasanov was put on the activity clock. Ashofteh then secured a takedown with 55 seconds remaining as Hasanov backed away before transitioning into a gut wrench for two more points to build a 5-1 lead with 37 seconds left. Ashofteh held on to seal victory, while Hasanov, the reigning U17 European champion, settled for silver in front of the home crowd, which was again denied a home world champion. At 71kg, Shamsipour survived a tense finish to defeat Georgia's Bohdan Kvantaliani 5-4 and claim Iran's third freestyle gold medal of the tournament. After conceding a passivity point, Shamsipour responded with quick takedowns in the second period to build a 4-1 lead. With 19 seconds remaining, he was penalized for fleeing, and again with two seconds left when Kvantaliani forced a stepout. However, Shamsipour retained the criteria advantage at 4-4 thanks to his higher-scoring techniques. Georgia challenged for another fleeing call in the closing seconds, but the appeal was unsuccessful, awarding Shamsipour an additional point and confirming the victory. Sunday's results came after Iranian wrestlers had won four medals on the penultimate day of competition in Baku. Amirali Ferasati led Iran's medal charge by claiming gold in the 80kg class. The reigning U17 Asian champion capped a dominant campaign, during which he outscored his opponents 33-2 across four bouts, with a 10-0 technical superiority victory over Hungary's Zeteny Tugyi in the final.

Amirhossein Esmaili was Iran's other finalist, settling for silver after a 7-4 defeat to Russia's Magomed Omarov in a thrilling 110kg final, adding to the superheavyweight silver medal he won at the U17 Asian Championships in Da Nang, Vietnam. Elsewhere, Arman Elahi (55kg) and Sam Arshad (65kg) claimed bronze medals through the repechage. Elahi, who also entered the competition as the reigning Asian champion, suffered a 5-1 quarterfinal defeat to Uzbekistan's Jakhongir Tulkunov but earned another chance at a podium finish after the Uzbekistani advanced to the final. The Iranian outclassed Hungary's Kyryl Shumeiko 7-0 in his first repechage bout before defeating Armenia's Davit Baleyan 5-2 in the bronze-medal match to finish joint third alongside India's Prathmesh Suryakant Patil. Arshad, meanwhile, reached the semifinals with three successive technical superiority victories before falling 5-4 to Uzbekistan's Shokhiddin Aliev. He bounced back with a commanding 9-0 win over Kazakhstan's Zamir Daniyar in the bronze-medal bout. The freestyle competition followed a disappointing Greco-Roman campaign for Iran, by its lofty standards, with the traditional powerhouse missing out on the team title for the first time in five editions. Amirreza Tahmasbpour and Alireza Rezaei won gold in the 60kg and 80kg classes, respectively, while Amirreza Mehri (92kg) and Ali-Akbar Akou (110kg) added bronze medals as Iran finished third in the team standings with 96 points. Russia, 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 despite failing to win a single gold medal across the 10 weight classes.

WTT Youth Contender Vientiane 2026: Faraji wins U19 boys' title



● IRIBNEWS

Sports Desk

Iranian table tennis prodigy Benyamin Faraji claimed the U19 boys' singles title at the latest WTT Youth Contender event in Vientiane, Laos.

The teenage sensation came from behind to beat India's Abhinandh Pradhivadhi 3-2 (15-13, 9-11, 8-11, 11-9, 11-9) in the final.

Faraji began his campaign with a 3-0 (11-5, 11-8, 11-5) victory over Hong Kong's Wong Wan Hei in the round of 32 before defeating Wong Alvin, also

from Hong Kong, by the same scoreline (11-3, 12-10, 11-9) to progress to the quarterfinals. He then rallied past South Korea's Ma Yeongmin 3-1 (7-11, 11-7, 11-3, 11-9) to reach the last four, where he defeated Chinese Taipei's Chang Bing-En in straight games (11-6, 12-10, 13-11) to book his place in the final against the Indian. The event served as part of Faraji's preparation ahead of the upcoming Aichi-Nagoya 2026 Asian Games, which will open on September 19. Faraji also competed in the U16 boys' singles event in

Vientiane but suffered an early exit after surrendering a two-game lead in a 3-2 defeat (2-11, 9-11, 12-10, 11-8, 11-7) to Chinese Taipei's Lu Shih-Yuan. Faraz Shakiba and Mohammad Habibi were the other Iranians in action in the U19 boys' singles event, but both saw their campaigns end after just one match. Handed a bye into the round of 32, Shakiba suffered a 3-2 defeat (11-8, 11-8, 7-11, 7-11, 11-5) to Chinese Taipei's Shih Jia-Hong, while Habibi exited at the same stage after a 3-0 loss (12-10, 11-9, 11-9) to Yang Hao-Jen.

Football Federation backs Qalenoei, dismisses coaching speculation

Sports Desk

An Iran Football Federation (FFIRI) board member has dismissed speculation over a possible change in the national team's coaching staff, insisting that Amir Qalenoei remains the federation's only candidate to lead Team Melli at the AFC Asian Cup.

present to guide Iran at the upcoming AFC Asian Cup. A semifinalist at the previous two editions, Iran will begin its bid for a fourth Asian Cup title – and its first since 1976 – against China in Group C, which also features Kyrgyzstan and Syria, at Riyadh's Kingdom Arena on January 9 next year. “Our entire focus is on Mr. Qa-

mestic transfer market after progressing through the national youth teams, particularly the under-23 side. “The time has come for these young but experienced players to wear the senior national team jersey,” Salari said. “We want to rely on their abilities as we pursue the Asian Cup title.” The Asian Cup will be Qalen-



● FFIRI

Speaking to Mehr News Agency, Mohammadrahman Salari said the federation is preparing to discuss an extension to Qalenoei's contract at its next board meeting, which is expected to be held within the coming week. Salari also rejected reports linking former Iran internationals Javad Nekounam, Farhad Majidi and Yahya Golmohammadi with the national team job. “These reports have no basis whatsoever,” he said. “Not only have the names of these three coaches never been discussed, but no other candidate has even been raised during board meetings.” He stressed that the federation's full focus remains on Qalenoei and the plans he will

lenoei and the program he will put forward to ensure the national team's success at the Asian Cup,” Salari added. “There is no other issue under consideration at this stage.” Addressing suggestions that Iran should prioritize developing younger players over immediate results at the continental tournament, Salari said the federation does not view the two objectives as mutually exclusive. “We do not believe success at the Asian Cup should be sacrificed for the sake of youth development,” he said. According to Salari, many of Iran's emerging talents have already established themselves among the country's most sought-after players in the do-

oei's fourth major tournament as Iran head coach. His current contract, signed in March 2023, expired last week. During his first spell in charge, Iran was knocked out by South Korea in the quarterfinals of the 2007 Asian Cup, while his second tenure produced a semifinal finish at the 2024 edition, where Team Melli lost to host Qatar. He was also at the helm during the recently concluded FIFA World Cup in North America, where Iran drew all three of its Group G matches – 2-2 against New Zealand, goalless against Belgium, and 1-1 with Egypt – to finish third in the standings and miss out on a place in the knockout stage of the expanded 48-team tournament.

Iranica Desk

Iran's Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts has launched a new initiative aimed at strengthening the country's handicrafts sector by connecting artisans directly with consumers through a network of Day and Night Markets.

Behrouz Nedaei, head of the ministry's Handicrafts Department, said the initiative is based on close cooperation with municipalities and urban management authorities to create new marketing channels that reduce the gap between producers and consumers while enhancing the economic resilience of the handicrafts sector, Mehr News Agency reported.

"The new approach transforms the traditional model of handicrafts marketing," Nedaei said. "Rather than waiting for customers to visit shops, artisans are bringing their products

into high-traffic urban spaces, allowing residents to encounter authentic Iranian handicrafts as part of their daily lives."

The Day and Night Markets are designed as cultural and social venues where handicrafts are showcased alongside cultural programs, live music and traditional refreshments, creating a more engaging shopping experience.

Nedaei said the pilot phase has produced promising results. According to reports from provincial offices, a significant volume of handicrafts was sold during the Iranian month of Khordad (May 22–June 21) at 33 markets across 16 provinces, under-



● yjc.ir

scoring the initiative's potential to stimulate the sector. He said a total of 690 tables and stalls covering more

than 7,700 square meters were set up during the first phase, enabling 727 artisans and craftspeople —

particularly those operating home-based businesses and small workshops — to sell their products directly

to consumers without intermediaries.

The first phase was implemented in the provinces of Isfahan, Ilam, South Khuzestan, Sistan and Baluchestan, Fars, Qazvin, Qom, Kerman, Golestan, Kermanshah, Gilan, Mazandaran, Yazd, and Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari. Nedaei said the successful pilot would pave the way for expanding the initiative to other provinces. Looking ahead, the ministry plans to integrate the physical markets with specialized online sales platforms, creating a unified marketplace that will broaden producers' access to consumers, stabilize in-

comes and strengthen the handicrafts economy.

Nedaei said data collected through the markets will provide valuable insights into consumer preferences and purchasing patterns, enabling artisans to adapt their products to market demand and improve their competitiveness.

Alongside efforts to strengthen the domestic market, the ministry is also seeking to expand its international presence through participation in specialized trade fairs and exhibitions to boost handicrafts exports and create new commercial opportunities for Iranian artisans and producers, Nedaei said.

Takht-e Soleyman remains symbol of UNESCO heritage

Iranica Desk

Twenty-three years have passed since Takht-e Soleyman, home to the Azar Goshnasp Fire Temple, was inscribed on UNESCO's World Heritage List, an achievement that ended a 24-year pause in the international registration of Iranian heritage sites and making it Iran's fourth UNESCO World Heritage Site.

The archaeological site of Takht-e Soleyman, one of the most important religious and political centers of the Sassanid Empire, was inscribed on UNESCO's World Heritage List on July 5, 2003, during the 27th session of the World Heritage Committee in Paris. The site had previously been registered on Iran's National Heritage List in 1937, according to ISNA.

The inscription marked a turning point for Iran's cultural heritage on the international stage. After the inscription of Persepolis, Naqsh-e Rostam and Chogha Zanbil in 1979, no Iranian site had been added to the World Heritage List for nearly 24 years. Takht-e Soleyman reopened the path for the international recognition of Iran's historical monuments.

UNESCO recognizes Takht-e Soleyman as a masterpiece of human creativity whose architecture reflects outstanding achievements of the Sassanid period. The site bears exceptional testimony to a vanished civilization whose political, religious and artistic influence extended across much of Southwest and Central Asia.

Located about 45 kilometers northeast of Takab in Iran's West Azarbaijan Province, the World Heritage Site occupies roughly 12 hectares in a mountainous landscape. The site stands on a natural travertine platform formed over thousands of years by mineral deposits from a spring.

At the center of the complex lies a striking mineral lake that has shaped both the landscape and the history of the site.

The complex is enclosed by an oval defensive wall strengthened by 38 towers and two monumental Sassanid gateways. Constructed from rubble stone, dressed stone and gypsum mortar, these fortifications transformed the site into a formidable elevated stronghold while also protecting one of the most sacred religious centers



● IRNA

of ancient Iran.

On the northern side of the lake stand the remains of the Azar Goshnasp Fire Temple, regarded as the holiest fire temple of Sassanid Iran. Historical sources describe it as the "Fire of Kings and Warriors," reflecting its close association with the ruling dynasty and the military elite. Unlike ordinary fire temples, Azar Goshnasp played a central role in the political and religious life of the empire, and Sassanid monarchs are believed to have visited the sanctuary after their coronation to pay homage to the sacred fire. Although the complex is known today as Takht-e Soleyman, this name became common only during the Ilkhanid period and is rooted largely in local legends that associated the site with the Prophet Solomon.

Archaeological excavations have shown that the fire temple formed the heart of a much larger religious and governmental complex. Around the central Chahar-Taq, or four-arched sanctuary, stood ceremonial halls, prayer chambers, a treasury, service buildings and structures associated with religious education and pilgrimage. Together they illustrate the scale and sophistication of one of the Sassanid Empire's most important institutions.

To the west of the sanctuary stand the remains of the monumental Khosrow Ivan, considered one of the finest surviving examples of Sassanid architecture. Other structures from the Ilkhanid period, including palace remains built centuries later, demonstrate that the site retained strategic and symbolic importance long after the fall of the Sassanid Empire. The Azar Goshnasp Fire Temple



● asriran.com



● tabnak.ir

reached the height of its prosperity during the reign of Khosrow I Anushirvan and his successors, particularly Khosrow II Parviz, in the sixth and early seventh centuries CE. During this period the Sassanid state strengthened its support for Zoroastrian institutions, especially as it sought to reinforce political unity amid religious and social challenges.

As a result, Azar Goshnasp became not only the empire's wealthiest fire temple but also its most influential religious center. Its sacred fire is believed to have burned continuously for nearly seven centuries, symbolizing both the authority of Zoroastrianism and the unity of the Sassanid state. The temple's prosperity, however, was eventually brought to an end during the long wars between the Sassanid Empire and Byzantium.

In the early seventh century, Byzantine forces under Emperor Heraclius captured and devastated the complex, looting its treasures and destroying many of its buildings. Historians regard this attack as one of the decisive turning points in the decline of Azar Goshnasp.

The destruction was followed by the political collapse of the Sassanid Empire, the Arab conquest of Iran and the spread of Islam. Although a small Zoroastrian community continued to use the site for some time, the fire temple never regained the status it had enjoyed during its golden age. Over the following centuries, Takht-e Soleyman gradually lost its role as the foremost religious center of Sassanid Iran, while its monumental ruins remained a powerful reminder of one of the

greatest civilizations of the ancient Iranian world.

During the Mongol Ilkhanid period in the late 13th century, the Ilkhans restored parts of the Sassanid complex, particularly the monumental Khosrow Ivan, and constructed new palaces and residential buildings. For a time, the site served as a royal summer residence, hunting retreat and administrative center. This renewed prosperity continued under Ghazan Khan, but following the collapse of the Ilkhanid state, Takht-e Soleyman gradually lost its importance and eventually became a small rural settlement before being abandoned altogether. Beyond its archaeological significance, Takht-e Soleyman occupies a unique place in Iran's historical and cultural memory. As one of the three principal fire temples of Zoroastrianism, it served for centuries as the foremost religious center associated with the kings and warriors of the Sassanid Empire. While the site's sacred traditions stretch back much further, its greatest prominence came during the fifth and sixth centuries CE, when the Azar Goshnasp Fire Temple became one of the leading religious institutions of the Zoroastrian world.

Over the centuries, the ruins also became closely associated with legends surrounding the Prophet Solomon. These stories, which gave the site its present-day name, transformed the ancient sanctuary into one of Iran's most famous legendary landscapes, blending history with folklore and strengthening its place in the country's cultural identity.

Fire has held a sacred place in Iranian civilization for thousands of years. Fire temples served not

only as places of worship but also as centers of education, justice and local administration, where religious instruction was provided, disputes were settled and valuable documents and treasures were safeguarded. During the Sassanid era, when religion and government were closely linked, these institutions reached the height of their importance, explaining why many of the surviving fire temples in Iran date from this period.

Historical sources also indicate that one of the copies of the Avesta, the sacred book of Zoroastrianism, was preserved at Azar Goshnasp. Because of its political and religious significance, the temple was frequently mentioned by Roman and Armenian historians as well as by Islamic geographers and chroniclers. It also occupies a prominent place in Ferdowsi's Shahnameh, where the name of Azar Goshnasp appears repeatedly, highlighting its symbolic importance in Iranian historical tradition.

Modern archaeological research at Takht-e Soleyman began in 1959, when Iranian authorities approved systematic excavations carried out by German and Swedish archaeological missions working alongside Iranian experts. Over nearly two decades, researchers uncovered major sections of the Sassanid and Ilkhanid complexes, revealing temples, ceremonial halls, palaces, defensive walls and numerous artifacts, including coins, seals, pottery, architectural decorations and everyday objects. These discoveries greatly expanded scholarly understanding of the site's architectural development and historical functions.

Excavations came to a halt after the 1979 Islamic Revolution, and for many years only limited conservation work was undertaken. Recognizing the site's exceptional historical value and the need to protect its fragile remains, Iranian authorities selected Takht-e Soleyman in 1993 as one of the country's major cultural heritage projects. Extensive archaeological research, conservation, restoration and documentation programs followed, ultimately providing the foundation for its successful nomination to UNESCO.



Talk with veteran performer Abolfazl Mirza-Ahmadi

Ta'ziyeh is more than religious play; it is mother of Iran's performing arts

By Alireza Sepahvand
Journalist

INTERVIEW EXCLUSIVE

Ta'ziyeh is Iran's traditional passion play, a form of ritual theater that recounts the martyrdom of Imam Hussein (PBUH), the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and the third Imam of Shia Islam, through a powerful blend of poetry, music and symbolic performance.

Imam Hussein (PBUH) was martyred in Karbala, Iraq, along with several dozens of his loyal companions and family members, more than 14 centuries ago in an unequal battle against the army of Yazid, the tyrannical ruler at the time.



Abolfazl Mirza-Ahmadi

For more than six decades, Abolfazl Mirza-Ahmadi has been a fixture on the Ta'ziyeh stage. He entered the art form as a

child and, after years portraying the revered figures of the Karbala tragedy, became one of Iran's best-known performers of its antagonists, most notably Shimir, the commander widely associated with Imam Hussein's martyrdom. Mirza-Ahmadi argues that Ta'ziyeh is far more than a religious ceremony. In his view, it is a complete dramatic tradition that brings together music, theater, storytelling, movement and moral instruction within a single artistic form.

In an interview with Iran Daily, he reflects on performing Ta'ziyeh both in Iran and abroad, the oral tradition through which the art has been passed from one generation to the next, audiences' emotional reactions to his portrayal of Shimir, and the importance of preserving the authenticity of Ta'ziyeh in a rapidly changing world.

Few performers become so closely identified with a role that audiences continue to see them as the character long after the curtain falls. That has happened repeatedly to Mirza-Ahmadi. Having portrayed Shimir for more than 60 years, he recalls that many spectators became so immersed in the performance that they continued to regard him as the historical figure even after the play had ended. To him, those reactions speak to Ta'ziyeh's enduring emotional

power.

Having entered the world of Ta'ziyeh in childhood and portrayed a wide range of characters, from the teenage sons of Muslim ibn Aqil, the cousin of Imam Hussein (PBUH), and Qasim ibn Hassan, Imam Hussein's young nephew, to Shimir, Mirza-Ahmadi sees the tradition as a living cultural inheritance passed down orally across generations. He believes it has played a vital role in preserving both Iran's classical musical heritage and its dramatic arts. In the interview, he discusses what makes Ta'ziyeh unique, how younger performers are trained, the experience of staging it for international audiences, and the challenges it faces in the age of social media. While the tradition must continue to engage contemporary audiences, he says, its artistic and cultural authenticity should never be compromised.

IRAN DAILY: If you had one minute to explain Ta'ziyeh to someone who had never heard of the tragedy of Karbala, how would you describe it?

MIRZA-AHMADI: The best way to introduce Ta'ziyeh to someone unfamiliar with Iran or Imam Hussein (PBUH) is simply to stage a performance. It is a theatrical art that combines drama, music and movement to tell a story of courage, dignity, self-sacrifice and the martyrdom of Imam Hussein (PBUH). Even without understanding Persian, audiences can connect with its emotional and visual language. Ta'ziyeh has the power to introduce people around the world to Iran's culture, history and human values. In my view, it is one of the country's most authentic cultural legacies.

You have spent more than six decades portraying Shimir, the principal antagonist in the story. Have people ever mistaken you for the villain off stage?

Many times. Whenever I step into the role of Shimir, I do everything I can to make him completely believable and to portray the cruelty and malice attributed to him in history. Because of that, after performances I have often heard children point at me and say, "That's Shimir." Some audience members became so immersed in the story that they threw stones, slippers or whatever they had at hand. On a few occasions, women, overcome with emotion, even tried to confront me physically. I've always taken those reactions



Abolfazl Mirza-Ahmadi, an actor of the Iranian passion play Ta'ziyeh, is seen performing on horseback at an undisclosed location in Iran.

as a compliment. They tell me I succeeded in making the character feel real.

In Western theater, costumes and makeup largely define a character. In Ta'ziyeh, however, audiences often recognize heroes and villains from the singing before they even notice the costumes. How does that musical language work?

Every character in Ta'ziyeh has clear visual and musical markers. Audiences know that performers dressed in red represent Shimir's camp and the opponents of Imam Hussein (PBUH), while green signifies his family and companions. Yellow is typically reserved for figures such as Hurr ibn Yazid al-Riyahi, a general in Shimir's army who defected to fight for Imam Hussein (PBUH). But costume is only part of the storytelling. Music plays an equally important role. The protagonists perform their verses in traditional Persian modes such as Nava, Mahur and Esfahan, using a lyrical, melodic style. Those portraying the antagonists use the same musical modes, but deliver them in a broken, declamatory manner with a distinctly different vocal approach. That contrast allows audiences to recognize whether a character is a hero or a villain almost as soon as they hear the voice.

Many researchers argue that Ta'ziyeh helped preserve elements of Persian classical music during periods when formal musical education was not possible. How have you seen that reflected in your own experience?

Ta'ziyeh has been part of my life for as long as I can remember. Its performance traditions and vocal techniques have been passed down orally from one generation to the next. As a child, I played roles such

himself in that role. If he cannot do that, the audience will not believe the character. When I portray Shimir, Ibn Sa'd, Ibn Ziyad or Harith, I must perform in a way that makes the audience feel they are truly facing those historical figures.

The aim, however, is not to promote violence. It is to present a historical reality and depict the struggle between truth and falsehood. When the audience believes that the character on stage is the same person who stood against Imam Hussein (PBUH) or killed the sons of Muslim ibn Aqil, it means the actor has fulfilled his responsibility.

Social media and short videos have changed people's attention spans, while some Ta'ziyeh performances last three hours or more. Should Ta'ziyeh adapt to today's audiences or preserve its traditional form?

Things are very different today compared with the past. When I performed Ta'ziyeh as a child, people would sit and watch for four or even four and a half hours without leaving their seats. Back then, there were no loudspeakers, no television, no social media and no mobile phones. We had to rely on the strength of our voices and our vocal ability to reach the audience, and people listened with patience and full attention.

Today, with the emergence of social media and changes in the way people consume media, audiences have shorter attention spans. In my view, Ta'ziyeh must preserve its authenticity, but its storytelling methods and performance length should be adapted to today's audiences. If we can present the central message of Imam Hussein's uprising in a more coherent and shorter format, we can both preserve the essence of this art and maintain its connection with the younger generation.

In Iran, Ta'ziyeh is a religious ritual, but it is also a theatrical and musical performance. Do you think people with different religious beliefs can connect with it? Why?

Yes, absolutely. If Ta'ziyeh is performed properly, it can appeal to any audience, including people with different religious beliefs or those who have little knowledge of the events of Karbala. Just as a successful film or theatrical production can move audiences from different backgrounds, Ta'ziyeh can also connect with all people through music, acting, movement

and storytelling.

Today, one of our most important responsibilities is to introduce this art to the younger generation and encourage them to continue this tradition so that this valuable heritage can be preserved for the future.

After more than sixty years on stage, which moment has stayed with you the most, a moment when you felt the line between performance and reality had disappeared for the audience?

One of my most unforgettable memories goes back to a Ta'ziyeh performance in France in 2012. In one scene, we portrayed the martyrdom of Hurr's son using a theatrical technique in which blood appeared to flow naturally from beneath his throat.

The audience was deeply affected by the scene and believed what they were seeing was real. Some even told us that the performance was extremely violent. After the show, we brought the child performer in front of them so they could see that he was safe and that everything they had witnessed was part of a theatrical performance.

The audience then applauded our group for around 25 minutes. Their reaction showed that Ta'ziyeh, even for people unfamiliar with its culture and background, can leave a profound and lasting impression.

If UNESCO or a major international festival asked you to share only one message about Ta'ziyeh with the world, what would you want people to know about this art form?

My message would be that Ta'ziyeh is not just a religious ritual; it is one of the most complete forms of performing art in the world.

In Ta'ziyeh, acting, music, singing, storytelling, horsemanship, combat, movement and many other theatrical skills come together. A Ta'ziyeh performer must be able to bring all these abilities to the stage at the same time.

That is why I believe Ta'ziyeh can be considered the mother of many performing arts. In many forms of theater, actors receive separate training for each of these skills, but in Ta'ziyeh, all these elements are combined in a single art form.

I would like people around the world to recognize Ta'ziyeh not only as a religious tradition, but also as a cultural, artistic and human heritage. It is an art that uses emotion, music and drama to convey universal values such as dignity, sacrifice and justice.



Abolfazl Mirza-Ahmadi (red), an actor of the Iranian passion play Ta'ziyeh, is seen performing the role of a villainous character on stage.



The photo shows Ta'ziyeh actors performing the centuries-old passion play, a deeply symbolic reenactment of the Karbala tragedy.