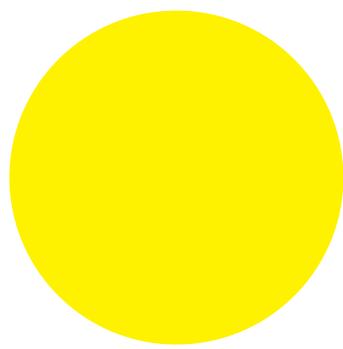


Poet Shahriar hailed as bridge between Iran's national, ethnic identities



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The combo shows volunteers taking part in a mass military exercise in Tehran on September 18, 2026.

Ansarullah advances pave way for talks

By Delaram Ahmadi
Staff writer

INTERVIEW

Ansarullah forces in Yemen have made significant advances along the country's western coast over the past week, capturing the strategic port city of Mokha, located just north of Bab al-Mandab, as well as the Hanish Islands in the Red Sea and Mayun Island in the Bab al-Mandab Strait itself. The rapid advance is expected to have a significant impact on the regional balance of power. According to Sabah Zanganeh, a regional affairs expert, the development will affect many countries, particularly those with interests in the Red Sea, and push them to negotiation and compromise with Ansarullah.



IRAN DAILY: What do Ansarullah's recent advances in Yemen, and its growing ability to influence strategic areas and routes in the Red Sea and Bab al-Mandab, mean for the region's security dynamics?

ZANGANEH: Ansarullah's recent advances in Yemen have effectively strengthened its position inside the country and enhanced its standing among the various forces operating in central and southern Yemen. Its arrival in other areas of western Yemen has also strengthened its control over both the ports and islands located in the southwestern part of the country, increasing its capabilities. It can now more easily control the movement of both oil tankers and commercial vessels, prevent some vessels from passing and allow others to transit. Therefore, the development will affect the region's overall economic and political equations and will play a decisive role in commercial and economic interactions.

Given the importance of Bab al-Mandab for trade and energy transfers, what implications will the strengthening of Ansarullah's position have for regional energy security and trade routes?

Strengthening Ansarullah's position in western Yemen and the surrounding islands will increase its ability to control the movement of vessels, trade and oil exports. Each of the islands off western Yemen will serve as a strategic position from which the movement of vessels can be controlled with greater strength, and other countries as well as state and non-state forces, such as forces affiliated with Saudi Arabia or the UAE, will inevitably have to give Ansarullah a more prominent position in regional equations.

Naturally, Israel, the United States and Saudi Arabia itself will be affected by this expanded presence in western Yemen. This presence will cover both western Yemen and provinces such as Hadramout and Al-Mahrah, increasing Ansarullah's ability to gain control over oil resources in these provinces as well as its ability to control and contain the ports of southern Yemen.

The alliances that Saudi Arabia had built in those areas, as well as the government that fled Sanaa and was established in Aden with Saudi backing, will all be affected by Ansarullah's power and capabilities. It is not unlikely that some of these forces will either join Ansarullah directly or accept its superiority in managing the political and economic affairs of their areas.

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US cannot escape responsibility for war crimes by leaving UN rights council: *Deputy FM*

International Desk

Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister for Legal and International Affairs Kazem Gharibabadi said on Friday the US cannot evade responsibility for war crimes it committed during its war on Iran by withdrawing from the UN Human Rights Council.

In a post on X on Friday, Gharibabadi said the international community recognized that the US strikes on an elementary school in Minab and a sports arena in Lamerd, both in the south, were "clear war crimes," rather than operational mistakes. "History will not forget," Gharibabadi wrote, referring to the February 28 attacks on the Shajareh Tayyebah Primary School, where 168 people were killed, most of them children and the sports center where at least 21 people died and 100 others sustained injuries.

His remarks came after US State Department announced on Thursday that Washington had ended its membership and participation in the council, accusing the body of promoting what it called "anti-American rhetoric" and adopt-

ing an overly accommodating approach toward governments it accused of repressing their populations.

The pullout followed a report by the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Iran, which examined US conduct during the war on the country that began on February 28, 2026.

The UN-backed mission said it had "reasonable grounds" to believe that US forces were responsible for two indiscriminate attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure that amounted to war crimes.

One of the incidents involved a Tomahawk missile strike on the elementary school.

The mission said the school was a clearly identifiable civilian facility and found no evidence that it was being used for military purposes when it was attacked.

Investigators said features including school signs, child-oriented murals and playground areas clearly identified it as an educational facility.

The mission concluded that the United States had failed to take all

feasible measures to verify that the site was a military objective before launching the attack, and said the circumstances indicated conduct going beyond mere negligence.

The mission also examined Lamerd with investigators saying the use of precision-strike missiles that dispersed tungsten pellets resulted in an indiscriminate attack and constituted a war crime.

The report is to be presented to the UN Human Rights Council.

A US official cited by The New York Times confirmed that the missile used in the attack was the PrSM and that the weapon was being tested in combat for the first time.

Airwars, weapons experts and journalists analyzing verified video and the pattern of destruction found characteristics consistent with the missile, including an airburst and the dispersal of large numbers of high-speed tungsten pellets.

The analysis found that civilians were killed as far as 50 meters from the points of detonation and that damage extended substantially farther.



The building of a destroyed primary school is pictured surrounded by rubble in Minab in Iran's Hormozgan province on August 10.
● AFP

'Sacrifice for Iran' Tehranis come out to show readiness to defend nation in mass drill

International Desk

Hundreds of thousands of people took to the streets of Tehran for a military exercise in a show of power to demonstrate public support for Iran and readiness to defend the country against foreign aggression. The "Jan-Fadaye Iran" drill, meaning self-sacrificing for Iran, began at 8 a.m. and continued into the afternoon, with organizers estimating that 500,000 people in attendance. People from all walks of life, dressed in military fatigues with some carrying weapons and some driving armored vehicles, marched from Imam Hossein Square towards the iconic Enghelab (revolution) Square in Tehran's late-summer heat. Several Iranian drones were displayed during the event, showcasing part of the country's unmanned aerial capabilities. Organizers said the exercise was intended to help establish lasting security, demonstrate popular strength and shore up resistance to threats from Iran's enemies. President Masoud Pezeshkian attended the rally and praised the participants' solidarity, unity and national loyalty. "Iran belongs to all Iranians, and preserving its dignity and pride requires unity, empathy and collective participation," Pezeshkian said. "Our lives are dedicated to the people, the country and Iran, and we are working for the country with all our might," he added, stressing

that unity on all issues "will disappoint the enemy". Hossein Taeb, head of Iran's Basij Organization, called Jan-Fadaye Iran participants a "nightmare for the enemies" and a symbol of national resistance.

Iran remains embroiled in a war that was launched by the United States and Israel on February 28. The fighting subsided after 40 days following a temporary peace deal but flared up again in mid-July with US airstrikes on Iran's southern coast that continued for more than two weeks.

The United States imposed a naval blockade on Iranian ports in the Gulf of Oman before the peace agreement was signed in mid-June. The blockade returned during the second round of fighting and remains in place. Iran regards the blockade and new US sanctions on 27 Iranian airlines imposed earlier this month as part of the war and an effort to create shortages and bring down the Islamic Republic. A war that the United States waged at Israel's instigation to take out Iran's peaceful nuclear program has now come back to bite US President Donald Trump where it hurts. Trump's major concern is now reopening the Strait of Hormuz, a crucial chokepoint for around 20% of global oil and LNG shipments which was open before the war but Iran closed it days after the conflict began, pushing oil prices from \$70 to above \$100 a barrel.

TENDER NO.: 08-21-0540009

Second Announcement

N.I.S.O.C
NATIONAL IRANIAN SOUTH OILFIELDS COMPANY
AHVAZ-IRAN

The National Iranian South Oil Company (NISOC) is seeking to procure the specified goods listed in the table below through a Qualitative Evaluation Call for conducting a public tender via the Government Electronic Procurement System (SETAD). All stages of the tender process including the receipt of tender documents, submission of bidders' proposals, and the opening of bid envelopes, shall be carried out exclusively through the Government Electronic Procurement System (SETAD) portal at www.setadiran.ir. Bidders who have not previously registered must complete the registration process on the aforementioned portal and obtain an Electronic Signature certificate to participate in the tender.

Item	Material Description	Quantity
1	CASING, API GRADE L-80, SEAMLESS, "VAM", "NEW VAM" THREAD, R-3 API 5CT/ISO 11960, PSL: 2, AS PER API 5CT/ISO 11960, SIZE(OD), WEIGHT(PFF), AS SPECIFIED MARKING: COLD DIE STAMPED IN ACCORDANCE WITH API 5CT, NOTE: LEVEL OF INSPECTION: 1 (L.O.I: 1), "QCP/MPS DOCUMENTS ARE ESSENTIAL TO REVIEW & CONFIRM", "ITP DOCUMENTS IS ESSENTIAL FOR TECHNICAL EVALUATION", OD: ACC. TO CLAUSE 8.11.1 API5CT 10 ED. (TABLE 13 & 14 & 15), WT: ACCORDING TO CLAUSE 8.11.2 API5CT 10 EDITION MASS: ACC. TO CLAUSE 8.11.3 API5CT 10 EDITION (TABLE 16), ID. ACCORDING TO CLAUSE 8.11.4 API5CT 10 EDITION, 5-1/2 IN., 20 PPF COUPLING, CASING, API GR.L-80, SML, ALL WEIGHTS, AS PER API 5CT/IOS 11960 AND NACE MR0175, COUPLING, CASING, API GRADE L-80, SML, ALL WEIGHTS, AS PER API 5CT/IOS 11960 AND NACE MR0175, TO BE ELECTRO PLATED, SIZE, THREAD AS SPECIFIED TO BE ELECTRO PLATED, 5-1/2 IN., (VAM-N.VAM-SEC)	2,000LE
2		30NO

Vendors who intend to participate in aforesaid tenders are requested to send their "Intention To Participate" letter via fax to the following number along with their resume according to Qualitative Assessment Form no. 1, available at: www.setadiran.ir, not later than 14 days after the second announcement, otherwise, their requests for participation in the tender will be disregarded. The applicants should have relevant background in supplying the required goods and capability to provide and submit a bid bond of 32,180/14 EURO or 57,689,979,366 RIAL, in favor of NISOC.

THE ONLY ACCEPTABLE DELIVERY TERM IS CFR, BANDAR IMAM KHOMEINI, IRAN PAYMENT TERM IS C.A.D. INCLUDING AN ADVANCE PAYMENT, SUBSEQUENT TO NISOC'S MATERIAL APPROVAL.

FOREIGN PURCHASING DEPARTMENT
Bldg. No. 104, Material Procurement Management Complex,
Kouy-e-Fadaeian Islam (New Site), Ahvaz, Iran
Tel. No.: 061 34 12 4644 Fax No.: 061 34 45 74 37

2277643 شناسه

PUBLIC RELATIONS

www.shana.ir www.nisoc.ir <http://iets.mporg.ir> www.setadiran.ir

TENDER NO.: 08-21-0440032

Second Announcement

N.I.S.O.C
NATIONAL IRANIAN SOUTH OILFIELDS COMPANY
AHVAZ-IRAN

The National Iranian South Oil Company (NISOC) is seeking to procure the specified goods listed in the table below through a Qualitative Evaluation Call for conducting a public tender via the Government Electronic Procurement System (SETAD). All stages of the tender process including the receipt of tender documents, submission of bidders' proposals, and the opening of bid envelopes, shall be carried out exclusively through the Government Electronic Procurement System (SETAD) portal at www.setadiran.ir. Bidders who have not previously registered must complete the registration process on the aforementioned portal and obtain an Electronic Signature certificate to participate in the tender.

Item	Material Description	Quantity	UNIT
1	CASING, API GRADE J-55, SEAMLESS "BUTTRESS" THREAD, RANGE 3, (MAX LEN: 40.5 FT) AS PER API 5CT/ ISO11960, PSL: 2SIZE(OD), WEIGHT(PFF), AS SPECIFIED MARKING: COLD DIE STAMPED IN ACCORDANCE WITH API 5 CT NOTE: LEVEL OF INSPECTION: 1 (L.O.I: 1) "QCP/ MPS DOCUMENTS ARE ESSENTIAL TO REVIEW & CONFIRM" "ITP DOCUMENTS IS ESSENTIAL FOR TECHNICAL EVALUATION" 20 IN., 133 PPF	2000	LE

Vendors who intend to participate in aforesaid tenders are requested to send their "Intention To Participate" letter via fax to the following number along with their resume according to Qualitative Assessment Form no.1, available at: www.setadiran.ir, not later than 14 days after the second announcement, otherwise, their requests for participation in the tender will be disregarded. The applicants should have relevant background in supplying the required goods and capability to provide and submit a bid bond of 111,776/72 EURO or

192,491,465,472 RIAL, in favor of NISOC.

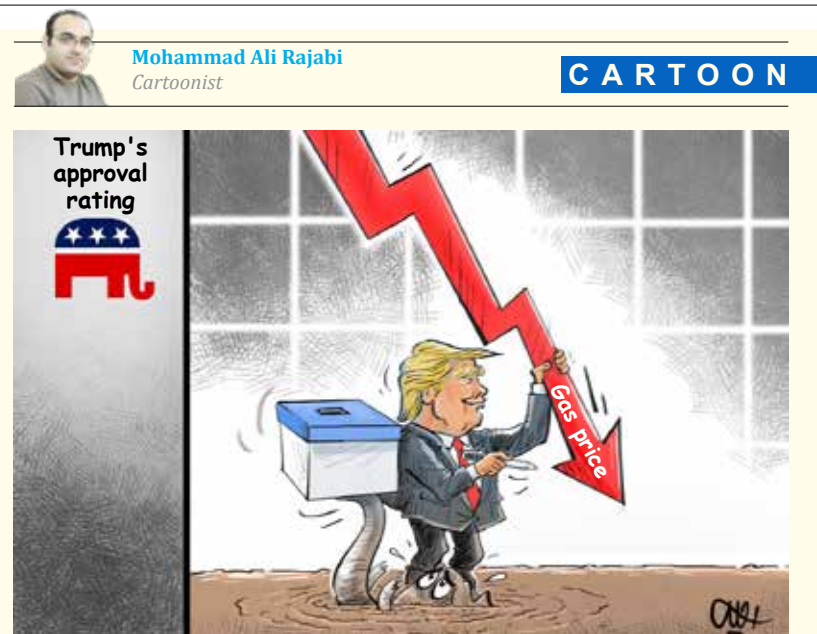
ONLY ACCEPTABLE DELIVERY TERM IS CFR, BANDAR IMAM KHOMEINI, IRAN PAYMENT TERM IS C.A.D INCLUDING 25% ADVANCE PAYMENT, SUBSEQUENT TO NISOC'S MATERIAL APPROVAL.

FOREIGN PURCHASING DEPARTMENT
Bldg. No. 104, Material Procurement Management Complex, Kouy-e-Fadaeian Islam (New Site), Ahvaz, Iran
Tel. No.: 061 341 23589 Fax No.: 061 34457437

2277640 شناسه

PUBLIC RELATIONS:

www.shana.ir www.nisoc.ir <http://iets.mporg.ir> www.setadiran.ir



Iran's trade with BRICS members reaches \$60b

Economy Desk

Iran's trade turnover with BRICS member countries amounted to \$60 billion last year.

The figure was announced by the Deputy Head of Iran's Trade Promotion Organization (TPO) Mohammad-Sadeq Qannadzadeh, according to IRNA.

"Iran exported \$23 billion worth of goods to BRICS member countries last year, while importing \$37 billion worth of goods from member countries of the group," he said.

Qannadzadeh added that despite sanctions imposed on Iran and problems in transportation, freight and air services arising from the US-Israeli war on the country, Iran has maintained economic exchanges with BRICS member countries. The official said Iran should use the opportunities offered

by BRICS members to expand trade relations and establish cooperation on projects covering trade, freight transportation, payments and investment. He added that Iran could also expand cooperation with BRICS members in transit, trade facilitation, customs, coordination on standards and payment mechanisms.

Qannadzadeh said there was room to expand the use of local currencies in bilateral trade between member countries, noting that this practice could contribute to the development of broader financial mechanisms among BRICS members. BRICS accounts for a significant share of Iran's foreign trade, he said, adding that despite the large volume of trade, the full potential of Iran's membership in the group has yet to be realized in the country's economy. "Iran's membership in orga-

nizations such as BRICS, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation needs to translate into tangible economic cooperation rather than political participation," he said. According to Qannadzadeh, Iran can create new avenues to sustain its foreign trade and reduce international restrictions and pressure by expanding trade relations with major economic powers despite the restrictions resulting from sanctions.

BRICS is an intergovernmental organization established in 2006. In addition to the original five members, namely Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, the group currently includes Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, and the UAE as members. Saudi Arabia's accession to the organization remains shrouded in ambiguity.



● IRNA

Tehran offers joint agricultural projects, tech exchange to Dushanbe

Economy Desk

The Iranian deputy minister of industry, mine and trade, in a meeting with the first deputy minister of agriculture of Tajikistan, emphasized the development of economic and commercial cooperation in the agricultural sector as well as technology export between the two countries as it "leads to the strengthening of relations".

According to IRNA, during his trip to Tajikistan, Mohammad-Sadeq Mofatteh met with Nur Ali Mohammadullah and expressed the readiness of Iranian companies to supply agricultural tools and machinery, plant pesticides, chemical fertilizers, irrigation equipment, livestock medicine and vaccines, and equipment required for animal husbandry and poultry farming.

"Proposals have been presented for providing the possibility of equal benefit for Iranian producers and joint producers from the offered facilities, which we hope will



● IRNA

be taken into consideration," he announced.

The deputy minister of industry, mine and trade noted that in the field of investment and joint production, a specific project for the production and assembly of tractors and agricultural machinery in Tajikistan with the participation of the TajIran company has been defined, adding that Iran has "the possibility of developing the export of these products to regional markets".

"We are also ready for cooperation with Tajikistan, from supplying and purchasing cotton to processing, spinning, weaving and production of final products, with the aim of export to third markets."

The development of greenhouse, cold storage, pack-

aging and processing industry projects with the use of technical and engineering services were other areas of possible cooperation the deputy minister highlighted in the meeting.

Mofatteh, referring to the creation of an export terminal and a logistics center for agricultural products, stated, "For the gathering, packaging, processing and exporting of Iranian and Tajik products, better use of customs and tax exemptions has been envisioned."

The possibility of creating a joint production unit for livestock and poultry medicines, after assessing the market and receiving feedback from the Ministry of Agriculture of Tajikistan and private sector activists, was emphasized as well.

Mofatteh and Mohammadullah also considered the capacities for livestock breeding and technology transfer and establishing communication between Iranian companies and the livestock breeding center of Tajikistan.

Japan follows US in raising interest rates

Japan's central bank has increased interest rates to a fresh 31-year high as it attempts to combat global inflation linked to the US war on Iran.

The Bank of Japan (BoJ) voted to raise its target interest rate from 1% to 1.25%, the highest level since 1995, The Guardian reported.

The move meant the BoJ joined the US Federal Reserve and the European Central Bank in tightening monetary policy this month, as central banks attempt to curb the impact of rising prices, linked to the conflict in the Middle East.

The Bank of England on Thursday voted to leave UK interest rates on hold at 3.75% but warned they could soon rise amid the fallout from the Iran war.

The BoJ policy committee's vote to raise rates was not unanimous — with two of the nine board members dissenting against the increase.

Kazuo Ueda, the governor of the BoJ, would not rule out the possibility of back-to-back rate rises by the bank's policy committee.

"That depends on how price conditions develop," he said.



The Bank of Japan headquarters in Tokyo
● KIM KYUNG-HOON/REUTERS

"There could be various possibilities. We shouldn't rule anything out. We're at a phase where we need to look at various data carefully. But that doesn't mean we can move slowly. We will analyse data carefully and take timely action as needed."

The BoJ's policy committee meets eight times a year, roughly once every six weeks, and Ueda said there is no set plan for the timing of any future potential increases in the rate.

"As for the pace of future rate

hikes, we don't have any pre-set idea in mind such as once every three months," he said. "We will determine at each policy meeting how best to ensure underlying inflation stabilises at 2%." The BoJ has been raising rates since 2024, when it lifted its base rate out of negative territory. It has been under pressure to raise borrowing costs as the yen weakened steadily against the dollar this year. The Japanese currency weakened more than 1% against the dollar late last week.

Freight, passenger transit back to normal at Iraqi borders: *Businessman*

By Sadeq Dehqan
Staff writer

INTERVIEW

The temporary closure of certain border crossings between Iran and Iraq following a security incident created concerns

in recent days regarding the process of trade exchanges between the two countries, particularly the transfer of perishable goods. The Shalamcheh border, which is considered

among the most important land gateways for trade between Iran and Iraq, faced restrictions and a halt in activity for approximately two days; a matter that caused congestion in the border



Mostafa Mousavi

area and the stoppage of a number of consignments. Concurrent with the dissemination of news regarding the closure of the Shalamcheh and Chazzebah borders, speculations and rumors were also raised concerning the cause of this closure, and some even attributed it to political decisions and regional developments.

According to Mostafa Mousavi, the head of the Khorramshahr Chamber of Commerce, a significant portion of the goods exchanged through these borders consists of food products and perishable items, and a halt of several days can cause damage to these consignments and impose losses on producers and exporters.

With the return of activity at the Iran-Iraq border to normal conditions, Mousavi said during an exclusive interview

with Iran Daily that there is no restriction at those border crossings at the moment, and the process of trade exchanges continues.

Regardless of whether in the future, for any security, executive, or other reason, a decision is made for restriction or halt of activity at the border, he said that prior notification can prevent damage to consignments because a portion of the goods transiting through Shalamcheh are perishable, and a sudden halt of the border can create problems for their owners.

"During the period in which the border was closed due to that incident, a degree of congestion of goods occurred. However, since Tuesday, with the cooperation of the Iranian border regiment and the Iraqi side, Iraqi trucks entered, and the loading operations were carried out gradually." The head of the Khorramshahr Chamber

of Commerce continued that conditions have improved considerably, and activities have become lighter and almost routine.

Regarding the position of Shalamcheh in trade exchanges between Iran and Iraq, Mousavi also stated that the two countries have several important borders, among which there also Mehran, Khosravi and other border gateways, but all those borders are important in bilateral trade.

"After the Parvizkhan border, Shalamcheh is among the borders that have considerable trade activity, and a high volume of trucks and trade consignments transit through this route."

The businessman added that on average, approximately 450 to 600 trucks cross the Shalamcheh border daily. Mousavi once again stressed that if a re-

striction is to be created at the border, it is better that, to the extent possible, prior notification or warning exist so that economic actors and owners of goods can plan for their consignments.

Reiterating the vulnerability of perishable goods under a halt in border activities, he explained that one of the important problems at land borders is the shortage of cold storage infrastructure.

The head of the Khorramshahr Chamber of Commerce added that in the event of the halt becoming prolonged, greater damage is imposed on the owners of the goods.

For the development of the required infrastructure, he maintained, "the private sector must enter, and the public sector must also provide the necessary groundwork and facilities for the expansion of this infrastructure."

Ansarullah's strategic gains in Yemen



By Saman Sofalgar
Political researcher

OPINION EXCLUSIVE

Yemen's war has entered a fundamentally new phase. After years in which the conflict appeared to be moving toward an uneasy political settlement, Ansarullah (the Houthis) has seized the military initiative and transformed the strategic map of the country. The movement's advances along the western coast, the capture of Mocha (Mokha), its expansion toward Bab el Mandeb, and its control of strategically important Red Sea islands have created a new balance of power on the ground.

The significance of these developments goes far beyond individual towns or military positions. Ansarullah has consolidated its position along Yemen's western maritime axis and is now fighting to expand this advantage on other fronts, particularly in Marib and surrounding areas. Forces backed by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates are attempting to contain the movement's advance, but years of external military and financial support have failed to produce the decisive outcome that Riyadh and Abu Dhabi once sought. The current phase therefore reflects a deeper transformation in Yemen's war. Ansarullah is no longer merely demonstrating its ability to survive sustained pressure. It is increasingly demonstrating an ability to translate military resilience into territorial gains and strategic leverage.

The western coast

The western coast has become the foundation of Ansarullah's new strategic position. The capture of Mocha was particularly significant because of the city's proximity to Bab el Mandeb. The subsequent expansion toward the strait and the reported seizure of Perim Island and the Hanish islands have extended Ansarullah's strategic reach deep into the Red Sea. Taken together, these developments have transformed the western coast from a contested battlefield into a central component of Ansarullah's military position. The geographical importance is considerable. Yemen's western coastline borders one of the world's most important maritime corridors: Bab el Mandeb Strait connects the Red Sea with the Gulf of Aden and the wider Indian Ocean. Ansarullah's presence along this coastline therefore provides strategic depth that is disproportionate to its conventional military resources.

Control of the coast does not automatically mean unlimited control over international shipping. But the ability to operate from territory surrounding a major maritime chokepoint gives Ansarullah significant political and military leverage. The western coast is consequently no longer simply a Yemeni battlefield. It has become an important ele-



ment of the broader regional balance.

From survival to initiative

For years, Ansarullah's most important military achievement was its ability to survive. The Saudi-led intervention, repeated air campaigns, economic pressure, and support for opposing Yemeni forces failed to eliminate the movement as a major political and military actor. The current offensive represents a different stage. Ansarullah has moved from strategic survival to strategic initiative.

The capture of Mocha and the subsequent advances toward Bab el Mandeb demonstrate that the movement can now conduct major offensive operations while maintaining pressure across other fronts. This is an important transformation. A movement that merely survives can preserve its political position. A movement capable of expanding its territorial control can begin to reshape the political balance itself. That is precisely what makes the latest developments so significant.

Saudi-Emirati forces

The performance of Saudi- and Emirati-backed forces is central to understanding the current battlefield. For years, Riyadh and Abu Dhabi have invested heavily in Yemeni forces opposed to Ansarullah. They have provided weapons, funding, training, intelligence, logistics, air support, and political backing. Yet these forces have repeatedly struggled to translate that support into lasting strategic control. The problem is partly organizational. The anti-Ansarullah camp consists of multiple political, tribal,

military, and regional factions. These groups do not always share the same political objectives or strategic priorities. The result has often been a sharp contrast between the resources available to the coalition and the effectiveness of those resources on the battlefield. Ansarullah has benefited from a more coherent political and military structure. Its ability to concentrate forces, sustain operations, and exploit weaknesses among its opponents has repeatedly allowed it to overcome significant differences in conventional military resources. The collapse or withdrawal of opposing forces from parts of the western coast illustrates this dynamic. The latest developments therefore represent not simply a series of battlefield defeats for Saudi- and Emirati-backed formations, but a broader challenge to the strategy that has supported them for years.

Bab el Mandeb

The movement's position around Bab el Mandeb gives the current campaign an international dimension. Perim Island occupies a strategically important location within the strait itself, while the Hanish islands provide additional positions farther north in the Red Sea. The significance of these locations lies primarily in geography. Bab el Mandeb is a critical maritime gateway connecting the Red Sea with the Gulf of Aden. Any military actor with a durable presence in its immediate vicinity possesses strategic leverage far beyond the size of the territory itself. For Ansarullah, this geography creates an important advantage.

The movement can now connect its territorial position inside Yemen with the maritime theater

of the Red Sea. This gives it a broader strategic environment in which to operate and increases the importance of Yemen in regional calculations. It also means that the conflict can no longer be viewed purely as an internal Yemeni struggle. The Red Sea has become an integral part of Yemen's military and political equation.

Battle for Marib

The next major test is inland. As Ansarullah strengthens its position along the western coast, the focus of the conflict is increasingly shifting toward Marib, al-Jawf, Taiz, and other areas where Saudi- and Emirati-backed forces maintain positions. Marib is particularly important because of its energy resources, geographical location, and political significance. It has remained one of the principal areas outside Ansarullah's control and has served as an important base for opposing forces.

The struggle over Marib therefore has the potential to determine whether Ansarullah's western gains can be transformed into a broader military advantage. The battlefield is more complicated than the coastal front. Tribal networks, fortified positions, local political interests, and external military support all play a role. Saudi Arabia has responded with intensified air operations in an effort to prevent further advances. Yet airpower alone cannot resolve the underlying political and military fragmentation of the forces operating on the ground. The coming battles in Marib and other interior fronts will therefore test whether the momentum generated on the western coast can be sustained.

Asymmetric power

Ansarullah's military development is another major factor behind its recent successes. Over the course of the war, the movement has developed capabilities extending well beyond conventional guerrilla warfare. Its arsenal includes ballistic and cruise missiles, drones, maritime systems, and anti-ship weapons. The importance of these capabilities lies in their combination. Ansarullah does not need to replicate the air force, naval power, or technological infrastructure of Saudi Arabia and its partners. Instead, it has developed a military model based on mobility, dispersion, relatively inexpensive precision systems, local knowledge, and organizational resilience. This creates

an asymmetric cost equation. A technologically sophisticated coalition may possess overwhelming conventional superiority while still finding it difficult to eliminate an opponent that can disperse its forces, regenerate capabilities, and impose costs from multiple directions. The Yemeni battlefield has become a particularly important demonstration of this form of warfare.

The Iran dimension

The strategic significance of Ansarullah's gains also extends beyond Yemen. The current developments are unfolding amid a broader confrontation involving Iran, the United States, and Israel. In this environment, Ansarullah's growing military position in Yemen has implications for the wider regional balance. The movement's control of the western coast and its position around Bab el Mandeb give the broader regional conflict an additional strategic theater. For Iran, Ansarullah's military resilience and territorial gains can strengthen its position indirectly by complicating the strategic calculations of the United States and Israel. This does not mean that Ansarullah is simply an extension of Iranian military power. The movement has its own political identity, domestic interests, and strategic calculations.

Nevertheless, a stronger Ansarullah creates a regional environment in which Washington and Tel Aviv must account for a capable actor positioned beside one of the world's most important maritime chokepoints. At a time when Iran is confronting American and Israeli military pressure, the consolidation of Ansarullah's position can therefore provide Tehran with additional strategic depth. The effect is not necessarily measured by direct coordination. It can be measured by the number of additional military, political, and strategic calculations that the opposing side must make.

Resilience as strategy

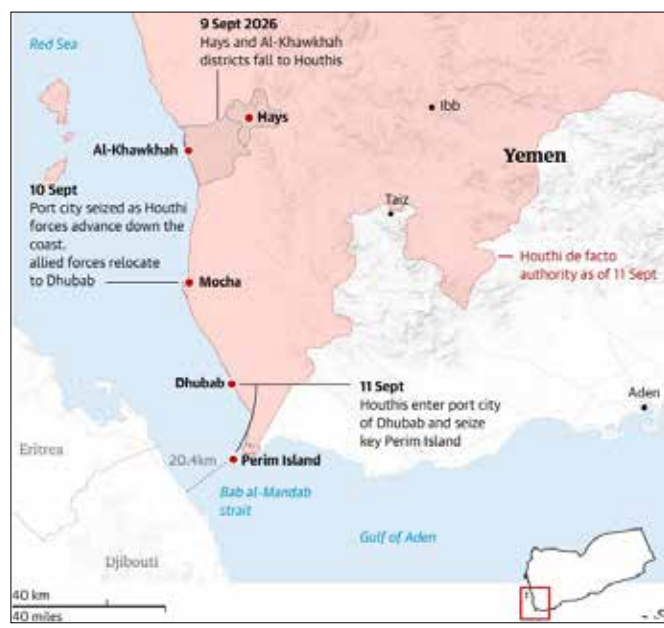
Perhaps the deepest explanation for Ansarullah's battlefield performance is resilience. The movement has survived more than a decade of intense conflict and has emerged with greater military experience, more sophisticated capabilities, and a broader strategic reach. Years of war have allowed it to develop organizational knowledge, improve its weapons systems, expand its operational experience, and maintain political cohesion. Its current offensive should therefore not be viewed as an isolated military episode. It is the product of accumulated experience. The movement has transformed endurance into capability and capability into territorial expansion.

A new map

Yemen's strategic map has changed. Ansarullah's consolidation of the western coast, capture of Mocha, expansion toward Bab el Mandeb, and control of strategically positioned Red Sea islands have created a new geographical reality. The next phase is likely to be determined on the interior fronts, particularly Marib, al-Jawf, and Taiz. There, Saudi- and Emirati-backed forces



The capture of Mocha and the subsequent advances toward Bab el Mandeb demonstrate that the movement can now conduct major offensive operations while maintaining pressure across other fronts. This is an important transformation. A movement that merely survives can preserve its political position. A movement capable of expanding its territorial control can begin to reshape the political balance itself. That is precisely what makes the latest developments so significant.



GUARDIAN GRAPHIC

continue to resist, supported by substantial external resources. But the fundamental strategic question has changed. For years, the central question was whether Ansarullah could withstand external pressure. It has demonstrated that it can. The question now is whether it can transform its new territorial and military position into a durable political advantage across Yemen. The humanitarian consequences of renewed warfare remain severe, and continued fighting will impose further costs on the Yemeni population. Any assessment of the military balance must therefore recognize the human consequences of the conflict. Yet from a strategic perspective, the direction of the war has changed. Ansarullah has moved from defending its established position to reshaping Yemen's military geography. The western coast, Mocha, Bab el Mandeb, and the Red Sea islands have become interconnected elements of that transformation. The battles now unfolding in Marib and other parts of Yemen will determine whether this transformation continues. At the regional level, the implications are even broader. A stronger Ansarullah gives Iran an additional strategic variable in its confrontation with the United States and Israel, while forcing Saudi Arabia and its partners to reconsider a strategy that has failed to produce decisive results despite years of substantial investment. Yemen is therefore entering a new strategic era. The balance of power is no longer defined simply by the number of aircraft, missiles, or financial resources available to each side. It is increasingly determined by who can sustain pressure, maintain organizational cohesion, exploit geography, and convert battlefield resilience into lasting political leverage. By those measures, Ansarullah has fundamentally altered the trajectory of Yemen's war.

Ansarullah attacks on Saudi Arabia challenge joint defence alliance

By Prasanta Kumar Pradhan
Research fellow at the Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses

OPINION

Tensions between Saudi Arabia and the Houthis (Ansarullah) of Yemen have once again escalated, further exacerbating the security situation in the Arabian Peninsula. The Saudi-led coalition, alongside the Yemeni cabinet at Aden, has intensified military operations against Houthi targets across several parts of Yemen. The Houthis have carried out attacks against military targets, as well as critical energy infrastructure, in Saudi Arabia. The conflict has also extended into the maritime domain, posing risks to commercial shipping and vessel movement through the Red Sea and the Bab el Mandeb Strait. This widening conflict has added another layer of complexity to the already volatile regional security environment. The evolving situation also raises questions about the credibility of the joint defence alliance, signed by Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Pakistan.

Saudi critical infrastructure attacked
As tensions in the Strait of Hormuz continue to persist, developments in the Red Sea and the Bab el Mandeb have emerged as another major security challenge for Saudi Arabia. The Houthis in Yemen, who had largely remained dormant during the US-Israel war, have intensified their attacks against the Kingdom. Since the first week of September, they have launched several attacks targeting Saudi territory, including critical energy infrastructure, such as the Abha International Airport, King Khalid Air Base and the East-West Pipeline (Petroline). The pipeline, which has gained particular strategic significance since the onset of the crisis in the Strait of Hormuz, is a critical alternative route for exporting Saudi oil to the outside world. Extending about 1,200 kilometres from the oil-producing Abqaiq oil field in eastern Saudi Arabia to the Red Sea port of Yanbu, the Petroline has become a vital economic and energy lifeline for the Kingdom amid ongoing disruptions in the Strait of Hormuz. The pipeline has been temporarily shut down following the attacks. Saudi Arabia has stated that these drones were launched from Iraq, but it has resisted retaliation at the request of the Iraqi prime minister. Several armed groups are operating in



Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan (L) shakes hands with Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif after signing a joint defence agreement on August 7, 2026, while Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman watches. ● AFP

Iraq, over which the Iraqi government exercises little or no effective control. The attack on the pipeline demonstrates an apparent intention to target Saudi Arabia's economic capabilities and critical energy infrastructure at a particularly vulnerable moment. For the Kingdom, it represents yet another serious breach of its security environment. It highlights the difficulty of protecting an extensive critical infrastructure network from threats originating across multiple geographical fronts.

Disruption in the Red Sea and Bab el Mandeb
Meanwhile, the security chal-

lenge has also extended into the maritime domain. The Houthis have claimed to have established control over the Red Sea coastline of Yemen. This enables them to disrupt the maritime traffic and energy supplies passing through this strategically important waterway. They have also claimed to have captured Mayun Island in the Strait of Bab el Mandeb off the Yemeni coast. In addition, their seizure of the strategically important port of Mokha (Mocha) along the Red Sea has further strengthened their position along maritime corridors. Thus, the growing instability in the Red Sea and the Bab el Mandeb is creating an additional and increasingly complex security challenge for Saudi Arabia and the wider regional order.

Challenge for the joint alliance
The Kingdom sought US assistance in responding to the

deteriorating security situation. However, President Donald Trump reportedly declined the Saudi request. Against this backdrop, the crisis has also raised important questions about the relevance and credibility of the joint defence alliance between Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Pakistan, which stipulates that an attack against one member should be regarded as an attack against all. Although both Turkey and Pakistan have condemned the Houthi attacks against Saudi Arabia, neither has, thus far, come to provide military assistance to the Kingdom against the Houthi attacks. A major visible discrepancy exists between the Alliance's stated commit-

Fighters loyal to the Ansarullah (Houthis) march during a rally in Sana'a, Yemen, on September 16, 2026. ● AFP



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Pakistan faces a strategic dilemma. While it has committed to Saudi Arabia, it does not intend to be drawn into direct military conflict against the Houthis. Joining the war against the Houthis would not only entangle Pakistan in the regional war in West Asia. Still, it would also undermine the image it seeks to project as a mediator in the region. Pakistan is, moreover, keen to maintain good relations with both Saudi Arabia and Iran simultaneously. Ankara faces a similar predicament.

ment to collective defence and its members' response during a crisis. This raises questions about the Alliance's nature and credibility. It also raises the question of whether the joint alliance can go beyond a political declaration and become a regional alliance for collective security architecture in West Asia. Pakistan faces a strategic dilemma. While it has committed to Saudi Arabia, it does not intend to be drawn into direct military conflict against the Houthis. Joining the war against the Houthis would not only entangle Pakistan in the regional war in West Asia. Still, it would also undermine the image it seeks to project as a mediator in the region. Pakistan is, moreover, keen to maintain good relations with both Saudi Arabia and Iran simultaneously. Ankara faces a similar predicament. Ankara faces a similar predicament. Like Pakistan, it too has no desire to fight Saudi Arabia's war on the Houthis. Turkey has established a close defence relationship with Saudi Arabia, but its participation in the joint alliance is strategic and not driven by the threat facing Saudi Arabia. Importantly, Turkey views the ongoing Saudi Arabia-Houthi clashes as part of the broader US-Israeli campaign against Iran. Given the close nexus between Iran and the Houthis, Turkish involvement in this conflict would likely be perceived as Turkey taking sides against Iran, which could jeopardise its bilateral relationship with Tehran. Ankara, therefore, feels it prudent to maintain distance from the Saudi Arabia-Houthi clashes. The Houthi attack on Saudi Arabia is the first significant test of the credibility of the joint defence alliance. As the Kingdom continues to confront the Houthis, the declared political and diplomatic solidarity of Turkey and Pakistan has not translated into tangible military support. The Saudi-Houthi confrontation, therefore, exposes a gap between the alliance's declared commitment to collective defence and the willingness of its members to undertake joint action when one of them comes under attack. This episode underscores the primacy of individual national interests in shaping the strategic choices of the alliance's members in the volatile political landscape of West Asia.

The full article was first published by the Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses.



Aichi-Nagoya Asian Games:

Iran falls to South Korea in men's basketball semifinals

Sports Desk

Iran's bid for maiden men's basketball gold at the Asian Games ended in a 77-51 defeat against South Korea in the semifinals at Nagoya's Aichi International Arena in Japan on Friday.

A silver medalist in 2014 and 2018, Iran will still have a shot at a fifth medal in six editions of the multi-sport event when Greek head coach Sotiris Manolopoulos's side takes on Japan or China for a consolation bronze on Sunday.

Lee Hyun-jung led South Korea with an impressive double-double of 26 points and 14 rebounds. He attempted 13 three-pointers, converting seven (54%).

Lee Woo-seok and Lee Jung-hyun contributed 19 and 11 points, respectively, as South Korea remained on course

for a first gold medal since beating Iran in the final on home soil at Incheon 2014. Veteran shooting guard Mohammad Jamshidi, who spearheaded Manolopoulos's men to a last-eight win over Jordan with 20 points, was the only player in the Iranian outfit to score in double figures, chipping in 12.

Mohammad Heydari had nine points to his name, while team captain Arslan Kazemi finished with eight points and 11 rebounds. South Korea made the difference from beyond the arc, repeatedly punishing Iran with accurate three-point shooting, making 14 of 33 attempts for a 42% success rate, to take control of the game and leave the Iranian side, which converted only two of its 23 three-point attempts, with little chance of



South Korea's Lee Hyun-jung (1) shoots during a semifinal win against Iran in the men's basketball at the Aichi-Nagoya Asian Games at the Aichi International Arena, Nagoya, Japan, on September 18, 2026.
● PARK SEONG-WON/THE CHOSUN DAILY

a comeback.

Iran started with a com-

pact defensive setup but fell 6-0 behind after South

Korea knocked down two three-pointers in the open-

ing two and a half minutes. Mobin Sheikhi opened Iran's scoring with two free throws, before Kazemi's drive and another two-pointer from Sheikhi brought the game level at 6-6.

South Korea, however, caught fire from long range late in the opening quarter, making four three-pointers in the final two minutes to finish the period with a 12-8 lead.

The Koreans opened the second quarter with another three-pointer to stretch their advantage to 11 points. Iran struggled to make inroads against a disciplined South Korean defense, although dunks from Alireza Sharifi and Heydari helped cut the deficit to nine.

Iran's struggles from beyond the arc proved costly, with its first 12 three-point attempts all missing. Heydari finally ended the drought with a

successful shot from long range, but South Korea went into halftime 36-24 ahead.

The Koreans continued their dominance after the break as Choi Jun-young hit consecutive three-pointers to widen the gap. Iran tried to respond by attacking the basket and drawing fouls, but could not change the momentum.

With South Korea extending its lead to 17 points, Lee Hyun-jung then took charge with a series of shots that pushed the advantage to 24. South Korea entered the final quarter with a commanding 61-37 lead.

There was little Iran could do in the closing period as South Korea continued to find the target from three-point range. The final margin reached 26 points as the Koreans sealed a 77-51 victory.

Iran lines up domestic league players for friendly double header



● MANU FERNANDEZ/AP

Sports Desk

Iran's men's national team head coach Amir Qaleneoi has named a list of 18 Persian Gulf Premier League players for the two upcoming friendly games against Uzbekistan and Russia.

The domestic top-flight group will be joined by the overseas players before Team Melli's meetings with the two familiar opponents of recent years.

Making its first appearance after the group-stage exit at June's FIFA World Cup, Qaleneoi's side will take on Uzbekistan in Tashkent on Thursday, looking to beat the Central Asian foe for the first time since the 2023 CAFA Championship final.

The two sides shared the spoils in four 2026 World Cup qualification games, before Uzbekistan won 1-0 in extra time in the 2025 CAFA final and then

emerged victorious in a shootout when they met in a friendly tournament in the United Arab Emirates last November.

Iran will then play Russia in Kazan on Sept. 29, which will mark a third friendly between the two sides since Qaleneoi was appointed to the national team job for a second spell in March 2023.

The two sides played out a 1-1 draw at Tehran's Azadi Stadium days after Qaleneoi's appointment, before Russia won 2-1 at Volgograd Arena in October last year.

The Russian national team has been banned from all FIFA and UEFA competitions for the past four years after Russia launched its military operation in Ukraine in February 2022.

The upcoming match will be part of Iran's preparations for the 2027 AFC

Asian Cup, which kicks off on January 7 in Saudi Arabia.

A semifinalist at the previous two editions, Iran will begin its bid for a fourth Asian Cup title – and its first since 1976 – against China in Group C, which also features Kyrgyzstan and Syria, at Riyadh's Kingdom Arena on January 9. Center back Hossein Kananizadegan and midfielder Rouzbeh Cheshmi – the skippers of Tehran archrivals Persepolis and Esteghlal, respectively – are the two high-profile absentees from the latest list.

Kananizadegan is set to be sidelined for up to three weeks after suffering a knee problem during a training session with the club last week, while Cheshmi, who missed Iran's three World Cup games with an injury, has only managed three starts

for the Capital Blues in seven outings across all competitions this season.

Persepolis striker Ali Alipour, who made a cameo appearance in the 2-2 draw against New Zealand at the World Cup, has also been overlooked by Qaleneoi despite an impressive run in the league, contributing three goals and three assists in six games.

Shams Azar winger Milad Sourgi and Persepolis defender Mohammad-Mahdi Zare, meanwhile, will fancy their chances of making their senior international debuts after receiving a call-up from Qaleneoi, while veteran fullback Ehsan Hajsafi, who has 148 international caps under his belt, could overtake Javad Nekounam for the all-time most Team Melli appearances should he feature in both games.

The following is Iran's 18-man roster for the September international break:

Goalkeepers: Alireza Beiranvand (Tractor), Payam Ni-azmand (Persepolis), Seyyed Hossein Hosseini (Sepahan)

Defenders: Mohammad Naderi (Tractor), Ehsan Hajsafi (Sepahan), Shoja Khalilzadeh (Tractor), Mohammad-Mahdi Zare (Persepolis), Aref Aghasi (Esteghlal), Saman Fallah (Esteghlal), Saleh Hardani (Esteghlal), Aria Yousefi (Sepahan), Ramin Rezaeian (Foolad Khuzestan)

Wingers: Mahdi Limouchi (Sepahan), Mohammad-Mahdi Mohebbi (Persepolis), Amirhossein Mahmoudi (Persepolis), Milad Sourgi (Shams Azar)

Aichi-Nagoya Asian Games:

Strong continental rivals awaiting Iranian GR wrestlers

Sports Desk

The preliminary entry list for the wrestling competition at the Aichi-Nagoya Asian Games has revealed a challenging field for Iran's Greco-Roman wrestlers, with several continental and world-class names set to compete for gold.

The wrestling event will get underway at Nagoya's Inae Sports Center on Sept. 30, with the list released by United World Wrestling featuring prominent wrestlers from Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Japan and other Asian nations. UWW has stressed that the entries are subject to change.

Sajjad Abbaspour, Javad Rezaei, Alireza Abdevali, Gholamreza Farrokhi, Amir-sam Mohammadi and Amin Mirzazadeh will represent the Iranian squad across six Greco-Roman weight classes.

A world U23 silver medalist last year, Abbaspour is set to face one of the biggest names in the Asian field in the 60kg class, with Kyrgyzstan's two-time world champion Zholaman Sharshenbekov – an Olympic bronze medalist in Paris 2024 – listed among his potential rivals. Reigning Asian champion Alisher Ganiev of Uzbekistan is another notable entry in the weight class.

At 67kg, Kyrgyzstan's Razzak Bishkekoy appears to be the leading challenger to Rezaei. Bishkekoy won gold at the 2026 Asian Championships, defeating Iran's Ahmadreza Mohsennejad by technical superiority on his way to the final. Uzbekistan's Aytjan Khalmakhanov and South Korea's Jeong Han-jae are also listed in the weight class.

The 77kg category could be particularly demanding for Abdevali, with Kyrgyzstan's Akzhol Makhmudov among the biggest names in the draw. The two-time world champion, who had moved up to 82kg, won Asian gold on his return to 77kg, defeating Iranian Ali Oskou in the final.

Japan's Nao Kusaka could add further difficulty to the weight class. The Paris 2024 Olympic champion has resumed training after recovering from injury and is preparing for a home Asian Games ap-



● IAWFIR

pearance.

Farrokhi will face a familiar opponent at 87kg in Kyrgyzstan's Asan Zhanyshov. The two met in the Asian Championships final in April, where home favorite Zhanyshov stunned the reigning world senior and U23 champion with an 11-4 victory. Kazakhstan's Shamil Ozhaev and India's Sunil Kumar are also among the entries.

The 97kg category features several contenders, making it difficult to identify a single standout rival for Mohammadi. Kazakhstan's Islam Yevloyev is one of the notable names. He lost 3-1 to Iran's Mohammad Hadi Saravi in the semifinals of the Asian Championships but remains an established contender in the division.

In the superheavyweight category, Mirzazadeh is aiming for back-to-back Asian Games titles after missing out on his world title defense in October following a setback against Fardin Hedayati in the national team trials.

The Olympic bronze medalist is set to renew his rivalry with Uzbekistan's Rafael Tsitsvashvili, whom he defeated 9-0 in the Asian Championships final.

With several reigning Asian champions, world-class wrestlers and a Paris Olympic champion in the field, Iran's Greco-Roman team faces a demanding path in its bid for gold in Nagoya.

200 historical buildings handed over to private investors for restoration

Iranica Desk

The deputy minister of cultural heritage, tourism and handicrafts said 200 historical buildings have been handed over to private-sector investors in the Iranian provinces through a fund tasked with preserving and revitalizing historic structures.

Anoushirvan Mohseni Bandpey made the remarks at a ceremony marking the opening of the first phase of the Khadem Bashi House in Ardabil, emphasizing that the restoration of historic buildings can strengthen the link between cultural heritage and tourism, according to IRNA.

He said the Khadem Bashi House was among the historic structures that could have been reduced to ruins if left unattended. Through the efforts of relevant organizations and private-sector investment, he added, conditions were created for the restoration and renewed use of the valuable property.

He said cultural heritage is a broad and valuable concept encompassing knowledge, traditions and



Khadem Bashi House, Ardabil
● ISNA

ways of life, resulting in the cultural, historical and social heritage of a community.

He described the Khadem Bashi House as an example of tangible cultural heritage and stressed that the historic property is part of the country's valuable heritage and can, through restoration and revitalization, once again become part

of social and economic life.

Mohseni Bandpey said the Ministry's Facilities Committee is seeking to create incentives and support projects aimed at restoring historic buildings so that the values embodied in properties such as the Khadem Bashi and Sadeghi houses, along with their related stories and narratives, can

be introduced to the public and tourists.

He also identified new technologies and virtual reality as important tools for introducing such heritage sites, saying that modern technologies can be used to present the historical narratives of these buildings in more engaging ways to younger generations and

tourists.

Referring to the conversion of the first phase of the Khadem Bashi Historic House into a traditional restaurant and the restoration of the remaining spaces for accommodation, he said such historic properties can create a link between cultural heritage and the tourism industry.

Mohseni Bandpey explained that when visitors enter the chambers of the historic house, which have now been restored for use as a traditional restaurant, they can see how spaces that have retained their historical identity have also generated economic activity, foreign-exchange earnings and sustainable employment.

The official described Ardabil as a province with a rich history, culture and civilization, saying it has a unique position in the country and a valuable historical and cultural heritage that should be properly utilized to develop tourism.

He noted that nine historic buildings in Ardabil Province have been handed over to the private sector through the Fund for the

Preservation and Revitalization of Historic Buildings, following efforts by the provincial Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Organization. He expressed hope that once their restoration and revitalization are completed, the properties will be made available to the public and tourists.

Mohseni Bandpey stressed that achieving this goal requires serious attention to the country's culture, history and civilization, as well as continued support for the restoration and use of historic buildings.

The historic house covers 3,900 square meters of land and built-up area, including 1,900 square meters of building.

Attending the Second International Conference on Museums at Mohaghegh Ardabili University, opening the first cultural, tourism and handicrafts event in Sareyn, visiting tourism projects and facilities, and meeting with tourism professional associations and investors in the province were among the other programs during the deputy tourism minister's two-day visit to Ardabil Province.

Shaneh Tarash village seeks global tourism recognition

Iranica Desk

The selection of villages for inclusion on the global tourism list is based on a rigorous, multidimensional assessment process that scientifically evaluates the vitality of local life, gender balance, service networks, biodiversity conservation and the equitable distribution of wealth within host communities.

Hossein Izadi, director general of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Organization of Mazandaran Province, explained the process behind the candidacy of Shaneh Tarash village in Tonekabon, saying that following the international recognition of villages such as Kandolus in Mazandaran, a village in Kerman and another in Bandar Lengeh, Shaneh Tarash secured the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts' approval this year in a highly competitive process.

"The criteria are very precise, and final acceptance requires detailed responses to 40 key questions and the submission of 114 documented strategic records," he said. "Fortunately, Shaneh Tarash has met the required benchmarks based on three fundamental pillars: organic tourism, a community cooperative for protecting the village fabric and nature-tourism routes, and a sustainable economy."

Izadi also described how international assessors monitor candidate villages, saying that UN evaluators travel to the area as undercover tourists to verify whether actual conditions on the ground correspond with the documents submitted.

Mostafa Fatemi, director general of Domestic Tourism Development at the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and

Handicrafts, also highlighted the region's unique potential during a meeting of the provincial strategic committee.

"Iran, with its pristine natural attractions and authentic local culture, holds a prominent position in rural tourism worldwide," he said.

"The Shaneh Tarash dossier is being finalized rapidly and to a high standard, and all executive agencies have been instructed to bring the area's physical infrastructure and services in line with international standards."

One of Shaneh Tarash's main competitive advantages over other ecotourism destinations is its legal and democratic governance structure, managed through a local institution that has helped prevent social divisions and the dominance of intermediaries over the village economy. Pedram Karkabudi, CEO of the Shaneh Tarash Rural Development Cooperative, explained the philosophy behind the structure, saying the cooperative was established in December 2018 with 17 founding members. Through transparent operations and the creation of tangible benefits, more than 90 to 95 percent of the village's local residents soon joined the cooperative.

Shaneh Tarash is described as the only village to have received support and scientific oversight from prominent international organizations, including UNIDO and UNDP, as well as three Iranian ministries, through broad community participation in public-benefit projects.

Fair distribution of income: Five percent of the direct revenues from each tourism project is allocated to infrastructure development, street beautification and landscape improvements, while another 5 percent is set aside to strengthen the

cooperative's financial base and support the collective interests of its members.

Physical revitalization: Six active ecotourism accommodation units have been established, a creative house has been launched, and the traditional facades of 30 old residential buildings have been restored to preserve the village's local character and harmony with its natural surroundings.

Employment: The village aims to create 500 direct jobs, develop overnight accommodation capacity for 1,000 tourists and encourage the return of educated young people to the village.

In Shaneh Tarash, tourism represents a comprehensive experience of rural life in northern Iran, where the concept of tourism is intertwined with the long-standing Mazandarani tradition of hospitality.

Mehdi Es'haghi, deputy director of tourism at the Mazandaran Province Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Department, emphasized the significance of this approach.

"Global villages become meaningful when tourism is built around ecosystem-based development and authentic experiences of local life," he said.

"In Shaneh Tarash, the six ecotourism accommodation units are more than places to stay; they are centers for creating experiences and strengthening the village's identity. More than 90 percent of residents share in the value created through this cycle, making it a clear example of collective capital. This approach is reflected in the everyday behavior of local residents."

Mehri Karkabudi, a female entrepreneur working in handicrafts and organic products in the village, described the community's approach to visitors.

"We do not call our visitors tourists; every person is a dear guest to us," she said.

"Here, we invite guests to experience our everyday lives, from milking fresh cows and picking organic herbs in the garden to taking part in baking traditional bread in a wood-fired oven and preparing local dishes. Global recognition would give us a valuable opportunity for cultural dialogue with people around the world and for reviving local crafts such as chadorshab weaving and traditional woolen sock making."

The name Shaneh Tarash is linked to a centuries-old tradition of carving combs and wooden implements by skilled woodturners. The craft has now been revived without harming the Hyrcanian forests' biosphere reserve.

Qasem Karkabudi, a veteran local woodcraft artist, said the village follows an environmental charter in producing its handicrafts.

"The authenticity of our work lies in respecting nature," he said. "In making hair combs, carpet-weaving combs and traditional wooden utensils, we never cut down living trees in the forest. Our raw materials come only from sound sections of fallen trunks and dead or deteriorated forest wood, including maple, beech, walnut and oak."

"Visitors can see in the village workshops that making each comb by hand takes between one and three hours. This authenticity has turned our handicrafts into a lasting part of the village's identity."

In recent months, following strategic committee meetings at the Mazandaran provincial governor's office, several projects have been launched to bring the

village's infrastructure up to standard. Communications and telecommunications: The installation and commissioning of telecommunications towers are being accelerated to provide comprehensive and stable mobile and internet coverage.

Physical improvement and safety: Coordinated stone paving of roads and passageways is being carried out with the cooperation of the Housing Foundation, while water and electricity networks are being organized and health and Red Crescent emergency facilities are being established.

Environmental protection and responsible use of nature: The management of parts of the region's forest parks is being entrusted by the Natural Resources Department of western Mazandaran to organize ecotourism routes and clean up natural areas.

The candidacy of Shaneh Tarash village in Tonekabon for the 2026 Best Tourism Villages program of UN Tourism reflects an innovative approach to rural tourism governance in Iran. The village has demonstrated that sustainable development does not have to conflict with environmental protection and the preservation of local authenticity. Through a "transparent cooperative structure," protection of the Hyrcanian natural heritage, production of organic products and accommodation-based tourism, Shaneh Tarash is seeking to create a lasting foundation for social well-being, economic equity and the preservation of the village's historical identity.

The initiative now awaits final approval in Spain, which could add another achievement to Iran's growing record in rural tourism.



The State of Kuwait Prize was established in 2003 to recognize advances in tackling major noncommunicable diseases across the Eastern Mediterranean. WHO says the award can honor contributions spanning prevention, disease control and research.