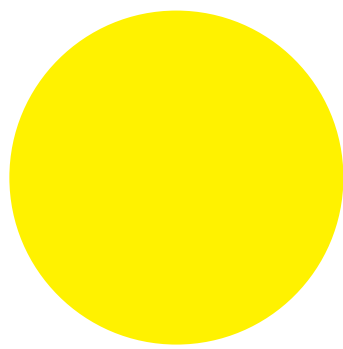


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Economic diplomacy: a door that remains open



By Asgar Ghahramanpour
Editor-in-chief

OPINION

In international politics, even under the most difficult and complex circumstances, the door to diplomacy is never completely closed. Relations among states do not move solely along the axis of confrontation and conflict. Alongside geopolitical rivalries, there are always avenues for dialogue, cooperation, negotiation, and the pursuit of shared interests. This is precisely where the art of foreign policy lies: identifying opportunities to turn constraints and disagreements into avenues for cooperation and the advancement of national interests.

From this perspective, Iran's participation in the 2026 BRICS summit in New Delhi should not be viewed merely as a political or ceremonial exercise. BRICS has emerged as one of the most important platforms for an expanding form of multilateralism in the international system. Its members include major economic and political powers, creating significant potential for trade, investment, financing, and economic cooperation. For Iran, BRICS can also provide an opportunity to expand economic relations and reduce vulnerability to external pressures—provided that membership goes beyond political statements and is translated into a practical and sustained strategy.

The government of President Masoud Pezeshkian should recognize that the significance of BRICS for Iran lies less in membership itself than in the opportunities that membership can create. Iran's economy needs new markets, foreign investment, access to technology, alternative trade routes, and more diverse financial mechanisms. BRICS can be one avenue toward achieving these objectives. But realizing its potential requires active, professional, and strategically focused economic diplomacy.

Iran possesses considerable economic advantages: a strategically important geographic location, vast energy resources, a large domestic market, substantial industrial and agricultural capacity, and a position at the crossroads of Central Asia, the Caucasus, the Persian Gulf, and the Indian subcontinent. The central question is why so much of this potential has yet to be translated into economic power and tangible opportunities for the Iranian people. Part of the answer lies in the weak connection between foreign policy and economic strategy.

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Yemen's Ansarullah targets Saudi military bases in retaliation for airstrikes

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The satellite image shows a view of a pumping station along the general route of Saudi Arabia's East-West pipeline in Al-Mesabaah, southeast of Medina, on September 13, 2026, following an attack on September 11.

AFP



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Pezeshkian says unity key to resisting 'US bullying'



International Desk

President Masoud Pezeshkian said on Monday national unity and cohesion are the key to standing up to "US bullying", arguing that Iran would never bow to Washington as long as the country maintains solidarity and cooperation.

"If there are empathy and synergy in the country and we can preserve unity and cohesion, we will never bow our heads before America," Pezeshkian said at a meeting with a group of retirees, IRNA reported.



Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian speaks during a meeting with a group of retirees in Tehran, Iran, on September 14, 2026.

● president.ir

Referring to the crimes committed by the United States and Israel against the Iranian people during their acts of aggression, Pezeshkian said those claiming to defend human rights and humanity are using their tools and technology to kill children and innocent people.

"The reality is that they are bullying and, by creating problems and restrictions, they are seeking social collapse [in Iran]," he said, adding that, the US has blocked the ways and is seeking to create divisions in the country.

The US has imposed two blockades on Iranian ports after Tehran closed the Strait of Hormuz in response to the US-Israeli aggression against Iran in February. The second blockade which is ongoing, has hampered Iran's

imports.

"Although the United States has blocked maritime routes, our level of engagement with other friendly and neighboring countries has increased through land routes", Pezeshkian said.

The Iranian president blasted the US and Israel for using their technological capabilities to carry out targeted killings, saying they had created a "terrorist state" and killed anyone they wanted.

He also referred to the situation in Gaza, saying innocent people there were being labelled terrorists despite lacking even basic access to water and food.

"In Gaza, they call the innocent people of that region terrorists, while they do not even have water and food to consume," he said.

Tehran raps Vienna's barring of nuclear chief from IAEA meet as 'serious violation'

International Desk

Iran on Monday protested a decision by the Australian government to prevent head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) Mohammad Eslami from attending the International Atomic Energy Agency's General Conference under US pressure, calling it a "serious violation" of a member state's rights.

Addressing the event, Iran's Ambassador and Permanent Representative to International Organizations in Vienna Reza Najafi rejected any characterization of the move as a minor administrative matter or human error, IRNA reported.

"This is [rather] a serious violation of our country's rights as a member of this agency," he said.

Najafi said preventing the move violated the principle of sovereign equality enshrined in Article IV, Paragraph C of the IAEA Statute. He said the principle guarantees equal rights for all members and their enjoyment of the benefits of membership.

The envoy added that the ban also undermined Iran's right to participate in the General Conference through a representative of its own choosing and weakened the privileges required for representatives to perform their duties under the IAEA Statute and the Agreement on the Privileges and Immunities of the IAEA.

Equal representation and participation



Head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran Mohammad Eslami is pictured in a plane as he departed Tehran for Vienna to take part in the International Atomic Energy Agency's General Conference on September 12, 2026.

● IRNA

are treaty-based membership rights that "cannot and must not be undermined," he said.

Najafi further described the act as a violation of Austria's obligations as host country under the IAEA Headquarters Agreement between Austria and the Agency.

He said the agreement requires Austria to take all necessary measures to facilitate the entry of representatives of member states into Austrian territory and issue their visas as promptly as possible. The obligation, he stressed, is binding and unconditional for representatives holding valid credentials.

Najafi warned that preventing the head of a delegation from attending the agency's highest policy-making body undermined the conference itself, stressing that anything short of corrective action would set a dangerous precedent for all IAEA members. US Energy Secretary Chris Wright confirmed to reporters that Washington had applied pressure to stop Moham-

mad Eslami from entering Austria, saying "he's a sanctioned individual and we don't want sanctioned individuals evading their sanctions".

Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baqaei described the Australia's move as "absolutely unjustified".

"They should have issued visas for the Iranian delegation in accordance with their obligations. We expressed our protest explicitly to the Austrian government and their chargé d'affaires was summoned to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs".

The violation followed adoption of an anti-Iran resolution by the IAEA's Board of Governors, which has faulted the Islamic Republic's refusal to provide access to the nuclear sites attacked during American-Israeli aggression.

Tehran has asserted that continued American aggression against the country has made effective IAEA inspections of the nuclear sites impossible, adding, however, that it has demonstrated a continued commitment to constructive manner and good-faith engagement with the agency.

Yemen's Ansarullah targets Saudi military bases in retaliation for airstrikes

International Desk

Yemen's Ansarullah resistance group launched a fresh barrage of missile and drone attacks on Saudi military targets on Monday.

The group, fighting the Saudi-backed government, last week seized control of Yemen's Red Sea coast and the Bab al-Mandab Strait, which has become vital as the wider US-Iran war chokes the Strait of Hormuz.

The Ansarullah said they fired dozens of drones and missiles at the kingdom, prompting the Saudi Civil Defense to issue brief alerts in the neighboring cities of Khamis Mushait and Abha.

A Khamis Mushait resident told AFP he heard "intense blasts" which left fires burning for a "long time".

"Honestly, we couldn't sleep at all."

The Bab al-Mandab waterway has become essential for Saudi oil exports, with Iran continuing to block the Hormuz strait as part of the Middle East war, but the Ansarullah has declared a maritime blockade on Riyadh.

Iran on Monday denied any involvement in the country's revived civil war.

"Iran does not interfere in Yemeni affairs," foreign ministry spokesman Esmail Baqaei told reporters on Monday, saying the Ansarullah fighters are "entirely independent actors who make their decisions based on their own in-

terests".

Yemen's prolonged civil war had been dormant for four years before bursting back into life in July over an Iranian flight to the capital Sana'a, as it became the latest conflict drawn into the wider regional war.

The Ansarullah's military spokesman Yahya Saree said Monday that the group's latest strikes targeted "fighter jet hangars, radars, runways, ammunition depots" at King Khalid Air Base in Khamis Mushait, in retaliation for airstrikes by Riyadh.

He accused Saudi Arabia of carrying out "more than 300 airstrikes in the past five days" across Yemen.

Yemeni Saudi-backed forces on Sunday said they had recaptured positions in the southwestern province of Taiz from Ansarullah's fighters and carried out airstrikes, telling the official Saba news agency they killed at least ten gunmen.

Last week, American media reported that US President Donald Trump had rejected a personal request from Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, the kingdom's de facto ruler, to intervene in the war.

The Saudi crown prince received the commander of the US Central Command, Admiral Brad Cooper, in Jeddah on Monday to discuss "the latest developments in the region", according to Saudi news agency SPA.

Iran confirms Oman meeting on Strait of Hormuz called off at Saudi request

International Desk

Iran said a meeting of foreign ministers of regional countries scheduled in Oman on Monday to discuss arrangements for safe commercial navigation through the Strait of Hormuz was canceled at Saudi Arabia's request.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baqaei said during his weekly presser that the planned meeting in Oman was an "opportunity" created by Tehran and Muscat and that regional countries were expected to recognize and make use of it, IRNA reported.

Iran and Oman announced the postponement on Sunday night.

Director General of the Persian Gulf Department at Iran's Foreign Ministry Mohammad Alibek said that, "At the request of certain regional countries and based on a joint decision by Oman and Iran, the

meeting of foreign ministers from Persian Gulf littoral states, originally scheduled for Monday, has been postponed to a later date," Alibek stated.

Alibek underlined that Tehran will work closely with Muscat to set a mutually convenient time for the gathering.

Omani Foreign Minister Badr Albusaidi also announced the postponement, noting that the decision was taken "in the interests of consensus."

Baqaei added that Iran and Oman have finalized an agreement concerning maritime routes.

"The understanding between Iran and Oman, as two littoral states, has been finalized. In consultation with Oman, we will decide on the next step, including how to announce or register the understanding," he said. He noted that the Iran-Oman understanding regarding the security of maritime routes was the result of weeks

of negotiations between the two countries. The Strait of Hormuz is a major global energy chokepoint, with roughly one-fifth of global oil demand passing through the waterway. Iran has maintained heightened restrictions on navigation since the start of the US-Israeli military aggression against the country on Feb. 28, citing security concerns and the need to safeguard its sovereignty.

Iran and Oman have been engaged in negotiations for nearly three months over arrangements for safe navigation through the strategic waterway. On August 25, the two countries announced discussions on a phased framework that would initially establish a temporary joint maritime corridor, alongside a joint mine-clearance project.

The framework is aimed at restoring safe navigation while preserving the sovereignty and sovereign rights of coastal states.



Mohammad Ali Rajabi
Cartoonist

CARTOON



CBI chief sets monetary discipline, FX stability as priorities to curb inflation



Head of Central Bank of Iran Abdolnaser Hemmati (c) speaks at a meeting of central bank governors of Islamic countries in Istanbul, Turkey, on September 14, 2026.
● IRNA

Economy Desk

Head of Central Bank of Iran's Abdolnaser Hemmati on Monday outlined the bank's approach to containing inflation and managing economic pressures at a meeting of central bank governors of Islamic countries, emphasizing monetary

stability and coordinated policymaking. Speaking at a meeting of central bank governors of Islamic countries in Istanbul, Hemmati said the approach included strengthening monetary discipline, managing exchange-rate fluctuations and maintaining transparent communication, as external shocks and economic

uncertainty continued to weigh on the economy, according to IRNA. Hemmati said the uncertainty facing Iran's economy was complex and multifaceted, with much of the volatility stemming from external pressures, sanctions and geopolitical risks that have coincided with balance-of-payments constraints

and fiscal risks. Iran's national currency has fallen to record lows, with the US dollar trading above 2 million rials on the open market in recent weeks. The depreciation has highlighted growing pressure on an economy already facing high inflation. Iran's 12-month consumer inflation rate reached 69.9% in the fifth month of the Iranian calendar year began on March 21, according to the Statistical Center of Iran. The country has also remained on a war footing since a US-Israeli coalition launched attacks in late February, particularly targeting civilians and infrastructure during a 40-day conflict. Hemmati said in Istanbul that external pressures were deliberately focused on fueling "perceived inflation" and turning economic pressure into public discontent. He said the central bank could not and should not take a passive approach to how external shocks were transmitted to the domestic economy. To contain currency fluctuations, Hemmati said the central bank was pursuing policies including monetary discipline,

limiting banks' balance-sheet growth and preventing the monetization of budget deficits.

Direct financial channels with Tunisia

On the sidelines of the Istanbul meeting, Hemmati also held talks with the central bank chiefs of Turkey and Tunisia. Hemmati and his Tunisian counterpart, Fathi Zahir Ennouri, stressed the need to expand monetary and banking cooperation, set up direct financial channels and remove obstacles to correspondent banking ties between Tehran and Tunis, ILNA reported. Hemmati said direct financial channels and smoother correspondent banking relations were prerequisites for expanding trade and joint investment. Ennouri welcomed the proposals and described the meeting as the start of a new phase in banking cooperation between the two countries, while stressing the importance of greater convergence among Islamic states in monetary and financial affairs. The two sides agreed to form expert working groups to examine practical ways to facilitate financial transactions and support businesses and traders, a step that could ease one of the main obstacles to bilateral trade: access to smoother banking and financial channels.

Tehran- Hanoi trade could reach \$4-\$5b, friendship association head says

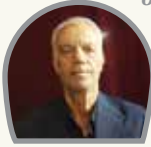
Vietnam seen as potential gateway for Iran to Southeast Asian markets

By Sadeq Dehqan
Staff writer

INTERVIEW

Vietnam has emerged in recent years as one of Southeast Asia's more dynamic economies, driven by economic reforms, foreign investment and a growing presence in global markets. Against that backdrop, experts say ties between Tehran and Hanoi, which date back to 1973, could expand beyond their current political and multilateral cooperation. Although political ties between Iran and Vietnam have remained relatively stable over the decades, bilateral trade is still well below its potential. At the same time, some goods needed by the two countries are complementary, while Vietnam's geographic position could provide a route for Iran to expand its presence in Southeast Asian markets.

Kamaleddin Sajjadi, chairman of the Iran-Vietnam Friendship Association and a former diplomat, is among those with diplomatic experience in Southeast Asia. He served as Iran's ambassador to Vietnam from 1995 to 1999 and previously headed Iran's embassy in the Philippines. Sajjadi has also served as Iran's ambassador to Cambodia and headed Iran's representative office in Brunei. In an interview with Iran Daily, Sajjadi discussed the history of Iran-Vietnam ties, the political and economic cooperation between the two countries, the potential for expanding trade, obstacles to economic cooperation, the possibility of using Vietnam as a gateway to Southeast Asian markets, and the country's economic experience and lessons for Iran. The following



Kamaleddin Sajjadi

is the full interview:

IRAN DAILY: When did relations between Iran and Vietnam begin, and how have ties between the two countries developed over the years?

SAJJADI: Formal relations between Iran and Vietnam date back to 1973, but they were not particularly active or extensive in the early years. After the Islamic Revolution in 1979, Vietnam welcomed the developments in Iran. From that point, bilateral ties entered a new phase and gradually expanded into various areas, with numerous high-level contacts and visits, including visits by their presidents and parliamentary speakers. Alongside political ties, economic and trade cooperation also received attention. Today, Iran and Vietnam cooperate and coordinate in international organizations and forums, and in many cases support each other's positions. There is also significant potential in the economic sphere, some of which is being activated, although we are still far from the desired level and the true potential of economic relations.

What is the current volume of trade between Iran and Vietnam, and how much room is there for growth?

The current volume of bilateral trade is more than \$600 million. However, this figure does not reflect the full reality of trade between the two sides because some transactions are carried out indirectly through third countries and are generally not recorded in the official statistics of the two countries. Given the existing potential, trade could be several times its current level and could reach around \$4 billion to \$5 billion even within a relatively short period of several years, because the two markets complement each other and there are suitable areas for expanding exports and imports.

Therefore, the current figure should not be considered the ceiling for economic ties between the two sides. Rather, it can be seen as a starting point with significant room for growth through planning and a better understanding of the available potential.

Which products could provide opportunities for expanding trade between the two countries?

Vietnam has export potential in products such as rice, rubber and many other goods, some of which are needed in the Iranian market. Iran, in turn, has a variety of products and goods that are attractive and needed in the Vietnamese market. Iranian petrochemical products, bitumen, dried fruits and some industrial and mineral products could attract interest in the Vietnamese market. Therefore, there is significant potential both for Iranian exports to Vietnam and for imports from Vietnam to meet Iran's needs. However, we have not yet been able to make full use of these opportunities, and economic ties have not reached their ideal level. To achieve this goal, knowledge among economic players on both sides about each other's markets, regulations, potential and needs must increase.

What are the main obstacles to expanding economic ties?

One of the main problems is insufficient knowledge among traders and economic players in the two countries. When businesses on both sides do not have a clear understanding of the other market, its products, regulations, investment opportunities and trading practices, trade is likely to remain below its potential. Therefore, ties between the private sectors of the two countries should be strengthened, and the conditions should be created for holding trade fairs, business meetings and economic delegations.

At the same time, sanctions and problems related to banking transactions are a serious obstacle. Banking restrictions have made some direct transactions difficult. However, this does not mean that all avenues are closed, and third countries can be used to facilitate trade. Countries such as Russia, Oman and even Turkey, along with some other regional routes, can play a role in this regard and help reduce some of these difficulties. Therefore, even under sanctions, economic ties can be expanded through appropriate mechanisms.

Could Vietnam serve as a gateway for Iranian businesses to Southeast Asian markets?

Yes, Vietnam has a suitable position in this regard. The country is located in Southeast Asia and borders countries such as Cambodia, Laos and Thailand, while also having significant economic and trade potential. If Iran can deepen its economic ties with Vietnam, the country could, to some extent, be used as one of the routes for Iran to enter Southeast Asian markets. However, government-to-government ties alone are not enough to achieve this, and Iranian private-sector companies and traders must also have a more active presence in the market. Vietnam can be a suitable place for establishing links with regional trade networks, creating new opportunities for exporting Iranian goods and services to Southeast Asian countries.

Vietnam has recorded significant economic growth in recent years. What have been the main reasons for this success, and what lessons can Iran learn from its experience?

Vietnam was able to attract domestic and foreign investors by creating a suitable environment for economic activity. At the same time, the country's private sector and traders were

also active abroad. Together, these factors enabled Vietnam's economy to achieve significant growth, reaching around 8% in some years. Vietnam's experience shows that legal reforms, investment facilitation, creating a suitable environment for private-sector activity and focusing on foreign markets can have a significant impact on economic growth. Iran can also draw on some of these lessons by closely examining Vietnam's experience, particularly in reforming investment laws and supporting private-sector activity. Of course, Iran's circumstances are not the same as Vietnam's, and Vietnam's model cannot be implemented in Iran exactly as it is. But some of the country's economic principles and policies, particularly in attracting investment and expanding foreign trade, are worth examining and adapting.

Given your experience in Vietnam, how do you see the future of bilateral ties?

In my view, the potential for bilateral ties is much greater than their current level. The two countries have good political relations and also cooperate and coordinate in international forums. Therefore, the necessary political foundation for expanding economic ties is largely in place. The important issue is to use good political relations to develop economic ties. If knowledge among traders in the two countries increases, banking obstacles are managed as much as possible, and links between the private sectors and chambers of commerce on both sides expand, we can expect trade to grow significantly. In particular, given Vietnam's position and economic growth in Southeast Asia, developing ties with the country could provide Iran not only with bilateral benefits but also with an opportunity to establish a more active presence in regional markets.

Geoeconomic competition and new wealth of nations

On 250th anniversary of Adam Smith's Wealth of Nations



By George Yeo

Singapore's former minister for foreign affairs

OPINION

The inability of the US and Israel to effect a quick regime change in Iran has shown the limits of physical force. They thought they could repeat in Iran what the US was able to achieve a few months earlier in Venezuela. Israel's success with decapitation attacks in Gaza and Lebanon after October 7 and in Iran last June gave hope that by killing Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei and other leaders, the Iranian government would quickly collapse. It did not happen. Iran had learned from bitter experience to decentralise its command-and-control network. The Ayatollah himself chose the path of martyrdom and galvanised the Iranian people by his death in the tradition of Shia saints like Ali, Hussein and others. In Europe, the war in Ukraine marked the limit of NATO's eastward expansion. I remember the speech Putin made a few days after Russian forces attacked Ukraine on February 24, 2022, explaining that the special operation was to forestall a repeat of Operation Barbarossa in June 1941 when Hitler unleashed a great land offensive against the Soviet Union. I remember the recollection of a German general who was my adviser in the Singapore Armed Forces of his experience during Barbarossa. He was then a lieutenant in Hitler's army. Wehrmacht units were received with flowers when they first entered eastern Ukraine. However, this welcome did not last long. Whatever was Putin's objective, Russian military power also found its limit in Ukraine. The unfortunate result of earlier NATO policies and Russia's attack is an inevitable partition of Ukraine and the injury and death of millions of young men.

The wars in Ukraine and the Middle East have revolutionized warfare, in particular, the use of drones, smart missiles and AI. Tanks are increasingly hard to defend. US aircraft carriers are clearly vulnerable when they deploy too close to Iran or Yemen. Iran might have been able to sink one or two with their heavy missiles working in conjunction with drone swarms but probably decided not to as this would

have defeated their strategy of dividing the enemy. Instead, Iran inflicted heavy damage on US land bases in the Persian Gulf. It is doubtful if these bases will be fully rebuilt. For the US, rebuilding and hardening will be very expensive. For host countries, this will only invite future attacks. The Pax Americana beneath which much of the world, including China, developed for decades is maintained by a network of hundreds of US military bases around the world. Once bases begin shutting down, entire regions will be destabilised before new equilibriums stabilise.

US retreat

For example, the inability of the US to subdue Iran, partly on behalf of Israel, must affect the way the people of Taiwan view cross-strait relations with China. Unless China behaves egregiously, the US will not go to war with China in aid of Taiwan independence. The US military establishment knows from repeated battle simulations that it cannot prevail without nuclear weapons. US aircraft carriers operating near Taiwan will be much more vulnerable than those operating near Iran. In anticipation of a different future, the countries on the western Pacific including Japan and Australia are re-triangulating their longer-term strategic positions. US national debt is now nearing \$40 trillion and growing. The money servicing that debt already exceeds the US defence budget. Ukraine is now described as a distant war on another continent. NATO countries are required to spend 5% of GDP on defence. In the Pacific, Secretary of War Hegseth at the recent Shangri-La Dialogue asked US allies to increase their defence spending to 3.5% of GDP.

Sensing its own financial weakness, the US is retreating into its own hemisphere under a new Monroe Doctrine, which President Trump egotistically called the Donroe Doctrine. It was articulated in the US National Security Strategy paper issued last year. The implementation of that strategy is opportunistic, in fits and starts, with episodic calls to take over Greenland, incorporate Canada and Venezuela, force regime change in Cuba. Columbia may also not be able to resist. However, it is unlikely that the Donroe Doctrine can ex-

tend to the greater part of South America because Brazil will remain a regional pole of its own.

Europe has been reluctant to reduce its dependence on the US but is increasingly forced to do so. Once Europe builds up its own military capabilities, it will have its own policy on Russia, the Middle East, China and Africa. A Europe less dependent on the US may become more united. How Europe applies a united weight on the scales of global politics in a multipolar world may make the difference between war and peace in some parts of the world. We do not know how future US administrations will change course but a reversal of direction is unlikely. Much will depend on the performance of the US economy, by which I refer not to financial markets but to the real economy. For a few years, it was thought that AI could give the US such an assailable advantage that the US pre-eminence in the world might continue for a long time. I will talk about this later. It is often said that no one should bet against America. Maybe. No one knows, not even many Americans themselves. A strategic retreat skilfully carried out, while preserving the status of the US dollar as global reserve currency, will create better conditions for national recovery. If the sun must set, let it be a long sunset, and, for some of us, may it quickly rise again.

China's rise

China's rapid rise is deeply unsettling to many in the West. Japan's earlier rise was roundly defeated, and the country virtually incorpo-



A protester holds a portrait of Iran's martyred Leader Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei in Baghdad, Iraq, during a protest against US and Israeli attacks on multiple cities across Iran, on February 28, 2026.

● HADI MIZBAN/AP



Iran inflicted heavy damage on US land bases in the Persian Gulf. It is doubtful if these bases will be fully rebuilt. For the US, rebuilding and hardening will be very expensive. For host countries, this will only invite future attacks. The Pax Americana beneath which much of the world, including China, developed for decades is maintained by a network of hundreds of US military bases around the world. Once bases begin shutting down, entire regions will be destabilised before new equilibriums stabilise.



President Donald Trump (L) joins his Chinese counterpart, Xi Jinping, in front of the Temple of Heaven in Beijing, China, on May 14, 2026.

● YONHAP NEWS



rated into the western sphere. In contrast, China is a much bigger country with a much larger population and has largely caught up with the rest of the world in almost all fields of science and technology. It is only behind the US in military strength. To many Americans, China poses an existential challenge to US supremacy.

Many American strategic thinkers see US competition with China in zero-sum terms. You live, I die. I live, you die. When President Xi met President Trump in May, he posited the Thucydides Trap as a choice. China will respond to the choice the US makes. China's overwhelming preference, however, is for a positive-sum future, what Xi calls "humanity with a shared future for mankind". Trump does not see the future as necessarily zero-sum and is therefore prepared to deal with China, not only because of the short-term need for rare earths but for the long term as well. Future US administrations may take a different position. China's approach is to hope for the best but be prepared for the worst.

China, in its own history, has always had to live with other powers in the world. Tang China had no equal in the world in its time, but, after a major defeat by the Abbasids in Central Asia in the 8th century, no Chinese army ever crossed the Tianshan mountain range again. China has always been a largely self-sufficient internal universe, seemingly able to carry on without the rest of the world. Dynasty after dynasty built great walls to keep invaders out. Over long centuries, Chinese statecraft was largely defensive. In the Chinese mind, hegemonic ambitions eventually lead to self-destruction. When Chinese tell Americans that they have no intention of replacing the US in the world, it is not out of inability or humility but of conviction.

China, in fact, wants a strong Europe and a strong Euro, knowing full well that such a Europe will be more independent of the US and share greater common interest with China. It wants Europe to be a separate pole of its own even though it knows that Europe will always be closer to the US because of history and culture. China sees India, like itself, an ancient civilization, to which it owes the light of Buddhism. China wants Brazil to be an independent pole not only as a counterweight to the US but also as a complementary economy.

China's rise is quickening the crystallisation of a multipolar world. Provided the US remains primus inter pares, such a world may be healthier for everyone. For smaller countries like Singapore, a multipolar world will give us greater freedom of action and make it easier for us to retain our distinctiveness. By its restraint on centralized power, a multipolar world better protects the principle of subsidiarity.

Data intensity as a measure of development

China is an unusually homogeneous country. A country with a population twice that of Europe has one written language, one literature and one set of heroes. When China is organised, it is highly productive. When it is in decline, the people go through decades of internal strife and hardship.

China's script is not alphabetic but ideographic. Chinese characters retain their meaning even though pronunciations change across time and space. This gives the written script a digital quality. Every character has a fixed value. Primary school children are able to read and recite verses from the Analects by Confucius written over two thousand years ago.

China also invented paper over two thousand years ago and was able to maintain the technology of its mass production until the defeat in Central Asia I referred to earlier. From Chinese prisoners of war, the Islamic world learned how to make paper and was transformed by it.

Alan Turing, whose ancestry was part Scottish, taught us that with an unlimited amount of paper, one could do an unlimited number of algorithmic calculations. Paper and ideographic writing enabled Chinese civilization to organise more human beings than anywhere else on earth by a large margin. During the Covid pandemic, the head of Chinese medicine pronounced that China had complete records of all epidemics that erupted in China over two thousand years. The collection and processing of data made possible a fine division of labour and therefore a highly productive economy when the country was at peace. It also facilitated the development of continental-scale infrastructural networks for irrigation, flood control, grain and salt distribution, water transportation, taxation and, of course, domestic political control. China has always been a data-intensive society. In sharp contrast to Europeans, Chinese people are less concerned with data privacy.

The scholars were the data specialists. For over a thousand years, they were selected by examinations and populated a civil service organised into ministries reporting through senior mandarins to the Emperor. It was only in relatively recent times that the rest of the world developed comparable civil services often through competitive examinations. Scholar-officials spent most of their time doing close work. Myopia became a competitive advantage. They also had many wives and children. It is not an accident that the Chinese have the higher incidence of myopia in the world. In today's world, one has to worry what mobile phones and endless scrolling will do for the eyesight of our children.

For the purpose of data recording and processing, brush ink and paper was orders of magnitude faster than nib ink and parchment. One can see the difference in the time needed to execute a painting using brush ink and paper compared to one using paint brush and canvas. They are different art forms, of course.

One way to gauge the level of advancement of a society is data intensity. Data intensity is a measure of education level, administrative efficiency and market dynamism. Good administration and efficient markets, in turn, draw talent into the social network. The healthy development of a community depends on its political, social and economic development. Markets cannot work well if the political system is dysfunctional and participants lack integrity and a sense of solidarity. Adam Smith's enduring legacy is not only the Wealth of Nations which explained how the market works its magic, but also in his Theory of Moral Sentiments which showed the importance of society having a healthy political and social framework within which an efficient market operates. Smith was first a moral philosopher; then an economist.

Codification and energy

Each human being in society can be likened to a computer chip networked to other human beings by an operating system which is composed of politics, law, values and culture. Part of the network is well defined like the electoral system and the legal system. They change relatively



slowly. A large part of the network is market-driven and can change at high speed. The more advanced a society is, the more highly coded it is.

Coding needs energy. Darwin's natural selection is driven by the competition for energy. Without energy, no organism can defend itself or attack others, or to find a mate and replicate. Within an organism, there is ceaseless competition for energy by different cells and organs. Cancers gobble up energy and can be overcome by depriving them of energy. All life is coding. The same four nucleotide bases A, C, G, T are the building block of all life on earth. In groups of three, they make up the 20 or 21 amino acids from which all proteins are made. Without the input of energy, order eventually breaks down, what in thermodynamics we call entropy. The struggle for life is therefore the struggle for energy and its efficient use.

Human civilization is equally driven by energy availability and efficiency. The agricultural revolution was an energy revolution. Civilization began in the great deltas after swamps were cleared for the cultivation of food crops. Seeds had to be selected, irrigation systems established, grain storage introduced and distribution systems organised. The surplus enabled armies to fan out and conquer. Empires grew until the cost of expansion outweighed the benefit. At that point, the energy equation turns negative.

In China, the agricultural system was largely unbroken over four thousand years. Control of water has always been key. The country continues to embark on huge water works today. The growing of rice which requires a high degree of organisation produces the most calories or energy per hectare of any crop. A complex internal network of canals facilitated efficient distribution over a vast area. China's agricultural system produced the energy which enabled a complex codification of its society. The steam engine invented by James Watt, a contemporary of Adam Smith, ushered in a new energy revolution, which led eventually to western domination of the world. Coal fired steam ships and trains. Later oil fueled cars and aeroplanes. The conversion of heat to mechanical power required an understanding of metallurgy especially of iron and thermodynamics. Singapore had three large markets built with Scottish cast iron. One still stands in Lau Pa Sat and is often frequented by tourists. Unfortunately, that energy revolution unleashed in Scotland also led eventually to slaughter on an industrial scale in the 20th century.

Energy and AI

The technology for producing energy and its efficient use has always underpinned political and military power in human history. So it remains today in the new age of AI.

British coal powered British manufacturing. The sea reduced friction of transportation, making energy use more efficient. Coal today is a fuel of the past, but I still have vivid memories of 1973 as a nineteen-year-old going up to Cambridge to study engineering. There was a miners' strike led by Joe Gormley and Arthur Scargill. Prime Minister Edward Heath's response was a three-day working week. On the other days, the shops in Picadilly

Circus and Leicester Square were lit by hurricane lamps.

America had not only coal but also abundant oil. Japan was forced into the Second World War because the US imposed an oil embargo in response to its invasion of China. In February 1945, after the Yalta Summit, President Roosevelt on board the USS Quincy stopped five days in the Suez Canal to confer with King Abdelaziz of Saudi Arabia. Out of that meeting, a historic agreement was made that in return for US protection of the kingdom, Saudi oil would be priced in US dollars. For decades, the US dominated energy markets in the world. The current standoff in Iran with double blockades of the Straits of Hormuz has altered an old dispensation. Energy markets continue to operate efficiently, but US dominance has been significantly weakened. King Abdelaziz's grandson, Mohamad bin Salman, is moving slowly to diversify away from the US dollar. China, in the meantime, has made rapid strides in developing alternative energy sources, particularly solar and wind. China has also steadily brought down the cost of battery storage. With sun and wind everywhere, political power will no longer be concentrated in the hands of major energy producers.

Energy will however always be scarce because the demand will keep growing with the development of AI. Energy is the ultimate constraint on the amount of computation that AI can do. The constraint is not in technology because the technology is readily available, but in politics. Elon Musk has repeated complained about how difficult it is to get approvals and public support for the construction of energy infrastructure in the US.

It is China that has made the most progress in energy production and distribution. Household electricity costs continue to fall and is among the lowest in the world. Just a few months ago, I was in Shantou near where my paternal grandfather and my mother grew up. There huge turbines capture energy from strong winds in the



The Painting, titled "Activities of Minister of War," depicts the career of an ancient Chinese civil servant. The career path starts with passing the civil service examinations (left side) and progresses to a high position in the government (right side).

● WIKIMEDIA



The concentration of power in the hands of a few cannot be good because it will inevitably lead to the degradation of humanity. From this perspective, multipolarity in AI is a good phenomenon. It will create healthy competition and curb abuse. By breaking the US monopoly, China's AI development is a blessing to all of humanity and will encourage the growth of other AI centers in the world. As Kai-Fu Lee pointed out a few years ago, AI systems are inevitably values-based. The Islamic world, for example, will allocate weights differently in their models.



A reporter films at a data centre supported by Huawei in Yulin city, Shaanxi province, China, on April 25, 2023.

● TINGSHU WANG/REUTERS



Taiwan Strait which is a veritable wind tunnel. I was told the electricity energy cost in Shantou is half that of China's average. The city is now considering two uses of that energy, for the generation of hydrogen and for data processing. China now generates more electricity than the US and Europe combined.

For a time, it seemed that the US' lead in AI would secure its superpower status into an indefinite future. By pushing its AI stack to all parts of the world, US intelligence and security agencies will potentially know everything about everyone at any time through the Magnificent Seven. When DeepSeek released its first AI LLM, it was surprisingly good and open source. Probably directed by the Central Government, all Chinese LLMs are now open source and keeping pace with US LLMs. This has enabled the use of AI to diffuse into all parts of the Chinese economy and beyond. Chinese LLMs are no more than six to nine months at most behind US LLMs. Nvidia CEO Jensen Huang has repeatedly warned that Chinese AI is catching up with US AI.

In chip technology, despite intense efforts by the US to stymie China, China has redoubled efforts to achieve self-sufficiency. Ironically, it is the US which is now pushing China to buy lower-end Nvidia GPUs. In physical AI, meaning the incorporation of AI into manufacturing systems and products, such as cars, drones and robots, China is advancing rapidly. China is ahead not because it has a monopoly of the technologies but because it has a huge domestic market which enables a division of labour no other country can match. By promoting free trade with its neighbours along the belt and road, China is extending this division of labour over a much wider region and a much larger population.

How much a country can benefit from open source AI and ubiquitous energy will increasingly depend on the political and social system it has in order to educate its people and engender cooperative effort and healthy competition.

Moral challenge of AI

Pope Leo XIV in one of his recent encyclical on AI, Magnifica Humanitas, talks about the moral challenge of AI. He described AI as a fruit of human intelligence. He likened the development of AI more as "cultivation" than as production upon a preconceived design. The fruit can be sweet; it can be bitter. It can be good or it can be bad.

The concentration of power in the hands of a few cannot be good because it will inevitably lead to the degradation of humanity. From this perspective, multipolarity in AI is a good phenomenon. It will create healthy competition and curb abuse. By breaking the US monopoly, China's AI development is a blessing to all of humanity and will encourage the growth of other AI centers in the world. As Kai-Fu Lee pointed out a few years ago, AI systems are inevitably values-based. The Islamic world, for example, will allocate weights differently in their models.

The key is always the availability of energy and its efficient use. Europe with its high energy cost is severely handicapped. The wound is partly self-inflicted. To overcome this crippling weakness, Europe will have to review its policy towards Russia, the Middle East and North Africa, and China.

India is not naturally endowed with plentiful energy but is determined to source oil and gas cheaply and to develop alternative energy. It has every ambition to be an AI power and will eventually become one too. Brazil has the potential as well and will not be left behind. Africa has energy in abundance but many parts are unfortunately held back by underdeveloped political and social structures. China is now building much needed physical infrastructure in this vast continent. It is in Europe's interest to work with China in helping Africa to grow sustainably.

AI can enhance our intelligence and creativity, or it can dumb us down and make us lazy. It can make us more human or less human. What is clear is that humanity is on the threshold of a new age.

The full article first appeared on The China Academy.

AVC Men's Volleyball Continental Championship:

Japan proves too hard to beat as Iran's Olympic quest drags on



Japanese outside hitter Ran Takahashi (12) hits a spike during the final victory over Iran at the AVC Men's Volleyball Continental Championship in Fukuoka, Japan, on Sept. 13, 2026.

● PAYAM SANI/IRIVF

Sports Desk

Iran's bid for an Olympic berth was left hanging in the balance following a 3-0 (25-21, 26-24, 25-23) defeat against host Japan in the AVC Men's Volleyball Continental Championship final in Fukuoka on Sunday.

A second successive final setback against Japan means Italian head coach Roberto Piazza's men will now have to go through next year's FIVB World Cup in Poland – where the top three teams not yet qualified in the final standings will secure Olympic spots – or the FIVB World Ranking, which will also offer three quotas, to punch their tickets for the Los Angeles 2028 Olympics.

The final result on Sunday hardly reflected the tight nature of the contest, with narrow margins ultimately making the difference between the two sides, who went toe to toe across the three sets.

While Japan was superior in attack, scoring 41 points against Iran's 36, Piazza's side outscored its opponents with 10 blocks, twice as many as the Japanese managed.

Japan was also the better team on the service line, hitting seven aces against Iran's three, while benefiting from 23 opponent errors, with Iran capitalizing on 19.

Yuji Nishida was the Japanese driving force in front of more than 6,500 home fans at the Kitakyushu City Gymnasium. The world-class opposite spearheaded the victory with three kill blocks, two aces and a 65% success rate in attack, finishing as the joint top scorer alongside Iranian counterpart Ali Hajipour.

Hajipour put away four kill blocks and an ace on his way to a match-high 18 points. Outside hitter Ran Takahashi fired three aces and 14 spike kills at a 61% success rate to finish with 17 points for the hosts. His 22-year-old Iranian counterpart Pouriya Hosseinkhan-

zadeh also reached double figures with 13 points, including two aces and a block.

Despite Iran's winless run against its familiar foe extending to five games, Piazza still took positives from the latest setback.

"I'm really proud of my guys. In volleyball, you have to deserve every single ball in each game. We have to focus on our own game rather than the opponent, and that is something the players will have to learn.

"We are playing with a little bit more stability, and the players are starting to understand what they have to do [on the court]. They are not always capable of doing it, but sooner or later, we will reach the goal," said the Italian.

"The most important thing is that we never gave up today. We were in the game from the beginning. We lost the first set because of our mistakes and not because they did an amazing job. Our mistakes were an important part of the first set.

"And then we were able to fight until the end in the second and third sets. We were leading in both sets but again in the crucial moments, when you need to find one special ball, they found it and we didn't. That's my final conclusion. Some mistakes are acceptable but some are simply not," added Piazza, whose team also fell short in a five-set thriller against Japan when the two teams met in the Volleyball Nations League preliminaries in June.

When asked what has contributed to the growing gap between Iran and Japan in recent years, the Italian said: "There are a lot of foreign coaches working in Japan. The Japanese players are learning from different cultures, and each coach is totally dedicated to their club while also helping the head coach of the national team.

"It doesn't mean that Iranian coaches are not good enough, but we still need support from

coaches from elsewhere. That's why in other countries, a lot of foreigners are working in different coaching staffs."

There was, however, a bit of consolation for three Iranian players, who received individual recognition at the awarding ceremony. Hajipour picked up the prize for Best Opposite Spiker, while Hosseinkhanzadeh and Seyyed Issa Nasserini won the Best Outside Hitter and Best Middle Blocker awards, respectively.

"Honestly speaking, this award doesn't really mean anything to me because when the team loses, it means we have all lost together," said Hajipour, who was "willing to swap this individual award with the championship trophy."

"We just have to forget about this setback and get ready for the next tournament. I hope that, just as Japan was able to secure the Olympic berth today, we too can open our path to the Olympics going forward."

Hosseinkhanzadeh, meanwhile, praised his teammates for "giving their all throughout the tournament," while urging them "to work more on ourselves to reach our ultimate goal."

"As you saw, we had a very difficult match against a team that is truly one of the best teams in the world. This match was very important for us and all the guys gave their hundred percent and spared no effort. Everyone played with grit and hats off to them," said the Iranian.

"We still need to work a bit more on our team and have better planning. Once again, I apologize to the dear people of Iran for not achieving what they wanted. Just seeing them smile for a moment is very valuable to us. I know they were upset by our loss, but, God willing, we can achieve good results going forward, and we need their positive energy for the rest of the way."

Aichi-Nagoya Asian Games:
Iran eyes six-medal sweep in weightlifting

Sports Desk

All six members of Iran's weightlifting team "have a chance to win medals" at the upcoming Aichi-Nagoya Asian Games, according to federation secretary Vahid Rabiei, who expressed hope that the lifters can reproduce their personal bests to finish on the podium. The weightlifting competition at the multi-sport event will open on September 23 at the Nagoya City Trade and Industry Centre.

Former world and Olympic silver medalist Ali Davoudi (+110kg) will spearhead the Iranian roster in the men's event, which also features five-time world medalist Mirmostafa Javadi (85kg), Ali Aalipour (95kg) – a world snatch silver medalist last year – as well as Alireza Nasiri, who will enter the 110kg contest as the world junior record holder in the clean & jerk and total.

Iran will also be represented by teenage sensation Mahsa Beheshti (86kg), who won a remarkable six golds at the Asian Youth & Junior Championships last month, and Reihaneh Karimi (69kg) in the women's event.

Iran managed just a single silver medal through Davoudi at the previous edition of the Asian Games in Hangzhou, but Rabiei believes the team is in far better shape this time around.

"We failed to achieve the result we wanted in Hangzhou, but the conditions of the athletes are better this time, and we hope we can make up for that result," he said.



Iranian weightlifter Ali Davoudi (front) will compete in the men's +110kg class at the Aichi-Nagoya Asian Games.

● IWFI

"The competition at the Asian Games is very tough and, in some cases, can even be considered more difficult than the World Championships, because all countries come with the aim of winning medals and Asian Games medals are very important to different countries. Therefore, we have a tough competition ahead of us."

"All the weightlifters who have been selected for the team have a chance of winning a medal. From the beginning, our discussions with the National Olympic Committee were based on sending a quality-focused team and selecting athletes who had medal chances, which is why we did not send a lifter in the men's 75kg category.

"Although all the weightlifters are among the favorites in their respective events, they have to compete and we have to see how things develop there," he

said. "We are also constantly monitoring their rivals. Through social media and the information available to us, we are keeping track of their conditions."

Rabiei was particularly hopeful about Iran's two female lifters, who will be seeking to make history at the multi-sport event.

"Our girls also have a good chance, and we hope to win a medal in the women's section at the Asian Games for the first time," he said.

"Both of Iran's female weightlifters have medal chances and can be counted on, though, as I said, the competition is very tough in both the men's and women's events.

"If it is our weightlifters' day and they can reproduce their own records, all of them will return from the Asian Games with medals."

Changwon 2026 WSPS World Championships:

Iran wins bronze in mixed 50m pistol, wraps up with four medals



● NATIONAL PARALYMPIC COMMITTEE

Sports Desk

Iranian shooters won a bronze medal in the mixed 50m pistol team SH1 event on the final day of the WSPS World Championships in Changwon, South Korea, on Monday, taking the country's medal tally at the competition to four.

The Iranian trio of Nasrin Shahi, Seyed Mohammadreza Mirshafiei and Sareh Javanmardi scored 1,596 points to finish third behind hosts South Korea and China.

In the individual event, Shahi advanced to the final after ranking second in qualifying with a score of 543, but ultimately missed out on the podium, finishing sixth with 139.6 points.

Mirshafiei scored 530 points, while Javanmardi and Mostafa Khadem recorded 523 and 510, respectively, with all three failing to advance to the final.

Faezah Ahmadi headlined the country's four-medal haul in Changwon by winning gold in the women's 10m air pistol SH1 event, also securing

a quota place for the 2028 Paralympic Games.

Shahi completed an all-Iranian one-two in the discipline, winning silver behind her compatriot with 233.7 points. Four-time Paralympic champion Javanmardi, however, missed out on the podium, placing fourth with 194.1 points.

The three shooters also teamed up to win team gold in the event, setting a new world record of 1,707 points in the final.

The men's competition, however, proved disappointing for the Iranians, as Mirshafiei, Khadem and Ali Golouei all failed to advance to the final in the men's 10m air pistol event.

Featuring 595 athletes from 53 countries, the six-day World Championships served as part of the qualification pathway for the LA 2028 Paralympic Games. Iran had previously secured its first team quota for the multi-sport event through the men's sitting volleyball team, which earned its place by winning the world title in July.

Iranica Desk

Among the historic buildings of Ahvaz, the Mapar House stands out as a surviving example of the city's architectural heritage. Dating to the early Pahlavi period, the mansion features distinctive brickwork, lush courtyards, stained-glass windows, wooden doors and old palm trees, offering a glimpse into the architecture and lifestyle of southern Iran.

Registered on Iran's National Heritage List in 1380 (2001), the house today serves not only as a historical and architectural attraction but also as a venue for cultural, artistic and tourism activities.

The Mapar House stands in the historic zone of Ahvaz, on Khansari Street in the Nadari neighborhood. Its location in the central fabric of the city makes it relatively easy for tourists and residents to reach, and a visit can easily be combined with seeing other historical and urban attractions of Ahvaz, according to IRNA.

The Mapar House is one of the surviving examples of Ahvaz's historic houses, having undergone extensive changes over the past decades, with parts of its old fabric lost. Preserving such buildings therefore does not merely mean maintaining an old structure; it forms part of the effort to safeguard the markers of the city's historical identity.

Sources do not agree on the exact date of construction, but architectural and tourism references attribute the building to the early Pahlavi period. The name of the house has also been linked to Abdolmajid Mapar, a well-known merchant of that era.

More significant is the building's place in the formation of Ahvaz's urban architecture during the late Qajar and ear-

Mapar House preserves Ahvaz's architectural heritage



● IRNA

ly Pahlavi periods. Ahvaz was gradually expanding at the time, and houses were built combining local southern architectural features with the prevailing elements of the era. The Mapar House is one example in whose structure part of this process can still be traced.

After many years, the house suffered from deterioration and was eventually restored under the supervision of the provincial Cultural Heritage Organization. It was registered on Iran's National Heritage List on 26 November 2001.

One of the first things to catch a visitor's eye on entering the Mapar House is the brick facade and entrance portal, where bricks are laid both horizontally and vertically in varied patterns. This type of brickwork provides strength while giving the facade a decorative quality. The building covers about 550 square meters and consists

of two floors and a basement. Basements were particularly important in the hot southern regions, offering residents a cooler environment away from the intense heat outside. Parts of the ceiling are built with wooden beams, and the interior architecture retains traces of traditional southern construction methods.

The courtyard is one of the most important elements of the Mapar House. The design incorporates two courtyards, with the building and rooms arranged around the open space. The pool, flower beds, wooden doors and old trees set the house apart from an ordinary urban building.

Among the natural features, the leaning palm tree is the most famous. Standing in the courtyard, it is a favorite subject for visitors' photographs and, because of its distinctive shape, is known locally and among

tourists as the "Sulking Palm" (Nakhl-e Qahr-Karde). This simple natural element has become one of the visual symbols of the Mapar House.

The stained-glass windows are another striking feature of the mansion. The interplay of light, colored glass, the pool and the courtyard greenery creates an effect found in many traditional Iranian houses. Such details show that the architecture was not limited to providing a residential space; beauty and quality of life were also considered in its design.

What sets the Mapar House apart from many historic buildings is how it has been used since restoration. The building has served cultural purposes in different periods. From the late 1990s, for instance, the basement was used for library and literary activities, hosting programs such as Hafez recitations and poetry nights.

The house later became a space for cultural and artistic activity. Published reports tell of exhibitions, literary programs, handicraft-related activities and other cultural events held there. In this way, the house moved beyond being a mere historical monument to become a space open to the public.

This kind of use is important for historic buildings. An old house can keep its connection with today's society when people are not simply looking at it from behind a fence, but have the chance to enter, explore and experience its space. In this respect, the Mapar House is an example of turning a historic building into a living cultural and tourism space.

For those interested in historic buildings, visiting the Mapar House is more than viewing an old structure. The combination of brick architecture, courtyard, pool, wooden doors, colored

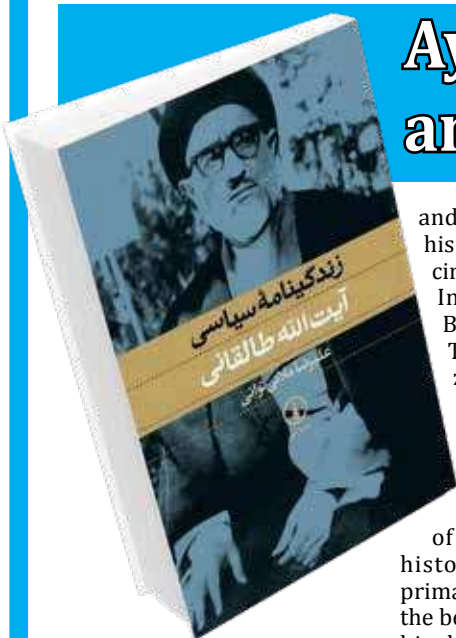
glass and the old palm creates a space that echoes the atmosphere of traditional southern houses.

At the same time, the hospitality and cultural spaces within the complex make the house appealing to visitors who are not necessarily deeply interested in history and architecture. Many tourists visiting historic buildings look for a place that offers not only historical value but also a chance to rest and make memories. The Mapar House offers exactly that combination. Ahvaz is best known for the Karun River, its bridges and its urban atmosphere, but the city has another face — one seen in the houses and historic buildings left from the past. The Mapar House is among the best-known examples of this heritage, sitting in the heart of the city and offering a chance to discover part of the architecture and life of Ahvaz's past.

Reading Room

Ayatollah Taleqani linked faith, freedom and political activism

Alireza Molai-Tavani



Examining the life and thought of Ayatollah Seyyed Mahmoud Taleqani requires an understanding of the political and social developments that shaped contemporary Iran. From the 1960s onward, his life took on broader dimensions as his political and social activities intensified and became closely intertwined with the changes taking place in Iranian society. His life, therefore, cannot be viewed merely as the personal story of a cleric, but must be examined through the intellectual, political, social

and cultural dimensions of his work and the historical circumstances of his time.

In his book *The Political Biography of Ayatollah Taleqani*, historian Alireza Molai-Tavani, a faculty member at the Institute for Humanities and Cultural Studies, examines Taleqani's life within the broader context of contemporary Iranian history. The study focuses primarily on the period from the beginning of the 1960s to his death on September 10, 1979, when his political and social activities expanded significantly and included trials, imprisonment, exile and close contacts with political activists and opposition groups, according to IBNA.

Taleqani was a distinctive figure among contemporary Iranian clerics. Alongside his religious activities, he paid close attention to political and social issues and maintained contacts and cooperation with figures outside the traditional religious establishment. He supported the movement to nationalize Iran's oil industry and was an admirer of Mo-

hammad Mosaddegh. He also played a role in the formation of the Freedom Movement of Iran, a nationalist-religious political organization.

Despite his strong commitment to Islam and the teachings of the Holy Qur'an, Taleqani maintained an open and conciliatory approach toward different intellectual and political currents. He was willing to engage in dialogue with people holding different views and showed a notable degree of intellectual and religious tolerance.

Some of these characteristics can be traced to the family and cultural environment in which he grew up. Taleqani was raised in a clerical family, but the religious establishment was not regarded as merely a profession. His father, Abolhassan Taleqani, was a religious scholar who was also connected with the intellectual and social issues of his time. The family maintained contacts with reform-minded clerics and figures such as Ayatollah Seyyed Hassan Modarres, while their home provided a setting for religious and intellectual dis-

cussions.

At the time, dialogue among followers of different religions and intellectual traditions was also relatively common in some circles. Muslims, Christians, Jews and Zoroastrians engaged in discussions and exchanges of ideas. Taleqani grew up in this environment and witnessed such religious dialogues firsthand. These experiences influenced his understanding of religion and society and helped foster his emphasis on dialogue and tolerance.

This background also made Taleqani more receptive to new ideas in the field of religion. While remaining firmly committed to Islamic principles, he avoided rigid dogmatism and was open to intellectual and religious reforms as long as they did not conflict with his understanding of Islamic foundations. His longstanding intellectual and personal relationship with Mehdi Bazargan, an Iranian scholar, academic, long-time pro-democracy activist, can also be viewed in this context. The two were longtime friends and worked together

on a number of intellectual and political activities. In some respects, Taleqani could even be regarded as more reform-minded and moderate than Bazargan.

One of the most important aspects of Taleqani's political thought was his attention to the Constitutional Revolution and the relationship between religion and political freedom. Following the August 1953 coup, Iran's political environment became increasingly closed and repressive. The Pahlavi government sought to further centralize political power and marginalize opposition groups and political movements. Under these circumstances, many political activists came to believe that earlier approaches to political struggle, particularly constitutionalism and the activities of the National Front, had reached an impasse.

It was in this environment that Taleqani published and edited the important work *Tanbih al-Ummah wa Tan-zih al-Millah* by Ayatollah Mohammad-Hossein Naeini. The work can be viewed as

an effort to revisit constitutionalist thought and demonstrate its compatibility with religious principles. Through this effort, Taleqani sought to reopen discussion of freedom, government and resistance to authoritarianism and to show that constitutionalism could remain a viable means of confronting despotism.

However, this approach did not become the dominant political discourse in Iran. Moderate and nationalist forces did not have sufficient opportunity to develop and promote a coherent theory of freedom, political legitimacy and democracy. As a result, the political struggle gradually moved toward revolutionary currents. With the emergence of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini (PBUH) and the growth of reformist and revolutionary Islamist currents, including the ideas associated with Ali Shariati, political Islam increasingly became a central force in opposition to the Pahlavi government. The revolutionary path gradually replaced gradual reform as the principal avenue of political struggle.



Culture minister calls Minab tragedy document against cruel wars

Arts & Culture Desk

Iran's Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance Abbas Salehi said Monday that the Minab school tragedy should be preserved as a lasting symbol of the Iranian people's suffering and resilience, describing it as a powerful cultural document against unjust wars.

Speaking at the 126th meeting of the Art Council in Tehran on September 14, Salehi said the tragedy possessed distinctive features that set it apart from many other painful events in Iran's recent history, IRNA reported.

"Over the past five decades, we have experienced many events combining grief and heroism," he said. "But the Minab school has characteristics that distinguish it from many other incidents."

Salehi said the tragedy should not be allowed to fade into the past as a distant memory. Instead, he called for keeping

its story alive through cultural and artistic work.

"The Minab school tragedy is a symbol of the innocence of the Iranian people and a document for deterrence against cruel and unjust wars," he said, describing it as a "flag" representing the suffering endured by Iran.

The minister recalled other attacks on schools during the Sacred Defense era, including an incident in Borujerd, but said the Minab tragedy had acquired a broader resonance because it occurred on the first day of a large-scale war and quickly established a powerful connection with wider public consciousness.

The US attack on Shajareh Tayebbeh Elementary school in the city of Minab left 175 students and teachers dead. On the same day, the US carried out another airstrike on a sports hall in the city of Lamerd in Fars Province, killing 24 innocent Iranians and injuring over 130 others.

Its particular circumstances and the innocence of its victims gave the event an enduring humanitarian dimension, he said. Salehi argued that preserving the tragedy through art and culture could give it a lasting place beyond Iran's borders.

"It can become a deterrent force against the unjust wars launched by the cruel powers of the world," he said.

The Art Council meeting also reviewed proposed amendments to regulations governing the establishment and supervision of private art schools. Members discussed preparations for a national survey on literary, cultural and artistic literacy, as well as cultural and artistic initiatives undertaken to commemorate the Minab school tragedy.

The discussions focused on how cultural institutions and artists can help preserve the memory of a tragedy that Salehi said should remain part of Iran's living cultural narrative.



FARS

Tehran, Tashkent chart new tourism roadmap built on Silk Road heritage

Arts & Culture Desk

Iran and Uzbekistan are preparing a 10-point roadmap to expand tourism, cultural heritage and handicrafts cooperation, Iran's Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Reza Salehi-Amiri said Monday during a meeting with Uzbek Ambassador Fariddin Nasriyev in Tehran.

Salehi-Amiri said the two countries were ready to open a new chapter in tourism cooperation by linking their private sectors, easing visa procedures and expanding direct air connections, CHTN reported.

"We are ready to define a new horizon in tourism, cultural heritage and handicrafts between the two countries," Salehi-Amiri said, calling for practical joint measures to turn their shared civilizational heritage into stronger people-to-people ties.

The roadmap calls for closer links among private companies, tourism operators and major business groups, as well as the creation of a joint technical



Iranian Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Reza Salehi-Amiri (R) presents a commemorative handicraft piece to Uzbek Ambassador Fariddin Nasriyev in Tehran in Tehran on September 14, 2026.

CHTN

committee in Tehran and Tashkent. Cooperation on restoring historic monuments and reviving the cultural identity of the Silk Road also features prominently.

Salehi-Amiri pointed to the architectural and cultural affinities between Iran's Isfahan and the Uzbek cities of Samarkand and Bukhara, describing them as expressions of a shared cultural landscape.

He also highlighted Iran's decentralization policy as an opening for greater regional cooperation, saying provinces such as northern Mazandaran were prepared to work with Uzbekistan on handicrafts, restoration expertise and tourism.

Nasriyev welcomed the pro-

posals and said Uzbekistan received 11 million international tourists last year, including 23,000 Iranians. He said existing direct flights between the two countries were operating at full capacity and that Tashkent was seeking to add more regular weekly services.

The ambassador also invited Iranian artisans and restoration specialists to conduct training programs in Tashkent and Bukhara, while pledging to relay the 10-point proposals to Uzbekistan's Culture Ministry and tourism authorities.

The initiative builds on recent bilateral efforts to deepen cooperation in tourism and cultural heritage, including plans for a joint tourism committee.

Tehran exhibition celebrates enduring legacy of Palestinian painter Suleiman Mansour

Arts & Culture Desk

Iran opened an exhibition featuring 17 works by the late Palestinian painter Suleiman Mansour in Tehran on Sunday, honoring the enduring artistic legacy of one of the most influential figures in contemporary Palestinian art.

'Painter of the Wounded Land,' curated by Mohammadreza Vahidzadeh, opened at the Art Bureau's Ali Gallery and brings together selected works that explore Palestinian land, memory, identity and everyday life through Mansour's distinctive visual language.

Mansour, who died in Jerusalem on Aug. 24 at the age of 79, spent more than five decades developing an artistic vocabulary deeply rooted in Palestinian landscape, heritage and lived experience. His work became widely recognized for transforming elements of the natural environment and traditional culture into powerful visual motifs.

Vahidzadeh, the exhibition's curator, said the presentation grew out of research on Palestinian art and Mansour's work. The exhibition was organized alongside a specialized discussion examining different artistic, cultural and social dimensions of his oeuvre.

Some of the works on display have complicated histories. Four originals are held by Tehran Museum of Con-

temporary Art, but access to them proved difficult, prompting organizers to produce high-quality reproductions for the exhibition.

Many other original works have also been separated from the artist over the years. Some were lost or stolen, while others were destroyed amid the difficult conditions surrounding Palestinian cultural life.

Mansour's own circumstances left a strong imprint on his artistic practice. Vahidzadeh noted that the painter frequently moved from one exhibition to another under conditions in which artworks had to be transported quickly. This led him to work in smaller formats that could be carried with relative ease.

His choice of materials also became an important part of his artistic vocabulary. At one point, Mansour and fellow artists decided to stop using Israeli-made art supplies and turned instead to locally available materials, including henna, plants and burnt wood.

Clay eventually became particularly significant to his work. Mansour had grown up in a village surrounded by the material and began incorporating mud into his paintings. As the clay dried, cracked and deteriorated, he initially regarded the changes as a problem. He later recognized their artistic potential.

The cracks became part of the image it-

self, evoking the fragility, endurance and passage of time embedded in Palestinian life.

Mansour's use of indigenous materials was part of a broader artistic shift that helped establish a distinctly Palestinian visual vocabulary. Art institutions and museums have noted his use of clay, straw, chalk, natural dyes and other materials drawn from the local environment.

"He never gave up art," Vahidzadeh said, describing Mansour's persistence through years of upheaval and uncertainty.

The curator also described the painter as a major cultural figure whose work offers an essential reference point for understanding contemporary Palestinian visual culture.

"Anyone seeking to understand the life of the contemporary Palestinian must turn to Suleiman Mansour's works," he said.

Mansour's artistic legacy extends well beyond the region. His works are held by major international collections, including the British Museum, Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art and the Institut du Monde Arabe. He received the Palestine Prize for Visual Arts and the Grand Nile Prize in 1998 and the UNESCO-Sharjah Prize for Arab Culture in 2019.

The Tehran exhibition runs through October 14 at Ali Gallery of the Art Bureau.

Economic diplomacy: a ...

Economic diplomacy must help bridge this gap. Iranian embassies and diplomatic missions should not be confined to political functions. They should also serve as platforms for identifying markets, attracting investment, showcasing Iranian productive capacity, and facilitating connections between business communities. The diplomatic establishment should work closely with economic ministries, the Central Bank, investment agencies, and the private sector to set clear and measurable objectives for each country and target market.

In this context, diversifying Iran's foreign economic relations is particularly important. Turning toward the East should not mean abandoning other economic opportunities around the world. Iran should not simply replace one form of dependence with another. A successful foreign policy

is one that expands a country's economic choices. Relations with China, India, Russia, Central Asian and Gulf countries, cooperation through the Eurasian Economic Union and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and even dialogue with European countries can each form part of a broader, more balanced, and more diversified economic network.

International politics offers many examples of countries maintaining economic cooperation despite serious political and security disputes. This is precisely where diplomacy demonstrates its value. Political disagreements do not necessarily have to result in the closure of every economic channel. States can cooperate in areas such as trade, energy, transportation, transit, technology, environmental protection, and food security on the basis of shared interests. One important principle of Iran's foreign policy, there-

fore, should be not to close any diplomatic channel before exploring its potential. This is also where BRICS matters for Iran. The group could provide a platform for expanding trade in national currencies, developing banking cooperation, creating alternative payment mechanisms, attracting investment, and strengthening joint infrastructure projects. Yet none of these objectives will materialize automatically. Membership without an implementation strategy is little more than a title. The government needs clear targets, defined timelines, and effective mechanisms for measuring progress if it is to make meaningful use of BRICS.

At the same time, it would be unrealistic to expect BRICS alone to resolve Iran's economic challenges. Domestic economic reforms, regulatory stability, an improved business environment, lower investment

risks, a stronger private sector, and banking reform are essential complements to economic diplomacy. Foreign investors do not enter a country simply because of favorable political relations. They also need a predictable and credible economic environment.

The Pezeshkian government should therefore approach economic diplomacy with strong political will, genuine determination, and a clear focus on opportunity. Regional and extra-regional opportunities should not be left to chance or simply expected to come knocking on Iran's door. They must be identified, pursued, negotiated, and ultimately translated into contracts and concrete projects. The success of economic diplomacy should not be measured by the number of summits attended or meetings held. It should be measured by increases in trade, investment, exports, technology transfer, and employment.

The BRICS summit should therefore be understood in precisely this way: neither as a miracle cure for Iran's economy nor merely as another political gathering, but as one opportunity among many. In international politics, the door to diplomacy remains open as long as there is the political will to open it. The Pezeshkian government has an opportunity to make smarter use of regional and extra-regional alliances and to place foreign policy more firmly at the service of economic development.

Today, more than ever, Iran needs a form of diplomacy that moves beyond conference rooms and into the real world of trade and investment. It needs diplomacy capable of turning political agreements into tangible economic opportunities—and of transforming the country's considerable geopolitical and economic potential into greater prosperity for its people.