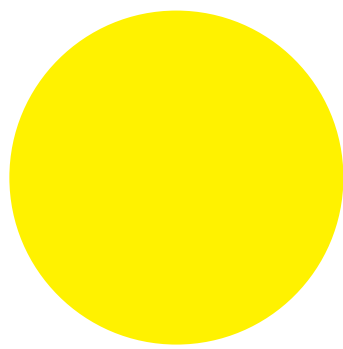


Heritage sites
at forefront
of protecting
cultural
identity



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Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian (L), accompanied by his Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi (C), is seen walking on the sidelines of a BRICS summit in New Delhi, India on September 13, 2026. president.ir

Iran's choice on trilateral defense pact Join, reject or rewrite the game?



By Hossein Kazemi
International affairs analyst

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

A new rumor has been circulating about the Mecca Pact between Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Pakistan, with the three countries re-

portedly inviting Iran to join the agreement. If Iran's possible responses are examined, three broad scenarios emerge. The first is that Iran joins the pact.

The three existing members have defined the agreement's objective as reducing regional tensions. None has a strategic conflict of interest with either Israel or the United States, which presents itself as the architect of the regional order, and neither Washington nor Tel Aviv appears opposed to the initiative. In practical terms, therefore, the pact would represent an emerging regional order whose strategic purposes broadly overlap with those of the US-led international order.

For Iran, which also claims a role in shaping the regional order, joining would mean entering an arrangement it did not design and which, in broad terms, is aligned with the regional order preferred by the United States and Israel. Unconditional membership would consequently force Iran to reconsider its broader strategy of shaping the regional order.

The pact's mutual-defense provision could even require changes in tactics, including Iran's support for Yemen. That, in turn, could undermine the legitimacy of the strategy of resistance and the narrative of a logical chain of steadfastness that has underpinned it so far.

The second scenario is that Iran refuses to join. Because the pact is presented at the point of signing as an instrument for reducing tensions and promoting peace, refusing to participate could leave Iran facing a diplomatic dead end. By rejecting an agreement defined in terms of peace and de-escalation, Iran could see its own identity as a country seeking peace and opposing tensions called into question. It could consequently be pushed toward greater isolation.

Ultimately, this scenario too could weaken Iran and the discourse of resistance. The important lesson for Iran's foreign policy is clear: without a foreign-policy plan of its own, Iran will be forced to operate within strategies designed by others. The result would be greater passivity in its foreign policy. Amid the ongoing hybrid war, combining geopolitical, security, military, economic and political dimensions, the development can also be viewed through the lens of the Western system and the roles assigned to countries within it.

Because of their geographical proximity and the growing difficulty of controlling regional tensions, the three countries have lacked the security and military options necessary to play a direct role in shaping the region's future order.

They have consequently been pushed toward political and diplomatic action at the regional level, assuming the role of actors operating within the emerging Western strategy.

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BRICS condemns attacks on civilian infrastructure, nuclear facilities

Pezeshkian calls for bloc's 'more active role' in defending members' sovereignty

International Desk

The BRICS group of emerging economies in a joint statement on Sunday condemned attacks on civilian infrastructure and nuclear sites as the United States continues its acts of aggression against Iran.

"We express serious concern over deliberate attacks on civilian infrastructure and peaceful nuclear facilities under full safeguards of the International Atomic Energy Agency [IAEA], in violation of international law and relevant resolutions of the IAEA," the joint statement said at the end of the 18th BRICS Summit in Indian capital, New Delhi. "Nuclear safeguards, safety and security must always be upheld, including in armed conflicts, to protect people and the environment from harm," the statement added.

It also expressed concern over the continued escalation of tensions in the region.

"We express deep concern over the continued escalation of tensions in Middle East/West Asia ... call for exercising maximum restraint, as well as avoiding actions that could further aggravate the situation."

The statement called for the protec-

tion of civilians, urged respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of states, and stressed the need to protect global trade, supply chains, energy flows and maritime security.

Addressing the summit, Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian called on BRICS to play a "more effective" role in defending national sovereignty and upholding the principle of non-use of force at the current critical time.

Consequences of war

Pezeshkian said that developments in West Asia, particularly the war of aggression waged by the United States and the Israeli regime against Iran, have demonstrated that the effects of targeting a country's economic, energy, and development infrastructure can, within a short period, extend beyond its borders and have regional and global repercussions.

"The people of Iran have paid a heavy price for these acts of aggression. Women and men, children and civilians have lost their lives, while infrastructure that had been built over decades to advance the country's development has been damaged. These events serve as a reminder of the international community's grave responsibility to pro-



Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian addresses the 18th BRICS Summit in Indian capital, New Delhi, on September 13, 2026.

● [president.ir](#)

tect civilians and prevent the normalization of attacks on civilian targets," he added.

"The people of Gaza and Lebanon continue to face the consequences of atrocities and genocide. It is impossible to speak of international law without an effective international response to military aggression, the killing of human beings, and the destruction of their lives. Therefore, BRICS should also play a more effective role in defending national sovereignty, territorial integrity, and upholding the principle of non-use of force."

Originally comprising Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, BRICS expanded in 2024 to include Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia, with Indonesia joining in 2025.

Additionally, Belarus, Bolivia, Kazakhstan, Cuba, Malaysia, Nigeria, Thailand, Uganda, Uzbekistan and Vietnam



became BRICS partner countries last year.

The bloc accounts for 45% of the world's population and generates more than 35% of its gross domestic product (GDP) as measured in purchasing power parity.

Economic resilience

Pezeshkian said that BRICS should build a shared capacity for the economic resilience of its member states through expanding trade in national

currencies and strengthening the New Development Bank, formerly referred to as the BRICS Development Bank.

He further emphasized that economic resilience cannot be sustained without security.

Excessive reliance on limited financial and trade systems leaves economies vulnerable to political shocks, the president said, noting that unilateral sanctions are not merely an economic issue as they directly affect food security and people's well-being.

Deal with Oman would not mean reopening of Hormuz: *Araghchi*

International Desk

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said that a possible agreement expected to be reached with Oman on the Strait of Hormuz does not mean the reopening of the strategic waterway.

Araghchi in an interview with Al-Araby Al-Jadeed said that Iran's condition for reopening the strait was the return of the United States to its commitments under the Islamabad memorandum of understanding. Iran and Oman are set to sign a deal on a joint shipping route through the Strait of Hormuz today, during a meeting attended by Persian Gulf Arab foreign ministers. Iran closed the energy chokepoint days after an American-Israeli aggression against the country on February 28.

In June, Tehran and Washington agreed on a



Abbas Araghchi
● [IRNA](#)

60-day reopening period as part of a Pakistan-mediated memorandum of understanding, but American violations forced Tehran to shut the waterway again.

Since the closure of the conduit, Iran and Oman, which sit on either side of the strait, have held several rounds of negotiations to regulate transit through the waterway. They have now reached an agreement

on arrangements for transit through the strait from which a fifth of the world's oil and gas is exported.

"We will provide the details of the agreement with Oman and the maps related to the new route to the participating countries," Araghchi said. The top diplomat also said Tehran believed responsibility for ensuring regional security and stability rested solely

with the countries of the region.

"We hope these talks will pave the way for future consultations on issues of concern to the countries of the region," he said.

Although the Strait of Hormuz remains the sole agenda item, Tehran believes that an increase in regional cooperation means that "the scope for interventions and imposed arrangements from outside the region will naturally decrease," the foreign minister added.

Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmaeil Baqaei on Saturday described the Oman meeting as a key step toward securing stability and security in the Persian Gulf.

He said the decision to hold the meeting is the result of a process shaped by major events over the past six months.

One killed, four injured after attack on commercial vessel off Qeshm Island

International Desk

An Iranian ship was struck in the Strait of Hormuz on Sunday, killing one person and injuring four others, local Iranian authorities said.

"A merchant vessel was struck around 5:00 am (0130 GMT) this morning off the coasts of Hengam and Qeshm islands. One person was killed and four others were injured," Qeshm city governor Amir Teymouri said, without specifying the origin of the strike.

Several explosions were reported overnight around Qeshm, the largest island in the strait.

The UK Maritime Trade Operations monitor said later it had received reports of a vessel being struck by an unknown projectile while transiting the Strait of Hormuz.

"A fire has broken out onboard the vessel following the reported attack. Local authorities are on the scene and assisting in evacuating crew members," it added without elaborating further on the attack.

Control over the strait has become a major flashpoint in the conflict between Iran and the United States in their six-month war.

In retaliation for attacks by the United States and Israel that started the war on February 28, Iran has blocked the waterway, a passage that was previously free and unobstructed before the conflict began.

Iran now requires vessels to obtain authorization to pass through the strait, citing security and sovereignty concerns, and is considering a mechanism to impose service fees.

Vessels that fail to comply are frequently targeted by Iranian strikes, while the United States sporadically bombs the Iranian coast in a bid to challenge Tehran's control of the strait.

In recent weeks, in violation of the Islamabad Memorandum of Understanding reached between the two countries to end the war, the US struck multiple locations in southern Iran, prompting Tehran to target US military facilities across the region.

Ansarullah hits Saudi base after airstrikes on Yemen

Yemen's Ansarullah resistance group on Sunday said its fighters used drones and missiles to attack a military base in southern Saudi Arabia as renewed fighting with Yemen's Saudi-backed forces forced growing numbers of civilians to flee.

The attack at the southern Sharurah base targeted "weapons depots and command and control centers that are managing the aggression against our nation and people", Ansarullah's military spokesman Yahya

Saree wrote on X. The date of the operation was not specified. Clashes have increased this week between the Ansarullah group and Yemeni's forces, which are backed by Riyadh, AFP reported.

On Saturday, the government forces said they had struck Ansarullah's fighters in the Red Sea city of Mocha, and later attacked other Ansarullah's positions in the southwestern part of the country. US news site Axios also reported that Saudi Crown

Prince Mohammed Bin Salman twice called US President Donald Trump to request strikes on the Ansarullah last week, but that the request was rejected.

The ongoing clashes follow a week-long Ansarullah's offensive that culminated in the group capturing the remainder of Yemen's Red Sea coast and several strategic islands, cementing their hold on the Bab al-Mandab Strait at the sea's southern entrance.

The waterway has become

an important artery for Saudi Arabian oil exports after Iran largely cut off shipments through the Persian Gulf with its blockade on the Strait of Hormuz at the start of the Middle East war.

The Ansarullah group has recently declared their own maritime blockade of Riyadh's Red Sea ports.

The Ansarullah said on Saturday evening that over the past 48 hours, "Saudi enemy aircraft conducted 129 airstrikes" on areas under their control.



Mohammad Ali Rajabi
Cartoonist

CARTOON



Power sector opens way for private electricity imports from neighbors

Economy Desk

Iran has opened the way for private companies to import electricity from neighboring countries to meet their energy needs, the spokesman for Iran's power industry said on Sunday.

"Private companies can use this route to secure the electricity they need," Mostafa Rajabi Mashhadi told reporters, according to IRNA.

Coordination has been completed for electricity imports from Iran's northern neighbors, and under existing contracts with Turkmenistan and Armenia, Iran imports about 320 megawatts from Turkmenistan, equivalent to roughly 2 billion kilowatt-hours a year, and about 300 to 350 megawatts from Armenia's grid, said Rajabi Mashhadi, who serves as deputy energy minister.

He described electricity imports as an important step toward meeting the country's energy needs. On electricity exports to Iraq and Iran's plans to serve as a regional energy transit hub, he said, "Due to restrictions imposed by sanctions, there are currently no electricity exports to Iraq."

"The Islamic Republic of Iran is fully prepared to resume cooperation if



IRNA

the restrictions arising from sanctions are lifted and, by using its transit capacity to access countries with surplus energy, play its role as a regional energy hub."

Iran also was in negotiations with Turkey to secure electricity imports for its petrochemical industry after power plants serving the sector were damaged during the recent US-Israeli war.

Rajabi Mashhadi was in Turkey in July for preliminary talks on importing up to 450 megawatts of power through the Khoynan transmission line, according to remarks he

made at the time.

The push for imports comes after power plants supplying electricity and steam to petrochemical complexes were targeted during the 40-day war that began in late February.

Some ancillary facilities were directly hit, and production units at multiple companies were struck and taken out of production, according to previous statements by industry officials.

Already under Western sanctions for decades, Iran was experiencing energy shortages before the attacks, a situation exacerbated by the con-

flict that began in late February and the peak of the summer heat season.

Rajabi Mashhadi said large companies and industries, particularly petrochemical producers, can use new mechanisms to secure the electricity they need directly through imports from neighboring countries.

He named Turkey, Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan as countries with which Iran has electricity supply contracts, adding that the approach would benefit industries while helping stabilize the country's power grid.

On Saturday, Rajabi

Mashhadi also said managing Iran's power grid, which serves 42 million subscribers, was a complex task and reported unprecedented progress in power-generation infrastructure, including more than fourfold growth in renewable energy capacity under President Masoud Pezeshkian's administration, which began in August 2024.

"The capacity of renewable power plants, which stood at 1,250 megawatts before the administration, has now reached 6,000 megawatts, representing growth of more than four times," he said.

"In the thermal power sector, an unprecedented record was also set this year, with 3,000 megawatts of new capacity, including 2,450 megawatts from steam units and 500 megawatts from other units, added to the grid."

Energy Minister Abbas Aliabadi said earlier this month that Iran's installed power-generation capacity had reached 102,000 megawatts, an 8% increase.

"The installed capacity of the country's power plants has risen from 93,388 megawatts at the beginning of the government to 102,000 megawatts, an 8% increase," he said.

ECONOMIC LENS

New energy rivalry: Shift from fuels to chains



By Mohammadreza Hosseini Aliabad
Researcher in int'l economics

OPINION
EXCLUSIVE

For decades, the world's energy editorials revolved around a simple question: will oil become expensive or cheap? Will OPEC cut production or raise it? But as 2026 approaches, these questions no longer explain the backbone of global energy developments. What is happening today is a deeper and quieter transformation: the world has moved from competition over "fuel" to competition over "chains."

The supply chain for critical minerals, the production chain for batteries and electrolyzers, the enrichment and nuclear fuel chain, and the transmission and storage chain for electricity. Any country that holds a key node in these chains retains the real trump card in the power equations of the twenty-first century.

The first sign of this shift can be seen in the struggle over critical minerals. Lithium, cobalt, nickel, graphite, and rare earth elements are no longer marginal commodities; they are key inputs for the energy transition. China, by dominating the refining of these materials—particularly in graphite and rare earth elements—effectively controls the gateway to the global battery industry. Europe and the United States, through legislation such as the Inflation Reduction Act and the Critical Raw Materials Act, are attempting to reduce this dependency, but building an alternative chain requires years and tens of billions of dollars in investment. The result is that, instead of competition over the price of oil, we are now witnessing competition over long-term lithium contracts and processing plants.

The second front is nuclear fuel. After the energy shock of 2022, many European countries that had once rapidly distanced themselves from nuclear energy have now returned to it. But this return comes with an important difference: Russia remains the world's largest provider of uranium enrichment services, and Europe and the United States are striving to rebuild their own enrichment capacity. At the same time, a new generation of small modular reactors has entered the scene—a technology that could shift the geography of electricity generation from gigantic power plants to cities and small factories. Competition over this technology is developing countries.

The third front is electricity itself. The world is rapidly electrifying: vehicles, heating, industries, and even artificial intelligence data centers. This growth in demand has turned transmission networks into a new bottleneck.

Submarine cables, cross-border transmission lines, and storage batteries now carry as much geopolitical significance as oil pipelines. A country that can supply stable and cheap electricity attracts energy-intensive industries to itself and moves up the global value chain.

The fourth transformation is the emergence of "energy as a weapon" in a new form. Oil and gas sanctions are no longer one-dimensional tools. Today, exports of solar panels, wind turbines, batteries, and even grid management software can be subject to restrictions. China, by dominating the production of clean energy equipment, has the capacity to regulate the pace of energy transition in other parts of the world.

In contrast, the United States and Europe are trying to strengthen domestic production through tariffs and subsidies. This techno-trade war raises the cost of energy transition in developing countries and deepens the North-South divide.

But perhaps the most important change is the change in actors. For half a century, OPEC and the International Energy Agency were the two main pillars of energy governance. Today, new actors have entered: technology companies that manufacture batteries and software, investment funds that invest in critical mines, and mineral-producing countries seeking a larger share of the value chain. Indonesia, with its ban on raw nickel exports, Chile, with the nationalization of part of its lithium, and Namibia, with restrictions on lithium exports, all demonstrate that the era of the "raw material exporter" is coming to an end. These countries want battery factories, not just mines.

In such a world, energy security no longer means possessing oil reserves; it means having diversity in the supply chain, refining capacity, battery technology, and a resilient electricity grid. A country that has only oil may, in the coming decade, be more vulnerable than a country that has graphite, lithium, and engineering capability. This shift is rewriting the map of global power.

Therefore, today's energy editorial should not focus solely on the price of a barrel and OPEC quotas. It must look at lithium mines in the Atacama Desert, battery factories in Shenzhen, enrichment centrifuges in Europe, and submarine cables in the Mediterranean. The world of energy has moved beyond competition over fuel and has arrived at competition over chains. Those who grasp this shift sooner will carry greater weight in tomorrow's equations. Those who remain in the oil paradigm may realize too late that the game has changed.

Iran's economic ties to Dubai hard to break despite war

Iranian merchants in Dubai's old markets say decades-old trade ties with southern Iran will survive after the United Arab Emirates suspended trade and financial ties with Tehran.

In the markets of old Dubai, saffron, cumin, pistachios and almonds from Iran still fill the stalls, as if the two shores of the Persian Gulf were not separated by war.

Last month, the UAE suspended trade and financial exchanges with Tehran, after it accused Iran of attacking UAE-linked vessels in the Persian Gulf.

But in old Dubai, where Iranian merchants are firmly established, they do not believe there will be a break in the ties forged over decades between the UAE's financial hub and southern Iran, AFP reported.

Since the start of the war, certain Iranian products have become scarcer, and others have seen their prices soar, says Morteza Asaadi, who runs the grocery store his father founded in 1963.

Most traditional foodstuffs, such as nuts or barberry – small red berries used in Persian cuisine – remain available, however.

"It's just coming. How? I don't know, but it's coming," he said.

Two wholesalers interviewed by AFP on condition of anonymity said they are still sourcing from Iran, notably via Omani ports.

"We can't export from the



AFP

Emirates anymore, but we can still bring in certain goods," one of them said.

In Yasser's saffron shop, the precious spice arrives by air from Mashhad, in northeastern Iran, thanks to the resumption of air links after a brief interruption.

Dubai's Iranian community

Dubai is home to a large Iranian community, estimated at several hundred thousand people, which has contributed to the emirate's commercial development and weathered the various periods of tension with Tehran.

After the US tightened its sanctions against the Islamic republic in 2012, "those in Dubai managed to convince their partners in Abu Dhabi that the trade, regardless of the sanctions, needed to continue because it was contributing

to the UAE economy," Mehran Haghiri of the London-based Bourse & Bazaar Foundation think tank told AFP.

In 2024, the UAE was the main entry point for goods into Iran, accounting for more than 30 percent of imports, worth \$21 billion.

It was also Iran's third-largest customer, absorbing nearly 12 percent of its exports, worth more than \$7 billion, according to the World Trade Organization.

Dubai is an important financial hub for Iranian businesses, with Washington accusing it of being a key node in financial networks used to circumvent sanctions.

As part of its policy of economic pressure on Iran, the US announced new measures at the end of August targeting Iran's trading partners, and sanctioned the director of the Dubai branch of Iran's Bank

Melli.

The institution nonetheless continues to welcome clients.

"We've been under sanctions for years," sighs an employee at one of two branches in Dubai.

'Priorities change'

Abu Dhabi's announcement of the suspension of relations with Iran will not necessarily cut informal flows or exchanges between private actors, which are deeply rooted on both sides of the Persian Gulf.

In the long run, a lasting rupture could even weigh on Dubai's economy.

"It's difficult to just suddenly cut it off and not have an impact, leave a huge chunk. That chunk cannot easily be replaced," he stressed.

But at a conference in Dubai, Emirati businessman and former senior official in the emirate, Nasser al-Shaikh, downplayed these concerns, claiming that Iran is "no longer as important to the emirate's economy as it was a few years ago."

"The relationship was mutually beneficial," he conceded, but "in times of war, priorities change... National security comes first".

In his shop in Bur Dubai, Asaadi is convinced that trade will survive the current crisis.

"You see the water there?" he said, gesturing at the Persian Gulf separating the UAE from the coasts of southern Iran.

"Water can break a mountain."

55 years of Iran-China relations

Test of a strategic partnership



By Sadeq Dehqan
Staff writer

INTERVIEW

To mark the anniversary of Iran-China diplomatic relations, Iran Daily conducted an exclusive interview with Mohammadreza Elhami, vice president of the Iran-China Friendship Association, about more than five decades of diplomatic relations between Tehran and Beijing, the two nations' seemingly divergent conceptions of strategic partnership, Beijing's conduct during the recent war, and the outlook for their bilateral relations.

Mohammadreza Elhami



Iran and China just celebrated the 55th anniversary of the establishment of formal diplomatic relations, a relationship that, over the last five decades, has expanded from political and economic cooperation to energy, trade, and regional affairs. Naturally, in recent years, this relationship with the eastern superpower has assumed greater significance for Tehran amid the intensification of Western sanctions. Nevertheless, alongside the depth of bilateral ties, questions persist regarding the extent to which the relationship's potential has been realized and, in particular, what "strategic partnership" means for the two sides. The recent Iran-US war also once again underscored the question of how far China is willing to incur costs for its relations with Iran at critical junctures and where it places its own interests above Tehran's expectations.

IRAN DAILY: Iran and China just celebrated the 55th anniversary of their diplomatic relations. So, this is an appropriate opportunity to assess the evolution of these ties. When did these formal relations begin, and what trajectory have they followed?

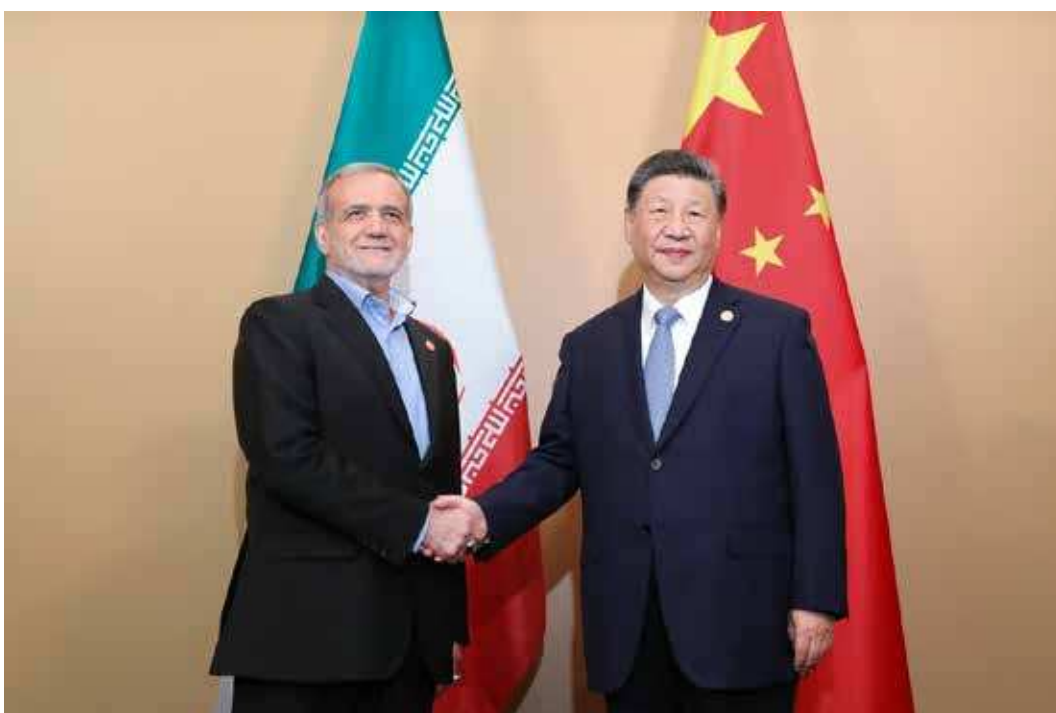
ELHAMI: If we are to examine the history of formal diplomatic relations between Iran and the People's Republic of China, we must identify 1971 as their point of inception. Formal diplomatic relations between the two countries were established that year, and they have continued to the present day.

Of course, contact between Iran and China has a far more extensive history and dates back to ancient times, but formal political relations between the two countries in the modern era commenced in 1971.

At that time, too, the establishment of Iran's relations with the People's Republic of China took place under particular international circumstances. The People's Republic of China had been established in 1949, but for years a substantial proportion of Western countries did not recognize it and regarded the Republic of China, based in Taiwan, as China's representative. Iran, too, belonged to the Western bloc and maintained close relations with the United States.

During the 1970s, China-US relations also entered a new phase. Nixon's visit to China, Henry Kissinger's diplomatic efforts, and the developments known as "ping-pong diplomacy" created the conditions for the normalization of relations between Beijing and Washington. Ping-pong diplomacy refers to the talks between the United States and China during the 1970s. At that time, the two countries still lacked formal diplomatic relations with one another and used the staging of a table-tennis tournament as a pretext for conducting negotiations. In such an environment, Iran also established formal diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China in 1971. Following the Islamic Revolution, relations between the two countries continued, and in 1981, the first ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran was dispatched to China. Therefore, if we consider the entirety of formal relations, we are now celebrating 55 years of diplomatic ties, and if we examine the period of the Islamic Republic, approximately 45 years of the two countries' formal relations have elapsed under the current establishments.

Over these 55 years, can Iran-China relations genuinely be considered a "strategic partnership"? In Iran, at least,



Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian (L) shakes hands with his Chinese counterpart, Xi Jinping, at the 16th BRICS Summit in Kazan, Russia, on October 23, 2024.

● AA

China is generally regarded as one of the country's strategic partners.

Here, we must distinguish between Iran's conception of "strategic partnership" and China's definition of the concept. China has never placed Iran in a position comparable to that of certain of its particular partners in the sense that we, in Iran, expect of a strategic partner. For example, China maintains relations with Pakistan that are exceptionally deep and strategic in certain domains, with extensive military, security, and economic cooperation between them. A comparable level of relations has not developed in the case of Iran.

The reason is also largely attributable to the divergence in the two countries' objectives and circumstances. Beginning in the late 1970s, China adopted a poli-

cy of reform and opening-up and gradually expanded its economic relations with the United States, Europe, and the wider world. During the same period, Iran's relations with the United States were severed following the 1979 Revolution, and Iran and the United States also became two of the most significant adversaries of one another.

Therefore, we cannot expect China, under circumstances in which it maintains extensive economic relations with the United States and Western countries, to act toward Iran in a manner that would place all those interests at risk.

So, should one of the principal reasons for China's caution be sought in its relationship with the United States?

Yes, that is one of the most im-

portant factors. Of course, China-US relations today are themselves characterized by highly serious competition, but the two countries nevertheless maintain extremely extensive economic relations.

While competing with the United States, China seeks to preserve its economic and strategic interests. It therefore does not want its relationship with Iran to assume a form that would eliminate all its capacity for engagement with the United States and Europe.

This issue assumes particular importance under sanctions. The Chinese government may maintain good political relations with Iran and even cooperate in certain areas, but many major Chinese companies are multinational corporations and possess extensive interests in global markets. These companies cannot



China has never placed Iran in a position comparable to that of certain of its particular partners in the sense that we, in Iran, expect of a strategic partner. The reason is also largely attributable to the divergence in the two countries' objectives and circumstances. We cannot expect China, under circumstances in which it maintains extensive economic relations with the United States and Western countries, to act toward Iran in a manner that would place all those interests at risk.



A woman holds up ping-pong paddles with images of then-US president Richard Nixon (L) and then-Chinese chairman Mao Zedong, in Dortmund, Germany, in 1971, to signify the historic thawing of relations between the two countries through "Ping Pong Diplomacy".

● AP



readily accept the risks associated with US sanctions.

For this reason, even during periods when the Iranian government has demonstrated a strong inclination to develop relations with China, we have encountered constraints in areas such as finance and investment.

Nevertheless, in recent years, particularly during the sanctions period, China has been one of the few countries that has continued purchasing Iranian oil. Should this action be regarded as China's strategic support for Iran?

The purchase of Iranian oil is, to some extent, an economic necessity for China and, to some extent, may be analyzed within the framework of assisting Iran in navigating the pressures of sanctions; ultimately, however, a reciprocal interest exists. China requires oil, and Iran requires a market for selling its oil. Therefore, this relationship cannot be construed solely as a political or supportive action on China's part. In many instances, China has sought to cooperate with Iran within the framework of its own interests, while simultaneously asking Tehran not to become embroiled in tensions with regional countries.

In this context, the recent Iran-US war was an important test for Tehran-Beijing relations. In your view, did China demonstrate the support that Iran expected from a strategic partner during this war?

If our criterion for strategic partnership is military support and direct involvement in security conflicts, my answer is no. China did not assume such a role toward Iran, and, fundamentally, expecting such a level of support from Beijing is unrealistic. China shares political positions with Iran on certain issues, including opposition to US hegemony and support for the emergence of a multipolar international order. This does not, however, mean that China will enter the field in every military conflict involving Iran or place its military capabilities and sensitive technologies at Iran's disposal. Again, for example, China maintains a different level of cooperation in its military relations with Pakistan and provides that country with advanced military equipment and technology. No such model exists in its relationship with Iran. We must therefore distinguish between political alignment on certain issues and a strategic and security alliance.

China simultaneously maintains extensive relations with Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and other Arab countries of the



After signing the 25-Year Comprehensive Cooperation Agreement in Tehran on March 27, 2021, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi (L) and his Iranian counterpart, Mohammad Javad Zarif, bump elbows to observe health protocols during the COVID-19 pandemic.

● REUTERS

Persian Gulf. Do these relations affect the nature of Beijing's engagement with Tehran?

Yes. China acts in pursuit of its own national interests, and this is entirely natural. Iran is important to China, but China does not formulate its Middle East policy solely on the basis of its relationship with Iran.

Beijing maintains important economic and strategic relations with Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and other countries in the region. China also purchases these countries' oil and attaches importance to their markets, investments, and infrastructure projects.

China's role in normalizing relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia also demonstrated that Beijing seeks to increase its influence in the region while maintaining ties with all major regional actors. China therefore does not want to choose between Iran and the Arab countries. Its policy is based more on equilibrium and the preservation of relations with all sides.

In Iran, expectations of China regarding issues such as war or regional affairs are sometimes higher than what we observe from it in practice. Should Iran revise its expectations of China?

In my view, yes. We must adopt a more realistic perspective on the relationship. China formulates its foreign policy on the basis of its own national interests. It does not pursue a hostile policy toward Iran and, unlike the United States, its approach is fundamentally not based on confrontation with Iran. This does not, howev-

er, mean that China will set aside its own interests to secure Iran's interests.

It is better to characterize China's policy as "cautious," rather than hostile. If China concludes that a deeper relationship with Iran serves its own national interests, it will certainly develop that relationship. If, however, it believes that a particular form of cooperation with Iran would result in the loss of more important interests in the United States, Europe, or the region, it will naturally exercise caution.

So, perhaps part of the problem stems from the fact that Iran and China have different expectations of the concept of strategic partnership?

Precisely. In Iran, when we speak of strategic partnership, we sometimes expect that this partnership should manifest itself across all domains, from the economy and investment to military and political affairs. From China's perspective, however, strategic partnership does not necessarily entail the acceptance of unlimited risk. China seeks cooperation that also generates economic and strategic benefits for itself.

For this reason, the 25-year comprehensive cooperation agreement between Iran and China, by itself, cannot transform the two countries into a strategic partnership in the sense expected by Iran. This agreement has considerable potential for cooperation, but a significant portion of it has not reached the implementation stage.

Why, despite the 25-year co-

operation agreement, have the objectives of this program and Chinese investment in Iran have not materialized in proportion to the expectations it generated?

Here, we must consider both Iran's problems and China's constraints. Within the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative, China has undertaken extremely large investments in various countries, from Central Asia and Pakistan to Arab countries. The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank was even established to finance infrastructure projects. Iran has not been able to utilize these capacities as it should have. China, for its part, has entered Iranian projects cautiously because of sanctions, financial difficulties, FATF, and its companies' concerns about US penalties. Therefore, the problem is not simply that China does not want to invest in Iran. Iran's economic environment must also be made conducive to foreign investment. As we have seen, during periods when Iran's relations with the West were more normalized, Chinese and European companies entered Iran with greater confidence, but following the reimposition of sanctions, many of them withdrew.

If that is the case, what must Iran do to transform its relationship with China into genuine, long-term economic cooperation?

In my view, the most important issue is that Iran must move away from a zigzag foreign policy. We should not incline excessively toward the East one day and excessively toward the West the

next. Specifically, by inclination toward the West, I mean periods such as the JCPOA, when we become inattentive to the East. The correct policy for Iran, in my opinion, is a form of positive equilibrium; that is, we should maintain economic cooperation with both the East and the West without relinquishing our political independence.

China is the world's second most powerful country and a country that has not had a fundamental or hostile conflict with Iran over the past several decades. China can therefore constitute one of the important pillars of Iran's foreign and economic relations, but we must not imagine that China is a substitute for the entire world. We must work with China while simultaneously developing our economic relations with Europe, regional countries, India, Japan, and other economic powers.

Could improved relations between Iran and the West, and even the resolution of hostility with the United States, really lead to stronger economic relations between Iran and China?

Yes. In fact, I believe this is one of the important points that must be taken into consideration in Iran. The more the pressure of sanctions is reduced and the more Iran is able to conduct normal economic activity within the framework of international regulations and mechanisms, the more easily Chinese companies will be able to work with Iran. Politically, China and Iran hold similar views on many issues, but the principal problem lies

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The 25-year comprehensive cooperation agreement has considerable potential for cooperation, but a significant portion of it has not reached the implementation stage. Within the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative, China has undertaken extremely large investments in various countries, from Central Asia and Pakistan to Arab countries. Iran has not been able to utilize these capacities as it should have. China, for its part, has entered Iranian projects cautiously because of sanctions, financial difficulties, FATF, and its companies' concerns about US penalties.

in the economic sphere. Chinese companies do not want to lose their major markets in the United States and Europe because of their activities in Iran. Therefore, the resolution of hostility and the reduction of sanctions could even create the conditions for greater investment and a larger presence of Chinese companies in Iran.

In this regard, what role could improved relations between Iran and regional countries and regional agreements — such as the joint defense agreement between Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and Turkey — play in Tehran-Beijing relations?

In my view, reducing tensions between Iran and regional countries could represent a highly important opportunity. China has consistently asked Iran not to become embroiled in tensions with regional countries and to improve its relations with them. China welcomed the normalization of relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia, and, in principle, the greater the stability in the region, the more favorable it is for China's economic and energy interests.

If Iran can normalize its relations with regional countries to a greater extent, this issue would not only pose no threat to its relationship with China but could also create the conditions for expanded Chinese cooperation with Iran. In fact, we must ensure that our relations with regional countries, and even the reduction of hostility with the United States, become an opportunity for developing economic relations with Beijing rather than a threat to our relationship with China.

Given that the span of diplomatic relations between the two countries has reached 55 years, if you were to offer one specific recommendation for the future of Iran-China relations, what would you say?

In my view, the most important issue is to move beyond the slogan of "strategic partnership" and toward mutual interests and practical cooperation. China is not Iran's enemy and does not pursue a hostile policy toward Iran, but China, like every other country, also pursues its own national interests first. If cooperation with Iran benefits China, Beijing will develop that cooperation.

Iran, for its part, must make its economic and legal environment more conducive to foreign investment, enhance regulatory stability, reduce banking and financial difficulties, and utilize China's capacities in areas such as infrastructure, technology, and investment.

Conversely, if China genuinely wishes to preserve and strengthen its position in Iran, it must go beyond a purely commercial relationship and the sale of goods and assume a more substantial presence in investment, technology transfer, industrial development, and the creation of productive capacity in Iran.

We must not view China merely as a market for selling oil or as a supplier of goods, and the Chinese must not regard Iran solely as a consumer market.

If the two countries can transform shared interests into reciprocal benefits and sustainable economic projects, Iran-China relations can then transcend the level of political and tactical relations and develop into a deeper and more durable relationship.



China's permanent representative to the United Nations Fu Cong (C) votes against an anti-Iran draft resolution on the Strait of Hormuz at the United Nations Security Council meeting in New York, on April 7, 2026.

● LIAO PAN/CHINA NEWS SERVICE

Aichi-Nagoya 2026 Asian Games:

Iran beats Jordan
to advance to
basketball quarterfinals

● aichi-nagoya2026.org

Sports Desk

Iran secured an 81-68 victory over Jordan on Sunday to progress to the last eight in the men's basketball event at the Aichi-Nagoya Asian Games.

Veteran Mohammad Jamshidi produced a game-high 30 points to help Iran overcome a physically demanding defensive display and maintain control at crucial stages of the game. It was Iran's second straight victory over the West Asian side, following a win when the two teams met in the FIBA World Cup Asian qualifiers in Amman in July.

The victory saw Iran finish atop the Group B standings with five points, equal with the Chinese Taipei, which defeated Qatar 91-69 later in the day to join Iran in the knockout stage.

Jordan put Iran's offense under considerable pressure, but Jamshidi stepped up when his team needed an offensive spark. The experienced guard combined calm decision-making with accurate shooting to repeatedly halt Jordan's attempts to swing the momentum.

The win followed Iran's earlier 72-69 victory over Chinese Taipei, in which

Jamshidi scored 18 points. Returning recently from injury, he showed considerable improvement against Jordan, exploiting gaps in the defense and making the most of isolation situations.

His mid-range shooting was particularly effective. Precise step-back moves allowed Jamshidi to create space against Jordan's defenders, and he repeatedly found the basket whenever the opponents threatened to narrow the gap. His ability to control the tempo helped Iran avoid rushing its possessions and remain composed under pressure. Jamshidi finished with two successful three-pointers and also contributed four assists, underlining his role in Iran's offensive organization. He posted an efficiency rating of 19 and remained influential beyond his scoring output.

His playmaking was highlighted late in the game when he delivered a spectacular no-look pass to set up Alireza Sharifi for a slam dunk, providing a fitting finish to one of Iran's most effective offensive sequences.

The victory will be particularly valuable for head coach Sotiris Manolopoulos,

who has now seen Jamshidi return to form at an important point in the campaign. The guard's ability to combine scoring with playmaking gives Iran another option when opponents succeed in disrupting its offensive rhythm.

While Jamshidi supplied the standout individual performance, Iran's success came from its ability to withstand Jordan's physical approach and respond whenever the game threatened to become a contest of momentum.

Matin Aqajani and Piter Girgoorian also made valuable contributions, chipping in 15 and 14 points, respectively, as Iran bounced back from its first-day setback against Qatar in style and remained in contention for a fifth basketball medal in six editions of the multi-sport event.

The victory offered further encouragement following Jamshidi's return from injury and gave Iran a reliable scoring outlet in a demanding game.

Iran will hope the win provides further momentum as the team advances to the quarterfinals and faces increasingly challenging opponents.

In-form Zahedi lighting up Malaysian football, chasing Asian glory

Sports Desk

When Shahab Zahedi made the surprising move to Malaysian side Johor Darul Ta'zim (JDT), few could have predicted the impact he would make. Yet, just eight games into his tenure, the Iranian forward has already racked up six goals and one assist, turning his goal-scoring exploits into a routine headline in Malaysian football. His performances have sparked both admiration and debate, with critics questioning whether his success is a product of a weaker league. Zahedi, however, remains unfazed, focusing instead on his ambitions in AFC Champions League Elite. Zahedi's transfer to Malaysia was as unexpected as his scoring streak has become predictable. The former Persepolis striker chose a league that some consider to be outside Asia's top tier, raising questions about his motivations. Yet, for Zahedi, the decision was deeply professional. "I

had several offers, even from Iran, but I preferred to continue abroad," he explains. "The club's structure, ambition, and investment in infrastructure convinced me. From the outside, people might see Malaysia and assume a lower level, but this club is different—professional, growing, and perhaps unattainable for many teams."

His choice appears vindicated. JDT sits atop the Malaysian league, and Zahedi's goal-scoring form has been nothing short of remarkable. "I have to be happy," he says. "My job is to score, and doing it consistently brings satisfaction to me, the fans, and the club. The key is to keep this momentum going."

Not everyone has been quick to praise Zahedi's achievements. Some critics point to the perceived lower quality of the Malaysian league as a factor behind his success, attempting to diminish his performances. Zahedi's response is measured but pointed: "I don't

know what to say to that. You've never seen me engage in controversy, and I'd rather stay silent and enjoy the journey. But if someone thinks that way, they're welcome to come here and try it themselves. Maybe they miss scoring and celebrating goals—perhaps they should come and experience it."

His words carry a quiet confidence, reflecting a player who has learned to let his football do the talking. With his focus firmly on the upcoming clash against Thailand's Buriram United in Asia's elite club competition, Zahedi is eager to translate his domestic form onto the continental stage. "We have a crucial match. Last season, the team performed well in Asia, reaching the quarter-finals before losing to Al-Ahli. Naturally, we expect to achieve something big again. But Buriram will be tough."

Zahedi speaks with palpable admiration for his new club's facilities and ambitions. "The club's

infrastructure is unmatched—on par with European teams. They're building a camp inspired by Real Madrid's, a comprehensive training complex for all age groups. The medical center is unlike anything in Asia, with consultants from Barcelona and Manchester City. The Sultan Ibrahim Stadium is modern and impressive, and the academy collaborates with Borussia Dortmund and Valencia."

"I've played in different leagues, but I love this club's vision. The investment in infrastructure and the future is something you don't see outside Malaysia. A team with a plan, a structure, and a place among Asia's elite last season—that's why I made a professional decision based on the project, not the country's name."

Zahedi's move to Malaysia has also raised questions about his chances of returning to the Iranian national team. Some worry that playing in a league perceived as weaker

could harm his prospects. Zahedi, however, remains pragmatic. "I played for Persepolis and in Japan's league, which no one could describe as weak. The national team has a strong staff that analyses performances based on various parameters. The most important thing a player can do is perform well. I can't control the coaching staff's decisions; I can only control my quality, goals, fitness, and performances in domestic and Asian competitions. If I continue this run and do well in the Champions League Elite, I've done my part. The rest isn't in my hands." Zahedi's final thoughts on JDT reveal a club driven by relentless ambition. "This team isn't satisfied with what it has built. From the outside, you see trophies, wins, and unbeaten runs. But inside, the message is always: 'Next step.' They talk about the future every day and have huge ambitions. We'll have to wait and see what they achieve."



● JDT



● Sadeq Samimi will represent Iran in the men's discus throw event at the Aichi-Nagoya 2026 Asian Games.
● IRNA

Sports Desk

The Athletics Federation of Iran has announced the names of the 11 athletes who will represent the country at the upcoming Aichi-Nagoya Asian Games.

"The track and field athletes were in training camps for more than 18 months and took part in several Grand Prix competitions, record-setting events within the camps,

international competitions in Belarus and the national championships in Shiraz. Ultimately, seven male and four female athletes were selected from among these competitors and will be sent to the Asian Games," Hashem Siami, vice president of the national governing body, told IRNA. Shot put duo Mohammad Reza Tayebi and Hassan Ajami will be joined by Ali Amirian (800 meters), Sadeq

Samimi (discus throw), Hossein Nouri (1,500 meters), Hassan Taftian (100 meters), and Benjamin Yousefi (100 and 200 meters) in the men's competition, which will kick off at Paloma Mizuho Stadium in Nagoya on September 23.

Meanwhile, Zahra Salehi (200 and 400 meters), Fatemeh Mohitizadeh (heptathlon), Reyhaneh Mobini (long jump), and Maryam Kazemi (triple jump) will look to secure Iran's maiden women's

athletics medal in the history of the multi-sport event.

Athletics has been one of the country's established medal-producing sports at the Asian Games, yielding 13 golds, 16 silvers and 10 bronzes across different editions. Ehsan Haddadi, the federation's chairman, tops Iran's list with four golds and one silver in the discus throw between the 2006 and 2022 Games.

Karaftu Cave could gain global recognition, boost tourism

Iranica Desk

Located in Divandarreh, Karaftu Cave is among the best-known attractions in Kurdistan Province, offering significant historical and natural value as well as considerable potential for tourism development. In recent years, efforts to protect the cave and its surroundings and pursue its inscription on the UNESCO World Heritage List have received increasing attention. Inscription on the UNESCO World Heritage List could help ensure better protection of Karaftu Cave while boosting tourism in the region. At the same time, alongside efforts to complete the global registration process, greater attention to tourism infrastructure and access routes to the cave is essential to fully capitalize on the site's potential. Against this backdrop, a group of cultural heritage advocates has launched a campaign calling for the cave to be inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List as a public demand. Jalal Safiari, one of the organizers of the campaign, told ISNA that the campaign was launched based on experiences from previous efforts related to drinking water in Sanandaj and opposition to construction projects within the Karaftu Cave's protected area. He said these experiences showed that protecting natural



● alibaba.ir

ply preventing destruction and that efforts must also be made to raise the status of such sites. According to Safiari, the group concluded that the global inscription of Karaftu could provide a way to ensure the site's permanent and scientific protection and transform it from a local attraction into a site of global significance. Referring to the collection of public signatures for the campaign, Safiari said the initiative seeks to demonstrate public demand to senior provincial officials and encourage them to pursue the issue more seriously. The greater the public participation, he added, the stronger the backing for the demand would be. Safiari also discussed the potential impact of global inscription



the designation should not be viewed merely as a title. Instead, it could help improve conservation practices, visitor management and the wider introduction of Karaftu to tourists.

Karaftu could move beyond being a local tourism destination and attract foreign visitors, researchers and those interested in natural and historical heritage. In such circumstances, tourism

be managed in line with the expected increase in visitors to ensure that tourism does not harm the site's preservation. The development of tourism at Karaftu could also create opportunities for local communities, ranging from jobs in tour guiding and tourism services to greater activity at accommodation facilities, handicraft businesses and local product markets. Safiari said that if tourism at Karaftu is developed properly, local residents could gain a greater share of the economic activities generated by visitors. He also pointed to the region's infrastructure, saying an increase in tourist numbers would not be possible without adequate infrastructure. Access routes, recreational facilities

and communications services should be developed in line with the site's tourism potential, he added. Referring to the condition of roads in the area, Safiari said the access routes to Karaftu require serious attention and that roads must not be allowed to become "killing grounds." He added that road safety should be addressed alongside tourism development so that increased traffic generated by visitors does not pose a threat to people's lives. The campaign organizer also believes that increased tourism at Karaftu could benefit areas beyond Divandarreh, with neighboring provinces and cities, including West Azarbaijan, East Azarbaijan, Zanjan, Bijar and Takab, also benefiting from a rise in tourist arrivals. Alongside the global inscription, the protection of Karaftu and its surroundings and the provision of appropriate infrastructure are issues that could play a decisive role in the site's tourism future. Safiari stressed the need for a development-oriented approach to Karaftu, saying the cave is more than a geological phenomenon and, with proper planning, could become an important tourism and economic asset for the province. The global inscription of Karaftu could ultimately serve as a starting point for greater attention to the site. Making full use of this potential, however, would require a range of simultaneous measures, from protecting and managing the site's surroundings to improving road safety, developing tourism services and creating opportunities for local communities to participate in the tourism economy.

Hashjin promotes diverse attractions for tourism development

Iranica Desk

Hashjin, a city in Khalkhal, has a variety of attractions to draw tourists, thanks to its pleasant climate and spectacular mountainous landscape. Located among the provinces of Gilan, Ardabil, Zanjan and East Azarbaijan, the city has also seen tourism projects implemented and others underway with private-sector investment. Hashjin is the center of Khorsh-e Rostam District in Khalkhal, in southern Ardabil Province. The city has a history of settlement dating back more than 6,000 years. It was established as a district in 1944 and remained part of East Azarbaijan Province until 1993, when it was incorporated into Ardabil Province. According to inscriptions, Sargon, king of Assyria, encountered a food-storage center called "Panizish" during his military campaign into the land of Urartu. He then moved his army toward the southern borders of Urartu in an attempt to capture it. Hashjin, located at an elevation of 650 meters along the banks of the rushing Qezel Ozan River and near Mount Aqdagh, which rises to 3,322 meters and is designated as a protected and no-hunting area, presents a remarkable panorama of natural, wildlife and mountainous attractions. Flower-covered slopes and summer highlands filled with fragrant thyme, pristine natural landscapes and refreshing springs, as well as the beautiful



forests around the villages of Now Deh, Ak-Suu and Chenarlaq, are among the colorful pages of Hashjin's scenic album. The city has numerous remarkable tourist attractions. The first is the Qezel Ozan River, which flows for 90 kilometers through Hashjin. The river lies near the borders of Zanjan, East Azarbaijan and Ardabil provinces, and fishing and boating festivals are held there every year. Qezel Ozan means "flowing gold." The name consists of two elements, "Qezel" and "Ozan." The river is somewhat reddish in color, which is believed to be why it became known as Qezel Ozan. Surrounded by beautiful scenery, the river can be included in the travel itineraries of tourists visiting the area. The Pir Taqi Bridge is another tourist attraction in the city, drawing thousands of visitors from across the country every year. Tourism development, according to experts, can play a greater role in strengthening the local tourism economy and improving the livelihoods of residents.



● IRNA



The suspension bridge is located near Pir Taqi village, 10 kilometers from Hashjin. It is 70 meters long and one meter wide and spans the ever-flowing Qezel Ozan River. Agriculture is also thriving in Hashjin, with extensive farmland and orchards. Some of the earliest seasonal fruits in Ardabil Province are harvested from villages and orchards along the Qezel Ozan River, including Nomehil and Mazraeh. These products include mulberries, pomegran-

ates, figs and apricots. The Pomegranate Festival is held annually in Nomehil Village in Hashjin and has gradually developed into a national event, attracting enthusiasts and visitors from different parts of the country. Yahya Najarqabel, deputy tourism chief of the Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Organization of Ardabil Province, said the festival is usually held in the fall, particularly in November.

He said the Nomehil Pomegranate Festival is held every year, with the sale of handicrafts and rural products alongside orchard produce, including pomegranates, among the main programs of the cultural and social event. He added that various cultural and artistic programs are also held during the festival and along the Qezel Ozan River, with one of its objectives being to create a sense of social vitality and excitement among tourists and, particularly, local residents. He continued that the tourism village of Nomehil is one of Ardabil Province's designated tourism areas. Holding the pomegranate festival there can help introduce the tourism potential of Khorsh Rostam District in Khalkhal. A winter festival is also held in Hashjin, highlighting the area's attractions during the cold season. Known as "Welcoming Spring," the event showcases the winter tourism potential of the region. According him, the event is held in cooperation with the Culture

and Islamic Guidance Department, the municipality, the district administration and public libraries. Various programs, including Nowruz recitations, traditional music and local rituals, are held during the festival. Yaser Ranaei, director of public relations at Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Organization of Ardabil Province, said Hashjin is among the province's successful cities in achieving the objectives of the winter festival. Aqdagh Mountain, designated as a protected and no-hunting area and a habitat for wildlife, is located within the Hashjin area. Covering more than 93,000 hectares, it boasts rich flora and fauna and contains a remarkable range of natural attractions that captivate visitors. Seven springs and rivers flow on the slopes of Aqdagh. The largest, Aq Bolagh Spring, has a flow rate of 500 liters of water. Numerous waterfalls are found throughout the Hashjin and are popular destinations for nature lovers and tourists. Hashjin's waterfalls attract many visitors during the summer. The most famous and scenic waterfall in the area is Nodeh Waterfall. The city's tourism attractions have, in themselves, helped turn Hashjin into a tourism hub in Ardabil Province. Visitors to the pleasant-climate city can not only enjoy its tourist attractions but also visit local handicraft outlets and purchase products such as Jajim (a traditional Iranian floor covering), hats, knitted socks and gloves, as well as fresh fruit from its picturesque orchards.



Heritage sites at forefront of protecting cultural identity

Arts & Culture Desk

Iran's Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Reza Salehi-Amiri on Sunday called for stronger national and world heritage sites across the country, describing them as the "front line" in safeguarding Iran's cultural identity and civilization. Speaking at a specialized meeting in Tehran on September 13 to review the challenges, capacities and executive structure of Iran's cultural heritage sites, Salehi-Amiri said reorganizing the network, strengthening its specialized workforce and preserving provincial authority were among the ministry's strategic priorities, CHTN reported.

National and world heritage sites

stand at the forefront of protecting the country's history, civilization and cultural identity, he said, stressing that their structural, scientific and operational reinforcement was vital to the sustainability of Iran's cultural heritage ecosystem. Salehi-Amiri called for a comprehensive reorganization of the sites and the creation of a more robust framework for their management and development. "Our fundamental mission at this stage is to comprehensively organize and structurally empower these sites while establishing a network of skilled and elite experts," he said. Such a network, he noted, would help ensure that conservation and research activities move forward

in line with the latest professional standards. Salehi-Amiri also highlighted the ministry's approach to balanced development and institutional decentralization, saying provincial cultural heritage departments should play a stronger role in managing and protecting the country's vast historical assets. "Our central policy is to strengthen the position of provincial general departments and avoid any weakening of executive structures at the provincial level," he said. The minister said empowering heritage institutions nationwide and reinforcing their specialized capacity would remain central to efforts to preserve Iran's rich cultural legacy for future generations.



CHTN

Vietnam eyes new chapter in cooperation with Iran

Arts & Culture Desk

Vietnam's ambassador to Iran said Saturday that the Southeast Asian nation is pursuing a new growth model centered on technology, innovation and strategic self-reliance while seeking to expand economic, scientific and cultural cooperation with Iran.

Speaking at a reception in Tehran marking the 81st anniversary of Vietnam's National Day, Ambassador Nguyen Luong Ngoc said Vietnam had transformed over eight decades from a country emerging from war and hardship into a dynamic economy valued at \$514 billion. His identity as Vietnam's ambassador to Iran was confirmed in recent reports by Vietnamese state media. Ngoc said Vietnam's gross domestic product grew 8.02% in 2025, while per capita GDP surpassed \$5,000. Total trade reached \$930 billion, foreign investment amounted to \$38.5 billion and the country welcomed more than 21 million foreign visitors. "Independence and self-reliance have remained fundamental



principles" throughout Vietnam's national defense and development, he said, referring to the Sept. 2, 1945, declaration of independence by President Ho Chi Minh. Vietnam now maintains trade relations with 230 countries and territories and diplomatic relations with 195 countries, Ngoc said. After four decades of economic reforms known as the Renovation process, the country has become increasingly integrated into the global economy. Vietnam is now moving toward a development model driven by science, technology, innovation and high-quality human resources, he said. The country is also pursuing institutional reforms, digital transformation, green growth and infrastructure development as it seeks

upper-middle-income status by 2030. Turning to the Middle East, Ngoc said Vietnam hoped the region would achieve "lasting peace and stability through negotiations and dialogue," based on respect for sovereignty, the United Nations Charter and international law. Vietnam and Iran established diplomatic relations on Aug. 4, 1973, and this year marks 53 years of ties between the two countries. Ngoc said Hanoi considers Iran an important partner in the Middle East and pointed to expanding political, economic and cultural exchanges. He also cited recent calls by Vietnamese and Iranian leaders to broaden cooperation. In July, Vietnamese General Secretary and President To Lam identified four

priorities for relations with Iran: enhancing political trust, promoting economic cooperation, making science and technology a new area for breakthroughs, and expanding cooperation in culture, education, training and tourism. Trade between the two countries rose from \$133 million in 2023 to \$170 million in 2025, according to the ambassador. Vietnam and Iran have complementary economic strengths, with Vietnam exporting products including rice, coffee, seafood, textiles and electronics, while Iran has strengths in industry, construction, pharmaceuticals, minerals and agricultural products. "There is considerable room for further cooperation between Vietnam and Iran," Ngoc said, citing science, technology, education, culture and people-to-people exchanges. The reception also featured performances of Vietnamese and Iranian music, bringing diplomats and guests together to celebrate Vietnam's National Day and the longstanding friendship between the two nations.

'Dark Moon' wins honors at four international film events

Arts & Culture Desk

Iranian short film 'Dark Moon' has collected three awards and an honorary diploma at four international film events in the United States and Europe, recognizing its producer, screenplay, lead performance and overall cinematic achievement, ILNA reported.

Produced by Mehdi Ansari pour, written by Masoumeh Rezaeizadeh and directed by Saeed Mo-joodi, the socially conscious short film has continued its international run with a series of honors for its creative team,



ILNA reported.

Ansari pour received the Best Producer award at the 10th Hollywood Gold Awards in the United States, while 'Dark Moon'

earned an honorary diploma for Best Film at the sixth Milan Gold Awards in Italy. Rezaeizadeh also won Best Actress at the seventh New York Movie Awards for her performance in the film. Her screenplay was named Best Screenplay at the 23rd Accolade Global Film Competition in the United States. 'Dark Moon' explores addiction and its social consequences through the experiences of children affected by the crisis. Inspired by real stories and events, the film takes a child-centered look at the human cost of addiction.

Iran's choice on ...

Their ultimate objective is to align their national interests with the transition in the regional order as the global order itself undergoes change, while securing a share of the distribution of power within the emerging system. So what is Iran's way forward? Should it join or stay out? In either case, the strategy of resistance risks disruption. Under the current circumstances, Iran could choose to play by the rules of Chinese Go and step out of the game for a round, leaving the request unanswered. But given the existing conditions, such an approach would amount to even greater passivity on Iran's part. Alternatively, like turning the board over in a game of Ludo, Iran could attempt to create an agreement of its own. Yet given the current circumstances, including the conditions surrounding oil sales, Western pressure on Iraq and the failure to recognize Yemen's Ansarullah as a government, such an option is not realistically available to the two actors supporting Iran's strategy of shaping the regional order. There is, however, another possibility. Iran could put forward a pro-

posal that would strategically redesign the objectives of the Mecca Pact. It could argue that Iranian membership would contribute to reducing tensions across the region and consolidating security and stability. At the same time, Iran could use membership as diplomatic leverage by making its participation conditional on the simultaneous inclusion of Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and Egypt. Such a move could foil the attempt to use the Mecca Pact to create a diplomatic dead end for Iran and undermine the legitimacy of the resistance. At the same time, it could turn a potential crisis into an opportunity for regional action in response to the Abraham Accords. This would allow Iran to demonstrate and consolidate its regional power while moving toward a model of power distribution it considers desirable. In this way, Iran could pursue de-escalation while retaining its position as a regional actor capable of helping shape the emerging order. China could also be brought into the equation as a super-power operating at a higher level of the international order. Its involvement could help balance power in the global sys-

tem vis-à-vis the United States, with corresponding effects on the regional order, and could strengthen the durability of the order taking shape in the region. The proposed inclusion of Syria and Egypt could create further diplomatic leverage. Syria's inclusion could provide a bargaining chip for securing formal regional recognition of Syria under the government of Ahmed al-Sharaa. It could also create an opening for relations and allow Syria's geopolitical potential to be used to strengthen the resistance. In Egypt's case, the proposal could, for the first time since Iran's 1979 Islamic Revolution, create the basis for establishing a diplomatic partnership with Cairo and taking bilateral relations to a new level. The same approach could also help shape the foreign policy of the Lebanese government in a direction supportive of the resistance. If the three existing members accepted such a proposal, the Mecca Pact would have to be strategically recalibrated in line with its revised objectives. If they rejected it, the three countries themselves would be placed in a position of diplomatic passivity.

173 foreign films reviewed for children's festival

Arts & Culture Desk

The international selection committee of the 38th International Film Festival for Children and Youth has reviewed 173 foreign entries and selected 17 films from 14 countries to compete in the festival's international section in Isfahan, organizers announced. The submissions included feature films, animations and short films from across Asia, Europe and the Americas, reflecting broad international interest in one of Iran's leading cinema events



for young audiences, ILNA reported. Following the review process, the committee selected eight feature films and animated works, along with nine short

films. The titles will be announced shortly before the festival opens. The international lineup comes after the festival drew a record 771 entries for its national section, marking unprecedented participation across its previous editions. The 38th International Film Festival for Children and Youth will be held in the historic central city of Isfahan with the participation of the Farabi Cinema Foundation and Isfahan Municipality. Hamed Jafari will serve as the festival's secretary.