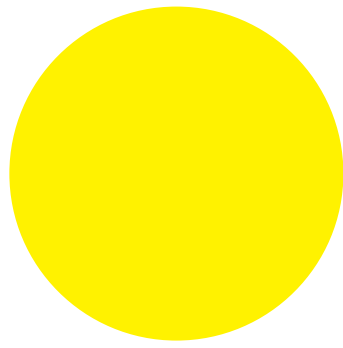


Minab tragedy to become national, global cultural narrative



8 >



Iran Daily

Vol. 8220 • Wednesday, September 23, 2026 • Mehr 01, 1405 • Rabi' al-Thani 11, 1448 • 100,000 rials • 8 pages



> irandaily.ir

newspaper.irandaily.ir

IranDailyWeb

Persian Gulf Arab states urge reset with Iran as conflict drags on

Strategic pivot of Iran's Arab neighbors toward Tehran: *Waning of security reliance on US*

2 >

Pezeshkian vows to firmly defend Iran's positions at UNGA US open to meeting Iran at United Nations: *Rubio*

2 >



President Masoud Pezeshkian waves goodbye as he departs Tehran for New York to take part in the UN General Assembly meeting on September 22, 2026. president.ir

In search of sellable win

What's on the table for Trump and Xi?



By Mohammad Sajjad Kashani
Regional affairs researcher

**ANALYSIS
EXCLUSIVE**

Xi Jinping's three-day visit to Washington (September 23-25) opens with a gesture that says almost everything about the logic of the relationship: Trump will personally greet Xi the moment he lands at Joint Base Andrews on September 23, the first time in his second term that he has gone in person to welcome a foreign leader at that military base. White House officials have described the move as part of an effort to "woo" Xi, since he is arriving for a dense and consequential summit and Trump is hoping to bank some goodwill before talks even begin. Politico quotes a US administration official saying the whole point is respect, being seen as an equal to the president, and that this gesture will carry real weight for the Chinese side. What's clear is this: they seem to be learning to speak the language of the East. The White House program shows a visit built in careful layers. Thursday morning, September 24, brings the formal arrival ceremony on the South Lawn with 479 troops from every branch of the US military. That evening comes the state dinner in the East Room, and Friday morning a tea reception in the Red Room. This level of pageantry mirrors, almost point for point, the lavish send-off China gave Trump in May 2026, when Xi announced the two sides had agreed to build a "constructive, strategic and stable relationship," a phrase that now serves as the official frame for these talks.

Economic dimension: fragile truce, fight over time

The most pressing item on the agenda appears to be extending the tariff truce, set to expire in November 2026. Beijing wants a longer horizon, one to two years, to give its economy room to breathe, while Washington prefers a shorter extension, three to six months, to keep its leverage intact. Commitments on agricultural purchases and Boeing jets, along with a proposed "trade council" for lower-sensitivity goods, function less as a real resolution and more as a mutual risk-management exercise. The 21% drop in rare earth export licenses in August is a signal that Beijing is still holding that card as pressure heading into the summit.

Security, technology dimension: rivalry dressed up as dialogue

Washington's proposal for a mutual notification mechanism on AI incidents involving national security risk looks more like risk management than genuine strategic cooperation. Semiconductor export restrictions remain firmly in place, and the presence of executives from Nvidia, OpenAI, Apple, and Tesla at the state dinner signals how much economic and security weight this sector carries for both sides, not any real opening.

Page 8 >



Iran says foreign flights still operating despite US pressure
Beijing rejects Washington's 'illegal' sanctions threats

3 >



OPINION
American power; a view from China

4-5 >



Aichi-Nagoya 2026 Asian Games:
Nemati opens gold account as Iran bags four karate medals

6 >



Pezeshkian vows to firmly defend Iran's positions at UNGA

US open to meeting Iran at United Nations: **Rubio**

International Desk

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian on Tuesday vowed to "firmly defend" the country's positions and convey Iran's strength to the world as he departed for New York to attend the 81st United Nations General Assembly meeting.

Pezeshkian underlined the hardships endured by the Iranian people and servicemen on the path of preserving their unity and defending the nation in the face of foreign aggression.

"We emerged from it with our heads held high, and this is a source of dignity and pride for all of us. Therefore, we will firmly defend our positions in international forums," he said.

"The UN General Assembly is a place where we can convey our positions, our grievances, and our strength to the world," he said.

The president noted that this Gener-

al Assembly meeting's theme was the restoration of trust among nations, lamenting that trust had been undermined on the world stage and international frameworks disregarded.

Pezeshkian said some countries use their power to pressure others and violate the rights of nations.

"At the General Assembly, I will speak about the grievances of the Iranian people, the crimes committed by our enemies, and the mistrust they have created. We have entered negotiations several times and signed an agreement, yet they acted despite the negotiations and understandings reached."

Addressing the latest round of unprovoked US-Israeli aggression that targeted the country from February 28 until April 7, including attacks on purely civilian targets, the president asked, "Is attacking homes and hospitals a fight against terrorism?"

Potential talks

Pezeshkian is scheduled to address the General Assembly on Wednesday. During the visit, he will also meet and hold talks with some heads of state and officials from countries participating in the assembly. A high-ranking Iranian delegation is accompanying President Pezeshkian.

US President Donald Trump has signaled he is open to meeting Pezeshkian in New York.

The potential encounter would come at a striking moment as Iran has sent Washington a list of conditions for renewed negotiations while Iranian military leaders warn that any new US attack would trigger retaliation against American bases and interests across the region.

Secretary of State Marco Rubio also told NBC News that the US is open to a meeting with Iran at the United Nations.



Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian speaks in Tehran's Mehrabad International Airport on September 22, 2026 before departing for New York to attend the 81st United Nations General Assembly meeting. [president.ir](https://www.president.ir)

"We're open to that. I don't think anything is scheduled at this point, but we're certainly open to something like that – especially if it has the pros-

pects of leading to something positive and ultimately achieving the goal of what this is all about," Rubio said in an interview with the Today show.

Persian Gulf Arab states urge reset with Iran as conflict drags on Strategic pivot of Iran's Arab neighbors toward Tehran: **Waning of security reliance on US**

International Desk

Following the experience of the US-Israeli imposed war on Iran, the Arab states of the Persian Gulf have come to realize that regional security cannot be sustained without Iran's participation and satisfaction.

The UAE, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia—acknowledging their vulnerability to the war's consequences and the erosion of US credibility—are now calling for dialogue, a shared security framework, and a non-aggression pact with Iran. This strategic shift presents the Islamic Republic of Iran with an opportunity to leverage its deterrence power and geographic position to steer its neighbors away from security dependence on the US and toward an independent, multilateral regional order based on shared interests.

Persian Gulf Arab states are now calling for a reset on Iran, with the United Arab Emirates urging a "new mindset" and Qatar advocating for a regional "security framework" with Tehran after the war exposed their vulnerability to Iranian attack and tarnished the US's credibility in the Middle East.

Speaking at an event on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly, Qatari Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman al-Thani described the war against Iran, which the US and Israel launched in February, as a "wake-up call". He said the Persian Gulf had to "act together responsibly as a region and to make sure that we are having good relations with Iran". "We are



Qatari Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman al-Thani addressing a Qatari Economic Forum held on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly on September 20, 2026. dohaneews.com

working towards that," he added. "Our regional partners believe in this." Sheikh Mohammed described the economic fallout from the US-Israel war on Iran as "an earthquake" with "its shock waves" reaching far beyond the borders of the Middle East, "challenging assumptions about security and stability". "Permanent security cannot be built through arrangements that leave any state permanently exposed to insecurity," Sheikh Mohammed said. "We must address the sources of tensions and build confidence."

Call for Arab states-Iran dialogue

Speaking at a separate event, Anwar Gargash, a diplomatic adviser to the UAE's president, echoed the calls for Arab states to hold a dialogue with Iran, adding that Tehran's talks with Washington "are not really moving forward".

"We need a new mindset [in] these sorts of discussions about what sort of region we all want," he said. While talks about the future stability of the region could take place between the US and Iran, Gargash said they "should also take place at an Iranian-Arab level".

In another speech this month, Gargash said: "Iran remains our neighbor, and at some point we will have to find a way to restore what can be restored... Geography leaves us no alternative to engagement."

The comments reflect a growing acknowledgment across the Persian Gulf that regional states, which had urged the US not to go to war, will have to manage relations with Tehran following the conflict, with Washington bogged down in the hostilities.

"Iran is our neighbor," Al-Thani said. "We need to understand that without having a security framework that brings us all together as [Persian] Gulf countries with Iran, ensuring that none of us is posing a threat on the other, this region will not just be continuing in the same way as it used to be."

Non-aggression pact

Saudi Arabia has also discussed the idea of a non-aggression pact between Middle East states and Iran since the war erupted, diplomats and analysts said, as part of talks with allies on how to manage regional tensions once the conflict ends.



Qatari Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman al-Thani addressing a Qatari Economic Forum held on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly on September 20, 2026. dohaneews.com

Riyadh is engulfed in a fresh crisis after Yemen's Ansarullah resistance group reignited a more than decade-long conflict with Saudi Arabia in recent weeks, firing almost daily barrages of missiles and drones at the kingdom.

US President Donald Trump has resisted appeals from Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman for American forces to join Riyadh in launching strikes against Yemenis.

Tensions between Iran and regional Arab countries were triggered by the US-Israeli aggression against Iran on February 28.

Iran retaliated with attacks on the US military bases in regional countries and Israel's positions in the occupied territories as the conflict continued to spread.

An April ceasefire put an end to the most intense fighting after Tehran and Washington signed the 14-point Islamabad agreement.

However, the US began attacking Iran in July after it violated the terms of the agreement under the pretext of Iranian strikes on vessels in the Strait of Hormuz.

The US also recently shifted toward a campaign of what it calls "economic asphyxiation" of Iran, imposing sanctions on various sectors in Iran.

Araghchi raps world powers over erosion of confidence in UN

International Desk

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi criticized some world powers for denting confidence in the United Nations as he arrived in New York to attend the 81st session of the United Nations General Assembly meeting.

Speaking to reporters upon his arrival in New York on Monday night, Araghchi said that the theme chosen for this year's General Assembly – restoring trust in the United Nations – was itself an admission that confidence in the organization had been undermined and, in practice, vanished, because of its failure to uphold international peace and security.

He placed the blame on powers that grant themselves the right to act as they please, ignore international institutions, international law and even the collective conscience of humanity, and claim immunity for themselves and their clients. "As a result, we see a criminal entity like the Zionist regime [of Israel] given a completely free hand to do whatever it wishes," he said. "Yet, regrettably, Western and European countries — who style themselves as champions of human rights and humanitarian law — remain silent in the face of these actions."

Iran, he said, had seen no serious condemnation from those same governments of the crimes committed in Pales-

tine, Gaza, Lebanon and Iran.

"If someone in a corner of a country like Iran faces a problem, they shed crocodile tears and raise a hue and cry," Araghchi said. "But in the face of the atrocities that occurred – where 168 innocent children were deliberately massacred in a single instant – these countries do not even issue a simple condemnation."

He was referring the US's deadly missile attack on a school in southern town of Minab on the first day of its aggression against Iran on February 28, which claimed the lives of 168 people, most of them children.

No trust, he concluded, could remain in an organization under the influence of such countries. That was why the question of restoring confidence mattered: it gave the world a chance to discuss how trust in the United Nations had been destroyed, and how it might yet be rebuilt. Araghchi also said the Iranian delegation's foremost purpose at this year's UN General Assembly is to take the world stage and defend the righteousness, rights and interests of the Iranian nation after the cowardly war of aggression by the US and Israel.

"Our most important objective is to appear on a major international platform to defend the righteousness, the rights and the interests of the Iranian people," he said.



Mohammad Ali Rajabi
Cartoonist

CARTOON



Iran says foreign flights still operating despite US pressure

Beijing rejects Washington’s ‘illegal’ sanctions threats

Economy Desk

Iran’s Civil Aviation Organization said on Tuesday that no international flights operated by Iranian airlines had been canceled and that services were continuing as scheduled, a day before new US sanctions are due to take effect against the country’s aviation sector. “None of the international flights operated by Iranian airlines has been canceled so far and they are being carried out according to schedule,” Civil Aviation Organization spokesman Majid Akhavan told ISNA. Akhavan said Iranian authorities were holding talks and making plans to maintain flight services amid recent restrictions. Iran Air, the country’s national carrier, also said on Tuesday it had received no notification or official instruction from the civil aviation authorities of Turkey, Azerbaijan or Iraq to halt or suspend its flights to Istanbul, Baku and Najaf. The statements came as the US prepares to tighten pressure on Iranian aviation. Earlier this month, Washington imposed sanctions on 27 Iranian airlines as part of a broader sanctions package unveiled on Aug. 24, which threatens secondary penalties against countries or entities maintaining trade ties with Tehran. US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent said on Monday that



all Iranian airlines would be shut down from Sept. 23 through the threat of secondary sanctions against foreign aviation service providers. He said providers could lose access to the US dollar system if they fuel Iranian aircraft, provide landing services or sell tickets for Iranian carriers. It was not immediately clear what would change in practice today, given that Iran’s aviation sector has already been subject to years of US sanctions. Iran Air and Mahan Air, a private carrier, are the two main Iranian airlines operating in-

ternational routes, mainly to neighboring countries as well as Russia and China. **China opposition** China on Tuesday rejected the latest US sanctions against Iranian airlines, calling unilateral sanctions without a basis in international law or authorization from the UN Security Council illegal. “China consistently opposes illegal unilateral sanctions that lack a basis in international law or authorization from the UN Security Council,” Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Guo Jiakun told reporters.

The comments came days before a scheduled summit between US President Donald Trump and Chinese President Xi Jinping and shortly after Bessent met Chinese Vice Premier He Lifeng for economic talks. Bessent said in a televised interview on Monday that “all the Iranian airlines will be shut down around the world” within days and warned foreign aviation hubs and companies that provide fuel, landing services or ticket sales to Iranian carriers that they could be excluded from the US dollar system.

Iran’s BRICS bank bid under review, chamber official says

Economy Desk

Iran’s application to join the New Development Bank of the BRICS group, submitted about two years ago, remains under review, a Tehran Chamber of Commerce official said, with sanctions and financial transparency requirements potentially complicating the process. Hessameddin Hallaj, the chamber’s deputy for international affairs, told Tasnim News Agency that Iran filed its formal application after joining BRICS and assessing the development bank’s capabilities. Iran, long subject to US sanctions, has pivoted toward non-Western blocs in recent years. It became a full member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation in July 2023, joined BRICS on Jan.



1, 2024, and implemented a free trade agreement with the Eurasian Economic Union on May 15, 2025. Hallaj said it remained unclear how sanctions-related obstacles and financial transparency requirements would affect Iran’s bid. He pointed to secondary sanctions as a key challenge to cooperation with the New Development Bank,

which works with a range of international lenders, and said Tehran should pursue local currency settlement more seriously in trade with BRICS members. Hallaj also called for new financial mechanisms, including joint currency-exchange platforms among BRICS members, saying they were particularly important given the banking difficulties

some members face. He said Russia’s experience using the bank’s capacity despite banking sanctions could offer lessons for Iran. Iran and Russia put into force a currency agreement in January 2025, allowing trade settlement in rial and ruble at agreed exchange rates. Russia’s Mir card network was connected to Iran’s SHETAB banking network in November 2024, with the first two phases of the payment system completed. According to the New Development Bank, Iran is not among its current members. The latest BRICS summit declaration in New Delhi stressed support for expanding the bank’s membership and accelerating the review of applications from prospective members.

Russia to increase Iranian fish imports fivefold

Economy Desk

Russia is expected to increase its purchases of Iranian fish and shrimp fivefold to 100,000 tons following a visit by a Russian veterinary delegation to Iran on Oct. 5, the head of Iran’s Union of Aquatic Producers and Exporters said on Tuesday. Ali Akbar Khodaei said that

Iran’s fish exports to Russia would increase fivefold, with 20 Iranian companies currently licensed to export fish to Russia. The visit by the Russian veterinary delegation is expected to pave the way for another 10 to 12 Iranian companies to obtain export licenses, he said. At that level, Russia would receive about 6.5% of Iran’s

annual fish production of 1.5 million tons, Khodaei said. Russia is a major buyer of Iranian shrimp and trout. It imported about 19,000 tons of fish and fisheries products from Iran in 2024, making it the third-largest destination for Iranian aquatic exports after Iraq and China. According to Fisheries Organization data, Iran catches more

than 800,000 tons of fish annually and produces more than 700,000 tons through aquaculture. The country’s trout production capacity is about 200,000 tons. Regulatory restrictions, including those affecting the trade of aquatic feed, remain among the obstacles to the expansion of the market, the data showed.

ECONOMIC LENS

Regulating online gold markets in Persian Gulf: A comparative analysis for Iran

By Golzar Aghaei
Economic policy specialist

OPINION EXCLUSIVE

Iran’s online gold market—an increasingly systemically relevant segment of the country’s retail savings and investment architecture—remains trapped in a regulatory no-man’s-land between the Central Bank of Iran (CBI) and the Deregulation Board. The executive directive issued in Aban 1404 (October–November 2025) obliges the CBI to operationalize a supervisory infrastructure within three months, yet unresolved jurisdictional questions continue to impede the formation of a coherent regulatory perimeter. This institutional vacuum is not merely an administrative nuisance: it distorts price discovery, elevates counterparty and custody risk, and creates fertile ground for regulatory arbitrage. Against this backdrop, the regulatory trajectories of Iran’s southern neighbors in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) offer a comparative laboratory—not of ready-made models, but of sequenced, risk-calibrated approaches to governing an asset class that sits at the intersection of commodities, digital finance, and retail speculation. A comparative analysis of these experiences—without overstating their effectiveness—can inform Iran’s policy choices as it seeks to move from regulatory limbo to a predictable, enforceable framework.

UAE: Pilot programs

Contrary to conventional wisdom, the UAE has not yet adopted a dedicated framework for gold tokenization. On 8 October 2025, the Dubai Multi Commodities Centre (DMCC) and the Virtual Assets Regulatory Authority (VARA) announced a joint pilot program to assess the tokenization of gold and diamonds. The pilot evaluates “technical and regulatory requirements, market viability, and investor protection” and has not yet reached the stage of final rulemaking. During this period, the issuance of backed tokens operates under VARA’s existing framework for “Asset-Referenced Virtual Assets” (ARVA), which requires monthly disclosure of reserve holdings and independent audits every six months. The “UAE model” is therefore a phased, pilot-based approach, not a proven operational framework.

Bahrain: Approved framework with structural limitations

Unlike the UAE, Bahrain has an operational framework. On 3 February 2025, the Central Bank of Bahrain (CBB) approved the “Gold Bar Token” whitepaper for the ATME exchange. Each token represents one kilogram of gold held in custody and is offered exclusively to accredited investors. However, the CBB’s approval is explicitly limited: the central bank “will not exercise ongoing supervision over the token issuer or its project after issuance” and “has not approved the associated smart contracts.” This structural limitation demonstrates that

even approved frameworks can contain supervisory gaps.

Saudi Arabia: Legislation at draft stage

In August 2025, Saudi Arabia published the draft “Executive Regulations for the Precious Metals and Gemstones Law” for public consultation. The draft permits online sales of precious metals “subject to requirements determined by the Ministry of Commerce.” However, the document remains in draft form and its final approval is uncertain. Citing the “Saudi experience” at this stage means citing a proposal, not an implemented practice.

Qatar: From prohibition to new framework

Until December 2019, Qatar prohibited virtual asset services in the Qatar Financial Centre. In September 2024, however, it introduced a “Digital Assets Framework” that defines “permitted” tokens as “digital representations linked to approved rights” while excluding cryptocurrencies as “excluded tokens.” Tokenizing gold under this framework is possible through a three-stage process: “validation, tokenization application, and token generation.” Nevertheless, the framework is very new, and no specific operational product has yet been launched under it.

Kuwait: A Payment-Channel Approach Rather Than Platform Supervision

Rather than regulating online gold platforms, Kuwait has focused on controlling payment channels. Ministerial Decision No. 182/2025 prohibits all cash transactions in the precious metals trade and restricts payments exclusively to “non-cash methods approved by the Central Bank of Kuwait.” This approach controls money flows rather than supervising platforms, representing a substantively different model from other regional states.

Conclusion and Implications for Iran

A close examination of Persian Gulf experience reveals that there is no single “model” for regulating online gold markets: the UAE is at the pilot stage, Bahrain has a limited framework, Saudi Arabia is at the draft stage, Qatar has just emerged from prohibition, and Kuwait has chosen a payment-control path. Consequently, recommending “emulation” of any one of these experiences without considering its stage of evolution would be misleading. The practical implication for Iran is that, rather than searching for a “best model,” it should pursue a “phased learning process.” The CBI’s supervisory system, currently undergoing final security testing, could serve as the technical infrastructure for a controlled pilot—similar to the UAE approach. Publishing pilot data (trading volume, physical reserve ratios, settlement times) before finalizing regulations would align with regional experience and reduce the risk of adopting a framework that proves ineffective in practice.

American power; a view from China



By Wu Xinbo

Director of the Center for American Studies, Fudan University

O P I N I O N

The United States' 250th anniversary has rekindled strong interest within China about the direction of America's domestic development and the nation's role in international affairs. Chinese strategists are once again debating whether American power is declining and whether US hegemony is experiencing irreversible decay in a world defined by fierce geopolitical competition and major economic, technological, and political transformations. Addressing these questions requires assessing American power from three perspectives: the status and outlook of American power growth, America's power superiority vis-à-vis China, and America's hegemonic power on the world stage.

Weaker growth momentum

• Economic power

Economic power serves as the foundation to overall American power. To better understand trends in the evolution of American power, it is therefore important to review US economic performance since the end of the Cold War. In the 1990s, dividends from the end of the Cold War, globalization, and the internet revolution provided a strong impetus for US economic growth. The United States' share of global GDP reached over 30 percent, the highest recorded in the post-Cold War era. However, the first decade of the new century brought slower growth due to the bursting of the internet bubble and the outbreak of the most severe financial crisis since the Great Depression. This brought the country's share down to below 25 percent in 2008 — the lowest level since the end of the Cold War. In the 2010s, the US economy recovered and continued to ascend, but the momentum became weaker. In the 2020s, it suffered a serious blow from the COVID-19 pandemic, and, even though it largely recovered, high inflation has become a recurring nightmare that will haunt future economic performance.

Looking to the future, AI promises to drive the next round of US economic growth. Given America's leadership in AI technology, it can expect to reap a heavy dividend from a flourishing AI economy. However, in spite of the booming stock market and heated investment in the construction of data centers across the United States, AI has not yet generated a giant leap in terms of economic productivity. In other



DEREK ZHENG/THE CHINA PROJECT

words, the returns have yet to match the input. Given the track record of the internet economy, some Chinese scholars believe the AI bubble will very likely burst at some point before a mature AI economy takes off. Just like the internet boom in the late 1990s, there is now too much speculation about the AI economy, which may limit its contributions to American economic power.

While the prospect of AI-driven economic growth is uncertain, some other factors crucial to US economic performance are definitely in decline. Aging US infrastructure is decreasing efficiency, raising costs, and reducing firms' willingness to invest. For instance, although AI data center construction has attracted significant investment in recent years, insufficient power supplies are seen as a hindrance to their operations. The fact that the United States lags behind in renewable energy development will only worsen America's power supply bottleneck. Meanwhile, US manufacturing industries, from ships to automobiles to the production of semiconductor chips, are becoming decreasingly competitive. This reveals an inability to commercialize technological innovation

and to ensure supply chain security in the United States. Furthermore, if protectionism becomes a long-term trend in US economic policy, it will only curtail the inflow of international trade and investment, at no small cost to American manufacturing and service sectors.

Over the last three decades, in spite of its waning manufacturing sector, the United States' technological and financial advantages have increased its power to attract imports, thereby boosting its economic growth. In other words, it is America's paramount technological and financial power that turned it into an attractive economic partner and has drawn goods and capital from other parts of the world.

However, as technological competition from China intensifies and undermines the advantages that the United States once possessed, America can no longer count on this trend to continue. In fact, China's rapid advancement in key technologies like batteries, solar panels, and humanoid robots, coupled with its strong manufacturing capacity and its ability to commercialize new technologies, means China is becoming a more attractive economic partner for

other economies.

On another front, as international investor confidence in the US dollar is compromised by the country's skyrocketing federal debt and more frequent weaponization of the dollar, the benefits associated with the dollar's position as the primary international currency — such as the demand for it and low borrowing costs — will continue to atrophy.

• Soft power

Soft power is another integral and significant part of American power. It not only generates respect and goodwill in international society toward the United States, but it also makes other countries more willing to accommodate Washington's concerns and endorse its foreign policy goals. As such, soft power helps amplify American hard power and expand the United States' international influence. American soft power peaked at the turn of the century due to a combination of factors, including American unipolarity in the post-Cold War world, a widely held belief that the Washington-led neoliberal economic model had triumphed over the Moscow-led socialist model, robust US economic growth during Bill Clinton's presidency, and US leadership in globalization and global governance.

However, US soft power suffered during the George W. Bush administration due to a tendency to act without consensus and consent, especially related to the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as the 2008 financial crisis. The Barack Obama administration repaired US soft power to an extent as it worked to bring an end to the Iraq War, promoted global governance, and demonstrated more enthusiasm for multilateralism. The two Donald Trump administrations, however, have inflicted significant and perhaps long-term damage on US soft power as Trump has pursued protectionism and unilateralism, enacted harsh measures against immigrants, cracked down on universities and research institutions, and challenged the rule of law. Today, the United States is widely regarded as an unreliable partner that is plagued by serious internal division and strife. Consequently, few countries, if any, would look to Washington for inspiration or guidance in either domestic or foreign policy.

As the United States celebrates its 250th anniversary, its soft power has been reduced to its lowest point arguably since the 1970s, when US international reputation suffered heavily from the Vietnam War and the Watergate scandal, and certainly its nadir since the end of the Cold War.

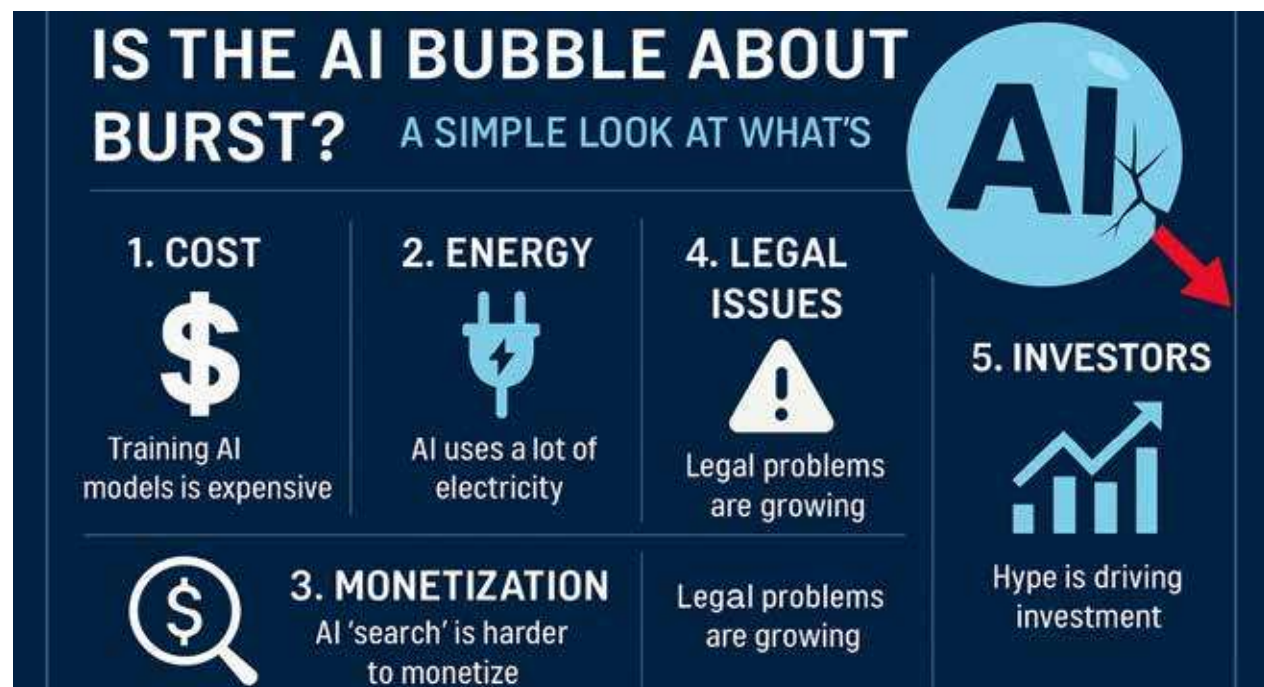
Declining power superiority

In international politics, absolute power is important insofar as it defines a state's capabilities, but what really matters is relative power, which determines how much influence a country possesses vis-à-vis others. In other words, one's superiority in the global balance of power will be factored into others' strategic calculations and impact their external behavior. Since the end of World War II, American superiority in economic, military, and technological capabilities has bestowed it preeminent international standing, which has enabled Washington to shape both the structure of international politics (bipolar or unipolar) and the behavior of many other countries, including China.

However, a significant shift in the balance of power between the United States and China has taken place in the early 21st century. In 2000, China's GDP was only 11. percent of that of the United States measured by exchange rate; in 2025, this figure was 63.4 percent. As measured by purchasing power



As technological competition from China intensifies and undermines the advantages that the United States once possessed, America can no longer count on this trend to continue. In fact, China's rapid advancement in key technologies like batteries, solar panels, and humanoid robots, coupled with its strong manufacturing capacity and its ability to commercialize new technologies, means China is becoming a more attractive economic partner for other economies.



SOCIAL MEDIA

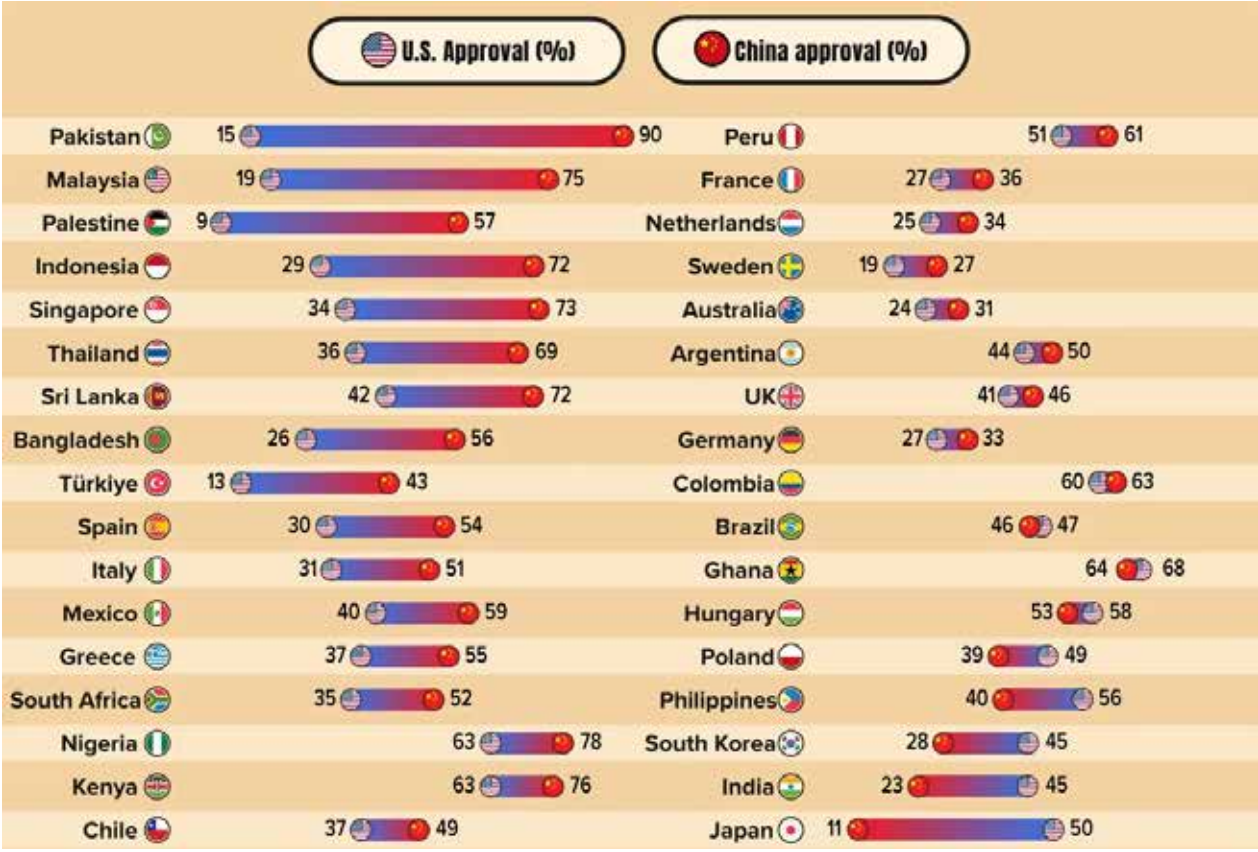
parity (PPP), China's GDP surpassed that of America's as early as 2016. On the military front, the gap between the United States and China has narrowed significantly. China's expanded military development has greatly undermined US preeminence in the Western Pacific. In the field of science and technology, China has successfully played a catch-up game over the past two decades, challenging US dominance and surpassing America in more and more areas, such as quantum communication, clean energy, and 5G. Indeed, China's rapid rise has been the most important challenge to America's power superiority and has caused unprecedented anxiety among US political elites over the last decade. As the Trump administration's 2026 National Defense Strategy acknowledges, "By all measures, China is already the second most powerful country in the world — behind only the United States — and the most powerful state relative to us since the 19th century."

The shift in Chinese attitudes toward the United States is illustrative of the shrinking superiority in American power. For a long time, China had looked upon America as a country with advanced science and technology, a prosperous economy, and comprehensive national strength. Indeed, from the 1980s to the 2000s, as China endeavored to turn itself into a prosperous modern country, it viewed the United States as a positive example. As the power gap between the two countries narrowed in the 2010s, however, Chinese strategists began to treat the US less and less like a formidable power, while more people in China began to look down upon the United States as a country plagued by sluggish economic growth, political stalemate and conflict, and poor domestic governance. Interestingly, nowadays, Chinese academics are more interested in studying the United States' mistakes, rather than its successes. In recent years, "the ascendancy of the East and the relative decline of the West" has become a buzz phrase among Chinese analysts in characterizing the broad changes taking place in the international landscape, fueled primarily by the shifting power balance between China and America.

Indeed, the changing power balance between China and America over the past two decades has enhanced China's self-confidence and increased its assertiveness in coping with US pressure. For instance, according to a multi-year poll on "How Chinese view the world," conducted by the state-run newspaper Global Times, when asked whether China is already a global power, in 2006, only 20 percent of respondents said yes, while in 2025, this figure jumped to 45 percent. Meanwhile, when asked how China should deal with US pressure and provocations, the combined share of respondents who support either moderate or forceful countermeasures rose from 51 percent in 2023 to 62 percent in 2025. Declining US power superiority has therefore altered not only Chinese perceptions of America, but also the pattern of interactions between the two countries. For instance, during bilateral trade and economic consultations held during the second Trump administration, the Chinese side insisted that talks should reflect "the spirit of equality, respect and mutual benefit" — employing a different stance than during the first Trump administration.

Shrinking clout on the world stage

Since the end of World War II, American power has consistently translated into a paramount ability to intervene in and shape international affairs, something usually referred to as "US leadership" or "American hegemony". America's international influence peaked in the 1990s as the United States emerged as the only superpower in a unipolar world: it set the



PEW RESEARCH CENTER/VISUAL CAPITALIST

rules of the game and led multilateral institutions. Other countries endorsed Washington's major diplomatic initiatives. However, since the 2010s, the process of multi-polarization has gradually diluted the United States' position as the sole pole in world politics, and international affairs have been dictated less and less by Washington. For instance, Russia and China have posed increasing challenges to US strategic goals, smaller states have become less responsive to Washington's diplomatic agenda, and major and middle powers have formed manifold political and economic groupings that better reflect their interests and preferences.

On another front, starting with the first Trump administration, the United States' skeptical attitude toward multilateralism and movement away from multilateral institutions has weakened the country's global leadership role. According to a Gallup survey conducted at the end of 2025 across more than 130 countries and regions, a median of 36 percent of respondents approved of China's leadership, compared with 31 percent for the United States. In 2024, a Gallup World Poll recorded an approval rating of 39 percent for the United States and 32 percent for China. It is likely that China's advantage will grow as the second Trump administration's disruptive and revisionist behavior continues to undermine the current international order.

Despite its declining power superiority, America will remain the world's most powerful country in aggregate for the foreseeable future. However, what really matters is not the power

per se, but the goals that this power is utilized to advance. If Washington intends to promote America's security and development interests in a multipolar world, its power will suffice to serve such a purpose; however, if Washington is intent on maintaining its hegemonic position in a fast-changing world, such as preserving a unipolar international landscape and dictating the behavior of other major players, it will likely fail in such endeavors as Washington no longer possesses sufficient strength and influence for that purpose.

Outlook of American power

Despite some ebbs in power and several rounds of discussions on America's decline since the 1970s, the United States has maintained a largely robust power growth trajectory and preserved its position as the most powerful country in the world. However, several novel emerging factors are constraining America's competitiveness and growth momentum, thus darkening the prospect of its power posture.

First and foremost, as the trend of multi-polarization accelerates, the United States is losing some significant advantages that have contributed to its material strength and international influence. Some countries no longer view America as a reliable partner and are therefore reluctant to seek active economic and military cooperation with it, and others will not endorse Washington's diplomatic agenda to the extent that they used to. These patterns decrease the international resources contributing to both US hard

Adopting more responsible international behavior, such as endorsing multilateralism and participating in international cooperation on global governance, would surely enhance US soft power. Still, it is almost politically impossible to address the challenge posed by the astronomical US federal debt. No party, Democrat or Republican, wants to commit political suicide to truly reign in the deficit.



PEW RESEARCH CENTER

and soft power. For instance, the position of the US dollar as the dominant international currency has historically generated tremendous economic benefits for the United States. But in 2025, the US dollar held only 56 percent of global foreign currency reserves, a decrease from over 70 percent in the early 2000s. As more countries seek the means to make non-US dollar payments, the trend of de-dollarization will only accelerate, and a more diversified monetary system is likely to replace the dollar-centered one.

Second, competition from other countries, especially from China, is already undermining US leadership in areas including the economy, finance, science and technology, and military preeminence in some regions. In the coming decade, China is likely to surpass America in certain key domains, such as overall economic output and leadership in some advanced technologies (for example, humanoid robots, 6G, and next generation of nuclear energy). Once the United States is no longer viewed as the all-round number one country in the world, some redistribution of international trade, investment, human capital, and foreign central bank reserves will likely occur, undermining resources that have contributed to US power growth.

Third, the surging US federal debt, already over \$40 trillion and projected to reach around \$50 trillion in five years, poses a severe structural challenge to the health of the American economy and pace of growth. If the debt triggers a major crisis, the country's long-standing economic benefits and the US dollar's position as the primary international currency could be at serious risk. Indeed, given the financialization of the US economy since the 1980s, the unsustainable debt now represents a huge time bomb threatening US power posture.

Of course, some liabilities to American power can be overcome or alleviated if the political will exists. For instance, the United States could make real efforts to upgrade its infrastructure, increase investment in science and technology, boost high-end manufacturing, adjust its immigration policy, and support the development of its renewable energy industry. All these endeavors would help improve the prospects for long-term US economic growth. Meanwhile, adopting more responsible international behavior, such as endorsing multilateralism and participating in international cooperation on global governance, would surely enhance US soft power. Still, it is almost politically impossible to address the challenge posed by the astronomical US federal debt. No party, Democrat or Republican, wants to commit political suicide to truly reign in the deficit.

In a world characterized by accelerating multi-polarization and growing competition, America is losing its economic advantages and leadership in science, technology, and commerce. And as a result, the world is seeing a more vulnerable America with limited capabilities, rather than a superpower with unlimited resources. If these trends continue, the United States will remain a first-tier major power, but not an unrivaled superpower. American leaders will have to wrestle with the hard fact that the United States no longer occupies the number one position in all major power domains, and Washington will have to redefine its role in the world commensurate with its new power portfolio. For China, one major challenge will be to manage the impact of the shifting power balance between the two countries as well as the decline of American hegemony. Washington, for the purpose of hegemonic maintenance, will certainly intensify competition with China, trying its best to thwart China's power growth and contain the expansion of Beijing's international influence.

The article was first published by Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.



Aichi-Nagoya 2026 Asian Games:

Nemati opens gold account as Iran bags four karate medals



Sports Desk

Iran's wait for a first gold medal at the Aichi-Nagoya 2026 Asian Games came to an end on the third day of the multi-sport event in Japan after Morteza Nemati secured the top prize in the men's kumite contests on Tuesday. Nemati's gold was part of a prolific run for the Iranian karate squad, which also bagged three silver medals across different men's and women's categories at the Toyohashi Gymnasium. A gold medalist at June's Asian Championships, Nemati picked up where he had left off at the continental showpiece in Bali, opening his -75kg campaign with an emphatic 8-0 victory over his familiar foe Nurkanat Azhikanov of Kazakhstan – a three-time Asian champion and gold medalist at the previous Asian Games – in a repeat of the Asian Championships final. The Iranian then defeated Filipino karateka Alwyn Batican

8-2 to progress to the final, where he edged out Turkmenistan's Davut Nazmyradov 4-3. Elsewhere, two-time Asian champion and former world team kumite gold medalist Ali-Asghar Asiabari settled for silver in the men's -84kg class. Asiabari began with a 4-1 win against Qatar's Abdulla Babikr before beating Palestine's Abdallah Alkhatib, who was disqualified by hansoku, in the semifinals. Mohammad Al-Jafari – the reigning Asian champion and bronze medalist at the 2025 World Championships – proved too strong for Asiabari in the final, as the Jordanian won 9-1 to improve on his bronze medal at Hangzhou 2022. In the women's division, Fatemeh-Zahra Saeidabadi also finished her campaign with a silver medal in the -55kg class. The 20-year-old sensation outclassed Pa Torvanhxi of Laos 8-0, followed by commanding victories over Singapore's

Iranian karateka Morteza Nemati celebrates after winning the men's kumite -75kg gold medal at the Aichi-Nagoya 2026 Asian Games in Japan on Sept. 22, 2026.

● VARZESH3

Hafezan Marissa (9-1) and Indonesia's Cok Istri Agung Sanistyarani (8-0), but fell to a controversial 6-4 loss to Malaysia's Adeola Fay Robert in the final. The Iranian representative saw several three-point kicks go unacknowledged by the officials, while even protests from Iranian women's head coach Pegah Zangeneh fell on deaf ears, resulting in her being ejected from the coaching area. The silver medal still gave Zangeneh something to cheer about after she had seen world champion Atousa Golshadnejad crash out in the first round of the -68kg class on the preceding day. Iran also bagged a silver medal through the trio of Fatemeh

Sadeqi, Zeynab Hosseini and Sepideh Amini in the women's team kata event.

A bronze medalist at the Asian Championships, the Iranian team defeated Thailand and the Philippines by unanimous decision but fell short against world champion Vietnam by the same scoreline in the final, providing Sadeqi with a bit of consolation after she had missed out on the podium in the individual kata event on Sunday.

Beach volleyball

The Iranian pair of Abolhasan Khakizadeh and Amir-Ali Qalenovi celebrated a second successive victory in the preliminary phase of the men's beach volleyball event, defeating their Bangladeshi opponents in straight sets. Having beaten the Maldives' pair in their Pool G opener, the Iranian duo emerged victorious 21-13 and 21-12 to go level on two wins from two with Japan's Kota Kurosawa and Taito Mizumachi ahead of their top-spot decider on Thursday. Referring to his teammate's physical condition, Qalenovi said: "My teammate has been dealing with a back injury for about a month, but now we will go back to the hotel to recover and get some rest for our next game. "Japan will be a tough opponent because they are the hosts and will have a lot of fans behind them. We will conduct a good analysis of Japan. We need to put in our best performance against them, and I hope we can come away with a victory."

3x3 basketball

Iran also enjoyed a victorious day in the men's 3x3 basket-

Iran's women's kata team performs at the Aichi-Nagoya 2026 Asian Games in Japan on Sept. 22, 2026.

● IRNA



Iranian karateka Fatemeh-Zahra Saeidabadi (r) is seen in action against her Indonesian opponent at the Aichi-Nagoya 2026 Asian Games in Japan on Sept. 22, 2026.

● IRNA

ball, claiming back-to-back wins against China and Hong Kong. Mohammadbasir Momeni chipped in a game-high nine points as the Iranian team – also featuring Mohammad Ghaffari, Saren Jafari and Mohammad-Mahdi Rahimi – defeated China 18-15 in their Pool B opener. Momeni and Rahimi then contributed six points apiece to lead Iran to a 16-11 victory over Hong Kong.

The Iranian team will be back in action against Malaysia today at the Kinjo Futo Station Square Venue for its final game in the group stage.

Tuesday's results continued Iran's impressive run in 3x3 basketball, after the women's team had also emerged victorious against Uzbekistan (19-5) and Japan (18-16) on Monday. Elsewhere on Day 3 of the Asian Games, the Iranian women's kabaddi team continued its perfect run with a one-sided 54-19 victory over Bangladesh in Group A. Having outclassed the host team 63-20 in their opening game, the Iranian team will now have to gear up for a highly anticipated clash against India in the final round of the group phase today.



Azmoun back in the fray for Uzbekistan, Russia friendlies

Sports Desk

Prolific striker Sardar Azmoun has received a call-up from head coach Amir Qalenoei as Iran named a 26-man squad for friendly meetings with two familiar opponents in recent years, Uzbekistan and Russia, during the upcoming FIFA international break. The third all-time scorer for the Iranian national team with 57 goals in 91 caps, Azmoun was left out of the squad for June's FIFA World Cup, where Team Melli failed to advance to the knockout stage after three successive draws against New Zealand, Belgium and Egypt in Group G. While Qalenoei insisted at the time that "nothing other than technical criteria" played a part in his team selection for the global showpiece, Azmoun's omission was widely believed to have been driven by off-field issues, following his controversial social media post regarding the regional war in the early stages of the conflict, which began with U.S.-Israeli airstrikes on Tehran on February 28.

Qalenoei's side will take on Uzbekistan in Fergana 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 Tuesday, which will mark a third friendly between the two sides since Qalenoei was appointed to the national team job for a second spell in March 2023. Meanwhile, Allahyar Sayyadmanesh, who also missed the World Cup, has been overlooked by the Iranian head coach yet again, despite the versatile winger bagging seven goals and two assists in 15 appearances across all competitions

for Lech Poznan after joining the Polish top-flight champions in the summer.

Unlike Sayyadmanesh, Shahab Zahedi has received recognition from Qalenoei for his flying form

with Malaysia Super League champion Johor Darul Ta'zim, which has seen the 31-year-old striker score a remarkable 10 goals in eight games for the club this season.

The two friendlies 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.

Established national team players in recent years Alireza Jahanbakhsh, Hossein Kananizadegan, Saman Qoddous, Rouzbeh Cheshmi, Shahriar Moghanlou, Ali Alipour, Milad Mohammadi and Mahdi Qayedi, who all represented the national team at

the World Cup, have also missed out on a call-up for the upcoming games. The following is Iran's 26-man squad for the friendly games against Uzbekistan and Russia:

Goalkeepers: Alireza Beiranvand (Tractor), Payam Niazmand (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), Ali Nemati (Lusail SC)
Midfielders: Aref Haji-Eidi (Sepahan), Omid Nourafkan (Sepahan), Mahdi Limouchi (Sepahan), Mohammad-Mahdi Mohebbi (Persepolis), Amirhossein Mahmoudi (Persepolis), Milad Sourgi (Shams Azar), Saeid Ezzatollahi (Shabab Al Ahli), Mohammad Qorbani (Al Wahda FC), Mohammad Mohebbi (HNK Rijeka)
Strikers: Mahdi Taremi (Al Wasl), Sardar Azmoun (Shabab Al Ahli), Dennis Eckert (Standard Liège), Shahab Zahedi (Johor Darul Ta'zim)



● AFC

Asara seeks to unlock its tourism potential

Iranica Desk

As you drive up the Karaj-Kandovan road in the morning, the city gradually disappears in the rearview mirror. The sound of the river rises from below the road, while villages emerge one after another around the bends. At times, an old house, a tree growing among rocks and steep slopes, or a striking landscape draws travelers' attention away from the road for a few seconds. Yet Asara's share of all this passing traffic often amounts to little more than a brief stop and a few photographs. Travelers arrive, admire the scenery and continue on their way. Their destination lies elsewhere.

Sajjad Khedari, governor of Asara District, said this reflects the gap between having tourism attractions and actually benefiting economically from them — a gap between the attractions that already exist and a local tourism economy that has yet to reach its full potential.

"Asara receives tourists throughout the year," Khedari said. "Tourists come from different parts of the country, and the natural and cultural attractions of Asara have considerable potential to draw visitors. So our issue today is not a lack of tourists. The question is how to turn their presence into an opportunity for regional development."

He added that visitors need opportunities to stop and make use of local services once they enter the area.

"In some of our villages, the basic facilities needed by tourists are not adequate for the potential that exists," he said. "If this infrastructure is not provided, tourists simply pass through the area, and the economic opportunity created by their presence is effectively lost."

Khedari said the length of tourists' stays could change the region's tourism equation.



● asregardeshgari.com

"Our goal is for Asara to be more than just a transit route from Karaj toward Kandovan," he said. "If tourists can stay in the area, visit its attractions, eat local food and purchase local products, naturally they will spend more time in Asara and more of their money within the local economy."

According to Khedari, longer stays would support accommodation facilities, restaurants, local-product sales, handicrafts and other services.

"Tourist stays mean greater activity for guesthouses, restaurants, local-product vendors, handicraft businesses and other services," he said. "If this chain is established, tourism can create jobs and income for local residents."

The district governor said, however, that achieving this goal does not necessarily require starting with entirely new projects.

"Some of the problems we face in tourism are related to existing regulations and restrictions," he said. "Sometimes the potential exists and there is even an investor, but it is not possible to use an existing property or building. So the issue is not simply about securing funding; legal and administrative obstacles also need to be examined and removed."

Khedari identified unused government-owned properties and buildings as one potential way to make better use of existing resources.

"There are buildings and properties along the Asara corridor that belong to various government agencies but are not being put to proper use," he said. "Our proposal is that, within the legal framework, the possibility of using or transferring these properties for the development of eco-lodges and tourism services should be examined."

He said there are already applicants interested in establishing and expanding eco-lodges.

"We have people who have approached us and expressed interest in investing," Khedari said. "But when restrictions exist, that interest does not turn into actual investment. If we make use of existing buildings, the cost of developing infrastructure will be lower, while buildings that might otherwise fall into disuse and deteriorate can be brought into the region's economic cycle."

"Tourism development does not always have to start from zero," he stressed. "Part of the facilities and potential already exists. We need to create the conditions that

allow us to make use of them."

Among Asara's attractions, the Yakh Morad Ice Cave and Tahmineh Tower in Meydanak village stand out. But even these sites, the district governor said, require proper management and organization before they can become fully integrated into the tourism sector.

"Yakh Morad Cave and Tahmineh Tower are important tourism assets in the region," Khedari said. "But some of our tourism sites have been closed or have deteriorated over time because they have not been properly organized and managed. In some cases, buildings that could have been used by tourists have even turned into abandoned spaces."

"An attraction alone is not enough," he said. "When we have an attraction, there must also be access, promotion, maintenance, services and management alongside it. If this chain is incomplete, we cannot expect an attraction by itself to activate the region's tourism economy."

Khedari said the region's attractions should be viewed as part of a broader network.

"We need to look at the different attractions together," he said. "Tourism in the region should not be limited to a single site. If a tourist enters Asara to visit one attraction, we should be able to introduce them to other attractions and services as well, while creating conditions that encourage them to stay for several hours or even several days."

He said the local administration is prepared to support the effort, but stressed that tourism requires coordination among several institutions.

"The district administration, councils and village administrations are ready to cooperate, but tourism is a cross-sectoral issue," Khedari said. "The cultural heritage authorities and other relevant agencies need to play a more active role in identifying, reviving,



● asregardeshgari.com

restoring and organizing tourism attractions."

"Over the past six months, with the participation of the district administration, the village mayors' cooperative, village mayors, associations and active NGOs, five rounds of cleanup operations have been carried out along the region's roads," he said. "Our aim has been to make the environment and appearance of the area more suitable for residents and tourists."

He said, however, that cleanup efforts can only be sustained if accompanied by greater environmental awareness.

"Cleanup is sustainable only when there is also a culture of protecting the environment," Khedari said. "If waste is dumped in nature again after every cleanup operation, the problem will

return. We expect tourists and passing motorists to help keep the area clean."

Khedari said that if Asara's attractions are properly organized and restored, infrastructure is expanded, investment is facilitated, and accommodation and recreational facilities are increased, tourists will be able to stay longer in the area.

Asara does not need help becoming known. The road itself brings thousands of people close to the area every day. The landscape naturally makes travelers turn their heads to take it in. The river, mountains and villages need no advertising to be seen.

What needs to change is not Asara's visibility, but its ability to turn passing visitors into staying guests — and tourism potential into a sustainable local economy.

Bushehr keeps its cultural traditions alive

Iranica Desk

Cultural heritage is not confined to historic monuments, architectural sites, archaeological remains and ancient artifacts. An important part of a society's cultural identity lies in its intangible heritage — traditions, knowledge and practices passed down from one generation to the next. Bushehr, a region with a rich historical background and a deeply rooted maritime culture, is home to a valuable treasury of such heritage. Preserving this legacy is not solely the responsibility of a particular institution or cultural organization; rather, it is a shared responsibility involving local communities, families, artists, researchers and cultural authorities.

Local customs and traditions, traditional music and folk songs, culinary practices, indigenous dialects and vocabulary, oral histories and storytelling, traditional games, knowledge related to the sea and fishing, and indigenous skills are among the elements of Bushehr's intangible heritage. Each represents a chapter of the province's history and the everyday lives of its people.

Throughout history, Bushehr's



● fajrmusic.ir

culture has maintained a close relationship with the sea. The sea has been more than a source of livelihood; it has been an integral part of the people's identity, beliefs, music, oral literature and way of life. Many local customs, traditions, words and expressions reflect this long-standing relationship with the sea and coastal living.

Among these cultural elements, Bushehr's music holds a particularly significant place. The region's traditional music is not merely a collection of melodies and rhythms; it is part of the community's historical and social memory. It has accompanied

celebrations, mourning ceremonies, work and various social occasions, while reflecting the experiences of the people across different periods of history.

Local cuisine is another important component of this heritage. Traditional methods of preparing seafood, the use of locally sourced ingredients and recipes passed down from mothers and grandmothers to younger generations represent more than culinary skills. They are an integral part of the identity and lifestyle of Bushehr's people and have the potential to become an important attraction for cultural tourism.

Safeguarding intangible heritage



● flytoday.ir

does not mean freezing it in the past. Such heritage remains alive when it continues to be practiced in contemporary life and when younger generations have the opportunity to learn about it, experience it and pass it on in forms suited to the language and needs of their own time. Consequently, registering, documenting and introducing these cultural elements, alongside education and opportunities for youth participation, is essential.

Schools, universities, the media, social media platforms, cultural centers and families can all play an important role

in this process. Recording the memories of older generations, preserving oral histories, documenting local music and rituals, and teaching traditional skills to teenagers and young people are among the measures that can help prevent the loss of this cultural capital.

At the same time, connecting intangible heritage with tourism can create new opportunities for the local economy. Tourism today is not limited to visiting historic monuments. Travelers increasingly seek to experience the culture, cuisine, music, traditions and lifestyle of the destinations they visit. With its rich

cultural resources, Bushehr can offer visitors a distinctive and authentic experience of cultural and maritime tourism.

Bushehr's intangible heritage does not belong solely to the past or the present. It is a legacy entrusted to us by previous generations, and we have a responsibility to pass it on to future generations intact and vibrant.

If historic monuments are the identity documents of a land, its intangible heritage is the spirit and story of the people who inhabit it. Preserving that spirit means safeguarding an essential part of Bushehr's identity for generations yet to come.



Minab tragedy to become national, global cultural narrative



Iran's Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Reza Salehi-Amiri (c) speaks at a meeting of the National Minab Martyrs Headquarters in Tehran, Iran, September 22, 2026.

● CHTN

Arts & Culture Desk

Iran's Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Reza Salehi-Amiri on Tuesday called for the creation of a broad cultural and international narrative around the children killed in Minab, southern Iran, as part of a national initiative to preserve their memory. Speaking at a meeting of the National Minab Martyrs Headquarters in Tehran, Salehi-Amiri said the story of the children should not remain a "local event" but should reach audiences worldwide through cultural, artistic, educational and media initiatives, CHTN reported. "We must make the global conscience sensitive to Minab," he said, stressing the need to introduce the incident to students, academics and wider audiences both inside and outside Iran.

The minister outlined plans to draw on museums, literature, poetry, storytelling and public art to preserve the memory of the victims and turn the Minab narrative into a "national and global cultural movement." A coordinated national approach is also being developed to bring together government institutions and existing initiatives rather than replace them. A central website dedicated to the Minab martyrs is planned in cooperation with the Art Bureau and is intended to serve as a comprehensive platform for information and cultural content. Salehi-Amiri also called for a unified public memorial to the children and said discussions were under way over naming a street or square after the Minab martyrs. The initiative is also set to incorporate tourism and educational programs.

Travel agencies could help develop tours to Minab and other destinations in southern Iran, while existing educational and cultural programs could be expanded to introduce visitors to the region and its history. The minister emphasized that preserving the memory of the victims should go hand in hand with supporting the people of Minab and paying attention to their livelihoods, local capacities and future. He also called for multilingual outreach, asking the government's information council to ensure that material about the Minab victims is made available in several languages. The initiative aims to bring together cultural institutions, schools, museums, artists and media organizations to preserve the memory of the victims and establish Minab as part of Iran's wider cultural and historical narrative.

VP calls for greater university autonomy as new academic year begins

Social Desk

Iran's First Vice President Mohammad Reza Aref has called for greater university autonomy, urging the government to give academics special powers to resolve higher education challenges as the new academic year gets underway. In a message marking the start of the academic year, Aref described universities as "smart drivers of national strength" and centers of social capital and hope, emphasizing their role in scientific progress, innovation and addressing the country's needs, fvpresident.ir reported. He said the government welcomed transferring university affairs to academics within the framework of national policies and development plans, stressing that higher education institutions should be empowered to manage

their own challenges. Aref also urged faculty members to strengthen students' confidence, encourage critical thinking and expand opportunities for in-person interaction and open discussion. He called on universities to provide a safe, rational environment where students can raise questions, express criticism and receive evidence-based responses. He highlighted the need for universities to engage more directly with national challenges, particularly structural imbalances in water, energy and financial resources. Moving beyond identifying problems, he said, academic institutions should develop practical solutions and bring technologies to market. The first vice president also called for stronger scientific diplomacy, expanded academic cooperation with regional countries

and the Islamic world, and greater engagement with Iranian scholars and students abroad to showcase the country's scientific achievements. Aref reaffirmed the government's commitment to supporting faculty members' dignity and livelihoods, improving student and staff welfare, and creating a calm and vibrant learning environment. He also encouraged philanthropists and private-sector supporters to contribute to higher education infrastructure and strategic scientific fields. Expressing confidence in the academic community's ability to advance the country's scientific and technological capabilities, Aref said the new academic year could become a turning point in addressing national challenges and strengthening public solidarity.

Tourism ministry advances digital transformation with startups

Arts & Culture Desk

Iran's Tourism Ministry is moving to accelerate digital transformation in the tourism sector by bringing startups, knowledge-based companies and universities into its planning and development efforts, Deputy Tourism Minister Anoushirvan Mohseni-Bandpey said Tuesday at a Tourism Week news conference in Tehran. The initiative aims to harness artificial intelligence and emerging technologies to improve destination selection, travel planning, service reservations, tourism marketing and visitors' overall experience while preserving Iran's cultural and historical identity, IRNA reported. "Technology must serve people," Mohseni-Bandpey said, stressing that digital tools should enhance human capabilities rather than create excessive dependence on technology. He said tourism plays an important cultural role by introducing the country's heritage, ethnic diversity, attractions and narratives to international visitors. The



ministry therefore plans to use technology to better understand tourism markets, promote destinations and improve efficiency. The official called for greater participation by the private sector, universities and innovation-focused businesses in designing the sector's digital future. He said the ministry was developing different scenarios, including a "neither war nor peace" situation, to adapt tourism policies to changing conditions. Mohseni-Bandpey also outlined a two-track strategy focused on expanding domestic tourism and developing foreign visitor markets. For international tourism, the ministry is prioritizing neighboring countries, with Iraq at the

forefront. Nine areas of cooperation have been identified to strengthen tourism exchanges between Iran and Iraq, while efforts are also underway to activate Iranian travel-service offices in Afghanistan and Pakistan. The ministry plans to maintain a presence at international tourism exhibitions to showcase Iran's diverse destinations, even when logistical challenges require multiple flight connections. Mohseni-Bandpey said tourism had recorded significant growth in the final quarter of the previous Iranian calendar year and the first month of the current year, before the 12-day war disrupted the trend. He described tourism as a dynamic but highly sensitive sector whose recovery requires sustained planning and renewed confidence. Despite the challenges, the ministry is pressing ahead with development plans. Around 3,000 tourism projects, including three five-star hotels in Mashhad and other cities, are scheduled to come on stream during Tourism Week.

In search of...

Geopolitical-energy dimension: Iran knot, China's real vulnerability

Here's a point that tends to get lost in most analyses: China's energy crunch was never simply "managed," it was genuinely serious. Before the war in Iran, China was importing roughly 1.4 million barrels a day of Iranian crude, about 13% of its total oil imports, and roughly half of all Chinese oil imports pass through the Strait of Hormuz. One report warned that if the strait stayed closed, China would face a real shortage within about two months, and other analysts have pointed out that China depends more

heavily than any other country on oil flowing through Hormuz, taking in 5.35 million barrels a day compared to India's 2.09 million. Beijing's official response is telling in itself: China's foreign minister said closing the strait serves no one's interests in the international community, and the foreign ministry spokesperson urged both sides to honor the temporary ceasefire and pursue political diplomacy, a stance that shows Beijing is deliberately avoiding getting boxed into a choice between a tactical alignment with Tehran and its relationship with Washington, especially with the summit approaching. In other words, the common assumption

that China is negotiating from a position of strength on Iran doesn't quite hold up. The reality is that China's own energy vulnerability is pushing it toward restraint rather than toward turning up the pressure on the United States.

Point that goes largely unsaid: mismatch in domestic urgency

What most analyses miss is that all this pomp and the warm tone from both sides owe more to domestic political pressure on each leader than to any real strategic convergence. Trump, with his approval numbers sagging ahead of the midterms, needs a win he can sell, whether

that shows up as lower gas prices (which ties directly back to re-opening Hormuz and squeezing Iran) or simply as symbolic images of strength. China, for its part, is wrestling with a property slump, deflationary pressure, and youth unemployment, and what it genuinely needs is a stable external environment, not necessarily a symbolic concession. This asymmetry in urgency means Trump is chasing a visible short-term achievement while Xi is after long-term predictability, and that difference in goals may explain why a package deal, one that bundles several issues together (say, limited cooperation on Iran in exchange for a longer trade truce), is more likely

than one sweeping, comprehensive agreement. Put differently, all this ceremony may be less a sign of genuine warmth and more an exercise in audience management. Both leaders need to show their domestic publics that they've come home winners, even if the substance of what's actually agreed turns out to be limited and temporary. Political-security dimension: Taiwan as quiet red line Taiwan remains the one issue where neither side is prepared to make even a symbolic concession. Congressional pressure on Trump to move forward with the arms package, combined with Asian allies' worry that Taiwan could become an eco-

nomie bargaining chip, keeps this file walled off from the atmosphere of trade councils and goodwill gestures. This summit looks less like a strategic turning point and more like a stress test for a fragile truce, one that has to manage several parallel crises at once (trade, technology, energy, Taiwan). The Iran-energy knot shows that real vulnerability, not symbolic leverage, is what's actually driving Beijing's behavior. And the mismatch in domestic political urgency between the two leaders helps explain why the diplomatic show is so elaborate, even as the substance underneath is likely to be limited and doled out in stages.