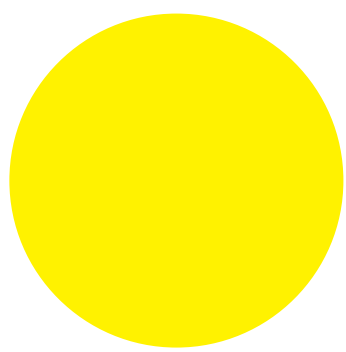


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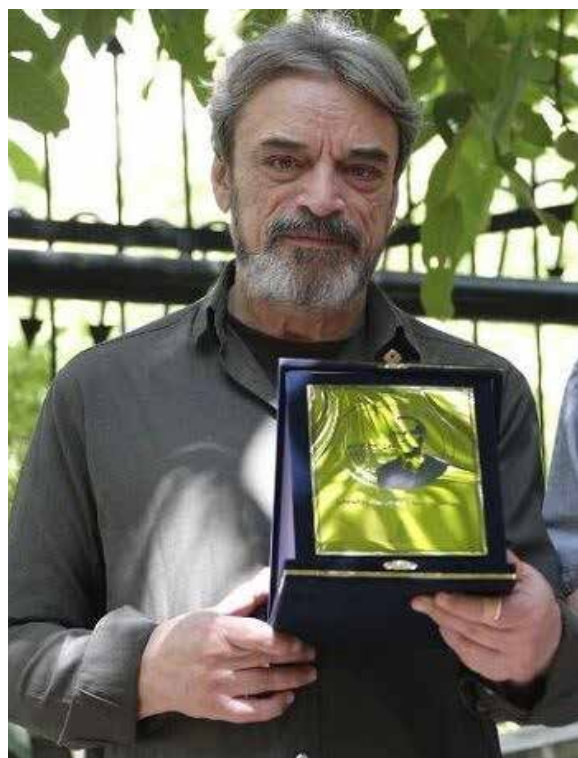
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First Vice President Mohammad Reza Aref (C) presents an award to a representative of Tehran Metro Operating Company during a ceremony in the Iranian capital on August 22, 2026.

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US puts regional allies at risk 'for the sake of Israel': *Speaker*

International Desk

Iran's Parliament Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf said on Saturday that Tehran has received "numerous messages" from neighboring countries about shaping new security arrangements and expanding economic cooperation in the region.

"The United States put the security of every single one of its allies at such risk through bullying and pure disregard for their interests for the sake of Israel that they briefly saw their entire existence on the line," Qalibaf said in a post on X. "A homegrown, independent order is what will actually deliver peace and security," he added.

The US and Israel launched wide-ranging strikes on Iran on February 28, sparking conflict across the Middle East region. Iran responded by attacking Israel and US military bases in the Persian Gulf Arab countries, and effectively closing the Strait of Hormuz, through which around 20% of the world's oil



Iran's Parliament Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf speaks during a meeting with Iranian and Iraqi businessmen at the Iranian Embassy in Baghdad, Iraq, on August 20, 2026.
● ICANA

and liquefied natural gas travels. The move sent oil prices soaring globally. Regional diplomatic efforts led to a peace agreement between Iran and the

US. The two sides signed the memorandum of understanding in Pakistan to end the cycle arising from the latest bout of unprovoked American-Israeli

aggression against Iran.

Under the understanding, Iran agreed to allow fee-free maritime transit through the strait for a period of 60 days.

In compliance with the MoU, the Islamic Republic devised a special maritime route for vessels to cross the chokepoint, warning vessels against using illegal routes.

The US has, however, been trying to escort transit through the strait along an illegal passageway, prompting the Islamic Republic to confront every instance of Washington-instigated transit through the chokepoint and shut the corridor until Washington ended its interference in regional maritime movement.

Tehran says any movement in the strategic chokepoint must be conducted under Iranian arrangements, as per the understanding.

The closure of the strait has affected the economies of the Persian Gulf Arab countries which heavily rely on the wa-

terway to export their crude oil and gas. Iranian parliament speaker, who was on a three-day visit to neighboring Iraq, also pointed to the economic problems caused by the aggression for the Iranian people and the region.

Addressing a group of Iranian and Iraqi businessmen on Thursday, Qalibaf said the US and Israel had concluded they could not defeat Iran and Iraq through direct military confrontation and had therefore shifted towards cognitive and economic warfare.

"The economy needs a foundation of security to take off, and if security is not established, capital will not come, so investment necessarily requires security," he said.

On Wednesday, US President Donald Trump announced what he called the "most crushing economic operation" against Iran, claiming that Tehran would face "economic warfare and isolation on an unprecedented scale". He also threatened sanctions against any country that does business with Iran.

Spox: US sanctions assertion of extraterritorial sovereignty over countries

International Desk

Iran's Foreign Ministry's spokesman Esmail Baqaei said on Friday that declaration of new sanctions by the United States on Iran is far more than continued unlawful "economic warfare" but it is an assertion of extraterritorial sovereignty over every independent country. "The United States' declaration of new economic sanctions on Iran is far more than continued unlawful 'economic warfare' against a single country. It is an assertion of extraterritorial sovereignty over every independent Member State of the United Nations," Baqaei said in a post on X.

"No State may lawfully compel foreign banks, enterprises, or airports - each subject to the exclusive jurisdiction of its own sovereign - to renounce lawful



Esmail Baqaei
● IRNA

commerce with a third State," he added. "Such secondary sanctions find no foundation in international law. They violate the principle of sovereign equality enshrined in Article 2(1) of the UN Charter and breach the customary prohibition on intervention affirmed by the International Court of Justice in the Nicaragua case. Economic

coercion designed to force a sovereign State to alter its lawful policy choices constitutes an outright internationally wrongful act."

The statement followed US President Donald Trump's announcement of new economic measures against Iran on Wednesday, accompanied by a warning that countries maintaining economic engagement with Tehran would face consequences.

Trump said on his Truth Social platform that he was announcing "the most crushing economic operation ever taken against any country!" He added that any country that allows its financial institutions, businesses, airports, or government entities to provide any type of lifeline to Iran will itself face tremendous economic consequences.

Ministry says production of military hardware tripled during US-Israeli aggression

National Desk

Iran's Defense Ministry spokesman said on Friday that production of some strategic defense products and war necessities increased by more than threefold during the 40-day US-Israeli aggression against the country.

Speaking in a televised special news program, Brigadier General Reza Talaei-Nik outlined the missions, position and role of the Defense Ministry and Armed Forces Logistics in shaping Iran's national and defense power.

Talaei-Nik stressed that the only way to confront foreign powers is to strengthen and enhance national power.

"One of the prominent features of our defense industry is the speed and capability to produce defense products. To the extent that weapons and ammunition are used on the battlefield, they are replaced at the same speed.

Talaei-Nik said the country's defense production had increased significantly over the past year, from July last year to July this year, particularly following the 12-day aggression by the US and Israel against Iran.

He further said the increase in defense production during the recent US-Israeli aggression had demonstrated the importance of sustainable production capacity within Iran's national ecosystem.

"Despite claims by US and Israeli officials, including [US President Donald] Trump and the Israeli prime minister [Benjamin Netanyahu], we achieved a twofold



● REUTERS

increase in the production of weapons, equipment and ammunition over the past year."

He added that production of some strategic and priority items required on the war fronts had increased by more than three times compared with production levels during the war.

Iran's Acting Defense Minister said the country has inflicted a "strategic defeat" on the US and Israel, stressing that Iran's defense industry had kept production lines operational during wartime and deployed new offensive and defensive systems on the battlefield.

Speaking on Saturday at a ceremony marking Iran's Defense Industry Day, attended by foreign military attachés based in Tehran, Brigadier General Seyyed Majid Ibn al-Reza said Iran's defense industry had strengthened the country's armed forces despite sanctions and other challenges.

Iranian Army's commander-in-chief also stressed that the country's defense capabilities strengthened its deterrence, forcing its enemies to change their calculations.

Rights official slams double standards in global response to terrorism

The deputy chief of Iran's Judiciary and secretary of the High Council for Human Rights condemned double standards in the international community's response to terrorism, saying the lives and rights of Iranian victims must be treated with the same importance as those of victims elsewhere in the world.

Speaking at a ceremony commemorating victims of terrorism on Saturday,

Nasser Seraj said thousands of Iranian citizens — including children, women, men and the elderly, as well as ordinary people, officials, scientists, military and law enforcement personnel, clerics, workers and students — have been killed in terrorist operations, Press TV reported.

Seraj said Iran has been a victim of terrorism for decades and has paid a heavy price as a result of

numerous attacks.

"If a terrorist attack occurs in a European country, it immediately becomes a global issue. But when the victim is Iranian, reactions are sometimes very limited," he said, adding that this is the double standard that must be addressed openly.

He stressed that human rights must be applied universally if they are genuinely universal, noting that the value of human

life should not depend on a person's nationality.

"An Iranian child, a Palestinian child, a European child, an African child and an Asian child are all children. An Iranian mother who loses her child experiences the same suffering as a mother anywhere else in the world," he added.

Addressing the issue of state terrorism and the responsibility of governments, Seraj said the international fight against terrorism should not focus solely on non-state groups.

Iran warns about captive pilots' health condition in Qatar, demands their release

International Desk

The head of the Missing-in-Action Search Committee of Iran's Armed Forces General Staff warned about the poor physical condition of Iranian pilots held in Qatar, urging the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to send an air ambulance to transfer them to Iran.

"The place where the captive pilots are being held on the water does not provide suitable conditions for maintaining their health," Brigadier General

Mohammad Bagherzadeh warned on Saturday.

Qatar must move the Iranian captives to land and transfer them to a fully equipped hospital as soon as possible, he said.

Bagherzadeh welcomed Qatar's decision to receive a team of Iranian experts and urged Doha to cooperate in speeding up efforts to address the captives' condition.

In a letter to ICRC President Mirjana Spoljaric on March 16, Bagherzadeh had already urged the organization to

investigate the pilots' fate and establish direct contact with them.

He identified the three pilots as Javad Salehi, Abdolmajid Dashtian and Emran Behrouzian, while confirming that Majid Kazemi, one of the four pilots involved, had been martyred and his remains returned to Iran.

According to Bagherzadeh, the three pilots were captured in Qatar during an air strike on an American base in the tiny Persian Gulf country days after the US and Israel launched a war of aggression against Iran in February.

Mohammad Ali Rajabi
Cartoonist

CARTOON



Government backs green development in industry

287 industrial units vied for top environmental honors

Economy Desk

Iran's First Vice President Mohammad Reza Aref said on Saturday that environmental considerations must be incorporated into all development plans, as 287 industrial and mining units, and services took part in the country's latest assessment of green industries, with 31 receiving the designation.

"Protecting the environment is the ethical and cultural component of every development plan," Aref said at the 25th National Conference on Green Industry, Mining and Services in Tehran. Aref described the assessment of 287 industrial units for their green practices as encouraging and called for efforts to strengthen the process.

He said the Islamic Republic had never taken a political approach to environmental issues, while saying that Western countries used environmental concerns to pursue monopolistic goals.

The vice president accused Western civilizations of wielding environmental regulations as a "club" to pressure emerging economies, arguing that developed nations had remained silent on carbon emissions and global warming

during their own industrialization over the past five decades.

Aref said Iran believed in green development and that environmental issues should be incorporated into development plans rather than treated as an optional annex.

Also speaking at the conference, Industry, Mining and Trade Minister Mohammad Atabak said industrial development and environmental protection were no longer competing priorities and that sustainable industrial development required a healthy environment.

"Environmental protection is not possible without an efficient, technology-driven and responsible industry," Atabak said.

"The criteria for industrial competition have also changed, and production quality is no longer measured only by the volume of output, the level of investment and access to markets. Water and energy consumption, waste management, production technology, emissions reductions and resource efficiency also directly affect the costs and competitiveness of businesses," he said.

"Green industry today is part of the economic logic of production and is no longer, as in the past,



Iran's First Vice President Mohammad Reza Aref addresses the 25th National Conference on Green Industry, Mining and Services in Tehran, Iran, on August 22, 2026.
● ERFAN KHOSHKHOO/ISNA

a decorative and ceremonial choice," Atabak said.

He said a national strategic document on industrial development and upgrading the country's value chains, approved by the government and issued last year, had incorporated environmental considerations, green industry development and energy efficiency into Iran's industrial policy.

The minister cited the recycling of some wastewater from industrial estates, expansion of the recycling industry and waste-man-

agement programs as examples of efforts to use resources more efficiently.

He said the selection of leading green industrial units could provide practical models for reducing resource consumption, improving efficiency and creating economic value through green solutions, adding that successful experiences should be measurable and transferable to other production units.

"The issue today is not choosing between industry and the envi-

ronment, but building a development model that puts both in the service of the country's progress," Atabak said.

The conference was attended by Aref, the head of Iran's Department of Environment, the industry minister and the government spokesman.

The Department of Environment said the assessment covered the performance of companies and industries over the previous two years. About 287 industrial and mining companies and work-

shops took part in the competition, following a process that began with companies' self-reporting and continued with assessments at the provincial and national levels.

Of the participants, 31 units were ultimately selected as green industries.

Saeed Mahmoudi, the department's deputy for human environment, said Iran had taken legislative steps to protect the environment but had not been successful enough in preserving it.

"We should have done better," Mahmoudi said, adding that environmental attention had focused largely on air pollution while other issues, including soil erosion, had not received sufficient attention.

Tehran Metro Operating Company was the only service-sector unit among the 287 participants and received one gold and two silver trophies at the conference.

Minister opens major chemical plant in Semnan industrial zone

Economy Desk

Iran inaugurated a plant producing adhesives and chemical products in the Semnan Industrial Town on Saturday in a ceremony attended by Minister of Science, Research and Technology Hossein Simaei Saraf.

The facility, located in the eastern Semnan industrial zone, has an annual production capacity of 15,000 metric tons of powdered tile adhesive, 5,700 tons of antifreeze, 260 tons of two-component epoxy adhesive, 3,250 tons of cyanoacrylate-based adhesive, 400 tons of polyurethane-based adhesive and 180 tons of silicone-based adhesive, according to Semnan Province's director-general of industry, mining and trade, Yadegar Ahmadi.

The plant also has an annual capacity to produce 1,100 tons of aluminum tube containers and 2,700 tons of adhesive liquid, according to IRNA.



Minister of Science, Research and Technology Hossein Simaei Saraf (c) inaugurates a plant producing adhesives and chemical products in Semnan Industrial Town, Iran, on August 22, 2026.
● IRNA

Ahmadi said the plant's products would be used to meet the needs of various industries, including construction, automotive and home appliances.

He said the plant was one of Iran's specialized producers of industrial adhesives and silicone, with output aimed at meeting part of domestic demand and entering export markets.

The plant is expected to consume 5,950 cubic meters of water, 900 kilowatts of electricity and 140,000 cubic

meters of gas annually. Its raw materials will be sourced from domestic and foreign suppliers.

During his one-day visit to northeastern Semnan province, Simaei Saraf also inaugurated two workshop projects at the Science and Technology Park and a geothermal heat pump system at Semnan University's Science and Technology Park. He also attended the launch and groundbreaking of several infrastructure, educational and economic projects.

Tehran stocks hit record high above 6m points

Economy Desk

Tehran's main stock index rose more than 126,000 points on Saturday, breaking above the 6-million-point mark for the first time as the market began the new week with a strong rally.

Thran's main stock index rose 1.83% on Saturday to close at 6,061,000 points, its highest level on record, as liquidity continued to flow into the stock market.

The benchmark index gained 126,447 points by midday, building on gains in recent trading sessions that have been accompanied by increased demand and significant inflows of liquidity into the stock market, according to ISNA.

The index had been steadily approaching the 6-million-point level in recent days and reached the 5.9- million-point range on Wednesday.

The broad-based rise was not limited to a handful of stocks, with increased demand across the market helping drive the index higher. By midday, about 293,785 trades had been recorded, while trading value ex-



ceeded 12 trillion rials.

Tehran stocks rank second globally in June returns

The strong performance follows a 20.4% monthly gain in Tehran's price index in June, which ranked the exchange second among 75 major stock markets worldwide, according to the World Federation of Exchanges.

Tehran's price index rose 20.4% from the previous month to 884,239 points in June, the federation's latest report showed.

Spain's Valencia Stock Exchange ranked first, with a 23.4% gain, while Indonesia ranked third

with a 19.1% increase.

Twenty-four major stock markets recorded declines in June, including US and some European and Arab markets. The Nasdaq fell 2.8% during the month, while the New York Stock Exchange index declined 1.1%.

Most Arab stock markets also fell. Saudi Arabia's index declined 2.5%, Abu Dhabi's fell 0.3%, Kuwait's dropped 1.2% and Jordan's Amman Stock Exchange declined 5.2%.

Hong Kong recorded the steepest decline in June, falling 10.9%, followed by Luxembourg, which fell 10.2%.

Iran pistachio exports to EU rise 6%

Economy Desk

Iran's pistachio exports to the European Union rose 6% in the first half of 2026 to €33.94 million, according to Eurostat data, while overall trade between Iran and the bloc fell 26% to €952 million.

Iran's pistachio exports to the EU totaled 31.85 million euros in the first half of 2025.

Shipments of shelled pistachios rose 8% to €33.6 million in January-June 2026 from 31 million euros a year ear-

lier, while exports of pistachios in shells fell 60% to 340,000 euros from 850,000 euros.

Germany remained the largest European market for Iranian pistachios, with imports of €24.38 million in the first half of 2026 – accounting for 70% of Iran's total pistachio exports to the EU. German imports of Iranian pistachios fell 3% year-on-year.

The United States was the EU's largest supplier overall, with pistachio exports rising 86% to €82 million. US

shelled-pistachio shipments to the bloc were roughly on par with Iran's, at about €34 million.

Iran-EU trade drops 26%

Total trade between Iran and the 27-member EU fell 26% year-on-year to €952 million in January-June 2026, from €1.287 billion in the same period of 2025, Eurostat data showed.

EU exports to Iran declined 26% to €754 million from €1.025 billion, while EU imports from Iran fell 24% to €198 million

from €262 million.

Germany was Iran's largest trading partner among EU members, accounting for 32% of total Iran-EU trade. Bilateral trade fell 36% to €304 million in the first half of 2026, with German exports to Iran dropping 41% to €212 million and German imports from Iran declining 18% to €92 million.

Trade between Iran and the EU fell 27% after the US-led military action against Iran in late February, reaching €574 million in March-June 2026, compared with



€786 million a year earlier, according to Eurostat.

Bilateral trade had already declined about 24% in the first two months of 2026, before the conflict, suggesting that tensions in the Strait of Hormuz did not significantly alter the downward trend. A significant share of Iran-Europe trade is conducted via road and air routes.

Iran's foreign policy throughout time

From Balance of Power to Pivot to East



By Arman Mahmoudian
Lecturer at the University of South Florida

OPINION

Since the late 18th century, Iranian foreign policy has gone through a series of evolutions, revolutions, and transformations. These changes were often dictated by historical circumstances, geopolitics, geography, and, perhaps most importantly, the pressure Iran faced from other powers.

During the Qajar era, from 1789 to 1925, the Iranian government found itself surrounded by major powers. Along its western border, Iran faced the Ottoman Empire. To the north, it confronted the Tsarist Russian Empire, while to the southeast it faced Britain and British India.

Iran faced growing pressure as Russia expanded southward into the Caucasus and Central Asia. Following a series of wars, Russia forced Iran to relinquish its claims to extensive territories in the South Caucasus, including areas that today form much of Azerbaijan, as well as territories connected to present-day Georgia. These losses were formalized through the treaties of Gulistan in 1813 and Turkmenchay in 1828. In response to these pressures, Iran adopted several different foreign-policy approaches in its effort to preserve its sovereignty and independence.

Balance-of-Power and Third-Power approaches

Iran initially adopted a "Balance-of-Power" approach. Iranian leaders sought British assistance in pushing back against Russian expansion. Britain viewed Iran mainly through the lens of protecting India and was unwilling to enter a major confrontation with Russia solely to defend Iranian interests. The problem, however, was that Iran did not possess sufficient strategic importance for Britain to risk war with Russia on its behalf. As a result, the support Iran hoped to receive never materialized, and the balance-of-power strategy failed to counter Russian pressure. Following this failure, Iran turned to a new foreign-policy approach: the "third power" policy. One of the earliest examples of the third-power policy was Iran's brief partnership with Napoleonic France. The Qajar government hoped that France would provide military support against Russia and help Iran recover its lost territories. In this context, the two countries signed the Treaty of Finckenstein in May 1807, formalizing the Franco-Persian alliance as a counterbalancing force primarily against Russia and Britain. However, this partnership did not last. When Napoleon reached an accommodation with Russia at Tilsit in July 1807, France effectively abandoned Iran. Following the failure of the third-power policy, Iran returned to the balance-of-power approach and turned toward Britain, hoping that British assistance would help contain Russian expansion. This effort, however, produced the same result as Britain remained unwilling to confront Russia on Iran's behalf. As Russia continued to expand

from the north, Britain increasingly sought to limit Iran's influence in the east, particularly in Afghanistan. British officials regarded Afghanistan, and Herat in particular, as a vital defensive buffer for British India. They therefore opposed Iranian attempts to bring Herat under their control, fearing that Russian expansion might enable Russia to extend its influence closer to India.

These tensions eventually contributed to the Anglo-Persian War of 1856–1857. After Iranian forces captured Herat, Britain declared war and launched attacks against Iranian positions in the Persian Gulf. Under the Treaty of Paris of 1857, Iran was forced to withdraw from Herat and formally abandon its claims to the city.

In response to the growing British threat, Iran turned to its former enemy, Russia, seeking to build a partnership that could serve as a counterbalance to Britain. This effort, however, produced few benefits and came at a considerable cost. Russia did little to help Iran restore its control over Herat, while exploiting Iran's dependence to extract extensive concessions.

One such concession came with the Treaty of Akhal in 1881. As Russia continued its expansion into Central Asia, it compelled Iran to accept a new frontier with the Russian Empire and relinquish its remaining claims to territories north of the border, particularly in areas located in what is now, Turkmenistan.

The Ottoman Empire also periodically competed with Iran over borderlands, tribal loyalties, religious influence, and the allegiance of Kurdish communities living along the frontier. Therefore, throughout much of the Qajar period, Iran faced pressure from several directions while lacking the military and economic capabilities required to resist these powers effectively.

To make the matters worse, by this stage, both Russia and Britain had established significant political and economic influence inside Iran. They sought commercial privileges, loans, monopolies, and concessions from the Qajar government. Iranian efforts to maneuver between Russia and Britain also created suspicion in both capitals. Rather than forming equal partnerships with Iran, Russia and Britain sought to extract concessions, expand their political and economic influence, and establish a stronger presence inside the country.

This process culminated in the Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907. Under the convention, Britain and Russia divided Iran into three spheres of influence: a Russian sphere in the north, a British sphere in the southeast, and a nominally neutral zone between them. Iran remained formally independent, but the agreement seriously undermined its sovereignty and was concluded without meaningful Iranian participation. As Iran faced simultaneous pressure from Russia and Britain, Iranian leaders experimented with alternative foreign-policy approaches. One of these was return to the "Third-Power" policy. The term "third power" did not refer to a minor or weak country. Rather, it meant an outside power other than Russia or Britain that



Iranians walk past a billboard depicting new Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Mojtaba Khamenei, as they gather to mark the 40th day since the martyrdom of his father, Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei, in Tehran on April 9, 2026.

could help Iran reduce its dependence on both. By the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Germany had become a major European power, while the United States was emerging as an increasingly influential power. Unlike Russia and Britain, however, neither had the same history of territorial expansion or direct imperial competition inside Iran. Under this approach, Iran sought relations with Germany, the United States, and other European powers that could counterbalance Russian and British influence. However, Iran's fundamental problem remained unchanged. Iran did not possess sufficient geopolitical or strategic importance for any third power to be willing to risk conflict or escalation with other major powers, such as Russia or Britain, on its behalf.

Positive- and Negative-Balance approaches

Having failed to secure meaningful support from a third power or to counterbalance the growing pressure from Russia and Britain, Iranian politicians became divided between two major schools of foreign-policy thought: "Positive

Balance" and "Negative Balance". These two approaches remained central to debates over Iran's foreign-policy strategy for years.

Positive Balance generally involved granting concessions or opportunities to competing powers in an effort to maintain an equilibrium between them. The assumption was that Iran could prevent one foreign power from becoming dominant by offering comparable benefits to its rival. Some Iranian political figures instead favored closer alignment with one particular power. Vosough od-Dowleh, for example, selected Britain as Iran's prospective partner and concluded the Anglo-Persian Agreement of 1919. The agreement would have given Britain extensive influence over the reorganization of Iran's military, administration, finances, transportation system, and infrastructure. Although Iran would have remained formally independent, opponents argued that the agreement would have effectively turned the country into a British protectorate or semi-dependent state.

The agreement was signed in August 1919, but it never received the required approval of the Majlis (Iranian parliament). Once its terms became widely known, it generated intense opposition. Iranian nationalists objected to the secretive nature of the negotiations, the extent of British influence envisioned by the agreement, and allegations that Iranian officials had received payments in connection



To make the matters worse, by this stage, both Russia and Britain had established significant political and economic influence inside Iran. They sought commercial privileges, loans, monopolies, and concessions from the Qajar government. Iranian efforts to maneuver between Russia and Britain also created suspicion in both capitals. This process culminated in the Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907. Under the convention, Britain and Russia divided Iran into three spheres of influence.

with it. As a result, the agreement was never implemented.

Other Iranian political figures advocated a policy of Negative Balance. This approach was associated with figures such as Hassan Modarres and later, most prominently, Mohammad Mosaddegh. Supporters of Negative Balance argued that Iran should refuse to grant major concessions to any foreign power. Rather than granting a concession to Russia to offset a British concession, or vice versa, Iran should reject comparable demands from both. Mosaddegh later made Negative Balance a central part of his political outlook, particularly in connection with the nationalization of the Iranian oil industry.

The difficulty with Negative Balance was not necessarily the principle itself, but Iran's weakness. This weakness was military, economic, and institutional. The Qajar state lacked the revenue and administrative capacity to maintain a modern army, while the central government often struggled to control provincial officials and tribal forces. Russia pursued territorial expansion, while Britain was less interested in annexing the remaining Iranian territories than in preventing Iran from regaining Herat. British officials feared that Russia could exploit its influence over a weak Iran, gain access to Herat, the gateway to Afghanistan, and threaten British India. Without sufficient domestic capabilities, Iran often struggled to enforce its independence even when its leaders refused foreign demands. Following the 1921 coup, Reza Khan gradually became the dominant political figure in Iran. He first served as minister of war and later as prime minister before becoming shah in December 1925 and ruled Iran until 1941.

Return of Third-Power approach

Reza Shah strongly pursued the third-power policy. Rather than relying exclusively on Britain or the Soviet Union, he sought to expand Iran's relations with powers such as Germany and the United States. His objective was to reduce Iran's dependence on its two traditional rivals and to obtain foreign expertise without allowing Britain or the Soviet Union to dominate the country.

Germany became particularly important to this strategy. German companies, engineers, technicians, and industrial experts played an important role in Iran's modernization projects. Germany was also attractive because it did not have the same history of territorial expansion and political interference in Iran as Britain and Russia.

However, Reza Shah's growing relationship with Germany created serious problems during the Second World War. Britain and the Soviet Union became increasingly concerned about the presence of German nationals and possible German influence inside Iran. Reza Shah declared neutrality, but he resisted Allied demands to expel German citizens.

In August 1941, Britain and the Soviet Union invaded Iran. The presence of Germans provided part of the political justification for the invasion, but it was not the only reason. The Allies, Britain



and the Soviet Union, also wanted to secure Iran's oil resources, protect transportation routes, and establish the Persian Corridor as a supply route to the Soviet Union. The invasion forced Reza Shah to abdicate in favor of his son, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. Therefore, Reza Shah's close relationship with Germany contributed to his fall, but the invasion should also be understood within the broader strategic context of the Second World War.

Positive-Nationalism approach

After Mohammad Reza Pahlavi came to power, Iran gradually adopted a new foreign-policy approach that he described as "positive nationalism". The young shah initially had limited authority, particularly during the Allied occupation of Iran. However, over time, and especially after the 1953 coup, Iran became increasingly aligned with the United States. Mohammad Reza Pahlavi argued that Iran should remain an independent and sovereign country and conduct its foreign policy according to its national interests. At the same time, he believed that, among the major powers, the United States was Iran's most natural and reliable partner. He maintained that the United States, unlike Britain and Russia, had no territorial ambitions toward Iran and occasionally presented Iran and the United States as countries that shared certain cultural and political values, including individualism and opposition to communism. This was the shah's own interpretation, even though Iran itself remained an authoritarian monarchy. Throughout much of his rule, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi maintained a close relationship with Washington. Iran became an important American ally in the Middle East and one of the largest purchasers of American military equipment. The shah used this relationship to modernize Iran's armed forces, strengthen the Iranian state, and expand Iran's regional influence. However, the shah's closeness to the United States also became one of the factors that turned parts of the Iranian population against him. His opponents increasingly portrayed him as dependent on Washington and argued that the United States exercised excessive influence over Iran's domestic and foreign policies. This criticism was particularly important among religious opposition groups and supporters of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. Nevertheless, the shah's relationship with the United States was only one cause of the growing opposition that contributed to the Islamic Revolution of 1979.

Neither-East nor-West approach

With the fall of the Pahlavi dynasty, Iranian-American relations deteriorated dramatically. One of the clearest examples was the seizure of the US Embassy in Tehran on November 4, 1979, by militant Iranian students. Ayatollah Khomeini subsequently endorsed the seizure, and the crisis became a defining moment in the breakdown of relations between the two countries. However, Ayatollah Khomeini's foreign-policy doctrine of "Neither East nor West" did not begin with the hostage crisis. It had already been one of the principal slogans of the revolutionary movement and became a foundational principle of the Islamic Republic. Ayatollah Khomeini believed that Iran neither needed nor should seek dependence on



Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian (L) and his Russian counterpart, Vladimir Putin, walk together during the BRICS summit in Kazan, Russia, on October 23, 2024. ● REUTERS

either of the two principal global powers, the Soviet Union or the United States. He regarded both as imperialistic, expansionist, and oppressive powers, although the Islamic Republic's hostility toward the United States was generally much greater. Under the doctrine of "Neither East nor West," Iran claimed that it would preserve its independence from both Cold War blocs. Instead of relying on the major powers, Ayatollah Khomeini argued that Iran should build relations with Muslim countries, revolutionary movements, and what he described as oppressed nations. In theory, the doctrine rejected dependence on both Washington and Moscow. In practice, however, Iranian foreign policy remained shaped by the country's security needs, regional circumstances, and changing relationships with the major powers. Nevertheless, "Neither East nor West" became one of the central principles through which the Islamic Republic presented its foreign policy after 1979. However, like other Iranian foreign-policy approaches, the "Neither East nor West" doctrine changed in response to shifting international circumstances and Iran's domestic political environment. In 1989, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, a strong opponent of Iranian dependence on either the Soviet Union or the United States, passed away. His successor, Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei, who was serving as president at the time, was selected as Iran's new Supreme Leader. Approximately two and a half years later, the Soviet Union — the "Red Empire" — collapsed. This event significantly transformed Iran's geopolitical environment. The emergence of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan created a belt of newly independent states between Iran and Russia. For the first time in modern history, the two countries no longer shared a direct land border. This territorial separation reduced Russia's image as an immediate threat. For nearly two centuries, Russia had expanded southward, seized Iranian territories, and pressured the Iranian government. After 1991, although Iran and Russia continued to compete in the Caucasus, Central Asia, and the Caspian Sea, Russia no longer posed the same direct territorial threat.

The transformation of Russia itself was also important. Unlike the Soviet Union, the Russian Federation was not a revolutionary communist regime. Both Ayatollah Khomeini and Ayatollah Khamenei rejected communism as an atheistic and materialistic ideology incompatible with Islam. Ayatollah Khomeini was particularly hostile toward the Soviet system, while Ayatollah Khamenei maintained the same ideological opposition but increasingly distinguished post-Soviet Russia from its communist predecessor. Soviet support for communist organizations such as the Tudeh Party, as well as its support for Iraq during much of the Iran-Iraq War, had contributed to Iranian distrust. The collapse of communism removed an important ideological source of tension between Tehran and Moscow. Russia's foreign policy was also changing. Some Russian leaders advocated integration with the West, while others argued that Russia should remain an independent great power. A third approach became associated with Yevgeny Primakov, who promoted a multipolar international order and closer relations with China, India, Iran, and other influential regional states. Iranian leaders welcomed this approach. They viewed multipolarity as an alternative to the American-dominated international system that emerged after the Cold War. From Tehran's perspective, post-Soviet Russia was not seeking global domination in the same way as the former Soviet Union, but instead was attempting to limit American influence by cooperating with other powers. Nevertheless, Iran did not immediately abandon "Neither East nor West". Under presidents Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani and Mohammad Khatami, Iran expanded relations with Russia and China while also seeking economic cooperation and improved relations with Europe. Later, under Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, as Iran's nuclear dispute with the United States and Europe intensified, Tehran accelerated the expansion of its relations with Eastern powers, including Russia, marking the full emergence of the "Pivot to the East" approach.

Pivot-to-the-East approach

Iranian leaders argued that "Neither East nor West" prohibited dependence on foreign powers, not cooperation with them. They also distinguished between the Soviet Union and the Russian Federation. Russia no longer shared a border with Iran, promoted communist revolution, or possessed the same capacity for global expansion. Closer relations



Iranian leaders argued that "Neither East nor West" prohibited dependence on foreign powers, not cooperation with them. They also distinguished between the Soviet Union and the Russian Federation. Russia no longer shared a border with Iran, promoted communist revolution, or possessed the same capacity for global expansion. Closer relations with Moscow were therefore presented as consistent with Iranian independence. They maintained that Iran could preserve its independence while using closer relations with Russia and China to counterbalance American pressure.

with Moscow were therefore presented as consistent with Iranian independence. Under the Pivot to the East, China became Iran's most important economic partner, purchasing Iranian oil and exporting manufactured goods to the country. India also played an economic role, although its relationship with Iran became increasingly limited by its growing ties with the United States. Russia, by contrast, primarily emerged as Iran's military, nuclear, and strategic partner. Iran needed to rebuild its armed forces after the Iran-Iraq War, while Russia became the Soviet Union's principal successor state and retained much of its military institutions, skilled personnel, design bureaus, and weapons-production capacity. Although the Soviet breakup left some important facilities in other former republics, the core of the arms industry remained in Russia, which increasingly needed foreign customers. Iran consequently purchased Russian aircraft, tanks, submarines, helicopters, missiles, and air-defense systems. Russia also completed the Bushehr nuclear power plant. However, the relationship was not a formal alliance and remained affected by mutual distrust. Russia sometimes delayed weapons transfers or limited cooperation under Western pressure. The partnership was therefore based less on trust than on shared interests, particularly an opposition to American influence. This cooperation became most visible in Syria. Iran supported Bashar al-Assad from the beginning of the Syrian war, while Russia directly intervened in September 2015. Russian aircraft provided air support to the Syrian forces, Iranian personnel, Hezbollah, and other Iran-backed groups operating on the ground. This marked the first sustained Iranian-Russian military campaign in a third country. The Pivot to the East became even more important after the United States withdrew from the nuclear agreement in 2018 and reimposed sanctions. It was further strengthened under president Ebrahim Raisi, whose government prioritized relations with neighboring countries and non-Western powers. In July 2023, Iran became a full member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation. Relations with Russia were further institutionalized through the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Treaty, signed in January 2025. The treaty expanded cooperation in security, defense, energy, transportation, trade, and technology, although it did not create a formal military alliance or a mutual-defense commitment. By 2025, the Pivot to the East had become one of the principal directions of Iranian foreign policy. It had produced extensive economic relations with China, military and nuclear cooperation with Russia, joint operations in Syria, and Iran's growing participation in non-Western institutions. However, the Pivot to the East did not formally replace "Neither East nor West". Instead, Iranian leaders reinterpreted the older doctrine. They maintained that Iran could preserve its independence while using closer relations with Russia and China to counterbalance American pressure. Whether this represented genuine independence or a growing reliance on Eastern powers remained an important question. If the primary objective of Iran's Pivot to the East was to counterbalance the West and reduce pressure imposed mainly by the United States, the policy failed to deter the Israeli attack of June 13,

2025, the subsequent US strikes of June 22, and the joint US-Israeli war launched on Iran on February 28, 2026. The renewed exchanges of fire in the Persian Gulf and the reinstatement of the American naval blockade in July 2026 have raised an important question: should the Pivot to the East be considered a failure? The fact that neither Russia nor China intervened militarily has strengthened this criticism. Both condemned the 2026 attacks and called for diplomacy, but neither attempted to alter the military balance in Iran's favor. Future direction of Iran's foreign policy Iran now has three broad options. The first is greater isolation and avoidance of major alignments. This is unlikely to work. Iran's military infrastructure has suffered considerable damage, while the country needs weapons, air-defense systems, investment, and access to international markets to recover from the war, sanctions, and the blockade. The second option is a major pivot toward the West. Iran could attempt to de-escalate tensions, reach agreements with Washington and European governments, and reduce its dependence on Russia and China. Although this might appear pragmatic, it would be politically difficult. A close relationship with the United States would challenge one of the central ideological foundations of the Islamic Republic and could be portrayed domestically as surrender after a destructive war. This option is even less likely under Leader Ayatollah Seyyed Mojtaba Khamenei. His father, Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei, and his wife were killed in the opening attack of the 2026 war, alongside several members of the wider family. This creates both a personal grievance and a political constraint. Even if he favored de-escalation, an opening toward Washington after a US-Israeli war that killed his father would carry significant costs among his political base. The third and most likely option is the continuation of the Pivot to the East. Its failure to deter an American attack does not necessarily mean that Iran will abandon it. The Pivot to the East was a foreign-policy orientation, not a formal alliance. Iran had no mutual-defense treaty with either Russia or China and may therefore have expected more from these relationships than Moscow or Beijing had promised. Iranian leaders also understand that Russia and China have interests extending beyond Iran. China depends heavily on international trade and maintains one of its most important economic relationships with the United States, despite the decline in bilateral trade during 2025. Russia, meanwhile, remains focused on Ukraine and its broader confrontation with the West. Iran is therefore unlikely to abandon the Pivot to the East. In fact, continuing hostility with the United States may encourage Tehran to deepen it. Iran still needs foreign investment, weapons, technology, and diplomatic support, while its confrontation with Washington remains unresolved. The more important question is whether Russia and China will reciprocate, or whether Iran will discover that its eastern partners value the relationship only when the political and military costs remain limited.

The article first appeared on E-International Relations.

FIVB Volleyball Boys' U17 World Championship:

Iran retains perfect run with Pakistan rout

Sports Desk

Iran claimed a second successive win at the FIVB Volleyball Boys' U17 World Championship by defeating Pakistan 3-0 (25-23, 25-22, 25-18) in Doha on Friday. Captain and opposite Sina Hazrati and outside hitter Arash Ashrafi spearheaded Iran with a game-high 16 points apiece. Ashrafi was particularly efficient in attack, converting 14 of 24 attempts, while Hazrati contributed 13 attacks, two blocks and an ace. Outside hitter Azhvan Namazi added 11 points as Iran, having beaten Algeria in straight sets in their Pool E opener on Wednesday, secured a place in the round of 16. Muhammad Waleed Khan led Pakistan with seven points, while captain Muhammad Irfan and Faizan Ullah scored six each. However, Iran's wider range of attacking options and blocking pressure allowed it to take control of the match and close it out in three sets. Tested through two competitive opening sets, Iran gradual-



ly found more opportunities in attack and at the net, turning a close contest into a more convincing finish in the third. The victory carried special

significance for the Iranian boys, as they avenged the two defeats suffered against Pakistan at last year's Asian U16 Championship. Pakistan

came out on top in four sets in the second-round pool phase before rallying from two sets down to stun the traditional Asian powerhouse in the final



Iranian players celebrate a point during a 3-0 victory over Pakistan at the FIVB Volleyball Boys' U17 World Championship in Doha, Qatar, on Aug. 21, 2026.
● VOLLEYBALL WORLD

in Nakhon Pathom, Thailand. "The game brought back some bitter memories for the Iranian team, and the players had been counting down the days to face Pakistan again and avenge the two defeats at the Asian championship," Sadeqiani said after the match.

"I can confidently say that we were playing against several age groups of the Pakistan national team at the same time today. Of course, everyone knows that this team uses older players," added the Iranian head coach. Sadeqiani identified attack as one of Pakistan's main strengths but said his players had neutralized it with solid defense.

"Attack was one of Pakistan's strengths, and our players managed to contain that strength with good defense. Overall, we

had a good game."

Next for Sadeqiani and his boys is a game against Chinese Taipei today at Aspire Ladies Hall, while Pakistan will face Algeria on Monday.

Elsewhere, defending champion France, Italy and Bulgaria also maintained their perfect runs on Friday, with 2024 silver medalist Argentina responding to its opening-day defeat by sweeping Mexico in straight sets.

Jaden Ebagne Yon and Noé Sognon shared the scoring lead with 15 points each as France made it two wins from two in Pool A with a 3-0 (25-11, 25-11, 25-11) victory over host Qatar. The identical set scores reflected France's consistency throughout the match, with its attack producing 37 points alongside nine blocks and three aces.

Italy, meanwhile, faced its first real setback in Doha after India snapped the championship-wide run of 12 consecutive straight-set matches by taking the second set. The champions, however, bounced back to win 3-1 (25-20, 18-25, 25-19, 25-18) in Pool B.

Asian Men's Youth Handball Championship:

Iran pulls off comeback victory over Saudi Arabia in opener

Sports Desk

Iran got off to a flyer at the Asian Men's Youth Handball Championship in Amman, Jordan, rallying from behind to defeat Saudi Arabia 28-20 in Group B on Friday. Iran trailed 12-10 at half-time despite putting in a solid performance in the opening period. However, the momentum shifted in the second half as Iran executed head coach Moham-

madreza Rajabi's game plan more effectively and produced a stronger all-round display to turn the match around and secure a convincing eight-goal victory. Ali Ghayour contributed a game-high six goals for Iran, with Arshia Javidifar and Mohammad-Taha Ebrahim Khanlari adding five apiece. Iran goalkeeper Mehrshad Mansouri was named Player of the Match after

a standout performance, with his saves playing a key role in the victory. With Asia's traditional powerhouses Qatar and Kuwait also in the group, Friday's victory gave Iran a massive boost in its bid for a top-four finish and a place in the quarterfinals. Iran will resume action against two-time champion Qatar, which defeated Kuwait 30-19 earlier on Friday, today before tak-

ing on Kuwait at Princess Sumaya Hall on Monday. The final round of the group fixtures will see Iran face Syria on Wednesday. The championship also serves 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.



● IRIHF

Toloukian named London Giants coach in English top-flight volleyball

Sports Desk

Iranian volleyball coach Alireza Toloukian has been appointed to the managerial role at English National Super League champion London Giants. Toloukian is currently with Iran's women's national team at the AVC Asian Championship, and will join up with his new club once his continental campaign concludes in Tianjin, China.

One of Iran's most experienced volleyball coaches, Toloukian has worked with both Iran's national and club teams. He has served as a coach and head coach at several Iranian Premier Volleyball League clubs and has also been part of the coaching staff of Iran's senior national

team. Toloukian's agreement with London Giants was finalized before Iran's national team traveled to China, with the move being officially an-

nounced after the Iranian women made a successful start to their Asian Championship cam-

paign. The appointment has drawn further attention to the prospect of an Iranian coach taking charge of the reigning English volleyball champions. Iran got off to a flying start to its campaign by coming from behind to beat Chinese Taipei 3-1 in its Pool A opener on Friday.

London Giants men's team rounded out a remarkable 2025/2026 season by winning the National Cup Final in April, adding the trophy to an already historic year for the club.

London Giants secured first place in the English National Super League regular season for the first time, before carrying that momentum into the Final Four, where they continued their strong campaign at the highest level of domestic competition.

The domestic triple marked an important step forward not only for the club, but also as a reflection of the rising standards and competitiveness of the sport across the country.

U20 Wrestling World Championships: Khateri bounces back to win consolation bronze in freestyle

Sports Desk

Iran's bid for a first freestyle team title in three years at the U20 Wrestling World Championships got off to a slow start in Bratislava, Slovakia, after Ahoura Khateri and Abolfazl Shamsipour failed to reach the final in their respective events. Khateri still managed to rebound and finish with a consolation bronze medal in the 61kg class, while Shamsipour crashed out in the 86kg division.

Outmuscled in a technical superiority defeat (15-4) by American Aaron Seidel in the first round, Khateri recovered by claiming three emphatic wins.

A silver medalist at the competition last year, Khateri defeated Azerbaijan's Jamal Abbasov 11-5 in his first repechage bout and then made quick work of home favorite Marian Kret, winning 10-0, before defeating Mexico's Moses Mendoza Garza 12-7 in a thrilling third-place contest. Seidel proved to be in a league

of his own, securing three more technical superiority wins to reach the final, where he followed up with a 7-0 triumph over Kazakhstan's Bekassyl Assambek for the top prize.

Russia's Zelimkhan Chaniev walked away with the other bronze medal, thanks to a 7-4 win over Itsuki Younashiro of Japan.

Asian U20 champion Shamsipour, meanwhile, got off to a strong start, defeating Estonian Nikolai Tarassov 12-0 and Swiss wrestler Nick Scherrer 11-0, but was undone by another American opponent, Aeoden Sinclair, losing 4-4 on criteria in the quarterfinals.

Shamsipour was given a second chance in repechage after Sinclair reached the final, but failed to seize it, suffering a 4-0 loss to Kazakhstan's Ashkhab Khajiev.

Sinclair went on to claim a second gold medal for the United States, which is chasing a third successive team title, by defeating Russia's Akhmad Mukutov in the final.



Iranian freestyle wrestler Ahoura Khateri (blue) is seen in action against American Aaron Seidel in the 61kg class at the U20 Wrestling World Championships in Bratislava, Slovakia, on Aug. 20, 2026.
● UJWW

Iranica Desk

Masouleh heritage officials have announced the continuation of specialized, conservation and preparatory measures to prepare the area covered by the “Cultural Landscape of Masouleh and Its Ancient Ironworking Sites” nomination dossier as the visit of a UNESCO evaluator to Gilan Province approaches. Rasoul Foroughi, director of the Masouleh Cultural Heritage Site and head of the Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Department of Fuman, said the dossier presents particular technical and operational challenges due to its broad geographical scope and the exceptional diversity of its historical, archaeological and cultural components, according to ctn.ir.

Located in the mountainous southwest of Gilan Province, Masouleh is one of northern Iran's best-known historic settlements. The town is renowned for its distinctive

stepped layout, in which the roofs and courtyards of lower buildings forming pathways and public spaces for the buildings above them. The settlement is built along a steep mountain slope, creating a close relationship between its traditional architecture and the surrounding natural landscape. UNESCO's Tentative List describes Masouleh as a historic settlement with a history of about 800 to 1,000 years. Foroughi said that, within this framework, organizing and preparing archaeological sites associated with the dossier, particularly the Ironworking sites, has been prioritized alongside efforts to maintain the overall quality of the Ma-



souleh cultural landscape. He noted that Masouleh's value is not limited to the historic fabric of the town, adding that the strong

connection between its stepped architecture, Hyrcanian ecosystem, historic routes, indigenous knowl-

dence of ancient Ironworking has shaped the unique identity of the cultural landscape. Therefore, he said, all components of the

dossier must be properly presented and made visible during the field evaluation. He added that, alongside specialized and conservation measures, efforts are also underway to improve environmental conditions, access routes, surrounding areas and visitor points so that the UNESCO evaluator can observe the historical, archaeological, cultural and landscape values of the site in a real, coherent and assessable setting. Emphasizing the decisive role of the people of Masouleh in safeguarding this valuable heritage, Foroughi said local community participation is a fundamental pillar of the sustainable protection of the Masouleh cultur-

al landscape. Efforts are being made to strengthen this cooperation and further activate community-based capacities for protecting, presenting and passing on the heritage values of the area. Masouleh was added to Iran's National Heritage List in 1975, while its historic city was placed on UNESCO's Tentative List in 2007. The current nomination expands the focus beyond the historic settlement itself to encompass the wider cultural landscape and associated Ironworking sites. Foroughi said the UNESCO evaluator will visit Gilan Province in October to inspect the area covered by the “Cultural Landscape of Masouleh and Its Ancient Ironworking Sites” dossier and conduct field assessments. He described the visit as a key stage in the World Heritage inscription process that could play an important role in introducing Masouleh's civilizational, cultural and natural potential to the world.

Gorgan Grand Mosque preserves legacy of Seljuk architecture



Iranica Desk

Among the alleys and passageways of Gorgan's historic district, the Grand (Jaame) Mosque stands as one of the city's most prominent monuments, with a history dating back to the Seljuk period. Located within the historic Na'lbandan Bazaar, the mosque has served not only as a place of worship but also as an important social center of the city over the centuries. Covering an area of about 1,000 square meters, Gorgan Grand Mosque features a central courtyard surrounded by four prayer halls. Two ivans, on the eastern and western sides, are also incorporated into the structure, placing the mosque among Iran's two-ivan mosques. Unlike many historic mosques in Iran, the building has no dome. Its pitched roof reflects the climatic conditions and architectural traditions of northern Iran. One of the mosque's most valuable features is its brick minaret, which rises above the mosque's southern entrance. The minaret can be regarded as the most distinctive surviving example of Seljuk architecture within the complex and has retained much of

its historic structure. A Kufic inscription and delicate brickwork decorate the minaret, adding to its historical and artistic significance. A platform for the muezzin was provided at the top, while part of the shaft was designed to allow light to enter the interior. Reaching the muezzin's platform requires climbing 47 spiral steps, beginning at the base of the minaret and continuing to its upper section. These details have made the minaret one of the most notable elements of Gorgan's historic architecture. Another valuable feature associated with Gorgan Grand Mosque is its historic wooden pulpit, which is now kept inside a glass enclosure for better protection. The eight-step pulpit is decorated with floral motifs, arabesques and other artistic ornamentation, while the names of the 12 Imams are inscribed on parts of it. Three inscriptions on the pulpit provide researchers with valuable information about the mosque's historical changes over different periods. The date 859 AH is also inscribed on part of the piece, while traces associated with the Timurid and Afsharid periods can be seen in its decoration. The mosque's western ivan

contains 19 historical inscriptions and stone tablets, many of which include royal decrees and endowment deeds. Beyond their artistic value, these documents reflect aspects of the social, economic and religious history of Estarabad, the former name of Gorgan. These features led to the mosque being listed as one of Iran's national heritage sites in 1932. Adjacent to the Grand Mosque is the historic Na'lbandan Bazaar, which was once one of the most important economic and social centers of Estarabad and continues to retain some of its traditional vitality. The architecture of Na'lbandan differs from that of many of Iran's better-known historic bazaars. Unlike the covered bazaars of central Iranian cities, Na'lbandan was built largely as an open-air marketplace, reflecting the climatic conditions of the region. Historically, the bazaar consisted of several commercial rows, with schools, caravanserais and various service facilities operating around it. The Sadat School and Haj Mohammad-Taqi Khan Hazare-Jaribi Caravanserai are among the buildings mentioned in sources discussing the historic structure of the area.

Kerman seeks to expand cultural, historical tourism

Iranica Desk

Kerman Province's extensive collection of historical, cultural, and civilizational heritage—including tangible and intangible assets, as well as sites inscribed on national and World Heritage lists—offers unique potential for developing cultural and historical tourism. According to an official, this could position the province as one of Iran's premier tourism destinations. Ali Saranjam, head of the Tourism Department of Kerman Province's Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Organization, emphasized Kerman's prominent standing in cultural and historical tourism, noting that this sector is among the most significant forms of tourism worldwide today.

traditional arts, handicrafts, music, cuisine, and indigenous ways of life. Referring to Kerman's World Heritage properties, Saranjam noted that the province holds a prominent place on Iran's cultural tourism map, thanks to valuable sites such as the historic city of Bam, the Cultural Landscape of Maymand, Shazdeh Garden in Mahan, the Lut Desert, its World Heritage qanats and Ganjali Khan and Chah-Kouran caravanserais. Alongside these World Heritage sites, hundreds of locations registered on Iran's National Heritage List—including historic urban fabrics and buildings, archaeological sites, museums, bazaars, castles, mosques, caravanserais, and architectural complexes—form a diverse chain of

tourism events and experiential activities. He noted that a major advantage of historical and cultural tourism is the distribution of economic benefits among local communities. Increased visitation to historical attractions can directly and indirectly generate economic opportunities for tour guides, ecolodges, handicraft producers, artists, local-product manufacturers, restaurants, shops, and other businesses across the tourism value chain. The official added that developing this type of tourism can also encourage the restoration, revitalization, and sustainable use of historic buildings and urban fabrics. With proper planning, each heritage site can become a tourism destination and economic asset without compromising its



He explained that cultural and historical tourism not only provides visitors with deep and lasting experiences but also contributes to heritage preservation and revitalization, strengthens the cultural identity of local communities, boosts related businesses, and creates sustainable employment. Saranjam added that the province's long civilizational history, vast geographical expanse, and cultural diversity have endowed it with a rich array of historical and cultural assets—from historic monuments and archaeological sites to rituals, customs,

cultural and historical attractions across the province, he said. Saranjam stressed the importance of intangible heritage in developing cultural tourism, pointing out that cultural heritage is not limited to historic buildings and archaeological sites. Rituals and ceremonies, traditional celebrations, local stories and narratives, traditional knowledge and skills, music and ritual arts, local cuisine, and traditional production and lifestyle practices are all vital components of Kerman's cultural identity. These, he said, can be introduced to visitors through

authenticity and cultural values through commercial exploitation. Saranjam stressed the need to move toward sustainable tourism, stating that cultural tourism planning must strike a balance between heritage conservation, the interests of local communities, and visitors' needs. Developing tourism infrastructure, educating local communities, improving service quality, providing professional interpretation, and strategically promoting attractions are among the requirements for making sustainable use of these resources.

Iran targets 2m tourists by 2028 as incentives rolled out for tourism investment

Arts & Culture Desk

Iran plans to attract two million foreign tourists a year and generate €6 billion in tourism revenue by 2028, while expanding private investment through new incentives and a major increase in state-backed financing, tourism minister said. Reza Salehi-Amiri said about 3,800 tourism projects were currently under way across Iran, all privately owned, with the government focused on policy-making, support, licensing and removing obstacles, IRNA reported in Saturday. He said the government had introduced five major incentives for the sector, including discounts of up to 80% on municipal fees for hotel construction, customs exemptions for importing hotel equipment, lower water, electricity and gas costs, and permitted for mixed-use hotel, residential and commercial complexes. "These incentives have led to a new wave of demand for tourism infrastructure development," Salehi-Amiri said.

According to the minister, bank financing for tourism projects has also surged 20-fold in 2024 to more than IRR500 trillion (\$270 million) this year. Iran will prioritize tourists from Central Asia and the Caucasus, followed by Persian Gulf Arab states and neighboring countries, major Muslim countries including Indonesia, Malaysia and Egypt, and then China and Russia. Europe, Australia and the US are ranked as a fifth-tier market. Salehi-Amiri said Chinese tourists were currently waiting for the regional security situation and war to ease before deciding whether to travel to Iran, while Russian tourism had also declined following the Russia-Ukraine war and regional conflicts. The minister said each foreign tourist spends an average of \$1,270 in Iran, calling tourism a major economic opportunity because its foreign currency earnings are distributed directly through the domestic economy.



Iran also receives about one million people a year for medical treatment, with hospital, treatment and surgery costs av-

eraging between one-third and one-fifth of regional prices and about one-tenth of European costs, he said.

Foreign tourists visit a historical mosque in Sari, northern Iran.
● IRNA

Salehi-Amiri called for collective efforts to reach out to the seven to nine million Iranians living abroad, saying they should be encouraged to visit relatives in Iran rather than traveling elsewhere. "We must reconcile with Iranians, invite them to their own home and put aside relationships that are full of ornamentation," he said. Iran has about one million historical sites, while 58 properties are on UNESCO's tentative list. It has 27 intangible cultural heritage entries and ranks fourth globally in that field, according to the minister. For handicrafts, Iran has set a 2028 target of €500 million in revenue, 100,000 jobs and 8% growth. Salehi-Amiri hoped that after the current conditions ease, tourism could open the way for cultural diplomacy and help present a real image of Iran.

Prominent composer Alizadeh receives Rouhollah Khaleqi trophy

Arts & Culture Desk

Iranian composer and musician Hossein Alizadeh has received the Master Rouhollah Khaleqi Trophy at the fourth Rouhollah Khaleqi National Composition Award, in a ceremony held at the home of veteran composer and conductor Farhad Fakhreddini in Tehran.

The ceremony, attended by musicians, members of the Khaleqi Iranian Instruments Orchestra and judges, was described by organizers as a symbol of "link between the experience of music masters and the capacity of the new generation," IRIB-NEWS reported on Saturday.

Alizadeh, a leading figure in Iranian composition, performance, education and the development of new approaches to Iranian music, was given the trophy in recognition of decades of artistic work, composition and teaching. The trophy is awarded each year to an influential Iranian music master. Previous recipients were Fakhreddini and composer Mohammadreza Fayyaz. Fakhreddini, who received the trophy in the previous edition, hosted this year's ceremony at his Tehran home. Members of the Khaleqi Iranian Instruments Or-



Iranian composer Hossein Alizadeh (L) poses for a photo with veteran conductor Farhad Fakhreddini as he holds a trophy during a ceremony in Tehran on August 22, 2026.
● IRIBNEWS

chestra performed at the event. The award, headed by Mohammadreza Azizi, was established to support young composers, identify emerging talent and open professional opportunities in Iranian music. Alongside its competition and research sections, the orchestra provides young musicians with opportunities for training, experience and collective performance. The composition jury comprises Shahrām Tavakoli, Pouya Saraei, Saeed Farajpour, Ali Akbar Ghorbani, Arash Gooran and Keivan Saket. The

research jury comprises Babak Khazraei, Hussein Meysami and Saraei. The award and orchestra were established in 2023 with support from the Journal of Art and Aesthetics Studies to preserve Khaleqi's musical legacy, support new creativity in Iranian composition and strengthen Iranian orchestral music. The official call for the fourth edition was issued in August, with entries accepted through khaleqiaward.ir until October 23. The ceremony also unveiled the official poster for the new edition.

Iranian short film 'Pasta Alfredo' to vie at India's Jagran Film Festival

Arts & Culture Desk

Iranian short film Pasta Alfredo, written and directed by Leila Noei and produced by Seyed Raham Rasouli, will compete at the 14th Jagran International Film Festival in India, adding another stop to its international festival run.

The festival opened in Delhi on August 20 and will close in Mumbai on November 1. Pasta Alfredo is scheduled to screen on the fourth day of the festival in Hall 2, ILNA reported on Saturday.

The film stars Mohana Seyed, Saeed Nejati, Sima Khan-Vakili, Barbod Farshidzadeh and Mohammadreza Ariansadr.

"Niloufar, a 14-year-old girl, tries to bring a moment of warmth to the cold atmosphere of her home by organizing a birthday party for her cat and cooking pasta," the film's synopsis says.

The Jagran selection comes after the film's appearance at several international festivals. It won Best Student Short Film at Albania's 13th Dea Open Air



Festival and was selected for the 16th Fenacies Festival in Uruguay, where it is due to compete as the only Iranian short film in the event's Student Competition. The film has also screened at Italy's 21st Diecimintuti Film Festival and 23rd CortiSonanti Film Festival, Russia's 33rd St. Anna International Film Festival, and the competition section of Kosovo's 14th FerFILM Festival. The latest selection adds to the film's international festival run.

Iranian researchers develop hydrogel for breast cancer treatment

Social Desk

Researchers at Iran's Arak University have developed a light-sensitive hydrogel that combines chemotherapy with photodynamic therapy and killed more than 80% of breast cancer cells in laboratory tests, while causing no significant damage to healthy cells. The drug-delivery system uses natural chitosan hydrogel as a biological base for two therapeutic agents: the anti-cancer drug methotrexate (MTX) and the light-sensitive compound perylene diimide (PDI), ISNA reported on Saturday. Researcher Farnaz Azadikhah said the system was designed to improve the effectiveness of breast cancer treatment while reducing the side effects associated with conventional chemotherapy. Methotrexate works by inhibiting

an enzyme involved in DNA synthesis, limiting the growth and reproduction of cancer cells. Its controlled release from the hydrogel is intended to maintain a therapeutic concentration around the tumor while reducing wider distribution through the body. PDI acts as a photosensitizer. When exposed to laser light at a suitable wavelength, it generates reactive oxygen species, particularly singlet oxygen, which can damage vital cell structures including DNA, proteins and lipids and drive cancer cells towards programmed cell death. Tests showed the system, using a low dose of methotrexate combined with laser irradiation, killed more than 80% of MDA-MB-231 breast cancer cells, while MCF-10A healthy cells showed no significant damage. "The combination of chemotherapy with photody-

namic therapy in a single platform increases treatment efficiency," Azadikhah said, adding that the two approaches target cancer cells through different mechanisms and could potentially work against some chemotherapy-resistant cells. The researchers said the system could also have potential for other cancers that respond to chemotherapy and photodynamic therapy. Its controlled drug release and the localized effect of the light treatment could cut down on damage to healthy tissue and reduce side effects such as nausea, vomiting, mouth sores and toxicity affecting the liver and kidneys. However, the researchers stressed that the findings remain at the laboratory stage and that further preclinical and clinical studies are needed before the treatment can be used in patients.