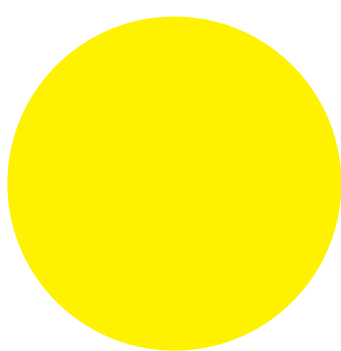


My cultural activities are tribute to Iran's culture: South Korean ambassador

INTERVIEW EXCLUSIVE



Iran raps Western human rights statements as ‘hypocritical blame game’

New military lineup signals shift toward offensive deterrence

By Mohsen Farkhani
International affairs analyst

OPINION EXCLUSIVE

Following the outbreak of the illegitimate US-Israeli war against the Islamic Republic of Iran in late February 2026, and the martyrdom of the Leader and a large number of senior commanders in the initial attacks, Iran's new Leader, Ayatollah Seyyed Mojtaba Khamenei, issued a series of decrees appointing key figures to senior military and security posts. Mohsen Rezaei was named secretary of the Supreme National Security Council and the Leader's representative to the council; Ali Abdollahi was appointed chief of staff of the Armed Forces, with Kioumars Heidari as his deputy; Ahmad Vahidi, who was promoted to the rank of major general, was named commander-in-chief of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC); Mostafa Izadi was appointed deputy IRGC commander; Ali Ozmaei was named commander of the IRGC Navy; and Hossein Taeb was appointed head of the Basij Organization. All of these figures are known for their hard-line and uncompromising positions toward the West.

These appointments cannot be viewed merely as a redistribution of responsibilities or an effort to fill the gaps left by the martyrdom of previous commanders. Their main significance lies in the precise fit between the individuals appointed and the fundamental shift in Iran's military-security doctrine — a shift from defensive deterrence based on strategic patience to offensive deterrence based on punishment. The adoption of this doctrine sends a clear message of Iranian deterrence, resting on two pillars: overt and covert military capabilities, and the credibility of deterrence. Following Iran's strategic victory in its asymmetric war with the United States, this message has gained greater relevance and substance for Tehran. Against this backdrop, the appointments as a whole signal a strategic realignment of the country's military and security structure amid the ongoing war and the transition in the international order, in a way that any escalation by the United States or Israel will be met with a heavier and more costly response, making the threat of punishment credible to the adversary and consolidating deterrence.

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Iran rejects US claims of normal traffic in Strait of Hormuz, asserts full control



Vessels are seen in the Strait of Hormuz, off the port city of Bandar Abbas in southern Iran on August 10, 2026. AFP



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Iran raps Western human rights statements as 'hypocritical blame game'

International Desk

Iranian Foreign Ministry strongly condemned a joint statement issued by France and a number of Western countries regarding human rights in Iran, describing it as a clear instance of 'hypocritical blame game'. The ministry's statement came after 32 countries, including France, Britain and Canada, in a joint statement condemned the executions of rioters and the use of the death penalty by Iran as a "capital punishment to silence dissent". The Acting Director General of Human Rights Department at Iran's Foreign Ministry Hamid Ahmadi described the move as a repeated attempt to evade

accountability for their role in gross violations of human rights and international humanitarian law in various regions of the world, including in Africa and the West Asia, and especially in relation to Iranian citizens. Recalling France's dark colonial history in Africa and elsewhere — as well as its meddlesome actions in certain African nations that have directly or indirectly led to the killing and violation of the human rights of millions of innocent people — Ahmadi advised French officials to correct their racist behavior citizens of other countries and immigrants, and to stop their comprehensive, unconditional, and inhuman support for the genocidal and occupying Israeli regime,



Iran's Foreign Ministry building
● IRNA

instead of preaching to others. Ahmadi said that the anti-Iran statement is being issued at a time when Iranians have not

forgotten the "shameful silence of its authors" regarding recent illegal aggression by the United States and Israel against Iran,

during which thousands of people, including 168 people at a school in Iran's southern city of Minab, lost their lives. Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi also reacted to the statement by the Western countries, censuring them for preaching about human rights and international law while supporting Israeli and US war crimes. "Countries like France should stop lecturing the world about 'human rights' and international law. The hypocrisy is blatant and embarrassing," Araghchi said in a post on X on Thursday. "Your backing of Israel's genocide in Gaza — and aggression against Iran — has destroyed whatever moral high ground

you imagined you had. Israel launched a genocidal war on the Gaza Strip on October 7, 2023, after the Hamas resistance group carried out a historic operation against the usurping entity in retaliation for its intensified atrocities against the Palestinian people. Israel's war on Gaza has killed more than 73,000 Palestinians, mostly women and children, and injured 174,259 others. The Israeli regime and the United States also waged their first illegal war on Iran in June 2025. Their second deadly aggression began on February 28 and came to a halt in early April after 40 days. Thousands of Iranians have lost their lives in the aggression.

Iran rejects US claims of normal traffic in Strait of Hormuz, asserts full control

International Desk

The spokesperson for Iran's Khatam al-Anbiya Central Headquarters, Iran's central command, dismissed US claims of normal maritime traffic through the Strait of Hormuz, saying no vessel can safely transit the strategic waterway without authorization and supervision by Iran.

Lieutenant-Colonel Ebrahim Zolfagari said in a statement on Thursday that US claims regarding the normal passage of vessels through the Strait of Hormuz are "false and baseless," describing them as a sign of the US military's desperation and helplessness. "The Strait of Hormuz remains, as in the past, under the full management and control of the Islamic Republic of Iran," he said, adding that no commercial vessel or oil tanker could safely pass through the waterway without authorization and supervision from Iran's armed forces. Zolfagari's remarks came after US President Donald Trump said the US has "total control" over the waterway. "I THINK WE WILL KEEP IT," Trump wrote Wednesday on his Truth Social platform. Zolfagari said the US and



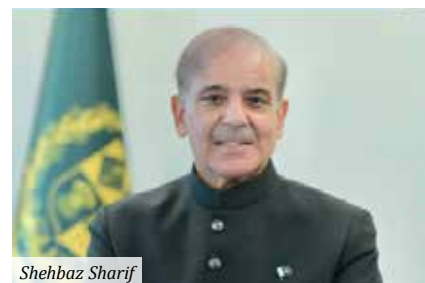
Vessels are seen in the Strait of Hormuz, off the port city of Bandar Abbas in southern Iran on August 10, 2026.
● AFP

its military have repeatedly experienced the "power and steadfastness" of the Iranian people and the country's armed forces. He further slammed Washington for continuously seeking to create instability and insecurity in the region, saying that unsupported US threats will only result in greater "desperation and helplessness" in the face of Iran's military preparedness. The US has been attacking Iran since earlier in July after Washington violated the terms of the Islamabad Memorandum of Understanding, which was meant to permanently end the war that the US and Israeli regime unleashed against Iran in late February. The understanding had recognized Iran's rights and sovereignty over the Strait of Hormuz, and said Iran was responsible for

removing restrictions that it has imposed over the Strait of Hormuz for vessels affiliated with aggressors and their supporters since the start of the aggression on February 28. However, the US attempted to undermine Iran's sovereignty by establishing an unsafe corridor near the Omani shores. The unlawful US measure prompted Iran's firm response to re-impose restrictions on the Strait of Hormuz. Tehran says any movement in the strategic chokepoint must be conducted under Iranian arrangements, as per the understanding. Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi recently said the reopening of the strategic waterway hinges on US actions. "Negotiations with Oman on the legal mechanism and management of the Strait of Hormuz regard-

ing the designation of the Strait of Hormuz transit route are under way and we are very close to an agreement, but the reopening of the Strait of Hormuz is subject to other conditions, including compensation for breaches of the Islamabad Memorandum of Understanding by the United States," Araghchi said. Reuters reported on Friday that shipping traffic at the Strait of Hormuz fell below the month average towards the end of the week due to volatile sentiment between the US and Iran. Commodity vessel transits at Hormuz picked up slightly on Thursday, but remained lower than the month's daily average of 12, based on Kpler data in August so far. A total of nine vessels transited the strait on Thursday, up from five the previous day, according to Kpler data. The nine vessels included five entries heading into the Persian Gulf and four exits into the Gulf of Oman, mostly via the Iranian shipping route.

Pezeshkian: Tehran determined to further strengthen Islamabad ties



Shehbaz Sharif



Masoud Pezeshkian

International Desk

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian emphasizes Iran's determination to further strengthen comprehensive relations with Pakistan and is ready to take more effective steps to strengthen the relations between and secure the common interests of the two nations, based on mutual trust and respect. Pezeshkian made the remarks in a congratulatory message to Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on the 79th anniversary of the independence of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. In his message, the Iranian president considered this occasion a valuable opportunity to commemorate the achievements of Pakistan's great nation, and a new turning point in efforts to deepen and expand longstanding and strategic relations between Tehran and Islamabad. "The common interests and fates of the two nations of Iran and Pakistan are more intertwined than ever before, and this reality doubles the necessity of closer synergy and cooperation," Pezeshkian stated. "Undoubtedly, the deep historical, cultural, civilizational, and people-to-people ties between the two nations are a valuable asset for charting brighter prospects in bilateral relations," he added. Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi

also congratulated Pakistani Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Mohammad Ishaq Dar on the 79th anniversary of Pakistan's independence, extending his warm congratulations to the Pakistani government and people.

In his message to Ishaq Dar, Araghchi described the occasion as a valuable opportunity to recall the strong historical, cultural, civilizational and people-to-people ties between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, calling them valuable foundations for strengthening friendship and deepening cooperation between the two nations.

Pakistan emerged as an independent state on August 14, 1947, following the end of British colonial rule and the partition of the Indian subcontinent.

In recent weeks, Iran and Pakistan have taken steps to expand economic cooperation, including a memorandum of understanding signed earlier this month to increase bilateral trade to \$10 billion and advance efforts toward a free trade agreement.

The agreement was signed in Islamabad during the 10th Iran-Pakistan Joint Trade Committee meeting by Iranian Minister of Industry, Mine and Trade Mohammad Atabak and Pakistani Minister of Commerce Jam Kamal Khan.

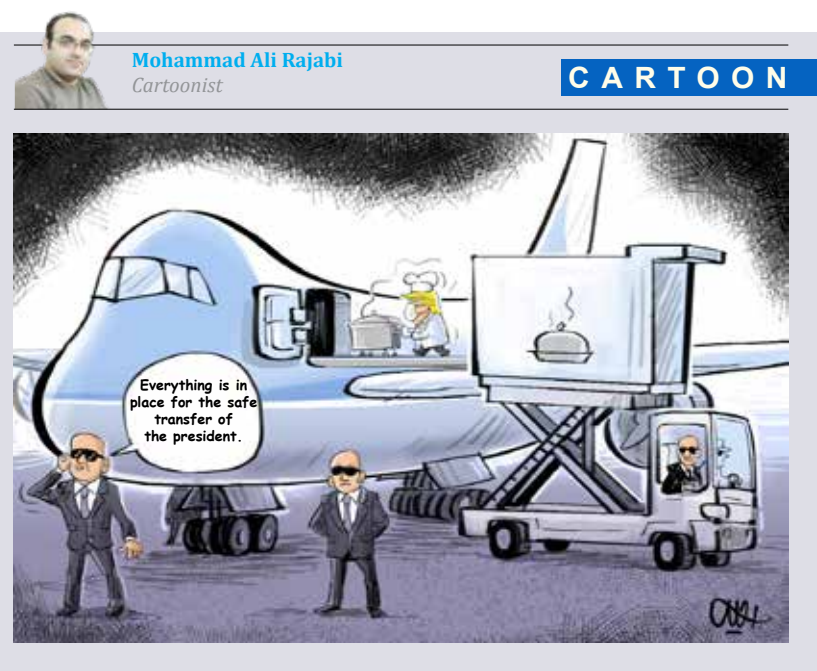
US, Israel guilty of 'gravest war crimes' since 1949

On the 77th anniversary of the adoption of the Four Geneva Conventions, Iran's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) issued a statement denouncing the United States and Israel for committing some of the most severe violations of international humanitarian law in modern history through their ongoing military aggression against the Islamic Republic. The statement, released on Thursday, recalls that on August 12, 1949, the four Geneva Conventions established binding principles for armed conflict, including the distinction between military and civilian targets, proportionality, military necessity, and the prohibition of unnecessary suffering, Press TV reported. Common Article 1 of the conventions obliges all states parties not only to re-

spect these rules "in all circumstances" but also to ensure their respect by others. These principles now form an integral part of customary international humanitarian law binding on every nation. Yet the world continues to witness unprecedented breaches. Israel, the ministry declared, remains the single greatest violator of international humanitarian law. Over the past eight decades it has perpetrated the most serious international crimes — war crimes, genocide, and crimes against humanity — in occupied Palestine, Lebanon, Syria, and across West Asia. The statement identifies Israel's aggressive operations against Iran in 2025 and 2026, carried out with the full complicity and participation of the United States,

as among the gravest violations of humanitarian law since the conventions were adopted.

"The war crimes committed by the terrorist US army and the genocidal Zionist regime during their military aggression against Iran over the past year and a half have pushed the boundaries of savagery and barbarity," the ministry said. It cited specific atrocities: the massacre of students and teachers in Minab with Tomahawk missiles; the attack on the Lamerd stadium with cluster munitions on February 28, 2026; and the bombing of residential homes in Qeshm with one-ton bombs on July 30, 2026. These, it stressed, represent only a fraction of the thousands of war crimes inflicted on the Iranian people.



Iran oil output rises to 2.478m bpd in July, OPEC data shows

Economy Desk

Iran's oil production rose by 26,000 barrels per day (bpd) in July from the previous month to 2.478 million bpd, according to the latest data from OPEC's secretariat based on secondary sources. The data showed Iran's output increased from 2.451 million bpd in June, keeping the country in third place among OPEC producers. Saudi Arabia remained the group's largest producer with output of 7.352 million bpd, followed by Iraq at 2.621 million bpd. Total crude oil production by OPEC members rose by 1.659 million bpd in July from the previous month to 23.632 million bpd, according to the OPEC data. Crude output by countries participating in the OPEC+ Declaration of Cooperation reached 37.655 million bpd in July, up 1.424 million bpd from June. The data came as the world's two most closely watched oil forecasters offered sharply conflicting views of the outlook for 2026 on Wednesday. The International Energy Agency (IEA) forecasts the first

annual decline in oil demand since the COVID-19 pandemic while OPEC continues to expect consumption growth, according to euronews.com. The Paris-based IEA now expects global oil demand to fall by 1.6 million bpd in 2026, a downgrade of 510,000 bpd from its July forecast. "The ongoing closure of the Strait of Hormuz and elevated fuel prices continue to weigh on oil consumption," the IEA said, cutting its second-half demand forecast by roughly 550,000 bpd. OPEC still expects demand to grow, although it has cut its forecast for a fourth consecutive month, to 580,000 bpd from 780,000 bpd. The two forecasts differ by about 2.2 million bpd in their estimates of global oil consumption this year. The Strait of Hormuz, one of the world's most important energy transit routes, has been at the center of contention between Iran and the United States since the latter waged a war of aggression with Israel against the Islamic Republic in late February. In response, Iran closed the strait and be-

gan talks with Oman to establish a joint mechanism for shipping arrangements. The move pushed oil prices from around \$70 a barrel to above \$100, with prices topping \$110 on some days. Iran also sold \$18 billion worth of oil during the war with the United States and the ceasefire that followed, the Oil Ministry's media outlet Shana reported last week. According to Shana, Iran exported \$11.5 billion worth of crude during the war and a further \$6.5 billion during the ceasefire period. The agency said the figure accounted for more than 60% of the oil revenue forecast in the current fiscal year's budget. During the 40-day war, the United States issued a temporary sanctions waiver for Iranian oil trade aimed at driving down prices. In mid-April, the US military imposed a naval blockade of Iranian ports in the Sea of Oman and the Indian Ocean. Shana said Iran seized on a "golden opportunity" created by the price rise, releasing about 100 million barrels of stored crude and condensates onto the



market that it had previously been unable to sell "favorably." The price increase is estimated to have generated an additional \$3 billion for Iran.

CBI urges BRICS financial corridor, payment network links



CBI Head Abdolnaser Hemmati (1st L) leads the Iranian delegation at a BRICS financial meeting in Jaipur, India, on Aug. 13, 2026. ● IRNA

Economy Desk

Head of the Central Bank of Iran (CBI) Abdolnaser Hemmati called on BRICS members to create a dedicated financial corridor and link their national payment networks. Financial cooperation among BRICS members should move beyond general discussions toward practical, secure and sustainable infrastructure for cross-border payments and settlements, Hemmati said at a financial meeting of the emerging-market group in India on Thursday, according to IRNA. "Linking payment networks and expanding the use of national currencies, while reducing reliance on financial channels outside BRICS, will help increase the speed, reduce the costs and enhance the security of trade transactions among members," he said. "Iran has already begun examining the technical, legal and operational aspects of linking the payment systems of BRICS members and is ready to cooperate in developing an operational roadmap for this initiative," Hemmati said. He added that Iran's pursuit of membership in the New Development Bank (NDB) could help expand financing for development projects, investment cooperation and economic ties among BRICS members. The first meeting of BRICS finance ministers and central bank governors under India's 2026 chairmanship was held on Aug. 12-13 in Jaipur. On the first day of the meeting, Hemmati called for stronger practical cooperation among

members in monetary and financial areas. "BRICS will have the greatest impact when it can turn policy discussions into practical initiatives and implementation mechanisms," he said. Iran's central bank has played an active and responsible role in BRICS working groups since the country's membership, participating in areas including cross-border payments, national currencies, financial technologies, cybersecurity, artificial intelligence and sustainable finance, Hemmati said. He also backed initiatives aimed at reducing transaction costs and risks, facilitating the use of national currencies and bringing payment infrastructure among member countries closer together. Hemmati described the New Development Bank as one of the group's most important institutional achievements and said Iran was ready to expand its engagement with the bank and pursue membership with the cooperation and support of its members. BRICS, originally formed by Brazil, Russia, India and China, has expanded to include Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia and Indonesia as full members.

Monetary ties with South Africa

On the sidelines of the meeting, Hemmati and his South African counterpart Lesetja Kganyago discussed ways to expand monetary and banking cooperation, facilitate trade and strengthen financial ties between the two countries.

The two sides also stressed the importance of using BRICS multilateral cooperation to develop effective mechanisms for enhancing economic and banking ties among member countries, according to ISNA.

Roadmap for Iran-Brazil trade

In a separate meeting, Iranian and Brazilian officials agreed on the need to draw up a joint roadmap for expanding economic ties. Mehdi Heydari, Iran's deputy economy minister, and Brazil's deputy economy minister for international affairs, Matias Alencastro, discussed ways to expand and facilitate economic and trade cooperation, support the private sector and increase bilateral trade, according to IRNA. Heydari stressed the complementary nature of the two countries' production needs and capacities. He proposed practical mechanisms to support the private sector and expand bilateral trade, saying the use of local currencies and barter arrangements for some products could help ease existing trade constraints. The two sides also stressed the importance of creating stability and sustainability in their goods value chains as a requirement for expanding bilateral trade. They agreed to expand agricultural cooperation, particularly through exchanges of goods needed by the two countries, and to design a reliable mechanism to facilitate trade. Given the presence of Iranian and Brazilian investors, the two sides also agreed to pursue negotiations and finalize basic economic agreements, including agreements to avoid double taxation and to promote and provide reciprocal protection for investment.

Bazargan customs sees imports surge 250%, exports up 40%

Economy Desk

Iran's Bazargan customs post on the border with Turkey has recorded a 250% increase in imports and a 40% increase in exports from the northwestern crossing since March, its director general said, as restrictions on southern maritime routes prompt changes in logistics corridors. Mohsen Baqerpour told the Tasnim news agency that some cargo routes had been shifted to the Turkish port of Mersin because of restrictions affecting southern ports, increasing the role of Bazargan customs in supplying and moving goods into Iran. "Since the beginning of the current year (March 21), 150,000 tons of essential goods, medicines, bananas and other imported goods have entered and been cleared through Bazargan customs, a 250% increase from the same period last year," he said. About 190,000 tons of goods were exported through Bazargan to Turkey, countries in the southern Persian Gulf and India during the same period, up 40% from a year earlier, Baqerpour said. Some Iranian exports from southern areas have also been redirected through Bazargan, he said, adding that changes in trade and logistics routes had increased activity at the customs post. Iran faces renewed restrictions on maritime routes. Southern ports remain under a US naval blockade imposed by Washington 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, the naval blockade was reinstated in mid-July. Iran is seeking to diversify its logistics corridors to counter growing restrictions on its trade routes. According to the latest data from Turkey's Economy Ministry, trade between Iran and Turkey rose 73% in June to nearly \$700 million compared with the previous month, as Iran faced renewed restrictions on maritime trade routes. Trade between the two countries reached \$3.16 billion in the first six months of this year, up 19% from \$2.65 billion in the same period in 2025.

Bazargan trade center

Separately, Hossein Garousi, managing director of the Maku Free Trade-Industrial Zone, said management of the Iran-Turkey Trade Exchange Center had been fully transferred to the zone and efforts were underway to reopen it by Sept.

22, provided the Turkish side fully cooperated. Speaking to reporters during a visit by Iranian and Turkish officials to the Bazargan border terminal and the joint Iran-Turkey trade center, Garousi said the center, which had long been sought by the Turkish side, had been renovated and made ready for operation within six months after its management was transferred to the Maku Free Trade-Industrial Zone. A development plan has also been prepared, he said. Garousi said the presidents of Iran and Turkey had emphasized increasing annual bilateral trade to \$30 billion, adding that the Maku Free Trade-Industrial Zone would play an important role in achieving that goal. If the Turkish side's plans are ready, the center is scheduled to open by September, he said. Mustafa Ayvat, governor of Turkey's Dogubayazit district near the Iranian border, said during the joint Iran-Turkey meeting at the trade center that the facility had been established to expand trade between the two countries and that measures had been taken on both sides of the border, but it currently had little commercial activity or significant traffic. Iran's request to reactivate the center would be reviewed by the Turkish side, Ayvat said, adding that any decision would be based on the two countries' common interests and security considerations.

Tehran, Kabul seek easier trade, closer economic ties

Economy Desk

Iranian Agriculture Minister Gholamreza Nouri Qezeljah called for easier two-way trade and goods transit, expanded trade ties and the holding of the seventh Iran-Afghanistan Joint Economic Cooperation Commission during a visit to Kabul on Friday, IRNA reported. Nouri Qezeljah, who heads the joint commission on Iran's side, met Afghanistan's Minister of Industry and Commerce Nooruddin Azizi to discuss ways to expand economic and trade ties between the two countries. The two sides discussed facilitating bilateral trade and goods transit, expanding trade and creating conditions for greater private-sector activity in both countries. Nouri Qezeljah stressed the need to use the joint commission to pursue economic and trade issues and turn bilateral agreements into implementation plans. He also called for holding the

seventh session of the joint economic cooperation commission, describing it as an opportunity to address obstacles, identify new opportunities and accelerate implementation of agreements between the two countries. The two sides also stressed expanding trade ties, strengthening links between the private sectors and using transit capacity to increase the flow of goods between Iran and Afghanistan. During his visit, Nouri Qezeljah also met with Afghan traders, businessmen and economic and trade representatives to discuss opportunities and obstacles to expanding economic relations. Private-sector representatives presented their views and proposals on expanding trade, strengthening links between businesses and using existing capacities to develop economic cooperation between Iran and Afghanistan. The meeting also focused on cooperation in agriculture, agricultural machinery and equipment, trade in agricultural

products and stronger links between private-sector organizations in the two countries. Nouri Qezeljah said that direct contact between traders and businesspeople could help identify new opportunities and increase bilateral trade. He invited Afghan traders and businesspeople to visit Iran and hold direct talks with Iranian economic and agricultural companies and businesspeople to further develop trade, investment and other forms of cooperation. He also called for continued exchanges of trade and specialized delegations and stronger ties between chambers of commerce, business associations and economic actors in Iran and Afghanistan. The consultations in Kabul were aimed at expanding bilateral trade, facilitating exports and transit, strengthening the role of the private sector and laying the groundwork for broader economic cooperation between Iran and Afghanistan.



By Annunthra Rangan
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OPINION EXCLUSIVE

When the Cockroach Janta Party (CJP), a youth-led movement, called off its sit-in in the Indian capital in late July, one of its members offered a wry aside to a reporter: young Indians had power, but no organised party built to carry it forward. It was a telling choice of words because CJP itself has never been a political party in any formal sense. It is not registered with India's Election Commission, fields no candidates and describes itself as a satirical movement rather than an electoral vehicle.

That single aside, though, captures the entire arc of the summer of 2026, a season in which a satirical Instagram page grew into the most serious challenge Modi's government has faced in years, forced a sitting union minister out of office and still left analysts wondering whether India was about to become "the next Sri Lanka" or "the next Nepal". It did not. It will not. But it came close enough to worry people who make a living tracking these things, left behind a movement and a set of grievances that have not gone away.

The spark was bureaucratic before it was political. In May 2026, the National Testing Agency (NTA) conducted NEET-UG, the entrance examination that decides admission to medical colleges for roughly two million aspiring doctors a year, in India. Within days, allegations surfaced that the question paper had been compromised. The government cancelled the exam and ordered a re-test for June 21, launching a CBI investigation into the leak.

What followed was not just an administrative scandal but a human one. In the weeks between the cancellation and the re-test, reports emerged of NEET aspirants dying by suicide across the country, from Ahmedabad to Rajasthan to Uttar Pradesh. It was reported at least 11 such deaths happened in the 46-day window; later reports put the toll at 13. These were not abstract statistics. They were teenagers who had spent years and families who had spent their savings, preparing for a single exam, only to watch the rug pulled out from under them through no fault of their own.

Almost simultaneously, a separate spark landed. On May 15, 2026, during a Supreme Court hearing, Chief Justice of India Surya Kant remarked that unemployed young people who turned to activism and social media were like "cockroaches," a comment he later said was misunderstood. It didn't matter. Within 78 hours, a satirical page calling itself the Cockroach Janta Party (CJP) had gathered millions of followers. Its founder, a 30-year-old Boston University graduate named Abhijeet Dipke, was in the United States finishing a master's in public relations when he posted a call on X, inviting "all cockroaches" to unite. What began as internet satire, complete with volunteers dressed in cockroach costumes at rallies, fused with the growing anger over the NEET deaths and evolved into a genuine protest movement, one that grew to more than 20 million followers within weeks.

Into this, Sonam Wangchuk stepped in as a moral anchor. Wangchuk, the Ladakhi engineer-turned-educator and climate activist whose earlier hunger strikes for Ladakh's statehood had already made him a familiar face of principled, non-violent protest,

Cockroaches rising

How India's youth forced a union minister to resign

joined on June 28 and began an indefinite hunger strike in solidarity, demanding transparency and structural reform of India's examination system. A man who has spent decades of his life on education reform and Himalayan ecology, lending his health and eventually his body to the cause, gave the student movement a gravity that a meme page alone could never have carried.

The protest, centred at Jantar Mantar, a historic public square in New Delhi long used as a designated site for demonstrations, had begun as early as June 6, but it hardened into something the government could not ignore once Wangchuk's health began to fail. Twenty days into his fast, with doctors warning of serious deterioration, police forcibly removed him from the protest site on the orders of the High Court and took him to hospital. Protesters said officers used excessive force in doing so; police called it a "slight commotion".

That act of removing a 59-year-old hunger striker by force did not end the protest. It escalated it. Abhijeet Dipke, CJP's founder, announced on the spot that he would begin his own indefinite hunger strike, calling the government's move a "grave mistake". Left-wing student organisations, including the All India Students Federation, the All India Students Association, and the Students' Federation of India, formally joined the sit-in alongside CJP in the days that followed, turning what had been a loosely organised, internet-native movement into a broader coalition with organisational muscle and campus networks behind it.

Dipke himself became a study in how quickly an ordinary young Indian can be thrust into national politics. He has said he never planned to start a political movement, only that he could not stay quiet after hearing his generation described as parasites. What-



A demonstrator wears a cockroach mask during a protest organized by the Cockroach Janta Party (CJP) in Mumbai, India, on July 16, 2026.

● INDRANIL ADITYA/NURPHOTO

ever his original intentions, his instincts for narrative and organising, honed in graduate school, proved decisive once real anger needed a shape. Alongside him, CJP's spokesperson Saurav Das became the public face of the movement's negotiations with the government, repeatedly briefing press and demanding written guarantees rather than verbal assurances, a caution that would prove justified.

By late June and into July, the protest had stopped being a story about one city. Rallies and sit-ins under the CJP banner spread to Pune, Bengaluru, Chennai, Bihar and beyond, with an online petition demanding the education minister's resignation collecting more than 800,000 signatures. But the protest carried two distinct meanings depending on where you stood in the country, and this is the fault line that will outlast the summer of 2026.

In the north, the demand was for a fair NEET: an end to paper leaks, transparent evaluation, and a trustworthy National Testing Agency. In Tamil Nadu and much

of the south, the demand has long been more radical, and it predates this year's crisis by a decade. The former Tamil Nadu government, under M.K. Stalin, has argued for years that NEET itself should be scrapped entirely, not fixed, pointing out that the exam structurally favours students who can afford expensive private coaching over government-school students who cannot, even when both groups are equally capable. Tamil Nadu's assembly has repeatedly passed bills seeking exemption from NEET and the party's data over the years has pointed to a grim, disproportionate toll of student suicides in the state tied to the exam. When the national protest reached its climax, communist-affiliated youth and student federations marched on the Chennai residence of Tamil Nadu's Governor demanding NEET's outright abolition and police detained more than 200 of them. That divide, fair exam in the north, no exam at all in the south, remains unresolved even after the immediate crisis passed.

The state's response, in several places, was heavy-handed in a way that only fed the movement. Police in multiple states arrested and detained students participating in CJP-linked demonstrations, from New Delhi to Mumbai to Chennai to Patna. When more

than 10,000 protesters marched toward Parliament on July 20, police responded with tear gas and batons, injuring roughly 150 demonstrators by some estimates and detaining many more. Dipke accused officers of tearing the clothes off female protesters and beating them badly, and told reporters afterward that he no longer believed Modi deserved to be called a democratically accountable prime minister. Dharmendra Pradhan, for his part, dismissed the protesters as a "B-team of terrorists," a remark that only hardened public sympathy for the demonstrators, especially with grieving families of the dead still very much part of the movement's moral core.

The pressure told. On the night of July 25, 2026, Dharmendra Pradhan resigned as Union Education Minister, telling the Prime Minister in his resignation letter that the matter was not one of personal prestige and that public confidence needed to be restored. President Droupadi Murmu accepted the resignation, and the government moved quickly to fill the vacancy with Pralhad Joshi, who took on the education portfolio in addition to his existing charge of new and renewable energy and consumer affairs.

With its central demand met, CJP called off its 36-day protest that Saturday. "We have done it," Das told reporters. Dipke, asked what came next for the cockroach movement, said only that a new strategy would be shared once they had "a little time". It was a strikingly modest note to end a campaign that had just unseated a union minister.

The government's other major promise, that no criminal cases would be filed against students who had participated peacefully, did not hold cleanly everywhere. In Bihar, cases were in fact registered against protesters even as talks were ongoing, prompting CJP to threaten a fresh round of agitation unless the FIRs were withdrawn and detainees released. Under that pressure, the Bihar Home Department ultimately ordered the dismissal of all cases registered before July 26, 2026, and directed the immediate release of anyone still in custody in connection with them, a notification the Centre and other BJP-ruled states were pressed to match. Even after that, CJP had to publicly flag a Supreme Court interim order that appeared to leave room for state governments to continue existing investigations, arguing it undercut the written assurances they had just secured, a reminder that promises extracted from a government under pressure can be slippery things. None of this scale would have been possible without the internet and it is worth being honest about that. A throwaway insult from a sitting Chief Justice became a rallying cry within 78 hours because a 30-year-old student understood exactly how to turn outrage into infrastructure: a logo, a slogan, a sign-up form, and a satirical identity that people from Kerala to Kashmir could adopt without needing to belong to any existing party. Students in



During a Supreme Court hearing, Chief Justice of India Surya Kant remarked that unemployed young people who turned to activism and social media were like "cockroaches," a comment he later said was misunderstood. It didn't matter. Within 78 hours, a satirical page calling itself the Cockroach Janta Party (CJP), had gathered millions of followers. What began as internet satire, complete with volunteers dressed in cockroach costumes at rallies, fused with the growing anger over the NEET deaths and evolved into a genuine protest movement, one that grew to more than 20 million followers within weeks.



Gadchiroli who could never make it to a rally in the capital still said they felt heard because the protest's grievances were being aired constantly, visibly and shareably online. Millions of followers translated into hundreds of thousands of petition signatures, and petition signatures translated into a political cost the government eventually could not ignore. Whatever else this movement was, it was a case study in how quickly a meme can become a mandate.

Pralhad Joshi now holds the education portfolio, inheriting a system whose credibility Indian students, north and south, have publicly and loudly said they no longer trust. The north's demand for a clean, computer-based, leak-proof NEET remains the more moderate task on the table and reports suggest the ministry is looking at shifting the exam to a computer-based format by 2027 alongside new anti-paper-leak legislation. Tamil Nadu's demand to abolish the exam altogether has not gone anywhere and shows no sign of doing so.

Foreign policy analysts who spent July drawing comparisons to the uprisings that toppled governments in Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka have mostly walked those comparisons back. The Council on Foreign Relations,

among others, has argued that a more useful precedent is India's own protest wave of the mid-1970s, which shook Indira Gandhi's government without unseating it outright. The reasons this movement stopped short of that kind of rupture are not flattering to India's youth, but they are honest ones: the Cockroach Janta Party's demands stayed narrowly focused on education policy rather than broadening into a full-throated challenge to the government itself and the numbers on the street, while historic for this kind of single-issue protest, never approached the scale of India's 2011 anti-corruption movement or the 2012 protests against sexual violence. There is also a harder political truth sitting underneath all of it: even young Indians who forced a Cabinet minister out of office have nowhere obvious to direct that energy come election time because India currently lacks an opposition strong enough to convert street anger into a governing alternative. Power was there. It just did not, in the end, find a full outlet.

India was not the only country in the region living through this in 2026. While the Cockroach Janta Party was still camped in New Delhi in mid-July, Bangladesh was going through an eerily similar



Police personnel hit activists and supporters of the Cockroach Janta Party (CJP) with batons to disperse them during a protest in New Delhi, India, on July 20, 2026. ● ARUN SANKAR/AFP

reckoning of its own. Hundreds of Higher Secondary Certificate examinees blocked intersections across Dhaka and more than a dozen other districts, demanding the resignation of Education Minister A.N.M. Ehsanul Hoque Milon after his ministry refused to postpone exam papers despite severe flooding that left some students wading through water

or travelling by boat to reach test centres. Anger boiled over further when an audio clip surfaced of Milon dismissing anxious parents by comparing their children to "farm chickens" who catch cold in a little rain, a remark that quickly became the protest's rallying cry, with students chanting back that they were "not farm chickens" but the country's future. One HSC candidate, invoking the uprising that toppled Sheikh Hasina's government in 2024, warned the minister he was about to find out exactly what "broiler chickens" could do.

The two movements were not, strictly speaking, a case of one

directly inspiring the other; they unfolded almost in parallel, only weeks apart and Bangladesh's protesters were drawing more on their own country's 2024 uprising than on events in India. But regional commentators, in Dhaka and elsewhere, were quick to read both as symptoms of the same underlying condition: a generation across South Asia, in India, Bangladesh and Nepal alike, that no longer trusts its examination systems, its job markets, or the adults running either and that has shown it can turn a single administrative failure into a national reckoning almost overnight. Bangladesh's students eventually traded their demand for the minister's resignation for a six-point reform charter once the government announced relief measures, but the message both governments received was the same: this generation is watching each other, organising fast, and no longer inclined to stay quiet.

What India's summer of 2026 did find, in the end, was a name, a face and a slogan that a Chief Justice never intended to hand a generation: cockroaches don't get employment, they don't get a place in the profession, and, as it turns out, they don't quietly go away either.

In mid-July, Bangladesh was going through an eerily similar reckoning of its own. Bangladesh's students eventually traded their demand for the minister's resignation for a six-point reform charter once the government announced relief measures, but the message both Indian and Bangladeshi governments received was the same: this generation is watching each other, organising fast, and no longer inclined to stay quiet.

South Asia's Gen Z revolutions now face difficult realities

By Chietigi Bajpae
Senior research fellow at Chatham House

OPINION

Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka find themselves at a turning point. Their relatively new governments, brought to power in the wake of youth-led protest movements, retain popular mandates. But they must now grapple with governance challenges exacerbated by the Iran war and complicated relations with India.

Similarities and differences

In 2022, the government of Sri Lanka's President Gotabaya Rajapaksa was overthrown in a mass protest movement known as the Aragalaya (meaning: Struggle). Bangladesh's "Monsoon Revolution" followed in 2024, with long-serving prime minister Sheikh Hasina removed from power, before the so-called "Gen Z revolution" in Nepal toppled prime minister KP Sharma Oli's government in 2025. These movements were all fuelled by a combination of economic distress (all three countries are undergoing IMF bailouts), demographic pressures and political dysfunction, with growing resentment against ruling elites due to a culture of corruption, nepotism and increasingly autocratic tendencies. Social media also played an important role and allowed anti-establishment narratives to flourish. There are undoubtedly some country-specific differences. In

Sri Lanka, the Aragalaya was triggered by a sovereign debt crisis, hyperinflation and commodity shortages. In Bangladesh, the issue of public sector job quotas for families of war veterans became a lightning rod for anti-government unrest. In Nepal, the catalyst was a social media ban. The elections that followed also took different trajectories. While Nepal chose radical change — electing a former rapper, Balendra Shah, as its new prime minister in March — Bangladesh opted for a degree of continuity in electing Tarique Rehman, the son of a former prime minister and president, from the established Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP). And while Nepal rejected established left-leaning political parties, Sri Lanka's President Anura Kumara Disanayake heads a coalition led by a Marxist-Leninist party, Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP).

After the revolutions

During a recent visit to the region, it was clear that despite optimism, all three countries now face similar internal and external challenges. A climate of hope and belief in a fresh start persists. The new governments all came to power with large electoral mandates, creating a sense of opportunity. Even in Bangladesh, where there has been a degree of continuity, the proposed political reforms of the July National Charter have fuelled a sense of democratic renewal. However, initial euphoria is also giving way to a feeling that gov-

ernments are squandering their goodwill through their inability or unwillingness to implement necessary reforms. These doubts are not helped by missteps stemming from the new governments' inexperience. In Nepal, despite Shah campaigning on an anti-corruption platform, two ministers in the new government departed within its first month after facing scandals. In Sri Lanka, growing frustration over austerity measures was exacerbated by the government response to Cyclone Ditwah last year, which some consider inadequate. Earlier in the year, the ruling party's vote share dropped in local elections. In Bangladesh, violent crime is a growing concern as the army returns to the barracks after the February election. There are also concerns that the BNP government may only implement parts of the proposed July Charter political reforms to avoid changes that could erode its power. The party will face its first test when Bangladesh holds local government elections later this year.

Stability not guaranteed

Strong mandates therefore do not guarantee stability. This is particularly true if broader societal challenges are not addressed. All three countries have a history of prolonged periods of violence and instability. Nepal, which was plagued by a decade-long Maoist insurgency, has various social divides, including along caste, generational, regional and ideolog-

ical lines. A constitution passed in 2015 sought to address these cleavages. However, there are fears that social cohesion could be undermined by the new government's focus on appeasing its younger urban voter base, which could risk overlooking other constituencies. In Sri Lanka, the government has sought to separate itself from ethnic-based politics. But following the decades-long civil war, ethnic Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism remains entrenched in Sri Lankan society. This holds implications for lasting reconciliation with the country's minority Hindu and Muslim Tamil community. Meanwhile, in Bangladesh, the main divide is between the country's two long-established dynastic political parties — the BNP and Awami League — with efforts to forge a credible youth-led "third front" failing to bear fruit in the election. For now, this rivalry has been deferred by the ban on the Awami League. However, this situation is unsustainable; it will eventually be necessary to rehabilitate the party in some form to break the cycle of revenge politics that has historically plagued the country.

Iran war and India relations

These pressures are exacerbated by the war in Iran. All three countries have been severely impacted by the war with inflationary pressures, fuel rationing and limited fiscal space to withstand the

People wade through a flooded road after heavy rainfall in Wellampitiya on the outskirts of Colombo, Sri Lanka, on November 29, 2025. ● ISHARA S. KODIKARA/AFP

economic shocks of the conflict. They are also all heavily dependent on foreign remittances from Persian Gulf states. These economic strains have cut short any post-election honeymoon period. Relations with India present another challenge. Governments in all three countries are seeking a reset in relations with New Delhi, which had been strained under their predecessors. India is a crucial source of humanitarian aid, development assistance and infrastructure investment to all three countries. The Iran war has also created space for greater alignment, given that New Delhi has stepped up energy exports to its neighbours as they face shortages. However, India's prominence in the region also breeds mistrust from its neighbours, who face challenges in managing relations with their larger neighbour. Against this backdrop, South Asia's newly elected governments face the shared risks of unfulfilled promises, external shocks and difficult regional relations. If they are unable to rise to these challenges, they themselves may come under pressure from renewed protests in the future.

The full article was first published by Chatham House.

Asian Youth & Junior Weightlifting Championships: Beheshti, Beiranvand dominate as Iran enjoys glorious campaign

Sports Desk

Mahsa Beheshti and Mohammad-Javad Beiranvand collected a remarkable 15 golds between them as Iranian boys and girls enjoyed a medal-laden campaign at the Asian Youth & Junior Weightlifting Championships in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, setting several new world records in the process.

A haul of 12 medals, including six golds, saw the Iranian girls claim the runner-up spot in the youth event – the country's best-ever finish in the history of the competition – with 534 points. Kazakhstan secured the team title in the age category with 551 points, while hosts Uzbekistan finished third with 514 points.

Teenage prodigy Mahsa Beheshti spearheaded Iran's medal hunt in the girls' youth contests by completing a clean sweep of three golds in the +77kg weight class on Thursday. Beheshti, who made her senior breakthrough with clean & jerk gold and two bronze medals at last year's Islamic Solidarity Games in Riyadh, registered three successful lifts to win the snatch gold with a best effort of 113kg. She picked up where she left off in the snatch by lifting 136kg in the clean & jerk before going on to post 142kg and 148kg – 14 kilograms better than her



Iran's Mahsa Beheshti (L) and Mohammad-Javad Beiranvand are seen in action at the Asian Youth & Junior Weightlifting Championships in Tashkent, Uzbekistan. ● IWFIR

mark in the Saudi capital – to win her second gold of the afternoon. She then claimed the total title with a combined 261kg. Her splendid performance saw Beheshti also sweep the gold medals of the junior 86kg class on Friday. Hosna Amiri and Roya Nourinejad secured an all-Iranian podium in the snatch contest, registering best lifts of 104kg and 98kg, respectively. Amiri won the total bronze with 224kg. Anahita Zarei and Nasim Qassemi bagged six medals, including three golds, between them in the girls' youth 77kg division. Zarei settled for bronze in the snatch but went on to win gold in the clean & jerk

and total with lifts of 126kg and 218kg, respectively. Qassemi, meanwhile, grabbed snatch gold with a successful 91kg effort before finishing runner-up to her compatriot in the next two categories with a 117kg clean & jerk and a 208kg total.

Beiranvand dominates

In the boys' competitions, Mohammad-Javad Beiranvand was in a league of his own in the 75kg weight class, collecting a remarkable nine gold medals across the three categories and age groups. The Iranian opened his snatch campaign by successfully lifting 140kg. Af-

ter failing to clear 145kg in his second attempt, he returned to the same weight in his third and successfully lifted it, setting a new world youth record.

The performance earned Beiranvand gold medals in the youth, junior and Central Asian categories in the snatch. He was equally impressive in the clean & jerk. Beiranvand successfully lifted 166kg in his opening attempt, breaking the Asian youth record. He then cleared 173kg in his second attempt to set new Asian and world records in the clean & jerk and total categories. In his final attempt, he successfully lifted 180kg, secur-



ing gold and once again breaking the world junior records in the clean & jerk and total.

Beiranvand capped his campaign with a total of 325kg to add three more gold medals to his individual haul in Tashkent, underlining his status as one of the country's most promising young weightlifters. Iran's Taha Nojavan and Pouria Abbaspourian delivered further record-breaking lifts for the country, sweeping the gold and silver medals in the youth +95kg class. Nojavan began his snatch campaign by successfully lifting 165kg and 170kg before clearing 176kg in his third attempt. The lift

secured snatch gold and saw him set new Asian and world youth records. The young Iranian went on to dominate the clean & jerk, successfully lifting 215kg to win gold. With a total of 391kg, Taha also claimed gold in the overall standings. His 215kg effort lifted him to new world youth records in both the clean & jerk and total categories. Abbaspourian also posted a best lift of 175kg in the snatch and 206kg in the clean & jerk to add three silver medals to Iran's medal count. Hamidreza Zarei, meanwhile, delivered a standout performance in the 95kg junior category, winning

three gold medals. A winner of a silver and a bronze medal at last year's World Junior Championships, Zarei cleared 164kg in his third attempt to secure snatch gold before winning the top prize in the clean & jerk with a new junior world record of 214kg in his final attempt. Zarei completed his impressive performance with a total of 378kg. Iranians were not short of glory in other weight and age categories. Competing in the youth category, Hajar Moini lifted 90kg for snatch silver and 105kg to win bronze in the clean & jerk before finishing with a total of 195kg to claim bronze in the total in the 61kg class.

In the junior 61kg class, Maryam Keshtkar successfully lifted 94kg in the snatch and 111kg in the clean & jerk to finish with three bronze medals. Mohammadamin Dadvand, meanwhile, rounded out his youth campaign with two gold medals and a snatch silver, courtesy of a 144kg-179kg-323kg performance. Iran also settled for a runner-up finish in the boys' youth standings with 530 points, winning nine golds, four silvers and two bronze medals. Uzbekistan won the team title with 553 points, while Kazakhstan collected 506 points to finish third.

Asian Men's Youth Handball Championship: Iran handed daunting tests after new draw

Sports Desk

Iran was drawn in a challenging Group B at the 2026 Asian Men's Youth Handball Championship after the Asian Handball Federation (AHF) held a redraw for the competition on Thursday. The draw was conducted again after several teams changed their decisions regarding participation in the 11th edition of the continental tournament, which will kick off on Thursday in Amman, Jordan.

The 2006 champions and two-time silver medalists, Iran, who had to settle for a below-par sixth-place finish in the previous edition in 2024, will face Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Syria in Group B, which appears to be the tougher of the two groups, with three teams besides Iran regarded as strong contenders for the title.

Iran will open its campaign against Saudi Arabia on Friday before taking on Qatar two days later at Princess Sumaya Hall. Iran will face Kuwait in its



● IRIHF

penultimate group-stage fixture on Aug. 24, with a game against Syria coming on Aug. 26. Qatar will enter the tournament as the second most decorated team in the history of the competition with two titles, as well as three silvers, while continental powerhouse Kuwait, which won the 2024 bronze medal, will look to add to its 2008 crown. Saudi Arabia, meanwhile, which claimed bronze in 2022, will chase a second

medal in three editions after falling short against Kuwait in the third-place playoff two years ago. Group A comprises South Korea, Bahrain, Jordan, India and Uzbekistan. The championship will also serve as the qualification event for the 12th IHF Men's Youth (U19) Handball World Championship, with the top four teams securing direct qualification for the global tournament, scheduled to be held from July 29 to Aug. 9 next year.

Jamshidi's return gives Iran boost ahead of hectic basketball schedule

Sports Desk

The addition of veteran Mohammad Jamshidi to Iran's national basketball training camp has provided Greek head coach Sotiris Manolopoulos with an extra boost ahead of a congested continental schedule.

The 35-year-old Jamshidi has been recalled to the national team after a lengthy absence, with the experienced forward expected to add a touch of experience to the young squad for the decisive FIBA World Cup Asian qualifiers and September's Aichi-Nagoya Asian Games.

Jamshidi has represented Iran at some of the world's biggest sporting events, including the FIBA Basketball World Cup and the Olympic Games, while also winning multiple medals at the FIBA Asia Cup. His most recent appearance for the national team came during the 2023 FIBA Basketball World Cup qualifiers. The veteran will now have the opportunity to

play under Manolopoulos for the first time since the Greek coach took charge of Team Melli.

Jamshidi's recall comes after an impressive campaign with Naft Zagaros Jonoubi last season, with his strong scoring numbers seeing him remain one of the most prolific scorers in the Iranian Basketball Super League. He has returned to camp in good shape and with plenty of motivation ahead of a demanding schedule.

One of the main talking points at Tehran's Mashhoun Hall in recent weeks has been the individual discussions between Manolopoulos and Jamshidi, with the Greek coach regularly offering tactical advice to the veteran.

Aware of the value of having an experienced player on the court during difficult international windows, Manolopoulos has spent considerable time working with Jamshidi and sharing his tactical ideas. It remains to be seen



Iran's Mohammad Jamshidi takes part in a national team training session in Tehran, Iran, on July 27, 2026. ● DANIAL AHMADI/IRIBF

what the reunion between Iran's Greek coaching staff and the veteran star will produce in the upcoming competitions. Having won the first-round group thanks to double wins over Syria either side of an impressive victory against Jordan in July, Iran will resume the World Cup qualifiers against New Zealand in the second-round Group E opener in Pasay, Philippines, on Aug. 28, before taking on the Philippines two days later. A back-to-back silver medalist in 2014 and 2018, Iran will chase a

fourth medal in six editions when the basketball event at the upcoming Asian Games gets underway on Sept. 10. Iran have been drawn into a tough group alongside Jordan – the silver medalist at Hangzhou 2022 – Chinese Taipei, which reached the semi-finals in the previous edition, and Qatar.

From Nazr to service:

Story of offerings at Imam Reza’s shrine

By Akram Saheb-Elm
Guest contributor

INTERVIEW

The Nazr (a religious vow and offering) made by people at the shrine of Imam Reza (PBUH) is a vivid expression of their boundless trust in the revered Imam. This bond has endured through the centuries, gaining new depth and breadth. As rulers and dynasties have come and gone, the people’s heartfelt connection with the shrine has remained steadfast, making it a cherished refuge for their hopes, intentions and vows. Against this backdrop, one of the fundamental responsibilities of Astan Quds Razavi in managing donations is to honor that trust, faithfully uphold donors’ intentions and safeguard the revered status of the shrine in the eyes of the faithful. Alireza Esmailzadeh, director general of the Donations Department at Astan Quds Razavi, explained that the practice of making religious vows has deep roots in all divine religions. At the Holy Shrine of Imam Reza (PBUH), written records of donations date back at least to 1111 AH. These documents show that donations have historically been registered according to specific intentions and used precisely for the purposes designated by donors. Throughout its history, Astan Quds Razavi has maintained its independence through endowments and public donations. He added that safeguarding donors’ intentions is the most important principle in managing donations. Whether in the

past or today, the intentions of an endower or donor are to be carried out exactly as specified. For both cash and in-kind donations, the process of documentation, recording the donor’s intention, allocating funds and monitoring begins as soon as a donation is received, with each endowment and donation assigned a specific code. Today, donations play a fundamental role in providing services to pilgrims and addressing social needs. A significant share of welfare, cultural, medical, livelihood and educational services — from



● [reservaak.ir](#)

providing meals to pilgrims to supporting vulnerable families and promoting reading — is funded and allocated according to donors’ intentions. Esmailzadeh said that more than 670 specific intentions have been defined through an intelligent donation management system. If a donor specifies a particular purpose, the donation is spent precisely along that designated path. For donations made without a specific purpose, the shrine’s



● [reservaak.ir](#)



● [mashhad-tourist.ir](#)

Imam Reza guesthouses. Every day, blessed meals are prepared using these donations and distributed among pilgrims at the Ghadir and Horr guesthouses. Esmailzadeh said that in recent years, donations have extended beyond the shrine precinct and into people’s everyday lives. The Razavi Keramat Foundation, as the executive arm of these initiatives, works to bring the benefits of donations to families in need. These services range from sup-

porting population growth and assisting needy families to providing dowries and distributing food packages, clothing and stationery to children. Esmailzadeh said the shrine’s vast repository currently safeguards more than 1.3 million valuable objects, making it an unparalleled treasury of heritage. Light, humidity and temperature are continuously monitored, while conservation specialists inspect and monitor the objects on a daily basis. Among these treasures is a particularly distinctive form of

shrine describes as a spirit of knowledge and enlightenment to different parts of the city and the sacred precinct. In this sphere, donations find expression in books and religious teachings, from providing Holy Qur’ans and prayer books for pilgrims to supporting major scholarly projects. Donations also support conservators working to preserve rare manuscripts and have helped illuminate libraries in remote areas through the distribution of more than 100,000 books. In some of the country’s less-developed areas, the initiative has also led to the establishment of 32 Qur’anic centers and Qur’anic schools, bringing Qur’anic teachings to rural communities. Every year, more than 30 million pilgrims travel long distances to visit the shrine of Imam Reza (PBUH). Recognizing their need for safe and dignified places to rest along the way, Astan Quds Razavi has established a network of “Imam Reza cultural and welfare complexes” along major pilgrimage routes, designed to provide travelers with places to rest and regain their strength and peace of mind. Esmailzadeh noted that, so far, 23 roadside complexes have been built along major routes used by pilgrims and travelers. They are located in Khorasan Razavi, South Khorasan, North Khorasan, Sistan and Baluchestan, Kerman, Yazd, Semnan and Golestan Provinces and several other areas. Together, they cover nearly 30 hectares and include more than 30,000 square meters of built-up space, providing services to pilgrims and travelers.

Iranica Desk

Preparations are underway to nominate the historic windmills of Iran’s southeastern Sistan and Baluchestan Province for inclusion on the UNESCO World Heritage List, with support from government institutions and local communities. Officials overseeing the nomination dossier say greater emphasis must be placed on documenting the structures and presenting their historical significance. They believe international recognition of the windmills could go beyond their physical preservation, helping strengthen social cohesion and create new cultural tourism destinations in southeastern Iran. According to IRNA, the windmills are among the oldest examples of indigenous architecture and engineering in Iran. Built to harness wind power for grinding wheat and other grains, the structures demonstrate how communities in the region adapted to their natural environment and used local climatic conditions to meet their everyday needs. The windmills were not simply tools for food production. They were an integral part of the local way of life, livelihood and economy in areas exposed to strong winds. In the past, windmills played a vital role in the lives of local communities, providing flour for households and villages and contributing directly to food security. At a time when industrial facilities were unavailable, such

Sistan and Baluchestan windmills set for UNESCO nomination



● [IRNA](#)

structures formed a crucial part of the production and consumption cycle in many parts of Iran. They therefore represent an important chapter in the history of labor, ingenuity and innovation in the country. Their significance, however, extends beyond their economic function. The windmills are also highly valuable from a cultural, historical and architectural perspective. Their distinctive design, adaptation to local climatic conditions and use of indigenous materials make them notable examples of sustainable archi-

centers of traditional windmill construction. Several examples of these historic structures remain standing in the region. Their survival is evidence of how local communities, through indigenous knowledge and ingenuity, adapted to a challenging environment characterized by strong winds and limited resources. Today, efforts to preserve the windmills represent more than the protection of historic structures. They are also aimed at safeguarding part of the region’s collective memory, local identity and ancient heritage. Conservation, restoration and promotion of the sites could help deepen understanding of the region’s history while creating new opportunities for cultural tourism in Sistan and Baluchestan. The windmills are located in the Hozdar tourism area near

Shahr-e Sukhteh, or the Burnt City. A roughly one-hour journey through the desert takes visitors to the area, where they can encounter evidence of an organized way of life dating back around 2,800 years. The presence of windmills alongside the remains of fortifications points to the area’s rich civilization and its historical role as a link between Sistan and other parts of Sistan and Baluchestan as well as neighboring provinces. The province’s Cultural Heritage Department has already registered the windmills on Iran’s national heritage list. Mohammad-Hadi Tehrani-Moqaddam, director general of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Organization of Sistan and Baluchestan Province, highlighted the importance of the windmills to the region’s en-

gineering heritage, describing them as symbols of the ingenuity of Sistan’s ancestors and their ability to adapt to the region’s distinctive natural environment. “Preserving these historic structures is not only about safeguarding our cultural identity; it is also a strategic step toward introducing the engineering achievements of this land to the world.” He said that, as part of the province’s conservation efforts, eight historic windmills have so far been registered on Iran’s national heritage list. In addition, 14 other windmills have been identified and documented in Hamun, Hirmand and Zabol. According to the official, the structures are now being prepared for inclusion in World Heritage nomination dossiers, with support from the provincial government and the involvement of relevant specialists. The windmills are among Iran’s oldest examples of indigenous engineering. For centuries, they harnessed the power of the wind to serve local communities, demonstrating how people in the region were able to develop efficient and sustainable technologies with limited resources. The structures have a particularly important place in Sistan and Baluchestan’s architectural and engineering heritage. Their long history and distinctive adaptation to the region’s climate make them a significant example of Iran’s indigenous technological heritage and a potential addition to the country’s World Heritage portfolio.



My cultural activities are tribute to Iran's culture: *South Korean ambassador*

By Sadeq Dehqan
Staff writer

INTERVIEW

South Korean Ambassador to Iran Kim Junpyo has a particular interest in using culture to bring the two Eastern nations closer together.

Since taking up his post in January 2024, he has twice delighted Iranians by performing well-known Iranian songs.

In November 2024, he performed the old Iranian song 'Porsoun Porsoun', meaning asking around in Persian, with the Iranian Istgah Orchestra to mark the 62nd anniversary of diplomatic relations between the two countries, and a video of the performance was released. A year later, on the anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic ties, he performed the much-loved song 'Jaan-e Maryam' (Dear Maryam) with the same private orchestra, using the language of music to convey a message of peace and friendship to the Iranian people.

In an interview with Iran Daily, the Korean ambassador said the aim of his cultural activities had been to "pay tribute to Iranian culture."

He believes cultural diplomacy can pave the way for economic and political diplomacy.

The following is the interview with the envoy, conducted through an interpreter.

IRAN DAILY: Mr. Ambassador, in recent years you have performed two popular Iranian songs, Porsoun Porsoun and Jaan-e Maryam. What motivated you to undertake these cultural activities?

KIM: Performing Iranian songs was quite difficult for me. I put a lot of effort into getting the pronunciation of the Persian words and sounds right. The main rea-



South Korean Ambassador to Iran Kim Junpyo performs Iranian song 'Jaan-e Maryam' in November 2025.

son I did it was that I had a great deal of respect for Iranian culture, and I wanted to find a way to express and convey that respect.

Iran and Korea have many similarities in common, and I find those similarities very interesting. There are many cultural similarities between the two countries, and I really wanted to recognize their value and somehow convey that feeling.

The two songs I performed, Porsoun Porsoun and Jaan-e Maryam, seem to connect with the human heart. That is what music does, in a way. It can become a means of linking people, and I really wanted to show that connection through music.

Tell us about your interest in Iran's great poets. Apparently, you have also performed some of Hafez's poetry. How familiar are you with Hafez and Persian poetry?

Before I came to Iran, I knew absolutely nothing about Iranian or Persian poetry. After I came here, I tried to connect with this poetry by reading the works of Hafez and Saadi and, in that way, become familiar with them. All of this happened after I came



to Iran. Before that, I had no background in Iranian or Persian poetry.

In South Korea, especially in the past — although perhaps a little less so now — it was quite common for people to quote a passage from a poem in their speeches and use it in that way.

When I came here, I noticed exactly the same thing. I thought, well, if I give a speech here, I can also quote a passage from a poem. And I found another similarity between Iranian and Korean culture in that respect.

It was exactly the same practice I had seen in Korea. People would use poetry in their speeches. I discovered that same cultural similarity here in Iran.

Korean television series

have a large following in Iran, as does K-pop. Were you aware of this popularity before you came to Iran to serve as ambassador? To what extent can this popularity help bring the two countries closer culturally?

I knew, even before coming to Iran, that some Korean television series, such as Jumong and Jewel in the Palace, were popular here. But after arriving in Iran as South Korea's ambassador, I became much more aware of this. Since I already knew how important culture is to relations between two countries, and how it can bring people from both sides closer together and connect them — music is a good example — I decided to focus heavily on cultural activities.

Since I arrived, I have tried to promote cultural exchange. But I wanted this exchange to be more than just Korea introducing its culture to Iran. I did not want it to be one-sided. I made a great deal of effort to create the conditions for a genuine, two-way and mutually beneficial cultural relationship.

Do you think Iranian music and films have the potential to attract Korean audiences

and become popular there?

Yes, definitely. The Busan International Film Festival, which is held in South Korea every year, has Iranian filmmakers among its participants, and a large number of Iranian films are screened there. They demonstrate many different aspects of Iran, and this can certainly continue and have an impact. And it is not limited to cinema. A few years ago, well-known Iranian musician and composer Kayhan Kalhor traveled to South Korea and performed there. Many of the young people who attended were deeply impressed by the music he played on the kamancheh and liked it very much. So cultural influence can certainly work in both directions, from Iran to Korea as well, and we have seen that happening over the years.

It seems that, unlike political and economic diplomacy, cultural diplomacy has to some extent been overlooked in relations between the two countries. How effective can cultural diplomacy be in bringing Iran and South Korea closer together, and how important is it?

I think it is very important. As I mentioned earlier, culture creates bonds between people. The better we understand another country's culture, the better we understand its people, and that mutual understanding can influence our relations in the future.

In other words, culture can provide a foundation and open the way for other forms of diplomacy, whether economic or political. Cultural diplomacy can pave the way for these efforts and can be very influential. That is why I personally place so much emphasis on culture.



Iraj chose to be singer of all people

By Alireza Sepahvand
Journalist

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

Famous Iranian singer Hossein Khajeh-Amiri, known as Iraj, passed away on Wednesday but when it comes to certain voices, one cannot speak of an "end." Some voices become part of the memory of a nation, and as long as someone in this land listens to music, song, and their collective memories, they remain alive. Iraj was one of those voices, a voice that was present in the sphere of Iranian music for more than seven decades and finally joined eternity, entrusting his immortality to the very thing to which he devoted his life: singing.

Iraj was not just a renowned singer. He was a vocal phenomenon. Iranian master singer Mohammad-Reza Shajarian said about him at an honoring ceremony for Iraj in 2013: "Iraj's voice is a yardstick and standard in the history of our singing," and emphasized that whenever one wanted to give an example of the highest level of vocal ability, one would give a voice like Iraj's as an example. This view, expressed by one of the greatest singers in the history of Iranian music, may perhaps be the most precise description of Iraj's position; a singer who became known as the "Pahlavan (hero) of Singing," and this title, more than being a promotional nickname, was a description of the dimensions of his ability and character. In terms of the type, color, quality, texture, and power of his vocal ornamentation, Iraj was unparalleled. In Iranian singing, the voice is not simply "loudness" or "range." Vocal color, the quality of resonance, the ability to control, clarity of expression, the power to maneuver through different vocal registers, and above all, the relationship between technique and music, together form what makes a singer a great singer. Iraj possessed qualities in all these components for which it is difficult to find an equal example.

With the emergence of Iraj in the realm of singing, a dimension of the power of Iranian vocal art was displayed that had never been seen on this scale and with this quality. The importance of this event becomes clearer when we know that he emerged at a time when Iranian singing itself was full of great peaks; Taj Esfahani was singing at the height of his authority, Banan was at the peak of delicacy, refinement, and musical understanding, and names such as Adib Khansari, Taherzadeh, and Zelli each represented a part of the glorious history of Iranian singing. In such a constellation, simply singing well was no longer enough. For a singer to be able to rise among these giants of singing, he had to possess something beyond ordinary talent.

That "something" in Iraj was an exceptional vocal instrument a voice that combined power with ease.

One of the wonders of Iraj's singing was that his vocal ornamentations in the high registers sounded so smooth, effortless, and natural that the listener imagined performing them was easy. But it was enough for a professional singer to try to perform even a much weaker imitation of the same phrase to realize what kind of power Iraj possessed. This is precisely where the distance between a "good singer" and the possessor of a historic voice becomes apparent. What sounded natural and effortless for Iraj represented, for many other singers, the limits of their vocal abilities.

Akbar Golpayegani, too, had emphasized the clarity of Iraj's voice and his unique vocal ornamentations, describing him as a singer with rare abilities. These testimonies from his contemporaries and the great figures of singing carry particular importance, because the true value of a singer is sometimes understood better by those who themselves have stood in the same field than by any critic.

But Iraj was not just the possessor of a powerful voice. An important part of his artistic personality must be sought in a choice that, at first glance, may have raised questions for many in the world of music: why a singer with such technical and vocal capacity devoted a significant part of his artistic life to singing in cinema, popular works, and songs that perhaps did not correspond to the image expected of a classical and sophisticated singer.

New military lineup ...

Preparing for multiple war scenarios

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The need to neutralize US conventional and asymmetric war scenarios in the air, on land, at sea and in people-centered domestic security has become unavoidable, and the current lineup of appointments precisely reflects this necessity. The lineup makes clear Tehran's readiness and firm resolve for a prolonged war of attrition, or at the very least to maintain an offensive posture in future negotiations and conflicts. The appointment of figures such as Ahmad Vahidi, with a background in commanding the Quds Force (IRGC's overseas arm); Hossein Taeb, with extensive experience in intelligence and security; Ali Ozmaei, with a significant record of

accompanying and commanding the navy under wartime conditions; Ali Abdollahi of the Khatam al-Anbiya Central Headquarters; and Mohsen Rezaei, the former IRGC commander during the Iran-Iraq War (1980-88), all attest to this doctrinal shift. The integration of the Armed Forces General Staff with the Khatam al-Anbiya Central Headquarters also underscores the need for unified command, allowing a faster and more coordinated response to combined military, cognitive and economic threats. The appointment of Hossein Taeb as head of the Basij Organization is likewise aimed at strengthening the grassroots intelligence network, making use of new technologies and organizing at the neighborhood level. This further reinforces the link

between military power and society because, under a deterrence doctrine based on punishment, the adversary must know that even in the event of domestic pressure or infiltration, the cost of popular and intelligence resistance will also be extremely high.

Domestic consolidation, international deterrence

Domestically, the appointments will, in the short term, help consolidate the command structure and reduce public confusion, while strengthening the Basij will put at hand tools for social control and countering enemy provocations stemming from the economic pressure of the war. On the international stage, the message of these changes has been clearly understood by the United States and

Israel. Tehran has demonstrated its readiness to respond in kind, step up the activities of the foreign allied forces known as the Axis of Resistance and carry out hard-hitting offensive operations, meaning any calculations by the adversary to launch an attack or apply greater pressure will inevitably have to factor in the cost of severe retaliation. From the standpoint of negotiations, this configuration also prepares Iran to bargain from a position of strength. Ultimately, the Iranian leader's recent appointments should be seen as a turning point in redefining the Islamic Republic of Iran's security and military doctrine in line with the ongoing transition in the international order; a shift that will formalize Iran's new regional and global role.