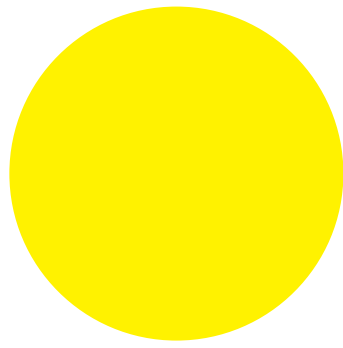


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A general view of the damaged building of the Shajarah Tayyebah Elementary School in the southern Iranian town of Minab, which was targeted by the US military on February 28.

● AP

Trump more focused on economic pressure than full-scale war

By Delaram Ahmadi
Staff writer

INTERVIEW

Former Iranian diplomat Kourosh Ahmadi told Iran Daily that US President Donald Trump's recent remarks about potentially resuming major attacks on Iran should be treated cautiously, given his history of making contradictory statements. Ahmadi said Trump's statements alone cannot provide a reliable indication of the



Kourosh Ahmadi

US course of action or a change in policy unless they are repeated by other senior officials, reiterated by Trump himself, and supported by moves or developments on the ground. He argued that Washington's current approach appears to be centered on more economic pressure and the continued naval blockade than on returning to a full-scale war. At the same time, Ahmadi said limited and localized military actions could continue, particularly in connection with efforts to reopen parts of the Strait of Hormuz and increase oil flows to global markets. He also stressed that regional countries will have an important role in shaping future security arrangements and that diplomacy will ultimately be essential to ending the conflict.

IRAN DAILY: How should President Trump's latest remarks about potentially resuming major attacks on Iran be interpreted? Do they signal a change in US policy?

AHMADI: Trump's statements should be treated with caution. He frequently makes contradictory statements and often speaks based on what seems important to him at a particular moment. Therefore, a single statement should not be taken as evidence of a major policy decision. We can take such remarks more seriously if they are repeated by other senior administration officials, if Trump himself repeats them several times in a period of time and on different occasions, and if there are supporting signs and actual moves and developments on the ground. In this particular case, I believe the same rule applies. His recent statements have been contradictory, and his broader conduct suggests that he does not have a strong intention or desire to return to a full-scale war against Iran. The reason is relatively clear. The United States and Israel already launched a major war, but it could not attain their goals and produce the expected outcome. The initial elements of surprise, the assassination of senior officials and the shock caused by the attack were expected to contribute to the collapse of Iran's political system. That did not happen. Iran is also a very large country, and it has significant capabilities to use both in terms of ground and missile and drone forces. My assessment is therefore that Trump has essentially moved away from the idea of a full-scale war and is instead focusing on continued naval blockade and increased economic pressure, hoping to achieve results within several months.

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Iran sets conditions for ending war with US

International Desk

Iran's top security official said the country has declared its conditions for renewed talks with the United States, saying that Washington should agree to Tehran's terms if it wants to escape from the quagmire of its war of aggression against the Islamic Republic.

Major General Mohsen Rezaei, who serves as the Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council (SNSC), made the remarks in an X post on Saturday amid a stalemate in negotiations between Iran and the US to permanently end the war due to the latter's acts of mischief in the region, Press TV reported.

"Iran has conveyed seven conditions to the US government for the start of any negotiations. Tehran's message is clear and unequivocal: if Washington wants to extricate itself from the predicament it has created and avoid

becoming further entangled, it has no choice but to accept Iran's rights and conditions," he wrote.

In an exclusive interview with the Qatari-based news channel Al Jazeera published on Saturday, Rezaei said that Tehran had conveyed its conditions to Washington through Qatari mediators and that it is awaiting US President Donald Trump's response.

"Our conditions are an end to the war on all fronts, the release of our frozen funds and an end to the naval blockade," he added. "It is in Washington's interest to accept these conditions."

Meanwhile, the SNSC chief said that Iran was working under a new strategy to bring the war, which is still going on "in practical terms," to an end "as soon as possible."

Iran considers another US aggression "very much on the cards" based on its military assessments, he noted, stressing that Tehran is prepared for a "decisive war."

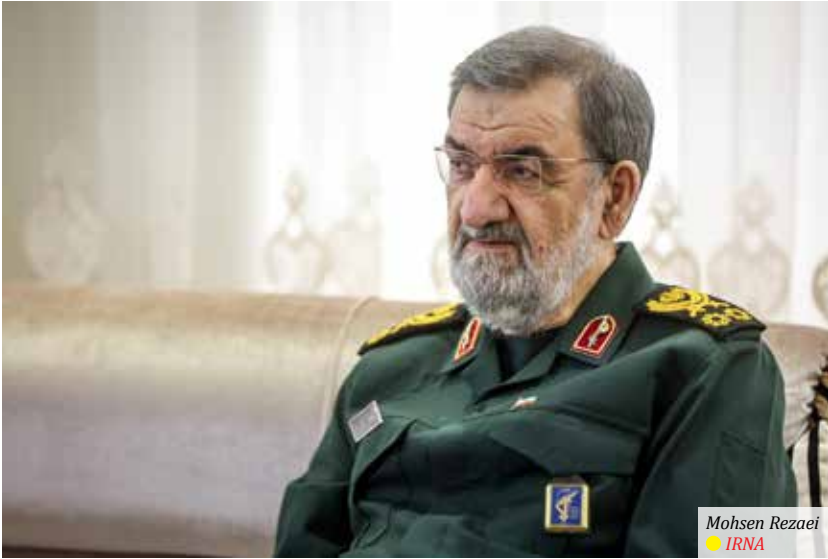
He further said Iran's military planning has shifted since the two US-Israeli-imposed wars and is now focused on US naval assets stretching from the Persian Gulf to the Sea of Oman and the Arabian Sea.

The US and the Israeli regime waged their first criminal war against Iran, which lasted 12 days, in June 2025. Their second aggression began on February 28, 2026, and came to a halt in early April after 40 days.

In both wars, Iran's resistance and successful retaliatory operations forced the aggressors to accept a ceasefire.

Iran has also maintained a tight grip on the Strait of Hormuz since the early days of the second imposed war.

In July, the US conducted waves of deadly air raids on Iran and imposed a naval blockade of the country in violation of the Islamabad Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Islamic Republic, signed on June 17,



Mohsen Rezaei
● IRNA

to end the war.

In response, the Iranian Armed Forces launched devastating strikes against

strategic American targets across West Asia and declared the Strait of Hormuz closed to all traffic.

Pentagon probe finds cascade of failures behind deadly Iran school strike

International Desk

A Pentagon investigation into a US missile strike that killed more than 170 people at an Iranian school in February has identified a series of preventable failures, including outdated intelligence, gaps in civilian-protection staffing and an overreliance on artificial-intelligence systems, according to US officials involved in the probe.

Two Tomahawk missiles struck Shajarah Tayyebah Elementary School in the southern Iranian town of Minab on Feb. 28, killing at least 123 children among more than 170 victims.

Within hours, some Pentagon personnel concluded that the United States was likely responsible for the strike, the officials said. A preliminary internal review had reached the same conclusion by early March, according to previous reports. According to Bloomberg, the findings described by officials point to an accumulation of smaller failures rather than a single decision that caused the disaster. The full Pentagon investigation, ordered by US Central Command chief Admiral Brad Cooper in March, has not been publicly released and is believed to have been effectively completed for several months.

A senior administration official, responding to questions about when the White House learned the strike was a mistake, also cited the ongoing investigation and said: "The United States does



The photo shows the damaged building of the Shajarah Tayyebah Elementary School in the southern Iranian town of Minab, which was targeted by the US military on February 28.
● IRNA

not target civilians."

The United Nations' Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Iran said this week that there were reasonable grounds to conclude that the Minab strike and another US attack on the same day amounted to war crimes. The panel said the United States had failed to do everything feasible to verify that the school was a military target and that the failure went beyond negligence.

Outdated intelligence

US officials said intelligence systems continued to reflect the site's earlier military status even though the facility had undergone substantial changes. Satellite imagery showed construction that separated the school from the military base, including new walls and entrances, according to an analysis of commercially available imagery. The changes appeared to have been completed by 2017, while imagery from the following year showed a brightly painted school alongside a soccer field

and other features associated with a functioning educational facility.

Questions over AI system

Officials also said some personnel at CENTCOM relied too heavily on Maven Smart System, an artificial-intelligence-enabled platform made by Palantir Technologies that integrates large amounts of information for military operations.

Maven can combine more than 150 data inputs and present them to commanders involved in activities ranging from targeting to command and control. Defense officials have increasingly incorporated the system into military operations over the past year.

The strike has become one of the deadliest US targeting errors involving children in the 21st century. The UN investigation said the failure to verify the target raised serious questions under international humanitarian law.

The Pentagon has yet to publicly accept responsibility for the attack, while the administration continues to maintain that the United States does not target civilians.

Ghalibaf: Strait of Hormuz will remain closed until Iran's conditions are met

International Desk

Iran's Parliament Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf reiterated Tehran's stance on the Strait of Hormuz, saying the critical waterway will remain closed until the US fulfils its commitments under the now-defunct peace deal that was signed in June.

"Our messages have been conveyed clearly to the other side, and our conditions have been explained through mediators. The enemy knows full well that the path to deception and unilateral coercion is closed," Qalibaf said while addressing a parliamentary session.

"Until these conditions are met, Iran's legitimate rights are recognized, and the commitments made by the United States are fulfilled, there will be no prospect for returning to the previous negotiating framework and reopening the Strait of Hormuz." Iran restricted transit through the Strait of Hormuz, a strategic waterway responsible for a fifth of global oil demand, in response to the illegal US-Israeli aggression that began on February 28.

On June 17, Tehran and Washington



Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf
● ICANA

signed the Pakistan-brokered Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), whose Article 5 places responsibility for reopening and managing the Strait squarely in Iran's hands. However, Washington attempted to undermine Iran's sovereignty over the vital global energy chokepoint, resumed its airstrikes on Iran, and imposed a naval blockade in violation of the war-ending deal. The unlawful US measures prompted Iran to declare the Strait of Hormuz closed to all traffic.

Qalibaf said that Iran's strategy in dealing with the enemy could be summarized in strategic advancement and the imposition

of the will of the nation.

He further highlighted two strategic miscalculations within the country's political and intellectual circles that oversimplify the realities on the ground.

Both views, one of which advocates war and another surrender, serve the enemy's objective of disrupting Iran's unity, he added.

The top negotiator said, "We must fight rationally and from a position of strength, and negotiate with confidence and pragmatism when the time is right."

"That means using our full military capabilities when necessary to push the enemy back and inflict serious blows on it. But once we have achieved significant gains on the battlefield and the enemy is weakened, we should use diplomacy to consolidate those gains, impose a defeat on the enemy, and strengthen the foundations of our national power until we reach a position of deterrence."

Qalibaf emphasized that the old American order in West Asia has collapsed and that it is now up to the region's Muslim countries to shape and implement a new order.

Iranian military warns US, allies against renewed attacks

International Desk

Iran's military headquarters warned Middle East nations they'll be "considered complicit" if the United States resumes major strikes on the country from American bases.

"We warn that if the countries of the region – by continuing their dual policy toward the Islamic Republic of Iran – align with the Great Satan's aggression against a powerful and sovereign Iran they will all be considered complicit in this evil and can no longer expect restraint or decency from Iran's powerful armed forces," the Khatam al-Anbiya Central Headquarters said in a statement.

It said if the US "commits any mistake" against Iran, "all its bases and interests in the region, without any limitation or consideration, will be targeted by sustained, effective and painful attacks."

"Based on the information received, the criminal America, in pursuit of covering up its defeats and achieving false gains in a war that began relying on the lies and staging of the Zionists and has continued through deception and trickery, has once again decided, with the green light of some regional countries, at a joint meeting in one of the European countries, to resume actions against the Islamic Republic of Iran," the statement read.

Earlier, Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) Mohsen Rezaei warned that the Islamic Republic considers another US aggression "very



much on the cards" based on its military assessments, declaring that Tehran is prepared for a "decisive war."

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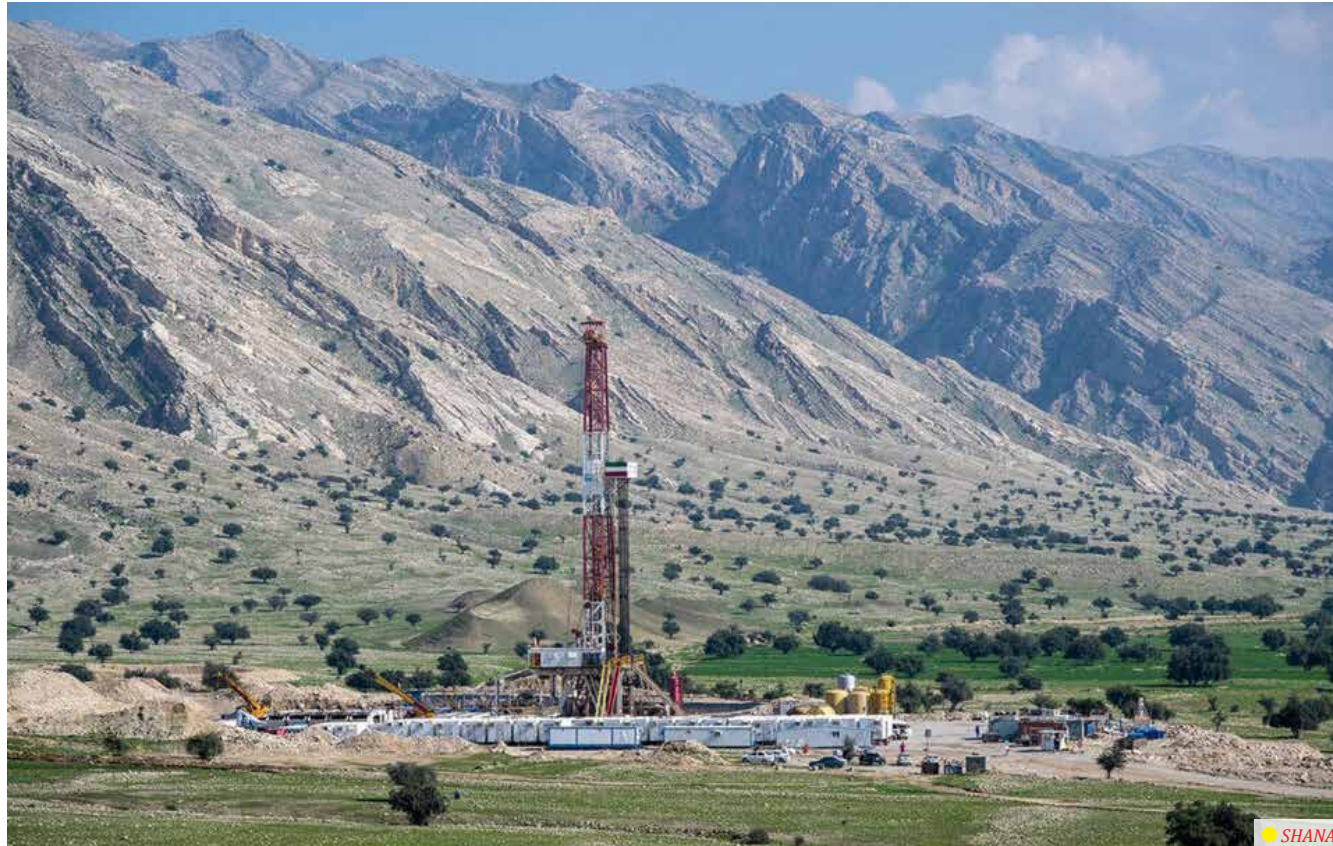


Mohammad Ali Rajabi
Cartoonist

CARTOON



Major contract signed to push up Azadegan output to 550,000 bpd



Economy Desk

Iran on Sunday inked a 24-month deal to bring up oil production from 55 wells at the Azadegan field to 550,000 barrels per day (bpd), from around 230,000 bpd currently.

The Integrated Production Services (IPS) contract was signed by Mahmoud Aminnejad, chief executive of Dasht Azadegan Arvand Oil & Gas Development Co. (DACO), and Abbas Sarkari, head of Oil Exploration Operations Co. (OEOC).

Under the agreement, the OEOC will carry out well testing and acidizing operations on the 55 wells to raise output and achieve sustained production.

The work aims to im-

prove well efficiency and make greater use of the field's existing capacity.

DACO will act as the employer, while the OEOC will serve as the contractor responsible for operations on the designated wells.

Sarkari said the OEOC expected the work to increase production from the wells by at least 40% to 60% in the initial stages.

"The company will develop the field using eight 2,000-horsepower drilling rigs and 13 technical service units," he added.

Aminnejad said \$2.1 billion in investment had been finalized for the field's development in cooperation with the Oil Ministry, the Economy Minis-

try and Iran's National Development Fund. Esmaeil Gholampour, project manager for the Azadegan development, said the contract was part of a larger integrated development project for the field.

Azadegan is Iran's largest shared oil field and lies in the oil-rich southwestern province of Khuzestan near the border with Iraq. Together, its North and South sections form a field known as Majnoon on the Iraqi side of the border.

The field is considered the world's 10th-largest oilfield and is estimated to contain 33 billion barrels of oil in place, of which around 5.2 billion barrels are considered recoverable for Iran.

Iran-Russia agricultural trade nears \$2bn in H1



Economy Desk

Agricultural trade between Iran and Russia reached nearly \$2bn in the first half of 2026, with Russia posting a trade surplus of 40.8%, Russian Federal Customs Service data showed.

Russia exported 3.2 million tons of agricultural products worth \$1.4 billion to Iran between January and June, while its imports of Iranian agricultural products stood at 495,700 tons worth \$588.9 million, Mehr News Agency reported on Sunday.

Russia's agricultural trade surplus with Iran was \$811.1mn during the period, as Russian agricultural exports accounted for about \$1.4 billion of the nearly \$2 billion trade, compared with \$588.9 million in Iranian exports to Russia.

Russia's main agricultural exports to Iran included corn, barley, wheat, sunflower oil and rapeseed oil. Iran exported fresh peppers, lettuce, pistachios, kiwifruit and shrimp, fish and other aquatic products and crustaceans to Russia.

The figures were discussed in Moscow on Sunday at a meeting between Sergei Dankvert, head of Russia's Federal Service for Veterinary and Phytosanitary Supervision, and Vahid Salehi, Iran's deputy agriculture minister and head of the country's Veterinary Organization.

The officials discussed ways to expand agricultural trade as well as veterinary and sanitary requirements governing shipments between the two countries.

The Iranian official called for higher exports of fishery products to Russia and for an expansion of the list of Iranian producers authorized to export to the Russian market. Dankvert said imports of Iranian fishery products into Russia were possible if Russian requirements were met, including "full control of the production process" and state supervision of exported products.

Economy shrinks 10.1% in first quarter

Economy Desk

Iran's economy contracted significantly in the first quarter of the Persian calendar year, official data showed on Sunday.

Gross domestic product, including the petroleum sector, fell 10.1% in the three months to June 21 from the same period a year earlier, while GDP excluding oil contracted 4.6%, according to a report by the Statistical Center of Iran (SCI).

The oil and gas extraction sector was the hardest hit, plunging 26.4%, while gas distribution dropped 21.3%. Output in other industrial and mining sectors also declined by more than 5% year-on-year.

The transport, warehousing and communications sector posted 17% negative growth, while wholesale and retail trade, hotels and restaurants slowed 3.9%.

Agriculture was the exception, growing by more than 2% compared with the first quarter of the previous year.



The SCI had previously estimated economic growth in the preceding quarter at negative 2.2%.

Two consecutive quarters of negative economic growth are generally considered a recession.

Iran's economy was hit during the period by a war launched by the United States and Israel in late February, followed by two naval blockades targeting Iranian



People walk past shops and browse for goods at the Grand Bazaar in Tehran on August 24, 2026.

● AFP

ports and related vessels in the country's south. The second blockade remains in place, making trade difficult.

Iran, Armenia pursue rail link through Syunik to diversify regional trade routes

Economy Desk

Iran and Armenia are pressing ahead with efforts to establish a railway link through Armenia's southern Syunik province.

Armenia's Ambassador to Iran Grigor Hakobyan and Jabbarali Zakari, head of Iran's national railway company, on Sunday discussed expanding rail cooperation and connecting the two countries' railway networks during a meeting, according to Mehr News Agency.

Hakobyan said the link could give Armenia access to southern waterways and help diversify Iran's transport routes to Europe.

Zakari highlighted Armenia's potential role in regional transit networks, par-

ticularly the International North-South Transport Corridor, saying greater participation could boost rail freight across the region.

The proposed connection would pass through Syunik, a narrow province in southern Armenia extending along the Iranian border.

The link could provide Armenia with greater access to railway routes leading to southern Iran, while giving Iran an additional rail connection to Armenia, the Black Sea and European markets. It could also diversify bilateral trade routes and strengthen Armenia's role in regional north-south corridors.

The project has not yet been established through a new bilateral agreement between the two governments.

A previous Southern Armenian Railway project was proposed in 2012 after a concession was granted to Rasia FZE, a Dubai-based investment company, to connect Iran and Armenia as part of a Persian Gulf-Black Sea transport route.

Efforts to revive the railway connection gained momentum in 2026 under the proposed Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity (TRIIPP). Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan said the railway section would run between Nernadzor and Agarak in Syunik, linking Armenia's railway network to Iran's.

The proposed connection could strengthen trade between the Persian Gulf, Armenia and the Black Sea by expanding transit and commercial opportunities.



From blockade to breakthrough

Iran's economic strategy at SCO summit



By Saman Sofalgar
Political researcher

OPINION EXCLUSIVE

Masoud Pezeshkian's participation in the 26th summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) in Bishkek should not be viewed merely as another item on Iran's diplomatic calendar. For Tehran, the summit came at a particularly consequential moment: Iran is confronting an increasingly militarized confrontation with the United States and Israel, severe economic restrictions, and a continuing US naval blockade that has disrupted the country's oil exports and complicated maritime trade through the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz. Against this backdrop, Pezeshkian's economic agenda at the SCO carried a significance beyond conventional summit diplomacy. Iran is attempting to transform its geopolitical position in Eurasia into concrete economic leverage. The objective is not simply to "look East," nor to replace dependence on Western markets with dependence on Asian powers. Rather, Tehran's emerging strategy is to diversify its economic relationships, build alternative financial channels, strengthen regional connectivity, and make Iran an increasingly indispensable node in Eurasian trade.

At the Bishkek summit, Pezeshkian proposed three initiatives aimed at deepening economic integration among SCO members: the establishment of an SCO bank, the creation of an export insurance and investment union, and the formation of an energy consortium. These proposals deserve attention because they address precisely the structural vulnerabilities that sanctions and military pressure have exposed in Iran's economy.

From political membership to economic strategy

Iran became a full member of the SCO in 2023. Since then, one of the central questions has been whether membership can generate tangible economic benefits rather than remain primarily a diplomatic achievement. The answer depends on whether Tehran can convert political relationships into commercial infrastructure.

For Iran, the SCO offers a unique combination of markets, energy demand, financial resources, industrial capacity, and geographical connectivity. China and India are major Asian economies; Russia remains a critical regional power; and Central Asian states are increasingly interested in diversified trade routes that reduce their dependence on traditional corridors.

Iran sits at the intersection of several of these routes. Its geography connects Central Asia and Russia with the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean, while its ports and rail networks offer potential links between northern Eurasia and South Asia.



At the Bishkek summit, Pezeshkian proposed three initiatives aimed at deepening economic integration among SCO members: the establishment of an SCO bank, the creation of an export insurance and investment union, and the formation of an energy consortium. These proposals deserve attention because they address precisely the structural vulnerabilities that sanctions and military pressure have exposed in Iran's economy.

This makes connectivity one of Iran's most important strategic assets. Yet geography alone does not create economic power. Infrastructure, customs procedures, banking mechanisms, insurance arrangements, political stability, and predictable regulations determine whether a geographical advantage becomes a commercial one. The challenge for Pezeshkian's government is therefore to turn Iran's location from a map-based advantage into an operational economic asset.

Naval blockade and the logic of diversification

The urgency of this task has increased dramatically because of the continuing US naval blockade. Recent reporting indicates that the blockade, reinstated in July, has sharply reduced Iranian crude exports. Reuters reported that Iranian oil loadings fell from roughly 2 million barrels per day in March to around 240,000 barrels per day in August. Maritime traffic through the Strait of Hormuz has also fallen substantially amid the escalation of the conflict.

This is more than a temporary commercial disruption. It demonstrates the strategic vulnerability created when a country's external economic lifelines can be targeted through military means. For Iran, the lesson is straightforward: economic resilience requires diversification not only of trading partners but also of transportation routes, financial

systems, insurance mechanisms, and energy markets.

This is precisely where the SCO becomes strategically relevant. Iran cannot eliminate the importance of maritime trade, nor should it attempt to isolate itself from the global economy. But it can reduce the consequences of disruption by expanding alternative land corridors, strengthening rail connectivity, increasing trade with neighboring states, and developing financial mechanisms that are less exposed to unilateral US pressure. The objective is not autarky. It is strategic redundancy.

The SCO bank proposal

Pezeshkian's proposal for an SCO bank is particularly significant in this context. One of the central weaknesses of Iran's external economy has been its limited access to conventional international financial channels. Even when European or Asian companies may have an economic interest in dealing with Iran, the threat of US secondary sanctions can discourage them from doing so.

A regional financial institution could, over time, provide an additional layer of protection for intra-SCO trade. Such an institution would not replace the global financial system overnight. Nor should expectations be exaggerated. Establishing a multilateral bank requires capital commitments, legal agreements, institutional trust, and a workable framework for settlements.

But the strategic value of the idea lies elsewhere. If SCO members gradually expand the use of national currencies, alternative payment systems, and regional financial institutions, the ability of any single external power to disrupt

Iran's President Masoud Pezeshkian (8) talks with the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi as they walk off the stage after taking a group photo with the leaders of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization during a summit in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, on September 1, 2026.
● president.ir

their commercial relationships could be reduced. For Iran, this would represent more than financial convenience; it would constitute a form of economic sovereignty.

Energy as Iran's strategic leverage
Energy cooperation is another area in which Iran possesses significant structural advantages. The SCO's energy agenda has already been moving toward deeper coordination. In June, the organization's energy ministers agreed to continue expert consultations on establishing an energy consortium among member states and discussed energy security, infrastructure protection, and cooperation through 2030.

Iran's participation in such a framework could be highly consequential. Iran possesses enormous oil and natural gas resources, extensive petrochemical capacity, and a strategic position connecting energy-producing regions with major Asian consumers. China and India, meanwhile, remain among the world's most important energy markets.

The creation of a more institutionalized SCO energy framework could therefore provide Iran with opportunities extending beyond crude exports. Joint investment, refining, petrochemicals, energy infrastructure, technology transfer, and electricity cooperation could all become part of a broader economic strategy. The critical point is that Iran should seek to

This screengrab from undated handout video footage released by the US Central Command (CENTCOM) on July 25, 2026, shows operations enforcing the US' naval blockade against Iran.
● CENTCOM



become more than a commodity supplier. Its long-term objective should be integration into regional energy value chains.

War has changed the meaning of economic diplomacy

The current US-Israeli conflict with Iran has also changed the meaning of economic diplomacy. Under ordinary circumstances, economic diplomacy is largely about attracting investment, increasing exports, and opening markets. Under conditions of military confrontation and blockade, it also becomes a component of national resilience. The SCO summit therefore provided Tehran with an opportunity to make a broader argument: economic connectivity can itself become a security instrument. The Bishkek declaration condemned military strikes on Iran and reaffirmed members' support for Iran's peaceful nuclear rights. It also emphasised economic cooperation, financial coordination, energy security, and the implementation of the SCO's economic and energy strategies through 2030. This political support should not be confused with a guarantee of unlimited economic assistance. China, Russia, India, and the Central Asian states have their

own national interests and calculations. None of them should be assumed to act simply as extensions of Iranian policy. But this is precisely why economic diplomacy matters. Iran does not need patronage. It needs mutually beneficial interdependence.

Corridors as an economic counterweight

Perhaps Iran's most underutilized strategic asset is its position as a transit country. If maritime routes remain vulnerable because of conflict around the Strait of Hormuz, land-based and multimodal corridors become more valuable. Iran can strengthen north-south connectivity toward Russia and Central Asia while simultaneously developing east-west routes connecting Asian markets to the Middle East. Such infrastructure would serve two purposes. First, it would generate direct economic benefits through transit revenues, logistics, investment, and employment. Second, it would create constituencies in other countries with a material interest in maintaining Iran's economic connectivity. This distinction is important. A country becomes harder to isolate when other countries have something

substantial to lose from its isolation. That is perhaps the deeper logic behind Iran's economic diplomacy at the SCO.

Beyond the 'Look East' debate

Iran's engagement with the SCO should not be reduced to the simplistic binary of "East versus West". A sophisticated foreign economic policy should preserve room for engagement with all major economic centers where national interests permit. But diversification becomes particularly important when one external actor possesses the ability to impose disproportionate costs through sanctions, financial restrictions, and military power. Iran's objective should therefore be strategic diversification rather than geopolitical exclusivity. The East is not a substitute for the entire world. But neither should Western financial and political structures remain the only gateways through which Iran can access international trade. The SCO offers an opportunity to build additional gateways.

From summit diplomacy to implementation

The real test of Pezeshkian's economic diplomacy will begin after the summit.

Iran has no shortage of memoranda, declarations, and diplomatic agreements. What it needs now is implementation. The proposed SCO bank must move toward serious institutional discussions. The export insurance mechanism needs a concrete framework. Energy cooperation requires investment projects rather than political declarations. Railways, ports, customs systems, payment mechanisms, and digital trade infrastructure must all be developed in parallel. The private sector must also become a central participant. Economic diplomacy cannot succeed if Iranian exporters and investors remain trapped by domestic regulatory obstacles while diplomats negotiate new markets abroad. The government therefore faces a dual task: expand external economic opportunities while simultaneously removing internal barriers to using them.

A strategic opening for Iran

Pezeshkian's appearance in Bishkek ultimately represented more than Iran's participation in another multilateral summit. It reflected an attempt to redefine economic diplomacy as an instrument of strategic resilience. Iran is facing military confrontation,

sanctions, restrictions on oil exports, and a continuing US naval blockade that has disrupted maritime trade. Yet the same pressures that seek to isolate Iran have also increased the strategic value of alternative economic networks. The opportunity presented by the SCO is therefore real, but it is not automatic. Iran must convert political relationships into infrastructure, infrastructure into trade, trade into investment, and investment into long-term interdependence. The strategic calculation is simple. If Washington seeks to constrain Iran by controlling its financial and maritime access, Tehran's most effective response is not economic isolation of its own. It is the construction of multiple alternative channels through which Iranian goods, energy, capital, and commerce can move. In that sense, the SCO may become important not because it offers Iran an escape from the global economy, but because it can help Tehran negotiate its place in that economy on more diversified and less vulnerable terms. For Iran, this is the real promise of economic diplomacy: not merely surviving pressure, but turning geography, energy, connectivity, and regional partnerships into sources of national leverage.

A Eurasia that no longer seeks US permission

By Shirley Ze Yu
Director of the China-Africa Initiative at the London School of Economics

OPINION

Chinese President Xi Jinping arrived in the Kyrgyzstan capital Bishkek this week, hailing a "golden period" in ties between the two Asian countries, at the 25th anniversary summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO). Xi also shared the stage with Russian President Vladimir Putin and Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian. Together, they lead the three most heavily sanctioned economies on earth. Against the backdrop of war, the summit projected a continental Eurasia whose mission no longer seeks America's permission. This year, the SCO advanced two important objectives that echo Beijing's long-term pursuits: a push for local-currency settlement to bypass Western financial systems (the Bishkek Declaration), and progress (at last) towards an SCO Development Bank. Kyrgyzstan made launching an SCO Development Bank the goal of its 2026 chairmanship. China first proposed the concept back in 2010, and Xi revived it at the Tianjin summit in 2025. He called it a strategic measure to address big geopolitical shifts. Initially, Russia and India were wary of a bank China would dominate, but US actions have made them think again. Russia has been locked out of Western capital, Iran is under a US trade blackout, and those who trade with Iran are also now in the firing line. An SCO bank offers obvious incentives. Central Asian states need infrastructure capital that no one else will provide on comparable terms. Escalating US pressure has been Beijing's best recruiting tool. Unlike the China-based Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and the New Development Bank, the SCO Development Bank will operate outside the dollar-denominated financial system. More than just a multilateral lender, it will also provide a settlement architecture that lets sanctioned or wary states move money outside the dollar-clearing system.



The summit comes a week after the US Treasury launched its so-called "economic D-Day" against Iran and its trading partners. Chinese financial institutions now risk further US sanctions. However, if Washington were to sever a major Chinese bank from dollar clearing, it would be a grave economic act against Beijing and one that the US Treasury is most reluctant to use. Asked why, US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent said: "Why would I want to blow up the global financial system?"

Chinese President Xi Jinping (L) arrives in Bishkek for the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) Summit 2026 and a state visit to Kyrgyzstan upon the invitation of President Sadyr Japarov (R) of Kyrgyzstan, on August 30, 2026. ● XINHUA



It was a telling answer because sanctioning a systemically important Chinese bank risks doing exactly that. China can hit back where America is genuinely exposed. For instance, Beijing controls the rare-earths that US defence and technology depend on, and has shown before that it will hold them to ransom. A Chinese bank sanction would almost certainly trigger that kind of retaliation. Even the prospect of it forces China to de-dollarise. China's Cross-Border Interbank Payment System now links 1,800 institutions and has cleared the equivalent of \$245 trillion in yuan annual transactions by March 2026. Iran's trade already clears outside the dollar through the yuan and barter. Every time the US Treasury threatens to weaponise the US-controlled SWIFT banking system, it boosts Beijing.



An SCO bank offers obvious incentives. Central Asian states need infrastructure capital that no one else will provide on comparable terms. Escalating US pressure has been Beijing's best recruiting tool. Unlike the China-based Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and the New Development Bank, the SCO Development Bank will operate outside the dollar-denominated financial system. More than just a multilateral lender, it will also provide a settlement architecture that lets sanctioned or wary states move money outside the dollar-clearing system.

Institutionalising an alternative

China's response to the US at the Bishkek Summit is to institutionalise an alternative. The SCO Development Bank and local-currency settlement turn a loose Eurasian gathering of illiberal nations into a functioning post-dollar regional economic bloc. This makes future American sanctions less effective. Against this backdrop, and from China's standpoint, US sanctions have not isolated Iran. Rather, they have drawn it closer to the Eurasian bloc. The wider message from this is that states under US pressure have an alternative. China also wants to 'lock in' the continental corridor end-to-end, with Xi's state visit to Kyrgyzstan likely to cement the spine of the rail corridor to Iran and Turkey, with Egypt being the Mediterranean terminus. This physical infrastructure ensures China's trade and partial energy supply in the event of a maritime blockade. Xi hosted several bilateral meetings on the sidelines of the SCO Summit, aiming to cement the China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan railway, the southern spine of a continental corridor already carrying freight from Xi'an to Tehran in 15 days, compared with a month by sea. Beyond that, Beijing wants to win the post-dollar world narrative. The leaders of the three most sanctioned nations standing side-by-side just days after Washington's 'D-Day' reframes American coercion as the gathering force for a Eurasian bloc of nations, one increasingly financed by (and settled in) yuan, gauged by rail and pipeline infrastructures, and built to route around every US-patrolled waterway. The project is far from complete. China still imports most of its oil by sea. The newly operational Arctic route (resulting from melting sea ice) and the rail corridor can still only carry modest volumes compared to seaborne trade. Meanwhile, an SCO Development Bank has been 'imminent' for 15 years, and India still has a veto. Washington's selective access to US capital, the dollar, and trade has become China's best recruiter. For the first time in 80 years, two parallel global trade and financial architectures now exist: one maritime, dollar-denominated, and US-financed; the other continental, local-currency-denominated, and Chinese-financed. The politicisation of one led to the other. By denying China access to energy, Washington shows that there is an alternative to trading with America. China could not have designed it better.

The article first appeared on Al Majalla.

Aichi-Nagoya 2026 Asian Games:

Iran rallies past China to bag basketball bronze on Day 1



Sports Desk

The Iranian men's basketball team got the country off the mark at the Aichi-Nagoya 2026 Asian Games in Japan, coming from behind to beat China 79-70 in the bronze medal contest on Sunday.

Power forward Matin Aqajpour spearheaded Iran with 21 points, including 12 from beyond the arc, while Piter Girgoorian and Mahdi Jafari also reached double figures, chipping in 15 and 10 points, respectively.

Veteran forward and team captain Arsalan Kazemi, meanwhile, played his part with four points and 15 rebounds, as Iran – knocked out in the quarterfinals in Hangzhou 2022 – secured a fifth men's basketball medal in six editions of the Asian Games, having settled for silver in 2014 and 2018.

Iran made a flying start, taking an 8-4 lead in the opening minutes. China quickly regained its rhythm, however, and took control of the game, closing the first quarter 17-12 ahead.

Aqajpour's impressive three-point shooting kept Iran within striking distance during the opening 10 minutes and prevented China from building a more substantial lead.

Iran came out with a completely different attacking approach in the second quarter. Mobin Sheikhi's accurate shooting, combined with Kazemi and Mohammad-Mahdi Heydari's dominance under the basket and intelligent playmaking, breathed new life into the Iranian offense.

Iran's strong team play earned it a 17-14 advantage in the second quarter, reducing China's halftime lead to 31-29. The third quarter began at a frenetic

pace, with both sides trading baskets. Jafari's three-pointer tied the game at 34-34 before Aqajpour produced another decisive spell, scoring a mid-range jumper and following it with a three-pointer to give Iran five straight points.

Iran led 42-38 with five minutes remaining in the quarter. Salar Monji then added two crucial points in a physical battle under the basket to extend the lead to 46-42.

Iran dominated the remainder of the quarter, outscoring China 26-15 to take a 55-46 advantage into the final period. The Iranian momentum continued in the fourth quarter as disciplined defense and well-organized attacks stretched the lead to 13 points.

With China throwing everything forward in an attempt to turn the game around, Aqajpour responded with another three-pointer. Arman Zangeneh then hit from beyond the arc with six minutes remaining to keep Iran nine points ahead, although China immediately answered with a three-pointer to cut the deficit to six. Iran suddenly found itself under severe pressure after a series of individual mistakes allowed China to close the gap to just one point with less than two minutes remaining.

But once again, Aqajpour stepped up at a crucial moment. He drew a foul on a brilliant individual play and completed a three-point and-one, giving Iran four vital points and restoring a four-point cushion.

Iran then held its nerve in the closing stages, with its players extending the advantage to nine points and securing the country's first medal of the Asian Games. Iran's impressive performance was



Iranian players celebrate after winning the men's basketball bronze medal at the Aichi-Nagoya 2026 Asian Games at Aichi International Arena in Nagoya, Japan, on Sept. 20, 2026.
● VARZESH3

reflected beyond the final score, as the team made 15 three-pointers and dominated China across several statistical categories, including rebounds, steals, assists and blocks.

Football

Elsewhere on the official first day of action at the multi-sport event, Iran's U23 side shared the spoils with China in a goalless draw in the men's football event.

Iran enjoyed a slight advantage in possession during the first half, with Hossein Abdi's side creating several half-chances through efforts from outside the box.

The game, however, turned on its head after the break, as China started on the front foot and went close to breaking the deadlock in the 49th minute, only to see Wu Xi's sublime volley from the edge of the box go just wide of the crossbar.

Sunday's draw at Wave Stadium Kariya saw Iran, which had beaten the United Arab Emirates 3-1 in its opening game, remain atop Group B with four points, thanks to a superior goal difference over China.

Chasing a first medal at the Asian Games since the Doha 2006 bronze, four-time gold medalist Iran will con-

clude the group stage against North Korea on Wednesday.

The top two teams in each of the four groups will advance to the quarterfinals.

Table tennis

In table tennis, Iran got off to a winning start in the men's team event, defeating Pakistan 3-0 in Group F. Teenage prodigy Benyamin Faraji got the Iranian trio off the mark with a 3-0 win (11-5, 11-3, 11-2) over Taha Bilal, before Nima Alamian came out victorious in straight games (11-5, 11-8, 11-3) against Muhammad Khan.

Noshad Alamian swept Abbas Khan 3-0 (11-6, 11-5, 11-2) to seal the victory for the Iranian team ahead of an encounter with India later in the day. The Alamian brothers also featured in the Iranian trio that won an impressive bronze in the previous edition in Hangzhou in 2022 – the country's first table tennis medal at the Asian Games in 65 years – and then teamed up to repeat the success in the men's doubles competition.

Beach volleyball

The Iranian pair of Abolhassan Khakizadeh and Amir-Ali Ghalehnovi opened their beach volleyball campaign in emphatic fashion, sweeping

Maldives' Naseem Adam and Sajid Ismail in straight sets (21-12, 21-14).

The Iranian duo will resume the preliminary phase against Bangladesh's Md Ali Al Murammar Rakesh Shaikat and Ratul Ahmed in Pool H today, with Abbas Pourasgari and Alireza Aqajani taking on Joninho Fernandes Xavier and Joel Savio Valente of Timor-Leste in their Pool F opener.

Karate

Iranian karateka Fatemeh Sadeqi was unfortunate to finish empty-handed in the women's individual kata event after being outscored 4-1 by Chinese Taipei's Chien Hui-hsuan in the bronze medal contest.

A six-time bronze medalist at the Asian Championships, Sadeqi defeated Thailand's Monsicha Sakulrattanatara by unanimous decision in her first outing, but fell to Grace Lau of Hong Kong by the same result in the semifinals. Lau settled for silver following a 5-0 defeat to the host nation's Ono Maho in the final.

Sadeqi will still have a shot at glory when she represents the country's trio alongside Zeinab Hosseini and Sepideh Amini in the women's team kata event, starting with a quarterfinal clash against Thailand.



The Iranian delegation parades at the opening ceremony of the Aichi-Nagoya 2026 Asian Games at Paloma Mizuho Stadium in Nagoya, Japan, on Sept. 19, 2026.
● VARZESH3

FIDE Chess Olympiad 2026:

Iran men back to winning ways, women beaten by Serbia

Sports Desk

Iran were back to winning ways in the Open competition at the FIDE Chess Olympiad 2026 in Samarkand, Uzbekistan, defeating Moldova 4:0 in Round 4 on Saturday.

Having shared the spoils with Belgium in a 2:2 stalemate in the previous round, Iran's four-man team moved to seven points in a tight Open standings table – one behind leaders China – thanks to a third victo-

ry in four outings.

Mohammad-Amin Tabatabaei opened Iran's account with a victory over fellow grandmaster Jegor Lashkin, before Bardiya Daneshvar defeated Ivan Schitco to double the advantage.

Mahdi Gholami and Arash Daghighi sealed the fourth-round win for the Iranian quartet, which is captained by Saeid Pirmaleki, coming out on top against FIDE masters Semion Sapocinic and Dmitrii Gubin, respectively.

Iran had begun its Open campaign with a 4:0 victory over Mozambique before defeating Bolivia 3½:½ in the second round.

The women's fourth round, however, was one to forget for the Iranian team, which had its winning streak snapped by a 4:0 loss to Serbia.

Mobina Alinasab fell to International Master Teodora Injac in the first matchup, before Melika Mohammadi drew with Alina Bivol.

Mitra Asgharzadeh's setback against Elif Mehmed was then followed by Parva Behzad-Nazif's loss to Jovana Srdanovic, leaving the Iranian women on six points – two behind leaders USA.

Iran's women had outscored Cyprus 4:0 in the first round before defeating Sri Lanka 3:1 and France 3:1, respectively.

The 46th edition of the biennial Chess Olympiad will conclude with Round 11 on September 27.



Shiraz's engraving tradition keeps Persian heritage alive

Iranica Desk

In Shiraz, history is not told only through the stones of Persepolis, historic buildings and the pages of books. Part of that history has for years been etched into metal with a chisel and hammer.

Engraving, known as Qalam Zani, is a deeply rooted art in the city that has become intertwined with the culture, art and historical identity of Fars Province over time, developing a distinctive visual language of its own.

With precise blows of a chisel and hammer, Shirazi artisans create motifs of flowers and birds, traditional designs, and elements drawn from Iran's history and culture on copper, silver and brass. These motifs are not merely decorative; they reflect part of the artistic heritage and aesthetic traditions of the land.

Shiraz's engraving tradition has survived over the years through the efforts of masters who have passed their skills down from one generation to the next, and it is regarded as one of the expressions of Fars' traditional arts.

Behind every piece are hours of practice, precision, patience and experience, much of which is passed from master to apprentice in workshops.

Today, however, the art stands between a proud past and an uncertain future. On one side is the legacy of master artisans and the distinctive characteristics of the Shiraz school of engraving; on the other are concerns such as a decline in the number of apprentices, rising material costs and market difficulties that have challenged the continuation of the art.

The story of Shiraz engraving is, in fact, the story of an art striving to keep part of the historical identity of Fars alive through the blows of a hammer — an art whose sound can still be heard in some workshops across the city.



Ahmadali Zand, a prominent Shirazi engraving master, told Mehr News Agency that engraving is an art with a history spanning several thousand years that developed and evolved during different periods of Iranian history and also held a special place in cities such as Shiraz, Kermanshah and Tabriz.

He said Shiraz had been one of the important centers for the development of the art during various historical periods, adding that engraving also held a special position during the Achaemenid and Sassanid periods. The art flourished further in Isfahan, where particular attention was paid to the arts during the Safavid era.

The master artisan continued that alongside Isfahan, cities such as Shiraz, Kermanshah and Tabriz also had considerable experience and potential in engraving, with each preserving its own distinctive characteristics.

Zand emphasized the differences between Shiraz engraving and other schools of the art, saying that Shiraz engraving has distinctive characteristics in terms of delicacy, ornamentation and creating three-dimensional forms that are not seen in many other schools.

He explained that Isfahan engraving relies more on techniques



such as shading and blackening to create visual effects, while in Shiraz, the artisan seeks to give volume to the design itself and bring the form out of the metal. The master artisan added that the type of chisel, the way it is struck and the method used to create three-dimensional forms are different in Shiraz works, giving the city's engraving tradition its own distinct identity and character.

Zand pointed to the difficulty of the technique, saying that working with a chisel to create three-dimensional forms on metal is highly demanding and requires the artisan to have precise control over each blow, as even the slightest mistake can damage a piece.



● MEHR NEWS AGENCY

that during a trip to Paris and a visit to the Louvre Museum, he saw examples of historic Iranian works that demonstrated the international interest in Iran's arts and handicrafts.

Zand emphasized the connection between art and cultural identity, saying culture and art cannot be separated and that Iranian identity cannot be fully understood without considering the country's authentic and deeply rooted arts.

He identified the declining attention to traditional arts as one of the major concerns facing engraving today, saying many traditional arts have disappeared over the years and warning that if steps are not taken to preserve arts such as engraving, they too could become part of history. He added that the number of students they have been able to train in recent years has been limited and that many artisans are also facing difficult circumstances because of economic conditions and insufficient support.

Zand criticized the lack of adequate support for traditional arts, saying funding and planning are provided for sports, different disciplines, competitions, training camps and talent development, while traditional arts do not receive comparable support.

He added that cultural heritage

authorities should pay greater attention to this sector and allocate specific funding and programs to preserve and revive traditional arts.

Referring to the age of masters in the field, Zand said the issue was not simply the loss of artisans. When a master dies, part of the knowledge accumulated over years and preserved through experience is also lost. Therefore, action must begin now to train a new generation, identify talented young people, provide them with training and investment, and encourage them to enter the field so they can pass the art of engraving on to future generations.

Zand said the first step toward supporting traditional arts was to recognize and understand them, adding that officials should understand that engraving is not merely a decorative craft or handicraft, but part of Iran's cultural and historical identity.

He proposed holding specialized exhibitions dedicated to introducing traditional arts and said artisans should be given opportunities to explain their works, the characteristics of these arts and their place in Iranian culture to officials.

The master artisan said that if works by Iranian artisans find a place in the homes of people in European and American countries, part of Iranian culture and identity would, in effect, be introduced to those countries.

Zand added that art can play a far greater role than many other tools in introducing Iranian culture to the world because a work of art can remain in a person's home for years and establish a direct connection with their mind and emotions.

He emphasized that with proper support for authentic Iranian arts, engraving can become one of the means of introducing Iran's cultural identity to the world and can regain its rightful place.

Quzlu holds untapped potential for rural tourism

Iranica Desk

Zanjan Province, with its diverse climate and ancient history, has always been a stage for the manifestation of culture and nature. Among the cities in this province, Mahneshan holds a special place with its unique geological landscapes and mysterious history. Mahneshan should be regarded not as a transit destination, but as a "destination for discovery" — a place where tourists can experience a new meaning of authenticity amid the corridors of history and untouched rural textures.

The villages of Mahneshan are the cultural identity of this city. Nestled in the heart of Mahneshan lies a village that, with its terraced architecture and pristine nature, spreads a breathtaking panorama before every viewer. From the terraced village of Quzlu to its ancient fortresses and pristine nature, all are an invitation to journey into the depths of history and the tranquility of nature.

The terraced architecture of Quzlu is the first feature that captures the attention of every tourist. In this architectural



style, where the roof of each house serves as the courtyard of the one above, an inseparable bond has been established between human settlement and the mountainous nature. These houses are built using local materials such as stone and wood, which, while helping maintain a comfortable indoor temperature, possess a unique harmony with the village's natural setting. In today's world, where tourists seek to escape machine-driven life and experience staying in authentic spaces, this architectural texture is considered a valuable competitive advantage for Quzlu. Preserving this historic texture not only prevents the destruction of cultural heritage but can

also serve as the main axis of the village's visual identity in attracting tourists.

Quzlu is not limited to its architecture alone. The pristine nature surrounding this village is a combination of towering mountains, verdant pastures, and crystal-clear springs that provide an ideal platform for nature-based tourism (ecotourism). The prevailing silence of the region, its clean air, and panoramic views have turned this village into a refuge for tourists weary of the city's hustle and bustle. Moreover, in different seasons of the year, the changing colors of nature in this region are a manifestation of God's painting on the canvas of Mahneshan, which can be a



● chn.ir

source of inspiration for photographers, artists, and environmental researchers.

To transform Quzlu into a tourism hub, a "sustainable development" strategy is needed in which the preservation of the village's cultural authenticity is not sacrificed for mass tourism. Tourism is one of the fastest ways to distribute wealth in deprived and remote areas. With the boom in tourism in Quzlu, the village's agricultural products will be sold directly to tourists instead of leaving the region. The handicrafts of the village women, which are rooted in the region's culture, will find a market among visitors, and the village youth, instead of migrat-

ing to large cities for work, can engage in entrepreneurship and earn income in their birthplace. This means preventing the emptying of villages and preserving the active population in the country's productive areas.

The terraced village of Quzlu is a treasure waiting to be identified and introduced. This village is not only a tourism destination but also a "national asset" that can change the face of tourism in Zanjan Province. The Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts Organization of the province, in cooperation with the village council, and local communities, can take small but strategic steps to transform Quzlu from an unknown village

into a distinguished destination on Iran's tourism map. The time has come for Quzlu to find its rightful place in the country's tourism landscape and to shine as a symbol of "authentic, pristine, and human-centered tourism."

If today, with a macro-level perspective and in the shadow of precise planning, the necessary infrastructure for hosting tourists is provided, "Quzlu" will not only emerge from its geographical isolation but will also become a hub of authentic tourism where the protection of architectural heritage goes hand in hand with equitable economic development.

The time has now come to introduce Quzlu to the world not as a hidden treasure, but as the shining gem of Mahneshan's tourism. The interaction between responsible institutions, local communities, and the private sector is the key to opening the gates of this terraced paradise to eager tourists — so that Quzlu may be not only a lasting memory in the minds of travelers but also a successful model for rural tourism development across the vast expanse of Zanjan.



Tehran advances tourism reconstruction, targets hotel brand development



Iranian Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Minister Reza Salehi-Amiri (R) and Tehran Mayor Alireza Zakani exchange documents during a meeting to discuss tourism development, the completion of unfinished projects and hotel brand expansion in Tehran, Iran, September 20, 2026.
● CHTN

ty infrastructure on Sunday, as part of broader efforts to advance reconstruction and development in the sector. At a meeting at Milad Tower, Salehi-Amiri called for coordinated support to establish reputable hotel brands, saying Tehran needs a recognizable hospitality identity rather than simply more hotel buildings, CHTN reported. "Tehran needs branding beyond a few structures," he said, stressing the importance of planning for and supporting the development of established hotel brands. The minister said the ministry and municipality had agreed to work together

to resolve obstacles facing unfinished tourism projects and speed up their completion. He also called for closer coordination among relevant agencies, streamlined administrative procedures and effective support mechanisms to bring developments into operation. Seven investors presented their proposals and outlined challenges affecting hotel construction and accommodation projects. Officials discussed ways to facilitate licensing, make use of municipal incentives and help projects advance toward completion. Ali-Asghar Shalbafian, head of the ministry's Center for Investment and Economic Affairs, highlighted an incentive granting an 80% exemption for the construction of hotels and tourism facilities in Tehran. Initiated by the municipality, the measure has since been implemented in 53 cities, he said. Shalbafian also pointed to joint efforts to develop mixed-use tourism projects and identify suitable sites for new hotels across the capital. He urged

investors to meet their commitments and project deadlines, emphasizing that public-sector support must be matched by timely implementation. Nasrollah Abedian, Tehran's deputy mayor for urban planning and architecture, said preliminary studies and a thematic tourism plan were underway across nine areas, including cultural and historical attractions, religious sites, recreation, health, accommodation, transit routes, commerce and events. The municipality has also defined 12 projects in areas surrounding historic buildings, aimed at strengthening ecological capacities, and is seeking the necessary approvals to make better use of existing incentives. The meeting focused on coordinating reconstruction and development priorities, completing unfinished projects, expanding accommodation capacity and removing administrative barriers to tourism investment in Tehran.

Arts & Culture Desk

Iran's Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Minister Reza Salehi-Ami-

ri and Tehran Mayor Alireza Zakani reviewed plans to accelerate the completion of unfinished tourism projects and strengthen the capital's hospitali-

Iran to showcase cultural heritage in four Russian cities

Arts & Culture Desk

Iran will stage a weeklong cultural festival in St. Petersburg, Moscow, Kazan and Astrakhan from October 1 to 6, bringing together a 168-member delegation of scholars, university professors, artists and cultural practitioners, the Islamic Culture and Relations Organization announced Sunday. Hossein Divsalar, the organization's deputy for scientific and cultural cooperation, unveiled the program at a press conference in Tehran, describing the event as an opportunity to expand cultural diplomacy and deepen exchanges between the Iranian and Russian peoples, CHTN reported. The delegation, named Minab in remembrance of schoolchildren killed in an attack, will present a broad range of Iranian artistic, academic and cultural achievements to Russian audiences. The festival will feature exhibitions spanning around 20 disciplines, including visual arts, painting, calligraphy and carpet weaving, alongside displays highlighting Iran's cultural heritage and civilization. One of the main attractions will be the Iranian National Orchestra, with around 60 musicians scheduled to perform in Moscow, Kazan and St. Petersburg. A concert at Mos-



Hossein Divsalar, deputy for scientific and cultural cooperation at Iran's Islamic Culture and Relations Organization, speaks at a press conference in Tehran on September 20, 2026, announcing a weeklong Iranian cultural festival in Russia from October 1 to 6.
● IRNA

cow's Bolshoi Theatre is also planned. Film and animation screenings will bring Iranian cinema to audiences across the four cities. Organizers also expect to sign a joint cinema production cooperation agreement following nearly three years of negotiations. Academic exchanges will complement the artistic program, with about six university and scholarly meetings planned in Moscow, St. Petersburg and Kazan. The events will bring together Iranian and Russian cultural officials and academic institutions. Kazan, a major center of the Muslim world, will host special activities marking the Year of the Prophet of Mercy, including musical performances, exhibitions, conferences and academic discussions. The festival will also feature children's and teenagers' activities, traditional Iranian

sports, ethnic clothing, and showcases of video games and creative industries. Business-to-business meetings will connect Iranian and Russian cultural entrepreneurs, with the aim of developing longer-term cooperation and cultural exports. A meeting of the cultural committee of the Iran-Russia Joint Cooperation Commission, chaired by the two countries' culture ministers, is also on the agenda. Organizers are additionally preparing a memorandum of understanding between Iran's National Library and the Center for Studies of the Written Heritage of Islam and Iran in St. Petersburg. "We want to move beyond a symbolic or exhibition-based initiative and turn the cultural week into a platform for meaningful cooperation," Divsalar said, emphasizing the role of cultural diplomacy in fostering lasting relations between nations.

Minab to open new fine arts school as Iran expands arts education

Arts & Culture Desk

Iran's Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance will open five new fine arts schools across the country, including a boys' school in Minab, Hormozgan Province, at the start of the new academic year in September, ministry official Mohammad-Hossein Esmaeili said. The Minab school is part of a broader expansion of specialized arts education aimed at widening access to formal training in the arts across the provinces, IRNA reported. The new schools will also include boys' and girls' schools in Damghan, Semnan Province, a second girls' fine arts school in Tehran, and a boys' school in Sirjan, Kerman Province. 'Minab' will thus join a growing network of institutions offering specialized instruction in various artistic disciplines, giving young students in the southern Hormozgan city a dedicated setting



to pursue arts education. The five schools will bring the number of fine arts schools established over the past two years to 12, while the national network now comprises 75 schools serving more than 10,000 students. The ministry has set an objective of establishing at least two fine arts schools, one for boys and one for girls, in every province under the country's Seventh Development Plan. The expansion is intended to strengthen both the reach and quality of arts education and provide students across Iran with broader opportunities to develop their artistic talents.

Trump more focused ...

Limited and localized military actions may continue alongside these measures. One possible objective would be to reopen parts of the Strait of Hormuz and allow more oil to leave the region, helping Washington manage the oil market and keep prices around their current levels. I believe this is the main direction of Trump's policy, at least until the mid-term elections.

What message does the recent meeting of the US CENTCOM commander with Israeli and Arab military commanders in Germany send about the region's future security

arrangements?

I believe this meeting is part of a broader effort to establish new security arrangements in the region. The developments of the past several months have shown that the existing regional security arrangements need to be readjusted, and all sides are working on this in different ways. The United States appears to be considering what kind of security structure should emerge after the conflict. This includes the future of US military bases in the region, the relationship between the United States, Israel and Arab countries, and the possible roles of China and Russia. There are also questions about

Iran's future military capabilities, including its missile and drone programs and regional groups closed to Tehran. These are among the issues that are now being considered as the parties try to shape the region's future security environment.

How much influence can the Persian Gulf Arab countries have on Washington's decisions about the continuation or suspension of the conflict? The Arab countries can certainly have a major influence. A significant part of the conflict has taken place in their territory, and they have demonstrated that they have room for ma-

neuver in their relations with major international powers. For example, during the Biden administration, some regional countries showed that they could distance themselves from Washington and develop closer relations with Russia and China. Saudi Arabia also refused a US request to increase oil production and instead cooperated with Russia within OPEC Plus on production cuts. The formation of Mecca Defense Pact is an important initiative in parallel with the US wish to see regional states move towards burden sharing. These examples show that the Persian Gulf countries have considerable room to maneuver and can in-

fluence the decisions of major international powers through their policies. Their role will also be important in determining the future of US military bases in the region and the extent to which regional countries can assume a greater responsibility for regional security through cooperation among themselves. Such arrangements could become an important part of the future regional security structure.

With military developments, consultations with Arab countries and renewed discussion of negotiations taking place simultaneously, what role can diplomacy play

in the next phase of the Iran-US crisis?

This crisis ultimately has to be resolved through diplomacy. Wars generally could only have two possible outcomes: the complete defeat of one side and occupation of its territory, or a diplomatic settlement. Since the complete defeat of one side and occupation of territory are out of question in this case, there is essentially no alternative to diplomacy. Diplomacy will therefore have a decisive role in bringing the conflict to an end. It can also reduce the costs for all sides involved. Ultimately, this crisis will have to be settled through diplomatic means.