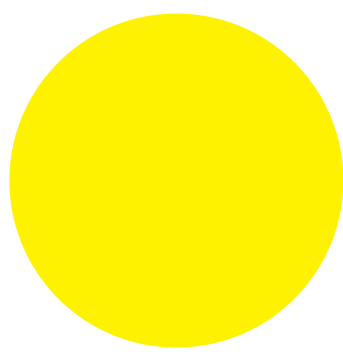


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Iran's Parliament Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf (c) speaks during a press conference upon his arrival in Baghdad on August 19, 2026 at the site where Iran and Iraq's anti-terror commanders, Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani and Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, were assassinated by the US in 2020.

● AFP

Caspian Convention in Iran's favor

Ratification delay preserves leverage but postpones access to its benefits

INTERVIEW

The submission of the Convention on the Legal Status of the Caspian Sea to the Iranian Parliament has once again sparked a wave of concerns in the country's media and political circles. International affairs analyst Kourosh Ahmadi spoke to IRNA, addressing some of the criticism. He believes the convention is fundamentally in Iran's interest and that delaying its ratification until after the baseline is determined could give the country some bargaining leverage, but it would also delay access to nearly 90 percent of the convention's other provisions that are beneficial to the country.



Kourosh Ahmadi

IRAN DAILY: A common crit-

icism is that ratifying the convention would pave the way for the construction of the Trans-Caspian pipeline between the eastern and western parts of the Caspian Sea. Would it actually grant such permission? And, fundamentally, is there any legal way to prevent littoral states from pursuing economic and transit ties with one another?

AHMADI: There is essentially no legal basis anywhere in the world to prevent two littoral states from building a pipeline or cable on the seabed belonging to them. Therefore, within a legal framework, the only thing the countries concerned can do is establish rules to regulate such projects and ensure that they do not jeopardize the rights and interests of the other littoral states. The Caspian Convention has done exactly that. It lays down two fundamental and robust

conditions and requirements for the construction of subsea pipelines and cables, particularly under Article 14: First, the agreement of the countries concerned whose territory, seabed and subsoil the pipeline directly crosses; Second, compliance with strict environmental requirements and standards under international conventions, the Tehran Convention and its protocols. One of the most important of these instruments is the Protocol on Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) in a Trans-boundary Context, which is attached to the Caspian Environmental Convention. Under this protocol, all five Caspian littoral states are considered concerned parties, and environmental assessments for any project must be conducted with the participation, review and approval of all the littoral states. Therefore, Iran has not lost

anything. On the contrary, within the framework of international law, it has gained very strong legal and regulatory leverage through environmental requirements and the prerequisite of consent from the countries concerned. In fact, the convention leaves more room for manoeuvre for Iran and even gives the Islamic Republic, alongside other four states, a veto over pipelines on environmental grounds.

Some critics claim that this convention is why a Turkmen gas pipeline has not been built through Iran and Iran has been unable to export gas to Europe. How do you assess this claim?

This issue has absolutely nothing to do with the convention or the legal issues surrounding the Caspian Sea. Iran had a gas swap arrangement with Turkmenistan under which Turkmen gas would enter Iran's

gas network and an equivalent volume would be delivered to Turkey. However, this arrangement lasted only a few months and was ultimately halted by US sanctions.

Moreover, the potential volume of gas that could be transported to Turkey through the proposed Trans-Caspian pipeline is more than 15 times the volume that could be transported through Iran to Turkey. Therefore, the main reason energy pipelines or transit corridors do not run through Iran is the comprehensive international sanctions regime and the country's acute foreign policy challenges.

It has also been argued that the designated territories allow foreign vessels to operate beyond 25 nautical miles from Iran's coast.

If the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), which is the

overarching instrument and general international rule, is taken into consideration, the breadth of the territorial sea is set at 12 nautical miles worldwide. Even within those 12 miles, foreign vessels have the right of "innocent passage." Beyond 12 miles, the area is considered a zone of control and international waters, where navigation is open to everyone.

Under the Caspian Convention, the territorial sea has been set at 15 miles, which is even beyond the international standard, while another 10 miles has been added as an exclusive fishing zone, bringing the total to 25 miles.

Therefore, objecting to vessels from the other four littoral states being allowed to move through the area beyond those 25 miles is entirely impractical, illogical and outside the rules of international law.

Qalibaf: Regional security order changing following aggression on Iran

International Desk

Iranian Parliament Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf said on Wednesday that regional security order is changing following the recent aggression by the United States and Israel against Iran.

Qalibaf, who has traveled to Iraq for a two-day visit, made the remarks at the site where Iran and Iraq's two iconic anti-terror commanders, Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani and Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, were assassinated in a US drone strike in January 2020.

Iran's top parliamentarian said that extra-regional powers are losing their influence over regional affairs, while US forces are seeking an orderly withdrawal from the region.

Qalibaf said his visit to Iraq is aimed at contributing to a new regional order and strengthening cooperation among regional countries without foreign interference.

"In the midst of the war, I also publicly stated several times that the Islamic countries of the region should seek deep security interactions and relations that are sustainable with economic cooperation, and the Islamic Republic of Iran is ready for this", he added.

Resistance in Iraq

The Iranian parliament speaker also said the Islamic Resistance in Iraq has become a major source of strength for both Iran and Iraq, stressing that resistance discourse has expanded beyond the region and gained global reach.

Qalibaf said the two Iranian commanders had played a role in fighting Daesh and protecting Iraq, Iran and the wider region from the terrorist group.

"Did the assassination halt the power and influence of the resistance?" he asked, arguing that developments across the region demonstrate that the resistance movement continues to gain in-



Iranian Parliament Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf (L) meets Iraqi Prime Minister Ali al-Zaidi in Baghdad, Iraq, on August 19, 2026.

● ICANA

fluence.

During his visit, the Iranian official held separate meetings with Iraq's president, parliament speaker and prime minister.

Iraqi Prime Minister Ali al-Zaidi thanked Iran for its support to Iraq, particularly during the fight against the Daesh terrorist group.

'Honorable exit' from region

In a social media statement, Qalibaf highlighted a profound transformation in the regional balance of power, asserting that the era of Western hegemony in the region is rapidly ending.

"In the new regional order, foreign powers' interference in the equations between states is re-



ceding at an accelerating pace," Qalibaf noted.

He observed that the United States, exhausted by its costly and failed military adventurism,

is now desperately seeking an "honorable exit" from the region. Furthermore, Qalibaf declared the total strategic defeat of the Israeli regime's expansionist

ambitions.

He stated that Israel's grand project of territorial expansion "from the river to the sea has become mere fragments of dreams."

Top general cautions Persian Gulf countries against helping US military

International Desk

Chief of Staff of Iran's Armed Forces on Wednesday warned Persian Gulf Arab countries against assisting the United States' military in its aggression against Iran.

Since the start of the US-Israeli aggression against Iran in February, many Middle Eastern countries have said they would not allow the US to use their territory as a launchpad for attacks, though Abdollahi cast doubt on those promises.

"Those southern Persian Gulf countries that issue various statements claiming they will not allow the United States to use their territory against Iran should know that nothing escapes our attention," Major General Ali Abdollahi wrote on his X account on Wednesday.

He said it seems unlikely that such a large number of military aircraft, particularly aerial refueling aircraft, could be stationed at regional bases without the knowledge of the host countries. "We warn that any assistance or facilitation provided to the aggressive US military will be regarded as participation alongside US military forces," Abdollahi said.



The satellite image shows a number of US military aircraft at the Al-Udeid Air Base, near Doha, Qatar.

● REUTERS

The Persian Gulf is dotted with US military installations. Since the beginning of the aggression against Iran, the US has used the bases for launching attacks on Iran. In re-

sponse, the Iranian Armed Forces have also targeted the military sites with missiles and drones and inflicted heavy damage to the installations. Iranian military officials have repeatedly emphasized that the presence of US forces and their proxies only multiplies the costs for the aggressors.

The Iranian Armed Forces have inflicted heavy losses on the aggressors despite their advanced weaponry and hybrid warfare tactics. The war between Iran and the United States broke out on February 28 with US-Israeli attacks on the Islamic republic, which retaliated with missile and drone strikes on US military bases in regional countries and Israeli positions in the occupied territories. Media reports have suggested that Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait and Bahrain have all hit targets in Iran in retaliation for Tehran's attacks, though the countries have mostly denied the reports.

Spox denies missile attack on UAE; warns of 'false-flag' plots

International Desk

Iran denied launching missiles towards the United Arab Emirates on Tuesday after Abu Dhabi accused Tehran of firing two ballistic missiles towards the Persian Gulf country.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baqaei in a statement "categorically rejected the United Arab Emirates' claim that Iran had launched a missile toward that country", calling it harmful to regional trust and security efforts.

Baqaei warned regional states against making unfounded accusations and urging vigilance over a history of "false-flag operations" seeking to implicate blameless parties.

He stressed that such conduct runs counter to the principle of good-neighborness and undermines ongoing efforts to build trust among regional countries and prevent a further escalation of insecurity in the region.

The spokesman also called on regional parties to take into account the complexities created by the continued "malign actions" of the United States and the Israeli regime against regional peace and security.

Baqaei specifically referred to the history of multiple "false-flag operations" and urged regional countries to refrain from



● REUTERS

making unfounded accusations against the Islamic Republic.

Earlier in the day, the UAE defense ministry claimed that its air defenses had "detected two ballistic missiles launched from Iran towards the country."

The claims came a day after a drone attack targeted the office of Iraqi Kurdistan Region's Prime Minister Masrour Barzani.

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi condemned that attack in a post on X, writing, "Nothing justifies the reckless attack on PM Barzani's office. Kurdish friends should be vigilant against false-flag ploys to sow discord between neighbors."

He added, "We protected our Kurdish friends against [former Iraqi dictator] Saddam [Hussein] and [the] DAESH [Takfiri terror group], and we're thankful for the security they've provided on our border."

Iran declares French diplomats persona non grata over illegal activities

International Desk

Iran's Foreign Ministry declared two French diplomats working at the French Embassy in Tehran persona non grata over activities deemed contrary to international law and the 1961 Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations.

In a statement on Tuesday night, the ministry's Public Relations Office said the two French officials engaged in activities violating international law, particularly the provisions of the 1961 Vienna Convention.

The statement said that despite several weeks having passed since their unlawful conduct was exposed, no action has been taken by the French government to rectify their behavior or provide assurances that such conduct would not be repeated. "Therefore, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs recognizes these two officials as



France's Embassy in Tehran

persona non grata, and their entry into Iran will henceforth be prohibited," the statement said.

In July 2026, the two French diplomats were briefly detained in Tehran after they were found at a meeting linked to a security investigation.

France accused Iranian security forces of mistreating the diplomats, while Tehran rejected the allegations and said they had

been questioned over "unconventional" conduct.

Iran's Ministry of Intelligence said the two diplomats had "extensive records of violations and conduct contrary to domestic laws and diplomatic obligations." After their identities were verified, the matter was reported to the Foreign Ministry, and the diplomats were handed over to Iran's ambassador to France in the presence of diplomatic police, it said. The ministry further said France subsequently launched a media campaign aimed at deflecting attention from the violations, saying an initial examination of documents found at the site revealed a project involving foreign infiltration and interference.

French Foreign Minister Jean-Noel Barrot said on Tuesday that Paris will expel two Iranian diplomats posted in France in retaliation for Iran's move.



Mohammad Ali Rajabi
Cartoonist

CARTOON



Iran's oil revenue up 50% in first quarter

Economy Desk

Iran's oil revenue in the first four months of the current Iranian year (beginning on March 21) was 50% higher than in the same period last year, with \$7.5 billion in oil revenue transferred to the Central Bank of Iran, according to information obtained from the Oil Ministry.

Based on the government's long-term pattern of dollar-denominated spending, the report said oil revenue generated during the first four months of the year is enough to cover all of the government's foreign-exchange expenditures through December.

Iran sold \$18 billion worth of oil during the 40-day war with the United States and the ceasefire that followed,

the Oil Ministry's media outlet Shana recently reported.

Of that amount, \$11.5 billion worth of crude was exported 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 that began in late February, the United States issued a temporary sanctions waiver for Iranian oil trade aimed at driving down prices. 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 was estimated to have generated an additional \$3 billion for Iran.

Iran also benefited from higher oil prices, which rose from around \$70 a barrel to above \$100, with prices topping \$110 on some days.

The increase came as the Strait of Hormuz, one of the world's most important energy transit routes, became a focus of contention between Iran and the United States after the latter waged the war of aggression along with Israel against the Islamic Republic on February 28. In response, Iran closed the strait and began talks with Oman to establish a joint mechanism for shipping arrangements.



● IRNA

Bank Melli owns all shares in Russia's Mir Business Bank, Joint chamber says



● IRNA

Economy Desk

Bank Melli Iran has acquired all shares of Russia's Mir Business Bank, providing Iran with banking capacity in Russia, a member of the Iran-Russia Joint Chamber of Commerce said.

Reza Rafiei, speaking to Fars news agency, outlined the details of banking relations between Iran and Russia, saying Mir Business Bank is now a wholly Russian entity owned by Bank Melli Iran and operates under the rules and regulations of the Central Bank of Russia.

"The connection of SHETAB cards to Russia's Mir network has enabled Iranians to withdraw rubles from ATMs, and

letters of credit are also active," he said. "This means banking relations have been upgraded and, contrary to what is believed, this channel is not blocked."

However, he added that although Mir Business Bank provides services to Iranian traders, using the channel for financial transfers can become impractical when currency conversion rates and related processes are not economically viable for traders.

The monetary agreement between Iran and Russia became operational in January 2025, enabling the two countries to use their national currencies — the rial and the ruble — as the basis for trade settlement at agreed exchange rates in the

commercial foreign exchange market.

Russia's Mir card network was connected to Iran's SHETAB banking network in November 2024. The first and second phases of the SHETAB-Mir payment system have already been completed.

During a visit to Russia's Mir Business Bank in June, Central Bank of Iran Governor Abdolnasser Hemmati called for expanded banking cooperation with Russia.

Hemmati said the Russian bank had made significant progress in recent years and that measures taken by the institution could help complete supply chains and provide additional services to businesses in both countries.

Exports to Qatar resumed after wartime restrictions



Economy Desk

Iran has resumed exports to Qatar after a wartime halt, with the reopening of Qatar's Al Ruwais customs terminal allowing shipments from Iran to restart, the head of the Iran-Qatar Joint Chamber of Commerce said.

"The resumption of maritime and logistics activity in the Persian Gulf and Gulf of Oman has reactivated Iran's export route to Qatar after restrictions caused by the war," Khorshid Gazderazi said, according to ILNA.

The United States and Israel launched a military campaign against Iran in late February, which led to the disruption of shipping and logistics across the Persian Gulf.

Gazderazi said wartime conditions in Iran and other Persian Gulf countries had restricted logistics, maritime activity and shipping in the

Persian Gulf, affecting Iran's export markets in the region. "This situation affected Iran's export target markets in the Persian Gulf countries and exports to these countries, including Qatar, stopped," he said.

Al Ruwais customs, one of the entry points for Iranian goods into Qatar, was also inactive during the period, he said.

"Given the good political relations between the two governments and the consultations that have taken place, Al Ruwais customs has resumed operations, and goods are now being exported from Bushehr and Hormozgan provinces to Qatar," Gazderazi said.

Some of the goods being shipped include minerals and construction materials needed by Qatar. Also, given the summer season, Iranian tropical fruits, which are popular

with Qatari consumers, are being continuously exported from Iranian ports to Qatar, according to him.

"There are currently no particular challenges in the export process, and trade with Qatar has returned to pre-war conditions," Gazderazi said.

He said the conditions for transferring money had not changed significantly since before the war, with previous restrictions on remittances and financial transactions still in place.

Business people use exchange houses to transfer funds and receive payments from trade, he explained.

He did not specify the pre-war export volume, but data from Iran's Customs Administration shows that in the Iranian year ending March 20, 2025, Iran exported 542,000 metric tons of goods worth \$144 million to Qatar.

Flydubai, Air Arabia restart flights over Iranian airspace

Economy Desk

Flydubai and Air Arabia have resumed flights over Iranian airspace following permits issued by Iran's Civil Aviation Organization and coordination with the air traffic control department of Iran Airports

and Air Navigation Company.

The move followed continued negotiations and consultations aimed at facilitating and expanding the passage of foreign flights through Iranian airspace, ISNA said.

An additional seasonal permit was also issued for Flydubai to use Iranian

airspace.

The Civil Aviation Organization said ensuring and maintaining the safety of the country's airspace remained its priority and that it was working to facilitate the entry and transit of foreign flights through Iranian airspace by putting in place the

necessary arrangements and coordination.

The country's airspace gradually reopened after a ceasefire was reached between Washington and Tehran on April 8, halting a 40-day conflict launched by the US-Israeli coalition in late February.



Lie that reached Netanyahu's podium

How fabricated quote exposed fragility of Israel's information war



By Saman Sofalgar
Political researcher

OPINION EXCLUSIVE

For years, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has sought to establish himself as one of the world's most authoritative voices on Iran. His political career has been closely intertwined with warnings about the Islamic Republic of Iran's so-called nuclear ambitions, its alleged threat to Israel, and the necessity of extraordinary measures to confront Tehran.

But a recent controversy has exposed a striking weakness in that narrative: a quotation attributed to the Commander-in-Chief of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) Ahmad Vahidi travelled from an obscure social-media account outside Iran through pro-Israel online networks and Israeli media before ultimately reaching the podium of the Israeli prime minister.

The alleged statement claimed that Iran would continue pursuing nuclear weapons as long as the United States and Israel possessed them. It was precisely the kind of declaration Netanyahu could use to reinforce his longstanding argument about Iran. There was, however, a fundamental problem: no reliable evidence has emerged that Brigadier General Vahidi ever made the statement.

No Iranian news agency published it. No verified transcript or recording has surfaced. Instead, the claim was traced to an India-based X account, before being amplified by accounts aligned with pro-Israel discourse, Israeli media figures and eventually, Netanyahu himself.

The episode is therefore more than another example of social-media misinformation. It raises a much more consequential question: How did a social media rumor end up being used by Israel's prime minister against Iran?

From social media to the Israeli PM

The alleged quotation first appeared on an India-based X account using the name "Ritika". The post presented an image of Brigadier General Vahidi alongside a supposed statement about Iran's nuclear outlook. Under normal journalistic standards, this should have been the beginning of verification, not the beginning of political amplification.

A statement allegedly made by one of Iran's most senior military figures would ordinarily be expected to leave a substantial evidentiary trail: an Iranian media report, an official transcript, a video, an audio recording or confirmation from independent news organizations.

None appeared. Instead, the claim began circulating through accounts sympathetic to Israel and was subsequently picked up by Israeli media. The transformation was remarkable: the



● BEN JENNINGS/THE GUARDIAN

original source did not become more credible; it simply became more widely repeated. That distinction is at the heart of the controversy.

When online echo becomes 'evidence'

One of the most revealing elements of the episode is the role of the account known as "Mossad Commentary". Despite its name and use of imagery associated with Israel's intelligence service, the account has no known official connection to Mossad. Independent investigations have repeatedly identified it as an unofficial account that has circulated misleading material.

That matters because online authority is often manufactured through appearance. A social-media account bearing the name of an intelligence agency can create an impression of access and credibility even when no such institutional connection exists. Once the account has a large following, its claims can be repeated by other users, journalists and political actors who may no longer return to

the original source.

This is precisely how misinformation acquires the appearance of independent confirmation. The alleged Brigadier General Vahidi quotation appears to have followed this familiar trajectory: an obscure online claim was amplified, entered Israeli media discourse and gradually acquired political significance. The source remained weak. The repetition became stronger.

Netanyahu's podium gave the claim political legitimacy

The most consequential moment came when Netanyahu himself referred to the alleged statement in public remarks, presenting it as evidence of Iran's intentions. At that point, the claim crossed an important threshold. It was no longer simply an unverified social-media post. It had become a statement attributed to an Iranian commander by the Israeli prime minister.

But political authority cannot substitute for primary evidence. The central questions remained unanswered: Where is the original Iranian source? Where is the transcript? Where is the recording? When and where did Brigadier General Vahidi supposedly make the statement? The absence of those answers is particularly significant because the claim concerns one of the most

sensitive issues in international politics.

A prime minister making an accusation about another country's nuclear program carries enormous political weight. Such claims can influence public opinion, diplomatic decisions and even arguments for military action. That is precisely why the evidentiary threshold should be higher — not lower.

Circular-citation problem

The episode illustrates one of the most dangerous features of modern information warfare: the circular citation trap.

Account A makes an allegation. Account B repeats it. A television channel reports that Account B made the allegation. A politician sees the television report and repeats the claim. Other media outlets then report that the politician made the claim.

Suddenly, the allegation appears to have multiple sources. But there may still be only one original source.

The information has not been independently verified. It has simply travelled through a chain of repetition. This phenomenon is particularly dangerous in conflicts where governments and political movements already possess highly developed narratives about their adversaries. Once a claim confirms a false existing belief, the incentive to

verify it can become weaker than the incentive to circulate it. The Brigadier General Vahidi episode is troubling precisely because the alleged quotation fit Netanyahu's longstanding narrative about Iran almost perfectly.

What does this say about Israel's information war?

This is a crucial issue that deserves everyone's attention: extraordinary accusations require verifiable evidence. If Netanyahu's argument about Iran's nuclear intentions is supported by strong intelligence, then there should be no need to rely on an unattributed quotation originating from an overseas social-media account. Indeed, the stronger the underlying case, the less necessary such a questionable piece of evidence should be.

Israel has invested enormous resources in intelligence gathering, strategic communications and international advocacy. Yet an alleged statement by an Iranian commander apparently travelled through the information ecosystem without first establishing its Iranian provenance. For a regime that routinely presents itself as possessing superior intelligence capabilities, that is an uncomfortable contradiction.

Iran's strongest response is evidence

For Tehran, the most effective response to the controversy is not to manufacture an opposing quotation or create another viral narrative. It is to demand evidence. Where is the original statement? Where was it published? When did Brigadier General Vahidi allegedly make it? Where is the recording or transcript? Why did no major Iranian news organization report such a consequential declaration? Those questions place the burden of proof where it belongs: on those presenting the quotation as fact.

They also allow Iran to make a broader diplomatic argument without relying on propaganda of its own: a claim about Iran's nuclear intentions should be judged by evidence, not by the number of times it is repeated on social media.

The most important consequence of this episode is not the fabricated quotation itself, but what it reveals about Netanyahu's credibility when it comes to Iran. For years, Netanyahu has built his political career around alarming claims about Iran's nuclear program and portraying the country as an imminent threat. Yet this latest episode shows how easily an unverified and apparently false claim can be incorporated into that narrative. When Israel's prime minister presents a baseless allegation as evidence against Iran, it raises serious questions about the credibility of his broader claims. The problem is not simply that one statement was false; it is that a long-standing narrative about Iran appears to have been built on claims that are not subjected to proper scrutiny.



Online authority is often manufactured through appearance. A social-media account bearing the name of an intelligence agency can create an impression of access and credibility even when no such institutional connection exists. Once the account has a large following, its claims can be repeated by other users, journalists and political actors who may no longer return to the original source.



Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu draws a red line on an illustration, making a false claim about Iran's ability to create a nuclear weapon, as he addresses the UN General Assembly on September 2012.

● REUTERS



CIA no longer believes Israeli intel

Where does that leave Trump’s fragile relationship with Netanyahu?



By Maira Butt
Reporter

PERSPECTIVE

Donald Trump launched his war on Iran after receiving an intelligence briefing from ally Israel that Iran was allegedly on the brink of acquiring a nuclear weapon. But six months into the conflict, he is struggling to find an exit strategy from a war that has upended the global economy and shrunk his domestic popularity. Israel, who once urged him to act, is no longer striking Iranian targets. Cracks in the relationship between Trump and his long-time friend Benjamin Netanyahu have emerged in the past three months, with the US president privately lashing out at the Israeli prime minister for attacks on Lebanon and jeopardis-

ing a peace deal with Iran. Earlier this week, it emerged that Trump took a secret military flight from Turkey to flee an Iranian assassination threat based on Israeli intelligence. The extraordinary operation involved the US president being moved between aircraft in a catering truck, to safely leave the NATO summit in Ankara for Britain. Trump’s own intelligence agencies were unconvinced by the tipoff. On August 12, The Washington Post reported that the CIA had “low confidence” in the intel — but US officials decided to act on them anyway. One source suggested to the newspaper that the warning fitted “a broader pattern of Israeli intelligence reporting that some officials see as designed as much to shape presidential decision-making as to inform it.”

A relationship under strain

Experts told The Independent that the strong bond between Trump and Netanyahu has been put under immense strain by domestic politics. Both

leaders have failed to meet their military and political targets in Iran, whilst struggling to manage internal divisions. Aaron David Miller, an American diplomat who served as an advisor on the Middle East to six US secretaries of state between 1978 and 2003, said Israel’s “extreme confidence” in February that a US-Israeli bombing campaign would pave the way for regime change in Iran will have triggered scepticism in the CIA about the reliability of their intelligence. “Netanyahu often plays fast and loose with intelligence assessments to further his agenda especially when it comes to ... actors like Iran and Hamas,” he says. “At the same time, given previous attempts on Trump’s life ..., there was no way the Secret Service was going to take any chances whatever CIA doubts about Israeli intelligence.”

CIA ‘may be trying to regain influence’ Professor Yossi Mekelberg, an expert on US-Israeli relations at Chatham House, told The Independent that intelligence reports

The illustration shows Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu (L) and US President Donald Trump during a meeting in the Oval Office on April 7, 2025.
● KEVIN DIETSCH/GETTY IMAGES

reported in the media may not be as credible as they first appear. “The CIA may be feeling it is sidelined and trying to regain influence,” he says. “There have been so many failures in intelligence, analysis and decision-making” in the war so far, he adds, referring to the Minab school attack that killed over 170 children which is currently being investigated by the US government. He says it is also important to note that Trump retains a “soft spot” for Netanyahu, despite details being leaked to the press about furious phone calls between the pair. Last month, Netanyahu made an eighth state visit to the US, demonstrating that the relationship remains strong despite tensions over Israel’s continued bombing campaign in Lebanon, which they have maintained

“

A shift is underway on a broader level, says Professor Andrew Moran. Earlier last week, a US state department official said a permanent Israeli military presence in south Lebanon was not consistent with commitments set out in Israel’s US-backed deal with Lebanon’s government. “Moving the president was a precaution they simply couldn’t ignore given the potentially catastrophic consequences, but publicly questioning the assessment is a bold move.”

is aimed at defeating Hezbollah. Prof Mekelberg points to Trump’s silence on Netanyahu’s public rejection of his peace plan for Gaza and his assertion that there will never be a Palestinian state as evidence of the strength of their relationship. However, with Trump facing a set of mid-terms likely to deliver bruising results for the Republicans and Netanyahu battling for his survival at a crunch election in October, experts say their relationship will inevitably come under further strain.

Israeli intelligence ‘no longer unquestionable’ Nevertheless, a shift is underway on a broader level, says Professor Andrew Moran, head of politics and international relations at London Metropolitan University. Earlier last week, a US state department official said a permanent Israeli military presence in south Lebanon was not consistent with commitments set out in Israel’s US-backed deal with Lebanon’s government. This came after Israeli defence minister Israel Katz said his country would not withdraw from Lebanon until Hezbollah disarm. “Israeli intelligence has long been viewed as the gold standard, so it’s notable that US officials reportedly acted on the warning whilst simultaneously signalling they didn’t believe it was credible,” Prof Moran says. “Moving the president was a precaution they simply couldn’t ignore given the potentially catastrophic consequences, but publicly questioning the assessment is a bold move.” “It may have been done to reassure the public that there was no threat, but also indicates that confidence in Israeli intelligence is not as unquestioned as it once was — a recurring theme since the October 7 attacks, which Israeli intelligence failed to predict.” He adds, “I don’t think we’ll see Trump pull back from Israel, but the relationship is becoming less predictable.”

The article first appeared on The Independent.

Air Force One is seen in Ankara, Turkey, on July 8, 2026. Top White House and administration officials engaged in an elaborate ruse to spirit President Donald Trump out of Turkey during the NATO summit there last month, transporting him in a catering cart to a military jet.
● DOUG MILLS/THE NEW YORK TIMES



U20 Wrestling World Championships

Shamsipour saves Iran's Greco-Roman campaign with 55kg gold

Sports Desk

Armin Shamsipour ensured Iran's Greco-Roman squad would finish with a gold medal at the U20 Wrestling World Championships after securing the 55kg title in Bratislava, Slovakia, on Tuesday.

Iran had also settled for a single gold across 10 weight classes last year, which proved enough for a fourth successive Greco-Roman team title. This time, however, the country was left all but out of the title race after Amirali Heidari (60kg) and Alireza Hosseini (82kg) fell short in the semifinals of their respective divisions earlier in the day.

Two years after capturing the imagination of Iranian wrestling with a gold medal at the U17 Worlds, 18-year-old Shamsipour cruised to the top of the podium in the Slovakian capital in style, winning three of his four bouts by technical superiority, while



Iranian Greco-Roman wrestler Armin Shamsipour celebrates after winning the 55kg gold medal at the U20 World Championships in Bratislava, Slovakia, on Aug. 18, 2026.
● UWW

his semifinal was a close 3-1 affair. In the final, Shamsipour outclassed Koba Karumidze 12-2, never allowing the Georgian to come close to pulling off an upset.

Shamsipour was on the attack from the outset, lifting Karumidze in par terre and scoring a beautiful four-point throw to take a 5-0 lead into the break. Karumidze appeared

drained as he engaged more with Shamsipour, who scored an easy go-behind. As he tried to lift and throw the Georgian, however, Shamsipour landed on his own back to con-

cede two points. Shamsipour did not take his foot off the gas despite leading 7-2 and scored another takedown with 1:22 remaining. Ten seconds later, he added another easy takedown to make it 11-2. Georgia challenged the call but lost the challenge, giving Shamsipour one more point.

"I was in good shape," Shamsipour said. "Based on the coaches' analysis, the plan was for me to start working on his arms from the first period and try to force the first passivity warning. Once I started doing that, I could see that he was really struggling, so I just kept going with the same strategy," added the teen prodigy, who also won gold at the U20 Asian Championships in June. Among his bouts, the Khuzestan-based wrestler singled out his semifinal against Uzbekistan's Khojakhbar Kuchkarov as his toughest test. Kuchkarov

had beaten Shamsipour 8-0 in the bronze-medal bout at last year's U23 Worlds.

"My toughest opponent was the wrestler from Uzbekistan because I had wrestled him before," he said. "I couldn't afford to take any risks. At the U23 Worlds, I was really upset. But here, I got my revenge."

At the 2024 U17 World Championships, Shamsipour went berserk with his celebrations, but on Tuesday he kept it simple.

"I was younger, I made a lot more noise and showed a lot more excitement after that competition," he said. "This time it was different. I knew I had to stay calm, take it one match at a time, and move forward step by step. Physically, the wrestlers at this level are stronger. Age and weight are both very important factors."

While he is yet to make his senior debut, Shamsipour said his ultimate goal is to qualify for the Los Angeles Olympic Games in two years.

"I hope I can always make my parents proud like this and achieve my dream of winning an Olympic gold medal. The 2028 Olympics is my goal, and that's what I'm focused on right now."

Elsewhere, Asian U20 bronze medalist Heidari claimed three comprehensive victories en route to the semifinals but was edged 4-3 by Azerbaijan's Aykhan Javadov.

Hosseini, meanwhile, also enjoyed an emphatic run to the semifinals before falling 5-1 to Russia's Ramazan Nekhal.

Tuesday's results came after Iran had won three bronze medals through Ali Gharibi (63kg), Mahdi Saeidi-Nava (77kg) and Amirhossein Nematzadeh (87kg) on the preceding day.

Iliya Alikhani fell short in the bronze-medal bout at 67kg, while Ahmadreza Mohammadian (72kg), Amir-sam Mohammadi (97kg) and Amirhossein Abdevali (130kg) suffered early exits.

Sports Desk

Iran's women's team may hardly be among the title favorites at the Asian Volleyball Championship, but will still have much to prove when it gets its Pool A campaign underway against Chinese Taipei in Tianjin, China, on Friday.

The Asian showpiece marks the end of a hectic international season for the Iranian women, who, despite wartime conditions hampering their preparations, claimed a second successive CAVA Championship title in June – only the second gold medal for the national team since it was established in 1963 – but endured a disappointing campaign at the AVC Women's Nations Cup.

Iran suffered three defeats in six outings to finish seventh in the 12-team tournament in Candon, Philippines – the country's lowest finish in four appearances.

The poor result ultimately convinced Iran's sports authorities to leave the team out of the equation for the upcoming Aichi-Nagoya

Asian Games, leaving the young squad desperate for a decent run in Tianjin to prove that the Iranian women's volleyball program remains on the right track following South Korean head coach Lee Do-hee's appointment two years ago.

With an average age of 23.8, Iran possesses one of the youngest rosters at the Asian Championship, though Alireza Toloukian, the team's technical director, believes the youth-oriented rebuilding was a risk worth taking.

"Since we have so many young players in the squad, we have also added a few experienced players to create a proper balance, so we are not concerned about that," Toloukian told reporters during the team's final training session in Tehran before departing for the tournament earlier this week.

"Youth development has to be gradual. This has happened as part of the federation's policy for the women's team."

"Considering the level of expectations the federation and the public have developed for

AVC Women's Volleyball Continental Championship:

Young Iranian squad eager to showcase upward trajectory



● MOHAMMAD-JAVAD AMINI/volleyball.ir

Iranian volleyball, rebuilding the women's team with young players was a major gamble. But this had to happen," he said.

"Many years of hard work have gone into women's volleyball, with foreign and Iranian coaches working together and planning for this team.

"I think with special attention, we can help these players progress in the future, but this is a time-consuming process. We cannot change

everything in the short term." Toloukian said the team's immediate goal at the Asian Championship would be to improve on its 10th-place finish in the previous edition, though he acknowledged that closing the gap with Asia's leading teams – including Volleyball Nations League trio Japan and Thailand, as well as record 13-time Asian champion China, which is also in Pool A – would require sustained progress rather than immediate results.

"This will not happen quickly. We have to participate in different competitions, improve our ranking and gradually win more matches," he said.

"We may not be able to catch China, Japan and South Korea at the moment, but first we have to beat teams such as Chinese Taipei, Vietnam, Indonesia and Kazakhstan."

Iran's opener against Chinese Taipei – runner-up to South Korea at the Nations Cup – will be a repeat of their encounter in the 2023 edition, when the East Asian side won in straight sets in the final classification match.

"We have analyzed Chinese Taipei in detail," Iran captain Shabnam Alikhani said on Tuesday. "They competed in an East Asian event before coming to the Asian Championship and have a high level of cohesion and readiness."

"We also have a very good understanding of them and are following our training program based on that knowledge and analysis."

"In general, East Asian teams are very good in terms of speed and ball reception. Chinese Taipei has been on a good run. They reached the final of the Nations Cup, and because their players have played together for years, they have a good understanding of one another."

Iran will face China in its second game on Monday before concluding the pool phase against debutant Iraq the following day.

The top two teams from each of the three groups will be joined by the best two third-placed teams – based on the AVC's Combined Team Ranking System – in the quarter-finals.

WT President's Cup:

Iran dominates with five kyorugi golds, three bronzes

Sports Desk

Iranian athletes stole the show on the first day of kyorugi competition at the World Taekwondo President's Cup – Asia 2026 in Lahore, Pakistan, collecting a remarkable five gold medals across six men's and women's categories.

There was further success for Iran, as Amir-sina Bakhtiari (men's -74kg), Yalda Valinejad (women's -62kg) and Fatemeh Ahmadi (women's +73kg) added three bronze medals

to the country's haul on Tuesday.

Reigning two-time world junior champion Hana Zarrinkamar carried the momentum from her gold-winning run at July's Korea Open to secure the top prize in the women's +73kg division.

Having beaten Ahmadi in an all-Iranian semifinal, the teen prodigy came out on top in straight rounds, 9-6, 4-2, against Uzbekistan's Svetlana Saidova in the final.

Nastaran Valizadeh was the

other Iranian gold medalist in the women's competition, defeating Uzbekistan's Diyorakhon Azizova, who had beaten Valinejad in the semifinals, in straight rounds, 0-0, 12-0, in the -62kg final.

In the men's competition, Abolfazl Zandi lived up to expectations as the reigning senior and U23 world champion, defeating South Korea's An Hyang-sik in straight rounds, 11-6, 12-3, in the -58kg final. The victory added to his gold medal from May's Asian

Championships and his Korea Open triumph.

Representing Iran in the -74kg class, Radin Zeinali also claimed gold at the expense of a South Korean opponent in the final, while Olympic champion Arian Salimi rounded out a glorious day for the country with the top prize in the +87kg division.

Salimi began his campaign with a win over host representative Muhammad Farrukh before defeating compatriot Ali Najafi in the semifinals. He then outclassed

South Korea's Park Chan-hui 12-3, 10-1 in the final.

Tuesday's results came after Iranian athletes collected seven medals, including one gold, in the poomsae competition on the opening day in Lahore.

Yasaman Limouchi headlined the medal haul with gold in the recognized category and silver in freestyle in the women's competition, while Mobina Sharifimaher, Yassin Akbari and Morteza Zendedel added three silver and three bronze medals.



● taekwondo.ir

Shirabad Waterfalls offer spectacular nature escape in Golestan

Iranica Desk

Among Golestan Province's natural attractions, the Shirabad Waterfalls complex holds a special place. Located in Fenderesk Rural District in Ramian, within the vicinity of Shirabad village, the complex is accessible from Khanbebin and then via Shirabad village. The Shirabad Waterfalls are a series of seven natural waterfalls formed in a forested mountainous landscape. Each waterfall differs in height, pool shape, water flow and location, making the Shirabad trail one of the province's most appealing nature-tourism routes. The first waterfall is located at the end of Shirabad Park, following a forest access road. Visitors must leave their vehicles at the end of the road and continue part of the way on foot, according to chtn.ir. Standing about 35 meters high, the first waterfall is the tallest in the complex. A large pool of about 700 square meters has formed at its base, with varying depths that reach approximately 17 meters at some points. Its rocky cliff, considerable height and expansive pool have made the first waterfall the main destination for many visitors. Shirabad, however, extends far beyond this waterfall, with the continuation of the trail revealing different and less-visited landscapes. After passing the first waterfall and walking about 300 meters along the natural trail, visitors reach the second waterfall. Known locally as the "Bride Waterfall," it is named for its broad stream of white water cascading from a relatively low height, resembling a bride's veil.

The second waterfall is about 12 meters high and has a pool covering approximately 288 square meters at its base. The deepest point of the pool is reported to be about nine meters. The combination of green walls surrounding the waterfall, its white stream of water and the natural pool below makes this section one of the most scenic parts of the route. Reaching the third waterfall requires another 400 meters of walking along the forest trail and



MEHR NEWS AGENCY



following the signs. Located between two rocky walls, the waterfall is not easily visible from the main trail, earning it the name "Hidden Waterfall." The third waterfall is about five meters high, with a pool covering 32 square meters and reaching approximately two meters in depth. Shirabad Cave, another major natural attraction, is located in the same area between the second and third waterfalls. One of the important natural caves in Ramian, Shirabad Cave is notable for its flowing water, natural pools, limestone formations and direct connection to the

waterfall complex. Much of the cave is in complete darkness, while a spring at its far end contributes to the formation of the cave and its natural features. Over time, the movement of water and the area's geological characteristics have led to the formation of natural pools, basin-shaped rock formations and limestone formations, including stalactites. In addition to its geological features, Shirabad Cave is also environmentally significant and is known as a habitat for several animal species, including the Caucasian salamander. The forested and mountainous surroundings of the cave also provide habitat for species such as red deer, roe deer, bears, leopards and other wildlife found in the region. The cave is also associated with various local stories and legends. In some accounts, it is referred to as the Div-e Sepid Cave (White Demon Cave), a name that reflects the cultural heritage and local folklore surrounding the natural attraction. Access to the fourth, fifth and sixth waterfalls becomes more difficult, requiring visitors to cross rocky sections and areas along the river.

Further upstream, the water divides into two branches, forming two waterfalls close to each other known as the "Twin Waterfalls." The fourth waterfall is about six meters high, with a pool covering approximately 20 square meters and reaching nearly four meters in depth. The fifth waterfall is also about six meters high. Its pool covers approximately 42 square meters and reaches a maximum depth of about two meters. The proximity of the two waterfalls and the simultaneous flow of water along two separate channels create one of the complex's distinctive natural scenes. The sixth waterfall lies upstream from the fifth. It is about 10 meters high and has a pool covering approximately 80 square meters, with a depth of around three meters. A rocky trail beside this waterfall continues toward the seventh waterfall. Access to this section is more difficult than to the earlier waterfalls, giving the nature-tourism route a more challenging character. After another 100 meters, visitors reach the seventh waterfall, which is about

26 meters high. A pool of approximately 12 square meters and about one meter deep lies at its base. From the first to the seventh waterfall, the Shirabad trail offers visitors a diverse combination of varying heights, natural pools, rocky cliffs and different patterns of water flow. The Shirabad Cave and Waterfalls complex is located near Khanbebin. The access route from Khanbebin continues toward Shirabad village, after which visitors pass through the village and continue to the park and entrance to the waterfall complex. The first section of the route

is more accessible, but beyond the first waterfall, the trail is largely natural, requiring visitors to cross forest paths, riverbanks and rocky sections to reach the subsequent waterfalls. This gradual transition from the park and walking paths into a fully natural environment is one of the features that makes the Shirabad experience distinctive. The succession of waterfalls, natural cave, geological formations, biodiversity and forest setting make Shirabad more than simply a recreational destination. The area also offers considerable potential for nature tourism, scientific tourism, geological studies, environmental research and exploration of the biodiversity of Golestan's forests. The presence of the cave, limestone formations, natural pools, continuously flowing water and habitats of various animal species brings a remarkable range of natural features together within a relatively compact area. Shirabad is one of those destinations that reveals an increasingly pristine and natural character the farther visitors travel along the route — from the first, high-volume waterfall to the Bride Waterfall, Hidden Waterfall, mysterious cave, Twin Waterfalls and finally the seventh waterfall deep in the forest. With these features, the Shirabad Cave and Waterfalls complex is one of the valuable natural tourism assets of Ramian and Golestan Province. Protecting its natural environment and managing visitor access can help ensure the sustainable use of one of the province's most remarkable natural attractions.

Sheikh Shaban village emerges as Iran's Khatam hub

Iranica Desk

Sheikh Shaban village in Ben, Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari Province, has emerged as one of Iran's key centers for Khatamkari, the traditional Persian art of intricate geometric inlay, with hundreds of artisans involved in the craft. Khatamkari is one of the province's most important traditional handicrafts and is produced mainly in Sheikh Shaban. Although the art's intellectual heritage is associated with artisans in Shiraz and Isfahan, the craft was introduced to Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari about 50 years ago through the traditional master-apprentice system and quickly spread among local communities. The growth of Khatamkari has made Sheikh Shaban an important national center for the production of Gol-e Khatam, or Khatam rods

and bundles. Around 400 craftspeople in the village are now familiar with the production of these components. Khatamkari involves arranging small triangular pieces alongside one another to create intricate geometric patterns. The craft uses natural materials including wood, bone, copper wire and metal filaments. Its products range from tissue boxes, jewelry boxes, wastebaskets, pen cases, Qur'an stands and chocolate boxes to tables, chairs, beds, picture frames and a wide variety of household items. Jahanbakhsh Torki, head of the Training and Production Support Department at the Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Organization, said local artisans produce more than 300,000 khatam rods or



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bundles annually. He said Khatam products generate around 300 percent added value, making the craft one of the province's economically significant handicraft sectors. Torki said the production of Khatam in Sheikh Shaban has a history of more than five decades. Many prominent Khatam artisans, retailers and producers in Isfahan are originally from the village, he added. According to Torki, 120 artisans are currently directly involved in Khatamkari in Sheikh Shaban. They work in 80 home-based and centralized workshops producing Khatam and Gol-Bandi, as well as a variety of finished products. The provincial Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Organization, in cooperation with the

industrial companies, has also taken steps to establish and activate a specialized khatam production cluster in Sheikh Shaban. Torki pointed to the rising cost of raw materials as one of the main challenges facing khatam producers, saying the provincial organization has pursued the issue with the relevant ministry. He said the development of handicrafts such as Khatamkari can contribute to job creation, lower unemployment, stimulate local economic activity, reduce uncontrolled migration and encourage villagers who have moved to cities to return to their communities. He added that products made by Sheikh Shaban artisans are sent to and marketed in the provinces of Isfahan and Fars Province, as well as Tehran. Sheikh Shaban is now widely known as a major center of Khatamkari in

Iran and has the potential to become a destination for domestic and international tourists visiting Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari throughout the year, Torki said. Khatam products are also increasingly marketed as distinctive souvenirs in tourist destinations across Iran, attracting both domestic and foreign visitors. Khatam-making, or Khatamkari, is regarded as one of Iran's distinctive traditional arts. The technique involves creating geometric patterns from combinations of regular polygons — typically five-, six-, seven-, eight- or 10-sided forms — by precisely arranging tiny triangular pieces of different materials. Sheikh Shaban is located about 40 kilometers from Shahrekord, the provincial capital, and has become known as one of Iran's leading centers for the craft.



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Iran, Indonesia seek closer environmental cooperation at BRICS meeting

Social Desk

Iran and Indonesia agreed to foster environmental cooperation, including on biodiversity, waste management, climate change and marine ecosystems, during a meeting between their environmental officials in New Delhi, India, IRNA reported on Wednesday.

Head of Iran's Department of Environment Shina Ansari met Indonesian Environment Minister Mohammad Jumhur Hidayat on the sidelines of the 12th BRICS Environment Ministers' Meeting which was held Tuesday.

Ansari pointed to the two countries' shared environmental potential and called for stronger bilateral cooperation, the exchange of experience and technical knowledge, and expanded expert-level cooperation. She stressed the importance

of protecting biodiversity and natural habitats, forests, water resources and marine ecosystems, as well as tackling climate change and managing waste. She called for the two countries to share experience in these areas.

Hidayat also called for greater specialised and technical environmental cooperation between Iran and Indonesia. Referring to Indonesia's efforts to tackle plastic pollution, he stressed the importance of cooperation and consensus among countries on practical waste-management mechanisms, particularly in coastal areas.

The two sides also agreed to keep up consultations and use multilateral mechanisms, particularly BRICS, to expand environmental cooperation. The BRICS meeting was held under the slogan "Building for



Head of Iran's Department of Environment Shina Ansari (L) meets with Indonesian Environment Minister Mohammad Jumhur Hidayat on the sidelines of the 12th BRICS Environment Ministers' Meeting held in New Delhi, India, on August 18, 2026.

● IRNA

Resilience, Innovation, Cooperation and Sustainability". Promoting sustainable lifestyles, forest protection and disaster resilience, the circular economy, and climate change adaptation were the four main areas of environmental discussions at the meeting.

BRICS ministers, senior officials and policymakers discussed ways to strengthen environmental cooperation, exchange experience and develop common positions aimed at achieving sustainable development and improving countries' resilience.



Iranian artist's photograph goes on display in US international art exhibition



Arts & Culture Desk

An Iranian photographer and filmmaker, Armin Amirian, is taking part in the 13th annual FL3TCH3R International Exhibit in the United States with his photograph 'Constitutional Revolution of Iran.'

The exhibition opened on August 7 and will run until September 27, at Fischman Gallery in downtown Johnson City, Tennessee, Mehr News Agency reported on Wednesday.

The photograph is part of Amirian's 'hICEstory' art series, which he created in 2020 as a continuation of his narrative approach to art. The series depicts figures from Iran's Constitutional Revolution emerging through layers of ice. The revolution passed its 120th anniversary in August this year.

The work marks another international appearance for Amirian, who has participated in more than 100 international exhibitions and festivals. He has previously received awards from the Fletcher

er Dyer Foundation, including an award for artistic excellence.

Works from 'hICEstory' have been shown in solo exhibitions in Iran, Italy and France, as well as international exhibitions at London's Saatchi Gallery and venues in the United States, Germany and Spain.

The FL3TCH3R Exhibit was established in memory of artist and designer Fletcher H. Dyer and seeks to continue his legacy of addressing social and political issues through art. The 2026 exhibition is an international juried show selected by this year's juror and curator, Jessica Burke. It has no specific theme, allowing artists to focus broadly on socially and politically engaged art and contemporary issues affecting society and culture.

The exhibition encourages diverse media and artistic approaches to exploring social and political concerns, with more than \$2,000 in awards to be presented. The awards ceremony is scheduled for September 4 at Fischman Gallery.

Part of the proceeds from the exhibition supports the Fletcher Hancock Dyer Memorial Scholarship for an art and design student. The scholarship reached its endowment goal in 2017.

Hot air ballooning, recreational flights to be introduced at airports

Arts & Culture Desk

Iran has signed an agreement to introduce hot air ballooning and light recreational flights at its airports, aiming to tap into underutilized infrastructure to boost tourism and attract private investment.

The memorandum of understanding was signed between the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts and the Iran Airports Company (IAC), IRNA reported on Wednesday.

Under the plan, authorities will develop "air tourism" by offering balloon rides, light recreational flights, and modern aerial entertainment services within airport premises.

In addition to aerial activities, the deal seeks to turn airport spaces into commercial hubs for Iranian handicrafts. Planners say the initiative will give domestic and foreign tourists easier access to authentic local products while creating new specialized jobs.

Traditionally used only for passenger and cargo transit, Iran's airports will now host a "new generation of combined tourism, recreational, commer-



cial, and handicraft projects," according to the agreement's framework.

To draw private investors, the two entities will identify unused airport lands and spaces, packaging them into investment projects.

The projects will benefit from tax exemptions and financial incentives provided under Clause B, Article 83 of Iran's Seventh Development Plan, a legal framework designed to lower the costs of tourism infrastructure and equipment.

The government's push relies heavily on private sector participation, aiming to convert idle airport capacities into active economic opportunities and strengthen the link between the country's aviation infrastructure and its tourism economy.

Caspian Convention in ...

Some believe the convention should not be ratified by Parliament before the "baseline" is determined and finalized. What is your idea on that?

The issue of determining the method for drawing straight baselines is extremely important for Iran because the Iranian coast along the southern Caspian has a concave shape. If the median line is used as the basis, that line would shift toward the Iranian coast, reducing Iran's share of the water, seabed and subsoil.

For this reason, Iranian negotiators included a provision requiring the "unfavorable situation" of geographically disadvantaged countries to be taken into account when drawing straight

baselines, with Iran declaring its coastline to be such a case.

An important point that critics overlook is that the convention does not address the delimitation of the seabed and subsoil at all. Article 8 of the convention explicitly states that the delimitation of the seabed and subsoil must be carried out through bilateral or multilateral agreements among opposite and adjacent states.

Therefore, the convention is, in this respect, simply a "Framework Convention," which has established principles and rules on the basis of which the work can subsequently be carried out among the countries concerned.

If ratification of the convention is delayed until the method for drawing

straight baselines becomes clear, Iran would have greater leverage and a useful bargaining tool. However, more than 90 percent of the convention consists of general provisions covering areas such as navigation, fisheries, safety, environmental protection, aquatic life, combating terrorism, organized crime, innocent passage and so on.

Government and Foreign Ministry officials favor sending it on to Parliament because they believe the convention's other 90 percent of cooperation should not be held up by lengthy baseline negotiations.

If this convention is set aside, could returning to the 1921 and 1940 treaties serve our interests?

This convention is the product of nearly three decades of intensive negotiations, expert assessments and consideration of all possible alternatives, whereas those two treaties did not address the legal issues surrounding the Caspian Sea, the delimitation of its seabed and subsoil, the water area, pipelines, cables, environmental issues and so on.

The 1921 treaty was essentially a treaty of friendship concluded after the Bolshevik Revolution in the Soviet Union to abolish the colonial privileges of tsarist Russia. It simply declared the eighth chapter of the Treaty of Turkmenchay null and void, restored Iran's right to maintain a naval force in the Caspian Sea, and recognized equal navigation rights for the two parties.

The 1940 treaty is mainly a commercial and customs agreement, with over 95 percent of its provisions covering land trade, ports and commercial navigation. Its only non-commercial provision established a 10-nautical-mile exclusive fishing zone.

Therefore, the 1921 and 1940 treaties in no way meet the needs or address the challenges facing the Caspian Sea today, such as the exploration and extraction of oil and gas from the seabed and subsoil, the construction of pipelines, fiber-optic cables, environmental protection and many other issues.

Drafting a comprehensive, new and up-to-date document was therefore an unavoidable necessity for safeguarding national interests.